

Wet Leg, Juan Wauters and Aesop Rock in their own separate worlds

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At its best, popular music expresses the moods of masses of people, articulating our common experiences and inspiring us to meet social challenges. Outrage at Israel's mass murder of Palestinians is growing, and the ruling class in the imperialist countries is doubling down on its efforts to criminalize opposition to the genocide. Every social gain that the working class has made over the past several decades — and even scientific thought — is under attack as never before. Most musicians have been slow to respond to these developments in their work. This article will consider new releases from three musically diverse artists.

Moisturizer

On the follow-up to their 2022 debut, the British rock group Wet Leg sound confident and together. Time on the road and collaboration in the studio have cemented them as a band. *Moisturizer* represents the first time that all the musicians, and not only founders Rhian Teasdale and Hester Chambers, have contributed to the songwriting.

Teasdale provides her trademark scorn “Mangetout” and the slightly less interesting “Catch These Fists.” It's a shame, though, that Teasdale hurls her poison darts at unwanted suitors instead of targets of greater social significance. In fact, big questions are entirely absent from the album. This is a real disappointment in a band with a knack for delivering sugar-coated venom.

Instead, most of the lyrics are about love; they were inspired by Teasdale's new relationship. Though these lyrics are sometimes funny, they become repetitive. Another problem is that the songs' rhythms and tempos tend to be the same, bringing unfortunate homogeneity to the album.

A more positive development is that Teasdale's singing is becoming more sophisticated. She changes her inflection quickly to suit the tone of the lyrics and

occasionally unfurls a long string of precisely sung notes in a single breath. On “11:21” and “Pokemon” (which is the most conventional song here), sincerity even begins to peek through Teasdale's reflexive irony.

But the latter song is dangerous territory; it reveals the risk that sometimes, musicians' growing artistic strengths can lead them in the direction of harmless pop music. The near-exclusive lyrical focus on love and sex reinforces this worry. The band would do well to look beyond the bedroom for inspiration.

MVD LUV

For the first time, Uruguayan American musician Juan Wauters has recorded an album in his native Montevideo, which he has long wanted to do. This homecoming has inspired a collection brimming with hummable tunes, playfulness and warmth. But with a running time of about 27 minutes, the album is notably short.

Wauters plays nylon string guitar and sings with almost childlike openness. His lyrics alternate between English and Spanish. The songs also feature piano, synthesizer, baritone saxophone, flute, bass and Latin percussion such as bombos and tambores. Most of the songs are lively with occasional humorous touches. The arrangements range from the *a cappella* “Lonely by Myself” to the elaborate and percussion-filled “La Lucía.”

Human connection is the theme of the album. Wauters sings about falling in love (“If It's Not Love”), reuniting with old friends (“Manejando por Pando”) and reassuring those who are down (“Dime, Amiga”). Elsewhere, he describes moments of personal growth, encourages others to express themselves and hopes that others can relate to his songs.

But as light and charming as these songs are, they are

also limited. Most last for two minutes or less, giving them little time to develop beyond attractive snatches. Wauters's lyrics express welcome human sympathy but are not very deep. They never venture beyond interpersonal concerns to social concerns.

Moreover, this album dedicated to Montevideo, gives us no sense of what the city is like. Nor does Wauters, a binational globetrotter, offer us a very worldly perspective. And for an artist's seventh album, one might reasonably hope for something more ambitious than a collection of *divertimenti*, however inspired.

Black Hole Superette

Projecting from his chest and deploying a large vocabulary, Aesop Rock is as recognizable as ever on his new album, which is named after a fictional bodega (an independent convenience store). Amid his usual idiosyncratic imagery and amusing anecdotes, the artist reflects, fleetingly and obliquely, on middle age and mortality. Such meditations are not surprising in a rapper whose career has spanned nearly 30 years.

Aesop Rock gained widespread notice with his third album *Labor Days* (2001), which discussed wage slavery in America. *Integrated Tech Solutions* (2023) examined technology, corporate jargon and consumerism. Unfortunately, *Black Hole Superette* (2025) retreats from these themes, which is especially disappointing at a time when Donald Trump is obliterating regulations on workplace safety and corporate regulation.

Nostalgic references to video games, singers and exercise videos of the 1980s pepper the album. Aesop Rock also expresses his fondness for whodunits, his various pets and his palm and fig trees. Though unpretentious, these remarks suggest a certain petty-bourgeois complacency. Many other songs are given over to gourmet word salad.

The album's best moments arise when the rapper contemplates nature. On "Bird School," he marvels as 12,000 Vaux's swifts (small, migratory birds known for their erratic flights) simultaneously flock to one chimney to roost.

On "Black Plums," as though he is channeling the 17th century Japanese poet Basho, Aesop Rock describes his habit of blissfully savoring newly ripened fruit in his backyard, oblivious to any potential threats around him.

Though the rapper implicitly acknowledges the need

for a sense of perspective, he focuses this album almost entirely on small pleasures and personal anecdotes. As the ruling class lurches toward fascist dictatorship and exterminates masses of people, Aesop Rock's intellectual energies seem misplaced.

Uneven artistic development

Wet Leg is a relatively new band that shows promise. Juan Wauters and Aesop Rock have had longer careers and more experience. Yet none of these artists attempts to face the questions of war, fascism or crying inequality on their new releases. Individual factors are surely at work, but deeper social and historical forces also have introduced confusion and encouraged withdrawal and other counterproductive responses. Macklemore, Bob Vylan, Kneecap and other artists are consciously reflecting the gathering opposition to oppression and war in their work. This social movement will not fail to touch other artists, lifting the best of them to new heights.



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