




Water Liars

 *Phantom Limb*
Misra Records

If the end of St. Louis' own Theodore has you bummed, don't despair too much. While members of the band recently announced that they were going their own separate ways, frontman Justin Kinkel-Schuster has already forged ahead as he has teamed up with Mississippi multi-instrumentalist Andrew Bryant. Written and recorded in three days, the collaboration resulted in *Phantom Limb*, a set of nine pieces ranging from aggressive, fuzzed-out washes of noise to brittle acoustic ballads. As it turns out, *Phantom Limb* was the spark that triggered the birth of a new artistic partnership known now as Water Liars.

Opening with a wall of stiff, towering progressions, the plodding chords soon enough give way to a coasting folk-pop

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number entitled "≈100", featuring a pulsing melody firmly propelled by rhythmically repeating duos of choppy guitar licks. "Dog Eaten", a spectral ballad which proves to be the album's finest piece, follows second. A trickling stream of crystalline guitar strumming hangs bright but somber in the background, suspended behind Kinkel-Schuster's haunting and melancholic confessions.

"Fresh Hell/It Is Well," another one of *Phantom Limb's* ethereal highlights, sweeps forward in gentle bursts before dissolving into a hazy mist that seems to dangle and lilt airily in place. The up-tempo "Short Hair" is a veritable rock 'n' roll headbanger, but the clang and clamor disrupts the pristine and chilled atmosphere left by the piece's softer-spoken counterparts. The warm, but wary "Rest" drifts to a lazy cadence, while the thicker "Whoa Back" precariously sways back and forth, its weight matched by the vocalist's heavy-handed resignations. The album, however, closes with the solemn "On The Day." Imagining life's final moments, Kinkel-Schuster narrates the consequences of his life and the aftermath of his departure, cognizant of every committed sin and wrongdoing,

as there is nowhere left for him to hide. A quiet buildup nearly results in a swelling crescendo, but, before picking up enough steam, "On The Day" concludes almost as silently as it had began, terminating in a halo of static and howling white noise in which a train roars in the distance.

Lyrical broaching themes of death, futility, and loneliness and often coupled with dark and murky religious overtones, Kinkel-Schuster and Bryant create haunting soundscapes that are as serene as they are bleak. The faded, muted tracks are what make *Phantom Limb* a quietly stirring release, one that may take more than a casual listen-through for the gravity of the compositions to sink in. Given the delicate, raw beauty of much of the record, however, *Phantom Limb* was not crafted for an inattentive audience. Though the more aggressive and up-tempo tracks leave more to be desired, the icy, yet elegant compositions from this initial output between both musicians indicates that this artistic tandem is built to last. After Theodore, there is life after death in Water Liars.

Water Liars release *Phantom Limb* at Off Broadway on February 24th, supported by Bob Reuter's Alley Ghost. »
- Andrew Blank

 **Yankee Racers**
Duologue
Self-Released

They say it takes a village to raise a child, but what about an album? In the case of *Duologue*, the first full-length release from the duo Yankee Racers, the term "group effort" is a vast understatement. The band - St. Louis' Curt Brewer and Chicago's Nathan Jatcko - compiled sounds and efforts from a wide spectrum of local musical big wigs, from the lads of So Many Dynamos to The Blind Eyes' Seth Porter to Jerry Mazzuca and Chris Turnbaugh of the jazzy heroes Groupthink. *Duologue*

features a significant chunk of the St. Louis music community within its bouncy, arpeggiated guitars and happy-go-lucky vocals.

Ambitious? No doubt. On paper *Duologue* adds up to a gargantuan album; in reality it falls short of its aspirations. "All the Ashes" is a perfect example - with its swirling guitar lines and wistful vocal melodies, it has the potential to be a massive song. Instead, what perhaps is intended to be dreamy simply comes off as a little bit lazy and flat. Too many of the songs on *Duologue* fall within the same auditory vein. "Fall Away" and "Morning

Train" could almost be mistaken for the same quiet, vaguely folk-oriented song, and "This Love" isn't much different from the two. Where the songs have the potential to be grand and profound, the music instead comes up thin.

The ideas are there - they just need to be tightened up and focused. The talent is there - it just needs to be allowed to flow more freely. Yankee Racers most definitely have enough ambition and skill to craft a better effort than *Duologue*. »
- Matthew Flores