

New Music

Jon Caramanica

Dum Dum Girls

"Only in Dreams"
(Sub Pop)

Veronica Falls

"Veronica Falls"
(Slumberland)

The Bangles

"Sweetheart of the Sun"
(Waterfront)

Since its inception a few years ago, Dum Dum Girls has felt like a project about reluctance and distance: skeletal frameworks, tersely worded sentiments, diffuse garage-rock arrangements, a coat of white noise slapped on top. It was of the moment, when pilfering from the 1960s and sounding bored while doing so was enough. You could easily imagine the group — largely the project of the frontwoman Dee Dee, with what felt like at best notional input from others — emerging and disappearing at will, never wanting to leave a heavy mark.

So much for all that. "Only in Dreams," the second Dum Dum Girls album, seethes with a beautiful, raging confidence, louder and fuller than anything they've done before, and better than the onetime peers they're leaving behind. These lush and reverb-thick songs are ambitious and pointed about subjects that often drag: leaving, wasting away, aching.

"How do I come around/ after all that has gone down/ I strain to hear the sound of my heartbeat," Dee Dee sings on "Heartbeat," one of several songs on which she opens her voice wide, showing new range and depth. Even better is the elegantly anxious



"Wasted Away": "I found the necklace that you used to wear/ I found the sweater, could still smell you there."

In the 1990s, when songs from the indie-rock fringes could become MTV and sometimes pop radio staples, the magnificent and alluring "Bedroom Eyes" would have been a smash. This is Dee Dee at her most sensual, but

ONLINE: AUDIO

Links to excerpts from the week's new releases:

nytimes.com/music

also tough, which never goes away. Even when she's cheerful, it's buffeted by toughness; on "Always Looking" she sings, "Before I met you I had a few/ who hung around and made me blue/ but I was always looking."

Richard Gottehrer of "My Boyfriend's Back" fame, and who produced the group's first album, is back here, joined by Sune Rose Wagner of the Raveonettes. Together they've amped up the band's energy, and also its clarity. Some of the hallmarks of the first album return: the forceful, swinging use of space between the drums on "Hold Your Hand," or the surf-rock guitars on "Just a Creep," which bear the indelible stamp of 2009. But those feel like winks as much as anything. Dum Dum Girls are finally demonstrating an interest in being something more than a project of its time; this is the girl-group revival growing up, standing up taller, insisting on living in the now.

But that old Dum Dum Girls sound hasn't gone away, nor is it atrophying. Into that spot are leaping bands like Veronica Falls, from London, which has just released its lovely self-titled debut album. Many of the starting points are the same — 1960s rock, distortion, the sense of drama in the use of halting guitars and percussion. (Veronica Falls will be touring with Dum Dum Girls in England next month.)

But Veronica Falls makes a lighter noise, with ample flashes of twee-pop anchored by the frontwoman Roxanne Clifford's piercing and brittle voice. She nails dreamy, lazy seduction on

"Come On Over," and bitterness on "Wedding Day." The boy-girl harmonies on this album at least suggest the possibility of outside points of view, but really, Ms. Clifford's tension is everything.

In an earlier era of revival, the Bangles were a band like these, too, a few years before "Walk Like an Egyptian" painted them forever as pop eccentrics. They're grown-ups now — at least, the three of four original members who remain — and their new album, "Sweetheart of the Sun," reflects that.

Made with the help of Matthew Sweet, a longtime collaborator of the frontwoman Susanna Hoffs, it's a spare and occasionally stiff album that has more to do with, say, the Indigo Girls than the 1960s bands the Bangles grew up worshipping. (The mandolin and steel guitar sprinkled throughout don't help.) But some songs here, especially "Anna Lee (Sweetheart of the Sun)," feel like mature takes on youthful ideas. And there's a glimmer of real ferocity on "Sweet and Tender Romance," the album's shortest and most convincing song, lean at just over two minutes, like the songs on the group's first preface EP. It shows that they haven't forgotten that loose, mean charm, from a time when looking backward felt like the newest thing.