

## Mann's Spins Musical Tales Of Love, Woe in Bachelor #2

By RUSS LANE  
Staff Writer

Aimee Mann miraculously turns sour grapes into fine wine.

This talent is not wasted on *Bachelor #2*, Mann's independent follow-up to last year's successful "Magnolia" soundtrack. Lyrically deft and musically intricate, Mann's singer-songwriter mystique ranks her among the genre's greats, Elvis Costello and Neil Young.

### CD REVIEW

Aimee Mann  
*Bachelor #2*



While Mann's previous albums — 1992's *Whatever* and 1996's *I'm With Stupid* — read like novels, *Bachelor #2* has no real beginning, middle or end.

Instead, the album is a collection of "Magnolia" material, old songs and new compositions, as if Mann is letting her audience catch up with her.

Of course, four years is a lot of catching up to do. After her label assimilated into Interscope Records, Mann bought back *Bachelor* after executives refused to release the album as Mann intended.

Unsurprisingly, Mann's record-company drama fuels much of the album's melodic ire.

Record-industry protest music is not a new musical sub-genre (just ask Prince and Joni Mitchell), but Mann's song-writing deftly blurs the lines between the personal and professional. "Calling it Quits" and "Nothing is Good Enough" can read either as songs of wounded

love or brutal condemnations of record execs.

Aside from industry kvetching, Mann writes love songs for *really* screwed-up people. Like "Save Me," which earned Mann an Oscar nomination, all of Mann's songs hope for the best and get let down. *Bachelor's* songs are no exception.

Mann issues a belated eulogy for Jeff Buckley in "Just Like Anyone," expressing a desire to have been closer to the drowned songwriter. "Driving Sideways" provides an extended metaphor for the nightmarish relationships which fascinate her.

"Susan" finds Mann lamenting over another failed endeavor in fluid couplets such as "There must have been some kind of parade/We kissed for a while to see how it played/And pulled the pin on another grenade."

"So don't work your stuff/Because I got troubles enough," Mann begs on "Deathly," which stands as her best composition to date. Inspiring Director P.T. Anderson to write "Magnolia," the song warns off a would-be savior, "deathly" afraid that her paramour will give her the help she needs.

Continually transforming her personal and record industry woes into Beatle-esque pop, Mann beautifully inflicts Hell's Fury upon her unfortunate, albeit deserving, targets.

If you are a jerk boyfriend or a soulless record exec, beware. Aimee is watching.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at [artsdesk@unc.edu](mailto:artsdesk@unc.edu).

## Ween Remains Weird on White Pepper

By ASHLEY ATKINSON  
Assistant Arts & Entertainment Editor

Ween's music can only be the product of long-term drug use.

To put it simply, it's just weird. *White Pepper*, the band's seventh album, is a schizophrenic joyride through the modern musical canon, sampling heavily from kitschy retro pop-rock with irreverent glee.

Country rock? Got it. Speed metal? Sure. Folk? Why not. Sappy love songs? Those too. It'd sound like a compilation if you didn't know better.

### CD REVIEW

Ween  
*White Pepper*



Dean and Gene Ween (no, they're not really brothers, and those aren't their real names) have been making music together since 1984, when they met in eighth-grade typing class.

*White Pepper* provides more of what a rabid cult of fans has grown to love and expect from Ween: crudely comedic songs in an absurd variety of musical postures (presented, admittedly, with a good deal of skill).

There's some of Ween's usual cheerful offensiveness, with lyrics like "Look at yourself/ Your lips are like two flaps of fat/ They go front and back and flap-pity flappy flap."

But the closest it gets to the disturbing subject matter of earlier work like "Spinal Meningitis (Got Me Down)" is a line about a dancer who lost her legs. This makes for a less instantly memorable album, but one more palatable to those not into songs about diseases.

So maybe time has brought us a



Dean and Gene Ween make a few changes to the Ween method on the band's seventh album, *White Pepper*. Ween's tour makes a stop at The Ritz in Raleigh on May 20.

kinder, gentler Ween; maybe they just laid off the hallucinogens a little.

For an additional change of pace, the album features not only strings, but horns and female backup singers, which Dean and Gene say are "three very bad signs for the future of Ween."

And in another out-of-character move, there's hardly an expletive to be found (nary a mention of the f-word).

But the risqué beach tune "Bananas and Blow" (think cocaine to Jimmy Buffett's margaritas) was still enough to

earn a parental advisory sticker.

That song's calypso beats are followed by a driving metal-punk song, then a weird, atmospheric instrumental, and then back to some '70s-esque pop rock. A logical progression, no?

Ween even reveals its soft underbelly with a few sweet, poppy love songs. It's hard to tell if they're serious, though; sappy lines like "In the morning sun I couldn't tell you/ I couldn't tell you so many things/ About how much I really love you/ About how much you really

mean" border on mockery.

So this is the new Ween, mouths washed out and ready for the masses. You might even hear the poppy single "Even If You Don't" on the radio alongside Dave Matthews and Sarah McLachlan — it's being marketed to the Adult Album Alternative radio format.

I don't think I see a Top 40 hit coming, but I'm sure that won't phase Ween.

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## MUSIC BRIEFS

**Portastatic: *De Mel, De Melao***  
Think very muted Superchunk mixed with very muted Santana, and you get Portastatic's new EP, *De Mel, De Melao*.

This tasty little EP is a selection of five songs by Brazilian artists performed by Mac McCaughan, the voice of Superchunk.

### CD REVIEW

Portastatic  
*De Mel, De Melao*



The title's translation, "Of Honey, Of Melon" is taken from one of the songs, and it seems appropriate for the entire EP.

Most of the lyrics are in the original Portuguese, but when McCaughan adds the occasional English verse, it's just as sugary as the music.

Don't be misled — these are merely new recordings of Brazilian pop songs of the '60s and '70s. Portastatic adds a

new touch, drifting towards a more updated pop sound. Compare Portastatic's cover of "Baby" to the '60s psych version by Os Mutantes, and you'll see what I mean.

Perhaps the best part of Portastatic is getting to hear McCaughan's sweet little vocals against a different musical backdrop — sans Superchunk.

Unless you know Portuguese, you'll have no idea what he's singing about, but when's the last time you listened to popular music for the lyrics anyway?

### Billy Dechand Band: *Hocus Pocus*

Like the average person, the average day in one's life, or perhaps most appropriate, the average local band, The Billy Dechand Band is neither god-awful nor amazingly wonderful.

The band is another Chapel Hill group whose album, *Hocus Pocus*, achieves a stable level of mediocrity.

The group is self-described as spanning from "dreamy, chipper, to Radiohead-esque longing." Dreamy and chipper, okay, but Billy Dechand couldn't be further from Radiohead.

Most of the other songs seem unfocused and lazy. Sometimes Billy Dechand sounds like swing that never quite makes it off the ground, and sometimes one hears the faintest trace of ska.

The album does have its solid moments. The first track, "See Saw" is pleasant and even kind of catchy.

Listening to this isn't a bad experience, only slightly mind-numbing.

Compiled by Joanna Pearson

## Mya Releases Impressive Sophomore Effort

By FERRIS MORRISON  
Staff Writer

With the release of her second album, *Fear of Flying*, Mya is announcing to the world her transition from childhood to womanhood.

Her self-titled debut album, released in 1998, went double platinum and included several Top 10 singles such as "Movin' On" and "It's All About Me," which earned a Soul Train Award nomination.

### CD REVIEW

Mya  
*Fear of Flying*



Two years later, 20-year-old Mya adds to her impressive music career with a sophomore album that shows even more promise than her first.

Each track, made through collaborations with some of the top producers and emcees in the industry, shows Mya's growth as an individual and as an artist. She co-wrote half of the songs on the album.

Songs like "Case of the Ex" highlight Mya's stellar vocals with inventive keyboards and programming. Other songs like "Pussycats" contain more jazzy vocals coupled with a distinctive hip-hop beat.

Mellow acoustic guitar accompani-

ment adds an unexpected flavor to the album in "How You Gonna Tell Me" and the title track.

Mya's wide range of guest emcees on the album add a little hip-hop flavor to her distinctive R&B sound that dominates *Fear of Flying*.

Jadakiss steps in as guest emcee in "The Best of Me," a sassy track with a subtle Spanish sound.

"Lie Detector" features reggae favorite Beenie Man. The jungle beat lends well to Beenie Man's style, but Producer Wyclef Jean creates no transition from Mya's soft vocals to Beenie's chorus.

The transition breaks the flow of the track, but Jean rectifies the situation by effectively blending the two sounds in the following part of the song.

"Takin' Me Over" contains a touch of piano accompaniment in its mix. The song's cheerful, upbeat sound is reminiscent of The Jackson Five era of music, when everything was as easy as "1-2-3."

Left Eye's comical cameo lets her outrageous personality shine through and only adds to the humorous attitude of the song.

From Intro to Outro, Mya's sophomore album discusses the relationships she has dealt with in her transition to womanhood.

Mya has had to work through some



Twenty-year-old R&B songstress Mya returns to the music scene with her promising sophomore release, *Fear of Flying*.

rocky times coming of age in the spotlight, and *Fear of Flying* artfully demonstrates that she has gracefully conquered those times and truly become a woman

with exceptional talent.

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