



CD
SUN KIL MOON: APRIL
 (Caldo Verde)

For the past 15 years, first with the Red House Painters and now with Sun Kil Moon, San Francisco-based singer-songwriter Mark Kozelek has been concocting melancholic, confessional music of uncommon beauty. Ripe with gorgeous acoustic tracks and sprawling, Neil Young-like guitar numbers, his first disc of original material since 2003's *Ghosts of the Great Highway* is no different. If anything, this follow-up to 2005's *Tiny Cities*—a collection of Modest Mouse covers—is even more striking, thanks in part to its propensity for elegant, sun-dappled melodies and the achingly pretty background vocals supplied by fellow indie icon Will Oldham. Kozelek has always sung in a wonderfully mumbly fashion, as if he were too miserable to open his mouth, but he enunciates more than usual on tunes like "Tonight in Bilbao," adding another hue to his vocal palette. As usual, his lyrics chronicle relationships good and bad, from love in the afternoon ("Harper Road") to love on the rocks ("Tonight the Sky"). It's not always a pretty picture, but that's Kozelek's genius: He can turn misery and longing into stunning, bucolic pop. **A**

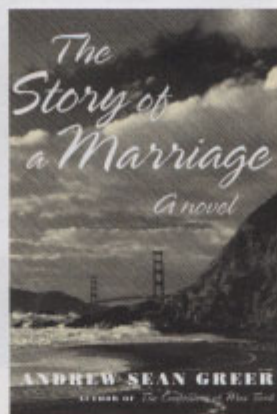
DAN STRACHOTA



BOOK
SIMONE CORDAY:
9 1/2 YEARS BEHIND
THE GREEN DOOR
 (Mill City Press)

Diablo Cody may be the ex-stripper-turned-writer *It Girl* of the moment, but Simone Corday is our local version: a former dancer at the O'Farrell Theatre (with a master's in English) and the sometime girlfriend of Artie Mitchell, the club's flamboyant co-owner. Her self-published memoir is unpolished at times, although the prosaic rough patches, coupled with Corday's deadpan insouciance while relating sensational details of the sex industry, add to its authenticity. In addition to its main tragic element—not Mitchell's infamous 1991 murder at the hands of his brother, Jim, but Corday's unwavering love for Mitchell, despite his being a philandering, substance-abusing, all-around asshole—the book offers a wealth of lurid and surreal anecdotes. Shame over wearing a gorilla mask during a threesome? Apprehension about having sex with a dwarf? Check and check; Corday covers it all. Surprisingly, the cameo appearances by Hunter S. Thompson (at one point the club's "night manager") prove disappointingly tame. In what other setting could Thompson turn out to be the most level-headed character? **B-**

HENRY JONES



BOOK
ANDREW SEAN GREER:
THE STORY OF A
MARRIAGE
 (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)

Andrew Sean Greer's justly celebrated breakout novel, *The Confessions of Max Tivoli* (2004), drops readers into the mind of an eccentric and reflective man who, born elderly, grows younger each year. Greer skillfully immerses us in that unbelievable situation, but in his long-awaited new novel, the disconnect from reality proves harder to accept. Set in the early '50s, the story is narrated by Pearlie, a young African American housewife whose quiet, narrow worldview—limited to her family's modest home in the Outer Sunset—is irrevocably disrupted by a figure from her husband's past. Writers who try to inhabit another gender—and, in this case, race and era as well—deserve credit for tenacity. And Greer, who lives in San Francisco, paints a compelling picture of the time and place and creates vivid minor characters. But Pearlie is our guide, and her voice feels too formal and sentimental, especially to a female ear. She explains her emotions instead of expressing them through her behavior and relationships, as if she were dictating a letter or delivering a speech. Although Greer is an excellent storyteller, his third novel doesn't quite succeed at the critical trick of his trade: allowing us to forget he's there. **B-**

MIA LIPMAN



CD
RUPA & THE APRIL FISHES:
EXTRAORDINARY
RENDITION
 (Cumbancha)

Some people find the term *world music* condescending, but there's no better way to describe the terrain of Rupa & the April Fishes, simply because the band's music encompasses so much of the globe. Founded by San Francisco physician Rupa Marya, who was born in the Bay Area and raised mostly abroad, this ensemble is at home playing Mexican waltzes, Indian ragas, French chansons, and Gypsy jazz. With so many cultures represented, the group's debut CD could sound like a dilettante's travelogue, a kind of sketchbook of tourist scenes. But Marya inhabits the languages she sings in (English, French, Spanish, and Hindi) with remarkable grace and sensuality. Her band—cellist Ed Baskerville, trumpeter Marcus Cohen, bassist Safa Shokrai, drummer Aaron Kierbel, and accordionists Adrian Jost (on the CD) and Isabel Douglass—is equally accomplished, moving comfortably from the ethereal balladry of "Yaad" to the bouncy carnival jazz of "Plus Que Moi" to the sultry tango of "Maintenant." The final song, "Wishful Thinking," is embellished with ambient sounds recorded beneath the Golden Gate Bridge. If Bob Dylan hadn't gotten there first, this album could easily have been called *Bringing It All Back Home*. **A-**

DAN STRACHOTA



BOOK
RABIH ALAMEDDINE:
THE HAKAWATI
 (Alfred A. Knopf)

Hakawati means *storyteller* in Arabic. The ostensible *hakawati* of this sprawling new novel is Osama al-Kharrat, a Lebanese expatriate who returns to war-shattered Beirut to see his dying father. The term could also refer to al-Kharrat's grandfather, who became a professional tale teller. The author, too, promises to take us on "a journey beyond imagining," alternating between a family history in contemporary Beirut and an *Arabian Nights*-style fairy tale that reinvents the history of Lebanon as legend. For the most part, Alameddine, a painter and fiction writer (*I, the Divine*; *The Perv*), who divides his time between San Francisco and Beirut, delivers on his promise, recounting both the legends and the family saga with warmth and grace. Too often, however, he forces the issue, telling us how bewitching his stories are when he would be better off proving it. "Stories with obvious moral lessons are like eels in a wooden crate," Osama's grandfather warns. "They slither all over and under each other but never leave the tub." Indeed, all the *hakawatis* in this ambitious epic, particularly the author, are at their best when they forgo the lessons and simply move on with the tale.

SHEERLY AVNI