

Local Releases Bring Light to the Indie Scene

Written by Culley Smith

Wednesday, 03 January 2007 02:26

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When you open your copy of the *River Cities' Reader* to see what's being offered in the way of live entertainment, you might come to the conclusion the Quad Cities has little to provide in the way of indie rock.

But a spate of nationally recognized acts that came through the Quad Cities last year prove the vitality of the local alternative-rock scene. Wilderness, Two Gallants, Hockey Night, and The M's played here, for example, and it's hard to imagine that promoters would have booked these groups if it weren't for the local bands that built a loyal fan base for this type of music.

Released in 2006, the following albums reinforce that the Quad Cities has a vibrant indie scene - a scene you might not be aware of but should not overlook.

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Rosalee Motor Revival, *Tablespoon*. From Muscatine, Iowa, Rosalee Motor Revival emerged in 2006 with its charming brand of indie folk. Building upon influences such as Belle & Sebastian and Elliott Smith, lead singer John Watkins spins intimate tales about friendship, loss, addiction, and resolution. The tone of *Tablespoon* switches between cathartic and somber, playful and plucky, but Watkins' dynamic voice manages wistful, whimsical, and everything in between. From the cheerful kazoos on "Music Is Her Boyfriend" to the tearful cries on "China Boat," *Tablespoon* was a welcome release for local music fans eager for smart pop.

(
<http://www.myspace.com/rosaleemotorrevival>
)



Burnt Ends, *Trip the Dandy*. Featuring members of Rosalee Motor Revival, Burnt Ends

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grew out of a weekly gathering of like-minded individuals who share an enthusiasm for music. From the quirky country overtones of "Little Horse" to the metaphysical musings of "Space Ghost," Burnt Ends put their craft to the test with this release. Though this is a guitar album, Trip the Dandy is not simply a bunch of guys showing off their chops; the band works as a whole rather than taking turns on lead. And when a lead does creep into the foreground, it's tight and focused, and only serves to enhance the end product. Complex song structures and timings along with multi-part harmonies make

Trip the Dandy

an equally engaging and entertaining listen.

(

<http://www.burntends.net>

)



The Parish Festival, *Handshakes & Heartaches*. Precocious but still playful, The Parish Festival released its stylish, jazz-influenced indie-pop debut in late 2006. What's more, the instrumentation used is more typical of folk than pop. On the title track to

Handshakes & Heartaches

, a banjo soars between lead singer Jamie Cummins' high vocals and a haunting viola. On "Lullagoobyes" the banjo returns to tease and taunt, all the while frolicking along, making for a quite danceable little number. Undeniable charm and talent make The Parish Festival immediately likable; and with

Handshakes & Heartaches

worthy of a full tour, these might just be the local boys who get themselves national attention.

(

<http://www.myspace.com/parishfestival>

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Death Ships, *Seeds of Devastation*. Iowa City's Death Ships bring a confidence to their live shows rarely shown by a band still in its adolescence. Able to transition fluidly between songs and keep the crowd on its feet, Death Ships have obviously picked up a few tricks after sharing the stage with veteran musicians such as Low, The Decemberists, and Jay Bennett of Wilco.

Seeds of Devastation, the debut effort from this up-and-coming act, captures much of the power of the band's live shows while drawing upon the opportunities a studio affords. "Story Never Gets Old," "Symmetrical Smiles," and "Great American" are catchy and infectious. Double-tracked vocals and additional instrumentation manage to refine the songs without filtering out their vitality. Whether playing in your favorite club or on your iPod, Death Ships maintain a punk sensibility while still having a lush and melodic sound.

(
<http://www.deathships.com>
)



William Elliott Whitmore, *Song of the Blackbird*. On his third full-length release, Iowa native William Elliott Whitmore weaves together mystical tales accompanied mostly by his banjo and the steady rhythm kept by his tapping foot. "Dry," "One Man's Shame," and "Take It on the Chin" are all vast and weighty in their simplicity. When Whitmore visited RIBCO earlier this year, he played to a packed house. And when you see him perform, it's not hard to see why. With topics and temperaments certain to appeal to people of all ages, yet with each song so poignant that it feels deeply personal, Whitmore's commanding voice captivates any crowd.

Song of the Blackbird

is haunting, harrowing, and one of the best things to happen in 2006.

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<http://www.williamelliottwhitmore.com>
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