

MUSIC discography

Nothing Hurts

Male Bonding

Sub Pop

There's bit in *Annie Hall* where Woody Allen describes his *weltanschauung* by retelling an old joke: "Two elderly women are at a Catskill mountain resort, and one of 'em says, "Boy, the food at this place is really terrible." The other one says, "Yeah, I know; and such small portions." The joke could just as easily describe *Nothing Hurts*, the full-length debut of Dalston, U.K.'s Male Bonding, in which the noise-pop trio tears through 13 songs in 29 minutes. Emerson, Lake, and Palmer's *Tarkus*, this is not. But no one will ever accuse the band of lacking enthusiasm. Guitarist John Arthur Webb's careening fretwork on the opening pair of "Year's Too Long" and "All Things This Way" is some of the fastest indie-pop guitar playing by a Brit since the Wedding Present's Peter Solowka. And to be fair, most of the songs, in and of themselves, are listenable. The moody "Franklin" delights even as it reminds the listener of the superior haunted pop of New Zealand's the Chills. "Nothing Remains," with its rickety girl-boy back-and-forth, could be a track from the Vaselines. If the shoegazer pioneers in Ride had been a sloppy punk band, they might've come up with "Crooked Scene." The songs, listened to discretely, show promise, but as a whole, *Nothing Hurts* is underwhelming. The guys in Male Bonding are obviously music nerds, and they wear their influences on their record sleeves. But the brevity of the songs makes it extremely difficult for the band to insert its own style; almost every song sounds like a different band made it. Occasionally, the musical shifts are jarring. After the syncopated dissonance of "Pumpkin," the band ends the album with the spare, acoustic "Worst to Come," which is misleadingly billed as a Vivian Girls collaboration—they contribute some innocuous background cooing. The band switches it up at the end, self-sabotaging the bucolic revelry with an extended burst of static, hiss, and feedback. Fair enough, then, that the band describes its aesthetic as "Tinnitus. And a hook." And no, Tinnitus isn't some obscure hardcore band.

—David Dunlap Jr.

