

Califone

Quicksand/Cradlesnakes (Thrill Jockey)

Duct tape coin piano? Slit gong? Fretless banjo? Left to its own devices, the Califone coterie does, in fact, transform these found—or hard-to-find—objects, into tried-and-true instruments. This alternating lineup of Red Red Meat alumni and friends, digs deep into the annals of American music, carving out sounds that resonate with whispered pulses of rock, blues, country and folk—similar to what Can did 30 years ago. Buzzing with wafer-thin kinetics, this sublime sophomore record is an essential lesson in the richness of resourcefulness. **Kurt Orzeck**



MIRA CALIX

Skimskitta (Warp)

A great deal of electronic music's most prodigious wank is produced by men, who are, quite simply, prone to wank. Mira Calix—Chantal Passamonte to her friends—gives us the superior sex's version of electro-prog, and there's an instantly recognizable exquisiteness and fragility that the boys seem rarely capable of. From the clattering eeriness of "savanna," to "sixnot6"'s bizarre, percussive evocations of nature, to the classical strains of "shadenfreude," *Skimskitta* is virtually unclassifiable and consistently astonishing. On "distracted2" and "you open always," in fact, she achieves the extraordinary: utterly heart-rending ambient music. Truly brilliant. Sorry, boys. **Ken Scrudato**

Echoboy

Giraffe (Mute)

Echoboy, aka Richard Warren, and producer FLOOD (U2, NIN, Depeche Mode, Smashing Pumpkins), ride the flaming highwire that link the worlds of rock and electronic. "Automatic Eyes," and "Good on TV," are ass-flogging buzz bombs armored with bitter-sweet paranoia—the Jesus and Mary Chain meets Radiohead. "High Speed in Love," is a deeply sinister romantic ode that nods to Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*. *Giraffe* is the very definition of a modern album, exuding fear and demanding escape from cubicle life. It takes place secretly in the dark hours of a nameless city. Structurally, *Giraffe* is a pop masterpiece composed of simple elements, both digital and electric, elaborately woven into a theorem of fuse-blowing complexity. **Mark von Pfeiffer**

Beans

Tomorrow Right Now (Warp)

Like a relic of Hip Hop future's-past, Beans—everyone's favorite Mohican-wearing Culture Renegade and former AntiPop MC—delivers us his starkly frenetic, robotic (and frankly genius) rendering of *Tomorrow Right Now*. Approximately early 80's New York (under attack from Space Invaders (the Atari game, that is), Beans spits tales of inflated egos, self-delusion and caustic insight over an icy AfroFuturist strut not unlike a shotgun beat-box staccato of Suicide, Konk, Ramm:Ell:Zee and Pan Sonic. In other words: The Shit is FRESH.

Alexis Georgopoulos

Daniel Johnston

Fear Yourself (Gammon Records)

The fledgling Gammon Records have one-upped their random roster with Daniel Johnston's best album to date. On his umpteenth full-length, the troubled troubadour's infamous kook-rock songs soar above a bubbling backdrop of studio sorcery, courtesy of Sparklehorse's Mark Linkous. The CD begins like a scratchy Gabby Pahinui record, with allocated ukulele strumming in monophonic sound transmission. All this, before the production unfolds to reveal a panoramic soundscape of enveloping static, sweeping string arrangements, dramatic piano and Johnston's lysergic blood on the tracks. **Eric Shea**

You Can Never Go Fast Enough

Various Artists (Runt Records)

Sure, it's a tribute album, but that doesn't mean you have to brave off-kilter rewrites and tempo-shifting takes on your favorite songs. No, this is a tribute to a film, Monte Hellman's great existential 1971 road film, *Two Lane Blacktop*. Using bleak, road-weary tracks that run from acoustic drones courtesy of folk legends like Sandy Bull and Leadbelly to dusty, bleary-eyed meditations provided by Wilco and Sonic Youth, this maybe the first movie-related album since *Paris Texas* to sum up the film better than the film can. **Jon Pruett**

