



AVAILABLE NOW

Björk
Volta
(Atlantic)

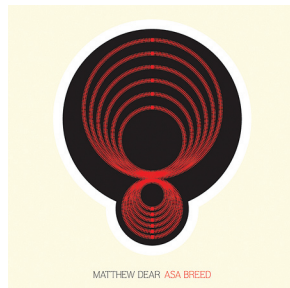
After delving into the avant-garde realm of entirely vocal-based songs with *Medulla*, Björk returns with a more straightforward release, *Volta*. For her sixth studio album, Björk recruited hip-hop icon Timbaland to produce three tracks, most notably the hard-hitting “Innocence” and the catchy, percussion-laden “Earth Intruders.” There is a fusion here of the older, more accessible Björk from the days of *Post*, with the newer, stranger, “I’m dating Matthew Barney” Björk that created *Vespertine*. *Volta* boasts a freshly seductive abrasiveness with tracks “Wanderlust” and “Declare Independence” while maintaining a sweet gentleness in the ballads “I See Who You Are” and “Pneumonia.” The only complaint here would be the tracks that involve the overrated, self-proclaimed androgynous, Antony Hegarty, whose “contributions” to two tracks make you want to jump out the window. Hegarty aside, *Volta* proves that Björk has yet to compromise her artistic integrity or take a lackadaisical backseat to her success. —CHESS HUBBARD



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Client
Heartland
(Metropolis)

Growing into their ever-evolving sound, Client has fulfilled all expectations of what a third album should be. Following the path of electro siblings Ladytron, the trio welcomes the sound of a full band in exchange for the two-dimensional aspect of their first two albums. *Heartland* kicks off with the title track, a song that conjures such a desolate and airy atmosphere, it’s quite mind-blowing, considering the rest of the album is extremely danceable and over the top. The third track, “Lights Go Out,” is a wicked romp through the better part of the ’80s via Depeche Mode-style synths and a sugary sweet killer of a chorus: “No mercy, no pleasure, no sin / I stand guilty loving you again.” *Heartland* is a 44-minute blast of sexuality, electronic voyeurism and the sophisticated sound of an electro outfit transcending the boundaries of their genre. —NEIL MILLER JR.



JUNE 5

Matthew Dear
Asa Breed
(Ghostly)

It’s been three years since Matthew Dear released his debut full-length, though that’s not to say the producer hasn’t been busy. He’s given us new production and mixes prolifically in that time under three other aliases: False, Jabberjaw and Audion. As Matthew Dear, however, he’s gained notoriety for breathing new life into the progressive Detroit electronic sound, crafting music that adheres to the pillars of the canon—melding glitchy techno breaks and melodic, jackin’ house—accessibly enough to pack serious crossover appeal. *Asa Breed* is no different. “Neighborhoods” is a sugary two-stepper that channels Modern English, the Detroit Grand Pubahs and Cajmere at once. “Shy” is what Prince would sound like had he pursued a career as a rave DJ. Though many artists are exploring the spaces where house, techno and new wave coalesce, Dear proves he can take a popular sound and make it all his own. —STACEY DUGAN



AVAILABLE NOW

DJ Jazzy Jeff
Return of the Magnificent
(BBE/Rapster)

Hip-hop is dead, according to Nas and his cronies. Drama aside, there’s actually solid albums being produced—like *Return of the Magnificent*. Similar to 2002’s *The Magnificent* (BBE), it introduces newcomers and highlights legends: “My Soul’s Not 4 Sale” with Raheem DeVaughn, “Jeff N Fess” with Rhymefest, “The Garden” with Big Daddy Kane, “Hold It Down” with Method Man and “Let Me Hear U Clap” with Posnuos of De La Soul. You get the flow you would expect from the MCs—complete with versatile and provocative diction, arrogance and hip-hop history lessons in the form of verse—only this time the production is all Jazzy Jeff’s. It’s mixed smoothly, blends jazz and hip-hop genres delicately, and is light on the samples throughout the album. So yeah, hip-hop just might be dead, but the Magnificent has indeed returned. —MICAEL JOHNSON



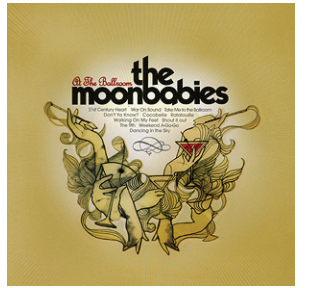
MAY 22

Miracle Fortress
Five Roses
(Secret City)

With the excellent *Five Roses*, Montreal multi-instrumentalist Graham Van Pelt (aka Miracle Fortress) draws influence from two Brians, specifically Eno and Wilson. The one-man band achieves an ethereal bliss comparable to Eno’s ambient work and borrows Wilson’s penchant for sunshine melodies—note the harmonic interplay on “Maybe Lately.” That the band previously released a John Cale cover is telling; “Next Train” sounds like a lost track from *Paris 1919* with its repetitive drone and detached lyrical ennui. If the album suffers, it’s from too much ambition. The vocals tend toward over-processed inaudibility—think back-up singers without a lead—which works sometimes (“Hold Your Secrets to Your Heart”), though not always (“Have You Seen in Your Dreams”); and the title track’s melodic collage fails to build any real dynamic tension. But overall these are minor glitches in one of the best pop albums you’ll hear all year. —C.T. BALLENTINE

It’s a cliché to trot out the whole “pocket symphony” Brian Wilsonism, but damn if Moonbabies don’t take that comparison and run with it. This Swedish duo, consisting of Ola Frick and Carina Johansson, is known for their expansive songs and optimistic bend, but their albums tend to be uneven affairs. *Moonbabies at the Ballroom* halts that trend. The album opens with the quiet prelude of “21st Century Heart,” all pinging bells and whispered crescendos, before erupting into the charging “War on Sound.” Frick and Johansson stuff each song with sonic wonder and glee while icing their base with lyrics delivered in breathy boy/girl bursts. The resulting pastiche of ’70s pop and new-millennial studio smarts is undeniably addicting and mirrors an innocent’s wonder at the world around. When they say, “Hey! It will be all right!” you believe them without worrying that the sentiment might be, well, clichéd. —JIM KOPENY

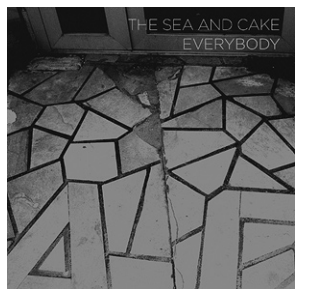
Moonbabies
Moonbabies at the Ballroom
(Hidden Agenda)



MAY 29

The side projects of the members of the Sea and Cake have eclipsed the band that spawned them. At the same time, the Sea and Cake is duly respected for helping define the indie-pop sound popular today. It’s precisely the band’s storied and well-regarded past that makes their first release in four years, *Everybody*, somewhat of a letdown. The group’s studious glorification of chamber pop has reached a point where the final results tend to be vacuum-packed compositions that are perfect in execution, but lack emotional heft. The group momentarily loosens up on “Exact to Me,” but the processed drums of “Lightning” that follow make it obvious that the band is so centered on their craft, they’ve forgotten to breathe life into their songs. They lay down tracks that glisten like naked branches after an ice storm, but the results are just as brittle and fleeting in their impression. —JIM KOPENY

The Sea and Cake
Everybody
(Thrill Jockey)



AVAILABLE NOW

Stars clearly trust their friends, but whether or not fans will appreciate that trust is another question. What starts out as an overhaul of their 2005 album, *Set Yourself On Fire*, soon proves to be a survey of (mostly) Canadian indie artists covering songs from Stars’ catalog. This is accomplished by applying the new band’s instruments and style to the existing vocals of Amy Millan and Evan Cranley, which casts an entirely different tone on the material. Allowing these groups to reinvent the songs took more humility than a mere remix album. But ultimately, more is revealed about the remakers than Stars themselves. Some bands fuse with the original for a glorious synthesis (Montag, the Most Serene Republic, Metric), while some just play like it’s their own song (Jason Collett, the Dears). There are enough different styles to appease a variety of listeners, but it’s still cohesive enough to be called a Stars album. Just don’t throw out the real thing. —NICK MEADOR

Stars
Do You Trust Your Friends?
(Arts & Crafts)



MAY 22

On their eponymous album, Voxtrox perfect the honeyed pop that brought their EPs industry buzz. It features clearer production than its predecessors, with mixed-up vocals that highlight the lyrics. “Maybe I want to be myself / But I am somebody else,” croons lead singer, guitarist and pianist Ramesh Srivastava in the chorus of “Steven,” which includes a bouncy piano melody and lilting violin that sounds almost Baroque. Though Voxtrox gravitate toward the plaintive tunefulness that has become their trademark, the band experiments here with a harder-edged sound. The driving “Firecracker” opens with a bobbing bass riff; vocals in the bridge crescendo and burst into the sing-along chorus the way the song’s title suggests they would. This full-length defines the Voxtrox sound: urgent, earnest and just plain pleasant. But with promising glimpses of a rock edge, fans are left to wonder whether Voxtrox might expand their boundaries the way they expand their deservedly growing fan base. —ARIANNA STERN

Voxtrox
Voxtrox
(Beggars Group)



MAY 22

“I’m so tired of you America / I’ve got a life to live / I’ve got a soul to fill.” So declares an amply pained wail on the second track of Rufus Wainwright’s emblematic fifth album. The track, “Going to a Town,” details a fetid, welled-up disgust over the current state of his sometimes home. Bluntly political overtones mark a new direction for the cult-status Canadian folk singer, seeing as the bulk of his themes reside in the personal-tragedy castle where Leonard Cohen and the ghosts of Elliot Smith and Jeff Buckley so gloriously hold court. But the sweeping, moody, orchestral sounds cushioning the indictments are classic Wainwright, and his unique sonic obsessions are painted all over each song. A steady infusion of complex operatic harmonies and layering—and a melancholy, morbid, droning quality—characterize pieces like “Tulsa” and “Do I Disappoint You,” while the title track is all jazzy, big-band, theatrical wackiness. —CLARA ROSE THORNTON

Rufus Wainwright
Release the Stars
(Geffen)



MAY 15