

The Uglysuit—*Uglysuit* (Touch & Go/Quarterstick)

On their sparkling debut, all six members of Oklahoma's The Uglysuit—drummer and bassist included—list “guitar” next to their names in the liner notes. But this is no in-joke or overblown “Freebird” shred-off; it's a gloriously textured and self-assured effort blending shoegaze guitar layers and shimmering melodies into refreshingly inventive compositions. Sixty seconds into the classic pop intro of disc-opener “Brownblue's Passing,” The Uglysuit detours into an unexpected epic bridge, sinewy guitar lines overlaying reverb-rich echoes until two minutes later a chorus emerges, reflective of the subtle left-turns that make these songs so compelling. Five of the nine cuts clock in at over five minutes, but none read too long because they all offer surprises: the sunny, open piano chords of “Brad's House” evolve into a thumping orchestral drive lifted by full-band choruses, which are in turn interrupted by near-prog rock sections; when, at the four-minute mark, the escalating promise of album-highlight “. . . And We Became Sunshine” delivers a monumental crescendo of soaring harmonies, driving percussion, and helix-like guitar lines spiraling off into infinity, it's one of this year's musical highlights. In the Rookie of the Year sweepstakes, The Uglysuit deserves serious consideration—though there's little rookie-like about this debut. (John Schacht)