

## FIRST STRINGERS

### ON THE RISE

BY BRAD ANGLE

## ALI HANDAL



**ALBUM** *Breathing Underwater* (Dessert First)  
**HOMETOWN** Los Angeles, CA  
**SOUND** Handal's acoustic songs range from bouncy, groove-heavy

numbers to tender ballads.

**HISTORY** Talented and beautiful, Handal was selected as "Miss June" for Epiphone's 2005 calendar, and has won the John Lennon Songwriting Contest and the ASCAP Plus Award. *Breathing Underwater* is drenched with her lush acoustic guitar work and hushed vocals.

**GEAR** Taylor 710ce, Dean Markley PhosBronze Acoustic strings (.012-.054)

**WEBSITE** alihandal.com

**QUOTE** "*Breathing Underwater* is an introspective and emotionally bittersweet album. And while there's a lot of fingerstyle playing and sonic textures, it's also quite bare."

## BOB BURGER



**ALBUM** *Cymbals at Dawn* (Big Brave Music)  
**HOMETOWN** Eatontown, NJ  
**SOUND** Burger's rootsy, rocking songs will remind listeners of the

acoustic guitar-based pop of singer-songwriters Matthew Sweet and Michael Penn.

**HISTORY** Stints in New York-based *Blonde Obsession* and the Bobby Bandiera band brought Burger to the attention of Styx guitarist Glen Burtnik, with whom he subsequently collaborated; he penned the title track to Styx's *Edge of the Century*. On this debut solo album, Burger flaunts his dynamic flat-picking and emotive vocals.

**GEAR** Taylor RH-LTD and CS-LTD, with Taylor's ES pickup system; GHS Infinity Bronze strings (.013-.056).

**WEBSITE** bobburger.com

**QUOTE** "My goal was to capture the energy of my live shows, so rhythm tracks were recorded live with only two acoustic guitars and electric bass."

Are you *this* close to making it? If so, send a CD, photo and bio to: Brad Angle c/o Guitar World Acoustic, 149 5<sup>th</sup> Ave., 9th Floor, New York, NY 10010

# Ditty Bops

## SUGAR AND SPICE

**T**HE DITTY BOPS, an acoustic duo who have been creating a stir in alt-folk circles lately, play an infectious blend of neo-ragtime, swing and jazzy pop, with sweet-as-cotton-candy vocal harmonies and sophisticated, sometimes wacky lyrics. Amanda Barrett and Abby DeWald have managed to attract an unlikely following that includes fans of Dan Hicks, the Hot Club of Cowtown and the Andrews Sisters.

Signed by Warner Brothers after a mere handful of live performances, their 2004 self-titled debut CD, brilliantly produced by Mitchell Froom, led to national radio and TV appearances and even a *New York Times* fashion spread. They've opened for Tori Amos, will soon

tour with Nickel Creek and hope to record their next CD in the fall.

But the fact that the twenty-somethings had planned on other careers—DeWald majored in art while Barrett has been a model and is coproducer of a sketch comedy cable show—belies their music's well-crafted artistry. Barrett was taught dulcimer from her musician mother and also plays mandolin. DeWald has studied guitar since age 13, and she credits classical music for developing her dexterity and jazz for teaching her chords, voicings and fretboard. She's also been influenced by the likes of Doc Watson and Jorma

Kaukonen, though her spiky strumming and picking styles are clearly her own.

"I like to write with my guitar," she says, "to use open strings and keys that are not violin-friendly."

The Ditty Bops alter perceptions of what's hip and what's passé, what's vintage and what's contemporary. Their live vaudevillian shows incorporate themes, sets, costumes and even puppetry. "We didn't want clear lines," says DeWald. Adds Barrett, "We challenge ourselves

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—AMANDA BARRETT

and the audience, and sometimes we fall flat on our faces—that's a good way to explore ideas."

—Celine Keating



The Ditty Bops' Amanda Barrett (left) and Abby DeWald

PHOTO: COFFEE; RENARD GARR