



Music

The War on War

Ted Leo protests on, not so we don't have to, but because most of us won't

by Zach Baron

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So there isn't a song on *Living With the Living* about the Nets absconding to Brooklyn or that miasmic odor-cloud that drifted over from Jersey into Manhattan back around January, nor a song about Al Gore's Oscar-night neck-weight or any of the other random things that've reminded me of Ted Leo since he's been gone ("Since U Been Gone" too, since he covered it). Ted's political punk reps Jersey to those of us who know nothing about the place, and he's cornered the protest-song market too—but there ain't much competition there.

Living With the Living is a better title than *Living With War*, and the rhymes are better too: "abnegation" to cap "accusation", "absolution" to finish "confusion." One song goes, "Yes, eternal peace awaits, but for now you get eternal war/And not even the government knows what the fuck it's for anymore." It's more blunt than 2004's already pointed *Shake the Sheets*, and more streamlined as well—spelling out in lieu of selling out. If his partisan angst to the blaring "Bomb. Repeat. Bomb" pales craft-wise beside the cheery Thin Lizzy upticks on "Who Do You Love," it's because Leo can't help reminding us that pop escapism can be political. He plays to his weaknesses so that we might better spot our own.