

EAR CANDY

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REVIEWS

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Flaming Lips

Embryonic

After a 15-year run that started with an unexpected Top 10 single and ended with one of its songs being chosen as the official state song of its native Oklahoma, the Flaming Lips have arguably become the most eccentric band to ever achieve widespread acceptance within the mainstream. But while the band will never be accused of tailoring surging psychedelic epics for the masses, its last few releases have been increasingly easy to digest, with the hooks turning up in television commercials and making it a go-to headliner at outdoor music festivals. *Embryonic*, then, is a return to its weird roots, a decidedly odd and willfully obtuse double album that focuses on long garage-psych grooves and features little of the soaring sing-a-longs that made the recent albums so accessible. Instead, the band has made one of its most thoroughly engrossing releases, an 18-song devolution into noisy feedback, distorted drums, fuzzy bass, and tangled knots of electric guitar. Taking cues from krautrock and free jazz, the tracks range from the squelchy push-and-pull of “Convinced of the Hex” through the pounding chaos of “Aquarius Sabotage” and the playful pop balladry of “I Can Be a Frog.” Zodiac signs and space themes repeat, mirrored in spoken word soundscapes such as “Virgo Self Esteem Broadcast” and spectral instrumental “Scorpio Sword,” every piece in its sonic puzzle fitting together perfectly in a sprawling, mutating whole. Add it up, and it’s the wildest, woolliest, and most downright dangerous release the Lips have made in the last 20 years, an album that sounds like four men setting up in the studio and chasing down every stray idea that enters the room. *[Matt Fink]*

