

overly mannered piano playing. By emphasizing that cool edge of combo-based jazz, the band blunts the hot, raw edge of bluegrass and country. It is a jarring misjudgment by these seasoned musicians.

Despite the flaws, it is solid work and shows a group with considerable potential to grow and shine new light on traditional American musical forms. New Grange will be at the Barns at Wolf Trap on Nov. 18 and the Grand Opera House in Wilmington, Del., on Nov. 23. — Sean Scully

NEW GRANGE

(self-titled) (Compass Records)

Updating antique music styles to give them a modern flair is hardly a new idea, but it almost always produces an interesting result. This second album by New Grange is no exception.

The six-member ensemble is a sort of country-folk super group from all around the nation, with a far-ranging musical pedigree — from pianist Philip Aaberg, a backing musician for Peter Gabriel; to Alison Brown, a one-time member of Alison Krauss' Union Station; to singer Tim O'Brien, who has written for Garth Brooks and Kathy Mattea.

The band weaves together jazz, bluegrass, traditional folk and country into an amusing, occasionally even compelling, package. It is at its best on instrumental pieces, such as the traditional "Sally Ann" and the original composition "Weetabix."

But not all of New Grange's genre-blending experiments work. They often go too far in embracing jazz elements, particularly Mr. Aaberg's

THE GROOBIES

(self-titled) (Blix Street Records)

Radio today is so highly regimented and homogenized that, unfortunately, most people never will hear of the Groobies simply because there's no easy way to label the band and fit it into a format.

The Amarillo, Texas, quintet — which takes its name from a group of minor characters in the old Gumby cartoons — mixes country, pop and rock in a way that defies easy classification but is a fun listen anyway.

The band shifts easily from country-flavored rock such as "Ahead of Time" and "Not My Man" to straight-ahead Texas boogie in "Shut This Place Down."

Unfortunately, it managed to steal its own thunder by giving away its best song to country superstars the Dixie Chicks, who made "Wide Open Spaces" a hit a year before the Groobies put out this, the group's second album. Thus, the band's best chance to break out of its format-defying limbo is lost because it sounds like a cover band even while singing its own song. —S.S.

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