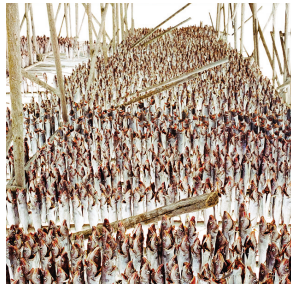


Dirty On Purpose

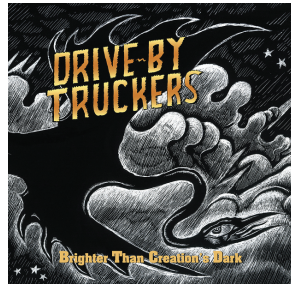
Like Bees EP
(North Street)



Dirty On Purpose is a Brooklyn four-piece whose sound is heavily rooted in the wash of guitars that typified late-'80s shoegaze. Their take on that sound pushes the melody more to the fore, creating an enjoyable if surprisingly pop-friendly amalgam. They play with volume dynamics and display an uncanny ability to unleash the noise at just the right moment without lapsing into predictability. Their new EP represents the group's sound well, making the most of the band's strengths. The songs carry a sweetly melancholy air, propelled by winsome vocals and minor chord workouts, but are buttressed by a hopeful strain that keeps the proceedings from ever growing mopey. Moments like the quiet, reflective calm of the title track counterbalance the bouncing distortion of opener "Audience," ultimately building into the lovely crescendo of "Airshow Disaster." Folks who have seen the group live will also undoubtedly be pleased with the inclusion of the band's scuzzed-out, crowd-pleasing cover of Real Life's "Send Me An Angel." The brevity of the disc also ensures that the songs never overstay their welcome, offering a track listing with no duds in sight. The band has been riding a wave of positive press, and this EP should keep the accolades coming.

—JIM KOPENY

RATING: ★★★★★
▶ AVAILABLE JAN. 15



Drive-By Truckers

Brighter Than Creation's Dark
(New West)

Drive-By Truckers are perhaps best known for the triple-guitar southern-rock pumpers of 2001's *Southern Rock Opera*. On *Brighter Than Creation's Dark*, the band delivers their signature twang and gothic-tinged tales alongside hardy tunes about adulthood and modern life. With track names like "The Man I Shot," "Daddy Needs A Drink," and "You and Your Crystal Meth," Drive-By Truckers are delivering yarns from the school of classic country rock; perfectly locked harmonies and robust slide guitar lines make clear that this is the same band who wrote an album loosely based on the history of Lynyrd Skynyrd. *Brighter Than Creation's Dark* has fewer soaring rock songs and a more personal feel than their seven previous albums. With songs about facing grown-up, real-life responsibilities, like "Two Daughters and A Beautiful Wife," and "The Righteous Path," owning up to realities like, "I don't know God but I fear his wrath," and, "Got a whole lot of debt and a whole lot of fear," Drive-By Truckers have delivered 19 tracks about beauty and pain as well as the extraordinary and the mundane realities of modern life. Still distinctly southern, *Brighter Than Creation's Dark* is Drive-By Truckers' most universal album yet.

—CHRISTEN THOMAS

RATING: ★★★★★
▶ AVAILABLE JAN. 22

Ghostface Killah

The Big Doe Rehab
(Def Jam)



With his third album in two years, Ghostface has turned in another outstanding effort: *The Big Doe Rehab* is an ode to what money can do to ease our troubles. The lyrics and production of the album have a soulful and celebratory feeling. It opens up with Ghost dropping a comical off-the-wall skit inspired by the Bennie Blanco scene in *Carlito's Way*. The musical tone of the album starts with a gritty collaboration with Beanie Sigel called "Barrel Brothers," a hardcore track with lyrics to match. Pretty Toney gets into a higher level of storytelling than usual that makes this album unique from its predecessors. "Yapp City" is a cleverly spun tale of violence and robbery, while "White Linen Affair" takes us through a fictitious hip-hop awards ceremony with vivid detail. This album in many ways is a better showcase for Wu-Tang than the recent *8 Diagrams* release that has garnered controversy. "Rec-Room Therapy," "Paisley Darts" and the excellent "Yolanda's House" all feature Wu-Tang members, including a re-invigorated Method Man, who pairs with Ghostface to close the album with the mesmerizing "Killa Lipstick," about a woman with a deadly secret. But without a strong single or a "ringtone" song, the masses may miss out on an otherwise stellar release.

—RASHAAN MEADOR

RATING: ★★★★★
▶ AVAILABLE NOW



Lupe Fiasco

Lupe Fiasco's The Cool
(Atlantic)

The rapper who brought skateboards, robots and intelligence to the forefront of hip-hop is back with his sophomore effort, *Lupe Fiasco's The Cool*. It shows the same finesse and lyrical dexterity that had hip-hop heads rejoicing over his debut, *Food and Liquor*, but this is partly a concept album that follows a character featured in two tracks on *Food*. The Cool, a product of a single-parent home, gets caught up in the streets—a familiar story that gets a fresh treatment on four tracks. Fiasco's up-tempo rapping shines as he tackles the ills of society over old-school rap drumbeats with soaring, epic music behind him. From immigration and rape on "Intruder Alert" to video game violence on "Little Weapon," Fiasco's thoughtful storytelling and lightning-quick wordplay is refreshing. He's unapologetic on "Dumb It Down," with a chorus of an unimpressed listener ("Them big words ain't cool / We didn't graduate from school") and a white exec pleading with him ("You've been shedding too much light, Lu / You make 'em wanna do right, Lu"). Faltering here and there (the ballad "Paris, Tokyo" and an ill-advised cameo from Snoop Dogg in "Hi-Definition"), *The Cool* is nevertheless a great listen for fans new and old.

—ANTHONIA AKITUNDE

RATING: ★★★★★
▶ AVAILABLE NOW