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**2010 ALBUMS
PREVIEW...**

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NICK CAVE

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FEEDBACK

Email allan_jones@ipcmedia.com or write to: Uncut Feedback, 4th floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SU. **And now... Tweet us at twitter.com/uncutmagazine**

LETTER
OF THE
MONTH!

VELVET LETTERS

I greatly enjoyed *Uncut*'s recent article [December issue] on the Velvets (recent in the USA, that is!). Nice to see Johan Kugelberg's photos reaching Albion's shores. He's a collector I run into now and then in my work with Latin music, and his new book for Rizzoli (*New York Art*) is a must for anyone interested in Warhol, the Velvets, or the '60s NY scene.

I'm in my mid-forties and consider myself one of the generation of listeners who enjoyed the dark fruits of Reed, Cale, Morrison, Tucker, Yule and Nico's labours: the so-called punk/new wave era. My dad was a college roommate and friend of Tom Wilson, a producer who put out Sun Ra's first recordings from their dorm room at Harvard. Later, Wilson sent my dad some of the rock LPs he did at Verve, and the Velvets records were part of that package along with Dylan and the Mothers. The Velvets records were always there in the background at my dad's as I was growing up, though I admit I was afraid of the second album well into my teens.

Being from Boston, I also used to hear the Velvets a lot on the radio back in the day; they had a rep in town among older rock heads that I hung with. When the Ramones, Television, the Pistols and the Bunnymen came along, I was well primed due to my background with Lou and the rest.

The one glaring omission from your free CD comp is REM. Their main influences seem to me to have been the Velvets on the one side, and The Byrds on the other. You may not have been able to include Stipe and co's version of "There She Goes Again" due to licensing issues, but they should at least have received top mention in the text right alongside the other new wave/punk groups listed. Putting a Reed/Cale song as the b-side to their first major single was a message that these New York unknowns were REM's musical forebears. I'd have also mentioned two prominent female acts – Snatch and Patti Smith. They both come right out of the Velvets school. But these are just minor quibbles in a generally stellar treatise on one of modern music's influential bands. Keep up the great work...

DJ Bongohead, aka Pablo Yglesias, Northampton, Mass., USA
You're right, Pablo, it would have been great to feature REM's version of "There She Goes Again" on our covermount – unfortunately, as you surmise, licensing issues prevented its appearance. I should, however, have mentioned them as one of the bands influenced by the VU, alongside Patti Smith. – Allan



...Judging by your letters page, plenty of readers share my feeling that your perennial revisiting of a certain kind of band, whether The Beatles or some US titan, gets a bit boring. Unless, of course, it suits us. Which, with The VU, it did!

It was 1973 and I was 12, listening to the old Radio Caroline under the bedcovers in the wee hours. There was a DJ who played stuff like the Dolls, Stooges and MC5 – as opposed to pompous shite like Barclay James Harvest – and this one night he put on "Waiting For The Man". It was the first and last time a song scared the living shit out of me. It was something about the weirdly staccato beat that refused to give any kind of reprieve or release that unnerved me.

I went on to buy everything by the Velvets I could get my hands on and gamely bought Lou Reed records until this became too unbearably awful. Your piece sent me straight back to *Live 69* and *Loaded*, my favourites after 36 years of listening to every screech, grind and thud of the VU. And the free CD was good, too. Especially "Blue Boy", which I first recall hearing on an NME giveaway cassette. So thank you.

David Holzer, via email

'70S HEAVEN

I'm afraid I could not disagree more with your readers' views [Feedback, January issue] that the 2000s are the best decade ever for music, especially as it is the decade that has brought us *Pop Idol* and *The X Factor*. The power and diversity of music from the 1970s proves without question that it was the best decade ever. Let's just look at an album from each year:

1970 – *Bridge Over Troubled Water*

1971 – *What's Going On*

1972 – *Ziggy Stardust...*

1973 – *The Dark Side Of The Moon*

1974 – *Band On The Run*

1975 – *Blood On The Tracks*

1976 – *Songs In The Key Of Life*

1977 – *Marquee Moon*

1978 – *Bat Out Of Hell*

1979 – *London Calling*

Then add these 20 for starters – *Never Mind The Bollocks*, *Exile On Main St*, *Born To Run*, *Rumours*, *Unknown Pleasures*, *Trans Europe Express*, *A Night At The Opera*, *The Kick Inside*, *Who's Next*, *Led Zep IV*, *Blue*, *Horses*, *Hunky*

Dory, *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*, *Harvest*, *Saturday Night Fever Soundtrack*, *New Boots And Panties*, *Parallel Lines*, *Off The Wall*, *Transformer*. I could go on...

George Pullar, via email

AN OLD ALBUM WON'T EVER LET YOU DOWN

Thanks for nothing, *Uncut*. I excitedly told my wife that I was the proud owner of 135 of your 150 Greatest Albums Of The 21st Century. "Do you have to buy every friggin' album reviewed in *Uncut*?" she asked. "What happened to the other 15, or did you buy them and forget about them?" She may be right, I have some Calixto somewhere, but just not sure which ones.

I blame that old sod Lou Reed. I bought "Walk On The Wild Side" as an impressionable 14-year-old and it changed my life. I have never understood how blokes seem to reach a certain age and then give up on music. Sure – wives, kids, family and friends come along but they will invariably let you down (dogs are the exception to this rule). Music never does.

Promise me you won't do an article on the 150 Greatest Books Of The 21st Century, because I have the awful feeling that...

William J Highton, via email

ROCK'N'ROLL DOCTOR

I am a 44-year-old doctor and father of four living in Cornwall and wanted to reflect on the year's music. I mean, 2009 – what a year. The 12 *Uncuts* piled up in my bedroom are a fitting tribute to that. I agree wholeheartedly with Allan Jones' personal choice – Richmond Fontaine's *Freeway* was the best, closely followed by The Low Anthem's *Charlie Darwin*.

Live music in Cornwall was outstanding with Tinariwen, The Hold Steady, Eagles Of Death Metal and next week Gallows all playing in Falmouth thanks to Katie at SW1 Productions. But without doubt the highlight of the year was my first visit to the End Of The Road festival where I met Willy Vlautin and his band, and cried at the sublime set by The Low Anthem in the blazing sun. Without any question you and your magazine have helped introduce me and my family to some incredible music.

Ian Fussell, via email

BAH HUMBOL!

I was relieved that John Mulvey gave a very truthful review of Bob Dylan's latest release, *Christmas In The Heart*, in your December issue. I have to admit that although your magazine is consistently accurate with your analysis of albums, I'm often annoyed at your lauding of anything Dylan throws out on the market.

OK, this is a charity record and it's not a typical release from Dylan, but if the World Food Programme is to benefit from this LP, they'd better not be over optimistic. This is a record that will fall into a category of one of the worst ever made, alongside Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music*. What was Dylan thinking? Please don't get me wrong, my record collection includes everything he ever recorded from '63 to the turn of the century, but this Christmas stinker won't be purchased by me, even if it is for charity. I'll just donate the money directly myself.

Buddy Carlsson, Limerick

MUSICAL YOUTH

I am a 58-year-old guy who grew up going to Who, Kinks, ELP and Zep concerts in the States and has never given up his love of good rock music. That is why I was delighted to discover *Uncut* a couple of years ago and am now one of your biggest fans. I tell all my friends (many of whom I grew up with and still know, and are still music maniacs) why *Uncut* is absolutely the best music magazine in the world today. I mean, you cover it all! Old stuff, new stuff, the reviews are just fabulous and there are things I didn't even know existed. Also, since I am an eternal youth, there are quite a few contemporary artists I listen to such as Son Volt, Drive-By Truckers and Alejandro Escovedo as well as a host of garage revivalists like The Urges, The Grip Weeds and The Chevelles. Anyway, I just want to say *thank you* for such a great magazine and as long as I am breathing, I will be subscribing!

Chris Saunders, Queens, NYC

May you keep breathing for a long time yet to come, Chris. – Allan

THE EDITOR...



Is there anyone lucky enough to have seen Jimi Hendrix in what turned out to be his brief but spectacular pomp who would say they were not in some way changed by what they saw and heard?

My own moment of what it doesn't sound too grand to call an epiphany came in November 1967, at the Sophia Gardens in Cardiff. The Experience were headlining what might have been one of the last great package tours, top of a bill that also included Pink Floyd,

Syd Barrett still aboard at the time, and just about with us, lysergic dementia yet ahead of him. Further support came from The Move, Amen Corner, The Nice and Eire Apparent. The Floyd were fantastic, but Jimi was out of sight, life-changing, a visitation from another world, the sound of many tomorrows. Three years later, he was dead.

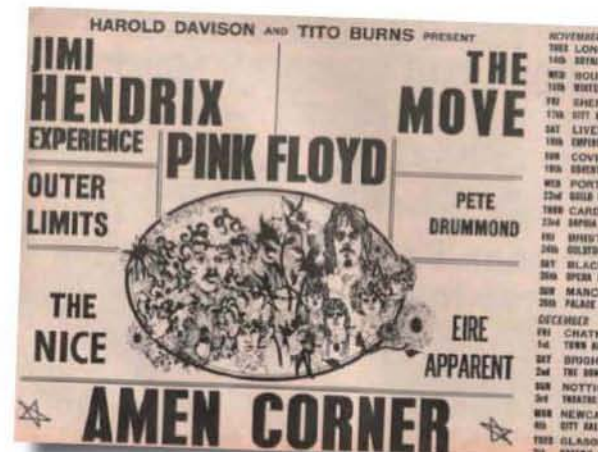
There is sometimes the suggestion that by the end, there, he'd somehow begun a hopeless drift, was musically lost, disenchantment with what he'd become finding a disconsolate echo in a creative aimlessness, inspiration hard to come by, his best music already, at the age of only 27, behind him. His death by implication was therefore in some respects an inevitable consequence of his career's faltering uncertainties, no answer needed now to the question of where to go next, which in the circumstances of his untimely passing turned out to be sadly nowhere.

The last year of Hendrix's life was not without a certain amount of conflict and chaos, as he struggled to liberate himself and his music from the predictabilities he increasingly resented. But as John Robinson reports in this month's terrific

cover story, whatever pressures he was under did not diminish his capacity for making music that was startling, significant and groundbreaking, and he seems never to have given up on the questing spirit that inspired him, whatever obstacles loomed in his way. It's an amazing story, told to John by many of the people Jimi hung with and confided to in his final 12 months, much of what they have to say previously untold.

Elsewhere this issue, Jimmy Page, another guitar legend, thankfully still with us, dukes it out conversationally with Andrew Mueller, in an interview occasioned by the release of the long-awaited documentary, *It Might Get Loud*, in which Page features alongside The Edge and Jack White. Andrew pushes Page at one point for an opinion of Robert Plant's *Raising Sand*, which Plant famously preferred to promote at the possible expense of a Led Zeppelin reunion tour. Page's response – or lack of it – is priceless.

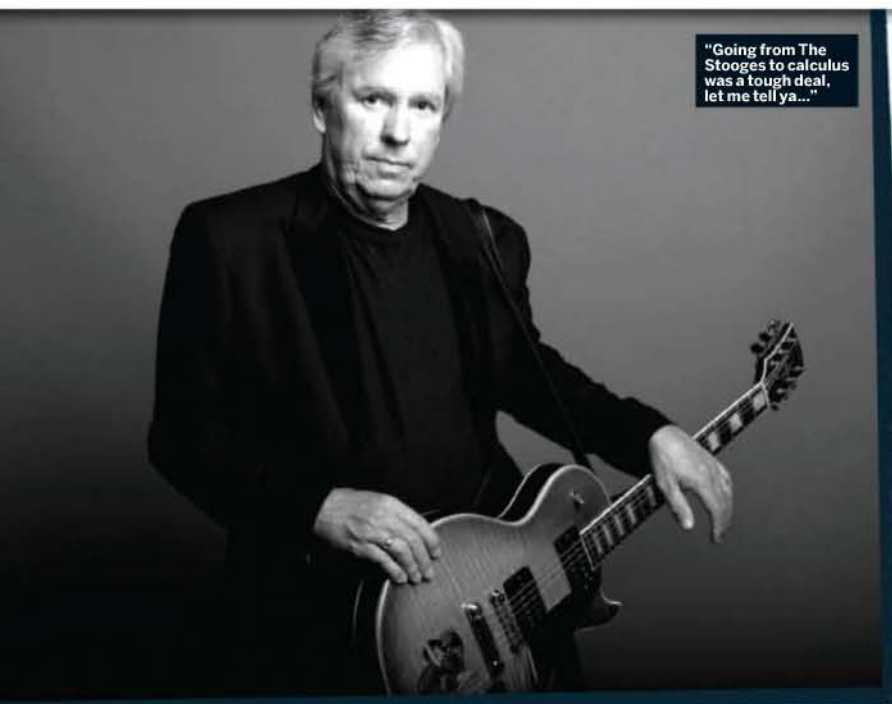
I think you'll also enjoy Barney Hoskyns on Marc Bolan, who at the start of 1970 retired his previous 'bopping elf' persona and turned himself almost overnight into a plugged-in rock god, as well as a great piece by Neil Spencer on this year's *Uncut* Music Award winners Tinariwen. Look out, too, for Robert Ellis' great shots of AC/DC from 1979's *Highway To Hell* tour in this month's Flashback and of course let us know if you saw any of those incredible shows.



Allan Jones

FIRST CUTS

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO UNCUT



"Going from The Stooges to calculus was a tough deal, let me tell ya..."

"BEING A STOOGIE IS MY RETIREMENT JOB..."

The strange story of James Williamson: from The Stooges, to Raw Powerpoint Presentations – and back again!

THEY LOOK LIKE THE epitome of rock'n'roll dissolution in the picture on the right. With the bass guitar foisted upon him, there's the late Ron Asheton. At the front, in some interesting trousers, Iggy Pop and Scott Asheton. And behind them, who else but the Vice President Of Technology Standards with Sony Electronics (retired)? James Williamson's journey from The Stooges, to the corporate moshpit of Silicon Valley, and back again, is one of the weirder rock stories of recent years. Iggy's decision to reconvene the 1972 *Raw Power*-era Stooges, in the wake of Ron Asheton's death, meant dragging Williamson back from a very different life.

"The Stooges couldn't really go out without me because they wouldn't be The Stooges," says Williamson. "You had one Stoogie left and Iggy, so they kind of needed

me. I said, 'What the hell!' I'm not doing anything, this is my retirement job. Actually I am doing something, consulting for Sony and other people."

Williamson originally split from Iggy in 1976, returning to collaborate with him on the *New Values* and, abortively, *Soldier* solo albums. After '76's *Metallic KO*, Williamson remembers, "Iggy and I decided we'd try to get another record deal, and we wrote some more songs. We never did get a record deal 'til much later when I sold the recordings to Bomp, and they released it as *Kill City* [1977]. Anyway, Iggy was in bad shape, and essentially we couldn't go on. He eventually went over to Berlin with Bowie, and I started working as an audio engineer.

"But very quickly, I started seeing around me the beginnings of the computer wave. I started getting more and more interested in that. It grabbed me as being more exciting

than rock'n'roll had become. I decided to go back to school. Coming from being a Stoogie to doing differential equations and calculus was a tough deal, let me tell ya, but I did it."

Williamson soon became immersed in the revolutionary business world of Silicon Valley, "The most exciting thing. I've never regretted it at all. It's been a great ride. These guys are by and large nerds and geeks, they don't listen to The Stooges much. In the last dozen years, when people started finding out about that, I always got the question from them, 'Why didn't you tell us all this stuff?' 'Well, it never came up.'"

Williamson and Iggy didn't talk at all for 20 years after the *Soldier* sessions. "Then we started talking mostly about business things. We really haven't been talking regularly until this year."

According to Williamson, the reactivated band are now getting along just fine. "We're all strong personalities in our own right, but I think we're also cautious. Let's just say we're more mature, and trying not to pick any fights with each other." There have also been "discussions" about new songs. "I've

got some new riffs that are good," he says. "I believe something will come of it."

In the meantime, the live setlist is focused on *Raw Power*, *Kill City* and other unreleased songs from that period, which seems to be going down pretty well.

"The fans so far have been just incredible," he says. "It's really kind of embarrassing, because I'm not into the rock

star thing too much. About six or seven songs into the set in São Paulo [on November 7], this kid tried to rush the stage and some security guys just grabbed him, beat the crap out of him. That pissed Iggy off, and he decided, OK, we're gonna do the stage invasion. So on "Shake Appeal", he called 'em all up. I've got guys kissing my boots, all this shit is going on!"

Iggy And The Stooges arrive in the UK in May, but there's also *Raw Power: The Masters Edition* due in April, featuring the return of Bowie's original mix. "The Bowie mix has been off the market for a number of years because of Iggy's [1997] mix. Bowie's mix is 'unique', I guess is the best way of putting it. We recorded it poorly. It's quite possible there are no decent tapes, and Bowie did the best he could. Gotta give the Devil his due, you know?"

"Iggy didn't know what he was doing, but he always thought he did. It came out fine. It has a special sound, a special place, and I like the songs. But I was astonished when I realised how this whole new generation really loves that music. In my era, my own peer group didn't want to know about it." ☺

The Stooges, '72:
(l-r) Ron Asheton, Iggy
Pop, Scott Asheton,
James Williamson





John Mulvey's

WILD MERCURY SOUND

Music from the outer limits. **This month:** New sounds for 2010, including **Fool's Gold**, **Gonjasufi** and **USF**

Spent the past few days putting off voting for the Brit Awards 2010 Critic's Choice Award, where I have to identify three brand new British artists I expect to do well this year. I suspect I'm congenitally incapable of choosing the sort of artist they're after [Ellie Goulding is this year's winner, following Adele and Florence And The Machine], not least because one of the criteria is that the bands or musicians can't have released an album yet.

A lot of the music I like is made by people who've released, one way or another, a fair amount before virtually anyone hears about them. A good case in point is **Natural Snow Buildings**, a truly magical acid-folk duo from France who I've just come across, and who seem to have made upwards of 20 albums; most, admittedly, hand-crafted CD-Rs in runs of a few dozen.

I'll write about them properly in the next month or so. In the meantime, a few selections, perhaps not all commercial smashes, for 2010. First up, **Voice Of The Seven Thunders**, the new incarnation of Rick Tomlinson's Voice Of The Seven Woods. Tomlinson is one of the few contemporary British players with the skills and vision to be judged alongside the best of the American psych underground, both as an acoustic fingerpicker and as a fierce electric jammer. The latter's in the ascendency here on Voice Of The Seven Thunders' self-titled debut, a suitably molten set that references the vintage underground psych of both Turkey and Sweden.

Seven Thunders received one of my Brit Awards votes, along with the neat ambient duo, **Pausal**, and, somewhat dubiously, **The Sexual Objects**. The Sexual Objects are the latest vehicle of Davey Henderson [pictured], first heard fronting The Fire Engines in 1980, last spotted mucking about with The Nectarine No 9.

USF: Seattle disciples of the woozy Animal Collective vibe...



The Sexual Objects are as capricious and shambolic as Henderson's usual projects, but they also seem to reference the distraught glam sound of his mid-'80s outfit, Win. Bizarrely – and effectively – they're also being produced by Boards Of Canada.

From America, this month's favourites include **Carlton Melton**, a phenomenally wasted-



sounding heavy psych band out of Northern California, who allegedly record in a geodesic dome; check out their barbaric cover of Pink Floyd's "When You're In" on MySpace. Also sounding good are **USF**, a Seattle group with a penchant for sweet melodies, woozy nostalgia and amniotic sloshing effects that puts them at the forefront of 2010's doubtless vast array of Animal Collective devotees, and

Gonjasufi, a sampladelic associate of Flying Lotus, whose frazzled beatnik schtick incorporates chunks of a fair few of the '70s Turkish sides that are almost certainly in Rick Tomlinson's record collection.

Finally, Billy Bragg mentioned in last month's *Uncut* that "in the next couple of years we'll be hearing young bands lifting the tensions and the rhythms of Tinariwen". Here's one: **Fool's Gold**, a collective of LA hipsters who draw on the *Éthiopiennes* sound and various other African styles as well as Touareg blues. And probably uniquely among this month's selection, they might even sell a few records...

Natural Snow Buildings:

myspace.com/naturalsnowbuildings

Voice Of The Seven Thunders:

myspace.com/voiceofthesevenwoods

Pausal: myspace.com/pausal

The Sexual Objects: myspace.com/thesexualobjectsmusic

Carlton Melton: myspace.com/carltonmelton

USF: myspace.com/usftheband

Gonjasufi: myspace.com/gonjasufi

Fool's Gold: myspace.com/foolsgold

THE UNCUT PLAYLIST

1 Animal Collective What Would I Want,

Sky? DOMINO
Grateful Dead-sampling standout from AC's magical "Fall Be Kind" EP. Phil Lesh on infinite loop!

2 Jack Rose Luck In The Valley

THRILL JOCKEY
Antique-styled fingerpicking brilliance from the great guitarist, who tragically died in December aged 38.

3 Hot Chip One Life Stand

PARLOPHONE
Now conceivably Britain's catchiest, most emotionally-resonant and – covertly – arty dance-pop band. Featuring Charles Hayward from This Heat on drums, oddly.

4 The Smoke Fairies Gastown

THIRD MAN RECORDINGS
"Matty Groves"-channelling Sussex duo make the best release yet on Jack White's eccentric Nashville imprint.

5 Ali Farka Touré & Toumani Diabaté

Ali & Toumani WORLD CIRCUIT
Second virtuoso set (recorded in 2005) from Mali's late guitar master and his kora-playing compatriot, plus the *Buena Vista Social Club*'s Orlando 'Cachaïto' Lopez on bass.

6 Field Music (Measure)

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES
Brewis brothers reunite for a Sunderland prog-pop tour de force!

7 Voice Of The Seven Thunders

Voice Of The Seven Thunders

TCHANTINER
As discussed: Rick Tomlinson kicks out the psych jams.

8 Corinne Bailey Rae The Sea

GOOD GROOVE/VIRGIN
Glibly, Norah Jones sings *Back To Black*. Surprisingly good, to be honest...

9 Pantha Du Prince Black Noise

ROUGH TRADE
Seductive minimalist electro from Germany, with a guest slot from AC's Panda Bear.

10 Retribution Gospel Choir

2 SUB POP
Low's Alan Sparhawk bulks up for some seriously heavy Crazy Horse-ish workouts...

For daily updates, drop in on the Wild Mercury Sound blog at www.uncut.co.uk



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BEN MARSHALL MEETS...

Ezra Koenig

Is Vampire Weekend's articulate frontman really part of the Whitest Band On The Planet?

Christian Lander, the creator of the site, *Stuff White People Like*, has dubbed Vampire Weekend the 'Whitest Band On The Planet'. Is that a title you're happy with? Well, that guy is a satirist. I don't consider us to be the Whitest Band In The World, no. Far from it. However, if what he means is that we're tapping into some weird new idea of what it now is to be white, then maybe it's a good thing. He also mentions *The Daily Show*, *Sarah Silverman* and *The Wire*, which is pretty good company.

Do you mind if we test just how white you are?

Go right ahead.

Bruce Springsteen or Marvin Gaye?

Hmmm. Well I'm from New Jersey, so I have to say Bruce Springsteen.

Bob Dylan or Smokey Robinson?

Jesus, I can see where this is going, you're here to make me sound like the, er, whitest guy on the planet. So firstly let me say that "Tracks Of My Tears" is one of my favourite songs of all time, nonetheless I have to say Dylan. This is like *Sophie's Choice*, this is not fucking easy.

Martha Reeves or Janis Joplin?

Martha Reeves!

The Jesus And Mary Chain or NWA?

NWA, no question, man.

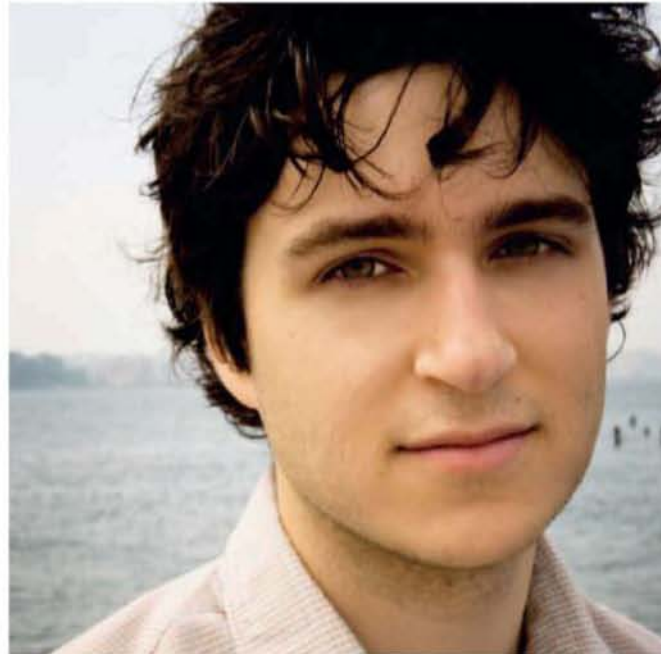
The Clash or Junior Murvin?

Aaaaaaargh! The Clash are my favourite band of all time. The Clash had enormous respect from Junior Murvin, so by choosing The Clash I'm also, in a sense, choosing Junior.

Crack or smack?

Crack, because although I haven't done either of them, I could at least imagine myself doing crack. Heroin is so beyond what I can think about.

You met the other members of Vampire Weekend while attending Columbia University. Does it ever occur to you guys



"I think I'll always be too scared to do heroin. However, I'm not scared of having sex with a model. . ."

that you might be too clever for rock'n'roll?

Well, there's cleverness in all the music I like, if by clever you mean intelligent. No-one can tell me that The Clash weren't intelligent, same with A Tribe Called Quest, or Elvis Costello. They all write intelligently, but that doesn't mean they write pretentiously, and they could all get big groups of people to sing along. You always know a song works when you can get a big group of people to sing along, and a lot of people sing along to our stuff.

Should the guitar be treated as something that gently weeps or as a throbbing extension of the penis?

Mmmm... that's a tough one. I don't think the guitar should have dominance over other instruments in the band. That's a basic tenet of Vampire Weekend, we have no

problem making a song with no guitar. We love the guitar but the moment you start giving it overriding importance is the moment you stop making the correct artistic decisions. So I'd have to say that I don't think it should be treated as something that gently weeps, and it emphatically must not be treated as an extension of the dick.

Are you surprised by how successful you are?

Yes, although I'm reluctant to say that in case it makes us sound like one of those bands that are full of self-loathing. We've always felt very confident in what we're doing, and we needed that confidence as we wrote and recorded the whole first album before any record label had ever heard of us. At the same time we never could have imagined coming as far as we have done.

You seem to have succeeded despite the climate of theft that pervades the music industry. How did that happen?

We've succeeded because of the climate. If we'd come out 10 years earlier, when people bought four times as many records as they do now, we'd have been less successful. Our first LP leaked a full year before it was supposed to have been released, so you'd imagine anyone who cared about it would've already downloaded it for free. But what people were doing was just becoming fans, as the moment the album was released, many of the people who already owned pirate copies went out and bought it.

Given the amount of records you've already sold, when can we expect you to start dating models and acquiring healthy heroin habits?

I wonder. I think I'll always be too scared to do heroin. However, I'm not scared of having sex with a model. If any models are reading this and want to meet up, cool, but you can leave your heroin at home.

Imagine I have a suitcase containing \$95 million. All you have to do to take it is accept that in doing so a Chinese guy will fall off his bicycle and die. Do you pick up the suitcase?

In the spirit of our universal hardwired conscience I have to say no. Besides what would I do with \$95 million, it's a dumb sum and also, taking a life is too violent.

Fair enough, but whom would you like to kick seven shades of shit out of?

Hmmm? Well I would fight Bill O'Reilly [*Fox News pundit*].

He's a big guy, and he's Irish. He might beat the shit out of you...

True, but he's getting older. He'd probably look at me and think I was a terrible fighter. But I've got a lot of heart, Bill.

Finally what sort of music would you like to see banned?

Oh, I don't want to see any music banned. The only genre I wish they hadn't invented is neo-Nazi techno. ☹



MY LIFE IN MUSIC

Rachel Unthank

From Morris dancing to moshing...

The new Queen of British folk's most treasured tunes

THE RECORD THAT TURNED ME ONTO DANCING



MORRIS ON 1972

Ashley Hutchings & others...

We're from the North East, which is more in the tradition of rapper dancing, which comes out of the mining industry, but this is Morris dancing. From the age of about four, me and my brother absolutely loved this record and insisted that my parents put it on, first thing of a weekend morning. They'd go back for a lie-in and we'd run around the living room. Some tracks got faster and faster, so we would, too.

THE ALBUM THAT MATURED MY MUSICAL TASTE

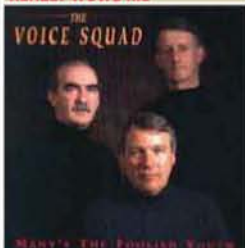


LADIES OF THE CANYON 1970

Joni Mitchell

This was in my parents' collection, so it's the first Joni Mitchell record I ever heard and the one I have the strongest bond with. I was about 13 and hungry for something more stimulating than '80s pop. I was totally blown away by her amazing voice and lyrics like, "He took his contradictions out and splashed them on my brow". They made everything she sang about seem sophisticated.

THE VOCAL ALBUM THAT REALLY WOWS ME



MANY'S THE FOOLISH YOUTH 1987

The Voice Squad

We grew up listening to a lot of English harmony groups like The Wilsons, who were five big, hairy brothers and one sister from Teeside, The Watsons and The Silly Sisters, and they all had a big influence on me. Then The Voice Squad came along; they're from Ireland and sing three-part, unaccompanied harmony, but have come together from the solo singing tradition. This is so beautiful and powerful.

THE RECORD I REBELLED WITH



THE REAL THING 1989

Faith No More

When I was 15, grunge came into fashion and I loved Nirvana, Pearl Jam and Metallica, and I thought Mike Patton was so sexy. His vocals were dark and threatening and for a teenager ready for a bit of non-folk rebellion, this was perfect! It's stayed with me, and if we've been playing a lot of folk festivals, me and my husband [The Unthanks' Adrian McNally] might put this on in the car and have a little rock-out.

THE RECORD THAT PROVES HUMOUR HAS ITS PLACE

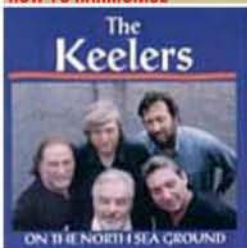


ROCK BOTTOM 1974

Robert Wyatt

I came late to him, really, because that's not my musical background and it was Adrian who introduced me. He'd play a track here and there, just to dip my toe in the water and see how I'd react. Of course, I loved it and this really opened my ears and mind to a whole new world of experimentation. I loved Wyatt's playfulness, his humility and his honesty, and the way he seems to follow his imagination. It's just magical.

THE RECORD THAT TAUGHT ME HOW TO HARMONISE



ON THE NORTH SEA GROUND

The Keelers

They're from the North-east and sing unaccompanied harmony – my dad [George Unthank] is one of them. They've obviously been a massive influence on me and my sister [Becky], and we learnt to harmonise by listening to them. They sing a lot of sea shanties and they pick real corks. You might think as a woman I'd be influenced by people like June Tabor and Maddy Prior – and I was – but more so by big, loud, robust men.

THE RECORD THAT SUMS UP GOOD TIMES IN GLASGOW



I WAS BORN IN GLASGOW 1991

Various Artists

In my second year at Glasgow University, I moved into this flat where someone had left a record player and a load of vinyl. Along with Madonna and Wham! there was this record by a load of Scottish folk musicians like Hamish Imlach, who sang "A Cod Liver Oil & Orange Juice". There's a song about sitting on the toilet called "Doon In The Wee Room". This reminds me of pub crawls, parties and singalongs.

THE ALBUM I LOVE MORE THAN ANY OTHER

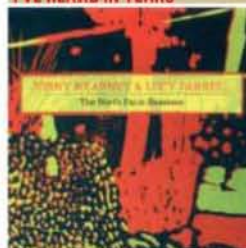


ILLINOIS 2005

Sufjan Stevens

This is probably my favourite album ever – it's so exhilarating and exciting. I'm usually very focused on words, but here I forget to listen to them because he takes you to places in your head and leads you into musical stories, as well as telling you an actual story. That storytelling obviously appeals to me, as does the fact that he plays all the instruments and has clearly spent so much time and energy lovingly making this perfect piece of music.

THE BEST NEW FOLK RECORD I'VE HEARD IN YEARS

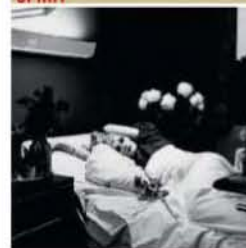


THE NORTH FARM SESSIONS 2009

Jonny Kearney And Lucy Farrell

These are two young singers/musicians who came to Newcastle to be on the folk degree course, and they supported us on our last tour. They made this EP in our house, so I was there at its birth. I really admire their music; Jonny's songwriting is full of truth, but also humour and unexpectedness – he's one of the best I've ever heard. Lucy's voice is beautiful. I've fallen in love with them.

THE RECORD THAT FEEDS MY SPIRIT



I AM A BIRD NOW 2005

Antony And The Johnsons

This is like nourishment for the soul; listening to it is almost a spiritual experience. It's so beautiful and it feels like it's pure – almost as if he's a magical being or some sort of... creature. There's an amazing sense of space and suspension, too, which we're always trying to achieve. His arrangements are really clever – sparse and simple – and I really admire how it's ambitious and yet full of humility.

EELS END TIMES

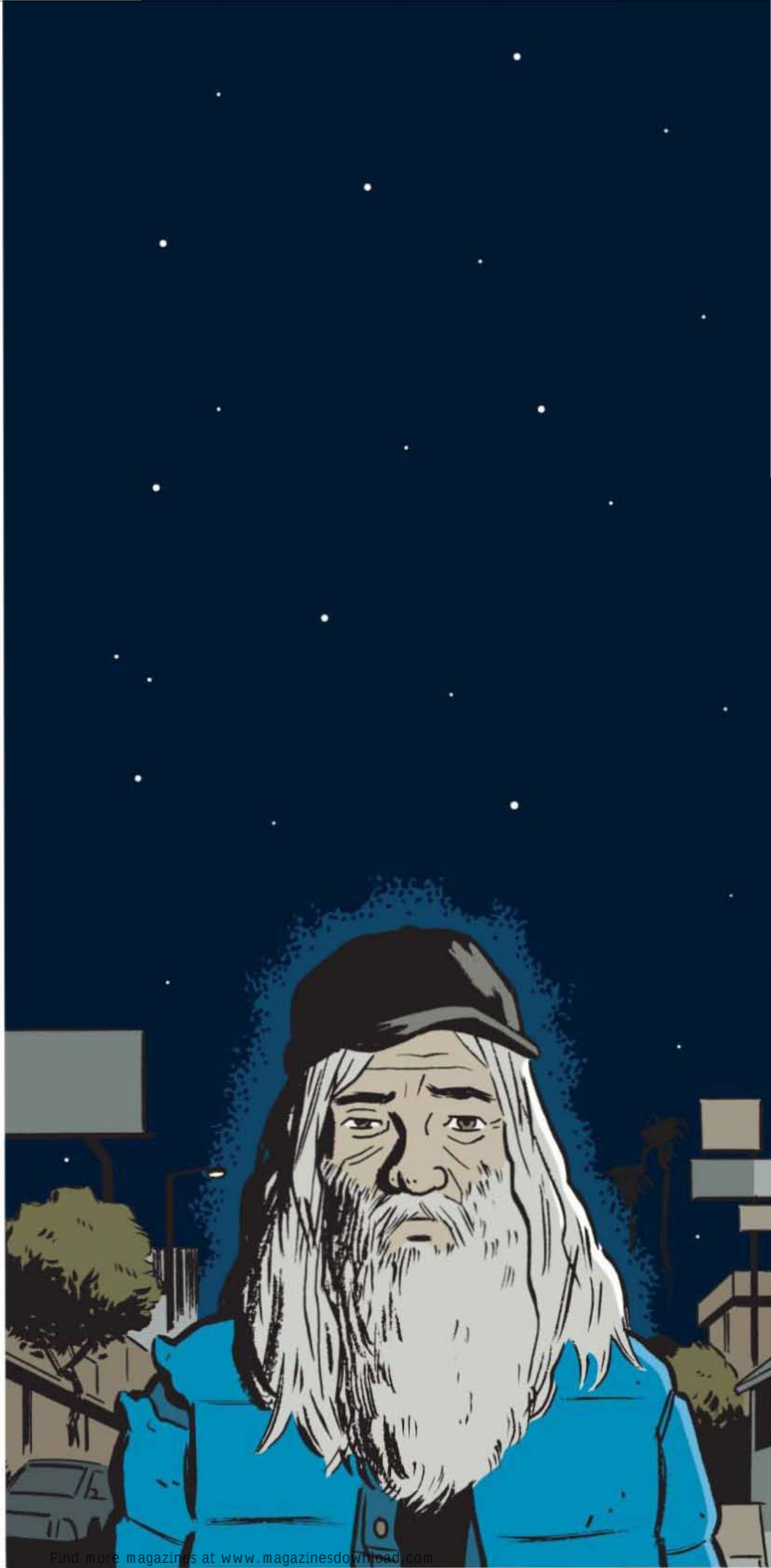
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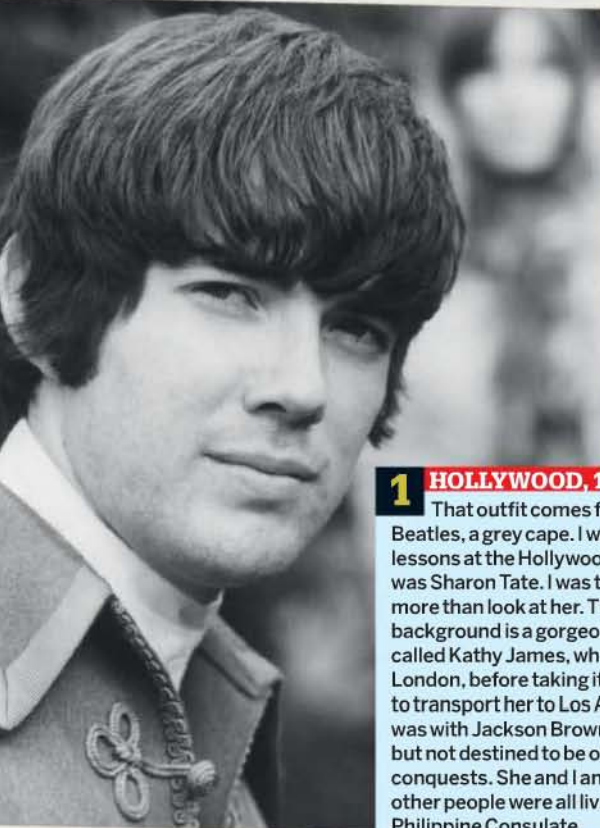




CH-CH-CH-CH-CHANGES

Jimmy Webb

The songwriting genius remembers flying his glider into a mountain. Among other things...



1 HOLLYWOOD, 1965

That outfit comes from The Beatles, a grey cape. I was taking lessons at the Hollywood Academy, as was Sharon Tate. I was too shy to do more than look at her. The figure in the background is a gorgeous young lady called Kathy James, who I met in London, before taking it upon myself to transport her to Los Angeles. She was with Jackson Browne for a while, but not destined to be one of my conquests. She and I and about 30 other people were all living in the old Philippine Consulate.

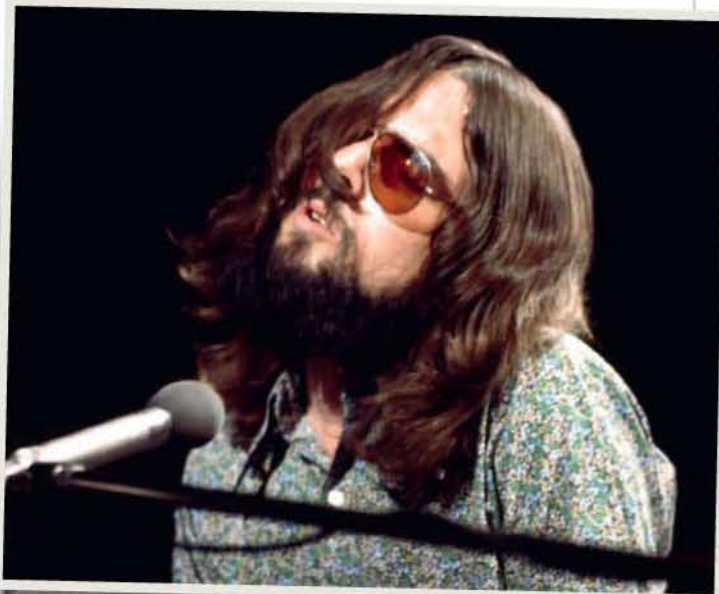
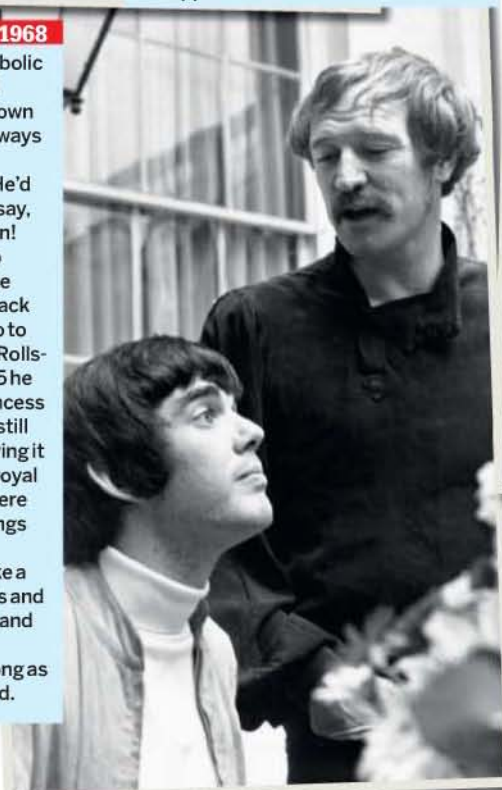


2 HOLLYWOOD, 1967

I'm standing behind the great Bones Howe [*legendary producer and engineer*], with The 5th Dimension looming on the console – all those beautiful young faces. I've just been given my liberty as a producer. And it wasn't a sickening disaster. When I woke up in the morning I was living a dream I had imagined since I was 11, and I don't think I had a firm grip on reality. I looked at The Beatles and envied this secret world I felt they lived in as musical brothers. But bending to the common good isn't part of my DNA. If you look at the picture, I'm there but not in there – I've always been a loner.

3 LONDON, 1968

This is a symbolic photo of Richard Harris, looking down on me. He was always guarding and instructing me. He'd take me out and say, "Ahh, I have a plan! We're going to go down to the White Star, and have Black Velvets!" We'd go to the studio in the Rolls-Royce Phantom 5 he bought from Princess Margaret, and it still had the seal proving it belonged to the royal household, so there were no such things as red lights for Richard. He'd take a pitcher of Pimm's and put it by the mic, and the length of the session was as long as the Pimm's lasted.



4 LONDON, 1972

I don't know about this look. It's a tendency I have to take it to the wall that I shared with Harry Nilsson. I'd look over the abyss, he'd jump. Here, it's how long can I grow a beard? Down to the floor would be nice. But this is before I met Rosemary [*Franklin*]. The night that we met, April 8, 1972, in the dressing room at the Royal Albert Hall, she took one look at me and said, "Who do you think you are, Jesus?" I said, "I'll be whoever you want me to be." The beard was trimmed that night.



5 LONDON, 1974

The gold chain around my neck was identical to one that Rosemary Franklin wore. We were involved in an almost desperate relationship. Here I'm making an album called *Land's End*, with 100 musicians. The whole thing was out of control. Coke was playing a role. Mostly I had her on my mind in this photo. It represents London to me. A house I had in Soho, entertaining Joni Mitchell and Ringo Starr, and this mutually destructive, intense relationship with Harry Nilsson. The chain is emblematic of my relationship with Rosemary, which had no way to work out. Both our chains were inscribed: "Fuck You".



6 CALIFORNIA, 1974

I'm flying this glider. Henry Diltz, the great photographer, is in the front shooting me. About a week later, we crashed the glider into the mountain you see in the background at 1000 feet a minute. I came very close to losing an eye, let alone my life. And maybe there would have been this minor cult spring up about this kid who wrote a few good songs. When death seems inevitable, a great serenity descends. Everything is amplified, beyond acid. Let's not kid each other, man. A miracle took place. Don't insult God by saying anything different. I had no right to walk away from that. And I thought, by being careless for a moment, I'd killed my dear friend, who took some of these pictures.



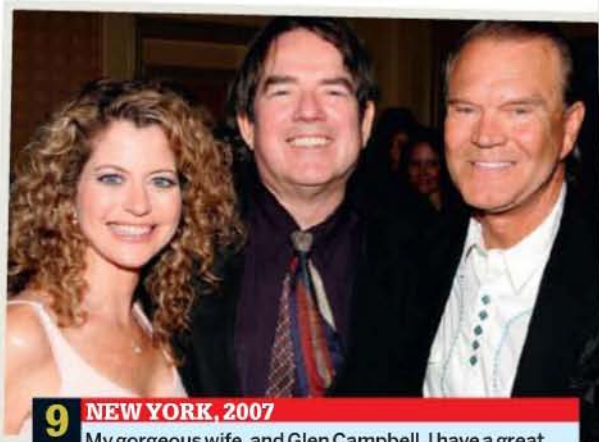
7 HAWAII, 1982

This is me with America. Gerry Beckley on the right is looking very dapper in his white suit, holding his customary Martini. These are three gentlemen feeling no pain. George Martin [*who produced some of the band's albums*] had gutted this house inside so they could make a record, such were the financial blessings of those days. The face is a little flushed, the belly's a little swollen, I'm doing a lot of drinking. I'd open the show for them and we'd leave in private planes. This is living the good life at the far end of the spectrum. There was very little thought for the future. It was a happy time.



8 NEW YORK, 2001

This is myself, Carly Simon and David Crosby, singing "In My Room" at a tribute to Brian Wilson. Me and Crosby are old chums. I took him for a ride in my sail-plane [*glider*] one day, up over the Californian high desert, where there's serenity and quiet. He drove off afterwards in his black Mercedes in a big cloud of dust, hi-ho silver. It's all testosterone with us. Carly was terrified here. As she and I were walking out, the director hit the house-lights so she could suddenly see everyone. Her grip on my hand was painful. I towed her out: "It's too late for that!" Her stagefright is legendary...



9 NEW YORK, 2007

My gorgeous wife, and Glen Campbell. I have a great deal of affection for this man. Our politics are polar opposites. He's swung to the right, I'm at least a socialist. Music's where we can forget all of that. He won't record anything he doesn't believe in. He becomes the song, and thus he communicated my music to millions of people almost as if he was in the same room with them. Songs like "Galveston" are 99 per cent real emotion. It was played in Vietnam. There were two ships there, the "Galveston" and the "Wichita", and whenever they met in the South China Seas, they'd blast their theme-songs at each other...



10 LOS ANGELES, 2009

These are my boys [the Webb Brothers], with whom I've just made a record, *Cottonwood Farm*. It's very exciting and almost spiritual to be onstage with these boys. I am proud of them. The business is a tough place these days, and I got into this thing with my sons to give them another shot at being musicians. I'm warming this project up before I take it to the most inhospitable place on earth for music, the United States...

UNSUNG HEROES

The Rain Parade

Pioneers of LA's '80s 'Paisley Underground' – it's warring psych revivalists the Roback brothers!

“NONE OF US really cared for the term, it made it sound like we were walking round with flowers in our hair,” says Rain Parade bassist and singer Steven Roback of the Paisley Underground label slapped on his band at the start of their brief lifespan. “It has limited use as a musical reference, and like all umbrella descriptions it can be misunderstood and turn as many people off as it might attract.”

Nevertheless, it helped create a media profile, giving critics a way in to celebrating a scene which, in addition to Roback's group, included Dream Syndicate and The Three O'Clock among its front runners. Initially kicking up dust in the bands' native LA before spreading across the US and into Europe, the Paisley Underground was seen as an early 1980s reawakening to the melodic and psychedelic concerns of The Byrds, Love and *Revolver*-era Beatles.

“We weren't really thinking in terms of reproduction or mimicry, we just wanted to incorporate any sounds we'd heard before and liked, and that involved a lot of Gretsch and Rickenbacker guitars,” says Steven. “You can do folk or jazz or anything, but if you've got those ringing guitars that kinda sound like church bells it's gonna colour the finished product.”

“As kids we'd soak up anything that Top 40 AM radio had to offer. Bob Dylan was big in my childhood, a little later it would have been David Bowie and Big Star, so we came up with a mish-mash of a whole bunch of things.”

The Rain Parade debuted with *Emergency Third Rail Power Trip*

1983, with three writers and singers vying for attention; Steven, his guitarist brother David (who'd previously been in a band with his Berkeley classmate Susanna Hoffs, later of The Bangles), and second guitarist Matt Pucci. But in keeping with rock tradition, the sibling rivalry led to tension.

“David left after *Emergency*... I guess you could speak about our relationship in the terms of a Greek play—I don't want to use the word tragedy, because it wasn't,” says Steven. “The truth is that we had complementary abilities within the band that worked really well, up to a point. But there's always friction between brothers, especially in a band environment where you're forced to spend more time together than you might normally choose to.”

“If I'd known how poorly those guys were gonna get along I would have thought twice about inviting Steven into the band,” says Matt

WHY I LOVE... The Rain Parade



“They were the best of the Paisley Underground bands by a mile, they had a broader sense of history and were phenomenal musicians...”

Alan McGee



The Rain Parade: Steve Roback, Dave Roback, Matt Pucci, Eddie Kalwa, Will Glenn

Pucci, who often found himself in the crossfire. “But if you throw eight 22-year-olds, including the crew, into a small van and drive them across the country with no money, but plenty of alcohol and a bunch of egos, something's gonna blow up.”

Following David's departure, the '84 live *Beyond The Sunset* brought them to the attention of Island Records, although their debut for the label, 1985's *Crashing Dream*, would prove to be their last release.

“The album succeeds in places, it captures elements of the electric folk sound we were heading towards,” says Steven. “But it was one of those classic rock band stories, we had limited time in which to make it. The original concept was for a double, but Island nixed that because they wanted something in the record stores quickly. We went through one last phase before we split, where we branched out into dark electric stuff, most likely as a reaction to the deadline pressures and outside interference from Island.”

David Roback enjoyed the highest profile, post-Rain Parade, forming first Opal, then Mazzy Star. He currently lives in Norway, producing records for European acts such as French jazz singer

Étienne Daho. He also works intermittently as an actor, and appeared in the Nick Nolte-starring *Clean*, an award-winner at the Cannes Film Festival in 2004.

Pucci now fronts his own band, Boat Club, having been in an early lineup of Green On Red following the demise of The Rain Parade. He was also briefly a full-time member of Crazy Horse, playing on their last studio album, 1989's *Left For Dead*, and still contributes to solo work by Crazy Horse's Billy Talbot. “I was with all the Crazy Horse guys just recently, jamming away—eight songs in five hours!”

Steven Roback made four albums with his own band, Viva Saturn, but has semi-retired from the music industry. “I still write music, I recorded an LP in 2005 but then I got distracted and never put it out. I'm still active, but I've not made any effort to release anything. I don't want to give the impression that I'm disillusioned, because I'm not. There's a song on the last Rain Parade LP called 'Don't Feel Bad', which sums it up for me. I'm happy with what we did as a group. It seems people are still listening to our old records 20 years later, and that's something to be proud of.”

TERRY STAUNTON

▶ HOW TO BUY... The Rain Parade



EMERGENCY THIRD RAIL POWER TRIP

★★★★ ENIGMA, 1983

Byrds psych with a post-punk edge. “Saturday's Asylum” breaks bread at the same table as Hüsker Dü, while “What's She Done To Your Mind” contains the germs of the sound David Roback would later fashion for Mazzy Star.



CRASHING DREAM

★★★

ISLAND, 1985 (LEMON REISSUE, 2009)

Subdued folk motifs liberally sprinkled with mid-period Beatles guitar figures, but Steve Gronback's synthetic production tends to hamstring the songs, preventing them from taking full flight.

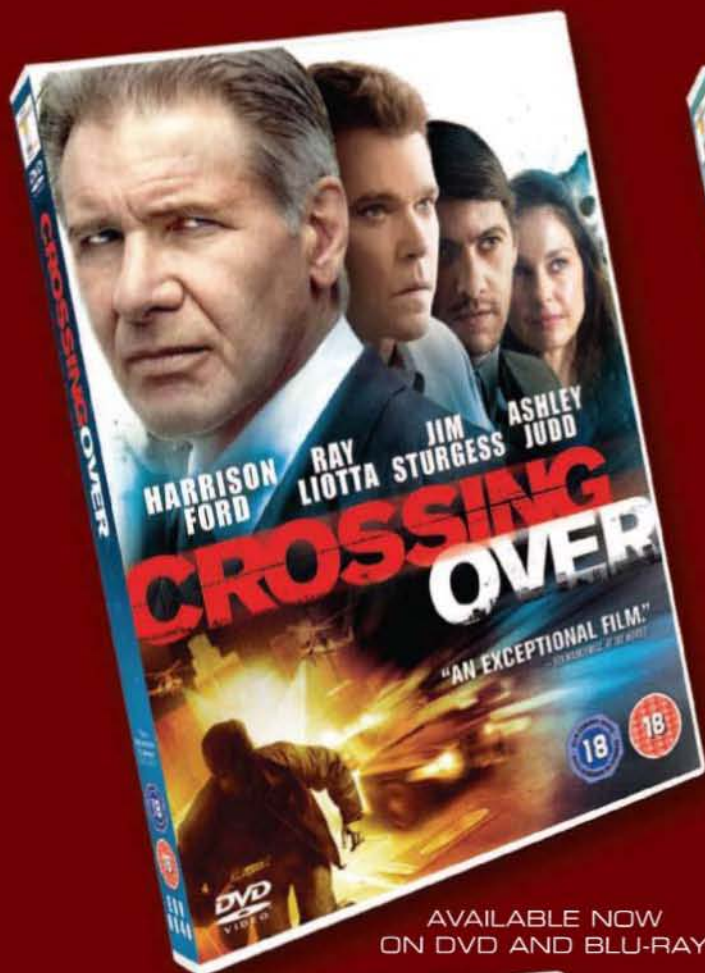


DEMOLITION

★★★★ BOOTLEG, 1991

Band-sanctioned collection of spikier demos for *Crashing Dream* in its original double album blueprint, easily found on the internet. Includes the rejected title track and the trippy “Tranquility Base”.

SEASON'S TOP TITLES 4 YOU



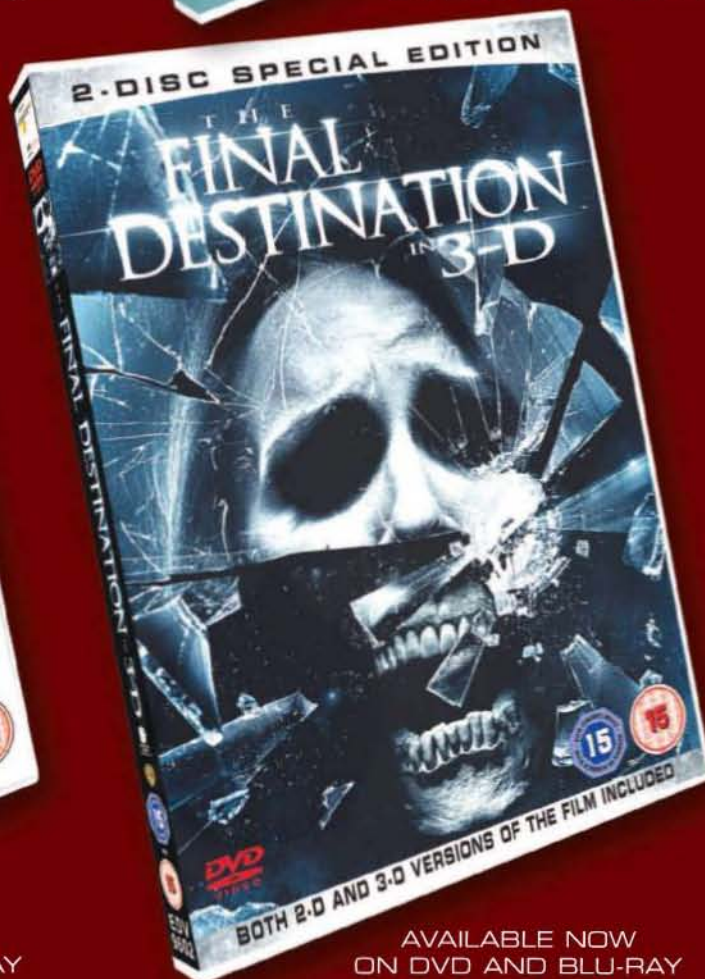
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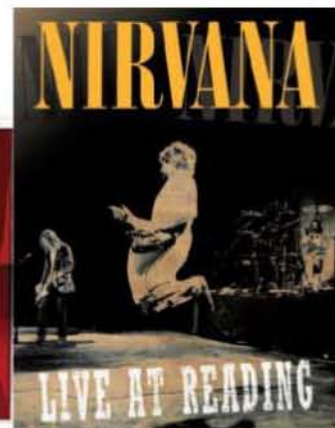
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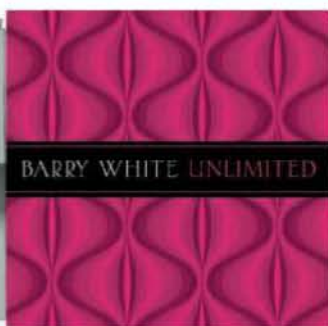
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LIAM CLANCY

Irish folk singer, *The Clancy Brothers* (1935–2009)

THERE CAN BE FEW accolades loftier than the one bestowed by Bob Dylan on Irishman Liam Clancy. "I never heard a singer as good as Liam ever," said Bob. "He was just the best ballad singer I'd ever heard in my life. Still is, probably." Clancy, heading up traditional folk outfit The Clancy Brothers & Tommy Makem, was hugely instrumental in popularising Irish music in postwar America. He arrived there in 1955, accompanied by American song collector Diane Hamilton, after which the group became the toast of Greenwich Village and a key factor in the folk revival. The quartet also beat a path for The Dubliners, The Pogues, Bono and Sinéad O'Connor.

Liam's dramatic, expressive renditions of border ballads and rebel songs became the centrepiece of the group. Debut LP *The Rising Of The Moon* appeared in the US in 1959, quickly followed by *Come Fill Your Glass With Us: Irish Songs Of Drinking And Blackguarding*, which featured Clancy perennials "The Croppy Boy" and "The Foggy Dew". A famous 16-minute slot on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in March 1961 brought them both national attention and a contract with Columbia Records, for whom they recorded throughout the rest of the '60s. In 1962 they sold out Carnegie Hall and played for JFK at the White House. Clancy also befriended a young Dylan at Irish hangout The White Horse on Hudson Street. The group's influence on Dylan is best heard on "Restless Farewell" (a variant of their take on the traditional "The Parting Glass") and "With God On Our Side", based on the Clancys' version of the theme from *The Patriot Game*.

In 1973, Clancy relocated to Canada to strike out as a solo artist with the album *The Dutchman*. Clancy, who struggled to curb a predilection for alcohol and women in the '60s, confessed in his 2002 autobiography *The Mountain Of Women* that his heavy drinking was an attempt to shut out a troubled personal life and that he'd fathered numerous children he'd never known. In 1975 he rejoined Makem for a decade-plus career as a duo, issuing six albums. When Tom Clancy died in 1990, Liam joined family members for a new version of the Clancy Brothers, reuniting with Makem at Dylan's 30th Anniversary Celebration Concert at Madison Square Garden.



JERRY FUCHS

Drummer with !!! and Maserati (1974–2009)

JERRY FUCHS' propulsive, motorik drumming was best heard on his work with post-funk collective !!!, whose vocalist John Pugh once likened Fuchs' distinctive style to "a robot built by cavemen. It has extreme precision, while remaining primal and hairy." Brooklyn-based Fuchs began as a founder member of math-rock band Turing Machine. In recent years, his drumming style, influenced by celebrated players such as Neu!'s Klaus Dinger and the Mahavishnu Orchestra's Billy Cobham, was much in demand for James Murphy's DFA label, playing with both LCD Soundsystem and The Juan MacLean. In 2006 he joined Georgian quartet, Maserati. Murphy, on hearing of Fuchs' tragic death in a lift shaft fall, said: "He was one of the only people we all knew who was literally great at what he did."

AARON SCHROEDER

Much-recorded songwriter (1926–2009)

FEW SONGWRITERS could claim to have written for both Elvis and Scooby-Doo, but Aaron Schroeder's far-reaching CV did just that, amassing over 1,500 composer credits in a career that spanned Roy Orbison, Duane Eddy, Nat King Cole and his 'discovery' Gene Pitney. Among the 17 Schroeder songs recorded by Presley were "A Big Hunk O' Love", "Good Luck Charm", "I Got Stung" and "Stuck On You". He's perhaps best known for co-writing "It's Now Or Never" with Wally Gold, who once said, "Aaron wrote other hits, I wrote other hits, but a song we finished in 20 minutes to a half-hour was the biggest song of our career".

ERIC WOOLFSON

Alan Parsons Project songwriter (1945–2009)

GLASWEGIAN Eric Woolfson's first big break came at 18, when producer and '60s label boss

Andrew Loog Oldham signed him up as a session musician. He graduated to writing songs for Marianne Faithfull, Chris Farlowe and Peter Noone, though it was his tenure as the other half of The Alan Parsons Project that made his name. He and Parsons formed the band in 1975, with Woolfson acting as songwriter, lyricist and pianist across 10 albums. In 2009 he explained

they were "never a 'band' in the conventional sense. The idea was to make recordings much as Kubrick or Hitchcock made movies, where the production values are the key rather than star actors."

EDWARD WOODWARD

Actor and vocalist (1930–2009)

EDWARD WOODWARD might have been better known as the flinty protagonist of *Callan* and *The Equalizer*, as well as his role as the doomed policeman in *The Wicker Man*, but he was also the owner of a fine tenor voice. He made 12 albums of rich romantic balladry, including *The Edward Woodward Album*, which made the Top 20 in August 1972. His sole UK hit was "The Way You Look Tonight", which peaked at No.42 in January 1971. He was much in demand as a singer on the TV series *The Good Old Days* and also recorded three LPs of poetry, building on his time at Stratford-Upon-Avon as a lyrical speaker of verse. **CONTINUES OVER ►**



Eric Woolfson, half of the Alan Parsons Project



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JACK ROSE

American guitarist (1971–2009)

THE FINGERPICKED odysseys of guitarist Jack Rose, who has died of a heart attack at just 38, were often compared to those of the original American primitive, John Fahey. But Rose reached down far deeper than just the Takoma label's vaults, with a scholar's ear for the detail and nuance of "anything that's pre-1942: Cajun, country, blues, jazz, all that stuff." His passion for minimalist composers Terry Riley and LaMonte Young also fed into his playing on both six-string and 12-string, scuffling the boundaries of experimental and traditional music.

The Virginian began constructing loud, drone-like improvisations with Richmond band Pelt in the '90s. Rose's solo career began in 2002, with *Red Horse*, *White Mule*, while its follow-up *Opium Musick*, caused Six Organs Of Admittance guitarist Ben Chasny to proclaim, "Finally somebody has something to say on the acoustic guitar that hasn't been said before." It was 2005's *Kensington Blues*, however, that became Rose's first real classic, an intuitive, often breath-catching stream of adapted styles, making room for Indian classical music, bluegrass, ragtime and pre-war blues.

Rose also went under the nom de plume Dr Ragtime, and released *Dr Ragtime And Pals* in 2008



and *Jack Rose And The Black Twig Pickers* in 2009. The final part of his self-styled "Ditch Trilogy" is the wonderful *Luck In The Valley*, again featuring the Black Twigs, and due for release this February.

Fellow acoustic explorer and friend James Blackshaw paid tribute: "I rarely saw him miss a beat. He had that 'swing' to his playing, an exaggerated sense of timing the old country-blues guys had, but most of all I think it was just very genuine. The real deal, as they say, much like Jack himself."

DEREK B

British hip hop musician (1965–2009)

DEREK B, who has died of a heart attack at 44, has the unique distinction of being the first British rapper to appear in the UK music charts, cracking the Top 20 with "Goodgroove" and "Bad Young Brother" in 1988. Hammersmith-born Derek

Boland began DJing in London at 15, graduating to pirate radio and releasing his first recording, "Rock The Beat", for the American hip hop compilation *Def Beats 1*, as EZQ. More recently involved in production and A&R, he was also co-writer of Liverpool FC's 1988 hit, "Anfield Rap".

BOB KEANE

Del-Fi label boss (1922–2009)

BOB KEANE first saw 17-year-old singer and guitarist Ritchie Valenzuela playing a tiny movie theatre in May 1958. He was "doing just a few riffs and a couple of songs, but I was impressed. The girls were going crazy, screaming." Keane shortened his surname to Valens, signed him to his Del-Fi label and guided his young charge to stardom with the hits "Donna" and "La Bamba". After Valens died in the same

crash that claimed Buddy Holly, Keane went on to record Brenda Holloway, Frank Zappa and Barry White and "I Fought The Law" by The Bobby Fuller Four.

AL ALBERTS

Four Aces vocalist (1922–2009)

THE FOUR ACES were formed from the ranks of the US Navy in 1950, where singer Al Alberts befriended fellow tenor Dave Mahoney. During his six-year stint with the band, Alberts scored a bag of hits in the early '50s, including "Mister Sandman" and a brace of Hollywood film songs, "Three Coins In The Fountain" and "Love Is A Many Splendoured Thing". Both won Best Song Oscars. Alberts left for a solo career in 1956, though he enjoyed greater success as the host of TV talent show *Al Alberts' Showcase*. ROB HUGHES



Derek B: the UK's first chart rapper

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MAR 1

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one, with a rare appearance by the legendary Pacific Northwest guitarist Sir Richard Bishop. Bishop (who's recently formed a new band, Rangda, with Ben Chasny and Chris Corsano) is promising some tunes by his old band, Sun City Girls, as well as sundry Middle-Eastern jams and whatever else takes his virtuoso fancy. Tickets from www.seetickets.com, as usual, are £9 apiece. Please note, too: due to tour scheduling, this show has

moved forward to March 1 from the date we originally advertised, March 29. All tickets will remain valid, and are still available through usual outlets.

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AN AUDIENCE WITH...

JARVIS COCKER

The Pulp frontman explains his legendary charm and why happy songs make him “physically want to kill someone”

Jarvis Cocker arrives at a wine bar in central London, wearing his characteristic tweeds and corduroys and looking not unlike the puppet that he voices in Wes Anderson's *Fantastic Mr Fox*. “I don’t actually get recognised that much,” he says. “I think I’ve done a really good job of sliding into obscurity. The beard helps a bit. I have to stand outside independent record shops to get recognised now.”

Yeah, right. Within minutes of his arrival, the waiters are whispering his name, and people on neighbouring tables are pointing and staring. Unaware of his presence, a posh young couple bluster into the bar, commandeer the neighbouring table and – rather imperiously – instruct

Jarvis to mind their coats while they get drinks.

“Not a soul will be allowed to come within 10 yards of this table,” he informs them. Both suddenly recognise his voice and shriek nervously. “Ohmygod, it’s Jarvis,” they gasp. Jarvis bows diffidently and then turns back to the interview. “Right, next question...”

What was the best Pulp parody: *Spitting Image*, *Goodness Gracious Me*, *Ali G* or *Brass Eye*?

Justin, Newark

Oh, *Brass Eye*, without a doubt. Perves Grundy and Blouse, ha! Chris Morris got the moves perfectly. I quite enjoyed *Goodness Gracious Me*’s “Hindi People”, a kind of parody of race tourism, rather than class tourism. I think the worst one was *Spitting Image*. It looked more like Dennis Norden. I understand that this puppet of me is now in the possession of The Edge from U2. No, really! Apparently, there was an auction of *Spitting Image* figures, and he bought mine. I hope he’s having fun with it.

I saw you playing bass on “Big Bottom” with Spinal Tap at Glastonbury – one of the festival’s many highlights. Did you learn the bassline specially for the occasion or did you already know how to play it?

Mathew West, Edinburgh

I’m glad that my bass playing is finally being appreciated. But it was good to unleash it in such a big arena. I was at Glastonbury, and I got a message from Harry Shearer, asking if I might be able to come along to Wembley Arena and do

STAR QUESTION



Beth Ditto, *The Gossip*

What music have you been listening to lately? And why haven’t you called me back?

Oh, sorry Beth, I wasn’t aware that I owed you a call, but I will. I was meant to sing a song called “For Keeps” on her record. But I was making my record in Chicago so it never happened. Regarding my recent listening habits, there’s a group called the Wooden Ships from San Francisco. We got to play with them when we played there. They’re psych and drony and great. There’s another guy from Portugal called The Legendary Tiger Man, a one-man rockabilly band, with a bass drum, snare drum and guitar. He uses three mics, one normal one, one with a kazoo, and one under his neck. You can’t imagine that all that noise is coming from one person. The first time I heard him in a Paris record shop I thought it was an Alan Vega record I hadn’t heard before.

something at Spinal Tap’s show the following week. I knew I couldn’t make that, but I was at Glastonbury, so I got in touch with them and said, I could do it today. So I ended up getting there 10 minutes before they went on stage, and offering to play on that song. It was quite a good spontaneous moment. What’s amazing is that they’re in character all the time. Even backstage, before and after

the show, they’re talking in those London accents. That was pretty impressive, actually.

How good is your French?
Gilles, Paris

Not as good as you might think, considering I’ve lived in Paris, on and off, for a decade. My son understands French much better than me. He watches *The Simpsons* dubbed into French and laughs at all the right bits. I only vaguely understand it if I’ve seen the original episode. My French has got a little better, but it’s such a slow and tortuous process. I never really applied myself as much as I should have done. I should go and enrol on one of those courses, like David Sedaris did in *Me Talk Pretty One Day*.

How did you enjoy your appearance on *Question Time*? You looked like you’d just woken up.

Jamaal, London

Cheeky git. I think I only woke up halfway through the programme, actually. I was a bit nervous about it. I know that previous shows had been a bit heated, especially at the height of the expenses scandal. But it was weird. You turn up to this sports hall in the middle of Cambridge and Harriet Harman is having her hair done, and Ian Duncan Smith is talking to someone, and that guy Peter Hitchens was asking me if my mum was really a Conservative councillor, ‘cos he’d researched me on Wikipedia. Which is true. I’ve always completely disagreed with my mother over politics, but arguing is kinda what families are all about, isn’t it?

What was your role in Wes Anderson’s *Fantastic Mr Fox*?
Sarah, Barnet

At one point I was going to narrate the introduction to the film, but then they showed it

CONTINUES OVER ►

STAR QUESTION



If asked to go on *Strictly Come Dancing*, would you do it? You’d make a great ballroom dancer!

Rachel Unthank, *The Unthanks*

I would definitely consider it. I’ve always found it really moving, especially going to the ballroom below Blackpool Tower, watching all these old couples dancing while a guy played the organ. I attended ballroom dancing classes twice – it was when I was studying at Saint Martin’s in London and students could get cheap lessons. They tried to teach us a basic rumba, and I was useless. I never had the discipline to learn dance moves, I was more into dancing freestyle. Maybe Latin would be the thing. You can get a bit wild with that, can’t you?

“You get more twisted as you get older. You realise things are more cryptic and convoluted”





With drinking buddy Richard Hawley. Right: Pulp's *Different Class* lineup, 1995. Inset: the cartoon Cocker – aka 'Petey' – from 2009's *Fantastic Mr Fox*

STAR QUESTION



Do you think you've been sliding through life on charm?
Marianne Faithfull

Well, that's the title of the song I wrote for her. She gave me the title for it. It's a very difficult thing to work out about yourself. I was once in the Groucho Club, and Will Self was in there, moaning, as he always seemed to be. I never really got on with him. Anyway, Keith Allen sat him down and said, "Will, the reason you don't like Jarvis is because he's got charm and you haven't." So, if Keith Allen is the arbiter of charm, I guess I have.

to an American preview audience and they couldn't understand my accent, even though I was trying to speak in my clearest, poshest voice. Maybe I'll just be a DVD extra. So I ended up with one line, and I did this song, where I wrote

the music and Wes wrote the words with Noah Baumbach. I think the film is wonderful, and weirdly similar to other Wes Anderson productions. It's nice to see foxes discussing really mundane things.

Having watched you in Sheffield play with a group of friends, including Richard Hawley, your sister Saskia and some of the Fat Trunkers, I wondered if you had ever thought about doing a little tour: An Evening with Jarvis Cocker and Richard Hawley. A night of anecdotes and music...

Susan Scott, Perth, Scotland
It might get a bit Richard Stilgoe and Peter Skellern, mightn't it? It would certainly be interesting. Maybe one night would be OK. If we did it on a regular basis, it would be quite bad for my health, because being with Richard Hawley would probably involve quite a lot of drinking.

The lyrical themes on your solo records seem a lot more

awkward than they were with Pulp. Is this the Gallic influence rubbing off on you or just part of the inevitable slide towards old age?

Giles, London

A few people have said this. I thought that I'd made quite a light-hearted record, and then everyone said it was my midlife crisis album. I suppose you do get more twisted as you get older. You realise that things are more cryptic and convoluted and labyrinthine, so *Further Complications* seemed an apt title. Thing is, I've never really written happy songs. If you look at a typical Pulp "smash" such as "Disco 2000", musically it's quite happy, but lyrically it's very dark. It's about somebody who fancies somebody and never got it on with

her and then she gets married and has a child, but he's still clinging to this sad fantasy that someday they're going to be together. It's pretty pathetic, really. I've never really liked happy songs. "Walking On Sunshine" makes me want to physically kill somebody.

What is it about Sheffield and the kind of music we produce?

Biff Byford, Saxon

It's certainly got its own personality, as distinct from Manchester or Liverpool. With the Human League or ABC, and I suppose Pulp to a certain extent, we made pop music, but did something slyly radical with its content. There might also be a fascination with technology, with Sheffield being an industrial city. I used to poo-poo that, but when you go to the Kelham Island Industrial Museum – which I'd recommend – you'll see a thing called a Bessemer Converter. It's like a big black egg that spins around. Obviously working in steel factories was very arduous and unpleasant work, but it must have been very impressive to be surrounded by such amazing hardware. And Sheffield is home to some very extreme sounds. I remember living near a steel forge where you'd hear this drophammer every hour and it would make the whole building shake. Perhaps this accounts for the whole tradition of music from Sheffield that is pretty extreme, with very low bass, and also listened to at extreme volumes.

INTERVIEW: JOHN LEWIS

STAR QUESTION



How did you get involved in the Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire film?
Paul Hartnoll, Orbital

Pulp had worked with Patrick Doyle on the *Great Expectations* remake. When he wrote the score for the Harry Potter movie, I was one of the people he asked to write a song, and they liked mine best. I thought they'd get someone else to perform it, but they asked us. What other chance would I get to be in a Hollywood blockbuster? We were on set for three days. All these extras were paid to scream at us like we were the most famous group in the wizarding world. So we had three days of being The Beatles.



Jarvis at the 2009 BFI London Film Festival with the *Fantastic Mr Fox* cast, including George Clooney and Bill Murray

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Unfinished Sympathy

by Massive Attack

How a simple breakbeat jam evolved into an anthem of love and loss, setting the tone for the '90s 'Bristol sound'...

THE KEY PLAYERS



SHARA NELSON
Vocalist, Co-Writer



ROBERT DEL NAJA
(3D) Co-Writer,
Co-Producer



WIL MALONE
String Arrangements



PAUL OAKENFOLD
Remixer



BAILLIE WALSH
Video Director

The first single to be taken from Massive Attack's groundbreaking album, *Blue Lines*, sounded like no R&B you'd heard before. It set the tone for the "Bristol Sound" – meditational beats; ambient sounds; eerie, disembodied vocals – while Shara Nelson's lyrics, of love, loss and loneliness seemed to establish the mood for a new kind of soul music. The producer Jonny Dollar – who died in May 2009 after a battle with cancer – chose the raw breakbeat, which came from smooth jazzier Bob James' Latin-tinged version of Paul Simon's "Take Me To The Mardi Gras". The song started out as a jam session, and Robert Del Naja describes the songwriting process as one of "deconstruction", in which ideas were constantly edited out. What remained by the end was Wil Malone's lush, elaborate string orchestration and Shara Nelson's astonishing vocal performance, one in which her lyrics are punctuated by operatic flourishes and ghostly falsetto wails.

Nelson stars in the iconic promo video, shot in January 1991, on the West Pico Boulevard in downtown Los Angeles. The song was remixed by Nellee Hooper and Paul Oakenfold; it was covered by Tina Turner (a version which went Top 10 in France); it was performed as a classical piano solo by Maxence Cyrin, and it has since found itself in numerous "greatest ever singles" lists. **JOHN LEWIS**

SHARA NELSON: The song started while we were rehearsing at the Coach House in Bristol in mid 1990. We had already recorded a few tracks that went on *Blue Lines*, including "Safe From Harm", and we had been struggling to record a track called "It Will Rain". I couldn't concentrate very

well, so we were told to take a break, have a cup of tea. I didn't drink tea at the time, so I just stood in the corner and started trying to put together this idea that had been going around my head for a while. I started mumbling to myself, half singing the lines, "I know that I've imagined love before". The melody and the words started to come into shape. At the time Mushroom [Andrew Vowles], was in the room with [the producer] Jonny Dollar. Mushroom heard what I was doing and said: "What's that? Sing up, girl!" So I started to sing, and Mushroom put some beats towards it, and Jonny Dollar started playing synthetic strings, and that was it! It was a real rogue track.

ROBERT DEL NAJA: The whole of the *Blue Lines* album was about us being coerced into a studio, and then confronted with trying to make a demo. It wasn't like we sat around on the piano writing songs together. We'd



always be in the studio separately. We'd come up with ideas and people would add or subtract. "Unfinished Sympathy", for instance, started out as a jam in the studio in Bristol. It was just breakbeats and a percussive line.

SHARA NELSON: The idea for the title came from a conflag between myself and the band. My working

title was something like "Really Hurt You Baby" or something, but they wanted something more abstract. In the end, the title suited the song perfectly, because the lyrics are about something unfinished, and it's about something that hasn't happened. There's

also the obviously symphonic overtones. We'd written the song with lots of space, space which we filled with the string orchestrations.

ROBERT DEL NAJA: Everyone's lost the sense of how important silence is. That was the way we first made music – keeping a lot of space in it, using very sparse arrangements and production. A lot of the beauty of "Unfinished Sympathy" was in the editing of ideas.

SHARA NELSON: The song sounded pretty good even at that early demo stage, without the breakbeat or the proper strings. The main difference was that it had more of a verse/chorus structure at that point. Then the band started editing bits out of the song, leaving more space, and then filling it with the string orchestrations.

WIL MALONE: I'd previously worked on Neneh Cherry's album *Raw Like Sushi* (1989). That album

CONTINUES OVER ►

"Probably my favourite pop song of all time" – Paul Oakenfold



Massive Attack in '91: (l-r) Mushroom, Daddy G, Shara Nelson and 3D

THE MAKING OF...

was produced by Cameron McVey, who managed Massive Attack, and I think Cameron had suggested that they use me if they needed any strings on the *Blue Lines* album. For "Unfinished Sympathy", the producer Jonny Dollar gave me a demo, which had synthesised strings, and he wanted it to be revoiced so that it would sound really big and symphonic. Most people will record with a small amount of strings – maybe a 10-piece or 15-piece section, and then put lots of heavy digital delay on them to make them sound bigger. Instead of doing that, we decided to use a lot of strings, so that it's big to start with, and then we can keep them dry. So we booked Abbey Road Studio Two, which is a pretty big place, with amazing acoustics, and got a 40 or 50-piece string section. So there's more texture, more gut.

SHARA NELSON: I was in and out of the studio at Abbey Road when they were recording the string parts. It seemed to be such a big undertaking. It was amazing to watch this piece really coming to life.

WIL MALONE: When I first spoke to Jonny Dollar, the idea was that there would be no specific bassline. The bass would be the double basses. So the bass strings are very prominent, and I think that's what makes it sound so dramatic. High-pitched strings tend to sound a bit cute, low-pitched strings are more suited to beats. They sound darker, growlier. I thought I'd scored the piece quite straight, and the string charts are quite conventional, until Shara's voice drops out about three minutes in. Because the chords are quite repetitive, my string arrangements start getting a bit more elaborate. The violas start playing the occasional augmented fourth. There's lots of chord extensions, a slight jazz air, the kind of chords that Gil Evans might use with Miles Davis. It starts to become more of a jazz groove, but on strings.

PAUL OAKENFOLD: It's a difficult song to remix. The original is an absolute classic, probably my favourite pop song of all time, so why fuck around with it? As Mushroom said at the time, why do we need a club hit? He said a remix would be like smashing up a clay pot and trying to rebuild it! And, in a way, he's right. In the end I did two things. I put in a bass line and I took out the original Bob James breakbeat: my breakbeat is much simpler. It's a much sleeker, more dancefloor-friendly piece. As it happens, Massive Attack's Daddy G [Grant Marshall] used my remix as the last track on his DJ-Kicks album, so he obviously doesn't hate it that much!

WIL MALONE: As I remember it, the band weren't even at Abbey Road when we did the strings! They seemed to be a very loose collective in those days. From my point of view, the producer Jonny Dollar seemed to be in charge.

ROBERT DEL NAJA: Jonny's death, earlier this year, was really shocking to us. We didn't even know he was ill. And it being sudden and not being able to get to see him after such a long time, it was very sad, man.

WIL MALONE: The first time I met Massive Attack was to record the songs again for *Top Of The Pops*. You had to do *TOTP* live in those days, you see. Do I think I should have got a songwriting credit? What do you think? Ha ha!

BAILLIE WALSH: I got to know Massive Attack through stylist Judy Blame. They liked a video I'd recently done for Boy George, called "Generation Of Love", and wanted to let me loose on their whole album. They sent me the tracks and let me dream up whatever ideas came to mind. The



Shara Nelson in the promo video for "Unfinished Sympathy". West Pico Blvd, downtown LA: "A scary, single shot – no cuts!"

idea I had for "Unfinished Sympathy" was trying to capture the feel that you're walking down the street and you've been so affected by love or hurt that you don't know where you are, you walk in a daze and you haven't noticed anything. So I wanted to take that emotion and make it big and cinematic, which is why I took it to LA. I liked the quality of light and the wide open streets in the slightly run-down parts of town.

SHARA NELSON: The art director on the shoot was [legendary performance artist] Leigh Bowery, and he sorted out my costume. He was wonderful! Good job it was a puffy little number, because we shot it in late afternoon in LA, on a slightly chilly January afternoon. The sky had that beautiful, orangey, golden colour, which is really striking about the video. It was all quite complicated – they were playing the song on a boombox, I was lip-synching, and there was a guy carrying this huge Steadicam in front of me. Remember that not everyone on that set was an actor – a lot of them were just people who lived there, or worked there, and you had to respect that.

BAILLIE WALSH: It was quite a difficult shoot, but I love presenting myself with those challenges. It was a single shot, no cuts. It's a technique that had been used in a few film scenes, Hitchcock's *Rope*, that Orson Welles film with Marlene Dietrich [*Touch Of Evil*], *Absolute Beginners* and Robert Altman's *Short Cuts*. But I don't think it had been done in a pop promo before. It was scary. I didn't have a big budget, I was shooting alone in winter, in a place where it gets dark at 5pm. I still hadn't shot anything by one o'clock!

SHARA NELSON: I seem to remember the guy with the Steadicam finding the length of the take a bit difficult. Six minutes is a long time to be holding one of those things!

BAILLIE WALSH: The Steadicam operator couldn't hack it, and he collapsed halfway down the street, on the first take! So I had to pull it all back and make it simpler. But I think the promo gained from that. I wanted people to pick up new ideas each time they watched it, so I tried to layer it. You notice new things each time you watch it, when you watch the people in the background, the tramps fighting, the beggars, the couples snogging, the boy with his dad, the cars that nearly knock Shara over! All that stuff.

SHARA NELSON: It's a pity how things ended up with me and Massive Attack. Put simply, the structure of the band changed, and we didn't get the same vibe working together. But I'm still hugely proud of the album we did together and I think "Unfinished Sympathy" is a brilliant, timeless song. It still sounds fantastic to this day. ☺

FACTFILE

Single and album version 5'08

Perfecto mix 5'14

Nellee Hooper 12" mix 5'52

Wild Bunch/Circa/Virgin Records

Written by Grantley Marshall (Daddy G), Andrew Vowles (Mushroom), Robert Del Naja (3D), Jonathan Sharp (Jonny Dollar), Shara Nelson

Produced by Massive Attack and Jonny Dollar
Recorded in 1990 at Coach House Studios, Bristol, and Abbey Road Studio Two, London.

Released as a single February 11, 1991

Highest UK chart position 13
US (did not chart)

TIMELINE

August 1990 Recording commences at Coach House Studios, Bristol

September 1990 Strings recorded at Abbey Road.

January 1991 Video is filmed in Los Angeles.

February 1991 The band temporarily rename themselves "Massive" because of the outbreak of the first Gulf War.

March 1991 Single peaks at No 13, spending nine weeks on the chart.

April 1991 album *Blue Lines* released, also reaches No 13, and spends nearly two years on the chart.



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*"I want to
make sure that
I do this music.
It's most important
that it sees
daylight..."*

WORDS by ANDREW MUELLER

John Paul Jones has Them Crooked Vultures. Robert Plant has Alison Krauss. But what, exactly, is JIMMY PAGE planning for 2010? As a new movie teams him up with The Edge and Jack White, *Uncut* is granted a rare audience with the master. Do Led Zeppelin have a future? And what does Page think of *Raising Sand*? "Mmm..."

THERE ARE MANY fine moments in Davis Guggenheim's film *It Might Get Loud*, a cinematic account of the summit meeting of three very different guitarists: The White Stripes' Jack White, U2's The Edge, and Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page. One of the most endearing sequences catches Page at home, pottering in a library of CDs and records. He has a point he wants to make about how and why he ended up doing what he does, so he slaps on a 45 of Link Wray's "Rumble", smiles, and then—delighted, transported—plays air guitar to it. It's strange, heartwarming and vulnerable, Page of all people enacting the most basic of rock-star fantasies.

In trying to understand where Jimmy Page, 65, is now, it seems safest to begin with the basics: the electric guitar, the instrument which anchors *It Might Get Loud*, and which Page has arguably wielded with greater panache and consequence than anyone else. A persistent rumour has it that he owns a vast

collection of guitars, running into more than four figures. Is this true?

"No," sighs Page, in the—perhaps forgivably—tetchy tone of a man who has spent much of his life denying lurid legends about himself. "I don't know how many guitars I have. I might have maybe 160 instruments, not including amplifiers. But this idea that I've got 1,500 or 2,000 guitars is absolutely ridiculous. Where does that come from? Is it internet gossip? It's not from anybody who knows me, that's for sure. Look, if I was 18 years old and had 180 instruments, that might be worth gossiping

over. But I've accumulated these things along the way. I did buy a double-neck so I could play two instruments at once, though. You can quote me on that."

The last line is delivered with leaden sarcasm, and completed by a mightily relieving gust of laughter. Page's formidable reputation hardly promises wry affability, but when he calls *Uncut*, he's cheerful, energised, only defensive where this might be expected—the subject of the future of Led Zeppelin. It's noticeable that during *It Might Get Loud*, Page's co-stars talk about their guitars with sentimental fondness while he, by contrast, seems to regard his as strictly tools of his trade. He must have a favourite, though...

"The one I play most," he decides, "is my Les Paul Standard—the one I'm playing in the film. I've used it in every group I've been involved in. I got it way, way back—1969 or 1970, I think—and I've used it all the way through."

What *It Might Get Loud* does make hearteningly apparent is that Page's affection for the noises guitars can make has never dimmed. He is utterly unembarrassed by the Link Wray moment.

CONTINUES OVER ►

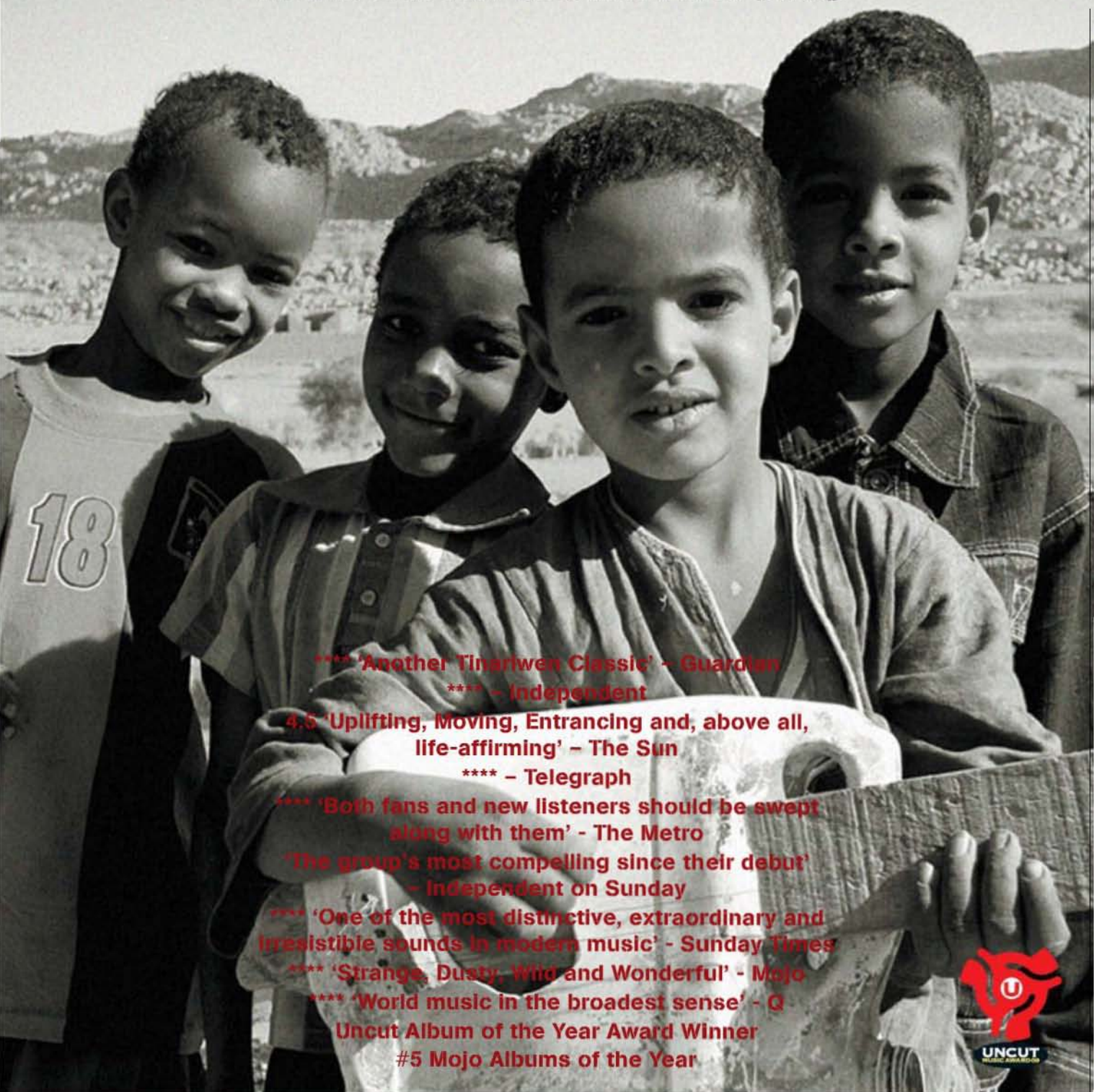
*"I'd rather like the
plans I have to
come as a bit more
of a surprise..."*



TINARIWEN

+10:1

IMIDIWAN: COMPANIONS



**** 'Another Tinariwen Classic' - Guardian

**** - Independent

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**** - Telegraph

**** 'Both fans and new listeners should be swept along with them' - The Metro

'The group's most compelling since their debut' - Independent on Sunday

**** 'One of the most distinctive, extraordinary and irresistible sounds in modern music' - Sunday Times

**** 'Strange, Dusty, Wild and Wonderful' - Mojo

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#5 Mojo Albums of the Year



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"I wasn't thinking about anything when I put on the Link Wray," he explains, "other than: 'Listen to this!' And of course you don't want to start talking over the top. And suddenly two minutes can start feeling like two hours and so many minutes, because you realise you've dug a hole for yourself, and that's when you start playing air guitar. That record is just pure attitude – and it is, it's vibrating with it."

PAGE DESCRIBES *It Might Get Loud* as a film about "Three decades of guitarists. Or four, if you're including me. Actually, maybe five." When Page tears off the riff from "Whole Lotta Love", Edge and White instinctively – indeed, judging by their face-splitting grins, gleefully – accept the roles of apprentices to the sorcerer. Most encounters Page has with other musicians must be like that, though – freighted with status imbalance similar to that attending any handshake Neil Armstrong exchanges with another pilot. Did Page perceive Edge and White as peers, descendants, or something else?

"I wouldn't put them in a category like that," he says. "At that point, they're two musicians. And they're both character musicians – you recognise their playing when you hear it on the radio, and that really is something, in this day and age."

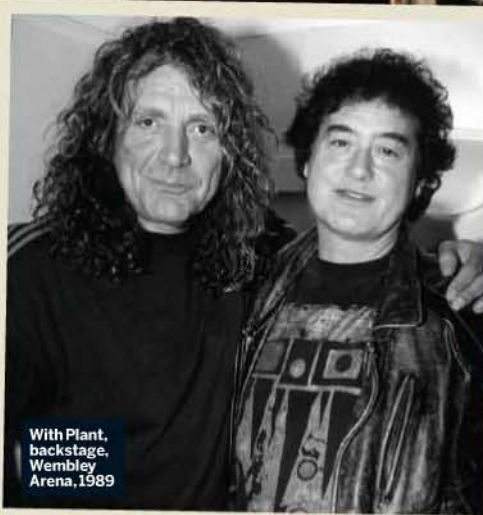
Were they guitarists he'd looked up to at all? "I'd had more of a point of access with Jack," says Page. "Up to that point I hadn't been to a U2 concert and I'd only briefly met Edge, at the O2 [after Led Zeppelin's reunion gig in November 2007], for a few minutes. But I'd seen The White Stripes in concert three or four times, and I'd done an interview with Jack for a guitar magazine – and when we did the photos for that, we had guitars on, and though they weren't plugged in, we were trading licks and having fun. I really respected the work that he'd done. I could understand where he was coming from, his roots in the blues, and I admired the way he presented himself – that whole artform that he is. Edge I got to understand a lot more, and it actually endorsed what I thought about him previously. He really works hard, almost like a scientist."

The question, really, is whether being Jimmy Page is ever a burden when dealing with other musicians. If they play rock'n'roll, they count Page as an influence almost by definition. The legacy is surely inescapable.

"I don't know whether that's true. Is it?"

"I think," he concedes, "that the body of work that we did in Led Zeppelin was seriously substantial. When I revisited it for the boxsets, and listened to everything, I realised what a strong body of work it was, and what a great textbook it was. When I was teenager, there was a textbook out there, but it was coming from many different players and groups, it wasn't just in one place that you would have

Axe summit: Page with Jack White and The Edge, *It Might Get Loud*



With Plant, backstage, Wembley Arena, 1989

such a vast, panoramic view. So somebody may access one aspect of Zeppelin and develop and take it on, and others may draw on something different. And if that's the case, job well done, because that's how music works."

Do you ever feel protective of that legacy? Does it hurt when you perceive the Zeppelin influence in something you don't like?

"Tough luck," he says. "Someone else's perspective. That's how it goes."

It must happen fairly regularly.

"Well," he replies, apparently amused by the idea, "give me an example of something."

The slick of '80s pseudo-metal bands with more hairspray than talent, maybe?

"Well," says Page, diplomatically, "they were taking elements of Led Zeppelin, and some of them could make the spirit of Led Zeppelin more substantial than others. The whole thing about Led Zeppelin was that we were an inspirational band."

WHICH BRINGS US, with an inevitability that Page has been perceptibly braced for throughout the conversation, to the present status of that subject. Led Zeppelin reformed for 2007's one-off O2 show in honour of Atlantic Records founder Ahmet Ertegun. Since then, rumour and wishful thinking have run rampant, every utterance of every Zeppelin member scrutinised for significance.

The band have seemed split into two camps. One, constituting Page, Jones and Jason

Bonham, son of original drummer John, who were all keen to continue. The other, comprising Robert Plant, who was not. Page grows slightly, discernibly peevisish at the subject. Does he have a day-to-day relationship with the rest of the group?

"Ummm," he hesitates. "No. I don't. But I see them every now and again, obviously. I don't have a working relationship with them, so I don't have a day-to-day relationship with them."

In the meantime, of course, John Paul Jones has formed Them Crooked Vultures with Dave Grohl and Josh Homme. Plant made one fine album with Alison Krauss

(2007's Grammy-laden *Raising Sand*), and the pair are working on another. Page is "aware" of these other projects. Asked if he can listen to them objectively, he says, "I think you have to." When pressed on whether he likes them, he replies, "If this is leading on to Them Crooked Vultures, I haven't heard it yet. So I can't pass a comment on that, though I would say that with the ingredients of it, with Dave Grohl and Josh Homme and John, there's got to be some areas in it that are really superb, but I haven't heard it, so I don't know."

And Robert's recent stuff?

"Obviously," says Page, "I heard the record he did with Alison Krauss."

Uncut advances the uncontroversial opinion that *Raising Sand* was a bit of a corker.

"Mmm."

A silence is left, for Page to elaborate. He declines to do so. It seems only polite at this juncture to ask about his own musical projects. In recent years, these have been sporadic, largely confined to guest appearances with The Black Crowes and Jerry Lee Lewis, among others. The only substantial body of new material Page has issued in the last decade or so was 1998's collaboration with Robert Plant, *Walking Into Clarksdale*. Armchair psychology is a perilous occupation, but it feels like Page is putting a great deal of stuff on hold in the hope of a reincarnation of the band he describes in *It Might Get Loud* as "absolute musical heaven" – when, presumably, he could just

CONTINUES OVER ►

Page as
Zeppelin's
magus, 1970



pick up the phone and work with anyone.

"Probably," he concurs, warily. "Oh, I don't know. I don't know about that."

Do those possibilities often occur to him?

"I'm very keen," he says, carefully, "to do what I need to do right now. I've got definite plans for how I'm going to go about things, and what collaborations I want to do – and it's not any one collaboration or any one particular set of circumstances. And I'm just going to go ahead and do that."

Can you talk in any detail about these plans?

"I'd rather not," he says, "and I'll tell you why. If you start saying you're going to do this, or that, it's easy for people – maybe even me – to project what it's going to sound like, and I'd rather it comes as a bit more of a surprise."

In the abstract, then, when you're writing new material, do you keep in mind an idea of who might end up performing it?

"Well, yes. Let's see... that's an interesting question. Without getting too specific, because I don't want to dig a hole for myself... What I have currently is a relatively large folio, if you like – and I do have ideas of how I want to make it manifest. And it isn't any one given set of circumstances. I don't want to give anyone any ideas anymore about what I want to try and do. The most important thing is to do it."

One currently popular rumour suggests that Led Zeppelin will headline Glastonbury next summer – a rumour driven by the fact that Plant has acknowledged he's spoken to Michael Eavis, and said, "There's a place for me there, but I have no idea who with." When Page is asked if there's any truth in the Glastonbury

*"You have ideas,
sometimes they
come off, sometimes
they don't..."*

rumours, the response is an unexpected glimmer of levity.

"U2 have confirmed, I believe."

So one reads.

"No, I haven't heard anything," he continues.

"I honestly haven't. So, no. We did put in quite a lot of rehearsal time, playing time, between myself, Jason Bonham and John Paul Jones, to

get into an area where you could move the number off on a tangent and come back in again, you know what I mean?"

Not really. The three of you were rehearsing as the three of you?

"Robert wasn't there every day for the rehearsals [*before the O2 show*]. It was important that we were playing together and feeling good about what we were doing. But we worked towards the O2, did the O2, nothing followed that, and I think that's it, really."

There were also stories that Page, Jones and Bonham were rehearsing with other singers, or at least thinking about it. The name of Alter Bridge singer Myles Kennedy cropped up.

"We played after the O2, Jason and John and I," says Page. "I think that's quite a natural thing to do, after having played so well on the way to the O2. We were playing new music that we hadn't played on the way to the O2. I was keen to do something in the shape of maybe... Led Zeppelin were known for the music, and I was keen to do something that was quite instrumental in its way, and then bring in singers along the line. But that was only an idea. You have ideas, sometimes they come off, and sometimes they don't."

And that one didn't.

"Clearly."

PAGE DOES HAVE other occupations. The day we talk, he's preparing for the 10th anniversary do of Outside Edge, a theatre company which works with people recovering from substance abuse, of which he's a patron. Two days after our interview, he's leaving for Rio, where he works with a charity called Task Brasil, which offers refuge and assistance to the children of Rio's shantytowns (a safehouse called Casa Jimmy is the most obvious manifestation of Page's support – Page was awarded the OBE for his Task Brasil work in 2005). When he talks about these projects, there's a change in his tone – he's animated, excited, much less guarded than when talking about making music, which for Jimmy Page seems to have become somewhat complicated by the fact of being Jimmy Page.

Do you still practise guitar?

"You're always learning to play," he says.

"That job is never done. I do play, but I usually tend to put that into a writing capacity now. If I'm playing at home, that's what I'm doing."

Is that like a job, with set hours?

"No, I don't do it like that. I play when it takes me, if I have an idea. I never think of it as work. Actually, that's a bit glib. Once you start documenting it, recording it, that's a form of work, isn't it? I didn't want that to sound... let's put it another way. I really enjoy playing guitar. If I didn't, it might feel more laborious."

Are you still ambitious? Can you still get fired up about making new music when it has no chance of making the same impact as Zeppelin?

"God, yeah," he insists. "It's something that I really need to do, certainly over the next year. I want to make sure that I do this music. It's most important that it sees daylight, and that I can get into a playing capacity, so I can get out there and do what I do best." ☺

It Might Get Loud is reviewed on page 108



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UNCUT

2010

ULTIMATE ALBUMS PREVIEW

From the horses' mouths: the lowdown on the essential releases of the next 12 months. Starring PETE TOWNSHEND, DAMON ALBARN, BRIAN WILSON, EDWYN COLLINS, THE NATIONAL, RUFUS WAINWRIGHT and LCD SOUNDSYSTEM, among many others. And starting with the Guv'nor...

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH *by* LAWRENCE WATSON

PAUL WELLER

Title *Wake Up The Nation* **Label** Island/Universal **Release date** April 2010

"We just started talking again..." Weller reunites with Jam buddy Bruce Foxton! And Kevin Shields guests, too!

Paul Weller: Yeah, Bruce Foxton plays bass on two tracks. It was fine together in the studio, not awkward at all. I guess we'd both been through different things lately. Bruce lost his wife, Pat, in March this year and I lost my dad in April, so there was a little bit of that for both of us. Bruce came to my dad's funeral. I spoke to him around Christmas time last year when Pat was really ill. I suppose those kinds of things put people back in touch with each other. We just started talking again, and I invited him down.

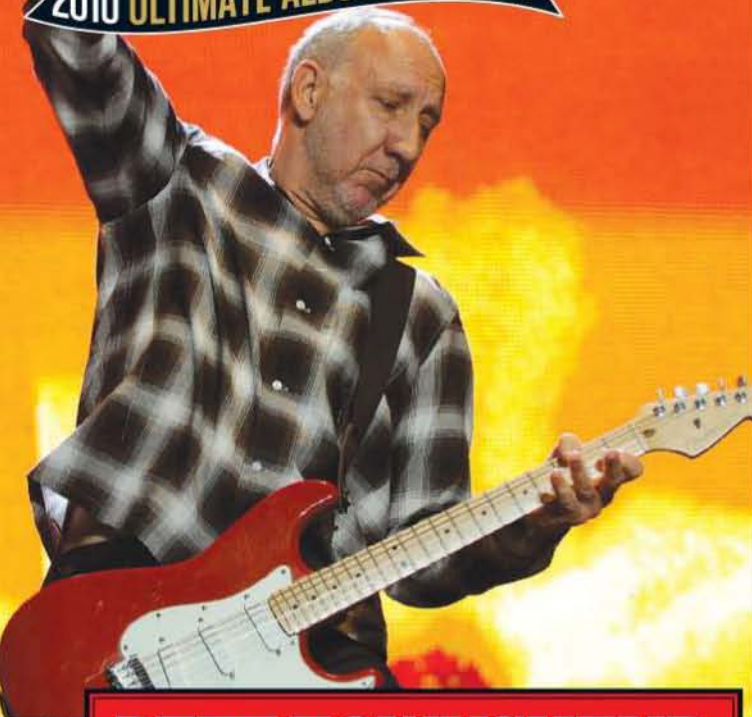
The album doesn't sound like *22 Dreams*. It's more guitar-driven, but a few tracks have

brass and strings. It took two months or so to put together – we were working two or three days at a time and then coming back to it. They're all short, sharp tunes, most are around the two-and-a-half-minute mark. We've still got the same band as before [*guitarist Steve Cradock, bassist Andy Lewis,*

“It's more guitar driven than *22 Dreams* – they're all short, sharp tunes”
PAUL WELLER

keyboardist Andy Crofts and drummer Steve Pilgrim], though they're all playing on different tracks with different people. There aren't a lot of live band performances on there. I play a lot of the instruments myself and the others came along to do bits and pieces. We've had Kevin Shields on a couple of tracks. He was lovely and unassuming; he just brought his big bag of effects and made a noise. It's not a star-studded album, though [*legendary '60s session drummer*] Clem Cattini came along to play drums. We also had Bev Bevan from The Move on drums on a couple of tracks.

Songtitles? There's "Moonshine", "Trees", "Aim High" and one called "Two Fat Ladies". Some of the songs are lyrically concise, but a lot of it is more or less improvised. The album's produced by [*22 Dreams producer*] Simon Dine – he came up with backing track ideas, which he sent down to me and I worked on them in a very haphazard way. A lot of it's just me reacting to what I was hearing in the studio. Most times I'll have a set of lyrics or a song written before I go into the studio, but I didn't really have anything this time. I just wanted to leave it open, see what happened. Following my nose, really... **CONTINUES OVER**



PETE TOWNSHEND

Title **Floss** Label **TBC** Release date **Late 2010**

...or "My Baby Boomer Generation". The Who man is back on the rock-opera circuit

2009 WAS A year of mixed messages from The Who camp. Roger Daltrey was upbeat last Spring when he told *Uncut*: "The Who are having nine months off this year. We hope to be back at it in the New Year. We're not giving up." Pete Townshend, on the other hand, had already been quoted as saying that "I am no longer a member of a band called The Who". Then, in August, Townshend blogged that he was writing a new rock opera: a belated reply to 1965's "My Generation", the anthem he wrote as a 19-year-old and which he now calls "the most explicitly ageist song in rock". He explained: "I now want to take on ageing and mortality, using the powerfully angry context of rock'n'roll."

Continued Townshend: "While Roger Daltrey exercises his ageing vocal chords by embarking on a solo tour, my focus is on Floss, which touches on the current issues faced by the Boomer generation. *Floss* is an ambitious new project for me, in the style of *Tommy* and *Quadrophenia*. In this case the songs are interspersed with surround-sound 'soundscapes'."

Townshend sees the album as an outdoor "son et lumière piece", and has revealed that he has already been talking to several producers in New York about staging it. The plot of *Floss* finds ageing pub-rocker Walter suddenly striking rich when one of his songs is chosen to soundtrack an advert. "When [Walter] tries to return to music after a 15-year hiatus," blogged Townshend, "he finds that what he hears and what he composes evoke the ecologically rooted, apocalyptic mindset of his generation."

Meanwhile, recent reports suggest The Who are lined up to perform during half-time at Super Bowl XLIV in Miami in February, while Daltrey has again hinted at The Who recording a follow-up to 2006's *Endless Wire*. "And who knows," he said. "We might make our best work."

"I want to take on ageing and mortality, using the angry context of rock'n'roll..."

PETE TOWNSHEND

MGMT

Title **Congratulations**
Label **Sony/Columbia**
Release date **March**

How to follow 2008's campy *Oracular Spectacular*? With "melancholic psychedelic surf music", recorded in Malibu...



Andrew Van Wyngaarden: We decided to call the album *Congratulations* while we were writing the first one. It's

sarcastic—like, "Okay, what now?" The songwriting process was similar. It's whatever comes into our heads. It's maybe almost like psychedelic '80s surf music, almost. '60s pop, sort of a little bit slower, more melancholy.

We were in Malibu for two and a half months, in a rented house, five of us together, a mile from the beach. I learned how to surf! Pete "Sonic Boom" Kember [*Spacemen 3*] listened to demos, and he was into it. He's co-producer, but he was really part of the crew. His influence was more bringing in cool music that we hadn't heard, which gave me more confidence to what we were doing.

I was listening to Red Krayola, OMD, The Monochrome Set, the Bunnymen. I think people going to our shows who don't really know who we are are going to be confused. To those who only know us for "Kids", it's going to be weird. I think people think we're an intellectual pop duo, a synth duo or something...

LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

Title **TBC**
Label **DFA**
Release date **TBC**

For his next trick, New York's dance-punk maestro moved to LA for added "sonic sunspots"...



James Murphy: It feels like part of the line with the first two albums [*2005's LCD Soundsystem* and *2007's Sound Of Silver*]

—but it's like a logarithmic difference. A step from 1 to 3, then 3 to 7. It's more different than *Sound Of Silver* was from the first record—it's more melodically generous, not quite as spartan. I think I'm afraid of

melody sometimes, like choruses are cheating.

It felt like a good idea to make it different to the studio I made the previous record in. So in LA, I rented this big, sprawling, run-down mansion and built a studio in it, that slept everybody, and a pool. And there were strict rules: everybody wore white when we were working, which felt weirdly cultish, like a family. What I liked about the place is it's sunny, and it's kind of funny. So the record is more upbeat-sounding and has more reckless abandon in it than I would typically allow. For me, everything's normally nailed-down and restrained. This stuff, I allow a lot more sonic sunspots.

BRIAN WILSON

Title **TBC**
Label **Disney Pearl**
Release date **TBC**

The Beach Boy has a new deal—with Disney—and two new projects, including writing with George and Ira Gershwin!



"This is the most spiritual project I've ever worked on," says Brian Wilson of his 'joint' album with late American songwriters

George and Ira Gershwin. His new deal with Walt Disney Records promises two solo LPs, the first being covers of Gershwin classics, for which the brothers' estate has given Wilson access to unfinished pieces of their music. From these, we're promised, he'll write whole new "collaborative compositions unlike anything the world has seen". Wilson accepted the challenge because of George Gershwin's huge influence on his own career: "The earliest music I remember hearing is 'Rhapsody In Blue'," he said of Gershwin's 1924 orchestral masterpiece. Todd Gershwin, George's great-nephew and a family trustee, has revealed that several dozen song fragments, ranging from "a few bars to some almost-finished songs and everything in between" had been sitting untouched since his death in 1937. Wilson's other work is an album of Disney songs, which he will "Brian-ize" with stacked harmonies and new arrangements.





RADIOHEAD

Title TBC

Label TBC

Release date TBC

*Nevermind the formats! The follow-up to the download-first *In Rainbows* is on the cards – and on vinyl and CD, apparently...*

Since their decision to release 2008's *In Rainbows* initially as a download, there has been much speculation about what form Radiohead's next album might take. Although bassist Colin Greenwood confirmed in May that the band had reconvened in the studio with regular producer Nigel Godrich, he couldn't say whether they would repeat the *In Rainbows* release model, while the online release in August of two new tracks – "Harry Patch (In Memory Of)" and "These Are My Twisted Words" – further suggested a move away from traditional release methods. However, guitarist Ed O'Brien said that, whether the album came out as a download before a physical release or not, it would be available on vinyl and CD: "WE WILL BE MAKING AN ALBUM! We love the artwork; that's really important to us, the physicality. And we like vinyl. That's not going to go away." O'Brien also revealed the band are "going into the studio in winter. It's always miserable! When you're in a studio in the countryside, the music you make is affected by what season it is."

GORILLAZ

Title Plastic Beach **Label** EMI **Release date** Spring 2010

Album No 3 from Damon Albarn's virtual band. Guests are still to be confirmed, but De La Soul are back on tracks apparently called "Electric Shock" and "Sloped Tropics". Here's bassist and band leader "Murdoc" to tell us more...



Murdoc: After the *Demon Days* Apollo shows in New York [April, 2006], we just split. Just walked out the door and off into the night. That was it. I didn't see any of them until...

Well, some of them I've never seen since. It was only me and 2D [vocals] at the Apollo shows, anyhow. How long have we been working on this record? How long is eternity? I started on this...well. Put it this way. The Blur band have reformed, toured and split up again in the time it took me to re-string my bass. But I'm a perfectionist so it takes time to get it right.

This album makes *Demon Days* sound like an intro tape. No-one's made something like this. N-ever. Guests? Yeah, we've got loads but I can't really say who at the moment. Legal

issues. But it's getting crowded in here. Let's see. There's, er... some grizzled old piratey-looking guy. There's two or three genuine icons over there. One giant legend of the soul era. There's someone kinda 'grimy'... a couple of 'golden larynxed chanteuses'... some epic opiumated string section... something exotic slumped in the corner. A bunch of what look like... 'Goths'. They might be my kids, actually. And is that an actor over there? A camel. And er... there's a couple of different obscure orchestras. A few donks. So yeah, it's a recipe I've been working for a while... "How to cook up a storm". It's just

ferocious! This record's like a giant black wind howling a damaged opera straight into your cakehole. Mmmmm.... sexy. Anyhow, mate, I gotta go. My Mongolian throat singers have just turned up... Ozzy?! **CONTINUES OVER**

“This record is like a giant black wind howling a deranged opera straight into your cakehole” MURDOC

"There are a couple of ways to avoid death
one is to be magnificent!" Ian Dury

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SERKIS

NAOMIE
HARRIS

OLIVIA
WILLIAMS

RAY
WINSTONE

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window-rattling, rock and roll blast"

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IN CINEMAS JANUARY 8 2010

Grinderman:
angry old men

GRINDERMAN

Title TBC Label Mute Release date Summer 2010

Nick Cave's foul-mouthed noisesmiths follow 2007's raging *Grinderman* with "psychedelic and psychotic" second



Warren Ellis: Grinderman was deliberately set up to throw it all up in the air, and I think the enjoyment we derived from doing the first album had a direct effect on everything since. The initial approach was the same as for the first one: go into the studio and bang away. But we tried to avoid it sounding like the first one and also that it was in the spirit of Grinderman.

Sonically, it's very catchy, psychedelic and psychotic. Lots of different sounds, no fancy chords, driving rhythms and funky. To my ear, this new recording is a step in a very exciting direction. I think the fact we were looking for the sound of the group for the first album has affected our approach to the second one. We've tried to steer clear of being pigeon-holed and what would be predictable. We did four days in the studio as demos, then trawled through the material and threw out what seemed obvious and concentrated on the least apparent.



Jim Sclavunos: Nick [Cave] likes to keep everyone on their toes. This record is more atmospheric and there are at least a

couple of extended sections with no vocals. It all feels a bit more open-ended; there's a strong improvisatory streak. Though it's certainly not the jazz-fusion-prog-rock record that we will someday make! I can't give you any song titles as yet, but I can tell you what some of the songs touch upon: there's lots of bestial imagery, and the usual tangled, and often perverse interactions between men and women. There's a fair amount of rage, though perhaps not as impotent as on the first album.

We went into the studio with almost nothing. We'd try anything, no matter how embarrassing. An important criteria for picking which improvisations get expanded upon is whether Nick thinks he can sing something over it. He often improvises lyrics, but sometimes the instrumental passages are just as interesting. Sometimes interludes between the more extended pieces hint at something promising...

Nick likes to keep us on our toes – we'd try anything, no matter how embarrassing"
JIM SCLAVUNOS

HOT CHIP

Title One Life Stand
Label Parlophone
Release date February 8

The synthpop kings have hit 30, so a more mature sound beckons – even if the lead-off single is "our version of minimal techno"...



Joe Goddard: It's been finished for quite a long time, and it's been very hard to resist urges to mess around with it. After the last album we wanted to make something more concise and focused, that worked as a piece better. We thought that we'd make a short record, like Prince's *Dirty Mind* – eight tracks, all killers. We've made an effort to use certain acoustic instruments this time. We feature real piano [Joe's "very nice" Steinway] as a very important instrument, and live bass guitar more than we ever have. But none of these rules apply to the whole album, the rules are broken on a lot of songs as well.

This has been a much more crafted, pored-over process than we've ever had on a record. You'll see a difference. We've moved on, it's a more mature record, and sonically richer. Listening to music we've made in the past sometimes makes me feel embarrassed by the choices that we've made. But this record has moved with us as we've aged. I'm proud of it, particularly Alexis [Taylor]'s songwriting. He's not content any more to use three standard chords throughout, and he's really developing as a songwriter. I think people are going to be impressed by that.

ORANGE JUICE

Title '80s reissue programme
Label Domino
Release date TBC

Rip it up and start again! The entire recorded output of Glasgow's mighty post-punkers, with plentiful "odds and sods"



Edwyn Collins: It's the four albums: *You Can't Hide Your Love Forever*, *Rip It Up* [both 1982], *Texas Fever* and *The Orange Juice* [both 1984]. The group collectively own the masters, so they were scattered to the winds a little bit. [Record label] Domino have a very tenacious approach to this, particularly [North American label director] Kris Gillespie, in Brooklyn, who is meticulous. He's been dogged in pursuing these masters. So there's loads of extra things: there's radio sessions, outtakes, b-sides, different versions, there's mucking about stuff, the flexi-disc from *Texas Fever*, produced by Flood.

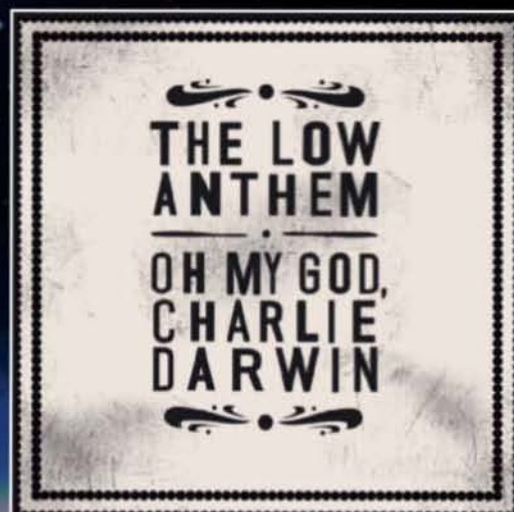
It's going to be full of odds and sods that people haven't heard in donkey's years. How we use the extras is important, there'll maybe be free downloads, all that modern stuff. And we've got millions of old things for artwork. The new network website has been great for that, the members have got hordes of stuff. People have been posting memorabilia, posters, photos and rare stuff. So that's going to be a great resource for rare stuff. And David [McClymont, bass] has suggested we have a two-day art event to celebrate the release, so the mind boggles.

CONTINUES OVER ►

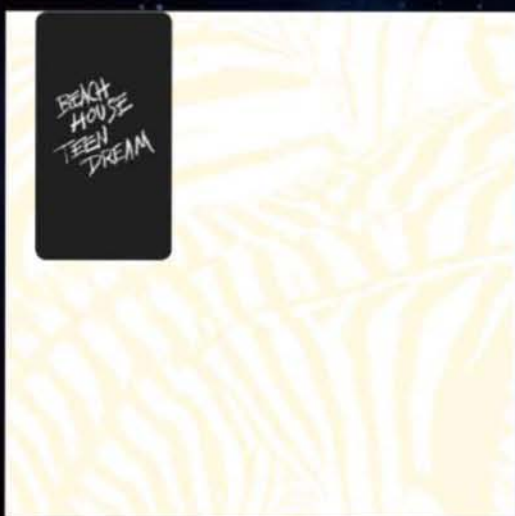
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Babyshambles:
"the path is
totally clear"

BABYSHAMBLES

Title TBC
Label Parlophone
Release date Summer

Punk! Indie! Baggy! Beats! Clearly anything goes for Peter Doherty and co's latest, helmed in the studio by Stephen Street, "hopefully"...



Adam Ficek [Drums]:

The band's in pretty good shape at the moment. Peter's been doing his solo stuff and it's sometimes difficult

to get momentum between those stints, but the path is clear to concentrate totally on Babyshambles. We've got a good body of songs already. The key for us is to write shit-loads of new songs, sit down in the New Year, look at producers and see where we go from there. We don't rehearse that much,

so it's good to actually air some new songs at gigs [recent shows have included new songs "Fireman", "Stranger In My Own Skin" and "BNP Blues"].

Songs are coming from all different angles. There is a punkish element – "Fireman", for instance, is like a late-'70s punk thing – but there are some really heavily-textured songs, too. Those ones hark back to early-'90s indie, even, dare I say it, with some layered guitar stuff on. There's also some beatier things, which are reminiscent of a slightly baggier element. Some of the other songs we have are "Natives At The Gates Of Rome", "Farmer's Son", "Maybelline", "Ocean" and one called "Potting Shed Punk".

As for which make the final cut, that's a good job for the producer. We'll leave that to Stephen Street, hopefully. I personally wouldn't ask anyone else.

TEENAGE FANCLUB

Title Shadows
Label PeMa
Release date March

"Tons of overdubs!" Glasgow's alt. powerpoppers are back, opulently, with their first album since 2005's Man-Made



Norman Blake:

Maybe the title is a reflection of the mood of the record. It is a little darker than usual, but not

massively. It's not a huge departure, but maybe the themes are darker now that we're getting older. So it's more reflective, but there are uplifting moments, too.

We made the last record over in Chicago with John McEntire [Tortoise/The Sea & The Cake], using all his equipment. The idea then was to not do many overdubs, but we've gone completely the other way with this one. There are tons of overdubs on *Shadows*, lots of string parts, guitars, harmonies, everything.

We recorded it at Rockfield Studios [Monmouthshire] and then down in Leaders Farm in Norfolk, with Nick Brine, who engineered the last few Teenage Fanclub albums.

We spent a year-and-a-half doing it, so hopefully it'll be a good one. As for titles, there's one song of Gerry's [Gerard Love] called "Sometimes I Don't Need To Believe In Anything", one of Raymond [McGinlay]'s called "The Fall" and one of mine called "Baby Lee".

ROBERT PLANT AND ALISON KRAUSS

Title TBC
Label Rounder
Release date Late 2010

The follow-up to the multi award-winning – and really rather great – Raising Sand is on its way...

After winning five Grammys for *Raising Sand*, the good news – unless you're hoping for more Led Zeppelin shows – is that Plant and Krauss have been prepping a follow-up for a late 2010 release. Work has reportedly been underway since February 2009



– indeed, *Uncut*'s spies saw Plant recording in Tony Visconti's old Good Earth studios in Soho in September – with T Bone Burnett once again producing. But there's no desire to replicate *Raising Sand*. "That was a moment in time and a beautiful moment, so to try and do that sort of thing again would detract from that," Burnett told *Rolling Stone*. "Hopefully we have at least two more records in us."

CONTINUES OVER ►

CROSBY, STILLS & NASH

Title TBC **Label** Columbia **Release date** Spring 2010

"Everyone's in good voice!" CSN get the Rick Rubin effect on a covers LP, their first studio set in 11 years

Stephen Stills: We've been on tour this year and we sang a bunch of these songs on stage. Those ones sound pretty polished and everybody's in good voice. Rick [Rubin] is like me in that we go into the studio every day for a few hours and if we don't get anything, we live to fight another day. We've done a few things already, but we're taking our time. And Rick is really good about that. This album will take a while. I don't like the phrase 'cover songs'. I like to think I try to Stephen-ise as many of those songs as I can. There are some things you just can't make your own though. It's impossible to do Beatles songs because they're practically perfect. That would be mad.

What have we done so far? Well, we did a nice thing with Jackson Browne's "Lives In The

Balance". And we've done an old James Taylor song, "You Can Close Your Eyes", Tim Hardin's "Reason To Believe" and one of Fred Neil's [CSN have also been playing *The Grateful Dead*'s "Uncle John's Band", *The Allman Brothers*' "Midnight Rider" and Dylan's "Girl From The North

“Other bands are going to read this and steal our ideas! But we got there first!”
STEPHEN STILLS



Country"]. We also do a great version of "Ruby Tuesday". I like it because there's a killer rhythm to it, while Graham sings it. It doesn't have that "Renaissance Fair" flavour to it; it feels more like "(Sittin' On) The Dock Of The Bay". It's acoustic, then the band comes in at the chorus. It's really cool. Other bands are going to read this and steal the idea! But we got there first.

MASSIVE ATTACK

Title *Heligoland*
Label Virgin
Release date February

After a seven-year hiatus, Bristol's finest return with a "stripped-back" work, part-recorded at Damon Albarn's place, and with a raft of guest vocalists

Robert Del Naja, aka 3D: It's been interesting putting together such a diverse bunch of tracks – and vocalists [including Damon Albarn,



Guy Garvey, TVOTR's Tunde Adebimpe, Hope Sandoval and Guy Garvey] – together and get them feeling like they belong to each other. Because some were recorded in London, some in Bristol, some in New York, and over different periods of time. We finished a lot of tracks last year [2008], and toured them, and I really didn't feel that it was an album that was working, so we

started again in November 2008. That brought with it a different sensibility. It's a more stripped back, simplified approach. I wanted it to feel more immediate and graphic, to feel like you could play it track by track and it wouldn't really matter, as it still held together as an album. And also going to Damon's [Albarn's] studio for eight days was great fun, because he's got a totally different take on everything. He's got a different energy level to us. He's like: "I'm going to get involved – but not if it's some Bristol fucking thing that'll set me back 10 years!"

FLEET FOXES

TITLE TBC
RELEASED Autumn
LABEL Bella Union

Seattle's finest folk hymnals prepare "cohesive" follow-up to their Uncut Music Award winner



Robin Pecknold: We've done tons and tons of demos of new songs, but I want to have the songs completely finished before we go into the studio. Much like you'd have a screenplay done before you make a movie. I want to be able to go in and make it in a condensed period of time, so all the songs have a similar sonic character. I want it to have the cohesive quality of an *Astral Weeks* or *Another Side Of Bob Dylan*. You know how that record

feels like it was made in one evening? It'll be a more embellished version of that feeling, I guess. There's one new song I've just been working on, which is like a '50s/'60s folk balladeer [John Jacob Niles song done in a Motown style. That guy was so fucking awesome as far as that old ballad stuff goes. So I'm really happy with the way the music's going and can't wait to get it out there.

One thing I've been thinking about lately, that I might write about for this record, is a feeling that whatever people are branding as the counterculture right now has no real politic thrust or anything. There's no reaction; it has no message. I don't say that as a judgmental thing. It's just there. And that's been bothering me. Will there be any guests? I dunno, but I really like [Vermont trio] Mountain Man. The singing is so awesome and I think it'd be really fun to have them sing on some stuff. And no, we're nowhere near deciding an album title yet. How about *Fleet Foxes 2: The Revenge*?

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT

Title *All Days Are Nights (Songs For Lulu)*
Label Geffen
Release date March

Just piano, voice and his inner "Dark Lady" – Rufus promises "a very minimalist work of high romanticism"

Rufus Wainwright: It's a magical

Rufus Wainwright:
"I'm flogging my
theatrical side"

album, I must say. I don't think it's a hit album, but it's certainly magical and very pure. It's the essence of what I've been doing for years, whether it's my own work, the Judy Garland stuff or the opera. It kind of all flows around in the background without you hearing it. *All Days Are Nights* is a very minimalist work of high romanticism, and is an answer to the opulence of my earlier work and [2007's] *Release The Stars*. And I'm smart; I know that it's never as

THE NATIONAL

Title TBC **Label** Beggars **Banquet** **Release date** May 2010

The band "push things to epic places" on the follow-up to 2007 breakthrough *Boxer*



Aaron Dessner:

We've been working on The National record since last winter, and non-stop since April, when we haven't had shows to do. We built a recording studio in our garage. It's quite a shock, because it all looks terrible from the outside, but very modern on the inside. As a band, we're constantly making things, then destroying them and redoing them. Normally that's difficult to do in a studio you're paying for. But now we can do that ad nauseam, without worrying about getting penalised.

We've recorded 17 songs and will end up whittling them down from there. The new album is much more ambitious than anything we've ever done. We've never pushed things to an epic place before, because it's never felt quite right. But there are a few songs on this record that do that: songs with bigger

dynamics that lend themselves more to the way we play live.

There's more experimentation, too. We're getting away from simple, organic sounds. Matt [Berninger]'s also singing on this one, rather than murmuring. His range has improved, exploring ways in which his voice

"This is much more ambitious than anything we've ever done before"
AARON DESSNER

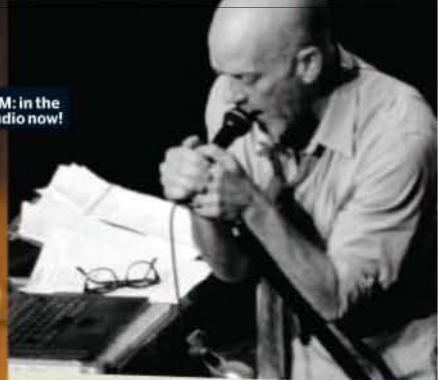


can work, but also he's found some melodies that are just amazing. He's really singing it out and going to places on this one. *Boxer* [which charted in the US] was more meditative, but this one goes to different levels. It's definitely more dynamic.

One of the new songs is called "Crumhorn", which I took from a Bob Dylan lyric, but Matt will probably change the title at some point. There are also ones called "Blood Buzz", "Vanderlylle" and "Runaway". We have some ideas for album titles, but haven't decided yet.



REM: in the studio now!



► INCOMING!

Other albums due for your delectation in 2010

REM have been recording in Portland, Oregon and New Orleans with Jackknife Lee producing a new album due at the back end of 2010... The long-awaited remastering of **THE ROLLING STONES'** 1972 masterpiece *Exile On Main Street* will be released on April 12, including three previously unreleased songs from the *Exile* sessions: "Following The River", "Plunder My Soul" and "Sophia Loren"... It's been 10 years since the last **THE** album, but Matt Johnson has recorded the soundtrack for a film, *Tony*, directed by his brother, Gerard...

JOSH T PEARSON is due to release his first new album since Lift To Experience's *The Texas-Jerusalem Crossroads* in spring/summer... **CAT POWER** is working on a follow-up to *The Greatest*, song titles reportedly including "Leopard", "Mountaintops", "Funny Things" and "Silent Machine"... **AMY WINEHOUSE** has been writing and recording with *Back To Black's* Salaam Remi in St Lucia, with a view to a new album in 2010... **THE AVALANCHES** are "clearing samples" for their follow-up to 2000's *Since I Left You*... **THE HOLD STEADY** have been playing four new songs live - working titles "Heaven In Whewener", "Going On A Hike", "Separate Vacations" and "Our Whole Lives" - fuelling rumours we might get a follow-up to *Stay Positive* this year, assuming Craig Finn's screenplay for Chuck Klosterman's rock'n'roll memoir *Fargo Rock City* doesn't get in the way... **THE ARCADE FIRE** spent late 2009 in a New York studio recording string parts for a new album, according to multi-instrumentalist Richard Reed Parry... **JOANNA NEWSOM** has been spotted in Tokyo, where Ys collaborator Jim O'Rourke lives, and, according to US fashion magazine *W*, is close to finishing a new album... Also expect new releases from **THE STROKES**, **SPIRITUALIZED**, **THE DEAD WEATHER**, **KINGS OF LEON**...

good as when it's just you and a piano. Me being a massive opera fan, I know that no opera is as great as Schubert Lieder [the songs Schubert wrote for just one voice and piano]. But technically it's far more difficult, having that magnifying glass on you and your technique.

The title comes from Shakespeare's Sonnets, No 43, I think. Then the *Songs For Lulu* bit is a reference to Pandora's Box, the Louise Brooks film. So it all relates to this Dark Lady theme and a kind of duality. Songs include "Who Are You, New York", "Martha" and "Give What Me What I Want". There are some sonnets on there too, then there's a piece from the opera, "Les Feux D'Artifice T'Appelle", the last aria from my opera [2009's *Prima Donna*], which will be at Sadler's Wells in April. So I'm flogging my theatrical side.

THE CURE

Title *Disintegration*
Label Universal/Rhino
Release date February

Full-works reissue treatment for that brilliant '89 album - plus lots of other releases, and second set of *Mixed Up*, maybe...

By way of celebrating the 21st anniversary of their last truly great album, Robert Smith has revealed plans for an ambitious three-disc set of *Disintegration*-era material. Alongside a remastered version of the album, a full CD will include 20 rarities ranging from home demos to rehearsals, rough mixes and unreleased tracks, while a third disc will feature *Entreat*, a live 1989 recording of *Disintegration*, originally available only as a limited edition. Smith, meanwhile, also promises "a lot more remastered Cure stuff in 2010", including *The Cure At The BBC* boxset, two concert

films new on DVD, 1986's *In Orange* and 1993's *Show*, as well as *Mixed Up* 2, a follow-up to the 1990 remix LP.

GLASVEGAS

Title TBC
Label Sony/Columbia
Release date TBC

Success hasn't changed them - the Scots Phil Spector are set to offer up more "over-sensitive" material



James Allan: When I've written a song, I don't take for granted I'll make another. But I've been surprised how quickly I've

written this time, quicker than the first. When I wrote the first album, I was a little bit more naïve to it all. I look back, and remember writing a certain song that changed my life. I used to worry about how I was going to get my dinner at night. But the things that used to be worlds away aren't so far away any more. Alan McGee called the other day and said it was very urgent. He said, "I've heard the next album is about cars and women. Please, please, please don't tell me it's true." I had to calm him down, and reassure him the Beach Boys had already done that better than I ever can. And my sister

was on at me the other day to return Noel Gallagher's text message - and Oasis are the reason I formed a band!

But the place where songs come from hasn't changed. I think to be honest I'm just an over-sensitive big girl's blouse. I'm just a big pussy. I've got the same tiny mind I've always had.

LEONARD COHEN

Title TBC
Label Sony
Release date TBC

He's been playing new material live - an album is on its way!

Since Leonard Cohen went back out on the road after a 15-year hiatus in May, 2008, there has been talk of a new album, Cohen's first since *Dear Heather*, released in 2004. Indeed, Cohen's musical director Roscoe Beck admitted to *Uncut* in 2008 that Cohen had written new songs, and plans were afoot to record them, after the tour had finished. Certainly, as Cohen's tour wound into late 2009, he began playing four new songs live, which appear to have been given titles "Lullaby", "Amen", "The Darkness" and "Feels So Good".

Interviews: Rob Hughes and Nick Hasted.
Additional reporting: Michael Bonner



Leonard Cohen: post-tour recording

Cry Freedom!

As JIMI HENDRIX entered the last year of his life, he was fighting hard to take complete control of his career. He set up a musical commune in Woodstock, jammed with jazz musicians, consorted with Black Panthers, and tried to turn his musical notes into colours. A whole new world was opening up – if only his own manager would let him fully explore it. Forty years on, *Uncut* talks to Hendrix's fellow travellers and pieces together the untold story of his final, thwarted and most significant creative journey. ♦♦

WORDS *by* JOHN ROBINSON | PHOTOGRAPH *by* ED THRASHER



It's shortly after midnight on a Friday, when the curtain opens on the auditorium of the Tinker Street cinema in Woodstock, upstate New York. This, however, is not the evening's movie presentation, but a gig put on by a local collective, the Aboriginal Music Society. It's a performance by an eight-piece band: an upright bass, percussion, a full horn section. Tonight, as an added attraction, they feature a guest musician.

What they're playing is music in march time, but in a jazz idiom that's anything but formal. There's a thrilling chorus of horns, and then, as if he's been biding his time, the ninth member of the group finally makes his presence known, soloing as the music rises ecstatically behind him. On guitar, that ninth member of the band reveals himself to be Jimi Hendrix. He's new to the area.

EARLY SUMMER, 1969, and for the past few weeks, Hendrix has been renting a house nearby, with the aim of pursuing new musical ideas. Since the spring he's been talking not about The Jimi Hendrix Experience, with whom he's enjoyed an 18-month rise to fame, but instead about a looser collective, a "Sky Church", a commune-cum-band that will have a shifting membership – that will even play for free. Years later, Carlos Santana will describe Hendrix's group as one that wanted to "tell stories of celestial time". In 1969, Hendrix calls it "a family thing". Whatever, it sounds incredible.

"He wanted to come out with a different sound – he didn't want to come out with the same thing that he was playing with The Jimi Hendrix Experience," says Juma Sultan, who played in the band that night. "And this is why he incorporated so many other elements. He wanted to do different things with horns and keyboards. He was hearing orchestral sounds."

"He had thoughts about Sky Church, Electric Church – and various things of that nature," says Billy Cox, who played bass with Hendrix for much of 1969 and 1970. "The concept was excellent, and it was viable – it would have worked, but he never had a chance to get it off the ground. Because the management didn't have a vision – and if your management doesn't have a vision, there's only so far you can go."

In the 12 months of his life that remained to him, what Jimi Hendrix aspired to in his creative life, his personal time, and in his music wasn't just simple, it was fundamental: freedom. Strangely enough, in this time of self-determination, civil rights, and militant organisations, it was something one of the most widely known African-American stars in the world felt himself to enjoy precious little of. Under pressure from his manager, Michael Jeffery, and from public expectation, what Hendrix faced instead was a kind of enslavement.

"We didn't have that freedom to have fun with it," says Cox, today. "And all musicians need freedom."



The Experience in LA, 1969: (l-r) Mitch Mitchell, Hendrix and Noel Redding

"There were a lot of drugs. But we were looking for a spiritual godhead, and we searched everything"
Juma Sultan

IRONICALLY, OF THE three musicians in The Jimi Hendrix Experience, it was the one thought to be most sensible who split the group. On June 29, 1969, after a gig in Denver, bassist Noel Redding walked offstage, returned to his hotel, and the next day flew back to England, signifying the end of the Experience. Over the past year, Redding had complained of the random elements making their way onto Experience recordings. With more such randomness in the wind, Redding decided that he'd had enough.

"I think Noel jumped before he was pushed, if you know what I mean," says Jim Leverton, who played bass in Redding's band, Fat Mattress. "Jimi was starting to work with black

musicians, and Noel said he was fed up with being a sideman. I think someone said to him: 'You're always going to be a sideman with Jimi Hendrix.'"

Though he was the first to act on it, Redding had not been the only one to feel constrained by his role in the Experience. In a little over 18 months, the band had gone from playing UK pubs and clubs in front of astonished scenesters, to playing 21,000 seat arenas in the United States. The showmanship of the early dates now becoming a chore, the band sought a new format for their show, before becoming imprisoned entirely by "Foxy Lady".

"They all felt slightly restricted in what they were doing," says Leverton. "So the idea was that each one of them was going to do their own thing during the show: Noel was going to go on with Fat Mattress,

Jimi was going to go on with [drummer] Buddy Miles and [bassist] Billy Cox, and Mitchell was meant to get some jazz thing going. Then at the end of the evening, they would play as The Jimi Hendrix Experience. The idea was that they'd each have their own ensemble, to satisfy their own musical needs."

With Redding being the only one to get something together in time, the plan for the 1969 spring tour didn't entirely work. But at the start of the summer Hendrix began to labour more earnestly on his own plans for music outside the Experience. On a trip to Woodstock to stay at the home of his manager Michael Jeffery, Hendrix renewed his acquaintance with avant-garde jazz musician Juma Sultan, who he had known in Harlem prior to his departure for England in 1966.

For \$3,000, Hendrix was about to take over the lease of an eight-bedroomed Georgian-style house on Traver Hollow Road in nearby Boiceville, near the Shokan Reservoir. He was looking for musicians to jam with him there, with a view to radically overhauling and expanding his sound for his performance at the Woodstock festival in mid August, and beyond, and asked Sultan's help to find them. What developed in the "Shokan House" in the months either side of the Woodstock festival was a scene where a shifting roster of musicians attempted to reach a higher consciousness.

With Gerry Velez at Woodstock, 1969



free players from New York, blues guitarists, and singer-songwriters (one Hendrix tape was wiped in favour of whimsical folk compositions by one "Dorothy"), a steadier, more viable lineup was being put in place: Hendrix on lead guitar, with support from Hendrix's army buddy Billy Cox on bass, Velez and Sultan on percussion, and, as the Woodstock festival approached, Mitch Mitchell, on drums. The Hendrix band even found room for a rhythm guitarist, another Army buddy, Larry Lee.

"The only one that was a little disgruntled during that period was Mitch," says Sultan. "He didn't really care for the full spectrum of what Jimi wanted to do, and he felt that the percussionists like myself and Gerry Velez were getting in his way, taking up his space."

Sessions took place in different venues in the house. Upstairs, Hendrix had two master bedrooms linked by a parlour area, which served as a home for low-key, acoustic improvisations. Downstairs, meanwhile, there was a "loud room", kitted out for Hendrix explorations at a more traditional volume.

"A lot of material was created there," says Sultan. "Some of it was Experience music. Some was music that he played back on the 'Chitlin' Circuit', as they call it. Some of it was totally innovative – it wouldn't just be a total Jimi Hendrix composition. It would be up to him to lead with the melodies, but there was a lot of innovation and creation."

"We just jammed, went out to lunch," says Michael Ephron, a keyboard player on the avant-jazz scene in New York. "I was playing an instrument then new on the scene, which was a Clavinet. Jimi did a lot of stuff with feedback when we were playing, a lot of stuff that I had never heard him do"

CONTINUES OVER ►

Move Over, Rover

...and let Juma take over. The various Hendrix band lineups, and where you can hear them

"We discussed Jimi's concepts of music coming from the spheres," says Sultan, "and trying to create it on this planet. There were a plethora of conversations. There were a lot of drugs – but we were looking for a spiritual godhead, and we searched everything. And this is where a lot of the drugs came through."

"People would come from all over the world and bring Jimi packages," says Gerardo Velez, who played congas with Jimi at Woodstock. "It would be on the table. Jimi was not a junkie, a heroin addict. He snorted his drugs, dropped a pill, smoked a little pot. That was it."

"There was some heroin use, and amphetamines," says Juma Sultan. "They want to paint him squeaky clean – but none of us was squeaky clean at that time. Jimi and I and Gerardo Velez were on the precipice of drug usage."

Amid the philosophical discourse and psychic fallout, music – nearly constantly – was being made. But while the evolving lineup at the house included a fluid local collective,



THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE

1966-June 1969

Jimi Hendrix: Guitar, vocals
Noel Redding: Bass
Mitch Mitchell: Drums

Hear on: *Are You Experienced* (1967); *Axis: Bold As Love* (1967); *Electric Ladyland* (1968)



GYPSY SUN AND RAINBOWS (sometimes, "Gypsies, Suns And Rainbows")

June-September 1969

Jimi Hendrix: Guitar, vocals

Larry Lee: Guitar
Billy Cox: Bass
Mitch Mitchell: Drums
Juma Sultan: Percussion
Gerardo Velez: Percussion

Hear on: *Live At Woodstock* (released 1999); bootlegs like *Shokan Sunrise*; *Drinking Wine, Sipping Time*



BAND OF GYPSYS

November 1969-January 1970

Jimi Hendrix: Guitar, vocals
Billy Cox: Bass
Buddy Miles: Drums; vocals

Hear on: *Band Of Gypsys* (1970); *Live At The Fillmore East* (released 1999)

THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE

February 4, 1970

Jimi Hendrix
Noel Redding
Mitch Mitchell

Hear on: More "read on", really. The original band is convened for one day, for a *Rolling Stone* interview – but then Hendrix decides he wants Billy Cox in the band again.

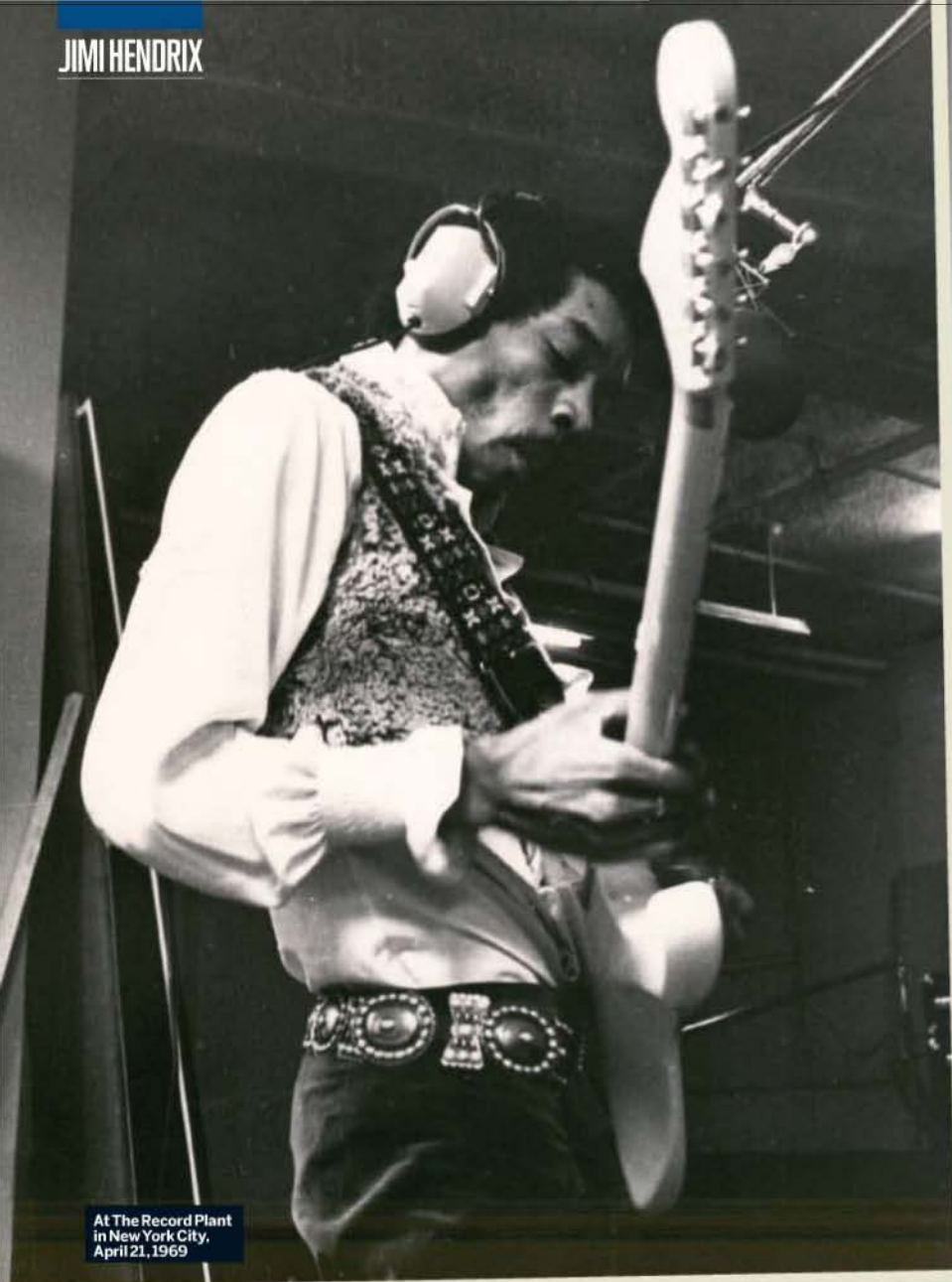


THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE (THE "CRY OF LOVE" BAND)

February 1970-September 1970

Jimi Hendrix: Guitar, vocals
Billy Cox: Bass

Mitch Mitchell: Drums
Hear on: *The Cry Of Love* (1971); *First Rays Of The New Rising Sun* (released 1997)



At The Record Plant in New York City, April 21, 1969

live—just amazing stuff. We took it out there. We were trying to break away from structure.”

However, while on the surface all in the house was peaceful and creative—the band would enjoy meals prepared by housekeeper Claire Moerice, jam on the deck at the back of the house, ride horses, even go for car rides with Hendrix, a legendarily terrible driver—there remained an undercurrent of unease. For Hendrix’s management, the rather lukewarm showing by this expanded band—now named Gypsy Sun And Rainbows—at their Woodstock gig justified heavy-handed attempts to shepherd Hendrix back towards his traditional trio format.

“The atmosphere in that house wasn’t kosher,” says Ephron. “His managers were more like... goons. They didn’t view that kind of music as commercial. Jimi didn’t want to play that other stuff any more, burn his guitar, and all that, and they were trying to elbow him into doing it. They were quite heavy duty guys.”

The negative atmosphere was one thing. When the band were booked onto Dick Cavett’s TV show shortly after Woodstock, Sultan arrived at the studio to find none of his equipment had been delivered by Hendrix’s roadies. “There was a total conflict with the management in reference to that,” says Sultan. “Cos they had the million dollar baby, which was Jimi, Noel and Mitch, and they didn’t want to see or hear anything other than that.”

Undeterred, Sultan borrowed an instrument, and played the Cavett show anyway. Hendrix, however, saw the writing was on the wall for the band. What he needed was moral support. Someone who understood exactly where he was coming from—and more importantly, where he needed to go next.

ALAN DOUGLAS is a controversial figure in the story of Jimi Hendrix. The producer of several posthumous Hendrix albums (among them 1975’s

“A bad eminence. A scary gentleman...”

Jimi’s sometime manager has a dreadful rep. So who was Mike Jeffery?

HE WAS LIKE the grey cloud that hung over everybody,” says Jimi’s friend Deering Howe. “He was a bad eminence. Michael was a scary gentleman.”

A constant presence in a leather jacket, and behind mirrored sunglasses, Michael Jeffery was the definition of sharp, slightly sinister 1960s music business practice. A nightclub impresario from Newcastle, who occasionally alluded to a high-level military past, he employed Eric Burdon, later his aggrieved client, to design an interior for his establishment, the Club A-Go-Go.

“In Newcastle, he was a big fish in a small pond,” says Burdon. “Long before The Animals were ever formed, he told me that he was active against FLOSI terrorists, and that he saw action on that level in Egypt. But nobody believed that.”

A graduate of London University, and able to speak French and Russian, Jeffery cultivated mystery: about his past, certainly, and also about where his clients’ money was going.

However the numerous conspiracy theories that surround Jeffery (including suggestions that he murdered Hendrix, faked his own death and escaped to a life on his clients’ money) are starting to wear a little thin. (As Deering Howe says: “It’s total bullshit!”) And while no-one remembers Jeffery with great fondness, there are those prepared not to see him as all bad. Some point to his foresight in having Hendrix concerts filmed—an unusual practice in the 1960s. Others see his controlling ways as simply short-sightedness in a music business that was in transition.

“Jeffery was not a bad guy,” says producer Alan Douglas. “But he misunderstood where the value was in Jimi. He kept him on the road—all Jimi wanted to do was stay in the studio.”

Jeffery was killed in a plane crash on March 5, 1973 when the Iberia Airline DC-9 on which he was traveling was involved in a mid-air collision over Nantes, during a strike by French air traffic controllers.



Crash Landing), harsh judgment has been meted out on him since, as the man who decided to overdub performances by session musicians on to fragmentary Hendrix studio recordings, in order to achieve a finished product.

In 1969, however, he was an integral, (if not much less controversial) part of Hendrix's evolving world. Douglas's wife Stella and her friend Colette Mimram ran a boutique on the Lower East Side that specialised in making leather stage apparel, and the affinity between the people who socialised around this nameless boutique was a cradle for the guitarist's evolving thoughts and ambitions.

"There was a big social scene there," Douglas remembers. "One day I came home, and Jimi Hendrix was sitting at the table, eating – and that's how we met.

"Everyone would hang out at the store, every Saturday afternoon, we'd meet there," he continues. "The leather jacket Jimi wore at Woodstock came from there. Miles Davis was having his clothes made there. Then Saturday night we would go to each others' house for dinner together: Miles and Jimi would get together and talk about music."

As a producer working in jazz, and with a feeling for street music (he discovered proto hip hop, spoken word artists The Last Poets, for whom Hendrix recorded a radio commercial) Douglas was part of a music world that Hendrix respected.

"Jimi had big respect for jazz artists, but he didn't like the classic jazz format," says Douglas. "He always satirised it by saying, 'I don't feel like playing 32 bars of "How High The Moon"...' He had big respect for Roland Kirk and those avant-garde kind of guys because they were taking it *out* somewhere."

Jazz, in its turn, respected Hendrix. In the early summer, Douglas had put together a session that featured Hendrix alongside guitarist John McLaughlin and bassist Dave Holland. A plan, initiated by Miles Davis, was also in place for Davis and Hendrix to record together.

"For Jimi, Miles was the ultimate musician," says Douglas. "He could read and write music, he understood classical and street music. Miles was like an uncle to Jimi, trying to guide him into some areas he didn't understand."

Eventually, a deal was brokered across record company lines. Though Hendrix recorded for Warners, Miles for Columbia and Tony Williams (who was to play drums) for

Billy Cox, Hendrix and Larry Lee, the 'Shokan House', 1969



PolyGram, a deal was put together where a session could be released, as long as it came out on Warners. When the day of the session came, Douglas was in his office when he received a call from Jack Whittemore, Davis' booking agent.

"He said, 'I hate to tell you this, Alan, but Miles wants \$50,000 before he goes into the

"Jimi's managers were more like... goons. They were heavy duty guys"

Michael Ephron

studio.' I called Miles' house, and I say, 'Miles, what is this?' And he said, 'Come on, you can do this...', and I said, 'No I can't.' Jimi heard the conversation, and just said 'Let's go eat...' Like, 'that's life.' Just as we're going out the door, Tony Williams calls and says, 'Hey! I hear you're giving Miles \$50,000...'"

ALTHOUGH THE POTENTIAL for collaborations was exciting, Hendrix still continued to work on his own songs. Always keen on bringing the jam session to the recording studio, the fact remained that Hendrix was moving further and further from the discipline that had yielded great results with his early producer, Chas Chandler.

Since the release of *Electric Ladyland* in 1968,

there had been no new Hendrix album – though he had worked constantly in the studio with drummer Buddy Miles and bassist Billy Cox. Sometimes it was simply recreational. But often the trio were recording and re-recording material that simply never got finished. Work had been started on Hendrix's bespoke studio, Electric Lady, but this would take much of the next 12 months to complete.

In a move guaranteed to madden Michael Jeffery, Hendrix asked Douglas for help in bringing some kind of order to his professional life. "After those first three records, he kind of blew out his concept of what pop music and rock music was," says Douglas. "Those three albums exhausted his library of songs.

"Songwriting came naturally to him, but his biggest problem was that he couldn't read or write music. That was the reason he was in the studio so much – every time he had an idea, he had to record it.

"I was in bed one night and someone shook me awake, and it was Jimi. I said, 'What's the matter?' He said, 'Come to the studio with me.'"

What followed was three months of recording sessions, in which Douglas observed Hendrix's tireless methods: a mixture of finding a groove, laying it down, improvisation, and attempting to work the accumulated material into the basic track for a song. It was an exhausting and expensive way of working, in total opposition to Michael Jeffery's business model for Hendrix.

The way to make money, in Jeffery's view, was on the road – in the studio, money was only spent. That Douglas was apparently only helping Hendrix to spend still more money in the studio only made Jeffery fume more about their relationship. On one occasion, Warners received a bill for \$36,000, and

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Power Of Soul brothers:
Band Of Gypsies, 1969 –
Buddy Miles, Jimi, Billy Cox

asked, reasonably enough, when they could expect delivery of an album in return. The company was informed that the bill was for one song, "Room Full Of Mirrors" – and it was still incomplete. It was a seemingly insurmountable task.

"The politics round Jimi were *toxic*," says Douglas. "I hadn't signed a contract to produce him. It got all too messy. I said, 'Let's quit it.'"

The months in the studio had not, it was true, yielded finished work. What had been established amid the confusion, however, was the groundwork for a band of surprising clarity. When Buddy Miles and Billy Cox next joined with Hendrix, it would be to create his last totally persuasive unit: the Band Of Gypsies.

AN ALBUM EDITED together from four live performances at New York's Fillmore East – two on December 31, 1969; two from New Year's day, 1970 – *Band Of Gypsies* broke step with the majority of Hendrix's psychedelic canon, and instead

"'Foxy Lady' was embryonic in comparison to 'Machine Gun' ..."

Billy Cox

picked up where the live songs from *Electric Ladyland* had left off.

Today – particularly on its 12-minute centerpiece "Machine Gun" – it conveys all you could want from an artist engaging with horrifying times. Rather than the cosmic child, this is a Hendrix with a Dylanesque eye for commentary, as well as for devastating, polemical, guitar playing.

As empowering as it might seem, as rooted in R'n'B, funk and the chaos of the revolutionary jazz he had lately been exposed to, however, *Band Of Gypsies* had its roots in a far more negative commonplace of black musical experience: a hastily signed contract. Having earlier in his career agreed to record for Ed Chalpin's PPX organisation, in late 1969, Hendrix was not only struggling to complete his own studio work, but facing the possibility that should any such work ever be completed, it would have to be delivered to Capitol records, as his settlement to PPX.

"We said, 'Well, you gotta give 'em something,'" says Billy Cox, who had spent the previous months in and out of Jimi's bands. "The next thing you know, Jimi, Buddy and myself, are doing the Band Of Gypsies. It was friends, rallying around another friend to help bail him out."

At the shows, the Hendrix band played compositions ranging from favourites like "Foxy Lady" to newer efforts like "Message To Love". What made up the album was for the most part music of a kind the three had played and listened to since the early 1960s: heavy R'n'B.

"We played some of the old things that Jimi had done," says Cox, "and we added a few things just to do that gig. We had all come up under the R'n'B genre of music, and it was a type of music we all enjoyed playing. So when we did that concert, it was like a bunch of friends getting together and going out and having some fun."

In hindsight, for Hendrix to come out with an African-American trio, playing at least one heavily political song seems like an overt statement of intent. The Gypsies themselves, however, never spoke on the subject.

"He was growing," says Cox. "You look at 'Foxy Lady' or 'Purple Haze', they were embryonic songs in comparison to 'Machine Gun' and 'Message To Love'. There was a spurt of growth. We looked out the first few rows, and people were enjoying it. They were having a ball, and we were, too."

WHILE THE BAND was held together, seemingly, by no manifesto more complex than the willingness to help a friend in need, to Michael Jeffery, the Gypsies were pointedly much more sinister. He loathed the opinionated Buddy Miles. And even if the band were not as large in number or as musically wayward as Gypsy Sun And Rainbows, they were still a diversion from the main Experience event. As a musician, Hendrix was in an invidious position. As an African-American, his position was no less awkward.

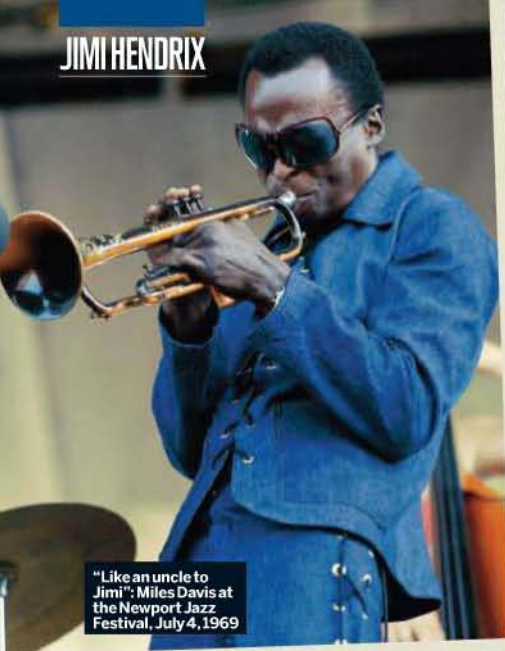
"Hendrix was getting requests from people like the Black Panther Party to play for them," says Juma Sultan. "Which the management absolutely refused to let him do, but which he wanted to do. He wanted control of his own life – the freedom to support African American causes being just one part of that."

"We were doing a gig somewhere down South," says Jim Leverton of an engagement earlier in 1969. "Jimi had his own caravan backstage. I remember someone

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The Isle Of Wight
Festival, August
30, 1970





"Like an uncle to Jimi": Miles Davis at the Newport Jazz Festival, July 4, 1969

Jazz Odyssey!

Hope you like his new direction. Jimi's jazzier fellow travellers...

DAVE HOLLAND

Young, British double-bassist – recruited by Miles Davis after the latter saw Holland play at Ronnie Scott's. Plays with Miles at the Isle Of Wight, 1970, and jams with Jimi in 1969. As does...

JOHN McLAUGHLIN

British, virtuoso guitarist. Later forms musical/spiritual alliance with another Hendrix acolyte, Carlos Santana. Hendrix offers advice on McLaughlin's first solo LP.

LARRY YOUNG

Keyboard player. Sessions featuring Young yield the enjoyable groove "Young-Hendrix", heard on 1980 release *Nine To The Universe*.

SAM RIVERS

A significant New York free jazz player. Jammed with Hendrix and Mike Ephron at Ephron's NYC loft. The tapes are missing in action, sadly.

LARRY CORYELL

Another high-technique guitarist. Jammed with Hendrix on several occasions. "Hendrix just went *ba-wo-ooooow*", recalled Robert Wyatt, "erasing everything with one note."

ROLAND KIRK

Blind multi-instrumentalist jazzier, and player of simultaneous saxophones. A Woodstock regular, and another jam-partner of Jimi's.

MILES DAVIS

The predominant jazz musician of the 20th century, and pal of Hendrix. His own *Bitches Brew* (1970) is strongly informed by his association with Jimi.

GIL EVANS

Arranger par excellence – was working, at the time of Hendrix's death, on a project for Hendrix. Later releases his own *Plays The Music Of Jimi Hendrix*, 1975.

said, 'No-one can go in there for a while. He's talking to some people.' And some pretty heavy-looking black guys came out. I think they were putting pressure on for money for their organisation. I'm not sure I fully appreciated the seriousness of the situation. I was told to stay out of the way, so I did."

"It got pretty scary," says Deering Howe, an American businessman, and close friend of Hendrix. "Being a black man in 1969, he didn't want to let them down, but didn't want to be controlled by them, either. Jimi was always, 'Hey brother, how are you?' But there was a lot of pressure being exerted on him to be black. It was a very difficult situation."

As difficult as it was, the musical component of the issue was not a problem for long. Although it is traditional for bizarre theories to be associated with Michael Jeffery and his managerial methods, there is a persuasive chorus of opinion that claims Hendrix's manager caused his artist to be "spiked", ensuring a disastrous performance at a high-profile Band Of Gypsies engagement at Madison Square Garden. Even today, Billy Cox is reluctant to revisit the events of the show.

"There's some things that happened that

I don't even want to discuss," he says. "You know what you heard. It was a terrible fiasco. But that was a way certain people have of controlling their artists."

After a furious argument with Jeffery, drummer Buddy Miles was fired. With that, Band Of Gypsies was no more.

"If Jimi had stayed around another year he'd have been the Miles Davis of his generation"

Alan Douglas

AUGUST, 1970. IN THE UK, Hendrix fans deprived of new material for 18 months, have spent the eight weeks since its June release digesting the contents of a new album, *Band Of Gypsies* – in preparation for Hendrix's arrival to play the Isle Of Wight Festival. In the United States, work is finally being completed on Electric Lady studios, where Hendrix has been enjoying a new creative rejuvenation, working with renewed vigor on material that he has developed over the past year.

Meanwhile, on the side of a volcano crater in Maui, Hawaii, a small crowd of 800 people await the arrival of The Jimi Hendrix Experience, who have been on the island for a week, decompressing after what will prove to be their last American tour. Under warm sun, by lapping water, an "om" is begun. Above, there are clear blue skies. It as if the events of the past 12 months have all been a bad dream.

This is the scene for the filming of what will become *Rainbow Bridge*, of all the eccentric projects that Hendrix has been involved with, by far the most eccentric. Filmed by Warhol acolyte Chuck Wein, it is an ambitious countercultural statement. With Hawaii as his notional ark, Wein has gathered together

representatives of seemingly every kind of alternative person: vegetarian, eco-warrior, surfer, yoga teacher, homosexual, musician, even – purportedly – a woman from Venus. On the island they will meet and, on film, argue for the merits of their respective lifestyle.

In its finished state, this Michael Jeffery-produced film will be, it's fair to say, nearly unwatchable. *Rainbow Bridge* does, however, bear witness to the "new" Jimi Hendrix Experience (historically known as the "Cry Of Love Band") that has been playing live and recording with Hendrix over the past six months: on bass Billy Cox, and on drums – a peaceably brokered compromise between Hendrix and his manager's vision of his music – Mitch Mitchell.

"It was called a colour sound vibratory experiment," explains Melinda Merryweather, a friend of Jimi's who acted in and worked on art direction for *Rainbow Bridge*.

"Jimi was taught how to turn his musical notes into colours," she continues. "He wanted to do two bars of green, two bars of purple, two bars of yellow. At the concert, we made people sit in separate signs – if you came with a Cancer and were a Scorpio, you had to sit in different places."

For Hendrix, the Maui excursion proved to be a rare respite in his schedule, into which Jeffery now shoehorned still more work. In New York, he had been recording constantly, evolving plans for a new album, possibly to be called *People, Hell And Angels*, but which might equally turn out to be one

called *Straight Ahead* or *First Rays Of The New Rising Sun*.

In between times, there were more gigs, though Hendrix now only worked long weekends on shows; the weeks, he predominantly had free to record. Now, on Maui, Hendrix was set to appear in the movie – which he did, to subtly comic effect – and also to play three shows.

"If you look at that concert, Jimi never seemed so present as he did there," says Melinda. "He never looked better in his life."

Hendrix also worked on new material. He wrote a song for Merryweather, called "Scorpio Woman", and sent her the tape. What it showed, in utterly embryonic form, was that though he was now touring and recording on a slightly more disciplined basis, the guitarist's interest remained in chasing down new forms: "Scorpio Woman" is a jam, but it's an ambitious one, with elements of Bach, Beethoven, and flamenco, Hendrix's flow only interrupted by the telephone ringing.

"If you open yourself to the universe and allow the music to come through you, you play like Jimi," says Merryweather. "He was searching for something that

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Ezy Ryder:
publicity shot,
April 1969



Jimi arrives at his final concert in Fehmarn, Germany, September 9, 1970

was a little more... I don't want to say spiritual by any means... but he was going for a whole other avenue." "Scorpio Woman" isn't a masterwork. But it seems to capture Hendrix at a moment of calm: free from political intrigue, from obligation, still chasing down experimentation and freedom in his music. As absurd as was the pretext for him to have been there, for Hendrix, Maui seems to have been a time of contentment.

A great deal would happen in the six weeks that followed it. There would be a performance at the Isle Of Wight festival, where the Experience, exhausted, and untested for three weeks, put in an unspectacular show. There would be an engagement to play in Germany on the Isle of Fehmarn, where Hendrix met Jimi LeVerton, and discussed how he thought it might be a good idea for Noel Redding to rejoin the band. Hendrix would return to England, and be noted by journalists as looking "unhealthy" (*NME*), "depressed" (*Record Mirror*), but equally looking "to settle down" with the right girl (*Disc & Music Echo*). Ultimately, he would retire to bed in basement rooms at London's Samarkand Hotel at some time on September 18, 1970 and not wake up again.

While he waited to leave Hawaii, however, Hendrix repeated an invitation he had made earlier in his stay: for Merryweather to come to New York and decorate Electric Lady studios for him. She said she would see him there later in the year.

"We didn't have freedom to have fun with it. And all musicians need freedom"

Billy Cox

What Hendrix said to her in reply was eerie, but unequivocal.

"I won't be here," he said.

SOME FRIENDS CHOSE to stay away, but on October 1, 1970, in Seattle, Alan Douglas attended Jimi Hendrix's funeral. Not only that, he attended it with someone that it's hard not to see as the villain of this piece.

"I went to the funeral with Michael Jeffery, in his limo," says Douglas. "And he had changed a lot, and felt sorry for the way he acted. He understood he could have dealt with Jimi in a completely different way and it would have been just as lucrative for him."

In the years since Hendrix's death, conspiracy theories have flocked to Michael Jeffery. Most notably this one: that the

manager (who himself died young, in a 1973 air crash) had Hendrix murdered when his artist came to the end of his contract. Really, though, there is no need to fantasise about a murky end to Hendrix's life. His final struggle, fought between commerce and creativity, was grim enough. The knife is twisted by a horrible irony – things may have been about to change.

"Jimi never had a chance," says Douglas, today. "He was used too much by people who saw him as a money machine. But that started to change when they realised that he wasn't a temporary situation. If Jimi had stayed around another year he would have been the Miles Davis of his generation. Mike finally came to that conclusion – but too late."

Though it yielded less important recorded work than the previous three, the last year of Hendrix's life may have been his most artistically significant: for all its inconclusiveness, his music was in transit, to unimaginable destinations. Though it was pulled by different forces, social, musical and political – these were the revolutionary energies of the era.

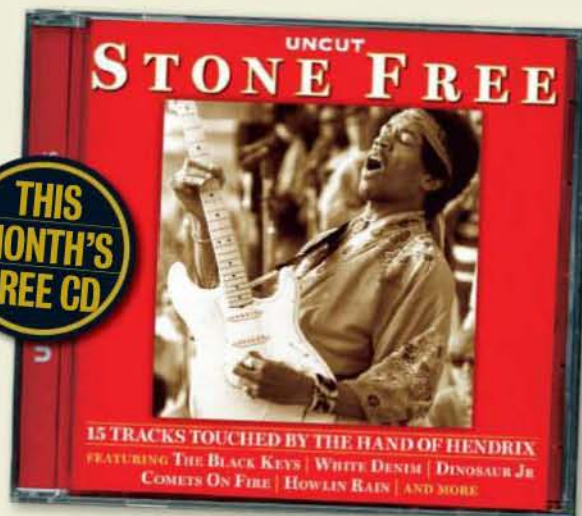
"This guy was not political, but his music reflected the politics and the culture of that time," says Juma Sultan. "Throughout the black jazz community, all the musicians I was playing with, from Archie Shepp to Pharoah Sanders, they had a respect level for Jimi because of him extending the boundaries of rhythm and blues. There is a cultural



Stone Free

THIS MONTH'S FREE CD

Your guide to this month's Hendrix-inspired free CD. Have you ever been experienced? These bands certainly have...



1 THE BLACK KEYS

I GOT MINE

To begin, a typically protean blues lurch from Akron, Ohio's compact and ferocious Black Keys. Produced, incidentally, by Brian 'Danger Mouse' Burton.

Taken from the V2 album, *Attack And Release*

2 THE HEADS

COULD BE, DOESN'T MATTER

Let the freakouts begin! Starting with this chuntering 2000 marvel from Bristolian psych veterans The Heads.

Taken from the Rooster/Forte deluxe reissue of *The Heads'* album, *Everybody Knows We Got Nowhere*, to be released later in 2010

3 COLOUR HAZE

SILENT

Axes, bold as love! A new discovery for us: Munich, Germany's Colour Haze, substantially nimbler than many of their stoner-rock contemporaries.

Taken from the Elektrohasch album, *All*

4 COMETS ON FIRE

THE SWALLOW'S EYE

Old *Uncut* favourites, currently on what is proving to be a lengthy hiatus, with a characteristically fluent and expansive jam from their last album, 2006's *Avatar*.

Taken from the Sub Pop album, *Avatar*

5 TOUMAST

IKALANE WALEGH

Fellow Touareg rebels with Tinariwen, now relocated to France and with a frontman, Moussa Ag Keyna, who explicitly draws links between Hendrix and his desert blues.

Taken from the Real World album, *Ishumar*

6 RADIO MOSCOW

NO GOOD WOMAN

The most obvious Hendrix homage yet. Radio Moscow are an Iowa power trio in the orbit of the Black Keys' Dan Auerbach. Drum solo!

Taken from the Alive Records album, *Brain Cycles*

7 HOWLIN RAIN

IN SAND AND DIRT

A second appearance for Comets On Fire's Ethan Miller, here fronting his crackling, soulful current outfit out of Northern California [below].

Taken from the Birdman Records album, *S/T*



8 TERAKAFT

TÈNÈRE WER TAT ZINCHEGH

Back to the Sahara, with this low-key and excellent spin-off band from Tinariwen. Check out the serpentine guitar solos.

Taken from the Reaktion collection, *Ishumar* (Mali-Niger Touaregs)

9 DINOSAUR JR.

THERE'S NO HERE

Another authentic guitar hero, J Mascis, with Hendrix alongside Neil Young in his musical DNA. A highlight of the band's superlative second comeback album, from last year.

Taken from the PIAS album, *Farm*

10 NEBULA

THE DAGGER

The quintessential stoner-rock trio, with a thrusting, surprisingly funky departure from their trademark Sabbath gunge.

From the Tee Pee album, *Heavy Psych*

11 BUFFALO KILLERS

LEAVE THE SUN BEHIND

Produced by the ubiquitous Dan Auerbach, a Cincinnati trio with past form supporting The Black Crowes.

Taken from the Alive Records album, *Let It Ride*

12 WHITE DENIM

SAY WHAT YOU WANT

Yet another clenched and flaming threesome, this time Austin's eclectic *Uncut* regulars, White Denim.

Taken from the Full Time Hobby album, *Fits*

13 PONTIAK

WAX WORSHIP

Three Virginian farmboy brothers with a suitably howling take on blues-rock.

Taken from the Thrill Jockey album, *Maker*

14 EARTHLESS

CHERRY RED

A full-on Groundhogs cover from the San Diego psych trio (featuring Rocket From The Crypts' Mario Rubalcaba).

From the Tee Pee album, *Rhythms From A Cosmic Sky*

15 WHITE HILLS

RADIATE

Churning, reverberant blow-out, courtesy of these Julian Cope favourites and Pontiak tourmates from New York.

Taken from the Rocket CD, *Heads On Fire* [also available on vinyl via Thrill Jockey]

connection that runs through the art, the music, the poetry and the mood of society. Jimi was a direct reflection of that."

"Sometimes the creative flow we get from the universe must be given time to be cultivated," says Billy Cox. "Jimi felt that coming. He felt things in his subconscious and in his mind, that was happening all the time."

With Hendrix, above all, we're dealing with an artist whose life, and whose music, though it had achieved a huge amount, was still filled with huge potential: there were false starts, wasted time, and some cosmic vagueness. But with his ability to find music in the moment, for his ability to catch lightning, Hendrix delighted, and confounded everyone.

"Put him in an environment, in a second he got it, and was gone," says Alan Douglas.

"I remember once, Miles Davis and I went down to a club, the Electric Circus, I think – and we were in the lighting booth. Jimi was on stage, we were watching one of his sets. Miles read and wrote music, and understood it: but as good as he was, he didn't have the street capacity that Jimi had. Miles had an incredible admiration for him – he was in awe of what he was playing; *Bitches Brew* came right out of his relationship with Jimi.

"But he couldn't figure it out. He couldn't figure it out where Jimi was coming from. He was just saying, 'What is he doing? *What the fuck is he doing?*'" 🍌

The Wanderers

Once TINARIWEN led a nomadic life in their Saharan homeland. Now they roam constantly around the planet, superstars of desert rock'n'roll. We track down the Uncut Music Award 2009 winners in Amsterdam, to discover the truth behind the Touareg rebel mythology: "All that matters are cigarettes, guitars and tea..."





WORDS *by* NEIL SPENCER | PHOTOGRAPH *by* MICHAEL CLEMENT

ON A BYWAY IN central Amsterdam Tinariwen are, quite literally, stopping the traffic. At the sight of the Southern Saharan group, their desert robes shimmering in the dusk, curious van drivers slow to a crawl, hippy matrons

dismount from their bicycles and tourists point their cameras. A pair of young Arab dudes on a Honda also pull over to shout across guttural phrases. With a dismissive gesture Ibrahim Ag Alhabib, the group's figurehead (though not their 'leader'), shouts something back and the kids take off.

What was that about? I ask after *Uncut's* photo session has wound up. "They were trying to talk Tamashek," Ibrahim tells me. "I told them to go back to their family and find out where they are from."

Tinariwen, of course, know exactly where they're from – the centuries-old traditions of the Touareg, the nomadic tribes of the Sahara, though beneath the robes and head-dresses they are dressed like the lads on the Honda, in jeans, trainers, fleeces and leathers. These days, as global stars and cultural ambassadors, Tinariwen occupy several cultures at once.

ON THE BUS that has just hauled the band from the Czech Republic to Holland for the 31st date of their latest European foray, the scene is familiar from any rock tour; duvets spilling from bunks, a clutter of T-shirts, ashtrays and laptops, though here proceedings are spiced with incessant glasses of sweet green tea, poured from a battered metal pot. "All that matters are cigarettes, guitars and tea," says the group's genial tour manager, Bastien, who met the band a decade back when French troubadours Lo'Jo first brought Tinariwen to the west.

The 10 years since have seen Tinariwen and their majestic desert blues rise from obscurity – local heroes in an area where a journey of a few hundred kilometres is normal – to become an international cause célèbre, helped by a colourful back story that has made much of the band's role in the guerrilla wars waged by the Touareg against a brutal Mali regime in the '80s and '90s. Music-making rebels! Guns and guitars! It's rock'n'roll myth made manifest, wrapped in a mystique as exotic and impenetrable as the dust-defying head-dresses and masks of the desert nomads.

The band's epic story is more complex and more profound than the headlines suggest, however. It's a tale in which tradition and modernity, friendship and imagination all play their part, along with the desert itself, "the invisible member of the band," as Andy Morgan, their former manager, puts it.

Of the group that coalesced in the tough military training camps of Libya, and whose songs became anthems among the Touareg warriors, passed on from cassette to cassette, just three members are in the lineup that's currently on tour; Ibrahim, Alhassane Ag Touhami – usually referred to as "The Lion" – and Abdallah Ag Alhousseyni aka 'Catastrophe'. The rest are recruits from a younger generation to whom the flame is being

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passed. "Tinariwen was always a fluid collective," Ibrahim tells me later. "That's how we have survived for so long. In the early days it seemed that every Tamashek musician was part of Tinariwen. In the desert, people are always on the move, that's our culture."

THE MUSICIANS THAT have created the four Tinariwen LPs, though, comprise a stable lineup. In further recognition of Tinariwen's position in the musical landscape, their most recent offering, *Imidiwan* (*Companions*) just lifted the Uncut Music Award for the year's most inspirational album. It's a seamless piece of work whose hypnotic grooves and call-and-response vocals shimmer with sadness, elation and mystery.

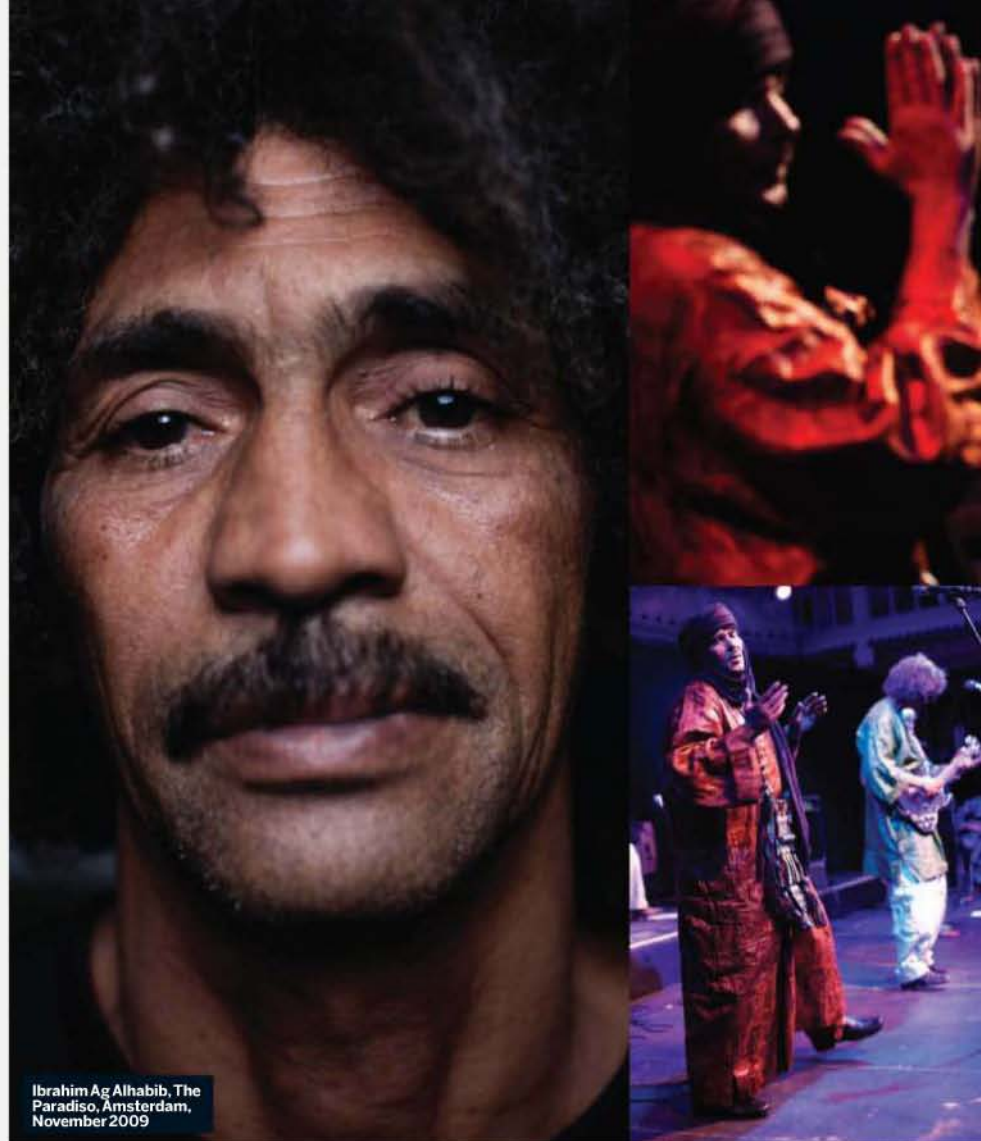
Its predecessors are equally indispensable; the raw *Radio Tisdas Sessions* (2001), the more refined *Amassakoul* (2004), and, their most sonically experimental record, *Aman Iman* (*Water Is Life*) (2007) that was produced by Robert Plant collaborator Justin Adams. "When I first met them in 2001 I didn't think they could tour the west," admits Adams, "but they've learned stagecraft, how to present themselves, while keeping their integrity. They've developed their sound – back home, it's all about the lyrics."

Like the group's live show, the toast of many a "rock" festival, their capture of the Uncut Award – triumphing against the likes of Kings Of Leon, Grizzly Bear and Bob Dylan – busts down the phoney ghetto of "world" music (after all, from where else might music emanate?). "I think Tinariwen will be hugely influential," says Billy Bragg, one of the judges. "In the next couple of years we'll be hearing bands lifting their tensions and rhythms."

Listening to Tinariwen at their soundcheck, what hits home is the universality of their music. At its core is blues, or rather, the ancient African rhythms that were exported with slavery to evolve into the blues, as exemplified by Mali guitarist Ali Farka Touré.

There's a mosaic of other influences in play, however. Some are drawn from Touareg tradition; the *tinde* rhythm that underpins numbers like "Kel Tamashek", for example, is said to be based on the loping gait of a camel. Others are clearly modern. At times Ibrahim's fluid guitar runs sound like Jerry Garcia in his pomp – early descriptions of Tinariwen as 'the desert Grateful Dead' weren't wide of the mark – while at other points he becomes John Lee Hooker's anointed successor, full of primal power. Other members of the band also defy easy categorisation. At times bassist Eyadou Ag Leche plays runs that seem to come straight from the reggae textbook, only to morph into Motown's James Jamerson, at one point pumping out what sounds like The Four Tops' "Sugar Pie Honey Bunch".

To talk to the band about 'influences' is to realise the complexity of their genealogy. At home what they play is referred to simply as 'guitar', to distinguish it from the strict Tamashek musical tradition. "We've never been traditional musicians," says guitarist Abdallah Ag Alhousseyni. "The purpose of founding Tinariwen was to take old melodies and play them on newer instruments like the guitar."



Ibrahim Ag Alhabib, The Paradiso, Amsterdam, November 2009

"Westerners have a false image of the desert. It has many faces. It is full if life"

– Ibrahim Ag Alhabib

The iconic power of the guitar as a symbol of modernity, emancipation and escape – a power endlessly, at times wearisomely, celebrated in rock – acquires a different dimension in the Tinariwen story. Relaxing in the tour bus prior to the night's gig, Ibrahim relates the first time he saw the instrument. "I was four years old, and we were watching a film projected on the wall of a building in my home village of Tessalit. There was a singing cowboy playing a guitar and straightaway I knew I had to have one. The very next day I started to make my own from bicycle cables, and a tin can."

The results must have looked much like the homemade jerry can instrument toted by a small boy on the cover of *Imidiwan*. Ibrahim was not to see another guitar until he was 18. "There was a guy who had one, I'd see him taking it out to the bush to practise and I'd

follow him to watch. Eventually I persuaded him to sell it to me." Later still, in Algeria, around 1979, Ibrahim would witness on film how the likes of Presley, Hendrix and Carlos Santana wielded their instruments.

By then, as a young man, Ibrahim had already spent most of his life in exile, his story emblematic of the wider fate of the Touareg. In 1963 the desert nomads had staged a brief, bitter uprising against the military dictatorship then governing Mali. As part of the reprisals Ibrahim's father was abducted by the security services and 'disappeared'. Not until many years later would he discover that his father had been executed. Soon afterwards, he and his family fled northwards into exile in Algeria.

They were not alone. Other families and clans had crossed the border to escape persecution. Here, far from their homeland, Tinariwen was born as a group of young friends united to sing about their lives as the unwanted dispossessed, the *ishumar*. Always in trouble with the cops, the friends would disappear into the desert for days and nights, writing songs that expressed their anger and what the Touareg call *assouf*, a longing for their homeland. They were also listening to the jumble of music that filtered through North Africa; rock, soul, Algerian rai, and Moroccan acts like Nass El-Ghiwane, whose protest songs struck a chord.

All of these influences and the group's experiences of exile and struggle, merged into the identity of Tinariwen. They are still



nomads, these days wandering across the planet, while the old fluidity of their lineup is apparent on stage, where everyone gets their turn in the spotlight. Alhassane Ag Touhami, who spends much of the show on backing vocals and handclaps, stars on "Tahult In", a salute to comrades, and he steps up to deliver a high-speed rap. The younger members of the band blaze out in a notably more rocky style on a couple of numbers, axe heroes in the making – a mark of Tinariwen's growing status as guitarists is that they are now sponsored by manufacturers Valley & Blues.

Perhaps surprisingly, they never compose jointly; their lyrics are considered to be poetry rather than song, words found in solitude and then brought to the band. "There's complete freedom within the group," says Ibrahim, "with no obligation on anyone."

OFFSTAGE, THERE'S NONE of the haughtiness that one finds around rock bands, even if a bottle of Jack Daniel's in the dressing room shows that all rock'n'roll habits aren't absent. All is courteous and reserved, though Alhassane Ag Touhami proves a mischievous presence. He's a stout, jovial man, eager to discuss the price and cut of his robes when I admire them. Back home 'The Lion' is an important guy, I'm informed, a friend of the mayor, though onstage, this pillar of the community proves a fantastic dancer, something akin to a desert Chas Smash.

It is the tall, rangy Ibrahim to whom most eyes are drawn, however. A dazzling guitarist, he also has a commanding, languid presence emphasised by a wild Afro that is rarely bound up by the *cheche*, the Touareg turban. "I'll wear the *cheche* in the desert for practical reasons," he tells me, "or as a mark of respect when I visit older people, but I have worn my hair long since I was a kid, when it got me into a lot of trouble. For me, it shows openness."

Conversation with Ibrahim is slow and thoughtful, conducted in deep, heavily accented French. In person he is intense but graceful, and with a touch of melancholia. He enjoys life on the road, he tells me, despite its relentless demands, and delights in seeing the world, "especially discovering things that I can bring back to the desert, like solar panels."

It is the desert, above everything, that he misses. "It offers complete freedom, no-one will bother you there. I love its peace and calm, especially at night. I go there to find music – the desert sings to me. Westerners have a false image of the desert, they think of it as just one vast, barren place, but it has many faces. It isn't always savage, there are places with water, animals, vegetation, it's full of life. When you have food and water it's a kind place, a friend, you're completely self-sufficient."

His home village is quite green, he continues, the water table there being near the surface. He has a large garden, where he grows fruit and vegetables, mangoes, melons, onions and so

forth. Despite Tinariwen's success, not much has changed in their lives back home.

"There's a bit more money, maybe some of us have a 4x4 now, but otherwise life goes on the same way. My family, for example, don't pay much attention to what I get up to with the group when we're away. They find it hard to believe you can sit on a plane for six hours and not touch the earth. It's very quiet around my home town, Tessalit, which is how I like it."

It was in Ibrahim's village that *Imidiwan* was recorded in a makeshift studio; the DVD accompanying the album gives a fascinating glimpse of the sessions and life in the outback – at one point the whole entourage up-sticks and go out into the bush to play. The record is a conscious step back from the sonic clarity of its two predecessors. "I like both those records, but we felt that we had strayed a little too far from our sound, especially on the slower songs. They are often the hardest to get right."

ALTHOUGH TINARIWEN'S TIME in armed struggle is now distant, their material often refers to those troubled times; even the title of *Imidiwan* is a tribute to old comrades in arms, and to all who helped the group during their ascent to fame. "I'm interested in what creates the bonds of loyalty rather than differences," says Ibrahim reflectively. "Our story is about friendship through bad times and good."

The band's success has, unsurprisingly, created ripples among the Tamashek, for whom someone like Ibrahim is the symbol of modernity. Where we see tradition, they see radicalism. Also, the band have played a part in sealing the peace accord reached with the Mali government, which since 1992 has been a constitutional democracy. The legendary first Festival In The Desert they staged in 2001, which was attended by Mali's Prime Minister, was seen as a symbol of buried hatchets; these days you can book tickets to the festival on the internet, or watch highlights on YouTube that include younger bands like Tamekrist.

Ibrahim welcomes the new generation of acts. "Bands like Tamekrist have us as a model, whereas we had to create something from scratch. Everything is in the wake of Tinariwen. I personally feel there is something special about my generation, a feeling that we have carried forwards from the old days."

The Touareg's struggle for their homelands is, perhaps, not yet finished. The new threat comes from what's under their feet; vast mineral deposits hungrily eyed by western corporations and Chinese state companies. Both have won extensive exploration rights in neighbouring Niger, and are moving in on Northern Mali, bringing the threat of open-cast mining and toxic waste.

"I fear what will come of it," says Ibrahim gravely, "The region where they are doing most of the mining is ecologically very fragile, it will be turned into a dust bowl. There is too much imposition on the desert."

Can it be stopped?

"I don't know. If we are forced to, the Touareg will fight, but we hope it won't come to outright war. We place our hope in peace and tolerance, and in the beauty of the desert itself." ☐

Reborn to boogie

WORDS by BARNEY HOSKYNs | PHOTOGRAPH by JØRGEN ANGEL

Forty years ago this month, MARC BOLAN was nothing more than a sweet hippy folk singer hanging out in the orbit of David Bowie. By the end of 1970, however, he had transformed himself into a glam-rock titan. *Uncut* talks to the key witnesses of this rapid, magical – and ruthless – rebirth. “*Say a few spells and baby, there you go...*”

IT'S JANUARY, 1970, and David Bowie is in residence at Soho's Trident Studios. Currently enjoying the Top 5 success of “Space Oddity”, he's now working on a new song, called “The Prettiest Star”.

Also in the room is another pretty, androgynous London boy, who's come to overdub lead guitar on the track. Although Marc Bolan – formerly Mark Feld, Mark Bowland, even Toby Tyler – is a familiar figure on the underground scene, he's usually to be found sitting cross-legged onstage, strumming an acoustic guitar and singing sweet psych-folk songs. Today, though, he's come in an altogether different guise. This is Marc Bolan as the Strat-wielding guitarist who, six months earlier, could be found jamming with Eric Clapton in the latter's Surrey home. Resembling nothing less than a petite Jimmy Page, he certainly looks the part.

“Marc was thrilled that someone wanted to use him as session musician,” says Tony Visconti, who produced the session. “He was dying to prove he could play. So he came in with his little amp, and he'd learned the song and practised really hard. And he did his solo and everyone applauded. And then suddenly

his girlfriend, June, turned viciously on David and said, ‘We're going now – Marc is too good to play on your record!’ I was stunned.”

Whether or not Bolan really could play guitar – and he was certainly no Mick Ronson, who played on “The Prettiest Star” when Bowie revisited it for 1973's *Aladdin Sane* – the story freezes him at a crucial point in his trajectory.

Like Bowie, Bolan was a suburban fantasist who'd evolved through '60s mod, folk and flower power without ever quite finding his niche. Even more than Bowie, he was a

chameleon-like opportunist who adapted seamlessly to whatever was in vogue, all the while talking a good game as an artist frantic to be taken seriously.

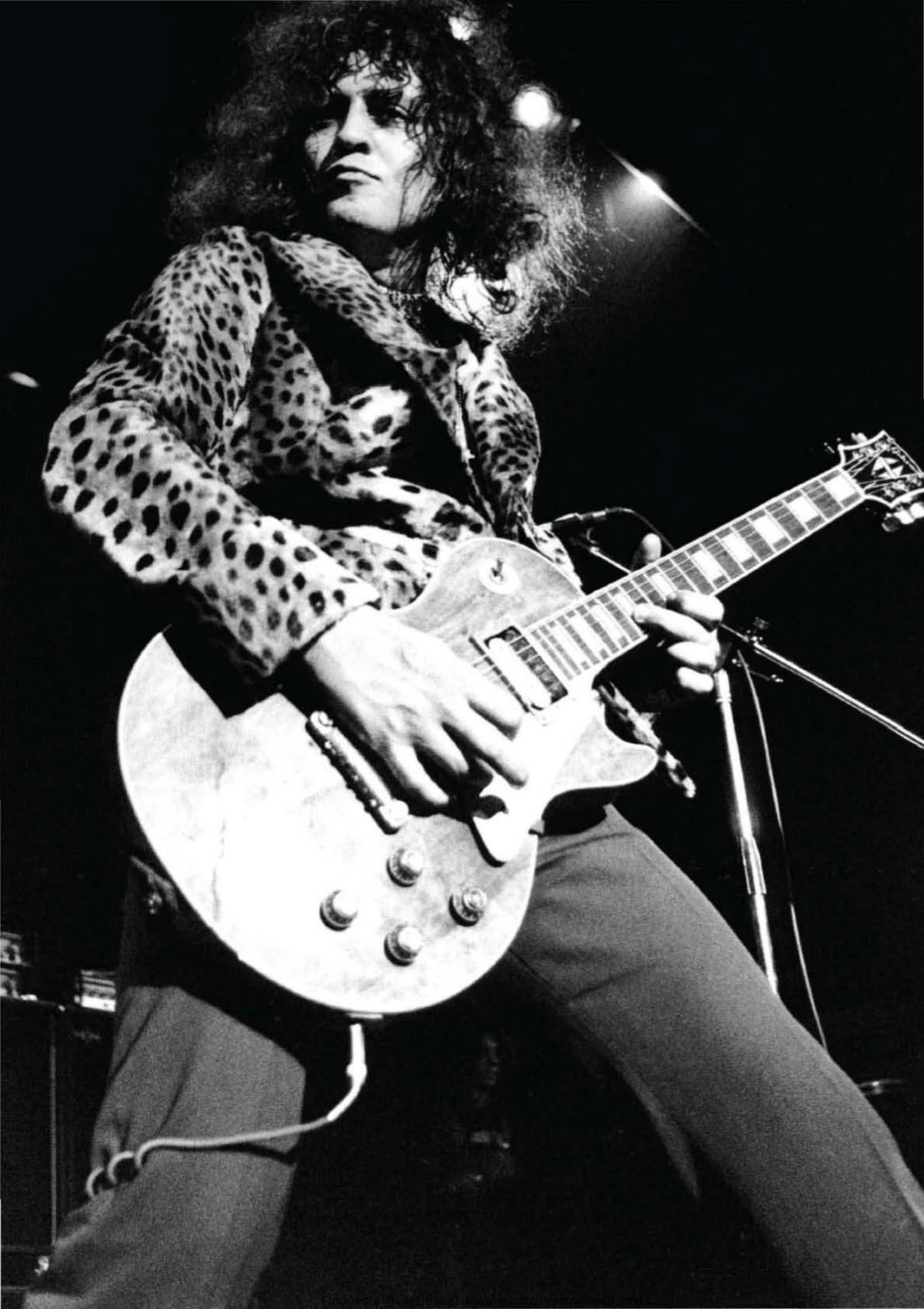
“Marc was just an oik from north London, but he was very ambitious,” says the DJ Jeff Dexter, a friend of Bolan's from the early '60s. “He was a bit of a fake but he believed in his own mythology. He and June had a coldwater flat in Blenheim Crescent and he was surrounded by every sort of weird book and absolutely eating it up. We were forever out looking for flying saucers. But then so was Bowie.”

As he left Trident on that cold day in January 1970, Bolan was halfway to the extraordinary auto-makeover that would transform him from the elfin folk singer of Tyrannosaurus Rex to the glam-rock idol who fronted T. Rex on a run of Top 10 classics stretching from “Ride A White Swan” to “The Groover”.

“Was Marc a great guitarist?” says John Gaydon, who managed T. Rex through that heady period. “No, he wasn't. Was he a great singer? No, he wasn't. Was he a great composer? No. But he was brilliant in the way Robbie Williams is brilliant. He had a magnetic charm; he could charm the

CONTINUES OVER ►





pants off any journalist or television producer. He was very vain and very sweet, and I was sort of in love with him – with his talent and with everything about him.”

IN FACT, BOLAN was hardly a newcomer to the electric guitar. After all, he'd played briefly in the post-mod band John's Children, who'd toured with The Who in Germany. But he became a key figure in the London underground scene when, in late 1967, he teamed up with percussionist Steve Peregrin Took (né Porter) to form Tyrannosaurus Rex. “When Tyrannosaurus did their first show at Middle Earth, it was pretty ropey and unsaleable,” Jeff Dexter recalls. “But Marc worked hard at it. He became a completely original character.”

In May 1968 – that key month of violent street protest – Tyrannosaurus Rex even scraped into the Top 40 with the tabla-driven “Deborah”. Championed by John Peel on his *Perfumed Garden* radio show, Bolan and Took were expected to stay in their acoustic pigeonhole – Bolan, though, was never going to settle for noble hippy poverty. As uncool as it would have been to admit it at Covent Garden's Middle Earth, he was determined to be a star. “You were aware that there was a little bit of steel to this character,” John Peel reminisced not long before his death. “I could tell there was a bit of a hustler element to him.”

“Marc wasn't a political animal and nobody held it against him,” says Mick Farren, then frontman with agitrockers The Deviants. “You have to remember that he was coddled by June – it was all very ethereal, very fairyland. He wasn't down the pub every night with Lemmy.”

“I was very unhappy with the way that we were really being ignored by the media of all sorts and the papers and the radio and that,” Bolan later admitted in an interview for Michael Wale's 1972 book, *Voxpop*. “I'd hear something like a new Dylan record or a new Beatles record or a Who record and I'd know I was as funky as them... I knew I was on that sort of level of being an artist.”

The first glimpse of change came in May 1969 with *Unicorn*, a Tyrannosaurus Rex LP whose boomy folk-rock production reflected the passion for Phil Spector that Bolan shared with Tony Visconti. Two months later, the single “King Of The Rumbling Spires” was even more unapologetically electric. “It doesn't actually sound that different, just more funky,” Bolan said of the single, a hint of defensiveness in his voice. “We always played pop music anyway, and to me it's completely fair to use electricity.”

“I didn't ever dream that Marc would change direction, though he loved electric things like Jimi Hendrix,” says Mick O'Halloran, then Tyrannosaurus Rex's roadie. “He was so good at what he was doing with the acoustic stuff, and John Peel and Jeff Dexter were always pushing him. At all the underground clubs, like the Electric Gardens in Glasgow, they went for him big time. But I think he thought people were getting tired of the same old thing, so he started playing some electric guitar and doing Eddie Cochran's ‘Summertime Blues’ as an encore. At one particular gig at the Redcar Jazz



T.Rex's “standard rock” lineup, ’72: (l-r) Steve Currie, Mickey Finn, Bolan, Bill Legend



Marc with wife and manager June, in 1973

“There wasn't any grand plan to start glam rock. All Marc did was give pop some attitude”

Club, there were queues outside for miles, all these hippies. And when he did the electric bit he brought the house down. And I think that was when he realised a lot of people wanted him to turn in that direction.”

BOLAN AND TOOK were already including electric numbers in their set when they flew to America in August 1969. (The duo were in New York City to play the famous Café au Go Go on the weekend of Woodstock.) But their lifestyles had become incompatible – while Bolan and June were content with a quiet domestic life, Took had become a regular fixture on the druggy, anarchic underground scene based around Ladbroke Grove. On their return to London, they agreed to split up. “I had no group and no money,” Bolan told *Beat Instrumental* the following May. “Everyone was saying, ‘Forget it, Marc, go away’ – which always happens when you're trying to get something new together.” But Marc Bolan was never going to go away: placing an ad for a replacement percussionist in *Melody Maker*, he received 300 responses. On the very day he was due to start auditioning, he was introduced to an out-of-work decorator – and part-time member of

hippie design collective Hapshash & The Coloured Coat – in Seed, a Notting Hill healthfood store. “Mickey Finn was sort of along for the ride from day one,” says John Gaydon. “You don't have to be a great conga player to be in a pop band.” Bolan had sufficient pop smarts to see that Finn's looks would be an asset for the act whose name he was already abbreviating to T.Rex in conversation.

Bolan and Finn decamped to a tiny Welsh cottage and started sifting through new material. The result was the first post-Took single – the dreamy, fluid “By The Light Of The Magical Moon” – and *A Beard Of Stars*, a mostly electric album, produced at Trident by Tony Visconti. Although “Magical Moon” flopped when it was released in January 1970, *Beard* climaxed with the unrepentant boogie rave-up of “Elemental Child”. It was, in many respects, a signifier of things to come.

“We focused in on that track,” recalls David Enthoven, Gaydon's partner in EG Management. “It was fantastic, and you can't play electric guitar sitting down. We talked about getting a band together. There wasn't any great science behind it, except for the fact that Marc started to play electric.”

Gaydon and Enthoven had been urged to meet with Bolan by Island's Chris Blackwell, whose prog pioneers King Crimson were managed by EG. “I think Marc had one gig in his book, 30 quid at Leeds University,” says Gaydon. “But we were very charmed, because Marc was a lovable chap – pretty and elfin and all those things. And of course six months later, he comes into the office and says, ‘I've got a great idea, I'm gonna get a drummer and a bass player!’ And we said, ‘Marc, you're brilliant!’”

Bolan was drawn to EG's hip management style; he and June, who became Mrs Bolan in February 1970, often socialised with the duo in their mews house off the King's Road. “June was lovely, well-grounded, intelligent, not at all abrasive,” says Gaydon. “She was a fantastic influence on him, though she always held back and let him perform for journalists.” One night, the Bolans were visiting Gaydon and Enthoven when nine plainclothes policemen burst in and busted them for dope. Enthoven and Gaydon persuaded the police to let Marc and June go.

Bolan and Finn continued as a duo, though Bolan played mainly electric and Finn was



Ride a white Strat:
live at the height of
Marc-mania

now to be found behind a small drum kit. "I think we'll have a bass player at some point, but not just yet," Marc told *Beat Instrumental*. "As my ambitions guitar-wise expand and Mickey gets to drum more... there'll come a point where if I want to do a long guitar solo... then we'll need a bass player for that number."

"It was fairly clear that the Tyrannosaurus schtick was at an end," says Mick Farren. "The externals of it – the toy instruments, the sitting cross-legged – were getting tired. The moment Marc got Mickey Finn he wasn't sitting down anymore. And the next thing you know, they've got a bass player. I think it was always his focus, to be the curly-headed pop star with the Flying V and the satin jacket. That was the history of John's Children and everything else."

If he was more fulfilled on stage, Bolan remained obsessed by the stardom that eluded him. In the summer of 1970 he told himself that unless something happened soon he would jack it in and concentrate on writing poetry. Bored with hearing her husband whingeing away in the Blenheim Crescent flat, June challenged him to write a hit. Bolan went into the other room and wrote "Ride A White Swan", in words "a 2-minute 30-second, funky, snappy foot-tapper" that seemed tailor-made

for a new kind of audience.

"I'm very aware there's no-one around who's mentally and physically equipped to cope with a real youth revolution," Bolan said presciently in the same May 1970 interview with *Beat Instrumental*. "The kids do seem so much nicer now. They're in there, understanding what it's all about."

"John Peel didn't like '...White Swan' at all, but I thought it was such a beautiful, simple record," says Jeff Dexter. "It reminded me of the roots of rock and Chuck Berry, which was the whole point behind it, but at the same time it was very young and innocent." Three months before it was released, Dexter brought an acetate of "White Swan" with him to the Isle Of Wight festival and played it regularly for the half a million hippies. "Everybody went home singing it. Marc was thrilled to bits."

"There was a gap in the market," explains former *Jackie* editor Nina Myskow. "Everyone was just waiting for something like T.Rex to happen." By January 1971, "...White Swan" had reached No 2 in the UK and Bolan was a star.

"The whole package was perfect pop," says John Gaydon, "but with an element of classic

beatnik warbling Tyrannosaurus Rex that gave Marc a certain gravitas. If he'd come on the scene straight off as T.Rex with 'Hot Love', he would have been put down as purely a pop singer, when he had a lot more than that. He had a very special way of melding these things together to create Marc Bolan the superstar."

Helping Bolan to reinvent himself was Essex Music publisher David Platz, who in October 1970 launched the Fly label specifically to release "Ride A White Swan".

"People like Platz were all sort of orbiting Marc as if they sensed there was a lot of money to be made out of him," remembers Mick Farren. "When Marc decided to make his commercial move, there was definitely cash there to finance the thing."

For the next single, Bolan and Visconti opted to go full-tilt with what he termed "a standard rock band", bringing in bassist Steve Currie and drummer Bill Legend (né Fifield). The latter recalled turning up for the first time at London's Advision Studio and cutting "Hot Love" and b-side "Woodland Rock" that afternoon. In April, with "Hot Love" in the charts for six straight weeks, Legend was hired as the permanent drummer for T.Rex – and found himself on board a plane to America with the band.

"The T.Rex sound was pure kismet," Tony Visconti says. "It was a story about how the right people met each other at the right time. Here was a band that technically shouldn't have sounded good together, but it was like winning the pools. Marc picked the right numbers and got a winning team."

IN MARCH, 1971, Bolan's ascent was complete – and, you can argue, glam rock was born – when he appeared on *TOTP* to lip-synch to "Hot Love". Just moments before he was due on stage, Chelita Secunda, wife of former Move manager Tony Secunda daubed spots of glitter underneath Marc's eyes.

"As soon as he got seen on TV, it all took off," David Enthoven reflects. "We didn't go out to target

15-year-olds, it was TV that did that. It was organic, how it happened: there wasn't any grand plan to start glam rock. All Marc really did was give pop some attitude."

"Previously I had more of an image than a musical identity – when we were an 'underground group,'" Bolan told *Record Mirror* in April 1971. "I've matured and progressed and suddenly found a high new influx of young people digging my music which has re-energised me even more. I don't think we'll lose any of [the freaks] because of the new young people – we intend to keep a lot of the old more popular numbers in the programme and do the new material as well."

Ultimately, though, the freaks – the underground hippies who'd adopted Tyrannosaurus Rex three years before – were expendable. "Our audience don't really have that kind of intolerance," Bolan said candidly, "but if they resent youth, then fuck 'em!"



ALBUM BY ALBUM

Todd Rundgren



He's the Philadelphia-born whizzkid who could and should have been the biggest star of the '70s. This February, the man John Lennon referred to as "Sodd Runtwhistle" comes to London to perform his greatest and most radical album, *A Wizard, A True Star* – a psych-prog, glam-punk rollercoaster ride that redefined the scope of the Anglo-American rock album. Either side of that 1973 release can be found dozens of pop-rock masterworks – not to mention some diverse production work. As all Toddheads know, the man is a genius, a one-man Beatles whose work stretches from heartbreaking beauty to Mothers Of Invention madness, heavy metal kidding to plangent blue-eyed soul. Persistently under-recognised, he's a genuine rock'n'roll hero...

THE POWERPOP DEBUT



NAZZ NAZZ

SCREEN GEMS, 1968.
PRODUCED BY BILL
TRAUT
The first album by

Todd's Philly pop band shifted from The Who-meets-Beach Boys *Nuggets* classic "Open My Eyes" to the power-trio blues of "She's Goin' Down" and orchestral pop of "If That's The Way You Feel" [string arrangement: TR].

RUNDGREN: When I graduated from high school, I left home with hopes of joining a band. The first thing that happened was that I got into a blues band. After nine months I left and decided to start a new one with the bass player. We gigged around Philadelphia and got discovered kind of by accident while hanging around with Roger Daltrey in a bar. A publicist saw us and wanted to manage a band of cute guys and we happened to have one. He was a friend of Gloria Stavers of *16* magazine and we were hugely hyped even before our first record, as if we were the next Monkees. The whole thing lasted 18 months before I cut loose, and we released two albums, marketed as three albums. "Open My Eyes" was cut on four-track at a small studio in NYC. We didn't have lots of studio experience but we were determined not to work in a union studio so we could set up and work whenever we wanted. It was the first time any of us had been in LA. There was a germ of influences to start with – including the Beach Boys, The Beatles and The Who – and a lot of them were unmediated.

PLAYING IT STRAIGHT



RUNT THE BALLAD OF TODD RUNDGREN

BEARSVILLE, 1971. PRODUCED BY TODD RUNDGREN

After 1970's *Runt*, Rundgren's adventures in Tinseltown continued with this second solo release, a set of effortless pop songs and ballads – most of them mid-tempo tracks written at the piano. He later dismissed these as the work of "the funk-free boy doing his little song". "Wailing Wall" and "The Range War" are not.

RUNDGREN: I was getting a bit more worldly in terms of the kind of artists I was producing. I'd done The Band's *Stage Fright* and the Great Speckled Bird LP – which featured Norman Smart, the main drummer on *Ballad*. I thought the LP was integral to my learning process as both an artist and a producer. The idea was to do something that wasn't as eclectic as my first solo record. People forget *Runt* was almost as experimental as *A Wizard, A True Star*. I was consciously settling down to something that might be called attention to style, learning how to apply limitations and discipline to what you're doing rather than blazing new territory. I was recording in LA but my head was still in East Coast mode. The superlative session musicians were all about playing simply and getting locked into a groove, with very tight arrangements.

THE BRILLIANT, DARING DOUBLE



TODD RUNDGREN SOMETHING/ ANYTHING?

BEARSVILLE, 1972.
PRODUCED BY

TODD RUNDGREN

Seven years before Prince cut his first album completely solo, his sometime idol Todd turned the studio into a lab for this superb double, which mixed superior AOR balladry ("I Saw The Light", "Hello It's Me") with psych-rock, powerpop and assorted weirdness ("I Went To The Mirror").

RUNDGREN: *Something...* was the point at which I took full responsibility for the sound. I was starting out to gain complete control of the process by playing all the instruments myself. It turned out to be audacious, though I didn't start out to be audacious. I had no plans for it to be a double; it was pretty much going to follow along the lines of *Ballad*... I'd record for eight hours during the day, but I'd also rented an eight-track and synths for other ideas that I didn't want to burn studio time on. So at night I'd take Ritalin and finish writing a couple of songs, then go over to record some more till 4 or 5am. The first three sides were done in three weeks: I was, like, Mr Music. I began to realise that I was guilty of glib songwriting. A lot of it was based on a long-gone relationship and I was just milking some old disappointment to inspire new music, rather than writing about what I was thinking about now. That had a big effect on the way I saw music – and on what happened next.



"I had to build my own studio. And it had to be a musical workshop..."

"THE IMPORTANT ONE"



TODD RUNDGREN A WIZARD, A TRUE STAR

BEARSVILLE, 1973. PRODUCED BY TODD RUNDGREN

Recorded in late 1972 in Rundgren's new Secret Sound studio on Manhattan's West 24th Street, *A Wizard, A True Star* was a gloriously unpunctuated trip through the various musics he had colonised, 19 tracks that leaked into each other or tripped on each other's heels. The result jumped from the fuzz-metal of "Rock And Roll Pussy" to the surreal ephemera of "Dogfight Giggle" – and from the nonsense of "Just Another Onionhead" to the anthemic rush of "When The Shit Hits The Fan"...

RUNDGREN: For some people *Something/Anything?* is the beginning and end of my career, the pivotal point. Everybody wants to climb Mount Everest, which is *Something...*, but the really hard one – and the important one – is *K2*, which is *A Wizard, A True Star*...

I became obsessed with the idea of a personal musical legacy, which in my mind didn't necessarily have to do with satisfying commercial criteria of any kind. Everything

I did in terms of my own work was conditioned by the fact that I was making a living as a producer and didn't need to make a living off my own records – which consternated the label and my fans alike. I didn't want to repeat what everybody else was doing, so I started to think about what would be unique – and the only thing I could think of was myself and the way that I saw things. Making *Wizard*... was essentially an evolution of that thought process.

I found a way of developing different relationships in the studio, to the point that I had to build my own studio. And the vibe in the studio had to be a certain way, like a kind of musical workshop. It was never intended to be a business, it was for me and my musical associates to go in and explore things. From that point on, I began writing more and more in the studio. That meant I didn't have to approach the album with a grand master plan; I had complete liberty to change it at any point. With "International Feel", for instance, we no longer had any engineer and I had to finish it myself. I wanted a certain sound so I got something that was simply a couple of pieces of hose inside a box, and it became characteristic of the sound of my recordings.

There was also an unusual kind of mastering machine made by a guy in Los Angeles, and that contributed a lot because we used to run things stupidly hot. We were just total cowboys about it.



PRODUCER FOR HIRE



THE NEW YORK DOLLS THE NEW YORK DOLLS

MERCURY, 1973. PRODUCED BY TODD RUNDGREN

As a 'producer for hire' Rundgren's myriad credits are as diverse as his music: The Band, Hall & Oates, XTC, Bette Midler, Meat Loaf, Patti Smith, Céline Dion... But his brief on the first Dolls album was unique: violent hard rock that was also witty, playful and not a little camp. Celebrated as the first 'punk' record, here was an album – and band – that sounded on the verge of collapse. Must have been fun behind the desk, then?

RUNDGREN: The Dolls enjoyed no commercial success whatsoever, yet they are constantly cited as being founders of some musical movement. So I suppose one can pat oneself on the back for at least having decided to work with them rather than a band like, say, Wayne County – another cross-dresser who was never heard from again! I probably had more fun with them on the new album, *Cause I Sez So* [released in May 2009], which was a little less like herding cats and a bit more like the way musicians really communicate with each other. We're all more seasoned and experienced. Everyone in the band was engaged and showed up for the sessions. I don't know... these things are the way they are because of the unique circumstances that created them.

CONTINUES OVER ►



Hello, it's Todd: "I was becoming a bit of an exhibitionist..."

MUSICAL THERAPY



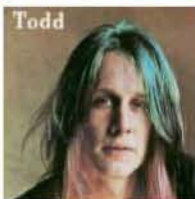
TODD RUNDGREN HEALING

RHINO, 1981. PRODUCED BY TODD RUNDGREN

On August 13, 1980, four masked men broke into Rundgren's Mink Hollow home, bound and gagged him and girlfriend Karen "Bean" Darwin, and stole items of studio equipment. Almost as traumatic was the fact that – just a few days before he shot John Lennon in December of that year – Mark Chapman made a trip to Woodstock to look for Rundgren. This entirely DIY album, heavy with synths, was intended as some kind of therapy.

RUNDGREN: I was always interested in the potential for music to do more than entertain and I took an interest in this from a number of aspects. One was that televangelism was becoming very big business. And a lot of these guys made absurd claims about their ability to heal the sick. So I thought about what it meant if that was actually true. The other thing was asking if music itself could be a mechanism for healing. So the first side was a story about someone who acquires the ability to heal people, and the logical end result of that is that people stop taking care of themselves. And they just completely use the guy up. And then the second side was an experiment, to see whether or not you could have an actual therapeutic goal for your music.

A "SHOWCASE OF STYLES"



TODD RUNDGREN TODD

BEARSVILLE, 1974. PRODUCED BY TODD

RUNDGREN

The double follow-up to *Wizard...* shared a similar eclectic nature, but perhaps the joins were more noticeable. Its 17 tracks ran from the romantic sublime ("The Last Ride") to the Zappa-esque ridiculous ("An Elpee's Worth Of Toons") and back (the hand-wringing "Don't You Ever Learn?").

RUNDGREN: *Todd* was a bit of a sideways move from *Wizard...*... I was becoming a bit of an exhibitionist, putting on a showcase of styles. It was like, "That's interesting, let's try something like that!" And that became my *modus operandi*, and it was up to me to rein myself in. There's still a lot of experimentation, but the difference was doing much more of it myself as we had additional drum machines and synths that were then making it to the market. I'd cannibalise the drum machines, open them up to get unusual rhythms. Songs like "The Last Ride" I continue to perform, and in the proper context that's one of the songs I enjoy playing more than the typical "Hello, It's Me" songs. I was getting to the point where I could paint pictures with sound that fill in a lot of what lyrics used to have to do.

THE EXTRAVAGANT ONE



TODD RUNDGREN'S UTOPIA UTOPIA

BEARSVILLE, 1974. PRODUCED BY TODD RUNDGREN

Assembling a lineup with the Sales bros and Eno-esque synth twiddler Jean-Yves "M. Frog" Labat, Rundgren developed an "expensive, high-concept" show featuring a large geodesic dome and flashbulbs. This *Spinal Tap*-like extravaganza split fans down the middle. The *Utopia* theme, tentatively introduced on *Wizard*, was officially unveiled on this 1974 set.

RUNDGREN: All of the prog-rock and jazz-fusion stuff was happening, and in some ways I was feeling left behind as a guitarist. *Utopia* also had an organic element in that it evolved out of players who were making the records I was making at the time: people like Ralph Shuckett and Moogy Klingman had played on *Wizard...*, so it became a natural evolution of all of us desiring these playing opportunities.

We had a disastrous gig in Philly when this big, elaborate intro built to a point of thunderous loudness and then the flashbulbs didn't go off, there was no sound coming from the guitar amps, and we were just standing there with our thumbs up our asses!

THE BEST IN A DECADE



TODD RUNDGREN LIARS

SANCTUARY, 2004. PRODUCED BY TODD RUNDGREN

Rundgren's 18th saw him return to pop-rock structures on an album that confronted dishonesty and hypocrisy in the modern world. The result was his strongest material in a decade.

RUNDGREN: Because of my long experience with the conservatism of the music business – which is that they need new things but they don't like them – I could see the internet was taking the legs out from under it. I was aware things were going to change and there'd be a chance to experiment without being hindered.

I'd gone through a decade of experiments in forms of music delivery and I finally got around to thinking I needed to make a record the way I used to, where I'd sequester myself and shut out all other distractions and influences and try to grow a record in my head. And that's essentially what I did. In terms of the theme, I'd started to realise that dishonesty and duplicity were inherently human, and I started to deconstruct that. I didn't think the record would turn out 80 minutes long, but there were so many examples of lying – not just in governments, but in everyday experience – that the record became easy to flesh out. ☺

INTERVIEW: BARNEY HOSKYNIS

FLIGHT of the CONCHORDS

I TOLD YOU I WAS FREAKY

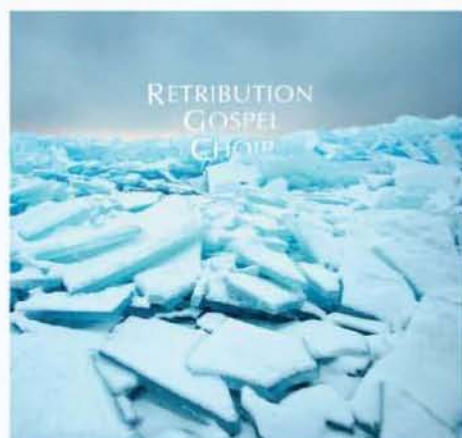
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AC/DC

Highway to Hull! The UK leg of the 79/'80 world tour saw the band at their hard-riffing, adrenalised peak. And, sadly, their last-ever shows with singer Bon Scott...

WORDS & PHOTOS by ROBERT ELLIS



"I first encountered AC/DC in August 1979 when they were supporting The Who at Wembley," remembers photographer Robert Ellis (pictured with Bon Scott). "Their fans arrived and took over the arena. They went

wild when the band came on and it felt like it was totally their show, even though they weren't the headliners. I was so impressed that I rang their record company and said I'd like to work with them on their autumn tour.

"Things started badly on October 25 in Newcastle, where the first night was cancelled, because the venue burnt down on the day of the gig. But the rest of the tour was great and I stayed with them right through to Bon Scott's death in February 1980 and beyond that to the *Back In Black* and *For Those About To Rock* tours. They didn't like photographers much and I'd have to say the band were tolerant of me rather than co-operative – but their road crew told me that was a result in itself! 'Highway To Hell' had just been a hit, they were really breaking through and I was in the right place at the right time. It was also Bon Scott's last tour before he died. In 40 years of photographing bands, very little has come close to the excitement of that tour..."





✦ "AC/DC were never just Bon's backing band. Although he was the lead singer, he was always second-fiddle to Angus Young and that was how both of them liked it. They weren't vying with each other, like Townshend and Daltrey. Bon was the foil to Angus – but at the same time they were a real old-fashioned rock'n'roll band and it was about the energy they created together. This shot was at the Liverpool Empire..."

FLASHBACK

Great rock moments revisited



★ "Because the stage at the Glasgow Apollo was about 20 feet high, there were no crush barriers and so the entire front row had room to go completely berserk, playing air guitar. I was proud of that picture because it captures the spirit of AC/DC and how they could transport an audience."



✦ "This is very poignant as it was Bon's last-ever gig, in Southampton on January 27, 1980. I travelled with the band from London and though he was very drunk, he was talking enthusiastically about the next album and was full of ideas for songs. Three weeks later he was dead."

✦ "Southampton, January 27, 1980. Angus used to head out into the crowd on the shoulders of a roadie, but when he'd completed his circuit he'd re-emerge back on stage on Bon's shoulders – so everybody thought it had been Bon running through the crowd. In fact, Bon used to do it in the early days but it became a security issue."





WERE YOU THERE?

Did you defy deafness and dehydration to witness AC/DC live in the great Bon Scott years? Then share your (hopefully still lucid) memories with us by emailing allan_jones@ipcmedia.com and we'll publish the best stories...



“Angus and Malcolm tuning up backstage in Stafford. They had the same procedure every night before they went on – they were methodical and meticulous about it. Angus always wore his cap to go on stage, but once he was out there, it flew off before he was even past the first riff, of course...”

“Outside the band’s hotel in Glasgow. These were fans who told me they’d bunked off school and lied to their parents to be there to get autographs. So they already had their genuine school uniforms on, but as you can see, they’d embellished them with all kinds of AC/DC regalia.”



“It’s a typical Angus pose and I’ve taken that picture 100 times. What made this particular shot special, though, was the way he was caught in the spotlight. This was one of five sold-out dates at the Hammersmith Odeon, which is one of the few stages big enough to get a picture like that without the rest of the band being in camera shot.”

“Ozzy was at home in Wolverhampton or somewhere in the Black Country, so as the band were playing in Stafford, he just turned up and came backstage after the show during the meet-and-greet. He was extremely drunk and not very coherent. Just being Ozzy, really...”



THE DUKE & THE KING

'NEIL YOUNG MEETS MARVIN GAYE ON THE
KIND OF RECORD THAT CULTS ARE MADE OF'
THE WORD

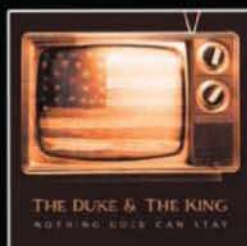
'SONGS SO PERFECTLY FORMED THEY MIGHT
HAVE BEEN AROUND FOREVER'
★★★★ THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

'A RARE, FIERY BRILLIANCE - EACH SONG
SOUNDS LIKE A CLASSIC'
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'EXQUISITE - ONE OF MY TOP TEN
ALBUMS OF THE YEAR'
No.6 GIG OF THE YEAR
No.3 AMERICANA ALBUM OF THE YEAR
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'A WONDROUS ALBUM'
No.4 NEW ARTIST ALBUM OF THE YEAR
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ALBUMS

76 VAMPIRE WEEKEND

The second from Ezra Koenig's band. Wry pop and well-connected indie rock

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Oblique interpretations on a set of well-chosen covers

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The prolific E knows which way the wind blows – and it's a bleak forecast

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VAMPIRE WEEKEND

Contra XL RECORDINGS



Ezra, Ezra, quite contrary. A second, rather different, culture-Clash. By Stephen Troussé



Ahead of the release of Vampire Weekend's second album, singer Ezra Koenig has taken, a little improbably, to protesting his band's punk authenticity:

"When people try to frame us as spoiled rich kids, I want to say, 'Well, hold up. You don't know anything about my family...' I mean, I grew up in New Jersey listening to the Ramones, The Clash, Elvis Costello..."

And, unlikely as it might seem, you really can hear echoes of The Clash on the new Vampire Weekend album. In response to *Sandinista!*, the Clash's sprawling 1980 triple album of international rebel songs named in honour of the Nicaraguan socialist party, Ezra and his pals have released a discreetly globe-trotting 37-minute album of diffident haute bourgeoisie synth pop named after the Contrás, the CIA-backed Nicaraguan counter-revolutionary insurgents.

What's more, the longest song on the album is called "Diplomat's Son", a bittersweet tale of a failed fling in 1981, backed by the kind of reggae you might associate with the theme tune to *QI*. It reminds you that Joe Strummer first got his

taste for world music as the son of a British diplomat based in Turkey, Egypt and Mexico. Complicating things even further, "Diplomat's Son" mischievously samples a snatch of MIA, the Hounslow-born, St Martins-educated, would-be queen of international shanty-House. Authenticity, once you get down to it, is never as simple as it seems. And *Contra*, in Vampire Weekend's case, might just be short for "contrary".

Despite their well-heeled poise and sense of diligent historical revision (What if one of those jangling UK indie bands who shared Peel playlists with the Bhundu Boys back in 1987 had tried to emulate Zimbabwean Jit or Congolese Soukous?), the sheer infectiousness and impeccable craft of Vampire Weekend's debut overwhelmed its contrivance. Eventually, it seduced even the most suspicious listeners. But as with so many immaculately conceived, fully-formed groups in the noughties, you wondered whether they would be able to repeat the trick for a second album.

What's immediately striking about *Contra* is how little guitar there is on it. It's almost as though, having made the most moreish electric guitar pop album since the Strokes' debut, sheer chutzpah has led them to banish the instrument and prove they can make tunes just as absurdly infectious from



digital bass, kalimbas, sequencers, synth pads and drum machines. And yet – with its melodic beauty, orchestral invention, rhythmic subtlety and metaphysical wit – it's still unmistakably Vampire Weekend.

The opening track, "Horchata", suggests the band might look to continue in the diamond-soled footsteps of Paul Simon, following an album of African-inspired pop with one based in Latin America – *horchata* being a Mexican rice drink. But the song's not so easy to place: they go on to rhyme it with "Aranciata" (the orangeade variety of San Pellegrino) and "Masada" (the ancient Israeli fortified mesa). The track is largely played on an African thumb piano, and the chorus brings in a massed choir. With wistful lyrics about how "years go by and hearts start to harden", altogether the effect is something curiously like the opening

TRACKMARKS

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 Horchata ★★★★★ | 6 Run ★★★★★ |
| 2 White Sky ★★★★★ | 7 Cousins ★★★★★ |
| 3 Holiday ★★★★★ | 8 Giving Up The Gun ★★★★★ |
| 4 California English ★★★★★ | 9 Diplomat's Son ★★★★★ |
| 5 Taxi Cab ★★★★★ | 10 I Think Ur A Contra ★★★★★ |



section of TS Eliot's *The Waste Land* adapted for the score of a *Dora The Explorer* movie.

The first single, "Cousins", is more familiar and more urgent: a frantic yet still somehow dainty two-minute dash that suggests the Penguin Café Orchestra having a bash at "Miserlou". But the lyrics, when you can make them out above the subterranean homesick rush, seem to hint at generational belatedness: "*Your dad was a risk-taker, his was a shoe-maker, you're a 2006 greatest hits little list-maker.*"

This little hint, on the album's most irrepressibly upbeat number, pervades *Contra* as a whole. On a couple of tracks, the terrific "Giving Up The Gun" and the teasingly titled "Run", the band seem to have channelled some of the spirit of New Order, where irresistibly huge synthetic rhythms glide by with a melancholy

...with its invention, subtlety and metaphysical wit, it's still unmistakably Vampire Weekend

undertow. The slowest, saddest songs on the album, "Taxi Cab" and "I Think Ur A Contra", are the best, Koenig singing of romantic might-have-beens and never-weres amid swirling synth pads, his voice drifting free into an affecting falsetto.

Typically contrary, the most suggestive line on the album might be on the most apparently throwaway song. "Holiday" is

another upbeat almost-ska number, the kind that might be cynically written to get a sluggish festival crowd moving. Koenig sings of a girl who's been "*a vegetarian since the invasion/She'd never seen the word BOMBS blown up to 96 pt Futura*". (Futura, of course, is Vampire Weekend's typeface of choice.) The image of the churning world of terror and destruction erupting so graphically into the aesthetic cocoon of hipster typophilia is ironic and incisive. It's not the Clash or MIA, but neither is it simply concerned with Oxford commas.

"*You wanted rock and roll/ You wanted complete control,*" croons Koenig on the closing "I Think Ur A Contra". There is very little in the way of rock'n'roll on *Contra*—and in truth it's all the better for it. But, bold, beautiful and carefully contrary, it's an album by a band in complete control.

YEAH YEAH YEAHS IT'S BLITZ!

THE CRITICS' ALBUM OF 2009

"THEIR POP STAR COMING-
OUT PARTY. SPECTACULAR"

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"EPIC, INTELLIGENT POP"

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AND IMPOSSIBLE
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ANIMAL COLLECTIVE

Campfire Songs C 2003

PAW TRACKS

★★★

Early free folk fumblings from band of the moment

The engulfing electronics are yet to be added, but Animal Collective's dreamy, all-acoustic third album from 2003 gives you a good idea of where they're headed. Recorded in one take on a Maryland porch, *Campfire Songs* is not a collection of cross-legged singalongs but an attempt to fashion music that shimmered and crackled in harmony with the flames. Long stretches of listless strumming may test your patience, but the reward is the gorgeous psychedelic folk reverie of 11-minute closer "Do Soto De Son", as hypnotically lovely as anything that they've laid down since.

Sam Richards

ARDENT JOHN

On The Wire

SLOW TRAIN

★★★

Self-confident first from Scottish indie-folk sextet

At a time when indie folk has become the default setting for acoustic guitar bands – most either overly self-conscious naïfs or Snow Patrol-style high achievers – Ardent John are refreshing new arrivals. The band is led by primary-school pals from the Isle Of Bute, Keiron Mason and Al Shields, who have hit on a mix of sensitively arranged acoustic balladry and more experimental alt.rock for their first full-length. If they look to anyone, it's to The Coral (textured psychedelics) and The Stone Roses (laid-back grooves), but "Fleeting Moments" and the reverberant "Believing Man" suggest Richmond Fontaine and My Morning Jacket have also turned their heads.

Sharon O'Connell

BEACH HOUSE

Teen Dream

BELLA UNION

★★★★

Grizzly Bear-affiliated duo relocate from Baltimore to upstate New York

Devotion, the previous long-player from Victoria Legrand and Alex Scally's Beach House, was a success within its own rather mild terms, quiet torch songs and sparse soul swathed in a wooziness that would be immediately

familiar to anyone who ever lost themselves in a Mazzy Star or Galaxie 500 record. Perhaps aware excessive recourse to such gentility can be a trap of its own, *Teen Dream* – recorded in a converted church in upstate New York with TV On The Radio producer Chris Coady – finds the duo resolving to present their songs in somewhat firmer strokes. Nothing rocks, exactly, but organs coo in sharper focus, drum machines beat with added vigour, and an eerie disquiet occasionally lingers. "It is happening again," warns Legrand on "Silver Soul", as guitars dangle tensely and drums snap in a minimal, Velvets-like march.

Louis Pattison

BELLOWHEAD

Unbellowhead

WESTPARK

★★★

Cosmopolitan primer of sprawling new folk family

Bellowhead originated five years ago as the ambitious concept of folk duo John Spiers and Jon Boden, soon becoming an 11-strong, sometimes unwieldy, folk juggernaut. This collection of songs by its individual members explores more multifarious styles, including an unreleased track from Bellowhead itself. Elsewhere, Belshazzar's Feast take on Mozart, Chavo interpret Bulgarian dance music and cellist Rachael McShane serves up the traditional "The Fisherman" with an atypical grinding backbeat. Further evidence, perhaps, that Bellowhead are already becoming a Fairports-like institution.

Mick Houghton

BIFFY CLYRO

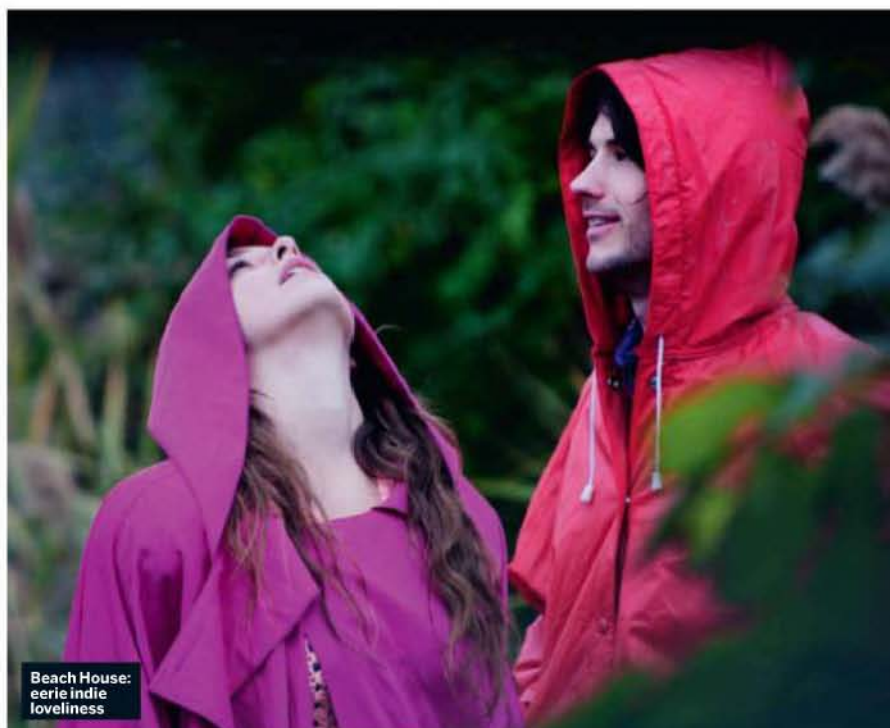
Only Revolutions

14TH FLOOR

★★★

Josh Homme guests on Scottish stadium rockers' latest offering

The purpose behind Biffy Clyro's fifth album is signposted on the opening song, the engorged singalong single "The Captain", which includes the rather needy-sounding plea "Somebody help me sing, oh-oh-oh", and is clearly designed with Freddie Mercury-style audience interaction in mind. This affinity with Muse is impossible to escape on pounding epics like "That Golden Rule" and



"Mountains", but the slight, personal "God & Satan" and intriguingly angular "Born On A Horse" offer respite from the bombast, while Queens Of The Stone Age's Josh Homme brings a welcome touch of class to "Bubbles".

Peter Watts



BLACK BREATH

Razor To Oblivion

SOUTHERN LORD

★★★

Scorching mini-LP from Seattle garage-metallers

In a universe not so different from this one, Black Breath would have sat quite comfortably on the Sub Pop roster, and not just because of the geography and the lumberjack shirts. *Razor To Oblivion* has trace elements of grunge in its blend of raw vocals and sludgy guitar chug, even if this Seattle quintet hail from a more orthodox metal lineage. The latter comes to the fore on "Beneath The Crust", an evil blend of Bathory and Celtic Frost that surges forth on a serrated bass riff.

Louis Pattison

BOO HOORAY

Haunted

69 BLUEBIRD

★★

Scot-pop theorists play it far too safe

You may remember On U Sound engineer Anth Brown and music writer Tom Doyle once coupling up as Electric Music AKA. Boo Hooray is their latest venture, one that borrows liberally from Talk Talk and the soft-pop of The Pernice Brothers. *Haunted* moves along pleasantly enough, though the tunes are often too predictable and lack spark. On "Cursed Moon", for example, Doyle sounds very like Mark Hollis, though without the sudden twists of invention. The lovely "Haunted By You" and "Johnny Won't Get To Heaven" are the standouts here, suggesting that they're still capable of something rather special.

Rob Hughes

STANLEY BRINKS & THE WAVE PICTURES

Stanley Brinks & The Wave Pictures

CIAO KETCHUP RECORDINGS

★★★★

Gauche folk from ex-Herman Düne man

The wonky world of Stanley Brinks isn't that far removed from the one he used to inhabit as part of Franco-Swedish trio Herman Düne. When Brinks (then called André Herman Düne) quit the band in 2006, he began

ferreting out similar companions. Enter London's The Wave Pictures, propping up Brinks' shaky-voiced anti-folk songs with trebly guitars and backings that often sound like lost desert shanties. It's all as charming as it is arch, Brinks' gift for a tragi-comic couplet as keen as Jeffrey Lewis or, as on the wonderful "Hi Jane" and "End Of The World", Jonathan Richman.

Rob Hughes

BASIA BULAT

Heart Of My Own

ROUGH TRADE

★★★

Promising 25-year-old Canuck's second, written on the road

Despite the enthusiastic embracing here of countless Canadian acts following the success of Arcade Fire, Broken Social Scene et al, Basia Bulat has yet to benefit. The singer-songwriter's debut LP from 2007 was an assured, if unremarkable indie-folk effort, but her follow-up is an earthier, more revealing and vigorous record. It is characterised by dramatic orchestral peaks that drop suddenly to tranquil plateaux, while her voice – full of throaty tremolo – suggests a young Natalie Merchant. Pop's lightness doesn't much suit Bulat; she's at her best on the banjo-driven title track and gospel-toned closer "If It Rains".

Sharon O'Connell

PETER GABRIEL

Scratch My Back VIRGIN

★★★★★

No guitars. No drums. Covers of Bowie, Radiohead and Elbow. Gabriel's "song exchange" opens for business. By Alastair McKay



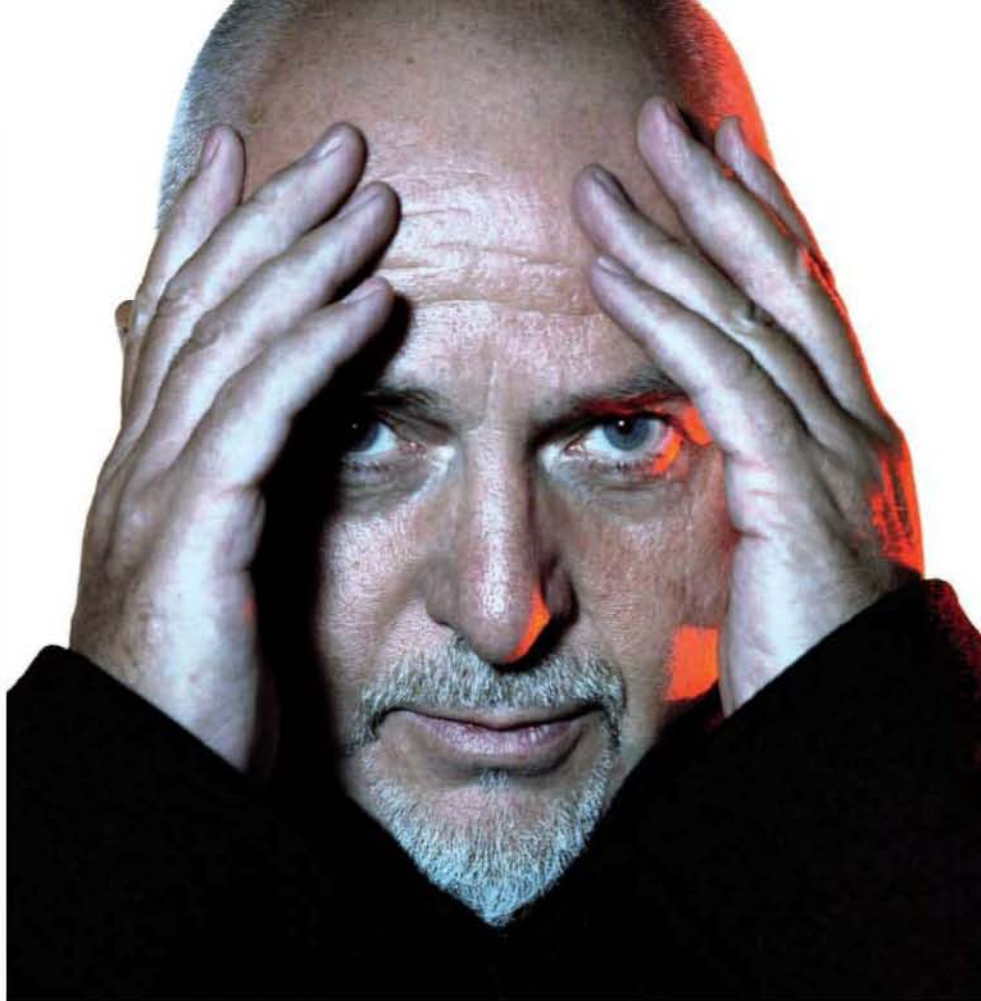
In these *X-Factor* times, the cover version finds itself in a difficult place, somewhere to the left of those old *Top Of The Pops* albums on which the day's hits were mimicked by

soundalike groups, and slightly to the right of karaoke. Peter Gabriel's covers album is not like that; it comes with an art concept attached, being the first of a series of "song exchanges" in which leading artists reinterpret each other's material. If true, this is surely a good deal for Gabriel, who can expect to receive, by return of post, a jiffy containing his own tunes reworked by Radiohead, Elbow, Lou Reed, Neil Young, David Bowie and Paul Simon.

On reflection, that album might be more surprising than this one, though it's far from obvious that Gabriel's own back catalogue is awash with standards awaiting creative interpretation. (The Simon Cowell hit factory is never going to retool "Sledgehammer".)

Needless to say, these covers are not straightforward. Gabriel limits his options by opting to record with an orchestral backing, with no guitar or drums. This makes the sound wilfully sombre, particularly as Gabriel's singing is often more theatrical than emotionally expressive: he is not, and has never been, a soul man. But this almost literary attitude also exposes the words, sometimes to great effect. Paul Simon's "Boy In The Bubble", for example, is a rush of pop. Gabriel's version has scarcely any rhythmic heft: the vocal, with sweetness excised, is plaintive and mournful, verging on desperate. Gabriel delivers it as a lullaby, cradling the words "*don't cry baby, don't cry*", so that the days of miracle and wonder sound ominous and desperate. It's stern, but quite lovely.

Gabriel's approach is clinical, similar to the surgery performed on "Heartbreak Hotel" by John Cale, which removed Elvis' pelvis, and stitched existential dread where romantic disappointment used to be. Oddly, Cale comes to mind on Gabriel's version of Lou Reed's "The Power Of The Heart", which manages to feel like a piano ballad, while also having the qualities of a Christmas hymn. The vocal is conversational, but it does sound rather as if Gabriel is delivering the message in a Welsh accent. "Heroes" is similarly effective: Bowie's defiant, suicidal optimism is replaced by dreamy despair. Again – the sensation is less



"Elbow reminds me of stuff I used to do in Genesis: unsingable and real buggers to get right..."

romantic, less teenage, more inflected with the weary realism of middle age.

If Gabriel is comfortable with Bowie and Lou, he's less relaxed with more recent material. Arcade Fire's "My Body Is A Cage" is twice as long as it should be, overcooked, and the nearest thing to Genesis on the record, despite a Mark Lanegan/Johnny Cash style vocal. Radiohead's "Street Spirit (Fade Out)" is played in the style of a tramp idling in a piano bar – albeit a clever tramp channelling Arvo

Pärt – while Robert Wyatt sings along in the snug. The delicacy of Elbow's "Mirrorball" is lost in a fog of over-cranked orchestration. Bon Iver's "Flume" is more convincing, and quite different from Justin Vernon's recording. The original is organic, angelic, and intimately acoustic. Gabriel gives the tune a widescreen interpretation, and replaces wispy diction with crisp enunciation. It's rather strange, and quite beautiful. My iPod shuffled it next to Nick Drake's "Fly": an exact fit.

But perhaps the most effective retreat is Talking Heads' "Listening Wind": Gabriel removes the funk, parks the dance, and leaves the words to do the work. David Byrne's 1980 song is a remarkable piece of narrative writing, switching between the first and third person as it follows the fortunes of Mojique, a terrorist who "*holds a package in his quivering hands*", finding justification for his behaviour in the sound of the wind. And it sounds like a timeless song, written yesterday.

Q&A Peter Gabriel

Has the 'song swap' idea been in your head for some time?

It's been hovering for a while, yes. I recorded a Vampire Weekend track and that revitalised it to some extent. But I knew that a regular covers album has been done to death and that I needed to find a way to make it fun. That's when I got the idea of making an exchange: you do one of mine and I'll do one of yours. I'm very keen still to push the craft of songwriting. It's underacknowledged. For example, everyone hears "The Boy In The Bubble" with that wonderful South African backing, but you tend to forget that's one of the best rock lyrics ever

written. The day you stop learning is the day you pack up. And I'm definitely still learning.

You've done Elbow's "Mirrorball"...

It's funny, because of all the melodies I've heard, Elbow's remind me of the stuff I used to do in the early Genesis days: unsingable and real buggers to get right. "Mirrorball" was the hardest track to do, by a long way. I just thought, I've been here before!

Why no guitar or drums on these songs?

The original concept was to make the songs stark and empty, so you'd listen to the lyrics and melody. That would allow me to function more as a singer. INTERVIEW: ROB HUGHES

CARBON/SILICON

The Carbon Bubble

WWW.CARBONSILICONINC.COM

★★★

Mick Jones and Tony James' follow up to *The Last Post* Another low-key internet release from Jones and James' project for "two gnarled, ugly old punks". If the first album recalled Big Audio Dynamite, much of this recalls The Clash, particularly the manic thrash of "What's Up Doc" and the *London Calling*-isms of "The Best Man". Jones' fragile voice remains a comforting presence, and there are some decent lyrics – "Unbelievable Pain" is a nod to WH Auden's Funeral Blues ("Stop all the clocks") – but James and Jones blot their copybook with schlocky Kenny Everett-does-punk routines ("That's As Good As It Gets") and some why-oh-why moralising ("DisUnited Kingdom"). **John Lewis**

CHRISTOPHE F

Heathen Frontiers In Sound

TRILLITHON

★★★★

Powerful sloganeering from Julian Cope protégé One of Cope's hairy Black Sheep collective, Christophe F is a representative of its acoustic division. He combines what Cope would call "catchy bastard tunes", like "Gringo Blues", with a series of image-laden broadsides equally indebted to urban political activist David Peel and *On The Beach*-era Neil Young. The highlight is the barbed epic "Talking Revolution Blues", reminiscent of John Cooper Clarke or of The Velvet Underground's "The Gift" given an acid-fuelled, politicised overhaul. **Mick Houghton**

CITAY

Dream Get Together

DEAD OCEANS

★★★

Psychedelic Americana – with added heavy metal axe! Ezra Feinberg's San Francisco collective are now on their third studio album (following an excellent album of remixes last year). Their music is drifts, psychedelic, often vocal-free, but where they distance themselves from the whole "New Wyrd America" scene is by displaying a real pop nous on tracks like "Dream Get Together" (which recalls Elvis Costello's "Tokyo Storm

Warning") and "Mirror Kisses" (a twisted take on Blur's "Tender"). The wildcard element comes in the shape of their guitarist, who makes much of this album sound as if Brian May had been airlifted into a Devendra Banhart recording session. Disconcerting, but really rather good.

John Lewis

STEVE CONTE & THE CRAZY TRUTH

Steve Conte & The Crazy Truth

VARESE SARABANDE

★★★

Solid but predictable set from New York Dolls guitarist

When not guitar-slinging for the current incarnation of The New York Dolls, Conte busies himself providing generic rock soundtracks for video games and fronting a handful of competent (though hardly spectacular) bar bands. The Crazy Truth differ little to his previous outfits, The Contes and Company Of Wolves; well-crafted power-strummers state their intentions in the first few bars and stick rigidly to well-worn formulae. "Gypsy Cab" is awash with Lower East Side sleaze and shout-along passages, while "The Truth Ain't Pretty" bedecks itself in Billy Idol posturing. The *Rain Dogs*-era Waitesian voodoo groove of "Busload Of Hope" offers a modicum of variety. **Terry Staunton**



STEVIE COYLE

Ten In One

TUNA MINE

★★★

San Francisco virtuoso finds life's a carnival

After several albums with country-rockers The Waybacks, Coyle's solo debut is a wonderfully imagined concept album about American carny folk and circus showmen. The dozen picaresque songs, sometimes spoken and sometimes sung, mix folk, bluegrass, ragtime, swing and roots-rock with evocative sound effects and



Kevin Coyne: a career of razor-blade blues-folk, smartly collected

are driven by Coyle's own classy fingerpicking, backed by a virtuoso acoustic ensemble. It all works a treat, mining traditional indigenous musical forms to illuminate a fascinating slice of vernacular American history in much the same way as Ry Cooder's *Chávez Ravine* and *My Name Is Buddy*. **Nigel Williamson**

KEVIN COYNE

Marjory Razorblade

1973

VIRGIN

★★★★

I Want My Crown: The Anthology 1973-1980

1973

VIRGIN

★★★★

Nurse, the screens! Sharp-tongued Peel favourite gets reissue treatment

Coyne's Virgin debut gets a proper release alongside a four-disc boxset of choice cuts from his 11 LPs for the label. *Marjory Razorblade*'s serrated folk-blues rock is a perfect foil for Coyne's peppery vocals; there are shades of Beefheart on "I Want My Crown" and Dr Feelgood on "Eastbourne Ladies". As the anthology's mix of album tracks, rarities and live shots confirms, Coyne's art was unpredictable but of high integrity. His nervous energy held up even into the very late '70s on the anguished *Babble* and *Bursting Bubbles*: this was a man for whom "punk was a confirmation of my principles". **Rob Young**

FYFE DANGERFIELD

Fly Yellow Moon

GEFFEN

★★★

Guillemots leader cuts loose with first solo effort

A lesser character than Fyfe Dangerfield might have spent a few months licking their wounds following the underwhelming response to the Guillemots' *Red* album. Instead, the singer-songwriter ploughed into this solo debut, seemingly treating the exercise as therapy – in the opening songs Dangerfield sings, like a macho Mika, of being madly in love, deliriously happy, and without a care. Fair play, but his vehicle of expression alternates between acoustic confessional ("Livewire") and clapped-out pub-rock ("When You Walk In The Room"), leaving Dangerfield pootling down the middle of a fairly nondescript road. **Piers Martin**

DANNY & THE CHAMPIONS OF THE WORLD

Streets Of Our Time

LOOSE

★★★★

Very decent second album from ex-Grand Drive man's current outfit

Having emerged as a leading exponent of UK-based Americana with Grand Drive a decade ago, Danny Wilson's transatlantic juxtapositions have surely never worked better than they do here. Banjos and mandolins evoke the Appalachian Mountains,

while many of the lyrical themes are more rooted in Tulsa Hill. "Henry The Van" – about a broken-down tour bus – evokes Neil Young's "Long May You Run", relocated to the M1 rather than Route 66. "Wandle Swan" sounds like the Doobie Brothers hymning the Mississippi, but is actually a tribute to a south London suburban stream. Lovely, improbably elegiac stuff.

Nigel Williamson

DELETED WAVEFORM GATHERINGS

Ghost, She Said

RAINBOW QUARTZ

★★★★

Third release from Norwegian psych-poppers

A crumbling barn in Trondheim may not be the most obvious base from which to replicate bygone US garage band sounds and melodic powerpop, but it's worked a treat for DWG. The five-piece have managed to filter an impressive roster of influences into one endlessly palatable whole: "Why I'm Falling" spins with the catchy harmonies and cute chord changes of Teenage Fanclub; "What You Trying To Prove?" places a Lennon drawl over a Byrdsian template, and "Hate Waiting In Line" shambles along like The Seeds or The Standells. It's one case of identity theft after another, but few pickpockets set about their work with such unbridled joy. **Terry Staunton**

SHORT CUTS

THIS MONTH... MOD



THE ATTACK

About Time! RPM

★★★★

A familiar sight on London's mid-'60s Mod circuit, The Attack looked set for a national breakthrough with their sparse rendition of "Hi Ho Silver Lining"

— until Jeff Beck released his rocked up version later the same month. This collection brings together their four Decca singles, plus radio sessions and unreleased tracks, the frenetic "Any More Than I Do" boasting a similar rough soul power to their great rivals, The Action. **Terry Staunton**



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Rare Mod Volume 2

ACID JAZZ ★★★★★

More overlooked gems stopping off at several points of the '60s club spectrum. Brit soul nearly man Mac Kissoon locates his inner Wilson Pickett on "1000

Ways Of Loving You". The Glass Company step up with the garage growl of "She's Got The Time", and rocker Ted Nugent's psych roots are revealed on The Amboy Dukes' "More And More". **Terry Staunton**



GEORGIE FAME

Mod Classics 1964-1966: From The Flamingo Into The Soho Dawn

ACE ★★★★★

Leaving the hits and ska recordings to one side, this set collects Fame's more soulful,

choice R'n'B cuts plus his stirring recordings with top UK jazzmen in the Harry South Big Band on 1966's *Sound Venture*, including "Dawn Yawn", an evocative depiction of the after-hours club lifestyle. **Mick Houghton**



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Keb Darge & Paul Weller Present Lost And Found: Real R&B And Soul

BBE ★★★★★

Both Weller and his crate-digging Scottish DJ pal Keb Darge have a well-documented love of late-

'60s and early '70s funk and soul, but this 28-track collection sees them mining a much older vintage of black music — blues, boogie, northern soul and big-band swing of the '50s and early '60s. Highlights include the shouty minimalism of Big T. Tyler's "King Kong" and Emmitt Long's effortless "Call Me". **John Lewis**



Factory men: the Durutti Column's Vini Reilly with label boss Tony Wilson (left)

JACKIE DeSHANNON

You Won't Forget Me: The Complete Liberty Singles

ACE

★★★★★

Stirring collection of rock'n'roll melodramas

Sharon Lee Myers went through several name changes before arriving at the newly formed Liberty Records as Jackie DeShannon. Even so, this set — the first part of Ace's comprehensive career overview — is a sampler of early 1960s rock'n'roll styles, with DeShannon being modelled first as the female Elvis (on the great debut 45, "Teach Me"), and later Bobby Vee. These teenage melodramas are slightly tentative, but there's an appealing rawness to DeShannon's voice. After abortive tributes to Ray Charles and Dylan, she blossoms when teamed with Jack Nitzsche and Sonny Bono on the glorious "Needles And Pins". **Alastair McKay**



DEXATEENS

Singlewide

SKYBUCKET

★★★★★

Alabama five-piece show a sensitive side. Kind of... Dexateens usually serve up hybridised post-Skynyrd rock, last heard on 2007's *Hardwire Healing*, an album produced by Drive-By

Truckers' Patterson Hood. *Singlewide* is altogether different, turning down the amps, flicking on the porch light and making the same rootsy career shift as Grateful Dead circa *Workingman's Dead*. As a result the songs, this time overseen by Lambchop's Mark Nevers, are more detailed and engaging. "Granddaddy's Mouth" carries the same grainy honky-tonk feel as Ryan Adams' work on *Cold Roses*, or even the Stones' "Dead Flowers", while longtime fans will be pleased with the ripping solo on "Can You Whoop It". **Rob Hughes**

DIGITAL LEATHER

Warm Brother

FAT POSSUM

★★★★

Synth-punk with raw, rock'n'roll appeal

The synthesiser remains tool of choice for all manner of Bacofoil-clad retro futurists, but on *Warm Brother*, Arizona native Shawn Foree is out to prove it sounds just as good dragged through the gutter. "Ugly and raw, like a porkchop left out in the sun," is how Foree describes Digital Leather, and sure enough, these are entertainingly scrappy, lo-fi specimens, as much informed by the greasy garage of Foree's compatriot Jay Reatard as by Gary Numan or Devo. Sadly, it's patchy: "Homesick For Terror" is Tenacious D without the jokes, and that ain't pretty. **Louis Pattison**

THE DURUTTI COLUMN

A Paeon To Wilson

KOOKY

★★★★★

Wordless homage to late Factory Records chief Vini Reilly's Durutti Column

were the first band Tony Wilson ever signed to Factory Records, back in early 1978. Their bond was such that, when Wilson was ill in hospital, Reilly sent him new instrumentals to listen to and was at his bedside when he died. This rich and contemplative record is the fruition of that, forsaking traditional song structure for nagging loops, ambient flurries of guitar notes (spilling over into Spanish flamenco on "Quatro"), highly rhythmic percussion and strobing feedback. John Metcalfe's viola, particularly, is mood-perfect. It all ends with Wilson's damning verdict on New Labour. Ever the last word. **Rob Hughes**

EDAN

Echo Party

FIVE DAY WEEKEND

★★★★

Vintage hip hop reconstituted with a psychedelic intelligence

It's been nearly five years since Edan Portnoy's last record, *Beauty And The Beat*, a remarkable feat that saw this Boston MC/producer reconciling his love of block-rocking '80s hip hop with the psychedelia of Hendrix and Haight-Ashbury. On *Echo Party*, we find him further subsumed within his source material. Assembled with the back catalogue of hip hop/funk distributors Traffic Entertainment group and instruments including echoplex, synth and glockenspiel, it's more than a mix, pulling out lost takes and reassembling constituent parts — a snatch of Afrika Bambaataa here, a flurry of Liquid Liquid percussion there — with phantasmagorical results. **Louis Pattison**



EELS

End Times EWORKS/VAGRANT



The worst of times, the best of albums, says Andrew Mueller



Eels' Mark Everett, usually known as E, has not deployed an unconsidered word in seven previous albums, but the title of his eighth is exquisite even by his

standards. *End Times*, to adherents of the Abrahamic faiths, are the tribulations that presage the apocalypse; an event which some 50 million of E's fellow Americans confidently expect to witness in their lifetime. While these people are wrong or, at least, will be unable to dispute that assertion if it turns out they're *not*, most of them, and most of the rest of us will at least have some appreciation of what it feels like when one's own world ends. Long story short: she's ditched him. While desolation and loneliness are hardly new subjects for E, he has never before explored and mapped them with this forensic exactitude: tellingly, the usually cheerfully confessional E is refusing interviews about *End Times*, apparently believing it too personal to discuss. It's doubtless no consolation, but this latest disappointment might well have prompted Eels' masterpiece.

It starts, logically enough, with "The Beginning", a snapshot of the contented optimism of a man who believes he has found what, or, more precisely, *who* he was looking for. It's all downhill from there. Like other distinguished chroniclers of middle-aged heartbreak (Randy Newman, say) *End Times* understands that the grief, rage, and

desperation that attend such calamity are ruthlessly magnified by the knowledge that the carousel has finite further rotations left in it. "In My Younger Days" notes that a man with less grey in his beard "*would've just chalked it up/As part of my ongoing education/ But I've had enough/Been through some stuff/ And I don't need anymore misery*".

Sonically, *End Times* contains no digressions from the template Eels established on their 1996 debut single "Novocaine For The Soul". This is no bad thing. Eels got it right the first time, and

Not merely Eels' best record yet, but one that stands in the highest rank of breakup albums...

perceive no virtue in fooling untowardly with what works: they're the AC/DC of consumptive electro-indie. This album was recorded in E's basement studio, and produced and substantially played by him. As ever, the songs are insidiously melodic despite their simplicity, evocative despite their directness, and E's careworn growl reliably affecting, despite its limitations.

The few eccentric excursions are perfectly

judged. "High & Lonesome" is a minute-long collage of suitably portentous sounds thunder, rain, church bells, an engaged tone. "Apple Trees" is a wistful answerphone monologue over a pretty toytown backing (the wilful naivety of some of the instrumentation is one of several echoes of Leonard Cohen's *I'm Your Man*). At the start of the Mark Eitzel-ish lament "Nowadays", a snippet of studio babble provides what might be a subtitle for the album: "*Something's not right. I don't understand.*"

For all its bleakness, *End Times* offers a few dimly glimmering, redemptive reprieves. E is not oblivious to the absurd humour of his situation: as a summation of domestic discord, Tom Waits would applaud the opening of "A Line In The Dirt": "*She locked herself in the bathroom again/So I am pissing in the yard.*" And though he has to contort himself painfully to perceive it, E can appreciate the haven of perspective ("*I take small comfort in a dying world,*" he offers on "Gone Man", "*I'm not the only one who is feeling this pain*"). He finishes with the only song on the album that clears three and a half minutes. The six-and-a-half minute elegy "On My Feet" is a dispatch from a man who has learnt the hard way that much of the energy we choose to expend is squandered on things that couldn't matter less: "*So many thousands of days in my life that I don't remember/And a small handful of days that I do hold near to my heart.*"

End Times is not merely Eels' best album yet, but in the highest rank of breakup albums, seething with the anguished fury of Ryan Adams' *Heartbreaker*, sighing with the stoic resignation of Bruce Springsteen's *Tunnel Of Love*. It's the sound of a man getting older, and wiser, but already wise enough only to marvel at how little you ever learn. It'll be the last thing E wishes to hear, but he should get divorced more often.



Sitting on the verge, etc – the very mighty Funkadelic, collected

EVERYBODY WAS IN THE FRENCH RESISTANCE... NOW!

Fixin' The Charts Volume One

COOKING VINYL

★★★★

Pop history wittily rewritten by Art Brut offshoot

It's a neat idea – you take a dozen classic pop songs and write a bunch of "responses" to them. Accompanied by the uncomplicated keyboard vamping of Blood Arm's Dyan Valdes, Art Brut's Eddie Argos delivers in deadpan fashion a series of clever lyrical replies to hits by Avril Lavigne, Kanye West, Martha & The Vandellas, Michael Jackson and eight others. Each turns the original song's conceit on its head, so that Dylan's standard becomes "Think Twice (It's Not Alright)". ... and so on. Arch novelty rather than post-modern profundity, then, but it's a damn sight smarter than the Barron Knights ever were. *Nigel Williamson*

FALL OUT BOY

Believers Never Die: Greatest Hits

MERCURY

★★

Premature Best Off from punk-pop hitmakers

Although often described as an emo band, Fall Out Boy have more in common with the likes of Weezer and Foo Fighters than the Kohl-eyed angst of My Chemical Romance. Their stock-in-trade is sophisticated Cali

punk-pop, polished to an almost unbearable sheen, topped with sardonic lyrics that are never quite as clever as the band thinks they are. After only eight years together, a greatest hits seems a little presumptuous, although admittedly their strike rate is fairly impressive. Sadly, the affected delivery and shrink-wrapped production precludes any real enjoyment. *Sam Richards*

LUC FERRARI

Les Arythmiques

BLUE CHOPSTICKS

★★★★

Electric shock therapy from celebrated French avant-garde composer

One of the late, great Ferrari's final compositions, *Les Arythmiques* has him imagining the crack of energy unleashed by an electric shock administered, post cardiac arrhythmia, while under anaesthesia. That cataclysmic jolt of noise crackles through this 40-minute piece at uneven intervals, interrupting ECG pulses, clinical drones, bells, birdsong, and recordings of the everyday taken from Ferrari's recent travel archives. It makes for seriously disorienting listening, the entire piece pulsing and writhing with discomfort, with electronics surging and throbbing in great washes above the shockwaves. *Jon Dale*

FINAL FANTASY Heartland

DOMINO

★★★★

Obtuse orchestral concept album from sometime Arcade Fire arranger

Owen Pallett's last release as Final Fantasy, *He Poos Clouds*, was a prize-winning chamber-pop song suite supposedly based on the eight types of magic in *Dungeons And Dragons*. Its successor is a more rigorously narrative concept, detailing the Jobian laments of a tormented Canadian heartland farmer. Recorded with the Czech Symphony, it's inventively arranged – stunningly so on "Red Sun No 5" – but Pallett's pallid voice fails to dramatise the narrative or really engage the listener. As a calling card for future soundtrack commissions, however, it should succeed splendidly. *Stephen Troussé*

MICK FLANNERY White Lies

EMI

★★★★

Irish stonemason singer. Doesn't rock, much

Flannery is, apparently, a stonemason from Blarney, County Cork, who once won a songwriting competition which might have been judged by Tom Waits (details are sketchy). His influences are a trinity of "depressing old fellas": Waits, Dylan and Leonard Cohen, which is fortunate for a man with a

voice that isn't so much world-weary as punctured by poetic despair. Occasionally, the maudlin introspection can sound contrived, but when he keeps things slow and mournful ("California", or the Waits-like piano ballad "Goodbye") Flannery has a command of blue melodies that is quite endearing. *Alastair McKay*

FOUR TET

There Is Love In You

DOMINO

★★★★

Reliable fifth from the head boy of the Putneyschool

Maybe Kieran Hebden relies on his endless collaborations, from jazz drummer Steve Reid to dubstep auteur Burial, to take him out of himself these days, but on his first solo album in five years, he's eased back into his Four Tet comfort zone. Ten years ago this hand-stitched tapestry of astral-jazz harp, dusty acoustics, crackling breakbeats, music-box twinkles and twitchy "Intelligent Dance Music" might have seemed bravely genre-bending, but now it's as cosy a pair of favourite slippers. Which isn't to deny its charm: the elysian gamelan of "Love Cry" and the sylvan hoots of the closing "She Likes To Fight" will surely grace a future best-of compilation. *Stephen Troussé*



NILS FRAHM

The Bells

ERASED TAPES

★★★★

A lesson in improvised piano solos

Produced by Peter Broderick, who allegedly lies inside the piano for the meditative "Peter Is Dead In The Piano", *The Bells* exists in a world where Keith Jarrett and George Winston reign supreme. Entirely improvised, the results perhaps lack the aching beauty of a contemporary like Dustin O'Halloran's *Piano Solos* or, obviously, the melody of Erik Satie, an obvious influence. But on the

likes of "Said And Done" Frahm conjures up a mood of melancholic introspection that makes this accomplished, genuinely pretty set a serious (if rather less extravagant) rival to Gonzales and Andrew WK's recent piano excursions. *Eden Parke*

FUCKED UP

Couple Tracks: Singles 2002-2009

MATADOR RECORDS

★★★★

Round-up of hard-to-find treats from fierce Canadians Thoroughly terrifying Canadian hardcore sextet Fucked Up struck unexpected critical paydirt with 2008's excellent *Chemistry Of Modern Life* and have followed it up with this great double-album of rare and unreleased tracks. It's more than just a cash-in – Fucked Up have released scores of 7" and 12" singles on numerous labels all over the world, making it difficult for fans to keep up. This wildly varied collection begins with their first release in 2002, "No Pasaran" about the Spanish Civil War, and includes treats such as "Dream Come True", a self-released 7" given away at gigs, which sounds like Henry Rollins singing the *Grease* soundtrack while vomiting marbles. Yes, it's that good. *Peter Watts*

FUNKADELIC

Standing On The Verge: The Best Of

WESTBOUND

★★★★

Spanning 1969-79, one compilation most certainly under a groove

From the "Cosmic Slop" get-go, this 20-track compilation sets a cracking pace that highlights the Detroit outfit's rhythmic engine. On "You Can't Miss What You Can't Measure", "Better By The Pound" and "Hit It And Quit It" it still sounds powerful enough to drive a superconveyer; the momentum only relents 12 tracks in, with Eddie Hazel's brooding, galactic "Maggot Brain" guitar solo (prefiguring "Purple Rain" by a decade and a half). Soul/funk tastemaker Dean Rudland's excellent selection fillets out the group's worst indulgences to home in on the "tidal wave of mysticism surging through [their] jet-age generation". *Rob Young*

CARGO HIGHLIGHTS OF 2009

THE ORB



THE ORB
BAGDAD BATTERIES
(ORBSSESSIONS VOLUME III)
MALOJUS DAMAGE CD/LP/DL

THE JIM JONES REVUE



THE JIM JONES REVUE
HERE TO SAVE YOUR SOUL
(SINGLES VOLUME ONE)
PUNK ROCK BLUES CD/LP/DL



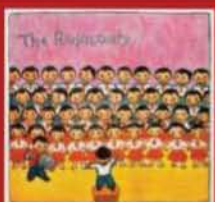
THE SLITS
TRAPPED ANIMAL
SWEET NOTHING CD/LP/DL



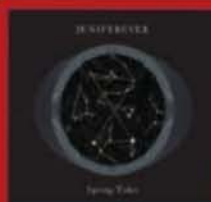
AND SO I WATCH YOU
FROM AFAR
AND SO I WATCH YOU FROM AFAR
SMALLTOWN AMERICA CD/DL



65DAYSOFSTATIC
ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK
MONOTREME CD+DVD/DL



THE RAINCOATS
THE RAINCOATS REMASTERED
VETREE CD/LP/DL



JENIFEVER
SPRING TIDES
MONOTREME CD/DL



THE PAINS OF BEING PURE AT HEART
THE PAINS OF BEING PURE AT HEART
FORUNA POP CD/LP/DL



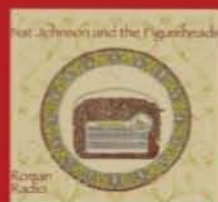
BILLY CHILDISH
ARCHIVE FROM 1959
DAMAGED GOODS 3CD/3LP/DL



CORNERSHOP
JUDY SUCKS A LEMON FOR BREAKFAST
AMPLE PLAY CD/LP/DL



JELLO BIAFRA
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Adam Green: darkness on the edge of toytown

FURT Sense

PSI

★★★★

English electronics duo pay tribute to Stockhausen

The pairing of Richard Barrett and Paul Obermayer strikes that rare balance between the academic and the pleasurable: while their collaborations are rigorous, they're not without humour. *Sense* consists of one studio composition, "Uranus", and a live tribute to Stockhausen, "Curtains", both of which intrigue, leaping between quiet burlings to hyper-complex weaving of wild electronics that are rather like a hyperactive version of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop.

Jon Dale

GIFT OF GAB Escape 2 Mars

CORNERSTONE

★★★★

Blackalicious rhymesayer's first in five years

If the sci-fi title and lurid artwork of his latest LP are anything to go by – not to mention the Illuminati name-check – then Gift Of Gab has been chewing the 2012 conspiracy fat with Matt Bellamy. In fact, the MC's focus on *Escape 2 Mars* is mainly ecological, the music packing ample punch to underline his message. As on *Blackalicious' The Craft*, a blend of Daisy-Age hip hop, space-jazz experimentation and neo-soul dominates, but GOG adds notes of electro-rock, psychedelic pop and

even pays respect to TLC (on the irresistible "In Las Vegas"), all to supremely groovy effect.

Sharon O'Connell

BRUCE GILBERT This Way

EDITIONS MEGO

★★★★

Ex-Wire man's compositions for dancer Michael Clark

The Fall might have been more successful with 1988's *I Am Kurious Oranj*, but Wire co-founder Bruce Gilbert got in first with Michael Clark on these 1984 pieces for *Do You Me? I Did and Swamp*. Originally released on Mute during a Wire hiatus that also saw Gilbert recording with Dome, Cupol, P.O., Gilbert/Lewis and Duet Emmo, *This*



Waysignals Gilbert's uncompromising ear for altered signals – built from queasy loops and snatches of found sound, the album is stark, unrelenting, ashen-grey experimentation, expertly rendered.

Jon Dale

GOOD SHOES No Hope, No Future

BRILLE

★★★

Second from confessional Thamesbeat janglers

Good Shoes' 2007 debut *Think Before You Speak* marked them out as one of the smarter prospects of the post-Libertines wave, frontman Rhys Jones' lyrics celebrating and castigating the band's hometown of Morden with sharp wit. As the title might suggest, though, *No Hope, No Future* is rather shorter on vim. The wiry, Wire-y dynamics are mostly present and correct, but "Everything You Do" forsakes engaging narrative for uninteresting relationship gripes and tepid songwriting, while "I Know" is apocalyptic hand-wringing with little real consequence.

Louis Pattison

ADAM GREEN Minor Love

ROUGH TRADE

★★★★

Narcotic nursery rhymes from former Moldy Peach

The prolific ex-Moldy Peaches man bashes out his sixth album in five years, cramming 14 songs into just over a half-hour. Musically it's toytown folk, like Jonathan Richman without the complicated bits, but Green's narrative lyrics grow increasingly weird and witty, recalling early '70s Lou Reed. "When I lost the magic sandals, I said some things I could not handle," from "Cigarette Burns Forever", is a typically childlike couplet. Little Joy's Rodrigo Amarante and Green's astronomer

brother Joel guest, though he played most instruments himself due to "incurable social phobias". Like the album, that's dark, funny and wholly plausible.

Chris Roberts

GREEN BLOSSOMS Whiskey Leaves

DIGITALIS

★★★★

Delicate folk-pop from Aussie ex-pat and partner

Green Blossoms are the boy/girl duo of Anthony Guerra and Aiko Koga. Guerra's history is in experimental music in Australia and London, but *Whiskey Leaves* reflects an ongoing rapprochement in his music with pop and folk. The approach on these diminutive songs is fragmented and elliptical, with harmonium drones, rippling acoustic guitars, muted pulses and ecstatic bells coasted by Koga's wistful sighs and chants. But rather like the recent *Pastels*/Tenniscoats album, which it superficially recalls, its gentle exterior shields an ideologically tough, smart core.

Jon Dale

GROUP DOUEH Treeg Salaam

SUBLIME FREQUENCIES

★★★★

Wild West Saharan grooves lifted out of the archives

Group Doueh are an insanely potent outfit from the Western Sahara whose music is brilliantly repetitive, with snaking, overloaded guitar, levitating keyboard drones

and street rhythms bursting out of home-jacked sound systems and bled to disc from cassette archives. Like other Group Doueh records, *Treeg Salaam* is positively overjoyed by its own blown-out, wildly variant recording quality – this is punk rock lo-fi as a socio-cultural imperative, not an indie rock vogue. The roughness makes *Treeg Salaam*'s excitement and fervour absolutely palpable.

I WAS A KING I Was A King

HYPE CITY

★★★★

Norwegian shoegazer pop – fans of the Fannies, clearly. Sufjan Stevens guests!

A fluctuating ensemble based around frontman Frode Strømstad, *I Was A King* favour lazy West Coast harmonies, ringing Rickenbackers and nodding three-minute powerpop songs draped in Mascis-like guitar squalls. They're from the church of Big Star and Teenage Fanclub, then, with a dash of reined-in shoegaze. Lead single "Norman Bleik" (sic) is a tribute to their Scottish mentors (in response to Teenage Fan Club's "Neil Jung", no doubt), and fan/friend Sufjan Stevens guests on no less than five tracks.

Chris Roberts

THE ICICLE WORKS Permanent Damage

1990

CHERRY RED

★★★★

A last throw of the dice for the Liverpool indie-poppers – and it almost paid off

The final outing for Ian McNabb's Scouse poppers found them moving ever further away from the psych bombast of their early hometown contemporaries Echo & The Bunnymen and The Teardrop Explodes, and embracing a more strict-time rock template with nods to Creedence or Free. "Motorcycle Rider" is the anthem to the open road that threatened to break them into the mainstream (the album was their first – and only – for a major label, Epic), although the more pensive and subtle "Melanie Still Hurts" and "What She Did To My Mind" are stronger indicators to the soul-baring romantic themes McNabb would explore in subsequent solo releases.

Terry Staunton



CHARLOTTE GAINSBOURG

IRM BECAUSE



Beck assists the Anglo-French actress, as she finally confronts her father's musical legacy. By John Lewis



In the last year, cinema audiences will have seen Charlotte Gainsbourg starring in Lars Von Trier's *Antichrist*, playing a woman who loses her child, tortures her

husband, rampages around a German forest and then mutilates herself with a pair of scissors. But despite numerous awards and huge critical acclaim as an actress, she is still primarily remembered for two earlier screen appearances, both made with her father Serge Gainsbourg. One is home-movie footage of her aged about eight, playing a complicated exercise on the piano while her beaming father hums along in encouragement. The other is a rather less benign promotional video for her father's worst single, "Lemon Incest", in

which the 13-year-old duets with the king of sleazy listening, lying beside him on a bed, wearing only a blouse and knickers.

Perhaps mindful of the latter image, Charlotte Gainsbourg has been reluctant to pursue a career in music. It took around two decades before she got around to recording her first album as an adult, 2006's well-

Beck plays Serge to Charlotte's Jane Birkin, stamping the whole album with his futurist Americana...

received 5:55, in which she was assisted by celebrity Serge-ophiles such as Air, Jarvis Cocker and Neil Hannon. Yet still she seemed awed by her father's shadow. "I might think in French, but I cannot sing in French," she said. "It's too heavy for me, because of my father."

This follow-up is her most explicit embrace of her father's musical legacy. It pairs her with another Serge-ophile, Beck, whose 2002 album *Sea Change* saw him borrowing from Serge's seminal album, *Histoire De Melody Nelson*. Here Beck plays Serge to Charlotte's Jane Birkin, co-writing and producing the entire album and attempting to stamp it with his scruffy brand of futurist Americana. He even shares vocals on the lead single "Heaven Can Wait", a thing of ramshackle beauty that should, by rights, be Beck's biggest hit in more than a decade.

Charlotte's whispery, well-enunciated, jolly-hockey-sticks voice is an obvious echo of her mother's, although there is a deadpan, newsreader-ish quality. It's immediately apparent that Charlotte Gainsbourg is no blank canvas, in the way that her father's ingénues (Birkin, Brigitte Bardot, France Gall, Françoise Hardy, Michèle Arnaud) might have been. She had a pivotal role in the album's writing, particularly the title track, "IRM", the French translation of an MRI scan (that's *Imagerie par Résonance Magnétique*). Charlotte apparently had 20 such scans after suffering a brain haemorrhage in 2007. The lyrics serve as a poetic reportage of the incident ("leave my head unmagnetised/tell me where the trauma lies"), but the pulsating backing track—a barrage of pounding tom toms and jarring sound effects—genuinely sounds like an MRI scan, albeit one in which these orientating electronic noises have been processed into a thrilling slice of junkyard punk in the style of The Flying Lizards.

Her other lyrics are nothing like the pun-heavy, ultra-literate couplets her father wrote, but the album certainly sees her and Beck explore Serge-ish musical textures. "Le Chat Du Café Des Artistes", a cover version of a 1970 song by Quebecois songwriter Jean-Pierre Ferland, sees Beck couch the melody in creepy minor-key strings that certainly recall Jean-Claude Vannier's arrangements for... *Melody Nelson*. The eerie verse/jolly chorus of the lovely "Time Of The Assassins" recalls Serge's dreamy "69 Année Érotique", while the Bolan boogie of "Dandelion" has a touch of "Rock Around The Bunker" to it. "Voyage", with its mix of African drums and American trash-culture references, is a nod to Serge's early 1960s world music flirtations like "New York USA". Even the hints of Björk-ish post-punk, like "IRM" and "Trick Pony" often recall Serge's more minimal experiments, such as "Requiem Por Un Con".

Ever since her father's death in 1991, Charlotte has kept Serge's house on the Rue du Verneil as he left it, and has sought permission from authorities to turn it into a museum. In a way, this album serves as a fitting sonic museum to Serge, one that plunders from his past while maintaining his relentlessly forward-looking, hybridised pop vision.

DEBUTS

The best new music

ERLAND AND THE CARNIVAL

Erland And The Carnival

FULL TIME HOBBY/STATIC CARAVAN

★★★★★

Folk standards recast as garage rock, with help from The Verve's Simon Tong. *By John Lewis*



Donovan has a theory that The Beatles were "a Celtic folk group cunningly disguised as a rock'n'roll band". He identifies in their music certain traits –

storytelling songs, austere harmonies, a certain yodel in the higher register – as evidence of a vestigial folk sensibility. Such folksy traits lurk just beneath the surface of much British pop music. But Erland Cooper, a young singer from the remote islands of Orkney, has managed to disguise them so well that you can listen to the whole of his debut without realising that most of its tracks are actually ancient folk songs from around the British Isles.

Erland's band, led by journeyman multi-instrumentalist Simon Tong (formerly of The Verve, now of sundry Damon Albarn projects), are named after a 1965 song by the Anglophile American folkie Jackson C Frank called "My Name Is Carnival", which is here performed like a particularly impressive Stone Roses rarity. It sets the tone for the album, in which folk ballads are reworked by a '60s garage rock lineup (guitar/bass/drums/organ), complemented by baroque harmonies and squiggly synths. "Love Is A Killing Thing", an old Scottish ballad, here sounds like Blur's "Sing", overlaid



with spooky medieval harmonies. "Tramps And Hawkers", a waltz made famous by The Dubliners, here recalls Echo & The Bunnymen; while Welsh folk ballads "Was You Ever See" and "Gentle Gwen" both resemble garage-rock nuggets played on Fisher-Price toys. Sometimes, ancient folk lyrics are cleverly altered: "The Derby Ram", a nursery rhyme about a giant sheep, here tells the recent tale of a suicidal young man who leaps to his death in a Derby car-park before a jeering mob.

Yet, for all this meticulous archivism, this is primarily a great rock album. It invokes countless familiar sources – The Byrds, Ennio Morricone, The La's, The Doors, Joe Meek – but reassembles them in such an unexpected way that 500-year-old songs sound utterly fresh.

CODEINE VELVET CLUB

Codeine Velvet Club

ISLAND

★★★

Jon Fratelli reinvented as Roy Orbison. In his dreams The Fratellis have often been slighted for their glammed-up neo-Britpop, their singer-songwriter judged a competent but far less interesting Alex Turner. You'd think, then, that he'd steer any side project clear of further comparisons. However, together with Lou Hickey, he's decided to explore his love of noir-ish, '60s American guy-gal duets and lavish orchestral pop and, as a result, comes off like a second-rate Last Shadow Puppets. Hickey is an accomplished jazz/swing vocalist, but from the woeful moniker onwards, this is an unsubtle move, made too late. *Sharon O'Connell*

DELPHIC

Acolyte

POLYDOR

★★★★

Po-faced Manc trio's glacial synth-rock For a group who extol the virtues of alienation and technology, it's fitting that very little about Delphic feels natural or uncontrived. Pitched as the Chemical Brothers with guitars, the serious young men of Delphic – hey, they're from Manchester – drape snazzy electronics around pedestrian indie, which can produce sparkling fare such as "The Momentary" but often results in gauche numbers like "Red Lights" and "Halcyon" – essentially Orbital remixing Shed Seven. There are flashes of brilliance here, but you do long for a wink or a flicker of wit. *Piers Martin*

FIRST AID KIT

The Big Black And The Blue

WICHITA

★★★★★

Rustic folk from teenage Swedish sisters Klara and Johanna Soderberg's YouTube rendering of "Tiger Mountain Peasant Song" showed what Fleet Foxes would have sounded like as Scandinavian teenage girls. FAK have also done startling covers of Buffy St Marie's "Universal Soldier" and "Ring Of Fire" (but more June Carter than Johnny Cash). They have bell-clear voices, and a spooky ability to evince naivety and world-weariness in the same breath. Their own songs are similarly fresh, conjuring an almost Nico-like gothic sensibility on "Winter is All Over You". *Alastair McKay*

FOOL'S GOLD

Fool's Gold

IRAMSOUND

★★★★★

More zesty Afro-indie, sir? Yes please! If Beirut's Zach Condon had romanticised Asmara instead of Bratislava or Marseille, the result might have sounded something like this. Fool's Gold are an LA 10-piece, packed with experts in a gamut of African styles, and fronted by Luke Top, whose sad but rousing vocals – sung largely in Hebrew – juxtapose nicely with his bands' persuasive rhythms and slippery riffs. It doesn't require a lyric translator to hear the exquisite sense of regret that permeates a song like "Ha Dvash" ("Honey"), but the sheer exuberance of the music keeps spirits soaring. *Sam Richards*

SINGLES BAR

Resting on laurels is not **Animal Collective's** style. A year after the adored *Merrweather Post Pavilion* they've delivered a rich new five-track EP, "Fall Be Kind" **DOMINO**. The Grateful Dead-sampling "What Would I Want? Sky" is the equal of anything on *Merrweather*... its triumphant refrain offset by a disorientating time signature, while "On A Highway" captures the weird dislocation of life on the road. The Knife face competition in the voodoo-disco stakes from Vancouver duo **Fan Death** [pictured]. Recorded at DFA's Platin Studios, the "A Coin For The Well" EP **THE PHARMACY** lacquers



moody synth-pop with live strings, while the dual vocals of Marta Jacubek-McKeever and Dandilion Wind Opaine entwine bewitchingly. Lead track "Reunited" also comes with a brilliant popstar-parodying video. MF Doom – now simply just **DOOM**, apparently – is not like other rappers. There's that ever-present metal mask for a start, and the fact that the remixers of his new single "Gazzillion Ear" **LEX** include members of Radiohead and TV On The Radio. Dave Sitek provides a parched, funky workout while Thom Yorke's eerie mix tugs Doom's dense rhymes out into the English fog. When she's not busy being half of drone vixens Pocahontas, Bethany Cosentino makes fuzzed-up girl group pop as **Best Coast**. "When I'm With You" **BLACK IRIS** instantly transports you back to a carefree teenage summer – at this time of the year, no mean feat. *SAM RICHARDS*

Fluid folk/fusion
collective The
Imagined Village



ICONS OF ELEGANCE

Dancing Is Easy

DINNER WITH DAISY

★★★★

Versatile Scandi-pop duo's decent third

Indie-pop bands on modest labels from Sweden, Norway and Denmark have made such an impression here that a couple of London club nights now champion their sounds alone. Finland, however, has yet to make a similar impact. Brothers Anssi and Henri Väcky might just change that – they peddle sweetly downbeat chamber pop that recalls Badly Drawn Boy, Simon & Garfunkel and an undernourished Doves. They tend toward the mimsy, but there's no denying their talent, especially for arrangements and vocal harmonies.

Sharon O'Connell

THE IMAGINED VILLAGE

Empire And Love

ECC

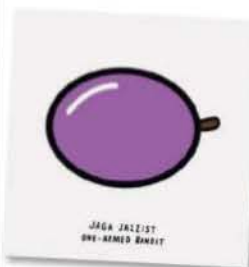
★★★★

Cum on feel the folk/fusion noise!

Launched at WOMAD in 2007, The Imagined Village emerged as a loose collective, grabbing attention for applying dub and beats to British folk and for featured guests like Paul Weller and Billy Bragg. Now a regular, more focused 10-piece helmed by bandleader (and Afro Celt Sound System man) Simon Emmerson, the music rests on a bed of guitar and sitar with a gentle backdrop of electronica. Its core singers represent three generations of folk, Chris Wood, Eliza Carthy and the tireless Martin Carthy. He transforms the familiar "Byker Hill", given a rhythmic twist plus a delicate, looping harmony by daughter Eliza.

"Scarborough Fair", taken at almost funereal pace, resonates beguilingly; sung twice by Wood, first underpinned by sitars, then beautifully reprised with a small string section. Reworking Slade's "Cum On Feel The Noize" is a little gimmicky but, sung by Carthy, it holds up – Noddy's lyrics notwithstanding.

Mick Houghton



JAGA JAZZIST

One-Armed Bandit

NINJA TUNE

★★

Overcooked flights of fancy from Norway's jazz rockers joined by two new members, the Oslo nine-piece's latest is mixed by Tortoise's John McEntire. On the title track, there's too much swilling in the pot: proggy switcheroos between Steve Reich pulsations, library music harpsichords and abrasive bass worms. "220 V/Spektral" yokes bass clarinet and tube-screaming guitar to hoary synths. Martin Hornveth's drums are way too prominent, like having your cranium bludgeoned with a moose antler. "Toccata" summons too many unpleasant memories of EL-P-style classical pretenders. In danger of becoming a Loose Tubes for the ATP generation, this once fleetfooted group have blundered into a vat of fudge.

Rob Young

ANNA KASHFI

Survival

LITTLE RED RABBIT

★★★★

Mancunian twosome offer more arresting gothic folk

The voice and songs of Sian Webley and spectral arrangements of multi-instrumentalist James Youngjohns range from psych-folk to country-noir on this set of literate, often menacing songs about love, sex and God. The highlight is "Devil's Bridge", with Willard Grant Conspiracy's Robert Fisher voicing the devil in a devastating duet that's one of the best of its kind since the Nick Cave/Polly Harvey collaborations. Yet the melancholic, warped waltz of "A Lonely Place", the bittersweet a cappella "Loser's Prize" and the world-weary "Drinker's Song" all find Webley playing characters every bit as striking.

Nigel Williamson

ANGELIQUE KIDJO

Oyo

PROPER

★★★★

Beninoise diva revisits music of her youth

Though rooted in West African traditions, Kidjo's music has always drawn from the pop music she heard in childhood, and in recent years she has extended this to include explorations of Latin and Caribbean rhythms. Oyo digs back into Kidjo's past, with well-executed covers of Curtis Mayfield's "Move On Up" – rendered as jittery afro-funk with the assistance of John Legend – and a jazzy reworking of James Brown's "Cold Sweat". She also tackles Otis and Aretha, and renders Sidney Bechet's "Petite Fleur" sweetly, as a tribute to her late father.

Alastair McKay

SHORT CUTS

THIS MONTH... COMPILATIONS



SINGAPORE A-GO-GO

SUBLIME FREQUENCIES

★★★★

From Sublime Frequencies, kings of the audio travelogue, come these 22 Singaporean beat-pop tunes, which correctly capture the cross-cultural

temperature of the time, with local motifs wound around US and British pop styles – surf guitars, big breaks, and finger-popping organs.

Jon Dale



BOB DYLAN'S THEME TIME RADIO HOUR

Best Of The 3rd Series

CHROME ★★★★★

Wrap-up of the third (possibly final) series of Dylan's satellite radio show, with 52 tracks as extraordinary, peculiar and

unfathomable as their curator, including Harry Belafonte's "Banana Boat Song", Conway Twitty's version of "It's Only Make Believe" and Lonzo & Oscar's immortal reflection on inbreeding, "I'm My Own Grandpa".

Andrew Mueller



JOE MEEK

The Lost Recordings

CHROME DREAMS ★★★★★

Before "Telstar" and all that, maverick producer Joe Meek was a gun-for-hire, applying sonic invention to various genres of pre-Beatles pop.

There's much brassy jazz, with notable interventions from Lonnie Donegan ("Cumberland Gap") and Big Bill Broonzy ("It Feels So Good"). Meek takes his first echoey spacewalk (via spaghetti Western) on "Lullaby" by Kenny Graham & His Satellites.

Alastair McKay



VARIOUS ARTISTS

A Complete Introduction To Tamla Motown

MOTOWN/UNIVERSAL ★★★★★

Irresistible four-disc set focusing on the earlier period and their European impact. There are "Milestones" (Marv Johnson, Barrett Strong), "British Chartbusters" (with under-trumpeted greats like The Isleys' "Behind A Painted Smile" and Four Tops' "A Simple Game"), a disc of London/Paris live tracks (Stevie Wonder on fire) and "Killer Bs" (which genius deemed Marvin Gaye's "Wherever I Lay My Hat" a b-side?) Ace.

Chris Roberts



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Bad Music For Bad People: Songs The Cramps Taught Us

CHERRY RED ★★★★★

In addition to the slew of obscure garage and rockabilly The Cramps covered both on record and onstage, Lux Interior and

Poison Ivy relished rummaging in dusty vaults for their numerous radio shows through the years. The 26 tracks collected on this disc veer dramatically in quality – Mac Rebennack, Slim Harpo and Charlie Feathers represent the more lauded end of the spectrum, while The Bangers ("Baby Let Me Bang Your Box") and Dave "Diddle" Day fly the flag for the enthusiastic amateurs.

Terry Staunton



Lindström & Christabelle: cosmic disco for the dancefloor

KITCHEN'S FLOOR Loneliness Is A Dirty Mattress

R.I.P. SOCIETY

★★★★

The best no-bullshit Aussie punk-rock record in yonks Kitchen's Floor are a trio from Brisbane, Australia whose songs are as minimal and rudely constructed as their spiritual predecessors, the early Go-Betweens (though a good deal more dysfunctional). Burning through 11 songs in just 19 minutes, *Loneliness Is A Dirty Mattress* reeks of bedsit, early twenties angst, perfectly essayed via their no-fidelity trio format. Rather like, too, an obsessively reductive Swell Maps. Amazing. *Jon Dale*

LANGHORNE SLIM Be Set Free

KEMADO

★★★★

Third album, stuck between the devil and the deep blue Waterboys... Langhorne Slim – aka Pennsylvania folk singer Sean Scolnick – walks a perilously thin line on this, his third album. Specifically, it's the line between the sublime pastoral ecstasies of Galway-period Waterboys and the mawkish snivelling of James Blunt. While the likes of "Say Yes" and "Land Of Dreams" are indeed pleasingly evocative of Mike Scott's guileless, wild-eyed

best, "I Love You, But Goodbye" and "Leaving My Love" are eerily reminiscent of Blunt. An uneven listening experience, to put it mildly. *Andrew Mueller*

JOHN LAWRENCE Rainy Night

WWW.MYSPACE.COM/INFINITY CHIMPS

★★★★

Ex-Gorky's man, quietly reborn as Lawrence Of Snowdonia... As a founding member of Gorky's Zygotic Mynci, John Lawrence epitomised their unbridled approach to music. Since leaving the band in 1999, however, he's kept under the radar, painstakingly recording *Rainy Night* in his Snowdonia studios. The music sombrelly and, often, harrowingly reflects his isolation in such rugged surroundings. Stylistically, it's like a lost, vintage CSNY album, with aching pedal steel, dense acoustic guitars and heart-rending, uplifting vocals and harmonies. "Rainy Night" conveys the atmosphere of living in one of the wettest areas of the British Isles, while "Pre-Armageddon Blues" simply explodes with anguish at personal loss and the wrongs of the world. *Mick Houghton*

SEAN LENNON Rosencrantz And Guildenstern Are Undead

CHIMERA MUSIC

★★

Flimsy soundtrack for forthcoming indie flick

Although he's the product of the world's most famous rock coupling, Sean Lennon has studiously shirked the spotlight, playing bass in Cibo Matto and issuing only two pleasantly low-key solo albums in an on-off 15-year career. It's hard to know why his latest work – the soundtrack to a new Shakespeare/Stoppard/vampire-themed indie comedy – is even being pushed as a standalone album, as its whimsical gothic instrumentals are functional at best. Download "Desire", featuring a welcome turn from sci-fi rapper Kool Keith, and ignore the rest. *Sam Richards*

JACKIE LEVEN Autumn

COOKING VINYL

★★★★

Final instalment of Leven's double-header fan club re-releases

The two albums collected on *Autumn* were first released with the veteran Scottish folksinger's fan club magazine, *Haunted Valley*. *Greek Notebook* is a scrapbook of scratchy demos, recorded onto a Walkman on the doorstep of an island villa, complete with interruptions by passing motorcycles and people: it's difficult to imagine many

wanting to listen to all of it. The properly realised, part-live *Only The Ocean Can Forgive* is a gem, however, graced by Leven's impeccable guitar and bleakly whimsical storytelling. The laughter of the crowd during his Connolly-ish "Sting's Dead" monologue is guiltily heartening. *Andrew Mueller*

LIGHTSPEED CHAMPION Life Is Sweet! Nice To Meet You!

DOMINO

★★★★

Second album from the well-connected former Test Icicle. Aged 24 and with chart-topping artists, X-Factor finalists and even Van Dyke Parks requesting his songwriting services, Devonte Hynes seems an unlikely candidate for a midlife crisis. Yet the follow-up to 2008's acclaimed solo debut sees him curiously depressed. Funk rocker "Marlene" is a withering anti-love song, as is his Motown pastiche "Faculty Of Tears", while even uplifting singalongs like "Madame Van Damme" are deflated by suicidal lyrics ("Kill me baby/ Won't you kill me"). Still, he couches this misery in beautiful arrangements, writing on the piano, orchestrating with strings,



and pitching his ambition somewhere between Serge Gainsbourg and Todd Rundgren. *John Lewis*

LINDSTRÖM & CHRISTABELLE Real Life Is No Cool

FEEDLITY

★★★★

Danceable disco-pop from Norwegian sound machine The title alone of Lindström's 2005 track "I Feel Space" was enough to kickstart the recent cosmic disco revival, but the ideal marriage of Georgio Moroder-ish rhythms and psychedelic warp has been a hard one to balance. But while recent projects have noodled towards the stoned beach

hut, *Real Life...* is a triumphant return to the dancefloor. In collaboration with Norwegian chanteuse Solale – aka Christabelle – Lindström has conjured a woozy, half-remembered mirrorball memory of '80s disco, echoing Chic, Prince ("Keep It Up") and even, on the brassy "Baby Can't Stop", Miami Sound Machine. *Stephen Troussé*

LIVING COLOUR The Chair In The Doorway

MEGAFORCE

★★★★

Godfathers of funk-metal return, five years on When they first emerged in 1988, the marketing hook for this NYC outfit – founded by songwriter and guitarist Vernon Reid – was "the black Led Zeppelin". Two decades on, "the black Metallica" or "Afro-American Red Hot Chili Peppers" would be more fitting. Not because Living Colour have made a career out of apeing their peers, but because their blend of heavy rock, funk and punk-metal has become so all-pervasive. Their fifth album reveals no radical stylistic shift, but the slurred blues of "Bless Those (Little Annie's Prayer)" and "Asshole" (Foo Fighters do Badfinger) emphasise both their virtuosity and their punching weight. *Sharon O'Connell*

LOSTPROPHETS The Betrayed

VISIBLE NOISE

★★★★

Fourth album from Welsh nu-metal peacocks Nu-metal as a genre died a good half-decade back, but Pontypridd's Lostprophets have successfully outlived its passing, thanks to a big-hearted, new romantic-tinged songwriting that reaches beyond the moshpit to the couples stood behind. *The Betrayed* displays a somewhat harder edge than 2006's *Liberation*. *Transmission*: the dynamite funk-metal of "Dstryr And Dstryr" channels Rage Against The Machine, while elsewhere Ian Watkins has adopted a gruff vocal timbre that recalls Chris Cornell. Still present is a populist edge that, while occasionally somewhat saccharine, shakes out some great choruses – see "Where We Belong". *Louis Pattison*



MIDLAKE

The Courage Of Others BELLA UNION



Texan dilettantes turn their hand to wintry folk-rock. **By Sam Richards**



The authentically auburn harmonies and storied West Coast AOR of Midlake's breakthrough album, 2006's *The Trials Of Van Occupanther*, suggested that the band

had been wallowing in Laurel Canyon lore their whole lives. In fact, Midlake's chief songwriter Tim Smith recently let slip that prior to starting work on that album, he'd never even listened to Neil Young.

Midlake began life as a student jazz band, in thrall to John Coltrane and Herbie Hancock. They were sniffy about modern rock music until they heard Radiohead's "Paranoid Android" – consequently, their debut album was a fairly rigorous homage to *OK Computer*. Then came a crash course in smooth '70s rock, from which emerged the glorious... *Van Occupanther*.

Now they've spent the last three years immersing themselves in another previously-unfamiliar field, that of British electric folk. Midlake have done their homework: in interviews trailing this album, they've namedropped not only Fairport and Fotheringay, but more obscure perfumed garden peculiarities such as Mellow Candle and Windy Corner.

However, Midlake's secret is out: they're highly skilled dilettantes, attempting to master a different genre on each album just to give themselves a challenge. That's no crime in itself, and it beats making the same record over and over again, but it may explain the gaping hole at the heart of this strangely frigid album.

The pristine harmonies are retained, but this time they're hitched to aching minor-key progressions, sung with cowed solemnity rather than uplifting abandon. Acoustic guitars and flute interweave in the space left behind by the absence of the last album's freewheeling piano, while an electric guitar smoulders in the background like an abandoned campfire.

Songs linger rather than glide, and while opener "Acts Of Man" is exquisitely forlorn – "When the acts of men cause the ground to break open! Oh let me inside, let me inside not to wake" – the sombre mood soon becomes a bit oppressive.

There are no "Roscoe"-style fantasies here to save us, either. Smith's delicate but austere lyrics evoke tableaux of weatherbeaten figures fruitlessly hoeing dry soil or huddling for warmth around a dying flame. "I will train my feet to go on with a joy/A joy I have yet to reach/I will let the sounds of these woods that I've known/Sink into blood and to bone," he sings dolefully on "Core Of Nature", like the

protagonist of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* forcing himself onward through the ravaged landscape... *Van Occupanther*'s golden wistfulness shines on "Fortune", but such sunny intervals are scarce.

The title track's forbidding drone heralds Smith's most vulnerable lyric to date. "I will never have the courage of others," he bemoans, before the song slips rather readily into a weary coda, Smith repeating the words "he trembles alone" like a fraught mantra, before he's consumed by duelling guitars. The lilting rhythm of closing track "In The Ground" finally gives the album a bit – but only a bit – of the verve it's been lacking, before it too succumbs to the frost.

Perhaps if *The Courage Of Others* had been released 10 years ago, it might've seemed more special, but the whole Brit-folk thing is ground that's been raked over fairly thoroughly in the last decade by the likes of Espers. If Midlake are taking suggestions for which genre to tackle next, let's propose something a little further off the beaten track, like Hawaiian exotica, or go-go. They're obviously good enough musicians to make a decent fist of pretty much anything.

Like... *Van Occupanther*, *The Courage Of Others* is texturally rich and technically refined, elegantly capturing the ambience of the folk rock scene to which it pays fulsome tribute. But sadly, there's something cold and unwelcoming at its core.

Q&A Tim Smith, Midlake

What's changed since... *Van Occupanther*?

Sound-wise, there aren't really any keyboards, and a lot more electric guitars. The album has an earthy feel. It's more into the British folk-rock thing than the Fleetwood Mac thing. Every now and again, with someone like John Renbourn, you get a hint of something medieval, and I think that's what drew me into it – that mystical sound. Also, instead of a concept about someone else, a lot of these songs are first-person.

How did the sessions go?

Denton [Texas] is a pretty small town, and we had this basement where we holed up there for a while. I'd written 15 songs that we worked on for six months and it just wasn't happening. At the same time I started listening to this British folk thing, and that was messing with them. I realised I'd have to start again.

Did hitting that dead end worry you?

When you've gone so long and still don't have anything, you feel, this is the end. I'm already writing the next one, because I don't want it to take this long again. INTERVIEW: NICK HASTED

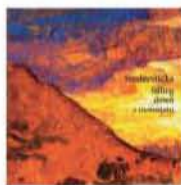


TINDERSTICKS

Falling Down A Mountain 4AD



The return of a cherishable British band, says **Chris Roberts**



Around the turn of the last decade, a lot of people – not least the band's own fans, perhaps – had started taking the Tindersticks for granted. A brand name guaranteeing

sensitivity and class, sure, but also a force which was, if not spent, at least unlikely to surprise us again. The ingenuity of their early '90s releases, which saw them hailed as Scott Walker singing for John Barry, or Lee Hazlewood performing with The Bad Seeds, had settled into a rather predictable broodiness. They'd claimed their turf and stuck to it religiously.

After 2003's *Waiting For The Moon*, there followed a five-year hiatus for the Nottingham-formed band. An ambivalence about what they were doing had lurked latently for some time: even 1997's *Curtains* had been made under the covert working title of "The Last Tindersticks Album". Now, baritone Stuart Staples released two solo albums while relocating his family to France. He set up Le Chien Chanceux studio, where a slimmed-down lineup convened for informal sessions resulting in 2008's *The Hungry Saw*. Live shows proved fruitful (not least a headline slot on *Uncut*'s stage at the Latitude Festival, and top billing – above Big Star! – at London's Serpentine Sessions), and the group rediscovered their drive.

It felt "great and worrying and frightening and exciting again," according to Staples. "Tindersticks now felt not like a conclusion, but like the start of something." Of course it helps when you're scoring films and are

commissioned to create music for the Louis Vuitton summer collection in Paris, assignments unlikely to fall the way of many nervously reuniting bands any time soon.

The new phase continues with this eighth studio album (not counting four soundtracks) of their 17-year career, again recorded in France and Brussels. Yes, they keep ploughing the sullen furrow they've made their own: mumbling, murky ballads that surge into majesty predominate. There's no room here for their spoken word tangents, or for the old-school soul tributes that once saw them cover Odyssey and pastiche The Chi-Lites so lovingly. Yet there is a major surprise, and it comes at once with the six-and-a-half-minute title track, which riffs on a jazz motif with much improvisation and hypnotic accumulative effect. If the backdrop isn't a mile away from Dave Brubeck, in the foreground the players (Terry Edwards' trumpet stars) weave in and out of each other's lines with poise and grace. "Falling Down A Mountain" always feels as if it's

climbing, carrying you with it.

Then the soft-shuffle ballads take up residency. Tindersticks remain masters of mood-setting, making songs that are lyrically odd ("She Rode Me Down" has something of the post-coital about its sighs) or potentially twee ("Harmony Around My Table" hints at domestic bliss) resonate with a cinematographer's sense of grandeur. The sparser, brittle "Factory Girls" swings the hardest emotional punch of all, with Staples singing, "It's the wine that makes me sad/Not the love I never had/Or the things I've never seen/Or the places I've never been." There's a craft economy to the self-pity.

Although the personnel has crept back up numerically (David Kitt joins on guitar and backing vocals), one visiting voice is a coup. "Peanuts" presents a rare sighting of Canadian chanteuse Mary Margaret O'Hara, who duets with Staples on a touching, country-tinged number so split between oddball eccentricity and quivering heartache that it's made for her unique gifts. Devotees take note: she doesn't just grunt a few noises. She properly contributes, phrasing those falling, swooning notes as only she can.

So, no startling change of pace, direction or feel, then. Instead, what Tindersticks sound like on this subtly strong album is a band with restored self-belief, again loving doing what they do better than anyone else.

Q&A Stuart Staples

How did the hiatus help you?

It gave us a chance to redefine what we wanted from this. In 2003 we were pretty jaded as a group of people. With this album we were looking for something else; a collage of different ideas and approaches. Much of the time it felt like we were working out on a limb.

How did you come to duet with Mary Margaret O'Hara?

Actually I didn't know so much about Mary Margaret, then met her after a concert in

Toronto. I was intrigued. I was trying to get to grips with "Peanuts", a song inspired by Fritz Lang's *Fury*. The two just came together.

Does living in France influence the sound?

The work in London started to feel as though it was defined by its surroundings. Here, especially in the studio, there isn't anything to define anything. It seems we arrived where we are now via a thousand little steps, although there has been the occasional leap.

INTERVIEW: CHRIS ROBERTS

PATTY LOVELESS Mountain Soul II

SAGUARO ROAD

★★★★

More trad country in a bluegrass style

Loveless emerged when Nashville's dilution of tradition was challenged in the mid-1980s, re-establishing her credentials as a roots-artist in 2001 with the bluegrass-flavoured *Mountain Soul*. This sequel similarly mixes hard country and mountain music, memorably on Harlan Howard's "Busted" and a plaintive "Half Over You". Also notable are "Fools Thin Air" – written by Susanna – (wife of Guy) Clark and Rodney Crowell – the *a cappella* "Friends in Gloryland", and "Diamond In My Crown" sung against a droning pump organ with the song's author, Emmylou Harris on heavenly harmonies.

Alastair McKay

THE MAGNETIC FIELDS Realism

NONESUCH

★★★

Misfiring "variety-folk" from Stephin Merritt

The reason why 2000's 69 *Love Songs* remains Stephin Merritt's finest hour (or three) is because every time he indulged his camp Broadway side, you knew there was a cunning lo-fi pop gem coming soon. *Realism* is conceptually closer to 69 *Love Songs* than anything he's done since, opting for a "variety folk" sound somewhere between Kurt Weill and Sufjan Stevens, but its ratio of heartfelt-to-hokey is out of whack. Opener "You Must Be Out Of Your Mind" is classic, wry Magnetic Fields. After that, only "Better Things" and "From A Sinking Boat" rise above the prettily-orchestrated smugness.

Sam Richards

MALORY Pearl Diver

CLUB AC30

★★★★

German wall of sound with strong British influence

Ten years ago, German quartet Malory's debut "Not Here Not Now" became a minor shoegazing landmark. Malory are fractionally better known outside their homeland than in it, and the fact that Portishead's Geoff Barrow champions the band suggests they have more tricks than mere Ride/Lush

imitations. The melodramatic opening of "Floating" proves as much, with female French spoken word adorning a slow, poised build and tingling synths that wouldn't have shamed The Sound or Comsat Angels. Not entirely consistent, but they also evoke The Chameleons, and "Cache" may be the new "Sugar Hiccup". *Chris Roberts*

JACK MARCHMENT Who's Afraid Of Iannis Xenakis?

HERB RECORDINGS

★★★★

Primitive electronics reimagined as futurist manifesto

Not subject to the same cultural agenda as its noisier dancefloor cousin, electronica tends to be propelled by the vision of a few genuine originals. While 25-year-old Jack Marchment is too in thrall to the music's past to qualify yet, he hits an original seam by setting contemporary studio techniques to work on samples of '40s, '50s and '60s innovators like Xenakis and Edgar Varèse. The resulting textures often recall Boards Of Canada, especially on gorgeous opener "Schult-Abbey", which builds a patina of textures into a beautifully simple melody. "Albers" processes Radiophonic textures through a sensibility that's equal parts Farben and Finders Keepers.

James Poletti



THE MARY ONETTES Islands

LABRADOR

★★★★

Goth-nouveau: hard to dislike, hard to love

Intentionally or not, this Swedish quartet's second drips with '80s nostalgia. Straddling synth-pop and the neo-Goth mannerisms of The Cure or Bunnymen, The Mary Onettes construct sweeping anthems laden with depressive lyrics and leavened by here-it-comes choruses. "Puzzles" and

The Magnetic Fields' Stephin Merritt: hooked on hokum



"Dare" echo Tears For Fears and The Stone Roses respectively: it's no surprise they've been embraced by the kind of USTV series that feature good-looking people crying. "Once I Was Pretty" and "The Disappearance Of My Youth" only confirm they know their territory and stick to it. *Chris Roberts*

IAIN MATTHEWS & SEARING QUARTET Joy Mining

FLEDG'LING

★★★★

Ex-Fairport man chairs Anglo-Dutch jazz-folk axis

An exceptionally clear recording frames this acoustic jazz/pop collaboration between former Fairport Convention and Southern Comfort vocalist Matthews, and Dutch jazz composer Egbert Derix. Matthews is in fine, open-throated voice, with boldly drawn lyrics to match. "My Town" evokes the decline of the industrial north, "1944" poignantly evokes wartime bereavement, while "Randolph Scott", a hymn to escapism in cowboy country, harks back thematically to Matthews' country-tinged early solo work. Elsewhere – "Waves", "Reservoir" and "The Solid Stuff" – there's a strong seam of self-investigation, heard to best, bittersweet effect on "Another Night In Paradise". *Rob Young*

THE MICRAGIRLS Wild Girl Walk

BONE VOYAGE

★★★★

Enjoyably goofy garage punk, from Finland

Not, apparently, a figment of the twin imaginations of Finnish film director Aki Kaurismäki and *Moomins* creator Tove Jansson (though the sleeve does depict them as a gang of Little Mys grown up glam), garage girl trio the Micragirls return with their second album of ramshackle bubblepunk. Farfisas parp, tin-pot drums crash and the fi is resolutely lo. It's as generic as it is energetic, but it's hard to resist tracks like "Electric Chair Twist". The volume is turned down to 10 and the charm is turned up on a couple of softer tracks: "Story Of Two" and the Jonathan Richman-esque "Summer's Gone". *Stephen Troussé*

MOONDOG WITH JULIE ANDREWS AND MARTYN GREEN Tell It Again – Songs Of Sense And Nonsense

1957

POPPYDOG

★★★★

When Mary Poppins met "the Viking of 6th Avenue"

In surely the most unusual pairing of the month, *Tell It Again* unites a young Julie Andrews with Moondog, the blind New York street musician whose Viking garb and unusual percussion

made him a Big Apple landmark. Moondog's billing is a little deceptive – it's Andrews and musical comedian Martyn Green, reciting nursery rhymes and nonsense songs in the plummiest of tones, who are at the fore here. But the Viking's snaking drum rhythms lend "The Animal World" a genuine sense of oddity, and the result is a curio, if not quite a lost classic. *Louis Pattison*

JASON MRAZ Jason Mraz's Beautiful Mess Live On Earth

ATLANTIC ★★

Dull live album by oppressively cheerful troubadour

Mraz is best thought of as a Frankenstein-style experiment, transplanting the bumptious pop sense of Gilbert O'Sullivan into the stolid radio rock of Dave Matthews. Despite these unenticing ingredients, Mraz and his most recent studio opus, *We Sing. We Dance. We Steal Things*, have become bemusingly popular (you've heard the single "I'm Yours" a thousand times, very plausibly without noticing). While Mraz's appeal is deafeningly obvious to the (largely female, judging by the screams) audience at this Chicago show, it is likely to be lost on anyone who asks more of rock'n'roll than mere proficiency. *Andrew Mueller*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

We Are Only Riders – The JLP Sessions Project

GLITTERHOUSE

★★★★

Excellent, star-stuffed tribute to late Gun Club founder



Jeffrey Lee Pierce, leader of LA blues-punks Gun Club, was once asked by an interviewer what his greatest fear was. "No life after death," came the instant reply. It's fitting, then, that since Pierce's own untimely demise (he died of a brain haemorrhage in 1996, aged 37, after years of drug and alcohol abuse) the Gun Club continue to be cited as a key influence by Jack White, REM, Nick Cave, Wilco and many more. Recent years have seen bio-docs and a four-disc box set, but this unusual set is the most satisfying tribute yet.

Pierce's old guitarist Cypress Grove was dusting out the loft when he chanced upon a heap of old tapes, one marked "JLP Songs". The tunes were fragmented demos for an LP they made together in 1992, though they were instead ditched for an album of blues covers. Now those same scratchy recordings have been overhauled and completed by a caravan of Pierce disciples, including Nick Cave and Mark Lanegan, The Raveonettes, Isobel Campbell, Debbie Harry, Dave Alvin and more.

One of the more fascinating aspects of all this is the tone of the songs themselves. These compositions only hint at the familiar psychobilly of Gun Club. Instead they realign Pierce as a latterday wandering soul, guitar



flung over his back, singing bluesy folk songs from some rural American hinterland. Cave, once described by Pierce as "my truest mate", sings "Ramblin' Mind" like a tumbledown minstrel, with Kid Congo Powers on slide guitar. Lanegan does an incredible "Constant Waiting" in a voice that sounds dredged from centuries-old clay, then joins Campbell for the almost upbeat duet, "Free To Walk". Cave and Harry do the same song later, in more menacing manner. Save for Lydia Lunch's excruciating contributions, it's all stirring stuff, not least the desert-rat country of The Sadies or David Eugene Edwards' powerful "Just Like A Mexican Love".

INARA GEORGE

Accidental Experimental

EVERLOVING

★★★★

Download-only third LP from Lowell's girl
2008's *An Invitation* was a sumptuous piece with George's mentor Van Dyke Parks, a close friend of her late father, Little Feat's Lowell. Now she's reunited with Mike Andrews (he of the *Donnie Darko* soundtrack) for this digital-only follow-up: a delicate suite of baroque, piano-led songs full of soft electronic squiggles, inventive arrangements and that disarming voice. Some *An Invitation* tunes are radically recast, with "Dirty White" a twinkly acoustic beauty, though "Can't Say No" and "Captured" are the pick of an elegant bunch.

JOE & ROSE LEE MAPHIS

Cold Heart Of Steel

RIGHTEOUS

★★★★

From the 1950s, the original George'n'Tammy
Until the 1930s, the fiddle was the traditional lead in country music. Enter the great Joe Maphis, one of the first to transpose fiddle leads into guitar licks. His flatpicking style was subsequently copied by Chet Atkins, Merle Travis et al. Maphis went on to back Wanda Jackson and Johnny Burnette, but these '50s duets with wife Rose Lee are unjustly overlooked. They're classic proto-country songs of breakin' up and pushin' on, though the backings are bluegrass, honky-tonk and raw folk. Impressive harmonies, too: his a raking tenor; hers with the rural keen of Kitty Wells.

DOUG PAISLEY

Doug Paisley

NO QUARTER

★★★★

Strictly personal: Toronto songwriter's UK debut
Such is the hermetic feel of Paisley's work that it often feels like you're invading something uncomfortably private. Everything here is stripped to the bone, skeletal songs strung up with softly strummed acoustic guitar, some piano and little else. Paisley himself sings with the buttery burr of Will Oldham, the gentle sweetness of his voice belying the quiet terrors of the subject matter: things lurking in the woods or scrabbling from within a fresh grave. Simone Schmidt's harmonies echo those of Dawn McCarthy on Oldham's *The Letting Go*, at their best on "Last Duet".

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Fire In My Bones

TOMPKINS SQUARE

★★★★

AKA "Raw, Rare + Otherworldly African-American Gospel 1944-2007"
This exceptional set unearths an abundance of riches, from the rural enclaves of the South through to Oakland and LA. Across three CDs and four hours, the spread is suitably wide, from porchlit folk songs and congregational choirs to slippery blues and devil-bashing soul. Sister Goldia Haynes' "The Truth In The Gospel" is unfettered piano boogie, while The Abraham Brothers' "Spirit Of The Lord" pounds along like a roaring sermon. It's often alarming, too: witness Rev. Charles White singing and playing water bucket and funnel on 1948's "How Long".

ROUND-UP

Chris Cacavas is probably best known as keyboard player for Green On Red, though lately he's been fronting his own band, **Junkyard Love**, and backing up Steve Wynn. *Love's Been Discontinued* ★★★★★ **BLUE ROSE** is a low-key, and folksy, driven by acoustic guitar and Cacavas' warm, thin voice. He does get to rock out, but this is mostly engaging, if unspectacular, desert blues. The CV of US songstress **Lisa Germano's** [pictured] is mightily impressive (Dylan, Iggy, Bowie, Johnny Marr). That said, *Magic Neighbour* ★★ **YOUNG GOD**, her first solo album in three years, seems to find her in



awkward transition. There's plenty of ambition in these mostly piano-driven songs, but, bar a few semi-magic moments (the aching "Snow", "A Million Times"), most of it doesn't stick. Hard to believe it's been 25 years since **The Walkabouts** first bubbled out of pre-Nirvana Seattle on Sub Pop. Enter a host of covers juxtaposed against for *Got No Chains* ★★★★★ **GLITTERHOUSE**, a 2CD set of covers juxtaposed against the band's remastered versions of the same songs. The most successful tributes are Willard Grant Conspiracy's suitably doomstruck "This Rotten Tree", Jon Langford's "Christmas Valley", Steve Wynn and Linda Pitmon's "Jack Candy" and Scott McCaughey and Peter Buck's Minus 5 making nifty work of "Nightbirds". There's nothing here from 1993's glorious *Satisfied Mind* though, which rather dilutes the effect.

MUSÉE MÉCANIQUE

Hold This Ghost

SOUTERRAIN TRANSMISSIONS

★★★

Portland duo's shyly restrained debut

Named after a Californian penny arcade game museum, Sean Ogilvie and Micah Rabin's debut takes the innocent simplicity of folk and gives it a little French polish. "Two Friends Like Us" could even be Air, their acoustics softened with tremulous vintage keyboards. But "The Things That I Know" treads similar ground to Belle & Sebastian, albeit with less twee enthusiasm, and hints of Elliott Smith (on "Fits And Starts") and Pink Floyd (on the gently psychedelic "Somehow Bound") make this a twilight pleasure.

Eden Parke

THE NOTWIST

Music For "Storm"

ALIEN TRANSLATOR

★★★

Post-rockers' minimalist soundtrack to Euro thriller

A soundtrack album shorn of context can be a difficult thing to judge, especially when the end result is as ambient as this offering from seasoned German electronica/post-rock outfit The Notwist. Recorded as the soundtrack for Hans-Christian Schmid's Balkan thriller *Storm*, this Enosque album straddles electronica and classical thanks to the adroit use of clarinet, double bass, viola and violin. Most appealing track? "Storm 1", which sounds like tapdancing deathwatch beetles.

Peter Watts

ALISON O'DONNELL

Hey Hey Hippy Witch

FLOATING WORLD

★★

MOR excursions from Mellow Candle folkie O'Donnell is best remembered as one of the two female singers in the cult '70s Irish gothic folk band, Mellow Candle, but anyone expecting anything as electrifying is in for a shock. This often borders on MOR, with lyrics just a little too wordy and sincere for their own good. Recorded in piecemeal fashion in a host of different locations, O'Donnell persistently overreaches; the simpler, more traditional sounding songs are the most effective, notably "The Flight Of The

Valiant Earls", with delicate, droning accompaniment from The Owl Service's Steven Collins.

Mick Houghton

CHRIS OLLEY

A Streetcar Named Disaster

LONG DISTANCE RUNNER

★★★★

Ex-Six By Seven man's ragged solo set

The transition from ranting idealist to grumpy old man has been smooth for Chris Olley, and it's in this latest incarnation as a Nottingham equivalent to Elliott Smith that he seems most comfortable – well, he did record the whole thing in his living room (a budgie can even be heard chirping during the Mary Chain scuzz of "Rock And Roll"). There's a lot to like about *A Streetcar Named Disaster*, notably the way a crumpled Olley delivers sardonic monologues on the jaunty "Pissing" and "Journey Through The Past". But above all it's good to hear this mercurial figure back on form. *Piers Martin*



PJ PROBY

I'm Yours

FANTASTIC VOYAGE

★★★★

Fulsome Elvis homage from the trouser-splitter

The chequered career of P.J. Proby has seen him playing singer, actor and drunk, but this reissue from 1972 finds the notoriously unpredictable singer impersonating Vegas-era Elvis, complete with full scale casino-style orchestra. It's a role which suits him remarkably well, since his resonant and perfectly-pitched baritone voice finds a ready home in tunes like the ballad-ish "Mary In The Morning" or Rodgers & Hammerstein's "If I Loved You". In "Twilight Time", Proby even manages to split his voice into baritone and tenor registers. A classic of its genre, but you might not want the genre.

Adam Sweeting

THE PROJECTS

Words Of Love Broadcast In Code

MIND EXPANSION

★★★★

Part-time experimental-pop project. With foreign language element

The lo-fi bedroom-pop lark is responsible for many more gauche and gratuitously "eccentric" records than it is real gems, but London multi-instrumentalist Graeme Wilson and bassist Alex Lawton Mawdsley have spent seven years making it work as The Projects. For their second LP, they've shanghaied into service Mira Aroyo (vocals) and Dino Gollnick (guitar) from Ladytron, plus former Television Personalities lynchpin Edward Ball, among others. This sample-spiked mix of retro space pop, motorik rock, art-punk, Slavic futuro-folk and electronica is odd, but oddly alluring. The hidden track – where a vacuum cleaner takes centre stage – is a particularly satisfying surprise.

Sharon O'Connell

PSYCHONAUTS

Songs For Creatures

INTERNATIONAL DEEJAY GIGOLO

★★★★

Modern cosmic touchstone helpfully reissued

One has hardly been deafened by the clamour to re-release this pretty decent psychedelic folk record from 2003 – that decision was made by self-effacing Gigolo boss DJ Hell, who wanted to show how *Songs For Creatures* inspired his recent *Teufelswerke* epic. Propelled by woolly funk, purring electronics and tribal rhythms, the Psychonauts' debut has aged remarkably well, but despite the gushing testimonies of both James Murphy and James Lavelle, it remains nothing more than a tasteful and mildly diverting proposition. Good to know where A Mountain Of One got their ideas, but that's all.

Piers Martin

GERRY RAFFERTY

Life Goes On

HYPERTENSION

★★★★

Aptly titled comeback for "Baker Street" man

When Rafferty went missing from hospital in 2008, many feared the worst. With no explanation, he recently resurfaced in Italy, promising a new album. He hasn't really managed that, for *Life Goes On* boasts only six new tracks, nestling alongside a

dozen remasters of material recorded in the '90s.

Rafferty's songwriting is still missing in action; the new material includes a pair of carols, "Kyrie Eleison" and a cover of "Because". But they're beautifully realised, with Rafferty creating a one-man multi-tracked celestial choir. *Nigel Williamson*

RAIN PARADE

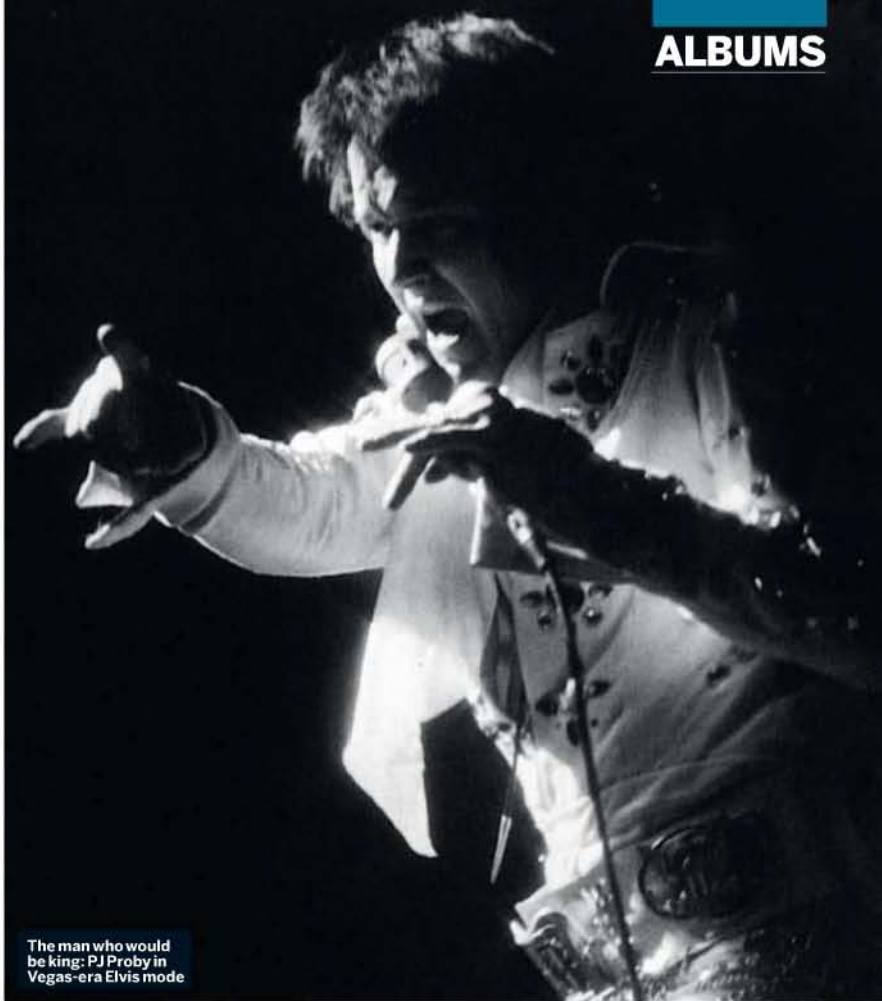
Crashing Dream

LEMON

★★★★

Doomed stab at mainstream by noted psych revivalists

The paisley underground tag having taken them only so far, California's Rain Parade attempted to tunnel their way up to mainstream terra firma on what would turn out to be their last album. The sun-dappled psychedelia and *Revolver*-lite concerns of previous records are still evident, but struggle to assert themselves on an overly glossy production and ill-suited washes of synths. The songs of Steven Roback and Matt Piucci tend to be solid more than inspired, although the hypnotic sways of "Depending On You" and "Fertile Crescent" suggest bolder and more left-field avenues were waiting to be explored, had they stayed together. *Terry Staunton*



The man who would be king: PJ Proby in Vegas-era Elvis mode

THE SPECIALIST

THIS MONTH... POWERPOP



"You used to fall in love with everyone/Any guitar and any bass drum." So barked Paul Weller, summing up the allure of The Crickets, The Beatles, The Jam. Spurred by punk, but loathe to forsake the hooks, legions of would-be radio stars ushered in the powerpop boom of the late 1970s. If only radio had been listening...

Judging by the thumping rhythms and infectious sing-songy vocals of "Everyday Things", from **The Breakaways' *Walking Out On Love: The Lost Sessions*** **ALIVE/NATURAL SOUND**, ★★☆☆, the group could've been a credible Californian answer to the Ramones. Led by Peter Case and Paul Collins (later in The Plimsouls and The Beat, respectively), they fused explosive punk fervor to gritty Nuggets/British Invasion styles and pitted teenage rage and suburban angst against hard-won optimism. The sound on these long-shelved demos is dodgy, but the crackling electricity of shoulda-been smashes like Case's brooding "House On The Hill" still shines.



Oddly, as the liners to **Radio City *RADIO HEARTBEAT***, ★★☆☆ relate, New York's Radio City also traded as The Breakaways near the end of their 1977-1980 run. Raised on The Raspberries and (as their name implies) Big Star, the group's creamy melodies, harmonies, and crystalline Rickenbackers were anathema at CBGB's, but sound damn fine three decades on.

London's **Fabulous Poodles** – that's Fab Poos to you – formed in 1974, and were a journeyman outfit afforded a rare break when The Who's John Entwistle produced them. Enjoying a mini-vogue circa 1978-79, the Poodles put a geeky, irreverent stamp on an oddball mix of pub-rock, music hall, Kinks-style rockers, and pre-Beatles throwbacks. ***Mirror Stars/Think Pink*** **AMERICAN BEAT**, ★★☆☆ revisits their tongue-in-cheek ironies, but only the driving "Chicago Boxcar" and "Man With Money," a sterling, fiddle-drenched Every Brothers cover, transcend the quaint.

Viewed as interlopers in NYC's late-'70s Bowery scene, and rightly so, **The Laughing Dogs** play like a talented but anonymous bar band on their first two LPs, ***The Laughing Dogs/The Laughing Dogs Meet Their Makers*** **AMERICAN BEAT** ★★. Tunes but vacuous, they missed their calling as the next Supertramp.

Finally, **The Scruffs**: as Memphians obsessed with anglophile pop, they were Big Star's heirs, Alex Chilton's comrades, and recorded at Ardent Studios. On ***Conquest*** **SCRUFFSVILLE** ★★☆☆, the band's new album, head Scruff Stephen Burns still brings the hooks, only filtered through a cavernous, textured sound awash in strings, horns, steel guitars, and keyboards. From the rolling anthemry of the gleaming "Treasure Girls" to "Demon Mine" – shades of Nikki Sudden – ***Conquest*** is modern pop with depth and heart. **Luke Torn**



The brilliant Mick Ronson: Bowie's not-so secret weapon, solo

REAL ESTATE

Real Estate

WOODSIST

★★★★

Beatific jangle-pop from lo-fi hipsters

2009's minor lo-fi boom threw up a bunch of productive, engaging, slightly dazed musicians, not least New Jersey's Matthew Mondanile. Mondanile's solo project, Ducktails, privileged a sort of sun-kissed, albeit fuzzy ambience, and the debut of his full band, Real Estate, has a similarly baked air, though artfully jangling songs like "Fake Blues" and "Pool Swimmers" are significantly more focused. The lackadaisical nostalgia for childhood beach holidays is certainly evocative – as, indeed, is the way Real Estate recall New Jersey antecedents The Feelies and Yo La Tengo, plus any number of old Flying Nun bands. **John Mulvey**

FIONN REGAN

The Shadow Of An Empire

HEAVENLY

★★★★

Twenty-something Dubliner beefs up his act

If Regan's Mercury Prize-nominated debut in 2006 attracted comparisons with Nick Drake, this belated follow-up ditched the finger-picking folksiness for full-on rock, and sees Regan mutate into a latterday Mike Scott. As you'd imagine, there are nods to Dylan going electric: "House Detective" and "Little Nancy" sound like outtakes from *Blonde On Blonde*; "Violent Demeanour" and "Lines Written In Winter" from *Highway 61 Revisited*. But Regan's USP is still a gorgeous, sighing, high-pitched tenor voice that recalls Hank Locklin. The

rockist tendencies peak with the Clash-like "Genocide Matinee". The two low-key closing tracks show that Regan is still a folkie at heart. **John Lewis**

ROBOT KOCH

Death Star Droid

ROBOTS DON'T SLEEP

★★

"International bass". Low on everything, including songs As remixer and producer for acts like Rustie and Amanda Blank, dubiously monikered Berlin artist Robot Koch has the attention of both Modeselektor and Flying Lotus, and his mixtapes for Brainfeeder have all the right blogs on side. This debut LP, which hurriedly cycles through bass styles from Anticon hip hop instrumentals to dubstep, sadly proves more big beat than international bass. Only the 2-step skip of "Gorom Sen" really excites, the rest of the album staying as resolutely earthbound as its leaden low-end swells and throbs. An ill-advised cover of "People Are Strange" only highlights the emotional shortcomings of the style. **James Poletti**



THE ROLLING STONES

Stripped

UNIVERSAL

★★★★

Stones reissues programme just keeps rolling The five Rolling Stones tour

and concert recordings from 1977's *Love You Live* to 2004's *Live Licks*, freshly reissued, don't have much to recommend them, frankly. The more intimate *Stripped*, from the *Voodoo Lounge* dates, stands apart, eschewing barnstorming hits for rarer cuts and a more acoustic take on country and blues material, notably coolly understated readings of "Sweet Virginia" and "Wild Horses" and a brilliant, shuffling, bluesy retread of "Not Fade Away". The cheesy, crowd-pleasing "Like A Rolling Stone" was extracted, providing their biggest UK hit of the '90s. **Mick Houghton**

MICK RONSON

Slaughter On 10th Avenue

LEMON

★★★★

Play Don't Worry 1975

LEMON

★★★★

The brief solo career of the Bowie's lead Spider

In the wake of the final Ziggy show, encouraged by MainMan's Tony DeFries, Mick Ronson momentarily looked like he could be hyped into the next David Cassidy. His surprisingly poised 1974 debut drew heavily on Bowie co-writes, managed to go Top 10 and proved clearly inspiring to both Slaughter And The Dogs and The Human League (who memorably covered "Only After Dark"). The following year's *Play Don't Worry* was purer Ronno, with self-written songs alongside the VU, country and R'n'B covers, but was less successful. And the guest appearance from Mott's Ian Hunter indicated where his immediate future would lie. **Stephen Trousse**



Stephen Stills: mining the glory years, live

SAM & DAVE Back At'Cha 1975

SHOUT

★★★★

Hold on, they're comin' back – again!

A valiant effort to recapture the glory of the dynamic duo's '60s hit-making days at Stax was given extra clout by having MGs guitarist Steve Cropper in the producer's chair. Cropper penned the record's strongest tracks ("Give It What You Can", "Don't Close The Curtain") which harked back to their signature sound, and added a lush orchestra to a reworking of The Drifters' "Under The Boardwalk". However, stuttering covers of Allen Toussaint ("Shoo Rah Shoo Rah") and Jimmy Cliff ("Come Into My Life") found them struggling to hit the soulful high notes of yore.

Terry Staunton

SAVIOURS Accelerated Living

KEMADO

★★★★

Cali metallers who worship at the altar of Maiden

If you like your heavy metal to be grandiose and bear the influence of the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal, you won't go wrong with Savours, a Californian act who sound like they wish they were born in Stourbridge and love ear-bleeding guitar solos and bellowing, impenetrable vocals. Based in Oakland, the band also claim an affinity with the skatepunk culture of bands like Black Flag, but it's metal that dominates songs like the seemingly endless "Livin' In The Void" or the punchier "Slave To The Hex".

Fun, but some variety would help. *Peter Watts*

THE SAW DOCTORS To Win Just Once: The Best Of

SHAM TOWN

★★★★

Galway knees-up brigade anthologised

Scoring a No 1 hit in their native Ireland last year with a rocked-up cover of Sugababes' "About You Now" speaks volumes about The Saw Doctors. It's typical of their goodtime Celtic pop and broad-themed novelty appeal, like a watered-down Pogues for the *X-Factor* audience. There's a Guinness-spilling bonhomie at the heart of odes to Irish motorways ("N17") or failed romances ("I Useta Lover");



cheery enough stuff in a crowded dancehall, but a little weary and one-note on record. They're at their best on country-tinged homages to their homeland ("Stars Over Cloughanover"), brief respites from the office joker jollity that's their default setting. *Terry Staunton*

THE BRIAN SETZER ORCHESTRA Songs From Lonely Avenue

SURFDOG

★★★★

Stray Cat stretches himself further into noir territory

When Brian Setzer first appeared, he seemed like a rockabilly-crazed wannabe scheduled for imminent burnout, but his abilities have blossomed impressively over time. Here, he extends the reach of his Grammy-winning Orchestra into a bunch of songs on a film noir theme. Opener "Trouble Train" is an awesome blast of punchy horns, hectic rhythms and molten guitar, from whence he navigates through a menu of bop, ballads, swing and jump-blues with absolute authority. His Cotton Club croon in "Kiss Me Deadly" is a treat, while his blistering guitar soloing in "Mr Surfer Goes Jazzin'" is disciplined and musical even while it's flying along at a speedfreak tempo. *Adam Sweeting*

SKIP BIFFERTY Skip Bifferty

GRAPEFRUIT

★★★★

Definitive set of forgotten flower-power poppers

Newcastle's Skip Bifferty formed in 1967 and, like many underachieving '60s musicians, adopted a pop-psych approach – here distinguished by Graham Bell's full-throated vocals and some operatic harmonies. Managed by the opportunistic Don Arden, they recorded a handful of brash, pop-slanted singles, with the complex, soaring "On Love" becoming a popular airplay hit. Further singles, including "Man In Black", produced by fellow Arden clients Steve Marriott and Ronnie Lane, and an

album followed, resplendent with the era's familiar trickery: tape loops, phazing, off-kilter piano, jagged guitars and sundry baroque touches. *Mick Houghton*

MARK E SMITH & ED BLANEY

The Train Part Three

VOICEPRINT

★★★★

Chuffing heck! Railway-themed Fall side project leaves crud on the tracks

Parts One and Two of *The Train* appeared on *Smith And Blaney*, Mark E Smith's 2008 collaboration with Ed Blaney, a former Fall member (see 2001's *Are You Are Missing Winner*). The CD-length *Part Three* is a compote of location recordings made on British and Bulgarian railways. Smith's typical irascibility alternates with Blaney's pop-culture ridden Lancastrian surrealism; the entire 40-minute journey is underpinned by the noise of a rushing, creaking, clanking train. Like a hybrid of LCD Soundsystem, Pierre Schaeffer and the acoustic Velvets fronted by, well, Mark E Smith. *Rob Young*

THE SORROWS You've Got What I Want: The Essential Sorrows 1965-67

CHERRY RED

★★★★

Skilful '60s pop mimics, definitively anthologised

Pop groups in the '60s needed hit singles to survive for more than a few years. The Sorrows achieved one, albeit lowly, chart entry – the smouldering "Take A Heart" – but deserved so much more. This collection encapsulates the era perfectly and pinpoints The Sorrows' strength, and their problem: they were chameleons – capable of effectively apeing The Kinks, The Pretty Things and co – but nothing more. So "Let Me In" passes for The Yardbirds, while "Let The Live Live" has the Small Faces down pat. Elsewhere, they sound like every American garage band worth a steal. *Mick Houghton*

DANIELLE SPENCER Calling All Magicians

DANIELLE SPENCER MUSIC

★★★★

First international release from Russell Crowe's wife The artwork suggest Stevie Nicks in her witchy éclat, while the voice and piano vamping evoke Tori Amos.

Sadly there's no "Rhiannon" or "Cornflake Girl" here, even though Spencer's had nine years to write the album since her previous Australia-only release. "On Your Side" – oddly reminiscent of Supertramp's "Dreamer" – is memorable enough, and she sings with some allure. But you don't want to explore the lyrics too deeply, and Tony Visconti's assured production can't quite paper over the cracks.

Nigel Williamson

LISBEE STANTON Girl On An Unmade Bed

MARIONET

★★★★

Radio 2 favourite's multi-faceted debut

Stanton is not the first and unlikely to be the last singer-songwriter lazily heralded as a British Norah Jones, and the occasional parallel is undeniable. Closer inspection, however, reveals the scattergun jazzy hues of Rickie Lee Jones ("Rainbow", "Never Quite An Angel") and a touch of Lily Allen mockney wit ("Harriet"), while the title track suggests the delicate folk of The Unthanks. Stanton's lyrics never veer far from the confessionals of a young girl's diary, but her use of language and turn of phrase hint at a wise and articulate head, who'll have more to say in time.

Terry Staunton

STEPHEN STILLS Live At Shepherd's Bush

EYEWEALL

★★★★

Solo and sadly exposed in concert, plus bonus DVD

Like Stevie Wonder, Stills had a decade of creative genius followed by 30 years of frustrating barrenness. Unsurprisingly, the material here draws heavily on his glory years with Springfield/CSN/Manassas, circa '66-76. Recorded in London on his 2008 tour, we get seven solo acoustic performances and seven with his full band, the latter marginally shading it; at least the rocking arrangements help disguise the fact that his voice is shot-to-pieces. Still, there's something painfully sad about these versions of "Rock & Roll Woman" and "For What It's Worth", their original, vibrant brio of 40 years back crushed into plodding mediocrity. *Nigel Williamson*

SPOON

Transference ANTI-



Texan guitar-pop underdogs triumph on dark, deadly efficient seventh. By Bud Scoppa



In 2001, Britt Daniel and Jim Eno – the Austin-based founders of Spoon – hit upon the sound that would carry them through the ensuing decade. “Everything Hits

At Once”, the opening track of their third album, *Girls Can Tell*, served as the blueprint for the mature Spoon sound: spare, propulsive, detailed with Rolex precision. No modern-day guitar-pop band has been more focused on the groove, laid down by Eno with both Bonham-like heft and the behind-the-beat momentum of Charlie Watts.

It’s a single-minded groove, mirroring the intensity of frontman Daniel, that stretched on into the masterfully distilled *Kill The Moonlight* (2002), with its stripped-down, amped-up Beatle-isms, and 2005’s more expansive *Gimme Fiction*. That album yielded the “Kiss”-meets-“Emotional Rescue” refracted soul of “I Turn My Camera On” and the torrid anti-anthem “My Mathematical Mind”. *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga* (2007), meanwhile, Spoon’s US commercial breakthrough, was their most unremittingly infectious set, paced by a song that could be their theme tune: “The Underdog”.

Like a Wilco in reverse, the band – now a locked-down four-piece – have chosen to follow their sunniest album with their darkest and most severe effort yet. Angular, monochromatic and desert-dry in both tone and attitude, *Transference* eschews conventional verse/chorus/bridge song structure altogether. Instead, on each of the 11 tracks, the band establishes a musical premise and rides it out, like a souped-up roadster barreling along an arrow-straight strip of blacktop toward the horizon.

The opening “Before Destruction” finds Daniel singing as if to himself and strumming an acoustic over Eno’s looped kick/cymbal pattern, before an otherworldly chorale of overdubbed voices floats in. After the characteristically punchy “Is Love Forever?”, we’re into the meat of the album with “The Mystery Zone”, a tension-builder with a springy groove and *Revolver*-like string-synths. “Who Makes Your Money”, featuring eerie electric keyboard chords over a drum loop and a dubby bassline, kicks into double time halfway through while a pugilistic rhythm guitar jabs away.

The tension is sustained through the surging “Written In Reverse”, with its anxious repeated phrase, “I’m not standing here”, and “I Saw The Light”, a jacked-up shuffle with a



lemon-tart melodic progression. An abrupt tempo shift signals the transition into a mesmerising instrumental section, as a buoyant piano vamp gives way to a sheet-metal guitar solo.

The mood changes radically soon thereafter with the drumless, muted piano ballad “Goodnight Laura”, its antecedent Big Star’s “I’m In Love With A Girl”, as Daniel turns unguarded, nary a trace of irony or distance in his vocal. This sense of tenderness carries through “Out Go The Lights”, its tone ghostly and panoramic, like Captain Beefheart’s “My Head Is My Only House Unless It Rains”, Daniel’s voice Lennon-like in its understatement.

The dry heat returns with “Got Nuffin”, a streamlined rocker with a trampolining guitar riff nagged by the piano’s incessant plink-plink. Finally, on the closing “Nobody

Gets Me But You”, Eno’s super-compressed drums reference “I Turn My Camera On”, while Daniel bites off a lyric that could serve as a love letter to the band’s fervent fans. “Nobody gets me but you/No one gets what I’m doin’,” he sings in his scuffed-up tenor. Over string-like accents, the tone turns urgent, and Daniel scribbles the arrangement with jagged guitar licks until we’re left with just static. Nothing resolved.

Daniel and Eno worked without a producer for the first time in an effort to pare things down to what the former has described on his band’s website as “pure Spoon”. This is the challenging, take-no-prisoners result, an audacious fusion of the reliable and the experimental, as Daniel and Eno continue into the new decade a musical conversation as lively and uncompromising as that of Jack and Meg White.

Q&A Britt Daniel, Spoon

Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga was loaded with hooky pop. This album is stripped to the bone...

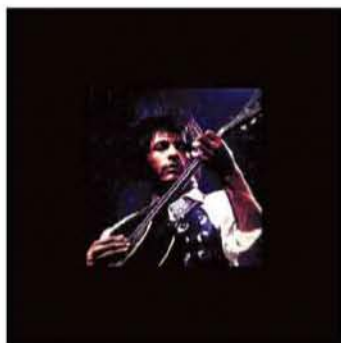
With each record you react to the one before, and the songs on this record are constructed in a different way. For instance, “The Underdog” has a zillion chords and a ton of different parts. A lot of songs on this record ended up having very few chords; it was more about setting something up, getting in a mood and sticking with it. There’s something real hardcore about playing one chord or one riff for four minutes. It’s just a different kind of good, and I wanted to see if we could do that kind of good.

But why mess with a winning formula?

More than anything, I just wanted to push myself, and at some point you’ve gotta stop thinking about topping yourself and go in a different direction. If you keep trying to make the same record and topping yourself, you’ll lose your mind. That kind of thinking is why Brian Wilson lost his mind.

Was working without a producer another way of reshuffling the cards?

I wanted to try it where we’re pleasing only ourselves, not having to think about anybody else. Just hardcore what we want – hardcore Spoon. INTERVIEW: BUD SCOPPA



LOVE

Love Lost SUNDazed



A trawl through the Arthur Lee archives. Long-discarded 1971 studio session tapes surface, and the ghost of Hendrix hovers... By Luke Torn

**REISSUE
OF THE
MONTH**

Love's 1967 masterstroke, *Forever Changes*, was a monster to live up to, and Arthur Lee knew it. An intoxicating mix of hope and hate, ebullience and

paranoia, shifting perspectives and orchestral beauty, it sprang from the Summer Of Love with a mysterious elegance and wisdom all too rare in pop.

It wasn't a commercial breakthrough, though, and instead of rallying the group behind its genius, the classic 1966-68 Love lineup (featuring crucial second songwriter Bryan MacLean) imploded in a haze of recrimination, drug abuse, and legal trouble. Lee retrenched, carrying on under the Love banner, but he could never have replicated the magic of *Forever Changes*, even if he'd been foolish enough to try.

Thus began one of rock's more peculiar odysseys – Arthur Lee's downward spiral from shaman to burnout, from Sunset Strip's most resplendent hipster to just another lost hippy soul sleepwalking through the '70s. Beginning with *Forever Changes*' 1969 follow-up, *Four Sail*, Lee's recordings proffered ever-dwindling returns.

Aided by a succession of musically adroit yet uninspired backing musicians, Love plummeted into hippy jams and anonymous hard rock, callow pop and perfunctory forays into R'n'B. Even the best of it wasn't traceable back to the man responsible for "The Red Telephone" and "Seven And Seven Is."

Lee remained a powerful singer, though, and glimmers of the old magic occasionally surfaced. But the songwriting was half-baked and mundane. It was as if the maelstrom had stripped Arthur of his identity. One would be hard-pressed to find a

more precipitous artistic drop-off in all rock'n'roll than 1967's *Forever Changes* to 1974's *Reel To Real*.

Love Lost, Sundazed's surprise unearthing of all-but-forgotten 1971 session tapes (laid down during the band's brief alliance with Columbia Records), throws a fascinating wrinkle into Love's disintegration. Veering from captivating to frustrating, charming to maddening, it's a typically uneven set. Yet there are moments of sheer beauty, and Lee clearly poured his heart into the grooves. Reinventing himself in the image of his recently deceased friend Jimi Hendrix, interweaving blazing rock with sublime, fly-on-wall acoustic tracks, *Dear You*, as the Columbia album was to be called, had enough mojo to fuel a plausible comeback.

Evidence that Hendrix's death hit Arthur Lee hard lurks everywhere – in his vocal phrasing and spoken asides, in guitarist Craig Tarwater's high-voltage riffs, in the souped-up bluesy arrangements. In fact, if imitation is the highest form of flattery, *Love Lost* could be interpreted as a Hendrix tribute album par excellence (although, to be fair, bits of Cream, Mountain, the Jeff Beck Group, and others percolate throughout). "I Can't Find It", which with a bit more work might have been the single, echoes "The Wind Cries Mary"; the stuttering strut of "Midnight Sun" is drenched in *Electric Ladyland*-isms. And on and on.

These are fine efforts – vicarious pleasures to be sure – that nonetheless get under your skin. "Product Of The Times" even gets away from stock paeans to troubled love affairs for a bit of self-reflective commentary, a flicker of Lee's old songwriting spark. "Product," riding a gutbucket riff and some sizzling lead guitar, and everyman anthem "Everybody's Gotta Live", given a hair-raising Lee vocal, are impassioned, fully realised gems.

Yet, for all the group's chutzpah, Lee's

indulgences – a tendency to over-sing into a screech, some cringeworthy misogyny – blunt the impact. Curiously, Columbia assigned no producer for these sessions, terminating the band's contract without releasing a note. A clearheaded producer, one capable of adding some discipline, focus and editing, might well have crafted *Dear You* into a remarkable rebirth.

For all Lee's bluster, though, the austere power of *Love Lost*'s acoustic cuts suggest the hard-rock moves sabotaged his natural talent and melodic gifts. "He Said She Said", a springy shuffle with flashing Dylanesque imagery, sparkles with a spontaneity and freshness the electric cuts can't touch. Album opener "Love Jumped Through My Window", Lee's soulful tenor soaring over some choppy guitar runs, is pure joy. It's a tempered direction Lee should have explored more.

Love Lost was, in effect, Arthur Lee's last true creative songwriting burst. Despite Columbia's abandonment of the project, Lee hardly gave up on this body of work, revisiting 12 of its 14 songs, on *Vindicator* (his 1972 hard-rock turn on A&M), 1973's *Black Beauty* (recorded for the short-lived Buffalo Records but never released), and *Reel To Real* (Love's last major-label fling, an R'n'B-flavoured set on Robert Stigwood's RSO Records in 1974). Lee's career truly unspooled thereafter: a few archival releases, an ill-fated 1978 reunion with Bryan MacLean, and only very occasional half-hearted rehabilitations. From 1996 to 2001, Lee served time in a California prison, just another troublemaker caught up in the state's controversial so-called "three strikes" law.

But unlike, say, Syd Barrett or Skip Spence, Lee managed a hardly expected, entirely revelatory comeback, beginning in 2002. Making peace with the incandescence of Elektra-era Love, Lee raced the clock, making up for nearly three lost decades in five short years. Resuming his alliance with a hungry, young Love – LA garage band Baby Lemonade – Lee played Hollywood and criss-crossed Europe, sometimes adding string and horn sections in breathtaking recreations of *Forever Changes*. In a familiar echo of Lee's mercurial past, it was as if the hard-rock-and-Hendrix-obsessed Love circa 1968-74 – and *Love Lost* – had never existed.

TRACKMARKS

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Love Jumped Through My Window ★★★★★ | 8 Good & Evil I ★ |
| 2 I Can't Find It ★★★★★ | 9 He Knows A Lot of Good Women ★★★ |
| 3 He Said She Said ★★★★★ | 10 Find Somebody ★★★ |
| 4 Product of the Times ★★★★★ | 11 For A Day ★★★★★ |
| 5 Sad Song ★★★ | 12 Good & Evil II ★ |
| 6 Everybody's Gotta Live ★★★★★ | 13 Looking Glass ★★ |
| 7 Midnight Sun ★★★★★ | 14 Trippin' & Slippin'/Ezy Rider ★★★★★ |

He set the scene:
the Hendrix-
obsessed Arthur
Lee, London, 1970



PUBLIC IMAGE LIMITED

Metal Box VIRGIN  1979

★★★★★

Plastic Box VIRGIN 

★★★★

"Careering" again? As PiL are reborn, a dark classic is reissued, alongside a patchy 4CD comp.
By Neil Spencer



"Public Image would like to thank absolutely no-one." The dedication on PiL's first album served notice that John Lydon's punk sneer hadn't entirely vanished. Released in

December 1978, *First Edition* found Lydon and his principal cohorts, Keith Levene and Jah Wobble, stuck between snottiness and artiness. To spite Virgin, the LP was kept to the contractual minimum of 30 minutes, while blatant instrumental filler like "The Cowboy Song" and "Fodderstompf" mocked the fans.

Yet there was also brilliance. "Public Image" came in a blaze of piercing guitar and pulsing reggae bass, over which Lydon reclaimed his artistic self-determination. "Attack" and "Annalisa" repeated the trick almost as well. Most of all, *First Edition* sounded like nothing else on offer, a strange hybrid that hovered between the motorik rhythms of Krautrock and the spacey mixes of dub.

Metal Box, released a year later, moved the PiL sound into still stranger territory, and suggested the group might realise their vaunted ambition to be something more than just another rock band. Housed in a film canister, a slip of paper for a tracklist, its three 12" 45 rpm discs comprised an 'album' with no clear structure or sequence. The industrialism of the packaging reflected the hour of stark, unsettling music it contained: 10 minutes of hammering bass and circular, scratchy guitar on "Albatross", for example, with Lydon moaning like a somnambulist unable to escape a bad dream (the Sex Pistols, clearly, also the subject of "Memories").

Wobble's relentless basslines, throbbing and humming across a full, three octave range, are the album's lynchpin, with Levene jangling, scything and picking spiky lines from his aluminium guitar, or sending out squalls of synth – a huge novelty at the time. The drums, played variously by Richard Dudanski, Martin Atkinson, Wobble and Levene, were simple, utilitarian, relentless.

A mood of paranoia and resignation was crystallised by Lydon's baleful vocals and lyrics. "Careering" was, and remains, the most

evocative depiction of the casual murderousness of Ulster's civil war. "Poptones", a suggestive sketch of abduction and rape, and "Swan Lake" (aka "Death Disco"), a description of watching a dear one die (in this case Lydon's mother), likewise glared unblinkingly into the void.

Metal Box still sounds like a revolution in progress; even its clumsy attempts at disco (post-punk heresy in '79) and Levene's synth

Uncompromising, indulgent, patched-together – *Metal Box* nonetheless remains magnificent

piece, "Radio 4", are endearing. Uncompromising, occasionally indulgent, patched together at the mixing desk, it remains a magnificent, jarring creation.

Although PiL had a reputation as a band that wouldn't/couldn't play live, the three John Peel Session tracks on *Plastic Box* ("Poptones", "Careering", "Chant") show them quite capable of reproducing their studio form when required. The will to strive and achieve

wasn't present, however, at least not in Levene, labouring under a chronic heroin habit, or Lydon, content to idle away weeks in a blur of lager, amphetamines and misanthropy.

Disgruntled by the poor wages and slack work ethic, Wobble was soon off, leaving a void no amount of prickly posturing could fill. *Flowers Of Romance*, PiL's third, succeeded only in patches. The title track (a hit!) ran with the tribal beats popularised by Adam Ant, and "Go Back" reprised *Metal Box*, this time lampooning the Oi boys of the fascist right. The lashings of cod avant-garde elsewhere were strictly for the impressionable.

A lurch back to mainstream rock arrived on the hit "This Is Not A Love Song" ("I'm changing my ways where money applies," says it all) and accelerated once Levene left. Where the first two CDs of *Plastic Box* – essentially the first three albums – are a mix of bravery and self-gratification, the second pair are a catalogue of mediocrity and dead ends. The Laswell-produced *Album* ('86) is often poor man's Iggy (try "F.F.F."), while *Happy* ('87), 9 ('89) and *That What Is Not* ('92) drift into Motörhead lite ("Luck's Up") and, ulp, Simple Minds ("Disappointed"). Two CDs and 32 tracks of generic rock are distinguished only by Lydon's trademark bark, now ossified into an unvarying wail, and lyrically usually fighting yesterday's battles; avant-garde turned same-old.





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These New Puritans: unbridled Essex experimentalists

TBA/NATALIE BERIDZE

Pending
LABORATORY INSTINCT

★★★★

Refined sixth from Georgian composer

Followers of Natalie Beridze – and there must be a few by now – could be forgiven for thinking they've heard *Pending* before. Across five albums in as many years, the Tbilisi producer has honed her distinctive style of sultry electronica and spooked folk to hazy perfection, but as this sixth illustrates, her range remains limited. Within that, though, Beridze manipulates the many shades of melancholy with exquisite sound-design. "Don't Know Why" flutters with delicious intent, while the scuffed beats of "Fallin Suga" and gnarly techno of "Everything Pushes Me Further Away" suggest she's on top form but needs direction.

Piers Martin

THE TENEBROUS LIAR

Jack-Knifed & Slaughtered
TV

★★★★

Ace rock photographer makes ace rock album

Many reading this will know the terrific photography of Tenebrous Liar's frontman, Steve Gullick. He's not doing badly as a rock singer, either. After a sequence of only

intermittently inspired records, a new lineup and sympathetic producer (Richard Warren, best known for his work with Spiritualized) have delivered Tenebrous Liar's finest hour. "Suffer You" and "No Guiding Light" are fine grunge-pop, borne by basslines borrowed from Joy Division, while the epic title track builds adroitly from Birthday Party blues into a thing of thunderous ferocity.

Andrew Mueller



THAO WITH THE GET DOWN

Know Better Learn Faster
KILL ROCK STARS

★★★★

Second album from Laura Veirs' buddy and her San Francisco band

Thao Nguyen's 2008 debut *We Brave Bee Stings And All* was a beguilingly giddy folk-pop collection, roughly presenting her as Sufjan Stevens' little sister. On the

follow-up she's repositioned herself somewhere between Natasha Khan and Chan Marshall. The scuzzy arrangements are trickier and less cute, while the lyrics fester with harsh experience. It's a break-up album – but it's the sexual carnage rather than the romantic holocaust Nguyen obsesses over ("Just a body in your bed," she sings on "Body"). Fortunately, an extrovert sharpness and insouciant wit avoid too much wallowing.

Nigel Williamson

THESE NEW PURITANS

Hidden
ANGULAR

★★★★

Daring second from precocious Southend-On-Sea quartet

It's safe to say These New Puritans are out there, on their own. Loosely, *Hidden* is a hymn to Benjamin Britten's Thames Estuary heartland, a region the group share with the composer, fashioned from tribal rhythms and sparse dancehall-styled electronics (think Gang Gang Dance) over which a blanket of horns and woodwind has been laid. The effect is at first jarring – a sensation not unfamiliar to those who own TNP's debut – but slowly its irregular groove, lead by Jack Barrett's insistent chant, proves weirdly seductive.

Difficult to pin down, *Hidden* is even harder to forget.

Piers Martin

TRANS AM

What Day Is It Tonight?
THRILL JOCKEY

★★★★

Career-spanning live set/ DVD from misunderstood Washington trio

Lazily associated with post-rock by virtue of being labelmates with Tortoise, Trans Am have always been more interested in reclaiming and exploiting classic rock and electronica clichés. Their live shows – complete with vocoders, semi-ironic rock poses, flaming cymbals and drum solos (caught here on "Outmoder") – make this transparent. *What Day Is It Tonight?* – culled from 15 years of recordings since 1993 – captures their tight ferocity in full force, with the splendidly titled "Tesco Vs Sainsbury's" resembling Big Black covering Eno, and "Futureworld" offering a witty but thunderous tribute to Kraftwerk.

Eden Parke

UNDERWORLD VS THE MISTERONS

Athens
IK7

★★★★

"Born Slippy" boys' jazzy mix, a little on the polite side

Underworld have always been the most progressive of dance acts, so it's not such a surprise to find them repping for the likes of Soft Machine and Mahavishnu Orchestra on this supremely tasteful mix. Even techno renegades such as Squarepusher and Moodymann are on their best supper club behaviour here. It's hard to fault many of the selections, but in the age of Spotify, a compilation CD needs something more than a discerning tracklist to make it worth buying; the one exclusive track, a rather hectic, burbling face-off between Underworld's Karl Hyde and Brian Eno, isn't really enough.

Sam Richards

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Sherm Sticks And Other Nasty Joints
LIGHT SOUNDS DARK

★★★★

Brain-frying set of forgotten psych nuggets

Whether or not cigarettes soaked in PCP are usually your thing, you'll certainly feel like you've smoked a few sherm sticks after dipping into this wonderfully

hallucinogenic collection of '70s psych obscurities. Names such as Orange Peel, Creative Craniums and Electric Max Band sound suspiciously made-up, but each of them turn out to be capable of cooking up a potent, psychedelic stink. In addition to their crazed and funky cosmic rock, there are also a few choice cuts of wobbly cosmic disco, and even, thanks to 360's "Money", some cosmic reggae. Set the controls.

Sam Richards

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Nowhere Boy
SONY

★★★★

Two-disc companion to the new Beatle biopic

A mix of '50s doo-wop, early rock'n'roll originals and covers, even a post-Beatles composition – this is a curious accompaniment to Sam Taylor Wood's film about John Lennon's formative years. It's hard to fault the standards on much of CD1 and all of CD2 – from Jerry Lewis' "Wild One" to Dickie Valentine's "Mr Sandman". More intriguing are the rock'n'roll covers by The Nowhere Boys, a band comprised of the actors who play The Quarrymen in the film. Lead Aaron Johnson does a decent approximation of Lennon's adenoidal rasp on "Maggie May" and "That's Alright Mama". Lennon's own "Mother", however, shows how it's done.

Michael Bonner

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Up In The Air
RHINO

★★★★

(Airport) Music from the Motion Picture...

Songs from Cat Power, Belle & Sebastian and The Moldy Peaches' Kimya Dawson set the offbeat tone of director Jason Reitman's last film, 2007's *Juno*. He does more or less the same thing here, gathering a like-minded bunch of fuzzy-folk travellers to soundtrack the new, George Clooney-piloted *Up In The Air*. It's smartly compiled – Dan Auerbach's "Goin' Home" nestles neatly alongside CSNY's "Taken At All" and Elliott Smith's heartbreaking "Angel In The Snow". Perhaps best of all is Charles Atlas' meditative "Genova", a seven-minute instrumental in which prodded pianos act as airport ambience.

Rob Hughes

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DAVID BOWIE

1967

David Bowie DERAM/UNIVERSAL

★★★★

The Dame's debut: an enduringly curious dispatch from "Gnome-man's land", expanded and remastered. By Rob Young



In the dying days of 1966, Ken Pitt, manager of the 19-year-old David Bowie, negotiated a contract with Decca's Deram imprint. The singer was backed on

early sessions by members of his group at the time, The Buzz, although long before his first solo LP was released on June 1, 1967 – the same day as *Sgt Pepper* – they had been ditched. This definitive double set is the first time the album's mono mix has been issued on CD, and includes almost all the recordings Bowie made for Decca (in stereo and mono) before the contract was severed in April 1968, plus some newly discovered BBC sessions. By then, he had been introduced to producer Tony Visconti, and to mime artist Lindsay Kemp. But *David Bowie*, with its hints of music hall, Tin Pan Alley and Anthony Newley theatricality, its unforgiving turnover of professional musicians and impermanent bands, is part of the Old Order. The futurist stomp of Ziggy Stardust and *Aladdin Sane's* wilderness of mirrors seem far, far off.

And yet, even back here, Bowie already sounds weary of pop. This might be a songbook stuffed with adolescent paradises, sartorial/girl hangups, little bombardiers, silly boys blue and eccentric uncles. But a darker imagination peeps through chinks in the chirpiness. How many British lyricists in 1966, after all, were self-aware enough to drop knowing references to "*psychedelic stars throwing down cigars, they're picking up the*



Even back here, a darker imagination peeps through the chirpiness...

joins now that they've joined the gang" ("Join The Gang")? Such cynical despond would resurface, three years later, on "Cygnets Committee", Bowie's disgusted kiss-off to the world of hippy communitarianism. And a foretaste of the dystopias of *Ziggy Stardust* and *The Spiders From Mars* and *Diamond Dogs* is traceable in "We Are Hungry Men", an unsettling vignette of a future, overpopulated world turning to cannibalism.

In the mouth of a more eager-to-please popster, you could imagine "Sell Me A Coat" being milked for mawk. The future Major Tom sings it from about 100 miles up, holding the

song at arm's length as if it's a reeking sock. The way he negotiates the appalling "*branch*" / "*romance*" rhyme on "Love You Til Tuesday" is a textbook case of passionless, gritted-teeth, 'can I have the money now?' professionalism. With its swingtime brass tootles, Edwardiana, scones and cups of tea, "Rubber Band" is surely a pisstake of "Penny Lane"... until you realise The Beatles were still two and a half months off recording it. "Please Mr Gravedigger" reveals Bowie's dramatic instincts, as he sniffs his way through a taped rainstorm, shovelling 'earth' from a theatre-prop dirt tray. Two years later, Bowie adopted the hippy ideal wholesale (at least until early 1972). For now, these songs don't feel cut from gaudy '67 cloth: they lack the pinch of psych that propelled Hendrix, The Beatles and Pink Floyd to the frontline, not to mention The Who or Cream's benny-fuelled abandon. In fact, "When I Live My Dream" suggests the alternative scenario, had Bowie not gone underground with his hippy commune at Haddon Hall, of him doing a Scott Walker: TV-friendly schmaltz at the Jack Jones-Brel interface.

The extra single versions, unreleased tracks and BBC material compiled on disc two hint at Bowie's subsequent chameleon nature. The LP's childish things are slowly thrown away in favour of Buddhism ("Karma Man") and overt carnality: "*brush the dust of youth from off your shoulder*", he croons on "Let Me Sleep Beside You". That song "hasn't been out of the house", Bowie deadpanned at the time, "because my mother thought the lyrics were dirty."

A false start, then, compared to the confident compression of ideas on "Space Oddity" and *The Man Who Sold The World*. Neither mod, nor psych, nor straight-up pop, this period in Bowie's career remains a nagging misshape, though one that sounds better than ever in this remaster. Stop the world, the ambitious prodigy seems to be saying, I want to get on.

Q&A Mike Vernon, Decca producer

What were your first impressions of David Bowie?

My first introduction to Bowie was the demos that Ken Pitt brought to Decca. Once I started to really listen, I realised the songs were totally unique – marvellous little cameo stories. And there was the naïve way he sang the songs, as if he was a relative of the person he was singing about. He wasn't even really a professional singer – he was storytelling. At that time I was into country blues – Blind Lemon Jefferson – and one felt that same kind of empathy.

Was he the driving force in the studio?

Very largely, yes. I felt at times like I almost wasn't needed. I was working with Gus Dudgeon, who later became his producer.

Bowie was very organised, learnt quite heavily on Dec Fearnley, his bass player and arranger, and they were terribly professional considering there was no history of recorded output. "The Laughing Gnome" was quite complicated and took a long time to do, and there was a lot of hair-pulling by Gus in particular.

Did you follow Bowie's later career?

What can you say about him – he's an extraordinarily talented artist. But when this album was finished and he left Decca, I wouldn't have put my hand on my heart and said, 'David Bowie is going to be one of the biggest international artists of all time.' It was so quirky and off-the-wall, you didn't think in those terms. INTERVIEW: ROB YOUNG

PETER VON POEHL

May Day

TÔT OUTARD

★★★

So-so sophomore effort from the Francophile Swedish troubadour

Von Poehl is a singer-songwriter from Malmö, but he's a more familiar figure in Paris, where he's worked with Bertrand Burgalat, collaborated with the eccentric author Michel Houellebecq on a bonkers trance album, and made music that's sung in English but has that slightly plasticky, pleasantly artificial French edge. This collection of mid-tempo ballads and aimless folksy warbling isn't nearly as good as his 2006 debut. But there are moments, like the horn-heavy "Parliament" and the Beach Boys-ish "Moonshot Falls", where Von Poehl – awash in clever chord changes, falsetto hooks and wistful lyrics – is in his element. **John Lewis**

WEEZER

Raditude

DGC/INTERSCOPE

★★★

Seventh album, part-produced by Jacknife Lee Weezer's likeable, insubstantial powerpop has often been infused with somewhat tetchy intimations of latent intellectual heft. On *Raditude*, this manifests in guest appearances by Amrita Sen and Nishat Khan on the dreadful "Love Is The Answer". Elsewhere, though, Weezer seem to have ceased caring. The rear cover pictures them yahooing on BMX bikes, while titles include "Trippin' Down The Freeway" and "Can't Stop Partying". At least the Glitter Band stomp of "The Girl Got Hot" and cheerful Cheap Trick pastiche ("If You're Wondering If I Want You To") I Want You To" suggest a band comfortable with or resigned to their lot in life. **Andrew Mueller**



Weezer: lacking powerpop punch

WETDOG

Frauhaus!

ANGULAR

★★★

London trio's endearing slipshod pop

The girls of Wetdog tend to find their music filed with The Raincoats or Huggy Bear and, true, their unorthodox indie does have a C86 sensibility and wouldn't sound out of place in a Stoke Newington vegetarian café. But the slender melody and ragged groove of second LP *Frauhaus!* suggest they've more in common with, say, The xx, the charms of this deceptively nifty record slowly revealed with each spin. Their instinctive approach, reminiscent of Stereo Total, gives the likes of "Round Vox" or "Women's Final" a homespun quality that's surprisingly appealing. **Piers Martin**

THE WHITEFIELD BROTHERS

Earthology

NOW-AGAIN/STONES THROW

★★★★

Heavy funk goes world psych, with bells on

Following Now-Again's reissue of their 2001 debut earlier this year, former Poets Of Rhythm Jan and Max Whitefield reconvene their Munich funk outfit for a

wildly ambitious excursion into world psych. Drawing on every rhythmic tradition they can find and master, they corral impressive guests like Edan, Mr Lif and Quantic to confound all expectations of a contemporary funk LP. "Reverse" sounds like Percee P and MED rhyming with The Jimmy Castor Bunch in Marrakesh's Djemaa El Fna, "Sad Nile" could be a lost *Éthiopiennes* outtake and "NTU" is a straight Gamelan workout. **James Poletti**

WILT

Cemetery Road/Dead Electronics

AD NOISEAM

★★★

Dark, instrumental drones from Wisconsin duo

Cemetery... marks a decade of Wilt, an impressive lifespan that's seen James Keeler and Don Hall evolve from drones and sonic collage into a more orchestrated ensemble. Rumbling synths gel with viola, guitar and eerie found sounds, and while much here festers with deliberately monotonous effect, there's no little compositional intelligence in play: see how "Escape" builds dramatic tension with shades of Krzysztof Penderecki or the latterday work of Earth. **Louis Pattison**

YETI LANE

Yeti Lane

SONIC CATHEDRAL

★★★

Fuzzy French trio, not quite abominable

This Parisian psych-pop trio featuring Ben (ex-Cyann & Ben) chose their name to evoke both The Beatles and Amon Düül II, yet often fall between the two stools. Yeti Lane's aim of tightening up the space-rock explorations of Cyann & Ben into poppier shapes leaves them too bubbly for Krautrock cool, yet too sprawling to be Tin Pan Alley. "Lonesome George", a frenetic tribute to the last Pinta Island tortoise, has eager charm, but elsewhere the Syd-Barrett-on-helium vocals grate. When they shoot for something more paced and epic, as on "Heart's Architecture" or "Black Soul", they drift off, pleasantly enough, into the ether. **Chris Roberts**

NEXT MONTH...

RINGO STARR

In 2010, Ringo embraces the world with a philosophical shrug: *Y Not*. Dave Stewart plays! Macca guests! And Ringo produces!

HOT CHIP

The much-loved electropoppers' unstoppable rise continues on *One Life Stand*, with the band apparently aiming for a "calmer" sound.

ALI AND TOUMANI

Recorded in 2005, but seeing the light now, it's Ali Farka Touré & Toumani Diabaté on mesmerising form.

UNCUT RECOMMENDS

The best releases, new and old, from the past few months



TOM WAITS

Glitter And Doom Live

ANTI- ★★★★★

The tickets were like expensive hens' teeth. Thanks, then, for this live document his 2008 tour, plus an extra CD of on-stage eccentrica.



BROADCAST & THE FOCUS GROUP

Investigate Witch Cults Of The Radio

Age WARP ★★★★★

"Hauntology", they're all calling it. Spooky voices drifting through ambient static and great tunes. Essence of *Bagpuss* and witchier things besides.



NORAH JONES

The Fall BLUE NOTE ★★★★★

A rockier Norah, for a less civilised dinner party. Ryan Adams and Will Sheff were onboard for a post-relationship shaking out of the cobwebs.



THE ROLLING STONES

Get Yer Ya Yas Out

UNIVERSAL ★★★★★

Catching the band live in pre-Altamont glory, this packaged an expanded setlist with DVD footage and a full supporting cast.



THE STOOGES

You Want My Action

EASY ACTION ★★★★★

The fi was lo. But the revelations came thick and fast. Profanity and riffs, riffs, riffs from the live Stooges in their brief "two guitar" lineup.

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Three generations, 18 strings: White, The Edge and Page in 2008

IT MIGHT GET LOUD

BLUE DOLPHIN



Riveting doc about the magical powers of the electric guitar, starring Jack White, Jimmy Page and The Edge. By Barney Hoskyns



Guitar-wise we live in times that are at once nostalgic and aspirational. Every other middle-class teenage boy has a Stratocaster or a Les Paul in his converted attic bedroom, or he's pretending to be Jimi Hendrix and Kurt Cobain on the *Guitar Hero* game.

Watching *It Might Get Loud* – Davis Guggenheim's absorbing film about a summit meeting in January 2008 between three generations of six-string gunslingers – makes you realise how commonplace and dilettantish our rock dreams have become. In their varying ways Jimmy Page, The Edge, and

Jack White had to struggle through early years of obsession and apprenticeship to get anywhere at all. Today's Wii wunderkinder could learn a lot from their views and their memories.

Released on DVD just two weeks after a limited cinematic run, *It Might Get Loud* is about the way the electric guitar and the amplifier combine to create a kind of superpower, transforming the player into a sonic god. Opening with a long shot of Jack White building an aboriginally primitive one-string instrument in his Tennessee backyard, the film shuffles back and forth along the timelines of – loosely – the Led Zeppelin, U2 and White Stripes stories, documenting the breakthrough moments in each man's musical growth. Despite one or two awkward

edits (e.g. The Edge talking about the Troubles, which dissolves inexplicably into Page remembering the day he quit the lucrative London session scene) the intertwined narratives work well.

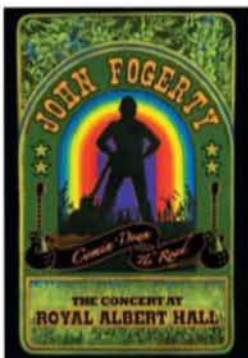
Given that White is so clearly an heir to the blues-boom sorcery of sometime skiffle prodigy James Patrick Page, The Edge is something of an odd man out here, devoid of dirty blues spirit and barricaded by his effects apparatus. But the contrast between his hi-tech fetishism and the relative primitivism of Page and White in fact makes for a more compelling film. White uses the film partly as a platform to attack technology at its most gratuitously flashy, but concedes, en route to meeting his elders, that he intends to trick them both into giving up secrets he can steal. And however much one might revile U2, it's hard to argue with the majesty of The Edge's glassily chiming "infinite guitar". The film's most powerful moment might just be when it segues from cassette demos for *The Joshua Tree* to a full-blown stadium version of the "Where The Streets Have No Name".

At one point Edge talks of riffs and sounds "invoking location", and Guggenheim takes our august power trio back to key places on their musical journeys: Page to Headley Grange in a black cab; White to decimated southwest Detroit; Edge himself to the Dublin comprehensive where U2 formed. There are lovely moments of reconnection with influences: White listening to a hallowed Son House LP, Page breaking out in a huge smile at a slashing vibrato chord on Link Wray's "Rumble". There's also wild footage of Stripes template the Flat Duo Jets and priceless home-movie scenes of Zeppelin at play in Headley Grange's garden.

Along with drooling dolly shots of necks and frets and gleaming pickups, there is conversation between the three men on an LA soundstage and enjoyable jams on "Dead Leaves And The Dirty Ground" and the ominous Delta slide-swarm of Zeppelin's "In My Time Of Dying". Though White is the commanding star of the show – as the only frontman of the three, that's to be expected – he's duly deferential, not to mention rapt as Page cranks out "Whole Lotta Love". Resembling a genial Asian Zen master, Page's timing has become a tad fuzzy but the feel is still there. "Whether I took it on or it took me on, I don't know," he says of the primal urge to transform oneself through amplification. "The jury's out on that. But I don't care: I've just really, really enjoyed it. That's it."

Occasionally *It Might Get Loud* turns into one of the more plodding BBC4 docs – at the juncture of prog-rock pomposity and punk insurrection, for instance – but in the main it's an engaging study of guitar heroism as a shared passion. Listening to Jack White on his back porch, throttling his customised Gretsch and wrenching emotion from its hollow body, makes you realise how many possibilities the hoary old thing still offers.

EXTRAS: Deleted scenes, Toronto Film Festival footage, commentary, Page/Edge/White discussions on music. ★★★



JOHN FOGERTY Comin' Down The Road: The Concert At Royal Albert Hall

★★★★

UNIVERSAL

Straightforward document of the former Creedence Clearwater Revival singer in concert in June 2008. The 26-song set spans Fogerty's career, the decades have scarcely wearied the sixtiesomething's signature abrasive howl. "Fortunate Son" still seethes with righteous fury, and "Rockin' All Over The World" is reclaimed from the leaden clutches of Status Quo. **Andrew Mueller**

CLIFF RICHARD & THE SHADOWS The Final Reunion

★★★★

2 ENTERTAIN

A half century since their first records together and 30 years since their last "farewell" show, it's a creakier Cliff & The Shads who rock out in the most polite fashion at London's O2 Arena. Having said that, there's still a charged thrill to "Move It" and selections from the Eddie Cochran library, though the singalongs of "Livin' Doll" and the like resemble a knees-up at a care home. What most impresses is Hank's deft guitar work, clearly a pioneer in his day. **EXTRAS:** Behind-the-scenes. **★★ Terry Staunton**

MARTIN SIMPSON Prodigal Son In Concert

★★★★

TOPIC

The man in the white shirt recorded at the Union Chapel in November 2007, celebrating his 30 years overdue 'breakthrough' LP. Simpson stagecraft is unassuming and unadventurous whether playing solo guitar or with a small accomplished band who help step up the pace. Otherwise, it's Simpson's



crisp guitar work that dazzles, occasionally exploding with flurries. No surprises, just a simple masterclass.

EXTRAS: Short, funny film retracing his youth, growing up in Scunthorpe. **★★ Mick Houghton**



MICK TAYLOR BAND THE TOKYO CONCERT

★★★★

WEINERWORLD

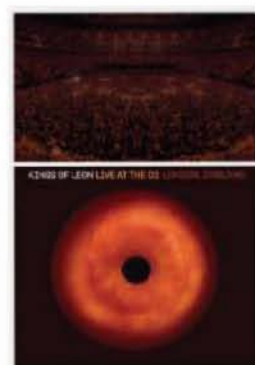
The trajectory of Mick Taylor's career is one of the most compelling in rock, encompassing the Bluesbreakers, a golden run of Stones albums and work with Dylan, before drugs and alcohol put him into decline in the late '80s. Taylor, though, is big in Japan, it seems, as this concert film from 2009 attests. Although looking like a man who has lived through several generous lunches, he's still a fine, intuitive blues guitarist. Dylan's "Blind Willie McTell" and the Stones' "No Expectations" are highlights. **EXTRAS:** Biographical doc, with Taylor talking Mick, Keith and Bob. **★★★ Michael Bonner**

KINGS OF LEON LIVE AT THE O2

SONY MUSIC

★★★★

No frills: the Nashville rockers at their best. **By Michael Bonner**



A three-minute TV clip from August last year can, arguably, sum up the position Kings Of Leon have now attained in the public consciousness. A Saturday night, on ITV, one hopeful candidate on *The X Factor* performed "Sex On Fire" during a live audition, which left the bussed-in audience on their feet and even Simon Cowell singing along to the chorus. In the space of 12 months, Kings Of Leon have gone from a medium-sized indie band to the soundtrack for a shopping trip round Topman; the Followill clan have found a route that's taken them from the grizzly swamp rock of their debut, 2003's *Youth And Young Manhood*, to the earnest, grand gesture rock of 2008's *Only By The Night*, best suited to a 20,000 capacity arena.

Indeed, the rise of Kings Of Leon should come as little surprise. Their mix of modernity and what we might call heritage rock is familiar to anyone who's ever bought a Strokes or White Stripes record, while their good looks make their ascent to magazine cover act a relatively easy-on-the-eye experience. In other words, it's not hard to comprehend why *Only By The Night* was one of 2009's biggest-selling albums in the UK (although they've enjoyed conspicuously more success here than in their native America). In fact, earlier last year, the band's singer/guitarist Caleb Followill was moved to declare "It's good to be home," during the first date of their UK tour promoting the *...Night* album. So it seems perhaps apt that Kings Of Leon have shot their first live DVD in London's O2 Arena, recorded in June 2009 during a two-night residency. "As you can see, there's some cameras going around and stuff," says Caleb, five songs in. "So I guess that means this is a big night. But for me, it's just another concert."

You could see this kind of comment as being emblematic of Kings Of Leon's work ethic: there's a sense here of a band simply getting on with what they do. There's no frills; no showboating. The film – crisply directed by Nick Wickham, who's done similar ventures for everyone from Nick Cave to Beyoncé – finds the band's approach to stagecraft presumably unchanged since they first rehearsed in a family member's garage. Visually, this is inevitably their undoing (this film is at best an undemanding viewing experience) yet what clearly works live are the propulsive qualities of the songs. There's the hopped-up Skynyrd boogie of "Red Morning Light", or "Sex On Fire", the closest the band has come to acknowledging, however tacitly, initial descriptions of them as a Southern Strokes. Both of these are fantastic examples of Kings at their best; great 18-wheelers of noise. **EXTRAS:** None.

SEX & DRUGS & ROCK & ROLL

Directed by Mat Whitecross

Starring Andy Serkis, Naomie Harris, Olivia Williams, Ray Winstone

Opens January 8, Cert 18, 113 mins

★★★★★

Like its subject – Ian Dury – this is a rock biopic you will like in spite of its faults, says Neil Spencer



Once a simple rags-to-riches tale, ideally with a young death for a tragic finale, the rock biopic has assumed a more psychological mantle in recent years. It's no longer enough to

celebrate a life in music – *The Buddy Holly Story*, *Elvis The Movie*, *The Doors*, even *Sid & Nancy* – an artist's demons need to be probed and exposed.

Walk The Line was arguably the trailblazer, suggesting Johnny Cash's troubled relationship with his ornery Pa lay behind the country legend's pill-popping, self-destructive ways. *Control* and *Nowhere Boy*, both scripted by Matt Greenhalgh, likewise gave us pop star as tormented soul, with epilepsy and failed marriage (Ian Curtis) and mother complex (John Lennon) at the root of their troubled genius. The music was almost secondary, and, one couldn't help feeling, the films were the better for it.

sex&drugs&rock&roll – let's call it *SDRR* – tries hard to do something similar for Ian Dury, vaudevillean bard of the punk music hall, later to become national institution and champion of the disabled. It's a winning proposition. Behind Dury's verbal dexterity and notoriously prickly charisma lay an idyllic boyhood blighted by polio. Confined

to hospital for 18 months, left with a twisted body and one leg in callipers, Dury then endured Dickensian tortures as a boarder at Chailly Craft School (motto: Men Made Here) before release into High Wycombe Grammar and the joyous discovery of art school and Elvis, twin liberators of an entire generation of British rock stars.

It isn't hard to imagine the damage those experiences would wreak on a psyche as intelligent, gifted and (deep down) warm as Dury's. Add in late

success (he was 35 when he charted with *New Boots And Panties!!* as an honorary punk) and a fêted roster of the hits and anthems he made with The Blockheads, and you surely have the ingredients of a demon movie.

It almost arrives. At the heart of any biopic is the central role and Andy Serkis delivers a spellbinding turn as Dury. Replicating Dury's cheeky chappie onstage persona is admirable enough; more astonishing (at least to anyone who knew Ian) is Serkis' uncanny incarnation of Dury in person, variously charming, belligerent, foul, pathetic and awesome. Serkis is a known chameleon – cue his spooky turn as Gollum in *The Lord Of The Rings* – but here he excels with a bravura performance surely destined for awards glory. Alongside him come powerful, simpático portrayals of the women in Dury's life; his wife Betty (Olivia Williams) and long-suffering girlfriend Denise (Naomie Harris),

while Ray Winstone, as Dury's Cockney father, has only to play himself.

The film is no tacky costume drama, either (unlike, say, *Stoned*), convincingly evoking the grimy '70s (contrasted with Dury's sartorial panache), and boasting a soundtrack supplied by the Blockheads. The unruly camaraderie of band life is well captured, its demands made even more problematic by Dury's confrontational style – when he first meets Chaz Jankel, Dury invites his future songwriting partner to “do us a favour and fuck off”. While the film, probably wisely, avoids getting too involved in the punk insurrection (there's no sighting of fellow travellers like The Clash or Elvis Costello), we do see Dury bemoaning “the Pistols ripping off my razorblade earring idea”.

Yet for all its strengths, *SDRR* fumbles its central story. Is that story how Dury swapped



SYNOPSIS



► Ian Dury junks Kilburn & The High Roads, joins up with Chaz Jankel and the Blockheads and

conquers punk-era Britain. Haunted by a lost childhood, he struggles to likewise make a success of his personal life...



a failed pub rock outfit for a gifted band led by a musician who could supply catchy accompaniments for his pun-drenched odes to working-class life? Is it how Dury surpassed his disability to claim fame? How an essentially middle-class kid reinvented himself as a Mockney music hall turn? Or how he seemed compelled to alienate those who loved and supported him?

SDDR never settles on a clear narrative arc, hindered by direction that veers between grainy social vérité, lavish pop promo fantasy, snatches of so-what animation and over-dressed recreations of Dury's live shows. By way of a central conceit the film tries to become a story of sons and absent fathers. There are flashbacks to Dury's relationship with his father, an Essex boxer and chauffeur, about whom he wrote the sentimental "My Old Man". Meanwhile, Dury struggles to bond with his own son,

Serkis is uncanny as Dury: charming, belligerent, pathetic, foul and awesome

Baxter (who advised on the film), a troubled teenager.

There's a strained quality about this. As Will Birch's imminent biography makes clear, Dury had a loving mother (and two close aunts) who were his principal support through the ghastly years of Chaily, but who are nowhere glimpsed. Instead come endless replays of Winstone striding manfully in slow-mo, overcoat and trilby. So Ian idealised his dad – yes, we get it!

Dury's involvement with his son was,

unsurprisingly, complex. "Are we posh?" asks Baxter at one point. "More arts and crafts," growls Dury, who 'helped' Baxter by lending him a minder (the wonderfully named Sulphate Strangler) who was generous with his drugs. With Dury's problematic relationships with Betty and Denise convincingly handled, this is a warts'n'all portrait of a diamond geezer who had no shortage of rough edges. Asked to write a song celebrating the year of the disabled, he delivered "Spasticus Autisticus", which was promptly banned by the BBC; an episode well captured here.

Dury didn't die young in a plane crash or of a drugs overdose. He endured and mellowed before succumbing to cancer at age 56, leaving *sex&drugs&rock&roll* with an anti-climactic ending. Like its subject, though, you can't help liking the film for all its faults.

Acutely credible:
Viggo Mortensen
and Kodi Smit-
McPhee



THE ROAD

Directed by John Hillcoat
Starring Viggo Mortensen, Kodi Smit-McPhee, Charlize Theron, Robert Duvall
Opens January 8, Cert 15, 111 mins

★★★★★

Impeccably gauged adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer-winning novel by *The Proposition* director, says Chris Roberts

You've seen "post-apocalyptic landscapes" in movies before, but none so convincingly barren, dark and cold as this. The air hangs with ash, cinders, smoke: you can feel the temperature, the survivors' despair and fear. And it's through this uncompromising bleakness that *The Road* earns its grace note of redemption, ultimately sings its small hymn to the human spirit and admits a tiny chink of hope.

It's a simple story, an almost Biblical parable. An unnamed man and his young son walk on through the devastated roads of a destroyed

America, which has been wiped out by a mysterious (to us) catastrophe. They have one gun, the rags on their backs, whatever scraps of food they can scavenge, and each other. They pass burned corpses, rifled buildings. They believe they are the "good guys". "Bad guys" might lurk around every corner, some of them hunting in packs, more than prepared to resort to cannibalism to continue existing. The boy has no choice but to trust his father's decisions. The father, refusing to give in to sickness and pain, knows only that he must keep himself alive to protect the boy. He insists they keep moving, towards the coast. "Is it blue?" asks the boy. "The sea?" says the man. "I don't know. It used to be." Everything they and we see here is brown, grey, drained, jaundiced. There is an essential yet futile mission straight out of Beckett, informed by Tarkovsky's "Stalker". It can't end happily, but it can end strongly.

The performances by Viggo Mortensen (heroic) and Kodi Smit-McPhee are acutely credible, with the boy avoiding all the pitfalls

of child actors. Along the road they meet a weathered Robert Duvall, who in 10 minutes offers his most affecting work in years. (Guy Pearce also cameos). In poetic flashbacks, Mortensen recalls the boy's mother (Charlize Theron): these are the only scenes extended beyond the book's minimalism and understatement, perhaps because the producers wanted a female lead and an extra star name. If they're the only suspect note, they're still very finely played.

It must have been tempting to make *The Road* a big noisy *Mad Max*-style blast of *sturm und drang*, a 2012 for people who read books, but Hillcoat, having shown in *The Proposition* that he can merge character and landscape, has paid the best kind of quiet tribute to McCarthy's achievements here. He again uses a Nick Cave and Warren Ellis score subtly. If fans of *No Country For Old Men* may find the film insufferably quirky (do not expect humour, not even the darkest kind), the decimated world created is wholly compelling and a submersive experience.

TRAILER PARK



GREEN ZONE

Bourne director Paul Greengrass and star Matt Damon reunite for this Iraq war conspiracy drama concerning the search for WMDs. Ultimatums and supremacies abound.



BAD LIEUTENANT: PORT OF CALL NEW ORLEANS

Frankly bonkers remake of the Abel Ferrara film, with Werner Herzog directing Nic Cage. Really, really, really crackers.



CRAZY HEART

Jeff Bridges is a down-on-his-luck country singer-songwriter attempting a comeback. Maggie Gyllenhaal and Robert Duvall co-star.

See them all at www.apple.com/trailers

MOUTHPIECE



"Their story is the untold story of all those big bands of the 1960s"

Expect serious filth and not a little fury in Julien Temple's next film project, *You Really Got Me*, a biopic of The Kinks



UP IN THE AIR

Directed by Jason Reitman
Starring George Clooney, Vera Farmiga, Jason Bateman
Opens January 15, Cert 15, 109 mins ★★★★★

Clooney excels in darkly funny romcom

On paper, it would seem *Up In The Air* bears all the trappings of a grown-up, sophisticated romcom. After all, here's Clooney as Ryan Bingham, a smug "corporate downsizer" who travels around America firing employees for companies too gutless to do the job themselves, all the while coveting his air miles and the comfort of business travel. Then he meets glamorous fellow frequent flyer Vera Farmiga, and their no-strings hook-ups in hotels soon find Clooney warming to the notion that, after all, there may be more to life than hotels and perks. Love, surely, and Bingham's redemption must inevitably follow, right? In fact, *Up In The Air*—director Reitman's first film since *Juno*—is too smart to follow the obvious path to dénouement. While, certainly, capable of a dark humour and moments of extraordinary bleakness, it's also commendable for another superb performance from Clooney. Bingham is a consummate game player who fails to realise, almost until it's too late, that he, too, has been played. *Michael Bonner*



44 INCH CHEST

Directed by Malcolm Venville
Starring Ray Winstone, John Hurt, Ian McShane
Opens January 15, Cert 18, 95 mins ★★★★★

Language of revenge explored by *Sexy Beast* writers

Despite the title, not a Robin Askwith tribute. The chest belongs to Ray Winstone, playing Colin Diamond, a geezer in meltdown, after the departure of his wife (Joanne Whalley); though it could equally refer to the wardrobe in which the wife's lover is imprisoned for half of the film. Written by Louis Mellis and David Scinto, *44 Inch Chest* isn't a sequel to *Sexy Beast*. It plays more like *Reservoir Dogs*, scripted by Harold Pinter, with five men in bad suits exercising—not exorcising—their ire. The chatter is confined to the murky room where Diamond's compadres—notably Ian McShane as a menacing gay gangster, and John Hurt, channeling Albert Steptoe—curse poetically. Fantasy sequences puncture the claustrophobic mood, while offering a realistic depiction of how the jealous rage of a psychopath might unfold, allowing the possibility that the whole thing is a dream from Diamond's unconscious. Winstone hurtles, like a punch-drunk Hamlet, into a black hole of pathos. De-fucking-plorable fun. *Alastair McKay*



NO DISTANCE LEFT TO RUN

Directed by Dylan Southern and Will Lovelace
Starring Damon Albarn, Graham Coxon, Alex James, Dave Rowntree
Opens January 19, Cert 12a, 110 mins ★★★

Solid documentary of Blur's history – in their own words

For anyone who followed Blur's return to active duty with last year's live shows, this will come as a satisfying cap to their recent activities. *No Distance...* might not offer much that's revelatory, but it scores in archive material and band access from their June 2009 tour rehearsals onwards. Those rehearsals are fascinating to watch for the dynamic between Albarn and Coxon: "You're getting tense, and I'm getting more tense," Damon tells Graham as they attempt to nail "Out Of Time", recorded originally after the guitarist had left. There is fun to be had watching a pre-teen Damon in his school play, footage of the band hammered backstage during the *Modern Life Is Rubbish* era, and girls screaming for Damon during the *Parklife* heyday. A solid enough document of the band's history, but one very much made on their own terms. *Michael Bonner*



A PROPHET

Directed by Jacques Audiard
Starring Tahar Rahim, Niels Arestrup
Opens January 22, Cert 18, 149 mins ★★★★★

Gripping prison drama with fine central performance

Imprisoned and alone, Malik (Tahar Rahim), a 19-year-old French Arab, is at first too naive to be terrified. He learns. Given little option, he undergoes an initiation rite for the dominant Corsican thugs. In the build-up to a messy act of violence, he carries a razorblade in his mouth for so long that Audiard's first film since *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* swiftly becomes a masterclass in suspense. Winner of the Cannes Grand Prix, this is a white-hot prison drama, matching *Mesrine* for sheer excitement. Malik, watchful over years, develops his own power base. He grows into a Machiavellian operator, fearlessly playing two gangs against each other for his own gain. By the time he's announcing "I work for myself", he is pretty much the Don of the cells. He even negotiates regular day release, during which he expands his empire. "Fuck, you've come a long way", whistles one admiring crime-lord. As involving as *Midnight Express* with a hero as complex as Cool Hand Luke, this blooms into a red-raw gangster epic. *Chris Roberts*

ALSO OUT...

IT'S COMPLICATED

Opens January 8
Meryl Streep is torn between Alec Baldwin and Steve Martin, though not literally. Much grown-up hilarity ensues.

MUGABE AND THE WHITE AFRICAN

Opens January 8
Doc. A white South African farmer stands up to Zanu-PF's tyrannical regime. Not much hilarity ensues.

THE BOOK OF ELI

Opens January 15
Denzel Washington tries to save humanity in the Hughes brothers' post-apocalyptic drama.

THE BOYS ARE BACK

Opens January 22
Clive Owen is a widower raising two kids. Hankies, not hilarity, ensue.

BROTHERS

Opens January 22
Tobey Maguire, Jake Gyllenhaal and Natalie Portman do serious in Jim Sheridan's latest.



TOY STORY 2 (3D)

Opens January 22
Woody and co! Back! In 3D! Sure to banish post-festive gloom.

EDGE OF DARKNESS

Opens January 29
Classic BBC drama remade with Mel Gibson as the cop investigating his daughter's murder.

ADORATION

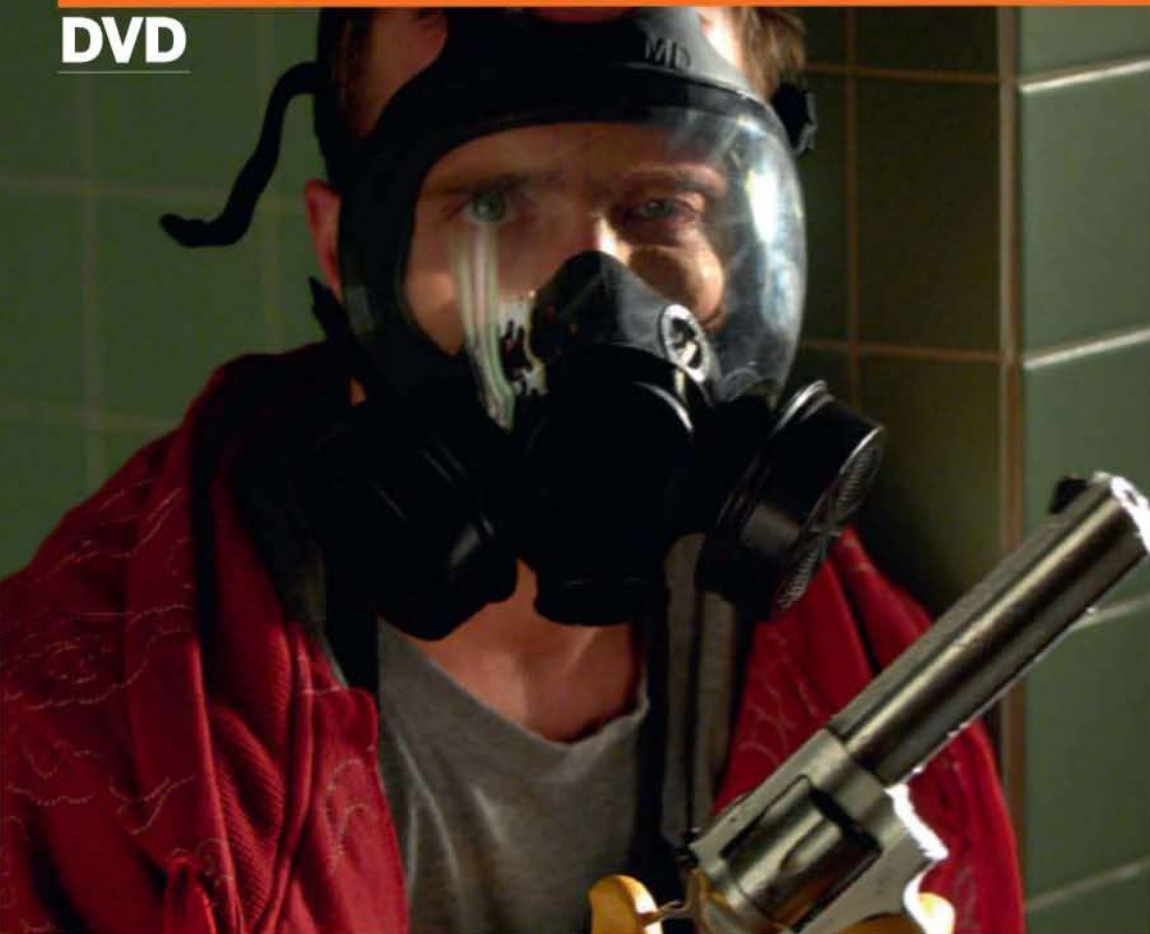
Opens January 29
The morality of terrorism, power of the internet and the nature of deception.

THE LOVELY BONES

Opens January 29
Peter Jackson film about a murdered teen coming to terms with her own death.

TONY

Opens January 29
British serial killer thriller from one Gerard Johnson (scored by brother Matt 'The The' Johnson!).



BREAKING BAD **B TV**

SONY PICTURES HOME ENTERTAINMENT

★★★★★

The latest US cult – cue a twisting premise and desert-dry humour. *By Alastair McKay*



Breaking Bad starts with a man in a respirator, wearing nothing but underpants, driving an RV at speed through the New Mexico desert. In the back of the vehicle, two men – drugged or dead – slither around on the floor. The vehicle crashes, the man climbs out and starts filming a suicide message with a camcorder, while sirens rush closer.

It sounds, and looks, like something out of *Blue Velvet*, and – to extend the ironic juxtapositions – was described by one American critic as “*Thelma & Louise*, written by Dostoyevsky”. That’s nearly true, but also misleading. Because *Breaking Bad* is – respirator on, deep breath – the tale of a 50-year-old chemistry teacher who, on learning he has terminal cancer, decides to diversify into the manufacture of crystal meth and finds himself sliding into a world of crime and guilt (though not, in the seven episodes of this first season, punishment).

The series was created for the US cable channel AMC by Vince Gilligan, a writer and executive producer on *The X-Files*. That it gets beyond its implausible premise is largely due to the Emmy-winning performance of Bryan Cranston, as the drab hero, Walter White. Cranston plays Walter as a slightly more rational version of Robin Williams in *One Hour Photo*. His skin is bloodless, his body doughy. He is, essentially, a living ghost. He wears

jumpers, a pointless moustache, and the expression of a man marooned in disappointment.

Ordinarily, his situation might be described as a midlife crisis, except that Walter has been told he has two years to live. Midlife has become an endgame. To further motivate his descent into criminality, Walter’s wife, Skyler, is pregnant, and insists he should undergo expensive medical treatment, whatever the cost. So, in addition to the routine dread of knowing that his life has been – in the realm of ambition – a failure, he finds himself in need of quick money, to absolve himself from the guilt of leaving his family in debt. There is also an uneasy sense of a marriage unravelling, as shown in a bedroom scene where Skyler offers hand-relief while, with the other hand, updating her eBay account.

It’s easy to forget, amid all the gloom, that *Breaking Bad* is a comedy. But it is funny, even though the humour is dry to the point of being almost undetectable. A rare moment of slapstick sees Walter, still wearing those pants, attempting to extinguish a desert brush fire. But that happens in the pilot, when Gilligan is still using sensationalism to snare his audience. More usually, the comedy exists just below the horizon of perceptibility.

The sense of understatement is maintained even at the finale, which contrives to underwhelm – possibly as the series was shortened by the Hollywood writers’ strike – while also leaving Walter at the point of becoming a drugs kingpin. The slow plotting is risky, but there is a palpable sense that Walter, in facing his death, has come back to life. Not his own life, necessarily. **EXTRAS:** Rather self-congratulatory cast commentary on the pilot. ★★

AWAY WE GO

★★★★★

FOCUS FEATURES

Sam Mendes changes pace to deliver what’s effectively an intimate, indie road trip, scripted by married novelists Dave Eggers and Vendela Vida. Confused thirty-somethings Burt (John Krasinski) and Verona (Maya Rudolph) can’t decide how best to deal with her pregnancy, so take a tour of cities, friends and relatives, only to find everyone else is more clueless about adulthood than themselves.

EXTRAS: Making Of, commentary with Mendes, Eggers and Vida.

★★★ *Chris Roberts*

500 DAYS OF SUMMER

★★★

20TH CENTURY FOX
(DVD & BLUE-RAY)

An indie rom-com – with the emphasis on the “indie” – this finds Joseph Gordon-Levitt’s Smiths-loving, LA-living greetings card writer falling for Zoëy Deschanel – only she doesn’t want commitment. Nothing we’ve not seen before, but the “sad British music” soundtrack and clever chronological jumps give it a smart spin.

EXTRAS: Blu-Ray: deleted and extended scenes; video mash-up(!); music video; cast conversations. DVD: deleted and extended scenes.

★★★ *Michael Bonner*

FISH TANK

★★★★★

ARTIFICIAL EYE

Fish Tank shows director Andrea Arnold to be the current bright star of British realism. Newcomer Katie Jarvis plays Mia, a surly, troubled teenager from an Essex estate. When Mum’s charming new boyfriend (Michael Fassbender) shows up, it looks like it’s going to be Happy Families, but it doesn’t turn out that way. Psychological acuteness, poetic visuals, and terrific acting make *Fish Tank* a superb, sympathetic dissection of “Broken Britain”.

EXTRAS: Arnold’s short film, *Wasp*; interview with Katie Jarvis. ★★

Jonathan Romney

FUNNY PEOPLE

★★★

UNIVERSAL
(DVD & BLU-RAY)

Two-thirds of a very good movie, the latest from Judd

(*Knocked Up*) Apatow moves away from knob gags and into discursive, adult themes: of love, death and even the nature of comedy itself. Adam Sandler is superb as a washed-up, terminally ill comedian made "funny" again by Seth Rogen's upstart writer, and while there are some excellent in-jokes and unlikely cameos (Eminem, RZA), the coda plays like a bad episode of *Friends*. And it's too long.
EXTRAS: Deleted, extended/alternative scenes, gag reel, docs. **★★★★** Mark Bentley

THE INFORMERS

★★★

ENTERTAINMENT IN VIDEO

This Gregor Jordan adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis' short story set captures the deadpan tone a little too accurately, resulting in a curiously flat, cold film. Yet it's a mis-shape well worth viewing, not least for the cast, which includes Mickey Rourke, Kim Basinger, Winona Ryder and the late Brad Renfro in a willfully amoral fable of sex, drugs and rock in L.A.
EXTRAS: Scene selection, trailers. **★** Chris Roberts

KISS TOMORROW GOODBYE

★★★★

CORNERSTONE MEDIA

From 1950, this isn't quite as apocalyptic as the previous year's *White Heat*, perhaps, but it's still a damned ferocious mid-period James Cagney movie. He's quite incredible as a thoroughly evil, decidedly disturbed killer escaped from jail, who stumbles across an isolated town that's almost as corrupt as he is, and then goes about taking the place over. Memorably brutal.

EXTRAS: None. **Damien Love**

LUBITSCH IN BERLIN

★★★★

EUREKA!/MASTERS OF CINEMA

Before films such as *Ninotchka* made Ernst Lubitsch a Hollywood legend, the

comedy master had a thriving career in his native Germany, as a prolific director of silent cinema. This six-disc set unearths six restored gems from Lubitsch's Berlin period, ranging from costume epic (*Anna Boleyn*) to high-society satire (*The Oyster Princess*) and even an eccentric 1918 tale of cross-dressing. In addition, a documentary includes footage of the maestro's early days as a silent comic whose bug-eyed mugging weirdly anticipates Rowan Atkinson.

EXTRAS: Ernst Lubitsch doc, notes on the features. **★★★★** Jonathan Romney

MICROCOSMOS

★★★★

SECOND SIGHT

Mortal combat over dwindling natural resources, Sisyphian labours, explicit sex, an attack of a giant pheasant: it's all here in Claude Nuridsany and Marie Perennou's magnified portrait of a French meadow's insectoid life. This is a world in which unutterably miraculous and alien stuff happens (the incredible mechanical pollen-transfer from a flower to a honey bee), but when you watch a montage of creepy-crawlies engaged in their morning wash, they can appear unsettlingly human.

EXTRAS: Three docs.

★★★★ Rob Young

THE MOONRAKER

★★★

OPTIMUM CLASSIC

This 1958 British swashbuckler, set in 1651, finds Oliver Cromwell (John Le Mesurier!) wiping out Royalists. George Baker plays the unassuming Earl who is secretly spitting England's aristos to France. When he tries to ferry Charles II himself to safety, however, the hunt is on. The sterling cast includes Sylvia Syms, Marius Goring as her evil Roundhead lover, and, if you don't blink, future Dr Who Patrick Troughton.

EXTRAS: Trailer. **★** Damien Love

PARIS VU PAR...

★★★★

ARTIFICIAL EYE

Made in 1965, this anthology sets assorted directors to work on the City Of Light. Eric Rohmer ponders on the difficulty of navigating the Place De l'Etoile, Claude Chabrol appears in his own very black comedy about the advantages and dangers of earplugs, and Jean-Luc Godard contributes a

somewhat sour moral tale about a woman juggling two lovers. Jean Rouch, Jean Douchet and Jean-Daniel Pollet are the other names in this uneven but intriguing sidebar to a movement.

EXTRAS: None.

Jonathan Romney

QUEEN OF SPADES

★★★★

OPTIMUM CLASSIC

Adapted from a Pushkin story, directed by Thorold Dickinson (best known for the original *Gaslight*), and hailed by Martin Scorsese as "one of the classics of supernatural cinema", this is a 1949 gothic morality tale played out amid expressionist shadows. Anton Walbrook is an ambitious army major whose attempts to conquer chance go horribly wrong. It's part *Dr Jekyll*, part *Tales Of The Unexpected*, with a great score by Georges Auric.

EXTRAS: Scorsese intro, film analysis, director interview.

★★★★ Alastair McKay

THE REBEL ROUSERS

★★★★

VIDEO INTERNATIONAL

Shot in 1967, shortly before *Easy Rider*, this is one of the must-see movies of the cycle of biker B-flicks. The holy trinity of Jack Nicholson (wearing incredible striped trousers), Bruce Dern and Harry Dean Stanton are members of a weird, interestingly dressed bastard outlaw bike gang, who hassle Bruce's old pal, middle-class architect Cameron Mitchell, and capture his pregnant girlfriend (Diane Ladd). Bruce's a good guy, really; Jack's just a psycho. Cinematography by the great Laszlo Kovacs.

EXTRAS: None. **Damien Love**

THE TAKING OF PELHAM 123

★★★★

SONY PICTURES

(DVD & BLU-RAY)

Tony Scott's shiny reboot of the 1974 Joseph Sargent cult classic almost, against the odds, comes off. As "ordinary" Denzel Washington is forced to play hostage negotiator with subway train hijacker and cackling panto villain John Travolta, the suspense and banter crackle. Inevitably, the climax regresses into the kind of budget-blowing excess that would have curdled Walter Matthau's face even more, but by then you're hooked.

EXTRAS: Commentaries and four featurettes. **★★★★**

Chris Roberts



1941 SE

UNIVERSAL

★★★★

A first UK DVD release for Spielberg's dotty wartime folly. By Damien Love



"I really didn't know what I was doing on this movie," Steven Spielberg has said of 1979's sprawling, star-studded WWII slapstick. No shit. Three decades on, *1941* remains the biggest turkey of his career, as close to out of control as Spielberg ever got.

It is set in the wake of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, when mass hysteria gripped the West Coast, and California's citizens grew convinced a full-scale Japanese invasion was imminent. The hot *Saturday Night Live* team of John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd are the nominal leads as insane US flyer Captain Wild Bill Kelso and tank commander Frank Tree. One of *1941*'s biggest problems, however, is that it's almost impossible to latch on to any character amid the pyrotechnics, simply because there are too damned many of them.

Yet if there's one reason to cherish Spielberg's folly, it's precisely that: its cast. Any film that includes Warren Oates, Mickey Rourke, and Elisha Cook Jr has to be doing something right, and we've Christopher Lee, Slim Pickens, Robert Stack and even director Sam Fuller in there, too. Most of these turns are superb, in particular Oates as the mad commander of a US military post, and Stack's contribution as a top army brass obsessed with *Dumbo*. But amid all the heat and noise, disconnected turns are all they are. Every character is a walk-on.

You can still see the bones of the idea sticking through the wild flab: a black, Strangeloveian satire, rendered in the style of epic Hollywood numbskull knockabouts. But Spielberg is stranded, clutching after juvenile gags, throwing in explosions to cover his uncertainty. This was only his fourth theatrical feature, and *1941*'s bombing almost derailed him. But it's hard not to see this as a crucial movie, if only for the lessons learned.

EXTRAS: Making-of, deleted scenes, galleries, trailers, a digest of the original (mostly bad) reviews. **★★★★★**



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Chronic City

Jonathan Lethem

FABER ★★★★★

Ambitious and brilliant dystopian fantasy, set in an alternative NYC



★ **CHRONIC CITY** is Manhattan, or at least a version of it. The time is the looming future, where things have and haven't happened. The Twin Towers, we are given to believe, are, for instance, still standing. Not that you can see them anymore. The whole of New York's financial district has

been shrouded for as long as anyone can remember in an obscuring grey fog. Are they there or not? Everybody assumes they are, because their absence under any circumstances is unimaginable. And anyway, there are other things to worry about. Like the marauding tiger, by legend and newspaper reports a gigantic thing roaming the East Side demolishing buildings and otherwise causing panic, havoc and a general fretfulness.

People elsewhere prefer to bury themselves in the bland condolences of the 'War Free' edition of *The New York Times*, where an ongoing human interest saga grips the city, a thrilling distraction. Janice Trumbull, an American astronaut, is marooned on an International Space Station, doomed to eternal orbit, cut off from Earth by a shield of Chinese space mines.

Plucky Janice writes gabby, heartbreaking love letters to her fiancé and boyfriend since high school, Chase Insteadman, and the *Times* publishes them, Janice's stoic chattiness holding the city in episodic thrall, like a long running soap opera. Chase, it turns out, is our guide to Chronic City. He's the former child star of the TV sitcom, *Martyr & Pesty*, a show popular enough in syndicated afterlife to keep him well off. His

celebrity, such as it is, has recently been much enhanced by his relationship with the courageous astronaut. The trouble is, Chase doesn't clearly remember Janice, can't quite place her in his own life story, although he's fairly sure she at some point has been part of it. The details of when and how escape him, which makes Chase start to wonder about things like what's real anymore.

Clarity of a sort is brought to Chase through an unlikely but eventually touching, hilarious and tragic friendship with Perkus Tooth, a once-celebrated cultural critic of dizzying originality and radical thought. Drugs and writer's block have reduced Perkus to paranoid isolation on the Lower East Side, where he's as marooned as the noble Janice, up there in space, getting stoned on high-grade pot, evolving a critical theory that posits Marlon Brando as "the living avatar of the unexpressed, a human enunciation of the remaining hopes for our murdered era".

Perkus takes Chase on a trip into "the world inside the world", where Chase discovers much about how the story of our lives is written by others and the way in which powerful cabals manipulate the world's compliance, largely by creating plausible new ones. The book's super-charged plot – absurdly rich in colourful characters, alternative histories and multiple cultural references – is a giddy unravelling of realities, virtual and otherwise, fabulously reminiscent of both Pynchon and DeLillo, with David Foster Wallace's mammoth opus, the appropriately named *Infinite Jest*, another key reference point. Even at his previous best – *Motherless Brooklyn*, *Fortress Of Solitude* – Lethem has been brilliant but frustrating. Here, he's simply brilliant.



Ian Dury
Will Birch

SIDGWICK & JACKSON

★★★★★

Will Birch's exemplary biography presents us with a much fuller and illuminating portrait of Dury than the forthcoming *sex&drugs&rock&roll* biopic reviewed elsewhere in this issue by Neil Spencer. The film reduces Dury's story to an almost cartoonish encapsulation of his life and career, its garish theatricality not wholly inappropriate but eventually in key respects luridly misleading. Birch's book, on the other hand, is well-considered in every aspect, inspired by a huge admiration for its subject and the songs he wrote, but clear-sighted enough to be able to separate the facts from the embellished fictions about his past that Ian was prone at times to indulge himself.

The film, for instance, dwells on Dury's polio-blighted childhood as a time of relentless suffering in Dickensian institutions for the disabled, endlessly bleak, apparently abandoned by his parents. His father, admittedly, was often absent from Ian's life, but his mother – not even mentioned in the movie – was, as Birch reminds us, lovingly devoted to him, as were her two sisters, and selflessly encouraged his creative instincts.

Birch also provides a better-realised social and musical context for Dury's late-blooming career, is good on the pub rock years of Ian's first group, the much-lamented Kilburn & The High Roads, the advance of punk that coincided with his re-emergence with the all-conquering Blockheads. He is revelatory, too, on Dury's extravagant lifestyle when the hits kept coming and his later desperation when they almost as quickly dried up and never flinches from acknowledging Ian's capacity for monstrous behaviour, not all of which he is glib enough to attribute to his subject's disability.



Route 19 Revisited: The Clash And London Calling
Marcus Gray

JONATHAN CAPE

★★★

Gray's written previously about The Clash in his 1995 band biography, *Last Gang In Town: The Story And Myth Of The Clash*, material accumulated in the research for which is recycled for this clumsily titled volume. After another re-telling of their individual backgrounds and the familiar story of how the band got together, Gray begins a track-by-track dissection of the album itself, meticulously documenting the songs' origins, developments in rehearsal where this occurred, the respective contributions to each one of Strummer and Jones, who wrote the bulk of them, and the recording process itself, mainly via observations by co-producer Bill Price. Much of this is duly fascinating, but somewhat overwhelming. Gray's research is comprehensive, but his determination to tell us everything he has learned becomes simply exhausting.

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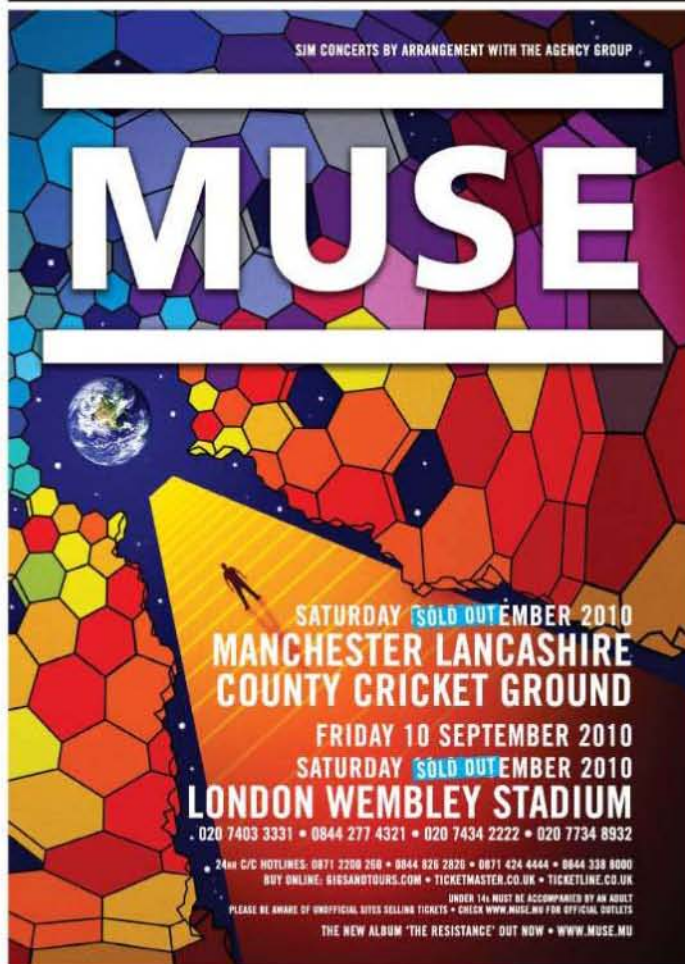
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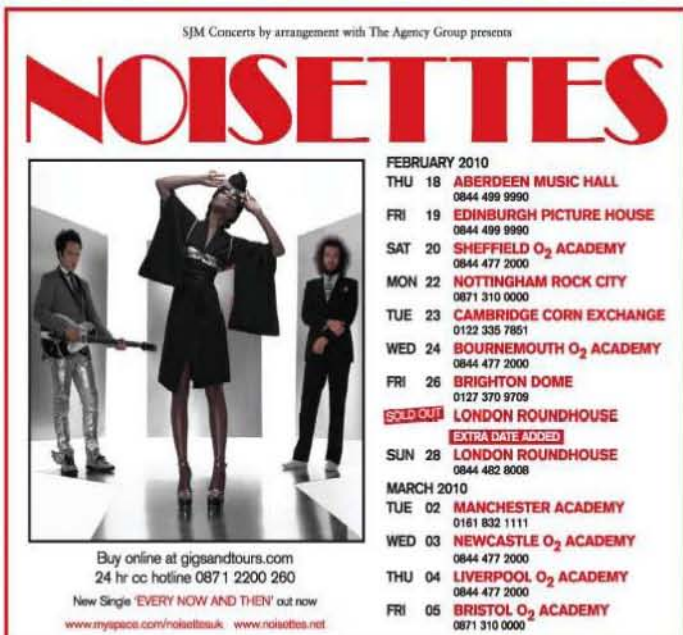
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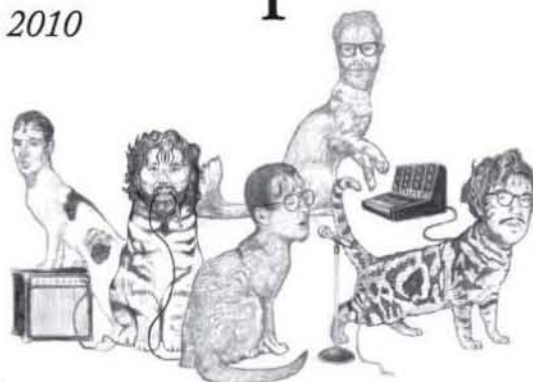
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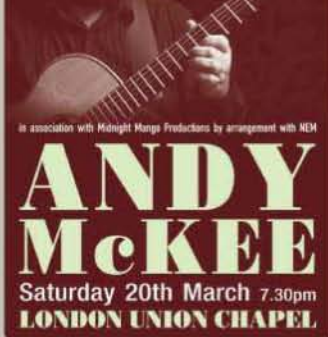


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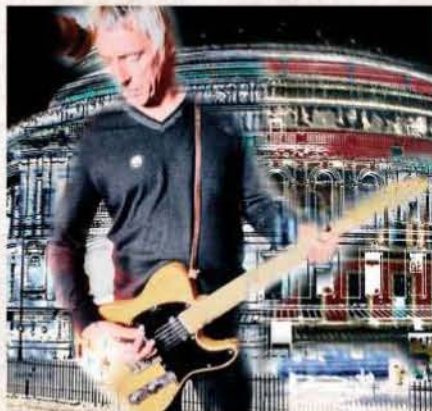
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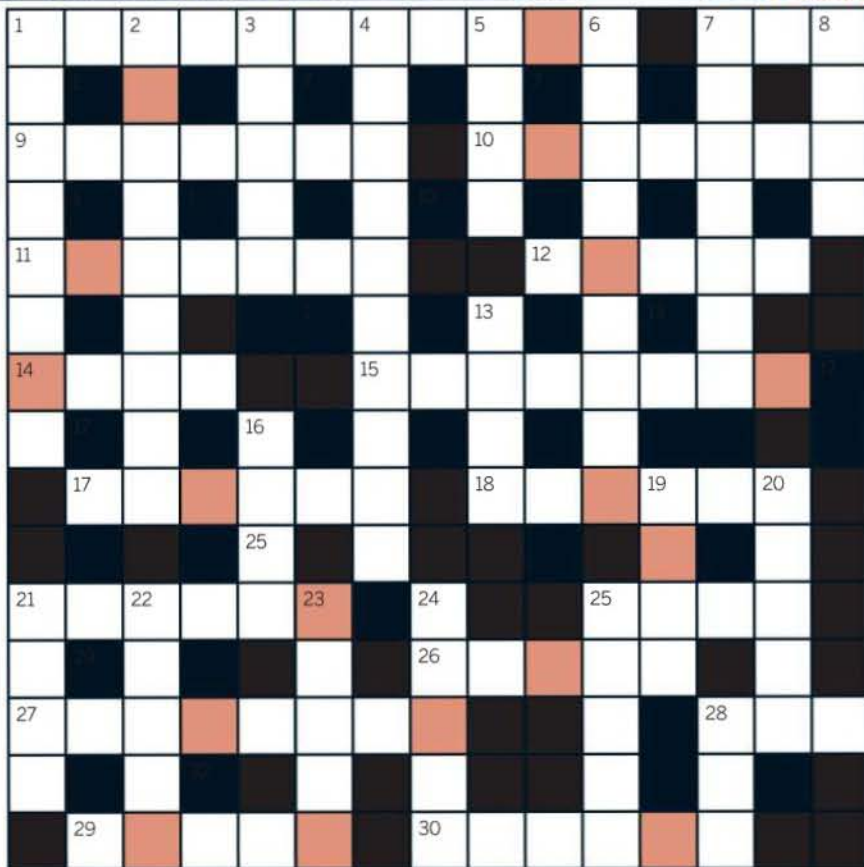
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7 George Harrison remembers the good old days in "When We Were..." (3)
9 "Find me and follow me through corridors, refectories and files", 2004 (7)
10+14A "You've got to wear the right clothes/Bewareful not to pick or scratch your nose", The Jam, 1979 (7-4)
11 "So I looked at the scenery, she read her magazine, and the moon rose..." 1972 (7)
12 (See 30 across)
14 (See 10 across)
15 Glasgow band who have released just four albums in 28 years together, resting on a high in 2004 (4-4)
17+13D "My brain says I'm receiving pain, a lack of oxygen from my life support..." 1994 (2-4-4)
18 Their debut album? Well, that's Not What I Heard (6)
21 "Got a low, low feeling around me, and a stone cold feeling inside", emotional stuff from Supergrass (6)
25+8D Singer who was at this year's 50th Newport Folk Festival, having debuted at the inaugural festival in 1959 (4-4)
26 Calypso and soca musician who had hit with "Hot Hot Hot" (5)
27 (See 1 across)
28 ... Soundsystem, act founded by producer James Murphy (1-1-1)
29 (See 19 down)
30+12A Speechless at old Welsh rock band making music with Bloc Party (6-5)

DOWN

- 1** He's all Glitter And Doom when playing live (3-5)
2 I wang with one or the other method (6-3)
3 Act in a strange way as a Nat King Cole song is performed (4-1)
4 "You can lose your life under a taxicab, you gotta have eyes in your feet", 1974 (3-3-4)
5 "I was just sitting thinking of your... and your warm ways", Etta James / Chicken Shack paying lip service to "I'd Rather Go Blind" (4)
6 Lads drank, getting disorderly, while listening to The Jesus And Mary Chain (9)
7 Arcade Fire having a jolly good time before real changes made (7)
8 (See 25 across)
13 (See 17 across)
16 British Sea Power located to an island in Galway Bay for their album Man Of... (4)
19+29A Sounds like Interpol number benefits from being Eric Clapton's (4-5)
20 "Dublin, Dundee, Humberside", 86 (5)
21 Their hits included "Blackberry Way" and "Brontosaurus" (4)
22 Björk album with music for an old-style Italian dance (5)
23 This band, who are actually boys, have an album actually titled Album (5)
24 Band with nothing for a half-sister (5)
25 Banged the drums for The Smiths (5)
28 Having started off in Littlehampton these Americans find A Place In The Sun (3)

HOW TO ENTER

The letters in the shaded squares form an anagram of a song by The Jimi Hendrix Experience. When you've worked out what it is, send your answer to: Uncut February 2010 Xword Comp, 4th floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St, London SE1 0SU. The first correct entry picked at random will win the prize. Closing date: January 27, 2010. This competition is only open to European residents.

ANSWERS FOR DECEMBER (TAKE 151)

ACROSS

1+4A+9A Paper Covers Stone, 10 Lilac Time, 11 Spiders, 12 I'm Lucky, 14+33A Reet Petite, 16+4D White Blood Cells, 18 Shea, 19 Skin, 22 Teeth, 23+5D Frankie Valli, 24+17D Ta-Dah, 28 Rhys, 30 Devo, 31 Byrne, 34 Kids.

DOWN

1 Poses, 2 Promises, 3 Reeves, 6 Rock Lobster, 7 Jim Croce, 8+15D Very Things, 13+30D Kiki Dee, 14+29D Run For Home, 16+25A Was It Worth It, 20 Keane, 21 New York, 26+2D Hard-Fi, 27 Trent, 31 Bad.

HIDDEN ANSWER

"Sister Ray"

Crossword compiled by Trevor Hungerford

UNCUT

FEBRUARY 2010 | TAKE 153

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Stop me

if you've heard this one before

WHO: THE SEARCHERS

WHERE: SOUTH WALES, NOVEMBER 1979

The rain's coming down almost horizontally, driven by a wild Rhondda wind.

Walking into it's like being stabbed in the face by someone with a fork and a colourful grudge. I grew up near where we are, but on the coast, where when the weather was bad it was worse than this. I am therefore stoically uncomplaining, unlike the company I find myself, among them grizzling photographer Tom Sheehan who you'd think had never seen rain before.

We're heading for the Rhydyfelin Non-Political Club, which turns out to be a concrete box at the end of Poplar Road, its bulk barely visible through the downpour, a blinding thing. Anyway, upon arrival we push open some doors and are suddenly standing in a garishly lit bar, like shipwrecked sailors washed up on some alien shore, dripping like people melting in a John Carpenter film.

The bar in front of us is host to a couple of pool tables, groups of men standing idly around them, eyeing us suspiciously, others at the bar itself, smoking and drinking.

There's music coming from upstairs. We can hear the twang of electric guitars, the muffled thud of drums, something that might passably be described as singing, but in actual fact possibly more closely resembles the sound of expiring wildlife, things with whiskers, paws and furs being noisily annihilated.

Wherever what we're distantly listening to is coming from is where we want eventually to be. So we squelch across the bar and up some stairs, at the top of which there's a poster taped to the wall advertising tonight's appearance by Merseybeat legends, The Searchers. And here, waiting for us, is the band's Mike Pender, who now tells us to follow him to what tonight passes for their dressing room.

He pushes through some doors into a smoky cacophony, a room the size of an aircraft hanger, packed, rows and rows of tables running its length, from the bar where we pause briefly to, at the far end, a small stage with a painted backdrop of a Spanish village.

Pender goes before us, negotiating a tortuous passage through suddenly shrieking fans who have maybe just recognised him from a time when in the early '60s he would have been on the telly and in the papers all the time.

The band's dressing room turns out to be a small cluttered place, beer crates and chairs stacked against the walls. This is where we find John McNally, with Pender the only other original member of The Searchers still with



The Searchers in '79: (l-r) Frank Allen, Mike Pender, John McNally and Billy Adamson

the band, although bassist Frank Allen has been with them since '64, while drummer Billy Adamson's been on board for almost as long.

"Not exactly the London Palladium," McNally laughs, hopping on one leg to get into his stage trousers. "But we've played worse places. When you're trying to survive, you'll play anywhere."

Remember this. Between 1963 and 1966, The Searchers were second only to The Beatles in popularity. The debut single, "Sweets For My Sweet", was the first of three No 1s, alongside "Needles And Pins" and "Don't Throw Your

"I resent being screwed, but we weren't the only ones. Even The Beatles got screwed..."

Love Away". Another of their signature tunes, "Sugar And Spice" went to No 2. They were big in America, also, where they once had three singles simultaneously on *Billboard* and where their distinctive harmonies and Pender's chiming electric 12-string was credited as an influence on the emerging West Coast sound of The Byrds, Love and Buffalo Springfield.

Towards the end of '66, however, the hits ran out. Their popularity had been on the wane for a year but they ignored the signs. Their contract expired and wasn't renewed. They weren't on telly any more. They moved down the bill on package tours. Workingmen's clubs, holiday camps and cabaret loomed, to which circuit they seemed doomed until a Ramones' cover of "Needles And Pins" made Sire boss Seymour Stein wonder what had become of them.

Stein's people found them somewhere on the

Northern cabaret circuit and offered them a deal to make a new album. They didn't have to be asked twice. A successful second crack at the big time would get them out of places like this, for a start.

It couldn't have been easy adjusting, after their glory years, brief as they were.

"It was surprisingly easy," says McNally, "when we realised how much we could earn."

"And you've got to remember," adds Allen, "we've never done a cabaret act as such. We've never run around dropping our trousers, doing impressions."

"Yes, we have," McNally laughs out loud.

"Well, a couple of times," Allen admits sheepishly. "But let's keep it to ourselves."

"People who come to see us at these places just want to hear the hits," says McNally. "They want to be reminded of what they were doing when 'Needles And Pins' came out."

"You can see them looking around dead shocked when we do anything new," says Pender. "They think we haven't learned anything new since about 1964."

"It gets to you some nights," McNally says. "When you see all these people just interested in the past. Some nights I hate doing 'Sugar And Spice'. Can you imagine playing it every night for 10 years? It's a pain in the neck."

"It's funny sometimes," says Pender. These kids come to us and say, 'Hey - you're really good, you can really play. You should be making records.' They don't realise. And what do you say to them? 'Oh, well, we used to...'"

"We were very green," Pender says of their fall from grace. "We were taken advantage of."

"People come up to us," Allen says, "and say, 'Hey - you must be millionaires now.' But we're not. It was the record company and the manager who made all the money."

Were they bitter? "There's no point in feeling bitter," says Pender. "I resent being screwed out of money, but we weren't the only ones. Even The Beatles got screwed. Ask them."

The new LP represents a possible new future for them. "Given a fair chance, we could be successful all over again," says Pender. All we need," he adds yearningly, "is the chance."

They don't get it. The album, which is good, sells poorly. Sire drop them. They are very soon back on the club circuit, rainy nights in Rhydyfelin and places like it once again their only future.

Man Jones



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