

"Now Hear This" Sept. 23, 2000

SPOCK'S BEARD

V (Radiant Records)

If you are mourning the late King Crimson, or wishing Rush and Yes could return to their prog-rock heydays, you are in for some good news.

Progressive rock is not dead—it is living quietly in Los Angeles under the assumed name of Spock's Beard.

The L.A. quintet's ninth release, known as "V," has all the elements of those bands at their prime—the pomp, the cryptic name (derived perhaps from a classic "Star Trek" episode known as "Mirror Mirror"—look it up), the inscrutable lyrics and even the surreal cover art.

All in all, Spock's Beard is pretty good if you're into concept albums packed with 15-minute tunes. By and large, the group hews to the classic art rock form, but once in a while it proves its modernity with an oblique reference to thrash-rock of Primus or pop-hop of Limp Bizkit.

So if the old Klaatu record is worn thin and you just can't find a replacement, grab a handful of — Sean Scully

CHRIS KEUP

The Subject of Some Regret

(Gratham Dispatch Records)

Washingtonian Chris Keup shows his mastery of lyrical and sonic elegance on his debut album, "The Subject of Some Regret."

Mr. Keup, 25, has assembled a solid group of backing musicians, including elements from Virginia staples Dave Matthews Band and Bruce Hornsby and the Range. He also has help from jazz master John Dearth, a fixture on Charlottesville's vibrant music scene.

His album combines those musicians into a sonically complex and enigmatic tapestry that mixes well with Mr. Keup's growling delivery, indistinguishable at times from cult favorite Tom Waits.

Therein, however, lies the central problem with Mr. Keup's new album—he always sounds like someone else. In fact, an unformed listener might reasonably conclude that he was hearing Mr. Waits singing with the Dave Matthews Band.

It's a good album—perhaps better than most debuts—but Mr. Keup needs an equally solid and even more original follow-up to prove that he is more than just a skilled and sincere imitator.

"V." — S.S.

6GIG

Tincan Experiment

(Ultimatum Music)

Finding a group that can break out of the crowd and carve out a distinctive sound is refreshing in this era glutted with punk-flavored pop bands.

The new export form Portland, Maine, 6gig manages to combine all the elements—crunching guitars, angry loser-punk lyrics and smashing drums—into a satisfying debut album. 6gig has enough edge to satisfy the angry core of the skate-punk audience, yet it has the musicianship and ear for production that will draw in traditional heavy-metal and rock fans.

Although the band was signed to a record contract only in April, it has a couple of songs poised for mainstream success. The first three songs on the album (the best tracks, as it turns out) are making ripples in different realms: "Method" has been picked up by ESPN for its "X Games" show, "Hit the Ground" is headed for the soundtrack for the movie "Stalk," and the song "S" has become a request staple on Portland-area radio.

If any young band deserves success in this jampacked field, it is 6gig. — S.S.