

Victory at Sea
Memories Fade
Gern Blandsten

Let's start with the namesake of the Boston four-piece, which is generally the subject of aquatic puns in music journalism. It's pretty irresistible to make such remarks, but as the tides ebb and flow and the sand shifts, the same thing can be said about the many lineup changes that it has gone through in its career. With Mona Elliott and Mel Lederman as the remaining core, Victory at Sea experienced the departure of drummer Carl Eklof after his one-off stint in 2002's *The Good Night*, replaced by David Miller Norton in the rhythm section. Permanent recruit Taro Hatanaka's dirgelike violin adds chamber rock sophistication to the forefront.

Although slightly lacking the emotional immediacy of its wonderfully crestfallen 2001 release *Carousel*, the band hasn't lost its chops. [Elliott even throws in a surprise brief arena-rock lick in the tongue-in-cheek "Birthday Song (Death March)."] Victory at Sea toys with songwriting structures, teetering between trauma and slap-happy posturing with mixed results. It's a hit or miss—"Animals and the Weather" is a botched attempt at creating a country-and-western upbeat piece that should've been left on the cutting floor of a Nashville studio. "This Life" suffers from lethargic vocals, but fear not—Elliott is very much alive and well when she's walking wounded. Call it sadomasochistic guilty pleasure or Schadenfreude, but as always, Elliott is at her best when she dons her emo sackcloth in "Love Is Ageless," "Logan Way," and "Break of Day" with the usual trappings of rend-your-heart-out, lung-busting mixed unison chorus and thundering math-rock drum rolls we have come to love from (the then-defunct and now-regrouped) Sunny Day Real Estate and its spiritual kin. Here's hoping for Elliott's many years of therapy—no sarcasm intended.

Tree Wave
Cabana EP +
Made Up

History does repeat itself (sometimes ad infinitum, ad nauseam) in the return of ruching patterns and polyester in the fashion world, shaggy '70s and '80s-inspired hairdos, and back-to-analog basics in the music circle. Whether it's nostalgia or mere lack of imagination over the decades, recycling and reusing are the in things to do. What Tree Wave does in the trend continuum is anyone's guess, but it's not your average jump-in-the-bandwagon outfit. This twosome has garnered an overnight success in the indie circuit—participation in various big-time festivals in NYC and their Dallas home base, in addition to being the subject of TV programs and documentaries. It's easy to see the EP's winsome qualities at first listen—bouncy, bubbly, highly infectious motorik beats topped with Lauren Gray's alluring voice. Machine gun-precise PacMan-style bleeps and bleeps pounce and scatter about. This is the Super Mario Brothers or Metroid dance soundtrack album that Nintendo never released.

In the age of Pentium-powered gadgets that are fast becoming obsolete the minute you walk out of the computer store, Tree Wave delivers pre-ProTools/CakeWalk geek-chic recording technique in the hands of programmer-by-trade Paul Slocum. Using Commodore 64, Atari 2600, and Epson dot matrix printer, he does an amazing feat in coaxing old-school trinkets into full-fledged hi-fi studio gear. Surprisingly, there's percolating warmth to the production

enough to whet anyone's appetite for the next full-length effort from this Texas export the whole world can agree with.

Pia Fraus

Mooie Island EP

Seksound

As the latest follow-up to the well-received *Plastilina*, Pia Fraus is back for good under its own newly established label Seksound to bring the usual pristine, crystalline jangly strums. It demonstrates more competence in layering other sound properties other than its guitar-based staple. Some new and improved warm fuzzies that hark back to *Isn't Anything*-era My Bloody Valentine are placed alongside a little moment of scratchy guitar-à la-Sonic Youth madness. Pia Fraus is more known for its confection of bite-sized pop munchies—immediate, to-the-point hooks galore in small EP-format packages—but it's willing to stretch out in “My Landlord Is Trying to Kill Me,” the low-frequency, darkly ambient synth free-for-all. Almost inaudible beginning on the last twenty minutes of the first half of the record, the band flirts with the experimental side of things, pulling off an avant-gardist stunt in its insertion of dead-silent spaces throughout the whole track. It's hardly a novel approach, but for a band with sunny pop proclivities, it's a brave step towards musical maturity.