

Morissette's Album Suffers From Self-Inflicted Overproduction

By MICHAEL ABERNETHY
Senior Writer

An Alanis Morissette album is a lot like Lenoir Dining Hall's sushi.

Just as there's something disturbing about the idea of Lenoir preparing raw fish, there's also something off-putting about listening to Morissette yodel her most intimate secrets.

But once you acquire the taste for them, you start to crave their distinctive flavor.

"Under Rug Swept," however, finds Morissette taming some of her characteristic vocal spiciness for a glossier approach to relationship therapy.

Men and their hesitant approach to

commitment are still the source of most of her rants.

But where Morissette once laid all the blame on her ex-boyfriends, she now admits her faults as reason for relationship woes. Tracks like "So Unsexy" and "Flinch" reveal a newfound confidence and understanding of her past involvements with men.

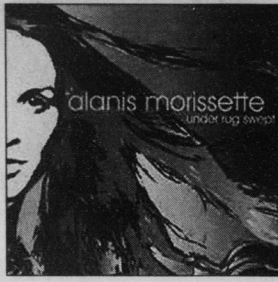
Musically, the album is a hybrid of the sharp song styles of "Jagged Little Pill," and the twisted lyrical-syntax of "Supposed Former Infatuation Junkie."

"21 Things I Want In A Lover" jump-starts the album with a dirty guitar riff and a tongue-twisting list of things she's looking for in a man. Morissette also revisits the kiss-off of "You Oughta Know" in "Narcissus," which begins with the bizarre damnation, "Dear mamma's boy/I know you had your

butt licked by your mother." The line isn't very poetic, but it's quite effective at getting her point across and proves that Morissette has not lost her knack for directness.

"Hands Clean," about her past relationships with pedophilic 30-something men, rounds out the excellent opening trio with a slick sing-along chorus full of major chords and "oohs."

But after these three amazing tracks, the album levels off a bit, and Morissette is left mostly restating similar sentiments in less intriguing guises.



The main disappointment of "Under Rug Swept" is Morissette's own heavy-handed production. There was always something so charming about hearing her screw up that flute solo on "That I Would Be Good" and feeling like the music could fall apart at any second during the guitar scratch of "All I Really Want."

But here, everything is in its right place, and it strips Morissette's performance of its originality. Though her lyrics remain as original as ever, Morissette lets her unique vocals take a

back seat to her band's performance in an uncharacteristic, Lilith-esque manner.

"That Particular Time" sounds like Sarah McLachlan a la "Surfacing," which wouldn't be disappointing if Morissette were famous for her liting ballads. It's a beautiful song - it's just not suited to her strengths.

And the radio-ready slickness of tracks like "So Unsexy" and "Surrendering" are at first catchy and engaging, but their over-produced drum loops and keyboard effects suffocate the songs.

This album marks Morissette's first time at bat without producer Glen Ballard, so she can be forgiven for erring on the side of safety. But one can't help but miss the ragged vocals and frenzied atmosphere that characterized her first two albums.

Still, the subtle groove and rapturous piano of "You Owe Me Nothing" and the breezy guitar blast of "Precious Illusions" are definite exceptions to the jinx of overproduction. But they are effective only because the songs themselves are strong enough to hold up the layers of keyboard sheen placed on top of them.

As it stands, "Under Rug Swept" is not Morissette's best album - that title still stands with the much-maligned but superior "Supposed Former Infatuation Junkie."

But at its worst, it's a very respectable holding pattern for an artist committed to exploring herself and the world around her.

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Imbruglia Torn by Influences; Cary Finds Life After Adams

Natalie Imbruglia
White Lilies Island
★★★★☆

In what seems to be an attempt to overthrow her former "Torn" personality, Natalie Imbruglia has managed to inhabit a strange place between Lisa Loeb and Shirley Manson.

Aussie pop princess Imbruglia, who gained fame for her single "Torn" from 1998's *Left of the Middle*, has returned to the music scene with something different. *White Lilies Island*, named after Imbruglia's home in Windsor, is not the poppy sophomore product that one might have expected as a follow-up to the former soap opera star's syrupy first album.

Although opaque threads of pop still dominate the album, *White Lilies Island* certainly deserves points for being stylistically eclectic. Imbruglia takes forays into Coldplay-esque rock and experiments with more elaborate sounds evocative of Garbage or U2.

But Imbruglia cannot quite master her Shirley Manson impression, attempted on tracks like "Sunlight."

Although "Sunlight" begins with an unexpectedly rolling sound like that of Garbage's *Version 2.0*, this rough, raw rock is made far less effective by the addition of Imbruglia's impossibly sweet-girl vocals. Additionally, her lyrics, though grasping at Manson's sadomasochism, ultimately cannot quite make an effective, pained power ballad.

Often, Imbruglia is more like Lisa Loeb - sweetness and light. Although melancholic and far more produced than Loeb's work, Imbruglia's "Talk in Tongues" and "Wrong Impressions" sound, at times, much like clips from Loeb's *Firecracker*.

Imbruglia is at her best when she finds a middle ground between these two extremes. Her potential shines through in the sensual and simple "Do You Love" and an oddly contemplative "Hurricane."

On these tracks, it seems that Imbruglia forgets to be the soap-star-

turned-musician torn between self-assertion and sugar. Instead, she becomes, for a few rare moments, a singer.

By Michelle Jarboe

Caitlin Cary
While You Weren't Looking
★★★★☆

While her Whiskeytown ex-bandmate Ryan Adams was charming the critics, earning three Grammy nominations, and wooing fans like Sir Elton John, Caitlin Cary was posing for a turn of her own toward stardom.

No longer content to play second fiddle, Cary has broken away from the shadow of Whiskeytown and Adams with her first solo album, *While You Weren't Looking*.

When given the spotlight, the Raleigh-based Cary boasts a lovely and affecting voice with only the slightest country edge - she sounds more like Sarah McLachlan than LeeAnn Rimes. Cary's voice proves most potent on the album's harder-rocking tracks, like the lilting opening song "Shallow Heart, Shallow Water" and "Thick Walls Down," the album's best track.

"Thick Walls Down" is a rocking duet with Todd Cockrell, one of many cameos on the album by noted Triangle musicians like Superchunk's Jon Wurster, Mayflies U.S.A.'s Adam Price, and former Whiskeytown players Mike Daly, Skillet Gilmore and Mike Santoro.

The gentle ballad "Fireworks" distinguishes itself from the album's other

tracks with its sparing but effective touches of Cary's trademark violin. Her voice is both fragile and impenetrable here, a heart-rending combination.

The depth of Cary's voice is also displayed in the plaintively aching closing track "I Ain't Found Nobody Yet." A wrenching take on heartbreak driven by a sorrowful electric guitar solo, "I Ain't Found Nobody Yet" is one of three tracks co-written by Ryan Adams.

Adams also lends his pen to "Please Don't Hurry Your Heart" and voice to "The Battle," included on a limited edition bonus disc, which recalls the former glory of Whiskeytown in a duet with Cary.

The album's weakest tracks suffer from cliché-riddled lyrics like those from "Sorry." Cary sings, "You are a bitter brother in the shadow of a twin/Strangled in her warm embrace/You have grown up savage, mean and thin."

But even the lesser tracks feature a mature musicality and elegant savvy that make this fresher effort indicative of great things to come.

It seems true talent bloomed while we weren't looking in Caitlin Cary's direction.

By Jill Spivey

Josh Clayton-Felt
Spirit Touches Ground
★★★★☆

Josh Clayton-Felt died from cancer before he could see the completion of his second solo album.

To keep Clayton-Felt's memory alive,

DreamWorks Records has released the former School of Fish singer's sophomore album, *Spirit Touches Ground*.

The album consists of songs Clayton-Felt originally recorded at A&M Records. After being dropped from that label in 1998 and going through lots of industry red tape, the singer/guitarist re-recorded his songs with DreamWorks.

The album is a mix of blues, funk, classic rock and splashes of music from across the world. Keyboards mimic sounds of India as "Night of a Thousand Girls" seductively dances around the listener.

Clayton-Felt's ear for musical arrangement is showcased on the track "Backwards World." His guitar strum is gently overtaken by the majestic waves of a trombone as the youthful ode to self-discovery becomes reminiscent of marching band competitions and half-time shows.

Sadly, listeners might wish *Spirit Touches Ground* was strictly instrumental.

From the beginning of "Diamond in Your Heart," Clayton-Felt annoyingly reverberates each line. Singing, "Sometimes my heart's so hungry I don't trust my mind," listeners are dragged back to the 80s and painful memories of "The Breakfast Club."

A fusion of blues and alternative rock, "Invisible Tree" slinks from line to line, running smack into a whimsical chorus. "Invisible tree/Invisible tree you're not invisible to me." Off-beat, the song makes for an overall funky track that advocates seizing the day.

Yet Clayton-Felt fans might have difficulty finding the silver lining in other songs like "Deer in the Headlights" and "Dragon Fly" that aren't openly optimistic like "Invisible Tree." Pensive and a bit somber, these songs and seem to foreshadow the singer's death.

But without a doubt, *Spirit Touches Ground* is meant to be celebratory, not mournful. Funky and full of life, the album leaves fans a musical portrait of Josh Clayton-Felt that's full of love and hope.

By Jenise Hudson

dive
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recommends
By Caroline Lindsey

■ **Elton John, *Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy*** This is pop music at its most versatile and inventive. The hit track "Someone Saved my Life Tonight" does stand out, but the album's classic quality comes from its exemplary cohesion and quirky lyrics.

■ **Led Zeppelin, *Houses of the Holy*** A mystical, sexual, captivating album featuring some of the most bad-ass guitar playing ever. With lyrics that ponder and vocals that linger with you, these eight well-crafted songs will invade your soul.

■ **Cat Stevens, *Teaser and the Firecat*** With precise acoustic guitar work and soulful lyrics, Stevens' album is full of beautiful songs that journey from the simplicity of "The Wind" to the emphatic emotion and strong rhythm of "Peace Train."

■ **Various Artists, *Music from 'Vanilla Sky'*** Few soundtracks require no track-skipping, but this one is entirely solid. Tracks from names like McCartney and Dylan are only the beginning of this introspective collection of songs. Props to Cameron Crowe for pulling some great artists out of the underground.

■ **Dave Eggers, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*** Believe it or not, this book lives up to its title pretty accurately. Eggers wittily and hilariously tells the inspiring story of raising his younger brother after their parents' deaths, as well as sharing some of his own college experiences.

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