

Low embraces the pretty on 'C'mon'

By Sarah Rodman
GLOBE STAFF

In one of the promo shots for Low's new album, "C'mon," the band's three members — guitarist-vocalist Alan Sparhawk, drummer-vocalist Mimi Parker, and bassist Steve Garrington — are sporting stick-on mustaches.

It's a funny image for a band not exactly known for having a high fun quotient. Over the course of nearly 20 years and more than a dozen albums, EPs, and other releases, Low has made its exceedingly acclaimed name with rock music of slow, stark, and sometimes solemn beauty, and the entrancing harmonies of husband and wife Sparhawk and Parker. "Yeah, it's very confusing to people," says Sparhawk with a laugh of the picture.

While "C'mon" should not confuse longtime fans of the band, which comes to the Paramount Center on Friday, the album is garnering the response of being Low's most accessible outing yet. And Sparhawk, on the phone from his home in Duluth, Minn., concedes the point.

"This record for sure is maybe the easiest to swallow of all our records as far as its lack of dissonance or noise or violence," he says, before adding, "I don't know that there's any terribly catchy pop hits on there. But we knew going into the record that we were going to let ourselves do something pretty and not be so hung up on disguising it."

The band embraces the pretty in several songs including the ha-

zy guitar sizzler "Witches" and the dreamy first single "Try to Sleep" — the video for which stars actor John Stamos. (Of the friend of a friend, Sparhawk says, "You can't go wrong with John Stamos.") While less conventionally pretty, such tracks as the burbling "Especially Me" and the austere "\$20" do refrain from the artful draping of noise one might expect from the trio.

That may be due in small part to co-producer and mixer Matt Beckley, whose background working with such artists as Katy Perry and Avril Lavigne differs dramatically from that of previous Low co-producers such as Dave Fridmann and Steve Albini. "I think what we've learned over the years is it's interesting to work with lots of different kinds of people, and it's interesting to see how we sound through different types of approaches," says Sparhawk, who wanted to see what would happen when he fought his instincts to obscure any sounds that might be more casually appealing.

Asked where his fear of the pretty stems from — or if indulging in it would somehow cause Low to be taken less seriously — Sparhawk says he is not exactly sure. "I've kind of had to ponder that lately. You think, 'Is it a selfish thing that all these years I've always sort of felt like I had to show the other side of the coin? Is it because I'm afraid of committing to trying to do something beautiful and knowing that you're going to fall short?'"

When it's guessed that the lat-

ter seems a likely answer, Sparhawk says with a wry laugh, "Yes, that sounds very philosophical. I don't know, I still think my favorite state of a song is one that's beautiful but sort of hints at the other side of things, or hints at some sort of unknown. But I think over time and being able to try extremes from one record to another, I feel OK holding off those urges for this batch of songs."

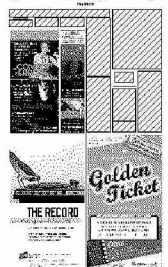
One person who located something beautiful inside the Low catalog was Robert Plant. The former Led Zeppelin frontman chose two older Low tracks, "Silver Rider" and "Monkey," to cover on his most recent album, "Band of Joy." Sparhawk was pleased with Plant's renditions, especially of "Silver Rider." "They do it pretty close to the way we do it. That it's the same atmosphere, it's really a compliment and really nice," he says.

It's also drawn a few new faces, mustachioed and otherwise, into the Low audience. "It's exciting. We're sort of off the path enough that if people hear about us through Robert Plant and then go listen to us and actually like it, then, yeah, that's great."

Sarah Rodman can be reached at srodman@globe.com.

LOW

With Marissa Nadler
At: Paramount Center,
Friday, 8 p.m. Tickets: \$20.
617-824-8000,
www.artsemerson.org





SARA KIESLING

Low's Alan Sparhawk (left) Mimi Parker, and Steve Garrington in a promotional photo for the band's new album, "C'mon."