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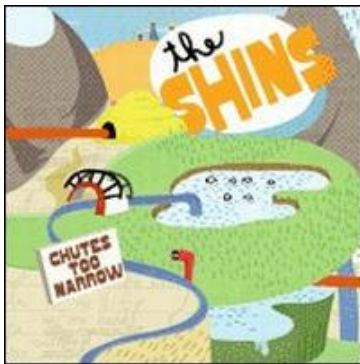
The Spin Cycle

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March 22nd, 2004

The Shins *Chutes Too Narrow*

By Elliot Cole



What we have here is a gem, an album that comes around every so often and fulfills every expectation with originality, sincerity, and flat out talent. Indie-rockers THE SHINS made a name for themselves in 2001 with "Oh, Inverted World", but unlike most indie acts have actually returned with an album that could possibly be *better* than the group's debut. THE SHINS make their influences readily apparent, but still manage to pull off an individualistic sound that creates a certain atmosphere throughout their sophomore effort, "Chutes Too Narrow", that could make this album a classic.

With fuzzy, reverb-laden guitars layered with the soft "woo hoo's" and "la la la's" of singer James Mercer, THE SHINS take a more ranged approach to "Chutes Too Narrow". While the pop sensibilities are as prevalent as they were with "Oh, Inverted World", the new album has more variety, from the unconventional feeling of

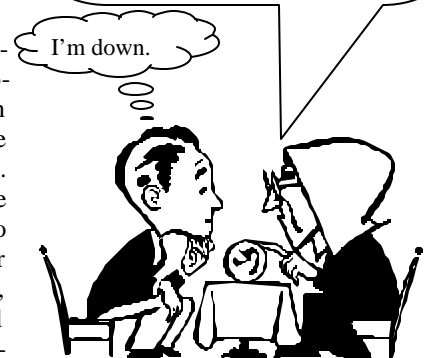
"Saint Simon" to the soft-spoken "Young Pilgrims" (which, along with the preceding "So Says I" and the opener "Kissing the Lipless", is one of my personal favorites). Every track on the 10-song album reaches out in a new direction for the group, but still manages to be cohesively fluid, as if tied together by some extraordinary element that lies beneath the surface of the music. Safe to say, despite the head bopping sound that could mistakenly be associated with simplicity, the musicianship on "Chutes Too Narrow" is amazing, from the distorted guitars to the timely organs. While subtle, the sound of tracks like "Pink Bullets" grabs you and doesn't let go until the following track can do it all over again. In a word, this album is capturing, and the raw, unrefined-but-just-right feel of each song compliments Mercer's melodic vocals, which seemingly have as much range as the band does talent.

While "Oh, Inverted World" blew away audiences a couple of years ago, nobody expected THE SHINS to be able to take it to this level. Generally, we associate debut albums with "potential" and "someday", but "Oh, Inverted World" seemed so superior that it left us wondering, "Could they honestly get much better?" Well, they have, and THE SHINS have crafted an album that is both precisely artistic and subtly natural. "Chutes Too Narrow" is essential for anyone who appreciates music enough to value the sheer honesty of an indie-pop album that combines harmonies with intelligent songwriting and enough variety to make you bob your head one minute and leave you breathless the next.

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**If You Are Who You Say
You Are, The Silent
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Top Ten Spins o' the Week (As submitted to College Music Journal)

1. **MINUS 5** — In Rock
2. **BLONDE REDHEAD** — Misery is a Butterfly
3. **ELECTED** — Me First
4. **AIR** — Talkie Walkie
5. **NELLIE MCKAY** — Get away From Me
6. **JOHN VANDERSLICE** — Cellar Door
7. **GREG ASHLEY** — Medicine F**k Dream
8. **ELECTRELANE** — The Power Out
9. **THE CHURCH** — Forget Yourself
10. **LAMB** — Between Darkness and Wonder

This profanity-free Top Ten list was brought to you by the FCC.



Harrumph.

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