

Mercury Rev



The Stone; Wed 10

Mercury Rev has spent the past two decades perched in the Catskills, recording songs steeped in psychedelia. Its vague lyrics concern hippie staples like dreams, girls and flowers. (And that's just one song: "Dream of a Young Girl as a Flower.") Yet if the musicians exude the whiff of flakes gazing at stars, their music has always reflected prevailing trends, be they roaring guitars and barking vocals (early '90s) or mellower roots-inflected rock (late '90s).

Now, Mercury Rev is preparing to release its seventh album, *Snowflake Midnight*, which finds the group adjusting its sound once again. The amorphous unit is stripped to the core of frontman Jonathan Donahue, percussionist Jeff Marcel and a multi-instrumentalist known as Grasshopper.

While the album hardly offers a reinvention, it emphasizes the trio's experimental tendencies, with rough electronic flourishes evoking Animal Collective as much as Brian Eno.

Snowflake Midnight comes out on Yep Roc September 30—a companion download, *Strange Attractor*, will also be available—and the band will no doubt play a larger club before year's end. This intimate show, however, should prove more interesting. At the Stone, Mercury Rev collaborates with Feeditank, a Brooklyn collective of digital artists, as well as Alex Chechile, who uses a "home-built electroencephalograph brainwave machine" to render sounds buried inside the band members' minds. How embarrassing it will be to find these hippie snobs dreaming of "When I Grow Up" or "I Kissed a Girl."—*Jay Ruttenberg*

Jack Jones

The Oak Room at the Algonquin Hotel; Tue 9–Sept 20



The '60s were the heyday of the singing crooner, and Sinatra set the image: macho, swaggering, nicotine-stained, alluringly dangerous. Then there was Jack Jones, who would never have made the Rat Pack. Born of a never-screen tenor, Allan Jones, he was ten-doll handsome, and sang in a

robust and sunny baritone. Neither his chauvinistic hit of 1963, "Wives and Lovers," nor the babe on his arm (actress Jill St. John, his wife in the late '60s) marred his wholesome air.

Jones made a dramatic interpretive breakthrough on his 1970 album, *Jack Jones Sings Michel Legrand*, but by then such records were landing on the commercial junk pile. At the height of disco fever, Jones ended up singing the theme from *The Love Boat*, which became his ball and chain; he also played a washed-up (and often shirtless) pop idol in the British gore shocker *The Comeback*.

Today Jones is a silver fox of 70, and time has mused him up in the best of ways. His once-honey-smooth voice is attractively craggy; his delivery has a touch of sexy arrogance. Jones also swings like he never did in the '60s, with breath control worthy of a swim champ, and his ballads are pretty enough to induce sighs. When he strolls from table to table, picking out special faces to sing to, you'll see some very well-heeled ladies turn goo-goo-eyed.—*James Gavin*

Album reviews

Graham Smith & KGW

★★★★★

Yes Boss (self-released)

Free download or no, a double album still comes with a huge target attached. Some critics will never tire of assailing marathon releases, proclaiming that they would have been better at half the length. But please, hold your fire in the case of the two-hour, 36-track *Yes Boss* by Graham Smith, the Chicago-reared Staten Islander best known as the leader of Kleenex Girl Wonder. Available on a pay-what-you-will basis exclusively through the bedroom-pop prodigy's home page (hbinfo.pbwiki.com), the release—complete with copious alternate takes—is indisputably overstuffed. But that seems only appropriate, considering the unflinching rawness of the emotions chronicled within. My love life is a sprawling jumble, Smith seems to assert, and so is my record.

But what a gripping jumble, filled

with ultraliterate songs—relentlessly hooky despite frequently lacking conventional choruses—in which a cutesy demeanor can conceal a devastating observation. If the *I* in these songs isn't autobiographical, *Yes Boss* nevertheless traffics in precarious emotional fieldwork: "High Tech Computer Magician," for example, painstakingly surveys a relationship's dissolution via 210 seconds of gradually intensifying power pop. Throughout the record, Smith twists phrases like shivs ("Why do you have to be so generously cryptic/Oh, I ask you for a pencil sketch, you hammer out a triptych"), portraying himself, his partners and his friendships with equally scathing clarity. Whether you measure in terms of length, verbosity or psychological heft, the results are unwieldy, but they ring absolutely true.—*Hank Shteamer*

Yacht

★★★★★

Summer Song (DFA)

The timing of this four-song EP from Portland, Oregon, disco outfit Yacht is unfortunate. Not so much because the season referred to in the title track is now over, but more for the fact that its accompanying music video—a shot-for-shot remake of the infamous "Baby Doll" scene from the 1988 John Cusack/Tim Robbins comedy *Tapeheads*—is so ridiculously entertaining that it

deserves an OK Go–like star turn at this week's VMAs.

Instead, Yacht—formerly just one Jona Bechtolt, but now a duo—will have to settle for the perks of signing with DFA: namely album-teasing 12-inch vinyl EPs like this one. Following up the impeccably succinct "Summer Song" proves to be a chore; while the T-Pain–referencing Italo-disco of "I'm in Love With a Ripper" shines, the organic, guitar-driven "I'm Bored" and "You Can Live Anywhere You Want" play like cutouts.—*Jesse Serwer*

Brian Wilson

★★★★★

That Lucky Old Sun (Capitol)

It's been a great summer for fans of L.A. art pop, with strong new records by Randy Newman, Ry Cooder and Van Dyke Parks—the last a collaboration with singer-songwriter Inara George, who's part of a new breed of SoCal artists inheriting those veterans' tradition of candy-coated innovation. Now, just in time for the conclusion of the season he promised would never end, comes Brian Wilson's *That Lucky Old Sun*, the first studio disc from the fragile genius since the way-overdue completion of his late-'60s curio *Smile* four years ago.

The good news is that Wilson seems as with-it as he ever has over the past couple of decades. Compared with his shaky performances during the wildly

overpraised *Pet Sounds* Live tour, he sounds confident in his abilities again, which means that though his melodies might not ascend to the dizzying heights of yore—that's the bad news—they actually get where they're going. "At 25 I turned out the light 'cause I couldn't handle the glare in my tired eyes," he sings by way of explanation in "Going Home." "But now I'm back, drawing shades of kind blues skies."

The songs on *That Lucky Old Sun* are strung together with a series of dreamy Parks-penned "narratives" about life in Los Angeles, which establishes a thematic through line Wilson's so-so writing doesn't quite do justice. (A typical excerpt: "Venice Beach is poppin' like live shrimp dropped on a hot wok.") It's warm under this *Sun*, but it's rarely hot.—*Mikael Wood*