



**ARTIST: Yo La Tengo**  
**ALBUM: "Popular Songs"**  
**Released: 9/8/09**  
**Review Published: 10/20/09**

Records like *Popular Music* are why I've been a *Yo La Tengo* fan for at least a decade. *Popular Music* is a sixties garage land of the mind where organ and reverb swirl, harmonies sway, and music can sprawl and yet maintain intimacy.

From Hoboken New Jersey, Yo La Tengo formed in the 1984 around husband and wife guitarist Ira Kaplan and drummer Georgia Hubley, later joined in the 1990's by bassist James McNew. Starting with a

love of the Velvet Underground, Yo La Tengo developed a similar range. They can play punk rock, folk, and jazz without sinking into retro-genre exercises. Songs can howl, no-wave, drone, or be hushed, on the verge of tears. But these elements are not exclusive, often appearing within a single song. Known for covering music from Daniel Johnston, Sun Ra, and acting as Ray Davies backing band, they have never been shy about influences. Like Lou Reed, Yo La Tengo is both tuneful and noisy, but is far more consistent.

The opening track *Here to Fall*, replete with strings and vibrato electric piano, is a darkly psychedelic jam. Kaplan sings over the sway, restrained, until the strings build with a soundtracks flourish. *Avalon or Someone Very Similar*, tambourine jangling in the background, is as sunny an A.M. radio hit as anything Roger McGuinn wrote. On the sixties soul infused duet *If it's True* Kaplan and Hubley try not to worry to much and let the love happen. The last three songs on *Popular Music* account for more than half of the records one hour playing time. *More Stars than there are in Heaven* builds in slow, shoe gazing distorted waves. *The Fireside* floats like a film score, just guitar and bass, Kaplan's voice entering quietly after some eight minutes. The finale, *And the Glitter is Gone*, is a fifteen-minute instrumental awash in Kaplan's fuzzed-out feedback guitar.

*Popular Music* will sate long time Yo La fans. The combination of screeching jams, swaying drones, and well-orchestrated pop show the bands tendencies and strengths. They have professional chops but a garage bands dedication. New listeners will find a wonderful introduction to a band with a deep catalog. Always reserved and self-effacing, Yo La Tengo isn't a rock star band. Twenty plus years into their career Yo La Tengo remains vital, full of love for the music and unburdened by chart chasing, creative drought, or self-immolation.

**By: Jeff McCarter, WERU volunteer.**