

LAWNCHAIR GENERALS AROUND THE BLOCK

Nordic Trax/CAN/CD

House fans have likely already heard these tracks from the Seattle duo of Peter Christianson and Carlos Mendoza, who have been pumping out Chicago-esque sounds since 2001 from their self-made studio. This album—their first full-length, though they've released several EPs—collects their best work, including remixes of others, all of which has appeared elsewhere. Still, the music's familiarity doesn't detract from its appeal, and the men's smooth mixing helps, too. Highlights include their warm remix of "Really Don't Stop," by Martin Venetjoki with Derek Conyer. Not a substitute for new work, but a reminder of the quality LCG have maintained for years (and hopefully a sign of more to come). *Luciana Lopez*

LETTERS LETTERS

S/T

Type/UK/CD

It's difficult not to hear Letters Letters' debut as a reaction to the defiant indie mega-pop of their fellow Montreal bands Arcade Fire and Wolf Parade. The trio's sound here is anything but "big": acoustic guitars make way for atonal washes of noise, understated angst-ridden vocals rarely leave the lower registers, and the use of electronics is both quirky and restrained. *Letters Letters* works best when a bit of melody pokes through the melancholy fuzz and the broken, scattering clicks meld into a syncopated beat. In these moments, the surrounding druggy abstraction and drone get the weight they deserve and the tracks shimmer. *Letters Letters* isn't a great album, but it's certainly an interesting one. *Ross Holland*

MAC LETHAL

11:11

Rhymesayers/US/CD

On *11:11*, his official debut album, Kansas City's Mac Lethal comes out swinging, bringing some clever lyrics, humor by the boatload, and a strong mic presence. Unfortunately, he has a tendency for lacing otherwise good songs with terrible hooks ("Pound that beer!") and corny one-liners ("My tear ducts are dry"). Tracks like "Crazy" and "Rotten Apple Pie" are fun, but quickly become expendable after a couple listens. The closing track, "Sun Storm," is the high point, and shows that with the right beat and concept, Mac can hold your attention. With that said, his songwriting setbacks make his debut a bit disappointing. *David Ma*

TOM MIDDLETON

LIFETRACKS

Six Degrees/US/CD

He hails from the English coast of Cornwall, sports a bearded visage in nearly every photo, has a production credit on the original *Analogue Bubblebath* EP—you're thinking Aphex Twin, right? Actually, Tom Middleton is the man in question, a major force behind Global Communication, Cosmos, Reload, Jedi Knights, and myriad other aliases. Harkening back to the angelic bliss of Global Communication's *76:14*, Middleton's solo debut, *Lifetracks*, is swathed with emotion from start to finish. The second half of the album is where Middleton truly hits recline on the studio chair and lets his trademark melodies work their magic, though: Tracks like "Margherita" and "Moonbathing" are steeped in mood and purity throughout. *Brock Phillips*

ONUR ÖZER

KASMIR

Vakant/GER/CD

For someone claiming to have no formal musical training, Turkish techno magus Onur Özer sure creates a sophisticated brand of dance music. Much like Berlin-via-Seattle producer Bruno Pronsato, Özer lays avant-jazz and *musique concrète* ideas over subliminally propulsive 4/4 beats. The seemingly incongruous juxtaposition of highbrow elements with hedonistic dance tropes generates a fresh variation on techno's overly familiar template. Özer is essentially ushering into techno sounds rarely, if ever, heard there. On this stunning debut album, he makes unlikely components—oddly diminished piano chords, baroque organ fugues, perverse percussion accents—coalesce into smoothly running compositions that never seem gratuitously fussy or weird. Anyone bemoaning techno's stagnancy needs to hear *Kasmir*, a decidedly more-is-more affair. *Dave Segal*

ORGONE

THE KILLION FLOOR

Ubiquity/US/CD

Sounding much like a cross between The Dap-Kings and Breakestra (with whom they share several members), L.A.'s Orgone keeps the hotness of the recent retro-soul revival coming; lead singer Fanny Franklin fits in very nicely between Sharon Jones and Amy Winehouse. As befits the band's name, Orgone's sound is quite organic, rooted in soul, funk, boogaloo, and jazz, with a classic appeal that's nevertheless contemporary. Covers of "Funky Nassau," "Do Your Thing," and "I Get Lifted" serve as touchstones for originals like "Sophisticated Honky" and "Dialed Up"; basically, the entire album is one non-stop groove. If smooth, soulful funk with jazzy arrangements makes you sweat, you just found your new favorite band. *Eric K. Arnold*

EDDIE PALMIERI

MOLASSES

Fania/US/CD

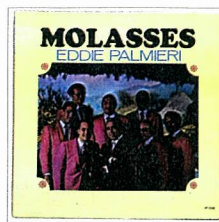
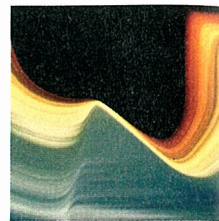
A Puerto Rican piano prodigy, Eddie Palmieri melded his own performance style (influenced by both Thelonious Monk and McCoy Tyner) and Latin musical roots to great effect. The compositions on *Molasses*, originally released in 1967 during an upswing in Palmieri's career, were purportedly inspired by dancers; as such, they're anything but sluggish and bogged down. A seemingly unlikely pairing of trombones and flutes, a common Palmieri arrangement, provides varied melodies, supported by a bedrock rhythm section and Palmieri's own intense piano lines and powerful chords. *Patrick Sisson*

PINCH

UNDERWATER DANCEHALL

Tectonic/UK/CD

Since the world heard the near-perfect "Qawwali" (re-imagined here as "Brighter Day" with vocals from Juakali) it's been waiting for Bristol dubstep king Pinch's full-length, and with *Underwater Dancehall* he delivers in spades. Pinch's layered production soars on tracks like the shuffle-bump of "Get Up," the tumbling percussion of "Lazarus," and the epic "Angels in the Rain," which features Indi Khur's vocals. While occasionally the vocalists risk smothering the tracks' intricacies, more often than not they support Pinch's echoed snares, bubbling basslines, and scattershot, world-traveled sounds (for instrumental fans, check the bonus vocal-free versions disc). This is The Wild Bunch updated for '08, with Pinch keeping the dancehall live. *Matt Earp*



Nicky Click

NICKY CLICK

I'M ON MY CELL PHONE

Crunks Not Dead/US/CD

Four songs in, in her best valley-girl-meets-'80s-club-diva voice, Nicky Click gets straight to the point: "Who here likes ice cream?" It takes a unique sort of sweet tooth to handle *I'm on My Cell Phone*; otherwise, this melts faster than soft-serve on a car radiator. *Cell Phone* plays out like the "Kool Thing" Kim Gordon/Chuck D exchange stretched to 15 songs; it's composed of dialogues between Click and a deep-voiced "Mr. Owl," and one-sided talks between her and her "diary." Topics range from the titular phone ("I got a brand new ring tone/And you're on permanent roam") to queer politics ("I'm gonna stay away from them/Their pleasure is much too intriguing") to twee-indie love screeds, though the corny-as-hell production—bubblegum electro-pop and early-days hip-hop, mostly—makes The Blow sound groundbreaking. *Michael Byrne*