

**PORTUGAL. THE MAN**  
**C E N S O R E D C O L O R S**

<EQUAL VISION RECORDS>

Something wicked has come out of Wasilla, Alaska, and it's not a bespectacled, moose-burger-eating *enfant terrible* of presidential politics. Instead, it is the sprawling sound of outlandish rock quartet Portugal. The Man. Crafted like an eclectic cathedral of sound, each song on the grandiose album *Censored Colors* is a keystone. And the sum is greater than its parts:



without one piece, the temple will fall. The fuzzy guitars are searing, the choir swoops, and the ivories bang with the ferocity of a carnivalesque revival led by a sweat-soaked televangelist. Think Paul Dano's sermons in *There Will Be Blood*. Think a down-home *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. But don't be lazy and catalogue them alongside sonic peers The Mars Volta, Cold War Kids, and Spiritualized. PTM has more in common with the cocksure Guns N' Roses circa 1980, *Smile*-era Brian Wilson, and most everything from (dare I say it?) Meat Loaf and his cohort, lyricist and songwriter Jim Steinman. There is no second-guessing in a Steinman song, but a brazen commitment to packing in every idea possible, what's popular be damned. PTM is no different. They have no qualms saying, "Fuck it. It's time for a sitar solo." Because of this all-inclusive creative policy, this record plays like a live show: each song runs into the next, and the pacing alternates fluidly between highs and lows, as in the transition

from the psychedelic breakout of "Never Pleased" to the transcendent choral arrangement and slow claps of "Salt." As the organ exhales a few tremulous notes, singer/songwriter John Baldwin Gourley's falsetto soars over guitar strums, while strings waft over jazz drums. It's undeniable that these are epic, orchestrated movements (*nota bene*: they're too huge to be just songs). Double takes are demanded. Wait. Is that a muted trumpet? Is that a dub breakdown? A sexy, low-slung guitar strangling? Portugal. The Man is unafraid to be Sizzler's all-you-can-eat buffet—a packed plate of disparate tastes, colors, and textures that somehow, some way, satisfy all the senses.

**J U A N A M O L I N A**  
**U N D Í A**

<DOMINO>

Imagine the following: Tina Fey, the immensely talented actress and writer, who is inarguably at the height of her game, decides tomorrow to forsake her acting career to become an experimental songstress who crafts delicately beautiful ballads. Former Argentine TV actress Juana Molina did just that. She left behind her fame (reportedly leaving fans in her home country aghast) to



return to her roots in music. Her father was a tango singer, and, within the constrained rhythms of her music—fragile micro beats seemingly sewn together with spiderwebs—she reveals the rhythmic skeleton of South America at her core. She

whispers and coos gently, "*Que difícil*," over crunchy guitar upstrokes, warped keyboards, and ticking kick drum in "Dar (Qué Dificil)." Many of the songs on *Un Día* are made up of inexplicable danceable beats and, oftentimes, a simple handclap drives an entire track. Creating complex rhythms between vocal layers—some of which are just sounds that become the beats to her intertwined lyrical wandering—her inclusion of subtle electronics, like the mangled dial tones percolating below her sweet, siren-like vocals in "Los Hongos De Marosa," push the album into uncharted territory for a woman with a guitar. Her sound is more akin to the innovative music of Björk and Joanna Newsom than, say, that of Jewel. But, she keeps it palatable and strangely beautiful.

**E L T E N E L E V E N**  
**T H E S E P R O M I S E S**  
**A R E B E I N G V I D E O T A P E D**

<FAKE RECORD LABEL>

The double-neck guitar is the ultimate signifier of musical masturbation and phallocentric crotch rocking. That is, unless you're El Ten Eleven, the post-rock duo from Los Angeles, who lay down simple rhythms, then wield the finished product as mechanized dance jams. During live performances, Kristian Dunn, brandishing his beautiful guitar/bass, and drummer Tim Fogarty create pulsating, fist-pumping songs with their trusty looping pedals. It's the musical equivalent of spinning plates. Dunn lays down a simple guitar riff, then loops it, then he overlays a bass line and loops that, too. Lather, rinse, repeat, and, voilà, the resulting sound is Daft Punk thumping ad infinitum. But, whereas Daft Punk is robotized, El Ten Eleven provides a real-time experience that pits man against machine. And, so it becomes challenging to encapsulate and replicate the energy of the band's intensely entertaining live act on the CD, where the songs must stand

alone, leaving by the wayside any ego-stroking by fellow musicians. El Ten Eleven's *These Promises Are Being Videotaped* takes on this challenge and ultimately succeeds. Instead of relying solely on the spectacular (but not gimmicky) aspects of their live show, the record takes



a breath and polishes up the edges. Abandoning the double-neck, Dunn creates the entire record on a fretless bass (which, as any douchebag musician can attest, is harder to play than a double-neck. Not like you care.), but he does not simply replicate Spinal Tap's three-bass wunderkind, "Big Bottom." The first track, "Jumping Frenchmen of Maine," epitomizes El Ten Eleven's dance-floor rocker: a sonic-groove pyramid built one brick at a time by embellishing a simple riff until it swells into a sweet floor-stomper. The stupidly named "I Like Van Halen Because My Sister Says They Are Cool" (perhaps taking an ill-informed bite from instrumental post-rockers Don Caballero), is El Ten Eleven's poppiest track, ripe for iPod commercials and one-off release parties at boutique hotels, sponsored by artisan-water corporations. Yet, there's still an edge to the record that provides undeniable street cred. On paper, El Ten Eleven might seem like a musician's band, but their danceable songs keep them grounded and accessible to non-musicians. Well, that is, until Dunn plays Radiohead's "Paranoid Android" entirely on fretless bass. Dude, yes way.