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## Pinback's "career" album

October 09, 2007

**BEN RAYNER**

PINBACK

*Autumn of the Seraphs (Touch and Go)*

★★★★ (out of 4)

Pinback is another of those cult-worshipped staples of the indie-rock periphery who've commanded fanatical legions over several records – enough to drop *Autumn of the Seraphs* in at No. 68 on the Billboard chart last month – without producing the elusive "consensus" album that persuades everyone to climb on board.

This is that record, the one that should cement Pinback as a fixture of rock-crit dialogue and hipster name-dropping in perpetuity. It's an audible step up, one of those discs that springs from the speakers, announces itself as a potential "career" album and then compels you to dig back into the rest of the catalogue and give it the more serious attention it probably deserved at the time.

The major development on *Autumn* is the San Diego duo's embrace of hooks, hooks and more hooks. Rob Crow and Zach Smith remain beloved of nimbly entwined guitars and deceptively airy, Elliott Smith-ish vocal melodies that mask Crow's angular, elusive lyrical content, and they can still brood with the best of them.

This time around, though, the songs are downright catchy – the lilting "Good to Sea" and "How We Breathe" are almost jaunty – and only rendered further so by the pair's enticingly rhythmic arrangements. "From Nothing to Nowhere" is one of the most arresting album openers you'll hear this year, for instance, smoothing gorgeous, slip-sliding harmonies over an insistent Krautrock clip. "Blue Harvest" nicks both its skittering guitar line and enervated back line from The Police's "Message in a Bottle" to entrancing effect.

The immediacy of the songwriting notwithstanding, *Autumn of the Seraphs* is also an obsessively well put-together record. There's not a wasted note or sonic detail, although such is the outer veneer of easy melodicism that the mechanics of the recording only begin to betray themselves as points of studious interest half-a-dozen listens in, when the songs already feel like old friends. Even the songs that initially threaten lulls in the proceedings tend to win you over with their conceptual genius by the time they've finished. The bandwagon pulls up here.

**Top track:** "From Nothing to Nowhere." This is the way every record should start, really.

Pinback plays the Opera House tomorrow night.

