

Stardrop

The Vole Sessions

Bevdone (stardroponline.com)

The Vole Sessions is an impressive, comfortable debut from Stardrop, a Columbus, Ohio-based four piece. Listeners will likely be immediately drawn into the familiarity and safety of their polished, radio-ready brand of alternative rock. Most of the EP's musical textures are of the mid-tempo variety and recall the dramatic sonic pastiche of bands like the Doves, U2 and early Radiohead. Singer Thomas Miller's raspy Cobain-esque voice mixed with the post-grunge drawl of Scott Stapp push the band toward the Creed camp of alterna-shlock, but where the band truly shines is on "She's a Star," a stark, bluesy stomp that shows how adept the band is at attempting some originality.

—JEFF SHELTON

Stratocruiser

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Neon Pie (neonpie.com)

Stratocruiser are a North Carolina-based five piece who, with the engineering help of pal Robert Sledge (Ben Folds Five) and musical contributions from ex-Gladhand Doug Edmunds, have released a debut full of psychedelic-tinged pop. Although the band does strive at times for a modern sensibility, it's hard to overlook the signature Byrds jangle, the heavily reverbed drums and the distinctively '60s sound (save for a brief fast forward to the '80s with the XTC-inspired "Brave the Storm"). There's no denying that Stratocruiser do a fine job paying homage to their roots, but the record suffers from inconsistent production values, (especially on more distinctively lo-fi tracks such as "Superstar of Cool" and "The Too Close Song") and Ronald Tucker's flat, soulless voice.

—JEFF SHELTON

The Suggestions

Mix Tape

Mr. Duck (thesuggestions.com)

The Suggestions are a band vehicle for John Brodeur, an Albany, N.Y., singer/songwriter who already holds a war chest of favorable local press

as the boy most likely to be the town's next power pop phenomenon – or, at the very least, its new Tal Bachman. Brodeur deadpans his urban pop constructions with the same arrogance as *Runt*-era Todd Rundgren, pulling off arrangement twists that keep his tunes floating a safe distance above the drainage ditch of pop icon body-snatching. "Be True" rockets along at a stage-diving pace, held in check by Brodeur's halting vocals and a mid-section that would make a Fountains of Wayne fan proud. *Mix Tape's* key track is "Halo," a haunting minor masterpiece of Harrison-esque acoustic passages. Speaking of the Quiet Beatle, there's an elegant reading of "Art of Dying," Brodeur's contribution to the recent Harrison tribute album *He Was Fab*. It makes sense – along with Rundgren, Harrison's shimmering late-Beatles sound seems to be Brodeur's other chief musical touchstone. With only eight songs ("Antidote" is the hidden bonus track) including alternate versions of "Halo" and the aforementioned Harrison tune, *Mix Tape* feels a little padded, like a holding action till Brodeur can lay something bigger on the pop world. Bring it on.

—BRAD HARVEY

Sukilove

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Hidden Agenda (parasol.com)

The second album by Dutch singer/songwriter Pascal Deweze under the "band" name Sukilove (basically a cover for himself and whoever else is in the room) builds on the sound first introduced on last year's *Talking in the Dark*. Deweze (better known on these shores as one-half of Chitlin' Fooks, the cosmic cowboy duo featuring Bettie Serveert's Carol Van Dyk) has a fondness for stately minor-key melodies decorated with strings, horns and tape effects. The effect is sumptuous and detailed, but unfortunately, Deweze is not as talented a singer or songwriter as he is an arranger; there are no genuinely bad songs here, and some are in fact excellent – the delightfully gimmicky "Man (Ain't Man Enough)," complete with kazoo solos and a bouncy melody, sounds like some weird fusion of Wings' *Venus and Mars* and

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