

The Caribbean “History’s First Know-It-All” (Endearing/Tomlab)

Press Clippings



(By Corey duBrowa)

The Caribbean. Shadowy quintet (perhaps trio?) draped in velvet enigma. Or maybe just Steely Dan on a light-beer budget, faceless contributors scattered hither and yon, submitting stealthy sonic fragments via telephone transmissions and paper-airplane parachute drops. Descended from primo D.C. agitpop, old-school division. Certainly of the Dischord tribe (see: the flip attitude of the Make-Up or Jawbox’s raw edge). But also Eggs. And Tsunami. The coy pop-culture savvy of Unrest (witness witty wordplay on “Annunciator Zone”: “All those great Chicago bands like King Crimson and Kraftwerk or that one that sounds like Tortoise”). Third albums. The landscape littered with the bleached skeletons of *Zen Arcade* and *Zenyatta Mondatta*. *Third*. Or even *III*. But this—*History’s First Know-It-All*—is knowing. Cynical, yet naively hopeful. Apropos of crushed feelings. Household appliances. Class of ‘83, UCLA. All lovingly rendered in illegible, handwritten scribble-scrrawl and plunked down erect beside sounds both found (celery crunching) and created (piano backdrops, drum stutters, nylon-stringed guitar webs). Glorious eclecticism or hipster fence-straddling? More the former than latter. Purposefully arcane and brainy-sounding hangtags: “Fresh Out Of Travel Agent School.” “It’s Unlikely To Settle The Difference.” (Todd Rundgren fans, in this day and age? Why not?) The verdict: difficult but rewarding, albeit in that William Carlos Williams kind of way. So much depends upon/A third longplayer/Glazed with dour postures/Beside the white women.



(By Jascha Hoffman)

Rating: 7.7

I have nothing to say about an album that says nothing. Except that it says it all about itself, and is very crafty about saying it well. The Caribbean has always made serious pop without a purpose, built of sequences of unmatched chords, cobbled from lyrical scraps that mean nothing in and of themselves, but when combined mean less. Doing this in a compelling way is no small accomplishment, and it comes off as thrillingly coercive: you’re forced to occupy their barren pop architecture, unfinished, unfurnished and uninhabited. You don’t understand it, but, though you might not admit it, you do hope it will understand you. Or at least not destroy you.

The songs are built with three tools: distance, omission, and interruption. Distance comes in when what you hear is very far from what any one person could have meant to put together. If you think of the original song

as a canvas, there's been a fair amount of collaborative shredding, staining, stacking, and abrasion before this thing made it to the gallery wall. Omission comes in with the oblique lyrical style and near-incomplete textures. You feel like there's a real live pop song in there somewhere, but it seems that most of the essential moments have been recorded over with silence or incidental noise. There's obviously still a skeleton to hang a song on, but you start to wonder whether you're the one who was supposed to bring it.

Interruption refers to the host of accidental and ambient noises that flick your attention away from the action just as you're starting to follow along. Dishes clinking, microphone sputum, crackling static, antique telephones, or synth grains lure your ear away from the loping meat of the song just as it's sending out spores to slip under your skin. And they get there, without any hint of the irony that usually makes academic pop like this unpalatable. These songs are for real, but they're not about disappointment, or complacency, or shame, or attention, or glee. They're about themselves.

Without ironic distance, such oblique experiments can seem exhausting. But only on the giving end: it takes a humble and prolific writer, some cunning musicians, a very patient engineer, and an overarching commitment to self-censorship to pull an album like this off. On the receiving end, however, the pop wreckages of "History's First Know-It-All" are quite easy to enter. Most are loaded with all-purpose catharsis, ready to be nodded to on the way to a blind date, or just as things are getting serious, or a few weeks after the break-up. They're taut with a kind of pointless frankness, but the point is just to be taut. And they are.



(By Sam Adams)

It's not surprising, then, that some of the songs on *History's First Know-It-All* (Endearing) sound as if they might have been assembled by a mad scientist with access to ProTools; clattering and swooshing sounds pop through the melody with the regularity of a whack-a-mole game. (Listening to the album on headphones is like being stalked by a particularly inventive ghost.) The piano ballads and falsetto vocals give it up, though – these mad scientists are romantics at heart, trying to cobble together their ideal mates out of debris and bric-a-brac, and never quite making the pieces fit.



(by Dave Heaton)

(I)t's always refreshing to see bands that are creating their own hybrid genre, one built from the pieces of music they love but not overly indebted to any one style of music....(their) songs use elements that are familiar but do so in a way that seems completely new. The Caribbean's songs are also sonically poly-dimensional. Their recordings are about depth more than just surfaces; listen closely and you'll hear voices and sounds in the background that you didn't know were there. It's like *Mulholland Drive* within a Burt Bacharach song, fascinating in ways both everyday and esoteric.

IN MUSIC WE TRUST

(By Alex Steininger)

...the songs are always engaging, always melodic, and always plentiful, offering up a lot well-written lyrics and enjoyable melodies. This is a band that knows their stuff, trading and switching between a few sounds without compromising the integrity or honesty of the album, a tough feat that is executed without a hitch here.



Though it may not be obvious at first, the gentlemen in The Caribbean are actually first rate songwriters. Though their material may require a bit more effort from the listener in order to obtain the full benefits of the music...the time is well spent. (Rating: 5++)

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HACKTIVISM

E-MUSIC

NEW MEDIA ART

(By Michelle Casela)

Nell'ambito del pop bislacco e versatile i Caribbean potranno certo ritagliarsi una buona fetta di cultori grazie al nuovo 'History's First Know-It-All', album che ha nella ballata lenta un referente essenziale. A tratti pronti a ricordare i preziosi insegnamenti impartiti da Mark Linkus e soci, ad esempio nell'allegria 'Officer Garvey', la band di Washington non rinuncia ad arricchire i brani di accenni elettronici e docili percussioni che si vanno ad affiancare alla voce spesso in lo-fi di Kentoff: ne vengono fuori le delicatezze cristalline di 'Fresh Out Of Travel Agent School', l'acquerello multicolore di 'Annunciator Zone', la marcetta indie pop di 'The Requirements' e l'ipnosi emotiva della title track. Talvolta eccessivi nell'uso degli archi, non rischiano quasi mai di annoiare e mostrano una discreta caratura cantautorale che potrebbe esplodere nel mondo mainstream con una produzione ostinatamente patinata, ma che in questo modo mantiene la spontaneità, l'eclettismo e la vivacità che può portare al colpo di fulmine.

DE:BUG <http://debug.tool42.com/review/17595.html>

Das erste Album von Chad Clark, aka The Caribbean, erschien auf einem kanadischen Label Namens Endearing. Für Tomlab bleibt The Caribbean schon ein Singersongwriter-Folk... ach, vergesst das schnell wieder, das ist Musik, die sich anhört als würde Mr. Clark in einem Zimmer voller Kissen den ganzen Tag herumflattern ab und an die Instrumente aus dem Proberaum unter einem finden, daneben immer ein paar Freunde, die damit rumspielen, als wäre nachmittags, und der Eismann kommt bestimmt noch vorbei geklingelt, lässig an seine liebsten Liebeslieder denken, durch die Fenster sehen die Beach Boys herein, Felt, neidisch Sam Prekop und dazu wird alles noch mit skurrilen Einfällen aus der elektronischen Welt verziert, als könnte er sich diese Seele verwundert immer wieder noch mal ansehen wie ein altes Photoalbum und würde die Bilder immer wieder neu auf den Seiten zusammenkleben und zu Collagen der Erinnerungen verarbeiten, die so süß schmecken wie ein Teller voller Weingummis mit einer heißen Milch mit Honig (nein, nicht irgendeiner). Warum das Cover (Supermarktparkplatz aus den 70ern) so verregnet aussieht? Vielleicht damit wir wissen, dass es früher mal anders war und dass es jetzt immer noch so sein darf.



(By John Wenzel)

It's difficult to overstate how unique The Caribbean's music is. Singer/songwriter Michael Kentoff credits a throng of other artists (Carole King, Jobim, Mission of Burma) without sounding like them at all. The nimble, unpredictable drumming suggests jazz respectability even as crunchy acoustic guitars, watery keyboard flourishes and sub-basement bass lines circle the rhythm like drugged birds.

As haphazard as that may sound, it's startlingly cohesive. Very rarely does a song begin or end on the wrong note. The moods and chords are varied enough to show the band's range without diluting the focused feel. When the rare electric guitar kicks in ("Officer Garvey," for example) it's like watching Clark Kent whip off his eyeglasses and crush a walnut between his biceps.

The Caribbean's music is not for everyone, and certainly not for lazy minds. Implicitly, this is pop music, but not like any pop music you've heard before. This is intensely personal, challenging music with a lot of heart and little bits of everything else you can think of. The bits are so small that at a distance all you observe is the beautiful, innate spectrum of emotion. There's attention to detail with an eye toward the bigger picture. Organic and whole, but effortlessly refined.



(By Philipp Bückle)

Was kann Tomlab eigentlich nicht? Ist tatsächlich alles fantastisch, was von dort aus losgelassen wird? Könnte Tomlab eigentlich das nächste große Konsenslabel werden und das auch noch zu recht? Drei Fragen, erste Antwort: "gar nichts!", zweite und dritte Antwort: "ja, verdammt!".

Tomlab ist nämlich selbst dann gut, wenn es Sachen releast, die so anders sind, dass sie sogar die normale Unerwartbarkeit des regulären Outputs noch mal toppen. Und das ist die Essenz, die fantastische von guten Indielabels unterscheidet: nicht einfach nur unbequeme Musik veröffentlichen, sondern selbst die jeweilige Definition des Unbequemen brechen. Bei The Caribbean geschieht dies zum Beispiel, weil es eine Folk-Platte ist. „Das ist doch überhaupt kein Folk, höchstens folky!“ höre ich da den einen oder anderen murren. Recht habt ihr, es ist tatsächlich nur folky, aber ein Oberbegriff musste her. The Caribbean ist funky, folky, lofi-Indiepop oder was auch immer, zumindest aber überraschend auf Tomlab zuhause, das trotz Mut zum

Experiment noch nie soweit in den Bereich der handgemachten Musik vorgedrungen ist. Wenn man jedoch ein wenig unter die Oberfläche schaut, sieht man, die Tomlab-typischen Experimente und crazy Sounds, jedoch besser versteckt als sonst. Für mich steht The Caribbean in unmittelbarer Nähe zu "Thought for Food" von den Books. Nicht, dass da wirklich offensichtliche.

Übereinstimmungen herrschen würden, aber dieses seltsame Gefühl beim Hören eigentlich konventioneller Gitarrenklänge haben beide gemeinsam. Irgendwie wie wenn jemand in deiner Wohnung heimlich ein paar Bücher im Regal umstellt oder Messer- und Gabeln in der Besteckschublade vertauscht, während man nicht da ist. Man weiß, das irgendwas nicht normal ist, kann es aber nicht genau begründen. Gut, bei den Books wurden dann schon die kompletten Möbel umgestellt, aber The Caribbean hat wirklich diesen seltsamen Appeal konventionell zu sein, aber dann doch nicht. Deshalb dann auch wieder genau richtig auf Tomlab.

The Caribbean ist ein four-piece bestehend aus Matthew Byars, Don Campbell, Tony Dennison und Michael Kentoff, deren Namen mir bis jetzt nicht wirklich viel sagten. Die Instrumente sind konventionell, werden aber wohl frei durch die Runde gereicht. Zudem spielt noch eine ganze Armada an Gastmusikern mit, die sowohl Gesang als auch orchestrale Instrumente beisteuern. Unter anderem spielt eine ganze Familie Badminton...

Fazit: Superschöne aber relativ konventionelle Indieplatte in unüblichem Rahmen.



(By Alfonso Méndez)

The Caribbean son una banda natal de Washington DC pero que no están inmersos en la escena underground que instantáneamente pensamos al referirnos a dicha ciudad. Ellos andan lejos de Dischord musicalmente aunque entre ellos estén algunos de sus mejores amigos.

Matthew, Don, Tony y Michael son un proyecto de pop con un aporte experimental que se eleva por encima de la media porque lejos de un simple agrado, en sus temas encuentras un poco de riesgo (no esperen mucho) y algo de estilo. Y este segundo trabajo se traduce en eso: pop experimental que seduce (o engaña) al oído. Lo cierto es que no importa caer en ese ficticio mundo que rodea a "History's first Know-it-all", eso es lo que lo hace diferente al resto porque sus piezas son pequeños relatos que no puedes dejar de oír ya que poseen un magnetismo que las hace especiales. No estamos ante una obra maestra pero es un trabajo aparentemente trabajado que ha podido ser madurado, o al menos da esa sensación, y que contiene doce temas que merecen ser escuchados con atención porque en cada uno de ellos hay algo especial.

La música de The Caribbean, para hacernos una idea, la compararía con esos momentos que se suceden tras el paso de una intensa lluvia, en los que comienza a brillar el sol y todo permanece mojado mientras recuperamos la actividad y respiramos, por unos momentos, algo de aire fresco.

Quizás los veamos pronto teloneando a Wilco, New Pornographers o Sea & Cake y es que no desentonarían con ninguna de estas propuestas.



(By Paolo Scortichini)

Nonostante la foto della (splendida) copertina sia stata scattata in un grigio parcheggio di Toronto e loro siano di Washington DC, Michael Kentoff e compagni hanno scelto di chiamarsi The Caribbean. Forse per gioco, o forse semplicemente per non essere banali. E la loro musica di certo non lo è: pop somnesso e soffuso, condito con timidi effetti elettronici e masticato in chiave lo-fi. Melodie fumose e sporcate, portate avanti con passo sghembo, ma elaborate attraverso introverse atmosfere. Insomma, come avete già capito, niente che non ci avesse già fatto sentire il signor Lou Barlow, quando si fa chiamare Sebadoh o Folk Implosion, ma qui il gioco riesce bene per una buona scrittura e unità d'insieme. E in mezzo a queste dolci composizioni si scorge anche una piccola perla (In House), che rimanda più direttamente ai migliori Sparklehorse. Canzoni come quadretti emotivi, raccontate con timidezza e introversione, quasi fossero intimi segreti personali, perfette da ascoltare chiusi nella propria cameretta quando si vuole dimenticare il rumore del mondo esterno e si vorrebbe essere sdraiati, liberi da ogni pensiero, su un'assolata spiaggia tropicale. Dei Caraibi ovviamente....



(By Alistair Fitchett)

Hints of mild psychedelia also filter through History's First Know It All by The Caribbean (Endearing / Tomlab). Stretching out from their lovely eponymous 1999 release and 2001's Verse by Verse, The Caribbean now straddle the kind of ground inhabited by the Blue Nile, Jim O'Rourke, Antonio Carlos Jobim, Chico Hamilton, Gary Burton, Weegee, The Sweet Smell of Success and The Go-Betweens whilst being bathed in the afterglow of assorted soft-pop luminaries like The Moon, The Association or Sagittarius. Sounds kind of special, huh? Well History's First Know It All is kind of special, meandering as it does through a variety of reference points, mirroring perhaps in part the manner in which it came to fruition via conspiratorial emails and exchanged audio files flying between Washington, DC, Baltimore, MD and Naples, FL. So that whilst it's all over the place, it's never all over the place, instead hangs together with a strange, gawky awkward beauty, like Scarlett Johansson serving bagels.



(By Edward McElvain)

History's First Know-It-All is one of the best constructed, composed, and informed albums that I've heard in a long, long time. I know I'm gushing here, sounding more a fan than a reviewer, but this record has made a fan out of me. Records like this are why I keep running this web site against all better judgment.

www.indiepop.it

(By Fabio)

The Caribbean pubblicano per Tomlab, etichetta che abitualmente mira luoghi ibridi, compromessi tra rock, pop ed elettronica amatoriale. Si potrebbero accettare alcune affinità tirate in ballo da alcuni, con Elliott Smith. Ma, stante la base folk, l'atmosfera è decisamente più quieta, immota, impressionista, caliginosa. Un habitat spartito fra U.S.A. e Canada, dati i trascorsi del gruppo con la label Endearing. History's first know-it-all risulta lavoro accattivante, persino originale di questi tempi (la produzione è affidata a Chad Clark dai trascorsi Dischord) ed è frutto di una lunga gestazione. Un'attrazione che definiremmo non senza imbarazzo *folk-tronica* (Momus docet). Ma è cosa buona e giusta che un disco possa confondere un poco le idee. Ballate ottundenti come "fresh out of travel agent school", "bulbs & switches", "in-house", "check kiting", eufonie di Beatles, Neil Young, Black Crowes (o dei più recenti Grandaddy) si dissimulano in brume e vapori, levano e diffondono bagliori lievemente elettrizzati (o noisizzati) *by self*.

mundane sounds

(By Sean Padilla)

Moments like this pop up all over *History's First Know-It-All*. The Caribbean knows that even the slightest touches can radically transform a song. Listen to how "Bulbs and Switches" switches from real drums to programmed drums at precisely the right moments. Listen to how "The Requirements" fades into nothingness after drowning itself in a sea of droning harmonicas and crowd noises. Listen to how "Perish the Thought" derives most of its tension simply from the absence of a bass guitar, or even how the drumming does a credible impersonation of the frenetic rhythms of drum-and-bass without drawing attention to itself. Listen to the entire record on headphones to absorb all of the little tricks and interruptions that pop up every couple of seconds. It'll take a while, though. Once you're done doing that, then notice how firmly rooted each song on this record is in a strong, indelible melody, even as the Caribbean steadfastly avoids obvious choruses, or throws odd chords into otherwise standard progressions.



(By Mattias)

The Caribbean sind eine weitere geniale Entdeckung des kleinen, aber feinen kanadischen Endearing Label. Die Qualität der Band hat auch bei Tomlab mächtig Eindruck hinterlassen, so dass man sich erfreulicherweise entschied, die Platte für den heimischen Markt zu lizenzieren. Smarter Move, keine Frage. The Caribbean sind aus DC, obwohl sie auch problemlos aus dem Mittleren Westen kommen könnten, denn mit dem geläufigem Dischord Sound der alten (Post-) Punk Schule hat das Album herzlich wenig zu tun und man eifert eher dem perfekten Popsong nach, der sich irgendwo zwischen Electronica, Folk und Singer/Songwriter versteckt hat. Die Stimmung ist bedächtig, aber keineswegs depressiv. Melancholisch, aber immer mit dem Blick nach vorne. Selbstmitleid ist ihnen fremd. Will man musikalisch neue Wege gehen? Keineswegs, doch da gibt es einige Dinge, die noch nicht gesagt wurden. Es dreht sich um das Thema Lo-Fi, sofern das hier überhaupt noch Sinn macht, denn im Prinzip sind The Caribbean auf einer Reise zu den Wurzeln, zu den Ursprüngen dieses ganzen Phänomens. Mal harmonieverliebt, dann doch wieder eher schräg und immer abseits von Anbiederung und stumpfem Charme. Die Jungs machen Pop, der sich noch traut, sich selbst zu hinterfragen, auch wenn man dabei Gefahr läuft, keine Antworten zu finden. "History's First Know-It-All" braucht Zeit und Geduld, wie eigentlich jede. 8/10



(By Jeff Norman)

The sonic detail Kentoff and his cast of thousands (okay, tens) work into these songs' careful mosaics is truly impressive and rewards repeated close listening. In fact, in its attention to sonic detail, odd lyrics, and jazz lurking in the background, could it be that a Steely Dan schooled not in the perfectionist seventies studio ethos but in the looser indie-rock bedroom recordist of the nineties and uh-ohs (that's this decade) might sound something like this? (That's a compliment in my book, by the way.)

History's First Know-it-All is another piece of evidence supporting the proposition that the Caribbean is among the best bands working today. Ignore it, and you'll have to lie in the future about how you were into them way back when before everyone knew how great they were.



"History's first know-it-all" es un disco caribeño sólo en el sentido de que provoca una sensación semejante a la de hundirse lentamente en la arena de una playa del Caribe mientras varias personas (la familia Sarmiento, según documentan los créditos del disco) juegan al badminton con alegría por encima de tu cabeza.

Bueno, más o menos. Resulta, en cierta medida, un poco más placentero: las melodías vocales de Michael Kentoff son ahora suaves rayos de sol, ahora olas refrescantes, que acompañan la inmersión con sabia tristeza y mucho cariño, encontrando además en los coros de Matthew Byars un eco entrañable. Resulta, también, bastante más entretenido: la base musical de guitarra-bajo-batería, ya de por sí estructurada por los pelos, sufre incursiones continuas de teclados estrafalarios y, sobre todo, de *found sounds* (entre ellos, los de la familia antes citada) que amenizan de manera casi desquiciada el hundimiento.

Los doce temas que componen el disco se dan paso uno a otro como ilustrando tímidos intentos de resistencia ("*Bulbs & Switches*" y su ritmo que roza lo feliz, cortesía del siempre inspirado Tony Dennison), anémicas decisiones de dejarse llevar ("*The Requirements*"), modestos avisos de que aún no está todo perdido ("*Officer Gravey*") y dulces resignaciones, dimisiones y rendiciones varias. A fin de cuentas, las canciones de **The Caribbean** (grupo surgido de las ruinas de Smart Went Crazy y Townies) no llevan a ningún sitio, ni juntas ni por separado. A menos que lleven, en realidad, a la conclusión de que éste, su segundo disco, ha de haber contado con el apoyo conjunto del sello alemán Tomlab y del canadiense Endearing por algo: aunque ya hay en el mundo muchos discos sobre y para el atardecer, quizá no haya aún suficientes que, como **"History's first know-it-all"**, intenten reflejar, aunque algo torpemente, el atardecer visto por dentro.



(By Mike Baker)

Vocalist Michael Kentoff takes on Ira Kaplan's whispered croon to stunning effect on this assured collection of avant-pop symphonettes. The Caribbean's crafty ability to ensure they're always firing on at least a few cylinders, especially when the lyrics swim in oblique directions, never fails to keep the listener engaged with an intelligent brew of homespun craft and highest-order spirit. The wayward East coast half-brother to Beulah's grandiose West coast pop obsessives, The Caribbean sit comfortably adrift in a sea of aggro guitars, walking bass lines, and swirling keys that create tidy little sonic environments that impress nearly perfectly. - MB