

Mp3 Sanford Arms - Too Loud For The Snowman



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Dreamy pop with slight twang. For fans of Sparklehorse, Wilco, and Califone. 12 MP3 Songs POP: 90's Pop, COUNTRY: Country Pop Details: Devil in the Woods, Issue 3.3, 2001 5 Stars. After far too long in hiding, former Alcohol Funnycar frontman Ben London returns with a devastatingly world-weary collection of songs. The guitars have been turned down from London's previous work, yet this effort still boils over with fervor. "Too Loud for the Snowman" is a painfully detailed account of how it feels to have life collapse on you. London's exceptional eye for how people lose their direction provides comfort for the wasted days, and the morning after. -- Adam Lauridesn Alternative Press, January, 2002 Former Alcohol Funnycar leader fills a Flaming Lips-sized void Somewhere in Oklahoma, Wayne Coyne and the boys are suiting up for the next Flaming Lips flight out - penning Americana and then brainstorming how to make the ditties positively cosmic. For those who can't wait to experience the follow-up to the Soft Bulletin, former Alcohol Funnycar driver Ben London debuts Sanford Arms. Ironically enough it's Too Late for the Snowman's conventionality that makes it a compelling listen. Beneath the pocket symphonies, the underwater guitars and the ambient noise that hangs over the songs like a rain cloud, the nuanced instrument panning and ghostly harmony melodies make for fine alt-country. London makes you feel good about feeling down. The images are fresh -- "cigarettes shine like stars" ("Science Industry") and "I've been laying here like a yearbook on a shelf pulled out from time to time so that you laugh at yourself" ("Mercury") -- and the chord changes are as dependably surprising as the four seasons. -- Lorne Behrman No Depression, September-October, 2001 "Just a song at twilight before I go," Sanford Arms' Ben London sings on "Mercury." The midtempo song builds to its chorus as if running uphill, telling of the end of summer and a romance. London's voice strains at the dissolution and entropy of something that had seemed certain and real only a few months before but, like the weather, has chilled. Departures and

reversals fill the lyrics on *Too Loud for the Snowman*. The cosmic cowboy that moves in waltz time on Sanford Arms' debut isn't so much a distant relative of Jimmie Dale Gilmore as a drinking buddy of Joe Pernice. Former Alcohol Funnycar leader London possesses a downy voice and a wounded delivery that convey early-morning reckonings and late-night comforts. The dozen songs are lushly crafted with idiosyncratic touches, playing as a remorse-laden song cycle with a clear-eyed observance that keeps the emotions in check. The lolling cadence and ghostly arrangements are built on Harris Thurmond's lonesome guitar, Jeff Wood's melodic bass, and Rob Dent's loopy drums. Rob Witmer's keys and accordion float through the soundscape, swelling to oceanic proportions and then ebbing back behind London's voice. Producer Tucker Martine (Modest Mouse, Bill Frisell) creates a simpatico environment for the compositions with just the right balance of space and compression to let them breathe while keeping them grounded. That's the perfect twilight for Sanford Arms to hitch hook-laden pop melodies to folk-country cadences. -- NATE LIPPENS *Uncut*, February, 2002 4 Stars - Outstanding debut from Seattle quartet. The name's only a consonant or two removed from that of the *Uncut* local, but you're hardly likely to find Sanford Arms playing the seedy bars of downtown Southwark. The four-piece are led by former Alcohol Funnycar frontman Ben London, whose songs pitch their tent somewhere in the middle of the territory staked out by Flaming Lips, Mercury Rev, Sparklehorse, and Joe Pernice. Trailing clouds of wistful glory, the album ebbs and flows on a sea of lazy cadences and ethereal arrangements. Your favorite track will change every time you hear it, so best to take alt.country fanzine No Depression's advice and treat it as one long, indivisible song cycle. A gorgeous record. -- NIGEL WILLIAMSON *The Stranger*, August 30-Sept 5, 2001 A lifetime ago (or what seems like a lifetime ago), Sanford Arms was a mostly alt-country-influenced four-piece, alternately raving and crooning, replete with the open sob of a well-placed accordion, and one of the city's most wistful-sounding bands. Theirs was a beautiful, throbbing sadness, and the band induced the same kind of ache and longing that Carissa's Wierd would claim a devoted audience with years later. Whatever happened to Sanford Arms? I'd asked myself that question so many times over the years, hoping its members hadn't grown too old or responsible to soldier on with their pretty, blue-colored sound. *Too Loud for the Snowman* is the answer to that question. Any former twang has been replaced by a mature, fully realized collection of songs that cause the breath to catch in my lungs as single lines stand out, and the strum of a guitar sends a long-lost memory sailing forth from the murky depths of my subconscious. Save for perhaps the first track, *Too Loud for the*

Snowman is a gorgeous album that, like Sanford Arms, gets better with every listen. -- KATHLEEN WILSON Amplifier, Nov - Dec 2001 Ben London, former front man for indie rock upstarts Alcohol Funnycar, has emerged with a new project of sleepy, emo-driven pop that serves as an ideal soundtrack for the band's gloomy home base of Seattle. Like winter in the Pacific Northwest, the soft, understated tapestry that makes up Sanford Arms' "Too Loud for the Snowman" takes some getting used to, but beneath the cold, rainy song structures are some unique, melodic textures and heart-felt lyrics that bring the songs to a very personal level. Fans of early Wilco and Mercury Rev will relish in the soft, yet forthright honesty of London's singer/songwriter approach and fans of emotionally inspired indie pop will find its unconventional take on song structures the next best thing to the new Built to Spill album. -- Jeff Shelton Irish Times, February 13, 2002 Four Stars With a band title that sound suspiciously like an English pub, Seattle's Sanford Arms (The name actually comes from a failed US comedy series on the late 1970s) come laden down with reference points that range from the alt.country of Wilco and the mesmeric Americana of Mercury Rev to the peachy-keen pop of Pernice Brothers and the soiled seductions of Mark Lanegan. Yet peeking out over the hill of influences is a sound that manages to be simultaneously familiar and of its own. Opening track Smolder sets the sonic tone: a dreamy soundscape with distinct, idiosyncratic touch. The rest of the tracks share equal amounts of slow motion reverie and indie rock naturalism. The warmest thing you'll find this winter this side of a hot whiskey. UK Independent, February 2002 Mixing the dreamy alt-rock soundscapes of the like of Flaming Lips with Wilco-style rustic maneuvers, Seattle's Sanford Arms create a state of melancholia, with sweet pop sensibilities shot through by harsher field recordings and lo-fi effects. A fairly soothing, yet thought provoking late night listen. Magnet, Dec/Jan, 2002 If it's too loud, you're too snowy. A little Low, a little Wheat, a little Spain, a little alt-country and a little space rock, the debut from former Alcohol Funnycar member Ben London's new group is the opulent sound of sadness and half-hidden, mellow melodies. Drum loops, accordion and keyboards flesh out the sparse guitar-arpeggio dreamscapes without becoming the center of attention. Instead, London's throaty vocals -- think a more laid-back Mark Eitzel or a somewhat happier Josh Haden -- give the downtempo numbers that mostly fill the record a smoky, romantic air... Occasionally, the sparkling music cuts through London's sadness; "Science and Industry," with its grandiose piano flourishes and drummer Rob Dent's sparse playing, is glorious without going overboard. The tracks with more spirit, such as "Red Vines" and "Permanent Wires" are barely rock at all resulting in power pop

without power. On these back-to-back tracks, London's voice rises above a hoarse whisper, making for a meatier experience and the album's centerpiece. -- David Simutis PopMatters, June 11, 2001

If you stole off into the woods at twilight in pursuit of the deepest emotions orchestrated at the unknown core of your heart, complicated by the turbulence of American society, chances are you might discover the Sanford Arms playing there. Forget grunge -- the '90s are way over, and the advent of the twenty-first century and the corporatization of the world commands a style of music that is far angrier than that dwindling musical style that Seattle has become known for. Lead singer Ben London, who writes all the music, exposes listeners to a lush and ethereal wonderland of sounds tinged with the delicate indie sensitivity of the Stone Roses, the watery sounds of Luna, and the acoustic brilliance of The Connells. I make you not -- this band will be the counter-option to The Strokes within one year. Of course, London's endeavors are not solitary. Guitarist Harris Thurmond, bass player Jeff Wood, drummer Rob Dent, and Rob Witmer (accordion, keys) combine their talents to create a symphony that not only saturates the space within any room, but transforms it into a dreamy experiment in sound and emotions. Formed by London in 1998, the band spent over three years recording its brilliant debut, *Too Loud for the Snowman* on Pattern 25 Records. A mellow soundscape in its own right, the songs are bolder than anything I have heard in this city for years. "Permanent Wires" fuses Bowie-esque vocals with a collage of spacey sounds and guitar rifts, while "Granted" is beautifully melds London's voice with fluctuating, harmonious electric and acoustic guitars. Other highlights on the album include the darkish "Science and Industry" and "Red Vine", which is nostalgic of the fab pop sensibility of Scottish band Belle and Sebastian with guitars that loudly articulate themselves. There is no doubt in my mind: Sanford Arms will put Seattle music back on the map of culture. -- - Rahul Gairola The Seattle Post-Intelligencer, October 5, 2001

...Sanford Arms, meanwhile, is eyeing a promising future of its own with *"Too Loud for the Snowman"* (Pattern 25). Led by ex-Alcohol Funnycar frontman Ben London, Sanford Arms has maintained a strong local profile that is likely to increase now that its debut is finally here. For those who prefer the wistful and dreamy company of Sparklehorse, Mercury Rev and Mark Eitzel, you have a new wonderful companion in *"Too Loud for the Snowman."* -- JOE EHRBAR The Seattle Times, October 5, 2001

Meet Ben London, reformed punker. After playing guitar and singing in a pop-punk band called Alcohol Funnycar in Seattle from 1991-97, London took a step back and decided to explore a new musical direction. "It was changing tastes," he explained, a few days ago. "I wanted to do something that had a little more space in it, to be able to

explore different moods." Three years ago, London started a band called Sanford Arms, taken from the title of a spinoff of the '70s TV show "Sanford and Son." Now, London has finally finished Sanford Arms' first album, "Too Loud for the Snowman." This Pattern 25 Records release is one of the best Seattle records of the year, expertly exploring moods such as nostalgia, longing and heartbreak. "It's a late-night/early-morning type of record, a transitional record," says London. Tucker Martine, who has worked with Modest Mouse and jazz guitarist Bill Frisell, produced "Too Loud for the Snowman," which puts a spare sound underneath London's pining vocals. Guitarist Harris Thurmond, drummer Rob Dent, keyboardist/accordion player Rob Witmer and bass player Jeff Wood join London on the album. "Tucker was definitely the sixth man of this project," says London. "I said to him, 'Let's really try to be sonically adventurous with this. ... Let's try to create music with a cinematic bent.'" -- Tom Scanlon Entertainment Today, Oct 11, 2001

Those of us who are originally from places with distinct seasons - where the end of summer actually signifies something - may be better equipped to handle Too Loud for the Snowman. The debut from Ben London's Seattle-based pop outfit is so good that it can actually make you cold. These 12 songs all seem to take place on the first night you can see your breath in the air, the last twilight you spend with a fading summer love. "I've been laying here like a yearbook on your shelf," London sings on "Mercury." "Pull out from time to time so you can laugh at yourself." The dreamily pensive guitars build toward a rousing climax as the mercury keeps falling and falling. This is the best song on a strong album; in fact, it's one of the best-crafted pop songs of the year. London is the sole songwriter on the album, and his songs are continually smarter than just about anything else that's out there. The lyrics actually feel like you haven't heard them a million times before, and he continually hones in on sharp imagery. Sanford Arms formed three years ago - composed of veterans from the Seattle indie scene - yet this is their first album together. The patience shows. In terms of mood, the album lingers somewhere near Coldplay's Parachutes. While Snowman may not provoke the same commercial clamoring, it is actually the better of the two albums. London sidesteps mopiness, even if his heart is being broken, and the Sanford sound is both fully rooted and polished. "These days are the hardest," starts "Ohio Summers Ends." London's wistful vocals float over the subtle string arrangement and Rob Dent's lazy cadence. "The silence is uncomfortable for someone who likes to speak." And you know it hurts - you've been hurt like this before - and yet you can't help wanting to be back there again. -- Adam McKibbin Seattle Weekly, Oct, 4-11, 2001

Led by Alcohol Funnycar's frontman, Ben London, this local outfit splits their time between spacey fuzz

and lonely, ghost-town twang. By singling out individual notes and holding on to them for long enough to cause a real stir-and then quickly allowing them to marry London's sweet vocal strains-guitarist Harris Thurmond (Hammerbox, Orbiter) evokes a wonderfully tempered My Bloody Valentine. (And I, for one, always thought MBV could use some tempering.) Comparisons to Sparklehorse, Knife in the Water, and Damian Jurado work, too-check out the new Too Loud for the Snowman and hear for yourself. -- Laura Learmonth Yeah Yeah Yeah, December, 2001 Really really solid slo-core. Imagine if J. Mascis could sing. Which means it sounds a bit like Lou Barlow. Strong production and performances. Recommended to fans of aforementioned artists. Tape Op, November-December, 2001 I confess -- here's another occasional Tape Op contributor, Ben London from Seattle. He used to be in a flat-out rock band called Alcohol Funnycar, and here collaborates with his bandmates to create a moodier, more personal journey. Tucker Martine produced, engineered and mixed this record on 16-track 2"at his own Flora Ave. Studio and Avast. It's a total ear treat, with sounds of instruments changing as the songs progress, floating Mellotron-ish keys, echoey guitars, roomy drums, drum machines, breathy vocals and more. There a freedom to this recording, like nothing had to sound the same track to track and anything goes with tracking and mixing -- and this is healthy and helps the album keep moving along and stay interesting. Plus I think "Mercury" is one of the best pop tunes I've heard in a while. --Larry Crane Swizzlestick, Oct 1, 2001 The members of this band spent time in early '90s Seattle rock bands, though none of them really achieved the successes of their grungy counterparts. Now, a few years later and a whole lot wiser, Sanford Arms has replaced the pop-rock-punk sounds of their past with a sobering and mature sound not unlike the Pernice Brothers, Mark Lanegan, or even the Red House Painters. Led by ex-Alcohol Funnycar frontman Ben London, Sanford Arms originally started out as an alt.country band before dropping the twang and embracing the sounds of dreamy guitars (as played by ex-Hammerbox guitarist Harris Thurmond). Bassist Jeff Wood (ex-Best Kissers in the World) lays down subtle bass lines, never intruding or calling attention, yet providing the vital rhythm that keeps the Sanford Arms heart beating. London's desperate vocals add credence to the songs that reflect growing up and maturing. Perhaps London says all that needs to be said on the very first line of the first track of the album ("Smolder"): "Today, I feel older / Unlike a birthday whose candle smolders / Today, I feel older / That is all." -- Chip Midnight KEXP 90.3 FM, September, 2001 The debut album from this Seattle band led by Ben London (ex-Alcohol Funnycar) and also featuring Harris Thurman (ex-Hammerbox, Orbiter) and Jeff Wood (Orbiter). With a vocal style

similar to Richard Buckner and a sound close to Wilco, this is a strong offering. -- JOHN RICHARDS In Music We Trust, August 2001 Former Alcohol Funnycar front man Ben London's latest project, Sanford Arms creates a pop masterpiece with Too Loud For The Snowman, an album cold as winter, as windy as fall, but as hopeful and promising as spring. Worn, almost defeated vocals tell the tired tale of life with ease, pulling you up to the table for some hot chocolate as it spills the stories that fill its mind. Light percussion sprinkled with raindrop bass and mood setting guitars, the light, intricate creations of Sanford Arms are instantly warming, allowing you to access them from the get go. This is brilliant pop music with charm, warm and enduring, though slightly lo-fi and rooted in indie rock. The hooks are ever so subtle, but there. And the lyrics are well written, worth repeating as you sing along. I'll give this CD an A+. -- Alex Steininger (inmusicwetrust.com/) Splendid, August 27, 2001 Sanford Arms, who hail from the slightly faded indie-music mecca of Seattle, have arranged twelve bittersweet pop songs that will touch you without being too self-indulgent or loud. Led by former Alcohol Funnycar driver Ben London, the group stands on the border of emo-land, but is a tad less extreme than most bands of that genre. While this is bound to frustrate some listeners, it gives the music a pleasantly tucked-in feel; instead of opting for the heart-piercing screams favored by 764-Hero or an all-too-heavy chord like Sunny Day Real Estate, Sanford Arms keep their songs and steady and melodic. Many of these songs, particularly from the album's first half, feature slow and simple background music, led by London's dreamy, sometimes sighing voice. He sings of those days and nights when you feel that something's wrong, or at least a little bit "off", but you can't really tell what it is that's bothering you. Take, for example, this lyric from "Ohio Summer's End": "The silence is uncomfortable, for someone who likes to speak... 3:00 in the morning, or 3:00 in the afternoon, I felt like someone else." Consider also this snippet from the opener, "Smolder": "Today I feel older, I'm like a birthday whose candles smolder..." They're speculations, self-analytical; after a couple of "I shoulda"s and "I just"s, London speaks to the listener and -- especially in "Permanent Wires" -- seems to be giving advice in a casual conversation: "Don't ya ever let it show." The songs speed up a bit at the disc's midpoint, then slow down for a sedate conclusion. The album ends with "The Grand Escape", in which all of London's songwriting elements come together perfectly. As if lost in thought, London ends every line of the song's final verse with "Away, away." There's a brief, explosive guitar solo, and then the album fades out, leaving you wanting more. Lots more. -- Josh Kazman Miles of Music, August 2001

MOM STAFFERS' CURRENT INFATUATIONS From Seattle comes a slab of dreamy indie-pop that hints

of Red House Painters, Mercury Rev, or perhaps Mark Lanegan seduced by the sequencer instead of whiskey and cigarettes. The perfect soundtrack for those pre-sunup hours adrift in the Puget Sound. -- Neal Weiss All Music Guide, August 21, 2001 Downbeat soundscapes, minimal-but-jangley guitar work and breathy vocals characterize this debut album from Sanford Arms. Frontman Ben London sits back and reflects on modernist discomfort, allowing for some cautionary feedback on some of the albums more aggressive, if not overtly passionate, tracks like "Red Vine" and "Permanent Wires". On most of the songs he adds atmospheric keyboards that give the feel of a melancholic coalition between resign and confrontation. The albums stronger tracks, like "Science and Industry", "Permanent Wires", and "Brass Ring" (which boasts harmonic overtones by Stephanie Wicker) sinuate through pop melodies that have been delicately seasoned with emo-core sensibilities and field recordings by sound engineer Tucker Martine (Bill Frisell and Vinicious Cantuaria). While the tracks can at times seem a bit repetitive, London can't be faulted for his careful chord construction and knack for the understated hook. -- Travis Drageset Seattle Magazine, September, 2001 Sanford Arms first caught my attention in 1998. I was drinking a beer at the Breakroom on Capitol Hill, where bands tend to be loud; the patrons, tough and chic. So I was surprised when a group of gentle-looking guys got on stage - one with an accordion, no less - exuding a calm focused energy. These weren't flutists-in-Birkenstocks types- but more like dreamy heartbreakers in worn sweaters with locks of hair coyly falling in their eyes. Turns out that these guys are seasoned veterans of Seattle's rock scene who have banded together to explore their more introspective sides. Fronted by Ben London (Alcohol Funnycar, St. Bushmill's Choir) and supported by Harris Thurmond (Hammerbox, Orbiter) and Jeff Wood (Gerald Collier) -- the band takes a collective deep breath and exhales a sweet, sunset sigh. I left that night humming their tunes and have had my eye out for a CD ever since. Three years later, the long-awaited album, is finally here. Spacey, noodley guitar, the true sounds of piano and hints of accordion together give Too Loud for the Snowman the stirring and dream-like feel of a hot-air balloon ride. Play this album when you are falling in love - or mending a broken heart. --

MOLLIA JENSEN

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