

mainly to the sweet sounds of Sweden's Annie, a one-named electro-diva who has set Internet music blogs afire for months with a handful of Royksopp-produced dance anthems that make Britney Spears sound like a lobotomized Tiffany, so mercilessly glorious are the hooks of "Heartbeat" and "Me Plus One" (see also Kylie Minogue's Scissor Sisters-produced "I Believe in You," a song which, like most of Kylie's music, oozes pure, unadulterated sex).

Or, ponder the curious career of Gorillaz, and more specifically, its singer-cartoon, Damon Albarn. Damon would've given up Guinness in 1995 to enter the American Top 10 with his "real" band, Blur. But for kids gorging on Soundgarden and, shudder, Bush, the music hall sing-along style of "Parklife" and the horns of "The Universal" sounded like a Herman's Hermits B-side; never mind that both are true nineties classics.

No, Damon had to become animated to crack the U.S.A. (let's not count "Song 2," an American smash that stands out in Blur's back catalog like Martha Stewart on Riker's Island). Gorillaz' "Feel Good Inc." is undeniably fantastic, a breezy, beat-drenched treat that calls to mind De La Soul with just a twinge of rootsy folk.

Speaking of Bush, wasn't that Mr. Gwen Stefani and former nineties pinup Gavin Rossdale acting all suave-Brit-creepy in the overblown Keanu Reeves vehicle *Constantine*? With his band's well of angsty, Nirvana-lite rock finally dry as a bone and virtually no buzz surrounding his new group, the drearily-named Institute, this seems like a good career move. Now if only Jessica Simpson would follow suit.

And while we're on the subject of filmhood dipped in nineties irony, Gus Van Sant's thinly-veiled portrait of Kurt Cobain's dreary end, *Last Days*, was recently released to bum us all out. (Let's not even get into Courtney's woes.)

Kurt's isn't the only corpse being plundered. There has also been the continued fascination with Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur, both of whom have released about an album a month since their deaths. (The Stone Roses spent five years in hibernation only to emerge with twelve tracks, Big Star has taken about thirty years between records—for the love of God,

how much music did Tupac and Biggie actually record? A track per hour?) *Tupac: Resurrection* was a documentary hit, and a Notorious B.I.G. biopic is planned. Death remains a wonderful career move, especially for nineties icons.

Some of this nuzzling of the past is rather nice. This year, for example, has seen killer albums from nineties heavyweights Nine Inch Nails, Oasis, Garbage, Beck, and even Scotland's Teenage Fanclub, whose *Man-Made* is the first the group recorded outside of the British Isles.

For a real mental trip back to the sounds of 1995, pick up Embrace's *Out of Nothing* or the Kaiser Chiefs' *Employment*. The Chiefs look set to be this year's Franz Ferdinand, having released two strong singles in America to downright rapturous response: "I Predict a Riot" and "Oh My God." The sound? Blur, back when Blur mattered.

Embrace was all the rage in Britain in the mid-nineties with a series of devastatingly pretty singles, and had the added bonus of featuring two brothers, a la the Gallaghers. However, the band's one American release, *The Good Will Out*, had less commercial impact than Pat Boone's metal album.

But Embrace toughed it out, releasing two more so-so records and even a greatest hits package, all without American distribution. Last year, the boys came back with two singles to remind the world what they once offered: the piano-driven, Chris Martin-penned "Gravity," and a soaring, thunderous anthem titled "Ashes," surely the band's finest single to date. Embrace now finds themselves with an American record deal once again.

Best of all? Hearing "Ashes" instantly brings an aging trainspotter back to the glory days of the mid-nineties, of The verve, Suede, Cast, and Pulp. And that's the right kind of nostalgia. It warms the heart, and, for better or worse, fogs the mind. Maybe Cinderella and Ratt have it right: rock certainly does not stop—even when you kind of wish it would.

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## BELIEVE IT OR NOT: ALICIA RIPLEY

HOW COULD WE RESIST A TWENTY-SOMETHING AUTHOR WHOSE WORK HAS BEEN CALLED "BOTH ENDLESSLY FUNNY AND RELENTLESSLY DISTURBING," a provocative mix of colorful dreamscapes and awful nightmares that settle into your thoughts and refuse to let go?"

We couldn't. Buffalo native and Buff Sem graduate Alicia Ripley will be visiting

her hometown this month to promote her first novel, *Traveling with an Eggplant*. The launch party is October 27, at the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, and will be followed by other appearances and readings to be announced.

*Traveling with an Eggplant*, as far as we could tell (no

preview copy was available), is a coming-of-age fantasy-adventure; the young female protagonist uses the music in her head to confront demons from the past and decide the possibilities of the future, as she rises through the ranks of music journalism and deals with difficult relationships.

Ripley was recently nominated for an Independent Spirit Award at the upcoming Toronto Book Festival. A graduate of Syracuse University, Ripley has also studied in the New York University Creative Writing Program and at the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute.

Ripley is currently completing two other novels and says about *Travels*: "This novel is a throwback to books that challenge readers to use creativity and imagination. I'm discouraged by all these so-called 'chick-lit' books on the market. Why is it interesting to read the umpteenth book on who is sleeping with whom in the Hamptons?"

A resident of Manhattan until recently, Ripley plans to relocate to Hawaii in early 2006. For more information on local readings and

appearances and how to obtain a copy of Ripley's new book, check the Spree blog, [www.spreeblog.com](http://www.spreeblog.com), as this information was not available at presstime.

—E.L.

