

2006: A year of change in local music scene

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BY CAPTAIN AMERICA

For genre-defying rock and roll, the Downtown "scene" remains the Dirt City's most vibrant. It's not as easy to find unique and original rock east of the railroad tracks but we gained and lost worthy venues there nonetheless.

Business improprieties closed upstart Harlow's (hipster indie rock) a few months before the venerable Sonny's (long-hair outlaw freak rawk) grew tired of needless harassment by the Mayor's goons and shut their doors. Nearby newbie artspace EVOC Gallery hosts the latest in avant rock/noise, albeit quite infrequently.

Meanwhile, in the Downtown area, newly transformed venue Ralli's offers good sound and a nice stage in stumbling distance of the top music clubs.

As in any year we lost a few stalwart bands, most notably the hip Manchester sound of The Mindy Set and the slo-core twang of Shine Cherries. The shoot-em-up Darlington Horns went out with a bang and the exciting mod garage of the Jackie O. Fanclub lasted only a couple of gigs. Barely making it into 2007, the criminally overlooked roar of Below the Sound is packing it in for good early January.

Relocation also took its toll: the lullaby beauty of the Gingerbread Patriots moved to the northwest and the cello poprock of Foma splintered and packed their remains off to San Francisco, while dustbowl storyteller Nels Andrews now resides in Brooklyn and multi-talented Jason Daniello, the deep south.

In return, however, new bands took the stage making up our losses. The lovely gothic (not goth) fairy tales of I Is For Ida are an uncanny delight. Ex-Foma violinist Heather Trost joined Neutral Milk Hotel's Jeremy Barnes in A Hawk and A Hacksaw for Euro-Yiddish gypsy balladry. Dameon (Scared of Chaka) Waggoner returned to Albuquerque to form the whiskey-sippin' y'all-ternative Lowlights. Currently going by the name Fando but also known as Pigheart, Meneal Sorrow and Millard Fillmore,

ex-members of Old Man and Van Buren, run the gamut from soaring ambient to glorious sludgecore. It's quite impossible to keep up with recent transplants Bud Melvin and Ginxy Lynx and their art/noise/twang projects: Lionhead Bunny, the Grave of Nobody's Darling as well as their solo acts and guest spots in numerous other avant outfits.

In these days of downloadable mp3s, record releases aren't what they used to be. Neither am I, except that I'm old enough to prefer the total package, liner notes and all. Picking the best CDs of the year isn't objective because the prime goal of music is to express and evoke passion, which varies not only from person to person but in music fanatics from day to day. These are my handful of local favorites of 2006.

• Lousy Robot Smile Like You Are Somewhere Else

(Socyermom Records)

Bittersweet pop heartache like slamming a tart cocktail out of a glass rim-dipped in sugar. Lucky me, I have a copy of Jim Phillips' bedroom demos that I spin as much as the final release.

• I Is For Ida I Is For Ida

(Self-released)

They've been quiet for months now but this synth-based EP of mildly disturbing bedtime stories is like Edward Gorey tucking you in while reading snippets of Baudelaire.

• The Giranimals Imperfectly Timed Words

(De*tach Records)

Sweetiepie jangle pop that almost makes your teeth hurt with lovely vocals someplace between Velocity Girl and Mary Lou Lord.

• Foma Phobos

(Little Kiss Records)

Beautiful string arrangements, intelligent lyrics, hush-a-bye vocals wrapped in a unifying concept throughout and the knock-out opening tune of the year, “Don’t Burn Babies.”

• Unit 7 Drain Lists

(Socyermom Records)

Unit 7 Drain leaves a trail of CDs like you or I leave empty burrito wrappers, but this latest finally equals the finely-honed machine that is Unit 7 Drain on stage, the promise of indie rock fulfilled.

• Black Maria Nope

Another year gone and still nothing by these masters of doom rock and roll but I had to call them out in public.

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