

THE MOTION SICK

PRESS CLIPS



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BAND OF THE MONTH
The Motion Sick
January 2006

The Motion Sick

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Sounds Like:
Hints of '50s pop, lyrical call-outs to Billy Joel tunes, songs named after '80s cartoon barbarians, and cheeky literary wordplay

Reader Comments:
"Always refreshing when smart people make listenable music that also engages your brain ever so gently. Lovely stuff."
- Intrepid
"Nerd rock at its finest."
- Zandar

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Songs

- 1** Fall Out Boy "Dance, Dance" (TS Radio Edit) Spin comrade Iommie Sunshine loses his frickin' mind on this hilarious electro-house remix, recasting the Boys as 'N Sync waving a rainbow flag.
- 2** Bonnie "Prince" Billy and Tortoise "Thunder Road" Bruce Springsteen's late-night bid for escape (and booty) gets a fresh gust of wind, courtesy of sci-fi synths and Ernie Isley's effects box.
- 3** Joanna Newsom "Only Skin (Live)" San Francisco's answer to Björk (both in vocal beauty and general weirdness), Newsom sings a heartbreaking lament for her skinned knees and absolutely shreds on the harp.
- 4** Ill Tactics "Rap Idol '06" A syrupy-smooth track from a Beaumont, Texas young'un with a switchblade for a tongue, who's "exploding on the game like a soda in the freezer."
- 5** East River Pipe "What Does T.S. Elliot Know About You?" F.M. Comog—indie rock's great satirist of sadness—rends a fool who quotes Elliot while dreaming of bong hits with Slash.
- 6** Mobb Deep and 50 Cent vs. Nu Shooz "I Can't Wait (Have a Party Pt. 2)" After selling their soul to thug exec Fiddy, the M-O-B-B are redeemed by an effervescent Nu Shooz sample.
- 7** Giant Drag "God Only Knows" Annie Hardy approaches this sublime Beach Boys classic with an adorable coo, like the world's hippest babysitter tucking in a sleepy-eyed kindergartner.
- 8** José González "Hand on Your Heart" The Swedish Argentine poet mauls Kylie Minogue's dance-floor confection into a despairing folk plaint straight from a Leonard Cohen afterworld.
- 9** Lavender Diamond "You Broke My Heart" Ginger Decky Stark merges with the trilly firmament on this gorgeously wounded, then sheepishly resilient, then inanely triumphant piano shamble.
- 10** Loose Fur "The Ruling Class" Jeff Tweedy and Jim O'Rourke deploy gentle strumming and sunny whistling on a campaign ad for Christ, reborn here as a crack-smoking, smack-shooting badass dude.
- 11** Lupe Fiasco "Tilted" Riding Needlz' fresh-to-death dying-siren groove, the Chicago MC tilts his brim and brings the "violins like Nero," burning the competition without even glancing up.
- 12** Pansy Division "He Whipped My Ass in Tennis Then I Fucked His Ass in Bed" The only queercore band to ever open for Green Day discusses romance's give-and-take.
- 13** Mystery Jets "Alas Agnes" This Mancunian family band—featuring Elaine Harrison on vocals and dead Harry on guitar—is a fun, groovy little fun to Aston Martin.
- 14** The Motion Sick "Satellite" After suggesting another Chris Carrabba copycat, the Motion Sick overturn a Dumpster full of chunky guitar fuzz, smooching his pompadoured noggin.
- 15** Wolf and Cub "Steal Their Gold" Starts out like normal garage-y dance rock, then transcends into a hell ride of scab-eating noise and trash-can-banging hate funk. A real charmer.

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GREEN LIGHT GO
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Best Boston picks for 2006

The Motion Sick "Her Brilliant Fifteen"

What's cooler--getting Spin.com Band of the Day or getting Spin.com Band of the Day before you've even played a show? That's the way it happened for The Motion Sick. Their charming chock-a-block debut is cut from double-A grade pop stock in the vein Neutral Milk Hotel, Weezer and Brendan Benson.

Check out: "Satellite," "Pre-Existing Condition," "Driving in England"

PERFORMERMAG.COM

The Motion Sick



A slightly clumsy horn section drives home the charmingly semi-awkward feel of the song. The group seems comfortable in their discomfort, like their shoes are a bit too large or maybe their contact lens prescription is just a little off. Epstein has a knack for twisting normal clichés into contradictory refrains: "The bigger they are, the harder they fall / But size never matters at the end of it all." While the song rides waves of catchy, classic melodies, its darkly resigned and frustrated lyrical tone are interestingly at odds with the music.

Other songs like "Dead-Letter Officer" exude this off-kilter, darkly comedic tone as well. The guitar stumbles around the song with melodies that seem to be tumbling down the stairs in their warbly descent.

The group's willingness to take pratfalls is perhaps their defining aspect, but it doesn't hurt that Epstein, Richter, Girard and Mussari are all capable hands at their instruments. Each part has distinct personality, yet the members function as a cohesive whole on stage and on record.

The band is like a well-balanced breakfast with equal parts musicianship and honesty, musically and emotionally. There is a lot of feeling in each song, but it's not garish by any means. While the band manages to distill a great deal of emotional pain and heartbreak, it eschews melodrama with quirkiness and understatement. They're Weezer without the over exaggerated indie style or Dashboard Confessional without the emo histrionics.

The group's latest release, titled *Her Brilliant Fifteen* is an 11-track effort in which the group puts its entire essence on display, dropping real world and not-so-obscure references to the aforementioned Marshall stack, *The Wizard of Oz*, and even some political issues in "My Country," a sort of protest song. The members of the band may feel like they don't quite "belong" yet — their name is a reference to stowaways on pirate ships — but they may find themselves captains yet. One can't imagine the band trading in their roguish essence in favor of something more "stately," though. The band seems currently on a course for Wyld Stallyns-style world domination. At least people will finally know where they saw the band members' faces.



The Motion Sick (Digital Bear, \$12) The debut from this Boston indie band is 24-carat radio fodder. Songwriter Michael Epstein threads glimmering pop hooks with a hipster sensibility and the odd lick of alt-country jangle, and he's not averse to layering '80's-style power chords alongside an accordion riff. An audiology professor at Northeastern, Epstein's lyrics are sometimes too cute, but so are Weezer's. Anything's pardonable, though, when you produce such ir-repressable, and indelible, pop choruses.

The Motion Sick guitarist/vocalist Michael Epstein is one of those people who seems instantly familiar for some reason. He has a distinct look, long sideburns streaking from his curly hair down the sides of his angular face. He is constantly asked "Where do I know you from?" and seems to always offer the same shrug and smile like it's the story of his life. The rest of the band follows suit: drummer Travis Richter, bassist Matthew Girard and guitarist Patrick Mussari might be the band you saw in Cambridge last night or the guys who work down the hall from you.

This is the story of The Motion Sick — they look familiar and sound familiar, too. Part of it is simple musical sensibility. The band threads hooks throughout their songs like skilled fisherman, pulling in ears with strong melodies and vocal harmonies in songs like the slow-building, harmony-laden "Satellite." Epstein bemoans a lack of communication, lamenting "Even if I had a satellite, I could never reach your brain."

The song continues with a list of fantastical items — UFOs, atom bombs, time machines and Marshall stacks — none of which he believes will help solve his relationship problems.



Another Life

Last Semester, Michael Epstein taught a course at Northeastern University in hearing science, which focused on how people perceive sound, but he's got more than an academic interest in the subject.

Epstein, 29 (center), not only teaches about sound, he creates it in his new band, the Motion Sick. And as the audiology professor--who doubles as singer and guitarist --tests his material on local audiences, he can see firsthand how people perceive the sound of his music.

The group's debut album, "Her Brilliant Fifteen," drew "Band of the Month" accolades in April's Spin magazine, which praised

Epstein's "cheeky literary wordplay." The songwriter melds danceable pop hooks with sometimes melancholy lyrics, such as "Let's go for a walk in the moonlight, so I can fail to say what I feel."

Epstein, who got his doctorate from Northeastern and lives in Somerville, is happy he can balance music and scholarship, even if it doesn't leave him much free time. He's been known, for instance, to write articles for academic journals at 2 a.m. after rehearsing all night.

"I've had people tell me, 'You're going to have to give [music] up or make a decision between two different things,'" he said. "And I just kept saying no. I don't have to. And I haven't had to yet."

Besides, playing music isn't that different from teaching, he says. It's all about getting people to listen.



Nerd rockers the Motion Sick were making headlines before they played their first show. Reminiscent of early Weezer, the group was deemed both Band of the Day and Band of the Month by Spin magazine before releasing its debut CD - "Her Brilliant Fifteen" - or playing its first gig.

"I sent out press releases and I guess they liked it," said singer Michael Epstein, sipping tea at the Diesel Cafe in Somerville. "I had the magazine the day before the first show."

A professor of audiology at Northeastern University, Epstein likes to work quirky quips into the band's songs. And since he's an expert on hearing - and has the degrees to prove it - it makes sense that people enjoy what this 3-year-old band plays - so much so that WFNX-FM chose the Motion Sick as the winner of the station's Last Band Standing competition.

Drummer Travis Richter said the group's moniker is "a strange, Victorian pirate term meaning a stowaway." When he confessed that he came across it while listening to a book-on-tape that had Fabio's picture on the cover, he blushed.

The band just finished recording its sophomore album for Naked Ear Records. In addition to a cover of Joy Division's "Love Will Tear Us Apart," Richter said that the Motion Sick will include more aggressive original tunes on the new album.

"Sometimes they give us nightmares as we work on it," Richter said.

That's not the case for the '50s-style original "30 Lives." The band made a dance remix of the song and a video, which was shot at Holliston and Arlington Catholic high schools. It gets its premiere tonight at Great Scott (check out behind-the-video photos at their Web site, www.themotionsick.com).

"'30 Lives' is a '50s-style song," Epstein said. "It has a dancey feel but it also has a video game reference. We're pushing it as our new single."

The song's title and lyrics refer to a game code that rewards a player with extra lives. The group chants the "up, up, down, down, B, A" code during the chorus while it teaches the audience to do an accompanying dance.

What fun.

"It's pretty easy," Epstein said. "You can get it after the first chorus."