

Ways of Scene

Jonathan P. Binstock, curator of contemporary art at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, sounds off on the best bands within walking distance.

Brandon Butler may be the singer/songwriter we all (well, those of us like me) wanted to be. Alt country, alt folk, alt rock, alt alt. I hate the word *alt* but I suppose it will have to do here, because ultimately *rock* just doesn't fit in. His aesthetic is earthy and resonant and seems familiar, but idiosyncrasy finally wins the day. Power and lyricism are honed by serious work on the guitar: He's unique, the real deal, and an inspiring musician.



◀ **Georgie James**, a group not a guy, lives somewhere between the New Pornographers and Everything But the Girl. The high-energy, male-female vocal duo bit with a groovy melodic sound always gets me, so I'm admittedly a predisposed listener. Nonetheless, the sound is perfect, polished pop, which one expects from the production value associated with studio recordings, but Georgie James does it live, too. They're a band to watch.

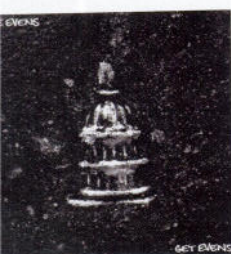
▶ **French Toast** is tight, and they rock. Not long ago I had them play the Corcoran, and they had everyone dancing and yearning for more. Ben Gilligan plays both bass and guitar, while James Canty and Jerry Busher do the same with the addition of drums—all of which means the group thrives on a certain kind of instability. Pop with a punk feel, French Toast grows from the District's rich musical soil and is heir to its distinguished musical history. Versatile, transformative, and very, very sexy.



◀ **Thievery Corporation**—sometimes it's necessary to state the obvious. Eleven years in the making, and Rob Garza and Eric Hilton are still in the making, cultivating themselves, their sound, aesthetic, everything. They are authentically, seamlessly international, a true reflection of the unique character of our fair city. They are loved all over the world, but they are ours. Embrace them. If you missed their end-of-year shows at the 9:30 Club, then you missed something grand. Next time, try not to be oblivious to the obvious.



▶ **Richard Chartier** is a sound and installation artist, which makes him an anomaly among this group; however, the curator in me can't help but mention him, a favorite son of the Washington art world. Chartier is usually traveling the globe, so he's something of a phantom in this town. But DC is actually his home, which means you can lose yourself to his ambient, deep-reaching, and slightly twisted aesthetic almost as frequently as you would like. It's all electronic, and his live performances are created using manipulated, mixed sound files. No talking, please. Just listen. ★



◀ **The Evens** are the duo of Ian MacKaye—of Minor Threat and Fugazi fame—and Amy Farina. When I talked about the District's distinguished musical history above, MacKaye, with his extensive and ongoing contributions to the scene, is what I meant. Everything he does is important, and the Evens are no different. "Mt. Pleasant Isn't" is a favorite in this household—that's why we live in Woodley Park. Just kidding. Get their CDs. Not kidding.