



PORTISHEAD

Third (Mercury/Island)

Mid-1990s Britain yielded some questionable pop pap, but Portishead was an exception. Singer Beth Gibbons, guitarist Adrian Utley, and multi-instrumentalist Geoff Barrow no doubt spent the last decade trying to shake a short-lived genre (trip-hop) that never really fit them. Smartly, the Bristol trio's first studio album since 1997 is free of the chopped samples and noir soundtracking that trademarked their sound, allowing them to create dissonance more organically. There's always been a spinning paranoia under Portishead's music, uncertainty never far from Gibbons' lyrics, and that hasn't been lost on *Third*. The unsettling "Hunter" unfurls like something out of a David Lynch movie, Gibbons purring, "My thoughts are taking over." Her matchless voice remains another instrument and now, free of the witchiness that dominated 1997's eponymous sophomore LP, she shines ethereal in the warm synth tide of "The Rip" and "Nylon Smile." The oscillations of Silver Apples are carbon-copied on midalbum standout "We Carry On," and from there, *Third* really starts droning, if you don't count throw-away banjo ballad "Deep Water." "Machine Gun" is Portishead's most jarring song yet, a stream of rapid-fire drum beats that smells like Germany 1981, and a psych-rock influence weaves into "Small," which rides a killer organ line and allows them to jam. Closer "Threads" brings it back to Portishead's old gloom and doom, Gibbons wailing, "I'm always so unsure," over fuzzy, foreboding riffage. Ten years later, they've managed to capture our paranoid times and sound transcendent as well.

★★★★★ — Audra Schroeder

THE BLACK KEYS

Attack and Release (Nonesuch)

The Black Keys' Nonesuch debut, 2006's *Magic Potion*, sounded a bit diluted and formulaic. Enter Brian Burton, better known as Danger Mouse, the beat scientist behind Gnarls Barkley, whose shape-shifting production – from the swelling organ of moody opener "All You Ever Wanted" to the backward guitar in the heavy blues of "I Got Mine" – results in the Akron, Ohio, duo's most diverse and subtly psychedelic work to date (just check the flute solo on "Same Old Thing"). Originally conceived as a collaboration to include the late Ike Turner, *Attack and Release* retains the anguished soul and ghostly



DVDNDS

THE CLASH

Revolution Rock (Epic/Legacy)

Five years after Joe Strummer's death and 30 years after the Clash's debut, the band's alternating pattern of genius releases and near-misses balances out here. Last winter saw the definitive Strummer bio-doc, Julien Temple's *The Future Is Unwritten* (the DVD hits stores in June), burnish the band's righteous legacy. Now, *Revolution Rock* follows up, dealing 22 live shots spanning 1977-83. Producer Don Letts of Big Audio Dynamite pulled much of the previously unseen footage from his personal archives, which, side by side with excerpts



chill of its inspiration, particularly in "Lies" and the banjo-laced "Psychotic Girl," while "Oceans and Streams" sways like Junior Kimbrough's *Chulahoma*. Burton's masterful production proves most evident on "Remember When (Side A)," which slows the classic *Thickfreakness* of its B-side counterpart to half-speed and treats it with eerie, haunted-house effects. All the keys needed was a bit of black magic.

★★★★★ — Austin Powell

R.E.M.

Accelerate (Warner Bros.)

Brooding disaffection about these *Accelerate*-end-times peaks on "Until the Day Is Done," introduced in the lyrics accompanying R.E.M.'s 14th album with Sinclair Lewis' co-opted anti-Bush sloganeering. Strangling jangle trademarks the Athens, Ga., trio's opening triptych, sealed by "Supernatural Superserious," first cousin to *Automatic for the People* smash "Man on the Moon." Where the previous indelible minored in ill-fated loon Andy Kaufman, here Harry Houdini plucks the rabbit out of Michael Stipe's skullcap – protection from Peter Buck's raw nerve-endings guitar. *Accelerate* isn't *Lifes Rich Pageant*, however. The moody flair of "Houston" and buzzing desperation that suffocates the title cut better reflect the group's musical temperament. As 34 minutes advance, songs get longer and less interesting ("Sing for the Submarine"), but "Horse to Water" stomps, and "I'm Gonna DJ" ("at the end of the world") doesn't decelerate. This time, really, "It's the End of the World as We Know It," only nobody feels fine.

★★★★★ — Raoul Hernandez

ALLISON MOORER

Mockingbird (New Line)

Honey-haired Allison Moorer follows her sister Shelby Lynne's lead for a set of mostly covers. While Lynne feted only Dusty Springfield, Moorer's sixth album features material by women celebrating their strength. The premise allows Mrs. Steve Earle a wide berth to explore a sweep of styles and emotions, choosing tunes from the unlikely combination of Patti Smith, Joni Mitchell, Ma Rainey, and Chan Marshall. As with her past work, the



from docs like his own *Westway to the World* and vintage films such as *Rude Boy*, plugs into the electric fury and ferocious energy that drove the Clash. It's all DIY, of course: sporadically shoddy sound and off-kilter cameras, plus an awful narrative supplied by Zane Lowe of the BBC that fortunately comes as optional. Scorchers include the reggae standard "Police and Thieves," "London Calling" from the group's legendary stand at Bond's NYC (more footage is apparently being restored for eventual release), beautiful bassist Paul Simonon taking over frontman duties in L.A. on "Guns of Brixton," and a deuce from NBC late-night, "This Is Radio Clash" and "The Magnificent Seven." Tom Snyder's interview extra is also worth a gander.

— Dan Oko

real attraction is Moorer's voice, an instrument that's muscular yet distinctively dulcet as well. Nina Simone's "I Want a Little Sugar in My Bowl" and Rainey's "Daddy, Goodbye Blues" are exceptionally effective for a singer whose work has long tilted toward country. With only one self-penned song, the title track, Moorer's song-writing career is seemingly on hold. The effortless *Mockingbird* proves she doesn't need to write to make music that's all her own. (Allison Moorer opens for hubby Steve Earle at the Paramount Theatre, Sunday, April 27.)

★★★★★ — Jim Caligiuri

SANTOGOLD

(Downtown)

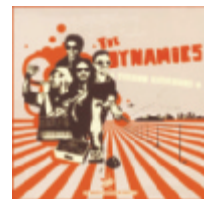
Santi White has been hailed as visionary, creative, genre-bending, and inventive – America's answer to M.I.A. – but despite Santogold's bloggerific buzz, her eponymous debut, while diverse, is no revolution. Aside from dubbed-up standout "Shove It," the Philly native and former A&R rep forgoes 24 karat for gold filler. Opener "L.E.S. Artistes" could be a Yeah Yeah Yeahs outtake, "Creator" and "Unstoppable" water down Maya Arulpragasam's politics, "My Superman" oozes Siouxsie Sioux, and "I'm a Lady" sews the three into a well-dressed, hypnotic frock. It might seem lazy to pull the comparison card, but the inflections are impossible to ignore. Santogold's nothing more than catchy, simple, dance-worthy trivia that the kids will probably eat up with both hands whether on the dance floor, falling in love, breaking up, trying on American Apparel deep-Vs, or experimenting. There's nothing offensive to speak of, just pure product. Don't let the "indie" label fool you.

★★★★★ — Darcie Stevens

THE DYNAMICS

Version Excursions (Groove Attack)

Jamaican music gets labeled green for reasons beyond the island's preoccupation with colie herbs. After all, no other country's musical community does more recycling. Riddims and sounds are continually and liberally borrowed and patched back



BEATBOX

The Roots

outdo themselves on eighth LP *Rising Down* (Def Jam), ?uestlove & Co. welcoming new bassist Owen Biddle into the mix of their most band-centric effort yet. Featuring spots from a whopping 12 outsourced MCs, jump-started by straight fire from Mos Def on the infectious title cut, *Rising* strips down for the a cappella "@ 15" and souls out on the Wale-featured "Rising Up." Showstopper "75 Bars (Black's Reconstruction)" proves the Philly crew would've been just fine without all the help. Over *Deadringer*-esque beats ("Beautiful Humanity," "The Cure"), Portland, Ore.'s **Braille** dials up Pharcyde stylings on *The IV Edition* (Syntax/Koch), nodding to the Beasties' *Check Your Head* with the organ-funked "ADDvice." Flexing lyrical muscle, the **Re-Up Gang's** Malice brings "the realest shit I ever wrote – not Pac inspired; it's crack pot inspired," on *We Got It for Cheap, Vol. 3*. The Clipse clique trades even bars with Philly heads Sandman and Ab-Liva on Raekwon's "Rainy Dayz," Obie Trice's "Cry Now," and Dame Grease-produced "20k Money Making Brothers on the Corner." With Ab-Liva and **Sandman's** two *Cheap* solo tracks, as well as the latter's *Philadelphia Ego* mixtape, the other half of the Re-Up proves they're more than simply Clipse sidemen. Edmonton, Alberta's **Cadence Weapon** drops geek-hop "In Search of the Youth Crew" with *Afterparty Babies* (Epitaph), an album dedicated to those conceived after Ma and Pa got loaded. Running parallel with what's popping in the Rhymesayers camp, the neurotic Cadence stays industrial, and, though his energy's to be applauded, the results are nearly annoying.

— Chase Hoffberger



together, tracks reborn in a rub-a-dub style, while nearly every 7-inch single has an alternate version on the flip side. The Dynamics' *Version Excursions* follows in this timeless tradition – reduce, reuse, recycle. The French-based quintet reworks a dizzyingly diverse collection of tracks from the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, and Bob Dylan to Wilson Pickett and Prince. The Dynamics manage to forge it all into a coherent, understated, soulful album, though no word on how much they dropped on licensing. The cooled-out Curtis Mayfield classic "Move On Up" is insanely good, and it's hard to believe the White Stripes' "Seven Nation Army" wasn't penned in Kingston after hearing this dubbed-out cover.

★★★★★ — Thomas Fawcett