

Taste: Why everyone can't just get along

We came late to the party. What can I say? It's almost halfway through January, and we're just now getting around to printing our Top 10s.

You're probably asking yourself, "What gives, Dive?" Maybe you're even asking, "Why bother?"

Well, for critics, the year-end list, as arbitrary and divisive as it inevitably turns out to be, is an important ritual. It's a chance to show some real enthusiasm for the art forms we spend our lives trying to know intimately.

But — most importantly, for the sake of this column — it's also a measuring stick for our readers. Even if only indirectly, we critics make having good taste into a job. And our readers are right to judge us on our taste.

But there's a crucial question in that idea: What exactly is good taste?

And that, friends, is a dangerous question.

As a critic, my taste is a function of my knowledge. The more I know, the broader my tastes become. The broader my base of knowledge and appreciation, the more diverse my taste can be.

And since one can't really claim to have good taste in something (popular music in my case) as a whole without at least a modicum of understanding about the whole of something, diversity equates to taste, right?

Well, almost. On top of the burden of knowl-



BRYAN REED
WHAT THE VOLUME KNOB'S FOR

edge comes the burden of argument.

Because the things we like are so subjective and personal, we must be able to defend, or at least explain, our choices.

But as with anything else in this world, as much as you defend your position, someone is always going to disagree. Whether you're going with "I like what I like because I like it," (a perfectly valid argument, though I'm reluctant to admit it) or a rambling thesis on the ability of Wolves In The Throne Room's recent album, *Two Hunters*, to evoke not only an emotional sense of lonesome desolation, but also to create a dark, cold sense of specific place and time that manifests itself both physically and metaphorically in the context of the record, making it an easy choice for year's best, you're not wrong.

But you're not entirely right, either.

At the end of the day, we like what we like because we like it, and sometimes something special will come along we get so excited about that it leads to rambling, abstract theses that try so hard

to pin down exactly what about it is so great but often end up just expressing an all-out enthusiasm that should be argument enough.

So what, then, is the job of a critic?

All year long the critic tries to keep an open mind to all styles, to review in context to the cultural whole and to disregard taste as much as possible.

But it's impossible to do that. So, once a year we get the opportunity to let our tastes run rampant, ranking the items we feel were the best, for reasons ranging from a perceived cultural importance to the mere fact that we liked something a whole heck of a lot.

As you peruse our Top-10 lists, judging Diversions on its collective taste, I'd like to think there will be something that might strike your fancy.

But maybe there won't be. Then what?

You could write in to tell us how wrong we were for overlooking your favorite movie of the year or how overrated you think our favorite record is. And I'll read that letter, and I'll probably disagree with it.

And sooner or later we'll both come to the conclusion that we like what we like because we like it. And you don't have to agree with somebody's taste to respect it.

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Organdrum makes classics fresh

BY JAMIE WILLIAMS
ASSISTANT DIVERSIONS EDITOR

Reverend Organdrum is much more than your run of the mill side project.

Essentially, it is a way for psychobilly star Jim Heath — who also fronts the Reverend Horton Heat — to explore his burgeoning curiosity with Hammond Organ music.

And explore he does, diving deep into the canon of American music to craft an album full of mostly instrumental covers from disparate genres ranging from New Orleans jazz to Texas blues, while also drawing on soul and surf rock.

The fact that Reverend Organdrum is able to combine all of these different genre influences without losing the listener's attention is not an accomplishment to be taken lightly and is a reflection of the trio's sonic unity.

Heath called on friend Tim Alexander for the organ work that gives the album its soul, effectively saving the instrument from its stuffy image as a relic reserved for religious services.

This record swings, it grooves, and it will get you dancing along to familiar songs presented in some unfamiliar ways.

A highlight is "James Bond Theme," which is exactly what



MUSICREVIEW
REVEREND ORGANDRUM
HI-FI STEREO
ROCK 'N' ROLL

★★★★☆

it claims to be, the theme to the James Bond film series.

Once the organ comes in, the tune becomes clear, but to get there one must first get through Heath's gloriously swampy guitar.

That guitar work adds a layer to *Hi-Fi Stereo* that becomes more and more clear after multiple listens.

It is easy — and certainly fun — to get caught up in Alexander's stellar organ grooves, but underneath, Heath's guitar work is a force to be reckoned with.

Nowhere is this more apparent than on "Night Train," the R&B

standard originally recorded and turned into a #1 hit by Jimmy Forrest in 1952.

Reverend Organdrum turns it on its head, with Heath providing a walking blues riff that owes just as much to Heath's Texas roots as it does to the song's classic soul beginnings.

That is not to say that the soul isn't there — quite the opposite.

Hi-Fi Stereo bleeds emotion, drawing the listener in with disparate styles that somehow never seem to stray far enough to make the record sound incomplete.

To say *Hi-Fi Stereo* has something for everyone would be too simple.

In effect, this record is for everyone who claims to be a fan of American music.

It serves as both a testament to the power of the classic Hammond organ sound and Reverend Organdrum's creativity and musical cohesiveness.

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BY RACHAEL OEHRING
STAFF WRITER

The smallest of actions always produces the farthest-reaching consequences.

"Atonement" illustrates this in the most devastating way.

The movie, based on the book by Ian McEwan, follows Briony Tallis as she deals with the relationship between her sister, Cecilia (Keira Knightley), and the gardener, Robbie Turner (James McAvoy).

Briony witnesses a flirtation between the two that she does not understand, and, in her jealousy, tells a lie that irrevocably alters all three of their lives.

The movie is split up into two distinct periods, which reflect the periods of Briony's life.

The first half is lent a childish air, with a bright but disjointed atmosphere.

Director Joe Wright's choice to pair small scenes perfectly mirrors the small actions around which the movie revolves.

Short scene cuts to short scene with no apparent connection, and events are replayed to illustrate the different points of view of the characters.

MOVIEREVIEW
ATONEMENT

★★★★★

But as the movie progresses, the scenes stretch into one another through tight segues, and the odd timeline begins to make more sense.

Keira Knightley handles the material of her lead role with surprising competence.

She conveys the stodgy "stiff upper lip" of British high society but also radiates emotion well enough when the time comes for it.

But the film's most affecting performance comes from James McAvoy, who is able to convey the full range of Robbie's emotions — from embarrassment to alarm to love — with just a quiet smirk and a downcast look of his striking blue eyes.

And "Atonement's" sumptuous cinematography takes on the role of another character entirely. Its sentient motions help to put the audience in the shoes of each character involved.

Whether it's the fuzzy close-ups

that project the stifling heat of the English countryside in 1935 or a magnificent five-minute continuous shot that illustrates a war-ravaged French beach, every scene is so breathtakingly beautiful that it's almost a shame to move on to the next one.

The gorgeous score is made more striking in its incorporation of the tiny-yet-pivotal sounds that the characters experience throughout the story.

As Cecilia begs Robbie to come back to her, the sound of the seaside vacation they promised each other filter in through the background into the soundtrack and makes their lost love so much more devastating.

Though it takes the form of an epic love story told across the span of many years, "Atonement" shows that really, it is the small things that truly count in love and life.

From a short moment shared in a library to a small, festering wound, the life-changing events are often the ones that don't seem to matter much at first.

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'Bricks' sinks in lame excess

BY BRYAN REED
DIVERSIONS EDITOR

Kate Nash is at her absolute best singing along to the plinking toy piano chords of "Foundations."

On the standout track from her debut, *Made of Bricks*, the British songwriter predicts an argument with a poetic specificity that belies the conflict's frequent nature and the fragility of the relationship in question.

Her lyrics leave no stone unturned and no edges softened. "I'll use that voice that you find annoying/And say something like 'Yeah, intelligent input, darling, why don't you just have another beer then?/Then you'll call me a b---h/And everyone we're with/Will be embarrassed/And I won't give a s--t.'"

Nash's biggest talent is her ability to make a playful song out of a tortured relationship and give it life with descriptive lyrics and clever turns of phrase.

But on *Bricks*, the urge to self-edit is glaringly absent.

The album's introduction comes in the form of "Play," a drum machine-fueled excrement that delays the listenability of the album for more than a minute.

And there are too many like-minded mistakes tossed on to expand the tracklist, "D-khead" and "S--t Song" being the most glaring culprits.

MUSICREVIEW
KATE NASH
MADE OF BRICKS

★★★★☆

The unnecessary inclusions distract from the record, and also belittle Nash's songwriting talent to a grave effect.

"D-khead" casts an ugly shadow on the otherwise beautiful heart-break tale that is "Birds," a delicate acoustic guitar tune that utilizes Nash's distinct accent and brilliant attention to detail to great effect.

And Nash also exhibits an astounding versatility on her debut, covering the tender melodies of "Birds" with as much confidence as the processed boogie of "Pumpkin

Soup." But for all the clever songwriting, versatility and confidence Nash puts into the album, it's a tainted delight, marred by the inclusion of a few too many throwaway cuts.

Made of Bricks is a lot like an old pair of socks left in the bottom of the drawer, dingy, holed and unloved.

There isn't much use for the socks, or the album, except on laundry day.

But when there's nothing else available, it'll do just fine.

Made of Bricks does exhibit a budding talent, one that with time could grow into a force to be reckoned with. But for now, there's too much miss to make a proper hit.

Contact the Diversions Editor at dive@unc.edu

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