

QUICK HITS

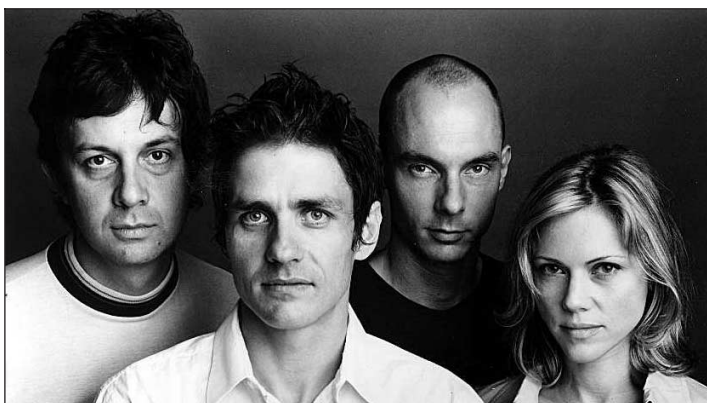
• **Boards of Canada, "Geogaddi"** (Warp) – Post-rave atmospherics for conceptualists, which is to say you must contemplate its (arguably) deeper meaning as much as bask in its otherworldly humming glow. As with similarly mind-bending works from Aphex Twin, Laurent Garnier and Wagonchrist (though this Scottish outfit's work is far friendlier), this is Pink Floyd for the digital age – spaced-out, lugubrious, grandiosely scientific, brimming with sonic metaphors that could help soothe shattered psyches, offer insight into an atrophying world ... or mean nothing at all. It's my kind of electro-doodling, yet it took me two months to decide it was more than head-trip background noise. Another season or two and it may become a personal favorite. Or its shortcomings will surface and I'll hate it. Bottom line: Approach with caution, but approach it nonetheless. **Grade:** B+ (Ben Wener/The Register)

• **David Holmes, "Come Get It I Got It"** (13 Amp) – The first misstep of the funky Irishman's career, though not a damaging one. Holmes has proved to be a mixer with an impeccable ear for the sexiest soul of the '60s and '70s, not to mention an obscurantist who appreciates accessibility for all; despite the wide dark streak that runs throughout his work, he tends to steer his collections toward the pop side, and unlike, say, Fatboy Slim, he thankfully doesn't allow much room for kitsch or silliness (his "Ocean's Eleven" soundtrack being a memorable exception). This is his first DJ set since 1998's "Essential Mix," and though his source material (the Staple Singers, Cyril Neville, oodles of forgotten groovers) is plenty lively, his treatment, delivered under the cheeky guise the Free Association, merely amounts to a swift perusal of his record collection. He's got some keepers in there, though, and what he does to Muddy Waters' "Tom Cat" is freaky in the best sense. **Grade:** B (B.W.)



ETTA JAMES puts out her first live album in nearly 20 years • Photo: Sonny Mediana

• **Etta James and the Roots Band, "Burnin' Down the House"** (RCA) – The blues queen's live show hasn't changed much over recent years, and why should it? It's rocking blues, rocking blues and then more rocking blues, delivered with extreme exuberance and simply oozing with authenticity. And here you have it in one convenient 72-minute package – one of popular music's great survivors and company captured live in December at the House of Blues in Hollywood. It's her first live album in nearly two decades, and the splendid remote recording captures every nuance of the busty, bluesy songstress' show as she tears through such war horses as "Come to Mama," "I Just Want to Make Love to You," the potently soulful "I'd Rather Go Blind" and a playfully sexy "You Can Leave Your Hat On." On the ballad side, there is a very sultry version of "My Funny Valentine" at the end of a three-tune medley – a nice change of pace. James' horn-drenched backup band, especially her longtime guitarist, Bobby Murray, is blazing throughout. Three



LUNA'S NEW ALBUM, 'Romantica,' is the seventh that the group has produced • Photo: Michael Lavine

words of advice: Turn it up. **Grade:** A (Steve Eddy/The Register)

• **Mason Jennings, "Century Spring"** (Architect/Bar None) – The singer-songwriter field has gotten pretty crowded lately, what with Jack Johnson, Pete Dinklage and Ryan Adams garnering airplay, and there's no slam-dunk on Jennings' third effort that will give the multinational gatekeepers pause for thought. Yet he's a strong, singular talent, whose tenderhearted pieces fall somewhere be-

tween the most melancholy of Freedy Johnston and the romantic realism of Ron Sexsmith. Here, stuffing 10 songs into 32 minutes flat, he veers from acoustic pop to chugging New York rock to dappled Kinksian balladry without overstating his good cheer or fondness for pretty melodies. Subtle, unassuming joy. (Jennings plays Monday at the Knitting Factory in Hollywood.) **Grade:** B+ (B.W.)

• **Luna, "Romantica"** (Jetset) – "I'm in a jam, you're in a pickle, we're in a stew," Luna

leader Dean Wareham sings in the title track from the band's seventh album (one of the finest in its catalog), a summation of sorts that ends with him asking, "How will I know what I think till I see what I say?" This comes at the finale of his loveliest and most lovelorn work, yet he draws no conclusions from his own sumptuous shoot-from-the-hip prologue, which begins with him blinded by "Lovedust" and feeling "Weird and Woozy," then saunters through a series of self-recriminations ("1995," when he "told a thousand lies") and hopeless scenarios ("Orange Peel's" shadows on the wall heading for a fall). In between, as tweaked by Mercury Rev's Dave Fridmann and Gene Holder of the dB's, are tunes of more variety than Luna is known for – rockers and downers, ornate ballads and cheeky pop that outdoes Imperial Teen. Real love songs for real lovers, sung by the only man who can get away with this couplet: "Salt and pepper and Singapore noodles / I could look at your face for oodles and oodles." **Grade:** A- (B.W.)

• **Rush, "Vapor Trails"** (Atlantic) – Long dismissed as irrelevant in mainstream music, Rush continues to plunge ahead. After a five-year absence to allow drummer and lyricist Neil Peart to recover from the deaths of his wife and daughter, the power trio releases yet another gem. But heed this warning: "Vapor Trails" (in stores Tuesday) does not continue in the same vein as the fresh "One Little Victory," released last month as the first single. The band not only has created a new sound, but has managed to blend a little bit of '70s, '80s and '90s Rush into the 13-song effort. The melodic jam-tempos of "Secret Touch" and "Peaceable Kingdom," the dreamy, almost whimsical "Ghost Rider" and the reflective approach to "Sweet Miracle" explore adventurous territory, proving the band has a new directive. Indeed, Rush devotees may scratch their heads, but by the third listen the fire will be brighter than ever. **Grade:** A- (Andrew Tuttle/The Register)