

CELLESTIAL STOLTZ || Home Alone

It must be the difference in hemispheres: In the Land Down Under, night is day, summer hits in winter and the water spirals the opposite way down sinks and toilets. Furthermore, Kelley Stoltz is king. Well, almost.

"We just played for 350 people in Melbourne," says the 33-year-old songwriter/multi-instrumentalist. "That's about as many as I get at home in San Francisco. And if I venture down to L.A., it'd be about 30. So it's pretty weird."

Though the hype hasn't reached Darryl Warhol's proportions (Courtney Taylor and Co. have had 12 top-10 singles in Australia), Stoltz laughs as he claims his own share of fandom. "Some girl had pictures blown up that she wanted me to sign," he says. "I told her that's good stuff for eBay. It'll at least get her 48 cents."

All joking aside, Stoltz—who spent much of his adolescence thumbing through albums at Detroit-area record stores—knows a thing or two about salesmanship. When he found himself without a label to release his sophomore album, 2001's *Antique Glow*, he pressed a couple hundred vinyl copies and hand-painted each cover to cut down on costs. The record eventually made it onto CD in Australia (on Corduroy/Rebel in 2002), thanks to fellow Bay Area musician Chuck Prophet (Green On Red).

"I first met Kelley when we played an odd show together at a gay leather bar called the Eagle in San Francisco back in 2002," says Prophet. "After the gig, Kelley came out to my van and sheepishly handed me his record. He'd painted his Br'er Rabbit over an old thrift-store album cover and tucked his white-label vinyl inside. Somehow, I just knew I wouldn't be letting go of it anytime soon."

Antique Glow's domestic release followed in 2003 on Jackline Social Club, but Stoltz's loyalties lie with the original handcrafted run. "Halfway through, I realized it lied in the term."

locally with the record and with the title," explains Stoltz of his one-man endeavor. "Afterwards, I was glad because it was a way to stay involved with the record without letting it go."

Holding on to the past is normal for Stoltz, as showcased by the nostalgic strain that resonates throughout the folk/pop blues of *Below The Branches* (Sub Pop), his new full-length. On groovy, piano-driven opener "Wave Goodbye," he sings, "There's a rock, and I'll be clinging/Until all my days are done. Later, on the bouncing "Memory Collector," he warbles, "I remember your childhood hair/floating/wind at the county fair." The song concludes with some Beatle-esque "Ba-da-da's, as if Stoltz can't escape the musical history that binds him.

"Any time you're looking back a little bit, it's with a degree of satisfaction or a degree of self-loathing," he says. "It's just trying to make something out of what happened in your life." Last year's *Crookedals* made work of his childhood obsession with Echo & The Bunnymen; it's a track-by-track cover of the 1980 classic. Ian McCulloch's woody touch is all over *Below The Branches*, as are traces of Ray Davies, Syd Barrett and the Band. Ironically, there is no band; Stoltz records every instrument at home on eight-track, reel-to-reel.

"I'm something of a control freak," he admits. "Part of it comes from wanting to play those instruments on the record, and part of it is kind of like taking a Polaroid picture, the gratification you get from that rather than taking it down to get developed at a lab."

Even with this do-it-yourself attitude, Stoltz isn't opposed to loosening the production reins in the future. But it would take the right offer.

"I could take my eight-track machine over to London and work with George Martin. I'd do that for sure," he says. "Look's as if no man is an island—even if you're loved by one."

—Kevin Lo

LARA HATA





Kelley Stoltz

PSYCH-MOODIST ACCESSES THE COSMIC BEYOND FROM BEDROOM STUDIO. BY SYLVIE SIMMONS.

FROM STAX to Abbey Road, Kling Klang to Toe Rag, the recording studio has been the ground zero of popular song. That said, the home-produced gem will always deliver a jolt of pleasure. San Francisco resident Kelley Stoltz's *Antique Glow* is one such jewel. Home brewed on 8-track from 1999 to 2001, it has an ebb and flow that filters Syd Barrett, Skip Spence, Beatles, Beefheart, folk, primitive electronics and more into a beguiling, tripped-out whole.

"There was a lot of musical recycling on my first album, *The Past Is Faster*," says singer, multi-instrumentalist and composer Stoltz, "but on this one, I think I've gotten better at absorbing things rather than simply replacing them. You

swirl it all around and what you come out with is me."

An Anglophile and vinyl fan, Stoltz spent his childhood in Detroit mowing lawns to buy British imports. The collecting stood him in good stead later. His own recording – "a small vinyl run for my friends" – and his move out West were partly funded by selling LPs picked up cheap in charity shops. And he works two days a week in the vinyl-only music mecca Grooves and fits in one night a week tending bar. "The rest of the time, I spend in my bedroom," he says.

It's there that Stoltz makes his records. He has hundreds more songs as yet unreleased, alongside a complete cover version of Echo & The Bunnymen's 1980 debut *Crocodiles*, entitled 'Crockodials'. If the Bunnymen were Stoltz's first

"I've gotten better at absorbing things. Swirl it all around and what you get is me."

love, however, infatuations followed with Joy Division, Bauhaus, The Kinks and Nick Drake. They all bled into *Antique Glow*, at first a limited vinyl run of 100 copies last year. A chance meeting with fellow SF-oddball Chuck Prophet led to phone calls resulting in a CD release. After UK press raves there's talk of Stoltz coming over in January to play and a UK-only release for the *Crockodials* covers LP. "Recycling things is very San Francisco," he muses. "Here, people's living rooms are full of stuff dragged in off the street – all that beautiful junk."



Antique Glow by Kelley Stoltz is available on *Beautiful Happiness*. To hear Kelley Stoltz go to www.mojo4music.com



The Great Pretender

KELLEY STOLTZ STEPS OUT OF HIS IDOLS' SHADOWS

KELLEY STOLTZ MAKES

gorgeous, cascading pop that recalls the Beatles, David Bowie and the Beach Boys. For his Sub Pop debut, *Below the Branches*, Stoltz says, "I've tried to get better at absorbing things and learning from the way things are done while telling my own stories and sounding like myself. I've always likened it to the Beatles when they were first getting started. I can imagine Chuck Berry saying, 'Man,

those guys sound just like me!'

"When I was a kid I loved Echo and the Bunnymen; I loved David Bowie, Leonard Cohen," he says from his San Francisco home. "They were larger-than-life figures to me. So, the best I could do was imitate them."

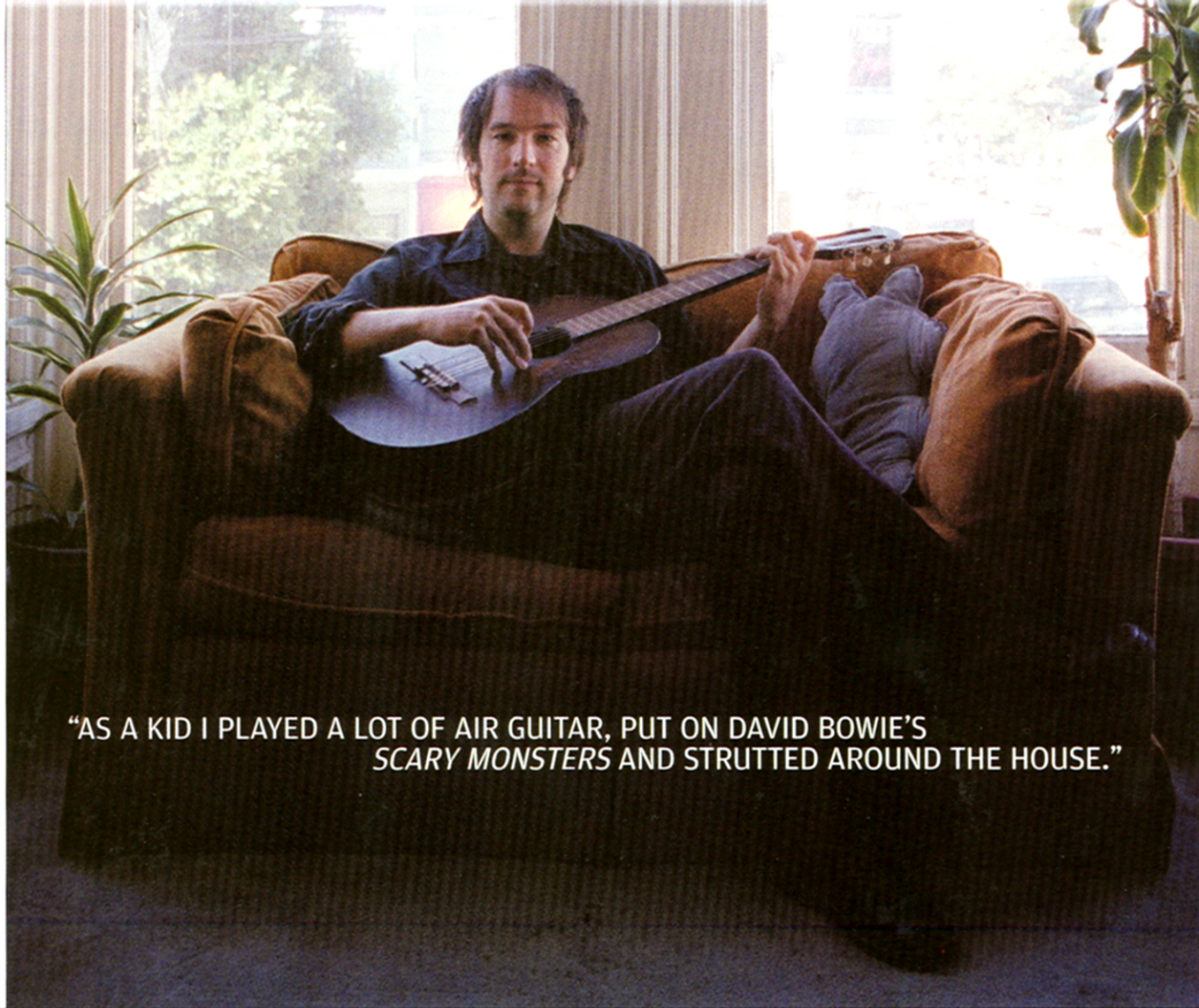
Even though *Branches* features a few Beatles, Bowie and Beach Boys dead-ringers ("Wave Goodbye," "Ever Thought of Coming Back,"

"The Sun Comes Through"), there is also proof that Stoltz is discovering his own voice. Tracks like "Words," "Mystery" and "No World Like the World" are melancholy, psych-pop nuggets that sound like the best singles the '60s never saw.

"As a kid I played a lot of air guitar, put on [Bowie's] *Scary Monsters* and strutted around the house," Stoltz says. "For a long time, music was

just a fantasy to me. At some point, around 18, I realized if you want to be a musician you have to write songs, you gotta be in a band, you have to mail things to people. So I thought if I really wanted to do this, I needed to learn something. I couldn't just hide in my bedroom pretending to be David Bowie. Nowadays I still pretend to be David Bowie, but I put it on tape!"

BRIAN J. BARR



"AS A KID I PLAYED A LOT OF AIR GUITAR, PUT ON DAVID BOWIE'S SCARY MONSTERS AND STRUTTED AROUND THE HOUSE."

Kelley Stoltz ★★½

Below the Branches

Sub Pop

Bay Area do-it-yourselfer goes to town with new disc of happy pop-rock

KELLEY STOLTZ IS A SAVVY SONGWRITER, BUT his songs have an almost guileless, unadulterated appeal. In 2001, the San Francisco troubadour recorded, produced, pressed and distributed his teensy, critically acclaimed psych-rock debut, *Antique Glow* (he also created the album's artwork), and on *Below the Branches*, Stoltz continues in that DIY vein, playing the majority of the instruments on each track himself. It sounds like he had a lot of fun making this record: The bouncy opening track, "Wave Goodbye," is a summer-camp ditty that recalls "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" — all strummy guitar and percussive piano, with lyrics ("Pack your worries in a suitcase/Send them off and wave goodbye") that herald the rest of the album's freewheeling Sixties-ish idealism. "Ever Thought of Coming Back" is a Beach Boys homage par excellence — a song of

Kelley Stoltz

Below the Branches (Sub Pop)

Something about home recording brings out the 1960's yearnings in a lot of songwriters, and Kelley Stoltz is one of them. He's from San Francisco and records on an eight-track reel-to-reel tape recorder, which is all he needs to concoct songs that transplant the British Invasion to California.

"Below the Branches" is Mr. Stoltz's second album of his own songs. Between his 2001 debut, "An-

runaway love replete with a sunshiny pop melody and layered vocal harmonies, cut with just enough bitterness ("Jesus Christ, what you been doing all this time?") to save it from being twee. And though the pedal steel tootapper "Birdies Singing" sounds half like a honky-tonk put-on, it's impossibly charming, proof positive that Stoltz can make masterful retro reproductions without taking himself too seriously.

LAUREN GITLIN

KEY TRACK "Ever Thought of Coming Back"

tique Glow," and the new album, he remade all the songs on *Echo* and the Bunnymen's album "Crocodiles," releasing the result last year as "Crocodials."

But "Below the Branches" has nothing to do with mope-rock. Mr. Stoltz sings as if he's carrying a crooked grin through any ups and downs. In concise, perpetually tuneful songs, his voice echoes the slouchy charm of the Kinks' Ray Davies, while the sun-dazed reverberations of the Beach Boys meet the music-hall bounce of the Beatles. Within his eight tracks, instruments like sitar and glockenspiel poke out between the guitars and piano. His lyrics muse on sunshine, the seasons, music, the meaning of life and occasionally a relationship. And just when he seems to be headed toward a cozy hippie dream, the present peeks through: "While love may never truly be free," Mr. Stoltz sings, "hey, it's cheaper than the price of gasoline."

JON PARELES



High Road Touring

Kelley Stoltz, whose new album was recorded on a reel-to-reel.

FILTER ALBUMS



Kelley Stoltz: dimestore cowboy.

MOJO

tration hint at long hours drowning in Nick Drake, but just as you think you've rumbled Stoltz as just another accomplished bedsit busker whose narcoleptic baritone is a dead ringer for Stephin Merritt, he starts lobbing googlies. Underwater's *Where The Action Is* takes Itchycoo Park's ramshackle skiffle for a joyous swim with the fishes and demonstrates the author's superior way with a cute couplet: "Flippers and manatee, they will be everyday vocabulary if you'd come on down a league or two with me." The Detroit delta blues are duly got with *One Thousand Rainy Nights*, where Stoltz suddenly reveals he can sing a lot like Ray Davies. He'll do so again later, on the Donovan-goes-ballooning toe-tapper *Please Visit Soon*. And yes, he can rock too: the sinfully ripe *Are You Electric* is a one-man-band Billy Childish doing *Have Love Will Travel*, while *Mt Fuji* is a droned groove freak-out from towards the end of side two of *The Velvet Underground And Nico*.

What makes these magpie manoeuvres so repeatedly enjoyable is Stoltz's self-conscious approach and, more importantly, his mastery of mood. Whether upbeat or hang-dog with dolour, it's like being granted access to an eccentric's private enclave, the sort of place you're glad you don't live in but are fascinated by nonetheless. Perhaps because the sunken-eyed narrator of *Listen Darkly* ("yeah I think I know why everyone must die on their way to loving") or *Crystal Ball's* depressed submariner feels a little closer to home than we might care to admit.

It has to be noted, however, that hovering like a massive ghost over this feast is another eccentric dimestore musical chameleon, a blues-loving anti-folk auteur who revels in muddying the waters between happy and sad. Kelley Stoltz has spoken — Beck, it's over to you.

Press to play

A Detroit native preoccupied with traffic cones: meet your new favourite lo-fi troubadour. By Keith Cameron.

Kelley Stoltz

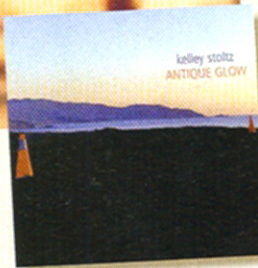
★★★★★

Antique Glow BEAUTIFUL HAPPINESS

HUMAN JUKEBOXES are legion, blighting town squares the world over with their blues sub-standards and out-of-tune Coldplays. But should Kelley Stoltz ever attempt to board a tube train near you, give the man a warm hand. Stoltz has interesting form: he once recorded a solo version of *Echo* & The Bunnymen's *Crocodiles* album in its entirety. Such admirable reserves of obsession are now brought to bear on this, his second

album of 4-track home-studio spot-the-influence boombox symphonia, originally self-released two years ago as a limited edition of 100 vinyl copies.

From the outset, we're plunged into a lo-fi pool of anglophile enigma: *Perpetual Night* creeps out from a spectral rendering of The Beatles' *Here Comes The Sun*, as Stoltz sings a lament for a dinosaur that's pure Syd Barrett warble drenched in lustrous, wheezy soundscapes, like *Soft Machine* recorded under a damp duvet. While a certain tone is thus established — Stoltz doubtless thinks *Pro-Tools* manufacture upmarket torque wrenches — the specifics vary from song to song. *Jewel Of The Evening's* finger-picked acoustic guitar and subliminal orches-



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KELLEY STOLTZ

Below the Branches (SUB POP)

Lo-fi pop: still hazy after all these years. And we like it



The do-it-yourself school of rock has yielded some truly forgettable music, but since 1999 San

Francisco's Kelley Stoltz has managed to get it right, releasing three albums before this, his second for Sub Pop. Stoltz's recordings have always been lo-fi, and although *Below the Branches* is more polished than its predecessors, it retains the songwriter's irresistible, mysterious and unrefined blend of pop, psychedelia and blues. Many of his songs are piano-driven, but rich harmonies, crunchy guitars and even Eastern-influenced oddities weave freely with Stoltz's sometimes strained and nasally vocals, which are mostly distorted and actually quite pleasing. There is a whimsy running throughout *Branches* that's wholly refreshing; he has a song called "Birdies Singing" and another about crank phone calls. Stoltz understands that music should be fun, and that's a good thing. **BENJAMIN FRIEDLAND**



Kelley Stoltz: *Below the Branches*
(Sub Pop)

Kelley Stoltz seems to play with a lot of bands that I like. I have seen him live several times without ever actually going to see him. Don't get me wrong, I always enjoy his psyched-out rock vibe, but he's never been my main course. This record should cause that to change.

On *Below the Branches*, Stoltz flexes his multi-tracking muscles. Self-recorded in his San Francisco home on an 8-track reel-to-reel, these songs are loaded with discerning instrumentation and subtle touches—tube-shake feedback, tape-reversed cymbal rolls, strains of sitar, buried horns—without ever overdoing it. The big change from his last album, *Antique Glow*, is that this entire album drips with piano, though Stoltz is primarily a guitar player. This record also shows terrific restraint and taste in song selection, as Stoltz is a prodigious songwriter with an arsenal to pull from. Standout tracks are "The Sun Comes Through" and "Ever Thought of Coming Back," with its Beach Boys harmonies. (www.electriccity.org/intro.html)

SIGNAL to NOISE

Kelley Stoltz
Below the Branches
Sub Pop CD

For his latest album, Kelley Stoltz stakes a claim to a wide swath of sonic possibilities from the very start, as the sound of an orchestra tuning gives way tribal drumming, a rambunctiously strummed guitar, and the added propulsion of wobbly-noted four-four piano chords. That opening song, "Wave Goodbye," serves as an overture for all that follows, as Stoltz sings, "Find a thing that makes you happy / Find a thing that gets you high / Pack your worries in a suitcase / Send them off and wave goodbye." The whole set is filled with delightful, heady arrangement flourishes that make it clear that music is the thing that makes him high and happy. Homespun psychedelia rooted in resonant songs that have the depth and flexibility to be presented in other ways, but here give flight to all of Stoltz's musical inclinations and sensibilities. There are shades of everyone from Brian Wilson to Ron Sexsmith, but it's also joyously amped-up at times. Orchestral in its sweep, organic in its bearing, *Below the Branches* sounds old, new and headed into the future.

David Greenberger

GUITAR WORLD

Acoustic

Kelley Stoltz

Below the Branches
SUB POP

»» Kelley Stoltz is truly DIY: the San Francisco-based multi-instrumentalist not only recorded, pressed and distributed hundreds of copies of his 2001 debut, *Antique Glow*, on his own, he even hand-painted the cover art. The effort paid off in spades—and a heap of international critical accolades. Now armed with a record



deal, Stoltz exhibits the same degree of auteurism on *Below the Branches*. The record showcases his multi-instrumental talents, as he layers acoustic and electric guitars, piano and even railroad train effects into songs that traverse pop, folk, country and electronic styles, all held together by his compelling gravelly vocals. While Stoltz certainly has got ample folk and blues chops, it is his ability as an imaginative arranger and lyricist that sets him apart from the singer-songwriter pack. —Carla Fredericks

FOR THE RECORD

CHORD



KELLEY STOLTZ

BELOW THE BRANCHES
[SUB POP]

[Fans of Brian Wilson, Syd Barrett, the Kinks and late-era Beatles/early Wings take note.]



One-man-band Kelley Stoltz's rudimentary playing turned me off at first, but his songs

(and those melt-your-heart melodies) won me over in no time. Despite my initial hesitation, I should point out that *Below the Branches* is actually quite complex in spite of the simple nature of the musicianship. It's just that Stoltz doesn't need much more than the basic skills he has to take a piano, bass, guitar and some drums and turn them into emotionally engaging songs. Hell, for all I know the guy could play the hell out of all these instruments. The point is, he doesn't need to. The songs feature enough emotional complexity and weight – they're at times playful, forlorn, hopeful and introspective – to hold their own. It's all vaguely '60s-ish sounding – from the warm, soft recording to the classic pop melodies – but Stoltz is more than just a retro-obsessed balladeer. These are heavily *inspired* songs, but more importantly, they are well-written and interesting ones.

—Adem Tepedelen

AMPLIFIER

Kelley Stoltz

Below the Branches

Sub Pop

San Franciscan Kelley Stoltz lives in a magical land where Brian Wilson and Paul McCartney play in a weekend combo at the Beatle Beach Bar, where John Lennon and Harry Nilsson occasionally sit in when they're not entertaining the waitresses with their tampon impressions and guests like Syd Barrett, Todd Rundgren, Ray Davies, Brian Eno, and Robert Pollard show up for baroque folk pop hootenannies. Perhaps the most amazing fact about Stoltz's sparkling third full length, *Below the Branches*, is that it was recorded at his home studio, just like its predecessors (2001's *Antique Glow* and 2004's *Crockdials*, a song-by-song recreation of Echo & the Bunnymen's *Crocodiles*). The album's swirling psychedelic folk pop is simply structured and executed but incredibly sophisticated for its humble surroundings. For all the reference points that crop up in Stoltz's songs (the Sgt. Pepperish "The Sun Comes Through," the Nilsson-esque "No World Like the World," the Beach Boys homage of "Ever Thought of Coming Back"), he is no mere replicant. More to the point, Kelley Stoltz is a musical sponge and he's been well served by the time he's spent sopping up the best pop music of the past four decades. The magic happens when he wrings out his consciousness and blends those absorbed influences with his own divinely touched musical abilities; that magic is all over *Below the Branches*, an early contender for Top 10 lists this year.

-BRIAN BAKER

Pop/Rock

KELLEY STOLTZ

Below the Branches (Sub Pop)



Stoltz's self-released *Antique Glow* wowed the *Mojo*-reading set in 2004.

His follow-up LP is kindred retro lo-fi pop-rock, dressed in pounded parlor-room piano chords and psych-folk filigree, invoking rain, stars, and sunshine. Derivative? Sure—think Beatles, Beach Boys, Kinks. But its opening lines are both defense and modus operandi: "Find a thing that/makes ya happy/find a thing that/gets you high-igh-igh." He did. Us too. **B+** —WH

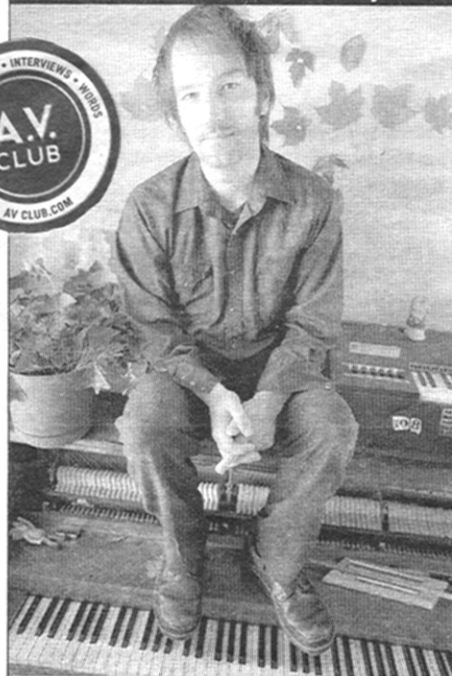
kelley stoltz

BELOW THE BRANCHES

(SUB POP)

This is the bigger indie debut for home recording multi-instrumentalist Stoltz, who in the past released his work in small batches on small labels, but his pop chops were too remarkable to go unnoticed for long. The San Franciscan has significant breadth to his songwriting skills, though the influence of mid-'60s Kinks and Beach Boys seems to have made a Grand Canyon-sized impression on him. "Ever Thought of Coming Back" and "The Rabbit Hugged the Hound" just drip with the spirit of *Pet Sounds*. But beyond the "spot the influence" fun is a solid pop songwriter coming into his own, and it should be interesting to see what's next. (www.subpop.com)

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 7



NOW

THIS WEEK'S ESSENTIAL NEW RELEASES



CMJ

KELLEY STOLTZ

Below The Branches (Sub Pop)

Bay area singer-songwriter Kelley Stoltz packs 40 or so years of bouncy, piano-laden pop into 13 new songs. From his Brian Wilson-influenced appeal to Jesus Christ for resurrection, "Ever Thought Of Coming Back," to the Kinks-y "Memory Collector," Stoltz isn't afraid to let his influences drip from his sleeves and onto his keyboards, replete with crackly, lo-fi vocals for added old school contrast. Considering he mostly works alone in a home studio, the stunning harmonies and well-conceived instrumentation make *Below The Branches* sounds like Stoltz's mastered-piece. (KG)

WEB: www.electriccity.org

ATTN: Fans of old school British pop (the Kinks to Marc Bolan) and *Pet Sounds*

RELEASE DATE / ADD DATE: February 7

RADIO: Susan Busch, susanb@subpop.com

KEY TRACKS: "Ever Thought Of Coming Back," "Memory Collector," "The Sun Comes Through," "Prank Calls"

OF NOTE: Last year, Stoltz performed at a Nick Drake tribute at San Francisco's Café Du Nord, along with Court And Spark.

Kelley Stoltz, Amoeba Music, 6 p.m., free, all ages

Considering the accolades he's received in other parts of the world (including a spot on *Mojo*'s best albums of 2004 list for *Antique Glow*), it seems like San Franciscan Kelley Stoltz should be a bigger deal around these parts. Perhaps the problem will be solved by his recent hookup with Sub Pop, which will release Stoltz's third proper album, *Below The Branches*, on the day of this in-store. Though it's not hard to get caught up in playing spot-the-influence while listening to *Below The Branches* ("Winter Girl" wouldn't exist without The Beatles, "Ever Thought Of Coming Back" sounds like a *Pet Sounds* outtake, etc.), it's just as easy to make the case that Stoltz has created a body of music (by himself, at home on an eight-track reel-to-reel) that's difficult to attach to any specific era or genre. Chances are good he'll concentrate on the new record here, but valiant requests for an Echo And The Bunnymen cover may be fulfilled: last year Stoltz finally issued (via UK label Beautiful Happiness) his track-by-track cover of *Crocodiles*.