

A romantic night with Willie Nelson at Abraham Chavez

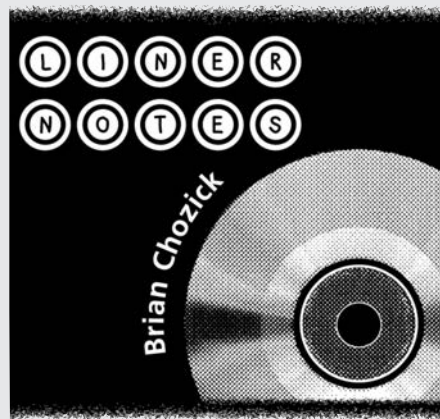
In April of last year he came out with an album by the name of "Last Man Standing," and there is no truer way to describe country legend Willie Nelson, as most of his contemporaries are no longer with us. Not only is this icon still making new music at age 84, he is also, as he so succinctly puts it, "On the Road Again." He will serenade us this Valentine's Day at the Abraham Chavez Theatre. For those who don't know the legend, here's a recap: He started out as a DJ playing his favorites on the radio, and within two years he was on those very same airwaves. In the late '60s Ray Price helped kick his career into high gear, and his songwriting credits also began to take hold of the charts. Billy Walker, Faron Young, and of course Patsy Cline (with her performance of "Crazy") solidified him as a top songwriter. In the '80s he co-founded the Highwaymen with his old friends Waylon Jennings, Johnny Cash and Kris Kristofferson. The new millennium has seen Willie doing jazz, reggae and even the blues. So on Feb. 14 at the Abraham Chavez Theatre, why not show some love to "The Red Headed Stranger"?

Old 97's, "Love the Holidays," ATO Records

The holiday season is gone, but some are already planning for the next one. So if you already feel that seasonal itch, you might as well add a soundtrack. The Old 97's snuck out a holiday gem last year that is not to be overlooked. Even if you've got a touch of Grinch in you there is no denying its greatness. "Love the Holidays" is a collection of Christmas tunes with a singular pit stop over to New Year's with "Auld Lang Syne," but the other 13 are all about the large bearded guy in the red suit or at least his big show. The disc contains half a dozen originals, a few traditional cuts done very untraditionally, and a few that may not be too familiar but if you do some digging you can find their origins. The CD starts off with the album's title track, which is a revved-up, horn-fueled rocker, and moves on to Christmas through a child's eyes and is highly spirited throughout. It goes without saying that they all have their cow punk alt. country spin, making every one truly unique. The artwork is eggnog-soaked as well, with the entire band donning Christmas sweaters, and there is also a not-to-be-missed fold-open photo.

John Mellencamp, "Other People's Stuff," Republic

In 2016 John Mellencamp played the Chicago Theatre, and it was last year that this incredible show was released as a physical recording. I am not sure if that performance's success prompted him to go back to the well for more inspiration, or maybe the new ideas simply aren't coming, but either way we benefit as he embraces his past. The latest is "Other People's Stuff." This is a collection of him taking on music that is not his own, culled from his past records, compilations, unearthed sessions and documentaries. The sound harks back to his mid-1980s heyday with plenty of fiddle, foot stompin', and storytelling. These are not huge hits that have been covered dozens of times. Most people will not even be familiar with the tunes, making this a very fresh album. To help keep out that stale taste he has recorded a brand-new version of "Eyes on the Prize," originally performed at the Obama White House in 2010. "Other People's Stuff" is simply amazing and documents that Mellencamp still has the stuff to get it done. Now we need some original stuff with the same passion.



Dan Baird and the Homemade Sin, "Screamer," JCPL

In the beginning of 2017 he dropped the "Homemade Sin" for his solo effort "SoLow," but he picked them back up later that year for "Rollercoaster." Since then Dan Baird himself has been on a rollercoaster ride as he was diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia. That didn't stop him from releasing one of the best albums of his life, "Screamer." As the former frontman for the Georgia Satellites, a band whose entire output was a pair of CD's in seven years, you would think new music would be slow going, but without the Georgia boys he has put out over a dozen discs on his own or as the ringleader of multiple groups. The new album features his trademark gritty, raucous vocals, a bounty of fuzz-filled guitars and bales of twanged-out honky-tonk perfection. It is filled with the soul of the South and cow punk slathered generously throughout. On "Mister and Ma'am" he seems to channel Jason and the Scorchers, which seems apropos since the very next track sees Warner E. Hodges, a man who pulls double guitar duties in the "Homemade Sin" and "the Scorchers," on lead vocals. Don't make me scream at you on this one, pick it up now!

Collectibles: The Posies, a Trio of Reissues, Omnivore

In the summer of 2017 Omnivore records embarked on a very ambitious project, one that would celebrate one of Washington state's finest exports. It had nothing to do with Pearl Jam, Soundgarden or Nirvana, and certainly nothing to do with fine roasted beans. This was all about The Posies and we aren't talking flowers here, but one of the best alternative power pop bands to ever sprout from that Northwest soil. The band primarily consists of Ken Stringfellow and Jon Auer; the pair also played a key part in the revival of Big Star, but that is for another day. The Posies' cultivation began with the band's major label debut, "Dear 23," and followed through with their subsequent releases for Geffen records, "Frosting on the Beater" and "Amazing Disgrace." All three albums have now been remastered for the best possible sound and have been bumped up to double-disc sets. They have added a truckload of extra cuts, not only as bonus discs that offer up to over 20 additional tracks in one case, but the original CD's include a handful of special morsels as well. All this extra material comes in the form of demos, alternate versions, and of course previously unreleased tracks. For pure alternative power pop bliss, plant these Posies and they will bloom bountifully for your listening pleasure.

Keep an eye out for these new and upcoming releases:

Ian Brown — "Ripples"
Steve Earle & the Dukes — "GUY"
Meat Puppets — "Dusty Notes"
Son Volt — "Union"

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During my last two years of college, I became increasingly involved in the evangelical Christian community on campus. All my friends were Christians, and we tended to eat together in the dorm cafeteria. At one point one of the wiser leaders of our group pointed out that we should spread out and sit with other people. Not only did we look like we were a clique (which, in fact, we were), but we were missing the opportunity to build relationships outside the circle of those who held the same worldview that we did.

That was my first experience of what I now call the "Christian bubble."

Many churches encourage "bubble" living. Going to church three times a week is the norm among some people: two services on Sunday and then a prayer meeting on Wednesday. And if you can squeeze in a Bible study or other fellowship group sometime else during the week, so much the better. Then you find yourself falling further into the gravitational pull — more and more of your social life revolves around church and your church friends. You talk the same language, read the same books, watch the same TV shows and movies, listen to the same radio station.

Maybe you send your kids to private Christian schools. And all their friends come from the same school or church. The cycle continues.

The bubble keeps growing and develops into an entire subculture. Even if you move to a different city, you can quickly submerge yourself back into that all-Christian, all-the-time environment.

This "bubble" mentality isn't restricted to certain kinds of Christians. It can happen anytime when like-minded people become increasingly exclusive of who they associate with and what they're exposed to. You can find it among ethnic groups. Occupational groups like police and doctors often find that they spend all their spare time with people who work in the same field. In today's world, we also are aware of political bubbles where we only hang around people who share similar views, and we only watch the



news shows and surf the websites that we agree with.

Bubbles are popular because they're comfortable and safe. You never get challenged outside your comfort zone. You feel protected from the outside world where the barbarians seem gathered outside the gate waiting to pounce.

One cliché of Christians is that we are supposed to be "in the world but not of the world." But this can lead to is a begrudging attitude about everything "worldly" — we're stuck here but we don't belong here. We're just biding our time for the great by-and-by.

Or as one person once said to me, in the Christian "bubble" subculture, you find people who are "not in the world but are still of the world." They are every bit as worldly as those outside — they just dress it up with religious talk.

The bigger problem of "bubble" thinking from a Christian perspective, however, is that it goes against what Jesus taught. Jesus told his followers they needed to be a city on a hill and the light of the world (Matt. 5:14). When he prayed for his disciples the night of his arrest, he said of them, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it." But then he went on to pray, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:16,18).

Paul described the church as "Christ's ambassadors," sent into the world on God's behalf as his emissaries.

Christians should never think of themselves as being stuck in the world while waiting for something else. We have been sent here for a reason.

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