



Guero 'Beck'ons With Allure

MICHEAL MONTESANO
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Beck is incomparable to any other artist, therefore Guero can only be evaluated with comparison to previous albums. Guero is a comprehensive reintroduction to all of Beck's successful sounds throughout his panoptic career.

Hell Yes and Que Onda Guero remind one of Midnight Vultures with their funky simplified beat and quirky non sequitrous sounds. It reminds me that hip-hop, with its eclectic sampling techniques, is what modernism is to poetry with its equally fragmented, global voice. Beck is unequalled in modern music with his seamless unification of mediums in a symbiotic intermingling of cultural genres. Amid Beck's eclectic musical skills, he registers on Guero with 15 different instrumental credits, including: vocals, bass, slide & acoustic guitars, programming, string collaborator, tambourines, harmonica, vocorder, percussion and piano. Only the Beastie Boys can be credited with posing any threat to his now unparalleled position as popular music's only current dilettante. But Beck realizes this and

pays Beasties homage by sampling their "So Watchu Want" in his Beastie-esque track E-Pro. E-pro's got the pop flavored hooks we crave vis-a-vis his vocal sighs that float up in high octaves as the immobile beast of a bass riff recoils in the symmetric loop. Que Onda Guero pays a belated Beastie tribute with Beck's funky hooks and simple drumline that's intricately layered with outside effects like a moaning trombone.

Girl is a perfect beachside ode that pays appropriate tribute to Brian Wilson with the song's fluent backup vocals and Wilson's signature chord progression. The tune begins with a digital precursor to Girl's (as well as most of the album's) simple rhythm that just doesn't encapsulate everything this song (and the album) has to offer. Girl might be my personal pick for best song of the album, but it's so hard to choose on this well-rounded album, similar to his previous opus Odelay. Lines like "And I know I'm gonna steal her eye" display the confidence necessary to catch a summertime

fling. But these lyrics are infused with Beck's peculiar personality, with images like "And I know I'm gonna make her die, take her where the soul belongs."

He delivers another fatalistic refrain in the track Earthquake Weather, this time with its constipated cadence, "I push, I pull, the days, go slow, into, a void, we filled, with death, and noise, that laughs, falls off, their maps..."



Beck's New Album cover

He continues to assert a fatal optimism that some mistake as depressing (common with Radiohead). However, it's just a rational reckoning with death, a subject that most people struggle with and artists feel driven to push the point home. Instead of depressing, Earthquake's lyrics (accompanied

throughout the album) express the natural progression from wallowing Existential proclivities. Here, in Broken Drum, he consoles a fatalist listener by suggesting life is only worth what we make of it, "One by one/ we'll shoot our guns/ we'll have fun/ don't ever doubt it." Farewell Ride continues Beck's recognition of his and our mortality. He confronts the issue through a nostalgic lens of the gritty harshness of the American west, "Carrying me to my burying ground some may say this might be your last farewell ride."

To put this review in perspective, it is just a first glance interpretation of lyrics and Beck's musical progression. There are far too many noteworthy tidbits that I've cut for brevity's sake, on this record to encapsulate within an article. Guero is not as much an artistic album moving forward thru experimentation as Sea Change or Midnight Vultures were, it is simply a sweeping reassertion of his multifarious complex sounds. Frankly, Beck's sound is all-encompassing, almost egalitarian. Just a shame our money-hungry music industry (that we're a part of as fans) produces very few such musical peers.

Too Much Gas, Too Little Reality

LISA HAGOPIAN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

It used to be that in order for one to achieve a successful career in television, a considerable amount of talent was necessary. But that was then and what is "now" is an era where a critical requirement for getting on TV is to be wealthy. Numerous television shows have surfaced that base their entertainment on not only the life of the rich but increasingly on their snob-

by and often, beautiful offspring. Heiresses and rich socialites like Paris Hilton, Nicole Richie, and "Rich Girls" Ally and Jamie all have achieved television stardom solely due to the reputations of their parents and the breadth of their bank accounts.

A prime example of such celebrity is the E! show *Gastineau Girls*. Chronicling the lives of Lisa and Brittany Gastineau, a mother and daughter pair who achieved their fame by being the wife and daughter of former New York Jets' star Mark Gastineau. Lisa's sizable divorce settlement is the sole source of their fortune. The two women now have a television show that is based on their rich lifestyle and the drama that coincides with their snob mentality. The latest episode was focused around the issue of Brittany's desire to be a model and her lack of work ethic. Lisa's connections with a long time friend allowed Brittany to star in a photo shoot but Brittany's constant complaining about the hardness and unfair conditions of the "work" made the shoot torturous.

It would be one thing if this show used the lifestyle of these women to relay some sort of useful message, to educate the public or even dis-

play the conscientious use of money. However, none of the above is prevalent in this show. If anything, it portrays a false stereotypic image of rich women and women in general. As Brittany admitted herself with considerable pride, "This is the first time I ever had to work for anything." At 22 years old, Brittany has just experienced her first job and that in modeling. By that age, most people have had at least than one part time job and the lucky ones are anticipating their college graduation where they will then enter the work force at a full time level. Brittany Gastineau, on the other hand, depends on her mother to protect her from the "dirty" side of life like work or the need to make money, and her father's



The Gastineau Pair

money to maintain her image. As for her mother, Lisa is an overgrown cross between a valley girl cheerleader and destitute society belle. Helping to extend the stereotype but to older women, Lisa not only helps to explain Brittany's mentality but supports the image of aging socialite goldiggers who simply marry for money. Lisa stated in the most recent episode, "Getting married is about a lifestyle," implying that the basis of marriage is to acquire a more socialite lifestyle.

Though these television shows are degrading and allow untalented, wealthy socialites to achieve celebrity fame, the show itself succeeds because we the public (sadly) are entertained by their obnoxious behavior. It could be because we live vicariously through their unrealistic and extravagant lifestyles or because it makes us feel better about ourselves after watching such deplorable behavior. Whatever the reason, as long as we watch, these shows will still be produced and the false celebrity continue.

Retrospective: Neutral Milk Hotel

PETER ALEKSA
NATIONAL COLLEGE NEWS

Neutral Milk Hotel was an indie-rock band from the mid-90s. The product of the singular genius of Jeff Mangum, and recorded with the help of an ensemble of instrumentalists, the band produced only two albums. The short lived Neutral Milk Hotel created a sound that was an emotional blend of folk, punk, instrumental, electronica, and noise-rock that continues to be highly influential today, as seen in neo-folk and emo bands such as Bright Eyes, Death Cab for Cutie, Iron and Wine, and Modest Mouse as well as abstract experimentalists and noise rockers such as the Mars Volta and Godspeed You! Black Emperor.

Every memorable band has one record that arguably stands out among their body of work as their defining moment, the height of their artistic genius; Weezer's Blue Album, Radiohead's Kid A, The Cure's Disintegration, etcetera. Neutral Milk's masterpiece is 1998's *In the Aeroplane Over the Sea*. This album is one in which songs and styles are masterfully blurred together into one long dreamlike sequence that possesses a certain oblique beauty; at the same time all together incomprehensible and yet somehow familiar. On display is a strong sense of melody and harmony, but also experimental splashes of dissonant atonal passages, white noise, and recorded sounds. Adding to the surreal quality of the album is the employment of instrumentation that includes the ubiquitous—acoustic guitar, drums, trombone—as well as more obscure instruments like the accordion, the flugelhorn, and the truly bizarre zanzinthiphone. This can

at times lend a very alien feel to the work that contrasts nicely with its familiar folk and pop elements. Though perhaps the most striking instrument featured on the album is Mangum's melancholy voice; sometimes poised and beautiful, other times a passionate overextended warble reminiscent of Bob Dylan.

The album's lyrics compose surrealist sketches that drop the reader into the imaginary world in Mangum's head like Alice through the looking glass. Lyrical passages such as, "The only girl I've ever loved/was born with roses in her eyes/but then they buried her alive/one evening 1945/with just her sister at her side/and only



Neutral Milk Hotel's Album Cover

weeks before the guns/all came and rained on everyone/nor she's a little boy in Spain/playing pianos filled with flames," from Holland, 1945 display a whimsical beauty whilst conveying a fatalistic sense of loss to the listener. While lines such as "The father made fetuses with flesh-licking ladies/while you and your mother were asleep in the trailer park/" from Oh Comely have a sort of disconcerting beauty to them that imbue the song with a romantic, circus freak show sort of aesthetic that is both enchanting and repugnant.

In a sterile musical landscape abound with derivative and contrived pop music, neatly packaged and consumer friendly, Neutral Milk Hotel's brand of neo-folk nad experimental pop is more refreshing than ever. I highly suggest you pick up a copy of this classic work of art at your local record store, or bootleg a copy off of a friend who has this gem in their collection.



Interested in summer concerts? Lollapalooza Artists have been announced!

The following are a list of artists that have been announced so far:

Pixies, Widespread Panic, Weezer, The Killers, Cake, Dashboard Confessional, G.Love and Special Sauce, Billy Idol, Dinosaur Jr...and many more.

For more information on Lollapalooza visit www.lollapalooza.com

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