

## Heavy soul

Andrew Male celebrates a schizo pop masterpiece.

### Nada Surf

★★★★★

#### The Weight Is A Gift CITY SLANG/02

FOR THE past three years, in the gin-gilded gutter lives of all discerning under-achievers, Nada Surf's *Let Go* has been a repeat-play soundtrack of euphoric consolation. Released in 2002, it arrived unheralded, the third studio album from a six-years gone MTV video band who'd been dropped by Elektra because they'd stopped making MTV singles. But this New York trio – old-time school-friends, singer

Matthew Caws and bassist Daniel Lorca, and ex-Fuzztones drummer Ira Elliot – had burrowed in, consolidated and, using their own tour money, independently recorded a 21st century pop masterpiece. Introspective, melancholy, hypnotic, joyous, *Let Go* pulled you into a series of damaged bachelor narratives, hallucinatory slow-day trawls through dark bars, deserted train carriages and 24-hour convenience stores that seemed to say it was OK to booze, fail, fall apart and ponder existence because, well, what else is there?

Three years on and *The Weight Is A Gift*



comes with the burden of expectation and a yet greater, existential encumbrance. Produced by Death Cab For Cutie's Chris Walla, it initially seems to pick up where *Let Go* left off with *Concrete Bed*, a chugging, self-lacerating piece of powerpop that finds its narrator fried in the flop-sweat of the morning after.

There's a change, however.

"To find someone you love," goes the bitter sweet chorus, "you've got to be someone you love." There's doubt here ("You know it because you wrote it," sings Caws, "You just didn't think you'll actually do it."). But like those drunken notes you write to yourself at three in the morning, *The Weight Is A Gift* finds Nada Surf trying to extricate themselves from sweet lethargy and do something with their sodding lives. On the gloriously uplifting *Always Love* ("Hate will get you every time") there's a danger that such new-found resilience could be interpreted as major chord new-age maxims for toothy windsurfers, but Caws's sweetly insistent voice trembles with such near desperation you can almost hear the unravelling hours lurking beneath the pop positivity.

Whether alluding to dark, unspecified instances of betrayal and dishonesty, or reasoning that *All Is A Game* ("Tell me something funny/Cos I'm cracking up") *The Weight Is A Gift* establishes a manic-depressive pattern of rise and fall, each moment of sonic uplift followed a ghostly, sidelined ballad of inertia and collapse. Even a potential summer stomper like *Imaginary Friends* finds Caw telling himself, "If you fake happiness/Then no-one knows/Convince yourself/And then you've got it made." In the end, however, whether fake or genuine, recovery or self-deception, *The Weight Is A Gift* is a triumph of majestic American pop uplift over bleak real-life adversity. Nada Surf, it seems, have finally done something with their sodding life.



Dread rocks:  
Nada Surf (from  
left) Daniel Lorca,  
Matthew Caws,  
Ira Elliot.