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PAGE 65!

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THE SHINS

PORT OF MORROW

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COLUMBIA

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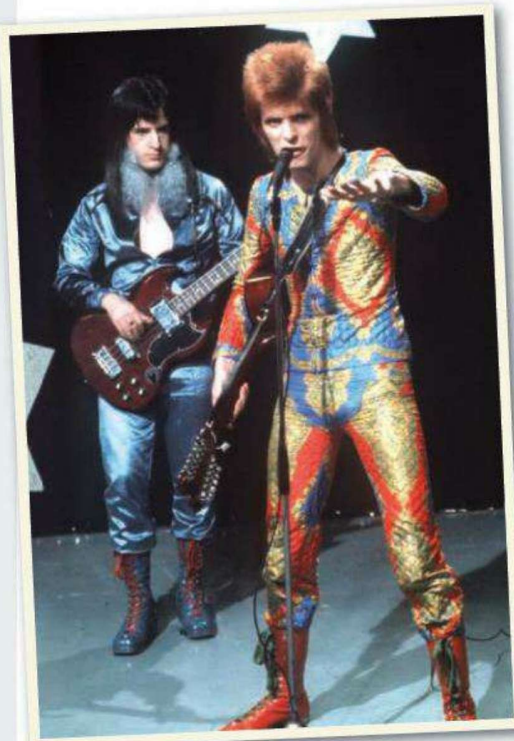
Folk eclectic Andrew Bird

Are we rolling?



DAVID BOWIE AS WE ARE OFTEN REMINDED is among many other things a master of reinvention. It seems more than a little appropriate then that he's on the cover of this month's issue. We have a new look, after all – nothing quite as gaudy, let's say, as Bowie in his high-glam period decked out in a sparkling Yamamoto leotard with only one trouser leg and a single sleeve, although if asked I couldn't truthfully vouch for what our art department might wear on one of their nights out, when their evident preference for whiskery country rock and plaid shirts may be revealed as a bit of a bluff, a hitherto publicly unacknowledged taste for sequins and boas actually their costume of choice, as it was once mine.

How many other *Uncut* readers, I wonder, were so similarly smitten by



the musical brilliance of *Ziggy Stardust* and the startling make-over Bowie affected for its launch 40 years ago that they were soon cutting an outlandish dash in surely quite comical attempts at sartorial emulation. For my own part, by the time I saw Bowie a week into the Ziggy tour, at Bristol's Colson Hall, on June 13, 1972, I had thoroughly discarded what the typical teenage art student of the era was more than likely to wear. Out went the loon pants and granddad vests. In came the Mary Quant boots, blouses from Dorothy Perkins, an occasional hint of my girlfriend's mascara, a bit of blush if I was in the mood, assorted bangles, bracelets and scarves. A friend named Charlie had a shop in Bristol, a trendy boutique, I suppose you'd call it, from which were plundered sundry pairs of what I thought were uniquely fetching polka-dot hipsters, tight enough to cut off the circulation below the waist, and velvet jackets with shoulder pads that wouldn't be as fashionable again until *Dynasty*.

Anyway, back to our new look. The changes we've made to *Uncut* may feel

Rising Starmen: Trevor Bolder and Bowie on *Lift Off* With Ayshea, June 15, 1972

initially a bit strange, like walking into a familiar room and finding the furniture's been moved around, not everything where it was the last time you looked and one or two pieces missing, replaced by things you've never seen before. I don't think you're going to need a satnav system, however, to find your way around or discover, for instance, that *My Life In Music* has moved to the back, that other favourite regulars are in some cases further into the features section than they were previously and there's a new front section, Instant Karma!. There's a contents column to your left, though, should you need it. As promised last month, the biggest change to our content is a major overhaul and expansion of our reviews section, for many readers the reason you buy *Uncut*. Music reviews are now split into two sections, with more detail than ever, to guide you through the month's new releases and to help you negotiate the sometimes mind-boggling multi-format reissues of classic albums – as is the case with Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, reviewed in this issue (on page 91), for instance.

We're looking forward to hearing what you think of the new *Uncut* – and also the revamped uncut.co.uk. You can email me at the usual address: allan_jones@ipcmedia.com

Allan Jones

INSTANT KARMA!

THIS MONTH: PETE TOWNSHEND | REAL ESTATE | THE CONGOS





FIRST LISTEN

“Same attitude, different times”

BOBBY WOMACK, ‘Greatest Man In The Universe’, returns, helped by Damon Albarn – “like a young Sam Cooke,” reckons Bobby

Photo: Gijsbert Hanekroot

IT’S BEEN a trying time for me,” sighs Bobby Womack, “but my dream is fulfilled, and I’m glad that Damon helped me do it.”

The veteran soul singer is talking about his new album, *The Greatest Man In The Universe*, a startling collaboration between himself, Damon Albarn and XL Records’ boss Richard Russell. Recorded mostly at Albarn’s west London studio, the record sets Womack’s familiar rasping vocals and trademark guitar funk to a variety of electro beats and distorted, dub-style backings. It’s unmistakably Womack, but not as we have ever heard him.

As a brave, experimental, candid and often pain-filled album, *The Greatest Man...* is something of a counterpart to *I’m New Here*, the 2010 album that Russell produced for another soul veteran, the late Gil Scott-Heron. Yet Womack’s album is high energy by comparison, a defiant roar from a man who is no stranger to mortality.

“I was in hospital for six weeks with prostate cancer,” says Womack, “but I came through it. And when I first got involved with Damon a couple of years back with Gorillaz, I was coming out of a long period of heavy drug use. I’d never heard of Gorillaz when he rang me, but my daughter loved them and told me they were hot.

“Working with Damon was one of the best things that ever happened to me. He is a special soul. I have known a few of those, though many of them, people like Sam Cooke and Wilson Pickett, have passed on. Damon is like a younger version of that old school, someone who actually believes in you and lets you express yourself.”

It was Albarn who approached Richard Russell with the idea of the album – the two men had bonded while on an Oxfam project,

DRC Music, in the Congo. “I had a gut feeling about the project,” says Russell, “firstly because Bobby’s spirit is so strong, it’s present in that incredible voice of his. I also know Damon is a do-er, he gets things done.”

Bobby Womack performing in his office in Los Angeles, 1974

GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

...CONTINUED

"Working in the studio was a total joy. It was a small team, with Bobby on guitar, Damon on keyboards and other instruments, myself on drums and samples, and Harold Payne, who has collaborated with Bobby since the 1970s [*Lana Del Rey* also guests]. It was open and free, with no egos involved... everyone was surprised how easy it was, really."

Though some songs on *The Greatest Man...* are new, others date back to Womack's early career in the 1960s and '70s, when he turned heads first with The Valentinos, and later with solo classics like *Across 110th Street* and *The Poet*. The title track is a case in point. "*The greatest man in the universe is the one who has forgiven birth*," howls Womack to a cavernous production punctuated by stark beats. It sounds like a mature man coming to terms with his history, but, says the singer, "I wrote that over 40 years ago. Damon and Richard were shocked when I told them, but it's a case of 'same attitude, different times'. When you tell the truth you never go out of style."



Womack appearing with Damon Albarn's Gorillaz project

Other songs reflect Womack's gospel roots. "Deep River" talks about the fabled "home over Jordan", while "Solid Ground" is almost the kind of hallelujah chorus that he sang as a boy in church in Cleveland, albeit set to a clatter of uptempo digital drums. Much of the record, though, is about the agony of a relationship breakup. "Trying To Hold On" wonders, "Did I get close to your soul?" and "Looking For My Yesterdays" pitches the anguish of regret against a distorted psych piano.

Womack is cagey about the inspiration behind such songs, though one suspects the divorce from his second wife might have something to do with them. "There is pain there," says Richard Russell, "but also joy on songs like 'Jubilee'. Guys from a background like Bobby's are tough."

For Womack, making the album was an uplifting experience, and its radical settings for the songs was "something that was always in me but which I wasn't allowed to explore. When I toured with Gorillaz I met kids whose parents had told them about me, it brought tears to my eyes. I'm distressed when I see people talk about the way Michael Jackson died, about the drugs he was on, rather than about his music. Is that going to happen to me? I hope not."

Besides *The Greatest Man...*, Womack has another project in the making. *The Best Is Yet To Come*, an LP with a cast of Stevie Wonder, the late Teena Marie, Ronnie Isley, Snoop Dogg and Rod Stewart, among others. "It's aimed primarily at America," says Womack. "How stupid can America be that it doesn't recognise what it has, its soul heritage? I'm saying, 'Wake up and smell the coffee'." **NEIL SPENCER**

The Greatest Man In The Universe is out in June on XL



Give thanks for (l-r) M Geddes Gengras, Sun Araw and The Congos

Into the Lion's Den

Jamaican psych-dub showdown! SUN ARAW travels to the heart of THE CONGOS' country...

THE FOUR JAMAICANS sat outside on the stoop are older, rather whiter of beard than the faces that peer out from *Heart Of The Congos*, one of the most legendary records to have emerged from Lee 'Scratch' Perry's Black Ark Studio. When their voices twine together, though, it is clear exactly why one might want to fly a couple of thousand miles to seek them out. Ashanti Roy, speaking to *Uncut* from the The Congos' Lion's Den studio, laughs in assent. "You know," he says, "All the people of the world like The Congos' harmonies."

Our occasion to talk is *Icon Give Thank*, an album in the FRKWYS series, which sets vintage acts in collaboration with like-minded forebears. In early 2011, two psychedelic-minded Californian musicians, Sun Araw's Cameron Stallones and M Geddes Gengras, travelled to meet The Congos at their home in Jamaica. Holing up in the group's St Catherine compound, the meeting is documented by film crew Icon Eye, who piece it back together as a sort of hallucinogenic travelogue. The Congos blend up fruit and nut cocktails, pass the

chalice, and take their visitors out for a sail through the Jamaican surf. Working out of Lion's Den, Stallones and Geddes assembled psychedelic, spaced-out pieces of music for The Congos to set vocals to, with rhythms and textures touched by dub but floating in their very own dreamscape. "The one thing that Ged and I were pretty sure of was that the only thing we could do is... well, whatever it is we do," says Stallones. "So in that sense, making the music seemed completely natural. Sort of a haven from the strangeness of everything else."

Geddes is effusive about the experience. "The whole trip felt like the best dream ever. And, a year later, I still haven't woken up from it." Schedule permitting, some UK shows are in the pipeline. In the meantime, says Ashanti, Stallones and Geddes have an open invitation to return.

"Anytime," he says. "If they want to work again, we are right here." **LOUIS PATTISON**

Icon Give Thank by Sun Araw & M Geddes Gengras *Meet The Congos* is released by RVNG INTL on April 9





Making maths exciting:
Pete Townshend and
Lawrence Ball

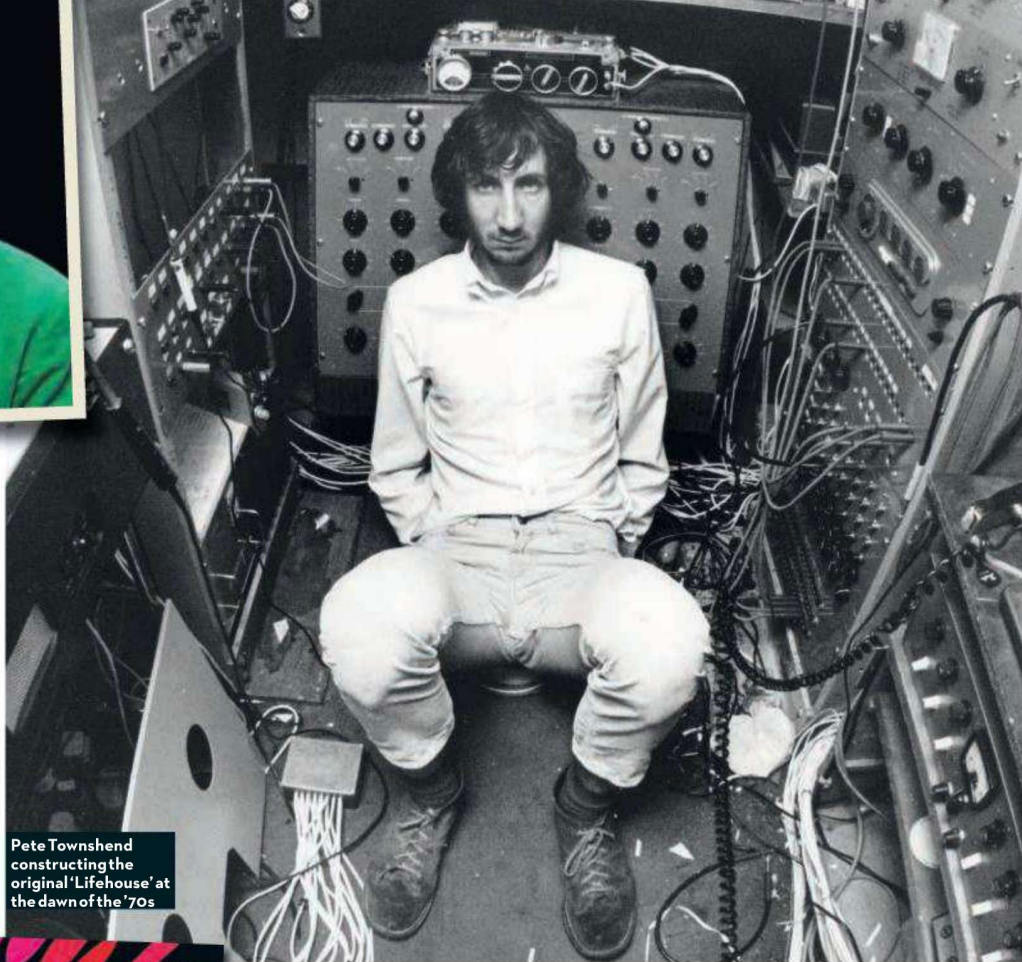
Who's in the 'house?

Forty years on, Pete Townshend finally produces the 'Lifehouse' album - for someone else! "Another chapter," he says...

"IN THE UNFOLDING of 'Lifehouse' there is no 'now'," says Pete Townshend. "We wait patiently for the singularity to catch up with us." Forty years ago, Townshend imagined compiling a personal profile for every member of The Who's audience, feeding each one into a computer to create a "celestial cacophony". This vision led to 'Lifehouse', his legendary unrealised rock-opera with a formidable afterlife.

When composer Lawrence Ball later began formulating a musical system called Harmonic Maths, Townshend recognised a kindred spirit. "I heard some of Lawrence's compositions when we communicated about Terry Riley, and I realised then that he and I had some harmonic and modal stuff in common," he says. "I spoke to him and it became immediately clear he was my man."

In 2007 the pair launched The Lifehouse Method, a website inspired by Townshend's original concept, capable of producing millions of unique pieces by converting personal data into



Pete Townshend constructing the original 'Lifehouse' at the dawn of the '70s



fucking time, Pete!" It doesn't really address the Who audience. It's a complex art project."

To determine how The Lifehouse Method would function, Ball produced preliminary "testbed pieces". These have been collected on *Method Music*, a Townshend-produced album of multi-layered electronic instrumentals. It nods to 'Lifehouse's origins on "Meher Baba Piece", a tribute to "Baba O'Riley" which Townshend

musical decisions. "People could enter a photograph, two sounds and a rhythm to create a musical portrait of themselves," says Ball. Over 10,000 people participated. Many were baffled. "They emailed saying,

'This is a waste of my

later recycled for "Fragments" on *Endless Wire*. "It all goes around and around," says Ball. "Pete loves all that! He was enormously enthusiastic, although quite insistent and very tenacious, which could be a little uncomfortable."

Ball imagines The Lifehouse Method being installed in the National Portrait Gallery, allowing visitors to enter a booth to create an almost instant musical portrait. Townshend mentions setting up access codes to a "compositional website", and an ambitious live event. "At this stage, letting people hear their completed Method pieces recorded carefully will possibly convince them to visit us again for the next chapter," he says. "And 'Lifehouse' will have another chapter."

GRAEME THOMSON

Method Music by Lawrence Ball is out now on Navona



"Telstar" legend
Clem Cattini

AND ON DRUMS... CLEM CATTINI

UNCUT'S GUIDE TO ROCK'S GREATEST SESSION PLAYERS

➤ "If I'd known pop music was going to be as important as this 30 years ago, I'd have played better," said British session drummer Clem Cattini - though since he played on 44 No 1 records, he must have done OK. Cattini, still working today aged 74, turned down the drummer's seat in Led Zeppelin, and was recently portrayed by James Corden in *Telstar: The Joe Meek Story*.

KEY SESSIONS Johnny Kidd & The Pirates' "Shakin' All Over" (Cattini's drum break was added because the song was too

short); The Tornados' "Telstar"; The Kinks' "You Really Got Me"; The Walker Brothers' "Make It Easy On Yourself" and "The Sun Ain't Gonna Shine Anymore"; Thunderclap Newman's "Something In The Air"; all of Dusty Springfield's UK sessions; Gene Pitney's "Something's Gotten Hold Of My Heart"; Jeff Beck's "Hi Ho Silver Lining"; Lou Reed's first solo album; The Wombles; and, most recently, Paul Weller's "No Tears To Cry" (from 2010's *Wake Up The Nation*).

PHIL KING



WE'RE NEW HERE

REAL ESTATE

Recommended this month:
the new kings of American
jangle pop

DAYS, THE SECOND album by Real Estate is a quiet masterpiece, a collection of reflective and personal indie rock songs, whose recollections of formative years spent in a pleasant, unchanging part of New Jersey is mirrored in the glacial repetitions of the band's guitar lines. The model for this sound, however, was actually a rather more turbulent world of drugs and divorce. Namely, 1970s rock.

"We wanted it to sound timeless, like it was made in the 1970s – not like it was made last year," says Martin Courtney, who writes most of Real Estate's songs. "We wanted a Fleetwood Mac-style production, like these soft-rock bands: smooth guitar sounds and clear drum sounds."

However they arrived there, Real Estate (that's Courtney, accompanied by bassist Alex Bleeker and lead guitarist Matt Mondanile) have made a record that nonetheless harks back not only to their own untroubled adolescences, but also those of people of a certain age, whose formative years were soundtracked by 1980s bands like The Smiths and, particularly, Felt.

It's been an album that has seen this unassuming group move from a world of making records in people's basements to that of releasing great singles (the fabulously catchy "It's Real",



Real Estate are reflective, in more ways than one: (l-r) Martin, Alex and Matt

and their latest "Easy"), making videos, touring and even acquiring celebrity fans.

"It's cool," says Courtney. "We read that Jason Schwartzman liked the record, so Alex emailed him and said, 'We hear you're into our album, that's so sick, you should come to the show!'"

Despite a prolonged email exchange with the *Rushmore* and *Bored To Death* star, confirming their mutual respects and discussing their technical setup (Schwartzman is also a musician), the actor's commitments have so far prevented him from seeing Real Estate in the flesh.

"But maybe one day," says Courtney. "The invitation stands."

JOHN ROBINSON

"Easy" is out on Domino on March 5

OUT NOW



REAL ESTATE

(WOODSIST, 2009)

A song about surfing was all it took for RE to be called "surf pop", oddly. The real story on their lo-fi debut, though, was the understated charm on offer.



DAYS

(DOMINO, 2011)

Better production, and a greater thematic confidence in their songwriting made the band's C86-invoking second a quiet smash. A swoon seemed appropriate.

THE UNCUT PLAYLIST

ON THE STEREO THIS MONTH...

NEIL YOUNG & CRAZY HORSE

Horse Back

NEILYOUNG.COM

A 37-minute stream of monolithic jams from the reconvened Horse, accompanied by footage of their gear. Includes one of their best ever takes on "Cortez The Killer".

JACK WHITE III

Love Interruption

THIRDMAN/XL

The insidious first taste of White's solo debut, *Blunderbuss*. A countryish sideswerve after Insane Clown Posse hook-ups and U2 covers. B-side "Machine Gun Silhouette" is great, too.

DR JOHN

Locked Down

NONESUCH

The good doctor decamps to Nashville, where Black Key Dan Auerbach produces

an edgy, sensational return to *Gris-Gris* territory.

DANIEL ROSSEN

Silent Hour/Golden Mile

WARP

Exquisite chamber pop EP; not miles away from Rossen's work in Grizzly Bear, it's fair to say.

HUSH ARBORS/ ARBOURETUM

Aureola

THRILL JOCKEY

Two skilled contemporary psych acts split an LP; honours go, just, to the heavy-duty folk-rock of Baltimore's Arboretum.

ORBITAL

Wonky

ACP/ADA

An ecstatic return to form from the cinematically inclined Hartnoll brothers – their best, in fact, since *In Sides* 16 years ago.



TY SEGALL & WHITE FENCE

Hair

DRAG CITY

Action-packed garage rock symposium from Segall and Tim 'White Fence' Presley (both pictured, above). Freak-outs aplenty, also featuring Mikal Cronin.

ELEPHANT MICAH

Louder Than Thou

PRODUCT OF PALMYRA

Understated gem from

Bloomington, Indiana folklorist Joe O'Connell, here sounding like a blessed hybrid of John Martyn and Will Oldham.

LIGHTSHIPS

Electric Cables

GEOGRAPHIC

Conceived at a pace leisurely even by Teenage Fanclub standards, Gerard Love finally delivers his first, predictably lovely, solo album.

GRAHAM COXON

A&E

PARLOPHONE

The Blur guitarist's eighth and best solo effort, with some of his most vigorous and experimental playing since 13.

For regular updates, check our blogs at www.uncut.co.uk and follow @JohnRMulvey on Twitter

A QUICK ONE



DEXYS RETURN

An auspicious comeback this summer, as Dexys (the 'Midnight Runners' has been dropped) release their first album in 27 years, and Kevin Rowland's first since 1999's notorious *My Beauty, One Day I'm Going To Soar* is due on June 4; early clips sound terrific.

BOSS TOURS

Bruce Springsteen will be taking out an expanded E Street Band when his tour starts in Atlanta on March 18. Among the auxiliary singers and horn players, one name stands out – saxophonist Jake Clemons, who'll be stepping into the very big shoes of his late Uncle Clarence.



REM SPECIAL

The latest of our *Ultimate Music Guide* specials is a 148-page monster on the subject of REM. In-depth new essays on every REM album from the *Uncut* team, plus a host of insightful features from the *NME* and *Melody Maker* archives, unseen for years. Look out for it in newsagents on March 15.

UNCUT ONLINE

It's not just the magazine that's had a makeover – www.uncut.co.uk, with news, reviews and blogs, has been radically upgraded.

DAVID QUANTICK



Stop me, if you think you've heard this one before

I'VE JUST READ *Here Comes Everybody*, the brilliant autobiography by Pogues accordionist James Fearnley, which has resonance for me because I was there for a lot of it, hanging around the Hope And Anchor, the Pindar Of Wakefield or the Clarendon Ballroom in the band's earlyish days.

The early days of a band are thrilling and with The Pogues it was no exception. I became one of their crowd of hangers-on, stealing setlists and shouting for obscure oldies ("King Of The Bop!"). Spider Stacy crashed in my bedsit ("Fancy a drink?" he said as he woke up, a Pogues song in human form), and I once found myself in the Devonshire



The gang of lovable Pogues in their early years

Arms with the band and their producer Elvis Costello, later to marry bassist Cait O'Riordan.

The Devonshire was across the road from the very un-Pogues-like breakfast telly company TV-am, and their presenters drank there. Which is how I ended up asking their weather lady for her autograph "for Elvis". Not that he'd asked for it, of course. I recently found the same weather lady on Twitter and reminded her of the event. She remembered it. I wonder, though, if Elvis Costello has ever sifted through a trunkload of ephemera and wondered why he has a piece of paper inscribed "To Elvis, lots of love, Wincey Willis."

Here Comes Everybody is published by Faber & Faber in May



EMA will be bringing her scary T-shirt collection to *Uncut's* Great Escape bill

Uncut at The Great Escape

EMA, WILLY MASON and TOY are all confirmed for our nights at the Brighton festival in May



Willy Mason (above) makes his long-awaited return, while Beth Jeans Houghton (below) sets out to show off her debut



UNCUT LIVE

UNCUT WILL BE decamping to Brighton in May for The Great Escape and, as usual, we'll be curating a stage at this excellent festival of new music. We're hosting shows on all three nights (May 10-12), featuring EMA, BETH JEANS HOUGHTON, WILLY MASON,

TOY and FOREST SWORDS.

2011's *Past Life Martyred Saints* revealed EMA – that's Erika M Anderson – to be one of the most compelling US singer-songwriters to emerge in recent memory. EMA will be joined on the Uncut Stage by Newcastle's Beth Jeans Houghton & The Hooves Of Destiny, whose eccentric folk-pop has garnered comparisons with Kate Bush and Bat For Lashes.

Look out, too, for the return of Martha's Vineyard troubadour Willy Mason, muzzy Merseyside soundscaper Forest Swords, and the psychedelic workouts of a terrific new London band, Toy.

We'll soon be announcing the rest of the Uncut Stage acts; keep an eye on www.uncut.co.uk for the latest. In the meantime, though, you could do worse than visit www.escapegreat.com and pick up one of their 'Early Bird' three-day tickets, at £45, for the whole festival.

EUROPE'S LEADING FESTIVAL FOR NEW MUSIC
THE GREAT ESCAPE

The Great Escape takes place at venues across Brighton on May 10-12 – for more information, head to www.escapegreat.com

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THE GUARDIAN ★★★★★ UNCUT ★★★★★★
SUNDAY TIMES ★★★★★ THE INDEPENDENT ★★★★★★

4AD

WATCH THAT BAND!

Your guide to our pick of new music for 2012

THERE ARE SOME dependable *Uncut* favourites on this month's CD, which includes tracks from albums by Lambchop, whose *Mr M* is in many respects a return to the glories of *Nixon*, The Hold Steady's Craig Finn, whose first solo album, *Clear Heart Full Eyes*, takes him into welcome new musical territory, and Simone Felice, formerly of The Felice Brothers and The Duke & The King, whose own solo debut is released next month.

Elsewhere, among cuts by the likes of Dirty Three, Shearwater and Andrew Bird, our CD features gems from some less familiar names – a number of them new even to us, like Sweet Lights and Elephant Micah – whose new albums have contributed to a great start to a musical year that, if it continues like this, promises to be truly memorable.



1 SWEET LIGHTS

The Ballad Of Kurt Vile #2

Sweet Lights' Shai Halperin briefly played guitar alongside Adam Granduciel and Kurt Vile in an early lineup of The War On Drugs. This hazily beautiful track with its sparkling guitars and wispy vocals from his new project evokes more the mood of Vile's *Smoke Ring For My Halo* than WOD's *Wagonwheel Blues* or *Slave Ambient*, but the detailed arrangements and layered production are reminiscent of both.

2 SIMONE FELICE

New York Times

Echoes of The Felice Bros and The Duke & The King, as you'd expect, but tinged with a more reflective, solitary mien on Simone's solo debut, which includes this vividly dramatic take on a song that's been a highlight of his live set for a couple of years.

3 ELEPHANT MICAH

My Cousin's King

MC Taylor of Hiss Golden

Messenger turned *Uncut* on to Elephant Micah, aka Joe O'Connell. Taylor hears hints of John Martyn and Richard & Linda Thompson, and elsewhere there's an evident kinship with Will Oldham, although you may find "My Cousin's King" bears a more than passing resemblance to early-'70s Neil Young.

4 BETH JEANS HOUGHTON & THE HOOVES OF DESTINY

Dodecahedron

The 21-year-old Georgie singer-songwriter's voice has a distinct touch of Vashti Bunyan on this sparkling slice of chamber folk-pop from her debut, *Yours Truly*, Cellophane Nose, lushly burnished by Blur/Elbow producer Ben Hillier.

5 FIRST AID KIT

Emmylou

Swedish sisters Klara and Johanna Söderberg knew the easy way to *Uncut*'s heart by name-checking

not only Emmylou and Gram but June and Johnny Cash on this enchanting song from their second album, *The Lion's Roar*, recorded in Nebraska with Bright Eyes' Mike Mogis.

6 CRAIG FINN

Apollo Bay

Finn's temporary break from The Hold Steady has clearly had a liberating influence on his writing.



This slow, swampy blues, which opens his solo debut, brilliantly evokes the world-weary vibe of Dylan's *Time Out Of Mind*.

7 ANAIS MITCHELL

Dyin' Day

Young Man In America, the follow-up to her ambitious 2010 'folk opera',

Hadestown, locates Mitchell in the same kind of allegorical American frontier landscape conjured by Dylan on *John Wesley Harding*, here with added fiddles and mandolin.

8 ANDREW BIRD

Orpheo Looks Back

Classically trained Chicago violinist turned quixotic pop auteur Bird dips his bow into Celtic and Appalachian folk memories on this haunting track from the follow-up to 2009's acclaimed *Noble Beast*.

9 JULIA HOLTER

In The Same Room

Tinkling harpsichord, drifting ambience and ethereal vocals pitch the crystalline pleasures of the 27-year-old LA singer's *Ekstasis* album somewhere between Joanna Newsom, Julianna Barwick and Holter's close friend and sometime-collaborator Linda Perhacs.

10 TALL FIRS

Waiting On A Friend

After "21 years of saditude" (as their label aptly puts it), no sign of any mood change from Dave Mies and Aaron Mullan, their guitars and voices intertwined as one on this expression of exquisite resignation from the duo's third album, *Out Of It And Into It*.

11 DJANGO DJANGO

Wor

David Maclean's art-rock quartet evoke The Beta Band on a swashbuckling debut – no surprise as the band's David Maclean is the younger brother of BB's

John. This fun-fuelled cocktail of Bo Diddley, The Shadows and glam rock is typical of the swagger.

12 LAMBCHOP

If Not I'll Just Die

Deconstructed Nelson Riddle strings and a mood of elegant despair from Kurt Wagner on the opener from Lambchop's first LP since '08's *OH (Ohio)* and best since career highlight *Nixon* a dozen years ago.

13 SHEARWATER

Breaking The Yearlings

Former Okkervil River man Jonathan Meiburg and crew sail into rockier waters on their eighth album, *Animal Joy* – a set of urgent, disquieting songs that evoke influences such as Talk Talk and perhaps Talking Heads.

14 SUN ARAW, M GEDDES GENGRAS, THE CONGOS

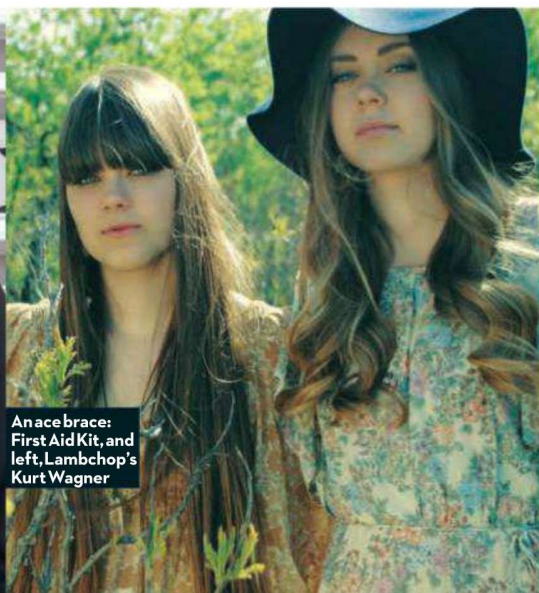
Happy Song

The inspired teaming of the audacious LA psych-experimentalists with righteous '70s Jamaican reggae legends The Congos creates a thrillingly mystical meditation of other-worldly vocals and cosmic jamming, taking dub-reggae places it's never been before.

15 DIRTY THREE

Moon On The Land

Sparse, absorbing aesthetics from the Australian trio, making a welcome return on their first album since 2005's *Cinder* – and sounding more immune to pop fad and fashion than ever.



Anacebrace:
First Aid Kit, and
left, Lambchop's
Kurt Wagner

AN AUDIENCE WITH...

Milke Scott

Interview: John Lewis
Photo: Paul Mac Manus

The bookish Waterboy talks Dylan, Yeats, turning away from 'The Big Music' and getting through more bandmembers than Mark E Smith

M

IKE SCOTT RECENTLY completed his memoirs, which will be published sometime in the next year. It's a fitting undertaking for a man who is obsessed with rock autobiographies (he counts Keith Richards' and Bob Dylan's as benchmarks, and his current favourite is Joe Jackson's *A Cure For Gravity*). Scott's book,

Kiss The Wind: A Waterboy's Adventures In Music, chronicles his life between 1969 and 2000, with diversions into music, art, spirituality and national identity. "It starts with me on a bus in Edinburgh, aged nine. It's about the sounds that were going on in my head, thinking about music, being obsessed with The Beatles."

Scott, the Edinburgh-born, Dublin-based 53-year-old singer-songwriter who remains the one constant member of The Waterboys since 1983, is an unusually bookish rock star. His latest project has been to artfully and convincingly set some of WB Yeats' work to music – transforming the Nobel Laureate's poetry into folk songs, blues shuffles and rock ballads. "It took me years to write," he says. "I had a copy of Yeats' *Collected Poems* on my piano, and every day I'd work through it, page by page, seeing if a poem suggested a certain melody. It's the album I've wanted to make for 30 years!"

STAR QUESTION



There are so many great-as-yet-unreleased outtakes from the *Fisherman's Blues* sessions; why won't you end the madness and just release them all? I'm thinking: deluxe boxset. Full-colour booklet. *Fisherman's Box*. There. That's the title. You can use that.

Colin Meloy, *The Decemberists*
Ha, I absolutely love it! Maybe we'll do that in 2013, for the 25th anniversary. I actually burned Colin about 10 CD-Rs of everything we did during those sessions. There's probably two more CDs of releasable stuff. I think that most of the best stuff has already come out, although there are a few gems among the unreleased material. It was a ridiculously fertile time.

We must have recorded about 100 songs. And I lost perspective. I didn't know which ones to pick. So I guess we'll have to release the *Fisherman's Box* and let you all decide. Thanks for the title, Colin!

You often finish your shows with a cover version. Which do you wish you'd written?

John Christian Gahr, *Norway*
Ha ha, all of them! Around about 1986 we used to do "Purple Rain", during the height of Prince's greatness, as a cheeky nod to him. We did Bruce Springsteen's "Independence Day" for a while, with a hip hop rhythm. Recently we've been doing a '60s Northern Soul classic called "Do I Love You (Indeed I Do)", which is by the great Frank Wilson. But the song I'll always come back to is "Jumpin' Jack Flash". I've been playing that since I was in my first garage band in the '70s. Every now and then,



usually without telling the rest of The Waterboys, I'll crack into that riff, and they'll have to sink or swim.

You've obviously been inspired by the poetry of WB Yeats for many years now. What is it about his work that attracts you more than other poets?

John Sweet, *Loughborough*
I like that he rhymes and scans, which is very useful when you're trying to set his words to music! And I like the subjects that he writes about. But, most of all, I like the way he uses words. Every word he writes seems very considered, almost sculpted. But at the same time there's a lightness to it. I think that's a mark of his skill. Did I study literature? I did English Literature and Language for a year at Edinburgh University, but I didn't study it. I studied punk rock. It was 1977! What was a boy to do? I don't think I'd have been much good at university. I like to choose what I read myself and study according to my own fascinations.

STAR QUESTION



When I was a Watergirl, you encouraged me to improvise freely and fearlessly over your song "The

Big Music". Do you have any methods about getting the best from the players you work with?

Eddi Reader

Well, I like players to be themselves, along the lines of what I said to Eddi all those years ago. I like them to express themselves, to not feel circumscribed or controlled. I believe less direction is more direction. I try not to give too many instructions to musicians, just let them slot in. But every musician is different. Some require a bit of direction, some don't require any; some require careful handling, some you can slag off and it's water off a duck's back. So they're all different. I like to get to know a musician before I figure out how I'm going to deal with them. There have been quite a few people who've gone through The Waterboys! I think it's more than 60 at the last count. Which is more than The Fall! I'm very pleased when they go on to do great things, like Eddi, and Sharon Shannon, and Guy Chambers, and Karl Wallinger and all the rest.

Bob Dylan continues to confound expectations. Are you at ease with his latest incarnation as a circus barker/incaging bluesman?

Bob Fletcher, *Northampton*
I think it suits him! Is Dylan a friend of mine? I wouldn't



*“I did English
at Edinburgh
University, but
I didn’t ‘study’ it
– I studied punk
rock. It was
1977!”*

MIKE SCOTT

→ say a friend, although I met him twice, and had a fine time with him. He'd said some really nice things about the record I had out. I liked him a lot. He was very gracious, really good company. Have I read his biog? Of course! It's terrific, and beautiful. I'm a bit disconcerted to hear allegations that he lifted whole paragraphs from other people's books. But I thought it was a beautiful read.

Are you a pantheist? A theosophist? A Blavatskian? A happy hybrid? I'm quite curious to hear your views on religion and spirituality!

Andrew JK Madigan, Al Ain, UAE

I'm a unique hybrid, but the closest would be a pantheist. I see all the different religions as the different attempts by various human cultures in their times to make sense of reality. But I don't follow any of them. And I think everyone sees the world slightly differently, conditioned by our upbringing, our surroundings, our environment. And if we can step out of those conditioning factors, it might give us a different perspective. I've spent a lot of my life trying to increase my own perspective, so that I have a better understanding. I've used meditation and I've learned how to use my intuition, and learned how to be honest and realistic with myself, to not bullshit myself. Because human beings' capacity for self-trickery is just humongous.

STAR QUESTION



If WB Yeats is No 1, who is No 2?

Rosanne Cash

Ha ha! I guess that presupposes that WB Yeats is No 1.

I'm not going to put Robert Burns No 2. I'm Scottish! I can't put my guy No 2 to the Irish lad! So who'd be the Irish No 2, after Yeats? It would surely be JM Synge, the playwright and author. He did write poetry, but he wasn't as good a poet as he was a playwright, kinda the opposite of Yeats. But I'm a huge fan of Synge's work to. How do I know Rosanne? Well, first, from Twitter. Like a lot of people I've met on Twitter, we've ended up friends. We've met her several times in New York since then.



After "The Whole Of The Moon", The Waterboys could have become massive, in a similar vein to U2. Was it a conscious decision to forsake that path and revert to the roots music of Fisherman's Blues?

Kathy Sweet, Leicestershire

No, not at all. That's actually a misconception – "The Whole Of The Moon" was a big hit on its second release in 1991, but it wasn't a hit in 1985. It was at that time that I moved to Ireland and started doing the *Fisherman's Blues* music. I'd brought Steve Wickham [fiddle] into the band and our sax player Anthony Thistlethwaite moved to mandolin. So suddenly this new form of music was available to us. Thing is, I was frustrated with the 'Big Music' sound. I loved making those records but it was impossible to reproduce them onstage. Suddenly, Steve's fiddle and Anthony's mandolin made a new sound that sounded the same in the studio as it was onstage. I liked that and went in that direction. With every intention of it being as successful, if not more, than what I'd done previously.

Do you wish Richard Curtis had used one of your songs in *Four Weddings And A Funeral*?

Neil, Lincolnshire

Sure! I'd have liked him to have used my songs in any film that he makes. I'd never met him, and then last year Richard wrote a wonderful article in *The Guardian* about how much he loved The Waterboys. I've



Portraits of the artist: (left) Scott with a painting of WB Yeats, Dublin, 2009; (above) playing the quintessential waterboy, New York State, January 1993

"More than 60 people have been in The Waterboys at the last count. That's more than The Fall!"

since had dinner with him. He's a splendid chap and I've enjoyed his films for years.

Around 2008 I had a project called *The Pan I Am* and you and I exchanged ideas via email. One idea was a lyric called "London Mick", which I believe was about Mick Jones. Will the song ever see the light of day?

Edward "Larrikin" Leeson, Larrikin Love/Sunless '97

Every now and then I go back to the lyric and work on it. But I would like to use it, and thanks for the reminder, Ed! That's usually the way I write songs. Occasionally, I'll go into a trance and write lyrics without knowing where they come from, and it's a beautiful experience. If I knew how to turn that on, I would do it every day!

Do you long for a pint of stout in a snug in Spiddal with the smell of burning turf in the air?

Shaun McLaughlin, Moville, Donegal, Ireland

Ha ha! I long for the snug, and the smell of the turf, and the being in Spiddal, but not the stout. I stopped drinking 20 years ago. I would wake up in the morning and think, "Where am I going to have my first pint?" My tippie of choice these days would be a cup of green tea. Or a decaff cappuccino.

On Twitter, you're something of a connoisseur of the Dublin busker. Who's your favourite?

Garry O'Shea, Dún Laoghaire, Co Dublin

My favourite buskers tend to be one-man bands. There's a terrific little guy at the moment, Cameron Europe, who manages to play a drum groove with a bass drum, a snare and a hi hat as well as playing guitar and singing. One evening I was walking up Grafton Street with Steve Wickham and Steve noticed that one guy was doing one of my old songs, "And A Bang On The Ear"! I got a bit shy, as I often do in that situation. It's odd but it's a lovely experience. It's the Robbie Burns: "Oh had some power the giftie gie us/To see oursel's as others see us". Just for that moment I get to hear my own music as a regular punter. I'm always grateful for that.

What books are you reading at the moment?

Nick S, Gloucester

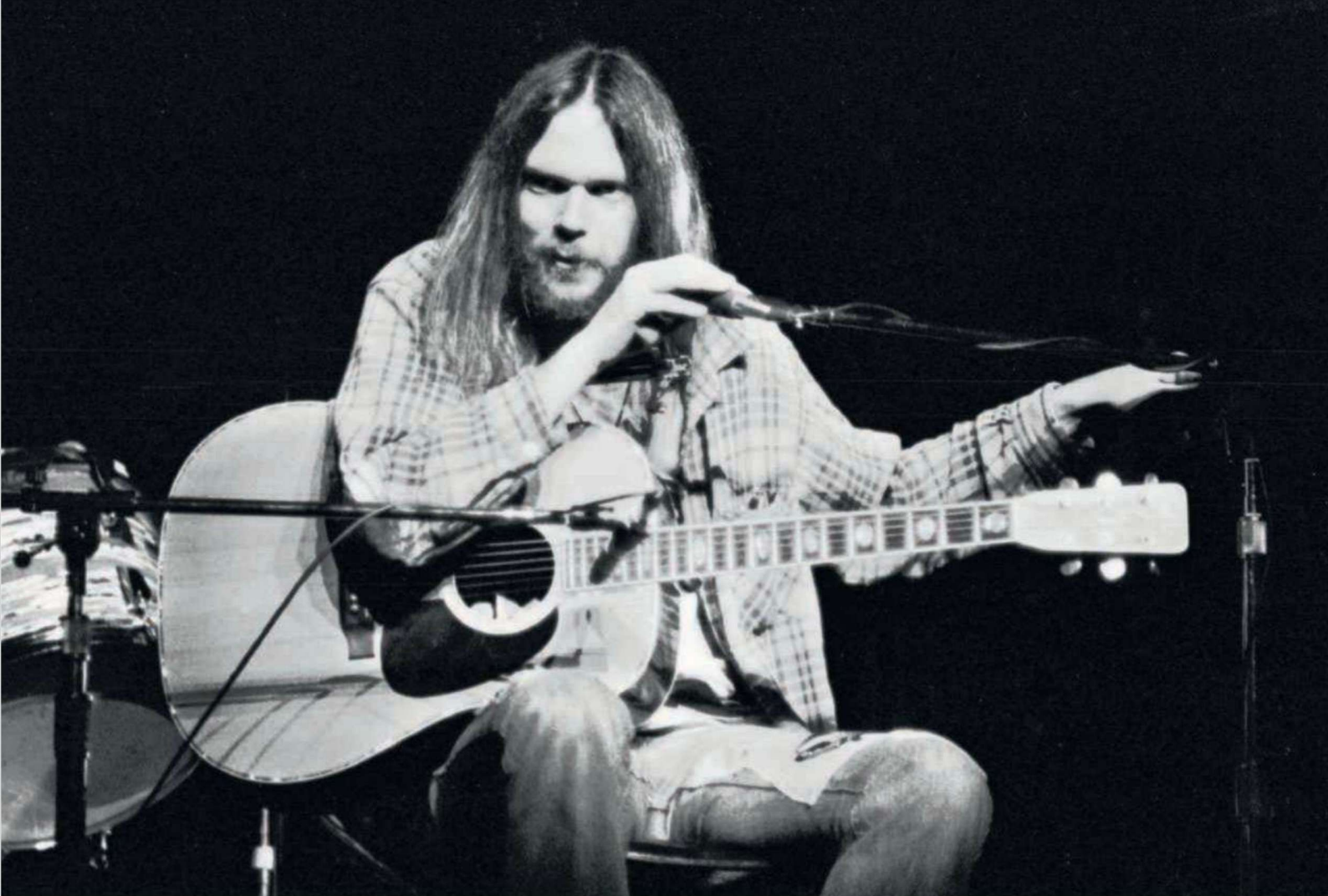
I always have three or four books on the go. I've been reading *Voodoo Histories* by David Aaronovitch, a debunking of all the most common conspiracy theories. And *Like A Hurricane*, by Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior: about the American Indian protests of the late '60s and early '70s. And *Sex At Dawn* by Christopher Ryan and Cacilda Jethá, which is not so much about sex, but about mating and partnership and marriage and the evolution of human relations. And a terrific history of New York music in the 1970s by *Rolling Stone* critic Will Hermes, called *Love Goes To Buildings On Fire*. I bought that in New York, it's released here later this year, I think. ☺

ON THE ROAD The Waterboys tour the UK this March, April and May, beginning the shows at *The Sage in Gateshead* on March 20

hunky dory

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OPENS IN CINEMAS MARCH 2

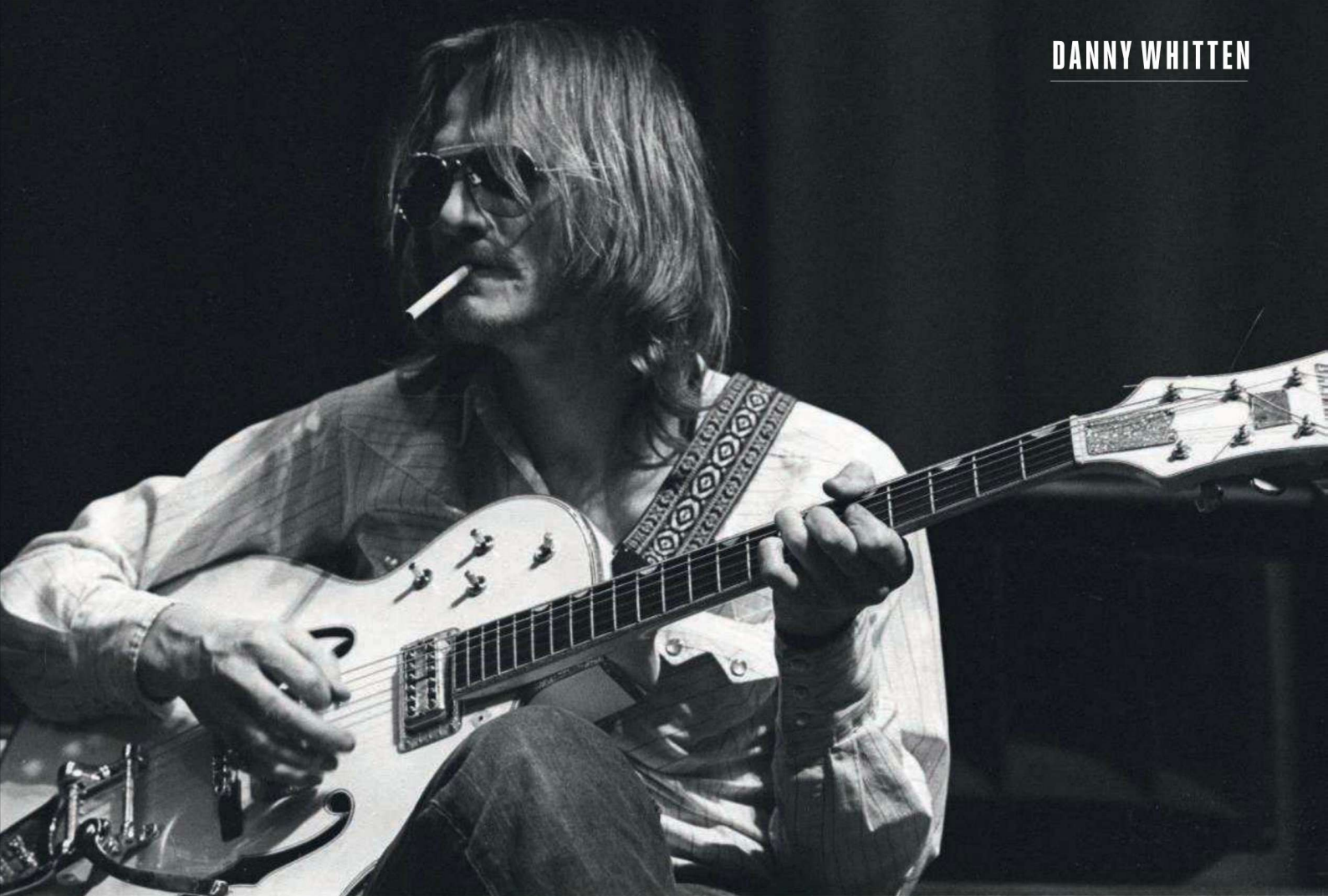


“I watched the needle take another man”

DANNY WHITTEN was Neil Young’s intuitive sparring partner in Crazy Horse, and a gifted singer-songwriter in his own right.

By the end of 1972, however, he was dead, remembered more for the brutal song he inspired – “The Needle And The Damage Done” – than the brilliant music he made. What happened?

Story: David Cavanagh
Photos: Henry Diltz & Getty Images



The news of Kurt Cobain's death reached LA's Mondrian Hotel at around lunchtime. Billy Talbot and Ralph Molina – bassist and drummer with Crazy Horse – were very subdued. For the rest of the day, they remained in a mood best described as unreadable. Thinking about Cobain? Sure they were. It was an inexplicable loss of a young man half their age. But they were also thinking of someone from their past. They were thinking of Danny Whitten, Crazy Horse's original leader, who died in 1972.

With Talbot and Molina that afternoon was the English songwriter Ian McNabb, with whom they'd recently been recording. McNabb picked up a guitar and started to sing Whitten's famous ballad "I Don't Want To Talk About It" (opening line: "I can tell by your eyes that you've probably been crying forever"). The song was fragile; forlorn verging on the bereaved – and a powder keg to drop into the room at that moment. Talbot and Molina hesitated, then nodded their recognition and began gently crooning harmonies. McNabb played it again and again, as if sensing their need to hear it.

"It must have been weird for them," McNabb says today. "Danny Whitten even looked a bit like Cobain. All day, Billy kept saying 'fragile souls, fragile souls'. Hearing them talk about Danny, I got the feeling he was a lot more important than history gives him credit for."

If we want to hear Whitten the musician, we reach for Crazy Horse's self-titled 1971 album or Neil Young & Crazy Horse's *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere* (1969), where Whitten sings the high harmony on "Cinnamon Girl" and his guitar spars and jousts with Neil's on "Down By The River" and "Cowgirl In The Sand".

Whitten sadly didn't leave much else behind. To his friends, however, he left an impression that never fades. Author Jimmy McDonough encountered it during

TRACK FACTS

"The Needle And The Damage Done"

► Neil Young (who never took heroin himself) wrote the song about an unnamed heroin addict, believed to be Whitten

► The song's first line mentions a "cellar door". Neil Young & Crazy Horse, with Whitten, had played Washington DC's Cellar Door club in 1969

► Young's famous version was recorded live at the University Of California in January 1971, a year before it appeared on his *Harvest* album

► Young performed it at Live Aid in 1985

► It's been sung by Laura Marling, Pete Doherty, Pearl Jam, Duran Duran, The Pretenders and more

► Young's fellow songwriter Randy Newman considers it to be the best song Neil's ever written

research for his Young biography, *Shakey*.

"You want to know the vibe when I asked people about Danny? Ever heard the Little Walter song 'Last Night'? Graveyard tempo; 3 am lyrics; mournful as a hoot owl at midnight. That's the kind of zone people went to when I asked about Danny. That guy stopped everybody's clock."

ON NOVEMBER 18, it will be 40 years since Whitten died of valium and alcohol poisoning (not a heroin overdose as is often stated), less than 24 hours after being fired by Neil Young during rehearsals for a North American tour. Whitten's bloodstream may have been clean of heroin that night, but his life had been in freefall for some time: his addiction was the backstory to Young's "The Needle And The Damage Done", and Crazy Horse – stymied by Whitten's unreliability – had sacked him in 1971.

"If you're thrown a life raft and ignore it, maybe you don't want saving," suggests Ralph Molina. "Danny spent about a week at my place. We got him into a treatment centre, which he left. We did what we could. He laid on my sofa with his eyes rolled back. Hindsight? I'm sure there was more we could have done. I said, 'Danny, we can't get anything done musically, the way you are now.' The problem is, they don't hear you. It's the drug." Molina recalls Whitten begging to be allowed back in Crazy Horse. He also remembers it being too late.

Whitten ended up a tragic, helpless figure. On that first Horse album he sings, "I'm gonna die, aren't you/As sure as the sky is blue" – words which became terribly poignant. And yet go back a decade and the young man dancing for the customers at Hollywood's Peppermint West nightclub stood out for his clean-cut looks, neat blond hair and fresh-faced enthusiasm. ➔

"I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT"

Danny Whitten's hit for Rod the Mod

When Rod Stewart (below) had a UK No 1 in 1977 with "I Don't Want To Talk About It", many thought he'd written it himself. He hadn't. It was a Danny Whitten song from Crazy Horse's '71 debut LP. Since 1968, Whitten had been working on the tearful ballad without being able to finish the lyrics. In the studio with Crazy Horse, he was too sick from heroin to write the second verse. Nils Lofgren suggested two lines of a new verse ("If I stand all alone") and repeated Whitten's couplet about the stars being a mirror. The track was done in one take with Lofgren and Whitten on chairs facing each other, and Ry Cooder on bottleneck guitar.

In 1975, three years after Whitten's death, Crazy Horse co-manager Ron Stone heard that Stewart was making *Atlantic Crossing*. He drove to the studio and played him "I Don't Want To Talk About It". Rod cut it immediately. It's since been covered by Everything But The Girl, Rita Coolidge, Rod Stewart (again), Dina Carroll, Indigo Girls and Alex Parks, generating royalties for Whitten's family. "His sister was able to put her kids through college. Danny would be happy about that," says Billy Talbot.

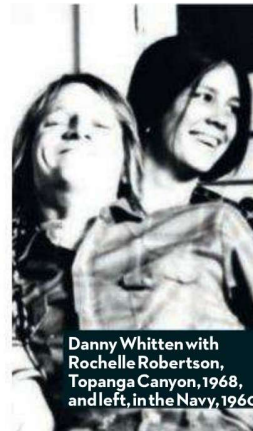
➔ Molina: "He looked like a surfer boy. Great dancer. That's how we all ate back then. Danny would enter the dance contests at the Peppermint West and come in first or second."

Depending on the tune, he danced the Pony, the Jerk, the Twist, the Mashed Potato. "He was really good," Billy Talbot confirms. "He could make a place really happen."

Whitten had had a poor upbringing in Georgia and Ohio, with an absent father and a mother who worked several jobs to feed Danny and his sister. In 1960, at 17, he'd joined the Navy where, fatefully, he developed rheumatoid arthritis in his knees. Doctors warned him he'd be confined to a wheelchair in middle age; at the Peppermint he was often in pain when he danced. But when he sang, he had a sweet voice with a warm vibrato. Whitten, Talbot and Molina formed a doowop group, Danny & The Memories. A year later, in 1966, they became The Psyrcle, a soul-influenced act. They moved to San Francisco, making a record with Sly Stone. They had no success. Whitten began to grow his hair and smoke pot. He was at the Human Be-In in Golden Gate Park, dropping Owsley acid with Suzy Creamcheese. Robin Lane, a girl singer who'd befriended Whitten in the mid-'60s, was surprised by his appearance when the band returned to LA in '67. "I'd first met Danny when I was in high school and he was a dancer on *Shindig!*. He wore cashmere sweaters. Then, a year or two years later, he was a hippy and he had long hair and wore Pendleton shirts."

Whitten, Talbot and Molina – now reinvented as The Rockets – rented a house in Laurel Canyon. The singer-songwriter boom would be born there, and everyone who moved to the Canyon would have an opinion, not necessarily a flattering one, about The Rockets. David Crosby would call them the worst band in history, and suggest that they should have been shot at birth. In 1968 they were still comparatively new to their instruments – Whitten played guitar in a funky, chunky style; Talbot and Molina were more rudimentary – but their lack of chops meant they sometimes jammed on the same chord for 30-minute stretches. Where their critics heard only sloppy tempos and bum notes, a tall Canadian on a passing visit to Laurel Canyon saw one of rock's greatest groove bands drop right into his lap. He renamed them Crazy Horse.

PRIOR TO CRAZY HORSE, Whitten wasn't on any music fan's radar as a guitarist. But by 1969, he was going for it in legendary style with Young on *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*. Young has often said that he never clicked with



Danny Whitten with Rochelle Robertson, Topanga Canyon, 1968, and left, in the Navy, 1960



Whitten, Allen Chance, Frank Somers, Chango (the dog) and Willie B Hinds, Topanga Canyon, 1967

"Danny was magical with Neil. Their guitar-playing was a beautiful combination"

BILLY TALBOT

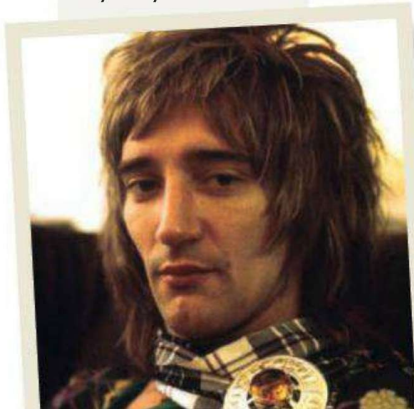
any musician the way he clicked with Whitten. Barry Goldberg, producer of The Rockets' self-titled 1968 album, could see it was a special relationship: "Danny was magical with Neil. Their guitar-playing was a beautiful combination." Talbot puts it like this: "It's about skipping the ego and going for the music. It's like BB King says – if you're provin', you're not groovin'. It's not about trying to impress someone or get a point across. When you're beyond all that, and you're connected emotionally, that's what Neil Young & Crazy Horse had together." When they played live, Whitten and Young could sound like they'd been musical brothers for years rather than weeks. Nils Lofgren, the teen prodigy guitarist who was to join Crazy Horse in 1970, was blown away by an early gig he saw in Washington DC. "The communication was very visceral and natural," he remembers. "Danny heard things in a similar fashion to Neil, in terms of leaving space and staying out of the way."

Neil Young & Crazy Horse got plenty of attention, and some of it was directed at

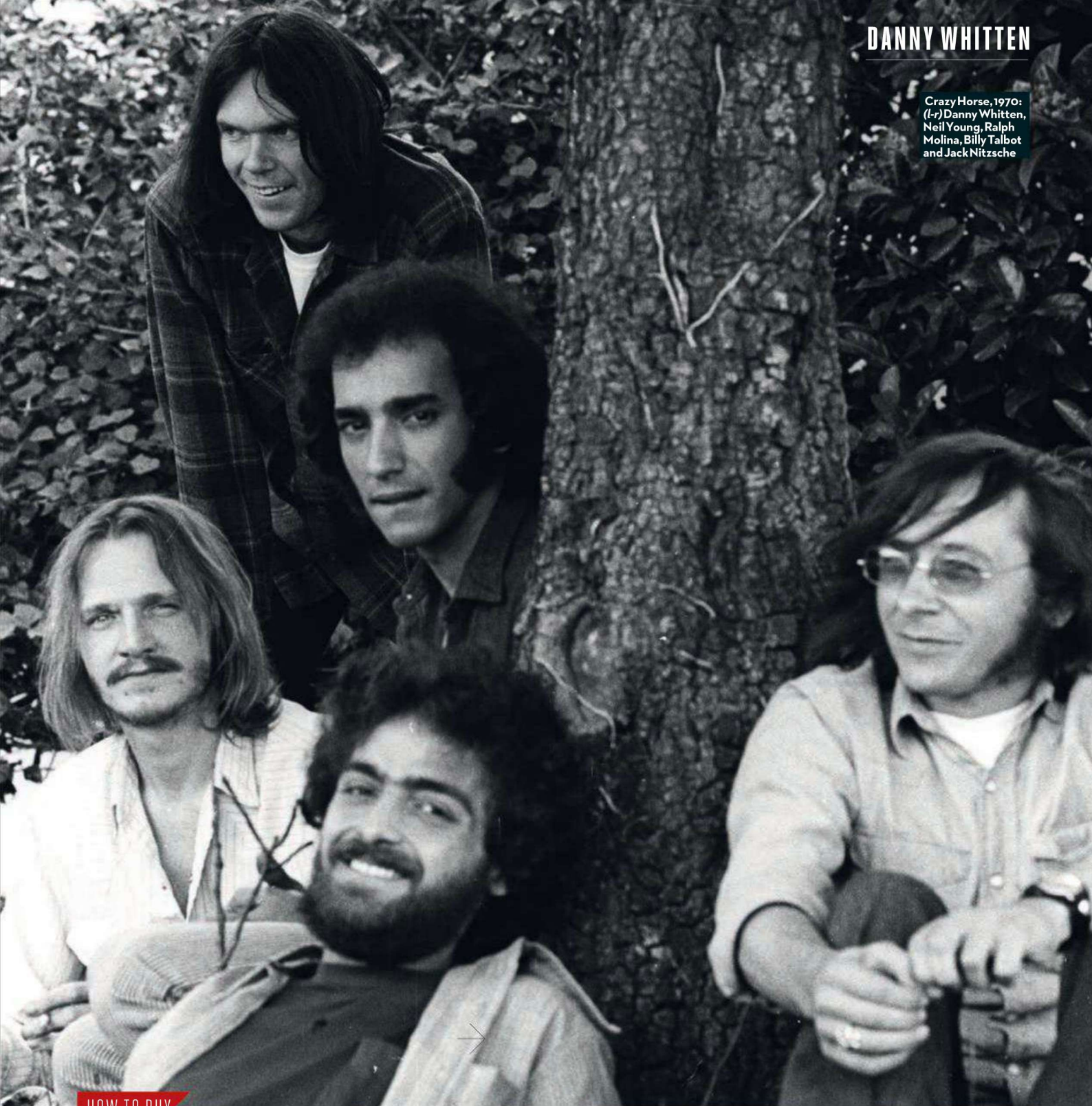
Whitten. "Danny was an excellent singer," notes their co-manager Ron Stone. "Neil had a thin, upper-range voice. Danny was actually the better vocalist." According to Stone, Whitten seemed happy to play rhythm guitar "with no aspirations" while Neil soloed – possibly without realising that this might become a defining issue in both their lives. Stone: "Think about it for a moment. This is precisely what Neil wanted. He'd come out of Buffalo Springfield where he and Stephen Stills spent most of their time competing as lead guitarists. What Neil wanted was a rhythm section that would do precisely what he asked." You could argue that Crazy Horse are still doing that in 2012. It's just that Whitten is no longer onstage.

Although Whitten (born May 8, 1943) was two years older than Young, their friendship worked more on Young's terms. Robin Lane, who sang on "Round & Round (It Won't Be Long)" on *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*, observes: "Neil was always the senior guy. That's partly because of the way Danny was. Danny was like the cushion that you could lean on." But friends agree that Whitten reached a point where he was frustrated at being Young's perennial sideman. Nils Lofgren, who'd moved to LA and become part of Young's scene, recalls that "one of the underlying themes was always that Crazy Horse were headed towards making a record featuring Danny as lead vocalist. Danny, once in a while, would get a little impatient about it. I remember [co-manager] Elliot Roberts saying, 'Hey Danny, relax, it'll happen.'"

It did happen. But it happened to a young man in considerable pain. He dismayed Molina one day by



Crazy Horse, 1970:
(l-r) Danny Whitten,
Neil Young, Ralph
Molina, Billy Talbot
and Jack Nitzsche



HOW TO BUY

DANNY WHITTEN ON RECORD

Six of the best from the multi-talented musician

DANNY & THE MEMORIES

CAN'T HELP LOVING
THAT GIRL OF MINE
VALIANT, 1965



5/10

Doowop ballad sung by Whitten while The Four Seasons do a fair job of imitating. Where to find it: YouTube.

THE ROCKETS

WHITE WHALE, 1968

Psychedelic rock with electric violin and LSD-drenched lyrics. "Well, I wake up in the morning/Can't find my mind..." Where to find it: Rev-Ola reissue CD.



6/10

NEIL YOUNG & CRAZY HORSE

EVERYBODY
KNOWS THIS IS
NOWHERE

REPRISE, 1969



10/10

Whitten's guitar (left channel) adds fire and atmosphere to everything Neil plays. Note their duet on "Cinnamon Girl"; that's Danny exclaiming "woo!" as Neil starts the solo.

NEIL YOUNG & CRAZY HORSE

LIVE AT THE
FILLMORE EAST

REPRISE, 2006



9/10

A 1970 concert with Whitten and Young at full throttle. Includes a 16-minute "Cowgirl In The Sand" and Whitten's "Come On Baby Let's Go Downtown".

NEIL YOUNG

AFTER THE
GOLD RUSH

REPRISE, 1970



9/10

Whitten, whose health was failing, plays on less than half the songs, including "When You Dance I Can Really Love" and "I Believe In You".

CRAZY HORSE

REPRISE, 1971



9/10

Defying his decline, he sings eight of the eleven tracks. Highlights: "I'll Get By", "Look At All The Things" and the timeless "I Don't Want To Talk About It".



Musical brothers: Young and Whitten onstage circa 1970

➔ saying he'd prefer to die than grow old and see wrinkles in the mirror. He had never really come to terms with his mother's death five years earlier. He sometimes burst into tears without warning. "Danny was deep," says Talbot. "He was an earth sign. He was a leader – but a silent leader, not an outgoing one." And in the meantime he had discovered the ultimate painkiller.

NILS LOFGREN WILL never forget the 1973 Tonight's The Night tour. Whitten loomed large over the concerts, even in death. Young's roadie Bruce Berry was dead, too, and Lofgren describes the tour as "a wake": insane, tequila-fuelled and grief-stricken. "There was a lot of improvised rapping where Neil would be pounding the piano and talking about Bruce Berry 'putting it in his arm'. I'd usually jump up on the piano with my combat boots, which had ankle weights because the record was so dark and slow that I needed to feel weighted down to the tempo: that deep dirge of darkness."

"Heroin was definitely seen as something detrimental," Talbot says unequivocally. "Ralph and I never took it, and neither did Neil. We backed off out of fear or caution. But Danny was in a lot of pain, and you can imagine how much better he might have felt when he took heroin." It took about two years, calculates Talbot, for Whitten to go from the golden boy to "a person you didn't want to be around". He lied, he cheated, he stole.

In late 1970, Crazy Horse – boosted to a quintet by Lofgren (lead guitar) and Jack Nitzsche (keyboards) – recorded their first LP. It had five Whitten songs on it. It was the chance he'd waited for. But he was in poor condition in the studio: apathetic, half-asleep. He couldn't be bothered to tune his guitar. Lofgren tuned it for him, and put his 'phones on for good measure. Whitten then amazed them by singing like a dream on every song he attempted. "Everything was falling apart around him," Lofgren marvels, "but when you put an in-tune guitar into his hands, it was like a light popped on." All the same, Lofgren concedes he had Whitten in mind

"I FELT RESPONSIBLE"

How Young gave Whitten one last chance...

In late '72, after a year in the wilderness, Whitten got a chance to redeem himself. Neil Young hired him to play guitar on the Time Fades Away tour, starting the following January. These were Young's first major shows since *Harvest* and the stakes were high. Whitten was put on a \$100 weekly retainer and warned to stay off heroin. "It was a great chance if he chose to get his act together," notes Nils Lofgren. But when rehearsals began at Broken Arrow, Whitten struggled to learn new songs. The other players watched aghast as he fell asleep standing up. He insisted he was heroin-free and was 'only' using valium – with vodka top-ups to help his nerves. "The mystery," writes Jimmy McDonough in *Shakey*, "is how anyone could've thought Danny was in good enough shape for any kind of

tour." Indeed, the only person who seemed to think so was Young. "Neil was convinced Danny was gonna be great again," Young's girlfriend Carrie Snodgrass told McDonough. But with a high-profile tour fast approaching, even Neil stopped deluding himself. On November 18 he gave Whitten \$50 and a plane ticket back to L.A. On the flight, Danny was so drunk he had to be restrained. He died later that day in a friend's bathroom, of acute valium and vodka poisoning. Some believe it was accidental; others suspect suicide. "The coroner called me and told me he'd OD'd," Young later recalled. "That blew my mind. Fucking blew my mind. I loved Danny. I felt responsible." Young has admitted he continued to blame himself for Whitten's death for several years.

"Put an in-tune guitar in Danny's hands, it was like a light popped on"

NILS LOFGREN

when he wrote Crazy Horse song "Beggars Day": "I've lost control of my darker side."

After making the Crazy Horse LP, Whitten visited Lofgren at the latter's farmhouse in Maryland. Lofgren was hoping to revive Whitten's spirits by inviting him to join Grin, his acclaimed trio, as second guitarist and co-vocalist. But Whitten arrived in appalling shape. The abuse had worn him out. He was sombre and listless, as though the light had been extinguished. "But you do your best to rally him, even if you're out of your league," Lofgren adds. "Nowadays everyone goes to rehab. Back then, none of us were aware of that. It wasn't part of the dialogue." And so, eight years after they'd first met as dancers and doowop fans in the Peppermint West, Crazy Horse now had to confront Whitten and fire him from the band he'd once led. Talbot likens it to severing your own arm. But he stresses that Crazy Horse had no choice but to make the decision: "To go on with Crazy Horse was something we had to do because we were young men with families. I remember crying because I didn't think Danny would live that long." Whitten's intelligence, Talbot continues, would have told him that his life was being wrecked by heroin (he had overdosed once before), but something inside him was unable to stop. A simple physical addiction? Or some other unspoken need? Talbot doesn't sound sure. "Danny was complicated. He never stopped being complicated. Thinking about it, he was complicated from the beginning."

As romantic as a 'what if?' scenario can be, not many people believe that Whitten could have returned to music in any meaningful way if he'd survived the overdose that claimed his life. Robin Lane doesn't want to go there. Ron Stone suspects that Whitten's downward spiral would never have been arrested. He may not have had the stamina for a resurrection in any case. He had never toured the world, or promoted an album, or done all the things that successful people do. He left behind a few photographs of himself, nothing more, and almost no visual footage. "Danny didn't care about the bullshit or the jive," Barry Goldberg says. "He was the opposite. He was the kind of person that people take advantage of. He didn't know how to protect himself emotionally."

One or two, however, think there might have been a possibility – you never know – of Whitten staying alive and building a reputation as an important singer-songwriter. "I wish someone would release the tapes of his last session," comments

Jimmy McDonough. "One song, 'Oh Boy', might be the best thing he ever recorded and nobody's heard it. As [producer] David Briggs would say, it has the spook. Had Danny beat the devils inside, I think he would've gone on to great things. But he didn't. I'm a sucker when it comes to slow, sad songs, but I can barely listen to 'Oh Boy'. Some things in life are just too sad. Danny Whitten is one of them." 🕯

➤ For further reading, check out Michael St John's ebook, *Waterface: The Story Of Danny Whitten*, at www.dannyraywhitten.com

➤ Nils Lofgren's album *Old School* is out now

A black and white photograph of Bruce Springsteen playing a Fender Telecaster guitar. He is wearing a dark shirt and a watch on his left wrist. The image is the background for the album cover.

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STARDUST MEMORIES

To mark the 40th anniversary of DAVID BOWIE's remarkable creation, the major players reconvene to tell the whole story of Ziggy Stardust and The Spiders From Mars. Featuring... tears in the studio, inspirational Cilla Black records, Scientology, the Trans-Siberian Railway, revelations in Aylesbury, Lobster Thermidor and, of course, copious amounts of Fantasy Colours by Schwarzkopf.

PLUS! Amazing unseen photographs, with new captions from Bowie himself

Story: Garry Mulholland
Photo: Sukita



“I want to do this live thing,”

David Bowie says, walking out of the cramped control room at Trident Studios, Soho, and heading down the stairs to the vocal booth, leaving the co-producer and his young assistant wondering what he means. Bowie beckons Mick Ronson and whispers in his ear. Ronson nods. Both put on headphones and approach the same microphone.



The older man in the control room, Ken Scott (left), Bowie's co-producer on these sessions, hurriedly sets levels and adjusts faders. His young engineer, Dennis MacKay, hovers over the record button. Both know that, if they fuck up the take, it will be lost forever. David won't sing something twice if he knows he got it right first time. And he always gets it right first time. They call

him 'One-Take Bowie'. He doesn't seem to mind.

Bowie nods towards the control room. A playback begins, a stately, sparse, naked drumbeat, in 6/8 time. A single piano chord rings out... and Bowie begins to sing: “*Pushing through the market square/So many mothers sighing...*” It's clear and true, in pitch and feel, just like they've heard from Bowie on so many first takes.

They eventually work out what “the live thing” is. Bowie wants Ronson to sing the title refrain into the same mic as him, just as he means the pair to perform the song live. But as Ronson walks forward to sing “*Five years...*”, something's wrong. The guitarist looks aghast. The engineers crane their necks to see why Ronson's so freaked out. It's Bowie. He's crying, face screwed up in anguish, as he sings about an Earth with just five years left to live.

“Bowie's screaming,” recalls MacKay, still amazed at the memory 40 years later, “and what you hear on that song – the emotion – is for real. He's bawling his eyes out. Ronson was looking at Bowie, stunned. I was in shock, because... he was also hitting every note spot-on.”

“So he comes upstairs, after doing this one take. And he got some tissues and was just sitting there wiping his eyes. I was like, ‘Holy shit! How did he do that?’” Dennis MacKay has gone on to be a successful producer, and has engineered sessions for Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Elton John and Smokey Robinson. “I've worked with some great vocalists since. But no-one who could do it in one take with that much emotion.”

LET'S SLIP BACK to June 1, 1971, to a van hurtling down the A1 towards London. Inside, crammed in with a drumkit and assorted gear are the members of Ronno, a three-piece blues-rock band from Hull. Two of Ronno – guitarist/frontman Mick Ronson and drummer Mick ‘Woody’ Woodmansey – had played on Bowie's 1970 LP, *The Man Who Sold The World*. Ronson had been introduced to Bowie earlier that year by a mutual friend, drummer John Cambridge, and he'd played with Bowie ever since. Woodmansey, meanwhile, had been hired for the *Man Who Sold The World* sessions on Ronson's recommendation.

TAYLOR MADE

The tragic story of Vince Taylor, one of Bowie's inspirations for Ziggy Stardust...

➤ According to Bowie, he met British rocker Taylor in Paris in the mid-'60s, dishevelled and ranting about UFOs. Born Brian Holden in Isleworth, Middlesex, Taylor frequented the 2i's Coffee Bar in Soho, signed to Parlophone in 1958 and made one of the great early British rock singles – “Brand New Cadillac” – later covered by The Clash. But what fascinated Bowie were the tales of an acid-fried Taylor, some time after supporting the Stones at the Paris Olympia in 1964, announcing onstage in London that he was the reborn apostle Matthew. He became involved with religious cults, suffered mental disorders and eventually died from cancer in 1991, age 52.



Hull's belles: Mick Ronson in just one of his flamboyant costumes



They'd now been invited by Bowie to form part of a six-piece lineup for a John Peel-hosted Radio 1 *In Concert* show. The third member of Ronno, bassist Trevor Bolder, had only come along for the ride. Or so he thought.

“Herbie Flowers was supposed to be playing bass on that session,” Bolder recalls in his gruff but friendly Humberside tones. “When we got Woody and Ronno's gear set up, Bowie said to me, ‘Where's your bass, then? Herbie can't do it. You're gonna have to do it.’ So we had one afternoon's rehearsals doing songs from *The Man Who Sold The World* and a few songs that ended up on *Hunky Dory*, and the next day we went straight in and did the John Peel show.”

Woodmansey and Bolder were both down-to-earth Northern men. Both liked beer, and both were in relationships that have lasted to the present day. Bolder's earliest musical achievements had been as a solo cornet player in a Yorkshire brass band. But Ronson was different: a classically trained pianist and extravagantly gifted guitarist and arranger, he'd taken a leading role on *The Man Who Sold The World*. BBC DJ and *Old Grey Whistle Test* presenter Bob Harris – a friend of Bowie's since 1966 – remembers Ronson as “a contradiction to the man playing guitar in a silver Bacofol suit on *Top Of The Pops*. Quiet and insecure, but fabulously creative – some people have a sound in their head and he certainly did. Gentle, but quite forthright. There was something very kind and endearing about him. He managed to remain relatively macho while kneeling at David's feet playing guitar at crotch level. I have no idea how he pulled that off.”

The *In Concert* show, recorded on June 3 at the BBC's Paris Studios on Regent Street, went well – so well, in fact, that Bowie asked the members of Ronno to stay on in London and work on his next album. Five days later – a day before Bolder's 21st birthday – Bowie, Ronson, Woodmansey, Bolder, keyboard player Rick Wakeman, co-producer/engineer Ken Scott and second engineer Dennis MacKay entered Trident Studios to begin work on *Hunky Dory*.



Dress to impress: Bowie outside Haddon Hall, Beckenham, April 1971

EYEWITNESS!

"WE PLAYED FOOTBALL IN THE GARDEN..."

From 1969–1972, Bowie lived at Haddon Hall, 42 Southend Road, Beckenham, Kent. Trevor Bolder (right) remembers when the Spiders moved in

➤ "It was a great big house with a big driveway. Bowie had the downstairs apartment which had a great big staircase which went up to bedrooms upstairs. But upstairs was actually all blocked off,



and we had to sleep on the balcony on mattresses. David had a bedroom, living room and kitchen downstairs. It was very impressive. We were together 24 hours a day and did everything together. When we first went there it was summertime and there was a big back garden where we could play football and mess about.

Did it have a bit of a reputation back then? To be honest, apart from dope, I didn't really know what drugs were, and Bowie was completely against it. He was very, 'Just stay away from that stuff.' We were a drinking band. But there was none of that going on at Haddon Hall."

But Bowie was already thinking ahead: with the sessions for *Hunky Dory* coming to an end, Bowie astonished Scott by asking to book more time at Trident, to start his *next* record.

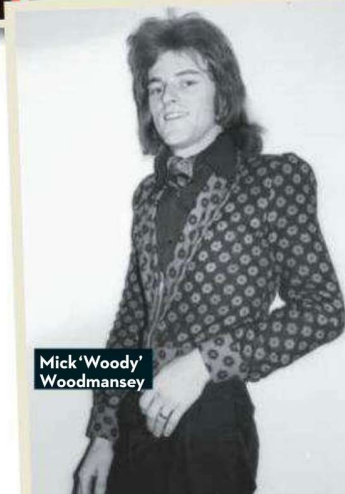
"As we were finishing off *Hunky Dory* in the mixing suite, Bowie would come in, go into the studio, sit at the piano and, unbeknownst to us, start playing his new songs," remembers MacKay. "He'd then come upstairs and sit between us, and while we were playing his last recording at blaring volume, just sit there writing. Once I asked him what he was doing, and he just said, 'I'm writing lyrics for my next song.' He then turned to Ken and said, 'I've just finished writing the next album.' But you haven't even finished making this one! That's how prolific Bowie was."

"David knew exactly what he wanted," Ken Scott acknowledges. "Some ideas came to mind as we worked on them. But there was a general understanding of what they were going to sound like. I saw him after the *Hunky Dory* sessions. He said, 'We're coming in again soon.' I said, 'You've gotta be crazy! *Hunky Dory* isn't even out yet!' He said: 'You're not gonna like this one. Its more rock'n'roll.'"

BOWIE HAD STARTED writing what would become *The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars* following his first visit to America in January 1971. It proved to be a hugely significant trip. Bowie discovered he was good at charming rooms full of hipsters, groupies and music business executives. He heard records by The Stooges and The Legendary Stardust Cowboy that quickly became obsessions. He learned that the RCA label was actively searching for a new Elvis Presley. And he went to see his heroes The Velvet Underground, and even got to meet Lou Reed after their January 27 show at New York's Electric Circus – except it wasn't Lou Reed. Bowie didn't know Reed had left the Velvets the previous August: the man Bowie enthused to about his cover of "Waiting For The Man" was Doug Yule, who had originally replaced the sacked John Cale and had now also replaced Lou.

Overcoming his initial embarrassment, Bowie became fascinated by the idea that Yule was, effectively, playing the role of Lou Reed.

During February and March 1971, Bowie demoed three new songs, "Moonage Daydream", "Hang On To Yourself" and "Lady Stardust", all inspired by his American trip. Additionally, an idea started to take shape around those new songs. Bowie had spent the previous eight years flitting capriciously between blues band leader, mod face, Anthony Newley-style novelty popster, mime and performance artist, sci-fi influenced hit-maker and hippy folkie. ➤ Now Bowie sensed an opportunity to devise a new



Mick 'Woody' Woodmansey

ARNOLD WHO..?

Who were **Arnold Corns**, and how were they connected to the Ziggy story?

➤ The 1971 Arnold Corns side-project is a small but crucial footnote in the Ziggy story. The band's versions of Ziggy songs "Moonage Daydream" and "Hang On To Yourself", which included Bowie vocals and contributions from Mick Ronson, Woody Woodmansey and Trevor Bolder, are listed as having been recorded during spring 1971 and released in May. Yet Trevor Bolder insists he didn't record with Bowie until the *Hunky Dory* sessions in June or July. Whichever way, the versions are fascinating: frantic and self-consciously quirky. "We did all the Arnold Corns sessions," says Bolder. "David's mate Freddie Burretti doing vocals and another mate Mark Carr Pritchard on second guitar. This was around August '71. Freddie Burretti was a clothes designer friend of David's. You'd think he was gay, but he had a girlfriend with him all the time. He was girly and skinny, but always wore suits. Bowie had this idea that he was going to launch Freddie as a solo artist. But he couldn't sing. They moved on from Arnold Corns to doing Mott The Hoople. Our versions were a lot heavier, a completely different feel to the Arnold Corns sessions."



➤ character inspired by his diverse fascinations with Lou, Iggy and The Legendary Stardust Cowboy, British rocker Vince Taylor, Japanese kabuki theatre and cosmologist Carl Sagan, a vocal advocate of life beyond Earth. T. Rex's

March 11, 1971 appearance on *Top Of The Pops* playing "Hot Love", with Marc Bolan in glitter and satin, opened the door on glam rock, but Bowie intended to take it to the next level. Ziggy was everything from sleazy queen to space-age prophet, teen pin-up to intellectualised art-rock.

Not that anyone in his close circle of friends was aware of this. Bowie wasn't one for discussing his latest ideas with anyone, even an old schoolfriend from Bromley, Geoff MacCormack, who joined the Spiders as tour percussionist.

"Theatre and mime and costume had always been part of what he'd done," MacCormack recalls. "He was never just a straight rock'n'roller. Did he ever explain Ziggy to me? No. I don't think he had that conversation with anybody. Not even himself."

"He never told us the concept behind the Ziggy album," adds Trevor Bolder, with wry cynicism. "It's a bunch of songs about a rock'n'roll star who kills himself at the end. Exactly what happened in real life, in a funny way."

In October, Bowie and the fledgling Spiders From Mars spent a fortnight at Underhill, a two-room rehearsal studio in Blackheath, working up the songs for the *Ziggy* album. "The Ziggy sessions were more of a band session, whereas *Hunky Dory* felt more like being a session musician," explains Bolder. "We were all really looking forward to going out as a band, rather than a solo artist with musicians behind him. That's what made *Ziggy* more special."

The band, well-drilled by Bowie, then moved on to Trident Studios on November 8.

"We had it well-prepared," recalls Bolder, and besides, as Ken Scott explains, "David didn't like being in the studio. He got bored. We'd do three or four songs in a day. Sometimes we did overdubs immediately and sometimes we waited and put them on a bit later. We'd start each session around midday and go on 'til somewhere between 8 or 10pm."



TRIDENT, WHICH CLOSED in 1981, was located at 17 St Anne's Court, separated from the Marquee Club by an alleyway. Scott, who had worked with The Beatles, the Stones and Pink Floyd, and engineered the sessions for George Harrison's *All Things Must Pass*, was Trident's in-house engineer.

"Trident was strange, physically," he explains. "It was very much like No 2 studio at Abbey Road, in as much as you had the studio and the control room was above it, on the next floor, with a window looking down on to the studio."

"There was no canteen, and the control room was really small," Bolder adds. "The desk ran right up to the door. When you went in, you'd have to slide round to make sure you didn't bang your head on the speakers. You could just about get five people in it. It had a very good grand piano that Elton John did a lot of stuff on. It had a crack in the frame that gave it this unique, bright sound. We used that piano for all the Bowie stuff."

"I used two bass guitars on *Ziggy*," Bolder continues. "A Fender Mustang, which you'll have seen in pictures from the time, and a Gibson EB3, which I still have now. I had a Carlsbro four-by-twelve cabinet and a Selmer 100W amp. Ken mic'ed me up because, in those days, they would turn the cabinet speaker to face the wall, and then encase the cabinet so no bass spillage got out. So the bass was both mic'ed up and DI'ed. If you listen you can hear the sound breaking up if I hit the strings hard. Ronno used his Gibson Les Paul. It was black originally but he stripped all the paint off it down to the natural wood. He was using a Marshall four-by-twelve cab and a Marshall 200W amplifier, which was a rare amp that gave him that unique sound."

The orchestral arrangements on "Five Years" and "Rock'n'Roll Suicide" were written by Ronson, an

EYEWITNESS!

"I SAID I'D CUT IT OFF..."

Suzi Ronson on how she created the iconic Ziggy hairstyle

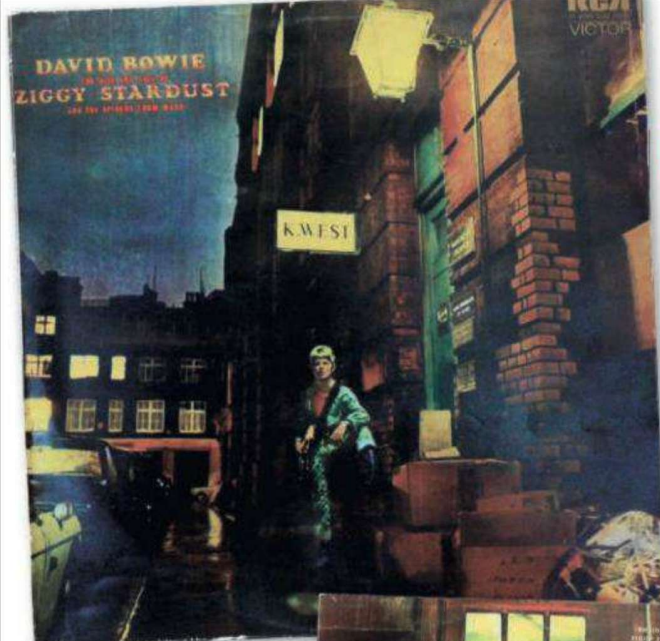
➤ Suzi Fussey was the Beckenham hairdresser who invented Bowie's iconic Ziggy mullet. Later, she became Bowie's on-tour wardrobe mistress and married Mick Ronson. "I used to do David's mother Peggy's hair. Then Peggy introduced me to David's wife Angela, who was quite the character. I did Angela's hair a couple of times and suddenly she asked me to come to Haddon Hall to meet David, and have a look at his hair. It must have been late

December 1971. David came in and he asked me what I'd do with his hair. At the time it was all Marc Bolan, and long hair was prevalent. I said, I'd cut it off. He had a great face, you see. And his body was odd; kind of girlish. He seemed excited about that. They had all these fashion magazines I'd never seen, and we came up with a combination of three hairstyles from these mags. And I just... did it, that night.

"The *Ziggy* cover shows the cut at its first stages. It's still blond. A few days after that they complained that it was still too flat. So we decided we were gonna dye it red. I used Fantasy Colours by Schwarzkopf. I did some experiments and it worked. It was far too long before I realised I'd created an iconic haircut. I should have opened a salon, been Vidal Sassoon. Not a very smart cookie."

Boy could he play guitar:
Bowie poses for Sukita a
week before his Rainbow
shows, August 1972
- the shots were originally
published in Japanese
fashion magazine an-an





EYEWITNESS!

"AT THE TIME IT WAS JUST ANOTHER JOB..."

Airbrush artist Terry Pastor remembers applying his magic touch to the Ziggy sleeve

➤ "My business partner then was George Underwood, a schoolfriend of Bowie's, so I'd already done the colouring for the *Hunky Dory* sleeve. Bowie really liked it so he gave me *Ziggy Stardust* to do. The photos were shot on a fairly wet winter's night near the photographer's studio on Heddon Street. But Bowie didn't tell me what he wanted. I hadn't heard the music. I was told to make it look nice.

"They were just black and white prints which I mounted on matte paper to keep them flat. I don't think the blue was the original colour of his suit. I just thought a turquoise-blue would look good against a dark background. I was working on the back cover one night when I got call from David, asking how it was going. I told him about the phone-box shot and he was surprised it was going to be used. So I gather from that he didn't have a lot of input. I was really dealing with Tony DeFries. I took it to his office, and that was the last I saw of the original boards. In those days, a lot of artwork was just binned by printers. Obviously, now, I wish I'd asked for it back. But at the time it was just another job."

➤ aspect of the guitarist's classical training that Bolder believes he never received enough credit for.

"Mick would write out all the session musicians' parts on sheet music. If he had a session to do he'd spend a weekend putting the arrangements together. He'd listen to a lot of records, orchestrations by other people. He used to listen to Cilla Black to get ideas. That would spark him off and then he'd sit in a room and write all the parts out. I remember Cilla Black because we all laughed about that one. But there were great orchestrations on her records."

"Ken Scott was more like an engineer-producer," explains MacKay. "The way Bowie worked was being on the talkback in the studio, saying to Woody, 'Play on the toms, man! Do some rolls. Hit the top and the floor one.' And then he'd grab his acoustic guitar and go down and establish the feel. He did dictate, but not harshly or rudely. 'Less on the bass! It's a little busy. Feel it out, man!' He didn't do guide vocals. He'd just la-la a bit live in the mic, and everybody would just fall in to what Bowie was hearing."

Ken Scott adds, "On 'Five Years', David would have told Woody what to play because that drum part was so important and so simple – no tom fills. But with a lot of the other songs it was left up to the musicians. A lot of the time Ronno seemed to be inside David's mind. We'd reach a point where it was time for him to go and do a solo, and just before either David or I said, 'OK, go down and do it,' he'd already said, 'I'd better go down and do the solo now.' Then he'd nail what was required. Instantly, without being told what to do.

"About 90-95 per cent of the vocals I recorded with Bowie were first takes," Scott continues. "There hasn't been anyone quite like that. The band weren't far behind him. The only track that took more than four takes was 'Moonage Daydream'. We got to Take 10, because there were breakdowns and false starts."

"Dave just had the most amazing vocal range," Bolder says. "Nobody could sing like him. The way he could change the character in his voice, he did that throughout his whole career. He also had an incredibly strong voice. Onstage, he was the same. He never pulled a show because he'd lost his voice. I remember sitting at the side of the stage watching him sing 'Amsterdam' or 'My Death', alone with a guitar, and he was tremendous. You were hypnotised by it."

There were few distractions in the studio. The only visitors were Bowie's wife, Angie, and his manager Tony DeFries.

The sessions were dry, apart from "a few beers for Ronno", according to Scott. But Bowie himself was a different matter. As an indicator of the changes to come over the next few months, Scott noticed modifications in Bowie's studio wear.

"He would often wear a brown and black check affair, with a hat," comments Scott. "Really tight black pants, shirt, and he would always carry a shoulder-bag of some kind, which was a bit of a throwback to his hippy days. When we first met he dressed like a folkie... baggy flares and jeans. But his image changed right after *Hunky Dory*."

"His hair got shorter," MacKay says. "He loved Japanese style, so he started reading these books and every time he came in he was wearing something more outlandish from Japan."

These sessions were completed on November 15, two days before the release of *Hunky Dory*. No-one, not least Bowie, appeared to recognise what they'd just achieved in a few short weeks. "We never, ever thought that this album would have the impact it's had," Scott says. "We were making records to last for six months, 'cos that's how often the artist had to put out records then. We never dreamed that 40 years on, we'd still have to be talking about the damn album! If we had, we'd have made notes and taken photos."

With the tracklisting at this point including covers of Chuck Berry's "Around And Around" [recorded by Bowie as "Round And Round"] and Jacques Brel's "Amsterdam" beside original compositions "Velvet Goldmine" and "Holy Holy", Ken Scott and Dennis MacKay began work on a mix. "One thing Bowie did relinquish to Ken was control over mixing, reverb, everything," says MacKay. "Bowie totally trusted him. I would work right next to Ken and when we mixed Bowie we'd do it very dynamically. Every time we got to a Woody drumfill, I'd push the drumfill. We'd just put all those dynamics in, when you hear those tracks on *Ziggy* where there's suddenly more reverb or the strings get louder. We

were very experimental with the Bowie stuff."

"David didn't warn us before he came out in the press. It was a bit of a freak-out"

TREVOR BOLDER

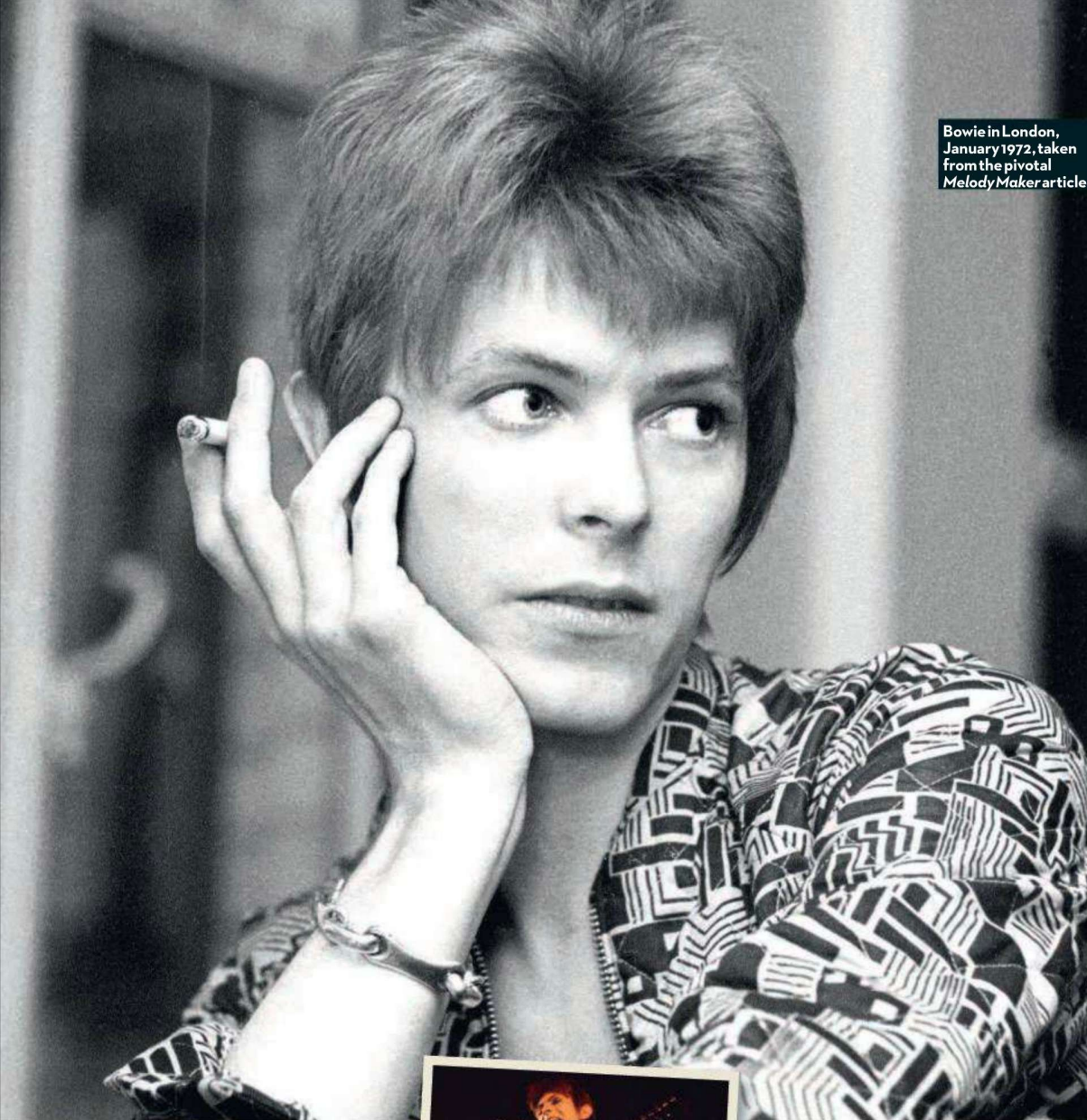
Ken Scott insists that even the running order wasn't Bowie's idea. "Because you had to make two sides of a record run roughly the same length, I would spend time when there wasn't much going on, or parts were being rehearsed, working out the timings and putting songs together so I could suggest which order would work best.

So, up to a point, the running order was dictated by the LP format. As far as I'm concerned, the whole

idea about the concept album thing... there are some songs on *Ziggy* that fit together into a certain story. But I dispute the idea that it's a concept album because why would you have 'It Ain't Easy', which was recorded for *Hunky Dory*? Why would 'Round And Round' have been on a concept album? And 'Starman' certainly wasn't written as part of a concept album."

The final elements of *Ziggy* came together over the next few months. In late December 1971, Bowie, Angie and hairdresser Suzi Fussey conspired to invent the red Ziggy mullet [see panel, p28].

"Angie would do a lot of David's clothes shopping because they were the same size," remembers singer Dana Gillespie, who appeared on "It Ain't Easy". "They could both wear each other's clothes and she would always buy his shoes because she had such great dress sense. But it imploded on her, in a way, because David got fed up with her spending all his money, even though he'd encouraged it."

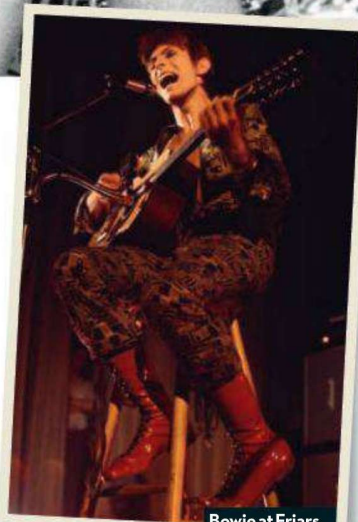


Bowie in London, January 1972, taken from the pivotal *Melody Maker* article

On January 13, 1972, the day *A Clockwork Orange* opened in London, photographer Brian Ward shot Bowie at his studio in Heddon Street, off Regent Street; the sessions yielded the Ziggy sleeve artwork. Meanwhile, back at Bowie's base in Beckenham's Haddon Hall, Bowie, Angie and teenage designer Freddie Burretti [see the *Arnold Corns* panel, p28] began designing a look for an imaginary rock'n'roll band, The Spiders From Mars.

"We all had a problem with it at first," Bolder laughs at the memory of Bowie persuading three heterosexual working-class men from Hull to look like a gang of androgynous bootboys from outer space. "We were supposed to be like the Droogs out of *A Clockwork Orange*. He took us to see the movie, and our costumes were kind of the same: boots, boilersuits, but more colourful. But then we went on to these black and silvery, sparkly suits, and Mick had his pants tucked into his socks, with little bows on. That was a bit weird.

"We never actually decided to be The Spiders From Mars," he continues. "It all just naturally progressed. We just became The Spiders From Mars once the album had been done. It all just sort of... happened. David must have had ideas in his head about what he wanted to do with Ziggy and the Spiders. But we didn't sit down and have a meeting."



Bowie at Friars, Aylesbury, January 29, 1972

ANYA WILSON, A GRIMSBY girl who went on to become Britain's first independent radio plugger, was employed by Bowie after her success with T. Rex's "Ride A White Swan". Her boyfriend, Dai Davies, was Bowie's PR. "Dai and I met with David at Haddon Hall in early January to discuss press and promo ideas for Ziggy. We were blown away... it was different from anything we'd ever been involved in. But dinner was interrupted by a call from the US, which was from Lou Reed asking David if he'd consider producing his next album, which was *Transformer*. It gave him production cred and us another media angle to work with."

Bowie asked Davies which music journalists he should target for interviews unveiling his new look. Davies suggested Michael Watts from *Melody Maker* and *NME*'s Charles Shaar Murray. In the issue dated January 22, 1972, *Melody Maker* published one of the most famous interviews in rock history. To a somewhat unconvinced but thoroughly entertained Watts, Bowie announced, "I'm gay, and always have been, even when I was David Jones."

"He didn't warn us," says Trevor Bolder. "It was a bit of a freak-out. We were all thinking, well, as long as we don't get lumped in with this, it's OK. But people did. I think it affected Mick more than anybody, him being Bowie's sidekick. He didn't like it at all. But we were never attacked by anyone for it. The people who recognised

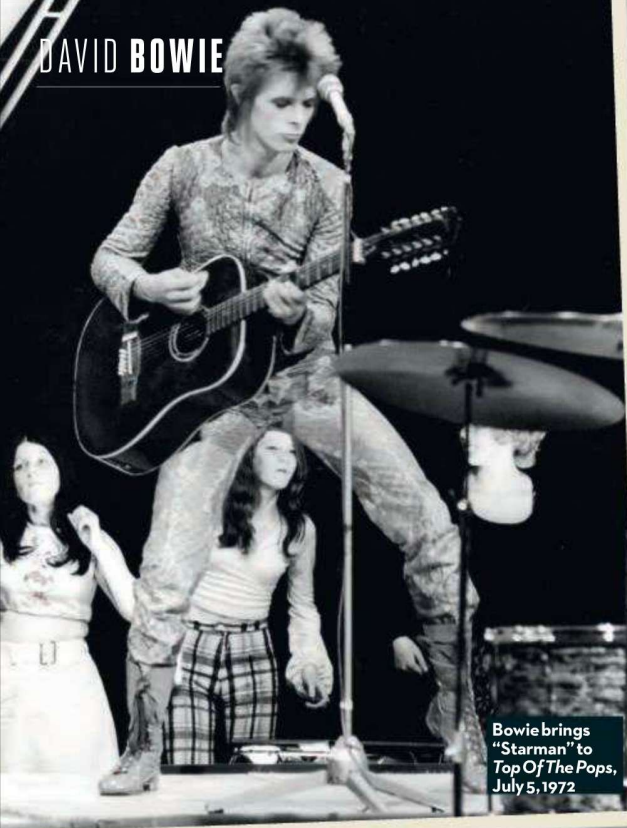
EYEWITNESS!

"EVERYTHING CAME TOGETHER IN THAT MOMENT..."

Lenny Kaye on the July 15, 1972 Ziggy showcase for the US rock press at Friars, Aylesbury



➤ "It was a great show. You could feel that the concept, the album, what he had been working towards, it was just beautiful. The Spiders, Mick Ronson, who don't get as much credit as they should... everything came together in that moment, it was just a fantastic thing of theatricality. If there was a moment where this kind of glitter reaction to more stolid progressive rock was made manifest, it was surely at that show. He had all the pieces of the puzzle and the music to go with it - a great look, a great delivery. At the end of the show, he took off his satin blouse and ripped it up and threw it into the audience. And I, a fan/writer, grabbed the sleeve. The next day, when I interviewed him, I tied it around my upper arm. At one point, he said, 'What's that on your arm?' and I said, 'Oh, it's just a rag I picked up somewhere...' I still have it. It would take some digging through the basement to find it, though. It's a great rock'n'roll splinter of the true cross."



Bowie brings "Starman" to *Top Of The Pops*, July 5, 1972

me in the street asked for my autograph. I never saw any violence towards us whatsoever. Maybe Britain was ripe for it."

Bowie was "quite a sexual fellow", continues Dana Gillespie. "His idea of partying, if he wasn't in the studio, was going down the Sombrero, which was a gay club. He'd always been very camp. Bowie was very much the 'cracked actor' for as long as I knew him. He was happier playing a role than being himself. I don't think he was ever gay at heart. He dabbled. It was a phase. But the announcement was really good for promo."

Seven days later, on January 29, Friars club in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, hosted the first public appearance of the band in their new, Burretti-designed threads. Bolder remembers a discreet run-through some weeks earlier, "in a pub somewhere in south-west London. Angie hired and set the lights up, and we wore all the clothes. It was like our first go at it. There were about 30 people in the pub, I think. We played the whole set, packed up and went back to Haddon Hall. A couple of weeks later we did Friars. The first gig I'd ever played with David was there, playing the *Hunky Dory* stuff, just in jeans and T-shirts. It was a folky audience... guys with beards and long hair. The next time we turn up we've got these clothes on and it was completely different. And... it was brilliant. They loved it. We couldn't believe it. We thought they were gonna throw stuff."

In the audience that night were Queen's Freddie Mercury and Roger Taylor, and Ian Hunter, whose struggling band Mott The Hoople would have their career revived by Bowie later that year. "That Aylesbury show was the first one where David started licking Mick's guitar strings," Hunter laughs. "I remember thinking, 'Ye gods!'"

Events were moving fast for Bowie now. On February 2 and 4, the band returned to Trident to record master takes of three new tracks, "Rock'n'Roll Suicide", "Suffragette City" and "Starman". Bowie's A&R man at RCA, Dennis Katz, had liked what he'd heard of the *Ziggy* album, but he insisted it lacked a hit single. Tony DeFries agreed. Bowie duly presented them with "Starman".

Ken Scott vividly recalls the "Starman" session, and how he got the 'morse code' sound that introduced the chorus: "A piano and guitar mixed together and put through a Countryman phaser." Anya Wilson remembers being "invited down to Trident to listen to the first mix of 'Starman'. We were thrilled. Because the thing with Bowie



EYEWITNESS!

"I CACKED MYSELF WHEN I GOT UP THERE..."

Lindsay Kemp on the August 1972 *Rainbow* shows

➤ "The show was a style of dance very much approaching the avant-garde. We were a group of eight dancer-mimes. We were in fantastical wigs and exaggerated make-up. We didn't perform in every song: We did 'Queen Bitch', 'Waiting For The Man', 'Lady Stardust', 'Starman' and 'Rock'n'Roll Suicide'.

"The set consisted of towers with platforms at the corners of the stage. And I was mostly on the very top. This had sounded so good in my head, but I cacked myself when I got up there. The show started off with the synthesiser version of Beethoven's ninth, 'Ode To Joy', from *A Clockwork Orange*. I climbed to the top of the tower, and then, in clouds of dry ice, emerged David, looking marvelous in his Kansai Yamamoto leotard. A lavender spotlight was used to bring out the red of the hair. That was probably the most exciting moment I've ever had on the stage.

"We had expected to go to America with him. But my friend Tony DeFries broke it to us that we weren't considered essential. David didn't really need us. He was better on his own."

was that he couldn't compromise his songs to fit the single mode. But this was written as a single – and it worked. You could sell an album, in those days, with album-orientated radio. But we wanted to bring the rest of Britain on board. And 'Starman' was the moment that Britain bought into David Bowie."

On February 8, the band appeared on *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, ostensibly to promote *Hunky Dory*, but they came dressed in their Ziggy finery. Wilson describes the performance as "a tipping point. 'Five Years' was mesmerising. We'd had resistance from the BBC. I was going to see producer Mike Appleton every week, and he just didn't want David on the show." But Bowie had fans on Appleton's staff. "Mike's assistant, Jenny Evans, called me one day and said, 'Is Bowie free this week?' There'd been a cancellation and she'd deliberately not called anyone else to check availability. So Mike finally relented. Once anyone saw David, there was never a problem... once they'd seen his magic. I credit that one to Jenny."

A few days after the *Old Grey Whistle Test* appearance, Bowie took the Ziggy show on the road, opening the tour at the Toby Jug pub in Tolworth, south London, on February 10. The tour zig-zagged around the country with Bob Harris compering a handful of early shows. Harris had been close to Marc Bolan during his conversion from Tolkien-loving hippy to all-conquering glam warrior, and noticed "it wasn't as teen-girl-orientated as it had been with Marc. Bolan's shows gave you an idea of what Beatlemania must have felt like. But Bowie attracted them and the older male students you'd see at rock shows. Somehow, he still fitted

into this burgeoning albums-rock market, along with Elton John, Yes and Zeppelin. Mick's guitar became more dominant and its rawer edge made it a forerunner of punk. You were being led quite logically to the release of the *Ziggy* album. You were just thinking, 'How big could this be?'"

"I connected with Bowie but never felt I knew him. It was his strength and weakness"

BOB HARRIS

THE RISE AND Fall Of *Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars* was released by RCA on June 6, 1972. "By now everybody ought to know

[Bowie]'s tremendous," wrote *NME*, "and this latest chunk of fantasy can only enhance his reputation further." *Melody Maker*'s Michael Watts acknowledged, "Bowie's bid for stardom is accelerating at lightning speed." The album sold 8,000 copies in its first week. On June 15, Bowie and the Spiders recorded for ITV children's pop show *Lift Off With Ayshea*. "Starman" entered the singles charts at No 49. The June 25 show at the Croydon Greyhound – support by Roxy Music – was the first complete sell-out of the tour. At the same time, "David was desperate to get on *Top Of The Pops*," explains Bolder. "They were ignoring us. When we did the gig at the Croydon Greyhound, the producers finally came to see us. Suddenly we got *Top Of The Pops* for 'Starman'."

Bowie and the Spiders recorded their performance of "Starman" on July 5. Bolder recalls the inauspicious events leading up to this pivotal TV moment. "You'd go there in the morning and at 12 you'd do a run-through just in your normal street clothes, just to get the camera angles. Then at three they'd do a dress rehearsal run-through. Around six o'clock they'd shoot it with an audience live, which was recorded to go out the next night. We'd done the 3pm dress rehearsal in our stage clothes but we didn't bother to get changed. So we went to the BBC bar, and



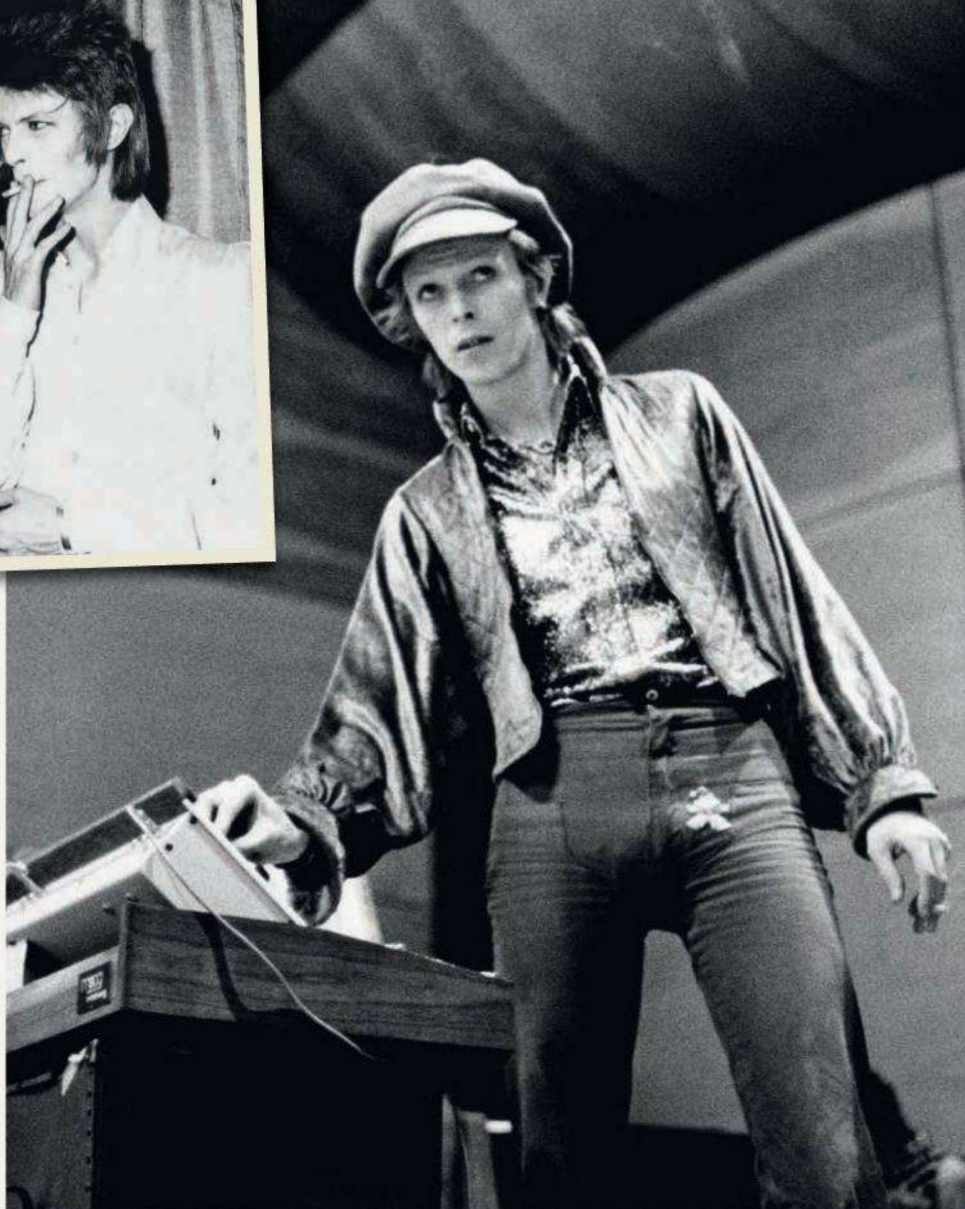
BOWIE SPEAKS!

The man himself recollects – more from David can be found in Sukita's book of Bowie photography, *Speed Of Life*

[Above: August 1972, the Rainbow Theatre]
 "Lou Reed pays a backstage visit. He's always been a really supportive and stand-up guy. Always seems to be there at the right time."

[Right] "Working out a riff on my Minimoog, the best little synthesiser in the West."

[Below] "Arriving for the first time in Japan. I wasn't flying, so sailing on a liner was my default situation, something I wouldn't have missed for the world. Here I am with one of my best friends, Geoff MacCormack [to the right of Bowie], who became Warren Peace when he sang backup on the Diamond Dogs tour."



EYEWITNESS!

"IT WAS ALL A BIT PARANOID..."

Geoff MacCormack recalls a hairy journey with Bowie on the Trans-Siberian Railway

➤ Bowie arrived in Yokohama, Japan on April 5, 1973, for a run of 10 shows. But Bowie's fear of flying meant arduous journeys by sea and rail. Geoff MacCormack accompanied Bowie on his long, strange trip back to the UK.

"Japanese art had fascinated him for years. We got to see kabuki theatre and hung out with Kansai Yamamoto, who designed his costumes. The audiences were polite, but by the end they were all screaming.

"We got a boat overnight from Yokohama to Nakhodka on the Russian coast. It had once been a ship that transported prisoners to the gulag. There were a couple of secret service guys on the ship. They were trying to be friendly with us. The staff all changed into Russian traditional dress and did a turn, so Bowie went and got his guitar and my bongos and we did a couple of impromptu numbers. I think we did a Jacques Brel song and 'Space Oddity'. Then we joined the train and that was very alien. It was scary. The people looked so poor. I remember David giving some journalist a book, and him not being able to take it. It was all a bit paranoid."



Bowie and Geoff MacCormack rehearsing at RCA Studios, New York, February 1973

➤ everybody thought we were actors from *Doctor Who*. The other thing I remember was talking to Status Quo. They were all in jeans and T-shirts and, of course, we're all in the Ziggy gear. You couldn't have got more opposite."

They returned to Friars for a showcase for US journalists on July 15 [see panel for Lenny Kaye's recollections, p31]. "Starman" reached No 10 and Ziggy was at No 5, bedding down for 106 weeks on the chart. It was joined by *Hunky Dory* in September, which peaked at No 3, and *The Man Who Sold The World* and a reissued *Space Oddity*, rising to 26 and 17, respectively.

"People were coming out of the woodwork at his and Angie's flat in Gunter Grove, west London," says Ian Hunter. "David Bailey, Cat Stevens... I went once and Mick Jagger and George Harrison were there. He was the next big thing, and that was it."

"Even in the early days Bowie was single-minded," adds Bob Harris. "I connected with Bowie a lot but never really felt I knew him. It was his strength and his weakness. For the music, all these layers to Bowie and the chameleon-like aspect to his life worked perfectly. But on a personal level, it was almost impossible to get near David."

Bowie and the Spiders arrived at their sell-out London Rainbow shows on August 19 and 20 [see panel, p32] as conquering heroes. These shows marked a departure from the usual live Ziggy experience, incorporating dance choreographed by Bowie's former mime tutor, Lindsay Kemp. "It was strange for the Spiders," adds Bolder, "because we were put in positions onstage and not allowed to move. One of Lindsay's dancers was Jack Birkett, who was blind. He used to count out his steps, and he'd come running up to me and he'd stop just before he got to me. So, obviously, you weren't allowed to move or he'd just run into you. So David was doing all these dance routines, while we were just watching."

"They looked like a fantasy: Mick Ronson's hair, Trevor Bolder's sideboards," laughs Geoff MacCormack. "They looked like theatrical players rather than musicians. Heavily conceptualised. This wasn't just a band onstage.

I met Lindsay Kemp a few times, and what he brought to the show was quite spectacular. You appreciated you were watching a different genre. It brought together all the things that David had done before Ziggy."

"Tony DeFries didn't like it," adds Bolder. "He didn't think it was the way to go at all. David was a bit upset about that. DeFries thought it was a very expensive experiment and David wasn't established enough yet. He wanted us to break America as a band, rather than a dance routine."

BOWIE AND ANGIE set sail for New York on the Queen Elizabeth II, arriving on September 17. The first American tour ran for 22 dates and kicked off in Cleveland, Ohio on September 22. In between shows, Bowie began writing *Aladdin Sane*; he even found time to record "The Jean Genie" at New York's RCA Studio D on October 6. Released on November 24, to capitalise on Ziggy's success, the single peaks at No 2 in the UK.

"We slotted studio time in when we could," explains Bolder. "They wanted David on the road, but they also wanted him in the studio. David was under a lot of pressure from the management and the record company to release stuff because they were making so much money out of him."

On October 16, the band – plus their 46-strong entourage – settled into LA's Beverly Hills Hotel.

Robin Mayhew, Bowie's live sound engineer, remembers "it was all Lobster Thermidor round the pool. Crazy, really. There were situations where you walked out of your bedroom door and found groupies everywhere. I don't know how they got in, but they did. But the drugs side of things... we were good boys. Quite a bit of grass smoked on the bus. But no heavy drug thing."

Highlights included the October 20 and 21 shows at Santa Monica Civic Auditorium. The band returned to the UK for Christmas, and two shows at the Rainbow on December 23 and 24, before entering Trident in January 1973 to work on sessions for *Aladdin Sane*. Then, they returned to the States to begin a five-month tour taking in America, Japan and the UK.

"The US tour in '72 had set him up," explains Geoff MacCormack. "So the following year, he could play Radio City Music Hall in New York and have Salvador Dalí in the audience."

But after 18 months of constant touring, the band was coming apart. Mike Garson, the Brooklyn jazz pianist brought in for eight weeks as the Spiders' US tour pianist, was a Scientologist, and his constant attempts to convert the band proved especially divisive.

"My mistake was, due to my enthusiasm for Scientology, trying to spread it," he explains, "and the people most interested were Woody, Trevor a little, Mick a little... but with Woody, it was a lot. He's still a Scientologist. I left Scientology in 1982 and he's never talked to me since."

"I went into Scientology for about four hours before deciding it wasn't for me," Bolder says. "All I remember was watching people wandering around talking to teddy bears."

Critically, Bowie had begun to distance himself from the Spiders. On the previous US tour, Bowie had travelled with band and crew. Now, he and DeFries went by limo. Bowie had begun an affair with singer Ava Cherry and Angie was conspicuous by her absence. A row before the Radio City concerts over money, with the Spiders threatening to return home, brought matters to a head.

"The bigger he got, the more people wanted to be near him. We only saw him onstage"

TREVOR BOLDER

The Spiders hit New York's
Radio City Music Hall,
February 14, 1973



EYEWITNESS!

"IT FELT A BIT TENSE"

The post-Ziggy party saw a dark cloud descending—a glimpse of the future...

➤ After Bowie retired Ziggy at the Hammersmith Odeon on July 3, the band and crew decamped to the Café Royal in Piccadilly and partied with their A-list guests, who included Jagger, Iggy, Moon, and rock filmmaker DA Pennebaker [who shot the 1973 Ziggy doc]—it wasn't exactly a happy atmosphere...

TREVOR BOLDER: David wasn't talking to any of the band. He had his own separate table with Lou Reed, Iggy Pop, Mick Jagger, Jeff Beck... and Mick [Ronson] was there as well. Me and Woody were left out of all this. And the next day we were thinking, "What the hell did we do?" We were supposed to go to America the next day, and it never happened—I still don't know why.

GEOFF MACCORMACK: It did feel a bit tense. And I felt for the band. But again, it was all a bit of a fantasy. There's a picture of me with Lulu talking to Mick Jagger and Lou Reed, with David sitting in between.

MIKE GARSON: Ringo and God knows who else was there. I still remember the electricity in the air.

KEN SCOTT: David was partying with Lou Reed, Mick Jagger and all that. And Woody and Trevor had no idea what was going on. It wasn't a nice situation.

DA PENNEBAKER: The whole film crew got an invite and I danced with Bianca Jagger. She kept saying, "You guys are really bad," and I'd never heard that expression before. But then we decided to film it. I still have it in my archive somewhere. Would I make it available? Maybe I'd have to find it first!



Angie and David arrive at the Hammersmith aftershow party to bid farewell to Ziggy. Bowie's make-up artist Pierre La Roche can be seen just behind Angie



A captive audience: Tony DeFries (far left), The Amazing Orlando (in shades), tour manager Tony Zanetta and Angie Bowie (right)



FROM ROCK STARS TO SOLAR POWER

Whatever happened to Bowie's manager, Tony DeFries?

➤ Singer and Ziggy guest Dana Gillespie describes Bowie's infamous '70s manager as "a big, bear-like Jewish guy with fuzzy hair, fur coats and a perpetual cigar. Neither David nor Angie had a good word to say about him at the end. But I have to differ. I thought he was great at what he did." A kind tribute, considering that Dana Gillespie's own musical career stalled for six years while Bowie, DeFries and their lawyers picked over the bones of the short-lived MainMan empire.

Following the collapse of MainMan, DeFries moved to the US and attempted to stay in management. In the '90s he moved into digital technology, starting a company called IOTA and acquiring a patent in 2001 for a digital communication device, the RF Receiver. His autobiography was announced in 2008, but never emerged. He is now the CEO of a broadband research company, Matter Inc, who do a nice line in solar-powered LED numbers for front doors.

➔ "We never really socialised with David," admits Trevor Bolder. "In the early days we did, because we lived in Haddon Hall together. But the bigger he got the more people wanted to be near him. It all went to his head a little bit. We became unimportant. So he hung around with other stars... The only time we saw him was when he walked onstage. He'd

been this open guy who was really good to talk to. A talented singer you went down the pub with. Suddenly, he was the big David Bowie and we were just The Spiders From Mars. And that's what the album's about, isn't it?"

"He was under a lot more pressure," adds Anya Wilson. "I had less to do with him, and Tony [DeFries] too. Stardom opened massive doors for David and we weren't such a tight-knit little team. I was suddenly involved on a need-to-know basis, rather than being in the thick of it."

"I haven't been in the same room as David since 1972," continues Bob Harris. "One minute we were hanging out, the next he'd gone to LA and I never saw him again. He moved from one set of circumstances to another and would adopt the new ones as his home."

On July 3, 1973 – the last date of the tour – Bowie called time on the Spiders, live from the stage of London's Hammersmith Odeon.

"We didn't know anything about it beforehand," sighs Bolder. "I was a bit, like, 'What the hell's he on about?' Woody thought about walking offstage before we did 'Rock'n'Roll Suicide'. He told me later that if he'd known beforehand, he wouldn't have done the gig. That's why they didn't tell us. They couldn't take the risk we'd say 'Up yours!' and walk. But everybody else knew. Mick Ronson knew. They just kept it from me and Woody."

Woodmansey never played with Bowie again. A week after the Hammersmith show, he married June, his girlfriend, at a Scientology ceremony administered by Mike Garson. He continues to play

drums, and lives with June in Sussex.

Bolder reunited with Bowie and Ronson to play on October 1973's *Pin Ups* – "I played my bits and just got out of there," he explains. "It was a strange atmosphere, and I didn't want to be there." The same month as *Pin Ups* was released, American broadcaster NBC recorded a live TV special across October 18, 19 and 20 at the Marquee, called *The 1980 Floor Show*, which marked Bowie's last appearance as Ziggy. Ronson and Bolder provided support.

"David didn't look after us," says Bolder now. "He wrote all the songs, but it wasn't just him. We put a lot in and didn't get a lot out. We were dumped, basically. That was the upsetting thing. But it was also the most exciting time of my life."

Today, Bolder plays with Uriah Heep.

Mick Ronson struck out first as a solo artist, but also collaborated with artists including T Bone Burnett, Roger McGuinn, Elton John, Morrissey and, especially, Ian Hunter. He was also a member of Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue in 1975 and '76. In 1977, he married Suzi Fussey, with whom he stayed until his death in April 29, 1993, aged 46.

"Ziggy remains the absolute peak of David's creative career," Bob Harris says. "I really believe that. What happened afterwards was David gradually muddying things up, and you can't discount the part that drugs played in that. Ziggy was his shining bright moment.

"After that," he adds in wry conclusion, "he didn't eat for two years." ☹



Gimme your hands: Bowie at *The 1980 Floor Show*, London's Marquee club, October 1973

Masayoshi Sukita's book *'Speed Of Life'*, is available now from Genesis Publications, signed by Sukita and David Bowie at www.genesis-publications.com

You can buy Terry Pastor's limited-edition prints of the 'Hunky Dory' and 'Ziggy Stardust...' artwork, signed by himself and Bowie, at www.albumcoverart.co.uk.

Ken Scott's book *'Abbey Road To Ziggy Stardust'*, will be published in spring by Alfred Music Publishing.

Geoff MacCormack's book, *'From Station To Station: Travels With Bowie 1973-76'*, is also available now from Genesis Publications, while prints of his Bowie photos can be found at www.rockarchive.com.

Mick Ronson and Bowie recording *Pin Ups* at Château d'Hérouville, France, July 1973



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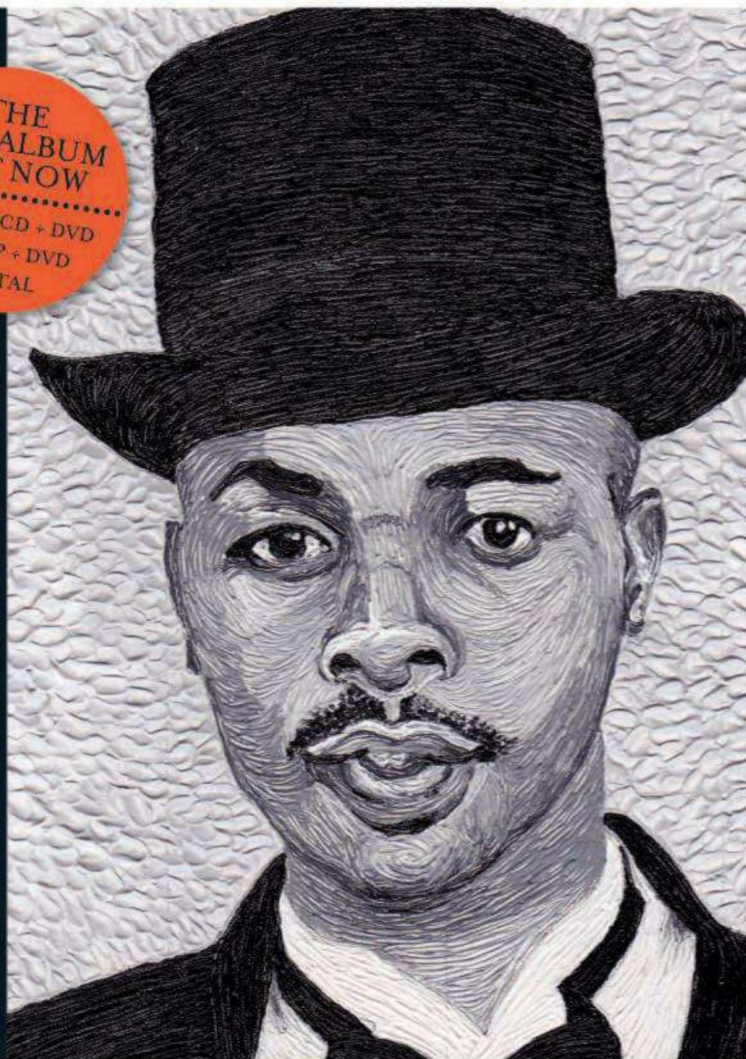
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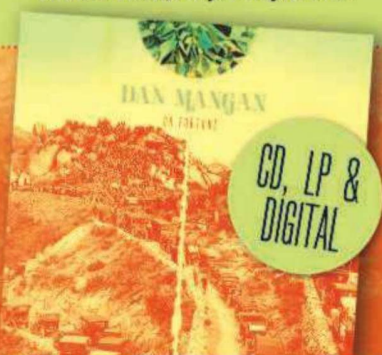
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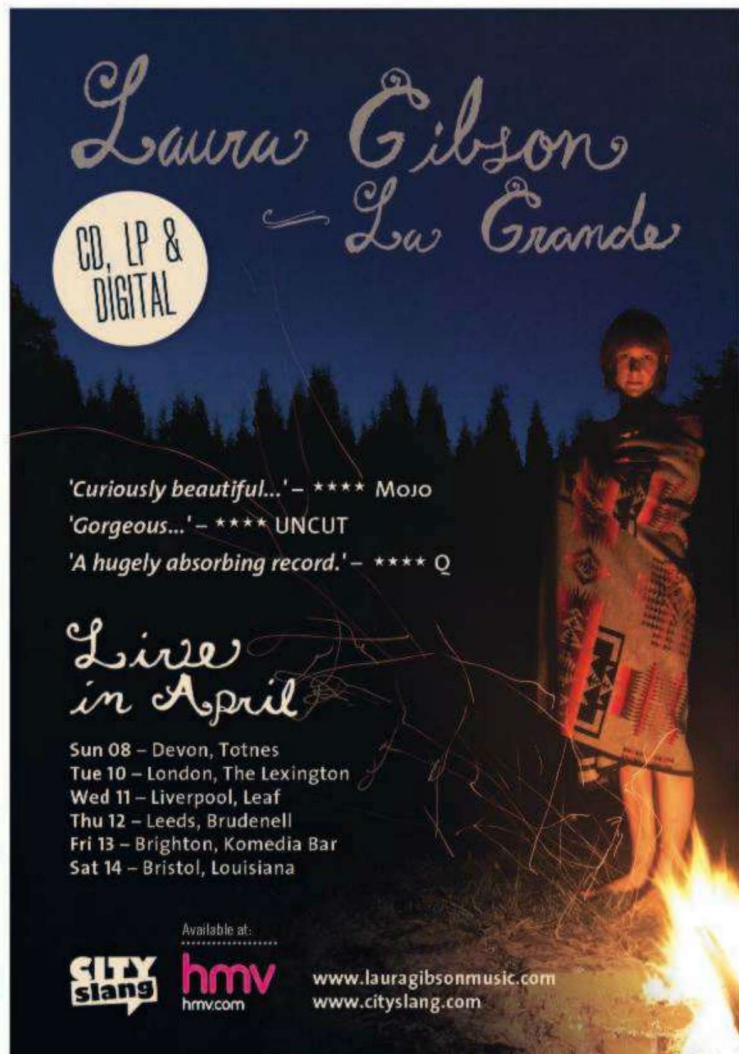
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Orbital

The dance music duo who shaped a rave revolution: the Hartnoll bros lead us through their key works

HEARING JOHN PEEL play US electro on the radio in the mid-1980s was a key moment for brothers Phil and Paul Hartnoll. A decade later, Orbital's sinuous techno had spearheaded the British rave revolution and crossed into the mainstream, making the Hartnolls the second-most-famous musical siblings of the '90s. From acid-house glory to spine-tingling headline sets at Glastonbury, Orbital transformed the way dance music was presented live, their head-torches flashing the whole way. "We wanted to do albums, because dance albums at that point were crap." Not bad for an act named after the M25.



ORBITAL (GREEN ALBUM)

FFRR, 1991

UK CHART POSITION: 71

Dubbed the Green Album because of its lime-coloured sleeve,

the debut arrived 18 months after the Top 20 success of "Chime".

PAUL HARTNOLL: I refer to it as our Harry Potter album because we recorded it under the stairs. Our parents moved out to run a pub and said to me, aged 17, "Do you want to come and live with us in the pub or do you want to stay in this house?" I said, can I get some beer now and again? Yes? Great, I'll stay in the house then. They had an office under the stairs and that's where we had all our bits and pieces.

A friend played me a tape of really early Chicago house music in his car and I went, "Hang on, that's electro mixed with high-energy disco – brilliant." We were already making electronic music by that point, we had drum machines, keyboards and were using guitars, and so when you hear things like that you want to try your hand at it.

PHIL HARTNOLL: "Chime" was very specific and went down well in the clubs. *Orbital*, style-wise, is all over the place. We wanted to be more like Kraftwerk with our albums, not just for the dancefloor.

PAUL: "Chime" got to 17 in the charts in March 1990, which for an instrumental acid-house track was pretty good.

PHIL: When we did *Top Of The Pops* we felt so awkward; it's the only time we've ever mimed. We put our plugs on top of the keyboards.

PAUL: We were mortified. But it was hilarious to

be on there with Big Fun and Snap!. I remember dancing in a club in Brighton and the DJ played "Chime" and all these people were enjoying it. I thought they were all going to go to the bar.



ORBITAL 2 (BROWN ALBUM)

FFRR, 1993

UK CHART POSITION: 28

Immersed in the rave scene, the brothers decamp to east London

for this superior acid-techno affair. Includes "Halcyon + On + On".

PAUL: We migrated to London and got a room at the Strongroom studios in Shoreditch. We had a room on the stairs – the most sociable studio I've ever been to and the favourite place I've ever worked. We used to leave our door open and everyone poked their heads in. We had a vodka and Coke with Les McKeown.

PHIL: The Spice Girls were there. Victoria made me a cup of tea – that's my claim to fame. I asked what's going on; they said, "Oh, we're the Spice Girls." I thought, "It'll never catch on."

PAUL: We'd learnt the ropes playing live and we started to develop. We met a guy called Mickey Mann who helped us produce a lot of our albums and did our live sound all the time. He was the extra push that really helped the *Brown Album* come along.

PHIL: We wanted to mix it up a bit, mix it like a live set. We got involved with Meat Beat Manifesto then, as well.

PAUL: That's Jack Danger's bass guitar sample and breakbeat on "Impact". They took us on tour to America. The Shamen were the first people to tuck us under their wing and got us our first

London gig. Back then, the scene felt like a bunch of happy amateurs coming together. There was a feeling of solidarity, but it was quite haphazard. It wasn't about money – everyone just wanted enough cash to be able to do the next thing.



IN SIDES

INTERNAL, 1996

UK CHART POSITION: 5

Back in the Strongroom and moving further from the dancefloor, the boys elegantly combine eco-disaster

and easy-listening.

PAUL: This was a continuation of *Snivilisation*, [see *Uncut Classic*] hence the similar covers, only less angry, more calming. I was going through my film scores and easy-listening phase – easy-listening was all the rage, hence the Morricone and John Barry influence and hammered dulcimer on "The Box". "Adnan's" came out of the whole War Child *Help!* campaign and "The Girl With The Sun In Her Head" was recorded using the Greenpeace solar panel van. They parked it outside the Strongroom on a Saturday, chucked their wires through the window, we plugged our studio into it and spent the morning recording that track. Mickey Mann came on for this album, mixing it up again. We'd become a touring band at that point which was good 'cos we were out of raves and doing festivals and our own tours, so whoever wanted to come could come. Again, this was not a dance album but we were still very heavily in the dance world because people would listen to Orbital after they'd been raving and in their daily lives.

We also got to meet Michael Kamen who was doing the score for *Event Horizon* with us; I've

Brothers beyond: (l-r) Phil and Paul Hartnoll get caught in their headlights

never learnt so much from someone. I like composing, I like the big overview, lots of things coming together. I'm not really interested in the skill or noodliness of one instrument – I want to hear what happens when the harmony comes together.



THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

LONDON, 1999

UK CHART POSITION: 4

A new studio births the Hartnolls' third and final appearance in the Top 5. As the '90s come

to an end, have the ideas, too?

PAUL: I bought a warehouse in Shoreditch for very little money and this was our first album in that new studio on Charlotte Road, again with Mickey Mann. We'd been on the Lollapalooza in the States for a month and wrote *The Middle Of Nowhere* after that. We were playing after Tool, a phenomenal rock band who were massive in America and right down our street. Loved seeing them. We were touring a lot at that point. *The Middle Of Nowhere* came out of us finding our way in the new studio. I wasn't sure about this album at first, it's only afterwards I'm very pleased with that album now.

People seemed to like it, but I think that was the beginning of some journalistic questioning: what are you doing? Is this as good as your last? The beginnings of doubt. We were on to our fifth album by then and people started to wonder if they'd had enough of this.

PHIL: There are a few weird tracks on there – that would be the Tool influence. We still had some good tours with that LP. Tracks like "Spare Parts" and "Style" were great to play live.

THE UNCUT CLASSIC



SNIVILISATION

INTERNAL, 1994

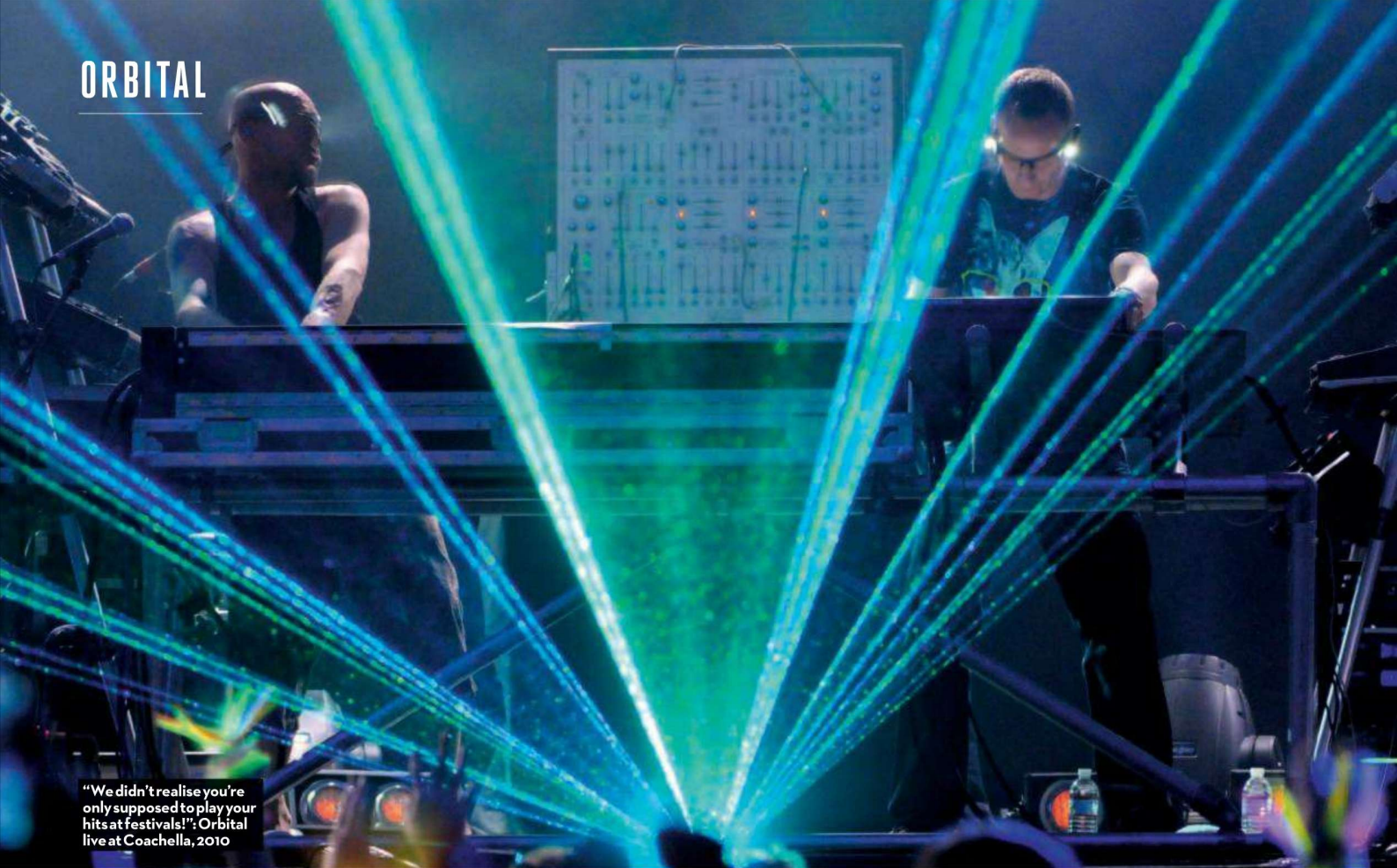
UK CHART POSITION: 4

As Britpop looms and the Criminal Justice Bill is passed, Orbital hold a cracked mirror to society on their first Top 5 album.

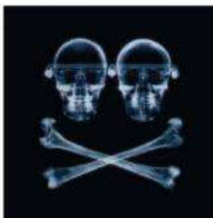
PAUL: That's the start of us finding our place properly. Whereas the *Brown Album* was very much us doing gigs, finding our way, this is a dance record. *Snivilisation* was our first, if you like, concept album where we said, right, let's do an LP about the ugly, seedier side of modern city life. We'll write it from the first track until we get to the end of the LP in a linear fashion so it writes like a story.

PHIL: I've got a very cynical view about how the human race has developed intellectually. I mean, come on, have a look at the news. The subject matter was like, civilised? Really? Pffhhh. The title 'Snivilisation', I stole from a Russell Hoban poem.

PAUL: We did that one on our own, still on the stairs in the Strongroom. That was the first LP where we turned on dance music and went back to our electro and independent roots. And also on the live front we got our first big break of playing something that wasn't a dance event, which was playing after Björk at Glastonbury. We played the whole album... we didn't realise you're only supposed to play your hits at festivals. We were still so naïve; we thought, 'Let's play them loads of new stuff!' Which was the worst thing you could do. But as it goes, out of the 40,000 people stood there, even if we'd played all our hits, there were probably only 14 who knew them. This was our introduction to an indie audience and it went down a storm. Afterwards, we said, right, this is where we belong. Even though we're part of the dance movement, we never hear our records in nightclubs and DJs don't really play us. One music fan explained it to me: "You're the band we listen to in the car on the way home from the rave. We put an Orbital album on when we get home and have our cup of tea. You're post-rave, that's what you do." Ah, OK, I thought, so that's why we're ensconced in the scene: you do all hear us, but it's always afterwards – which is my favourite bit of the rave. The scornful tone is something we carry over from Crass and the Dead Kennedys – that '80s cold-war paranoia, 'the apocalypse is coming!' – it's still there in me and weighed heavy on the album. We thought, 'OK, what can we do that's different and give it a reason? Let's talk about these things that never get spoken about in dance music, which is supposed to be all hedonistic and happy.' Well, that's not my vision of what electronic music should be about, so let's bring some of that back.



"We didn't realise you're only supposed to play your hits at festivals!": Orbital live at Coachella, 2010



THE ALTOGETHER

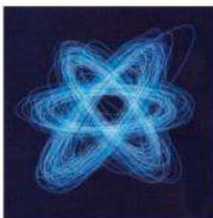
LONDON, 2001
UK CHART POSITION: 11
Not even the *Doctor Who* theme can help them out on an aimless sixth studio

album. David Gray vocal compounds misery.

PAUL: I'm not happy with that album. Some people like it, but I don't. I like "Tension". The David Gray song? We get a lot of flak for that but I actually like it [Gray is married to the Hartnolls' sister, Olivia, and they share the same management]. Bottom line is, we were tired. Tired of the whole rock ebb and flow of touring and releasing, and that's really stupid because it's only when you stop doing that, that you realise how lucky you were to be doing it. But at the same time it doesn't stop you being tired. What would have been better would be to do something else or lay off for a bit until you get some inspiration.

PHIL: This was the start of losing our way. Things were getting foggy, like you do when you're tired.

PAUL: This is another one from Charlotte Road but it's directionless. Moving from the Strongroom was actually the worst thing we did. That place was a great source of inspiration. But you only realise this afterwards.



BLUE ALBUM

LONDON, 2004
UK CHART POSITION: 44
As solo projects beckon, this seemed a dignified swansong. But can brothers ever really split up?

PAUL: That was us realising we didn't want to do it anymore. Lots of things had happened – I'd

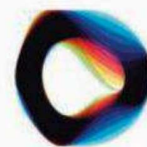
"We were tired of sitting in a tiny room together like submariners for 15 years. With the best will in the world, it was getting boring"

PAUL HARTNOLL

started to have babies, I'd moved to Brighton; we were just very tired of sitting in a tiny room together like submariners for 15 years. With the best will in the world, it was getting boring. We had all these bits and pieces lying around and felt that there could be an album. I'm happier with the *Blue Album* than *The Altogether* but I'm still not entirely happy. I think the best thing would have been a combination of the two.

I enjoyed recording it in Brighton in The Levellers' place, the Metway, which was like a hippier version of the Strongroom with lots of different people floating around. But it's like a book: you can't keep writing it even if it is *The Lord Of The Rings*. When you get to the end, even if you love writing it, you can't keep writing it. We had to stop it because the last couple of chapters have not been as brilliant as the rest of it.

I remember the final show in Japan. We finished the gig, had a beer and then I walked back to the hotel on my own and thought, 'Well, that's that, then.'



WONKY

ACP, 2012
Shades of the *Brown Album*'s giddy euphoria grace this tougher, Flood-produced comeback. Zola Jesus guests.
PAUL: I felt the call of

the wild again. Going to see The Chemical Brothers in Brighton was the spark. I thought, 'God, I miss this.' I realised it takes 15 years to get a set that good. But it took three years off to realise I was missing this. Afterwards, I walked into their dressing-room and said, "I haven't seen anything like that for ages." And Tom turned to me and said, "Well, we learnt from the master." It had never occurred to me to think in those terms.

I also used to listen to Pete Tong on Fridays 'cos I'd always get a curry on Friday nights and as I'd drive down to pick up my curry I'd listen to Tong, but every time I'd end up sat in the car with my curry going cold, wanting to hear the end of the tracks. I thought, 'Yeah, I miss this.' Then a friend booking the Big Chill asked if we'd like to reform to headline the next year, our 20th anniversary.

PHIL: And that snowballed and got us back together and became two years of touring. Then it was like, hang on, we haven't got any new tracks. So we introduced songs like "Don't Stop Me" to the live set, and thought, 'Let's see what it's like for an album.' And now this has been one of our most enjoyable albums. It feels like when we were in my mum and dad's house.

PAUL: It's fresh again. We had a reason for this album. We enjoy playing live so much we want to carry on doing it, so we need to write stuff we want to play live. Flood brought this sheen to *Wonky* that I wanted. He doesn't make things polite, he brings a rock dirtiness to an electronic production, which is what he always used to do with Renegade Soundwave. 🎧

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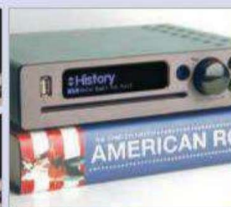
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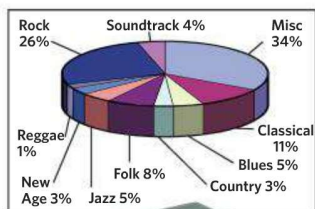
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new day rising



HOW THE SOUND OF ROCK'N'ROLL WAS INVENTED
IN SUN STUDIO, 60 YEARS AGO – BY A “LUCKY HILLBILLY”
WHO BECAME MUSIC'S THOMAS EDISON

Story: Alastair McKay



DELTA CATS, HOWLIN' WOLVES AND BLUE SUEDE SHOES...

10 classics singles
recorded at Sun

JACKIE BRENTON AND HIS DELTA CATS ROCKET 88

Recorded by Phillips in March 1951 (and released on Chess Records), this joyous tribute to a new model Oldsmobile was assembled by Ike Turner's band. Notable for Willie Kizart's distorted guitar sound caused - myth has it - by damage to the amplifier, when it fell onto Highway 61 while the band drove from Clarksdale, Mississippi, to Memphis. Turner suggested the amp was rain-damaged, and stuffed with newspapers.

HOWLIN' WOLF HOW MANY MORE YEARS

Although licensed to Chess, Wolf's fierce, distorted blues riff was recorded at Sun on May 14, 1951. According to the



bluesman, Ike Turner brought him to Memphis to meet Sam Phillips. On hearing Wolf, Phillips reportedly said: "This is where the soul of man never dies." **CONT**



Sun King: Leo Soroka, Sam Phillips, Elvis Presley and Robert Johnson at Sun Recording Studio, Memphis, Tennessee, December 4, 1956

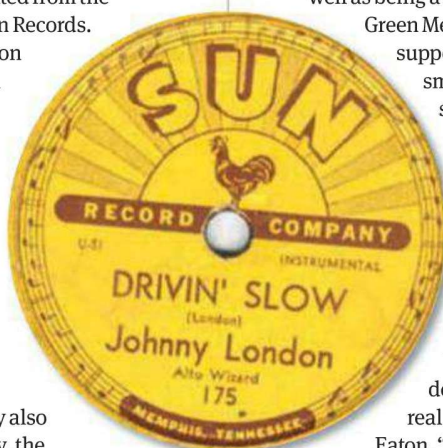
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UN STUDIO AT 706 Union Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee, has many special qualities, some of which remain mysterious. It is possible to analyse them in terms of engineering, the way the sound bounces around the room. You might also consider history

and coincidence, and the extraordinary array of talent it hosted, going back to when it opened in 1950 as Sam Phillips' Memphis Recording Service, although it has always been better known by the same name as the label Phillips went on to launch that operated from the same building, which Sam called Sun Records.

Between 1950 and 1960, the studio on Union Avenue was where the Million Dollar Quartet of Elvis, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins all recorded. Roy Orbison got his start there, as did Howlin' Wolf and Charlie Rich. Ike Turner may even have invented rock'n'roll within the walls of this fabled space.

But T Bone Burnett, whose affection for Sun and its sound is such that he plans to build a replica in Los Angeles, believes that Sun's success, what made it so unique, may also be a matter of geography; specifically, the meanderings of the Mississippi. "That river system is the lifeblood of the country," Burnett says. "Most things that come in and out of this country go up and down the Mississippi. The river starts right where Bob Dylan was born, up in Minnesota, and it gets big by about St Paul, Minneapolis. It's interesting that Dylan was up at the top of it, and Louis Armstrong was at the bottom in New Orleans. That is the axis, and Memphis was right in the middle."



record was pressed on March 27, with a rooster label designed by a commercial artist on Beale Street.

As beginnings go, "Drivin' Slow" was decidedly low-key. But listen closely to the way the sax seems to exist in its own hollow space, and you may detect the first inkling of what has become known as the Sun sound.

Sam Phillips' studio was a no-frills affair, housed in a building first built as a bakery, and latterly-used as a radiator repair shop. "I hadn't been to many studios, so my first impression was great," says Roland Janes, who played guitar in the Sun band, accompanying Jerry Lee Lewis, as well as being a member of Billy Lee Riley's Little

Green Men. "I didn't know what a studio was supposed to look like. I thought it was a small building, and I was amazed at the sound that we got out of it, but I didn't think anything but good thoughts.

"The first part of the building, there was a small office. You'd go through a door, directly into the studio, and you'd go through the studio to the control room. So the entire building was not real big."

"The office in Sun, that's about 10' by 10', and they had two or three desks, so you could get a crowd in there real quick," adds house drummer JM Van Eaton. "Most people hung out at Sun because

it was the premier local label, plus it had a nice little restaurant right next door to it, Taylor's Café. That's where the musicians would come and hang out, because Sun was so small. They'd sit around and drink coffee, talk about their gigs and write songs."

"Marshall Grant and Luther Perkins [*the Tennessee Two*] worked right across the street at a garage," explains rockabilly bandleader Sonny Burgess. "They'd walk over there to that café and eat lunch every day. Marshall told me: 'We didn't even know there was a studio there until [Johnny] Cash took us in there to record.'"

Commercially, Sun's breakthrough came in March 1953, with Rufus Thomas' "Bear Cat"; a novelty response to Big Mama Thornton's "Hound Dog".

THE FIRST RECORD on the Sun label was released exactly 60 years ago. Johnny London's "Drivin' Slow" had a rolling blues piano, and a haunting saxophone sound. It was recorded on March 1, 1952, and delivered on acetate to DJ Dewey Phillips on the same day. The 78 rpm



Ike Turner's Kings Of Rhythm, 1956: (backrow, l-r) Jackie Brenston, Raymond Hill, Eddie Jones, Fred Sample, Billy Gayles; (frontrow, l-r) Jesse Knight Jr., Ike Turner, Eugene Washington

"HE WAS A TRUE VISIONARY..."

We pay tribute to the genius of Sam Phillips

BORN JANUARY 5, 1923, Sam Phillips was a DJ and radio engineer who honed his skills recording orchestras at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis. After selling Sun to Shelby Singleton in the 1969, he returned to the radio business. He died in 2003.

"He was a true visionary," says T Bone Burnett. "He was a civil rights leader. That's something he doesn't get credit for. He was an inspirational leader. He had the first all-woman station in the country, WHER. He was fighting for equal rights for women, he was fighting for equal rights for African-Americans in the South. He always said the most profound thing he did was the Howlin' Wolf stuff."

"He just let us play," says Sonny Burgess. "He didn't tell you: 'Well, you ought to do it this way.' Sam didn't care, as long as it felt good. If it had that feeling, he knew he had something on his hands."



"It was mainly blues bands at first," says musician and Memphis cultural historian Tav Falco. "They didn't have the term rock'n'roll at the time. They had rhythm and blues, but that encompassed jump blues, jazz blues, R'n'B-sounding bands. Ike Turner was pretty important. Who knows what Sam would have recorded without Ike? Who knows if those people would have come in like they did?"

Ike Turner had showed up on March 3, 1951 to record the supercharged "Rocket 88", with singer Jackie Brenston. To some, the distorted guitar on the record marked the birth of rock'n'roll. But in those early pre-Sun years, Phillips also made some extraordinary blues recordings. "The first major breakthrough Sam made was with Howlin' Wolf," argues T Bone Burnett. "That's when he started bringing the bass and drums up loud. Back in those days the bass and drums were background instruments; it was about the horns and the piano, the melody instruments, and Sam brought the rhythm section right up front, and that became rock'n'roll. That was a big shift."

"In some ways 'How Many More Years' by Wolf would be the first rock'n'roll song because that has the guitar lick that became the central guitar lick in rock'n'roll, and that's the first time we heard that played on a distorted guitar. It was an old big band lick, turned into something completely fresh."

But Sun's reputation rests largely on what happened when Phillips managed to fuse hillbilly music with the energy of rhythm and blues. Famously, Phillips' grand ambition was to find a white singer who could replicate the energy found in black R'n'B. That singer was Elvis Presley, who also added a dash of gospel.



Left, Sam Phillips with Elvis Presley; right, Phillips with Carl Perkins, celebrating 1,000,000 sales of "Blue Suede Shoes" in 1956

The 18-year-old Presley first entered the studio in July 1953 to record two songs – "My Happiness" and "That's When Your Heartaches Begin". "You could pay a few dollars and they let you cut two acetate dubs, one song on each side," recalls Van Eaton. "The first time I went in there, Sam was doing the engineering."

Phillips wasn't present on July 18, 1953, when Presley first visited, but the singer made enough of an impression on his assistant Marion Keisker for their brief conversation to become part of Elvis lore. "Who do you sound like?" Keisker asked. More out of humility than boastfulness, Presley replied: "I don't sound like nobody." The truth of this statement was evident when Phillips got round to recording Elvis, along with guitarist Scotty Moore and bassist Bill Black. Their version of "Blue Moon", says Burnett, "is psychedelic for sure. Elvis was being Bing Crosby, right? And The Ink Spots. He was synthesising all this stuff."

"The recordings that Elvis and Scotty and Bill made are out of another world," says Chris Isaak, whose current album was recorded at 706 Union. "That voice and that echo and that guitar... and Bill Black: his bass doesn't sound like it's a bass. It's like a click and a clack, like some guy walking in the background. It's otherworldly. Carl Perkins told me, he could listen to a record and if it was cut at Sun, he could hear the room."

"Sam Phillips was Thomas Edison with music. He was light years ahead of the rest of us."

Presley's first single, "That's All Right", was issued on July 19, 1954. JM Van Eaton is in no doubt about its importance of the moment. "When Elvis came out," he says, "man, it changed everything."

CERTAINLY, AFTER ELVIS, it became possible to talk of a Sun sound. Presley's Sun recordings – around 20 songs in just over a year – crystallised a musical revolution. It started with the untutored energy of rockabilly, and matured into rock'n'roll. "What was going on at Sun was outside of the mainstream," says Falco. "Nobody was touching this stuff with a 30-foot pole except for race records and blues labels. Sam said: 'People didn't know what to call this music, they didn't know whether it was fish or fowl.'"

It's tempting to imagine that Phillips was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time. But such an analysis ignores the technical brilliance of his work.

"Sam looks like a lucky hillbilly who started a little studio and all this talent was just here, and all he did was turn the lights on," says Sun's current engineer, Matt Ross-Spang.

"But Sam had his electrical engineering license, and that's a tough test. He came into this room, he put in a hardwood floor and he designed the tile for certain frequencies. That's not hit or miss – acoustics is one of the hardest things in the world. He always talked about how he had this

sound in his head that no-one else was recording."

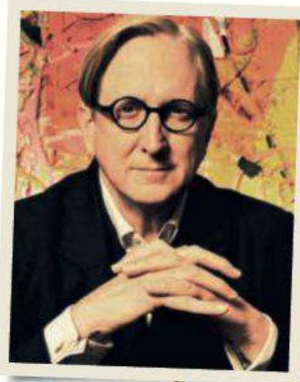
"His greatest gift was in being able to spot unusual talent and get the most out of them," says Janes. "He was a great engineer. He had a great ear, a great imagination. He was smart enough to let people do what they did best and then he kind of loaded it."

"When we were in that studio, playing that first session, Sam was



"Sun was outside the mainstream. People didn't know what to call the music"

TAV FALCO



"IT'S A BIT OF A JOB..."

T Bone Burnett on building a replica of Sun Studio

➤ "It's a long process, because we're involved with the city and the state, and we're looking at a historic building that we're going to build the thing inside of. So it's a bit of a job. Sun is an incredible sounding room. Somehow the dimensions of it are the perfect

dimensions to record a four-piece rock'n'roll band. We're taking the exact dimensions, and the idea is to re-build it with the same substances, the same surfaces. It has those old acoustic tiles – they're probably asbestos or something, and you probably can't get them now, but that's an important part.

"The control room is small, and for the things we need to be able to do today it's definitely out of date. The room, however, is not out of date. That room will never be out of date."

CLASSIC SUN SINGLES CONTINUED...

ELVIS PRESLEY **THAT'S ALL RIGHT**

Presley's version of the Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup song was recorded on July 5, 1954, after Elvis, Scotty Moore and Bill Black started fooling around during a break in a recording session. The record launched Presley's career.

CARL PERKINS **BLUE SUEDE SHOES**

Recorded on December 19, 1955, two days after Perkins wrote it. On his way to play it on Perry Como's TV show, his Chrysler smashed into a pick-up truck. "I was 85 miles away from being the first rockabilly on national television," he recalled. Perkins had to look on as Elvis made the song his own.

ROY ORBISON **OOBY DOOBY**

Originally recorded in Norman Petty's studio in Clovis, New Mexico, then re-made at Sun on March 27, 1956, this was Sun's big seller of the rockabilly era, shifting almost half a million copies. **CONT▶**

CLASSIC SUN SINGLES CONTINUED...

But Orbison was bored; the strictures of rockabilly were a limitation for a singer who had to leave Sun to explore his interest in operatic pop.

JOHNNY CASH I WALK THE LINE

Recorded in April 1956, Cash's first No 1 was written as a promise to his first wife, Vivian, and speeded up at the urging of Phillips. Jack Clement, who worked with Cash, recalls: "I wasn't impressed with Cash at first, because I like recordings with class... And Cash seemed too rough, but 'I Walk The Line' was a class recording."



SONNY BURGESS WE WANNA BOOGIE

Inspired by visits to Arkansas by Elvis, Scotty and Bill, Burgess (above) re-oriented his country band to rock'n'roll. His first Sun single, recorded in 1956, was wild, with an extraordinary guitar break. At times out of tune, it was released by Phillips as it had the untamed spirit he was seeking.

BILLY LEE RILEY FLYING SAUCER ROCK'N'ROLL

Released in January 1957, written by Jack Scott to cash in on the UFO craze and

our audience," says Burgess. "Only one person – it didn't matter, as long as somebody wanted to hear us play. So we were playing like we were in front of a huge crowd. That's why it's so wild."

"He didn't have a lot of equipment," says Roland Janes, "but he put it together wisely, and he was one of the first people I knew of who used slapback echo. He had three tape recorders in the control room. He had one, the main recorder that he cut the sound on, and he had another that he used to transfer tapes from. Then he had a third machine that was rack-mounted. He fed a portion of the signal, as it came into the room, into that machine, then he played that back through the board, and added it to the original recording machine; by increasing or decreasing the volume, he was able to get, and control, the slapback echo."

Phillips was also a master of microphone placement. "Even during a session," Janes continues, "he might move the mic further or closer, but once he got it to where it was sounding good to him he left it alone. He came up with a brilliant thing with Johnny Cash – he took thin paper, and put it over one string and under the next one, over the next string, under the next one, on his guitar, and then he had that little bit of slapback on that, and that's how he got that boom-chicka sound, along with Luther Perkins' guitar-playing to have sort of a snare drum sound. They were recording with just three instruments. He got a big sound."

For all that rock'n'roll was decried as the devil's work, there was a spiritual side to the revolution which took place at Sun. "Gospel and rock'n'roll were cut from the same cloth," says Tav Falco, "even though one is considered by some the devil's

music, and the other sanctified music. It was played by the same people, and appealed to the same audience."

Sun even pitched to the same marketplace. Sam's brother Judd Phillips – who pioneered record promotion – was a former gospel performer, and he hawked the records to the DJs he knew in Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana and Tennessee.

"It gets to a point where musically it's not so easy to distinguish," says Falco. "The lyrics, yeah, and the content, but if you listen to Roebuck Staples playing the guitar in sanctified music, you hear hill-country blues coming out of the guitar."

If this conflict could be located in the body of one individual, that person was Jerry Lee Lewis. JM Van Eaton recalls his first meeting with the piano player from Ferriday, Louisiana. "He had a goatee, and JW, his uncle, was with him, and he had his arm in a cast. I'm thinking, 'Man, they called me in to do this with this crazy-looking piano player and a guy with his arm in a cast trying to make music? This is strange.' But Jerry Lee was awesome. He could make any record his own."

Lewis' ability to synthesise faith and devilment in the same phrase was evident in the ferocity of his recordings, which were delivered with the passion of a hellfire preacher. And it wasn't an act. As luck would have it, the tapes were rolling in 1957 when Phillips tried to coax Jerry Lee into recording "Great Balls Of Fire". What ensued was a furious spat, in which Lewis wrestled with the notion of sin, and Phillips tried to counter with the suggestion that a rock'n'roll singer might, in some way, be able to save souls.

"I thought it was funny because I

THE SUN ALSO RISES

What was next for the legendary studio

➤ At the turn of the '60s, Phillips built a new studio a few blocks from Sun. The Sam C Phillips Recording Studio recorded bands such as Tav Falco's Panther Burns (below, sometimes featuring Alex Chilton) and The Cramps. Roland Janes now works in the newer studio. "Both are great studios," he explains.



"This one here can handle more people, and has more modern equipment. The new studio has receptionists – and we weren't used to that."

Sun was revived in 1986 for the *Class Of 55* album, made with a recording console parked outside. It reopened as a studio (and tourist spot) in 1987, and hosted U2 for some of *Rattle And Hum*.

Record breakers: Sam Phillips gives Johnny Cash a framed copy of "I Walk The Line" in 1956 – the single would go on to sell more than two million copies



could see both of them,” says Van Eaton. “Sam’s as serious as he could be, and Jerry’s as heated as he could be.”

“It’s an argument that went on for almost 50 years,” says Burnett. “I think it’s finally been resolved: music is a good thing, it doesn’t need any name put on it to make it good; writing ‘Jesus’ on a flower doesn’t make it more beautiful.”

“I think Sun was a God thing,” concludes Van Eaton. “Certain things happen in life, and that was one of them. Sam Phillips being there and opening that studio at the right time, and the people came to him. It wasn’t like a record producer going to a venue and saying, ‘Hey, I’d like to sign that band.’ These people came knocking on his door. How strange is that, that you’ve got Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, Jerry Lee Lewis, Charlie Rich, Billy Riley – all of these guys coming in asking you to make records on them? That’s phenomenal. There is something more to it – that just doesn’t happen every day. To me, that’s amazing.”

More Cash! Turn to page 60 for rare photos of the Man in Black, Muddy Waters and others



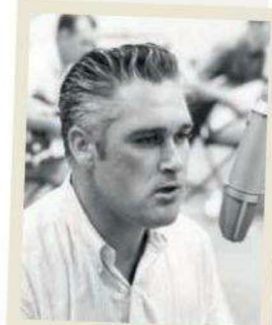
Great balls of blasphemy: Phillips with Jerry Lee Lewis, Sun Studio, 1957

CLASSIC SUN SINGLES CONTINUED...

with Jerry Lee Lewis on piano, this fierce slice of rockabilly established Riley as one of Sun’s many nearly men. His band, including Roland Janes and JM Van Eaton, were named The Little Green Men, and wore green suits, which leaked dye when they sweated.

JERRY LEE LEWIS GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

Recorded on October 8, 1957, but only after a heated debate between Lewis and Sam Phillips about whether Otis Blackwell and Jack Hammer’s song, with its innuendo-laden twist on Pentecostal imagery, was blasphemous.



CHARLIE RICH LONELY WEEKENDS

The final recording at 706 Union Avenue, October 14, 1959, Rich’s (above) shuffle was finished at the new Sam C Phillips Recording Service. A session man at Sun, Rich was squeezed into a Jerry Lee Lewis-shaped box, later becoming an easy listening superstar aka The Silver Fox. 🐾

UNCUT ON SPOTIFY
check out this playlist on Spotify at is.gd/m85fph

CHESS! STAX! CAPITOL!

We salute six other legendary American recording studios...

CHESS

2120 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago

Described as “Mecca” by Keith Richards, the studio was opened in 1957 by Leonard and Phil Chess. It produced the defining work of Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, Little Walter and others. The hallway-shaped studio was on the second floor, which black artists had to enter via the back stairs. Leonard was a perfectionist, getting 144 takes of “Maybellene” out of Chuck Berry. The studio also had a custom-built echo chamber, which Chuck Berry slept in when he hit hard times.

STAX

926 E McLemore Avenue, Memphis

Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton converted the Capitol movie theatre in 1959, establishing it as the home of Southern soul. The studio was built in the cinema auditorium, so the recording space was large, with a sloping floor, which added depth to the sound. Heavy velvet curtains, rumoured to be from the original cinema, were stretched across the walls. Stewart reportedly refused to have them cleaned, in case it changed the sound in the room.

RCA STUDIO B

1611 Roy Acuff Place, Nashville
Constructed in 1957, and home to the “Nashville Sound” invented by Chet Atkins. Elvis recorded 150 songs here, Roy Orbison (below) did “Only The Lonely”, Dolly Parton “Jolene”. Engineer Bill Porter found the acoustics problematic, so he spent \$50 on fibreglass ceiling panels, which



he cut into triangles and hung randomly from the ceiling. Gillian Welch recorded *Time (The Revelator)* here in 2001.

ROYAL STUDIOS

1320 South Lauderdale Street, Memphis

Opened in 1957, this converted movie theatre was the house studio for Hi Records, and enjoyed

its golden period from the early 1960s, when Willie Mitchell was hired as producer, most notably on Al Green’s hits. Mitchell tweaked the studio space to achieve the “Memphis sound”, hanging mineral wool insulation in “U” shapes from the A-frame ceiling.

CAPITOL

1750 Vine Street, Los Angeles

The Capitol Record Tower opened in 1956, with a Recording Department, including three studios on the ground floor. The studio walls were built with shutter-like baffles, birch on one side, and fibreglass on the other. The ceilings were suspended beneath rock-wool insulation. Echo chambers designed by Les Paul were located in concrete bunkers 30 feet underground, offering five seconds of reverb.

COLUMBIA RECORDS STUDIO A

799 Seventh Avenue, New York

Columbia had several studios in New York, but Studio A, a modest facility on the top floor of a block off 52nd Street, was their oldest, and was in operation from the 1930s until 1966. Sinatra, Miles Davis and Simon & Garfunkel recorded here, but it was most notable as the host for most of Dylan’s early recordings, not least “Like A Rolling Stone” and some of *Blonde On Blonde*.



CH-CH-CH-CH-CHANGES

Lee Ranaldo

The ground-breaking guitarist looks back on 30 years of Sonic Youth and radical middle age...



NEW YORK, 1981

LEE RANALDO: Thurston [Moore] and me performing with Glenn Branca. He was working on rock music as composition, that led to him writing symphonies. Live, a critic described it as a 20-minute version of the last three chords of a Who song. I remember I was on my first tour with Glenn in San Francisco when we heard that John Lennon had been shot. I was standing on a tube platform. I had to attribute a lot of my involvement in music to The Beatles, and here I was finally on my first rock tour when this guy has his life taken. I remember this strange hour or two of figuring all that out.



NEW YORK, 1984

Sonic Youth when Bob Bert was our drummer. We all look so incredibly goofy. The first time that Thurston and I went to Europe with Glenn in 1983, we hooked up a Sonic Youth tour straight afterwards. New York at this time really was an island, in the same way Berlin was. There was all this stuff happening that no-one else in the world knew anything about. It was a few years before any other downtown band of our stature got to Europe. So it was really easy for Sonic Youth to blow people's minds live, because it wasn't like anything they were prepared for. It was so visceral, and had so much drama.



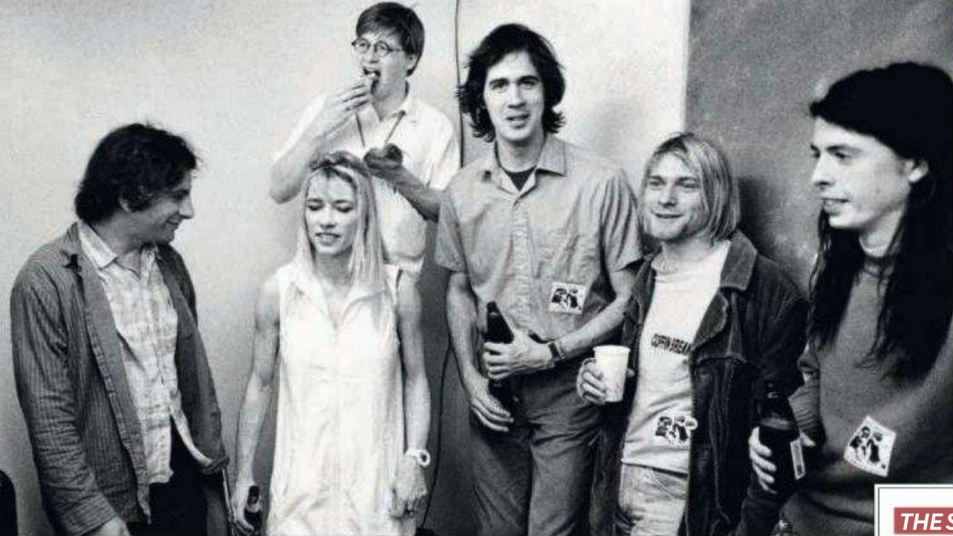
NEW YORK, 1985

The "Death Valley '69" video by Richard Kern. This was taken a few hours before my first son Cody was born. That song came about because Sonic Youth were very interested in the whole Charles Manson thing, the idealism of the '60s coming up against this crushing end. We felt that we were living in the aftermath of that. Through the '80s we felt that everything was fucked-up. There was nothing redeeming going on politically. The city was crumbling. That's reflected in the music.



NEW YORK, 1990

The "Kool Thing" video. This was our first 'real' video with a real budget and locations, when we signed with Geffen. We had a blast dressing up in these crazy clothes, and we coated this place with tinfoil to look like Andy Warhol's Factory. It had a Chuck D cameo. We made our records across the hall from Public Enemy then, we were working on *Daydream Nation* when they made *Fear Of A Black Planet*. And then we made videos for every song on that album, *Goo*, by people doing interesting things in film. The Geffen money let us involve more friends in our scene.



ON TOUR IN EUROPE, 1991

With Nirvana. This was the European tour for *Nevermind* – it was the *Goo* tour, really, and they were along with us. We thought Kurt was an amazing songwriter, that became clear very quickly, as it did that he was a very troubled soul, though then he was a little bit lighter. They were so raw and perfect at that time. It was before mass acclaim, a band at the height of their powers, just doing it for absolute love. I think at this stage, Kurt was revelling in doing what he wanted to do. I never sensed the amount of conflict he had later.



THE SIMPSONS, 1996

To my kids, this is one of the biggest things I can lay claim to, that we were *Simpsons* characters. It's one of the most visible things we ever did in terms of pop culture infiltration, which is funny. We also thought it was funny they didn't draw Thurston any taller than the rest of us. We covered the theme song, at Electric Lady Studios, our only time in the house that Hendrix built. The theme is by Danny Elfman, an old boyfriend of Kim [Gordon]'s from high school.



LONDON, 2004

Sonic Youth with Jim O'Rourke (far right). I'd asked Jim to sit in on a live album by me in '94. He started to come to New York a lot, to our studio down on Murray St. Without us ever feeling like we needed another member, we found there was this extra guy in the room, and happily so. He became a member without there being any discussion. He brought so much to that period, '99 to 2005. And for him, he'd never gone on big-time rock tours, and it allowed him to indulge that dream every kid with a guitar has.



THE KNITTING FACTORY, NEW YORK, 2008

That is me, Jimmy Rip, Tom Verlaine, Nels Cline, J Mascis and Thurston, celebrating 50 years of the Fender Jazzmaster. We're all diehard fans, and were announcing the Lee and Thurston signature models of it. Verlaine, Nels and J are all players who are super-influential to me, and I think Thurston would say the same. Tom played with me on the *I'm Not There* Dylan film, Nels is a good friend, and J we've known since we took Dinosaur on tour in '86.



LAS VEGAS, 2010

This is the Matador 25th anniversary show. It was Pavement's last reunion show in the US. We were sharing Mark [Ibold] with them. We took Pavement on tour to Europe with us in 1991. They were my favourite band of the '90s. Coming back to Matador for *The Eternal* was such a relief for us. By the last five years at Geffen no-one there knew anything about us. Gerard Cosloy at Matador released some of our earliest records, so it was like coming back to a family.



NEW YORK, 2012

In these last couple of years, when Sonic Youth has been less active, I was busy with a million things, but I missed having an outlet for songs. And somebody invited me to do an acoustic show, and in preparing for that a couple of songs popped out, and it just naturally flowed into this record, *Between The Times & The Tides*. I had it 80 per cent done before all the revelations of what was going on with Thurston and Kim [whose marriage broke up in 2011], and knowing that the Sonics were going to stop for a while. Hopefully it's a good reflection of me and where I'm at.

INTERVIEW: NICK HASTED. PHOTOS: STEPHANIE CHERNIKOWSKI; JOE STEVENS; PAT BLASHILL; CHARLES PETERSON; STEVE DOBLE/CAMERA PRESS; GETTY IMAGES; JIMMY FONTAINE; AARON MULLAN

Story: Jaan Uhelszki
Photo: Mary Rozzi

HEAVY PRECIOUS METAL

1-2-3-4 Feistodon! Is FEIST one of the most intimate and gifted singer-songwriters of her age? Or a more complex, hard-rocking beast? *Uncut* interrupts her latest metal session and discovers, “I don’t give a shit anymore about what anyone thinks!”

TWENTY MILES PAST Hollywood lies East Los Angeles, where those fabled streets of gold turn into blocks of grey concrete and graffiti. In a neighbourhood that’s more famous for its tacos and knife fights, Leslie Feist has located a world-class recording complex, Estudio.

It is in these barrios that the first strains of “La Bamba” were heard, and where Cannibal & The Headhunters emerged; the first Mexican-American band to have a national hit (with “Land Of A Thousand Dances”) which earned them a spot on The Beatles’ second American tour. It’s where Los Lobos cut their wolf teeth, and gave birth to what has become known as Chicano rock.

Today, these streets mostly cause unease. The cabdriver warily picks his way across abandoned railroad tracks, past junkyards, crumbling smokestacks, deserted grimy storefronts and abandoned factories, stopping in front of Wendy’s Tortas – a place without a menu, known city-wide for its birria de chivo (goat) and pork leg. He checks his satnav and points to a long stucco bunker, the colour of a dirty band-aid, across the street. “That’s got to be the place,” he says. “Are you sure you want to get out?”

Just outside the triple-steel door, a homeless man is keeping not-so-silent sentry, muttering as he repeatedly pulls his hands through his hair. Only “the good, the bad-ass and the ugly” record here, claims Estudio owner Manny Nieto, with recent clients including Los Lobos and Kim Deal. It is an unlikely place to come looking for the apparently winsome Leslie Feist, with her strapless blue sequin jumpsuits; hair like a Beatles wife, face like a

“I never explain songs. Why don’t you just open up the trenchcoat and flash your naked body?”

cameo; indie-rock past as part of the sprawling Broken Social Scene collective.

But then the Canadian singer, 35, is so much more than rock’s Princess Leia. She’s a little bit Nina Simone, who she reveres, Astrud Gilberto on a very good day, and Sandy Denny, with a little *Anticipation*-era Carly Simon thrown in to keep things satisfyingly off-balance.

Feist handpicked this studio herself. She also booked her first two cross-Canadian tours, drove the van and collected the money herself after the shows. Her favourite album growing up was Dinosaur Jr’s *Bug*, and if she had a hero, it was Henry Rollins, with whom she shares a birthday. She once snuck into his dressing room to leave him a note.

“I was obsessed with Henry Rollins,” she confesses. “Creepy obsessed. I snuck into his dressing room in Calgary when I was about 15. He was playing at the big hall at the university, and I was playing downstairs with my punk band, Placebo. I wrote him a note, and was leaving it along with our gig poster by his stuff, when the promoter caught me. ‘What the fuck do you think you’re doing?’ he screamed. I was so terrified, but in my heart I was like, ‘Henry Rollins needs to come down to our gig. He’s going to get it.’ I was that typical 15-year-old, so badly wanting my hero to see what I was doing.”

TO UNDERSTAND THE further complications of Feist, it’s worth looking at a YouTube clip of her as Bitch Lap Lap, performing with her old roommate, Peaches. The folkish singer-songwriter is wearing form-fitting spandex and a sock puppet on one hand, while Peaches chants “*Fuck the pain away*” over and over.

“I think the path she took is fearless,” Peaches says of





Feist recording in Estudios, L.A. and below, as Bitch Lap Lap, with Peaches



➤ Feist. "It's really fearless to sing so quietly and have so much power. Also, let's not forget that she actually started as a punk rocker, and I used to be a folk musician. She's definitely not the introverted one."

"There's another video she did for me called 'Cum Undun', where we called her Kitty, and I gave her a knife and put her in a leather jacket. You see the video and you don't think that's Feist. That '1234' dance Feist? She looks really like a tough New York junkie. She's made her decisions, of course, of who to present. But we're always more than what is shown in a public way."

Feist slips from one persona to the other

with an effortless grace that is as unexpected as it is baffling. Although she insists that she's a tomboy, fans continue to shower her with marriage proposals, roses and inappropriate love letters.

"Of course she's feminine, but she thinks she likes to roll with the boys," says Mocky, aka Dominic Salole, her longtime friend and co-producer on *The Reminder* and *Metals*. "In *Broken Social Scene*, last time I counted there's like seven guitar players. And Feist held her own with all of them. You have to remember when she's up there singing her butt off, she's also playing guitar at the same time."

"Right before she was Feist she was a guitar player in the band *By Divine Right*," continues Peaches. "They were a rock band, and she was the rockin' guitar player. They hired her because she could really play."

HOW TO BUY

1-2-3-4...5!

The best of Feist on record

KEITH MEGNA



MONARCH (LAY YOUR JEWELLED HEAD DOWN)

SELF-RELEASED, 1999



Sold mainly at early Feist shows, she likened this to an

6/10

"awkward high school photo she doesn't want anyone to look at". Self-conscious and stylised, think "Yellow Taxi" Joni Mitchell rather than "Who Knows Where The Time Goes" Sandy Denny. Guitars are insinuating and countrified, and it's clearly the bridge between her work with *Broken Social Scene*.

LET IT DIE

INTERSCOPE, 2004



8/10

Major label debut, recorded in Paris. Her soft, swaying torch songs are as tortured as they are sensual, devolving into the high whimsy of "Mushaboom". She stylishly covers Ron Sexsmith's "Secret Heart" and turns the Bee Gees' "Love You Inside Out" into her own personal exorcism, but it's the title track that shatters the heart with its line, "Don't you wish we could forget that kiss".

OPEN SEASON

INTERSCOPE, 2006



6/10

A collection of remixes from *Let It Die*. The stand-out track is The Postal Service's reworking of "Mushaboom", which sounds a little like it was recorded underwater. Also included is her breathy duet with Jane Birkin, "The Simple Story", and a version of Peaches' "Lovetits". Not for the casual fan.

THE REMINDER

INTERSCOPE, 2007



8/10

Her breakthrough album. Eclectic, understated, and almost unbearably intimate. Highlights include the arrhythmic and addictive "I Feel It All" and minor-chord metaphysics of "My Moon My Man". But "1234" is the song that launched her career, sold iPod nanos and got Feist a spot on *Sesame Street*.

METALS

INTERSCOPE, 2011



9/10

On her fourth album, Feist stopped trying to please anybody but herself, allowing her songs to go where they needed to, telling great truths and effecting great metaphysical change. It marks a watershed in her abilities and her emotional development and heralds an important shift in an already inspired career. Her best and most complex album to date.



That's something that didn't escape Shane Smith, one of the owners of Estudio, where Feist and her crew have been sequestered for the past two days. "She really spends a lot of time on her tone," he says. "She uses a lot of pedals, too..."

Feist has left the studio to fetch food, so Smith conducts a tour of his rather messy facility. Past a chipped statue of a Chinese warrior, a plaster golden dragon and a framed scroll of an Indian deity subduing a startled maiden, he points out a patchwork of dusty oriental rugs that baffle the sound in this analogue studio. A piece of notebook paper is taped to one of them, covered with the lyrics to "Black Tongue", a song by the eminent contemporary metal band Mastodon.

Finally, we walk up a dark stairway, which leads to a womb-like control room. "Look what she did last night," Smith says, indicating the perforated white ceiling tile at the far end of the room. Written in brown permanent marker, in what passes for classic metal/goth

scrawl, it is emblazoned with one word: "FEISTODON!"

IT IS QUITE a coup for Smith to have Feist in his recording lair. Her third album, *The Reminder*, has now sold over 1.5 million copies since its release in 2007, not to mention an additional 1.5 million downloads. Its belated follow-up, *Metals*, might be a more jarring, sad and occasionally cacophonous creation – there is no obvious hit like "1234" this time round – but it has already racked up more than 500,000 sales since its release last October.

Metals is an exorcism of sorts, written in three months during autumn 2010, after an annus horribilis that saw her lose her grandmother and an uncle, and suffer, if

the songs are to be believed, a rather wrenching breakup. Feist recorded the album in a converted cliff-top barn overlooking the Pacific, near Big Sur, California – chosen mainly because John Steinbeck and Henry James used to live nearby. For her next, more playful project, however, she has shifted operations to East Los Angeles. She is recording Mastodon's "Black Tongue" for a split seven-inch with the band, for Record Store Day (on the flip, Mastodon are tackling her anxious, rather atonal "A Commotion").

"After we're finished with this, we're all getting pedicures," Feist announces as she ambles into the studio, accompanied by keyboardist Brian LeBarton and engineer-cum-manager Robbie Lackritz. The trio pick their way through the clutter, gingerly stepping over a snakepit of exposed wires, cardboard cartons and instruments strewn across the refurbished floor of this former sewing sweatshop. They are heading to the dim control room, with Starbucks coffees and takeaways from a nearby Salvadorean restaurant.

Feist is dressed in tighter-than-tight dark denim stovepipe

pants – the kind Brian Jones used to sport – and a sleeveless denim shirt. Despite the winter chill, her petite, sockless feet are stuck in eccentric gold shoes. Her nails are short and painted scarlet, with most of the polish chipped off. Most strikingly, her trademark bangs have grown out, as if to emphasise the idea that *Metals* was a goodbye to a past self; "The Bad In Each Other", especially, sounds like an elegant kiss-off to a relationship.

"Well, it's true," she says slowly. "'The Bad In Each Other' is kind of about that. But the hackles come up if I ever try to take a song and say it's about anything. When someone starts a song at a show and says like, 'This song is about...' I'm always just like, 'Let the song speak for itself.' It's just like flashing. Why don't you just open up the trenchcoat and flash your naked body? Somehow it just seems so in bad taste to discredit the song's ability to explain to you what it needs you to know.

"If you want to know the truth, I love not knowing. I love figuring things out. I figure everyone is like that."

But they're not.

"Yesterday, we were living in the Land Of Snacks," Feist says, abruptly changing the subject and ripping into her bag of takeaway. "We worked so hard we didn't have a chance to break for a meal the whole day. You can see the evidence on the snack altar," she laughs, before going across the room to get a stained plastic trashcan. She pushes a torn Reese's Peanut Butter Cups wrapper, a banana peel, a half-eaten bag of pistachio nuts, three empty beer bottles, and three green limes that never made it near a shot of tequila, into the bin and sits back down. Feist, Peaches recalls, was always a tidy roommate.

Spooning black beans, Mexican cheese and plantains into a flour tortilla, the singer says she prefers to be called Feist, her school nickname as well as surname, rather than

Leslie. "You have to admit it's a pretty great last name," she says, ladling plenty of hot salsa verde onto her taco.

Is this Mastodon cover the most daring thing you've done, something so far out of your comfort zone?

"I don't consider it daring, really," she says, all but

dismissing the question. "I wouldn't have agreed to cover them, if I wasn't comfortable. I get to make a snapshot of my own interpretation of what their song makes me want to do. What wouldn't be comfortable is singing a hook on some rapper's record. Being taken out of my own equation. This is still my world."

One tends to forget that, because most people know Feist from the inescapable 2007 hit "1234". As it turns out, that wasn't even her song.

"That was the only song I didn't write on *The Reminder*, so it wasn't like I had to try *not* to write another '1234'." The tune was written by Sally Seltmann, aka New Buffalo, who was touring with her. Seltmann offered her the song because she thought it sounded "too Feist" for her to perform herself. First titled "Sally's Song", about a couple divorcing, Feist added some new lyrics, changed the title and made it sound like a teenager's lament, playing it for the first time at The Trabendo in Paris in December 2005.

"It's not really saying much about being an adult,"



THE ODD COUPLE

How Feist and Mastodon got acquainted

Feist has long been a covert

rocker: her ringtone is Led Zeppelin's "Immigrant Song". The Mastodon hook-up, however, came when they both appeared on *Later... With Jools Holland*.

"Brent [Hinds, Mastodon singer] and I were nodding at each other, and he finally says to me: 'Nice riff.' I said, 'Yours, too.' I don't know where it came from, but I said: 'You should try my riffs on for size.'

"Yeah, OK, girl. I'll try on your riffs," he said. "It was totally funny on a guitar level that he saw something in what we were doing, which is like a pillow compared to their granite arrow."

The mutual admiration society has now been solidified with this split seven-inch for Record Store Day, featuring a Mastodon cover of Feist's "A Commotion" and her take on "Black Tongue". The work-in-progress reveals the diminutive singer howling like Glenn Danzig, unhinged and unnerving.

"She was so elated that she finally got to shred," says Mocky.

"They're taking my song and making it heavy," laughs Feist, "and we're taking a Mastodon song but we're not making it acoustic."



Shredding the KROQ
Almost Acoustic
Xmas on December 9,
2007 in Universal
City, California

continues the singer. “1234’ is like a lot of the songs from the past that have fallen away, so it’s not on the setlist anymore. There’s no reason for it to be there right now. It doesn’t belong, so it’s not invited to this party.”

“I feel like *Metals* is the gateway drug for me. I think it’s the gateway to absolute freedom because, again, I just pleased myself. It seems like that’s not a big deal, because that’s what everyone should be doing, but I got asked a lot if I was trying to follow up my last album. Actually, I wasn’t trying to escape it, but I wasn’t trying to copy it, either. I was just trying to forget about *The Reminder*.”

“I didn’t want to be guided by that into a negative, obstinate place, where I’d say to myself, ‘I’m not going to write a single again or even try to write one.’ That should not be guiding me. This moment is about this moment.”

But that moment seemed a long time coming. After touring non-stop after the release of *The Reminder*, Feist vowed to take off an entire year. Somewhere along the line, it began to stretch to two years. She moved back to Toronto from Paris – where she had kept an apartment for almost five years, although never learned the language. She took long walks with her two dogs, baked bread and even enrolled in literature night classes at the nearby University Of Toronto. Mostly, she took a long, hard look at her life.

“I realised my life was just a physics experiment,” she says, a little sadly. “If you picture a cylinder spinning, things will just cling to the outside wall. Then if you take gravity away, everything just falls apart. Like on the space shuttle, the guy’s trying to drink water and it’s just floating away in particles because there’s nothing to keep it together.”

“I stopped touring and there was nothing to keep what I

thought my life was together, because the movement had stopped and everything I thought was real turned out not to be.” She stops just short of any salient details that would tie together the unease and unravelling of two hearts suggested by songs like “Bittersweet Memories”, “Comfort Me” and “How Come You Never Go There”.

You know, you did leave a lot of clues. Can’t you call this a breakup album?

“I’m trying to leave clues, but they’re for myself,” she says, with a Mona Lisa half-smile. “But if you spotted the clues, that’s amazing.”

“All I can say is I very psychedelically realised that there wasn’t really as much there as I thought. It had all been held together by never being home, always experiencing it at a distance. You do these little pop-ins, you think they’re super-potent and they’re going to maintain a relationship. But what you’re really doing is patching and embroidering all these little illusions.”

“It’s beautiful because you’re living in symbols, and that helps in the writing mind. But I wanted life to be something that’s rooted in something more true.”

“This record was medicine that I self-administered – like through an IV, one drop at a time – because it took a long time for me to get over stuff. I was in a really horrible state of mind for lots of reasons, and it all happened at once, when you’re dealing with loss and death and everything is being called into question. I was living under a giant black cloud...”

The experience was so painful that she wasn’t sure she’d ever write again, let alone tour.

“I’m never sure that it’ll ever happen again, although I think it will. With the right headspace, with the right respect, I think it will. But it’s not to be presumed it’ll always be there. It’s like anything, it just has more value if you imagine it could be gone tomorrow, or if you think it’s gone and then it reappears.”

“Since I’m in Los Angeles so much, I decided to buy a car,” Feist says of her latest acquisition, a champagne-coloured Karmann Ghia that is older than she is by almost a decade. “It cost me the same as renting a car here three times, so I said to myself, ‘Why not?’”

Why not a lot of things?

“You mean why I called the record *Metals*? I was feeling grave. I realised there was no reason to apologise, instead of, ‘Oh, I’m sorry I’m the bummer of the room because I’m having a really fucking brutal time.’”

“It was my experience, and it’s actually amazing

that I got to experience it. I wanted the music I was writing to be physical and heavy, and I really did dose myself properly, because these songs helped me see things as they were.”

“I didn’t want to lay blame and I didn’t want to give myself over completely to mourning. Even though you have to. I mean, in terms of people close to you dying, and relationships dying. It’s like a death and, in a way, it’s more confusing than death because it’s not as final... They’re still there, somewhere...”

“I don’t want to cast any blame. I’ve been really careful not to. But I don’t give a shit anymore what anyone thinks about how my life works.”

So in the spirit of that, maybe you could tell me...

“OK, OK,” Feist laughs, finally. “I did make a breakup album.”

FEIST & CO

Five of the restless collaborator’s best team efforts...



Feist & Jane Birkin
“The Simple Story”

Rendez-Vous (2004)

Birkin duetted with a pre-fame Feist on “The Simple Story”. Their intimate, breathy delivery makes it hard to figure out where one chanteuse begins and the other one ends. Also appears on *Open Season*.



Feist & Broken Social Scene
“Feel Good Lost”

Feed Good Lost (2004)

BSS founder Kevin Drew: “She came over and we built a repetitive, almost meditative line based on the conviction of her voice. It was quiet but with a smooth tone of her almost yelling a whisper in your ear.”



Feist & Wilco
“You And I”

Album (2009)

“I always liked the idea of bringing a female voice to Wilco,” says Jeff Tweedy. Feist duetted with the Wilco frontman on “You And I”, about the latter’s relationship with his wife. “It’s one of my favourite parts on the album,” he admits.



Feist & Beck
Oar (2009)

Along with Wilco and Jamie Lidell, Feist helped out on Beck’s reworking of Skip Spence’s *Oar*. She played guitar on “Little Hands” and sang lead on “Weighted Down”. Beck remixed *Metals*’ “How Come You Never Go There”.



Feist & Grizzly Bear
“Service Bell”

Dark Was The Night (2009)

After touring together in 2007, Feist and the Brooklyn collective teamed up on the brooding “Service Bell” for the *Dark Was The Night* benefit album. GB also remixed Feist’s “My Moon My Man” in 2008.

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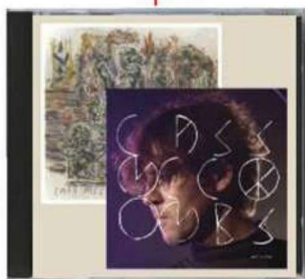
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Spiral Scratch EP

BUZZCOCKS

A Manchester-based band of students put the city on the map with arguably punk's most influential record: "The studio didn't know what had hit them," recalls Pete Shelley



THERE ARE MANY candidates for the title of punk's most important recording, but a main contender must be the "Spiral Scratch" EP. Its four songs – "Breakdown", "Time's Up", "Boredom" and "Friends Of Mine" – had already been recorded by the Buzzcocks in a four-track studio in Stockport, but the December 1976 "Spiral Scratch" session at Indigo Sound yielded more satisfactory results. This time, the band had 16 tracks to play with, while behind the mixing desk they'd secured the services of future Joy Division producer Martin Hannett, credited here as Martin Zero.

Critically, the EP was released on the band's own label, New Hormones, stretching punk's DIY ethic to its furthest point so far. Everything from sleeve design to distribution was orchestrated – and paid for – by the band, an undertaking that proved inspirational to many groups, as well as entrepreneurs like Alan McGee and Geoff Travis. The sleeve notes attempted to demystify the record-making process. As Jon Savage explained in *England's Dreaming*, "What was so perfect about the Buzzcocks' EP was that its aesthetics were perfectly combined with the means of production."

"Spiral Scratch" sold 16,000 copies, a huge amount for an indie label, and helped establish Manchester as a credible musical centre outside London. It was also the only official release by the original lineup. Howard Devoto left the band soon after. "I'm already a has-been", he insisted on "Boredom", but more was to come – from Devoto, Buzzcocks, Hannett and Manchester – and much of that was down to "Spiral Scratch". Not bad for 10 minutes of fuzz, recorded and mixed in a couple of hours as the studio owner was enjoying his Christmas break. *PETER WATTS*

PETE SHELLEY: Martin Hannett was our booking agent and came up with a scam that we could go into a studio during downtime to record a single. That never happened, but it gave us the idea we could do a record. But we didn't want to go cap in hand to London.

HOWARD DEVOTO: I don't think we ever phoned a record company. The only music industry we saw were journalists that Malcolm McLaren brought up for Sex Pistols gigs.

STEVE DIGGLE: Malcolm brought them up North in one of his Situationist follies. Those gigs put us on the map, so we thought we should do a record to sell to fans locally. We didn't think a record company would let us in a building.

RICHARD BOON: After the Stockport demos [*bootlegged as Time's Up*] we thought it was important to have a document of this period, especially as there was already uncertainty about Howard. Doing it ourselves was the logical conclusion: you form a band, put on your own gigs and put out your own records.

SHELLEY: We worked out it would cost £500. My dad was on good terms with the Friendly Society and he got us £250.

DEVOTO: Dave Sowden, an old schoolfriend,

KEY PLAYERS



Pete Shelley
Guitar,
songwriter



Howard Devoto
Singer,
songwriter



Steve Diggle
Bass



John Maher
Drums



Phil Hampson
Engineer



Richard Boon
Manager

came up with some money.

DIGGLE: This girl, Sue Cooper, had just got a university grant so we used her money. We were that skint, Pete was making plectrums out of margarine tubs.

SHELLEY: We voted for the tracks we'd use. We thought we'd do an EP because it was better value.

JOHN MAHER: I was pleased that "Boredom" went on there. It was the stand-out track.

DEVOTO: I wrote "Boredom" a bit later than the others. It was more

sophisticated because it has those stops in it.

MAHER: I liked it 'cause it had those breaks. It was an opportunity to try a drum fill, which at that stage – and possibly even today – was beyond my capabilities.



DIGGLE: We were playing 100 miles an hour but the idea of singing about something existential made it different.

BOON: After the onslaught of the Anarchy tour, something that was supposed to have no boundaries became incredibly restricted and the idea of 'boredom' became a cliché. People think Howard was celebrating that, but he wasn't. There's a lot of satire on "Spiral Scratch".

MAHER: I've never been into lyrics, but occasionally a song comes along where the words jump out. "Boredom" was so bloody clever. And it had Pete's great two-note guitar solo.

SHELLEY: I came up with this non-flashy solo, and everybody just fell about laughing. I got it from a Bonzo song, "Jazz, Delicious Hot, Disgusting Cold", with a really bad

saxophone solo that goes on forever.

DEVOTO: Pete will say he got it from a Bonzo track. I think it has a nod to Eno's "The True Wheel". It was certainly Pete's idea to deploy it there.

PHIL HAMPSON: I was a chief engineer at Indigo. Mike Thomas, a young tape op, said some friends wanted to use the studio over Christmas and New Year, and would I do the session. Our regular fodder was cabaret bands, all quite sedate, so I wasn't sure what to expect.

SHELLEY: The studio didn't know what had hit them.

HAMPSON: It was a shock.

DIGGLE: We'd never been in a studio with a full desk, and Hannett said he knew something about production. Little did we know he'd become Manchester's Phil Spector.

*"We didn't know
what we were doing,
but a terrible beauty
was born from that
noise"* STEVE DIGGLE

MAHER: In Manchester, there weren't many people you could ask to produce a record. Martin was on the edge of the scene, he had a bit of a reputation and his name came up.

DEVOTO: We knew we needed somebody in the control room. We were thinking a bit more seriously now there was money involved. There was definitely a feeling that we had better get a result from this.

HAMPSON: This was the first time Martin had ever been in a pukka studio. But it was the first punk session I'd done, so we were both swimming in the deep. We ended up recording a few punk bands. We were across the road from Granada, so Tony Wilson would sniff around. We had an animation studio upstairs where Barney Sumner worked.

DIGGLE: We didn't know what we were doing, but you didn't have to be an expert with the kind of music we were playing. A terrible beauty was born from that noise.

DEVOTO: I can remember turning to the engineer and asking, "What do you think?" and he being distinctly non-committal.

THE MAKING OF...



Lesser Free Trade Hall, Manchester, July 21, 1978: the second anniversary of Buzzcocks' first gig

HAMPSON: I'm sure I was diplomatic. But I was shell-shocked.

SHELLEY: My dad drove us in his transit van. He said every time Martin turned something up, the engineer turned it down again.

HAMPSON: Martin kept turning up the faders to make it louder. Pete Shelley's dad says that every time Martin turned it up I turned it down, but I had to: all he was doing was overloading the tape. If you want it louder you turn up the monitor and sort it out in the mix.

DEVOTO: I don't think Martin had time to fiddle around, but there are the odd touches like at the end of "Boredom" there's a repeating tone so it flows into "Friends Of Mine".

MAHER: It was kept simple. We were paying by the hour and could only afford to do so much.

HAMPSON: There was a lot of distortion, because they were making as much noise as possible. The studio had three rooms, so to get some separation we stuck the drummer in one room and the bass in another.

DIGGLE: We put some of the amps where they kept the rubbish. It was very unorthodox.

HAMPSON: After the first song I handed over to Mike and legged it. They were there about four hours. After New Year, they asked me to mix it again. It wasn't difficult, just getting it so it would sound good on tinny radios and cassettes. Mike Thomas still has the masters.

BOON: We decided the sleeve had to be spare, lean and minimal. The phrase 'heart beats up love' is only on the back to make the copy symmetrical. I took the cover pic with a Polaroid.

DIGGLE: We went to some monument in Piccadilly Gardens for photos. There were two Polaroids in the camera and in one Howard has his eyes closed so we had to use the other.

DEVOTO: Richard and I designed the sleeve.

These were more skills we had to learn. I did a bit of terrible Letrasetting, but Richard had studied fine art so was a little more sophisticated.

SHELLEY: Howard did the pub-rock column for *New Manchester Review* (NMR), and we used their type-setting machine. Then this box of singles arrived and we set up an angle-poise light on the kitchen table to make sure there were no scratches – except the spiral scratch that started at the outside and worked its way in.

MAHER: I got very excited when we saw the first batch of 1,000. They turned up in these white sleeves and the picture sleeves arrived separately. We spent all day taking them out of the plain sleeve and putting them in the picture sleeves.

DIGGLE: It was boring, so we kept going to the pub.

DEVOTO: Were we going to sell a thousand? I wasn't sure, but we sold them quickly. In total we pressed 16,000. We'd get so few people at gigs I didn't think we'd sell 200. It was a surprise to everybody.

SHELLEY: I told the bassist in this band, The Drones, we were doing our own single and he said, "Don't do that, we did it once and we've still got loads left."

HAMPSON: I knew they were putting out their own single but a lot of bands pressed their own record and six months later they'd still have boxes in the hall. To sell 16,000 was remarkable.

SHELLEY: I went round with a shoulder bag, selling copies at gigs. But it took off when we sent John Peel a copy and he played it. Then Rough Trade and Virgin started stocking it.

BOON: We used the NMR as our address for mail orders and began getting loads of order. That decreased as distribution increased, but there really wasn't an infrastructure for independent releases.

DEVOTO: The record came out and I left within a month. I'm sure there was an element that we'd got it immortalised on record, so that'll do for me. I'd done a bit of everything: played live, been in a studio, made a record – ticked all the boxes.

SHELLEY: Howard wanted an artefact, something to remember. He was in his last year at college and wanted to concentrate on that.

DIGGLE: It came out and then Howard went off to do Magazine, so we ended up with two bands for the price of one.

DEVOTO: The record turned round Buzzcocks' career. At that point it didn't actually feel hugely happening in Manchester. There were barely 100 people at gigs.

BOON: The NMR was very slim and came out fortnightly because in Manchester there really wasn't much going on. The Pistols shows brought a few people out the woodwork, but it was a case of 'build it and they will come'.

MAHER: There was no established scene. We were doing gigs in places like The Ranch run by a transvestite called Foo Foo Lamarr.

DIGGLE: It put the provinces on the map. People realised you didn't have to go on your hands and knees to some cigar-smoking business guy in London. We put the record out and created a vibe.

SHELLEY: The record was probably responsible for a lot of the things that went on to happen in Manchester. And not just in Manchester. Alan McGee has said he would

never have started Creation if it wasn't for "Spiral Scratch".

BOON: The plan had been to do "Orgasm Addict" next, but schoolboy drummer John left school and the DSS wanted him to get a job as an insurance clerk. That forced the issue, and labels were interested so we signed with United Artists.

MAHER: It's held up as being more important as a pioneering indie/DIY release than it is for the music. It's good to be remembered for any reason.

HAMPSON: I was in Florida in 2006 and these kids were going on about it. I had no idea how popular it was. But I loved

the idea. I'd tried to get into the music industry since the '60s and it was a closed shop. The record companies and managers had it sewn up. So I thought it was fabulous, the idea that anybody could do their own thing. It made people realise they could go out on a limb, on their own, make it work and be successful. ☺

FACT FILE

- **Written by** Howard Devoto and Pete Shelley
- **Performers** Howard Devoto (vocals), Pete Shelley (guitar), Steve Diggle (bass), John Maher (drums)
- **Producer** 'Martin Zero'
- **Engineer** Phil Hampson
- **Recorded at** Indigo Sound Studio, Manchester
- **Released** Jan 29, 1977
- **Chart position** N/A

ON THE ROAD Buzzcocks play Manchester Apollo on May 25 and London Brixton Academy on May 26

TIMELINE

Feb 1976 Buzzcocks form, taking their name from a *Time Out* review of TV show *Rock Follies* that ends, "get a buzz, cock". They play their first gig in April.

Oct 1976 Having played with the Sex Pistols, as well as organising their first two Manchester shows, Buzzcocks cut a demo, later released as the *Time's Up* bootleg.

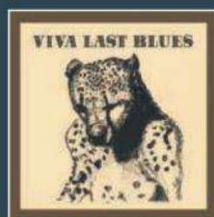
Nov 1976 Buzzcocks record a single. They borrow some money from their friends and family to release it on their own label, New Hormones.

Dec 28, 1976 The band record at Indigo Sound. **Jan 29, 1977** "Spiral Scratch" is released and quickly sells its initial 1,000 pressing. It goes on to sell 16,000.

Feb 1977 Devoto leaves to form Magazine. **1979** EP is re-released as 'Buzzcocks With Howard Devoto' on Virgin and reaches No 31 in the UK chart.



THE CROWN JEWELS



THE PALACE ALBUMS REISSUED

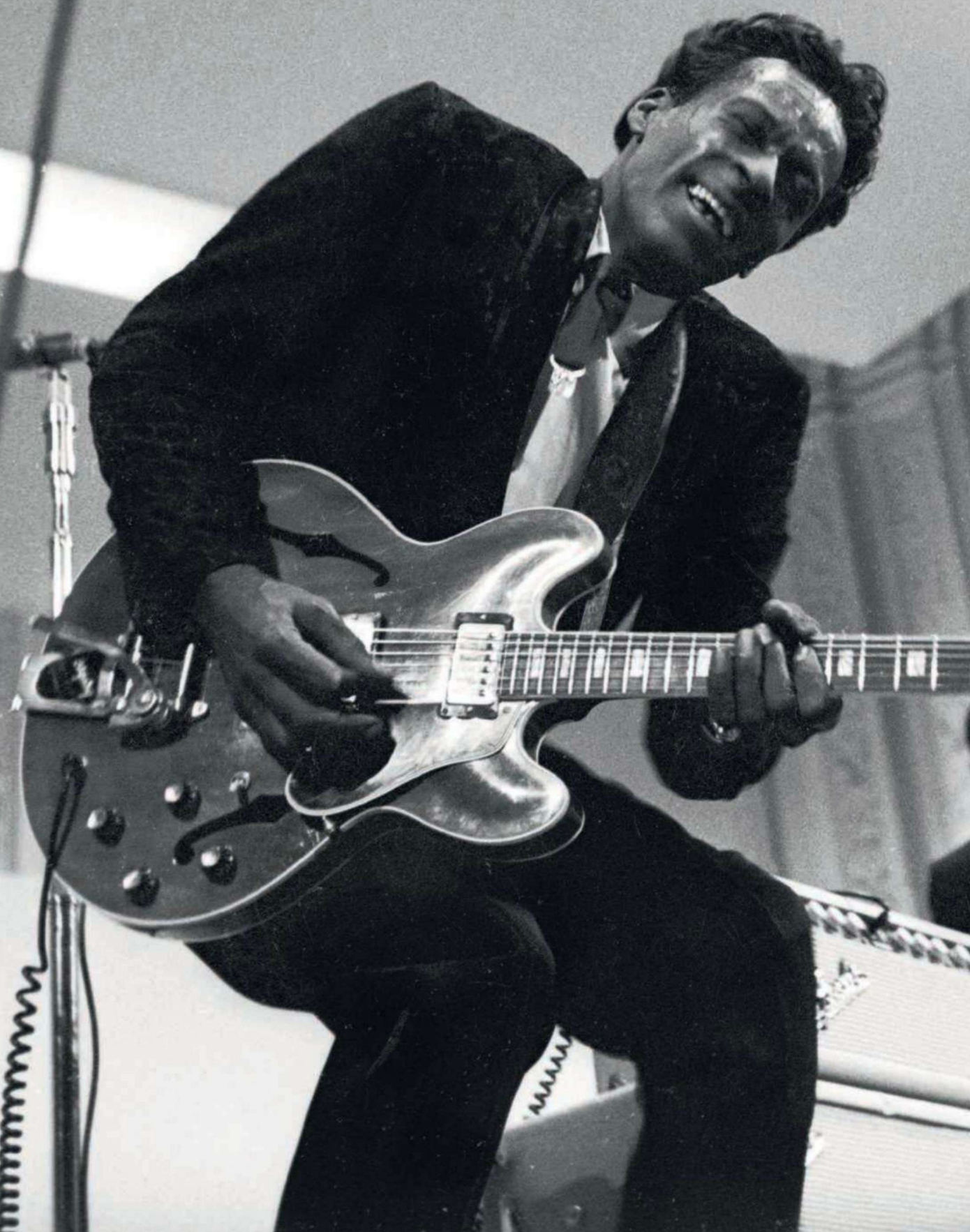
Before adopting the name Bonnie 'Prince' Billy in the late 1990s, a series of classic albums was recorded under the names Palace Brothers, Palace Music, Palace Songs.

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New York Folk Festival

Words & photographs:
Joe Stevens

July 1965: Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, Johnny Cash and Mississippi John Hurt at that bastion of high culture, Carnegie Hall

JULY 1965 AND the 'folk boom' is so booming that even New York's most prestigious venue of high culture, Carnegie Hall, is in on the act, playing host to the 'New York Folk Festival,'" recalls photographer Joe Stevens. "They adopted a pretty generous interpretation of what constituted folk – today you'd call it a roots festival, because it encompassed blues, country and rock'n'roll. I hadn't yet become a professional photographer, but I took my camera along, in the way that kids still do to this day. I'd got to know Mississippi John Hurt and he'd given me a ticket – it was my first 'access all areas' pass, so I just wandered about backstage taking pictures of the likes of Muddy Waters, Johnny Cash and Chuck Berry. I couldn't afford to have the film processed at the time, and I kind of forgot about it until almost 30 years later when a magazine asked me if I had any pictures of Johnny Cash. I said 'no' – then I remembered I had two rolls of film from Carnegie Hall. A bit of dust had got into the cartridges, but when I printed them up the pictures were really sharp – and the memories came flooding back..."

🔥 "Chuck kicked ass. I think he loved the idea of playing Carnegie Hall. He was running all over the stage, screaming his head off. If Springsteen had been there, he'd have had an early lesson in what it's all about. Sadly, Chuck's the only one I photographed that night who's still alive."



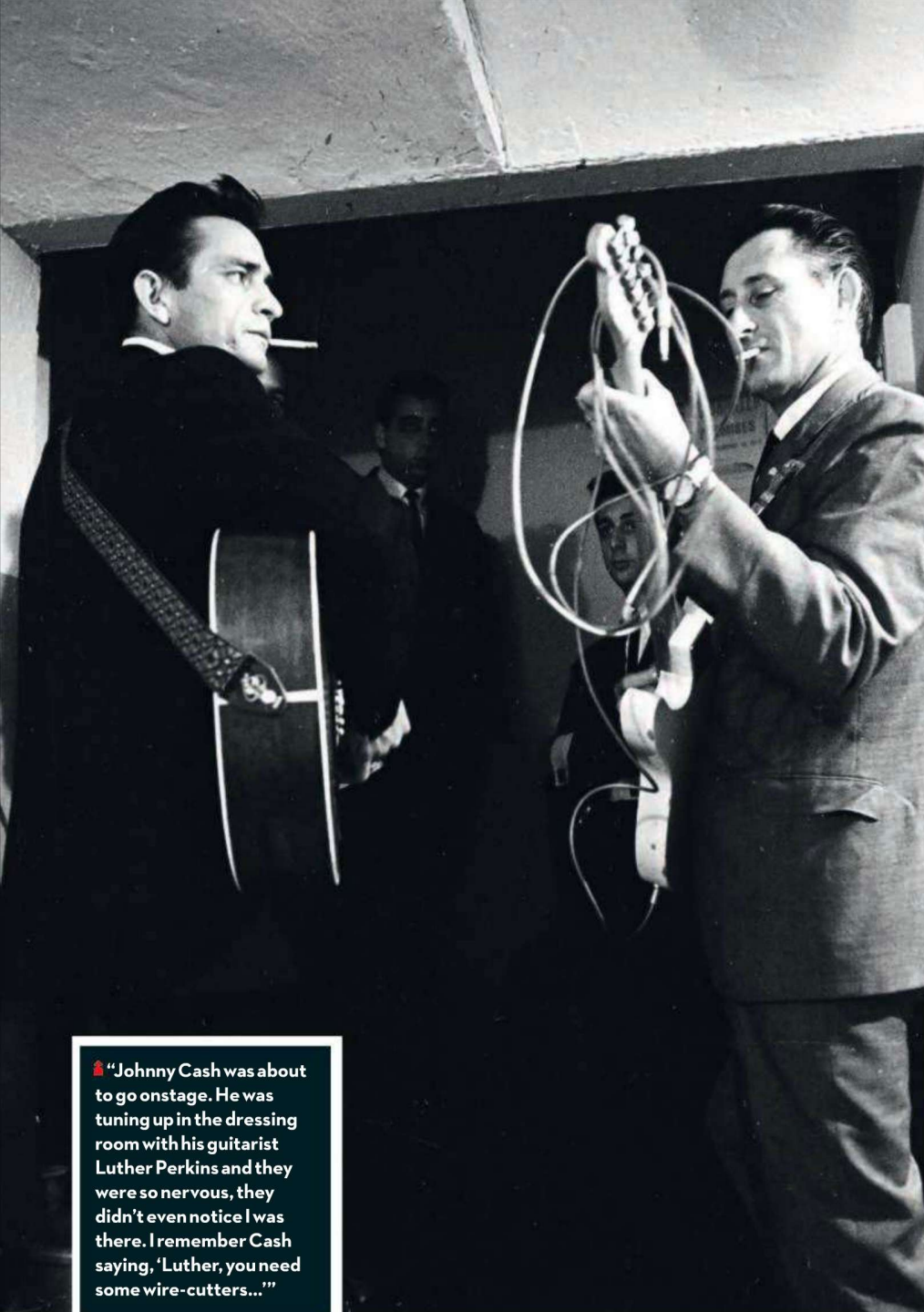
📍 "This is Muddy backstage with his guitarist, Pee Wee Madison. No idea where they got those haircuts, but everybody was dressed up and spruced up, because that's what you did you when you played Carnegie Hall."

📍 "I wandered around the backstage dressing rooms with my camera and stumbled on Chuck and Muddy. What a summit meeting. If anyone knows the name of Chuck's guitarist who's also in the picture, let me know."

📍 "It was still the age of innocence. Look how well-dressed the audience is. You didn't wear jeans to the Carnegie Hall. Even I was in a suit – the last time I ever turned up to a gig in one."



📍 "There were fans queuing outside on the sidewalk all day to get standing room tickets. The concert had been sold out for months and I might have been queuing with them if Mississippi John hadn't given me a ticket."



🔥 “Johnny Cash was about to go onstage. He was tuning up in the dressing room with his guitarist Luther Perkins and they were so nervous, they didn’t even notice I was there. I remember Cash saying, ‘Luther, you need some wire-cutters...’”



🔥 “I read the biographies of Cash later and found that he was a major-league speed freak at the time. But there was no sign of it. He looked healthy, happy, smart and alert.”

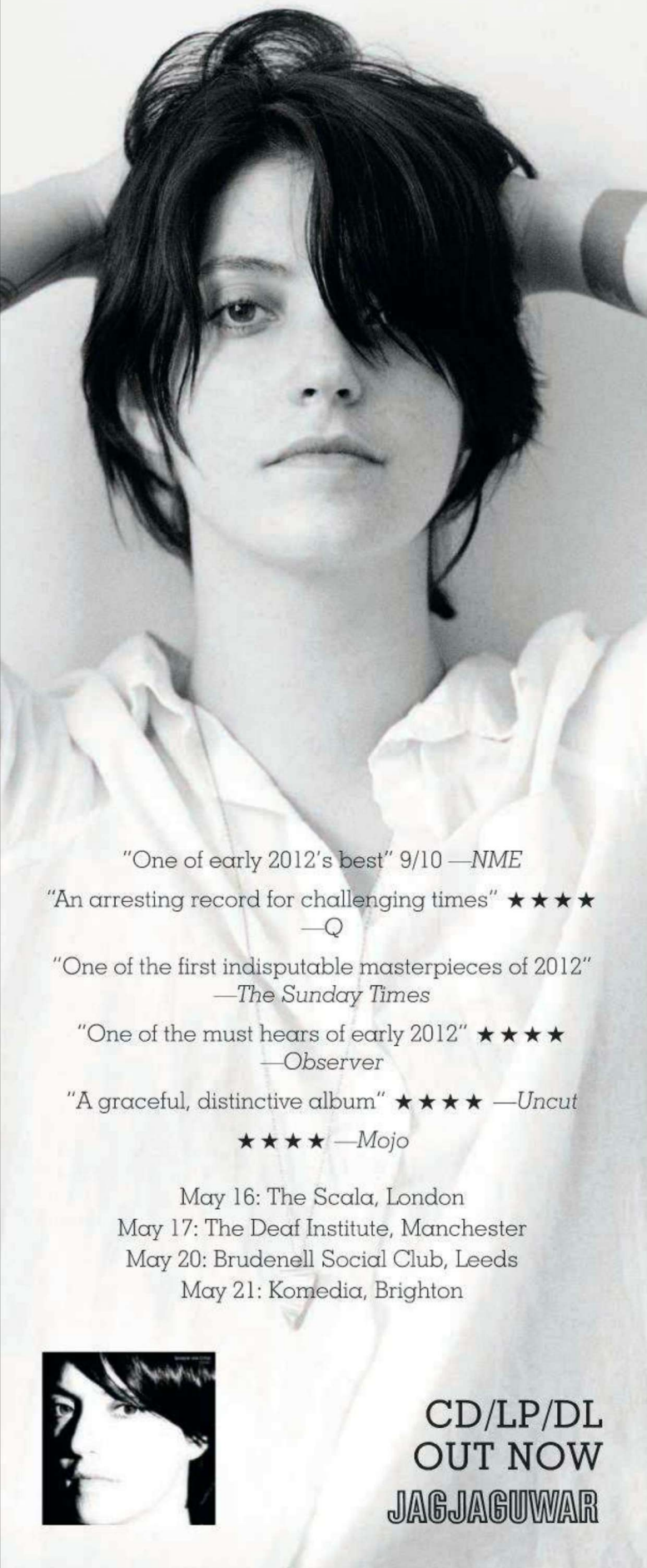


🔥 “I’d been to see Mississippi John Hurt at the Gaslight in Greenwich Village a few times and one night he asked me if I was going to ‘the big show’. I told him it was sold out but he said, ‘You’re going.’ He’d just been rediscovered and was enjoying a second career. He was beautiful. He died the following year.”



🔥 “The Carnegie Hall wasn’t keen on you taking pictures in the auditorium. It was a very staid institution and they didn’t want you moving around. But I did get this shot of Cash on stage with the Tennessee Three.” 📷

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—The Sunday Times

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—Observer

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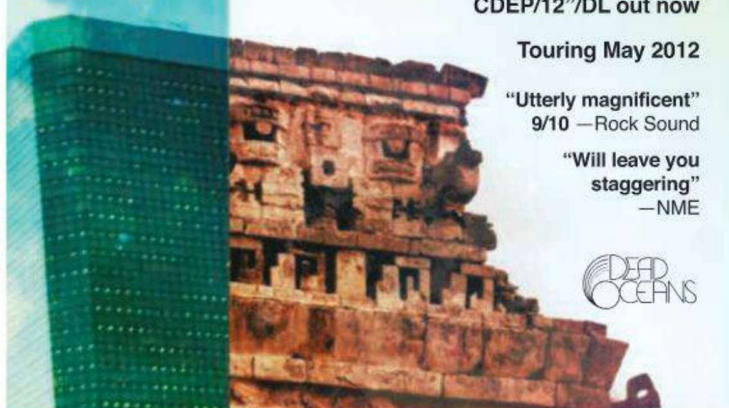
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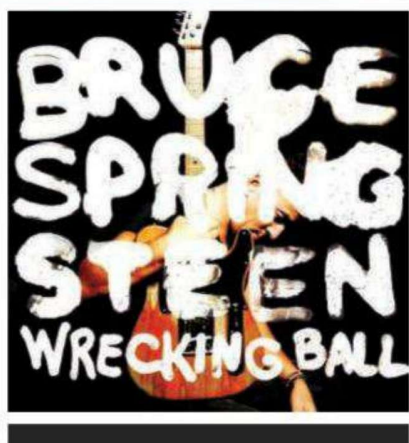
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TRACKLIST

- 1 We Take Care Of Our Own
- 2 Easy Money
- 3 Shackled And Down
- 4 Jack Of All Trades
- 5 Death To My Hometown
- 6 This Depression
- 7 Wrecking Ball
- 8 You've Got It
- 9 Rocky Ground
- 10 Land Of Hope And Dreams
- 11 We Are Alive
- 12 Swallowed Up (bonus track)
- 13 American Land (bonus track)

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

Wrecking Ball

COLUMBIA

An angry Boss attacks big business on his grim but brilliant 17th studio album. *By Andy Gill*

9/10

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN HAS never been shy of confronting the gloomy and unpalatable downside of capitalism – indeed, some would say he rather revels in the bitter tears of working-class defeat – but he's never before sounded quite so bitter and angry as he does on *Wrecking Ball*.

The contrast with his last studio album, 2009's *Working On A Dream*, is instructive: on that record, flush with the renewed hope furnished by Obama's election, he meditated optimistically upon the possibility of change, alongside the usual complement of blue-collar tableaux, with even a few cheery, almost euphoric, contemplations of a possibly positive future.

Here, the few glimmers of light are themselves occluded by curtains of bitter irony and weary acknowledgement of defeat. It's as if this most engagingly demagogic of American underclass standard-bearers is having to fight grimly to stave off the lure of nihilism.

On first hearing, the opener "We Take Care Of Our Own" sounds like a typical Springsteen anthem of uplift, a celebration of fellowship and communality that one can see being hijacked by politicians the next time Navy Seals pluck an American citizen from the clutches of Somali pirates, or take out some high-level jihadist. "Wherever this flag flies," he sings, "we take care of our own." But then you start hearing

New Albums

→ what he's actually saying, and it's another "Born In The USA" moment, as he pours out condemnatory question after question: "Where's the promise from sea to shining sea?/ Where's the work that will set my hands and my soul free?" And the song's most potent image, "From the shotgun shack to the Superdome", transforms from a superficially bullish expression of inter-class community to something with a sting in its tail, the mention of the Superdome inevitably drawing one's mind back to Hurricane Katrina, when America signally failed to take care of its own. That disregard, he suggests, has spread across the entire country.

And there's no dispute here about who's to blame: *Wrecking Ball* features the bluntest condemnations of bankers and big business yet expressed by a star of Springsteen's magnitude. "Up on banker's hill, the party's going strong/Down here below, we're shackled and drawn," he avers in "Shackled And Drawn", one of several songs in which the dense, ebullient folk-rock textures blend with revivalist gospel touches, in a burlier, more muscular version of the hootenanny stylings of the *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions* L.P. In "Death To My Hometown", the big, sturdy beat, fiddle and tin whistle bring the flavour of an Irish rebel song to another condemnation of the "robber barons" who managed to destroy families and factories without firing a single shot.

But has Bruce ever been this bitter and bloodily corporeal before? "They left our bodies on the plains, the vultures picked our bones... the greedy thieves who came around and ate the flesh of everything they found..." Rather than the pained nobility of previous Springsteen anthems of dispossession, this has the visceral tang of a horror movie: capitalism as cannibalism. There's an inescapable impression that, decades on from the great romantic blue-collar gestures of *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, *The River* and *Born In The USA*, he realises that for men and women 30 years older than

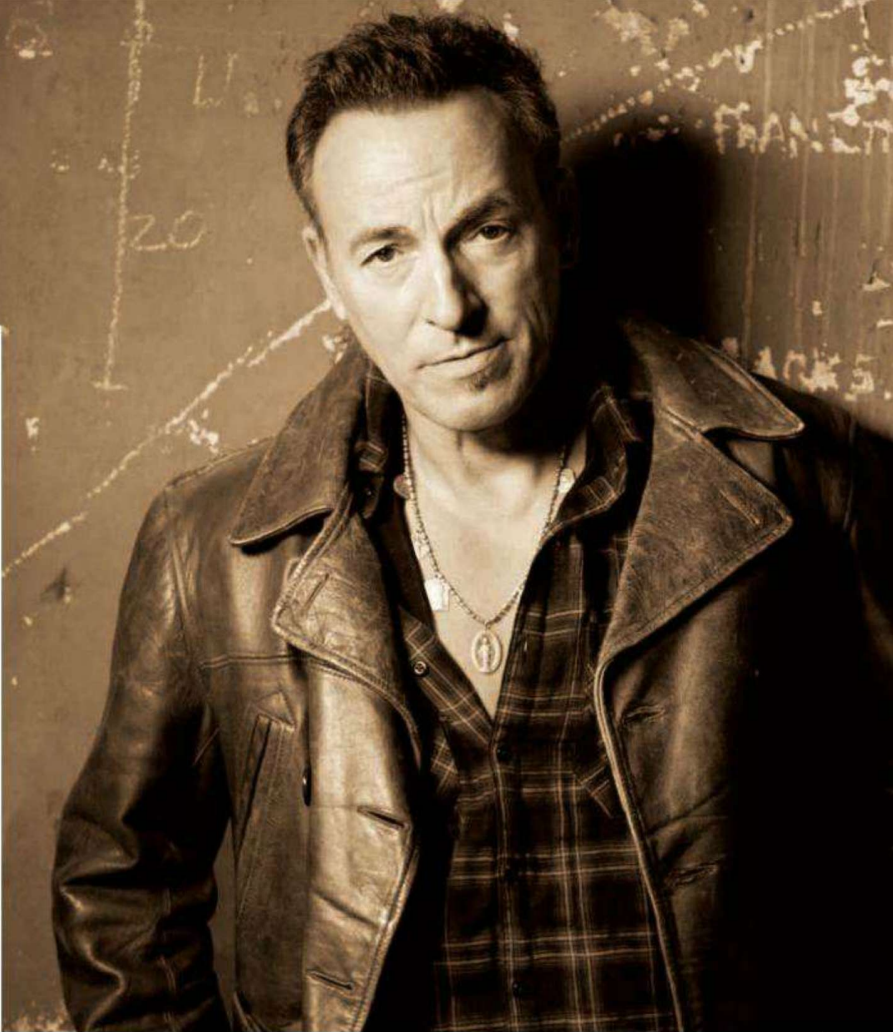
SLEEVE NOTES

Produced by: Ron Aniello with Bruce Springsteen
Recorded at: Stone Hill Studio, NJ
Personnel include: Bruce Springsteen (vocals, guitars, banjo, piano, organ, drums, percussion, loops), Ron Aniello (guitar, bass, keys, drums, loops, bk vocal), Matt Chamberlain (drums, tracks 3, 5 & 8), Max Weinberg (drums, tracks 7 & 11), Steve Jordan (percussion, track 2), Kevin Buell (drums & bk vocal, track 5), Charlie Giordano (accordion, piano, B-3 organ), Marc Muller (pedal steel), Tom Morello (electric guitar, tracks 4 & 6), Greg Leisz (banjo, mandola, lap steel), Rob Lebet (electric guitar, bk vocal), Darrell Leonard, Curt Ramm, Clark Gayton, Stan Harrison, Ed Manion, Dan Levine, Art Baron (horns), Clarence Clemons (sax solos, tracks 7 & 10), Soozie Tyrell (violin & bk vocal), Patti Scialfa, Lisa Lowell, Michelle Moore, Cindy Mizelle, New York Chamber Consort, Victorious Gospel Choir (all bk vocals)

then, losing one's job is so much closer to losing one's life. Hence the bitter truth behind a song like "This Depression", a slow, mournful piece streaked with Tom Morello's eerily yearning guitar, in which economic depression brings emotional depression, bluntly stated in a cry for help from his beloved: "I haven't always been strong, but never this weak." It's bleak, but not in the fancifully literate, cinematic manner of *Nebraska*; it's not a study in bleakness, it's just as grim as it gets. Again, there's an underlying

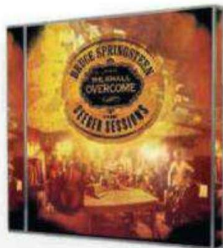
acknowledgement that these slings and arrows of outrageous fortune are that much more wounding for those in their fifties and sixties than they were 30 years earlier, when the prospect of failure could be burnished with a Bukowskian lustre of romantic tribulation.

Anger all but overtakes Bruce in "Jack Of All Trades", where slow piano triplets carry his careworn delivery of the protagonist's sentimental determination to survive by taking any job offered. A trumpet and mandolin break piles on the poignancy as he reflects on how "banker man grows fat, working man grows thin," his stiff upper lip finally slipping to confide how "If I had a gun, I'd find the bastards and shoot 'em on sight." As the song ends, the Spectroesque welter of horns, guitars and chimes seems to



HOW TO BUY... BRUCE ON CD

Four of the best recent Springsteen albums...



WE SHALL OVERCOME: THE SEEGER SESSIONS

2006

An anthology of songs drawn from Pete Seeger's vast repertoire, from gospelly civil rights plaints and labour anthems to dustbowl ballads, performed with Dixieland horns and folksy bonhomie by Bruce's old-tyme band.

7/10



MAGIC 2007

The most compelling of Bruce's 21st-century LPs offers a sustained assessment of the ramifications of the Iraq campaign, refracted through its impact on the traumatised and the left-behind, delivered with the full ebullience of the E Street Band. Unflinching.

9/10



WORKING ON A DREAM 2009

A tentatively optimistic set of songs born out of the hope invested in Obama's election, this features a broad cast of characters, from outlaws and rebels to check-out girls and circus carnies, trying to chisel out some space - emotional as much as geographical - in which to rebuild their lives.

8/10



THE PROMISE 2010

These mid-'70s outtakes provide the bridge between *Born To Run* and *Darkness...*, several - "Because The Night", "Fire" - having been farmed out to third parties initially. The cauterising of Bruce's natural romanticism with a flintier edge can be discerned in alternative takes like "Racing In The Street".

8/10

Springsteen: "I don't have some enormous political message I'm trying to deliver"

the VAULT



MARCH 1996: NME's Gavin Martin sits down with The Boss, touring his *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* album, solo...



Have you been working up to a solo tour for a long time?

"Really, the bottom line is that, through the '90s, the voice I've found, the voice that's felt the most present and vital for me, has basically been a folk voice. It really hasn't been my rock voice."

"I was originally signed as a folk singer and so it's a funny sort of thing. John Hammond [the late, legendary CBS talent scout who signed Billie Holiday, Bob Dylan and Bruce] would be laughing right now, because he was always saying to me, 'You should make an album with just a guitar.'"

"Musicians are funny. When you're home, you're never a real connected part of your own community, so you create one of your own. So I created the band and that was your family and that was the living manifestation of whatever community you imagine and sing about, and I think that's what they were to my fans. I think that's what they represented and that's why the band has power and why it is important and has been important."

On "Lucky Town" you sang, "It's a sad, funny ending when you find yourself pretending/A rich man in a poor man's shirt". On *Tom Joad* the metaphor is more explicit: you're a land-owning Californian millionaire, writing about welfare rejects, illegal immigrant drug-runners and child prostitutes – people as far removed from you on a socio-economic scale as is possible. Is that what writing is about? Making connections that aren't supposed to be possible?

"The point is, take the children that are in 'Balboa Park', those are your kids, that's what

I'm trying to say. It's like, I've got mine, you've got yours and these are kids, too. As a writer, I've been drawn to those subjects, for personal reasons, I'm sure. I don't have some big idea. I don't feel like I have some enormous political message I'm trying to deliver. I think my work has come from the inside. I don't start from the outside – 'I have a statement I want to make, ladies and gentlemen!' I don't do that. I don't like the soapbox thing; so I begin internally with things that matter to me personally and maybe were a part of my life in some fashion."

"I lived in a house where there was a lot of struggle to find work, where the results of not being able to find your place in society manifested themselves with the resulting lack of self-worth, with anger, with violence."

"And, as I grew up, I said, 'Hey, that's my song', because, I don't know, maybe that was my experience at a very important moment in my life. And those ideas, those questions, those issues were things I've written about my entire career."

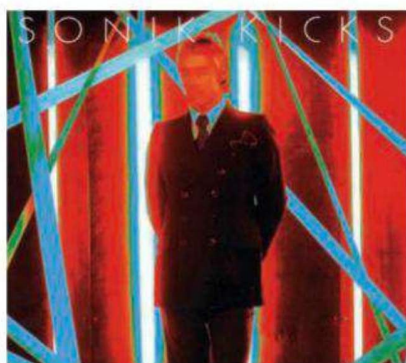
Did you do any research to amass the material and detail that features in *Tom Joad*?

"If you're in Los Angeles, there's an enormous amount of border news. Immigration and border life is a big part of the town. That's part of what I've gotten from being in California every year, for half the year, for the last

five years. It's a very, very powerful place; a place where issues that are alive and confronting America are happening at this moment. It represents what the country is turning into; a place where you see the political machinations of how the issue of immigration is being used, and a lot of the bullshit that goes down with it. It's just the place that, ready or not, America is going to become."

chorus assent. The flipside attitude is expressed in "Easy Money", which deals with the corrosive trickle-down effect of toxic greed: if they can get away with it, reasons the benighted protagonist preparing for petty crime, why should I follow the rules? Elsewhere, "You've Got It" offers a Little Feat-style steel-guitar tribute to a lover's indefinable qualities, while "Rocky Ground" dips into religious imagery of money-changers and an endangered flock as it looks to a new, less troubled dawn. And inspired by the demolition of Giants Stadium in New Jersey, "Wrecking Ball" itself was written some years ago, and first performed on the Working On A Dream tour, which perhaps explains the truculent tone of the song's resolute fatalism, which employs the failing building as a metaphor for the doomed nobility of human endeavour: "When all this steel and these stories drift away to rust/And all our youth and beauty has been given to the dust."

"Land Of Hope And Dreams", one of several songs employing the kind of white gospel choir vocals used by Dylan on "All The Tired Horses", was written even earlier, back in the late '90s. A full-blown Springsteen anthem with added mandolin wistfulness, incorporating Clarence Clemons' final solo for *The Boss*, it's an updated version of those Woody Guthrie dustbowl ballads anticipating a new life in California; it's typically resolute and uplifting, but in this context its exultant spirit seems a touch bogus, though it's understandable he would want to end the album on a more positive note. Which gives the concluding "We Are Alive" that follows the run-out groove crackle an unexpected mordancy, as Springsteen gives voice to the graveyard dead: "If we put our ears to the cold grey stones, this is what they'd sing: 'we are alive.'" Set to a chipper Johnny Cash-style mariachi groove of banjo, whistle and horns, it's a strange but redemptive affirmation of the human spirit, and, in the face of endemic depression of all kinds, of endurance as the defining heroic act of our age.



TRACKLIST

- 1 Green
- 2 The Attic
- 3 Kling! Klang
- 4 Sleep Of The Serene
- 5 By The Waters
- 6 That Dangerous Age
- 7 Study In Blue
- 8 Dragonfly
- 9 When Your Garden's Overgrown
- 10 Around The Lake
- 11 Twilight
- 12 Drifters
- 13 Paperchase
- 14 Be Happy Children

PAUL WELLER

Sonik Kicks

UNIVERSAL/ISLAND

A sprightly Modfather, bringing it all back home on another career-high solo LP. *By Garry Mulholland*

8/10

THE CLUES TO where Paul Weller is now lie in the final two tracks on his 11th solo album. The penultimate "Paperchase" throbs sleepily like Blur's "Beetlebum", and looks quietly aghast at a modern-day Icarus, "*Flying too close to the solar flames*", out of step, blind to love. "*Was the Earth not enough for you?*" Weller accuses. "*No, the Earth wouldn't do*". It's about Weller's view of himself while drunk, a note to self from a man confessing to a serious problem. Most of us knew he liked a bevvy or two. Few of us grasped that, in Weller's words, "The writing was on the wall".

Compare and contrast with the closing "Be Happy Children", a blue-eyed soul ballad based around an insistent, optimistic piano line that recalls Dobie Gray's northern soul anthem "Out On The Floor". It takes its cue from the death of manager-father John in 2009, but rejects grief in favour of cycle-of-life positivity, employing Weller's daughter Leah and son Mac as vocalists, urging the babies to look to the adventure of tomorrow while understanding that both Dad and Grandad's spirit will always be there to keep them safe. "Be Happy Children" closes an album that also features lyrics from Weller's daughter Jessie ("Dragonfly") and a vocal

Q&A

Paul Weller



You scrapped the original version of *Sonik Kicks* and made some fairly radical changes... The first version wasn't doing what the title said, it wasn't sonic enough

and it wasn't kicking. Stan [Kybert] really turned it round in the mix. He was just ruthless with it and cut back a lot of stuff, making it cleaner and harder. All that extreme stereo sonic trickery on "Green" was down to Stan. And that crystallises *Sonik Kicks* to me. I wouldn't have been clever enough to think of it or do it.

How big a part is co-producer Simon Dine playing in this purple patch? A massive part on *Wake Up The Nation*. I was a lot more involved in this one. I was much more on it. It's from being sober, as well. This is probably the first album I've made where I've been sober for fuck knows how long.

So giving up alcohol is a big life decision for you? Yeah. I feel I've sort of turned things round. It was getting a bit too much and the writing was on the wall for me, really.

You must be one of the few people on the planet who can get a member of Blur and Oasis to play on the same album... Yeah. I'm the punk rock Henry Kissinger.

Waters", a gentle two-track retreat from the rest of the album's reckless fusions of Krautrock, Blur, post-punk and goth with restless

psychedelic experiments and guest spots from old friends Noel Gallagher, Graham Coxon, Aziz Ibrahim, Sean O'Hagan and loyal lieutenant Steve Cradock.

Much has been made of Weller's recent discovery of Neu! and one suspects that *Sonik Kicks* will be dubbed his 'Krautrock album'. In truth, accomplished takes on Neu!'s gleaming motorik rhythms are only evident on opener "Green", "Dragonfly" and "Around The Lake". Elsewhere, the references are more unlikely, with "Drifters" coming on like PiL doing "Sixteen" by Buzzcocks, "Kling I Klang" oompahing away like a Balkan rave combo covering The Clash's "Know Your Rights", and midlife-crisis satire "That Dangerous Age" bolting *The Great Escape*-era Blur onto a rhythm and riff happily reminiscent of "She Drives Me Crazy" by Fine Young Cannibals. *Sonik Kicks* feels like an LP defined by its makers' love of the present and excitement about the future, where even ponderings on the wars in the

Middle East ("Kling I Klang") or a death in the family are accepted as the darkness you need to balance the light, and where death is always balanced by birth. As Weller intones among the crazed stereo pannings on "Green": "I'll be backing/Hip young breed". See Weller at home, still dapper and modernist, surrounded by kids and tripping on their energy. The kids know where it's at, and so, in this career-high purple patch, does Paul Weller.

SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:** Paul Weller and Simon Dine
Recorded at: Black Barn Studios, 2011

All songs written by: Weller/Dine except "Dragonfly" (P Weller/J Weller/Dine), "Sleep Of The Serene" and "Twilight" (Weller/Ibrahim/Rees), "By The Waters" (Weller/Ibrahim), "Drifters" (Weller/Cradock/Dine)

Personnel: Weller, Dine, Noel Gallagher ("The Attic"; "Around The Lake"; "When Your Garden's Overgrown"), Graham Coxon ("The Attic"; "Dragonfly"), Aziz Ibrahim and Steve Cradock

contribution from wife Hannah on the Augustus Pablo-esque love song "Study In Blue", and is released just weeks after the birth of twins John Paul and Bowie. The message seems simple and unavoidable: when a man becomes lost, he must take solace in family. *Sonik Kicks* is Weller's bringing-it-all-back-home album.

Nevertheless, in keeping with the energy and eclecticism of Weller's stunning return to form since 2008's *22 Dreams* and finding a new creative foil in Noonday Underground's Simon Dine, there's much more to *Sonik Kicks* than tributes to the folks back home. Weller changed his lyric-writing MO for this record, eschewing his usual thematic literalism for attempts at cut-up-style impressionism. The finished album has also changed dramatically from the first version completed in March 2011, which Weller rejected as "too full-on". Four tracks (due to surface as bonus tracks and B-sides) were removed and were replaced by the bucolic "Sleep Of The Serene" and "By The

AtoZ

COMING UP THIS MONTH...

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p72 JULIA HOLTER

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p76 LEE RANALDO

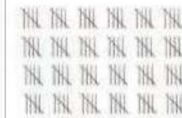
p79 HOWLIN RAIN

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120 DAYS

120 Days II

SPLENDOUR

Stadium prog-electro-disco that doesn't match its ambition

Part of the Norwegian cosmic disco community that birthed

Lindstrøm, Bjørn Torske and the Sunkissed club night (namechecked on a track here), 120 Days make a bro-friendly version of the sound with lots of delayed guitars, Moroder pulsation, and inelegantly wasted Lizard King pronouncements from vocalist Adne Meisfjord. The 10-minute "Dahle Disco" is an enjoyable ride, and the quieter sections show real production finesse. But much of it feels bloated, reminiscent of U2's emptiest '90s moments, or like a videogame designer's version of the dancefloor. They cite Wagner as an influence, sharing his bombast but with none of the drama.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



KRISTOFER ÅSTRÖM

From Eagle To Sparrow

STARTRACKS

Swedish folk (with tragic undertones)

Hailing from Luleå, Sweden, Åström's music was rooted in punk rock, and he spent a decade with Fireside before rebooting as a folk singer whose songs betray a doomy sensibility that wouldn't be out of place in heavy metal (not least on "Taser Gun"). He's a delicate guitarist, offering John Fahey-like spirals on "Loupita #5". Lyrically, he's endearingly blunt. "Evening, like heaven/Morning, feel like shit again", he whispers on "Queen Of Sorrow", a dreamy ballad with a hint of the confessional angst you'd find in *Unplugged* Nirvana.

ALASTAIR MCKAY

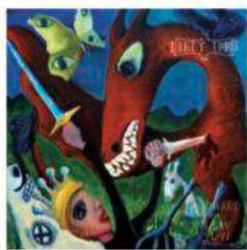
DIRTY THREE

Toward The Low Sun

BELLA UNION

Album 10 finds Warren Ellis and company staking out new and beautiful territory.

By John Robinson



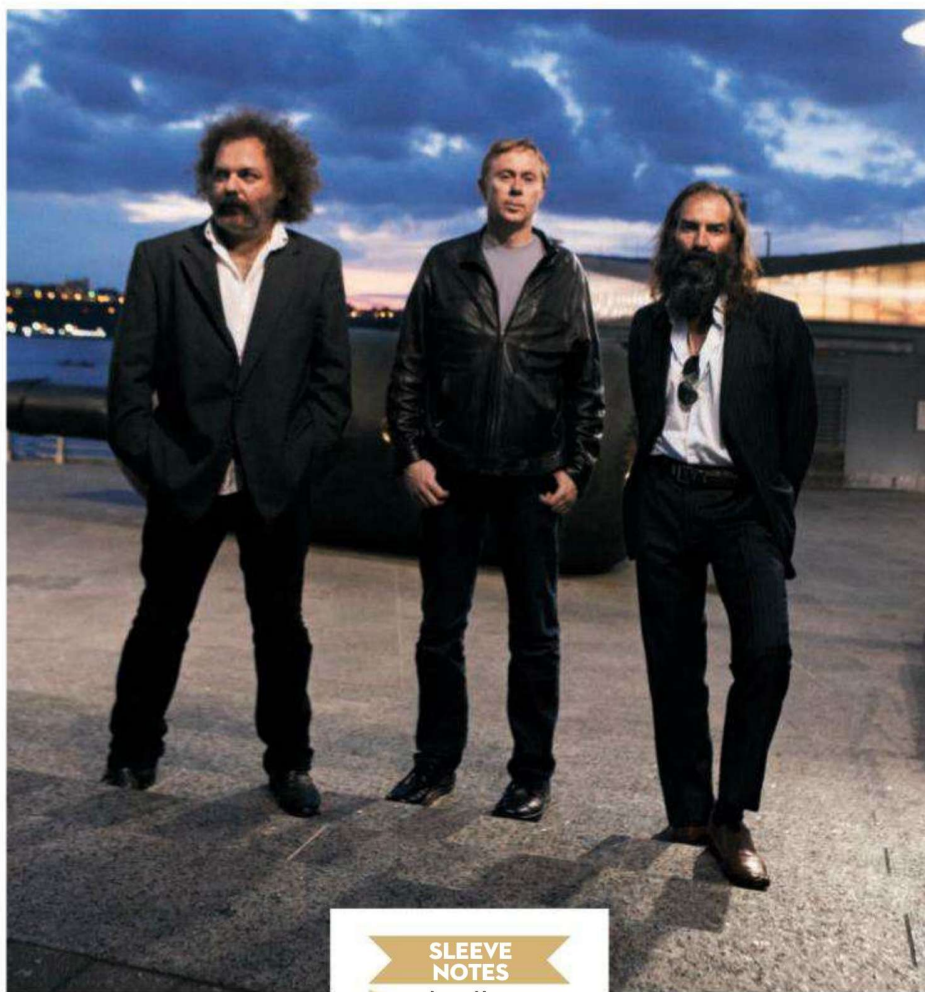
8/10

MUCH LIKE HIS frequent collaborator Nick Cave, Warren Ellis is a man of extremes. Whether it's traditional balladry of the most romantic kind (as a Bad Seed) or frazzled abstraction of the

most modern and intense variety (Ellis didn't only provide Grinderman's noisy mid-section, but was also the laptop-hip muso who looped their ad hoc output into shape), in whichever arena Cave wants to compete, Ellis is there with the complementary materials.

Predating even his collaborations with Cave (now extending to yet a third format, duo recordings for film soundtracks), however, there was Dirty Three, Ellis' own band, a trio that exemplified his bipolar musicality. Live, the band – that's Ellis on violin and its variables, Mick Turner on guitar, with superb drummer Jim White – would combine a fierce physical energy, often finding Ellis perched on one leg like a feral Ian Anderson. Dirty Three albums have often delivered great beauty, but have also occasionally obliged one to sign up for what one might describe as melancholic sawing of an only intermittently engaging kind.

Toward The Low Sun, although a revelatory, rejuvenating work, dispenses with neither the Dr Jekyll in the band's music, nor the Mr Hyde. Having tried on two previous occasions (and failed) to record their 10th album, the members of Dirty Three had begun to wonder if there was any life left in their aggregation. The session that eventually resulted in this album, however, found them getting off on the right foot, and then staying grimly on track, through an album that seems paced like a rough voyage. There are



SLEEVE NOTES

Produced by:

Casey Rice

Recorded at:

Head Gap Studios, Melbourne

Mixed at: Sing

Sing Studios, Melbourne

Personnel: Warren

Ellis (violin), Mick Turner (electric guitar), Jim White (drums)

moments of terrific turbulence, solemn quietness and some sadness, but the collection eventually lights on safe harbour.

Hearing the first track recorded for the album, opener "Furnace Skies", one can understand how the Three felt that they were onto something. Beginning with a dirty and growling riff, "Furnace Skies" is a pretty terrifying but incredibly thrilling thing, a storm of savage temperament that whips the band and the listener about. Having set off in this rough weather, the band rise immediately to the challenge: Jim White's drums expanding the band's remit into something pretty close to free jazz, the abandonment they achieve in their own unconventional rock'n'roll almost nudging them

out of the genre altogether. Still, the Dirty Three's musicality is such that they find beauty in such a harsh environment, a Farfisa organ discovering some peace amid the chaos.

The following track, "Sometimes I Forget You've Gone", amply illustrates what varied types of musical activity they are capable of, being an exquisitely melodic piano piece.

If there's a mood for the remainder of the album, it's fair to say that this – understatedly sad; detailed, but free; generally beautiful – is the model for it. There are breaks from this pattern (particularly the Crazy Horse-with-violin squall rock of "That Was Was") but the quality of this album is its sparing use of Dirty Three's most immediately recognisable signature – Ellis' expansive violin playing. What's on offer instead is a sequence of tunes like "Moon On The Land", which are concise, well-developed and innovatively arranged. "Rising Below" and "The Pier" both foreground Mick Turner's guitar clanks, Ellis providing an almost loop-like accompaniment, "Ashen Snow" meanwhile, sounds like a bridge between post-classical piano and a hip-hop break.

Toward The Low Sun essentially is an album where the Dirty Three stop taking themselves for granted. As much of a novelty as it may once have been to have presented a band in which much of the drama was provided, for want of a better expression, by rock'n'roll violin, this album demonstrates how even that unorthodox unit might be reinvented. Now, they are much as their first album proclaimed them to be: that's to say sad, but also genuinely dangerous.

Q&A

Warren Ellis



Is this the sound of the Dirty Three coming out fighting?
Absolutely. We realised it had been a while since we'd made a record – and we wanted this one to come out roaring.

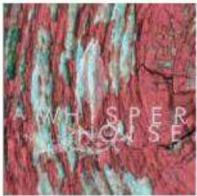
Do you actually see each other when you're not making records?

We live on three different continents, which has been the case for the last 15 years – we've

worked out a way to deal with that. That's like any band I'm in. We're in touch, particularly with Jim. We have a continued dialogue, even when we're not recording.

There's been a long gap since the last album.

We were trying to record. We'd get together, but things just wouldn't seem to evolve. We tried twice – once in Paris and then once in Australia and it didn't seem like we'd got anything, and I was a bit spooked by that – our only way of knowing if we keep going is if we keep moving forward, because time is precious. Playing live gave us a way to get back in to this. We knew we didn't want much structure, didn't want to harness anything.



A WHISPER IN THE NOISE

To Forget
EXILE ON MAINSTREAM

Icy, lush, arty atmospherics from the Midwest

6/10 Steeped in Minnesotan chill, A Whisper In The

Noise's fourth album emerges from the disorientating introductory instrumental "To Forget", an unnerving and scene-setting cousin to the *Twin Peaks* theme. The rest of the album hangs in this opiate haze. Songwriter and multi-instrumentalist West Thordson is in control of atmosphere, with occasional help from violinist Sonja Larson, and he repeatedly builds up suffocating layers of sound before puncturing the mood with deft percussion or strings. That is epitomised by the languorous "A Sea Estranging Us", with its startling blasts of drum shooting out the fog, or the dazzling enigma that is "Your Hand".

PETER WATTS



BBB (BALKAN BEAT BOX)

Give
CRAMMED

Gypsy specialists rebrand themselves as electronica act

4/10 This Israeli-American collective released their

debut in 2005, adding a sampladelic twist to the thumping Balkan Gypsy music that seemed to be sweeping global dancefloors around the release of the *Borat* movie. Having rebranded themselves BBB for their fourth album, they now lurch around aimlessly from genre to genre (Diwali dancehall, 2step, dubstep, reggae), which means that they may have lost their USP. The half-baked agitprop posturing (on tracks like "Political F**k" and "Money") doesn't help, although the best tracks, like "Fight The Urge To Be Violent", retain a vestigial, Gypsy-friendly emphasis on the first beat of the bar.

JOHN LEWIS



MASAKI BATOH

Brain Pulse Music
DRAG CITY

Ghost leader conducts cerebral Fukushima requiem

6/10 Who knew Masaki Batoh, spirit guide of

Japanese psych-folk cult Ghost, is an acupuncturist and healer by trade? Following last year's devastating earthquake/tsunami/nuclear meltdown, a planned album composed of electronic synapse scans took on wider significance and urgency. *BPM* works its vibrational magic with quietude and organic peace, and comes across more like an ancient Zen ritual. Restorative dirges are summoned from instruments of skin and bone, supplemented with struck metal chimes and wood flutes. Electronic sounds of the cerebellum finally appear on the incantatory closer, "Aiki No Okami".

ROB YOUNG



WALLIS BIRD

Wallis Bird
RUBYWORKS

Third album by Irish singer-songwriter

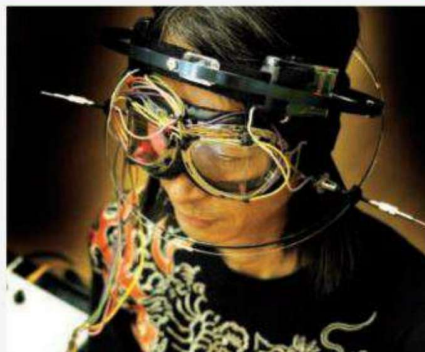
6/10 Apparently compiled from

fragments of overheard conversations, this LP sees Wallis Bird hedging her bets. It's split between earnest, folksy, finger-picking ballads, and kooky, uptempo pop numbers with an eye to daytime radio. The latter can be effective – "Encore" sounds like a synth-pop song arranged for a folk band – but Bird seems to find it easier to connect emotionally in acoustic mode. She's particularly good on coal-black, suicidal ballads like "But I'm Still Here" and "Dress My Skin And Become What I'm Supposed To", both pitched somewhere between Morrissey and Laura Marling, and both showcasing her unorthodox, kora-like acoustic guitar style.

JOHN LEWIS

REVELATIONS

Japanese folk shaman and Ghost frontman Masaki Batoh

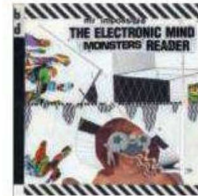


MASAKI BATOH HAS led Japanese group Ghost since its formation in Tokyo in 1984. These shamanistic nomads have kept their distance from the neonlit metropolis, instead dropping out to live an itinerant life among the country's neglected rural temples, abandoned subway stations and most recently in a mountainside commune called the Ghost House.

Ghost's weft of intoxicating freakout, tribal drumming and the mysterious 'plasma ball' increasingly turned to political ends: they have supported Free Tibet and are boycotting America until 'US hegemonism' is removed. Batoh's spooked songwriting, under the esoteric influence of Moondog, Toru Takemitsu and Henry Cowell, was highlighted on *Collected Works 1995-96*, which alerted perspicacious listeners to his bewitching acoustic sensibility, long before the current acid-folk boom. He also collaborated with ex-Galaxie 500-ers Damon & Naomi on an exquisite album that's just been reissued on Drag City.

The latest Ghost release, *In Stormy Nights*, came out in 2007 and the following year Batoh teamed up with Helena Espvall, Espers' cellist, on an incense-laden acid-folk meditation. *Brain Pulse Music* opens a dramatic new avenue in a trip already marked by unexpected diversions.

ROB YOUNG



BLACK DICE

Mr Impossible
RIBBON

The emperor's new clothes: now available in XXL

2/10 Can anyone actually admit

to loving Brooklyn outfit Black Dice? These darlings of the art scene have travelled a long way on surprisingly meagre content, and their sixth album is the unloveliest of the lot. Incongruous parts, linked by the vaguest gestures towards contemporary dance styles, make for an utterly unmemorable nine-track sequence, characterised only by a recurring electronic flatulence appropriate to titles like "Shithouse Drifter" and "Brunswick Sludge". Music without charm or purpose, with all the nutritional value of a Twinkie.

ROB YOUNG



BONGA

Hora Kota
LUSAFRICA

Angolan veteran celebrates life at 30 albums

7/10 It's a sad irony that the standard-bearer

of Angolan music has spent most of his career in exile, but such is the life of political truth-tellers. Forty years on since his debut, Bonga remains defiant, and while most of the music here lopes along cheerfully enough to squeezebox backing, he is still reporting on his beleaguered homeland, with which he is now reunited. The album's stand-out tracks have a flavour of woeful Portuguese fado; both the title-track and "Angola", a duet with French politico Bernard Lavilliers, showcase his sandpaper vocals.

NEIL SPENCER



BOWERBIRDS

The Clearing
DEAD OCEANS

Rural Southern duo reinvent American folk music

7/10 Bowerbirds' previous releases were lo-fi affairs,

in which cabin-dwelling couple Phil Moore (guitars) and Beth Tacular (accordion) sang mysterious love songs heavily steeped in their immediate North Carolina landscape. Album number three enlarges their sonic palette with piano, dobro and touches of strings and woodwind but maintains the same folksy charm. While the lyrics are rooted in their terroir, and the instrumentation borrowed from trad folk, Bowerbirds reinvent Americana by importing wonderfully weird rhythms (check out the Afro-tinged "Hush") and gorgeous voicings. In particular, the interplay between Moore's Buckley-ish croon and Tacular's ghostly harmonies is always spine-tingling.

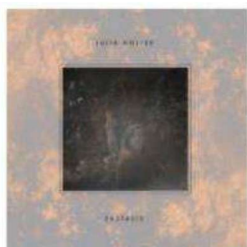
JOHN LEWIS

JULIA HOLTER

Ekstasis

RVNG INTL

A new American maverick finds her voice. *By Laura Snapes*

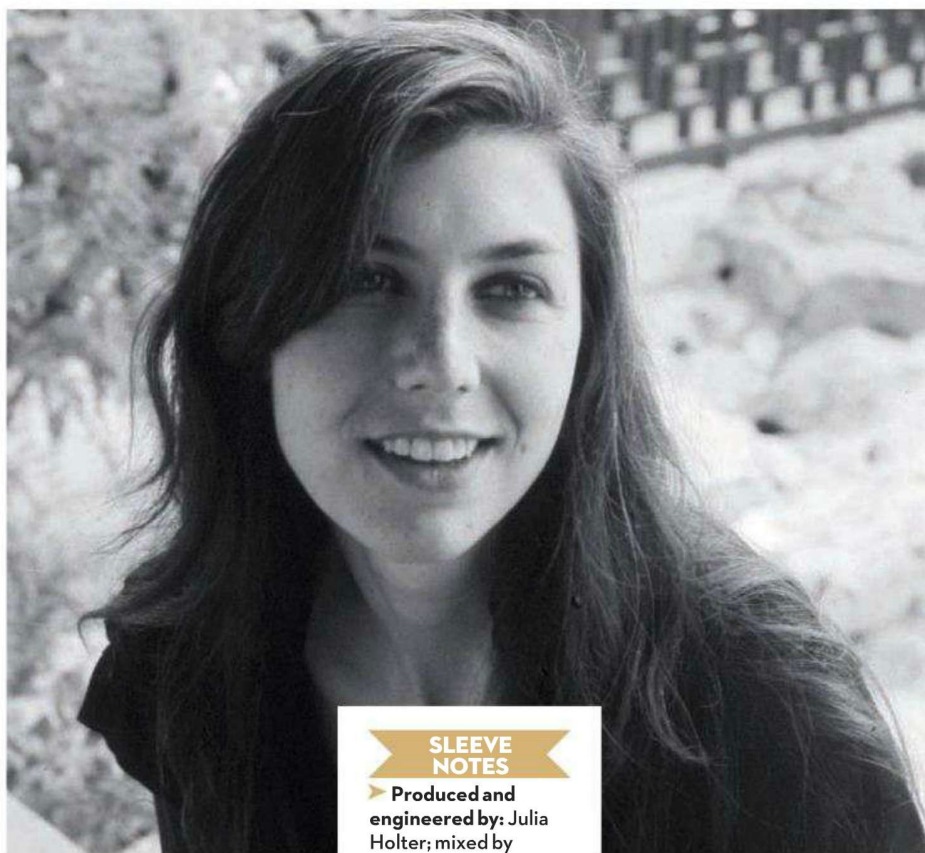


8/10

GETTING OUT INTO the wider world is often considered the making of a bedroom musician; the moment that they break through their solipsistic tendencies and begin to produce

music with the potential to connect. To point out that LA-based DIY-recording artist Julia Holter studied at CalArts, as did Ariel Pink and John Maus, and that she has frequently collaborated with Nite Jewel's Ramona Gonzalez, may provoke certain misconceptions about the potential limitations of her work. However, if *Ekstasis*, her second full-length album, reveals anything about the hitherto relatively unknown 27-year-old, it's that her approach is anything but environmental, even when recording at home.

Ekstasis arrives fast on the back of Holter's small but loudly acclaimed debut, *Tragedy*, released on LA-based Leaving Records last year. That LP followed CD-Rs and cassettes released on labels based in Vermont, Philadelphia and Yorkshire, and was based around Euripedes' *Hippolytus*, taking many of its lyrics verbatim from the play's dialogue. It doesn't take a degree in classical literature to discern that *Ekstasis*, while rooted in Greek thought, is not the opposite of *Tragedy*. Its predecessor – complete with "Introduction", "Interlude" and "Tragedy Finale" – lightly but grandly explored the wholeness of narrative form, and its thick-weft drones and creaks were difficult to separate out into individual pieces. *Ekstasis* (meaning a transcendent state) takes sensory experience and disconnect as its conceit, allowing its nine songs to exist alone, as well as part of a whole. The record alludes to a burgeoning vision that reaches far beyond the four walls within which



SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced and engineered by:** Julia Holter; mixed by Cole M Greif-Neill
Recorded at: Julia's home, Los Angeles
Personnel: all songs written and performed by Julia Holter; with Corey Granet (guitar on "Marienbad"), Catherine Lamb (viola on "The Boy In The Moon"), Max Kaplan (clarinet, bass clarinet on "Four Gardens"), Casey Anderson (alto saxophone on "Ekstasis"), Kenny Gilmore (electric bass on "Ekstasis")

it was made, establishing Holter's maverick status in a lineage that stretches from Linda Perhacs – with whom she's currently collaborating – to contemporary artists such as Julianna Barwick, whose vocal blanketing is a close relative of Holter's kaleidoscopic incantations.

Holter's lack of domestic inclination runs surface-level and below ground. *Ekstasis* genuinely conjures other worlds as harpsichord undulates between rolling grooves and intricate drones, harmonium billows and blusters, and sax stutters carnally. Most strikingly of all, Holter's layered, glowing madrigal vocal conveys a horde of abbesses using their voices to break down the walls of their cloister. She demonstrates her full range on opener "Marienbad", named after Alain Resnais' *Last Year At Marienbad*, a distinctly strange but deeply satisfying pop song. She starts with monosyllabic intonation, tapping out words like

individual notes on a piano, before fracturing to a girls' choir hell-bent on bastardising the liturgy, and cresting into breathy vocal fanfares without warning.

This unpredictability helps divorce the idea of word from meaning, of sense from sensation: something that may well have come from Holter's work with phonetic translation. At the start of "Marienbad", she remarks, "*I can hear a statue wonder why they're so still*" before wincing at "*the human whisper so cold*", and she places obstacles between her faculties and emotions on the sweet helix of "In The Same Room" – "*I can't*

recall his face, but I want to" – and the spacey, empowered clank of "Goddess Eyes II", where she laments, "*I can see you/But my eyes are not allowed to cry.*"

"Goddess Eyes I" appears at the end of the LP, though its original incarnation creaked into being on *Tragedy*. It sums up that these aren't traditionally ecstatic states, but uneasy conflicts: "*This is not the quietness... This is ekstasis*," she intones in a trembling tone, before reversing the statement, eventually letting language dissolve into cries and caws as swing drums dally hellishly with looped cello and grunting sax.

Despite exploring convoluted sensory planes, it's remarkable that the cosmic *Ekstasis* – recorded in Holter's home with only five additional musicians – feels surer of itself than *Tragedy*, a record rooted in millennia-old practice. It's in that respect – and let's be unequivocal here, not sonically – that Holter may warrant comparison to Joanna Newsom, as both define their own respective traditions that they then rewrite with each subsequent record. If anyone's going to assess the limitations of Julia Holter's work, it's Holter herself. You can rest assured that she'll seek to break them on whatever she does next.

Q&A

Julia Holter



You're a teacher by day. What does that entail? I work at a continuation school with students who've flunked out, had kids or are on probation. I'm one of the few music people there.

I have this group of girls who really want to learn piano, which is important. A lot of kids just want to record without learning to play. It's not that you have to, but that kind of skill is disappearing.

As a trained musician, does the amateur culture of experimental music bug you?

No. You should just want to do something honest. I feel that certain artists don't put a lot of soul into their technique. That's not OK. I used to work at Human Ear and people would send demos they'd made in their bedroom, that sounded like shit. I was working on stuff for years before I got attention. It's important to have your own time without worrying what others think.

You were writing for years before you recorded anything, and didn't tour while you were recording. Is self-restraint important? I'd have been happy if, in 2007 when I moved back to LA from college, more people had heard my music. I don't think I intentionally held my music back as I've actually been very ambitious, but things just kept happening. I've never been good at promoting myself.



BRETON
Other People's Problems
FAT CAT

Post-millennial tension from south London squatters
Like The xx, Breton are a thoroughly

modern band, hooded youths from an insalubrious borough of London, making music with equipment both traditional (guitars, drums) and extremely now (drum machine, samplers). Compared to The xx, though, Breton are distinctly maximal, all corrosive guitars, callow vocals and beats jutting at awkward angles. There is something faintly self-flagellating about the tone, but the aim, you feel, is locating a sort of beauty in urban ugliness: see how the claustrophobic "Edward The Confessor" arranges its slate-grey synths around the heavenly ring of a plucked harp.

LOUIS PATTISON

7/10

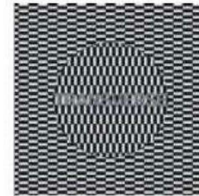


CAROLINA CHOCOLATE DROPS
Leaving Eden
NONESUCH

Grammy-winning string band don't falter on third album
No-one has reclaimed

heritage with more verve than the Drops, 2010's *Genuine Negro Jig* mixing antiquities with banjo-driven R&B hits. This follow-on plays things safer. Buddy Miller provides a suitably unvarnished production for their winning formula of blues, jigs, gospel hollers and quirky country, while new member Hubby Jenkins slots in comfortably. Only the title track, with its mournful cello, breaks fresh ground. Rhiannon Giddens' vocals remain at the heart of things, gritty on the galloping "Ruby", elegant on Ethel Walters' "No Man's Mama". The stream of banjo, fiddle, bones and spoons rolls on agreeably, marred only by a tendency to tweezeness. NEIL SPENCER

7/10



CARTER TUTTI VOID
Transverse
MUTE

Industrial collaboration: predictably unsettling results
Chris Carter and Cosey

Fanni Tutti are one half of original Industrial group Throbbing Gristle. Nik Void is frontwoman of Factory Floor, who have taken an idea or two from TG's proto-disco "Hot On The Heels Of Love". Here, the trio embark on a live collaboration at Mute's Short Circuit festival in 2011. A shared interest in brut electro-pop falls by the wayside in favour of four forays into skittering, arachnoid electronics. Carter's rhythms twine eerily with Void's heavily treated guitar, while Tutti breaks the gloom with the occasional unholy call to prayer. Hardly revelatory, but compelling in its sustained vision.

LOUIS PATTISON

6/10



BUSHMAN'S REVENGE
A Little Bit Of Big Bonanza
RUNE GRAMMOFON

Norwegian power trio drum up cetacean vibrations
'Bastard' anything is

rare in Norway, so this cacophonous coupling of hard rock, murky metal and free jazz from a power trio with connections to Shining, Supersilent and Jaga Jazzist is doubly welcome. Even Helle Hermansen unleashes a riot of electronically enhanced guitars over bass (Rune Nergaard) and drums (Gard Nilssen) that's by turns ponderous ("Jeg Baker Kokosboller") and frenetically loose ("Iron Bloke"). Confident, streamlined jamming goes hand in hand with a subtly Scandinavian sense of humour – who but Nordics could title a piece "Fetch The Carving Knife Ivar, A Whale's Been Beached"?

ROB YOUNG

6/10

WE'RE NEW HERE

Carolina Chocolate Drops

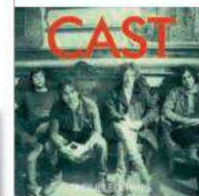


"IF BLACK PEOPLE can now become president, surely they can play banjo?" So figures Dom Flemons of the **Carolina**

Chocolate Drops, the group that has re-animated a lost era of jug bands, minstrelsy, vaudeville and novelty hits from the early 20th century. The three original members originally met at North Carolina's Black Banjo Gathering in 2005, and formed for fun, only turning professional three years on.

For an acoustic string band their live shows are electrifying affairs, with the group swapping instruments, clacking bones, blowing kazoo, sawing fiddles and, of course, picking banjo, an instrument now in vogue but a pariah a few years back. Singer Rhiannon Giddens also features a cool line in stomping – some distance from her teenage training as an opera singer – while new live member Adam Matta is an accomplished beat-boxer. Such is their crossover appeal that last year they became the first black string band to play Nashville's notoriously conservative Opry. It's ironic, perhaps, that their greatest hit is Giddens' blazing version of Blu Cantrell's R'n'B smash "Hit 'Em Up Style (Oops!)", but the Drops are no folk purists. Says Giddens, "It's OK to mix it up and go where the spirit moves."

NEIL SPENCER



CAST
Troubled Times
CAST RECORDING

Cosmic Scousers retrace their steps
Britpop by association

rather than conviction, Cast's *All Change* proved to be more millstone than milestone in the long run, followed as it was by six years of diminishing returns until singer and former La's sideman John Power pulled the plug in 2001. Rebooted and reunited with the producer of that 1995 debut album, John Leckie, Cast retain their souped-up skiffle band charm here. While *Troubled Times* lacks the wide-eyed scally swagger of old, the opening track "Bow Down" and "Bad Water" once again see Power's ear for a rough-edged, 1965 pop melody eclipse his more questionable gifts as a lyricist.

JIM WIRTH

7/10



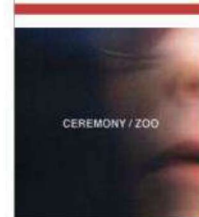
CARDINAL
Hymns
FIRE RECORDS

Orchestral-pop friends (finally) reunited
In 1994, when grunge

and Britpop reigned supreme, the bittersweet, sensitively arranged chamber pop of Eric Matthews and Richard Davies' self-titled debut went very much against the grain, and saw them lauded as keepers of the Beach Boys/Beatles orchestral-pop flame. Now, 18 years on, their second record, Cardinal's fine harmonised vocals and muzzy, Byrds-like melodies are still intact, but there's a DIY roughness and punk swing to "Carbolic Smoke Ball" and "Love Like Rain", while the Pink Floyd-toned, trumpet-assisted "General Hospital" cheekily lifts a lyric from Davies' hard-rock compatriots Cold Chisel, without missing a (mournful) beat.

SHARON O'CONNELL

7/10



CEREMONY
Zoo
MATADOR

Invigorating fourth from Cali-punk shapeshifters
Hardcore purists

who reckon Californian punk died with the suicide of Germs singer Darby Crash in 1980 are unlikely to be convinced by Ceremony's determination to keep the flame alive by changing its shape. Less reactionary souls, however, will thrill to the dynamic *Zoo*, which sees them tacking between Black Flag/Dead Kennedys, The Cramps and the dark minimalism of PiL and Gang Of Four. Ross Farrar's vocal range far exceeds genre expectation, while the band's Anglophilia ("Brace Yourself" is an unabashed homage to "God Save The Queen") will likely revive those hoary arguments over the true birthplace of punk.

SHARON O'CONNELL

7/10



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THE CHAP
We Are Nobody
LO RECORDINGS

London art-pop jesters reveal serious side

8/10 After ten years, four albums and

a best-of collection with not even a Kylie writing credit to their name, you can see why north London's experimental arch-rockers The Chap would dismiss their career so far as "the most interesting failure in pop history". But few acts bristle with quite as many ideas, and so on they press with this very good (and relatively straight-faced) set of juicy new wave and slanted funk that – "We Are Nowhere" and "Curtains" in particular – recalls Talking Heads' more tender moments. Failure looks a long way off.

PIERS MARTIN



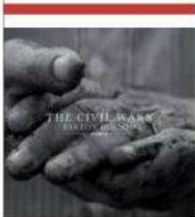
CHOIR OF YOUNG BELIEVERS
Rhine Gold
GHOSTLY

Orchestral pop from Denmark multi-instrumentalist

8/10 COYB have already

topped the Danish charts and won an award at the country's answer to the Grammys, which is impressive given the ambitious nature of their sound. The band is the solo vehicle of Jannis Noya Makrigiannis, formerly of indie popsters Lake Placid, whose singing bears an eerie resemblance to Tears For Fears' Roland Orzabal, and whose second full-length album is richly textured and exceedingly complex in its arrangements. Songs average around six minutes to accommodate Makrigiannis' widescreen vision that harnesses synth-pop, fidgety electronica and orchestral minimalism to put you under its spell.

FIONA STURGES



THE CIVIL WARS
Barton Hollow
COLUMBIA

Fingerpicking magic from Grammy-nominated American folk duo

7/10 This is a second stab at success for Joy

Williams and John Paul White. When they first met in Nashville in 2008 she was making Christian albums while he was licking his wounds after a botched attempt at becoming the new Jeff Buckley. In their current guise, however, they have found a rare synergy reflected in lilting harmonies and a simple musical style that gives full vent to their vocal talents. Comparisons to Gram and Emmylou may be pushing it, and you sometimes wish they would pick up the pace, but there's a passion and naturalism to these songs that make them worthy of the hubbub.

FIONA STURGES



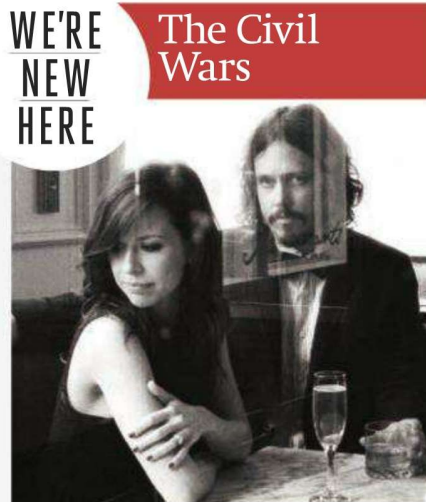
THE CORNSHED SISTERS
Tell Tales
MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

Northeast quartet present Vera Lynn 2.0

6/10 The Spice Girls made over by the Jarrow

Townswomen's Guild, Tyne and Wear harmony group The Cornshed Sisters present a world of perpetual tea-time on their wonky debut album, which flits between Unthanks-ish folk and blitz-spirit World War II pop. The water nymphs chalk up another victim on "Tommy" and "Pies For The Fair" unexpectedly brings the word "crusty" back into pop circulation, but the less mannered material shines brightest – the wistful "Dance At My Wedding" and Andrew-Lloyd-Webber-in-Nora-Batty-stockings closer "Sail To Me". And if you ever wondered what happened to Kenickie's Marie du Santiago, now you know.

JIM WIRTH



WE'RE NEW HERE
The Civil Wars
WHEN THEY MET at a songwriters' workshop in Nashville three years ago, Joy Williams, a God-fearing Californian raised on The Carpenters, and John Paul White, an Alabama soul and country nut, had already, as they put it, "seen the good, the bad and the ugly of the music business". Both had given up on solo careers, having left their respective record labels, and were laying the groundwork to become songwriters-for-hire.

In their Nashville writing room, Williams and White were assigned to compose a song together. In doing so they discovered a rare vocal chemistry along with a shared fascination for the darker side of life, and decided to pool their talent. The pair founded Sensibility Music and put a live recording of their second ever gig online, which was subsequently downloaded 100,000 times. Their debut album, *Barton Hollow*, named after a one-horse town in Tennessee, was released a year ago in America, where it went to No 1 in the iTunes chart and was later nominated for two Grammy Awards. The Civil Wars have since found an unlikely champion in the gazillion-selling songbird Adele, who gave them a generous career-boost via her blog when she declared them "the best live band I have ever seen". FIONA STURGES



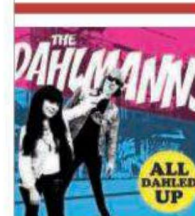
ERLAND DAHLEN
Rolling Bomber
HUBRO

Madrugada drummer plays everything including the cake tin

6/10 The versatile Dahlen

has percussed on records by the likes of Mike Patton/Kaada, Eivind Aarset, Hanne Hukkelberg and Nils Petter Molvær. Here he commands a Slingerland Rolling Bomber kit of 1940s assemblage, whose wooden shells resonate with profound warmth alongside his custom array of timpani, gongs, musical saw and a bowed cake tin festooned with springs. Far from self-indulgent improvising, Dahlen works up an insistent pulse on "Monkey" and autobahn-friendly motorik on "Germany": this one-man band-in-a-box sounds fuller and more imaginative than many 'post-rock' quartets.

ROB YOUNG



THE DAHLMANNS
All Dahled Up
POP DETECTIVE

Ramones meet Abba in Oslo garage

7/10 The Dahlmanns, like the Ramones,

are a fake family, led by André Dahlmann (former Yum Yums guitarist) and wife Line Cecile. Occasionally, as on "I Want You Around", they echo Joey and da bruddas, though Line's vocals push towards the bubblegum end of powerpop. Don't expect any surprises: The Dahlmanns are classicists, almost to the point of pastiche. The splendid opening song, "Candy Pants", chronicles a man, "48, going on 16" who loves young girls. It also rhymes "candy pants" with "new romance". Not so innocent, then, perhaps.

ALASTAIR MCKAY



DELTA SPIRIT
Delta Spirit
ROUNDER

Former Americana outfit now pushing Dawes as the best young SoCal band

8/10 Since their first album, *Ode To Sunshine*, in

2008, Delta Spirit have left their alt.country roots in the dust, Matt Vasquez's maturation as a writer and singer accompanied by a tightening and toughening of the band's sound. Guitarist Will McLaren gives the band a second heavyweight musician, joining force-of-nature drummer Brandon Young. The band's smarts and muscle come together with a resounding whomp on the new LP with the galloping "Empty House", the jubilant "Tear It Up" and the glorious "California", on which Young's snare-and-kick assaults alternate with a motorik drum-machine beat under a galaxy of shimmering harmonies. BUD SCOPPA

LEE RANALDO

Between The Times And The Tides

MATADOR

Sonic Youth guitarist makes his 'proper song' debut. *By Rob Young*



7/10

SOLO SONIC YOUTH albums often act like a colour filter that reveals hidden patterns in a picture by blocking out certain aspects of the spectrum.

Separated from the host group,

individual elements of the maelstrom can be heard with less interference. Sadly, following the breakup of Kim Gordon and Thurston Moore's marriage, individual albums may be the only way we'll hear from the group from now on.

Still, on guitarist Lee Ranaldo's opening salvo of this year – his ninth solo LP proper, not counting scores of collaborative works – there are plenty of continuities. Sonic Youth partner Steve Shelley is principal drummer, and Bob Bert, briefly the band's skinsman in the early '80s, crops up on percussion. There are contributions from old friend Alan Licht and Ranaldo's wife Leah Singer, plus the surprising addition of John Medeski on keyboards. Unlikely as it seems, his spit-roasted organ sounds so right in this company, providing a gurgling underlay for the songs to bed down upon. Even former SY alumnus Jim O'Rourke comes out of hiding in Tokyo to punch in some bass pulses on "Tomorrow Never Comes". But the instrumental man of this match has to be Nels Cline, the avant guitarist (currently a member of Wilco), who takes the majority of the LP's stunning solos.

Lee Ranaldo's authorship was always recognisable amid Sonic Youth's copious songbook – his contributions were usually in a rapturous register that confirmed his immersion in Beat writing, hipster poetics and a range of literary references transcendental and



SLEEVE NOTES

Produced by:

Lee Ranaldo and John Agnello

Recorded: January-

July 2011 by Aaron

Mullan, with LR,

Tim Glasgow and

Bentley Anderson, at

Echo Canyon West, NJ.

Mixed by John Agnello,

July 2011, with Aaron

Mullan and Ted Young

Personnel include:

Lee Ranaldo (guitar,

vocals), Steve Shelley

(drums), Nels Cline

(guitar, lap steel),

Alan Licht (guitar,

marimba), John

Medeski (organ, piano),

Irwin Menken (bass)

apocalyptic (*Salt Press are due to release his collected writings later this year*). Where Moore frequently injected Pop Art trash or goof-off humour, Ranaldo came across as the dark horse, whose songs – "Eric's Trip", "Wish Fulfillment", "NYC Ghosts & Flowers", to name three – were the ones that sounded genuinely angry, mournful and engaged with the visible world.

A couple of tracks here – "Waiting On A Dream", "Off The Wall" – could have been minted in the same forge as recent rocky SY LPs like *Rather Ripped* or *The Eternal*. But the rest has the recognisable Ranaldo imprint. The notable set pieces on *Between The Times...* are "Xtina As I Knew Her", which sets its oblique story of a

cosmopolitan lost soul, "shaky in these times uncertain", among primal tom-tom drum patterns cushioned in the acid bath of Ranaldo's guitar. Ranaldo and Cline's dual solo is configured at the tipping point between Verlaine chime and "Dark Star" meandering overload. The multi-part "Fire Island (Phases)" – personalised enough to

namecheck his son Sage – dips into Byrdsian country-rock mode and ends with a short section of upbeat sunshine pop.

Voices from Occupy Wall Street – taped at Zucotti Park, round the corner from Ranaldo's apartment – illustrate "Shouts", while Bob Mould could have written "Lost", a straightahead power-pop cut whose edges are a shade too smooth. He gears down to an open-tuned acoustic on "Stranded" and "Hammer Blows", which includes a vocal impersonation of a wah-wah and fateful knocks on the hollow-body. Closer "Tomorrow Never Comes" does seem to be as much a distant cousin to "Tomorrow Never Knows" as its title suggests – same drum riff and drone, but containing its own innate melodic skylights and airshafts.

Ranaldo, who already enjoys a prolific parallel career in experimental and improvised music as well as numerous art and film projects, has easily earned the right to produce an album such as this, so perfectly pitched at the watershed of alternative and mainstream rock. In Ranaldo's hands, though, he steers clear of any dampening compromise; in some ways this must be the best the US underground can offer in this moment: a mature album that's abrasive but not 'freaky' or 'weird', that enjoys its moments of harmony when it finds them, and is as serious-minded as the times demand.

Q&A

Lee Ranaldo



Your previous solo LPs have often been more abstract/experimental. Why a song album, now? At the moment, I'm much more invested in song-form exploration than I've been

in quite a while. With Sonic Youth working less over the last few years, I found I missed having a 'song forum', and songs started coming out. I want to tie this record into the whole history of my music-listening and what it meant to me as I grew up, even if those standards and forms don't really exist anymore. Hence I've got 'side one' and 'side two', even on the CD.

"Shouts" is clearly motivated by the Occupy protests... The song was finished before all that started in the USA, and inspiration came from one actual event in Vancouver – the 'riot/kiss' picture – and from all the 'Arab Spring' hopefulness and defiance. The rising tide of protest and defiance that began in Tahrir Square has been deeply inspiring on many levels. It feels like the first real flowering of 'the left' since I was so much younger, in the '60s/'70s.

What's the current assessment of Sonic Youth's future at this point? We are 'on hiatus'. I prefer to leave it at that. Sonic Youth was not working much over the last few years, by our choice – we were just simply in a relaxed and slow period, and I found I was missing an outlet for song-based work. No matter what happens from here, 30 years has been a pretty good run.



DISAPPEARS Pre Language

KRANKY

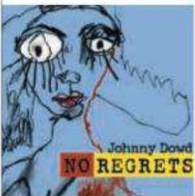
Steve Shelley picks up the sticks on Chicago quartet's third

As Sonic Youth's future may now be in some doubt, drummer

7/10

Steve Shelley is powering ahead with the post-punk quartet Disappears. This, the first album for the Chicago band that Shelley has appeared on, arrives barely a year after *Guider*, so it's no great surprise that the latter's dark, psychedelic drone/Krautrock charge is still in evidence (most notably on the effects-drenched epic "Love Drug"), but the malevolence and needling insistency of Gang Of Four and Fugazi are this record's core. "Replicate" in particular thrills, booting Iggy's sneery nihilism into the seductive shadowlands of Girls Against Boys, clipping The Fall as it goes.

SHARON O'CONNELL



JOHNNY DOWD No Regrets

MOTHER JINX

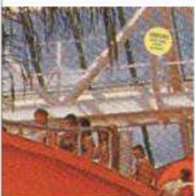
US maverick tackles the not-so-tender trap

New York-based Dowd has long dispensed with the overt country mannerisms of his

8/10

earliest work. This boisterously great 11th album finds him in typically uncompromising form, thumbing through his little black book and paying tribute to all the girls he's loved and lusted over before. Musically it's mostly throbbing electronica and sliding rhythms ("Billie" is a dead ringer for Suicide), with Dowd's rusted-saw voice often scarifyingly intense, not least on stalker ballad "Betty". It's all served with a knowing grin (the fabulous "Ella" is notable for a pastiche of Rihanna) and able cameos from Mary Loran and regular vocalist Kim Sherwood-Caso.

ROB HUGHES



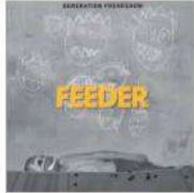
ERRORS Have Some Faith In Magic

ROCK ACTION

Scots equip themselves with glowsticks, with some decent results

6/10

Having gone through two albums of relatively tedious guitartronica, Errors give themselves a kick up the backside and try to write some less bookish, more satisfying tunes. The addition of vocals is hugely welcome, even if they are only Panda Bear-style chants, and the likes of "Pleasure Palaces" and "Holus-Bolus" really take off, the latter hovering somewhere between Fuck Buttons and Simple Minds. Sadly the threat of their old sonic masturbation is always close at hand, leading to directionless melodies-for-melody's-sake that dissolve their reached-for pop into a post-rock band's approximation of it. BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



FEEDER Generation Freakshow

BIG TEETH MUSIC

A return to a more melodic sound

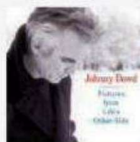
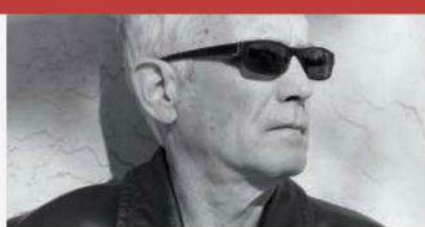
After the heavier, grittier pursuits of 2010's *Renegades*, it's a more

6/10

anthemic, traditional and radio-friendly Feeder that greet us on their eighth album. Even when the amps are cranked up to 11, as on the title track and the punk rush of "Headstrong", Grant Nicholas certainly knows the value of a catchy chorus. The chant-like "Idaho" in particular has 'future crowd-pleaser' written all over it, although Nicholas' songs tend to have more substance when he takes his foot off the pedal a bit, such as on the folky "Quiet" and the lovelorn grunge-lite of "Tiny Minds", the latter sounding somewhat curiously like late-period Pulp.

TERRY STAUNTON

HOW TO BUY... JOHNNY DOWD

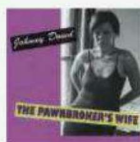


Pictures From Life's Other Side

MUNICH, 1999

Late-bloomer Dowd had turned 50 by the time this deliciously Dada second LP was released. His convulsive voice is as sinister as the music itself – a seething whirl of beat-up blues and sidelong country – as he essays tales of adultery, bleeding skies and trailertrash junkiedom. Standout is "No Woman's Flesh But Hers", a disquieting ditty about a comatose spouse.

8/10

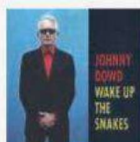


The Pawnbroker's Wife

MUNICH, 2002

Punk'n'roll is the defining sound of one of Dowd's more accessible forays into the inner reaches of Americana, alongside a fair splurge of rockabilly and, as on "Separate Beds", a winning way with a country ballad. Though "Rose Tattoo" and "True Love", narrated by a man gunned to death by his wife, suggest marriage is never the wisest option.

8/10



Wake Up The Snakes

MUNICH, 2010

Swamp-soul doused in voodoo and set aflame by the roaring rhythms of '60s garage. Mike Stark's Farfisa adds splashes of Seedy colour, as Dowd unhinges his mind to full effect on "Fat Joey Brown", coming on like The Night Tripper.

8/10



LEE FIELDS & THE EXPRESSIONS Faithful Man

TRUTH AND SOUL

Veteran soul belter, with Aloe Blacc's backing band

Fields has been making records since 1969 but – like his

6/10

occasional collaborator Sharon Jones – he's experienced far more success recently as a figurehead to the retro soul revival. His albums are the sonic equivalent of Mormon scriptures – documents that have been painstakingly crafted to seem like ancient artefacts, but ones you'd unearth in a Memphis vinyl vault rather than a Utah desert. The lovelorn lyrics, galloping 6/8 ballads, surging Hammond and soaring strings sound like late-'60s Southern soul, while the fuzz bass and electric sitar add some weird '70s psych-soul touches. Great, if a little pointless. JOHN LEWIS



FOE Bad Dream Hotline

VERTIGO

21-year-old Hampshire lass offloads her angst

On paper, Hannah Clarke is an intriguing prospect – an art-school drop-out who was raised

7/10

on a diet of PJ Harvey and Captain Beefheart, who prefers making her music alone at home to hanging out with her peers. However, her debut doesn't quite deliver on that promise, its unapologetically rockist, goth-grunge (melo)drama edging dangerously close to My Chemical Romance and (especially) Garbage territory as often as it suggests punky, organ-driven soundtracks to highly personal nightmares. The acerbic "Get Money" ("die young, live fast") and the neurotically se-sawing rhythm of the title track suggest a bright future – if only Foe can somehow erase that '90s date stamp.

SHARON O'CONNELL



JOHN FOXX AND THE MATHS The Shape Of Things

METAMATIC

The original alienated synthesist, still exploring the analogue

7/10

Before finding success with vocalist Midge Ure, Ultravox were led by the Chorley-born John Foxx, whose pale, alien appearance and passion for synthesisers proved a little exotic for a general public still absorbing the shock of punk. The zeitgeist, of course, caught up with Foxx, although he still remains on the fringes. Unfairly, perhaps. *The Shape Of Things*, a collaboration with London synth collector Bengie, couches his dolorous laments amid a retrofuturist show of bubbling electronics. It works well enough that when "Falling Away" pastes on some broiling guitar feedback, it sounds almost superfluous. LOUIS PATTISON

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GABRIEL & THE HOUNDS

Kiss Full Of Teeth

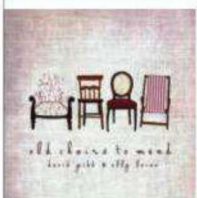
COMMUNION

Brooklyn artist's arty debut

8/10

The name suggests gothic whimsy, but the solo debut of Takka Takka singer Gabriel Levine was inspired by Kate Bush's *Hounds Of Love*. Actually, Sufjan Stevens is a better touchstone (many of Stevens' orchestral players contribute, along with The National's Bryan Devendorf) for a record which throws wistful melodies into sudden orchestral squalls ("An In-Between"). It's an intense 30 minutes, with found sounds and birdsong colouring the mood, but the simple intimacy of "The World Unfolds" recalls the brash charm of Jonathan Richman or The Go-Betweens.

ALASTAIR MCKAY



DAVID GIBB & ELLY LUCAS

Old Chairs To Mend

HAIRPIN

Pleasant, unadorned folk with a touch of the dark side

7/10

After two solo albums, Derbyshire singer-guitarist Gibb has now teamed up with fiddler Lucas from his band The Pony Club. They produce cosy, clean-cut folk drawing ideas and songs from as far afield as Topic's hearty 'Voice Of The People' series and Terry Pratchett's fictional mythology, while the stirring, unaccompanied "(They Were Only Playing) Leapfrog" is sourced from *Oh, What A Lovely War!* The duo's approach oozes charm but it's Lucas' soulful voice on the well-worn "Blacksmith" that's such an obvious highlight, exploring a welcome darker side.

MICK HOUGHTON



GRIMES

Visions

4AD

Beguiling GarageBand pop from Montreal

7/10

On her first outings as Grimes, Claire Boucher brought to mind a chillwave Liz Frazer, so it's only appropriate that she's now been picked up for wider release by 4AD. On *Visions*, however, the allure of goth has been superseded by a more globalised exotica: these delicately loopy cooings are a filigreed echo-chamber of everything from Sally Shapiro's indie-Italo house to K-pop girlgroups, the ghostly sirens of dubstep, Julie Cruise Lynchpop and even Minnie Riperton's portamento. Over the course of an album even dogs will find the whistle register wearing, but taken individually these are sublime cocktails of post-geographical orientalism.

STEPHEN TROUSSE



THE HONEYDOGS

What Comes After

GRAIN BELT

Minnesotans couch thematic ambition in easy-to-swallow songs

8/10

Honeydogs founder Adam Levy has been making smart, heartfelt rock since the mid-'90s, though under the radar, while also holding down a day job as a social worker. His eighth full-length with The Honeydogs, now a seven-piece, is Levy's least thorny and most immediately appealing collection. It also covers a lot of stylistic terrain, evoking The Band ("Particles And Waves"), Beatles ("Devil We Do") and *Summerteeth*-era Wilco ("Fighting Weight"), along with acoustic pieces, while Levy's lyrics consider such heavy themes as blue-collar burdens, atrophying relationships and encroaching mortality.

BUD SCOPPA

HOW TO BUY...

HOWLIN RAIN'S ETHAN MILLER



COMETS ON FIRE

Blue Cathedral

SUB POP, 2004

After two albums of ferocious psych rock scree – 2001's punky self-titled debut on Alternative Tentacles and 2002's Hawkwind-esque *Field Recordings From The Sun* – Santa Cruz's Comets On Fire hit their stride on LP3 with the addition of Six Organs Of Admittance's Ben Chasny to the lineup. A sense of brooding folk majesty underpins the skull-splitting onslaught of molten guitar action, screeching sax and bludgeoning cosmic FX.

8/10



COMETS ON FIRE

Avatar

SUB POP, 2006

At once both more serene and more intense than its predecessors, Comets On Fire's fourth and final album introduces some of the freewheeling classic rock elements that will soon become the province of Howlin Rain. Yet there's still room for plenty of epic, elemental guitar duels between Chasny and Miller, above a glowering landscape of scorched forests and vengeful frost.

8/10



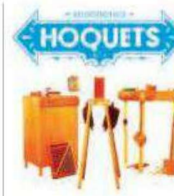
HOWLIN RAIN

Magnificent Fiend

BIRDMAN, 2008

Initially envisioned as a Comets On Fire side-project, Howlin Rain established themselves as Miller's main jam with their terrific second album. Recruited from the Bay Area's underground scene, the band play rich and ribald Southern rock laced with subtle psychedelic flavours as a backdrop to Miller's appealing pulp fiction yarns. 2010's stopgap EP "The Good Life" is also well worth seeking out.

8/10



HOQUETS

Belgotronics

CRAMMED

Inspired punk Dadaism from novel Brussels trio

6/10

Like their labelmates Konono No 1 and the other 'Congotronics' groups, Hoquets fashion their homemade instruments – also known as 'hoquets' – out of wooden boards, tin cans and other cast-offs to create an extraordinary mash-up that is as intoxicating as it is absurd. That the junkyard is a choice made from European aesthetics rather than African necessity lends a surreal quality. But the savagery of the beats is impressive, while songs about Belgian culture and history, ranging from the Battle of Waterloo ("1815") to beer-brewing monks ("L'Abbaye d'Orval") recall blessed Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band insanity.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



HOWLIN RAIN

The Russian Wilds

AGITATED RECORDS

San Franciscan quintet attain classic rock

8/10

nirvana on sumptuous third

Ethan Miller was once the leader of latter-day psych-rock warriors Comets On Fire and he brings the same intensity to bear on the soulful Southern rock symphonies of his current band Howlin Rain. On their finest album to date, they come across like a turbocharged Little Feat, each song generously extended to accommodate glorious, rampaging solos or philosophical bon mots ("When they tell you about existential pain/They count the distance from your soul to the desire in your brain"). Fabulous stuff all round.

SAM RICHARDS



RAY WYLIE HUBBARD

The Grifter's Hymnal

BORDELLO RECORDS

Grizzled Texas songster keeps getting better; Ringo Starr, Ian McLagan guest

8/10

Though he was around during Outlaw Country's 1970s glory days ("Up Against The Wall, Redneck Mother"), 1994's *Loco Gringos Lament* is where Hubbard truly found his songwriting sea legs. Since, he's rolled out an astonishing body of work – bruised, lyrical, mordant, hysterical, righteous rusted-out country, folk, and blues – proving himself among pop's most gleefully unpredictable, free-thinking songwriters. As for *The Grifter's Hymnal*, from the Stonies "South Of The River" to "Mother Blues", a rousing, absurd if somehow autobiographical narrative of his Dallas youth, it's among his best.

LUKE TORN

MICHAEL KIWANUKA

Home Again

POLYDOR

Soulful debut from hotly tipped north Londoner. *By Neil Spencer*



7/10

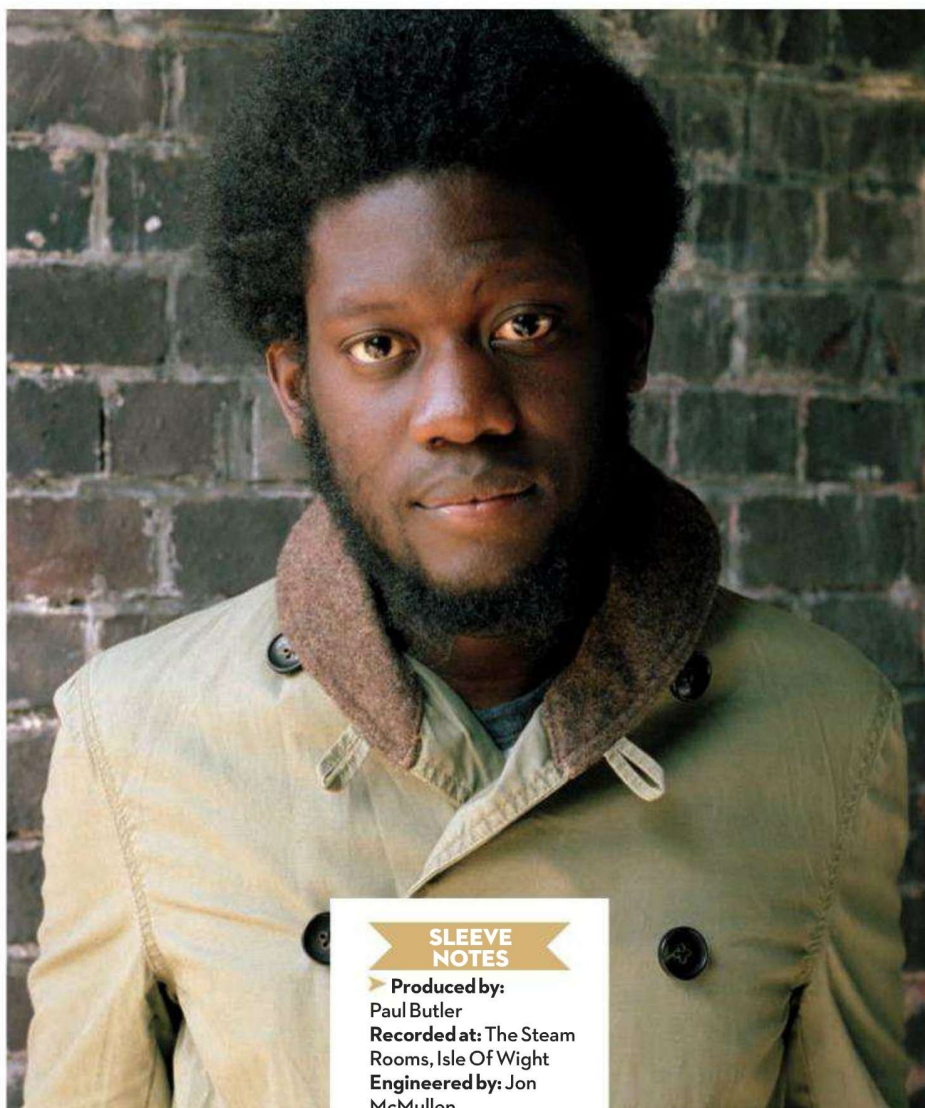
THE BBC'S ANNUAL 'Sound Of...' award has an impressive history of picking the right names for the year ahead. So will Michael Kiwanuka, the Beeb's choice for 'Sound of 2012' likewise go on to sell albums by the

lorryload? Probably. *Home Again* is an arresting, if low-key, debut that confirms its creator's rapid ascent. Last year Kiwanuka, a modest 25-year-old from Muswell Hill (of Ugandan parents) was plying his trade as a singer-songwriter in north London pubs. Now he fronts his own band, recently playing to 2,000 people at the Worldwide Awards.

Support slots with Adele and Laura Marling have helped his climb, but much of the work was done by last year's "Tell Me A Tale" EP – all three tracks are here – that had him widely likened to the folk-soul sound of yesteryear greats Bill Withers and Terry Callier. The comparisons are not entirely fanciful. Kiwanuka's gruff, direct vocals are akin to Withers', while his songs are similarly simple affairs driven by acoustic guitar.

After that, the similarities start to fade. Withers was ex-navy when he made it, a seasoned observer of life and love. The 10 songs on *Home Again* are the heartfelt cries of a young man looking for his place in the world, their vulnerability being part of their appeal. Opener "Tell Me A Tale" hits the spot straightaway, with its plea to "turn me around so I can be/Everything I was meant to be". With its washes of strings and dancing flute contrasting to Kiwanuka's powerful voice, there's a touch of Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks* in play, too.

Kiwanuka hands credit to producer Paul Butler of The Bees for the orchestral flourishes that wrap around what were previously spartan songs. Having seen Kiwanuka play, Butler offered him his Isle Of Wight studio and secured him a record deal.



SLEEVE NOTES

Produced by:

Paul Butler
Recorded at: The Steam Rooms, Isle Of Wight
Engineered by: Jon McMullen

Personnel:

Michael Kiwanuka (vocals, guitar and bass), Paul Butler (drums, trumpets, baritone sax, percussion, tambourine, shaker, triangle, wood blocks, piano, Rhodes, clarinets, kora, bk vocals, percussion, vibra-slap, bells, timpani), Tim Parkin (trumpet, Rhodes, violin), Gary Plumley (flutes, sax), Paul Armfield (double bass)

The mood of world weariness but hoping for better times is the mainspring of *Home Again*, with most tracks following the same structure, moving from a bare, acoustic opening into orchestration. It's an effective ploy, though one arguably over-used, and has helped make "I'll Get Along" and "Home Again" feel like familiar classics after a few months of exposure.

Variety arrives in an unlikely shape on "Bones", the kind of whimsical lovecall likely to pop up

on a Norah Jones album. Kiwanuka drawls and pines for that certain girl while a jaunty massed-vocal chorus lends the piece the feel of a 1950s country song. It's the exception among the 10 cuts on offer. "Always Waiting" returns to the theme of "my time is coming soon" set to an intricate piece of guitar-picking (a reminder of Kiwanuka's regard for early Dylan) while "I Won't Lie" has the singer wondering "what it is that I can't find".

"Any Day Will Do Fine" is more straightforwardly downcast, a call on God for help, with Kiwanuka's vocals shifting towards Otis Redding territory. "Rest" evokes another soul great, Al Green, using the kind of crawling pace Green employed on hits like "For The Good Times" – the plea to "rest your head on my shoulder" echoes that song none too subtly – and while Kiwanuka hasn't Green's vocal range, he captures sorrow and resignation.

The closing "Worry Walks Beside Me" strikes a more defiant note, stretching Kiwanuka to the upper end of his vocal powers but oozing strength. By that time the lack of ups to go with the album's downs has become apparent, an imbalance addressed live, where the band brings more attack. There will doubtless be more varied shades on future records, but for now, this pensive debut gives notice of a fine new talent.

Q&A

Michael Kiwanuka



Did you write these songs with orchestration in mind?

I always thought of "I Need Your Company" that way, but I write everything on acoustic guitar. The arrangements came from

working with Paul Butler.

How did you fit everyone in his small studio?

We did it with one violin player and moved him round to sound like a section! It was very

spontaneous. That studio has a lot of analogue equipment, and I prefer the sound of valve amps, but we also used Logic mixing.

What about the Bill Withers comparisons?

I'm starting out, and wear my influences on my sleeve. I listened a lot to Bill and Otis Redding, but more to Shuggie Otis, a fellow guitar player – you can hear rock'n'roll alongside the soul.

You don't sound as downbeat as the album. Writing anything new?

I don't think of it as downbeat, there's hope in there, too. I've written a new one which closes the live set, "Lasan", named after a Brum curry house. It's about how life's short so live to get the most from it.



HUE AND CRY Hot Wire

BLAIRHILL

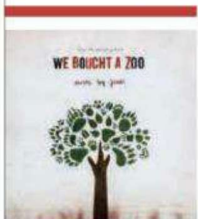
(Mixed) business as usual from the brothers Kane

Though the album cover might suggest they're now

5/10

moonlighting as a pair of Govan-based loan sharks, Hue And Cry's shtick remains essentially unaltered by the passing of time – they're still marrying Pat Kane's pseudish socio-political musings to slick sub-Steely Dan-isms and synthetic soul-funk stylings. "Duty To The Debtor" rides a choppy New Orleans groove not entirely unpleasantly, though, and "Hand And Heart" is uplifting, but much of the rest sounds pale and dated, not least the grim "Carlos Takes The Fall", the kind of shocker that was last heard being back-announced by Gary Davies on Radio 1 in 1987.

GRAEME THOMSON



JÓNSI We Bought A Zoo

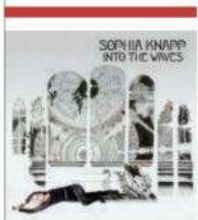
SONY

Ravishing soundtrack to new Cameron Crowe movie

According to director Crowe, Jónsi's music actively influenced

8/10

the mood of his new film, about a family who buy a rundown zoo, of course; it's certainly easy to believe that these sublime pieces could have inspired such a profound reaction. Among the nine themes – including the delicate music-box melody of "Brambles", the glacial chorale of "Snaerisendar" and the pulsing "Sink Ships" – are reworkings of the Sigur Rós classic "Hoppípolla" and three tracks from Jónsi's 2010 solo album *Go*, as well as two new songs: the hymnal "Ævin Endar" and the closing "Gathering Stories", a valedictory anthem that was actually co-written with Crowe. GRAEME THOMSON



SOPHIA KNAPP Into The Waves

DRAG CITY

Toothsome country-pop from Brooklyn

Last year's *Memories Come True* album by New York soft-rock revivalists Cliffré

7/10

Swan featured a song called "Dream Chain", channeling the band's evident Fleetwood Mac-fandom by eliding the titles of two *Rumours* tracks. Now their frontwoman goes solo with an album that would dearly love to be Stevie Nicks' *Bella Donna*. *Into The Waves* isn't quite that strong, though, and Knapp's sweet voice is closer to Olivia Newton-John than Nicks, but nevertheless tracks like "Glasses High" and "The Right Place" have abundant charm, some superb, glowing arrangements and, on highlight "Spiderweb", a winningly lugubrious cameo from Bill Callahan.

STEPHEN TROUSSÉ



JODIE MARIE Mountain Echo

VERVE

Soulful young diva, aided by Bernard Butler and Ed Harcourt

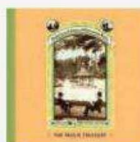
6/10

She's a young, Welsh neo-soul chanteuse

who's been mentored by Bernard Butler, so it wouldn't be unreasonable to conclude that Jodie Marie must be the new Duffy. However, while tracks like "On The Road" and "Numb" see Jodie trying to replicate the classic, big-lunged mid-'60s soul sound favoured by that particular artist, she generally goes for a more scattershot approach. Songs like "Dandelion Wishes" and "Single Blank Canvas" mangle together a bunch of dippy-hippy lyrics with some ersatz Americana. It's the more spartan, folksier tracks, like "Greeny Blue", that hint at better things to come, however.

JOHN LEWIS

HOW TO BUY... THE MAGNETIC FIELDS' STEPHIN MERRITT'S SIDE-PROJECTS



THE GOTHIC ARCHIES The Tragic Treasury: Songs From A Series Of Unfortunate Events

NONESUCH, 2006

With songs originally composed for the Lemmy Snicket audiobooks – including the timeless "Smile! No One Cares How You Feel" – Merritt's imaginary bubblegum trio ("like The Magnetic Fields with the last glimmer of hope extinguished") unexpectedly delivered his best, most blackly comic album of the 21st century so far.

8/10



THE 6THS Wasps' Nests

LONDON, 1995

A self-conceived tribute project featuring minor luminaries like Heavenly's Amelia Fletcher, Sebadoh's Lou Barlow and Yo La Tengo's Georgia Hubley, The 6ths established Merritt as something like a mid-'90s indiepop Leonard Cohen: composer of a profound, inimitable songbook, ripe for reinterpretation.

7/10



STEPHIN MERRITT Showtunes

NONESUCH, 2006

Following the masterstroke of 69 *Love Songs*, Merritt declared that he now intended to produce 50 Hollywood musicals. On his way towards this ambition he's worked in off-Broadway musical theatre, and *Showtunes* collects songs from three pieces composed for plays by Chen Shi-Zheng. It's hit and miss, but tunes like "What A Fucking Lovely Day!" and "Sorry, Wrong Show" are worth the price of admission.

6/10



KINDNESS World, You Need A Change Of Mind

FEMALE ENERGY/POLYDOR

Secretive space cadet's seductive MOR voyage

9/10

Press-shy newcomer Kindness – aka disco-

inclined longhair Adam Bainbridge – had the luxury of a major-label budget and the ear of all-star producer Philippe Zdar (Cassius) while recording this intriguing debut, so it's certainly a brave move to furnish it with such exotic pieces, but one that pays off beautifully. More a presence than a personality, Bainbridge slips between slices of grungy bliss ("Cyan", Replacements cover "Swinging Party") and slabs of ripe ZTT funk ("That's Alright"), even transforming Anita Dobson's *EastEnders* theme revamp "Anyone Can Fall In Love" into a tumbling slow jam. Remarkable.

PIERS MARTIN



LLOYD King Of Hearts

POLYDOR

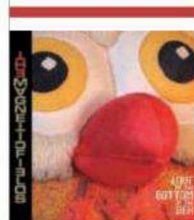
Second-tier R&B singer clambering into the big time

Riding high on the chart success of his "Dedication To

7/10

My Ex (Miss That)" single, Lloyd's 2011 album gets a deserved UK release. That song (a tale of adultery exposed via Lloyd's detection of changes to his sweetheart's genitalia) doesn't really represent the rest of the set – its vintage Motown sass gives way to thickly buttered, modern, The-Dream-like production from Polow Da Don. While the lyrics are clichéd to a fault, Lloyd is a convincing loverman across the range of backdrops he's given, from the delicate shimmy of "Shake It 4 Daddy" to the epic "You II", featuring '80s Cameo drums, wheezing vocoder and wonderful skywriting vocals.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



THE MAGNETIC FIELDS Love At The Bottom Of The Sea

DOMINO

Green shoots from the old Fields

6/10

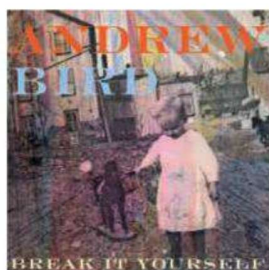
The final track of 2010's *Realism*, "From A Sinking Boat", seemed like an epitaph for the Fields' underwhelming decade on Nonesuch. *Love At The Bottom Of The Sea* is inauspiciously titled, but there are some signs of sub-aquatic life. The ukulele has been abandoned, the emphysemic synth orchestra has been rebooted and Merritt's muse seems freshly stirred on the pitiless satires "God Wants Us To Wait" and "The Machine In Your Hand". Too many tracks are still founded on tiresome conceits, but "Andrew In Drag" is a promising revival of erotic despair.

STEPHEN TROUSSÉ

AMERICANA



BEST
OF THE
MONTH



ANDREW BIRD

Break It Yourself

BELLA UNION

Chicagoan prodigy drops his guard and takes flight

Like the green parakeets of south London, Andrew Bird is an exotic creature (violin prodigy, jazz-folk-zydeco musical adventurer, musical-saw virtuoso and world-class whistler) who has adapted himself impeccably to a more staid environment – in his case the 21st century, post-Arcade Fire ecology of adult alternative. So successfully, in fact, that his eighth album, 2009's *Noble Beast*, debuted at No 12 on the US album charts and established him as the darling of NPR.

Nevertheless, you still got vivid flashes of peregrine plumage, not least in his lyrics, which revealed him to be the most recondite rhymester this side of Edith Sitwell. *Noble Beast* featured not just “calcified arhythmatis” and “young radiolarians” but “proto-Sanskrit Minoans” and indeed “a colony of dermestids”. *Break It Yourself* by contrast feels like an attempt to communicate more directly and is his most affecting album yet. “Eyeoneye”, for example, may refer to reionisation and defibrillation, but, rocking along on a Win-Butler-goes-Spector beat, is concerned with more visceral matters: “You’ve done the impossible/Took yourself apart/Made yourself invulnerable/No-one can touch your heart/So... you break it yourself”. Similarly “Lazy Projector” extends a metaphysically cinematic metaphor but concludes, simply, “I can’t see the sense in us breaking up at all.” Elsewhere Bird lets a little air into his previously overly studied exercises: “Danse Caribe” seems borne on some blithe gulf stream breeze from Van’s “Cyprus Avenue” back to the rhythms of Trinidadian soca, while “Hole In Ocean” ascends to Vaughan Williams heights. But the LP’s two highlights hit a perfectly judged pitch of heartbreak: “Lusitania”, which tramps the dream prairies of early Grant Lee Buffalo, and best of all, “Sifters”, a lovely lullaby of departure in which “the moon plays the ocean like a violin”. **STEPHEN TROUSSÉ**



THE AMERICANA ROUND-UP

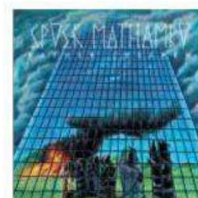
► Early April sees the first solo album in three years from **M. Ward** (left), most recently of She & Him and supergroup-of-sorts Monsters Of Folk. *A Wasteland Companion*, issued

on Bella Union, finds the Portland polymath joined by Howe Gelb, John Parish, Zooey Deschanel, Steve Shelley, Mike Mogis and a host of others.

Bonnie Raitt also returns that same month with *Slipstream*, a covers collection on her new Redwing label. Expect versions of Dylan’s “Standing In The Doorway” and Loudon Wainwright III’s “You Can’t Fail Me Now”. And while *Uncut* reserves judgement on Lionel Richie’s decision to go country on

upcoming duets album *Tuskegee* (including “Easy” with Willie Nelson), it’s caps in the air for the imminent return of **Rodney Crowell**. *Kin*, co-written with author/poet Mary Karr, features ex-wife Rosanne Cash, Norah Jones, Lucinda Williams, Kris Kristofferson and Emmylou Harris. The latter has also been talking up a duets album with Crowell, her original guitarist in the Hot Band, overseen by Emmylou’s longtime producer Brian Ahern.

Plenty of unmissable road action, too. **Lambchop** play six UK dates the first week of March, while the following month marks the visit of **Low** for a couple of post-ATP shows in Birmingham and London. After which **Simone Felice** celebrates the release of his wonderful self-titled debut album with an extensive tour throughout April and early May. **ROB HUGHES**



SPOEK MATHAMBO

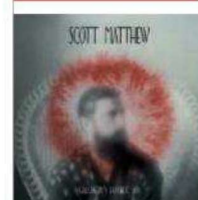
Father Creeper

SUB POP

Second album from experimental South African producer

7/10

Mathambo caused a stir last year with his post-hip hop cover of Joy Division’s “She’s Lost Control”. Now on a bigger label with a budget to match, he’s built a futuristic skyscraper of electro, house, dubstep, rap and other urban beats. It’s been called ‘township techno’, although apart from the African jive guitar intro on “Dog To Bone”, there’s little that directly identifies his Soweto origins. But from the Detroit-styled rap of “Kites” to the techno-grunge-metal of “Let Them Talk”, it’s the most potent sound to come out of South Africa since DJ Mujava’s ‘08 leftfield hit on Warp with “Township Funk”. **NIGEL WILLIAMSON**



SCOTT MATTHEW

Gallantry's Favorite Son

GLITTERHOUSE

Dark grandeur from displaced Australian

6/10

A quietly dramatic, not-quite-folk despatch from the wee small hours, Matthew’s third album is easy to admire but perhaps a little tougher to love. Perhaps it’s the generally funereal pace throughout, or maybe his slightly parched voice, but at times (“True Sting”, “Duet”) the music feels washed out and grounded rather than elegantly sorrowful. The chipper “Devil’s Only Child” and the breezy “Felicity”, with its jaunty whistling refrain, offer refreshing antidotes, while “Buried Alive” and the gorgeous “Sinking”, both punctuated by hair-raising vocal swells, illustrate just how good Matthew can be. **GRAEME THOMSON**



MEAT LOAF

Hell In A Handbasket

SONY LEGACY

Undignified soft-rock soul-baring

5/10

Meat Loaf once mildly amused as an operatic conduit for Jim Steinman’s cartoon-rock hysteria, but this painful exercise in manufactured soul-baring is a genuinely grim proposition. In the musical equivalent of panic buying, everything is thrown in. The rote-rock teenage angst of “All Of Me” sounds baleful coming from someone who is 64 years old, while a dreadful cover of “California Dreamin’” lacks any discernible point. Bafflingly, Chuck D appears – you’d hope under major duress – while throughout Loaf sobs rather than sings, like a man all too aware that it’s nearing closing time at the last chance saloon. **GRAEME THOMSON**



MOUNT WASHINGTON
Mount Washington
GLITTERHOUSE

Nordic soft-rockers resurface with more ambitious agenda

7/10

Roving Norwegians with an eclectic record of shifting indie-rock styles, Mount Washington recorded this fourth album during an extended stay in Berlin. Here their erstwhile folksy Americana and Europop influences have been superseded by a more glitchy electronic palette and a more anthemic songwriting approach, which veers into Killers or Coldplay territory with choirboy-voiced stadium-janglers like "Silver Screen" and "How Does It Feel". Maybe a quintessentially Nordic tastefulness prevents them from giving experimental excursions such as "Toscana" and "Radio Silence" the essential bite they lack, but this solid album is still rich in robust melodies and interesting noises.

STEPHEN DALTON



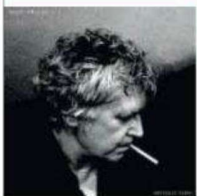
NITE JEWEL
One Second Of Love
SECRETLY CANADIAN

Second album of offbeat synth-pop from Los Angeles' Ramona Gonzalez

7/10

Like Chairlift and Yeasayer, Nite Jewel are another act from the US underground whose quest for the exotic has led towards a curious fascination with slick, adult-oriented '80s pop. The lo-fi shroud of Ramona Gonzalez's 2009 debut *Good Evening* has been largely pulled back to reveal a set of pristine ballads that veer somewhere between the atmospheric folk of Suzanne Vega and Sade's austere pop-soul. Yet a weird undercurrent still remains; "Mind & Eyes" and "Autograph" are yearning break-up songs whose very poise and restraint is in itself unsettling.

SAM RICHARDS



ROBERT POLLARD
Mouseman Cloud
FIRE

And still, the songs keep coming...

6/10

The man who guides Guided By Voices, a solo career, Boston Spaceships, Cosmos and more has long been a pillar of prolificacy, but 2012 might be a new peak – alongside a rumoured three GBV albums comes this low-key outing. Here Pollard has concentrated heavily on lyrics, and his oblique wordplay sparkles on the miniature title track ("Pigs in the oyster dip/Squeal for the oxygen drip") and the atmospheric "Lizard Ladder". The songwriter is on fine form – but it's sometimes hard to suppress doubts over the need for solo Pollard now GBV are back, especially when Todd Tobias' production is so characteristically uninspired.

TOM PINNOCK



PONTIAK
Echo Ono
THRILL JOCKEY

Southern meat-and-potatoes rock, now packed with extra stodge

5/10

This Virginia trio are now on their seventh album in six years, and the workrate makes you wish the band would properly hunker down and drum up ideas between each one. From QOTSA stoner riffage to Black Keys blues chug and back again, it's so generic it could be sold in a supermarket basics range. It's not incompetent, though, and on occasion unexpectedly pretty, but let's face it – office managers kicking back at the weekend will play this sort of thing to their quietly reluctant friends in bars until the end of time, and is that really what you want from a record?

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS

WE'RE
NEW
HERE

Luke Roberts



BORN AND RAISED in Nashville, Luke Roberts had a classic Southern Gothic upbringing, or at least so he claimed when promoting his debut LP, *Big Bells And Dime Songs*, in 2010. "I was born into a charismatic nondenominational family in Nashville," he said. "My mother sang hymns and spoke in tongues. My dad played bluegrass. I hopped trains for the first time when I was 11 years old." Embellished or otherwise, it sounds like something out of a Handsome Family song.

Although steeped in the music and spirit of the South, Roberts was living in Brooklyn when he made that album of beautiful finger-picking country blues, but had relocated to Nashville for the excellent follow-up, *The Iron Gates At Throop And Newport*. His sad, contemplative songs are in the spirit of songwriters like Townes Van Zandt or Blaze Foley. "This album is about freedom," he told *Uncut*, before adding, with tongue in Southern cheek, "It is one of the greatest American albums ever made. I only wanted to make sure I gave the world a classic, and I did." PETER WATTS



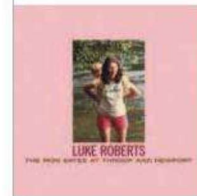
CHUCK PROPHET
Temple Beautiful
YEP ROC

Spirited homage to the City by the Bay; Flamin' Groovie Roy Loney pitches in

8/10

After dabbling in everything from swamp-pop to hip hop – not to mention his verbatim *London Calling* tour – renaissance-rocker Prophet literally brings it all back home on *Temple Beautiful*, a dozen beautifully melodic, razor-sharp guitar-pop elegies to his 'Frisco roots. Mythological in scope, soulful in execution – tracking everything from the city's vaunted musical history to baseball star Willie Mays and madman/murderer Jim Jones, it's a feast of contextual songwriting and sizzling guitar. The piercing "Castro Halloween" and the NY Dolls-style rave-up title cut jump out first, but the whole lot is first-rate.

LUKE TORN



LUKE ROBERTS
The Iron Gates At Throop And Newport
THRILL JOCKEY

Excellent lonesome fireside blues from indie troubadour

8/10

After the fine lonesome country-blues of his debut, *Big Bells And Dime Songs*, Roberts returns mining similar emotions but with a bigger budget and band to match. On the squalling elemental hymn "His Song" he's managed to cram half-a-dozen bodies into the studio, but even more affecting are those tracks where he keeps things simple. The plaintive beauty of "I Don't Want You Anymore" is the first of many to feature the fine fiddle of Billy Contreras, while gorgeous solo piece "Cartier Timepiece" offers a fingerpicking fusion of Beat and country, and "Old Fashioned Woman" is a majestic bluesy strummer.

PETER WATTS



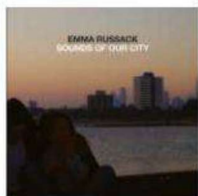
FRANKIE ROSE
Interstellar
MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

Star turn from reformed NYC drummer

8/10

As the one-time drummer with New York loft sensations the Vivian Girls, Crystal Stilts and the Dum Dum Girls, Frankie Rose boasts a flawless indie-pop pedigree, but the transplanted Californian has perfected her own English-accented vision since giving away her drumkit. *Interstellar* slowly turns up the reverberations on her 2010 debut *Frankie Rose And The Outs* – recorded in the midst of a Spacemen 3 binge – but the shuddering pulse that shines through the title track, "Gospel/Grace" and "Had We Had It" sees disco lights twinkling through the Cocteau Twins fog. Think Veronica Falls meets Arthur Russell, and investigate further.

JIM WIRTH



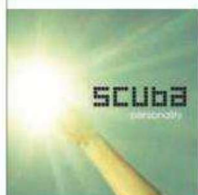
EMMA RUSSACK
Sounds Of Our City
SPUNK

Melbourne singer-songwriter makes fine debut

7/10

Russack hails from New South Wales, and introduced herself via well-chosen YouTube covers ("Love Will Tear Us Apart", "The Killing Moon") that showed self-confidence, and a voice which could squeeze warmth from tragedy. Her self-composed debut delivers on this promise, opening with the stark couplet "*Tonight I'm gonna go out and get drunk, and find someone to take me home*", on the rebound song "Tonight". The sultry chill of Russack's voice is beautifully complemented by understated guitar, pedal steel and strings, as on the elegantly cinematic closer, "This Love".

ALASTAIR MCKAY



SCUBA
Personality
HOTFLUSH

Unashamedly banging choons from Hotflush label boss

8/10

Scuba's Paul Rose has been at the vanguard of British bass music since 2006, overseeing its evolution from dubstep to a kind of fidgety mongrel breed of techno. Latterly, however, he seems to have concluded that there's less nobility in constantly striving to push things forward than there is in serving the needs of the dancefloor. Consequently, *Personality* is rife with the kind of populist touches that some will dismiss as overtly cheesy. As it happens, the exhilarating collision of muscular breakbeats and ripe trance synths makes this one of the most enjoyable dance albums in recent memory.

SAM RICHARDS



SIMIAN GHOST
Youth
HEIST OR HIT

Grown-up second album from sensitive Swede
Last year's Simian Ghost debut found

6/10

sole member Sebastian Arnström flirting with hazy electro-pop just as the final chillwave rippled into the abyss. This time, for *Youth*, the former frontman of Swedish post-rockers Aerial has more success exploring the adolescent jangle of Sarah Records with a brace of lush sephia ballads called "Wolf Girl" and "Sparrow". No doubt Arnström can craft an uplifting tune – "Fenix" might be, well, Phoenix – but his simpering tone ultimately suggests The Whitest Boy Alive being kicked in the face with sand.

PIERS MARTIN



SMOKE FEATHERS
Liberation
DELTA CREEK

Articulate worldviews in an acoustic setting

7/10

Feathers frontman Matt Falloon arguably has more life experience to draw upon than most songwriters his age. His early twenties were spent as a crime and politics newspaper reporter in post-election riot-torn Guyana (chronicled in the opening "Liberation"), shadowing Gordon Brown and David Cameron on overseas trips. It all pours out in a vivid series of folk-tinged portraits, with shades of Jackson Browne ("Islands In Her Eyes") and Paul Simon ("Faint Heart"), although the eloquent study of mental health, "Light Over Me", is inspired by events closer to home within his own family.

TERRY STAUNTON

REVELATIONS

US President Barack Obama's favourite sounds...



WANT TO OWN the tunes that entertain the most powerful man on Earth? Easy! Since running for the US Presidency, Barack Obama has often mentioned his musical

tastes and love for classic soul. At a fundraiser in January 2012 he trumped such talk with a live rendition of Al Green's "Let's Stay Together", a moment that eclipsed Bill Clinton's 1992 sax rendition of "Heartbreak Hotel". Find it on Green's *Gold* (Demon).

Stevie Wonder is Obama's biggest hero, however, his "You And I" being the wedding song for Obama and wife Michelle – it's on 1972's *Talking Book* (Motown), the first LP Michelle bought. Wonder has since played for The Pres several times. Bob Dylan, another favourite, performed "The Times They Are A-Changin'" at the White House, while Paul McCartney delivered, what else, "Michelle".

Stacked up on the presidential iPod are Earth Wind & Fire, Coltrane, The Boss, Aretha, Stones and Sinatra, while daughters Malia and Sasha have pushed dad towards hip-hopppers Nas and Lil Wayne. Most recently Obama's championed jazz star Esperanza Spalding, who's played for him three times, including at his 2009 Nobel Peace Prize award ceremony. "Isn't she wonderful?" said The Pres. Yes sir!



Ace of bass:
presidential fave
Esperanza Spalding

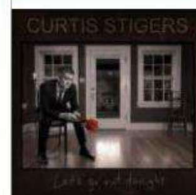


SOAP & SKIN
Narrow
PIAS

Sublime sophomore sobfest from arty Euro-goth siren

8/10

Cloaking her sumptuous post-folk torch songs in Middle European melancholia, multilingual Austrian chanteuse Anja Plaschg takes a great leap forward from her 2008 debut on this gorgeously gloomy second album, sobbing and smouldering like a Teutonic Lana Del Rey. Sounding older than her 21 years, Plaschg commemorates her father's recent death in the stormy German-language lament "Vater" and sounds utterly bereft on the half-whispered heartbreak ballad "Lost". She also experiments with more adventurous rhythmic arrangements in "Deathmental" and "Boat Turns Towards The Port", clanking steampunk contraptions grounded in mechanised percussive chatter. Utter desolation never sounded so lovely. **STEPHEN DALTON**



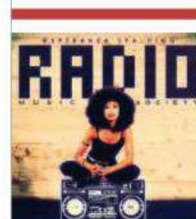
CURTIS STIGERS
Let's Go Out Tonight
DECCA

Nothing self-written, but Stigers' bust-up album proves a personal affair

8/10

Stigers has spent the past decade successfully remaking himself from arena rocker into jazz crooner. Here he takes a neat sidestep, drawing 10 favourite songs into a hushed breakup album for those disconsolate wee small hours. A slinky version of Dylan's "Things Have Changed" retains a kernel of bitterness, but most choices are straight-ahead sorrowful, among them Steve Earle's "Goodbye", Eddie Floyd's "Oh How It Rained" (a well-found obscurity) and the Blue Nile title track. Brushed drums and muted brass provide the mood music. Stiger's well-measured vocals deliver the required desolate intimacy.

NEIL SPENCER



ESPERANZA SPALDING
Radio Music Society
DECCA

Triumphant fourth album from Afro'd jazz princess

8/10

A glamorous 27-year-old bassist who commands respect from jazz purists, and composes, sings, hangs with hip-hopppers and is an Obama favourite – Esperanza has it all going on. This companion piece to 2011's Grammy-winning *Chamber Music Society* is a funkier cousin, with fusion keyboards replacing strings and Spalding's light, agile voice floating over immaculate horn arrangements and the thrum of her bass parts. Most of the songs are breezy reflections on romance – even two Q-Tip productions lack bite – but its melodious artiness is engaging and "Land Of The Free" offers a touch of silky dissidence. **NEIL SPENCER**

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THE SHINS

Port Of Morrow

AURAL APOTHECARY

Career. Commitment. Can this really be The Shins? It surely can, says *Stephen Troussé*



7/10

THE US INDIE renaissance of the early noughties had its roots in Georgia's mid-'90s Elephant 6 scene. That collective laid the template for a certain kind of smalltown college-rock idealism, collaboration and co-operation. But it

also defined a defiant, fundamentalist indie against the MTV alt.rock mainstream of the time. On one wing you can trace the consequences of Neutral Milk Hotel's *In The Aeroplane Over The Sea* – its orchestral, earnest hysteria – through Arcade Fire's first two albums. On the other you can see how the skewed psych-pop of The Apples In Stereo and even The Olivia Tremor Control were instrumental to The Shins' 2001 debut, *Oh! Inverted World*.

Now that these bands escape the indie bars for the amphitheatres, move beyond the campus, into marriage, mid-life and mid-career, you get the sense that a different template has been adopted, a new role model for entering the mainstream with integrity. If Neil Young was the '90s indie-rockers' ancestral affinity of choice, then in the 21st century he's gradually been replaced by Bruce Springsteen. You could hear an adaptation of Bruce's widescreen, smalltown romanticism all over the Arcade Fire's *The Suburbs*, of course. And you can hear something of his way with a powerchord and unabashed sentiment on The Shins' sterling comeback single, "Simple Song".

"I know things can really get rough when you go it alone," sings James Mercer, acknowledging that, following the departure of founder members Jesse Sandoval and Marty Crandall in 2009, The Shins is once again, as it started out back in Albuquerque in 1996, essentially his solo project.



SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:** Greg Kurstin, additional engineering by Jesse Shatkin, May–October 2011, and at Aural Apothecary, Portland, OR, additional engineering by Graeme Gibson, March 2011
Recorded at: Echo Studio, Los Angeles, CA
Personnel: James Mercer (vocals, guitar, drums), Greg Kurstin (guitar, bass, keyboards), Janet Weiss (drums), Dave Hernandez (guitar), Ron Lewis (bass), Joe Plummer (drums), Eric D Johnson (piano, bk vocals), Marty Crandall (keys), Nik Freitas (guitar), Nathaniel Walcott (trumpet, flugelhorn)

For this first album in five years, mindful of how productive his collaboration with Danger Mouse on 2010's *Broken Bells* was, he's hooked up with Greg Kurstin – soft-pop sophisticate of The Bird And The Bee, but also commercial producer of big-selling albums by Lily Allen and Foster The People.

Apparently, the pair initially bonded through a shared fandom for the Anglo-kosmische sounds of Clinic and Broadcast, and you can hear a little of this initial spark in the ambient clang and longwave whine that wash over songs like opener "The Rifle Spiral". However, the pair's pop instincts ultimately prevail over more esoteric ambitions. Most successfully on "No Way Down", a heavenly hit that marries radiant, sun-spangled guitars to a lyric addressing the global plutocracy of the One Per Cent. The combination is reminiscent of The Go-Betweens' "Streets Of Your Town". Or, on the other side of

the fine line of hipness, the Crowded House of "Distant Sun".

Indeed Neil Finn circa *Woodface* and *Together Alone* might be the most accurate comparison for James Mercer's songs on *Port Of Morrow*. Tracks like "It's Only Life",

"September" and "For A Fool" are slow-strummed, bittersweet explorations of domesticity, family and memory. They're well-turned, touching, replete with crafty couplets and plangent middle-eights... and a little well behaved. Tunes you can imagine accompanying some hard-earned moment of emotional revelation on an ITV domestic drama, the weepy money shot in a movie. Crucially their more earnest emotional undertow means that Mercer's real gifts, the melodies that zinged through his early albums, are comparatively subdued.

The title track, however, is more suggestive, bearing the same emotional weight but drifting out into more mysterious territory. It's a snapshot collage of 20th-century terror, as dreamy and unsettling as Radiohead's "Street Spirit", which captures something of the dawning dread of parenthood: the realisation that you're stitched into the fabric of history, suddenly profoundly invested in the precariousness of the future. Despite Natalie Portman's exhortations, The Shins were never likely to change your life. But at moments like this, *Port Of Morrow* suggests that they might turn out to be exactly the kind of band that ends up successfully soundtracking it.

Q&A

James Mercer



It's been five years since *Wincing The Night Away* – did you ever think you might not make another Shins record?

There was a period when I wasn't sure, when *Wincing...*

was done. The weight of the relationships with these old friends, of recording, producing and touring – all those responsibilities. I felt I needed to figure something new out. So *Broken Bells* was a great new outlet for me.

You said early on that domestic happiness meant the new album would be more upbeat. That doesn't seem to have quite panned out...

I didn't realise that having kids makes all the sadness of the world much more poignant. Having children pulls the veil away from the dark side of life, not the positive happy side. It is positive and enjoyable and you love them, but it's their fragility that becomes powerful.

Port Of Morrow is an industrial port in Oregon – why name the album after it?

It's a very boring place, but it sounds awesome! Like a mystical departure point to another world. So then I think about the River Styx. And then... death! That's just where my head goes.



THE STRANGLERS Giants

COURSEGOOD

Something's gotta change? Not likely
The Stranglers' music was always an ill-defined

hotchpotch. After almost 40 years and three singers, they're still anchored by atmospheric organ and JJ Burnel's nasty bass (most prominent on "Another Camden Afternoon", a kind of post-punk "Green Onions"), but within those twin poles they roam freely: "Freedom Is Insane" comes on like a slightly peppier take on Pink Floyd's "Comfortably Numb", "Adios" is a rock tango, and "My Fickle Resolve" is jazzy and noirish. It's a solid rather than spectacular effort, although "Time Was Once On My Side", nefariously crooned by Burnel, is close to vintage.

GRAEME THOMSON

6/10



TALL FIRS Out Of It And Into It

ATP

Sonic Youth acolytes attain a rare, subtle beauty
Anyone who has mixed Sonic Youth live

hundreds of times would likely absorb some of the radical adults' sound into their own. And so it is with Aaron Mullan – half of Tall Firs alongside Dave Mies. But the NYC duo's third album, while undeniably similar in approach to SY, is quieter and moodier, dual electric guitars twinkling like grimey chandeliers. The loss of drummer Ryan Sawyer has gutted their alt.rock muscle, making *Out Of It...* less visceral, but ultimately more singular, affecting and timeless. Two guitars and vocals haven't sounded this good since Jimmy Page and Roy Harper carved out "The Same Old Rock".

TOM PINNOCK

7/10



TANLINES Mixed Emotions

TRUE PANTHER SOUNDS

Electro, meet classic rock. Yet again
Since springing from New York in 2008, Eric

Emm and Jesse Cohen have released a slew of pulsing singles on dance labels such as Kitsune. For their debut album, however, the duo have gathered their favourite stadium rock tricks and crafted actual songs – with guitar and everything. Despite taking as much from '80s Springsteen as it does modern electro, *Mixed Emotions* isn't the subtle Casio retro of M83, though, but something more eager to please. Sometimes the union flourishes, as on the tropical "Lost Somewhere", but at times it's a grab-bag that's fallen apart at the seams – "Green Grass"'s Van Halen keys a case in point.

TOM PINNOCK

6/10



SUN ARAW & M GEDDES GENGRAS MEET THE CONGOS

Icon Give Thank

RVNG INTL

Summer recess gets psychedelic: natty US underground youts

vs Jamaican dub heroes

In the ninth in the RVNG label's FRKWYS series of curated collaborations, two young American bucks of sprawling psychedelic bliss enjoy the hospitality of veteran Jamaican dub heroes The Congos at their St Catherine studio compound. The residency produces inspired results, with Sun Araw and Gengras rubbing spangly guitars and synthetic textures against the grain of the Jamaicans' pattering, percussive rhythm mazes in a kind of controlled delirium. Like the very best dub of ages, the deliciously stoned sonics mask a nub of righteousness.

ROB YOUNG

8/10

REVELATIONS

Symmetry – and the Drive soundtrack that never was...



A little night music: Ryan Gosling in *Drive*

JOHNNY 'SYMMETRY' JEWEL'S soundtrack-inspired outing might be titled *Themes To An Imaginary Film*, but unlike many such ersatz OSTs, it boasts real cinematic provenance. Back when Nicolas Winding Refn's 2011 film *Drive* was little more than a neon gleam on a tinted windscreen, Refn and actor Ryan Gosling would cruise the streets of LA at night, scouting locations and soaking up the city's shadowy vibe. One of the fixtures on the car stereo was *Night Drive*, the 2007 album by Jewel's noir-disco Chromatics, and as the film went into pre-production, Refn and Gosling decided Jewel was the man to write the score. Jewel got to work, but as the film grew, he says, the studio tightened its grip. "Nic's used to having creative control, just like me," says Jewel. "But this was his first Hollywood-shot film and had six different producers." Jewel's score was bumped in favour of one by veteran Cliff Martinez (although two Jewel songs, Chromatics' "Tick Of The Clock" and Desire's "Under Your Spell", made the cut). Jewel says his *Drive* soundtrack will never be released, but four tracks have found their way onto *Themes* apparently. It's your guess which, because he's not telling.



Jewel's score was bumped in favour of one by veteran Cliff Martinez (although two Jewel songs, Chromatics' "Tick Of The Clock" and Desire's "Under Your Spell", made the cut). Jewel says his *Drive* soundtrack will never be released, but four tracks have found their way onto *Themes* apparently. It's your guess which, because he's not telling.

SYMMETRY Themes For An Imaginary Film

ITALIANS DO IT BETTER

Not actually the score to *Drive*. But something like that

Johnny Jewel, Montreal-based synth auteur behind neo-disco groups Glass Candy and Chromatics, was commissioned by director Nicolas Winding Refn to pen the soundtrack to *Drive*, his ultraviolent film about a getaway driver pursued by Mafioso. Hollywood put the kibosh on that, but Jewel's lost soundtrack fed into his new project: a composed, largely instrumental synth score with hints of John Carpenter or Claudio Simonetti, noir-ish and simmering with tension. At two hours, it's a lot to stomach, but worth staying for the closing "Streets Of Fire", a love song that trickles tears over the end credits.

LOUIS PATTISON

8/10



KEVIN TIHISTA On This Dark Street

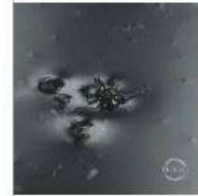
BROKEN HORSE

Brilliantly droll and twisted fifth album from San Francisco maverick

It has been seven, evidently wayward and troubled, years since Tihista's last offering, offcuts collection *Home Demons Vol 1*. Bitter experience provides obvious grist for a creative mill where the casual candour of Nilsson and melodic melancholia of Elliott Smith unite. The intimate, stripped-down settings capture Tihista in alluring form. The cautionary "Don't Let Him In", a haunted and gripping exploration of broken family life, the blackly comic "N.Carolina" and the beautifully ravaged heartbreak of "Teenage Werewolf" are among the minimal but compelling highlights.

GAVIN MARTIN

8/10



TREACHEROUS ORCHESTRA Origins

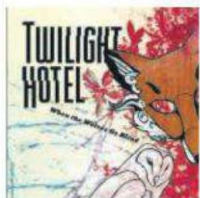
NAVIGATOR

Daring Celtic instrumental collective

The opening "Overture" here is pure folk prog: imagine an 11-piece ELP featuring bagpipes, whistles, flutes, fiddles, accordion, banjo, guitars, bass and drums. Taking inspiration from such Scottish folk-fusion trailblazers as Martyn Bennett and Croft No 5, Treacherous Orchestra are a fiercely energetic Celtic take on Bellowhead but often employing thumping club rhythms or repetitive pulses (notably "Sea Of Okhotsk") reminiscent of Terry Riley. Equally adept giving traditional Scottish melodies a facelift, the epic "Easter Island" is a particularly skilful arrangement led by flute and border pipes. Impressive.

MICK HOUGHTON

8/10



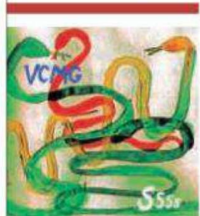
TWILIGHT HOTEL
When The Wolves Go Blind
CAVALIER

Award-winning Canadian Americana duo move south

7/10

Relocating to Austin and travelling to LA to record their third album in only three days has given duo Brandy Zdan and Dave Quanbury both immediacy and reach. Taking their inspiration from touring the great wide open, the songs on *When The Wolves Go Blind* reveal grand vistas while subtly distorted sax, discordant guitar, wheezing accordion and lonesome lap-steel are used to conjure convincing atmospheres ("Frozen Town"). The ominous production and gothic moods illuminate rather than overshadow the real life experiences and striking stylistic advance at the album's core.

GAVIN MARTIN



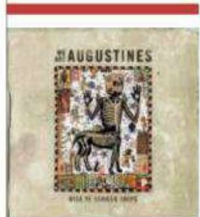
VCMG
Ssss
MUTE

Depeche Mode and Erasure boffins come together in electric dreams

7/10

A fantasy pairing for 1980s electro-pop geeks, VCMG reunites Depeche Mode's original and current chief songwriters, Vince Clarke and Martin Gore, for the first time in three decades. Billed very much as a low-key side project, this joint album indulges the duo's shared love of minimal techno, analogue synths and retro-futuristic squelching sounds. The dominant flavour is deliberately faceless and club-friendly electro, but the highly finessed sonics and subtle attention to detail emerge over repeat listens. The best tracks, including "Windup Robot" and "Single Blip", are nagging earworms that blossom into full-on rave anthems in the vein of classic LFO or Orbital.

STEPHEN DALTON



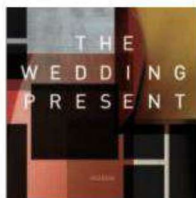
WE ARE AUGUSTINES
Rise Ye Sunken Ships
TURNOUT/OXCART

Intense anthemic debut born from remnants of musical

6/10

As Billy McCarthy's previous band Pela fell apart, his institutionalised, schizophrenic brother committed suicide. We Are Augustines, a power trio pitched between Glasvegas angst and Arcade Fire euphoria bringing stadium-sized ambitions to deep-seated wounds, was his response. "My demons are countin' rosaries", he declares on the tortured "Juarez". Unburdening his emotional freight with raw shredded vocals, McCarthy's catharsis is often gripping. But the resigned dénouement "Barrel Of Leaves" provides welcome balm after the turmoil and torment that precedes it.

GAVIN MARTIN



THE WEDDING PRESENT
Valentina
SCOPITONES

The more they change, the more they stay the same

6/10

"All the songs sound the same" was once a Wedding Present slogan – and they still do on this ninth album, being a cross between 1990s US alt.rock and the passionate UK indie of the mid-1980s. Quite an achievement, given the band's many lineup changes (David Gedge remains the band's compass), and it's a policy that on "524 Fidelio" and "Back A Bit...Stop!" is enjoyable enough. That Gedge remains, at 50, stranded lyrically at a romantically disappointing post A-Level party is less of a cause for celebration. He still wears someone's heart on his sleeve – but it surely can't be his own anymore.

JOHN ROBINSON



RECOIL
Unsound Methods
STUMM, 1997

Abruptly parting company with Depeche Mode in the

depths of their dysfunctional dark years, Alan Wilder applied fresh momentum and professional polish to his experimental solo project. An upmarket blend of industrial trip hop, ambient textures and eclectic guest vocalists, Recoil's second album joined the likes of Massive Attack and Tricky in providing a brooding techno-rock counterpoint to the brash Britpop '90s.

6/10



MARTIN L GORE
Counterfeit 2
MUTE, 2003

Paying solo homage to his personal cult-pop heroes,

Gore took a break between Depeche Mode albums to assemble these 21st-century techno torch-song covers of tracks by John Lennon, Lou Reed, Iggy Pop, Brian Eno, Nico and others. The wild card here is a spooked reboot of the vintage David Essex hit "Stardust", the weirdest post-fame burnout anthem ever to grace the pop charts.

7/10



DAVE GAHAN
Paper Monsters
MUTE, 2003

Fired by his pent-up creative frustration in Depeche Mode, Gahan finally tested himself as a songwriter on this solid solo debut. The sound is raw and rocky, the lyrics dominated by redemptive love after years of self-destructive addiction. But the singer still finds room for the sleazy alter ego he calls Evil Dave on ragged meatgrinder blues like "Dirty Sticky Floors".

7/10

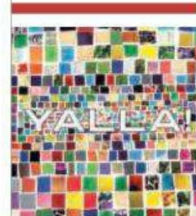


WHITE HILLS
Frying On This Rock
THRILL JOCKEY

More cosmic freakery from the Cope-endorse New Yorkers

7/10

White Hills now enjoy a higher cult profile here than in their own country – not that surprising, perhaps, given the deep European roots of kosmische/space rock/heavy psych. However, guitarist Dave W and bass player Ego Sensation are no slavish revivalists. Neu! and Amon Düül II are clearly their groove/drone touchstones, and they channel the wiggy shamanism of Acid Mothers Temple and Hawkwind, but on their second release for Thrill Jockey they sometimes clear space in the pummelling blizzard of delay, fuzz and reverb – most effectively in the 14-minute closer, where strikingly contemporary synths help achieve lift-off. SHARON O'CONNELL



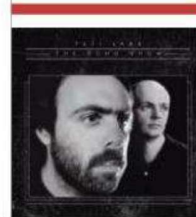
THOMAS WHITE
Yalla!
BLEEDING HEART

Beguiling acoustic LP from Electric Soft Parade man

6/10

In 2010, armed with a laptop, a guitar and an old Sony handcam for a microphone, Thomas White took himself off to Dahab, Egypt, where he embarked on a rigorous six-week schedule of snorkelling, sunbathing and songwriting. The result is *Yalla!* (Arabic for "Let's get going") which, far from being a series of ecstatic musical holiday snaps, is all about mourning the end of a relationship and longing for home. With their simple acoustic backing, these songs are contemplative without being mawkish, simple but not sparse, and stand as proof of how homesickness and a shortage of equipment can focus the mind.

FIONA STURGES



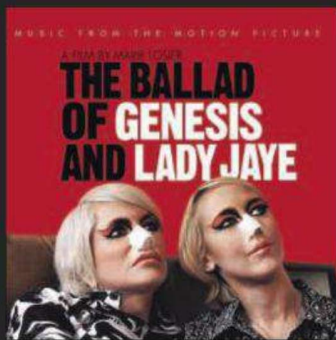
YETI LANE
The Echo Show
SONIC CATHEDRAL

Fearsome Notre-Dammerung from Parisian pair

8/10

"Essentially, I like good songs and good trippy music," says Ben Pleng, the singing and guitar-playing half of Yeti Lane, mindful that the Parisian power-psych duo's second LP shudders under the weight of bucketloads of both. Having shed a member since their compact self-titled 2010 debut, Shins-ish Cubist pop has been very definitely edged off their menu. Instead, *The Echo Show* offers Jean Michel Jarre meets Neu! '75 with everything turned up to 11. What Yeti Lane once sought by stealth, whirling opener "Analog Wheel", "Alba" and the colossal, pulsating "Faded Spectrum" seize by force. In the nicest way possible, it's monstrous.

JIM WIRTH



THE BALLAD OF GENESIS AND LADY JAYE

MUSIC FROM THE MOTION PICTURE

Sweet Nothing CD

Music soundtrack to the intimate, affecting portrait of the life & work of ground-breaking performance artist & music pioneer Genesis Breyer P-Orridge (Throbbing Gristle / Psychic TV) & his other half & collaborator, Lady Jaye..

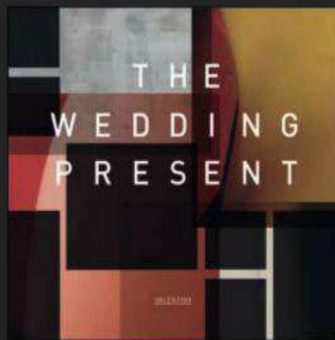


THE MEN

OPEN YOUR HEART

Sacred Bones CD / LP

On their third full length, while still being fundamentally a punk band, The Men explore twangy country music, guitar solos, surf-ish riffs, psych, and just about everything in between.



THE WEDDING PRESENT

VALENTINA

Scopitones CD

The Wedding Present's eighth studio album, Valentina, recorded in the wilds of France, the suburbs of Los Angeles and the lanes of Brighton... it shimmers with near perfection.

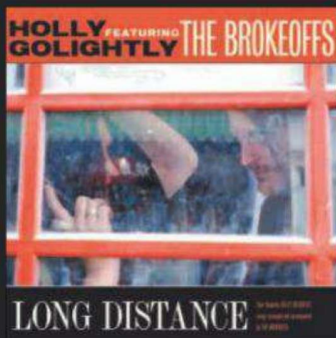


ROBERT POLLARD

MOUSEMAN CLOUD

Fire Records CD / LP

Robert Pollard's new solo album Mouseman Cloud from the Guided By Voices frontman is the work of a consummate craftsman as well as a crazy genius.



HOLLY GOLIGHTLY FEATURING THE BROKEOFFS

LONG DISTANCE

Damaged Goods CD / LP

An album of Holly's original band songs given the Dave Brokeoffs treatment includes 'My Love Is' & 'No Big Thing'. Limited Red & White splattered vinyl too.

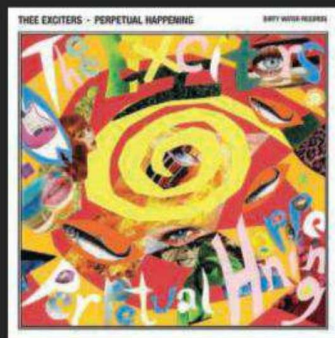


NORTNER

I AM ON YOUR SIDE

Home Assembly CD

Innovative second album from Yorkshire guitarist blending strands of dub, techno, house, instrumental hip hop, funk and soul. All held together by gorgeous, Vini Reilly inspired guitar.



THEE EXCITERS

PERPETUAL HAPPENING

Dirty Water Club CD / LP

They've chucked some acid tabs of psychedelia into their earlier proto-punk MC5 / Stooges sound for a second album of hard, bluesy licks and fuzzed-out guitars battling with distorted, spacey vocals.



BADDIES

BUILD

Medical CD

Build is an organic progression from Baddies debut 'Do the Job'. Keeping hold of all the sonic elements, their brand of direct post-punk has been sharpened with maturity and experience resulting in an overwhelming assault on the senses.



NEDRY

IN A DIM LIGHT

Monotreme CD / LP

Second album from Nedry, whose distillation of advanced rhythmic structures, low frequencies and raw human tones stand uniquely at a fascinating sonic crux of leftfield, club and indie juncture.



THAT FUCKING TANK

TFT

Gringo CD

That Fucking Tank is a DIY noisy rock duo from Bradford, UK. TFT is their 3rd album and is classic rock radio at its finest.

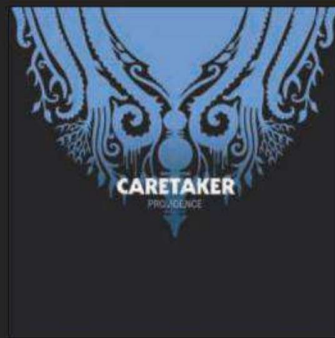


WHAT THE BLOOD REVEALED

HARBOUR OF DEVILS

Field CD

Field Records is proud to release Harbour Of Devils by What The Blood Revealed for fans of Isis, Pelican, Neurosis and Mogwai.



CARETAKER

PROVIDENCE

We Be Records CD

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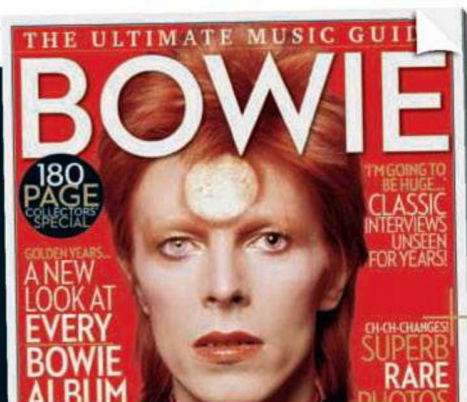
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Archive

REISSUES | COMPS | BOXSETS | LOST RECORDINGS



NEAL PRESTON

TRACKLIST (original album)

Disc One

- 1 In The Flesh?
- 2 The Thin Ice
- 3 Another Brick In The Wall, Part 1
- 4 The Happiest Days Of Our Lives
- 5 Another Brick In The Wall, Part 2
- 6 Mother
- 7 Goodbye Blue Sky
- 8 Empty Spaces
- 9 Young Lust
- 10 One Of My Turns
- 11 Don't Leave Me Now
- 12 Another Brick In The Wall, Part 3
- 13 Goodbye Cruel World

Disc Two

- 1 Hey You
- 2 Is There Anybody Out There?
- 3 Nobody Home
- 4 Vera
- 5 Bring The Boys Back Home
- 6 Comfortably Numb
- 7 The Show Must Go On
- 8 In The Flesh
- 9 Run Like Hell
- 10 Waiting For The Worms
- 11 Stop
- 12 The Trial
- 13 Outside The Wall

PINK FLOYD

The Wall

EMI

Edited highlights: a new 7CD/DVD 'Immersion' boxset includes 64 demos from the archives. *By David Cavanagh*

7/10

"ROGER HAVING A bit of a whinge." That's how David Gilmour, in a moment of

devastating offhandedness, described *The Wall*. The 1979 double album, a personal obsession for Waters, concerned the meltdown of an English rock star damaged by childhood trauma: his father's wartime death, his mother's creepy over-protectiveness, his miserable schooldays. Spawning a worldwide No 1 single ("Another Brick In The Wall, Part 2") and a movie, the project took

a heavy toll. One bandmember was sacked (Rick Wright) and two others (Waters and Gilmour) embarked on a 25-year feud.

The Wall, of course, was not afraid to lose friends and alienate people. That was, if anything, its field of expertise. It was a chanting, ranting, screaming, gruelling journey into hysteria and catatonia, with only the odd ballad and Gilmour's guitar solos for comfort breaks. Some it was shockingly un-Floydian; as well as an orchestra and three choirs, Waters and co-producer Bob

TRACKLIST (Extra discs) 9/10

The Wall is also available as an 180g double-vinyl edition, and as a 3CD 'Experience' edition. Tracks from the reviewed 'Immersion' edition that are available on the smaller 'Experience' edition are marked with a ■

Discs Three & Four (Is There Anybody Out There? The Wall Live 1980-81) Remastered, 2011

Disc Five (The Wall Work In Progress, Part 1, 1979)

PROGRAMME ONE: EXCERPTS FROM WATERS' DEMOS

- 1 Prelude (Vera Lynn)
- 2 Another Brick In The Wall, Part 1
- 3 Mother
- 4 Young Lust
- 5 Another Brick In The Wall, Part 2
- 6 Empty Spaces
- 7 Mother
- 8 Backs To The Wall
- 9 Don't Leave Me Now
- 10 Goodbye Blue Sky
- 11 Don't Leave Me Now
- 12 Another Brick In The Wall, Part 3
- 13 Goodbye Cruel World
- 14 Hey You
- 15 Is There Anybody Out There?
- 16 Vera
- 17 Bring The Boys Back Home
- 18 The Show Must Go On
- 19 Waiting For The Worms
- 20 Run Like Hell
- 21 The Trial
- 22 Outside The Wall

PROGRAMME TWO: WATERS/BAND DEMOS

- 23 Prelude (Vera Lynn) (Roger Waters Original Demo) ■
- 24 Another Brick In The Wall, Part 1 (Band Demo) ■
- 25 The Thin Ice (Band Demo) ■
- 26 Goodbye Blue Sky (Band Demo) ■
- 27 Teacher, Teacher (Band Demo) ■
- 28 Another Brick In The Wall, Part 2 (Band Demo) ■
- 29 Empty Spaces (Band Demo) ■
- 30 Young Lust (Band Demo) ■
- 31 Mother (Band Demo) ■
- 32 Don't Leave Me Now (Band Demo) ■
- 33 Sexual Revolution (Band Demo) ■
- 34 Another Brick In The Wall, Part 3 (Band Demo) ■
- 35 Goodbye Cruel World (Band Demo) ■

PROGRAMME THREE: BAND DEMOS

- 36 In The Flesh? (Band Demo) ■
- 37 The Thin Ice (Band Demo) ■
- 38 Another Brick In The Wall, Part 1 (Band Demo) ■
- 39 The Happiest Days Of Our Lives (Band Demo) ■
- 40 Another Brick In The Wall, Part 2 (Band Demo) ■
- 41 Mother (Band Demo) ■

Disc Six (The Wall Work In Progress, Part 2, 1979)

PROGRAMME ONE: WATERS/BAND DEMOS

- 1 Is There Anybody Out There? (RW Original Demo)
- 2 Vera (RW Original Demo)
- 3 Bring The Boys Back Home (RW Original Demo)
- 4 Hey You (Band Demo)
- 5 The Doctor (Comfortably Numb) (Band Demo)
- 6 In The Flesh? (Band Demo)
- 7 Run Like Hell (Band Demo) ■
- 8 Waiting For The Worms (Band Demo)
- 9 The Trial (Band Demo)
- 10 The Show Must Go On (Band Demo)
- 11 Outside The Wall (Band Demo)
- 12 The Thin Ice (Reprise) (Band Demo)

PROGRAMME TWO: BAND DEMOS

- 13 Outside The Wall (Band Demo)
- 14 It's Never Too Late (Band Demo)
- 15 The Doctor (Comfortably Numb) (Band Demo) ■

PROGRAMME THREE: BAND DEMOS

- 16 One Of My Turns (Band Demo) ■
- 17 Don't Leave Me Now (Band Demo) ■
- 18 Empty Spaces (Band Demo) ■
- 19 Backs To The Wall (Band Demo) ■
- 20 Another Brick In The Wall, Part 3 (Band Demo) ■
- 21 Goodbye Cruel World (Band Demo) ■

PROGRAMME FOUR: DAVID GILMOUR ORIGINAL DEMOS

- 22 Comfortably Numb (David Gilmour Original Demo)

The architect of *The Wall*, Roger Waters: or is it Pink?



→ Ezrin hired a number of American session musicians. Glutted with speech and sound-effects, if *The Wall* had precedents, they were not *Animals* or *Wish You Were Here* but Lou Reed's harrowing *Berlin* and Alice Cooper's *Welcome To My Nightmare* – both of them Ezrin productions. But *The Wall* went further. It beat its protagonist (Pink) to a pulp, refusing to stop until Waters, man of a thousand accents, donned the robes of a judge presiding over Pink's fate in an emotionally charged courtroom of the superego. Roger, in other words, was having a bit more than a whinge.

EMI's "Why Pink Floyd?" reissue campaign, which has been running since last September, has dismantled one or two bricks in the band's implacable wall by making outtakes and other unreleased material available. This new 7CD/DVD 'Immersion' edition of *The Wall* includes two discs of demos from their archives – 64 tracks, to be precise, 26 of which were part of the original work-in-progress that Waters played to the group. This is an edited highlights package rather than the complete match: all but three songs are in the form of excerpts (some as brief as 10 seconds), all of them crossfaded into

a continuous sequence. The detail in the sketches is surprising. Waters pretty much has the story worked out, from World War II to Pink's trial, and the music features synthesisers, fuzzy lead guitar lines and a dark, disembodied ambience reminiscent of Bill Laswell's remixes of Miles Davis. Echoey fragments of familiar songs ("Empty Spaces", "Goodbye Blue Sky") fly past, leaving only impressions of their shape. It's a digest of *The Wall* for the modern consumer in a hurry. Pink is "sitting in a bunker here behind my wall" ("Waiting For The Worms") after only 11 minutes, and gets his schooldays out of the way before we've time to unpack our pencils. But as Waters adds each piece to the jigsaw, you can see why the rest of Floyd were intrigued. There's something grimly inexorable about his narrative, like a work that has to be made whatever the cost.

Like *The Beatles' White Album*, there's a theory that *The Wall* would have worked better as a single LP. The brilliance of Gilmour ("Comfortably Numb", "Run Like Hell") would have counterbalanced the morbid self-pity of Waters. The trial would have gone, the hotel-room longueurs would have been scaled back, and the mother would have been a battleaxe but not a bore. The theory makes *The Wall* more palatable on paper, but the problem is it wouldn't

have been *The Wall*. Logic dictates that Pink's deterioration into a blob of sociopathic nothingness should last for 80 arduous minutes, otherwise why is he so unhappy in the first place? On a smaller canvas, *The Wall* might have been just another allusion to Syd, another "threatened by shadows at night", a rehab rehash. Waters was correct to dream large. It had to be an epic. Where he and Ezrin went wrong was to assume that every scene in an epic – the flashbacks, the soliloquies, the crowd shots – must be taken to excess. Thus did *The Wall* become a cartoon even before Gerald Scarfe turned it into one.

This explains why Floyd's 'band' demos, which account for over 100 minutes of music on the boxset, do a lot more than just bring guitars, drums and definition to Waters' one-man outlines. They allow us to hear what *The Wall* could have sounded like without Ezrin and without such a megalomaniacal Waters. It could have been a rock album – and a decent one at that. The Englishness, the poignancy, the taut riffing ("Young Lust") would have been on a par with "Time" and "Have A Cigar", without all the derangement of smashed televisions and

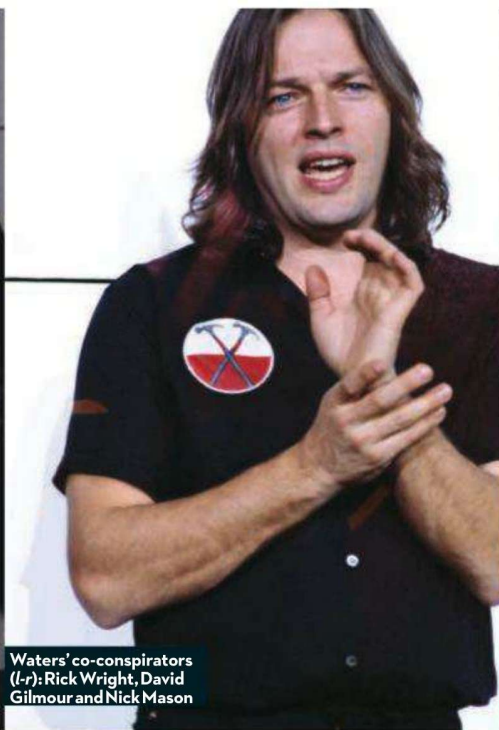
horrendous groupies.

But it wouldn't have been *The Wall* without that derangement, and so these Floyd demos are a mere pathway, an indication of what happened before the madness. "The Doctor" (which became "Comfortably Numb") has Waters singing the vocal while Mason (I think) does a sit-down-old-chap comedy routine as the family quack. Not a

great idea. They drop it for the next version, designating Gilmour as lead singer, but again it's not right. There are no guitar solos, no woozy transfers from doctor to patient.

The demos are undoubtedly this boxset's main attraction. A new remaster of a live album is included (*Is There Anybody Out There? The Wall Live 1980-81*), but Floyd fanatics are declaring themselves disgruntled with the lack of high-resolution 5.1 or Blu-ray, unlike 'Immersion' sets for *The Dark Side Of The Moon* and *Wish You Were Here*. Remember, though, how *The Wall* began: as a mouthful of Waters' phlegm in the face of a fan in Montreal. How did audiences become so insatiable for that idea? Masochism? Waters still performs it today, his mega-grossing tour scheduled to hit South America at Easter. "So ya thought ya might like to go to the show," his opening song will begin, dripping with derision, and South America will lap it up.

Roger Waters was correct to dream on a large scale. The Wall had to be an epic



Waters' co-conspirators
(l-r): Rick Wright, David
Gilmour and Nick Mason



NEAL PRESTON

DETAILS

What's In The Box?

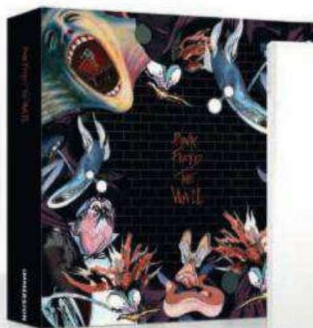
The 'Immersion' edition of *The Wall* unwrapped...

PRINTED MATERIAL

Photo book, 27 x 27 cm art print, 5 collectors' cards featuring art/comments by Storm Thorgerson

WORK IN PROGRESS

The album in demo form (previously unreleased), in two separate versions from different stages



COASTERS

Nine coasters with early Storm Thorgerson design sketches. Seem likely to spell out "P-I-N-K-F-L-O-Y-D"

SCARF

Wear it outside when you're playing with your brick-design marbles, maybe...

DESIGNS

Prints/cards of Mark Fisher's stage designs for the live show; credits booklet for the whole package

REPLICAS

Wall tour ticket and backstage pass

THE ALBUMS

The Wall and accompanying live album, both remastered in 2011 by James Guthrie

MARBLES

Three white marbles with brick design

AUDIO-VISUAL DVD

"Another Brick In The Wall, Part 2" promotional video - restored in 2011, *Behind The Wall* documentary, Gerald Scarfe interview, short filmed extract of Earls Court concert featuring animation





BIG BROTHER AND THE HOLDING COMPANY featuring JANIS JOPLIN Live At The Carousel Ballroom 1968

SONY COMMERCIAL MUSIC GROUP/LEGACY RECORDINGS

Fly on the psychedelic wall: The Bear's sonic journals snag a masterpiece. *By Luke Torn*

TRACKLIST

- 1 Combination Of The Two
- 2 I Need A Man To Love
- 3 Flower In The Sun
- 4 Light Is Faster Than Sound
- 5 Summertime
- 6 Catch Me Daddy
- 7 It's A Deal
- 8 Call On Me
- 9 Jam - I'm Mad
- 10 Piece Of My Heart
- 11 Coo Coo
- 12 Ball & Chain
- 13 Down On Me
- 14 Call On Me (bonus track)

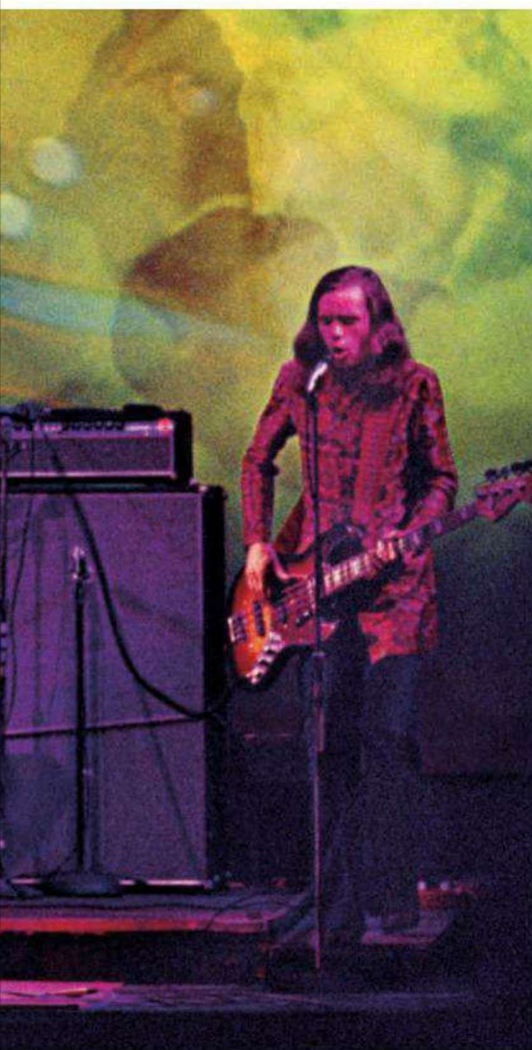
Produced by Owsley "Bear" Stanley

9/10 SOMEWHERE WITHIN the sonic depths of this extraordinary concert tape's opener, "Combination Of The Two", as James Gurley's distorted guitar angles towards a kind of demented Coltrane-like climax, Janis Joplin lets off a series of whooping, exhortative screams – the kind born of revelation or epiphany. It's as if from the get-go she knew that Big Brother And The Holding Company—just two months from splintering into oblivion—was destined for immortality, on this night at least.

It's the tip of the iceberg for *Live At The Carousel Ballroom 1968*, a tour de force of such intensity it places Big Brother on their rightful perch as, perhaps, psychedelic San Francisco's fiercest lysergic combo. A combustible group whose

expansive sound defied the straitjacket of the studio, Big Brother – in the dumbed-down, Time-Life version of history – were simply a backing group, random bystanders who happened to launch Joplin into superstardom. But deep in the mythology of San Francisco's psychedelic heyday, they were always a contender, an ensemble, capable of pushing all boundaries as rock grew burly in the late '60s.

Fortunately for posterity, acid king Owsley "Bear" Stanley had the gumption to roll tape on June 23, 1968. Not just regular old tape, though. The Grateful Dead roadie and confidant had been running the mixing boards at the Carousel for most of 1968, experimenting with the technology of how to best capture the music via "sonic journals", recordings made to document



Q&A

Big Brother's Sam Andrew



What is your best memory of this show and the Carousel Ballroom? And of Bear?

The Carousel was a large, cavernous space, dark, high ceilings and it seemed as if all my friends were there. Owsley Stanley was cavorting around the sound system and talking to me a mile a minute in a technical language that was quite beyond me. Bear was always an enthusiastic mix of the cerebral and the celebratory.

How much of the Big Brother sound was improv?

In Big Brother we began as pure improvisation and moved steadily toward a scripted music. That's how I think of it anyway. Janis was a very creative singer, and I can tell what night we are doing "Summertime", just because it is so different from another night. We took a lot of chances because, a) that's who we were, and b) we often didn't know any better.

Big Brother broke up soon after this great show. What were y'all thinking?

We were not thinking. Janis was restless. She wanted to be a soul singer like Tina, Aretha, Gladys, and I was thinking about songwriting ALL the time. We had a lot of discussions about the band and she felt that on some nights people weren't trying hard enough. I wish I'd tried harder to talk her out of leaving the band.

the scene and fine-tune the club's sound.

This tape, in storage and/or legal limbo for decades but finally produced and mixed by Bear himself prior to his untimely death in 2011, is almost pugilistic in presentation. Amplifying every nuance, every kaleidoscopic shade from the roar of the guitars, every electrifying scrap of back-and-forth among the musicians in crystal-clear, full-dimensional fashion, it's a transcendent, revelatory listen. The recording is so pure, so lively, in fact, that it virtually drops the listener into the Carousel on that summer night.

Big Brother's roots, in truth, ran deep into American music. Bassist Peter Albin cut his teeth on folk and bluegrass; drummer Dave Getz was an in-demand jazz player; songwriter/guitarist Sam Andrew was well-versed in blues and jazz, a frequent jamming partner with Jerry Garcia, and, along with James Gurley, developed a formidable double-lead guitar assault.

Only a year-plus into their brief reign, they had mongrelised their influences – twisting, stretching and distorting R'n'B, blues and folk motifs into a towering, multi-tentacled psychedelic monster. Adept at sustain and release, they were both sonic architects and masters of improv. Case in point is "I Need A Man To Love", which begins with Andrew and Gurley's guitars sneaking, curling around Joplin's yearning, stinging, openly sexual vocal, before threading into a spellbinding extended bit of call-and-response guitar interplay – a high-wire act pitting inner turmoil against just-out-of-reach catharsis.

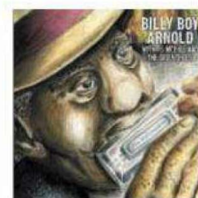
The aural carnage plays out repeatedly amid Joplin's otherworldly vocals. Singing with all of

hell's fury, she pulls every last stitch of romantic desperation and deranged dejection out of the songs, pleading with herself, the cosmos, the audience, the coterie of cheats she's been seeing, torturing the words past literacy into streams of emotion – exploding then crazily reassembling the blues paradigm.

Their repertoire is fascinating: pop standards, tripped-out and barely recognisable (eg, Gershwin's chestnut "Summertime"); ancient folk songs, like English ballad "Coo Coo", hotwired into a psychedelic wall of sound; and showstoppers "Ball & Chain", a smash at Monterey, and "Piece Of My Heart", their most straightforward pop song and biggest hit single.

"Catch Me Daddy" is the most violent cut, souped-up psycho-rockabilly, while "Down On Me", amid jagged guitars, is a nod to folk-rock. "Light Is Faster Than Sound", a Peter Albin showpiece from their debut album, is most allegiant to proto-psych – dual guitars making like air-raid sirens, rising up from the scrum, screaming as they go by, only to submerge again. When Joplin's vocal fades, Gurley's rampaging guitar emerges with a shattering solo, a marvel of controlled chaos.

No-one could've known it, but this was one of the last blinding flashes of the original psychedelic era. Ominous changes were afoot, "not better world a-comin'", as American folk and rock music critic Paul Nelson once opined. Like a tunnel into an alien world, *Live At The Carousel Ballroom 1968* offers a trenchant if temporary trip back. **EXTRAS:** None.



BILLY BOY ARNOLD WITH TS MCPHEE AND THE GROUNDHOGS
Blue And Lonesome
(1977, reissue)
MUSIC AVENUE/BLUES BOULEVARD

4/10

Lauded '70s blues pairing fails to swing

A meeting of minds, much celebrated on its release, *Blue And Lonesome* is a record that speaks volumes about what was expected from a blues LP in the '70s, and the gulf between that and what's expected now. Billy Boy Arnold – caricatured on the inexcusable cover as an ancient, kindly faced itinerant bluesman, but in civilian life a bus driver and parole officer – was there at one of rock'n'roll's many births, harmonica player on early Bo Diddley sides, and later several more for Chess.

This, cut during his '70s return to music and a then-thriving blues festival scene finds him backed in London by Tony McPhee and an ersatz Groundhogs, and showcases Arnold's fine voice and harp, but features unswinging, proto-metal blues comping by the band. "Dirty Mother F..." opens, with a poor collection of era-evoking sexism that today sounds staggeringly unpleasant. So things continue, slowly, and at a real ale-swigger's chug, only really mixing things up with the Diddley-era "I Wish You Would" from 1955 and the great, Chris Isaak-appropriate title track. Were they to record this today, one imagines Arnold and McPhee making a rawer, more appealing work. Sadly, this evokes little but the image of drunk men at a terrible festival, getting their questionable mojos working. **EXTRAS:** None. **JOHN ROBINSON**



GLEN CAMPBELL
Live In Japan
REAL GONE MUSIC

'70s schlock revisited: vintage concert tape from Glen's glory days

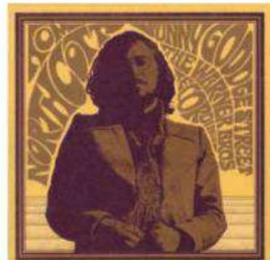
As perhaps the prime progenitor of country-pop, Glen Campbell – with hits like "Wichita

5/10

Lineman" and "Gentle On My Mind" – swept from studio guitarist for the Wrecking Crew and backup Beach Boy to global pop stardom at the end of the '60s. By the mid-'70s, he was everywhere, a country boy running loose in the metaphorical big city: TV specials, movie acting roles, a chat-show regular. Musically speaking, though, he was coasting. *Live In Japan* (a souvenir originally released only in that country) casts him as the likeable entertainer he was (and still is), performing an Elvis-style musical revue replete with moribund greatest-hits medleys and sappy covers of contemporary hits: it's a show aimed to please. Campbell is in fine fettle though, leading a solid band, aided by texture from the makeshift Japanese Coming Home Orchestra. But the material is sorely lacking. From a gooe reading of Olivia Newton-John smash "I Honestly Love You" to a misguided stab at John Denver's "Annie's Song", Campbell is dealing in hokum here. A few things work. A nicely paced version of Conway Twitty's "It's Only Make Believe"; a mesmerising run-through of Jimmy Webb's "Galveston"; a tiny if soaring snippet of his '69 single "Try A Little Kindness". But the rest, kitsch factor aside, is strictly showbiz as usual. **EXTRAS:** None. **LUKE TORN**

Rediscovered!

Uncovering the underrated and overlooked



TOM NORTHCOTT

**Sunny Goodge Street:
The Warner Bros Recordings**

WARNER BROS/RHINO HANDMADE

8/10

Stunning '60s pop productions from the Canadian finally see the light of day

In 1968, a gifted singer and a now-legendary producer teamed up on a series of striking but little-heard singles. Now,

44 years later, the tracks are finally rescued from the dustbin of history.

Lenny Waronker was fresh off his first hit as a Warner Bros staff producer – Harpers Bizarre's 1967 cover of Simon & Garfunkel's "The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin' Groovy)" – when San Francisco tastemaker Tom Donahue brought him some sides from Vancouver artist Tom Northcott.

"When I heard the guy, I thought he sounded like one of the Everly Brothers," says Waronker, who's now back at Warner Bros mentoring the A&R staff. "It's always the voice for me, and he could really sing. And when we started talking, I realised how musical he was. I'd convinced Leon

Russell to do the arrangement for Harpers Bizarre, and it was fun. So I called Leon and said, 'This guy's really good; you want to do it together?' I sent him the Judy Collins version of Donovan's 'Sunny Goodge Street' and said, 'I think we can make a pop record out of this.' We went to this studio in Glendale that had this gigantic organ. Leon played it, then we added some stuff on top of it."

So began a brief collaboration that combined Northcott's angelic tenor with Waronker's experimental approach, in tandem with associates like Russell, Jack Nitzsche and Harry Nilsson. They cooked up baroque pop treatments for songs from Nilsson, Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Randy Newman and Buffy Sainte-Marie, some of which were released as singles. But Warner Bros never released a full album. "It was at a time when, if you didn't have a hit, you didn't do an album," Waronker explains. "When nothing happened with the Joni Mitchell song ['Night In The City'], it was like, where do we go from here?"

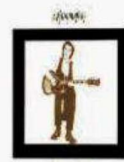
So Northcott returned to Canada, where he's continued to make music. The 20 tracks dusted off for *Sunny Goodge Street*, which also include a pair of songs cut in England with Tony Hatch, vividly embody the hot-house atmosphere of that time.

BUD SCOPPA

I'M YOUR FAN

"We were trying to make hits, but if you weren't experimenting, what was the point?"

LENNY WARONKER



MICHAEL CHAPMAN
Rainmaker
(reissue, 1969)
LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

The Resurrection And Revenge Of The Clayton Peacock (reissue, 2011)
RURAL RETREAT

Yorkshire guitarist's earliest and latest releases

After the 70th birthday celebrations of Martin Carthy and Roy Harper, the rehabilitation of

Michael Chapman was an impressive achievement. Perhaps it's because he combines elements of both: the Anglo-Saxon folk guitar and the visionary. His recent work sees him opening up to experimental sounds and hooking up with younger collaborators.

Rainmaker, which features Aynsley Dunbar and Danny Thompson, stands out through its little flourishes: the title track's downpour; Chapman's gruffly appealing vocals.

His long-awaited answer to John Fahey's "The Death Of The Clayton Peacock" finds Chapman striking out into improvisation and electronic enhancement. Its two sides of textural play, in which he knocks, strokes and seduces his guitar are mesmerising.

EXTRAS: *Rainmaker* has six extra tracks, plus 6/10 single "Mozart Lives Upstairs" and the instrumental "Bert Jansch Meets Frankenstein".

ROB YOUNG



SUZANNE CIANI
Lixiviation
FINDERS KEEPERS

Sonic exploration from "the American Delia Derbyshire"

Now a Grammy-nominated pianist, in the 1970s Italian-

American composer Suzanne Ciani was on the cutting edge of early electronic music. While studying music composition at UC Berkeley, she worked alongside the sound scientist Don Buchla, whose primitive synthesisers would form the backbone of her subsequent music work. *Lixiviation* collects lost archive material from 1969 to 1985, most notably a number of new-age pieces ("Princess With Orange Feet", nine-minute closer "Second Breath") that achieve an emotive dreaminess. Dotted among these longer pieces are brief advertising stings that best show off Ciani's resourcefulness.

"Inside Story" PBS TV Spot" neatly evokes the bustle and urgency of a busy newsroom, while "Pop & Pour" Coca-Cola Logo" is a sparkling bit of synthesis that uncannily mimics the crack of an opened soda bottle. Though it's a patchwork piece, tonally, *Lixiviation* has the feel of a uniform and complete work. The package is completed by illuminating track notes from Ciani herself, and a good number of photos that should appeal greatly to fans of attractive women posing near analogue synthesisers.

EXTRAS: Liner notes from Ciani and 5/10 Andy Votel, 12-page booklet.

LOUIS PATTISON



DEPARTMENT OF EAGLES The Cold Nose (reissue, 2005) MELODIC

Rambling, underrated first revisited, with bonus tracks

8/10

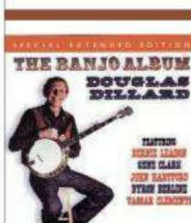
If the 2005 debut from then-23-year-olds vocalist/guitarist Daniel Rossen (of Grizzly Bear) and beats/samples man Fred Nicolaus has a visual equivalent, it's surely Paul Klee's famous artwork, *Twittering Machine*. Similarly fragmentary, artfully sprawling and delicately warped, *The Cold Nose* is a patchwork of leftfield hip hop, folktronica, film soundtracks, art pop and ambient glitch, that reveals DOE's teenage listening habits (Pavement, Nirvana et al) while hinting at their future direction. Nicolaus' interest in weird-beard noise complements Rossen's ear for melody; thus, "The Horse You Ride" looks forward to Thom Yorke's downbeat electronica and "Origin Of Love" affects cLOUDDEAD's whacked-out wooziness, but there are echoes of The Kinks in "Family Romance" and of Erik Satie in the sheerly lovely "The Piano In The Bathtub". Difference and deviation may rule, but the duo's hand is always firmly on the tiller.

EXTRAS: Rather than the sonic toenail clippings

7/10

so often passed off as reissue "bonuses", these six are a revelatory treat. "Sailing By Night" is rinsed twice, once by Tunng and then by Daedelus. Most startling, however, is "Mining For Gold/Payoff", a collage of chopped vocals and scratchy electronic effects that's unsettling, yet still oddly affecting.

SHARON O'CONNELL



DOUGLAS DILLARD The Banjo Album (reissue, 1969) FLOATING WORLD

Twisted bluegrass from Byrds cohort

7/10

Having cut a string of conventional bluegrass albums for Elektra with The Dillards, Doug Dillard was soon among the first to re-imagine American roots music in a modern context. On leaving The Dillards in 1968, Dillard made an immediate impact playing electric banjo on Gene Clark's debut LP. His distinctive attacking style also graced albums by The Monkees and Glen Campbell. He toured Europe with the Gram Parsons-era Byrds before recording *The Banjo Album* for the Together label. On the surface it's standard bluegrass, re-working Carter Family songs, even tackling "Foggy Mountain Breakdown", but Dillard adds tablas and harpsichord on "Hard Times", and recruits atypical players such as Milt Holland and Bernie Leadon. Gene Clark plays harmonica on "With Care From Someone", recorded (with vocals) by Clark, Leadon and Dillard on *The Fantastic Expedition Of Dillard & Clark*, recorded later in 1968 and as monumental as the Burritos' *The Gilded Palace Of Sin*. *The Banjo Album* is a lesser achievement but another link in the chain.

EXTRAS: Five further cuts, notably "Runaway Country", recorded as The Doug Dillard Expedition for the cult 1971 movie *Vanishing Point*.

MICK HOUGHTON



DREADZONE Second Light (reissue, 1995) EMI

2CD reissue of fusionists' second LP

Formed by Big Audio Dynamite renegades Greg Roberts and Dan

8/10

Donovan in 1993, Dreadzone's dubbed-up global electro-reggae-trance fusion made them firm Peel favourites. In the mid-'90s it seemed that no festival stage was complete without them and it has since become de rigueur to claim they were best experienced in a muddy field. *Second Light* reminds us they were bold studio innovators, too, and the album today sounds like a potent early expression of a newly self-confident multicultural Britain. For among all the reggae and dub rhythms, *Second Light* is a distinctively English statement. "Little Britain" opens with the strains of Purcell. The bucolic "A Canterbury Tale" samples bird song. "Captain Dread" is a tranced-up sailor's hornpipe. The use of samples shows an imagination way above the norm, too, as snatches of Lee "Scratch" Perry mingle with dialogue from *If...* and *Monty Python*. It still sounds fresh – and without Dreadzone, arguably the global-dance fusions of Asian Dub Foundation, Afro Celt Sound System et al would never have been possible.

EXTRAS: A Peel session and a set from

6/10

Glastonbury '95. Joyous versions of the best songs from their debut 360° remind us that there were few bands better equipped when festival spirits needed raising.

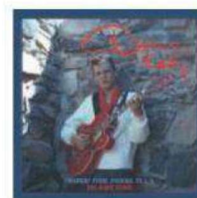
NIGEL WILLIAMSON

REVELATIONS

Michael Chapman... not "a fuckin' folk singer!"

A WEEK AFTER TURNING 71, Michael Chapman found himself onstage performing an entirely improvised piece of music for the first time. Before it began, Chapman triumphantly proclaimed that it should "put to rest the idea that I'm a fuckin' folk singer". Chapman always distanced himself from the folk pack, preferring to identify with fellow Harvest label mavericks Kevin Ayers and Roy Harper and insisting he'd never even heard of Bert Jansch. It denied him a lifeline in folk clubs and he's spent 40 years jobbing around, independently recording everything from gritty rock to Americana.

A woefully underrated songwriter whose best songs preach a resigned, Everyman philosophy, it's Chapman's versatile guitar playing, steeped in jazz and blues, that's now garnering praise. Touring America with Jack Rose in 2008 was a reminder that Chapman was an originator of modern primitive guitar alongside John Fahey. The two toured together in the '70s, Chapman's 'noise' LP paying homage to his friend's final lo-fi recordings. Next up is a cross-Atlantic collaboration with arranger Paul Buckmaster, the pair having first worked together on *Fully Qualified Survivor*. MICK HOUGHTON



DUANE EDDY Twangin' From Phoenix To L.A.: The Jamie Years (reissue, 1994) BEAR FAMILY

Duane's world of boxed delights

9/10

No rock instrumentalist in history has shifted more product than Duane Eddy. This 5CD box, now reissued to coincide with Eddy's second wind and comeback album *Road Trip*, is a terrific showcase for his extraordinary guitar technique. It also proves that his repertoire shone beyond his copper-bottom twang. Given that this six-hour fest is for the most part instrumental, it rarely sounds dull. Eddy had a lyrical elegance to his playing that is endlessly engrossing.

His recordings for Philadelphia's Jamie label spanned 1958 to '63 and heralded the boom years. "Rebel Rouser", "Peter Gunn" and "Shazam!" might be over-familiar, but they're never unwelcome. The same goes for "Because They're Young", Eddy's hit from the 1960 film in which he had a cameo.

But the real selling points of this collection are the lesser-known songs. Disc one finds him backing Jimmy Delbridge on two dippy ballads from 1955, before easing himself into his first reverber recording of note, "Movin' N' Groovin'". Disc five is fascinating, producer Lee Hazlewood leading Eddy through 20 works-in-progress. All in all, this set more than backs up John Fogerty's assertion that Eddy was the first rock'n'roll guitar god.

EXTRAS: None.

ROB HUGHES



ELBOW Cast Of Thousands: Deluxe Edition (reissue, 2003) UNIVERSAL/FICTION/V2

6/10

Leaders Of The Free World: Deluxe Edition (reissue, 2005) UNIVERSAL/FICTION/V2

Before the stadiums...

Following 2009's reissue of Elbow's debut, their second and third albums get a similar treatment, each containing two bonus discs (including a DVD).

Cast Of Thousands, from 2003, has much to recommend it, although its appeal is more textural, and there are few strong hooks, save for the shoegazy "Fallen Angel" and the hymnal "Grace Under Pressure".

It's as if the earworms were being saved for 2005's *Leaders Of The Free World*. Guy Garvey's elegies to Manchester ("coming home I feel like I designed these buildings I walk by") packed an enormous emotional punch, as did throwaway lines like, "You little sod/I love your eyes".

EXTRAS: The bonus CDs of B-sides, sessions and live tracks shed some light on the original albums' occasional sonic failings. For example, on *Leaders...* the live version of "Mexican Standoff" is better than the original.

JOHN LEWIS

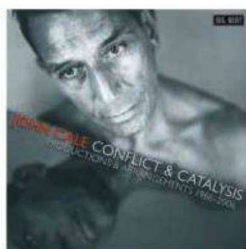
JOHN CALE

Conflict & Catalysis: Productions & Arrangements 1966-2006

BIG BEAT

The Velvet Underground man's knob-twiddling years.

By Alastair McKay



7/10

YOU HIRE JOHN Cale to produce your record; what do you expect? Logically, you might expect the unexpected – as a musician, Cale has always been an artful butcher, pulling the guts from songs and snapping sinews;

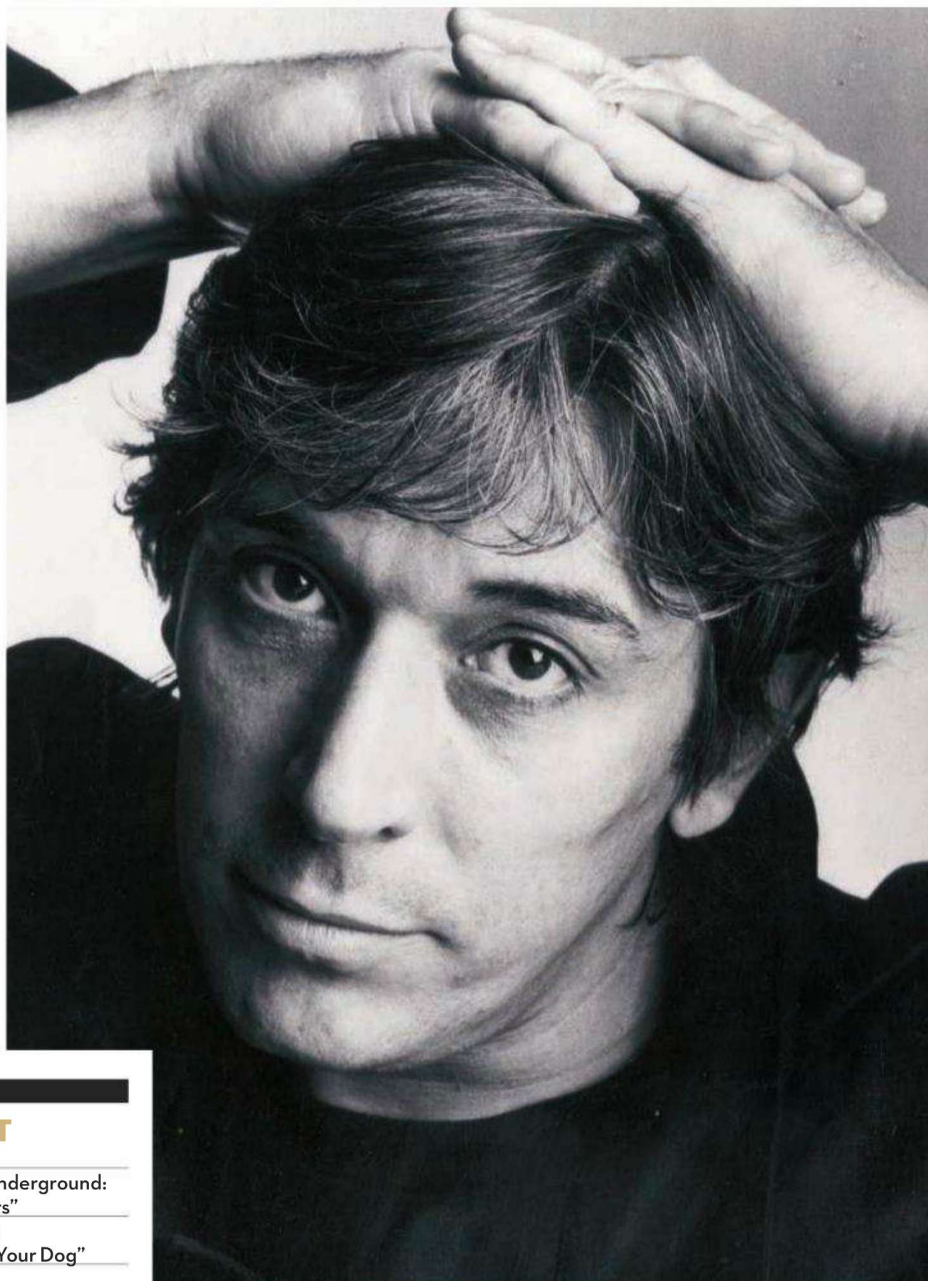
then adding poetry, discord, disquiet or wit.

You might also wonder which Cale was going to turn up: would it be John Cage or Dylan Thomas? Waldo Jeffers or Sister Ray? Well, this survey of Cale's production work comes with a quote culled from Cale's autobiography, in which he defines the role of the man behind the desk. The producer, he suggests, has to be "a catalyst, an ally, a co-conspirator".

Sometimes, that will mean introducing conflict. "I always try to approach it from the point of view, what would a Zen master do in these circumstances? That is not to give the artist a direct answer to all his questions, but to suggest a solution by other means." Try telling that to the Happy Mondays.

Actually, let's start there. Cale's stewardship of the Mondays' *Squirrel And G-Man...* LP is not regarded as a success. It was, Cale says, "a very quick nightmare", made more nightmarish by his sobriety. "The band complained I was on a health kick and that all I did was sit around eating tangerines." In the circumstances, faced with the task of producing Bez's maracas, eating tangerines may be the way to go. And Cale goes some way towards making the Mondays sound like a proper group. The palindromic rap, "Kuff Dam", has a decent groove. If Shaun Ryder could sing, the Mondays wouldn't be Happy: their appeal is based on the singer resembling a hod-carrier in the midst of a lost weekend.

In fact, many of Cale's more successful productions feature



TRACKLIST

- 1 The Velvet Underground: "Venus In Furs"
- 2 The Stooges: "I Wanna Be Your Dog"
- 3 Patti Smith: "In Excelsis Deo/Gloria"
- 4 Nico: "Afraid"
- 5 The Modern Lovers: "Pablo Picasso"
- 6 Harry Toledo & The Rockets: "Who Is That Saving Me"
- 7 Marie Et Les Garcons: "Re-Bop"
- 8 Cristina: "Disco Clone"
- 9 Chunky, Novi & Ernie: "Italian Sea"
- 10 Ventilator: "No King"
- 11 Squeeze: "Sex Master"
- 12 Alejandro Escovedo: "Take Your Place"
- 13 Happy Mondays: "Kuff Dam"
- 14 The Necessaries: "Runaway Child (Minors Beware)"
- 15 Mediaeval Baebes: "Omnes Gentes Plaudite (The Drinking Song)"
- 16 The Jesus Lizard: "Needles For Teeth"
- 17 Goya Dress: "Scorch"
- 18 Lio: "Dallas"
- 19 Siouxsie & The Banshees: "Tearing Apart"
- 20 Eno/Cale: "Spinning Away"

vocalists operating within the borders of their own peculiarities. Nico, who was Andy Warhol's idea of a soul singer – which is to say, she sounded like the bored ghost of the embalmed Marlene Dietrich – has her mannerisms housed within an elegant production, with pretty piano framing her diction. True, she sings like a bad actor playing somebody who can't sing, but it makes a kind of sense.

Cale's production of The Modern Lovers was regarded a failure. He quit before their debut album was complete, after a breakdown of trust with Jonathan Richman, but, really, he did a great job. "Pablo Picasso" chugs like the Velvets, and Richman inhabits a place between pathos and comedy while the guitar makes noises like insects being electrocuted. With Patti

Smith – another vocalist in the process of finding her voice – you can detect the moment she stopped being a poet and became a rock singer. It occurs one minute and 43 seconds into "In Excelsis Deo/Gloria". The Cale mix of The Stooges' "I Wanna Be Your Dog" is more percussive, less neurotic, than the mix which made the original release. It also sounds more like the Velvets, which is a smaller problem now than it would have been in 1969.

Cale's later productions are less emphatic. There are novelties (Cristina's "Disco Clone"), gnarly rock'n'roll (Harry Toledo & The Rockets' "Who Is That Saving Me") and absolute disasters ("Sex Master" by Squeeze). Sadly, there's no place for Sham 69's debut, "I Don't Wanna", which is a shame, because it would be nice to know whether Cale was to blame for the unfathomable success of Jimmy Pursey's Hersham jobs during punk's twilight.

There are two stand-outs. The Velvet Underground's "Venus In Furs" is fabulous theatre, while Eno/Cale's beautiful "Spinning Away" marries Eno's dreamy melodies with off-kilter rhythms. That's the real lesson here. If you want a bit of John Cale, you need the whole John Cale. Anything less is a Zen tangerine.



GENTLE GIANT Free Hand (reissue, 1975) EMI

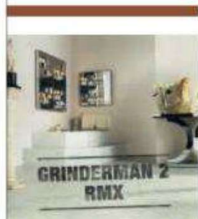
Mischievous,
eccentric prog
virtuosity

8/10 Formed from the ashes
of one-hit wonders

Simon Dupree And The Big Sound by the Shulman brothers, Derek, Ray and Phil, Gentle Giant's pop origins never afforded them the credibility given to King Crimson or Van Der Graaf Generator. Yet Gentle Giant were one of the more adventurous progressive groups of the '70s, and one never afraid to deflate pretentiousness with a streak of humour. One of the first signings to Vertigo, *Free Hand* came seven albums down the line, recorded for Chrysalis in 1975. It's now reissued alongside the following year's more intense *In'terview*. *Free Hand* was the group's most accessible album, but it was still far too eccentric for mass consumption. Known for a complex sound which relied on eclectic instrumentation and weird time signatures, like Yes they even boasted a Royal Academy Of Music keyboard graduate, Kerry Minnear. Yet compared to Yes, Tull or ELP they were an anonymous bunch, and hard to pigeon-hole. *Free Hand*, for example, takes in playful choral pieces like "On Reflection", a medieval instrumental, "Talybont", and uses folk reels at the core of the intricate "Mobile" – a truly twisted take on folk rock. Too schizophrenic for their own good.

EXTRAS: Audio-only DVD with 4.1 surround
6/10 sound mix by Ray Shulman.

MICK HOUGHTON



GRINDERMAN Grinderman 2 RMX MUTE

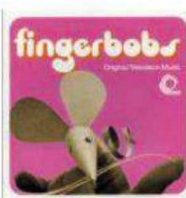
12 excursions on
the version from
Grinderman's 2010 LP

6/10 Time was when
nobody would have
dared to attempt a

Nick Cave remix for fear of ending up on the wrong end of a "Scum"-style character assassination. But the whole point of Grinderman's existence was for these four inveterate Bad Seeds to try something new, and so each single from *Grinderman 2* came accompanied by its own set of remixes (sympathetic reworkings by fellow travellers such as Barry Adamson and Josh Homme).

They're all collected here, alongside a couple of unreleased works by Yeah Yeah Yeahs' Nick Zinner and recent Mute signings SixToes. The latter's sinister folk-noir cover of "When My Baby Comes" is actually one of the best things here. Andrew Weatherall's superb psych-disco dub of "Heathen Child" is suitably capacious, while young upstarts Cat's Eyes and Factory Floor provide intriguingly noisy takes on the scabrous source material. But as with many remix albums of this kind – see also Radiohead's *TKOL RMX 1234567* – most remixers are too reverent or aesthetically similar to the parent band to draw anything new from the music. If Grinderman really are no more, as Cave intimated onstage in Australia in December, then *Grinderman 2 RMX* makes a rather unsatisfying epitaph. **EXTRAS:** None.

SAM RICHARDS



MICHAEL JESSETT, MICHAEL COLE, RICK JONES Fingerbobs TRUNK

Retromaniac releases
perplexing folk music
from kids' TV show

6/10

In a world of record collectors with nothing to show for their passions but crowded flats filled with cellophane-wrapped arcana, Jonny Trunk has turned his insatiable retromania into an artform – his brand a stamp of, if not always quality, then at least a unique aesthetic taste.

This latest release is a testament to how that taste can pay quiet dividends. A British children's TV show of 1972 (there was only one series), *Fingerbobs* starred Rick Jones, a Canadian musician with a warm, rich voice, as "Yoffy" – an artist/storyteller who crafted the characters in his tales from found objects. As with a lot of Trunk releases, it's likely to satisfy only a very small community but prove at least mildly diverting to anyone interested in that strain of folk music that grew around the doorways of '70s kids' TV.

Flutes, guitar and hand drums give the music its flavour, while tape hiss lends the package a nostalgic blurriness. If you're curious, it's worth noting that you can, for less than the price of this CD, buy a DVD of all the episodes. But for the Trunk connoisseur of course, it's not so much about appreciation of the material as it is the eccentric imprimatur of the master's curating hand.

EXTRAS: None. There were no master tapes.

JOHN ROBINSON

HOW TO BUY... JONNY TRUNK'S ODDEST



BUFFET CAR ATTENDANTS The MMs Bar Recordings TRUNK

Between 2006 and 2007, artist Sandra Cross travelled between London and Leicester, and whenever she could (and whyever), she recorded the announcements made by the buffet car attendants. An amusing look at the marginalia of British quotidian life.

6/10



DIRTY FAN MALE Genuine Letters Written To Porn Stars TRUNK

Another niche market unveiled. *DFM* began with Trunk unearthing a cache of "fan" mail written to his sister, Eve Vorley, a former glamour model. This led to this, a series of narrations of these and other letters. Now an Edinburgh show!

6/10



EDWARD WILLIAMS Life On Earth: Music From The 1979 TV Series TRUNK

Occasionally it seems that rarity equals quality in the Trunk HQ. An exception to this is the scarce (100 private copies) original issue of this entrancing music from David Attenborough's TV show. After receiving a blessing from Attenborough himself, Williams' pieces could reach a (fractionally) wider audience.

8/10



PAUL KELLY Greatest Hits: Songs From The South DRAMATICO

The Adelaide
Springsteen's 39 finest
Since the first of his
two-dozen albums back

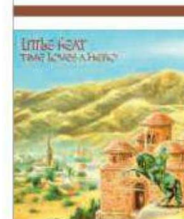
7/10

in 1985, Kelly has, in his own words, been mining themes of "sex, death, memory, friendship and love". Early praise saw him touted as Australia's answer to Ray Davies or Springsteen, producing literate folk and country with a mainstream pop accessibility, but he's long since found his own voice.

Songs From The South is essentially a double-disc version of last year's eight-disc boxset *The A To Z Recordings*, but whereas the larger beast sequenced 100 of Kelly's most celebrated songs in alphabetical order, this is a chronological telling of his story, starting with the jangling travelogue of a smalltown boy moving to Sydney, "From St Kilda To Kings Cross". Along the way Kelly plays a reflective troubadour ("To Her Door") and a tough rocker ("Pouring Petrol On A Burning Man"), and makes frivolous pit stops for the Xmas song "How To Make Gravy" and a hymn to his cricket hero, "Shane Warne".

For all the plaudits his evocative storytelling has attracted, Kelly's musical blueprints are closer to Americana warhorses Steve Earle and John Hiatt, and the influence Neil Young has had on his craft is worn on the sleeve. He remains his own man throughout, however, a legend in his homeland and a hot ticket wherever he goes. **EXTRAS:** None.

TERRY STAUNTON



LITTLE FEAT Time Loves A Hero/Down On The Farm (reissues, 1977/1978) EDEL

On their last legs

By 1975, Little Feat
had recorded five

6/10

incomparable albums on the trot, including the undisputed classic *Feats Don't Fail Me Now*. Soon, however, cracks began to appear due to a battle of wills between founding members Bill Payne and Lowell George. Strung out on drugs, the latter's contribution to *Time Loves A Hero* was minimal. George had never been the band's only writer but it now fell to Payne and guitarist Paul Barrere to write the lion's share. Only "Hi Roller", boosted by the Tower Of Power horn section, "Old Folks Boogie" and the gently rolling title track measure up to past glories. Lowell George had been more preoccupied with completing his debut solo album, *Thanks I'll Eat It Here*, before suffering a fatal heart attack on June 29, 1979 during the accompanying tour with a new band. Little Feat's future had been uncertain before George's death but their troublesome final sessions were dutifully pieced together as *Down On The Farm*. This time, George had a hand in writing five numbers and sang on six, and despite the circumstances, the heart-breaking "Be One Now" and playful "Six Feet Of Snow" stand out on what is a surprisingly poised album.

EXTRAS: None.

MICK HOUGHTON

The Specialist

Lost soul and jazz



► The turbulent era of black American radicalism is back. Alongside *Black Power Mixtape, Uncut*'s star DVD last month, comes a swathe of albums from times when jazz, militancy and spirituality were part of a rich, Afro-centric culture.

As a piece of social history, the 3CD box **East Of Underground: Hell Below NOW-AGAIN** (6/10) is compelling. Recorded at the height of the Vietnam War in the early 1970s, its four featured bands were made up of US soldiers who had entered their groups in a talent contest run by the American Army.

The motives for Uncle Sam's military *X Factor* are obscure. Was it simple morale-boosting, a recruiting tool or a plot to subvert black militancy in the ranks? The liner notes suggest a mix of all three. Writer Sam Lipsyte recalls a visit to his school by an army band who told students, "This is army fun!"

And army funk. The winning bands here – **East Of Underground**, **The Black Seeds**, **The Sound Trek** and **SOAP** – were competent covers bands but nothing more. Musically, it's not much of a curio.

That isn't the case with the latest reissues from Soul Jazz. A gifted flautist, **Lloyd**

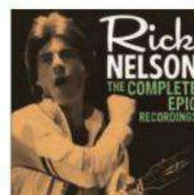
McNeill is also an acclaimed painter and scholar who was befriended by Pablo Picasso. There's a painterly elegance to the playing on his second album,

Washington Suite **UNIVERSAL SOUND** (8/10) from 1970, whose hushed Fender Rhodes shows the influence of Miles' *In A Silent Way*. McNeill was a civil rights activist but there's nothing angry about ...*Suite*, and while "City Tryptych" simmers nicely, "Fountain In The Circle" is chamber jazz.

More radical is **House Of Spirit: Mirth** **UNIVERSAL SOUND** (6/10) by **Pheeroan Ak Laff**. Though no household name, Laff worked with many jazz greats, and was mentored by Coltrane's drummer Rashied Ali. ...*Mirth* mixes refined percussion jams with chants on "Freedom",

forming slabs of haunting 'deep jazz'. With a limited pressing, it's deservedly become a cult item.

Triumph! **UNIVERSAL SOUND** (6/10) is a rare 1980 outing by Chicago pianist **Steve Colson**. It includes wailing reeds by the Art Ensemble's Joseph Jarman, vocals from Colson's wife Iqua, and shimmering solo piano on "Temple At Dendera". Spiritually inclined uneasy listening, it's still way out there. **NEIL SPENCER**



RICK NELSON The Complete Epic Recordings REAL GONE MUSIC

The hidden years: pop pioneer's commercial dead end, alive with wealth of riches

8/10

Nelson's multi-platinum recording career was all but drying up by the late '70s. But it wasn't for lack of trying, or lack of quality. The teen idol-turned-country/rock-pioneer hit with "Garden Party" in 1972, but a string of good-to-excellent Stone Canyon Band albums stiffed. By the time he landed at Epic in 1977, many ideas were floated, but no-one knew how to bring him back. Al Kooper was brought in to produce; Paul McCartney volunteered to help; James Burton was asked to reprise his lead guitar role (he declined); and a bevy of songs and songwriters were presented, in hopes of a comeback hit. It was a practical disaster, Epic rejecting two of the three albums it commissioned. But artistically, Nelson was far from washed up. His pop instincts and interpretive powers shone brightly, and strong performances abound on this set: some solid rockabilly; a gorgeous rendition of Bobby Darin's "Dream Lover"; "Wings" and "Stay Young", country/pop perfection; and stabs at songs by John Fogerty ("Almost Saturday Night" might have been that elusive hit), Graham Parker and Arthur Alexander, proving that Nelson's under-appreciated artistry was present long after the public had moved on.

EXTRAS: None.

LUKE TORN



WENDY RENE After Laughter Comes Tears: Complete Stax & Volt Singles + Rarities 1964-65 LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

7/10

Alicia Keys and Wu Tang-sampled singer's short but superb Stax career in all its glory

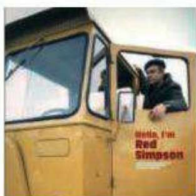
Renamed Wendy Rene by Otis Redding, Mary Frierson was a 16-year-old Memphis schoolgirl when she arrived at Jim Stewart's legendary Stax Studio. A precociously talented singer and writer, Rene embarked on two parallel careers as a solo performer and dual lead in vocal quartet The Drapels. Both are here in their entirety. Rene's songs often foregrounded Stax stalwart Booker T, giving the uptown teen-trials yarns familiar from Spector girl groups a funky twist.

The unmistakably Steve Cropper-prepped dance party "Bar-B-Q" was an early regional hit, but atypical of Rene's style. "I Wish I Were That Girl" has her coming into her own, while "Give You What I Got" is a raw showcase for her mighty, horn-like phrasing.

After a last-minute cancellation on the plane that took Otis to his death, Rene chose motherhood over her career. But her best work shows a mature beyond-her-years insight that reigns supreme on the deliciously aching title track. Deservedly rediscovered and utilised by Keys and The Wu, it's proved a welcome nest-egg for a singer too good to be forgotten.

EXTRAS: Four previously unreleased tracks.

6/10 **GAVIN MARTIN**



RED SIMPSON Hello, I'm Red Simpson BEAR FAMILY

Truckin' country boy finally gets his dues

Merle Haggard and Buck Owens may have covered over 40 of his

7/10

songs, to say nothing of The Byrds, Gram Parsons and Lucinda Williams, but Red Simpson remains an undiscovered figure on the California country scene. Bob Dylan has even called him "the forgotten man of the Bakersfield Sound". Perhaps the reason for Simpson's lack of success was the absence of an easy signifier, though Lord knows he tried. In 1966, nearly a decade after his first recordings, producer Ken Nelson suggested he cut a bunch of trucker songs, after which Simpson (despite not having driven a rig in his life) adopted the persona wholesale.

It's a career explored in detail on this 5CD box. Everything he released is here, from his beginnings in 1957 through to the sides he cut in 1984, the year he retired from touring.

Simpson wasn't short on talent, be it trotting out honky-tonk ballads or twangy road tunes. His highway guise finally achieved traction with "I'm A Truck", a major country hit in 1972, but he was also prone to overdoing the novelty schtick. Numbers like "Truckin' Trees For Christmas" prove that you really can be too niche for your own good. Still, at six hours-plus, including 18 unheard demos, there were plenty of alternatives in Simpson's tank.

EXTRAS: Demos and unreleased tracks.

7/10 ROB HUGHES



TAMBA TRIO Avanço SOUL JAZZ

**EDU LOBO WITH
THE TAMBA TRIO
A Música De Edu
Lobo Por Edu Lobo
SOUL JAZZ**

6/10

Bossa nova classics from mid-'60s Brazil

A cult concern outside of Brazil, the Tamba Trio were a Brazilian bossa nova outfit whose tracks you'll often find tucked away on funky jazz and samba compilations. *Avanço* is their second

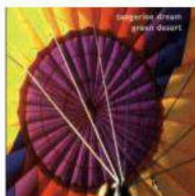
8/10

LP, one that contains the definitive version of Jorge Ben's "Mas Que Nada". Otherwise, many tracks slip into muzak territory.

However, the Tamba Trio really came into their own as a backing band, a function they perform on the 1964 debut by bossa nova songwriter Edu Lobo, then aged 22. It's the arrangements by Tamba's remarkable pianist and MD Luizinho Eça (1936-92) that really transform Lobo's material. On ballads such as "As Mesmas Histórias", Eça's mix of virtuosity and whimsy resembles Dudley Moore; while on "Aleluia" and "Resolução" there's an effortless funk groove that's made them faves of Gilles Peterson. Lobo, now 68, went on to an illustrious career, but he rarely recorded anything as good as this again.

EXTRAS: None.

JOHN LEWIS



TANGERINE DREAM Green Desert ESOTERIC

Scrapped early-'70s gem gets a polish

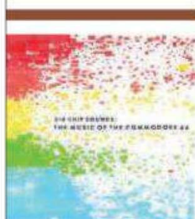
Edgar Froese's long-running kosmische unit have never been the sort

8/10

of group to live in the past, forever forging forwards with the newest technology. *Green Desert* constitutes an unusual aberration in their catalogue: Froese looking backwards. Originally intended as the follow-up to 1973's *Atem*, *Green Desert* was put on ice after TD signed to Richard Branson's fledgling Virgin, and Froese decided to pursue a more commercial direction (heard on the following, exceptional *Phaedra*). Finally appearing in 1986, right as TD were at their zenith of popularity as Hollywood soundtrackers, these four tracks travel a weird wormhole through the group's career, as Froese takes the raw mid-'70s material and remasters it, overdubbing wishy-washy digital synths. A controversial decision, but the good bits work. The 20-minute title track is whooshing space-rock with a Floyd-like Froese guitar solo. "Astral Voyager", meanwhile, is hypnotic sequenced synth in a *Phaedra* vein. No bonus tracks, which might go some way to unpicking the album's unusual genesis, and an enclosed essay doesn't shed light on specifics, either. Some nice artwork, though, including a photo of Froese and Richard Branson stood outside a Threshers in 1973.

EXTRAS: None.

LOUIS PATTISON



VARIOUS ARTISTS SID Chip Sounds: The Music Of The Commodore 64 ROBOT ELEPHANT

The sound of the future, 30 years ago
Nowadays, anyone

8/10

playing a PS2 can choose which Fela Kuti or LCD Soundsystem track they want to accompany them in *Grand Theft Auto*. Thirty years ago, before sophisticated soundcards, video game soundtracks were rather more limited. Even the relatively advanced SID sound chip for the Commodore 64 gave you a limited range of timbres and restricted you to playing no more than three notes at once.

Despite this, the young composers who wrote gaming soundtracks were able to create epic electronica by pushing this primitive technology to the limits.

This collection features 1980s work from 10 C64 game composers. Ben Daglish's music for *The Last Ninja* lurches from Tangerine Dream calm to Yellow Magic Orchestra whimsy; Rob Hubbard's miniatures sound like proto-grime anthems. Best of all are Martin Galway's *Arkanoïd* and Matt Gray's *Dominator*: through your TV they probably sounded like a wasp trapped in double glazing; on a big stereo they sound like brutal techno, somewhere between early Human League and Nitzer Ebb. Play this at a School Disco clubnight, to fortysomething computer nerds, and you could damn near start a riot.

EXTRAS: None.

JOHN LEWIS

COMING NEXT MONTH...

➤ In this first "next month" column it seemed sensible to tell you about the new **Spiritualized** album *Sweet Heart Sweet Light*, which is out in April. For those who had lately rather despaired of Jason Pierce's appetite for saccharine string arrangements, this seemed to represent in part a paring back of his template to admit some heads-down motorik jamming.

Sadly, we can't: the album we've heard isn't really "the one" - the "real", final version of the record is still being worked on by Pierce. Silly old music writers, Pierce said in a magazine article, they probably won't even notice! All will be revealed in a few weeks, though.

Less perverse of temperament, but no less Krautrocking, is Blur guitarist **Graham Coxon**, whose upcoming **A+E** is easily his best solo album yet, accommodating his noodling noise vibes and his batty English songwriting.

Which might seem an appropriate juncture to mention **Roxy Music**, whose catalogue is reissued and boxed (it should not need to be said) most handsomely next month with what promises to be an appetising selection of extras. The very opposite of Roxy's cerebral pop is also represented with an archival release, *Pearl*, the final **Janis Joplin** album, found the singer's life in a parlous state, but her art in robust health. *The Pearl Sessions*, replete with outtakes, reveals how the extraordinary talent and the ungovernable personality were able to work together until the end.

JOHN_ROBINSON_101@FREELANCE.IPCMEDIA.COM

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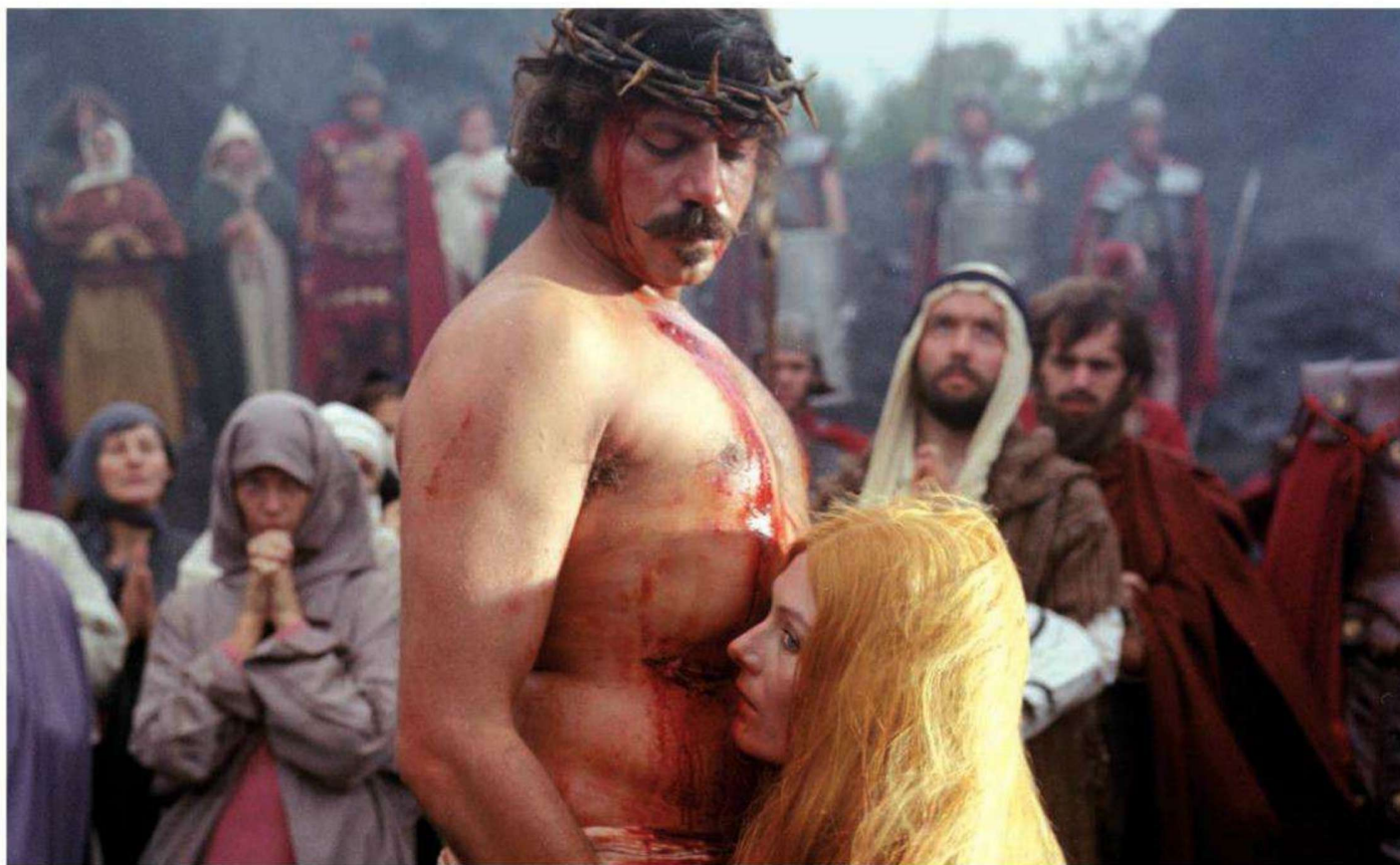
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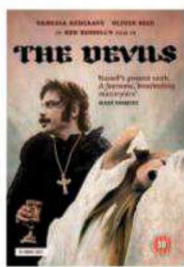




THE DEVILS

BFI DVD

Ken Russell's controversial classic, 'circumcised' by the censors, is now restored to its original X-certificate glory



10/10

"I GUESS I'VE been a voyeur all my life", wrote Ken Russell in his 1989 autobiography, and he always assumed his audiences were the same – that voyeurism, in fact, defined cinema's appeal. By the time he came to make *The Devils* – in which he found a subject matter that fully justified the hysterical pitch of his movie-making – it was 1971, and he had just

come off *The Music Lovers*, his pyrotechnic ode to Tchaikovsky, in which the composer's obsessions with work and his male lover cause his wife to seek male attentions elsewhere. *The Devils* would put Russell in similar straits: while he was consumed with work, his wife Shirley, the film's costume designer, began an affair that ended in divorce.

The Devils, Russell also conceded, was "the last nail in the coffin of my Catholic faith". The story it tells is of a political conspiracy in the name of Christ. Sister Jeanne (Vanessa Redgrave), head of an enclosed Ursuline convent in the walled town of Loudun, begins having blasphemous fantasies about the popular local priest, Father Urbain Grandier (Oliver Reed), already known as a ladies' man. Jeanne's possession eventually spreads to the

rest of the order, and before long the whole convent is seething with lewdness. Cardinal Richelieu, puppetmaster over the weak king Louis XIII, seizes an opportunity to break down one of France's last independent walled strongholds, part of an ongoing campaign to reduce the power of the feudal aristocracy. So he engineers an Inquisition, directing the nuns' possession against Grandier. Russell plays up the tragedy by focusing on Grandier as a happy, romantic newlywed, wrenched from marital bliss, shaved, tortured and delivered up to a kangaroo court. The conclusion is an epic immersion in the sensation of pain, as the camera tracks the bloodied, broken Grandier on his final, agonised journey towards the stake.

The film was an adaptation of John Whiting's play, itself a staging of Huxley's *The Devils Of Loudun*, which novelised real events from the 1630s. The film was butchered by the censors, especially in America ('circumcised', Russell called it) – the first cut included a dream sequence of Christ raped, hanging on the cross, and two exorcists analysing Jeanne's syringed stomach contents for a blasphemous mixture of sperm and communion wafer. Hideous it might have been, but the latter was a fact drawn (by Russell's brother-in-law, a Medieval French lecturer at the Sorbonne) from historical record.

Plot aside, Russell contrived to make *The Devils* an orgy for the eyes and ears. Derek Jarman's production design is exceptional: Loudun is a

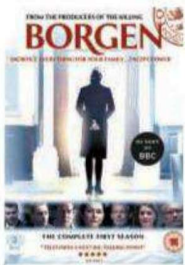
colossal walled city in tiled white brick, more like a public convenience than a fortress. The sets provide an amphitheatre for the film's many arresting images: Redgrave's incredible study of wracked, twitching, frustrated lust; plague pits bursting with swaddled corpses; Richelieu's monstrous, Borges-like scriptorium; Grandier's residence ransacked before his eyes; Louis XIII (Graham Armitage) sportingly picking off peasants with a blunderbuss.

Russell installed a quadraphonic sound system on the set, getting his cast in the mood with blasts of Prokofiev's *The Fiery Angel*. But even that demonic opera was trumped by Peter Maxwell Davies' soundtrack, a discordant orchestral nightmare that exudes total religious dementia. It's a fine use of dissonant music in cinema, and churns in the mind long after the credits roll.

Rarely screened on television, and only released in its censored form on a Warner US DVD, *The Devils* has remained more talked about than seen for four decades. The BFI's glorious restoration presents the original UK 'X' certificate version – the longest version so far available – breathing new life into its artful colour scheme and with a host of extra features and essays that illuminate Russell's intentions beyond mere notoriety, including a commentary by the director himself. "Corruption and mass brainwashing by Church and State and commerce is still with us, as is the insatiable craving for sex and violence by the general public," was his later justification for the film's existence, and we need a purgative against those unholy forces now, more than ever.

ROB YOUNG

EXTRAS: Commentary, two documentaries, 7/10 on-set footage, director Q&A, trailers, plus Russell's 1958 short film, *Amelia And The Angel*



BORGEN

ARROW FILMS

Danish political TV drama series proves absorbing

From the producers of *The Killing* comes another Danish heroine, but whereas knitwear-loving cop Sarah Lund was, for the most part, a thorn in the side of her bosses, Birgitte Nyborg (Sidsé Babbett Knudsen) holds all the cards as the country's first

female Prime Minister. Flagged by the BBC on its UK debut earlier this year as Denmark's answer to *The West Wing*, the central plot of a woman heading a shaky coalition government while her domestic life crumbles has closer parallels to another US political drama, the short-lived *Commander In Chief*. However, *Borgen* is a more savvy, layered affair, held together by Knudsen's charismatic performance.

EXTRAS: None.
TERRY STAUNTON

8/10



CORMAN'S WORLD: EXPLOITS OF A HOLLYWOOD REBEL

ANCHOR BAY

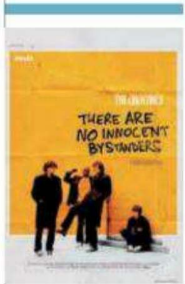
Hugely entertaining look at the legendary director-producer-hustler

The subject of Alex Stapleton's fascinating doc is Roger Corman, of course, the famed indie director behind

low-budget cults like *The Little Shop of Horrors*, *The Man With The X-Ray Eyes* and his '60s Edgar Allan Poe cycle. As Stapleton stresses, though, Corman's greatest legacy might be the incredible roster of talent he nurtured: Scorsese, De Niro, Jonathan Demme, Bruce Dern, John Sayles, Peter Bogdanovich. All these and more pay tribute to the great man – and roll their eyes over his legendary penny-pinching.

EXTRAS: Trailer.
1/10 DAMIEN LOVE

8/10



THE LIBERTINES

There Are No Innocent Bystanders

PULSE

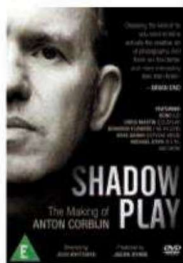
Sad and bitter story of a band in freefall

Lovingly pieced together by longtime fan and trusted group photographer Roger Sargeant, this doc follows the motley Arcadians as they reunite for some

high-profile gigs in 2010. Assisted by Sargeant's iconic images, Doherty, Barât and the other two tell the band's relentlessly depressing tale, taking in lies, wasted opportunities, squalid dives and squandered talents. Doherty and Barât can't get through a sentence without taking a bitter swipe at each other, and the climax, a scrappy set at Reading and Leeds, is hardly stuff of legend. For hardcore fans only.

EXTRAS: London Forum gig footage, extended interviews, signed prints. TOM PINNOCK

6/10



SHADOW PLAY: THE MAKING OF ANTON CORBIJN

CRABTREE FILMS

The Dutch lensman turned filmmaker

Perhaps unwisely seeking to replicate his brooding high-contrast style, this is a slightly patchy doc on the Dutch photographer-turned-filmmaker, shot while he

was making his first feature, Ian Curtis biopic *Control*. While Corbijn himself proves a non-committal interviewee, the film explores the role of the rock photographer and the "look" of music, stressing Corbijn's place in helping define the enduring image of Joy Division as well as bands like Depeche Mode and U2. Michael Stipe, Bono, and an archive Kurt Cobain are among the other interviewees.

EXTRAS: Trailer.
1/10 DAMIEN LOVE

6/10



SHERLOCK SERIES 2

2ENTERTAIN

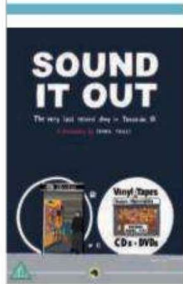
Arresting reincarnation of the great detective

He's an anachronistic retro-dandy legend with superhuman intelligence and alien emotions, humanised by a faithful companion; quite why *Doctor Who* guru Steven Moffat was attracted to

Sherlock Holmes is itself a mystery. That said, this *Sherlock* is a decent (re)incarnation of the great detective; allowing his recreation the updatedness started in the Rathbone years works, though at times Benedict Cumberbatch is less Sherlock and more Sheldon from *The Big Bang Theory*. This second series piles on the flashiness and contains just enough detective ingenuity for old-school fans. Series three ahoy!

EXTRAS: Documentary, audio commentaries.
6/10 DAVID QUANTICK

8/10



SOUND IT OUT

DOGWOOF

Warming tale of the 'last record shop on Teesside'

Sound It Out is the last record shop in Stockton-on-Tees. That's sad enough. But in Jeanie Finlay's doc, it's a symbol of something bigger. Stockton, we learn, is a town in decline, and the visitors to Tom Butchart's tiny shrine to vinyl are refugees from the

vicissitudes of life. They're men, mostly, and the shop operates as a kind of drop-in-centre where their addiction is tolerated. It's familiar territory, but Finlay teases out the personalities of the customers. The quiet hero of the piece is the Quo fan who reveals he was sent to 'spastic school' and now works nights at B&Q to fuel his record habit. His ambition, as he has no dependents, is to be buried in a coffin made of melted vinyl.

EXTRAS: Short films, videos.
5/10 ALASTAIR McKAY

7/10



THE JAZZ BARONESS

3DD ENTERTAINMENT

Mini-bio of the great Thelonious Monk

Even in the mid-20th century, a genius still needed a patron. For Thelonious Sphere Monk, the "high priest of bebop", that patron was Panonica De Koenigswarter, born into the über-rich Rothschild family. On a trip to NYC, a friend played her Monk's "Round Midnight" and, on hearing

the tune, 'Nica' experienced a damascene conversion to jazz. The interchange between high society and perceived low-life is a defining feature of bohemian life, but even in this context, the relationship between Monk and Nica was unusual. The pair were not lovers (Monk remained devoted to his wife Nellie) but kindred spirits, floating around NY's vibrant jazz scene, encountering kindly bemusement on the way. Cats, in short, dug her; she was hip.

Some folks who didn't dig the Baroness' downward mobility, however, were her family. Nica's redefinition of her life vexed the Rothschilds, who will still not discuss it. And this is where *The Jazz Baroness* comes unstuck. Made by Hannah Rothschild, Nica's niece, and someone you would think literally born to tell this story, the film never gets over one hurdle – the fact that family members who might lift the veil on Nica's enigma refuse to talk, even to another family member. "What are you doing this for?" one unseen relative asks, crushingly. "Is it just for the publicity?" Compared to Clint Eastwood and Charlotte Zwerin's *Thelonious Monk: Straight No Chaser*, *The Jazz Baroness* isn't flattering. There's simply not enough Nica to go around, so this becomes a mini-Monk bio, handicapped by Rothschild's lack of empathy with jazz and its players (an interview with Sonny Rollins is particularly painful), and her fatuous attempts to draw parallels between the lives of someone of unimaginable wealth and someone whose father was born a slave.

Unwittingly, the film's about access (something that, as *Withnail & I* had it, is "free to those who can afford it, very expensive to those who can't"). Where doors flew open for her aunt, for Rothschild, alas, they remain stubbornly closed.

EXTRAS: Over 100 minutes of extended interviews. JOHN ROBINSON

7/10

Films

BY MICHAEL BONNER

THIS MONTH: earthy UK drama *Wild Bill*, Herzog's latest documentary, *We Bought A Zoo* and a Belgian *Kes*

IF THERE'S A CONNECTION between any of the films reviewed this month, you could say it's the difficult relationship between fathers and their children. It's a universal thing, apparently: this collection of domestic dramas unfold near the Olympic building site in east London, on Texas Death Row and in a zoo, of all places, run by Matt Damon. First, though, let's stick close to home with Dexter Fletcher's *Wild Bill*. Fletcher is probably best known as one of the four main leads in Guy Ritchie's *Lock, Stock And Two Smoking Barrels*. Fortunately, Mockney gorbline is in short supply here. Set in the scruffy council estates and pubs of Newham, one of the five London boroughs hosting the Olympics, this finds Bill Hayward (Charlie Creed-Miles) returning home after eight years in prison to discover his two sons, 15-year-old Dean (Will Poulter) and 11-year-old Jimmy (Sammy Williams), fending for themselves after being abandoned by their mother. Bill, an ex-drug dealer with a legendarily violent temper, finds himself having to decide whether to assume responsibility for his sons or settle back in with his old crowd.

It's familiar stuff, but Fletcher – who co-wrote the script – focuses on the domestic fall-out caused by Bill's absence. Despite some tasty business involving local drug dealer Leo Gregory and a proper punch-up in a boozier, *Wild Bill* is a small, rather quiet story about two boys forced to grow up before their time. Dean's resourcefulness when staying one step ahead of social services and providing for Jimmy might be admirable, but it's also heartbreaking: he's 15, he should be bunking school, playing *Call Of Duty* and lusting after girls, not working illegally on a building site. Charlie Creed-Miles – memorable as Ray Winstone's junkie brother-in-law in *Nil By Mouth* – plays Bill as a wiry, nerdy man, struggling to keep his violent tendencies in check while feeling his way clumsily into parenthood. Will Poulter and Sammy Williams have previously done excellent work in *Son Of Rambow* and *Attack The Block*, and deliver commendably unshowy, naturalistic performances here. For all Creed-Miles' gradual teasing out of our sympathies, Poulter and Williams provide the film's emotional beats.

In 2001, Michael Perry and Jason Burkett committed triple homicide in Conroe, Texas over a red Camaro. When we meet them in Werner Herzog's latest doc, *Into The Abyss*, it's the summer of 2010. Perry is on Death Row, eight days away from execution by lethal injection, while Burkett is serving life imprisonment. With grim testimonies from the victims' families,

'Top-class nut job'
Charlie Creed-Miles
as Wild Bill



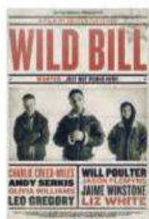
One connection between the films reviewed this month is the difficult relationship between fathers and their sons

the sheriff's deputy, bystanders and a former captain of the Death House itself, you could easily accuse Herzog of lapsing into self-parody here: the misery is unrelenting. There is one amusing anecdote about squirrels, but other than that, this is bleak stuff. I'm reminded of Herzog's quote from the 1982 documentary *Burden Of Dreams*: "The trees here are in misery, and the birds are in misery." Well, yes, Werner.

Tenuously, *Into The Abyss* resembles one of those schlocky real-life crime shows you see on TV, with to-camera testimonies and contemporaneous footage (in this case, Herzog has access to the police's crime scene videos). But, predictably, this is a more valid, forensic exercise. Herzog is less interested in the crime itself or what led Perry and Burkett to commit it – drugs, alcohol, poverty. "I've seen so many horrible things, I can't deal with them," says a bartender from a nearby town called, almost impossibly, Cut And Shoot, Texas.

As you'd expect from the director of *Fitzcarraldo*, *Aguirre: The Wrath Of God* and *Grizzly Man*, Herzog is intent on exploring the extremities of human behaviour. Interviewing Jason's father, Delbert Burkett, himself serving several lengthy sentences, we are offered a clear-eyed reflection on wasted life. After all, here is a man who has had ample time to consider at leisure his actions and their consequences. "Describe the feeling to me when you were handcuffed together with your own son," Herzog, off camera, asks Burkett Snr. "I can't," he replies. "It don't get much lower than that."

Reviewed this month...



WILD BILL

Director
Dexter Fletcher
Starring Charlie Creed-Miles, Will Poulter
Opens March 30
Certificate 18
7/10



INTO THE ABYSS

Director
Werner Herzog
Starring Michael Perry, Jason Burkett
Opens March 30
Certificate 12A
9/10



WE BOUGHT A ZOO

Director
Cameron Crowe
Starring Matt Damon, Scarlett Johansson
Opens March 16
Certificate PG
4/10



THE KID WITH A BIKE

Directors The Dardenne brothers
Starring Thomas Doret
Opens March 23
Certificate 12A
9/10



In contrast, there is plenty of light in Cameron Crowe's *We Bought A Zoo*. Too much, in fact. This is super-mainstream studio drama, occasionally scuffed at the edges when Crowe tries to remind us of his former counterculture credentials with a burst of Neil Young's "Cinnamon Girl" over a montage, or a clubhouse jukebox

stacked with new wave classics. The film follows the attempts of widower Benjamin Mee to turn round an ailing zoo with the help of his two children and the on-site workforce. Matt Damon – is there a more likeable leading man in Hollywood? – does sturdy enough work as Mee, but plausibility is stretched by the casting of Scarlett Johansson as the zoo's head keeper. The film is heavy on sentiment, and the dialogue offers platitudinous life lessons: "If you do something for the right reasons, no-one can stop you." Drama is provided by an escaped bear, an aggressive zoo inspector and an elderly Bengal tiger. There is a timely discovery in a safety-deposit box. The most credible thing here is the relationship between Damon (himself a father of four) and his two screen children, which has convincing warmth, in contrast to the I-just-don't-buy-it syrupy romance that kicks in between Damon and Johansson. The soundtrack, by Sigur Rós singer Jónsi, telegraphs Crowe's sad-happy narrative: Mummy died – but look, kids! We bought a zoo!

The Belgian Dardenne brothers, Jean-Pierre and Luc, are heavyweight European filmmakers, having twice won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and, with *The Kid With A Bike*, the festival's Grand Jury Prize in 2011. You can draw comparisons – superficially, at least – between the Dardenne's slender but important body of work and filmmakers like Ken Loach and Mike Leigh, who explore a similar social landscape. Shot around a semi-industrial suburb of Liège, *The Kid With A Bike* explores the relationship between 12-year-old Cyril (Thomas Doret, who closely resembles *Kes*' David Bradley) and Samantha (Cécile de France), a local hairdresser who takes him in when his father disappears. Unlike the self-reliant Dean in *Wild Bill*, Cyril is unable to accept that his father abandoned him and heads out on his bike to find him (a plot riff from De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*). In one of the film's many understated scenes, Cyril's father – played by Dardenne's regular Olivier Gourmet – almost cracks as he explains to Samantha that he just can't cope with raising a 12-year-old boy. There is an honesty here and a naturalism that's missing from, say, Crowe's programmatic storytelling. As ever with the Dardenne's, it's their keen eye for the complexities of human behaviour that makes the film so watchable.



We Bought A Zoo: Cameron Crowe goes super mainstream

Also out...

BLANK CITY

OPENS MARCH 2

Doc on the New York music and film scene of the '70s and '80s. Jim Jarmusch, Thurston Moore and Debbie Harry talk the talk.

HUNKY DORY

OPENS MARCH 2

Minnie Driver is the teacher who stages a rock musical version of *The Tempest* in Swansea, 1976. Clearly, not a patch on *Hamlet 2*.

MICHAEL

OPENS MARCH 2

Austrian drama, about a 10-year-old boy held captive by a paedophile.

BEL AMI

OPENS MARCH 2

Uma Thurman, Kristin Scott Thomas and Christina Ricci fall for R-Patz's inestimable charms in 19th-century Paris.

JOHN CARTER

OPENS MARCH 2

From Edgar Rice Burroughs' novels. A Confederate soldier ends up on Mars. *Wonder Boys* novelist Michael Chabon co-scripts.



21 JUMP STREET

OPENS MARCH 16

Johnny Depp's career began in this '80s cop drama, now updated with Jonah Hill and Channing Tatum (above), playing it for comic effect.

THE HUNGER GAMES

OPENS MARCH 23

Post-*Twilight* franchise-in-waiting: in post-apocalyptic America, two teens fight to the death in televised combat. The tween *Running Man*, surely?

THE PIRATES! IN AN ADVENTURE WITH SCIENTISTS!

OPENS MARCH 28

What's not to like? Pirates and scientists, together, in Aardman animation. David Tennant is Charles Darwin!

TINY FURNITURE

OPENS MARCH 30

Mumblecore drama, about a college graduate who returns to her parents' New York loft to, like, find herself. Honestly.

WRATH OF THE TITANS

OPENS MARCH 30

More classical Greek mythology lovingly rendered in 3D. Perseus goes to the Underworld to rescue Zeus from the Titans.

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Books

BY ALLAN JONES

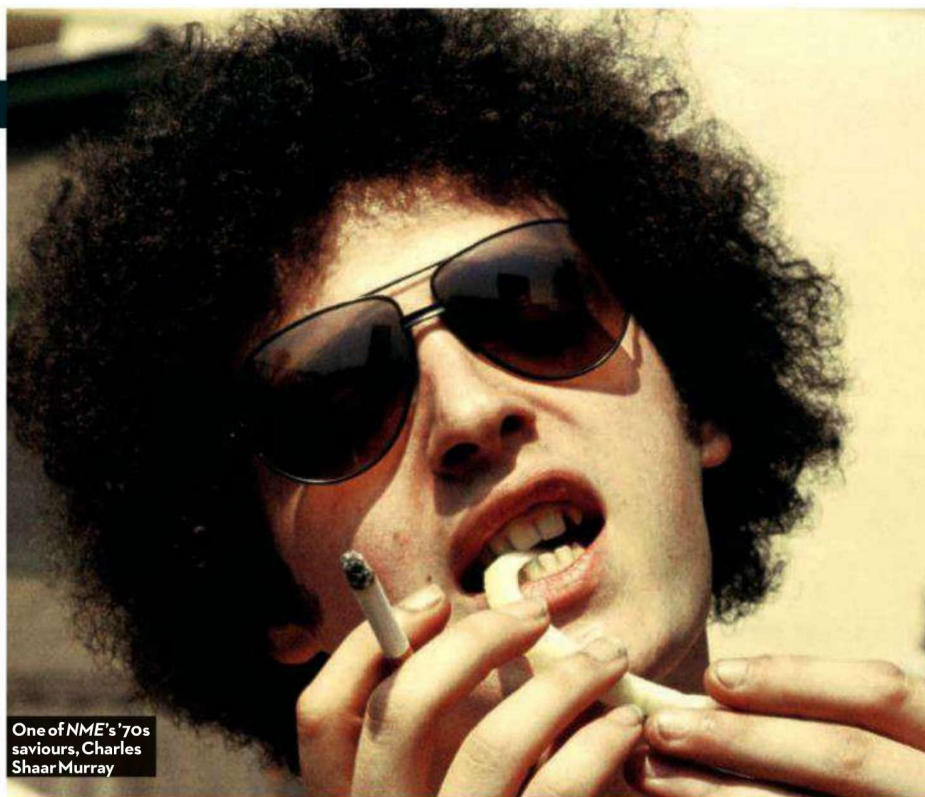
THIS MONTH: the fascinating story of the NME, a far-fetched Nazi caper and a moving tale of sudden deafness

FORMER *NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS* assistant editor Pat Long's history of what he describes as 'the magazine that changed the nation's cultural DNA', is a racy, illuminating, sometimes salutary account of its life and times that packs an enormous amount into its 240 pages as Long documents its serial incarnations across six decades.

There is much wry humour in the opening chapters, covering the paper's early years, but it really takes off at the point of its brilliant reinvention in 1973, when editor Alan Smith and his deputy Nick Logan rescued it from closure by the inspired plundering of young writing talent from what was left of the '60s underground press. This was the start of what's commonly known as *NME*'s 'golden era', and Long gives due prominence to the swashbuckling days of Nick Kent and Charles Shaar Murray, when under the astute stewardship of Logan, Ian MacDonald and later Neil Spencer, *NME* was the provocative, contentious and compelling magazine of its era.

What followed is no less gripping, however, and Long steers a steady and clear course through the vast turbulence that followed Spencer's departure, when *NME* had to contend with waning sales and influence and the challenge to its former supremacy by changing popular tastes, and a reader backlash against the sometimes colossal self-indulgence of several of its writers. There were protracted periods, too, of debilitating in-fighting, backstabbing, schisms, rifts, controversial editorial appointments, self-doubt and confusion as *NME* sought to reassert its relevance. There were rejuvenations, also, of the paper's fortunes under Danny Kelly and the entrepreneurial editorship during Britpop of Steve Sutherland, who nervously took *NME* into the digital age, perhaps at a future cost to its core circulation ("We either had to be murdered or commit suicide," Sutherland remarks). Long's history ends about here, in 2000, just before he joined its staff, with *NME* squaring up to new challenges. Long is optimistic about its future, while the fact that this year it celebrates its 60th birthday as the only survivor of the weekly music press some of us grew up with is an achievement in itself.

A debut novel, 10 years in the writing, for which Chad Harbach received an astronomical advance, subject of a gushing *Vanity Fair* profile before hardly anyone had read it and subsequently a *New York Times* best-seller, Harbach's **The Art of Fielding** caused quite a commotion last year when it was published in America. It finally reaches the UK puffed up with praise, in a manner that recalls



One of *NME*'s '70s saviours, Charles Shaar Murray

the blustery excitement that attended the publication of Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections*.

On this occasion, though, the hype is entirely justified. This is a marvellous book, set in a fictional Midwest college and ostensibly about baseball, or at least a baseball prodigy, Henry Skrimshander, whose skills as a short-stop are almost supernatural. Of course, despite the pages lavished on the game (often very exciting, whether you know anything about it or not), it's not really about baseball so much as friendship, loyalty, love and literature. It's by turns hilarious, lyrical, sad and wonderful. The expertly burnished narrative is populated by a fabulous cast of beautifully drawn characters, whose lives and predicaments consume the reader entirely. When the book after 500 pages that simply breeze by comes to an end, we are reluctant to let them go, ache for their continued company, feel nothing but loss at their absence.

Nick Coleman had enjoyed a 25-year career writing about music, first as a provincial stringer for *NME*, subsequently as Music Editor of *Time Out* and then as a senior arts editor on *The Independent* and *Independent On Sunday*, when one morning he was stricken, no other word for it, by sudden neurosensory hearing loss. In any circumstances, the unexpected onset of deafness would have been traumatic. For Coleman, the consequences were especially devastating. Music for even longer than he'd been writing about it had been central to Coleman's life and the shaping of it, and he was blessedly lucky, as some of us are, to have been able to make a living from what he had to say about it.

Part medical history, part autobiography,

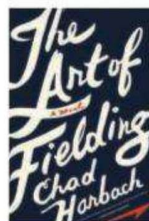
The Train In The Night is Coleman's affecting account of his struggle to reconnect himself with who he previously was, that large part of himself that was defined by music. He effectively re-plays in his head everything he heard before his deafness, reflecting on what certain keys songs meant to him. Some of this writing is exceptional and illuminating. Less successful are the pages, a lot of them, Coleman spends on his fenland adolescence, episodes of familiar teenage turbulence that feel self-consciously generic.

Peter Leonard's three previous novels were snappy crime thrillers, in the style of his father, Elmore, hugely entertaining capers and highly recommended. He comes a bit of a cropper with **Voices Of The Dead**, though, in which the daughter of Detroit scrap-dealer Harry Levin, a concentration camp survivor, is accidentally killed in a car crash by a former SS officer, Ernst Hess, who it turns out killed Levin's family in Dachau, in a massacre Harry luckily escaped, eventually fetching up in America. Hess is now big news in the post-war German government, his Nazi past a secret, and immune under diplomatic law from prosecution in the US. So Harry flies to Munich, to track Hess down and possibly kill him, Hess in turn going on a killing spree to wipe out every possible connection to his murderous past. There's some good writing here, but the book relies too much on far-fetched coincidence, Levin is an unlikable hero, Hess is a lazily drawn villain, the action is often repetitious and the plot twists implausible. You might also balk at the Holocaust being used as not much more than a plot device.

Reviewed this month...



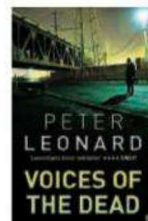
The History Of The NME: High Times And Low Lives At The World's Most Famous Music Magazine
By Pat Long **PORTICO**
8/10



The Art Of Fielding
By Chad Harbach
FOURTH ESTATE
9/10



The Train In The Night: A Story Of Music And Loss
By Nick Coleman
JONATHAN CAPE
8/10



Voices Of The Dead
By Peter Leonard
FABER
5/10

Live

ROCKING IN THE FREE WORLD



Sounding glam, if not looking it: (l-r) Patrick Carney and Dan Auerbach

SETLIST

- 1 Howlin' For You
- 2 Next Girl
- 3 Run Right Back
- 4 Same Old Thing
- 5 Dead And Gone
- 6 Gold On The Ceiling
- 7 Thickfreakness
- 8 Girl Is On My Mind
- 9 I'll Be Your Man
- 10 Your Touch
- 11 Little Black Submarines
- 12 Strange Times
- 13 Money Maker
- 14 Chop And Change
- 15 Nova Baby
- 16 Ten Cent Pistol
- 17 Tighten Up
- 18 Lonely Boy
- 19 Everlasting Light
- 20 She's Long Gone
- 21 I Got Mine

THE BLACK KEYS

ALEXANDRA PALACE, LONDON, FEBRUARY 9, 2012

There's got to be a way to Block Buster! The Akron duo's new, supersized glam racket

OVERNIGHT SUCCESS sure has been a long time coming for The Black Keys. Midway through the first of three sell-out nights at the Ally Pally, Dan Auerbach takes a moment to reflect. "It's been an amazing year. The record just went gold in the UK, so this is like a celebration, right?"

With that, the Keys launch into "Strange Times", the gnarly rocker from their 2008 album, *Attack & Release*. It's a strange song comprised of two distinct parts, in the way that Nirvana songs used to be, though it

sounds nothing like grunge. The chorus is reflective and somewhat mysterious. On record, it has an outer spacey quality: here, in this vast hall, the melody blows around, taking a while to find its bearings. But when the riff finally thumps home, the effect is visceral.

Still, there's an echo of something. "Strange Times" is like a whiskery mutation of The White Stripes' "Seven Nation Army"; which is to say that it sounds like a London Underground busker playing Led Zeppelin while falling down a moving escalator. This being a large space, the effect doesn't

quite make it to the back of the hall, but the way that it fails tells you something about The Black Keys. To my left, a young couple are engaged in the advanced stages of foreplay. To my right, a young woman with platinum hair is periodically distracted by the Scrabble on her iPhone; which is to say that while the carnal qualities of their music translate to the big arenas, the cerebral bits do not.

For almost a decade – up to and beyond *Attack & Release* – Auerbach and his musical partner, drummer Patrick Carney, have laboured to



distance themselves from a blues-rock label which, in the States especially, implies a conservative musical outlook, and (for those labouring towards the Stevie Ray Vaughan end of this equation) a concern for conspicuous musicianship rather than anything more immediate. No doubt The Black Keys can play, but in their finest moments the power comes from the things they leave undone. They understand noise, certainly, and they celebrate it, but they have a keen ear for silences, too.

Blues rock always was a misnomer, and the seed of the group's originality can be found in the tension between the tastes of Auerbach – raised on bluegrass, a blues aficionado, though not a purist – and Carney, a card-carrying indie rocker. Since Auerbach released his solo album in 2009, to Carney's apparent annoyance, there has been a definite sense that the Keys' music has grown more playful. Large parts of their current album, *El Camino*, betray an obvious debt to the Sweet, and possibly even The Glitter Band. Listen superficially enough, and you might hear bits of Billy Idol floating around in there, too.

The set is heavily weighted towards *El Camino* and its immediate predecessor, *Brothers*. Since both albums were released within 18 months, there is little room for laurel-resting. The glam influence is obvious from the start. The opener, "Howlin' For You", is built on the muddy thud of Carney's drums, and they really do thud. They sound, at times, like damp cardboard. The screens at the back of the stage flash with Pop Art imagery, and the addition of Gus Seyffert on bass and John Wood on keyboards adds depth. But the song really revolves around the absent-minded chant in the chorus, with Auerbach scatting like a shower-stall crooner, before nailing the tune with a brisk, tense guitar solo.

Another glam thing: many of Auerbach's riffs sound like sirens. There's a bit of that in "Next Girl", which they play second, with the stage now splayed in purple and red light, but the song is loose and primal, almost to the point of collapse. By the third song, "Run Right Back", Auerbach is dredging up memories of Chicory Tip and (surely an accident, this) The Dead End Kids.

The mood changes with "Same Old Thing", and not just because of the appearance of a guitar with two necks at the back of the stage. The song is like the sketch for a heavy metal blowout, and while Auerbach is quite capable of the kind of high, slightly pained soulful singing that is generally accompanied by lyrics about warlocks or celestial mushrooms, he errs, sensibly, on the side of restraint. It's followed briskly by "Dead And Gone", which sounds much harder and punkier than on record, but emerges with its pugilistic Motown rhythms intact. The opening section of the show concludes with "Gold On The Ceiling", which is "Block Buster" caught in an unseemly embrace with "Spirit In The Sky".

Naturally, when the band strip down to a two-piece for a handful of older songs, they get louder and wilder, with Auerbach suddenly becoming animated, and prowling across the stage during a punishing assault on "Thickfreakness". The influence of '70s heavy rock is clear on "Girl Is On My Mind", though they deliver its brooding gestures with considerable flair. "I'll Be Your Man" is more sensuous, and while its trainwreck blues rhythms aren't exactly a definition of romance, they do betray a caring side. And "Your Touch" captures the essence of what The Black Keys used to be: bludgeon riffola, with jittery propulsion and a danger of epileptic fits, thanks to the strobes.

From here, it's a noisy slide towards the climactic encore, when a giant mirrorball spins above the stage. Auerbach's falsetto on "Everlasting Light" is pretty, but its gentleness is underscored by knowledge that the song will swell and burst, taking that dark energy into "She's Long Gone", and on into "I Got Mine", an electrical storm of feedback... and the band's name spelled out in lights. **ALASTAIR MCKAY**

FURTHER DATES

The Black Keys' US tour begins at Cincinnati, Ohio's US Bank Arena on March 2.



Son of his father: Vieux Farka Touré shows off his dexterity

Vieux Farka Touré

QUEEN ELIZABETH HALL,
LONDON, FEBRUARY 12, 2012

The Saharan blues scion blurs African and Western styles to stunning effect

VIEUX FARKA TOURÉ is the son of Mali's prodigious Saharan blues guitarist Ali Farka Touré, who before his death from cancer in 2006 recorded two albums of duets with Toumani Diabaté which are masterpieces of virtuosity and meditative effect. Vieux is a thrilling guitarist too, and at 30 is increasingly his own man. Over the course of three studio albums, he's shown growing disdain at the idea that there's much division at all between Malian music and Western blues and rock.

Tonight's show lacks the diverse guest guitarists on last year's *The Secret* (Derek Trucks and John Scofield among them) – though Touré does initiate a cutting contest with a rather nervous Oli Brown, the young British blues support act who, with his long frizz of hair, at least looks a skinny '70s rocker. Every song, however, effectively combines circling, Malian guitar lines with structures familiar from a thousand blues-rock shows, filed to a sharp point by Touré's disciplined intelligence.

He sits back on that circling beat, then leads his trio in short rapid charges with a blur of two-handed dexterity. On some songs, the right hand holds down the strings at the neck's base, letting the left chop out woody, scraped, stranger sounds. "Lakkal" has some of that, but bass-heavy, wah-wah funk too. Drummer Tim Keiper's Bonhamesque work as "Gido" climaxes add to the feeling that this band would work as well opening minds at a hard rock festival as at Womad. Touré, one suspects, would be Robert Plant's ideal support act – or, indeed, vice versa. **NICK HASTED**



Bryce and Aaron Dessner demonstrating their twin ambition

THE LONG COUNT

THE BARBICAN CENTRE, LONDON, FEBRUARY 4, 2012

Striking out from The National, the Dessner twins compose the baseball/Mayan song-cycle of their dreams

SETLIST

- 1 Nine (vox by Shara Worden)
- 2 Long Summer
- 3 Our Sleep (vox by Tunde Adebimpe)
- 4 Bull Run (vox by Kelley Deal)
- 5 We Were Born (vox by Kelley Deal)
- 6 Dry Creek
- 7 Matilde (vox by Shara Worden)
- 8 Long Autumn
- 9 Hunahpu Drones
- 10 Tests (vox by Tunde Adebimpe)
- 11 To The Sea (vox by Shara Worden)
- 12 Long Winter (vox by Shara Worden)
- 13 Aheym
- 14 The Long Count (vox by Kelley Deal)

AFENDER TELECASTER hangs suspended in the middle of the stage. Slowly, Aaron and Bryce Dessner – the guitar-playing twins who are the musical driving force behind Brooklyn indie-rock behemoth The National – approach the instrument and begin solemnly whacking it with baseball bats, the shudders of noise created by this act of auto-destruction drowning out the snatch of commentary from the 1976 World Series that is playing in the background.

This is the curious centrepiece of *The Long Count*, a “multimedia song-cycle” created by the Dessner twins in collaboration with artist Matthew Ritchie, first performed in the US in 2009. The title refers to the Mayan Long Count calendar, whose current cycle is due to end on December 20 this year (so make sure you’re stocked up on tinned goods). However, this production is more concerned with the beginning of the Mayan calendar, specifically the creation myth outlined in the book of the *Popol Vuh*, involving two “hero twins” – represented here by Aaron and Bryce – avenging the death of

their father by descending into hell to retrieve his severed head.

During this voyage into the underworld, the twins honour their father by playing his favourite ballgame – hence *The Long Count*’s baseball allusions. Really, though, the narrative is simply a framework for the Dessners’ songs: 14 enigmatic compositions that exist in the grey area between contemporary classical music and ornate chamber rock.

When *Uncut* interviewed The National back in 2010, the Dessners confided that singer Matt Berninger regularly vetoed their more leftfield ideas. Projects such as *The Long Count* – as well as Bryce’s work with the Kronos Quartet, some of which is adapted here – are their opportunity to flex their compositional chops.

Although unassuming in person, the twins are also assiduous networkers, having assembled a formidable cast of contemporary indie-rock heavyweights for Red Hot’s *Dark Was The Night* compilation. For *The Long Count*, they’ve reeled in the talents of Tunde Adebimpe from TV On The Radio, Shara Worden from My Brightest Diamond, and The Breeders’ Kelley

Deal, all of whom appear onstage as spirit guides who seem to reflect their existing musical personas.

Worden is impish and ethereal, striking statuesque poses in a feathered headdress. Adebimpe looks like he’s just returned from some ancient frontline, singing dolorously of painting “*your worried head with flowers for the war*”. Deal is a mischievous presence in black, chiselling away at the floor and scraping an electric violin. Aside from their brief game of Telecaster swingball, the Dessners remain hunched over their guitars stage left, opposite the 12-piece Heritage Orchestra, whose increasingly tempestuous contributions begin to sound a bit like Mastodon for strings.

Ritchie’s visuals are actually one of the most successful aspects of the production, his animated doodles oozing out across the stage like a troubled child’s sketchbook come to life. Musically, there are moments of browbeaten beauty, particularly from Adebimpe. But when Deal returns to the stage and straps on a guitar for a breezy, Breeders-esque closing number, it comes as something of a relief. **SAM RICHARDS**

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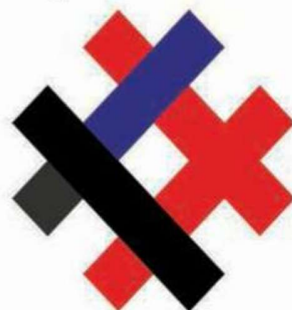
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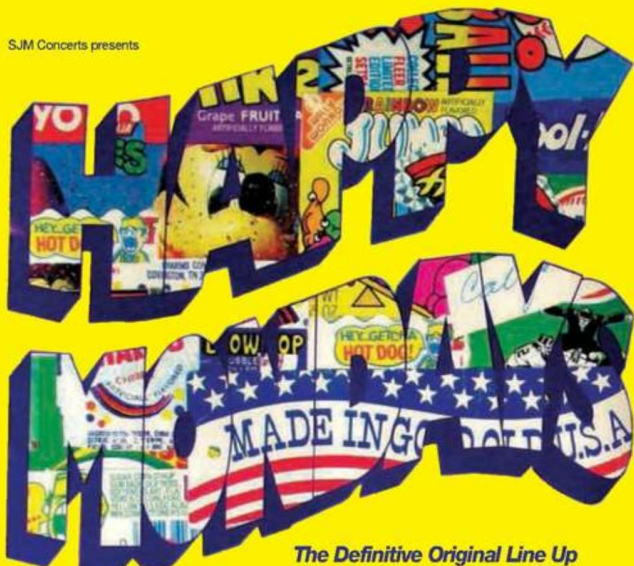
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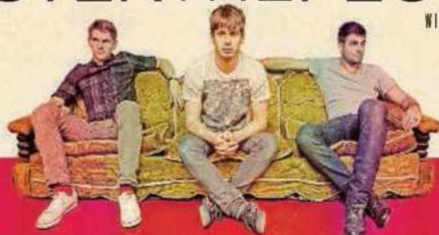
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08.05.12	Windmill Brixton - London, Brixton
09.05.12	The Palmeira - Hove, Brighton
10.05.12	The Bicycle Shop - Norwich
11.05.12	Korks - Otley, West Yorkshire (tickets from venue only)
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Fri 11	Kendal Brewery Arts Centre	01539 725 133
Thu 17	Norwich Arts Centre	01603 660 352
Fri 18	Leamington Spa Assembly Hall	0844 854 1358
Sat 19	Birmingham O2 Academy2	0844 477 2000
Sun 20	Wolverhampton Slade Rooms	0870 320 7000
Mon 21	Milton Keynes The Stables	01908 280 800
Thu 24	Oxford O2 Academy2	0844 477 2000
Fri 25	London O2 Academy Islington	0844 477 2000



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WWW.BANDONTHEWALL.ORG

WEDNESDAY 16 MAY GLASGOW O2 ABC2

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THURSDAY 17 MAY LONDON O2 ACADEMY ISLINGTON

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28 Southampton, The Brook + 02380 555 366

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04 Holmfirth, Picture Drome + 0844 478 0808
05 Durham, Gala Theatre + 0191 332 4041
06 Dublin, Vicar Street + 01 775 9800
07 Hayes, Beck Theatre + 0208 566 8721
08 Gravesend, Woodville Halls + 01474 337 731
09 Wolverhampton, Robin 2 + 0900 401 231
10 Milton Keynes, The Stables + 0900 380 800
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12 London O2 Academy Islington
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13 Sheffield Leadmill
0114 221 2828

14 Durham Live Lounge
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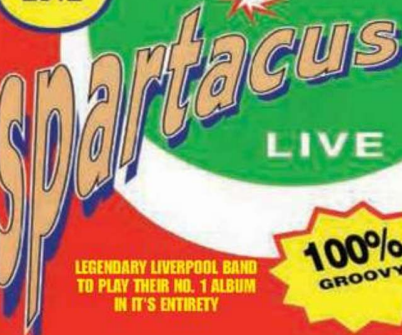
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01452 583 050

10 NEWCASTLE O2 ACADEMY
0844 477 2000

11 NUNEATON QUEENS HALL
02476 347402

12 BLACKBURN KING GEORGES HALL
0844 847 1684

17 WOLVERHAMPTON THE ROBIN 2
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19 LONDON O2 ACADEMY ISLINGTON
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20 SOUTHAMPTON THE BROOK
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25 MANCHESTER CLUB ACADEMY
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ON TOUR - JUNE 2012

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THURSDAY 07
BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY

THURSDAY 12
MANCHESTER HMV RITZ

WEDNESDAY 13
NEWCASTLE O2 ACADEMY

THURSDAY 14
LEEDS O2 ACADEMY

SATURDAY 16
LONDON O2 SHEPHERDS
BUSH EMPIRE

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TUESDAY 29 MAY
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WEDNESDAY 30 MAY
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SATURDAY 02 JUNE
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13 LIVERPOOL O2 ACADEMY

14 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY

17 NEWCASTLE O2 ACADEMY

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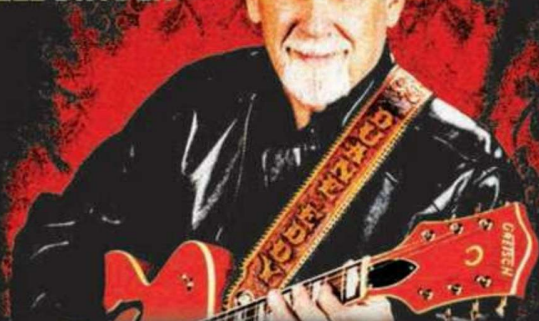
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APRIL

- | | |
|---|---|
| Wed 4 BRIGHTON Komedia | Sun 15 LIVERPOOL Kazimer |
| Thu 5 BATH Chapel Arms | Mon 16 MANCHESTER Deaf Institute |
| Fri 6 WINCHESTER Railway Inn | Tue 17 CARDIFF Clwb Ifor Bach |
| Sat 7 OXFORD The Jericho | Tue 24 SWANSEA Chatterbox |
| Mon 9 BIRMINGHAM Glee Club | Wed 25 SHEFFIELD Lantern |
| Tue 10 NEWCASTLE Cluny 1 | Fri 27 LONDON Bush Hall |
| Wed 11 EDINBURGH Electric Circus | Sat 28 BRISTOL Colston 2 |
| Thu 12 GLASGOW Oran Mor | Sun 29 POCKLINGTON Arts Centre |
| Fri 13 KENDAL Arts Centre | Mon 30 LEEDS Brudenell |

MAY

- | |
|-----------------------------------|
| Wed 2 NOTTINGHAM Glee Club |
| Thu 3 CAMBRIDGE Junction 2 |

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- 07 Milton Keynes The Stables**
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- 08 Manchester Band on the Wall**
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- 10 Kendal Brewery Arts**
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- 24 MANCHESTER**
THE CASTLE HOTEL
- 25 BRISTOL, THE LOUISIANA**
- 27 BRIGHTON**
GREEN DOOR STORE
- 28 LONDON, THE BORDERLINE**
- 29 NOTTINGHAM, THE BODEGA**
- 31 NEWCASTLE, THE CLUNY 2**

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07 London Royal Albert Hall
08 Reading Hexagon
09 Oxford New Theatre
10 Birmingham NIA
12 Cardiff Motorpoint Arena
13 High Wycombe Swan
14 Manchester Bridgewater Hall
16 Leicester De Montfort Hall
17 Gateshead The Sage
18 Aberdeen Music Hall
19 Glasgow SECC
21 York Barbican

22 Scunthorpe Baths Hall
24 Sheffield City Hall
25 Tunbridge Wells Assembly Hall
26 Brighton Centre
27 Norwich Theatre Royal
28 Torquay Princess Theatre
30 Truro Hall for Cornwall

JUNE 2012

01 Portsmouth Guildhall
02 Cambridge Corn Exchange
03 Bristol Colston Hall
05 Poole The Lighthouse
06 Dartford Orchard Theatre
07 Bradford St. George's Hall
08 Malvern Forum Theatre
10 Milton Keynes Theatre

21 Isle of Wight IOW Festival
22 Salisbury City Hall
23 Newtown Theatre Hainan
24 Shrewsbury Theatre Severn
26 Blackpool Opera House
27 Whitehaven Civic Hall
28 Inverness Eden Court Theatre
29 Perth Concert Hall
30 Dunfermline Alhambra

JULY 2012

02 Liverpool Philharmonic Hall
03 Swindon Wyvern Theatre
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22 MAY

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23 MAY

LONDON Barbican Centre 020 7638 8891 barbican.org.uk

24 MAY

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27 MAY

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11 MANCHESTER The Deaf Institute
12 LONDON Dingwalls
13 OXFORD Bullingdon Arms
14 WINCHESTER The Railway (2 shows)
15 BRIGHTON The Haunt
16 BRISTOL The Tunnels
29 NOTTINGHAM The Maze
30 SHEFFIELD The Greystones

May

1 LEEDS Brudenell Social Club
2 GLASGOW King Tuts Wah Wah Hut
3 NEWCASTLE The Cluny

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Mar 9 TINGEWICK Village Hall
Mar 10 EDINBURGH Playhouse ★
Mar 11 LIVERPOOL Academy ★
Mar 12 BRISTOL Academy ★
Mar 19 GUILDFORD Angel Hotel
Mar 20 CARDIFF 10 Feet Tall
Mar 21 BATH Chapel Arts Centre
May 1 WINCHESTER The Railway #
May 2 YORK The Duchess #
May 3 BURY The Met #
May 6 BELFAST CQA Festival #
May 7 LONDON Cecil Sharp House #
May 8 NEWCASTLE The Cluny 2 #

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07 NOTTINGHAM Rock City
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08 BIRMINGHAM HMV Institute
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09 LONDON O2 Shepherds Bush Empire
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Optimus Primavera Sound official Facebook and www.optimusprimaverasound.com

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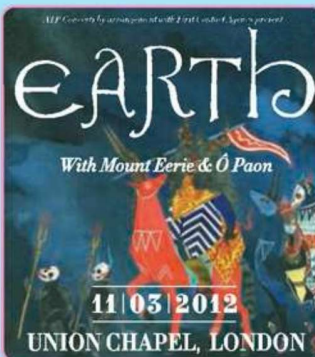
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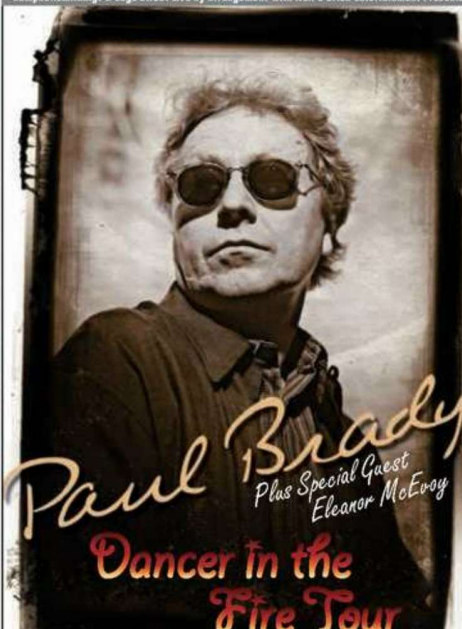
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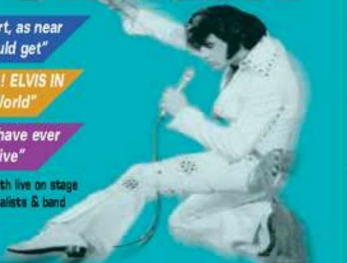
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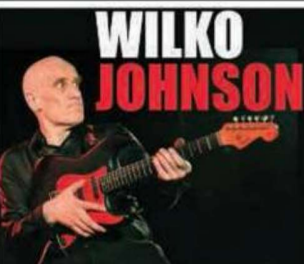
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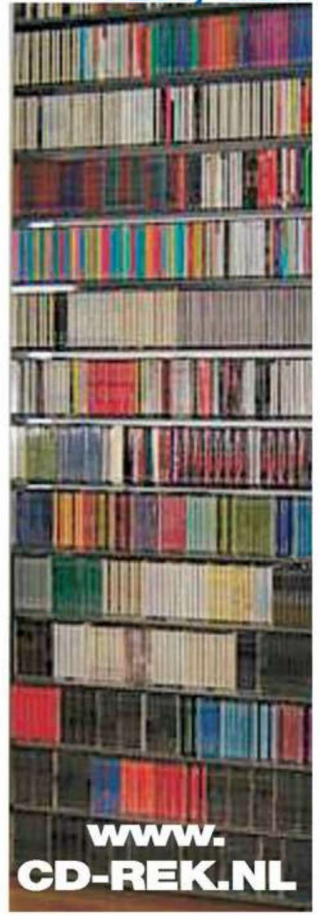
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OBITUARIES

Not Fade Away

Fondly remembered this month...

ETTA JAMES

Legendary blues and R'n'B vocalist

1938-2012

ETTA JAMES' STORY isn't for the faint of heart. Born in LA to 14-year-old Dorothy Hawkins and a white father that she never knew (though she was convinced it was pool legend Minnesota Fats), James was given up to adoptive parents. By the age of 12, her birth mother had reappeared and taken her to San Francisco, where Dorothy worked as a prostitute and Etta started the drinking and drugging that would become a constant in her life.

Theirs was a tempestuous, often violent relationship that set a pattern for James' own romantic dalliances. She struggled with heroin and alcohol addiction throughout much of the '60s and '70s, juggling her singing career between stretches in prison and rehab. In 1974, as part of her treatment, she began a 15-month stay in a psychiatric ward.

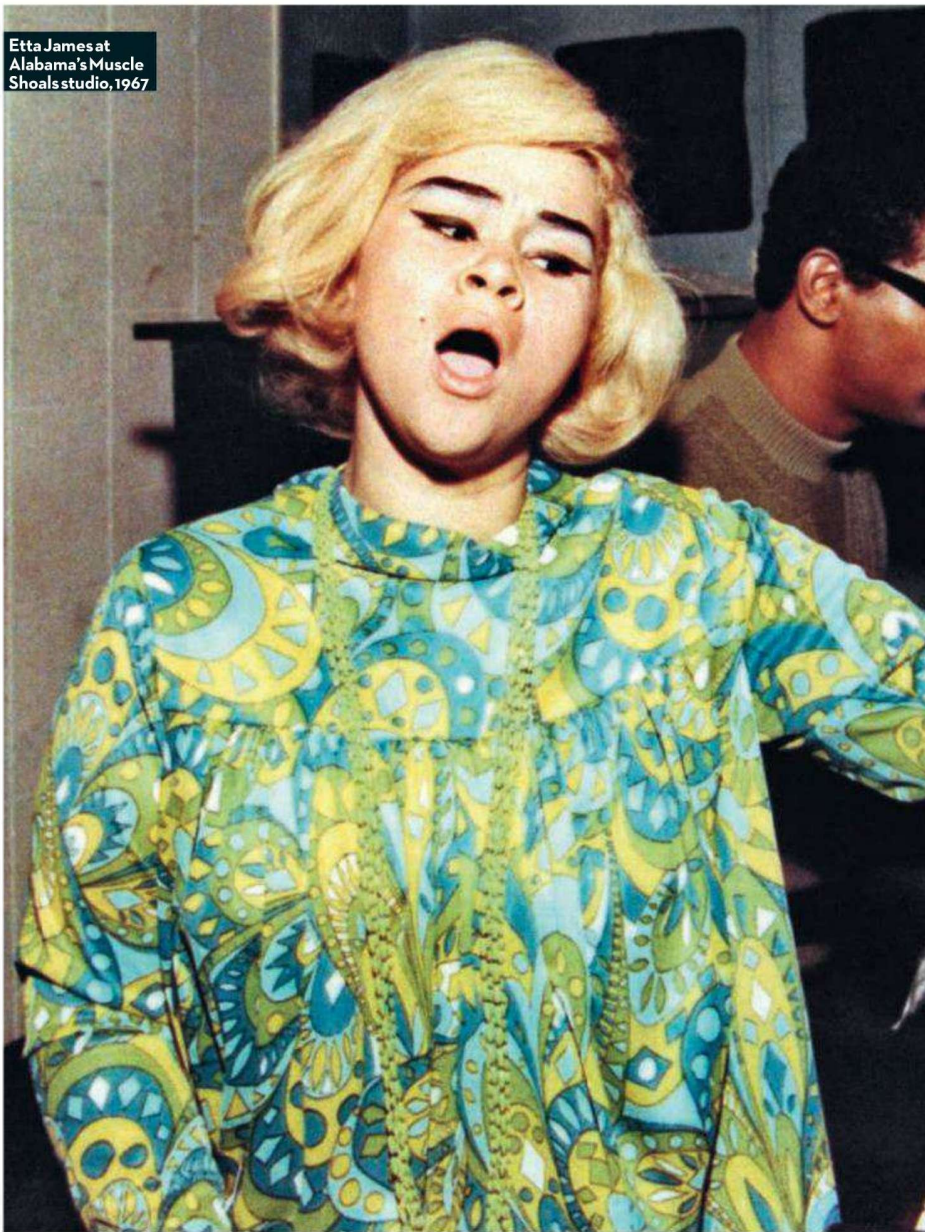
James' big break landed when her vocal trio The Creolettes were discovered by bandleader Johnny Otis. He renamed them The Peaches and oversaw their recording of "The Wallflower (Dance With Me, Henry)", which reached the top spot in the R'n'B charts in 1955. "I was just a little schoolkid," she recalled later, "bumming around at being a delinquent... I was so bashful that I had to go into the bathroom and sing from there."

By 1960 James had struck out as a solo artist on Chess Records. Her debut album *At Last!* featured both "I Just Want To Make Love To You" and the title track, a bluesy ballad that became a hit the following year. Later in the decade she travelled to Muscle Shoals in Alabama to cut another signature tune, "I'd Rather Go Blind", apparently co-written with friend Ellington Jordan while he was in jail. It has since been covered by Rod Stewart, BB King and Beyoncé.

James' career had begun to slide by the end of the '60s. Mired in personal problems, the ensuing decades saw her attempting several comebacks, including the excellent *Etta James* (1973), but it was only after emerging from the Betty Ford Clinic in 1988 that she declared herself finally free of addiction. The resulting *Seven Year Itch* was a strident return to her R'n'B roots, while 1995's *Mystery Lady*, a plumb set of Billie Holiday songs, won her the first of six Grammys.

She was a formidable character to the last. Beyoncé, who played James in the 2008 film *Cadillac Records*, incurred her wrath after performing "At Last" at Barack Obama's inaugural ball. "She had no business singing my song that I've been singing forever," snapped the veteran, though she later claimed it was a joke. Asked to expand on her explosive

Etta James at Alabama's Muscle Shoals studio, 1967



style, James once called it a release for "all this bitch shit inside of me".

That "bitch shit" undoubtedly contributed to

*"She set the bar so high
for the depths that
someone can sing from"*

BONNIE RAITT

the emotional heft of her performances. She boiled with as much rage and passion as she did tenderness and hurt, be it the lusty R'n'B of "I Just

Want To Make Love To You", the wounded blues of "I'd Rather Go Blind" or the ravaged gospel of "Something's Got A Hold On Me".

Janis Joplin, who covered the rollicking "Tell Mama", partly modelled herself on James. Her reach and power extended across generations, from Tina Turner and Candi Staton to Beyoncé and Amy Winehouse. Adele has credited her as her chief inspiration for becoming a singer, adding that "Etta James is the only artist I've ever properly believed when I listen to her." Bonnie Raitt was similarly indebted: "The mark she made was setting the bar so high for the depths someone can sing from. The ache and the pain and the ferocity and the soul and the sexiness – it all came through in the space of one three-minute song."

WHITNEY HOUSTON

Million-selling, yet troubled, pop superstar

1963-2012

IT'S A SOURCE of some tragedy that Whitney Houston, whose cause of death was still to be confirmed at the time of going to press, will be remembered as much for her very public fall from grace as her staggeringly successful early career. The figures alone are head-spinning: 170 million worldwide sales, 11 US No 1s (four in the UK), six Grammys and, in her 1992 cover of Dolly Parton's "I Will Always Love You", one of the biggest-shifting singles by any female artist in history. Her records may have largely consisted of airbrushed dance-pop, but Houston's soaring, often over-emotive voice became the benchmark for vibrato-bothering disciples like Mariah Carey, Celine Dion and Christina Aguilera.

Yet fame and unbidden riches brought out a darker facet of her personality. Houston became addicted to cocaine for much of her later life, once confessing to TV host Diane Sawyer that "the biggest devil is me. I'm either my best friend or my worst enemy." Her failed marriage to Bobby Brown was marked by drug binges and allegations of domestic abuse. Houston had most recently finished filming her role in *Sparkle*, a movie that's loosely based on the story of The Supremes, the soundtrack of which will feature her last recordings.

JOHNNY OTIS

R'n'B bandleader, producer and talent scout

1921-2012

GREEK IMMIGRANTS' SON Johnny Otis, dubbed the "Godfather of Rhythm and Blues," became one of the first bandleaders to integrate black and white musicians when he began playing around LA in the late '40s. He was a man of myriad talents – songwriter, arranger, DJ, producer, TV host and club owner among them – though his ear as a talent scout led to him discovering Little Esther Phillips, Jackie Wilson, Etta James and Big Mama Thornton, for whom he produced 1952's signature tune, "Hound Dog". Six years later Otis' own composition, "Willie And The Hand Jive", made No 9 on Billboard, eventually selling over 1.5 million and inspiring covers by Eric Clapton, Levon Helm and Cliff Richard.



DON CORNELIUS

Soul Train producer and host

1936-2012

"A VISIONARY PIONEER and a giant in our business," was Quincy Jones' assessment of Don Cornelius, the creator, producer and host of US TV's seminal black music show, *Soul Train*. "His contributions to television, music and our culture as a whole will never be matched." Cornelius hatched the idea while working as a DJ in Chicago, after which *Soul Train* began airing nationwide from October 1971 through to March 2006. Its status was such that it regularly attracted the cream of African-American talent, from James Brown and Aretha Franklin to Michael Jackson and Prince.

WINSTON RILEY

Chart-topping reggae producer and songwriter

1943-2012

THE GLOBAL SPREAD of reggae was due in no small part to Jamaican producer and composer Winston Riley. The rambunctious "Double Barrel", released on his own Techniques label and recorded by Dave And Ansel Collins, was one of the genre's first crossover hits, topping the UK charts in April 1971. While his 1973 instrumental "Stalag 17" contains the most sampled rhythm in the history of reggae. Riley, who began with rocksteady group The Techniques

as a teenager, also helped kickstart the careers of Buju Banton, Gregory Isaacs and Frankie Paul.

MIKE KELLEY

Destroy All Monsters co-founder and artist

1954-2012

MIKE KELLEY, WHO is believed to have taken his own life, achieved fame as a visual artist, though he's best known to the music world as co-founder of underground provocateurs Destroy All Monsters. Formed in his native Detroit in 1973, the band's self-styled "anti-rock" was a confrontational clash of performance art and experimental noise. Their debut gig in Ann Arbor, in which they laid waste to Black Sabbath's "Iron Man", lasted just 10 minutes. Kelley quit in 1976, though he later formed The Poetics and created the sleeve art for Sonic Youth's 1992 LP, *Dirty*.

DAVID WHITAKER

Orchestral pop arranger

1931-2012

ANDREW LOOG OLDHAM was responsible for recruiting BBC orchestra man David Whitaker to his Immediate label in the mid-'60s. His inventive string arrangements graced records by Nico ("I'm Not Sayin'"), Marianne Faithfull ("Plaisir d'Amour") and the Andrew Loog Oldham Orchestra, including the latter's semi-classical version of The Rolling Stones' "The Last

Time", later sampled by The Verve for "Bitter Sweet Symphony". Among Whitaker's other credits were Lee Hazlewood, Simply Red and Air, for whom he arranged an alternate version of *Moon Safari*'s "Remember", and numerous film scores.

JIMMY CASTOR

Much-sampled New York funk saxophonist and songwriter

1940-2012

IT WAS TESTAMENT to the widespread influence of New York funklord Jimmy Castor that his '70s output included some of the most sampled recordings of all time. There was more than a touch of novelty about his biggest hits – 1972's ebullient "Troglodyte (Cave Man)" and "The Bertha Butt Boogie" (1975) – though his schooling in doo-wop, soul and Latino jazz earned him the nickname "The Everything Man". The title track of The Jimmy Castor Bunch's 1972 album *It's Just Begun* was sampled by everyone from 2 Live Crew to the Spice Girls, while he successfully sued the Beastie Boys for their appropriation of "The Return Of Leroy (Part One)" on 1986's "Hold It, Now Hit It!".



DAVID PEASTON

Gospel/soul vocalist

1957-2012

GOSPEL SINGER DAVID PEASTON, son of Martha Bass and brother of Fontella Bass, enjoyed a fair deal of success after signing to Geffen Records in the '80s. His two best known songs were "Two Wrongs (Don't Make It Right)" and "Can I?", both of which made the business end of Billboard's R'n'B chart in 1989. **ROB HUGHES**

Feedback...

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

LETTER OF THE MONTH

ON YOUR MARKS...

IF I MAY expand upon Vito Morawetz's comments in the February issue about the state of the record industry, *Uncut* reviewers regularly give around 45-50 new releases four or five stars each and every month, and have been doing so for years.

Projected over a year, this means that according to them approximately 500-600 very good or exceptional records are released every year, or one such record every 16 hours, which is a ludicrous claim.

Never mind that it would be near impossible to keep up with so many records over a period of years, but the fact is the majority of these alleged gems really aren't that good, and even in the best of years there aren't remotely so many first-class records released.

In his letter in the March issue refuting Morawetz, Giles Lewis lists some 35 or so "strong albums" released in 2011. That may be, but can he name the other 500-plus strong albums that according to *Uncut* were also released last year? Furthermore, how many of these artists Lewis names will stand the test of time, how many people will be listening to Opeth, Megafaun or High Places, to pick a few at random (no offence, guys), as we still listen to the great artists of the '60s and '70s, arguably rock's best decades.

Some of today's artist no doubt will stand the test of time, but the large majority I suspect will be long forgotten, remembered if at all only as answer's to trivia quiz questions. How many of these artists will the reviewers themselves be listening to in the future?

John Chough, via email

The rating of music has always been a contentious issue. Great American rock critic Paul Nelson reacted notably badly when *Rolling Stone* introduced a ranking system, walking out in an absolute huff on a well-paid and hugely influential position as the magazine's Reviews Editor. Lou Reed probably spoke for a lot of musicians when he memorably launched a hilariously vituperative, methamphetamine-inflamed rant on his live album *Take No Prisoners* against *Village Voice* rock critic Robert Christgau for having the temerity to mark albums out of 10, which he thought was simply demeaning.

The best way to look at ratings of any kind, perhaps, is to see them as indicative of the particular worth of an album in the context of the career



Swedish metal outfit Opeth, in a dark-ish alley

of a specific group. In the case of, let's say, the Stones, most people would probably give *Sticky Fingers* five stars, but award a more modest three to *Steel Wheels* or *Voodoo Lounge*. Giving four stars to the new album by Opeth, say, would indicate it's a very good Opeth album, but wouldn't necessarily be meant to suggest they've suddenly made an album that will be universally hailed as an all-time classic. Mind you, I'm sure there are Opeth fans who don't give a fig for rock's acclaimed pantheon and would only be separated from their copy of their favourite Opeth album by prising it from their cold dead fingers. – Allan

NEW ADVENTURES IN HI-FI

I'm writing in response to Bob Boiling's letter in Take 178 [*March issue*]. I'm someone who was encouraged to take a look at Creedence Clearwater Revival by your recent cover story. The article would've been enough for me to investigate them but the Spotify playlist tipped me over the edge. After listening to the playlist I promptly ordered the 'best of' CCR, which I've been playing nearly everyday since. How I've missed this band up until now is a mystery, but thanks to you I've a whole new catalogue to investigate.

Mike Fowler, via email

...Just wanted to say that January's issue of *Uncut* was for me thoroughly informative and educational. It turned me on to artists previously unknown to me, namely Jonathan Wilson and Dawes. The article on Jonathan Wilson sent me in search of Beachwood Sparks and Benji Hughes, much to my eventual enjoyment. Last year another article led me to seek the back catalogue of The Jayhawks. I'm glad I did and I'm off to see them in London next month. Please continue to educate me on new and old artists alike and good luck with the new layout.

Mike Powell, Biggin Hill

I WANNA BE A DOOR

Picking up the February addition I found in your Review section a piece by John Robinson on the 40th- anniversary edition of The Doors' *LA Woman*. Many years ago I remember thinking, like any young man with intelligence, that I was Jim Morrison. I was very proud of my locks and leather pants. To me *LA Woman* was an anthem symbolising virility and cool... the whole album, goddamn it! I hadn't listened to The Doors for a while when I read your review and decided to stick it on, even though Mr Robinson's enthusiasm for the release was somewhat held back, regardless of the five-star rating.

What a treat. Listening to Jim sure makes ye feel alive. It made my old bones shake and twist. I hollered "Yeah!" There was life in the old dog yet. It's one of the best remastered albums I have heard. And I know John loves Jim really, because he was right. *LA Woman* is like a familiar room and boy it's hot in there!!

Pocket Punk, via email

BETTER THAN GRAM?

Just read a nice post by Allan Jones on uncut.co.uk. The Lost Genius Of Paul Siebel. I bought the CD reissue of Siebel's *Woodsmoke And Oranges* and *Jack-Knife Gypsy* in 2004 after it got a five-star review

in *Uncut* (might have been Allan's review, I can't remember). The albums were a revelation, absolutely gorgeous. I would rate them higher than Gram Parsons' solo records. I think they are a much finer example of Cosmic American Music, so rich and deep and melodic. Haven't listened to them in a while now – must cue them up as soon as the kids are in bed! Really looking forward to the new-look *Uncut* by the way!

Paul McLoughlin, via email

TV TURN-OFF

If you really want to make the new *Uncut* more appealing, please, please can we have more women involved? I'm not especially feminist, but surely you can see that the fact you have no female contributors is shameful! Bearded muso dope-smoking nerds may enjoy reading dreary rams on Amon Düül and Television, but nobody else does! When I saw Television at Hammersmith Odeon in 1977 I was so bored I fell asleep – and I was in the front row (Blondie, the support act, were quite a different story). Couldn't you track down somebody like Jane Suck, who knocked Julie Burchill into a cocked hat back in the day?

Molly Gilligan, via email

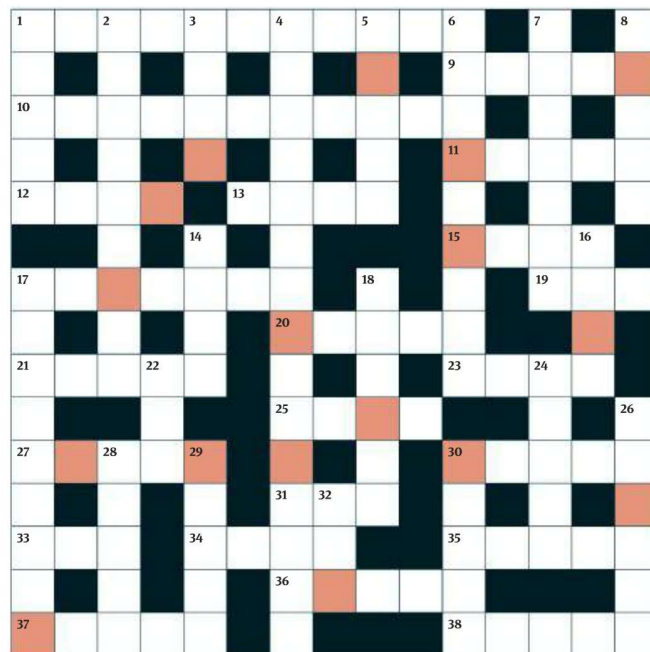
Jaan Uhelszki, Sharon O'Connell and Fiona Sturges may not exactly constitute a Suffragette Army, but their presence in *Uncut*'s pages contradict your claim we have no female writers at all. Jane Suck? Last time I saw her, she'd just passed out in the back of a taxi on our way to Heathrow for a flight to Paris for the launch of a Kraftwerk album. – Allan

ELEPHANT TRAILS

"I'm yet to dig deeper; if anyone can steer me, I'd appreciate it," John Mulvey wrote in his Wild Mercury Sound blog about Elephant Micah on *uncut.co.uk*. Well, John, my personal favourites are *Hindu Windmills*, *Elephant Micah And The Agrarian Malaise* and *Elephant Micah And The Loud Guitars*. The first is very lo-fi, though there are demos floating around that are higher-fidelity. ...*Agrarian Malaise* was the first album of his I fell in love with. You'd have to go the file-sharing route to find ...*Agrarian Malaise* (or shoot an email to Elephant Micah himself), but *Hindu Windmills* is available on his Product Of Palmyra digital store. ...*The Loud Guitars* even features some upbeat rockers.

It's hard to go wrong with any of his albums, though I consider *Exiled Magicians* the weakest.

Ryan Hisner, Middlebury



HOW TO ENTER

The letters in the shaded squares form an anagram of a song by David Bowie. When you've worked out what it is, send your answer to: *Uncut* April 2012 Xword Comp, 9th floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St, London SE1 0SU. The first correct entry picked at random will win the prize. Closing date: March 28, 2012. This competition is only open to European residents.

ACROSS

- 1+18D Macca's smackers heading for Uranus... (6-2-3-6)
9+7D ...or some other planets (5-3-4)
10 Oh, cool video from Hendrix (6-5)
11+17D "Fall for charms of silver, you can fall for charms of gold", 1981 (5-3-6)
12 "Looking for a girl who has no face, she has no _____ number", Traffic (4)
13 Get a taste of The Lemonheads (4)
15 "I won't let you _____ it, I won't let you smother it", "Time Is Running Out" (4)
17 Include Black Crowes album in the scam, or I cash in (7)
19 Abba's music had a message (1-1-1)
20 Television man with bust dolly (5)
21+26D "All I Want For Christmas Is A _____ Away Kit" from Half Man Half Biscuit (6-5)
23 Daniel Blumberg's not so tasty (4)
25 Final outcome for Dr Dog album (4)
27 Yes, John Mellencamp (2-3)
30 Carole _____ Sager had '70s hit with "You're Moving Out Today" (5)
31 "_____, get your plane right on time", from Simon & Garfunkel (3)
33 William in the end completes an Earth, Wind & Fire album (1-2)
34 "Cos you're my sunshine, you're my _____", Oasis, "The Hindu Times" (4)
35 Johnny _____, from one of the first mixed-race bands in South Africa (5)
36 Scorpions vocalist since 1970 – or it's me with an inexperienced start (5)
37 The sound qualities of Bauhaus

- spin-off band _____ On Tail (5)
38 Band whose hits include "We Are The Pigs" and "Trash" (5)

DOWN

- 1+24D Englishman who made album *Matching Head And Feet* (5-5)
2 Tom's crock of Roy Harper (9)
3 A bit of true loyalty from German prog-rock band (4)
4 "Letting the days go by, water flowing underground", 1981 (4-2-1-8)
5 Born John Alder, drummer with Pretty Things and Pink Fairies (5)
6+29D "Sometimes everything is wrong, now it's time to sing along", 1993 (9-5)
7 (See 9 across)
8 Pete _____, from The Loft (5)
14 The flamboyant female singer that is Annie Lennox (4)
16 Northern link for Spencer Davis Group drummer Peter _____ (4)
17 (See 11 across)
18 (See 1 across)
22 Foreigner singer seen in Slough (3)
24 (See 1 down)
26 (See 21 across)
28 "I did my best to notice when the call came down the line", opening line to 2008 hit (5)
29 (See 6 down)
30 Seb Coe loses direction and finds a Mercury Revalbum (5)
32 "Did I disappoint you or leave a bad taste in your mouth?", U2, 1992 (3)

ANSWERS: TAKE 177

ACROSS 1 Last Day Of Summer, 9+24D Radio City, 10 Automatic, 11+16A Let It Bleed, 12 Rosalie, 13+15A The The, 18 Pearl, 21 Burn, 22+26D Idle Race, 25 Stutter, 27

Sinfield, 29 Duke, 31 Emily, 32 Vee, 34+20A La Roux.

DOWN 1+14D Lord Upminster, 2 Sudden, 3 Doolittle, 4+33A Year Zero, 5 Future Blues, 6 Unmasked, 7+23D

Metal Guru, 13 Terrell, 17 Doubt, 19 Atlantis, 28 Dave, 29 Dio, 30 EMA.

HIDDEN ANSWER
"Ramble Tamble"

Compiled by Trevor Hungerford

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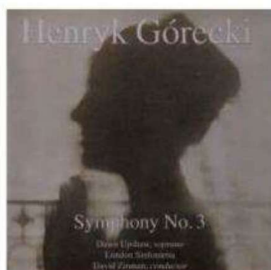
IPC INSPIRE



MY LIFE IN MUSIC

Andrew Bird

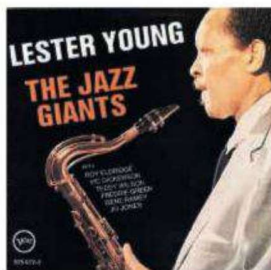
The influences of Americana's renaissance man: classical groovers, blues – and songs about parakeets



The classical record that gave me ideas

Symphony No. 3 1976
Henryk Górecki

I grew up playing classical music and this has been influential in my approach to looping and using the violin. It was a neo-spiritual, modern-music crossover hit, of sorts. It has an almost inaudible beginning – just double basses bowing and building up – but the effect is almost static, like time slowing down. It has a dramatic effect only a few pieces can pull off – a kind of off-tension.



My favourite saxophonist

The Jazz Giants '56 1956
Lester Young

Of all the tenor players, Les Young is my favourite. You don't really hear obvious jazz elements in my music anymore, but in terms of sensibility, phrasing and space, and the way I play, I've evolved more like a tenor player than a violinist. There's less articulation, more a fluid flow of notes, and I think you can hear that on the new record. It's pretty melismatic and out-there.



A song that reminds me how to sing

Too Close 1960
The Staple Singers

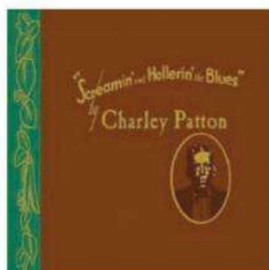
This just kills me every time; listening to it was part of my pre-show ritual for a while – it reminded me of how one should sing. Before a show I don't play my own material, I play a lot of old gospel, blues and early jazz, to connect with the way it's supposed to feel. I got to play with Mavis Staples last year and that was about as good as it gets, for me.



The classical piece that really grooves

String Quartet 1904
Maurice Ravel

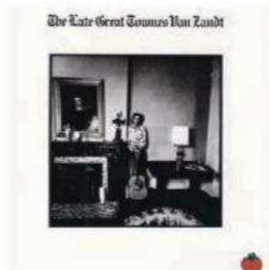
A lot of classical music can sound rhythmically lacking. When I was about 18, this is the first classical piece I played that really rocked. It had this rhythmic propulsion, almost like an African polyrhythm thing, going on. I've always wished I could play fingerstyle guitar, so a lot of the violin loops I've made are somewhere in between African kora and Ravel.



The bluesman I prefer to Robert Johnson

Elder Greene Blues 1929
Charley Patton

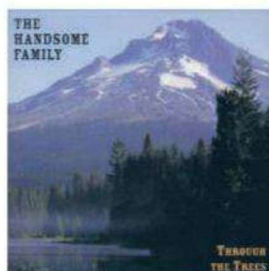
Even before Robert Johnson, Charley Patton was the father of Delta blues. He represents songs that don't quite make sense. He comes from more of a gospel angle and is a little harder to listen to, because the singing's rough and the guitar isn't so sweet. It's not 12-bar blues all the time – it's odd. He'll turn the beat around and just not care, and the lyrics are kind of mysterious.



A song that can distil an emotion

If I Needed You 1972
Townes Van Zandt

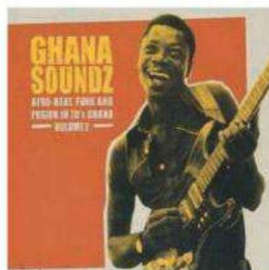
I've been exploring songwriters who really cut to the quick lyrically and can distil an emotion into very few words. This does that. I've listened to about six of his records in quick succession and there are a lot of references to flaxen-haired girls who have a certain kind of eyes... but here he's making a very direct plea to his lover. And I like the last verse, with its reference to his parakeets.



A song that spurs the imagination

Cathedrals 1998
The Handsome Family

Every couple of months, I'll learn a new Handsome Family song and cover it. Their lyrical vagaries really spark the imagination, and this talks about standing in front of Cologne cathedral, observing that it looks like a spaceship and thinking about how long it took to build. Then it goes to a fiberglass castle in Wisconsin, where kids are racing go-karts around a moat.



An album that mixes high-life and funk

Ghana Soundz Vol 2 2007
Various Artists

I like danceable music and this is all late-'60s/early-'70s stuff. A lot of African music is kind of jammy, whereas this is less like Fela Kuti and a little more produced – in a good way. It's where high-life crosses over with western funk, and there's a lot of James Brown-style screaming. Oscar Sulley's "Olufeme" is the song that stands out. It's pure joy, with seemingly effortless grooves.

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A close-up, high-contrast portrait of Michael Kiwanuka, looking slightly down and to the side. The lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting the texture of his skin and the intensity of his expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

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