

BRIAN



Volume 1

September 2009

Featuring
Madvillain
Sufjan Stevens
and Sleater Kinney

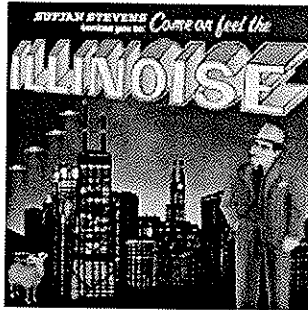
Introduction

This is my attempt at giving you some info on the records I want to recommend for this month's club. To be honest I am not very good at writing about music so instead I have stolen reviews from a website called www.pitchforkmedia.com which is really good and well worth checking out. I have also tried to tell you why I like the album and what else you should check out. This is not intended as a template for everyone else to follow

but just a way for me to tell you a bit about the music I like and waste a few hours on a bank holiday Monday night. The CD includes some tracks from all the records. The sound quality may not be great as they are all records recorded to my machine. I have tried to include a few bonus bits and pieces not available on CD which I have marked with an *. Hope you enjoy.

Sufjan Stevens *ILLINOISE*

Asthmatic Kitty; 2005



Buy if from ... www.play.com

Tracks

1. Concerning the UFO Sighting near Highland Illinois
2. JOHN WAYNE GACY, JR.
3. Go! CHICAGO! Go! Yeah!
4. They Are Night Zombies!! They Are Neighbours!! They Have Come Back From the Dead!! Ahhhh! / Let's hear that string part again, because I don't think they heard it all the way out in Bloomington-Normal!
5. THE AVA LANCHE*
6. The Good Lord Bird*

Dicography

Enjoy Your Rabbit
A Sun Came
Seven Swans
Greetings From Michigan: The Great Lakes State
Illinois

Why I Love It

I love this album because it is really beautiful and total different to a lot of what is being made today! He has

taken the template of Michigan his first in the series of albums about US states and has really built on it. The sound here is more diverse and includes some amazing song writing. The music itself is often gentle and relaxing although he often sings about quite dark issues! To be fair I am not doing a great job of selling this album but it truly is very beautiful. The vinyl version of the album comes with a bonus track on shiny gatefold and is really really nice. I have also included an additional track he wrote for a radio station called the Good Lord Bird which demonstrates what an amazing song writer he is.

If You Like This Try...

Sufjan Stevens *Michigan*

Sufjan Stevens first US state album is not quite so diverse but is equally as beautiful as *Illinois*, I keep coming back to it.

Elliott Smith *Either/Or*

This album is fragile and beautiful, an absolute classic and incredibly heart breaking.

Nina Nastasia *Run to Ruin*

This album is very difficult with angular orchestration and shifting time signatures, but it is also a fantastic vehicle for Nina's amazing voice and the album is recorded beautifully. If it sounds a little oblique her earlier albums are also very good, more accessible but not as rewarding.

Vetiver *Vetiver*

This album is an excellent entry point for anyone interested in freak folk like Joanna Newsome or Devendra Banhart. It is beautiful and very folk without being as odd as the aforementioned artists, although both are involved in this project.

Badly Drawn Boy *The Hour of the Bewilderbeast*

By far BDB best work a really charming album filled with brick-a-brak style song writing, some excellent songs and some real funk as well.

Pitchfork Says 9.2...

The best travel writers skew their journeys into pointed narratives, writing the story of the landscape by seizing all the weird, awkward bits that make it distinct. On first listen, Sufjan Stevens' latest installment of state-based chamber-folk, *Illinois*, sounds dangerously similar to 2003's *Michigan*, all chirping vocals and copious orchestration. Both records inadvertently validate East Coast stereotypes of tough Midwestern values: This is earnest, hard-working music, morally rooted and technically precise.

Still, Stevens has always been a folk singer more in theory than in practice. He routinely ditches folk's scrappy, stripped-down aesthetics, but consistently embraces its stories-of-the-people unanimity. Consequently, *Illinois* is less about place than spirit. Stevens dutifully celebrates and indicts all the appropriate landmarks, isolating the highest and lowest points in Illinois history, but at its best, the album makes America feel very small and very real: A boy crying in a van, a girl with bone cancer, stepmothers, parades, bandstands, presidents, UFOs, cream of wheat, trains after dark, a serial killer, Bible study.

Musically, *Illinois* is strange and lush, as excessive and challenging as its giant, gushing song titles. Despite employing a small army of backers (including a string quartet, the Illinoismaker Choir, drummer James McAllister, trumpeter Craig Montoro, and a pile of extra vocalists), Stevens is more forefronted than on the comparably solo *Seven Swans*. Manning nearly every instrument in his arsenal (and some beyond-- Stevens recorded the piano parts at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn), Stevens conducts his friends with impressive grace. Stevens' pipes quiver generously; his vocals could be easily (perhaps accurately) read as precious, but they're really more intimate than emo, and always beautifully echoed by his backers.

The colossal "The Black Hawk War" cartwheels slowly into a climax of strings and horns, gurgling and pushing, ostensibly signifying (with much aplomb) the violent return of the Sac and Fox Indians to Illinois. Stevens may be deploying state propaganda, or validating Black

Hawk's push home, but no matter how grave its reality, the moment still lands like a giant, neon-cased WELCOME TO ILLINOIS billboard. Trumpets blare, submission looms, our eyes widen, it makes sense: Illinois. Is. The. Greatest. State. Of. All. TIME!

The excellent "Casimir Pulaski Day" (named after an Illinois state holiday honoring the polish-born victor of the Battle of Brandywine) is a heartbreaking story of late winter death, bravely sung over rich banjo; the bubbly "Decatur" (the title of which is, awesomely, rhymed with "alligator," "aviator," and "emancipator") features one of Stevens' most undeniable melodies, the kind of pretty, tinkling cue that sends everyone in earshot twirling through the streets, jazz hands and all. Matthew Morgan yeeps solid backing bits (see their gorgeously squeaky harmony on "Stephen A. Douglass was a great debater/ But Abraham Lincoln was the great emancipator!"), while Daniel and Elin Smith (of Brother Danielson, and the Danielson Famile) chime in for a campfire finish, complete with self-applause.



Sufjan Stevens and the Illinoismakers

Stevens has a remarkable habit of being rousing and distressing at the same time, prodding disparate emotional centers until it's unclear whether it's best to grab your party shoes or a box of tissues. The gut-punching "Chicago" capably celebrates the innate (and deeply American) tendency to employ highways as escape routes, ditching old mistakes for new swatches of land, new plates of eggs, new parking lots. Impossibly propulsive, each calm, harmonized, Illinoismaker cry of "All things go!" pushes harder, promising liberation, by death or by automobile: "If I was crying/ In the van with my friend/ It was for freedom/ From myself and from the land," Stevens chokes, voice shaking over a haze of drums, strings, and shimmering keyboards.

"John Wayne Gacy, Jr." traces, with alarming accuracy, and over a hazy swirl of acoustic guitar and piano, the pathology of Illinois' most infamous serial killer: From

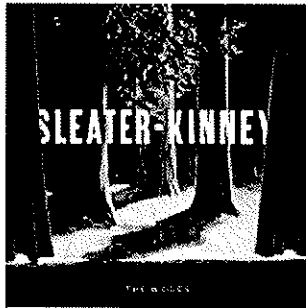
1972 until his arrest in 1978, Gacy was responsible for the torture, rape, and murder of 33 boys and young men, many of whom were discovered buried under the floorboards of his Norwood Park home. Lyrically, Stevens nails the specifics (as a kid, Gacy was slammed in the head by a swing, resulting in a blackout-inducing blood clot in his brain; he routinely donned a clown suit to entertain at a local hospital; victims were typically immobilized with chloroform-soaked cloths), and shifts perspectives gracefully; anchored in first-person, the song's narrator prods Gacy's mother and father, his neighbors, his victims, himself. More than any other track here, "Gacy" highlights Stevens' literary prowess, perfectly packed with nuance and detail.

At seventy-four minutes, *Illinois* is an exercise in patience; considering how long it takes to dog paddle through all the gooey orchestration, chugging through Stevens' meticulous arrangements and parsing out the melodies, *Illinois* is a bit of a commitment. Its 21 tracks consist of a handful of transitional snippets (many arresting in their own right), and plenty of good stuff ("The Tallest Man, the Broadest Shoulder", in particular) is buried way in the back, rewarding those who persevere, and in both theory and execution, *Illinois* is huge, a staggering collection of impeccably arranged American tribute songs.

-Amanda Petrusich, July 5, 2005

Sleater Kinney *The Woods*

Sub Pop; 2005



Buy it from... www.play.com

Tracks

7. The Fox
8. Jumpers
9. Entertain
10. Steep Air
11. Night Light

Discography

Call The Doctor 1995
 Dig Me Out 1996
 All Hands On The Bad One 2000
 One Beat 2002
 The Woods 2005

Why I Love It

This album is a real old school rock record. It has massive guitars, really long solos and sounds like it was recorded in a shed. The album is heavy without being to

angry or overbearing. You can sing along to all the songs and despite the rawness there is a lot of tunefulness around. As a newcomer to Sleater Kinney this album is really great, although I cannot compare it with earlier material. Great all round album. Also if you are a vinyl junky like me this one comes in a gatefold, with a khaki green disk and a brown disc with a screen printed side which looks like a tree stump! It is very very cool.

If You Like This Try...

Queens of the Stone Age *Songs for the Deaf*
 I haven't got the new queens album yet but this one is absolutely incredible. I keep coming back to it and it keeps blowing me away. Stoner rock at its absolute best.

The Shins *Chutes to Narrow*
 The shins have created a CD full of summertime. Sat in your car in a traffic jam, in the middle of Bristol, with the rain chugging down, throw this beauty on and you are suddenly flying down the A30 for a weekend of surf in cornwall. Short sweet and packed full of tunes.

Shellac *1000 Hurts*
 If you are after heavy this album is really really heavy. Not in a conventional turn everything up to 11 and rock

out way, but in a messed up really angry way. This is definitely not one to play to the kids or wife but is really quite incredible.

Coachwhips *Bangers vs F****ers*

This is a pure adrenaline rush of a record. It kicks so hard. It is the sort of music that makes you drive at 80 in a 30 zone. It is primal garage at its best. It is recorded very rawly and when you play it the sound is way WAY louder than on a normal CD. Like the white stripes having a massive fight.

Nirvana *with the lights out*

The 3cd box set is expensive but well worth a look. It has loads of great tracks including raw lofi deems, acoustic versions, new songs, covers and inevitably the odd bad track. The first cd is worth a miss but the other two and the DVD are ace.

Pitchfork Says 9.0...

By now you probably don't need to be told the particulars of Sleater-Kinney's new album, *The Woods*: about how they signed with Sub Pop, making it their first album since 1995's *Call the Doctor* not released by Kill Rock Stars; about how they hired Dave Fridmann to produce and recorded it in rural New York instead of Washington State; about how they wanted a heavier sound that mines classic rock like Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, and Jimi Hendrix for inspiration; about how one song is more than 11 minutes in length.

So it should come as no surprise that *The Woods* marks a significant transformation for the band-- one they first hinted at on 2000's *All Hands on the Bad One*, and crept closer toward on 2002's *One Beat*. Nor should anyone be shocked that, despite the new song structures, guitar solos, and drum fills, Brownstein's guitar still roars wildly, Weiss's drums still thunder, and Tucker still wails with a primal urgency that is one of the most compelling sounds in rock music today. What hasn't necessarily been made explicitly clear is that, even in the face of its cock-rock trappings, *The Woods* most closely recalls the righteous fury of their first great albums, *Call the Doctor* (1995) and *Dig Me Out* (1996).

The brash economy of punk, for Sleater-Kinney at least, has always been just a short step away from the lumbering behemoth of hard rock. "The Fox", however, seems to say otherwise. Opening the album, this piece of Aesop rock is about a fox and a duck, and I think it just might be allegorical. But it's loud and it thrashes and Tucker shouts to be heard over the din. It's ferociously uninviting, but it works both as a context-providing preface to the nine songs that follow and as a deterrent for weak-eared listeners. Those who make it to "Wilderness" will have passed a test of sorts.

"Wilderness" and most of "What's Mine Is Yours" sound like prime Sleater-Kinney, as does much of the rest of *The Woods*. Fridmann's presence is far from disruptive; you can hardly hear him in the mix, except for a little sludge in the low end-- a nice substitution for a bass player. Instead of weighing them down with single-mic'd Flaming Lips drums or Delgados density, he simply steps out of the way and allows them to sound larger, louder, and looser.

Turning their crosshairs away from the overt political issues of *One Beat*, Sleater-Kinney's amplification here sounds like a reaction to the current wave of backwards-looking boys-club bands that idolize post-punk dramatists like Joy Division and the Cure and abstractors like Gang of Four and Wire. (And anyway, weren't the women of Elastica working this same nostalgia, like, 10 years ago?) On "Entertain"-- the first single, no less-- Brownstein chides the eyeliner brigade righteously: "You come around looking 1984/ You're such a bore, 1984/ Nostalgia, you're using it like a whore/ It's better than before."



Sleater Kinney

But Sleater-Kinney are looking backwards too, albeit to a different time in rock history and to different styles, as well as with a greater open-mindedness and self-awareness. Many of the hard-rock trappings of *The Woods* sound self-conscious: Leading into the album-closing "Night Light", the 11-minute guitar solo on "Let's Call It Love" is just that-- an 11-Minute Guitar Solo. The badass breakdown on "What's Mine Is Yours" is just that-- a Badass Breakdown. But the point of "Let's Call It Love" is the equation of music and sex as Brownstein sings, "I've got a long time for love" and then proves it with her guitar. And the point of "What's Mine Is Yours" is, as the lyrics reveal, not the breakdown but the recovery: As Brownstein's guitar squawks boisterously and arrhythmically, Tucker stitches it together with a low Led Zep riff and Weiss wraps it up with a big drum

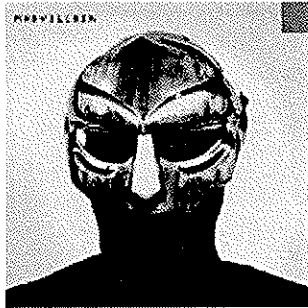
beat, all three of them literally creating music from chaos.

In other words, this hard-rock transformation sounds like an extension of all the meta songs they've been writing since before "I Wanna Be Your Joey Ramone"--rock-about-rock songs that chronicle their experience as an all-woman band and that deploy that self-reflexivity as a weapon against industry double standards and general ignorance. In the past, this self-awareness often resulted in songs that sounded closed-off, each with its own extremely precise meaning that related but didn't always connect to other songs around it. *The Woods*, on the other hand, is their most album-like album since *The*

Hot Rock, each song building on the previous and leading to the next. With its artificially sweetened melody, "Modern Girl", for instance, almost sounds saccharine ("My whole life is like a picture of a sunny day"), but coming after "Jumpers", a song so empathetic it considers suicide a viable act of defiance, "Modern Girl" takes on deeper meanings. The pair are two sides of the same woman, the ultimate predicament: To survive these days, you have to be either suicidal or superficial. Sleater-Kinney, meanwhile, get by simply sounding fucking supersonic.

-Stephen M. Deusner, May 25, 2005

Madvillain *Madvillainy* Stones Throw; 2004



But it from www.boomkat.com

Tracks

12. Accordion
13. Meat Grinder
14. Curls
15. Fancy Clown feat Viktor Vaughn
16. All Caps
17. Rhinestone Cowboy
18. Rhinestone Cowboy – Remix by Fourtet

Discography

MF Doom

KMD – Mr Hood
KMD – Black Bastard
MF Doom – Operation Doomsday
Viktor Vaughn – Vaudeville Villain
Viktor Vaughn – Venomous Villain
King Geedorah – Take Me To Your Leader
MF Doom – Live From Planet X

Danger Doom – Danger Doom (Released 17th October)

Madlib (abridged, full discography is 4 sides of A4 and can be found at <http://www.stonesthrow.com/madlib/discography.html>)

Quasimoto - The Further Adventures of Lord Quas
DJ Rels - Theme For A Broken Soul
Monk Hughes & The Outer Realm (YNQ) - Tribute To Weldon
Yesterdays New Quintet - Stevie
Madvillain - Madvillainy
Jaylib - Champion Sound
Madlib - Shades of Blue
Yesterdays New Quintet - Angles Without Edges
Quasimoto - The Unseen
Lootpack - Soundpieces: Da Antidote

Why I Love It

This is quite possibly my favourite Hip hop album of all time. It is amazing. The rhymes are incredible, the production is second to none. It has 23 tracks on it yet only lasts 40 minutes unlike sprawling hip hop albums

like Kanye West (which gets really boring). This is more like looking through someones doodle pad. Songs last only as long as they must, but the whole album flows into one. If you are not so comfortable with Hip Hop give this time as it really is a grower, I just keep coming back for more.

If You Like This Try...

These guys have both released loads and loads of records, and they are pretty much all amazing (or the ones I have heard) so check em out!

Themselves live

Themselves are part of a record label called anticon who make abstract Hip Hop, kinda like avant garde jazz, surrealist lyrics and hip hop melded into one. This record is absolutely astonishing and I love it but it is pretty hard work. You need to listen to it a lot to get into it.

Edan *Beauty and the Beat*

Edan is crazy. He loves old school hip hop and it shows. This album feels like it was made in 1988 and comes straight at ya. His album is also one big psychedelic trip, all the songs merging into one. This album is great fun and pretty heavy all at once.

DJ Shadow *Endtroducing*

This is definitely one of my favourite albums of all time. DJ Shadow created instrumental hip hop which is beautiful, interesting, textured and accessible. It is regarded as by far and away the best instrumental hip hop ever made and has never been bettered.

Dudley Perkins *A Lil' Light*

This is a curious little album, produced by Madlib and bristling with new soul, whilst a little to wacky to be mainstream. A real gentle listen for chilled out evenings.

Various *Stones Throw 101*

This is a definitive DVD and CD of the stones throw record label. The DVD includes 15 music videos, including the amazing Madvillain animation for All Caps, a load of straight up hip hop, funk, instrumental hip hop and weirdness. It also has a few decent extras including interviews and a funk band live performance. The CD is a megamix of over 42 tracks (some are two tracks together) giving you an idea of the breadth of interest this amazing label has.

Pitchfork Says 9.4...

Madvillainy, one of the most anticipated releases in underground rap history, happens to parallel one of the most anticipated arrivals in comic book history: the short-lived Amalgam Comics label. As the name implied,

the Amalgam Universe brought together the two most dominant and popular comic factions-- Marvel and DC-- and all of their respective characters, styles and quirks. The long-awaited collaboration between producer/emcees Madlib and MF Doom, *Madvillainy* is the *Infinity Gauntlet* of rap, a tense mainstream-meets-indie, avant-meets-antique melee that, as the opening sample suggests, plays on a "seminal connection that audiences can relate their experience in life with the villains and their dastardly doings."

"MADVILLAIN: RETARDED HARD COPY"

In November 2002, Otis Jackson, Jr. (aka Madlib) went south to Brazil on business. For the trip, he compiled two mix CDs of beats and unfinished tracks: one stored his collaborations with Detroit's Jay Dee; the second held work with Brooklyn's Daniel Dumile (aka MF Doom). As a true testament to both fidelity's fragility and the power of file-sharing, both discs leaked a few months later, giving birth to a logical buzz, but more importantly, heightening expectations to impossible heights; these demos were pretty fucking tight. If "Peeyano Keys" and "Powerball #5" were just rough drafts, what could be expected of the completed project?



Madlib and MF Doom the Madvillains!

Undoubtedly, Madlib and Doom felt the pressure. The leak seemed to be a huge kick in the ass, especially for Madlib, who in the past few years has been garnering the reputation of being brilliant and prolific, but distracted: His *Blunted in the Bomb Shelter* mix (rumored to have been concocted in less than a day), Blue Note-sampling *Shades of Blue*, and even the Jaylib collaboration are fresh, but sloppy and often unfocused. *Madvillainy* is anything but: The samples are smart and never played-out, and the production and rhymes reveal a determined sense of cooperation, as Doom spouts off

his most brilliant lyrical change-ups and production-conscious playoffs.

"Wild guess, you can say he stay sedated."

One of the noticeable differences between the unauthorized promo and the final burn of the album is a change in vocal tone from Doom, which has shifting from an excited, measured performance to a slower, scratchier and ultimately better-suited delivery, considering Madlib's low-key, bass-oriented production. Some people take the new chilled delivery as somehow inferior to the old incarnation, but taken in context, the album benefits from the re-recording, particularly in cases where Doom re-arranges couplets to optimize his punchlines ("Meat Grinder") or adds new lines altogether ("Figaro").

"Your first and last step to playing yourself like accordion."

Doom's acknowledgement of Madlib's accordion sample (the same one Daedelus used on 2002's *Invention*) is the most obvious instance of *Madvillainy's* lyrics/production integrity, but the album is chock full of them. For a collaboration which the duo has described as something "like a telepathy thing. There wasn't a lot of talking," Madlib and Doom, proponents of two distinctive hip-hop styles, are of one unusually strong mind.

"Mad plays the bass like the race card."

The axis of *Madvillainy* is Otis Jackson Jr.'s production. While Doom's entire career has been shadowed by consistently strong production efforts, never has such chemistry developed between him and another beatmaker. From the unbelievable *Castlevania*-meets-*Rocky & Bullwinkle* piano chase music of "Supervillain Theme" to the shifting keyboard jazz suite of "Great Day" to the dark chamber bass, timbales and jump-cut ukulele plucks of "Meat Grinder", Madlib proves himself as much more than just a loop digger, topping his best work on Quasimoto's *The Unseen* with an album of consistently incredible beat work. And it isn't just the beats that make the partnership work so well: The character of his vocal samples and the smoothness of his song-to-song segues make this album individual to the styles of both artists-- a difference that puts this pairing far ahead of similarly talented teams like RJD2 and Blueprint's Soul Position.

"Don't make me have to pound his tin crown face in."

Both Doom's and Madlib's myriad aliases make sparkling cameo appearances on *Madvillainy*, most notably on "America's Most Blunted", in which Madlib bickers with

alter-ego Quasimoto, and on "Fancy Clown", which features Dumile as Viktor Vaughn. Here, Vaughn steams on an ex-girlfriend's unfaithfulness-- but she's cheating with Metalface, another Dumile alias. It's a brilliant conceit, and perhaps makes "Fancy Clown" hip-hop's first schizophrenic self-diss track.

"Hey you: Don't touch the mic like it's AIDS on it."

Okay, so maybe that's a little harsh. Although the guest appearances from the Stones Throw massive are Jackson Jr.'s take on label-based self-aggrandizement, they never disrupt the album's flow, and never say anything too stupid (Medaphoar even garners a laugh on "Raid" with, "My niggas take 'no' like Kobe"). Still, it helps that these extraneous verses are few and far between; most listeners would likely have preferred an additional Doom cut instead, or at least an appearance from Doom's Monsta Island Czars.

"Spit so many verses, sometimes my jaw twitches/ One thing this party could use is more... booze."

When much of the underground often aspires to Truth and Something Bigger, Madlib and Doom have always seemed content to be quirky through and through, lightly roasting themselves and subverting the genre itself to brilliant effect. Like in the above quote from "Great Day": The rhyme's pattern and rap's topical stereotype demands the word "bitches," yet Doom hilariously says "booze" instead. Or on "Money Folder", in which Doom starts off, "Don't mind me, I won't just rhyme lightly off of two or three Heinies," but flips beers to babes midway: "And boy was they fine, G: One black, one Spanish, one Chi-nee."

"The best emcee with no chain ya ever heard."

Madvillainy is inexhaustibly brilliant, with layer-upon-layer of carefully considered yet immediate hip-hop, forward-thinking but always close to its roots. Madlib and Doom are individually at their most refined here, and together, they've created one of the most exciting blockbuster alliances in the underground to date. Good luck finding a better hip-hop album this year, mainstream, undie, or otherwise.

-Rollie Pemberton & Nick Sylvester, March 25th, 2004



asthmatic kitty

