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Mi Ami

by Michael Harkin • February 26, 2009



Mi Ami
Watersports
(Quarterstick, 2009)

In a sweaty, energetic, red lamp-lit set at San Francisco's Bike Kitchen last March, Mi Ami ripped through a memorable set of drum-centric, transcendent dub-punk jams. The cable for guitarist Daniel Martin-McCormick's vocal mic, receptacle for piercing yips and yelps aplenty, was slung through a bicycle hanging overhead, swaying to a tempo nowhere near as frenetic as the clanging pulse of the rhythm section: Damon Palermo on drums and Jacob Long on bass guitar, who together forge a trance-inducing throb for the freaky proceedings underway. This kind of experience is difficult to capture on tape, but the band's full-length debut, *Watersports*, is pretty damn successful as a document of their live sound circa late 2008; the recordings have an incidental, loose quality, together forming an intriguing showcase of the band's sonic palette.

Watersports doesn't sport an easily defined arc—every track, no matter how it begins, is given the space to breathe and mutate as it will. What's being captured is not so much a set of songs as a compelling group dynamic, where three guys, clearly down with space disco, Afrobeat, and the kind of stuff you'd hear on Soul Jazz's *New York Noise* releases of Big Apple no wave (e.g. Liquid Liquid, ESG, Pop Group), took their chops in whatever directions their raw abilities would take them in one another's company. They're a rock band, no doubt, and one has to imagine that these tracks were edited to some extent, but for the most part, it feels as wonderfully rough-edged and uneven as a live set would.

Both Long and Martin-McCormick were members of Black Eyes out of Washington, DC—one of Dischord's more adventurous signings, and a band that, while quite different from Mi Ami, foreshadowed their current project in the wayward free-jazz aspirations of their posthumous second album, 2004's *Cough*. This new record clicks in a way that *Cough* did not—recording this record last year over two-and-a-half days in San Francisco, they struck a balance between the haphazard fun of an improvised music ensemble with the locked-in, practiced funk of an African highlife band.

Opener "Echonoecho" has the record's most club-like beat (it was the A-side of a recent 12" single), feeling like a fresh, freer take on what was great about the early-'00s heyday of disco-punk—it expands, contracts, and squeals with noisy guitar and a warm, brilliant logic. While clanging third track "New Guitar" is its own thing, the word "echo" is incidentally intoned a few times in a fashion not unlike the album's opening track. Makes one wonder: Is this song a wholly separate entity from the first one? Certainly not—hang-ups over track titles, lengths, and structure are pointless anyway, especially when the groove's as thick and gripping as it is here. For its first half, "The Man in Your House" feels like a straight improvisation, but four minutes in, after a brief pause, the three simultaneously snap into a stabbing, noisier variation on the pulse—wow! The more spazzed, frenetic moments of the album's first half are nicely offset by its final 20 minutes: "Freed From Sin" and the nine-minute "White Wife" are considerably more downbeat and dub, bringing Long's watery basslines and Palermo's kick drum thuds and cymbal shimmers to the forefront. It's not necessarily music where you'll find yourself homing in on the details—one can't help but "zone out" a bit now and again listening to *Watersports*—but the space Mi Ami create is one you'll likely want to keep coming back to. Definitely check them out live if you get a

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It shows

Noise Pop Day 2: Stephen
Malkmus, Sleepy S...

Anyone who's heard Stephen Malkmus, whether fronting Pavement or the Jicks, knows he's an adventurous songwriter, but he was particularly anything-goes at the Great American Music Hall on Wednesday night. Following a relatively mellow acoustic set by local popster Kelley Stoltz, Malkmus came to the bare stage with an iBook in hand in place of a set list. "Hello, hello, it's only me," he said with a grin, an earnest greeting considering what followed: He turned out to have brought a hell of a lot more of his back catalogue along than anyone could have expected. Eyes collectively widened when he started the set with "Harness Your Hopes", a Brighten the

chance, as it'll clear away some of the smoke conjured up here.

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Corners-era Pavement B-side signaling something was most definitely up. He's never really played this stuff since they broke up in 1999, with the famous exception (among fans, anyway!) of a 2003 gig with the Jicks in Milwaukee. Was there more to come? Yes! The solo format clearly freed him up a bit as far as his repertoire: Alongside a few of his solo/Jicks tunes, including "Us", the autumnal "Freeze the Saints", a bit of "Vanessa From Queens", and a lovely "Real Emotional Trash" (cut short by a broken D-string), he played 12 Pavement tunes, and for the most part, they weren't even the "hits" per se. [more »](#)

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