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band width



Portastatic
Bright Ideas
(Merge)

Mac McCaughan is probably best known as the leader of Superchunk. Portastatic began as his solo side project but, with Superchunk bassist Laura Balance on maternity leave, has evolved into a full-fledged touring band with Superchunk guitarist Jim Wilbur on bass and McCaughan's brother Matt on drums. As Superchunk has mellowed on later recordings and both of McCaughan's bands have expanded their sonic palettes, the line dividing them has become less and less distinct. On *Bright Ideas*, Portastatic's new album, the differences between the two is nearly nonexistent. Riffs that could have easily been on Superchunk's 1995 record *Here's Where The Strings Come In* propel songs like "White Wave" and "The Soft Rewind," and both prove that McCaughan has lost none of his intensity or skill when it comes to writing infectious power-pop with ragged punk edges. The tunes "Through With People" and "I Wanna Know Girls" are clean, ringing-pop gems akin to The Connells, while "Little Fern" chugs along amiably with a touch of country. Elsewhere, "Truckstop Cassettes" bears the influence of the same Brazilian music for which McCaughan revealed his love on his EP release from 2000, *de mel, de melao*. The subtle, pulsing percussion and smoldering guitar of the title track illustrate that McCaughan knows something about conveying atmosphere. *Bright Ideas* further proves that the consistency of Mac McCaughan's sound should never be mistaken for lack of talent or inspiration.

—matt barber



Rocky Votolato
Makers
(Barsuk)

It's been half a decade since Rocky Votolato's *Burning My Travels Clean* landed him in the "next Elliott Smith" discussion group (alongside Conor Oberst and Denison Witmer). In the interim, Votolato has emerged as an artist comfortable with his roots and influences. Perhaps best known as the vocalist for Waxwing—the Seattle-based rock band featuring his brother Cody Votolato of The Blood Brothers—Rocky Votolato deserves accolades for a solo catalog that whispers Neil Young, Paul Westerberg and Ryan Adams without beating you over the head with it. Votolato's latest recording is *Makers*, a sly nod towards both whiskey and spiritualism. While it isn't a huge departure from *Burning My Travels Clean*, this Barsuk release shows a continued maturity in both song development and hooks. *Makers'* best songs are its anchors: opener "White Daisy Passing" and the album-ending title track both show Votolato's lyrical gift for meandering through life and death with heart in throat. With its quick, twinkling guitar line supporting Votolato's half-gravel, half-angelic voice, the song "Uppers Aren't Necessary" is fit for a Wes Anderson film. "She Was Only In It For The Rain" successfully utilizes both dark, backwoods acoustics and church organ. Traditionally words like "understated" and "honest" can be veiled kicks at a singer/songwriter, but Votolato's music embraces those words as they are—without much fanfare. At his best, Votolato can be considered *Pink Moon*-era Nick Drake with guts and three fifths of Yukon Jack. At his worst, he's just another songwriter trying to balance out his fetishes for Elliott Smith and Bob Dylan. For the most part, thankfully, you can find him nursing the former.

—nicholas mendola



Lady Sovereign
Vertically Challenged EP
(Chocolate Industries)

Lady Sovereign is a name you'll likely be hearing a lot of in 2006. The Missy Elliott of the UK, Lady Sov had the standout track, "Cha-Ching," on last year's already legendary *Run the Road* compilation. Now Lady Sovereign stands ready to conquer the American charts like her peers Dizzee Rascal and The Streets. Sly and sarcastic, Lady Sov has a playful style and a penchant for pop hooks that eludes many of her dour contemporaries. While waiting for the full-length album she is bound to drop this year, don't miss the *Vertically Challenged* EP. Featuring the big single, "Random," the disc features club-ready bangers and fierce lyrical work. On a radically different tip is His Name Is Alive's new album, *Detrola*. A pleasant collection of lounge-pop numbers, *Detrola* features little more than a bass, some wind instruments and hushed, cheery, Isobel Campbell-like vocals. Yet there is a surprising range to the songs. While nothing gets too heavy, a song like "In My Dream" sounds like something Ladytron would put out, the disc's stand-out track, "Get Your Curse," is a jaunty slice of pop gold. A lo-fi breath of fresh air amidst a sea of stale rock (Bloc Party), His Name Is Alive offers sunny skies and sweet hooks.

—matthew holota



His Name Is Alive
Detrola
(Silver Mountain)

Name: Adam Zadok

When/Where playing this week?

Saturday (Feb. 4) at 9pm at Caz Café with Lisa Rose.

Instruments played...

Acoustic/electric guitar and voice (I think it counts!).

When did you start performing?

Around 1998 with a band called Spill.

You might like my music if you like...

Rock music—unplugged.

List of Recorded Releases

2005 - Self-titled, 5-song demo.

First full-length album to be released late 2006.



Upcoming events:

Feb. 11 - Tudor Lounge at 10pm

March 4 - Just Plain Folks Showcase at American Legion (42 Niagara Street)

Also, working on a radio interview/performance at Fredonia State Univ. in a few weeks.

Worst show ever played:

My friend Robin put on an evening of poetry called Saucebox at the old Stimulance Café. I was to perform before the show and during the intermission. During my first performance I broke a string in the middle of my second song. Of course, I didn't bring any replacements. I was so embarrassed that I had to stop and race home to get another one. After driving to my house and then back to Stimulance (like a man possessed), I finally got the replacement string put on...only to break it again during the next song! Sometimes things aren't meant to be.

Best show ever played:

This past summer, I performed at a music festival called Thirsty Melon at the Six Flags in Lexington, Ky. It was great. I not only got to play two showcase spots but also got to go on all of the rides, including the water rides, for free.

Anything else you would like our readers to know about yourself/your music?

I've been nominated "Best Male Solo Artist" for the 2006 International Online Music Awards. My song "Warpath" has been in rotation at over 150 acoustic-format radio stations in the U.S. and abroad. My song "Sunflower" will be included on 107.7 The Lake's *Local Music CD - Vol. 3*.

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