

New Releases



Baxter self-titled Maverick Records Grade: B

We've all come to expect great things from Swedish electronica groups, first ABBA and then their illegitimate offspring Ace of Base both made their impacts on the American music scene — well, on Casey Kasem anyway.

Baxter, a Swedish import for those who prefer deeper brews, will never share the Top 40 success of its predecessors, but it will garner plenty of attention — and not because it exudes rays of Aryan bliss.

Engineered by band member Michael Herloffson, a Swedish guitar player, producer and head of indie label Primal Music, this self-titled first release stretches the boundaries of typical drums and bass electronica by adding one little thing — well-crafted lyrics. And lots of them.

Along with bass deep enough to make a Sanyo sound like a church organ, Baxter's first album shines as a highly composed and densely structured piece of sonic artwork.

The trio is led by frontwoman Nina Ramsby whose plaintive, willowy vocals lit a mood of suspense over cries of violins, tickings of snare drums and the omnipresent throbs of the blackest bass.

In America, we call it "Portishead-esque."

Although the lyrics are far from startling, they are, at least, refreshing for a drums-and-bass ensemble. Songs like "Television" and "I Can't See Why," the two leading singles on the album, detail neurotic passions with lyrical precision.

The former escalates into a gloomy, yet excited, chorus rejoicing a TV addict's decision to kill his television. Unfortunately, he also destroyed the only world he knew. Now he is alone.

These themes of alienation and hopelessness mix freely with neo-European excesses of Freudian thought. Songs concerned with identity and the frequently resulting despair haunt each track in one way or another.

"I Can't See Why" delves into the dynamics of a skewed, but not common, relationship in which one person tries to make the other into a personal image.

The tension of the lyrics is played out vibrantly with staccato violins and blue streaks of electronic tone.

Unfortunately, these lyrics begin to sound familiar by the fourth track, and after a full listening it becomes obvious that they must have been written on a refrigerator with magnetic poetry words — interchangeable and always profound.

But, then again, it is only a drums-and-bass album after all. While Baxter may be breaking new ground by adding some introspection to the lyrically sparse genre, the words aren't nearly as deep as the bass.

Baxter does deserve credit for composing songs that move you emotionally as well as physically. The yearning vocals typically climax in unison with the thick layers of instrumental back-drop.

On "Fading," Nina pardons herself for an unnamed offense to a lover as the bass plods and the strings mourn. But she turns around with a cry of freedom as the music heightens and peaks.

The songs are neurotic, to be sure. But they are honest, even if a bit redundant. But, hey, look where it got ABBA.

— Bret Schulte

Book sheds light on Salinger

The Associated Press

There is a hole in this story, and his name is Jerome David Salinger.

He wrote a few short stories and a novel that shook lives — "Catcher in the Rye" — and then he shut the world out. Since 1965, he has published nothing and said little, rebuffing efforts to pierce his wall of silence.

In 1972, when he was 53, he sent a fan letter to an 18-year-old college freshman who had written an article in The New York Times Magazine. Within months, they were living together. Months later, he broke off their relationship.

That would have been the end of it, except that Joyce Maynard was fated to become the anti-Salinger.

"Of all the 18-year-olds in America that J.D. Salinger could have written to ... he invited into his life a person who was almost destined sometime or another to find her way out of the mist and sit down at a typewriter," Maynard says.

Less than half of her new book, "At Home in the World," is devoted to her time with Salinger, but in those 138 pages she tells more about him than has been revealed since the Eisenhower administration.

He might as well have pulled the ears off Bambi.

If the entire book was even 15 percent as bad as a Vanity Fair excerpt, "it will bid fair to be the worst book ever written: smarmy, whiny, smirky and, above all, almost indescribably stupid," wrote Jonathan Yardley of the Washington Post.

"Just because we are dying to know, does that mean we have a right to know?" Elizabeth Gluck wrote in Time magazine. "Maynard may have written this story because she needed to. But she published it because someone was willing to pay her to do so. And that is not reason enough."

Maynard is steadfast. This is her story, she insists.

The market for her book would have been smaller had it not

involved Salinger, she acknowledges, but "it would still be a good story." She did not consider writing but not publishing the book: "I have a family to support, and I make no apologies about that."

She says her book is drawing attention because it provides the first Salinger fragments "in a long time. Like fragments from the Titanic." And as for Salinger's privacy? "If you want to lead a totally private life, I don't think that you should be writing letters to 18-year-old girls."

That is what happened to Maynard. She was attending Yale when her picture appeared on the cover of the Times Magazine. It accompanied her story, "Looking Back: An Eighteen Year Old Reflects on Life."

The story drew hundreds of letters, but the one from Salinger stood out. Maynard had not even read "Catcher in the Rye" at this point, but she knew about Salinger, about his celebrity and his seclusion.

A correspondence started, and then there were phone calls. He told her that they were "landsmen," a Yiddishism meaning that they were from the same place, soul mates. Finally, she quit school and moved in with him.

The portrait of Salinger that emerges in "At Home in the World" is of a crank. Maynard's Salinger is a control freak. He is obsessed with homeopathic medicine; a strange diet consisting of nuts, cheese, vegetables and ground lamb patties cooked at 150 degrees (he taught her how to induce vomiting after eating foods that were deemed unhealthy); the treacheries of publishing and of fame.

The book details their problematic sex life, and the disintegration of their relationship. Salinger disapproved of Maynard's desire for celebrity, her willingness to put her picture on the jacket of the book-length version of "Looking Back." The covers of his books are plain.

After eight months, Maynard says, during a trip to Florida with his children, Salinger told her they were

through. She should go to the New Hampshire house, remove her belongings and be gone.

"One review of the book said, 'Joyce Maynard is shameless.' That's true! I decided to give shame up, and what a relief it was," Maynard said. "I can reveal regret and sadness and even dismay, but I am not a bad person."

Salinger's fans are all over the Web — every bit as devoted as Maynard's and more numerous, though he doesn't encourage them at all. If Maynard is celebrated for her willingness to invite readers into her messy life, Salinger is revered for his purity of vision and his refusal to open up.

Salinger has written for more than 30 years but refuses to publish. When quotes from his works were reprinted on Web sites, Salinger unleashed his literary agents, Harold Ober Associates, to order them removed.

In Cornish, N.H., his neighbors respect Salinger's choices, and have no respect for Maynard's.

"What she's doing is despicable," said state Rep. Peter Burling. "We certainly aren't going to open any doors to folks that are attracted here because of that book. If anything, we'll probably be a little tighter-lipped."

Orange "No Trespassing" signs are nailed to nearly every tree on the dirt road to Salinger's house. The man who lives inside, Maynard says, speaks with the voice of his most famous creation, Holden Caulfield.

It is Holden, in "Catcher in the Rye," who says he would "pretend I was one of those deaf-mutes. That way I wouldn't have to have any ... stupid useless conversations with anybody."

Maynard does not understand why the world goes along.

"A man kind of dictates the rules about how he is to be treated, and for 30 years, people do what he says. I can't think of another public figure — and he is a public figure — who has been allowed to do that. He's not a monster, but he's not a god. He's a man."

New lineup magical for Baby Jason

SPANKERS from page 12

be too much for the band to deal with.

"The road really sucks. It's hard work, and it tends to wear you out," Davis said. "I would have loved to play with those guys forever, but I'm not in this to try and talk people into playing with me. I want them with me because they want to be with me."

Davis said the breakup was an amicable one.

"It's been a peaceful split and they have really gone out of their way to help me out while I formed the new band," he said.

Davis said the main difference

between the new and old lineups is one thing: focus.

"We looked at the songs and made them more efficient. The new band has the skill, but we also have the groove," he said.

Steen agreed.

"It's going to be the same tunes, but the sound is going to be so much newer," he said, "just because we are all different musicians, and we have different styles."

Davis said the band has been sticking to a rigorous practice schedule, sometimes playing for eight hours straight.

The backbreaking schedule has paid off.

"We've had a good, solid month

of practicing, and I think each time the songs just sound tighter and tighter," Steen said. "It's new and fresh."

Although this time around Davis seems to be playing for keeps with his new lineup, he said another breakup wouldn't stop him.

"This industry is definitely survival of the fittest. And it will beat you down," he said. "But if it ended again, I would have no choice but to do it again."

Baby Jason and the Spankers play tonight and Friday night at the Zoo Bar. Tickets are \$3 and the show starts at 9 p.m.

For more information, call the Zoo Bar at (402) 435-8754.

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Associate professor's poetry looks to the future

A University of Nebraska-Lincoln professor continues to leave her footprints well off campus.

Terri Brown-Davidson, associate professor of English, appears tonight at the Bennett Martin Public Library, 14th and N Streets, as part of the John H. Ames Reading Series.

The Palo Alto, Calif., native describes herself as a self-proclaimed "modern romantic," drawing on visions of the future and the 20th century in her collections of poetry and fiction.

She confesses as her quest to "return poetry to the realm of the imagination."

"The Doll Artist's Daughter," a book-length narrative poem, was published in 1997, yet another addition to her tome-like list of accomplishments.

Brown-Davidson is published in more than 300 journals and was hailed in the journal "Tri-Quarterly New Writers," as among the brightest talents in modern fiction.

Her reading begins at 7:30 p.m. in the Heritage Room of Nebraska Authors. Admission is public and free of charge.

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