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The Birdwatchers | *Martian Beauty*

Here's a classy, if overlong, harmony-laden pop-concept album (albeit a tenuous astrological one) for all those in search of a high melody/imagination collision. Brothers Sam and Joshua Burbank (aka The Birdwatchers) enlist a lengthy supporting cast to enliven their stop-start crafted songs with strings, brass and, on a couple of tracks, ratchet, saw, belt grinder and other less-than-predictable peripherals from one Andy Moraga. As much as I loathe the overused Jellyfish comparison (they remain 'the incomparable Jellyfish'), there is a similar level of invention on display throughout *Martian Beauty* to make it a favourite alongside recent efforts from *The Sun Sawed In Half* and *The Days* in the running for the dubious 'next-best-thing to Jellyfish' crown. It's an album also reminiscent of both (ex-Jellyfish) Tim Smith's first Umajets album, and current hot-properties *The Wondermints*, being a Wilson-esque journey (the obligatory cover is Don't Talk) sparked with occasional flashes of originality, boosted by impeccable performances and production. If you're into that, you're into this.

Matt Dornan
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