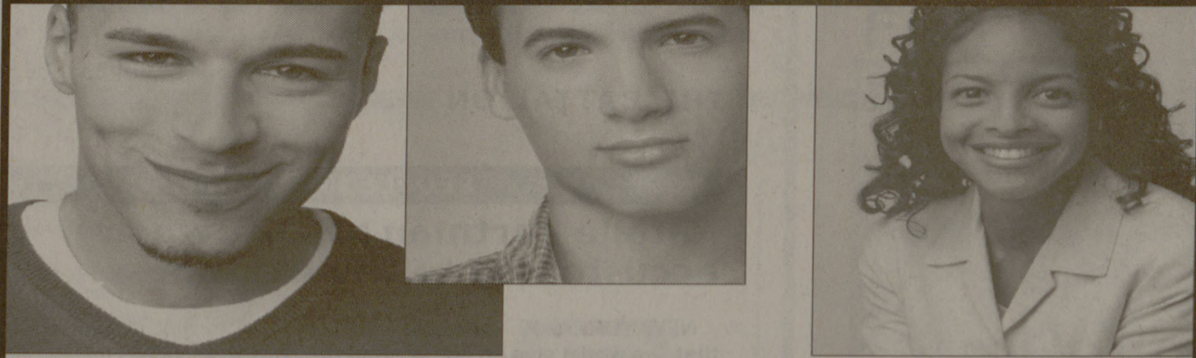


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VOLUME CONTROL

JJ72
Lakota/Columbia Records

It takes several minutes for the human eye to adapt to a dark room. Similarly, it may take listeners a moment to adjust to the wailing melancholic cries of JJ72's lead vocalist, Mark Greaney. Although some listeners may consider his voice whiny, Greaney's sorrowful and echoic skill is the perfect instrument to supplement lyrics of the same qualities. But the longing and sometimes cynical subjects of JJ72's sobering melodies should not discourage listeners. Even though verses alluding to death and mourning may be disheartening and lyrics like "torrential seas dragged me to my knees bleeding" may be unsettling, the poetry of songs like "Undercover Angel" and "Improv" evoke introspection and reflection.

Greaney's voice, which at times resembles the banshee-like wails from rock bands of old, is only one musical facet that distinguishes the group.

He also plays lead guitar, and along with bassist Hilary Woods and drummer Fergal Matthews, there is an entourage of violists, violinists and cellists who implement classical capacities in several songs, namely "Oxygen" and "Willow." Both songs employ spiritual expressions and metaphors like "true love has no simplicity/Gods our world you and I" and "by the bright leaves, the garden of my savior."

Of course lyrics like "dreams of dying mother and "decaying as I am/I need not some promised land" may appear a sharp contrast to the serenity of other lyrics that permeate the album but JJ72's self-titled LP is far from inconsistent. From "October Swimmer" to its finale "Burnt Bee," JJ72 breathes both musical harmony and lyrical poeticism. (Grade: B+)

—Matt Pat

Sly Letter
Theme of Six
Bayou City Music

The unique styles of lead singers Ryan Slie and Sean Smith and the sounds of different instruments are what make Sly Letter original. With the release of its second CD, *Theme of Six*, by Sound Arts Recording Studio, the band continues to grow in the number of fans as well as musical performance.

The CD's first track, "Beside Me," is a great start. It is energetic and catchy — a main theme throughout the album that keeps the listener hooked. The CD ends with "We All Fall Down," a song that leaves listeners begging for more, because it is just as catchy as the first track.

The songs on *Theme of Six* fit together well, with a mixture of high-energy songs such as "Still the Same," as well as slower, more emotional songs such as "The Promise" and "Mercury."

The lyrics remain strong throughout the pieces and are held together by refreshing beats. The different instruments of Sly Letter mesh well with the distinct voices of the vocalists. The mandolin also is a great aspect of the band and Mark McDavid does an amazing job playing the unique instrument, and it is always easy to pinpoint the sound of the mandolin in each song.

The name of the album fits the band, as Sly Letter is composed of a six-piece lineup, each person contributing a significant amount to what makes the CD worthwhile. The CD release of *Theme of Six* will be held at The Tap, Wednesday, April 24.

(Grade: A+)

—Crystal Dobson

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