

Reviews: **Music**

BY JOHN LEWIS



Coming Out of the Fog

Arbouretum (Thrill Jockey)
Arbouretum hones its distinctive, guitar-driven sound down to essentials on its fifth full-length disc. Less sprawling than past efforts—there are no 11-minute epics this time around—it shoehorns a head-nodding, majestic aura into classic rock and folk configurations with often thrilling results. The weary tenderness in singer Dave Heumann's vocals contrasts beautifully with the mighty riffs from his guitar and the carefully contained maelstrom generated by his bandmates. But the two most effective songs here ("Oceans Don't Sing" and the title track) dial back the volume, insert some piano and steel guitar, and push forward a hushed folkiness that brings to mind the fractured Americana of Will Oldham. Like Arbouretum's evocative 2011 cover of Jimmy Webb's "Highwayman," they suggest new possibilities for a band that's long been considered one of Baltimore's best.

Ostrich

Crack the Sky (Aluminum Cat Recordings)
Crack the Sky achieved legendary status around Baltimore with a stunning string of albums during the 1970s and 1980s and thrilling shows to match. Songs like "Surf City" and "Lighten Up McGraw" lit up local FM radio—although the heavy airplay wasn't replicated in other parts of the country—and CTS (at least around here) rivaled the likes of Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin in terms of popularity. The band's concerts at Painters Mill and Hammerjack's became mythic. As a result, a new CTS album generates unrealistic expectations of a return to past glories. That's never going to happen, but it isn't necessarily a bad thing, because CTS continues to grow artistically, as these 10 songs attest. Longtime fans will recognize the sarcasm, social commentary, and prog-rock leanings, though they might bristle at the electronically processed vocals, tongue-in-cheek gospel and country flourishes, and polished pop tone. But if fans curb expectations, they'll find plenty to like about *Ostrich*.



Suburban Superstar

John LT (Mother West)
John LT is Baltimore's Ben Folds. Like that jaunty and quirky songwriter and pianist, he weds a suburban sensibility and eccentric sense of humor to an encyclopedic knowledge of power-pop hooks and songcraft. On this, his third album, LT delivers an engaging and delightful set of songs that makes the most of shaking tambourines, handclaps, horn blasts, and bouncy piano chords and echo classic 1960s, 1970s, and even some 1980s material. He sounds like a caffeinated Billy Joel on "Katie," a bouncy Elton John on "The Sound of My Tears," and a masculine Aimee Mann on "Nowhere To Go." Listen closely and you'll hear some Steely Dan in the mix, along with the occasional nod to jazz and blues history. It's infectious stuff, and don't be surprised if you're humming along by the second chorus.

Q+A

DAVE HEUMANN

JOCKEY'S CLUB

BY JOHN LEWIS

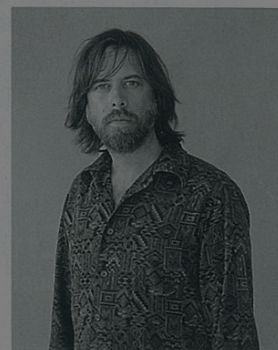
What do you think of Thrill Jockey, the acclaimed indie record label, signing so many Baltimore bands, including Arbouretum, over the past few years?

It's fine with me. We've always had good bands here, but I think it took the situation reaching a critical mass in order to interest Thrill Jockey.

Arbouretum recently played at Thrill Jockey's 20th anniversary celebration in Baltimore. How was that?

I really enjoyed talking to [Wham City's] Ed Schrader, who struck me as an interesting and hilarious guy, and it was great hanging with the other bands—Future Islands, Pontiak, and Tortoise—and the label folks. Also, the hummus was pretty good.

For the full interview with Heumann, visit baltimoremagazine.net.



Dave Heumann of Arbouretum.

B To read more of arts and culture editor John Lewis's musings on Baltimore's arts scene, check out his blog, *All the Pieces Matter*, at baltimoremagazine.net/allthepiecesmatter.

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Fable Gambling Comes To Town
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Baltimore

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