

HOT MUSIC

BY MICHAEL SHULMAN

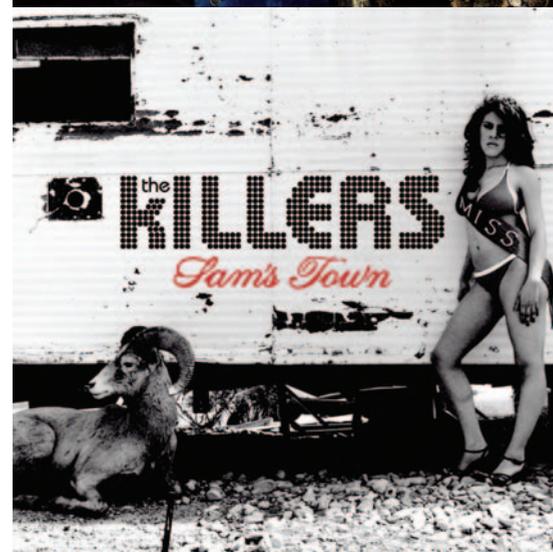
Rock 'n' Roll Renaissance

Why The Killers and Scissor Sisters Are Better Than Ever

The summer of 2004 saw a renaissance in rock 'n' roll that was spearheaded on both sides of the Atlantic by two very dynamic bands that reached back a few decades and let loose with debut albums that were at once anthemic, danceable, possessing of legitimate melodies and emotive, lyric-driven songs. That both were fronted by young men in their 20s who took their musical cues from the record collections of their older siblings (and in some cases, their parents) didn't matter. These were songs (and albums) that brought to mind British groups and artists of the '70s and '80s such as Queen, David Bowie, Elton John, The Smiths and The Cure. The two groups are Scissor Sisters and The Killers, and their debut albums (*Scissor Sisters* and *Hot Fuss*, respectively) served as nothing less than a beacon on a musical frontier that had grown mind-numbingly lackluster in the past few years since the blitzkrieg of such tediously soulless "music" as appeals to the audiences of *American Idol* (except for Kelly Clarkson, who gives pop music its *raison d'être*), the people who keep Paris Hilton in the headlines, and everyone who ever got excited to do "The Lean Back."

Fast forward two-and-a-half years. The bands that have produced what many consider to be two of the best debut albums in recent memory are releasing their much anticipated sophomore efforts—within a week of each other, no less. Both groups face obstacles, though from completely disparate directions. In the U.S., Scissor Sisters has received only a fraction of the airplay it has in the U.K., to which lead singer Jake Shears rightfully attributes the band's much higher success on that side of the pond. The Killers have faced the double threat of sour grapes (the only thing people seem to like more than rooting for the underdog and pushing him to the top is being able to kick him back down) and front man Brandon Flowers' alleged ego.

Ta-Dah by the Scissor Sisters shows a definite focus that was absent on its eponymous debut (where every song seemingly went off in a different direction). The album deals with much darker subject matter than did the first. Del Marquis' hypnotic guitar play melds deliciously with the syrupy texture of Shears' voice and Paddy Boom's intentionally restrained drums on "The Other Side" (which ends hauntingly with a ghost-like recording of Judy Garland intoning about her right to be loved). Meanwhile, "Kiss You Off" is the group's version of the classic "don't let the door hit you in the ass on your way out" song, which pairs the throaty sexiness of Ana



SCISSOR SISTERS: KEVIN MAZUR/REIMAGE.COM; KILLERS: SETH BROWARNIK

Scissor Sisters (left) and The Killers (above), both with their new albums, are American music's brightest hope in the face of continued mediocrity.

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Matronic with Babydaddy's production wizardry to put it on a par with similar breakup anthems (think M People's "Movin' On Up," Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive" and Hi Gloss Empress' "You'll Never Know").

Sam's Town by The Killers should be listened to as a stand-alone album and (this is where I'm going to critique most of my fellow critics) not as *Hot Fuss: Part II*. That said, it's an even better album than the original—the songs are more fleshed out, and while the lyrics do bear some similarity to those of the great American storytellers such as Bruce Springsteen and Tom Petty, the end result is more akin to Bowie and Queen. "Bones" (arguably the song that will best stand the test of time) combines Freddie Mercury's grandiosity with the urgency of Peter

Gabriel, while "When You Were Young" has far more in common with Ziggy Stardust than with The Boss (and that's certainly not a bad thing). As to Mr. Flowers' rep as an egomaniac, I can only say that when we spoke he was an utterly charming young man who laughingly discussed dressing up as a vampire on Halloween five years in a row, how much he dislikes spending time away from his new wife, and that if the band were to go on a road trip, Ronnie would drive while Mark would play DJ.

When I asked both bands about which contemporary groups they admire, each readily listed the other. Flowers even went so far as to express his frustration about the Scissor Sisters' reception in the U.S., saying, "They're great, and it really sucks that they aren't given their due over here!"

Will Scissor Sisters have the staying power of Elton John? Are The Killers the next U2? Well, as the French say, *qui vivra verra*. But until time does tell, they're certainly our best hopes for fun music that lets us rock out, flicking our Bics and holding them high! 📸