

Wacky Walkmen revive classic New York vibes

BY PHILIP MCFEE
ASSISTANT ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

When Sony first came out with the Walkman 20 years ago, the clunky tape-decks-to-go were nothing short of beastly.

In the following years, the company churned out line after line of portable players, each time packing the streamlined packages with more bang for the buck.

Now, in the 2004 rock arena, with the release of their sophomore album *Bows + Arrows*, the Walkmen have both streamlined the garage-influenced scene and continued the long-running New York tradition.

For listeners seeking more variation in the Strokes' three-minute steadfastness or wishing that the arty, seven-minute Interpol song would just end already, the Walkmen are the prescription.

The blossoming quintet pack a great deal of complexity into their most recent effort while somehow managing to uphold the classic New York chord change-phobia.

In 2002, the group's debut, *Everyone Who Pretended to Like Me Is Gone*, introduced listeners to a sound reminiscent of classic New York noise acts like the Velvet Underground.

Their style is unique, but it suf-

MUSICREVIEW

THE WALKMEN
BOWS + ARROWS

★★★★

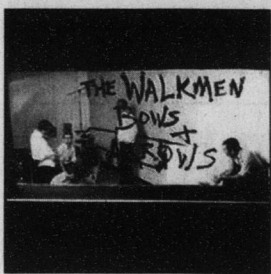
fers from a familiar geographic set-back.

New York acts have been stricken by a disease. No two successive releases by any band can differ musically. The Strokes' albums *Is This It* and *Room on Fire* aren't exactly night and day, and the Walkmen fall symptom to the same syndrome.

Although *Bows + Arrows* retains a similar sound, it's a more polished effort — as evident in the first two tracks.

On the opener, "What's in It for Me," lead singer Hamilton Leithauser's soaring rasp co-ops a Bob Dylan-esque slur but remains articulate. The airy number meanders along, a mix of Dylan's Empire State weariness and Interpol's echoing down tempo tracks.

The follow-up track, the fast-paced standout "The Rat," channels anger through the unlikely combination of combo organ and shoegaze-esque wall-of-sound guitars. The effect is simultaneously peculiar and effective — typical of the Walkmen's take on indie rock.



Throughout, the quintet revives the classic fury of the garage movement, combining it with epic guitar work.

Heavy strummers such as "Little House of Savages" are tough to beat, while slower tracks such as "138th Street" pull in the reins.

Although not as rife with riffs as those of their New York brethren, the Walkmen's tracks shift modes frequently enough to stay fresh.

And, once *Bows + Arrows* hits track seven, it's cut after cut of memorable licks as the group dashes for the finish.

The repetitive Walkmen, though lacking skip protection, put out anything but empty rehash.

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

Jones clears second LP snare

BY TANNER SLAYDEN
STAFF WRITER

The sophomore jinx has claimed more careers than illegal drugs.

How many people bought Alanis Morissette's follow-up to *Jagged Little Pill*, and how many recent reggae acts have made it to round two?

Now, a new offbeat singer/songwriter, Norah Jones, is facing every musician's Achilles' heel.

After winning eight Grammy Awards and selling 18 million copies of her first LP, *Come Away With Me*, Jones has to get over the slump that is a running theme in shows like "Behind the Music" and in nature: what goes up, must come down.

But her ascent might not be over yet.

Jones' second attempt, *Feels Like Home*, shows her maturity and growth as a musician. Although the LP has its share of turnoffs, no one should expect Jones to become the next Tracy Chapman.

It begins on a bright note with "Sunrise." The angelic pop song sets the mood as well as the tempo for the rest of the album.

Listeners shouldn't expect slow and delicate tunes such as "Don't Know Why." Although retaining the mellow feel of *Come Away With Me*, Jones picks up the tempo, adds more southern rock-inspired guitar riffs and replaces

her quiet jazz sound with a more country-and-blues tone.

Her musical intonation not only goes south — it goes back a couple of decades.

She goes from jamming with Dolly Parton to covering a Tom Waits song to playing a jazz composition by Duke Ellington.

Adding to the schizophrenia, she infuses her signature live aura. In songs such as "In the Morning" and "Above Ground," the rehearsal ended up being the take. With tracks that have random improvised sounds and solos, Jones has made a record that feels like a live LP.

This free musical environment, usually only captured on live recordings, somehow has made her deliberately simple style interesting.

But her low-key approach isn't completely saved by her spontaneity, and she gets caught in the too-mellow trap.

The equation is clear and simple. Thirteen breezy, dragging tracks in a row equals sleep.

It's also difficult for the male sex to relate to the album. Some of the songs are about Jones' personal love stories, and men probably will lose interest at lines that say, "My girlfriend tried to help me / get you off my mind."

There are more masculine things to do than listen to Norah Jones.



MUSICREVIEW

NORAH JONES
FEELS LIKE HOME

★★★★

But some of these love songs lose their meanings because of one disappointing fact: This quirky artist only contributes about half of the lyrics.

Even though she donates more words to this record than any other of her projects, there is something about not writing your own songs that is very Backstreet Boys. Which isn't bad.

Wait — yes it is. But her growth spurt on this CD shows that she has the potential to make it past the second round course. She might even win all the Grammy Awards next year.

Who knows?
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Fresh, influence-blending West well schooled

BY KEMP BALDWIN
STAFF WRITER

On Kanye West's first outing as an MC, he wants to be Talib Kweli and Jay-Z at the same time, producing a confusing worldview: bling-infused activism.

Despite his mental wavering, *The College Dropout* is a stellar debut. West has silently become one of the top producers in the game, turning out hits for artists like Ludacris, Alicia Keys and Jay-Z. And production alone makes this album worth copping.

The beats are masterful. After a

MUSICREVIEW

KANYE WEST
COLLEGE DROPOUT

★★★★

year controlled by the tiring minimalism of the once innovative Neptunes, the thickness of West's grooves drives your posterior crazy. It's like Dr. Dre, without the gangsta, coupled with Andre 3000, sans the eccentricities.

Take "Jesus Walks," a combination of gospel choir, clipped violins, a battle-driven drum corp and a sin-



gle Curtis Mayfield lyric, that would make any atheist think seriously about hanging with "Buddy Christ." Just as when Missy Elliott stepped out of the production booth, now we understand why so many mediocre rappers have sounded so good — Kanye West.

And his lyrics aren't bad either. They aren't focused, but most rappers aren't. He thanks one of many guests, Talib Kweli, for pointing him in the right lyrical direction. For more than half the LP, Kweli's influence plays true.

But then there's the Roc-A-Fella side of the album. The self-pro-

claimed hottest label on the streets churns out some of most exploitative tripe on the shelf. West should be forgiven for his deal, but he shouldn't have jump the Jigga-contrived bandwagon.

Instead, he apologizes: "Golly more bullshit ice rap / I gotta apologize to Mos and Kweli ... Always said if I rapped I'd say something significant / But know I'm rappin' 'bout money, hoes and rims again."

Sadly, Roc-A-Fella has wrapped its hands around his creativity. *Dropout* is plagued by stupid skits and rhymes about how Roca is super neat. A characteristically rapid cameo from Jay-Z almost ruins "Never Let Me Down." Let's hope Jigga has truly scribed his last epitaph and bows out without donning another nickname.

But really, West could have spit rhymes about sharpening his pencil and this album would still end up being one of the most listenable of 2004.

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

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