

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2008

THE FIRE STILL BURNS

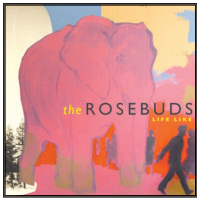


DEAD CONFEDERATE, “Wrecking Ball” (Razor & Tie) ☆☆☆½ — Indie rock quintet Dead Confederate are the latest in a long line of bands hailing from the tiny — but potent — musical hotbed of Athens, Ga. Their full-length debut, “Wrecking Ball,” comes hot on the heels of the stellar EP the guys dropped earlier this year and

offers more of Dead Confederate’s blend of Southern rock, grunge and psychedelia. The band aims high here — and mostly succeeds — with a series of sprawling tunes comprising the 10-track release.

Happily, Dead Confederate have included “The Rat” on the full-length after the killer track was the clear highlight of the EP (and the centerpiece of a sparsely attended, but well-received June set at Bonnaroo). Additional keepers include “It Was a Rose,” “All the Angels” and “The News Underneath.” The disc-closing title track “Flesh Covered Canvas” flirts with greatness along the lines of “The Rat,” but at a mind-numbing 12-plus minutes is at least twice as long as it needed to be.

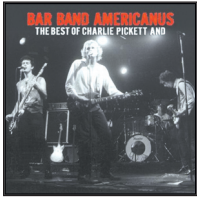
Time will tell if these guys will follow in the footsteps as past Athens luminaries R.E.M., the B-52s and Widespread Panic, but “Wrecking Ball” is a good start. (JS)



THE ROSEBUDS, “Life Like” (Merge) ☆☆☆½ — I knew almost nothing about Wilmington, N.C.-based indie rockers the Rosebuds before getting my hands on last year’s outstanding “Night of the Furies” release, a synth-heavy collection of dance pop that marked a refreshing change of pace from their first two albums.

Ivan Howard and Kelly Crisp keep listeners guessing on “Life Like,” a more restrained effort that allows the songwriting and vocals to take precedence over the infectious beats.

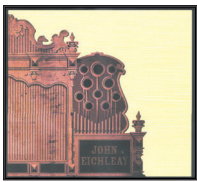
This 10-track collection might be a notch below “Furies,” but it’s a worthy addition to the Rosebuds discography. Standout tracks “Cape Fear,” “Nice Fox” and “Black Hole” are as good as any they’ve recorded, and “Border Guards,” the Go! Team-ish “Bow to the Middle” and “Another Way in Concordia Military” aren’t far behind. (JS)



CHARLIE PICKETT, “Bar Band Americanus: The Best of Charlie Pickett And...” (Bloodshot) ☆☆☆½ — Whether alone or while fronting bands such as the Eggs and the MC3, native Floridian Charlie Pickett has been churning out punk-tinged roots rock for almost three decades. “Bar Band Americanus” is an ambitious collection

— 19 tracks clocking in at more than 70 minutes — that provides an excellent overview of Pickett’s just-below-the-mainstream-radar career.

In addition to vintage tunes such as 1985’s “All Love All Gone,” 1984’s wonderfully profane “Liked It a Lot” and his tour de force “But I Didn’t,” there’s a previously unreleased gem “Get Off on Your Porch” and even a brand-new track in the good-but-not-great “Penny Instead.” The real gems, however, are the quartet of live cuts that close the set (“American Travelust,” “Phantom Train,” “Watch Out,” “Shake Some Action”) as Pickett and his bandmates romp through a 1982 performance in Ft. Lauderdale. Good stuff. (JS)



JOHN EICHLEAY, self-titled (Copper Beach) ☆☆☆ — Big Apple native John Eichleay is a musical jack-of-all-trades. He earned his stripes playing everything from rock to folk to blues to Gypsy jazz as a session guitarist. He took those varied experiences and molded them together to create

one of the year’s more enjoyable debut records. There are wonderful songs sprinkled throughout this 10-track release, with highlights that include the Decemberists-ish “Strange Parade” (you’ll swear it’s Colin Meloy at the microphone), the infectious pop of “Tree Song,” “Subway Shuffle” and the deliciously melancholic “Poor Excuse.”

Though I’m sure he gained invaluable experience as a relatively anonymous sideman for jazz great Alfonso Ponticelli and others, going the singer/songwriter route was the right move for John Eichleay. He’s a guy to keep your eye on. (JS)



CASTANETS, “City of Refuge” (Asthmatic Kitty) ☆☆☆ — It took me a while to absorb the Castanets’ well-received “In the Vines” release last year. I immediately recognized Ray Raposa’s talent and dug the country-folk elements, but was put off by some of the experimental aspects of the music.

The more I listened, however, the more I came to appreciate the record for the gem it was. I thought “City of Refuge” would be a little easier to digest, considering I knew what to expect. Not quite.

If anything, the band’s fourth full-length is even harder to warm to, with several tracks of minimalist experimenting opening the proceedings. Just when I thought hope was lost, however, Raposa hits his stride on “The Destroyer” and I found myself liking what I heard. There are some stinkers here — parts of “High Plain 3” and “Savage” give me a nasty headache — but winning tunes such as “The Quiet,” “I’ll Fly Away” and “Shadow Valley” make up for any shortcomings. (JS)



THE LITTLE ONES, “Morning Tide” (Chop Shop) ☆☆☆ — I guess it’s true that good things come to those who wait. Los Angeles-based indie pop quintet The Little Ones were poised to drop this full-length debut album earlier this year, but were unceremoniously released from their contract and “Morning Tide” sat on the shelf for several months.

I don’t know what their former label was thinking when they dumped the Little Ones, because this record is a winner — even better than the excellent “Terry Tales & Fallen Gates” EP released in the spring.

The 11-track collection opens in strong fashion with the tone-setting title track, a wonderfully catchy tune that worms its way into your brain after just one listen. The upbeat pop grooves continue with additional keepers “Ordinary Song,” “Al Your Modern Boxes,” “Everybody’s Up to Something,” “Rise & Shine,” “Like a Spoke on a Wheel” and the album-closing “Farm Song.”

This is a record that’s guaranteed to cheer you up if you’re feeling blue. And many times that’s just what the doctor ordered. (JS)

U2, “Under a Blood Red Sky: Deluxe Edition” (Interscope/Island) ☆☆☆ — When U2 took the stage at Colorado’s Red Rocks Amphitheatre in the summer of 1983, they weren’t the full-fledged superstars they’d become a few years later. Never lacking in confidence, however, Bono, the Edge, Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen Jr. served up a spell-binding performance that was captured on the short-but-



Backyard Tire Fire set the bar pretty high with the excellent ‘Vagabonds’ in 2007, but they’ve managed to exceed even the most optimistic expectations on the new ‘The Places We Lived’

BACKYARD TIRE FIRE, “The Places We Lived” (Hyena Records) ☆☆☆ — The catchy band name is what caught my attention, but it’s the fantastic music that keeps me waiting for more from Chicago-based rock trio Backyard Tire Fire.

I was blown away by last year’s superb “Vagabonds and Hooligans” release — and thoroughly enjoyed gigs at both Garfield Artworks and Mr. Smalls — but wondered if frontman Ed Anderson, brother/bassist Matt Anderson and drummer Tim Kramp could take things to the next level. Well, I’m happy to report that Backyard Tire Fire have outdone themselves on “The Places We Lived,” their best record to date.

Anderson continues his development into a

world-class songwriter, weaving vivid imagery into catchy story-songs such as the title track, “Time With You,” the Tom Petty-ish “Welcome to the Factory” and the sublime piano ballad “Rainy Day (Don’t Go Away).” Additional standout songs include the country-rock anthem “How in the Hell Did You Get Back Here?” and “One Wrong Turn.”

Despite their prodigious talent, Backyard Tire Fire continue to build their audience. Good luck getting into a BTF gig in the greater Chicagoland area, but they served as the opening act for the likes of William Elliott Whitmore and Clutch when they came here. Hopefully “The Places We Lived” will be the record that makes them the stars they deserve to be. (Jeffrey Sisk)



sweet live album “Under a Blood Red Sky.” A quarter-century later, “Blood Red Sky” is getting the deluxe treatment with a two-disc set that includes the “U2 Live at Red Rocks” DVD.

U2’s talent and charisma were evident even in those days, as they worked their way through eight tunes highlighted by “Gloria,” “I Will Follow,” “Sunday Bloody Sunday” and “40.” The DVD includes seven more tracks — with “New Year’s Day,” “Two Hearts Beat As One” and “An Cat Dubh/Into the Heart” the standouts — five of which have never been released before. The only complaint now, as then, is that the CD is barely 30 minutes long — too short for a live recording.

Surprisingly, there are no bonus audio tracks in the package, but the DVD is reason enough to invest in the deluxe edition. (JS)



THE IGUANAS, “If You Should Ever Fall on Hard Times” (Yep Roc) ☆☆☆½ — Among the damage wreaked by Hurricane Katrina in and around the New Orleans area was the fact that it threatened the career of veteran traditional rockers the Iguanas. The band had built a solid career with their eclectic blend of rock, R&B, zydeco, swamp pop and tex-mex sounds, but Katrina almost brought things to an end. But the guys stuck with it and “If You Should Ever Fall on Hard Times,” their first release in five years, shows their abilities remain intact. This enjoyable 14-track collection is all over the musical map, from first-rate instrumentals (“The Beep”) to infectious Spanish-language tunes (“El Huracon y Pin Pon,” “Celos Con Mezcal”) to poppier delights such as “Dancing for

Dollars Again” and disc highlight “Morgan City.”

While there’s the occasional misfire — “Back in the Limelight” and “Pelican Bay” come to mind — the Iguanas have overcome far more than a couple bad songs. Welcome back, fellas. (JS)



DION, “Heroes: Giants of Early Guitar Rock” (Saguaro Records) ☆☆☆ — Over the course of a career that’s spanned six decades, Dion DiMucci has been responsible for such rock classics as “The Wanderer,” “Teenager in Love” and “Runaround Sue.” On his latest release, Dion revisits the early days of rock ‘n’ roll with covers of some of the most recognizable songs of that era.

He tackles tunes such as “Summertime Blues,” “Bye Bye Love,” “Runaway” and “Blue Suede Shoes” on this 15-track collection that ends with an updated version of “The Wanderer.” Dion’s readings of the material are solid — though most of the originals, as expected, are better — and he shines brightest on “Jailhouse Rock,” “Come On, Let’s Go” and a slightly less countrified rendition of Johnny Cash’s “I Walk the Line.”

As he nears his 70th birthday, Dion’s voice remains strong as he pays tribute to some of the most influential artists in rock history. (JS)



THE SAFES, “Sight of All Light” (O’Brothers’ Records) ☆☆☆½ — The hard-rocking O’Malley brothers — Frankie, Michael and Patrick — took the Chicago music scene by storm when they started recording as the Safes five years ago. They’ve released two full-lengths and one EP since then and this latest effort (an enjoyable

five-track EP) doesn’t break much new ground musically, but should tide over their growing fan base until the next full-length drops.

“Sight of All Light” is a driving record with blistering tunes that include the title track, “Troublemaker,” “The Sky Is Falling” and “Unlock the Mystery.” “Greed” is the weak link here, though it’s by no means a bad tune.

If you like what you hear from the Safes on “Sight of All Light,” then mark Nov. 1 on your calendar. That’s when the brothers O’Malley will be performing at Garfield Artworks and you can see for yourself what all the fuss is about. (JS)



LAURA WARSHAUER, self-titled (Island/Pink Chariot) ☆☆☆ — If you haven’t heard of Laura Warshauer before, here’s your chance to get on the bandwagon before she hits it big. Because, if this self-titled debut is any indication, stardom awaits the 24-year-old singer/songwriter.

Her pop-with-an-edge demo made such an impression on Island Def Jam chairman Antonio “L.A.” Reid, he quickly signed Warshauer to a record deal.

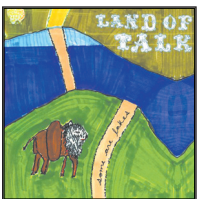
This seven-song release serves as a perfect introduction to Warshauer, who scores with keepers such as “Sweet 17,” “Convince Myself,” “December Night,” “Please Don’t Lie” and “Breathe Again.” Her songs are deeply personal, yet relatable — a tough trick to pull off for many musicians. “People respond when you’re honest in your art,” Warshauer says. “I want to make my music mean something, and I want them to feel an emotional connection. I also want to bring them on some sort of ride.” Mission accomplished. (JS)



THE MORNING LIGHT, self-titled (Fearless) ☆☆☆ — With the Povertyneck Hillbillies broken up and the Clarks having seen their best chance of breakout success pass them by, maybe it’s time for Pittsburgh to pin its pop hopes on another hometown band. Enter ‘Burgh-based indie quintet the Morning Light, who opened eyes and ears

earlier this year with an impressive debut EP, “The Sounds of Love.” The guys look to build on that momentum with their self-titled debut full-length, a good-but-not-great collection of emo-leaning indie pop that figures to appeal to fans of label-mates Plain White T’s, Mayday Parade and the Maine. With Harrison Wargo and Bobby Garver trading high-pitched vocals, the Morning Light shine on standout tracks “Wake Up!,” disc highlight “Done Writing Love Songs,” “Follow Me Home” and “Honest (Apologies Endless).”

The Morning Light aren’t going to chance the world with their upbeat tunes, but they’ll make it a happier place to be. (JS)



LAND OF TALK, “Some Are Lakes” (Saddle Creek) ☆☆☆ — “Applause Cheer Boo Hiss,” the 2006 debut EP from Canadian indie rockers Land of Talk, was one of those how-did-I-stumble-across-this treasure that was so good, you had to wonder how long the band could stay in tiny label town. Turns out not long. They were

scooped up by powerhouse Saddle Creek for a record that’ll only further aggravate the groundswell.

“Some Are Lakes,” the band’s first full-length, keeps in tact much of the energy, jangly guitars, and right-to-the-point vocals from indie icon-in-the-making Elizabeth Powell, but also adds new shades of color to make their body of work that much fuller. The 10 songs show nary a weakness and even manage to one-up many of the really great tracks from “Applause” that, before this, seemed rather untouchable.

The record gets off to a more pulled-back start with “Yuppie Flu,” where Powell asks, “Are you seeing your own death and selling it to me?” and “Death By Fire.” “Give Me Back My Heart Attack” is built on a bassline that is similar to Death Cab’s “Long Division”; “Young Bridge,” with its damaged guitar strikes, and “Corner Phone,” full of shoegazed string sweeps, play more like their EP, as does directly fired “Got a Call”; and country-like, harmonized closer “Troubled” and heart-defying ballad “It’s Okay,” where the guitar lines bow to Lindsey Buckingham at his weepy best, show their more tender side. On the latter, perhaps the best song Land of Talk ever has written, Powell sounds moved as, over an airy chorus, she dreams, “Maybe when I die, I get to be a car/Driving in the night, lighting up the dark.” Great song, great record, great band. (Brian Krasman)

Kimmel to host AMA again

NEW YORK (AP) — Jimmy Kimmel is coming back to provide more laughs for the American Music Awards.

The comedian and talk show host is slated to host the annual event on Nov. 23 live from Los Angeles on ABC. Pink and the Jonas Brothers are among those scheduled to perform.

Kimmel has hosted the American Music Awards four previous times.

In a statement, Orly Adelson, president of Dick Clark Productions, the show’s producer, called Kimmel “a masterful host with incredible spontaneity and wit.”