

The Washington Post

CD review: Portugal. The Man's 'American Ghetto'

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PORTUGAL. THE MAN.

"American Ghetto"

Kindred spirits: Panic! At the Disco, Blonde Redhead

Show: With Port O'Brien and the Dig on Thursday at the 9:30 club. Doors open at 7 p.m. 202-265-0930.

<http://www.9:30.com>.

Those who miss the creativity and artistry of John Lennon's more poignant pop songs need only look to the latest offering by Portugal. The Man.

Sniff if you will. After all, how could a rock band from Wasilla, Alaska, possibly compare to a musical genius?

Quite frankly, very well, as evidenced on the band's newest release, "American Ghetto." In a world of "American Idol" hopefuls imitating commercial artists in the hopes of winning pop stardom, "American Ghetto" brings a sensory thrill.

This beat-heavy album is full of electronic exploration by way of drum machine, synthesizers and vocals auto-tuned to perfection. But despite the techno tweaks, the sound retains a soulful, expansive quality. Imagine a modern-day version of the Beatles' "Revolver" and you've got the idea.

Frontman John Gourley said in a recent interview that the album's sound reflects the pains, joys and reflections of growing up in a small town. With such songs as "60 Years," which explores the fears and dreams of breaking free of geographic and personal limitations, and "The Dead Dog," which ruminates about a bar on the proverbial shady side of town, Gourley invites us along for the retro ride.

"American Ghetto" is proof that thoughtful musical artistry is out there for those who care to turn off the TV and listen.

-- Nancy Dunham

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