

Mp3 Ho-hum - Now I Love You



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Good pop music from major label refugees from Arkansas. Ho-Hum spends less and less time recording their records and they keep getting better and better. 13 MP3 Songs POP: Folkly Pop, ROCK: Americana
Details: POP NOTES : Ho-Hum : Fearless and loopy BY PHILIP MARTIN ARKANSAS

DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE You could start off talking about prophets without honor and all that, but the truth is Ho-Hum isn't without honor in their adopted hometown of Little Rock. In fact in some quarters they're pretty well revered and rightly so. Lenny and Rod Bryan and their various co-conspirators (their new album, Now I Love You, features keyboardist Sam Heard and drummer Brad Brown) have always been conscientious about producing honest and interesting music. Even the occasional misstep - the major-label disappointment Local, for instance - have had their moments of dissonant grace and sonic power. In a way, it's remarkable that they've remained true to their vision of themselves as a kind of homegrown refutation of the careerist rock cliches. Constantly maneuvering, you never get the feeling they're looking for a formula or a uniform. So it's possible to admire the band while not totally buying into their records - they'd probably understand and appreciate that sort of respectful yet appraising stance, for one suspects the brothers Bryan are their own most scrupulous critics. Still, it's difficult to be cool about their latest CD - released by their own Playadel Records - for it has about it a loopy, pop sprightliness in addition to the band's trademark fearlessness. These are pop songs, with big, full chords and bouncing synths and lots of goodies knocking around in back of Lenny's raw yet pliable voice. It's the few seconds of these songs that hook you - listen to the reverb-soaked opening of "Raindropshine" or the pulsing '80s keyboard figure that kicks off album opener "This Is My Home." "Theeicansee" reveals an absorption of dance music influences, with guitars occasionally vibrating through the mix and a wonderfully ingenuous vocal hook. As with most of the band's recorded projects, not every sound will delight every listener -

interludes such as "Insofar" and "Insomuch" seem more like snatches of abandoned ideas than fullfledged songs, and the final track - "Lot in Life" - is as initially daunting as it is ultimately rewarding. Nobody starts out wanting to love an 18:35-minute pop song - its duration makes it something other than a pop song; it's a soundscape, a soundtrack to a movie you can make in your head. What do these things sell in? The hundreds? If the aspiration to be heard is an important component of what we call pop music, does this stuff even qualify? Sure. You should hear this. It's different, it's fun and if Ho-Hum had the will and the wherewithal and the right numbers on the speed-dial, they could be as big as, say, Wilco, or at least Ted Leo the Pharmacists. They're one of the best bands out there, and that's not in spite of their decision to downscale their operation. In fact, it might even be partly due to that decision. One senses a genuine purposefulness - an authentic impulse to communicate - throughout this record. Even in its most oblique moments Now I Love You struggles to connect. Often it does, and when it does it never seems false or easy, or like these guys are pretending to be anything other than who they are. Whatever dreams they might have held of pop stardom are subservient to a more adult vision of reaching - and moving - those lucky enough to brush up against their work. That's the imperative felt by real artists, the guys for whom commercial success really is subservient to a vision. They don't play those wicked games. And that's entirely honorable.

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