

dimension. Frankly, the structure of the music itself only accomplishes so much; rather, it is the profound sincerity, passion, anger and intensity with which it is played and the lyrics that are belted out that has hooked me so thoroughly. I was right about Bread and Circuits factoring heavily in the Heartattack race issue, for they are a band composed entirely of so-called "racial minorities," which lamentably is still somewhat of an anomaly in the punk/hardcore scene (lamentable that there are not more people of colour actively involved, or even who feel comfortable, in the scene). Through both the lyrics of the band and the writings of its members, Bread and Circuits represents itself a thoroughly politically conscious (and active) entity which gives rise to the voice of the oppressed, marginalised, and disenfranchised in a way that, obviously, no band comprised of white males could ever hope for. Further, they address issues with a critical eye and genuinely progressive attitude, coupled with a passion and fire the equal of which one would be hard pressed to find these days. Damn. I'm tempted to compare this to Los Crudos, but when it comes down to it, the lyrics here are better and the music quite dissimilar, and it is really only the incredible energy which both bands exude which spurs me to draw such a comparison. Get this.

-Jonah CAMPBELL

Show: Nathan Wiley  
 Location: Baba's Lounge  
 Date: January 12, 2001

We were on the topic of groups that share songwriting duties. Matt Mayes' departure from The Guthries is what started us on this subject. On the one hand, the absence of his songs from the country group would be noticeable when they play at Brennan's on January 25 and 26th. But on the other, it was agreed that a project that focuses more on his talents would have a consistency lacking in his previous band. And who knows, maybe The Guthries will find a more comfortable atmosphere to develop their own songs in. On the walk from the bank machine to Baba's, Buzzy mentioned a quote he heard by Jeff Tweedy from

Wilco. When making the Woody Guthrie album *Mermaid Avenue* with folk singer Billy Bragg, Tweedy and Bragg had conflicting views of which songs should be included on the album. Bragg was concerned with using specific songs to appropriately represent the politics of Guthrie, but Tweedy's philosophy was simple: "Just use the songs that don't suck." Using the songs that don't suck is easier said than done when dealing with collaborations between different songwriters. When individual egos conflict with the overall vision of a band, there's a lot of potential for sucking. But the same goes for singer/songwriters that lack the skills to direct a band. Nathan Wiley has found the perfect band to collaborate with in Birdhouse. The band comfortably emphasises Wiley's talents as a singer and provide an atmosphere that transcends the crowded, smoky bar environment and takes listeners wherever Wiley wants to go. Relatively new to singing live (he used to be in an instrumental surf band called The Evil Agents and is infamous for destroying a perfectly good Gibson Les Paul), Nathan's gentle vocals are the focus of his show and the band provides a bed of soft sounds for them to rest peacefully on. Everyone works together to create a performance that reinforces the praises of Wiley as a formidable songwriter. The show worked well because Wiley avoids playing songs that suck.

-Stephan MACLEOD

Album: *Go Everywhere*  
 Artist: The Topsy Kings  
 Label: Independent

To my mind, a cover song has to either reinterpret a song completely or improve on the original enough to justify the cover. Most of the songs on *Go Everywhere* do both. The Topsy Kings, like Luther Wright and the Wrongs did with *The Wall*, take classic songs and give them a bluesy spin. Their take on stuff like Alanis Morissette's "Hand In My Pocket" and Green Day's "Basket Case" are refreshing and extremely listenable interpretations of their originals. Many of the songs are so altered that you can't tell what the song is until they get to the lyrics. Granted, a new



Leonard Cohen. Really.

version of "Brown Eyed Girl" wasn't needed, but the band's ability to reinvigorate songs that you didn't even know needed reinvigoration is matched only by their ability to flawlessly interweave rhythms, like the insertion of the *I Dream of Jeannie* theme into "Basket Case." From the liner notes, it sounds like this album was sort of an experiment (though there must have been much work involved in getting all the rights to these songs), and the band isn't a serious band with a serious touring schedule. Which is too bad, because it sounds like it would be a great band live.

-Joel MEGGS

Album: *01010101*  
 Artist: Portraits of Past  
 Label:

You know what? This is a great album, a really great album. Portraits of Past play some sort of hardcore that should definitely be called emo, on account of the sense of emotional poignancy which emanates from every aspect of this record, but most likely no one these days would call it emo, basically because it sounds nothing at all like Jimmy Eat World (who are a pile of shit, just for the record). The music moves in and out of quiet melody and more intense, over-driven guitar harmonics, all backed up by screamed, yelled, and occasionally sung vocals which convey a very satisfying and atmospheric sense of despair. All in all their sound is very tragic, maybe even epic (well, epic in an "aw, my life is

over AND it's snowing sort of way" you know?). Unlike pretty much every band who's doing the quiet melodic/screamy thrashy thing lately, it really works for them, and the parts flow together nicely without sounding forced at all. Despite the fact that I have serious difficulty discerning one song from another, this really isn't such a problem, and in fact adds to the atmosphere of the album and develops a sort of fluid continuity throughout the whole thing. I have no idea what the lyrics are about, but the song titles are suitably obscure ("KQED=Volvo," "Snickers Snickers") and often are almost melodramatic in their negativity ("Something less than what was intended," "Implications of a sinkhole personality," "The outlook is bleak"). Good times feeling bad, in any case.

-Jonah CAMPBELL

Album: *Volume II: Thirteen Songs From the House of Miracles*  
 Artist: The Two-Minute Miracles  
 Label: Teenage U.S.A.

Lo-fi done well is almost always more creative than studio albums. The Two-Minute Miracles exploit their home-made sound to its fullest on *Volume II*. Combining a raw indie pop sound with rootsy kitchen folk, the TMMs are fucking wicked awesome. You best believe. They keep the songs short and throw in cool horn accompaniments for good measure. It kind of reminds me of a Mercury Rev album on a very limited budget...like say \$40. But it works really well.

-Jonah CAMPBELL