

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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A new Day, a new season

Howie Day rocks up the charts with his second album, 'Stop All the World Now'

By Lauren Smith
THE BATTALION

Howie Day, a 22-year-old songwriter from Bangor, Maine, said his music smells like London in May and like Maine in January. This metaphor is due in part to the fact that he wrote all of his songs for his sophomore release "Stop All the World Now" in his Maine apartment and recorded 11 songs for the album in London.

"I breathe strong sort of images of seasons, which is pretty weird. It probably comes from being from Maine, and the name of this record was almost 'Winter's Summer,' as in the winter owns the summer," Day said. "A lot depends on where I recorded the song, some might remind me of London in May and sometimes it goes back to where I actually wrote the song."

No stranger to life on the road, Day has opened for Tori Amos, Jack Johnson, Sting and John Mayer, and he is currently touring the country as a headliner for the first time. Day has been a solo artist for the past six years and is playing with a band for the first time.

Day's live shows pre-band accompaniment were different than the typical acoustic sets of a man and his guitar, as he pushed norms by using his feet to push pedals and scratching the lower strings for extra percussion beats.

"I adjusted to playing with a band quicker than I thought I would," Day said. "I think it is more difficult to go from having a band to being a solo artist. Although the transition was very different, there is now just more sound behind what I was already doing."

Day explores love, love lost and regret in his introspective lyrics, which makes him seem vulnerable as he shares his mixed emotions about getting older. Day said it is nice to have two albums and an EP full of material because his catalog of what he can play each night has tripled in size.

Day's first CD, "Australia," was independently released in 2000 and was recorded in 1999 in a Boston studio with funds from his own bank account. By word of mouth and a little bit of Napster sampling, his album sold 30,000 copies. He caught the eyes of Epic Records executives, signed Day and started distributing the album, which has now sold more than 125,000 copies.

As Day released his first true major label debut, he said he felt a little older and a little wiser. Though Day could go back and work on

both of his albums for another year, he said he feels pleased with the way his labor in London turned out.

Day relates making a record to doing a painting, because there could always be more paint on a painting, and it could always be better.

"The reality is that it is just a snapshot of a moment in time of where you are as an artist, and you have to kind of know the point where it is time to stop painting," Day said. "You are always going to want to go back and paint more, but you have to stick it in the back of your mind and remember what you want to do differently and do that on the next one, and then you can have that progression as an artist, and people want to see that."

At age 15, Day started playing gigs at bars and coffee shops near his Maine home and latched on to the University of Maine, where the college students in the area became his audience. When he was a high school student, Day said he was into the same things as the college kids, and he became more serious about his writing at 17.

Charlotte Cauwe, a senior communications major, recently caught one of Day's shows in Austin, one of his three stops in Texas, and said he was everything live that she expected him to be.

"I feel like he never plays the same song twice," Cauwe said. "He is constantly bringing something new to his fans. His songs are fresh, and his lyrics truly strike a chord in me."

When Day returned from touring with Amos in Frankfurt, Germany, he moved back to his old apartment in Maine and devoted all of his time to writing. For "Stop All the World Now," Day wrote in the dead of winter and in the summer months.

"I felt like there was a real dynamic between the summer songs and the winter songs," Day said. "I think about records that I get into sort of in the winter time, and I can listen to them several years later and it reminds me of that winter, so I think there is a really strong time period and seasonal thing that goes with songs."

As Day has risen from coffee-shop crooner to MTV star and head-



COURTESY OF EPIC RECORDS

Howie Day made three Texas stops on his national tour last weekend in Houston, Austin and Dallas.

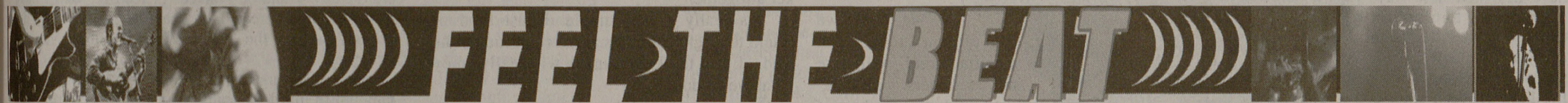
liner of an international tour, he has been aided in his efforts by devoted fans and members of the Howie Day Rep program, which includes 5,000 reps, who are mostly college students.

Though Day is not a supporter of file sharing, he said Napster came at a good time for him.

"I was pretty much unknown, playing really far away from home, and it helped me build a core audience," Day said.

James Gardner, a student at Blinn Junior College, said he discovered Day through Napster.

"I was actually downloading some John Mayer stuff, and Howie played some shows with him," Gardner said. "So I gave him a listen and have been hooked ever since."



Dressy Bessy
Dressy Bessy
Kindercore Records

Pop music should be fun. It should bounce through a CD with melodies you can't help singing out loud in your car, even in traffic. There's something about a great pop record that makes you just not care that it is put out by a band called Dressy Bessy.

Dressy Bessy's self-titled third album works so hard to get there and almost makes it. That could be its biggest problem, because just as great pop can transcend prejudices, bad pop can reinforce a sincere hatred for bubble gum-flavored garbage.

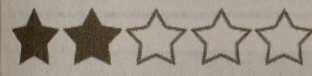
Dressy Bessy is a neo-pop band out of Denver whose third album is, at best, the good kind of pop that warrants a listen. Lead singer Tammy Ealom coos thinly over an abundance of oddly powerful three-chord songs, but the charm eventually runs lean.

Where a repetitiveness of tempo and style is the album's weak point — especially over two discs — Ealom is the definitive strength of the band. Her notorious knack for bringing the crowd into the vigorous live showspills over into this CD.

While Dressy Bessy comes across as fun and energetic, it is not always interesting. Ealom's well-crafted lyrics, often intimate portraits of the female psyche lost in the angry growl of bands such as Kittie or the plastic cutout whisper of Britney Spears, are repeatedly overshadowed by bland, cyclic songs.

In "This May Hurt (a little)," Ealom opens a window into notions seldom expressed in today's music with the line "Cross-legged in the kitchen then we'd giggle cry and rub our eyes," but it shuts just as quickly with another dull chord progression and the monotonous hi-hat and listeners are left looking in.

In the end, the great lyrics and initial hooks are not enough to stay with you or save what could have been a commendable pop record. If the same craft that was used for the lyrics was applied to the music, this album would be better than average.



-- Will Knous

Chris Knight
The Jealous Kind
Dualtone Records

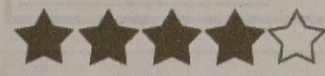
Chris Knight's third release takes the soulful resonance of his Kentucky home and stirs in the darkness of stories that come down out of the mountains and find their way on to this rough and truthful album. The record sounds like a cold day spent inside, and is all the better for it. Knight says his songs are without compromise, that there is no pretense. His bare melodies and honest lyrics are the sharpest way to transcend the common complaint of country music's triteness. In "A Train Not Running," a bankrupt town is illustrated by the absence of the shipping train at the closed coal mine; with "Devil Behind the Wheel," Knight's soul rides shotgun while the "the devil's behind the wheel straight downhill ... in a long black Coupe Deville."

Knight's southern gothic style, as it unfolds, affecting stories in a way that draws a reaction other than scorn from a listener, is an art few have mastered. Knight's music is full of powerful visions that seem broken off a whole rather than shaped by studio technicians. The rough edges are there — in Knight's voice, and the acoustic guitars, and they never wear down.

Knight draws on methods tested by many Texas Country artists. Creating substance in the form of thoughtful lyrics and songs built around flawed people are something mainstream country music has been sorely lacking for too many years, and something at which Knight is getting better.

Singer-songwriters are often considered the truest musicians today, which can cause them to be judged a little more harshly. Sometimes the reworking of something that's been done before turns out well; sometimes it is better than the original. Knight's third revision of classic country music surpasses attempts by most other artists. Knight stands up to any criticism with individual strength and this remarkable record.

This is a great album, worth more than \$15. Knight is still young, so a comparison alongside the great singer-songwriters is something that is not possible just yet. Knight works hard at it though — there's a blue collar on this record.



-- Will Knous

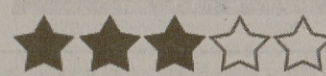
Jason Boland and The Stragglers
Truckstop Diaries
Tenkiller Records

Jason Boland & the Stragglers tries to buck the trend of the sophomore jinx with the release of its second album, "Truckstop Diaries," and has surpassed its initial attempt in terms of quality of songs and music.

Originally released in 2001, Jason Boland & the Stragglers made its money on this album by telling believable stories over simple but not simplistic melodies. Boland soulfully croons about the lost loves of his life and the roads he has to run just like all the other routinely mocked country artists. However, Boland defies convention — changing perspectives of even the better times with lines such as "lying ain't nothing but 'falling with style.'" Instead of whining into a whiskey bottle, along with what seems like everyone else, about his unfound love, he makes his confession to St. Valentine himself in "St. Valentine." It is this sly reversion of convention in its music that makes Jason Boland & the Stragglers one of the premier bands traveling the South in the burgeoning Texas music scene.

The album can be inconsistent. The problem lies where the gems are interrupted rudely by fillers — songs seemingly written by the band the day before the album was to be released — disappointments such as "Mexican Holiday," a middling attempt to emulate the Tejano sound that can be seen finely executed by Robert Earl Keen, but are best left alone by Boland. But there are enough terrific songs on this album to warrant purchase. "Traveling Jones" rolls on sweetly like the Texas highways it alludes to. Jeremy Watkins' double duty solos on the harmonica and fiddle convey the air of restlessness that the song intones. The mid-tempo, radio-friendly sound of this first single propelled it all the way to number eleven on the Texas country charts.

Overall, the good far outweighs any bad. Tuneful dobro slides, heartfelt sentiments and incisive lyrics make up one of the best country albums in recent years. Take another look at it.



-- Will Knous

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