

Diversions

The Daily Tar Heel

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INSIDE DIVE ■ HOOK, LINE AND SINKER ... Tim Burton reels in a winner with warm "Big Fish." PAGE 7 ■ GOTTA KEEP 'EM SEPARATED ... Aging Offspring stray further from decent music PAGE 6

2003 THE BEST OF

ALBUMS 1 MOVIES

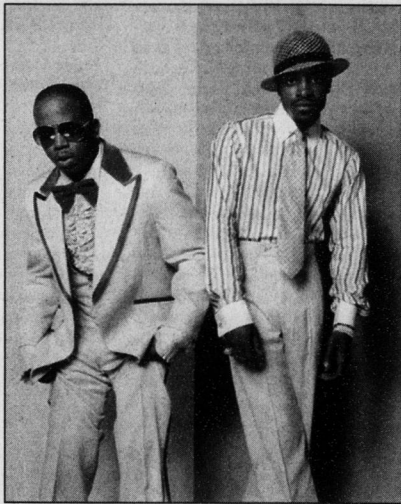
OUTKAST

SPEAKERBOXXX & THE LOVE BELOW

Even apart, Dre and Big Boi present the same brilliant, crowd-pleasing aesthetic where the past and the future of hip-hop meet.

Big Boi's *Speakerboxxx* gives audiences the most personal and open glimpse of the duo's less conspicuous half. *The Love Below* is Dre's Frankenstein monster: part Prince-ly throw-back, part Pink Floydian concept album.

There's a reason the duo's respective lead singles locked down BET's "106 and Park" and MTV's "TRL" at the same time. They're just that good.



COURTESY OF LA FACE

THE SHINS

CHUTES TOO NARROW

As current keepers of the indie rock throne, the Shins faced the dilemma of how to improve on *The Daily Tar Heel's* 2001 album of the year. Their response? *Chutes Too Narrow*, which, while being a more textured and consistent listen than *Oh, Inverted World*, retains all its predecessor's charm.

RADIOHEAD HAIL TO THE THIEF

The Oxford quintet has stayed in its post-*OK Computer* funk, but with this sixth release there appears to be light at the end of the tunnel — a mix of tense, moody feelings with a long-absent gallows humor that becomes apparent after the first listen.

Thief sees Radiohead more or less comfortable with the idea of being a "guitar band." If only lead singer Thom Yorke would pretend to enjoy it.

THE WHITE STRIPES ELEPHANT

Cold and brooding, but seething with barely buried Canger, Jack White is the classic Byronic hero in tight red leather pants. Despite Meg White's elementary drumming, *Elephant* redefines garage rock with its minimalistic production, rough edges and raw feel. It might not sound that pretty, but that's where half its appeal lies.

THE WRENS THE MEADOWLANDS

For a much-maligned teenage wasteland, New Jersey has produced an amazing crop of talent. Not the most recent but one of the most deserving acts is The Wrens, an aging group of earnest rockers making an epic effort at stardom with *The Meadowlands*, a sprawling set of sincere rock tunes that both soar and run thicker than Jersey sewage.

THE POSTAL SERVICE GIVE UP

Before rejoining his Death Cab for Cutie bandmates later in the year, Ben Gibbard teamed with Jimmy Tamborello to create this endlessly enjoyable slice of electronic pop. Highlighting Gibbard's plaintive vocals and Tamborello's deft use of synthesizers, *Give Up* is a great album for the simplest of reasons — it just makes you want to keep listening.

THE STROKES ROOM ON FIRE

Maybe they aren't the next saviors of rock, but The Strokes do a damn good job pretending to be. The Strokes' sophomore LP, even without the production assistance of Nigel Godrich, is as quick, catchy and well-written as their premiere. Though they might not have grown much, it doesn't really matter — if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

KING GEEDORAH TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER

MCs don't come more versatile than MF Doom. The man behind a handful of decent releases dropped two huge LPs in a year chock-full of throwaway commercial rap, masquerading as Viktor Vaughn on the dark *Vaudeville Villain* and offering up infectious rhymes on the intergalactic throwback concept album *Take Me to Your Leader*.

BELLE & SEBASTIAN DEAR CATASTROPHE WAITRESS

The gentle gang of Glasgow hipsters toe-tapped back to form with its best album in seven years. *Dear Catastrophe Waitress* is a precious pop stone, all ironic asides and lovesick laundry lists. Humbly reclaiming the group's spotlight, singer-songwriter-heartbreaker Stuart Murdoch shines, finally proving himself that rare man among Morrisseys.

ZWAN

MARY STAR OF THE SEA

The Smashing Pumpkins spiraled to a disappointing death as lead singer Billy Corgan experimented with gothic tunes and makeup. Zwan's *Mary Star of the Sea* is the story of his redemption. Having found God — or something like it — Corgan's new project is his lightest, brightest and most hopeful work yet. Unfortunately, Zwan already has broken up, thanks to Corgan's weirdness, so it could also be the last.

JAY-Z, *THE BLACK ALBUM*
MANITOBA, *UP IN FLAMES*
MY MORNING JACKET, *IT STILL MOVES*

HONORABLE MENTIONS

28 DAYS LATER
SCHOOL OF ROCK
CAPTURING THE FRIEDMANS

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Sofia Coppola's second film is a neon masterpiece — an ethereal blend of jet lag and surreal, bustling cityscapes. Her Tokyo is vibrant, but the film is fueled by its sense of quiet intimacy and subtle, yet powerful, performances.

A prestige piece for Bill Murray and a launching pad for youngster Scarlett Johansson, their awkward, platonic pseudo-romance is at once comic, believable and heartbreaking.



COURTESY OF FOCUS FILMS

LORD OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING

An exclamation point on what eventually will go down as the crowning achievement of epic filmmaking of our time. Ridiculously bold, unapologetically bombastic and — most remarkably — brimming with real heart, it's the first digital blockbuster made by an actual, ambitious auteur. Credit Peter Jackson for making the world think, if only for a few hours, that hobbits, elves and evil elephants could not only be cool, but great. It's high time to give away that King of the World hat James Cameron's been wearing.

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

Despite rotting flesh, exposed skeletons, thieving pirates and poor hygiene, Johnny Depp still emerged from this film as the sexiest man alive — that's for all the ladies. For the men, there's fast-paced action, sword fights, drunkenness and cleavage. This is how pirate movies are meant to be made, proving once again that Peter Pan is a punk.



COURTESY OF TOUCHSTONE PICTURES

Only Quentin Tarantino, the perpetual purveyor of retro-cool, could make such a sharp mix of camp and excessive eye-candy. Pushing the envelope with its anime sequences, Hong Kong film allusions, eclectic soundtrack and blood-spattered fight sequences, this slashfest is a cut above the majority of its action competition. The package even comes with a cliffhanger: framing for "Volume II."

KILL BILL VOLUME I

5 COLD MOUNTAIN

It had all the makings of a disaster: questionable casting, delayed production and curious on-location filming. Despite the signs, the film adaptation of "Cold Mountain" managed to keep the power of the book with near-*"Lord of the Rings"* success. Renée Zellweger's potent performance drives the human side of a movie that also touts sweeping shots and a plethora of quirky cameos.

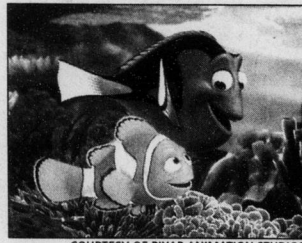
6 21 GRAMS

If you're willing to buy into this film's nonlinear storytelling technique, you'll be rewarded with an emotional story and some of the finest acting in recent memory. Sean Penn and Naomi Watts shine as usual, but it's Benicio del Toro whose performance lingers longest after the final tortured frame.

FINDING NEMO

What might be the final nail in Disney's traditional animation casket, Pixar produces another gem with the winning "Finding Nemo." In the spirit of past pictures like "Toy Story" and Dreamworks' "Shrek," the film has humor that appeals to both children and the adults who are forced to tag along.

As family films go, this is the catch of the year.



COURTESY OF PIXAR ANIMATION STUDIOS

AMERICAN SPLENDOR

Bristly, grumpy and bitter, the biopic of Harvey Pekar makes a surly hero of the mundane cartoonist and professional misanthrope. Weirdly and wonderfully blurring the lines between the real world and the film world — the best of the comic book movies — it bursts with more personality than anything else this year.

With "Mystic River," Clint Eastwood directs his best film since 1992's "Unforgiven" and Sean Penn turns in one of his two unforgettable leading performances of 2003 (see #6). This adaptation of the Dennis Lehane novel was a stark exploration of how childhood tragedy can change three lives forever. Don't believe the critics who say the movie moves too slowly — this film requires and rewards patience.

MYSTIC RIVER

IN AMERICA

Salty Jim Sheridan went big softie with his Irish immigrant drama, based largely on his own family's struggle to survive the late '80s in Hell's Kitchen. Sweet but not syrupy, full of sentiment without sentimentality, the film packs an emotional wallop without the expected dose of contrivance. So truly heartfelt it hurts.