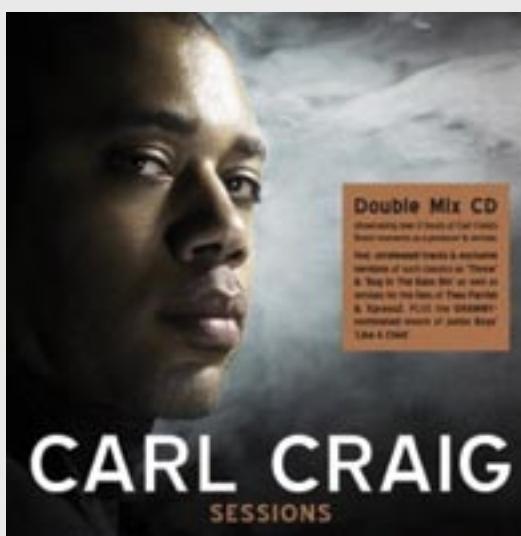


COMPACT DISCS

Albums you need to know

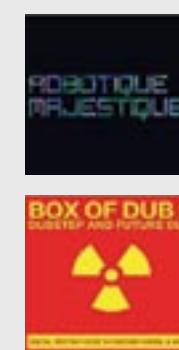


GHOSTLAND OBSERVATORY
Robitique Majestique
4.5 stars

(Trashy Moped Recordings) Fog. Lasers. "Opening Credits." Children of paradise billow out of gothic keyboards. Those flying monkeys from Oz swarm in carrying Freddy Mercury's leggings. No, wait, this is Texas. That's Aaron Behrens, Ghostland Observatory's frontman, in a high-piercing vocal register long-hallowed by rock n' roll arenas, on producer/drummer Thomas Turner's tight fuzzy backbeat wings. Beside their standalone sharp sensationalism, "Heavy Heart" and "The Band Marches On" boast a melodic acuity that begs to be ripped and shredded into anemic dancefloor permutations. Instrumental "Holy Ghost White Noise" grooves to a Stevie Wonder stroll turning the superstitious into holy believer of gruff pop. Better child proof the house before opening the window to these guys. They claim to sound like "a robot making love to a tree." But I'm talking pillow fights. **Diana Feuer**

THE KILLS
Midnight Boom
4.5 stars

(Domino) Were they French, Alison "VV" Mossheart and Jamie "Hotel" Hince would be easily compared to Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin—she of startling beauty, he of effortless cool, both chain smoking as if Silk Cuts were their muse. Of course, Mossheart's Florida upbringing and Hince's UK residence, along with the band's blues-rock tendencies, meant White Stripes references have been the dominant touchstone. But recent developments like Hince being linked to a post-Pete Doherty Kate Moss and more importantly, the sultry burn of *Midnight Boom*, makes the duo seem more continental than ever.

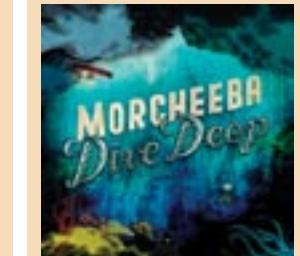


THE KILLS
Midnight Boom

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Box of Dub 2: Dubstep and Future Dub
4.5 stars

(Soul Jazz) Dubstep isn't a self-absorbed genre, fiendish to inject itself into the clotted veins of mainstream (like its predecessors UK garage and grime). Unprovoked, this dark and sometimes eerie electronic subgenre is leisurely creeping into the peripheral of North America's consciousness. Dubstep isn't intentionally sidestepping us, albeit dubstep producers like N-Type and Digital Mystikz continue to tour Europe and pack some of the hottest clubs in London. Let's face it, it's going to be a while before your neighborhood bar is blasting "Midnight Request Line." In protest, you can blow out your Civic's subwoofers with the must-have *Box of Dub 2: Dubstep and Future Dub*, a 12-track compilation brooding with the intensity of darkstep d&b (minus the aggression) that imparts a certain bittersweet sedation, like the guilty satisfaction of an opiate binge.

Skream, the producer/DJ who gained attention last year for his remix of The Kicks' "Not Over Yet," brings the clout of name to the album, along with two solid, by-the-book dubstep tracks, created exclusively for the compilation (as with all the other tracks on *Box of Dub 2*). More experimental in its execution, Digital Mystic's "Third One" answers its minimalist horn intro by pairing an industrial, robotic rhythm with a heavy sub-bass drop, creating a conveyor belt assemblage of dissonant chords. Yet the most decadent cut on the album is the least mainstream: "Tamil Dub," produced by King Soly, one sure to send even the most steadfast dubstepper into a luxuriously heavy sub-bass K-hole. **Skye Mayring**

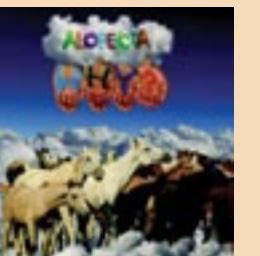


MORCHEEBA
Dive Deep
4 stars

(Studio !K7) Think about it: Who has done more than Carl Craig to advance the notion that Detroit techno has been the soul and inspiration behind 4/4 club music around the world? Sure, his storied elders—Atkins, May and Saunderson—can make that claim, but this double-pack CD makes a strong case that Craig's is the most impressive career overall. One based on consistency, power and incredible range.

Sessions, a flowing mix that includes 21 originals, remixes and reconstructions, reveals Craig at his versatile best: his angry re-working of Rhythm & Sound's sublime "Poor People Must Work" is included here, as is Craig's pounding redo of Theo Parrish's "Falling Up." More highlights: a 10-minute future-jazzy take on Innerzone Orchestra's "Bug in the Bass Bin" and an unreleased version of "Throw," from another of his 1990s projects, Paperclip People. The beauty is that there's more, much more, in Craig's vaults, like his 2004 new wave remix of Throbbing Gristle's "Hot on the Heels of Love." Keep the dark hits coming. **C2. Walter Wasac**

of acoustic instrumentation, giving this endeavor a much earthier feel. Tracks such as "Run Honey Run" and "Enjoy The Ride" perhaps illustrate best this progression from youthful trip-hop to more melancholy, bluesy territory, (the latter being a collaboration with the folksy Judie Tzuke). As the song says, those that have problems getting over the loss off Edwards (and Martey) should "stop chasing shadows and just enjoy the ride." **Nicole Powers**

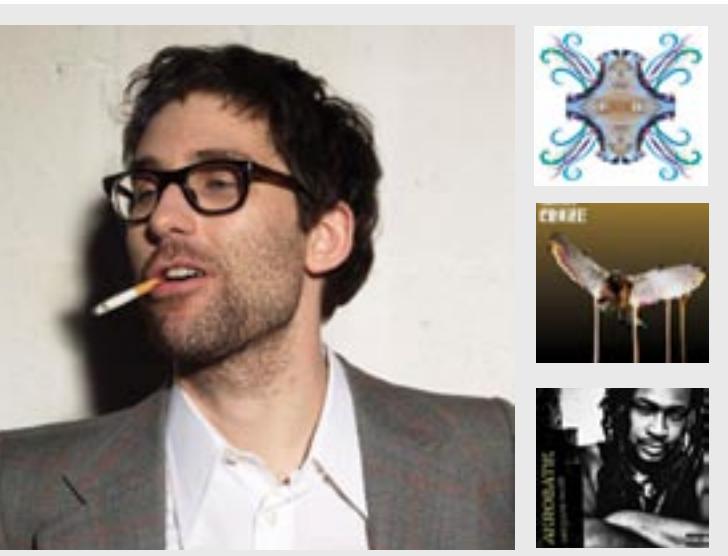


WHY?
Alopecia
4 stars

(Anticon) Why? are Midwesterners at a glance and Oakland to the bone. Alopecia, their second full-band affair, would sound perfectly placed in a jukebox between Deerhoof and Silver Jews, but even as Anticon's flagship unit leans heavy into an indie rock slouch, they dig deeper still toward 21 grams of solid gold hip-hop soul. With 2005's *Elephant Eyelash*, love-lorn leader Yoni Wolf pushed his twisted croon to Malkmusian heights, and the shag-and-sweater set did take note. With Alopecia, however, he mines the art of rhyme. Embracing verse over his usual metered prose (the Anticon M.O.), Wolf deftly distills his stalker stories, suicidal musings and knack for kaleidoscopic detail into taut, fluff-free raps. On tracks like "Good Friday" and "By Torpedo or Crohn's," he adopts a deadly deadpan to lay down backwards boasts: "It feels exciting/Touching your handwriting/Getting horny by reading it/And repeating, 'Poor me.'" And when he stretches out on "Twenty-Eight," it's not hard to imagine Lil' Weezy slurring out a Dylan Thomas poem about death. Of course, Yoni still sings, and his band still plays—here as a quintet rounded out by Fog's main musicians. It's a syrup-sick pop rotted by dark folk, elaborate rhythms and droning psychedelia, but it's always tight—meticulously so—making Alopecia an across-the-board delicacy of warped obsession. **Chris Martins**

AKROBATIK
Absolute Value
4 stars

(Fat Beats) I like Akrobatik—as a person and a rapper—so why does he have to tell me and all other rap critics to suck a fat *did-ick*? He's got serious muscles and, terrifyingly enough, has Freddie Foxx backing him on "If We Can't Build," so I'll only raise the question: What did we do wrong? Ak's debut album, *Balance*, was pretty much universally heralded as a great piece of rap, helping it become one



of the better selling indie hip-hop albums of 2003. (In retrospect, however, rock journalists did initially call early-'90s rap records like *36 Chambers* "a mess," but that's hardly my fault.)

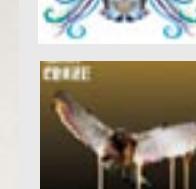
Akro's problems with the media existed in premonition and probably in provocation. URB didn't write a lengthy feature on him and if we didn't, who did? He's got on-paper potential and in-practice features that register quite impressively, from Talib Kweli and Little Brother to Mr. Lif and a spoken-word Chuck D, but still, unlike the climate of *Balance*, the subprime loans are as fucked up as radio rap without an autotuner. *Absolute Value* contains all the elements of real hip-hop, from the uplifting messages directed toward black youth to exclamations of lyrical superiority aimed at everyone else. Album opener "A to the K" features Ak's favorite sport metaphors over a menacing beat and may be close to the most perfect thing the Boston MC has ever touched. It just feels like a different time for indie rap, and maybe that's Ak's problem with those who define that kind of stuff. **Brandon Perkins**

DJ CRAZE
FabricLive 38
4 stars

Fabric DJ Craze filled his shelves with battle championship trophies because of his astonishing displays of dexterity and precision that few can rival. For his contribution to the esteemed *FabricLive* mix series, however, the three time DMC champion focuses on his ear for music, his knowledge of sound and his equally impressive skill at programming the good soundtrack for a night out.

While MC Armani Reign brings some rhymes to the obligatory introduction shout out, Craze uses this mix as a chance to move away from the drum & bass sounds he's championed for years in favor of the revived dancefloor hip-hop exploding out of the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest. Fitting 27 tracks into just over an hour, he lets the music hold the focus, cutting and scratching just to add an occasional accent. Craze illustrates the origins of today's fashionable club beats by digging up cuts from Tuff Crew, Debbie Deb and even Jan Hammer's "Miami Vice Theme." The classics are matched with their sonic descendants, including The Cool Kids, Bangers & Cash, Pase Rock, Chromeo, Kid Sister and DJ Blaqstarr.

The energy builds and falls nicely as Craze works his way through a range of tempo and styles. On this mix, he showcases his appreciation for the past, his understanding of the present and his skill at mixing things up for the dancers instead of the judges. **Noah Levine**



FUCKBUTTONS

Street Horrrsing
4 stars

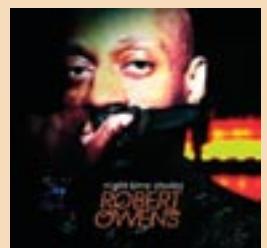


FUCKBUTTONS
Street Horrrsing
4 stars

(ATP Recordings) Fuck Buttons has its formula down. The UK duo of Andrew Hung and Benjamin John Power open their debut with a clatter of ambient percussion. Buzz-saw chords swell and swirl, conjoining with sweeter tones, until a wash-of-sound crescendo erupts with tinny vocal howls. The blueprint holds for much of the record; patterns emerge; themes recycle. "Bright Tomorrow" and "Colours Move," in particular, mutate this slow churn, balancing drone and melody, relieving knots of tension with climactic lyrical bursts. Tribal drums introduced on "Ribs Out" reappear in similar form later on the album, mixed with other elements collected throughout. Fuck Buttons' brutality is abusive, yet its patience is soothing—a contradiction that could bury bands less skilled in the art of monotony. But, using familiarity to its advantage, this duo is smart to refine its palette, making even the most migraine-inducing compositions seem like comforting lullabies. **Aaron Richter**

NEON NEON
Stainless Style
4 stars

(Lex Records) No one felt the pain of the '80s like John DeLorean. Just as the jet-setting oddball millionaire began to realize his dream of unleashing an army of gull-winged, stainless steel sports coupes onto the world, Reagan's coke-slinging goons came along and ruined him. Thus, the decade that gave so much (in inane excess), tooketh with ease, and we're left to foot the cultural bill. But bad decades give us what good ones cannot: endless fodder for blushing nostalgia and optimistic revisionism. Enter Neon Neon, who combine a musical reverence for the era's flanged guitars, canned drums and synthetic blips (offset by plenty of modern grime) with the actual life story of DeLorean, a glorious man bit in the ass by the American dream. Erstwhile Super Furrys eccentric Gruff Rhys sings the tale in his dulcet rasp, documenting his protagonist's rise and fall in the first person and with hilarious detail ("I see my reflection in Michael Douglas' mirrored sunglasses") over the power-pop bounce of LA-based electro texturist Boom Bip. *Stainless Style* is impressive for so many reasons—"Raquel," dedicated to Miss Welch; hearing crunk meld with Italo Disco; a Yo Majesty cameo—but it's the utter lack of irony that steals the show. **Chris Martins**



ROBERT OWENS
Night-Time Stories
4 stars

(Compost) It really doesn't get more old-school than Robert Owens, but if you aren't aware of the house music experience prior to 1996, you probably won't dig him. The vocalist's tone was once attached to Chicago house's hip, bearing a quality found in many Italo "hits": his croon is dramatic and cheesy but in a way that makes fans fondly remember the special time from whence the music came. Inside the genre's realm, Owen—a Midwesterner living in London—is a god of self-help house. He took that sensibility from his collaboration with Larry Heard as Fingers Inc., and it remains steadfast in his latest effort, *Night-Time Stories*. Most all the dubby, glittering production on the album is guest-work (Atjazz, Jimster), and while we could do without Owens' breathy interludes, one thing is clear: the man's still got it. **Jen Boyles**

CUT COPY
In Ghost Colours
4 stars

(Modular) Cut Copy's debut album, *Bright Like Neon Love*, dropped on Modular Recordings in 2004, which in the iPod/MySpace era translates to about a bajillion years ago, making them grandfathers of the dance-punk revolution. Full of the kind of hooks that made Patrice Rushen's "Forget Me Not" such a massive hit in '82, the album spun out the catchy "Future" and landed them the #2 spot in the *FabricLive* series. The flawless mix, the series' best of the last two years, drew a powdery white line between groups like Severed Heads and MSTRKRFT, and brought shine to upcoming Modular artists like the Pre-sets and New Young Pony Club. *In Ghost Colours* sounds like Depeche Mode on Lorazepam—dramatic, well enunciated and full of arpeggiated synthy goodness. "Feel The Love" is so sweet it'll give you cavities, and the sax that creeps in towards the end of "Hearts On Fire" is particularly saucy and irony-free. Cut Copy may not be French or from Brooklyn, but they've got the magic sauce for sure. **Richard Thomas**