

saxophonist and composer **Chris Potter** has avoided clichés and refused to get locked into a single style or tone. On *Imaginary Cities*, his second outing for ECM, Potter again goes places that he's never gone before, augmenting his **Underground** quartet (guitarist **Adam Rogers**, pianist **Craig Taborn**, drummer **Nate Smith**) with two bassists, a string quartet and **Steve Nelson** on vibes and marimba. The music—centering on the four-part title suite—is expansive and palatial, richly textured and bold, without ever falling into overreach. Potter balances tight composition and improvisation deftly (the solos on “Sky” are penetrating), presenting a unified work whose grandeur can't help but envelop. *Jeff Tamarkin*

## American Aquarium

**Wolves** SELF-RELEASED



Both resolute and introspective, *Wolves* finds the Raleigh, N.C.-based outfit **American Aquarium** offering up an ode to regret

and remorse in ways that are unceasingly compelling. While singer-songwriter **BJ Barham** spends much of his time lamenting things he's not—a dancer, a boxer, a responsible family man and certainly not The Rolling Stones—he compensates by expressing a decided resolve and determination to persevere regardless. From the solemn stance of “Family Problems” and the self-doubt and sadness filling “Man I'm Supposed to Be” and “Losing Side of Twenty-Five,” to the staunch deliberation that fills “Southern Sadness,” “Wichita Falls” and the title track, *American Aquarium* provides a postscript on lessons learned and hopes that somehow survive. Here's proof the Southern spirit is as indomitable as ever. *Lee Zimmerman*

## River City Extension

**Deliverance** ANCHOR & HOPE



Songwriter **Joe Michelini** grapples with ability themes here, with most centering on the uncertain meaning of existence. His vision is

equal parts hope and despair, with his band intensifying his dramatic lyrics by shifting abruptly from silence to aggressive hurricanes of noise. The bright, frenetic opener, “Something's Gotta Give,” blends icy guitars and swirling cellos, urging us to overcome self-doubt and ignore adversity. Album closer “I'm Not There” flips the coin to deliver a grim piano-and-cello-dominated ballad that questions our ability to learn from our mistakes. “Vox Populi” moves from a whisper to a scream, praising the artist and decrying any compromise made in the name of popularity—a strange stance to take if you're a band looking for an audience. *J. Poet*

## Mount Eerie

**Sauna** P.W. ELVERUM & SUN



**Phil Elverum** is one of indie rock's most fascinating creators. As the force behind The Microphones and now **Mount Eerie**,

Elverum has draped his songs in mystery and also revealed the raw materials of his creative process, releasing collections of GarageBand demos, his songs layered

on top of each other, and isolated drum tracks. His latest, the sprawling double album *Sauna*, continues his employment of New Age, ambient and black metal themes, with gorgeous drones like the title track and “Spring,” doom-pop nuggets “Turmoil” and “Emptiness,” the Reich/Riley minimalism of “(something)” and “Books,” and bruising ballads like “This,” which makes flutes and female choruses sound like blast beats. Inspired by “vikings and zen and real life,” Elverum gives his compositions a natural air, adding in sounds of wind, rain and maybe a crackling fire, and like nature itself, the songs often veer from serene to violent on these blown-speaker environmental anthems from the Pacific Northwest. *Jason Woodbury*

## James McMurtry

**Complicated Game** COMPLICATED GAME



It's been six years since **James McMurtry**'s last studio set, an eternity in terms of sustaining a

viable career in today's competitive marketplace. Happily then, *Complicated Game* proves to be well worth the wait. A series of rustic, rambling narratives, it suggests that his father, writer Larry McMurtry, gifted his son, James, with a similar storytelling prowess. That's evident in songs like “Copper Canteen,” “Deaver's Crossing” and “Carlisle's Haul,” well-worn travellers' tales fleshed out in vivid detail with his exacting imagery. McMurtry plays these various roles well, whether it's the crusty desperado crooning the edgy, banjo-plucked lament “How'm I Gonna Find You Now” or the hopelessly infatuated loser repeating the indelible refrain in “You Got to Me.” Indeed, his unflagging resilience makes an indelible impression. *Lee Zimmerman*

## Off The Tracks

ON THIS MONTH'S CD

### Sneaky Pete and The Secret Weapons

**Breakfast** SELF-RELEASED

There is a luxury to developing your sound in a relatively tranquil environment like Jackson Hole, Wyo., as opposed to New York, that can allow for a lot of stylistic freedom. The six-piece **Sneaky Pete and The Secret Weapons** exemplifies this theory on their full-length album, *Breakfast*. Their tight, practiced musicianship is on display, and a pulsing groove remains the foundation for the majority of the 12 songs. While the mix is a little flat, the sonic imperfection allows the listener to easily focus on any one instrument, which is a blessing, as each of the players sounds great throughout. Their genre-hopping works best on tunes like “The Road Unseen” and the Red Hot Chili Peppers-like “Jackson Stomp,” but the band succeeds when they focus in on one solid idea to the end, as on the jammy, mostly instrumental “Tricycle.” *Wayan Zoey*

## Whitehorse

**Leave No Bridge Unburned**

SIX SHOOTER



*Leave No Bridge Unburned*, the third album by the Canadian husband/wife duo of **Luke Doucet** and **Melissa McClelland**, is

a decidedly dark affair, marked by raging rhythms and a somewhat stealth-like demeanor. Nevertheless, the Polaris Prize-nominated pair seems fond of purveying their angular melodies with a razor-sharp edge. That's especially true of songs like “Baby What's Wrong” and “You Get Older,” which find McClelland's sultry vocals and Doucet's imaginative guitar spinning seductive webs of elusive intents. The dreamy duet “Dear Irony” and Fleetwood Mac-sounding “The One I Hurt” add to the mystique, although as the proceedings wind down, **Whitehorse** races off at full frenzy. Indeed, closing entries “Oh Dolores” and “The Walls Have Drunken Ears” provide the album with its most emphatic impressions. *Lee Zimmerman*

## Tim Lee 3

33 1/3 COOL DOG SOUND



Doggedly determined, **Tim Lee 3** has been a staple of the Knoxville, Tenn., scene for several years now, with Lee himself

considered an elder statesman due to his power-pop credentials. On record, they come across with an unmistakable air of arched insurgence, a no-nonsense approach that might have found them headlining at CBGBs circa 1979. Lee and his wife **Susan Bauer Lee** alternate on the vocals—the latter assuming a degree of venom and confidence that assures her co-fronting role—but it's the propulsion provided by drummer **Chris Bratta** that keeps “Baby Caught Fire,” “Shut Up and Kiss Me” and “Night Takes Legs” humming at full tilt. An unapologetic little gem, 33 1/3 suggests the sound of rocking revenge. *Lee Zimmerman*

## Tuxedo

**Tuxedo** STONES THROW



**Mayer Hawthorne** has carved out a niche for himself in creating soulful, throwback tunes, so it's not too unexpected that

the musician has formed a new project with producer **Jake One** that centers on the same sort of vintage soul. The duo, calling themselves **Tuxedo**, have collaborated to create an album that feels truly rooted in the '70s—in the best way possible. Horns tinge most of the tracks, although the augmentation may sometimes come from production tricks rather than from actual instrumentation, as if the musicians are proving that you

## Ghostface Killah

36 Seasons TOMMY BOY

### BADBADNOTGOOD & Ghostface Killah

**Sour Soul** LEX



There are few longer standing and wider reaching legacies in hip-hop than the Wu-Tang Clan, and as such, it can occasionally be difficult for its less visible members to achieve individual prominence. Not that this stops any of the Wu from trying, least of all **Ghostface Killah**. His post-Def Jam output suggests that he's found a comfortable stride, and exercises it over the course of a pair of live musician-assisted LPs.

Heads in the know have been hip to **BADBADNOTGOOD**, the young Canadian jazz trio with a penchant for reconstructing J Dilla beats live, and following some stellar collaborations with **MF DOOM**, they deliver a full-length alongside GK. Unfortunately, as demonstrated on their recent *III*, BBNB are a bit better at interpreting great beats than they are at coming up with their own, so while unique and original, *Sour Soul* doesn't quite provide the musical heft necessary to support GK's outer-space rhymes. All that said, “Ray Gun,” featuring the aforementioned **DOOM**, is pure fire. Comparatively, when GK is left to his own devices—thanks to the assistance of studio musicians and co-producer **Daniel Schlett** (DIIV, TEEN)—the whole album is a winner. The instruments serve the rhymes, and the other Tony Starks is given room to spread his lyrical wings, with overall stellar results. Guest turns from legends like **Kool G Rap** and **Pharoahe Monch** make the already great even better. *Wayan Zoey*

can make old music with new technologies. It's a worthwhile endeavor, too, as the songs are interesting and are dabble in various genres, including disco on several numbers like the buoyant standout “The Right Time.” *Emily Zemler*

## Asleep at the Wheel

**Still The King: Celebrating the Music of Bob Wills & His Texas Playboys**

BISMEAUX

In a way, you could say that **Asleep at the Wheel**'s entire career has celebrated the music of Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys. Their first album, 1973's *Comin' Right at Ya*, started off with the Wills classic “Take Me Back to Tulsa” and

they've been keeping Western swing alive ever since—they've even released two Wills tribute sets prior to this one, the last an offshoot of a Wills-themed musical. But *Still The King* aims to be definitive and it's hard to argue against that. For the occasion,

