

Kate Nash
Made of Bricks
 (Geffen)



If *Made of Bricks* is what happens as the result of Kate Nash falling and breaking her foot, then the 20-year-old singer-songwriter should get injured more often. Nash experiments here with everything from acoustic guitar to vintage synthesizer. From spoken word over beats on the album opener, “Play,” to piano-infused power-pop tracks “Foundations” and “Mouthwash,” *Made of Bricks* captures the life of a 20-something girl full of mixed emotions. On tracks like “We Get On” and “Pumpkin Soup,” Nash laments crumbling relationships and unrequited love with jazzy pop that channels Motown piano and brass. Less impressive tracks like “Dickhead” and “The Shit Song” are full of no-nonsense attitude and have a decent chorus, but the lyrics remind us that Nash is still only 20 (for instance: “Why you being a dickhead for / Stop being a dickhead.”) Regardless, Nash’s honest lyrics, paired with her natural melodic flair, help her stand out from the crop of London girls in bright dresses and sneakers and make *Made of Bricks* an enjoyable debut from an artist we’ll probably hear more from in the future. (Though hopefully she won’t have to be hurt in order to create.)

—SARA ABADI

RATING: ★★★★★
 ► AVAILABLE NOW



Magnetic Fields
Distortion
 (Nonesuch)

On Stephin Merritt and Co.’s first record since 2004’s lackluster *i*, the band drenches every tune in warm feedback (hence the title) and eschews banjos to form three-minute pop gems. What they do best is write woe-is-me narratives encompassing self destruction, loneliness and unrequited love disguised with gossamer melodies. Despite these motifs, Merritt remains a hopeless romantic. Trading off vocal duties with longtime collaborator Shirley Simms, the first four tracks amaze. Opener “Three Way” explodes with gnarling guitar and occasional shouts of “three way!” interrupting the flow. The biting “California Girls” borders on violence with Simms singing how she hates California girls and wants to unleash her wrath on them. On “Old Fools,” Merritt’s deliberate vocals soar with sentimentality and romanticism, becoming the best track on the album. Affectionate distortion bleeds through on the catchy “Xavier Says,” while Merritt sings, “I gotta drink wine not to pine for you” on “Too Drunk to Dream.” Near the end, “Zombie Boy” and “Till the Bitter End” cope with dark material, as “The Nun’s Litany” and “Courtesans” focus on salacity. Nothing in Magnetic Fields’ oeuvre could surmount the brilliance of *69 Love Songs* or *Get Lost*, but *Distortion* comes pretty close.

—GARIN PIRNIA

RATING: ★★★★★
 ► AVAILABLE JAN. 15

MGMT
Oraculat Spectacular
 (Columbia)



Brooklyn-based duo MGMT (known as “Management”) have created the first great album of 2008 in *Oraculat Spectacular*—not good, *great*. Despite “selling out,” as member Andrew VanWyngarden so honestly calls signing a major label record deal, he and co-founder Ben Goldwasser have managed to craft a release that is more than capable of winning over even the most jaded indie-rock aficionado. Of course, having Flaming Lips producer Dave Fridmann as chief knob twister on the album and a couple of tours with Of Montreal under their belt doesn’t hurt their indie cred, either. Running the gamut of styles and influences over the course of its 40-minute-and-15-second running time, *Oraculat Spectacular* sounds at times like late ’60s-era Stones (“Weekend Wars,” “Pieces of What”), at others like the Knife (“Kids”), and still others like Of Montreal (“Electric Feet”), all with a psychedelic Flaming Lips-inspired vibe. This is an album that just might connect with people the same way that the Strokes’ *Is This It* did, becoming a “must have” album for an entire generation of kids. Seriously, it’s that good. Bottom line: Buy this album now, before this band explodes and it’s not cool to like them anymore.

—MATT DUFOR

RATING: ★★★★★
 ► AVAILABLE JAN. 22



Medeski Martin and Wood
Let’s Go Everywhere
 (Little Monster)

Let’s Go Everywhere is MMW’s first children’s album, but adult fans won’t be disappointed. The album is as musically complex as the band’s past catalog; in fact, without the adventure-themed lyrics, listeners wouldn’t know that the songs are directed toward kids. The trademark funky beats and heavy bass remain, lightened with tinkling whistles and bells to keep it sweet on songs like the perfect closer “We’re All Connected.” Classic nursery rhymes like “Pat A Cake” and “Hickory Dickory Dock” are morphed into word and sound experiments, as children’s voices recite the verses accompanied by mad percussion. Storytelling plays a huge role on tracks like “The Squalb,” in which an animated John Lurie (who founded the Lounge Lizards) tells us the truth about that lint in your pocket. For the first time, fans can hear the voices behind the instruments. As always, the group’s skill level is quite impressive—and this time, you hear them use music to expertly mimic cats, trains and kitchens. Inspired by Johnny Cash’s “I’ve Been Everywhere,” MMW’s latest is occasionally schizophrenic, caught between an adventurous play date and a sophisticated jam session, resulting in an experience that’s both fun and challenging.

—OLIVIA WARE

RATING: ★★★★★
 ► AVAILABLE NOW