



## broken social scene | broken social scene

★★

Frankly, I don't want to hear these songs anymore. Nothing personal, but are there people who think Every scene needs its pioneers. One

band that has the skill and determination (not to mention a large slice of good fortune) to crank open the gates of crossover success to let others of their ilk flood through in their wake. In Britain, Franz Ferdinand did the spadework, while the likes of Bloc Party and the Futureheads straightened their ties and waited patiently in line. Across the water in Canada however, it's taken a larger than average group of musicians making epic, widescreen rock to make a big breakthrough in these parts. No, I'm not talking about Broken Social Scene, but rather their neighbours the Arcade Fire. While Broken Social Scene's sophomore effort (2002's *You Forgot It In*

People) won them the Canadian equivalent of a Brit award, it never rose above its station of 'cult status' on this side of the water. The Arcade Fire may have stolen a march on all of their peers last year, but BSS will be hoping to make up some of the ground with this eponymous-titled new album. Seen as something of a phenomenon in Canada, the Scene are now comprised of no less than 17 members, mostly from established local bands like Feist, Stars and the Dears. That's big, even by Canadian indie standards, and they've come to be known as the indie rock Wu-Tang Clan, such is the sheer size of their collective. It's no surprise then to find that the big-sounding songs on the album are weighty and thunderous. Lead single "Ibi Dreams of Pavement (A Better Day)" is a full-on squall-guitar assault, but with a killer refrain that'll be lodged in your head for the rest of the day. "7/4 (Shoreline)" is lighter in touch, with a female lead vocal, but no less memorable, and slow-burning closer, "Its All Gonna Break," bursts with imagination. De-Facto band

leader Kevin Drew obviously knows a good idea when he hears one and when he can pull the multitude in the same direction, the results are no less than breathtaking. It's when he appears to take the reins off the band that things get a little more unfocussed and self-indulgent. The seven-minute "Bandwitch" is an aimless piano-and-beats meander that outstays its welcome by about five minutes. Even titles like "Handjobs For The Holidays" and "Finish Your Collapse and Stay For Breakfast" can't save these songs from a similarly self-indulgent fate. There's a stubbornness running through BSS that may prevent them making the same impact as other bands of lesser ability. Apparently, "Major Label Deal" is a live classic, but here it sounds deliberately hi-jacked: slowed to a funeral pace, with the vocal melody so buried as to be almost indecipherable. If BSS are making these moves as a conscious attempt to avoid mainstream success, they may have their wish granted. | **barry jackson**



## arctic monkeys | whatever people say i am that's what i'm not

★★★★

The recent history of indie rock is littered with reasons, if not to completely disbelieve the hype, then to at least approach the hype with caution. After all, as Alex Turner sings on the first line of this album, "Anticipation has a habit of setting you up...for disappointment." It's a relief all round then, to find that the Arctic Monkeys have given us thirteen reasons to

believe. Some of you will be familiar with a chunk of this album already, what with the rate that the 'Monkeys music has been shooting around cyberspace. While there has been talk aplenty about how these boys are the pioneers of an internet-led revolution in the music industry, Alex Turner gave lie to this fact somewhat by admitting in a recent interview of just finding out what "MySpace" was all about "the other week." So even though the band have shown a commendable spirit (and acumen) by allowing bootlegs and demo's to be traded on 't' internet, what has really made their name has been their evolution into a thrilling live act, a status built on constant gigging, which has gradually won them an army of loyal supporters through good old-fashioned word-of-mouth. The re-recordings of these songs for their debut album don't add a hell of a lot to what had gone before- more of a nip here and a tuck there, but equally, and crucially, the higher production values haven't sacrificed any of the

songs intensity in the process. The excellent (and excellently titled!) no.1 debut single of last year, "I'll Bet That You Look Good On The Dancefloor," still makes you want to jump up and down even though you know you'll spill your pint, and "When The Sun Goes Down" has to be up there for catchiest chorus of the year, even if it's still only February. There's a real raw power to the 'Monkeys music, a sound that marries the energy and gusto of the Libertines with the northern snarl of the Fall and early Oasis. But you can be sure Noel Gallagher has never written lyrics as sharp as this. What comes out of 19-year old Alex Turner's mouth is full of the spit and rage of adolescence, a kind of well-observed social diary of doomed youth. But these are tales told very much from the point of view of the insider rather than the outsider. Fair enough, "if it wasn't so dark in here" you might notice his face going red when approached by a girl he fancies on the scatter-gun "You Probably Couldn't See For The Lights," but Alex is also the kid running away from the cops "just for a laugh" on 'Riot Van.' If the "Spokesman For A Generation" tag is wheeled out a little too readily these days, the Arctic Monkeys at the very least possess a Mike Skinner-like ability to speak to the everyman, from the nervous and self-conscious indie-kid to the shifty looking guy in the hoody hanging out at the edge of your estate. It's this capability, as well as a stockpile of brilliant tunes, that is sure to have most people rooting for the Sheffield lads to succeed in 2006. | **barry jackson**



## clearlake | amber

★★★★

When Brighton-based Clearlake first emerged in 2001, they seemed destined to be forever tagged as the 'quintessential indie band' i.e. all

awkwardness and pasty-faced under-achievement. But while second album *Cedars* failed to cause a stir in the UK charts, its brooding introspection struck a chord with American critics and led to a surprisingly fruitful two-month stateside sojourn in 2004. Wishing to capitalise quickly on ground gained, the band decamped to Britain to record

what they hoped would be a swift follow-up. Instead, *Amber* is the result of an epic recording process-one that saw them trawl through eight studios across France and the UK. There may have been a crisis of confidence or two along the way, as the band have emerged with what amounts to a fairly schizophrenic record; one that can't quite decide whether it wants to be Queens of The Stone Ages' geekier younger brother, or 80's art-rockers, the Psychedelic Furs. The album sticks to a coherent vision for all of the first four songs. In "Neon," Jason Pegg feels like he'll be missing out on a great night if he doesn't go out, while beneath him, the crunching guitar and bluesy harmonica riff don't leave him with much of a choice. The Kinky shuffle

of "Finally Free" features the band's strongest chorus to date, and the song would be a sure fire hit if it wasn't, well, Clearlake. Thereafter, *Amber* becomes decidedly more uneven. A few semi-successful punkish songs later and you get the feeling that Jason Pegg's heart is just not in it. He feels much more at home with the emotional depth and introspection offered on the likes of the tender "Dreamt That You Died," with its echoing steel-guitar, or the collaged melancholy of the album's otherworldly title-track. By the time we get to the faint message of hope at the end of "It's Getting Light Outside," it seems Clearlake have resolved some of their identity problems. Maybe they'll have finished the job by the next album. | **barry jackson**



## 22 | the cultural coupon

★★★★

When the latest offering from the Limerick rock scene fell across my desk, it was with a certain amount of trepidation that I took upon myself the task of reviewing it. With The AMC hardly registering as a blip on the cultural radar these days, the once vibrant rock community seems to be in somewhat of a malaise. Putting aside those reservations, my first listen to 22's *The*

*Cultural Coupon* was a relatively pleasant, if confused, affair. At a scant 30 min. running time, 22 cram quite a lot into their debut disc. Too much in fact. Plenty of contemporary bands out there today indulge in genre-bending shenanigans to varying degrees of success, but *The Cultural Coupon* sometimes smacks of schizophrenia. Opening track 'Prize-X' lulls listeners into a false sense of security with its post-rock sensibilities, Eastern-tinged strings and compelling

percussion before track 2 'Market Retard' builds the album into a wall of sound, noise-nik rock fest and Dave Grohl-style vocals. Third track 'Impact' sees 22 return to an instrumental vein, with the playful wit established on the album opener swimming amidst plink-plonk electronica and an organ melody that sounds like it was lifted from one of Tim Burton's darker moments. Peppered throughout the album is the promise of potential, not least in the undeniable musical talent on display here. One criticism though; 22 need to decide exactly what kind of band they are before progressing. At their best, they offer inventive keyboard playing with dreamy bass lines and vocals that fall (thankfully) out of token rock and-into Flaming Lips territory. See them live, then decide whether *The Cultural Coupon's* for you or not. | **jeff ree**

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