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Port of Morrow's album artwork was inspired by Eastern European and Hopi Indian art, incorporating an abundance of smoke.

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Pop music's missing something. On a fundamental level, it's missing originality. As a genre, it lacks a diverse group of individuals who write good, catchy songs. To be fair, pop music is an honest-to-goodness great genre. It's granted us 'catchy' music and the ability to listen to something without becoming too heavily invested.

For the past five years, though, the genre and music world as a whole has been missing something: The Shins. Yes, The Shins are technically considered pop music; 'smart' pop, as it should be called, but that's not the point. You hear The Shins everywhere, from TV shows, to car commercials, to the radio, to concert venues and the list goes on.

The Shins are perfect for music because James Mercer, the mastermind behind The Shins,

manages to collect the good things about pop music and combine them with the even greater diverse world of general music. The Shins just released *Port of Morrow*, their new album after a long, very lackadaisical five years. Shockingly enough, Mercer writes all of the music by himself. He has a touring band to help him perform, but the fact that one man writes all this music is awe-inspiring.

Port of Morrow is the same old The Shins we know and love: radio-worthy hits, while still being just indie enough. *Port of Morrow*, to put it lightly, is brilliant. Mercer and his merry band of fellows create a pop-acoustic-rock-Shins masterpiece. They do everything without hesitation on this album. It breathes fluidly from song to song. The only complaint I can muster is the album is too short, as The Shins albums usually are. Each song clocks in at roughly four minutes or less, with the only exception being the title track.

Songs like "September" and "For a Fool" truly stand out for their relaxing, mesmerizing lullaby-esque tones. The reverb-soaked guitars wash over you and remind you of the beach. Upbeat songs like "The Rifle's Spiral," "Fall of '82" and "Simple Song" scream original The Shins that stick in your head like Gorilla Glue. The Shins' consistency is key though; formed in 1996 it's nearly impossible to stick to your guns and write music that's the same style, but different.

Mercer has been writing under-appreciated radio sleepers since 1996, when most of us were merely children. Mercer's dedication shows in every album. It's truly hard to describe the type of music that is The Shins, though. The pop label has too many connotations - negative and positive - to be associated with The Shins, but it's the best way to tip-toe around the genre garden. Pop is ubiquitous.

We've grown up with pop music, and most of us have come to love it. The Shins are no exception. Mercer has rightfully earned his place in pop history with his seemingly effortless songwriting, album after album. *Port of Morrow* is no different; it takes you on journey, from the murky, building "The Rifle's Spiral," to the six minute title track "Port of Morrow" filled with falsetto, an entrancing flanger and a bluesy beat.

At the end of *Port of Morrow*, you don't feel empty and tired as if you were at sea with Mercer. You feel light and freed. *Port of Morrow* is a pop experience that any listener, ranging from avid fan to newbie, must have.