

The San Diego  
 Union-Tribune.

---

ALBUM REVIEWS

Jumping genres

**Pinback's diverse sound keeps indie cred but manages to go mainstream**

By Erin Glass  
UNION-TRIBUNE

September 6, 2007

Most of us can remember a time in our lives when one's musical preference was nearly a replacement for meaning – something to believe in while strapped into a cynical world. But more and more music is reduced to some sort of multimedia component to make flashy car commercials or to convince every other American of the necessity of an iPod.

What does this have to do with local math-rock heroes, World of Warcraft-obsessed Pinback and their fourth full-length release, "Autumn of the Seraphs"? Patience. This will be longer than a text message. A little.

If you've spent any time with their dreamy, insistent, anti-climactic tunes, you've almost heard this album already. Yep, Pinback still sounds like the flicker of lights on a control panel in a giant spaceship. They are still not a recommended soundtrack for driving solo late at night – their trance-inducing drumbeats take over the blood flow, voices float in as enchanting as the breeze, the angular guitar and bass work build a staircase right to the subconscious.

It's definitely the product of capable musicians with an impossibly distinctive sound, one that they're not particularly interested in reinventing.

Sure, there's punchier and lighter single material, like "Good to Sea" and "How We Breathe," but if not in the appropriate mood with appropriate volume setting, one might accidentally toss out the word "boring" as the appropriate adjective.

That's not necessarily a criticism.

It's just that Pinback is more interested in weaving together a sonic jigsaw than creating massive, bang-you-over-the-head hooks that become brain-cell-eliminating after the fifth play.

Zach Smith and Rob Crow noodle around scales like kids who grew up on grunge but loved video games, sing in rounds like they know it doesn't threaten their manhood, and make recordings that sound produced in a windowless home studio on a Mac where all the wires work perfectly.

Something about that polished, glimmering sound recalls the musical quests of early Nintendo games, even if "Autumn of the Seraphs" dodges the electronica genre completely. All discussion about "indie" music's new television ambitions aside, a Nintendo's bigwig liked "afk" off the last album, "Summer in Abaddon," enough to toss it a starring role in a Game Boy commercial.

And if San Diego was a video game, then clearly, this would be the soundtrack. Pinback sounds like this city's skylines and gutters and all the dive bars and taco shops and weary nights compressed into one endless, musical diorama.

They may churn out songs that make sense most as a backdrop to something else – like a new Ford commercial or an upcoming Landmark Theatres flick. But anyone can make their own meaning and media these days, and all "Seraph" needs to become a favorite is to brand a few memories.