

# TOP PICKS

<p><b>A. Armada</b></p>	 <p><b>Anam Cara</b> It's tough being a band with no vocals—or is it? I'm not sure if there's been a huge push of post rock because of Explosions in the Sky, but this band is totally capable of being a band that can do a full-length movie soundtrack (hopefully not about football). They take the best parts of Explosions, which is the rocking guitar parts, and expand on them by detouring into mellow rock. What they produce is a guitar-based brand of rock instrumental that's sad and meditative at times, but also capable of arty rock that's more like prog. Part of the Athens scene, they're solid players in the non-vocal music world. They've even toured Europe with one of the best bands around, From Monument to Masses. [Hello Records] en</p>	<p><b>The (International) Noise Conspiracy</b></p>  <p><b>The Cross of My Calling</b> No one can accuse the Swedish band of copying The Make-Up anymore. On their first album in four years, the garage funk elements have been replaced by twanging guitar and shimmering melodies. But while the style of songwriting doesn't remain the same, the message does. Songs like "I Am The Dynamite" and "Storm the Gates of Beverly Hills" are annotated Marxist theorist Guy Debord and proto punker Iggy Pop. Meanwhile, as they repurposed the title of The Damned's apolitical "Smash It Up" and aimed it at The Man on their first album, this time they use the "Washington Bullets" song title by The Clash and transplant the sentiments to oil fields in the Middle East. It turns out the band's teeth and chops are sharper than ever. [Vagrant/ American] mw</p>
<p><b>The Analog Girl</b></p>	 <p><b>Sometime Next Galaxy</b> Laptops keep getting smaller, but Mei Wong's brand of laptop rock keeps sounding bigger. Her latest release is epic sounding, and almost dizzying from the get-go. Occasionally she utilizes the heavier beats that characterize dance music, but song titles like "Superfly," "Hello, Machina," and "Tramp" suggest a sense of humor about that genre. More often, the Singapore-based performer balances her sugary vocals with experimental, noisy tracks, and those are the compositions that I prefer. The gorgeous "April" has layers of droning sounds that can be interpreted as hypnotic and border on cosmic, while "Unspecial" probably has the fewest tricks but is perhaps the most honest and arresting song of the bunch. [Roji Ltd.] mw</p>	<p><b>N.A.S.A.</b></p>  <p><b>The Spirit of Apollo</b> I thought this all-star jam would be a mess, but somehow the duo of producer/directors Sam Speigel (North America) and Ze Gonzales (South America) pull it off. Tied together by an undercurrent of Brazilian funk, the 17 songs feature unlikely team-ups such as M.I.A., Santogold, and Nick Zinner ("Whachadoin?"); Tom Waits and Kool Keith ("Spacious Thoughts"); and Karen O, Ol' Dirty Bastard, and Fatlip ("Strange Enough"). Not bad. Other ones make more sense, like George Clinton and Chali 2na in "There's a Party." While the results are highly listenable, perhaps even better is the idea that such diverse range of artists could work together on something so cool. The accompanying DVD should be interesting. [Anti-] mw</p>
<p><b>Asobi Seksu</b></p>	 <p><b>Hush</b> Asobi Seksu is sort of the group that shoe gazers have been waiting for—especially after My Bloody Valentine just ripped up the nation on its last tour. There are plenty of peers that make pretty sounds that aren't musical, and many more who play pop without enough gaze. Asobi Seksu composes songs that feed your mind and your soul at the same time with layers of guitars and the stunning vocals of Yuki Chikudate. (I hardly understand a thing, but I know she sounds just right.) On first listen alone, the new album is a winner, and the group's future can only get better. I can't say there are hits, but Asobi Seksu has to be one of the best new groups around still playing in small venues. [Polyvinyl] en</p>	<p><b>Jimmy Rodway &amp; The Fe Me Time All Stars</b></p>  <p><b>Dub I</b> Because the Micron record label bit the dust soon after the great Errol Thompson recorded this album at Joe Gibbs' studio, this album was impossible to find until now. As suggested by the title, the tracks are early dub, heavy on rhythm without too many effects or tricks. This is almost like an instrumental album—albeit one with incredibly heavy, earth-shaking bass and echoing drums. No vocals are sung, toasted, or spun, but roots consciousness seeps through in titles like "Black Rights," "Back to Africa," and "Black I Am." Among the many choice cuts, "This Child of Mine" is a relative of "Woman of the Ghetto," while the title of "The Great Tommy McCook" should require no extra explanation. [Pressure Sounds] mw</p>
<p><b>Chop Chop</b></p>	 <p><b>Screens</b> Kind of like a lo-fi counterpart to Cornelius, Catherine Cavanagh mixes what seems like a million elements into each of her songs. The first cut, "In a Room," has the mellow sounds of a French horn, hints of drum machine, very occasional guitar, and various fuzzy tones sounds backing up her wispy vocals. The airy feel is intensely personal, and makes for excellent indietronica. Other songs resemble folk ("Play"), new wave ("Damascas"), or post punk ("I Met You at a Space Station Bar"), but intimacy and honesty are key throughout, allowing Cavanagh to survey sounds and styles without seeming schizophrenic or forced. With lineups in Cambridge and Los Angeles, it will be interesting to hear how live shows will vary on either coast. [Arch Enemy] mw</p>	<p><b>Supersuckers</b></p>  <p><b>Get it Together</b> Cowpunk 'n' rollers The Supersuckers haven't rode their horses into the sunset quite yet. They're still spurring their guitars and on tour all the time. I saw them at a point in their career when they were more punk—faster, beer-driven, and throwing up the horns—and less cowboy. Their transformation of late has them going in a more "rock" direction, even playing at a Farm Aid and backing Willie Nelson on TV. On this album, their pace stays mid-tempo, and if you're into saloon-style rock à la Social Distortion, then they're your band. You might even know some of their songs since they get used a lot in commercials and television. At turns out they've been around all along, and it's me who's been gone. [Sub Pop] en</p>
<p><b>Diplo/Santogold</b></p>	 <p><b>Top Ranking Santogold</b> You know how each issue of the UK magazine <i>Mojo</i> includes a mix CD that shows influences and shares a few rare cuts by the cover artist? This is like that, but a million times more interesting. Diplo weaves exclusive songs by Santi White into a nonstop fabric from rap to reggae to punk, putting her songs in context but also working as a nonstop jam. It makes total sense for The Clash to appear not once but twice ("Ghetto Defendant" and her twist on a classic cut from London Calling, "Guns on Broadway"), as well as killer tracks by the likes of Sister Nancy, Desmond Dekker, and Barrington Levy. On either end of the spectrum, there's Devo and The B-52's or Sir Mixalot and LL Cool J, all put to heavy-duty dancehall beats. [Mad Decent] mw</p>	<p><b>White Fang</b></p>  <p><b>Pure Evil</b> If you like punk rock, it shouldn't take more than 10 seconds to get into this album. The Portland band is considered by some to be thrash, but they don't hesitate to work choruses into their silly and fun sound, which resembles Seaweed, J Church, and surfy pop-punk bands from Southern California's South Bay. The lo-fi, indie recording of the songs—which are two minutes or less—are reminiscent of a four-track demos, but are powerful enough to prove that this band means business. The inclusion of horns nearly removes the band's low-budget excuses, but it doesn't really need it anyway. White Fang delivers the goods and fun times from Portland, OR on its own raw terms. [Mariage] en</p>

# MUSIC



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Akimbo



**Jersey Shores**

Great name for a band, since it sounds like “Kimbo.” I came to find that the name means to have your arms on your hips, but it also describes wielding two guns like Chow Yun-Fat, which makes more sense. In their songs, Akimbo displays power and slow rage, with wild vocals like Mark Arm and music that’s pure Sabbath. (A more recent point of reference would be High on Fire.) Akimbo’s badass style is turned up to 11 in their song “Great White Bull,” which rocks like Mastodon. [Neurot Recordings] en

...And You Will Know Us By the Trail of Dead



**Festival Thyme**

“Bells of Creation” is a hell of an opener for this Austin band’s new teaser EP. It quickly builds up into a majestic rock opener complete with twinkling keyboards, epic guitar riffs, and dreamy vocals—perhaps the opposite of “Ball of Confusion”? The second cut puts on the brakes with violent, sporadic guitar and piano before it busts into a prog-rock jam. The melodic pop of “Inland Sea” and “The Betrayal of Roger Casement & the Irish Brigade” seem downright quaint in comparison, leaving the listener hungry for next year’s full-length LP. [Justice Records] mw

Tim Barry



**Manchester**

While the faster numbers resemble acoustic versions of songs by Barry’s punk band Avail, this is not just some half-assed “unplugged” album. With banjos, fiddles, mandolin, and bass pedals, it is full-on hobo music that trades touring in vans for riding in trains and smelly punkers for wanderers. The best songs combine the energy of punk with folk storytelling. “Texas Cops” is one such great piece of narrative, while “Tile Work” mixes Cadillacs, cocaine, and regret into a rollicking good time. [Suburban Home] mw

Beta.Beta



**Hello**

Electronic pop will never die, and Beta.Beta injects a no-holds-barred pop attack that is happy, fast paced, and might make some of you gleefully jump out of your seats and dance. Making happy beats is one thing, but Beta.Beta’s actually a good band, with great vocals by Adelin Cai and composed songs that anyone will like. There’s even a melancholy ballad mentioning the 14th St. station in New York City, and even though it’s labeled an EP, it’s a full 30-minute ride that’s a winner. [Cult Hero] en

The Binges



**Self-Titled**

With doom metal, drone metal, and death metal in vogue, is the new generation of rockers ready for party-hearty hard rock and roll? Japanese sisters Mayuko and Tszumi Okai do an amazing job of summoning the technically proficient but trashy and fun Cathouse-era vibe with their shredding guitar and bass. You can sense in scratchy-voiced, fist-pumping songs like “Upside Down” and “Bad Enough” that the shaggy haired band gets airborne, has fun, and doesn’t just pout and pose like a lot of their art-school counterparts. [Label of the Beast] mw

Coffins



**Buried Death**

This Japanese band plays a slighter faster brand of doom metal than many of their stonier counterparts. On the first few tracks the raw drums and steady guitar riffs are almost like Mötörhead and “Buried Death” even has a guitar solo, but the unmistakable Cookie Monster vocals reveal the band’s true allegiances. This band slows the pace to a heavy grind in “Cadaver Blood” and doubles up the drums to a death metal rumble in “Altars in Gore.” Overflowing with chops yet free of theatrics, the group spews a dark, deliberate, and evil sound. [20 Buck Spin] mw

Crystal Antlers



**Self-Titled EP**

There are plenty of acid-soaked psychedelic rock groups out there, and this Long Beach band freaks out with the best of them. What sets it apart from the pack is not the powerful riffs, humming organs, or wild horns, but the majestic moments when the feedback diminishes, clouds part, and Jonny Bell’s soulful vocals ooze through the speakers. In “A Thousand Eyes,” I can imagine a thousand tears dropping in slow motion. From epic space jams to short blasts of garage rock, this full-on delivery stays true. [Touch & Go] mw

Cut Off Your Hands



**You & I**

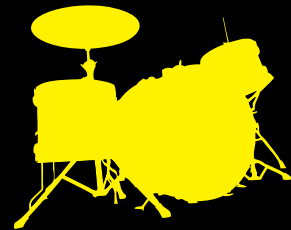
This band from New Zealand starts off its first full-length release with a bang, channeling the pounding drums and chiming guitars of Phil Spector’s best girl group singles. “Happy As Can Be” is tribal, driving, and maybe even a little Christmas-y with the echoing vocals. But an entire album in that style could get old (Pipettes, anyone?) so they mix in the oldies flavor in small doses from there on, smoothing out angular indie pop with AM radio grooves in songs like “Oh Girl” and “It Doesn’t Matter.” The results defy time, trends, and odds. [French Kiss] mw



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Auxes make a strong argument for some serious rethinking about the role of pop punk in modern music, wrapping wiry, angular guitars around melodies lifted out of the pop spectrum."

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Arrington de Dionyso



***I See Beyond The Black Sun***

Tuvan throat singing has been a recurring element in albums by de Dionyso's band Old Time Relijun for a while now, and here it takes center stage. Establishing the guttural, whistling, resonating, and holy sound in the opening track, he goes on to mix it with bass clarinet and various homemade instruments. The effects range from jazzy to natural, but are always epic, intense, and subtly spiritual. When the album culminates in the 11-and-a-half-minute "Pluto in Capricorn" with drums, it's as if a higher power is getting off its ass to dance. [K Records] mw

Dir En Grey



***Uroboros***

While this Japanese metal band is capable of playing heavy music, it also has a commercial angle that puts them on the charts in Japan. They have more than one vocal style, and I prefer the throaty, death metal vocals over the more nasally, Mike Patton-like pop ones that sound like Japlish even though the lyrics are in Japanese. The best part about the group is that they look like the freaks you might see in *Fruits* sporting the Gothic Lolita outfits. The difference is that they're for real and play the part every day. [The End] en

Eddie Sedgwick



***Things Are Getting Sinister and Sinisterer***

As a solo artist, the cross-dressing ex-member of Antelope and El Guapo sings electroclash songs mostly inspired by real people. More refined than Wesley Willis but less obsequious than Momus, her lyrics obsess over details rather than tell a biography. The refrain to "Angelina Jolie" addresses black babies, "Mary-Kate Olsen" is about eating disorders, and "Sissy Spacek" is soaked with pig's blood. Even so, she is not above deconstructing herself ("Eddie Sedgwick II") or wildlife ("March of the Penguins"). [Dischord] mw

Japanther



***Tut Tut Now Shake Ya Butt***

Why is it that I have a hard time believing that Crass co-founder Penny Rimbaud executive-produced this album? Japanther is an amalgam of mostly pop and with small dosage of old punk. The recording quality is crappy, but the songs are fun and as dumb as the album's name. Singing through effects, the duo's vocals sound like toy voice changers, and they have an arty edge that's somewhat gimmicky but hot. They have a few guests like MC Spank Rock as well as some spoken word by Penny over the music. [Wantage] en

Night Horse



***The Dark Won't Hide You***

Kind of like Glenn Danzig singing for Soundgarden, these six songs have dark, howling vocals over chunky guitars and unstoppable drums. Amazingly, the riffs are pushed way over everything else but remain crystal clear—and not fuzzed out—for each 5-minute-plus song. The emotionally charged beginning gives way to blues rock as the L.A. group's debut album progresses, roughly mirroring (and perhaps providing a soundtrack for) the typical evening for adult beverage drinkers. [Tee Pee] mw

Ocean



***Pantheon of the Lesser***

Remember when Sabbath was considered sludgy? Now it's a race to see which doom rock band can play the slowest, and these guys dial it down a few more notches. The result is magnified intensity, kind of like when a scene in a John Woo movie is shown in slow motion to emphasize the drama. This, Ocean's second release, has only two songs but they last about 35 and 25 minutes with pounding guitar riffs, plodding drums, and supremely heavy atmosphere lightened only by vaguely elfin female vocals at the end of the first song. [Important Records] mw

Prince Klassen



***iMi Fresh!***

This mix CD bridges the gap between a summertime jam and late-night radio show with classic funk (James Brown), vintage hip-hop (Gang Starr), and newer dance music (Santogold) as well as more obscure dancehall and house music. There's enough of each song to make it a mood-setter rather than a dick-out needle thrasher and enough scratching to establish that Klassen not only has superior musical knowledge than you, but has more skills than your iPod. [www.myspace.com/princemotherfuckinklassen] mw

Tipsy



***Buzz***

The songs on this lounge album aren't too long, which means you better swallow that highball before the mood changes. The tone is serious in the Martin Denny style, using orchestration and sound effects, and themes vary from outer space to jungle and back to cocktail hour. As is the norm for this kind of music, there are few vocals, and the ones that surface are female. Why it's on an arty metal label like Ipecac Records makes no sense, but this is a nice listen that's perfect for a party. [Ipecac] en