

It's a Sure thing, but not much new

● R & B

AL B. SURE!
Honey I'm Home
Hidden Beach Recordings

★★½

Al B. Sure!, who found success with his falsetto in the '80s as one of New Jack Swing's most popular singers, returns with his first studio release in more than 15 years. Singing over a steady backup of lush vocal harmonies and hip-hop riffs, he sets a laid-back groove on *Honey I'm Home* and expectedly delivers convincingly on the slow jams about the ups and downs of love.

Sure has proven he's no one-note wonder, and his musical maturity is evident in several songs. Fans undoubtedly will appreciate the return of his perspective on love, romance and relationships. However, despite the smooth production and new-school swagger, his comeback after nearly two decades doesn't offer much new.

He reveals more of the range of his mellifluous tenor on the mid-tempo confection *I Love It (Papi Aye Aye Aye)* and the elegant percussion-based ballad *Dedicated (Open Up 2 You)*.

Out of place, though, are Sure's rendition of Sting's reflective *Fragile* (with Michael Jackson-style hoots) and a jarring closer, the pop-rockish *Never Stop Loving You*, more suited to a boy band.

Among the few lyrical moments are the hip-hop-and-vocoder-infused *Whatcha Got?* and the bouncy *Top of Your Lungs*, about a tempestuous romance ("Baby, we can't go on like this, a bunch of worthless arguments, when we should be drinkin' Cris.")

— WILLIAM T. MCGEE
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● HIP-HOP

IMAYDAY!
Technology
iMayday! Music LLC, Pitch Key Recordings

★★★

Mayday! has changed quite a bit since the then-duo released its self-titled debut album in 2006. Three years later, the Miami-based hip-hop band has been flooding fans digitally with singles and



EPs. The latest, appropriately titled *Technology*, will be available on iTunes Tuesday.

Much like the group's last EP, February's Valentine's Day-themed *The Thinnest Line*, *Technology* often touches upon the complexity of relationships, but takes it a notch further with an overarching theme of loneliness set to a mechanical musical bedrock.

No song better embodies those themes than the title track. Over layers of space synths provided by producer and keyboardist Plex Luthor, rapper (and surprisingly, singer) Wrekonize croons, "Even with all of this technology, my friends they find it hard to talk to me," while iMayday!'s original MC, Bernbiz, raps about losing himself in an overly digitized world. The eerie song is reminiscent of Outkast's *Stankonia* phase.

Musically, some of the most compelling moments on *Technology* re-create what makes iMayday! a great live band: The final 1½ minutes of *Crossroads & Avenues* features a furiously paced scatting session, while *Junkyard Dog* has a fiery percussion breakdown.

Technology leaves something to be desired — namely, more songs. With only six, the EP is further proof the band needs to release another full-length album.

— ADRIAN RUHI
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● ROCK

CHICKENFOOT
Chickenfoot
Rogers & Cowen

★★½

This debut album from a new supergroup — guitar god Joe Satriani, singer Sammy Hagar and bassist Michael Anthony (both formerly of Van Halen) and drummer Chad Smith of the Red Hot Chili Peppers — is a revival of classic rock n' roll with a little extra personality and a lot of extra energy.

Satriani's talent as songwriter and musician has finally found its home alongside his new bandmates, and they all seem to be having fun. The hard-hitting riffs in *Get It Up* and *Turnin' Left*, coupled with Hagar's exclamations of "yeah!" and "come on!", beckon the listener to jam along with the band.

The quartet's topic choice ranges from



a more serious look at the world in *Running Out* to lusting after a rough, tough gal in *My Kinda Girl*.

Satriani's fretwork is as startling as ever, and the funk-inspired drumbeats that are Smith's trademark add a modern twist.

Not every song is memorable, but this debut makes it clear that these guys have decades of talent and indefatigable energy. Chickenfoot has added a new chapter to a classic sound, and it's pretty refreshing.

— STEPHANIE ROSENBLATT
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● ROOTS

STEVE MARTIN
The Crow: New Songs for the Five-String Banjo

Rounder
★★★

Comedian and comic actor Steve Martin has long been serious about the banjo, and though he's surrounded by a host of ringers here, including Earl Scruggs, Jerry Douglas and Tony Trischka, he displays real chops and compositional ability.

The songs, most of them instrumentals, show that Martin possesses not just technical prowess but also an ability to strike emotional chords. He takes one vocal turn, on the animatedly comic *Late for School*, leaving the rest of the singing to pros like Vince Gill, Dolly Parton and Mary Black. As with the guest instrumentalists, they tend to enhance Martin's own vision rather than overwhelm it.

— NICK CRISTIANO
The Philadelphia Inquirer

