

Locals SAD Rock Out; White Turns Out Strange, Southern Album

Jim White
No Such Place
★★★★

Sometimes artists try to be bizarre simply so they stick out from the crowd. Other times artists are truly bizarre. Such is Jim White.

To roughly approximate his sound, try mixing Beck's rambling, mumbling lyrics, Neil Young's passionate folk influence and an upbringing in the rural South. Then do acid.

There is no effective way of describing White's sophomore effort without accompanying audio samples, but his poetically descriptive lyrics might serve as an introduction to *No Such Place*: "God was drunk when he made me, but that's OK / Cause I forgive him," he sings in one song.

"You got no choice but to learn to glean solace from pain/ Or you'll end up cynical or dead," he warbles in another.

"My Trans-Am is missing/ I guess no more kissing the girl who loved my car."

If one were to attempt to categorize the music of Jim White, it would be something like gospel-influenced, Southern country rock. This description doesn't take into account, however, the bundle of contradictions that make White so interesting. This includes combining White's rural lyrics with modern British production, and the fact that White is obviously strongly influenced by Southern gospel despite the fact that he appears to distrust God.

White's first album, *Wrong-Eyed Jesus*, met with critical confusion. Some proclaimed it strangely beautiful while others simply felt it was strange. *No Such Place* continues in the same vein, with the additional help of a host of contributors that are almost as unexpected as White himself. They include producers from such varied acts as trip-hop veterans Morcheeba, R&B chanteuse Sade and a member of the Japanese under-

ground country group World Standard. Although the beats of the first and fifth tracks are obviously the result of Morcheeba's influence, White personalizes each song with narratives about missing Trans-Ams and gas-station attendants. He shows a talent for creating vivid scenes of the rural South with his words on tracks such as "Christmas Day" and "Covair." Unfortunately, the majority of the scenes he creates are vividly depressing.

But though many of White's songs describe depressing situations, the underlying message is often one of success when you least expect it. This message ends up being an apt description of *No Such Place*.

Trafton Drew

Sorry About Dresden
How the Cold War Began
★★★★

Somewhere amid the songwriting and recording process exists a small window of time when a song's newness spurs intense excitement that spills from the individual and creates an electric force. Rarely do bands capitalize on that explosiveness in the studio, as endless repetition makes songs lose their potency.

Enter *Sorry About Dresden*. The latest EP by this local four-piece, *How the Cold War Began*, captures that raw passion most bands squander all too quickly. And boy, is it a beautiful thing.

The opening track is an acoustic song with dual vocals. Warm keyboards and a recorded thunderstorm make a perfect prelude to the dynamic rock that strikes like lightning on the next track.

"The Cults of the Famous and the Dead" begins with a quiet, anticipatory intro that quickly burgeons into an all-out rock assault. The sometimes-shouting and always-straining vocals are, well, odd. But not odd in a "turn this off" way, but an "mmm ... tell me more" way.

The chorus does just that, as SAD breaks into a perfectly crafted bridge to an infectious refrain that almost surely results in head-bobbing from live audiences. And the curious "tell me more" turns to a demanding "give me more."

The EP continues to overflow with personality and sincerity, as SAD colors outside the lines, serving up rock songs

that flaunt creativity in a manner reminiscent of the late Archers of Loaf. Its uniqueness makes this EP a little hard to swallow at first, especially considering SAD's tendency to pour out a song and throw away the mold.

Although track three is another full-on distortion rock song, the second half of the EP is more experimental. Only for a few rough minutes do the endeavors give way to dissonant improv noise sessions. But even the mellow "The Store You Deserve" and "The Mayor Will Abdicate" have build-ups that rock out Dresden style.

Armed with hyperactive drumming, rebellious pop vocals and snazzy lead guitars, these Chapel Hill rockers have taken it upon themselves to carry a torch that has been dimming ever since the last regime of local indie legends called it quits. And while that flame still needs a lot of fanning, this EP is gas on the fire.

Jason Arthurs

Regatta Sixty9
SKAttered, SMOTHered, COVERed
★

Regatta Sixty9's latest album, *SKAttered, SMOTHered, COVERed*, is 16 tracks of pure ska hell. It's a fine example of what happens when you give clarinets to a flock of geriatric ducks and tell them to blow. (Remember, ducks don't even have lips.)

In its press material, Regatta Sixty9 bills itself as "a great band with a fun sound and a subtle message." This self-proclamation of excellence and virtue is a hyperbole, to say the least, and a downright factual error, to be honest.

SKAttered, SMOTHered, COVERed is a crack attempt at producing an album full of cover tunes, live tracks, compilation works and previously unreleased material. The result is a bunch of songs that should never be taken in a ska context.

Take, for example, Regatta Sixty9's cover of Bob Marley's "One Love." Regatta's version is weak, with depressing horn hits and vocals that are completely lost in the noisy mix excluding the chorus. There have been better covers in the Holiday Inn piano lounge. Marley must be rolling over in his grave. Moving on to the cover of "Damn It



Folky, blue-haired English export Eliza Carthy fuses the modern and the traditional on her debut album, *Angels and Cigarettes*, using both a fiddle and synthesizers to sometimes good, sometimes ill effect.

Janet" from that cult classic, "The Rocky Horror Picture Show," Regatta Sixty9 further illustrates that the creative forces behind the band aren't exactly geniuses. "Damn It Janet" was decently catchy the first time around, but a.) it's not the best material for a cover, and b.) it's certainly not ska, no matter how hard you try.

Theoretically ska blends reggae with rock, calypso and jazz influences to create a horn-driven, spunky mix. Ska is that kind of music that's good for annoying the neighbors or violently dancing across the lawn in your underwear.

Regatta Sixty9 doesn't quite have this concept down yet. The band's energy level is a far cry from that of Fishbone or the Mighty Mighty Bosstones. Unfortunately, Regatta offers very little to compensate for its general mediocrity.

"Lonesome Track," recorded live in Little Rock, Arkansas, features one notable trumpet solo and "I Wanna Smack You" has a relatively decent set of lyrics with one semi-interesting, though often repeated, guitar riff.

Regatta Sixty9 actually manages to drum up some enthusiasm on "Someone to Cling to," however, such minimal redeeming qualities can quickly be tossed out the window in the face of the inanely stupid "Micro Bus."

SKAttered, SMOTHered, COVERed does not speak well for Regatta Sixty9 and its (assumedly hidden) talents. With a lot of work and stronger chops in the horn section, the band might be worth the box set CD comes in. Until that happens, the most hard-core ska addict

might find Regatta Sixty9 somewhat entertaining, but anyone else is best advised to leave the album on the record store shelves.

Sarah Kucharski

Eliza Carthy
Angels & Cigarettes
★★★

Eliza Carthy, like her music, is a study in contrasts. She's got the blue hair and multiple piercings of a punk rocker, but she's an avid folk traditionalist who plays a mean fiddle, not a loud guitar.

Carthy is one of the recent folkly trip-hop exports from Britain, along with Dido and Beth Orton. But Carthy differs from them in pedigree - her parents are elder statesmen of British folk and vocal performance - and her approach. Traditional tunes of an almost medieval flavor suit Carthy's fiddle and earthy, soulful voice; she's more Renaissance and less Joan Baez, with whom Carthy toured the U.S. in 1999.

On the appropriately titled *Angels & Cigarettes*, her major label debut, Carthy turns in a sincere set of folk fusion that owes as much to Portishead as it does her British folk music. It's a strange brew that doesn't always come together pleasantly.

"Whispers of Summer," the sunny opening cut, tumbles along with a bright melody and an unobtrusive marriage of fiddle and drum machine. It's a wonderful, successful song.

But songs like "Beautiful Girl," a lament on the trials of a pretty woman,

and "Train Song," the obligatory Latin-influenced track, are mired by their thick electronic pulses. Some otherwise fine songs are crushed under the weight of the pretentious production.

On a large portion of the album, a soup of synthesizers and violins clash in an off-putting manner; call it Enya meets the Dust Brothers. The lush and contemporary-sounding production makes her songs, which dip into love, longing and self-image, more muscular than they ought to be. "Fuse," about a world-weary woman, stands out as the most affecting, gentle track because of its more sparse arrangement. You have to wonder if the whole set would be better if Carthy were alone in the studio with her fiddle.

A number of good songs still find their way to the surface. "Whole," a sweetly sincere take on love as obsession, is that much more soulful and lovely because of the jazzy beat. "Poor Little Me," a very Dido-sounding trip-hop song championing self-pity, is a song so cold in meaning that the disconnected accompaniment fits perfectly.

Angels & Cigarettes might not have the immediacy of some of Carthy's earlier work, when her folk fusion experiments were fresher, but her new album is an engaging listen nonetheless.

Carthy's major label debut is mostly a success; the overly self-conscious production might not be the apt forum for her talents, but she manages to shine through the muck with fiddle firmly in hand.

Brian Millikin

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