

DisagreeEeable

9 November 2022 | Jonah D, editor-in-chief

What We're listening to:

Album: Pieces of a Man | Gil Scott Heron

Gil Scott Heron should go down as the world's first rapper. He beat even the Sugarhill Gang to the first published rap with his tightly knit spoken word overtop of energetic jazz instrumentals. Essential for explorers.

Track: So. Central Rain | R.E.M.

Reportedly Thom Yorke's favorite R.E.M. song. It perfectly combines the jangly guitar they are known for with the mournful but never maudlin voice of Michael Stipe. And it actually pulls off a chorus of 'I'm sorry'.

Track: The District Sleeps Alone Tonight | The Postal Service

The first track off of the (2nd!) best selling Sub Pop album (behind *Bleach*), it was early to combining indie songwriting and IDM chirps and synths. A beautifully placid expression of long distance heartache.

Reviews:

Something Else

The Kinks

1967

Highlights: Waterloo Sunset, Afternoon Tea, Two Sisters

Author: Jonah Dayley

It turns out that I horribly misjudged the Kinks. After a decade of my short memory hearing 'You Really Got Me' over and over, I assumed that they were a fun, if inconsequential, garage rock one-hit wonder. Turns out, none of the above is strictly true (the garage rock contention could go either way). I heard 'Sunny Afternoon' a few days ago and was immediately blown away by the wry humor and precise portraiture of the lyrics, the deeply affecting chord progression, and the simplicity of the music. Well, it turns out that it isn't an outlier in the Kinks discogs; rather, it's the precedent for a large and brilliant body of work. And so, I decided to formally review one of their records. I randomly chose one from the collection that seemed most interesting from the Wikipedia article, and ended up with *Something Else*. It's fantastic.

Apparently, the Kinks *were* at one point exactly what I described above. They formed along with other British youth inspired by R&B into a loud, rhythmic, and often violent band. Fist fights were known to break out on stage. This behavior was so routine and excessive that they were denied a visa to US, and thus never gained anything remotely akin to the fame of the Rolling Stones, or the Beatles. This severely limited their state-side appeal, playing majorly into their distinct lack of recognition here.

Well, that and the fact that they are so wholly and purely British. Unlike groups like the Beatles with their boy band-ish tendencies, the Kinks quickly matured and simmered in their island of abode, eventually becoming fully an extension of it. *Something Else* is basically a journey through southern England, as led by the venerable tour guide of Ray Davies. How worn and world-weary he is. The sarcasm and irony holds strong in these songs, such as in the lines, "The old fortune teller lies dead on the floor / Nobody needs fortunes told anymore" of 'Death of a Clown'. Thankfully, though, he isn't too cynical to not see the beauty in his home. The wondrous closer, 'Waterloo Sunset', stands in my book as one of the best songs of the 60s. It's thoroughly British in its references, to be sure, but is distinctly universal in its ability to see beauty in the working-class mundane, the everyday ho-hum of life. It's a joy of a song, with all the pains of life melting away at the refrain, 'As long as I gaze on Waterloo Sunset / I am in paradise'. While Waterloo station abides in London, this same sentiment can echo in each of us as we watch the sunrise in the morning over the Locust Grove overpass.

New Music:

Blue Rev

Alvvays

2022

Highlights: Belinda Says, Pharmacist, Pressed

9.1

Author: Jonah Dayley

Finally, a piece of our future to be found in the current ashes of the music industry. Blue Rev came out less than a week ago, and I've already listened to it 5 times through. Even the day of, though, I could tell from the first bars of Pharmacist that the record was going to be great. Here, however, I'll jump to the drastic: Alvvays are the future of Power Pop.

Power pop, the genre probably cut the most critical slack. Power pop is evergreen and rarely innovative, a perpetual trip back to the musical prowess of the Ramones and the days of bubblegum harmonies being sung on boardwalks. There's been vague advances within this paradigm, of course, but the general framework usually gets immediate goodwill points on sweetness and nostalgia alone. Reasonably speaking (at least as a critic who wants to stay in the business), the worth of a work should not be judged on this little. Philosophically, there is objective good and bad, and the fickle tastes of whatever is in vogue doesn't necessarily conform to this. But that's really just a long way of saying that Blue Rev is the most recent innovator in power pop since The New Pornographers.

Unlike large swathes of prior art, Blue Rev does things a little differently. Sure, there's the loud guitars and the chiming vocal harmonies, but there's a lot more to it than that. Alvvays throws in all sorts of new elements from other areas. There's some jangly guitars, the tight songwriting of Tin Pan Alley. Most interesting, though, is the dream pop elements added into the mix. There's a general feeling of fog over the entire album, as if the entire thing was worked on and completed in the earliest hours of the morning. Vocals blur and fade in a dream.

There's even some glide guitar to impress the MBV folks. These elements lead to the feeling of a deep winter, maybe a snowstorm, with the emotional heart of the warm interior of the car driving through it.

The real question though: this record may be fantastic and innovative, but is it enough to spawn forth a new realm for pop music? Will it actually lead things in a new direction? I would in fact, argue yes. The reason power pop gets so much grace in the first place is it's just... likable. Every new generation gets a fresh spin of it from whatever band is lucky enough to have heard of Badfinger or Big Star. And this is the newest adaptation of it. It's more than the past, there's a fresh new layer on it. However, regardless of any philosophizing or discourse on the relevance of the new, there's just an undeniable likable to this record, something that can be appreciated universally.

In Memorium: Mimi Parker

Last night, November 6th, Mimi Parker of Low passed away. She was diagnosed with Ovarian Cancer in 2020, and had been fighting it since then. She was 54. I make no claims as to say that I or any other writer for DisagreEeable is qualified to speak as to her personally. However, I think we can speak to her musically. Mimi Parker provided most of the uncommon elements of Low, with her stripped-down drumming and angelic harmonies. She will be sorely missed.

Listen to Low's 'More', 'Will The Night', and 'Lullaby' for just some of Mimi Parker's understated and glorious contributions.

Any review suggestions? New releases from new artists? Want to write for DisagreEeable? Contact us at:

NetworkForPublicity@gmail.com

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