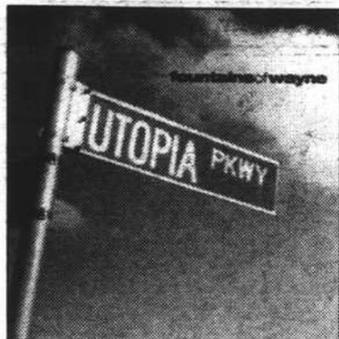


New Releases



Fountains of Wayne
 "Utopia Parkway"
 Atlantic Records
 Grade: C

Maybe it's the parking-lot landscape or the aching brink-of-the-big-city sensitivity, but if you come from Jersey you are born armed to the teeth, tongue and swagger with a cement-hard tool of survival: cynicism.

The shadow of New York casts an eternal gloom on your own meager surroundings, and the patchworks of license plates resting at the Burger Kings and strip malls or streaking along the interstates are the labels of continental dreamers, each plotting a path through or around your hometown straight to America's island Mecca.

This is the legacy of songwriters Chris Collingwood and Adam Schlesinger, the duo foundation for smart-ass pop foursome Fountains of Wayne.

The New York-based band is releasing its sophomore album and features a fleshier sound owing to two new members (drummer Brian Young and gui-

tarist Jody Porter). But Fountains of Wayne is still a coming-of-age effort engaged in modern-age musical therapy.

The problem? Suburban angst, of course. Schlesinger actually hails from the New Jersey jungle, while his partner commiserated the outskirts experience growing up in a small town outside Philadelphia.

Meeting in Boston and playing together for the past few years, the two have explored the cultural urban backwater and pop-culture iconography in pure suburban fashion: unabashed and shamelessly hooky pop songs.

A meritorious self-titled album in 1997, "Fountains of Wayne" rendered a spot on several critics' Top Ten lists for its cute wit and catchy melodies. The single "Radiation Vibe" smacked just enough of self-referential fun to be smart, and they plugged it into a short electric hook for radio success.

With such a glowing introduction into the modern-rock world, Fountains of Wayne seems to have taken the success formula just a step further in its newest album.

Oh, that step's a doozy.

In "Utopia Parkway" Fountains of Wayne desperately tries to recreate the mood of its first album but fails to capture the lightness and fun that enamored pop-rock fans two years ago.

Instead, we hear a painfully cynical and meaningless rhyme-scape of bubble-gum jargon including references to .38 Special, KorN, Puff Daddy, laser shows and miles and miles of girls who just don't get the pain of existence.

With an obvious affection for Britpop, each song is structured in a way to reflect the victim subject matter. Most songs rely on Weezer-esque synth sounds and tempo changes, but each tries to reflect a certain idea.

"Go, Hippie" is a half-baked mix-

ture of hoarse vocals and fuzzy guitar, while a twinkling and strikingly boring ballad, "Prom Theme" actually climaxes with a flutter of drum sticks on the cymbal.

It could be clever, but the problem is it becomes impossible to take any of these songs seriously. In fact, it's impossible to take Fountains of Wayne seriously. Through every tongue-in-cheek motif and snide reference, the band distances itself further and further from credibility.

Fountains of Wayne makes clear that these subjects don't really matter, and the carefully constructed mockeries render every song utterly irrelevant.

"Prom Theme," when you stare at the words on the printed page, strikes you initially as earnest frozen-moment nostalgia but is turned into a farce when you hear the lackadaisical and humorously synthesized final product.

Sincerity does seem to exist brightly on parts of the album, but it is drowned in gratuitous smirks and cynical asides. Their most tried-and-true theme is one of chicks, not women, but chicks. Chicks are always lost; chicks extract meaning from Puff Daddy; chicks just obviously don't get these clever guys.

But Fountains of Wayne loves them anyway.

Thank goodness they found something to love, because they don't seem fond of much. Minivans, soccer moms, laser shows, hippies (okay, give them that) are all cut down. Does love exist? It's hard to tell, as the concept suffers under stupid metaphors of thrown-away cans. In this world of cynicism the only shelter seems to be the ignorance of chicks.

Chicks are cute, and for the Fountains of Wayne being cute is what it's all about.

- Bret Schulte

Hip-hop scene expands, diversifies

SCENE from page 12

ances he provides in the hands of his niece and nephew, who live in Colorado.

With the New York influence still strong, Coleman is planning on moving his label by the end of the summer to a city larger than Lincoln.

And though he already has about six artists from around the country lined up to put on his label - varying from inspirational hip-hop to alternative country - Coleman has his eye on Lincoln acts that he would like to work with in the future.

"I think there's so much talent here," Coleman said. "It's just amazing."

Some of that talent is materializing in the form of CDs. Beyond has an album that is about ready for release, and the Blackshirts have a release tentatively slated for this summer.

Beyond's local success and exposure has been greatly helped by opening for alternative bands as well as hip-hop groups, Griffin said.

"The alternative scene supports local music a lot better than the hip-hop scene does," Griffin said.

Beyond opened for the recent Digital Underground shows as well as

Vanilla Ice, Everlast and Ice T.

Watson, one of the four members of the Blackshirts, said his group played at Temptations about every other week, and they worked closely with Johnson.

But with the CD release planned for this summer, Watson hopes his group will be able to inject some more life into the local scene.

A lot is going on right now to expand the scene, Johnson said, even though it might not seem very evident to a large portion of Lincoln.

"We're doing a little of everything," Johnson said. "It's like we're hidden, but we're there."

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