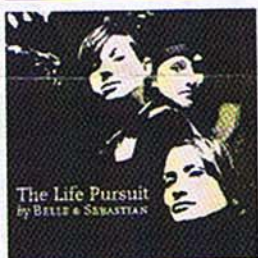


said "it's folk music, because it's for folks?"). With the variety of acts that play major folk festivals each summer, it seems that virtually anybody might be considered a folk musician. So yeah, that fits. It just doesn't help our understanding.

Let's just say "to hell with the labels." If you're a musical vagabond, someone who's tastes are as hard to categorize as the Avett Brothers' music, then *Four Thieves Gone* might be just what you're looking for. Indie rockers with an urge to unplug and roots music fans looking to push the envelope should take note. | **Al Kunz**

BELLE & SEBASTIAN
THE LIFE PURSUIT (MATADOR)



RYI: The Essex Green, Sondre Lerche, The Reindeer Section

Fans of the rabidly passionate stripe don't forgive change easily.

Those who swoon with the release of every new B-side from the Scottish pop collective Belle & Sebastian are fans of such a persuasion: obsessive,

dedicated, and almost palpably addicted to the six records, one DVD, countless concerts, and few dozen singles released by Stuart Murdoch and company. The Belle & Sebastian brand was, until 2003, known for its quiet, fey reliability—ample doses of twee guaranteed.

After stumbling with their fifth album—2000's *Fold Your Hands Child, You Walk Like a Peasant*, Murdoch and his crew took stock and decided to alter their approach. Teaming up with über-producer Trevor Horn, Belle & Sebastian dropped *Dear Catastrophe Waitress* in 2003, stunning the faithful with punchy horns, galloping beats, and—horror of horrors—not too much navel-gazing.

This break with the past earned the previously under-the-radar band a few new fans, as well as a seeming critical re-examination; those who might've previously dismissed Belle & Sebastian as lightweight throwaways reevaluated that opinion in light of the startlingly vivid work found on *Dear Catastrophe Waitress*.

While that record was an (arguably) much-needed shock to the system, longtime fans felt that it strayed too far from what made Belle & Sebastian so compelling in the first place: Murdoch's devastating wit, laced through dense compositions, making for tight, focused collections of sigh-inducing pop songs. Jagged, robust, and shockingly propulsive, the songs on *Dear Catastrophe Waitress* were far afield from the tentative days of *Tigermilk*.

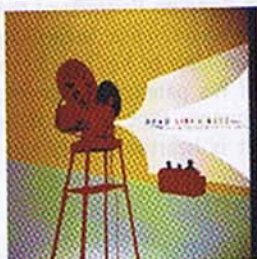
The Life Pursuit, Belle & Sebastian's seventh full-length record, restores the balance,

leavening the more punchy tracks with tunes that could've easily been outtakes from *If You're Feeling Sinister*: "Funny Little Frog," the album's first single, even goes so far as to lyrically reference "The State I Am In." Clearly, Murdoch's reached a sort of peace with his creative duality, since not only does he display a dazzling deftness that's been missing since *The Boy With the Arab Strap*, but he's reached out, including other members of the group in the songwriting process. As a result, though there are a few flubs, *The Life Pursuit* is easily the band's most cohesive and consistently enjoyable effort since their 1996 debut.

Dabbling in glam ("White Collar Boy"), jangle-pop ("The Blues Are Still Blue"), and moody compositions that musically echo "Rollercoaster" from the *Arab Strap* album ("Dress Up in You"). Belle & Sebastian sound like a band accepting itself, settling into its own skin. Full of verve and limited by nothing, it's thrilling to hear a group so beloved as this taking risks, reigniting its passions, and pushing its sound in fresh directions.

The Life Pursuit is the sound of confidence, a brash, diverse effort that may alienate the diehards, but will most certainly accrue scads of new converts. | **Preston Jones**

HEAD LIKE A KITE | RANDOM PORTRAITS
OF THE HOME MOVIE (PATTERN 25)



RYI: Air, Four Tet

For listeners seeking a novel idea in album form, look no further than Head Like a Kite's *Random Portraits of the Home Movie*, a dreamlike collection of blips and whirs that

comprises a soundtrack for both life at present, and life as we remember it. Having excavated his family's home movies on Super 8 film, Sushirobo guitarist Dave Einmo has created an anthology of soundscapes to accompany the reels of his childhood, and the result is a stirring compilation of sometimes eerie, oftentimes whimsical tracks that pulse to the very beat of our existence.

To accomplish such an epic task, Einmo enlists the aid of many familiar musical guests, including members of Smoosh, the Posies, Crooked Fingers, Preston School of Industry, and of course, Sushirobo. The diverse repertoire of contributors reflects the eclectic nature of the album itself, as the tracks distill trip-hop into ambient sounds, electronica into rock, and industrial noise into everyday sound loops. Even the hum of a flickering film reel weaves its way throughout, reminding us that we are

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listening to a soundtrack of sorts, meant to underscore the steady hum of life as it appears on home video. The track lengths drive this notion home, as each song spans no longer than two to three minutes—just the amount of time that a standard Super 8 reel runs.

Most of the tracks are instrumental numbers, packing in a candy store of aural treats that dazzle and fizz like Pop Rocks for the ears. These are splendid and wholly enthralling, but if the listener is more in the mood for a mix tape-friendly song, the tracks that feature guest singers are the most coherent. Einmo's collaboration with Smoosh's Asya on "Noisy at the Circus" is the standout among those that sound more like radio singles, with Asya's breathy vocals floating over a catchy pop hook.

However, it is the last, purely instrumental track that is most memorable, leaving the listener with an enduring impression as the album slowly fades out. It is here that Einmo truly drives home his ode to life past and present, bridging the gap between personal experience and universal understanding. Entitled "Scenes From the World Trade Center 1979," the final track is a requiem for the loss of what once was, an ambient elegy of solemn beauty that addresses both Einmo's past and that of a nation. It is in this way, on this last track and throughout, that *Random Portraits of the Home Movie* maintains its brilliance. In digging up the cobwebbed film reels of his past from the dusty recesses of his parents' basement, Einmo speaks to a history that is not only familial, but one that is heartbreakingly universal.