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MARCH 27, 2007

CD Reviews

New, noteworthy or otherwise.

BY [SCOTT ELINGBURG](#)

### DAVID EZELL

*The Backshop Live* (Running Time Music, 2006)

"You have to know real pain/ to know how good I feel right now," David Ezell achingly sings out in one of his louder moments on this live CD. Louder, in this context, is only just above a conversational tone on this intimate disc. Still, it stands out amidst some of his more plaintive tunes such as "Time I Search No More (My Prison Door)" and "Leaning Forward" and some of his walking, syncopated numbers like "Rock-n-Roll Woman" and "I Don't Want Your Girl."

Ezell is a treasure of a singer-songwriter - he's the Upstate's Townes Van Zandt, Lyle Lovett, and Willie Nelson rolled into one with a library of songs that stand out amazingly on their own. Nowhere else is this more apparent than on this superb live disc recorded at the Backshop in Spartanburg in February 2006. The songs are intimate and perfectly suited to the setting. They don't lose an ounce of quality; in fact, Ezell sounds like he's more at home in front of an audience than in a studio judging from the interplay he holds with the crowd.

Discs like these remind one of the power of music; sometimes you barely have to raise your voice to get attention and sometimes all it takes is a well-placed chord and an impeccable lyric. In that department, Ezell has the market cornered.

**Favorite Track:** "The Strength of Fields," "Real Pain"

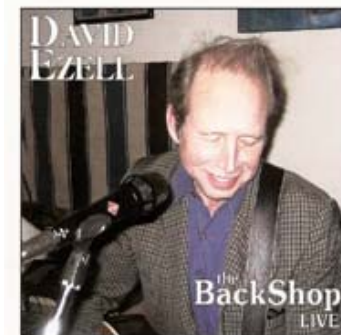
**Website:** [www.davidezell.net](http://www.davidezell.net), [www.backshopmusic.com](http://www.backshopmusic.com)

### THE BROKEN WEST

*I Can't Go On, I'll Go On* (Merge Records, 2007)

Though The Broken West may make reference to Samuel Beckett in the name of their album, I can find no similarities with which to compare them to such a notable and famous presence. In fact, their songs (with the exception of one or two) are pieces of brilliant sunlight reflecting off a swimming pool in late July and, when compared to such a dismal title, that's really just a bit disappointing.

The Broken West are power pop, plain and simple. There are all the rudimentary elements to complete the formula: jangly guitars - check, keyboards in tow - check, cute song titles - check. Don't misunderstand; I'm a dedicated fan of the genre - when it's done well (ie: Big Star, Teenage



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Fanclub). What I am not a fan of, however, are sunny groups like this one aping The Beach Boys and The Posies and coming up completely empty-handed.

Songs like the opener "On the Bubble" and "Down in the Valley" go on for about two minutes too long, and those hand claps mid-chorus don't make it any easier to bear. "Shiftee" and "Abigail" sound just like the Beatles right down to the chord progressions ("I Want You (She's So Heavy)," and "I'll Follow the Sun" respectively). Toss in some sugary-sweet lyrics like "If you want to see me/ come on over" and "I want my baby on my arm/ ar-ah-ah-ah-rm" and what you end up with is a slightly more talented version of The Wonders from *That Thing You Do*.

Power pop is not a subtle genre; it's very easy to muck it up. As a result, bands should tread lightly into the territory because when they suck, they suck hard. And no amount of sunshine is going to cleanse those mistakes.

**Favorite Track:** "Big City"

**Website:** [www.mergerecords.com](http://www.mergerecords.com)

## LONG DISTANCE RUNNER

*The Fire of Cumulative Hours* (Existential Sounds, 2006)

There are five tracks and approximately 29 minutes of music on the first label release from Existential Sounds, but it might be enough to solidify their place among the electronic and experimental heavyweights. Smart electronic music is difficult to come by because most of it lacks the ability to morph into something truly unique. In other words, after you've heard one or two tracks, you needn't listen anymore. Long Distance Runner may be guilty of repetition, but at least it's repetition that builds to something or moves somewhere and, thus, it's the difference between novelty and homage.

The excellent "After the Math" (whose title may in fact be a reference to "math rock" an amusing subgenre of "prog") is both harmonic and expansive with instruments coming in and out, shifting in their places until the crescendo. The next track, "Mongolian Disco in Exile," sound just like you imagine it's title implies. There's a sample from what sounds like a Hindu chant that's twisted electronically to fit the frame of the celebratory sounds beneath it. It makes me want to dance, and that's not something that occurs often.

The sticker on the front of this new release says "for fans of: Air, Caribou, The Books, Four Tet, RJD2, etc." Those are some heavy names to elicit comparisons—unless, of course, you've got the tunes to back it up. Judging from this release, LDR does.

**Favorite Track:** "Mongolian Disco in Exile"

**Website:** [www.long-distance-runner.com](http://www.long-distance-runner.com)

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