

Album reviews: Plain White T's and Mother Mother

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Plain White T's: "Big Bad World"

2 1/2 out of four stars

To say a pop-punk band has gone commercial seems sorta redundant. After all, the world of pop-punk is inhabited by shrieking teen fans raised on MTV and reality-TV junk food. But Chicago's Plain White T's have clearly retooled their approach to follow up on the surprising success of the omnipresent, acoustically sticky single, "Hey There, Delilah," which earned a Grammy nomination even if it quite frankly didn't sound a whole lot like the rest of the rock band's repertoire.



So on "Big Bad World," we find frontman Tom Higgenson and his bandmates trotting out the syrupy, mostly acoustic "1, 2, 3, 4" and almost Beach Boys-ish "Sunlight," both impressive as well-produced pop songs go (as is the closing track, "Someday"). Overall, though, the shift toward string arrangements, lush vocals and the pop half of the pop-punk's sonic spectrum produces mixed results, so much so that one teenager told me she likes the album better if she pretends it's not the Plain White T's.

That's probably because "Big Bad World" mostly drops the punk part of the equation: It's pleasant and listenable but too rarely compelling.

Mother Mother: "O My Heart"

Four out of four stars



Oh my, indeed. Mother Mother has made some waves and for good reason: The band's second album is a fine piece of

This Vancouver quintet -- Ryan Guldemon, Jeremy Page, Molly Guldemon, Ali Siadat, Debra-Jean Creelman -- attacks its musical prey with the delicious energy of fellow Vancouver indie-rockers The New Pornographers. It also shows a willingness to chew more slowly on the airy, vocally pleasing and Beatlesque "Burning Pile" or the Pixies-like throbbing bass of "Body of Years." With their ever-inventive harmonies and vocals front and center, they even pull out banjos, ukuleles and such for the rootsy pop of "Wrecking Ball."

Suffice to say, it's mostly undefinable -- and remarkable -- stuff.

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