Fray album far from chaotic

By Jessica Gadтуla

The soothing melody of the piano has worked its way through pop-rock with artists such as Ben Folds, Keane and Coldplay. The Fray, with its debut album, How to Save a Life, is no exception to this musical phenomenon.

Melancholic, yet calming, best encompasses The Fray’s sound. The Denver-based four-piece formulate the perfect mix of vocal harmony, sophisticated songwriting and genre, impressive rhythms. Though The Fray’s sound is, at first, reminiscent of its mainstream counterparts, the intensity backed up in its lyrics is unmistakable.

The Epic Records release gives off a feeling of nostalgia. The listener is given different perspectives of sentiment with each track, adding depth and attention-grabbing. How to Save a Life immediately establishes such credibility with the initial track, “She Is.” The Fray’s radio hit single, “Over My Head (Cable Car),” a song that’s hard to forget when hearing words like, “I wish you were a stranger I could disengage,” follows afterward.

There is no doubt that The Fray’s music is piano driven. Isaac Slade’s vocals compliment his piano skills well and are best displayed in the album’s self-titled track, “How to Save a Life,” a song inspired by his own experience as a mentor to a crack-addicted teen. It is one of the more memorable songs on the album and perfectly highlights the vulnerable vocal/guitar/keyboard as well as Slade’s writing ability. Other tracks that emphasize the piano’s melody include “Little House” and “Hundred.”

Though each song is worth giving a listen to, there comes a point in the album where the listener may become bored. Consecutive tracks “Fall Away” and “Heaven Forbid” may result in the listener doing off due to their monotonous feel. Such is the case though with most mellow albums that are listened to for the first time around. But once How to Save a Life is given a chance, one will find it is the ideal album to put on repeat when looking for “feel good” music.

How to Save a Life is simply refreshing and leaves an impression of brilliance. The Fray furthers the classic combination of raw talent with real emotions, while attempting to stay away from the typically structured “break heartbroken” writing styles. The music speaks for itself and is sure to not disappoint “piano rock” lovers.

Porcupine Tree crafts sharp album

By Jordan Blum

An album can be one of three things in relation to the band who made it. It can be a work of art that illustrates how the band is progressing, a repeat of past work with no evolution, or a mix of both. Deadwing, the latest album by Porcupine Tree, is just that. When considered by itself, it is truly a great album with phenomenal music, vocals and lyrics. However, if you compare it to the past works of the band, you’ll find that it may fall a bit short of expectations.

Porcupine Tree has been around for roughly 15 years. The singer/songwriter/guitarist of the band is Steven Wilson, a true genius when it comes to music. His influences vary from pop-music icon Brian Wilson to progressive-rock creators King Crimson (Adrian Belew from King Crimson plays on Deadwing). It is the most versatile band of this generation. Every Porcupine Tree album it has made has shown progression in the band as well as amazing diversity. On Deadwing, the band maintains what has made it amazingly unique and inventive while also beginning to repeat itself and give in to the formula of mainstream music.

Deadwing has a feeling of regret, pain and anger. It is mostly a pop album with some rock and metal elements. It opens with a sound loop showing influence from the opening of The Who’s Who’s Next. The rock portion is very catchy and extremely well played and arranged, but it feels too generic and formulaic for a band with such amazing depth and distinctiveness. Wilson has often spoken out against mainstream music for being more about the image of the artist and “safe” sound of the material than of pure talent and originality. It is for this reason that disappointment is felt after hearing the band and its main rock songs on Deadwing. They are good songs with intelligence if taken on their own, but when compared to past works of the band, they aren’t acceptable. It almost seems as if Wilson and the rest of the band took a break from innovation just to play some good songs.

The rest of the album is a work of brilliance and near musical utopia. The vocals vary from unaccompanied to overlapping and all of it sounds great. The music is filled with odd time signatures and sprawling degrees of human emotion. The lyrics are pure poetry, whether dealing with aggression or heartbreak. Take for instance “The Start of Something Beautiful.” This is a song that represents what truly remarkable music should contain. It is a sad song that has a stunningly powerful instrumental piece serve as its middle. It builds upon melodies and then places a gorgeous guitar solo over it. Another reason to listen to Deadwing is the song “Glass Arm Shattering.” Its vocals overlap and provide an eerie, yet memorable sound. There are so many wonderful moments on Deadwing that several listeners are needed to fully realize and appreciate its beauty. It is truly a terrific album.

The amount of enjoyment the listeners get from Deadwing is dependent on who they are. Elements of metal are present as well as different types of rock, pop and even some electronic wizardry. This is an album not only full of lush sounds, brilliant music and great concept but amazing wizardry. This album is a perfect mix of all the things that Porcupine Tree is known for itself and is sure to not disappoint.