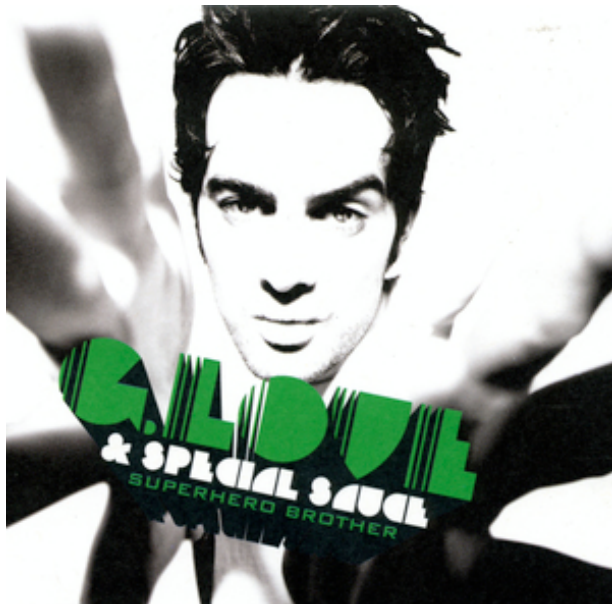




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Philly flare from Amos Lee, G. Love

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Two Philly dudes lead our new music parade this week.

Our Famous Amos: Singer-songwriter Amos Lee is back with a third and altogether agreeable album "**Last Days at the Lodge**" (**Blue Note, B**). Haven't made his acquaintance? Lee is master of a gently soulful, organic, vocal and finger-picked guitar style that updates the aesthetic of guys like Bill Withers, Eric Clapton and Dion (DiMucci). He also connects - in tonality and intimacy - to the kind of tasteful, genre gapping, adult alternative work that his label mate Norah Jones is into. The guy grabbed me quick this time with the easy rocking ballad "Won't Let Me Go" that wraps his earnest two-zone vocals (love that falsetto) in a

bundle of sweet strings tied by arranger Larry Gold. And Lee kept me hanging in with the mysterious blues "Truth," the country tinged ex-lover's lament "What's Been Going On" (dig the Spooner Oldham and Rami Jaffee keyboard work), the hip hop-styled phrasing of "Street Corner Preacher" and the sweet benediction of "Better Days."

Hitting The G Spot: "Philadelphonic" singer, guitarist and harmonica playin' G. Love has cut a unique niche as a "hip hop blues artist." And he's firing on all cylinders again with his band Special Sauce on "**Superhero Brother**" (**Brushfire Records, A-**). G (who also answers to the name Garrett Dutton) seems to have a perpetual grin on his

face and positive spin in his tunes, jamming even through the struggles of "City Livin' " like a latter day Archie Bell and the Drells. This party animal also serves up a funky new dance sensation (how very Philly) called the "Wiggle Worm," evokes a "Good Lovin' " kinda vibe on "Peace, Love and Happiness," gets a good buzz on with The Pharcyde MC Slim Kid on "Who's Got the Weed" and saves the day with the talking blues, superheroic title track.

Rock Around the Clock: Alejandro Escovedo began his career as a rocker in The Nuns and cow-punky Rank and File. Happily he's now come full circle with **"Real Animal" (Back Porch/Manhattan, A-)** reflecting on his impulsive youth. This time, he had the sense to sign on a super producer - Tony Visconti of David Bowie fame - to make sure all is sonically punchy, even when he's sharing memories like "We know we're not in tune, we know we'll never be great" (from "Nuns Song.") Say, it ain't so! The 57-year-old Escovedo has had some health concerns recently, and occasionally gets around to putting things in contemporary perspective with "People (We're Only Gonna Live So Long)" and the show capping "Slow Down." But truthfully, the fun comes in turning back the clock.

Some fans seem ready to follow My Morning Jacket off the edge of a cliff on the basis of **"Evil Urges" (ATO, B)**. I'm not quite as entranced by front guy Jim James' "charisma," chameleon-like vocals and classic rock quoting compositional ways - evoking at turns Led Zeppelin, Prince, Bob Dylan, Tom Petty, Badfinger, the Moody Blues and umpteen, pedal-steel flavored southern rock bands. But he and the band did get me good on the soul popping "Thank You Too!," split nature "Two Halves" and rousing "Smokin' From Shootin'."

If you're a fan of frisky fellas like Franz Ferdinand, Kaiser Chiefs and Vampire Weekend, take a listen to The Wombats, a dance rock group equally splashy and sunny and lyrically lots more amusing. Spawned in Liverpool, England, this heavily accented trio repeatedly revels in romance gone sour on their debut set **"A Guide to Love, Loss & Desperation" (14th Floor Records, B+)**. Me favorite character studies? The mixed blessings of "School Uniforms" and "Backfire at the Disco," the out of reach dental hygienist "Little Miss Pipedream" and maybe too accessible "Patricia the Stripper," plus the augering of bad things to come "My First Wedding" and especially their odd solution to all problems - "Let's Dance to Joy Division."

Tribute Time: Whisky-throated lounge singer (and I mean that in a good way) Steve Tyrell pays tribute to his former mentor on **"Back To Bacharach" (New Design/Koch, B)**. We're talking composer/arranger Burt Bacharach, the genius in residence at Scepter Records when Tyrell landed there as an A&R and promotion man. Like Burt, Steve's an imperfect singer with lots of feeling, which makes him ideal to do up the master's work - "Walk On By," "Alfie," "I Say a Little Prayer for You" (joined by Patti Austin) and "What the World Needs Now" (also featuring Bacharach, Martina McBride, Rod Stewart, James Taylor and Dionne Warwick.)

While identified as **"Hucknall-Tribute To Bobby" (Atco/Rhino, B+)**, I would have called the set "Red on Blue." Cause it's carrot-topped Mick Hucknall (longtime lead

singer of Simply Red) redoing songs made famous by blues great Bobby "Blue" Bland. The good news is that Hucknall has stamped the stuff with a modern, smoother and at times jazzier touch, turning up the tempo of songs like "Farther Up the Road," "Stormy Monday" and "Chains of Love." All the better to lure in the uninitiated.

Win, Place & Show: Hardest working man in show business Lil Wayne sure ruled the cash registers last week with the scattershot **"Tha Carter III" (Cash Money, B-)**, selling an amazing million copies. Gangsta rap duo Three 6 Mafia will likely kick butt this week with the heavy-handed **"Last 2 Walk" (Hypnotize Minds/Columbia, B-)**. But for sheer fun and enduring musicality, **"Seeing Songs" by N.E.R.D. (Interscope, A-)** remains the hip-hop album of the season, by my book. *