

Emo, screamo 'War' on release

BY PHILIP MCFEE
ASSISTANT ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

At one time, playing a Thursday album was akin to spinning a recording of a lawn mower.

It was that precise. But cacophony was and is par for the course in Thursday's corner of the rock scene.

When emo kids lost their courduros, they inevitably moved on to something a smidge more "edgy" — and so, "screamo" was born.

Not to disappoint, Thursday continues in the screamo vein with its latest release, *War All the Time*.

Thursday's performance might not garner any legitimate decorations, but the heavy moniker of its choppy, jagged album might land it "most fitting title" accolades.

Riding in the wake of its 2000 debut *Waiting*, Thursday blew into the mainstream with 2001's throaty, raging *Full Collapse*.

The release left emo kids breathless, just like the time their girlfriend left them crumpled on the floor like a love letter and forever walked out. Of their hearts.

Sheesh. On each release Thursday has jumped a level in production value.

This latest effort finds the band at their most technically adept.

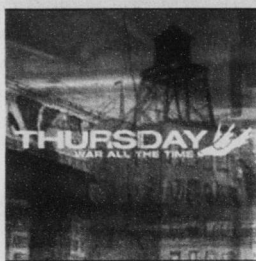
The heavy, rhythmical guitar work slugs throughout every track. Nearly every song has a powerful, if ultimately unoriginal hook.

But the lyrics are where it's at. Right, the lyrics.

Thursday's verbal message is where the band stands out. But remember, the verbal message is also why Don King stands out.

Often, the band is personal to the point to self-parody — "I held you tight like an empty bottle but the glass broke."

Whereas many artists (ahem, Thom Yorke) would cloud political messages in romantic symbolism,



MUSIC REVIEW
THURSDAY
WAR ALL THE TIME
★★★

Thursday is one of the rare acts that — with sincerity — uses war jargon when waxing emotional.

The album's title track is a ballad on a seemingly changed America that also could be gaged with ease as an emotional allegory.

Listeners can find similar sonic ideas from the crunching opener "For the Workforce, Drowning" to the solid closer "Tomorrow I'll be You."

War All the Time could be seen as intense by a first-timer, but in context, the album is a straight-down-the-middle Thursday effort, competent to the last.

Because it can say "we burn like the paper hearts of dead presidents" all they want to, but, in the end, Thursday thanks <http://www.homestarrunner.com> in its liner notes.

The screamo mainstays are back at it, and emo kids will be waving the white flag.

For the rest, Thursday's *War* for innovation may be over, but the battle hasn't been won.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

Mayer stagnates; Naess pretty in pink

John Mayer
HEAVIER THINGS
★

Sometimes it's good to stop while you're ahead.

John Mayer should have stopped a long time ago.

He just released his fourth LP *Heavier Things*, which turns out to be weaker than the other three records.

The opener, "Clarity," is a bad omen for the rest of the album. Starting with an obnoxious clapping noise and synthesized horns, all hope for the album is crushed within the first couple of seconds.

The first song lacks an amazing amount of clarity.

The pre-chorus vocals can be identified as a whale call before it can be identified as singing.

Also, Mayer, who became a household name because of the acoustic guitar, has more musical effects and synthesized noises than all the Devo records combined. The album lacks much actual guitar playing.

His radio single, "Bigger than My Body," features an effect that is almost identical to the noise produced in the movie "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" as the aliens are landing.

The driving force behind Mayer used to be his talent with a guitar. He has amazing ability as a picker, and he was enrolled at Berklee College of Music for his chops. But he has traded all that in for trippy noises one would have to be stoned to enjoy.

Beside the lack of guitar, Mayer forgot to add something else while he was playing with the sound effects on his computer — tempo.

It's almost as if the girl in "Your Body is a Wonderland" broke up with him, and not only broke his heart, but his metronome.

On "Something's Missing," Mayer talks about what's lacking in his life and how he doesn't know what it is.

It is called tempo, John. Let's hope he finds it before he makes another CD.

The only decent aspect of his new release is that it might pass as original — but all hope for that

argument is swept away by the eighth track.

As the song goes on and the tempo seems to get slower, Mayer moans out the first line, "I (pause) know a girl." And it doesn't get any deeper than that folks — please hold back the tears.

That line is straight out of Dana Carvey's "Chopping Broccoli" "Saturday Night Live" sketch.

Although Mayer made a CD consisting of moaning, clapping and a fake horn section, the album did score the No. 1 spot on the Billboard 200.

Bad news for the musical community, but great news for people who use recordings of whales to relax.

By Tanner Slayden

Leona Naess
LEONA NAESS
★★★★

So exactly how much pink can you cram into one album?

Leona Naess' eponymous third album might appear a tad bit flowery, but stick with it.

Naess received enough critical acclaim for her 2000 debut, *Comatized*, to draw comparisons to '90s angst-rock staples such as Liz Phair and Alanis Morissette.

But Naess can be placed more easily in the traditional, acoustic guitar-toting singer/songwriter vein. She plays guitar and piano on most of the album, which is quite mellow. You could even describe it as ... pink.

In fact, everything about this album is pink: the sound, the disc, the text, all the way down to the roses on the cover.

That said, fans of delicate vocalizations and heartfelt lyrics will appreciate Naess' musical sensibility.

Almost all the songs are directly or indirectly about relationships, though some are more overt than others. "Don't Use My Broken Heart" or "Yes, It's Called Desire" are in-your-face, at least lyrically.

And that's where the album really shines: its lyrics. Naess crafts under-the-radar songs that occasionally contain a line or two that truly sting.

"Dues to Pay" contains a virtuosic crescendo to the first two lines of the chorus: "It's only been a pain loving you/You're my dues to pay."

The addition of a real string section to a good chunk of the tunes is a godsend.

Nothing — nothing — can kill an acoustic track faster than a Radio Shack synthesizer's idea of what a viola should sound like — something between a rubber band and a belt sander.

But the production is somewhat stodgy. Fortunately, this effect is minimized by the style in which Naess plays.

While detracting from the objective quality, it serves to increase the intimacy of the songwriting.

It's mind-blowing that Leona Naess is the daughter of soul diva Diana Ross and a Norwegian shipping magnate.

No, really. Really.

Naess has followed her mother's career, but certainly not her style.

It will be interesting to see if she will be able to apply her lyrical ability to more interesting subject matter.

Still, on this effort, the songs are solid, and Naess seems comfortable in her skin.

It's not a landmark album, but it certainly contains the kinds of songs some people really might love.

By Jeff Fowler

Story of the Year
PAGE AVENUE
★★★

Story of the Year's Web site — full of flashy graphics and loud music — proves that the band is trying hard to attract a pre-pubescent crowd vulnerable to its emo sway.

It appears to be working.

The band developed a fan base this summer at the Warped Tour, where it performed songs from its debut album, *Page Avenue*.

The emo kids were swarming, prompting the band to move to a larger stage — not surprising considering its poppy punk appeal.

Story of the Year's commercial-

ly geared single "Until the Day I Die" repeatedly falls into a singsong chorus that might attract radio airplay. However, it lacks lyrical depth.

Lyrics such as, "Until the day I die/I'll spill my heart for you" clearly are neither profound nor moving.

Despite its lack of originality in the midst of a pop-punk movement — or maybe because of it — you can catch Story of the Year's video for "Until the Day I Die" on MTV2.

This brings to mind other recent forays into the pop world by previously "acceptable" punk bands.

For this reason alone, pretentious, hardcore punk rockers probably will scoff at this album as they have at recent releases by Thursday and AFI.

For the more mainstream of us, the album admittedly has something more to offer. The band is from St. Louis, so it follows that heartbreak is the only material it has to sing about.

Case in point: St. Louis did produce the musically revolutionary rap artist Nelly.

Nevertheless, the recently heartbroken will find the album a cathartic experience.

Wooing interspersed with desperate screaming portrays the range of emotions accompanied by the loss of love.

Lyrics such as, "Even now as I write this down, all pretension disappear/Now our impulses will bite at the ankles of our fears" are acceptably melodramatic.

The album's highlights are "Swallow the Knife" and "Sidewalks," which both carry messages that are subtle but somewhat poignant — leading to a respect for the intended message of the group's debut.

Page Avenue is not a pick-me-up — but emo kids aren't looking for happiness anyway.

For the rest of the world, carefully approach this CD as you would a post-breakup box of chocolates: pop a Prozac and then dive in.

You might regret it afterward, but for now it's what you need.

by Jackie Randell

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