

waves and off-time signatures in “Scars.”

Coupled with the humor frontman Jacoby Shaddix interjects into his between song banter, you get the feeling that this is a band that really enjoys every moment of being onstage. The only downer of the live tracks; however, is that there aren't any songs included from the band's sophomore effort, *Love Hate Tragedy*. These tracks show that it's only a matter of time until a follow-up Live DVD to 2005's *Alive & Murderous in Chicago* is released - Matthew Pashalian.

drumming and Matt Berninger's haunting baritone croon.

It's not until the third track, “Anyone's Ghosts,” *High Violet* takes off with Devendorf's drumming giving the muscle it needs to elevate to the emotional peak it needs to go. Berninger's vocals give the song that final touch of intensity as he croons, “Didn't want to be your ghost, didn't want to be anyone's ghost. But I don't want anybody else.” This with the next three songs is the true core of the album with the brooding keyboard-driven “Little Faith” and the slow-building mid-tempo rocker, “Afraid of Everyone.” However, “Bloodbuzz Ohio” is the album's masterpiece that builds to a gripping climax.

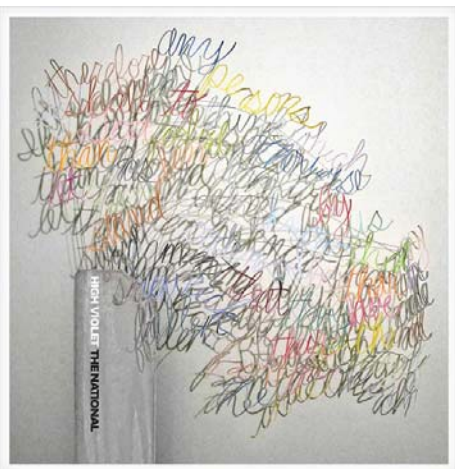
These highlights and the three tracks that close *High Violet* brilliantly make the album another solid release for The National – the urban keyboard atmospheric of “Conversation 16” and “England” with the odd but lovely “Vanderlyle Crybaby Geeks. Despite the slow start and the interlude deep in the second half of the record (“Lemonworld,” “Runaway”), the album is another engaging and beautiful record by The National; even if *The Boxer* is better – Jeff Noller.

DLR strikes out as something completely independent from what you would expect from the masked one. Off-kilter keyboards and mellotron-type sounds spread throughout the disc on “You Say,” while staccato drums and vocals follow suit on “I Love You.”

Upon first hearing Dirty Little Rabbits, “Hello” was the first I had heard. It immediately it stood out as almost Broadway musical in nature from the vocal delivery in its verses to the stripped down yet searing chorus.

Tonally, vocalist Stella K sounds reminiscent of Lacey Sterm from Flyleaf, but, like Sterm, has a style all her own one going from a whisper to a scream. Though she seems to channel Korn's Jonathon Davis on “Put It In The Rock,” breaking into a nursery rhyme mid song. On “Professional Hit,” Stella K rants about a relationship gone well and at times seems to throw a somewhat comical fit.

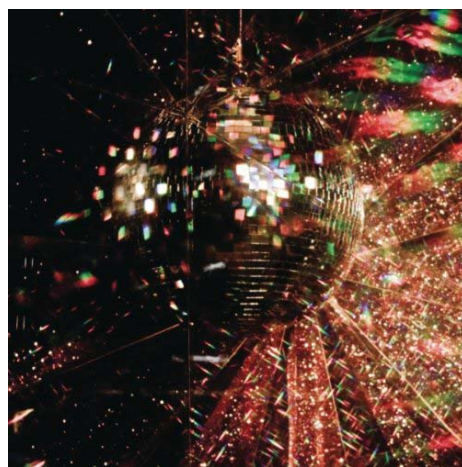
Dirty Little rabbits maybe score big points for originality, but as far as having memorable songs that will stick in your head for days, that's where DLR seem to lack the most. Aside from that, they're different and really seem to be having a lot of fun doing what they're doing - Matthew Pashalian.



The National
High Violet
4AD

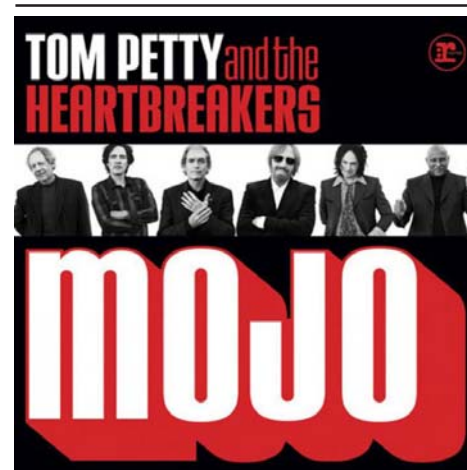
The National's fifth album, *High Violet*, continues the band's growing atmospheric ambition. 2007's *The Boxer* raised the stakes for the Brooklyn-based indie rock quintet, which they attempt to swing for the fences with an outright masterpiece with producer Peter Katis again behind the boards. It's too bad some of the songs tend to move a little to slow for their own good, no matter how mesmerizing the band's performance is.

From the opening numbers, “Terrible Love” and “Sorrow,” the songs tend to crawl on for too long before building a good groove. This slows the album from gaining momentum, despite Aaron and Bryce Dessner's guitar work and keyboards, Scott Devendorf's subtle bass lines, Bryan Devendorf's hypnotic



Dirty Little Rabbits
Dirty Little Rabbits
The End Records

To say that Dirty Little Rabbits full-length debut is different is an understatement to say the least. Initially formed as a side project by Slipknot's Shawn Crahan,



Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers
Mojo
Warner Brothers

It seems from a creative standpoint; Tom Petty has been lying in the creative doldrums for the better part of a decade.

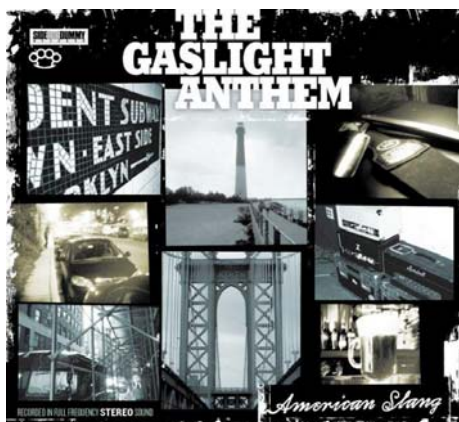
Following his last solid album, 1999's *Echo*, he released the tepid and pretentious *The Last DJ* in 2002 with the Heartbreakers and 2006's weary and melancholy *Highway Companion*. When he revived his first group Mudcrotch in 2007 to release their self-titled album the following year, people welcomed the ragged and loose feel that had been absent from most of Petty's recent material. If there was hope that would translate to great record when he brought back the Heartbreakers for this year's *Mojo*, that is not the case.

Sonically, Petty brings the band of Mike Campbell, Scott Thurston, Benmont Tench, Ron Blair and Steve Ferrone into the world of Chicago-styled blues. This may make *Mojo* sound great, but it's mind-boggling how Petty has failed to come up with any kind of hooks or melodies to really make a sharp and swaggering record like he had done for decades.

Lyrically, he meanders all over the place from the opening "Jefferson Jericho Blues," where he brings up Thomas Jefferson and the black maids he slept with before going into metaphors of jilted lovers and getting old. Rambling and mumbling through the songs neuters the fresh bluesy feel of the record.

Sure, the band sounds vibrant with Campbell's great guitar work, Ferrone and Blair's solid rhythm section; but Petty sounds like he could care less about playing or being there. Bringing the band into the blues doesn't have the result he looks like was going after. His heart does not seem into it this time around.

At least on *The Last DJ* he had conviction, even if it was misguided and self-righteous. *Highway Companion* might have found Petty sounding sad and defeated, dealing with older age; but there was an earnest to his playing. *Mojo* is a 65-minute bore that doesn't even sound good if you were stoned off your rocker. Petty can't use that excuse anymore. He once had the kind of swagger to make Mick Jagger blush. Now, he just sounds old without a care – Jeff Noller.



The Gaslight Anthem
American Slang
SideOneDummy

Having established themselves through non-stop touring and an ever-growing reception to 2008's *The '59 Sound*, New Jersey's The Gaslight Anthem continue to strike the iron hot on *American Slang*. The band is in fine form here from the punchy, chest-pumping title track that opens the album. This song showcases the throaty vocals of guitarist Brian Fallon, the solid rhythm section of bassist Alex Levine and drummer Benny Horowitz alongside Alex Rosamilia's slicing guitar licks.

Yes, fans of *The '59 Sound* will love this record's tight rockers like the punkish rockabilly of "Stay Lucky," the bluesy doo-wop of "The Diamond Church Choir" and the frantic "Orphans." However, *American Slang* does signal a change in the band's sound and direction to more mid-tempo and soulful sounds. This finds them stretching out their sound to great results as on the slower but affirming melodies of "Bring It On." Both "The Queen of Lower Chelsea" and "We Did It When We Were Young" are spacey but strong compositions with the latter closing the album on a stunning note.

The Gaslight Anthem do fall close to run-by-the-mill numbers on "Boxer" and "The Spirit of Jazz." These tracks dull the album's momentum during the second-half of the disc. However, this can't keep *American Slang* from being the right step in the band's progression with their more patient and slower tempos – Jeff Noller.



The Pretty Reckless
Light Me Up
Interscope

Taylor Momsen sings with a lot of smokey and soulful grit throughout The Pretty Reckless' debut album, *Light Me Up*. A surprisingly solid set of ten tracks that go from sleazy blues and menacing grunge to shimmering arena rock and acoustic ballads, the album is quite a surprise, given you don't expect Momsen to sing such earnest and expressive lyrics without sounding hammy or over-the-top. This fact is more surprising when you consider Momsen was only 16 at the time when she wrote the songs with producer Kato Khandwala and songwriter Ben Phillips earlier this year.

There are a plethora of solid rockers on *Light Me Up* such as on the opener, "My Medicine," with its sleazy blues guitars and towering drums. This gives a perfect platform for Momsen's smokey and gritty vocals without sounding over the top or ham-fisted. In fact, this latter fact only becomes an issue on such songs as the bass-driven funk of "Since You're Gone," the new wavish "Miss Nothing" and the arena rock of "Factory Girl." Even then, it doesn't take away the intended feel of these tracks.

Momsen and company deliver quite well on such numbers as the sinister "Make Me Wanna Die," the melodic "Light Me Up" and the balls-out grunge of "Goin Down" – the latter goes for the throat with less-than-saintly lyrics by Momsen to match. There are also some memorable slower numbers with strings, acoustics and keyboards like the melancholic "Just Tonight," "Nothing Left to Lose" and the closing "You."

Overall, *Light Me Up* is a solid debut by The Pretty Reckless. It will be curious to see where Momsen will go from here – Jeff Noller.