

leading to a cool vibe flowing across the city's hotbed of musical lore.

*Glenn BurnSilver*

**Cracker**

**Sunrise in the Land of Milk and Honey**

429 RECORDS



Let's face it: '90s rock was one of the best music eras ever—and **Cracker** was right in the middle of it. Who doesn't crack a huge smile when **David Lowery** sings "Hey, hey, hey like being stoned" on the 1993 hit single "Low"? Cracker brings the noise on its twelfth album, inspired by New Wave and power punk of the late '70s and early '80s. From the raging "Show Me How This Thing Works" and "We All Shine a Light" to the country twang of "Friends" (a duet with Drive by Truckers' **Patterson Hood**) to the '60s nostalgia of "Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out with Me," Lowery, **Johnny Hickman** (guitar), **Sal Maida** (bass) and **Frank Funaro** (drums) serve notice that, despite the indie label, Cracker remains a major band with big hooks, solid lyrics and attitude to spare.

*Steve Bloom*

**Crocodiles**

**Summer of Hate**

FAT POSSUM



**Crocodiles** has a serious jonesing for the dark psychedelia of its '80s forebearers. All of the signifiers are there: the sound (distorted vocals, pounding drum machine, wall-of-sound guitars), the look (black shades, tight pants) and even the song titles ("Young Drugs," "Sleeping with the Lord")—it's distinctly Jesus & Mary Chain shorthand. The San Diego duo's means to the end, however, are unmistakably 2009: Garageband loops, preset keyboard sounds, tinny reverb. This is homemade music—cheap, big and brash. When the band focuses on shimmering, sunstroked guitar pop, *Summer of Hate* shines. Even the de facto Spaceman 3 tribute to "Sleeping with the Lord" comes off as charming with its hypnotic, repetitive keyboard drone. Much of *Hate*, though, sinks into dirgey drudgery—sounding a bit like dollar-store Black Rebel Motorcycle Club: forced and uninspired. The rote paint-it-black numbers, like the quick-and-fast overdrive of "Refuse Angels," weigh

the album down with posturing and a faux-snarl that feels misplaced.

*Alex Naidus*

**Abstract Rude Rejuvenation**

RHYMESAYERS



After years of silence, L.A.'s underground hero **Abbey Rude** has returned. Hailed for his smooth, clear, intelligent and thought-provoking baritone rap style, Rude's chops are clearly intact—and the switch to producer Vitamin D provides everything from wah-wah guitar, funky bass, spacey keys, backup singers, a definite jazz sensibility and a few great samples, including Bill Withers' "Ain't No Sunshine." Key additions also find guest spots from **Aceyalone**, **Myka 9**, **Busdriver** and others, but this is Rude's show and whether he's rapping or singing, busting story form or social commentary, talking about weed or revolution, this cat is all soul. Abstract Rude is a real artist with a deeply musical mind, approaching hip-hop similar to the way that Outkast does—only by way of Cali, not the ATL. *Aaron Kayce*

**Elvis Costello**

**Secret, Profane and Sugarcane**

HEAR MUSIC



Among many things, **Elvis Costello** is a great country singer. And **T Bone Burnett** is perhaps the greatest producer of Americana working today. So it's not shocking that *Secret, Profane and Sugarcane*, produced by Burnett, is the duo's first full pairing since their one-off project as the Coward Brothers in the '80s—is as rich and pure of a collection of spare country ballads as you're going to hear in 2009. **Emmylou Harris** guests on "The Crooked Line," one of two tunes co-written by Costello and Burnett—and country icon **Loretta Lynn** shares a writing credit with Costello on "I Felt the Chill"—but it's the quartet of songs originally penned for an unfinished opera about Hans Christian Andersen that are the most intriguing. *Jeff Tamarkin*

**Todd Snider**

**The Excitement Plan**

YEP ROC



Most of the buzz around **Todd Snider's** latest release, *The Excitement Plan*, is because of the singer/songwriter's ballyhooed duet with country legend **Loretta Lynn** on "Don't Tempt Me," but that song is just the tip of the iceberg. It's

just as smokin' as you'd expect: energized with old time piano playing and percussion, which gives it a raw energy that you don't often hear outside of Nashville music halls. Indeed, that song's pureness may be the problem because it shows what Snider can do. Even though other songs on the release—including "Greencastle Blues" and "Barefoot Champagne"—are technically superb, they almost scream for more of that raw, unchained energy found on the duet. Here's hoping that Snider doesn't allow high-tech music production to rob his music's soul.

*Nancy Dunham*

**Assemble Head in Sunburst Sound**

**When Sweet Sleep Returned**

TEEPÉE



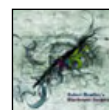
Dark, dense and apocalyptic, *When Sweet Sleep Returned* is the psychedelic disaster movie soundtrack sequel to *Ekranoplan's* robot space invasion. The bass is aggressive, the guitars fuzzed, the drums complex and punk. The platter opens with "Two Stage Rocket"—big, dry guitar riffs, shuffling drums, and the theremin's siren wail. "Two Birds," with guest turns from Sleepy Sun singer **Brett Constatino** and guitarist **Evan Reese**, is a seven-minute, medieval, almost druidic rock epic, with trilling organ and Garcia-esque guitar melodies. Riff-anchored but not hooky, this is guitar rock without histrionics. The vocals, typically sung in synchrony or harmony, are sometimes murky, giving the songs a thick, oceanic feel—but occasionally, space opens, and **Camilla Saufley's** vocals ("The Slumbering Ones"), an upbeat, major scale guitar lick or a bit of flute cut through like blue sky and light through the purple-orange clouds.

*Richard B. Simon*

**Robert Bradley's Blackwater Surprise**

**Out of the Wilderness**

QUARTER2THREE



**Robert Bradley** was discovered singing on a Detroit street. On his fifth album, he maintains a from-the-pavement-to-the-studio persona, making *Out of the Wilderness* sound as if a blues rehearsal was taking place and he just happened to walk through the door and straight to the microphone. His raw singing style leans more toward the elocution of Wesley Willis rather than the gutbucket vocals of R.L. Burnside—a stark contrast to the polished and economical instrumentation of the backing band behind him.



Elvis Costello