

# NOTES TO GO FOLK YOURSELF

The idea for this mix originated when I realized, after our talking about my year-end mix and folk influence, that in fact, there was a lot of music I'd been listening to recently that had a strong folk flavor. And while I'm sure you've heard of some of these folks, a lot of them move in musical circles that seem a bit different from the usual folkie world, as far as I understand it—even though a lot of them are part of a “scene” that's become a fairly big deal over the last couple of years, with epicenters in New York and San Francisco. (The mix also gives me impetus to do some further exploring of these acts.) Anyway...here are some comments:

## disc 1

1. Teigan & Sara “Fix You Up” (So Jealous): In a territory not dissimilar to that inhabited by the Roches and Indigo Girls—even with the cult-celebrity production (in this case, John Collins from buzz band The New Pornographers).

2. The Nields “Best Black Dress” (Gotta Get Over Greta): Voted “Most Likely To Have Been Heard Of By You Folks”; still, a must for inclusion, and a good folk/pop follow-up to the previous track.

3. Lullaby for the Working Class “Show Me How the Robots Dance” (I Never Even Asked for Light): These Nebraska folk have gotten less and less song-based with each album, to the point that they're writing near-abstract song/ symphonies with the sort of kitchen-sink acoustic instrumentation you hear here.

4. Drunk “Scaffold” (Raised Toward): I know little about these guys, except their music is usually more morose. This is the first track on the collection to do that Appalachian modal thing, which is decidedly a running theme.

5. Abunai! “Barbara Allen” (The Mystic River Sound): The band's name is Japanese for “look out!”; they were from Boston, and if Fairport

Convention had been from San Francisco and played bills with Jefferson Airplane and Can, they might have sounded like this.

6. Animal Collective “Leaf House”: We enter an odd stretch of the mix: clearly these folks are as into weird as anything else. Of course, we like the ending...

7. The Books “All Our Base Are Belong to Them” (Thought for Food): The strangest band here: at first I thought calling them “folk-influenced” was a stretch...but then, looking up info on some of the other bands online, sure enough they popped up in various aficionados' lists of new, folk-inflected acts. This is one of their more song-like productions; the “extraneous” sounds here generally *structure* their music.

8. The Mountain Goats “Linda Blair Was Born Innocent” (We Shall All Be Healed): The Mountain Goats is basically John Darnielle, who for years recorded everything on a battered old reel-to-reel with its own distinctive wheezy capstan. He's abandoned that, found a band of sorts, and gone into the recording studio for the last couple albums—but his short-story –like songs remain pretty much the same.

9. The Decemberists “The Engine Driver” (Picaresque): Led by a guy with an MA in creative writing with a serious jones for 19c Britain, the Decemberists have been getting mucho press lately. This is from the poppier end of their musical spectrum, which also draws from vaudeville, sea chanteys, and Gilbert & Sullivan.

10. Pinetop Seven “Heavens” (No Breath in the Bellows): They started as kind of a country band, and then apparently ransacked a thrift-shop's worth of old instruments and started writing like a soberer, less urban Tom Waits. Or something.

11. The Wooden Stars “Outlaws” (The Moon): The sometimes discordant harmonies and spiky

guitar voicings are fairly typical for these Canadians, who combine a minimal, literary lyric sense with harmonies that are sorta Kingston Trio after studying Bartok or something. And who's that playing violin near the end? Current buzzed-about musician Kathleen Edwards, that's who.

12. Joanna Newsom "Clam, Crab, Cockle, Cowrie" (The Milk-Eyed Mender): Many people, it may surprise you to find out, cannot get past her voice. I've managed...in part because of a very fine review I read online (forgot to note where) in which the writer noted that its odd spooky little girl timbre actually serves the lyrics, which are often simultaneously nursery rhyme –like and a bit creepy. Probably also the only classically trained harpist who opens for rock bands.

13. Faun Fables "Shadowsound" (from WFMU comp Don't Shoot the Toy Piano Player): I know pretty much nothing about these folks (two of them), except we're in the "odd-voiced female singers" section of the mix.

14. Sixteen Horsepower "Heel on the Shovel" (Sackcloth 'n' Ashes): I'll just link to [the review I wrote of their most recent album](#) to save time...

15. The Handsome Family "Weightless Again" (Through the Trees): Another act whose lyrics (by the wife of this husband/wife duo, Rennie Sparks) read almost like super-short stories. I almost put "The Snow White Diner" on here, solely for its extraordinary lyric, but musically it doesn't fit as well. Oddly, they go between a sort of synthesized indie-rock sound and near-straight country. This is one of their few tracks I've heard that split the

disc two:

1. Damon & Naomi "Beautiful Close Double" (The Earth Is Blue): I've been getting more into these folks lately, with their haunting sense of beauty. Recent albums feature Japanese guitarist Michio Kurihara (of Ghost) who adds a nice,

blazed-out sound on guitar (not so present on this track).

2. Doleful Lions "Graveyards of Swallows" (Out Like a Lamb): From an album I've been obsessing over – again, I already wrote about it (and Damon & Naomi) [online](#).

3. Red House Painters "Things Mean a Lot" (s/t a/k/a "Rollercoaster"): These guys would be completely mopey except that occasionally things sparkle into life, and the melodies and guitar voicings aren't just everyday standard.

4. Spiny Anteaters "Well Laid Plans" (Badaboom Gramophone #4 compilation): The comp this is drawn from has proven, in retrospect, to be tremendously influential. It surveyed a group of current, "weird folk" artists as well as their ancestors in the late '60s (such as the source for the next track).

5. Tower Recordings "I Saw the World" (For the Dead in Space: A Tribute to Tom Rapp and Pearls Before Swine): A lot of the spirit that animates many of the tracks on this mix can be found, in its original form, in the work of Rapp and his band Pearls Before Swine, whose box set I probably should just go ahead and pay way too much for. This is a cover...

6. Six Organs of Admittance "All That They Fear (For Molly)" (Badaboom Gramophone #4): I'm not sure if this is a "band" so much as one guy; at any rate, one guy in the band definitely has several records by folks like John Fahey (you can't hear it as evidently here, but on the other two tracks I have by them/him, it's very apparent).

7. Flying Saucer Attack "The Season Is Ours" (s/t a/k/a "Rural Psychedelia"): Their earlier stuff was a delirious blur of distorted electric guitar – but when they (mostly) turned the volume down, it became apparent that at the root of the songs was (as the alternate title of this record suggests) a very old, folksy take on musical materials.

8. Society of Rockets "Little Roads" (not sure...downloaded from someone's website): The

most “mysterious” (to me) song here. Yes, it’s placed after the last track primarily because of the band’s name...

9. Pedro the Lion “Slow and Steady Wins the Race” (Winners Never Quit): While it’s not completely clear from this track, the rest of the album it’s from makes quite clear what the singer thinks of the fatuous narrator...I didn’t do this purposely, but this track and several others have a fairly strong undercurrent of left-Christianity (in some cases avowedly so by the artist; in others perhaps just as useful metaphor). Don’t know why...

10. The Negro Problem “Doubting Uncle Tom” (Post Minstrel Syndrome): Musically, not at all typical of this act, who take their cues from Jimmy Webb, Burt Bacharach, and the Beatles. But lyrically typical...Stew (too many other “Mark Stewart”s in the biz) clearly relishes his anomalous position (the band name pointedly lashes the industry for its inability to know what to do with a black-led act that isn’t “soul” or “R&B”).

11. American Music Club “Patriot’s Heart” (Love Songs for Patriots): Virtual title track from this band’s reunion album. Less obviously folkish than much of their material—but I couldn’t not put this track on, especially near the “political” suite of songs near its end. I haven’t fully unpacked everything Eitzel’s getting at with his metaphor of patriotism as a sort of closeted performance art (note: as with the name of the last act, its reception is quite different when you’re aware it’s from inside, so to speak: Eitzel is gay), but somehow a lot of lines just get right to the point of our tawdry little political arena right now.

12. Bill Fox “My Baby Cryin’” (Transit Byzantium): New Dylans? We don’t need no steenkin’ new Dylans! I take this song as being about things that should not be ignored.

13. Sufjan Steven “For the Widows in Paradise, For the Fatherless in Ypsilanti” (Greetings from Michigan: The Great Lakes State): As an aside I

should mention that an excellent source for exploring music is the [All Music Guide](#). Among other things, there you’d find that Stevens played nearly everything on this record (including the horns), impressive enough by itself but even more so given how creatively and effectively they’re all arranged.

14. PG Six “When I Was a Young Man” (from a mix CD given me by a friend): “PG Six” is one guy named Pat Gubler (and if you were named “Pat Gubler” you’d probably invent a band name for yourself too), who also played in Tower Recordings (see above).

15. A Hawk and a Hacksaw “Portlandtown” (? – another download): I think this speaks for itself – as does the final unlisted track, a cover of Leonard Cohen’s famous arrangement of “The Partisan” by Sixteen Horsepower.

You might note, of course, the similarity of the cover design to NO...FUCK YOU DICK CHENEY. All such resemblances might be utterly intentionally accidentally on purpose.