



LOUDS FORMING CROWNS

Clouds Forming Crowns

DFM-066

CLEVELAND SCENE

Clouds Forming Crowns

Clouds Forming Crowns (Morphius)

Jason Bracelin

February 9, 2005

<http://www.clevescene.com/issues/2005-02-09/music/rbeat.html>

Like many brothers, Tim and Todd Tobias are skilled at finishing one another's thoughts. They've collaborated on music since childhood, most notably in Guided by Voices – Tim played bass and Todd produced a handful of the defunct indie-rock darling's recent records.

The duo's latest project takes its name from the title of last year's debut from Bloom, Tim's first gig post-GBV. Clouds Forming Crowns functions in much the same way that group did: Tim comes up with the framework of songs, Todd fills in any open spaces with all manner of chiming instrumentation and whirring sound effects. The result is busy, changeling pop, darkened by Tim's abstract lyrics ("And the birds give birth to falling split native tongues into dope scars rise to derive"). The band's debut features all manner of pretty, pristine songs ("Dreaming of Flying"), papier-mâché ballads ("Let's Bleed"), and even wayward disco ("Collapsing the First String"). Here, family ties are the only things that bind this duo's refreshingly formless rock and roll.

CHART MAGAZINE

CLOUDS FORMING CROWNS

S/T

(Morphius)

February 2005

Marc Boudignon

<http://www.chartattack.com/damn/2005/02/0801.cfm>

Mimicking the humble four-track beginnings of now-defunct Guided By Voices, former GBV members Todd and Tim Tobias patch together a fine lo-fi pop-rock debut that would make Poppa Pollard proud. The Tobias' haven't ripped off his playbook though, even if "Accidents Of Air" leads off the album with an unmistakable Beatles-via-Bob veneration. The bulk of their music feels like a cross-pollination of early '90s DIY production, classic rock signatures and Soft Boy Robyn Hitchcock's lyrical vagaries. Of course, GBV flirted with all these at various stages, but the Tobias brothers can say they're the first of the gang to make them gel. Marc Boudignon



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EARCANDY MAGAZINE

Clouds Forming Crowns,
"Clouds Forming Crowns"
(Morphius Records)
J.R. Oliver
February 2005
<http://earcandymag.com/reviews31.htm>

Indie rock with a pop edge from the Tobias brothers. Tim and Todd grew up in Akron, Ohio. You know, Ohio, the State that gave us Devo and the Dead Boys. Tim was a former bassist for the band Guided By Voices, his brother Todd doesn't tour with the band preferring to work only in the writing / recording end of it. The brothers have given you sixteen tracks on their debut full-length release. Clocking in at a fuzz over forty three minutes there's plenty of music for your money here.

www.tobias-music.com

Rating: 3 out of 5

ROCKNORLD

Clouds Forming Crowns
"S/T"
Morphius
February 2005
Eric Bodrero
<http://www.rocknworld.com/features/05/cfc.shtml>

The creative genius of Robert Pollard and Guided By Voices spills over into the Tim Tobias fronted "Clouds Forming Crowns", a project delving into the familiar GBV formula, but expanding it by adding an almost classic rock sound the likes of Bob Dylan and Neil Young, and a sense of warm nostalgia thanks to Tim's brother Todd, who produced the last three GBV albums.

Clouds Forming Crowns makes use of a more gentle approach to the melodies via a heavy dose of acoustic guitar and a gentle, weeping lyrical atmosphere where hushed, soothing riffs of the album closer "Night Playing Tricks" and the sugar-sweet "Collapsing The First String" are jolted out of their haunted existence by the deep-cutting guitars of "Wish-Hound" and stripped down to a shoe-gazer sound in "Minus Drivers".

Long-time fans of GBV may be hesitant in listening to Clouds Forming Crowns sans one Robert Pollard. While there is no denying that Robert is a melodious mastermind, he is also hardly missed here. The Tobias brothers aren't exactly highbrow slackers, and can convincingly pull their own weight.

Clouds Forming Crowns' debut album has that lo-fi feel to it made popular by such indie pioneers as Pavement, Modest Mouse, and well, Guided By Voices themselves, something some first-time listeners may not welcome or appreciate upon first listen. However, Tim and Todd Tobias obviously know how to make brilliant music, and they put their near-best foot forward here on their self-titled effort. It will be exceedingly interesting to see where they go from here. If this record is any indication, and noting the track record of the Tobias brothers' previous band, they'll go far.



CLOUDS FORMING CROWNS

Clouds Forming Crowns

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STRUTTER ZINE

CLOUDS FORMING CROWNS 'CLOUDS FORMING CROWNS'
(MORPHIUS RECORDS)

February 2005

<http://www.angelfire.com/zine2/strutterzine/HOTNEWREVIEWS49.htm>

(Points: 7.8 out of 10)

Clearly an independent band, but their sound is actually quite interesting, because it borrows a lot from late 1960s Psychedelic Rock (JEFFERSON AIRPLANE meets THE BYRDS) and also some slight LED ZEPPELIN kinda grooves can be heard in the underground Rock sounding debut CD of the American band CLOUDS FORMING CROWNS. 16 songs are included on the CD, and the beginning is quite nice with such songs like "Accidents of war", "Blades and teeth" (starts slow a la BYRDS but then has a twist after a minute when it starts to rock a la THE WHO!), "Are you sleeping well" and "Wish-hound", but towards the end it all gets a bit too depressive, so be aware that this is not a happy record to listen to. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see an independent band creating an own style, which is best comparable to the late 60s San Francisco Psychedelic era. More info at: <http://www.morphius.com>

BETTAWREKONIZE

Clouds Forming Crowns

"S/T"

Morphius Records

February 2005

Tim Anderl

http://www.bettawreckonize.com/album_reviews/late_reviews5.htm#cloudfcst

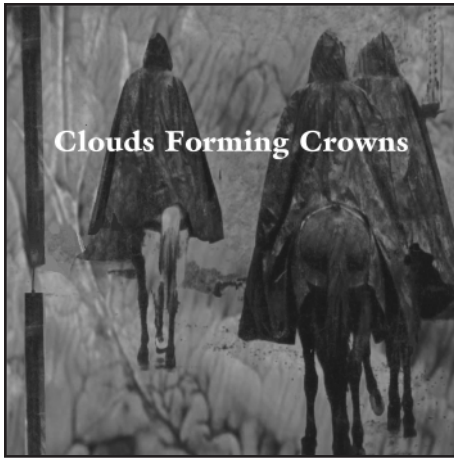
The names Tim and Todd Tobias should elicit quick recognition from indie kids who take the time to actually read the liner notes of their favorite records. Tim has spent the last five years touring with Guided By Voices while brother Todd produced their last three albums. The brothers Tobias have teamed up here, with Tim in the musical pole-position and with Todd adding the sheen and filling in the blanks, to tread the timeless waters between White album-era Beatles and Ziggy Stardust-era Bowie. This album quickly shapes up to be one of many reasons Dayton, Ohio natives can hold their heads high amidst the uber hip uppercrust of any L.A., Chicago or New York.



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CLOUDS FORMING CROWNS

Clouds Forming Crowns

DFM-066

STANKY GROOVE PRESS

Clouds Forming Crowns – Clouds Forming Crowns

(Morphius, 2004)

February 2005

Alan Haworth

<http://www.stankygroove.com/albums/clouds.html>

Clouds Forming Crowns released their self-titled debut at the beginning of 2005 with little promotion. Todd and Tim Tobias project the classic “indie rock” sound through sixteen tracks that span forty minutes. You may recognize the names. Todd Tobias produced the three previous Guided By Voices albums, and his brother, Tim, played with the band for five years. Guided By Voices were an enduring independent ensemble of players, which was led by singer/songwriter Robert Pollard. Having a rock and roll pedigree does not assure that Clouds Forming Crowns can responsibly record an excellent album of lo-fi rock songs.

The tracks begin innocuously enough with smooth strumming and familiar voices from the past. I was tapping my toes and enjoying the first few tracks, reminiscent of The Replacements, Husker Du, and Hot Snakes. Unfortunately, by the time I got to the third track, “Blades and Teeth,” I realized that they all exuded one familiar trait: David Bowie. Tobias has the same cadence as Bowie did during Station to Station, ably backed by an acoustic guitar a la Carlos Alomar. I felt guilty, nodding my head in anticipation of the chorus.

The middle of the album sags, as Clouds Forming Crowns continue to deliver on their new-Bowie formula, which becomes forgettable and bland. Suddenly, guitars crank up and “Wish Hound” (track eleven) comes out of nowhere. The simple chorus, “Yes wish hound, it’s easy to love,” keeps the song quick paced. The immediacy to this song reminds me of early Dinosaur Jr. records. The chord progression (C G A D) fuels the song that is as catchy as U2’s “Desire.” As the album repeats, I find myself longing to hear “Wish Hound” again.

The album ends on a whimper, leaving the listener with nothing to process. There are no explosions or drums crashing. There’s no comment from the producer. It’s just over. I hear a few good tracks that could be singles, but as far as an album, shotguns have tighter patterns. I’ll probably listen to Clouds Forming Crowns a few more times in my life, but there is nothing “classic” about this album that heavily borrows from classic rock.

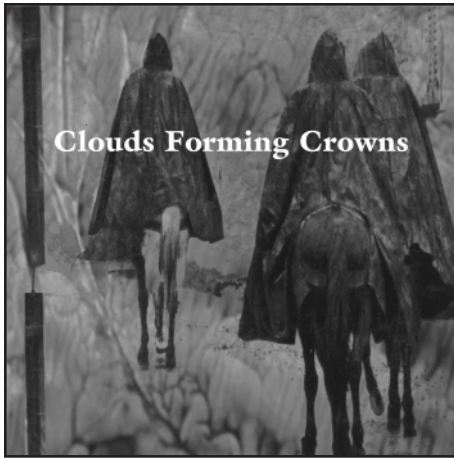
RIYL: Love As Laughter, David Bowie, Afghan Whigs



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AVERSION MEDIA

Clouds Forming Crowns - Clouds Forming Crowns
Morphius Records
Michael LeRay
http://www.aversion.com/bands/reviews.cfm?f_id=1958
FEBRUARY 2005
(4 out of 5)

Tim Tobias and his brother Todd, a couple of Bob Pollard's many discards, parted ways with Guided By Voices on uneasy terms. Just the mention of their former affiliation might cause uneasiness on the Tobias' part, but since the radio isn't jumping at the chance to introduce you to Clouds Forming Crowns and since Morphius Records' budget is probably just short of bankrupt, a little name dropping won't hurt anyone.

Succinctly, Todd produced and Tim played bass on three of GBV's best albums; Earthquake Glue (2003, Matador), Universal Truths and Cycles (2002, Matador) and Isolation Drills (2001, TVT). For Clouds Forming Crowns, the two combine their finely honed musical skills to craft 16 songs of which their former boss might be envious.

Tim wrote the music of Clouds Forming Crowns piece-meal, during breaks in his hectic touring schedule with you know who, so it's not surprising that some of the material here resembles ... you know who. Instrumentally and vocally, CFC unassumingly pay homage to the lo-fi pop-rock veterans that came before them, namely The Replacements and Sebadoh. Tim's often smooth but sometimes strained vocals contain hints of Bob Dylan and strains of Paul Westerberg which easily justifies both the hard rockin' and soft folk'n' sides of this album.

Depth is created through the blending of acoustic and electric guitars, arpeggios and strums are alternated masterfully. And Tim's bass playing is phenomenal as always - he's all over the place, leading one moment then wandering the next without losing time or key. And it's Todd's skillful production that allows for each layer to be heard unabated.

Overall, the unforced lo-fi sound and the absence of elaborate studio wizardry make for a very user-friendly affair. The result is an excellent combination of pop hooks, conflicted by strange lyrics ("soul trails and tails coughing knives up again...Out of your stations, then up to space...I'm dreaming of flying"), a hard/soft duality, and an overall brashness those of you already familiar with their work will find irresistible. It's unlikely you'll see any mic' twirling or leg kicks at a CFC show, but the music on this album provide the proof that their shows will be just as fun.

These discards may not have ruined Pollard's chances for the pot. Hell even his album of drunken stage banter sold out in two days, but musically these guys bring a lot to the table. Even if there were only 500 of his "comedy" albums pressed, the fear is that much more worthy material such as Clouds Forming Crowns may sell even less.



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CRUD MAGAZINE

CLOUDS FORMING CROWNS - CLOUDS FORMING CROWNS
MORPHIUS
APRIL 2005
Alan Sargeant

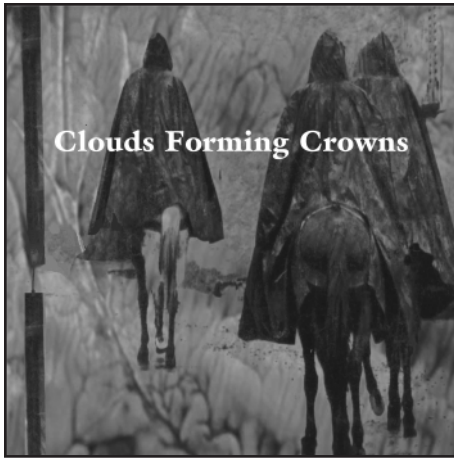
Along with Uncle Tom Cobbley, Tim and Todd Tobias lay claim to having been a part of the loose ensemble of lo-fi misfits that have over the course of the years made up the godfathers of lo-fi rock, Guided By Voices led by singer/songwriter Robert Pollard. Tim was the bass player for a few years and Todd produced a spate of recent albums for the band. But that's where the connection ends. Anybody hoping for a block of well-crafted space rock will be disappointed by this overlong, indulgent and poorly produced crock of fool's gold. The folksy glam peculiarities of opening track, 'Accidents Of The Air' starts the album promisingly enough – full of Mott The Hoople vigour and nasally rasp – but 'Nowhere Is Everywhere', 'Blades and Teeth' and 'Are You Sleeping Well?' replicate everyone from the Beatles to Bowie and Husker Du respectively. Fans of The Replacements might tip a nod in their direction too. And this is the problem, Tim and Todd are evidently great fans of music first, and innovators second, if at all. There's no doubting their knowledge, but their ability to extend that knowledge further is really rather questionable on the evidence of this debut alone. Not even the faux-Bowie surrealism redeems it any.

Clouds Forming Crowns masks some adventurous and attractive suggestions, but too few clear statements

COPPERPRESS

Clouds Forming Crowns
Clouds Forming Crowns
APRIL 2005
Morphius
Jedd Beaudoin
<http://www.copperpress.com/new/reviews/html/42105cloudsforming.html>

Former Guided By Voices members Tim and Todd Tobias unite for a unique and genius-drenched stroll through the cornflake meadows and cigarette smoke clouds of life. Exactly the kind of album to put on during an autumnal afternoon spent in bed with all the lights in the house off and nothing but you and little navel gazing going on (but not in the sad, depressed way). Clouds Forming Crowns is the kind of band - and the kind of record - you can't let go of once it has you in its grips. Thank you, brothers Tobias for giving this to us. May you make many more.



CLOUDS FORMING CROWNS

Clouds Forming Crowns

DFM-066

BEATBOTS

Clouds Forming Crowns - Clouds Forming Crowns

Morphius Records (2005)

www.tobias-music.com

Beau Finley

March 2005

6 / 10

<http://www.beatbots.com/viewReview.php?cd=17>

Clouds Forming Crowns could be the Elephant 6 band that embraced Tom Petty instead of Brian Wilson at the altar of late era Beatlemania. Consisting of two brothers, Todd and Tim Tobias, Clouds Forming Crowns is a lot like their friends and colleagues Guided By Voices in that their rock is both steady and sturdy.

The 16 tracks on Clouds Forming Crowns are pop inflected rock filled with the predictable but delicious changes inherent to the genre. The music is a-rockin' and fun, but the lack of naturally occurring dynamics and the over repetition of the verse-chorus formula and particularly unspectacular riffs provides a dampening effect on an album otherwise destined for repeat listens. Unfortunately, the songs are more sketches than anything, and tend to drift away rather than end.

Todd Tobias, the production oriented half of Clouds Forming Crowns, might be the one to blame for the sound of the album. Each song features a lot of guitar tracks that don't mesh well in the final mix; the sound is sometimes overly cluttered. The recording quality of this album is pretty good, but lacks clarity and crispness, and this muddiness renders many of the choruses less catchy.

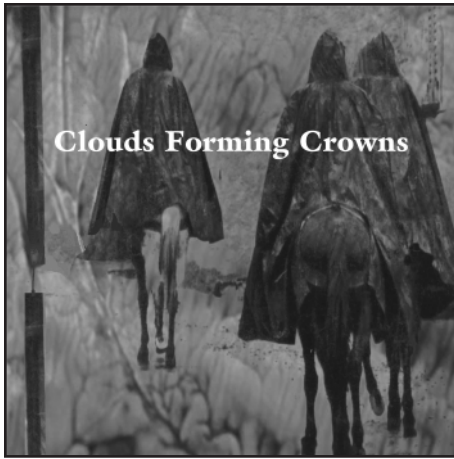
Despite the aforementioned drawbacks, Clouds Forming Crowns is a solid rock band, and their self-titled album is a great soundtrack for one of those nights where it seems like almost anything can happen.



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SPLENDID MAGAZINE

Clouds Forming Crowns - "S/T"

May 2005

Brett MCallon

<http://www.splendidezine.com/review.html?reviewid=11141638591269068>

Clouds Forming Crowns is the brainchild of brothers (and former GBVers) Tim and Todd Tobias, so it's no surprise that the album sounds too much like Guided By Voices for its own good. Furthermore (and also unsurprisingly, as the Tobiases' Pollard-backing tenure dated back to GBV's latter days), the albums it apes aren't the strongest in Bob's catalogue. There's rampant Who-ism strewn liberally throughout Clouds, especially on the least appealing tracks. Actually, there's pretty much a one to one ratio of less-appealing tracks to pretty-good-or-better tracks, which was also a hallmark of the Isolation Drills, etc. period.

With all of that carping out of the way, we're still talking about a pretty strong (at least half the time) rock album, and if Tobiases I and II didn't learn anything about editing their own work from Bob Pollard, it's not as if they had the greatest teacher in the world, is it? Let's get to the good stuff.

The excellent "Are You Sleeping Well?" rips up one side and rocks down the other, capturing the kind of beautiful abandon that's part and parcel of the GBV legend. Opener "Accidents of Air" nails some of that magic as well, with a simple three-chord progression and a solid riff. On the other hand, "Wish Hound" kicks off well, but never gels into a compelling melody, and "Minus Drivers" is simply sluggardly and self-indulgent. Cough, cough, (Pollard) cough, cough.

It wouldn't be fair to view Clouds Forming Crowns' debut entirely through the lens of the Tobias brothers' former band, except that they've so clearly appropriated the entire Guided By Voices personality, both good and bad. Sure, there's a legion of indie kids out there with a Bob-shaped hole in their lives, but those are the same kids who felt abused by his refusal to self-edit and his endless indulgence of his weakest tendencies. It's admirable that the Tobiases have learned so much from their former bandleader, but they probably could've taken a few of his other traits as cautionary tales.

Cutting roughly a third of Clouds' 16 tracks would leave a much stronger album. Pollard never took this advice to heart. Hopefully his protegés will.



30MUSIC.COM

Clouds Forming Crowns - "S/T" (CD)

Morphius

Dan Shvartsman

<http://www.30music.com/rev.php?rev=1207&mode>

Clouds Forming Crowns have formal connections to Guided By Voices: Tim and Todd Tobias, the two songwriters/producers that make up CFC both worked with the famed Pollard outfit, Tim as a member for five years and Todd as the producer for the last three albums. We'll ignore that tie from here on out when discussing their eponymous debut album; it may be pertinent, but not necessary when talking about the grainy, solid, and varied indie rock that CFC have put out here.

Variety is what makes this any sort of a standout disc, as different influences pop up throughout the album. "Accidents in Air" kicks off and sounds like a lost Olivia Tremor Control song, from Tim's gruff vocals to the bouncy but dark melody to a few different sections. "Nowhere is Everywhere" is sort of dirty slowed down indie rock, and while no specific band name comes to mind, it sounds familiar. "Are You Sleeping Well" sexes up the throwback '60s garage pop/E6 sound a little bit, with more edge to the guitars and a slightly faster tempo.

A rather different and perhaps incidental sound comes in on "Forest of Twins," namely the feel of the mid-'60s band Love, circa their classic Forever Changes, right down again to vocals that sound much smoother and more British, mimicking (American) Arthur Lee's sound. Multiple tempo and melodic shifts, along with obscure lyrics, also draw upon this feel. And a last likeness comes from a more modern peer, akin to the filtered folk Old Canes put out last year. Again, it could be that the voice (and in this case production) is all that makes it sound similar, but "Night Playing Tricks" could have fit on Early Morning Hymns fairly well (besides the incongruous titles...).

CFC does also pull out a few good tracks that sound their own, whether "Dreaming of Flying," "Wish-Hound," or "It's Easy, Knife." In the end, however, this disc is pretty solid, but not extremely memorable. CFC have some nice things going for them, but so far sound like just a sum of their influences at this stage, and while those are interesting influences, it's not enough to make this more than a solid record.

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ERASING CLOUDS

Clouds Forming Crowns - Clouds Forming Crowns
(Morphius Records, 2005)
May 2005
<http://www.erasingclouds.com/wk1705tonydoug.html>

THE BAND: Todd Tobias and Tim Tobias

THE HISTORY: Clouds Forming Crowns is a new Tobias brothers project. Todd and Tim have worked and performed with fellow Ohio artists such as Gem and Guided By Voices.

THE REVIEW: It is important to have an impressive rock 'n roll resume because working with the right musicians and producers will open many doors of opportunities. Also, working with the right people will sharpen your skills as a singer, musician and songwriter. Take Tim and Todd Tobias for instance. They have spent the past five years performing, collaborating and producing music with Guided By Voices and frontman Robert Pollard's side projects.

The result is the Clouds Forming Crowns self-titled release that definitely reflects an influence from Guided By Voices and The Rolling Stones. Both Tim and Todd have compiled an album with sixteen tracks of acoustic-driven rock songs that are both gritty and raw. Tracks such as 'Are You Sleeping Well?' and 'Wish-Hound' are standout efforts that will have you turning up the volume. Lyrically, Clouds Forming Crowns seem to have tapped into the same cosmic songwriting channel used by Robert Pollard. Overall, this release from Clouds Forming Clouds is an impressive debut by two veterans of the Ohio rock scene.

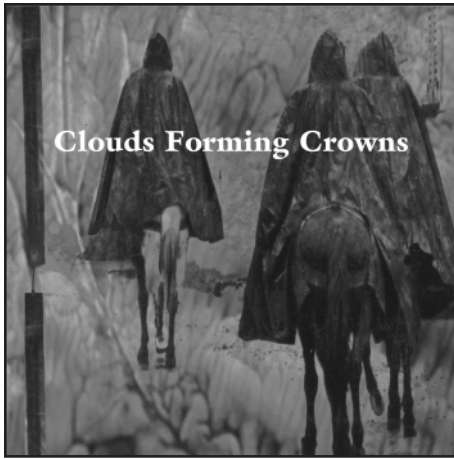
INDIEVILLE.COM

Clouds Forming Crowns - "S/T"
Matt Shimmer
June 2005
<http://www.indieville.com/reviews/cloudsformingcrowns.htm>

Clouds Forming Crowns is the work of Tim and Todd Tobias, two ex-members of Guided By Voices. This is clearly the main selling point, though the GBV connection isn't really that defined. There is a similar song aesthetic here, with many Pollard-esque hooks, but the intricate melodic detail of better GBV material is never really recreated here. With that said, however, this is still an above average pop album - many songs are worthy of repeated listens, and all but a few of them have the power to addict you.

The music on this album is generally classifiable into two categories - powerful rock numbers (ala GBV's recent work) and slower pop tracks (think Under The Bushes' more melancholy moments.) "Accidents of Air" and "Tails Being Born" are exceptional tracks belonging to the former section, while the minor-key "Nowhere is Everywhere" and the depressed "Let's Bleed" lend themselves to the latter. There are, of course, a few poorer songs on this record - "Minus Drivers" lacks hooks and "Night When People Go Fast" isn't particularly memorable. Many of the disc's tunes will require a few listens to sink in, but the wait should prove to be worth it in the end.

Clouds Forming Crowns isn't up there with some of GBV's other off-shoots (Tobin Sprout) but it is still a very enjoyable record - and a must for any fan of the band.



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DELUSIONS OF ADEQUACY

Clouds Forming Crowns - S/T

Morphius Records

March 2005

<http://www.adequacy.net/review.php?reviewid=5283>

Moody guitar pop

David Bowie, The Beatles, George Harrison

Ohio's venerable Guided By Voices may have disbanded, but it's members keep dropping spin-off albums. Resolved to be more than just the indie rock version of TV's "Joey," Todd and Tim Tobias – former GBV producer and bassist respectively – have serious aims for their new band Clouds Forming Crowns. On Clouds' self-titled release, the brothers Tobias crafted a whopping 16 tracks. Rather than remove songs or drop a pretentious double album, the Tobias brothers have decided to leave their debut's B-sides intact.

Though it's far too long and lacks the focused pop professionalism of former GBV'er Doug Gillard's 2005 Salamander, Clouds Forming Crowns' debut is largely a successful effort. Seeming prepared to sing every song in the type of faux British accent that invites immediate comparisons to The Beatles and, when they feel like rocking out, to proto-progers like David Bowie, the Tobias brothers are nevertheless capable of turning out well-wrought melodies. Their accents seem to demarcate Todd and Tim's hopes for this album, which seem to be distinctly two-fold. The songs seem to be reminiscent of either later-day Replacements-style pop tunes like "Are You Sleeping Well?" and "Wish-Hound," or they are taken with a space-rock aesthetic that favors the oblique melodies and trip-tastic lyrics "Accidents of Air" and "Nowhere is Everywhere." Given a choice between these two conventions (considering the regrettable length of this album, the Tobias brothers clearly didn't make a choice), most listeners will likely endorse the pop face of Clouds Forming Crowns' bipolar nature.

The infectiously humable "It's Easy Knife" and the gritty electric blues licks behind "Night When People Go Fast" are perfect examples of where Clouds' music should be heading on future albums. The potent, heartfelt songwriting that the Tobias brothers demonstrate is simply more effective when it avoids the muddiness that obscures many of this album's songs. It's not particularly surprising this album is about six songs too long – not many bands could have sounded consistently excellent on a 16-song debut. Still, as Clouds Forming Clouds, the Tobias brothers are batting a respectable .500.



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CLEVELAND FREETIMES

Clouds Forming Crowns - "S/T"

Jeff Niesel

<http://www.freetimes.com/print.php?sid=935>

January 2004

Guided by Voices played at the Grog Shop last year, singer Bob Pollard introduced the band's new bassist to the audience and said he couldn't mention the old bassist's name, even though he was a hometown hero. It's hard to understand how Pollard, a guy who goes through bandmates like Liz Taylor goes through husbands, would be upset by yet another defection. After all, you need a family tree to trace the GBV history and there's more than one outcast who's still on bad terms with the school teacher-turned-boozehound rocker.

BLOOM, SLUMBER PARTY, VOLTA SOUND

Soft-spoken Tim Tobias – the bassist Pollard deemed unmentionable – doesn't have any answers either. Tobias simply says "That's Bob" when told of the Grog Shop incident and says he's left GBV to form Bloom because he needed a change from the GBV schedule of touring nine months out of the year.

"I had a lot of fun," Tobias says of his GBV tenure while sipping a beer at the Harp, a bar close to his West Side home. "But it became something of a job. When it stopped being fun, it was time to go. You'd have to ask [Pollard] how he's taking it. I just didn't want to be a sideman for the rest of my life – not that there's anything wrong with that."

It wasn't even the heavy drinking – something for which GBV has become known – that was an issue.

"I'm okay," Tobias says when asked about how the consumption of mass quantities of alcohol affected him. "It got to be a bit of a cliché, after a while. But I've always enjoyed beers."

A native of Akron, Tobias started playing guitar when he was a teenager. Initially inspired by the Beatles and Led Zeppelin, he then shifted gears when punk rock hit.

"I was like in seventh grade when Devo broke, and at first I didn't like it," he says. "Then one day it dawned on me that they were really great. It was one of those things where you start realizing how punk rock did open the doors for anyone to do whatever they wanted. Having a lot of hometown bands made it really exciting, too."

Tobias played in several bands before hooking with guitarist Doug Gillard and drummer Scott Pickering to form Gem in the early '90s. Eventually, he and Gillard would join GBV. Gillard still plays alongside Pollard, and Tobias says Gem is kaput.

(continued)



CLOUDS FORMING CROWNS

Clouds Forming Crowns

DFM-066



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Two years ago, Tobias started writing songs of his own and passing them on to his younger, multi-instrumentalist brother Todd who put the finishing touches on them. They finally recorded them this past summer at Waterloo Studios in Kent and are releasing the album called Clouds Forming Crowns on Viva Recording Co., the label run by local band Viva Caramel. Bloom essentially consists of the Tobias brothers, but for the upcoming live show, the line-up will also feature Pickering, guitarist Brian Strazek, bassist Brian Noga and keyboardist Matt Charboneau. It's a line-up that, with the exception of Todd Tobias who won't play live, Tobias hopes he can take on the road for regional shows.

"I'd really like to keep the band together – it'd be nice to be able to call the guys up to do a show here or there," he says. "I didn't even plan on playing out. I decided I wanted to promote the record. It seemed like the right thing to do and practices have been great and exceeded any expectations I had."

The songs on Clouds Forming Crowns, which Tobias describes as a "real quiet record," also exceed expectations. Decidedly downbeat, they veer from Stony rockers ("Enter Like Clouds") to lo-fi pop ("Crept"). It's an unassuming album that sometimes even has a folk feel. If GBV was afflicted by writing hits that always seemed to just miss, Tobias says his hopes for the album are much less calculated.

"I don't have any preconceived notions," he says. "Doing this record and practicing with this band has been fun because there aren't any expectations. It's nice to get back to that. It feels more like getting together with your friends and bullshitting instead of going to a job every day."



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DIG THIS REAL

Clouds Forming Crowns
"Clouds Forming Crowns"
Issue #9, July 2005
Edie

Tim Tobias, songwriter and guitarist of Clouds Forming Crowns is a multi-dimensional poet. But don't say that to his face. He'll cock his head quizzically at you, blush a moment, and then in an honest yet stern notion say, " Nah. But thanks anyway."

"Your spirit is ugly and a little too hungry to forgive yourself sunset stays around soothing direction the sky might take."- Collapsing the First String

Well call me dumb ass. Figuring I was too old to collect or play with Kaleidoscopes, it is this very type personality that I find Tobias displaying but only in a pure and natural sense. Either he is a brilliant actor or we've all had too much to drink this evening this interview took place. You see, Tobias is an ever-shifting pattern in mass and matter, even when he's laughing at some joke or perking up because some favorite song is starting to lay on the jukebox. And when that happens, I lose him a bit. but then again, who isn't a junkie to the jukebox...

With brother Todd, the two grew up neat Akron, Ohio and both were soon seduced by the music disease which would later yield fruitful outings between them. This would include playing together, forming the musical acts, the Ghost Sonata, The Four Coyotes and Gem. Eventually both brothers took up with Robert Pollard's Guided By Voices (Tim joined as bassist and Todd would go on to produce Guided By voices from 2002 to 2004).

But between the two of them, the collaborations continued and soon the incant nation of Clouds Forming Crowns appeared. But Clouds Forming Crowns was a seed in Tim's brain during the stint with Guided By Voices where he found himself penning songs in between studio and gig breaks. The sketches were passed onto Todd who worked his imprint into the songs weaving musical landscapes with the first recording called, All The Pharmacies (2004) and another recording called 'unreleased ONE' (which actually show-cases instrumental versions of some songs from All The Pharmacies). Got it? Enter self-titled Clouds Forming Crowns, out on Morpheus Records. When this disc landed on my desk, I plopped it in and couldn't part with it (The funny thing about this is- I didn't even spy the CD liner note credits to even give a fuck who this was!) for I was in love and hard I fell.

All 16 songs here are polished, perfect compositions ranging from the balls out, rangy, "Are You Sleeping Well," to the melodic, luxurious undercurrent of "Minus Driver." And within most of these tunes you will find songs within songs mini compositions roll around within each musical offering. Whether it's the bridge found in the aforementioned "Minus Driver," or the code of "Blades and Teeth," the listener will find themselves not where they thought they would end up. These ingredients work well with the Tobias brothers. The proof is in this magnificent, non-obtrusive, yet seductive release.

In person, Tim Tobias is much like the songs. You can hold a spotlight to him or take him to the ground, all the while seeing different prisms of what makes him up. On stage he is uncompromising, swinging around a Telecaster, playing loud, sloppy rock and roll giving these songs an almost unfamiliar facelift as they are performed back to you.

I caught up with Tim and Clouds Forming Crowns at OttoBar in Baltimore, Maryland before a gig. Read on:

DIG THIS REAL: What should I expect to happen tonight at your show?

TIM TOBIAS: I'm not sure what is going to happen tonight because a lot of it is improv.

DTR: How excellent- better yet! I gather your relationship with Todd is a tight one and you and he tend to collaborate on all these songs?

TT: Yeah, I basically build the skeleton and he puts the flesh on it.

DTR: And you two have been working long like that together?



CLOUDS FORMING CROWNS

Clouds Forming Crowns

DFM-066



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TT: Oh God! Since we were little kids! Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't! But Todd has the final word. It's funny because if something grabs him, he'll take it and run with it. He is really good at that. If something doesn't grab him, it's pretty much done. We're not terribly confrontational about stuff as much as we use to be, like when we were younger, where we use to argue alot! I'm still impressed with everything Todd comes up with and he consistently surprises me. It's awesome. When I give him a four-track tape or just me and a guitar and I get this thing back, I'm like 'where'd the hell did that come from !!?'

DTR: So it's safe to say that despite you are in awe of his work, he feels the same way about your work?

TT: He wouldn't work on something that doesn't pique his imagination because he's very particular on what he likes and dislikes.

At this moment the jukebox (probably the best stack box in the nation) goes on and "Ashes to Ashes" by David Bowie blares into our conversation... Tobias- in mid-sentence perks up, "I love this song..." I lose him for a brief moment as the sound wafts through the club...

DTR: So Todd loves the studio work then?

TT: He really comes to life in the studio

DTR: And you are the performer on stage?

TT: I like the visual experience of playing live.

DTR: What do you like about the studio? Do you like getting in and staying for a while, tooling around?

TT: (laughing) I don't like the studio! No, most of the stuff I record is done at home, which I am very comfortable with. It's just me sitting on the floor with just a four-track and I'm totally fine with it. When I'm in an actual studio, I don't know, I've been in enough of them that I find the environment somewhat sterile. And the time is what gets me, especially the mixing. Just leave me out of it! But Todd enjoys that, so between us this works you nicely.

DTR: Can you say that your real document what is personally happening in your life?

TT: Well, the first record, I was getting divorced and I wasn't in very good shape physically (laughs) or mentally at that time. So yes, a lot is reflected on it. I think the new one (self-titled) though it's not generally a happy record; it's not as emotionally desolate as the first one. The new one is more surreal. I'm not sure if there is even a theme or anything. The best way to describe it is- its happier sounding to me. But, then again I am not living through the same crap I was living through then.

DTR: Most musicians documents hurts and pains through their music...

TT: It's always the cathartic experience.

DTR: Do you find it difficult to go back there and pull this stuff up (the hurts, pains documented in the songs) when performing it live?

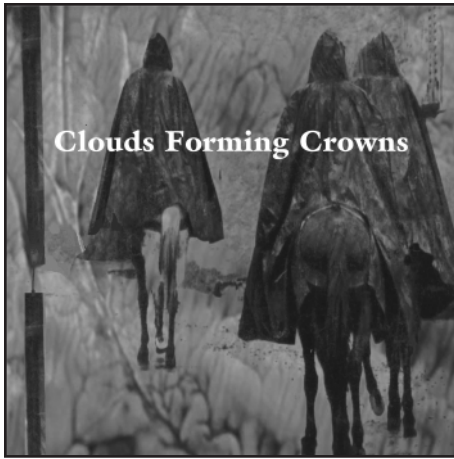
TT: Well, we don't play it (laughs)! But that's because I'm bored with playing stuff. I always like to play newer stuff or stuff I haven't even put out yet. You could say I have a short attention span!

DTR: That's O.K. because half the audience does too!

TT: I also don't want to get caught up in dwelling in it and I'm also not one of these people that needs pain to write. I got over that when I was about 17 or 18 years old, 'oh I'm the depressed writer/poet' shut up! (laughs). It really gets to a point where you better be able to write under any circumstances or you're done.

DTR: For you, when did it hit musically?

TT: I was probably eight years old. My mom actually sat me down and told me to watch The Beatles', A Hard Days Night. It was the first time it was on TV in the states in the 1970's. That just blew my mind. Never since then has it been the same. I was like, 'That's what I want to



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do. They look like they are having a blast! It changed everything. It's like the cliché of going from black & white to color.

DTR: So you are an Ohio boy. Have you ever gone to the Rock n Roll Hall of fame?

TT: As Howard Stern put it, it's like the Hard Rock cafe without the hamburgers. I can understand why people like it but left me kinda cold. It's like, why am I looking at John Lennon's lyrics? Now you've put it in this museum where it can collect dust.

DTR: "Wish Hound," from your latest release is being touted as the single. How do you feel about it?

TT: I like that song. I like the words in that song despite that I might not always remember them when I'm singing them but that's ok (laughs)! That song just kinda popped out, which is weird because that doesn't really happen to me a whole lot.

DTR: What about songs like, "Let's assault?" from One?

TT: Now to me, that's a very, very dark song even though it may not sound as such.

DTR: That to me, would have been a great single...

TT: "Let's assault expectations fail to ..." or whatever I say, that's a direct, black and white picture of my marriage. "Let's assault, expectations fail where we were meant to succeed," is the lyric...

DTR: But on the new album you also have some trickily emotional songs like "Let's Bleed..."

TT: But that's a happy song! That's like 'I need you.' It doesn't get more basic. "Let's Bleed," had more of a Stones reference to it.

DTR: I feel that some of your releases have this huge Stones' feel to it.

TT: Thank you, thank you! As much as I like the Beatles, the Stones are it for me, especially their earlier 70's s stuff, dark and deathly. I love that shit. Sticky Fingers, Let It Bleed, Exile on Mainstreet, but then again I like all their stuff, well actually up until Under The Cover of The Night. Then They Lost Me.

DTR: That period of time for the Stones, they sounded very raw and organic...

TT: and messy! I love Keith Richards' guitar playing. He's my hero, Unfortunately or fortunately.

DTR: Can I ask you the money question?

TT: Shoot.

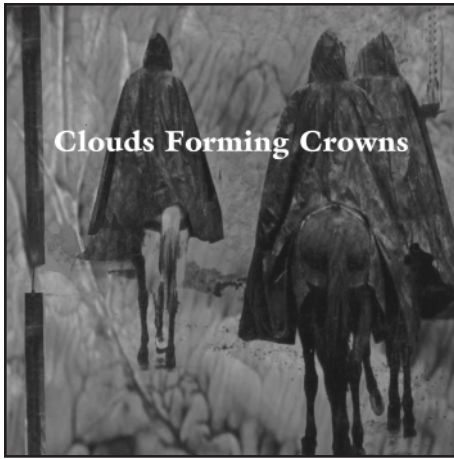
DTR: A lot of Guided By Voices fans were really; really distraught when you chose not to tour on the final GBV shows last year...

TT: I quit. I was completely burnt out. I was very tired. I was also living a lifestyle that wasn't very conducive to maybe living a whole lot longer! I'm old enough to know better. And I am going to say something that people may not understand and I hope this doesn't come out the wrong way but I got so tired doing show after show, playing for hours after hours. And for so many years. to me as a performer, being bored or tired on stage conveys louder than anything you could ever say to the audience. My attitude is, I don't want to go see some guy on stage bored and tired. Get the fuck off! So I got the fuck off. I was a huge, huge fan of Guided By Voices and Bob's (Pollard; songwriter and singer) songs before I ever joined that band but I was just so tired and wasted in the end. I guess that's the best way to describe it. I got tired of the whole lifestyle and I don't blame anyone but myself for that. I totally put myself in that situation. I just didn't like me and the person I was becoming.

DTR: Your lyrics are amazing.

TT: Thank you.

DTR: It's more like poetry than anything else.



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TT: Thank you. I'm blushing! Well, you can ask me anything about the lyrics and I'll tell you if any of them mean anything or not. Some of them don't mean anything at all. I tend to write a lot of lyrics and then pull another line from another page of lyrics and put them together.

DTR: Wow, that works!

TT: Occassionally something will come out all at once. "Let's Bleed," came out all at once, but that's probably the only one! (laughs)

DTR: How about songs like "Minus Driver." How does a song like that come about?

TT: That song was an accident. In retrospect I would have left that song off the record.

DTR: Really?

TT: I like the last half of that song but don't really like the first part.

DTR: You have an outstanding break in that song where it sounds like a light string arrangement before the chorus...

TT: Well that's all Todd. I did the guitar part, then Todd did something I don't even understand. Like I was saying before, I give Todd these little pieces of music and I get that back.

DTR: I also like "Accidents of Air." I do hope you play that one tonight.

TT: Yeah, we will be playing "Accidents of Air."

DTR: Another great song from your latest release is, "Tails Being Born..."

TT: We're doing that one too. I'm usually the type of person that when it comes to my albums I'm like, it's finished, on to the next. But with this one, I'm pretty proud of it.

DTR: So are you excited to play tonight?

TT: I am. I found it hard to stop during the sound check!

Tobias's live band consists of Brian Strazek (guitar/back upvocals), Brian Noga (Bass), and Scott Pickering on drums and tonight the performance was smoldering as Tobias led everyone into a harrowing exhibition of a proud, rock show. Just like mentioned before, this was improv all right. Almost all the tracks from the latest release were unrecognizable except for maybe "Accidents of Air." It took a swiped song list for me to come to that conclusion. At one point, Tobias demonstrated his slide guitar playing by falling to his knees and racing a full bottle of beer up and down the neck of his guitar. Almost too bored to stay with that, he throws his bottle down and takes his open hand to the guitar, hitting it. I look in his face, and once again, I lose him one last time, for he really isn't there at the moment. Almost similar to some of his compositions, it's apparent in his performance as well, piercing kaleidoscope prisms and all.

Clouds Forming Crowns is out now. For more info, check out: www.morphius.com
or www.tobias-music.com



LOUDS FORMING CROWNS

Clouds Forming Crowns

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SKYSCRAPER

Clouds Forming Crowns
"Clouds Forming Crowns"
August 2005
Desmond Ngiam

Clouds Forming Crowns is a collaborative effort between the Tobias brothers Tim and Todd Tobias. Tim is fresh off a five year stint with Guided By Voices, whose last three albums had been produced by Todd. This self-titled release is an accomplished effort that serves up enigmatic vocals and sharp guitar progressions. There are strong hints of psychological ambivalence that comes in stark and immediate currents, like the stuff of Robert Pollard's solo work but not as vague or frustrating. There are streaks of murky uncaniness and stripped down low-fi stylings, found in the sound "Nowhere is Everywhere," "Minus Drivers," and "True Heart of Medicine." This is counter-balanced with excellent contributions such as "Accidents of Air," "Are you Sleeping Well," and "Dreaming of Flying," which are catchy and/or anthemic indie-prog rock. However, the general feel of Clouds Forming Crowns is that of a gentle disconcertedness and bemusement. The music is immediate and questioning, fleshing itself out through interweaving rhythms. Time signature shift around and leave a general sense of ambience. The lyrics and song composition operate on a more subconscious level. It is paranoid, hopeful, unsettling, and ambivalent; mindful of the particular collective unconscious minded by bands such as Neutral Milk Hotel and Modest Mouse. A good effort where the vagueness of the music opens up the world of possibilities and ruminations. (Desmond Ngiam)
www.tobias-music.com

AIDING & ABETTING

Clouds Forming Crowns
"Clouds Forming Crowns"
Issue #262
March 2005

But, really, can't we take all these folks on their own merits? I think so. Sprout has an exceptional ear for truly gorgeous pop music. The Tobias boys seem a lot more interested in noodling between the lines of hooks. Which makes these songs just that much more difficult to glom on to...at least, at first.

There are plenty of points of purchase here. The songs often are quite pretty, even if a tangent or two within tends to undercut the surface beauty. Those scars, however, seem to enhance the overall. Pop music is more than skin deep, in other words.

Now I'm making a fool of myself. But that's alright. Good music has been known to do that to me. Clouds Forming Crowns may be a truly silly name for a band, but the music within is most worthy of its pedigree



CLOUDS FORMING CROWNS

Clouds Forming Crowns

DFM-066

EVIL SPONGE

Clouds Forming Crowns
"Clouds Forming Crowns"
October 2005
Indoor Miner

Guided By Voices fans may be pleased to know that Clouds Forming Crowns are the Tobias brothers, Tim and Todd, who have apparently been involved with Robert Pollard's crew in recent years. Now I must admit that I'm not a huge GBV fan, but this really is very good. Acoustic in the main, the excellent opener Accidents Of Air pretty much sets the tone. It opens beautifully with its quietly strummed intro and an odd haunting melody that brings to mind the strange way Roy Wood had with a tune on latterday Move records like Tonight. The band then kicks in - albeit not for long - but it's a cracker all the same. That's not the only time that The Move came to mind, however. Forest of Twins has a great chorus that Roy Wood would have been proud of.

There's another famous 60's band that springs to mind on a number of songs here though - The Rolling Stones. Admittedly it's The Stones in their Angie ballad mode rather than Jumpin' Jack Flash kick-ass style that we're talking about here. It shows on tracks like Blades and Teeth, True Heart of Medicine (which is not unlike a slowed down You Can't Always Get What You Want), and Let's Bleed. The latter even sounds like a Rolling Stones title, though the vocal style is strangely reminiscent of early Steve Harley.

That's not to say that the album is totally acoustic, though. Are You Sleeping Well and Wish-Hound are probably more reminiscent of GBV and really rock out, whilst It's Easy, Knife sounds like early, fuzzy REM. Night When The People Go Fast has an altogether looser feel, with its welcome, almost funky beat and a Sabbath-like riff!! But it's the quieter songs here that work best for me. Apart from those tracks already mentioned, there's Nowhere Is Everywhere with the type of woodwind sound that Led Zep used to favour on their more mellow moments as well as the slow, repetitive and doomy riff laden Minus Drivers, and Tails Being Born with its discorded acoustic guitars and slightly off-kilter harmonies.

So, as you can probably sense from the mentions of The Move, The Stones and Led Zep, this probably isn't exactly the most cutting edge album of 2005. However, it does nicely doff its cap to these influences and is one of those records that I've found myself reaching for on a regular basis. Indeed, this is a damn good album by a pair of brothers who certainly don't need to cling to anyone else's coat-tails, be it Mr. Pollard or anyone else. I'm very pleasantly surprised.



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POPMATTERS

Clouds Forming Crowns
June 2005
Dave Malitz

As someone whose formative musical years came during the indie-rock boom era of the early-to-mid-'90s, I'll always hold a soft spot in my heart for bands like Clouds Forming Crowns. The self-titled album from this Ohio group – a low-key, family affair between brothers Tim and Todd Tobias, recorded largely on four-track cassette and eight-track reel – has the feel of many records from last decade. There's little grand ambition, no flash, no big statement. It's simply a large collection (16 tracks in all) of concise, well-crafted songs that displays a definite knack for tunefulness and intricacy.

If this description sounds similar to another Ohio group, it's not just a coincidence. Clouds Forming Crowns has no shortage of connections to Robert Pollard and Guided By Voices. Tim Tobias, the principal songwriter/lyricist/singer/guitarist for CFC served a five-year stint as GBV's bassist, performing on *Isolation Drills*, *Earthquake Glue* and *Universal Truths and Cycles*. Todd, whose role in CFC is described as providing "musical back-up", produced the latter two of those GBV albums as well as their swan song, last year's *Half Smiles of the Decomposed*.

The GBV influences aren't hard to pick out on this record, but the songs that sound most like something from the Pollard songbook are among the least effective here. "Are You Sleeping Well?" announces itself with a big, major-chord riff, the type that followed a sloppily shouted "1, 2, 3, 4!" from Pollard thousands of times. But despite a lifetime of cigarettes and alcohol, Pollard was still able to give his power pop numbers the soaring vocal melodies needed to make them classics. Tim Tobias has less range with his rough, raspy drawl, which limits the upward mobility of the most instrumentally rousing numbers here. "Sleeping Well" and "Wish-Hound" seem like they should be the most accessible songs here with their classic structure, big riffs and catchy solos. But instead they tend to drag and sound like the output of anyone of a dozen or so garage bands in your hometown.

The highlights over the course of the rest of the album are more than enough to overcome these shortcomings, though. Opener "Accidents of Air" is about as perfect as lo-fi indie rock comes. Todd Tobias shows that lo-fi production doesn't necessarily mean sloppy, haphazard production, utilizing multi-layered acoustic guitars and vocals during the song's intro. The juxtaposition of the airy guitars during the verse and the fuzzy distortion during the chorus is especially effective, and the drums crack with extra vibrancy. It heavily recalls some of the finer moments from Olivia Tremor Control's *Dusk at Cubist Castle*, which is high praise indeed. "Dreaming of Flying" doesn't pack quite the punch as "Accidents" but exists in that same enjoyable, slightly acid-fried terrain.

Elsewhere, CFC evokes another lo-fi Ohio duo with Guided By Voices ties, Swearing at Motorists. (Although, to be fair, after the band's 20-plus year career it might be hard to find anyone in Ohio who *doesn't* have GBV ties.) SaM have released three somewhat moody, introspective lo-fi rock albums on Secretly Canadian over the past few years, and songs like the plaintive "Let's Bleed" ("And the battles will be broken/ And we'll enter heaven/ We are the new ghosts") and the deliberate, and eventually driving "Blades and Teeth" could fit in on any of those albums. These songs are deceptively intricate, which could be said for most of the tracks on here, and it helps give the album an identity.



CLOUDS FORMING CROWNS

Clouds Forming Crowns

DFM-066

Like most albums with 16 songs, there are a few too many. We could have done without the faux-funk of "Night When People Go Fast", for example, which might keep people from getting to the delightful "Night Playing Tricks", which serves as a perfect campfire sing/strum-along album closer. But on a record that has only two songs pass the three-and-a-half minute mark, the misses are brief enough so that they take little away from this enjoyable album.

ALIVE

Clouds Forming Crowns
"Clouds Forming Crowns"
October 2005
Chip Midnight

If Clouds Forming Crowns music bears striking similarities to the Brit-infused pop sound of Guided By Voices, it shouldn't come as a surprise, CFC's ring-leader, Tim Tobias, spent the better part of the '00s a member of Robert Pollard's seminal indie-rock band, and his brother (and bandmate) Todd Tobias produced the last three GBV records. Trying to get out from under Pollard's shadow, clouds Forming Crowns released it's self-titled full length in early 2005.



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