

'Contra'

Reviewed by Lindsay Cryer
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Vampire Weekend's new album, "Contra," gives fans reason to stay close by as the band takes its music into a more electric realm.



Courtesy of amazon.com

The band has added to its already addicting sound by complementing a synthesized rock feel with electro-pop spices, such as sped-up Auto-Tune in the track "California English" and '80s-inspired tempos in multiple tracks, including "White Sky."

High-tempo string instruments in "Taxi Cab" and instrumental breaks — which uncannily resemble Nickelodeon's "Rugrats" theme song — in the opening track "Horchata" make "Contra" reminiscent of the band's song "A-Punk" from its self-titled album, released in 2008.

"Bound" to be the biggest hit of the album, "Cousins" attracts the ears of not only those who love Vampire Weekend's steadfast rock beats, but also a more eclectic crowd who will enjoy the awkward and sporadic backward vocals.

The addicting chorus will prove to be one that "me and my cousins and you and your cousins" will all enjoy.

While the themes of the songs ring a bit cliché — including songs about California escapes and city-found love — the mysteriously honest lyricism shines through, with the band even daring to rhyme "horchata" and "balaclava" in the opening track.

It may be the album's title, but the word "contra" in "I Think Ur a Contra" remains undefined. Still, the message — one of heartbreak in the making — is clear. Listeners will continue to find difficult-to-decipher lyrics in readily relatable songs.

Vampire Weekend's triumph lies in its decision not to try to change its sound — that's improvement enough. The vibe is more vivacious, the beats — though somewhat similar in a few tracks — are more bubbly, and the lyrics are still genuine.

Vampire Weekend fans from the start will not stray too far with "Contra," and those who weren't have now been given a reason to join the fun.

Grade: B+

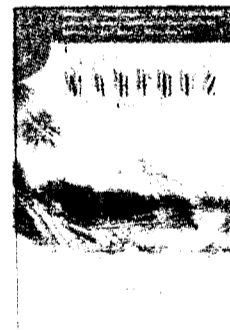
Download: "Cousins," "Diplomat's Son"

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'Cairo Modern'

Reviewed by Stephanie Goga
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Although Naguib Mahfouz's "Cairo Modern" was published in 1945, it remains just what the title alludes to: a modern, timeless tale.



Courtesy of amazon.com

The novel, recently translated from Arabic, paints a glorious picture of Cairo in the 1930s, replete with cruises down the Nile River and elegant parties. Of course, societal and governmental changes also emerge, making the story a realistic portrait of Egypt at this time.

Despite some minor problems with the plot's flow, "Cairo Modern" remains a stunning historical novel — and one that isn't easily forgotten.

The storyline follows Mahgub, a student in his last semester of college. Mahgub's father suddenly takes ill and has little money to spare for Mahgub's living expenses.

While Mahgub is learning how to pinch pennies, he's also searching for the elusive post-graduation job — a subplot that makes the novel immediately relatable to college students.

Desperate to escape his life of poverty, Mahgub accepts a life of luxury: a high-level government job, an arranged marriage and paid living expenses. But the agreement comes with a price. His new wife, Ihsan, is actually the mistress of another government worker, who pays for all expenses in return for Mahgub's silence.

Mahgub swiftly gets swept up in his own greed — which naturally swirls into conflict throughout the rest of the novel.

The idea behind the novel is innovative, and Mahfouz's gift as a storyteller shines through his characters.

Even while the protagonist does some unsavory things — lying to and abandoning his destitute family, for instance — the reader somehow remains endeared to him. He may be too self-absorbed for his own good, but he is also delightfully human.

The novel is sometimes stalled by the asides of some of the secondary characters, which calls to mind a subtle Shakespearean influence. These lulls often leave the reader yearning for the action to return to Mahgub's tribulations.

For readers unfamiliar with world literature, "Cairo Modern" may be an appropriate starting point. The prose flows in such a way that its Arabic origins are virtually unrecognizable.

In case any Arabic phrases slipped past the translation though, a glossary accompanies the novel and explains some words, like Mahgub's favorite and perhaps overused catchphrase, "tuzz": "a contemptuous interjection." Thus, the reader can indulge in "Cairo Modern's" engaging plot while also picking up some Egyptian slang: an added bonus to an already intriguing novel.

Mahfouz has passed away since the publication of this novel, and the Cairo that is illustrated in this novel probably has, too. Fortunately, readers can escape to this thrilling time period and indulge in the scandalous plot by picking up "Cairo Modern" — no passport required.

Grade: B

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BRIGHT 'SIDE OF THE MOON'

The Flaming Lips bring a new sound to Pink Floyd.

Reviewed by Nick Weingartner
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

The new royal family of psychedelic jam-rock has paid its dues.

After years of talk around the indie-rock water cooler, The Flaming Lips has joined forces with Stardeath and White Dwarfs to officially release an entire cover of Pink Floyd's timeless "Dark Side of the Moon" — and with astounding results.

Also helping them on their mission to conquer the psychedelic Mount Everest is Peaches and Henry Rollins.

Peaches, most known for ridiculously sexual albums like 2006's "Impeach My Bush" — which included the seminal "Tent in Your Pants" — lends her surprisingly angelic voice to jams like "The Great Gig in the Sky."

Rollins is the notorious lead singer of Black Flag and an occasional actor/TV personality. With this, he provides an ongoing monologue that includes potential killing methods, maniacal laughing and philosophical statements like "There's no 'Dark Side of the Moon' really ... matter of fact, it's all dark."

The album swirls and dips with keyboard textures galore. But this isn't to say the album isn't full of rock, too. On "Money," the original chimes and register ringing is replaced by glitchy computer sounds. "Any Colour You Like" easily sounds the most like the Flaming Lips — especially its last album,

"Embryonic" — and is probably the most rockin' track on the record as a whole.

The album artwork is also much cooler — a baby shoots out rainbow-lasers from its eyes — and 36 years of improvement in recording technology didn't hurt either.

But there's a question to be asked, whether the Flaming Lips intended to invite it or not: Is it better than the original?

No. But it's still pretty amazing.

It's difficult to gauge the greatness of an album that pulls from some of the strongest source material the human race has manufactured since the Industrial Revolution.

When covering a masterpiece, do you automatically make a masterpiece?

No. You can't create a classic by covering a classic. You'll always be living in the shadow of the original, the dark side of its moon.

And if it wasn't for the fact that the notes and lyrics comprising this album didn't originate with the Flaming Lips, this album would easily be put in glass cases on dorm rooms and basement walls as an LSD-ridden musical Mona Lisa. But, in the end, it doesn't surpass the original, and therefore can never reach that musical status.

Still, the Flaming Lips remain the only band that could ever have hit such a high watermark covering such an iconic album.

For most bands, it would be suicide. But for the Lips and their musical commodore companions, it was just something fun to do.

Grade: B+

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Adams, Goode have chemistry, spunk

