

MUSIC » NEW RELEASES

ROOTS ROCK

HAYMAKER!

The Gourds
Yep Roc
★★★★½

An entertaining wallop of southern music comes from a swamp-loving Texas band that admires the boot-shaped Cajun state to the east. With its extroverted rattle of accordions, mandolins, fiddles and cosmic country arrangements, the Gourds' ninth album is a spirited affair, likeable to listeners of John Hiatt, the Kinks and, on the album-closing *Tighter*, Blue Rodeo harmonies. *Fossil Contender* is an amiable collection of riffs, and *Country Love* dances tirelessly under the stars. In the race for 2009's best roots-rock disc, *Haymaker!* beats all others to the punch. » *Brad Wheeler*

CLASSICAL

FELIX MENDELSSOHN: COMPLETE WORKS FOR CELLO AND PIANOFORTE

Sergei Istomin, cello
Viviana Sofronitsky, pianoforte
Passacaille
★★★★½

A "song without words" asks more, not less, of its executor, who must reinvent the silences between words, the absent consonants, commas and question marks: It is the opposite of an excuse for a smooth, unhindered line. Cellist Sergei Istomin's playing is as eloquent as if he were sculpting out the syllables of a hidden text, not only in his ardent interpretation of the *Song Without Words, Op. 109*, but in the cello sonatas too. These blaze with clarity and urgency, not the least for pianist Viviana Sofronitsky's effervescent performance, on a period instrument remarkable for "special effects" in timbre no modern piano can match. » *Elissa Poole*

JAZZ

SOLO

Chris Donnelly
Alma
★★★★

Jazz fans love to talk about a pianist's chops, waxing enthusiastic over speed, flash and technical acumen, but give little thought to touch. But from Horowitz to Hancock, touch—the shading and tone a pianist produces—is the truest mark of virtuosity. Chris Donnelly has touch in spades, bringing a level of warmth and nuance to his improvisations rarely heard in jazz, and that is one of the qualities that makes *Solo* such a jaw-dropping debut. His flawless sense of line and utter mastery of harmony are equally stunning, while his witty deconstruction of *Donna Lee* may be the freshest take on that chestnut since Charlie Parker. » *J.D. Considine*