



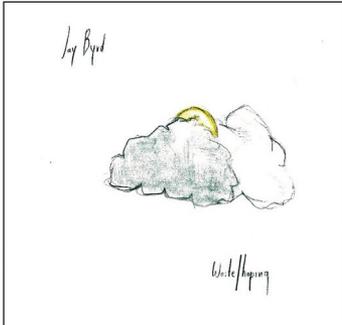
by Michael Coleman and Joel Sparks

On Tap takes a look at four local and touring bands each month. If you are interested in being featured, please send your CD along with contact information, including your website and a list of upcoming shows to On Tap Magazine. Attention Four Play: 25 Dove St., Alexandria, VA 22314

JAY BYRD

WEB: www.jasonbyrd.net

ALBUM: waste/hoping



SHOW: Tues., August 23; Vermilion, Alexandria, VA

For years, Jay Byrd was a big part of Charlotte band Wavy Train, who started out strictly as a Grateful Dead tribute group. His recent solo work shows both why he fit in and how he grew from there. His "waste/hoping" EP shows his feel for American Beauty-like songwriting: the plaintiveness of bluegrass, the spareness of the solo singer-songwriter, and the lyrical originality and directness of folk. Among many other recognitions, Byrd won the 2010 BMI Songwriter Award in the Mid-Atlantic Songwriting Contest. In the past, he's used more of a mainstream sound with electric guitar country-rock, but the new disc in particular brings to mind Elliot Smith with its gentle melancholy and sneaky melodic celebrations. The five songs focus on quietly bleak contemplation--the "waste" of the title--with just a breath of hope to come. Byrd plays all the instruments except for the occasional mandolin. He sings, "I should feel blessed to be putting my hands to good use," and he is. Now based in Bethesda, Byrd often appears in area venues both solo and with a full band. - JS

Vermilion: 1120 King St., Alexandria, VA, 703-684-9669; www.vermilionrestaurant.com

THE GREY AREA

WEB: www.listn.to/thegreyareadc

ALBUM: Streaming songs and videos online



SHOW: Wed., August 17; Velvet Lounge, DC

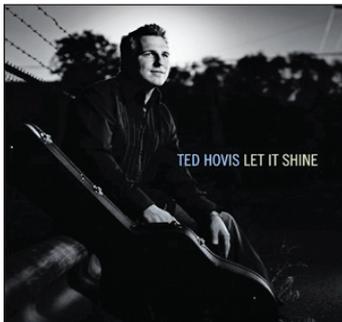
From the amount of energy they put into their songs, videos, and live appearances, it's hard to believe that the Grey Area is just two guys: singer Jason and drummer TJ. The two shave-headed men, both living in DC, are breaking out with a three-song collection called First Sessions after bringing their enthusiastic indie rock to festivals and area bars since 2010. Local institutions like the Vinyl District and the DCLiveMusic video blog have taken note. The single—if a trio of tunes with no physical format can be a single—is the peppy "Ourselves," highlighting Jason's chatty, Dave Matthews-like writing, TJ's considerable rhythmic experience for a young man and the pair's jaunty charisma. - JS

Velvet Lounge: 915 U St. NW, DC; 202-462-3213; www.velvetlounge.com

TED HOVIS

WEB: www.tedhovis.com

ALBUM: Let it Shine



SHOW: Sat., August 27; Brion's Grille, Fairfax, VA

Ted Hovis is living proof that looks can be deceiving. Glancing at a photo of the clean-cut, DC-based musician, I thought he probably made shiny power pop or modern folk music. But 30 seconds into the title track on "Let it Shine," Hovis' strong new CD, I'm conjuring images of long-haired, tattooed 80s rockers. Bombastic yet melodic, "Let it Shine" is the kind of muscular meat and potatoes rock song that would sound great out on the open road with the car windows rolled down. Hovis showcases his versatility on the second track, "Pocketful," a mid-tempo ballad featuring chiming guitars and a hypnotic groove. In track three, "Thinking Out Loud," Hovis shifts gears again, dropping into a funky bassline punctuated by languid vocals. While the ever-shifting styles might give a casual listener a case of musical whiplash, this well-produced disc showcases Hovis' talents as a songwriter, guitar player and singer. - MC

Brion's Grille: 10621 Braddock Rd., Fairfax, VA; 703-352-7272; www.brionsgrille.com

ALEXANDRA DAY

WEB: www.alexandradaymusic.com **ALBUM:** Untangle



SHOW: Thurs., August 4; Baldwin's Station, Sykesville, MD

Alexandra Day's confident, crystalline voice carries this stripped-down record, a collection of serene songs recorded in a loft in downtown Philadelphia. The record, featuring only Day's vocals and a perfectly tuned Steinway grand piano, unspools at a leisurely pace. "Take it Easy," a plea to a lover to go easy on her heart, is a soulful rumination on relationships while "Virginia" is a cheerful, nostalgic ode to growing up in the area. "Chemicals in My Brain" is a funny track that describes how hormones – not drugs or booze – propels her to become attracted to a man and want to have his babies. While "Untangle" displays Day's unquestionable talent, the disc has a certain sameness to it. The tempos and textures are largely similar, but that consistency also makes for a steadily pleasant and relaxing listen. - MC

Baldwin's Station: 7618 Main St., Sykesville, MD; 410-795-1041; www.baldwinsstation.com