

New AND FOLLOWED music coming soon to a store near you

What Peggy Wants isn't really looking forward to summer. After all, it'll be losing its drummer, Tom Maxwell, for over a month.

Maxwell was invited to stand in as the temporary drummer for fellow labelmates Metal Flake Mother when MFM does a month-long tour with newlyacquired Virgin artists, Cracker.

"After that, we told Metal Flake that they were just going to have to find another drummer, because they couldn't have ours anymore," joked What Peggy Wants guitarist Tim "Scout" Roven.

Such a glitch in WPW's immediate future is no big deal because it's nothing new for a band which in the last year has dropped its founding guitarist, switched names (from Teasing the Korean) and had their debut record release date pushed back so far that it'll be over a year since it was recorded.

Death of a Sailor will be out on Baited Breath Records in a couple of weeks, and as sort of a preview record release party, WPW and MFM will play at the Cat's Cradle tonight. Tom Maxwell will marathon as drummer for both bands.

Like a first taste of Jaegermeister, WPW's authentic blend of scorching Goth-rock and a dreamy mix of spicy swing and acoustic cabaret make for an impressive a la carte of alternative rock and pop.

Death of a Sailor, despite its delayed release, is a record which isn't held by any kind of temporal boundaries usually set by industry trends, because it's anything but trendy.

Indeed, listen to "Mold," "Baby Dracula" and "Come on Wallflower" and you'll see why it would have been remarkably en vogue in the mid-'80s, or even mid-'30s. Then listen to "Live to Ride" and "What Peggy Wants" to see how well it fits that post-punk, pre-Nirvana stage.

The new four-piece line up gives the smoother Roven room to roam and gives the band a cleaner sound. Perhaps more importantly, it brings bassist Jeff Taylor back into the forefront, where previously the cavaliering clash and clutter of two guitars relegated the effervescent Taylor to being a role player, playing way too much rhythm for a bassist of his talents. Taylor's bass now plays more melody and adds

... What Peggy Wants debuts new LP tonight, plus all the music briefs you can stand

By Charles Marshall Senior Writer and Allen Baddour Staff Writer



What Peggy Wants

a fatter sound that gives added muscle to songs like "No Answer" and "Love Potion 69"

The shift to a four piece also leaves room to roam physically. Ensslin and Taylor especially appear liberated on stage — now able to jump and dance around with abandon, unconcerned with running into a handmate.

What Peggy Wants' live performances have always been intriguing, due to the sneaky stage presence of John Ensslin, whose high pierced vocals are stamped with a mysterious and exotic-sounding accent ringing true the nasal blur of Bowie, the gouliness of Robert Smith or even the impulsive firepower of Axl Rose. But his loud eyes often penetrate innocent audiences with a look of someone possessed in a bizarre offbeat horror movie.

Virgins to a WPW show are often floored by this sultry, unfazing gaze. His vocals wander, often unintelligibly, through a forest of snapshots and

otherworldly allusions: "Alcoholic French maids scramble through the snow," during "Mold" and "Tandem bikes and espadrilles are back in style" on "Love Potion 69," for example.

While some of the songs do a have some sort of ordered narrative, ("Cruel Samantha," "Let's Play House.") many of his picturesque lyrics bring to life the background characters, establish the setting, all helping to create a blurred vision of the song. Only the frayed edges of the picture are revealed; the focused heart of the song is left to imagination.

Ensslin's lyrical themes on *Death of a Sailor* bear a striking resemblance to the Cure's *Kiss Me, Kiss Me, Kiss Me*, as both contemplate forcefully the feelings of physical desire — the passions that engulf erotic love and dangerous lustful pleasures.

"Love Potion 69" tiptoes around the parts of love surrounding physical climax and how even the initial de-

scend into lust can make sense out of what seemed previously nonsensical. "One kiss and you can sympathize" he says with a distinctive bite. "Mephisto Drag" tackles one-night stands: "I'll show you wrong from right/ain't nothin' like your mama told you/baby open your eyes/cause there ain't nothin' here but us/except for Mephisto drag."

Many of the *Death of Sailor* songs, particularly "Come on Wallflower" and "Beg," would erupt into a frenzy of chaos, Maxwell's drums often tipping Taylor's bass overboard and Ensslin wailing out desperately — singing about the most unusual characters — the beautiful and the depressed, the horrific and the grotesque. All this seems to be saved only by a song's abrupt ending, or Roven's stabilizing guitar patterns. The new songs have a cleaner edge to them, often lacking the thundering assaults mentioned above.

These songs are less threatening and less boisterous, but the band agrees that they have quality dynamics, a mature addition to their songwriting that wasn't very apparent before under all of the hazy rush of sonic depravity.

This legroom allows for more recognizable melodies and a wider spectrum of sounds. The less-is-more attitude suits the band, which may find its niche not in the new wave of guitar grinders so easily found in the area, but in a slightly more refined, yet mellow scene.

Undergoing a name change has its obvious disadvantages, mainly getting the message across that the new band is the old band. But it also showed just how loyal some of the anonymous Teasing the Korean fans were.

But WPW really hasn't lost stride. If you haven't caught them in awhile, you haven't seen them at their best. Many of the songs have been reworked with Roven maintaining a full guitar sound and Taylor adding trusty new bass licks that could shake a beer right out of your hand. Ensslin's vocals ranged from peaceful to poignant and power-

Jeffrey Gaines

Jeffrey Gaines

Chrysalis Records

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Jeffrey Gaines offers up more than a healthy dose of pessimistic realism to anyone who cares to hear on his debut, self-titled release. While it's hard to beat the musical quality of the album, the introspective depression might just be a bit too much for the average listener to handle.

Gaines approaches the rather grand subject of life in much the same way as Lloyd Cole and Tracey Chapman. That is, while there exists a faint reason to have hope, life — and love, in particular — holds humiliating, debasing prospects for mere mortals.

But unlike Cole, Gaines favors the acoustic stylings of Chapman rather than Cole's classic pop or orchestrated sounds. And unlike the other acoustic, folk greats, Gaines prefers to avoid the irony of dark lyrics superimposed over bright chords, choosing straightforward lyrical and musical synchronicity.

The opening cut typifies the sound Gaines favors. "Hero in Me" looks at the security that people find in painful situations. The acoustically dark chord progressions mirror the psychological limits of the subjects of the song, while the chorus shines faintly brighter.

"And I dream of the person I might have been/There I am free again/... And I swear that my grass is greener than anyone's/Till I believe again/Then I wake/And the dream fades away and I face the day/And I realize/That there's got to be some hero in me." While Gaines finds hope only in dreams, at least he realizes something good exists.

If you're looking for a male Tracey Chapman, Jeffrey Gaines' new release will please you. On the other hand, if you aren't into that sort of depression, "Jeffrey Gaines" will probably just turn you off. Still, if you can tape it from a friend, it could grow on you ...

—Matt Morgan

Michelle Shocked

Arkansas Traveler

Polygram

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There's nothing sweeter than homemade jam, as Michelle Shocked can and does attest with her new album *Arkansas Traveler*.

Getting back to her musical roots in a somewhat controversial way, Shocked

ful to pugnacious. And yes, those eyes. Many of the refashioned and new songs include more harmonies. Previously limited to Ensslin and Maxwell, Taylor has jumped in on some vocals.

Anyone who has heard Taylor sing backup with Chapter Two knows he can do it well. The harmonies add one more wrinkle to an already wrinkled and creviced band that so easily climbs in and out of genres. Also in the works is an electric violin for Roven, which should streamline the transformation. Band members seem to enjoy their

gives an impressive presentation of original, semi-original, and traditional tunes with an all-star guest list ranging from Hothouse Flowers to Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown to Chapel Hill's own Red Clay Ramblers.

The album definitely has a bluesy-bluegrass flavor, with many of the tunes adapted by Shocked from traditional fiddle tunes straight from the Ozarks. Through her research, Shocked found that many originated in the old minstrelsy tradition, where whites would perform in blackface, singing and acting out scenes from plantation life.

As she states in her liner notes, "My early intention was to present this record with a cover photo of myself wearing blackface ... my sincere intention was that it would provide a genuine focus on the real 'roots' of many of the tunes included; blackface minstrelsy. It's my contention that a blackface tradition is alive and well hidden behind a modern mask."

The music is simple and accessible and keeps the down home sound and feel despite the high tech recording. The title track clip-clops and fiddles its way to the tune we all grew up with as "Bringing Home a Baby Bumble bee" and ends with the classic "Shave and a haircut" with Shocked chuckling in the background.

In case you're missing an utter lack of far-fetched metaphors and descriptive phrases, this album has left me quite at a loss. It can't be compared to other artists and albums, and some descriptions would fall flat. If you're a Michelle Shocked fan, buy the album...no doubt. If you're a fan of traditional music, blues, bluegrass, this album's a keeper, if for nothing other than the guest musicians. It's upbeat attitude, twangy guitar and mandolin, and all around travelin' atmosphere will eventually sweep you right up along with it.

—Lindsay Lowry

Cracker

Cracker

Virgin Records America

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With the demise of Camper Van Beethoven, former lead vocalist David Lowery proceeds to the nobler truths as revealed by his new band, Cracker. These truths include lust, being stupid and being "pissed off."

Johnny Hickman on guitar, Davey Fargher on bass and Joey Peters on the drums join Lowery to fashion a classic rock sound juxtaposed against the satirically stupid and inane lyrical

steady evolution, and unfortunately, a live show will be the only way to catch these new songs for the time being. Songs like "No Answer," "Blue Boy" and "Another Tragedy" scream for inclusion on the next album, which hopefully won't have to travel the same path for production as *Death of a Sailor*.

So, what does Peggy want? Only *Death of a Sailor* will tell you, or maybe one of the encores tonight. So come on; wallflowers, come and take this chance. Put on your black dress (or Connells T-shirts), and we'll meet you at the dance.

scheme. With a few exceptions, the album relies heavily on simple electric power chord progressions and "Southern"-sounding guitar fills to poke fun at the return of guitar-centered, good ol' boy rock and roll.

Lowery's new band forsakes the esoteric subjects that made Camper van, opting instead for such greats as "What the world needs now/Is a new Frank Sinatra/So I can get you in bed/What the world needs now/Is another folk singer/Like I need a hole in my head," from the opener, "Teen Angst (What the World Needs Now)."

Poking fun at classic rock comes easy for Cracker, playing up the guitar fills and the cooing female back-up vocals. Especially good is the mockery of the classic rock "inspiration ballad" in "I See the Light." "I see the light at the end of the tunnel/Somebody please tell me/It's not a train."

Despite the predominant humorous slant on this disc, Lowery manages to stiffen up a bit for the more serious numbers "Someday" and "Another Song About the Rain." While the humor disappears from these two songs, the simple topic remains: the depression of missing someone during separation. But instead of breaking up the rhythm of the album, the pieces only prove what Lowery is capable of.

The self-titled debut release by Cracker proves to be a must-have for music fans. Even if you buy this one on a whim, this writer believes that you won't be disappointed.

—Matt Morgan

Def Leppard

Adrenalize

Mercury Records

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The new Def Leppard album, *Adrenalize*, should have a warning label on its cover. Not because the lyrics are dirty, but because they suck. ("Lyrics may cause you and your unborn offspring to become stupider.")

Not that Def Leppard has ever really been a songwriting powerhouse, but last year's death of guitarist Steve Clark has left the band glaringly cliché-ridden.

The liner notes credit Clark with contributions to some of the songs on this album. However, I don't recall Def Leppard ever writing as screamingly moronic a line as "Make love/Like a man/I'm a man/At what I am" when Clark was alive. It's terrible that the band would drag a dead man into this travesty.

After one gets over the astonishing drop in lyrical quality (and that's an obstacle), one can move on to the music, the real test of a Def Leppard album.

The burning question is whether or not Steve Clark's death hurt the sound. The answer is... yeah. Steve Clark was a cool guitarist who'll be missed. Fortunately, studio technology allows for the surviving guitarist, Phil Collen, to play enough to fill out the songs. "White Lightning" and "Stand Up (kick love into motion)" are two notable songs in which Collen makes Def Leppard a



M.C. Brains

decent band able to rise above its sorry lyrics.

Def Leppard has one other part of its trademark sound still working on this album: the power chorus. Even on a dumb song like "Let's Get Rocked," the band sings in a very convincing, catchy style that can make one smile like a dork and wag one's head with the drums.

On better songs like "White Lightning," the chorus makes the entire album seem almost worth whatever one paid.

Since *Adrenalize* debuted at number one, it's probably going to sell millions of copies. But it's not a great album, and it's completely forgettable.

On the other hand, it's a good album to leave in the car — not too distracting and something to beat the time to on the steering wheel as the odometer rolls over. As some earlier music scholar once said, "It's got a good beat and you can dance to it."

—Alex DeGrand

M.C. Brains

Lovers Lane

Motown

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Bel Biv DeVoe's Michael Bivins is really on to something. His latest discovery, M.C. Brains, proves that he has an eye for young talent. The newest member of Biv's showbiz family is definitely out there to make a name for himself.

The showbiz name that James Deshannon Davis chose clues the listener to his unique style. Brains is an acronym for Bringing Raps And

Instrumentals Non-Stop. That's killer.

The 17-year-old lyricist has created a debut album that is more fun than anything else. Stepping away from the controversial topics that many rappers prefer, M.C. Brains raps mainly about sex and romance.

Lovers Lane sports several potential hits sure to liven up those late spring parties after dark.

There's at least two different types of rapping here. On the Pooahny side, M.C. Brains starts with a funky sound guaranteed to make you move. He then travels into more serious, romancing music that appeals to the lover in you. But don't be fooled by the drop in tempo, because he pulls a fast one on the Non-Stop side.

M.C. Brains has a host of talented artists working with him: Boyz II Men sets the mood for "Brainstorming" and "Boyz II Men (sequel)." Then Mike Bivins not only does background vocals but throws in some additional rap lyrics in "G-String." And you can't forget sexy soul singer Johnny Gill who provides background in "Brains Is Goin' Cra-ze."

"Brainstorming" is surprising, because Brains not only raps but sings lead vocals and it sounds good. There aren't too many rappers who have done that on a serious cut.

—Carol Davis

THE RATINGS

- — forget it
- — wait for the bargain bin
- — tape it from a friend
- — buy it
- — buy two copies



Metal Flake Mother: Who looks familiar?

Metal Flake Mother to celebrate belated release

Metal Flake Mother's *Beyond the Java Sea*, has been out for a couple of months, though they'll be boosting it again tonight at a double release party with What Peggy Wants. *Java* has had, as expected, worthy critical acclaim since its release. Obvious comparisons to the Pixies are getting old, but listen to the opening Black Francis shriek that kicks in "Tounge Long" and you'll see why. The guitar licks are also have that tight, Bostonian scratch pop edge.

MFM's record sounds like its front cover design, which looks like an ad for a '50s coffeeshop and all-night diner, toutong consumer culture at its best. The slow swing beats that drive "Mean to Me," and the fuzzy snap and pop guitar staples would sound perfect on an old phonograph. MFM plays intel-

ligent pop that never loses its edge. The band's recent personnel changes have been a shock to most underground local music fans. With such a bright future ahead, guitarist Randy Ward dropped out. A partial solution came as drummer Jim Mathis moved to guitar, leaving the drum seat vacant. MFM seemed all but broken up — another story of an inspiring young band flattened at its finest hour. But Mathis and Ben Clarke now share guitar and vocal duties. And, with Tom Maxwell of What Peggy Wants playing substitute drummer, they'll go on tour with Cracker in May, giving them a push outside the state and time to get a permanent drummer, all without losing too much valuable time following the release of a successful album.

—Charles Marshall and Allen Baddour