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FLAMING LIPS
JOHN LYDON
AND MORE

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Email allan_jones@ipcmedia.com or write to: **Uncut Feedback, 9th Floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London SE1 0SU.** Or tweet us at twitter.com/uncutmagazine

A HERO REMEMBERED

The jolting news of Jackie Leven's passing transported me again to the Blue Note club in Derby. The day the man became my hero. And that is not a word to bandy about lightly.

I guess it had to be 1983 or 1984, since it was post Doll By Doll and pre the catastrophic mugging which was to rob him of his falsetto. My boss' husband at the time told me I simply had to go with them and see this bloke play. I'd read about Doll By Doll of course, knew who he was in that sense. It had the makings of a disastrous night. The PA had packed up. The man himself sat alone, aloof, presumably in a huff, in a great-coat at the bar, unapproachable. Someone said a PA was being fetched from Belper, a few miles away. We began to doubt it, but it happened.

Some time in the early hours, still in the coat, this huge, fierce man played. I don't recall individual songs, bar "Love Is Shining Down On Me", the 12-inch single I bought the next day. Burning into my mind as I stood transfixed was that this was likely to be the most intense performance – of any art – that I would see. I'm not surprised that nothing has come close since. Backed by a very loud band, he played on tip-toe at times, as if urging more noise from his guitar, his voice. It's very special, knowing you've seen something great that no-one can ever take away from you.

LETTER
OF THE
MONTH

"The greatest
singer-songwriter
of a generation":
Jackie Leven,
London, June 1981

I lost track of Jackie's progress. Fast forward 20 years and I picked up on the prolific body of work he was by now issuing and which, of course, I'm playing as I write. Thankfully, I saw him play twice more, very different shows by now of course but, in their own way, no less intense. I treasure the fact that, in the Flowerpot in Derby, someone requested "Stripshow", from *Gypsy Blood* and he laughed, said they were

joking, of course he couldn't remember it well enough. Then, of course, he did, well, for a minute and a half anyway.

Musical appreciation is all about opinion. For me, he was the greatest singer-songwriter of my generation. I think some will agree.

Colston Crawford, Derby

See [page 38](#) for our tribute to Jackie Leven.
– Allan

2011: THE YEAR MUSIC BROKE?

I've just read Uncut's 2011 Review [*January issue*]. I could argue that My Morning Jacket, The Decemberists and Laura Marling all produced better albums than anything in the Top 10, but that's not the point. The point is that it has been an extraordinarily piss-poor vintage. *Let England Shake* is a long declamation over a random set of cacophonies. Gillian Welch and Josh T Pearson are so slow that you want to go sleep, like, forever. As for Radiohead, The King of Whinge and his sidekicks have not made a note of worth since '97. Isn't it time someone told them?

The industry often complains of low sales figures, but isn't it that maybe there's just nothing worth buying out there? Maybe you should stop being cheerleaders for a boring and uninspiring music scene and start telling readers, industry and artists what's what. First step: get your "stars" right. Do you really think there were almost 40 new albums last month worthy of four stars? If so, how many stars do *Blonde On Blonde*, *Exile On Main Street*, *London Calling*, *Nevermind* or *White Blood Cells* get? 50?

Vito Morawetz, London

WILD AT CHART

I always eagerly look forward to the Uncut Top 50 of the year. I know this is a totally subjective

exercise, but I just can't see how Ryan Adams' *Ashes & Fire* did not make the Top 10, never mind the Top 50, and it is almost an insult seeing this incredible album languish at 16/20 in the Americana list. Having read the story behind "Save Me" in the Ben Marshall interview [*December issue*], it transformed an already great song into a truly transcendental song.

I wholeheartedly agree with PJ Harvey at No 1 (and Gillian Welch at No 2), but I can't escape the feeling that sometimes *Uncut* falls into the trap of pushing the "fashionable" for its own sake (Josh T Pearson, White Denim, Destroyer), and showing undue loyalty to "pet bands" (I love the Drive-By Truckers, but *Go-Go Boots* is a long way from their best, and *The King Of Limbs* is just Radiohead in further decline). All those albums could easily be replaced by some glaring omissions – Sarabeth Tucek's *Get Well Soon*, Elbow's *Build A Rocket Boys!*, Beirut's *The Rip Tide*, The Low Anthem's *Smart Flesh* or Lia Ices' *Grown Unknown*. Well, at least you didn't put Beady Eye up there, respect for that.

Richard Millington, via email

SLIGHTED KINGDOM

Less of the "Homegrown English artists" please and less about the state of the English nation [*January issue*]. It is not just English youngsters who are unemployed or English children living

in poverty. I have had a look at the Uncut Albums Of The Year from a few issues I have at hand. In 2010 there were four Scottish albums and four Welsh albums in the Top 50. In 2009 it was two Scottish albums, one Northern Irish album and two Welsh albums, with Super Furry Animals at No 2. In 2000 Primal Scream were at No 2. Super Furry Animals made the Top 50 in 2005, 2007 and 2009. Please do not forget that a lot of your readers live in Britain, but not in England.

Russell Campbell, Stirling, Scotland

HEY, THAT'S NO WAY TO SCORE LEONARD

Leonard Cohen's Complete Studio Albums Collection: four stars. Excuse me?

I expect better from *Uncut*. Opinions of Cohen range but there are two more-or-less alternative mainstream takes on him:

1. He's miserable, he can't sing and his poems are over-rated.

2. He is one of the greatest songwriters of all time, whose output over 45 years puts him in a category with Bob Dylan and very few others.

Neither of these appraisals supports a four-star ranking. It is either two or five. Four stars puts the entire works of this master artist (oops, showing my bias there) on a par with new works (also reviewed in *Uncut* last month) by The Amazing and Blackout Beach, among others.

Point made. Andy Gill's review is not without merit. But it is cursory and inadequate. Please don't do this to major artists. You wouldn't do it to Dylan (or even Richmond Fontaine).

Edmund Brown, Dubai

STONED ALONE

I couldn't tell exactly from *Uncut*'s review if Simon Wells' book about the Stones '67 bust makes clear just how targeted the band were compared to their contemporaries. The Beatles didn't "remain coy about their drug use..." McCartney literally announced he had done LSD in a BBC television interview the same year, the fallout being a few minor raids on the band in the fading (Sgt Norman) Pilcher days. The Stones' persecution made them the countercultural representatives that the pampered Beatles never could be.

It was also interesting to hear Glyn Johns' opinions on producing some of the greatest records in rock, including the nonplussed reactions of Jagger and Harrison to the first Zeppelin record. What Johns doesn't seem to get is that these '60s idols saw this music for what it was – a cynical, soulless plundering of the blues for maximum bank, and thus the blueprint for rock in the coming decade.

Stephen Conn, Las Cruces, NM, USA

AN OIL SPILL

As much as *Uncut* is to be commended for getting Glyn Johns to talk about some of the great albums he's worked on, I wish he'd been asked about Midnight Oil's 1981 album *Place Without A Postcard*. It may not be all that well-known in the UK, but in Australia a lot of Oils fans (myself included) rate it as their favourite Midnight Oil album. I've read about the Oils' take on working with Glyn Johns, but it would've been great to have heard his side of the story.

John Waddell, via email

HOLY IS THE ISSUE

If I were allowed to buy only one issue of any musical magazine in the whole of eternity, and my life depended on it, I would have bought *Uncut*'s December issue. I bought it because Tom Waits is on the cover, and that alone would be enough. Up there in the corner is Robert Smith. Great, I thought, two guys that I actually appreciate. However, as I started reading the magazine I was truly amazed. It was as if a totem pole was carved out, full of faces of musicians that are members of a secret musical pantheon for me. Seriously, through divine intervention (or the editors), what found its way into the issue is a musical bible as far as I am concerned.

It starts with Mr Waits on the front page and ends with Mr Quantick writing about Queen live in Budapest, which is a seminal event for my generation. Inside are The Last Poets, David Lynch, The Cure, Bert Jansch, Bob Dylan, Deep Purple and Slade, with cameos from Jello Biafra, Pete Townshend, George Harrison and Tim Buckley, and an honourable mention of Zoran Orlic (compatriot, eh!) – this *Uncut* is to be cherished as a holy relic.

Thank you, oh, people of the *Uncut*, you made my day, and a perfect piece of memorabilia to remind me of what has been a truly great year.

Petar Petrovic, Belgrade, Serbia

THE EDITOR...



READING DAVID CAVANAGH'S cover story this month, I was reminded of a time when it seemed that the most likely reason someone had gone to all the trouble of inventing the radio was to make sure that wherever you were in the world you could switch one on and more often than not find yourself listening to Creedence Clearwater Revival. Those, as they say, were the days.

Down the years, I've found myself in frequently far-flung locations, on trips that have taken me hither and yon across the globe. Not unusually these jaunts were to places where I've ended

up propping up bars in the company of people whose language I wasn't always able to speak, a predictable hindrance to conversation, meaningful or otherwise, but where music, however, would be a language we eventually found we shared.

Everyone, everywhere, in my experience was as fluent in CCR as they were in The Beatles, Stones or Bob Dylan. I can't think of anywhere I've variously found myself – from chilly Lapland to the sunny antipodes – where, let's say, "Proud Mary" didn't make sundry gatherings of disparate souls feel like they were at the point it was played on the wireless or jukebox part of a single community, a nation without boundaries, a chorus with a single voice.

When Bruce Springsteen inducted Creedence into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 1993, he made a similar point about the same song pulling people together.

"Me and my band worked on Route 35 outside of Asbury Park, at a club called the Pandemonium," he said. "It was five 50-minute sets a night and rarely a night without a fight. But into New Jersey came the music of Creedence Clearwater

Revival and for three minutes and seven seconds of

'Proud Mary', a very strained brotherhood would actually fill the room. It was simply a great song that everybody liked and it literally saved our asses on many occasions."

CCR split after an astonishing run of hits, in 1972. But 40 years on, how much more immediate and still of the moment their music seems whenever you hear it, whatever the circumstance, the radio inclined to sound like it's turned up its own volume whenever something by them comes on, just about every minute of music they put their name to an undiminished thrill all these years after they originally claimed the world's attention.

"Creedence weren't the hippest band in the world," Springsteen also reflected in his Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame induction speech.

"But," he was quick to add, "they were the best."

The full story of CCR starts on [page 44](#).



Creedence Clearwater Revival

Man forger



THE UNCUT COLLECTION

Uncut has teamed up with Sonic Editions, who specialise in high-quality, limited-edition music photography, to curate a series of classic archive images of rock icons, including Bob Dylan, The Beatles, the Stones, Hendrix and The Who. These beautiful, framed prints are available from £59. Visit www.soniceditions.com/uncut for details

FIRST CUTS

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO **UNCUT**

2012
ALBUMS
PREVIEW

'It's a brave record, as you'd expect'

From the people who know: the lowdown on the most exciting releases of the next 12 months. Starring **PAUL McCARTNEY, CAN, FLAMING LIPS, PATTI SMITH, PAUL WELLER, JOHN CALE, DAMON ALBARN** and more...

PUBLIC IMAGE LIMITED

TITLE *This Is PiL* | **LABEL** TBC |
RELEASED May

Terrible arguments, but no egos: John Lydon's reunited troupe are tackling grief on this heavily improvised album

JOHN LYDON: "I'm deeply proud of this record. I think it's a very thrilling piece of work. We recorded it at Steve Winwood's barn in the Cotswolds. It felt almost exotic for someone like me to be surrounded by sheep, and all these wealthy people pretending to be farmers. I found that I liked the barn doors wide open so I could sing in the open air. I just used a regular stage-mic—I wanted to avoid the usual trappings of recording an album, all the expensive microphones and the endless EQing, so we threw all that out of the window and just let rip. Two years of pretty much **CONTINUES OVER**"

PiL, and a lovely
pair of shorts:
(l-r) Scott Firth,
John Lydon, Lu
Edmonds and
Bruce Smith



solid touring seems to have paid off – the band are especially tight. It's [drummer] Bruce Smith, [guitarist] Lu Edmonds and [new bassist] Scott Firth. There have been, what, 49 members of PiL? These are the ones I now remember the best.

"A lot of it was recorded live, and improvised on the spot. That's not to say it's like some horrible jazz album. The music evolved as we went along. Musically, Lu and Bruce have these terrible arguments because their approaches are so different, so that fed in. The band push me into a place where they know damn well I can't sing. But unlike previous bands, they never leave me stranded. There's so little egotism. And that includes from me, too. I've even written a song about it on the album.

"It's a brave record, as you would expect. It doesn't sound

"This is the most comfortable I've been in a musical situation" – John Lydon

like anything you've heard before. There are themes running through it – one song leads into another in very subtle, sly ways. I suppose it's like a novel with different chapters. Each one is pertinent to a particular emotion, but they're all connected by a sense of humanity – of 'Don't do anything to hurt another human being.' I've even got the Tottenham riots in there – not bad for an Arsenal fan! But they're my working-class fellas, I understand them.

"This is the most comfortable I've ever been in any musical situation. I don't have so much self-loathing and self-doubt. I think there are subtler ways of approaching things now. There've been a lot of tragedies recently, and grief is something I find doesn't go away too easily. I can never come to terms with death, even my worst enemies. Malcolm. That was terrible. People with that kind of annoying energy should go on forever. So some of the songs are about personal tragedies."

New beard, new sounds: Albarn's got more than a few projects coming up...



EDWYN COLLINS
ALBUM TITLE **Understated**
LABEL **AED**
RELEASE DATE **Summer**

Simply thrilled, honey: Edwyn returns with a new label, a 'greatest hits', and "a very loose concept album"

EDWYN COLLINS: "The first album of mine on our new label [AED] will be an iTunes greatest hits called *Down The Line*. The title song is a new one, but the rest were recorded between 1989 and 2001. Then we're going to take the 12 tracks and turn them into six seven-inch

singles in a case with special artwork and handwritten labels. This was inspired by the original 'Blue Boy' single on Postcard, where every sleeve was different. It'll be like coming full circle.

"My new solo album is called *Understated*, but that might change. I've done eight songs so far and it's going pretty well. I like fast songs now – soul and Northern soul and a little country. I suppose you could call it a very loose concept album. I'm getting a lot more confident and am pushing myself further. And this is the big difference. Now I'm experimenting with things. There's

one song called 'Understated', then there'll be 'Down The Line' and one called 'Carry On, Carry On', which is my interpretation of Northern soul and Motown. It's got a Four Tops feel to it. It's melodically like Levi Stubbs, but in a different vein, the lyrics are very British and eccentric."

DAMON ALBARN
TITLE **tbc**
LABEL **EMI**
RELEASE DATE **tbc**

Is this the busiest man currently working in music today?

Theoretically, the first official public engagement in Damon Albarn's 2012 diary is February 21, when Blur will receive an Outstanding Contribution gong at the Brit Awards. On current form, though, the likelihood that something will arrive beforehand is strong. February also sees the release of new Gorillaz material to mark the release of a new collection of Converse trainers. There's Albarn's project Rocket Juice And The Moon, with Chili Peppers bassist Flea and The Good, The Bad & The Queen drummer Tony Allen, whose debut album will arrive through Honest Jon's: tracks currently under consideration include "Poison", "The Moon", "Red Skies", "Dolo Mbife", "Damn" and "Pull It Out". Meanwhile Albarn's opera, *Dr Dee*, runs at London's ENO in June, with an album of music from the show to follow. He's also been in the studio, busy on a solo album.

"I work 9-5, five days a week, with no working at weekends," he says of his productivity. "I'm militant about it. If you work 9-5 every day and you don't fuck about too much, you can get a lot done."

Fighting fit: Edwyn Collins



PAUL McCARTNEY

TITLE **My Valentine** | LABEL **Concord** | RELEASED **February**

One for your dad. It's an album of covers of standards from the pre-rock era

PAUL McCARTNEY: "I grew up listening to those songs, my dad and his generation played those songs. My dad used to play piano at home and particularly on New Year's Eve, he was the pianist and they'd roll back the carpet and all the ladies would sit around, sipping their rum and blackcurrant. And then after half an hour of those, they would start singing and so I heard all the songs, you know, and always grew up loving them and associating those songs with family and good times. So there was that and then I think the other thing was, when I got into songwriting, I realised how well structured these songs were. I think I took a lot of my lessons from them."

"I met Tommy (LiPuma, producer), in New York and we started talking about this. I kept saying to him, the problem for me is everybody's doing it. You've got Rod Stewart doing his *American Songbook* stuff and then he was doing another and another, Robbie Williams was doing one and somebody else would be doing it. And I just thought, I can't do that because it's just going to look – and in fact this album still may look like – 'Oh, here he goes, it's another person doing The Great American Songbook.' So our big challenge, we thought, was to try and do something else. So we talked long and hard about that. Why now? We figured a few things out. We thought that I could write a few songs, which you wouldn't find on Rod's record, so that might help distinguish it a little bit. And then I think in the end it was, 'Look, if I don't do it now, I'll never do it.'"

JOHN CALE

TITLE **tbc**
LABEL **Double Six**
RELEASE DATE **May**

Post-OBE, Cale's follow-up to last year's "Extra Playful" EP: "sloppy, lurching grooves" expected



CALE: "I have a little studio in LA and most of the album was done there. Some of the songs I wrote on bass. There's

one called 'Vampire Café' and there are some very sloppy, lurching grooves in there. I remember first hearing Dr John doing *Gris-Gris* and then seeing them in LA in the late '60s and they were scary as hell. There were girls with feathers in their hair and a gigantic bass player wearing a boiler suit. It was very funky and some of that I've been trying to get to – that low-down funk. My drummer, Michael Jerome, is

really good. A lot of these things sound like machines but they're really not. At some points I've got two floor toms going on. The grooves are really what I started with, though there's some more lo-fi stuff on there too. One song's about Japanese anime and there's also one about all this nonsense with the press, called

'Scotland Yard'. And one called 'The Flying Dutchman', which I wrote on viola. So it's a real variety. Some songs I wrote with a Fender Telecaster, some with bass and some with a bunch of keyboards and put some back-up singers and horns on there. I've dressed up the turkey a little bit."

QUICK CUTS

ANIMAL COLLECTIVE

WHEN? Summer



How do you follow up *Uncut*'s 2009 Album Of The Year, *Merriweather Post Pavilion*? "We just finished another two weeks of writing sessions and put together five new songs," Avey Tare told US website *Madison.com*. "We're really excited about this... it's been fun jamming with those guys again."

NOEL GALLAGHER

WHEN? Summer/winter



"It sounds a bit like *Dark Side Of The Moon*," Gallagher told *Spin* of his second post-Oasis album, featuring Amorphous Androgynous. "The sound is similar to [debut solo album] ... *High Flying Birds*, but more psychedelic and tripped out. But it's not an electronic project."

JAY FARRAR, WILL JOHNSON, ANDERS PARKER, YIM YAMES

TITLE **New Multitudes**
LABEL **Founder**
RELEASE DATE **February**

Esteemed singer-songwriters gather to score unpublished Woody Guthrie lyrics as part of centenary celebrations



JAY FARRAR: "The four of us got together to record in Brooklyn in 2009. Will Johnson from Centro-Matic is a very good

drummer, then Jim [known as Yim] from My Morning Jacket volunteered to play bass. Anders and I are sticking to our normal roles [guitars/vocals]. The amount and scope of Woody's creative output was staggering and impressive, so we took a while to choose which of his unpublished lyrics we should create music for. There are 12 songs **CONTINUES OVER ►**

THE LITTLE WILLIES

FOR THE GOOD TIMES

AN ALBUM OF LOVINGLY RENDERED COVERS OF ARTISTS
SUCH AS JOHNNY CASH, LORETTA LYNN, KRIS KRISTOFFERSON,
DOLLY PARTON AND MORE



FEATURES THE SINGLE 'JOLENE'
9 JANUARY





PATTI SMITH

TITLE TBC | **LABEL** Columbia | **RELEASED** Spring

After an award-winning memoir and a swaggering best-of, Patti returns with her first album of new material since 2004

PATTI SMITH: “We’ve worked on it intermittently for the past year and a half, cut some of it in Italy, some in New Jersey and a lot of it in New York. In the past, I’ve always gone and done a record in six weeks. I’ve never done a record like this, where I could think about it and write some more songs, and had time to let songs grow. But all our records for me are like movies, I think of them as a movie or a soundtrack of my life at the time that we’re working on them, so that’s what this one will be.

“The record reflects things I’ve been studying. It could be Gogol or Bulgakov, it could be St Francis. We wrote a very nice little song for Amy Winehouse and I think a beautiful song for Maria Schneider, the actress who was a friend of mine in the ’70s. They just happened, like gifts.

The little song for Amy just blossomed in the studio. We were at [New York studio] Electric Lady doing a whole other song and I wrote Amy a little poem when she died and my bass player, Tony Shanahan, wrote a piece of music, and I happened to hear his little piece of music and the two matched perfectly. The record is done with my core band, Lenny [Kaye, guitar] and Jay Dee [Daugherty, drums] and Tony. Tom Verlaine plays – there is a vintage Tom Verlaine [solo] on one song. My son Jackson plays guitar on the record, and my daughter Jessie plays piano, and our second guitarist who we play with live, Jack Petrocelli, is on the record. Most of the album is very live in the studio. It reflects the band and our years together and the contributions of my son, my daughter and Tom.

“The record is done, and we’re mixing in January. I’ve even taken Polaroids for artwork. The record has been much on my mind, even though it was postponed because the book [her memoir, *Just Kids*] was very demanding – but I didn’t forget about the record. I know people listen to songs and they break down records in terms of songs, but I still think that it’s important to offer something holistic that’s thought of from beginning to end. I’m a 20th-century girl and I think of putting together an album in a 20th-century way, while understanding that the 21st century will take it apart. But I still have to stand on some of my process and my concept and the way albums should be presented to the people.

“I think there’ll probably be 11 or 12 tracks on the album. There’s one very long track, as usual. Lenny Kaye and I, that’s one area that we excel in. For me, an artist does work and then they’ll give it to the people and they’ll decide. I don’t feel any pressure at all to try and seduce or market the work that I do, hopefully I’ll do the work and if it speaks to them then they’ll hear it.”

on the main release and there are 11 more on a bonus CD, which will come out later. One thing I learned throughout the process is that he was by no means a one-dimensional writer. On the extra CD there are songs about cocaine, whorehouses, the atomic bomb and one called ‘Dope Fiend Robber’.

“We chose the lyrics based on some kind of familiar personal frame of reference. For ‘Hoping Machine’ I came across the words from one of Woody’s journals, a large notebook filled with stream-of-consciousness writing. ‘Careless Reckless Love’ is another universal theme and the song ‘New Multitudes’ speaks for itself. Woody was carrying on his message with that one.”

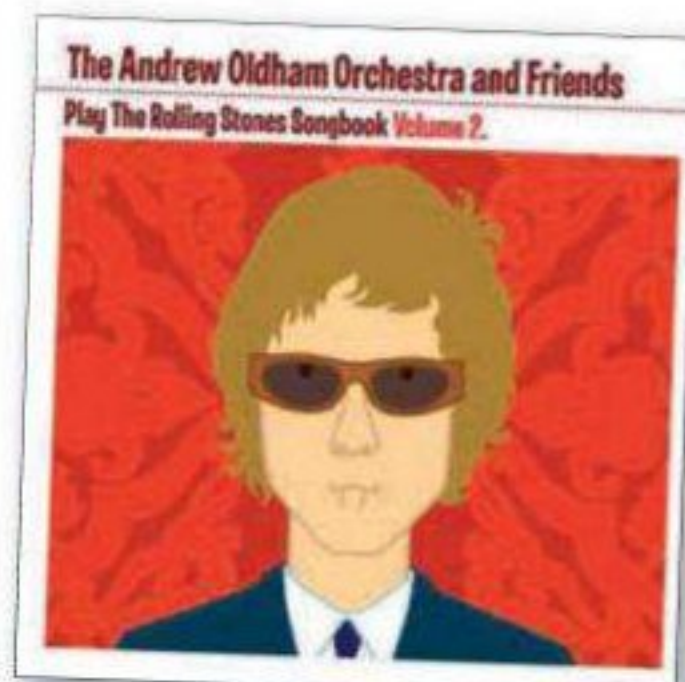
THE ANDREW OLDHAM ORCHESTRA AND FRIENDS

TITLE Play The Rolling Stones Songbook Volume 2

LABEL tbc

RELEASE DATE Spring

The impresario re-opens the



Nanker/Phelge songbook for the first time in 45 years. A Verve cover is included

ANDREW LOOG OLDHAM:

“I started a couple of years ago here in Bogotá with guitarist Gary Lucas, Juan Galeano – he plays everything – and Ratones Paranoicos’ bass player, Pablo Memi. Then friends started dropping in. I finished it all up in Vancouver. Gruff Rhys gave me a great version of ‘I Am Waiting’ that Al Kooper played French horn on. Jerry Shirley from Humble Pie added percussion to a lot of stuff. Christine Ohlman delivered a defining version of ‘You’ve Got The Silver’ and Johnny Marr played on a version of ‘As Tears Go By’. There’s two versions of

‘Bittersweet Symphony’. One from Vashti Bunyan, and another from Wyckham Porteous. Why ‘Bittersweet Symphony’? I always loved The Verve version. Examining it in the studio was my way of getting rid of the rubbish that accompanied that whole episode [Allen Klein sued The Verve for sampling ‘The Last Time’ from the 1966 Songbook].”

DEXYS MIDNIGHT RUNNERS

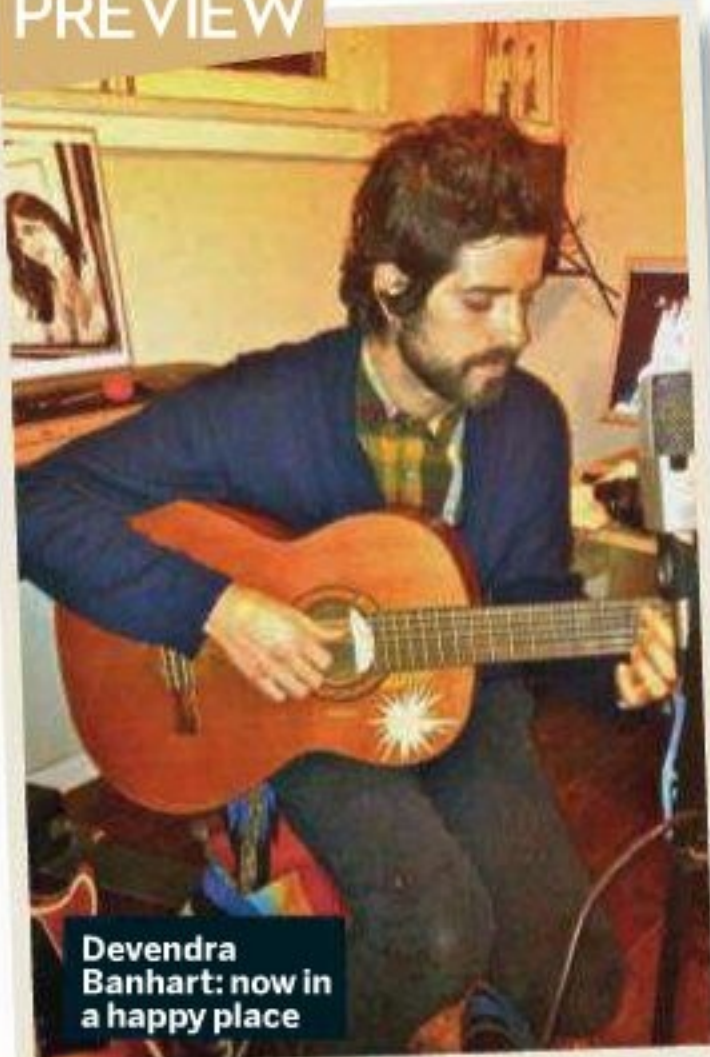
TITLE tbc

LABEL tbc

RELEASE DATE tbc

It looks like the prodigal sons really are returning this time

When we spoke to Kevin Rowland for our 2008 Album **CONTINUES OVER ►**



Devendra Banhart: now in a happy place

Preview, he confessed he had no idea when the first Dexys album since 1985 would be ready. Indeed, four years on and it still hasn't materialised. However, followers of the band's official Twitter feed (@DexysOfficial) will have noticed some thrilling developments lately: "The recording of the new album is finished," wrote Kevin on October 22. "We mix in December." Such auspicious news was quickly followed by a selection of lyrics from album tracks – one particular *Uncut* favourite: "Oh I know that I've been crazy, and that cannot be denied/But inside of me, there's always been a secret urge to fly" – plans for forthcoming live shows (announced on October 25) and even confirmation that the album cover has now been shot (December 4). The lineup? Rowland and long-serving bassist Pete Williams alongside former Style Councillor Mick Talbot and guitarist Neil Hubbard. Now all Kevin needs to do is get Dexys signed...

DEVENDRA BANHART

TITLE **tbc**

LABEL **Reprise**

RELEASE DATE **tbc**

Pet Shop Boys, Brett Anderson and Arthur Russell provide unlikely reference points for the freak-folk pioneer

DEVENDRA BANHART: "Right now there's 33 songs. Me and my producer Noah Georgeson are pulling it down to 15 today. I've had a very strong desire to return to a place similar to the first record I made. There's been this progression since, where I've added more instruments and tried different genres. The last record, *What Will We Be* [2009], was the breaking point. From the minute that album was done to about eight months ago was the worst time of my life. The songs written then have their truth, but now I'm the happiest I've ever been, and I'm turning what was wholly noxious, poisonous



Some rare cuts, taken straight from the Can (Irmin Schmidt far left)

CAN

TITLE **The Lost Tapes** | LABEL **Mute** | RELEASED **March**

Three CDs of never-before-heard material, sourced from the archives of the Krautrock greats

IRMIN SCHMIDT: "The *Lost Tapes* is a nice title, but this material was not really lost. There were some 100 tapes in cupboards, which made about 50 hours of music. It was music lost to our memory, but it was always clear where it was. One day I said, we have to go through all this. Listening to them has been enjoyable, but this music is in the archive for a reason. We recorded everything, and most of it is not very interesting! Nevertheless, it was worthwhile, because there were wonderful things to be found.

"The *Lost Tapes* will comprise three full CDs of music. One of them will be only film music. Two will be from studio sessions. It dates from throughout the band's lifespan, from the early music with Malcolm [Mooney] to the very last years with Rosko [Gee, bassist]. There is some really crazy contemporary music stuff I had forgotten we had done, material recorded in the castle [Schloss Nörvenich, outside Köln] very early on. There was a big hall that was totally ruined, full of stones and broken glass, and we crashed around in there, recorded, made some incredibly strange noises. Sometimes in the studio we created an incredible sound and then didn't know what to do with it, but saved it to integrate into a piece we played later.

"I worked with [longtime Can collaborator] Jono Podmore, putting it together. We then spent two or three days in London with [Mute boss] Daniel Miller to make the final selection. Much of the material is less worked-out than the known work of Can. But that is nice, because even the studio records are witnessing the certain point in a process. In a way a Can piece is never ended. It is always stopped at a certain point.

"I don't think there is anything here that people will have heard on releases or bootlegs, save for the film music. The track 'Das Millionenspiel' was recorded for German TV, but, without crediting it, the author took the idea from a science fiction novel by Robert Sheckley. The Sheckley estate took them to court, and the film was forbidden to be shown for 35 years. We usually only released the title songs of these films, or the main piece, so there is quite a lot of incidental music that is unreleased.

"There are more live recordings to go through, but there will not be a *Lost Tapes 2*. Can records should be of a standard, which I would hate to undermine. The only thing is if one day, the idea comes into my head to use the material in some kind of collage or montage work. But it's not good enough, I don't think. The rest is to be forgotten. Three new records! That is the end."

'There is nothing here that people will have heard on bootlegs' – Irmin Schmidt

behaviour into music that's a little more salubrious.

"I decided to record in a very small guesthouse behind my house in Los Angeles. A lot of the songs have been informed by the constant rotation of certain music that I've been listening to recently. People like Arthur Russell, the Pet Shop Boys, and Brett Anderson. His solo albums are beautiful. There needs to be a thread running through the album. I'm trying to make it all a little more cohesive."

DIRTY PROJECTORS

TITLE **tbc**

LABEL **Domino**

RELEASE DATE **March**

US indie rockers' sixth: contains a song about an offshore drilling rig



DAVID LONGSTRETH:

"There was a perennial optimism about [2009's] *Bitte Orca*, which I think was largely to do

with it being recorded on the West Coast in the summer. I think this record is a little more terrifying. I wrote pretty much everything in an old house in the middle of the woods in Delaware County. Having gone on tour for so long it felt like an invitation to sit in one place and write a whole album of songs. There's one called 'Whose Hair Is Whipping', which has this image of a girl standing by the ocean and the wind blowing really strongly and her hair whipping around her face. It's got the



Bobby Womack:
soul survivor

weirdest guitar sound I've ever found, like you've got your foot caught in a pile of gum on the street. There's another called 'Irresponsible Tune', which is one of the quieter songs. 'Just From Chevron' is about an offshore drilling rig in the Arctic Circle. I think this may be more of a lyric-driven album than *Bitte Orca*. That was so much about orchestral colour, arrangement and flourish and ended up aligning itself with a certain kind of extravagance. But this one feels a little more reflective."

BOBBY WOMACK

TITLE *The Bravest Man*

LABEL XL

RELEASE DATE Spring

Soul's great survivor teams up with Damon Albarn and Richard Russell

BOBBY WOMACK: "Most of it was recorded at Damon's studio in west London, with two or three sessions in New York. We were both full of ideas, and Damon being Damon... well. Ha! I love him. I've never experienced anything like Richard Russell. He's the president of the record company, but he's doing all the drum programming. So we worked as a team. There was no ego. There was only we go."

"There's more electronics on it than anything else, but when I get into it, the spirit comes in and electronics has to take a back seat. We'd talk about stuff, like war, for example, and laugh about other stuff, and then sit down and write a song about it."

"All the songs are originals, everything was written right on the spot. We started in September and by the end of November we were done. It's the best thing that I've done. It's a step in another direction."

THE FLAMING LIPS

TITLE *tbc*

LABEL Warner Bros

RELEASE DATE Summer

So far details are sketchy – but expect weirdness...



WAYNE COYNE:

"With our last album, *Embryonic*, I wanted us to become more experimental – and we're kind of in the zenith of that right now. I just try and get all the great subconscious moments together

CONTINUES OVER»



PAUL WELLER

TITLE *Sonik Kicks* | **LABEL** Island | **RELEASED** March

Eleventh studio album finds Weller getting his Krautrock freak on. Also: Metal Machine Music an "influence"!

WELLER: "We actually finished this album in March, but, after going away, I wasn't entirely happy. I ended up remixing a few things, chucking some songs out and writing some new stuff. So it's gone through a few different stages."

"I've been listening to a lot of freeform music, call it electronica or whatever. And I like Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music*, so I guess there's a certain amount of influence, but more in textural and sonic terms. There are some avant-garde and electronic elements that have been incorporated into the songs and there are a couple of soundscape pieces. There's an experimental edge to it, but with some good tunes. It's co-written and co-produced by Simon Dine."

"'Sleep Of The Serene' is one of the soundscape pieces. But in the middle of those quite chaotic electronic sounds, there are also some really lovely strings which Sean O'Hagan from The High Llamas wrote and arranged. 'By The Waters' is a track I wrote with the guitarist Aziz Ibrahim, which is more tranquil. It's just voice, guitar and string arrangement."

"'That Dangerous Age' is very funky. That's going to be the first single I think. Noel Gallagher came down and

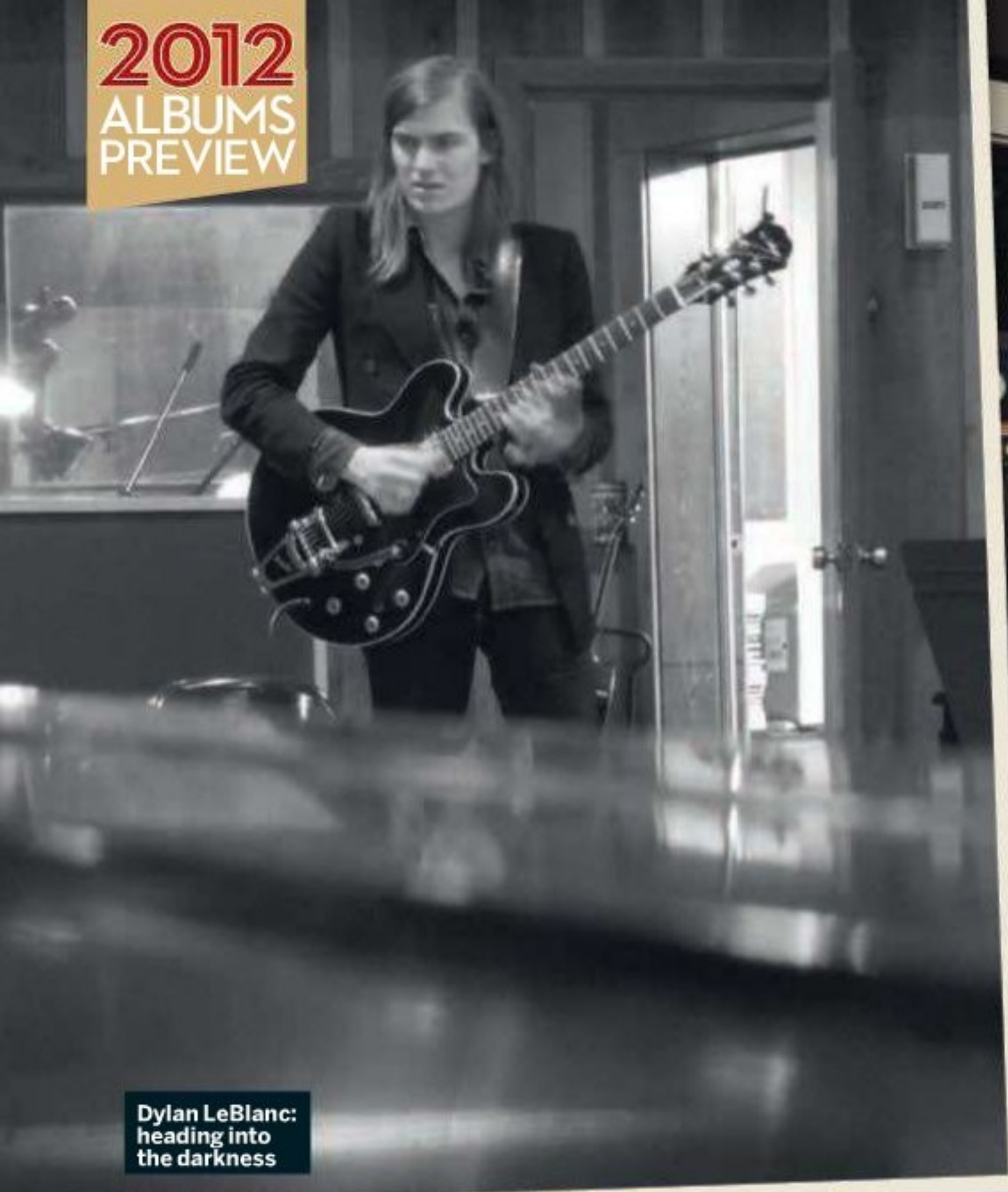
played bass and guitar on 'When Your Garden's Overgrown' and a couple more. And Graham Coxon plays on a track called 'Dragonfly'. As for the rest of it, I played a lot of things myself, then my live band played on some stuff, too. Whoever came down to the studio on any given day usually ended up on the record."

"We've got one called 'Around The Lake', which is very influenced by Neu!. In fact, Michael Rother has done a remix of it that's not on the album but will probably end up as a bonus track. He put some guitar parts down on it, too."

"The last track on the album is 'Be Happy Children', which has two of my kids on it. My daughter sings, which is really beautiful, and my little lad Mac, who's only six, is on there, too. Leah only did two takes and is pretty nonchalant in the studio. She sounds uncannily like

her mum, DC Lee. For Mac it was his first time in the studio, but he wasn't happy with his performance, so he threw his headphones down and stormed off like a diva! He's great on it, though. I suppose it was influenced by the passing of my own dad [*John Weller died in 2009*]. His message was, 'Look, I'm always with you,' and it was a case of using the strength he passed down to me."

'There's an experimental edge to it, but with some good tunes'



Dylan LeBlanc:
heading into
the darkness

and get rid of the normal stuff. Some of the things we've done this year have been surprising, even to us. We've released music on USB sticks placed inside sweets and toys, even an actual human skull. There's been coloured-vinyl EPs every other month, the 24-hour song, and the Beatles song played on multiple iPads. We've recorded with Nick Cave, I'm trying to connect with this Swedish singer Lykke Li at the moment, and we've done tracks with Sean Lennon and Yoko Ono. I would hope that by the end of next summer we could say, 'Here's 11 of these songs that only insane collectors have gotten hold of, that you can listen to while you're having a dinner party.' I think that would be a fine way to listen to this stuff."

DYLAN LeBLANC

TITLE *Cast The Same Old Shadow*

LABEL Rough Trade

RELEASE DATE March

Expect a "more cinematic" second album from the Louisiana singer-songwriter

DYLAN LeBLANC: "The success of *Paupers Field* definitely changed my life. But more importantly it changed my approach to this new one. I felt very pressured to make a better album and a bigger production. Trina Shoemaker co-produced it with me and I figured out that I wanted to do some different things, expand out, maybe get more experimental. George Harrison's *All Things Must Pass* has been a big influence, I think.

"There's the same vibe as *Paupers Field*, but these songs move more and are definitely more cinematic.

"It's like the soundtrack for a really dark movie. We did half of it at FAME Studios in Muscle Shoals and then finished the record in New Orleans. So there's flavours of different places, though it's not really the happiest album in the world. One track is called 'Part One: The End' and it's basically about getting older and how things change. The most upbeat song on the record is 'Brother', which has a Southern rock vibe. I'm really hoping this

'All Things Must Pass has been a big influence on this album' – Dylan LeBlanc

album will move people as much as it moves me."

THE NATIONAL

TITLE *tbc*

LABEL Beggars Banquet

RELEASE DATE *tbc*

Following their step into the bigger league, the Brooklyn indie rockers prep album No 6

Since The National's last studio album, *High Violet*, arrived in May 2010, the band have been busy with an epic world tour – when we last looked, they were selling out 20,000-capacity venues in North America. Such pesky interruptions as tour dates, however, don't seem to have distracted them too much from prepping a follow-up to *High Violet*. "We've started writing new songs



The National:
expect something
less academic...

over the past couple of months on the road, which is weird for us," frontman Matt Berninger told Canadian website *Jam!*. "We're getting really excited about the new record already. So we might just dive into the writing process right away. I feel like we're kind of ready... Aaron [Dessner, guitarist] has given me about 10 ideas so far. He seems to be in some sort of really weird creative space at the moment. He recently had a baby, so maybe it's a lack of sleep. He's wired differently. The songs he's given me so far are much less cerebral and academic and much more immediate and visceral than usual."

SPIRITUALIZED

TITLE *Sweet Heart Sweet Light*

LABEL Double Six/Spaceman Records

RELEASE DATE March

Everyone's favourite psychedelic adventurer attempts to make his "pop album"



JASON PIERCE:

"Songs include 'Heading For The Top', 'Freedom' and 'So Long You Pretty Things'. There's one track I started with

Dr John nearly eight years ago, though it's become quite a bit different from when we started. I got rid of the studio and I've been working on it at home. That way, I could do three-hour days. It took quite a long time, though – I don't have the right tools here, or an acoustically clean space. My idea initially was to make a pop album – my references were those kind of lost gems like Link Wray's '70s Polydor records, or Alan Vega's *Jukebox Babe*, as well as '60s girl groups and *Rubber Soul*." 

AND THERE'S MORE!



Ahead of a world tour, **BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN** unveils his new album in March

– his first since the death of Clarence Clemons last June... **MAZZY STAR** release their first album since 1996's *Among My Swan* in May – a taster of the new material, "Common Burn" and "Lay Myself Down", was released on iTunes last October... March sees the arrival of *A + E*, **GRAHAM COXON**'s noisy follow-up to 2009's *The Spinning Top*... A **STEPHEN STILLS** retrospective box is due in the spring... **ATOMS FOR PEACE**, the supergroup headed up by **THOM YORKE** and Red Hot Chili Pepper **FLEA**, make their recorded debut, produced by **NIGEL GODRICH**. And



Thom's band-mate **JONNY GREENWOOD** releases a collaboration with composer

KRZYSZTOF PENDERECKI in March... while **THE SHINS** put out their fourth LP, *Port Of Morrow*, the same month. **MARK KNOPFLER** returns to the studio in January to work on his seventh solo LP... The reunited original **BLACK SABBATH** release a Rick Rubin-produced album in the autumn... **VAMPIRE WEEKEND** have been busy in Brooklyn on the follow-up to 2010's *Contra*... And expect **NEIL YOUNG**'s auto-biography *Waging Heavy Peace*, and *Bowie: Object*, a photographic collection of 100 pieces from **DAVID BOWIE**'s archives, annotated by the man himself.

RODRIGO Y GABRIELA AND C.U.B.A.



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FIRST CUTS

CH-CH-CH-CH-CHANGES

Evan Dando

The irrepressible singer recalls wild times with The Lemonheads, Oasis and Courtney. Plus: the bizarre reason why he was thrown out of the MC5



LEMON HEADS

1 MASSACHUSETTS TURNPIKE, 1988

That was taken by a guy at the radio station that launched our career, WHRB, a kid called Barney. That was a period in my life when I used to fantasise about being a gas station attendant in Kansas, so that's why I was dressed like that. The Lemonheads started off as a Minor Threat, Black Flag tribute band. We wanted to resurrect '77 English punk rock – The Adverts, that was our thing back then. We didn't get hotels, every night we'd just find some people who would put us up. We were touring in our bass player's mom's station-wagon.



2 BOSTON, 1990

Jesse Peretz and Dave Ryan. We'd just put out *Lovey* on Atlantic, and it sold less than half of our indie release the year before. It was with some trepidation that we signed with a major. We had a good lawyer who had the "commercially viable" thing struck from our contract. But I never really wanted to be that experimental anyway. I always liked melodic pop rock'n'roll. I love to just make noise, but I keep it to myself. That picture symbolises the moment when it became my band. It became me and whoever was around. I guess I'm not a very good team player.



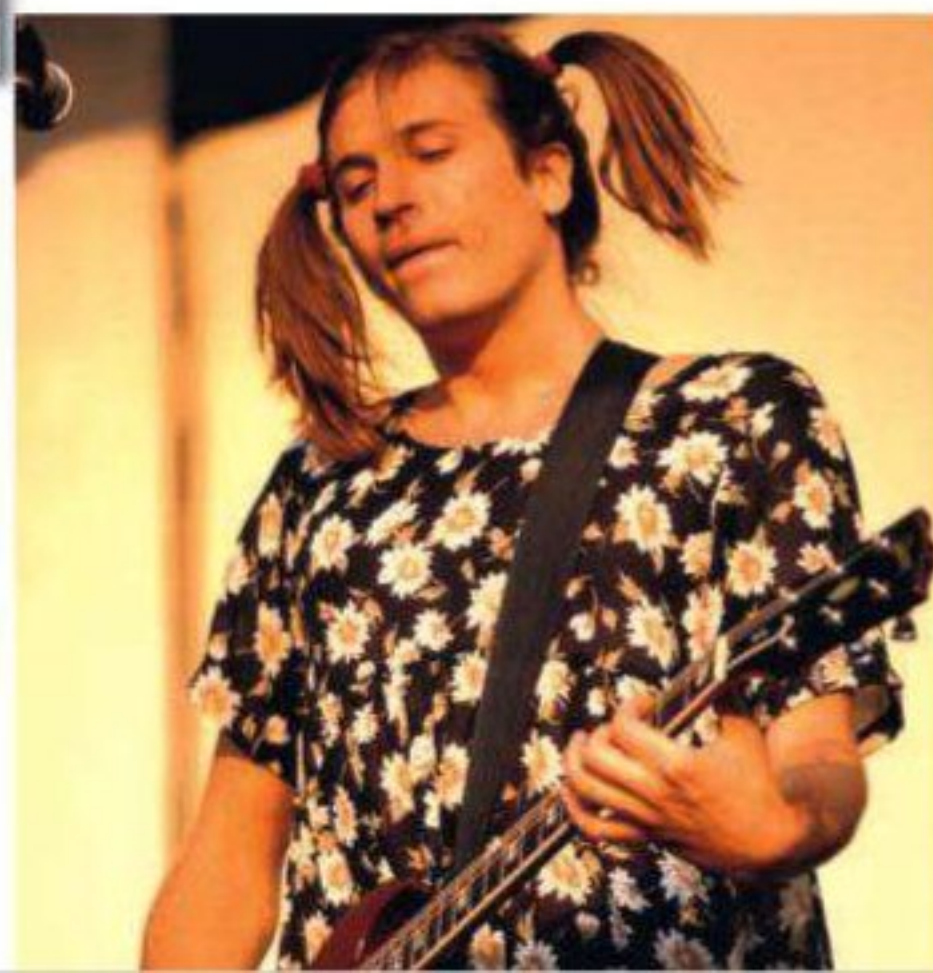
4 CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, 1993

Me and Tanya Donelly. They said it was going to be the cover of *NME*, but it didn't turn out to be. We'd just done the "Mrs Robinson" cover. Tanya's face didn't end up in the picture – just the leg. That single did get in the way. It also allowed more people to hear our real music, so it was a curse and a blessing. At least no-one seems to yell out for it at our shows now. But, you know, we did it because we loved the movie, that's all.

JOE DILWORTH/STEVE DOUBILE; PHIL NICCOLLS/GETTY; RETNA; INTERVIEW: NICK HASTED

3 AUSTIN, TEXAS, 1992

Myself, Nic Dalton and Dave Ryan. That night, Juliana [Hatfield] opened up for us, and she played 45 minutes longer than she was going to, and I had dropped acid, thinking it was going to come on after our set, but it came on in the middle. I felt the guitar in my left hand was getting wider and smaller, so I was offering everyone their money back and saying I was tripping. I can't believe Carlos Santana played guitar at Woodstock on acid. I found it hard. I guess you need to practise that one...



5 READING FESTIVAL, 1993

The last time that I saw a girlfriend of mine in LA, I said, "Give me what you're wearing right now." It was kind of for her – "I'm going to wear that." We'd been into wearing dresses since we started out. It was just funny. My friend Alison made the [hair-] bunches just for laughs. I think Pavement played right before us, and before them was Hole, and Dinosaur Jr played after us. I was getting a lot of attention then. It was like being a spectator on your own life. Then there's the perverse side of me that says, "Let's fuck it up."

6 BOSTON, 1993

Juliana Hatfield.

We met when we were about 19, and have been best friends ever since. That was funny the way people made that whole thing around Juliana and I. We would mess around, but we never had full sex, because she kept her virginity until she was 27. So that was a funny set-up. But things worked out OK. She's been disappointed in me sometimes. But she's always there. She's a very beautiful, very talented, perfect example of womanhood.



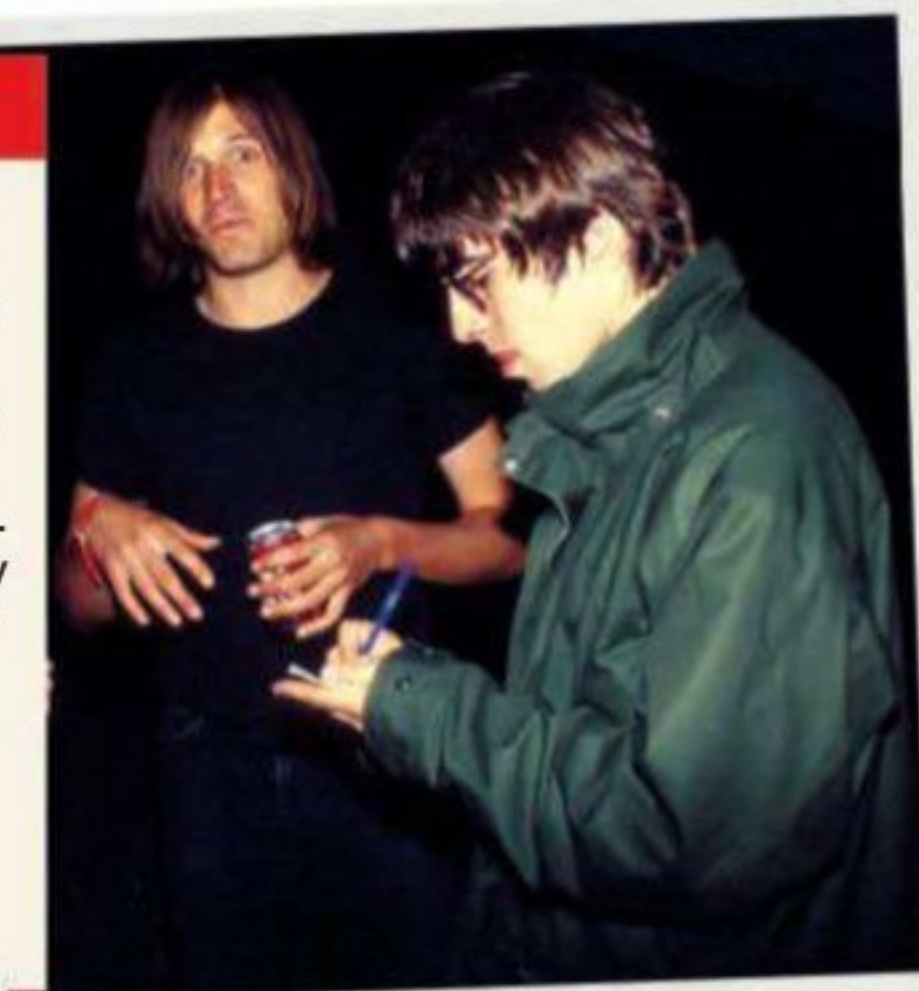
7 READING FESTIVAL, 1994

With Courtney. We were out of our minds on drugs back then. It was also because of all that sadness, that Kurt was dead. It's a pity people think that Courtney and I were ever an item. She was at times difficult, but oh man, she was funny. I think she dosed the security guard at Reading that day. This guy was messing with us a bit, and she gave him a Secanol, and he fell asleep! Did she lean on me emotionally? Yeah, she picked her teddy bears back then. She had a few...



8 GLASTONBURY FESTIVAL, 1995

Me and Liam. That was a year after I went on the road with Oasis, because I didn't want to stop touring. Of course, in the end I ended up in rehab, but I still had a great time. This was the Glastonbury when I missed my gig. I'd like to play there again, but it'll have to not be the Acoustic Tent. The dude there won't let me play any more. He was not impressed.



9 MARTHA'S VINEYARD, 1996

I'd finished the *Car Button Cloth* record. At that stage I was mainly drinking a lot, and I'd rented a house at Martha's Vineyard on the beach. I'd taken 10 months off, and was about to go back into the fray. It was OK. It was a good time. That was a record we made not to please anyone but ourselves. It was not polished, just done for its own sake.



11 GRIFFITH PARK, LOS ANGELES, 2006

Splitting The Lemonheads had been the old idea of the fallow field. You've got to leave it alone for a while. I had way too much money back then, so I thought, 'Well, let's see if I can get rid of it.' And I managed to do it, and it was fun. But ah, it's horrible, without something to do, I'm no good. I have not much self-discipline at all... I'm kind of shiftless when I'm idle. When this picture was taken, we had an album coming out called *The Lemonheads*. When I was a kid, The Descendents had my favourite punk rhythm section, and that's the one I got, finally. That's the way I always wanted The Lemonheads to be.

10 ON TOUR, 2004

Me and the MC5. That was the most fun I ever had. It was like being in a proper rock'n'roll band. And I was a little bit proud of myself because... [bashfully] I sort of got kicked out of the MC5 for taking drugs. I didn't really want to go to Europe with them anyway. I did 41 shows, and that was enough. It was fun. Too much fun. A dream come true? Oh God, yeah. It was like flying on a spaceship when we got going playing "Kick Out The Jams".



12 THE ROSE BAR, GRAMERCY PARK HOTEL, 2009

That's The Time Whales, me and Gibby Haynes' band. The idea was to play at a posh bar and piss off as many people as possible. And actually it was really fun, and Jim Jarmusch came along. It's funny, the Butthole Surfers were my generation's Grateful Dead. Now Gibby's one of my best buddies, and my neighbour here in Brooklyn. Gibby's helped me a lot over the years. He's a sage, for sure.





MY LIFE IN MUSIC

Pegi Young

Singer, songwriter – and Mrs Shakey – on her favourite records. Whatever can her favourite Neil song be?

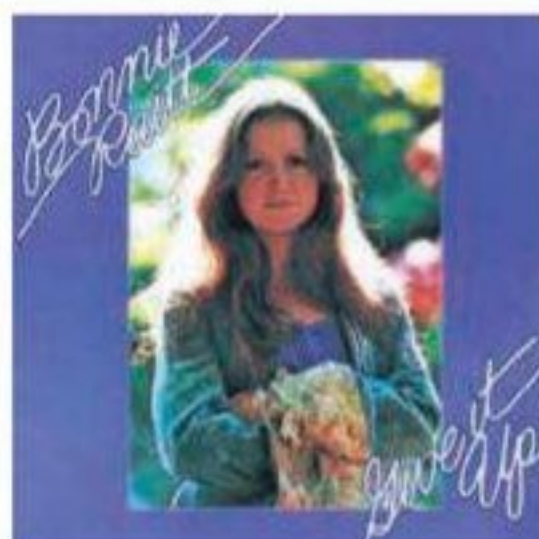
THE SONG THAT IMPRESSED ME AS A TEEN



TRY A LITTLE TENDERNES 1967 **Otis Redding**

This is from *Live in Europe* and I distinctly remember the first time I heard it. I was 15, sitting in a room full of people experimenting with – how can I put this? – some substances that were popular at the time. In this instance it wasn't so much the lyrics, but the music. It starts off so sleepy and dreamy and then it just... pounds you. I don't think I'd heard anything quite like it.

THE SONG THAT SOUNDTRACKED MY EARLY TWENTIES



TOO LONG AT THE FAIR 1972 **Bonnie Raitt**

I probably listened to this record about 100,000 times between the ages of 19 and 22. I've never heard a version of "Love Has No Pride" like the one that's on *Give It Up* – you're on your knees when Bonnie's doing that – but that's not my pick from the album. This song is full of wistful longing and she sounds so weary, even though she's only about 25, and her blues roots go so deep.

A RECORD THAT RETUNED MY EARS



GONNA TAKE A MIRACLE 1971 **Laura Nyro**

She was part of the early New York music scene and is just a beautiful poet. Oh, my god – that reminds me of Leonard Cohen and Fred Neil, too. She's super-raw and real, especially for her time. I'd been listening to girl groups of the '60s with all their vocal harmonies, so to then hear this lone, passionate voice, just belting it out... "The Bells", on this record, is especially beautiful and so haunting.

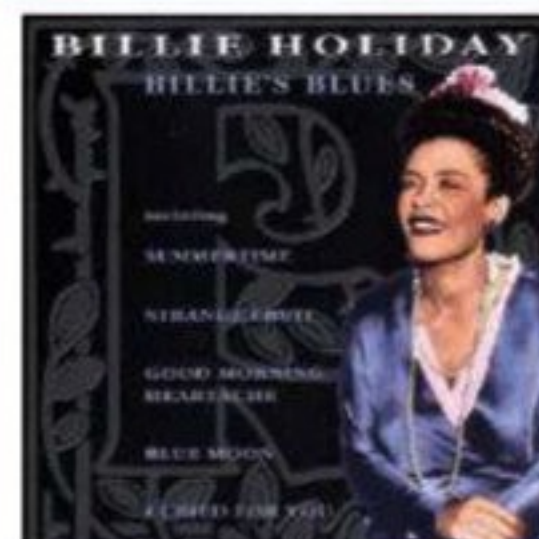
MY FAVOURITE JONI MITCHELL SONG



THE RIVER SONG 1971 **Joni Mitchell**

She's one of the most fabulous songwriters ever. This is from *Blue*, which is a masterpiece, but she has so many records that are equally majestic. "I wish I had a river/I could skate away on" – as a lyric it's just fabulous. I remember being in Saskatchewan, looking at the Saskatoon river and thinking, "Hmm, I wonder if this is the river that she wrote the song about?"

A SONG FROM MY DAYS WAITING TABLES



BILLIE'S BLUES (I LOVE MY MAN) 1936 **Billie Holiday**

Back in my waitressing days when there were jukeboxes, this was on one of them and I would play it again and again after I finished working, when I was singing and dancing. And drinking! "I Love My Man" was my favourite. It's the rawness and amazing honesty of her voice, the phrasing, delivery... I like that sultry, smoky sound, which Etta James has, too.

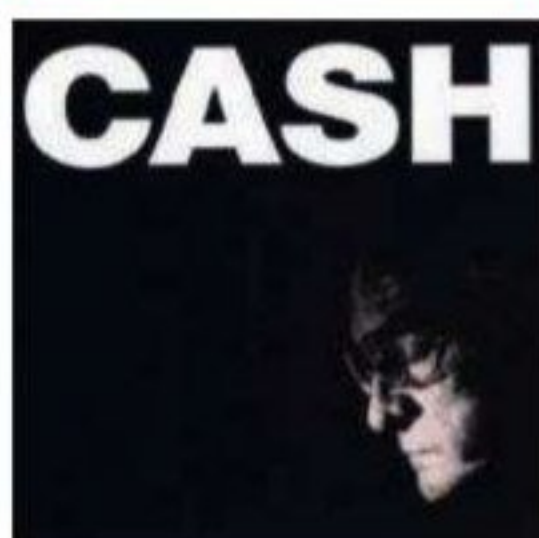
MY FAVOURITE NEIL SONG



BIRDS 1970 **Neil Young**

So many of my husband's songs have stood the test of time, but this is one I've always loved. I first heard this when I was in my late teens or early twenties on some FM radio station, long before I knew Neil. And I just played it and played it; it's so tender and it still evokes the same feeling that it did originally. It's so wistful and I'm a real lyrics and vocals person, so...

THE MOST POIGNANT SONG EVER



HURT 2002 **Johnny Cash**

I cried when I first heard this record. I'd bought the CD and was driving in my car and I called my husband when I started playing it and said, "I can't believe this record – I know it's his last." It's just so intense; it's too much. It's terribly, unbearably sad because it's so obvious it's his final work. His pain... my God, I get goosebumps just talking about it now. It blew my mind.

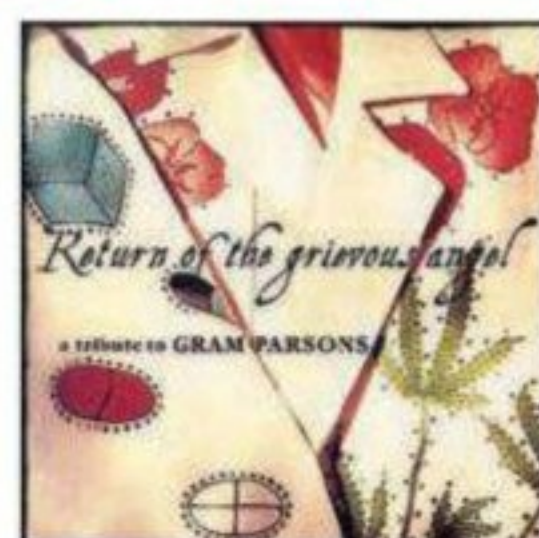
A SONG THAT REVEALS "THE OTHER" JANIS



A WOMAN LEFT LONELY 1971 **Janis Joplin**

Cheap Thrills was the big record, when everybody was introduced to Janis, but *Pearl* is a real gem. My friend Spooner Oldham was one of the co-songwriters of this, which was recorded the day before she died. It's a song that, as you got to know her – even from a distance – became like a signature song. She had her issues with drugs and I think she was lonely.

THE SONG THAT INTRODUCED ME TO GRAM PARSONS



SHE 1999 **Chrissie Hynde/Emmylou Harris**

I didn't know about Gram Parsons until the last decade, which is bizarre. Our studio manager turned me onto this Gram tribute album, *Return Of The Grievous Angel*, and "She" is a beautiful song. I'd have to listen to the original to be able to compare them. Like "Hickory Wind" from the same record; I'm married to the Gillian Welch/Dave Rawlings version.

THE SONG THAT WILL ALWAYS MAKE ME CRY



MAGNOLIA 1972 **JJ Cale**

This is off *Naturally* and is a sweet, super-soft song with a lot of space in it, and it's particularly tender. He almost sings it in a whisper and really draws you in. It's a love song from a woman's point of view and this is one cover I'm still flirting with the idea of recording – it's probably a bit less well-known. I would love for people to hear it, because I think it's an absolutely incredible song.



BEN MARSHALL MEETS...

Mark Stewart

The Pop Group's frontman reveals his latest radical plans, en route to the barricades with Bobby Gillespie!

What do you make of the general strike that is happening today (November 30)?

I'm just about to go to it. I don't know if it's a picket line I'm joining 'cos I've just come in from Spain, but me and Bobby G from the Primals and Doug (Hart, ex-Jesus And Mary Chain bassist, now a video and film director) are going to this march that'll be weaving its way through London.

Can I tell you a joke? There's a banker, a Tory MP, a *Daily Mail* reader and a teacher sitting in front of a bowl of 10 biscuits. The banker scoffs nine of them and the Tory MP turns around to the *Daily Mail* reader and says, 'That teacher's trying to nick your fucking biscuit.'

That's not funny. One of the things I'm reading about is nation states, and how they've always been a bit of an illusion. How really, going way back, it's been corporations and money that have controlled what's going on. There are certain kinds of power groups who do seem to be above the law, above taxation. 'Cos they're the ones running the stuff. And they get away with it 'cos of the general zombification of society.

What do you mean by that?

Well, the more distractions there are, the easier we are to control. It's quite difficult to explain all this in music magazines, and also if I go on about it, it makes me look a bit of a wanker. I'm not a kind of Billy Bragg; if I read people making big, general political statements, I just think, 'Fuck off.'

Nonetheless, if you could just explain a little more?

Well, I do see us as being this zombie worker-bee force. They seem to have convinced us that we need to get Greek pensioners to pay for American bankers' mistakes. By the way, I don't even believe in the debt crisis, as no-one has ever been able to tell me who, exactly, this money is actually owed to. It's bullshit.

Let's talk about the music. There are a lot of people helping out on your new solo record: Eve



"I'm not a kind of Billy Bragg; if I read people making big, general political statements, I just think, 'Fuck off.'"

Libertine, Lee 'Scratch' Perry, Kenneth Anger, Keith Levene. Were you trying to create some sort of supergroup?

Not at all. I was hanging out with them, and I thought that they could become kind of actors in radio plays. So instead of sampling them I would use them, their vibe.

Is Kenneth Anger as mad as he's cracked up to be?

Kenneth studied with Jean Cocteau and Jean Genet. He specialises in juxtaposition, and he came to it by accident. He had some footage of a Jehovah's Witness coming to his parents' door and he cut it into a biker film (*Scorpio Rising*) he was making. People considered that to be very controversial, but Kenneth is a prankster. He's still got his quiff; he's still doing his art. I try and do what he does with my music. Put stuff that doesn't apparently belong together.

It reminds me a bit of how bands used to inspire one another in the late '70s and early '80s...

Yeah, and that's what I really miss about those post-punk days. It's the way we all used to share bills, people would go and see one band and get to see some completely different music thanks to the other bands on the bill. Back then you'd get into something because of something else. We did stuff with Joy Division or Gang Of Four or Linton Kwesi Johnson. So the record was, in a way, going back to that. Also, it's a way in which some of the bigger people, like Massive (Attack) and the Primals are trying to help me, get me closer to the mainstream. It's nice to realise we should stick together rather than compete against each other. It makes for a nice atmosphere.

It's probably that attitude that made things like Rock Against Racism possible...

Yeah, being in a band for me is not

just about music, it's a social thing; getting to be with your mates, not working in an office with people you probably don't have much in common with. And you're right, a lot of the bills that helped make Rock Against Racism so exciting started with friendships between all these madly different bands. That spirit is coming back, or maybe it never went away. Now we do stuff with Global Resistance.

Were you one of those people who really believed in the ideals of punk rock?

Yes, completely! My problem was I totally believed in punk. I believed in whatever this idea was. And you know what? I still kind of believe in it. We came to London because of punk and we practised those ideas. We weren't gonna tug our forelocks or work for any fucker. Punk politicised me. Punk let me look behind the mirror. And you know what, more and more people are looking behind the mirror, more and more people are becoming politicised. There's people in the American Midwest who have seen their sons die, and they see behind the mirror.

In a strange way, you sound really upbeat, really optimistic. Are you?

Yes, I am very optimistic. I have chosen with this record to do something that engages with life as I see it. I don't wanna do vanity publishing. When I was with The Pop Group we had this idea about being an explosion at the heart of the commodities. We were gonna do the telly, we were gonna do every interview, we were gonna put ourselves about. And that's what I wanna do now.

What's the most expensive thing you bought this year?

Well, I bought a thing of Beach Boys outtakes the other day and that cost about 18 quid. And I thought, 'Cor, that's a bit decadent.'

If you could have someone killed, or kill them yourself who would it be?

You. And your dad.

UNSUNG HEROES

Omar Souleyman

The Middle Eastern radical who consorts with Björk... 700 releases into his career!

BACKSTAGE AT XOYO, a club in east London, Omar Souleyman sits impassively, eyes sheltered behind his ever present dark sunglasses. His iconic red and white keffiyeh absent in favour of a blue sports beanie, there is little that outwardly suggests Souleyman, a moustachioed fortysomething Syrian standing little over five feet tall, has become something of a world music sensation.

Onstage, though, with headwear restored, Souleyman looks like a giant. He strides the stage, preacher-like, singing romantic Arabic folk poetry, clapping to the rhythm or commanding the crowd. The music is an urgent, raw fusion of folk tradition and modern equipment, Souleyman's bandmates stood at hulking keyboards that spit out rapid-fire beats, or playing droning, raga-like Kurdish and Turkish melodies on electric saz and buzuq.

It shouldn't necessarily work, but it does, and since 2007 – when *Highway To Hassake*, his first CD issue of his music, made it to the West courtesy of Seattle's Sublime Frequencies label – Souleyman's itinerary has grown exponentially. To Glastonbury and WOMAD – but also to last year's All Tomorrow's Parties, or to London's fashionable Shoreditch. The way Western audiences have taken to him, he admits, has been a surprise. "For a foreigner to listen to an Arabic singer, that is quite something," he says, through an interpreter.

Born in the village of Tel Tamer in rural northern Syria, close to the Iraq border, Omar started singing professionally at the age of 27. "Dabke is a style of music you find in all Arab countries," he explains. "It's traditional music, for dancing, linked, intrinsically, to happiness, to laughter and fun."

Since 1996, he has played with Kurdish keyboardist Rizan Sa'id, during which time they've chalked up over 700 live and studio recordings, for sale at cassette kiosks across Syria. It was at one of these kiosks in the late '90s that Mark Gergis, a Californian musician and Sublime Frequencies affiliate, first heard Souleyman's music. "I was searching for rawer forms of Middle Eastern dabke music at the time, and Omar's sound really struck me. I bought as many cassettes as I could, and continued to visit the country over the next

decade, always buying his latest issues. His sound reflects the sounds of the local region – Syrian, Kurdish, Assyrian, Iraqi. Many of the tribal ways of life still exist in that region of Syria and it is perceived as its own thing, far removed from Damascene or Aleppan Syrian culture. In ways, it's more Iraqi than Syrian."

In 2006, following a conversation with Sublime Frequencies' Alan Bishop (formerly of cult heroes Sun City Girls), Gergis visited Syria and tracked down a contact number for Souleyman. They arranged to meet in Hassake, where Gergis befriended the singer, and brokered the deal to release his music in the West. He also got a taste of the man's local standing. "He's a regional Syrian working-class celebrity. When he travels, all the workers and officials at the Damascus airport know who he is



Souleyman the collaborator: "If they are not famous, I do not want to work with them..."

WHY I LOVE...

Omar Souleyman



"Omar has an indescribable presence. At the first show for a Western audience

in 2009, he flawlessly adapted to his new surroundings, flaunting his own style of charisma."

Alan Bishop, Sun City Girls

and offer him VIP privileges."

The week we speak, violence rages in Syria, as the military moves to crush pro-democracy protestors. *Uncut* has been asked to avoid the topic of politics,

although Souleyman notes, pointedly, while referring to his home region of Hassake, that there is "agriculture, petrol... but the petrol is for the government, not for the people. So we are not well-off."

Lyrical, Souleyman's music is firmly apolitical. Writing in collaboration with local poets, the likes of "Kaset Hanzal" ("Drinking From The Glass Of Bitterness") and "Kell Il Banat Inkhatban" ("All The Girls Are Engaged") deal with matters of the heart – as Souleyman has it, "life, sadness, love and jealousy". The best known of his songs, at least in the West,

remains "Leh Jani", a 1998 composition Gergis has revived for his new imprint, Sham Palace.

Souleyman seems bemused at the suggestion he might experiment with his sound, but explains how the march of technology has changed his modus operandi. Cassettes are no longer the sole medium: today, they record directly to a laptop and distribute USB keys for drivers to plug into their cars. Meanwhile, fame has opened up fresh opportunities. Last year, Björk's people commissioned him to remix three songs off *Biophilia*. "I had not heard of her before, but she is very good," he says.

And, *Uncut* ventures, would Omar like to do more remixes? "With Björk?" he wonders.

Well, with anyone.

He mutters something to the interpreter, who translates with a smile. "He says, 'If they are not famous, I do not want to work with them.'" And behind those dark shades, Omar Souleyman's eyes twinkle, just a little. *Louis Pattison*

» HOW TO BUY... Omar Souleyman



HIGHWAY TO HASSAKE

SUBLIME FREQUENCIES (2007)

★★★★

The first Western compilation of Omar's music, collecting material recorded and released between 1994 and 2006, including "Leh Jani" and the near-10-minute "Atabat".



JAZEERA NIGHTS

SUBLIME FREQUENCIES (2010)

★★★★

Some more heartfelt fare from the Souleyman back catalogue, including the really-quite-frightening track "Hafer Gabrak Bidi" ("I Will Dig Your Grave With My Hands").



LEH JANI

SHAM PALACE (2011)

★★★★

No edits here: this reissue of a 1998 tape collects two scorching 15-minute live versions of Souleyman's signature tune, and more treats besides.

John Mulvey's WILD MERCURY SOUND



Uncut's monthly trip to music's outer limits.
This month: The Necks



The Necks: (l-r) Tony Buck, Lloyd Swanton and Chris Abrahams

I'M INCREASINGLY conscious that one of the main criteria for inclusion in this column appears to be a penchant for very long tracks. When writing about **The Necks**, a questing trio from Australia, it is especially easy to come up with a timetable rather than a review. A typical Necks album tends to consist of one subtly evolving improvisation, played out in a demarcated zone between jazz, minimalism and rock, that lasts roughly an hour. Piano, drums and double bass manoeuvre around each other, engaged in a long, intuitive game. Occasionally, the sound is augmented by extra percussion, a guitar, a discreet fizz of electronics. More often, The Necks' simple and engrossing pieces are punctuated with a fearless use of silence. As soundtracks, they're perfect for thoughtful, slightly uneasy rides on near-deserted public transport late at night.

Their latest album, however, is

a little different. By normal Necks standards, *Mindset* is a masterpiece of brevity. Instead of containing the usual solitary epic, there are two 21-minute pieces – "Rum Jungle" and "Daylights" – designed to sit on either side of an LP: quaintly, this is their first actual vinyl record in a 25-year career.

Plenty of The Necks' previous albums, like the outstanding *Aether* (2001) and *Mosquito/See Through* (2004), have a spacious calm that verges on the sacred, or at least the usefully meditative. *Mindset*, though, begins at a clip, with "Rum Jungle" immediately locking into a claustrophobic and busy groove that emphasises the trio's unusually urgent mood.

In contrast with *Silverwater*, The Necks' last release from 2009, there are no radical shifts or phases in "Rum Jungle". Rather, it has a constant, looming momentum, propelled by the drummer Tony Buck's frantic train rhythms and the rolling epiphanies provided by Chris Abrahams on piano. The

Necks' aesthetic always seems very far removed from the psychedelic or cosmic; there's a measure and rigour to their music, even though it's all reportedly improvised from scratch. Nevertheless, when Abrahams starts firing out Alice Coltrane-like flurries, the impact is just as transporting.

"Daylights" – Side Two, I guess – initially seems to have more air and stealth than "Rum Jungle"; a return to the stately and familiar territory that has made the band something of a live phenomenon these past few years. A third of the way in, though, Abrahams' diffident piano and the glassy electronic ambience is given new thrust by the arrival of a still-hyperactive Buck. From here, "Daylights"

goes into a kind of edgy overdrive, accumulating density as it goes, and somewhat suggesting how an early '70s Miles Davis band – minus Miles Davis – might sound if they reconvened to record for the Warp label.

Warp artists, of course, have been near to this musical space themselves; not least Tortoise, whose cerebral fusion of jazz with electronica, Krautrock, dub and various other avant-garde stratagems has certain affinities with The Necks. The Necks, though, sound a lot less self-conscious than the average post-rocker, with a looseness and feel that probably stems from a jazz background rather than one in indie or hardcore bands. They have the power to make it up as they go along, and embark on trajectories that feel organic, unforced and free – even when you know the trio must always have an eye on that most restrictive of instruments, the clock.

THE UNCUT PLAYLIST

1 Howlin Rain The Russian Wilds

AMERICAN

After years of Rick Rubin-sponsored hothousing, the psych vets return with blues jams, James Gang covers and the odd salsa break. Black Crowes fans may approve.

2 Palace Music Viva Last Blues DOMINO

A hefty reissue programme of Will Oldham's early work is due next month, including this fractured '95 classic.

3 Eyvind Kang The Narrow Garden

KRANKY

A grandly exotic imaginary soundtrack from US avant-rock's violinist-for-hire. Part Sun City Girls, part Rodgers & Hammerstein.

4 Hans Chew Live At The Earl

NOISETRADE.COM/HANSCHEW

Roistering free download EP from New York pianist Chew and his band, coming on like a revitalised Leon Russell.

5 Michael Chapman The Resurrection And Revenge Of The Clayton Peacock

BLAST FIRST PETITE

The venerable folkie reinvents himself, at 70, as a fearless guitar experimentalist under the aegis of Thurston Moore.

6 Mikal Cronin Tide GONER

Super-rare 7" from 2011's new garage hero, carrying on where his Mikal Cronin debut LP left off.

7 Suzanne Ciani Lixiviation FINDERS KEEPERS

Archive wonders from an American-Italian synth pioneer; who knew old Atari advert soundtracks could sound so otherworldly?

8 Hot Knives Hot Knives

GROWNUPWRONG

A lost mid-'70s folk-rock/power-pop marvel, featuring a couple of Flamin' Groovies, finally earns a release.



9 Lambchop Mr M CITY SLANG

Kurt Wagner responds to the death of Vic Chesnutt intimately, idiosyncratically, and with some very lush strings.

10 Dayone/Early One Multiply/Earth

DUPPY GUN PRODUCTIONS

Cameron Stallones goes to JA and sends his freakish psych tumbling into the dancehall.

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

HUBERT SUMLIN

Trailblazing blues guitarist, most famously with Howlin' Wolf (1931–2011)

Captain Beefheart wasn't much given to publicly praising other musicians, but there were a few exceptions. Mighty blues singer Howlin' Wolf was one of those he openly adored, as was Wolf's guitar player, Hubert Sumlin. "He just stands there like the Statue Of Liberty," marvelled the Captain, "making you want to look up her dress the whole time to see how he's doing it."

Sumlin served as Howlin' Wolf's guitarist for 22 years from 1954, when he was summoned to Chicago by the man he'd first met as an awestruck teenager in an Arkansas club. His unpredictable phrasing and terse riffs proved the perfect foil for Wolf's bone-quaking voice, to the point where the two men were inseparable. "Hubert was Wolf and Wolf was Hubert," Sumlin once offered. "He wouldn't go nowhere without me and I wouldn't go nowhere without him." It all made for a fractious relationship, both protagonists often squaring up to each other during disagreements. But it also produced some of the greatest blues recordings of all time: "Smokestack Lightning", "Spoonful", "Killing Floor", "Back Door Man" and more. Sumlin's influence on the '60s school of British guitarists was immeasurable. Eric Clapton, Keith



Hubert Sumlin: idolised by Hendrix, Page and Clapton

Richards and Jimmy Page were among those who idolised Sumlin, the latter in particular struck by his unwavering ability to "always play the right thing at the right time". Jimi Hendrix was inspired to cover "Killing Floor" and Cream did "Spoonful", while others who reworked the Wolf-Sumlin songbook included The Doors, The Yardbirds and Stevie Ray Vaughan.

In 1956, much to the chagrin of Wolf, Sumlin briefly left to join Muddy Waters, who offered

a bigger purse. He continued to perform with Wolf's band after the great man's death in 1976, and enjoyed something of a renaissance in recent years when all manner of rock royalty queued up to play on his solo albums. 2005's *About Them Shoes* featured contributions from Richards, Clapton, Levon Helm and David Johansen. Jagger and Richards' final gesture was to pay for Sumlin's funeral. "He was an inspiration to us all," said Jagger.

DICK SIMS

Keyboard player and Clapton's Tulsa collaborator (1951–2011)

Keyboard player Dick Sims' first claim to fame was an appearance on the final *Ed Sullivan Show* in 1971, where he performed with Phil Driscoll. He went on to provide Hammond licks on Bob Seger's *Back In '72* and Freddie King's *Burglar* before landing the job that really made his reputation. In 1974 he was recruited by Eric Clapton for *461 Ocean Boulevard*, after which he became an integral part of the Tulsa sound that Clapton used into the '80s, alongside fellow Okies Carl Radle (bass) and drummer Jamie Oldaker. Among the hits he played on were "I Shot The Sheriff", "Cocaine" and "Wonderful Tonight". Sims quit music for 10 years post-Clapton, returning with solo LP *Within Arm's Reach* in 2008.

DAN 'BEE' SPEARS

US country bassist (1949–2011)

Nashville bassist 'Bee' Spears was a backbone of Willie Nelson's band

for over four decades, beginning as a 19-year-old in 1968. Spears appeared on the bulk of Nelson's greatest recordings, including 1975's outlaw classic *Red Headed Stranger* and 1978's *Stardust*, a nimble covers set of pop standards. Both albums showed Spears to be a highly versatile musician. He even starred alongside Nelson in the 1980 film *Honeysuckle Rose*. His career wasn't wholly consigned to his work with Nelson, though. In 1978, as part of a backing band that included Albert Lee and David Briggs, Spears played on Guy Clark's eponymous third LP. He also co-wrote "Pastels & Harmony", covered by Waylon Jennings and wife Jessi Colter in 1981, and provided bass for Johnny Cash, Leon Russell, Jerry Jeff Walker and The Highwaymen.

MICHAEL GARRICK

British jazz pianist, composer and teacher (1933–2011)

Middlesex-born pianist and composer Michael Garrick was once described as "the British Duke Ellington". A key figure of the modern jazz scene, Garrick formed

his first quartet while studying at University College London in the late '50s. His first major undertaking was as musical director of the Poetry & Jazz In Concert roadshow in 1961, improvising piano while the likes of Laurie Lee, Spike Milligan and Adrian Mitchell read aloud. Between 1965 and '69 he recorded with the Don Rendell-Ian Carr Quintet, issuing landmark LPs *Dusk Fire* and *Phase III*. The following two decades saw him emerge as a leading educator, teaching jazz at the Royal Academy and Trinity College Of Music. In recent years he was championed by DJ Gilles Peterson.

MOOGY KLINGMAN

Keyboard player and much-covered songwriter (1950–2011)

New York teenager Mark 'Moogy' Klingman had already jammed with Jimi Hendrix and Randy California by the time he first met Todd Rundgren outside the Café Au Go Go in Greenwich Village in 1968. The keyboardist and songwriter became a founder member of Rundgren's Utopia,

drafting in the nucleus of his own band, Moogy & The Rhythm Kings. Alongside his numerous albums with Rundgren, Klingman was largely known for co-writing Bette Midler's 1973 hit "(You Got To Have) Friends" and for both playing on and producing "Buckets Of Rain", the duet Midler cut with Bob Dylan three years later. His own songs, meanwhile, were covered by Carly Simon, Thelma Houston, Eric Clapton and Johnny Winter. Most recently he'd been playing the New York club circuit with his band, The Peaceniks.

DON DEVITO

A&R and Dylan producer (1939–2011)

A chance meeting with Johnny Cash in Arkansas provided the impetus for guitarist Don DeVito to take up a job with Cash's CBS label in 1967, where he began training as an executive. By the early '70s he was a bigwig in New York's A&R department. His first major coup was helping secure Bob Dylan's return to Columbia from Asylum in 1975, upon which DeVito produced *Blood On The Tracks* and *Desire*. The fruitful association with Dylan

also yielded 1978's *Street Legal* and the live albums *Hard Rain*, from the Rolling Thunder Revue tour, and *At Budokan*. DeVito's other charges included Bruce Springsteen, Billy Joel, James Taylor, Aerosmith and Blue Öyster Cult. In 1989 he pocketed a Grammy for his producer's role on *Folkways – A Vision Shared: A Tribute to Woody Guthrie And Lead Belly*.

BARBARA ORBISON

Manager, widow and guardian of Roy's legacy (1950-2011)

German-born Barbara Jakobs was only 18 when she first met Roy Orbison backstage during a UK tour in July 1968. They soon became a couple, marrying in Tennessee the following year and raising two sons. The '80s found Barbara taking active control of her husband's professional life, skilfully managing his career revival and serving as Executive Producer on 1988's starry *Roy Orbison And Friends: A Black And White Night*, a TV special and live album that saw the Big O joined by famous admirers like Springsteen, Tom Waits, Jackson Browne and Elvis Costello. After Roy Orbison died later that year, she presided over his business affairs and did much to keep his flame burning, including the 1992 release of *King Of Hearts*, a posthumous set of recordings co-compiled with Jeff Lynne.

RONALD 'ROSS' MACMANUS

Composer, singer and father of Elvis Costello (1927-2011)

One of the more curious ideas of recent years was 1997's *Elvis' Dad Sings Elvis*, an album of Presley covers rendered by Elvis Costello's father, Ross MacManus. MacManus played on his son's *Out Of Our Idiot* and *Mighty Like A Rose*, and covered his songs in concert. He began as trumpeter on the Liverpool jazz scene of the early '50s, though by 1955 he'd secured a place with the Joe Loss Orchestra. There were also some sporadic solo recordings (including a 1970 cover of The Beatles' "The Long And Winding Road", billed as Day Costello), but he became best known in his own right for creating the jingle for R White's Lemonade, a hugely popular TV ad of the '70s.

KEEF HARTLEY

Drummer and jazz-rock bandleader (1944-2011)

It was an unfortunate piece of scheduling that resulted in the Keef Hartley Band going onstage

directly after Santana at Woodstock in 1969 – the crowd, already spent after the ecstasies of the previous set, largely failed to respond to the British outfit's live US debut. That year's studio LP *Halfbreed* was the first of five jazz-rock odysseys the band recorded over the next three years, after which Preston-born Hartley released the solo *Lancashire Hustler* (1973) and one album with Dog Soldier in '75. The drummer's first break came when he joined Rory Storm And The Hurricanes in the immediate wake of Ringo Starr, who'd just left for The Beatles. He then moved on to The Artwoods and John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, on whose *Crusade* and *Diary Of A Band* Hartley can be heard.

ALAN STYLES

Roadie and Pink Floyd collaborator (1936-2011)

Roadie Alan Styles, who has died after being treated for pneumonia, secured his place in rock lore when his employers Pink Floyd immortalised him on 1970's *Atom Heart Mother*. Three-part instrumental "Alan's Psychedelic Breakfast" consists of the band providing the music while Styles mutters reminiscences of some of his favourite breakfasts over the years, accompanied by the sound



Fusion star Keef Hartley

of a whistling kettle, snapping bacon and the popping of cereal. He can be heard intoning "macrobiotic stuff" and "marmalade, I like marmalade", among other things. By the end he's washed up and left the kitchen, leaving only the gentle drip of the sink tap. Styles also appeared on the rear sleeve of the previous year's *Ummagumma* and later joined Nick Mason on "Merry Xmas Song", aka "Here Comes Santa".

LOREN JANSCH

Folk singer, wife and manager of Bert (1963-2011)

In the mid-'80s folk legend Bert Jansch featured on two albums by singer Loren Auerbach, framing her brittle vocals in suitably delicate acoustic settings. *After A Long Night*

and *Playing The Game* were both released on Auerbach's own Christabel label, the latter mostly written by Jansch and Richard Newman, though the title track was co-credited to Loren. Auerbach quit her music career shortly after to study at university, finally reuniting with Jansch on the Isle of Arran, when he was recording 1998's *Toy Balloon*. She became his third wife a year later, and subsequently his manager. Loren regularly appeared onstage at Bert's solo performances and also sang "My Donald" on *Crimson Moon* (2000) and "The Quiet Joys Of Brotherhood" on *Edge Of A Dream* (2002). She died after suffering from cancer just two months after Bert succumbed to the same disease.

ROB HUGHES

DOBIE GRAY

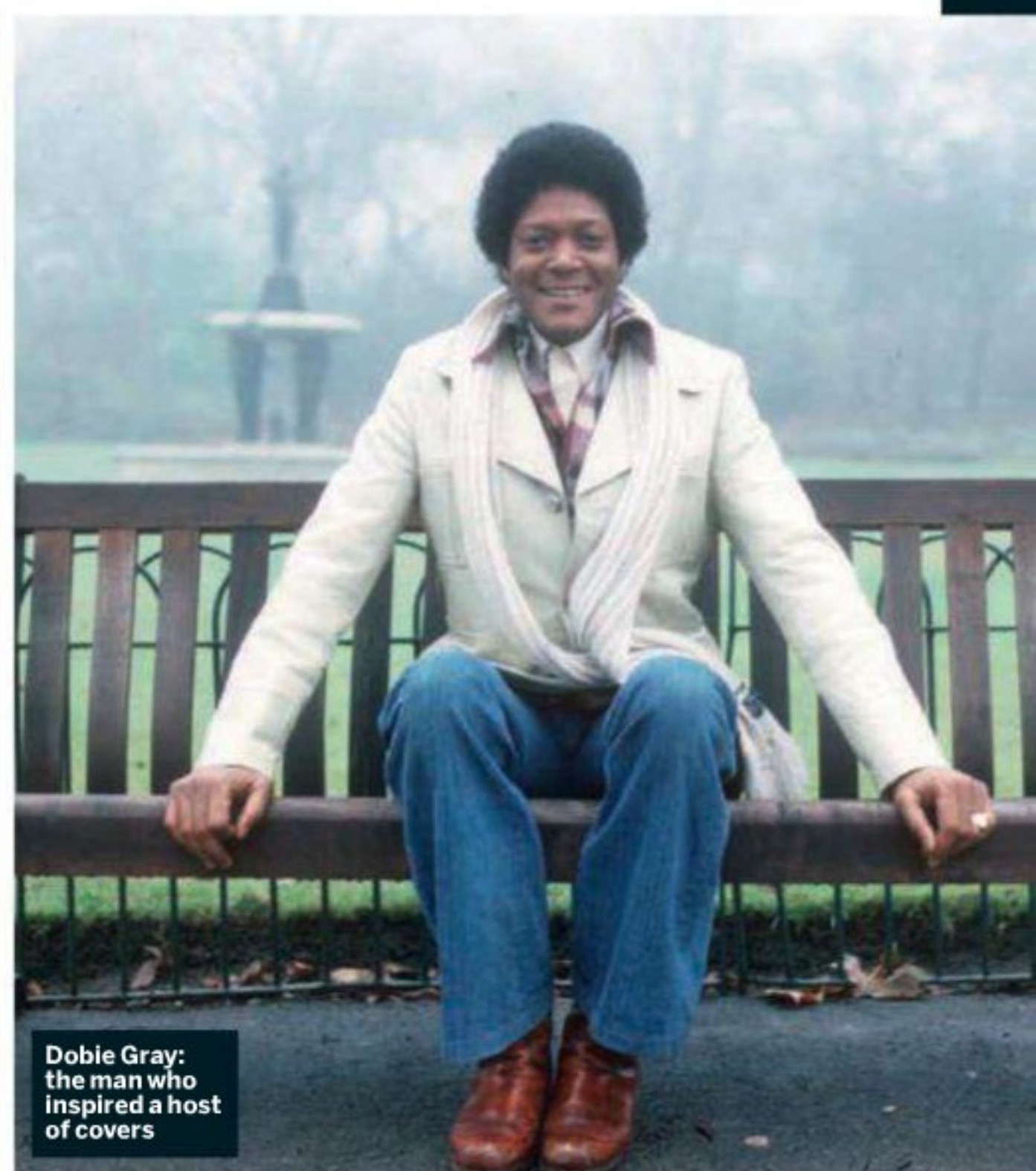
Soul and country singer, songwriter and performer (1940-2011)

Texan soul singer Dobie Gray wrote songs for Ray Charles, George Jones, Don Williams and Julio Iglesias, though he'll forever be remembered for "Drift Away", his 1973 hit that shifted over a million copies and inspired covers by everyone from Roy Orbison to Rod Stewart. Its success came at a crucial time in his life. Contractual and management problems had stalled his career and, recently signed to MCA, Gray needed to leave his mark.

His other great defining moment had arrived in February 1965, when his sharp rendition of Billy Page's "The 'In' Crowd" made the US Top 20 and No 25 in the UK, inspiring versions by the likes of the Ramsey Lewis Trio, Petula Clark, The Mamas And The Papas and Bryan Ferry.

Gray's musical education began at an early age, when he sang in the gospel choir at a Texas Baptist church. By the early '60s he'd moved to LA, scoring his first local hit with 1963's "Look At Me". A parallel career as a theatre actor proved a useful source of income from the late '60s.

In 1978 he quit the West Coast for Nashville, where he wrote hits for others in the shape of "Got My Heart Set On You", "Come Home To Me" and "If I Ever Needed You". Gray secured a solo deal with Capitol Records in the '80s, his last country hit being "That's One To Grow On", released in 1986.



Dobie Gray: the man who inspired a host of covers

AN AUDIENCE WITH...

JOAN BAEZ

Inventing hip hop, dating Steve Jobs and revealing why Dylan doesn't need to attend demos – the folk legend answers your burning questions...

THERE'S A MISCHIEVOUS – and largely inaccurate – misconception of Joan Baez, one that portrays her as a humourless, politically naive Earth Mother. It's made her the butt of hippy baiting broadcasters on Fox News; she was the subject of a *National Lampoon* parody; and has been parodied on *Saturday Night Live* in a recurring spoof telethon called "Make Joan Baez Laugh".

"Oh man, I laughed my head off when I saw that thing," says Baez. "It took decades for people to realise that I had a sense of humour. I think part of that perceived seriousness was down to my terrible stage fright. But, not only did I get over all that, I began to really enjoy being silly."

Anyone who sees Baez on tour might be surprised at quite how silly this youthful 71-year-old can be. At gigs you'll hear dirty jokes, anecdotes and even an alarmingly accurate impersonation of her old beau, Bob Dylan, as she races through five decades of music.

"It's a little terrifying when you realise that you've been doing this

★ STAR QUESTION ★



I recently bought an obscure documentary by David Hoffman of your 1972 concert for the prisoners at Sing-Sing with BB King. What do you remember from this extraordinary show?

Natalie Merchant

First thing that comes to mind is how the prisoners seemed to be divided up – whites, blacks and Chicanos. So [Joan's sister] Mimi and I figured out we needed to do some country things, then some songs from the black churches that were part of the Civil Rights movement, and then songs in Spanish. I remember leaving the jail and seeing these arms coming out of the bars on the second floor. It was so moving, so sad. I also played Cook County Correctional Center in Chicago, a terrible place, where I ended up on the basketball court, boiling hot sun, no microphone, singing my heart out, until the warden virtually dragged me away!

for 52 years," she says. "There are people who only know about one area of my career – some might only know the early folk songs, some might just know *Diamonds & Rust* or 'The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down', some might just know the latest Steve Earle [produced] album. So you gotta get them all on side."

Tell us a secret about Martin Luther King.

Karen Barrett, Tooting

Before performing at the March On Washington [1963] I spent a lot

of time with Dr King. In private, he and his lieutenants – Jesse Jackson, Andrew Young and others – were constantly ragging on each other and telling racial jokes about themselves! Totally not PC. I'd be standing there with my mouth open thinking, oh dear, we're not supposed to say these things, and they'd just be howling! I remember myself and Andy Young picking up Dr King before a conference. He gets in the car and they start telling dirty jokes. They were giggling and laughing all the way to the conference. Later I said to Andy, "I thought I was going to see how you guys organised the march?" And he said, "You just did." Ha ha! Obviously, guys like that can't afford to horse around on camera, so they save it all up for backstage. Any politician who doesn't, I sure as hell don't wanna vote for them!

In your 1987 autobiography, you quote Dylan on the difference between you: he said you thought you could change things, and he knew no-one could. Who was right?

James Perry, Glasgow

Well, I know that Bob spent some time in the Deep South before he came up to New York. That's where he started writing songs, and I'm

guessing that his experiences there encouraged a more Woody Guthrie approach. The thing with Bob is that he hated responsibility. My mistake was that I kept pushing him to be more political, but he resisted. He pretended he wrote "Masters Of War" for money! People for the next 40 years would say to me, "Is Bob going to come to the demonstration?" Bob doesn't do demonstrations. His gift to us was to write us that arsenal of the best music in my lifetime. If you look at that new Amnesty International compilation of 75 Bob Dylan songs, sung by 75 different people, I swear to God you'll know nearly all of those songs. I guess he doesn't need to be politically engaged when he's left us that extraordinary legacy.

How has your voice changed after 52 years in the business?

Justine, Bristol

Oh man, the fact is I can't sing most of these early folk ballads any more, because I've lost that high register. When I do sing them I have to take them down a few semitones. I'm much more comfortable singing songs by Steve Earle or Natalie Merchant or Ryan Adams, where I'm in a different zone. My voice is much lower these days, and I prefer it. There's also a lot less vibrato, because the ends of the vocal cords start to calcify. You do hear some people my age who shouldn't still be singing, where the vibrato is very wide and out of control and not very attractive. I try to avoid that!

Is it true that you dated Steve Jobs?

Paddy Creasy, Swansea

We met in Palo Alto – I've lived around here for 42 years now – and we were close in the late '70s and early '80s. After that we always kept in touch, we'd call or email. I'd always snag a new laptop out of him! He came by **CONTINUES OVER ►**

★ STAR QUESTION ★



I'm currently staying in an old 18th-century fisherman's cottage in Fife. It seems to be haunted by an auld women, who talks and sings to my wee boy while he's sleeping. Have you had any similar supernatural experiences?

James Yorkston

I haven't, but my mom – who James might be interested to know was born in Edinburgh – has them constantly. She's always being visited by spirits and it doesn't bother her at all. "Oh, so and so came last night and we talked." I have no reason to doubt her, because if a spirit presents itself in a certain way, you treat it appropriately and it'll be fine. Although, as the Native Americans say, you've got to be careful what spirits you invite into the house! Yeah, my mother still lives with me. She's now 98! She's got tough Scots blood. She gets a cold and she'll be over it in a couple of days, no trouble. She has a heart condition, but she's strong as an ox, and utterly beautiful.





With Pete Seeger and Bruce Springsteen at a concert for Seeger's 90th birthday at Madison Square Garden, May 3, 2009



...and with Bob Dylan at the 1963 "I have a dream..." Civil Rights March on Washington

recently, and he was clearly close to the end, and we just sat out on the porch and looked out to the mountains. And then he emailed and said he'll be up in a month. I wrote back and said, 'Great, can I start nagging you about an iPhone?' Ha ha. He died a few months after that. Two days after his memorial, someone at Apple sent me an iPhone, which was very moving. Steve had a very sweet side, even if he was as... err... erratic as he was famous for being. But he gets genius licence for that, because he was somebody who changed the world.

Your Spanish language album, *Gracias A La Vida*, sounds nothing like the rest of your canon. Do you become a different person when you perform in Spanish?

Martin Morales, San Diego

Even though my father was Mexican, and Spanish was his first language, my Spanish is very poor. But I can imitate anything! And yes, I do feel like a different person singing in Spanish, especially when I'm doing a Gipsy Kings thing. It releases some Latin element in my blood, something that I also explore when I'm dancing samba and salsa. Once or twice I'll be on tour and I think, oh no, my 25-year-old assistant is

off running, and the soundman is in the gym. Then I remember that I've just spent half an hour in my hotel room dancing to Ozomatli or the Gipsy Kings. That's the best exercise you can get!

Will we ever overcome?

Stella Casey, London

Everything has to be measured in small bits and pieces. The large picture is that the world is in pretty terrible shape. But you have to count the wins. It's important not to expect too much: progress is long and slow and arduous. Human nature is both good and evil and, unfortunately, it's easier to organise evil. It's easier to train the killer in someone than it is to educate someone, or to train someone to meditate long enough to have an intelligent reaction. I'm very heartened by the Occupy movement. Those kids [at the UC Davis campus] who responded to being pepper sprayed; they didn't raise an arm. It was amazing. And that's how this movement will make its gains. Each one of those gains is a wonderful step, and you can't ever dismiss that.

What's Steve Earle like to work with as a producer?

Ross, New Braunfels, Texas

I've always liked his music but working with Steve was

★ STAR QUESTION ★



When did you first realise you were now "Joan Baez"?

Janis Ian

Janis has this recurring fantasy that she saves me from drowning, where she heroically drags me out of the ocean. But that's another story, ha ha. I know what Janis means by that question. It took me *ages* to come to terms with the "Joan Baez" persona – you know, the dour, serious, political activist – that had been conferred upon me. Eventually I had to simultaneously resist it and embrace it. I resisted it by goofing around and being silly onstage, but at the same time I was happy to embrace being a political spokesperson when necessary. One night I was blabbing at the audience and I said, "... in my humble opinion", and then I laughed and said, "Who am I kidding? I've never had a humble opinion in my life!"

a no-brainer for me, if only because we're so similar. He's a little to the left of me, politically. I call him Mr Pinko, ha ha. But his songs are so wonderful: simple and down-to-earth and perfect. In the studio he's such a compulsive talker that I developed this hand signal to make in order to get him to shut up so we could record something! The thing is, he's really bright, he reads all the time, he's totally informed and it put me to shame. He has so much in his head that he needs to get out that I soon discovered that it's easier to just let him talk!

Is it true that you invented hip hop in 1977 with your song "Time Rag", from the *Blowin' Away* album?

Gavin Broughton, Nottingham

Ha ha! Maybe it was. I don't think anyone used the words "hip hop" at the time, but the last line is "Okay guys, this is a rap." I was good and pissed off when I wrote it. It's about this guy from *Time* magazine who came to interview me and started asking me about Dylan. Which was fine, but then he kept on and on and on with the same questions. And he got a little testy when I asked him to move on. When he left I wrote this ferocious song. "Suddenly it stopped and he started to lobby/Said: Tell me some inside stuff about Bobby/Bobby who? I

smiled and said/And the Time man's face was laced with red". Ha ha!

You spent a year growing up in Iraq – have you ever wanted to return?

Samia, Coventry

Maybe I should. My father was a physicist and he worked on a UNESCO project in Iraq in the early 1950s. Even then, there was a lot of misery. Iraqis always joked that their country was 50 years behind the other Arab states. So we saw a lot of suffering there that most Americans would never see. But yeah, it does give the contemporary news broadcasts from Iraq – and all over the Middle East – a horrible personal resonance for me. The endless brutality is something I don't think I'll ever get used to, which is good. When you hear about Syrian protesters being shoved into a car trunk and disappearing, it's just forever heartwrenching. But then you meet people who are organising inside these countries, organising at the risk of their life, but doing it non-violently. And that doesn't get in the press. But that's how change will come. ☺

★ STAR QUESTION ★



The *Daily Beast* once printed that Joan and I had had an affair. I told the reporter that this was just a rumour with no basis, even though neither of us cared. But are there any other ridiculous stories you've heard about yourself?

Judy Collins

I was in a cab in New York with some friends and my name came up in conversation. And the driver, not knowing I was in the cab, turned around and said: "Oh, Joan Baez. She's an alcoholic. I've had her in the car once. She was drunk." We were like: "Really? Tell us more!" And he went really deep into my "alcoholism" and generally what a rotten person I was. It got funnier and funnier. It reminds you that 90 per cent of the talking we do is gossip, and lots of it isn't true. You should be aware of that next time you read anything about a famous person!



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THE MAKING OF...

EVERYTHING FLOWS

by Teenage Fanclub

Norman Blake's 1990 indie masterpiece isn't just an epic slacker anthem – it's still the blueprint for the band's whole career

THE KEY PLAYERS



NORMAN BLAKE
Singer, songwriter,
guitar, co-producer



RAYMOND MCGINLEY
Guitar, singer,
co-producer



GERARD LOVE
Bass, singer,
co-producer



BRENDAN O'HARE
Original drummer,
left in 1994

THE FIRST TEENAGE FANCLUB single is one of those totemic songs which seem to drag the entire essence of a band along in its wake: the sluggish yet soulful guitars; the wistful vocals conjoined in harmony; the raggedly thrilling solo spooling over the long coda; the lyrics (*"I'll never know which way to flow"*), both worldly wise and stoner-dumb. Every inch is archetypal Teenage Fanclub. Recorded twice, first in Wet Wet Wet's Glasgow base and then, definitively, in Joy Division's old studio in Rochdale, "Everything Flows" is a great rolling tsunami of ennui, mischief and melancholy. Released in the summer of 1990, it never troubled the charts but quickly became "a signature song with a special meaning", according to its composer Norman Blake. A 22-year-old's response to the fact that he "was just wandering aimlessly through life", it became Britain's own pre-grunge slacker anthem and has since been covered by everyone from Idlewild to J Mascis. "I was thrilled when he did it," says Blake. "The Boy Hairdressers [Blake's pre-TFC band] played a show at ULU with Dinosaur, before they were Jr, and I watched them and thought, 'Long guitar solos are OK!' So when Mascis did a session version of 'Everything Flows' with Ron Asheton from The Stooges on guitar, it blew my mind. I felt like the song had come full circle." **GRAEME THOMSON**

RAYMOND MCGINLEY: I'd been in a band with Norman since 1986 called The Boy Hairdressers. We'd got a bit frustrated that things weren't happening, we wanted to just get out there and make an album. Towards the end of that band we had a few songs that ended up being on the *A Catholic Education* album. Me and Norman bought a Portastudio between us and started knocking ideas out.

GERARD LOVE: I remember Norman later saying that he'd introduced "Everything Flows" to The Boy Hairdressers and they didn't fancy it because it wasn't perhaps as obvious as some other things.

Maybe that was one reason they decided to move on.

NORMAN BLAKE: I only have the very vaguest memories of writing it. There was no sense whatsoever that it was particularly special. Myself and Raymond did a demo of it in his little flat in Wilton Street in Glasgow, with a drum machine and guitars. No vocal. It didn't have any lyrics at that point, they were added when we took it to the Fanclub. I like the fact that that song links the two bands.

MCGINLEY: He came over to mine and said, "I just got out of bed and recorded this song." He had the chords, a melody, pretty much the structure, and it sounded really good. There was a certain idiosyncrasy in the chord movements that maybe defined where we wanted to go.

BLAKE: The title was a subconscious lift from "Glass Onion" by The Beatles: "*You know the place where everything flows...*" I was listening to that a few years ago and thought, 'Oh fuck, that's where that comes from!'

MCGINLEY: We started working on that and some other ideas, and we thought, 'Let's get some people in, get some money and make an album.'

BLAKE: We'd watched so many bands going through that process of making endless demos and sending them to record labels. We thought we'd bypass that and make the record ourselves, and then see what happened.

LOVE: I bumped into Norman one night at a Dinosaur concert at Glasgow Tech. He told me he was starting a new group and did I fancy playing bass? Of course! He sent me a cassette of demos with perhaps nine songs that ended up on *A Catholic Education*. I didn't hear the strength of "Everything Flows" initially, I liked a few others better in demo form. It seemed quite sophisticated, lots of minor chords. Maybe it went over my head! It's an intriguing song for a young man to write. The chorus is like classical Eastern philosophy or something.

BRENDAN O'HARE: That vague, wondering aspect appeals to me. I remember asking Norman what it was about and he said it's what you think it is but you can take from it what you will. It's got a philosophical edge to it but it's slightly tongue in cheek.

BLAKE: I'm not entirely sure what it's about. In some ways it's about being a young guy and not really knowing what I was going to do with my life. I was just wandering aimlessly through life. Soon after writing that song we made the first record and I became a musician, and I think that's what I still do as a living!

MCGINLEY: We asked Gerry if he'd play bass and we knew Francis [MacDonald] because he'd played in The Boy Hairdressers, so we went and made an album, even though we hadn't played any shows and we'd done minimum rehearsals. The first studio was called Pet Sounds, in Glasgow, and was owned by Wet Wet Wet.

BLAKE: Raymond's neighbour had died and left him a washing machine and a fridge, so he sold **CONTINUES OVER ►**



A black and white photograph of the band The Fannies performing on a rocky shore. Three band members are in the air, jumping or running, while a fourth member is crouching on the ground in the foreground, looking towards the camera. The background shows a body of water and a city skyline under a bright sky.

“The long solo was integral to the song. In 1990 not a lot of people did that” **RAYMOND McGINLEY**

THE MAKING OF...

those to pay for the studio time! And we had this fancy microphone that we traded in for more time at Wet Wet Wet's studio.

LOVE: It was the late '80s and the fashion at the time was to record everything separately. We had four days and did everything. I found a real hidden strength in it once we'd recorded it and started playing it live.

McGINLEY: Francis couldn't commit to the band because he wanted to concentrate on his studies, he was just helping us out. So we ended up asking Brendan in, and then we kind of became a real band because he was properly available.

O'HARE: Before I joined I got given all the recorded versions from the Glasgow sessions. I was pretty enamoured with "Everything Flows" straight away. It had that great feel-good feel-bad kind of thing.

McGINLEY: We listened to what we'd done in Pet Sounds and felt some songs we hadn't quite done justice to. We thought we'd have another go at three or four of them, one of which was "Everything Flows". We'd worked out a new arrangement for the guitars and Brendan brought a different identity to it, and we felt happier with that.

O'HARE: We did a few gigs and a few songs changed from how they'd been, and "Everything Flows" was one of them.

BLAKE: We thought we could get better versions. I think we might have borrowed some cash from Raymond's mum.

McGINLEY: We went to Peter Hook's studio in Rochdale, Suite 16, which had previously been Cargo, where Joy Division worked. We knew [writer and *Membranes* singer/bassist] John Robb and he put us up in Manchester for the four days. We were sleeping in his "sauna".

O'HARE: It was an attic conversion that was meant to be a sauna, but it was actually a hut on the roof. There were four of us in sleeping bags in there and it was freezing. We were totally skint. We tended to buy a loaf of bread and Dairylea. There was a lot of camaraderie and daftness going on, and it set up the way we were as a band for a long time after.

LOVE: There was a whole dole culture we were all part of. Nobody I knew had a job or thought they could get a job, and nobody had any money. We survived on thin air, but good things could happen out of that.

When we got back to Manchester after being in the studio in Rochdale it would be 11pm and we could either get the bus to John's or, if we walked the three or four miles back, we could afford to get either cigarettes, chips or chocolate. We budgeted for about 10 quid a day spending money between us.

BLAKE: The studio was cool. We had New Order's emulator in there, which was fun. We'd play around with the big choral vocals and bass drum parts from "Blue Monday" that were programmed into it. Fortunately, that didn't make it onto "Everything Flows". This time we recorded live, although the vocal and one solo part were overdubbed. It's pretty minimal instrumentation.

McGINLEY: That long guitar coda was part of the song from the start. It wasn't like we just decided to keep playing in the studio. It was integral to the song. It felt that in 1990 not a lot of people were doing that.

LOVE: That extended guitar solo had a real confrontational aspect to it. It was the antithesis of what was happening in Glasgow at the time, which was all riffs. I got the feeling that Norman liked to challenge people, maybe it was a challenge to tell them to fuck off! We continued it for a time with things like "The Concept". Then again Raymond is a very original guitarist and I think Norman saw the strength in that, to keep it going at the end.

BLAKE: We didn't spend a huge amount of time on lyrics, a lot of the verses repeat, so maybe it started as a way to pad out songs, if I'm being honest. But then the solo became quite an important and intrinsic part of that song.

"It wasn't successful, but even younger people know the song. It seems to be our signature" NORMAN BLAKE

O'HARE: Once it was recorded we knew it was a cracker. There was a certain weight to it. It was like, "Yes, that is a beauty!"

BLAKE: The catalyst for *A Catholic Education* getting released was Stephen Pastel. I was playing bass on The Pastels' European tour and Stephen passed the tape of the album to David Barker at Paperhouse in the UK and Gerard Cosloy at Matador in New York. They picked it up and financed the pressing of the record.

GERARD COSLOY: [Co-owner of Matador] I was blown away. There were vague echoes of other things we all loved: Dinosaur Jr, The Byrds, Neil Young, but the identity was strong just the same. "Everything Flows" was a fantastic introduction. I only wished it was 10 minutes longer.

McGINLEY: At that point things seemed to happen pretty quickly. The album came out in summer 1990 and we toured all over the place, and the reaction to "Everything Flows" seemed really positive.

BLAKE: It was always going to be a special song because it was our first single. It wasn't a successful record, but even younger people who like us know that song. It seems to be our signature.

LOVE: On the first tour you just play every song you have, and then gradually you're aware that this song keeps appearing in the set and you realise it has staying power. Through the years a lot of

younger bands have played it. Velvet Crush might have been the first. Certainly *A Catholic Education* did really well in the US college circuit, and a lot of those slacker bands maybe gravitated towards that song.

O'HARE: Whenever I see them live these days I always think, 'Oooh, playing that one was good fun.' I do pine for it the odd time. It's like guys you were in the army with: I miss the trench humour and trench foot. It's hard to live up to the fact your first single is one lots of people consider your best song, but it's a testament that they've kept going and kept writing such brilliant music after coming up with such a beauty straight away. A lot of other songwriters would just have shat it and gone to work in a supermarket.

LOVE: I've got sick of every song we've ever played at some point except that one. It's an unusual series of chords. A lot of classic pop songs follow a pattern but this one doesn't.

BLAKE: It's always been part of the furniture and it's always gone down well – people still like a guitar solo, don't they?

McGINLEY: I'm sure occasionally we've dropped it from the set, but now we play it every time and we play it last, partly because it has a definite resonance for us. It forms a certain template for what we went on to do. 🎧



Teenage Fanclub in the early '90s: (l-r) Raymond McGinley, Norman Blake, Brendan O'Hare and Gerard Love

Teenage Fanclub

A (OVER)

EVERYTHING FLOWS (BLAKE)

(FROM THE LP "A CATHOLIC EDUCATION")

PAPER 003

45RPM

B (THIS)

PRIMARY EDUCATION (BLAKE)

SPEEDER (BLAKE/McGINLEY)

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FACTFILE

Written by

Norman Blake

Performers Norman

Blake (vocals, guitar),

Raymond McGinley

(guitars, vocals),

Gerard Love (bass,

vocals), Brendan

O'Hare (drums)

Produced by

Teenage Fanclub

Engineer Rex Sergeant

Recorded at Suite 16,

Rochdale

Released June 1990

Chart Position N/A

TIMELINE

July 1989 Ex-Boy

Hairdressers Norman

Blake and Raymond

McGinley recruit

Gerard Love and

Francis MacDonald

to record *A Catholic*

Education at Pet

Sounds, Glasgow

Autumn 1989

Brendan O'Hare

replaces MacDonald

as drummer. Further

sessions take place

at Suite 16, Rochdale,

including a new version

of "Everything Flows"

1990 The band sign to

Paperhouse in the UK

and Matador in the US

June 1990 "Everything

Flows" released as the

band's debut single

July 1990 Debut album

A Catholic Education

is released

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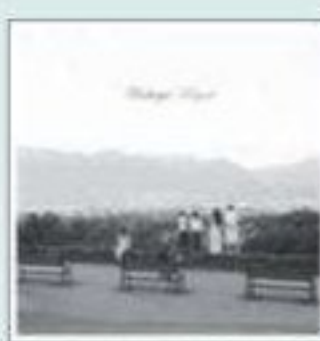
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"We're studio nerds": The Black Keys in their Easy Eye Studio, Nashville 2011 – (l-r) Dan Auerbach and Patrick Carney



KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

WORDS BY ANDY GILL PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOSHUA BLACK WILKINS

How an unassuming garage blues duo from Akron became the biggest new rock band of the decade. With a little help from Danger Mouse, two illustrious musical uncles, and the man who almost became their bassist... Robert Plant!

BLACKKEYS

The Black Keys have recorded in a bunch of different places during their 10-year career, some less salubrious than others. There was their former home base in Akron, Ohio, The Audio Eagle Nest, in drummer Patrick Carney's basement. Then there was Sentient Sound, where they recorded *Rubber Factory*—an abandoned power station, now demolished.

For last year's multiple-Grammy-winning *Brothers*, the duo decamped to Muscle Shoals Studio in Alabama, legendary site of such epochal recordings as the Stones' "Brown Sugar" and The Staple Singers' "I'll Take You There". By the time the Keys showed up, however, a lot of that old magic had disappeared—along with most of the equipment.

"There was a Hammond organ, and that's all," says singer/guitarist Dan Auerbach. "We brought all our gear from Ohio—it was like a field recording, on location. Anything that had been there when they made great records in Muscle Shoals was gone, including the treatments. It used to be called The Burlap Palace, it was covered in burlap; but all the burlap had been ripped out, it was just cinder-block walls. We sorta got screwed! That's when we realised it doesn't really matter where we record, whether it's a basement, an abandoned warehouse or a proper studio."

We're sitting round the kitchen table in Easy Eye Studio, Dan's own place on 8th Avenue South in Nashville, soon to become legendary for the recording of another epochal album, in this case The Black Keys' own *El Camino*, a landmark of propulsive, rocking rhythm'n'blues. Engineers and assistants mill about, getting drinks and planning for the day. Our drinks are served in jam-jars, which makes it appear as if we're swigging illicit moonshine, white lightnin' driven in from the Tennessee outback by good ol' boys in souped-up trucks. This seems apt, but in reality it's just water.

Easy Eye is becoming something of a hang-out for passing musicians, it seems, with people like Beck dropping by when they're in town. Only last night, apparently, Jakob Dylan was down here with a friend. "That's the cool thing about Nashville, it's very laidback," says Dan. "In places like New York

and LA, famous musicians are a bit more guarded, and when they get to Nashville they relax, go hang out a little."

One local resident who occasionally hangs out with Dan and Pat is Robert Plant, who a while ago almost became the band's bass player.

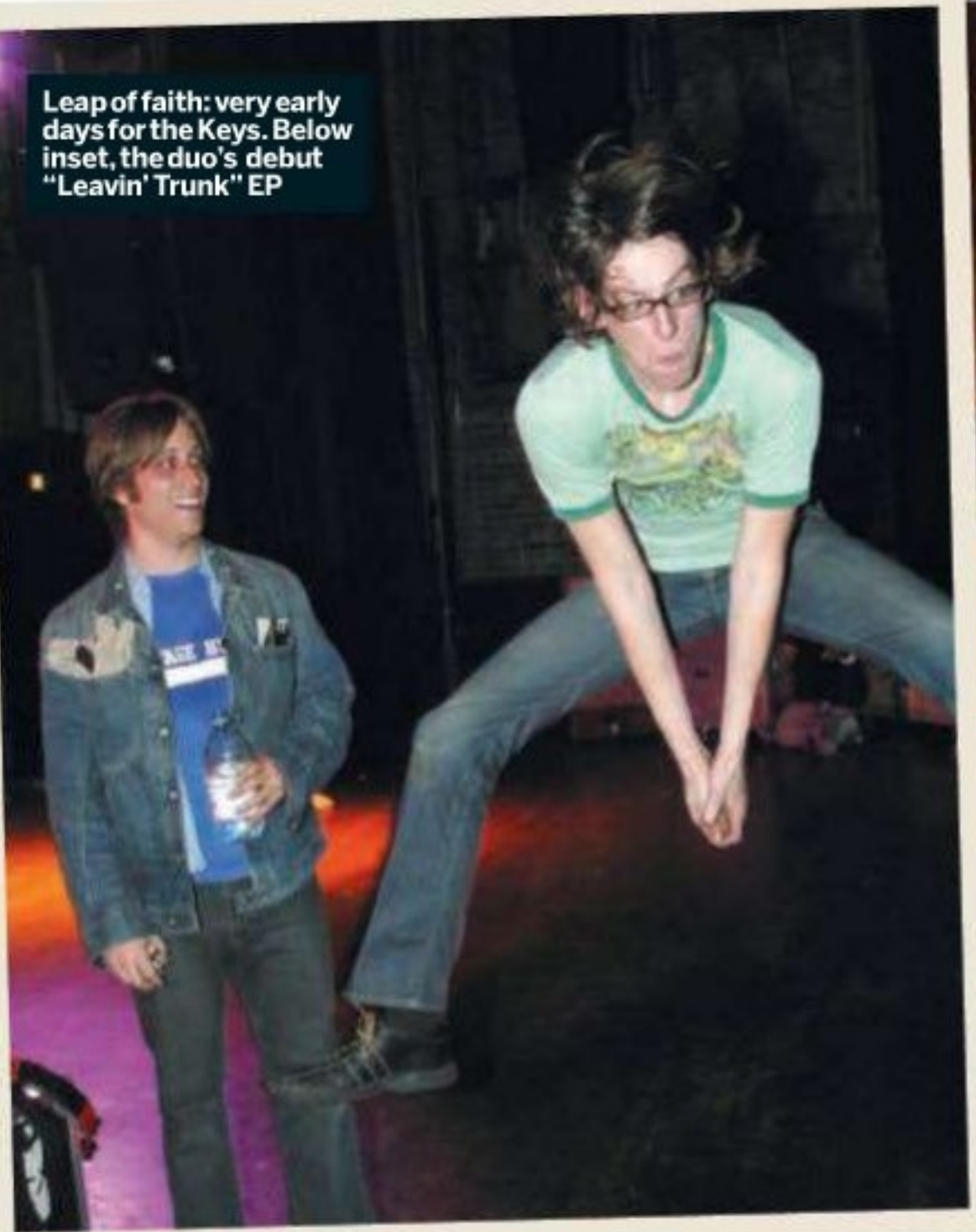
"They offered me the gig," says Plant. "I asked them what they were achieving by not having a bass—and of course, on the records they do have a lot of overdubbing, so it's less noticeable—and they said, 'Well, why don't you come and be our bass player?' I'd love to have done it, actually, just to see the look on John Paul Jones' face! Because of course, I did play 'occasional bass' on the first Led Zeppelin album."

Sadly, other commitments got in the way of this potential alliance, but the parties remain firm admirers of each other's work. "I love Led Zeppelin, and I met Robert Plant, and he's a gracious, really nice guy," says Pat. "He doesn't act like he invented fuckin' rock'n'roll. But I've met a few other musicians who

think they're God's gift to music, when really they're all borrowing from earlier music."

EASYEYE CONSISTS of three rooms, back-to-back, with a storeroom stuffed with guitars and other kit off to the side. At the far end there's the control room, with a handful of banjos and guitars hanging on the wall alongside a few lovingly embroidered biker club jackets. Instruments pile up everywhere: mellotrons, electric pianos and an Orchestron, a string-keyboard device which uses pre-recorded vinyl discs. The middle room is the studio space itself, already crowded with Dan's accumulation of old instruments, including a magnificent antique Stetson upright piano, an Optigan, countless keyboards, chimes and tympani. Finally, there's the living room, with a lounge

Leap of faith: very early days for the Keys. Below inset, the duo's debut "Leavin' Trunk" EP



The Black Keys

"leavin' trunk"
&
"she said, she said"



LEARN YOUR KEYS

Japanese psych? Hip hop? *Cloverfield*?! Here's what Dan and Pat have been up to over the years...

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The Keys' raw debut, with blues and Beatles covers ("She Said, She Said") alongside the band's own early efforts, such as "I'll Be Your Man", which seven years later became the theme tune to the HBO TV series *Hung*.

THICKFREAK-NESS 2003

PRODUCED BY PATRICK CARNEY

★★★★



The band's splendid Fat Possum debut was a tough, no-frills no-filler set recorded using Carney's patented "medium fidelity" technique. The song "Set You Free" was used in the *School Of Rock* movie.

RUBBER FACTORY 2004

PRODUCED BY THE BLACK KEYS

★★★★



Their licensing potential went into overdrive here, with tracks used in ads for American Express and Sony Ericsson, and films like *Cloverfield* and *The Go-Getter*. Who knew garage blues-rock had such mainstream appeal?

CHULAHOMA 2006

PRODUCED BY THE BLACK KEYS

★★★★



This six-track tribute to Dan Auerbach's main influence Junior Kimbrough ends with a phone message from the legendary bluesman's widow, complimenting them on their interpretations of her late husband's songs. Aaaaaw!



Live at the 100 Club, London, July 2003

area, kitchen facilities, a couple of bunk beds, about a thousand vinyl albums, and a hi-fi system with a two-inch thick solid aluminium turntable, huge speakers, and high-end amplifiers bristling with exposed valve tubes. Antique kit has started to colonise this space, too, with an old Altec solid-state console buried beneath a couple of Wurlitzer electric pianos. Someone, clearly, has an equipment habit that's hard to feed.

"I'm a bit of a studio nerd," admits Dan, "but I do know that none of the gear matters – in the end it's all about the musicians and the music. But when you get great musicians with great music, and then you get the great gear also, it's so satisfying."

The latest musician to take advantage of Dan's great gear is Dr John, recording what

"By making these records in our basement and ensuring they'd never get on the radio, we saved ourselves, just by being ignorant dummies!"
Dan Auerbach

Auerbach promises is "the best record he's done in 30 years". But the studio's real claim to fame will surely be *El Camino*, a monstrously good album that takes The Black Keys' blues and rock roots and rams them head-first into a series of irresistibly infectious pop hooks. They've come a long way from their raw 2002 debut *The Big Come Up*, but their current sound is still largely traceable to its blend of

country blues and heavy rock. Which points to the secret of the band's enduring success: where other, more hyped bands have soared and plummeted like short-lived, gaudy skyrockets, they have kept plugging away, certain that their music would eventually bring a more secure success.

The cover of *El Camino* pays homage to this past. The vehicle depicted is not, as you might think, a Chevrolet El Camino, but rather the humble minibus in which the band spent the first few years of its existence, endlessly touring around America. The title is intended in its Spanish sense of "the way": the ancient rite of rock'n'roll dues-paying as a form of pilgrimage. "It cost \$4,000, which at the time was a shitload of money," explains drummer Pat Carney over coffee in a nearby cafe. "We toured in that little mini-van for the first year and a half."

DAN AUERBACH and Pat Carney grew up a few blocks away from each other in Akron, Ohio, and were brought together by their younger brothers, who were best friends. By that time, Auerbach had dropped out of college and been playing bars and clubs solo for four or five nights a week, his repertoire drawn from old bluesmen like Son House, Fred McDowell and Furry Lewis. "I started going backwards, searching for sounds," he says. "I never listened to any Chicago stuff, I never listened to British blues. And then I found Fat Possum, and Junior Kimbrough just blew me away."

When the future Black Keys first met, however, Pat Carney knew diddley-squat about the blues. "I've always been more drawn to rock'n'roll," he says. "When we first started the band, I had never heard of Fred McDowell; but then, Dan had never heard The Stooges, or Led Zeppelin."

They did, however, share an unusual connection, in both having relatives working on the avant-garde fringes of the rock scene. Dan's first cousin, once removed, was Robert Quine, king of "skronk" guitar, who played with Lou Reed and Richard Hell & The Voidoids, while Pat's uncle was Ralph Carney, sax player for Tom Waits. "My Uncle Ralph would send me tapes of weird albums like [Can's] *Tago Mago*," says Pat. "If it was anybody but my eccentric uncle, I would have hated it, but I forced myself to get into it." Uncle Ralph's efforts paid off years later, when

MAGIC POTION 2006
PRODUCED BY THE BLACK KEYS
★★★★



Their first album of all original material, the band's Nonesuch debut features the soulful "You're The One" and Zep-tastic "Just A Little Heat". But the overall sound seemed thin and pasty by comparison with...

ATTACK & RELEASE 2008
PRODUCED BY DANGER MOUSE
★★★★



Made under the influence of Japanese and South American psych-rock, *Attack & Release* saw the Keys' roots warped by embellishments of flute, marimba, organ and Danger Mouse's psychedelic treatments.

BLAKROC 2009
PRODUCED BY DAMONDASH, DAN AUERBACH, PATRICK CARNEY, JOEL HAMILTON
★★★★



Built around bass and drums, this rock-rap crossover, pairing the Keys with artists such as Mos Def, Raekwon and RZA, has a wonderfully swampy texture, with a tough funk edge to the heavy grinds.

BROTHERS 2010
PRODUCED BY THE BLACK KEYS, MARK NEILL, DANGER MOUSE
★★★★★



Continuing to build tracks around bass and drum grooves, there's a confident swagger to the band's sound on the hugely successful *Brothers*, and a burgeoning diversity that finds them exploring mellotron and whistling.

EL CAMINO 2011
PRODUCED BY DANGER MOUSE, THE BLACK KEYS
★★★★★



With Danger Mouse now integral, *El Camino* bristles with urgent invention, subtle organ washes and threads of celeste. Inspired by garage and rockabilly, it's faster and more hook-filled than their previous work.

his nephew used a Can beat as one of his touchstone rhythms for the band's most successful album. "*Brothers* is basically variations of just two beats," he explains. "One is the Gary Glitter beat, the other is my shitty version of Can's 'Vitamin C'. 'Tighten Up' is a poorly played version of that beat."

Early on, they settled into a general division of labour, with Dan writing and singing the lyrics, the two of them writing the music, and Pat recording them on his little home studio. The division of labour extended to extra-musical duties, too. "When we were on tour, I would do all the late-night drives, and Dan would do all the daytime driving," says Pat. "We're both organised people, we both like challenges. When we first decided to be a band, the goal was for us each to make \$150 a week, and we were able to do that within four months of our first show in March 2002. And we've supported ourselves ever since."

Having secured a small-label deal for their first album *The Big Come Up*, the duo swiftly made the transfer to Fat Possum, while on their first hand-to-mouth tour in the minibus. In outspoken Fat Possum boss Matthew Johnson, they found a supportive and driven

the amp. A great player can make any of those things sound great."

For years, The Black Keys made a decent enough living, selling between 200,000 and 300,000 copies of each album, but without securing the mainstream airplay necessary to hoist them to the next level. Ironically, the breakthrough came with *Brothers*, an album considerably longer than their 11-track, 37-minute ideal, and prompted by the single success of "Tighten Up", a track they initially didn't want to include on the album. Had their natural inclinations, perhaps, not been working in their best interests?

"Well, the thing is that our natural inclinations were holding us back, but they're also what make us extra successful now," believes Dan Auerbach. "Having stuck to our guns for so long, it's only benefited us now. We would go tour England, and we'd see all these other bands headlining Reading and on the cover of *NME*, and we'd wonder, 'Why are these bands getting all this attention, and we're not?' Then two years later we'd still be touring, our crowds would be increasing steadily, and those other bands would have disappeared. By making these records in our

"We'd tour England and see all these bands headlining Reading and on the cover of *NME*, and we'd wonder, 'Why are these bands getting the attention and we're not?'" Auerbach

champion. "I love the guy, we wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for him," acknowledges Pat Carney. "But by the same token, I don't think he'd still be going if it wasn't for us. When we signed with him, I asked what his biggest-selling record was, and he said it was RL Burnside's remix album, that had a song that was on *The Sopranos*, and it had sold about 100,000 copies. We put out three records with them, and they all went above 200,000."

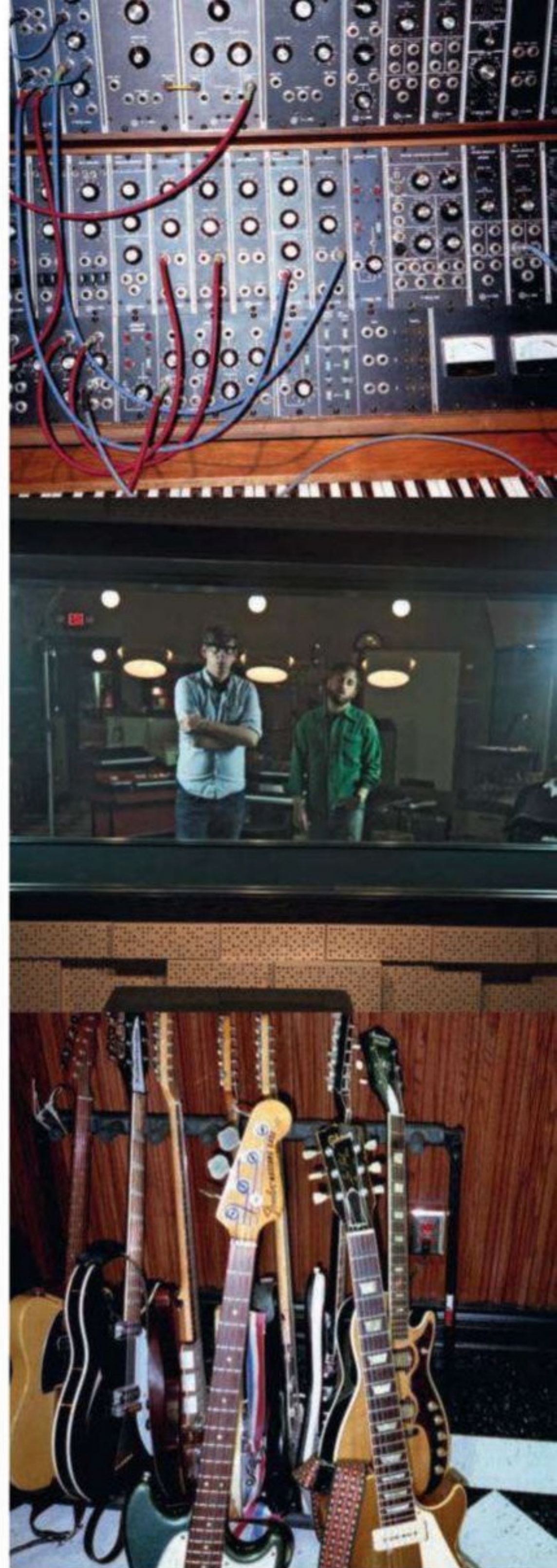
Throughout their early career, The Black Keys stuck almost religiously to what they considered the perfect length for an album: 11 tracks, about 37 minutes long. With albums like *Thickfreakness* and *Rubber Factory*, they came close to a kind of lo-fi, high-impact perfection, and have striven to retain a similar dynamic power even as their records have become more sonically "acceptable".

"We used the same kind of shit that we're using now," says Auerbach. "Little tube amps, and just whatever guitar I chose. I like a lot of '60s Japanese and American off-brands, that's what I gravitated towards. The guitar I used on the first record was a Harmony Stratotone, and I've used it on every single Black Keys record since." He hooks the guitar in question off the wall, and hands it to me. It's a primitive, chunky affair with a thick neck, made sometime in the '50s from a single solid plank stretching from headstock to bridge, like Les Paul's original prototype electric guitar, The Log. "But I'll use any guitar," says Auerbach. "It's not the guitar, and it's not

basement and ensuring there was no chance in hell they would ever be played on the radio, because sonically they just weren't up to par, we kind of saved ourselves, just by being ignorant dummies!"

"TIGHTEN UP" came about as the result of the duo's ongoing relationship with Brian 'Danger Mouse' Burton, who first started working with The Black Keys on their 2008 *Attack & Release* album, which featured a significant diversification beyond their basic guitar/drums format. Recorded at Suma Studios in Cleveland, location of Pere Ubu's great early work, it likewise featured dark emotions stirring beneath a patinated surface. Auerbach's solo album *Keep It Hid*, released early the following year, prompted similarly dark emotions in the duo's relationship. True to its title, its appearance came as a shock to Pat Carney, who had become increasingly distracted by the deterioration of his marriage. Piqued, the drummer decided to change his life, split from his wife and leave Akron for New York.

"I just tried to change my entire outlook on everything," he says. "I flipped the script, stopped harbouring any childish resentment. I was going through some personal shit and I thought, y'know what, I'm going to grow the fuck up and get out of town, see what's going on – and living in New York was the best decision I've ever made in my life. After a year I was telling Dan, 'This is awesome! You don't need to live in Akron!' Then he said he was



looking to move to Nashville. So I decided to move here, too. I just figured it would be better for us to both be in the same place."

Before the pair fetched up in Nashville, however, they got involved with hip hop entrepreneur Damon Dash on the Blakroc rock-rap crossover project. "For the first time, we started all the tracks with bass and drums," says Dan, "and we went right from making Blakroc to making *Brothers*, using the same method. So it was a huge influence on the way we made that record."

Thanks to the sudden chart profile of "Tighten Up", *Brothers* became their most successful album yet, going on to win a handful of Grammys. And having completely changed their way of working, they elected to change it again for the follow-up. Unlike before, they went into the studio without even the basic sketches for songs.

Cutting The Keys

FIVE STUDIOS THE BAND HAVE RECORDED IN...



An "ongoing relationship" with Brian 'Danger Mouse' Burton (right) in Easy Eye studios, October 2011



Muscle Shoals Sound Studio

AUDIO EAGLE RECORDING NEST, AKRON

Otherwise known as the basement of drummer Pat Carney's house in Akron, Ohio, where he applied what is jokingly referred to as "his patented recording technique called 'medium fidelity'". The basement also went under the fancy nom-de-disque Synth Etiquette Analog Sound and the more straightforward Studio 45. *The Big Come Up*, *Thickfreakness*, *Chulahoma* and *Magic Potion* were all recorded here.

SENTIENT SOUND, AKRON

For their third album, *Rubber Factory*, the duo moved Pat Carney's equipment into a disused power-plant at an Akron rubber factory (Akron is – or was – of course, the world centre of tyre manufacture). Well, at least it got them out of the house. The factory has since been demolished. Hey, the album didn't sound that bad! Sounded pretty good, as it happens.

SUMA SOUND, CLEVELAND

When they hooked up with Brian 'Danger Mouse' Burton for the first time, the three of them decamped to nearby Painesville to record *Attack & Release* at Suma Sound, site of Pere Ubu's legendary early recordings, using engineer Paul Hamann, who had done the Ubu sessions. The result was a striking increase in depth, space, tonal colour and general fidelity, though that may just have been Burton and Hamann's combined influence as much as the studio itself.

MUSCLE SHOALS, ALABAMA

The majority of *Brothers* was recorded by the duo at Muscle Shoals, once legendary cooking-pot of soul and rock classics by Aretha Franklin, the Stones, Rod Stewart, etc, but now a shadow of its former self, requiring equipment to be shipped in before it was serviceable. Still, they seemed to make it work well enough for the Grammy-winning album, though a fair amount of post-production work was apparently required: step forward, master mixer Tchad Blake!

EASYEYE SOUND STUDIO, NASHVILLE


Four tracks from *Brothers* were recorded at Dan Auerbach's new studio in Nashville, where the duo and Brian Burton were subsequently able to ease comfortably into the task of writing and recording *El Camino*. The results are the most potent realisation so far of The Black Keys aesthetic, a punchy combination of rock power and pop hooks.

"We didn't talk about the album before we went into the studio," says Dan. "We just all showed up here on the first day, started listening to records and getting inspired by stuff – rockabilly stuff, The Cramps, the Johnny Burnette Trio and bands like the Sweet, The Clash, Jonathan Richman And The Modern Lovers – all kinds of music, from all decades, but all stemming from simple, no-frills rock'n'roll. Then we'd start jamming, something would catch our ear, and we'd build on it, consciously aiming for the simplicity of the records we were listening to."

Another significant factor was the involvement from the start of Brian Burton as an equal writing and performing partner on *El Camino*. "They have a very natural way of working and they're really great musicians," he says of The Black Keys. "It was inspiring just to watch Patrick play drums, or the way Dan

sings. Out of all the people I've worked with, they're the ones I've stayed closest friends with, except maybe James [Mercer, *The Shins*]. They're a lot of fun to hang out with."

"Brian changed the way we worked quite a bit," says Pat. "If either of us is feeling musically cocky, Brian gives a good reality check, helps us work harder to find something better." The result was the band's most potent release so far, an album of muscular intent and hooky pop charm.

The success of *Brothers*, Auerbach claims, placed no extra pressure on the group. "If we'd have felt pressure, we would have made a record just like *Brothers*," he says. "But we did completely the opposite of what we had done on our most successful record. We're not smart, I told you! But we make bad decisions in the short run that turn out to be good decisions in the long term." 



‘I’m too connected to the pain of other people... It really breaks me up.’

JACKIE LEVEN 1950-2011

In his life as in his music, the Scottish singer-songwriter, who died last November, found inspiration in the raw extremes of human behaviour, which he documented with poetic soulfulness. *Uncut* pays tribute to a wild and brilliant talent

ON AUGUST 8, 2008, Jackie Leven appeared at Cabaret Voltaire, a small, subterranean club in Edinburgh’s Old Town. There were significantly less than 100 people in the audience that night, a typically low turnout, unfortunately. Leven’s music for 40 years inspired fierce devotion among a small but fanatical following, but never troubled the mainstream. His songs – about addiction, isolation, alcohol and violence – were simply too extreme and uncompromising for mass appeal.

On and off stage that night, Leven was a force of nature. We talked before the gig, as we had a few times previously, and he seemed in particularly expansive mood. He was a physically imposing man, like late-period David Hemmings with a dash of Robbie Coltrane: very tall, very round, with Byronic hair and deep, dark eyes, well oiled but ferociously articulate. Later, drinking wine straight from the bottle, he regaled the audience with scatological anecdotes before destroying them with “Single Father”, “Poortoun”, “Call Mother A Lonely Field”, songs of astonishing power and poetry. Not quite folk, not quite soul, but all heart. **CONTINUES OVER»**

WORDS BY GRAEME THOMSON
PHOTOGRAPH BY SIMON MURPHY

On the up: Doll By Doll, near London Bridge, June 1981



Three years after that Edinburgh show, on August 11, 2011, Leven returned to the same venue. The transformation in his appearance was shocking. He looked grey and had lost at least six stone. The wine had been replaced by water, and halfway through he left the stage to urgently address a “bladder problem”.

Nobody yet knew it, but Leven was already gravely ill, yet he performed as beautifully as ever, with the un-showy, soul-baring candour that touched almost everyone who ever heard him.

Three months later, he was dead, claimed by cancer on November 14, at the age of 61.

THE MUSIC OF Jackie Leven was tied umbilically to a life lived not always well or wisely, but to the full. The son of a London-Irish father and a Romany mother, he was born in Fife on June 18, 1950, and his gypsy heritage set the seal on a wayward sensibility. “I was always an outsider,” he told me in 2008. “In my teens I couldn’t go home at night because gangs were waiting for me. I remember hiding in an allotment all night in the pissing rain while these bastards were hanging around. I thought: ‘I can’t carry on like this.’”

He left home aged 16, already married and armed with a guitar that he simply “tuned to what I thought a guitar should sound like”. According to his partner Deborah Greenwood, “nobody played in Jackie’s tuning. He had no tuition, his chords were all made up.” He traversed Britain, working odd jobs, playing, fighting, drinking, burning up life. By the time future Doll By Doll guitarist Joe Shaw met him in Dorset in the early 1970s, Leven had already

left two marriages and a son behind.

“I saw him at a folk club in Bridport and you could hear a pin drop,” says Shaw. “He was in complete control of the atmosphere in the room. He had a fantastic power of personality and was an outstandingly gifted musician. His songs were so amazingly allegorical. There was something almost Blake-like going on beyond it, he kind of invented his own mythology.”

Leven was already an enthusiastic consumer of psychotropic drugs, which tended to exacerbate his extremes of personality. “He could make you feel things intensely, about yourself and life in general,” says Shaw. “Sometimes intensely disturbed, sometimes intensely exhilarated.” You can hear both the influence of acid and that peculiar intensity on his 1971 debut, *Control*, credited to John St Field

“A THOUGHTFUL, WISE MAN, JACKIE HAD A GENTLE, OLDER-BROTHERLY PRESENCE”

Mike Scott

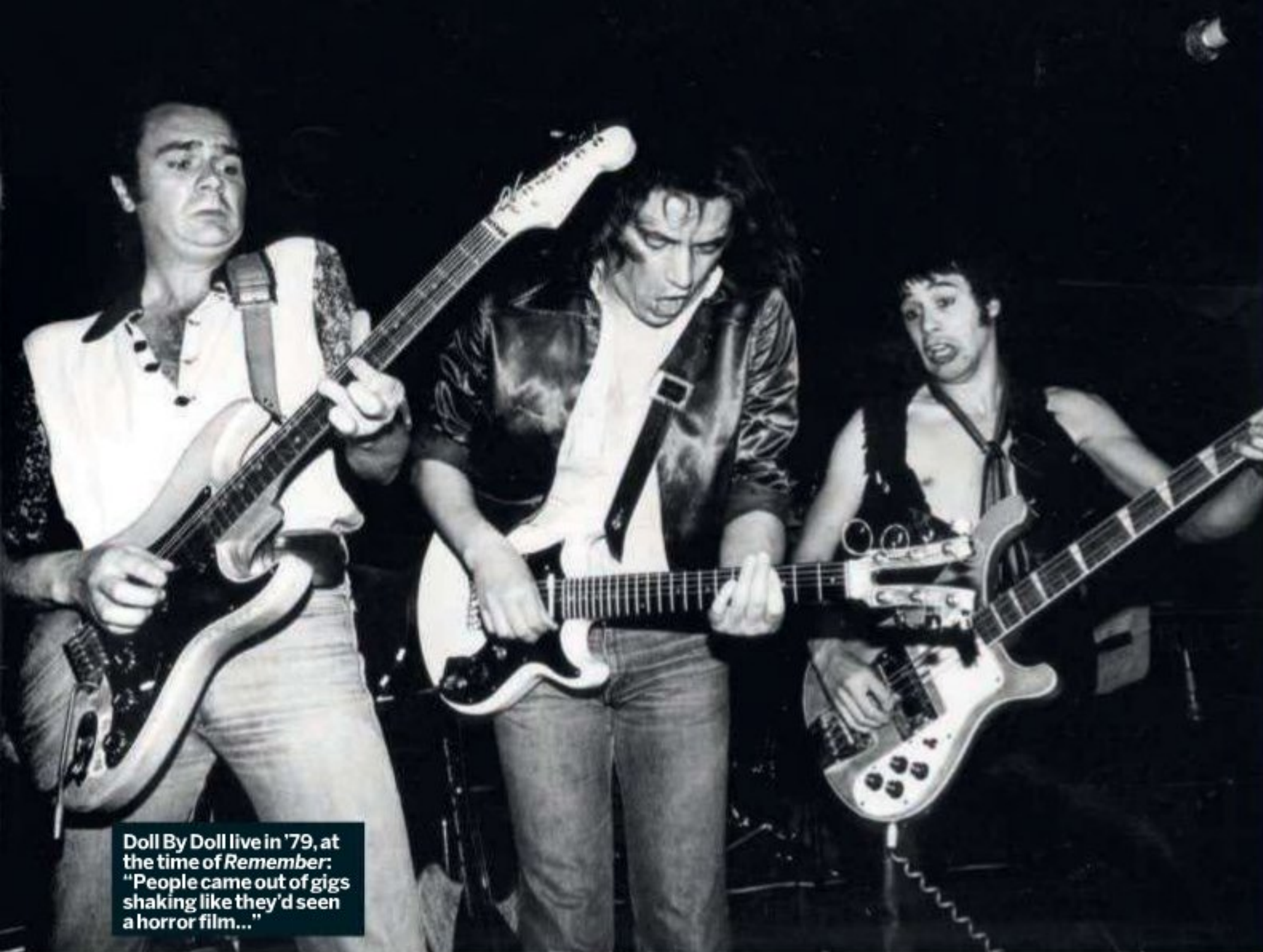
because using his own name would, apparently, have attracted unwanted police attention. Soulful, poetic, trippy but with a rock kick, *Control* is a postcard from the heart of an itinerant life. After leaving Dorset, Leven travelled throughout Europe, landing for a spell in Berlin, before heading to London in 1975 to hook up with Shaw and another mutual friend, Dave MacIntosh.

Settling into a Maida Vale squat, they formed Doll By Doll. Mixing Leven’s folk leanings, Shaw’s interest in black music and a collective

love of ’60s pop and classic rock, they made tough, Celtic-fringed rock’n’roll with a dark heart. Signed to Warner Brothers subsidiary Automatic, in 1979 they released two albums: *Remember* and *Gypsy Blood*. Both are superb, and were rightly acclaimed, but there was something disquieting about the band, particularly up close, which precluded mainstream acceptance.

Shaw recalls “people coming out of gigs shaking like they’d seen a horror film. We thought that was great!” *Uncut* contributor Mick Houghton was their press officer at Warners. “They were incredibly intense, real outsiders as musicians and people. They’d finish their shows with a song called ‘Palace Of Love’ and it was a frenzy: strobes, white light, a barrage of noise. You couldn’t look away. Jackie had extraordinary presence, he was mesmerising. He’d laugh at punks, say they were tame, all cartoon violence. With Doll By Doll it was much more real.”

Their confrontational streak saw them thrown off tours, first following an onstage punch-up with Hawkwind, then for intimidating Devo. “We drank all our own beer so took theirs,” says Shaw. “They pinned themselves against the wall in terror and gave us all of it.” Doll By Doll’s Maida Vale HQ was a den of violence, drink, drugs, and what Leven once described to me as “dangerous women”. They’d stay up for days playing music and ingesting speed, acid, tranquilisers and cocaine. It was, says Houghton, “squalid and seedy. They were properly ingrained in the drug culture, completely off their faces. The first time I met them they were tripping wildly. I gave my big



Doll By Doll live in '79, at the time of *Remember*: "People came out of gigs shaking like they'd seen a horror film..."

marketing spiel and at the end all Jackie said was: 'I'd like to meet a man in a castle'."

Leven later looked back on this period with real dread. "I think I was genuinely mentally ill," he said. "Not all the time, but episodically, when my drug-taking really got a grip. I recall everyone staying well out of my way for significant periods." Says Shaw: "He could be scary, for sure. Very scary. When he was going into one you'd know all about it, but it wasn't all doom and gloom. A lot of the time we were just a bunch of young guys having a laugh."

DOLLBYDOLL split in 1983, having left Automatic and released two more commercially misfiring albums on Magnet; the last, *Grand Passion*, featured only Leven from the original lineup. He signed to Virgin, but during sessions for a solo album in 1984 he was brutally attacked walking home. "I got properly mugged," he recalled. "I probably would have been killed, except the guys I was working with decided to come looking for me and probably saved my life."

Suffering from the physical and psychological effects of strangulation, Leven couldn't speak or sing for two years, and never regained his falsetto. Heroin had been around during the last days of Doll By Doll, but now he succumbed to addiction for several years. He eventually quit cold turkey using a mixture of acupuncture and psychic healing. Seeking to formalise this unorthodox methodology Leven set up the CORE Trust, a holistic treatment centre for alcoholics and drug addicts, which continues to thrive today.

Creatively, the '80s were a write-off. Leven finally returned to music-making in 1994 with *The Mystery Of Love Is Greater Than The Mystery Of Death*, the beginning of his long, immensely productive final act. It was like a dam-burst of creativity. "He would write everywhere," says Greenwood. "He'd come off a train at night and would have scribbled a song across three napkins. He constantly had a little 99p notebook on the go for stories, jokes, songs, poems."

There followed a flood of records, 26 in all, including official releases, fan-club CDs, live

recordings, and material released under his Sir Vincent Lone pseudonym. Many are superb (1994's *Argyle Cycle Vol. 1* and 2010's *Gothic Road* make deeply impressive solo bookends), some are very odd (not least Sir Vincent Lone's *Songs For Lonely Americans*, with its "Balamory Death Chant"), all are worthy of investigation. He'd record at Bryn Derwen studios in Snowdonia alongside David Wrench, the Welsh singer who engineered over a dozen Leven albums. Working quickly and quietly during the day, they'd spend the nights "falling over" in the Douglas Arms in nearby Bethesda.

With these solo records Leven cemented a unique identity. Few artists wrote better or more honestly about damaged masculinity (on "Extremely Violent Man" he sings that "small children/and scars on my right hand/remind me"), loneliness ("Universal Blue", "Desolation Blues"), family ("Single Father", "Beware Soul Brother"), and what he called "the revenge of memory". Humanity in its rawest state was his specialised subject. "I sometimes think my problem is that I'm too connected to the pain of other people," he said. "It really breaks me up. Out of that, and anger about that, I find myself writing. I'm not entirely sure it's healthy, but I think that's where my music comes from."

He once told Greenwood he felt like he was covered in "electric fur", a distressingly visceral description of his sense of otherness and isolation. "Anyone who knew Jackie well would say there was a huge piece of damage somewhere," she says. "He had a massive fear of abandonment which overrode everything he ever did, and it's there in the songs. There's a searing loneliness, and his ability to recognise that in other people was just devastating. It makes some of his work hard to digest, because it's uncomfortable."

Yet there were also tender love songs and comically existential ditties about burger vans and hotel mini-bars. Deadpan monologues like "Sting's Dead (Story Of The Sad Death Of The Well-Known Singer)", meanwhile, were hilariously near-the-knuckle. "There was a painful truth behind every embarrassing thing that Jackie said on stage,"

CONTINUES OVER»

'Jackie Leven said...'

Crime writer IAN RANKIN, a fan who became a collaborator with Jackie Leven on several projects, recalls an inspirational friendship



"I came relatively late to Jackie's music. Somehow I missed Doll By Doll but I bought some solo albums and became a fan. I reckoned Inspector Rebus would also like that rough-edged voice,

the great musical ability, arrangements and passionate lyrics: Jackie wrote of love lost and found, of the inner turmoil of men. So in one of my novels, Rebus sits down to listen to Jackie Leven.

"A little later, Jackie is on a plane reading one of my books. It turns out it's the book where he's mentioned. He contacts my publisher, we meet, and he invites me to perform with him at the Crossing Borders Festival in The Hague, where we're joined by David Thomas of Pere Ubu. A little later, Jackie is invited to play Celtic Connections and asks if we can plan a more organic show. I write a 40-minute short story called 'Jackie Leven Said', and Jackie then writes some songs to capture the mood of the piece, which is about a music producer who heads from London to Fife, where Jackie and I both grew up, for a funeral.

"The show does well. Cooking Vinyl record a version of it when we play the Queen's Hall, Edinburgh, so that's us with a CD to our name! We toured it around festivals and cities. The rider always had some spirits and some wine, and I seem to recall a bottle of JD being passed around onstage at The Hague, but mostly Jackie was sober, thoughtful, articulate. I did get a sense of something simmering just below the surface. Not rage exactly, but locked-in energy. He wouldn't be someone you'd want to cross..."

"I was devastated when I heard he had 24 hours to live. I'll treasure his countless stories and anecdotes, and he leaves a great legacy of recordings. I chose 'Linseed Oil' when I was invited on to *Desert Island Discs*. Jackie wrote it for our album. It's all about Kirkcaldy, our happy hunting ground when we were young. The man was a legend who lived an extraordinary life and touched many people."





Leven in the early '80s: "I think I was genuinely mentally ill when my drug-taking really got a grip"

says his longterm collaborator Michael Cosgrave. "You winced because you recognised part of yourself you were trying to suppress. He was one of the most honest depictees of life in all its aspects."

Musically Leven could easily have settled into a comfortable Celtic soul niche, but instead his albums are a compelling, sometimes jarring mix of folk, blues, country and rock, with eccentric forays into cheesy pop, electronic experimentation, even Eurodisco. "At times they sounded quite odd," says Wrench. "He said the worst thing he could do would be to make a dry, stripped-down acoustic album. He liked making big-sounding records and he didn't like repeating himself at all."

"He believed in running the gamut," adds Cosgrave. "That was probably the biggest commercial problem – people never knew what they were signing up for."

In Germany, Leven enjoyed a relatively high profile, but in Britain he remained firmly under the radar. The man who wrote "The Sexual Loneliness Of Jesus Christ" could hardly have expected it to be otherwise, while in Cooking Vinyl he had the support of a label who generously – perhaps too generously, on occasion – allowed him free rein. "We did whatever he wanted," laughs label boss Martin Goldschmidt. "He was able to make a good living as a musician, and not many people manage that without having a hit. Overall, I think he was happy with his career."

IN HIS FINAL decade Leven came as close as he was probably able to finding contentment. After his two early marriages and countless turbulent entanglements he settled down with Deborah Greenwood in the Hampshire village of Botley, surrounded by cats, dogs and horses. "He had never, ever had a home and it took a long time

for him to realise Botley was his home. When he did, he loved it with a passion," she says. "He'd get up, walk the dogs, see the horses, potter home, sit with his guitar and play for hours."

Cosgrave believes he "had developed lots of personal therapeutic techniques and was a much more settled, reasoned person", while Mike Scott of The Waterboys recalls a "thoughtful, wise gentleman, with an expert eye for witnessing and facilitating the growth of younger men. He had a gentle, older-brotherly presence." He was not entirely tamed. His drinking

could be problematic and his behaviour, says Greenwood, "could be appalling. He was a big, scary man, even in his later years. There were times when he'd have the bouncer with his jacket over his head."

Leven told me once that "dynamically, I'm not convinced these demons ever leave you," but now he tried to channel them into his songs. "He was an incredible, lovely man, but he wasn't any tamer in his thoughts and lyrics," says Wrench. "He was still prepared to go to amazingly difficult places and report back."

The future seemed bright. Creatively he was in fine shape, and he finally quit drinking after his brother died, of an alcohol-related illness,

in February 2011. "He categorically stopped it – overnight," says Greenwood. "He never touched another drop. It was amazing. He looked fantastic, felt really well. And then he lost more and more weight..."

Following that Edinburgh gig in

August, Leven played a couple more dates before cancelling tours of Canada and Germany, but he wanted the gravity of his illness kept under wraps until just days before the end. The sense of loss felt by friends and fans is leavened by the knowledge that not only is his body of work a rich and significant one, but it reflects the courage and honesty of the man who created it. "His music was warm and dark and funny, which is the embodiment of him," says Wrench. "Not many people can do that, most have to pose or find a character."

Says alt.country firebrand Johnny Dowd, who appeared on Leven's 2007 album, *O What A Blow That Phantom Dealt Me!*, with what sounds like first-hand knowledge: "Jackie was the kind of person who, if you called on him, he would come." He was that kind of songwriter, too. Whether you're seeking beauty or something uglier but no less true, his music will rarely, if ever, let you down. **U**

"THERE'S A SEARING LONELINESS... IT MAKES SOME OF HIS WORK HARD TO DIGEST"

Deborah Greenwood, Partner

Fairytales for hard men...

10 essential Leven albums



CONTROL (COOKING VINYL, 1971)

Dated in places but remarkably assured first album for a tripped-out 20-year-old. Already vocally adventurous, Leven ranges over psych-folk, Celtic ballads and spacey gothic-rock.



REMEMBER (AUTOMATIC, 1979)

Doll By Doll's powerful debut. "Butcher Boy" lurches from ominous opening tattoo to thuggish blues-rock, the complex harmonies of "Chances" showcase Leven's falsetto, while the climax to "Palace Of Love" is genuinely demented.



GYPSY BLOOD (AUTOMATIC, 1979)

Remember's slick, sharply dynamic follow-up. "Teenage Lightning" is a thrillingly aggressive revamp of '50s rock'n'roll, while the late-night loneliness of "Strip Show" and the epic "Highland Rain" are devastating.



THE MYSTERY OF LOVE... (COOKING VINYL, 1994)

Mike Scott and US poet Robert Bly guest on a triumphant comeback. Stylistically promiscuous – ranging from folk to Bacharach & David – the depth and quality of the writing binds it together.



FAIRYTALES FOR HARD MEN (COOKING VINYL, 1997)

A dark and defining statement on male identity. If "Boy Trapped In A Man" has the punch of prime Doll By Doll, then "Poortoun" is the most bleakly beautiful thing Leven ever wrote.



DEFENDING ANCIENT SPRINGS (COOKING VINYL, 2000)

After an incongruous opening duet with Pere Ubu's David Thomas ("You've Lost That Loving Feeling"), Leven dives into memory. Tough and engrossing, not least the gorgeous "Single Father".



JACKIE LEVEN SAID (COOKING VINYL, 2005)

Two Fifers look homeward. Ian Rankin recites his excellent short story and Leven's songs weave in-between. A second disc of studio recordings contains the shadowy lounge-jazz of "Exit Wound".



WHEN THE BRIDEGROOM COMES (COOKING VINYL, 2007)

A sparse release as Sir Vincent Lone includes tributes to Johnny Dowd and Kevin Coyne, plus ace covers of "Blues Run The Game" and Judee Sill's title track.



OH WHAT A BLOW THAT PHANTOM DEALT ME! (COOKING VINYL, 2007)

One of his warmest, most soulful records, featuring a recitation from Johnny Dowd ("The Skaters") and Leven at his most Van Morrison-esque on "Another Man's Rain".



THE HAUNTED YEAR (WINTER) (COOKING VINYL, 2009)

The best of four thematic live LPs released in 2009, with a mix of eye-popping patter and some of his greatest songs, including "Universal Blue".

JULIAN LENNON ON JOHN • DEEP PURPLE • HOW R&B BECAME REGGAE

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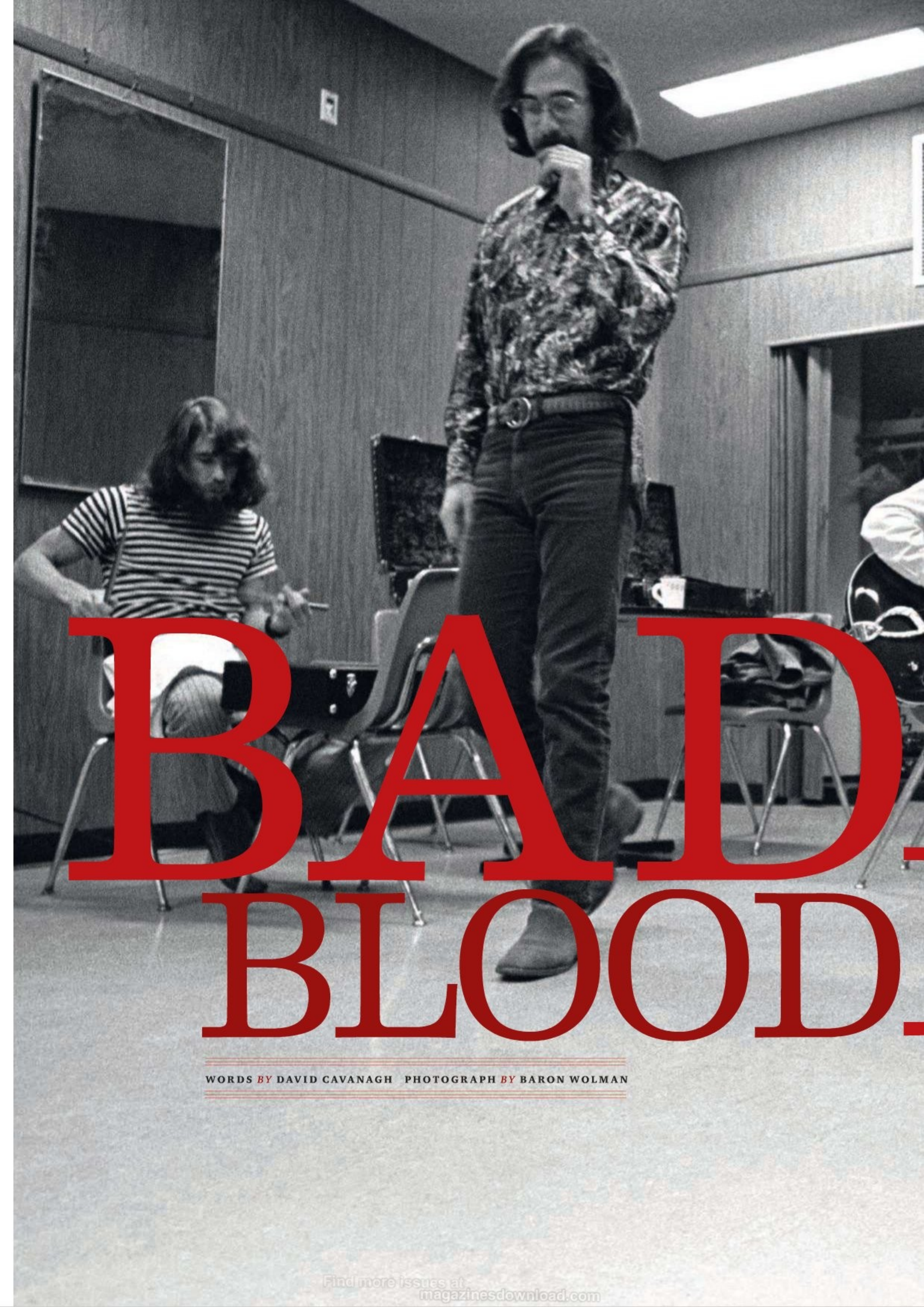
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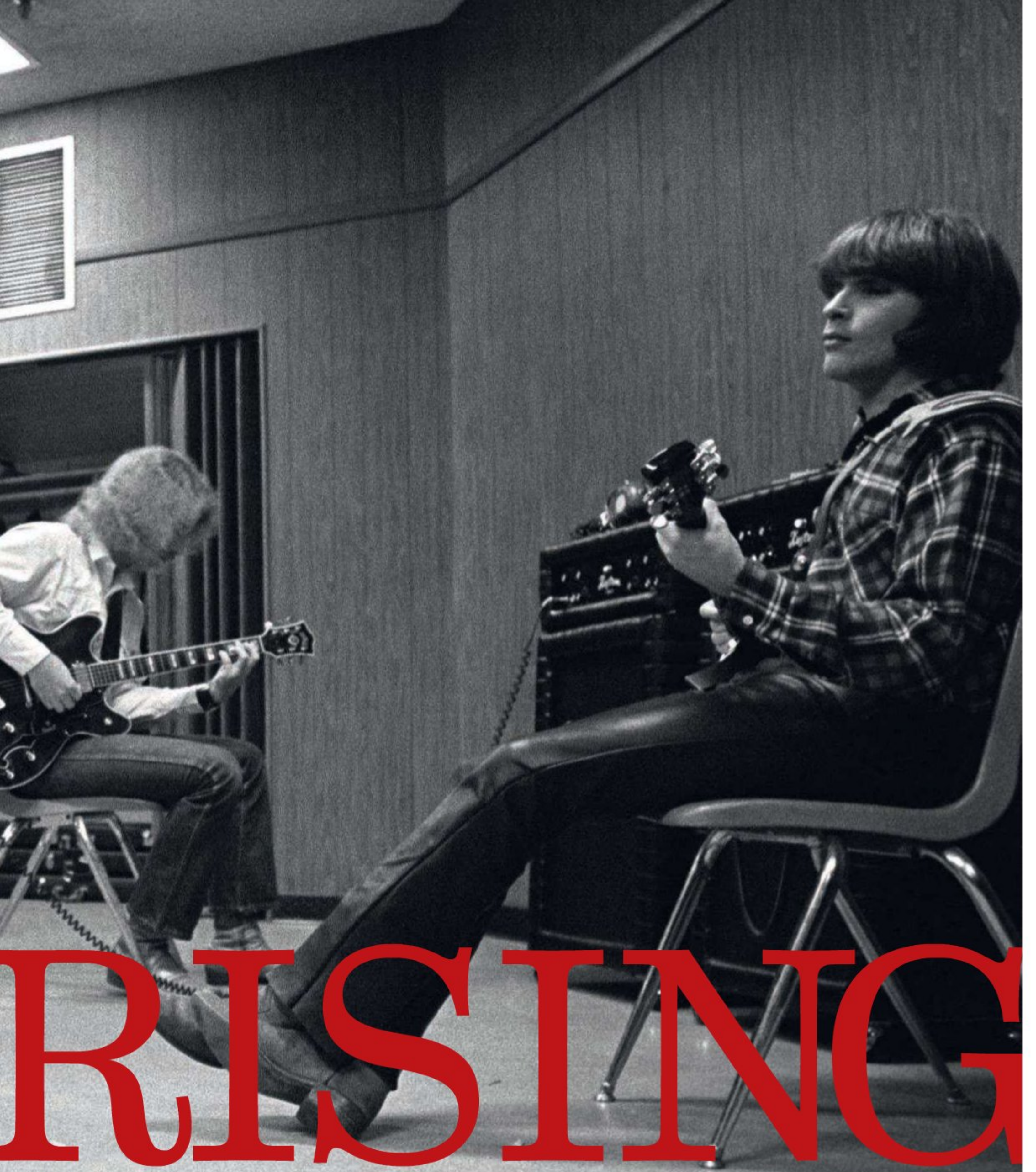
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BAD BLOOD.

WORDS *BY* DAVID CAVANAGH PHOTOGRAPH *BY* BARON WOLMAN



RISING

At the dawn of the '70s, CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL were the biggest band in the world – a brilliant and driven hit machine with deep roots in American tradition. By 1972, though, it was all over, and the ex-bandmates embarked on a bitter war that still continues, 40 years later. As JOHN FOGERTY finally revisits his glorious songs, *Uncut* lets him tell his side of a remarkable story – and then hears the very different stories of his old Creedence sparring partners. “I had so much anger,” says Fogerty, “I couldn’t play those songs...”

Built in the Roaring Twenties, New York's Beacon Theatre is known as the 'older sister' of the famous Radio City Music Hall. The 30-foot Greek goddesses towering either side of the Beacon stage have witnessed everything from opera to a series of Allman Brothers concerts. Tonight, John Fogerty is playing the first of two shows in which he'll perform Creedence Clearwater Revival albums (*Cosmo's Factory* and, tomorrow, *Green River*) in their entirety. Both million-sellers, they contain eight classic singles between them.

For various reasons, Fogerty refused to play Creedence's music for almost 15 years after their 1972 break-up. He relented on a few occasions in 1986–7, following some gentle cajoling by Bob Dylan and George Harrison, but then came a typically Fogertyesque withdrawal – a gloomy, implacable silence – before his re-emergence in 1997 with *Blue Moon Swamp*. He officially began reintroducing Creedence songs into his sets that year.

CREEDENCE Clearwater Revival were an American phenomenon. From 1968 to 1972, they dominated FM and AM radio alike – an unusual feat – with a prolific run of glorious singles ("Suzie Q", "Proud Mary", "Bad Moon Rising", "Green River", "Fortunate Son", "Up Around The Bend"). In 1969 alone, they earned three platinum discs and released three acclaimed albums (*Bayou Country*, *Green River*, *Willy And The Poor Boys*), as well as playing Woodstock and most major festivals. By late '69, Creedence could have called themselves the biggest band in America. By mid-1970, they could have widened the parameters to 'biggest band in the world', since The Beatles, their only real competition in sales terms, no longer existed.

"Creedence took America by storm," says Jake Rohrer, their former press officer and tour manager. "They had the broadest demographic imaginable. At Creedence concerts you'd see pre-teens, grandparents and literally every age group in between." Some of their most enthusiastic fanmail came from US soldiers stationed in Vietnam, and inmates of federal prisons back home. "Creedence didn't bring anything new to the culture," Rohrer clarifies. "What they did was remind Americans from whence they'd come. Their lyrics were just so American."

Creedence's art was neither cosmic nor complex. Their grooves were smooth and warm, with steady, hypnotic momentum from Tom Fogerty's rhythm guitar and a Memphis-like sense of economy. Paradoxically, their songs were haunted by anxiety and premonitions – malevolent moons and Biblical rainfall – like those from a Calvinist preacher crossed with a pessimistic meteorologist. Writing while bodies fell in a faraway war, John Fogerty composed allegories for a conflict which he

Fogerty acknowledges the burden of engaging with the music (and, perhaps, demons) of his past. He compares it to the Eagles reuniting for their Hell Freezes Over tour. "Yes, there were long, dark times," he tells *Uncut*. "I was miserable. I stopped playing guitar. I was a bitter person." Claiming to be free of his grudges, Fogerty – whose dyed hair makes him appear younger than his 66 years – is animated onstage. His voice remains one of the most rip-roaring of rock'n'roll instruments, seeming to come with its own slapback echo. "This [*Cosmo's Factory*] was an important record in the days when they still had vinyl," he winks to the Beacon audience, "when people had Grateful Dead hairdos and smoked Jefferson Airplane cigarettes."

The third song he plays is "Travelin' Band", a worldwide hit in 1970, which Fogerty wrote as an homage to Little Richard, a boyhood hero. But his tone turns sarcastic as he informs the crowd: "Of course, before you know it, lawyers got involved and I was *sued*." The crowd don't know what to say. Why has he mentioned a lawsuit? Why would someone sour the atmosphere of their own gig?

They might if they were John Fogerty.



emotionally opposed, but which, all the same, he could easily have joined. Some Creedence songs exchanged voodoo for parable, portraying a folkloric South of bayous, railroad stowaways ("flatcar riders") and old-time courtesies. In Fogerty's dual America, the bonfires of protest raged on the White House lawn ("Effigy"), but the people on the river were happy to share food with strangers ("Proud Mary"). "Creedence made music for all the waylaid Tom Sawyers and Huck Finns," pronounced Bruce Springsteen, inducting them into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 1993, "and for the world that would never be able to take them up on their most simple and eloquent invitation, which is: 'If you get lost, come on home to Green River.'"

Fogerty's post-Creedence depression in the '80s had nothing to do with music. Mired in contractual disputes about royalties and publishing, he gradually lost his taste for the songs that the rest of the world loved. "I had so much anger," he says of his long spell in the wilderness. "I was afraid that I'd start singing 'Proud Mary' and go off on a tirade. If one of

my songs came on the car radio, I'd change the station. That's why I couldn't play those songs. I didn't want that person standing in front of an audience."

Does time heal all wounds? Intriguing comments by Fogerty last July suggested he would now be interested in a Creedence reunion. They last played together in 1983 (at a private party) and

Fogerty explains that while he's "not actively making overtures" to tour with them again, he'd be willing to listen to proposals. *Uncut* telephones Fogerty's ex-colleagues to get their reactions. "Leopards don't change their spots," says an unimpressed Stu Cook (bass). "This is just an image-polishing exercise by John. My phone certainly hasn't rung."

"It might have been a nice idea 20 years ago, but it's too late," shrugs Doug Clifford (drums), who plays alongside Cook in Creedence Clearwater Revisited, a five-piece 'reincarnation' of CCR. Clifford adds: "I prefer the band I'm in now. We play Creedence better than Fogerty does."

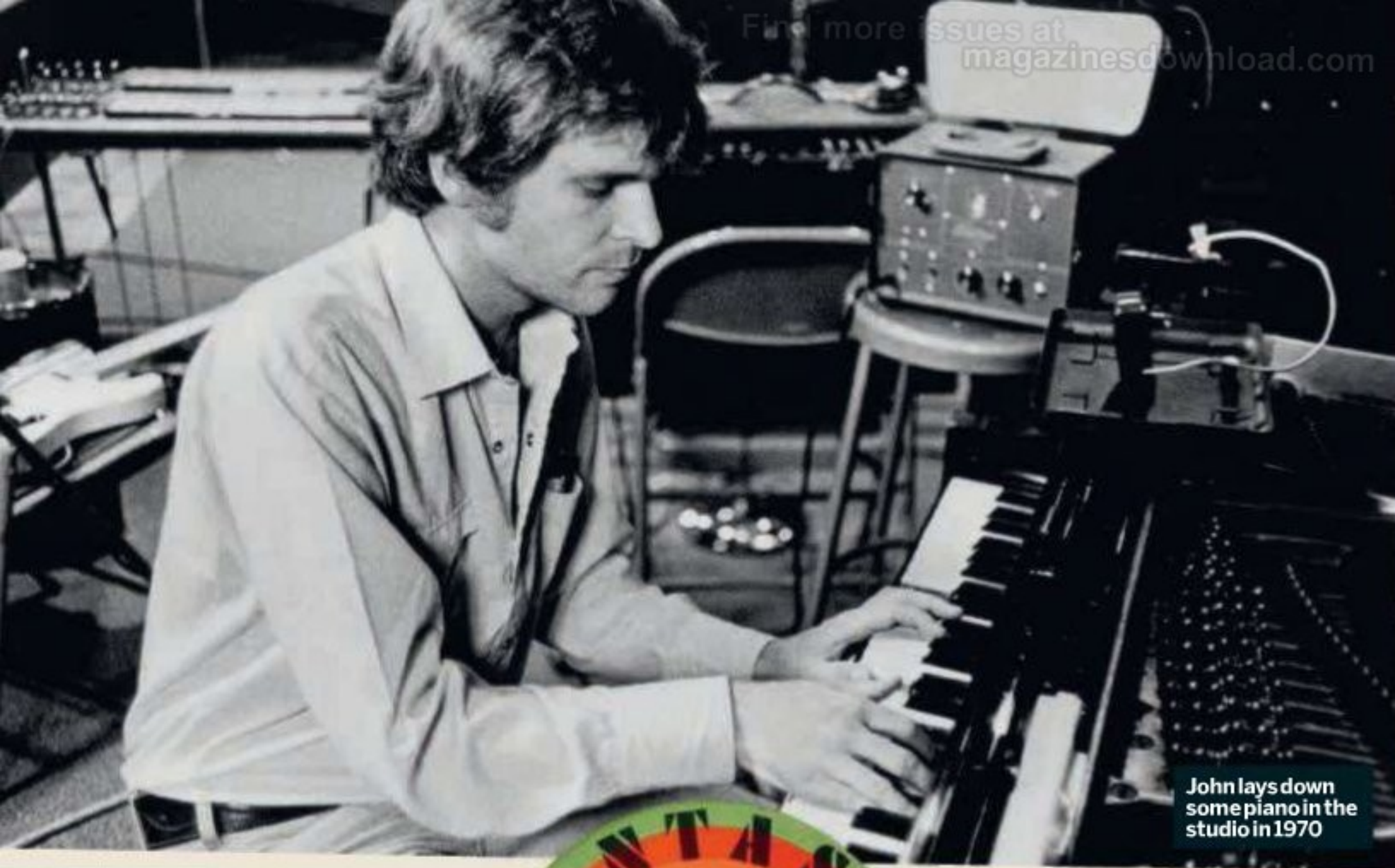
The three old friends and comrades, sad to say, have become used to aiming their remarks at the jugular.

IN ONE OF HIS GREATEST songs, "Born On The Bayou", John Fogerty sang nostalgically of the places where he'd grown up. He recalled the hound dog in the Louisiana backwoods; the Cajun Queen; the freight train "chooglin'" past on its way to New Orleans. There was just one thing. "Born On The Bayou" was complete fiction. It bore absolutely no resemblance to Fogerty's childhood. Like all the members of Creedence, he hailed from the Northern Californian town of El Cerrito. **CONTINUES OVER**



CCR in 1970: (l-r)
Doug Clifford, Stu
Cook, John Fogerty,
Tom Fogerty

**“I didn’t like those acid-rock,
45-minute solos. I thought music
should get to the point a little
quicker” *John Fogerty***



John lays down some piano in the studio in 1970



nestled between Berkeley and Richmond, with pleasant views of San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge for the families who could afford a house on the hill.

John Fogerty was something of an anachronism. A serious, introverted boy, he grew up with a fondness for Uncle Remus stories and Disney's *Song Of The South*, absorbing by osmosis a language of riverboats and catfish. Just like his contemporary Robbie Robertson (a Canadian), Fogerty would find his songwriter's voice in the lexicon of the Southern states. "Let's go all the way back," he smiles. "Brer Rabbit. The Tar Baby. 'Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah'. I found those things fascinating. Perhaps I identified with them more than kids who actually grew up in the South. I took note of them because they were so foreign to the place where I grew up."

One of Fogerty's favourite movies was *Swamp Water* (1941), directed by the émigré Frenchman Jean Renoir. Filmed on location in Georgia's Okefenokee Swamp, it used real alligators and snakes and featured a spine-chilling shot of a human skull, balanced on a crucifix made of tree branches, grinning evilly above the foul water. Fogerty must have seen *Swamp Water* at an impressionable age. "Walter Brennan plays a guy living in the swamp," he enthuses. "Dana Andrews is a government revenue guy trying to catch moonshiners—people making illegal booze—so he's the enemy. But then Dana gets bitten by a snake, and Walter's running around saying, 'Cottonmouth bit! Cottonmouth bit!' He nurses him back to health, but Dana goes delirious for a while and we see all these weird images. It's a swampy, scary-looking movie and I was just fascinated by it."

It was Bo Diddley's "Who Do You Love?" that opened Fogerty's eyes to "the darkness and spookiness" that could inhabit rock'n'roll. Along with a lifelong passion for echo-drenched Sun 45s, Diddley's voodoo-steeped universe was a key influence on Fogerty's thinking. "How can you *not* be inspired by a song about a guy wearing a cobra snake for a necktie?" he asks rhetorically. "And I liked

anything to do with "gumbo" and "*Little John the conqueror*" and "*putting a spell*" on somebody—those things seemed way cool."

In 1959, Fogerty and two schoolfriends—Stu Cook, a well-to-do lawyer's son, and Doug Clifford, a classmate of Cook's with a drumkit—formed The Blue Velvets, an instrumental trio. All three boys were 14. John's 18-year-old brother Tom, a singer, would sometimes borrow them as his backing group for gigs and demo recordings. In 1963, Tom joined The Blue Velvets permanently. "The four of us spent the next few years," Stu Cook recalls, "putting out unsuccessful records and touring around Central and Northern California, playing little towns and military bases. We had a variety of names: The Visions, Tommy Fogerty & The Blue Velvets, The Golliwogs. We put out half a dozen singles on the Scorpio label, a subsidiary of Fantasy. They got airplay in towns like San Jose, Lodi, Merced, all the little stations in Central Valley." The idea of a musician playing out his days in one such backwater ("*oh Lord, stuck in Lodi again*") would inform the *Green River* album's poignant song "Lodi". Doug Clifford remembers Lodi as "a small agricultural town with a seedy bar full of drunk farmhands and not a woman in the place".

It had been Tom, not John, who led the charge in the band's formative days, encouraging the younger lads to think of music as a viable career. Without his energy, they might have got nowhere. But it would be John who took over as singer, writer, leader and—ultimately—visionary as the years rolled by. A symbolic sibling shift took place, unspoken, for the benefit of all.

THE GOLLIWOGS was a gimmicky British Invasion name foisted on them by Fantasy Records. The band hated it, mumbling into their collars when people asked them what they were called. Meanwhile, a more worrying matter presented itself. In late '66, John Fogerty and Doug Clifford were drafted. Fogerty was placed in the reserve force. "I had a six-month

"WE SMOKED AT WOODSTOCK BUT IT'S AMAZING HOW MANY PEOPLE DON'T KNOW WE WERE ONE OF THE HEADLINERS"

They came. They played. They disappeared from the final cut. Why CCR and other Woodstock acts didn't make it to the screen...

"At Woodstock, I felt totally part of my generation," John Fogerty says. Strangely, though, not many people know that Creedence played Woodstock—because they don't appear in the movie or on the soundtrack album. They took the stage late on Saturday (Day Two) after a 95-minute set by The Grateful Dead. Fogerty, complaining that the audience was asleep, thought that Creedence played poorly and refused to allow their performance to be used. Other bands who performed but did not feature in the movie include:

THE GRATEFUL DEAD

Disenchanted with their own set, the Dead denied permission for it to be shown—though an interview with Jerry Garcia is seen in the film.

CANNED HEAT

Their 1968 hit "Going Up The Country" was featured in the film's opening credits, but Canned Heat didn't appear until the 1994 Director's Cut.

JEFFERSON AIRPLANE

Headlined Day Two (by which time it was at 8am on Day Three!), but only singer Grace Slick was seen in the original movie.

JANIS JOPLIN

Played at 2am on Day Three but was unhappy with her singing and is only seen walking to her dressing-room in the movie.

THE BAND

Played at 10pm on Sunday (Day Three) but were absent from the movie owing to a dispute between their manager Albert Grossman and the filmmakers.

And more!

MOUNTAIN, THE INCREDIBLE STRING BAND, TIM HARDIN, JOHNNY WINTER, THE PAUL BUTTERFIELD BLUES BAND



active duty, plus a long period when I would do a whole weekend once a month, and every summer I'd do two weeks. And all that time I had the fear, at any moment, of being activated and sent to Vietnam." Clifford had an even narrower escape. "I was two weeks away from being transferred to the Army and sent to Vietnam," he confirms. "I even had the piece of paper in my hand, telling me where I'd be going." Clifford calls it "the destiny of Creedence". He says quietly, "Fifty-eight thousand Americans were killed out there, and hundreds of thousands were wounded, and John and I could have been among them."



Creedence play
American Bandstand,
September 20, 1969

The Golliwogs re-signed with Fantasy—now run by new owner Saul Zaentz—in late '67 and changed their name to Creedence Clearwater Revival. The three words came from different sources. Creedence was the Christian name of a friend of someone that Tom Fogerty knew. Clearwater was taken from a beer commercial. Revival (which they liked to say was the most salient part of the name) signified a rebooting of their youthful ambitions and a return to '50s rock'n'roll values. "I didn't like the idea of those acid-rock, 45-minute guitar solos," says John Fogerty today. "I thought music should get to the point a little more quickly than that. I was a mainstream rock'n'roll kid, and I also had a country blues ethic. Lead Belly was a big influence. I learned about him through Pete Seeger. When you listen to those guys, you're getting down to the root of the tree."

Despite the constant threat of John or Doug being suddenly dispatched to Vietnam, there was a growing feeling in the Bay Area that Creedence had a promising future. Promoter Bill Graham expressed interest in managing them. "They'd play Winterland and the Fillmore West, third on the bill, and blow everyone off the stage," declares Jake Rohrer. Fantasy were confident, too. "We sat in Saul Zaentz's kitchen," recalls Cook, "and he told us, 'When you guys are successful, we'll tear up this contract and give you a real deal.'"

"John's theory was that if we ever went out of the charts, we'd be forgotten. It put a lot of pressure on all of us" Doug Clifford

Cook sighs. "Well, we kept our side of the bargain. He didn't."

Their 1968 debut album, *Creedence Clearwater Revival*, was a modest seller at first. Its standout track was "Suzie Q", an eight-minute version of a 1957 hit by Louisiana rocker Dale Hawkins. For all his scepticism about long solos, Fogerty stretched out penetratingly on guitar while Creedence's rhythm trio laid down a sublime slow boogie. An edited version, issued by Fantasy as a single, was picked up by AM radio and reached No 11 in the charts. Nine years into their career, Creedence were finally a smash. That summer, on the day that he received his discharge papers from the Army, Fogerty wrote a song about a man shaking off the pressures of the city and finding harmony on the river. Fogerty called it "Proud Mary".

THE FIRST OF Creedence's true monster hits, "Proud Mary" would have topped the American charts if 1969 hadn't been the *annus mirabilis* of bubblegum pop. As it

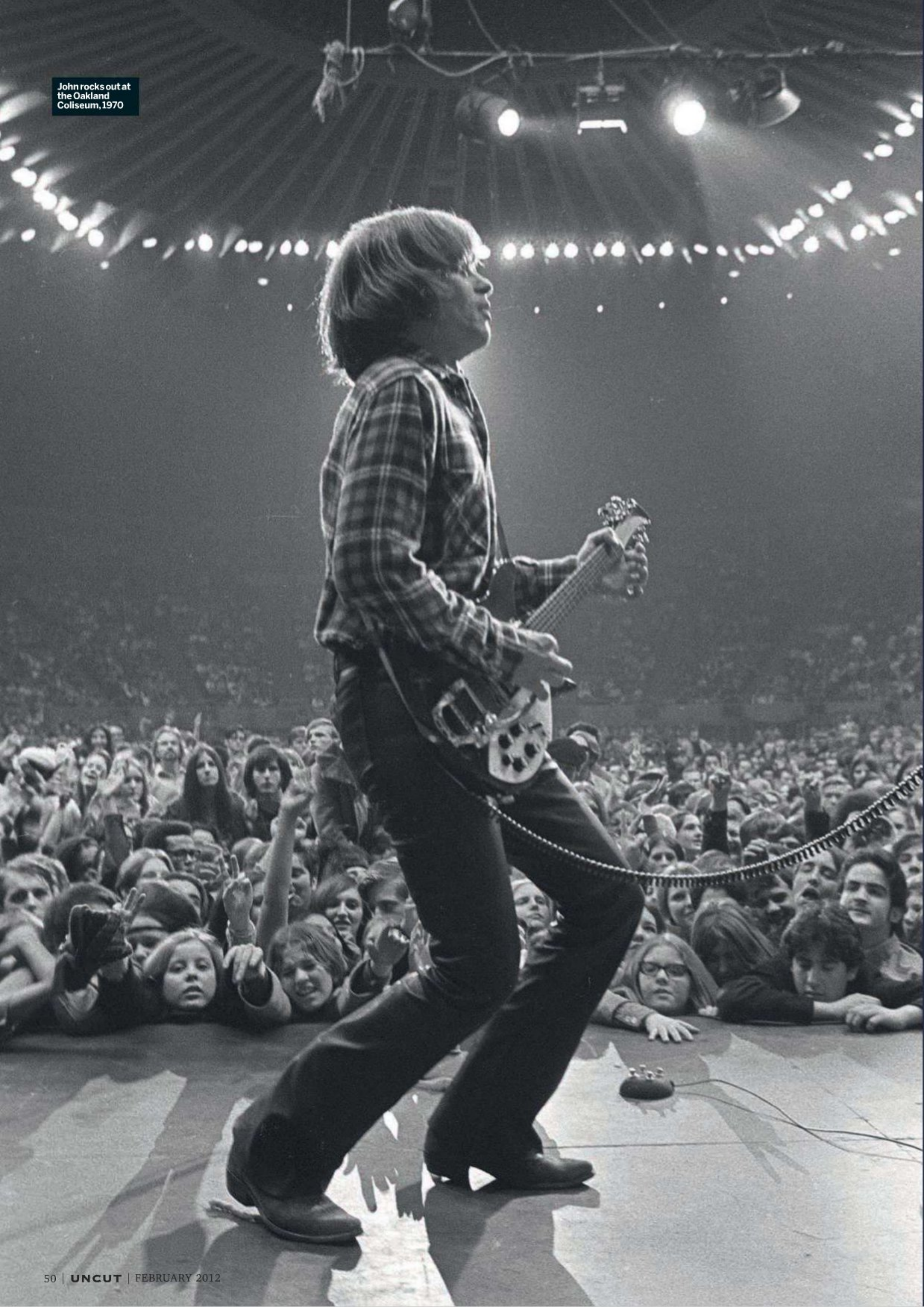
was, Tommy Roe's infernally catchy "Dizzy" kept Creedence at No 2, but "Proud Mary", later covered by Ike & Tina Turner, Elvis Presley and a couple of hundred thousand bar bands, was already on its way to being established as a landmark in rock'n'roll. "Bad Moon Rising", another million-seller, followed it to US No 2. As soon as the bad

moon began to wane, it was promptly replaced in the charts by "Green River", which sat (once again) at No 2 behind The Archies' "Sugar Sugar"—another bubblegum behemoth—in September.

"We worked on a 12-week cycle," explains Clifford. "John's theory was that if we ever went out of the charts, our career would be over and we'd be forgotten. None of our peers thought that way. It put a lot of pressure on John. A lot of pressure on all of us." Talking to Fogerty now, he gives every indication that the pressure stimulated him immensely. In 1969–70 he was arguably America's most socio-politically significant songwriter since Dylan. Ask Fogerty about any song's origins and he quickly applies his answer to the context of the times. "Effigy" (on *Willy and The Poor Boys*) was his response to President Nixon emerging from the White House one afternoon and sneering at the anti-war demonstrators outside. ("He said, 'Nothing you do here today will have any effect on me. I'm going back inside to watch

CONTINUES OVER»

John rocks out at
the Oakland
Coliseum, 1970



the football game.”) “Fortunate Son”, angry and indignant, was an attack on the iniquities of the draft system, which saw rich men calling in favours to help their sons avoid the Vietnam bombs and bullets. “Run Through The Jungle” warns of a different kind of arms proliferation – this time at home – though its gun control message, couched in metaphor like most Fogerty songs, didn’t stop it being adopted as an anthem by US troops in the Vietnam jungles. Fogerty wrote the bulk of Creedence’s *Bayou Country* album, meanwhile, while a muted TV in the corner of his room showed horrified reactions to the assassination of Bobby Kennedy in June 1968.

“I would sit in my little apartment – which was very sparse – and stare at the wall. That’s how I wrote. I would stare at it all night. There was nothing hanging on the wall, because I didn’t have any money for paintings. It was just a beige wall. It was a blank slate, a blank canvas. But it was also exciting.

I could go anywhere and do anything, because I was a writer. I was conjuring that place deep in my soul that was me.”

A loner who rarely socialised, Fogerty put Creedence through their paces as musicians. They rehearsed doggedly until songs’ arrangements were inch-perfect, enabling them to record whole albums in a matter of days. The emphasis was on being well-drilled, well-prepared, almost like the army that

Fogerty had recently left. Creedence had a ‘no alcohol’ rule in their dressing-room. They disdained the drug culture. “The San Francisco bands called us boy scouts because we didn’t get high and we were all married with families,” laughs Clifford.

Fogerty’s natural discipline (and self-confessed fear of LSD) made him a Roy Keane in an era of Balotellis. “At a time when rock’n’rollers were developing increasingly flamboyant looks,” relates Russ Gary, a recording engineer on several Creedence albums, “Fogerty, in his simple jeans and flannel shirt, came across as more of a shaggy haired workingman than a rock star. But

heads.” Jake Rohrer: “I remember Duck Dunn of Booker T & The MG’s telling me that when he found out the guys who’d done ‘Born On The Bayou’ were from Berkeley, he was going to go and burn all his Creedence records.” In the event, Creedence and The MG’s became friends and later toured together.

In the studio, Creedence shunned the psychedelic effects that other bands relied on, and instead used slapback echo to get the sounds of the mid-’50s Sun singles that John Fogerty adored. “I was greatly influenced by the early records of Elvis Presley and I just thought that was the way that music should sound,” he says. “I also loved Carl Perkins’ great records from that era. And also Roy Orbison’s ‘Ooby Dooby’ [which Creedence covered in 1970] and ‘Go Go Go.’” Fogerty

would never outgrow the traditions and protocols of the ’50s. His aim was to make music that sounded great coming out of a radio, not music that hippies could trip out to on headphones. “This statement holds true for everybody in Creedence: simple is better, less is more,” Fogerty says. “But even though it’s simple rock’n’roll, everybody will have a certain role within the

framework. Tom’s guitar playing may just sound like a guy in a garage strumming away, but it’s awfully specific.” Cook adds: “People called it swamp-rock. We never called it that. We just called it rock’n’roll.”

Green River is Fogerty’s favourite Creedence album. The second of the three albums they released during 1969 (an amazing statistic which was matched by Fairport Convention in Britain), *Green River* was,

CONTINUES OVER

“We were tied – and we’re still tied to this day – to the worst contract signed by any band in history” Stu Cook

even just standing around, he gave off an intensity that drew your eye to him.”

As they travelled around the country, Creedence were thrilled to be embraced in Louisiana and Georgia, where they’d been somewhat nervous about playing. Cook: “We were celebrating their culture and they liked us. The real disconnect was that they thought we were from the South. When they found out we were from California, they scratched their



‘We were bigger than The Beatles...’

Between 1968 and 1972, CCR sold over 30 million albums and singles in America alone. Just look at their stunning discography...

1968

ALBUM

CREEDENCE
CLEARWATER REVIVAL
(JULY; US sales platinum)
US chart position 52

SINGLES

PORTERVILLE/CALL IT
PRETENDING
(JANUARY) debut single,
didn’t chart

SUSIE Q PART I/PART II
(JUNE) US chart position 11

I PUT A SPELL ON YOU/
WALK ON THE WATER
(OCTOBER) Second cover
released as a single, US chart
position 58

1969

ALBUM

BAYOU COUNTRY
(JANUARY; US sales
platinum x2) 7
UK chart position 62

SINGLES

PROUD MARY/BORN
ON THE BAYOU
(JANUARY) US chart position 2

ALBUM

GREEN RIVER
(AUGUST; US sales platinum
x3) 1
UK chart position 20

SINGLES

BAD MOON RISING/LODI
(APRIL 1969) 2/52

GREEN RIVER/
COMMOTION
(JULY) 2/30

ALBUM

WILLY AND THE
POOR BOYS
(NOVEMBER; US sales
platinum x2) 3
UK chart position 10

SINGLES

DOWN ON THE CORNER/
FORTUNATE SON
(OCTOBER) 3/14

1970

ALBUM

COSMO’S FACTORY
(JULY 1970; US sales platinum
x4) 1 UK chart position 1

SINGLES

TRAVELIN’ BAND/
WHO’LL STOP THE RAIN
(JANUARY)
US chart position 2

RUN THROUGH THE
JUNGLE/UP AROUND
THE BEND
(APRIL) US chart position 4

LOOKIN’ OUT MY BACK
DOOR/LONG AS I CAN
SEE THE LIGHT
(JULY) US chart position 2

ALBUM

PENDULUM
(DECEMBER; US sales
platinum) 5
UK chart position 8

1971

SINGLES

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN
THE RAIN?/HEY TONIGHT
(JANUARY) US chart position 8
SWEET HITCH-HIKER/
DOOR TO DOOR
(JULY) US chart position 6

1972

ALBUM

MARDI GRAS
(APRIL; US sales gold) 12

SINGLES

SOMEDAY NEVER
COMES/TEARIN’ UP THE
COUNTRY
(MAY 1972) 25



CCR on London's South Bank on their April '70 European tour – note (the bearded, bespectacled) Saul Zaentz in the background

UNFORTUNATE SON

The bizarre case of “The Old Man Down The Road”, when John Fogerty became the only major artist to be sued for self-plagiarism...

John Fogerty's *Centerfield* (1985) reached No 1 in America, but was also highly controversial. Two songs, “Zanz Kant Danz” and “Mr. Greed”, appeared to be personal attacks on Saul Zaentz, owner of Fantasy Records, Creedence Clearwater Revival's former label. Zaentz complained that the songs' lyrics made him out to be “a thief, robber, adulterer and murderer”. Fogerty remixed “Zanz Kant Danz” and gave it a new title (“Vanz Kant Danz”), but Zaentz still sued for defamation, seeking \$144 million in damages.

The issue was settled out of court, but in a surreal twist Zaentz launched a simultaneous suit claiming that another song on *Centerfield*, “The Old Man Down The Road” (a US Top 10 hit) had the same guitar riff as Fogerty's Creedence tune “Run Through The Jungle”, to which Zaentz owned the copyright. Fogerty was being sued, in effect, for illegally plagiarising his own music. “[The case] marks a high point of absurdity in the history of music and the legal system that will probably never be

surpassed,” wrote Creedence's biographer Craig Werner in 1998.

The case went to trial in 1988. Fogerty brought his guitar to the witness stand. “What is a musical riff?” the cross-examining attorney asked. Fogerty replied: “I'm not sure I can answer that. A short series of musical events.” Attorney: “Are they related in some way?” Fogerty: “Are who related?” Attorney: “What about ‘Old Man...’?” Fogerty: “What about it?” Attorney: “Does it sound like Creedence music?” Fogerty: “It sounds like swamp music.”

In the end, Fogerty was able to convince the jury that “The Old Man Down The Road” and “Run Through The Jungle” were two distinct compositions. The trial, however, intensified his animosity towards Stu Cook and Doug Clifford, whom he accused of declining to speak on his behalf. Cook and Clifford retorted that they were never asked. In 1997 Fogerty sued Cook and Clifford to try to prevent them using the name Creedence Clearwater Revisited, but was unsuccessful.



says Fogerty, “something that I'd been carrying all of my life. Musically, *Green River* was everything that I was about. I really enjoyed making it. I was really focused with the arrangements, the rehearsals, the necessities for each song.

“The inspiration for ‘Bad Moon Rising’ was an old movie called *The Devil And Daniel Webster*. It's an old tale about the Devil seducing some poor guy who's wishing for a better life. In steps the Devil: ‘I can promise you untold success and wealth.’ ‘You can?’ ‘Yes. All you have to do is give me your soul.’ The movie made a big impression on me – especially a scene where there's a hurricane during the night and the guy is cowering in his barn. The next morning he opens the door and it's a beautiful sunny day. He looks over and sees his neighbour's field trounced to the ground by the hailstorm, but his own crops are standing straight up. That was a very powerful image to me. That was my inspiration for ‘Bad Moon Rising’. I saw the movie again recently and the scene was so subtle, and so hard to hear, that it's a wonder I got any inspiration from it. I guess in the old days movies *were* more subtle.”

Creedence made a rare foray outside America in 1970, flying to Europe and

headlining the Royal Albert Hall. Jake Rohrer remembers arriving in West Germany “and finding we were bigger than The Beatles”. *Cosmo's Factory*, released in July, was their fifth album in two years. Its title was a reference to the band's Berkeley office space (The Factory) and also to their gregarious drummer Clifford (whose longtime nickname was ‘Cosmo’). The album's front cover showed the four of them caught by a camera in an off-duty moment, a proudly uncool quartet who looked more like lumberjacks than rock stars. The album was enormous and the hit singles kept coming. *Cosmo's Factory* had six of them. While San Francisco longhairs across the bridge scoffed at their commercialism, Creedence henceforth made a point of releasing double A-sides. And invariably both songs would have an uncanny knack of cutting through the weasel words and speaking directly to all sections of the population. Clifford: “‘Fortunate Son’ and ‘Who'll Stop The Rain’ – which was about Nixon – were very powerful messages. Some of the other bands on the political left were writing stuff like ‘fuck the pigs’, but who's going to listen to something like *that* except the hardcore freaks? To be able to spread a message to a divided country,

so that *both* sides heard it – and to do it poetically and descriptively – that's where the power of John's songs lay. We reached the masses with strong messages and feelgood music, and that really was our greatest achievement.”

In the autumn of 1970, Creedence were on top of the world. Nobody could have foreseen what would happen next. Having captured America's hearts and minds, the four men somehow found a way to implode – with toxic effects on long-held friendships and a relationship between two brothers. It was to be the most acrimonious and protracted divorce that rock'n'roll has ever known.

IT BEGAN, JOHN FOGERTY recalls, with a band meeting. That in itself was odd. Creedence didn't have band meetings. Creedence was a benevolent dictatorship in which the will of the rhythm section yielded to the decree of the flannel-shirted leader. Ever since “Proud Mary”, the system had worked with spectacular results. Fogerty was therefore irritated and nonplussed, towards the end of 1970, to be confronted with the first mentions of an unwelcome concept called democracy. “Suddenly everybody wanted to be a general,” he says ironically.



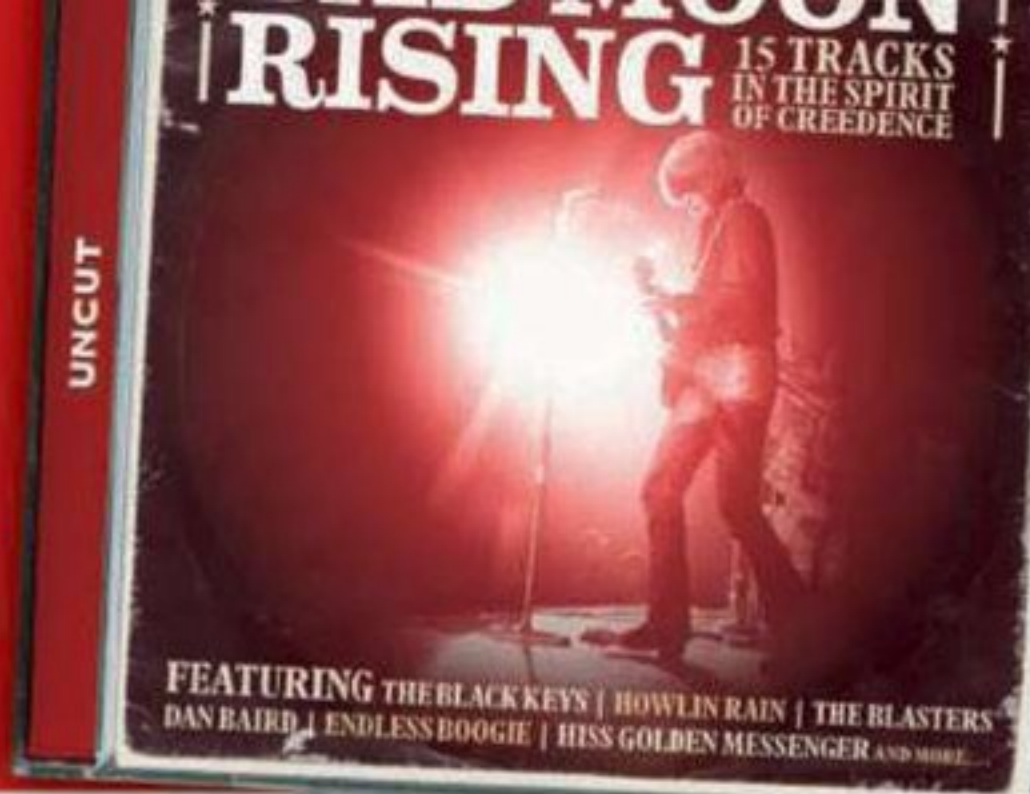


Still four: (l-r) Doug, Tom, John and Stu on tour in Europe, April 1970

Part of the problem was that Creedence, even at their height of their fame, were a remarkably small operation. They travelled with two or three roadies, plus Rohrer, and that was it. They had no manager, no booking agent, no PR firm, no entourage. They were the equivalent of a small family firm that accidentally creates a brand name as marketable as Coca-Cola. "John was our manager," Clifford groans. "Bad idea. He had no concept of the business side. Zero. None. Nada." Stu Cook, who has a business degree from San Jose State University, gives a withering assessment of Fogerty's managerial shortcomings. "He condemned us to a career that effectively never became professional. Doug and I call it El Cerrito Syndrome. We were always limited by John's vision of how a band is supposed to be run. We were tied – and we're still tied to this day – to the worst contract signed by any band in history. We said to John, 'Look, you didn't get us a new contract with Fantasy like you were supposed to do, like you said you'd do. You're not qualified to be the manager.' **CONTINUES OVER ►**

BAD MOON RISING

The spirit of CCR lives... here are tracks that inspired, or were inspired by, Fogerty and co



Seven albums in less than four years and they were gone. But in that brief time Creedence Clearwater Revival not only became the biggest band in America but forged a potent brand of roots-based rock'n'roll which has never dated. From chooglin' guitar jams to succinct songcraft based on the John Fogerty template, Creedence's DNA continues to course vigorously through the veins of American music – and through these 15 prime cuts on this month's exclusive *Uncut* CD...

1 DAN BAIRD & HOMEMADE SIN TWO FOR TUESDAY

What better way to kick-off than with Baird barrelling down the road with CCR on the radio? "Johnny never let me down", he sings – and nor does Dan, who's been channelling Fogerty's influence since his days in The Georgia Satellites.

2 JAMES McMURTRY BAYOU TORTOUS

The swamp-infested waters of "Green River" swirl and eddy through this funk workout from the Texan veteran and his Austin band, The Heartless Bastards. Find it on his 2008 album, *Just Us Kids*.

3 THE BLACK KEYS RUN RIGHT BACK

There's always been a trace of Creedence's DNA in the Ohio duo's chemistry. This stomper from new album *El Camino* adds the riff from "Spirit In The Sky" and even a touch of T. Rex to the mix.

4 HOWLIN RAIN CHEROKEE WEREWOLF

We were originally thinking of "Riverboat" from 2008's *Magnificent Fiend* to illustrate Ethan Miller's debt to CCR. Then the band themselves suggested this from their forthcoming new album, *The Russian Wilds*. Who'll stop the Rain?

5 THE BLASTERS AMERICAN MUSIC

Fogerty almost came out of self-imposed exile to produce The Blasters when they burst onto the scene in the early '80s. This live cut from '86 is a potent example of how the Alvins carried the torch for the same roots music which fuelled CCR.

6 JEFFREY FOUCAULT MESA, AZ

This restless lament from Foucault's 2006 album *Ghost Repeater* echoes Fogerty's stranded-in-a-one-horse-town threnody on "Lodi".

7 CHRIS FORSYTH NEW PHARMACIST BOOGIE (FOR JACK)

The Philadelphia guitarist's third solo album *Paranoid Cat* finds him channelling John Fahey, Television, Sandy Bull, John Lee Hooker and much else besides – including a healthy dose of CCR chooglin' on a tribute to fellow guitarist, the late great Jack Rose.

8 HISS GOLDEN MESSENGER SUPER BLUE (TWO DAYS CLEAN)

The CCR influence may be buried among other flavours, but check the guitar solo on this beauty from 2011 album *Poor Moon* and you'll hear where San Fran's Michael Taylor fits in the scheme.

9 ENDLESS BOOGIE NEW PAIR OF SHOES

Paul Major's vocals owe more to the Waits/Beefheart school of growling. But the dual guitars on this track from 2010's *Full House Head* choogle endlessly, like Fogerty if backed by ZZ Top.

10 NATURAL CHILD AIN'T GONNA STOP

An *Uncut* exclusive: an unreleased track from the forthcoming album by one of Nashville's most rambunctious bar bands, discovered by *Uncut* designer Miles Johnson when he spent a year in Music City working at Third Man Records.

11 ISRAEL NASH GRIPKA LOUISIANA

This plaintive tale from the second album by this son of a Baptist minister stands in the tradition of Fogerty's more reflective side as a songwriter.

12 LIQUOR STORE PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN MAN

According to legend, this New Jersey-based band once played a gig with seven guitarists. We tried counting the guitars on this righteous racket from debut album *Yeah Buddy*, but soon lost track.

13 LINCOLN DURHAM RECKONING LAMENT

A self-confessed "floor-stomping roots-rock revivalist", the Texas-born Durham whips up a storm of chooglin' guitars on this swamp-saturated rocker from his debut, *The Shovel Vs The Howling Bones*.

14 PG SIX PALACE

Fey the vocals may be, but the guitars on this gem from the fourth album from Pat Gubler's New York band evoke Fogerty jamming with a supergroup comprised of Crazy Horse and Fairport Convention.

15 LEAD BELLY MIDNIGHT SPECIAL

Creedence covered this alongside another Lead Belly standard, "Cotton Fields", on fourth album *Willy And The Poor Boys*. Lead Belly almost certainly learned the song while serving time in a Houston prison after WWI.



Natural Child, (inset) Endless Boogie

We're the number one band in the world and we deserve a real manager.' So what does John do, in an act of what I can only describe as brutal cynicism? He brings us Allen Klein."

Klein was sent packing after one meeting and Fogerty resumed management of Creedence. A contract renegotiation was put on the table, but it would drag on for a year, complicated by Saul Zaentz's offer of a percentage in Fantasy as a sweetener. Cook describes the percentage as "huge". Clifford calculates it as "monumental". Fogerty disputes their accounts, arguing that the percentage was minuscule and that only a pair of idiots would think otherwise. Cook counters that Fogerty was a novice at reading contracts and should have asked a lawyer to help him understand it. Fogerty refused to sign the contract. Cook and Clifford claim that his intransigence cost them tens of millions of dollars.

If the restrictive clauses and meagre royalties of Creedence's 1967 contract have denied Cook and Clifford the earnings they feel entitled to – well, that could be termed a 'professional' grievance. But so much of Creedence's disintegration is personal. Fogerty's stranglehold over their affairs was challenged, crucially, by his brother Tom, who had grown resentful of John's refusal to allow him a more prominent role. "Tom had put up with a lot of shit from John," remarks Clifford, Tom's closest ally in the group. "I think Tom was expecting John to say, 'OK, now we've achieved our goals, why don't you start singing a few of the songs?' Tom had a great voice, kinda like Ritchie Valens. Tom would have done a damn good job on 'La Bamba'. But John didn't want him to sing it, in case we had a hit with it. He didn't want Tom to succeed." John insists he simply didn't want to mess with a successful formula.

Creedence's sixth album, *Pendulum*, had a fuller-sounding production than its predecessors, and had been a long time in the works while John overdubbed keyboards and saxophones. Engineer Russ Gary remembers that Cook, Clifford and Tom Fogerty were only in the studio for "two or three days at the most". *Pendulum* was launched to the media with an expensive PR event to which 200 journalists were invited – a very un-Creedence-like evening which John maintains he attended under protest. The party had been Tom's idea.

Tom, nevertheless, left Creedence in early 1971 to begin a solo career. The others considered asking Duck Dunn to join, before deciding to continue as a trio. The bombshell lay just around the corner. Forty years later, the accusations are so vehement on both sides that it's impossible to know who to believe. Fogerty complains that Cook and Clifford concocted a false story about him giving them a bizarre ultimatum in a limousine after a concert in San Diego. Cook and Clifford are adamant that the ultimatum (and the limo) were real. Fogerty says that Cook and Clifford demanded to write and sing a third of the next album each, or they'd leave. Cook and Clifford reject this completely, alleging that Fogerty

KEEP ON CHOUGLIN'

10 of *Uncut's* favourite Creedence tracks: check out this playlist on Spotify at www.is.gd/vYrZrW

BORN ON THE BAYOU

FROM: *BAYOU COUNTRY*

The Creedence mission statement: a perfect meeting of swampy groove and Louisiana mythology.

KEEP ON CHOUGLIN'

FROM: *BAYOU COUNTRY*

A bouncy seven-minute boogie on one chord. To choogle: 1. To chug like a train. 2. To have sex.

LODI

FROM: *GREEN RIVER*

Lovely ballad about a failed musician touring a depressing circuit of small provincial clubs.

CROSS-TIE WALKER

FROM: *GREEN RIVER*

A quintessential Johnny Cash two-step with a nifty bassline and a tale about a hobo hopping a train and starting a new life.

IT CAME OUT OF THE SKY

FROM: *WILLY AND THE POOR BOYS*

A farmer finds a UFO in his field...and unwittingly becomes the most famous man in America.

EFFIGY

FROM: *WILLY AND THE POOR BOYS*

Epic album-closer warning of revolution and apocalypse, with savagely exciting guitar solo from Fogerty.

RAMBLE TAMBLE

FROM: *COSMO'S FACTORY*

Rockabilly tune that slows into a near-psychedelic middle section. A real Creedence wall of sound.

I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE

FROM: *COSMO'S FACTORY*

Marvin Gaye's hit is given the 11-minute CCR treatment. Soulful and satisfying.

PAGAN BABY

FROM: *PENDULUM*

A churning, crunching riff meets a blistering Fogerty vocal on this underrated rocker.

SOMEDAY NEVER COMES

FROM: *MARDI GRAS*

Tear-jerking song about Fogerty watching his parents' divorce – and how the son was fated to repeat the actions of the father.

threatened to leave if they *didn't* write and sing a third of the next album each. It seems a shocking allegation for them to make, because it implies that Fogerty would intentionally sabotage an album – not to mention tarnish Creedence's legacy – in order to make his two bandmates look inadequate.

"John wanted out," says Clifford with contempt, "but first he wanted to punish us for supporting Tom. He was cutting his nose off to spite his face. That's the way John Fogerty does things. Stu and I wanted some input, but the last thing we wanted to do was sing. But, anyway, we wrote and sang three songs, and of course the album was doomed to fail. John told the press that we'd put a gun

to his head, but it was quite the opposite. It was a cruel lie." *Mardi Gras* (1971), one of the most scathingly reviewed albums ever, was the last record Creedence would ever make.

"I had a pretty good idea that the album would be dreadful," says Fogerty, who blames Cook and Clifford for forcing their songs on him. "I'd known these guys since high school and I figured I had a good handle on their abilities. The phrase I kept repeating to myself was, 'I guess they deserve a shot.' But I was dreading the results. Jon Landau in *Rolling Stone* called it the worst album he'd ever heard. And I agreed. The other guys didn't. They thought the album was really cool." He laughs. "They changed their tune later."



...and Tom, who left to begin his solo career



John, right, at the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, with Bruce Springsteen, May 21, 1993

The three-piece land at London Heathrow in September 1971

Creedence split in 1972. Fogerty released *The Blue Ridge Rangers* in 1973, a country-bluegrass album on which he played all the instruments himself. In the years following Creedence's demise, the real poison seeped in. Cook and Clifford became convinced that Fogerty's mismanagement of the band's affairs had got them into trouble with the IRS. In the meantime, the band members had lost millions in an offshore banking scheme that turned out to be a swindle. "The full picture slowly unfolded," says Cook, "that not only were we broke but we were also in trouble with the authorities. We found out more and more of what had actually gone on in John's negotiations with Fantasy. More hard feelings developed. We got more and more isolated and estranged from John over the years."

Fogerty's solo career faltered in the mid-'70s. He stopped recording, angered by a clause in his Fantasy contract that seemed to demand greater and greater amounts of product as each year passed. Jake Rohrer, who worked for Fogerty until 1977, questions his interpretation of the wording. "I disagree with John's comment that the contract was a prison sentence. I personally thought that John wasted two decades of his life waging a war with Saul Zaentz." Either way, it became dangerous to mention Zaentz's name in Fogerty's presence during the '80s. His 1985 comeback album for

"The full picture slowly unfolded. Not only were we broke, we were also in trouble with the authorities" *Stu Cook*

Warner Bros, *Centerfield*, railed at Zaentz on not one but two tracks ("Mr. Greed", "Zanz Kant Danz"), to the disbelief of his former colleagues. "He even told Warners, 'I'll indemnify you against lawsuits,'" says Doug Clifford. "He was still carrying all this crap from 15 years ago. He's free, he's won, he's on the biggest label in the world, but he can't get his foot out of the bucket of shit. So, of course, he gets sued." [See panel on p52]

In spite of their animosities, Creedence played together twice during that decade. Both were private occasions. First came Tom Fogerty's wedding in 1980. Then John Fogerty showed up at a 1983 high-school reunion in El Cerrito and Creedence performed as The Blue Velvets, shaking a tail feather the way they'd done in 1959. But the problems between the Fogerty brothers remained unresolved. At some point in the '80s, Tom, who had undergone several operations on his back since 1974, caught AIDS from an unscreened blood transfusion. By 1989, his illness was a matter of desperate concern. Tom had one last request.

He wanted Creedence to play as a four-piece one more time, if only in his living room, before his inevitable return to hospital. John declined the request. "Finally," recalls Stu Cook, "when Tom couldn't even lift his arm properly because he was so weak, John said, 'OK, I'll play with you.' Just a little bit late there, John." Admitting that he did not make his peace with Tom (who died in 1990), John reveals why he felt unable to grant him his wish. Some of the last words Tom ever uttered to John while he lay in an Arizona hospital were: "Saul Zaentz is my best friend." They were the six words that John Fogerty could never forgive.

Creedence were inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 1993. For Jake Rohrer, it was "the saddest chapter of their career". It was Fogerty at his most ruthless: he'd learned Cook and Clifford had sold their Creedence veto rights to Zaentz for five-figure sums, and he was not happy about it. Cook and Clifford arrived at the Hollywood centre with their families, expecting to play Creedence hits with Fogerty that night. They were informed by the stage manager that Fogerty would be performing with an all-star band (including Bruce Springsteen and Robbie Robertson) instead. "It was humiliating," says Cook. "It was like John thought *he* was getting inducted, instead of Creedence.

He thought he could exclude us." Booring was heard when Fogerty took the stage. "It was a terrible night," concludes Rohrer, "and all it did was pour kerosene on the flames."

In Hank Bordowitz's well-researched Creedence biography, *Bad Moon Rising* (1998), there are 31 index entries for 'Fogerty, John, bitterness and rage'. Fogerty claims to lack venom these days ("I'm no longer a prisoner of my own device, to quote a Don Henley line," he assures us), but it's noticeable that, during a follow-up interview, he repeatedly describes a former business associate as a cheat, a liar and the second worst man in history after Saddam Hussein.

Clifford, who regards Fogerty's career arc as "kind of Shakespearean" attempts to put a positive slant on Creedence's ongoing hostilities. "The good news is, the music is what's important," Clifford says. "Look, we all made mistakes. It's unfortunate, but the legacy of the music is still there, intact."

The bayou will surely freeze over, however, before Creedence Clearwater Revival share a stage again. ☺

LAWRENCE

‘I’M YEARS AHEAD OF MYSELF’

For three decades, LAWRENCE has plotted an idiosyncratic course around the margins of rock, fronting FELT, DENIM and, of late, GO KART MOZART. Legends have massed around him, but the stardom that he craves remains elusive. Can a remarkable new documentary change all that? And how can Lawrence, at 50, retain such obsessive zeal for his music? “I’m trying,” he says, “to prove you can get older and still have the same convictions you had when you were 16.”

WORDS BY JOHN ROBINSON

PORTRAIT BY HARTNETT



DUE TO AN earlier misunderstanding with a different publication, today, Lawrence—the surnameless aesthete behind the British groups Felt, Denim and Go Kart Mozart—will

be making notes. If he mentions the names of any other persons, he explains, he'll write down the spelling of their name, so there can be no confusion as to exactly who he means.

"I think it's my Birmingham accent," he continues. "I was telling someone that I liked the way a song had been covered by Billy Idol, and when I saw the article, they'd written that I'd said 'Billie Piper', which made me look a complete idiot."

An acute attention to detail. A concern with controlling as far as possible how he is perceived. It's this droll but intransigent way of looking at the world that has led Lawrence to be regarded, down a career of 30-plus years, as something of an eccentric personality.

However, this same uncompromising nature is also the undoubted driving force behind his musical projects: from his first, unknowable, self-released single "Index" (1979), through the 10 albums in 10 years he made with Felt, to the high-concept 1970s pop of Denim (his 1990s band), all the way to his current project Go Kart Mozart, its forthcoming album *On The Hot Dog Streets*, and what he feels may be the last hurrah of a genre he has invented, called "Novelty Rock".

"Bands of the future will say, 'We play Novelty Rock'," he says. "But this is the last days of Novelty Rock. It's the end of Go Kart Mozart, in a way. Unless we get in the charts—I'm not a mug. But if it does what my records usually do, I think we'll wind it up."

THIS, AS ILLUSTRATED magnificently in director Paul Kelly's 2011 film *Lawrence Of Belgravia*, is the reality of life as an uncompromising British cult musical figure: penury, eviction (the film opens in 2006, with Lawrence in the process of being evicted from his Belgravia flat for non-payment of rent), critical



Felt with Maurice Deebank (second right), Soho, London, 1983

acclaim, but not much in the way of commercial success. As of winter 2011, however, things are looking up for Lawrence. In addition to the upcoming *On The Hot Dog Streets* album in early 2012, and its companion taster album, *Mozart's Mini-Mart*, a couple of months later, Paul Kelly's film has provided the focus for a widespread rediscovery of Lawrence's first group, Felt. Following the success of the excellent *Foxtrot Echo Lima Tango* fanzine in early 2011, a high-quality photo book about the band, with captions by Lawrence, will also arrive in 2012.

It's a satisfactory situation for Lawrence, after what have been a testing few years (his problems with addiction, alluded to in the film, are not something he wants to talk about today). Still, his situation is a far cry from the notoriety he once hoped would accompany each of his releases with Felt, a group intrinsically part of the independent music scene of the 1980s.

"Every record we released I thought was going to be a hit... every album, Album Of The Year everywhere," he says, still passionate about the unfulfilled potential in his music of that time. "Each single we released, I thought was going to be a hit."

'Penelope Tree', that's a chart record, 'Sunlight Bathed The Golden Glow'..."

Although the kind of success that Lawrence dreamed of failed to materialise, if there was any consolation to be had, it was in creating a group that was founded on rigorous aesthetic principles. The first record to bear the name Felt was "Index", a seven-inch self-released by

Lawrence and sold into London's Rough Trade records with the kind assistance of Scritti Politti, a group experienced along the routes available to the underground music artist at that time. A strange and distorted recording, it was born out of Lawrence's self-knowledge: he may not have been able to write songs or a beautiful piece of music yet, but he could still devise a way to establish himself.

"I thought it'd cut out all the rubbish," he explains, "having a van, putting a band together, rehearsing, getting some attention. I thought, 'I'll make a record.' But I couldn't make a great record, because I'd be doing it in my bedroom. So I thought, 'I'm going to make the most outlandish thing possible.' It was neither good nor bad. It just existed. It couldn't be ignored."

LAWARENCE'S EUREKA moment about how to take Felt forward was hearing the guitar talent of a younger school contemporary from the village where he lived, Water Orton, on the outskirts of Birmingham. Lawrence had met Maurice Deebank prior to making "Index", but after its failure to make much of an impact, he realised he needed to form a group to realise his vision—essentially, for an English version of Tom Verlaine's Television. He and Deebank bought an amplifier, found it could make an unadulterated, bright sound, and it was this they settled on.

"It was clean and pure," remembers Lawrence. "A new sound for a new decade."

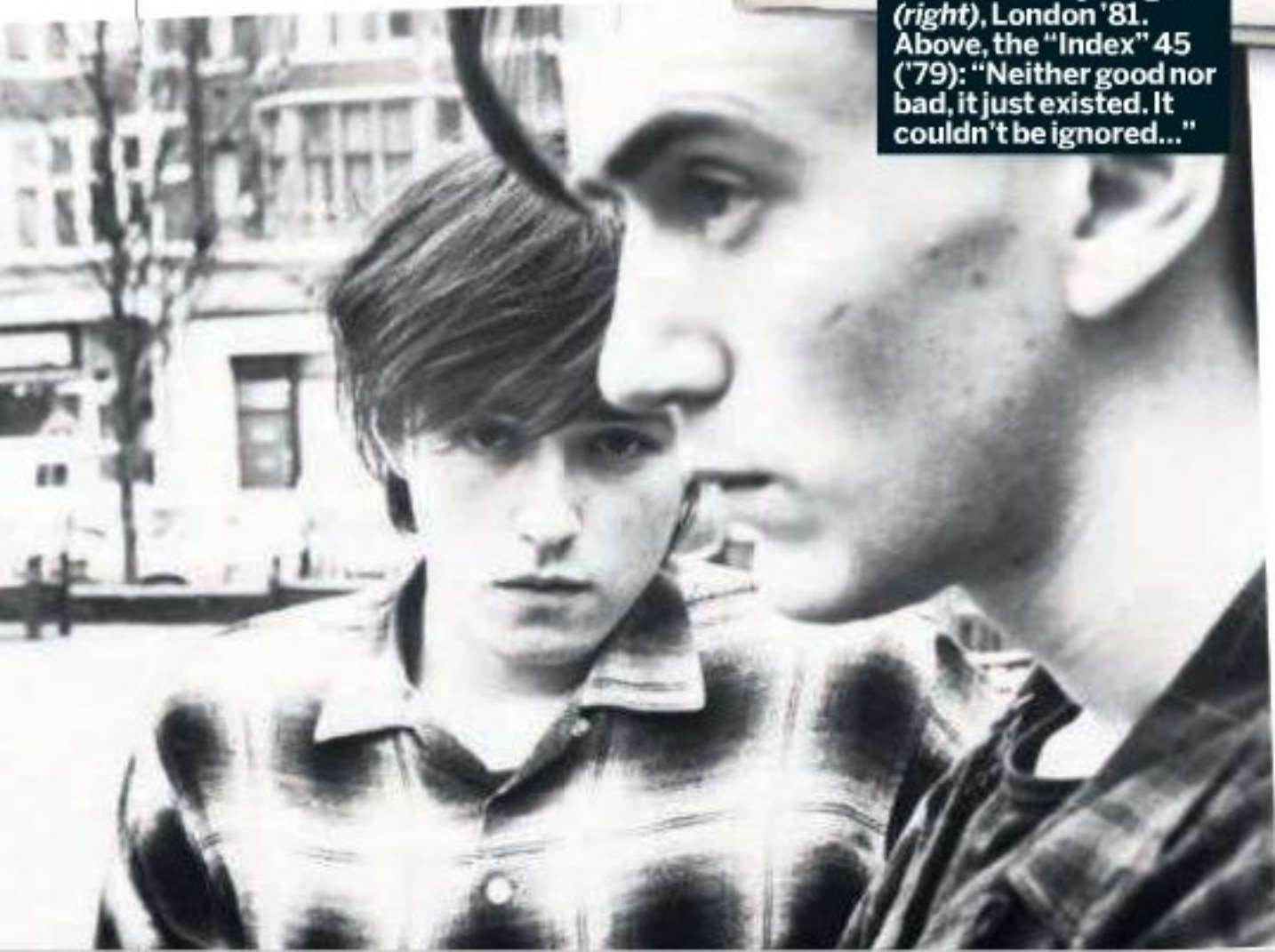
To accompany this crystalline guitar sound, for his lyrics, Lawrence drew on poems he had written over the past few years, among whose verses were found phrases like: "*crumbling the antiseptic beauty*", later the title of Felt's debut album, a string of words much derided by influential BBC radio DJ John Peel.

"He said it was the worst title he'd ever heard," says Lawrence. "Like, not just of that time... ever. But it was good, in a way, because it meant I was doing something..."

Lawrence remains mystified by those, like Peel and Julian Cope, who found Felt's songwriting to be whimsical in the extreme. For him, he explains, his lyrical abstractions



Felt, with Gary Ainge (right), London '81. Above, the "Index" 45 ('79): "Neither good nor bad, it just existed. It couldn't be ignored..."





Felt: (l-r) Marco Thomas, Gary Ainge, Martin Duffy and Lawrence Moseley, Birmingham, 1985

created an escape route from humdrum suburban existence. Rather than remain stuck in a feedback loop with the ordinary, Lawrence chose escape, via poetic and stylistic rigour.

"I didn't want to write about the drudgery of everyday life," he explains. "You're living in a little terraced house with money problems, a gambling father, a horrible world you're just dying to get out of it. You felt on your own all the time – you wanted to escape into a different world, the world of words."

"The lyrics are pretentious, but they're knowingly so," he says. "I wanted to introduce a poetic vision into it. I thought that poetic lyrics were up there: *Horses*, Richard Hell, Tom Verlaine. And I wanted to bring something like that, but with my own Birmingham aesthetic."

"I wasn't copying my heroes, I was doing what I was told to do when I read their interviews, like: 'absorb us, learn from us, and do something different.' I wanted to add to that rich tapestry, and if you were going to copy someone, you're never going to be counted like the people you loved. I hate copying people. At school, I wouldn't even want to have the same shoes as everyone else."

Far from being a vague, wafty sort of a group, Felt, if anything, were a hardline proposition, the music part of a complete aesthetic package that, as Lawrence remembers it today, ran to edicts on clothes and guitar straps.

"Many ideals came with it," he says, "right down to small things like Maurice wasn't allowed to use sunburst plectrums. There was a kind of rule book."

The combination of Lawrence's vision, "coloured in" as he put it, by musicians like Maurice Deebank and organist Martin Duffy (later of Primal Scream), led to Felt making albums of great musicality and intrigue, peaking, to some ears, with the instrumental *Let The Snakes Crinkle Their Heads To Death* (1986) and the subsequent *Forever Breathes The Lonely Word* of the same year.

As the 1980s progressed, Lawrence's utterly serious but unfailingly droll and quotable

"EVERY RECORD WE RELEASED I THOUGHT WAS GOING TO BE A HIT... EVERY ALBUM, ALBUM OF THE YEAR"

public persona kept him a person of great interest (on the Glastonbury festival he once said: "I thought there would be bungalows for the pop stars..."), even if Felt's albums were far from making anyone rich. For Lawrence, however, some comfort could be drawn from the fact that even if the band's time was inexorably passing, one of their greatest propositions remained still within their grasp: making 10 albums in 10 years, then splitting up. "Music had changed," says Lawrence of the late 1980s. "It was The Stone Roses and The La's. I said to Gary [Ainge, longstanding Felt drummer], 'Good job we're splitting up – we'd be finished. They looked so new, and I was wearing my Tom Verlaine shirts. I felt old-fashioned for the first time.'"

A TRUE MODERNIST, much of what Lawrence has done since Felt has been about making an abrupt break with the style of the project that preceded it. Denim, conceived of in New York shortly after the Felt split, reacted against the independent, arty aesthetic of the 1980s by attempting to make pop records in big studios, for a major label, about the 1970s. "Even though our electricity used to go off, and there was rubbish in the streets, they were amazing times," says

Lawrence. "The night of the pub bombings... it drew people together. Glam rock. I commented on all of it. I know I'm guilty of being retrospective but I did it for valid reasons, with a heart of gold."

After a dispiriting period spent as "a loss leader for London Records", but yielding two

conceptually strong albums – *Back In Denim* (1992) and *Denim On Ice* (1996) – the band's commercial end was assured by the death in a car accident of Princess Diana. Denim had just recorded the catchy number, "Summer Smash". After the failure of Denim, Lawrence hit a personal low. "If I was a boxer, I was knocked out, I was on the deck," he remembers. "The guy was counting 10 and I wasn't going to get up. I thought, 'I can't do it any more.'"

From this unpromising situation, Go Kart Mozart emerged surprisingly quickly. Not entirely dissimilar to Denim in its motive, it's a band that operates very differently as regards its means and opportunity. With a feeling of having nothing to lose, Lawrence devised the band in the best traditions of the B-side: with the pressure off, magic, of a kind, **CONTINUES OVER**

no "just" or "basically" — ①

NOTES FOR UNCUT

THE LP IS GOING BUT IT ^{MAY BE} NOT OUT ON TIME —
THE REVERSE DATE IS KIND OF OPTIONAL —

"Knock the whimsy out of ^{Felt} Cope" — ②

"we were a loss leader to make
LOWDOWN look good"

IVOR RAYMONDE — ③

LP — EARLY MARCH — followed 3
months later — MOZART'S MINIMAX
BOOK — JANUARY —
called "FELT"

Appendix (1) A note from Lawrence

1. Paul Weller asks interviewers to remove swearing from transcripts. For Lawrence, it's the words "just" and "basically" — as he sees them, unattractive conversational tics.

2. Julian Cope was once suggested as a Felt producer — but said he would "knock the whimsy" out of

Felt. They never worked together.

3. Ivor Raymonde (1926-1990), arranger/producer of Dusty Springfield. Felt asked him if he'd arrange their "Sunlight Bathed The Golden Glow" single, which he did, but, says Lawrence, "Cherry Red wouldn't pay for it."

would surely emerge. Novelty rock, duly, was born — and if things go as Lawrence expects, the concept will flourish for the release of *On The Hot Dog Streets*, die, and then be re-animated by future generations of musicians. For Lawrence, what seems likely to come next is a project long-rumoured, and, for those who have found the chirpy synth-pop of Go Kart Mozart a little hard going, hoped-for new direction.

"I'm itching to do something else — I've done this Novelty Rock," Lawrence says. "Like if I did it next year, I think people would be sick of

the 1980s, he's now taking a similarly hardline stance against middle age.

"Something happens when people get to a certain age," he explains. "They get married, have kids, move away from music. Their artistic vision goes down the drain. I see it all the time and it saddens me. I get it: it's life-changing, but they lose the naivety, the seriousness of music. I'm trying to prove you can get older and still have the same convictions you had when you were 15 or 16.

"It's to do with sticking to your word," he

says. "I like to picture a kid who's mad on my group: I say I'm not going to reform it, and he tells his friends. Music's serious — I want to be that person, that fans can say, 'You don't have to worry about Lawrence, he's not going to reform Felt.'"

Of course, he realises some people find this odd. But then, Lawrence has always found it

hard to find complete empathy for the purity of his vision, even among members of his own group. "We said we'd do 10 albums in 10 years, then split, whether we're No 1 or not — and it'll be better if we are, 'cos then we'll be the best group to come out of England," Lawrence recalls of Felt's early theoretical discussions. "We talked about that for half an hour, then they went down the pub and forgot about it, 'cos that's the sort of people they were." ①

"I HATE COPYING PEOPLE. AT SCHOOL, I WOULDN'T EVEN WANT THE SAME SHOES AS EVERYONE ELSE..."

it. If I was a fan of me, I'd say, 'Don't do that, Lawrence.' The next album I've written is a singer-songwriter album. It's not James Taylor or anything — but I love that genre, the simplicity of it. The artist, and their songs. It's maudlin and introspective. I'm years ahead of myself."

If there's an event for which Lawrence fans will wait for in vain, however, it's a Felt reunion. Never mind that the stigma has been taken out of greatest hits shows by the Don't Look Back series — it's not a game you'll find him playing. Although he's now 50, Lawrence has kept faith with the seriousness of the young, highly principled, teenage music fan. If in *Denim* he declared himself against



FELT, a unique, limited-edition photobook — signed and captioned by Lawrence himself — can be ordered from www.firstthirdbooks.com



Lawrence in
Denim (and fur):
'against the '80s'

ABSOLUTE CLASSIC MASTERPIECES

Five great Lawrence albums...



FELT
THE SPLENDOUR OF FEAR CHERRY RED, 1984

A three-year wait yields this great second LP, housed in Alan Aldridge's poster for a London showing of Warhol's *Chelsea Girls*. Delicate, powerful and largely instrumental.



FELT
THE STRANGE IDOLS PATTERN CHERRY RED, 1984

Lyrical but mysterious, *Idols* contained songwriting that played equally to Lawrence's writing and Maurice Deebank's playing on the fabulous likes of "Crystal Ball".



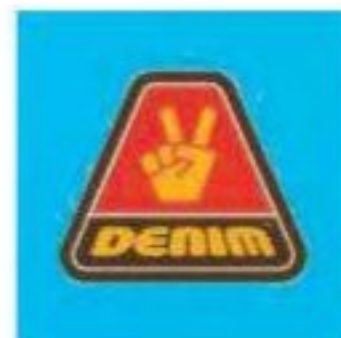
FELT
IGNITE THE SEVEN CANNONS CHERRY RED, 1985

Smitten with Dylan's "I Threw It All Away" Lawrence moves on to less abstract, more personal songwriting. Cocteau Twin Robin Guthrie produces, Cocteau Liz Fraser guests on "Primitive Painters", Felt's most immediately dramatic recording.



FELT
LET THE SNAKES CRINKLE THEIR HEADS TO DEATH CREATION, 1986

Lawrence stockpiles instrumentals ("They were like my babies") and re-points them as a standalone album. Result? Wintry, evocative, genius like "Song For William S Harvey" as augmented by Martin Duffy.



DENIM
BACK IN DENIM BOY'S OWN/LONDON, 1992
Written in New York, pitched to Andrew Weatherall in Windsor and sold to London Records, this contains Lawrence's mission statement "I'm Against The Eighties", and marks his departure from indie rock for big-budget, high-concept climes.



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IVO WATTS RUSSELL

"I hear 'Diamond Mine' as an aural painting, its sorry flawed subjects fleshed out by much more interesting bystanders and a vibrant scenery, and my ear can take in something new and surprising as it roves from the golden spot to the darkest murky edge. My own Holy Grail is Talk Talk's 'Spirit of Eden' and with each KC album I've tried in my own way to attain that perfection of space, longevity and timelessness... this is as close as I'm likely to get, unless Jon agrees to another collaboration. Game over." KC 2010

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40TH
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THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF SUPER FLY

OR: HOW CURTIS MAYFIELD
BROUGHT MILITANCY AND
COMPASSION TO THE SCORE
OF A BLAXPLOITATION MOVIE,
AND BECAME A SUPERSTAR.



“HE WASN’T LOOKING FOR A HIT.
HE WANTED TO WRITE ABOUT
WHAT WAS GOING ON RIGHT NOW.”

WORDS BY GARRY MULHOLLAND



ALPHA/GLOBE PHOTOS INC.



OF THE FIVE people standing in the foyer of an uptown New York cinema, four are white men in suits and the other is a bespectacled black man in floppy hat, loon pants and stylish German military coat. They watch as a fleet of cars pulls up outside – customised Cadillacs and Rolls-Royces re-painted in the gaudiest colours. The doors open and the stars spill out into the balmy night air of August 1972. These are not your conventional stars of stage and screen, but, from the forbidding, decaying streets of Harlem, Brooklyn and The Bronx, black men resplendent in purple floppy hats, fluorescent pink silk scarves and shirts, voluminous hipster flares and multi-coloured platform shoes. Each have five women on their arm. They could be characters in the movie they're about to see. But the actors who play those characters are already inside, looking altogether more sober. The ghetto superstars swagger into the cinema and head towards the five men in the foyer, who stare in amazement.

One of the white men is Steve Ross, Chief Executive of Warner Communications, the distributors of the film that these characters are here to see. He turns to another of the white men, Marvin Stuart Heiman, and asks him, seriously: "We're not gonna get killed here, are we?"

The bespectacled black guy just laughs.

Marv Heiman laughs about it now, too. Heiman managed Curtis Mayfield – the bespectacled black guy – from 1968 until his death in 1999. He is one of the few left alive who can offer eye-witness testimony to the timely fusion of music and image, talents and turbulent times that was *Super Fly*, which stands as both Curtis Mayfield's greatest success as an artist and also the most popular and admired of a string of 1970s movies about

'em bring their women and everything else. Warners weren't too excited about the idea at first. But they gave in. I was concerned when Bogart came up with the idea. But Curtis got it. And they were right. The excitement in the theatre... both the men and the women were screaming. The next day there were lines around the block at the theatre. Same thing in Chicago, LA, all over the country. Word had got out."

Curtis Mayfield was never the most likely of soul superstars. A short-sighted, buck-toothed and chubby faced boy raised in Chicago's tough Cabrini-Green housing projects, he grew up to be a soft-spoken, thoughtful, easy-going but ambitious songwriter and guitarist with a falsetto singing voice. His grandmother instilled in him a deep love of the gospel church. By 1971, at the age of 29, he'd had 14 successful years in the music business, as composer and lead singer of The Impressions, co-owner of the independent Curtom label, and for the past 12 months as a solo artist, leading a tight touring band, The Curtis Mayfield Experience.

Brimming with ideas and energy, Mayfield entered his imperial phase, releasing three albums in a little over 12 months. February 1971's solo debut *Curtis* featured "Move On Up", Mayfield's best-loved feelgood anthem. By the time Mayfield released the live album



Curtis with The Impressions, 1966

Eddie Thomas, who managed The Impressions from 1957 until 1968, and was Mayfield's initial partner at Curtom (the company name was literally a splicing of 'Curtis' and 'Thomas'), puts Mayfield's grittier sound and lyrics down to the influence of a post-hippy counterculture.

"When he started to write the Civil Rights anthems his timing was perfect. Martin Luther King was fighting so hard for Civil Rights and the whole thing going on in Atlanta. Curtis' music was right on the money and right on time, more so than anyone else. He wasn't a member of a political party. He didn't want to speak on the subject. He wanted his music to speak for him. Songs like 'Keep On Pushing' gave people a lot of hope. By the late '60s Curtis had got into – what do you call it? – the underground, I guess. All the guys who were smoking pot and getting high... the kinda music that they loved."

CURTIS MAYFIELD OFTEN recounted the story of the *Super Fly* script being first brought to him by screenwriter Phillip Fenty and producer Sig Shore backstage at a Mayfield show at the Lincoln Center For Performing Arts in New York in late 1971. Marv Heiman disputes this version of events. According to Heiman, Shore had already taken the script to Neil Bogart to secure some funding for the movie from Buddah Records in return for the rights to the soundtrack.

"Neil sent both me and Curtis the script," he confirms. "We both read it and we both fell in love with it. We then found out that they needed to raise \$300,000 to do the picture. They were short a quarter of a million dollars! So I raised the money."

Mayfield had closely followed the success of movies like the Chester Himes adaptation *Cotton Goes To Harlem* (1970), Melvin Van Peebles' *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* and *Shaft* (1971), and was keen to be involved with this new industry niche aimed at black

"CABRINI-GREEN WAS A ROUGH, ROUGH AREA THAT CURTIS GREW UP IN BACK IN CHICAGO, AND HE SAW A LOT..."
BOBBY WOMACK

African-American characters and themes we now call 'blaxploitation'.

Mayfield, Steve Ross and the other two men standing in that foyer, film producer Sig Shore and Buddah Records co-president Neil Bogart, are all dead. Bogart achieved his own tragic infamy as head of Casablanca Records, home to KISS, Donna Summer, the Village People and a lifestyle that may well have led to his death, in 1982, aged just 39. Heiman wishes someone had filmed *Super Fly*'s unique premiere.

"Neil, who was a great marketing guy, came up with the idea of... let's not invite the normal people," Heiman recalls. "Let's do the opening with the pimps and hustlers of New York. Let



Curtis/Live in August 1971, his regular second guitarist was Craig McMullen, a Columbus, Ohio prodigy and now the only surviving member of the rhythm section that cut *Super Fly*. McMullen sees Mayfield's change of direction as an inevitable result of the transition from Civil Rights optimism in the '60s to the black militancy of the early '70s.

"He wanted to write about what was going on right now. It wasn't that he changed. He could be the

most love ballad-writing person in the world. But at this point he wanted people to know that somebody on record is saying the same thing that you're thinking. He wasn't looking for a hit. He wanted his message to come out."



Mayfield onstage (with actor Ron O'Neal in the foreground) in a still from the *Super Fly* movie, 1972

filmgoers. Directed by Gordon Parks Jr, the son of the photographer and filmmaker Gordon Parks (who'd directed *Shaft*), *Super Fly* followed Youngblood Priest (played by Ron O'Neal), a coke dealer who wants to do one last deal and then escape with his girlfriend. But Mayfield's image was that of a gentle, church-going crusader for aspirational peace. Didn't he have misgivings about being associated with a film about a dealer snorting coke and offing various (mainly black) adversaries on his way to that mythical last big score?

"I had the same thought process," Heiman laughs, "and I'll give you the answer that Curtis gave me. I said to him, 'Do we wanna be associated with this? Is this the right move for you?' And he said, 'I'm not going to boast about the drugs. I'm gonna tell the story in a different way, through music.' It was preaching anti-the drug culture. And the people who really got into his music at that time understood it. In hindsight I'm glad I didn't talk him out of it! His

approach was absolutely brilliant."

Mayfield began work immediately on writing the *Super Fly* score, neglecting promotion of his third album, *Roots*. He had plenty of experiences to draw upon, growing up in the Cabrini-Green housing projects. Bobby Womack, who made his own outstanding blaxploitation soundtrack with his songs from *Across 110th Street*, was a friend of Mayfield's and remembers hearing tales of the notorious Cabrini-Green projects as far afield as his hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. "If anyone mentioned Cabrini-Green the next thing they said was, 'Don't go over there—you'll get killed.' It was a rough, rough area that Curtis grew up in and he saw a lot. I'm sure a lot of those things rubbed off on him and that's why he could feel the whole tone of the movie. That's a lot easier when you've been there. He'd been there."

According to Marv Heiman, Mayfield wrote the bulk of the score in just two months. "The writing just flowed out of him. Our offices in our building were separated by a little kitchen-bathroom. He would come in my office with his guitar and say, 'You gotta hear this!' And he would sing the melody and lyrics to one of the *Super Fly* songs right there and then. Things came to him and he put it to music very, very quickly on most things."

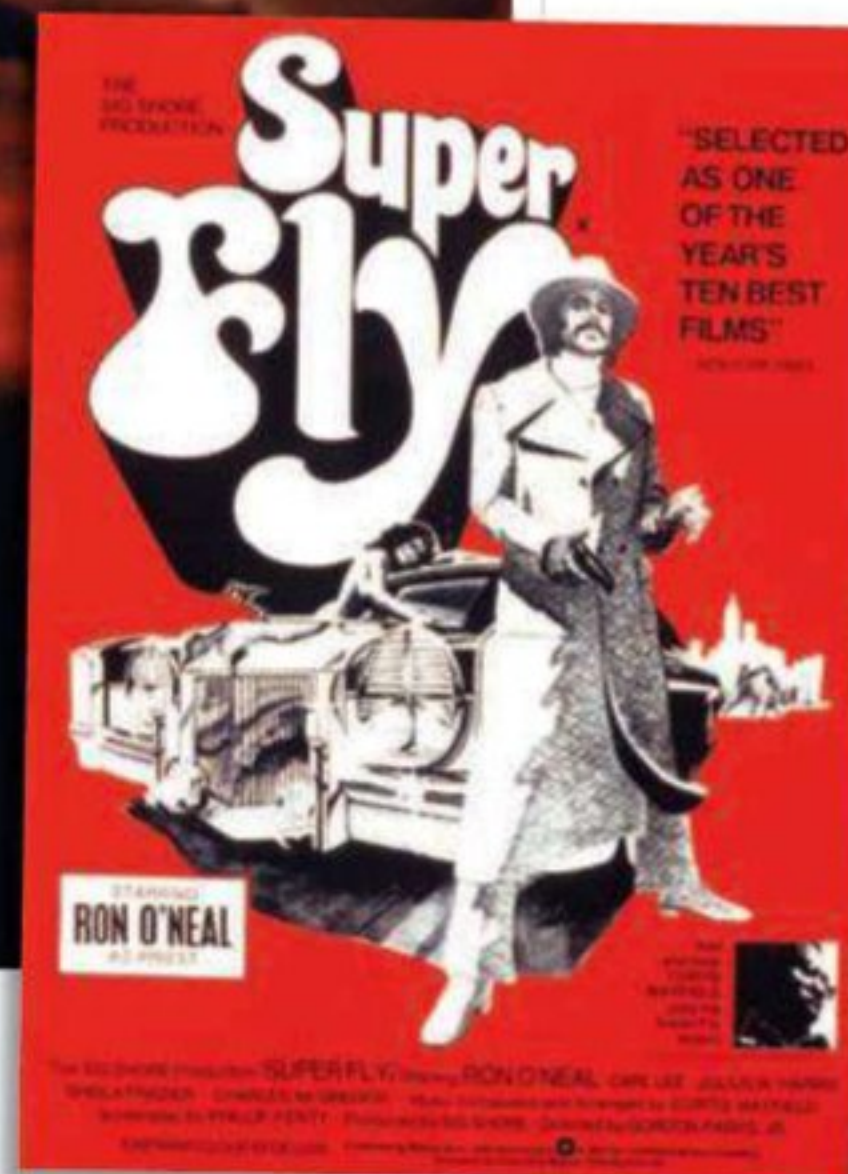
"'Pusherman' was the first song that was recorded for the *Super Fly* album," Craig McMullen confirms. "We recorded that at Bell Sounds Studio in New York in January 1972 and we also had a cameo appearance in the movie. But straight after that we had to go to Europe for some shows. The rest of the work on *Super Fly* wasn't done until we returned from that tour, some time in March '72. They wanted us to film our cameo appearance early so we had to do 'Pusherman' first."

You can see the band's performance of "Pusherman" halfway through the film, playing in a subterranean nightclub full of flamboyant hustlers and their women. McMullen doesn't have awestruck memories of his first and last time on a movie set. "As anyone who works in the movies will tell you, there's a lot of stop and go. My main memory was about a pair of boots. We'd filmed one day and had to come back, and I went shopping.

I came back to the set with these boots on. The flashy boots of the time... combination suede and multi-coloured. Typical 1970s stuff, y'know? So I wandered on set with my pants stuffed inside my boots, so I could show 'em off. Problem was, they'd already taken still shots with my pant legs covering my boots. So they made me cover 'em up. I was like, 'What? But they go so well with my yellow top!' Sounds crazy nowadays. But these boots was, like, slammin'!"

With filming and touring commitments completed, Mayfield and his band—McMullen, Joseph 'Lucky'

Scott (bass), 'Master' Henry Gibson (percussion)—returned to Chicago to record the bulk of the *Super Fly* album at RCA Studio A in late March 1972. For reasons no-one can recall, Mayfield regular and "Pusherman" drummer Tyrone McCullen was replaced by Morris Jennings. Chicago's RCA Studio A had been chosen for its size because Mayfield wanted to record band, strings, horns and backing singers in the same room, both to save time and get more of a live feel. Mayfield couldn't read or write music, so his long-standing arranger, Johnny Pate, had to work up sheet music for every musician, including players from the Chicago Symphony. Pate also had to conduct the musicians while Mayfield produced, and his regular engineer, Roger Anfinson, manned the desk. **CONTINUES OVER ►**



The ensemble worked in three-hour sessions in daylight hours, playing Pate's arrangements together in the packed studio, usually getting each one of the eight tunes completed in four takes at the most. Mayfield was a perfectionist, but no in-studio martinet. "Curtis was a very, very nice and easy-going guy," says McMullen. "He allowed all of us to put our creative input into whatever parts we was gonna play. He wasn't no harsh guy. We operated like a team. He would say, 'I'm gonna go this way', and because we were around each other so much we would automatically see what he meant and go our way. He expected that type of reaction from us as players. And we had fun playing."

But the *Super Fly* sessions did produce one rift that never healed, between two people who had been friends and collaborators since 1963.

"Johnny (Pate) and Curtis had worked together for years," explains Marv Heiman. "When Curtis made changes to the arrangements for the *Super Fly* sessions—which Johnny had been used to—Johnny, for whatever reason, spoke up. Not in front of everybody. He came in the control room. Johnny didn't agree with this and that and Curtis basically said, 'I'm writing the music. I'm performing the music. I want the music to be me. I want it changed, good, bad or indifferent.' After *Super Fly*, Curtis never used Johnny Pate again. It was the end of the relationship."

After the album's release, Pate publicly stated that he had co-written the soundtrack's two jazz-inflected pieces of instrumental incidental music, "Think" and "Junkie Chase". Mayfield insisted that everything on *Super Fly* was solely written by him, and threatened legal action. Although it never went to court, the matter was never amicably resolved. When I call Pate, now 88, at his home in Texas, he declines to be interviewed, except to say that the *Super Fly* affair is still "a sore point". I ask Heiman if Pate had a case.

"No. Curtis wrote the rhythm tracks and added the lines. And I think that, when Johnny did what he did... well... there were several things. First of all, if Johnny really believed that—and I told Curtis this—he could have brought a lawsuit. He never did. All he did was act in a bad way towards Curtis. That bothered



Mayfield (right) being directed by Gordon Parks Jr on the set of *Super Fly*

"SUPER FLY WAS CURTIS' PEAK. I BELIEVE, DOWN DEEP, THAT HE THOUGHT SO, TOO, THOUGH I DON'T KNOW IF HE ADMITTED IT TO ANYBODY" MARV HEIMAN, MANAGER

Curtis immensely. I think Johnny did that because it was such a huge success that he felt he should be entitled to a bigger share of the recognition."

Craig McMullen, who has remained close to Pate, sees things rather differently. "For Marv to say that Johnny could have sued... sometimes, somebody has to be big enough to say, 'Hey—I don't wanna take this any further.' It's like taking your mama to court. My opinion is that it was Johnny Pate's stuff."

BY THE END of April 1972, the album was finished. Heiman recalls his excitement at hearing the completed record. "You knew it right away. You could feel the energy. Curtis' guys were slapping hands and yelling,

'I hear you Curtis!' When we took the tape up to Buddah they called us right away, going crazy."

With Mayfield's cutting of music to image completed by late June '72, Buddah's excitement over Mayfield's album forced Neil Bogart's hand. "The *Super Fly* album was released ahead of the film to create momentum to the opening of the film," Heiman explains. "The idea was Neil Bogart's and mine." By the time of the New York premiere the album's first single, "Freddie's Dead", was all over US radio and *Super Fly* sat triumphantly on top of the *Billboard* charts, the only No 1 album of Curtis Mayfield's career.

The impact of Mayfield's greatest work was immediate, as the success of film and album fed off each other. "In the first four weeks we

KOBAL/GETTY

CLASSIC CURTIS A guide to the best of Mayfield, and The Impressions...



THE IMPRESSIONS KEEP ON PUSHING UNIVERSAL

★★★★
With a title hit that captured a moment in the Civil Rights movement, this third Impressions set defines Mayfield's missing link between sophisticated doo wop balladry and his later conscious soul.



THE IMPRESSIONS THE YOUNG MODS' FORGOTTEN STORY SUNSPOTS

★★★★
This is not a proto-*Quadrophenia*, but still the 1969 peak of the late Mayfield-led Impressions, by way of glorious pro-integration anthems "Choice Of Colors" and "Mighty Mighty (Spade & Whitey)".



CURTIS MAYFIELD CURTIS RHINO

★★★★★
Mayfield's 1970 solo debut almost equals *Super Fly* in depth and scope, veering between the dancefloor optimism of "Move On Up" and the blistering psych-funk protest of "(Don't Worry) If There's A Hell Below, We're All Going To Go".



CURTIS/LIVE SUNSPOTS

★★★★
One of soul's greatest live albums, recorded at The Bitter End in Greenwich Village in '71. Mayfield career highlights are revamped by the classic Experience five-piece lineup.



ROOTS RHINO

★★★★
Mayfield's third is preparation for the daring structures and arrangements of *Super Fly*, and features, in "Keep On Keeping On" and "Beautiful Brother Of Mine", two of his most inspiring black-is-beautiful testimonies.



Curtis and the Experience perform on USTV

sold around 700,000 albums,” says Heiman. “We ended up selling over 800,000 eight-track tapes, which no-one else had done. It led to Curtis’ success as a solo artist. But more importantly, it opened up an avenue for him to do other movie soundtracks. He did *Claudine* with Gladys Knight, *Let’s Do It Again* with The Staple Singers and *Sparkle* with Aretha Franklin. They were all hugely successful. The hit soundtracks led a whole new set of people to know who Curtis Mayfield was at that time.”

But what no-one knew at the time was that *Super Fly* represented Mayfield’s creative and commercial peak. Although the soundtracks Mayfield produced for others provided pop hits, his own works declined in popularity with each release. By 1975 he was no longer a chart

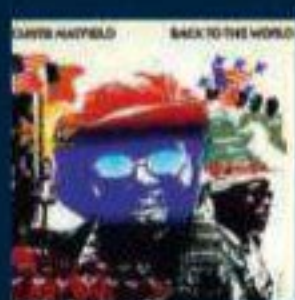
artist, as disco overtook soul as the black music of popular choice, and his albums became more plaintive, despairing, resigned. “The hardest part about that was that Curtis found it very difficult to repeat something which he maybe felt was his best work,” insists Heiman. “I believe *Super Fly* was his peak. I believe, down deep, that he did, too, though I don’t know if he admitted it to anybody.”

Super Fly is a deeper and truer work of art than the film it illuminates. As Bobby Womack puts it: “The impact at the time was tremendous. The whole world was able to look in on black people. Now, of course, everybody wasn’t hustling. Everybody wasn’t no pimp. People liked the flash clothes and cars. I wish the movie had given a little more credit to kids who

was trying to go to school and stay away from the street. ‘Cos without them, there wouldn’t have been no Barack Obama. Curtis’ music gave that credit. That was what he was about.”

“It’s been an influence on the hip hop generation,” Marv Heiman argues. “His music has been sampled by everyone from LL Cool J to Jay-Z and beyond. The music has longevity.”

Curtis Mayfield’s legacy is one of protest with positivity, anger sweetened by reason, and a musical talent as rich and visionary as it was instinctive and humble. *Super Fly* is where that legacy best resides. “It’s a funny thing about a genius,” Bobby Womack muses. “We always underestimate or overestimate when they’re around. But you don’t appreciate ‘em or miss ‘em ‘til they gone.” 🍌



BACK TO THE WORLD

CHARLY

★★★

This 1973 semi-concept album inspired by returning Vietnam vets suffered in comparison to its *Super Fly* predecessor. But it has plenty of the same cinematic flourish, plus the prophetic eco-funk of “Future Shock”.



SWEET EXORCIST

CHARLY

★★★

The sci-fi mystical sleeve alone makes this worth owning, as well as the somewhat surprising kitsch-funk of mini-hit “Kung Fu”.



SHORTEYES OST

CHARLY

★★★

The soundtrack from the 1977 movie that bankrupted the Curtom label is one of Mayfield’s most elegantly bleak albums.



SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN

CHARLY

★★★★

This 1980 suite of gorgeous love songs featured deft remakes of Impressions classics “It’s All Right” and “Never Let Me Go”, and stands as Mayfield’s classic seduction set.



NEW WORLD ORDER

WARNERS

★★★

His final 1997 set had to be recorded line by line as the paralysed and ailing Mayfield lay on his back. A new version of “We The People Who Are Darker Than Blue” and the tracks produced by Organized Noize make this more than a sentimental choice.

ALBUM BY ALBUM

DANIEL LANOIS

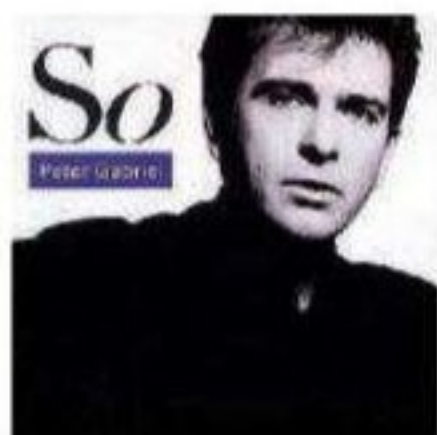
INTERVIEW BY ALASTAIR MCKAY

An early encounter with Brian Eno shaped the career of producer and performer Daniel Lanois. From 1979 to '83, the two men recorded instrumental LPs in Hamilton, Ontario, a body of work that was uncommercial, but hugely influential. Lanois calls those records (*Apollo*, *On Land* and Harold Budd's *The Plateaux Of Mirror*) "wildflowers on a concrete bridge" – but his subsequent career has seen him bring his sonic curiosity to records by some of rock's biggest names. "Was it intimidating working with Dylan? I'm a hairdresser's son from Steeltown, Canada, so everything's intimidating to me. I'm a little pawn among royalty! I pinch myself every day..."

SHUFFLES, GROOVES AND HI-HATS

PETER GABRIEL *SO*

CHARISMA, 1986



Gabriel embraces James Brown-style percussion, and unleashes "Sledgehammer".

I was in Hamilton, Ontario when I got a phone call from Peter.

He was making a soundtrack for *Birdy*. The next morning I was on the plane. Peter said, "Whatever's in my library take it out and do whatever you want."

I worked on my own for a few days, and presented Peter with a finished soundtrack from what he had in the vault. He asked me to stay to work on his next song record. I lived in what I called the Bell Tower – a farmhouse just outside Bath. The studio was an old cow barn. It was very crude there, with a coal-burning fire, and that was my life for a year.

I loved everything about Peter; he was completely dedicated, and I wanted to make sure that his heart was at the centre of the picture.

There were some obvious directions that he accepted. I told him he'd done enough with that kind of stark drumming that he loved. I told him he should embrace the hi-hat, because a lot of the groove comes from it. We brought in Manu Katché; that was the turning point. We had a drummer who could play a great shuffle – being a North American musician I have a high regard for the shuffle; it comes from James Brown – and he nailed it in one take. When that happened I knew we had "Sledgehammer". I just kept fertilising and watering that plant!

SPLENDID ISOLATION

U2 *THE JOSHUA TREE*

ISLAND, 1987



The ambient experiments give way to epic rock, on U2's love letter to the USA.

On *The Unforgettable Fire*, U2 were happy to embrace sonics that

Brian Eno and myself brought to Dublin from Canada. We made an atmospheric, spiritual record.

Then we went on to *The Joshua Tree*. We were at Adam Clayton's country house. He hadn't even moved into it yet. The fact that it was out of the way and just on the outskirts of Dublin enabled us to concentrate. There were no cellphones then, and you could hardly make a regular phone call in Ireland at all. When you don't have any distractions you get a lot of work done, so people were very focused and dedicated.

I always look for the four pillars of a record – the four songs that you then build everything else around. "With Or Without You" existed after the first week of work. Things fell into place; "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" was built on top of a Larry Mullen drumbeat that was not designed for the song at all. I fought for that drumbeat and then we built a whole other song around it. I whispered a few melodies in Bono's ear. I had essentially come out of a dark rabbit hole, oblivious to everything.

As I hear that record now, it's naïve. We like that in art – that somebody gave it the best of what they had to work with.

HELPING OUT A FRIEND

ROBBIE ROBERTSON *ROBBIE ROBERTSON*

GEFFEN, 1987



The Band man's reflective solo debut album.

I have to admit, I was mystified as to why The Band didn't exist anymore. I think Robbie appreciated having a

Canadian mate around. He had a lot of songs written, but only a couple of those made the record. I encouraged him to write new songs. "Fallen Angel" was about one of his mates who didn't make it [Richard Manuel] – it's a fascinating and unusual thing. I wanted to find out from him how he felt about being in Arkansas, as a Canadian kid who moved there. He was describing it to me and I turned the microphone on. He talked for 20 minutes about the fishing technique, how they'd throw dynamite in the river, all of this. I had given him this toy instrument to help him with songwriting, a Suzuki Omnichord, and it had a couple of diminished chords and augmented chords, old-fashioned fruity chords... so we decided to work with those and build a story. It rings true because he obviously talks about a special time in his life when he met Levon Helm. I sewed that together for him – I demonstrated the idea – and then he refined the story, and then we built the songs.

I did everything that I could to fight for my Canadian friend! I even brought some Canadian musicians down there to work with him because I knew that he missed his mates.

Lanois – from producer to performer in 1989: “I just made the record I thought I should make at the time...”

FREEWHEELING IN NEW ORLEANS

DANIEL LANOIS *ACADIE*

OPAL, 1989



DANIEL
LANOIS
ACADIE

Solo debut as a performer – Lanois heads South.

As I hear *Acadie* now I hear an honest and clear effort that really was operating outside of stylistic boundaries.

I just made the record that I thought I should make at the time. I didn't really care whether it was in synch with anything that was happening. It's always been a Canadian trait, our capacity as writers to observe. We still have a talent for proposing a toast and celebrating what's around us. I like the storytelling in that record. Simply put, you gotta go to the best sources, and without any doubt, the basslines and the rhythms are more exotic in the South.

Much of what I loved rhythmically was happening in New Orleans, so I went down there just to complete my PhD! Not an actual PhD – I'm an honorary! I recorded Aaron Neville singing “Amazing Grace” in my apartment in New Orleans, with his brother Art playing the organ just as a textural thing in the background, so he had a pitch reference to work with. It was a freewheel, without time, essentially a cappella.

I loved the out-of-body aspect of it, so I built a high-speed fixed rhythm electronic backing for his voice, and I hit on this echo that was quite magic. I married the vocal to something that I built after Aaron's performance, so it has this uplifting dynamic expression, and he's like a ghost floating over the top of it. I'm proud of that one!

TWO SIDES OF BOB

BOB DYLAN *OH MERCY*

COLUMBIA, 1989

TIME OUT OF MIND

COLUMBIA, 1997



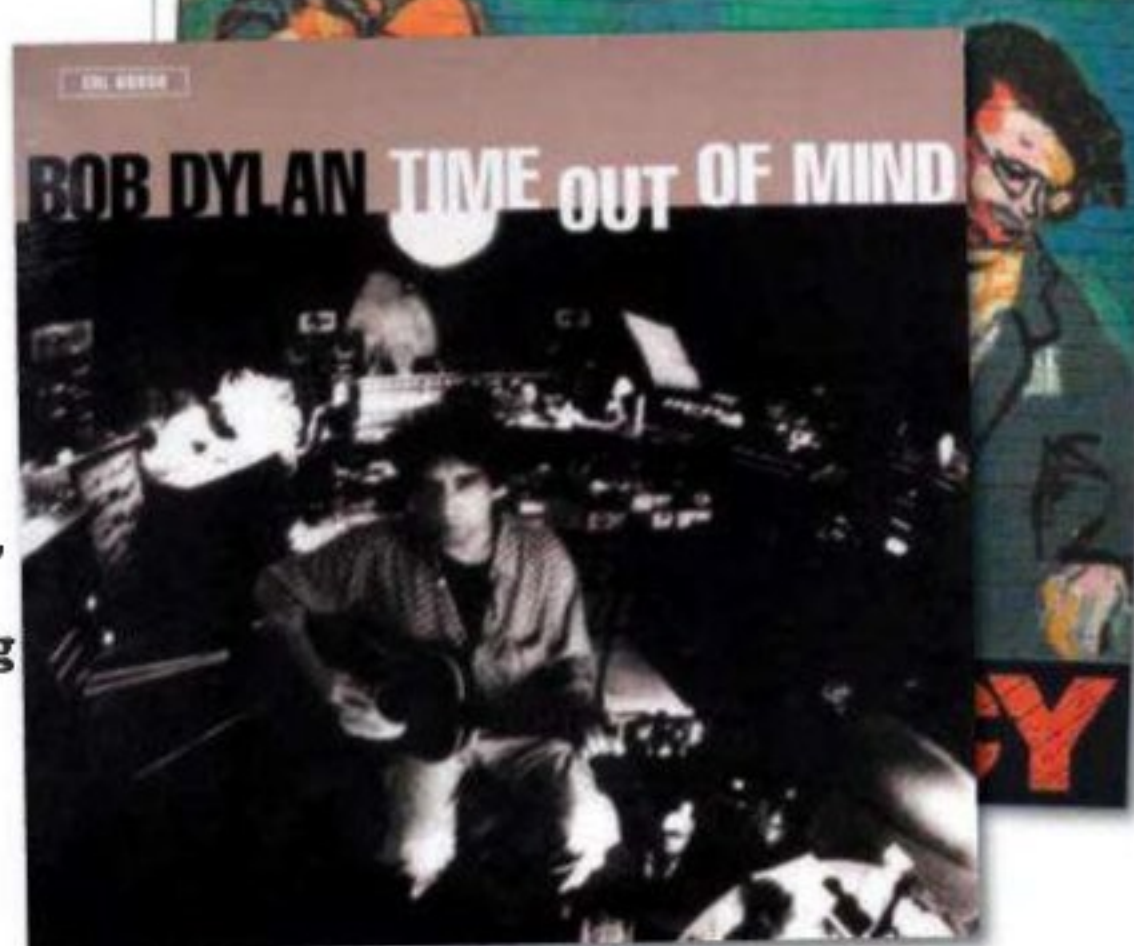
The “back porch” record with a beatbox, cut in a New Orleans kitchen, and eight years later, a sprawling congregation,

with duelling pedal steels, in Miami.

Our first meeting was in New Orleans; I was working with the Neville Brothers. Bono hooked us up. I went to hear Bob's show and he stopped by the studio after. I played him a few tracks we were working on, which included two songs of his – he heard “With God On Our Side” and was touched by the delivery. We made *Oh Mercy* essentially in a kitchen. Two guys and two chairs. I had a little extra equipment, but it was pretty much a back porch record. I made a decision to magnify the centre of Bob Dylan. Technically, I wanted to make sure we had a beautiful vocal sound that commanded attention. It's an electro record, really. It's a Roland 808 beatbox. I just fed that to him, right in his face. It was all about that pulse, the vocal, his instrument, then mine. That's how we got the clarity and the fidelity. That record is not everything, but it is something.

Time Out Of Mind is very different. It's a congregational record. We had 11 people in the room. I used the same mic I'd used on *Oh Mercy* for his voice. I sat next to him at the grand piano. I was essentially his guard, to make sure he didn't step into any sandtraps. Earlier, I met him in New York. He read me the lyrics, and

BOB DYLAN



I knew where he was going. He said, “I love rock'n'roll records; early blues records.” He gave me a list of records to listen to. I went to a friend's studio and played along with them and tried to get to the bottom of it. I then deleted the sources and took our playing and made about 20 loops, all fascinating, all rock'n'roll. I took those loops to *Time Out Of Mind* – “Highlands” is built on one. What that does is, it's like a landscape that doesn't change. It's a long highway over long wheat fields, with telephone poles going by. You don't want to ask the pole to suddenly become a serpent: it's a telephone pole. So the landscape never changes, and that's what's good about a loop, and then what Bob does on top, and what the musicians did, qualify as the expression. It's like a blue screen where you're happy for the cloud formation to repeat itself – like you'd go, “OK, we get the trick, now what does the central character have to say?” It becomes a moment in the limelight – that's what's endearing.

CONTINUES OVER»



Every man needs a mate: with Neil Young in 2010 to record *Le Noise*

AN ALT. ROCKING COUNTRY CLASSIC

EMMYLOU HARRIS WRECKING BALL

GRAPEVINE, 1995

EMMYLOU HARRIS Career-altering, Grammy-winning diversion for former *Fallen Angel*.



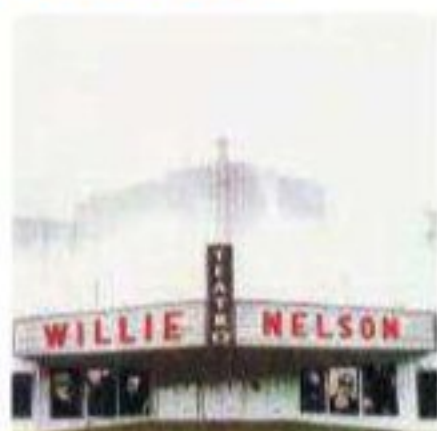
I visited Emmylou in Nashville. After five minutes I knew I'd make a record with her. Not

because of her song choices, or the direction of her music; it had nothing to do with that. It had everything to do with what I felt coming out of the walls of her house. I knew I'd entered the tapestry of George Jones, Johnny Cash, June Carter and Linda Ronstadt. I felt a certain kind of American dignity that I'd never felt before. At that point I took on a responsibility, as I felt she needed to be elevated to that place where the things the house spoke of could be represented on record. That was the initial driving force. I was happy to just have a soulful record, rather than a curio. I was happy for it to resonate and have its bones in the right place. I rented this old upright piano, and I found some dulcimers at Emmy's house. I had my electric mandolin. By having them live on a record, we hit on a nice, kind of Appalachian sound – the dulcimer's an Appalachian instrument. Something came into play symphonically that was great. I suggested we record Hendrix's "May This Be Love" as there's a part of Jimi that is country-like. It was an interesting connection with Americana.

A DANCE CLUB DELIGHT

WILLIE NELSON TEATRO

ISLAND, 1998



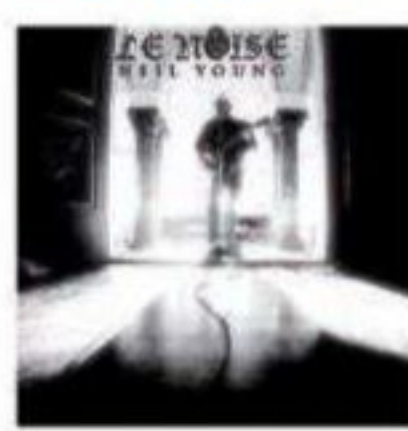
Country legend, relaxing in an old Mexican cinema. What's not to like?

I met Willie in Las Vegas and rode on his bus to Oxnard, CA, where the Teatro is. It's an old, abandoned cinema I rented. Emmylou jumped onboard, and we worked up the songs on the way. All the while I was talking to Willie about what it was like back in the day, and he said, "We were only ever a dance band. That's what bands were for in the '50s." So I got on the phone with my engineer. I said, "Let's build a Cuban night club, put the musicians up on pedestals, maybe get some dancers in, so it feels like Willie's back at the dance club." We came off that bus, it was perfectly built. We put weather balloons from the surplus joint next door on top of drainpipes and projected old 16mm films onto them. It was magic, and that made its way into the music. We went off, one song at a time; we'd record, I'd do a bass overdub, knock out a mix right on the spot. We made the record in four days – it's like a jazz record, there's not a lot of gadgetry. You don't get the sense somebody was fucking with it in the studio. You can hear the air around it and the musicians were actually there – responding to Willie's phrasing, as Emmy was. Listeners feel that, when something is vibrant – you're rolling the dice, and it's that little moment.

VOICE. GUITAR. MAGIC

NEIL YOUNG LE NOISE

REPRISE, 2010



Neil – solo, loud and reverberating through Lanois' patented "black dub" guitar-distorting machine.

Neil didn't want to have a band, he wanted to make the record on his own. I thought: what are we going to do with this? So we hit on a couple of sounds early on that really helped. It kept getting greasier and greasier; the house was rocking with noise. As secretive as we tried to be, there was a 10-block radius of people listening to the new Neil Young record! The sessions were under the full moon. We did three days, then we'd break up till the next full moon. So I said, things are going well, but if you happen to hit on another rocker before the next session, that'd be great. He just kept coming in with them! What started out an acoustic record – in the end there's only two acoustic songs.

We had one session left to go, and I had a motorcycle crash and almost died. Neil was very helpful. He had connections in the hospital – I went from being the homeless guy down the end of the hall, to being put in a private room. I was three weeks in intensive care. When I got back to the house I couldn't move. Neil called and said, "What's happening with the record?" I said, "OK, Neil," and finished it in a wheelchair. Maybe it all added up to what the record is now. But I wouldn't wish it on anyone!

BACK TO THE FUTURE

BLACK DUB BLACK DUB

SONY, 2010

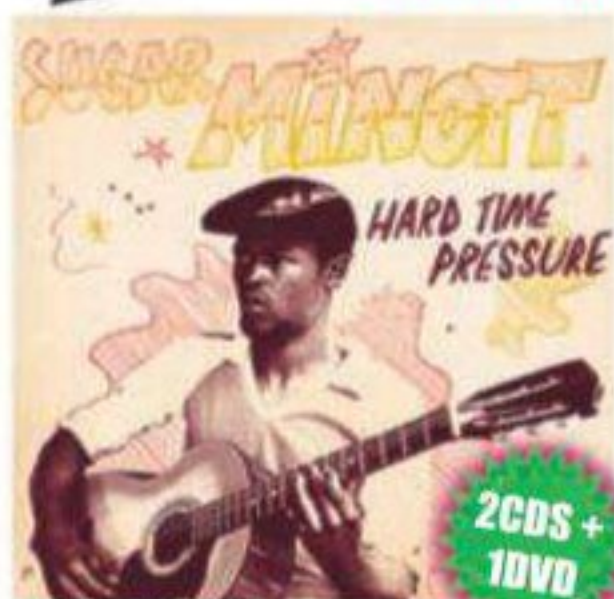


Lanois relinquishes the singer's seat in favour of jazz-flavoured jamming.

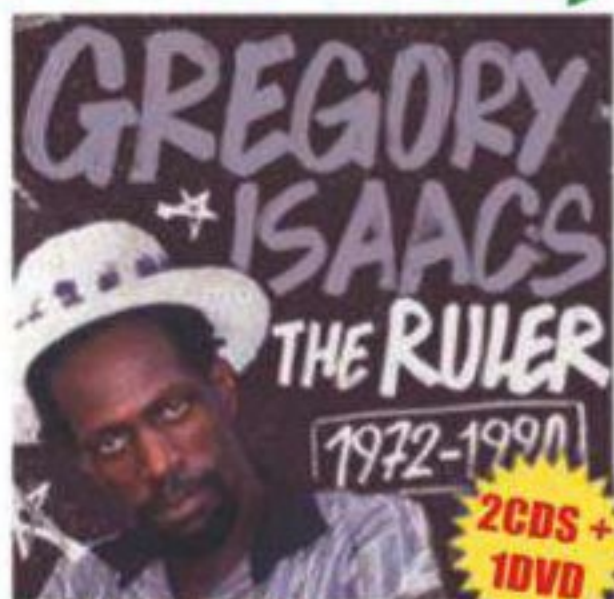
I met Trixie Whitley in Belgium. She's the daughter of my old friend, Chris Whitley, and thought it might be fun to put a group together that was able to feature her talent. It was a way to play with a different set of colours. It really supports what I do as a guitar player, and it's a chance to gather up a few mates. We were coming to this as appreciators and lovers of music. The members of the band are all traditionalists – but we all have an appetite for the future. We are essentially American-based in our inspirations, as all hip hop is, and as pretty much everything is, barring some electro music. That's where we come from. Our drummer Brian Blade plays in church, and his father's a great singing preacher. Trixie's father was essentially a blues singer and musician. I grew up with gospel and folk songs, so that's a great mélange. If you say there's a spiritual feel, I'll take it as a compliment: once we get out of the fast lane, in this very fast world we're living in, you just look in the mirror and say, "Who am I, and what am I driven by, what are my philosophical tendencies, how good a human being am I, how kind am I to a neighbour?" You can't run away from who you are. ①

17 North Parade

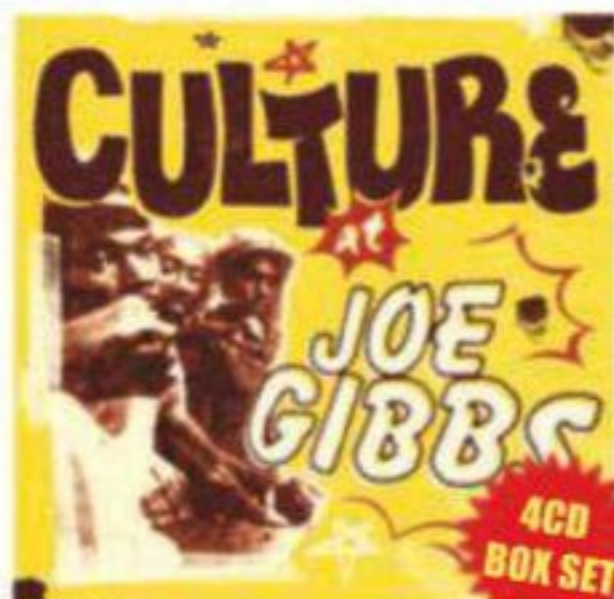
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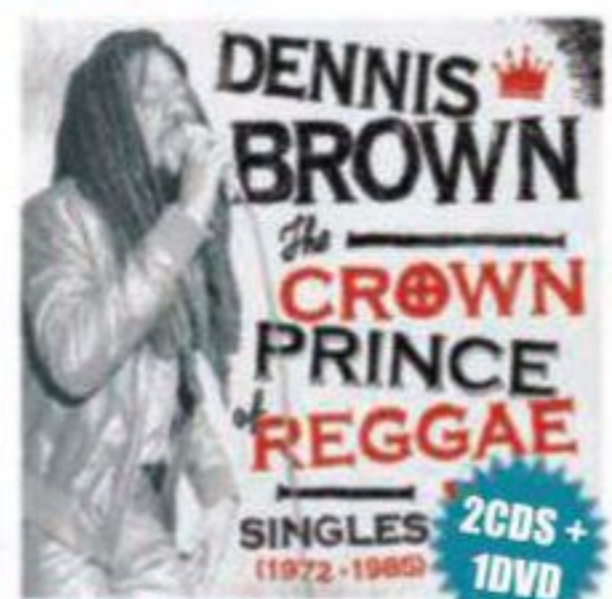
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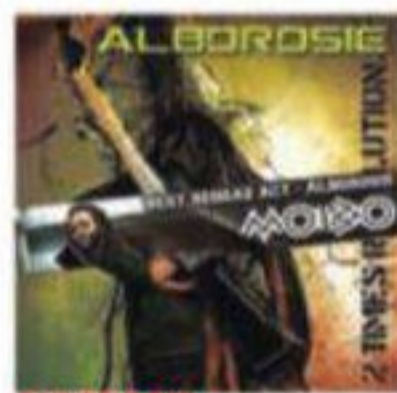
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New Order

The Early Years

Back at the start of the '80s, Dec Hickey, along with a bunch of other Bedford fans, was present on “the coolest of road trips...”

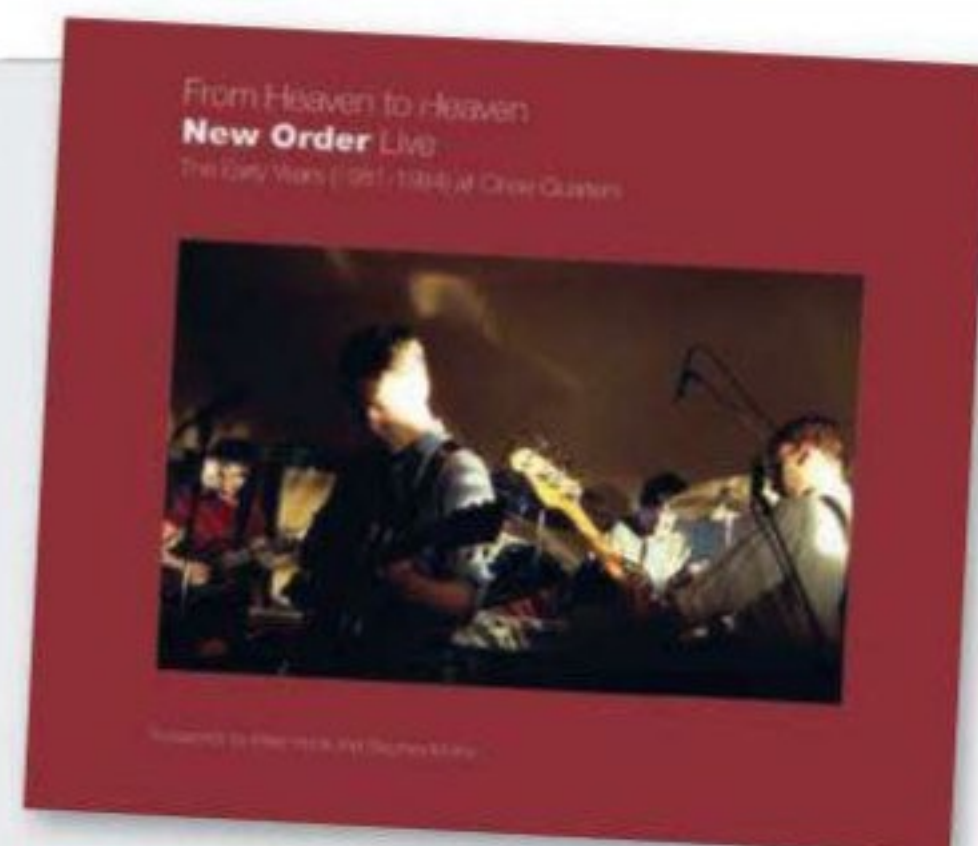
WORDS: DEC HICKEY PHOTOGRAPHS: DEC HICKEY, TOM LOCKE, IAN TAYLOR

“February 9, 1981: New Order had played 17 (arguably 18) gigs to this point, all very low-key, but London’s Heaven (above) was their first in the capital and the time when, in effect, they broke cover: 10,000 applied for 1,000 tickets and it was hard to tell which was heavier, the weight of expectancy from the audience or the pressure under which the band found themselves. Opening with ‘In A Lonely Place’ there wasn’t a hint of recognition from the crowd of anything in the 8-song/42-minute set, and Paul Morley’s subsequent ‘The Haunting Of Heaven’ NME review (with Anton Corbijn colour photos, to boot) was possibly more epic than the gig itself.

“I caught Hooky at the bar afterwards and asked him if they’d fancy playing Bedford. He gave me Rob Gretton’s number and a week or so later we’d arranged it. I got lucky, and from Bedford onwards I caught all New Order’s British gigs for the next three-and-a-half years. And though I wasn’t a photographer I often had a camera to hand, and a tape machine! It quickly became a groundbreaking time for the band, and their musical trajectory was breathtaking.”

CONTINUES»

From Heaven To Heaven, New Order Live: The Early Years (1981-1984) At Close Quarters, by Dec Hickey. Introductions by Paul Morley and Moby. Forewords by Peter Hook and Stephen Morris. Price: £30 Hardback. ISBN: 9780956993601. Published this month. For more details, visit www.fromheaventoheaven.com





«“April 18, 1981 – Aberdeen Victoria Hotel soundcheck. Minutes earlier, on the smallest stage I ever saw New Order play, they’d run through an instrumental take of ‘Isolation’, the first Joy Division song they’d touched since the Heaven soundcheck, back in February.”



★ "March 21, 1981 – Bedford Boys' Club. My gig... though I had no written contract. Looking at the empty stage at 3pm, I was thinking it might all be a wind-up, then a van pulled up, in bounced the crew and a flight case with the words 'Joy Division' on the side rolled across the floor. I thought, 'We're on!' 225 lucky souls watched New Order that night."

✦ "March 3, 1982 – Derby Blue Note. A magical gig: the band were edgy and really starting to propel their electronic side. It was a small club and roadie Terry Mason spent most of the gig trying to stop the staging breaking apart and Gillian and her keyboards falling in between."





▲ "June 20, 1981 – Glastonbury. Taken during an epic version of 'Everything's Gone Green', which was forced upon 18,000 hippies..."

▼ "January 29, 1983 – Cardiff University. 13 of us on the guest list and in a transit van hammering across the country, trying to make the soundcheck. Business as usual."



▲ "April 10, 1981 – Birmingham Cedar Club. Dressing room, post gig. Barney is probably just relieved none of the equipment has screwed up. Looking back, I'm slightly stunned at my bravado, taking photos backstage (something I rarely did). I hadn't known the band three weeks at this point."

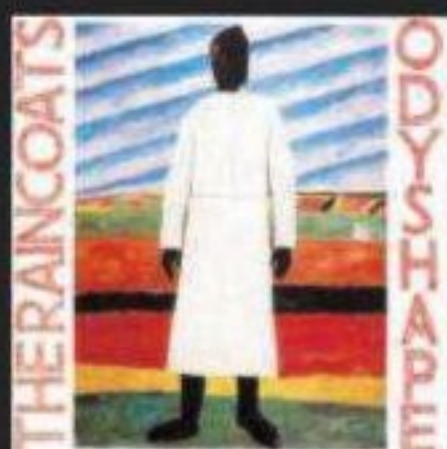
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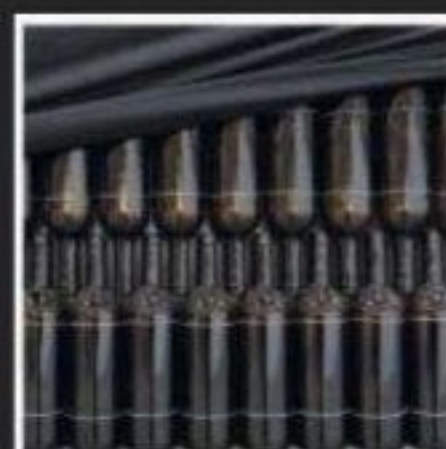
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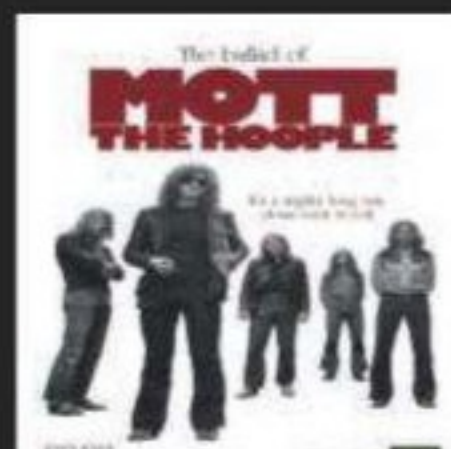
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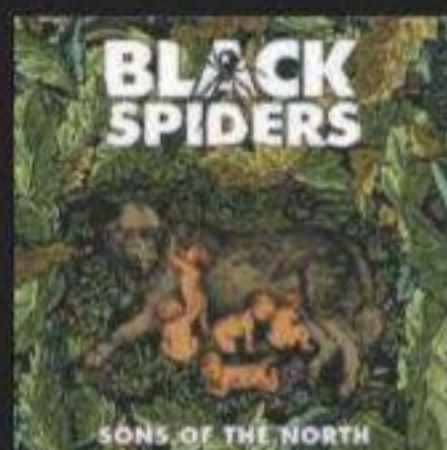
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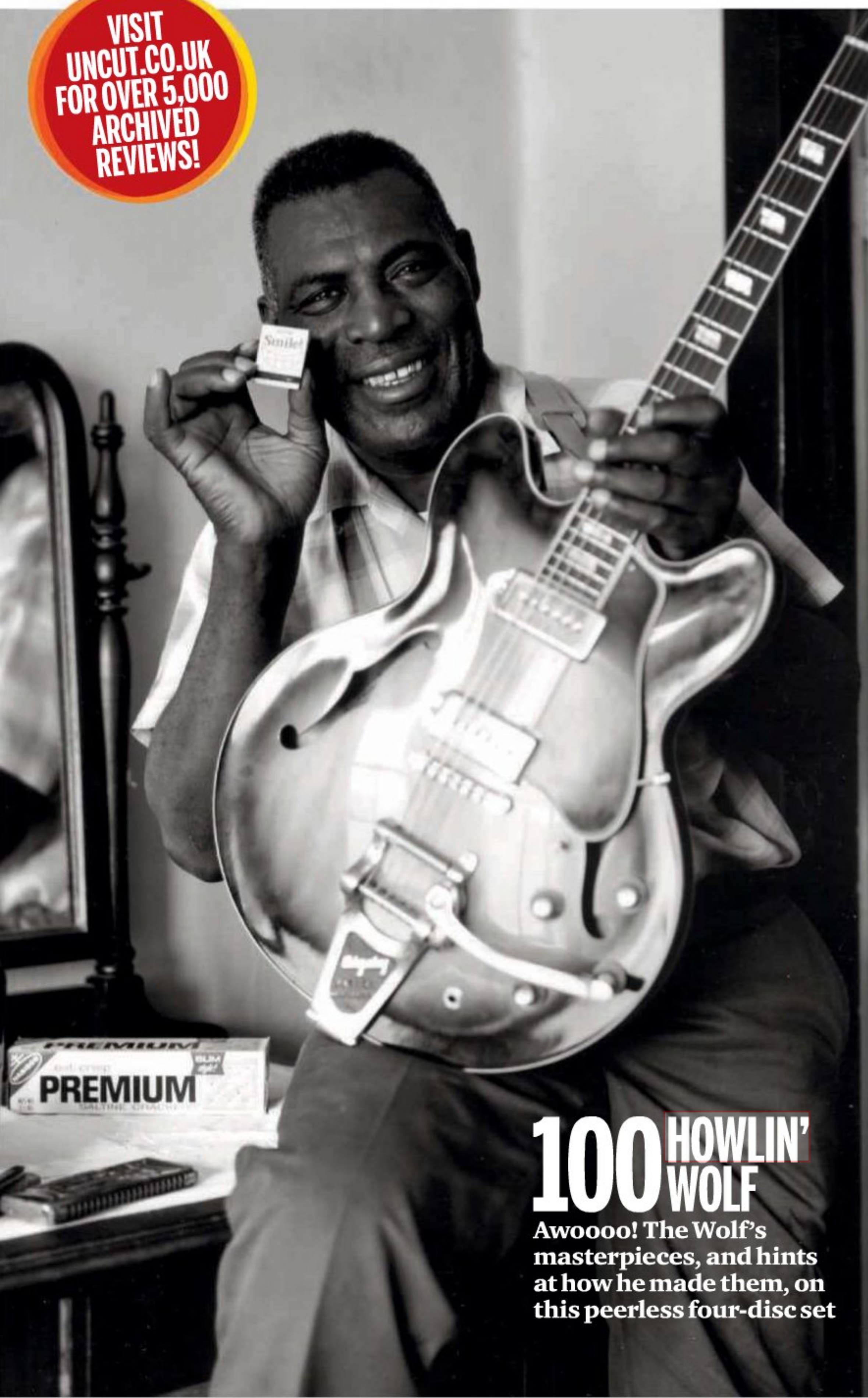
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ALBUMS

78 LEONARD COHEN *Old Ideas* brings the cosmic wisdom of Leonard's experience, and with it, considerable wit, also

82 CRAIG FINN Hold Steady man strips things back a bit, to everyone's relief, not least his own

85 KATHLEEN EDWARDS Americana singer-songwriter seeks escape from said niche. Succeeds, hooking up with Bon Iver in process

88 CHIMES OF FREEDOM The works of Bob Dylan, reinterpreted over five CDs, for the benefit of Amnesty International

92 THE LITTLE WILLIES Norah Jones' downtime band deliver more tasteful country covers

95 GUIDED BY VOICES A reunion album from the classic mid-1990s lineup. Now with added ambition

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103 CALEXICO *Selections From Road Atlas* picks the best of the band's idiosyncratic, impressive Tour Only CDs

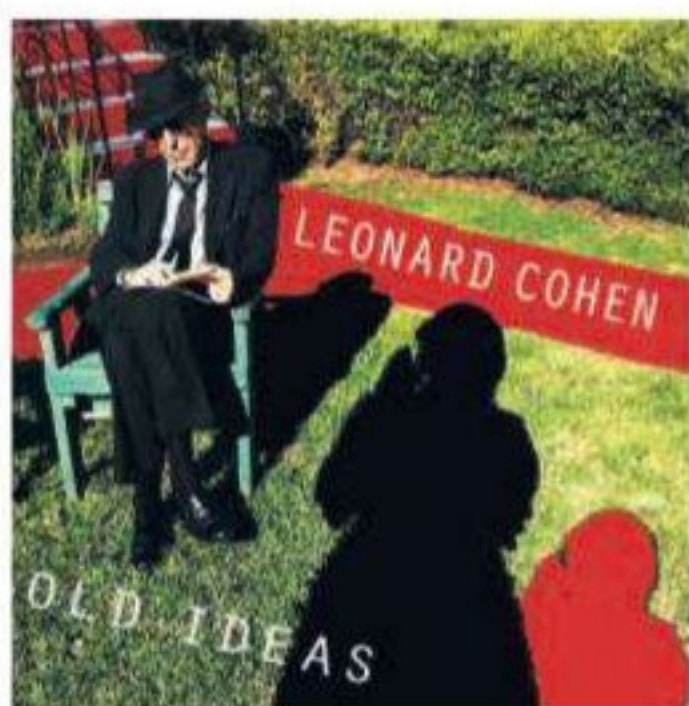
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LEONARD COHEN

Old Ideas COLUMBIA



His first studio album for eight years finds Cohen addressing love on a larger moral scale. By Andy Gill

**ALBUM
OF THE
MONTH**

ONCE UPON A time – as so many magical fantasies begin – there was a character called Leonard Cohen. He wrapped himself in the raiment of a poet, which turned out to be

a role for which he was well equipped, blessed as he was with an imaginative, questing soul and a clever way with words. Leonard was a lucky fellow, for when poetry, allied to music, developed an hitherto unforeseen popularity in the 1960s, he was perfectly placed to capitalise upon that collusion. He had a voice, unusually low, that seemed to speak straight to the deepest hidden desires of women, in particular. Which was nice. And he was one of those particularly lucky fellows who, though not especially blessed with film-star good looks in his youth, matured like a fine wine or noble cheese, developing a winning handsomeness as he grew older. By the time he was in his sixties, he had that kind of glowing charm, shared by such as Sean Connery and Jack Nicholson, that slayed all hearts that crossed his path. Lucky old Leonard!

But of course, as with all magical fantasies, there is a downside, a price to be paid for being so abundantly blessed, and for our hero, it's the constriction that such an image places upon the inner man. Unlike most film and pop stars, Leonard Cohen has always displayed – if that's quite the right word – deeply introspective leanings that confound the usual showbiz mores. He was quite happy, until suffering the cruellest of financial mishaps, to spend his dotage meditating, shaven-headed, on a mountaintop. Forced back out onto the road to replenish his pension fund at an age when most are drawing theirs, he had to don the poet's raiment again, which in his case took the form of a stylish suit and raffish trilby.

"I love to speak with Leonard, he's a sportsman and a shepherd, he's a lazy bastard living in a suit," is the sentiment which opens this first album in eight years, a typically wry, self-deprecating acknowledgement which in a

few words sums up Cohen's indulgent good fortune, his spirituality, and his easy charm; but which also casts the shadow later illuminated in the same song, the self-knowledge that, for all the supposed wisdom of his words, he's "*nothing but a brief elaboration of a tune*", and for that matter, keen to discard "*this costume that I wear*".

The song is called "Going Home", which is about as valedictory as it gets. It's a textbook Cohen slice of insightful resignation, tinged with regret, and delivered over the wistful electric piano and synthetic reeds that made *I'm Your Man* so lazily beguiling. It's a perfect opener for an album titled *Old Ideas*, which is itself a brilliant title for an album that pores over the passing and the past with such defiant, deadpan nobility. In "The Darkness", a track whose subdued, whiskery blues style and sentiment makes it sound like something

An album that pores over the passing and the past with such defiant, deadpan nobility

from Dylan's *Time Out Of Mind*, Cohen confronts the inevitable with sanguine grace. "*I've got no future, I know my days are few*," he admits. "*I thought the past would last me, but the darkness got that too*." Ouch! So much, then, for posterity, even if he does try to dress the theme up in some of his characteristic obsessive-romantic erotic entendres later in the song.

Set to the plaintive plunking of banjo and poignant wisps of violin over a reassuring bed of organ and cooing angels, the track "Amen" gives some idea of the *Old Ideas* involved here. Again, it's a rumination on deeper, darker matters delivered in the guise of a love song, the refrain "*Tell me that you love me, Amen*" punctuating a series of requests to "*Tell me again...*" that grow progressively

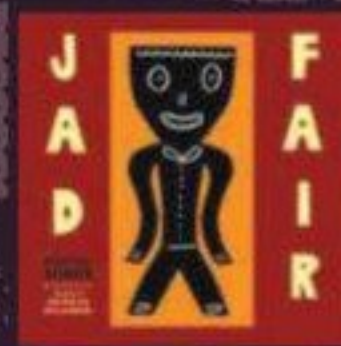
bleaker as the song progresses: what kind of love song, for instance, includes a line like "... *when the filth of the butcher is washed in the blood of the lamb*"? Clearly, this is about love on a larger scale, about notions of ethics and morality being eroded away as if unnecessary for the future, as Cohen acknowledges with some asperity: "... *when the victims are singing and the laws of remorse are restored*".

Continuing this theme, "Come Healing" is this album's most likely heir to "Hallelujah", a plea that the heavens might hear "*the penitential hymn*" and visit succour on both the heart and the mind, the body and the spirit. Although, given that "Hallelujah" was as much about triumphing over waning potency as it was about anything religious, "Show Me The Place" might be a more fitting successor. "*Show me the place where you want your slave to go*," sings Cohen, "*show me I've forgotten I don't know*." Again: Ouch! So much for the endurance of sexual desire, presented here and in "Anyhow" as a matter of self-abasement before a reluctant lover – both songs plodding along to a glum blend of organ and piano that perfectly straddles the fine line between pathos and bathos, between cabaret suavity and crushing ignominy.

Elsewhere, "Lullaby" wafts languidly on an undulating guitar figure that's like the breathing of a deep sleeper; "Different Side" pulses trenchantly along as Cohen examines the wretched situation of an increasingly antagonistic couple who "*find ourselves on different sides of a line nobody drew*"; and "Banjo" uses quaintly antique dobro, horn and clarinet to evoke how the mysterious image of "*a broken banjo bobbing on a dark infested sea*" affects him. But it's "Crazy To Love You" that perhaps summarises *Old Ideas* most effectively: the thrumming acoustic guitar harks all the way back to his debut album while Cohen makes reference to "Tower Of Song" in confronting his waning powers. "*I'm tired of choosing desire, I'm saved by a blessed fatigue*," he admits. "*But crazy has places to hide in that are deeper than any goodbye*."

Time to get back in the suit, Leonard.





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DOUGHNUT FOR A SNOWMAN (7")
OUT JANUARY 2012

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CARDINAL

HYMNS (CD/LP)
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ARCHERS OF LOAF

ICKY METTLE (CD/LP) * REISSUE
RECORD COLLECTOR ★★★★★

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COMING SOON
YEE YEE (CD/LP) * REISSUE
ALL THE NATIONS AIRPORTS (CD/LP) * REISSUE
WHITE TRASH HEROES (CD/LP) * REISSUE

ESG

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COME AWAY WITH... (CD/LP)
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PITCHFORK "BEST NEW REISSUE"

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DOUGHNUT FOR
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ACID MOTHERS TEMPLE AND THE MELTING PARASO UFO

The Ripper At The Heaven's Gates Of Dark

RIOT SEASON

★★★★

Japanese guitar warriors are back with typically trippy looong-player

Consisting of just five songs and lasting for around 75 minutes, the Japanese space rock cadets' latest opens with "Chinese Flying Saucer", a seemingly endless blistering psychedelic mélange of "Stairway To Heaven" and "Whole Lotta Love". Elsewhere things are no less hairy: there's the Tibetan jam of "Chakra 24", the sitar-led echoes of "Back Door Man Of Ghost Rails Inn" and the Pink Floyd homage "Shine On You Crazy Dynamite". This isn't as heavy as their usual fare, but it's no less mindbending.

Peter Watts

ALOG

Unemployed

RUNE GRAMMOFON

★★★★

Magisterial post-rock from the far north

Once fêted for their precise electronic minimalism, the Norwegian duo of Dag-Are Haugan and Espen Sommer Eide open up their creative process to rough sketches, found sounds and acoustic collaborations on this sprawling masterwork. Defying categorisation, *Unemployed* offers electro-organic textures, desiccated jazz rhythms, drones and clonks, and heavily processed vocal fragments. Flanked by spooked analogue hymnals and twitchy metronomic grooves, the sublime centrepiece is "Last Day At The Assembly Line", an extended symphony in industrial neo-Krautrock worthy of primetime Can. Alog are humane master craftsmen, breathing vitality and mystery into this mesmerising post-rock epic.

Stephen Dalton

ALVARIUS B

Blood Operatives Of The Barium Sunset

ABDUCTION

★★★★

Surrealist song cycle from Sun City Girl

One-time Sun City Girls member Alan Bishop has been releasing unpredictable solo albums as Alvarius B for several decades now. They're

often hermetic, cloaked in low fidelity, but on *Blood Operatives...*, originally released on vinyl in 2005, things go widescreen, as though Bishop's soundtracking an old Italian horror film filled with amoral desperadoes and vampyric relationships. Like all broadcasts from his corner of the world, it's loaded with B-grade vision – pubic hair in the sink, damaged, trip-fuelled hallucinations, and whacked-out psychedelic folk. *Jon Dale*

AZUSA PLANE

Where The Sands Turn To Gold

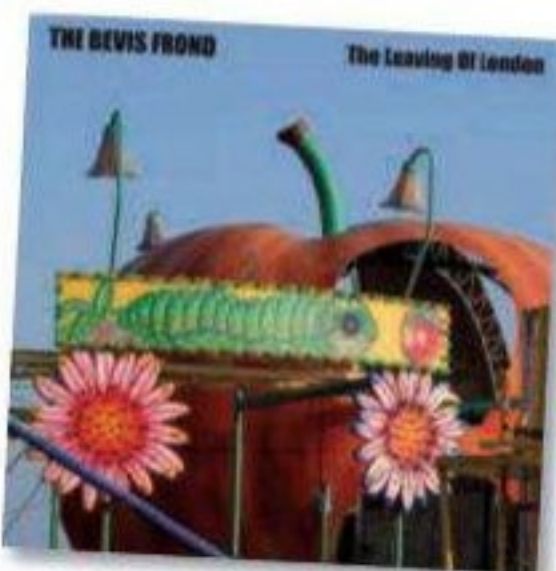
ROCKET GIRL

★★★★

'90s post-rock rapture, posthumously collected

This 2CD retrospective compiles the prodigious solo output of Philadelphia's Jason DiEmilio. At times suffocatingly dense, his homemade tracks are composed of controlled feedback waves, Fender vibrations with a background radiation of percussion and pure electric tones. Like a more scientific MBV, Azusa Plane's gorgeously abrasive textures could sound indiepop-sweet ("Live At Leeds"), salute heroes ("Shooting Speed With Lou Reed") or even score political points ("United States Direct Investment In Other Countries"). DiEmilio, a sufferer from hyperacusis, or ultra-sensitivity to sound frequencies, committed suicide in 2006. Listening to this, the loss feels huge.

Rob Young



THE BEVIS FROND

The Leaving Of London

WORONZOW

★★★★

Psych-rock cottage industry Nick Saloman returns with first album in seven years

Given The Frond's prolific output (over 20 albums since 1987), Saloman's withdrawal from active service in 2004 boded ill for hardcore fans. The self-explanatory title of this comeback, and the

beautifully weighted acoustic reflection of "The Divide" point to a period of upheaval and relocation. But this emotionally testing period has evidently also given an inspirational recharge – check triumphant rouser "Hold The Fort" and the mighty and the vintage Neil Young intensity of "Too Kind". Sybaritic guitar rock is still the Frond stock in trade but this time it's highly personalised. *Gavin Martin*

THE BIG PINK

Future This

4AD

★★★★

East London gadabouts swap drugs for hugs

Picking up where the shamelessly anthemic "Dominos" left off, The Big Pink's second album trades in a portion of their old industrial sleaze for sackfuls of earnest positivity. Their new exultant outlook is matched by some skyscraping sonics, most notably on "Hit The Ground (Superman)" and "Give It Up" (built around samples of Laurie Anderson and Ann Peebles, respectively). The album sags in the middle, descending into slick electro-rock territory worryingly reminiscent of Garbage, but the good songs are terrific.

Sam Richards

MARY BLACK

Stories From The Steeples

3U

★★★★

First album in five years from doyenne of Irish song

Like a Celtic Judy Collins, Black has made a career giving a break to little-known songwriters (she once recorded five David Gray songs on one of her albums before anyone had heard of him). Black's young protégés this time around are mostly Irish, including Ricky Lynch, who contributes ghost story "Marguerite And The Gambler", and Danny O'Reilly, who on the strength of "Faith In Fate" could well be destined for Gray-like eminence. *Nigel Williamson*

BLACK BANANAS

Rad Times Xpress IV

DRAG CITY

★★★★

Royal Trux caterwauler keeps on truckin'

After three albums as RTX, Jennifer Herrema has rebranded as Black Bananas.



What a bunch: Jennifer Herrema (right) funks up the junk rock with Black Bananas

Although her bandmembers – waifs and strays playing trashy bubblegum metal – remain, there is a change in tone here. The more ostentatious rock moves have been dialled back, "It's Cool" and "RTX Gogo" adopting a low-slung funk lope, every inch filled out with keyboard squelches, wild solos, cowbells and assorted sonic detritus. Royal Trux's '80s junk aesthetic has since been appropriated by James Ferraro et al, but Herrema does it with a sneer that's hard to resist.

Louis Pattison

BLACK TRUTH RHYTHM BAND

Ifetayo

SOUNDWAY

★★★★

Reissued 1976 rarity from Afro-Trinidadian outfit

While much of the Caribbean looked to black America for inspiration in the early 1970s, Trinidad's Oluko Imo was tuned to West Africa, a fascination reflected in his adopted name. This, his sole release as Black Truth Rhythm Band, is a real oddity. With Afrobeat as a prime influence, much of this sounds like a Nigerian band playing funk. Yet other

influences creep in; the vocal harmonies of "You People" come straight from The Wailers, while "Aspire" has a calypso lilt. Competent world fusion way ahead of its time. *Neil Spencer*

BOY & BEAR

Moonfire

V2

★★★★

Wizards of Oz? Maybe

This Sydney five-piece are big news Down Under, an achievement which doesn't always translate to greater glory but in this case might. Their debut mixes a robust rock kick ("Feeding Line") with pastoral indie-folk leanings: Dave Hosking's emotive keen married to the bucolic beauty and close choral harmonies of "Lordy May", "House & Farm" and "Beach" can't help but recall Fleet Foxes, but they're capable of more: "Milk & Sticks" has shades of Arcade Fire and "Big Man" comes on like a less annoying Mumford & Sons, while the hokey "Part Time Believer" sounds like "A Horse With No Name" ambling through the outback. Enjoyable stuff.

Graeme Thomson



CRAIG FINN

Clear Heart Full Eyes

★★★★

FULL TIME HOBBY

Hold Steady man's impressive solo flight. *By Graeme Thomson*



It didn't require a telescope to spot Craig Finn's first solo record glinting on the horizon. The most recent Hold Steady album, last year's *Heaven Is Whenever*,

hinted at creative restlessness within the ranks. The band carved out a little more space and Finn scaled down his narratives to the less obviously cinematic, yet it seemed clear there was ample room for further exploration.

With the group currently on a recording hiatus until 2012, Finn has duly wriggled free from their tightly wound signature sound to embrace a rootsy intimacy. Recorded in Austin with Spoon producer Mike McCarthy and a band which includes White Denim drummer Josh Block, *Clear Heart Full Eyes*

aims for what Finn calls "pure songwriting" and offers the strongest evidence yet that the distance between writer and subject matter is rapidly closing. Appropriately for a debut solo outing, these songs are primarily concerned with solitude: people walk into every conceivable kind of wilderness and are either stranded or simply disappear; lovers leave yet still hang around cheap rooms like phantoms.

The music matches the mood, drawing heavily on a broad sweep of Americana. The emotional and sonic terrain of many of these songs will be familiar to anyone who's ever visited American Music Club's *California*, REM's "Country Feedback" or the darker edges of Whiskeytown's *Pneumonia*. Opener "Apollo Bay" is soaked in the same slow, swampy blues vibe as "Can't Wait" from Dylan's *Time Out Of Mind*. Rickie Ray Jackson's pedal steel makes an evocative scene-setter throughout, whether descending like sea mist over mournful minor chords on the bleakly beautiful "Western Pier", or sending hot little licks scudding over the train-track rhythm of "New Friend Jesus", a mordant mix of cutting irony and ragged country-rock which finds Finn flirting with a Texas twang.

Finn does occasionally return to the comforting embrace of beer, bar-room rock and Jesus. "When No One's Watching", the tale of a "weak man living off of weaker women", told over a twitchy back-and-forth riff, is pretty much business as usual. "No Future",

Q&A Craig Finn

Why a solo album?

We decided to take time off and I wanted something to do. I also wanted out of my comfort zone. A lot of these songs were quiet and just didn't seem right for the band, and they were all supportive. I don't think they'd have wanted to make the record I've made.

How did it come together?

Mike [McCarthy] picked the musicians. I first met them on the Monday morning in the studio. We shook hands, got to work, and by Friday night we had 14 songs recorded. They jumped right in. It was exciting and validated what I wanted to do.

The record feels much closer, more personal...

It's that warm Americana thing. I've been listening to Townes Van Zandt, Warren Zevon, Neil Young, and the pedal steel is so nice, it lulls and makes everything a little sadder. And yes, I think there's a little more of myself on the line. I turned 40 in August and wanted to reflect the quieter moments, those softer fears and anxieties. A lot of the songs are about this idea of being displaced and alone, whether geographically or through the end of a relationship. Finding yourself by yourself – that's a big theme.

INTERVIEW: GRAEME THOMSON

a terrific chugging rocker that calls in Johnny Rotten and Freddie Mercury as spiritual advisors, is similarly archetypal.

Elsewhere, however, the familiar falls slightly flat. "Jackson" has some weird three-way thing going on between an actor, his depressive girlfriend and the protagonist, but it's a bit drab and disjointed. The stomping "Honolulu Blues" is a blast but feels similarly peripheral, partly because it comes before a strikingly beautiful troika of heartbreakers, a closing suite as affecting as anything Finn has done. "Rented Room" – sparse, desperate, quietly anthemic – obsesses over a departed lover from a strip-lit box "above a saloon", while "Balcony" flips back to the moment it all ended, culminating in a parting shot full of blackly comic bravado: "I hope that dude don't break his nails when he tries to help you carry all your stuff", sung over a deceptively breezy descending melody. The slow, sad waltz of "Not Much Left Of Us" is made of far darker stuff: weeping pedal steel, drawling fiddle and Finn's ragged voice, at once urgent and exhausted. The lyric is one long night sweat, spilling out memories, regrets and a series of unforgettable images, none more remarkable than: "The part that remains is rotten and bruised, the soft spot on a passionfruit". Yet it's all he has left, and he's holding on tight.

Fact or fiction? Does it matter? Finn's been playing this game too long to suddenly turn confessional, but there's no ambiguity about the quality of the music. It won't soundtrack any turbo-charged nights on the tiles, but *Clear Heart Full Eyes* is a low-key triumph, containing some of the most emotionally satisfying work Finn has yet produced.

THE BYRDS

Preflyte 1969

FLOATING WORLD

★★★★

Flawed prenatal recordings

Preflyte was first released in 1969 on Byrds manager Jim Dickson's own Together Records. Definitively upgraded by Sundazed in 2001, Roger McGuinn helped collate the 40-track selection of the group's pre-Columbia tapes. This new edition adds a further eight recordings, including The Byrds' previously unreleased Columbia audition reel. These five acoustic tracks, including "Mr Tambourine Man", are cut from the same cloth as the other *Preflyte* material. The arrangements and harmonies are all but there, though not McGuinn's electric 12-string jangle. Two post-*Preflyte* demos are the jewels here: an early acoustic version of David Crosby's "Everybody's Been Burned", plus an aching Gene Clark demo for "She's The Kind Of Girl". The original Byrds lineup eventually recorded the song in 1970, turning up on Clark's *Roadmaster* album. **Mick Houghton**

CAKE

Showroom Of Compassion

NAIVE

★★★★

Sacramento alt.rockers break seven-year hiatus with... more of the same

There is, as usual, a lot of brass on Cake's sixth album, a flourish that seemed idiosyncratic 20 years ago but now leaves them sounding a little stale. Still, you have to admire their staying power – this shot to the top of the *Billboard* charts on its US release – not to say their dedication to such off-piste subjects as the academic grant application process ("Federal Funding"). Elsewhere, a familiar cynicism runs through "Sick Of You", where "all the music that you own, won't change the fact you're all alone". **Fiona Sturges**

THE CARETAKER

Patience (After Sebald)

HISTORY ALWAYS FAVOURS THE WINNERS

★★★★

Grainy soundtrack to Grant Gee's film on the late author

The Caretaker creates ambient music that doesn't merely settle in the background but is evocative

of memory and loss. As such, it's a perfect fit for Grant Gee's 2011 film based on the writings of the late WG Sebald. Clouded in the hiss of decay, tracks like "Now The Night Is Over And The Dawn Is About To Break" are simultaneously as saddening and uplifting as anything you'll hear. **David Stubbs**

CHAIRLIFT

Something

YOUNG TURKS

★★

Hooks but not much sparkle from the hip Brooklynites

The trio best known for boosting sales of iPod nanos with the bittersweet "Bruises" is now a duo, having lost member Aaron Pfenning to a solo career. But it's business as usual with the band's second album, still in thrall to the experimental end of '80s pop. While opener "Sidewalk Safari" is a dynamic exercise in electro revivalism, "Take It Out On Me", devoted to tinny period accuracy, lacks the same verve. For the most part, tired melodies and banal lyrics make for a disappointing collection. **Fiona Sturges**

CLOUD NOTHINGS

Attack On Memory

WICHITA

★★★★

Moody tunes given a lift by Steve Albini

Cleveland's Cloud Nothings spew forth heavy rock but with a little more emo-esque pop pep. You could call it happy hardcore, even if there's nothing particularly upbeat about the content – see titles such as "No Sentiment" and "Stay Useless". However, songwriter Dylan Baldi is not afraid to spice up his tunes with some catchy hooks: "Wasted Days" is a nine-minute epic that rocks far more than it broods. **Peter Watts**

NEIL COWLEY TRIO

The Face Of Mount Molehill

NAIM JAZZ

★★★★

Album number four from the stadium rock piano trio led by Adele collaborator

Working in a trio for piano, double bass and drums leads Cowley to be filed in the "jazz" racks, but these 12 instrumentals have little in common with orthodox bebop. Cowley's songs sound like pulsating Bond themes ("Fable"), funereal laments



Robert Smith: taking The Cure to a new audience

("Meyer", "Slims"), and the greatest stadium-filling anthems that Coldplay never wrote (the title track, "Hope Machine"). Most intriguing of all is "Mini Ha Ha" – based around a sample of Cowley's baby giggling – which is by turns hilarious, sinister and moving. **John Lewis**



ANDREW CRONSHAW

The Unbroken Surface Of Snow

CLOUD VALLEY

★★★★

Music For Glaciers?

Andrew Cronshaw, nominated for a Radio 2 Folk Award for *Ochre* a while back, is like nobody else in the genre. He turns traditional tunes into soundscapes built from every corner of the world's music, all sealed with his electric zither. Here, Irish tunes like "Mhàiri Mhìn Mheall-Shùileach (Gentle Dark-Eyed Mary)" meet music more suited to the Arctic Circle in a setting as melodic as it is ambient. *The Unbroken Surface Of Snow* is warm in its playing and precise in its arrangements; if the BBC ever make a sequel to *Frozen Planet*, here surely is its emotive soundtrack. **David Quantick**

THE CURE

Bestival

SUNDAY BEST

★★★★

Cap'n Bob enchants the Isle of Wight

The Cure's Saturday night headline show at last September's Bestival was regarded by some as the

festival set of the summer. Showcasing hits plucked from one of pop's richest catalogues – some, such as "The Caterpillar", rarely played – Robert Smith gave Bestival's youthful crowd, smattered with middle-aged goths dressed for rain, the classic teenage rite of passage his band have specialised in for 30 years. Clearly delighted on the night, Smith, too, must have fond memories of these three hours onstage or he wouldn't have permitted this 2CD release, the proceeds of which go to a local charity. Away from a UK stage for long enough to surprise with "The Lovecats" or "Boys Don't Cry", and with no new record or 'Reflections'-style setlist to trawl through, this captures The Cure at their crowd-pleasing best, an ageless band revelling in their past. **Piers Martin**

KAREN DALTON

1966

DELMORE RECORDING SOCIETY

★★★★

Reel-to-reel magic from a remote rehearsal

Although Karen Dalton was only coaxed into the studio for two official albums in 1969 and 1971, this is the third set of unearthed tapes to be released since a new audience discovered her in 2005. The source for *1966* is a tape of a Colorado log cabin rehearsal by Dalton and her estranged husband Richard Tucker. Dalton's expected repertoire features "Katie Cruel" and two songs written by her mentor Fred Neil, but it's the inclusion of four Tim Hardin compositions that makes this so fascinating; Dalton was most likely the first person to cover Hardin's timeless classics "Reason To Believe" and "Don't Make Promises", even if her versions were only meant to be privately heard. The old-timey accompaniment

and Dalton's bluesy vocals perfectly suit Hardin's exquisitely sad songs.

Mick Houghton

RICK DANKO

Live Anthology

FLOATING WORLD

★★★★

Band man recorded solo in concert between '85 and his death in '99

Danko emerges here as an engaging live performer of material spanning The Band, classic covers and folk-blues standards. His late-career voice had the weathered quality of a Tim Hardin, but versions of "It Makes No Difference" and "When You Awake" from an '85 solo acoustic show boast a down-home attraction, as does a serviceable cover of Dylan's "Blind Willie McTell". The most poignant material, though, lies in the nine tracks recorded with Richard Manuel at another mid-'80s show, including ramshackle versions of "The Unfaithful Servant" and "Chest Fever". **Nigel Williamson**

DARK OCEAN COLORS

Dark Ocean Colors

RAINBOW QUARTZ

★★★★

A masterclass in ear-catching harmonic pop

Ohio duo Mark Mikel and Scott Hunt know a good hook when they hear one, and gleefully pile them into this debut set of pop psychedelia which, while derivative, borrows from some sure-fire sources. "My Barbara Closed The Doors" is like Dennis Wilson fronting Badfinger, "She's A Cornucopia" skates across The Zombies' baroque landscape, and "Lazy Lighthouse Jupiter Band" resembles a lost Roy Wood masterpiece. You'll swear you've always known these songs, such is their sense of genuine warmth and well-being. **Terry Staunton**

ALBUMS



The Doors: *LA Woman* reissued with alternate takes and unheard tracks

DEAR READER

Idealistic Animals

CITY SLANG

★★★★

South African siren loses her religion

Anyone who enjoys unpicking the bittersweet layers behind Feist's brittle sweetness or St Vincent's buttoned-down anguish will find rich material on Cherilyn MacNeil's latest album, her first since swapping Johannesburg for Berlin and splitting from former musical partner Darryl Torr. Inspired by MacNeil's rejection of her strict religious upbringing, these Aesop-style animal-themed fables combine elegantly quirky orchestral chamber-pop arrangements with barbed and knotted lyrics. The apocalyptic "Fox (Take Your Chances)" manages to sound both lustful and fatalistic, and "Monkey (You Can Go Home)" offers galloping melodrama, while the sorrow-steeped "Elephant (Hearer)" bleeds rueful nostalgia. *Stephen Dalton*

DIAGRAMS

Black Light

FULL TIME HOBBY

★★★★

Welcome return for former Tunng frontman

Sam Genders quit Tunng citing chronic insecurity and raging demons. After three years spent getting his mojo back and working in a London primary school, his

almost-solo debut inhabits a similar hybrid territory of acoustic guitars crossed with samplers and synths. The most obvious analogue is to think of him as an English Sufjan Stevens. But then again, the reflective "Night All Night" has a vaguely Midlake psych feel, there's an '80s synth-pop vibe to "Tall Buildings" and "Peninsula" surges with classic '60s folk rock earnestness.

Nigel Williamson

DJ FOOD

The Search Engine

NINJA TUNE

★★★★

Seasoned culinary beatmaster serves up variable menu

Once a collective side-project of Ninja Tune label bosses Coldcut, the DJ Food alias is now the main musical vehicle of graphic designer and sample virtuoso Strictly Kev. An anthology of recent EP tracks, this is the first full-length Food release in 11 years. The patchwork of Orb-like sonic tapestries and guest vocals by some uncharacteristically gnarly rock veterans is not hugely original, but still manages to engage. Nestled between disembodied voices, retro sci-fi imagery, ambient jazztronica and tooth-rattling electro, Matt Johnson of '80s indie stalwarts The The lends his darkly humorous rasp to the floor-stomping "Giant". *Stephen Dalton*

THE DOORS

LA Woman 40th Anniversary Edition

ELEKTRA/RHINO/DMC

★★★★★

Did an extra disc about an hour ago...

A rootsy album cut in The Workshop, The Doors' Los Angeles rehearsal space, *LA Woman* is at times a raw and bluesy affair, but still one of exquisite taste and judgement. Now reissued with a disc of alternate takes and two additional unheard tracks ("She Smells So Nice", a Dylanesque, "Tombstone Blues" ramble; and "Rock Me", a slow, mildly salacious blues), we can hear just how much this was so. Vocal takes on the alternate versions present Morrison as an excitable bear, mauling "The Changeling" and "LA Woman" almost because he loves them so much, while the tweaks and key changes that helped make "Love Her Madly" a classic pop song are yet to be put in place. It's an odd, not uncomfortable situation – like being in a very familiar room, where someone's moved your favourite chair into a new spot. *John Robinson*

DREXCIYA

Journey Of The Deep Sea Dweller

CLONE

★★★★★

Detroit electro titans anthologised

Between them, the myriad projects of Gerald Donald

and the late James Stinson have had a profound impact on modern-day electronic music, but it's as clandestine operators Drexciya – the psy-ops wing of Underground Resistance – that their abstract expressionist take on techno resonates strongest. This first disc of a 4CD retrospective of their early mid-'90s work is an embarrassment of riches, the likes of "Wavejumper", "Bubble Metropolis" and "Beyond The Abyss" highlighting their raw fusion of jazzy riffs and pounding analogue funk. *Piers Martin*

EARTH

Angels Of Darkness, Demons Of Light II

SOUTHERN LORD

★★★★

Drone pioneer once again shuns noise and tips his hat to the faire folk

Earth's Dylan Carlson has recently started a blog documenting his supernatural encounters with the fairies of London Town, which is a reflection of just how far this Seattle guitar maverick has travelled from his grunge roots. Once the purveyor of a singular feedback roar, Carlson has since become enamoured with the bands of the English folk revival. This sequel to his 2011 LP takes a similar path, Carlson's electric guitar chiming over Lori Goldston's long cello strokes. It does feel a somewhat softer collection than its predecessor, although the 13-minute "Waltz (A Multiplicity Of Doors)" stretches out into something quite grandiose. *Louis Pattison*



MARK FELL

Periodic Orbits Of A Dynamic System Related To A Knot

EDITIONS MEGO

★★★★★

Wild computer music, straight outta Sheffield

Mark Fell's recent releases, both as a solo artist and as one half of SND, attest to an obsessive pursuit of the infinite within the microscopic. *Periodic Orbits*

Of A Dynamic System... has Fell using MIDI and his MacBook Pro to create asymmetrical grids of pulse, and wire-thin, strangely levitating chords, all fiendishly cut together in an almost abstruse way to create what he dryly calls an "almost live album". It adds up to a furiously inventive whole, getting maximum results from the most simple of means. *Jon Dale*

FENNESZ & SAKAMOTO

Flumina

TOUCH

★★★★★

Second collaboration featuring ex-Yellow Magic Orchestra leader

Berlin guitarist and laptop sound artist Christian Fennesz clearly enjoys working collaboratively; notably and improbably, he teamed up with Sparklehorse's late Mark Linkous on 2009's *In The Fishtank*. This 2CD collection is his second full outing with Ryuichi Sakamoto, following on from 2007's *Cendre*. The formula is essentially the same; Sakamoto provides droplets of piano in an echo chamber, with Fennesz supplying amorphous, gaseous electronics and clouds of processed guitar, particularly effective on the mottled "0409". It's quite beautiful, even if it feels a little pacific and lava-lamp-like in the long haul. *David Stubbs*

FIRST AID KIT

The Lion's Roar

WICHITA

★★★★★

Precocious Swedish sisters look backwards for inspiration

Two serious souls only just out of their teens, Klara and Johanna Söderberg have crafted a remarkably mature work that mixes up surging psychedelia, roughshod country and fireside ballads. There's a beguiling lyrical wisdom to the opening title track, in which buried grievances sink a relationship, and in "Dance To Another Tune" that hints at a deeper instability. We're left in little doubt as to their musical proclivities in the winsome "Emmylou" where, along with Ms Harris, they lay themselves firmly at the feet of Gram Parsons, Johnny Cash and June Carter. *Fiona Sturges*

KATHLEEN EDWARDS

Voyageur

★★★★★ ROUNDER

The Canadian went looking for a new producer. What she found, on her fourth album, was love. *By Bud Scoppa*



The story of *Voyageur* is the very definition of bittersweet. Newly divorced after five years of marriage to Colin Cripps, her guitarist/bandleader, Kathleen Edwards was

writing up a storm and itching to break out of the alt.country/singer-songwriter cul-de-sac. Edwards' search for a new producer led her to the doorstep of Justin Vernon's Wisconsin studio. Vernon took a break from his labours on 2011's *Bon Iver* to cut a quick track with Edwards, to determine whether the two had any chemistry. She chose the autumnal ballad "Wapusk", which she'd written and recorded for Canada's National Parks Project (the new version was released last September as a non-LP single). To say the session broke the ice is an understatement; not only did Edwards locate a simpático co-producer in Vernon, she also found her soulmate. Vernon acknowledged their experience in an ardent dedication in the *Bon Iver* booklet: "To Kathleen for... bringing the most peace I've ever felt in my life".

The album opens on a doggedly hopeful note, as, amid the exuberant, acoustic guitar-driven onrush of "Empty Threat", Edwards anticipates a fresh start: "*Thit my head 'til it bled/I pressed reset, goddammit!! I'm moving to America... It's not an empty threat*". She'd written the song right after spending several weeks in Seattle and Portland, where she'd done some co-writing with John Roderick of The Long Winters, and though the lyric relates to that experience, it dramatically foreshadows what would subsequently go down in Wisconsin. Two songs later, on the hushed ballad "A Soft Place To Land", she's practically crushed under the weight of unfinished business, desperately clawing her way out of the wreckage. "*Calling it quits/You think this is easy*", she asks at the top of the song, over her own mournful violin.

From these thematic scene-setters, the LP erupts into sustained grandeur. The blend of Edwards' beguiling voice, sticky, handcrafted melodies and singalong refrains with Vernon's heady arrangements is intoxicating, as the moods and images continually shift between heartbreak ("A House Full Of Empty Rooms", "Pink Champagne") and open-hearted anticipation (the chunky rocker "Mint", the

percolating "Sidecars"). These juxtapositions continue through *Voyageur*, forming its psychological and musical dynamic, posed by continual shifts between the visceral and the ethereal. The most striking moments occur when the extremes collide on "Change The Sheets" and "Going To Hell", with Edwards' wounded vocals enclosed in Vernon's pillowy tapestries like a lover's embrace. "Change The Sheets" boasts the album's biggest hook in Edwards' urgent chanting of "*Go ahead, run, run, run, run*", as if she can't wait for the past to recede and the future to flood over her.

Though the LP can be seen as a companion piece to *Bon Iver*, Edwards' defining characteristics have never been more present: her personae (vulnerable ingénue, ballsy chick); the Neil Young-like elliptical resonance of her lyrics; the elegance of her melodies. As a divorce record, *Voyageur* is as brutally honest as *Shoot Out The Lights*, but this is a song cycle that documents a journey from darkness to light at the end of the tunnel. Vernon's contributions come off not as an overlay to Edwards' songs but as an ecstatic outgrowth, a literal labour of love. It's hard to conceive of a more thrillingly romantic record than this.



Q&A Kathleen Edwards

Were you consciously trying to escape the Americana/singer-songwriter pigeonhole in making this record?

I look at my body of work and everything is a snapshot of who I am and where I've been, and I don't think any of it's dishonest, but also I have all of these musical influences laying under the surface that I've never had the chance to get on a record: Randy Newman, John Prine, Richard Buckner. And Wilco has been able to progress as a musical entity without having to reinvent themselves.

That's what you've done with *Voyageur*.

I finally got the chance to work with someone who was committed to the idea of helping me see that through. Someone who could step in and work on the ideas until they were where they needed to be.

"Empty Threat", with its "Coming to America..." chorus, seems to anticipate what was about to happen to you.

[Laughs] Yeah, it's pretty fucked up. The going joke with my friends and family is, "Not such an empty threat, is it?" And I'm like, "Well, I couldn't see that comin'."

INTERVIEW: BUD SCOPPA



Holy Dread! Gonjasufi's swamp-funk sermons prove strangely soothing

FOXES!

Foxes!
BIG SALAD

★★★★
Cute, shambling but solidly constructed debut
Led by husband and wife Adam and Kayla Bell (guitars and drums, respectively, sharing lead vocals), Brighton-based Foxes! are clearly in thrall to the jangling, shambling spirit of the C86 generation. Theirs is a world of winsome, delicately spiced indie pop – setting out their stall somewhere between BMX Bandits and Young Marble Giants, they're best heard on pastel-coloured postcards from birthday discos ("It's Ridiculous, Adam") and paeans to childhood bicycles ("Who Killed Rob?"). They occasionally veer perilously close to the twee, but taken as a whole the album's lo-fi charm and mannered innocence is a winner.
Terry Staunton

FRANÇOIS & THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS

E Volo Love
DOMINO

★★★★
Wistful French pop with Afro flavours
Along with hip hop, France's African connections have provided a fertile influence on the country's pop scene. The best moments on this latest from François Marry come with added West African guitar sparkle – "Les Plus Beaux" is a stand-out, while the hand of Tinariwen's studio lieutenant is also evident. Otherwise Marry's melancholic pop works intermittently. "Cherchant Des Ponts", with its strings

and female vocals, is a keeper, but the Smiths jangle of "City Kiss" or the synth shimmer of "Bail Eternal" are Euro ordinaire. *Neil Spencer*

GENESIS

From Genesis To Revelation 1968

REPERTOIRE

★★★★
Biblical! Jonathan King urges Carthusians to first concept album

Oft-reissued to capitalise on their later success, one imagines this could have disappointed the band's prog-minded undergraduate fanbase. Pretty much anyone else will still derive pleasure from the first Genesis album, as producer Jonathan King coaxes the band towards a cross between "Step Inside Love" and "2000 Light Years From Home". Poshness wafts from the LP like chalk on a master's gown, but the efforts of Gabriel, P and Banks, T (special commendation) on "The Serpent" make it more than a quirky period piece. *John Robinson*



LAURA GIBSON

La Grande

CITY SLANG

★★★★
Haunted Americana from the Pacific Northwest
An alluring blend of

analogue alt.country and contemporary nu-folk, Gibson's latest album pays spine-tingling homage to the Oregon logging country of her roots. Abetted by various guests, including stray members of Calxico and The Decemberists, Gibson weaves her shivery vibrato sighs into a delicate tangle of strums and strings, gentle brass fanfares and antique saloon-bar pianos. The best tracks ooze a kind of drowsy melancholy, from the lush lyricism of "Milk-Heavy, Pollen-Eyed" to the gorgeous scratchy vinyl crackle of "The Rushing Dark". Gibson places the ghosts of the Old West in a contemporary context, long gone but never quite silent. *Stephen Dalton*

GONJASUFI

MU.ZZ.LE

WARP

★★★★
Parched bard's dusty blues
A desert-dwelling, dreadlocked beatnik with an album of ramshackle soul overseen by Brainfeeder's finest, Flying Lotus, Mojave's Gonjasufi wasn't hard to miss when his debut *A Sufi And A Killer* surfaced two years back. His second, self-produced effort is a more focused affair: 10 potent swamp-funk sermons on the significance of poverty and charity in society, "Nikels And Dimes" the vivid centrepiece. Delivered in a voice as angelic as Vincent Gallo's on *When*, over what could be mangled outtakes from the last Tom Waits record, Gonjasufi's nervous energy makes *MU.ZZ.LE* strangely soothing. *Piers Martin*

SHORT CUTS

Soul



ERNIE K-DOE

Here Come The Girls

CHARLY ★★★★★

The use of the title track on a Boots TV ad, and the subsequent Sugababes rework, led to renewed interest in K-Doe's laconic goodtime R'n'B, and this two-disc set contains almost his entire 1960s output. Writer and producer Allen Toussaint looms large, penning the most notable cuts, including the big hit "Mother-In-Law" and "A Certain Girl" (later covered by both The Yardbirds and Warren Zevon), but it's jam-packed with rarer gems.
Terry Staunton

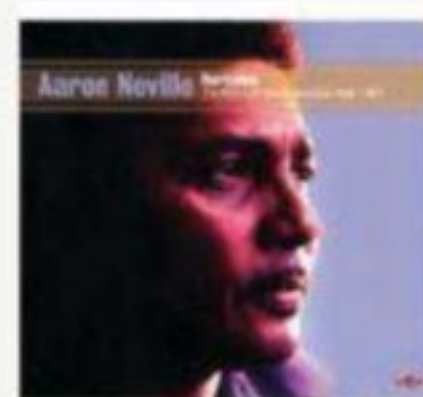


ETTA JAMES

Losers Weepers

KENT ★★★★★

Chess remained loyal to James for over 20 years, despite the end of her late-'60s chart revival and her ongoing battle with heroin addiction. James recorded the typically powerful *Losers Weepers* in 1970, sticking largely to tormented blues ballads, none better than the epic "Hold Back My Tears". It's expanded with selections from the same year's funkier *Tighten Up Your Own Thing*.
Mick Houghton



AARON NEVILLE

Hercules: The Minit And Sansu Sessions 1960-77

CHARLY ★★★★★

The sweetest-voiced of the four Neville brothers offers up an array of slowburn funk and deep soul grooves from his time at two New Orleans labels. The title track's brooding bassline may have been sampled to oblivion over the years, but it's Aaron's torch-like tonsils that distinguish the aching balladry ("For Every Boy There's A Girl", "Tell It Like It Is") and equally emotionally charged uptempo tracks ("Waiting At The Station").
Terry Staunton



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Dynamic Grooves

BGP ★★★★★

This collection numbers diverse funk and soul cuts recorded between 1968 and 1971 for leading New York independent labels such as Scepter and Wand. Among the gems the city spawned around this period were the JB's-style Latino group Untouchable Machine Shop and the solid fusion of one-time Manhattan Cheetah Club house band Raw Meat. More familiar names from elsewhere include Inez & Charlie Foxx and New Orleans stalwarts Earl King and Allen Toussaint.
Mick Houghton



IRMA THOMAS

Soul Queen Of New Orleans

CHARLY ★★★★★

Still playing occasional gigs in her hometown some 50 years after making her first record, this collection eavesdrops on two separate periods in Thomas' career. Disc one covers her early '60s tearjerkers ("Ruler Of My Heart", "I May Be Wrong"), while the second disc showcases a looser, jazzier Irma in concert in 1976, cutting a rug on "Lady Marmalade" and "(You Can Have My Husband But) Don't Mess With My Man". *Terry Staunton*

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VARIOUS ARTISTS

Chimes Of Freedom: The Songs Of Bob Dylan

★★★★

SHANGRI-LA

So big you can't get over him, so deep you can't get under him. The only ones not benefiting from this charity covers set are the artists, says Andrew Mueller



In May 1961, an English lawyer named Peter Benenson wrote a newspaper article highlighting a worldwide blight of people imprisoned, and worse, for no greater crime than expressing an opinion. Later that year, an American A&R executive called John Hammond signed a 20-year-old folk singer to Columbia. More than half a century later, the leviathans turned loose by this pair, Amnesty International and Bob Dylan, are a congruent pairing. Both are widely regarded, especially among actual and spiritual children of the 1960s, as irreproachable touchstones of all that is admirable. Both are given to vexing those who nurture an idealised vision of them. Both certainly stand, one by charter and one by example, for individual liberty.

Only one, Amnesty, has a Nobel Prize, but Dylan was the subject of speculation vis-à-vis the Literature gong as recently as last October, and an eventual award would not be unseemly. The sheer heft of the inevitably titled *Chimes Of Freedom* reflects a belief that both golden jubilees are noteworthy: four discs, 75 tracks, more than 80 artists (none of whom are profiting from the exercise), including Elvis Costello, Pete Townshend and Lucinda Williams. It's a lot to take in indeed, in a few cases, specifically Miley Cyrus' risibly miscast "...Lonesome When You Go", Daniel Bedingfield's belief-beggar Nine Inch Nails impression on "Man In The Long Black Coat", and Sting's prissy whine on "Girl From The North Country", it's rather too much to take in. But at worst, best and all points between, *Chimes Of Freedom* is a monumental demonstration of the extent to which Dylan, however much he has bristled at his works being characterised as such, has cornered the protest song market. Fifty years since recording "Song To Woody", Dylan has become to any politically engaged musician what Shakespeare is to actors: something you feel you have to step up to at some point.



In the case of both bards, the greatest rewards are frequently reaped by those who can summon the nerve to take liberties. There are some perfectly decent, faithful readings on *Chimes Of Freedom* – Kris Kristofferson's "Quinn The Eskimo (Mighty Quinn)", Steve Earle's "One More Cup Of Coffee", Maroon 5's "I Shall Be Released". These suffer, however, not from a lack of inherent quality but from the fact that you've already heard any number of perfectly decent, faithful readings of them. The cuts which stand out – and which you can just about imagine tickling Dylan's own, presumably by now, leatherlike palate – are the ones unafraid of what they're dealing with. Rage Against The Machine guitarist Tom Morello (as The Nightwatchman) turns "Blind Willie McTell" into an electrified trip hop nightmare, The Gaslight Anthem bounce "Changing Of The Guards" off the garage walls with abandon, and Queens Of The Stone Age simply swagger through "Outlaw Blues" as if it had always been a Queens Of The Stone Age tune. It's not an exact science, of course. Some straightforward takes are lovely – Mark Knopfler's "Restless Farewell", Thea Gilmore's "I'll Remember You". And not all efforts at stamping one's own brand find their mark.

Michael Franti's "Subterranean Homesick Blues" sounds like a *Sesame Street* sketch, and Natasha Bedingfield's – who do this family know? – "Ring Them Bells" would elicit pleas for mercy from Celine Dion.

Whether it was ever Dylan's intention, it has been the case for 50 years that any songwriter who lifts a pen in any cause knows there's already a Dylan song which will do at least as well, and probably better. Dorian Lynskey, in the epilogue of *33 Revolutions Per Minute*, his superb 2011 history of the protest song, effectively wonders if the artists on *Chimes Of Freedom* are urging a mount to the glue factory: "For a songwriter coming of age now, the idea that music can, and should, engage with politics seems increasingly distant. This is entangled with a broader loss of faith in ideology and a fading belief in what we might call heroes: inspirational individuals with the power to move mountains."

Chimes Of Freedom makes the case, if inadvertently, that the ebbing of the protest song might also be due to the form's domination by one writer, whose overwhelming prodigiousness has cowed all potential peers and successors beyond the point at which they feel able to say, here is your throat back, thanks for the loan.

GROUP INERANE Guitars From Agadez Vol 3

SUBLIME FREQUENCIES

★★★★★

Incredible, hypnotic guitar grooves from Niger
Group Inerane are one of the many great guitar bands to come out of the Tuareg scene. This latest album features their new lineup, with Koudede Maman taking the place of Adi Mohammed, killed in Tuareg rebellion battles. Like their peers Group Bombino, the Inerane crew play with a group mind at once loose-limbed and on the dime. There's space for improvisation among their interlocking parts, as they play with a seemingly oxymoronic laidback fury.

Jon Dale

GUELEWAR Halleli N'Dakarou 1982

TERANGA BEAT

★★★★

'Mbalax-psych' set, live and raw in the early '80s
Guelewar are one of the most important groups from Gambia in the '70s/'80s, with ties to other bands like Ifang Bondi and Super Eagles. This recording comes from their twilight years, after their late '70s regrouping, which led to their classic 1980 album *Sama Yaye Demna N'Darr*. It's beautifully rough and ready, scorched by spidery, fuzz-bomb guitar solos and hyperactive organ vamps. They're close to the best free-jazz collectives in the way their 12-strong lineup moves as one.

Jon Dale

DARREN HAYMAN January Songs

BELKA

★★★★★

A month of song from former Hefner maverick
Last January, London's Darren Hayman set about writing and recording a song a day. What could have been an exhausting mixture of conceptual gimmick and low quality control turns out to be his best solo album thus far; 31 taut songs of detailed nostalgia, lost love and wry anger that stand as a very English answer to 69 *Love Songs* by The Magnetic Fields. Guests including The Wave Pictures, Terry Edwards and Pete Astor give clues to Hayman's pithily literate, post-Jonathan Richman bedsit muse. Maybe every songwriter should be forced to work this hard.

Garry Mulholland

HOODED FANG Tosta Mista

FULL TIME HOBBY

★★★★★

Gorgeous UK debut from Canadian collective
Here's a thing, a break-up album that doesn't languish in self-pity, or at least manages to disguise the lyrical sentiment beneath chiming guitars and sashaying pop beats. Written by Daniel Lee about his relationship with bassist April Alierio, *Tosta Mista* fades in like a film score and then hits you with a bang on "Clap", a garage gem that sounds like it's coming from a different era, The Jesus And Mary Chain in surf shirts. And there's plenty more like that—such as the swinging title track, the anthemic "Brahma" and the bittersweet ballad "Den Of Love".

Peter Watts



HOWLER America Give Up

ROUGH TRADE

★★

Teenage scamps from Minneapolis reactivate rough'n'tumble guitar rock
Following in the footsteps of revivers The Strokes and The Drums, and boasting the hometown heritage of The Replacements and Hüsker Dü, Howler's ebullience is evident as they play to their pin-up potential. But while the energetic form they take is welcome, the content, as on the kitschy, twangy "Pythagorean Fearem" and the JAMC-go-Spector ham of "Too Much Blood", is often too light and derivative to suggest they really are saviours in waiting.

Gavin Martin

THE HOWLING HEX Wilson Semiconductors

DRAG CITY

★★

Maddening solo excursion from former Royal Trux man
While Jennifer Herrema has kept Royal Trux's freak-rock flag flying with RTX and Black Bananas, the recent output of her erstwhile partner Neil Hagerty has



been more erratic. The Howling Hex has gone through numerous incarnations since 2003, but *Wilson Semiconductors* finds Hagerty flying solo. The result is four meandering tracks on which he runs through his repertoire of experimental guitar licks over the most inane basslines imaginable (no drums either). "Reception" is catchy, but otherwise it's a desert out there.

Sam Richards

HYPERPOTAMUS Delta

BELIEVE

★★★★

Lousy name—extraordinary one-man band
Madrid's Jorge Ramirez-Escudero has spent the last three years impressing festival crowds armed with nothing but a mic and a loop pedal. This second album showcases not just a great a cappella vocalist, but a sophisticated composer, arranger and producer, building accomplished pop out of nothing but his voice. From beatbox percussion through basslines and harmonies to his burnished lead croon, he takes his sound way beyond gimmick into the kind of pop Brian Wilson might have made if he'd grown up with Son Of

Dave. What hippos or hype have to do with it is anyone's guess.

Garry Mulholland

DIETER ILG Otello Live At Schloss Elmau

ACT

★★★★

German piano/bass/drums trio interpret Verdi's Otello
Dozens of jazz musicians—from Duke Ellington to Wayne Shorter—have improvised over classical themes, but few have reworked operatic arias in the same way. Here German bassist Dieter Ilg bucks the trend by ruminating over Verdi's *Otello*: not the best-known tunes in the operatic canon, but there are some sublime moments. The opening "Fuoco Di Gioia" is turned into rumbling funk, with pianist Rainer Böhm turning in a Keith Jarrett-ish performance. "Ave Maria" is a pretty bass-led ballad, while "Quai Grida! Orrore!" is turned into a clever-clever slice of bebop.

JAPE Ocean Of Frequency

MUSIC/IS/FOR/LOSERS

★★★★★

Album four from Richie Egan's Irish electro-rockers
Aptly for an album fascinated by the connections between

scientific certainties and the mysteries of the soul, *Ocean Of Frequency* mixes hard electronics, sticky melody and dreamy interludes, often recalling the introspective intensity of Steve Mason's *Boys Outside*. "Scorpio" sounds like "A Horse With No Name" trotting off to the Balearics, but it's the epic, chilly "The Oldest Mind" which really nails the mood of modern electro-mysticism.

WIZZ JONES Huldenberg Blues

SUNBEAM

★★★★

Old stager's first live album
A contemporary of Bert Jansch and Ralph McTell, Jones lacks Jansch's allure and McTell's mainstream appeal but can lay some claim to being almost the quintessential British troubadour guitarist. Unfortunately, he never made his defining album, *Right Now* and *The Legendary Me* coming closest. Taped in Brussels in 2006, this is a fine introduction to Jones' work. Plenty of stylish folk blues, broadening his repertoire to play Steve Tilston's classic "Sometimes In This Life Are Beautiful" and songs by collaborator Alan Tunbridge.

Mick Houghton

BETH JEANS HOUGHTON & THE HOOVES OF DESTINY

Yours Truly, Cellophane Nose

MUTE ★★★★★

Newcastle singer's dazzling first effort. *By Fiona Sturges*



IT'S BEEN A long wait for 21-year-old Beth Jeans Houghton's first album. Having made her stage debut in 2007 after being plucked from a crowd to sing with Devendra Banhart, the Geordie singer's debut EP followed a year later and sold out its initial production run. But rather than capitalise on her early kudos, Houghton has chosen to take her time over her first full-length LP, an approach that has clearly reaped huge rewards.

Houghton is already fabled for her stage outfits comprising wigs, tiger suits and gold lamé, the resulting look being part Marie Antoinette, part panto dame. This outré aesthetic is just one facet of a broader tendency towards theatricality, as revealed in an album that is as eccentric as it is atmospheric.

While early reviews saw Houghton filed as a folk singer, in interviews she has resisted such categorisation, voicing broader musical ambitions and an impatience towards those wanting to pin her down to a single genre. Indeed, Houghton's refusal to play the promotional

game is mischievously reflected in her official biography, which claims she was born in Transylvania to a pack of albino wolves who raised her on chewing tobacco and stuffed clams.

Perhaps the closest musical reference points here are Kate Bush and Bat For Lashes, with whom Houghton shares a love for the psychological and elemental. Rolling thunder, rising tides and twisted, groaning mountains form the lyrical backdrop to her darkly romantic tales. Musically, the melodrama is piled on with bells, harps, string quartets and massed male-voice choirs. Trumpet fanfares herald the opener "Sweet Tooth Bird", which hovers between fairytale and nightmare as Houghton shoots down the eponymous creature, while twinkling xylophones and galloping drums elevate "Dodecahedron" – in which she relates a dream that makes her eyes bleed – into the ethereal.

Houghton is certainly right about one thing: despite some notable antecedents, on this album she follows her own idiosyncratic path. Where she treads, others will undoubtedly follow.

SINGLES BAR

Accompanied by a ringing personal endorsement from Sun Araw's Cameron Stallones – "most excellent burners!" – Leeds five-piece **Hookworms** have just unleashed their self-titled debut EP **FAUX DISCX/GRINGO**. It enthusiastically ploughs a linear psych furrow in the manner of Spectrum and Wooden Shjips, although Hookworms' outlook is broadly sunnier; on "I Have Some Business Out West", they're pleasingly redolent of 'Mad Richard'-era Verve. Even further out there are **Koolaid**, a collective whose identity remains a mystery, even to their label. Their synapse-shredding "Global Tyranny" EP **AGITATED** consists of dense hypnotic drones, sampled diatribes and squalls of toxic feedback, leading to blissed-out transcendence.

At the other end of the brevity spectrum, but no less wild, are London/Corby quartet **Chapter 24**, whose new 45 "Spindle" **ODDBOX** is done and dusted in less than two minutes. Led by yelping singer Claire Smith, the song bucks and whirls restlessly, possessed by the spirit of The Slits, Bush Tetras and a host of other cool, antsy post-punk bands.

Meanwhile, both Ethan and Glyn Johns have been jostling for the right to



produce Watford trio **The Staves** (pictured above). It's not hard to see why the legendary father-and-son studio dynasty are smitten – The Staves are three harmonising sisters who come across like Laura Marling in triplicate – but as with much of the music from London's new folk scene, "Mexico" **ATLANTIC** is almost overpoweringly twee. *SAM RICHARDS*

TRAILER TRASH TRACYS

Ester

DOUBLE SIX

★★★★★

Intriguingly opaque offering from London dreampop newcomers

Boasting a sleeve designed by Ultra Vivid Scene's Kurt Ralske, *Ester* is a poised, Lynchian blend of '50s Americana and fuzzy 4AD-style dreampop. It was supposedly recorded using the *solfeccio* scale, an ancient tonal system – but then the band also once claimed their terrible name was taken from a troupe of Stalin-era Soviet strippers. Certainly, Jimmy Lee's guitar twangs and Suzanne Aztoria's lubricious voice can sometimes feel out of tune with the samples, but with everything slathered liberally in reverb, *Ester* is wrong in all the right ways. *Sam Richards*

JAMES LEVY & THE BLOOD RED ROSE

Pray To Be Free

HEAVENLY

★★★★★

One-off singing partnership gives Lee and Nancy a run for their money

James Levy, known by his surname in an earlier anti-folk incarnation, hired the services of The Pierces' Allison Pierce for this exceptional album of duets, produced by Coldplay's Guy Berryman. While the neo-gothic cover has a Jack 'n' Meg vibe, its contents are more Hazlewood and Sinatra, with added malevolence. Levy's baritone brings a velvety richness to string-drenched songs about infidelity and betrayal, while Pierce proves a distinctive foil. These are beautiful songs with a murderous heart. *Fiona Sturges*

ISLET

Illuminated People

TURNSTILE/SHAPE

★★★★★

Percussion-happy Welsh troupe make their debut

A sort of mini-supergroup drawing together members of Cardiff indie flyweights The Victorian English Gentlemen's Club and Attack + Defend, Islet come with a mission statement of sorts: lots and lots of drums. *Illuminated People* doesn't disappoint in this respect, with lashings of cowbell and crescendos aplenty. "This Fortune" is what they do best, Emma Daman's doomed lament set amid tumultuous organ and machine-gun drums. Elsewhere, the enthusiasm can be wearying, although there's some engaging wild cards: see "Funicular", a sweet detour into quaver-voiced calypso. *Louis Pattison*

THE 2 BEARS

Be Strong

SOUTHERN FRIED

★★★★★

Charmingly grizzled dad-house 'supergroup'

Hot Chip's side-projects seem to have perfectly distilled the band's primary elements: with last year's About Group project, Alexis Taylor indulged his taste for Wyatt avant-balladry; now Joe Goddard teams up with dancefloor veteran Raf "Daddy" Rundell for an album of cuddly south London deep house. Though the title track pays tribute to everyone from "Steely Dan to the Wu-Tang Clan", the album's charm lies chiefly in its Chicago beats and the geezerish charm of Rundell's rueful vocals. *Be Strong* is warm and easy comfort food for recessionary midlife ravers. *Stephen Troussé*

LAZARUS AND THE PLANE CRASH

Horseplay

ANTIQUE BEAT

★★★★

Deranged gypsy pop meets Tom Waits on this oddball dark delight

Seemingly influenced evenly by Waits, black magic and The Cramps, this appealing curio features Joe Coles of The Guillotines working with The Clerkenwell Kid, producer of the kaleidoscopic The Real Tuesday Weld. It's a suitably weird stew, mixing brothel creepers like "Two Frankfurters" with gypsy pop like "Mating Dance" and gleeful psychobilly brawlers like "Nasty And Naked" with Waitsian bawlers like "Violent Men". The fact it is packaged in a simulacra of an Ouija board and references mythical London monster Spring-Heeled Jack only adds to the sense of bewildering charm.

Peter Watts

LEILA U&I

WARP

★★★★★

Upfront fourth from mercurial synthesist

Leila Arab's perfectionism, among other things, led to her releasing just three albums in 11 years, so the brash nature and sudden arrival of *U&I* (a mere three years after the last) suggests this longtime cohort of Björk and Aphex Twin is finally knuckling down. Electing to collaborate with Berlin's cybernetic crooner Matt 'Mt' Sims gives Arab's heady electronics *Blade Runner*-ish malevolence, particularly on the nauseous new wave of "Welcome To Your Life" and "Colony Collapse Disorder". And yet it's the intoxicating instrumentals, "Boudica" and "In Motion Slow", that remind you of her capricious talent. Piers Martin

THE LEMONHEADS

Laughing All The Way To The Cleaners

MUSIC CLUB DELUXE/RHINO

★★★★★

Hotel Sessions

HALL OF RECORDS

★★★★

College-rock hunk empties out his bottom drawer

In 1993, Australian teenagers Noise Addict released a weak-kneed tribute to Evan Dando. "I Wish I Was Him" was appalling, but at the time, the Lemonheads frontman

did seem to have it all:

a killer combination of powerpop Gram Parsons and Keanu Reeves beach bum, he came unstuck with a bad crack habit and a limp crossover record, *Come On Feel The Lemonheads*. This retro double bill settles a minor score; *Hotel Sessions* is a Walkman demo of that ill-fated album recorded on Bondi Beach, and infinitely more charming than the finished item, while *Laughing All The Way To The Cleaners* – a 2CD random shuffle through his entire back catalogue – shows that Dando's command of that three-chord trick, like those killer cheekbones, never faded. For all those wasted years, you might still wish you were him, too. Jim Wirth

LEPISTO & LEHTI

Radio Moskova

AITO

★★★★★

Second from the nostalgic Finnish accordion/bass duo

Once members of Finnish folk group Värttinä, this alliteratively allied duo became a surprise hit with the world music crowd with their first release, *Helsinki*, an atmospheric soundscape of their hometown. *Radio Moskova* is a similarly seamless set of instrumentals, marrying Lepistö's sinuous accordion to the stalking, jazzy bass of partner Lehti. The pair stretch the limitations of that combination further than might be expected. With childhood memories as its motif (listening to Soviet Radio on steam radio, for example), the album includes wistful waltzes ("Waltz For Eino"), jaunty Piazzolla-style tangos ("Skrubu"), austere chamber folk ("Raudanselkä") and an antique hymn ("Vasulaisten Juhlamarssi"). Classy stuff. Neil Spencer

LFO

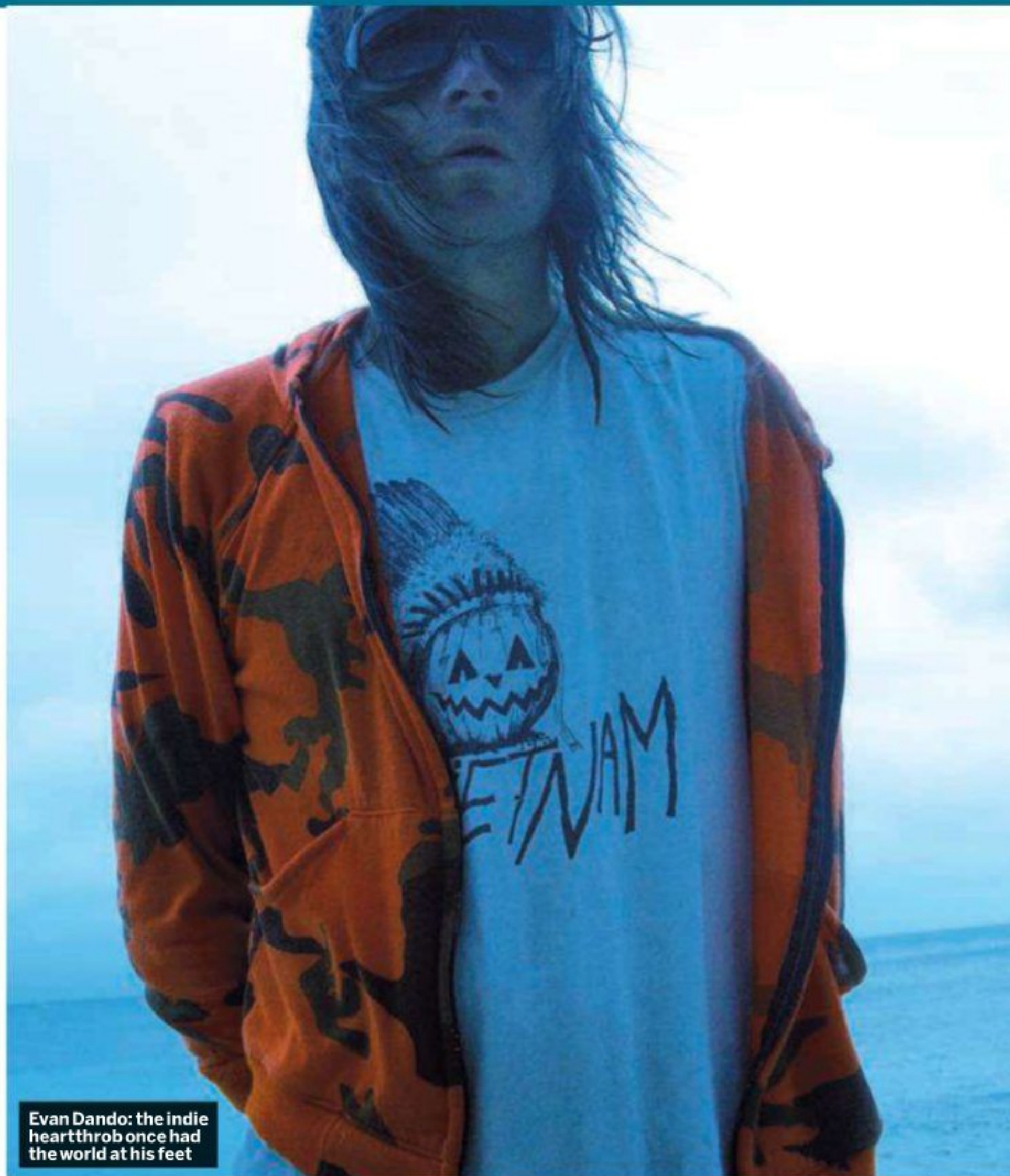
Frequencies 1991

WARP

★★★★★

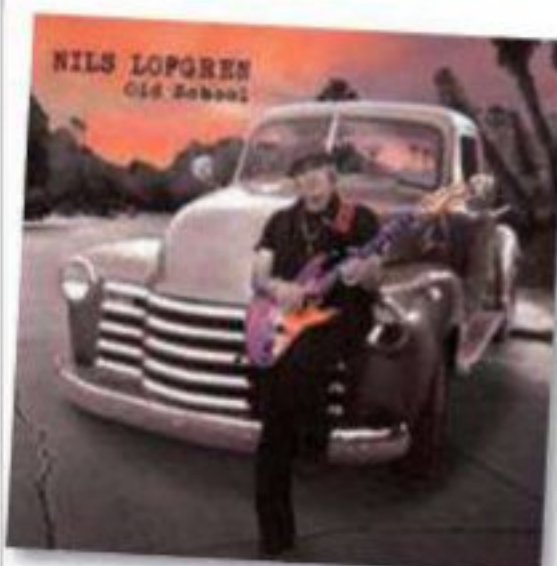
Bleep landmark turns 20

Leeds duo LFO's debut galvanised the British rave scene in the early '90s not just because its fortified blend of Kraftwerk and Marshall Jefferson sounded great on any dancefloor, but because *Frequencies* was one of the first techno albums that played just as well at home and on headphones. The addition of lesser-spotted



Evan Dando: the indie heartthrob once had the world at his feet

numbers "Groovy Distortion" and "Track 14" to this anniversary vinyl edition is cause for some celebration, though one surely needs no excuse to revisit Mark Bell and Gez Varley's hypnotic – and surprisingly soulful – grooves. Piers Martin



NILS LOFGREN

Old School

VISION MUSIC

★★★★

E Street Band guitarist's first new material in five years

Adding to rock's rapidly swelling canon tackling old age and mortality, longtime Bruce Springsteen/Neil Young sideman Lofgren here lets loose with a barrage of trenchant observations on old-timers struggling to cope with contemporary life: the catchy (if creepy) "60 Is The New 18", "Ain't Too Many Of Us Left" (with legendary

soulman Sam Moore on vocals) and "Old School," a kind of supercharged, R'n'B "Subterranean Homesick Blues" turned inside-out. Though balanced out with love songs and touching balladry, "Amy Joan Blues", a rousing country blues, may be the disc's highlight. Despite Lofgren's rather limited voice and *Old School*'s unfortunate flat production, the songwriting is top-shelf. Luke Torn

THE MACCABEES

Given To The Wild

FICTION

★★

Anodyne third from the indie flyweights

South London's Maccabees have always felt like a band designed for weaning pre-teens onto rock music, before they get a taste for the real stuff. Their third album *Given To The Wild* at least demonstrates some kind of progression from their previous weedy efforts, but as with so many British guitar bands of their generation, the five-piece have expanded outwards rather than upwards, opting for huge, blustery soundscapes, devoid of

character or incision. Even at its best, *Given To The Wild* sounds like British Sea Power without the esoteric charm, which is hardly the heartiest of recommendations.

Sam Richards

MAISON NEUVE

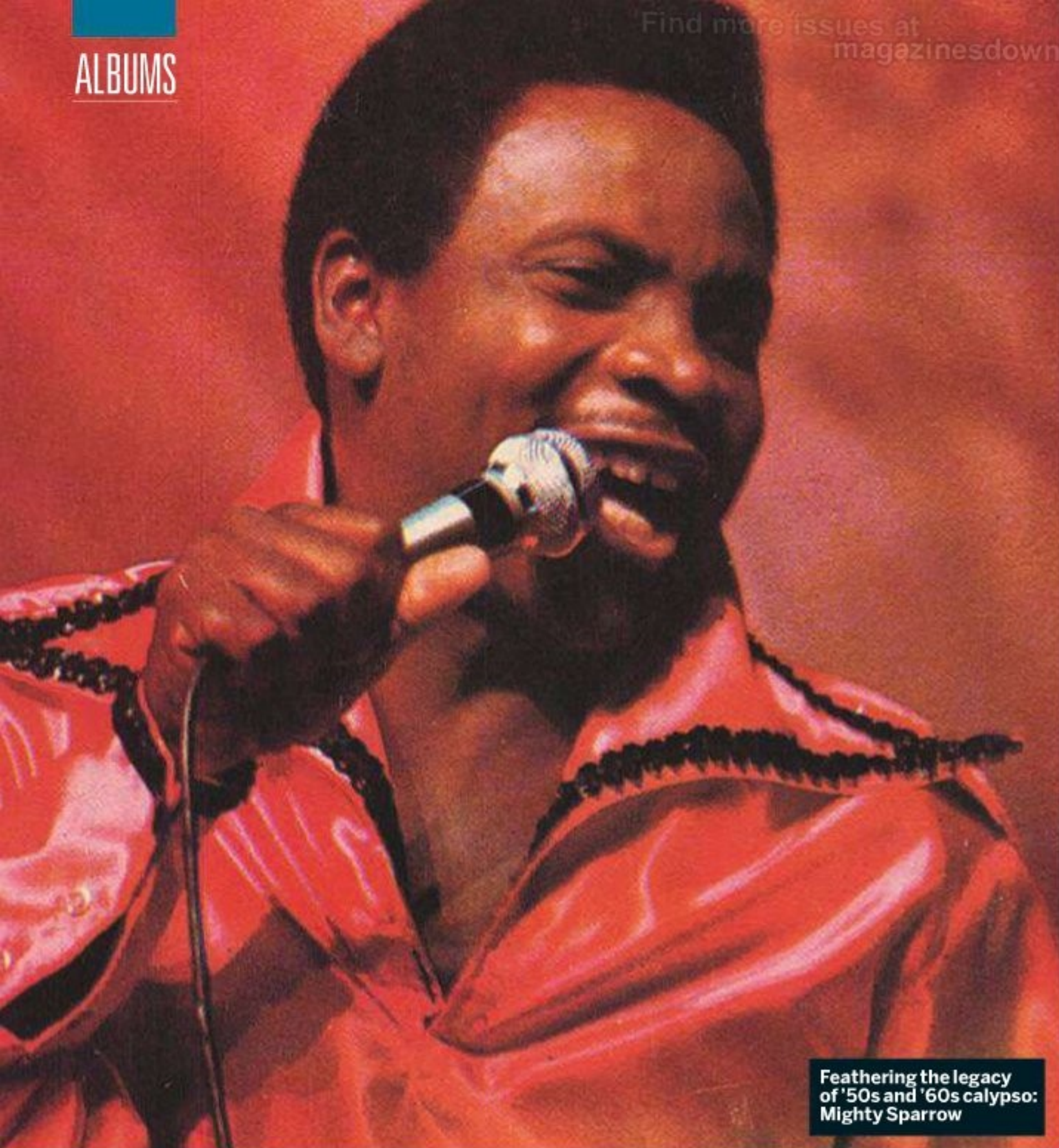
Joan

TALITRES

★★★★★

Gorgeous indiepop debut from France

It's not that often that you can say an artist has been influenced by The Auteurs, but Maison Neuve's splendid debut certainly has some of Luke Haines' idiosyncratic mix of cynicism and romance. Maison Neuve are part-French but sing (a bit limply) mainly in English, favouring repetitive, expressive lyrics ("You are my only landscape and my most tasty wine" they sing on "You Are My Prophet") over churning, vibrant guitars and the odd burst of saxophone. There isn't a weak track here, though, and indiepop gems like "Under Skies Of Fire", "Victor" and "Humble Hearts" at times recall some glorious fusion of The Modern Lovers and The Smiths. Peter Watts



Feathering the legacy of '50s and '60s calypso: Mighty Sparrow

MAN The Live Adventures Of Man

RETROWORLD

★★

Endless jamming rules on this mammoth, bootleg-style 7CD set

These journeymen Welsh rockers eventually found a niche adopting the freewheeling style of late '60s San Francisco ballroom bands. Four sets here were even recorded in 'Frisco in 1976, one including a guest appearance by Quicksilver's John Cipollina. As with their official collaboration with Cipollina, *Maximum Darkness*, the results are disappointing. These thin recordings and the understandably repetitious setlists don't do justice to a popular band who, on their day, could capture something of the spirit of the American West Coast bands they sought to emulate. *Mick Houghton*

MANFRED MANN'S EARTH BAND 40th Anniversary Boxset

CREATURE MUSIC

★★★★

Enigmatic, enduring Mannerisms

Complete set of the band's 19 albums, plus a live disc by the present day lineup and *Leftovers*, featuring rarities

and the group's major hit singles. This is, above all, a tribute to the much-maligned Manfred Mann himself. His Zappa-like conceptual continuity has shaped the band's music in the face of regular personnel changes. Unfashionable, misunderstood even by prog aficionados, MMEB set out their stall from day one, with an unsung self-titled debut which embraced catchy contemporary pop, jazz, gospel and New Orleans R'n'B. A consistently surprising body of work, highlighted by *Messin'*, *Give Me The Good Earth* and *Somewhere In Africa*. *Mick Houghton*

MARCONI UNION Under Wires And Searchlights/ Distance

JUST MUSIC

★★★★

Mysterious Manchester duo's first two albums reissued

Having declined almost all interview requests throughout their decade-long career, Marconi Union remain as low-key as their music, a soothing blend of ambient electronica, jazz and dub that never sacrifices structure for atmosphere. Finally mastered for the first time, these two reissues explain their later (ill-fated)

alliance with the Eno-associated All Saints label: 2003's *Under Wires*... is an especially restorative experience that recalls Labradford's *Mi Media Naranja*, while *Distance* is more narrative-driven, its



seven tracks merging into one immersive and meditative journey. Sonically immaculate, these two albums remain vital excursions into a shadowy but bewitching world. *Wyndham Wallace*

LAURA J MARTIN The Hangman Tree

STATIC CARAVAN

★★★★

Scouse ingénue's fairytale flute salad

Laura J Martin's debut album is an extraordinary and eclectic mix of flute, loops, mandolin and xylophone, on which the Merseysider creates a genre-neutral space of her own. These spry, gnomish songs echo Slapp Happy's downmarket

Weimar bohemia or the invertebrate oddness of The Raincoats' *Odyshape*, but inner-space shanties like "Silent Maria" and "The Lesson" have the exciting contours of virgin territory. "It's a scary ride when you don't know it all", Martin chirrups soothingly but bewitchingly on "Tom", weird but more than a little wonderful. *Jim Wirth*

MAVERICK SABRE Lonely Are The Brave

MERCURY

★★★★

Soul-singing Anglo Irish MC makes solo debut

The artist formerly known as Michael Stafford is groomed to follow in the footsteps of pals Plan B and Professor Green after appearing on the latter's smash "Jungle". As a vocal stylist Sabre is in the Ali Campbell 'transplanted Jamaican' mould, but as a songwriter he can tend to stray a little towards dullness (as on "Memories" and "Open Your Eyes"). Some real incision is made on the hardhitting "Shooting Stars", suggesting that it is in the genre of acoustic guitar rap where Maverick's most telling contributions could be made. *Gavin Martin*

MIGHTY SPARROW Sparromania

STRUT

★★★★

Bumper collection of the calypso king's wit and wisdom

The archetypal view of calypso hasn't changed much since the music's brief twirl in the international spotlight in the 1950s, when Harry Belafonte (and Robert Mitchum!) presented a bloodless version of the sassy commentaries of Trinidad's Lord Kitchener and Mighty Sparrow, among others. This 2CD compilation of the latter's work comes from the post-craze 1960s and presents a fuller picture of calypso's development. There are no ditties sung to strummed guitars here; Sparrow fronts a big band, complete with blaring brass, shrilling clarinets and a muscular rhythm section generating a ballroom ambience (there are even a couple of live tracks from the Barbados Hilton). Sparrow, ever the mercurial lyricist, offers sharp commentary on subjects

raging from 1962's Cuban missile crisis ("Kennedy And Khrushchev"), the broken economy ("Ah Digging Horrors") and the black slave trade ("Slave"). Then there's the customary bawdy fayre; the perennial "Big Bamboo" and Sparrow originals like "Bois Bandé". More than just a historical curio, *Sparromania* rocks. *Neil Spencer*

MILAGRES Glowing Mouth

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

★★

Second album – and the first UK release – from Brooklyn quintet

Milagres (Spanish for "miracles") is essentially a vehicle for singer Kyle Wilson, who has one of those vaulting falsetto voices made for epic rock melodrama. He demonstrates it on a set of songs apparently written while bed-ridden after a climbing accident. "Moon On The Sea's Gate" is typical – a sixth-form lyric of undefined disillusionment that explores images of empty beaches and crashing waves etc over a prog-rock backing. "Gone" even borrows the intensely irritating keyboard riff from Supertramp's "Dreamer". You're left wondering how much more impressive Wilson's striking pipes might sound with less gauche material. *Nigel Williamson*

MULL HISTORICAL SOCIETY City Awakenings

XTRAMILE

★★★★

Globe-trotting Scotsman rediscovers his roots

Seven years after mothballing his MHS identity to strike out under his own name, Colin MacIntyre here reactivates the recording alias inspired by his island home. A musical homage to the grit and glamour of Glasgow, London and New York, *City Awakenings* mostly retains the meatier arrangements of MacIntyre's solo work, tapping into a noble heritage of western Scottish guitar-janglers stretching from Aztec Camera to Teenage Fanclub to Attic Lights and beyond. There are a few indifferent folk-rock chuggers here, but the honeyed roar of "Can You Let Her Know" and "The Lights" are exhilarating. *Stephen Dalton*



THE LITTLE WILLIES

For The Good Times

★★★★★

PARLOPHONE

Second collection of old-school country and western covers from Norah Jones and co.

By John Lewis



By sheer dint of the fact she plays the piano and occasionally dips into the Great American Songbook, Norah Jones finds herself marketed as a lounge jazz singer, an error compounded by the fact that her sales have all but bankrolled the Blue Note label for more than a decade. Of course, she'll be the first to admit that she's not a jazz musician.

Listening to her albums, Jones makes more sense viewed as a bucolic country singer who wears her jazz chops lightly; pitched (on some nebulous jazz/country continuum) somewhere jazzwards of Willie Nelson, but a little twangier than Ray Charles. She rarely sounds as comfortable as she does in *The Little Willies*, the classic C&W covers band she started in 2003 with four New York pals. One of them is Lee Alexander, her erstwhile partner and bassist; when the couple split in 2007 it was assumed that *The Little Willies* would not reconvene, especially when Alexander left Manhattan to build and race sportscars in Nevada. But their split was clearly amicable enough to reunite for a second album.

The band's 2006 debut was recorded in just two days with no overdubs. Album number two – laid down live in only three days – follows a similar template, comprising covers of classic country songs by the likes of Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson and Willie Nelson (the last, of course, inspiring the band's name). The band's elder statesman is lead guitarist Jim Campilongo (the Bert Weedon of Brooklyn hipsters), and the lead vocalist on half of the songs is Richard Julian (a singer-songwriter who has recorded a few albums of his own songs, featuring members of Bright Eyes and Wilco), but the band's USP remains Jones' beautifully groggy voice. On

Q&A Richard Julian

You record fast, which is astonishing when bands spend months in the studio...

The thing is, we're not having to write material or work out our "sound". We're playing old material and we've already got our sound figured out from live shows! This time it took a little longer. But we still finished the whole thing in three days.

How do you divvy up the lead vocals?

It's just whatever sounds good. Some songs suit Norah better, some suit me. Not everyone who becomes successful at music at her level is a great musician. But Norah – you can stick her in any musical context and she can handle it, 'cause she's got great ears. Here she shows that she can be a rhythm section player.

The standard criticism is that these are pointless cover versions by bourgeois New Yorkers – what's your response?

There's always the question of "are you authentic enough?" We're authentic to ourselves, in that we're not affected. There's plenty to chew on with our versions because we've got some terrific musicians. "Diesel Smoke, Dangerous Curves" is a bit of a novelty song, but I think we make it sound kinda... sexy. Ha ha!

INTERVIEW: JOHN LEWIS

tracks like Hank Williams' "Lovesick Blues" or Willie Nelson's "Permanently Lonely", it's those sighing backing vocals that leap from the speakers. It's enough to turn even the novelty songs – like "Foul Owl On The Prowl" (a pastiche song knocked out by Quincy Jones for the soundtrack to *In The Heat Of The Night*) or Burl Ives' "Diesel Smoke, Dangerous Curves" (the "Louie Louie" of trucking songs) – into lovely slumber ballads, their spikiest elements liquefied by Jones' contributions.

Jones, of course, is not your usual feisty, spit-and-sawdust country diva, and some tales play very differently when she sings lead. When Loretta Lynn sings "Fist City" you can visualise the narrowed eyes, the spinning handbag and the Popeye fists; when Dolly Parton pleads "Jolene", you can hear the quiet desperation and the implied threat. But, in Jones' hands, these songs are sanded down, polished to take on a different charm.

Only it's not too polished. For five exceptionally good musicians (all except Richard Julian trained at one of America's finest jazz and improvisation conservatoires), it's surprising how sparingly they play. Nashville music – both in its classic honkytonk and its ickier recent guises – has a tendency to pile on the strings, the harmonies, the fiddles and the pedal steel, but *The Little Willies* keep things gorgeously spartan, with barely an unnecessary note played anywhere. As a result there is no unearned sentiment, and Jones and co manage to eke emotions from Kris Kristofferson's tear-jerking "For The Good Times" that neither KK nor Elvis Presley managed, and locate a core to Hank Williams' "Remember Me" that eluded Rickie Lee Jones. It's that discipline that stops this from being a self-indulgent, back-slapping bar-room session and turns it into something sublime.



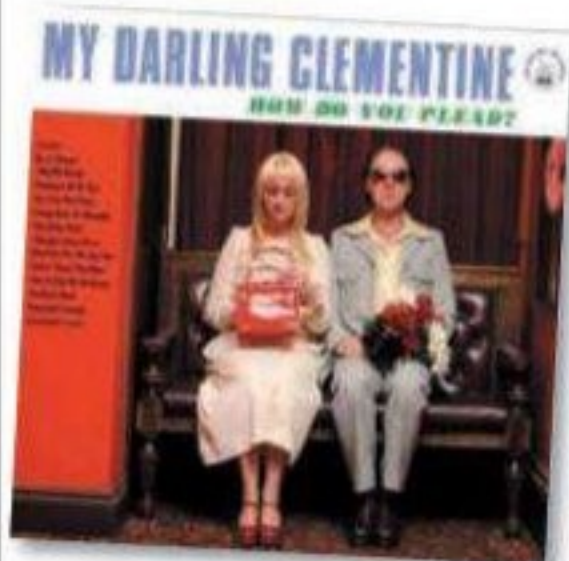
Nada Surf:
branching out with
melancholy epics

MY DARLING CLEMENTINE How Do You Plead?

DRUMFIRE

★★★★

Heartaches and hangovers from a new country pairing Singer-songwriter Michael Weston King has teamed up with Lou Dalglish for his latest project, effortlessly earning a place in the roll call of great country duettists (George & Tammy, Gram & Emmylou). This plucks at the heartstrings, transporting the listener to smoky saloons where star-crossed lovers bare their souls. This is elegant, grown-up country, cut from the same cloth as Nick Lowe's recent records (Lowe lends his producer and various bandmembers to the party). The gentle "Put Your Hair Back" picks over the bones of wrecked romance; "She Is Still My Weakness" adds a Percy Sledge soul. *Terry Staunton*



NADA SURF The Stars Are Indifferent To Astronomy

CITY SLANG

★★★★

Veteran indie-rockers regain their focus It was Nada Surf's misfortune to have a hit with "Popular", a novelty which framed them as commentators on teen dating. Their seventh album finds them in a melancholy

mood (the epic "When I Was Young"). The sound's core remains Matthew Caws' candyfloss voice, but Doug Gillard's guitar adds mettle (he had James Honeyman-Scott in mind). It gels beautifully on the relentless "Looking Through", while the opening "Clear Eyed Clouded Mind", is fast and fuzzy; a glorious rush of powerpop. *Alastair McKay*

MESHELL NDEGECELLO Weather

NAIVE

★★★★

Joe Henry produces soul singer's ninth studio album Berlin-born Ndegeocello produces some of the more thoughtful soul records, mixing up styles and genres while writing lyrics that are an arresting mix of personal and political – as a black bisexual, the lines between the two are blurred. On *Weather*, her vocals are buried deep within lush, lean arrangements, often accompanied only by piano, as on the exploratory "Oyster". She can visit more upbeat territory – "Chance" is bouncy soul-pop, while "Dirty World" is sparky jazz-fusion – but otherwise this is a more low-key collection than 2009's fine *Devil's Halo*, epitomised by the spartan title track and the languorous cover of "Chelsea Hotel". *Peter Watts*

OCCAM My Rorschach

PIMODAN

★★★★

Immaculate Eastern Bloc electronica

Though it's over a decade too late for the chillout wave, Tibor Lázár's debut offers

gentle, lush electronica that, on tracks like "Midnight Taper", recalls Kid Loco if produced by Pole's Stefan Betke. "La Dolce Vita" is full of barely perceptible percussive twitches and hints of dub, while the more cinematic "Town Of Introspection" reflects the jazzier sound of the domestically successful act Zagar with whom Lázár drums. Elsewhere, guest vocals from Enikő Hodosi lend tunes like "I Was A Dervish" the air of an overly polite Lamb, making this an old-fashioned, but still intriguing, opening gambit. *Wyndham Wallace*

ODDFELLOWS CASINO The Raven's Empire

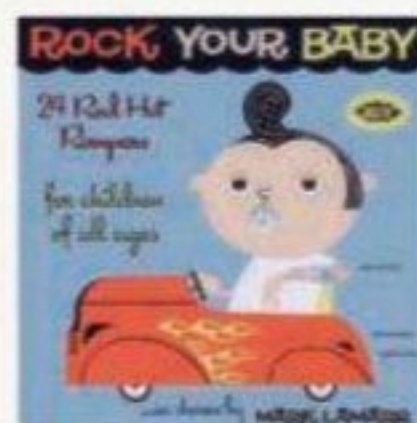
NIGHTJAR RECORDS

★★★★

Brighton's one-man answer to austerity and Elbow Named after a Victorian freakshow, Oddfellows Casino are surprisingly orthodox, their driving force, David Bramwell, reserving his eccentricities for extra-curricular activities like a Sing-Along-A-Wickerman tribute show. His third LP, produced by Grasscut's Andrew Philips, is full of restrained anthems that mix the sensitivity of Sufjan Stevens' arrangements with the big-hearted warmth and soft harmonies of Elbow, "We Will Be Here" especially reminiscent of the latter's "Station Approach". Though shorn of polished production – it's recorded to eight-track tape – Bramwell's integration of acoustic folk techniques and even a local 30-piece concert band is impressively, endearingly widescreen. *Wyndham Wallace*

SHORT CUTS

Various Artists



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Rock Your Baby: 24 Red Hot Rompers

ACE ★★★★★

Comedian, broadcaster and rock'n'roll aficionado Mark Lamarr sets himself a near-impossible task here, compiling "child-friendly offerings guaranteed to eradicate the horrors of car journeys with fractious offspring". The result is a set of lesser-known quality novelty tunes from The Kingsmen, Sam The Sham, Johnny Cash, Shirley Ellis and more, which can grate after first listen, let alone six hours stuck on the A303. *Mark Bentley*

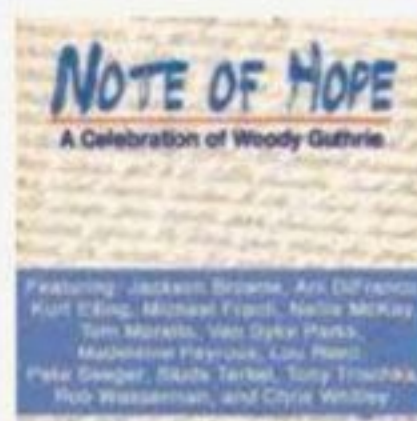


VARIOUS ARTISTS

Deep Roots Of The Ramones

SIREENA ★★★★★

The Ramones had a sound that embodied Year Zero's repositioning of incompetence as art strategy, so "roots" seems a bit bourgeois a concept for a comp. Maybe "kindred spirits" gets the feel of what's on here a bit better: MC5, Iggy and Link Wray represent the rawness, but only "Ooby Dooby" (Teen Kings) and the opening "Shake Some Action" really come near the naivety and sweetness that became a part of the band's sound. Still, good comp anyway you dice it. *John Robinson*



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Note Of Hope

429 ★★★★★

A Woody Guthrie tribute that relocates the great American songwriter from boxcar troub to post-WWII social commentator. Jazzy backdrops frame journal entries, and include terrific performances from Madeleine Peyroux and Jackson Browne, the latter with a 15-minute poem about Woody meeting his wife. Late novelist Studs Terkel brings period authenticity, Michael Franti brings us Woody the sex god. Really! *Neil Spencer*

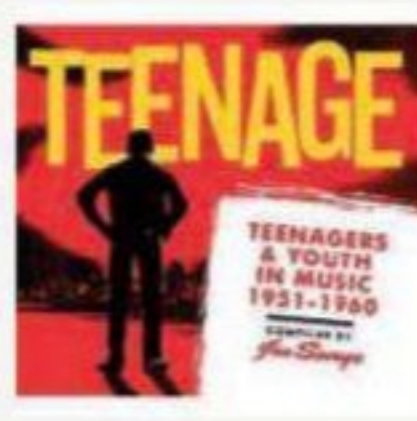


VARIOUS ARTISTS

Reggae Going International

KINGSTON SOUNDS ★★★★★

A basket of hits from JA producer Bunny Lee's heyday between 1967-76. Lee quickly succeeded in the UK market, with Max Romeo's "Wet Dream" making Top 20 here and Eric Donaldson's "Cherry Oh Baby" and Johnny Clarke's "None Shall Escape" among many cult tracks. Lee's famed 'flying cymbal' sound is here on Cornell Campbell's "Dance In A Greenwich Farm" along with era-defining cuts like Dennis Alcapone's hypnotic "Cassius Clay". *Neil Spencer*



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Teenage: Teenagers & Youth In Music 1951-60

BEAR FAMILY ★★★★★

Author Jon Savage reanimates rock'n'roll's founding era with an acute perspective and a polished, graphic-heavy package. Familiar *American Graffiti* sides like Chuck's "Sweet Sixteen" and Mark Dinning's doomy "Teen Angel" jostle with obscurities like Eddie Cochran's "Teenage Cutie" and Lord Luther's X-rated "(I Was A) Teenage Creature". Pop archaeology at its swinging best, kids. *Neil Spencer*

GUIDED BY VOICES

Let's Go Eat The Factory



FIRE RECORDS

The chaotic US band's "classic lineup" convenes for the first time in more than 15 years. Interesting, says Sam Richards



When US indie institution Matador celebrated its 21st birthday with a mini-festival in the unlikely surroundings of Las Vegas' Palms Hotel & Casino in October 2010,

the big draw was not the last ever Pavement reunion show, nor Sonic Youth's *Sister*-heavy set, nor even the possibility of finding yourself at the blackjack table with one of Superchunk. No, the biggest clamour of the weekend was reserved for the reformation of a greying, beer-swilling bar band from Dayton, Ohio.

Guided By Voices are a group who command a great deal of affection, spawning numerous tribute acts (Gilded By Vices, anyone?) and websites dedicated to chronicling their every recorded note (no mean feat – side-projects included, there are upwards of 1500 GBV songs in circulation). It's not so hard to understand the appeal: GBV songs are typically short and catchy with endearingly daft titles, recorded just primitively enough to deter the casual listener; their vast catalogue rewards the retentive fan; and bandleader Robert Pollard is an avuncular have-a-go frontman who flies the flag for middle-aged Joe Schmoes everywhere.

For a period in the mid-'90s, it felt like there was a new Guided By Voices record every week, crammed with pithy lo-fi pop missives called things like "Tractor Rape Chain" and "Big Chief Chinese Restaurant". Even if they weren't all classics, the band's extreme prolificacy transmitted an infectious enthusiasm. Live shows were celebratory affairs, with sets lasting up to three hours and Pollard acting out his rock star fantasies by scissor-kicking his way across the stage, soaked in beer and sweat.

Several slicker incarnations of Guided By Voices soldiered on until 2004, but it's the reformation of the "classic" mid-'90s lineup – Robert Pollard, multi-instrumentalist Tobin Sprout, guitarist Mitch Mitchell, drummer Kevin Fennell, bassist Greg Demos and studio member Jim Pollard – that has got the die-hards frothing. Following the success of the



Matador 21 show and subsequent reunion tour, the "classic lineup" decided to make an album together for the first time since 1996's *Under The Bushes, Under The Stars*.

In an attempt to recapture some of the patchwork lo-fi charm of 1994's breakthrough album *Bee Thousand*, *Let's Go Eat The Factory* is entirely home-recorded. Yet despite the familiar set-up, this is no lazy retread of minor past glories. "Chocolate Boy", "Doughnut For A Snowman" and "The Unsinkable Fats Domino" are typically succinct melodic gems, but elsewhere Guided By Voices appear to be getting gnarlier in their old age.

Opener "Laundry And Lasers" offers a terse volley of strafing drone rock. The three-minute "Imperial Racehorsing" – an epic by GBV's former standards – is a thrilling psychedelic churn, complete with sizzling guitar wig-outs. The deconstructed rock weirdness of "The Big Hat And Toy Show" sounds like something from the Not Not Fun label, or an early Royal Trux record. It's not quite what we were expecting, but it's not unwelcome either.

On the flipside, the deployment of the ersatz

This is no lazy retread of minor past glories – GBV appear to be getting gnarlier with age

string sounds from a child's keyboard and a cavalier approach to playing and singing in key renders several numbers unlistenable. But the joy of any Guided By Voices release is that you're on to the next song soon enough.

It was always widely assumed that GBV's experimental flourishes were a bit of a

smokescreen for their lack of technique. But this record is deliberately confounding, suggesting that the reformed band are not content to just turn up and play the expected role of idiot uncles. *Let's Go Eat The Factory* is not a brilliant album in and of itself, but it does cast Guided By Voices in a slightly different light: more than just a quirky sideshow, perhaps we ought to view their whole career as a prolonged act of rock'n'roll subversion.

Q&A Tobin Sprout

What convinced you that the conditions were right to make a new GBV album?

It seemed to be the next thing to do. I was in Chicago with Bob and was thinking of bringing up the idea when he just came out and said, "We are going to do a GBV album and we are calling it *Let's Go Eat The Factory*." I already had the song "Waves", so it became the first song for the album.

How did you ensure that you weren't simply recycling the past?

We never stopped writing so there really wasn't any going back. Though we did use some of the same methods we used on the early albums, such as recording in different locations – Mitch's garage, my basement, Greg's eight-track. There might even be some boombox recordings in there. It's what gives all the songs a bit of a different sound. But we are different as people. Fifteen years have passed.

What are the benefits of home recording?

It gives us a lot of freedom and I know how to get the sounds I hear in my head. Having said that, the first day of recording all together was a disaster. Everything that could go wrong went wrong. The kick drum mic fell into the drum, pre-amps wouldn't work, mics wouldn't work, the vocal sound was bad. I had to fix a lot in the mix. The second day everything came together, and around 3am we wrapped up the recording with "We Won't Apologise For The Human Race". INTERVIEW: SAM RICHARDS

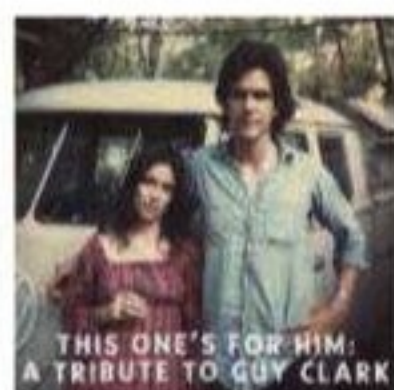
VARIOUS ARTISTS

This One's For Him: A Tribute To Guy Clark

ICEHOUSE MUSIC

★★★★

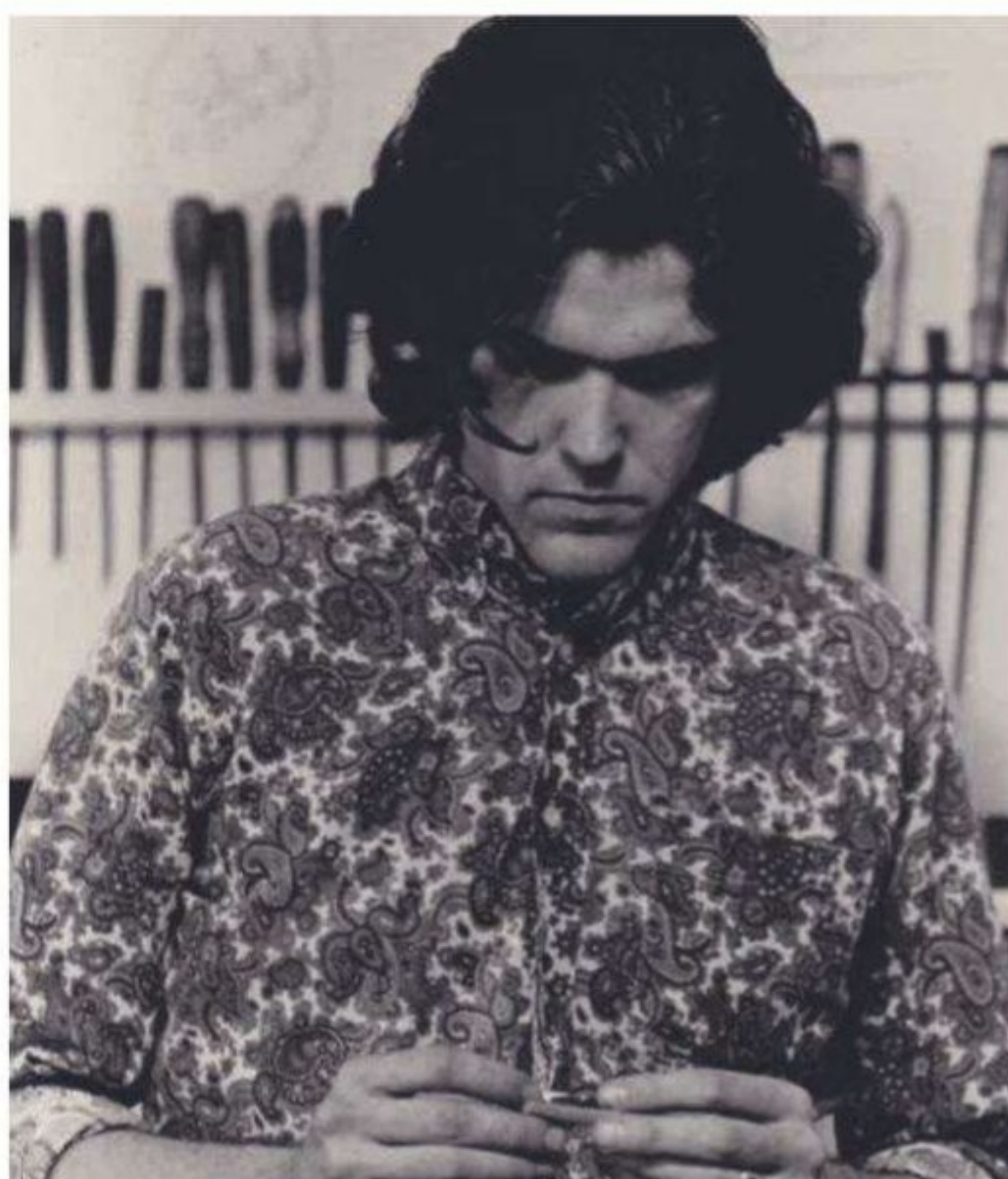
All-star cap-doffer to one of the uncrowned kings of American roots



You could never accuse Guy Clark of being impetuous. Having issued less than a dozen studio albums since his classic 1975 debut *Old No 1*, he is instead a prime example of quality over quantity, crafting his folk-blues songs with the same artful diligence as the guitars he makes in his other career as skilled luthier. Clark's simple chords have served to frame his rare gift for salting universal truths down into rhyme, much like his late great friend Townes Van Zandt.

The hits were never forthcoming, but he's never been short of admirers. Johnny Cash, The Highwaymen and Jerry Jeff Walker are among many who've covered his tunes. But the occasion of Clark's 70th birthday has now brought *This One's For Him*, a comprehensive 2CD tribute with several boxcars' worth of big names.

The case for Clark as perhaps the greatest songwriter mainstream America never knew it had is made from the off, with Rodney Crowell's version of the sad, lyrical "That Old Time Feeling". James McMurtry offers a faithful "Cold Dog Soup", a song that suggests Clark was never destined for the enormodomes of this world: "Ain't



no money in poetry/That's what sets the poet free / I've had all the freedom I can stand". Though the major highlights are Ron Sexsmith's piano-driven version of barfly ballad "Broken Hearted People" and Willie Nelson's forlornly stoic take on "Desperados Waiting For A Train".

Having voices as lived-in as Clark's certainly helps. Emmylou Harris and John Prine bring out the border-town ennui of "Magnolia Wind" like two old hands who've been there more than once. While Vince Gill, who played guitar on the original "Randall Knife", takes stage centre for a fresh update on one of the most moving elegies to a dead father that you'll ever hear.

In truth, these people don't need to do an awful lot to the source material. Ultimately, Clark's songs are left to speak for themselves, which is just as it should be.

ROUND-UP

The obligations of Kevin Bacon's Hollywood movie career have no doubt put a crimp in the 15-year recording life of **The Bacon Brothers**

(pictured below). Best-of comp *Philadelphia Road* ★★ **HYPERTENSION** doesn't exactly suggest we've been deprived of any genius talent, though, Kevin and older sibling Michael opting for a predictable roots-pop route. The similarly tepid **Bellamy Brothers** are at hand for "Guilty Of The Crime", though "Unhappy Birthday" and "Angelina" show a keen ear for earthy balladry. Altogether more satisfying is *The Garden* ★★ ★ **REDHOUSE**, the debut LP from ex-member of US



folk supergroup The Wailin' Jennys, **Ruth Moody**. Warm yet spare arrangements mirror Moody's own delicate breath of a voice. At times it wafts a bit too pleasantly for its own good, but the whole thing is a winning exercise in folksy restraint and musicianship. Louisiana native **Lance Lopez** doesn't quite elicit the same response with *Handmade Music* ★★ **STRING COMMANDER**, a largely workmanlike selection of 12-bar blues tunes that you swear you've heard before, and not in a complimentary way. Always worth a punt are Seattle old-school roustabouts **The Water Tower Bucket Boys**. EP "Where The Crow Don't Fly" ★★ **SELF-RELEASED** transposes their beloved mountain music onto the restless rhythms of punk. This isn't some lame pastiche of hillbilly tropes. It's elegant, blindingly well played and delivered with a devotion to core tradition.

VERN GOSDIN

Chiseled In Stone/Alone

T-BIRD AMERICANA

★★★★

Polished twofer from country ledge

Vern Gosdin will forever be remembered in hipper country circles for his early tenure with the Hillmen and Gosdin brothers, particularly his and sibling Rex's sterling work on '67's *Gene Clark With The Gosdin Brothers*. The '80s found him in the midst of a successful solo career, breaching the country charts with honky-tonk weepies about good love gone bad. Both these LPs date from the back end of the decade and find him in sonorous, if sentimental, voice. Perhaps the best moment is "Tight As Twin Fiddles", a lovely tribute to doughboy Bob Wills.

MARY LORSON & THE SOUBRETTES

Burn Baby Burn

MLS

★★★★

American songbird turns up the heat

Since her '90s beginnings with New York indie darlings Madder Rose, flute-voiced singer Mary Lorson has fronted minimalist outfit Saint Low and composed drama scores. This latest project finds her heading up a female trio informed by the inflections of jazz and the soft fortitude of Southern folk. It's all artfully understated stuff, the songs for the most part unfurling over piano ("These Police") or the insistent cluck of banjo ("Lately"). Some of it's tied to Lorson's ongoing play about an old vaudeville star, which explains the stagey dynamics of songs like "I Don't Care".

DAMIEN JURADO

Maraqopa

SECRETLY CANADIAN

★★★★

Seattle folkie continues topop

Jurado's first collaboration with much-fancied songwriter Richard Swift, the latter guiding things from the producer's chair, resulted in the sub-Spector pop of 2010's *Saint Bartlett*. Here the pair resume roles for an equally enchanted follow-up. Jurado again provides the same lost-boy voice that lent his stark early work such a chill, though the music is now awash with warm reverb, subtle harmonies, soulful percussion and, as on "Life Away From The Garden", a full-on children's choir. Pick of the bunch is the fluttering title track, a lovely thing that sounds borne aloft from Laurel Canyon circa 1971.

BILL ANDERSON

The First 10 Years: 1956-1966

BEAR FAMILY

★★★★

The other side of 'Whispering Bill'

It's unfortunate that US country star Bill Anderson is probably best known in Britain as unwitting hit-maker for Ken Dodd, who took both "Still" and "Happiness" into the charts in the '60s. Anderson was in fact both a prolific supplier of songs, for Ray Price, Eddy Arnold, Brenda Lee and others, as well as a major player in his own right. These terrific recordings from his golden years at Decca shift smoothly from teary honky-tonk to soft-shoe shuffles to Western swing, including "If It's All The Same To You", a duet with a pre-Porter Dolly Parton.

OPPOSITE SEX Opposite Sex

FISHRIDER

★★★★★

The new wave of New Zealand pop begins here

A trio hailing from Gisborne, in New Zealand's North Island, Opposite Sex share with their compatriots a penchant for vernacular psychedelia and lop-sided songwriting. Parts of their self-titled debut album recall Flying Nun groups like 3Ds, but fed through the warping prism of British DIY (Homosexuals, Bing Selfish) and a dash of the new lo-fi consciousness of American groups like Times New Viking. For a debut, it's remarkable, leaping from sea-sick waltzes and crunchy post-punk to ADD-pop (see the hyper opener "La Rat").

Jon Dale

DANIEL PEARSON Satellites

SAINT IN THE CITY

★★★★★

Route 66 meets the M1

The debut from the Leeds-based singer-songwriter aims for an unplugged approximation of Springsteen's epic '80s sound but never quite makes it. Pearson's voice is pleasant but lacks distinction, while his songs rarely deviate from their rather rote country-rock settings: the crunchy "Wishing Well" nods to The Jayhawks, while "Black N Blue" is so close to Ryan Adams' "New York, New York" it's practically a legal matter. He's more convincing leafing through the bittersweet backpages of "Satellite Town", while two contemplative closing pieces just about save the album from worthy-but-dull status.

Graeme Thomson

PEPE DELUXÉ Queen Of The Wave

CATSKILLS

★★★★★

Conceptual hi jinx on electro oddballs' fourth

Based on Frederick S Oliver's 19th-century cosmic cult novel, *A Dweller On Two Planets*, this is an album laden with baroque invention. Securing the services of the world's largest instrument, The Great Stalacpipe organ in Virginia, USA, this is a diverting retro-futurist soundscape that travels from the 'Girl Group playing Space' rockabilly mash-up of "Hepserus Garden" to the epic 'Scott

Walker fronts a Morricone horse opera at the edge of the galaxy' "Riders Of The First Ark". All over the shop stylistically – but a keen handle on dynamics and narrative holds it all together.

Gavin Martin

PHENOMENAL HANDCLAP BAND Form & Control

TUMMY TOUCH

★★★★★

Second helping of cosmic disco from retro New Yorkers

This much-trumpeted eight-piece, led by DJs Daniel Collás and Sean Marquand, occupy a languid, free-spirited territory where '70s rock, disco and soul collide. Fleetwood Mac, Sly & The Family Stone, Boney M and ELP are musical touchstones on an album that invites you on to the dancefloor only to leave you standing there motionless. While there's plenty to admire in PHB's ability to mix and match disparate styles, the songs never reach the giddy climax to which they seem to be building. All in all, it's a little too cool for its own good.

Fiona Sturges



PLUG Back On Time

NINJA TUNE

★★★★★

Recently unearthed sequel to Luke Vibert's '90s IDM classic

Back in 1996, Luke Vibert released *Drum N' Bass For Papa*, an inspired fusion of kitsch funk and scampering Amen breaks that represented a high-water mark for so-called 'intelligent drum'n'bass'. This follow-up – recorded sometime between '96 and '98, but only recently recovered from down the back of Vibert's sofa – is equally enjoyable. Naturally inclining toward the rolling style of later drum'n'bass and even speed garage, *Back On Time* is restlessly inventive without being overwrought, slotting in nicely alongside the vivid post-rave fantasies of latter-day electronic adventurers



such as Zomby and Hudson Mohawke. *Sam Richards*

PORCELAIN RAFT Strange Weekend

SECRETLY CANADIAN

★★★★★

The sweet sound of slumber

Mauro Remiddi seems enervated in the very best sense. The itinerant Italian makes dreamy, disconnected pop, gauzy waves of sound floating on atmospheric electronics. His thin, androgynous voice most obviously recalls John Lennon, whose later-period ghost flits through "The End Of Silence" and "Shapeless And Gone". The latter, almost bluesy, is as muscular as things get. The gorgeous lethargy of "If You Have A Wish" and "Backwards" prove more typical, with only the too-twee "The Way In" (imagine Ariel Pink rewiring Wham!'s "Last Christmas") misfiring. Otherwise, *Strange Weekend* drifts and delights.

Graeme Thomson

PORTICO QUARTET Portico Quartet

REAL WORLD

★★★★★

Mercury-nominated post-jazz quartet move into spooky electronic territory

This unorthodox quartet have come a long way from their humble beginnings as

a busking street band. While they still use the same gear – sax, double bass, percussion and a tuned metal drum called a hang – they are now adding weird effects and moving way beyond the "jazz" rubrik. Increasingly, the hang mutates into a ravey synth, the sax resembles a trumpet and the double bass is bowed and sampled to sound like a full string section. "Steepleless" features a childlike female vocal, but otherwise these instrumental soundscapes run the gamut from ECM-ish ambient to the heavy-duty electronica of Aphex Twin or Flying Lotus.

PRECIOUS JULES Precious Jules

AGITATED

★★★★★

Fine punky two-piece, smartly executed

Aussie Kim Salmons – formerly of cult rockers The Scientists – has teamed up with Michael Stranges to produce this slice of lowlife rock and punk. The spirit of 1976 is strong in Precious Jules: "A Necessary Evil" has a spoken intro – "let's not waste any time, let's just get wasted!" – like a Damned classic, while the Ramonesy "Cheap N Nasty" was written in 1977 for Salmons' punk band The Cheap Nasties. It's

not all cockney snarl and buzzsaw guitar, though. "Shine Some Darkness On Me" is gluey glam, "The Urban Swamp" has a squally, slinky strut, while "Listening To The Sand" has Replacements-esque blue-collar beauty.

PRINZHORN DANCE SCHOOL Clay Class

DFA

★★★★★

Bracingly bleak return from south coast duo

You might have expected PDS to disband after their 2007 debut, leaving the most peculiar record ever to be released on EMI to flower into posthumous legend, but their evident dedication dispels the notion that they were mere artschool ironists. In many ways *Clay Class* is another helping of their broken blues and Stuckist infra-poetry, charting a Fall-en landscape, stripped even of grotesque enchantment. But increasingly their affectless irony bleeds into anger: "skinny trees, naked in winter: Britain in bloom" they chant bitterly on "Flora and Fauna...". "Shake The Jar" concludes by imploring, "rattle their cages/let the fight back in", raising the prospect of PDS as England's most unlikely protest singers.

Stephen Troussé



Rodrigo Y Gabriela:
heading to Havana for
a big band sound

THE PUPPINI SISTERS Hollywood

DECCA

★★★★

Radio 2-friendly vocal trio eschew pop kitsch for vintage material

Their first two albums played up the jokey angle: kooky dames in burlesque frocks doing Andrews Sisters-style covers of Beyoncé and The Smiths. This collection of 1940s and '50s standards suggests that, while the novelty has long worn thin, these three Guildhall graduates may have worn their astonishing chops rather too lightly. Check out the tight chord clusters in "True Love"; the sinister, minor-key settings of "Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend", or the Swan Lake-goes-tango arrangement of "I Feel Pretty". Sadly, the accompaniment – chugging banjos and stolid woodwind – rarely matches the swagger of the vocals. *John Lewis*

REBOLLEDO Super Vato

COMEME

★★★★

Drum rolls, please, for Superpitcher collaborator's debut

One half of Pachanga Boys alongside Superpitcher, Mauricio Rebolledo employs simple methods with devastating results. Layering the barest of keyboard melodies over, for the most part, a one-note drone, he stirs up drama with propulsive rhythm tracks and, occasionally, brief bursts of vocals. "Te Conozco Moscow" is even starker, just drums and a single bass note, while "Aire Caliente" offers

little more than tribal chanting over didgeridoos, but "Steady Gear Rod Maschine" [sic] has a winning motorik feel. It could be dull, but instead sounds like John Carpenter, had he signed to Kompakt.

Wyndham Wallace

CATHERINE RINGER Ring N' Roll

BECAUSE

★★★★

Ex-Les Rita Mitsouko frontwoman makes recovery solo album

When her partner/mentor and co-founder of Les Rita Mitsouko Fred Chichin died in 2007, Catherine Ringer was understandably distraught and fell silent. She had to be coaxed back into the studio by musician friends, persuaded that singing would be a catharsis. The result is this fine album, in the Mitsouko tradition of avant-pop from the French tradition of chanson and cabaret. Ringer emotes flamboyantly, invading your space with her emotional intimacy. "Mahler", which draws on the composer's 'Fifth Symphony', is a fitting tribute to her departed lover. *David Stubbs*

RODRIGO Y GABRIELA Area 52

RUBYWORKS

★★★★

Big band reinvention from acoustic duo

After several albums of furious rock-flecked flamenco strumming, it was high time for the Mexican acoustic guitar wizards to transcend the 'novelty' tag. In search of something more ambitious, they've headed

for Havana to record with a 13-piece swinging Cuban orchestra. All nine tracks (produced by Peter Asher) revisit previously recorded material, but the simple two-guitar arrangements are transformed by blaring brass, Alex Wilson's sinuous Latin piano trills, Buena Vista rhythms and even some exotic sitar from Anoushka Shankar on "Txtapa". All round, there's a punch that saves them drifting into coffee-table politesse.

Nigel Williamson

THE ROLLING STONES The Brussels Affair

ROLLINGSTONESARCHIVE.COM

★★★★

Open sesame! Stones open vault with keynote (long-bootlegged) address

The European Tour of 1973 was the last time the Stones would tour with the silky skills of Mick Taylor, and he is heard to magnificent effect on this full-length Brussels show. *Goats Head Soup* is the promoted LP, and though the version of "Doo Doo Doo Doo (Heartbreaker)" is particularly fine, other highpoints compete with it – a magnificent "Angie", and Mick Jagger's game song intros in French among them. As Keith Richards has admitted, the Stones can be touch and go live. This, however, is a thrilling tryst. *John Robinson*

MARLON ROUDETTE Matter Fixed

WARNERS

★★★★

West London/St Vincent-raised alumnus' pan global solo debut

Son of Massive Attack

producer Cameron McVey, Roudette had a 2005 global chart-topper and UK Top 20 with "Big City Life" as half of Mattafix. The subsequent period of upheaval informs this absorbing reassessment of personal and creative life. His vocal ranges from Caribbean patois rap to creamy pop harmony, a versatility matched by consummate touches such as the sorrowful, steel pan-dappled reggae groove of "Brotherhood Of The Broken" and the lovely lazy trombone on the Finley Quaye-assisted "True To Yourself". Already a Europe-wide chart-topper, "New Age" sounds like a big UK hit to come.

Gavin Martin



SEEKAE

+Dome

RICE IS NICE / POP FRENZY

★★★★

Second-hand sounds from Sydney trio

Only half the length of their 73-minute debut, Seekae's second still boasts a double-album's worth of ideas. Many of them, however, are Kieran Hebden's. Opener "Go" is a psychotic merry-go-round of detuned guitars and cymbals, but elsewhere the trio's blend of live performance, samples and electronica is hardly groundbreaking, and territory covered by Four Tet's *There Is Love In You*. Purer experiments in electronica are more satisfactory, recalling Warp's early-'90s compilation *Artificial Intelligence*, but "Underling"'s 99 seconds of quasi-orchestral ambience are the most enjoyable moments.

Wyndham Wallace

PHIL SEYMOUR

The Phil Seymour Archive Series Vol 2

FUEL 2000

★★★★

Troubled sophomore disc from powerpop flameout, remixed

A powerful singer with a devastating gift for melody, Dwight Twilley Band alumnus Seymour was a

mega-talent, nascent powerpop's secret weapon, contributing to works by Tom Petty, 20/20, The Plimsouls, among others. His powerhouse 1980 solo debut remains a genre high-water mark. But album two, resurrected here, flopped. Mis-produced and possessed of too many one-dimensional gotta-get-laid songs, it somehow overplayed Seymour's hand. Powerpop junkies will still dig, but the lighter touch (and better material) evident on a clutch of demos, especially the thumping "Teaching Me" – shades of Rockpile – and "Now", The Plimsouls classic, return to Seymour's strengths. *Luke Torn*

PETE SHELLEY

Sky Yen 1980

DRAG CITY/GROOVY

★★★★

Buzzcock's solo debut and more reissued

Recorded in 1974 by a 19-year-old Pete Shelley and first released on his short-lived Groovy label in 1980, *Sky Yen* not only predates the Buzzcocks but, in its giddy, unceasing scree, sounds fiercely ahead of its time. Freaky late-night improvisation defined Groovy's two other LPs, now reissued by Drag City: Sally Smmit And The Musicians' *Hangahar*, an avant-garde collage by The Mekons' Sally Timms, and the post-Can jams of Free Agents' £3.33. Most palatable, however, is the Factory-ish funk of Shelley's 'lost' *Strange Men In Sheds With Spanners* self-titled effort.

Piers Martin

STEVEN R SMITH Floor Of The Sky

BURNT TOAST

★★★★

Coal-black melancholy by American guitarist

Working from his home in Los Angeles, Steven R Smith has spent the best part of the last decade slowly advancing a take on scorched-earth guitar dramatics that draws from free rock, Eastern European traditional music, and unknown-tongue blues. On *Floor Of The Sky*, he essays six short pieces that are as redemptive as they are deep and dark. Everything moves slowly in this world, as Smith determinedly pulls chords into elastic shapes, stringing them out with pin-drop melodies that harpoon the heart. *Jon Dale*

PUBLIC IMAGE LIMITED

Catalogue reissue

VIRGIN/EMI

JOHN LYDON

Psycho's Path

VIRGIN/EMI

I can't believe it's not butter!
The entire PiL back catalogue.
By David Quantick



It's always seemed slightly ironic that former Public Image Limited member Jah Wobble – who refused to rejoin PiL, along with his ex-bandmate Keith Levene, allegedly because

his former close friend John Lydon had offered each of them slightly more than a three-figure sum per show – should have named his first post-PiL album *Betrayal*. Because surely if there's one person in the history of that band for whom being betrayed seems to be a daily occurrence, it's John Lydon. PiL song after PiL song contains sneers about former friends who've stabbed him in the back, which is perhaps why Public Image – a band who began their career as a stunning, if massively surly, experimental band and ended it as a kind of hip Led Zep – have had enough lineups to keep Pete Frame in black ink for decades.

And how many times have Lydon's alleged fans accused him of betraying them? From outrage at *Metal Box* (it costs £3.99! It isn't "Pretty Vacant"! to horror at the Sex Pistols reformation (it costs £25.99! It is "Pretty Vacant"! and, most latterly, his TV ad for butter (which Lydon claims he did to fund PiL's recent tour) John Lydon, né Rotten, has consistently refused to be who the punters want him to be.

Which is, of course, the whole point. Contradiction and paradox abound in the career of this extraordinary, charismatic, talented, influential (and annoying) man, who has gone from Artful Dodger to Mr Toad in the space of 30 or so years, and along the way encompassed more than a few extraordinary things. Let's have a look at them now, shall we?

Beginning with the brilliant, bitter song of betrayal "Public Image" – a hit single – Lydon recruited old friend Jah Wobble, Clash guitarist Keith Levene and a box of drummers and made, first, the variable but sometimes



Early PiL, 1978:
(l-r) John Lydon,
Jah Wobble, Keith
Levene and Jim Walker

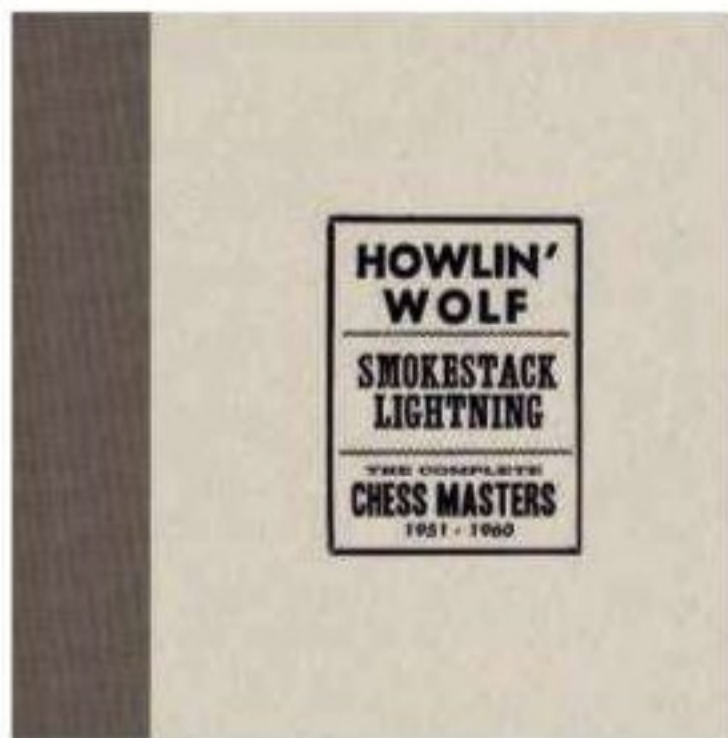
brilliant debut album [**First Issue** – aka *Public Image*] ★★★ ("Low Life" remains superb, while the more indulgent moments improve with age) and then the incredible **Metal Box** (here in its repackaged form **Second Edition** ★★★★★), a record which has been ripped off by generations yet still sounds like nothing else; absurdly, it was often mocked at the time by people for whom The UK Subs were enough. Then, as ever, there were fractures. Wobble's absence made **Flowers Of Romance** ★★★ an eerie ghost train of an album with great moments (he's present on the reasonable live LP **Paris Au Printemps** ★★★, a record which adds little to the PiL catalogue, much like **Live In Tokyo** ★★★, featuring the next incarnation of the band).

Then there's the blip of **This Is What You Want... This Is What You Get** ★★★, which contains the global hit "This Is Not A Love Song", in which Lydon refined his wide-eyed 1980s persona, and led to the "lounge band tour". Another switch followed, to the relief of fans bored with the scrappiness of his work, and the result was 1986's **Album** ★★★★★, the template for the rest of PiL's career. A bizarre

crew of musicians, from Steve Vai and Ginger Baker to Ryuichi Sakamoto and Bernie Worrell managed to create a sound that was as much Led Zeppelin as it was world music, and contained the brilliant "Rise" single and some of the band's best songs (notably "Home" and the bitter song of betrayal "F.F.F."). The last three albums form a sensible trilogy, soundtracking the band's stadium years and featuring the great John McGeoch on guitar. Of these, **Happy?** ★★★ (containing "Seattle" and "Rules And Regulations") and **9** ★★★ (containing "Disappointed", "Warrior" and, er, "Happy") are the most consistent, more at least than **That Which Is Not** (1992 ★★). Most people would, wisely, opt for the well-chosen **Greatest Hits... So Far** ★★★★★ (which one doubts will have any extra tracks on it soon).

Lydon's solo album **Psycho's Path** ★★★ is fun and '90s-dancey and now contains his Leftfield collaboration "Open Up" (although not the Lydon/Bambaataa single, "World Destruction").

The future? With PiL and the Pistols reforming almost alternately, there's just no way of telling. Which is nice.



HOWLIN' WOLF

Smokestack Lightning

The Complete Chess Masters

1951-1960



A 4CD, 97-track boxset charting the ascendance of the blues' most distinctive voice. Awoooo! *By Neil Spencer*



CHESTER 'HOWLIN' WOLF' BURNETT never did make an easy fit for the world, at least not until he became an overnight sensation at the age of 42, bursting

onto the post-war blues scene to claim his place as one of the genre's titans, a status time has only enhanced. His primal growl arrived as a force of nature – "This is where the soul of man never dies," producer Sam Phillips famously declared. No-one has ever sounded like Wolf, before or since.

The 97 tracks here document only the first decade of his recording career, and even then there are omissions from his tangled start – the sessions he cut for other labels – but they confirm him as a "true blues immortal", as Dick Shurman puts it in his liner notes. Present are only a clutch of the sides that branded a generation of Brit and US bluesers and which they duly made into standards in the 1960s – the crooked lode of "Smokestack Lightning", the hypnotic "Spoonful", the forlorn "Sitting On Top Of The World" – but the extras and alternate takes amount to a serious treat. The whole package is delivered with restrained good taste, with a slew of evocative pictures and graphics, and a brace of classy essays, Peter Guralnick being the other scribe present. The crucible of 1950s Southside Chicago is brought to bubbling life.

One thing that springs from those black-and-white photos is the sheer exuberance of Wolf, a hulking giant who was nonetheless always dapper. There's an odd disconnect between his artful tie-pins and geniality, and that gravel pit of a voice and the pain and anguish it conveys, a disjunction explained by his early life. The 1950s were a time of happiness and success for Wolf. The self-destructive ways of many of his peers were never a temptation. He was financially astute and happily married. Yet he remained stubborn and suspicious, and the scars of his previous life clearly ran deep: a troubled, dirt-poor childhood in Mississippi that included estrangement from his mother, hard graft on

his father's farm, an unhappy spell in the army, the grinding life of an itinerant bluesman in the segregated South.

To the young Wolf, only music made sense of the world. The mentoring role of Charlie Patton, whom the 20-year-old Wolf met in 1930, when Patton was top draw on the delta blues scene, was pivotal in shaping what followed. Wolf's "Saddle My Pony", for example, is a direct descendant of Patton's "Pony Blues", and "Smokestack Lightning" itself is modeled on Patton's "Moon Going Down".

It's astonishing it took so long for Wolf to get recorded – he was a celebrated performer first in Mississippi, then in Memphis, where he relocated. It took Sam Phillips, a visionary

No-one has ever sounded like Wolf, before or since

contemptuous of the South's segregation code, to put him on disc, licensing tracks cut in his Memphis studio to Chess in Chicago. A third of what's here originated with Phillips, who always cited Wolf as the purest, most instinctive talent of a roster that included Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and BB King. Wolf's decampment to Chicago and Chess in 1954 hurt Phillips badly.

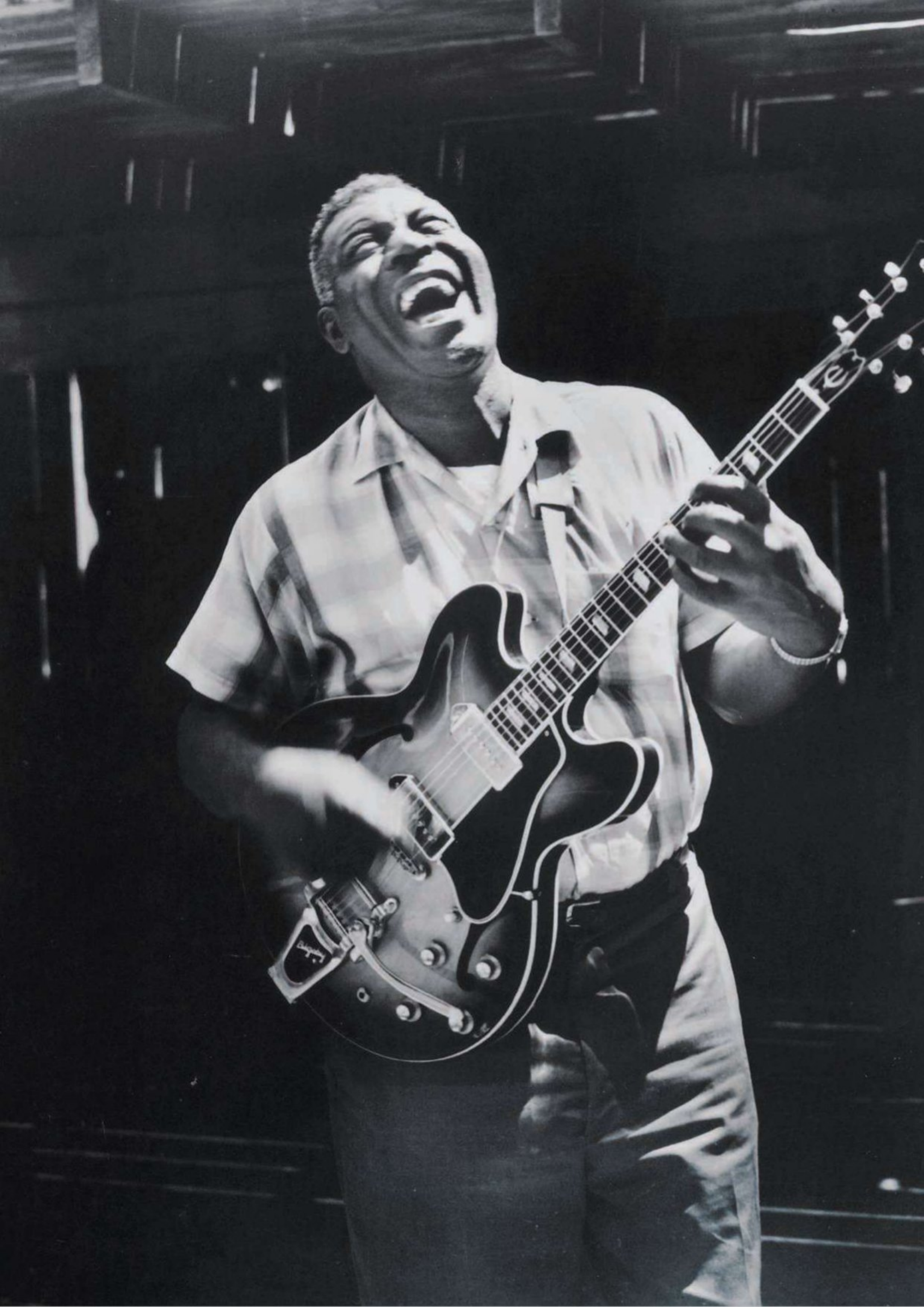
Phillips' faith in Wolf was instantly rewarded when "Moaning At Midnight"/"How Many More Years" became a double-headed No 1 on the R'n'B charts. Both still sound bitingly fresh, setting Wolf's buzzsaw vocals – punctuated by that trademark falsetto howl – and droning harp against the dazzle of Willie Johnson's guitar, a mix of delta picking, T-Bone Walker bebop, and proto power chords. Because microphones overloaded under the sheer power of Wolf's voice, his rasp emerged as electrified as Johnson's guitar, a delivery that was later imitated

by DJ Wolfman Jack and Captain Beefheart.

It took Wolf a couple of years and a move to Chicago – he proudly drove there in his own station wagon – to top his debut. "Smokestack Lightning" and the menacing "Evil" surely did so, with "Baby How Long" another contender. Nonetheless the mid to late 1950s represent a lull in Wolf's output after his spectacular arrival. Chess, flush with the success of Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, could afford to let him freewheel. Wolf recorded mostly self-written originals; simple songs about the pain of betrayed lovers, a parade of heartache, broken homes and his baby buying a train ticket "*as long as my right arm*". Yet Wolf was capable of delicious irony on, say, "Sitting On Top Of The World" ("*She's gone but I don't worry*"), and in "The Natchez Burning" he wrote a famous memorial for the more than 200 clubgoers killed in a 1940 Chicago fire.

What moved things on from routine fare like "That's Alright" and "Rockin' Daddy" was in part due to the quality of his sidemen. The young Hubert Sumlin (who died December 2011), summoned from Memphis, quickly developed the piercing riffs and curlicued solos that became a signature of Wolf's later output (try "I'm Leaving"), and which made him a hero to the likes of Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck. Chess sessioners included outstanding players like pianists Otis Spann and Hosea Lee Kennard – the latter's hammering keyboard elevates the second half of this collection – while bassist Willie Dixon was a prize songwriter and arranger. Another relocated Southerner, Dixon had supplied Wolf with "Evil" before a fall-out with the Chess brothers over money. When he returned he hit a dazzling streak that included "Wang Dang Doodle", "Back Door Man" and "Spoonful" – a trinity that closes this compilation – and later "Little Red Rooster" and "I Ain't Superstitious", among others.

Discs three and four, with their flurries of outtakes and studio banter, give a pungent taste of how these masterpieces were created; with a mixture of tiresome persistence, exceptional skill and pure love for a music that was so often about being unloved.





Mark Sultan:
eyeing up a
mammoth
double album

THE SOFT HILLS

The Bird Is Coming Down To Earth

TAPETE

★★★★

More ghostly retro
American folk-rock

Veering towards the '70s FM-nostalgic end of the Americana spectrum, Seattle's Soft Hills provide familiar but atmospheric pleasures. This second album from Garrett Hobba, Brittan Drake, Randall Skrasek and Brett Massa mixes haunting harmonies, Crazy Horse guitars and echoing production to balmy effect, especially on the singing saws of spook ballad "Midnight Owls" and the '50s-style innocence of "It Won't Be Long". Hobba's lead vocals are erratic and his lyrics deal in too many darkly elemental clichés, but this will still delight a fair few Fleet Foxes and Grizzly Bear fans. *Garry Mulholland*

SONNY AND THE SUNSETS

Hit After Hit

FAT POSSUM

★★★★

Back to the future with indie
semi-super group

Sonny Smith's outfit features an impressive array of garage pop stars, including Kelley Stoltz and John Dwyer from Thee Oh Sees. They sound like they're having a blast on this second album of old-school doo-wop and breezy pop that harks back to the Kim Fowley-produced novelty singles of the early 1960s. "She Plays Yo-Yo With My Mind" opens things with a strutting beat that drives the motor throughout, through stylised doo-wop like "Reflections On Youth", freewheeling psych instrumentals like "The Bad

Energy From LA Is Killing Me" and the Technicolor stomp of "Teenage Thugs". Unsophisticated but utterly infectious. *Peter Watts*

STEALING SHEEP

Noah & The Paper Moon

HEAVENLY

★★★★

Taster EP of Liverpoolian
psych folk

This eight-track EP, collating two early releases, is a taster for an imminent album by this uncategorisable trio. The opener, "I Am The Rain" starts out like "Venus In Furs", with droning melodies and lazy tambourine, then morphs into dreamy, deconstructed pop. There are



wheezy synths, breathy harmonies led by Becky Hawley, and galloping rhythms: imagine Laura Veirs re-interpreting The Raincoats. Occasionally, the eclecticism eats itself, but the newest song, the sweet, swirling "Paper Moon", suggests Stealing Sheep are beginning to wrangle the chaos into shape. *Alastair McKay*

STEW & THE NEGRO PROBLEM

Making It

TNP

★★★★

Long-MIA, Los Angeles pop
provocateurs pick up where

they left off, sorta

Always a supreme risk-taker, singer-songwriter Mark Stewart (aka Stew) makes singular creations as likely to branch out into some terminally weird lyrical directions as they are to rely on shards of classic '60s-pop melody. The real story of *Making It*, though, is Stew's musical reunion with ex-bandmate/ex-lover Heidi Rodewald, whose poignant vocal turns lend the album – especially its poetic centerpiece "Curse" – a kind of post-punk, post-indiepop *Shoot Out The Lights* sheen. *Luke Torn*

MARK SULTAN

Whatever I Want, Whenever I Want

IN THE RED

★★★★

A little bit of everything from
lo-fi Canadian rocker

Prolific garage rocker Sultan – also known as BBQ in King Khan And The BBQ Show – returns with another album, available either abridged on one CD or as two separate vinyl albums – called *Whatever I Want* and *Whenever I Want*, respectively. Sultan is recording with a full band for the first time, and the fruits of that can be heard on the deeper, more rounded sound of rockabilly stomper "Satisfied And Lazy" or the chunky drums that open "Never Coming Home". Sultan's confidence is impressive – he follows snotty punk ("Let Me Freeze") with doo-wop ("If I Had A Polaroid") – and while his songwriting may be tight, the tone is decidedly frisky. *Peter Watts*

THE SPECIALIST

This month... Elvis Country



In its crudest form, the critical consensus about Elvis suggests he lost his superpowers in 1958 when the Army barber amputated his quiff. A sophisticated reading of the King's career would accept the brilliance of the Sun and early RCA

recordings, while acknowledging that he was reborn with *From Elvis In Memphis* in 1969. On that record, he created a unique brand of Southern rock, infused with the elation of gospel. It still sounds fantastic. Arguably, the Vegas years mark another reinvention, with Elvis assuming the persona of God-as-lounge-act; a conceit so extreme it remains beyond parody. *Elvis Country* was recorded in 1970, just as the novelty of Vegas was starting to dim. This is the Presley of the documentary film *Elvis: That's The Way It Is*. Domestically, his marriage to Priscilla was beginning to dissolve. Existentially, the sense that he was betraying his ideals may have begun to gnaw at his colon. But musically, given the right conditions, he was still in the building.

The recordings for *Elvis Country*, now in a Legacy edition RCA/SONY CMG (★★★★), took place at RCA's Studio B in Nashville. Over five nights in June 1970, Presley, with Felton Jarvis producing, laid down 34 master tracks. The band – including Charlie McCoy, Chip Young and the Muscle Shoals rhythm section (with James Burton on lead guitar) – was proficient, yet startled by the singer's creative impatience. Once he'd nailed the vocal, he moved on. A second session in September, by which time Presley's mood had soured, delivered another four cuts.

The creative breakthrough occurred on the fourth night of the June sessions. The stock of bland songs ran out, so Presley opted to remodel some country hits. He didn't tinker. He didn't bother himself with the Nashville Sound. There was nothing countrypolitan about it. Instead, Elvis wrestled the songs into submission. The honky-tonk strum of Ernest Tubb's "Tomorrow Never Comes" became a blood-and-thunder ballad; the wistfulness of Willie Nelson's "Funny How Time Slips Away" was bled dry; Hank Cochran's "Make The World Go Away" re-emerged as a dark sermon from the church of the broken-hearted. At his most romantic, Elvis sounded like a man conducting his own funeral.

Most of the good stuff was released on the album *Elvis Country*. The remainder emerged months later as *Love Letters From Elvis*. The sessions are reunited here, with a few inessential extras. The second set has its highpoints (not least "Life" on which Elvis completes a Creationist history of the universe in 197 seconds), but what lingers is the first record's peculiar blend of melodrama, self-importance and piety. This is the music of a wounded soul. It is all about the voice, and the voice remains majestic. We all live in Elvis Country. *ALASTAIR MCKAY*



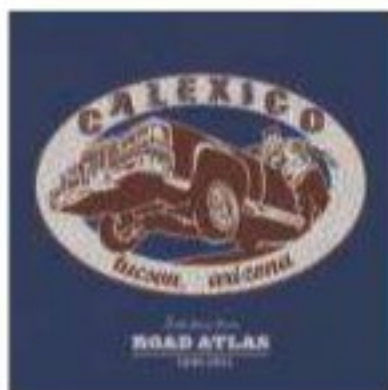
Flying the flag for
rock 'n' roll: Elvis
meets Nixon

CALEXICO

Selections From Road Atlas 1998-2011

★★★★★ CITY SLANG

A handsome parent, *Road Atlas* births a fine digest of Calexico, in more unguarded moments, says *Alastair McKay*



Fifteen years into their career, we have an idea what Calexico are supposed to sound like. Broadly, you may expect desert dust, a bit of Morricone twang,

occasional trumpets. Since the group is headquartered in Arizona, we may employ critical shorthand to signpost these expectations: desert rock doesn't quite do it, so let's settle for "Southwestern soundscapes".

And it's true, on most of their records, the musical collective which has coalesced around Joey Burns and John Convertino will deliver something to fit that template. But, more often than not, their music will explore uncharted territories. Yes, there will be a hint of Sergio Leone carried on the hot, dry air, and the lyrics may be specific to the troubled terrain which connects the US to Mexico, but the essence of the songs will be broader. To extend the film metaphor – Calexico don't really sound like spaghetti westerns; their songs are John Sayles micro-dramas, looking at the politics of emigration and borderlands on a human scale, finding the universal in the particular (with occasional twang).

But away from their official releases, there is another Calexico. The group's 'tour only' albums are sold at gigs, and showcase a more playful, experimental side to their creativity. There are eight albums in all, and they have now been collected in a handsome, limited edition, 12LP boxset called *Road Atlas*. Two of these are live sets, and there are six albums of original material. Some of these are very fine indeed; *Travellal* (from 2000) is a beautifully evocative, ambient jazz album, in which Calexico make a sideways nod to Charles Mingus (a native of Nogales, on the Arizona border); and the soundtrack from Aaron Schock's Mexican circus doc *Circo* (from 2010) makes effective use of their cinematic sense of atmosphere.

For those who are nervous of investing in the box, the tour LPs are available individually (on the Touch & Go/Quarterstick website) but, short of that, *Selections* is a well-curated comp that stands comparison with any of the band's official label releases. Those in search of the twang will be reassured by "Glowing Heart Of The World" (from 98-99 *Road Map*), which is almost like a re-imagined "Ghost Riders In The Sky", starting gently, and cantering into a western melody that couldn't be more



Morricone if it featured Eli Wallach on maracas. There's some lovely slide guitar on "El Morro" (from 98-99 *Road Map*), a dusty desert instrumental which channels Ry Cooder. And "Waitomo" (from 2007's *Tool Box*) has some of the instrumental snap Burns and Convertino first located on their pre-Calexico lounge band, Friends Of Dean Martinez.

Then there is their beautiful re-styling of "All The Pretty Horses" (from 2001's *Aerocalexico*), which adds campfire melodies and some eerie steel guitar to the children's lullaby, making it bleaker than it has any right to be (buried beneath the sweetness of Burns' singing is a line about a child having its eyes pecked out by bees and flies). Also from *Aerocalexico* is the original version of "Crystal Frontier", delivered here with greater percussive spring, and outer space sound effects. Sadder yet is

"Gift X-Change", an existential Christmas song seemingly fashioned from an old Scots lament. "I trust you'll find some inner peace through times that are rough", sings Burns, sounding far from convinced. But it's the more marginal pieces which make *Selections* work as an LP. "Entrenando A Los Tigres" is little more than a percussive sketch, but is jammed with atmosphere. "Inch By Inch" is like a Neil Young blues, condensed into a minute. And "Boletos" is 90 seconds of *Top Cat* jazz, with taco seasoning. If that sounds fragmented, it isn't. In another life, not entirely dissimilar to this one, Calexico would be a jazz band. In this life, they make the music that leaks through the walls of abandoned motels. It is majestic music; sometimes futuristic, often traditional. It's a soundtrack for now, which accounts for the tears.

Q&A Joey Burns

What's the idea behind the Tour Only LPs?

They were our way to give something back to the fans at our concerts. Hopefully they give another perspective to our identity. So we experimented a lot, and mashed the lo-fi recordings together with proper studio recordings as well as instrumentals and songs. There are no rules to the construction of our Tour Only albums.

How does the material differ stylistically from your official releases?

It seems to lean more on the spontaneous and

dares to be as different as we can within our style and aesthetic. We do have some limits, but there are some huge leaps here and there.

When can we expect new material from Calexico – and what will it be like?

We are setting our sights on releasing a new Calexico record in 2012 to help ramp up to the celebration of the Mayan calendar's changing of the guard. The world news has been so bizarre and crazy that I've become a full-on news junkie, tuning in my radio dial to the 7am broadcasts.

INTERVIEW: ALASTAIR MCKAY



THROBBING GRISTLE

Second Annual Report 1977 ★★★★★

DOA: The Third And Final Report 1978 ★★★★★

20 Jazz Funk Greats 1979 ★★★★★

Heathen Earth 1980 ★★★★★

Greatest Hits 1981 ★★★★★ INDUSTRIAL

Final reports. The Industrial pioneers, reissued. By Louis Pattison

THEIR UNSAVOURY rep precedes them, but the photo of Throbbing Gristle on the sleeve of *Greatest Hits* reminds us there was more to the first Industrial group – their capital letter – than first appeared. Posing in a tiki lounge in Hawaiian shirts, Cosey Fanni Tutti coquettish in a cocktail dress, they look more like *Hi-de-Hi!* campers than “wreckers of civilisation”. Nor was this irony, exactly. ‘Dedicated to Martin Denny’, reads the sleeve, and one might wonder what the bandleader and “king of exotica” made of it all, were his letter of response not printed in the booklet inside. “I do have a sense of humour,” types Denny, before admitting to being “incredulous” that someone would choose to cut TG’s music to wax. “Is it intended to be a shocker?” he asks. “I would appreciate a reply.”

To be fair to Denny, this sort of confusion to the work of Genesis P-Orridge and friends was far from uncommon. Appearing in 1976, TG shared certain things with punk – an outsider stance, a taste for transgression – but their methods were alien by comparison. While the punks were busy scribbling zines and folding seven-inch sleeves, TG were way ahead; their DIY activity yielded modular synths, tape-loop machines, and the Gristleizer, a custom effects box built by the group’s electronics wizard Chris Carter. They recorded in the ruin of a Hackney school,

christened the Death Factory, and released it on their own Industrial Records, styled like a corporation, right down to the pseudo-business-speak communiqués. Jon Savage described them in the terms of a “laboratory... a research institute”, while vocalist Genesis P-Orridge said of the group’s ambitions: “We wanted to get away from all the connotations of rock’n’roll and blues... drag it out of slave music and into the 20th century.”

The death of Peter ‘Sleazy’ Christopherson in 2010 brought to a close the second incarnation of the band, precipitating this final issue of five albums. The music collected within veers from visionary electronic invention to meandering unmusical passages and ambiguous field recordings.

That moments border on being boring would seem to be the point: TG specialised in a sort of exquisite tedium, of music decayed. 1977’s *Second Annual Report* collects live recordings and one studio piece, “After Cease To Exist”, but really it’s more about an atmosphere than distinct songs, a dystopian churn of smoke and asbestos dust, P-Orridge reciting true-crime tales from the gloom. Queerly hypnotic, it takes a live rendition of “Maggot Death” from Brighton to break the spell, as the music is interrupted by hecklers, an irate DJ berating them as “a load of fucking wankers” before putting a record on.

Q&A Chris and Cosey

What’s taken place in the reissue process?

Cosey: When Sleazy left us last year we were just about to start work on the reissues. Historically he’d always overseen TG’s artworks, graphics and photography. By the time we could actually face doing anything and Chris had completed the remastering, it dawned that responsibility for redoing the cover artworks was on our shoulders.

Chris: Gen offered to send us material but didn’t follow it through. But we hold the bulk of the TG archive and access to Sleazy’s negs so it’s not like we had a shortage of material.

Does one album stand out as a favourite?

Chris: My strongest connection is with *DOA* because at the time of recording I’d fallen head over heels in love with Cosey. *DOA* showcased some of our strongest work and established the course we would head in.

And what of the final TG record?

Chris: *Desertshore – The Final Report* will be TG’s last studio album, and is a cover of the Nico album. The concept came about in Berlin in 2006, but when Genesis walked out on TG in 2010, Sleazy began reworking the album with the intention of using guest vocalists and an esoteric piece of equipment he’d bought. This year we’ve been recording those vocals and trying to make sense of the recordings he left us with. INTERVIEW: LOUIS PATTISON

If TG were misunderstood in their day, perhaps it was because in an era of preachers and polemicists, they stood at a slight remove from their material; they were documenters of their surroundings, paying special attention to social ills, the mechanical and the macabre. 1978’s fine *DOA: The Third And Final Report* reflects the world in strange and bold ways. “IBM” uses chattering machine code found on a tape disposed of by the computer manufacturers. “Hamburger Lady”, inspired by the tale of a burns victim, pulsates like some grotesque organism. “Death Threats” is audio direct from the group’s answering machine, while the rudimentary electropop of “United” – inspired by Abba, quoting Aleister Crowley – showed the breadth of their reference.

20 Jazz Funk Greats marked a turn into lighter territory, the tongue-in-cheek cover picturing TG posing like catalogue models at suicide spot Beachy Head. Musically, it turned away from the precipice; not exactly jazz and funk, but sublimating TG’s noise elements within electronic rhythms and proto-exotica. Album highlight “Hot On The Heels Of Love” is Moroder-esque disco, Cosey breathing sweet nothings amid bubbling synths and whip-crack snare. Elsewhere, P-Orridge mines a lyrical seam of control and domination. “I’ve got a little biscuit tin,” he wheedles on “Persuasion”, “to keep your panties in”.

Two more releases complete the campaign: *Heathen Earth*, a stern live album, and *Greatest Hits*. Marking the group’s 1981 split, it mixes TG’s modes with impunity, brittle synth-disco giving way to misanthropic squall, and back again. A bewildering entry point, as Martin Denny could confirm, but there is pleasure in the fact TG remained perverse until the end.

SUNN O)))

ØØ Void

SOUTHERN LORD **2000**

★★★★

**SUNN O))) MEETS
NURSE WITH WOUND**

**The Iron Soul Of
Nothing**

EDITIONS MEGO **2008**

★★★★

A little history from the esoteric doom-droners Stephen O'Malley and Greg Anderson's guitar drone outfit have evolved at pace since their inception, with 2009's *Monoliths And Dimensions* integrating harp, French horns, even a Viennese women's choir. This reissue of *ØØ Void*, though, is a reminder of their tremendously effective original formula: gigantic, circulating doom guitar riffs that roll like liquid tar. A separate release, *Iron Soul*, features a radical remix of this material by Nurse With Wound's Steven Stapleton. Chilly and ethereal, it's like the original cast in negative, but foregrounds intriguing elements such as a chanted vocal from Goatsnake's Pete Stahl that are lost in *ØØ Void*'s epic chunder. *Louis Pattison*

THE TEMPTATIONS

**50th Anniversary:
The Singles Collection
1961-1971**

UNIVERSAL

★★★★★

A- and B-sides collected Covering just the first decade of their half century, this three-disc collection comes to an end as The Temptations were at the forefront of radical changes at Motown. Norman Whitfield's daring productions ("Psychedelic Shack", "Ball Of Confusion") embraced more elaborate arrangements and a shift towards social commentary in lyrical content. It's a far cry from the rough-edged doo wop of the band's beginnings ("Romance Without Finance", "Isn't She Pretty?"), or the mid-'60s breakthrough hits, the luxury of five singers capable of taking the lead making them arguably the label's most versatile act. *Terry Staunton*

**THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION
Buddha Electrostorm**

FIRE RECORDS

★★★★★

Deceptively throwaway '70s rock homage from Elephant 6 stable Originally released in 2008 through Elephant 6 but now

reissued on Fire, this is a splendid affair, a '60/'70s garage mash-up that sounds like Black Mountain meets *Nuggets*, referencing Deep Purple, Big Star and the Sabs, dashed off with a deceptive playfulness. This throws up fine stuff, such as the Weezer-like pop gems "Haircut" and "Power House" and the sweet bubblegum "Blow My Mind". It's Pavement goes pop, it's Blur c.1997, it's really rather great. *Peter Watts*

THEE ATTACKS

**That's Mister Attack
To You**

CRUNCHY FROG

★★★

**Xeroxed retro-rock from
Danish quartet**

Thee Attacks make Beady Eye seem as outré as Sun Ra. The Danes' debut is so shamefully derivative it's almost—but not quite—heroic. On "Can You Do It", "Are You?" and others they have that patented '65 Who sound off pat: ringing power chords, bluesy holler, high harmonies, drum detonations. They also throw in The Kinks, Merseybeat and some Small Faces on "Red Light". They're clearly having fun, but you do ultimately wonder what the point is. *Graeme Thomson*

THREE CANE WHALE

Three Cane Whale

IDYLLIC RECORDS

★★★★

Captivating folk musicality Three Cane Whale is an instrumental trio hinging around acoustic guitar, mandolin and trumpet but allowing for the occasional textural drone of a harmonium or bowed psaltery. Recording live in a Bristol parish church, the group creates a singular, intricate, minimalist chamber folk with elements of the music of Philip Glass and Steve Reich. The pieces are short, melodic and often utilise repetitive themes reminiscent of a stripped-down Penguin Café Orchestra but where trumpet replaces strings. Reliant on moody atmospherics for its appeal, the music does get a little fogbound at times. *Mick Houghton*

TUNNG

**This Is Tunng... Live
From The BBC**

FULL TIME HOBBY

★★★★

The collected radio sessions 2005-10 Over four genre-defying



studio albums Tunng have forged a unique place as folktronica pioneers. Their collected BBC sessions offer a splendid showcase of their cavalier eclecticism. The Incredible String Band whimsy of "Jenny Again" is balanced by the exuberance of "Bullets" which bounces as gleefully as anything by Madness. "Hustle", from an acoustic set for Rob da Bank, oozes with the charm of early Badly Drawn Boy. Elsewhere there are distant echoes of SFA, Gorky's and The Beta Band while "Tamatant Tilay" finds them at their most adventurous on a jam with African desert rockers Tinariwen. *Nigel Williamson*

THE UNTHANKS

**Diversions Volume 1:
The Songs Of Robert
Wyatt And Antony &
The Johnsons**

RABBLERouser MUSIC

★★★★

**Tyneside Watersons pay
unlikely dues**

Once purveyors of astringent folk, The Unthanks' reading of King Crimson's "Starless" on this year's *Last* was a serious breach of the trad descriptions act, and they redraw the boundaries again on this live album, ironing the transgender nuances out of the work of Antony Hegarty before giving a string-laden caress to a selection of Robert Wyatt tracks. Ultimately, though, it's well-crafted, but clunky. *Jim Wirth*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

**Alan Lomax In
Asturias, November
1952: The End Of
Everything**

GLOBAL JUKEBOX

★★★★★

Rich collection of field recordings from Spain

In 1952, folklorist Alan Lomax was one of two recordists in the field in Asturias, documenting the traditional music of this small but culturally rich region. The use of the bagpipes in some of these recordings is particularly startling, suggestive of links between Asturian and Celtic musical traditions. There's some great, throaty unison singing accompanied by DIY percussion, but the most beautiful moments are those of a cappella frailty—Florinda Suárez's two performances are heartbreaking. *Jon Dale*

**VOICE OF THE SEVEN THUNDERS
The Blue Comet Mixes**

TCHANTINLER

★★★★★

**Expansive remix treatment
for UK electric folkies**

Rick Tomlinson handed the masters of his 2009 *The Burning Mountain* over to Andrew Liles, a sound artist who's worked with Nurse With Wound and Faust among others. His remixes expand the cluttered originals into a more spacious and sculpted experience. The hard rock of



"The Burning Mountain" has various psych electronic squiggles grafted on, while Tomlinson's guitar riff on "Out Of The Smoke" is given a serrated edge. Making it more than just an electric folk-rock record, Liles picks out and zooms in on tiny

details and psycho-acoustic effects that turn the group inside out. *Rob Young*

MIREL WAGNER

Mirel Wagner

BONE VOYAGE

★★★★★

**Minimal gothic folk, from
Ethiopia, via Finland**

Biographical details say little more than that Wagner has been writing gloomy folk songs since she was 16 (she's 23). Vocally, she's a chaste version of Hope Sandoval, and her songs are sparse to the point of loneliness, delivered with the diction of Leonard Cohen. There's a hint of English-as-a-second-language, but the simplicity of the imagery is a strength. "No Hands" is as unsettling as it is childish; "Dream" is a skeletal blues, like PJ Harvey at her most mellifluous. Stark and poetic, with an echo of danger. *Alastair McKay*

BILL WELLS

Lemondale

DOUBLE SIX

★★★★★

Scots jazzers's Tokyo daytrip

Wells is known for surprising collaborations, having added a jazz sensibility to recordings by various Scots indie luminaries (most recently Arab Strap's Aidan Moffat). Here, along with Jim O'Rourke, he assembles a Japanese underground supergroup (Tenniscoats' Saya, Kama Aina's Takuji Aoyagi, Tori Kudo) for an album that mixes plaintive melodies with cinematic experiments. "Harvest Bag" sounds like "The Girl From Ipanema" re-styled as Japanese pop, while "Mizu Tor" has the cadences of a Tokyo torch song. It's a jazzy swoon of a record, like Haruki Murakami re-working *The Clangers*. *Alastair McKay*

THE WEST COAST POP ART
EXPERIMENTAL BAND

Companion

SUNBEAM

★★★★

Fascinating career sidebar for '60s psych-rockers Unheralded at the time, this group's five albums between 1966 and 1969 are now much fancied. *Companion* excavates early recordings and some later work by the core trio of Bob Markley and Shaun and Danny Harris. The 29 tracks spanning 1960-'71 take in everything from experimental noodlings to Markley's unlikely teen pop beginnings. He cut a couple of singles for Warner Bros in 1960, signed at the same time as Paul Anka. Elsewhere, the Harris brothers, recording as The Laughing Wind, play more expected, jagged folk pop, including a cover of Phil Ochs' "The Bells".

Mick Houghton



WILEY

Evolve Or Be Extinct

BIG DADA

★★★★

Chart-topping grime linchpin keeps moving For all Richard 'Wiley' Cowie's insane profligacy—last year, he pre-empted his 100% Publishing album with the *Zip Files*, a free download of over 200 tracks—you can loosely divide his music into two camps: crossover pop hits like "Wearing My Rolex" and his generally superior 'Eskibeat' material. *Evolve...* falls into the latter category, Wiley's stream-of-consciousness rapping cast atop a flurry of alien synth



Wiley: coming down on the side of his weirder tendencies

melodies and snappy beats. Quality is spotty, though, bizarre immigration skit "4 Characters" and "Can I Have A Taxi", a sub-Streets slice of London life, among the clunkers. A little reflection might pay dividends.

Louis Pattison

GAVIN ADAM WOOD

Souls Apart

BANANIA

★★★★

Thought-provoking country folk from busking bright star

An award-winning busker and regular on the pub-level folk circuit, Wood makes the transition from street corner to studio with ease. There's a confidence to his laconic strumming that suggests a more seasoned performer, the likes of "Gentle Moon" and "The Timing Was All Wrong" sharing an eloquent and melodic worldview with, say, Jackson Browne. The vagaries of love won and lost are his bread and butter, although "Trust In The Universe" (written while working with aid agencies in post-earthquake Haiti) tackles bigger themes with intelligence and articulacy.

Terry Staunton

PEGI YOUNG & THE SURVIVORS

Bracing For Impact

VAPOR RECORDS

★★★★

Stellar Memphis-style R'n'B platter from the wife of Neil

With the easy-rolling groove of an ace backing band (especially guitarist Kevin Holly and keyboardist Spooner Oldham), Young turns in her third straight strong LP. Nothing fancy—old-school blues and soul, mixed with a few splotches of twang—but Young's knowing vocals lend plenty of range, depth and intimacy. A countrified take on Tarheel Slim's "Number 9 Train" shines; a throwaway by hubby Neil—"Dog House"—brings a smile. But the alcoholic's paean "Trouble In A Bottle", sent into orbit with a soaring Holly guitar coda, and "I Don't Wanna Talk About It", the old Crazy Horse gem, are sublime. *Luke Torn*

WARREN ZEVON

Bad Luck Streak In Dancing School

FRIDAY MUSIC

★★★★

Barebones remaster of LA maverick's troubled third Chemically challenged and

estranged from producer/mentor Jackson Browne at the time, Zevon's follow-up to his best-selling *Excitable Boy* was disappointing. The thinly written title track, the half-baked machismo of "Jungle Work", the odd, classical interludes. And yet, "Play It All Night Long" and "Wild Age"—astute comments on the American condition with some high-wire David Lindley guitar—remain among his most timeless, affecting work. Others, from the tormented romanticism of "Empty-Handed Heart" to the absurdist "Gorilla, You're A Desperado", given the luxury of 30 years' perspective, sound like wayward classics.

Luke Torn

NEXT MONTH...

LAMBCHOP

Kurt Wagner returns in characteristically sedate mood, leading the band through more lovingly hand-crafted Americana.

LANA DEL REY

An arrival too late for this issue, breath is to a degree bated about the debut LP proper from Elizabeth Grant, singer-songwriter behind the beguiling "Video Games" viral phenomenon. Or "good song", as we used to call them.

PALACE MUSIC

A handsome payload of reissues from a pre-Bonnie Will Oldham, including *Hope* and *Viva Last Blues* among others.

UNCUT
RECOMMENDS

The best releases of the past few months



KATE BUSH

50 Words For Snow

FISH PEOPLE/EMI ★★★★★

Elton John! Stephen Fry! Snowman sex! Such are the ingredients of Kate Bush's winter wonderland. Ethereal majesty still very much in evidence, if more terrestrially voiced.



THE ROLLING STONES

Some Girls

POLYDOR ★★★★★

A companion piece to the *Exile* reissue, *Some Girls* finds the band responding to the changing musical climate of the '70s: funk, disco, punk and Ron Wood are all now in their mix. Plus a CD of rootsy extras.



WILCO

The Whole Love

DBPM ★★★★★

Jeff Tweedy's band successfully broker a peace 'twixt experimental and melodic selves. A redemptive return.



THE BEACH BOYS

The Smile Sessions

EMI ★★★★★

The unfinished symphony to God, finally released. Many CDs. Much greatness. Much madness.



FEIST

Metals

POLYDOR ★★★★★

Giant pop hooks erupt at unexpected moments in a marriage of solipsistic risk-taking. Lustily appealing from top to bottom.

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'Sweet Black Angel'
Angela Davis: "They
meant to send me to the
death chamber because
I was a convenient figure"

THE BLACK POWER MIXTAPE 1967-1975

SODA PICTURES

★★★★★

Black America's militant years, captured on rediscovered Swedish documentaries. Right on! By Neil Spencer



Black America's brave fight for emancipation during the '60s and '70s started with the Civil Rights marches of Dr Martin Luther King and ended in the ignominy of ghettos awash with hard drugs and crime. The struggle was not without victories – the end of legalised segregation in the South, the emergence of an honoured class of black artists and intellectuals (even a black President in the White House) – but the sense of failure is far more profound. It's a long fall from the optimism of King's "I have a dream..." speech and the great albums of Curtis Mayfield and Stevie Wonder to the misogyny of gangsta rap and the underclass squalor depicted in *The Wire*.

Using a cache of forgotten documentaries discovered in a Stockholm basement, *The Black Power Mixtape* is a juddering return to the hopes, conflicts and sinister political plays of the Black American Uprising. The movie is a time capsule, and while its 90 minutes are an inevitably incomplete portrait, its footage – most of it finely shot in black and white and with some terrific interviews – offers a mesmerising glimpse into an under-

documented era. Here is a coolly militant Stokely Carmichael – the man who coined the term 'Black Power' – in 1967 with his critique of Dr King's non-violent protests: "It was founded on the false assumption that America has a conscience – it doesn't." Here is Angela Davis, the Stones' "Sweet Black Angel", welling with tears and anguish under her giant Afro as she faces the death penalty on trumped-up charges. Here is Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver in 1970, defiant but clearly broken by his enforced exile in Algeria.

Alongside such charismatic headline-makers come shocking scenes of police brutality on protesters, vox pop interviews, Black Panther soup kitchens, and glimpses of the seedy New York that provided the scenario for *The French Connection*. There's even a surreal cameo of a Swedish bus tour of Harlem from 1973, with well-heeled Scands rubbernecking at the Big Apple's mean streets.

The material was shot for Swedish television. Sweden's criticism of the United States' uncompromising response to black protest, specifically the 'show trials' of dissidents in the early '70s and the apparently co-ordinated assassination of black power firebrands, led to the Nixon regime breaking off diplomatic relations with the historically neutral country

in 1972, an event unimaginable today.

Presented chronologically, the original footage is sensibly left unadorned, though there are voiceovers from modern times. Angela Davis (now a retired professor) reflects that, "They meant to send me to the death chamber simply because I was a convenient figure." The story that emerges from the film's assemblage is of an unyielding and corrupt US government prepared to go to extreme and at times murderous lengths to eliminate its critics.

The Vietnam War provides an intrusive backdrop to the story. In 1967 the US had over 500,000 troops in Vietnam (today there are 68,000 in Afghanistan), a disproportionate number of them black Americans (cf *Platoon* and *Apocalypse Now*). Martin Luther King's widening of the Civil Rights struggle to a "Stop The War" stance is, it's implied by several commentators, the reason behind his assassination. "He was tampering with the playground of the wealthy," reckons singer, actor and activist Harry Belafonte.

The proliferation of hard drugs in black ghettos in the early '70s is another, shadowy strand of the tale. Smacked-out Vietnam vets were part of the problem ("they weren't killed on active service, they OD'd," comes one voice), but it's suggested that the CIA also fuelled the heroin boom to quell dissent.

With its leaders silenced or exiled, its street warriors imprisoned or addicted, its optimism dismayed, Black America's revolt wilted. The humanitarian, democratic impulses of the King years give way to Marxist cant – the Panthers become "the vanguard of the People's Party" – and the apocalyptic tones of the Nation of Islam. The 1974 allegation by Louis Farrakhan, a former calypso singer, that "the white race is one of devils" is a low point.

EXTRAS: Short film about Stokely Carmichael.

★★★

FANTOMAS THE DIRECTOR'S CUT LIVE: A NEW YEAR'S REVOLUTION

IPECAC

★★★★★

The 2001 album *The Director's Cut* found Fantômas – Mike Patton, Dave Lombardo of Slayer and Buzz Osbourne and Dale Crover of Melvins – indulging in their love for classic film scores. In this live performance at San Francisco's Great American Music Hall, renderings of *The Godfather* theme and Badalamenti's *Fire Walk With Me* theme lurch entertainingly between camp horror and splattery thrash-metal. Also noteworthy is a phlegmatic commentary by comedian Neil Hamburger, filmed in a dilapidated travel tavern.

EXTRAS: Commentary.

★★★★★

Louis Pattison

GORILLAZ THE SINGLES COLLECTION 2001-2011

PARLOPHONE

★★★★★

Across 14 promos we see how Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett's multimedia concept has developed. Early videos see the animated band sketched as Manga-style cartoons, then integrated into live footage – Middle Eastern warzones, Shaun Ryder's head, Bruce Willis as a gun-toting motorist – before finally becoming the panto stars of concert footage. Unusually for pop videos, there's a narrative quality here that merits repeated viewings.

EXTRAS: A 23-minute mockumentary, two Brits appearances, three trailers, a 15-track CD.

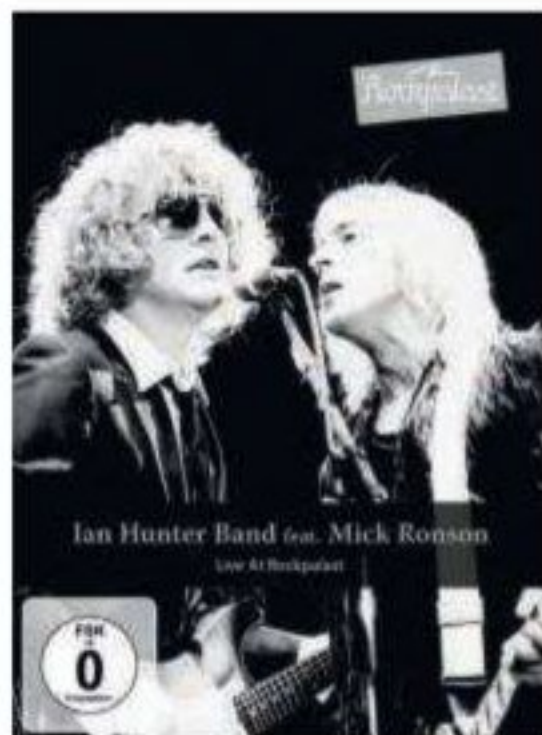
★★★★ John Lewis

IAN HUNTER BAND FEATURING MICK RONSON LIVE AT ROCKPALAST

WDR

★★★★★

Filmed across two of the



celebrated German TV show's "all-nighters" in 1980, the Hunter-Ronson set leans heavily on the former's Mott The Hoople past ("I Wish I Was Your Mother", "Angeline"), embellished by the latter's dextrous guitar and mandolin arrangements. Mick takes centre stage on a hard rock hammering of The Shadows' "FBI" and his signature piece "Slaughter On 10th Avenue", but material the men recorded together ("Cleveland Rocks") feels a little pedestrian in comparison.

EXTRAS: None.

Terry Staunton

PAUL MCCARTNEY THE LOVE YOU MAKE

EAGLE VISION

★★★★★

"I wanted to do something but I'm not a fireman," say Paul McCartney, who was in New York on September 11, and organised a fundraising concert in its aftermath. This documentary – by Stones and Beatles documentarian Albert Maysles – shows Macca's preparations. He is typically affable – no Elton John-style meltdowns here – causing chaos when on walkabout, and signing autographs to anybody who asks. The concert footage is impressive – The Who are blistering – and there are countless celeb cameos, from Ozzy Osbourne to Bill Clinton.

EXTRAS: None.

Peter Watts



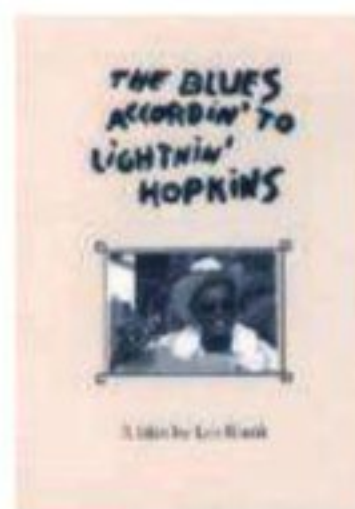
Lightnin' Hopkins in L.A., 1960: "The blues is about eternity..."

THE BLUES ACCORDIN' TO LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS

HALLSO

★★★★★

Intimate portrait of a country bluesman. By John Robinson



If you were a blues enthusiast in California in the mid '60s, your university was the Ash Grove. Part music venue, part instrument shop, coffee bar and ideas factory, it gave rise not

only to musicians like John Fahey and Canned Heat, but to filmmakers like Les Blank, who, fired up by his enthusiasms, set about documenting US folk culture. After a film on jazz musician Dizzy Gillespie, Blank arrived at the blues, and Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins, then a 55-year-old roué biding his time in rural Texas.

Although initially keen on the idea, Lightnin' Hopkins soon tired of the process of documentary filmmaking. After playing 10 songs for Blank and his camera, after one day's filming, Hopkins ordered Blank back to California. Whereupon, with the camera off, the men began playing cards. Blank lost, and lost again. The more money he lost to his subject, in fact, the more Hopkins began to see the virtue of keeping the young documentarian around.

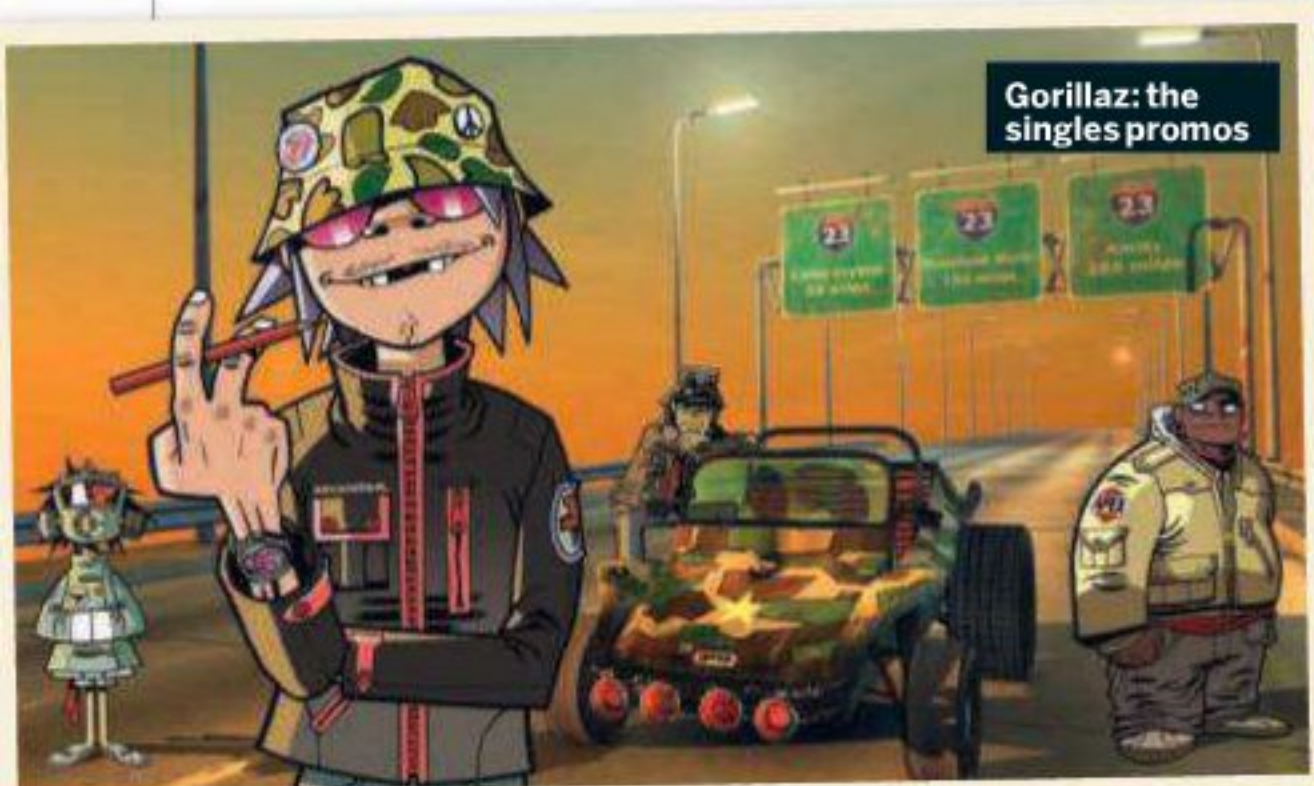
As a hard luck streak, Blank's was fortunate indeed. Over the next six weeks, his potential as an easy mark saw him spend what we'd now call unguarded, "all access" time with the country blues performer, as he drank, played music (with his cousin Bill Bizer and his near-neighbour Mance Lipscomb), and spun

tall stories. Blank's is documentary filmmaking in the most naturalistic sense possible. There's no attempt to contextualise. We experience instead a brief immersion in the bluesman's life, and it's a compelling thing to watch.

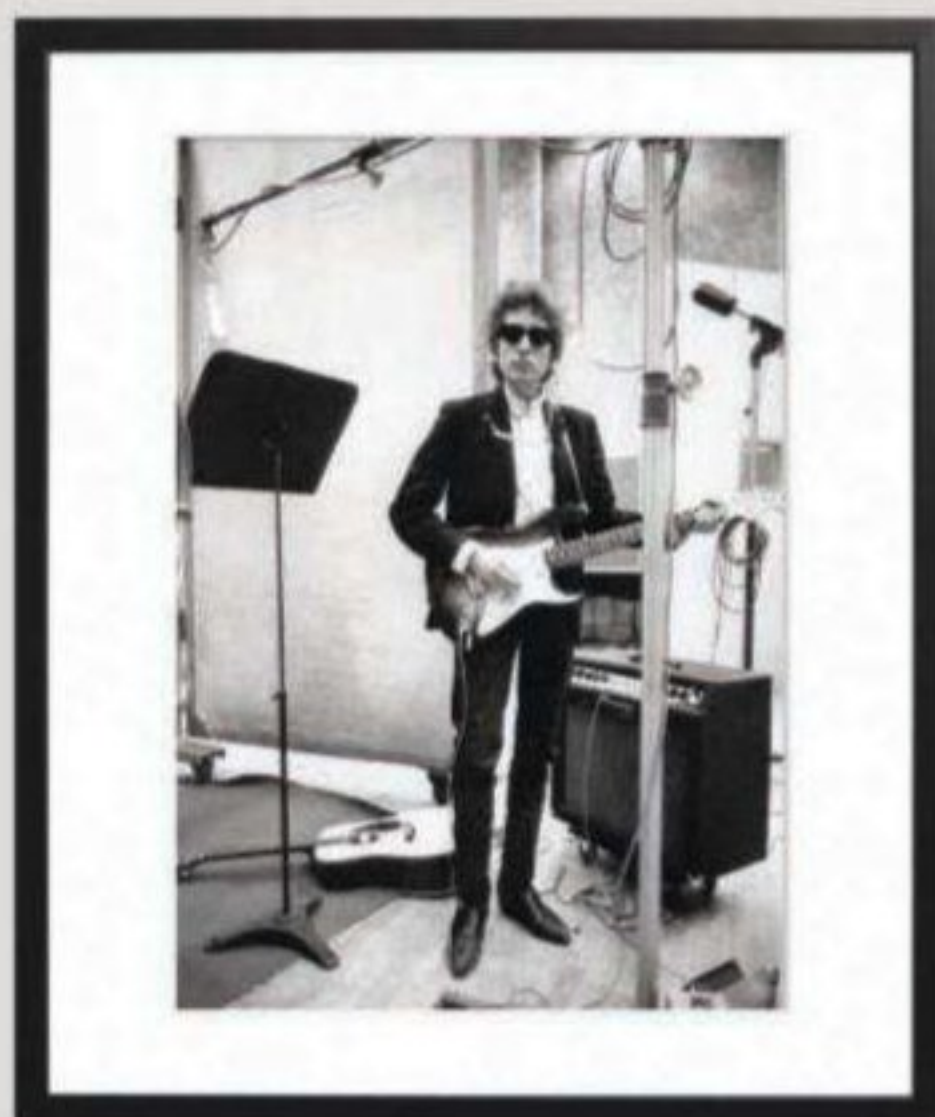
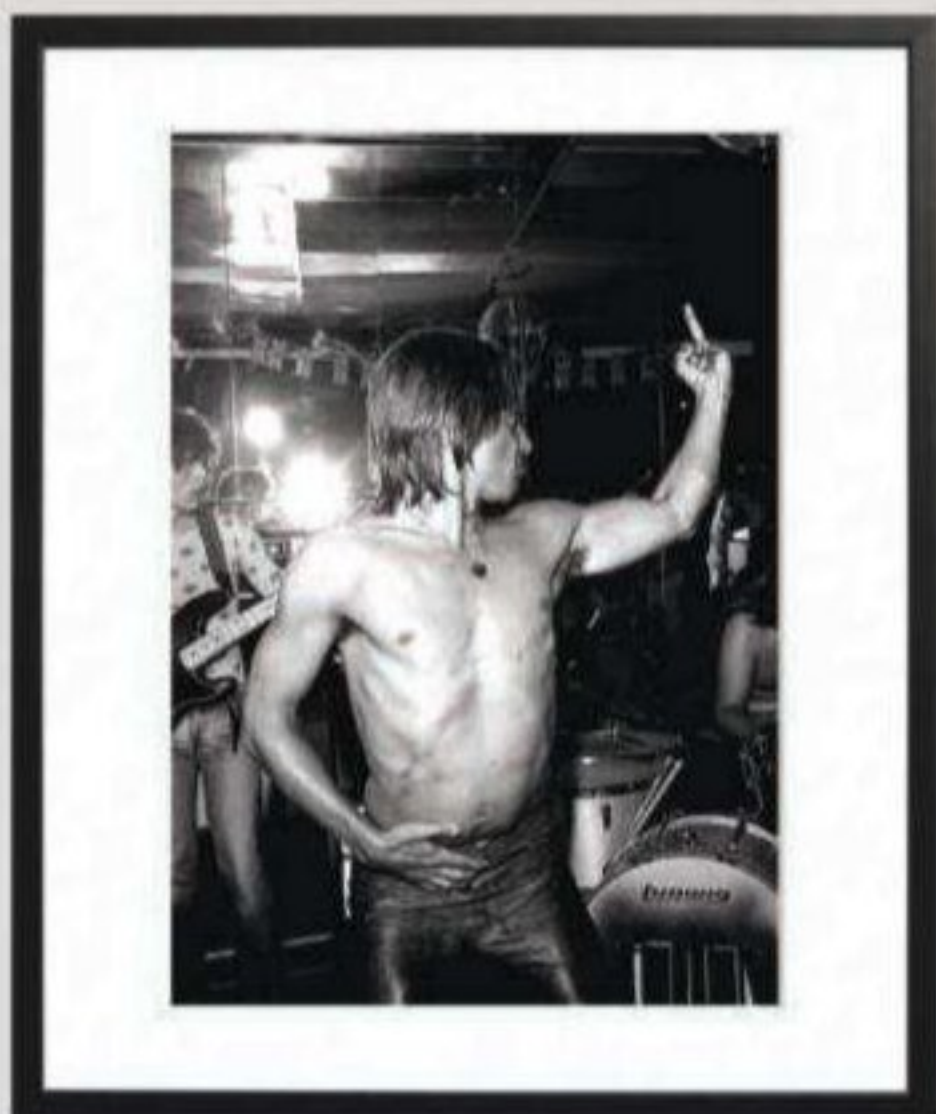
Along the way, intercut with scenes in which he visits his home town, plays and sings with his friends, has a few drinks at a rodeo, Lightnin' attempts to answer a fundamental question: what, in essence, is the blues? Anyone, he assures us, can have the blues: over money problems, or a woman leaving. He also draws a link between church music and secular blues music finer than any academic could hope to. It's about how one deals with one's problems and one's mortality. "It's about eternity," Hopkins says.

All of which, as told by the bibulous, charismatic musician is fascinating and hugely enjoyable to hear. For all that, it's still Blank's movie. Having gained Hopkins' confidence, he was rewarded with intimacy, which he portrays in an enjoyably non-linear way, with Hopkins's rambling anecdotes cut to unguarded shots of the singer fishing, or killing a snake, or to footage of local people just living their lives. As a fantastic scene of Hopkins playing at a bar-B-Q stand makes clear, to be a blues musician in 1967 did not mean you were a person apart, but rather right in the middle of the community, the music you were playing not dead, but in fact very much alive.

EXTRAS: None.



Gorillaz: the singles promos



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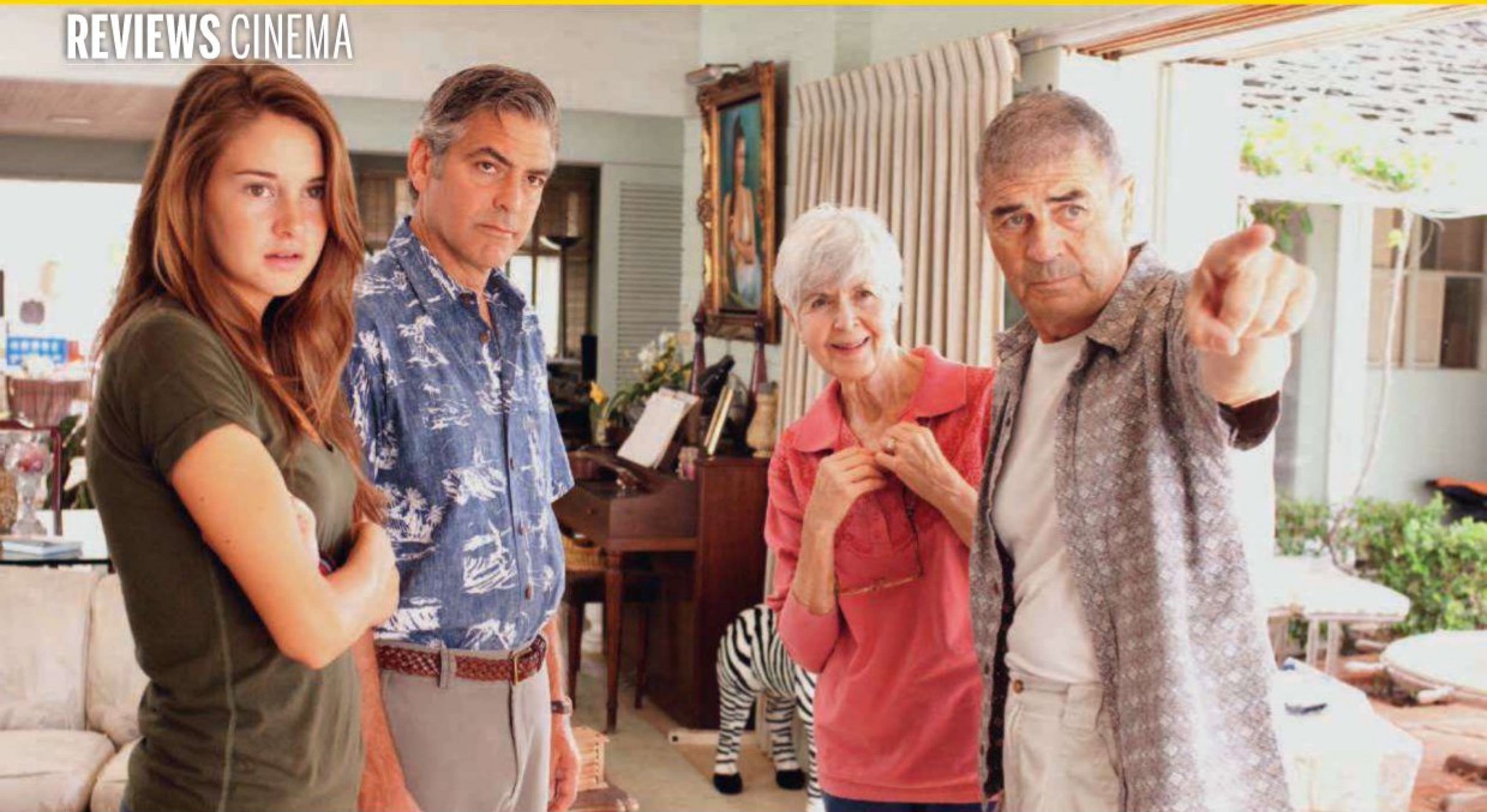


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THE DESCENDANTS

Directed by Alexander Payne. Starring George Clooney, Beau Bridges, Matthew Lillard, Judy Greer. Opens January 27, Cert 15, 115 mins



A melodrama as sophisticated as it is funny. By Jonathan Romney

THESE DAYS, only a handful of US directors can be relied on to make intelligent, enjoyable, properly grown-up films. Among them are Jason Reitman (*Up In The Air*, *Young Adult*), the seldom-seen Todd Haynes and – perhaps most consistently of all – Alexander Payne. The Omaha-born writer-director may have made his rep with a high-school political satire (1999's *Election*), but since then, Payne has specialised in stories about older males looking ruefully back at chances missed and wrong roads taken: *About Schmidt*, which allowed Jack Nicholson to act his weary age, and wine-steeped mid-life-crisis road movie *Sideways*.

At first glance, his new offering *The Descendants* is Payne's straightest film yet, a tragi-comic family story about life, love, death and inter-generational misunderstanding. But this deceptively simple film – based on the 2008 novel by Kauai Hart Hemmings – is marked out by its unusual Hawaiian location, a superb cast headed by George Clooney, and a way of wrong-footing the expectations that accompany the gentle melodrama this initially resembles.

Clooney plays Hawaii resident Matt King, who begins proceedings by telling us in voice-over that he's sick of hearing that life on the island must be paradise – a point proved by shots of

freeways and parking lots. Matt's own life is anything but blissful – his wife Elizabeth is in a coma following a waterskiing accident, and Matt is looking after the daughters he barely knows – 10-year-old Scottie (Amara Miller) and wayward teen Alexandra (Shailene Woodley). In addition, he has to decide how best to sell the tract of family land that's been handed down through generations, going right back to the Hawaiian royalty who were his ancestors.

Then Matt discovers his wife had been having an affair and decides it's time to track down her lover – ostensibly so that the man can say his farewells before Elizabeth dies, but partly also in the spirit of good old-fashioned stalking. What ensues is a road trip – or in this case, an island hop – as Matt goes on the trail of the other man, accompanied by his daughters and by Alex's clueless pal Sid (a hilarious Nick Krause) who can be relied on to say the wrong thing in any situation.

The film is superbly acted, both by its young unknowns and by familiar faces including Beau Bridges (rheumy eyed and laid-back as one of Matt's sprawling clan), a formidably blunt Robert Forster (of *Jackie Brown* fame) as Matt's disapproving father-in-law, and Matthew Lillard as the other man. You may remember Lillard as the goofy arch-slacker of the *Scream* films, or as Scooby-Doo's sidekick

Shaggy; it's quite alarming how quickly he's aged, but Lillard seems to have discovered fruitful new career prospects playing smarmy middle-aged dorks.

What makes *The Descendants* – scripted by Payne with Nat Faxon and Jim Rash – so exceptional is its ill-mannered mischief, its willingness to step on conventional emotional sensibilities. It's not enough that Matt and family are living through a uniquely painful situation, Payne makes the emotional comedy that much more excruciating, too. In one scene, Matt steps into the hospital room for what we expect to be a tear-stained tête-à-tête with the comatose Elizabeth – only to lambast her for messing up his life. Later in the film, a superb and affecting Judy Greer, as the lover's wronged wife, gets her chance to speak some bedside home truths, as well. Yet, no matter how far the film goes in a black comedy direction, there's always a sense of emotional fragility and tenderness that makes *The Descendants* feel not just bearable but compellingly wise.

Few of today's Hollywood male leads could have carried off the delicacy of this drama, or given the essentially stolid, self-absorbed Matt some substance without grandstanding or laying on the redemptive humanity too thick. But Clooney – having revealed several new layers of subtlety in *Up In The Air* – pushes his register even further here, and gives us cinema's best Harassed Middle-aged Man for some time – with an ordinary vulnerability to match the greying hair. *The Descendants* is another film, like *Sideways*, that shows Payne to be a master in making something exceptional out of the almost exaggeratedly ordinary. And like *Sideways*, it's at once hugely entertaining and at the same time, deep in an almost throwaway fashion. It's about as classy and mature as contemporary American cinema gets.

FILM
OF THE
MONTH



J EDGAR

Directed by Clint Eastwood
Starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Armie Hammer
Opens January 20, Cert 15, 136 mins ★★★★★

Eastwood's overly fair look at the life of the FBI giant

A rabidly conservative powerbroker who outlasted half a dozen US presidents as director of the FBI, J Edgar Hoover was in many ways despicable: a snoop and blackmailer who routinely broke the law to protect America from itself. Clint Eastwood's biopic isn't a whitewash, but it is a nuanced and even sympathetic portrait of a homosexual who spent his life in the closet – his own and everybody else's.

Written by Dustin Lance Black (*Milk*), *J Edgar* cuts between the elderly Hoover dictating his biography of the FBI to the Bureau's glory days in the '30s, when the "War on Crime" claimed John Dillinger and other public enemies. Brilliantly played by Leonardo DiCaprio, J Edgar champions modern methods of detection, but can't bring himself to admit he's in love with sidekick Clyde Tolson (Armie Hammer). It's a long, clumsy movie, but this love story sneaks up on you, an emblem of America's capacity for self-delusion. *Tom Charity*



CORIOLANUS

Directed by Ralph Fiennes
Starring Ralph Fiennes, Gerard Butler
Opens January 20, Cert 15, 122 mins ★★★★★

Shakespeare tragedy gets aggressive Balkan makeover

Fiennes' impressive, if very macho, foray into filmed Shakespeare is set in a grey, modern-day Europe reminiscent of the former Yugoslavia during the Balkan wars of the 1990s. The actor-director throws in shaky, verité-style camerawork and CNN-style news reportage. Inevitably, when gun-toting characters in military fatigues start speaking in verse, the effect is jarring and anachronistic. However, Fiennes himself brings such gimlet-eyed fury to his role as the vengeful warrior that the storytelling never seems precious. Gerard Butler is in equally aggressive form as his enemy turned uncomfortable ally, Aufidius. Vanessa Redgrave excels as the mum with even more of an appetite for violence than her son. John Logan's screenplay is occasionally heavy-handed in its attempts to yank Shakespeare's play into a modern context, but the film's trump card is its conviction. Fiennes directs just as he performs – with ferocious intensity. *Geoffrey Macnab*



THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO

Directed by David Fincher
Starring Daniel Craig, Rooney Mara
Opened December 26, Cert 18, 139 mins ★★★★★

Swedish thriller gets a stylish English-language version

If David Fincher's *The Social Network* was concerned with a very contemporary phenomenon, then this adaptation of Stieg Larsson's Swedish potboiler finds plenty in the differences between the new and the old. Specifically, the new is represented by a computer hacker, Lisbeth Salander (the terrific Rooney Mara). The old, meanwhile, is embodied by print journalist Mikael Blomkvist (Daniel Craig), investigating a girl's disappearance on a private island 40 years earlier. Although cleaving closely to both Larsson's novel and the original 2009 Swedish-language adaptation, this is very much Fincher's film – from the immaculate design to the precise sound editing. An exhilarating opening credits sequence, meanwhile, scored by Trent Reznor, recalls *Fight Club*'s intensity and subversion. *Michael Bonner*



THE IRON LADY

Directed by Phyllida Lloyd
Starring Meryl Streep, Jim Broadbent
Opens January 6, Cert 12A, 104 mins ★★★

Great performance – disappointing film

Rarely has the disparity between the quality of a performance and the quality of a film been so striking. Meryl Streep compellingly inhabits Thatcher, from the autocratic bouffant to the conservative court shoes. But partly as a result of Abi Morgan's diffident screenplay and partly due to Phyllida Lloyd's plodding and conventional direction, the film has little of interest to say about either the woman or the period of British history she shaped. Lady Thatcher's life, pre and during her political career, is reduced to a series of vignettes, with the film's emphasis falling firmly on the latter part of her life, showing her as an elderly lady mourning her husband, Dennis (Jim Broadbent). Streep handles it effectively – flashes of the old Thatcher sporadically cut through the fog of senility. But if the idea is to humanise the woman, it's rather wasted. If there's one thing Margaret Thatcher won't be remembered for, it's her humanity. *Wendy Ide*

ALSO OUT...

THE LADY

OPENED DEC 30
Yes, this really is a biopic of Burmese pro-democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi directed by Luc Besson.

ZELIG

OPENED DEC 30
One of Woody's finest – re-released alongside another early "funny" gem, *Hannah And Her Sisters*.

MOTHER AND CHILD

OPENS JAN 6
High-end talent – Naomi Watts and Annette Bening in domestic drama.



DESPAIR

OPENS JAN 6
Reissue of Fassbinder's first English-language drama, with Dirk Bogarde (above).

MARGIN CALL

OPENS JANUARY 13
Fictional take on the Lehman Bros crash, with Kevin Spacey.

WAR HORSE

OPENS JANUARY 13
Spielberg's adaptation of Michael Morpurgo's WWI novel.

HAYWIRE

OPENS JANUARY 18
Another Steven Soderbergh film. This one's about assassins.

THE SITTER

OPENS JANUARY 20
Jonah Hill goes baby-sitting in David Gordon Green's latest comedy.

UNDERWORLD: AWAKENING

OPENS JANUARY 20
Kate Beckinsale does more vampire high kicking, this time in 3D.

W.E.

OPENS JANUARY 20
Yes, this really is the life of Wallis Simpson directed by Madonna.



SHAME

Directed by Steve McQueen
Starring Michael Fassbender,
Carey Mulligan
Opens January 13, Cert 18, 104 mins
★★★★

Powerful, grimy sex-addiction drama

WHEN THE Manhattan branch of the Standard Hotel opened for business in summer 2009, it instantly became the hot topic of conversation among New Yorkers. Not as you might think, for its stunning views across the Hudson River—but because people were flocking to the park below to watch guests having sex in front of the hotel's floor-to-ceiling windows. Some of these scenes are repeated in *Shame*, British director Steve McQueen's bracing and unsettling film about sex addiction in New York that features a powerful central performance from Michael Fassbender.

Fassbender is an actor who can move easily

between the mainstream and arthouse. Here, though, in his second collaboration with McQueen, he is required to go the extra mile. In the first five minutes, we see his character, Brandon Sullivan, naked, then masturbating in the shower. In a near-silent opening half-hour, Brandon prowls New York, hitting on women in the subway, scoring in bars, entertaining call-girls at home. This is Brandon's routine. Into this, Sissy (Carey Mulligan), Brandon's sister, arrives uninvited. She and Brandon are refugees from an unspecified childhood trauma, and accordingly Sissy suffers from her own set of problems. "We're not bad people," she tells her brother. "We just come from a bad place."

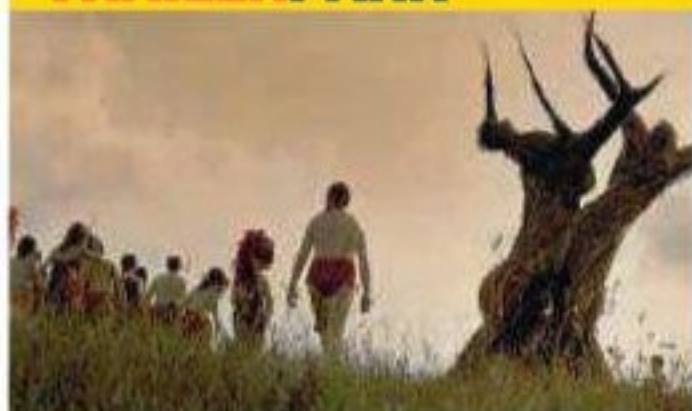
The other main character in all this is New York, shown here as a city of white workspaces and antiseptic apartments, filthy sidewalks and subways. Arguably, New York acts as a facilitator for Brandon, providing him with opportunities to feed his addiction. There are echoes of *Midnight Cowboy* in the damaged,

mutually dependent relationship between Brandon and Sissy, and *Taxi Driver* in its depiction of a nighttime New York. With the soundtrack featuring Chic's "I Want Your Love" and Blondie's "Rapture", you could be forgiven for thinking this was set in the grimy New York of the late '70s or early '80s. I'm reminded, too, of *American Psycho*: when Brandon tells a girl in a bar what he'd like to do to her, he sounds like Patrick Bateman describing his plans for his latest victim. One famous Bateman line—"I simply am not there"—could just as easily apply to the inscrutable, cipher-like Brandon.

Shame is less formal than *Hunger*, McQueen and Fassbender's previous collaboration about IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands, which owed a debt to McQueen's background as a visual artist. *Shame* moves more fluidly, particularly in a long tracking shot of Brandon jogging through New York at night. Strangely, for a film filled with memorable, shocking images, this is one that lingers: Brandon, alone, running through a neon landscape. *Michael Bonner*

TRAILER PARK

See them all at www.apple.com/trailers



THE WICKER TREE

Director Robin Hardy returns to the world of his 1973 folk horror classic, *The Wicker Man*, for this, which finds two evangelical Christians caught up in pagan fertility rites and sacrifice.



THE DICTATOR

The latest film from Sacha Baron Cohen, here playing the despotic ruler of a Middle Eastern country who travels to America.



MEN IN BLACK 3

It's been 10 years since the last one. Here, Will Smith's MiB heads back in time to find the younger version of Tommy Lee Jones' character, played by Josh Brolin.

MOUTHPIECE



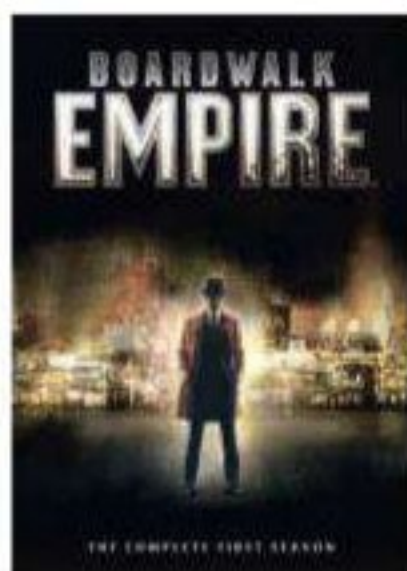
"We were told there was no money and no presents for Christmas..."

RALPH FIENNES reflects on a grim childhood

BOARDWALK EMPIRE

★★★ HBO (DVD & BLU-RAY)

For all its merits, HBO's latest lacks that spark. *By John Robinson*



WHENEVER he was at his most distracted, Tony Soprano generally made his way to the Boardwalk. Though he never actually left the house, in his troubled imagination, the anxious mob boss was frequently condemned by his conscience to return

to the stomping ground of Bruce Springsteen, the shoreline at Asbury Park, New Jersey, there to confront his demons: his murder victims; strange visions; a fish whom he became convinced was his onetime colleague Salvatore "Big Pussy" Bonpensiero.

Such multi-layered, innovative post-modern and above all engrossing storytelling is not something you'll often find in *Boardwalk Empire*, though at first glance many similar ingredients are present. Among them, there's nefarious activity in a coastal location (the series is set in Prohibition-era Atlantic City, in which the resort came into its own as a hotbed of illegality). There's producer Terence Winter, a guiding light of *The Sopranos*, as a writer. There's quality acting talent (headed by Steve Buscemi, another *Sopranos* vet, here playing Enoch "Nucky" Thompson, about whose New Jersey empire we are ostensibly talking). There's Martin Scorsese, who exec produces and directs the opening episode. Then there is, of course, the Boardwalk itself.

This, understandably, given the considerable

expense involved in building it, is something of which the show is justifiably proud. Prior to the show's release, HBO released a promotional stop-motion film showing the construction of this \$5 million principal set. On one level, it was a fascinating glimpse behind the curtain. On another, it brought in an unwelcome note of reality, as if we had accidentally skipped to the DVD extras before watching the main feature.

A tale rooted for the most part in the true story of Atlantic City's nefarious rise, *Boardwalk Empire* introduces us to the architects of that rise, some real, some not. The sketchy morality of institutions and the corruption of individuals that exploit them for their own ends is the familiar theme here. Nucky Thompson is Mayor of Atlantic City. Publicly, he's a supporter of causes and defender of the weak. Privately, he's a womanising villain, albeit a complex one – a complexity Buscemi effortlessly inhabits. He and his jawdropping mistress Lucy Danziger (Paz de la Huerta, the actress from the Lana Del Rey video) provide edgy HBO content of an indoor kind, while on the sly, he quietly becomes intrigued by recent immigrant Mrs Schroeder (Kelly Macdonald). The picture is filled out by Nucky's enforcer and WWI veteran, Jimmy Darmody (Michael Pitt, looking these days more Jack White than Kurt Cobain) and magnificently, investigating agent Nelson Van Alden (the superb Michael Shannon). These people are all in transitions of a kind, but all, in a way, playing their own

angle. Strange to say for a 12-part series, but somehow for all the class on display, all of which makes this very watchable, there's not enough actual story.

In a way, *Boardwalk Empire* is a victim of HBO's success. It's trying to turn the clock back, not only to the Prohibition era (which it does successfully enough) but also to a time before mobster movies (which it cannot hope to do). Since the 1970s, our minds have been blown by the resourcefulness with which racketeering and mob violence has been dealt with on screen. In *The Sopranos*, the mood and quality of the piece was heightened either by knowing reference to these works, or offering genuinely new takes on familiar situations. The writing and direction of *Boardwalk Empire* leave Nucky and co prisoners of their own era, their situations already over-familiar to us. An early 20th-century automobile at night? You're right: it *will* soon be riddled with bullets.

Boardwalk Empire might be best described, along with David Simon's *Treme*, as the first post-HBO series, in which we have come to accept long-form storytelling as a given. In any meaningful way, however, the show doesn't deliver anything like the quality of *The Wire*, *The Sopranos* or even *Deadwood*, whose plot it closely resembles. The story at times seems simply to be struggling to sustain itself.

As Tina Fey's character Liz Lemon says when delivering a reality check to a cast member in *30 Rock*, "This isn't HBO. This is TV." It's a valuable reminder about delivering what people want to watch. For all the painterliness of direction and historical accuracy, TV still needs to draw us in. For all the top performances, somewhere in among all the big names, someone seems to have forgotten how that's done.

EXTRAS: Commentaries, Making Of..., featurettes including one on Atlantic City and another on creating the Boardwalk itself. ★★★



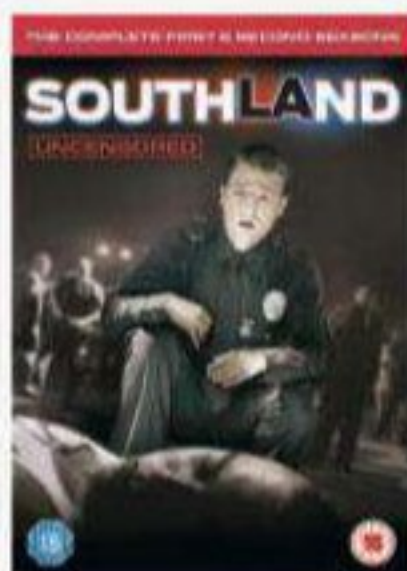
"Womanising villain" (Steve Buscemi) with "jaw-dropping mistress" (Paz de la Huerta)



SOUTHLAND TV

★★★★★ WARNER HOME VIDEO (DVD)

OK, it's not *The Wire*. But don't discount this tough, witty investigation of LA's dark side too readily. By Alastair McKay



After *The Wire*, how do you do a TV cop drama? Well, *Southland* isn't quite in the same league as David Simon's multi-layered epic, but this LA-based cop show shares the same cold

manners, and has a refreshing reluctance to endear itself to its viewers. If anything, it wallows in bleakness, and it takes a few episodes for the characters to get round to revealing their more endearing qualities.

Southland was created by Ann Biderman (who won an Emmy for her writing on *NYPD Blue*), and was designed as an ensemble drama, focusing on the work of the Hollywood division of the LAPD (that's Hollywood as in gangs, guns and drugs, not the dream factory). Each episode begins with a shocking moment in the day of a cop; the story then spools back to show what led up to that incident. The grim tone is underlined by the absence of music and the de-saturated colour. The camerawork is done with unsteady Steadicam, adding a documentary feel, though the action is so fast that you'd be forgiven for feeling somewhat car-sick. All of which led to some jitters at NBC, which cancelled the series before broadcasting the second season. TNT bought and revived it,

diluting the ensemble aspect, and focusing on the two most appealing characters, downwardly mobile rookie Ben Sherman (Ben McKenzie, from *The OC* and *Junebug*) and ghetto-girl made good Lydia Adams (Regina King).

This box contains the 13 episodes of the first two series. Watched as a whole, the conventional architecture of the drama reveals itself. Sherman is paired with John Cooper (Michael Cudlitz – who played Bull Randleman in *Band Of Brothers*), a hardboiled cop who needs painkillers to keep going. Cooper is the show's cynical heart, and it's his job to introduce Sherman to the tough realities of the street. In this capacity, he also gets most of the big lines, consoling Sherman after a bit of morally dubious policing: "We live in the grey," he says. "We live there." Or, after rescuing a motorist from the attentions of an aggressive transsexual: "This is Hollywood, idiot! Keep the doors locked."

Just as *The Wire* made Baltimore fascinating, *Southland* succeeds in making a character out of LA. At times, it's an unappealing character, and those are the times when *Southland* is at its best. When it falls back on car-chases and explosions, it risks being like every other cop story from the other side of Hollywood.

EXTRAS: Featurettes, commentary, tour of show's fictional crime scenes. ★★★

THE BIG PICTURE

★★★

ARTIFICIAL EYE (DVD & BLU-RAY)
Romain Duris delivers another charismatic performance in this French adaptation of Douglas Kennedy's novel. A psychological thriller that stirs dim echoes of Antonioni's *The Passenger*, the plot centres on Paul (Duris), a successful young Parisian lawyer who secretly hates his life, and sees a way out amid a terrible act of violence. Some of the plot convulsions depend on the viewer's indulgence, but Duris carries it compellingly. Catherine Deneuve contributes a near-cameo as his slick boss.

EXTRAS: Interviews, trailer.

★★★

Damien Love

BLACK MIRROR TV

★★★

4DVD
Drawing inspiration from great cautionary tales like *The Twilight Zone*, Charlie Brooker's anthology series also riffs rather darkly on ideas explored in his acerbic TV review series, *Screenwipe*. Three nightmarish dramas all reflect on the nets of technology we now live inside, the flat black mirrors of computer, phone and TV screens. There are audacious ideas – the first story sees the Prime Minister Twitter-bullied into having sex with a pig, for example – though across all three a faintly patronising tone begins to grate.

EXTRAS: Unconfirmed.

Damien Love

BRAZIL

★★★★★

20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT (BLU-RAY)
From 1985, Terry Gilliam's black comedy *Brazil* imagined a world where the accountants won. Pulling in everything from film noir to Orwell, Huxley, Kafka and Tex Avery cartoons, Gilliam created a brilliant steampunk aesthetic, all brass-and-rubber, aided by the fantastically off-the-wall casting of Robert De Niro as a renegade plumber and a strong lead in Jonathan Pryce, as the drone who's dreaming of escape.

EXTRAS: *What Is Brazil?* featurette, trailer. Sadly, there's still no commentary from Gilliam himself.

★★★

Michael Bonner

CLEOPATRA: 50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

★★★

20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT (BLU-RAY)
Not Elizabeth Taylor's greatest moment, but probably her most iconic. She and Richard Burton became the world's most famous adulterers while making this 1963 spectacle that, infamously, cost 13 times its initial budget. Boasting more gold and eyeliner than widow's night on the Costa Del Sol, it feels like a slow hallucination brought on by sunstroke, but worth seeing for Cleo's regal entrance into Rome, La Taylor perched atop an enormous ebony Sphinx.

EXTRAS: A plethora across a two-disc set, including docs on the making of and cultural history of the film, commentary, archive material, missing footage and trailers.

★★★★★

Damien Love

THE CLEVELAND SHOW SEASON ONE AND TWO TV

★★★

20TH CENTURY FOX
Spin-offs are always weird. Who now remembers *Bootsie And Snudge*, which was to *The Army Game* what *Joey* was to *Friends*? And so it is with *The Cleveland Show*, possibly the least-likely spin-off from *Family Guy*, in which Cleveland Brown was the straightest character. Here he plays stooge to a comical family and some unlikely neighbours (including a bear). Lacking the insane and unpleasant, but often inspired and deranged, humour of Seth MacFarlane (who plays the bear), *The Cleveland Show* is an uncertain family comedy where a black man is voiced by a white comic, with a black supporting cast (and a bear). **EXTRAS:** Commentary on selected episodes, featurettes, deleted scenes.

★★★

David Quantick

COMMUNITY: THE COMPLETE FIRST SERIES TV

★★★★★

SONY PICTURES HOME ENTERTAINMENT
Set in a community college with various oddballs pupils and tutors (including Chevy Chase), *Community* has all the hysteria of *Glee* with an adult edge and a fairly high wit quotient. It suffers somewhat from characters

telling each other what they're doing ("You're just trying to get into my pants!", etc) but its relentless pace and manic energy disguise its occasional flaws. A cameo by Jack Black fits right in; if you like this, why not go deep and find Amy Sedaris' far more terrifying series *Strangers With Candy*?

EXTRAS: 90 minutes, included extended episodes, outtakes, commentaries.

★★★★

David Quantick

FOUR FLIES ON GREY VELVET

★★★★★

SHAMELESS (BLU-RAY)

Outside of grainy imports, Dario Argento's 1971 *Giallo* has been almost impossible to get hold of in the UK, so this restoration, reincorporating rarely seen footage, will be seized on by Euro-slasher fiends. Michael "Dempsey" Brandon stars as a surly prog-rock drummer plagued by a relentless, mysterious fiend in a grotesque puppet mask. Relatively restrained, still damned nutty, with gruesome killings and mad camera angles (the opening inside-a-guitar shot). Ennio Morricone gets his groove on for the score.

EXTRAS: Interviews, trailers, alternative credits, restoration doc.

★★★★★

Damien Love

THE INGLORIOUS BASTARDS

★★★★

STUDIO CANAL (BLU-RAY)

Italian WWII drama from 1978, whose title Tarantino co-opted for his own war flick, with Bo Svenson and Fred Williamson among four rogue American soldiers making their way across Occupied France to the Swiss border, who get caught up in a mission to steal rocket parts from the Germans. Echoes of *The Dirty Dozen*, with a touch of blaxploitation, make for a fun, if undemanding, ride.

EXTRAS: None.

Michael Bonner

JULES VERNE'S ROCKET TO THE MOON

★★★★

STUDIO CANAL

This frantic 1967 British sci-fi romp sees a group of Victorian inventors, charlatans and mountebanks attempt to design a rocket that will put the first man on the moon. Humour verges from the painfully dated to the inspirationally pre-Python, while the characters and set frequently appear to have



inspired any number of Alan Moore graphic novels. The plot is convoluted but the cast ham it up terrifically, none more so than Terry-Thomas as "a cad and a bounder" and the always fascinating Burl Ives as PT Barnum (with Jimmy Clitheroe as his sidekick, Tom Thumb).

EXTRAS: None.

Peter Watts

LIE TO ME SEASON THREE

★★★★

20TH CENTURY FOX

What proved to be the last series of the once-novel US crime drama finds maverick psychologist Cal Lightman (Tim Roth) and his "deception expert" cohorts running out of steam. Plots reliant on reading body language and facial expressions quickly become repetitive, with their conclusions telegraphed too far in advance. Roth remains good value, however, as the dishevelled Brit peppering his language with colloquialisms and creative use of "bollocks".

EXTRAS: Featurette, deleted scenes. ★★

Terry Staunton

THE SCARLET BLADE

★★★★

STUDIO CANAL

Muskets and swordplay abound in John Gilling's 1964 English Civil War piece, filmed in 'Hammerscope', which here means a muddy brown and terracotta palette and Ladybird-book aesthetics. In a story of divided loyalties, Oliver Reed smoulders as the mercenary Roundhead turncoat, but it's Lionel Jeffries who steals the show as the Cromwellian Colonel Judd, an ice-hearted study in polite brutality.

EXTRAS: Alternative opening sequence.

★★

Rob Young

THE SECRET WORLD OF ARRIETTY

★★★★★

STUDIO CANAL (DVD & BLU-RAY)

Hiromasa Yonebayashi, chief animator on *Ponyo* and *Spirited Away*, steps up to direct this animation based on *The Borrowers*. Tiny folk inhabit the cracks of an oddly hybridised Japanese/English country house, and their precarious interactions with the giant humans' world are beautifully realised with superb detail. Cécile Corbel's harp soundtrack reinforces the Celtic 'little people' angle.

EXTRAS: Storyboards, trailers, director interviews.

★★★★

Rob Young

THE THEO ANGELOPOULOS COLLECTION VOL. ONE

★★★★★

ARTIFICIAL EYE

Certainly one of the most

uncompromising greats of world cinema, Greek director Theo Angelopoulos has spent his career tracing his country's recent past in slow, sombre films that resemble elaborate performance pieces. The first of three sets contains four early films, including Angelopoulos' monumental 1975 masterpiece *The Travelling Players*. In a modern drama that slyly echoes classical tragedy, a theatre troupe wanders through the landscape of 20th-century Greek history – a hallucinatory, time-bending epic that compellingly justifies its 230-minute running time.

Jonathan Romney

THIS IS ENGLAND '88

★★★★

4DVD

The second series spin-off from Shane Meadows' brilliant 2006 movie begins 18 months after the first, *This Is England '86*, with only a few days of 1988 actually left. A scuffed *Christmas Carol*, the focus again falls on a brittle Lol (played by the great Vicky McClure), who is struggling to cope with what life threw at her in the previous series – in particular, a baby. Decent fare, but every new series is double-edged. The original film felt so very special, and each return to the well of what-happened-next seems to chip it away. Just don't let it become *Shameless* with more ska.

EXTRAS: Unconfirmed.

Damien Love

ALSO OUT...

ALIEN QUADRLOGY

Ahead of *Prometheus*' release later this year, the quartet gets Blu-rayed.

AN AFFAIR TO REMEMBER

Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr's 1957 classic arrives on Blu-ray.

THE BRIGAND OF KANDAHAR

The British Army face Oliver Reed and his Indian hoards on the Northwest Frontier.

DOCTOR WHO: THE SENSORITES

From 1964. William Hartnell's Doctor battles telepathic aliens.

THE GUARD

Boisterous Irish shanigans with Brendan Gleeson as a bent Garda officer.



KILLER ELITE (pictured)

When his boss Robert De Niro is kidnapped, Jason Statham goes to the rescue. Yow.

MAHLER

The late Ken Russell's bonkers biopic, with Robert Powell as the composer.

TABLOID

American director and documentarian Errol Morris tackles the 1970s kidnapping of a Mormon missionary.

TWO-LANE BLACKTOP

Dennis Wilson, James Taylor and the mighty Warren Oates star in Monte Hellman's atmospheric road movie.

X-MEN: FIRST CLASS

Comic strip prequel, with Michael Fassbender and James McAvoy.



Stretching the rules of film (and face): Jim Broadbent in *Brazil*



There's at least one murder, usually a lot more, in each of these stories, which serially introduce us to ordinary people whose lives by accident or weird coincidence are derailed or otherwise made fraught by unpredictable circumstance and inexplicable happenings, chance encounters and the schemes of gangsters – "bright boys", in the book's sharply evocative vernacular – hucksters, hoodlums, grifters, extortionists and generally disreputable types.

So we have a door-to-door collector of census data, Frank St Clair, in the opening "All In A Day's Work", who can't make a call without becoming involved in someone's untimely passing, in one case especially grisly. In "Who Do You Know That I Don't?", a tailor specialising in suits for mariachi bands attempts to solve the mysterious death of a popular young singer, modelled on

Johnny Ace, while in "Kill Me, Por Favor", a jazz drummer playing a deadbeat residency finds himself an unwitting accomplice to a double homicide and goes on the lam with an underage girl on her way to becoming a hard-bitten moll and a transsexual piano player. "My Telephone Keeps Ringin'", meanwhile, drops a middle-aged mechanic into a plot about property swindling in Santa Monica as complicated as *Chinatown*. In "End Of The Line", a recently laid-off tram driver out on one last run picks up a girl who's just plugged her gangster boyfriend and comes into a bundle of mob dough, which certain people will kill to reclaim and eventually do.

Taken as a whole, this collection offers a panoramic view of a rapidly changing Los Angeles and its immigrant communities, rich in period detail and idiomatic dialogue, sometimes based on Cooder's own memories of growing up in the same neighbourhoods in which the stories are often set. Music plays an important part in all this and musicians, too, of course – including "the code-talking black men of jazz, the card-playing Filipinos of the Temple Street dance halls, the nihilistic pachuco boogie boys". There are also walk-on parts for John Lee Hooker, John Coltrane, T-Bone Walker and Merle Travis, variously on their ways up or down, each with some piece of gnomic wisdom ruefully passed on as they themselves pass through these pages.

No dates are attached to the stories here apart from the years in which they are individually set, so there's no clear indication of when Cooder wrote them. You'd guess, though, that *Los Angeles Stories* was written alongside his so-called "California Trilogy" of *Chávez Ravine*, *My Name Is Buddy* and *I, Flathead*, with which this often brilliant book forms part of a truly remarkable late-career renaissance.

LOS ANGELES STORIES

Ry Cooder CITY LIGHTS BOOKS ★★★★★

Impressive debut collection of hardboiled tales from the multi-talented music man



POST-WAR LOS ANGELES was doubtless a swell place to live if you were a movie star, Hollywood mogul, business tycoon, captain of industry, political big-wig, gangster or otherwise a money-bags, cosseted by wealth, not much in life you couldn't afford.

On the other hand, if you were more the common drudge than the high-roller of your fantasies, going home every night from a dreary job to your one room, a hot-plate and only the radio for company, Los Angeles, as much as anywhere else, would have resembled nothing much more than the arse end of a cruel world. And how much worse for anyone with no money, none at all, those lavish spreads in Beverly Hills and similarly swish places a mocking reminder of your low place in the unhappy scheme of things, which is somewhere that makes you disinclined to see your fellow man in the best of possible lights. Which would be an understandably jaundiced point of view, given that in such disconsolate circumstances your fellow man may often be out to kill you, or at least rob you blind of even the little you've got, including your dreams. "Everyone out there is a mad dog from

hell until proven otherwise," says one of the characters in Ry Cooder's wholly impressive fiction debut of the LA in which these stories, eight of them, are set. It's a purely hardboiled universe, down here. Nearly all and sundry are scrapping for whatever they can get, on the make, hungry for whatever it is they haven't got, including money, fame, drugs, pussy, a new outlook on things and a way forward that doesn't end up with them in a ditch.

It's a world at least partly familiar from fatalist noir classics from the time in which these stories are set (1940-1958), the kind of movies in which the way a character lights a cigarette tells you everything you need to know about them and how and where they may fetch up, which as a rule is nowhere they'd want to be. You'll also recognise it from the books of Raymond Chandler, say, or James M Cain, and their tales of multiple duplicity, greed and murder, although there are also hints in the often surreal humour Cooder brings to bear on things of more recent writing by Denis Johnson, Barry Gifford and Barry Hannah. There's also something often off-kilter about these stories that's reminiscent of the Coen Brothers, who had similarly disturbing period fun in this vein with *Barton Fink*, whose blackly comedic horrors are several times recalled.

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THURSDAY 26 / 0161 832 1111
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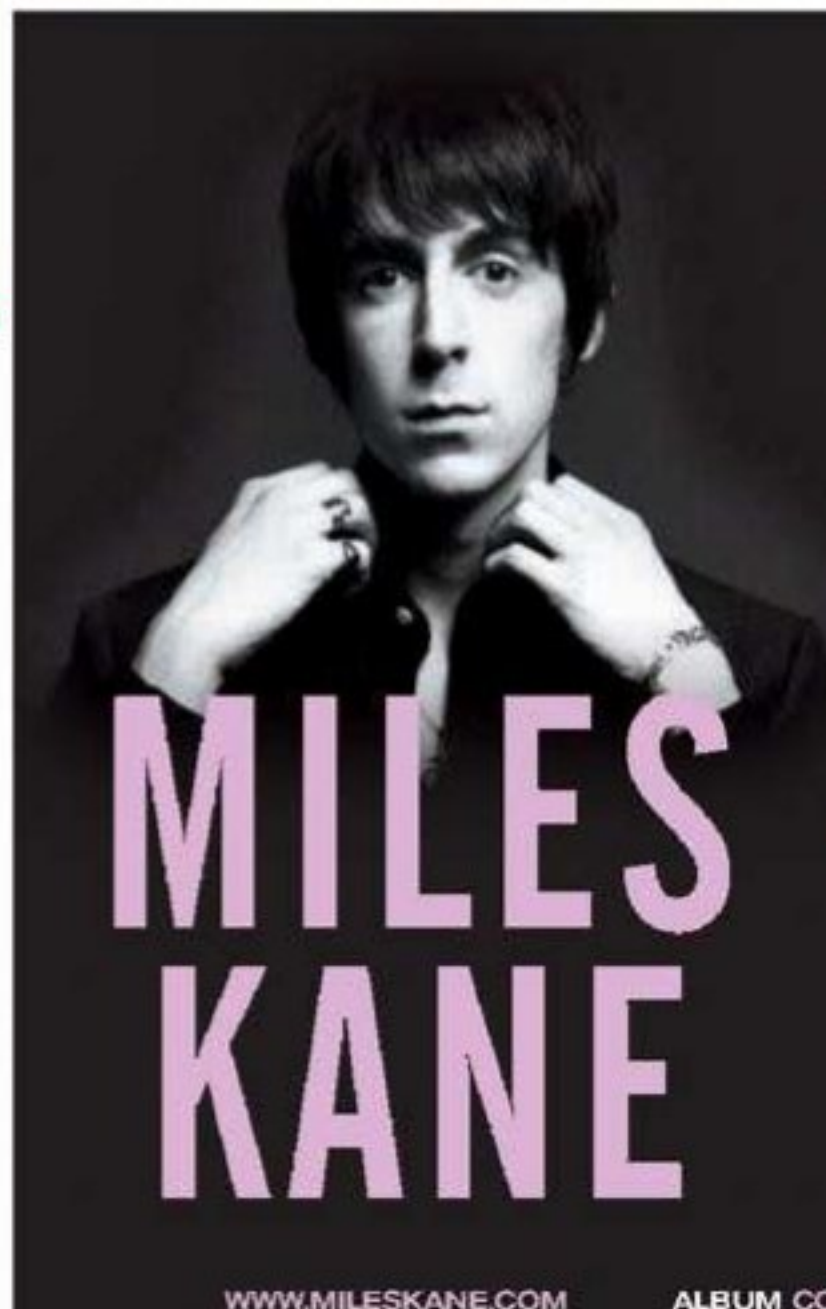
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11 SOUTHEAST City Pavilion
12 HIGH WYCOMBE Swan
13 YORK Grand Opera House
15 SOUTHPORT Theatre
16 CARDIFF St David's Hall
17 TRURO Hall for Cornwall
18 BASINGSTOKE The Anvil
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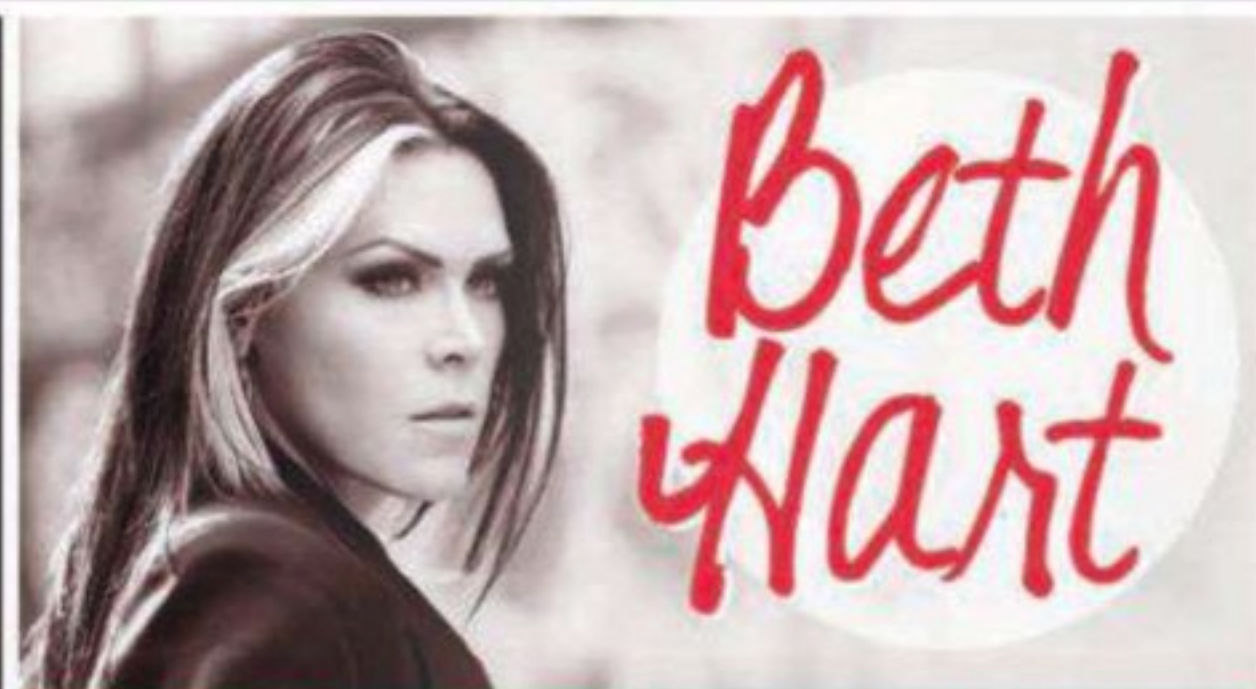


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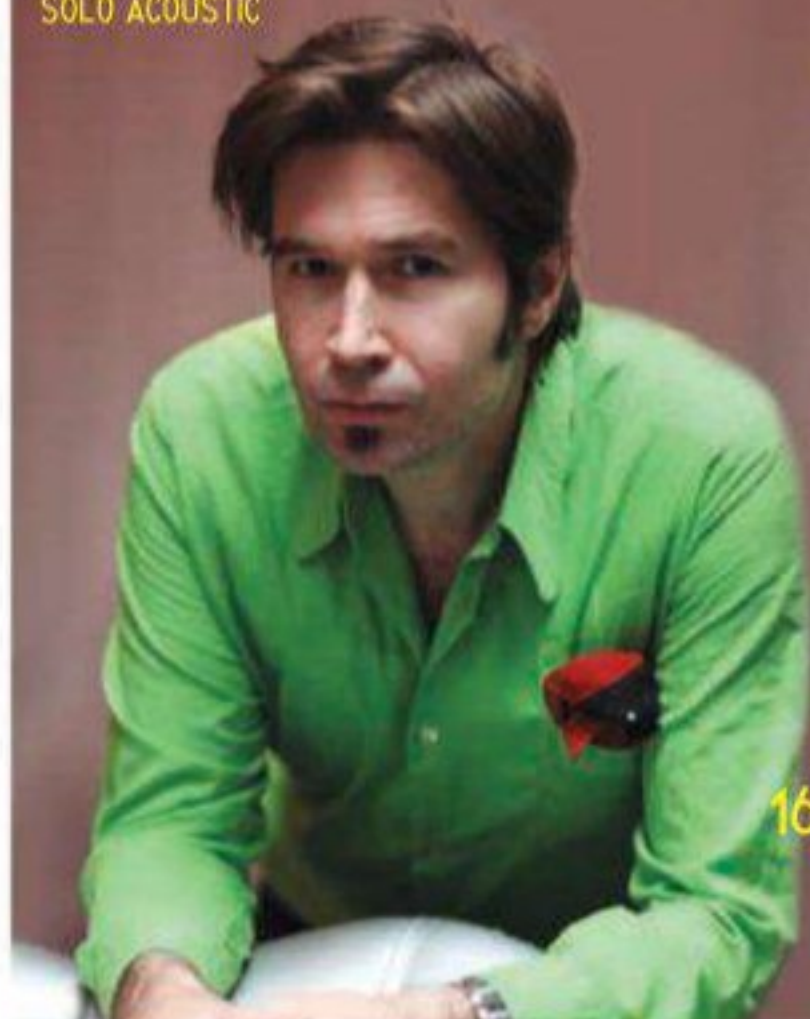
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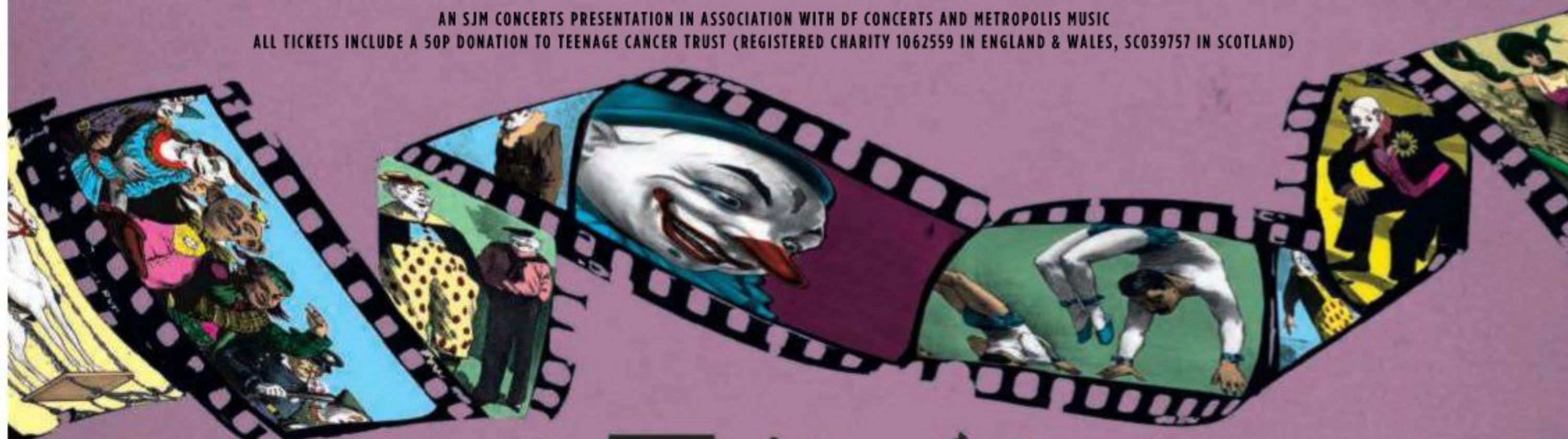
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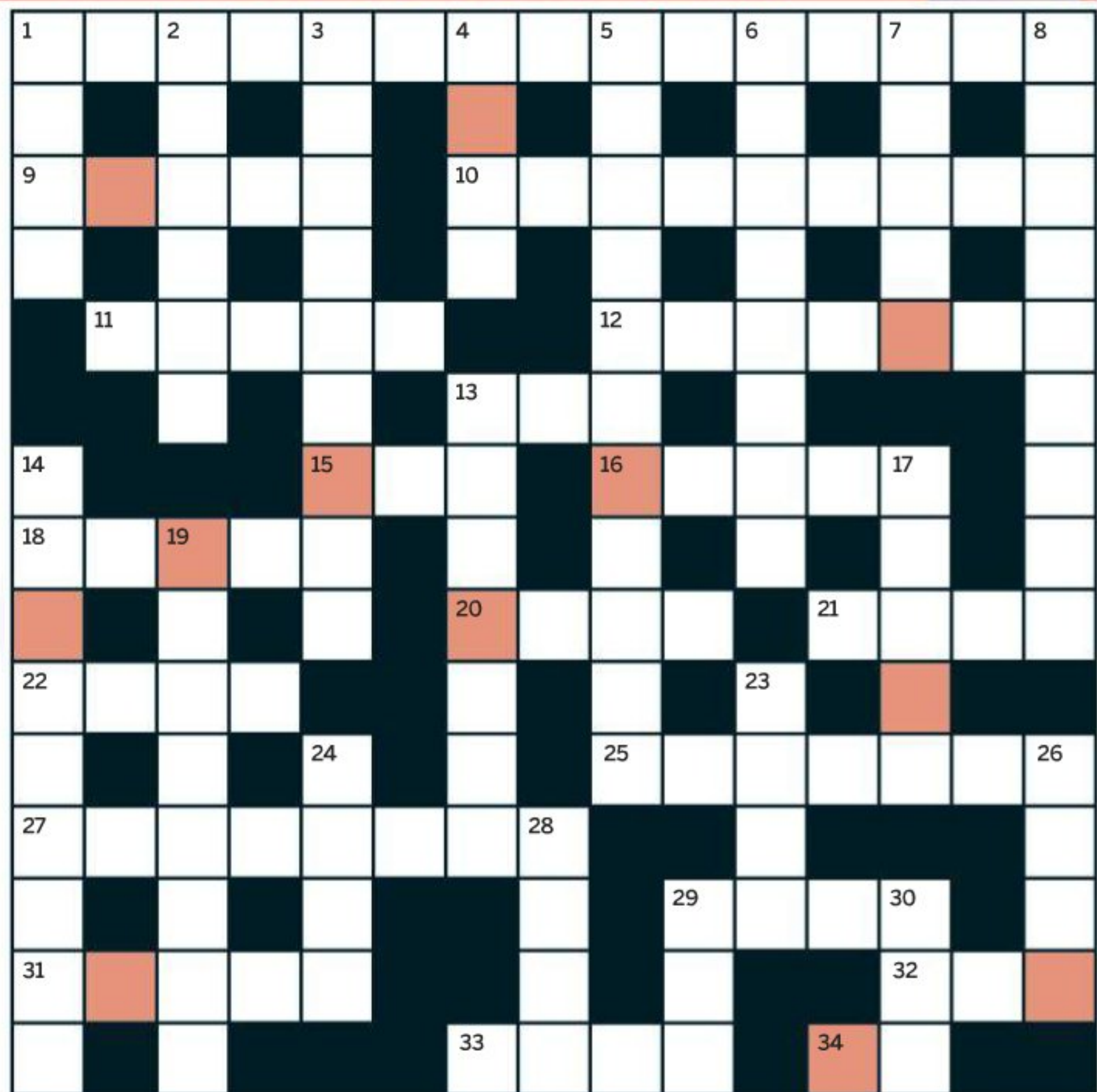
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ACROSS

- 1 White Denim won't still be hot tomorrow (4-3-2-6)
 9+24D Acidity or otherwise of a Big Star album (5-4)
 10 Jesus And Mary Chain music performed from force of habit (9)
 11+16A Not one cut on this Rolling Stones album was covered (3-2-5)
 12 A loser I somehow associate with Thin Lizzy (7)
 13+15A Planter of a *Mind Bomb* (3-3)
 16 (See 11 across)
 18 A gem of an album by Janis Joplin (5)
 20 (See 34 across)
 21 Deep Purple album which actually didn't include tracks 'Fireball' or 'Smoke On The Water' (4)
 22+26D I cleared mess up of Jeff Lynne's band in the '60s (4-4)
 25 James didn't get their message across clearly with first album (7)
 27 Find lies made up about lyricist for King Crimson (8)
 29 Improved UK economy includes big-selling album by Genesis (4)
 31 Girl associated with Stephen Fretwell, Adam Green and Bowling For Soup (5)
 32 Bobby ____, bounced onto the scene with a 'Rubber Ball' (3)
 33 (See 4 down)
 34+20A Duo that had hits in 2009 with 'In For The Kill' and 'Bulletproof' (2-4)

DOWN

- 1+14D Ian Dury knew how to live the high life at the end of the District Line (4-9)
 2 Nikki ____, singer-songwriter who co-founded the post-punk band Swell Maps (6)
 3 Old toilet demolished to make way for a Pixies performance (9)
 4+33A In no time at all, Nine Inch Nails came up with an album (4-4)
 5 An album of black music forthcoming from Canned Heat (6-5)
 6 Album where KISS faced up to their audience (8)
 7+23D "_____, is it you/_____, is it true/All alone without a telephone", 1972 (5-4)
 8 "It's just my job five days a week, a _____", 1972 (6-3)
 13 Tammi ____, duetted with Marvin Gaye on 6 hits at the end of the '60s (7)
 14 (See 1 down)
 17 Uncertain as to whether this is an album by Jesus Jones (5)
 19 "Knowing her fate, _____ sent out ships to all corners of the Earth", Donovan (8)
 23 (See 7 down)
 24 (See 9 across)
 26 (See 22 across)
 28 "Grandchildren on your knee, Vera, Chuck and _____", from The Beatles' 'When I'm 64' (4)
 29 Namely a connection between Rainbow and Black Sabbath (3)
 30 Unbelievable to include US singer-songwriter ____ Cassidy (3)

HOW TO ENTER

The letters in the shaded squares form an anagram of a song by Creedence Clearwater Revival. When you've worked out what it is, send your answer to: Uncut February 2012 Xword Comp, 9th floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St, London SE10SU. The first three correct entries picked at random will win the prize. Closing date: January 30, 2012. This competition is only open to European residents.

ANSWERS FOR TAKE 175

ANSWERS ACROSS

11 Bad As Me, 5+17D That'll Be The Day, 10+23A Cee Lo Green, 11 Example, 12 Ummagumma, 13+29D Young Girl, 15 Neo, 16 Eleanor Rigby, 18 Tea, 20 Hats, 22 Detours, 24 Nero, 30 Gira, 31 Eat, 32 My Star, 33 Tams.

ANSWERS DOWN

1 Because The Night, 2 Dream Letter, 3+28A Shotgun Wedding, 4 Evermore, 6+26A Happy Jack, 7+34A The Sun Years, 8 Let's Go, 9 I Am A Bird Now, 14 Never, 18 Turn Into, 19 Ask, 25 O'Jays, 27 Kane, 32+21D Ms Grace.

HIDDEN ANSWER

"Rain Dogs"

Crossword compiled by Trevor Hungerford

UNCUT

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Stop me

if you've heard this one before

WHO: GRACE JONES **WHERE:** MILAN, JULY 1989

“GRICE! GRICE! GRIIIICE!” The voice is getting louder. Suddenly the limousine door opens and a young Italian woman throws herself into the back, where Grace Jones is sitting. Grace swears as the woman throws herself across her lap (and mine, as I’m sitting next to her). “I LOVE YOU GRICE!” wails the woman as she thrashes about in the back of the limo.

It’s been a long day...

It began in London when the *NME* commissioned me to go and interview Grace Jones, on the occasion of the release of her latest album *Bulletproof Heart*. Nowadays Jones is rightly revered as a unique figure in popular music, a post-modern blend of fashion and dance who finally proved her brilliance beyond all doubt with 2008’s album *Hurricane*, but in 1989, her golden age – Sly and Robbie-produced and Jean Paul Goudé-styled – seemed long gone. But she was still Grace Jones, so I jumped at the chance to interview her. Also it was in Milan, a city I had never visited, largely because I have the fashion sense of a fire-damaged clown.

Laconic rock photography legend Derek Ridgers and I flew to Italy together, which was in itself a joy. Derek’s dry view of life made every assignment with him a delight, whether discussing his old college chum Freddie Mercury (“or Freddie Bulsara as I knew him then”) or – my favourite moment – correcting Peter Cook’s knowledge of history in a voice not dissimilar to Cook’s (“Goering’s dead,” said Derek, interrupting Cook’s musings on which Nazi he’d play in a film. “You’re quite right,” noted Cook. “Goering is dead.”) Derek, as a noted lensman of London club life, was ideal for this assignment, which was to take place around a nightclub PA by Grace, who would perform her new single, “Love On Top Of Love”, and a couple more oldies, then move on.

We met Grace in her hotel, where she was attended by one of her dancers, a young gay black man whose name, sadly, escapes me, so I’ll call him Michael because that’s a nice name. Michael was one of the most cheerful men I have ever met and it was easy to see why Grace liked to hang out with him. As he stood in the room dressed in little more than some leather straps, he reminisced about his previous life, as a crewman on an American aircraft carrier. “I loved being in the Navy,” he told us. “One time President Reagan came and inspected us. I don’t remember a thing about it, though, because I was tripping on acid the whole time.”

The interview with Grace is short, but entirely pleasant. At no point does her well-known



Grace and David, 1989: fashionista and fashionista

As the girl hits the ground, Grace Jones kicks her prone form, and she begins to roll down the hill

fearsomeness emerge, and she is even affable when I ask her about former lover Jean-Paul Goudé’s art for her records. I’m very happy and, when he’s got his shot in the hotel, so is Derek.

We head off to the gig, where Grace does her brief PA and the three of us end up at the bar (Michael has disappeared, possibly consumed by a Ronald Reagan-inspired acid flashback). I think we may have a drink or two as the evening is going terrifically well. Certainly Grace’s friendliness has emboldened Derek, who asks Grace if he can be photographed with her. This may or may not be something to do with the fact that she is wearing a two-piece body stocking whose opacity is questionable. Even though Grace Jones commands huge sums of money for being photographed (I expect), she readily agrees. Derek hands me his camera, I briefly enjoy the bizarreness of asking Grace Jones to smile for me, and just before I press the button, she pulls down the lower half of her

body stocking, revealing what the French may call her *jardin des femmes*. The moment is captured for posterity.

“I can’t believe you did that,” I say to Grace. “I know!” she laughs, “And I’m the daughter of a minister, too!” “You are!” I agree, possibly drunk now. “You’re the son of a preacher man!” Grace finds this hysterical, and it is probably now that I have my photograph taken with her, too. I have to say that I have no memory of this picture being taken, and in fact, looking at it now I wonder if perhaps it’s a photo of Grace Jones and Freddie Garrity from Freddie And The Dreamers.

The evening winds down, which is probably a good thing, and we are invited to return to the hotel in Grace’s limousine, definitely a good thing. The car, a long black limousine of the kind whose bumper Grace has previously invited her listeners to pull up to, rolls up to the side of the kerb and we get in. And just as we are about to move off, a high keening voice fills the air. “GRICE! GRICE! GRICE!” The young Italian woman pulls open the door and literally dives across Grace’s lap, becoming the first person ever to crowdsurf in a limo.

Other stars would have burst into tears or at best yelled for security. Not Grace Jones. With a mighty oath, she pushed the woman out of the car, which I should have mentioned was parked on the side of a hill with a 40% gradient. As the woman landed on the pavement, Grace Jones kicked her prone form, and the woman began to roll down the hill, still, quite remarkably, yelling “GRICE! I LOVE YOU GRICE!” “Fuck off!” shouted Grace, aiming blows with her expensively clad feet. “GRICE!” shouted the woman, rolling further down the hill like a distressed bolster. Finally the woman was nowhere to be seen, so Grace got back in the limo and we returned to the hotel, where the next morning I got up with a head like Satan’s vineyard and walked through the bleak empty streets of Milan, looking for a cab to the airport. Derek was long gone, and so was Grace Jones.

Since then, our paths have not crossed. I worked on *So Graham Norton* when Grace was a guest and, I was told, asked to change hotels because she could see buses from her bedroom window. And I saw her perform at Latitude a couple of years ago, where she ignored the wind and lashing rain and won over a festival crowd. Grace Jones truly is a rock legend. I love her, although I might think twice about leaping into the back of a limousine and telling her.

David Quantick

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