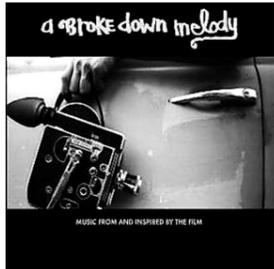


Look at this!

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**A Brokedown Melody**

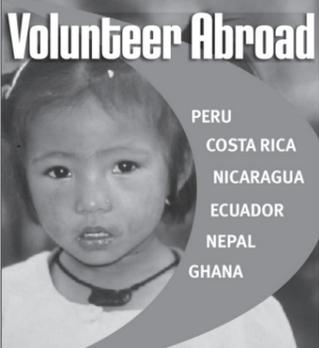
Original Soundtrack  
Brushfire Records  
www.brushfirerecords.com

KRISTINA DE GUZMAN  
Arts & Entertainment Staff

If you can get away from the surfing stereotypes—namely beach bums and *The OC*—the soundtrack to Chris Malloy's film *A Brokedown Melody* may actually surprise and remind us that the wave riding culture extends beyond the boundaries of California and Hawaii.

In fact, the soundtrack does a fairly good job of making you forget that you're listening to music that's supposed to accompany a surfing documentary. Norwegian band Kings Of Convenience, along with Broken Social Scene's Feist, make "Know How" a catchy, atmospheric-rock tune while Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder lends some impressive vocal work in the ukulele-backed "Goodbye."

However, *A Brokedown Melody* isn't without its faults. Producer Jack Johnson's track "Breakdown" would've been a near masterpiece for the whistling alone if he hadn't included a cheesy quote about surfing. "Needle in My Eyes" would've been better named "Needle in My Ears," since the instrumentals—which completely take over the vocals—are just about as torturous to one's hearing as never-ending feedback. And for an album that goes beyond the typical background music so many soundtracks are known for, the far too monotonous "Home" is simply the wrong track to finish things off with, unless "a broke down melody" was what Johnson had in mind. In that case, it works.



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**Arcade Fire**

*Neon Bible*  
Merge Records  
www.arcadefire.com

MATT FREHNER  
Editor-in-Chief

I feel a little bit bad for Arcade Fire, honestly. It must be a touch depressing to become a massive critical success and then see your sound adopted by every 20-something urban Canadian musician with a slick haircut and a skinny tie.

With that in mind, one might expect Arcade Fire to break away from the wild success of *Funeral*; but, while *Neon Bible* adds some spit to their tried-and-true sound, there's nothing here that can't be found on earlier albums. Much to the relief of those who just want some more of the now-classic Arcade Fire, this leaves the rest of us wondering why purchasing this album is at all worthwhile. Indeed, it's not a positive

omen when your stand-out track is a reinvigorated version of 2003's "No Cars Go." *Neon Bible* is undoubtedly infectious and fun, but it offers very little that's new. There are even points during the album—namely in the opener "Black Mirror"—where some Swan Lake's breathy reverberations may have been an influence. Really, it seems that nothing can trump the epics like "Rebellion (Lies)" or "Woodlands National Anthem."

If you're a diehard Arcade Fire fan, *Neon Bible*'s "Intervention" and "Black Mirror" will satiate, but keep in mind that CBC Radio 3 will no doubt give these few good tracks a heavy rotation—and the podcast is free.



**Yoko Ono**

*Yes, I'm a Witch*  
Astralwerks  
www.astralwerks.com

BRYAN SAUNDERS  
Arts & Entertainment Writer

Oh no.

A notoriously odd songstress and former Missus John Lennon, Yoko Ono is at it again. This time, Ono takes a departure from her previous albums, where songs involved repeatedly burping and saying "Number 8," and creates *Yes, I'm a Witch*, an anthology of collaborative works.

It boggles the mind trying to understand how Ono managed to convince other artists to collaborate with her, even at the risk of damaging their careers, their brain cells and their prospects in the after-life. Nevertheless, nearly 20 artists join forces with Ono on this album including Le Tigre, DJ Spooky, The

Flaming Lips and Peaches. The overall sound is a wee bit of Madonna, a wee bit of Elton John, an extremely healthy dose of electronica and a fatal overdose of screeching banshee.

The album does have its catchy moments, though. For instance, the song "Everyman Everywoman," a collaboration with Blow Up, really gets the toes tapping. Well, for the first 34 seconds. Then Yoko Ono joins in and one never really recovers from the shrill, inflection-ridden disease that is her voice. In fact, the first 34 seconds of every song on this album is extremely magical. The black magic of the witch, however, negates it all.

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**NEeMA**

Masi Cho  
Bacar/Tonality Productions  
www.neema.ca

KELSEY TANASIUK  
Arts & Entertainment Writer

"She has met the Dalai Lama and Mother Teresa; she has managed an isolated Aboriginal community in the North of Canada and worked with street children in Egypt." That's what's boasted on NEeMA's website. Now, it's clear that this girl is a traveller—her album art is very earthy and sweet—but for a girl that's a born wanderer, one would assume that she's got her fair share of stories to tell.

NEeMA experiments with a variety of different sounds throughout her album. "Masi (Choukran)" plays like an exotic and haunting chant, but the seventh track, "Love Conquer Fear," is altered to give her voice a robotic

sound, which really just comes across as having been badly recorded. NEeMA claims to be a singer-songwriter, but perhaps only one of those titles is truly deserved. Her lyrics are honest, unique and beautiful—it's true—but you can't help but be distracted by the undeniable weakness of her voice. It's a truly saddening thing. You'll feel as though NEeMA has so much to talk about alongside the lovely accompanying music, but truth be told, this young lady is simply not a vocalist.

In some genres, sub-par vocals are acceptable, but the folk-pop world isn't one of them. Unfortunately, NEeMA and her messages are doomed to be lost in the shuffle.



**the bird and the bee**

*the bird and the bee*  
EMI  
www.thebirdandthebee.com

MARIA KOTOVYCH  
Arts & Entertainment Staff

Animals make a lot of unpleasant noises when they're hurt. If a cat was strangled, run over by a car or neutered without the benefit of an anesthetic, it would probably howl pretty darn loud—which is too bad, because this is what the bird and the bee sing like on their self-titled album.

The duo, Greg Kurstin and Inara George, create a sound that's nothing but grating on the ears. Their website says they sound like "a futuristic 1960s American film set in Brazil." This is a pretty accurate description of their sound, although someone needs to tell Ms George that she's not a soprano; her attempts to hit the high notes are often very strained, making her sound like she's drowning and calling for help

while gasping for air. It's not pretty. This goes on for most of the CD, and it's unfortunate, because the few times that she sings a bit lower, she doesn't sound all that bad.

The song's lyrics are also quite laughable. In "Again and Again," the duo sings: "Say my name, say my name / Say my stupid name. It's stupid how we always seem to do it again / Oh, oh." Um, okay. Your stupid names are Greg and Inara. What's next? "You're so stupid and perfect, and stupid and perfect / I hate you, I want you, I hate you, I hate you / Oh, oh." Their names aren't the only thing in this song that can be called "stupid."

This CD urgently needs a lot of help.