

From the Vault: 'Oh, Inverted World' by The Shins

By Ryan Kamphuis

A&E EDITOR

Welcome to the first article in a new series called, "From the vault." Each week in From the Vault, somebody will write a review of one of their favorite albums. An album that has stood the test of time for them, and they feel needs to be shared. Whether it be an old Columbia jazz record from the 1950s, arena rock from the 1980s, or some grunge from the 90s, this section is where you can write about it!

2001 was an interesting year for music. Boy bands, who dominated the music scene all through the late 90s, were in rapid decline. Daft Punk released their Discovery album, symbolizing the growing mainstream popularity of techno music. The bands that would grow to define the next decade in music were releasing their first EPs. Amidst this backdrop, a band that had been performing under various names and lineups throughout the 90s was signed to Seattle's Sub Pop Records, settled on a lineup and the name "The Shins" and released their first record: Oh, Inverted World.

Oh, Inverted World was something totally new for 2001. Playing a subdued-summer pop that harkened back to The Beach Boys, the album enjoyed good reviews and solid sales. It also formally kicked off the career

of The Shins, and quickly became one of the definitive indie-rock albums of the early 2000s.

The feeling of the album is constantly changing. Each track is unique, and makes for a diverse compilation. The common elements throughout the album are the chill feeling that The Shins are known for, the undear singing of James Mercer (The Shins' frontman and lead vocalist), and the wistful chords that have an almost longing quality to them.

Ten years later Oh, Inverted World is just as good as the day it was released. Since it first came out, The Shins have enjoyed enormous success. Many of their songs were used in movie soundtracks (movies like Garden State and The Spongebob Squarepants Movie), they went on to release two more highly-successful albums, and have become one of the go-to indie rock bands of the past decade. But Oh, Inverted World still sounds relevant. In fact, I would claim that the album has gotten better with age. As The Shins gained popularity, their style changed and became more alternative, losing some of the strong 60s folk-rock feel. Oh, Inverted World still is strongly in touch with that and is more unique because of it.

If you're into rock music, I can't recommend Oh, Inverted World enough. It's something different and exciting, and can be enjoyed by almost anyone.

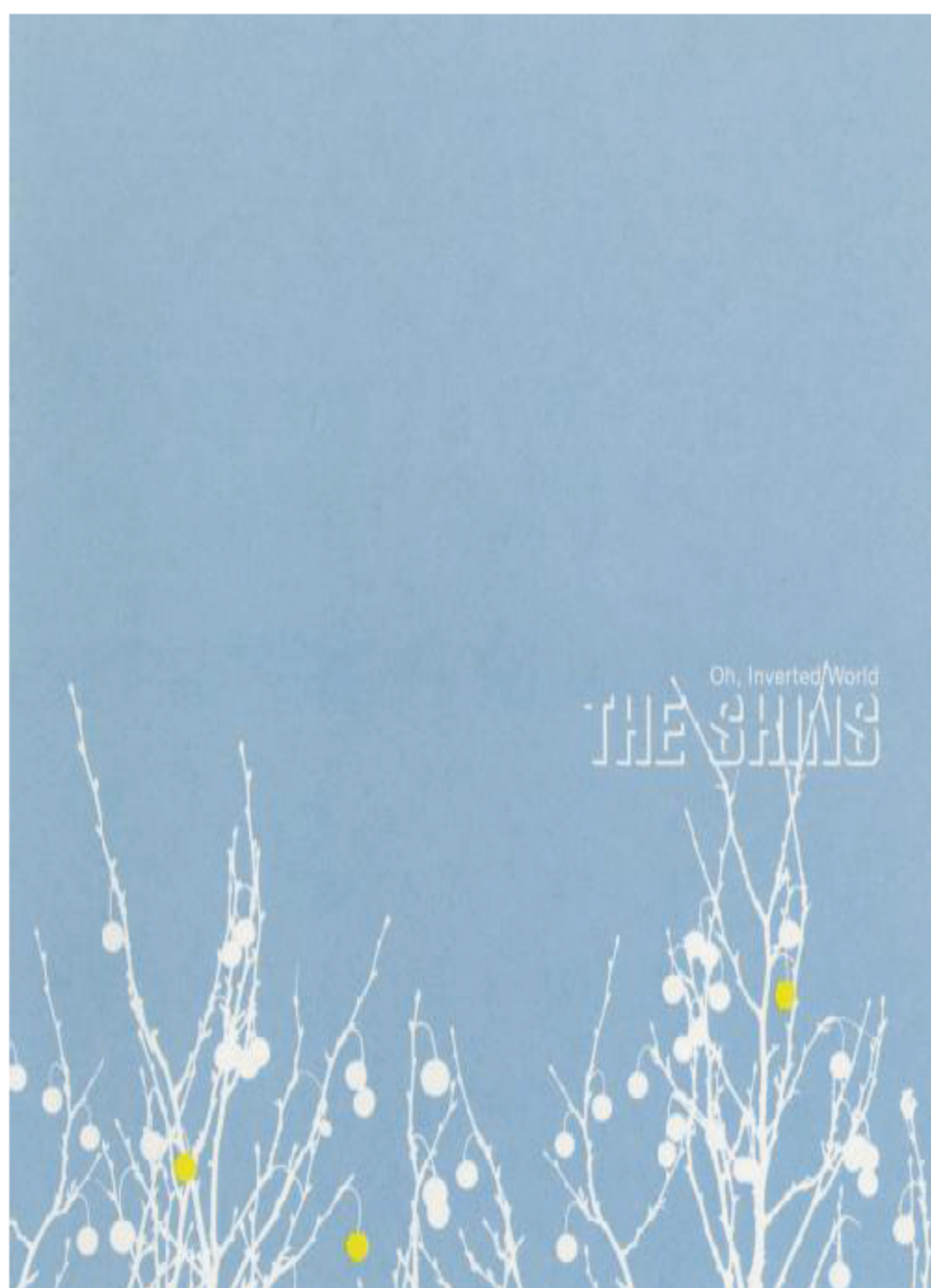


Image courtesy of turntablekitchen.com

Bastion: great game in a small package

By Karl Ryballowski

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

At a glance, Bastion is a whimsical-looking bite-sized isometric hack 'n slash adventure in the vein of Diablo and its clones. But with an astounding soundtrack, watercolor art design, and a deceptively addictive story, it offers a lot in a very small package. Add to that gameplay as casual or as intense as one desires - something you can change on the fly - and the \$15 price tag starts to look very compelling.

Bastion is the debut effort by indie outfit Supergiant Games, and for a small game (available via Xbox Live Arcade and Steam), is a very ambitious first effort. It follows a character trying to piece the world back together after an apocalyptic event - the Calamity - literally shatters it. As the protagonist moves around, bits and pieces of the world literally form in front of him (a very cool effect to start with, but with thematic importance, as is slowly revealed). The character picks up a bevy of weapons to defeat foes on his quest, while finding a small cast of survivors and slowly learning what brought the Calamity about.

The hero of the story - simply known as The Kid - is the silent type. But the introduction of a narrator - an old grizzled man with a gravelly voice and a world-weary delivery - lets

the central plot of the game unfold, piece by piece, with each action the protagonist takes. Weapons or other items scattered throughout the game get little back-stories when picked up, and the narration allows the player to peel away at the layers of the story, a little at a time, without sacrificing any momentum in the actual gameplay.

Bastion's music is a mix of electronic beats and stringed instruments - guitar, banjo, mandolin, even viola - that gives the game a baroque Western feel. The soundtrack itself was recorded by Darren Korb, with a pedigree in design of music for television shows and even games in the Rock Band series, and the attention to detail shows, with different pieces perfectly matched with the art design and narration to evoke a genuine atmosphere, whether it be ominous, suspenseful, or merely wistful. In fact, the soundtrack has become available on its own and is enjoying brisk sales.

For a game that can be finished handily in under ten hours, Bastion leaves an impression - the seemingly simple gameplay and art style slowly develop into a very rich, complex, rewarding experience, with a strong narrative and a unified feel. Don't just take my word for it, though - play the demo, check it out, and you won't be disappointed.



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