



## BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

### *Working on a Dream* (Columbia)

First and foremost, Bruce Springsteen has realized that oft-evoked rock & roll ideal almost never pulled off since *Sgt. Pepper* replaced singles with the album. Boss struck while the iron was hot. Because everyone who saw Springsteen & the E Street Band live over the last two years behind 2007's *Magic* will assuredly raise their hands to rock. For Jersey's favorite son to then make his best album of the decade on stolen tour time is a superstar feat. Not that his 24th disc rivals *Born to Run*. And yet opening *Working on a Dream* with the couplet "He was born a little baby on the Appalachian Trail/At six months old he'd done three months in jail" telegraphs a top-down time, especially since "Outlaw Pete," easily read as tribute to Pete Seeger – who's prompted two Springsteen releases in the past five years – runs at a length that matches the singer's ringlets and beard in the 1970s. Where 2002's *The Rising* sought to reassure in a post-9/11 dawn (and cried for an old-school label edit) and *Magic* aimed one last swift if errant kick at a new millennial order (now superseded), *Working on a Dream* crowns Springsteen & the E Street Band's most productive period since their first four LPs. Recent bad habits remain, the frontman still scraping his epiglottis with fare too transparently blue-collar anthemic ("Working on a Dream," "Kingdom of Days") and even mundane (*Lucky Town/Human Touch* throwback "Queen of the Supermarket"). Penultimate cut "Surprise, Surprise" belongs on *Tracks II*. Fortunately, "My Lucky Day" raves on pure ramrod, while the heart of the album, brand-new Asbury Park Hall of Famer "What Love Can Do" through "Life Itself," coasts with a confidence not heard since *The River*. While Brendan O'Brien's hamfisted production on the previous two E Streeters was criminal, here the platter's pointed filigree – Fat Possum breakdown "Good Eye," willfully Beatles-esque "Tomorrow Never Knows" – even masks Clarence Clemons' overall absence from the proceedings. "The Last Carnival," eulogy for late group organist Danny Federici, closes this lean *Dream* with a contained blast of gospel stunning in its closure. Bonus cut "The Wrestler" pins a coda on flawless sequencing. Wind it out as the years go passing by. **(Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band shake the Frank Erwin Center April 5.)**

★★★

– Raoul Hernandez

## ANDREW BIRD

### *Noble Beast* (Fat Possum)

Over the last decade, Chicago's Andrew Bird has created his own lexicon of pop music, layering spells of violin and guitar into novelistic labyrinths. The first half of fifth LP *Noble Beast*, buoyed by the brief, aqueous interlude "Uou," marks his most exquisite work to date. His Orbison-like croon is pushed to the forefront, guiding the movements, which makes opener "Oh No" and "Tenuousness" sound like jigsaw-puzzle pieces falling into place, gradually unfolding into a much bigger picture, while "Fitz and the Dizzyspells" and "Effigy" mirror the wide-lens grandeur of 2007's *Armchair Apocrypha*. Though less focused, the latter half has its moments, notably the romantic "Souverian" and "Not a Robot, but a Ghost," which crosses the songsmith's former vehicle, *Bowl of Fire*, with sideman Martin Dosh's kitchen-sink instrumentalism. With *Noble Beast*, Bird proves that he's a whistling Renaissance man for modern times. **(Andrew Bird's show at the Paramount Theatre, Thursday, Feb. 12, is sold out.)**

★★★★

– Austin Powell



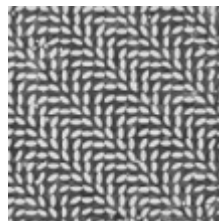
## ANIMAL COLLECTIVE

### *Merrweather Post Pavilion* (Domino)

The praise bestowed on Animal Collective is justified, even if the exultation over the Baltimore-born trio's latest LP is overblown. From the group's freak-folk anticipation on 2003's *Campfire Songs* to its ushering in indie's new density with *Feels* (2005), the Collective forges musical frontiers even when the results are scattershot. *Merrweather Post Pavilion* decamps as the outfit's most consistent album, readily remixable but largely lacking moments of thrilling unexpectedness that redeemed the band's electro-eccentricities. "In the Flowers" opens with an eerie and subdued underwater warp, but its mid-song surge is predictable and uninspired, as opposed to the touch of Beach Boys harmonies on the equally mellow "Bluish." "My Girls" and "Summertime Clothes" are catchy highlights, the latter layering skuzzy beats under chanted verses, but the droning "Daily Routine" is as tedious as its title. Animal Collective has backslid into a comfortable, but unfortunately unexciting, middle ground.

★★★

– Doug Freeman



## in box

BY RAOUL HERNANDEZ

### THE COMPLETE MOTOWN SINGLES

#### Vol. 11B: 1971 (Hip-O Select)

Despite messieurs David Ruffin and Eddie Kendricks having outgrown the Temptations and Smokey Robinson readying his exit from the Miracles; regardless of the Supremes going through the motions post-Diana Ross, Florence Ballard, and Holland-Dozier-Holland; and notwithstanding Martha & the Vandellas down to their last three Motown singles and the Four Tops reduced to covering "MacArthur Park," Detroit's soul brand wasn't about to concede July-December 1971 to the fact that L.A. was quickly becoming its base of operations. Although November's Vol. 11A betrayed a

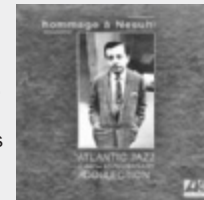


noticeable limp, 11B recovers with a 5-CD bumper crop of B-sides, one-offs, and songs that haven't seen the light of playback since they were pressed on a 7-inch splat of petroleum product. The first grouping boasts Bobby Darin's affecting cover of Dylan's "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight."

New Orleans powerhouse Jack Hammer (né Earl Burroughs) doing his best Edwin Starr-style "War" cry on interracial shout-out "Colour Combination" and equally potent flip side "Swim" constitute his only Motown output. Finally, 11A's surprise stars Stoney & Meatloaf here debut on CD a cover of the Tempts' "The Way You Do the Things You Do." Filler includes Marvin Gaye's "Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)," Stevie Wonder's "If You Really Love Me," and Jr. Walker's raw vocals on "Way Back Home." So long, Detroit. ★★★

### HOMMAGE À NESUHI (Atlantic/Rhino)

"This boxed set is the life's work of two men: one the master, the other the apprentice." Forward author David Dorn still mourns "the apprentice," his father Joel Dorn (1942-2007), who died the day after "putting the final touches" on this boutique, limited-edition, 5-CD labor of love. Tellingly, Rhino Handmade's latest Atlantic Records anthology not only memorializes the label's jazz "master," Nesuhi Ertegun (1917-1989), but its mixtape mentality also fetes the eyes and ears that made music's most renowned indie. Ahmet Ertegun (1923-2006), Jerry Wexler (1917-2008), Tom Dowd (1925-2002), and Arif Mardin (1932-2006) built a house that Ray Charles and myriad others then helped refurbish. Nesuhi's standardization of



the 12-inch LP and producing all of John Coltrane's and Ornette Coleman's defining work on the label assures him musical immortality. Bookended by volumes titled "Some Atlantic Jazz" and "Some More Atlantic Jazz," *Hommage* simmers like an overnight radio slot from the early 1970s – appropriate considering Dorn's deejay background. Blowing apart on newly departed Texan David "Fathead" Newman's "Hard Times" and sealed 60 tracks later on Coltrane's "Equinox," this sampler drips crystalline Modern Jazz Quartet ("Summertime"), purrs Mose Allison ("Your Mind Is on Vacation"), and begs "Oh Lord Don't Let Them Drop That Atomic Bomb on Me" by Charles Mingus. Don't forget Max Roach's quintet spinning mortality on 12.5 minutes of "Nommo." Mo' s'il vous plaît. ★★★

JOHN ANDERSON



## live shot

### BROKEN SOCIAL SCENE

#### Bass Concert Hall, Jan. 31

"You can't be 100 percent your whole life," a disheveled Kevin Drew admitted to the sold-out crowd. The Broken Social Scene father figure swayed blearily for 2½ hours, ravaged by flu, the reason for the previous night's Dallas cancellation. Austin/Brooklyn duo Lymbyc Systym opened with the brothers Bell setting an early tone for the evening with their lovely instrumental mix of Air and Postal Service. The bliss ended at BSS' second song, "KC Accidental." With original band members Andrew Whiteman (Apostle of Hustle), Charles Spearin (Do Make Say Think), and Justin Peroff joining Drew and co-father Brendan Canning, along with lackluster female sub Lisa Lobsinger, the Canadian sevenpiece rolled through oldies "7/4 (Shoreline)" and "Fire Eye'd Boy," Canning's solo material, and Spearin's new Happiness Project featuring saxophonist/percussionist Leon Kingstone, a spoken-word/avant-jazz experiment and the highlight of the evening. American Analog Set's Andrew Kenny afforded Drew a breather on AmAnSet's "Hard to Find," part cover, part reimagining, before the BSS frontman's solo take on "Lover's Spit" at the keys. Two songs stopped in their tracks; Lobsinger generalized crowd favorite "Anthems for a Seventeen Year-Old Girl," originally oozed by Metric's Emily Haines; and Drew repeatedly stepped offstage to vomit. It was a hot mess, but the crowd ate it up, rising to its feet after botched closer "It's All Gonna Break," rooting for Drew's heroics and his promise to return to Austin when the Dallas makeup show is scheduled. Everyone deserves a do-over. – Darcie Stevens