

WINTER READING

Forever Young: My Friendship With John F. Kennedy Jr.

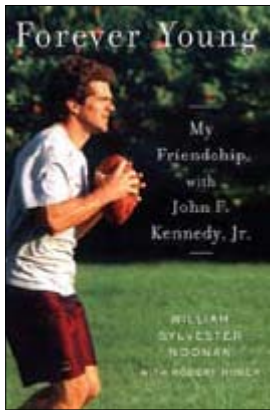
By William Sylvester Noonan
(Plume/Penguin, \$15)

REVIEWED BY CINDY ELAVSKY
Special to Florida Weekly

Like many Americans, I get a little wistful when I think about "the days of Camelot." No, I don't mean the times of Lancelot and King Arthur, but rather, the time of the Kennedys, when this political family seemed to rule the world. And of course, we will always associate John F. Kennedy Jr. with the image of a little boy in an overcoat and short pants saluting his father's casket as it rode past him.

Like his father, John Jr. had a short life, but unlike his father, the public never got to see "what could have been." Rumors swirled that near the end of his life at the young age of 38, John was finally considering taking a stab at politics -- a route he had purposely avoided for much of his adult life.

However, a plane crash in stormy weather ended all hopes and aspirations for young John. William Noonan, who was one of John's best



friends since they both spent summers as kids playing at the Kennedy compound in Hyannisport, Mass., gives readers a behind-the-scenes look at the man who would be king.

As adults, they grew even closer -- they were in one another's weddings and were there for the births of many children. They were supposed to be together the night that John's private plane when down, with John, his wife and wife's sister on board.

Noonan's book is a wonderful biography of the young and dashing man we only thought we all knew. From their days of swimming and boating all summer long, through adulthood when wives, children and jobs took up most of their time, Noonan provides a deeply personal, first-hand account of America's favorite son. ■

Books reviewed in this column are available online or at your local bookstore.

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MUSIC SCENE

The Flying Burrito Brothers



Gram Parsons Archive, Vol. 1: Live at the Avalon Ballroom 1969 - Amoeba Records

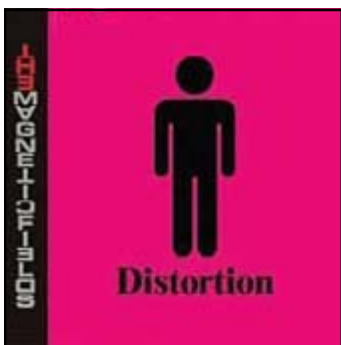
Gram Parsons Archive, Vol. 1: Live at the Avalon Ballroom 1969

MUSIC REVIEWED BY BOB JONES

The late Winter Haven native Gram Parsons single-handedly made it cool for rock musicians up and down Laurel Canyon, the heart of the LA music community, to listen to traditional country music. Though never an official member of the band The Byrds, Parsons was the driving force behind that group's country record "Sweetheart of the

Rodeo." After that LP, Gram and Byrds founding member Chris Hillman started The Flying Burrito Brothers, releasing their first record, *The Gilded Palace of Sin*, in 1969. It has become the blueprint for the alt-country movement and country rock in general. Live at the Avalon Ballroom is a never-released two-disc set of two live performances recorded just before that first release. Found in the vaults of The Grateful Dead's archivist, a man known as Owsley, Live at the Avalon Ballroom highlights the raw talent and beautiful vocal harmonies between Parsons and Hillman. Unfortunately, because it was recorded through the soundboard and misses the noise of the ballroom crowd and sound of the ballroom, it has the feel of a high quality bootleg but a bit of an empty sound overall. It's not a good place to start for the uninitiated. That's still *The Gilded Palace of Sin*, which features many of the same songs, including the five original songs as well classic country tunes. With a life story that has spawned at least two movies and two books, this Florida native, who died at the tender age of 26, is a legend in American music. This set is an interesting record of Parsons in his prime, but the poor sound quality makes it just that, a primitive field recording for hardcore fans only. ■

The Magnetic Fields



Distortion - Nonesuch Records

Distortion

MUSIC REVIEWED BY BOB JONES

The ever clever Stephen Merritt will always have the shadow of his 1999 critically acclaimed epic three-disc set *69 Love Songs* hanging over his shoulder, a very

high standard to live up to. But *Distortion* is a record that should please fans and critics alike. "California Girls" is his answer to Brian Wilson's song of the same name, with the unabashedly homosexual Merritt ticking off reasons why he hates California girls. In fact the aptly named *Distortion*, due to the recording quality and cynicism, seems to be retaliation from the love songs (of which there were 69 of) from the box set. The theme from this record seems to be a repudiation of love. There are songs like "I'll Dream Alone" and "Drive on Driver." Although we in Southwest Florida are, for the most part, inoculated from the harshness of winter, this is very much a cold record aptly released in the harsh month of January. All that being said, Merritt's sense of humor keeps *Distortion* from being a complete downer of a record. Daniel Handler aka Lemony Snicket is a part-time Magnetic Fields band member, and like his dark children's books there is a sense of humor in *Distortion* that keeps it from being just a record to sulk to. ■

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