Minus 5 Down With Wilco

As if becoming the unofficial fourth member of R.E.M. wasn't enough.

Seattle's Scott McCaughey, leader of the long-running Young Fresh Fellows, joins the Athens rock godfathers in the studio and on tour. He also manages to keep a steady side project, the loose-knit Minus 5, which teams him with R.E.M. guitarist Peter Buck and the Posies' Ken

But McCaughey has really robbed the rock gold mine this time. For his latest Minus 5 release, McCaughey recruited alt-rock kings Wilco to sit in and play at being a backing band. The album, featuring Wilco's Jeff Tweedy and company, is appropriately titled Down With Wilco The situation is amusing, something like when The Band backed Dylan in the mid-'60s, but only if Dylan was somehow inferior to his supporters.

Though sharp in spurts and catchy in a few stretches, *Down With Wilco* is no Yankee Hotel Foxtrot. Not that it aspires to be, but the participation of the now-gilded band attracts greater expectation more than the next release of the side project of an indie-rock elder statesman should otherwise attract.

Wilco provides superb support, sup-plying everything from bubbly power pop to retro-'60s honey-soaked rockers. There's a candy playfulness to its back ing here, trading in its cool art sound for ne of the man-child giddiness of

McCaughey's cutesy rock experiments. McCaughey couldn't ask for a better backdrop. Conversely, Wilco the backing band deserves better songwriting from its captain. McCaughey's songs largely aren't up to scratch – not even up to the catchy standards of his two previous Minus 5 and Young Fresh Fellows albums. The melodies are confused and cluttered, and the lyrics struggle for a too-showy, clever hook.

Down With Wilco lacks any real consistency. For every excellent "Where Will You Go?" there's pitiful filler like

"Daggers Drawn." For every glowing "Retrieval of You," there're two pointless and trying numbers like "That's Not the Way It's Done."

It doesn't help that McCaughey's voice simply isn't interesting. His flat Beach Boys croon quickly wears out its welcome, and its robotic consistency

begins to grate on one's ears.

Calling this incarnation of the Minus 5 a super-group implies that it's a collection of renowned talent – which it is but also that it's a successful merger which it's not.

McCaughey and Wilco are both capable of far better.

If Down With Wilco proves anything,

it's that such strong talents ought to stick to their own corners. More is less By Brian Millikin

Bettie Serveert Log 22 ★★★☆

Holland's Bettie Serveert first gained recognition in 1992, when its album Palomine became an indie rock classic That level of success soon disappeared, and the band settled into the role of cult artist over the remainder of the decade.

If the group is ever to return to mainstream prominence, its new album should be the one that does it. It would

certainly be well-deserved.

Log 22 is the best kind of pop record, one that sounds instantly familiar but evolves into something more distinctive.

Lead singer and principal songwriter Carol Van Dyk is the best weapon in the band's arsenal. Her vocal delivery recalls

everybody from Gwen Stefani to Bob Dylan but is ultimately unique unto itself.

She can utterly hypnotize you with a ballad like "Captain of Maybe" but can also tear into such a song as the incisive Not Coming Down.

Aside from Van Dyk, what makes Bettie Serveert so appealing is how it manages to create seemingly simple pop

songs that are really expertly crafted.

Listen to how the album's best track, "De Diva," begins gently, adds instru-ments slowly, builds momentum until it reaches its transcendent chorus then launches into a stinging guitar solo by

At a playing time of over 60 minutes, it's close to an embarrassment of riches.

As a result, the album eventually loses steam toward the end. This is particularly evident in the 8-minute "White Dogs," an apparent homage to the Dogs," an apparent homage to the band's primary inspiration, The Velvet Underground, which is even thanked in the liner notes the liner notes.

Unfortunately, the song is too mean-dering to justify its length and will likely lose the listener.

Despite a couple of minor missteps that better editing could have fixed easily, the band recovers admirably, finishing on a high note with the irresistibly trippy disco of "The Love-In."

There is an unfortunate stigma

attached to music produced by foreign-based pop bands – that most of it is too

weird and inaccessible to enjoy.

The truth is, *Log 22* is some of the best pop music you're likely to hear all year. *By Michael Pucci*

Minus Mimics Wilco; Serveert Pure Pop Experienced Singer/Songwriter Continues With Discord, Talent

By Michelle Jarboe Staff Writer

Ani DiFranco seems to have traded n her romance with liberal thought in favor of a love affair with dissonance

Evolve, DiFranco's 14th LP, overflows with incongruent tones that paradoxically attract rather than repel the ear. And these tonalities are

what bind together elements of funk, folk, jazz, country and Latin music Ani DiFranco into an eclectic evolution of style.

The aptly titled album evokes comparisons to DiFranco's career, which began with her 1989 self-titled LP featuring her voice and her guitar and has led to an elaborately produced con-

glomeration of instruments and styles. But the artist who has developed her compositions dramatically retains the driving element of all her albums -

Over the slightly jarring chords of "Serpentine" and "Icarus," DiFranco's voice prevails, dictating the movement of the music through its rhythm and diversity. diversity. From singing to pseudo-rap-ping, and most often somewhere in between, DiFranco carries the album with her words.

And this is nowhere more evident

than on "Serpentine," a 10-minute meditation on self, country, politics, music and the media. Instead of becoming a repetitive tirade, the lengthy song is dis-tinguished by the rhythmic presentation that highlights each line and drives

every point:
DiFranco uses her voice as an instru-

ment to compliment and balance her music. Guitars, piano, saxophones, percussion and other instruments are allied into the melodies of "Promised Land" and "Slide" as the vocals travel from husky to full, from harsh to soothing.

Laugh-infused vocal gyrations make it impossible to sit silently and lis-

ten to the jazzy
notes of "In the Way" and "Here for
Now." And DiFranco's range of abilities

ous albums yet departs into its own world
of incongruence and rhythm unparalis showcased by the contrast of revealing tunes such as the building, melancholy beauty of "Icarus," one of the album's most impressive lyrical and musical

The notes often don't instantly fit together but are resolved into exotic chords that eventually find segues into harmony. Similarly, vocal and musical

contortions are always balanced by simpler, calmer moments, few and far between though they may be.

"Phase" takes a less elaborate approach than many of the other tracks. Its unpol-Plastic Castle's "Two Little Girls."

But the gentlest point of DiFranco's evolution is the closing "Welcome To:," a

song previously released on 2002's So Much Shouting, So Much Laughter. The musical hills and valleys of this finale knit raw emotion and polish in an appropriately final catharsis that leaves nothing to desired.

The path Evolve is connected

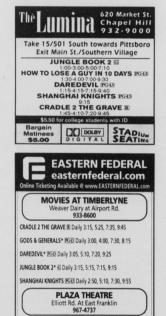
leled by much of her recent work.

But that's not surprising coming from the nonstop singer/songwriter, who succinctly explains herself through the lyrics of the album's title track:

"I'm just trying to evolve."

EVOLVE

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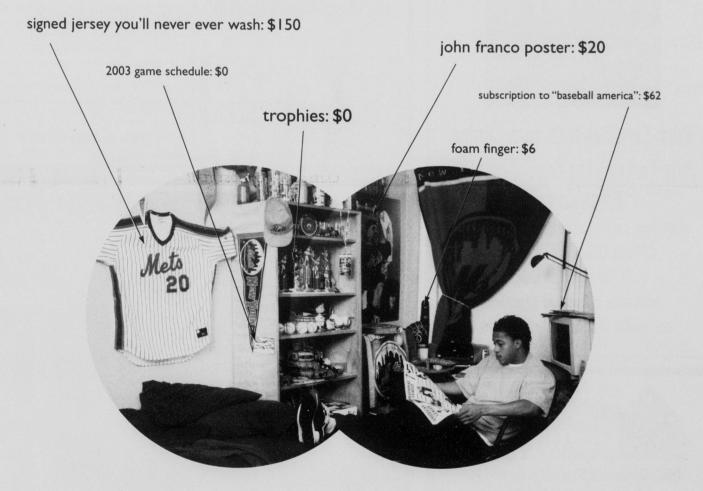
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