
Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Disney Girl Does Dulwich - 15-05-2008 09:06

I have to admit I'm struggling to find much to get excited about this year so far in terms of good albums from established acts and decent new acts across the spectrum.

Has it been a bad year so far or am I just getting absent minded?

Examples of decent output please.....

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by King Mob - 15-05-2008 09:22

Albums by...

Kelley Polar
These New Puritans
The Presets
Cut Copy
Crystal Castles
British Sea Power
Ladytron
M83
Neon Neon
British Sea Power

I could go on, but these are the ones that happen to be on my mp3 player right now

I found that at the end of last year, I was struggling to find more than a couple of albums that comfortably deserved a place in my top 5. In contrast, it's not even halfway through this year and already I'm spoiled for choice.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Spearmint Rhino - 15-05-2008 09:29

Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds, The Ting Tings, British Sea Power, Heloise And The Savoir Faire, Neon Neon, Sam Sparro, Alphabeat, Hercules And Love Affair, Duffy, Portishead, The Long Blondes, Ladytron, Glasvegas, Robots In Disguise, Oh No Ono, The Mae Shi, MGMT, Foals, Wu-Tang Clan, Crystal Castles, The Whip, Estelle, Ghostface Killa, Hadouken!, Scarlett Johansson...

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Hofzinser - 15-05-2008 09:45

The new Shortwave Set album is great too.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Melbourne Arab - 15-05-2008 10:09

Silver Jews, Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, Dodos, No Age, Robert Forster, MGMT, Times New Viking, The Gutter Twins, The Breeders, Portishead, Hercules and Love Affair, Cut Copy, Helio Sequence, Earth, Beach House

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Fatter Hipper - 15-05-2008 10:15

Despite not being at uni anymore, I've started reviewing stuff for the student rag. Here's what I had to say...

A Storm of Light- And We Wept Within The Black Ocean
Neurot CD/LP, Released 12/5

And We Wept The Black Ocean Within is an odd beast- a concept album without a concept. Or at least, not a concept main man Josh Graham (Neurosis, Made out of Babies, Red Sparowes) is going to let us know- these songs could be sung by "something inanimate, something animal or the words of someone long since deceased", according to the press release. A (mildly) interesting idea, but the lyrics (when audible) are so vague that it's difficult to care that much who (or what) is supposed to be singing them. There's an "I am sinking" here and an "I'm falling" there- and plenty of other generic, "hey, this is serious stuff, yeah?" signifiers- but there's no real originality of thought on display. Its ambiguity stems from its vagueness, not from fascinating lyrical riddles.

The music follows equally generic means to generate a sense of dread- all eerie synth drones, crushing riffs, ginormous drums and slightly constipated sounding vocals. It's an effective mix, but we've heard it a hundred times before and there's not a lot of room for manoeuvre. Still, it's mightily effective when done right- and on Mass and album closer Iron Heart A Storm of Light manage to craft tunes so skull-crushingly immense it seems futile to stick your hand up and say "excuse me sir, but doesn't this sound a bit like Neurosis/Cult of Luna/Isis"?

3/5

Christopher Bissonnette- In Between Words
Kranky CD

There can be a lot of joy to be found in between words. Away from the bustling humdrum, ambient music offers listeners a space to reflect, to explore their own consciousness, to come to terms with themselves. I can attribute some of the most aesthetically profound experiences of my life to the music of Stars of the Lid, William Basinski and Fennesz. Unfortunately, ambient music can also be incredibly mundane: drippy rather than trippy; womb-regressive rather than mind-exploratory.

And that's pretty much the case with In Between Words. Unremarkable synth sounds are dissolved in swathes of reverb and yawned into the distance with little purpose. Sometimes they're dissolved in layers of crackle and sometimes other unremarkable synth sounds are added to the mix. Rarely is the tactility of sound that marks truly great ambient music displayed. Fennesz's guitars can sound like Velcro feels, Stars of the Lid's humming guitars like a caress across the back from a feather, but In Between Words is like one of those birthstones you get from new age shops: cold and unrewarding.

Closing track Jour et Nuit is the album's most successful track by dint of having a modicum of compositional interest as uneasy chords billow out of the fluff, but ultimately this album drifts by in a disappointingly innocuous manner.

2/5

So'eza- 7 Obstacles
Gringo CD, Released 12/5

So'eza have been going for well over a decade now and this is their third album (their second for Nottingham's delightful Gringo label), but their sound remains blessed with a sprightly vigour. Dan Cornfield's French Horn has a fair bit to do with that- anyone who's heard Mozart's Horn Concerto will know it's an instrument bursting with ruddy cheeked joie de vivre- and 7 Obstacles' best moments come when its jolly tones are fleshing out the itching, angular funkisms of guitarists Ben Owen and Nick Earle.

Though eccentric, 7 Obstacles is almost unfailingly polite- there's no outlandish Deerhoof-esque derailment of songs- but there is plenty of deference to the uncanny – an unexpected chord gently lobbed into the mix here, an unusual harmony there. The quirky sensibilities are retained in the vocal department (where so many bands like this are let down), with the fidgety enunciations of Ben Owen and the soulful, moving tones of Jenny Robinson. Though wildly different vocalists, their voices combine to great effect on album highlight Silver Runners.

It's not an unqualified success- The Roast and Novak are a little less than the sum of their parts, but for the most part 7 Obstacles is a refreshing, rewarding work.

3.5/5

Lords- Everyone Is People
Gringo CD/LP, Released 9/6

Lords once complained that all reviewers do is regurgitate their press releases, but when their press release contains truths as startlingly self-evident as “your booty will not go unshaken”, you have little sympathy for their complaints. Hell, my booty remained shaking even during the string section breakdown in Good Dog Bad Dog. Such is the incessant booty-shaking reality of Lords’ music.

It’s music for brain as well as ass, though- this is a far more mature album than 2006’s debut ‘This Aint a Hate Thing, It’s a Love Thing’. Phil Welding’s vocals have moved from rasping to growling and acquired a whole new menace in the process, whilst the songs are now extra-jam packed with the kind of blues inflected riffery that Tony Iommi would churn out if only he knew how to crack a smile- though Beefheart and Mule remain the most obvious reference points. Then there’s the blasts of free jazz ecstasy and those ass-shaking string sections. Drummer Elvin Beetham-Wallace’s loose-limbs are put to great use too- it’s his rhythmic contortions that allow Lords’ music to appeal to all facets of the body- from right butt cheek to left butt cheek.

4/5

Eric Chenaux- Sloppy Ground
Constellation, out late May

Being able to write effective reviews is often about having a decent bank of adjectives stored away- or at least owning a decent thesaurus. But every so often an album comes along for which there seems to be no appropriate descriptors. And they’re fucking brilliant, because they encapsulate what’s so great about music- its existence can’t always be translated into words. It conjures up states of mind that exist between the adjectives.

Sloppy Ground from Toronto’s Eric Chenaux is one such album. Woozy, off-kilter and hazy all go some way to describing it, but neither I nor Roget possess a sufficient vocabulary to convey the state of mind this puts the listener in. Chenaux’s strangely gentle combination of acid-fried funk, Scottish folk and psych-rock is a manner that just escapes classification. It’s too gentle to be ecstatic, too pleasant to be disconcerting.

Chenaux is a considerably talented songwriter: lyrics are simple but devastating, and these songs are beautifully played by his assembled cast of improvisers. Despite the title there’s no sloppiness to the playing, but there is a lovely lightness of touch and gentle looseness to these songs. I don’t believe I’ll ever find an adjective to describe how they make me feel- and that’s fine by me- because this music has a magic all of its own.

4.5/5

The Owl Service- A Garland of Song
Released 26/5

The parenthetical adjunct to the title of A Garland of Song’s self-titled first track- (Folk Revival) is a pretty explicit statement of intent from Essex resident Steven Paul Collins’ The Owl Service project. Whilst plenty of people continue to make music in the folk-rock tradition (Eliza Carthy being perhaps the most notable), such music has all but fallen off the leftfield rock music radar. With the release of A Garland of Song, and Cathy & Phil Tyler’s wonderfully humble Dump Supper, that seems to be changing.

Unfortunately, the purity of voice required to make these songs really resonate isn’t quite present throughout this album. The opener and Child Ballad No.49 (Rolling of the Stones) strike the perfect balance between clarity and otherworldiness- but when the subject matter gets darker the balance is tipped too heavily in favour of the latter. Folk tunes are simple beasts and require simple tellings to convey their purity of meaning. Lavish on too many extras and you obscure their beauty. It’s a trap Collins falls into too often here- murder ballad Oxford City (The Jealous Lover) is sung a capella, but its violent power is drowned in a great wash of reverb, and the same fault removes much of the power of North Country Maid.

Elsewhere it’s the playing itself that lets the album down. There’s no virtuosity required to make good folk music, but the interaction between various instrumentalists is key. Because Collins has played all the instruments on A Garland of Song himself, this level of spontaneity that can make folk such a toe-tappingly satisfying experience is lacking.

This isn’t a bad album, though. It’s extremely successful at creating a mood- a gently psychedelic and very English one and if it helps spark an interest in Britain’s rich folk tradition then it’s served a noble purpose indeed.

3/5

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Fatter Hipper - 15-05-2008 10:24

My favourite album of the year isn't reviewed above. It's 'Hello, Voyager' by Evangelista (Carla Bozulich & friends). Here's my live review, which pretty much encapsulates the feel of the album...

Hysteria: madness of the womb. An insanity of the irrational woman- something to be overcome, theraputised, made to fit into 'normal', healthy society.

Only society's not normal and it's not healthy. It stinks, it's putrefying, it's rotten to the core. In these times it's perfectly rational to embrace the irrational, perfectly sane to go insane. Old, transcendental modes of thought are no use; we need a politics powered by the injustices of the present- what radical theorist John Holloway calls 'the scream', to power us to a better world.

Evangelista's singer/leader Carla Bozulich knows how to scream, and her band have certainly abandoned transcendentalism: there's no calculated build up and release of tension here, rather the music is dictated by the moment. Whilst these songs may have been composed they're subject to Bozulich's whims- one moment she's giddy on her heels like a little girl, the next she's staring psychotically at the audience. The music- lulled improv one minute- becomes a thrashing, throbbing monster the next- anchored by the throbbing low end of Tara Barnes' bass.

Bozulich sure knows how to sing, too. Her dark, husky voice fills every corner of every soul in the room and destroys the foundations of our world leaving "monuments, architecture- lying at our feet". It's a war not only against the ugliness of the world but against the plastic passions that fill it. On Hello, Voyager! we learn what's supposed to be replacing everything that's false: "there's only one word that hasn't dried completely in your parched throat", intones Bozulich- "the word is love". But this is no hippy ideal- this is love as a terrifying union of blood and hope. This is love that- as Bozulich sings on The Winds of St.Anne- "bursts from our chests". This is love that can change the world.

It's a fucking terrifying thing, this love. When Bozulich asks the audience "Love! Can you say it with me?" it feels far safer to say inwardly think 'no'. But whoever said truth was easy? The title of another song Evangelista play tonight- Truth Is Dark Like Outer Space- is instructive here. Cowards can have their plastic passions- the brave should plunge into that darkness, "buzz through the dark skies with their hands in their pants" and embrace Evangelista's daring, hysterical future.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Pan Tau - 15-05-2008 10:35

I doubt that my picks of the year have wide OTF appeal. Tift Merrit, the Weepies and Kathleen Edwards have turned in fine albums in the folk-pop/country categories.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by King Mob - 15-05-2008 10:41

The Owl Service album is great. Perhaps not exactly 'virtuoso' stuff, as FH says, but the whole thing's just so wonderfully heartfelt, and of course oozes pleasantly hauntologically-tinged vibes.

What does 'fried' mean, exactly, when used in music reviews?

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Greenlander - 15-05-2008 10:46

Los Campesinos! - the best jingly, jangly, girl, boy loveliness since, ooh, Heavenly.

Glasvegas - just fuckin ace. 20 minute sets are where it's at.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Lyra - 15-05-2008 11:07

Hofzinser wrote:

The new Shortwave Set album is great too.

Yeah we were talking about this before so I kept meaning to say, it's totally underwhelmed me I'm afraid. I expected to be instantly hooked like I was with The Debt Collection, and actually - I'm a bit bored. It's disappointing.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Fatter Hipper - 15-05-2008 12:22

I only ever use fried as in 'acid-fried'. As in, your brain (or you music) has been fried by acid (as in the drug). Or sounds as if it's been fried by acid.

Some of the singing on that Owl Service album is terrible. I was probably a bit kind on it in that review.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by King Mob - 15-05-2008 12:38

You see, not being especially au fait with the parlance of the habitual drug user, I invariably take 'fried' to mean hot, and a bit, er, sizzly.

Some of the singing on that Owl Service album is terrible

Well, perhaps, but the rough edges give it an endearing quality.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by King Mob - 15-05-2008 12:42

And the year just gets better. I've found out that Ellen Allien's new studio LP is released in ten days.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Hofzinser - 15-05-2008 13:16

Yeah we were talking about this before so I kept meaning to say, it's totally underwhelmed me I'm afraid. I expected to be instantly hooked like I was with The Debt Collection, and actually - I'm a bit bored. It's disappointing.

Really? That's a shame.

Having said that, I listened to it without any expectations at all, never having heard a note by them previously. That probably makes a difference.

Their sound was right up my street. But I can imagine that it could be done better - and if that's what the first album was then I can see how this could be a disappointment.

That makes me want to buy the first one now, mind you.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by linus - 16-05-2008 10:16

Stereolab is coming out with a new album and tour late this summer, looking forward to it. The cover looks promising, strong reference to the late 60s:

<http://assets3.pitchforkmedia.com/images/image/48507.stereolabsmall.jpg?>

Tracklisting:

- 01 Neon Beanbag
 - 02 Three Women
 - 03 One Finger Symphony
 - 04 Chemical Chords
 - 05 The Ecstatic Static
 - 06 Valley Hi!
 - 07 Silver Sands
 - 08 Pop Molecule (Molecular Pop 1)
 - 09 Self Portrait with "electric brain"
 - 10 Nous Vous Demandons Pardon
 - 11 Cellulose Sunshine
 - 12 Fractal Dream Of A Thing
 - 13 Daisy Click Clack
 - 14 Vortical Phonotheque
- =====

Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by marke - 16-05-2008 11:54

this thread is making me realise that i have obviously falled off all the PRs maling lists as i aint had one album in 2008 thats hit me hard.
not a single one of SRs list has dropped on my mat.
however to be fair, i aint feeling anything other than electronic/techno music these days so i guess the PRs are saving their stamps for a good reason.
though as of this morning, i am looking forward to the missill album, target on the strength of what i heard.
hopefully the album will get a UK release.
so yeah, 2008 has been a pretty dry run for me.
sole entry of the year so far :
the black dog - radio scarecrow

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by robw - 16-05-2008 12:38

Been a much better year so far than 2007.

I'm listening to The Last Shadow Puppets and i'm genuinely supriised and impressed.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Fatter Hipper - 16-05-2008 12:57

01 Neon Beanbag

-
- 02 Three Women
 - 03 One Finger Symphony
 - 04 Chemical Chords
 - 05 The Ecstatic Static
 - 06 Valley Hi!
 - 07 Silver Sands
 - 08 Pop Molecule (Molecular Pop 1)
 - 09 Self Portrait with "electric brain"
 - 10 Nous Vous Demandons Pardon
 - 11 Cellulose Sunshine
 - 12 Fractal Dream Of A Thing
 - 13 Daisy Click Clack
 - 14 Vortical Phonotheque

Magnificent! They could only be Stereolab track names. I listened to the 18 minutes of 'Jenny Ondoline' twice in succession last night. What a glorious way to spend half an hour and a bit!

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by hobbess - 16-05-2008 13:22

head and shoulders above anything else is Neon Neon's Stainless Style, I reckon. The Shadow Puppets are pretty good, Wu Tang's latest album is really smart and despite myself I quite like She and Him (possibly helped by my terribly crush on Zooey Deschanel.) Even REM's new one isn't too bad.

SR, what's the Ting Tings album like? I've had "That's not My Name and a couple of their other songs on my MP3 player for ages (since last year some time) and I've just seen they're getting a real push over the last week or two in the press and on xfm.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by hobbess - 16-05-2008 13:25

Oh and of course, the album of the year is out on September 13th.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Squid Ink - 16-05-2008 13:57

Fatter Hipper wrote:
Magnificent! They could only be Stereolab track names.

True, although "Fractal Dream Of A Thing" sounds like they ran out of inspiration.

"I've got it! Fractal Dream of a...parsec...no... podual...modual...oh, sod it. Fractal Dream of a Thing will do."

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by robw - 16-05-2008 14:15

D'oh. Can't believe i've forgotten the Neon Neon album. Gruff Rhys is an absolute genius. The other stand out album which I keep coming back to is 'Distortion' by The Magnetic Fields.

Other notable albums i've enjoyed this year include, British Sea Power, Cat Power, Clinic, Cut Chemist & DJ Shadow, Duffy, Elbow, The Fall, Grand Archives, The Gutter Twins, Hot Chip, Isobel Campbell and Mark Lanegan, Lightspeed

Champion, Nick Cave, The Raconteurs, Sons & Daughters, Stephen Malkmus and Vincent Vincent & The Villains.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by steveeeeeeeee - 16-05-2008 14:43

Mango by Sascha Funke is pretty good, even if it's a terrible name for a musician. I'm really looking forward to the Ellen Allien album too. There's a been a couple of great mix albums this year, Ellen Allien's "Boogybytes" and the Fabric Robert Hood one.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Not me - 16-05-2008 15:03

True, although "Fractal Dream Of A Thing" sounds like they ran out of inspiration. You should hear the EP tracks, Ectoplasmic Rorschach of a Doofer and Star Sine Analogue of the Wotsit.

I love all the ingredients of the Neon Neon record, but it still doesn't sound any good to me. Weird.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by hobbess - 16-05-2008 15:44

That's because you're a freak. A well-dressed freak, but a freak none-the-less.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Spearmint Rhino - 17-05-2008 09:02

marke wrote:

this thread is making me realise that i have obviously falled off all the PRs maling lists as i aint had one album in 2008 thats hit me hard.

not a single one of SRs list has dropped on my mat.

however to be fair, i aint feeling anything other than electronic/techno music these days so i guess the PRs are saving their stamps for a good reason.

Hah, don't worry about it, you're not the only one. The stuff Fatter Hipper talks about I haven't received copies of, haven't received a paper press release about, haven't received a phone call about, haven't received so much as an email about, haven't heard of in any way.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by O Colluphid - 18-05-2008 11:32

The Owl Service sound good from what I've heard. I must check them out. If you're into folk music in any way I'd also recommend the new album by Faustus.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Fatter Hipper - 18-05-2008 16:09

If it's any consolation SR, I didn't get promo copies of any of the albums you've mentioned!

Great piece on Evangelista in The Wire by wincgo. I've misunderstood some of what the music's about in that review, but I like my interpretation. A piece of Deleuzian 'enculage'- sneaking up behind the text and bugging it to produce new meanings.

The audience member who looks awkward after receiving a hug from Bozulich that wincgo mentions in The Wire is my friend Hannah. She was petrified, but I thought she did pretty well.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Disney Girl Does Dulwich - 06-06-2008 07:50

OK, got a few of the suggested releases and have given them a chance to sink or swim:

Alphabeat - excellent pop. No problems.

Neon Neon - Very good indeed. Also funny.

The Whip - Totally derivative. New Order should sue BUT also very addictive. I like it.

Cut/Copy - Weird record. Sounds like Icehouse b-sides with a really cheeseey backing. Not sure on this yet...

The Ting Tings - Yeah, alright but pretty hit and miss and the skip button came into play a lot after the second play.

Sam Sparro - Yuck. No thanks.

Hercules and Love Affair - Very front loaded. Fades badly as it goes on.

Heloise and the Savior Faire - The lyrics are total toss but by far the funkier thing on the list. I play this a lot.

Crystal Castles - Virtually unlistenable and I've got 3 Faust albums!

Robots in Disguise - Surprisingly good. A bit too defensive on parts of it but has been played a lot as well.

One little gem I did dig out when looking for some of these was LCD's 45:33. Now that is a top piece of work! Somehow missed it in the past.

The others I know already and either love or have no time for but thanks for the leads on the above. C.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Mighty Mudhsuden - 06-06-2008 09:26

Alphabeat seconded. Total guilty pleasure though.

Has anyone mentioned Fleet Foxes yet?

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Disney Girl Does Dulwich - 06-06-2008 13:10

I am having a bit of trouble with the new Ladyton album. I loved the last one but this one seems (whisper it!) a bit samey....

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by dalliance - 18-06-2008 12:22

Plenty of good stuff this year so far.

Aside from many of the things already mentioned I've been impressed by best yet albums from long established stalwarts like Portishead, The Notwist, Goldfrapp and the Magnetic Fields.

In terms of new bands, well Wye Oak and Bon Iver have done the services of psych folk proud this year.

Frightened Rabbit are a great new Glaswegian band, somewhere between Arab Strap, Belle and Sebastian and My Latest Novel.

Danny & The Champions Of The World are worth a listen and The Low Lows are great fun too.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by delicatemoth - 18-06-2008 15:12

Good album by The Fall. Very much looking forward to receiving Chris Wood's 'Trespasser', the track I heard ('Sing John Ball') is folk to die for.

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by Melbourne Arab - 19-06-2008 03:28

dalliance wrote:

Frightened Rabbit are a great new Glaswegian band

Aren't they from Selkirk?

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Re:Rubbish year for music so far?

Posted by dalliance - 19-06-2008 11:58

Rate Your Music suggests Glasgow but Wikipedia says Selkirk. Perhaps they just base themselves in Glasgow these days.

Still, the second best thing to come out of the Borders after Dawn Of The Replicants.

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