



# Reviews: Parquet Courts’ “Human Performance” is their most compelling album yet

Soren Spicknall  
WIIT STATION MANAGER

There are countless many lines that can be drawn between Parquet Courts and other festival-heavy acts of the last five years. The group rose to prominence on the simultaneous nostalgic waves of revival surf punk and 60s-style psych, straddling the line between the nonchalance of groups like Wavves and the reverb-driven concentration of Cloud Nothings with the added stylistic consciousness of Temples. Yet despite the ease at which comparisons can be made when discussing the group, Parquet Courts are very clearly a unique entity that remains compelling for the way they blend all these disparate facets of the rock genre. On their newest album, Human Performance, they craft a set of songs that are at one familiar and daring, a collection that stands as their strongest to date.

Parquet Courts’ most recognizable track to date, 2012’s “Stoned and Starving,” is a poor first impression to measure their music by, though it does serve vaguely as a milestone for how far they’ve progressed in the last three and a half years. That song is similar in structure Black Flag’s “TV Party,” but lacks the classic hardcore punk piece’s social satire or manic energy. Instead, as its title suggests, it’s a fairly lazy stoner punk anthem, lacking dynamic contrast or any sort of musical shift during its run. The first piece on this new album, titled “Dust,” would be easy to dismiss as similarly simplistic on first blush, but it evolves slowly into a much more thoughtful composition, culminating in a crescendo swirl that evokes Wilco’s more experimental moments, of all



Image courtesy of Parquet Courts

things.

The bulk of the album moves deftly between styles, never jarring the listener with an out-of-place transition or an outlier track

(with the exception of semi-acoustic closer “It’s Gonna Happen,” which could have and probably should have been left off the LP.) Parquet Courts’ truest talent comes from blending

influences in a completely organic manner, resulting in songs that can’t possibly be pigeonholed into any particular subgenre. ‘Human Performance’ moves through Reflektor-esque psychedelic pop, talk-singing moments reminiscent of Cake, and countless other rock microcosms with absolutely zero sense of intention, leading the listener to suspect a writing process that consists primarily of just “feeling it out.” In the context of today’s independent music landscape, that works in Parquet Courts’ favor.

There are quite a few low energy moments on ‘Human Performance,’ but they aren’t so casual that they can’t stand on their own. The most memorable song of the album won’t be the relatively calm “Steady On My Mind” for any fan, but it and other predictably structured pieces from the LP exhibit some of the band’s best songwriting to date, and are worth paying attention to on a close listen. On the other hand, tracks like “I Was Just Here” and the stellar “One Man No City” (whose three-minute solo guitar exploration mimes Them’s 1968 milestone “Square Room”) grab your attention instantly, but their focus is more musical than literary, and their simplistic lyrics may turn off fans of Cloud Nothings and other groups that occupy the same scene. What’s most interesting about the album, though, is that Parquet Courts have left themselves plenty of room to grow. While some artists (like Wolfmother, for example,) bring their best music right at the start of their careers, Parquet Courts have proven again that they have more tricks still to come. 7.3/10

## Chicago Flower and Garden Show in full bloom at Navy Pier



Photos by Neesha Narayanan