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1939-2014

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Are we rolling?



IS MANY FANS will no doubt wonder at the absence of anything by Wayne County from the list of Top 50 American punk albums we've compiled as part of this month's cover story on the Ramones. After all, Wayne - who by 1980 was Jayne County, following the necessary surgery - was with his band Queen Elizabeth part of the same Max's Kansas City, Mercer Arts Center and Club 82 scene that nurtured the early New York Dolls. With his subsequent band, Wayne County & The Backstreet Boys, he was a regular at CBGB's and in 1976 appeared in the film *The Blank Generation* that documented the beginning of New York punk that grew around the Bowery venue.

He had to come to London, though, to record an album, after a deal with David Bowie's management went sour, arriving here in March 1977. We met at the Soho digs of Lee Black Childers, who'd worked previously with Bowie and was now managing Johnny Thunders, who Wayne later took me to see at The Roxy, where Johnny was playing with The Heartbreakers. What an entertaining date this turned out to be, especially after we bumped into Speedy Keen of "Something In The Air" and Thunderclap Newman fame. Speedy, who's become a bit of a pal after I wrote something in *Melody Maker* about his first solo album, the little-heard *Previous Convictions*, was just back from recording a new record in America with Little Feat that's never been released and here to see The Heartbreakers prior to producing *LAMF* for Track. Needless to say, things were quickly a blur.

But I digress, not for the first time. Back at Black Childers' pad, Wayne's telling me how much his act's been toned down since a 1972 report in *MM* described a somewhat depraved spectacle. "I've stopped doing the really crazy out-and-out disgusting stuff," he says in a surprisingly sweet Georgia accent. "I used to come onstage, sit on a toilet bowl and simulate a shit and I got a reputation for really shitting onstage!" He sounded aghast that anyone would think him capable of public defecation. "It never happened! That would be disgusting. From the audience, it looked like I was taking a shit. I'd squat on a bowl and then reach into it and bring out this mess that looked like shit but was actually dog food and the audience would go into shock. If they hadn't already left the theatre or the club or whatever, that's when a lot of them would run."

Before forming a band, Wayne was busy in off-Broadway productions, including a couple of things with Patti Smith. "She played the same kind of character she is now: rough butch types. We were in a thing together called *Femme Fatale*, written by Jackie Curtis. It was set in a women's prison. Patti was a gun moll, I was a dyke. In another play, she was a speed freak and I was a transvestite revolutionary. She wasn't in any of my plays. Cherry Vanilla was

in one where she played one of those girls who do it with dead people. Her little dog got run over when she was a little girl and that turned her on. So whenever anyone died in the play she went down on them."

I ask about his association with David Bowie, who Wayne's manager, Peter Crowley, describes as "the evilest person on the planet, completely without a soul". Wayne doesn't want to talk about Bowie, but refers colourfully to the Wayne At The Trucks! stage show, bankrolled by Bowie's management, who paid \$200,000 to make a never-released film of it.

"The Trucks is a very, very depraved area in New York," he says. "There are all these bars where everyone's got short hair and they all dress in leather and have sex shows. Places like The Claw and The Mineshaft, very S&M. People tied to walls and all that. This was a parody of that scene. I had dancers and slaves dressed in leather and chains, with little dildos tied to their whips. There was this huge set with a picture of me with my mouth wide open and for my entrance I'd crawl out of it. It was like I'd been thrown up out of my own mouth."

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INSTANT KARMA!

THIS MONTH'S REVELATIONS FROM THE WORLD OF UNCUT
Featuring THURSTON MOORE | MARC ALMOND | COURTNEY BARNETT





Phil Everly, right, with brother Don, during a shoot for the cover of their Beat & Soul LP, 1965



'A Prince among men'

PHIL EVERLY 1939-2014

PHIL EVERLY WAS destined to spend his life as one half of a greater whole, a phenomenon that came into focus when he and his brother Don went 10 years without communicating. It was a period in which each man made a handful of solo albums. "They were quite good," said Warren Zevon, who had played in their band before the acrimonious split came in 1973, "but together they were divine, sublime."

As the younger brother, Phil acquired the habit of taking his lead from Don. But while the first-born sang lead, came up with the guitar riffs and generally behaved like the dominant partner, it was Phil's high harmony that gave the Everlys the sound that captivated the new generation of teenagers in the late 1950s, when the duo blended the harmonies of Kentucky bluegrass with the look and moves of the new rock'n'roll.

I met Phil in the 1970s, and found him modest, open and immediately likeable. But Pete Wingfield, who played keyboards with the Everlys for 18 years, knew him a great deal better. "I spent hundreds of hours in his company on the tour bus," Wingfield told me a few days after Phil's death from lung cancer, aged 74, on January 3. "He was generous, always appreciative, and a faithful friend. Which philosopher said that the object of existence was to increase the sum of human happiness? He fulfilled that function admirably. Phil was a prince among men."

Wingfield's first appearance with the brothers came at their celebrated reunion concert in 1983, at the Albert Hall in London. He had recently played on "She Means Nothing To Me", Phil's hit duet with Cliff Richard. The Everlys' reunion is as electrifying on film as it was in person. In the final song, "Let It Be Me", the camera catches Phil's

gaze locked on Don's face with an intensity that is still startling. It isn't just the emotion – a 10-year estrangement dissolving in the applause of an adoring audience – although it is that as well. He's watching for clues to Don's phrasing of the melody. "That's how it was," Wingfield said, "right back to the early days, with 'Bye Bye Love'. Don was the leader. He was the older brother. Simple as that."

The dynamic between the two was not straightforward. They may have resembled near-identical twins, despite the two-year gap between them, but if

you look closely now you can see how Don conveyed a sultriness that carried a hint of danger, while the younger brother radiated a sunny, boy-next-door eagerness. "Like a lot of brothers, they were different in character," Wingfield affirmed. "The circumstances of their lives were so unusual: they'd been performing together since they were eight and six years old. So it's hardly surprising that in adulthood they wanted to occupy different spaces. But at the first sign of a threat, they'd form a united front."

Apart, neither achieved anything comparable to their achievements together. Phil's first solo LP, *Star-Spangled Springer*, was produced by Duane Eddy and orchestrated by Zevon, with a cast including James Burton, Buddy Emmons, Victor Feldman, Jim Horn and Earl Palmer. It opened with "The Air That I Breathe", written by Albert Hammond and Mike Hazlewood, but it was The Hollies' later version, more dramatic in its



The Everly Brothers onstage at their reunion show, Royal Albert Hall, London, September 23, 1983

"The circumstances of their lives were so unusual..."

arrangement, that became a hit. The album closes with "Snowflake Bombardier", one of the many songs Phil wrote with his British friend Terry Slater; listen to it now, with its tender vocal, Eddy's delicate acoustic solo and Zevon's watercolour strings, and it's hard to believe the singer's solo career never caught fire. There were more albums, and he had some success with the songs he wrote at Clint Eastwood's behest for the films *Every Which Way But Loose* and *Any Which Way You Can*, but it took the Cliff duet to return him to the charts shortly before he and Don finally answered their fans' prayers by getting back together.

They'd been through a lot, not least appearing on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in their Marine uniforms and buzzcuts during their military service in 1961. That period out of the limelight seemed to break the back of their career. But it was followed by great albums like *Rock'n'Soul*, *Beat & Soul* and *Roots*, and classic singles like "So Sad", "Lucille", "The Ferris Wheel", "Love Is Strange" and "The Price Of Love". Plus, of course, the one many Everly fans found themselves playing after they learnt of Phil's death: "Gone, Gone, Gone". RICHARD WILLIAMS

BEAUTY LIES IN THE HACKNEY!

Moore:
"People
still readin
England..."

N16 Ghosts & Flowers

...In which THURSTON MOORE, patron saint of New York noise, starts a new life in Stoke Newington, northeast London...

REGULAR ATTENDEES OF Café Oto, an experimental music venue in east London's fashionable Dalston, may have noticed a familiar figure wiggling out to the venue's late-night bills of experimental drone or free jazz. Your eyes do not deceive you: that lofty American with the fringe and the glasses really is Thurston Moore, alternative rock godhead and former frontman of Sonic Youth.

Moore is no stranger to London, or indeed to Stoke Newington, the Hackney neighbourhood that he's called home since last June. "I've been coming here since the 1980s, when we first stayed with Richard Boon, proprietor of the New Hormones label, who released the Buzzcocks' 'Spiral Scratch'. Stoke Newington was kind of rough and ready back then, and I had no idea I would return to it in a domestic way," he laughs. "But here I am."

The move was precipitated by a series of upheavals in Moore's life: his separation from wife Kim Gordon, the subsequent dissolution of their band Sonic Youth, and a new relationship. But he was surprised to settle in quickly. "People still read in England and I'm sort of a book-store junkie," he says. "A bookseller last year told me, 'London reveals itself very slowly to people, each in a very unique way.' That really inspired me. I started letting London reveal itself to me – just walking a lot, riding the buses, just being by myself in the streets."

He's still playing with Chelsea Light Moving, who released their self-titled debut album on Matador in 2012. "But it turns out the shows haven't been that busy because no-one knows it's me, there's a sort of obscuring of my name going on," he laughs. "I've tried to change the name to Thurston Moore And Chelsea Light Moving, but it's too late, the name is already ingrained." Concurrently, then, he's founded a local outfit, going by the more straightforward name Thurston Moore UK. Currently, the outfit is just Moore and guitarist James Sedwards, also of the London prog-hardcore group Nought, but the pair plan to expand in unusual directions. "I want someone in a multi-instrumental role, like Andy Mackay in Roxy Music – I like the idea of someone playing low-register horns, but can also pick up a bass guitar, or a drummer who can be more percussion and play like a frame drum for 20 minutes, in a Don Cherry, Steve Reich kind of way."

London's literary underground has inspired Moore to focus on the Ecstatic Peace Library, the art and culture press he runs with co-founder Eva Prinz. Along with Xerox poetry zines and an upcoming book of photos from the *Village Voice* lensman James Hamilton, they've prepared an exhibition and artist's book exploring Stoke Newington's history of radical politics and left-wing activism. It's a history that's also fed the debut seven-inch from

Thurston Moore UK, which is released on London imprint Blank Editions in February. The A-side, "Detonation", is dissonant protopunk sloganeering in a classic Sonic Youth mould, Moore's cries of "revolution greasers" and "wildcat strikes" inspired by the history of the Angry Brigade, an urban guerrilla movement that targeted the banks, embassies and the homes of Conservative MPs with a number of small-scale incendiary devices in the early '70s. Unlike, say, the Baader-Meinhof, they weren't out to kill.

"It was the time of Vietnam, a period of complete economic degradation, a time where people were trying to come to terms with anarchist studies," says Moore. "They were very gestural, trying to draw attention to their own ideology and create a ruckus. It's not quite the Red Army Faction, wiping out pigs with guns."

Modern-day Stoke Newington is not the revolutionary hotbed that it once was. "If it is, it's camouflaged by a fairly active yummy mummy population," laughs Moore. Now, though, it feels like home. "It's an adventure of a sort I haven't had in my life," says Moore. "To be 55 and relocate from a city you lived in since you were 19 is a huge step. But to be in a new environment that's new to you, but very old, with such history – it feels really rich."

LOUIS PATTISON

Thurston Moore's "Detonation" is released by Blank Editions on Feb 7



Courtney Barnett

"My songs take between 30 minutes and three years to finish!"

Recommended this month: a droll and compelling new singer-songwriter – Australia's hardest-working slacker!

When I was over in America doing interviews, I mentioned that I liked The Drones. People were like, 'Who? Never heard of them.' But here in Australia, they're one of the most highly regarded bands..."

Courtney Barnett is struggling to work out this conundrum – exactly why she's being heralded by critics and music fans around the world when some of her favourite ever bands, such as Augie March, You Am I and The Drones, are still struggling to break out of Australia after years together. "I've got no idea why my stuff has seemed to resonate with people. It's good, though," she laughs, on the phone from her Melbourne home, where she's laid up and ill.

It's no wonder Barnett is run down. *The Double EP: A Sea Of Split Peas*, a compilation of her first two self-released records, last year's "I've Got A Friend Called Emily Ferris" and "How To Carve A Carrot Into A Rose", has just come out around the globe, and American and British tour dates beckon – "it's just been go go go," as she says.

The tracks on *A Sea Of Split Peas* elegantly mix effortlessly cool, elongated garage-rock grooves with psych textures, topped with Barnett's wry, narrative songs – most impressive of which is "Avant Gardener", a true story, woozily half-spoken, about the songwriter being rushed to hospital after suffering anaphylactic shock while gardening. "Avant Gardener" is all true," Barnett explains, "apart from the adrenalin to the heart, like in *Pulp Fiction*. I just got adrenalin in the top of

the thigh... But in the heart sounded so much more exciting! Most songs are stories. Some are more elaborate than others. Darren Hanlon's one of my biggest influences – his songs are very story-based.

"People keep mentioning the word 'slacker,'" laughs Barnett, amused at the way a lot of the press

have defined her (though she did cover The Lemonheads' "Being Around" for a recent *NME* session). "Maybe the music sounds like that, but I spend so much time on my songs. And the more complicated they get, like 'Avant Gardener', the more time it takes to fit the perfect amount of syllables into each line. My songs take between 30 minutes and three years to finish!"

Barnett will return to a Melbourne studio in April to record her long-awaited debut album, with a plethora of new songs to choose from. Her live experience has also made her keen to play more lead guitar than she did on her EPs.

"I really enjoy playing with a three-piece onstage. When the first EP came out I was a bit shy onstage, and tried to hide behind other players in the band, but it's kind of fun now playing heaps of guitar.

"I loved playing in the UK last year," Barnett says of her first visit to Britain. "It was pretty exciting, 'cause I've never travelled. I can't wait to spend more time there soon... it's gonna be really cold, though, isn't it?"

I'M YOUR FAN
"She seems to pick away at various forms of herself in a sort of instantly recognisable half-hearted manner which is reflected by the gracefully simple music which she surrounds her words with. Lovely."
Conor O'Brien, Villagers



Courtney Barnett plays London Sebright Arms (Feb 12), London Ace Hotel (Feb 13) and Leicester Musician (May 19). *A Sea Of Split Peas* is out now on House Anxiety/Marathon Artists

THE UNCUT PLAYLIST

ON THE STEREO THIS MONTH...

BONNIE 'PRINCE' BILLY

Bonnie 'Prince' Billy NO LABEL

Will Oldham's latest brilliant wheeze: a striking solo acoustic album, clandestinely released, that's effectively the sequel to 1994's *Days In The Wake*.

THE WAR ON DRUGS

Lost In The Dream SECRETLY CANADIAN

Adam Granduciel steers his Springsteen-gone-cosmic band towards ever greater heights. "Seven-minute Kraut jammers for late-night driving on the highway" proliferate.

DAMON ALBARN

Everyday Robots PARLOPHONE

Dan Abnormal's long-awaited solo debut proper: a delicate, understated and personal document that expands on the aesthetic of Blur's "Out Of Time".

HANS CHEW

Life & Love AT THE HELM

Generally shitkicking action on the inspired piano man's second solo LP; like James Booker inducted into an NYC rocker gang, loosely.



ENDLESS BOOGIE

Live At Tusk Festival 2013

www.soundcloud.com

Titans of the heavy jam bring the ruckus to Newcastle-Upon-Tyne for a steamrollering live set.

ELBOW

The Take Off And Landing Of Everything

FICTION

A merciful absence of Olympics-highlights anthems this time, as Guy Garvey and co privilege their proggish, everybloke-does-Spiritualized side.

JOHNNY CASH

Out Among The Stars SONY

A clutch of lost 1980s sessions with Billy Sherrill provide a strong opportunity to reassess Cash's 'wilderness' years before Rick Rubin.

DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS

English Oceans ATO

The Southern institution's 10th album turns out to be their most rocking, Stonesiest set in years, with Mike Cooley in the ascendant.

PYE CORNER AUDIO

Black Mill Tapes Vol 3 & 4 TYPE

Faintly spooked, highly potent electronica in the vein of Boards Of Canada and early Aphex Twin. Sample title: "Dystopian Vector".

NEIL YOUNG

Live At Carnegie Hall 7/1/14 BOOTLEG

Yes, of course we've been listening to solo Neil boots all month. Night Two in New York seems to be the pick... "On The Way Home"!

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

"Things have really come together..."
Almond in 2013

NO HANGING AROUND

Non-Stop Eclectic Cabaret

Collaborations with Tony Visconti and Jarvis Cocker, "lustrous pop" albums, classical crossovers – and even an '80s revival... MARC ALMOND's hectic 2014

I AM A workaholic," Marc Almond admits. "If I look in my diary and it's empty, I start to freak out."

Even by his own standards, 2013 was a feverishly creative year and now, the first fruits of that industry are about to appear. In February, Almond will release two records, *The Tyburn Tree* – which

is his second collaboration with contemporary classical composer John Harle – and a four-track EP partly produced by Tony Visconti and featuring songs written by Jarvis Cocker and Carl Barât, both of whom also guest. A brand new solo LP, co-written and produced by Lana Del Rey and Britney Spears collaborator Chris Braide is

finished and due out in summer; called *The Velvet Trail*, it's described by Almond as "very posh, lustrous pop". In addition, there are UK tours with both Harle and Jools Holland, a couple of ['80s festival] Rewind dates, possibly a free show in support of Record Store Day and "maybe a special showcase in Los Angeles with Chris. It's early in the year yet," Almond concedes, "but I'm filling up the diary with as many interesting things as possible."

Clearly, lolling about on his '80s synth-pop laurels doesn't appeal. "I just need a challenge," Almond says, simply. "It's being conscious that you're getting older – I'm 56 now – and are in the latter scenes of your life. I don't want to be morbid, but I do feel driven. It took me a good few years to recover physically and mentally from the [2007 motorcycle] accident, so after I did I was determined to really work on things to enliven my mind and challenge me, and to never stop. I thought that the only thing that was going to get me through it was being stoic, and work. I did feel like I'd been given another chance and I didn't want to waste it. It's a terribly corny cliché, but it is true."

Another part of this year's workload is the consolidating of Almond's back catalogue. After "a lengthy and emotionally exhausting battle", in 2013 he finally reclaimed the rights, so a run of reissues in special packaging is planned, with extra tracks so that "people can capture the essential Marc Almond, if you like". Rewind is another way of acknowledging his past and provides a balance to his more challenging and serious projects. "I avoided them for years and years, but someone asked me to do it, so I decided to just dip my toe in – I wasn't sure I wanted to be part of this '80s experience. But it was 60,000 people singing along to every song and I really enjoyed it. I don't do them every year, but I kind of look forward to them now," he admits.

"The past couple of years have been great in that things have really come together and I feel I've reached this... place. I hate the term 'elder statesman of pop' and I hate 'national treasure', too. A national treasure is either something really valuable and beautiful that you put on display or it's a mouldy old relic that you put in a box and lock away." Almond laughs delightedly: "But I can be both on different days, I suppose!"

SHARON O'CONNELL

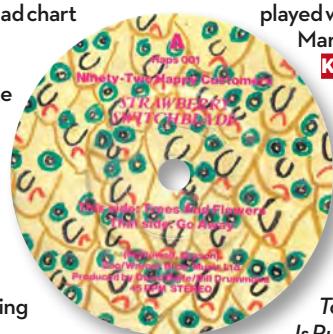


Kate St John

AND ON WOODWIND... KATE ST JOHN

UNCUT'S GUIDE TO ROCK'S GREATEST SESSION PLAYERS

► St John started her career with The Ravishing Beauties in the early '80s and had chart success in 1985 with "Life In A Northern Town" as part of The Dream Academy. In the '90s she worked with Van Morrison, made two solo albums and one with Roger Eno. Recently she has been musical director for Way To Blue: The Songs Of Nick Drake, A Wainwright Family Christmas, Rogues Gallery: Sea Shanties, An Evening Of Political Song for Richard Thompson's Meltdown, Bright Phoebe



Revisited, Hal Willner's Nino Rota tribute and played with Tom Waits' Black Rider and Marianne Faithfull's band.

KEY SESSIONS: Strawberry Switchblade's "Trees And Flowers", Julian Cope's *World Shut Your Mouth*, Fried and Saint Julian, Tears For Fears' *The Seeds Of Love*, Kirsty MacColl's *Titanic Days*, Van Morrison's *No Guru, No Method, No Teacher, Hymns To The Silence*, Blur's *Modern Life Is Rubbish*, The Waterboys' *An Appointment With Mr Yeats*. PHIL KING

A QUICK ONE

➤ Heartening reunion news this month, after Mick Fleetwood lets slip during a Hawaii solo show that Christine McVie had formally rejoined Fleetwood Mac. In other good news, John McVie, who was diagnosed with cancer last October, returned to the stage at the band's Las Vegas shows on December 30 and 31.

➤ While Robert Plant draws the flak for avoiding Led Zep reunions, John Paul Jones' career becomes, on the quiet, ever more esoteric. *Cloud To Ground*, a remorselessly avant-garde album by his new band, *Minibus Pimps*, is due March 3.

➤ An intriguing distaff take on British punk is scheduled for June, when Faber will publish *Clothes, Clothes, Clothes. Music, Music. Boys, Boys, Boys*, a memoir by Slits guitarist Viv Albertine. "An unflinching account of a life lived on the frontiers of experience," promises the blurb.

➤ And in *Uncut* news... We'll be hosting our usual stage at The Great Escape festival in Brighton this May 8-10. Early Bird 3-day tickets are still available for £45... Our latest *Ultimate Music Guide*, on Lou Reed, is now in the shops (£7.99)... and www.uncut.co.uk is busier than ever. News, reviews, archive features – it's all there...



Same Nashville, Different Country!

Introducing the radical new faces of mainstream country, KACEY MUSGRAVES and BRANDY CLARK...

THET TWO BIGGEST hits in last year's US country singles charts offer a brief education in what's currently going on at the genre's poppier end. Luke Bryan's "That's My Kinda Night" spent 12 weeks at No 1; male duo Florida Georgia Line's "Cruise" 19. Both slickly rustic songs identify happiness as luring lithe women into their trucks for joyrides, backseat loving and maybe a hand-caught catfish dinner. It's harmless fun, but perhaps not a wooing technique that's particularly relatable outside of the intended heartland audience.

A touch further down those charts, however, are solo records by two Nashville women who have made an impact beyond the genre by defying mainstream country tropes and values, marrying the country-politan gimlet eye flashed by Neko Case and Kathleen Edwards to yearning banjo and steel-licked pop.

Same Trailer, Different Park is the fourth album by Kacey Musgraves, but her first to gain real attention. The 25-year-old East Texan's 2012 single "Merry Go 'Round" lit the touch-paper, surprising listeners with its provocative lyrics: "If you ain't got two kids by 21/You're probably gonna die alone/Least that's what tradition told you," she sang over feathery banjo. One DJ told Musgraves it was in fact an "anti-country song", but she insisted that it was "an anti-small-mind song, anti-settling".

Musgraves described her MO to NPR as, "If you don't have something to say, or somewhat of a point of view, then what do you have?" Country pop megalith Taylor Swift (a Neil Young favourite) paved the way for young country stars to sing to their peers, but Musgraves pushes that further, honing an astute voice that calls out the contradictions inherent in marriage, religion and home with youthful impatience. "A label's typical plan would be to put something out that's safer, then push buttons," she told *The New York Times*, "but my idea is to push buttons

first, scare off the people who are gonna be scared off, and then the right people will like you for who you really are."

It's a philosophy she preaches on "Follow Your Arrow": "Kiss lots of boys/Or kiss lots of girls if that's something you're into/When the straight and narrow/Gets a little too straight/Roll up a joint, or don't." Musgraves co-wrote the song with friend and peer Brandy Clark, who last year released her own debut, *12 Stories*. 38-year-old Clark is another anomaly in country pop: an openly gay woman who spent 16 years writing on Nashville's Music Row before releasing her own music, which sounds richer and more bittersweet than that of Musgraves.

"I got it in my head that my goal was to write songs for people who didn't write songs," Clark told NPR. "Somebody working at a bank or checking out groceries. It took me to a great place because I never tire of that perspective." Most of *12 Stories* empathises with put-upon housewives, a worldview Clark uses to get away with murder – or at least contemplate it. "Stripes" is a mordantly funny song about resisting killing an unfaithful husband because the threat of prison uniform is too unbearable: "There's no crime of passion worth a crime of fashion."

Not blessed by religious or financial salvation, her characters rarely bemoan their lot, but their actions show how constricting the Bible Belt can be. On "Pray To Jesus", a churchgoer checks her scratchcard numbers; later she watches floors tick by with the same nervous anticipation as she takes the lift to a rendezvous on "What'll Keep Me Out Of Heaven" – admitting that at least her married man will "take [her] there tonight".

Neither Musgraves nor Clark's songs detail abject triumph or destitution, but everyday moments where the women in their songs find their salvation in smoking, kicking heels to the curb – and the catharsis of humour and self-expression. LAURA SNAPES

THE ANTI-SEX PISTOLS CLUB!... How to buy the New Country

KACEY MUSGRAVES *Same Trailer, Different Park*

MERCURY, 2013
After coming seventh on TV's *Nashville Star* in 2007, Musgraves eschewed the easy road to stardom by speaking her mind on *Same Trailer...*, slowly changing country in the process.

BRANDY CLARK

12 Stories SLATE CREEK, 2013
While a song like "Stripes" shows off Clark's comic range, much of *12 Stories* portrays tough women dealing with sad lives – on "Hungover", a woman musters up the courage to leave her husband.

PISTOL ANNIES

Annie Up RCA, 2013
Musgraves and Clark have both written for Miranda Lambert who, along with Angaleena Presley and Ashley Monroe, are Pistol Annies. Their self-written *Annie Up* is by turns bawdy, indignant and poignant.

ASHLEY MONROE

Like A Rose WARNER BROS, 2013
Monroe is also shaking off country's piousness for genuinely funny songs about being unmarried, pregnant and late with the rent, and forsaking clichéd romantic trappings for narcotics and danger.

HEY! HO! LET'S GO!

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Your guide to
this month's
free CD

1 MUTUAL BENEFIT

Golden Wake

A gentle start this month, courtesy of Jordan Lee, a peripatetic US singer-songwriter, and his loose collective of musicians. "Golden Wake" is a highlight of Mutual Benefit's first conventionally distributed album, *Love's Crushing Diamond*, typical of their discreetly ornate chamber folk. It may be wise to keep an eye on Lee; potentially, a next-generation Sufjan Stevens.

2 KARL SMITH

Hang Our Bodies

In a similar vein to Mutual Benefit, Aussie indie vet Karl Smith has been finessing his tender music for almost two decades now, mostly as a key part of Sodastream. "Hang Our Bodies" comes from the nervy singer's first solo LP, *Kites*, a baroque fantasia of strings, horns, piano and surprisingly crunchy guitar.

3 STEPHEN MALKMUS AND THE JICKS

Lariat

Not much explication needed for this guy, though it's worth pointing out that a) Malkmus is interviewed at length on page 22; and b) *Wig Out At Jagbags* is one of his best LPs, solo or with Pavement, not least because of the loose and infectious "Lariat". A heroic achievement to reference the Dead, Mudhoney, Sun City Girls and Bongwater in the space of two lines, too.

4 DUM DUM GIRLS

Lost Boys And Girls Club

Dee Dee Penny's earlier Dum Dum Girls records betrayed a strong love of 30-year-old noise pop. But her

comeback, *Too True*, feeds those influences through a glossier '80s wall of sound, so that "Lost Boys And Girls Club" resembles Simple Minds as much as The Jesus And Mary Chain. An intriguing blend.

5 D CHARLES SPEER AND THE HELIX

Cretan Lords

Serious players on New York's roots rock and avant-psych scenes, Dave Shuford (aka D Charles Speer) and his band (including master piano man Hans Chew) return with a typically heady brew from their latest LP, *Doubled Exposure*. In the mix on "Cretan Lords": exuberant country rock, cosmic tinges and, as the title promises, plenty of Shuford's Greek-style picking.

6 DEATH VESSEL

Isla Drown

Joel Thibodeau's androgynous vocals have previously been heard mostly in a folkish context. Here, though – in a key excerpt from his third album, *Island Intervals* – the Death Vessel singer is placed in a fluttering, atmospheric new context by auspicious new collaborators, namely Sigur Rós' Jónsi Birgisson (who co-writes and duets) and producer Alex Somers. Recorded in Iceland, conspicuously.

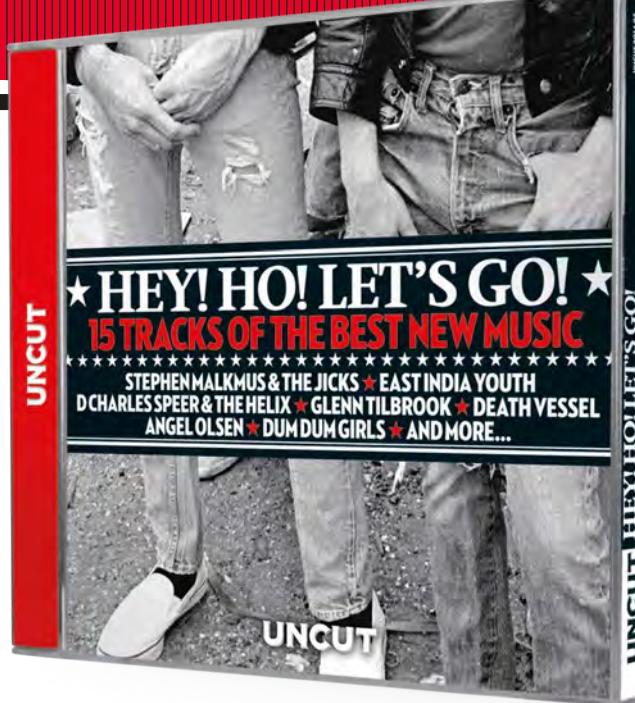
7 ANGEL OLSEN Hi-Five

A little classic from the former Will Oldham backup singer's second LP, *Burn Your Fire For No Witness* (reviewed on page 81). "Hi-Five" lends Olsen's fine voice – at once dramatic but unfussy, somehow – to a racket hybrid of country slouch and rampant fuzz guitar. "Are you lonely too?": great stuff!

8 TOM BROSSEAU

Today Is A Bright New Day

A prolific, underrated player from Grand Forks, North Dakota, Tom Brosseau is a singer-songwriter in the classic mould. In fact, "Today Is A Bright New Day", from his latest solo set, *Grass Punks*, wouldn't have sounded too out of place on the soundtrack to *Inside Llewyn Davis*.



9 MARISSA NADLER

Drive

Boston's Nadler is a generally unheralded forerunner of currently acclaimed singers like Sharon Van Etten, Jessica Pratt, Torres and, indeed, Angel Olsen. "Drive", from her seventh LP *July*, shows how, being candlelit folk with a slightly eerie, disorienting undertow.

10 GLENN TILBROOK

Peter

Word is that Squeeze are back in the studio, cutting songs to accompany a TV version of Danny Baker's autobiography. In the meantime, here's a typically vivid piece of storytelling from Tilbrook's *Happy Ending*, his first solo LP since 2009, in which a gullible schoolboy falls in with a gang of older shoplifters.

11 EAST INDIA YOUTH

Dripping Down

Much of William Doyle's impressive debut as East India Youth, *Total Strife Forever*, locates him as a dramatic techno composer in the vein of Jon Hopkins. "Dripping Down", however, shows even more noteworthy talents, as Doyle feeds Beach Boys harmonies and a catchy, Panda Bear-like pop song into his expansive soundscape.

12 CHRIS ECKMAN

Many Moons

A stalwart of latterday Americana, Chris Eckman has recently built a

new rep as producer and collaborator with Tuareg desert rockers like Tamikrest. "Many Moons" and its parent album *Harney County*, however, find Eckman back on home territory, mapping the backroads of a lonely part of Oregon with the gritty precision he brought to so many notable Walkabouts records.

13 MORGAN DELT

Little Zombies

A follow-up to the possibly obscure cassette EP "Psychic Death Hole", Delt's first longplayer is the latest winning artefact to emerge from the burgeoning new Cali psych scene. *Morgan Delt* features much antique ramalam but, as "Little Zombies" shows, also showcases Delt's talent for ethereal whimsy, in the same vague orbit as early Pink Floyd.

14 HARD WORKING

AMERICANS

Welfare Music

More robust stuff, this, as you might expect from a band called Hard Working Americans. They are, it transpires, an Americana supergroup of sorts, fronted by Todd Snider and featuring the ace Neal Casal on guitar. Those of you on tenterhooks for the forthcoming Drive-By Truckers set could do worse than check the eponymous album of covers (this one's a Bottle Rockets song, incidentally).

15 SNOWBIRD

Porcelain

"Porcelain" is a suitably precious title for this month's lovely closer; a sepulchral highlight of Stephanie Dosen and Simon Raymonde's recent *Moon*, and one which is more or less impossible to write about without reference to Raymonde's gilded old band, the Cocteau Twins. All hail the new spangle-makers!

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SUZANNE VEGA

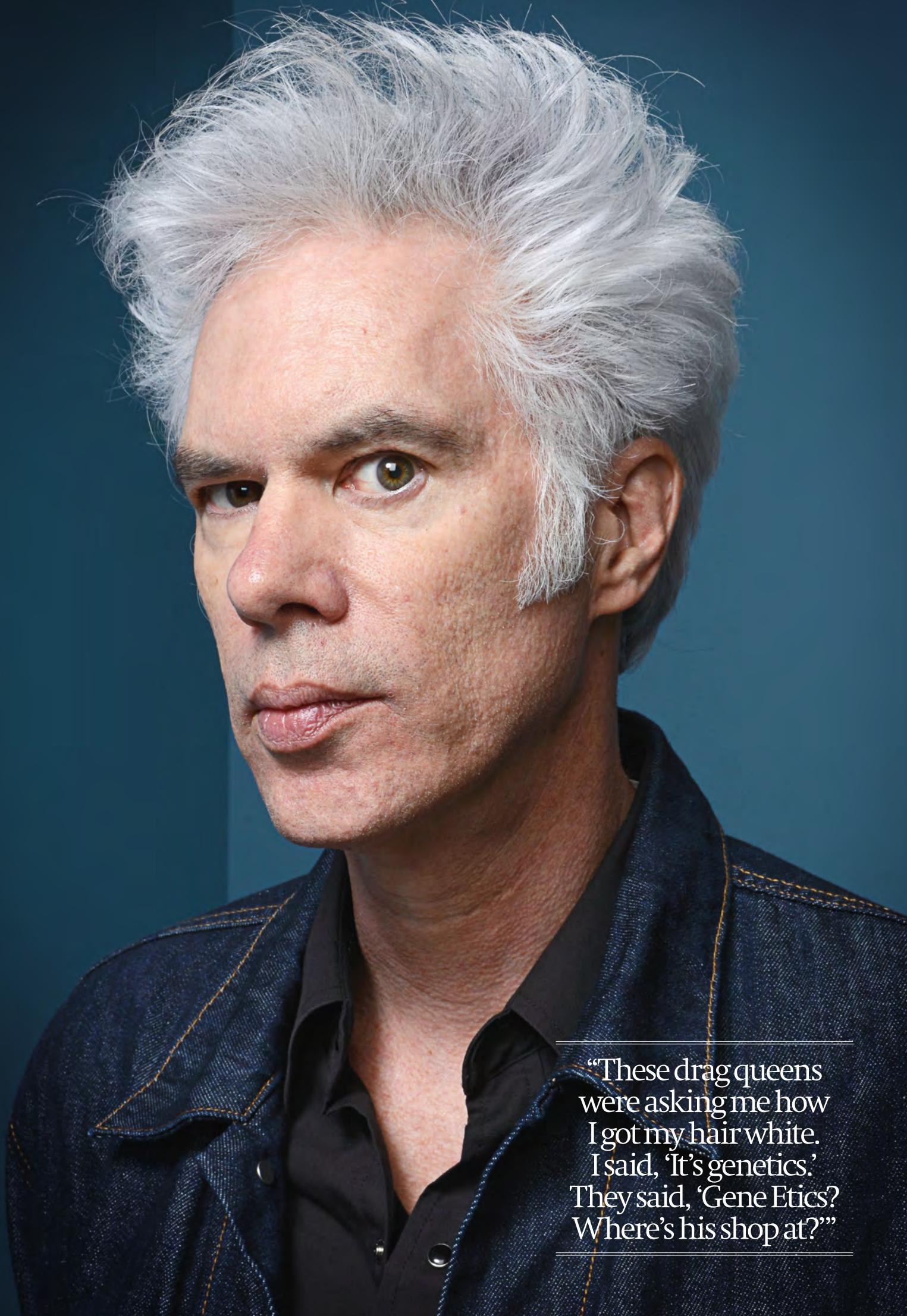
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“These drag queens
were asking me how
I got my hair white.
I said, ‘It’s genetics.’
They said, ‘Gene Etics?
Where’s his shop at?’”

interesting. When did I first meet Joe? In the early '80s. Lots of mutual friends, especially in New York. I also met Mick and Paul, who I remain friends with, and Don Letts, I'm a godfather to his children. I love Joe so much, I'm still mad at him for being gone. Apparently with his heart condition, he could have gone at any moment in his life. When you think what that guy left and gave to us all, it's staggering. RIP Joe. What an amazing gift he was.

STAR QUESTION



Speaking glacially; how do you morally react to the retraction of great glaciers in Greenland, Iceland, Alaska, Montana, etc? Do these phenomena and the global warming theory affect you when producing your films or music?

Stephen O'Malley, Sunn O)))
Wow. I don't know if they do consciously, but they are of course a concern. When I get depressed about the state of the Earth and human activity, I try to remember that all life on Earth in universe time is a fraction of a second. So the fact that we are here at all with a consciousness is such a strange and rare gift in the universe that I try to cling to that. While these phenomena affect us all, I'm not sure I'm conscious of it while producing a film or music. When you're making a movie, you have so little time and you are working so hard that the rest of the world drops away. You have to shut off your mind to a lot of things to get your work done. I wonder how Stephen would answer that. Maybe the glacial movement retraction, the speed itself, is an influence itself on the speed of Stephen's music.

What was the first album you ever bought?

Carrie, Los Angeles

It was *Out Of Our Heads* or 12x5. Before that, I didn't have money for albums, so I bought singles. Some Beach Boys singles, Stones singles, maybe a Them single. Oh, and Jan & Dean's "The Little Old Lady From Pasadena". Bought in the suburbs of Akron, Ohio, where I'm from.

You worked with Jack White on a number of occasions. How did you guys first meet?

Sheena Bruen, Oxford

I got to go back to say hello after a fairly early White Stripes show in New York. Then when they came back to town again I got to see them again, then we went out to dinner. A cumulation of encounters. I was



Jarmusch with Strummer circa '93: "RIP Joe. What an amazing gift he was..."

playing the MTV Awards with The Raconteurs and Jack was allowed to pick three guests as he was in charge of the background band. He asked Lou Reed, Billy Gibbons and me. I got to hang out backstage with Billy talking about everything you can imagine. Dadaism, the history of pinstriping on custom cars, the guy is amazing. I didn't get to hang out with Lou that night. Came and went like a ghost. Ah... I was honoured to go to the memorial on Monday night at the Apollo which was moving, to say goodbye to Lou.

Music enters early in the writing process. I'm listening to a lot of music and I use it as a guide for the atmosphere of what I'm imagining. I don't watch films usually when I'm writing at all. So it's the music that guides me and gives me inspiration. There are times when I've found songs during the editing, but I haven't changed course in terms of the score or background. Obviously, I don't know exactly what it's going to be, but I have a musician in mind even while I'm writing the script.

"The Clash embraced everything and the Pistols were beautifully reductive... this is all we need!"

STAR QUESTION



Music plays an important role in many of your films. At what part of the writing process does music become an influence? Have you changed direction in a story after hearing a particular song or artist?

Ripley Johnson, Wooden Shjips

When was the last meeting of The Sons Of Lee Marvin? Have there been any new members recently?

Alison Moore, Glasgow
I can't answer these questions. It's part of the rules. All I can say is the organisation is in full existence. If I tell you anymore, you don't want to suffer the consequences. You could have members appearing at your home, and that's not what you want. Where did the idea come from? Years ago, I had an idea, a

silly idea for a film where John Lurie, Tom Waits and another character were three brothers who did not get along at all – this was the story – and their father was a recluse, semi-alcoholic, but a very intelligent, gruff guy living out in nowhere, with a bottle and a shotgun. He summons them – I don't remember why – so it was a story where the three sons came to see their cranky, difficult father. I wanted the father to be Lee Marvin. Then we lost him. But the organisation existed in spite of the fact the film never did, and it had more members than could ever look physically like Lee Marvin's son.

Where can we see your doc about Joe Strummer making the OST of the Sara Driver movie *When Pigs Fly*? *Paolo Falossi, via email*

It is available. There's a boxset of Sara Driver's films, *Driver X 4*, available from Films We Like, which is a Canadian company of the great documentary maker Ron Mann, who made *Grass* and lots of interesting films on the Twist, ukuleles and *Know Your Mushrooms*. It's all footage that I shot while Joe was recording at Rockfield in Wales. They were working, working, working, and I was just sneaking around, filming some things here and there.

Why the umlaut on SQÜRL?

Ben Chester, Berlin

It's an American affectation of heaviness. We had a funny thing happen where a friend, who speaks some European languages, said, "The umlaut over the 'u' is pronounced 'Squeerl'." So I went and told Shane [Stoneback] and Carter [Logan], "My friend said it should be pronounced 'Squeerl'." They said, "Oh, really? Tell your friend it's an American affectation and would he say 'Meeterhead', 'Blue Eester Cult' and 'Meetley Creeeu'?" So that's my answer.

You have great hair. What's your secret? *David, Swindon*

It's just genetics. Hair genetics. I had a funny thing when I was young and my hair was turning white, these drag queens on the subway were saying, "Man, how did you get your hair like that? Did you dye each hair white?" I said, "It's genetics." They said, "Gene who? Gene Etics? Where's his shop at?" Never mind. I couldn't explain. ☺

Only Lovers Left Alive is out Feb 21; the OST is out Feb 17 on ATP Recordings

 **UNCUT.CO.UK**
Log on to see who's in the hot-seat next month and to post your questions!

AN AUDIENCE WITH...

Jim Jarmusch

Interview:
Michael Bonner
Photograph:
Larry Busacca

The film director on Joe Strummer, Robert Mitchum, fighting Tom Waits, and upsetting Neil Young: "I thought he might burn psychic rays through my skull!"

IT'S A BUSY time for Jim Jarmusch right now. As the director explains, not only is he about to release his latest movie – *Only Lovers Left Alive* – he is also putting the finishing touches to the accompanying soundtrack, recorded by his band SQÜRL and lute player Jozef Van Wissem. Of course, Jarmusch is a man of many disciplines, equally at home curating a day at ATP as he is working with actors like Johnny Depp or Bill Murray. Indeed, our conversation touches on his involvement in film and music – whether it be directing Robert Mitchum in one of his last screen roles or locking Tom Waits in a car park. As Jarmusch – a longtime *Uncut* subscriber – tells us, "I love talking about anything. I like these questions!"

STAR QUESTION



Can you tell the story about Neil Young working on the *Dead Man* soundtrack, when you were outside the sound booth, and there were "production concerns". *Kurt Vile*

OK, Kurt's going to get me in trouble here. We were recording the score in a warehouse in San Francisco with a remote truck outside. We mic'd the room in various places for Neil to use primarily electric guitar, but he could also use acoustic or an organ he had. There were screens set up around in a circle so that Neil could record to the picture while the film was playing. It was a rough cut. Neil wanted the dialogue of the film audible to himself. I was worried it

was going to bleed into the music so that we couldn't move the music later. When Neil had left the room, I said to Jay Rabinowitz, the editor, "Man, this isn't going to work. It's going to bleed and we'll never be able to move it. I've got to tell him, what do I do?" Then Neil walks back in, walks right up to me and looks right through my skull, saying, "I heard what you said. I was out in the truck. You know the whole room is mic'd, man? Just loosen up. Don't worry about it. If the score is good, you won't want to move it. Don't worry about the technical shit, let me do my thing." In the end, he was right, because we didn't move it. The music landed where Neil played it. But there was a scary moment when I thought Neil might burn psychic rays through my skull. He's an intense character.

You've directed promo videos for musicians – Neil Young, Tom Waits, among them. Do you consider a promo as a film in miniature? *Chris Parker, Leeds*
I used to, but I got into a fight with Tom Waits when we were making

one for his song, "I Don't Wanna Grow Up". He wanted me to cut it differently, and I said, "But it's like a film I'm making, Tom," and he said, "No, it's a commercial for the song. If people are watching TV, I don't want them changing channel. If you can pop this crazy image in earlier, it would help this, that, blah blah blah." We had a big fight in which I locked him in an enclosed parking lot behind a metal door in LA in the middle of the night. He was pounding on the door. I vividly remember the insult, which no-one has ever said to me again. He yelled through the door: "God damn it, Jim, I'm going to glue your hair to the wall." At which point I let him back in. It was a fight between friends. We reconciled.

STAR QUESTION



How did you end up casting Sonic Youth's first drummer, Richard Edson, and John Lurie – known mainly as downtown musicians – as actors in *Stranger Than Paradise*? *Lee Ranaldo, Sonic Youth*

I cast them because they were my friends. I knew them from the music scene. John became an important part of my early films. He was in my first film, too, *Permanent Vacation*. And he was very important in *Stranger...* The initial short version of the film, the first third, was a story he and I cooked up together.

In *Dead Man*, you cast Robert Mitchum in one of his last film roles. Was he easy to work with? *Andy Roberts, Tyne & Wear*
He was generous and easy to work

with as long as you didn't change the dialogue you gave him in advance. His manager, or the person who came with him while we worked, took me aside because I wanted to change a line, and he said, "Mr Mitchum does NOT improvise." So I said, "I just want to go in his trailer and ask him to change one line." He said, "Well, good luck." I went in there and told him I wanted to flip some words, and I said, "I'm sorry to do this to you." And Mitchum said, "You're sorry? That's what they said to Gary Gilmore, isn't it?" He was funny and self-deprecating. We'd do a take and I'd say, "That was good, let's do one more." He'd say, "Oh, at least." He told me a lot of amazing stories and I wish I could do an interview just to talk about those.

A few years ago, you mentioned a series of essays you were doing on The Clash. Were these being done with a view to making them public? And knowing, and having worked with Joe Strummer, have you any interest in working on a biopic? *Ray Burke, Offaly, Ireland*

I was preparing a series of essays, some of which I began, which were all in the form of 'versus'. In other words, it would be Clash vs Pistols, Keaton vs Chaplin, Duchamp vs Warhol. They were comparisons of artists or groups that I loved. I had Tesla vs Einstein, these kind of things. I did write a Clash vs Pistols, but I never published any of them. It was an idea to make a whole book of this nonsense. Maybe better it wasn't. The Clash embraced everything, they were open, and the Pistols were beautifully reductive... this is all we need. I love them both, but their differences were very



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Q: What links *Blonde On Blonde*, *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary & Thyme*, *At Folsom Prison*, *Songs Of Love And Hate* and *Fog On The Tyne*?

A: The irrepressible BOB JOHNSTON.

“Don’t ever quit – don’t stop playing. If you do, don’t come back!”

Story: John Robinson

Photograph: Al Clayton

SUCH IS HIS irrepressible nature, Bob Johnston can’t stop himself from sharing a good story – even when he’s declining an interview and is on the point of putting the phone down. You’re calling from England? He knows about England.

“Guy stood on the front steps of my house in Nashville on a Sunday night,” he says. “Tells me he’s got a group in England who he wants me to record. He says to me, ‘I have a castle in Crowborough. If you record the group, and get them to 99 on the charts, you can come and live in the castle for a month...’

“I said, ‘Can I really? What will you give me if I get them a No 1?’ He said, ‘You can stay there a year.’ So I went over to England and recorded Lindisfarne for *Fog On The Tyne*...”

He pauses, recalling his meeting with Charisma Records boss Tony Stratton-Smith and this commission as a freelance producer. This was 1971 – after Johnston had spent several years recording artists like Simon & Garfunkel, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen and Johnny Cash. For all his time spent as head of Columbia in Nashville, and his other successes, you can tell the 81-year-old Texan still enjoys the punchline of the tale.

“They went to No 1,” he says triumphantly. “And I moved into the castle.”

But he’s not interested in talking right now. He’s got a book coming out, and doesn’t want “too many versions of himself” out there at the same time. That, however, seems impossible. A man of warm regards and bitter enmities; who has rubbed shoulders with the greats while never hoping for their glory; a man, what’s more, whose fantastically tall stories all turn out to be true, there is, quite simply, only one Bob Johnston.

CHARLIE MCCOY, THE multi-instrumentalist who played on every Bob Dylan album from 1965 to 1970, recalls his first recording with Dylan as an apparently completely accidental event. When McCoy was in New York for a visit, Nashville pal Bob Johnston arranged for him to go and see a Broadway show. Johnston suggested he drop by the Columbia

“I didn’t get Dylan to come to Nashville... You couldn’t make him do anything!”
Bob Johnston



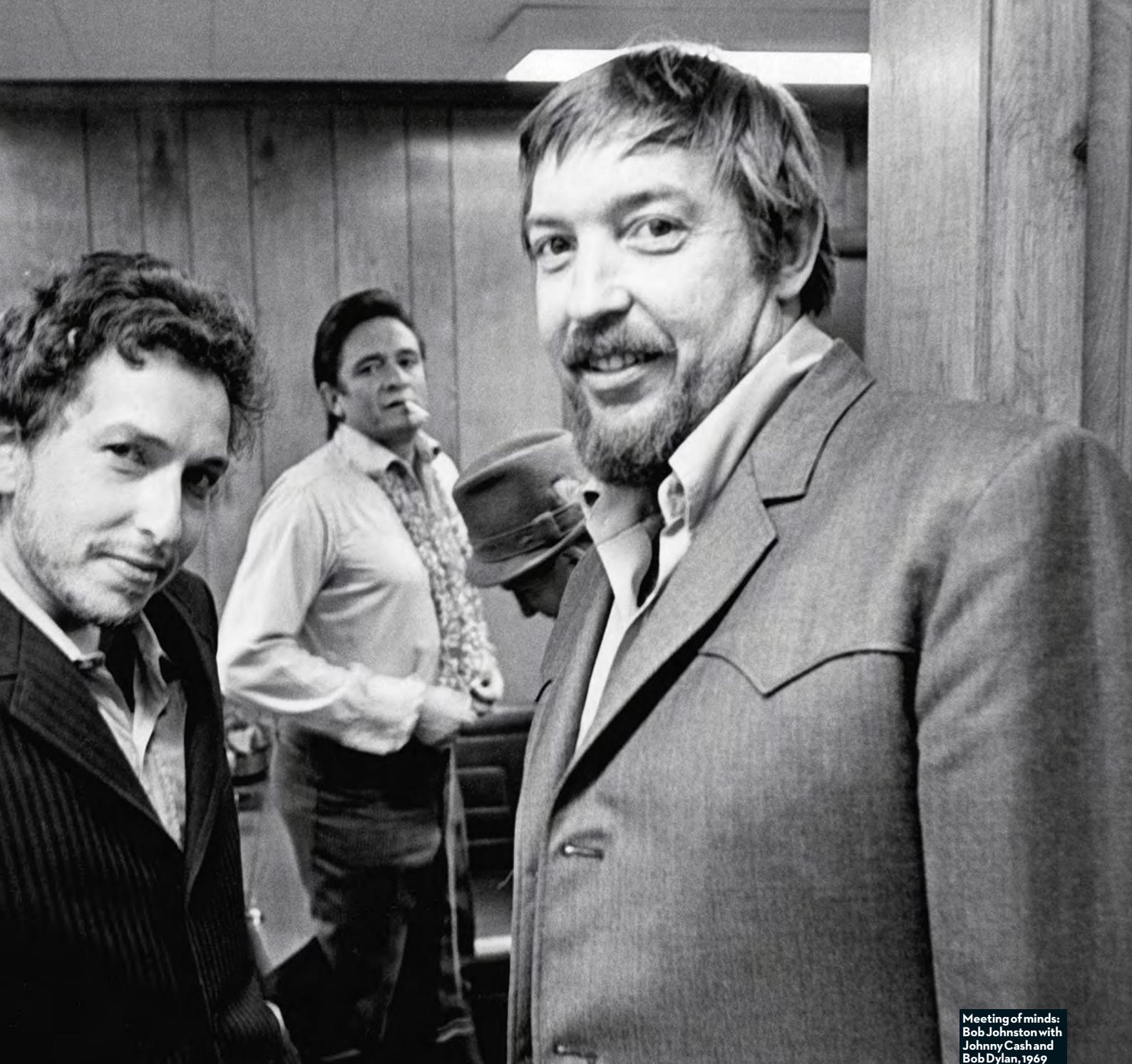
studios on 51st Street to pick up the tickets.

“He introduced me to Dylan,” recalls Charlie today, “and he said to me, ‘I’m getting ready to record a song, why don’t you pick up that other guitar and play?’ We had time for one take, one playback and then the bass player left for another session. And that was ‘Desolation Row’.”

Bob Johnston has historically explained his role as a producer in terms of staying out of the way of the artist and what they have to communicate. He has no respect for those who leech off or otherwise obstruct talent. That might be a business executive. Equally, it might be a lesser artist. In New York, Bob recorded Simon & Garfunkel.

“Don’t kid yourself,” he says today. “It was Paul Simon. I wanted Simon to do the harmony too – I think that would have been better than Artie. But they had been at high school together. Artie never did like me very much.”

Some of Johnston’s key recordings – say, Dylan’s *Nashville Skyline* – are indeed remarkable for their documentary veracity (vis, “...is it rolling, Bob?”).



Meeting of minds:
Bob Johnston with
Johnny Cash and
Bob Dylan, 1969

But staying out of the way doesn't remotely cover the subtle placing of musicians together in environments, the ear for arrangement, and behind the scenes horse-fixing that goes into a Johnston recording. His emphatic fulfillment of the producer's brief is a character game.

Indeed, when Bob finally agrees to this interview, *Uncut* discovers that he doesn't so much converse, as pinball between fruity stories involving marquee names; chronology a distant consideration to strong impressions. Our call is periodically interrupted by loud electronic tones. During vexatious recollections of, let us say, a music business legend like Clive Davis, Johnston's fury will actively censor his torrent of profanity, as he involuntarily increases his stranglehold on his mobile phone. Occasionally this violence cuts off the call. On redialing, Bob's flow immediately continues. Perhaps it never stopped.

"When I first went in there for *Highway 61*," Bob continues, "I found a piece of paper on the floor. I said to Dylan, 'What's this?' and he said, 'It's

"Bob was stubborn and determined... He'd stay up 24 hours without a second thought"
Charlie Daniels

something Al Kooper wrote down, it's overdubs.' I said, 'If you keep doing that there won't be anything left. I'm gonna cut live. If we have to overdub, we'll overdub. But not because Al Kooper wants 14 chances to be a little better.'

Highway 61 was the last Dylan record that Johnston recorded in New York until he returned for *New Morning* in 1970. He had done impressive work there, but this was not his city. His natural environment was a place where his recording and

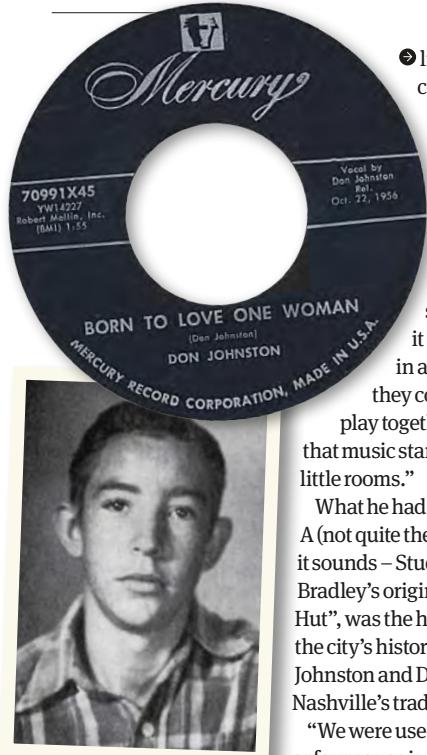
business reputation still endures, a conservative town then in need of a shake-up.

"I was surprised Dylan came to Nashville," says Charlie McCoy. "I'm not sure he was too keen on the idea – but I think Johnston used that session with me in New York as a way to have him convinced. Like, 'Did you see how easy that was? That is how it would be in Nashville...' Knowing Bob, I bet he was selling it bigtime."

"I DIDN'T GET HIM there," says Johnston today of Dylan's appearance in Nashville. "You couldn't make him do anything."

Still, Bob Dylan's arrival to record in Nashville in February 1966 conferred on Bob Johnston a role as change agent in the city: musically, culturally, even structurally. For him, the fabric of Columbia's Studio A came to embody the intransigent attitudes to making music in the city.

"In Nashville they had little rooms," he says of the isolation booths in the facility. "It looked like a toilet, with wooden earphones and one little



The young Bob (then known as "Don") Johnston, 1956

"So when Dylan came in that first day and said, 'I'm not finished writing yet' and we didn't start recording 'til 4am – that was a shock to us. But we were on the big clock, so it wasn't all that bad!"

What they ended up playing on was worth waiting for. Neither Dylan nor his songs ran on a regular timetable, so Johnston's instructions to his assembled band of Nashville musicians were simple: "Don't ever quit – don't stop playing. And if you do, don't come back."

"No-one ever counted-off for Dylan," remembers Bob. "He clicked off on his boot heel. He just started playing and that was it – and it was up to him to end it. With 'Sad-Eyed Lady...', when he ended the first verse and the little chorus there, I was yelling at them to carry on playing. Instead of ending after three minutes, it went on for 20 or something..."

"I had the best in the world in my hand – there was no place I couldn't go with him, so that's where I went," says Bob. "I think it's the best record he ever cut – it was the best situation in the world when the New York people mixed with the Nashville people. They thought that the Nashville guys were country people but when they got through they had a symphony. *Blonde On Blonde* was the first symphony cut in Nashville!"

NASHVILLE WASN'T READY for symphonies. When Bob took over as head of Columbia Records in Nashville in 1967, the city's Kings and Queens were



Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison, California, January 13, 1968

HOW TO BUY... BOB JOHNSTON ON RECORD



**SIMON & GARFUNKEL
PARSLEY, SAGE,
ROSEMARY
AND THYME**

COLUMBIA, 1966

For all his professed leaving well alone, Paul Simon's songs were here treated to some evocative reverb, delicate harpsichord and the occasional bongo. A harmonious relationship.



**JOHNNY CASH
AT FOLSOM
PRISON**
**COLUMBIA,
1968**

"Hello, I'm Johnny Cash..." Cash's gnomic opening remark was apparently Johnston's idea – no big build-up, straight to the heart of the matter. Whatever: Johnston's fixing ("the governor of Folsom was the first to answer...") gave Cash his (first) career rebirth.



**BOB DYLAN
BLONDE ON
BLONDE**
**COLUMBIA,
1969**

Johnston as producer, pitch-maker and personnel manager. Recorded with minimal rehearsal, Dylan calls the tune, suggests the mood – Johnston calls the players, and rolls tape. Result? That "thin, that wild mercury sound..."



**JOHNNY CASH
THE HOLY
LAND**
**COLUMBIA,
1969**

Cash and wife June travel to retrace the steps of Jesus. Sensibly, Johnston doesn't go with them. Instead, on their return, he splices together their documentary audio pieces along with Cash's (mainly Nashville-taped) religious songs.



outraged by Johnston's salty attitude and the recent influx of longhairs. The city's recording engineers, exhausted by his round-the-clock studio regime, threatened a work-to-rule. Charlie Daniels, today a Southern rock legend, and who met Johnston for the first time in 1959, was now encouraged by him to move to the city.

"Nashville at the time was very cliquey, a small community of the same producers, same musicians, songwriters, record company heads, that had been in place for years," says Daniels. "Bob was now in a position of power: over publishers, and songwriters, which musicians were hired to do sessions. They were very apprehensive about what he was going to do."

"The first day I was down there, [country music entertainer] Minnie Pearl called up Clive Davis and said 'We got to get rid of him, he's stirring up trouble down here,' Bob remembers. "I called *Billboard* and gave them a list of the artists I just dropped: [rhinestone-covered country music humorist] Jimmy Dickens, Minnie Pearl..."

"One engineer complained about Bob and how hard he made him work," remembers Charlie Daniels, "and whoever was in charge at the time sent back a note to the effect of, 'If Johnston tells you to put a microphone on the ceiling, the best thing you can do is go and get a very tall ladder...' He was making them money. The first thing he did when he came to town was cut a No 1 for Marty Robbins."

While anathema to some, Johnston's irreverent attitude offered hope to others.

"Johnny Cash told me that he went to Sun about his idea to cut a record in a prison," says Bob. "Sam Phillips told him that he would hold him to a five-year contract – but wouldn't record him – because he thought it was such a bad idea. Columbia told him the same thing. Cash called me and said, 'Dylan told me that you could get things done. Is there anything you can do for me?' I said to him, 'Quit being a pussy and get ready to go to Folsom...'"

Unthinkably, Johnston was changing Nashville.

"He was not afraid of record company executives. He would stay with something 'til he got it done," says Charlie Daniels. "It takes a very stubborn, energetic and determined person to do that, and that was what Bob was. He would stay up 24 hours and not give it a second thought."

"He learned his work ethic the hard way, and I don't mean in the music business," Daniels continues. "He learned that



Johnston onstage with Leonard Cohen, 1973

if he was going to get something accomplished, he was going to have to not let other people's opinions deter him from doing it. Bob came up hard."

THE MUSIC BUSINESS is in Bob Johnston's blood. Both his grandmother and mother wrote songs professionally. Johnston's mixture of combative and creative, meanwhile, comes from still further back in the bloodline. "I had one great grandfather who was a No 1 Texas ranger," he chuckles, "and another who was a piano player in a whorehouse."

Bob's own experiences in the music business began after a stint in the navy. Drawn to the rockabilly scene, he wrote and recorded (as Don Johnston) a rockabilly hit called "Born To Love One Woman". However, life as a performer in a time of soft-focus, dreamboat stars was not for him.

"It was embarrassing," he remembers. "I got a hit record and they got me on the LA waterfront with about 5,000 kids watching. They had Ricky Nelson who looked like about a million dollars. Then they had me. When I went on, they were screaming 'We want Ricky!' so loud you couldn't even hear

"They can wheel Leonard out when he's 180 and he'll still do the same thing"
Bob Johnston

for Aretha Franklin he much admired. Mercy was looking for songs for Andy Williams. Though Bob had nothing appropriate, the quality of his demos meant he was offered a producer's job at Columbia.

Mercy's first assignment for Johnston was a tough one: the once-popular, but long-faded Patti Page. "He said, 'See what you can do with that old scumbag,'" says Bob. "But she was a wonderful lady."

"They gave him the coldest artist on their roster," says Charlie McCoy. "But using the contacts that he had made with the Elvis movie people, he found a movie that was in production in need of a theme. 'Hush... Hush Sweet Charlotte' was a huge hit. It revived her career and meant that he was the new boy wonder at Columbia Records. It led directly to him working with Dylan."

"The real genius of Bob Johnston is in his first session," McCoy continues. "With Dylan or Leonard Cohen, they had the whole concept in their head. The main thing he had to do was keep it rolling. But with Patti Page it was from scratch. He found the song, we recorded it live – we had live strings on the session. To me that was his greatest work."



"Let's do this..."

How long does it take to record a masterpiece?

BLONDE ON BLONDE

CHARLIE MCCOY: "Johnston said, 'Tonight he wants to do a song with a Salvation Army sound - we need a trumpet and trombone.' I said, 'Does the trumpet need to be good?' He said, 'No!' I kept track: it took 40 hours to cut *Blonde On Blonde*."

JOHN WESLEY HARDING

CHARLIE MCCOY: "We did *John Wesley Harding* in nine and a half hours. It was basically just the three of us. Me, Dylan and Kenny

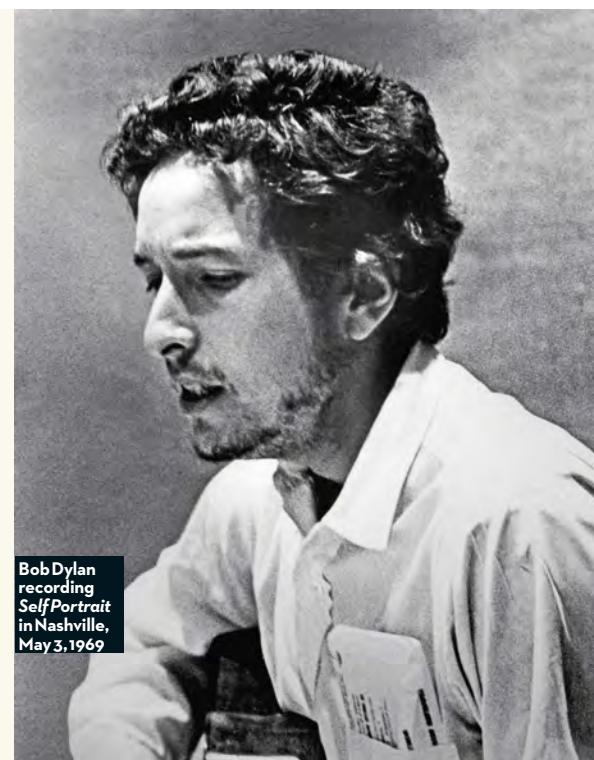


Buttrey – I was playing the bass now. Dylan had all the songs and knew his part, it was, 'Let's do this...'"

NASHVILLE SKYLINE

CHARLIE DANIELS: "Bob Johnston said, 'I've got another guitar player coming in.' And Dylan said, 'I don't want another guitar player, I want Charlie.' I think he had booked 15 sessions for *Nashville Skyline*; we used eight or nine. It went like clockwork: Bob would play, I would fall in, we'd turn the machine on and record it."

Bob Dylan recording *Self-Portrait* in Nashville, May 3, 1969



me. I was 10 years older than all of them. I looked like shit."

Johnston made his way, incrementally, to a position out of the public eye. Firstly, as a writer – the day he met Charlie Daniels in 1959 the pair wrote and recorded a song called "Jaguar". As a producer, meanwhile, Bob began to work with his wife, Joy Byers. Joy wrote songs, and together the pair looked to place them in Elvis Presley movies. With the help of demos made by some of the musicians he would use on his Dylan recordings, like Kenny Buttrey and Charlie McCoy, they landed 22 of them.

While hustling this material in New York, Johnston ran into Bob Mercy, whose string arrangements

JOHNSTON CONTINUED TO work with Bob Dylan. He presided over the Spartan, quietly revolutionary *John Wesley Harding* ("He said, 'What do you think about a guitar, bass and drums?' I said, 'Fine, but you need a steel...'), the warm, slight *Nashville Skyline* and *Self Portrait* – for whose syrupy strings, since the release of 2013's *Another Self Portrait*, Johnston has become the whipping boy. Bob is characteristically unrepentant.

"They send in those people who don't know a goddamn thing about it and get them to change shit," he says. "I thought strings was perfect and Dylan did, too. I would mix it. He'd listen and say 'Could you put a couple of drumbeats on there?' I'd deliver it to him in New York – he passed everything I did mixing-wise. Everything had to go through him."

Still, some perceive there was a parting of the ways between Dylan and Johnston at this time.

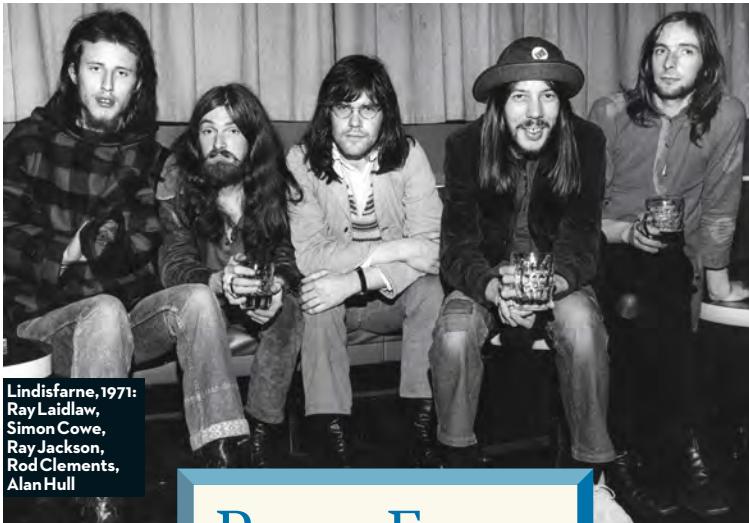
"I didn't stop working with Bob, he just wasn't there," insists Johnston. "So I started working with Leonard [for 1971's *Songs Of Love And Hate*]. I wanted to capture him – have him be Leonard Cohen one time. He said, 'Is that what I'm supposed to sound like?' I said, 'Yeah, forever.' I didn't want his charm, I didn't want his bullshit."

"It was a different thing with Leonard when we went on tour [for the European dates recorded for 1973's *Live Songs* album]. I said, 'I'll get you the best goddamn band that ever walked onstage...' He said, 'I just want your friends.' So I got Charlie Daniels and people like that and we smeared every place in glory. They can wheel Leonard out when he's 180 and he'll still do the same thing."

"One of the really specific things about Bob was his talent," says

Charlie Daniels. "Today, everyone's like 'Great, great...' Bob would say something like: 'Your voice sounds like a mountain.' But also if something was not good, he didn't mind saying that either. It's about honesty. You know how artists can get caught up and self-indulgent? Sometimes you need your playhouse torn down."

WHEN TYNESIDE FOLK-ROCKERS Lindisfarne learned they would be working on their second album with Bob Johnston, as Bob Dylan fans, they were delighted. Professionally, they hoped that this would be the record to elevate them from the ranks of student circuit favourites. They prepared a running order to represent the interests of each of the band's three writers, and met Johnston and Stratton-Smith for lunch before the sessions began.



Lindisfarne, 1971:
Ray Laidlaw,
Simon Cowe,
Ray Jackson,
Rod Clements,
Alan Hull



Poem For Lindisfarne By Bob Johnston

The five musketeers on their way to the fair

Funky old clothes and long English hair

*You're all clowns at the circus,
you're freaks at the fair
you're carnival riggers with extra long hair*

*One guarantee weird, one
guarantee strange
and the other half ready to be re-arranged*

*at the snap of a finger at the drop of a hat
you're off to play cricket with your glove and your bat*

*You've run through the woods,
you've gone into town
and you've all bought your tickets for the merry-go-round*

*So jump on your brown wooden horses and ride
and don't bitch too much when there's no place to hide*

*So welcome I bid you, the train's on the track
Jump right on board but don't expect to come back*

*Because bread in your pockets
and a black limousine
can fuck up your mind like you've never seen*

*Good luck and god bless you is all
I can say
my advice – run like hell, or fall down and pray.*

Bassist Rod Clements remembers that, at the slap-up meal, Johnston ordered only a bowl of strawberries and a glass of red wine ("He dipped the strawberries in the wine").

The next day, they went to Trident Studios to begin work.

"We had all the songs prepared, and we played them," remembers drummer Ray Laidlaw. He said, "Great. What else have you got?" It was a bit of a comeuppance. So we spent the rest of the first day doing every song we knew – hooks, parts of songs, anything. I think we ended up using half of what we originally had. He was constructing an album that had a feel, sequencing it in his

head as he went along.

"He was very professional. But he basically sat with his feet on the desk rolling joints most of the time," Laidlaw continues. "He had a great big bag of grass and would roll lots of one-skin joints. I remember one day we asked him about Elvis, and Bob said, 'He's a truck driver. He'll always be a truck driver.'

"He had a lot of presence about him," says Rod Clements. "He was quite pithy: I remember him telling Ray Jackson to sing something again and saying to him, 'You sound like you're talking to a trunk.' By which I think he meant a suitcase. He did some quite bizarre and touching things. He wrote a poem about the band, and told us the occupation he thought we would each have if we weren't in a band. Mine was 'gravedigger'."

During recording, the band played a date at the Royal Festival Hall, at which they performed Alan Hull's "Fog On The Tyne" – a rousing number from his solo folk club shows. Johnston hadn't heard it. "It went down a storm at the Festival Hall," says Ray Laidlaw, "and when we came back, Bob said, 'How come you haven't played me that?' We said, 'We don't think much of it...' It wouldn't have been on the album if it hadn't been for him."

Perhaps tellingly, it remains Lindisfarne's best-known work.

"I never paid any attention to people at the record company apart from John Hammond and Ahmet Ertegün," says Bob. "John took me up to run CBS one time and asked me, 'What would you do?' I said, 'I'd move the talented people away from the business people and never let them go visit each other. That way you can steal all the money you want but you can still have good music.' I wanted the job, but on my terms..."

"He would not back down if he had something he wanted to say," says Charlie Daniels. "He's got a talent for staying out of the way of what the artist is trying to do – he's not saying, let's get in a horn section, let's get in a vocal group... He starts at the root of the song. He always had respect for a song. He hears something that no-one else hears."

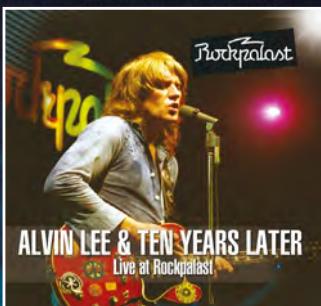
"If the right artist went into the studio with Bob, I daresay they'd still come out with something very special," Daniels continues. "He's still got that talent. He's still got a fire down there. You can tell when you talk to him. He's still Bob Johnston."

Rockpalast

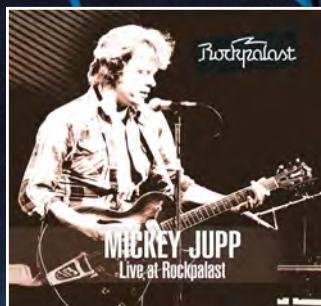
The legendary German music TV show - now with restored and remastered sound + vision!



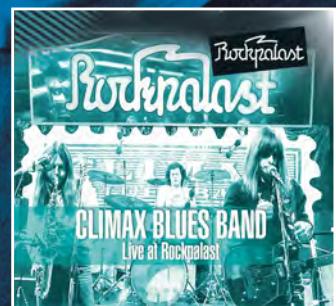
THE BLUES BAND
'Live At Rockpalast'
1980



ALVIN LEE &
TEN YEARS LATER
'Live At Rockpalast'
1978



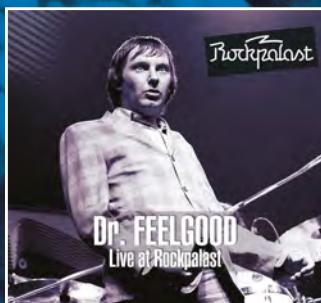
MICKEY JUPP
'Live At Rockpalast'
1979



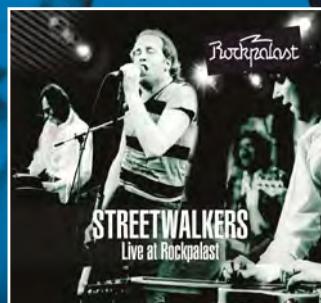
CLIMAX BLUES BAND
'Live At Rockpalast'
1976



ROCKPILE
'Live At Rockpalast'
1980



Dr. FEELGOOD
'Live At Rockpalast'
1980



STREETWALKERS
'Live At Rockpalast'
1975 & 1977



ROGER CHAPMAN & THE SHORTLIST
'Live At Rockpalast'
1979



ROGER CHAPMAN & THE SHORTLIST
'Live At Grugahalle'
1981



the FIXX
'Live At Rockpalast'
1985



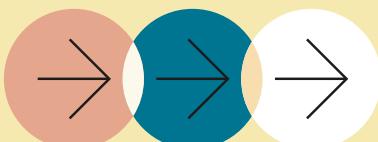
ROBBEN FORD
'Live At Rockpalast'
1998 & 2007

Crooked reign, crooked reign

STEPHEN MALKMUS' time fronting the Jicks has now lasted longer than his storied stewardship of Pavement. Still, though, his reputation as droll indie-rock magus continues to grow. After a spell in Berlin, *Uncut* finds him back in Portland, musing on fame, Radiohead, the "quaintness" of being in a rock band, the Stones as "poncey carpetbaggers" and, yes, Pavement. "We were sports-obsessed music fans in touch with their feminine side!"

Story: Sharon O'Connell

Photograph: Leah Nash



A well-respected
indie gentleman...
Stephen Malkmus
in Portland, 2013



OMMY ERDELYI DIDN'T KNOW QUITE WHAT to expect when he arrived for the Ramones' first band practice. Guitarist John Cummings and bass player Doug Colvin had bought their instruments just the week before, meanwhile the only thing any of them knew about drummer Jeffrey Hyman was that he was a fan of The Stooges and the New York Dolls. But when they had all convened at Performance Space Studio in New York on January 28, 1974,

Erdelyi was astonished to discover the existence of two brand new songs. "I was shocked because not only were they original but I'd never heard songs like this before, they were so bizarre," remembers Erdelyi, the only surviving original Ramone. "I saw them as very artistic. One was 'I Don't Wanna Walk Around With You' and the other was 'I Don't Wanna Get Involved With You', which was the same song with slightly different lyrics."

The formula the Ramones laid down that afternoon on 20th St and Broadway served them for the rest of the decade – a busy and exciting time for the band during which they recorded five classic albums and also helped define the stylistic parameters for a new genre of music. They were called punks, but if the Ramones looked tough and acted dumb they were a hard act to pigeonhole. Birthed in New York's CBGB's scene, they shared a dense knowledge of popular culture and rock music that they distilled into minimalist pop poetry, reducing musical and lyrical concepts to their base elements with pop art economy. They wanted to be The Bay City Rollers, but they looked like The Velvet Underground and played faster, louder and more intensely than anybody around. It was genius but America didn't want to know. Now, the legacy – and logo – of the Ramones is everywhere. "If the Ramones were still around they'd be playing stadiums," says Patti Smith's guitarist Lenny Kaye. "They became the template for punk rock – very fast eighth notes, call-and-response lyrics, deliberate dumbness, incredible propulsion." Erdelyi sighs, "We were influential in more ways than a lot of people realise. I always thought eventually everybody would catch up with us. I didn't realise it would take 30 years."

THOMAS ERDELYI WAS born in 1952 in Budapest but his family moved to America, settling in Forest Hills, a middle-class New York suburb where Erdelyi would soon bump into some like-minded souls. "I met Johnny [Cummings] at my first day of high school in 1964," says Erdelyi. "He was charismatic, outgoing, holding court at the lunch table. I had a feeling that one day he'd develop a cult around him." The pair bonded over music. Also on the scene was a lanky, gawky kid, Jeffrey Hyman, who Erdelyi met at a jam session: "I played guitar, he was drumming and didn't say a word but I always saw him around – he was so unusual-looking you couldn't miss him." A year later, an army brat called Doug "Dee Dee" Colvin

moved to the neighbourhood from Germany, where he told his new friends he sold Nazi paraphernalia to buy morphine. "He would tell these great stories that we later found out were kind of tall tales," says Erdelyi.

All four loved pop music and Cummings and Erdelyi formed a garage band, Tangerine Puppets, with Cummings on bass. After they broke up in 1967, Cummings sold his guitars and drifted into dope-smoking delinquency, often in league with the impish Colvin. "Johnny was bad," says Erdelyi. "He did things like drop TV sets off roofs. He was trying to scare people but he could have killed them. Eventually he turned it round."

Erdelyi remained in music, playing in bands with another local boy, Monte Melnick, while also working as an engineer at the city's Record Plant studio. "And I stayed in touch with John. I thought he should be in a band, he had such charisma. I kept encouraging him to take up music when he was working on construction sites." Tired of seeing serious, untouchable bands play endless solos, the pair went nuts over The Stooges before discovering the New York Dolls. "They were so different," enthuses Erdelyi. "They weren't virtuosos but they were the most exciting thing I'd seen for years. I thought that if John could put a band together they could do something because they didn't need to be amazing players."

Cummings bought a \$50 Mosrite guitar from Manny's on 48th St in January 1974. "It didn't even have a case, he had to carry it around in a shopping bag," recalls Erdelyi.

"He talked Dee Dee into getting a bass. I thought this was great, they'd put a band together and I'd be manager. We put Jeffrey on drums because he had a set and looked right. They were a trio, with Johnny on guitar and Dee Dee on bass and singing."

The band wrote out a list of 40 possible names before agreeing on the Ramones – Dee Dee took it from Paul Ramone, a pseudonym Paul McCartney used in the early days of The Beatles. In the first of several brilliant creative decisions, the band decided to adopt Ramone as a collective surname – Cummings became Johnny Ramone, Colvin was Dee Dee Ramone and Hyman was Joey Ramone. People assumed they were brothers. "It created a sense of

"You had to have intellect to get the Ramones"
TOMMY ERDELYI

EYEWITNESS



"JESUS, THESE GUYS HAD IT!"

Richard Lloyd, Television guitarist, on seeing the Ramones in 1975

"I was sitting at CBGB's, which is where I spent every night in the mid-1970s, when this young lady said I should head over to 20th Street to see a new band who all went by the same last name. I wasn't doing anything and she was gorgeous so we jumped into a cab and went to the Performance Space. There were about 20 people there. Dee Dee calls out '1-2-3-4!' and they go into something. Johnny's yelling to Dee Dee, 'A! A! A!', and Dee Dee is hitting every note but A. So Johnny takes off his guitar and goes for Dee Dee. Joey and Tommy have to hold them apart. Eventually, they separate and Dee Dee shouts 'Ein-zwei-drei-vier!' and they start again. Johnny's yelling 'D! D!' but Dee Dee doesn't know where D is. This time, Dee Dee gets pissed, takes off his bass and slams it on the floor. So they get into another fight, go off, come back and finally do a song that's more like a 60-second commercial. Johnny is glaring at Dee Dee, but we were jumping up and down and freaking out and I instantly knew, Jesus Christ, these guys had 'IT', the famous 'IT'. If they could get their shit together they would be so big. The next time I saw them, Dee Dee had stickers on his bass with the letters of the notes on them. He didn't have many, just the notes in the songs."



“FOLK MUSIC IS A FOLK STYLE at this point,” Stephen Malkmus explains to *Uncut*, over an early afternoon beer on an unusually cold winter’s day in Portland. “In reality, guitars are old-fashioned instruments, so anyone who’s playing a guitar is inevitably playing a folk-y music. It’s newer and based on rhythm’n’blues – it’s not like they’re miners’ songs from 1800, or anything – but it’s not a modern music form.

Even Radiohead sound like Pink Floyd or the Soft Machine. Or they sound like some electronic Warp artist from five years before and they take that and do something with it. There’s not too much that’s really new.”

It’s perhaps a more brutally pragmatic assessment of his chosen craft than you might expect from Malkmus. After all, the former linchpin of indie-rock demigods Pavement – and current leader of the Jicks – has spent the last 25 years carving a cultish, but hugely influential niche via artfully asymmetric song structures, tricksy time signatures and slyly witty, frequently opaque lyrics that reveal a fondness for metaphor. But Malkmus understands very well what it means to be doing what he’s doing in 2014, at the age of 47.

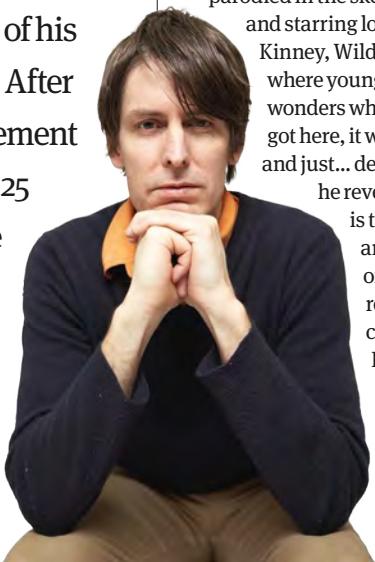
TOM OXLEY/INNME/IPC/SYNDICATION

We’re sat in an old-school bar and grill, one of the few places in this south-east neighbourhood holding out against creeping hipsterification, with its neon booze signs puncturing the gloom, a menu boasting peanut-butter bacon burgers with fries and a hand-written notice suggesting that customers “remove loose clothing and scarves”. It’s minus four outside and not exactly snug inside, so we both opt to keep our scarves on. Malkmus, who’s a droll and thoughtful conversationalist, returned to Portland last August with his wife – mixed-media artist Jessica Jackson Hutchins – and two young daughters after a two-year spell in Berlin. “We wanted a change of scenery and were just burned out by the same routines,” he explains. “I like it here, but neither me nor my wife have ever really thought, ‘this is our place.’ We probably wouldn’t be back here if we didn’t have kids. I really liked Berlin, but it’s a commitment to move, so no matter how much you like somewhere, if you don’t have a job there or a real purpose, you can start to feel dilettantish – like you’re just hanging out, endlessly. I like to feel grounded for my family.”

Portland – with its countless cool cafés and microbreweries, its robust music scene and impressive number of independent record stores – has been famously parodied in the sketch show *Portlandia*, co-written by

and starring local Carrie Brownstein (Sleater-Kinney, Wild Flag). It’s tagged Portland “the place where young people go to retire”, but *Uncut* wonders what Malkmus makes of it. “When I first got here, it was kind of like Doc Marten’s and rain and just... depressing – not too many pretty girls,”

he reveals. “The best thing about Portland is the closeness of everything. And there are things going on – certain niches of consumer-edge culture with restaurants and design... My wife’s cousin is a celebrity agent in Hollywood who represents old-school people like Jack Nicholson and Sean Penn and he came up with his daughter because he was getting his early ’60s Italian sports car renovated here. That’s the kind of thing Portland does. Like, making



BUYERS' GUIDE

How to buy... Stephen Malkmus & The Jicks



STEPHEN MALKMUS

DOMINO, 2001

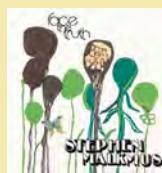
Debut (working title – “Swedish Reggae”) features Malkmus on guitar/keys/vocals, Joanna Bolme on bass and John Moen on drums. Although markedly less dense and difficult, some songs – ie “Discretion Grove” – were rejigged Pavement numbers.



PIG LIB

DOMINO, 2003

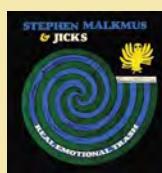
A missive from Malkmus’ elected “folk-prog-psych-punk” territory, signalling the arrival of the Jicks proper. Sometimes rambling and indulgent, difficult and dense, at others tender and goofy, it’s still a signature sound.



FACE THE TRUTH

DOMINO, 2005

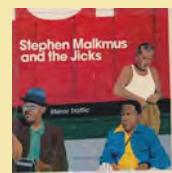
A lot of this record was recorded by Malkmus alone, hence the solo sleeve accreditation. Guitar wig-outs a-go-go and the odd epic (eight-minute) song, but structure and focus replace the previously distracted air.



REAL EMOTIONAL TRASH

DOMINO, 2008

The first Jicks album to feature Quasi and former Sleater-Kinney drummer Janet Weiss, who replaced John Moen after he joined The Decemberists. One man’s meaty content is another’s meandering, blues-prog guitar jam.



MIRROR TRAFFIC

DOMINO, 2011

Fifteen songs long and produced by Beck, who drew something lighter and more easy-going from the Jicks, without sacrificing their eccentric energy. The last for Janet Weiss, who left to join all-gal alt.supergroup, Wild Flag.



WIG OUT AT JAGBAGS

DOMINO, 2014

Features strings, piano and “the Berlin horn guys”, with plenty of double-tracked vocals, while the trademark extended wiggy workouts are now in more concentrated bursts. The (atypically) spacious “J Smoov” is a standout.



The Jicks as they are today: Malkmus, Mike Clark, Joanna Bolme and Jake Morris

junk food fancy – that's really happening here. The worst thing is that overall there is a kind of small-town claustrophobia, which isn't about numbers of people – it's just the way it feels." As for Berlin, Malkmus reckons "the best thing is its anonymous largeness. I'm not the mayor of Berlin or anything, so I was a tiny ant in this system and no-one really knew who I was. Here it's different, but everyone's pretty sweet. If I'm out at the Whole Foods Market and a guy gives me his tape, it's nice. I would do the same thing. When I was a young person in New York, if I saw Thurston Moore I'd be thinking it was cool that he was there."

F, TO MALKMUS' mind, guitars have now been around so long that their work is necessarily restricted to keeping the rock tradition alive rather than breaking new ground, it certainly hasn't hobbled his creativity. In fact, the Jicks' latest album is their sixth, which means they have one more to their credit than Pavement. After several shuffles down the years, the lineup is now Malkmus (guitar, vocals, piano), Mike Clark (keyboards, guitar), Joanna Bolme (bass) and Jake Morris (drums). *Wig Out At Jagbags* strikes a neat balance between the complex and extended prog workouts of 2003's *Pig Lib* and 2011's *Mirror Traffic*'s peppier, less brow-furrowed material.

"The new album is really poppy by our standards," agrees Malkmus, who wrote its dozen songs right after Pavement's reunion dates of 2010. It may pinball around rock history from early Pink Floyd to Flipper, the Grateful Dead to Steely Dan, Dylan to The Velvet Underground, but *Wig Out...* is a homage to no-one. There have always been similarities between the Jicks and Pavement – Malkmus' voice and guitar style guarantee that – but it's important to him that the former guard their own identity. He mentions how crucial it is that the Jicks' music "sounds like we did it" and despite his reputation as a post-modern bricoleur, Malkmus



Pavement with Bob Nastanovich, second left...

"I'll take a stab at a genre I like, and find out I'm not a blues rocker, say..."

Stephen Malkmus

clearly values authenticity of self. "It's just having some experience in this game," he reasons. "It's like saying, 'Oh, I like Fleetwood Mac-style blues rock, so I'm going to do that. No-one else is really doing that and it's cool.' So then that record comes out and it's pretty good, but it's not exactly right. It's about realising that you're maybe not as good at that as you thought you would be. I'll take a stab at certain genres or styles I like, and find out I'm not really a blues rocker, say. There are individual songs on all of our albums that are like that." He laughs: "Except this one, which is perfect. I'm joking... some of *Pig Lib* could have been better, even some Pavement records. But I was trying to do something that was cool that I like, and that was different from what I did before. Over time, you realise that the world doesn't need that thing from you. But always, I'm just being excited by new music that I like and wanting to share that love."

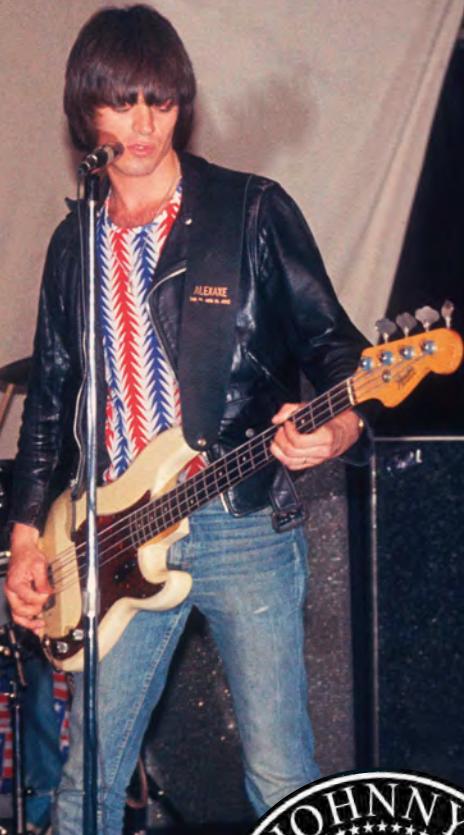
Uncut wonders if during his two years spent in Germany, Malkmus was ever tempted to dip his toe into its progressive electronic music scene. He stiffens slightly and covers his mouth with his hand when he answers, his body language betraying a surprising self-consciousness. "I could, but it's a younger person's music. I guess you can jump in at any time, but... it makes me uncomfortable. I could sing on top of something somebody else did, but the years it takes to learn the programming... I'm not into figuring out machines; I'd know that by now if I was. In Germany, Cologne's where it's at and the pulse is not on guitar rock at all, apart from Von Spar, who are great. It's really verboten. But here, we still like guitar bands in their quaintness."

AS SOMEONE WHO'S known Stephen Malkmus for 28 years, and played with him in both Silver Jews and Pavement, Bob Nastanovich has intimate, first-hand knowledge of not only Pavement's demise, but also of the

RAMONES



The band live at Performance Studios, New York, September 1975



unity, a bond of sorts,” Joey would say. “We might have got it from the Walker Brothers, but we liked it as an idea,” admits Erdelyi, and the name went to the heart of his emerging grand plan. “What we were doing was almost like a concept. I realised that what you needed wasn’t musicianship, what you needed was ideas. Anything that worked, we kept. A lot of things were discarded, we were dropping things left and right – if it didn’t work, boom, it was out. We were very conscious about what felt right.”

THE RAMONES MADE their debut on March 30, 1974 at Performance Space, the studio Erdelyi ran with old schoolfriend Monte Melnick. A chaotic set concluded with Dee Dee stepping on the neck of his bass and breaking it. “Oh my God, they were raw,” remembers Melnick, who attended those early rehearsals. “The Ramones were so bad, forget about it. It was painful.” In front of around 30 friends, the band blasted out seven brutally brief songs, all written by themselves with self-explanatory, brattish, titles – “I Don’t Wanna Go Down To The Basement”, “I Don’t Wanna Walk Around With You”, “Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue”, “I Don’t Wanna Be Learned/I Don’t Wanna Be Tamed”, “I Don’t Wanna Get Involved With You”, “I Don’t Like Nobody That Don’t Like Me” and “Succubus”.

Inevitably, there were teething problems. “Joey’s hands would blister up and start bleeding, and after every song his drums would fall apart,” explains Erdelyi. “After two or three songs Dee Dee would get hoarse so Joey would sing, and he had a really good voice. I thought Joey would look good as a lead singer because he wasn’t the cliché of a lead singer. We tried out new drummers and eventually the guys said I should play drums. My drums locked into what Johnny was doing on the guitar. All of a sudden the sound of the Ramones came together.” Erdelyi became Tommy Ramone, the Ramones were a quartet.

Even at this early stage, the band were developing their trademarks. Dee Dee introduced songs with a bellowed “1-2-3-4”, Tommy drummed like a guitarist, Johnny played chainsaw guitar, all thunderous down-strokes and unique in style, while gangling hairball Joey sang crazy, funny songs in a weird Brooklyn-mockney yelp. “From very early, he sang with this strange British accent,” laughs Erdelyi. “I don’t know where it came from, maybe his love of Herman’s Hermits, but we encouraged it, we thought it was cool because it was different.” The content of the songs was also unusual. “We liked horror comics, B-movies, *Mad* magazine,” lists Erdelyi. “At that time, everybody was so serious that anybody who used humour couldn’t be taken seriously. They thought we were retarded and on the surface, it might have seemed that way. You had to have intellect to get the Ramones. We had an encyclopaedic knowledge of music and all forms of culture. We had our tastes and they’d get filtered and the crap thrown out.”

On August 16, 1974 the Ramones made their debut as a four-piece at CBGB’s in the Bowery. “It was under a flophouse where you could get a cot for \$1.65,” says Television guitarist Richard Lloyd. “There’d always be passed-out bums on the sidewalk outside. We found this place and started to play every Sunday. We decided to do double features, two bands alternating two sets each. There was dogshit on the stage, and urine and wine dripping from the ceiling, but it was an incubator.”

Bands treated CBGB’s as a live rehearsal space, with an audience full of fellow musicians including members of Blondie, Talking Heads, the Heartbreakers, Patti Smith’s band and Television. The Ramones were regulars, working on their stage show almost as diligently as they worked on their songs. Soon, they had developed a uniform of sorts – leather jackets, jeans, trainers and Beatles haircuts. “It was a bit constructed,” notes The Damned’s ➤

HEY! HO! LOGO!

WHO IS...
ARTURO
VEGA?

Behind-the-scenes Ramone

THE Ramones’ powerful image was largely self-created, but assistance came from Arturo Vega, an artist friend and colleague. “He was always talking to John,” says Monte Melnick. “Sharing ideas about how things should look.” Vega lived in a loft near CBGB’s and became friends with Dee Dee. He did the band’s lighting, and more. “Arturo did the logo,” says Tommy Erdelyi. “He bought a silk-screening machine and began pressing T-shirts. He showed me a type catalogue and I chose Arial Bold.”

“The merch he was producing was making more money than they were,” says Danny Fields. Vega died in June 2013. Roberta Bayley, who photographed the Ramones sleeve, says, “He was a genius in that he realised the brand and consistency of the image was as important as the music.”



Vega, right,
with Danny
Fields

evolution of the Jicks – who he tour managed for their first couple of years – and what makes his former bandmate tick. “Stephen told me first about quitting Pavement and it completely made sense,” he tells *Uncut* down the phone from Richmond, VA, where he’s visiting family. “He didn’t know where to go and was sick of doing it for a lot of reasons. The main source of frustration for him was that the rest of us weren’t keeping up from a musical standpoint, and especially with *Terror Twilight*, the musical focus was more than ever entirely on him. It’s a Pavement album, but it was almost like a singer-songwriter presentation and it got to be too much. He wanted to do something else and work with a band that he lived near, to practise and jam. Stephen almost had to dumb down some of his compositions in Pavement; he wanted people who challenged him musically and just wanted to go in a different direction.

“One thing I clearly noticed from the start with the Jicks was that Stephen was much happier onstage; he was more



“Pavement acolytes”: (from top) Yuck, Mazes and Parquet Courts

expressive and he enjoyed the focus more. It was really nice to see him happy again. I don’t know the new Jicks drummer – although I imagine he’s a great guy – but they’re all perfect players and have the perfect personalities for Stephen. They seem to be a lot more relaxed and pro and settled into their groove. There really weren’t rivalries within Pavement, but at the end of the day, it was five dudes. People got along, but the personalities didn’t blend and there was a lot of sarcasm. Pavement was disparate; the Jicks seem cohesive.”

Cohesive enough to have just embarked on their 14th year, even. The weight of Pavement’s history has finally shifted, such that that band is now another contour on Malkmus’ career landscape, rather than its defining feature. Although the current crop of young Pavement acolytes – Yuck, Mazes, Parquet Courts – might disagree. Malkmus is magnanimous. “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em,” he quips. “Mark E Smith might have been pissed off that Pavement

had three songs that were musically direct takes from *Grotesque*, but now I’m sure he’d say thanks for being into me. You love the people who love you, right?” As to helming the Jicks as compared with Pavement, he feels “it’s less of a whirlwind. There were times when I felt a burden of expectation in the Pave. And it’s a different band dynamic. Perhaps the banal fact we’re all in the same town makes it more organic. Working in a band of five guys as opposed to a band with three guys and a girl isn’t too different; if any band of sports-obsessed music fans were in touch with their feminine side, it was the Pave.”

WIG OUT... WAS recorded in October of 2012 at La Chapelle Studios in the Belgian Ardennes and produced by the band with longstanding collaborator Remko Schouten. It was, according to bass player Joanna Bolme, a great unifying experience. “It was gorgeous,” she says of the studio, when we meet up later the same afternoon in a mercifully warm bar halfway between her Mount Tabor home – where she lives with husband Gary Jarman of The Cribs – and Malkmus’ neighbourhood. “It was affordable and there was an apartment for us to stay in. That always works for us. *Pig Lib* was the same in that there was a big barn at Bear Creek Studios where we all lived together, and for *Real Emotional Trash* we went to this place where we could camp out. And working with Remko again was really great. He’s worked with us for years, so he knows the way we like to sound and the way we communicate.

“For me,” offers Bolme, “the new record is a little more light-hearted. What I’m hoping comes across is that we’ve been having a lot of fun playing together again recently. Everybody’s in a certain place where they’re in good spirits, we’re enjoying each other’s company and recording was a lot of fun. We’d stay up late together, listening to music... it was a very nice experience and not a labour, so I’m hoping that shines through.” It does, although for a while the future of the Jicks looked shaky because of Malkmus’ shift to Berlin. “We were really anxious about Steve moving,” she admits, “because we had already recorded *Mirror*

MAKING OF WIG OUT...

Wowee zowee!

Malkmus lists 10 of his inspirations for Wig Out At Jagbags. In no particular order...

1 Mark von Schlegell: “A sci-fi genius – he’s weird. He’s the son of the famous deconstructed/Language poet, Susan Howe.”

2 University Of Virginia in the late ’80s: “Cheap beer and Butthole Surfers.”

3 Can: “The best band ever. They have musique concrète ideas, jazz, funk, classical, and were clearly listening to Pink Floyd...”



4 The NBA: “It’s like a working-class jackpot, where people can come from nowhere and become these stars. It’s very theatrical, to the point where it’s barely a sport sometimes, but the game itself is great. My goal would be to own an NBA franchise myself – that would be awesome.”

5 Gas: “I saw Wolfgang Voigt play in Berlin and it’s something totally different. We don’t do things that way in America. That’s why we didn’t start BMW; we have Ford. This is a real tailored sound. It’s utopian and I like that.”

6 Indie guys trying to sound Memphis: “I don’t even know who’s trying to do that. Is that me? It’s laptop soul – a couple of loops and some singing.”



7 Rosemarie Trockel: “She’s an awesome artist and a spiritual comrade of my wife’s. There are a lot of good female artists in Germany, from all sorts of different places and it’s really great to see that happen.”

8 Sic Alps: “A great band. I like the fact that they’re deconstructed. But they’re finished – Mike Donovan is solo now. Bands like The Kills have taken the wrong road in being influenced by Royal Trux. This is the right direction to be influenced by them.”

9 Aroma, Charlottenburg: “We lived in Charlottenburg, which is old Berlin, not one of the hipster neighbourhoods. This is an average dim sum place, but we had many happy Saturdays and Sundays there with our kids.”

10 Home life in the 2010s: “It’s what defines my life, what goes on behind closed doors for 12 hours a day. But nobody wants to talk about being a dad in rock’n’roll. I don’t want to read in my magazine that somebody’s changing diapers, too. I want to be taken backstage, where they’re still partying with My Bloody Valentine like it’s 1991.”



Sic Alps, with Mike Donovan, left



RealEmotional
Trash-era Jicks,
2008: Bolme,
Malkmus, Janet
Weiss and Clark

Traffic but it wasn't out yet, and we had just asked Jake [Morris, drummer] to be in the band. I think I probably yelled at him, but Steve kept saying, 'It's going to be OK.' It was a leap of faith but I felt so bad for Jake, who was excited about joining. He has a funny story about when Steve asked him to be in the Jicks; it was actually April Fool's Day and he sent Jake this really cryptic message. He looked at it and wondered if it was the meanest joke ever, or if Steve really meant it. Then, first or second

practice, Steve was like, 'I'm moving to Berlin!' But what I thought was going to be a big disaster wasn't really a problem." Bolme smiles, her understatement speaking volumes: "It all worked out pretty well."

When asked to set the latest album in the context of his broader career,

Malkmus jokes that "the flabby craftsmanship is disguised by the fresh coat of paint. It's hard to say so soon – another reiteration of the inherent genius of the Jicks? Wishful thinking. There are four people in the band," he adds, more seriously, "and I always want them to get turned on first. I'm kind of playing with genres and small bits from the past – such small bits that once they've been dragged over four minutes, with my lyrics and natural singing voice and everyone else playing, they become something else. That stops it

"As far as songwriting goes, for me the '70s were the best and weirdest time..."

Stephen Malkmus

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ICE COOL...

MALKMUS & THE LICKS

The Jicks' new line in treats

CINNAMON & LESBIANS" from the new Jicks LP fuses Malkmus' fantasy about the Green Tortoise bus – a cheap way of getting from San Francisco to Portland in the '70s – with an encounter he had with a "ne'er-do-well hippy guy", who declared that the people who died in the Twin Towers on 9/11 deserved their fate because they were working for The Man. "It's a Portland song, but it's Portland in the '80s, before I was here," he explains, "when cinnamon was avant-garde and lesbianism was shocking to some people. Joanna was worried the title might be un-PC, so I asked our publicist in New York. He's like, 'No. There's cinnamon and there's lesbians. What's the problem?'"

The song recently inspired New York's groovy Momofuku Milk Bar to develop a new, limited-edition ice cream flavour. "I love cinnamon ice cream," Malkmus enthuses. "I always ordered it – 'zimt' – in Berlin. Berlin has nice gelato; usually, one euro and you turn that frown upside down."



The Jicks at the Momofuku Milk Bar



sounding too retro, like it would if I could do everything too right or if the scope was too limited. The Velvet Underground is better than every other band, but there's no need to focus in on them for a whole album, or even a whole song."

Joyous single "Lariat" salutes a youth spent "listening to the music from the best decade ever" – that is, the '80s – but it's the previous decade that has always been Malkmus' creative touchstone. "Anybody's own decade is the best," he says. "I mean, it's my story, but everyone grew up in the '80s. Well, they didn't really, but it's just something you hold onto to make yourself feel better; The Replacements, early Sonic Youth, Pixies, Butthole Surfers... but as far as songwriting and sonic textures go,

for me the '70s were the best and the weirdest time and a lot went on then that's important to me. All the big guys doing stuff in the '60s did it just as well in the '70s – except The Beatles, maybe. I like '70s Stones better, although I did watch this documentary about Muscle Shoals Sound Studios, and the Stones, who went there in 1969, seemed like really poncey carpetbaggers of sounds. There's Sir Mick now talking about that time and I imagine the Stones' PR would wish that this didn't exist. It doesn't really go with the way the covers look on those albums," he adds, dryly.

Malkmus' Anglophilic is well known and stretches beyond music into literature, sport, customs and language (he uses the decidedly un-American "posh" and "poncey", *Uncut* notices).

It's a love the UK has always reciprocated. "Over in England, I have a certain pedigree, plus Pavement was into British culture," he acknowledges, "but we spent a lot of time there. Steven Abbott [founder of Big Cat

Records] was an orchestrator of hype and it was ripe for the picking, because there wasn't anything like us at that time." That was over 20 years ago. Does it seem shocking that the Jicks' latest now puts them ahead of Pavement in the album numbers game? "Yeah," he grins, pausing for effect. "I think most of continental Europe is probably shocked there's been even one." 

Wig Out At Jagbags is available now on Domino



From underground to mainstream...the Ramones in New York, July 18, 1975: (l-r) Dee Dee, Tommy, Joey, Johnny

drummer Rat Scabies. "But if only one of them dressed like that, nobody would have noticed. They realised a small collective makes a louder noise."

Roberta Bayley, a photographer who was dating Richard Hell, worked the door at CBGB's while Television were performing. "I first saw the Ramones at Performance Space Studio on 20th Street with Richard. It was like a showcase and they were in a very primitive state. Then they started playing CBGB's, opening for Television. At first, it seemed like a comic act. You couldn't believe what you were seeing. They were very simplistic and their songs were always very short, fast and there weren't many of them. But they went down great because there were only 14 people there. That's really not an exaggeration, that's how many people were there in those days. We all knew each other. From very early on they were in leather, although there are photos of Johnny in gold lamé pants before they found the uniform."

Marc Bell, drummer for Wayne County's band, caught one of those early CBGB's gigs. "They weren't fully developed image-wise, John and Joey were in satin pants and Dee Dee had these shirts with the collar buttoned high. The next time I saw them, they were in brand new leather jackets. They were sloppy, they had to stop songs and go back to recount the intro, they'd argue about songs, but that's how it was, we were there to hone our skills."

"Those early shows were chaos," Erdelyi agrees. "They acted like The Three Stooges at times."

"They were complex, strange, mutant personalities," adds



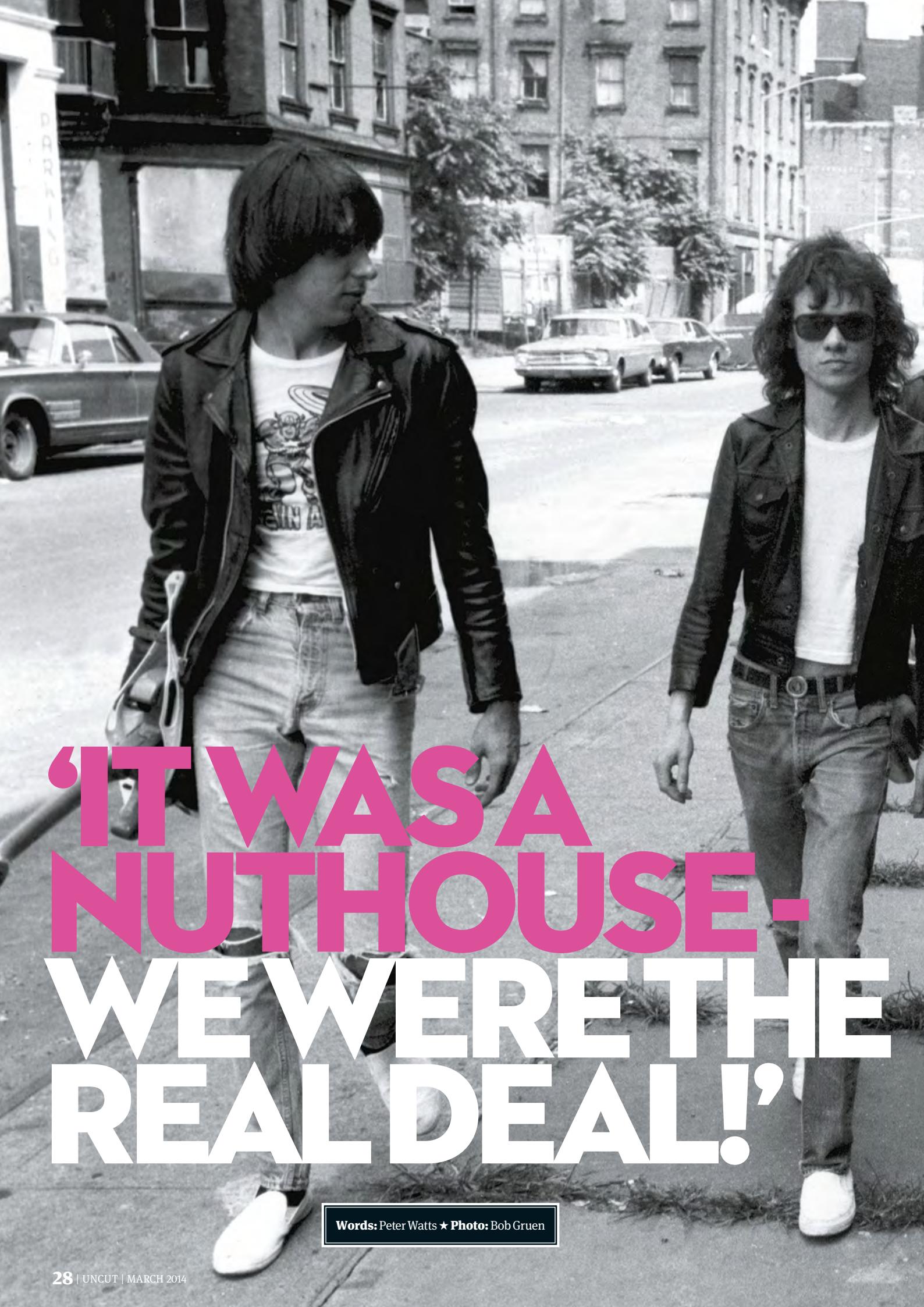
"They hated each other from the start, the way teenagers do"

DANNY FIELDS

Lenny Kaye. "The fact they could get together and make music is a great triumph of what music exists for. It's a place to channel your weirdness into something that is magical, and the Ramones were certainly magical."

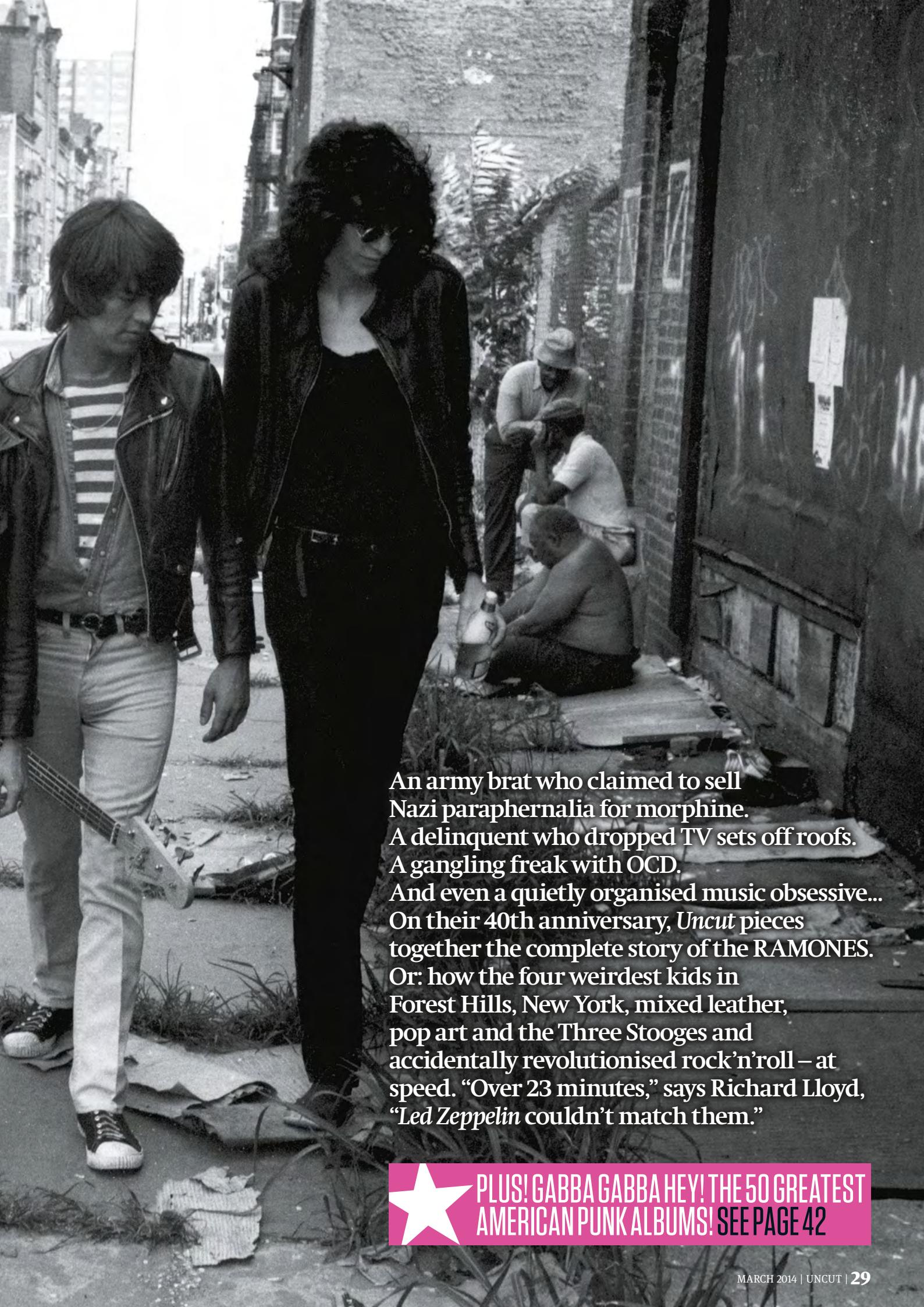
"They were all dazzlingly intelligent and that manifested itself in radically different ways," says Danny Fields, who later became their manager. "Tommy was quiet but very organised. He loved detail. Dee Dee pretended to be dumb and crazy. He was crazy but not dumb, but liked being seen as out-of-control. He was the clown everybody wanted to fuck. He was a great songwriter and a great poet in his bizarre, very funny, very charming, way. Joey was one of the strangest people I ever knew, so full of irony. I could never work out whether he meant something, was being droll or was just rolling it around in his incredible mind. Johnny was ferociously smart and strict, definitively scrupulous. He could be cruel, mean, difficult, but he had a superb sense of justice and he was always right, as unpleasant as it often was to be on the end of one of his lectures. It was like the four weirdest kids in the neighbourhood and they hated each other right from the beginning, the way teenagers hate each other."

For now, though, the band were focusing on tightening their set, making it all muscle, no fat. "They had rules," explains Melnick, by then their road manager. "They never tuned onstage and they never talked between songs. It was 1-2-3-4 song, 1-2-3-4 song after song after song. I'd hang up their jackets after the show and they'd be soaking wet with sweat. Sometimes



**'IT WAS A
NUTHOUSE -
WE WERE THE
REAL DEAL!'**

Words: Peter Watts ★ **Photo:** Bob Gruen



An army brat who claimed to sell
Nazi paraphernalia for morphine.
A delinquent who dropped TV sets off roofs.
A gangling freak with OCD.
And even a quietly organised music obsessive...
On their 40th anniversary, *Uncut* pieces
together the complete story of the RAMONES.
Or: how the four weirdest kids in
Forest Hills, New York, mixed leather,
pop art and the Three Stooges and
accidentally revolutionised rock'n'roll – at
speed. "Over 23 minutes," says Richard Lloyd,
"Led Zeppelin couldn't match them."



PLUS! GABBA GABBA HEY! THE 50 GREATEST
AMERICAN PUNK ALBUMS! SEE PAGE 42

AXE HERO

WHY I LOVE
JOHNNY
RAMONE

By Kevin Shields

The person who really inspired me the most was Johnny Ramone. That attitude, that thing. I'd been aware of punk bands and stuff like that, then I saw a documentary about punk in '78, I think, and it was the footage of the Ramones that blew me away by far the most. To me, it was very different

and alien and very removed from the whole '50s, '60s, '70s rock'n'roll attitude towards playing guitar, with the guitar hero. He was just this entity that had a guitar attached to him. It was that alienness.

At a playback of their first album at New York's Plaza Sound Studio, with producer Craig Leon, right, and engineer Rob Freeman, 1976



the next day they still weren't dry." "It requires a great deal of physical strength to play those downstrokes for half-an-hour," notes Kaye. "It's exhausting to keep that sense of metric propulsion going."

"Over 23 minutes Led Zeppelin couldn't match them," says Richard Lloyd.

AS 1975 PROGRESSED, CBGB's began to draw larger crowds. The club's founder, Hilly Kristal, had settled a dispute with *Village Voice* and was at last able to advertise gigs. In July, he launched the Unsigned Band Festival, whose lineup included the Ramones, Television and Talking Heads. The festival was covered by the music press; the Ramones were getting noticed.

"I'd watched them develop," confirms Sire Records producer Craig Leon. "By summer '75 I decided it was time to get my bosses along to see them. The root of all these punk bands was The Fugs, who were poets and beatniks who played music, and that tie-in with the New York art scene and the folk tradition of New York – folk in the sense of music from the streets being played back to the people, like The Fugs and The Velvet Underground – was important to me. I saw the Ramones as an extension of that, as well as a return to the cool record of the 1950s, Sun Studio and Eddie Cochran. There was this raw energy and they were also hysterically funny. Plus they wrote catchy songs. It was all the things rock and roll wasn't at that time. I didn't see it as a breakthrough, just something that was radically different. We thought they would give Bay City Rollers a run for their money."

Another admirer was Danny Fields, former manager of Lou Reed, the Stooges and The Doors who now wrote for *Soho Weekly News*. After prompting from Erdelyi – and a tip-off from fellow writer Lisa Robinson – Fields made





"The most perfect band..." Ramones in one of their Roberta Bayley shots for Punk magazine

BEHIND THE COVER

BLITZKRIEG SNAP

Roberta Bayley on photographing the Ramones cover

Punk magazine came out in 1976 and as soon as I saw it I fell in love. It had such a great sense of humour. For the third issue, they were doing the Ramones and asked me to shoot the cover. I shot about four rolls, just me and the Ramones, John Holmstrom, Legs McNeil and Arturo Vega. We took some in Vega's loft and the rest in this playground against a wall two doors down from Arturo's place. At the time, the album was coming out and Sire had hired a professional who took these pictures nobody liked. So they were scrambling around for pictures and went to Punk and saw mine. They picked one for the cover and I got paid \$125. It wasn't shot as an album cover which I think contributed to its success, because there wasn't any pressure about it. They are all looking at the camera and



in England especially a lot of people saw that and thought they were a gang. For *Rocket To Russia*, Danny Fields admits he wanted to capture the same image and tried to find the same wall but nobody could remember where it was. They are the most perfect band. Young kids still love them because they have it all - they are funny but they are loud, with this great image. It wasn't forced, it was how they were. A perfect band that worked because they were being exactly what they were."

I said I could make a whole album for the same cost. What's the point in setting up the Ramones for five songs when you can get an album? There had been inklings in the British press that something was happening in New York and Sire felt that if we could make a cheap album and get our money back in Europe it wasn't a risky proposition."

The Ramones entered Plaza Sound Studios above Radio City Music Hall to record their debut album in February 1976. Although Leon was producing, his guide was Erdelyi. "I was very conscious I was interpreting his vision. Tommy had the whole concept already planned. He designed the sets like one long art experience rather than a bunch of songs."

Ramones was recorded in five days. "We had a very low budget so had to work quickly," explains Erdelyi. "The first day we all had really bad colds so we had to redo the songs and lost some time there. It was hard to work with the engineers because what we did was so different they couldn't work it out. We then mixed it in one marathon session. In the end, it sounded almost arty."

That was precisely Leon's intention. "Nothing about it was conventional," he recalls. "Every track was done three-piece live, but there was considerable doubling, tripling, quadrupling of guitars. Johnny, Dee Dee and Tommy were all in different rooms, playing along to earphones. Tommy was playing to a visual metronome set at 208bpm because that was as fast as it could go, although for 'I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend' we slowed it down to 192."

Leon mixed three versions - mono, stereo and the one released, which had "extreme separation, with guitars in one speaker, bass in the other and drums coming down the middle with vocals all around. It was meant to be high impact." The album cost \$6,300 and was packaged with Roberta Bayley's photograph of the band slouching meanly against a brick wall - a happy accident, even if Leon had proposed

just such an image, inspired by that on The Fugs' debut. From the opening salvo of "Blitzkrieg Bop", with Joey's "Hey ho, let's go" battle cry, this was a dramatic hello. Songs were belligerent, comic, romantic and autobiographic, often all at once, as with Dee Dee's "53rd & 3rd", which recalled his experiences turning tricks to pay for his continuing heroin habit. "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend" was beautiful and yearning, "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue" gleeful, funny and dumb. The songs were deceptively simple - Richard Lloyd once tried to write a song with Joey, but discovered Joey's guitar only had two strings because that was all he needed

- supremely melodic and incredibly fast. "Their songs are sweet, they have great melodies, they are hummable and they are on those basic chords that often change in a strange place in the bar," says Kaye. "When you add Joey's sense of romantic longing, there's a real sense of desire in those songs."

Although the album was well-reviewed, it sold poorly and was ignored by radio - a pattern that would become familiar. But Leon says that "where radio took a chance, you could see these little pockets of bands popping up - in Ohio, in Athens, Georgia, and in Europe." He sent a copy to Paul McCartney, with a note that the band had been named after him. "He wrote back saying his mind was blown, he couldn't believe it," says Leon.

"The audience didn't want to hear it... they threw batteries, coins, ice picks"

MONTE MELNICK

• a new face in the studio. "Phil Spector wanted to produce the Ramones ever since he saw them at the Whisky in 1977," explains Stasium. "He was always calling Seymour and it got to a point where the band couldn't say no. Joey wanted to do it, Johnny was more wary, but they'd had no success selling records or getting on the radio."

While Stasium, on Johnny's insistence, was in LA working with Spector as "musical director", Erdelyi didn't get the call. The band's chief architect had been ditched. He remains phlegmatic: "The record company decided that to get a hit, they needed a hit producer. I didn't have a problem with that. I felt lucky we still had a label. I didn't do anything with the band again until the mid-1980s. It was rough, but that's the way it was."

At the same time, Fields and Linda Stein's management contract was not renewed. The band, perhaps blindly, were looking for anything that could break their bad luck. In some ways, Fields and Erdelyi had a lucky escape. The *End Of The Century* sessions were legendary for Spector's bizarre behaviour, which was too much even for the Ramones. "Phil would make us do take after take and then listen back for an hour at excruciating volume while he stamped his feet and swore," recalls Stasium. "It was so loud he couldn't talk so had this sign language worked out with his engineer – like if he wanted reverb he'd slap his tongue. He'd listen to tapes on playback 300 times. He'd pick up the phone and yell at imaginary people. There was a Nice Phil and Evil Phil. Nice Phil would be casually dressed with glasses and a paperboy hat, like Lennon in *A Hard Day's Night*. Then he'd disappear for 45 minutes and Evil Phil would come back, with sunglasses and a wig, Beatle boots, a purple jacket... and a cape." One evening, Spector refused to let the band leave his mansion, making them repeatedly watch an Anthony Hopkins film, *Magic*. "He didn't want people to leave, he was lonely," says Stasium, who, along with Marc Bell, refutes the claim that Spector pulled a gun on the band. "I saw no gunplay," confirms Stasium. "Nobody pointed a gun at anybody," agrees Bell.

Johnny took things particularly badly, infuriated with the way Spector fawned over Joey while making Johnny play the same chord hour after hour. "John thought Phil was busting his balls," admits Bell. "He wasn't, he wanted a certain feedback sound. Phil was meticulous; the Ramones were quick but this was Phil Spector and this was how he worked. Johnny tried to be in control and when he was belittled he couldn't take it. But Phil wasn't his girlfriend, Johnny couldn't push him around, and Seymour was paying the bill. Me and Joey understood that, Dee Dee and Johnny didn't."

After a week, Johnny threatened to return to New York and Stasium called Seymour Stein to arrange a summit. "We met in Joey's room at the Tropicana," reveals Stasium. "Phil took his bodyguard in case Johnny jumped him. I told Phil that Johnny couldn't work like that and Phil gave in. After that, things went a lot quicker."

Despite the hours in the studio, Stasium says, "Phil didn't do anything. The arrangements were the same as on the demos. Phil's presence is really felt on the mixing, with tons of reverb and handclaps." Spector was convinced it would be



END OF THE CENTURY was the band's best-selling album but still didn't give them an American hit and remains an oddity. "Do You Remember Rock'n'Roll Radio?" points to a more mature take on the signature Ramones sound, "Chinese Rock" has real bite, while the stunning cover of "Baby, I Love You" could come from a Joey Ramone solo album, itself a bone of contention for Johnny, who feared being sidelined. There is, though, too much forgettable material on the record; a sign, perhaps, that the Ramones were reaching some kind of plateau. Starved of chart success but with an increasingly fanatical fanbase, the band had painted themselves into a corner. "Their concept was so firm they had to become that concept," is how Lenny Kaye sees it. Things got worse when Joey's girlfriend, Linda, started seeing Johnny. They eventually married. Joey and Johnny didn't speak for the rest of their lives.

There is, on *End Of The Century*, a particular poignant song, "Danny Says", which begins with Joey referencing their former manager. "That song isn't really about me," admits Fields. "It's a love story Joey wrote to Linda. It's a poisoned song and I get introduced as the person it is about. Well, it's not about me, I had nothing to do with the fucking album and it's about a love affair that turned into a tragedy."

When the Ramones came out of Spector's studio, relationships were damaged and loyal companions cast aside. The '80s and '90s would be a long, hard slog for a band that continued to release albums but had more or less given up on chart success. They instead focused on playing to adoring

fans in Europe, South America and Japan, never deviating from the purity, the audacious simplicity, of that original vision. Of that, Erdelyi remains proud. "Through my life, I came up with a lot of ideas," he says, "but this one not only happened, it worked out better than I could ever have imagined."

The Ramones split in 1996 and affirmation would arrive when they were inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 2002. In 2003, they featured in a documentary, *End Of The Century*. By then, Joey was gone, dying of lymphoma in 2001. Dee Dee and Johnny followed within three years.

"They wanted to be on Top 10 radio, and maybe they should have done, but in the long term they are revered in the iconography of rock'n'roll," says Lenny Kaye. "With their very short songs they brought everything back down to ground zero, in the same way The Stooges had performed that alchemical reduction in form. Because it was so easy to play and understand, it was incredibly infectious. They made a load of great albums and their sound went around the world." ①



RAMONES ON FILM

ROCK'N'ROLL HIGH SCHOOL

The band's bizarre starring movie role

Director Allan Arkush first got the idea of making a film about a rock band taking over a school from his teenage daydreams. When he began working for prolific B-movie producer Roger Corman, Arkush was able to turn it into reality, writing *Rock'n'Roll High School* with Joe Dante. At first, Cheap Trick, Van Halen and Devo were considered for the role, but then the Ramones came into the picture and "a bell went off in my head", Arkush said. The film was shot in LA in 1978. The Ramones, awkwardly, play themselves ("the hottest band this side of the Iron Curtain"), and PJ Soles plays their biggest fan, a student at a school where the principal despises rock and does her best to keep the Ramones and students apart. She fails, obviously, the Ramones rock out and the school explodes. Marky Ramone remembers the film as "six hours of waiting around to do a five-minute part. Me and Dee Dee spent a lot of it zonked. In the last scene there were these pyrotechnics going off behind us while we played. I was actually scared. It was a lot hotter than we expected, especially with the leather jackets." The film was released in 1979 and became Corman's most successful production.



Director Allan Arkush, actress PJ Soles and Joey Ramone, 1978



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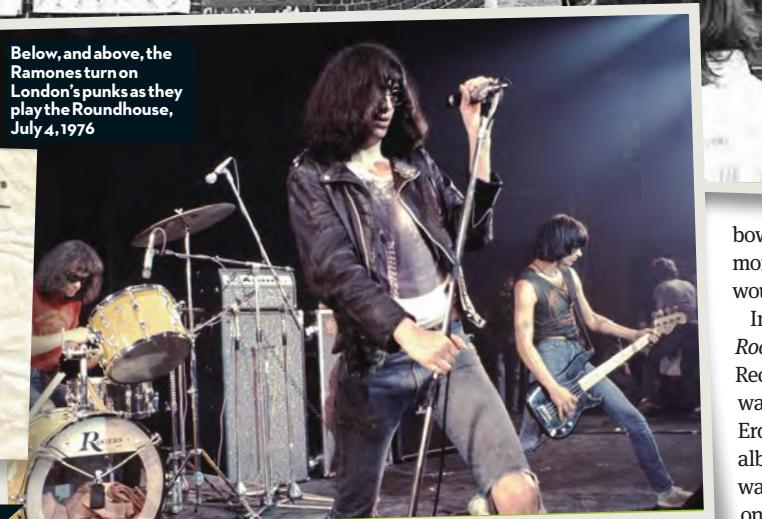


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Below, and above, the Ramones turn on London's punks as they play the Roundhouse, July 4, 1976



DAMNED GOOD

POP PUNKS!

Rat Scabies, Damned drummer, on the view from London in 1976

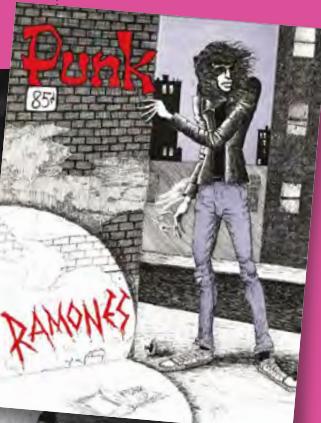
Everybody in the London scene had heard of the Ramones. We'd go to Bizarre Records in Praed Street in Paddington run by a French guy who was au fait with the New York scene and stocked *Punk* magazine. We'd get *Punk* and look at the photographs of these bands and try to guess what the music sounded

like. The first record we heard was 'Little Johnny Jewel' by Television.

"There was nothing disappointing about Ramones. I remember listening to it with Paul Simonon and we thought it was great, as it was what we were about, short pop songs about life. The Ramones had a pop sensibility that made me think of Sweet or Marc Bolan, they weren't abrasive like Iggy.

"I saw both Ramones shows in July 1976 and met them at Dingwalls. They sounded just like the record and that was what we wanted."

They felt like a big deal - they got reviewed in the papers and had a deal with a proper record company. We felt an immediate connection and it was confirmation that we weren't the only ones doing it. It wasn't about 'who came first?' but the fact the same thing was happening in different parts of the world. It wasn't just London frustration, it was the next generation getting angry, in London, in New York, in Australia. It made us realise we weren't alone."



The Ramones with The Damned's Rat Scabies and Brian James at London's Dingwalls, July 5, 1976

In July 1976, the band landed two gigs supporting The Flamin' Groovies at the Roundhouse and headlining Dingwalls in London, where the first stirrings of punk were taking shape. "We knew that we had sold out these places so we had an idea something was going on," says Erdelyi. Fields recalls the three-day trip with astonishment: "They played for 3,000 people; their biggest audience before had been 50. There were people lining up to meet them, to sleep with them, to sleep with me. The dressing room was full of people from The Clash, The Damned and the Sex Pistols - Johnny Rotten had to climb up knotted sheets to get through the window. They were amazed that a band could put out a record like this. Johnny told Paul Simonon, 'We suck, we can't play. But don't worry, just do it.'"

BUT BACK HOME it was a different story. "We bought a van [Melnick was designated driver] and hit the road, playing smallish venues, 200-300 people, all kinds of places like lumberjack bars and bowling alleys," confirms Erdelyi. "We weren't making money but by the time we left each town, six bands would start up."

In 1977, the band released two albums, *Leave Home* and *Rocket To Russia*. Erdelyi enlisted an old contact from his Record Plant days, Tony Bongiovi, as producer. "Tony was a kid genius who ran off to Motown when he was 16," Erdelyi explains. "On *Leave Home* we wanted a hard-pop album, and he knew where all the first-rate equipment was that came within Sire's budget. But my hands were on everything."

Bongiovi recruited Ed Stasium to help. "I thought I was co-producing until I got my copy of *Leave Home* and saw I was just the engineer," says Stasium. "In truth, Tony was hardly there, Tommy did most of the producing and I jumped in." *Leave Home* was an appendix to *Ramones* with songs about war ("Commando"), insanity ("Gimme Gimme Shock Treatment") and adhesives ("Carbona Not Glue"), but the combination of Erdelyi and Stasium would click on *Rocket To Russia*. "It is the Ramones at their peak," confirms Erdelyi. "It's my favourite and it was Johnny's favourite. We mixed it at the Power Station, we were the first act to use it - Tony had just finished building it. That's why it sounds so good, we were able to use the best studio, the songs were great and the band was playing well. It all came together."

Rocket To Russia was a fabulous, punchy, album, featuring gorgeous single "Rockaway Beach" (a classic summer song, released in the winter), the belting "Sheena Is A Punk Rocker", the pleading "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow" and the desperate, snotty "I Wanna Be Well". Despite the brilliance of the songs, the band, who were aching for chart success, were struggling to get airplay. "We thought their songs were catchy, they sounded like hits," acknowledges Fields. "We never had any problems with subject matter, although we did suggest they stop singing about Nazis. The Ramones were tarred more by the subject matter of another band, who were getting a great deal of publicity, and that was the Sex Pistols. The Sex Pistols were huge news when they came over and this thing called punk was all over the national news. Radio stations thought that if the Ramones had a hit they'd have to get them into the studio and then they'd puke all over the console or swear at everybody."

Punk wasn't the only problem. "One way to sell records is to open for bigger bands and steal their audience," confides Fields. "But the Ramones were a terrible opening act. They were always getting things thrown at them." This was no exaggeration, as audiences reacted in horror to the Ramones' unique approach, a problem dating right back to June 1975,

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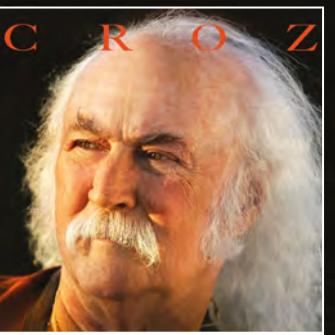
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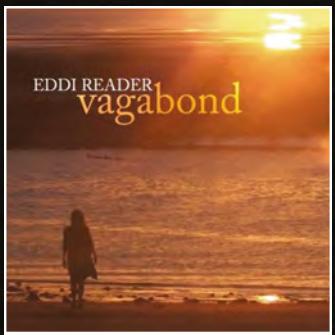
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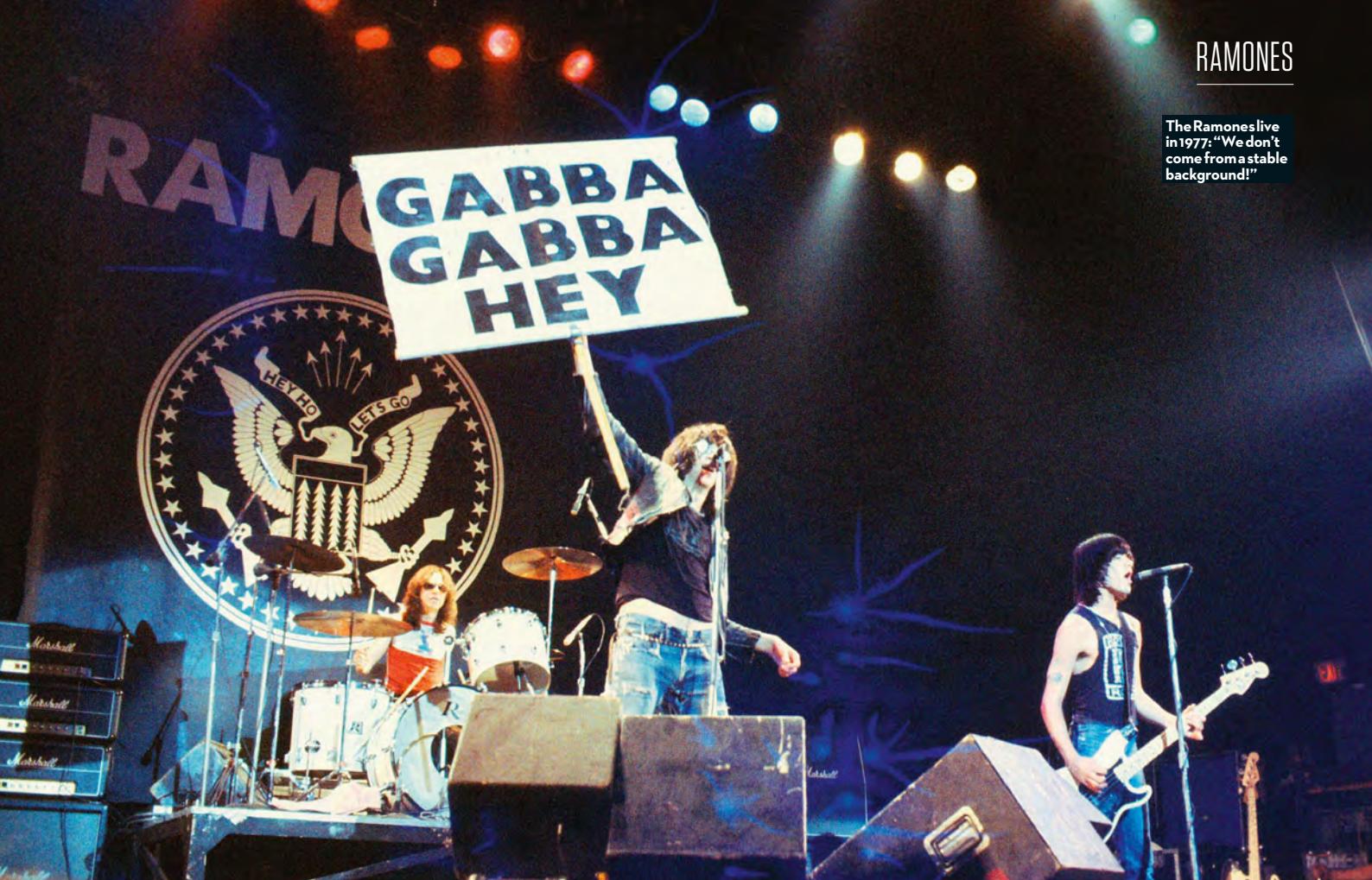
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The Ramones live in 1977: "We don't come from a stable background!"



when the Ramones played their first gig outside New York, supporting Johnny Winter in Cincinnati. "We were doing our thing, which meant we didn't stop between songs until we'd done about six, when we took our leather jackets off," says Erdelyi. "There was silence. Then slowly this noise, this rumbling, came up from the audience and they went crazy – 'What the hell is this! Get off the stage!'"

"We'd be on crazy bills opening for Black Sabbath, it was painful," says Melnick. "The audience didn't want to hear it, they threw batteries, coins, ice picks – they weren't kidding. Ted Nugent's audience were a little easier, they just threw sandwiches. We opened for Toto, who were so laidback that by the time they worked out what was going on, the Ramones had played their set and were off." It took years before booking agents realised the Ramones could only work as headliners, which for much of the 1970s meant they had to play smaller clubs.

ROBERTA BAYLEY/REDFERNS

"I lost touch with reality. I was in Ramones world, not the normal world"

TOMMY ERDELYI

The Ramones had something special, but they were hurling themselves against a brick wall trying to prove it. "It was hard for me," notes Erdelyi. "We got along great until we started touring, which is true of a lot of bands, but the Ramones were different, they were a little higher strung than other bands. What made the music so different and exciting was their personalities, but their personalities were kind of rough to be in a band with. I lost touch with reality. I was in the Ramones world, not the normal world. It was like being in a Picasso painting, everything was sideways. You only have to listen to the songs to get an idea of what it was like to be with these people."

In 1978, Erdelyi decided to concentrate on producing. As Dee Dee once said, "People who join a band like the Ramones don't come from a stable background" and a huge number of early Ramones songs referenced mental illness. This wasn't fiction: Dee Dee was bipolar, Joey had OCD. "Joey's OCD wasn't diagnosed so

HOW TO BUY



RAMONES

SIRE, 1976

Brilliant, short, unforgettable, from the snarky

"Beat On The Brat" to the heart-tugging "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend". "That album smells of New York," says producer Craig Leon.

9/10



LEAVE HOME

SIRE, 1977

Same again, a B-movie combination of

the weird and the lovelorn with future live staples "Pinhead", "Commando" and "Oh, Oh, I Love Her So".

8/10



ROCKET TO RUSSIA

SIRE, 1977

Their best, with the Ramones sound crystallised on "Cretin Hop", "Rockaway Beach", "Sheena Is A Punk Rocker" and "Teenage Lobotomy".

10/10



ROAD TO RUIN

SIRE, 1978

Acoustic guitars on "Don't Come Close" and the country-ish "Questioningly" were a sign of something new, while "I Wanna Be Sedated" and "It's A Long Way Back" were classic Ramones.

8/10



IT'S ALIVE

SIRE, 1979

Live set from New Year's Eve in 1977 at the Rainbow in

London, with Tommy on drums and the band in pulverising, headlong form.

8/10



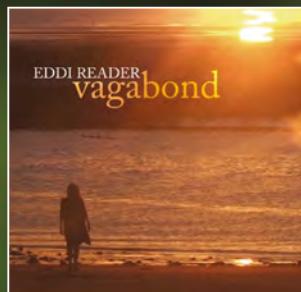
END OF THE CENTURY

SIRE, 1980

Spector's hand is all over this odd album that has some substandard songs but also classics like "Danny Says", "Do You Remember Rock'n'Roll Radio?" and "Baby, I Love You".

8/10

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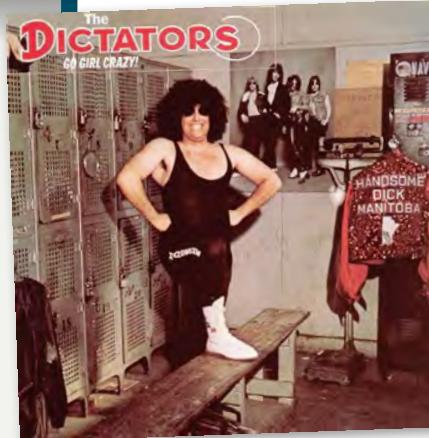
GREATEST AMERICAN PUNK ALBUMS



THE RAMONES ARE on the cover, and to celebrate the *Uncut* team have dug out their leather jackets and Converse sneakers and compiled a Top 50 of the greatest American punk albums. But what constitutes "American punk" in the first place? After some debate, we decided to avoid the ur-punk groups like The Velvet Underground and The Stooges, or the proto-punk garage scene that spawned *Nuggets*, and focus on the period between 1975 – where the CBGB's crowd were at their rowdiest – and 1983, when punk had arguably fragmented and mutated into something beyond its original form. Our list incorporates albums by bands hailing from the urban-industrial landscape of Cleveland, the backwaters of the American Northwest, from Los Angeles, New York, Houston and Minneapolis. One album is produced by a '60s West Coast rock legend. Another features 14 songs in 15 minutes. A third includes an unlikely encomium to Idi Amin. Here, then, is *Uncut*'s pick of the loudest, fastest, hardest, sweatiest albums ever...

Hey! Ho! Let's go!

GIJSBERT HANKE/ROOT/REDFERNS; ROBERTA BAYLEY/REDFERNS



1 THE DICTATORS GO GIRL CRAZY!

EPIC, 1975

Rarely accorded iconic status, The Dictators' debut is a milestone in smart-assed, knuckleheaded American punk, hymning beer, junk food and TV in stoopid anthems like "Teengenerate". Formed in 1973 around the three-chord method of songwriter-bassist Andy "Adny" Shernoff and metal soloing of guitarist Ross "The Boss" Friedman, their no-frills New York street gang look and trash culture aesthetic predated the Ramones (as did their buzzsaw cover of "California Sun"). Roadie-turned-singer Handsome Dick Manitoba's antics made them a live favourite, but an antagonistic presence: Manitoba's macho heckling of Jayne County resulted in a brawl that saw The Dictators banned from Max's Kansas City. **DL**

YOUTUBEKEYWORDS: "dictators teengenerate"

dream lyrics, but equally important is the album's pop-literateness, collaging old songs ("Gloria", "Land Of A Thousand Dances") as the foundations from which she takes flight. John Cale's production leaves the rough edges on the jams driven by guitarist Lenny Kaye, while Tom Verlaine contributes imitable flashes as guest guitarist. **DL**

YOUTUBEKEYWORDS: "patti smith SNL Gloria"

3 RAMONES RAMONES

SIRE, 1976

Dolly Parton famously joked "it costs a lot of money to look this cheap". By the same token, to sound as stupid as the Ramones managed on their debut required considerable intelligence. Superficially a piledriving record, *Ramones* is actually all about variety: noise and silence, punk and pop, black and white. So it was with the songs. From hustler's lament to high-school romance; United Fruit and Castro to assault with a deadly weapon... the Ramones had it all covered. The extremity makes it punk. The subtlety makes it an enduring classic. **JR**

YOUTUBEKEYWORDS: "ramones max's 1976"

4 THE RUNAWAYS THE RUNAWAYS

MERCURY, 1976

Chugga-chugga-paced hard rock sufficiently rudimentary to pass for punk, the debut by Kim Fowley's teen-girl rock group is the missing link between the glitter-fetishism of Rodney's English Disco and the day-glo punk of Los Angeles' Masque club. Constructed around lingerie-clad singer Cherie Currie and moody guitarist Joan Jett, The Runaways cut up rough on "You Drive Me Wild", with attitude aplenty on "Cherry Bomb", but Jett felt there was revolutionary intent, too. "Girls playing rock'n'roll means that they're being blatantly sexual," she said. "And in America, girls and women aren't allowed to be." **JW**

YOUTUBEKEYWORDS: "jett runaways cherry 1976"



Punk queen and king: Patti Smith in 1976 and Richard Hell in 1977

everybody thought he was out of his fucking mind," reveals Melnick. "He couldn't help himself, he had to touch the door knob six times, walk on the kerb then walk off the kerb. One time we came back from a tour and he said, 'I have to go back to the airport to touch something' and jumped in a cab. He had to do it. And Dee Dee had multiple personalities. You never knew who would turn up, the good one, the naughty one, the happy one, the sad one."

Bell took over on drums, becoming Marky Ramone just as the relationship between the band was starting to fray. "From the moment I joined, Joey and Johnny didn't talk," Bell recalls. "Joey didn't like Johnny because he didn't like his politics. John didn't like Joey because he thought he was a freak but Joey and Dee wrote all the songs and Johnny wouldn't have a band without them. Dee Dee and Joey had mental problems, Dee Dee did drugs, I liked to drink and Johnny's problem was having to deal with us. It was a nuthouse, we were the real deal, borderline mental cases."

Johnny responded to the instability around him by becoming increasingly controlling; what had once been Tommy's band was now Johnny's, and although contemporaries speak fondly of the guitarist, he could be ruthless. "Johnny felt insecure when he wasn't in control," says Erdelyi. "He was incredibly controlling, but he was a complex person and it kept everybody on their toes, which they needed."

"It was Johnny's band," continues Fields. "There was no situation he would be in, in which he was not the leader. I considered myself to be working for him. He'd make everybody crazy. Why isn't there ketchup? Why can't they make a hamburger in France? Why do we have to eat curry in



The Ramones with Marky, far left, NYC, 1981

the UK? He didn't like foreigners or being in a foreign place. It took him a long time to work out that curry is not the enemy." It was tough for the others, but Richard Lloyd isn't alone when he points out "Johnny's rigidity brought them great opportunities. You think Dee Dee could have been leader of that band?"

MARC BELL WAS thrown in at the deep end. "I had to learn 40 songs in two weeks," he remembers. "We did *Road To Ruin*, then we made *Rock 'n' Roll High School*, then we did the Phil Spector album, all in 18 months. What Tommy was doing is what Ringo did in The Beatles but faster. I had to bring what I knew into the songs that Tommy couldn't because he wasn't a drummer. There were players like Van Halen coming out and they needed a stronger backbone."

1978's *Road To Ruin* was the first album credited as an Erdelyi-Stasium co-production and it showed the band beginning to explore new areas in search of that elusive hit. "We were trying for something a little more commercial," agrees Erdelyi. "We added some country elements and

acoustic guitar. We did what we thought were radio-friendly songs – 'Questioningly' and 'Don't Come Close' – which the radio completely ignored." Again, the songs were superb – "I Wanna Be Sedated" is among their very finest – but after another flop Johnny Ramone put on a brave face: "I don't feel desperate. Although I don't feel like waiting another two years to get big."

Sire – now owned by Warner Bros – were also getting anxious. Ed Stasium first sensed something was afoot when he went to Los Angeles to mix the title song for their B-movie *Rock 'n' Roll High School*. "I went to the studio and Tommy wasn't around," he says. "Johnny just said, 'Tommy's not coming.'"

It was a sign of things to come. When the Ramones recorded *End Of The Century*, their fifth album, there was

“From the moment I joined, Joey and Johnny didn't talk”

MARC BELL

STASIUM ROCK

THE FIFTH RAMONE

Ed Stasium's crucial role in the Ramones

THE TITLE of "fifth Ramone" has been given to designer Arturo Vega and road manager Monte Melnick but could also go to Ed Stasium. Stasium was engineer, then co-producer, then musical director, on five of the Ramones' six 1970s releases and also played on many of

them. "When they wanted to embellish the sound I'd play clean guitars under Johnny's chainsaw. Nobody can sound like Johnny Ramone, so Tommy and I both did some acoustic soloing. I also did a lot of background singing, I'm an

expert at Ramones' 'Ooohs'." By the time the band recorded *End Of The Century*, Stasium was rehearsing with the band as a second guitarist and ever-present in the studio, playing instruments and liaising between Spector and the Ramones. Earlier, he had even been asked to join the band by Danny Fields and Linda Stein. "I would have been Eddy Ramone," Stasium laughs. "But I didn't fancy being on the road, I liked producing, so I said no." Stasium continued to work with the band on and off through the 1980s and 1990s.



Ed Stasium (right) with Lenny Kaye



Pump it up...
The Heartbreakers
onstage: (l-r) Walter
Lure, Billy Rath,
Jerry Nolan, Johnny
Thunders; below right,
Jonathan Richman

5 THE MODERN LOVERS THE MODERN LOVERS

HOME OF THE HITS, 1976

 Post-punk before punk even existed, Jonathan Richman had dialled down the volume considerably by the time the first Modern Lovers album was released. Recorded between 1971 and 1973, when the insanely sensitive Bostonian's mission was to splice the clanking assault of his beloved Velvet Underground to lyrics that espoused hope and a healthy lifestyle, *The Modern Lovers* celebrates motorway driving ("Roadrunner"), loving your parents ("Old World") and romance, though purely from the neck up. Richman's U-certificate quest for honesty would lead his MkII Modern Lovers to spend part of the summer of 1977 recording a version of "The Wheels On The Bus". Winsome, lose some. JW

YOUTUBEKEYWORDS: "jonathan richman interview 1978"

6 TELEVISION MARQUEE MOON

ELEKTRA, 1977

 New York punk's founding fathers – they literally built the CBGB's stage in 1973 – Television were the last of the first wave to actually record an album. By this point, the group had dropped co-founder Richard Hell from bass and moved from the ballsier, more succinct garage-derived sounds of their original live incarnation. The tense, abstruse poetry of Tom Verlaine's barked, sneered and whispered lyrics lend an urban intellectual bent to songs like "Elevation": but it's his questing, free-jazz inflected guitar trade-offs with Richard Lloyd on the title track that define the record, and became their trademark. DL

YOUTUBEKEYWORDS: "television marquee cbgb's"

7 TALKING HEADS TALKING HEADS: 77

SIRE, 1977

At first listen, the lean, (nerve-) jangling minimalism of Talking Heads' debut seems far removed from the thick, ominous world grooves of later landmarks *Fear Of Music* and *Remain In Light*. But from the first, the band's peculiar tension derives from the disconnect between the rock-solid, watertight pop rhythms of bass-drums couple Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth, and David Byrne's strained, jerky falsetto and odd, neurotic lyrical focus: not for nothing was their second album titled *More Songs About Buildings And Food*. The presence of steel drums on

TALKING HEADS: 77

opener "Uh-Oh, Love Comes To Town", meanwhile, already signals the desire to move beyond the textures of two guitars, bass and drums. DL
YOUTUBEKEYWORDS: "psycho killer old grey whistle test"

8 CHROME ALIEN SOUNDTRACKS

SIRE, 1977

 Credited to "Chrome featuring Damon Edge", *Alien Soundtracks* suggests just how dramatically Edge's band were changed by the arrival of guitarist Helios Creed. Formerly a more "punk" group – their 1976 debut sounds like a lo-fi



Eno production for Sparks – this was an altogether more experimental beast. Filled with tribal rhythms, tape splicing and Krautrock hoedowns, it expressed its alienation by mangling any human element within its collage. Makes a very strange bedfellow with, say, the first Ramones album – this lies down more between Can and 23 Skidoo. JR

YOUTUBEKEYWORDS: "chrome alien soundtracks"

9 RICHARD HELL & THE VOIDOIDS BLANK GENERATION

SIRE, 1977

 Poet manqué Richard Hell never tires of telling everyone within earshot that he invented punk rock. With his strung-out yowps and the mischievous twinkle in his eye as he tells you how bored he is long before John Lydon, Hell has as good a claim as anyone. Hell may not have had the snot or snarl we now associate with punk, but his devil-may-care ennui on the title track is music's ultimate anti-hero pose. But the real star of the show

here is the peerless guitarist Robert Quine, whose jagged solos on "Blank Generation" and "Love Comes In Spurts" – somehow both filled with rage and absolutely exquisite – proved that you could create a new language and challenge orthodoxy without resorting to blunt force or trying to break the land speed record. PS

YOUTUBEKEYWORDS: "hell voidoids love cbgb's"

10 HEARTBREAKERS LAMF

TRACK, 1977

 It's probably fitting that *LAMF* should be known for its murky mix. Featuring Dolls refugees (Johnny Thunders and Jerry Nolan) and compositions by Richard Hell and Dee Dee Ramone, a certain lack of clarity went with the territory. In love with extremity, but also nostalgic for the formulations of '50s and '60s pop, *LAMF* is junk rock in extremis, with a foot in more innocent times. The past had Chuck Berry and Keith Richards. In the future was Julian Casablancas. In the fleeting present, an all-too-brief candle, were the Heartbreakers. JR
YOUTUBEKEYWORDS: "heartbreakers thunders born live"

11 IGGY POP AND JAMES WILLIAMSON KILL CITY

BOMPL, 1977

 This being the 1970s, even the most self-destructive character in rock'n'roll was lost without a major label deal. At sea (actually in a California mental hospital) after the dissolution of Iggy And The Stooges, in 1975 Pop and Stooges guitarist Williamson worked on a career-saving demo ultimately rendered unnecessary by the timely intervention of David Bowie. This Stonesy, wound-licking and saxophone-laced rock eventually found a home with Greg Shaw's garage/punk label Bomp!, and instantly feels a piece with the sparky new wave of 1979's *New Values*. JR
YOUTUBEKEYWORDS: "iggy pop james williamson"

12 SUICIDE SUICIDE

RED STAR, 1977

 Coming from a background in avant-garde jazz (Martin Rev, keyboards) and visual art (vocalist Alan Vega), many reacted to Suicide the band, and *Suicide* the album, as an assault on rock'n'roll, due to their no-guitars heresy. But in truth they formed a very punk offensive, as on the LP's centrepiece, "Frankie Teardrop": a nightmarish epic of urban despair, murder and suicide, delivered inside a relentless, two-note, proto-industrial hiss, Vega's hiccuping, mumbled vocals sounding like Elvis' paranoid ghost being drowned by the dense wash of Rev's boiling synths. DL
YOUTUBEKEYWORDS: "suicide cbgb's ghost rider"

50 GREATEST AMERICAN PUNK ALBUMS



Blondie at the *Parallel Lines* cover shoot, 1978

13 PERE UBU THE MODERN DANCE

BLANK, 1978



New York gets the glory, but in the early '70s, Cleveland's desolate urban-industrial landscapes produced some of the US' most alienated, intelligent and downright rockin' punk activity. Founded by the imposing David Thomas following the demise of Rocket From The Tombs, Pere Ubu was conceived as a one-off studio project to record the devastating "30 Seconds Over Tokyo"/"Heart Of Darkness" single, but proved too potent to stop. Spacious but claustrophobic, abstract yet pop, *The Modern Dance* transmutes a fistful of influences – Velvets, Stooges, Beefheart, Roxy, analogue synth noise, motorik pulse, soundtrack atmosphere – into something never quite heard before. **DL**

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "pere ubu live 1978"

14 LOU REED STREET HASSLE

ARISTA, 1978



Lou Reed didn't need distorted guitars to be punk rock. A record incorporating ersatz lounge jazz, loose R'n'B and exquisite string arrangements, *Street Hassle* is nonetheless capable of offending nearly anyone. At age 36, Reed addressed his work and reputation with a terrible savagery. The album begins with Reed heckling himself as a "faggot junkie" over the chords of "Sweet Jane", while the title track boils his street-level scenarios thus far into a suite of distillate misanthropy. Posing a question – if he felt like this about himself, what did Lou Reed think about anyone else? **JW**

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "lou reed live chicago 1978"

15 DEAD BOYS WE HAVE COME FOR YOUR CHILDREN

SIRE, 1978



Another Rocket From The Tombs veteran, Cheetah Chrome netted Cleveland art-rockers when he formed neanderthal glam outfit Frankenstein, roping in sandpaper-voiced weasel Stiv Bators as singer. Rebranded the Dead Boys, they moved to New York. Their first album, *Young, Loud And Snotty*, maybe had more hits, but its hastily assembled follow-up better encapsulates their tasteless cock-rock tendencies. Wince and wonder as they sing a hymn to a New York serial killer on "Son Of Sam" and close with a reading of deceased former RFTT bandmate Peter Laughner's nihilistic "Ain't It Fun". **JW**

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "dead boys son sam cbgb's"



16 DEVO Q: ARE WE NOT MEN? A: WE ARE DEVO!

WARNER BROTHERS, 1978

Ohio art-school boppers Devo morphed into a vaguely sci-fi novelty act, scoring a major US hit with 1980's "Whip It", but their 1978 debut was grimmer and greyer. Produced by Brian Eno – with a little help from David Bowie – *Q: Are We Not Men?*

fleshes out founder members Jerry Casale and Mark Mothersbaugh's dystopian vision of de-evolution: mankind's gradual descent back into ape-like idiocy. Their rinky-dink reworking of The Rolling Stones' "...Satisfaction" symbolised the dark underpinning of their signature tune, the Frank Zappa twitch "Jocko Homo": "We're pinheads now, we are not whole," Casale barks. Wholly disconcerting. **JW**

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "devo satisfaction french tv"

17 BLONDIE PARALLEL LINES

CHRYSTALIS, 1978



Ultra-slick and disco-literate, Blondie's third album propelled US punk into another stratosphere. Regarded as lightweights by snarkier New York contemporaries, Blondie embraced their pop instincts by hiring Mike Chapman to oversee *Parallel Lines*, with the Sweet and Suzi Quatro producer corralling an odd ragbag of material – there are writing credits for five of the band's six members, plus three cover versions – into a cogent whole. "Heart Of Glass" gave them a No 1 on both sides of the Atlantic, but the more nuanced "11:59" and "Fade Away And Radiate" hold their own amid a glut of hits. **JW**

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "blondie glass glasgow 1979"

18 JOHNNY THUNDERS SO ALONE

REAL, 1978



Recorded in London after The Heartbreakers' dissolution, Thunders and co-producer Steve Lillywhite assembled a veritable supergroup for his solo debut: the core is Sex Pistols Steve Jones and Paul Cook and Thin Lizzy's Phil Lynott on bass, with backing spots for Steve Marriott, Chrissie Hynde,

The Only Ones' Peter Perrett, and Heartbreakers Walter Lure and Billy Rath. Built around Thunders' brawling guitar and endless love of rock'n'roll, doo wop, R'n'B, surf tunes and girl groups, it's a swaggering, trashy, magnificently messy affair but spiked with surprisingly tender, painful introspection as in the masterly epitaph, "You Can't Put Your Arms Around A Memory". **DL**

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "johnny thunders so alone 1978"

19 GERMS (GI) SLASH, 1979



The short life and largely unnoticed death of Darby Crash (he committed suicide two days before John Lennon's murder) gave LA punk its own doomed hero. Heroin-addicted and chaotic, however, isn't the full story of the Germs. After the nagging simplicity of their debut single "Forming", the leap into focused aggression made by the Joan Jett-produced *(GI)* ("Germs Incognito") is huge. A band that matched its intensity with rugged lyricism ("What We Do Is Secret"), tracks like the deadly "Shut Down (Annihilation Man)" find the band staggering towards the sick blues later cultivated by The Gun Club and Nick Cave. **JR**

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "germs decline western"



20 THE CONTORTIONS BUY

ZE, 1979

The sound of James Brown torturing a seagull, *Buy* epitomises the No Wave sound that dominated high-end post-punk discourse. Short and violent, it was the musical embodiment of the Contortions' Cuban-heeled founder James Chance, a Milwaukee sax maniac who received his first music lessons from nuns and happened upon CBGB's after coming to New York in an attempt to make it as a jazzman. Tired of the dead-eyed responses the Contortions received from SoHo loft smugsters, Chance gained a reputation for physical confrontation. "I just started slapping some of them," he recalled. For a more sustained aural beating, try "Design To Kill" or "Contort Yourself". **JW**

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "contorts live max's"



21 THE DICKIES DAWN OF THE DICKIES

A&M, 1979
The LA cover version kings' bad-taste orgy peaked with their second LP, featuring Sammy Davis Jr tribute "Where Did His Eye Go?" and a reading of The Moody Blues' "Nights In White Satin", issued as a single in a superbly crass Ku Klux Klan sleeve. Sharp-witted for all of their dimbo reputation, things went dark for the Dickies; keyboard player Chuck Wagon shot himself in 1981, and singer Leonard Graves Phillips recalled: "I was strung out on drugs – all of us were – and we just sat in front of a TV for about seven years." JW

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "dickies white satin"

22 BLACK RANDY AND THE METROSQUAD PASS THE DUST, I THINK I'M BOWIE

DANGERHOUSE, 1979
A telesales genius and notorious liar, as well as a lightning rod in the early LA scene, Black Randy – aka John Morris – died of an AIDS-related illness in 1988, having made three singles and this LP. Tone deaf and confrontational, his brand of black humour means an encomium to Idi Amin rubs shoulders with a cover of "Theme From Shaft", but "I Wanna Be A Nark" – his gas station clerk's fantasy of being a cop so he can bust the cool kids – encapsulates his malodorous beauty. JW

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "i wanna be a nark"

23 THE JIM CARROLL BAND

CATHOLIC BOY

ATCO, 1980
"I can remember when I was a kid going up to Times Square and it was this breathtaking scene of depravity, which I think every kid should be exposed to," recalled Jim Carroll. Those formative influences come across on his debut, a Springsteenish approximation of Richard Hell that followed on from his 1978 heroin memoir, *The Basketball Diaries*. Beat poet Carroll was shepherded into rock'n'roll by former flatmate Patti Smith, and while fan Keith Richards could not be marshalled into producing *Catholic Boy*, it does feature a stylish Annie Liebovitz cover shot and memorable mass obituary, "People Who Died". JW

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "jim carroll live" ●

20 Great American Punk Singles

Not all the great American punk bands released an album: here's the best 45s

CRIME

Hot Wire My Heart

CRIME MUSIC, 1976

The cop-uniform-toting San Francisco act released the first punk record on America's West Coast – as covered by Sonic Youth on 1987's *Sister* album.

THE NERVES

Hanging On The Telephone

NERVE, 1976

Los Angeles pioneers released just this one masterful power pop EP in their lifetime, Blondie taking the lead track to *Top Of The Pops*.

RANDOMS

Let's Get Rid Of New York

DANGERHOUSE, 1977

Fast, shrill and silly, this is the first release on the quintessential US punk label, which spawned X and the Avengers among others.



THE ZEROS

Don't Push Me Around

BOMP!, 1977

The "Mexican Ramones" greatest hit – surly biscuit tin classic from the Chula Vista band who featured Robert Lopez, AKA El Vez.

THE DILS

I Hate The Rich

WHAT?, 1977

Finest outing from California's leftist Kinman brothers, whose ear for a tune had them dubbed the "punk rock Everlys".

WEIRDOS

Destroy All Music

BOMP!, 1977

"Sold my records and my stereo, ripped up my tickets to see ELO" – keynote address from Los Angeles' illuminati.

TEENAGE JESUS



ORPHANS

b/w

LESS OF ME

TEENAGE JESUS & THE JERKS

Orphans

MIGRAINE, 1978

New York goth maven Lydia Lunch's first assault on the world; plodding and shrieky but strangely moreish.

ELECTRIC EELS

Agitated

ROUGH TRADE, 1978

Posthumous release from Cleveland's notoriously violent proto-punks: confrontational, angry anti-music.

THEORETICAL GIRLS

You Got Me

THEORETICAL, 1978

Manhattan loft mini-masterpiece; the lone contemporary release by avant-gardist Glenn Branca's outfit.

DEADBEATS

Kill The Hippies

DANGERHOUSE, 1978

"Send them back to San Francisco," shriek the manic Deadbeats on this tinpot masterpiece: see also the Bags' "Survive" and the Eyes' "TAQN".

SONIC'S RENDEZVOUS BAND

City Slang

ORCHIDÉ, 1978

The sole release by Fred 'Sonic' Smith's post-MC5 band free-jazz punk group, also featuring Stooge Scott Asheton – stupidly rare, righteously expensive.



THE ROTTERS

Sit On My Face Stevie Nix

ROTTEN, 1978

Lecherous filth from LA idiots – kudos also to the tasteless follow-up, "Sink The Whales, Buy Japanese Goods".

URINALS

Another EP

HAPPY SQUID, 1979

Wise-guy SoCal minimalists: their second EP includes three-chord wonders "Ack Ack Ack" and "I'm A Bug".

CHEETAH CHROME

Still Wanna Die

ORK, 1979

Dead Boy's finest hour – The Who's "My Generation" fast-forwarded to 1970s New York.

TEEN IDLES

Minor Disturbance

DISCHORD, 1980

The dry run for Minor Threat, Ian MacKaye and friends pooled their pennies to release this EP posthumously – Dischord #1.

STIMULATORS

Loud Fast Rules!

NO LABEL, 1980

A published poet at nine, Harley Flanagan drummed on this rough cut aged 12 en route to becoming New York's gnarliest skinhead.

SHEER SMEGMA

Audio Suicide

FART FACED DECADENCE, 1980

Ugly atonal squall from this grrl-powered Florida act, later to become Teddy & The Frat Girls.

STATE OF ALERT

No Policy

DISCHORD, 1981

Häagen-Dazs store manager Henry Garfield's vocals define this EP. As Henry Rollins, he was accused of ruining Black Flag.

IRON CROSS

Skinhead Glory

DISCHORD/SKINFLINT, 1982

The first US skinhead record. Slow and gruff, but a reminder of how much hardcore's DC founding fathers loved Sham 69.

DEEP WOUND

Deep Wound

RADIO BEAT, 1983

Landmark hardcore from upmarket MA dirtbags, including future Dinosaur Jr frenemies Lou Barlow and J Mascis. JW



Jefferson Airplane

The darlings of the counterculture on the psychedelic highs and lows of their career

P

PAUL KANTNER REMEMBERS the first time he met Marty Balin. It was spring 1965, and Kantner was playing at a San Francisco folk club, the Drinking Gourd. "Marty came up to me and asked if I wanted to form a band. It was as simple as a stranger asking me that." For the rest of the decade, Jefferson Airplane were psychedelic pioneers. Guitarist Jorma

Kaukonen and bassist Jack Casady were the group's other constants. "I look back with a good deal of satisfaction at the elegance of what we did," Kantner considers. "I look at it as being like Columbus or Vasco da Gama, exploring the world, having ups and downs, on a white-water raft. That's what we did, and we got away with it."



JEFFERSON AIRPLANE TAKES OFF

RCA, 1966

The Airplane became the first San Francisco Sound band to sign to a major and release an album. Future Moby Grape co-founder Skip Spence is, briefly, their drummer.

PAUL KANTNER: We thought of ourselves as folk musicians. I was greatly influenced by The Weavers, they taught me about three-part harmonies, and most importantly, having an extremely powerful female singer in my bands. And that served me well. We were all folkies. But all of our albums were different.

JOHN KAUKONEN: Most of us came from very different musical backgrounds, but were united in the goal of making music. ... *Takes Off* was a real folk-rock album. It was recorded on a three-track machine, which was like the Starship Enterprise to us then. We were really lucky, as we had all these great singers, like Marty and Signe [Toly Anderson]. She wasn't funky by any stretch of the imagination, but she had a great, powerful voice. She got pregnant and wanted to start a family and went off to do that. Skip wasn't a drummer, he was a guitar player. Marty and Paul bagged Skip because they liked the way he looked. He was blond and he had bangs. Marty never told anybody what to play. But we all looked to him as the leader at that time.

JACK CASADY: We came into that with material we'd played live, and we recorded it that way. Our audiences were in the San Francisco area, which had this small community feel. The Charlatans were starting out, and Sopwith Camel, and The Warlocks, who became the Grateful Dead, and

Quicksilver Messenger Service. A lot of them moved from the folk world to plugging in.

SURREALISTIC PILLOW SURREALISTIC PILLOW

RCA, 1967

Grace Slick joins the band, helping to define the band's sound - and their place in the culture - with "Somebody To Love" and "White Rabbit".

KANTNER: Marty was a big factor in that. He came out with a whole bunch of great love songs so easily, and they're real, and they have emotion in them.

CASADY: When Signe left, Paul wanted another female singer, and after a Great Society show, I asked Grace [Slick], "Would you come over one afternoon and sing a couple of songs with us?" And it worked out. We were starting to expand the group's tonal sound. That was a real breakthrough for us in the studio.

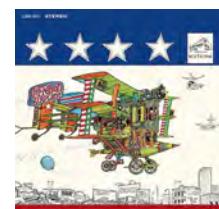
KAUKONEN: *Surrealistic Pillow* really is a rock'n'roll album of that time. We did it in 10 or 11 days. And Grace brought two iconic songs, "White Rabbit" and "Somebody To Love", and those two songs are the reason we're in the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. Nobody sounded like Grace back then, and she was also, to put it mildly, not a conservative person. The music was inextricably entwined with the culture around us. Back in those days, San Francisco was a small town. The magic was that the music was able to escape its boundaries and be heard elsewhere. But we were playing to the home crowd. We were talking to our peers, and to the people that mattered to us.

KANTNER: The point of "White Rabbit" was to



Society girl: Grace Slick in the studio in the mid-'60s - "Not a conservative person, to put it mildly..."

put stuff into your head that you might like to consider that is good for you. That's what "feed your head" is about, in my opinion - joy, passion, bliss. And unfortunately too many believed it, and all these people came here to San Francisco in the summer and fucked everything up!



AFTER BATHING AT BAXTER'S

RCA, 1967

The psychedelic pop of *Surrealistic Pillow* is replaced by jams, song-suites, sonic collages and a reworking of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Midway through the protracted sessions, the band find time to play the Monterey Pop Festival.

KANTNER: That was a little crazy and chaotic. We just went in and jammed. We were taking a lot of acid, both onstage and in the studio and everywhere else. I've always wanted distraction.

KAUKONEN: We were running two eight-track machines side-by-side. And, because we'd had a hit with *Surrealistic Pillow*, we had an unlimited budget. So all of a sudden we had all this money, all this technology, endless time to mess around and create things. The songs are long, they're convoluted, there's overdubbing up the wazoo.

KANTNER: We had a good time at the mansion we rented while we recorded. Our first album took a week. *Baxter's* took seven months.

KAUKONEN: We became rock stars. The Beatles had rented this house when they came to LA, so of course we had to rent it, and it had all kinds of absurd amenities. A pistol range, and a window into the pool underwater. I think we enjoyed being famous and enjoyed having money, and I'm sure

20 Greatest American Punk Compilations

Fancy a host of 'hits' in one package?
Then check these out...

MAX'S KANSAS CITY

RAM, 1976

Lower Manhattan venue's class of '76: Pere Ubu and Suicide spar with Wayne County and the Fast, featuring future members of Hi-Nrg posse Man 2 Man.

THE AKRON COMPILATION

STIFF, 1978

Devo's success prompted this trawl of local oddballs from Ohio's rubber city. The Waitresses, of "Christmas Wrapping" fame, grabbed their chance to escape.

NO NEW YORK

ANTILLES, 1978

Brian Eno produces the cream of New York's loft-scene skronkers: Mars, DNA, Teenage Jesus & The Jerks and the Contortions. "Aggressively ugly," wrote Creem.



YES LA

DANGERHOUSE, 1979

Los Angeles' curt, one-sided response to the above: the Eyes' rinky-dink "Disneyland" is the pick of this selection of sun, sea and sleaze.

BEACH BLVD

POSH BOY, 1979

Essential LA label sampler features the Simpletones' gormless "California" plus Rik L Rik's magnificent "Atomic Lawn", home to history's worst guitar solo.

RODNEY ON THE ROQ

POSH BOY, 1980

K-ROQ deejay Rodney Bingenheimer's pick of early Californian punk, featuring the Adolescents' microbial masterwork "Amoeba": introduction by Brooke Shields.

DECLINE OF WESTERN CIVILISATION

SLASH, 1980

Penelope Spheeris' film spearred the grot and silliness of West

Coast punk - the classy soundtrack features Black Flag, Circle Jerks, Germs, Fear and X.

PROCESS OF ELIMINATION

TOUCH & GO, 1981

Tesco Vee's puerile Meatmen lead the line on this notorious Michigan sampler. A seven-inch single featuring eight bands: nasty, brutish and short.

PUBLIC SERVICE

SMOKE 7, 1981

SoCal class from Bad Religion and Redd Kross, plus Christian-hardcore maniacs Circle One - Google what happened to singer John Macias and shudder.

HELL COMES TO YOUR HOUSE

BEMISBRAIN, 1981

SoCal at the crossroads, with Social Distortion bootboy punk on one hand, morphing



into 'death rock' - the US goth - through 45 Grave and Christian Death.

LET THEM EAT JELLYBEANS!

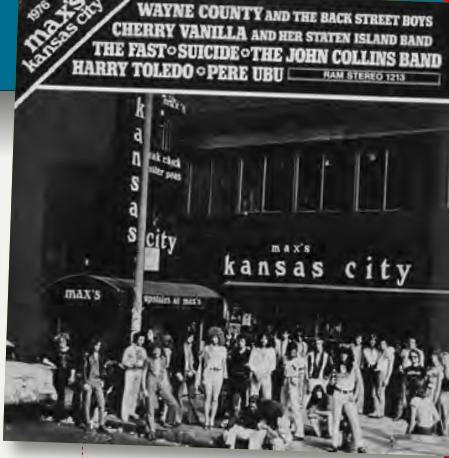
ALTERNATIVE TENTACLES, 1981

AKA the two sides of Jello Biafra: the Dead Kennedys frontman's state of the alternative nation - one side of pogo punk, and one side of West Coast art noise.

BUSTED AT OZ

AUTUMN, 1981

Naked Raygun and The Effigies' meaty punk here encapsulates the Windy City's underground scene before house music, Big Black and Ministry redefined the Chicago sound.



FLEX YOUR HEAD

DISCHORD, 1982

Pivotal Washington DC round-up, featuring local titans Minor Threat and Government Issue, plus inadvertent comedy cameos from Artificial Peace and Iron Cross.

NEW YORK THRASH

ROIR, 1982

On the cassette-only Roir label, the pre-hip-hop Beastie Boys and Bad Brains rub shoulders with low-end street trash on NYHC's clarion call.

CLEVELAND CONFIDENTIAL

TERMINAL, 1982

The Styrenes and The Pagans lead the lineup on this local sampler - the fall-out from Rocket From The Tombs' local big bang.

THIS IS BOSTON, NOT LA

MODERN METHOD, 1982

Straight-edge zealotry defined one side of Boston hardcore; the proto-metal excess of Gang Green and young Republicans the FU's covered the other, as heard here.

AMERICAN YOUTH REPORT

INVASION, 1982

Thrilling California round-up; among many highlights, the Minutemen's bouncy "Working Men Are Pissed".

WHAT IS IT?

WHAT?, 1982

Featuring tracks from the tiny label's clutch of 1977/78 singles - Germs, Dils, Controllers, et al, all of which are record-nerd gold.

FAITH/VOID

DISCHORD, 1982

Epochal split LP, as namechecked by Bill Callahan, from The Faith, led by Ian MacKaye's brother Alec, and Maryland metal crossover visionaries Void.

COTTAGE CHEESE FROM THE LIPS OF DEATH

WARD-9, 1983

Texas sampler featuring Stickmen With Rayguns' moody "Christian Rat Attack" and pedigree oddness from the Butthole Surfers, Dicks and the Big Boys. JIM WIRTH

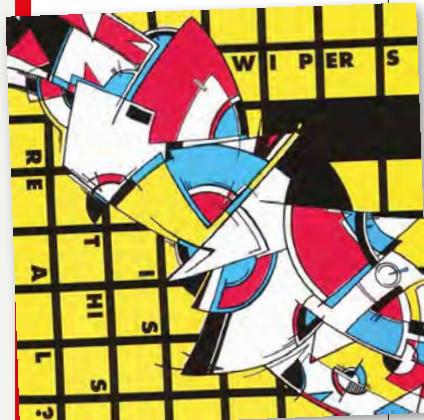
24 WIPERS

IS THIS REAL?

PARK AVENUE, 1980

Working in isolation in what was then the cultural backwater of the American Northwest, Wipers mainman Greg Sage was a guitar prodigy, a pro wrestling and UFO aficionado and an autodidact with a DIY philosophy who found mystical inspiration in his father's record lathe. Sage's emotionally raw, psych-tinged dispatches from the alienated fringe were the ancestral beginnings of the Pacific Northwest's most famous musical export, a fact borne out by Nirvana covering two songs from *Is This Real?*. Regardless of influence, Sage's at times beautiful, at times terrifying lyrical ("A softer landing might ease the pain/Being a coward is such a drag") and instrumental voices make *ITR?* one of punk's most original statements. PS

YOUTUBEKEYWORDS: "wipers is this real"



25 THE CRAMPS

SONGS THE LORD TAUGHT US

IRS, 1980

When he witnessed The Cramps playing CBGB's in 1977, Alex Chilton, who would produce this debut, knew he'd

seen "the best rock'n'roll band in the world". Formed when singer Lux Interior picked up guitarist Poison Ivy hitchhiking in 1972, The Cramps drew a straight, spiritual line from '70s punk back through '60s garage and psych to obscure, pilled-up '50s rockabilly and R'n'B. Totemically recorded at Sun Records founder Sam Phillips' Memphis studio, their reverb-drenched mutant folk method is exemplified by "Sunglasses After Dark", welding lyrics adapted from a then-forgotten rockabilly single to thin, roaring, sheet-metal guitar voodoo appropriated from Link Wray's "Fat Back". DL

YOUTUBEKEYWORDS: "cramps werewolf live 1980"

26 THE FEELIES

CRAZY RHYTHMS

STIFF, 1980

Pitched somewhere between the suburbanite Velvet Underground of The Modern Lovers and the trebly minimalism of Television, New

Jersey-ites the Feelies mastered mumbly understatement on their debut album. It's not just the gawky dress sense displayed on the *Crazy Rhythms* sleeve that seems prescient now: it is but a short leap from the scratchy "Loveless Love" and the title track to the Byrds' clatter of the early REM. CBGB's latecomers, the Feelies' greatest failing was their timing. "The Talking Heads and the Ramones had record deals," singer Glenn Mercer sighed. "We just came after them. They were playing to packed houses and we were playing to half-empty." JW

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "feelies cbgb's crazy"

27X LOS ANGELES

SLASH, 1980



Despite its title, *Los Angeles* has far more in common with New York punk progenitors like Patti Smith and

Richard Hell than with X's SoCal compatriots. Existing in a world apart from either Darby Crash's retinue of slumming scenesters or the disaffected surfer dudes from Hermosa Beach, X were grown-up boho hipsters with literary pretensions who found refuge from Los Angeles' sex, glitz and relentless post-modernity in junk shop arcana and American roots music. With its hooks and harmonies (and Ray Manzarek production), *Los Angeles* didn't see punk as a year zero in the way that the Germs or Black Flag did. Instead, it used punk's pace and rejection of "Moon-June-Spoon" to add bite to Exene Cervenka's unflinching look at society's underbelly on the terrifying "Johnny Hit And Run Paulene" and "Sugarlight", the best song about addiction this side of the Velvets' "Heroin". PS

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "johnny hit and run paulene live"

28 HALF JAPANESE HALF GENTLEMEN/NOT BEASTS

ARMAGEDDON, 1980



The day-glo primitives on the sleeve of Maryland brothers Jad and David Fair's notorious three-disc debut album give a fair impression of the strident brutality that lies within. Jonathan Richman sought some idyll of childish purity with The Modern Lovers, while Half Japanese – 100 per cent American, incidentally – took a step further, with musicianship every bit as guileless and clumsy as the songwriting on "Shy Around Girls" and "Patti Smith". "There were so many people making music with chords and following the notes, it was too standard for me," Jad Fair explained. "My brother and I wanted to do something different." Mission accomplished. JW

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "half japanese live in hell"



The Cramps... "best rock'n'roll band in the world", according to Alex Chilton

29 DEAD KENNEDYS FRESH FRUIT FOR ROTTING VEGETABLES

CHERRY RED, 1980

For all Jello Biafra's polemic, the signature feature of *Fresh Fruit...* (to paraphrase the title: "pearls before swine") is its swing. A blend of '60s garage, '50s rock and punk thrash, the San Franciscan band enabled their singer's uncomfortable truths –



chiefly, about how right-wing America had become the playground of monsters – to slip down effortlessly. Oddly, the fraternity-endorsed pratfalls of "pop punk" have their origins in this infinitely more witty, tuneful and satirical environment. JW

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "holiday cambodia kennedys live"

30 CIRCLE JERKS GROUP SEX

FRONTIER, 1980

 "Wasted Again". If you had to sum up the young Keith Morris, that's probably how you'd do it. A founder member of Black Flag, singer and

frontman Morris personifies the wild-card spirit of early hardcore. Duly, much about the Circle Jerks' debut album (it features 14 songs in its 15-minute duration; the album is, just to recap, called *Group Sex*) screams novelty, but former art student Morris put a strong, if amusing concept to work here. "Don't want to be... 57!" he screams in "Live Fast Die Young". Keith Morris is now 58. JW

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "circle jerks live 1980"

31 THE dB'S STANDS FOR DECIBELS

ALBION, 1981

 The first of two splendidly quirky albums that non-native New Yorkers The dB's released in the space of 12 months, *Stands For Decibels* passes for punk just in terms of sheer velocity, Peter Holsapple's channel-hopping "Black And White" keeping pace with his North Carolina schoolmate Chris Stamey's similarly propulsive but slightly trippier offerings such as "I'm In Love". Their songwriting style was firmly rooted in Big Star and the British invasion, but spikier impulses underlie the likes of "Espionage", "Cycles Per Second" and "Tearjerkin" – tellingly, Stamey later recalled "playing shows with Arto Lindsay and jamming with Richard Lloyd". The fact that neither *Stands For Decibels* nor the follow-up album, *Repercussion*, were initially released in America tells its own hard-luck story. JW

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "dbs big brown eyes live"

32 BIG BOYS WHERE'S MY TOWEL?/INDUSTRY STANDARD WASTED TALENT, 1981



The "industry standard" experience of making their first album (a live split with Austin, Texas neighbours the Dicks) so scarred the Big Boys it gave them enough material for a whole new record. *Industry Standard*, a work as angry and articulate as it is tuneful, is a riposte to anyone who would try and impose a rubric on punk rock. From its sexual politics to its musical versatility – the songs can thrash, but are at times minor-key and even folky – it showed punk not as nihilistic dead end, but a spectacular artistic liberation. JR

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "light attic doc big boys"

33 REALLY RED TEACHING YOU THE FEAR CIA, 1981



While the vast majority of hardcore bands grew up in small, insular local scenes whose only connection to the outside world was to other small, insular local scenes, Texan hardcore groups like Houston's Really Red were listening to the post-punk from overseas. Really Red's integration of Gang Of Four and The Birthday Party into hardcore's "three chords and a cloud of dust" attack gave their songs a simmering rage that was completely different from the spasmodic tantrums of most of their peers. This quiet intensity is at its most effective on the landmark title track, a chilling indictment of the notoriously racist and brutal Houston police department ("Take one Chicano with his hands cuffed behind his back/Toss him in the bayou, watch him sink like a rat"). PS

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "really red no art"

34 MDC MILLIONS OF DEAD COPS RADICAL, 1981



The hardcore scene in the People's Republic Of Austin, Texas was the most political of any of the legions of local scenes across America, and no band was more political than MDC. Led by Long Island transplant Dave Dictor, MDC railed not only against the cops (obviously), corporatism, fascists, racists, religion, work and John Wayne, but MDC was also perhaps the first band to address gay issues on the remarkable "Dead Cops/America's So Straight". Despite all the leftist screeds, listening to Millions Of Dead Cops never feels like being hectored by a *Socialist Worker* hawker thanks largely to the breathless intensity of Dictor, fast and furious guitars that threaten to skid out of control, and the amazing drumming of Al Schwitz. Then there's "I Remember", which may be the ultimate hardcore song. PS

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "mdc i remember" ↗



Preparing for a bumpy landing, November 24, 1970: (l-r) Kaukonen, Kantner, Dryden, Slick, Casady, Balin

some abuses went along with it. It was a non-stop carnival. Neil Young was there, Stephen Stills was there, Crosby was an old friend of Kantner's. And people you didn't even know.

CASADY: We even put a free-form instrumental ["Spare Chaynge"] on the album. For RCA it was sort of horrific.

KAUKONEN: The line in Grace's "Rejoyce" – "I'd rather have my country die for me" – a lot of people found that unbelievably offensive, and seditious. We really didn't care.



CROWN OF CREATION

RCA, 1968
Adopting a heavier rock sound – influenced by Cream – Marty Balin feels increasingly isolated. David Crosby contributes his song "Triad", which had been rejected by The Byrds.

KANTNER: A lot of the lyrics on title-track "Crown Of Creation" came from John Wyndham by accident. We had explored probably every button on the studio board during *Baxter's*. So now that we got to *Crown Of Creation*, we could use them sound-wise and idea-wise, and brought all sorts of things to bear on that album that were subtler than *Baxter's*, but I think equally exciting.

CASADY: Was Marty on the outside by then? It sounds so neat and tidy, at the time I'm not so sure. Marty was dealing with the fact that there was another hugely strong personality in Grace Slick, and you've gotta understand, at the time, hardly anyone had seen a woman in a rock band really strong like that. But Marty was opening up his singing style, too, to match the improvisatory style

THE UNCUT CLASSIC



VOLUNTEERS

RCA, 1969

"Up against the wall, motherfuckers!" the Airplane jeer on "We Can Be Together". *Volunteers* offers a more militant vision than in 1967, but songs such as "Wooden Ships" – shared with CSN – paint a more rounded picture of the counterculture, and the band, at the end of the '60s.

KANTNER: I took that line "Up against the wall, motherfuckers" off some graffiti. RCA Victor didn't like to use bad language on records. That was one of the first times we went head to head with them, and we got away with pretty much everything. Did we feel we were in a revolutionary situation, which we could contribute towards? In a way. I don't think it's a position any of us consciously tried to

take up, other than giving people an opinion to investigate – although we had contacts with everyone from Abbie Hoffman to Black Panthers, people united in an unspoken connection. That was the point of "We Can Be Together". An element of put-on too? Exactly. *Volunteers* for me is one of my more splendid albums.

KAUKONEN: It's easy to be a "revolutionary" when there's no possibility you're going to be shot or put in prison. My grandmother, who emigrated from Russia in the late 1800s, was a Jew fleeing Russia, and her family was killed by Cossacks, and when they left, they killed Cossacks. That's a revolutionary. Yes, we spoke out. But for me, it's like an art revolutionary.

CASADY: The iconic songs are "Volunteers" and "We Can Be Together". Paul loved looking out over the great masses of people, holding his guitar up like an AK-47. I preferred orchestrating parts when everyone had left the studio. I didn't have that sense of confrontation that's in those songs' lyrics. That doesn't mean I wasn't emotionally affected by it, and sometimes I was very, very emotionally affected by it. We were all children of that time, of Vietnam and the assassinations, and all of that anger comes out in the music, and all of that disappointment, too. *Volunteers* was also the first album we recorded in San Francisco. Wally Heider started a studio that looked like a San Francisco turn-of-the-century environment inside, with stained glass and wood accoutrements, and cut-glass chandeliers. And I hit my first bass note, and everything rattled! After one note, they had to strip everything out.

35 HÜSKER DÜ

LAND SPEED RECORD

NEW ALLIANCE, 1982

A triumphant homecoming. In the summer of 1981, Hüsker Dü toured the United States, plugging into local scenes from San Francisco (playing with Dead Kennedys) to Portland, Chicago and Vancouver (DOA; Subhumans). When they came back to play 7th Street Entry, a Minneapolis nightclub, they were enlightened, battle-hardened, and – as this demented 26-minute mono recording of the first of two sets on August 15 illustrates – finding wild rock'n'roll animus within the straitjacket of hardcore. Released later by Mike Watt's label, the prospect of a "deluxe edition" including both sets remains a tantalising possibility. **JR**

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "husker du 7th street entry"



36 DESCENDENTS

MILO GOES TO COLLEGE

NEW ALLIANCE, 1982

There is no better articulation of male hormonal rage than *Milo Goes To College*. Recorded at the height of hardcore by four high-school-aged fishermen hopped up on caffeine, *Milo* distilled years of adolescent angst, outcast frustration and unconsummated hard-ons into 22 minutes of thrash bops propelled by furious basslines and simple melodies. Milo Aukerman's adenoidal delivery of lyrics like "You're just flesh and blood like all the rest/You'll get old and have a wrinkled ass" is the voice of all the boys from the wrong side of the tracks in the John Hughes movies finally expressing their sublimated rage. Inevitably for an LP made by lovesick male teens, there's some unfortunate sexism and homophobia, but as the success of Green Day, Blink 182, et al (who owe their careers to this record) shows, sometimes everyone feels like a 15-year-old with an acne breakout on prom night. **PS**

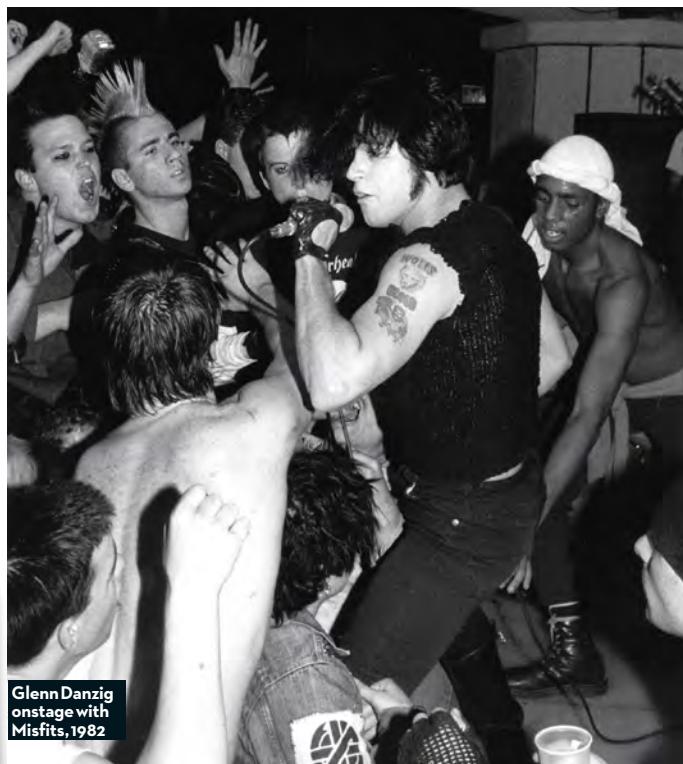
YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "descendents live early 1980s"

37 BAD BRAINS

BAD BRAINS

R.O.R., 1982

Former jazzers Bad Brains used their considerable chops to oblique ends on this classic debut album. The band's intensity – engaging on



Glenn Danzig
onstage with
Misfits, 1982

stage, singer HR at times cutting a Little Richard kind of dash – is terrifying on record, the likes of "Don't Need It" dropping you without warning into the eye of their hurricane. Notable also for its roaring guitar solos and for its occasional forays into reggae, it was a formative influence on the Beastie Boys – who soon cultivated their own magpie take on punk. **JR**

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "bad brains cbgb's 1982"

38 MISFITS

WALK AMONG US

RUBY/SLASH, 1982

MISFITS *WALK AMONG US* A slasher-movie Ramones, the Misfits – named in honour of Marilyn Monroe's last film – owe their musical resurrection and band T-shirt ubiquity to the patronage of Metallica, who recorded a mash-up of "Last Caress" and "Green Hell" on their "The \$5.98 EP: Garage Days Re-Revisited" in 1987. Fabulously theatrical despite a desperately low budget, the New Jersey-ites released a trail of superb, sci-fi-besotted singles before reaching critical mass on *Walk Among Us*, "Skulls" perfectly encapsulating frontman Glenn Danzig's ability to conjure up the spirits of Elvis Presley and Vincent Price simultaneously. A fave from the grave. **JW**

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "misfits detroit 1982"

39 REDD KROSS

BORN INNOCENT

SMOKE 7, 1982

Snarky teenage stoners Jeff and Steven McDonald were early Black Flag acolytes, but the trashy *Born Innocent* shows how much Red Cross differed from their South Bay neighbours. The only fruit of Red

Cross's two-girl, two-boy lineup, it is a blizzard of off-colour wisecracks from "Linda Blair" ("In The Exorcist baby, you were really insane/You got busted for cocaine") to a cover of Charles Manson's "Cease To Exist". "We did it just because it was funny and irresponsible," smirked Jeff McDonald, who – along with his brother – kept the bad taste coming with the rebranded Redd Kross. **JW**

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "red cross santa monica 982"

40 FEAR

THE RECORD

SLASH, 1982

A Kurt Cobain favourite, the first album by Fear built on the bad-boy reputation the LA liberal-baiters gained after being invited by John Belushi to appear on the Halloween 1981 edition of *SNL* – with predictably chaotic results. Occasional fancy time-signatures on *The Record* out Fear as 30-something Zappa-heads with a mean sense of humour; frontman and sometime singing waiter Lee Ving admitted later: "I wanted the boneheads to think that I was completely serious." Metallica KO "Let's Have A War" and No Wave riposte "New York's Alright If You Like Saxophones" still sound darkly, dreadfully convincing. **JW**

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "fear new york saxophones"

41 REPLACEMENTS

STINK

TWIN/TONE, 1982



"They were never part of the punk thing," said Bob Mould, summing up Hüsker Dü's biggest Minneapolis rivals.

"They were like a fast bar band." True enough, but their second outing pitched America's drunkest group at a pace even the most ardent straight-edgers could enjoy. The Side One track listing suggests standard-issue, blue-collar hardcore – "Kids Don't Follow", "Fuck School", "Stuck In The Middle", "God Damn Job" – but as strident and speedy as the EP is, any band with a lyricist as stylish as Paul Westerberg or a guitarist as idiosyncratic as Bob Stinson could never do generic. **JW**

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "replacements 7th street entry"

42 ANGRY SAMOANS

BACK FROM SAMOA

BAD TRIP, 1982



Clever-dick pop critics Gregg Turner and Metal Mike Saunders had previous before the lightning-fast Blue Öyster Cult assault of the Angry Samoans' second LP, past works including VOM's "Electrocute Your Cock" and the Queer Pills' similarly groin-level "They Saved Hitler's Cock". The sardonic intent in the supremely foul-mouthed "Ballad Of Jerry Cullin", "You Stupid Jerk" and "Lights Out" may have been somewhat lost on the Samoans' core audience of young, LA meatheads. Turner later became a maths professor while Saunders was an accountant by day; appropriately, given the Samoans' misanthropic streak, they also now hate each other. **JW**

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "angry samoans live 1982"



43 FLIPPER

GENERIC FLIPPER

SUBTERRANEAN, 1982

ALBUM
GENERIC FLIPPER

It may sound more like Black Sabbath playing through the hangover after one of Ozzy's three-month benders than anything else calling itself "punk" in 1982, but *Generic Flipper* is one of punk's most influential masterpieces. On top of turgid, brackish bass sludge and undermixed, roiling guitar drone, lead singers Bruce Loose and Will Shatter affirm in no uncertain terms



The Replacements

Twin Tone
RECORDS

Twin Tone Records, 445 Oliver Ave. So. Minneapolis, MN 55405

that life sucks and then you die ("There are hearts that are no longer beating/And there are entrails spilled on the floor/That's the way of the world"). After such an uncompromising reality check, the album ends the only way it could: with the epically dumb "Sex Bomb". PS **YOUTUBE KEYWORDS:** "flipper sex bomb"

44 SS DECONTROL THE KIDS WILL HAVE THEIR SAY

X-CLAIM! / DISCHORD, 1982

 The straight edge philosophy – "don't drink, don't smoke, don't fuck" – evolved in urbane Washington DC but found its most virulent acolytes in tough Boston, with SS Decontrol the macho head honchos of a brutish scene. The lyrics of guitarist Al Barile – who worked in a local aeronautical engineering firm by day – set that supremely ascetic agenda for the fearsomely committed *The Kids Will Have Their Say* – which, to his immense credit, he has refused to reissue. Singer Springa, oddly, was not straight edge at all, which might explain SSD's subsequent drift into metal and obscurity. JW

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "ss decontrol boiling point"

45 MISSION OF BURMA VS. ACE OF HEARTS, 1982

 The second wave of US punk was largely a fusion of the Ramones' speed (without their sense of humour or love of AM radio) and Pere Ubu's rigour, and punk became the province of intelligent young men who could only access their feelings by screaming at a wall. Mission Of Burma couldn't even do that. Instead, Roger Miller, Clint Conley, Peter Prescott and Martin Swope cocooned their wounded psyches in spiky and angular guitars, making the most neurotic and skittish brand of punk imaginable. On *Vs.*, the alienation and self-consciousness is resolved (if not exorcised) by the relatively straight-forward attack of the stunning "That's How I Escaped My Certain Fate". Sadly, the abrasion was too much for Miller, whose tinnitus became debilitating, and the

group was forced to disband. PS **YOUTUBE KEYWORDS:** "burma trem two 1983"

46 MINUTEMEN WHAT MAKES A MAN START FIRES? SST, 1983

It was sometimes a thin line between punk and post-. The San Pedro three-piece exemplified the furious energies of the one, but leaned towards the jazz/funk/noise recipe that came to exemplify the other. The band made landmark shorter records (like their seven-song debut single "Paranoid Time") and a magnificent double-LP (*Double Nickels On The Dime*), but this 27-minute second album plots yet another original course: modal excursions, anathemic invective ("Chasing a reason, refusing to reason, by listening to reason") – as they had it



in "Life As A Rehearsal") and wailing avant-funk-rock guitar. JW **YOUTUBE KEYWORDS:** "minutemen life rehearsals 1983"

47 BLACK FLAG THE FIRST FOUR YEARS SST, 1983

 They were picky about filling the vacancy. Still, vocalist in Black Flag was no prestige assignment. All the words and music having been written by guitarist Greg Ginn, the mic was a place at which one would put in work, and submit to the collective goal. This comp collects the cuts made with the band's three pre-1981 singers (Keith Morris, Ron Reyes, Dez Cadena). It also charts the group's evolution from speedy and satirical ("Nervous Breakdown") to the more emotional heavy punk they would develop

with Henry Rollins ("Damaged I" – sung here by Cadena). JR **YOUTUBE KEYWORDS:** "black flag live 1980"

48 MINOR THREAT OUT OF STEP

DISCHORD, 1983



In the form/record single/split life-cycle of DC hardcore bands, by 1983 Minor Threat were already an anomaly.

This, their sole studio LP, is almost a break-up record, as Ian MacKaye's band explores disappointment with a scene it had been pivotal in articulating. Extreme velocity is still a feature, but in its 21-minute playing time, *Out Of Step* also displays accomplished dynamics, rancorous satire and MacKaye's enormous voice, which finds anthemic tunes amid the chaos. How hardcore? The LP reveals that "Cashing In" for Minor Threat meant charging \$4 on the door. JR **YOUTUBE KEYWORDS:** "minor threat step 1983"

49 DICKS KILL FROM THE HEART SST, 1983



"A guy dressed up like a nurse with chocolate frosting in his pants singing about communism – that's weird,"

smiled singer Gary Floyd as he reflected on the career of Austin's Dicks. The "Commie faggot band" needed a three-year run-up to make an LP after their unbelievable debut single, "Dicks Hate The Police", but it was a sun-boiled wonder when it came. Righteous anger predominates ("Bourgeois Fascist Pig"), but there is space to remind butch Marxist zealots that "young boys' feet are pretty". Plenty were faster and louder, but none were further out. JW **YOUTUBE KEYWORDS:** "dicks hate police"

50 AVENGERS AVENGERS

CD PRESENTS, 1983



In the popular memory San Francisco's Avengers have largely been sidelined as the answer to a trivia

question: the group was the opening act for the Sex Pistols' last gig at the city's Winterland in 1978. But with perhaps the definitive buzzsaw guitarist in Greg Ingraham and one of punk's finest lyricists in Penelope Houston, the Avengers deserve to be more than a footnote in punk history. *Avengers* showcases the group's range, from rabble-rousing anthems (the Steve Jones-produced "The Amerikan In Me") to the reflective and bitter "Corpus Christi", to the song that set the tone for American punk, "I Believe In Me". Oh, and they blew the Sex Pistols off the stage. PS

YOUTUBE KEYWORDS: "avengers winterland" ☺

Written by Damien Love, John Robinson, Peter Shapiro, Jim Wirth

HIPSTER HARDCORE

**Sticks and stones...
insults will never harm
21st-Century punk**

HOWEVER BRUTAL THE process, punk was always about opening minds. Despite that ethos, punk still attracts regulators – all attempting to define "true punk".

These guardians of authenticity still have a lot to chew over. As "their" music has become less ghettoised, it has since become necessary to judge if bands making hardcore in the 2000s and onwards are still punk. Or are they just for those culturally promiscuous souls, the "hipsters"?

Do, say, **FUCKED UP** pass muster? They have a brutal, if epic, sound. They have an album pastiching UK microgenre punk styles. Keith Morris guested with them. Hopefully they can stay.

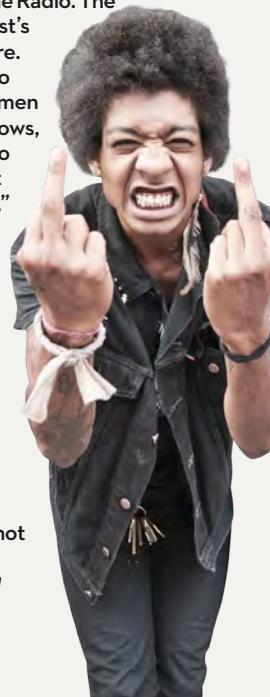
Even in spite of their patronage by Vice, surely no punk can argue with **OFF!**. Veterans of punk from bands like Redd Kross (and fronted by Keith Morris), speed is their essence. To listen to their 33-song discog will take 35mins.

The greatest challenge to punk prejudice is probably New York's **CEREBRAL BALLZY** (pictured). They can skate all they want, play chaotic shows with Black Flag alumni **FLAG**, and have Raymond Pettibon sleeves. But for some it will never be enough. They are, reads one online review, "an assortment of assholes" who "treat music like a toy".

They should stick around, worse is to come. Cerebral Ballzy have signed to Cult Records, owned by Julian Casablancas, and are making a record with Dave Sitek from *TV On The Radio*. The band are a purist's worst nightmare.

"Girls come to our shows, old men come to our shows, and people who don't really get the punk thing," frontman Honor Titus said recently. "Our shows are a melting pot. Kids with Cerebral Palsy are coming. It's crazy."

There's a place for everyone here, not just hipsters. Why not get involved? JOHN ROBINSON



JEFFERSON AIRPLANE

of the way Jorma and I were driving the band. Jorma and I were starting to faction off together as a musical entity, and Marty was left on his own a little bit. *Crown Of Creation* displayed some of those different directions on the record.

KANTNER: We were close to Crosby and Stills. We'd all grown up musically together. Everybody was in that clusterfuck, if you will, and learned and expanded. It was just a sense of adventure and exploration. "The House At Pooneil Corners" explored the dark side of taking off into the world and exploring, and what to do about it. The violence and riots then, the Black and White Panthers, it's not like we didn't take notice of shit. But I like to think we were taking notice in a positive way. That's why we left that one where it was at the end of the album. Notes of caution, where necessary...



BLESS ITS POINTED LITTLE HEAD

RCA, 1969

Fierce live album,
recorded in 1968 at
Fillmore East and
Fillmore West.

KAUKONEN: I think that's a great live album. I've heard some cuts from that recently, and I thought, 'Wow, we were pretty good.' It shows the Airplane at the peak of our creative existence. It was an exciting time. New York was always so exciting. As an American artist, that's where you feel you've done good. In some ways it shows what the band was more than the studio records.

CASADY: It really showed how we were playing; we were changing the style of music and the songs we'd recorded just a couple of years earlier, we're a lot more aggressive, and a lot more experimental than in the studio. You know, I downloaded that album on my iPhone last month, and I was doing an eight-mile run along the Hudson River, and "Bear Melt" came on, and I don't think I'd listened to it since we recorded it. It sounded familiar, and I stopped by the 42nd Street Pier. I looked to see what it was and went, "Wow." I listened to the whole thing, and I heard me doing some playing that I couldn't do today if my life depended on it. I really was taken aback with how passionate and forward we were with our music then. What we were about was the live band, that's where we took our chances. I thought that was the peak of Jefferson Airplane. And right on the other side of the peak is the demise.



BARK

GRUNT, 1971

Marty Balin leaves, Joey Covington takes the drumstool, Kaukonen and Casady's side-project Hot Tuna gathers pace. And the Airplane

start a record label.

KANTNER: We lost Marty. But we were also a good enough band to carry on without him.

KAUKONEN: I was beginning to lose focus with the Airplane. The magic that made it possible to make that music be the sole group goal, for me, was starting to dissipate. Marty founded the band, and without him, in some respects, it lost its way. Was it not quite the Airplane after that? I'd agree. We had obligations, we had to make records, and the business was starting to become more important



The classic
lineup in 1970

than the music. And with Grunt Records, our eyes were bigger than our stomachs – The Beatles had a record company, we needed one, and we were utterly unequipped to deal with these things.

Grunt helped hasten the demise of the Airplane.

CASADY: Joey Covington had come into the band, Spencer [Dryden] had left. Jorma and I'd done our first Hot Tuna album in '70. *Bark* was where we put together all the approaches. It didn't have the cohesiveness the other albums had. With Joey's personality, and Marty's loss, it was a different band. It had run its course. Going back into the band from Hot Tuna, it was almost like, what for? People came in with their own little cliques. There wasn't a lot of passion in it. Jorma's "Third Week In The Chelsea" says it all in the lyrics. That's the story of us all spending three weeks in the Chelsea Hotel, and coming to grips with the weight of all these years there'd been, and how we had all been at it non-stop since 1965. I mean, every day.



LONG JOHN SILVER

GRUNT, 1972

The sleeve - which folded up into a replica of a cigar box, all the better to store your stash - is the most imaginative

moment of this otherwise desultory swansong. Three drummers were needed to finish it.

KANTNER: That was probably making a record for the sake of making a record that was due. It wasn't as focused as the previous LPs, and we were in the process of transition to Jefferson Starship. And then I had a child, and that took a while, and changed a lot of things, as you can imagine.

CASADY: The alcohol and the drug-taking that had fuelled all of this took its toll on your ability to communicate, and to be a good person with others.

KAUKONEN: I'm sure we'd had to put another album out, and we did the best we could. Not that I'm comparing myself to Bob Dylan, but Dylan has always written about whatever was going on at the time. In those tumultuous years of the early '60s, that was exciting stuff, and the times that were surrounding *Long John Silver* weren't inviting those kinds of songs any more. The different time has a lot to do with it; the contractual obligations; the fact that we weren't really a unified spiritual, creative entity any more. Had the Airplane outlived

its usefulness to the times by 1972? Yeah, it had. And that's reflected by the fact that Jack and I left the band to do Hot Tuna. And Paul carried on with the Starship, that had bigger records than the Airplane ever did. Was it as relevant, or significant? It was a good adult pop band, but I don't think so.



JEFFERSON AIRPLANE

EPIC, 1989

After a 17-year absence,
Balin, Kantner, Slick,
Kaukonen and Casady
reconvene.

KANTNER: Jorma had invited me out to play with Hot Tuna, and when we came to the Fillmore, Grace joined us onstage. And there it was.

KAUKONEN: It seemed a good idea at the time. We got involved – and this is so strange for a band that started out the way the Airplane did – with these big-name management companies, and expectations major labels were going to come back. Tiananmen Square was happening, and Paul really got on the oppressive Chinese. But our relevance had passed, we weren't adult enough to realise, "Look, we've gotta make some songs here." There were extraneous studio players. I remember thinking, "I'm not sure this is going to work."

CASADY: It was done for shallow reasons. Money! And to see what would happen. It wasn't based on anything real.

KAUKONEN: It was great to have Marty and Grace back as friends. As far as "putting the band back together again", I don't think that happened. I found Paul difficult to deal with at the time, he was very autocratic. But I don't blame him, as I didn't have any better ideas. That magic the Airplane once had wasn't there. It wasn't that time any more.

CASADY: We couldn't break down our personality barriers. But let's face it, in the time that it mattered, that we were relevant as a band, Jefferson Airplane were really a creative high point.

KANTNER: I don't think we've ever thought of a beginning or an end. As long as we're still alive, I foster hopes of playing with Jack and Jorma and Marty again. ☺

Jefferson Starship's 40th Anniversary UK Tour continues until February 2 (www.jeffersonstarshipsf.com)

neil finn

DIZZY HEIGHTS

THE NEW ALBUM - 10.02.14



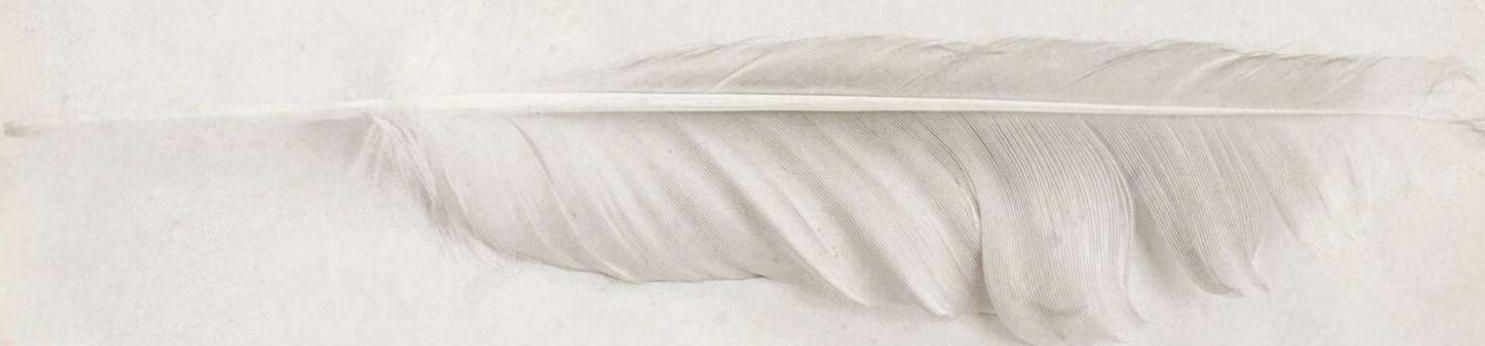
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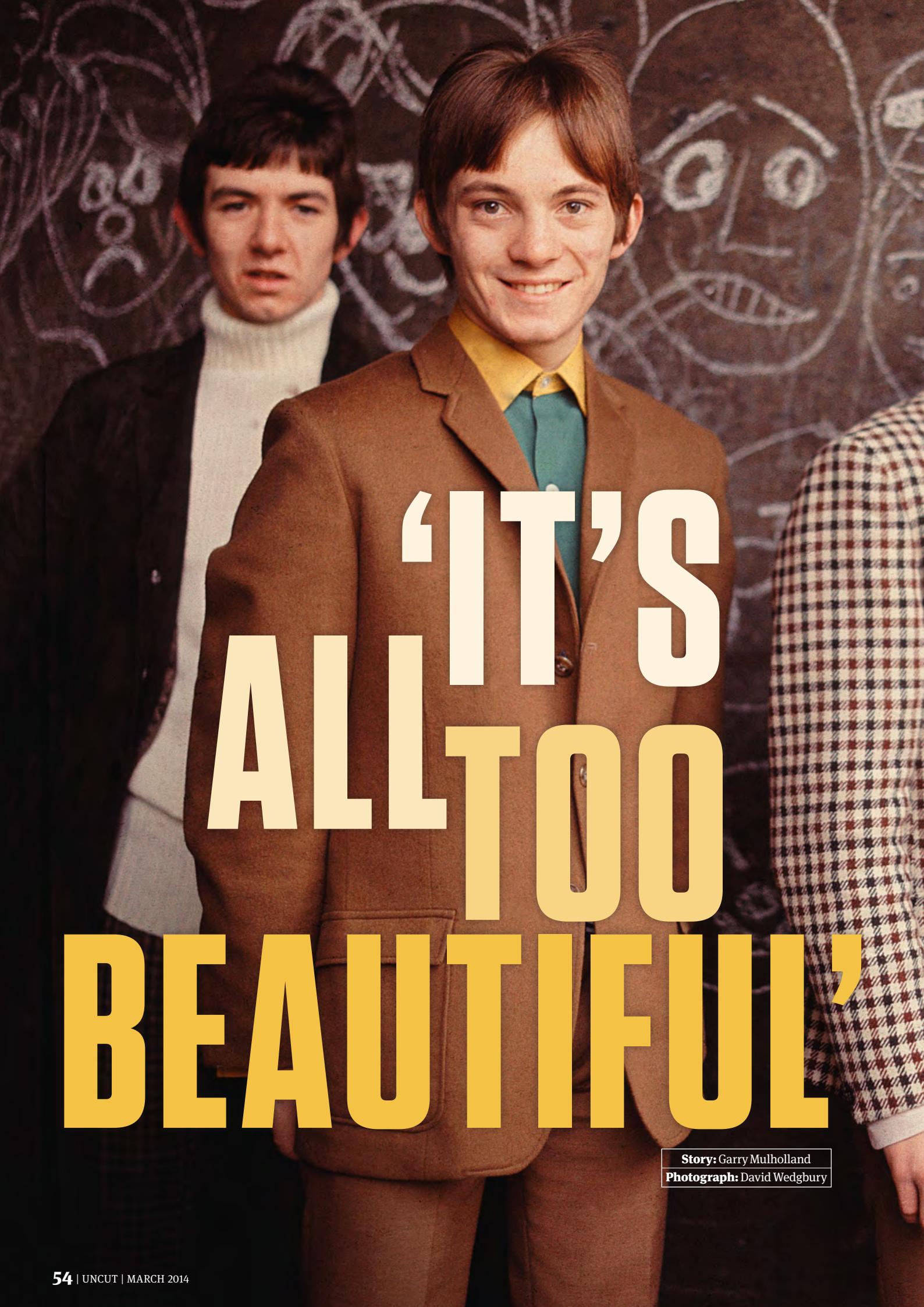
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‘IT’S ALL TOO BEAUTIFUL’

Story: Garry Mulholland

Photograph: David Wedgbury



Small Faces photograph by David Wedgbury © Not Fade Away Archive. From May 3 to June 15, 2014, Snap Galleries, London are hosting an exhibition of photographs from the archives of David Wedgbury. Sign up to receive further details at www.snapgalleries.com

From "Whatcha Gonna Do About It?" to "Afterglow", the **SMALL FACES** were one of the most explosive singles bands of the 1960s. Now, **IAN McLAGAN** and **KENNEY JONES** reveal the stories behind every one of those historic 45s, and how Ronnie Lane "found beauty in a nettle patch in the East End of London."

WHATCHA GONNA DO ABOUT IT?

DECCA, AUGUST 1965. UK: 14; US: N/A

Spotted at London's own Cavern club in Leicester Square by manager Don Arden, the Small Faces sign to Decca. Their debut single – an aspiring soul standard – is written for them.

Kenney Jones: "We recorded it at IBC Studios with Ian Samwell, who wrote the song with Brian Potter. IBC was opposite the BBC at Portland Place. We hadn't fully established our own songwriting abilities – our stage show was mainly covers of things like Otis Redding's 'Shake' – and this really suited the power of Steve's voice. The style was very indicative of the time and we loved it. We never set out to be a mod band. We were just young and liked clothes. The feedback was Steve's idea; he was pissing about in front of his old Marshall amp and it sounded lovely, so we kept it. 'Sammy' Samwell was charming. He wrote Cliff's 'Move It' and was virtually a member of The Shadows. Did Don Arden spend £12,000 on buying it into the charts? That's what he told us. Everybody did that at the time, including The Beatles. Probably still do." ☺





Shock-haired shorties: the Small Faces in 1966



I'VE GOT MINE

DECCA, NOVEMBER 1965. UK: N/A; US: N/A

Steve Marriott and Ronnie Lane's first self-penned single. A soulful mid-tempo ballad with a hint of The Kinks' "See My Friends", it bombs. Ian McLagan replaces original keyboardist Jimmy Winston.

Jones: "We'd had a hit after being in the business for about five minutes so we thought, 'Well... we've written a song.' I loved it 'cos it was more expressive on the drums and had this guitar line through a Leslie amp. Stunning. It's underestimated and still one of my favourite Small Faces songs. But because it wasn't a hit... that was it. Don Arden said, 'We can't afford to have another flop. I'm bringing Kenny Lynch in.' Plus the film that was meant to promote it, *Dateline Diamonds*, didn't come out until months after the single. But we did launch the first ever Transit van. It was some kind of tie-in with Radio Caroline, the film and Ford. This was the first phase of business greed."

Ian McLagan: "I Got Mine" came out the week I joined. I had to buy a guitar so I could play the

part that Jimmy Winston played on the record. I still have that guitar to this day."

SHA-LA-LA-LA-LEE

DECCA, JAN 1966. UK: 3; US: N/A

A charming-but-lightweight Kenny Lynch/Mort Shuman song, this is a big teenybop hit for the band. Lynch also wrote Marriott's unsuccessful '63 debut solo single, "Give Her My Regards".

Jones: "This is where Don Arden steered us towards being a pop band when we wanted to be an experimental band, more like Booker T & The MG's and The Yardbirds. It was stifling and we never entirely lost that pop idol thing. We recorded this at the Decca studios in West Hampstead. I was getting into the song and Kenny Lynch came over the tannoy: 'Don't play anything you can't mime to!' He's the one singing the high harmonies on the chorus. We got along with him, though. Kenny was Jack-the-lad and I still see him as often as I can."

McLagan: "I'd joined an R'n'B/soul band and almost immediately we'd become a pop group. The kids coming to our shows became mostly little girls."

WE ALWAYS WENT INTO THE STUDIO DRESSED FOR A GIG

IAN McLAGAN



ALL OR NOTHING

DECCA, AUGUST 1966. UK: 1; US: N/A

The Small Faces' only UK No 1. Steve Marriott's white soul masterpiece finally revealed the full scope of the band's powers.

Jones: "We were on tour and staying in the Station Hotel, Leeds, when Steve suddenly runs down the corridor screaming, 'I've got it! I've just written our next hit!' We did it in IBC and it

THE MAKING OF...

Making Plans For Nigel

BY XTC

Splintered guitars, 'the Jimmy Edwards Experience', and the lovechild of Rudolf Nureyev and Chrissie Hynde... How Swindon's pop eccentrics finally cracked the UK singles chart

INEARLY 1979, XTC weren't exactly in the best shape. With two punky, eccentric albums under their belts, they were yet to have a hit; but more pressingly, they had just lost Barry Andrews and his distinctive keyboard sound. But his departure allowed bassist Colin Moulding to blossom as a songwriter, penning melodic, chart-friendly songs like "Making Plans For Nigel" – their first Top 20 hit. A song about those crushed under the weight of expectations from society and their parents, it's now the group's most covered song. "When Barry left, it seemed to set off something in me," explains Moulding. "Almost like one less person I had to please. So I began to please myself, and let my natural melodic sensibility out."

By now, Dave Gregory had joined, establishing the band's classic two-guitar lineup. Meanwhile, the production team of Steve Lillywhite and Hugh Padgham were on board for "...Nigel" and the *Drums And Wires* LP, which featured some of Andy Partridge and Colin Moulding's catchiest, cleverest songs. Not bad for "four herberts from Swindon", as Partridge sarcastically puts it. Despite its success, "...Nigel" wasn't born without pain – its creation included smashed guitars, terrible videos, band tensions and copious blood loss. "At one gig in Australia just before *Drums And Wires* was released," says Gregory, "Colin's white Fender Musicmaster bass was covered in blood. It was '...Nigel' at the end of the set that finally tore his finger to shreds!"

TOM PINNOCK

COLIN MOULDING: Andy had been the dominant songwriter for so long and any offerings from other people were viewed with scepticism. I remember Dave suggesting I do *[Drums And Wires]* "Ten Feet Tall" as a solo record, which hurt me a little. Luckily, Virgin were very complimentary about what I was doing and this seemed to make the band more accepting.

TERRY CHAMBERS: Andy was the mainstay of the band. Colin and myself were just basically a couple of drunks [*laughs*]. We just wanted to drink as much beer as we could, shag as many women as we could and live the rock'n'roll lifestyle.

ANDY PARTRIDGE: After [the Moulding-written] "Life Begins At The Hop", Virgin started thinking, 'Wait a minute, there's that handsome bass player, he writes songs as well. We haven't got to have that weird potato-ey chap with the glasses who writes that arty shit...' And that started Colin's ascendancy in Virgin's eyes.

DAVE GREGORY: Barry left in January, then I joined, and I don't think they had any new songs

SIMON HOGG; KAICHAMBERS



KEY PLAYERS



Colin Moulding
Vocals, bass,
songwriting



Andy Partridge
Guitar, synth,
bk vocals



Dave Gregory
Guitar, bk vocals



Terry Chambers
Drums



Steve Lillywhite
Producer



Hugh Padgham
Engineer

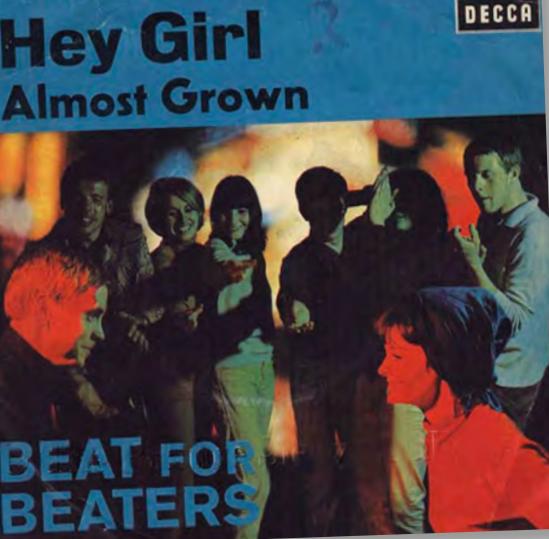


written, but between January and June, we'd written and rehearsed more than an album's worth of new songs.

MOULDING: I had an old Eko nylon-string guitar. I used to strum downstrokes, never any up, which put a pulse into everything. "...Nigel" I'm sure wouldn't have seen the light of day if not for my very amateurish way of playing. It was like a nursery rhyme or a kiddies' tune – I really didn't think it was a hit.

PARTRIDGE: Colin came into rehearsal and started lazily strumming these chords, and I thought, 'Bloody hell! It sounds like Julie Felix, or The Spinners... Christ, what are we gonna do with this?' It was Val Doonican territory. I said, 'Look, we've gotta put a bit of

fire into this.' I was very enamoured with Devo's version of "Satisfaction", 'cos I loved the fact that they took a normal beat but moved it to the wrong drums. You'd program Terry Chambers, you could name the most ridiculous rhythm and he'd learn



didn't take long to record. I mean, we did the first album in a morning! I based the opening drum fill on the intro of Wilson Pickett's 'In The Midnight Hour'. I was proud that we had a No 1. But we had to share it... we were joint No 1 with 'Yellow Submarine'. That week the last photos on the chart rundown on *Top Of The Pops* were half-Beatle, half-Small Face; they spliced my face with Ringo's."

McLagan: "I remember we always used to go into the studio dressed for a gig. We'd get up, go to [publicist] Tony Brainsby's office for photo sessions, then on to the studio for three hours to cut an A-side. Then... quick... B-side! Then in the car, and off to a gig. IBC was a four-track studio, and we didn't get to use an eight-track until we went to Immediate. Soon after this, we took acid and that turned our music a little bit sideways for a while."



MY MIND'S EYE

DECCA, NOVEMBER 1966. UK: 4; US: N/A

Experimental demo released by Arden and Decca while the band are on tour. The kids love the self-mocking psych-lite. The band don't.

Jones: "This was so commercial it reminded me of Christmas. The 'Ding Dong Merrily On High' steal was a piss take, but it had some good backing vocals on it. When we realised it had been released behind our backs it was just awful. Enter Andrew Oldham and Tony Calder. One thing I should say: no-one ever – ever – told me what to play in the Small Faces. Everyone just let me get on with it. My nickname was Shut Up Kenney. Because while they were trying to work out a song in the studio, I was playing away, trying to work out what drums would fit. But I was very proud of

my bandmates for allowing me that. Because I did fucking annoy 'em."

McLagan: "You could say Steve and Ronnie led the sessions, but really we were all equals in the studio. Just the four of us: no session men at all in the Decca days, contrary to some belief. There was no fucking about. It was quick and painless."

I CAN'T MAKE IT

DECCA, MARCH 1967. UK: 26; US: N/A

Despite leaving Arden and Decca for Tony Calder and Andrew Loog Oldham's Immediate label, this funky soul-rocker is released on Decca as part of the severance package. ☺



THEY CAN'T MAKE IT

"I DON'T THINK ANY BAND'S BEEN TREATED WORSE THAN THE SMALL FACES"

McLagan and Jones on leaving Don Arden, the band's money woes and the rock'n'roll gangster pose...

Kenney Jones: "Why did Don Arden let us go to Andrew Oldham? Money. At the time the thinking was that all pop groups had three months and then it was over. So when Immediate offered Don money he was happy to let us go because he didn't think we'd last and because we were hassling him about where our money was."

Ian McLagan: "We were pissed off with Arden and happy to be leaving him. He was a frightening kind of bloke. But I don't believe the whole story about him

dangling Robert Stigwood out of an umpteenth-storey window because he wanted to manage us. If he did it, it happened by mistake. Brian Epstein came to our flat once. He and Graeme Edge of The Moody Blues came over with an orange laced with finest LSD. So I think Don had heard that some manager was at our house and got the name wrong."

Jones: "Don played this gangster role. What he didn't know is that the Kray twins were my cousins. My cousin Billy Boy used to work for the Krays and

threatened to break my manager's neck if he was giving me a problem. It took me a while to convince him not to do anything."

McLagan: "Arden never paid us. We got £20 a week and that was it. We went to Immediate and now we were on £50 a week... and that was all we got from them, too. Unbelievable. I don't think any band's been treated worse than the Small Faces. We got our very first royalty cheque from the sales of our Decca records in 1997. So Steve never got a penny."

PHASE BE

"THIS SWOOSHING SOUND"

Engineer George Chkiantz on "Itchycoo Park" and the ultimate psychedelic effect

"I WAS WORKING in-house at Olympic and had become one of the more technically competent tape ops. The Beatles came into Olympic in June 1967 and I worked on 'All You Need Is Love' and 'Baby, You're A Rich Man'. They wanted to use ADT [Automatic Double Tracking]. George Martin explained how they did this at EMI. I'd become interested in echoes, and what George was talking about made me think about creating an effect mixing two versions of the audio playing at a microscopically different timing. You'd get phase distortion, or phase cancellation. A swooshing sound.

"I began experimenting with two Ampex tape recorders and the first time I made it work was one afternoon in July. I practised on PP Arnold's 'The First Cut Is The Deepest'. Glyn Johns happened to come in and he was very impressed.

"That night we were mixing 'Itchycoo Park'. It was a pleasant enough song but it wasn't gonna set the world alight. So Glyn said to the lads, 'George has got this effect. Are you interested?' Steve Marriott was always interested. So we nicked the four-track machine from the other studio. It took me two hours to get everything set up. We used it on the drums and the bridge. And I have to say it worked beautifully. But Andrew Oldham didn't like the mix so, the day after next, I did it all over again. The released version is a much better mix... but the phasing wasn't quite as good.

"As soon as 'Itchycoo Park' happened everybody wanted phasing. I called it phasing because I thought it was phase distortion. My fellow Olympic engineer Eddie Kramer called it flanging because he thought it sounded like a flange, whatever that may be."

McLagan and Marriott in Olympic Studios

ITCHYCOOPARK

SMALL FACES



SMALL FACES ★ I'M ONLY DREAMING ★

• The band refuse to promote it, while the BBC ban it.

McLagan: "This was another one with that familiar kind of bridge. A good song. And at Olympic Studios recording became much more fun. We were experimenting with different sounds. Nobody told me what to play. Sometimes I would ask, and invariably that would be Ronnie Lane, because he had good arranging ideas and melodies."

Jones: "There was a little tiny room in the basement of Olympic. We put a speaker in there with a mic and fed that back through the mixing desk, and that's what gave us our reverb and echo. That's where my great snare drum sound came from. I'd get Glyn Johns to put those effects through my cans while I was recording so I could pick up the feel from there. The strange thing was that the BBC banned 'I Can't Make It' because they reckoned it had some sexual reference, but happily played 'Here Come The Nice', which was blatantly about our drug pusher."

HERE COME THE NICE

IMMEDIATE, JUNE 1967. UK: 12; US: N/A

The Small Faces join the Summer Of Love party with their own catchy psych single laced with drug references.

Jones: "By this time we were writing songs that meant a lot to us, not commercial crap. Stories about our everyday lives. Calling our pusher 'The Nice' was inspired by Lord Buckley's skit, 'The Nazz'. I always bracket this song with 'Tin Soldier' because they're very similar in their arrangement."

McLagan: "I bought a different Hammond organ for this; an M102. It was what Booker T played on 'Green Onions'... it was a sturdier version of the B3. That

changed the sound a little bit. They had a nice Steinway at Olympic and I had my Wurlitzer. The weird things to me about this song are, a) that it was never banned, and b) that it was about Methadrine, which was a horrible drug. I mean, we loved smoking dope."

Jones: "The ending was our attempt to imitate a speed comedown."

McLagan: "It sounds like crap now."

ITCHYCOO PARK

IMMEDIATE, AUGUST 1967. UK: 3; US: 16

It's all too beautiful! Another Summer Of Love anthem. Kaftans are involved. Also: the band's only US hit single.

Jones: "We were definitely influenced here by the circumstance of flower power. We were experimenting with Mellotrons, and me and Glyn were always doing experiments with drums, which is how phasing came about [see panel]."

McLagan: "We tried to replicate the phasing effect when we played it live. It was fucking hopeless. I never liked 'Itchycoo Park' because me and Ronnie had to sing, 'It's all too beautiful', and you sing that a few times, and you think... it's not. But years after that I finally, properly, checked out the words, and realised it was about education and privilege. The 'bridge of sighs' is the one in Cambridge. The 'dreaming spires' are a reference to Oxford. Then 'to Itchycoo Park... that's where I've been'. Ronnie was saying, 'I didn't need privilege or education. I found beauty in a nettle patch in the East End of London.'"

Jones: "Its success did vindicate being left to our own devices, but we were still entering dodgy waters. It offered something different, but it was still commercial. There was one photo session for 'Itchycoo Park' where I wore a kaftan. I'm still very embarrassed about it."

TIN SOLDIER

IMMEDIATE, DECEMBER 1967. UK: 9; US: 73

A powerful love letter from Marriott to his future wife. A key example of the fusion between rock and soul.

McLagan: "This is the best track we cut. It was us going back to our roots."

Jones: "Dramatic, great build-up, lovely key change, and it suited Steve's personality and vocals. Then there's PP Arnold's backing vocals... ah, this was right where we wanted to be. It was originally meant for PP but the one we did give to her was 'If You Think You're Groovy', one of my all-time favourites. Steve Marriott was such a great singer; that high voice at the end... we kept asking, 'How the fuck can he do that?' The answer was, 'Because he's Steve Marriott.' He loved Ray Charles and James Brown and you can hear those influences here. He had three different voices: the gentle, soft one, the screaming, soulful rocker and the cockney actor. And then, on something like

'I'm Only Dreaming'
['Itchycoo Park' B-side],
he'd combine all three."

"ITCHYCOO PARK" VINDICATED US BEING LEFT ALONE"

KENNEY JONES

LAZY SUNDAY

IMMEDIATE, APRIL 1968.

UK: 2; US N/A

English pop-psych classic, "lumbago", "khazi" and all.

Although never intended as a single,

Loog Oldham's pop instincts prevail. A No 2 hit, and a hefty promotional gift for the parent LP, Ogdens' Nut Gone Flake.

McLagan: "When Steve came in with this it was slower. We started taking the piss out of it while he was out of the room. The 'Root-ti-doo-ti-di-day' thing. And he laughed when he came back in and heard us. So we cut it like that. It was a pisstake!"

Jones: "This is a record I'm still not sure about.





"They were just so bloody clever..." XTC in 1979:
(l-r) Moulding, Gregory, Partridge and Chambers

it. He'd tell you, "Right, fuck off, I'm gonna fucking learn this fucker." "Cos he wasn't really a musician, more a sort of groovy automaton builder... Some people say he's punk's John Bonham, and I can't think of a better starting reference point than that.

STEVE LILLYWHITE: Terry was as powerful as Dave Grohl but 100 times more inventive.

CHAMBERS: You have to dare to be different. And I think Andy really had that thing, like, 'We can't go down the same track as everybody else.'

GREGORY: We did a BBC session before we recorded it. And the drums have a real Glitter Band feel to them, like there were tea towels on the toms.

HUGH PADGHAM: It is a strange song! What was so brilliant about XTC was that they could write such interesting songs that weren't, "I love you, you love me", boring shit like that. They basically were just so bloody clever, you know.

GREGORY: If you see the lyrics, it's the simplest little song... there's not a single rhyme in the whole thing. And yet, it's crammed with hooks.

MOULDING: There were Nigels at school. I wasn't bullied, but I think I had a natural empathy for people that were. "...Nigel" was my song for the bullied, I suppose. British Steel was just a bit of naughtiness. What I hadn't bargained on was the union boss later ringing me up and asking me to join the cause! I had a devil of a job to convince him it was an organisation I chose at random.

PARTRIDGE: After we demoed it underneath Swindon Town Hall, Virgin said, "That's the single." Or whatever the imperial command was.

CHAMBERS: Up until that point, Colin was quite a shy lad. We had a job to get him to do back-up vocals... Having come up with this song sort of brought him out of his shell and he surprised everybody. If you'd have seen him in the early years you'd have thought there's no way he's going to stand up by a mic, let alone sing into one.

MOULDING: Before I knew it, I was singing and fronting the band, which was rather odd. It was like that scene in *I, Claudius* where he is raised on people's shoulders and a crown put on his head...

GREGORY: "Life Begins At The Hop" in April 1979 was our first meeting with Steve and Hugh.

PADGHAM: We must have passed the test with Virgin, so they said, "OK, now you can make the album." "...Nigel" was the first hit I engineered.

MOULDING: The Townhouse at the time had only just been built – Studio Two, when Andy and I had looked at it, was still a mass of wires. Sometimes The Jam were in next door and we used to meet up in the games room. I remember Dave always had a McEwan's Export on his amp!

GREGORY: We did it in three days, June 7, 8 and 9. We had a weekend put aside to do the single, and I think we did the B-sides as well, "Pulsing Pulsing" and "Bushman President". Then we must have gone back to Swindon for two weeks to

rehearse the rest of the songs, and then we were back recording the album from June 18 to 30. So three times as long was spent on "...Nigel" than on any of the other songs on the record.

MOULDING: In those days we played the backing track at the same time, so we could do that in an afternoon, providing we got the sounds. It was the vocals that took the time.

PARTRIDGE: The things that sound like sheets of metal being struck, that's a white noise patch on a monophonic Korg synth we had. We decided to do it with this industrial-sounding noise, so it hinted at British Steel, which is where Nigel works. We were rather enamoured with the sound of the live drums in The Townhouse. Hugh was beginning to work on this gated drum sound which became the thing in the '80s...

PADGHAM: Steve and me were always a bit competitive, because even to this day, Steve thinks he invented the Phil Collins drum sound, not me...

CHAMBERS: I loved the sound of the Stone Room in The Townhouse so much, I now live in a stone house! It's like a cave.

LILLYWHITE: Working with XTC was one of my easier jobs. At the same time I was working with U2 – they were pretty good players but they were so untogether and never had anything written for the studio, whereas XTC pretty much had all the arrangements done. There was very little for us to do on "...Nigel", other than record it well and do

Marriott and Lane
live on Ready
Steady Go!



Steve had been a child actor, he was the first Artful Dodger in Lionel Bart's *Oliver!* in the West End. He brought that theatricality to this. Once again, we were on tour in Germany, picked up *Melody Maker*... and this was a hit! Andrew had released it without our knowledge, like 'My Mind's Eye'. So this dragged us back into poppy-land. We wanted to be known for being as good as the Claptons of this world. We wanted a tougher image. It wasn't a fair representation of *Ogdens' Nut Gone Flake*."

McLagan: "After we'd done *Ogdens'...*, things with Steve got kinda strange. And then he wrote 'The Universal'."

THE UNIVERSAL

IMMEDIATE, JULY 1968. UK: 16; US: N/A

Marriott records this dig at the hollowness of Swinging London in the back garden of Mick Jagger's house. A sudden change of style that bewilders fan and Small Face alike.

Jones: "He brought it into the studio, we overdubbed drums and stuff onto it... and that was basically it. It's certainly not 'Tin Soldier'."

McLagan: "I'm not even on this. The drums and bass are so clear on it that they've obviously just been stuck on top of Steve's cassette recording."

Jones: "People love it because it's very relaxed and shows where our heads were at the time. Even the dog barks in time. Yes, of course the 'Mick' in the song was Jagger. And maybe the song was Steve's sort of goodbye to the London scene

because he was planning his departure."

McLagan: "I quit around this time. Steve started telling me what to play. As soon as I left he phoned Nicky Hopkins and got him to play on some tracks. I came back but it hurt me. Steve was in his own world by this time. He wanted Peter Frampton to join the band. Fuck that."

AFTERGLOW (OF YOUR LOVE)

IMMEDIATE, MARCH 1969. UK: 36; US: N/A

Marriott quits the Small Faces onstage at Alexandra Palace on New Year's Eve 1968. Immediate rush out this stunning farewell. But the British rock audience, like Marriott, have moved on.

McLagan: "This, 'Tin Soldier' and 'All Or Nothing' are the best Small Faces recordings."

Jones: "There were two reasons why Steve left. One was that, no matter what we did, we never lost this pop image. And this affected Steve more than anyone else. Another was *Ogdens'...* We always knew, in the back of our minds: how are we gonna top this? The only thing I hated was him leaving us onstage standing there like twats – he should've realised we all felt the same way."

McLagan: "Steve and I fell out over the B-side, 'Wham Bam Thank You Man', which was a hint to what Steve wanted to do in *Humble Pie*. It was all a bit obvious and a bit heavy, man. He was already on his way out."

Jones: "There was never a discussion about carrying on the Small Faces without Steve. People still think we replaced Steve Marriott with Rod Stewart. We didn't. The Faces were a completely new and different band." Ⓛ

Uncut's Ultimate Music Guide on the Small Faces is available from www.backstreetmerch.com and also as a digital download. Here Come The Nice: The Immediate Years 1967-1969 boxset is available now

POP GOES THE FACES

"THEY DIDN'T KNOW A PIANO FROM A PENIS!"

Ian McLagan on what '60s pop TV did for the Small Faces

"I FIRST SAW the Small Faces on *Ready Steady Go!* doing 'Whatcha Gonna Do About It?' and I was blown away. My dad said, 'Ere! That guy playing the bass looks like you!' A few months later I joined the band. It was unbelievably magical to me."

"But *Ready Steady Go!* was just a great show to do. Peter Stringfellow, who ran the King Mojo Club in Sheffield at the time, was a big fan of the Small Faces so he would hustle the crowd so they were really pumped up when we started. And most of the acts were live, so you might meet James Brown or whoever."

"*Top Of The Pops* may have sold more records but it was all a load of bollocks. They forced you to re-record the backing track. They would send someone from the Musicians' Union to check your re-recording, and they were always such bozos – didn't know a piano from a fucking penis – that we would just play them the original backing track and they'd never notice."

"The only reason I know we did 'I Can't Make It' on *The Morecambe & Wise Show* is because I've seen footage of it. It's really strange 'cos I loved them. I know we met them but I have no memory of it. We were endlessly hustled into one place then another and it all became a blur."





...Nigel' has become part of the language...' Partridge and Moulding rip it up at New York's CBGB's, January 4, 1979

→ a little bit of dub on the word "steel", which I think was my idea. It was all very sensible, there weren't any drugs or anything like that.

MOULDING: I think it was the best production team we ever had. I have very fond memories of those days, the camaraderie was great, we had lots of laughs and were very included in everything.

PADGHAM: I remember the sessions with such fondness, Andy was so bloody funny. Later, when we were making *English Settlement*, we used to get a crate of beer in, then they'd do these Hendrix and Led Zeppelin renditions, but with their own lyrics. The Jimi Hendrix Experience became 'the Jimmy Edwards Experience'... Andy used to take his trousers off, hitch his pants up and pretend he was a samurai. It was stupid stuff, but such good fun.

MOULDING: When the fucker came out, we were in Australia! But it was OK, we'd done videos.

PARTRIDGE: We went up to London to do two promo films in one day [July 10, 1979], for "Life Begins At The Hop" and "Making Plans For Nigel". I hated our videos, and I hate the "...Nigel" video especially. Because it was, "Andy, we're gonna make you up as a weird, sinister joker fella and you've got to terrorise this Nigel character." And I thought, 'Oh, Fuck me.' "Statue Of Liberty" had such a shit cover, it was just a black and white photo of the Statue Of Liberty... After that I insisted on having input on the sleeves. We were on perm-tour, and Virgin rang up and said, 'What do you want on the sleeve of this?' and I thought, 'Well, I like board games at the moment so maybe we can make a Victorian parlour game where you're deciding the fate of Nigel.' And of course, when we saw it I thought, 'Oh, no, it's a bit too *Beano*-looking. It's not at all Victorian.' But at least you get the suggestion that Nigel's fate is not his own.

MOULDING: After all the Chicory Tips, the Mott The Hooples, the Slades and the T.Rex's that you'd seen down the years on *Top Of The Pops*, suddenly, it was our turn. Did I enjoy it? Of course, who wouldn't? The phrase, "like a duck to water" comes to mind. I know Andy would say that I milked it, but one has to, up to a point.

PARTRIDGE: Colin did behave quite a bit differently after "...Nigel" was a hit. 'Cos he's a Leo, you see, he did adopt this slightly imperious air. He was a little bit unbearable. He just had this funny five minutes, like a little Caligula or something.

GREGORY: The following year he insisted on making a solo single [as The Colonel, 1980's "Too Many Cooks In The Kitchen"], and he didn't want the band involved. Certainly, Colin was quite happy to be centre of attention for a while.

MOULDING: When I did The Colonel, it was a kind of consolation prize for the fact I was a bit disappointed with my efforts for *Black Sea*. I was going through an emotional period with my partner at the time. It was never said, but I felt the chill sometimes from the others. I felt a bit of a fraud and I suppose Andy was grinning through his teeth. I was told he once said, "I feel like pulling the rug from under him." He was naturally peeved, he'd been the songwriter in the band for so long. It's human nature to have the reaction that he had.

LILYWHITE: Andy was definitely the leader, he was the alpha male. Whenever you're in a room with him, it's Andy's room. But I never got any sense that he was pissed off about Colin's success, none.

PARTRIDGE: I was quite jealous of the attention "...Nigel" got. I was also annoyed that everything Colin was writing, Virgin were going, "Oooh, that handsome bass player's written another one." But you can't blame them, he was good-looking, like a cross between Rudolf Nureyev and Chrissie Hynde. And suddenly he started writing very melodic songs. For years to come, Virgin would say, "Oh yeah, that's nice,

Andy. All those 30 songs are great. Oh, what? Colin's written five?! There you go, there's your singles!" I remember thinking, 'What about me?' But now I can sympathise with why they did that.

LILYWHITE: What XTC were great at was chronicling, in the way The Kinks would, their daily life and the mundane, and "...Nigel" may be one of the greatest songs about that in the world.

CHAMBERS: Some of the songs we did, your gut's not really in it, but perhaps because I was a bit more involved in "...Nigel", I thought, 'Shit, this don't sound too bad!'

MOULDING: I had no idea it'd have the legacy it has. It's become part of the language. Newspapers quote it when some Nigel makes the headlines – that's the greatest thrill of it all.

PARTRIDGE: Without "...Nigel" we'd have found it hard to have made a dent in the UK *Top Of The Pops* conscience. 'Cos a lot of people assume either that or "Senses Working Overtime" is all we ever did. It still hurts that the English ignored us, but you can never be a prophet in your own land, can you? The Americans really took to us, and the Japanese. But to the English, we were just four herbarts from Swindon. If we came from New York, playing the same music, they'd be all over us.

GREGORY: Andy considers that we went on to do far more important, worthwhile stuff than "...Nigel", and that it was just a bit of fluff to get the public interested. To a certain extent that's true, 'cos it's not really typical of what we went on to do. But I think it was perfect for the time.

PADGHAM: If someone asks what I used to do and I say, "XTC were one of my favourite bands and I worked with them", they always say "Oh! 'Making Plans For Nigel'!" It always comes up.

LILYWHITE: As a band, they were one of the best I've ever worked with. They had it all.

Certainly Andy, of all the people I've worked with over the years, is one of the most talented.

PARTRIDGE: That nylon-string guitar that Colin wrote "...Nigel" on was later smashed over his head! We toured Australia, and the rest of us were bringing back souvenirs like a Sydney Harbour Bridge ashtray or a kangaroo testicle tobacco pouch. Colin brought back a girl who wrote for a newspaper in Sydney, and of course Colin's wife was not too pleased about that. When you bring back a souvenir, it usually hasn't got breasts attached to it. We went round to collect Colin one night, and I remember the lights were on and the curtains

were open and you could just see him and his wife rowing through the window... and she grabbed his acoustic guitar and smashed it over his head!

MOULDING: I never got clocked over the head with it, my missus was aiming for more subtle parts. Still, we had good fun both of us glueing it back together. ☺



FACT FILE

- **Written by:** Colin Moulding
- **Released:** August 17, 1979
- **Personnel:** Colin Moulding (vocals, bass), Andy Partridge (guitar, synth, bk vocals), Dave Gregory (guitar, bk vocals), Terry Chambers (drums)
- **Producer:** Steve Lilywhite
- **Recorded at:** Studio Two, The Townhouse, London
- **Label:** Virgin
- **UK chart position:** 17
- **US chart position:** N/A



TIMELINE

Early 1979: Keyboardist Barry Andrews leaves the band, to be replaced by guitarist

June 7-9: XTC record "Making Plans For Nigel" at The

Townhouse, London
June 18-30: The rest of *Drums And Wires* (right) is recorded

September 14:
"...Nigel" is released, reaching No 17 in the UK singles chart

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Produced in with Thomas Bartlett and featuring Norah Jones, Bluebird is Dawn Landes' answer to her ex Josh Ritter's "divorce record. There are two sides to every story, and this is hers.

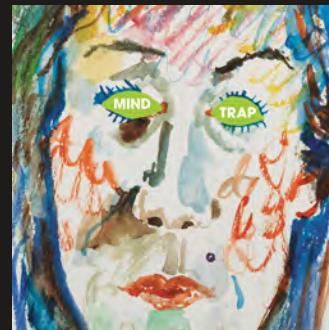


THE FAT WHITE FAMILY

CHAMPAGNE HOLOCAUST

TRASH MOUTH LP / CD

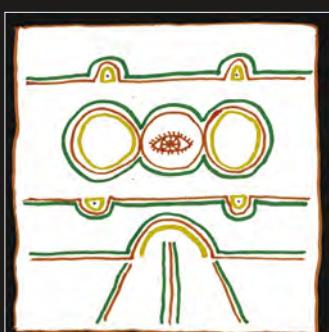
Champagne Holocaust slides from darkly comic to dangerously manic without skipping a morphine blurred beat. According to NME "The most exciting new band in London!"



MARTIN CREED MIND TRAP

TELEPHONE RECORDS LP / CD

Martin Creed's new album 'Mind Trap' features gospel singers and a symphony orchestra and it was recorded in Chicago, London and Czech Republic.



KEEL HER

KEEL HER

Critical Heights LP + CD

Keel Her's songs are intimate vignettes - guitars and synths vie for melodic prominence over vast swathes of fuzz, feedback, swampy reverb and broken beats.



HOSPITALITY

TROUBLE

FIRE RECORDS LP / CD

Taking unexpected yet satisfying turns, the new album sees Hospitality offer up a moodier palette, with more space and silence, looser arrangements and more open production.



CYMBALS

THE AGE OF FRACTURE

TOUGH LOVE LP / CD

The long-awaited new album from CYMBALS named after a book by Princeton academic, Daniel T. Rodgers. Produced by Dreamtrax (Swim Deep, Hot Chip) in his Hackney studio, the result is a cleaner, brighter sound than their brattier early recordings, edging towards the European sophistication of the end-of-the-century French house they grew up around.



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LET'S WRESTLE

FORTUNA POP! LP / CD

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FIKA LP/CD

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BIG UPS

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TOUGH LOVE LP / CD

Debut album from Brooklyn 4 piece. Big Ups. At their most direct, they have recall brattiness of prime-era The Descendents, but with a penchant for existentialism & the unhinged, they mostly obviously channel the Dionysian thrill of Pissed Jeans & The Jesus Lizard.



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POEMSS

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THIS MONTH: WILD BEASTS | ST VINCENT | TINARIWEN & MORE



PETER HAPAK



TRACKLIST

- 1 Morning
- 2 Heart Is A Drum
- 3 Say Goodbye
- 4 Waking Light
- 5 Unforgiven
- 6 Wave
- 7 Don't Let It Go
- 8 Blackbird Chain
- 9 Evil Things
- 10 Blue Moon
- 11 Turn Away
- 12 Country Down

BECK

Morning Phase

CAPITOL

The LA maverick invokes Anglophile folk on first new album in six years. By Stephen Troussé

7/10

“TURN, TURN AWAY/From the sound of your own voice,” sings Beck towards the end of *Morning Phase*, his first new album in six years. Those lines serve as a pretty neat summary of his working methods during his hiatus, where he seemed to explore every possible musical avenue other than write and record an album of his own songs.

First he took a back seat as producer for fellow travellers such as Thurston Moore and Stephen Malkmus, most strikingly and successfully crafting and co-writing Charlotte Gainsbourg's

IRM. Then there was the enjoyably ramshackle Record Club, where he assembled disparate like-minds – Liars, St Vincent, Devendra Bernhardt, Feist, members of Tortoise, Wilco and Os Mutantes – to record a version of a favourite album – *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, INXS's *Kick* – in one day.

Most satisfying – conceptually, artistically and in performance – there was 2012's *Song Reader*: an album in the form of sheet music, a tribute to the lost American songbook from before recording, which culminated in a delirious, unhinged performance at the Barbican →

New Albums

→ featuring interpretations from Jarvis Cocker, Franz Ferdinand and The Mighty Boosh. If the gap years were a deliberate attempt to recharge the batteries and to revive his muse, then by the climax of the Barbican show – leading his raggle-taggle troupe in a raucous singalong – he seemed a man revived.

Right enough last year, unexpected one-off singles appeared – “Gimme”, “I Won’t Be Long” and best of all, the Animal Collective-ish “Defriended”. If Record Club seemed to gently establish him as a godfather of 21st-Century blog-rock, then every sign seemed to be that he was gradually re-emerging to reclaim his crown.

Morning Phase isn’t quite such a bold return. Rather than lighting out for new territory or reaffirming his place as high-concept freakfolk/artpop conjuror, the new record returns to the Beck of *Sea Change*, the plangent, acoustic, confessional album he recorded in 2002 in the wake of his break-up with long-term girlfriend Leigh Limon. Though Beck himself seems reluctant to consider *Morning*

Phase a companion piece or twisted sibling to the earlier recording, it does reassemble the same group of musicians – guitarists Smokey Hormel and Jason Falkner, keyboard player Roger Manning and drummer Joey Waronker.

Morning Phase dawns with “Cycle”, an unsettling Arvo Part-y string drone – the first of a couple of orchestral interludes – before beginning in earnest with “Morning”. “Woke up this morning...” he keens – and here you might anticipate some lyrical dislocation, a monkey wrench in the genre mechanics but instead he

continues faithfully, earnestly, “from a long night in the storm”.

Like *Sea Change*, *Morning Phase* seems intent on pursuing emotional authenticity deep into plain speaking, and even cliché. His research into sheet-music history of the American songbook may even have heightened this commitment: elsewhere on the new record you find another track titled “Blue Moon” without the faintest wink of irony.

Beck has talked about how he found inspiration for *Morning Phase* in the cosmic

Californian music of his youth, the wild-honey harmonies of The Byrds and Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, and on “Morning” you hear a hint of the pie-eyed starsailing of Judee Sill. But elsewhere if you think of The Byrds you’re more likely to be put in mind of the desolate dawn chill of “Draft Morning”. The album is presented as a new dawn for Beck, but emotionally it feels still tied to the trauma that triggered *Sea Change*. After emerging from the storm, Beck continues, “Looked up this morning/Found the rose was full of thorns”.



Golden Feelings

SONIC ENEMY, 1993

“I woke up on the futon and my boots were on fire...” Beck groaned on his debut, cassette-only release, channeling ancient blues woe through antifolk schtick. But the beautiful fingerpicking on “Gettin’ Home” was an early sign of his sincere devotion to the folksinger craft.

7/10



Mutations

GEFFEN, 1998

On the kind-of follow-up to *Odelay* (slated to appear on Bong Load until Geffen realised it was no vanity indulgence) Beck took a left turn out into Tropicália, country bar ballads and Pentangular folk. But at the heart of the LP you found Beck riding an old train of the Lennony, baroque folk of “Dead Melodies”.

7/10

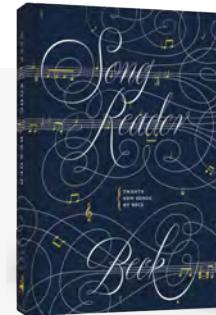


Sea Change

GEFFEN, 2002

Beck’s acoustic breakup confessions seemed to chime with a more general post-9/11 cultural malaise, eschewing postmodern genre play and irony for a supposed new sincerity. “The sun don’t shine even when it’s day,” he sang on “Golden Age” – as the stormclouds gather, that seems to have cleared on *Morning Phase*.

9/10



Song Reader

MC SWEENEYS, 2012

Not a recorded album, but a collection of songs inspired by early 20th-Century sheet music, that saw Beck explore back roads of the classic American songbook with wit and feeling, and laid the foundations for *Morning Phase*.

8/10

THE ROAD TO MORNING PHASE

The Beck records that laid the foundations for his latest LP

Beck gets the blues: “Woke up this morning...”



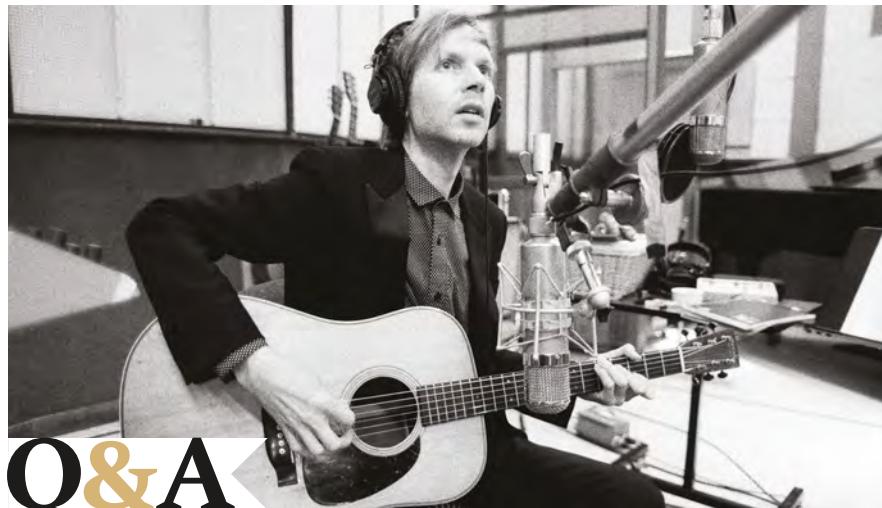
Furthermore, rather than California dreams, *Morning Phase* generally evokes a more wintry, Anglophilic folk music. "Heart Is A Drum" distills the soundworld of Nick Drake's *Bryter Layter* – the frosty clarity of the acoustic fingerpicking, the tinkling brook of piano and looming Robert Kirby orchestral cloudscape, here reprised by Beck's father, David Campbell. "Turn Away" owes something to Simon & Garfunkel's "The Sound Of Silence" while the closing "Waking Light" aspires to the interstellar bombast of Roger Waters' Pink Floyd.

Individually there are some wonderful songs on *Morning Phase*. "Blackbird Chain" is a small marvel, shuffling through time signatures like prime Lee Hazlewood, Smokey Hormel's mercurial guitar flowering and then spiralling across "Country Down" as Beck sings of "a tiger rose growing through your prison floor".

But cumulatively *Morning Phase* can feel too consistent in mood and pace. The songs tread some well-worn melodic routes, and Beck's thin but serviceable voice is dulled rather than bolstered when multitracked into harmony. "Unforgiven" distills some of the problems of the record. Over echo-laden electric piano chords Beck sings solemnly of driving into the night, into the afterglow, to somewhere unforgiven. In a way that seems somehow typical of Gen Xers (think of how Johnny Depp or Leo DiCaprio still seem boyish and unconvincing as leading men), Beck is unable to convincingly get into the saddle of this kind of mythic American deepsong – it feels forced and unconvincing, like someone trying to sing an octave too low.

One of the more intriguing songs is "Wave". It's just Beck alone on an orchestral seascape, like Robert Redford in "All Is Lost", singing atonally of "isolation". The song was originally written for Charlotte Gainsbourg and it hints tantalisingly at some fresh, strange, latter-day Scott Walker horizons for Beck. Along with the preceding singles, and the talk of a second album already in the works, it makes you wonder if *Morning Phase* was selected as simply the most commercially tenable release for Beck to return with – a placeholder rather than statement of ambition.

But this also highlights quandary that may have led to Beck's six-year hiatus. Back in 2006, *Uncut*'s John Mulvey remarked on the irony that, for a supposed maverick, Beck had succumbed to routine: "He releases a hip-hop/pop/blues romp showcasing his post-modern hipster schtick. Then he follows it up with a faintly ethereal, largely straight-faced singer-songwriter album, helmed by Nigel Godrich." As impressive as *Morning Phase* in places is, it doesn't disturb this formula – even if it's followed up by a wilder, stranger album. This division may make the records easier to market but it hobbles Beck's antic muse. If the second act of his career is to be as arresting as the first, his problem is not so much to synthesise the poles of authenticity and audacity as to arrange them once more in some deliciously precarious balance – the way that the lonesome hobos of "Derelict" and "Ramshackle" haunted the stoned soul picnic of *Odelay*.



Q&A

Beck on his new album and the inspiration behind it: "There's definitely an English influence on there..."

Morning Phase is your first album in six years. You've been very busy musically, but did you miss that sense of event, of having a new album about to drop? I did, yeah. I feel like I put out a lot of work, though it hasn't necessarily been as an album proper. I did the album with Charlotte Gainsbourg, so I did I feel like I had gone through making an album.

When did you realise it was time to make another Beck album? What changed? I didn't have any sense of what I was looking for. For a while I was so busy with other things, I wasn't sure if I was going to make another record, or if it was going to be later down the line. I was really just on the sidelines. It has changed. I'm trying to push things forward. It feels like the right time.

Are you in a better place than you were on *Sea Change*? Well, a lot of the songs on *Sea Change* were written over a number of years. I wouldn't say I was in a bad place, just a different place. There was a gap between when the songs were written and when they were recorded. It's probably the same with this record.

The recordings began in Nashville in 2005. Was the intention to make a country record?

I had gone to Nashville initially to make a record that I didn't end up finishing for various reasons. And then I tried to go back in 2011 to do it properly and it's not completed. I recorded a lot of musicians there, and again it wasn't quite right. But I ended up keeping three of the songs that are on the record. It was about, you know, all the books you've read and things you've heard about people going to Nashville and making a record. The first time I went to Nashville I was 18 and we took a Greyhound bus across country and we stopped off there for hours and I was steeped in country music and George Jones, so to see Nashville – it held a... not a mystique, but it felt like a centre of a lot of music I'd grown up on. So I'd always wanted to do something there.

Did it feel more natural to finish the record in LA? We finished it off in Paris and London. I did a lot of work here in LA but I was scheduled to be over there for a few months so I brought all the

songs with me and continued working there. So I worked on it in LA, Paris, London and New York.

You've talked about the record having the sound of the California of your childhood: The Byrds, Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young... I thought you said Crosby, Stills and Carl Jung! Bad connection.

...But I heard quite an English feel to some of the songs. That's like what I was saying. There's definitely an English influence on there. For a lot of years I was drawn to music from the South or British folk music, New York music – the Velvets and Television. Something comes out when I play with this band. These guys have all grown up in California and there's a certain something that comes out when we get together. When you're younger you try to hide it, you're scared, you reject it – but then as you grow old older you become fonder of it. Obviously you can also hear things like Nick Drake and Bert Jansch.

Morning Phase seems driven by a desire to write a simpler kind of song. Beginning a song with "Woke up this morning..." and playing it straight... Yeah, I'm always trying to simplify. That's the trick – to simplify without it becoming pedestrian. That's the beauty of folk. Although I do love writers who are wordy and obscure and strange.

"Obviously, you can hear things like Nick Drake and Bert Jansch"

Another song is called "Blue Moon" – were you inspired by the Song Reader experience of old standards? That song came out of a few things. I was collecting so much of this sheet music from the early 20th-Century and there were thousands of moon songs. You think about a song like "Blue Moon", which Elvis covered. Behind a great song there are thousands of other 'moon' songs. So there is a tradition and it's OK to dig into that and carry it forward.

Can you tell us about any other records you've been working on? I recorded lots of other songs, but for *Morning Phase* I just went with the songs that had that particular... spell. I'm now thinking about the show, so I'm writing more energetic, more 'pop' songs I suppose you'd call them, without painting myself into a corner.

INTERVIEW: STEPHEN TROUSSE

WILD BEASTS

Present Tense

DOMINO

Synths and sex... the Kendal clan's excellent fourth. By Sam Richards



9/10

eventually graced their 2008 debut, *Limbo, Panto*, alongside some equally fruity numbers called things like "The Club Of Fathomless Love" and "She Purred, While I Grrred". It introduced them as a band confidently rushing in where most of their peers conspicuously feared to tread, into the murky realm of male sexuality.

Wild Beasts remain pretty much out on a limb as a band who regularly entertain the topic of male lust and its sometimes terrible consequences. It's difficult to think of many singers of their generation who would dare to adopt the role of a gloating Don Juan with such menacing relish as Tom Fleming does here on "Nature Boy", working a catchphrase borrowed from wrestler Jake "The Snake" Roberts – "a little fun for me, none for you" – into a narrative that points up the destruction wrought by the myth of the alpha male.

Their previous album, 2011's *Smother*, felt a little frigid (in both senses), so it's good to see the colour returning to their cheeks. *Present Tense* finds a more acceptable compromise between their passionate urges and modest temperaments. Fleming's fellow vocalist Hayden Thorpe has long since tamed his more rococo lyrical flourishes but, encouragingly, much of the fervour that fuelled the likes of "The Fun Powder Plot" has returned. Steely opening track "Wanderlust" is a trenchant takedown of careerist rockers with nothing to say, concluding with a sideswipe at those who adopt American accents in order to get on: "In your mother tongue, what's the verb 'to suck'?"



SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:** Lexxx and Leo Abrahams

Recorded at: Konk Studios, London, and The Distillery, Wiltshire

Personnel: Hayden Thorpe (vocals, synthesisers), Tom Fleming (vocals, synthesisers), Chris Talbot (drums), Ben Little (guitar)

Thorpe's voice is still a swooping, exotic pleasure, fuller and more controlled than in the early days, only dominating the picture when absolutely necessary. Fleming's is charming, cautioning, the keeper of dangerous knowledge. His songs, such as "Daughters" and "A Dog's Life", are ominous affairs, full of dark imagery, ulterior motives and dire consequences. Thorpe tends to handle the more tender, romantic stuff, such as "A Simple Beautiful Truth", a gorgeous grown-up funk smoulderer, and "Palace", a soaring, heart-on-the-table love song. "Sweet Spot" is an eloquent paean to orgasm, the moment of ecstasy described as "a godly state/ Where the real and the dream they consummate".

Musically, it's as if Wild Beasts heard Jon Hopkins and Oneohtrix Point Never's stunning remixes of their own "Two Dancers" and thought: we could probably do all that ourselves. Synthesizers dominate, but there is none of the metallic harshness that implies. Nor is there any of the diffuse bluster often created when sensitive guitar bands attempt to bolster their sound with

electronics. With the aid of producers Alex Dromgoole AKA Lexxx and Eno protégé Leo Abrahams, Wild Beasts have meticulously selected only the richest, most evocative synth tones with which to reconstruct their distinct

soundworld. Ben Little's patient, eddying guitar figures haven't been jettisoned, but subsumed seamlessly into the new order; or, as on "A Dog's Life", employed to provide exultant relief from the chorus's menacing machine drone. As a result, *Present Tense* never sounds alien or abrasive, but intimate, eerie and seductive. Its antecedents are Sylvian & Sakamoto, Side Two of Kate Bush's *Hounds Of Love* and particularly The Blue Nile, Fleming's vocal on "New Life" assuming more than a hint of Paul Buchanan's sad, rain-lashed majesty.

But mostly, Wild Beasts still sound like nobody else but themselves. For the fourth album in a row, they've moved the goalposts, challenging themselves to apply their whooping idiosyncrasies to a new aesthetic framework. On *Present Tense* they've done so with such exquisite attention to detail, you can't help but submit to their advances.

Q&A

Tom Fleming



Were there a few favourite pieces of kit that ended up dictating the sound of this album?

We don't have loads of synthesisers: a Roland Juno-6, a Prophet 08 – which is a lovely thing and all over the record – and we had access to a working Jupiter-8. But equally we did a lot with the Roland 404 sampler, a little tabletop thing that looks a Game Boy. Obviously we're interested in sound and we

tried to get things right because in electronic music the style is the substance to some extent; you have to take care over these things. But we're not really programmers – we like things we can hit.

"Nature Boy" seems to allude to myths about male sexual potency. Were you thinking of anything specific when you wrote it? It's a play on all kinds of macho-ness: the blues song "Back Door Man", the old myth of Reynard The Fox, and also WWE wrestlers and rappers – "I'm the peacock", that kind of thing. "Nature Boy" is about the archetype of man's conquering sexuality.

Sex and sexuality is certainly a recurring topic in your lyrics – why do you think most of your peers are scared to broach the subject?

It's weird. Indie bands, for want of a better term, don't like to talk about sex. Probably because it's difficult to come across convincingly. Bearing in mind that chat about sex is everywhere in our daily lives, but none of it's actually sexy. Sex isn't talked about as a real thing, it's all glammed up and sanitised. The actual flesh and bone and sweat and hair is left out. It's all very happy, healthy, heterosexual and not very interesting. So it does take a few leaps of logic to write about that stuff, but it's a shame that more

don't try. You've got to be comfortable with ridicule if you're going to stand up onstage in front of a thousand people.

In hindsight, do you think maybe you went a bit too far on *Smother* in trying to counteract the ribaldry of the first two albums?

Potentially, I think that record needed to be made, otherwise we could have found ourselves stereotyped as this oddball, sexual indie band, so it was a very deliberate rejection. But this new record definitely had to be a bit more aggressive. We wanted to sound like a gang again.

INTERVIEW: SAM RICHARDS



BENMONT TENCH

You Should Be So Lucky

BLUENOTE

The Heartbreakers keys man debuts – with a little help from his friends. *By Bud Scoppa*

8/10

AS A MEMBER of Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers and a busy A-list session player, Benmont Tench is a master of the art of getting the job done without drawing undue attention to himself. This quintessential sideman is also an eminent presence in the LA musical community, egolessly

blending in with his fellow players, who revere the 60-year-old veteran for being a musicians' musician and a disarmingly laidback dude.

Long one of producer Rick Rubin's guns for hire, he always shows up when a friend like Ryan Adams or Ringo Starr calls. Both are on Tench's first solo album, part of a veritable supersession

TRACKLIST

- 1 Today I Took Your Picture Down
- 2 Veronica Said
- 3 Ecor Rouge
- 4 Hannah
- 5 Blonde Girl, Blue Dress
- 6 You Should Be So Lucky
- 7 Corrina, Corrina
- 8 Dogwood
- 9 Like The Sun (Michoacan)
- 10 Wobbles
- 11 Why Don't You Quit Leaving Me Alone
- 12 Duquesne Whistle

that also includes locally bred guitarist Blake Mills, expat drummer Jeremy Stacey, bassist Don Was, multi-instrumentalist Ethan Johns, singer/guitarists Gillian Welch and David Rawlings and Petty himself. Ethan's dad, legendary producer Glyn Johns, first broached the subject of Tench making a solo album 20 years ago, and took his chair behind the console when Benmont finally decided to go for it. Computers were absent from the control room. With its organic arrangements, live-off-the-floor performances and painterly detail, *You Should Be So Lucky* is very much an old-school Glyn Johns production, cut in the same room and featuring several of the same players who appeared on Adams' similarly timeless 2012 LP, *ashes & Fire*. There's nothing flashy about this record; it's totally in character for the resolutely understated Tench. It opens subtly with the melancholy ballad "Today I Took Your Picture Down", which recalls Warren Zevon at his most stoic. "On this track you can hear the players really listening," Tench notes in his track-by-track breakdown, but he could just as accurately be referring to the album as a whole, which is about simpático players locking in with the material and each other. Tench sings his lyrics much as he plays, with restraint, feel and unforced emotion, not letting himself get in the way of the song yet still fully inhabiting its nuances. The title of "Veronica Said" signals Tench's debt to Lou Reed (another singer who made the most of a limited voice). The sublime "Why Don't You Quit Leaving Me Alone" (recorded by Rosanne Cash for 1987's *King's Record Shop*) wouldn't be out of place on a Randy Newman album: the tender love song "Hannah" inspires Tench's most heartfelt vocal, its melody pushing his voice to the top of his narrow range, with poignant results; and "Blonde Girl, Blue Dress" knowingly captures the emotional state of the other guy, the one who doesn't get the girl – presumably a common occurrence with sidekicks and sidemen alike.

Bob Dylan, who's done more with less than any singer, is Tench's primary touchstone, and he

Q&A

Benmont Tench

You're known around LA for your willingness to play with anybody.

I hope I use a little bit of taste when I go out [laughs]. "He's no pushover, but he can be had." But the Heartbreakers have a lot of downtime, and I love to play. If you play with other people, you're gonna learn something. You blend everybody's dialects and you find a common language.

This record strikes me as an extension of that impulse.

Everybody on this record is a good friend of mine. I've played with these folks in my house; we cook some food and talk, break out some instruments and play. So making the record felt like my house. That's exactly what I wanted and what Glyn wanted. Hell, we just wanted to have some fun and do something good. But if I hadn't been surrounded by friends, it would've been too intimidating and overwhelming.

You made the record in 10 days, soup to nuts. That's impressive.

That's the amount of time that we could have all of the musicians, Glyn and Sunset Sound. But I like limitations. Limitations make you work in a different way, and you get a different result.

INTERVIEW: BUD SCOPPA

honours the bard on the album's two non-originals, a luminous take on Dylan's

rendition of the folk standard "Corrina, Corrina" and a rollicking barrelhouse cover of *Tempest*'s "Duquesne Whistle". You can also pick up his influence in the torrid title track, which comes across with the hellbent ferocity of *Highway 61 Revisited*, as Tench unleashes his inner Al Kooper and Adams, playing rhythm guitar as if his life depended on it, practically tears the strings off his acoustic.

"Ecor Rouge", one of two instrumentals, is a watercolour landscape, while the other, "Wobbles", swings New Orleans style, propelled by the dual drumming of Stacey and Ethan Johns. As different as they are, both capture lightning in a bottle, and hearing them, it's easy to see why Was, after playing on the record, was inspired to release it on the iconic label Blue Note, which he now heads. Much like the classic Blue Note albums of the last century, *You Should Be So Lucky* is tailor-made for

connoisseurs of musicianship at its headiest and most tasteful – the kind of record you're proud to own, matching the pride of all those who participated in its creation.

SLEEVE NOTES

➤ Recorded at: Sunset Sound (Hollywood)
Produced by: Glyn Johns
Personnel: Benmont Tench (vocals, piano, organs, guitars), Blake Mills (guitars, tipple), Ethan Johns (guitars, tipple, harmony vocals, additional drum and shaker on "Wobbles"), Ryan Adams (guitars, harmony vocals), Don Was (bass), Jeremy Stacey (drums), Gillian Welch (guitars, harmony vocals), David Rawlings (guitars, harmony vocals), Tom Petty (bass on "Blonde Girl, Blue Dress"), Ringo Starr (tambourine on "Blonde Girl, Blue Dress"), The Section Quartet (strings), Joel Jerome and Mandy Moore (harmony vocals)

A to Z

COMING UP THIS MONTH...

p70 WILD BEASTS
p71 BAND OF HORSES
p72 BILL CALLAHAN
p74 ST VINCENT
p77 TINARIWEN
p78 KATY B
p80 THE NOTWIST
p81 ANGEL OLSEN
p84 SUN KIL MOON



A NEW LINE (RELATED)

A New Line (Related)

HOME ASSEMBLY MUSIC

Techno and beyond, direct from British bedrooms

8/10

The new project of Andrew Johnson from British electronica heads The Remote Viewer. *A New Line (Related)* sits closer to the dancefloor than any of his previous music. This self-titled debut album is an object lesson in graceful dance music, building blocks of dub-techno from the gaseous ambience of the Chain Reaction label and the rigid insistence of Detroit's finest. But it's wilder than that yet: "Didn't We Almost Have Etoiles" swoons with the same hypnotic density as MBV's "Glider", while the lock-groove lullaby of "Repetition (For Pryzbylewski)" is as joyously maddening as Steve Reich's early tape-loop pieces.

JON DALE



ANGEL HAZE

Dirty Gold

UNIVERSAL

Anthems for doomed youth from ambitious New York rapper

Originally slated for later in 2014 but rush-released after Angel Haze herself

leaked it in a fit of impatient anti-label pique, this is the debut album from a rapper whose candid and disturbing mixtape work often chilled to the bone. She's admirably tried to go beyond being merely internet-famous, using Rihanna-worthy production muscularity to launch her tracks about self-reliance into the bedrooms of the dispossessed. Her flow is stirring, particularly on double-time "A Tribe Called Red", and recalls the pent-up righteousness of Eminem's late period. But her weakness is the occasional lapse into 12-step blandness on the big – and rather underwritten – choruses.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS

7/10



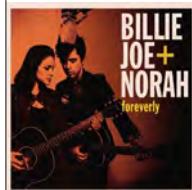
THE APRIL MAZE
The April Maze
APRILMAZE.COM

UK debut from an Aussie Mr & Mrs

7/10

The Melbourne-based husband-and-wife duo of Todd Mayhew and Sivan Agam have been peddling their skewed alt.folk for seven years, and their eponymous fourth album adds more varied hues to their musical template. "Oh Yesterday" and "I've Seen The Rain" make excursions into jazz and country, respectively, with Agam's emotive voice recalling Mama Cass Elliot, the couple's lyrical jousting also bringing to mind The Civil Wars. The arrangements are sparsely elegant, stripped to the bone on the ode to unattainable love, "Winter", and the defiant rallying cry to victims of bullying, "Don't Let The Bastards Bring You Down".

TERRY STAUNTON



BILLIE JOE ARMSTRONG & NORAH JONES
Foreverly

REPRISE

Loving remake of The Everly Brothers' Songs Our Daddy Taught Us

As improbable musical marriages go, Jones' sweetly elegant jazz-pop and the feral punk yelping of Green Day's Armstrong takes some beating. You'd be hard pressed to recognise either singer's default style as they croon nostalgically like Gram and Emmylou on a loving recreation of the rootsy set of country/folk ballads the Everlys recorded in 1958. There's a beguiling, relaxed charm to songs such as "Roving Gambler" and "Barbara Allen". But ultimately you're left frustrated by the safety first approach. Some of the boldness Nick Cave brought to similar material duetting with Kylie and PJ Harvey on *Murder Ballads* would've been welcome.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

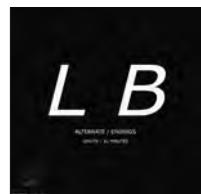
BAND OF HORSES
Acoustic At The Ryman
BROWN/KLS

Hushed balladry focused on the passage of time and ties that bind

This unplugged set marks the completion of Ben Bridwell's musical odyssey, as BOH fill the sanctified atmosphere of the venerable Nashville auditorium with their trademark Appalachian harmonies. The 10-song tracklist draws from each of the group's four studio LPs, from early minor-key laments ("The Funeral") to the rustic Southern songs that are the specialty of the current lineup ("Older") symbolically charting Bridwell's cross-country journey from BOH's origins in Seattle back home to South Carolina. These dead-earnest takes are suffused with existential melancholy, as the group's feathery vocals bring uplift to the heavy emotional burden of the songs.

BUD SCOPPA

7/10



LEE BANNON
Alternate/Endings
NINJA TUNE

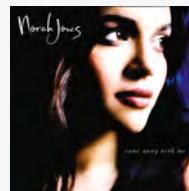
Former hip-hop producer ushers in the jungle revival

8/10

Lee Bannon's profile received a boost last year when four of his classic-sounding hip-hop productions were included on a mixtape by fast-rising New York rapper Joey Bada\$\$. Yet his first album for Ninja Tune scoots off in an entirely different direction, firing out volleys of convincing Metalheadz-style jungle breakbeats, embedded in brooding sound collages apparently influenced by Jonny Greenwood's score for *There Will Be Blood*. You could even argue that "Readily/Available" and "Shoot Out The Stars And Win" do for drum'n'bass what Burial's *Untrue* did for UK garage, fashioning something profound from its echoes.

SAM RICHARDS

HOW TO BUY... NORAH JONES
The singer-songwriter's best

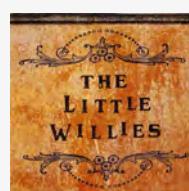


NORAH JONES
Come Away With Me

BLUE NOTE, 2002

Beguilingly romantic country-pop with a jazz twist, Jones' debut won five Grammys and sold 26 million copies worldwide. From covers of Hank Williams and Hoagy Carmichael to her own exquisite "Come Away With Me", her sultry voice and Sinatra-like ability to sing just behind the beat made her sound mature beyond her years, brilliantly showcased by Arif Mardin's peerless production.

9/10



THE LITTLE WILLIES
The Little Willies

PARLOPHONE, 2006

Jones becomes just 'one of the band' in a low-key honky-tonk combo. Western swing, hoedowns and country-rock covers of Townes Van Zandt, Kristofferson and Willie Nelson delivered with an easy-going charm that's lightweight but irresistible - plus the most leftfield Lou Reed tribute you ever heard.

7/10



NORAH JONES
The Fall

BLUE NOTE, 2009

On which Jones came of age as she sloughed off the MOR chanteuse tendencies to emerge as a heavyweight, artful singer-songwriter, her wistfulness replaced by genuine heartbreak. Producer Jacquire King nudges her towards a less piano-based, gnarlier guitar sound and collaborators include Ryan Adams and Will Sheff.

9/10

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



BLACK SUBMARINE
New Shores
KOBALT MUSIC

Ex-Verve dudes' waterlogged debut

Nick McCabe kept a low profile after The Verve's final exit, but resurfaced in

6/10

2011 as one fifth of Black Ships, alongside old bass-playing cohort Simon Jones and feted multi-instrumentalist and string arranger Davide Rossi. Now renamed, the lineup promises much - McCabe is one of the most talented UK guitarists of his generation - but this is the sound of an over-familiar style battling for distinction and running out of puff. Even by eddying psych-rock standards the tracks are too long, with "Lover" - a ponderous blend of Cocteaus and below-par Verve - the nadir. Neither the abstraction of "Is This All We Feel" nor the John Martyn-like sweetness of "Move Me A Mountain" quite save the day.

SHARON O'CONNELL



BOMBAY BICYCLE CLUB

So Long, See You Tomorrow

ISLAND

North London four-piece go globetrotting

8/10

A long way from their folk-ish roots but a fairly natural progression from 2011's more adventurous *A Different Kind Of Fix*, BBC's fourth album finds singer and songwriter Jack Steadman embracing a kind of pan-global polyphony, the dense songs full of loops, samples, techno bleeps and shimmering Bollywood strings. "Feel" borrows its itchy rhythm from east of the Bosphorus and "Luna" is bright and uplifting, but "Carry Me" is ultimately more representative, with its clanking, off-kilter electronics, tumbling chorus and creeping sense of dread. A brooding, impressive return.

GRAEME THOMSON



BOY & BEAR
Harlequin Dream

NETTWERK

Sturdy AOR from Down Under chart-toppers

Platinum-selling artists in their native Australia, Boy & Bear look to the West Coast rock classicism of

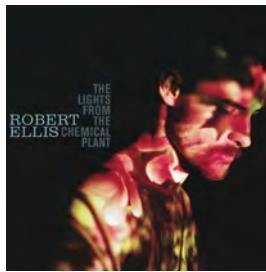
Fleetwood Mac and Jackson Browne on their second album, given a glossy transatlantic sheen by mix engineer Phil Ek (Fleet Foxes, Father John Misty). Lush harmonies and sweeps of strings underpin the songs of twin frontmen/guitarists Dave Hosking and Killian Gavin, tales of tormented love and yearning ("A Moment's Grace", "Old Town Blues") alternating with more joyful declarations ("Arrow Flight"). Rich in melody throughout, although a more fractured, sombre tone pervades the confessional "Stranger" and the atmospherically theatrical "End Of The Line".

TERRY STAUNTON

AMERICANA



BEST
OF THE
MONTH



9/10

ROBERT ELLIS
The Lights From The Chemical Plant

NEW WEST

Razor-sharp dissections of the human condition

On his previous LP, 2011's *Photographs*, 25-year-old Houston native Ellis wore his influences brightly on his sleeve in a collection of songs that revolved in the kind of wisely observed character studies familiar to listeners of Kris Kristofferson or Paul Simon. His plaintive tenor echoed with the evocative narratives of George Jones, and he even went as far as name-checking other heroes (Willie Nelson, Townes Van Zandt, Hank Williams) in his lyrics.

The Lights From The Chemical Plant is unashamedly cut from the same cloth (Simon's "Still Crazy After All These Years" is covered, with pedal steel accompaniment), but there's an arguably greater cinematic quality to his own songs than before. The noir-ish title track draws parallels between the changing skies above a factory and the shifts in mood of a longterm relationship (partly inspired by his own grandparents' 60-year marriage), while the protagonist in "Bottle Of Wine" loses himself in booze and drugs to snuff out memories of a failed affair, couched in a shanty-like ballad that could have been lifted from an early Tom Waits Asylum album.

Set to a softly plucked acoustic, "TV Song" casts Ellis and his significant other as an unhappy couple held together only by the small-screen dramas they watch, scripted tales striking chords with their own lives ("Oh Betty Draper, I wish my wife was less like you"). The most constant theme in Ellis' songs is conflict, be it internal, unspoken or as a form of emotional autopsy. On the whispered, shuffling "Pride", it's never clear if the singer is taking a former lover to task or admonishing himself. Yet, nestling amid the naked confessions and debris-strewn inquests are heart-stopping moments of unadulterated declarations of love, such as the elegant "Steady As The Rising Sun"; a graceful, powerfully simplistic valentine pointing towards gold at the end of life's more wretched rainbows. Ellis' purist, even traditionalist, voice is the perfect vessel for his sanguine portraits of ordinary people, battered and bruised but never without hope. **TERRY STAUNTON**



THE AMERICANA ROUND-UP

Now that we've got a firm footing in the new year, February sees plenty of live action. **John Murry, The Deep Dark Woods, Anais Mitchell** (left) and **My Darling Clementine** all

currently tour the UK. Though special mention goes out to **Laura Cantrell**, who's joined by ace Nashville newcomer **Sturgill Simpson** on a handful of dates and whose *No Way There From Here* finally gets an official release on Spit & Polish. On the recorded front, February sees the return of US folk-country type **Dawn Landes**. *Bluebird* is produced by Thomas Bartlett (aka Doveman) and features Norah Jones and Bon Iver's Rob Moose, among others.

Elsewhere, The Felice Brothers, Leah Siegel and a couple of Lumineers guest on *Strangers*, the new LP from **Simone Felice**. Due on Team Love at the back end of March, it's presaged by a single, "Molly-O!", which also includes his brother James and Bowie/Springsteen drummer Zach Alford. Not to be outdone, his ex-band **The Felice Brothers** also drop a fresh studio offering, *Raccoon*, later in the Spring. In other news, **Paul Burch & The WPA Ballclub's** *Fevers* explores what the ex-Lambchop drummer calls "American Groove": Cajun, rockabilly, Latin and honky-tonk. And the end of March sees the release of a 'lost' **Johnny Cash** LP, *Out Among The Stars*, on Legacy. Originally cut with producer Billy Sherrill in the early '80s, its rollcall includes Waylon Jennings, Marty Stuart, June Carter Cash and steel great Pete Drake. **ROB HUGHES**



BRETON
War Room Stories

CUT TOOTH/BELIEVE RECORDINGS

Earnest quintet's Berlin bloc party

Breton's restless debut *Other People's Problems* made much about the

7/10

London cut'n'paste upstarts' "multimedia" credentials, accurately asserting that they had better ideas than songs. *War Room Stories*, recorded in a former East Berlin propaganda complex and featuring the famous Macedonian Radio Symphonic Orchestra, largely rectifies this. "Legs And Arms" and "National Grid" boast Coldplay-sized choruses, while the hectic genre-splicing on "Envy" and "Got Well Soon" no longer irritates. However, their slick, mirthless approach and Roman Rappak's self-satisfied delivery threaten to turn Breton into Topman art-rock mannequins in the mould of Everything Everything or Alt-J.

PIERS MARTIN



CAGE THE ELEPHANT
Melophobia

EMI

Assured third effort from Kentucky quintet

Five years ago, Cage The Elephant's mash-up of garage rock, blues and

ferocious attitude seemed destined to bring them money-spinning success. In the event it didn't quite go to plan, with sales of their first two albums proving respectable rather than stratospheric. But on this evidence they are far from washed up. While the familiar swagger is present and correct both in the Bowie-influenced "Spiderhead" ("Your mother wants me dead") and the crackling "It's Just Forever", these moments are leavened by quieter, more reflective tracks such as "Hypocrite", which finds an emotionally battered Matt Shultz "bleeding from the holes in my face".

FIONA STURGES



BILL CALLAHAN
Have Fun With God

DRAG CITY

Yep, it's Dream River in dub...

Like Hiss Golden Messenger and Matthew E White, Bill Callahan

7/10

is the latest notionally rootsy American musician to exploit the space in his songs and turn up the echo deck. Here, the eight songs of last year's masterful *Dream River* are recast by that album's mixer, Brian Beattie; not as reggae, exactly, but as reverb-heavy and mostly instrumental pieces that point up the rich musical subtleties and contemplative mellowness of the originals. Callahan's baritone, meanwhile, is reduced to the occasional booming cameo, most profoundly on the opening remake of "The Sing", "Thank Dub", when his command for "BEER!" becomes, uncannily, hilariously portentous.

JOHN MULVEY



CEO Wonderland

MODULAR

Not all Swedish synth-pop sounds like Stargate. Eric Berglund's former group The Tough Alliance exuded an intriguing combination of innocence and menace (they took a baseball bat to gigs to deal with anyone who complained about the miming). Now flying solo as Ceo, there remains a belligerent subtext to his nostalgic fantasias. A penchant for saccharine synth pads, marching-band drums and choirboy vocals ensures that much of *Wonderland* resembles a Christmas album from the mid-'80s. While "Mirage" and "OMG" are sparkling pop tunes that successfully stir memories of intense teenage love affairs, Berglund also seems to be challenging you to see how much stilton you can stomach before recoiling.

SAM RICHARDS

6/10

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SAM RICHARDS

CHEATAHS Cheatahs

WICHITA

Multinational indie-rockers stick to the textbook

There are plenty of bands around at the moment channelling the spirit of '92 – Yuck, Swim Deep, Swearin' – but London-based Cheatahs are the most brazen. Their debut album attempts to nestle cosily into the space between *Loveless* and *Bandwagonesque*, offering dazed, yearning melodies over driving rhythms, all swaddled in comforting layers of fuzz. "Geographic" and "Fall" are undeniably pretty, but not quite transcendent enough to bear direct comparison with My Bloody Valentine. Instead, *Cheatahs* brings to mind the era's second-tier acts, such as Swervedriver and Drop Nineteens – faint praise, but praise all the same.

SAM RICHARDS

7/10

NENEH CHERRY Blank Project

SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND

First solo set in 18 years lacks Cherry-flavoured tunes

From forming Rip Rig + Panic through the hit *Raw Like Sushi* album to duetting with Youssou N'Dour for global hit "7 Seconds" in the '90s, Don Cherry's daughter has always been the lovable Rainbow Coalition maverick. *Blank Project* is dark, moody and bracingly modern, with sparse electronic soundscapes backed by real percussion and shaped by Kieran Hebden and Chingford duo RocketNumberNine. Cherry's still-youthful voice and angsty lyrics feel somewhat disconnected from these dubby rumbles and dirges, but if urban alienation is the intended theme, then "Cynical", "Spit Three Times" and "Everything" define the spine of a brave, atmospheric long-player.

GARRY MULHOLLAND

6/10



COCOANUT GROOVE

How To Build A Maze

FORTUNA POP!

Swedish indie-pop channelling The Zombies and The Smiths

6/10

Cocoanut Groove's influences from the fact they are named, in a fashion, after a Lovin' Spoonful song, and this Swedish band's love of the '60s can be heard throughout, from the title track, which borrows from "Ticket To Ride", to the lyrics for "A Secret Tune", which reference The Zombies. There's also a debt to UK indie, from the Smiths swagger of "Seven Flowers" to "On A Monday Morning", which recalls The Auteurs. The band's fondness for guitar hooks combine with melancholic, yearning lyrics to create a dreamy but tangible soundscape, something like a Scandinavian take on Saint Etienne.

PETER WATTS

HOW TO BUY... BILL CALLAHAN

The artist formerly known as Smog...



SMOG

A River Ain't Too Much To Love

DRAG CITY, 2005

The last of Callahan's outings under his pseudonym, and a great one. A powerful

and stark collection, it featured Joanna Newsom guesting on piano on the album's key, inevitably dark and watery track, "Rock Bottom Riser", perhaps a more sophisticated cousin to "Your Wedding" from 1993's *Julius Caesar*.

8/10



BILL CALLAHAN

Sometimes I Wish We Were An Eagle

DRAG CITY, 2009

Rural, deadpan, warm and completely engaging – this

post-relationship album is a gift that keeps on giving. Sumptuous arrangements help the uncomfortable truths slip down. Love, Callahan says, is the king of the beasts – when it gets hungry it must kill to eat. Magnificent.

9/10



BILL CALLAHAN

Apocalypse

DRAG CITY, 2011

A great album that peaks with an address to his home country: "America!". This eccentric piece finds

Callahan commenting wryly, but lovingly, on the USA – praising its armed forces for having the foresight to enlist country music icons such as Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson and Mickey Newbury.

8/10

JOHN ROBINSON



MARTIN CREED

Mind Trap

TELEPHONE

Second solo album by the Scottish conceptual artist Martin Creed is one of those conceptual artists that the wider public

6/10

view with a certain bemusement, probably still best known for his 2001 Turner Prize-winning *Work No. 227, The Lights Going On And Off*. His music provokes similar perplexity. The first half of *Mind Trap* is dedicated to a sort of naïf folk-rock, flirting with the banal ("I Like Things") but occasionally happening on moments of quiet loveliness: see "I Want You", a gentle harmonica-assisted love song with shades of King Creosote. Most impressive, though, are the orchestral pieces that conclude the record, beautifully paced chamber music suites played on strings, piano and gentle brass.

LOUIS PATTISON

SHERYL CROW Feels Like Home

WARNERS

Eighth studio album from the well-travelled singer-songwriter

7/10



Billed as Crow's "debut country album", the reality is more complex. First, there's always been a strong Americana/roots flavour to her pop-rock populism. Secondly, although a couple of tracks sound like a blatant pitch for the Taylor Swift market, *Feels Like Home* is a rich, varied record that harks back to her spectacular debut 20 years ago with *Tuesday Night Music Club*. "We Oughta Be Drinkin'" is a witty sequel to her career-defining "All I Wanna Do", and she's found something to say again, too, on a set of story-telling songs full of zeitgeist references to Wall Street bankers, single mothers and reality TV. A substantial return to form.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

DAVIDGE

Slo Light

7HZ PRODUCTIONS

Regular Massive Attack collaborator combines lush soundscapes and starry guests

7/10



Producer, composer and auxiliary member of Massive Attack for two decades, Neil Davidge's debut solo album shares its format with Massive's latterday releases: noir-ish future-soul, light-touch electronica and plush cinematic soundscapes showcasing a range of guest vocalists, mostly female. Robert Del Naja even collaborates on one of the stand-out tracks, "Riot Pictures", an orchestral torch song of palatial dimensions graced by Sandie Shaw. Quality levels are high, with Cate Le Bon's sleek Krautpop chanson "Gallant Foxes" and Claire Tchaikowski's aqueous ambi-folk ballad "That Fever" helping to excuse a small handful of underpowered, over-polished numbers.

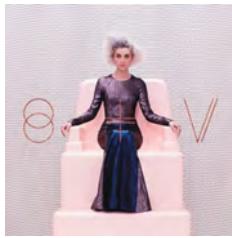
STEPHEN DALTON

ST VINCENT

St Vincent

CAROLINE

Dance rhythms, rattlesnakes and digital stress – business as unusual on the art-popster's fourth, says Sharon O'Connell



8/10

that other winners included writer/philanthropist David Eggers and an engineer with Nasa's Mars Exploration Rovers team.

It was her *Strange Mercy* album from 2011 and 2012's *Love This Giant* (a collaboration with David Byrne) that saw St Vincent judged as worthy, although the mix of oddly anxious sophisto-pop and shredded alt.rock that's made her the cultish favourite she is today wasn't just whipped up over the past couple of years. After quitting The Polyphonic Spree and Sufjan Stevens' band to go solo in 2006, the singer-songwriter and Berklee-educated multi-instrumentalist has gone on to work with artists as radically different as Andrew Bird, Glenn Branca and Kid Cudi. Recently, rapper Danny Brown was clearly recognising a kindred idiosyncratic spirit when he declared on Twitter that St Vincent was top of his collaborative wishlist.

But if a wayward muse has generally been her guide, then St Vincent's fourth solo album is a deliberate attempt to tap into the "normalcy" of rhythm-centric party music. She's talked about what it was like to be in a band in front of audiences who were dancing – a first, for her – when she was on tour with Byrne and playing both his songs and cuts from *Love This Giant*, and that buoyancy and feeling of abandonment has charged St Vincent with all the drama and thrilling unpredictability of an electrical storm. Strains of The Gap Band, Parliament/Funkadelic, Talking Heads, '80s Bowie, Blondie, Gary Numan and Madonna are detectable. Homer Steinweiss of The Dap-Kings is one of two drummers bringing the funk, but as St Vincent can only craft grooves her own way, the result is some of the most entertainingly perverse electronic pop music likely to surface this year.

She's described it as "a party record where there's blood on the piñata", and although St Vincent is neither Amanda Palmer nor Planningtorock, it's hard to disagree. Opener "Rattlesnake" tells the bizarre (true, she swears) tale of disrobing in the Texan desert and being forced to flee from just such a creature, over a tune that suggests an update of Bowie's "Scary Monsters..." by Major Lazer, with St Vincent's breathless gasps upping the anxiety ante.

Similarly striking are the deranged, chip tune-

LAST NOVEMBER, Annie Clark was the recipient of a Smithsonian American Ingenuity Award, which is given to a select few recognised as "revolutionising their fields with recent, high-impact achievements". Quite an accolade, given

SLEEVE NOTES

► Produced by:

John Congleton

Recorded at: Elmwood Studios, Dallas, Texas

Personnel: Annie Clark (vocals, guitar), Daniel Mintseris (synthesiser, piano, harpsichord), Bobby Sparks (Minimoog), Adam Pickrell (Minimoog, keys), Ralph Carney (horns), Homer Steinweiss, McKenzie Smith (drums)

styled "Bring Me Your Loves" and "Huey Newton", a stream-of-consciousness homage to the Black Panther party co-founder that leans on sweet, laid-back beats and a stream of burbling electronica before exploding at the halfway mark in a burst of unashamedly rockist guitar and guttural growling. *"Entombed in the shrine of zeros and ones,"* St Vincent sings, presumably referring to the preservation of Newton's identity made possible by technology. Themes of virtual connectivity and isolation and our increasing obsession with watching

and being seen are central to the horns-blasted "Digital Witness": *"What's the point of even sleeping, if I can't show it, if you can't see me?"* she asks.

Despite its strident synths, Moogs and

keyboards, its swinging rhythms and contrasting clipped beats, the record isn't all about bent dance-floor bangers. "Prince Johnny" throbs with darkly lustrous romance – although St Vincent undercuts the melodrama brilliantly with lines about snorting a piece of the Berlin Wall and lying prostrate on her carpet – while "I Prefer Your Love" is a ballad along Madonna/Annie Lennox lines, warm and mournfully lush, with the tiniest ice chip in its heart. And if "Regret"'s distorted chunks of treated guitar, woodwind and odd choral effects don't quite align with the rest of the pack, then it's just another example of the way St Vincent twists the common language of pop to end up speaking in tongues.

For all her ineffable cool, there's nothing reserved here. Darkly entertaining, thoughtful and a little threatening, *St Vincent* fizzes with enthusiasm and the uncontrollable strangeness of life. It's the sound of someone who's let herself go. Bravissimo.

Q&A

Annie Clark

You've said you knew "the groove needed to be paramount" on this LP. How did you fix on that? I think I meant I knew the groove needed to be Parliament.

Did you feel that you were plunging into less familiar territory this time? I feel like I just became more myself.

A self-titled LP often signals a fresh start for an established artist. For you, too? I was reading Miles Davis' autobiography where he says "the hardest thing for a musician to do is to sound like him (or her) self."

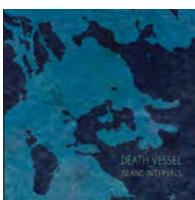
Where did the drama, distortion and darkness come from this time? The same place it comes from in every person – a fear of death and an active imagination.

Can "Prince Johnny" and "Bring Me Your Loves" be read as autobiographical? You could read it all as autobiographical. A song like "Rattlesnake" is an unembellished, factual recollection of being chased by a snake while walking naked in the Texas desert.

How deep is your love of '80s electro rock? "Silhouettes and shadows/Watch the revolution/No more free steps to heaven/It's no game/Ore genjitsu kara shime dasare/Nani ga okkote irunoka wakara nai..." [she quotes in full the lyrics of Bowie's "It's No Game (Part 1)"]

INTERVIEW: SHARON O'CONNELL





DEATH VESSEL

Island Intervals

SUB POP

Soprano-voiced alt.folkie sprinkles some Sigur Rós magic into the mix. Joel Thibodeau's two previous albums defined his signature mode as

timeless, folksy plainsong elevated by the striking range of his androgynous choirboy voice, which inhabits heights normally reserved for female singers. Recorded in Iceland with Sigur Rós singer Jónsi Birgisson and his longtime boyfriend-collaborator Alex Somers, *Island Intervals* sprinkles otherworldly Nordic sparkle on Thibodeau's dainty, homespun Americana. The drowsy folktronica of "Ejects", with its digressions into ambient abstraction, and the sublime Jónsi duet "Isla Drown" smack of Sigur Rós-lite. Which is no bad thing, though the mix of cryptic lyrics and childlike whimsy wears a little thin over the long haul.

STEPHEN DALTON

6/10



BLY DE BLYANT

Hindsight Bias

HUBRO

Experimental jazz-rock and bluegrass served up by curious Icelandic-Brooklyn trio

To give some idea of the eclecticism that can be found on Bly De Blyant's second LP, one band member, Shahzad Ismaily, is listed as playing instruments as varied as bass, Moog, organ, banjo and drum machine. The Icelandic-Brooklyn trio take a similarly broad approach to the genres they pursue. Alongside the straightforward dance groove (with banjo) of "Laura" you get the ghostly electronic experimentalism of "Hindsight Bias" or the disjointed rock of "Michael Jackson Pollock", as the album veers from becalming soulful jazz to arresting dissonance before ending on a bluegrass note with the splendid romp "The Eighteen Irascibles".

PETER WATTS

7/10



ECCENTRIC RESEARCH COUNCIL

Magpie Billy And The Egg That Yolked (A Study Of The Northern Ape In Love)

DESOLATE SPOOLS

5/10

Tall tales by Sheffield pop-hauntology duo
On 2012's *1612 Undertale*, ERC teamed up with *Shameless* actress Maxine Peake for a concept album about the Pendle witch trials. It was likeable enough, a sort of whimsical take on the haunatorial territory staked out by Ghost Box, Mordant Music, et al. Their follow-up, however, is a harder sell. A shaggy-dog yarn about the fate of a grumpy ne'er-do-well named Magpie Billy, it's light on plot and heavy on digression, to the extent that by the time Peake sounds the first note of jeopardy, you've more or less tuned out. The kitsch, hall-of-mirrors electronica gives little sense of real eeriness or depth.

LOUIS PATTISON



ECHASKECH

Origin

JUST MUSIC

London audio-visual act mellow with age

Though Dom Hoare and Andy Gillham – Echaskech's original duo – cut their teeth as drum'n' bass DJs at Metalheadz, they've moved towards more placid realms since their 2007 debut. This third album still demonstrates a fondness for breaks, but in the style of downbeat electronica wizard, Ulrich Schnauss: the lush "Voyager" and "Ash Fallen"'s sparkling calm could be lifted from the German's *A Strangely Isolated Place*. Meanwhile, despite lacking the Hartnoll brothers' unexpected sonic detours, the lavish production of "Scanners" and, particularly, "Form[Function]" might almost pass for a demure Orbital.

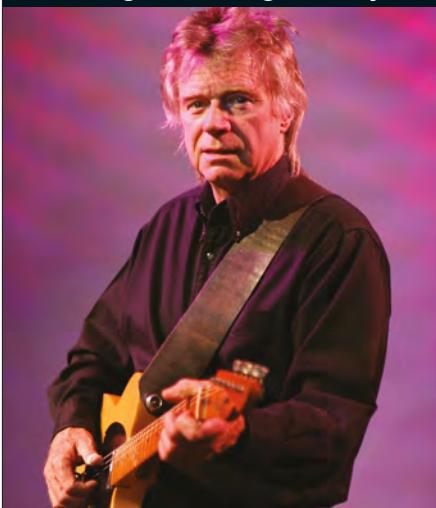
Origin isn't entirely original, then, but it is carefully composed.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

7/10

REVELATIONS

Dave Edmunds on missing out on being a Traveling Wilbury



► "I've never been striving to work some career," Dave Edmunds admits, as he returns with ...*Again*, his first new album in 20 years. That relaxed nature helps explain why the likes of Led Zeppelin and Keith Moon have relished the company of rock's best-connected man. But it may also have cost Edmunds his place as a Traveling Wilbury. "I'd be sitting around George [Harrison]'s," he ruefully recalls, "with the 1961 Château Latour and all that – he always had fantastic wine up there – and whoever was there, he'd say, 'Let's form a band called the Traveling Wilburys.' I'd say, 'Oh, are we going to tour?' 'No. That's why we're the Traveling Wilburys.' Just silly stuff, you know. But I got Jeff Lynne into that. Because before *Cloud 9*, they'd never met. Now and again George'd say, 'Why don't you produce an album for me?' You never knew if he was serious, so I'd say, 'Why don't I get Jeff Lynne down here?' This went on for two years. Finally, I drove Jeff to Friar Park, and walked out of the whole situation I'd created. So it came as a bit of a jolt when the Wilburys materialised with him in it."

NICK HASTED



DAVE EDMUNDS

Dave Edmunds... Again

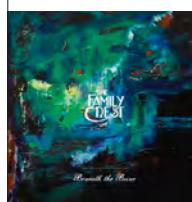
RPM

First 'new' album since 1994 from veteran Welsh rocker

5/10

Edmunds sounds positively proud when he claims he's never made "a good, consistent album" and prefers singles. It would be an exaggeration to claim ...*Again* breaks the habit of a lifetime, although there are plenty of songs here that'd sound great on a jukebox. Only four tracks are genuinely 'new' recordings, including two originals and covers of Elton and Hoagy Carmichael. But like Nick Lowe, his loving reconstructions of everything from classic rock'n'roll to vaudeville jazz are as immaculately crafted as ever, even if his enviable ability to pastiche everyone from Elvis to The Beach Boys ultimately obscures his own musical identity.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



THE FAMILY CREST

Beneath The Brine

TENDER LOVING EMPIRE

Pure pomp for now people

Founded and fronted by half-Irish/half-Chinese writer/singer Liam

7/10

McCormick, The Family Crest pumps out panoramic, delirious orchestral pop that comes off like Jeff Buckley paired with *Funeral*-era Arcade Fire, with occasional forays into big-band jazz ("Howl") and Broadway ("She Knows My Name"). Defiantly over the top from the titanic opening title track to the whirling-dervish closer "Make Me A Boat", the San Fran collective's first LP in wide release turns on arrangements of jaw-dropping complexity and opulence. Though the flirtation with bombast can make for exhausting listening, *Beneath The Brine* stands as an impressive achievement by an overarchingly ambitious young band.

BUD SCOPPA



THE FAUNS

Lights

INVADA RECORDS

Well-connected Bristol shoegazers bliss out again

Signed to Geoff Barrow's label, remixed for Record Store Day by Clint Mansell

7/10

and now produced by Portishead associates Tim Allen and Jim Barr, The Fauns have friends in high places. Their music, too, is high-friendly: a dreamy, droney rejuvenation of the '90s Thames Valley sound that still reveres Chapterhouse's *Whirlpool* and wishes Andy Bell had never joined Oasis. No harm there: the title track mixes the programmed drums of Chapterhouse's "Pearl" with Bilinda Butcher-style swooning vocals to impressive effect, while "Seven Hours" peaks convincingly with a colossal wash of effects. More M32 than M83, and consequently suitably gritty.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

New Albums



NEIL FINN

Dizzy Heights

LESTER RECORDS

Crowded House man gets trippy on third solo outing

Continuing his engagement with gently experimental music outside of Crowded

8/10

House, Finn's third solo album is a lush, multi-layered affair, making full use of its producer, MGMT and Tame Impala collaborator David Fridmann. The beautiful "Recluse" proves Finn hasn't mislaid his melodic muse, but these songs are equally about daring textures, dense rhythm and a woozy disorientation of the senses. "Impressions" is liquid '70s funk, all cracked falsetto and tipsy strings, while "Divebomber" is a trippy and somewhat malevolent sound collage. Throughout, Finn seems to be heeding his own advice on the slinky "Better Than TV": "Don't die wondering."

GRAEME THOMSON



THE FURROW COLLECTIVE

At Our Next Meeting

FURROW

Stellar folk quartet delve deep into balladry

Emily Portman and Alasdair Roberts have

both visited tradition in more daring ways than here, where 13 antique ballads are voiced in somewhat austere fashion. The quality of singing means the stand-outs are often the most naked – the pastoral "I'd Rather Be Tending My Sheep", the American hymn "Wondrous Love". Yet the collective's instrumental talents – Lucy Farrell and Rachel Newton are here, and viola, harp, harmonium and concertina all feature – bring a welcome lift to "Handsome Molly" and "King Henry". The songs and their tales of treachery, bewitchment and drunkenness remain fascinating.

NEIL SPENCER

8/10



ELIZA GILKYSON

The Nocturne Diaries

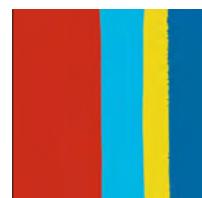
RED HOUSE

Hope and sorrow: Texas veteran's first disc in three years

8/10

Considering she's recorded since the '60s, it's a mite surprising that Gilkyson is just now entering her performing prime. But with 2011's *Roses At The End Of Time* and this equally stunning effort, that's how it feels. An eloquent, open-hearted songwriter, Gilkyson's best often carry the weight of the world – like *Nocturne*'s "An American Boy", a devastating first-person portrait of a young mass killer just before the party. Though firmly in the folk tradition – "Touchstone" recalls the Carter Family; soulful highlight "Eliza Jane" plays on the trad-arr "Liza Jane" – she's adventurous, prone to sonic experimentation, ie, the wall-of-guitars outro to "Midnight Oil". Essential and sublime.

LUKE TORN



DAVID GRUBBS

Borough Of Broken Umbrellas

BLUE CHOPSTICKS

Grubbs alone in the studio, testing the strength of strings

8/10

It's taken some time – almost two decades – but David Grubbs has navigated back to the denuded landscapes of his debut solo record, 1997's instrumental *Banana Cabbage, Potato Lettuce, Onion Orange*. That album had Grubbs essaying solo pieces for piano, electric and acoustic guitar; on *Borough...*, he sticks to the six strings, mining the terrain offered by electrification (reflective chords ghosted by two-finger phrases) and the lucidity of the acoustic. The latter is particularly gripping, the close-mic recording capturing the buzz of strings against wood and finger against string, as single notes spark off into the void of near-silence.

JONDALE

HANDS

The Soul Is Quick

ECSTATIC



7/10

Droning electronic minimalism from Field man Axel Willner defined his own little corner of the electronica world with his work as The Field, creating beatific techno; his romping pulses have now been slurred and smothered in ether for new project HANDS, with each track named after Berlin's Beelitz Heilstätten sanatorium for recovering tuberculosis patients. Boards Of Canada is the obvious comparison – Willner uses ambient watercolour chords and well-chosen spoken-word samples ("you're so ill!" a child cries from nowhere, startlingly), but rather than drum machines he uses live drum loops seemingly recorded under the stairs. Over 10 minutes or more, he wisely avoids manipulative builds and drops, leaving a compelling opacity.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



WILLY GANTRIM

Alone & Adrift

WIND SOME LOSE SOME

Bleary country blues from Texas via Copenhagen

Willy Gantrim's curriculum vitae includes

enough exotic jobs to people a pulp novel – dental floss flavouring operative, casino surveillance officer... the important bit occurs when the Wisconsin-born, Texas-raised troubadour arrives in Copenhagen with a suitcase full of songs. His first two studio sets had a country-blues flavour; he's now dimmed the ragtime stylings and plunged hook, line and beer-tumbler into a bleary country shuffle. Delivered in a voice that is halfway to a yodel, songs such as "Tomorrow Is Only A Dream" and "The Rancor In Needfulness" hail from the same delirious barroom as early Tom Waits.

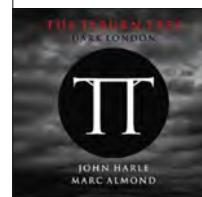
ALASTAIR MCKAY

7/10

► How does a pop craftsman grow old, if not disgracefully, then at least unexpectedly? Neil Finn is trying to find out. "The temptation as you get older is to get more tasteful, intimate and grown up," he says from his Auckland studio. "I'm resisting that urge and hoping the songs will be taken places you don't expect. I have a greater willingness now to throw things in the air and reassemble them." Part of that process is collaborating with "people who help you step off the path a bit".

Finn credits *Dizzy Heights* producer Dave Fridmann – "all freak on the inside, but on the outside he's like a rocket scientist" – with "curbing my natural tendency to craft and over-perfect things". He stayed closer to home when recruiting musicians for the record: the studio band consisted of Finn's two sons, Elroy and Liam, and his wife Sharon on bass. "We'd never played together as a group and it was a wonderful thing, a new place for the family to go." As for Crowded House, "that lovely car is sitting in blocks in the garage but it can be easily pulled back on the road. It's always a delight to do it."

GRAEME THOMSON



JOHN HARLE & MARC ALMOND

The Tyburn Tree

SOSPIRO NOIR

Music hall, melodrama and post-modernism

No-one could accuse Marc Almond of trading on former glories; 2003's LP of Russian folk songs and recent performances of Mark Ravenhill's "Ten Plagues" suggest that his artistic choices are becoming increasingly radical. His second outing with acclaimed composer John Harle is a song cycle exploring the darkest depths of London's history, both real and mythical, pressing William Blake's poetry, nursery rhyme, traditional folk and the writings of Iain Sinclair (who guests) and John Dee into bracingly contemporary service. Almond's richly expressive voice is the unifying thread of a set-piece that demands attention but is far from dour, as the '60s pop-toned "My Fair Lady" and brilliantly OTT "Labyrinth Of Limehouse" attest.

SHARON O'CONNELL

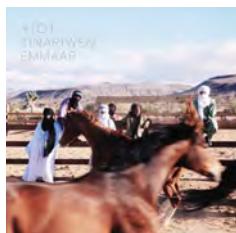


TINARIWEN

Emmaar

PIAS/COOP

You can take the band out of the desert... Well, actually, no you can't, says Jon Dale



8/10

"MUSIC IS POLITICS," Eyadou Ag Leche, bass player for Tinariwen, recently proclaimed. "Music is 'maux de vie', the news and the current affair." It's distressingly easy for the Global North to exoticise the music of

Tinariwen and their peers at the expense

of dealing with the political realities of the Tuareg, but Leche's comments make things clear: this is music as reportage, close to Chuck D's infamous proclamation of rap as "black America's CNN".

Indeed, this has been part of Tinariwen's music since they formed in the early '80s, their leader Ibrahim meeting other members of the troupe in Libya: the upheaval that erupted in Mali after the 1963 drought led Tuareg nomads to seek exile, and some of them ended up in Libya, finding refuge in military camps and rebel training centres. Their music circulated samizdat-style in Mali for several

decades, until the Global North started paying attention early last decade, Tinariwen heading up a wave of bruised, burnished Tuareg 'desert blues'.

These geopolitics had more direct consequences for Tinariwen's recording practices: the recent wave of political instability in Mali meant the group had to reconvene elsewhere to be able to lay down *Emmaar*. With culture a direct target – Islamist militants banned music from the radio earlier this decade – the group relocated to the Joshua Tree, California, to record, building their own home studio in a house in the high desert, allowing the group the capacity to work at leisure, in an undivided space, no separation. Where 2011's Grammy award-winning *Tassili* had been recorded literally out in the desert, with *Emmaar*, the group manages a rich balance of the stark landscapes of their surrounds, and the hushed intimacy of humans playing together in a room, in relatively close confines.

As with most Tinariwen music, their peculiar alchemy is clear from the first few minutes of *Emmaar*. "Toumast Tincha" may open with some poorly judged spoken word, but they move through this quickly, stretching their bodies and their instrumentation into the kind of circular, hypnotic, snaky lines that characterise most of their songs. Rattling percussion sends smoke spiraling through the studio as ghostly drone guitars, which recall the infinite guitar of Michael Brook, float through the background. It sets the tone, the tempo and the temperature of the album perfectly: respectively, hypnotic, molasses-slow, and body-warm. "Chaghaybou" starts with a brief, twining blues lick, before picking up speed, drawing chants out of the air while claps and shakers shuttle in the background, and one guitar, curling and cutting its way through the percussive smoke.

Many of *Emmaar*'s most hallucinatory moments come when Tinariwen really pull things back, allowing just one guitar and a low-lying scrum of percussion to sing out the bare elements of their songs. This doesn't play into a base 'primitivism', though – the spectre of the Other – but, rather, an understanding of the connective forces that make Tinariwen's music work, drawing out the blues in 'desert blues' and finding common threads between the nakedness of American blues forms and what Tinariwen are up to, many decades later. It's something that gets deeper the further you move into the album. For all the production touches and unnecessary extra guests – this time around, Matt Sweeney of Chavez, Josh Klinghoffer from the Chili Peppers, and Saul Williams – it's when Tinariwen pull back and let the simplest of phrases do their work that they truly transcend. There's a paradoxical 'minimalist heaviness' here that makes songs like "Koud Edhaz Emin" feel so damn psychedelic. And that's the real power in Tinariwen's music. While you can draw connections between the group and peers like Tariq and Tamikrest, Tinariwen have their own thing going, a convincing minimalism that pulls no punches when it comes to drawing on the emotional force of a less-is-more aesthetic to articulate both fierce defiance and its inverse, melancholic longing.

In some ways, Tinariwen's music feels closer to other, more experimental re-readings of the blues, whether it be Keiji Haino's astonishing *Black Blues* set, or the wildly expansive song suites Jandek's been performing in his recent live incarnations. Listen for the cracks in the performances, the spaces between the notes, the hallucinatory heaviness of the air in these songs. There's very little quite like it, and it's much wilder than it first seems.

HOW TO BUY... TINARIWEN Desert rock and blues, and the 'ever-changing same'



The Radio Tisdas Sessions

WAYWARD, 2001

The band broke cover with this signal record for Mali's 'desert rock' corps, setting out their 'ever-changing same' aesthetic with crystalline clarity: deep grooves on one chord, intricate guitar lines and vocals that shadow pearl-like melodies. Spare, flinty percussion seals the deal.

7/10



Aman Iman: Water Is Life

INDEPENDIENTE, 2007

2004's *Amassakoul* felt transitional; on *Aman Iman*, Tinariwen spiral into focus. The performances are more complex, the guitars have more grit and fire, and the choral vocals come swooping in from other spaces. The naked blues plaint of "63" is the set's stealth highlight, bruised and alone.

8/10



Imidiwan: Companions

INDEPENDIENTE, 2009

After a normative title track, "Lulla" sets things right, the guitars flintier than ever. There's something deep and low-slung about this disc, the group broadcasting from dark corners: the closing "Ere Tasfata Adounia" is a tripped-out mantra, followed by a surprising drone-out coda.

7/10



Tassili

V2, 2011

A lovely record, peeling back to mostly acoustic guitars, which allows a different side to shine through. The crepuscular "Tameyawt" is astonishing, a broken-backed lament, the vocals fragile, and the acoustic guitar close-mic'd to draw every nuance from the ever-circling phrases.

8/10

New Albums



ILLUM SPHERE *Ghosts Of Then And Now*

NINJA TUNE

Radiohead remixer crafts his full-length debut album

7/10

As lynchpin of one of the north's best club nights, Manchester's Hoya:Hoya, Illum Sphere has been well-placed to see how dubstep fragmented into house, garage, minimalism and avant-garde gestures, and he reflects all of these in his debut LP. The grainy, slapdash boogie of *Actress* is a clear influence, from the analogue crackles to the Moroder arpeggios of "Sleeprunner", but there is a strong line in trip-hop balladry too, and the jazzy 4/4 house of "Near The End" is a powerful upbeat moment. Thom Yorke is a fan, and this sits nicely alongside his work with Flying Lotus.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



KEZIAH JONES *Captain Rugged*

BECAUSE

Nigerian funkster dons cape, can fly
Given Jones' space cadet credentials, a concept album

7/10

was inevitable. Happily, the conceit of an African superhero isn't too strained on this sixth album, which for all its ambitions to portray 21st-Century Lagos is grounded in '80s funk. Jones' description – "George Clinton sharing a joint with Fela" – hits the mark for songs such as "Lunar" and "Utopia", and on "Afronewave" and "Nollywoodoo" there's plenty of his trademark slap guitar. Yet the record's best moments are slow-mo funk cuts like "Laughter" and "Praise" where Jones' silky falsetto finds a sweet spot east of Prince and Earth Wind & Fire.

NEIL SPENCER



KATY B *Little Red*

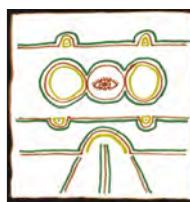
RINSE/COLUMBIA

The endearing pop underdog still on a mission

8/10

pop flax, and this second LP is a triumphant consolidation of her position as the voice of nocturnal youth. Lyrically it's utterly generic, but that's often what you want on the dancefloor, as she channels Robyn's melancholy along with the lens-flared gloss of pop-house's new school – George FitzGerald and Jacques Greene join her production mainstay Geeneus behind the boards. Her voice is even stronger than before, switching from sly minx on "I Like You" to wailing diva on "Emotions"; on "Crying For No Reason" she brilliantly synthesises the two.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



KEEL HER

Keel Her

CRITICAL HEIGHTS

DIY pop debut; R Stevie Moore guests
Brighton-based home-recording enthusiast and relentless SoundCloud poster Rose Keeler-

7/10

Schäffeler blows in from the blogosphere like a blast of sea air. Although appealingly simple in form (much of it sounds like it was recorded in a lint-lined cardboard box) and intriguingly opaque of content, it's a far from clumsy triumph. These 18 short tracks comprise a refreshingly un-self-conscious reinterpretation of lo-fi punk, '90s slacker rock, shoegaze and bedroom electronica, but each one dodges categorisation. The organ-driven outburst that is "Wanna Fuck?" may rely on Riot Grrrl orthodoxy, but with its sweet melody thrown off-centre by detuned guitar, "Women Lost In Thought" suggests Laetitia Sadier fronting Beat Happening.

SHARON O'CONNELL



ANGELIQUE KIDJO *Eve*

429

Tenth album from Benin's 'Mama Africa'
A tireless activist and longtime UNICEF goodwill ambassador, Kidjo has

8/10

assumed the late Miriam Makeba's mantle as Africa's best-loved diva. She dedicates *Eve* to the "pride and resilience of African womanhood" and the swelling voices of female choirs in half a dozen different languages from ten African villages permeate the album. But a worthy field recording it's not, as the women thrillingly echo Kidjo's gymnastic lead vocals in call-and-response style over a dynamic Afro-American funk soundbed provided by the likes of Dr John, Vampire Weekend's Rostam Batmanglij and the heavyweight rhythm section of Steve Jordan and Christian McBride. Bold, visionary and, in places, spine-tingling.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



LET SPIN

Let Spin

EFPI

British punk-jazz with a wiry electrical crackle

7/10

This quartet comprise members from London and Manchester's punkier new jazz outfits. Acoustic Ladyland's Ruth Goller provides wiry, post-punk basslines, sometimes plucking oddly dissonant chords, sometimes playing in unison with Led Bib's saxophonist Chris Williams. There are nods towards the rockier end of '70s fusion, particularly Henry Cow (on the angular opener "Castle, Sea, Ferry") and Tony Williams Lifetime (the proggy metal of "Awowowa"). It only really takes off when Mancunian guitarist Moss Freed goes feral (as with "Up And At Them"), but there is a woozy beauty to slow-burners like "A Change Is Coming" and "Piper".

JOHN LEWIS



LET'S WRESTLE

Let's Wrestle

FORTUNA POP!

London indie kids come of age

Wesley Patrick Gonzalez operates in the tradition of proudly lo-fi Brit-janglers, from Felt and

7/10

The Wedding Present to a current crop including his friends Darren Hayman, Veronica Falls and much of the Fortuna POP! roster. This third set from the Londoner's lo-fi quartet sees Gonzalez move from raw teenage tweeness towards elegant classicism, as his modest voice explores angsty themes adorned by folk and country strings as well as the obligatory guitar arpeggios. London landmarks abound on the excellent "Opium Den", "Codeine And Marshmallows" and "Always A Friend", and it all often sounds like Metronomy's secret Hackney-themed indie project.

GARRY MULHOLLAND



JACKIE LOMAX

Against All Odds

ANGEL AIR

Fine farewell from The Beatles' great lost protégé

Recorded shortly before his death last year, Lomax signs off some 45 years

on from his Apple solo debut with a ripe set of late night R'n'B grooves marinated in a lifetime's listening to Ray Charles, Al Green and Solomon Burke. The moody Hammond organ, jazz guitar tropes and swinging saxophone breaks (courtesy of Brian Jones, who played with Lomax in The Undertakers at the Cavern in the '60s) might have come from a late-period Van Morrison album, while Lomax's own blue-eyed soul chops remained intact to the end; his falsetto vocals on "The Little Things Of Love" is wonderful. A fitting last testament to an undervalued talent.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



MARK McGUIRE

Along The Way

DEAD OCEANS

More affable ambience from ex-Emeralds guitar stylist

Across more than 20 (mostly self-released) albums since 2007,

Cleveland's Mark McGuire has developed a distinct style of serene, multi-layered, meditational guitar music. Although *Along The Way* is partly inspired by astro-theologian Michael Tsarion, you don't need to subscribe to any new-age mumbo-jumbo to appreciate the universal sentiment of "The Human Condition (Song To My Father)". McGuire's experiments with more conventional structures and arrangements don't always come off – the chuntering drum machines can make things feel a little brisk and muzak – but when he hits the spot, track titles like "In Search Of The Miraculous" don't seem too far-fetched.

SAM RICHARDS



MODE MODERNE

Occult Delight

LIGHT ORGAN

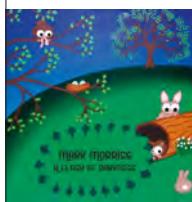
Noir-pop nostalgia in excelsis

They're not the only culprits, clearly, but this Vancouver quartet are

5/10

so infatuated with the '80s you begin to hope their name is an ironic joke. Their 2009 debut, *Ghosts Emerging*, grabbed hard onto gothic minimalism along early Joy Division lines and had a certain bleak, drum machine-driven appeal, but these 12 pallid songs comprise a barely disguised homage. Seemingly unable to decide whether their first love is Joy Division, The Cure or The Smiths, they opt for all three, with "Baby Bunny" a particularly brazen mimicking of Morrissey and Marr. The B-movie twang of "Come Sunrise" shows that MM do have some personality of their own; that they choose to deny it is frankly baffling.

SHARON O'CONNELL



MARK MORRISS

A Flash Of Darkness

ACID JAZZ

Former Bluetone with a wider choice of colours

7/10

Morriss' second solo album, his first since the Bluetones split two years ago, is painting on a broader canvas than its folk-infused predecessor, 2008's *Memory Muscle*. The spectre of his old group may hover over the acoustic pop of "This Is The Lie (And That's The Truth)" and the psych harmonies of "Space Cadet", but the title track (originally written for a collaborative theatre project with comic actor Matt Berry) wallows in a kind of Latino melodrama that recalls Arthur Lee's Love, and "Low Company" digs itself a deep country blues groove. It's all imbued with an accessible, populist touch, even referencing TV's *Bergerac* on the sun-kissed strum of "Consuela".

TERRY STAUNTON



MARISSA NADLER

July

BELLA UNION

Subtle shifts on fine Boston siren's seventh

Nadler has made her cultish name via six albums of hushed and

8/10

haunting, darkly sensual songcraft with a gothic-folk bent and a despairing heart. There's been little deviation in style or content since her 2004 debut, but with *July*, Nadler leaves the wyrd woods for the big city and an adventure that sees her dusting several tracks – notably "I've Got Your Name" and "Holiday In" – with the faded glamour of Lana Del Rey. The mien suits her well, but so too does the malevolent air of "Anyone Else", the mark of producer Randall Dunn (Sunn O))), Earth) and a potent reminder of Nadler's work with black metallers Xasthur. Welcome signs of movement after a lengthy stasis.

SHARON O'CONNELL



NEW BUMS

Voices In A Rented Room

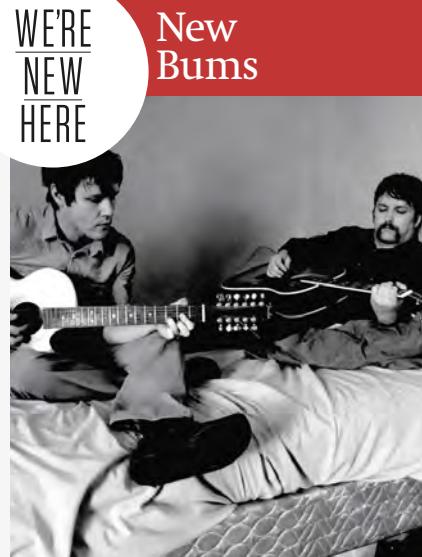
DRAG CITY

Comets On Fire guitarist goes acoustic with splendid, stripped-down collaboration

8/10

This collaboration between Ben Chasny of Comets On Fire/Six Organs... and Donovan Quinn of The Skygreen Leopards sees the pair pick up acoustic guitars and trade campfire songs like the earnestly tongue-in-cheek anti-folk "Your Girlfriend Might Be A Cop" and Gothic "Welcome To The Navy". Occasional throwaway aside, there are some real gnarled beauties on display here, like sublime Townes Van Zandt-esque ballad "Town On The Water". Chasny has named "acoustic Johnny Thunders and the Faces" as influences, but there's a trace of Marc Bolan on tracks like "Sometimes You Crash", while brilliant baroque Western "The Killers And Me" has an early '70s Dylan vibe.

PETER WATTS



THE NOTWIST

Close To The Glass

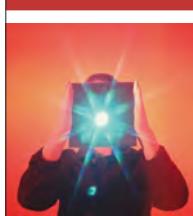
CITY SLANG

Bavarian indie rockers' triumphant return

Britain's reticence to embrace The Notwist – despite 2002's tremendous *Neon Golden* album,

whose elegant precision was offset by glitchy tickles and endearingly hesitant vocals – remains mysterious. Their eighth album, however, maintains their well-refined formula. For the unsettling, brittle beauty of the title track and mini-epic "Kong"'s energetic rush, they're a Teutonic take on alt.rock greats like Sonic Youth and My Bloody Valentine given an electronic veneer by Martin 'Console' Gretschmann. Elsewhere, they're unafraid of quieter passages, such as the subdued shimmer of "Into Another Tune" or "Lineri"'s discreet, mournful instrumental. Either way, it's sensitively poised and technically perfect.

WYNDHAM WALLACE



PEAK TWINS

Peak Twins

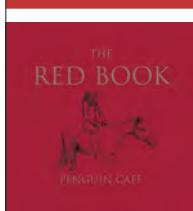
BEDROOM SUCK

Patchy, moping bedroom pop geek-outs

Chalk it up to the pressure-cooker environs of incestuous scenes, but Peak Twins are another

Australian group cocking half-an-ear to classic pop, the other half to lo-fi, jangling poppery. Their biggest error is covering Fred Neil's 1966 gem "The Dolphins": you've got to admire the Peak Twins' cojones, but they have neither the voices nor the ambition to pull it off convincingly. Indeed, too much of *Peak Twins* is a case of form over content, a set of signifiers that never cohere. While they have a few good tunes in their repertoire, ultimately you're left thinking of other, better bands – such as The Bats, Crash, Sic Alps – but without the requisite songwriting chops.

JONDALE



PENGUIN CAFÉ

The Red Book

EDITIONS PENGUIN CAFÉ

Sweet sophomore offering from Arthur Jeffes' ambient ensemble

7/10

Creating a 'son of' Penguin Café Orchestra is a tough call for Arthur Jeffes, son of PCO's late founder Simon. If 2011's *A Matter Of Life* fell short, *The Red Book* fulfils the mission with a varied palette that skips from outer space to hotspots on planet Earth. "Aurora" and "1420" were beamed into the cosmos by Nasa but are at the conventional end of systems music. More fun are the African-tinted "Radio Bemba", "Odeon", where New Orleans greets Irish tin whistle, and the Mexico-meets-Chopin "Black Hibiscus". "Solaris" and "Moonbo" add gentle English pastoralism to a beguiling set.

NEIL SPENCER



THE MAGIC BAND

The Magic Band Plays The Music Of Captain Beefheart

PROPER

7/10

And the Band played on...

John French was many things to Don Van Vliet: drummer, guitarist, amanuensis, and ultimately whipping boy. It stands to reason that since the Captain's death, French should have since assumed an additional role: of ersatz Beefheart, in this doughty but agile aggregation of (mainly) Magic Band members. This set from a London show in 2013 mixes cult *Trout Mask* classics ("Hair Pie: Bake 1") with later rockers like "Owed T'Alex", complete with roaring work from an underrated Beefheart sideman, the superb slide player Denny "Feelers Reebo" Walley. Sadly omits the band's stellar "Big Eyed Beans From Venus", which concluded the set on the night.

JOHN ROBINSON



MAXÍMO PARK

Too Much Information

DAYLIGHTING

7/10

Appreciable fifth from Newcastle synth pseudos Maximo Park did well out of last decade's indie-rock boom, never quite reaching premiere league status, but going double platinum with 2007's *Our Earthly Pleasures* regardless. Always of a synthy persuasion, here they lean in that direction: "Brain Cells" is a cool fusion of New Romantic gloom and Knife-style melodies, while the electropop of "Leave This Island" finds vocalist Paul Smith observe a collapsing relationship with his knapsack full of topological metaphors. Elsewhere, as on "I Recognise The Light" – inspired by deceased Chilean author Roberto Bolaño – Smith's lyrical flights of fancy come off somewhat top-heavy, but by and large such bookish pretensions feel like something to appreciate, not castigate.

LOUIS PATTISON



7/10

MAKING MARKS

A Thousand Half-Truths

FIKA

Fine indiepop from Norway, embracing love, regret and jangly guitars

There's a trace of Saint Etienne's suburban

romance to be heard in the superior pop of Making Marks, a Norwegian four-piece whose debut album puts a winning finish of wit and longing on the belts-and-braces indiepop undercoat. Part of the charm comes from the great girl-boy vocals of Ola Innset and Nina Bø, which allows further musical and emotional possibilities to be explored on songs like the Smiths-y "Bruises", countryish "Forgive And Forget" and maudlin Norwegian ballad "Uten En Trad". Pick of the bunch, though, is "Barcodes", gorgeous bristling guitar-pop tinged with sadness and regret thanks to the judicious use of lap steel.

PETER WATTS



ELENI MANDELL

Let's Fly A Kite

YEP ROC

8/10

Confident country pop with a Lowe threshold Singer-songwriter Mandell's previous nine albums have largely been recorded in her native Los Angeles, skipping confidently between folk, country and jazz, drawing comparisons with kd lang and both women's heroine Patsy Cline. *Let's Fly A Kite* was recorded in an economical three weeks in London with Nick Lowe's band and producer (Neil Brockbank), and bears many of the assured and lyrically deft hallmarks of Basher's own work. "Put My Baby To Bed" wittily juggles motherhood and romance, the mariachi-flavoured "The Man Who's Always Lost" gives voice to lonely shut-ins, and "Little Joy" bristles with the optimism of newfound love.

TERRY STAUNTON



PAT METHENY UNITY GROUP

Kin (←→)

NONESUCH

7/10

Axe hero gets a little too ambitious

It seems churlish to criticise guitarist Pat Metheny for possessing too much ambition. But that's sometimes the case with his first album with a newly expanded Unity quintet, featuring saxophonist Chris Potter and wildcard pianist/multi-instrumentalist Giulio Carmassi. Four of these tracks run well past the 10-minute mark and pack in an exhausting series of musical ideas that most artists would be content to spread more thinly over an entire album. Much more successful are the simpler moments: the lute-like medieval modernism of "Adagia", acoustic ballad "Born" and Ornette-like angular miniature "Genealogy" are all terrific.

JOHN LEWIS

REVELATIONS

The making of Jackie Lomax's final album



► "Most people think I did the Apple album and that was the end," Jackie Lomax remarked ruefully in his final interview. In the '60s his Beatles connections were certainly gold-plated. After sharing bills at the Cavern and then following them to Hamburg with his group The Undertakers, Lomax became one of Apple's first signings. His solo debut, 1969's *Is This What You Want?*, featured George, Paul and Ringo. But when Apple folded, he relocated to America and was soon forgotten. Yet he continued performing and recording and in later years there were annual pilgrimages back to Liverpool for Beatles/Merseybeat conventions, where he teamed up again with The Undertakers' sax-player Brian Jones. "He asked me if I'd co-produce an album and we took our time," says Jones, who also plays sax on Lomax's final outing *Against All Odds*. "Over a four-year period we did about three songs every time he came back to Liverpool, trying to recapture the R'n'B sound we loved back when we started." Lomax's final journey home was in September 2013. "He'd had lung cancer but while he was here he got pneumonia," says Jones. "He died on Merseyside, where he was born. The album was already finished, but sadly he never got to see its release."

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



MILAGRES

Violent Light

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

7/10

Impressive bombast from Brooklyn quartet There is a proud ridiculousness at the heart of Milagres, which is Portuguese

for "miracles". Leader Kyle Wilson has a self-conscious post-Bowie voice and writes songs that all sound like Big Statements. But his band know their way around '80s-influenced bluster-pop, and carry it off through sheer deadpan lack of irony on this strangely beguiling second album. Wilson actually gets away with breathily crooning "Love is just a chemical" on "The Black Table", but the tribal drums and Peter Gabriel-esque chord changes quickly turn your mocking laughter into pleasure. Whether Wilson is poet, fool or bum depends on your tolerance for narcissistic pretension.



PARKER MILLSAP

Parker Millsap

OKRA HOMA

8/10

Stunning second album from the pride of Purcell, Oklahoma

Sounding like a very old soul trapped in the body of a baby-faced, 20-year-old Southern kid, Parker Millsap's second album is possessed of classic troubadour restlessness, drenched in the Pentecost but heading onto country/folk/blues highways tramped down by everyone from Johnny Cash to John Fullbright. While the antsy, get-out-of-town epic "Disappear" comes on like a reborn Rodney Crowell, and the shuffling "When I Leave" (like many here) wrestles with spiritual affairs, "Truck Stop Gospel" is borderline genius, a thumping, thrashing character sketch depicting the antics of a flamboyant, conversion-minded, bible-hawking truck driver.

LUKE TORN

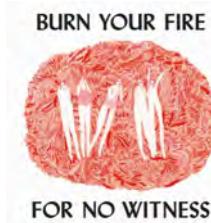


ANGEL OLSEN

Burn Your Fire For No Witness

JAGJAGUWAR

Cathartic second explores longing and lonesomeness. By Louis Pattison



8/10

sentiments that coarse and churn throughout Olsen's music. Occasionally, her songs reach the sort of melancholic depths that give you cause to wonder if she'll ever be able to find her way back to the light.

"Everything is tragic/It all just falls apart," begins "White Fire", six minutes of sung-spoken musings with the lyrical command and hangman atmospherics of Leonard Cohen's *Songs Of Love And Hate*. Throughout, Olsen reaches around in the dark, looking for someone or something to fix herself. Succour can be found in love, but salvation, we learn, is fleeting: "If you've still got some light in you, then go before it's gone/Burn your fire for no witness, it's the only way it's done."

It might be a mistake to read too much into such grave sentiments, though. There is a touch of theatre to Olsen's delivery, a sly witticism or flourish tossed in to remind you that these are but songs, and she is but their craftsman. Born in St Louis, Missouri, now resident in Chicago, her solo career has burgeoned in tandem with her association with Will Oldham. She's played in the Bonnie 'Prince' Billy backing band The Cairo Gang, and also in The Babbler, a playful group assembled to perform the songs of Kevin Coyne and Dagmar Krause's peculiar 1979 concept album *Babble*, one of Oldham's favourites. Live shows have seen her singing Krause's parts while dressed in novelty sunglasses and a colourful fleece onesie, which are decidedly not the actions of a young woman terribly bothered about maintaining

BURN YOUR FIRE For No Witness, the second long-player from singer-songwriter Angel Olsen, wrestles with heavy emotions. Romantic longing and high lonesomeness, the ache of a broken heart and a sadness that wrenches at the gut: such are the

the reputation of a doomed waif, keening and gnashing her teeth at the death of love.

Burn Your Fire For No Witness feels like a big step forward from its predecessor, *Half Way Home*, which landed in 2012 on small North Carolina indie Bathetic. Olsen's voice has developed a deeper, huskier resonance, while remaining unnaturally flexible, capable of assuming everything from sultry country twang to Polly Jean Harvey snarl and all sorts in between. Making their presence known, meanwhile, are her band, drummer Josh Jaeger and bassist Stewart Bonnaugh, who conspire to inject a dynamism and variety to the arrangements.

"Forgiven/Forgotten" is an enjoyable nod to The Breeders, a raucous clatter of hairball guitar distortion and punchy garage drums with a chorus that reaches for comic insouciance ("I've made up my mind/I've made up my mind/I've wasted my time making up

my mind"). The lilting bossanova of "Iota" begins as a thing of hippy whimsy but gradually reveals its true purpose, a dreamy, queerly distant rumination on a relationship under strain. And they know how to pull the instrumentation right back, too: see the almost a cappella "Enemy", or "Unfucktheworld", quaint, wobbly gramophone folk in the vein of Josephine Foster or Jana Hunter, but with an emotional fortitude that adds corporeality to its eerie, ethereal tones.

It is tempting to hear an album like *Burn Your Fire For No Witness*, a collection of songs about romance gone sour and lovers separated by yawning emotional chasms, and assume that it is something intensely personal: a break-up chiselled into song. Naturally, Olsen has felt and experienced these

things, but as with the work of Will Oldham, there's clear artistry here, a sense of exploring perspectives and trying on headspaces for size. She sets out to emotionally devastate herself in every song. But in doing so, there are things to be gained – the casting off of baggage, or the flinty spark of raunch that flashes in "High & Wild", with its cry that "We could put our fears aside/And learn to laugh and be alive/And let our bodies be revived". Everyone knows the conundrum of heartbreak. Yet we're no closer to figuring it out. Still, as "Hi-Five" puts it, at least we can expect a little solidarity: "Are you lonely too?" sings Olsen. "High five! So am I!"

Q&A

Angel Olsen

How did things change for you on this record?

Working with [John] Congleton, first of all I was like, who is this big-shot producer? I don't want anything to be overproduced. But we actually ended up getting on pretty well. I also understood my sound was changing – that electric guitars were going to be added, so there was going to be that element of production. Change was happening, but I was open to it.

So has this transition been for the better or for the worse?

It was a good year... the first time I took a stand for my own voice. I've been watching everyone around me carry themselves like professional musicians, and I've had this perspective of being a person who gets to watch, participate, but wasn't in charge. After a while, I was like, maybe it would be nice to play songs with a band. Then I had to be the person who everyone looks at and goes, so, what do we do? When you follow your dreams, you have to be organised. This year was spent learning how to communicate my wishes to others without being upsetting or confusing... I had to learn to go, I don't see it that way [laughs]. I smile, and just say no.



NINA PERSSON

Animal Heart

LOJINX

The Cardigans and A Camp singer finally goes it alone

The Swedish singer Nina Persson has been keeping herself to herself lately.

7/10

While The Cardigans' reunion two years ago put her briefly back in the limelight, there's been precious little new material since A Camp's second album, *Colonia*, in 2009. On her first solo album proper, Persson shows she is still a dab hand at melodic indie-pop, as she tackles floundering relationships, failing memories and new horizons. Her voice is the centrepiece here, though with their stabs of hard-boiled synth, songs such as "Food For The Beast" and "Animal Heart" prove as robust and irresistible as anything on The Cardigans' *Gran Turismo*. It's good to have her back.

FIONA STURGES

PLANNING TOROCK

All Love's Legal

HUMAN LEVEL

Disco politics from The Knife's comrade-in-arms

Jam Rostrom AKA Planningtorock's

explorations of gender politics were a key influence on The Knife's *Shaking The Habitual*, and *All Love's Legal* takes a more playful approach to the same issues. Essentially, it's an album of disco torch songs with the usual glib lyrics about good times and sexy dancers replaced by light-hearted queer/feminist sloganeering ("patriarchal life, get out of the way"). Sadly, it appears Rostrom didn't have the budget to give these songs the full Love Unlimited Orchestra treatment, but at least elastic punk-funker "Misogyny Drop Dead" turns the lo-fi production to its advantage.

SAM RICHARDS

7/10



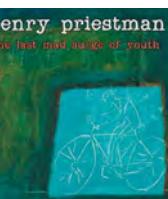
HENRY PRIESTMAN

The Last Mad Surge Of Youth

PROPER

Christians man continues to grow old gracefully

Five years since the



8/10

release of his belated solo debut, *The Chronicles Of Modern Life*, Priestman here delivers a more reflective, deeply personal work that expertly straddles sentimentality and poignancy. Stylistically sliding between elegant pop, Americana and, as on "At The End Of The Day" – written after his mother's death – the stately folk of the Albion Country Band, the observational wit of "Rant'n'Rave" and "A Pint of Bitter And Twisted, Please" compares favourably to Ray Davies. These are heart-warming, self-assured songs from a man confidently declaring that he's not done yet.

MICK HOUGHTON



QUILT

Held In Splendor

MEXICAN SUMMER

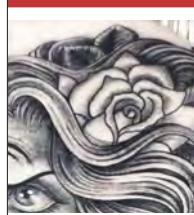
Blissed-out Boston trio put the pop back into psychedelia

Anna Fox Rochinski, Shane Butler and John Andrews make gorgeous

three-part harmony pop, occasionally as rooted in the classic West Coast '60s as Fleet Foxes, but buoyed by a thoroughly modern pop eclecticism. This second album finds them as at home sounding like Echo And The Bunnymen with a girl singer ("Arctic Shark") as they are with the ramshackle, fiddle-flecked Americana of "The Hollow", while "Mary Mountain" and its hypnotic drone coda evokes as much Blue Öyster Cult darkness as it does The Mamas & The Papas' sweetness. A happy music that isn't bland; *Held In Splendor* makes that toughest of tricks sound easy.

GARRY MULHOLLAND

8/10



RED PINE TIMBER COMPANY

Different Lonesome

RED PINE

Hootenannies with a transatlantic sheen

Formed from a loose cooperative of Scotland-based session musicians, buskers and novices four years ago, and led by former Southpaw frontman Gavin Munro, the now eight-strong Timber Company offer up a wild cacophony of Americana with Celtic twists on their debut. Whiskeytown meet The Waterboys on the prairie soul of "Lonely Days Are Gone" and heartfelt twang of "The Speaking Of Your Name", with a barroom rock swagger making its presence felt on "The Way I Was" and "Dark Clouds". Munro's songs tend towards typical love lost and won territory, but despatched with verve by a lively troupe adding several layers of texture to the sound.

TERRY STAUNTON

7/10



RACHEL RIES

Ghost Of A Gardener

SODAK

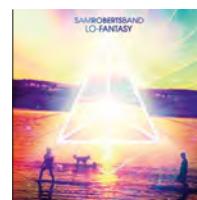
Organic storytelling Americana fresh from the oven

Raised in South Dakota but now based between

Brooklyn and Vermont, Ries recorded her third anthology of hand-crafted analogue Americana in Chicago with help from various indie-folk friends. Raised by Mennonite missionaries, Ries makes a connection between music-making and religious faith, but there are few overly spiritual references here beyond fleeting allusions like "Holiest Day", a gorgeous gush of warm-blooded harmonies. Her finger-picking introspection is too timid in places, but she uncorks a more passionate side with her waltz-time numbers, notably the heartbreak weepie "Where I Stand" and the attractively sloppy, booze-soaked farewell ballad "You Can Go".

STEPHEN DALTON

7/10



SAM ROBERTS BAND

Lo-Fantasy

PAPER BAG

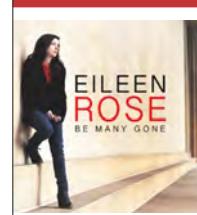
Northern soul from Montreal

Little known outside his home country, where he was once hyped as the

Canadian Springsteen, Roberts gained provincial notoriety with his rousing live shows and his 2003 breakthrough LP, *We Were Born In A Flame*, introducing a hyper-rhythmic, hook-heavy brand of rock'n'roll. On *Lo-Fantasy*, working with producer Youth, the pint-sized dynamo and his ace band reclaim the molten mojo of their early days, unleashing a non-stop barrage of booty-shaking rockers that variously recall The Kinks ("We're All In This Together"), Primal Scream ("Metal Skin"), The Clash ("Angola") and U2 ("The Hands Of Love"). A bonus disc of pulsing remixes underscores Roberts' devotion to the almighty groove.

BUD SCOPPA

8/10



EILEEN ROSE

Be Many Gone

HOLY WRECKORDS

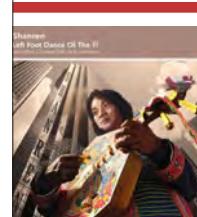
Understated honky-tonk from the country-minded Boston troubadour

When living in London a decade and more ago,

Rose recorded two acclaimed albums for Rough Trade that seemed to herald the arrival of a significant talent. Since returning home her trajectory has been more low-key and the restraint continues with a Nashville-recorded, understated honky-tonk album on which her attractive twang is enhanced by weeping pedal steel and mournful fiddle. But the meandering songs tend towards mundanity and it's only when Jimmy Clark's trumpet shakes up the formula on "She's Yours" and "Each Passing Hour" that we are reminded why some of us were so excited by her all those years ago.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

6/10



SHANREN

Left Foot Dance Of The Yi

RIVERBOAT

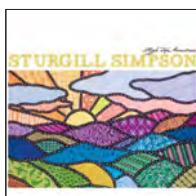
Are you ready for some Chinese folk-rock?

From the mountainous Yunnan province in

southwest China, Shanren cut their teenage teeth on illegal Zeppelin cassettes back in the 1990s, later moving to Beijing to win a reputation as a happening live act. This international debut is largely acoustic, its updates of traditional songs plucked on lute and tooth harp, cheerily chanted and drummed. Melodic and percussive, it breezes along, with a droll rap turn on "Song Of The Wa". Just as you're used to the mountain air comes an abrupt turn to electric rock reggae for "The Crab" and "Yi Wa", with a grungy rock-out on "Happy New Year". Enjoyably playful.

NEIL SPENCER

6/10



STURGILL SIMPSON

High Top Mountain

LOOSE

Terrific debut from rising countryphile

Steeped in the bluegrass of his Kentucky roots, Nashville resident Sturgill Simpson is an intriguing diversion from the Music City norm. The arrangements on *High Top Mountain* feel like old-school country, versed in strident tones that recall Merle Haggard and Marty Robbins at their leanest. But there's also a rebellious streak that aligns him more to singer-songwriter Todd Snider and others from the opposite end of town. The rousing "Life Ain't Fair And The World Is Mean" and "You Can Have The Crown" are typical, both tunes serving as subversive commentaries on what passes for commercial country today.

ROB HUGHES

8/10

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ROB HUGHES

SUMIE

Sumie

BELLA UNION

Prettily glacial debut album from the Swedish chanteuse

With a voice pitched between the icy clarity of Nico, the controlled sultriness of Julie London and the stark melancholy of Sibylle Baier, Swedish singer Sandra Nagona has elected to perform under her middle name, perhaps to avoid comparisons with her sister, Yukimi Nagano of electro-pop group Little Dragon. Musically, the siblings are poles apart. Sumie blends Japanese and Scandinavian folk, singing crisply over repetitive acoustic guitar patterns (with a wash of cello on the sultry "Speed Into"). The sonic clarity dims on the closing "Sailor Friends", which also features the elegantly woozy piano of producer Nils Frahm.

ALASTAIR MCKAY

6/10

Sultriness of Julie London and the stark melancholy of Sibylle Baier, Swedish singer Sandra Nagona has elected to perform under her middle name, perhaps to avoid comparisons with her sister, Yukimi Nagano of electro-pop group Little Dragon. Musically, the siblings are poles apart. Sumie blends Japanese and Scandinavian folk, singing crisply over repetitive acoustic guitar patterns (with a wash of cello on the sultry "Speed Into"). The sonic clarity dims on the closing "Sailor Friends", which also features the elegantly woozy piano of producer Nils Frahm.

ALASTAIR MCKAY



D CHARLES SPEER & THE HELIX

Doubled Exposure

THRILL JOCKEY

Intermittently burning, rural rock moves

D Charles Speer is an American neo-primitive with an umbilical to downtown improv operatives No-Neck Blues Band. But when he's with The Helix, Speer is sketching rough-as-guts country and rock songs in with the simplest of colours, an alternate universe bar-band with Speer's gnarled country-tough voice prowling the top. Strangely, though, for all its surface grit, *Doubled Exposure* can sometimes come off sounding precious, a bunch of genre studies without that mysterious extra something – this grit ain't turning into a pearl. But when they stretch out, as on "Mandorla At Dawn", The Helix move with loose-limbed grace.

JONDALE

7/10

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SUNN O))) & ULVER

Terrestrials

SOUTHERN LORD

Three tracks. Two bands. One LP

Greg Anderson and Stephen O'Malley clearly have no worries that collaboration might compromise either the primacy or the "purity" of their low-end-weighted drone/doom metal. They've recorded with both Earth and Boris, and for their last LP hooked up with Nurse With Wound. For this three-song set of (mostly) live improv, Sunn O))) have joined Norwegian experi-metalists Ulver, again eschewing beats to focus on the Moog-heavy, meditative aspects of their shared aesthetic. Infinite loops and surging crescendos constitute a psychedelic session more about melancholic beauty than foreboding, with trumpet, viola and violin setting "Let There Be Light" in particular on a cosmic jazz tip.

SHARON O'CONNELL

Sturgill Simpson

WE'RE NEW HERE



► You can't accuse Sturgill Simpson of lacking ambition. When cutting his debut album in Nashville, the 35-year-old songwriter vowed to make the purest hard country album in decades. "I definitely wanted to make a very traditional record," he explains, "using references from the early '50s all the way into the sparser, raw production qualities of the '70s. At the same time, I was adamant about not making it a retro thing. You have to pay attention to the sonic landscape of where we're at today." The resultant *High Top Mountain* is a ravishing confection of classic country, made all the more authentic by the inclusion of old-school veterans like steel guitarist Robby Turner (Waylon Jennings/Charlie Rich) and piano player Hargus 'Pig' Robbins (Dylan/George Jones). Its biting lyrics contrast Sturgill's mountain roots in Kentucky with his frustration at trying to be heard amid the pop-oriented culture of Music Row. "I really believe with all my heart that life is a struggle," says Sturgill, whose career has been supplemented by spells in the US Navy, as a railroad worker and on a shrimp boat. "And if there were any means to celebrate that struggle, then music would have to be it. It's where I feel the most alive."

ROB HUGHES



TEMPLES

Sun Structures

HEAVENLY

Retro futurism par excellence from Northamptonshire psych-rockers

8/10



new band by the likes of Noel Gallagher and Johnny Marr, Temples are a four-piece from Kettering who've truly mastered the sonic tics of psychedelia. Singer and guitarist James Edward Bagshaw apparently recorded this in his box room using vintage equipment and clearly knows where to place his microphones to create a whole range of deliciously swirlly, astral freakbeat sounds. But crucially, it's not just 1967 – there's also 1961 Brill Building craftsmanship ("The Guesser" recalls Bobby Hebb's "Sunny"), 1963 Merseybeat ("Keep In The Dark") and 1970 Pentangle spookiness ("Fragment's Light"). Tremendous stuff.

JOHN LEWIS

THEE SILVER MOUNT ZION MEMORIAL ORCHESTRA

Fuck Off Get Free We Pour Light On Everything

CONSTELLATION



7/10

Godspeed You! Black

Emperor founder's joss-stick punk rock

Crass possessed by *Red*-era King Crimson, Efrim Menuck's other band have changed personnel and name with dizzying regularity since the GY!BE guitarist's first Silver Mount Zion recorded an affecting requiem for his dog Wanda – 2000's *He Has Left Us Alone But Shafts Of Light Sometimes Grace The Corner Of Our Rooms....*

A focus on electric violin adds a mildly jarring echo of Curved Air to the Canadians' seventh, but the apocalyptic "Austerity Blues" and wistful "Rains Thru The Roof At Thee Grande Ballroom" encompass their extremes of post-rock paranoia and Popol Vuh transcendence.

JIM WIRTH



TONIC FOLD

The Violent Language Of Portraits

CAYOS MUSIC

Disappointing orchestral pop project

5/10

Tonic Fold is the ongoing project of film and stage composer Shane Cullinan, where he invites pop singers and actors to provide vocals for some of his orchestral miniatures. For all the ambition and complexity of these pieces, much of the album is suffused by an air of Coldplay-ish blandness. Exceptions include David McAlmont's gentle piano ballad "Let Lay" (a homage to the war correspondent Marie Colvin), the Nyman-esque "Bacon's Pope" (where actor Chris New whispers a tribute to Francis Bacon), and the rather lovely "Skin", in which actress Kathy Burke mourns the death of a lover over a triumphalist orchestral backing.

JOHN LEWIS

SUN KIL MOON

Benji

LEAD LABEL

Mark Kozelek confronts death on brutally sad confessional.

By Laura Snapes



9/10

and ruminations on songwriting that landed somewhere between placeholders and meta-textural exercises. "I wrote this one, I know it ain't great/It'll probably end up as track number eight", he sang on the knowing "Track Number 8". That the song was ultimately placed as track 11 of 17 was an indication of just how witty and self-deprecating the album could be.

The consensus drawn from this record was that Kozelek was secretly happy; they contrived a portrait of a man swatting and sighing from his front porch, content to bask in the breeze for a while. *Benji*, Kozelek's sixth studio album as Sun Kil Moon, only contains one song like this. "Ben's My Friend" muses on his friendship with Ben Gibbard from The Postal Service. In the crowd at one of that band's four dates at LA's Greek Theatre, his back aching and backstage pass flapping over his gut, he admits that he's competitive with Gibbard, but not unhappy with his lot – he's an impulse-buyer of \$350 lampshades and he's eating a lunch of "blue crab cakes".

Still, as they eat, his girlfriend notices that something isn't right with him, and asks why he's so distracted. "I said, I can't explain it/It's a middle-aged thing". Written over the summer of his 46th year, on *Benji*, Kozelek dispenses with pithy observations about the touring life to confront

A NOTED BOXING fan, the fight nonetheless seemed to leave Mark Kozelek somewhere around the release of his last album as Sun Kil Moon. *Among The Leaves* was terrific but Kozelek's meticulous craftsmanship had been replaced by sardonic travelogues

SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:**

Mark Kozelek

Recorded at: Hyde Street Studios, San Francisco

Personnel: Mark Kozelek (guitars, Portuguese guitar, xylophone, vocals, bass), Steve Shelley (drums), Owen Ashworth (Rhodes), Will Oldham, Jen Wood, Keta Bill (backing vocals), Forrest Day (horns), Chris Connolly (piano), Nathan Winter (drums), Tim "Tiny" Lindsey (bass)

death's inextricable role in his music and character. "Songs can be like little battles for me," he told an interviewer last year. "I hear a piece of music and I want to beat the fuck out of it with my words and voice. I size it up and deal with it." Perhaps refreshed by his full-length collaborations with Desertshore and The Album Leaf in 2013, *Benji* (more cheerily, the name of a dog) is a product of this merciless battle. It is brutally sad, which may prove a deal-breaker for anyone who appreciated the comparatively light

deaths of many people you've known and loved, but never appear to worry about your own passing. Is it implicit... is that something that keeps you up at night? I don't worry about my own death much. When you see a friend pass at 34 years old, it's very sobering, and singing about friends of mine who passed so young, it puts things into perspective: what they all would have given to live longer. I'm almost 47. I do worry about ageing – my left foot has been a mess and I just bought some very unsexy orthopedic shoes – but that's life. I've made it this long and I'm grateful for what I have in my life and all that I've accomplished.

On a lighter note, have there been any reprisals from Nels Cline yet? Nah. He's tall, right? He'll be OK.

INTERVIEW: LAURA SNAPES



Q&A

Mark Kozelek

How did the collaborative records you released last year impact on how you approached *Benji*? I don't really approach anything. I just write and react to whatever is happening. Nobody was sending me any music post-Desertshore, so I just wrote my own.

What brought on the tonal shift from the last Sun Kil Moon record, which was often very comic and self-deprecating? Things just change, that's all – your life is different now than it was five years ago, right? Things change.

Throughout the record, you sing about the

Among The Leaves (although there is another joke at the expense of Wilco guitarist Nels Cline here), but it never feels gratuitous or exploitative.

The wretched souls of *Benji* beg the question: is death worse when it comes suddenly and without warning, looms inevitably, or doesn't come soon enough? On "Jim Wise", Kozelek recalls a trip with his father to meet an aged family friend. Jim Wise is on house arrest after the mercy-killing of his sick wife in hospital. He turned a gun on himself only for the trigger to jam, and is now electronically tagged and awaiting sentencing. The wry groove of "I Love My Dad" and the gracefully fingerpicked "I Can't Live Without My Mother's Love" instantly deserve to sit among the greatest love songs ever written to parents, underpinned by Kozelek's heartrending anxiety about what he'll do when they're gone.

In many ways, *Benji* is a traditionally confessional singer-songwriter album that just exposes more than most. (The lurid "Dogs" covers in slightly uncomfortable detail how his teenage sexual encounters affected his adult life.) But most affecting is how Kozelek finds his place among the losses. When confronted with his dying grandmother on "Micheleene", the teenage Kozelek hides in a car because he can't handle it, and accidentally reverses into a busy road. Age 46, when a thirtysomething relative dies, he flies home to Ohio for the funeral. "She was only my second cousin," he sings of a woman he barely knew, "but it don't mean that I'm not here for her/Or that I wasn't meant to give her life poetry/Or to make sure her name is known across every sea". It's never going to be easy, but it's a fight worth taking on.



**VARIOUS
ARTISTS**
**Acid Arab
Collections**
VERSATILE

Oriental explorations from Parisian DJ duo

7/10

have understood the value of a splash of the East, a sitar drone ideal for giving the impression a track hails from somewhere more exotic than a bedroom studio in Basildon. This 70-minute mix draws largely on music by French producers, but luckily compilers Guido Minisky and Hervé Carvalho have an enthusiasm and shared knowledge that runs deep. Their own Acid Arab productions, such as "Berberian Wedding", blend squelching 303s with the beat of Moroccan bendir drums. Elsewhere, the electro-dabke of Omar Souleyman's "Shift Al Mani" is mixed into thumping techno, and Hanaa Ouassim slows the pulse with the haunting "Madad".

LOUIS PATTISON



SUZANNE VEGA
**Tales From
The Realm Of
The Queen
Of Pentacles**
COOKING VINYL

7/10

Having spent the past few years rebooting her catalogue via the 'Close Up' series, Vega returns with her earnest, slightly chilly take on classic folk and rock forms, aided by a stellar cast which includes Larry Campbell, Tony Levin and Gail Ann Dorsey. These are strong songs, only occasionally hampered by the over-ripe allegorical nonsense advertised in the album's title. "Fool's Complaint" comes laden with hooks, "Silver Bridge" says a touching farewell to a friend, and "I Never Wear White" adds brawn to Vega's brains, aligning the singer with the world's black-clad "poets of the dark".

GRAEME THOMSON



VULKANO
Live Wild Die Free
VULKANO MUSIC

Electro-punk Swedish pair let loose on busy debut album

Swedish duo Lisa Pyk-Wirström (keys/percussion) and Cissi

Efraimsson (drums/vocals) play a fusion of synth disco-funk and percussive punk that recalls aspects of electroclash, in part due to Efraimsson's exaggerated, theatrical vocals on thumping, yelping tracks like "Vulkano" or the Björk-like "Psycho Girl". At times it can get a little over-heated – the Banshees/Adam Ant freak-out mash-up "In The Jungle" is a prime example – but the pair are more than capable of refining it when they want to, as on the excellent PiL-like "Vision Tricks", the sinewy, percussion-led "Spider Spider" or the raggedy lo-fi pop-rocker "2 Young 2 Die".

PETER WATTS

6/10



DAVID WARD
**Golden Future
Time**
GOLDEN FUTURE
RECORDINGS

Genre-hopping Canadian reveals split personality

Vancouver's David

Ward is a singer-songwriter whose semi-operatic vocal style has earned him comparisons to Jeff Buckley. Certainly, in this follow-up to last year's EP trilogy, the similarity is striking, most notably in "Ghost In The Woods", an affecting tale of woodland isolation that spookily evokes Buckley's "Grace". But there's more to Ward than mere pastiche. Recorded with vinyl in mind, *Golden Future Time* comes in two parts, with the acoustic and psychedelic leanings of the first half replaced by soul and funk in the second. It's as surprising as it is pleasing.

FIONA STURGES

7/10

8/10



**THE
WOODENTOPS**
Granular Tales
CHERRY RED

Low-key but long-awaited return from indie-Balearic pioneers

Though their percussive focus made them darlings

of the nascent '80s Ibiza scene, Woodentops founder Rolo McGinty's true talent lay in his mastery of sentiment. Their debut, *Giant*, swooned with earnest passion, and almost 30 years on it's still evident in the patient restraint of "A Little More Time", their comeback's humble opener, and the heartfelt warmth of "Take Me Through The Night" and "Because Of You". Furthermore, the good-humoured ska of "Conversations" and the rattling "Stay Out Of The Light" prove they've lost none of the vigour of second (and last) album, 1988's *Woodenfoot Cops On The Highway*.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

XIU XIU
**Angel Guts:
Red Classroom**
BELLA UNION

Avant-garde Californians grapple with the seamier side of life

5/10



SUZANNE VEGA
Solitude Standing

A&M, 1987

Anointing Vega as an East-Coast Joni for the post-Reagan era, her second album remains her most crisply accessible. "Luka" and "Tom's Diner" (which opens the album a cappella, and closes it as an instrumental) became hits, but they're surrounded by many more fine songs, notably the title track, "Gypsy" and "Ironbound".

8/10



SUZANNE VEGA
99.9°F

A&M, 1992

Vega's first production with future husband Mitchell Froom was an abrupt stylistic shift, deploying synths and

drum machines alongside ex-Attraction Bruce Thomas and Los Lobos' David Hidalgo. The clattering "Blood Makes Noise" is sharply experimental, but on "Blood Sings" and "In Liverpool" Vega's writing remains rooted in the contemporary folk tradition.

7/10



SUZANNE VEGA
Beauty & Crime

BLUENOTE, 2007

This bittersweet album, themed around Vega's reflections on New York, came after a six-year silence in which she left A&M, remarried and regrouped.

She returned with fine songs, elegant arrangements and lyrics that mostly opted for heartfelt over clever-clever, not least on an elegy to her late brother Tim ("Ludlow Street") and two closing ruminations on 9/11.

8/10

GRAEME THOMSON



**YOUNG
FATHERS**
Dead
BIG DADA/ANTICON

Beat-twisting weirdness from Edinburgh's hip-hop fringe

8/10

Scotland's contribution to progressive hip-hop takes a great leap forward with Young Fathers, a musically omnivorous multi-racial Edinburgh trio with family connections in Nigeria and Liberia. Previously a clean-cut R&B boy band, their sound has become progressively more experimental. This arrestingly adventurous debut is a densely layered mash-up of shudders and drones, narcotically twisted beats, gospel-infused vocals and surreal wordplay. With echoes of everyone from J Dilla to Tricky to Outkast, their formula sometimes veers into sonic irritant territory. But more accessible tracks like "Get Up" strike a healthy balance between pop hooks and compelling weirdness.

STEPHEN DALTON

TEMPLES

SUN STRUCTURES

THE DEBUT ALBUM
10/02/14

‘ALBUM OF THE MONTH’
ROUGH TRADE SHOPS



ON TOUR

24 FEB, GLASGOW, ORAN MOR / 25 FEB, HULL, FRUIT

27 FEB, NOTTINGHAM, RESCUE ROOMS / 28 FEB, LEEDS, STYLUS

01 MAR, MANCHESTER, ACADEMY 2 / 03 MAR, OXFORD, ACADEMY 2

04 MAR, BIRMINGHAM, INSTITUTE LIBRARY / 06 MAR, CARDIFF, GLOBE

07 MAR, BOURNEMOUTH, OLD FIRE STATION

08 MAR, LONDON, SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE

SCORING: THE ORIGINAL ALBUM

10 Masterpiece

1 Poor!

SCORING: EXTRA MATERIAL

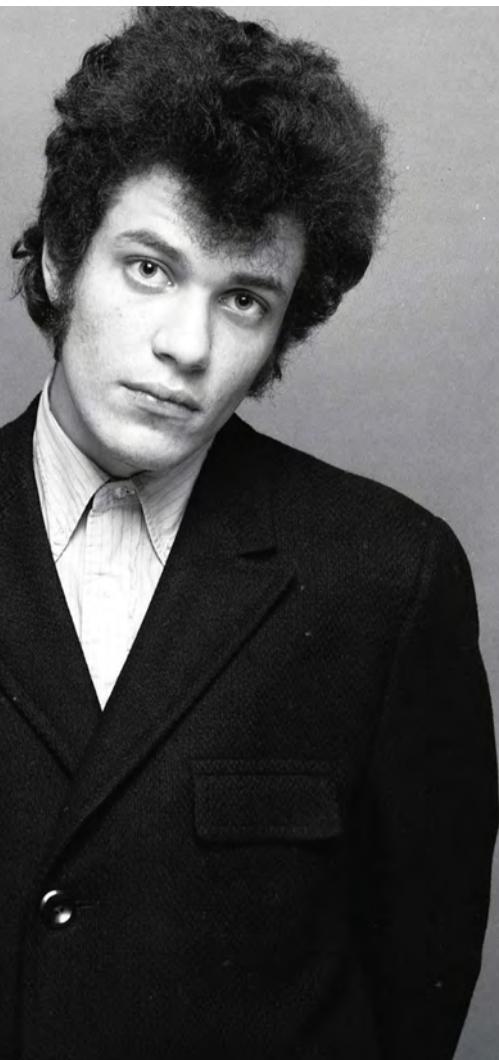
10 Untold riches

1 Barrel-scrapings

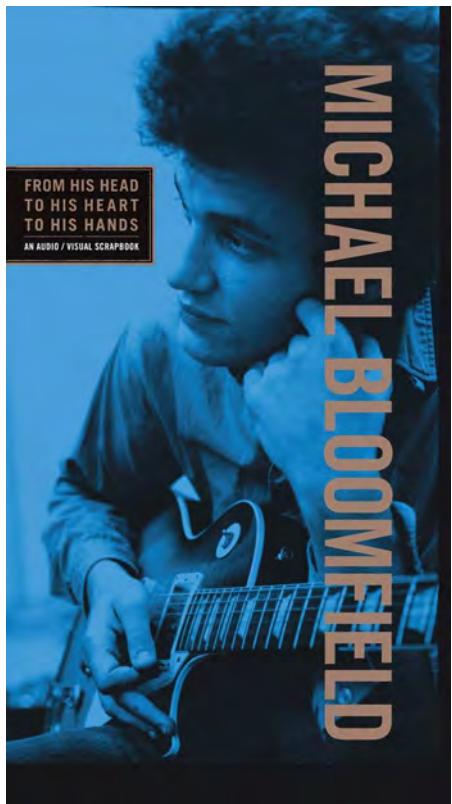
Blues explosion:
Bloomfield in Norman
Rockwell's studio,
New York City, 1968

Archive

REISSUES | COMPS | BOXSETS | LOST RECORDINGS



BOB GATO



MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD

From His Head To His Heart To His Hands: An Audio/Visual Scrapbook

LEGACY RECORDINGS

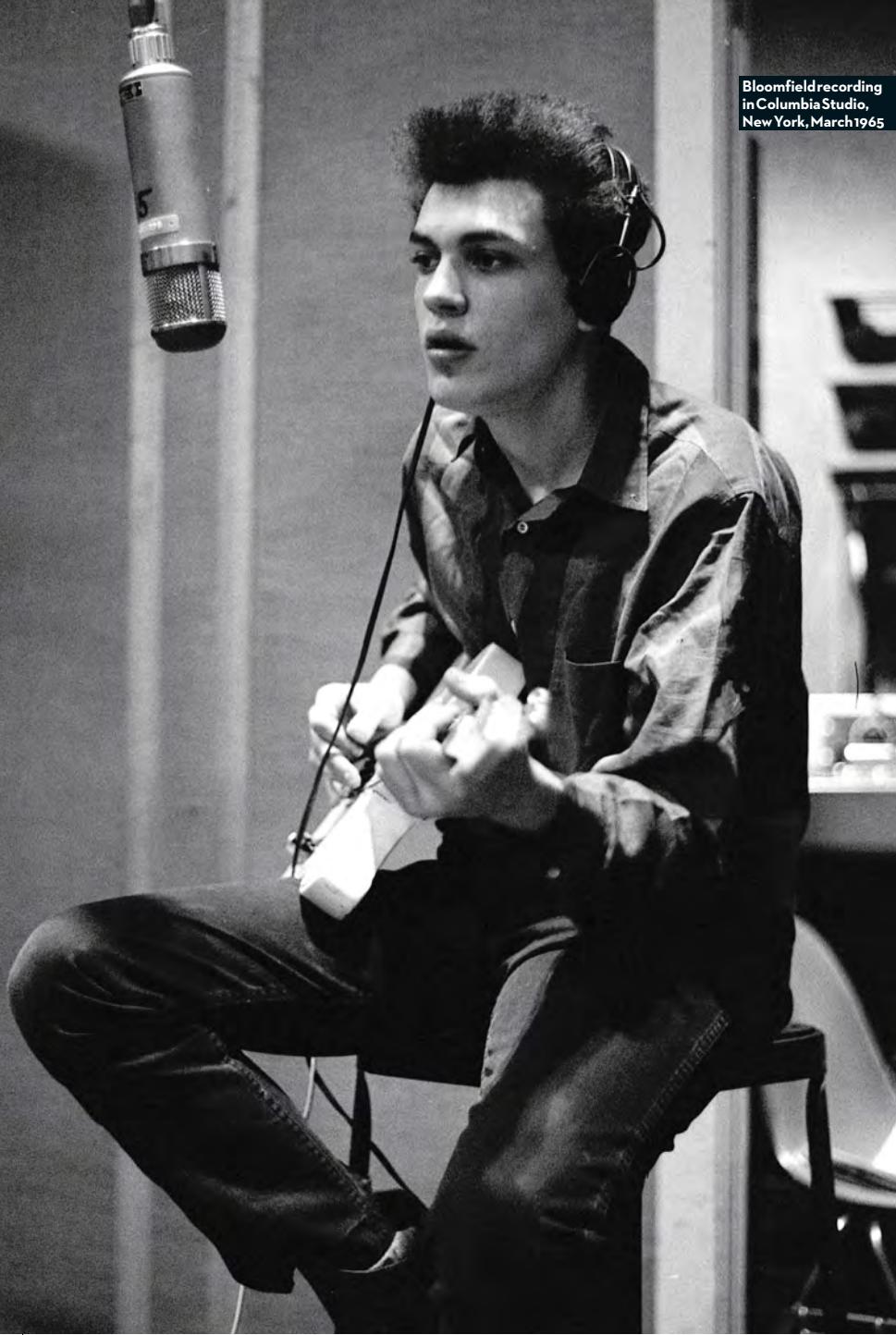
Bloomfield is God? Long-overdue, career-spanning look at rock's foremost guitar trailblazer. *By Luke Torn*

9/10 MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD
(AFFECTIONATELY: Bloomers) lit up the '60s. A guitarist of indomitable power and grace, an effervescent personality, a maestro likely to astound in virtually any environment, any genre, he was a shape-shifter, a transformer, an architect and an archetype – the original rock guitar superhero. Like flipping a switch, he could accelerate from sweetness to fury and back again in the blink of an eye. "At times," remembers his friend and bandmate Barry Goldberg, "his solos would be like bombs going off."

As the blazing experimentalism and sense of

discovery of the 1960s faded into the genre-codified, corporate rock of the '70s, the legend of Bloomfield's mind-melting guitar prowess could be felt and heard everywhere – in post-psychadelic San Francisco, in the distorted, cartoonish blues riffs of proto metal bands and arena rockers, in the playing of Eric Clapton, Carlos Santana, Jeff Beck and, later, a Texas kid named Stevie Ray Vaughan. All of which, strangely enough, was anathema to Bloomfield.

His high points are unassailable: backing virtually every significant bluesman, from Sleepy John Estes to Muddy Waters; linchpin →



Bloomfield recording in Columbia Studio, New York, March 1965

of The Paul Butterfield Blues Band, the interracial juggernaut that helped transform "pop" from shallow teenybopper fluff to serious "rock". He accompanied Bob Dylan on his most momentous gig ever – Newport 1965; spun out trippy, mesmerising guitar on Al Kooper's smash-hit *Super Session*. His low points are, sadly enough, unassailable too, including quarter-hearted '70s supergroup projects, a nasty heroin habit and a kind of self-imposed exile.

Decades in the making, curated by friend and collaborator Kooper, *From His Head...* collects 46 tracks, a dozen previously unreleased, abetted by a fine hour-long documentary – *Sweet Blues* – directed by Bob Sarles, which, through many interviews, captures some of the essence of the man. Less an authoritative scouring of the vaults, more of – as noted – a scrapbook, it supplements a discography that is as scattered and discordant as a typical Bloomfield guitar lead is fluid and pure.

The set begins at New York's Columbia Studios, Bloomfield auditioning for legendary producer John Hammond. He pours his heart into a sturdy acoustic blues, "I'm A Country Boy", delivering enough intricate figures to virtually overwhelm the song, before sliding effortlessly into the country fingerpicking flash of "Hammond's Rag", a Merle Travis rip, an anomaly, a fairly shocking one at that, in the Bloomfield repertoire.

Hardcore blues, though, as filtered through the post-war electrified giants like Waters, Wolf and Williamson, was Bloomfield's passion, and virtually his entire dossier reflects it. Standards like "I Got My Mojo Workin'" (a later Hammond demo) and "Born In Chicago" (embryonic, exhilarating Butterfield) are emblematic and revelatory, auguring a new, heavier, high-octane normal as rock merges with blues circa 1965-66.

By the time of his 1968 improvisatory LP with Kooper and Stephen Stills – *Super Session* – Bloomfield's approach had evolved ever so slightly. "Albert's Shuffle", a highlight, is typical – pure unsullied blues structures, but with notes twisted, stretched, battered and bruised amid a sly mix of vibrato and sustain, draped over familiar rhythms, cut to fit any (usually dark) mood. "Stop", a workout of Howard Tate's soul smash, is even better, Bloomfield freewheeling, shooting out the lights and sparring with some

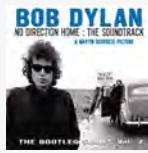
HOW TO BUY... MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD The raging axe-man's finest cuts



THE PAUL BUTTERFIELD BLUES BAND
Unicorn Coffee House '66

BOOTLEG, 2004
Though the Butterfield Band's first three studio albums are essential, this band was built for the stage. This (decent) audience recording documents what all the hubbub was about, capturing them in modest but spectacular bent, before self-consciousness and showmanship crept in. With Bloomfield trading eloquent harmonica/guitar leads, it's intense yet relaxed.

8/10



BOB DYLAN
The Bootleg Series, Vol. 7: No Direction Home - The Soundtrack

COLUMBIA/LEGACY, 2005
While his work on *Highway 61* has long passed into legend, stray session tracks abound, including "Sitting On A Barbed-Wire Fence" (Bootleg Series Vol. 1-3), and the larger concentration collected here. "It Takes A Lot To Laugh..." derives from Newport's arrangement; an alternate "Leopard-Skin Pillbox Hat", with lightning-bolt Bloomfield guitar, is Dylan payback – his best stab at Butterfield Band territory.

9/10



THE PAUL BUTTERFIELD BLUES BAND
East-West

ELEKTRA, 1966
The Butterfield Band at their fearless, high-flying best – the point at which all the Chicago woodshedding pays off in a focused dazzle of breathless musicianship to rival their legendary heroes. While Bloomfield burns on the trad stuff, and they even tackle Michael Nesmith's catchy "Mary, Mary", it's the daring experimentalism of the mutant jazz "Work Song" and the immortal, jaw-dropping title track that, simply put, rate them among the all-time greats.

10/10



MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD
If You Love These Blues, Play 'Em As You Please

FANTASY, 1976
Relaxed and playing the role of guitar professor to the hilt, Bloomfield takes listeners on a no-frills, all-soul travelogue through his history and influences, from Earl Hooker to BB King, T-Bone Walker to Guitar Slim. Especially effective are gorgeous excursions into traditional folk, country and gospel, like the timeless Merle Travis-style fingerpicking of "I Am A Pilgrim".

8/10

electrifying stutter-step organ fills from Kooper.

Within easy hindsight, three-plus decades on from his sad death at just 37, one can sense that Bloomfield was boxed in, by audience expectations, by his drug use and declining health, and by a blues purist's self-imposed limitations. Never a great (or confident) singer, nor a particularly committed songwriter (though he had his moments), his expertise was in interpretation and embellishment, and as a classic ensemble player and ambassador, passionate in bringing substance, foundation and a jazzman's gravitas to an often-times ethereal pop world.

Conversely, the more Bloomfield was challenged, the more he produced work of immense emotional intensity and stunning complexity. Instructed by Dylan on *Highway 61...* to avoid "any BB King shit", he invented a new sonic language, reeling off stinging leads and fills of coruscating power. *From His Head...* picks up two heretofore unreleased pieces therefrom, a mesmerising instrumental cut of "Like A Rolling Stone", and a rare version of "Tombstone Blues", the Chambers Brothers on backing vocals, Bloomfield's raw, caustic guitar dancing darkly, forcefully around Dylan's every verse.

The splendiferous Butterfield Band opus "East-West" is Bloomfield's crown jewel, and one of the most audacious pieces of music produced in the pop pantheon. Blindingly ambitious, pushing boundaries at every level, it begins on a bluesy plane, but soon swerves – traditional musical structures melting in a fiery 13-minute rage of raga and Eastern modalities, straight R'n'B, free jazz, classic pop and back again, Bloomfield's guitar set to stun. Though others were toying with this worldly fusion, Coltrane-meets-Shankar territory in the mid-'60s, including The Byrds on "Eight Miles High", one might easily argue that the preeminent aesthetic of "East-West", especially when taken up by legions of West Coasters, ignited the psychedelic movement. That Bloomfield toyed with but never truly returned to its lofty heights is a shame, and one of his darker mysteries.

The Electric Flag were, potentially, even more revolutionary. Envisioned by Bloomfield – shades of Gram Parsons – as a repository for "all kinds of American music", they had flashes of brilliance, like a horn-driven swing through Howlin' Wolf's "Killing Floor", as well as its emotional flipside, the subtle "Easy Rider". But personality struggles, lack of strong original material and, eventually, an appetite for hard drugs, did them in.

From His Head... adds a couple of solid live Flag cuts and a generous section of studio/live tracks from the *Super Session* period, before heading into Bloomfield's '70s wilderness with nearly an entire disc of latter-day live material. These complete the picture, but gaps remain: Though the fledgling Flag might have best exhibited their early ambitions on the psychsploitation soundtrack *The Trip*, that period is ignored; so too are two exemplary LPs with Butterfield/Flag alumni, where Bloomfield relished his backing role – Barry Goldberg's *Two Jews Blues* and Nick Gravenites' *My Labors*. Surprisingly, no live '60s Dylan material appears either, though the set winds down with the oft-bootlegged "The Groom's Still Waiting At The Altar", Dylan at the Warfield in 1980, Bloomfield riffing out turbo-charged monsters like it's 1965 all over again.



Bloomfield and Goldberg (second and third from right) in The KGB, 1976

Q&A

With The Electric Flag's Barry Goldberg

When did you first meet Michael? 16 years old, in high school. He was from the suburbs, I was from the city, and we had high-school bands. Mike and I had a band called King Dennis & The Kingsmen. We would play Sweet 16 parties. Those were a big deal, because we'd make sure we were the only guys there. We'd cover The Ventures, Johnny & The Hurricanes, all those early instrumental bands.

When did Michael start checking out the blues scene? The south side of Chicago might as well have been Russia, nobody ever went down there. Except Michael started going down there... playing on Maxwell Street, 14, 15 years old. He did it because of his love and passion for the blues.

What do you think attracted him most? It was a cultural thing... mystical. You know, it unleashed certain things in our heads, our minds, and our souls, that rock'n'roll didn't. It cast a spell. The great guitar players that Michael could listen to, because in rock'n'roll at that time, there wasn't a Hendrix or anyone. With the blues, Michael was into BB King, Otis Rush, Muddy Waters, and he wanted to learn, he also discovered country blues, too – Blind Lemon [Jefferson], all those people.

He was playing both acoustic and electric in those days? Oh yeah, along with the folk music. He was an MC at this coffeehouse on Rush Street, which was like the Bourbon Street of Chicago, and he would conduct those shows, and bring down all those guys from the south side and west side, like Big Joe Williams, to play for these college kids and introduce them to this whole other life. He had that kind of personality – you would follow him into hell. You know, I loved him, man. Later on we were inseparable. He inspired me.

Did you see the Paul Butterfield Blues Band in their earliest days? I was actually asked to play keyboards in the Butterfield Band in Chicago. I did a couple of gigs with Paul, and Michael and Paul invited me to come to Newport [in 1965]. We drove to Rhode Island, and when we got there, their producer, Paul Rothchild, said, 'I don't hear keyboards with the band', so that brought me right down. They were a huge success, though.

You were in the group for the Dylan set, though... Michael introduced me to Bob. And Bob asked me to play organ. I had known "Like A Rolling Stone" as Michael had brought home the demo from the sessions. I learned the changes, so that was OK. And we did "Maggie's Farm". It was a controversial reaction – some people liking it and some feeling Bob that had betrayed them.

Do you think that Michael had a sense of the gravity of the moment? I thought he had a great time. Just smiling. And we were just on a mission, blazing through in the name of rock'n'roll.

What was the reaction after the show that night? Of course, Bob was upset – I guess. But I thought that a new movement had been born – a new focus and a new direction in music – and it changed that thing forever.

What was the blueprint of The Electric Flag? Michael was uncomfortable with the Butterfield Band, so he approached me to start The Electric Flag – he wanted to have an all-American-music band – from blues to Motown – and he liked that until it became on the verge of becoming a supergroup.

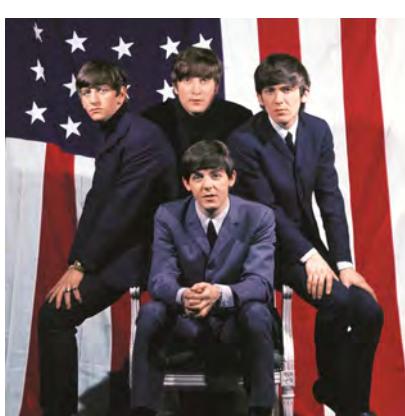
"No-one ever had that intensity in their playing... unfortunately, it was also a curse"

on Michael because he was the leader of the band. His very intense personality caught on fire, and consequently he couldn't sleep. He couldn't turn it off. No-one ever had that intensity in their playing. Unfortunately, it was also a curse.

That led to The Electric Flag's demise? To me, from the reaction of the crowd, we accomplished our mission. We had an above-average set. After that, we had sorta won the battle, won the war. We were on a course. Unfortunately, there were a lot of drugs around, and the band started to deteriorate. It became awful personality-wise.

As Michael receded from the spotlight, do you think he was a misunderstood figure? He didn't like the spotlight, didn't like the pressure. He had bad insomnia and he liked the comfort zone of his room. He didn't really need the fame and glory, he shunned away from that. He was a private kind of guy. *INTERVIEW: LUKE TORN*

The Beatles with Ed Sullivan, New York, February 9, 1964



WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

CD1 *Meet The Beatles* (1964)

CD2 *The Beatles' Second Album* (1964)

CD3 *A Hard Day's Night* (1964)

CD4 *Something New* (1964)

CD5 *The Beatles' Story* (1964)

CD6 *Beatles '65* (1964)

CD7 *The Beatles VI* (1965)

CD8 *The Early Beatles* (1965)

CD9 *Help!* (1965)

CD10 *Rubber Soul* (1965)

CD11 *Yesterday And Today* (1966)

CD12 *Revolver* (1966)

CD13 *Hey Jude* (1970)

THE BEATLES The US Albums

CAPITOL

Altered states... The Fab Four's idiosyncratic US catalogue 1964-1970. By John Robinson

8/10

ON ANOTHER NIGHT, America might have been wowed by Fred Kaps. Unluckily for the magician, on February 9, 1964, Ed Sullivan had made a more dramatic booking for his show. With a hesitant speech ("this city never has before witnessed the excitement stirred by these youngsters from Liverpool...") and a dramatic wave of his arm, the 63-year-old host introduced a new epoch in entertainment. With hindsight, a card trick with a salt cellar was never quite going to measure up.

The US Albums boxset celebrates 50 years of Beatlemania in America, the phenomenon that arose after the rush-release of "I Want To Hold Your Hand" in December and the band's appearance on the Sullivan show. You think you know the Beatles catalogue? This box might test that familiarity. It's like returning home to find the furniture has been moved around, or that someone has built new rooms to put your stuff in. It's not that these are bad rooms – they're just not quite where you expected them to be, and certainly not

how the architects conceived the building.

All 13 albums in this package, from *Meet The Beatles!* (1964) to *Hey Jude* (1970) via a very different *Revolver* (1966) were unique to America. Six (including an amusing US-only documentary album, *The Beatles' Story*) were released in 1964 alone – to strike while the fad was current. Indeed it was as a passing phase that The Beatles were first introduced to American television viewers in November 1963. For CBS News, reporter Josh Darsa met the band after a gig in Bournemouth. During an amiable chat about their likely longevity, Paul McCartney hoped the band would have "quite a run". The voiceover wasn't so sure. Having noted their \$5,000 a week earnings, "The Beatles," it said, "play non-music, wearing non-haircuts, giving non-mercy." As an introduction to America's moral certainty and mercantile drive, it was about perfect.

If anyone was giving non-mercy, it was Capitol Records. Capitol's plan was to supply as large a number of (shorter) Beatles albums to the US market as possible while there was still an appetite for them. To do so, they excised material from the original British releases, assembling additional albums made from the cut material and whatever else they could find. The liberties taken with chronology can seem crazy. Those taken with sequencing (to which The Beatles objected at the time) are philistine.

Not hamstrung by British reservations about value for money, the US albums had less tracks and weren't shy of including hit singles, and this wasn't always a bad thing. By including "I Want To Hold Your Hand" and containing Lennon-McCartney stuff from *With The Beatles*, the US debut, *Meet The Beatles!*, is the definitive document of Beatlemania. As such it bears out a point made repeatedly by American fans and critics – who even knew there were meticulously sequenced UK versions of these albums? As the nation reveled in some innocent respite after the Kennedy assassination, who really cared?

A similar innocence prevailed at the end of the band's career. The compilation album *Hey Jude* allowed the Beatles dream to live a little longer. On the cover, the band are pictured estranged outside George's Friar Park home. Inside, they remain a singles band of thrilling continuity, the joy that attends "Can't Buy Me Love" undiminished all the way through "Rain", and "The Ballad Of John And Yoko".

Closer scrutiny reveals surprises, too. George Harrison's "You Like Me Too Much" might not particularly catch the ear on *Help!*. On *Beatles*

VI, however, it stands out a mile, its rolling piano throwing forward to The Byrds, to Dylan and the rootsy American company Harrison would keep in the late 1960s. A similar transatlantic exchange is proposed by the US version of *Rubber Soul*, wherein McCartney's opener "Drive My Car" is replaced by his "I've Just Seen A Face". Evidently an influence on Paul Simon, the song found favour among folk-rockers (there's a nice Dillards version) and lends credence to the idea that the album was sequenced with its potential appeal to US folk-rock fans in mind.

Still, there were regrettable incidents. The *Hard Day's Night* and *Help!* soundtracks, particularly, were victims of Capitol's asset-stripping, and with their muzak filler, they hark back to a pre-Beatles paradigm: albums that were, as Phil Spector put it, "two hits and ten pieces of junk". The so-called "butcher" sleeve art of *Yesterday And Today* (1966) provides a fitting analogy for how the band's material was treated – and Capitol even changed their mind about that cover, too (a "trunk" sticker is included here with which to bowdlerise your copy).

The Beatles' productivity also occasionally worked against them. Material that predated "I Want To Hold Your Hand" (released on Vee-Jay's *Introducing... The Beatles*) only found an anachronistic Capitol release as *Early Beatles* in 1965. In the mind of the unsuspecting US consumer, the band appeared to make the leap from "Twist And Shout" to "You've Got To Hide Your Love Away" in a startling five months.

For all the screaming fans, however, if you saw true mania as The Beatles arrived in America, you would have been looking at their business affairs. From mismanaged licensing for the music, to botched deals on Beatles wigs, combs and lunchboxes, those nominally in charge of Beatles business were making it up as they went along. One way of looking at this set is as a release that retrospectively quells that chaos, submits the errant US catalogue (here in mono, stereo and duophonic mixes) to Apple's museum-quality archival system, and regains control.

Another is to leave the canon and the respect aside, and enjoy the new pathways opened up by these albums. To listen, in fact, to these pre-*Pepper* works with a post-*Pepper* mindset – and see something familiar in a very different way. Was that, after all, not the suggestion that The Beatles had been making to their fans from the start – to embrace the unknown, and take the path less-travelled?



THE AUTEURS/BAADER MEINHOF

New Wave/
Baader Meinhof
(reissues, 1993/96)

3 LOOP MUSIC

8/10

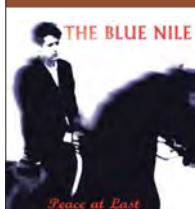


8/10

New Wave is an assured debut, and while not intended as a riposte to grunge, a sense of witty defiance informs "Bailed Out" and "American Guitars" – smart, spiky songs in the Kinks/Soft Boys tradition, lent gravitas by judicious use of cello. Haines' vocals are already sinfully effete, regarding his cast of showgirls, child stars and other assorted rubes with withering pity. Three years later, Haines found himself at the height of Cool Britannia cooking up malevolent glam-funk dedicated to '70s German leftwing terrorists. *Baader Meinhof* offers 10 tales of insurrection, Haines hissing villainously over bass synths, needling guitars, tablas and spy-theme strings. If you'll excuse the pun, it's a blast.

EXTRAS: *New Wave* contains B-sides, demos and 6/10 alternate versions, plus a BBC session. *BM* includes outtakes and pointless remixes.

SAM RICHARDS



THE BLUE NILE

Peace At Last
(reissue, 1996)

UMG

Expanded, remastered reissue of trio's patchy third album

7/10

Originally released in 1996, *Peace At Last* marks the point where The Blue Nile consciously decided to mess with the spare perfection of their first two records, *A Walk Across The Rooftops* and *Hats* (both given the reissue treatment last year). Recorded in scattered locations over the course of seven rather tortured years, the album introduces acoustic guitar, gospel choir and falsetto to the musical mix, while Paul Buchanan's lyrics turn to spirituality and personal salvation. While the hymn-like "Happiness" and rousing romantic "Tomorrow Morning" make a superb opening salvo, much of the remainder is patchy and half-formed. The bleached funk of "Sentimental Man", "Soon" and "Holy Love" veers perilously close to anaemic AOR, while songs like "Body And Soul" and "War Is Love" simply aren't up to snuff. The album does boast a formidable ace in the hole in "Family Life", a three-in-the-morning heartbreaker which remains the band's most magnificently melancholy five minutes.

EXTRAS: A second disc of six songs featuring 7/10 three alternate mixes and three outtakes, including the previously unreleased demo "A Certain Kind Of Angel" and lovely "There Was A Girl".

GRAEME THOMSON

Rediscovered! ▶

Uncovering the underrated and overlooked



9/10



8/10

NIGEL MAZLYN JONES

Ship To Shore (reissue, 1976)

Raft

Cornwall-based folkie's continuing journey into conservation

Nigel Mazlyn Jones' debut, **Ship To Shore** SOMMER, came as a breath of fresh air in the fallow folk year of 1976. Alongside 1979's *Sentinel*, it unveiled a distinctive combination of sincere songs, shape-shifting acoustic guitars, sparing use of echoplex effects and glissando bowed techniques. Both albums appeared on Jones' self-funded Isle Of Light imprint. "I knew of musicians who were in a mess and not creating because of record deals gone sour," he explains. "Some lived on promises never fulfilled. I wanted to make sure I never killed the inspiration to write and play."

Born in Dudley in 1950, Jones played Black Country folk clubs before moving to Jersey in 1969 to work with the great apes for conservationist

Gerald Durrell. The experience profoundly affected Jones; he moved to North Cornwall, where the land, sea and sky offered further lyrical inspiration.

Despite touring widely during the '80s, often with ex-Van Der Graaf Generator drummer Guy Evans, and later recording with Roy Harper, Steve Hillage and Banco de Gaia, Jones consciously preserved his anonymity. Strongly principled and uncompromising, even today Jones' idealistic worldview invites ridicule by some.

"The planet gives the raw materials and we give nothing but garbage back," he says. "All the answers to our survival lie in nature, yet we abuse and destroy it. These issues have not improved in my brief lifetime and still influence me."

Raft ISLE OF LIGHT, is Jones' 12th self-released album, admirably pursuing such ecological themes in a style most reminiscent of early Island-era Cat Stevens, although it's his daring instrumental tracks that shine brightest, particularly the electric, raga-textured "Push The Boat Out" and Spanish-style "Free Flight". "Instrumentals take up the themes where words cease to work," he says.

MICK HOUGHTON



DAVID BOWIE/ EUGENE ORMANDY/ PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA

David Bowie Narrates Sergei Prokofiev's Peter And The Wolf (reissue, 1978)

7/10

SONY CLASSICAL

"Are you sitting comfortably? Then I shall begin..."

No wonder "Where Are We Now?" found Bowie looking back fondly on 1977. What a productive year it was: sobriety, *Low* and *"Heroes"*, not to mention extensive touring with Iggy. This was the year not just of "Beauty And The Beast" but also of "Little Drummer Boy". No surprise, then, that in November, Bowie should find a couple of days in New York to provide this narration for Prokofiev's work for children. Bearing in mind the ghostly, alarming figure Bowie had cut in film and on television in the previous two years, his approach to this assignment is certainly different. Bowie introduces the instruments and the roles they play in the story, which he then jauntily tells. At the start, he uses the over-eager mode of someone talking to a friend's child. As the story continues, however, both listener and narrator get swept along. Apparently, Bowie was third choice for the gig, but there are moments here where a real warmth and humour shine through. Bowie later said he did it because he thought his son would enjoy it. Today's Thin White Dads might find themselves agreeing.

EXTRAS: None.

JOHN ROBINSON



CARAVAN

If I Could Do It All Over Again I'd Do It All Over You (reissue, 1970)

DECCA

Even unusual time signatures can be easy listening

9/10

The notion of a Canterbury scene has always been a little inflated, originating from just one mid-'60s group, The Wilde Flowers, which included most of the figures who later formed Caravan and Soft Machine. For decades, Caravan have run second-best; Soft Machine were more high-brow, and were at the heart of the burgeoning London underground alongside Pink Floyd, while Caravan's albums were regarded as more playful, quirky – their silly titles meant they were taken less seriously. The passage of time is now reversing that trend and this, Caravan's second record, and their one truly great album, knocks spots off any of Soft Machine's more fractured recordings. No less adventurous musically, its two long suites of songs mercifully avoid the pitfalls of pompous jazz rock and are highlighted by Richard Sinclair's ingenious swirling organ playing. The title track is wonderfully catchy pop, albeit in 5/4 time, while "And I Wish I Were Stoned/Don't Worry" is almost too melodic for its own good. Now that prog is no longer reviled, Caravan can finally stand up as true trailblazers of a much maligned genre.

EXTRAS: None.

MICK HOUGHTON



CONGREGACION

Viene... (reissue, 1972)

LION

Absorbing and entrancing Chilean acid folk

This Chilean group's sole album was released in 1972, a year before

8/10

Pinochet's military coup completely stifled a flourishing period in contemporary music. Congregacion's blend of mellow pop and sorrowful folk was indicative of the strength of folk music in Chile in the shape of Nuevo Canción Chilena (new Chilean song), most famously associated with Victor Jara. Congregacion favoured a more Western approach and, led by guitarist Antonio Smith, preached peace and enlightenment rather than radical politics, although such musings as "there is no Jesus, Marx, nor Lenin to come to help you" (from "Trapped By A Thought") would soon be outlawed. *Viene...*'s revered reputation is, however, more to do with its spacious sound and natural textures than its discreet political overtones. That Pink Floyd and The Beatles were an influence is clear from "Arrebol", its pastoral guitars and strident cello creating a hybrid of "Grantchester Meadows" and "Eleanor Rigby". Though unlikely to have offered such direct inspiration, Congregacion's sometimes disquieting, esoteric acoustic meanderings are reminiscent of the Incredible String Band, early King Crimson and ESP-era Pearls Before Swine. Fans of any of the above will find *Viene...* utterly spellbinding.

EXTRAS: None.

MICK HOUGHTON



THE DREAM SYNDICATE

The Day Before Wine And Roses

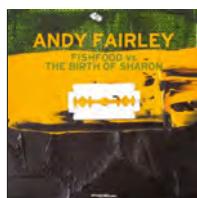
OMNIVORE RECORDINGS

Snapshot of '80s psych kingpins at their most focused and ferocious

Ominous and brooding, spooky and mysterious, the original lineup of LA quartet The Dream Syndicate, caught here in its fiery, primordial state – Karl Precoda on guitar – came closest of any band ever to the dark majesty of The Velvet Underground. That fact is written all over this 10-track 1982 radio broadcast, from the moody opener "Some Kinda Itch", even to somewhat obvious interpretations of Neil Young, Bob Dylan and Donovan. For all that, though, it's Steve Wynn's wide-angle, impressionistic originals – especially "When You Smile", the see-sawing, frenetic "That's What You Always Say" and the wrecked anthermy of "The Days Of Wine And Roses", given brain-rattling psych guitar treatments by Precoda – that astound. In the former, the rumbling rhythm section sets the table for Precoda's mind-melt solo. The knives really come out on "Open Hour", later to morph into "John Coltrane Stereo Blues", wherein Precoda and company, hijacking The Byrds' heady aesthetic circa "Eight Miles High", merge jazz and rock, psych and avant-garde. Here, amid feedback waves that alternatively stab and float, race and stomp, The Dream Syndicate rendered their peers – from punchy power-poppers to the hardest hardcore combo – positively cartoonish.

EXTRAS: None.

LUKE TORN

9/10

ANDY FAIRLEY

Fishfood Vs The Birth Of Sharon

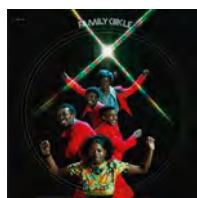
BRISTOL ARCHIVE

Post-punk concrète from late, great Bristol performance poet

Andy Fairley is probably best remembered today for his work with Adrian Sherwood's On-U Sound, his visionary recitations gracing early '90s tracks by the likes of Gary Clail and Dub Syndicate. All but forgotten, however, are Fairley's early years on the Bristol post-punk underground, where he fronted two bands – first Fishfood, later The Birth Of Sharon – very much in line with the city's volatile genre ferment. Those familiar with The Pop Group or Mark Stewart And The Maffia will hear clear echoes in these nine long-lost tracks, wild explorations in dub, funk, guitar noise and musique concrète. Instead of revolutionary fervour, though, we find a Beefheart surrealism that's sometimes hilarious, sometimes nightmarish, often both at once. "Seventeen Eels" is a zig-zag wander of sharp guitar angles and slithery bass, while "Sex Is A Language" finds Fairley pondering the peculiarities of human biology ("It's all so simple/Just a pig bag of skin/With a few holes/Stuck right in"). The stand-out, meanwhile, is "Volition". Long used by Portishead as a warm-up tape, its dry-as-a-bone drums, slow synth oscillations and haunting snatches of shortwave radio coalesce into a rumbling apocalypse dub atop which Fairley croons like a psychotic opera singer.

EXTRAS: None.

LOUIS PATTISON

8/10

FAMILY CIRCLE

Family Circle

(reissue, 1973)

JR/NUMERO GROUP

Another resurrected gem from Numero side-label Five members of the Simmons clan from Newark, New Jersey, came

8/10

together for this album of classic soul from 1973, which has been going for around \$250 a pop of late. And for good reason: these songs should have become standards, and have higher production values than many second-tier bands of the era (though still with a compellingly mic-blasted quality). Accompanying keening strings and the walnut-veneered handsomeness of Al Green or Minnie Riperton's backing, the family's pipes blur beautifully in chaste, coolly observational harmonies – they pre-empt the stillness and spiritual clarity of the Quiet Storm style that followed them years later. Killer session players, including guitarist Cornell Dupree and polyrhythmic drummer Bernard 'Pretty' Purdie (in a group who also played for Aretha Franklin), nicely offset these moods with their stuttering funk rhythm section, giving potentially naff pop like "Well Runs Dry" a swing to its step. The absolute highlight is "It Doesn't Make Sense", which begins as a waltzing ballad before transmogrifying into a psychedelic classic, its final minute tripping off into clouds nine, ten and beyond via constant incantation of the title. The beaming smiles on the sparkling cover hide a profound – yet never indulgent – melancholic edge throughout.

EXTRAS: None.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS

REVELATIONS

One-time world-music enfant terrible Hector Zazou



If you can tell a man by the company he keeps, the serial collaborator Hector Zazou could be said to have led a fascinating life, working as he did until his death aged 60 with a range of far-flung performers including Corsican choirs, Congolese singers, Laurie Anderson, Siouxsie Sioux, Björk and – why not – Gérard Depardieu on all manner of pan-cultural projects. Born Pierre Job in Algeria, in 1948, to a Spanish mother and French father who moved to Marseilles, peregrination was in his blood. Inevitably, there is a thrilling spikiness to his early work in the late '70s and early '80s with quasi-seditious new-wave acts ZNR and La Perversita, which fed into the Afro-electronics of his Fela Kuti-meets-Kraftwerk act Zazou Biyake and his jazzy Reivax Au Bongo LP. His palette slackened in the '90s as he became more accomplished: albums set in the Arctic and Sahara were, in contrast, tastefully commercial affairs, characterised nevertheless by his wanderlust. "I wanted to have a sound where everything would be part of a whole," he told *Sound On Sound* in 1995. PIERS MARTIN



JEANNE FOLLY/JL HENNIG/VXZ

375/HECTOR ZAZOU/BAZOOKA

La Perversita

(reissue, 1979)

SCOPA INVISIBLE

9/10

Spellbinding set of "musical erotica" from late-'70s Paris

Reissued after 34 years in obscurity, *La Perversita* is one of the first significant recordings by Hector Zazou, the Algerian-born French artist and producer who spent the best part of three decades exploring an enlightened fusion of, loosely, world music and avant-garde electronics, collaborating with Björk, John Cale and Harold Budd. He died in 2008, bequeathing an outstanding discography, of which the surreal new-wave of *La Perversita* is his most mischievous work. Produced by Zazou and design group Bazooka, whose co-founder Kiki Picasso provided the sleeve art and newsprint inserts of provocative collages in the manner of Crass' Gee Vaucher, this is a compellingly weird glimpse into the seamy underbelly of absurdist Parisian bohemia – there are Dadaist covers of "Strawberry Fields Forever" and "Satisfaction", narrated by satirist Jeanne Folly – all somehow coherently assembled by a bunch of latter-day Lettristes. The LP's best-known songs, narco-disco jams "I Love You S" and "La Soupeuse", close each side. Long cherished by DJs, they end up bruised by feedback and dragged along by Hamilton Barclay's crisp drumming. Whatever it all means still remains tantalisingly elusive.

EXTRAS: None.

PIERS MARTIN



BRENDA HOLLOWAY The Artistry Of Brenda Holloway

KENT

Classic cuts from Motown's missing-in-action star

8/10

With the voice to rival Diana Ross and Martha Reeves, Holloway supported The Beatles at Shea Stadium and seemed destined to become one of Motown's biggest stars. But her strong religious convictions, refusal to move from LA to Detroit and a mind of her own meant she never fitted the dictatorial demands of Berry Gordy's 'hit machine'. One day in early '68, she walked out on a recording session with Smokey Robinson, never to return. She was just 21 and it was another two decades before she resumed her secular singing career. Nine months after her departure, Motown issued this album in the UK only, compiling 16 of her finest recordings made between 1964-67. Without exception it's magnificent stuff, from the deep, orchestrated soul of her only Top 20 hit "Every Little Bit Hurts" to the Aretha-like gospel power of "Too Proud To Cry" via a thrilling "Unchained Melody" (recorded before The Righteous Brothers'), the silkily smooth "Operator" and the definitive version of her own composition "You've Made Me So Very Happy", later turned into a huge hit by Blood, Sweat & Tears.

EXTRAS: Eight unreleased tracks from the 6/10 Motown vaults, including the previously unknown Smokey Robinson composition "After All That You've Done".

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



CLIFF MARTINEZ Solaris: Original Motion Picture Score (reissue, 2002)

INVADA

Drive man's superior sci-fi soundtrack

8/10

after his menacing *Drive* soundtrack – a lurid revamp of John Carpenter's suspense themes – but it was the New Yorker's 2002 score for Steven Soderbergh's existential sci-fi flick *Solaris* that first made the film world take him seriously, and which lingered with the viewer far longer than the George Clooney-in-space vehicle, itself a simpler version of the Tarkovsky classic. Martinez, a drummer for Captain Beefheart and the Red Hot Chili Peppers in the '80s, has recently been quite open about his influences for *Solaris*, citing Kubrick favourite György Ligeti and Tangerine Dream as key references and admitting that this is the only soundtrack of his that he enjoys hearing. Were this entirely composed of mournful widescreen Ligeti sweeps intended to convey gravitas, one would question Martinez's integrity, but he's shrewd enough to balance those orchestral elements with airy passages such as "Wear Your Seat Belt" and "First Sleep", made with treated layers of undulating steel drums, which have a rhythmic quality that gives motion to this ambient score. Though ponderous at times, *Solaris* reveals Martinez's strength to be his ability to evoke complex emotions such as guilt and loneliness in a straightforward, poetic way.

EXTRAS: None.

PIERS MARTIN



BOB MOULD

Workbook 25
(reissue, 1989)

OMNIVORE

Sugar man's refurbished solo debut

The first act from America's hardcore underground to get a major-label deal, Hüsker Dü crash-landed untidily in the late '80s, prompting a significant rethink for the punk-rock Byrds' main songwriter – still, at the time, sullen and closeted. Heavy on the cellos, *Workbook* was Bob Mould's slightly self-conscious lurch towards maturity – he even wears a cardigan on the sleeve photo – but his writing is startling throughout, college radio hit "See A Little Light" and the truck ride torment of "Brasilia Crossed With Trenton" emblematic of his backwoods reinvention, while "Poison Years" and "Wishing Well" bear witness to his abiding power. Commercial success with Sugar and sidesteps into mutant disco and pro-wrestling took Mould's career on an odd path later, but this may be the last record when he knew absolutely that he was on the right track. "That album means the world to me," the hype-averse Mould said of *Workbook* recently. "It's great. It's a great record." No mistaking.

EXTRAS: A complete contemporary live set 8/10 from Chicago's Cabaret Metro – previously cherry-picked for B-sides – includes the mighty and unrecorded "If You're True", plus a cover of Richard Thompson's "Shoot Out The Lights": due respect to Mould's stylistic forebear.

JIM WIRTH

9/10



MORRISSEY

Your Arsenal
(reissue, 1992)

EMI

How Morrissey brought out the big guns

All feints and dummies, *Viva Hate* and *Kill Uncle* did much to kill off

Morrissey's post-Smiths goodwill in Britain, but Moz finally made the record his dream audience of "skinheads in nail varnish" wanted third time out. Bootboy sharp and Bet Lynch brutal, the combination of Mick Ronson's glam racket production and Morrissey's new rockabilly band slipped a horseshoe in his lyrical glove. "We Hate It When Our Friends Become Successful" is archly triumphant, while Morrissey's evisceration of the British far right ("there's a country, you don't live there, but one day you would like to") on "The National Front Disco" and football hooligans' apology "We'll Let You Know" document a disappearing world with devilish understatement. A typically perverse decision to substitute a US remix for the standard version of album closer "Tomorrow" does little to deaden the impact of an album that owned its moment every bit as much as *The Queen Is Dead*. *Your Arsenal* – his spurs.

EXTRAS: A thrillingly wobbly unreleased live 7/10 DVD recorded in California at the height of US Moz-mania; scenes of *Jesus Christ Superstar*-style fan adoration capture the gold-lamé-shirted Morrissey's dream of being "blindly loved" rather than judged finally coming true.

JIM WIRTH

9/10

HOW TO BUY... BOB MOULD

From hardcore psych to metallic KO

HÜSKER DÜ

New Day Rising

SST, 1985

Mould's first and greatest power trio released three psychedelic hardcore LPs in 14 months, with *NDR* the second. The title track and "I Apologize" punctuate perhaps the greatest first side in American underground music. *Revolver* with distortion.

10/10

BOB MOULD

Black Sheets Of Rain

VIRGIN, 1990

Mould's solo debut was not cheery, but its follow-up made *Workbook* seem like the New Seekers. One long anguished howl, *Black Sheets...* still has candy-apple sweetness at its core, with "Stop Your Crying" one of Mould's most poignant outpourings. A metallic KO.

9/10

BOB MOULD

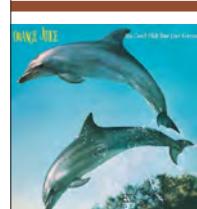
Modulate

GRANARY MUSIC, 2002

An attempt to reconcile his love of Air's "Sexy Boy" and gloomy alt.rock, this appalled Mould's core fans, but – mad as it is – *Modulate* is his bravest LP. Melody gushes from "Slay/Sway", while "Homecoming Parade" sounds like *Metal Machine Music* on bagpipes. *Everything since has felt like a backward step.*

7/10

JIM WIRTH



ORANGE JUICE

You Can't Hide Your Love Forever
(reissue, 1982)

DOMINO

Highlight of the Glasgow band's post-Postcard work

8/10

When it was issued in 1982, Orange Juice's debut disappointed some admirers of the angular pop the Glasgow group had pioneered on the super-hip – yet commercially marginal – Postcard label. In the spirit of the time, producer Adam Kidron had sacrificed the punky spirit of those early singles for something brighter, in pursuit of commercial rewards which never came. With hindsight (and a remastering job which highlights the Juice's disco influences) *YCHYL* does a good job of capturing the tension which made the group so special. The influence of guitarist James Kirk shouldn't be underestimated. As well as providing some of the best songs ("Felicity", "Wan Light") Kirk's presence seemed to give Edwyn Collins permission to explore his vulnerability, as on the glorious, Velvets-tinged "In A Nutshell". Kirk was ousted before the second release of 1982, *Rip It Up* (6/10), the title track of which finally delivered a hit single, but some of the magic of the Postcard period was lost. Subsequent Orange Juice releases, the mini-LP *Texas Fever* (7/10) and the valedictory *The Orange Juice* (8/10) – both 1984 – are less democratic affairs, and can be viewed as the foundation stones of Collins' gloriously erratic solo career.

EXTRAS: None.

ALASTAIR MCKAY

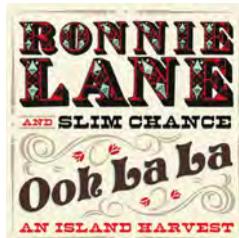


RONNIE LANE'S SLIM CHANCE

Ooh La La: An Island Harvest

UMC/ISLAND

Double-disc retrospective of the king of rustic rock. By Graeme Thomson



8/10

WHEN RONNIE LANE left the Faces in 1973, he had grown tired of the rock lifestyle and of being around "the names that, when dropped, attract a crowd," as he put it so beautifully on "Little Piece Of Nothing". Even the name he gave his hastily assembled new

band was a sly – and, as it transpired, accurate – comment on their commercial potential.

Still only 27 but already deep in the transition from ace face to gypsy king, Lane sealed the deal by settling into Fishpool Farm, up in the Shropshire hills near the Welsh border. From his new base, surrounded by animals and rolling countryside, he set about fashioning a rustic-rock idyll in which the music he made reflected the landscape and his new way of life. "I'm Just A Country Boy", one of 37 album tracks, singles, outtakes, alternate versions and live cuts compiled for this two-disc retrospective, is almost a manifesto, Lane finding "silver in the stars and gold in the morning sun". Elsewhere there are songs about blacksmiths, poachers, Indian summers and harvest time.

To bring nature's bounty to life, the shifting groups of musicians he assembled hit upon a fertile blend of rock'n'roll, country, folk, music hall, roadhouse blues, hot jazz, Cajun and early American roots music. Covers here include "Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?", Fats Domino's "Blue Monday" and the Isaac Family's bluegrass gospel obscurity "Bottle Of Brandy". But as well as honouring a past that stretched back much further than "Heartbreak Hotel" or the first Beatles LP, this music contains pre-echoes of future records by Paul Weller, The Waterboys, Nick Lowe, Van Morrison and countless others. The disarmingly beautiful instrumental "Harvest Home" would sound completely at ease on any recent release by contemporary folk trio Lau.

These tracks hum to the sound of accordions, fiddles, mandolins, saloon bar piano, acoustic guitars, squawking geese and chirruping birds, but as fiddler Charlie Hart points out, "It's not all polite." You can well imagine the Faces tearing through "Steppin' And Reelin'"; "One For The Road" is a rowdy closing-time sing-song and "Ain't No Lady" indulges Lane's bawdy side; the raw "Back Street Boy" is rude Southern funk with a Romany heart.

Whether stately or rambunctious, Slim Chance made good-time music with bags of soul. Imagine Chas & Dave meeting Meher Baba. The darkly beautiful "Burnin' Summer" may have a powerful seam of pastoral spirituality running through it, but Lane still prefacing an unbridled first tilt at Chuck Berry's "You Never Can Tell" with the elbows-out cockney joshing of the young Steptoe. Emerging from the shadow of Rod Stewart, his characterful voice blossomed, settling into a hybrid of Dylan's

clean *Nashville Skyline*-era croon and George Harrison's ragged soulfulness.

As wonderful as much of this richly diverse music is, *Ooh La La: An Island Harvest* is not an entirely satisfactory overview of Lane's first few post-Faces years. As the title implies, it focuses on his two Island albums, *Ronnie Lane's Slim Chance* (1974) and *One For The Road* (1976). The complete omission of tracks from the first Slim Chance LP *Anymore For Anymore*, released in 1974 on GM Records and therefore presumably sidelined for contractual reasons, is regrettable, ensuring meagre pickings from the band's first act. All that's on offer is a (beautiful) alternate version of "The Poacher", as well as live renditions of debut 45 "How Come" and *Anymore For Anymore*'s "Tell Everyone", the latter pair part of an eight-song BBC *In Concert* set from April 1974, when Slim Chance, in its initial incarnation, featured Scottish folk duo Gallagher & Lyle.

The live tracks also provide a connective thread back to Lane's work with the Faces, with outings for "Last Orders", "Debris", "Flags And Banners" and "Ooh La La". The latter song crops up again in a previously unreleased version which brings a vibrant Dixieland verve to one of Lane's greatest compositions, though admittedly at the expense of some of the original's poignancy.

Wonderful songs all, of course, but their presence, alongside the jumbled chronology and omissions elsewhere, lend a slightly incoherent, rag-bag feel to an otherwise very welcome salute to an undervalued songbook. A decent crop, but not quite the full golden harvest.

Q&A

Slim Chance's Charlie Hart



What are your memories of life at Fishpool? It's the most fabulous, out-of-the-way part of the world. We'd stay up all night, watch the light coming up in the valley, then I'd go out and sow

barley with Ronnie and we'd come home and record "Harvest Home". The music is rooted to the place, the lifestyle, the characters. It was idyllic. When he moved back to London in the '80s he'd say, "God, that was a magical time."

The blend of music is remarkable. He was bringing in music hall, Cajun, early jazz, Lead Belly, East End songs, and somehow it all came together in unified form. He has been influential.

In the mid-'70s rock was getting over-ripe, and Ronnie was reacting against that in a similar way to punk. He didn't like pretence, that's for sure.

Did he talk about the Faces? He wanted to start afresh, but he'd talk about it. He liked Mac, who remained a very good pal, and there was a bit of ranting about Rod Stewart! He didn't let go of it all. He wanted to retain the entertainment factor of the Faces, he wanted to look good onstage, and he was still up for rocking out.

Was he turning away from the mainstream? He had done it all, so he was content to do whatever he wanted artistically. But he was also trying to broaden rock'n'roll, and to do that you have to remain reasonably commercial. We did OK, but we weren't successful enough to keep the band together. That was a source of deep regret to him. He was trying to do two things and couldn't quite manage it. *INTERVIEW: GRAEME THOMSON*

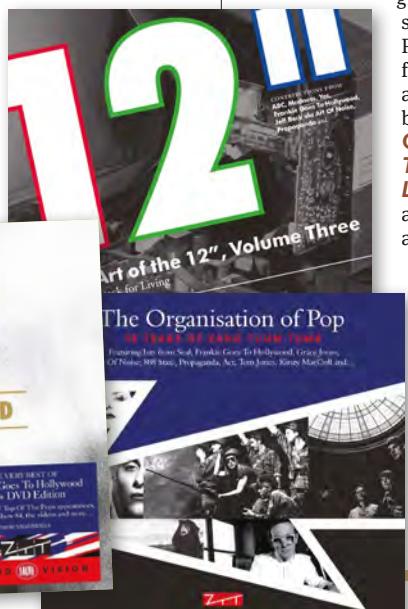
The Specialist

ZTT



► THIRTY YEARS AGO, Frankie Goes To Hollywood were the biggest thing since The Beatles – three consecutive chart-toppers, global success, blanket coverage in teen pop mags, inkies and tabloids, a T-shirt craze ("Frankie Say..."; which spawned less grammatical "Frankie Says..." bootleg apparel) and even a best-selling video game.

On the evidence of an updated, two-disc comp *Frankie Said: Deluxe Edition* (ZTT/Salvo, 6/10) they were a high-end novelty act, with "Relax" a super-charged take on Village People's "YMCA", and "Two Tribes" a Reagan-era update of Boney M's "Rasputin". Trevor Horn uses the early singles as a vehicle for his proggy muso instincts (ponderous digital pianos sit alongside craftily deployed samples of The Blockheads jamming in Horn's studio); later 45s see Horn lose interest in his protégés as they morph into a hamfisted scally rock band, set apart only by Holly Johnson's clipped, Lydon-esque delivery. The DVD of promos and TV appearances is tremendous fun but, for all the talk of hedonism, the music is oddly joyless. A broader overview of ZTT (Frankie's parent label, founded by producer Horn, journalist Paul



Morley and businessperson Jill Sinclair) comes from *The Organisation Of Pop: 30 Years Of Zang Tuum Tumb* (ZTT/Salvo, 6/10). Disc One features the bankable ZTT signings (Frankie, Art Of Noise, Propaganda, Grace Jones, Seal, 808 State, Tom Jones) alongside a few charming oddities (Sinéad O'Connor and Shane MacGowan's beauty-and-the-beast ballad "Haunted", Kirsty MacColl's pretty piano-led "Angel"). Disc Two reminds us that ZTT wasn't always a hit factory: you might remember some of the label's artier acts, such as off-key Parisian wailer Anne Pigalle, minimalist composer Andrew Poppy, and Claudia Brücken's collaborations with Thomas Leer and Glenn Gregory, but Paul Morley's "Incidental Series" features some terrible, opportunistic releases by the likes of Leilani, Hoodlum Priest and Nasty Rox Inc. Listening to this cache of failed singles in one go is a bit like tuning into a foreign radio station – you'll identify some poptimistic gestures but you'll struggle to understand the grammar or vocabulary. It suggests that Morley's New Pop agenda was often more fun to read about than actually listen to. Most baffling of all is *The Art Of The 12", Volume Three: A Soundtrack For Living* (ZTT/Salvo, 2/10), a 29-track megamix of assorted Horn productions

(ABC, Yes), TV themes by ZTT acts and 12" dub versions of apparently random '80s tracks (Sigue Sigue Sputnik? The Belle Stars?) – a white-knuckle ride through the worst bits of the 1980s. Once was quite enough, thank you. Avoid.

JOHN LEWIS



THE SEEDS

Raw & Alive: The Seeds In Concert

BIG BEAT

Definitive restoration of a faux-live classic

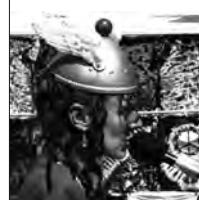
8/10

Everything about this album smacks of

deception. Yes, it was recorded live but it was fabricated track-by-track in the studio with the benefit of multiple takes. The vociferous audience applause was dubbed on later and, equally disingenuously, actually lifted from a Beach Boys show. Yet, despite the sham, *Raw & Alive* is a worthy swansong for the much-maligned Seeds and a truly great garage punk record. This 2CD edition presents the original 1968 album with and without the crudely imposed screaming which, once removed, exposes the full excitement of a series of Seeds classics, notably a frenzied "Up In Her Room" and "900 Million People Daily (All Making Love)" where Sky Saxon tries his damnedest to outdo Jim Morrison. The welcome addition here is a genuine live Seeds recording, albeit in a studio before an invited audience that was rejected ahead of the concocted concert. It's easy to see why; Saxon's vocals are often strained and stretched but the band is on heat and versions of "Falling", a very fitting "A Faded Picture" and a Doors-like "Satisfy You" reveal a band past their former Top 40 glories but which could easily have become a great '70s rock band. As it was, the group didn't survive the year.

EXTRAS: None.

MICKHOUGHTON



THE SPACE LADY

The Space Lady's Greatest Hits (reissue, 1990)

NIGHT SCHOOL

Street musician channels Casiotone dreampop

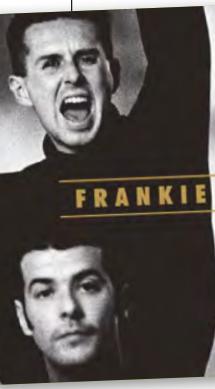
7/10

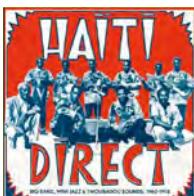
You couldn't invent it, really: a lady in a winged helmet, covering pop classics with Casio, echo, phaser and microphone, on the streets of firstly Boston and then San Francisco, earning her nickname thanks to the gay community in the latter city. What's surprising about The Space Lady's music, though, is how warm and feather-light it all actually sounds: imagine a low-rent version of those lovely ballads from Suicide's second album. Indeed, there's a good case to be made that The Space Lady is the shadow side to Martin Rev's warped vision of analog electronica dreamt from teenage tears. So, while at times the music gets pretty cute, as with the pointillist melodies of her version of Steve Miller's hit "Fly Like An Eagle", some of the covers, like the take on The Electric Prunes' "I Had Too Much To Dream Last Night", pull the songs up by their rockist bootstraps and give them an entirely new life: far more psychedelic in its hermetic gentility. It's no surprise that she turned up in Irwin Chusid's *Songs In The Key Of Z* book of outsider oddballs.

EXTRAS: Bonus CD which features, among

7/10 other gems, a pretty righteous cover of Johnny Kidd & The Pirates' "Shakin' All Over".

JONDALE





VARIOUS ARTISTS
Haiti Direct
STRUT

27 tracks from the overlooked vaults of the Caribbean's troubled island

7/10

Haiti's musical traditions have long been overshadowed by the country's reputation for danger and the malefic strains of voodoo, despite the corrective attempts of Port-au-Prince-born Wyclef Jean and filmmaker Jonathan Demme, whose 1989 compilation *Konbit* remains a landmark. This double CD from the archivist adventurers at Strut fills a colossal gap, gathering assorted styles from the 1960s and '70s, when the nation suffered the murderous regimes of 'Papa Doc' and 'Bébé Doc' Duvalier. No songs of social protest, then. Instead came elegant big bands playing compas-direct, a local variation of Latin meringue. Try the swaying seduction of Raoul Guillaume's "Mal Élélé" or the intricate brass of Webert Sicot's "Ambiance Cadence". Later came the jazzier, more electric experiments on Disc One; the slinky funk of Les Vikings, the psych organ of Les Loups Noires, the soukous guitar of Rodrigue Milien, the serpentine sax of Les Pachas, the folk chants of RaRa De Leogane. It's a lost world of frenetic rhythms, rattling cowbells, distorted surf guitars, mad whoops and shrieks – a wilder party than the big orchestras offered. Fascinating stuff, with extensive liner notes telling the tale.

EXTRAS: None.

NEIL SPENCER



VARIOUS ARTISTS
Alice In Wonderland & Other Rainy Day Girls
CHARLY

6/10

Off-the-beaten-track psych from the late '60s

California and the Midwest may be considered the most vibrant hotbeds of the psychedelic and garage scenes of '60s America, but there were other, arguably surprising outposts. Subtitled 'The Great Lost Southern Popsicle Trip', this two-disc set mines the vaults of labels way down in Tennessee and Florida, including Sam Phillips' pioneering Sun Records. And what a wild trip it is, from the brassy baroque chamber pop of The Berkeley Kites ("Mary-Go-Round", "What Goes Up Must Come Down") to the gothic moptop mayhem of Randy & The Rest ("The Vacuum") to the staccato Farfisa soul of The Jerms ("I'm A Teardrop"). Though showcasing little in the way of what could be described as breakout national hits, these 40 tracks nonetheless offer an alternative portrait of how American rock fragmented in the wake of the British Invasion, a period of experimentation and discovery that would sow the seeds of the future. It's not all great; there's a fair share of lazy bandwagon-jumping, but for the most part it's a cavalcade of lesser-heralded mavericks delighting in pushing envelopes. The Strange Bedfellows and The Sound Laboratory, in particular, display a surly-faced aggression attached to a savvy way with a groovy tune.

EXTRAS: None.

TERRY STAUNTON



VARIOUS ARTISTS
Punk 45: There Is No Such Thing As Society
SOUL JAZZ

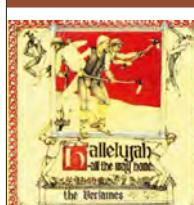
8/10

Blowing dust off DIY 7"s with 'Underground Punk And Post Punk In The UK, 1977-1981, Vol 2'

Following Soul Jazz's US punk singles comp *Kill The Hippies! Kill Yourself! The American Nation Destroys Its Young* is a second volume, dedicated to the crop of DIY groups that sprang up as punk reverberated this side of the pond. Clocking in at 24 tracks, it's appealingly free of the usual suspects, with Television Personalities' satiric paean to bandwagon jumpers, "Part Time Punks", and Josef K's debut 45 "Radio Drill Time" about as close as the collection gets to popular standards. Elsewhere, much conforms to the 'here's three chords, now form a band' ethos, shambolic but often inspired takes on the Buzzcocks/*Pink Flag* template (ie, the 90-second stomp of The Jermz' "Powercut" and the snotty existentialism of "Neutron Bomb" by Art Attacks, featuring Edwin 'Savage Pencil' Pouncey). Tracks by Swell Maps, Cravats and Mekons all venture advances on the punk template, but while there are hints here of technological experimentation (eg Eric Random's "23 Skidoo") this witty, wonky compilation is best represented by the knockabout *Beano* punk of Leamington Spa group The Shapes, whose "Wot's For Lunch Mum" is a feverish plea for culinary sophistication: "What's for lunch mum/Not beans again/What's for lunch mum/Anything but them."

EXTRAS: Sleevenotes compile band biographies, 7/10 artwork and photos.

LOUIS PATTISON



THE VERLAINES
Hallelujah All The Way Home/ Juvenilia (reissues, 1985/87)
FLYING NUN/CAPTURED TRACKS

9/10

Breathtaking guitar pop – vintage NZ-style

One of the signal groups from Flying Nun's earliest, most exalted era, The Verlaines have long exerted a peculiar sway over fans of Kiwi music. Of that first rush of Nun groups, they were the most literate and informed; if The Clean were the giddy rush of post-VU/Dylan pop, and The Chills were more

gently psychedelic, then The Verlaines were their bookish friends, an idiosyncratic campus gang. It's there in their moniker, the Paul Verlaine name-drop in their classic debut single, "Death & The Maiden", and the references to Baudelaire and Rimbaud in "Baud To Tears". But it's also there in the formally trained Graeme Downes' songwriting, full of articulate gestures, grand flourishes and wild moments of theatre, all projected through a post-punk lens. *Juvenilia* compiles early singles and comp appearances, every song a breath taken in sharply, brutal and poetic dissections of romance. *Hallelujah All The Way Home*, their debut album, is more of the same, but fleshed out with piano and horns. It also features "It Was Raining", Downes' most moving song. They're absolutely essential.

EXTRAS: None.

JONDALE

COMING NEXT MONTH...



► Some office favourites return to the fray next month. A new one from **Drive By Truckers** continues to make mockery of Paterson Hood's claim that the band are taking it easy: **English Oceans** is filled with quality Stoney rock from the pen of Mike Cooley. Offering a fractionally more streamlined version of American rock, there is the slick new one from Adam Granduciel's perennially tuneful and anthemic **The War On Drugs**.

In a rather more delicate and sensitive vein, there's the attractively glacial indie reminiscences of **Atlas**, the expansive new recording from NJ's **Real Estate**. There's a new one from **Toumani Diabaté**, while missing in action folk futurist **Linda Perhacs** returns after 40 years spent as a dental hygienist, with musicians including fan and sometime live band member Julia Holter.

Over in the curiosity shop/microbrewery of the Archive section, there's more. There's a quote unquote lost **Johnny Cash** album, which seems to cast the man in black's 1980s in a slightly different light, **Elton John's Goodbye Yellow Brick Road** gets a 40th anniversary going over. Obviously no smart person ever tried to predict confidently what **Neil Young** might be up to. Nonetheless, rumours abound – could be a new *Crazy Horse* album, could be a covers album made up of singles in a box. Might be neither. We shall see.

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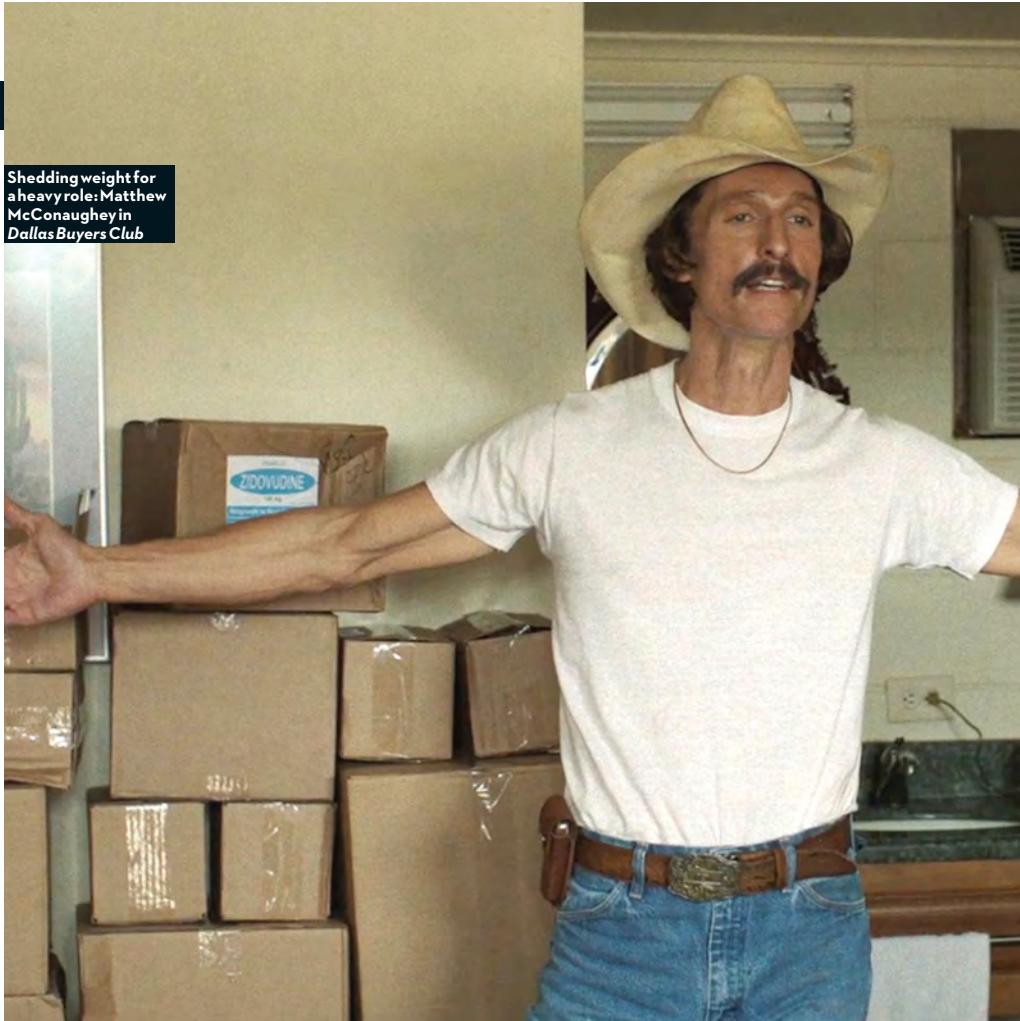
Films

BY MICHAEL BONNER

Method-mumbling crime drama, Matthew McConaughey's lean transformation, Jim Jarmusch's cliché-free vampire film, and a bloody war in glorious 3D...

OUT OF THE FURNACE features some of contemporary cinema's most accomplished mumblers, each making full use of their Method skills to out-mumble one another. There's squinting, too – another reliable sign of actorly acting in today's business. When two or more of these Olympic-standard mumblers are gathered together to act in one scene – as is often the case in Scott Cooper's crime drama – subtitles are advised. The setting is a Rust Belt steel town; the story features an army veteran scarred by his experiences at the front, a close-knit community hit by tragedy, and a hunting trip. Those of you playing *Deer Hunter* Bingo will be eyes down for a full house. Resonances with Michael Cimino's film (and also Sean Penn's *The Indian Runner* with a smattering of early Bruce Springsteen) aside, Cooper's film follows the grim trajectory of brothers Russell and Rodney Baze. Russell (Christian Bale), the eldest, has chosen to keep his head down and follow his father into employment at the local mill; after three tours in Iraq, his younger brother Rodney (Casey Affleck), is in debt to the local bookie (Willem Dafoe), who enters him in bare-knuckle fights out of town to work off his debt. This ends up in the Ramapo mountains, in the Appalachians, presided over by Harlan DeGroat (Woody Harrelson), a man for whom cooking meth and shooting people is second nature. Along the way, Sam Shepard and Forest Whitaker turn up the mumble quotient. In an ideal world, this would be a major film for *Uncut*: a downbeat crime drama full of proper actors, some of whom shoot each other. As it is, for all the mumbling and squinting (and shooting) that goes on, it never quite hits its stride. It might be that Cooper – previous film: *Crazy Heart* – is too much in awe of his actors to quite sharpen the film's edges or move the pace through the gears. Harrelson, incidentally, is the best thing here. His DeGroat – introduced in a hilariously unpleasant pre-credit sequence at a drive-in – is an amused and amusing kingpin, presiding over his mountain domain with a broken-tooth smile and tattoos aplenty.

Shedding weight for a heavy role: Matthew McConaughey in *Dallas Buyers Club*



► **Dallas Buyers Club** Would that Matthew McConaughey had starred in *Out Of The Furnace*. As it goes, I can't think of any film that wouldn't in some way be improved by the presence of McConaughey on his current form. The recent work – *The Lincoln Lawyer*, *Killer Joe*, *Bernie*, *Mud*, *Magic Mike*, the 10-minute monologue about the benefits of masturbation and cocaine in *The Wolf Of Wall Street* – has found the actor escape the rom-com circuit to find himself in the welcome position where he is winning awards for serious dramatic work. Indeed, he is even nominated for a Best Actor Oscar for his role in *Dallas Buyers Club*, which is a performance worthy of one of the greats of the New Hollywood elite. He plays Ronald Woodroof, a real-life Texas rodeo hot-shot and avid womaniser who tested HIV-positive in 1985. Thinking back a decade to McConaughey in the pomp of his rom-com phase – in movies like *How To Lose A Guy In 10 Days* – it's astonishing to see the transformation here. Gone is the gleaming torso, the easygoing smile and button-bright eyes.

McConaughey shed 40 pounds for the part and accordingly his Woodroo is rendered as a dark, spindly skeleton. The film follows Woodroo's simultaneous attempts to overcome the stigma of his illness – no easy task in mid-'80s Texas – and also bring non-approved treatments to patients who have otherwise been excluded. It is a David and Goliath story of sorts, as Woodroo takes on the pharmaceutical industry and the authorities; but it is also about Woodroo's transformation from good ol' homophobe to a vaguely haunted form of humanism. It is to the credit of director Jean-Marc Vallée – and the scriptwriters Craig Borten and Melisa Wallack – that at no point does *Dallas Buyers Club* drift into the saccharine. Vallée's use of natural light and the film's milieu – rundown bars and trailer parks – recall Aronofsky's *The Wrestler*. Of course, this is very much McConaughey's film – and deservedly so – but credit is also due to Jared Leto as a fellow AIDS patient and Jennifer Garner as the doctor who takes Woodroo's side against the establishment.

Reviewed this month...



OUT OF THE FURNACE
Director Scott Cooper
Starring Christian Bale, Casey Affleck
Opened January 29
Certificate 15
6/10



DALLAS BUYERS CLUB
Director Jean-Marc Vallée
Starring Matthew McConaughey, Jared Leto
Opened February 15
Certificate 15
9/10



ONLY LOVERS LEFT ALIVE
Director Jim Jarmusch
Starring Tom Hiddleston, Tilda Swinton
Opened February 21
Certificate 15
8/10



TIM'S VERMEER
Director Teller
Starring Tim Jensen, Penn Jillette
Opened January 17
Certificate 12A
7/10



STALINGRAD
Director Fedor Bondarchuk
Starring Thomas Kretschmann, Pyotr Fyodorov
Opened February 21
Certificate 15
6/10



► **Only Lovers Left Alive** In the five years since his last film, *The Limits Of Control*, director Jim Jarmusch has formed a new band, SQÜRL, and curated a bill for ATP in New York. Jarmusch, of course, is no stranger to music – he has cast musicians ranging from ex-Sonic Youth drummer Richard Edson to Tom Waits, Joe Strummer, Iggy Pop, Jack and Meg White. For *Only Lovers Left Alive*, one of his characters – Adam (Tom Hiddleston) – is a musician, living in modern-day Detroit. Adam is also a vampire, as is his (very) long-term partner, Eve (Tilda Swinton), who is hanging out in Tangier with none other than Christopher Marlowe (John Hurt). Adam and Eve are an odd couple – he is gloomy and reclusive, she is spirited and playful. Reunited in Detroit, Adam takes Eve for a spin round the sites – “That’s Jack White’s old house” – before

Eve’s sister Ava (Mia Wasikowska) turns up to spoil the party. As you would expect from a filmmaker as idiosyncratic as Jarmusch, *Only Lovers Left Alive* exists entirely outside the current trend for cinematic vampires: no tweeny *Twilight* here, nor gruesome monster mash. Instead, this is a mischievous, hyper-literate film – elegantly shot entirely at night by Jarmusch and his cameraman Yorick Le Saux – that finds fresh ways of presenting the hoariest of vampire movie clichés. Even the Gothic typeface used in the opening credits is

playful. Hiddleston and Swinton, of course, are an excellent double act: pale and interesting old souls drifting through a desolate modern world, with only their connoisseurship to keep them going.

► **Tim's Vermeer** A documentary about the contested techniques of Dutch Master Johannes Vermeer may not, at first glance, sound like entertaining viewing: coursework for an A-level History Of Art student, or something a bit dry on BBC Four on a Wednesday night. As it is, *Tim's Vermeer* is both enlightening and surprisingly great fun – a clever little ‘how did they do that?’ masterminded by magicians Penn and Teller. They start with a question: did Vermeer use optical devices to achieve the near-photographic quality of his art? To help answer the question, they formulate a witty exercise involving software pioneer Tim Jensen, who builds a replica of Vermeer’s studio in a San Antonio warehouse, learns how to grind lenses, read Dutch and spends 130 days painstakingly repainting Vermeer’s *The Music Lesson* inch by inch. The current owner of *The Music Lesson* is the Queen, no less, which affords Penn (who presents; Teller directs) the opportunity to gag around at Buckingham Palace. David Hockney cameos. It’s a clever film: one that is essentially asking you to watch paint dry, but also raises some droll questions about obsession, the nature of art and the role of the artist.

► **Stalingrad** Director Fedor Bondarchuk is hardly the first filmmaker to bring to the big screen one of the bloodiest battles of WWII. He is, however, the first to render the horror of Stalingrad in IMAX-ready 3D. Accordingly, Bondarchuk’s film is both a faintly old-fashioned period war film and also a high-end, effects-driven blockbuster. After a clumsy prologue in today’s Fukushima, we spool back to 1942 and what remains of Stalingrad, midway into the German siege, with the Russian army advancing across the Volga, the city in flames ahead. What follows includes some of the film’s best action sequences, as the Nazis blow up fuel supplies to hinder the Soviet advance, and a fierce stand-off between German troops and a handful of Russians who have holed up in a multi-storey house close to German command. Once the action calms down and the story itself emerges, the flaws in

Bondarchuk’s project become clear. Largely, they are to do with the thinly drawn characters, many of whom seem to have come straight out of central casting. A sadistic Nazi commanding officer,

you say? A love story between a noble Prussian officer and a Russian girl, yes? This isn’t *Cross Of Iron*. What Bondarchuk’s film lacks in originality – or, indeed, characterisation – it makes up for in grim, attritional realism. Bondarchuk – whose previous credits include *The 9th Company*, about Russian troops in Afghanistan – has a war correspondent’s eye for detail. There is no plane blown up, no tank overturned, no soldier turned into a flaming ball of screaming flesh that we do not see rendered in excruciating 3D detail.

Jarmusch’s hyper-literate *Only Lovers Left Alive* exists outside the trend for cinematic vampires

Also out...

THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

OPENS FEBRUARY 7

Ralph Fiennes directs and stars as Charles Dickens, here taking a secret mistress.

ROBOCOP

OPENS FEBRUARY 7

A case of remake/remodel for the ‘80s action film, co-starring Gary Oldman and Michael Keaton.

BASTARDS

OPENS FEBRUARY 14

The latest from Claire Denis: film noir in the director’s typically elliptical style.

CUBAN FURY

OPENS FEBRUARY 14

Nick Frost’s salsa comedy with Chris O’Dowd, Ian McShane and *Parks And Recreation*’s Rashida Jones.

HER

OPENS FEBRUARY 14

Reviewed last month. Spike Jonze’s rom-com with Joaquin Phoenix falling in love with a computer program.



THE LEGO MOVIE

OPENS FEBRUARY 14

It’ll do until the next Muppets film arrives. Basically, some good Lego fellas unite to save the universe from being glued together by some bad Lego fellas.

THE MONUMENTS MEN

OPENS FEBRUARY 14

George Clooney leads John Goodman, Bill Murray and others into WWII Europe. Dad’s Army meets *The Dirty Dozen*, then.

NYMPHOMANIAC VOLUME 1 & 2

OPENS FEBRUARY 21

Latest piece of provocative cinema from Lars Von Trier, with Charlotte Gainsbourg.

THE BOOK THIEF

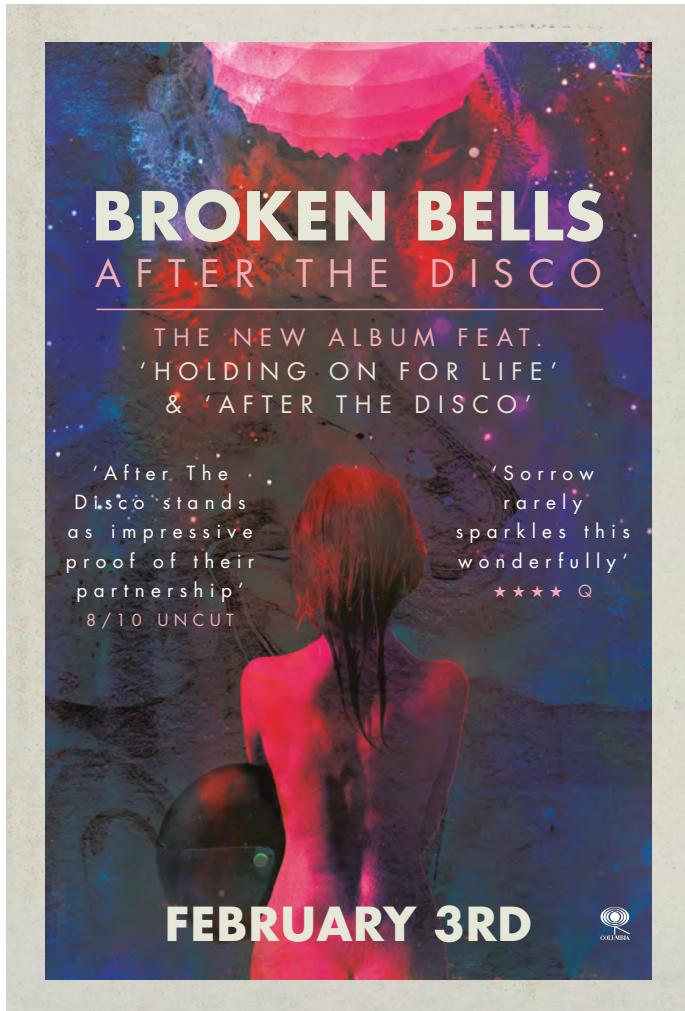
OPENS FEBRUARY 26

Another WWII drama, this time about the travails of a young girl in Germany as the war escalates.

NON-STOP

OPENS FEBRUARY 28

Liam Neeson kicks ass as an air marshal out to foil a hijack.



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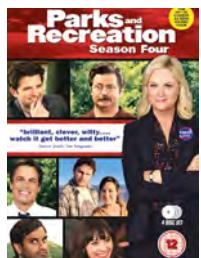
THIS MONTH: PLAY IT COOL! | CSNY | WILKO JOHNSON | DOCTOR WHO



PARKS AND RECREATION Season Four

FOUR SUN PRODUCTIONS

Moustache combs, long-ass rice and Nefertiti's Fjord... the strange hinterland of America's best sitcom. By John Mulvey



NICK OFFERMAN, a 43-year-old actor with a splendid moustache and a key role in what might currently be America's best sitcom, is an interesting guy. Last year, he wrote and starred in a video for the LA indie band Fidlar, in which he goes on an extended urinating spree. Throughout the clip, he wears a T-shirt

8/10

emblazoned with the logo of the Offerman Wood Shop, an actual business where the actor and his colleagues "like to carve spoons, chainsaw stumps, plank canoes [and] keep our chisels sharp with stones". At www.offermandwoodshop.com, one can buy meat paddles (\$47) and moustache combs (\$75), as well as autographed copies of Offerman's book, *Paddle Your Own Canoe*.

Among the topics addressed in *Paddle Your Own Canoe* are, apparently, "meat" and "manliness", as well as Offerman's wife, the actress Megan Mullally, who plays his terrifying ex in *Parks And Recreation*. At this point, real life and absurdist sitcom seem to be collapsing in on themselves, given that Offerman's character, Ron Swanson, is a local government employee with a love of meat, woodworking, and extreme male self-sufficiency.

Whether Offerman embraces Swanson's Tea Partyish desire to eliminate more or less all government agencies and activity is, one suspects, less likely. In *P&R*, Offerman strives to undermine local government by filling his office – the Parks & Recreation department in a small Indiana town called Pawnee – with a selection of amusingly incompetent staffers. There is his personal assistant, April Ludgate (Aubrey Plaza), who has elevated hostile adolescent apathy to a high art; April's husband Andy Dwyer (the brilliant Chris Pratt), a galumphing man-child who frequently pretends to be "Burt Macklin, FBI" and falls over a lot; and Tom Haverford (Aziz Ansari), a deluded playa who calls noodles "long-ass rice". In all of this, though, Swanson is thwarted by his deputy, Leslie Knope (Amy Poehler, the ostensible star of the show), a hyper-efficient idealist whose love of her job is only equalled by her love for Pawnee.

Over several series (the sixth is currently being screened in the US), it would have been easy for Greg Daniels and Michael Schur, the architects of *Parks And Recreation*, to point up the antagonisms between Swanson, mildly sociopathic right-winger, and Knope, the noble busybody with a thing for legislative protocols (and, it transpires in Series Four, for Joe Biden). Indeed, that may have been the original plan judging by 2009's first season, in which Knope was more irritating, and the show resembled an attempt to cash in

SCORING:

10 A true classic 9 Essential 8 Excellent
7 Very good 6 Good 4-5 Mediocre 1-3 Poor

on *The Office (USA)*'s success.

Ushered in by an episode about the marriage of two gay penguins, however, the second and third series found Schur and Daniels radically upping their game. The mockumentary format remained, just about, but the characters – including new recruits Rob Lowe and Adam Scott as Pawnee's city managers – became more likeable, and their vigorously repressed love for each other came to the fore. In many ways, *P&R* is a classic piece of American schmaltz. It exalts the charm of an eccentric Midwestern town, fetishises the honour and fulfilment that can be earned by serving one's community, and features a cast of characters whose craven whimsies cannot entirely hide the fundamental goodness of heart that lies within.

Fortunately, the scenarios, jokes and personalities are so relentlessly entertaining – and, critically, the sentimentality almost always comes from a slightly skewed angle – that a lack of snarkier laughs seems pretty irrelevant. UK fans will already have seen the first three series on

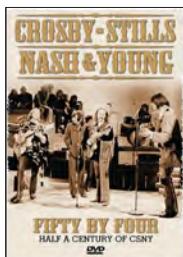
DVD (the first two also aired on BBC4 last year), and will be well versed in Pawnee lore: the violent, racist town hall murals; local TV hosts Joan Callamezzo (predatory) and Perd Hapley (hapless); the cop played by Louis CK, prepping his *American Hustle* role; Andy's risible grunge band, Mouse Rat; the tragic, totemic miniature horse, Li'l Sebastian.

Series Four tweaks the formula, as Leslie Knope stands for the town council, opposing a dim rich kid (Paul Rudd, great as ever) and his much less dim electoral agent (Kathryn Hahn). Opportunities for farce remain manifold – an election rally at Pawnee ice rink is a fantasia of pratfalls – and the brief lifespan of Tom's Entertainment 720 company provides a showcase for one of the best of *P&R*'s many recurring characters, imbecilic playboy Jean-Ralphio (Ben Schwartz).

There are emotional complexities, too, not least between Leslie and Ben Wyatt, the oft-flummoxed nerd played by Adam Scott. Mostly, though, *Parks And Recreation* Series Four is a kind of madcap analogue to *The West Wing* (Bradley "Josh" Whitford even makes a cameo), in which political intrigue, with all its cynicism and expediencies, is given a feelgood spin, and decency mostly endures.

That *P&R* achieves this without appearing disingenuous, cloying, or even particularly twee, is remarkable. That it does so while packing in a bunch of subplots (Andy's discovery of Women's Studies is a highlight), bizarre local colour (the radio host who favours "Lesbian Afro-Norwegian Funk Duo" Nefertiti's Fjord is Dan "Homer Simpson" Castellaneta), and the odd auspicious director (Nicole Holofcener helms Episode 8) is nothing short of miraculous. Swanson, meanwhile, faces a triple threat from Tammy 2, his second ex-wife (Mullally), Tammy 1, formidable first ex (Patricia Clarkson) and Tammy 0, his feral mother (Paula Pell). His reward for such an ordeal comes in Episode 18. Too staunch to brag about a sexual conquest, the evidence of intercourse is clear for all his workmates to see: in a strong morning-after tradition, he wears his "Tiger Woods outfit".

EXTRAS: None.



CROSBY STILLS NASH & YOUNG Fifty By Four - Half A Century Of CSNY

PRIDE

50 years of close-harmony feuding

This survey of the career(s) of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young is long on talk, but has no fresh input from C,S,N, or Y (they appear in archive

interview clips). The musical content is scant, too. But CSNY collaborators such as drummer Dallas Taylor and engineer Bill Halverson deliver a lively summary of the quartet's ups and downs, showing that tension was present, even when the Laurel Canyon harmonies were sweet. As one collaborator notes: "It was never 'bury the hatchet'. The hatchet head was always out."

EXTRAS: Extended interviews.
5/10 ALASTAIR MCKAY

8/10



DOCTOR WHO The Web Of Fear

BBC DVD

Recovered! A classic Who adventure

When it was announced in October 2013 that nine episodes of *Doctor Who* missing since the 1960s had been discovered in a dusty TV station storeroom in Nigeria, it wasn't just great news for *Who* geeks,

but TV and pop cultists everywhere hoping legendary "lost" works might yet be found. The best of the stories recovered (the other is "Enemy Of The World"), it's Patrick Troughton in the fabled "Yetis in the underground" one, and lives up to reputation: sweet, creepy, set-shaking fun. Sadly, episode three (reconstructed from stills and soundtrack) remains lost. But we live in renewed hope.

EXTRAS: None.
DAMIEN LOVE

8/10



ENOUGH SAID

20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

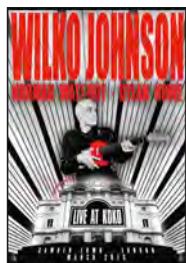
Wry, grown-up romcom starring the late James Gandolfini

Directed by US indie stalwart Nicole Holofcener, *Enough Said* features one of the final performances of James Gandolfini – as

a huggable good guy. Julia Louis-Dreyfus plays a divorcee who starts seeing eligible Albert, only to realise that he's the ex of her new best friend (Toni Collette) – but neglects to mention it to either. You may find yourself doing a double take – yes, that's Elaine from *Seinfeld* snogging Tony Soprano! – but the duo spark to surprisingly winsome effect.

EXTRAS: Featurettes.
6/10 JONATHAN ROMNEY

7/10



WILKO JOHNSON Live At Koko, March 2013

CADIZ MUSIC

Pulsating, valedictory performance from Oil City's finest

The red and black Telecaster spits riffs, the angular figure shimmies robotically and barks the familiar Thames

Delta news, that he's "going back home" and be seeing us "in the morning, down by the jetty". With the gifted rhythm duo of Norman Watt-Roy and Dylan Howe on hand, this is a definitive showcase of Wilko's unique talents, with the love from the crowd tangible.

EXTRAS: Super interview with Milton-loving **8/10** astronomer Johnson, with bites from *Oil City Confidential* and rare performances.
NEIL SPENCER

9/10



THE LEBANESE ROCKET SOCIETY

SODA

Space is the place...
Earnest but engaging documentary chronicling a forgotten chapter of modern Middle Eastern history – the bid by a small group of students at Haigazian University in Beirut to make Lebanon

a competitor in the early '60s space race. Their efforts, despite a tiny budget and limited resources, were creditable – *Cedar IV* reached the edge of orbit in 1963, and was commemorated on a stamp. The justly proud reminiscences of those involved are a wrenching reminder of Lebanon's immense promise, shortly to be buried beneath decades of war.

EXTRAS: None.
ANDREW MUELLER

7/10



JULIAN LENNON Through The Picture Window

RIGHT TRACK

The son rises again
A companion piece to *Everything Changes*, his first album in over a decade, this documentary examines how Lennon returned to music after a period of working as

a photographer, seemingly less troubled by his father's shadow. Bono and Steven Tyler praise Julian's determination to be his own man (though the latter's claim that he took his dad's gift and "stretched it tenfold" is debatable), while Lennon is disarmingly honest about his worth as a jobbing musician.

EXTRAS: Video clips for all *Everything Changes* **7/10** tracks, acoustic performances, extended interviews.
TERRY STAUNTON

7/10



PLAY IT COOL!

NETWORK



Winner's world of pop...

THE '60S POP movie may not have produced the most distinguished canon in British cinema but it allowed certain directors to etch their names on the map. There were entries from the great (Richard Lester's Beatles films, John Boorman's Dave Clark Five vehicle *Catch Us If You Can*) and the good (Peter Yates, who captained Cliff on his *Summer Holiday* before

graduating to the wilder ride of *Bullitt*).

And then there was Michael Winner. In 1962, the late polymath and testy bon viveur teamed up with cowlicked beat boy Billy Fury in *Play It Cool!*. This creaky musical represents a long-lost world of British pop, just before the Beatles generation arrived to blow the cobwebs away. But 'til they did, another Liverpudlian held sway. The man born Ronald Wycherley plays up-and-coming rocker Billy Universe, off to Brussels with his band the Satellites. There's much time-wasting humour revolving around this journey: but by the time Billy has hung around Gatwick and serenaded the stewardesses, the flight is cancelled. The rest of the film is spent hopping between Soho nightclubs with an heiress who's defying her crusty papa (Dennis Price) to pursue a love-rat pop star.

The thin plot is a hanger for a series of songs, spirited Twist sequences and some lame comedy, never lamer than when Bernie Winters bursts in wearing a zany hat. The big draws are appearances by Helen Shapiro and Bobby Vee, but you can also spot Shane Fenton, a decade before Alvin Stardust, and an unsettlingly louche Lionel Blair.

Fury is agreeably raw in his rockier numbers. An unashamed Elvis emulator, he can't be faulted on his snake-hipped postures, but when it comes to delivering his lines, he's an exquisitely lacquered plank. The real interest is historical. *Play It Cool!* documents a time when pop hadn't properly begun to challenge Britain's class hierarchy, and although the film's heroes have a veneer of rebellion, it's clear the old ways are firmly in place. Billy and co are outsiders politely venturing into a privileged middle-aged world where establishment showbiz holds sway. And while the Soho scenes pay lip service to an emerging multi-ethnic London, there's still plenty of casual racism served up at a Chinese nightclub.

Still, Billy went on to play a version of himself in *That'll Be The Day* (1973), while among his sidekicks, Ray Brooks would soon incarnate hipster-Lothario cool in Richard Lester's *The Knack...* (1965) – while Jeremy Bulloch donned the Boba Fett costume for George Lucas. As for Michael Winner, the rest is, after a fashion, legend. **JONATHAN ROMNEY**

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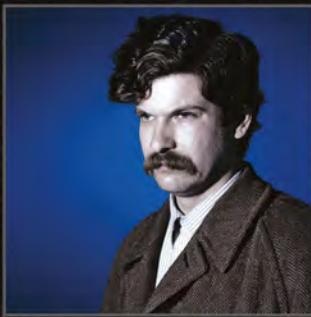


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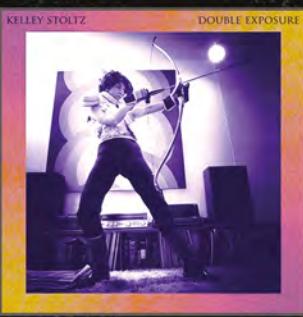


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SETLIST

- 1 From Hank To Hendrix
- 2 On The Way Home
- 3 Helpless
- 4 Love In Mind
- 5 Mellow My Mind
- 6 Are You Ready For The Country
- 7 Someday
- 8 Changes
- 9 Harvest
- 10 Old Man
- 11 A Man Needs A Maid
- 12 Ohio
- 13 Southern Man
- 14 Mr Soul
- 15 Pocahontas
- 16 After The Gold Rush
- 17 Journey Through The Past
- 18 Needle Of Death
- 19 Heart Of Gold
- ENCORE**
- 20 Comes A Time
- 21 Long May You Run

NEIL YOUNG

MASSEY HALL, TORONTO, JANUARY 12, 2014

The incorrigible master returns to his old hometown with a bountiful harvest of hits. *“Dream up, dream up, let me fill your cup!”*

GIVING THE PEOPLE what they want has never been high on Neil Young's list of priorities. Indeed, after almost a half-century of unexpected detours, hard left-turns and other moves that would've killed lesser careers, the man's contrarian streak seems more like a *raison d'être*. Many are the disgruntled ticket-buyers – not least in the UK last summer – who've come expecting the sweetly plaintive folk songs of their youth only to receive squalls of guitar feedback instead. Nor has he ever been afraid to toss out setlists of familiar fare in favour of obscurities or yet-to-be-released albums performed in their entirety, the latter gambit

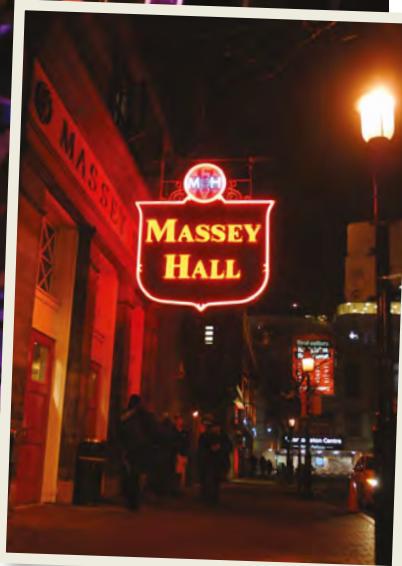
marking the first and last time some fans ever got through *Greendale*.

Perhaps that's why the seemingly conservative nature of Young's first performances of 2014 have a radical aspect all the same. For one thing, his decision to start the year with a slate of classics-heavy solo shows in New York and four Canadian cities flew in the face of reports of an imminent all-covers album recorded with Jack White and previewed at Farm Aid last September. (Only two covers crop up in the New York and Toronto sets.) These gigs also mark a gentler respite between legs of his considerably louder Alchemy Tour with Crazy Horse, with more shows planned for Ireland and the UK in July.

As was the case at Carnegie Hall, the setlist in Toronto is unusually generous toward the fans who didn't follow Young past the commercial high-water mark of *Harvest* in 1972, with “A Man Needs A Maid”, “Old Man”, “Helpless” and “Ohio” figuring alongside two songs that date back to his tenure in Buffalo Springfield. Judging by the howls of recognition, many are pleased that tonight's repertoire isn't a million miles from the ones on *Live At Massey Hall 1971* – recorded in this venue – and *Live At The Cellar Door*, the sterling 1970 recording that is the latest instalment of his Archives Performances Series.

Of course, not everyone came to hear the most widely cherished entries in

Home on the stage:
Young at the historic
Massey Hall



the back catalogue. Late in the show, Young gently ribs the audience members still “waiting for me to do my hit”. But before he can proceed with “Heart Of Gold”, he’s interrupted by a loyalist in the crowd obviously aware of the Carnegie Hall setlist: “We want the Bert Jansch cover!” Though an old hand at ignoring requests, Young has a chuckle, before obliging with a stark rendition of “Needle Of Death” and a story about the impact of Jansch’s music when he first heard it at a fellow songwriter’s apartment not far from Massey Hall.

It’s one of many special moments in a concert that serves as a reminder of the grace and beauty of Young’s most enduring songs, as well as the sly humour and idiosyncrasies that have ensured his continued relevance. Following a four-night run at Carnegie Hall that saw tickets exchange hands for as much as \$3,000, the Toronto show is the first of four Canadian concerts organised to raise money for a First Nations band battling the federal government over the expansion of energy projects on protected treaty lands in Northern Alberta. Along with the benefit concerts, he’s been promoting the cause with politician-baiting press conferences and much talk of the biofuel-powered LincVolt car that allows him to indulge his

love of the open road while spurning fossil fuels. At Massey Hall, the evening opens with music by native drummers and Diana Krall, whose own ’70s-heavy repertoire includes nimble covers of songs by Tom Waits, Randy Newman and Warren Zevon.

Young spends his two-hour set moving between his seat within a circle of acoustic guitars (plus a banjo and harmonicas) and the pianos and pipe organ elsewhere on the stage. Stories about instruments serve as preambles for many songs, though some anecdotes are cryptic at best, like the one about the bullet hole he found in one guitar.

Young is more loquacious about the stand-up piano that was originally rented (and never returned) for his then-new home studio during the sessions for *After The Gold Rush*. “I’ve written several songs on it that make no sense at all,” he says wryly. “But I know there’s a message for me in it somehow.” He makes his case with a superb performance of *Harvest*’s “Are You Ready For The Country”, the piano’s metallic clatter evoking an oldtime saloon.

Far weirder is the “Mr Soul” that wheezes out of the pipe organ positioned a few steps above the stage. His back to the audience, Young works the keys and pedals with the look of a crazed old organist in a country church whose congregation has long since fled for more hospitable territory. On the way up the stairs, he pauses to share a quiet moment with the cigar-store Native American statue that has been a fixture on his stages for many years. The tribulations of North America’s indigenous peoples have been a theme in Young’s lyrics for even longer. Here, on the first night of Young’s Honor The Treaties tour, the images of murders in teepees and children left “cryin’ on the ground” take on a special significance in “Pocahontas”, which Young amends to include a mention of Canada’s Big-Oil-friendly Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Young is willing to attack his hallowed classics with a vigour that defies his age

Strident performances of “Ohio” and “Southern Man” further confirm Young’s willingness to attack his most hallowed classics with a vigour that defies their age – and his, too. As for fans who’ve been busy speculating about the potential treasures to be found on that purported covers album, they’re well served by “Needle Of Death” and a striking version of Phil Ochs’ “Changes”. The latter is preceded by some reminiscing about the “little stages” in Greenwich Village and Toronto’s Yorkville strip whose performers fired the young Neil’s passions. It’s hard not to think of the Coen brothers’ vision of the period in *Inside Llewyn Davis* and wonder whether Young might resume his occasional career as a filmmaker to make a cinematic riposte. Even if that’s just a pipe dream, Young’s latest visit to Massey Hall proves that few peers can match his ability to give the past a place in the present – without slighting the importance of either.

JASON ANDERSON

Cass McCombs

QUEEN ELIZABETH HALL, LONDON,
JANUARY 13, 2014

Cultish, wandering singer-songwriter plays his biggest ever gig. Fame at last?

YOU MIGHT IMAGINE that Cass McCombs – he of the checked shirt, Vans and uncharacteristically tamed hair – has a load of entertaining anecdotes to share and a talent for between-song one-liners. After all, he’s been itinerant for much of his adult life and has spent long periods living in his car. But no: he addresses the audience just twice, and then only to offer polite thanks and wishes for a good night. McCombs has manifold followers on Twitter but has never posted a single tweet – not one, evidently, for unnecessary chat.

At any rate, everything the enigmatic Californian wants to say is there in his songs, some of it on latest (double) album *Big Wheel And Others*, which comprises most of this set, although he and his band draw from as far back as his 2003 debut, *A*. McCombs’ songs are inventive melds of country soul, grungey Americana, honky-tonk and ’60s R’n’B, as well as traditional folk and blues. They range in tempo from languid tidal flow to freight-train hurtle, and tap a history that reaches from Woody Guthrie and The Drifters to Lambchop and Calexico.

McCombs switches between an electric guitar (with tremolo arm) and an acoustic throughout, but a fair amount of the character work – notably, the spindly, Television-like tones of “Morning Star” and the surprisingly menacing mix of chain-gang blues and jive on “Lionkiller” – is done by former Radar Brothers man Daniel Lead, who also plays pedal steel. Not that there’s a whiff of individual grandstanding, least of all from Daniel Allaire, whose kick drum remains resolutely silent until a good six songs in.

It’s hard to nominate highlights from such a beautifully pitched set, but “What Isn’t Nature”, where McCombs howls so hard over the cranked tumult his voice cracks, and regret-stained finale “County Line” stand out, the latter’s chorus line, “What did I have to do to make you want me?”, suggesting a place where hopes fade fast. Somewhere, you suspect, the singer once knew very well indeed.

SHARON O’CONNELL

Wandering soul:
Cass McCombs



Mike Scott with classic lineup
members Trevor Hutchinson, left,
and Anto Thistlethwaite, right



THE WATERBOYS

HAMMERSMITH APOLLO, LONDON, DECEMBER 18, 2013

“The chains all around me will fall away at last!” 25 years on, Mike Scott and old friends recreate the epic *Fisherman’s Blues* sessions

THE LIVE RECREATION of a classic album is pretty familiar business these days, but how about a live recreation of the sessions which resulted in a classic album? A show predicated not just on evocative songs recorded 25-odd years ago, but on a nostalgia for outtakes that – up until a couple of months ago – most of the crowd in the Hammersmith Apollo tonight had never even heard?

Such is the enjoyable paradox that lies behind Mike Scott’s reunion of the *Fisherman’s Blues*-era Waterboys. “*Fisherman’s Box* is the real album,” he notes drolly, “*Fisherman’s Blues* was the sampler.” Towards the end of a shortish British/Irish tour, Scott has the air of a vindicated man, whose expansive vision has finally been realised. He has, it seems, found a way to capitalise on the legendary status of the sessions conducted by himself, Steve Wickham, Anto Thistlethwaite and Trevor Hutchinson through the latter half of the 1980s.

All four have reconvened here, raggle-taggle swagger artfully recaptured with the exception of Hutchinson, the implacable bassist who looks like he grew into a proper job in senior management (appearances can be deceptive – he has in fact remained a roving folk musician, as

part of Lúnasa). For strict historical veracity, the quartet should be joined by a different drummer for every song. But, as it is, the excellent current Waterboys incumbent, Ralph Salmins, provides the backbeat consistency that the band lacked during those flighty ‘80s adventures.

“The ‘80s were so rubbish,” Scott suggests during a carefully scripted introduction that, in its invective against synthesisers, drum machines and so forth, betrays a blissful detachment from the 1980s revivals that have cycled round and round for the best part of two decades. The musical explorations of The Waterboys were, he explains, a reaction to – fine phrase, this – “gestural stadium rock”; exactly the sort of music, of course, that many expected Scott to make in the wake of *This Is The Sea*.

Instead, he went off in a different and ostentatiously rootsier direction, signposted by the covers revisited from those old jams: “*Girl From The North Country*”; “*The Raggle Taggle Gypsy*”; Ray Charles’ “*Come Live With Me*” (magnificent); “*I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry*”; an uproarious, locomotive spiritual, “*On My Way To Heaven*”; and, best of all, the Celtic Soul epiphany of “*Sweet Thing*”. Wickham’s quicksilver improvisations on

fiddle grab the spotlight, but it’s Thistlethwaite who emerges as crucial to the sound: not so much with his Clemons-ish sax breaks, but with the distinctive electric mandolin ring that underpins so many of these songs, from “*Fisherman’s Blues*” itself back to an equally radiant, if substantially less well-known, “*Higherbound*”.

Scott doesn’t resurrect the most obvious abandoned songs collected on *Fisherman’s Box*; there’s no “*Higher In Time*”, say, or “*Too Close To Heaven*”. But where could he begin and end with this surfeit of riches? He starts with a neat piece of theatre, wandering onstage alone singing “*Strange Boat*”, then letting this extraordinary lineup reconstitute itself, one by one, as each verse rolls out.

He ends with a joyfully rambunctious “*And A Bang On The Ear*”, its open-hearted sentimentality having even more resonance 25 years down the line. The support act, Freddie Stevenson, and 21st-Century Waterboy James Hallawell help out in the Rolling Thunder-ish mêlée. Then, at the death, roadies bring out a few chairs, shades and spare mandolins, and the entire company pose, before the backdrop of Spiddal House, to recreate the group shot that graced the cover of *Fisherman’s Blues*.

SETLIST

- 1 Strange Boat
- 2 Higherbound
- 3 You In The Sky
- 4 A Girl Called Johnny
- 5 Girl From The North Country
- 6 Stranger To Me
- 7 When Ye Go Away
- 8 Tenderfootin’
- 9 When Will We Be Married?
- 10 Come Live With Me
- 11 The Raggle Taggle Gypsy
- 12 We Will Not Be Lovers
- 13 I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry
- 14 Don’t Bang The Drum
- 15 Sweet Thing/Blackbird
- 16 On My Way To Heaven
- 17 Fisherman’s Blues
- ENCORE**
- 18 Dunford’s Fancy
- 19 The Whole Of The Moon
- 20 How Long Will I Love You?
- 21 And A Bang On The Ear

It’s an arch gesture, a historical re-enactment of a moment frozen in time – and exactly the kind of thing that makes some people recoil from these nostalgic projects. Nevertheless, it’s also a tribute to a period, half Mike Scott’s lifetime ago, when he tapped into a music that illuminated and transformed his cultural life – and, perhaps, the cultural lives of a good few of us in the audience, too. Under the circumstances, a little rheumy-eyed pantomime can probably be excused... *JOHN MULVEY*

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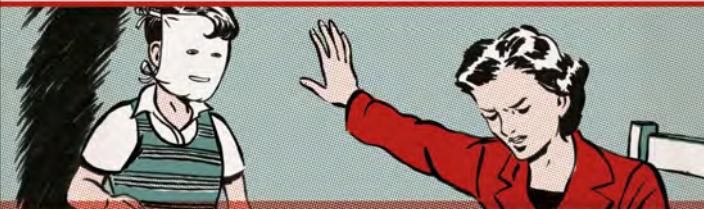
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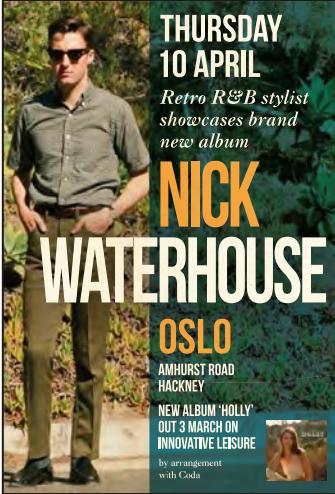
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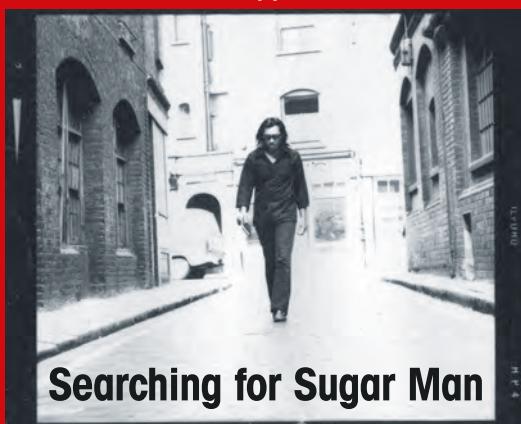
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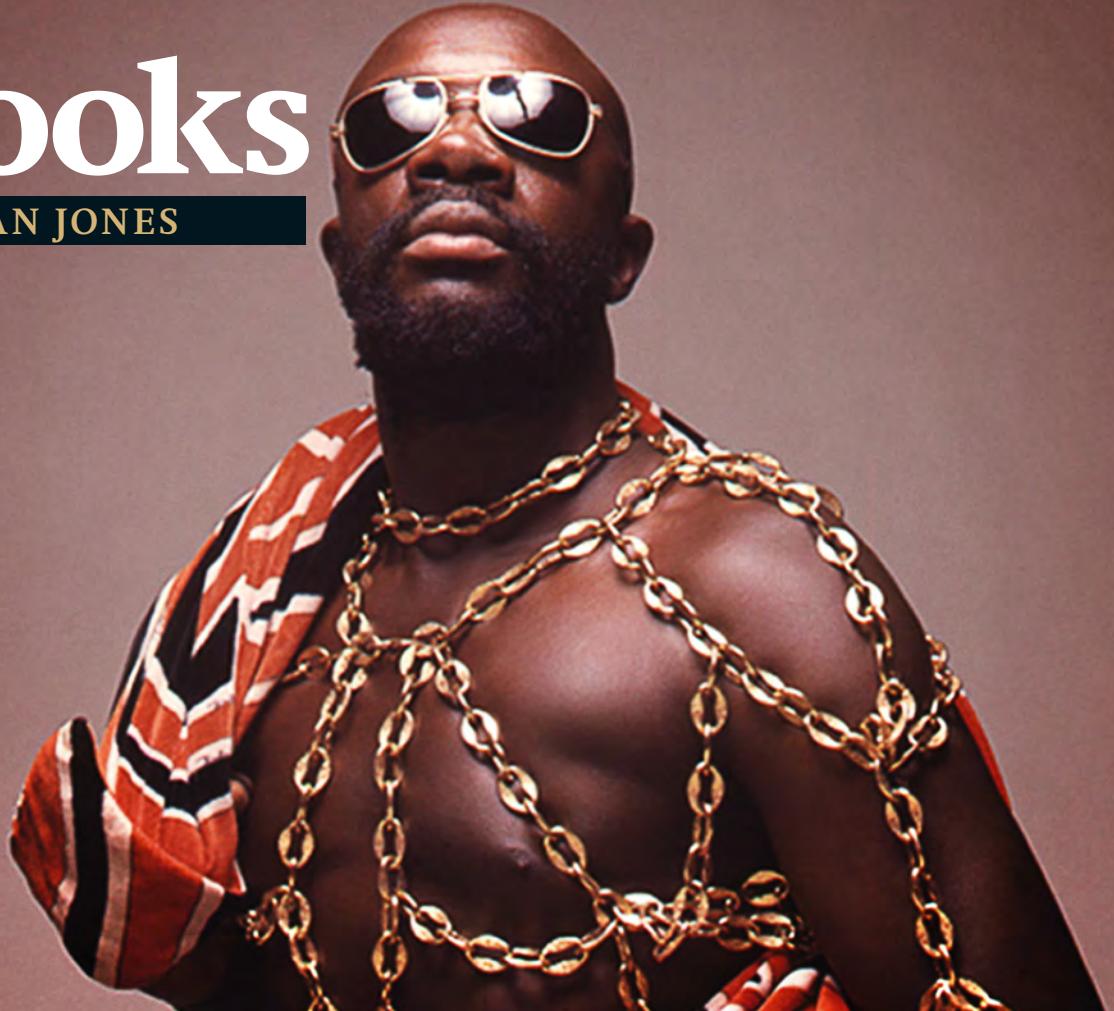
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Stax hitman
Isaac Hayes,
New York, 1972



**Respect Yourself:
Stax Records And
The Soul Explosion**

Robert Gordon

BLOOMSBURY

9/10

competing with large, of the disenfranchised seeking their own tile in the American mosaic."

The success of Stax in its heyday was astonishing. Between 1960 and 1975, it released 800 singles and 300 albums, a huge proportion of them major hits on both the R'n'B and pop charts, the label making international stars of Otis Redding, Isaac Hayes, Sam & Dave, Booker T & The MG's, Wilson Pickett and The Staple Singers, the label growing from homespun beginnings to a major money-making conglomerate with breath-taking velocity. For Gordon, who grew up in Memphis as Stax was establishing its commercial supremacy, it remains nothing less than miraculous that a label that recognised no racial boundaries, whose founders were white but whose talent pool was largely drawn from the local black communities, should have flourished in a place where deep into the 20th Century "plantation prejudices still prevailed".

As was the case with so many cities in America's Deep South, racism in Memphis was deeply institutionalised. President Lyndon Johnson may have introduced the Civil Rights Act in 1964, but Memphis simply ignored it, as if federal legislation had no legitimacy here and would therefore not be heeded or obeyed. The black population of Memphis

AS ROBERT GORDON reminds us in *Respect Yourself: Stax Records And The Soul Explosion*, his terrific account of the rise and fall of the great Memphis soul imprint, the Stax story is more than a record-label history. "It is an American story," he writes, "where the shoe-shine boy becomes a star, the country hayseed an international magnate. It's the story of individuals against society, of small business

thus remained unrecognised and unrepresented in local government, and was allowed no municipal voice. Its grievances and claims for equality were brushed aside, an unwelcome chorus of complaint. In the converted cinema at 926 East McLemore Ave in South Memphis where Stax built the legendary studio where in time it cranked out hit after hit after hit, young black and white musicians worked together freely. But outside, they were separated by the imperatives of unforgiving segregation. In the circumstances, Stax, in Gordon's words, became "an accidental refuge that flourished... nourished by a sense of decency" whose music "became the soundtrack for liberation, the song of triumph, the sound of the path toward freedom".

Such aspirations were not paramount in Jim Stewart's ambitions when he modestly started Satellite Records in 1957. Stewart was 27 years old then, working in a bank, studying law at night on the GI Bill and playing fiddle in a country band at weekends. Encouraged by the recent local example of Sam Phillips, a former mortuary assistant and radio technician who had made such a spectacular success of Sun Records, Stewart launched his own label as a side line that quickly became an obsession, an opportunity to make a few quick bucks that within a few years became the all-conquering Stax juggernaut. With crucial investment from his sister, Estelle Axton, Stewart moved Satellite from the rural garage where he recorded the label's first records to the site of the old Capitol movie theatre on McLemore Ave, changing the label's name to Stax (a conflation of Jim and Estelle's surnames, Stewart/Axton) in the process.

Gordon warmly relates the label's initial rise, as Stewart and Axton, with vital initial input from engineer Chips Moman (subsequently ousted in an early power struggle), attracted and encouraged what turned out to be a torrent of interracial local talent, a seemingly inexhaustible tide of gifted songwriters, arrangers and musicians, including The MG's, who became the Stax house band, most of whom were still in school when the label started. Drawing on a vast archive of vivid interviews originally conducted for a PBS documentary on

Stax, Gordon allows us to relive these exciting times.

The fledgling label's early success brought it to the attention of Jerry Wexler at Atlantic, whose distribution network brought Stax product to a national audience as part of a production deal that would eventually cost the Memphis label dearly. When the hits started coming, there seemed to be no end to them. The company grew quickly, many of its major artists discovered by its open door policy, aspiring talent often just walking in off the street, into the studio and onto the charts. These were heady times, with hits for Sam and Dave, Booker T & The MG's, William Bell, Rufus and Carla Thomas, Eddie Floyd and Wilson Pickett and, of course, Otis Redding, who was on his way to becoming an international superstar when he was killed in a plane crash that also claimed the lives of most of his backing band, The Bar-Kays. Many would later claim that Stax never recovered from the loss of Otis and it was further deeply demoralised when Warner Bros bought out Atlantic, who it now turned out owned their entire back catalogue, the result of an overlooked clause in their original agreement of which Wexler later unconvincingly argued he had no knowledge. Martin Luther King's assassination in Memphis early the following year further soured the atmosphere between black and white employees at Stax who previously had given no thought to race.

Former Memphis DJ Al Bell, who had been brought to Stax by Jim Stewart in 1965 as national promotions director, now became increasingly influential, introducing a bold new programme of expansion that included the almost-instant creation of a whole new catalogue, funded by heavy-duty loans that put the company hugely in debt but made a superstar of Isaac Hayes, who briefly brought Stax even greater riches, even as the label's original creative core began to splinter, in often bitter circumstances as Bell brought in his own people, including the gun-toting enforcer Johnny Baylor, whose criminality presaged the widespread corruption revealed in the company's subsequent fall from grace amid a tsunami of litigation and unpaid debts, the label's decline as spectacular in every instance as its brief but incredible ascendency.

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Not Fade Away

Fondly remembered this month...

AMIRI BARAKA

Radical poet, playwright and activist

1934-2014

US WRITER AMIRI Baraka was a controversial figure who left a divided legacy. An erudite poet, playwright and critic, his emergence as one of the most important African-American voices of the '60s coincided with his involvement in the black separatist movement.

He began working under his birth name of LeRoi Jones, having settled in Greenwich Village in 1957. Alongside first wife Hettie Cohen, Jones founded Totem Press and set about publishing Beat authors like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. He wrote several volumes of poetry and, in 1963, a highly regarded study of black musical traditions and their wider social context, *Blues People: Negro Music In White America*.

The assassination of Malcolm X in 1965 made him "focus on my own identity". Jones divorced his wife, renamed himself Amiri Baraka and moved to Harlem. There he co-founded the Black Arts theatre and wrote poems like "Black Art": "We want poems that kill/Assassin poems/Poems that shoot guns/Poems that wrestle cops into alleys." His newfound militancy also resulted in one-act play *Arm Yourself Or Harm Yourself* and several public pronouncements that led to accusations of homophobia, anti-semitism and misogyny. He later renounced these views, though his poem "Somebody Blew Up America", written just after 9/11, saw him stripped of his title as New Jersey's

Village voice:
Baraka in
New York,
May 10, 1975



poet laureate when he suggested that Israeli and US leaders knew about the attacks beforehand.

Baraka's spoken rhythms and vernacular were ideally suited to musical settings. In 1965 he recited "Black Art" on Sonny Murray's avant-jazz album, *Sonny's Time Now*. Though his most curious

recorded work arrived three years later, when he was backed by Sun Ra and the Myth Science Arkestra on a live piece dedicated to Malcolm X, *A Black Mass*. More recently he collaborated with The Roots on "Something In The Way Of Things (In Town)" from 2002's *Phrenology*.

RAY PRICE

Country singer and songwriter

1926-2013

Not only was Ray Price noted for his masterful baritone, he was also a pioneer. The 4/4 shuffle rhythm he introduced in the late '50s, which brought a modern pulse to traditional honky-tonk, was hugely influential. So much so that Hank Williams' bandmate Don Helms declared that "Ray Price created an era". Among the major country hits he racked up were "Crazy Arms", "City Lights" and "The Same Old Me". In the '60s he polarised fans by embracing the sophisticated pop of new Nashville, though he was partially vindicated when his version of Kris Kristofferson's "For The Good Times" fell just shy of the US Top 10 in 1970. His final album, 2007's *Last Of The Breed*, was recorded with lifelong fans Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard.

DAVE HIGGS

Eddie And The Hot Rods guitarist

1950-2013

Eddie And The Hot Rods' status as a vital link between pub rock and punk was due in no small part to the elemental guitar rush of Dave Higgs. Formerly in The Fix with Lee Brilleaux, who'd also employed him



Hot Rod:
Dave Higgs

as roadie for Dr Feelgood, he co-founded the band in 1975. The quartet's boisterous R'n'B was first uncorked on the following year's *Teenage Depression*, with Higgs' songwriting to the fore, most notably on the title track. 1977's "Do Anything You Wanna Do" cracked the Top 10, but four years later they split. He briefly reunited with the original lineup for a European tour in 1992. A special memorial show for Higgs, who has died of cancer, is being organised for late February at the Oysterfleet in Canvey Island.

DAVID RICHARDS

Queen and Bowie producer

1956-2013

David Richards produced Iggy Pop's *Blah Blah Blah* and a trio of latter-period Bowie albums, but he's best remembered for his longstanding relationship with Queen. Based at Montreux's famed Mountain

Studios, which he later owned, he oversaw their final four studio efforts: *A Kind Of Magic*, *The Miracle*, *Innuendo* and *Made In Heaven*. Richards began in 1973 as engineer at London's Chappell Studios, before moving to Switzerland two years later.

JIM HALL

Jazz guitarist

1930-2013

Pat Metheny cited Jim Hall as the "father of modern jazz guitar", adding that his gift for improvisation "reinvented what the guitar could be as a jazz instrument". Hall began on the cool jazz scene of '50s LA, where he became a major facet of Chico Hamilton's quintet. The following decade saw him work with Bill Evans, Ella Fitzgerald, Sonny Rollins and Art Farmer, before going on to record over 40 albums as bandleader.



Yusef Lateef,
Montreux Jazz
Festival, June
20, 1970

YUSEF LATEEF

Jazz/world saxophonist and bandleader

1920-2013

THE KEY TO Yusef Lateef's pluralist blend of jazz and Eastern scales, he once explained, was a fascination with diverse cultures. Sometime student of Indian flautist Saj Dev, and as enamoured with Lester Young as he was Stockhausen, Lateef became one of the great innovators of world music. "I believe one should seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave," he told the National Endowment For The Arts in 2009. "With that kind of inquisitiveness, one discovers things that were unknown before."

It was an approach that found its keenest expression from 1957's *Prayer To The East to Eastern Sounds* (1961), a series of albums that combined hard bop with exotic instrumentation like Chinese bells, rahab, shanai and koto. Lateef was chiefly a tenor

saxophonist and flute player, though the addition of oboe and bassoon to his repertoire further distanced him from traditional jazz.

Born in Chattanooga but raised in Detroit, William Huddleston began playing sax as a teenager, inspired by a fertile local scene that included Milt Jackson, Elvin Jones and Kenny Burrell. He turned pro at 18, after which he joined various swing bands and, in 1949, Dizzy Gillespie's orchestra. In the early '50s he converted to Islam, twice making the pilgrimage to Mecca and taking the name Yusef Lateef. He made his first recordings as bandleader in 1957, alongside sideman duties with Cannonball Adderley, Charles Mingus, Donald Byrd and Art Blakey over the following years. After forming his own quartet in 1964, he enjoyed a prolific output on Impulse! and Atlantic while dedicating himself to his studies. He received a master's from the Manhattan School Of Music and a doctorate from the University Of Massachusetts, where he also began to teach. In 1988 he won a Grammy for Best New Age Album for *Yusef Lateef's Little Symphony*.

SAUL ZAENTZ

Film producer, label executive

1921-2014

Saul Zaentz was feted in film circles as the Oscar-winning producer of *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, *Amadeus* and *The English Patient*, but his reputation in the music biz was far more contentious. In 1955 he joined Fantasy Records, then owned by Max and Sol Weiss, before he and his partners bought the company 12 years later. His major signing was Creedence Clearwater Revival, whose huge success was irrevocably soured by disputes over contracts and publishing rights. John Fogerty's claim that Fantasy misled him over royalties and investments resulted in court cases during the '80s and '90s. Zaentz countersued, bringing one case for defamation of character against two barely veiled attacks on Fogerty's *Centerfield*: "Zanz Kant Danz" and "Mr Greed".

BENJAMIN CURTIS

Secret Machines/School Of Seven Bells guitarist and songwriter

1978-2013

Songwriter, guitarist and drummer Ben Curtis, who has died of cancer after being diagnosed with T-cell Lymphoblastic Lymphoma last year, was a founder member of both Secret Machines and School Of Seven Bells. The Oklahoma native began in UFOFU, with his brother Brandon, in 1993. Four years later he joined Texan band Tripping Daisy, where he took up residence behind the kit for Jesus



Benjamin
Curtis in
2010

Hit Like The Atom Bomb and 2000's self-titled swansong. The brothers formed Secret Machines in Dallas that year, soon moving to Brooklyn. Two albums of spacey prog-pop followed, before Curtis, who cited Michael Rother and the Boredoms' Yoshimi P-We as key signposts, left to launch the dreamier School Of Seven Bells in March 2007. The band's most recent album was 2012's *Ghostory*.

RONNY JORDAN

Acid jazz pioneer

1962-2014

Ronny Jordan's sinuous revival of Miles Davis' "So What" marked him out as a chief architect of the acid jazz sound. The guitarist's appropriation of soul, hip-hop and R&B first came to prominence on 1992's *The Antidote*, which married swinging grooves to the stylistic influence of Wes Montgomery and Grant Green. A year later he appeared on Guru's cult classic *Jazzmatazz, Vol 1*, alongside Branford Marsalis, Donald Byrd and Lonnlie Liston Smith.

GARY GRIMSHAW

Psychedelic/proto-punk artist

1946-2014

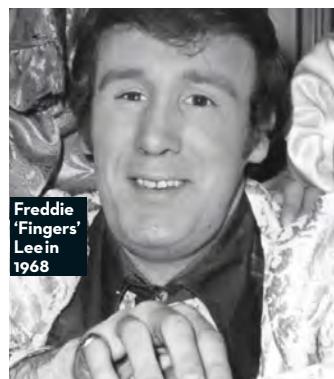
Detroit concert promoter Gail Parenteau called Gary Grimshaw "as brilliant a rock star as any of the legendary bands and events he imagined in his iconic poster art". As originator of vivid psychedelic imagery, he made his reputation designing posters for the MC5, the '60s proto-punks led by schoolfriend Rob Tyner. Grimshaw also created the cover of debut LP *Kick Out The Jams* and later became associate art director at *Creem*.

FREDDIE 'FINGERS' LEE

Rock'n'roll pianist and songwriter

1940-2014

Hearing Jerry Lee Lewis had a profound effect on Freddie 'Fingers' Lee. Previously guitarist in a skiffle group, the Durham-born musician began pounding piano for Screaming Lord Sutch, before touring with Eden Kane. By the early '60s he was in the house band at Hamburg's Star-Club, backing



Freddie
'Fingers'
Lee in
1968

visiting rock'n'rollers like Lewis, Chuck Berry and Gene Vincent. Lee also released eight albums and saw his songs covered by Tom Jones and Charlie Gracie.

THE CHILD OF LOV

Belgian indie-funk singer

1987-2013

Recording as The Child Of Lov, enigmatic Belgian musician Martijn Teerlinck arrived on the scene in 2012 with "Heal", a pop-funk 45 with strong echoes of Prince and Pharrell. Last summer saw Domino's sister label Double Six release his self-titled debut album, recorded at Damon Albarn's 13 studio and featuring cameos from Albarn, DOOM and Thundercat. Teerlinck, who also went by the name of Cole Williams, died after complications from surgery.

JAY TRAYNOR

Soul vocalist, manager

1943-2014

The smooth vocal sound of Jay And The Americans owed much to predecessors The Platters and The Harptones. Led by singer Jay Traynor, their breakthrough single was 1962's Leiber and Stoller-produced "She Cried", a Top 5 hit in the US. Traynor quit to pursue a solo career soon after and by the early '70s was part of the management team behind Mountain, West, Bruce & Laing and gospel singer Mylon LeFevre. **ROB HUGHES**

28 May - 25 June

THE EAGLES

Prince of Wales Theatre

THE BOOK OF MORMON

30 March - 3 April

ALISON MOYET

5 - 16 April

ELBOW



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THE SONGS REMAIN THE SAME

Robert Plant did just compare Led Zeppelin to a tepid bath tub in the February issue, didn't he? Forgive me if I'm wrong, but isn't his current set stuffed with those very same hits. I've seen several interviews where I've thought he's been very disrespectful to the band that made his name and all of us who bought the albums and attended the concerts. Shit, I was even sacked for playing hooky from work to go to Brussels on the Over Europe tour.

I'm at a loss as to why he seems quite prepared to play his classic songs with just about anybody, other than Jimmy, John Paul and Jason. He's in the exalted position that he's in because of all of us who have supported him down the years. I don't think that, while it's still possible, asking for a proper farewell world tour is too much to ask.

He could then go back to reinterpreting "Black Dog" with Nepalese nose flute players or anybody else that takes his fancy. I've always thought that he'd be great fronting Tinariwen, or how about a Christmas album with Bellowhead?

Steve Shaw, via email

KINKY LOGIC

While I found the news about expanded versions of *Lola Versus Powerman* and *Everybody's In Show-Biz* exciting in your recent entertaining article [February issue] about The Kinks, my eyebrows were raised with incredulity at the news that "Expanded editions of the first five studio albums plus *Arthur* follow in May." Excuse me? Were these the first five studio albums and *Arthur* that were released in extended editions in 2002 and then released in deluxe double editions in 2011? I understood the 2011 releases as there was improved sound quality, plus mono and stereo versions (where available) and a mopping up of EP rarities and demos.

So are we going to have the same albums with an extra 5.1 surround sound version (hmm!) and then a few sweepings from the studio floor to justify yet another release. Sounds like milking the cash cow blues to me!

Andy Gaines, Norwich

"Tepid bathtub"
Led Zeppelin, with
a "disrespectful"
Robert Plant, right



GEE WIZZ!

Great to see you report a prominent role for Wizz Jones at the Bert Jansch tribute concert. Nearly 140,000 people have viewed Bruce Springsteen's version of Wizz's great song "When I Leave Berlin" on YouTube. However, self-effacing Wizz is sadly not a music millionaire. His website displays a 2004 royalty statement for 12p which was deemed "too small to pay by BACs". How about some *Uncut* profiles of brilliant – but neglected – UK folk icons? Meanwhile I enjoyed reading Allan Jones' encounter with Don Arden. I made sure I was extremely polite to Don when the *NME* sent me to New York to report on ELO in the 1970s – Don himself had a suite in the Plaza, while Jeff Lynne and the band were quartered in a rather cheaper gaff a few blocks away. Pecking order very clear. Best wishes.

Bob Edmonds, via email

ENGLISH ROSE

I really enjoyed the last *Uncut*, as I always do and I have a couple of questions. In the Nick Lowe article they recommended various albums to check out. One of his best LPs was not listed. Is it because *The Rose Of England* is out of print or am I the only one that thinks that is his best album? I loved the Americana list for 2013 and I have most of them.

However, it was a surprise not to see Holly Williams' *The Highway* there. I am sure it got a release in England, so once again I must be in the minority when I say I believe it worthy of a mention as one of the best Americana albums of last year. There you have my humble views. The Lou Reed article was classic. Great reading.

Norm Tandberg, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

I'm not sure *The Rose Of England* is Nick's best album, but the title track is certainly one of his best songs. Amazingly, it does seem to be out of print. Secondhand copies are going for £30 and more on Amazon. – Allan

BLAKE'S HEAVEN

Just finishing an initial glance through the new *Uncut*, and two articles combined to trigger a great memory. It was at the ATP [RIP] a few years ago and Teenage Fanclub were backing Edwyn Collins. I shook hands with Norman Blake after and thanked him for great set. He gave me the biggest grin you've ever seen and said it was a privilege for him to back the great man. ATP and Norman – the epitome of classy and accessible music.

Oh, and where the hell is The Pastels' *Slow Summits* in your Best Of 2013 list?!

Simon Perry, Derbyshire

KNOCK DOWN GINGER

I've been trying to resist the temptation to respond to Ginger Baker's comments from a few issues ago re: his contemporaries not being able to 'swing'. As a lifelong fan of John Bonham's work, I can only say, listen to "The Lemon Song" on the second Zep album. End of. Methinks Mr Baker is just a bitter and twisted individual (probably for several decades now) and should get over himself. Isn't it interesting that he only attacked drummers who have since passed on. I say, weak as piss Ginger! Love your work. Hate your attitude. Not that he'll give a shit, but I just had to express my disappointment. Apart from that, I've been a fan of the magazine since day one and continue to be. The only lament being the downsizing of the movie section. However, you've turned me on to so many fantastic artists and bands that I'm bound to forgive you. Sincere thanks to you and the team of contributors for keeping me up to date with what's happening and season's greetings (a bit late, sorry).

Just a thought, how about a feature on "Australiana", with the likes of Nick Cave, Dave Graney, Midnight Oil, Cold Chisel, Dingoes, et al?

Graeme Smith, Traralgon, Australia

CROSSWORD



DISGUSTED, FROM SOUTHFIELDS...

As I enter my 60th year I fear I'm morphing into Disgusted, From Tunbridge Wells, a situation not helped by the latest *Uncut* and the scoring of albums you review.

Exhibit one; Ry Cooder, 1970-1987. Now no-one rates Mr Cooder higher than I do, so this collection of his first 11 LPs is hugely welcome. But as your individual rating of the albums only has one as 9 out of 10 and three rate 6, then even allowing that the sum of the parts is greater than the sum, it's surely difficult to justify the overall score of 9.

Exhibit two; an LP review that talks about 'memorable moments', 'bracing thrusts of electric guitar', 'lilting folk' and 'fine tunes' that scores a miserable and illogical 6 out of 10. Catch The Deep Dark Woods on their tour in early 2014 and shake your head at the ineptitude of the scoring editor at *Uncut*. As correspondents to *Private Eye* are wont to say, if I had a subscription to your magazine I'd cancel it. But I don't so I can't, which reminds me, I really must get round to purchasing a subscription to your magazine early in 2014!

Richard Hilton, Southfields, London

CHEERS, BUD!

Would you please give my thanks to Bud Scoppa for his fine reviews. Through these I've been introduced to some wonderful music, including my favourite album of the year, The Parson Red Heads' *Yearling*. I also agree with his box-set of the year, the Duane Allman retrospective, *Skydog*. Please keep up the superb work. Life wouldn't be the same without *Uncut*.

Paul Collingwood, via email

BAREFOOT IN THE DARK

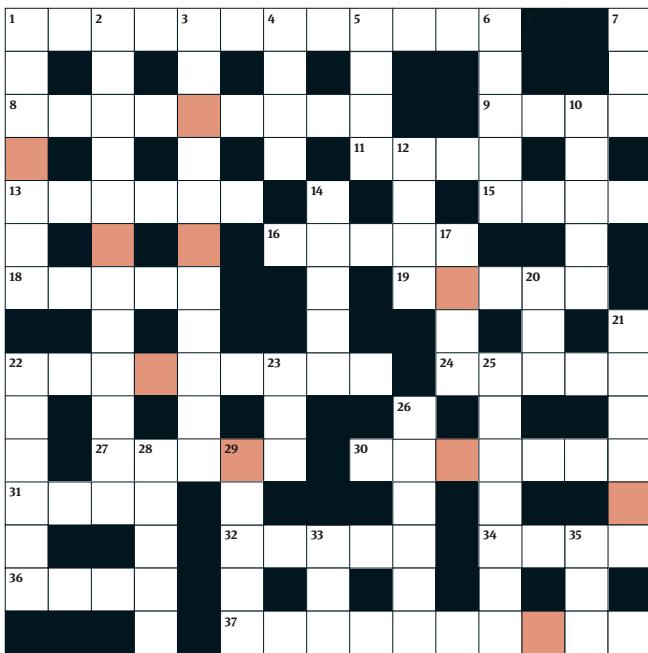
I've been a lifelong Barefoot Jerry lover, since their '70s heyday and was happy to see them referenced in your review of White Denim [December issue]. Until I read the blurb under their eponymous second LP in your pit barbecue section. "Hospitality Song" is the lead-off track of their 1971 debut *Southern Delight*, not their second album. The lead track there is "Castle Rock". Barefoot Jerry get so little attention, when they were really the best at what they did – progressive acid country rock that could both boogie and swing. It would be great if someone would look deeply into their sound and history, and pay them the respect they deserve. Charlie Daniels certainly knew about it!

Dok Webb, via email

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artwork and arrange music by genre, artist, album and discography via this interface. The X10 is also an internet radio and music streamer. The Cocktail Audio X10 starts at £379.95 and is available at www.signtifi.co.uk. NB: The prize includes wi-fi dongle worth £29.



HOW TO ENTER

The letters in the shaded squares form an anagram of a song by the Ramones. When you've worked out what it is, send your answer to: *Uncut* March 2014 Xword Comp, 9th floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London SE1 0SU. The first correct entry picked at random will win a prize. Closing date: February 27, 2014. This competition is only open to European residents.

CLUES ACROSS

- Biting and scratching, Billy Bragg puts up a real fight (5-3-4)
- On reflection, he was responsible for this Captain Beefheart album (6-3)
- The actual album released by the Pet Shop Boys (4)
- 11+37A** 1985 TV drama series with soundtrack by Eric Clapton and Michael Kamen (4-2-8)
- 13** "I wanna play cricket on the green, ride my bike across the stream", 1966 (2-1-3)
- 15** (See down)
- 16+7D** The Charlatans' Tim Burgess going solo was just another 13 across (4-1-3)
- 18+22D** Mazzy Star getting mixed up with that bird of mine (5-2-4)
- 19** Stuart Adamson's band before Big Country (5)
- 22** An REM lyric rewritten by ex-member of The Fall (4-5)
- 24** Blanco Y _____, record label for The Jesus And Mary Chain (5)
- 27** Rory Gallagher's band before going solo (5)
- 30** (See 28 down)
- 31** US alt. rock band make an appearance in *The Sweeney* (4)
- 32** (See 29 down)
- 34** Comic editor includes reference to Julianne Regan's band after leaving All About Eve (4)
- 36** Prog-rockers who shared with us "The Thoughts Of Emerlist Davjack" (4)
- 37** (See 11 across)

CLUES DOWN

- 1+21D** "If I could save _____, the

ANSWERS: TAKE200

ACROSS

- Aftershock, 6 Cher, 10 Angel, 11 Love Hurts, 12 Toto, 13+27A Heart Full of Soul, 16 Daniel, 17 Devo, 19+35A Nasty Girl, 21 Gypsy Eyes,

24 Bang, 26 Blue, 28 Loon, 30 Youth, 32 Overgrown

DOWN

- 1 A Salty Dog, 2 Tighten Up, 3 Relf, 4+22D Helter Skelter, 5 Cover Me, 7 Horslips, 8 Rush, 9 Chiffons, 14+26D Sexy Boy, 18 Mykonos, 20

first thing that I'd like to do is save every day", Jim Croce (4-2-1-6)

2+15A It's where we prefer to buy Style Council gear (3-9-4)

3 Aussie band whose albums include *Mars Needs Guitars!* and *Purity Of Essence* (6-5)

4 Linkin Park song performed without feeling (4)

5+6D Steve Winwood, Bonnie Raitt and Aerosmith all had albums with this title (4-5)

7 (See 16 across)

10 Curtis Mayfield, Sepultura and The Everly Brothers all had albums with this title (5)

12 (See 26 down)

14 (See 29 down)

17 Senegalese musician who created 'Trouble' in 2004 (4)

20 Oasis, Jam and Nick Cave all had LPs with this as the first word of the title (3)

21 (See 1 down)

22 (See 18 across)

23 "I look at yours, you laugh at mine, and love is just a miserable ___", The Smiths (3)

25 Nasty bloke within Fatima Mansions (4-3)

26+12D "I got a new suit of clothes, a pretty red rose, and a woman I can call my friend", Bruce Springsteen (6-4)

28+30A I'll get hanged, wrongly, for naming a Fairport Convention album (5-7)

29+14D+32A Difficult to see how to dance to this Fleetwood Mac album (5-2-3-5)

33 "I'm not scared, light my candles in a daze, 'cause I've found ___", from Nirvana's "Lithium" (3)

35 Alexis Korner's band whose version of "Whole Lotta Love" was used as *Top Of The Pops* theme (1-1-1)

Ten, 23+15D Sister Ray, 24 Blur, 25 Gown, 29+36A Oh Diane, 31 O.M.G., 33 God, 34 Win

HIDDEN ANSWER

"Alma Matters"

Compiled: Trevor Hungerford

UNCUT

TAKE 202 | MARCH 2014

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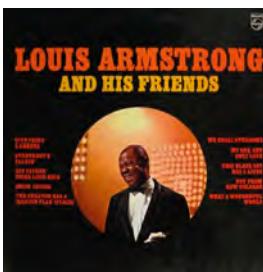




MY LIFE IN MUSIC

Neneh Cherry

From Harlem to Stockholm, from Poly Styrene to John Coltrane ... the eclectic, homebrewed soundtrack of the singer's life



A song that touches me

Louis Armstrong And Leon Thomas
The Creator Has A Masterplan (Peace) 1970

It's a beautiful meeting between the two of them, and I associate it with happy moments in my family environment. We also played it when we were sending my mother off at

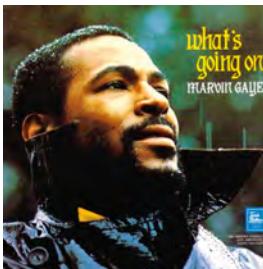
her funeral. Leon Thomas and my mother had a special relationship, and I remember meeting him on the street in New York with my family – he wore a lot of jewellery... an African shirt with, like, leather trousers. A real individual.



A soundtrack to Stockholm

Burial
Burial 2006

When this came out I was living outside Stockholm on an island – we had an amazing view of the water. This represents that little era, like it's creating a soundtrack around you. I listened to it over and over, and was struck by its resonance and soulfulness, the depths, the sounds, the beats, the melancholy... I'm addicted to contrast, so this album brought the concrete to the country.



An album I always go back to

Marvin Gaye
What's Going On 1971

This resonates in my inner sanctum, as it came out when we were living on the Lower East Side of New York and my family was having a pretty tough time. I remember driving up through Harlem and "What's Going On" was on the radio and it was raining, you know, just like on the album cover, and I was just feeling it. So when I listen to that album, it brings back that place.



The album that helped find my voice

X-Ray Spex
Germfree Adolescents 1978

This made me want to sing. Another singer I really love in the same way is Dinah Washington, but Poly Styrene could be more of a role model as she wasn't that much older than me. So she kind of led the way, into a place where I'm still going. I used to sing along, listening with her and it was almost like I found my voice. It's just so alive and ass-kicking... she was an amazing woman.



The record that made me want to rap

Tanya "Sweet Tee" Winley
Vicious Rap 1980

This was the first ever female rap record I bought – I was in a record store in New York, I was about 16, and I was like, "That's a girl's name, I'm buying that record." It's a vicious track and I still play it. It was made with a brilliant live band, the Harlem Underground Band, and it's a huge inspiration and maybe it made me want to rap. It's fresh as hell, just wicked. I love it so much.



A super-intelligent album

A Tribe Called Quest
People's Instinctive Travels And The Paths Of Rhythm 1990

Their first LP and a super kind of intelligent record. It just was full of growth, without borders and boundaries... it's poetic, it has humour. It's a really important record, one of those albums you can just go back to and listen to one track after another; "Bonita Applebum", "I Left My Wallet In El Segundo" – y'know, there's just tons of them.



An album I grew up with

John Coltrane
Giant Steps 1960

My first daughter is named after the track "Naima". The LP is like a lullaby – when I was growing up it was played so much at home that it almost makes me want to go to sleep! I know that Coltrane, for my dad [jazz trumpeter Don Cherry], was a real guru, he always spoke about him with such reverence. As long as the world's turning, the diamonds in this music just can't be taken away.



An incredibly beautiful song

Johnny Osbourne
Truths And Rights 1980

One of my all-time favourite backing tracks. It's lovingly political, and melodically it's so simple, but so heart-rending and touching. The way reggae singers from that era sing is so original, they're soulful in their simplicity. Just the quality and the sound of those records from that time, there's nothing else like it. So it's just a really meaningful track that I've listened to a lot and I'll always listen to.

Neneh Cherry's first solo album in 18 years, *Blank Project*, is released on February 25 on the Smalltown Supersound label.

IN NEXT MONTH'S UNCUT: "You got the impression he was making it up as he went along. He would just let his imagination go..."

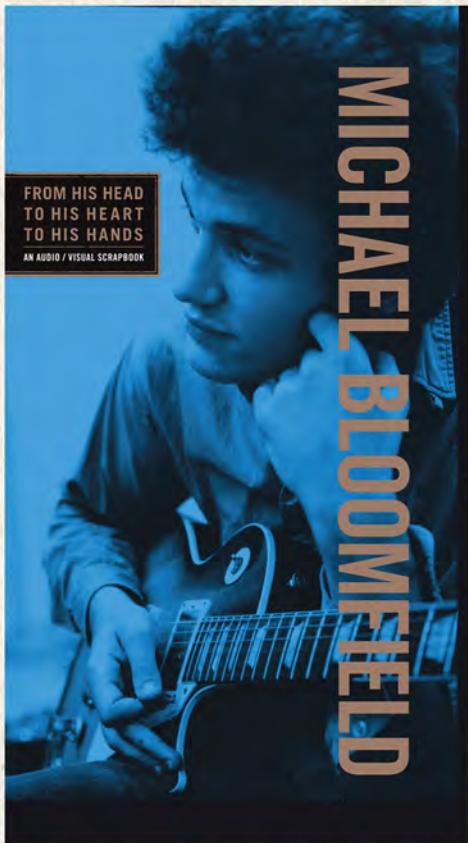


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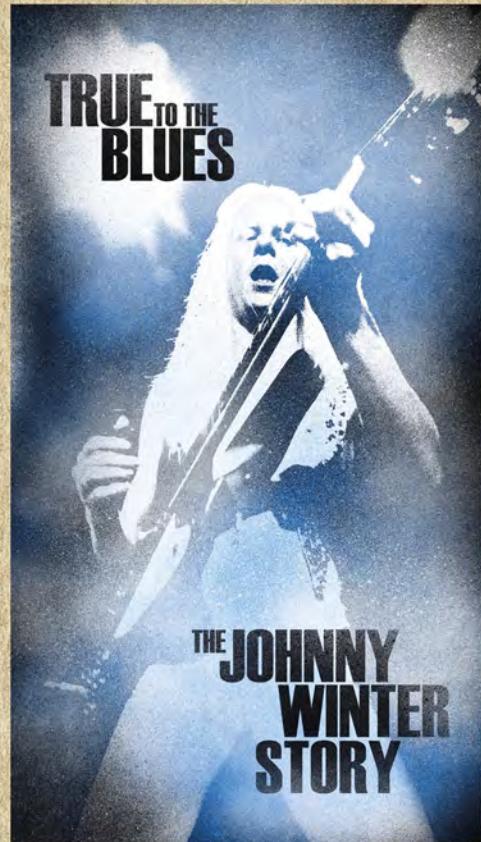
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