

TURN!
TURN!
TURN!

PETE SEEGER | 1919-2014

**39 PAGES OF
REVIEWS**

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WILKO JOHNSON
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ELBOW

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MILES DAVIS

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"We misbehaved
very badly..."

AND
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NED DOHENY
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**AFGHAN WHIGS
AND SLOWDIVE
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PLUS

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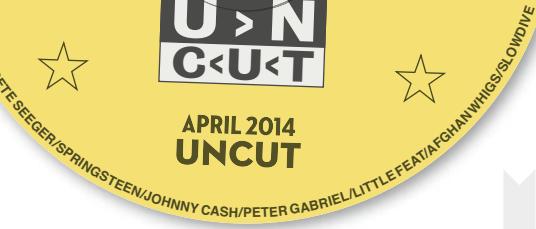


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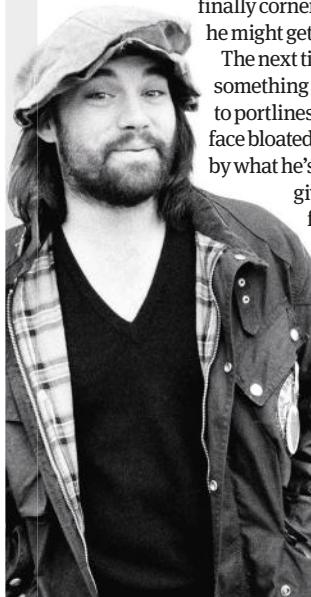
122 My Life In Music

Simone Felice

Are we rolling?



Lowell George, London, January 1975



O-ONE WHO saw Little Feat at their peak will want to contest Jon Dale's description of them later in this issue as one of the greatest American bands of their era. Their records were great, but live they were sensational – at least until a not unusual mix of drugs and personality clashes ruined them. I missed them in 1974 when they came to the UK as part of a Warner Bros package tour intended to break The Doobie Brothers, who they nightly blew off the stage. When they come back in June 1976, however, to play on The Who Put The Boot In tour of various football stadiums, I'm waiting for them. I've been dispatched to interview them individually for a regular *Melody Maker* feature called Band Breakdown. I'm supposed to meet them early on a Friday afternoon, the day before they play Swansea with The Who, at the Montcalm, a swanky hotel near Marble Arch.

Unfortunately, when I get there, I'm informed by a worried label lackey that they're being held at Heathrow, their impounded equipment, flight cases, amps and the like, being stripped, much like the group themselves, and thoroughly searched for drugs. They turn up around six, their remarkable good humour explained by the fact that whatever the officials were looking for had been sent ahead by the band and was waiting for them at the hotel, their stash quickly liberated, which makes for a series of mostly very convivial interviews.

Sam Clayton, Ken Gradney and Bill Payne are fine. But I don't get on with guitarist Paul Barrere, who in a surly hint of tensions to come grumpily complains at one point that Lowell George gets too much credit for the band's music. I get on fabulously, however, with drummer Richie Hayward. He's sharp, funny and extremely generous with his share of what the band had collected when they'd rocked up at reception. We jabber for hours and I realise I still need to speak to Lowell, who doesn't answer his door. Richie suggests I meet the band in Swansea and so the next day I spend a lot of time in Little Feat's trailer, drinking beer, smoking this and that.

I still don't manage to get Lowell in front of a tape recorder, so it's agreed with someone that I'll meet up with him at the soundcheck for their show on Monday at London's Hammersmith Odeon, but that doesn't happen either. There's an aftershow party for the band at the Zanzibar, a Covent Garden cocktail bar, however, which is where after a sensational show Lowell is finally cornered. He's already pretty much out of it, although not yet as far gone as he looks he might get, but for the next 45 minutes he's charming and hilarious, hugely charismatic.

The next time I see him it's August 1977. Little Feat are playing The Rainbow and something dreadful has clearly happened to Lowell in the last 12 months. Always given to portliness, he's now grossly overweight, fat as a Buddha, hair greasy and unkempt, face bloated and his mind clearly elsewhere. His appearance is made even more disturbing by what he's wearing – candy-striped overalls, puffed at the wrists and shoulders, that give him the appearance of something nightmarish from a nursery rhyme come frighteningly to life. By now, Barrere and Payne have taken control of Little Feat and apparently turned them into a brash jazz-fusion band, barely recognisable from a year earlier. When they play "Day At The Dog Races" from *Time Loves A Hero*, Lowell walks off, disconsolate and marginalised.

When I next run into him, it's June 1979. He's recently disbanded Little Feat and touring to promote his solo album, *Thanks I'll Eat It Here*. I'm in a lift at The Gramercy Park Hotel in New York with Captain Sensible from The Damned, who's dressed in a fluorescent pink rabbit suit, complete with ears. The lift doors open and Lowell steps in, stares disbelievingly at Sensible and before I have a chance to say anything gets out, possibly worried that he's having a psychedelic episode. Two days later, he dies of a heart attack, another good man gone. You can only hope that the last thing he thought of wasn't a man dressed as a rabbit, swearing his head off in a lift at five in the morning. Enjoy the issue.

Mark Jones

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“He wanted everyone to be involved...”

PETE SEEGER | 1919-2014



Pete Seeger at the Newport Folk Festival, Rhode Island, July 24, 1966. Photo by David Gahr/Getty Images

Continued over page



• PETE SEEGER (CONTINUED)

JUST UNDER A week after his death, Pete Seeger's family organised a public memorial near his home in Beacon, New York. Visiting hours were scheduled from noon, though a line was already trailing around the block by late morning. "For six hours I stood there, shaking the hands of people coming through the door," says Seeger's half-sister, Peggy. "I reckon we had between 2,000 to 4,000 people. They turned up from all over – Minneapolis, Virginia, Vermont, Massachusetts. People of all ages, colours and ethnicities arrived to pay their respects, crying and hugging. It was an extraordinary experience. You only had to be at one of Pete's concerts to realise where this plurality came from, because he'd get an entire festival of people singing. He just wanted everyone to be involved."

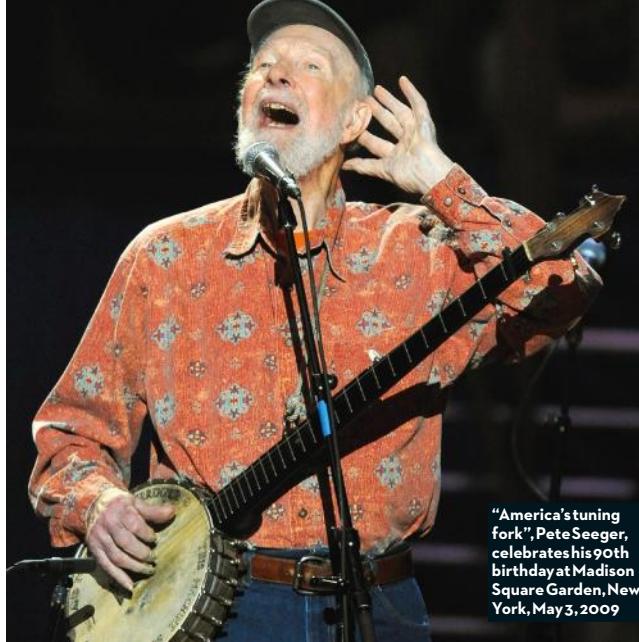
The turnout wasn't merely a testament to Pete Seeger's popularity, it served as a physical measure of his impact on American culture and society. In the immediate wake of his passing, at the age of 94, tributes poured in from all over. Longtime disciple Bruce Springsteen marked the news with a stirring version of "We Shall Overcome" while on tour in South Africa. Barack Obama, for whom Seeger had played during his 2009 Inauguration, issued a statement in which he called him "America's tuning fork", praising his ability to affect social change and "reminding us where we come from and showing us where we need to go".

As one of the shining beacons of the American folk revival, Seeger pointed the way for others, most notably Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, to seize song as an effective form of protest. He was always ready to support a just cause. Long before his appropriation of "We Shall Overcome" became the anthem of the '60s Civil Rights Movement, Seeger had sung ballads for Spanish Civil War Republicans, played countless fundraisers for US union groups and founded a publishing house for political song.

He'd joined the Young Communist League at 17. By the time he became a full member of the party in 1942, Seeger was recording with folk ensemble The Almanac Singers, cutting societal manifestos like "If I Had A Hammer" (co-written with Lee Hays). Meanwhile, *Songs For John Doe* offered biting commentaries on US foreign policy. It was a leftist stance that brought him to the attention of the FBI.

When The Almanac Singers regrouped as The Weavers in 1950, their fresh arrangement of "Goodnight Irene", the signature tune of Seeger's friend Lead Belly, clung to the top of the *Billboard* chart for 13 weeks.

Despite giving up his Communist membership in 1949, Seeger's political affiliations continued to land him in trouble with the authorities. The Weavers may have been national stars, but their stock fell sharply when they were investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Bookings were cancelled and, after several half-hearted reunions, Seeger quit. He went on to cut pointed anti-



"America's tuning fork", Pete Seeger, celebrates his 90th birthday at Madison Square Garden, New York, May 3, 2009

war songs, most prominently "Where Have All The Flowers Gone?"

"The Weavers had been on their way to becoming nightclub singers," offers Peggy Seeger, "and if they'd continued, I don't know whether Pete would've become the person he did. Also, he was best as a solo singer. He knew how to control the stage."

In 1957 he was held in contempt of Congress when he refused to answer questions about his

"Pete was best as a solo singer. He knew how to control the stage"

PEGGY SEEGER

personal beliefs during the McCarthy trials. Seeger was eventually convicted and sentenced to prison, though an appeals court overturned the decision sometime after. The upshot was that he was blacklisted for over a decade. Undeterred, he set about playing schools and colleges, regularly appearing at folk festivals and becoming a keen opponent of American involvement in Vietnam.

His reputation as a champion of progressive society only grew stronger. The Byrds slipped a folk-rock beat behind "Turn! Turn! Turn!", Seeger's adaptation of the Book of Ecclesiastes, and hit the top of the charts in 1965. He returned to TV on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* two

years later, though his rendition of anti-war ballad "Waist Deep In The Big Muddy" was censored until 1968.

Seeger continued crusading for the rest of his days, lending his voice to various political, environmental and ecological issues. In October 2011, the then 92-year-old was leading the Occupy Wall Street march in Manhattan. A year before he died, he was playing alongside Harry Belafonte and Jackson Browne in aid of Native American activist Leonard Peltier.

What tended to get overlooked amid a lifetime of such endeavours was Seeger's musicality. Born to a musicologist father and violinist mother, as a teenager he underwent a "conversion experience" after hearing an Appalachian banjo player at a festival in North Carolina. He was

also taken with the plain-spoken lyrics, which essayed the small tragedies of life without reverting to sentimentality. It was a fascination that deepened when Seeger met Lead Belly and archivist Alan Lomax in New York. By 1940 he was touring the States with Woody Guthrie.

"Pete influenced so many people to pick up the guitar and the banjo," says Appleseed Records boss Jim Musselman, who signed Seeger in the '90s. "Roger McGuinn of The Byrds basically started playing music after watching Pete. And a lot of Lindsey Buckingham's guitar playing came from banjo notes from The Kingston Trio, who'd learned how to play from Pete's banjo book. So many rock musicians have told me how influential Pete was from a musical standpoint: John Fogerty, Neil Young and others. There's this direct lineage, as well as Pete being a link in the chain from Woody Guthrie and Lead Belly through to Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen, carrying on the songs and tradition."

Above all, Seeger was an enabler. Well-read, with an affable personality and inquisitive mind, he understood that intellectual concepts were worthless if they couldn't be given physical form. He once said he'd "rather put songs on people's lips than in their ears". Music and communion, for him, were one and the same.

"It was a very idealistic view and some people will say that he was up in cloud cuckooland," says Peggy Seeger. "But Pete believed there's an essential goodness in everybody. And he thought that music brought that out. He believed that people are willing to work together because they sing together."

ROB HUGHES

RETURN! RETURN! RETURN! How to buy Pete Seeger on CD



American
Industrial
Ballads

FOLKWAYS,
1957

Seeger maps the plight of ordinary workers during the Industrial Revolution across two dozen songs that ultimately serve as a rallying call for communities everywhere. The tone is austere, just banjo and occasional guitar, while the message is moving and poignant.



We Shall
Overcome

COLUMBIA,
1963

Issued at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, this impassioned live set from Carnegie Hall is stuffed with the topical and political: spiritual anthems "Keep Your Eyes On The Prize" and "We Shall Overcome", plus a charged version of Dylan's "A Hard Rain..."



Rainbow
Race

COLUMBIA,
1973

Pete turns eco-warrior on environmental clean-up songs "Our Generation" and "The Clearwater". Meanwhile, "My Rainbow Race" took on new life in Oslo in 2012, when sung by a crowd of 40,000 in protest at Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik.



At 89

APPLESEED,

2008
A luminous, Grammy-

winning collection of songs old and new as Seeger nears his 90th year, interspersed with spoken-word passages. Highlights include eco-ballad "If It Can't Be Reduced" and a remake of his anti-Vietnam parable, "Waist Deep In The Big Muddy".

WELCOME BACK

Just for another day

Glad to be 'gaze! Welcome back SLOWDIVE, the dreampop dons returning as unlikely superstars, 19 years on

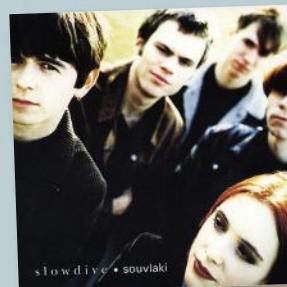
NEIL HAD SAID in interviews back in the day that what he wanted was longevity," explains guitarist Rachel Goswell, "and I think we've achieved that..."

Slowdive, now reuniting with their classic lineup after splitting in 1995, have got what they wanted, then – today many see the Reading five-piece as shoegaze visionaries the equal of My Bloody Valentine. They were, though, as much reviled as adored when they were originally together, and overlooked in favour of grunge and Britpop bands.

"I think we were seen as part of that whole scene with Chapterhouse, Ride, Moose and Lush," says frontman and songwriter Neil Halstead. "We got quite a lot of attention, then after six months the press decided they'd had enough of it."

"By 1995, we were quite pissed off with it all," adds Goswell. "Clearly, our label [Creation] wasn't supporting us, we had no money, the British press hated us..."

Famously, the Manics' Richey Edwards stated that he detested the band "more



than Hitler", and they received tepid reviews, even for 1993's *Souvlaki*, which featured Brian Eno, and now sounds like a lost masterpiece of noisy dreampop.

No longer seen as passé, their influence over swathes of indie groups and shoegaze revivalists – for example, most of the acts on New York's hip Captured Tracks label – is obvious. In particular, their final album, *Pygmalion*, was a brave precursor to the electronica-influenced experimentation Radiohead would embrace on *Kid A*.

"I hear songs on the radio sometimes and go, 'Oh my God! That sounds like Slowdive!'" laughs Goswell. "With the resurgence of shoegaze in the last decade, there is a lot of respect out there for us."

"It's weird that shoegazing is an actual musical term now," adds Halstead.

The band have had several reunion offers over the years, but only now have all the members been available – as their frontman insists, they "never fell out". Halstead has been the busiest since the split, playing with Goswell in Mojave 3, then releasing three acclaimed

solo albums and one LP with Black Hearted Brother.

After reuniting, Slowdive intended to return with a new LP before deciding to first warm up with some shows, including this summer's Primavera festival in Barcelona and Porto. Their high billing (below only

The National and Pixies on the day they play) and the reaction to their return – their London show sold out in minutes – has shocked the band.

"We weren't quite expecting that," laughs Goswell. "Clearly, we were all a bit clueless. Neil was concerned Village Underground might be too big and we wouldn't be able to sell it out, bless him!"

The band have had one set of rehearsals so far, but Goswell has been busy working out setlists. Excitingly for fans, they are keen to draw from *Pygmalion*, which was never performed live due to their split.

"I asked fans on Twitter what they wanted," says Goswell, "and [Pygmalion's ten-minute] 'Rutti' has come up a lot. My favourite is 'Souvlaki Space Station'. It was still sounding awesome in rehearsal."

Halstead, who got rid of most of his Slowdive gear over the last two decades, and until recently only owned one electric guitar, has been preparing in another way.

"I went on the Guitar Geek website to figure out what my rig used to look like," he laughs. "So I've been out in the shed constructing a monolith, my pedal board... Thankfully, we don't have to recreate too many elaborate stage moves, so we should be OK." TOM PINNOCK

Slowdive play London Village Underground (May 19), Primavera in Barcelona (30) and Porto (June 6), and Latitude (July 17-20)

A QUICK ONE

► Twenty years on from their debut, **Oasis** are the subject of our next *Uncut Ultimate Music Guide*. Revelatory new reviews of every LP. Spectacularly daft interviews from the archives. Out March 13.

► There was an auspicious return to the stage last month when British folk doyenne **Shirley Collins** sang live for the first time in 35 years. Collins performed "All The Pretty Little Horses" and "Death And The Lady" before a Current 93 gig at London's Union Chapel on Feb 8. A movie is being made about Collins and, to consolidate her current raised profile, she's even joined Twitter @shirleyeCollins.

► The 20th anniversary of Kurt Cobain's death will doubtless bring a bunch of tawdry cash-ins, but we can recommend **The Nirvana Diary**, a photobook that documents the band and their contemporaries – including The Jesus Lizard, Mudhoney and Screaming Trees – as seen through the lens of Steve Gulick (www.pledgemusic.com).

► And in more Pledgemusic news, **Ginger Baker** is launching a 20-track career anthology there. Among the incentives to donate money, there's the intriguing and possibly terrifying offer of "drum clinics for fans who want to learn from the master".

► And as ever, don't forget www.uncut.co.uk: all the goodness of the monthly mag, in sizeable daily doses.



Gearing up again...
Slowdive in 1991 (l-r): Nick Chaplin, Christian Savill, Simon Scott, Neil Halstead, Rachel Goswell

REDISCOVERED

Lost in the canyons

Rediscovered: the decadent nearly-man of the Laurel Canyon scene, NED DOHENY. "He could've been a giant star," says Graham Nash

LOOKING BACK ON his life in the thick of the '70s Laurel Canyon scene, Ned Doheny is the first to admit that his career didn't pan out the way it did for many of his contemporaries. "We all had high hopes," he explains. "I became friends with people whose work I truly admired. I thought, 'Well, shoot, we're next.' But it didn't really work out that way."

"Ned was very handsome and very talented," elaborates Graham Nash, who sang harmonies on Doheny's self-titled debut album. "But a lot of people get overlooked in music. He's one of many who could have been a giant star. He had the songs and he had the talent."

Born into a wealthy Californian family – his great-grandfather "dug the first oil well in Los Angeles" – Doheny graduated from session work for Byrds producer Terry Melcher to a place among the Elektra Records contingent following an encounter with another young singer-songwriter. "A friend said somebody's looking for

a guitar player, so I went to this hotel off Sunset," says Doheny. "I'd gotten pretty good at snatching Clapton riffs, so I played a little and this guy said, 'Great, you should meet Jackson!' I thought he was talking about a middle-aged black man of imposing girth and history, so I was surprised to meet this scrawny, almost Latin-looking kid."

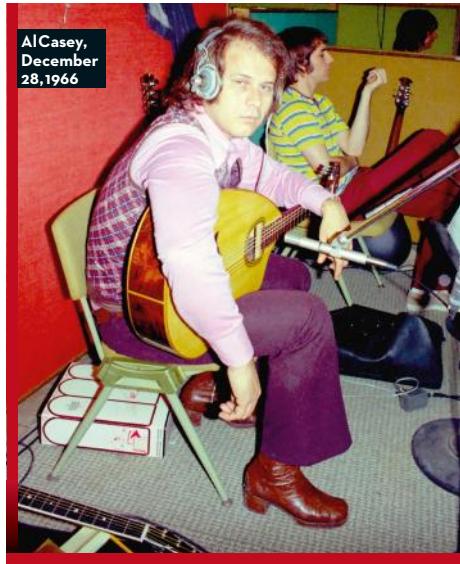
Along with Jackson Browne – who became a lifelong friend – Doheny was invited to Paxton Lodge, "a utopian environment where people of like minds could get together and make music free from urban pressures", bankrolled by Elektra and overseen by label producer, Barry Friedman. "We ate like swine and smoked lots of weed," says Doheny. "But there's a thin line between utopia and dystopia: Barry's own demons took him down and Paxton went with it." In the subsequent fallout, Doheny, then 21 years old, remembers, "I put all my stuff in a Land Rover. I drove from Los Angeles to New York, put the Land Rover on the QE2 and went to England." There, Doheny

that. But I'd have approached it a little differently myself, pared it down and not been so influenced by the musical conventions of the time." A third album – 1979's *Prone* – earned Doheny an audience in Japan, where he released three further albums during the '80s and '90s. In 2011, he released "my fourth American record", *The Darkness Beyond The Fire*. "When I told Jackson I'd done this album, the fucker said, 'Why?' I told him I felt compelled to. I gave him a copy and he said, 'My God, you're singing your ass off.'

"This has been a lifelong endeavour," emphasises Doheny, who is the subject of an upcoming retrospective anthology, *Separate Oceans*. "Even if I'm not in the studio pulling out what's left of my hair, I'm always connected to the creative process. You don't really get to turn your back on it. If you do, it will deal harshly with you."

MICHAEL BONNER

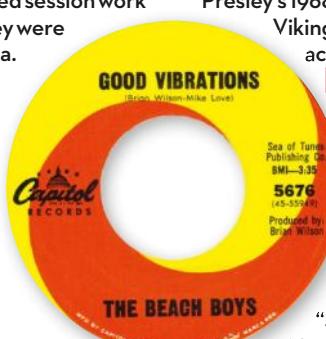
Separate Oceans is out on May 13 on Numero Group



AND ON GUITAR... AL CASEY

UNCUT'S GUIDE TO ROCK'S GREATEST SESSION PLAYERS

► Al Casey (1936-2006) started session work with Lee Hazlewood when they were both based in Phoenix, Arizona. He played guitar on a song Hazlewood wrote for Sanford Clark, "The Fool", and wrote one of Duane Eddy's earliest hits, "Ramrod". Casey then moved to LA and became part of the Wrecking Crew, playing on sessions for The Beach Boys, Phil Spector, The Monkees, Johnny Cash and Frank and Nancy Sinatra, among many others. He also played on Elvis



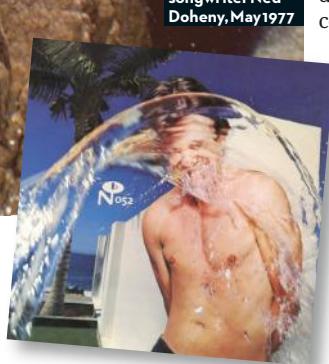
Presley's 1968 TV special; the red Hagstrom Viking II guitar Elvis used on the show actually belonged to Casey.

KEY SESSIONS: Sanford Clark "The Fool", Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots Were Made For Walkin'", The Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations" and "Sloop John B", Richard Harris' "MacArthur Park", Elvis Presley's "A Little Less Conversation", Frank Sinatra's "Strangers In The Night", Frank & Nancy Sinatra's "Somethin' Stupid", Nilsson's "Everybody's Talkin'". **PHIL KING**

collaborated with Traffic's Dave Mason and fellow visiting American Cass Elliot: the trio, however, proved short lived.

Instead, Doheny found himself picked up by the high-achieving management team of David Geffen and Elliot Roberts and living in an "unnaturally large but really secluded house" in Benedict Canyon. It was a "kind of salacious and slightly goofy" time, where Doheny worked on his 1973 debut album for Geffen's Asylum label: a luxe AOR spin on the era's California singer-songwriter tropes. "The 10 songs on that record are the first 10 songs I wrote," he admits. "But I don't think David ever felt a deep connection to my material. Also it's not like I needed the money."

A "mind-altering" hook up with Glasgow's Average White Band yielded two singles, "A Love Of Your Own" and "What Cha' Gonna Do For Me?" (later a hit for Chaka Khan), while Doheny's second album, *Hard Candy*, followed in 1976 on Columbia, with Steve Cropper producing. "It's certainly my most accessible record. I thought there was some serious composition on





I'M NEW HERE

Robert Ellis

Recommended this month: Nashville's newest star, a Paul Simon-loving purveyor of "atheist bluegrass anthems"!

PEOPLE MAKE CERTAIN associations with what I do and who I am, so it's important to put things in context," says Nashville-based songwriter Robert Ellis, whose new album features a cover of "Still Crazy After All These Years". "When people hear your name and then Paul Simon's, they tend to approach the music differently than if they heard you next to George Jones. I wanted to give some frame of reference for what I was going for."

The 25-year-old is busy explaining why *The Lights From The Chemical Plant* marks a spirited departure from his previous work. If 2011's *Photographs* introduced a torchbearer for folk-country greats like Townes Van Zandt and Kris Kristofferson, his latest is an expansive opus that finds room for R'n'B, bluegrass, baroque pop and even a little jazz. Not that he's ditched the country classicism that made *Photographs* so engaging.

The songs relay tales of absence, infidelity and emotional strife, delivered in warmly weathered tones that belie Ellis' tender years. Many of them, like "traditional atheist bluegrass anthem" "Sing Along", are rooted in his formative years in the South Texan suburb of Lake Jackson. "I grew up in a very religious household and was indoctrinated into the church at a young age," says Ellis. "The Protestant faith in the States is very dogmatic and evangelical and, where I'm from, it's the only option. So I still feel a lot of resentment about the fear-based brainwashing that I experienced as a kid."

Songwriting offered an outlet: "In

that little town there weren't a lot of people I could relate to, but I really felt like I related to Simon & Garfunkel and John Prine. When I first heard Prine as a kid, it was like, 'Holy shit! I know exactly how he feels.'"

Ellis' familial environment and Southern locale played its part, too. His mother was a skilled pianist who encouraged his talent, though perhaps the key figure was a guitar-picking uncle. "We used to go to this yearly bluegrass festival he'd play at, outside of Belleville," Ellis recalls. "That was super influential on me, because he introduced me to John Prine and Doc Watson and taught me how to Travis pick."

The renewed adventurousness of *The Lights From The Chemical Plant* can partly be attributed to the fact that, after self-producing *Photographs* and 2009's limited-release debut *The Great Rearranger*, Ellis has brought in outside help: producer Jacquire King. As well as retaining his usual back-up (including White Denim's Josh Block), there are contributions from Dawes' Taylor Goldsmith, Deer Tick's Rob Crowell and Nashville Vet Jim Lauderdale.

It's all in keeping with a restless, exploratory nature. Ellis says he's already planning his next move: "I recently bought a drum machine, some monophonic synths and sequencing software. I'm trying to force myself to get away from guitar. The beauty of it all is that I'm now getting to make records at a level I've always dreamed of."

ROB HUGHES

I'M YOUR FAN

"Robert is a one-of-a-kind: a musician, singer and songwriter who excels at all three. He chose to make an album that's a challenge to the listener, the best kind of album, which is a rare thing these days."

Rob Crowell, Deer Tick



The Lights From The Chemical Plant is out now on New West

THE UNCUT PLAYLIST

ON THE STEREO THIS MONTH...

THE AFGHAN WHIGS

Do To The Beast SUBPOP

16 years on, Greg Dulli and John Curley rediscover their ferocious mojo. For the full exclusive story, read our interview on p52.

GRUFF RHYNS

American Interior TURNSTILE

The quixotic Super Furry Animal goes on a Stateside quest for a renegade 18th-Century relative, and somehow ends up sounding more than usual like his old band.

WOODS

With Light And With Love WOODSIST

Jeremy Earl's ever-improving Brooklyn janglers hit a sixth album high. A good companion piece to this month's lovely *Real Estate* LP.



Ryley Walker

RYLEY WALKER

All Kinds Of You

TOMPINKINS SQUARE

A reckless new guitar prodigy from Chicago, supernaturally attuned to Bert Jansch's auspicious frequencies.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

Highway To Hell

YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=D3RTFFGMH6Q

The preposterous AC/DC cover that opened one of the Boss' Perth shows. Check the four-pronged assault of Lofgren, Van Zandt, Morello and Springsteen: who's Angus?

SLINT

Spiderland Boxset TOUCH&GO

The most enigmatic of '90s bands submit to the forensic boxset/documentary treatment. Includes a fearsome "Cortez The Killer".

AVEY TARE'S SLASHER FLICKS

Enter The Slasher House DOMINO

Animal Collective's Dave Portner forms a new band and moves a fraction closer to the lysergic Hollywood pop of Ariel Pink.

HOLLY HERDON

Chorus EP RVNGINTL

After last year's fine *Movement* LP, the LA radical dices and splices her voice into a kinetic, compelling new take on electronica.

FELA KUTI

Expensive Shit

[HTTP://FELAKUTI.BANDCAMP.COM](http://FELAKUTI.BANDCAMP.COM)

A predictable 1975 entry point into an online Fela goldmine: 48 albums streaming for free!

VARIOUS ARTISTS

John Fahey's Mix Tapes

[HTTPS://SOUNDCLOUD.COM/NBRADDO/SETS/JOHN-FAHEY-MIX-TAPES-1](https://SOUNDCLOUD.COM/NBRADDO/SETS/JOHN-FAHEY-MIX-TAPES-1)

Deeply weird '90s mixtapes concocted by the guitar master for a record store clerk in Oregon. Heavy on drones and awkward silences.

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



Vlautin: "I said hello to Kris Kristofferson then hid in the back!"

FREE WILLY

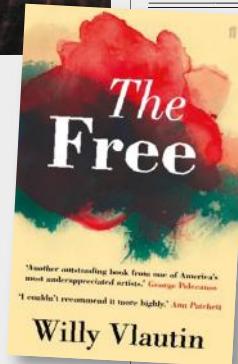
'The first time I went home where I didn't feel like a bum...'

A timely catch-up with Americana renaissance man, WILLY VLAUTIN. Pending: a fourth novel, a first movie and a new band, too...

IT'S A DECADE since Richmond Fontaine's fifth record *Post To Wire* became *Uncut's* Album of the Month, and introduced the band's singer-songwriter, Willy Vlautin, to the world. Five albums since have each broken free of default Americana with high concepts and stylistic quirks – the feverishly violent country-rock opera *The High Country* (2011) is especially wild.

But Vlautin, 46, is Americana's renaissance man these days, with a more successful career as an acclaimed novelist (his new, fourth book, *The Free*, inspired "Pauline Hawkins" on Drive-By Truckers' latest, *English Oceans*). Then there's Alan and Gabriel Polsky's deeply affecting new film of his novel, *The Motel Life*, with Emile Hirsch, Stephen Dorff and Kris Kristofferson. Vlautin has even found time to form a country-soul band, The Delines, around Damnations singer Amy Boone.

"One night after a few drinks, she says, 'Will, why don't you write me a record?'" is how he remembers



The Delines' debut, *Colfax*, beginning. "Every song I wrote I imagined her going to work in an office, and she's got a cup of coffee and she stops, and puts a brandy in it. And knowing I was writing for someone who really can sing, I tried to lay back, and let her voice be the character. I wanted it to be like those great old country-soul songs, but a little slower, and more vibey and ragged."

Bobby Womack and the "big, lonesome, cinematic sound" of Jimmy Webb's "Wichita Lineman" were influences. So was Randy

Newman, author of *Colfax*'s lone cover, "Sandman's Coming". "Dream yourself a place where we can go," goes a line in this song about a hemmed-in woman. One of *The Free*'s characters, the dreaming Iraq vet Leroy, and Frank and Jerry Lee Flannigan, played by Hirsch and Dorff in *The Motel Life*, similarly escape from harsh lives into their own, vividly imagined stories.

Vlautin did the same, growing up unhappy in Reno, Nevada. *The Motel Life* was filmed there, in locations the now Portland-based Vlautin knew well. "They invited me to meet Kris Kristofferson. I said hello, then hid in the back! It was the first time I went home where I didn't feel like a bum."

In film and book, Frank and Jerry Lee follow a fatal car accident by careening from one bad move to the next. "It's hard to be a stand-up guy when you've just been getting drunk paycheque to paycheque," Vlautin

says. "I lived like Frank until my mid-thirties. A lot of time when I'm writing, I'm trying to lay things like that to rest."

Vlautin is a novelist first these days. But rehearsals have begun for a new album by the band who made his name. "Richmond Fontaine is like my brother," he says, loyally. "So I'll stick with 'em as long as I can." **NICK HASTED**

The Free is out now from Faber, and is reviewed on p117. The Delines' *Colfax* is out on April 28 on Décor Records. *The Motel Life* is released in April, date tbc

UNCUT AT THE GREAT ESCAPE

Our first headliner confirmed for 2014: COURTNEY BARNETT!

MUCH HERALDED IN these pages for the past few months, the exceptional new Australian singer-songwriter Courtney Barnett is the first name pencilled in for the Uncut Stage at The Great Escape Festival in Brighton. "Shaggy guitar jams that evoke a less spaced Kurt Vile, and observationally lyrics that squirrel poignant moments into apparently prosaic details," noted *Uncut's* reviewer about her debut, *The Double EP: A Sea Of Split Peas*. We're fairly confident, too, that Barnett's "Avant Gardener" will be

the best song about anaphylactic shock performed at The Great Escape this year.

This year's doubtless frantic shenanigans will take place between May 8–10, and we'll be announcing the rest of this year's *Uncut* lineup over the next few weeks (last year, you'll recall, we hosted Phosphorescent, Mikal Cronin, The Strypes, the Allah-Las, Woods and White Fence). Three-day tickets for the whole festival cost £54.50: for more info, check www.mamacolive.com/thegreatescape.com.



ROCK'N'ROLL WITH US

Your guide to this month's free CD

FREE
CD!

1 THE WAR ON DRUGS

Red Eyes

A lot of old *Uncut* friendships are rekindled on *Rock'n'Roll With Us*, beginning with the return of Adam Granduciel on this sky-punching instant classic. His reference point, at least for the snare sound, is "Candy's Room" (see panel on p28). The gleaming euphoria of "Dancing In The Dark", however, seems equally applicable.

2 NOAH GUNDERSEN

Isaiah

Amid so many faithful retainers, Washington newcomer Noah Gundersen fits in well, purveyor as he is of a burnished, spiritually charged brand of chamber Americana that recalls some of Damien Jurado's earlier work. From the self-released album, *Ledges*.

3 DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS

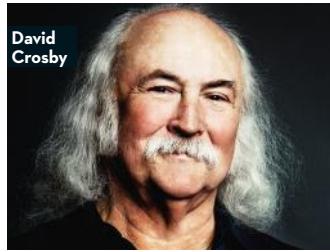
Shit Shots Count

The Truckers sound notably rejuvenated on their 10th studio LP, *English Oceans*, not least because Mike Cooley asserts himself as much as Patterson Hood. Here's evidence: a no-nonsense, kick-ass rocker in shameless thrall to the Stones. Watch out for the horn section that barrels in near the end, too.

4 DAVID CROSBY

What's Broken

That long-promised CSNY '74 live LP has been put on hold again, but its absence does allow Croz' first solo LP in over 20 years a deserved longer stretch in the spotlight. "What's Broken" is typical, with the great man at his most languid and deep. On guitar, discreet and empathetic support by Mark Knopfler.



5 REAL ESTATE

Talking Backwards

Jangle-pop in excelsis, courtesy of the sound's foremost contemporary craftsmen. "Talking Backwards" is a fine entry point to the New Jersey escapees' third album, with its nagging, Felt-like guitar line, and an atmosphere that's at once sprightly and distractingly melancholic.

6 THE HOLD STEADY

I Hope This Whole Thing Didn't Frighten You

"There was a side of the city I didn't want you to see," sputters Craig Finn somewhat disingenuously, given his noble ongoing mission as a self-conscious, hyper-literate bard of the underbelly. The song, though, is an exhilarating clarion call from *Teeth Dreams*, our Album Of The Month, hooking up The Hold Steady's storied power to a riff that's part-Hüsker Dü, part-Thin Lizzy.

7 SUN KIL MOON

Micheline

Mark Kozelek's latest LP, *Benji*, has been acclaimed as one of his most brilliant, thanks to tender, elaborate, confessional like "Micheline". Among the plethora of references, note the 1999 film role he hears about while on tour in Sweden turned out to be his memorably sullen part in Cameron Crowe's *Almost Famous*.



8 NICK WATERHOUSE

This Is A Game

Waterhouse came to our attention in 2012 as the historically meticulous producer of the Allah-Las' debut LP. He has, though, his own career as a slick R'n'B revivalist; a West Coast analogue to the Daptone empire in NYC. Hence "This Is A Game", the twanging, beautifully recreated highlight of second solo LP *Holly*.

9 SPAIN

In My Soul

A busy time for the Haden family, with The Haden Triplets' LP just out on Third Man. Brother Josh, meanwhile, continues on the serene path of gospel-tinged slowcore he set out on two decades ago, with a song that's close kin to the Spain classic covered by Johnny Cash, "Spiritual".

10 LINDA PERHACS

River Of God

44 years have passed since Linda Perhacs, LA's most cosmic dental hygienist, released an LP. As "River Of God" celestially illustrates, the belated follow-up to *Parallelograms* is a blessed comeback to match that of her British spirit twin, Vashti Bunyan, in 2005; New Age folk-pop with a rapturous sense of purpose.

11 HANS CHEW

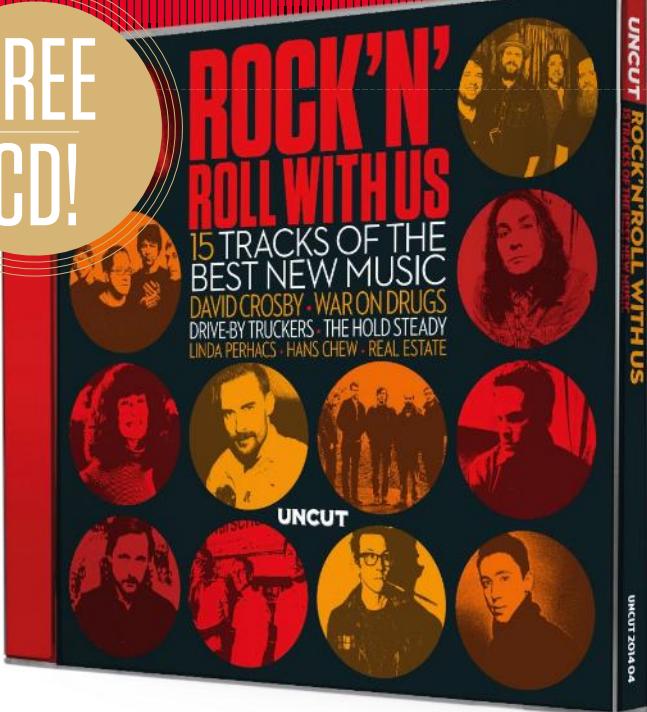
Chango

2010's *Tennessee & Other Stories* revealed Chew to be a battered and inspired piano man, planting his narratives in the hinterland between country and blues. The forthcoming *Life & Love* shows he and his band can rock, too. Exhibit A: the howling "Chango", where Chew's tumbling keys duke it out with the jams of his new foil, guitarist Dave Cavallo.

12 MICAH P HINSON

Sons Of USSR

Hinson's extended tale of personal woe could provide enough ongoing



material for a few dozen of his Americana contemporaries. Here, though, he calmly tells someone else's story – the highly suspicious Mr Dmitri – while a fuzzily disorienting carny plays out in the background. Unnerving...



13 STURGILL SIMPSON

Railroad Of Sin

Much like Nick Waterhouse and his excavations of R'n'B, Simpson is an old-fashioned country boy, tapping deep into the traditions of Nashville – and calling on some of the town's most gilded musical vets to help. Dangers of pastiche abound, but the rockabilly swing of "Railroad Of Sin" is more vigorous than scholarly. One, we think, to watch out for...

14 ROBERT ELLIS

Chemical Plant

...As, of course, is Robert Ellis, a new country troubadour with a knack of resembling Willie Nelson and Paul Simon. There's a tender grandeur to the lead track from his second LP, too, with a production from Jacquire King that could well have resonance on some of America's bigger stages.

15 STANLEY BRINKS & THE WAVE PICTURES

No Goodbyes

Brinks has form as part of cherished French folk duo Herman Dune. For this rowdily apt finale, he's joined by Jonathan Richman-loving UK indie band, The Wave Pictures. From their forthcoming, marvellously titled collaboration, *Gin...*

AN AUDIENCE WITH...

Peter Gabriel

Interview:
Michael Bonner

The singer, songwriter and activist discusses giant flower masks, writing songs with monkeys, and the odds on a Genesis reunion as they “creak towards senility”

A

CONVERSATION WITH Peter Gabriel is a distinctly wide-ranging affair, covering everything from the whereabouts of his fabulous Genesis costumes to his attempts to mastermind the opening ceremony for the 2006 World Cup with Brian Eno. TED talks, books on child psychology and the intelligence of household pets are typically intriguing asides.

This month, Gabriel releases *Back To Front* – a concert film shot at London's O2 during his recent tour celebrating 25 years since the release of his *So* album. It provides us with a fine opportunity to take questions from a couple of former Genesis bandmates, which leads, perhaps inevitably, to the question many of you wrote in to ask: will he ever play with Genesis again? You'll find an answer of sorts somewhere below...

STAR QUESTION



I've often wondered about the reason behind you writing "San Jacinto". You and I both went to San Antonio back in

1973 and saw the Alamo, a place that's always fascinated me.

San Jacinto is also a place of significance in the story of Texas. So why the song? Just a place that took your fancy? *Phil Collins*

The song was more about Native American culture and it was the California San Jacinto, not the Texas San Jacinto. I remember going to visit the Alamo with Phil, and he began what proved to be a long-standing obsession with it. I think he was already interested but he's an expert now in Alamo history. "San Jacinto" was more about the culture clash between Native America and present-day America.

As you've gone on to perform *So* in its entirety, will you be doing the same with other albums? *Anthony Stobart, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne*

Not planning to at the moment. This is the first retro-tour I've ever done.

Previously, I stayed away from the idea of doing it, but seeing *Pet Sounds* with Brian Wilson was one of the things that convinced me to re-think it. As a fan, hearing an LP played in its entirety was a treat. I've actually enjoyed it much more than I thought I might, so we're doing a bit more of it. You know, you never freeze a moment in time. Mentally, physically, aesthetically, you move on and so you re-inhabit a place, but it's never going to be the same. But you still can evoke a lot of memories and find new discoveries. "This Is The Picture (Excellent Birds)" and "Big Time" didn't get played very often because we couldn't find an angle and now I think we've got a better approach to them.

What was the most surprising reaction you got when writing a song with a bonobo monkey?

Robin Beaumont, London

That they were that smart and that musical! The project came about because I was just fascinated by the ability of apes to absorb and learn and communicate in our language. They're



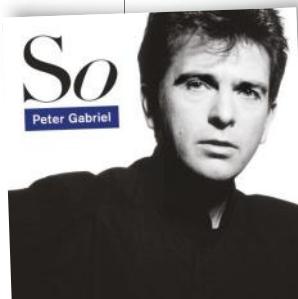
Gabriel in the video shoot for "Sledgehammer", 1986

much more adept at mastering our language than we seem to be at theirs. So it was just a plan. I rang up a couple of places to see if anyone was interested to try some music. Sue Savage-Rumbaugh in Atlanta said come on down and let's try something. I went about four or five times and it was a life-changing experience. They initially had been given some percussion things to shake, but I was determined we should try them with a keyboard because it was their sense of exploration of melody and harmony that was most intriguing to me. Sue would be the intermediary and she would communicate with the apes, and particularly Panbanisha, who was very expressive. I think you can find it on the internet. We have a

As a musician, do you feel frustrated that you spend a lot of time, money and effort getting your record to sound just right, only for it to be transferred to a low quality MP3 file listened to on a pair of tinny headphones?

Mark Foscoe, via email

Absolutely. We have a project with B&W Speakers called Society Of Sound, which is trying to get some high-quality stuff. I had a quick talk with Neil Young, who's been trying to push it along in America. A lot of people use music as background fodder. But then you get real music fans who care about quality and for those people, they should have easy access to great sounding stuff. It's absurd that as technology has moved forward, audio quality has gone in the opposite direction. Where do I stand on Spotify? I've always said that the music biz is dead but there's lots of interesting things crawling out of the corpse. It's a great service, in the sense of being able to get pretty much anything, anytime, anywhere. We had a rival service called We7, and we paid, I think, for a stream on one artist, 100 times what Spotify





“Yep, it has been 10 years since I’ve had a new record, so it is time, probably...”

• were paying. Someone's making money out of Spotify but it's not the people who create the content. I have a problem with that. Do I want what they provide? Yes. Do I think musicians should be better compensated? Absolutely. So, I'm sometimes there, sometimes not.

STAR QUESTION



Hi Pete, how do you feel your music has changed over the years?

Steve Hackett

You learn more about what you're doing so you can go a little further down any passage you open. That's about as vague an answer as I can give! I think you do get more critical as you get older, which is, in terms of quality control, good. In terms of quantity, it's bad. Was it different when I started out in Genesis? In truth, there were some songs that were written entirely by one person or another, even though there were some collaborative things, so I think we were still very used to solo songwriting – even before we'd started as a group. But, yes, there is an evolutionary process that is a shared responsibility.

Do you still have your costumes from the Genesis tours?

Brendan Ewins, *Shepherd's Bush*
A lot of them have rotted away. I'm being asked by the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame to pull out a few; they'd like to get some memorabilia. But there's not much. Some of the clothing is still intact, like the flower mask. But I'm wondering about re-creating one. A fan re-created one which has survived better than the original, which like a lot of painted rubber product, had dissolved as kids' toys do in the garden. Do I have a big archive? I've tried, but I'm not as methodical as Bowie, who obviously intended to be historical at the time he was being modern.

Do I remember correctly that you sang "Me And My Teddy Bear" at Knebworth '78? Do you still have the bear? Allan Miller, via email

I've no idea where that bear went – it was probably borrowed from one of my kids at the time. If I'd been a smart archivist! The slogan: Your History is Your Future is a good one. Did I enjoy those big festivals in the '70s? Most artists were whisked in and out, so you didn't see more than two or three acts around your slot. But I used to enjoy them because we played to the unconverted, so it was always a challenge. And you got to see really different genre artists. For me, they were a pleasure. But the down side was you very often had



Flower power:
Gabriel in his
painted rubber
Genesis mask, now
partially dissolved

no soundcheck, no set-up time, and you were working off existing equipment, PA and lights. Now it's more acceptable to bring elements, at least, of your own production. So you weren't able to have quality control in the same way you can on your own gig.

How on earth did you and Brian Eno get involved with the opening ceremony for the 2006 World Cup?

Chris Fraser, Cardiff

We knew Austrian producer Andre Heller and French choreographer Phillippe Decoufle, and we worked for a little while in Paris hatching plans. There's a cool piece of software called Melodyne that allows you to take any audio source and turn it into a midi control file. So we had some of the most famous football commentaries which we were bleeding into their melodic content and using them as compositional elements. There were a lot of cool ideas. It was just fun. I don't know if they suspected that it was getting too arty and we were going to disappear up our backsides and not have something that would work for popular entertainment. I have no idea why they cancelled, but on the night we were told it was all shelved, it was a black night.

The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway
is arguably your grandest, if not finest, work. My chums and I have debated what it's about for years.

Would you enlighten us?

AlKing, via email

Well, it was sort of a punk *Pilgrim's Progress*... a journey of discovery. I was trying to bring a few references from all over the place. Around that time I'd come across *El Topo*. When I was working with Scorsese, I mentioned it enthusiastically, and he hated it. He thought it was pretentious rubbish! But it was key. So in a sense there was that cowboy, spiritual journey which was one of the influences on *The Lamb*.... I started to work on a screenplay with him. What happened to it? We couldn't get enough interest at the time. Since then, a few people have been interested in looking at it again, as a film or as a stage thing.

I'd like to know if the So/Back To Front band will be appearing on any new recordings with Peter in the future? Mike Curry, via email
Nothing planned. I've got a few things cooking and a few things recorded, so it'll probably be a mixed-bag of musicians, whenever I do get something out. Yep, it has

been 10 years since I've had a new record, so it is time, probably. There's a lot of other things going on and I find it hard to say no. Much less of my time is now



Gabriel live in '87: "I used to be a 24-hour-a-day musician"

music only. I used to be a 24-hour-a-day musician and now I try and live a normal life, be a proper dad, and technology and benefit projects take up a third each of my work time, along with music. So there's less physical time making it. Do I stockpile songs? Bits. And they're not always finished songs. Fortunately, I've had no trouble generating musical ideas, and they're lots more in the can. But actually getting them into proper songs, with lyrics, is a lot harder.

"Digging In The Dirt" made reference to your post-So psychotherapy – what did you learn from having therapy?

Mark Jones, London

There was a book – *Why We Kill*, a study of murderers – that had inspired that song. But as I'd come out of therapy there must have been a connection. I read a lot trying to understand the buttons that operate and make you feel the way you do. When you have self-knowledge, you don't fall into the same behavioural traps. One of the keys is – take responsibility. Blaming anyone else, especially in relationships, is a futile activity and not going to move you forward.

"I've no trouble generating ideas... there's lots in the can"

Will you play again with

Genesis? Robin Dastari, Paris

I looked at their last bit of touring and it grew into a bigger meal than I was quite ready to visit. It's a bit like going back to school, a fun place to visit but not necessarily a great place to live. There's nothing to say I won't. I'm not sure it's going to happen as we all creak towards senility, but we'll see. Am I in contact with the guys? From time to time. I think we're going to do something around the anniversary of *The Lamb*..., so I'll see everyone then. ☺

Peter Gabriel: Back To Front is released on March 20

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

ASUS Transformer Book T100

Is it a laptop? Is it a tablet?

All-New 10.1" touchscreen laptop
that transforms into a tablet.



ASUS Transformer Book T100 is a powerful 10.1" convertible device featuring Windows 8.1 – a notebook when docked into its keyboard base and a powerful tablet once detached.

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STAPLES

John Lewis



Ostrich attacks
and pill addiction.
Bible studies and
Muppet duets.

Elton John costumes and
extraordinary music...

The inside story of
JOHNNY CASH's
weirdest decade

Story: Graeme Thomson
Photograph: Norman Seeff

A

JOHNNY CASH

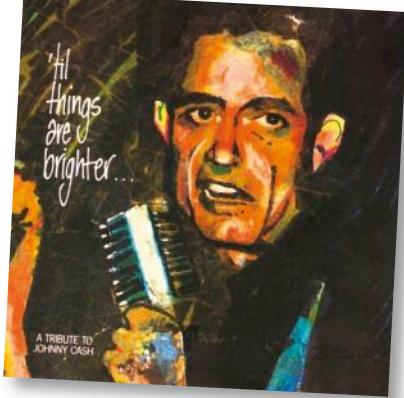
“young folks” he has never heard of: Pete Shelley, The Mekons, members of The Triffids, Microdisney and That Petrol Emotion. He holds the sleeve up to the camera and begins to recite names: “Michelle Shocked. Tracey and Melissa from Voice Of The Beehive. Mary Mary from the Gaye Bykers On Acid...”

Cash’s wilderness years certainly don’t lack entertainment value. He spent Valentine’s Day 1981 with The Muppets, singing “Egg Sucking Hound” as Rowlf The Dog vamped on piano. He dressed up as Elton John and narrowly missed sharing a bill with Frank Sidebottom. He was hospitalised after fighting with an ostrich and released “Chicken In Black”, the most abject three minutes of his entire career. Having recovered from a second spell of drug addiction, Cash was unceremoniously dumped by Columbia, his label since 1958. “He was tired,” reflects Rodney Crowell. “The audience had lost their bearings, and John was doing a few things by rote. I think he was played out.”

Yet Cash’s ‘80s deserve a second glance. The release this month of *Out Among The Stars* – an album of lost recordings dating from 1981 and 1984 – opens a door into a fascinating

scene from Johnny Cash’s weird ’80s. Backstage at the Royal Albert Hall on May 13, 1989, the Man In Black is being interviewed by the BBC. In his hands he clutches an album of his own songs recorded by a bunch of

“He was never comfortable just being the guy on the discount rack”
Marty Stuart



decade in which his missteps are counterbalanced by the success of country supergroup The Highwaymen, an ambitious novel, several overlooked gems, and the seeds of his

extraordinary regeneration in the ‘90s.

“Dad made some beautiful music through the 1980s, this was a true prime in his life,” says his son, John Carter Cash. “It was a period in which he was being very creative. All his records are works of art, and if they don’t garner too much attention it doesn’t mean that they’re any less important. It all adds to the full picture.”

THE PERIOD COVERED by *Out Among The Stars* [see panel] was not an auspicious one for Cash. The ‘70s had witnessed his

slow decline, a culmination of increasingly wayward albums, Billy Graham crusades and schlocky Carter Family shows. In 1980 he was inducted into the Country Music Hall Of Fame, sealing the perception that Nashville’s one-time enfant terrible was now a pillar of the establishment.

The same year, a young guitarist called Marty Stuart joined Cash’s touring band. “I thought I was going to work with the character that had made the *Folsom* record, or *San Quentin*, but what I walked into was more of a family show,” says Stuart today. “He was Patriot Cash, working a lot of state fairs. I sensed right off the bat that he was doing his duty, but he was musically discontent. He asked me not long after I’d been there, ‘How are you liking it?’ I said, ‘Pretty good.’ And he went, ‘Pretty good?’ I said, ‘Yeah, the music’s not what I thought it was. I love it, but...’ We didn’t have to go much further, because I think he knew what I was feeling, and I certainly knew what he was feeling.”

Personally and professionally, Cash was adrift. In the 2005 biopic *Walk The Line*, his 1968 marriage to June Carter is portrayed as a final deliverance from a drug addiction which almost killed him. The reality was, inevitably, more complex. By the early ‘80s he was, once again, in serious trouble with pills.

“We had a lot of conversations about drugs,” says

Crowell, at the time married to Cash’s daughter Rosanne. “He started opening up, talking about the dark side a little. I saw a few things he was doing that was like, OK, I’ve



Johnny's Technicolor Dream Coat... Cash impersonates Elton John on Saturday Night Live, April 17, 1982

JOHNNY'S
NEW ALBUM

OUT AMONG THE STARS

John Carter Cash on the genesis of a ‘lost’ Johnny Cash album

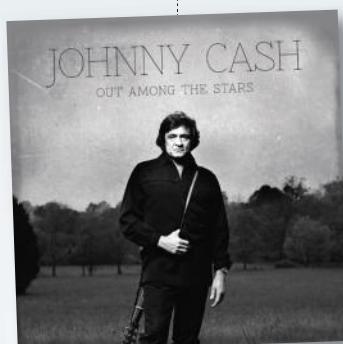
“**M**y parents never threw anything anyway. They had a storage vault in Tennessee and various objects got put there: a camel saddle from Saudi Arabia, the keys to 75 cities, old pistols, and many 24-track two-inch tape reels.

“Dad had recorded these tracks with Billy Sherrill, but they were never mixed. Columbia wasn’t excited about him back then, they didn’t quite know where to place him. We shipped the tapes to New York and transferred them to digital. We tried to stay true, but we wanted to enhance the original masters. Marty Stuart is a better guitar player now, so he replaced his guitar and mandolin. Jerry Douglas played some dobro. Buddy Miller played

guitar. We added a few things, then mixed it.

“There were other tracks we considered, but this seemed the cohesive body of work. We always wanted to focus on what was meaningful. There’s a great diversity. ‘I Came To Believe’ was his statement to God, but on ‘I Drove Her Out Of My Mind’ he sounds so happy about committing suicide! ‘Baby Ride Easy’ is a duet with my mother, and my sister Carlene came in to sing harmony on it. Carlene sang it with Dave Edmunds

back in the ‘70s, that’s where my dad learned the song, so it was really meaningful to have her there. To me, the album is a very powerful statement, and there is more, if the time is right.”





Cash in a comedy sketch with Eddie Murphy on Saturday Night Live, 1982

caught you with your pants down." Nick Lowe, married to his step-daughter Carlene Carter at the time, recalls a letter Cash sent him which ended: "I think everyone has decided it's OK to be weird. You'll be comfortable in my home. If you aren't, I'll burn it down. Sincerely, John." During one recording session, Cash halted proceedings in order to paint his brown boots black.

In 1983, while walking through the animal compound he'd built near his Hendersonville home, he became involved in an altercation with an irate ostrich. Attempting to reason with the beast using a large wooden stick, Cash was left with a crushed chest, five broken ribs and a huge gash down his stomach. To manage the pain he simply increased his drug intake. On tour in Nottingham near the end of 1983 he was hallucinating so badly he ripped the panelling off the wall in his hotel room, severely damaging his hand. In hospital back in Nashville he smuggled Valium under his bandages, the chemicals dissolving into his bloodstream effectively tripping him out. Eventually, the family staged an intervention, and Cash entered the Betty Ford Clinic. He emerged early in 1984, but the damage to his creativity was obvious. "I'm sure the pills had an effect," says Crowell. "Barbiturates dull everything down rather than stoking the fire."

Now in his early fifties, Cash had been overtaken by a new generation of musicians marketed via video and country music radio. This was a slicker crowd, highly image conscious, attuned to the age of *Dallas* and the urban cowboy. "In the '80s there was a big sea change towards younger artists coming in," Rick Blackburn – head of Columbia Records between 1980 and 1987 – told me shortly before his death in 2012. "It had a displacement effect for people like John. There was this big sucking sound, and it rocked the industry. There was a hunger for something new."

CASH'S RESPONSE WAS barely coherent. His creative focus scattered. Perhaps his greatest work-related pleasure was appearing on *The Muppet Show*. "I really would like to do it about once every six months," he said in 1981, after singing "Jackson" with Miss Piggy, who looked resplendent in a purple Stetson. The following year he presented *Saturday Night Live*, performing a sketch with Eddie Murphy as a Death Row prisoner whose last request was to have Cash sing "99,999 Bottles Of Beer On The Wall". Later in the show he dressed up as Elton John, wearing a glittering multi-coloured cape, pink feather boa and what appeared to be Dame Edna Everidge's glasses. He was a little stiff but game. He starred in several routine TV movies with



Animal magic: Cash with Miss Piggy on The Muppet Show, 1981

EYEWITNESS

CHICKEN IN BLACK

Cash bottoms out...

Rosanne Cash calls this 1984 single "the nadir", and it's hard to argue. Written by Gary Gentry and produced by Billy Sherrill, the lyrics are about a man who has undergone a brain transplant. The organ was taken from the body of a recently deceased criminal, and thus post-op Cash



unwittingly becomes Manhattan Flash, the "best bank robber in town". He asks for his old brain back only to be told it's been transplanted into a chicken, which has since signed a 10-year recording contract. In the video, Cash hammed it up as bank-robbing superhero in flowing cape, yellow tunic, big black boots and baggy blue trousers. "I thought it was awful," says Marty Stuart.

titles like *Murder In Coweta County* and *The Baron And The Kid*. In *The Pride Of Jesse Hallam*, Cash's oaken dignity lends weight to an otherwise slightly stilted morality film about adult illiteracy.

His songwriting was largely subsumed by the writing of *Man In White*, a quasi-autobiographical historical novel about the Apostle Paul, with whom Cash identified as another man born with a "thorn in his flesh". A genuine Biblical scholar, through 1984 and 1985 Cash conducted vast amounts of research for his first-person narrative, rifling through libraries and haunting Foyles bookshop whenever he was in London. "The book was probably his priority at this time," says John Carter Cash.

"He said he always wanted to be remembered for his faith."

On record, on the other hand, there is no clear aesthetic beyond a desire to keep the wheels turning around. *Rockabilly Blues* (1980) has a back-to-basics sound with a contemporary edge, featuring songs by Nick

Lowe, Billy Joe Shaver and John Prine. On *The Baron* (1981)

Kenny Rogers' gambler was recycled as a pool hustler, framed by Billy Sherrill's slick countrypolitan sound. On *The Survivors Live* (1982) and *The Class Of '55* (1986) Cash banked on nostalgia, hooking up with old Sun compadres Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins and Roy Orbison. He released three gospel albums that Columbia wanted nothing to do with, farming them out to their subsidiary label Cachet.

Stuart calls these his "let's-try-anything" records. "What do you do when you grow out of style? You start chasing and looking for ways to freshen it up. I never got the feeling that he wanted to settle for what last year had brought him. He never gave up, and he was never comfortable with just being the guy on the discount rack. He was way beyond that."

Nobody makes outlandish claims for Cash's '80s albums, but to dismiss them all would be a mistake. John Carter Cash sticks his neck out for *The Baron*; Rodney Crowell has a soft spot for *Silver*, released on the cusp of the '80s and containing "(Ghost) Riders In The Sky". Best of the bunch is *Johnny 99*, the 1983 album Cash made with James Burton, Jerry Scheff and Hal Blaine and named after one of two Bruce



Springsteen covers, the other being "Highway Patrolman".

"Johnny 99 is wonderful," says John Carter Cash. "You can see the seeds of what he went on to do with *American Recordings*." Crowell adds: "He understood the poetry of Springsteen, and he was really, really enthused about that album. I remember the conversation: 'You could do this live, really stripped down with a three-piece band.' Of course he didn't, but I was always lobbying for what Rick Rubin succeeded with."

Even in his career doldrums, on a good night Cash was still capable of summoning greatness with a sweep of his hand. "I remember being on tour with him in Switzerland, and just being mesmerised by his stage presence and body language," says Crowell. "Recorded music is one thing, but here's a night in his so-called down period when he's just absolutely captivating on. You have to somehow put it all together."

CASH WAS UNDER contract to CBS to deliver a number of family-friendly TV specials for the network. In 1984, filming for the Christmas show took him to Montreux, where his guests were Kris Kristofferson, Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings. "The hotel we stayed at was not very English-speaking friendly," says Stuart. "So all the cast and the principals wound up in John and June's suite after the day was over, and invariably it became a guitar pull. Chips Moman was Willie's producer, he was there, and after five



Supergroup The Highwaymen:
(l-r) Johnny Cash, Willie
Nelson, Kris Kristofferson,
Waylon Jennings

GOLD
DIGGING

CASH IN THE ATTIC

10 memorable tracks from the forgotten '80s

WITHOUT LOVE

Rockabilly Blues (1980)

Years before his definitive reading of Nick Lowe's "The Beast In Me", Cash breezes through Basher's bespoke country strut.



THE BARON

The Baron (1981)

Billy Sherrill's big production number is corny but fun, especially the spoken word eulogy to "a general on a battlefield of slate".



PARADISE

The Adventures Of Johnny Cash (1982)

Cash's warmth, set to twinkling mandolin and fiddle, envelops John Prine's waltz around bittersweet nostalgia.



HIGHWAY PATROLMAN

Johnny 99 (1983)

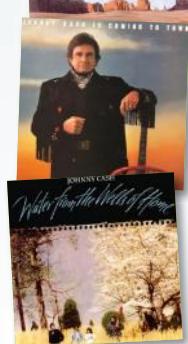
A taut, pitch perfect reading of Springsteen's brooding reckoning of the bonds of love and blood.



NEW CUT ROAD

Johnny 99 (1983)

Cash has a heap of fun on Guy Clark's ornery stomper, "drinkin' sour mash and riding that mare".



THE HIGHWAYMAN

The Highwaymen (1985)

Spotlit by Chips Moman's evocative production, the four country stars fully inhabit Jimmy Webb's robber, sailor, dam builder and astral traveller.

COMMITTED TO PARKVIEW

The Highwaymen (1985)

Cash's wry tale of drying out in Nashville State Hospital becomes a fantastic two-hander with Willie Nelson.



THE BIG LIGHT

Johnny Cash Is Coming To Town (1987)

Driven by punchy horns and a female chorus line, this is a spirited romp through Costello's hangover song.



CALL ME THE BREEZE

Water From The Wells Of Home (1988)

Father and son tear a strip off JJ Cale's blues, rekindling memories of Elvis Presley's "Mystery Train".



THE LAST OF THE DRIFTERS

Water From The Wells Of Home (1988)

A gutsy swing at Tom T Hall's swampy baby-boomers anthem.



minutes Chips was promoting the fact that John and Willie should do a duet record together."

Cash and Nelson began working on the record when they returned to the States, but according to Stuart "nothing was clicking. Their voices were worlds apart." Thinking back to Montreux, and "the magic that happened when you watched the four of these guys pass guitars around the room and rag on each other and present songs," Stuart was convinced that Jimmy Webb's song "The Highwayman", which featured a different character in each of its four verses, would be perfect for all of them. "I got Chips and John in the control room, and said, 'I want to play you this song.' Immediately John said, 'I want that verse about the starship!' And so we cut a track, and one by one the parts came in, and that's how The Highwaymen came to be."

Released in May 1985, "The Highwayman" became a country No 1, as did the album that followed. The band dynamic was companionable but sparky. "They were all friends, but so different," says Mickey Raphael, Willie Nelson's harmonica player, who recorded and toured alongside Cash in The Highwaymen. "Kris was the fighter of the underdog, and so was Johnny, but he was also very patriotic. If Kris was supporting the Sandinistas, or said something a little to the left, Johnny would say, 'I support your right to defile the flag, but if you defile my flag I'm gonna shoot you!' That kind of stuff was off and on. It was a lot of fun, but it got edgy sometimes."

Signs of the physical frailty that would dog Cash's final years were beginning to show. "I knew there were pills, but they weren't recreational," says Raphael. "He was in pain. I remember one night we all gathered around with our hands on him and one of the guys was praying. It was very powerful. He was looking for help. There was definitely pain involved, emotional pain and physical pain."

The Highwaymen was, according to Rosanne Cash, "the one place where he still seemed to be centred. It was most true to his nature, and where he felt the most relaxed during that period. He was with his friends, and the music was good."

But within months of The Highwaymen hitting the charts, in 1986 Cash was dropped by Columbia, his home for almost 30 years. Crowell recalls an "acrimonious parting of the



Family gathering: Cash onstage at London's Albert Hall, with Nick Lowe, Elvis Costello, June Carter and the Carter Family, May 13, 1989



Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash, on the set of a TV special, October 26, 1983

ways. He's a Mount Rushmore artist and you're going to let him go? It seemed sacrilegious at the time, I think he felt he'd earned that place that Bob Dylan has earned with Columbia. Instead he'd gotten fired, and there's no way that doesn't hurt. I know it hurt, I was there."

Rosanne Cash was his labelmate, and exactly the kind of young, contemporary country artist who had displaced the generation of which her father was perhaps the most potent emblem. "Rosanne was selling a million copies and John was selling less than 30,000," Rick Blackburn told me. "That's the sucking sound right there. It was awkward, but it was a natural progression. John was gracious about the whole transition. He didn't think about record sales as much as some. We were sitting out at his house one day and he said, 'My biggest fear is going onstage, the curtains open, and nobody's there.'"

Cash was picked up by Mercury but the records he made for his new label were sturdy rather than spectacular. On *Johnny Cash Is Coming To Town* (1987) he hedged his bets, Elvis Costello's "The Big Light" sitting alongside Merle Travis' gnarly "Sixteen Tons". On the follow-up, *Water From The Wells Of Home*, he duetted with Paul McCartney, Glen Campbell, Hank Williams Jr and The Everly Brothers in the hope of gaining some traction. It's a good record, but it didn't do the business. "The critics weren't paying attention, even friends and neighbours weren't paying that much attention," says Stuart. "It just wasn't time. He could have recorded anything in this world at that time, and I don't think it would have mattered."

"Johnny Cash was a poet," says Rodney Crowell. "In that period it was just hard for the poetry to get through, because you need people to believe in the essence of what you do, not merely in the projected notion of what might fit the commercial market. Someone like Billy Sherrill had a very polished sheen. It's not a poetic mindset."

IN THE '80S, Cash the Poet garnered support and sustenance from the most unlikely quarters. West Coast punk band Social Distortion were hugely influenced by his music, and The Cramps' brand of psychobilly was a clear homage. On their 1985 album *The Firstborn Is Dead*, Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds recorded "Wanted Man", the travelogue of a lady-killer on the lam written by Cash and Dylan, and recorded on the 1969 live album *At San Quentin*.



With Rosanne backstage at Carnegie Hall, New York, 1994

"Rosanne Cash was selling a million copies and John less than 30,000"

Rick Blackburn

"We've had a long time now to see if these [80s] albums worked," says Stuart. "Some did, some didn't, but every record he made during that period of time, he tried. I'm glad to see that they're getting some justice, because they're not to be dismissed." Ⓛ

Out Among The Stars is released on March 31 by Legacy Records

The following year, on *Kicking Against The Pricks*, Cave recorded

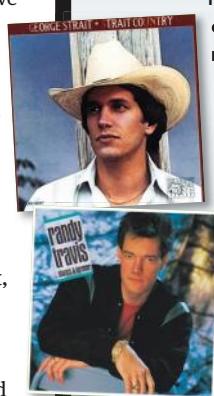
"The Singer", the B-side of "Folsom Prison Blues", and tackled other songs closely associated with Cash, including "Muddy Water" and "Long Black Veil". At Cash's lowest ebb, such endorsement made explicit his longstanding outsider credentials. They were reinforced by the 1988 tribute album, *Til Things Are Brighter*; put together by The Mekons' Jon Langford and ex-Fall guitarist Marc Riley. "People didn't really get that Cash was a serious artist," says Langford. "They thought we were indulging a bit of kitsch, but these were great songs. The album was like a pre-echo of his stature, that he wasn't forgotten and hadn't gone off to Vegas."

There was an artist in there who was troubled by complacency. I think we managed to stir up a bit of interest about him. He told us it was a morale booster."

When Langford and Riley caught up with Cash after a London show in 1989 they told him they were throwing a release party at the Old Pied Bull pub in Islington the following week. "He said, 'I wish I'd known, June and I would have stayed over a few days longer.' He'd have done it, too. Sharing a dressing room with Frank Sidebottom..."

Rosanne Cash: "He loved that album. He felt a real connection with those musicians, he felt very validated. He absolutely understood what they were tapping into, and it was re-energising for him."

Soon Cash would slough off his difficult, complicated '80s and step back into the big picture. In the early '90s he recorded with U2 and hooked up with Rick Rubin, sparking one of the most remarkable third acts in musical history. It was no accident, says John Carter Cash. "The truth is that dad always stayed true to his spirit and what he believed in. This period shows that he wasn't afraid to take risks, he would go anywhere his heart led him creatively. It took some time, but music came back around to him – he didn't have to modify to fit it. That's the mark of a true artist."



Cash's commercial decline in the '80s coincided with the rise of neo-country, a slick new commercial sound inspired by the popularity of films like *Urban Cowboy* and *9 To 5*, and exploited via Madison Avenue market research, country music radio, TV and video. This upscale, boot-scootin' boogie was a world away from the Outlaws of old.

Cash was not impressed. "If I hear 'demographics' one more time I'm gonna puke right in their faces," he growled. Even the rise of more credible neo-traditionalist artists like Alan Jackson, George Strait, Ricky Skaggs and Randy Travis failed to give him a boost. They were young, fresh, clean-cut. Cash belonged to a generation which had had its day.

A NEW DECADE

ARE YOU READY FOR THE NEO-COUNTRY?

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Working On A Dream

Story: Jason Anderson
Photo: Pieter M Van Hattem

THE WAR ON DRUGS' cosmic, anthemic music has made them one of the most potent American bands of the past few years. Now, as the arrival of their *Lost In The Dream* album presents a new career high, *Uncut* hitches a lift through a Philadelphia blizzard in mainman Adam Granduciel's van. Panic attacks? Weird anxieties? Heartache? Just say no!





A man called Adam:
Granduciel at home
with his dog, Jessie:
"It's time to start
connecting to people"

WHAT WITH VU biographies strewn on the seats, the Neu! CDs on the floor and the beat-up camera on the dashboard, the inside of Adam Granduciel's van looks as lived-in as it could without anyone actually living in it. The War On Drugs leader bought the second-hand Chevy passenger van ahead of a run of shows with Vancouver indie rockers Destroyer in early 2011. This beige monstrosity served them through the 70,000 miles they racked up over the next year and a half. Meanwhile, TWOD's second album, *Slave Ambient*, headed toward a wider breakthrough that included tours with Sharon Van Etten and The National, and prime spots on 2011's year-end lists (we ranked it No 10).

After pulling up outside the band's new space in an industrial stretch of north Philadelphia on a bright January afternoon, Granduciel swings open the door and apologises for his lateness. He got stuck waiting for a mechanic to attach a new hitch. The latest proof of the band's rising fortunes will be the trailer for their gear so there'll be no more worries about sudden stops that send cases flying. "Safety is always a concern," Granduciel says and he means it, too. As Neil Young's *Silver & Gold* plays on the stereo, he steers through the dauntingly narrow streets of Philly with considerable finesse. He's just as comfortable at the wheel the next morning amid a snowstorm that will paralyse much of the American northeast for days.

Like any battered band vehicle, this one has a certain symbolic significance. In US indie circles, the van remains an emblem of perseverance in the face of truck-stop food and dismal gigs hundreds of miles apart. Henry Rollins best expressed that ethos in the title of his Black Flag memoir, *Get In The Van*. Yet Granduciel's love of the road has even greater resonance due to the music he's made with The War On Drugs, which began nine years ago as a loose smattering of Philly friends including Kurt Vile. These are songs that head down the same lonesome highways of Young, Dylan and Springsteen, albeit propelled by Krautrock's motorik pulse and occasionally subsumed in dense fogbanks of drones and ambient sound. As sung by Granduciel in a dreamy drawl, this is music built for a perpetual state of – as he sings in *Slave Ambient*'s "Come To The City" – "just moving, always drifting."

The van also became Granduciel's refuge in the "weird year" of anxiety and heartache that sometimes crippled him as he tried to finish *Lost In The Dream*, TWOD's third album. "Something flipped inside of me," he says. Trips to studios in North Carolina and New York helped with the cabin fever. On other nights, he'd drive around Philly listening to rough mixes of new songs. Says Granduciel, "If a mix was 10 minutes long, I'd be like, 'Man, I gotta keep it long – gotta make sure we don't fade it out.' This environment went into a lot of the songs."

THE VAN TAKES up a good chunk of the street parking across from the weathered row house where Granduciel lives. Inside, things feel transitional. Though this was where he recorded significant portions of The War On Drugs' music, most of the gear has been moved out to the new space. His Waterboys and Spirit LPs and French movie poster for *Rust Never Sleeps* are all still here, as are his dog Jessie and three cats.

It remains a home base but Granduciel's mind is on other places. One is Dover, Mass., the Boston suburb where he grew up. "There's only one stop light in the whole town," he says.



DRUGS TALK

Class-A moniker

Adam Granduciel on the benefits of his band name

I thought it was an awesome name when I first heard it. My buddy Julian came up with it years before there even was a band. It's funny because people get the joke, but not always older people. We got pulled over once by a cop in Tennessee. We were driving from Denton, Texas to Nashville and it was four in the morning. We weren't speeding – he stopped just because we were driving so late. He was like, 'What's your band called?' 'The War on Drugs.' 'I like the sound of that – what do you sound like?' 'Umm... Tom Petty.' He's like, 'I like the sound of that, too!' And he let us go. For parents or older people, they hear it that way and they're like, 'Oh, cool.' They think it's a public service announcement."

"As a kid I would go on bike rides by myself for miles." The son of a clothing merchant and a Montessori teacher, he was raised by parents that believed in good educations for their kids and supported their artistic and athletic endeavours. It was a good family, Granduciel says, albeit one that was "reclusive in a weird way – we kept to ourselves." Having spent his youth in a place where Bostonians buy giant houses to show they've made it, he felt a keen desire to get out and find "a little more excitement".

A series of adolescent milestones – like getting his first guitar from his dad at age 13 and having his mind blown by a Spacemen 3 record at 14 – fostered his love of playing and recording. His Dylan obsession began in college, where he and a friend liked to "drive around out in the country, smoke weed and listen to cassettes". After graduating, he spent two years in Oakland working alone on his music and doing restaurant jobs. He moved to Philadelphia on a whim in 2003. One of the earliest and strongest bonds he forged here was with Vile. The future indie-rock upstart was then working at a brewery with a mutual friend and the two hit it off. "It's like when you're a kid and you had this friend you would hang out with after school four nights a week," says Granduciel.

Speaking to *Uncut*, Vile remembers the time with the same fondness. "Honestly, it was just bliss to be able to bounce off someone like that," he says. "We would play together and it would just be effortless." At that point, Vile says The War On Drugs wasn't a band so much as "this thing at Adam's home where all our friends would come over and psych out". Having his own growing stack of solo CD-R releases, Vile admits that things got "slightly weird" when he saw himself identified in the press as TWOD's guitarist. Yet the two maintained close ties in those years, with Granduciel recording and touring in Vile's band The Violators and Vile returning the favour.

Another of Granduciel's key collaborators, producer and engineer Jeff Ziegler came into the picture when working on Vile's *Childish Prodigy* and Granduciel was grappling with the songs that would comprise *Wagonwheel Blues*, TWOD's 2008 debut. As Ziegler recalls over the phone from his Uniform Recording studio in Philly, the music was mostly in "bits and pieces" then but impressive all the same. Assembling it would rarely be an easy task given Adam's preferred methodology, which involved recording various groupings of musicians and his own multi-tracked efforts on guitars and keyboards. Gradually the songs would emerge from the dozens of takes.



The War On Drugs:
"just moving,
always drifting..."

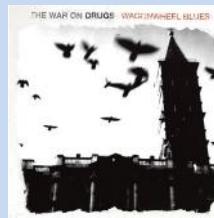
The live version of The War On Drugs coalesced around the core of Granduciel and two more multi-instrumentalists, Dave Hartley and Robbie Bennett. And though the acclaim for *Wagonwheel Blues* in 2008 and the impact of *Slave Ambient* boosted Granduciel's confidence, the gulf remained between the band's studio and live incarnations. Warm and affable during his quests for "sweet sounds" alongside his friends, Granduciel required a more solitary headspace to create new music. When the touring for *Slave Ambient* was finished and he didn't have to go back to a day job, the pressure mounted. "This was the first time where it felt more professional," he says, leaning hard on the p-word. "It was like, 'OK, time to do this, time to make the record.' And that really freaked me out."

What Granduciel calls his "weird year" began pretty well. Working long hours to capture the necessary "midnight vibe", the new songs were progressing well from the demos he'd recorded in late 2012. Then things went squirrely. Granduciel's girlfriend of several years moved out, leaving him alone with Jessie, the cats and too much gear. (He doesn't talk much about the split but confides they got back together near the end of last year.) Overindulging in bad habits wasn't the issue – "I tried to live a sober life for most of the year," he says. He'd even quit smoking and eating meat, barring the chicken in the pho soup at his favourite Vietnamese spot. He's not sure what flipped that switch. "Maybe it's because we had such a good couple of years and I was worried about when the other shoe was going to drop." In any case, "I became incredibly uncomfortable in my own skin and in my own head." Feeling like he'd suddenly sunk into "a total fucking hole", he went out rarely, foregoing his first-floor home studio to stay in his bedroom on the third or head out in the van. "I felt like I was having 10 panic attacks a day. It was certainly weird to not feel like I could enjoy the time to explore or do things at my own pace – I'd strived for my whole life to get to that point."

Typically painstaking with his music, he burrowed in further. Ziegler recognised the importance of finding some means of escape. "We did a lot more bouncing around in terms of traveling to different studios, just for the sake of getting away," he says. For TWOD's methods, Ziegler says having a greater budget and longer schedule to exhaust all possible options was "a blessing and a curse". Granduciel says the weeks he spent mixing with Nicholas Vernhes at Brooklyn's Rare Book Room studio were particularly grueling. "I hope I never ever feel like that again."

HOW TO BUY

The War On Drugs and friends



The War On Drugs *Wagonwheel Blues*

SECRETLY CANADIAN, 2008

The debut disc sees the band's basic blueprint of psych-out Americana emerging alongside influences they'd soon outgrow, as heard in the epiphanic, Broken Social Scene-style indie-rock jams and shoegazer swirliness. It's a bit too diffuse but Granduciel blows a mean harmonica.

7/10

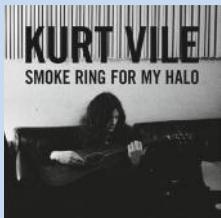


The War On Drugs *Slave Ambient*

SECRETLY CANADIAN, 2011

The 10th best album of 2011 according to *Uncut* remains a mesmerising merger of widescreen Americana, Waterboys-scaled Big Music, motorik grooves and dense soundscapes. "Brothers" and "Baby Missiles" became instant road-trip staples. Kurt Vile appears on two tracks, too.

9/10



Kurt Vile *Smoke Ring for My Halo*

MATADOR, 2011

As a member of Vile's backing band, The Violators, Granduciel helps beef up his friend's previously sparse sound on his second set of irresistibly laconic rockers for Matador. With its layers of guitars and Mellotron, "On Tour" achieves a Drugs-calibre density.

9/10



Sharon Van Etten *Epic*

JAGJAGUWAR, 2012

Drugs' bond with the singer-songwriter was forged when bassist Dave Hartley guested on her breakthrough mini-album, recorded in Philly. Van Etten sounds like an artist finding her feet as she nimbly shifts from the jagged pop of "Peace Signs" to the woozier "DSharpG" to "Love More", later covered by Bon Iver.

8/10

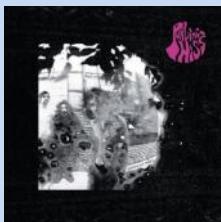


Nightlands *Oak Island*

SECRETLY CANADIAN, 2013

The first album by Hartley's side-project (with cameos by all his TWOD bandmates) is a winning collection of endearingly egg-headed, Eno-esque art pop with no end of soft-rock flair. Catnip for anyone who ever wished Peter Cetera would record an album for Warp.

8/10



Purling Hiss *Water On Mars*

DRAG CITY, 2013

Singer-guitarist Mike Polizze's fuzz kings get a (slight) clean-up job from producers Granduciel and Jeff Ziegler on the power trio's debut for Drag City. As mucky as it often sounds, it's pure pop compared to the heavy action that Polizze plays in Birds Of Maya, members of Philly's strong psych axis.

8/10



Kurt Vile, and left,
Sharon Van Etten



Though clearly happy to be on the other side of it all, Granduciel wonders whether his sometimes debilitating battle with his neuroses brought a new sensibility to his writing. The spectral beauty and open-hearted ache in songs like *Lost In The Dream*'s title track suggest he may be right.

"Before we started making this album, I was like, 'I want to find a way to be a different kind of person, a more open person – how do I do that?' Then as I was making this record, my life changed in this weird way that has forced me to open up a bit."

WHAT WITH THE demands of crafting TWOD's music, it's no wonder Granduciel seems easier-going (and easier on himself) with his friends. Over tacos and beers at a favourite dive bar, Granduciel and the lineup for the tour to come – Bennett, Hartley and Charlie Hall, a compadre since the early days of TWOD now enlisted as drummer – trade jokes, talk sport and marvel over Johnny Marr's niceness upon meeting him at an Aussie festival a few weeks before. Their bonds survived the weird year even if they didn't spend much of it playing music together. "Breaking Bad was our once-a-week thing," says Bennett. "We'd get Indian food and sit around his house."

"We were still hanging but we were ready for new material," says Hartley. "Adam was going through hell all the time."

Though the other War On Drugs members would contribute their parts and hear mixes, even they weren't sure where it was heading. Says Hartley, "There are some songs where Adam could probably say it was in his head but I didn't see the big picture until the very end." Granduciel admits he'd like to find ways to better integrate TWOD's parallel incarnations and get more new music started while on tour. At the same time, he's thrilled by this part of the process, when he gets to hear his friends put their stamp on the songs. *Uncut* can't help but lament the fact that getting to this point requires so much heavy lifting. "That's why my back is so fucked up!" exclaims the frontman with much laughter all round. All jests aside, his connections to a wider community of musicians in and outside Philly have just as much meaning to Granduciel. TWOD's co-headliner on a 2012 tour, Sharon Van Etten invited Hartley and Granduciel to guest on her new LP, *Are We There?*. As she told *Uncut*, it wasn't so much a recording date as "an excuse to hang out with some friends and play music, too".

The band's new space has also been seeing some action. As the snow begins to come down the next morning, the self-professed gearhead shows *Uncut* some of his most beloved possessions, like that Harmony Bobkat guitar from his dad and the Fender Vibratone that adds a shimmer to much of *Lost In The Dream*. He'll spend the next few days here recording with his friends Sore Eros.

Vile's tried it out, too. Having drifted apart as their career paths diverged, Granduciel isn't sure if they'll ever enjoy that closeness again: when they see each other now, it's most likely at dinner parties or birthday celebrations for Vile's kids. Vile notes that for the first time, they'll both have current albums that "neither of us played a lick on". "But," he adds, "I'm proud of Adam and his music is beautiful. I was really anticipating this record and I'm excited for him to finally get it out."

Granduciel's just as stoked to be done with trailer hitches and indulging in his "maniacal micro-managing" so that he can really get back in the van and share the music he worked so hard to make. "For all the paranoia I have, all the weird fears and anxieties and phobias, one thing I've not thought for a second about was getting onstage and playing. That's awesome to know it hasn't affected that part and I'm not like, 'Am I going to faint? Am I going to have an aneurysm?' It's an exciting time to start making the songs breathe and come to life and start connecting to people instead of obsessing over the record and whether anyone will like it.

"I want to make it everyone else's to enjoy." 



TRACK BY TRACK

Lost In The Dream

Adam Granduciel walks us through the new album

Under The Pressure

Graceful opener sets the mood by enhancing TWOD's signature momentum with an *Avalon*-like lustre.

"I'm not a good dancer but I'd always start to dance as I heard everything come in. So I knew it wasn't right if it didn't make me do the weird hip thing."

Red Eyes

Pace picks up with first single, which could be an '80s Springsteen anthem remodeled by The Clean.

"I remember 'Candy's Room' and loving the certain way the snare comes in. It sounds so papery and so thick at the same time. We never really achieved that, but we got a lot of other sweet sounds."

Suffering

Starck but gorgeous portrait of a relationship in tatters.

"I started that one night on a drum machine – it was really sparse. I'd written a few versions on the piano that sounded like they could've been on *Mind Games*, because I was listening to that record a lot."

An Ocean In Between The Waves

Spidery guitar lines give some tension to a classic TWOD highway song.

"I did the demo here and it was real haunting. Then we built it up and built it up – it sounded so blown out that I thought, 'This is the exact opposite of what I wanted.' We re-recorded it when we were mixing."

Disappearing

Midtempo reverie with the album's densest thicket of synths.

"It began as a 27-minute Juno synth thing I did at home. Then my friend Michael Johnson put an ARP 2600 on it and did something that gave it more of a heart. He adds something irreplaceable to each of the albums."

Eyes To The Wind

Like Wilco at their stateliest, and Granduciel's favourite song on the album.

"One reason I haven't moved out of this dump is because I go into that kitchen with an acoustic guitar and songs come out. It's the weirdest thing. It's not every day, but 'Eyes To The Wind' is one of those songs."

The Haunting Idle

FX-laden instrumental provides eerie pregnant pause.

"I took my van to a mechanic because it was doing this thing while it was idling – it sounded like a horse. He said, 'Oh, it's the haunting idle.' I thought that would be an incredible title so that's what this record was called until the very last second."

Burning

From a Kraftwerk-like thrum emerges a rocker driven by the keyboard melody in Rod Stewart's "Young Turks"...

"When people told me that 'Red Eyes' sounded like 'Young Turks', I'd be like, 'Wait 'til you hear "Burning" – that sounds way more like it!' To be honest, I didn't know it started with that similar ascending organ line."

Lost In The Dream

First in closing duo of ballads steeped in that "midnight vibe".

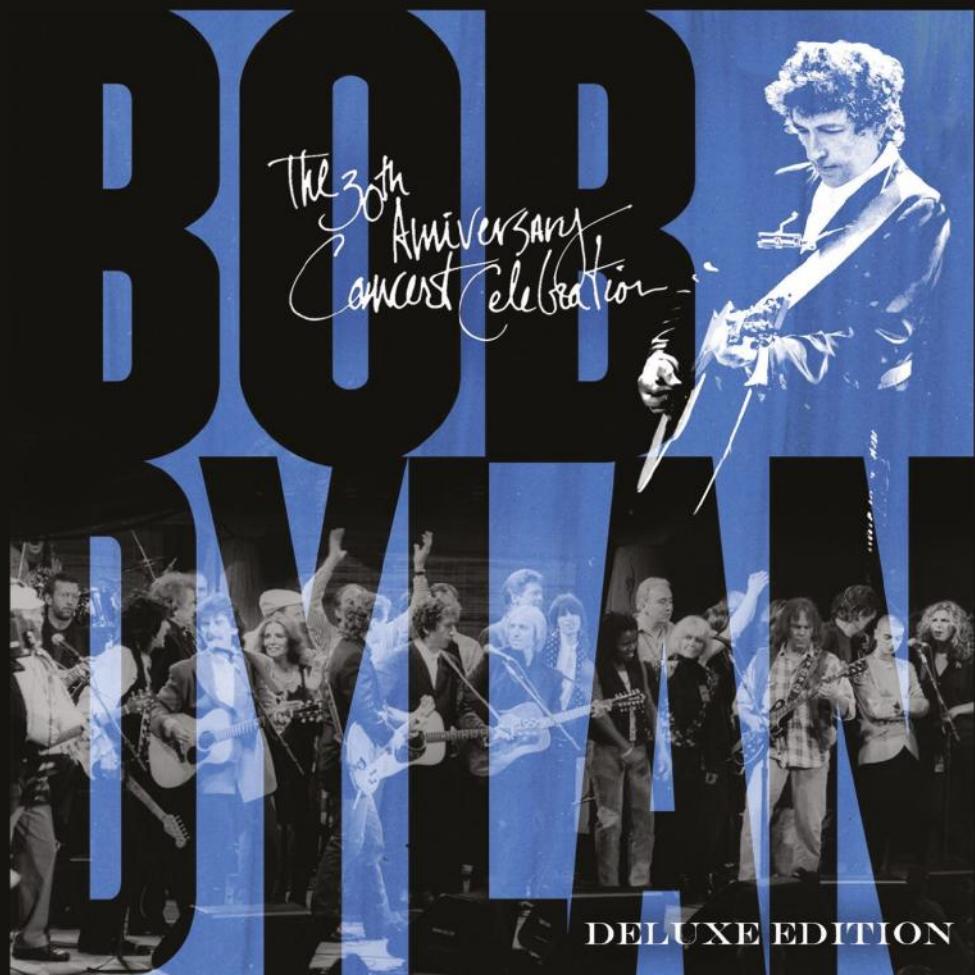
"Whether or not what I do is perceived as a band, a band fronted by one person, my music, the band's music or whatever, I still want to be able to showcase a song like that."

In Reverse

Granduciel saves his sweetest vocal performance for this yearning finale.

"I always knew this would be awesome as the last song, with these beautiful synths and the slide guitar that kinda sounds like nighttime at the beach."





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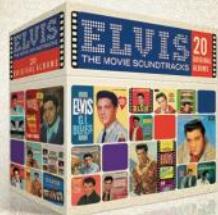


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“JUST A HINT OF MAYHEM.”

1974, and the next phase of DAVID BOWIE's uncanny career is coming into focus. It will be decadent and dystopian. It will involve George Orwell, sexual fluidity, cut-up lyrics, Broadway spectacle, union disputes, “fuel for creativity” and the sound of “a young, French drummer who was witnessing his first execution...” Forty years on, a cast of brave Apollos, seedy young knights and hot tramps remember the days of Diamond Dogs.

Story: John Robinson

Photographs: Terry O'Neill



Outtakes from the
Diamond Dogs
album cover shoot





1

THE STORY OF DIAMOND DOGS

ATER IN THE MONTH, its patrons could look forward to sets from Greenslade, Wild Turkey and Ace. However, anyone in hope of a Thursday night boogie at London's Marquee Club on October 18, 1973 would have found the venue's doors closed to all but invited guests. Had punters checked the listings in the music weeklies beforehand, they would have discovered that the club was scheduled to be "closed for filming and recording session".

That didn't completely cover it. Inside, a select group of observers were witnessing the latest re-invention of David Bowie. Musicians. Americans. Persons whose gender remained a matter of speculation (one observer: "I hit on her... but I saw her going into the men's room..."). Lionel Bart. Wayne County. Mary Hopkin. All, along with 400 delegates from the Bowie fan club, were gathered to watch a spectacle part musical, part theatrical, part wearily technical. David Bowie called it, punningly, *The 1980 Floor Show*.

A show filmed for broadcast on NBC's music strand *The Midnight Special*, the programme was to be the tip of the spear in Bowie's as yet hypothetical conquest of the United States. *Midnight Special* was filmed by veterans of variety television, and Bowie's themed show represented a kind of trade-off. He would benefit from the exposure; *Midnight Special* would appear fractionally more cutting-edge by their relationship with an innovator.

"He was giving us the last of Ziggy, in a primetime environment," says Rocco Urbisci, NBC's creative consultant for the filming. "We did live shows, studio performances. His was the first framed in a concept. The premise was solid. Once it was named *The 1980 Floor Show*, whatever happened within that context, he had license to do it without having to justify it."

Musically, it meant that Bowie was able to reprise for his new television audience material from across his most successful creations. From Major Tom, through Ziggy ("Rock'n'Roll Suicide") to his most recent album *Pin Ups*. He even offered a glimpse of where he might be headed next. So far that seemed to be in a direction pointed by George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The TV special would allow him to try some things out.

"It was a convergence of a lot of work and ideas," remembers Geoff MacCormack, then known as "Warren Peace" and singer with Bowie's vocal back-up group.

JOE STEVENS

"David was in his own little world"

Ava Cherry

THE 1980 FLOOR SHOW: THE SETLIST

- 1984/Dodo David Bowie
- Sorrow Bowie
- Bulerias Carmen
- Everything's Alright Bowie
- Space Oddity Bowie
- I Can't Explain Bowie
- As Tears Go By Marianne Faithfull
- Time Bowie
- Wild Thing The Troggs
- The Jean Genie Bowie
- Rock'n'Roll Suicide Bowie (not broadcast)
- 20th Century Blues Marianne Faithfull
- I Got You Babe Bowie/ Marianne Faithfull

Note: the *Dollars in Drag* bootleg adds "Hang On To Yourself", "The Supermen" and "Man In The Middle" - not from the NBC show



Taping The 1980 Floor Show at London's Marquee, October 1973 - above, Bowie performs "The Jean Genie"; below, Bowie, Marianne Faithfull and Mick Ronson tackle "I Got You Babe"



"He'd been itching to do it. He wanted to include dance and movement and mime, as he had with Lindsay Kemp. It wasn't a gelled idea, but it was like a trial run for what came next. It was like a camp cabaret."

It also commenced a balancing act – between artistic truth and commercial

breakthrough; English rock and American soul; Ziggy Stardust and David Bowie – that would consume much of the next two years.

Bowie's cabaret featured The Troggs, a Spanish group called Carmen, and Marianne Faithfull, dressed as a nun. Bryan Ferry's muse Amanda Lear, then known as Dushenka, made an appearance during "Sorrow". Dancers spelled out Bowie's name with their bodies. As it turned out, all these pansexual hijinks were too rich for the American stomach.

"David wore a kind of fishnet thing," says Ken Scott, who mixed the show for broadcast. "I don't mean like stockings, but like the nets people go out to catch fish with. There were three hands on it: one on each breast and one clutching his crown jewels, shall we say. The producers came out and said, 'You're going to have to get rid of that third hand.' But when that disappeared, they could see pubic hair..."

"*Midnight Special* was a slick production, but this show wasn't like that," remembers Urbisci. "It was a little dirty under the nails, a little edgy. I think that was Bowie's design: to force us to reinvent ourselves and to adapt to an environment that he picked, rather than have him



Bowie performs "Everything's Alright" during *The 1980 Floor Show* with backing singers Jason Guess and Ava Cherry

adapt to our environment, where he would be more uncomfortable."

What Bowie did next certainly didn't feel like an attempt to reconcile the two positions. It required the breaking of old ties, and balancing the familiar with the completely untried. To make headway in America wouldn't require a compromise. In fact, it required something more like a tightrope walk.

DIAMOND DOGS, DAVID BOWIE's album of 1974, was a recording of inversion: made among the stars, but looking down at the gutter. Oppressive in its tone, the record opens on a joyless future metropolis called "Hunger City", where the only creatures doing well are the rats. Love, such as it is, is stolen in doorways. There are judgmental eyes everywhere. It was a far cry from Bowie's own easygoing life on Oakley Street in Chelsea, with, as Geoff MacCormack recalls, "a Mercedes dealership at the end of the road".

Guests were invited in to savour the waft of this affluent Bohemia. *Diamond Dogs* tape op Andy Morris lived with his parents in Palmers Green. "David said to me, 'Where do you keep going on that little motorbike of yours?'" remembers Morris. "Why don't you come and stay with me?" I had my own room on the second floor. Every night I would get in the Daimler with him and make the journey to Chelsea from the studio in Barnes."

Money appeared to be no object. "He wasn't really watching what was going on, all the money that was being spent," recalls Ava Cherry, then Bowie's backing singer, protégée and girlfriend. "David was in his own little world, very focused on his creating thing."

Inspired by William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, Bowie



Q: HOW DID DAVID BOWIE END UP PLAYING SAX ON A STEELEYE SPAN RECORD PRODUCED BY IAN ANDERSON?

A: Steeleye Span had a positive attitude when it came to recruiting guests. In 1974, they needed someone to play the ukulele. "Someone said, 'Peter Sellers plays the ukulele...'" remembers singer Maddy Prior. "And if you don't ask..." They asked, Sellers guested.

This "Why not?" policy had been introduced the previous year when the band were attempting a cover of Phil Spector's "To Know Him Is To Love Him". The band thought it needed sax, "and [bassist] Rick [Kemp] said, 'David Bowie

made cut-up lyrics which he kept in a box. Socially, Ron Wood provided empathetic company, and a fittingly starry social circle. "At that time, David was trying to integrate himself with people like Mick [Jagger]," Cherry remarks. "Ronnie was one of the guys we were always hanging out with."

Diamond Dogs is a product of both a solitary creative mania and a gregarious social whirl. After creating personae hard to pin down in time and space, *Diamond Dogs*, for all its ties to an imagined future, fleetingly touches down on a recognisable planet earth, and

plays the saxophone..." says Prior.

Kemp's Bowie connection came from a post-*"Space Oddity"* trip to Beckenham when he and a drummer, Richie Darmer, offered to be Bowie's rhythm section. "We figured he might not be doing much after that," remembers Kemp. "Wrong!" Bowie remembered the connection, and came down to the session, bringing his Selmer plastic sax. "He was his usual charming self," says Kemp. "[Jethro Tull's] Ian Anderson was producing," says Prior, "and there was some... jockeying." "Ian said something to David on the talkback," says Kemp, "and David said, 'What's that? You say you're going to make me a star...?'"



▷ sometimes hints at Bowie having real-time contemporaries. The Top 5 hit "Rebel Rebel" broached the disapproval faced by the suburban androgynous, in the language of the 1965 Rolling Stones. The title track is a close cousin to that same band's "It's Only Rock'n'Roll". The point during "Big Brother", meanwhile, at which Bowie sings about a glass asylum, "...with just a hint of mayhem", should have had Bryan Ferry running for legal advice.

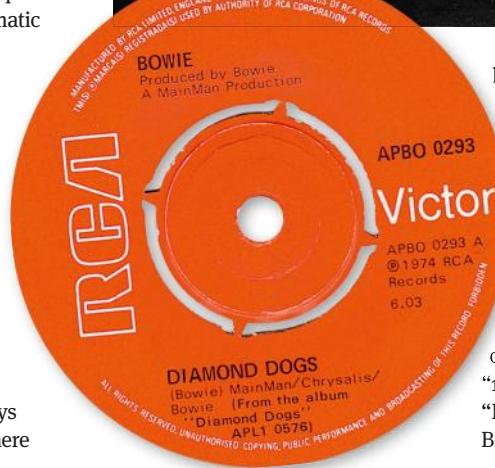
Elsewhere, the sound and conception was uniquely Bowie's. The majority of the first side is given over to a trio of songs ("Sweet Thing/Candidate/Sweet Thing (Reprise)") inspired by George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The final four songs of the record flesh out that influence in musical languages from US funk to Velvet Underground rock. Never mind musical theatre – after the stripped-down room sound of the Spiders From Mars, the rock/soul hybrid was a dramatic spectacle on its own.

Ken Scott, Bowie's producer until this point, gently demurs. "Nyeaaah," he says. "It wasn't one thing or the other. It didn't do it for me."

It certainly isn't everyone's favourite. When the title track came out as a single, it didn't make the Top 20 – unthinkable for a Bowie release in the '70s. But for Herbie Flowers, the session bass player who became Bowie's right-hand man during the album recordings, it's vital that critics see the bigger picture.

"They don't know how important it is," says Flowers. "David has built a city of music. There

King of the castle:
Bowie recording *Pin Ups* at the Château d'Hérouville, northern France, July 1973



have to be the slums, the castles and the cathedrals and all the rest. Take the artwork. When I first saw it, I thought 'That is utterly awful.' But you could see that record sleeve a mile away."

"I think he did have a sense of mission," says Andy Morris. "He was completely entrenched in American music. He really looked up to Bruce Springsteen – he talked about him as an important new songwriter."

To Geoff MacCormack, the record's shift towards soul and funk seems completely natural. If "Rebel Rebel" offered a last word on British glam, the funky likes of "1984" simply reflected his interests at the time. The soulful "Rock'n'Roll With Me" was written with MacCormack, at Bowie's home at Oakley Street.

REBEL REBELS

DAVID'S DAWGS

Who's who in Uncut's story...

JON ASTLEY

A tape op on *Diamond Dogs*, Jon went on to co-produce The Who's *Who Are You* with Glyn Johns. Jon also released two albums: *Everyone Loves The Pilot (Except The Crew)* (1987) and *The Compleat Angler* (1988).



AVA CHERRY

The "black Barbarella" has maintained a singing career, and recently featured in the 2013 documentary *Twenty Feet From Stardom* (about backing singers) – as well as the Bowie doc *Five Years*.

MIKE GARSON

"The best rock'n'roll pianist – because he doesn't play rock'n'roll," was how Bowie described Garson, whose next-level piano solo on "Aladdin Sane" may be his signature recorded Bowie moment. Was in

the loop for *Outside* and *Toy*, though he doesn't seem to appear on *The Next Day*.



EARL SLICK

Joined Bowie for the *Diamond Dogs* tour, played on the New York

parts of *Young Americans*, during which he formed an association with Lennon/Ono which led to him playing on *Double Fantasy* and *Season Of Glass*. He most recently played on Bowie's 2013 album, *The Next Day*.

HERBIE FLOWERS

The genial Flowers has enjoyed an enormously varied session career, and – as one of Sky – in the spotlight. Herbie stayed with Bowie for the first leg of the *Diamond Dogs* tour, but then "fizzled out, for family reasons. Family – that's the most important thing..."

ANDY MORRIS

After continuing his career as an engineer, Andy went into band management and runs Sound Merchants LLC from his base in New York.

GEOFF MACCORMACK

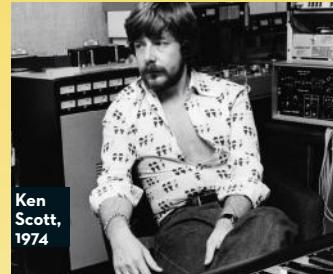
Bowie's mate from school turned backing singer (and occasional co-writer), Geoff has since composed award-winning music for film and TV. His photobook, *From Station To Station: Travels With Bowie 1973-1976*, is available from www.genesis-publications.com.

TONY NEWMAN

Former Sounds Incorporated man and later session drummer for The Who, T.Rex and many more, Tony embraced the costuming element of the *Diamond Dogs* tour: "I looked like I was a drayman," he recalls. "Fucking ridiculous."

ALAN PARKER

Alan's work with Bowie was pivotal, but his head wasn't turned by the starry assignment. "The day after I was working for Frank Sinatra, and the night before I started with Bowie had just finished a week at Grosvenor



Ken Scott, 1974

KEN SCOTT

Former Beatles engineer Scott worked with Bowie from *Hunky Dory* through to *Pin Ups*. Ken has lately told the story of his career in a memoir, *Abbey Road To Ziggy Stardust*.

ROCCO URBISCI

Rocco has worked for 40 years as a writer and producer for film and TV. He has enjoyed a long working relationship with the American comedian George Carlin.

TONY ZANETTA

Actor turned MainMan staff member, Zanetta has turned his experiences with Bowie into a memoir, *Stardust*, and designs events for corporate clients. <http://anthonyzanetta.com>

"He said, 'Do you want a coffee?' I sat down at the piano and started playing these chords," remembers Geoff. "He said, 'Hang on a minute – do that again...' So I did, he said, 'OK, get up...' and he finished it off."

"We influenced each other from when we were little kids, like eight years old," MacCormack continues. "We were listening to Little Richard, Fats Domino. Little Richard freaked us out the most because it was so brilliant: the look, the whole thing."

"David was into going to gay clubs at the time because of the music they were playing," remembers Jon Astley, another tape op at Olympic during *Diamond Dogs*. He and [Diamond Dogs engineer] Keith Harwood were going off to places I would have called 'quite dodgy' then, but subsequently became very famous."

"We went out a lot," says Geoff MacCormack. "We went to a place called El Sombrero, which I knew because a girl I went out with knew a load of gay guys. They would play the Temptations, James Brown. A lot of high-energy stuff. It goes well with the amyl nitrate."

"Freddie Burretti used to hang out there with all his crowd," says Geoff. "Freddy was David's personal tailor – he lived in the basement at Oakley Street. David would just go down there any time he needed a new outfit."

MacCormack's recollection of the time offers a refreshingly different take on a dark and theatrical record, and a period which found Bowie distancing himself from his former associates.

"...Which is fucking brilliant, isn't it?"

Bowie's new lifestyle was bought with the spoils of his most successful creation. But that was not, he had come to understand, a role he could play forever.

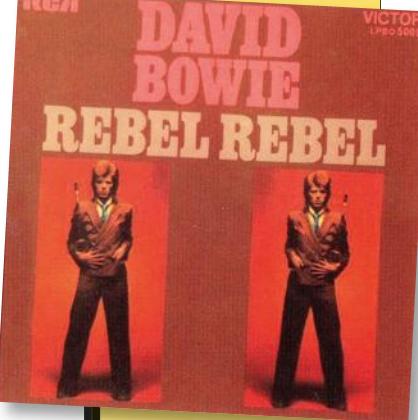
"David understood that he had to move on, or he would be stuck playing Ziggy Stardust for the rest of his life," says Tony Zanetta, then a MainMan employee.

"But in the moment, he had become the character and we all related to him as if he were Ziggy. He didn't look that different, but working with new musicians gave *Diamond Dogs* a very different sound."

ALTHOUGH ZIGGY WAS dead, as his British fans had known since the summer, few suspected that his suicide had been an assisted one. Where were the Spiders? In autumn 1973, such members of David Bowie's band that might reasonably still claim the name (guitarist Mick Ronson and bassist Trevor Bolder) were recording with Ken Scott and *Pin Ups* drummer Aynsley Dunbar at London's Trident Studios. Stout British yeomen attempting to fake it as American funk musicians, they were working on their employer's new direction.

"It was obvious that things were changing," recalls Ken Scott. "We'd gone through *Pin Ups*, which wasn't one of the best sessions..."

"1984/Dodo" was certainly a departure. A song in its initial version based around a distant guitar riff and a honking baritone sax, the song debuts Bowie's vision of an Orwellian future state, supplementing the author's original with his own hip, street-level reportage. The authorities will empty your head of thoughts. Don't trust anyone. Don't go looking for a Dylan-style revolutionary prophet ("The times they are a-telling/The changing isn't free..."). Love? The struggle of the tale's romantic leads is beautifully told, but rejected as corny



EYEWITNESS

DAVID PLAYED GUIT-AH-AHHHH

With Mick Ronson out of the picture, Bowie decided that he would attempt the bulk of guitar on *Diamond Dogs* himself. Alan Parker supplied the skills on "1984" and "Rebel Rebel", but the soloing on "Sweet Thing", for example, is most likely all Bowie.

"I think he did a kick-ass job," says Earl Slick – still Bowie's go-to lead guitarist. "The way he plays and thinks is so out of the box. There are things a full-time guitarist would not do."

Experimentation was key to Bowie's approach. Both Andy Morris and Jon Astley recall his use of a Dan Armstrong guitar. "They made Plexiglass guitars," says Morris. "They made guitars with pick-ups you could slide in on a rail – he would experiment with that."

"He approached it from the outside," says Slick. "'Sweet Thing' – that's David. He'll use a lot of sonics. That thing's pretty flanged up and weird."

("We played out an all-night movie role").

A middle section, "Dodo (You Didn't Hear It From Me)", uses stacked voices and brass to suggest malign whispers and the passing of incriminating information. The sumptuousness of Mick Ronson's string arrangement, and the propulsive nature of the tune is quite at odds with the paranoia at its heart.

Not that this mismatch would even momentarily distract from the magnificence of what you were hearing. If Bowie wanted to shake being confined by the kind of beefy British rock that had made up *Ziggy Stardust*, he was going the right way about it.

"He kept on referring to Barry White and the Philadelphia Sound," remembers Ken Scott of this prototype recording. "He wanted to head in that direction."

Even if the actual recording session was, as Scott recalls, unremarkable, Bowie's interest in the detail of the finished product was uncharacteristic. "The biggest difference was when it came to mixing," says Scott. "He had only previously come to the mix of one song – [*Aladdin Sane's*] 'Lady

Grinning Soul'. But for "1984/Dodo" he was there for the entire mix and he was pushing for the way he wanted it. We'd listen to how the rhythm section and orchestra was mixed on a Barry White record and try to head in that direction."

The song is the number with which Bowie chose to open *The 1980 Floor Show*: a song with which Bowie broke off relations with Ziggy Stardust – even if he retained his stylist and some of his personnel. This, however, is not the version of "1984" that we know from its appearance on *Diamond Dogs*.

"The immediate reaction was that he liked it," says Ken Scott. "I can almost guarantee that we wouldn't have walked out of the studio if he didn't like it. I never got any feedback from him on anything – I just assumed he liked what we did because we continued working together."

That was soon to change. Having experimented with cutting up lyrics, Bowie now extended the policy to his personnel. He cut Trevor Bolder and Mick Ronson, then cut Ken Scott. Soon, the only person left standing from Bowie's most successful period would be himself.

"We did '1984', and that was the last I saw of him," says Scott today. "I wouldn't say I was surprised. But I was a little hurt."

Bowie during a TV appearance for "Rebel Rebel" in the TopPop studios in Hilversum, Holland, February 13, 1974

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ELBOW





Ziggy retires: Lou Reed and Mick Jagger join Bowie at his retirement party, London's Café Royal, July 4, 1973

AS BEFITS AN album of ruined worlds, ill-starred trysts and power gone mad, the path to *Diamond Dogs* was not a straight one. It would be another year or so before Brian Eno would publish his *Oblique Strategies*, but if David Bowie had a policy in 1973 it was to embrace an unorthodox way forward. He honoured mistakes as hidden intentions. He worked at a different speed. He improvised.

He was in good company. In New York, his manager Tony DeFries presided over MainMan Enterprises, a concern seemingly run on speculative chutzpah alone. Bills went unpaid, but filet mignon kept getting ordered. DeFries had been attempting to sell promoters on a 90:10 split for Bowie US arena shows in autumn 1973, but found little enthusiasm for this Led Zeppelin-style, "take it or leave it" deal-making.

Promoters left it. "DeFries was a bit of a megalomaniac," says Tony Zanetta. "David hadn't really proved that he could do that kind of business..."

However, Bowie's "retirement" in July allowed DeFries to spin this lack of interest to his public relations advantage: it enabled him to announce, with great sadness, the unavoidable cancellation of a truly spectacular (and entirely non-existent) arena tour. "He was an optimist," says Zanetta.

Nonetheless, DeFries and MainMan had to face the fact that they had a cancelled tour, no new record, and a major artist who had apparently retired. At a meeting at RCA Records to discuss the situation, an executive mentioned Alice Cooper's residency at the New York Palace Theatre: "Alice At The Palace".

"We immediately said, 'Let's do 'Bowie on Broadway,'" says Zanetta. "It was alliteration, as simple as that, and it was the seed of what became *Diamond Dogs*."

MainMan's concept was to exploit the "theatrical" content of Bowie's work, and to swiftly make concrete the abstract notion he had for an Orwell musical. They sent experimental playwright Tony Ingrassia to London to work with Bowie on a script.

"Disaster is too strong a word," recalls

"YOU WOULDN'T WEAR A NEW PAIR OF SHOES IN FRONT OF DAVID..."

So said Mick Jagger, apparently. So how close was the relationship between Bowie and the Stones?

"DIAMOND DOGS"

Bowie sang on the demo of "It's Only Rock'n'Roll" (recorded at Ron Wood's house with Willie Weeks on bass and

Kenney Jones on drums). "Genocide" notwithstanding, Bowie's song has much of the swing of the Stones number. Bowie would later occasionally drop the Stones title into live versions of his song.

GUY PEELLAERT

Mick Jagger is an exemplary commissioning editor ("Do whatever you want," he wrote to Warhol in 1969, "please write back saying

how much money you'd like..."). In 1973, he approached Belgian artist Peellaert to paint the sleeve for the new Stones LP, a fact he mentioned to Bowie. You snooze, you lose: Peellaert's art for *Diamond Dogs* came out in April, six months before his work on *It's Only Rock'n'Roll*.

OLYMPIC STUDIO 2

"Olympic Studio 2 was the studio built for the Stones, because they wanted to leave their set-up as it was," remembers Jon Astley. "That 'clunk' at the beginning of "We Love You" is that door. The desk became quite famous because of all the Stones stuff it had put through it. *Diamond Dogs* has that same grungy feel to it."

KEITH HARWOOD

Having appropriated the Stones' studio, Bowie also borrowed a key element of personnel. Not that Harwood (1940-1977) was easily bossed: "Keith was the architect of the sonic quality," says Andy

Morris. "He was one of those guys who if he thought of something that would make the record sound better and the client disagreed, he would do it anyway.

He would do that with the Stones a couple of times."

CUT-UP TECHNIQUES

Brion Gysin, the British artist and psychedelic experimenter who was an early adopter of the "cut-up" technique was - through Brian Jones - an associate of the Stones. Jagger is thought to have written *Exile...* songs using the technique. A few years on, Bowie was doing something fairly similar.

Bow-wowie! It's superstar David painted half-dog...



Artist Guy Peellaert, left, and David Bowie study the painting which will form the cover for David's next album as they meet at the artist's exhibition, 'It's Peellaert', said David.

DAVID BOWIE came face to face with himself at an exhibition of paint-

ings by ROGER ALLSTON

in May 1973.

Exclusive Evening News picture

by ROGER ALLSTON

1973

Bowie with Ava Cherry taping *The 1980 Floor Show* for NBC's *Midnight Special* programme



• Zanetta, "but there was no way in hell these two were ever going to be able to work together. Their approach was totally different – Tony Ingrassia was a total dictator, very much the centre of his world. David had a very different style – he was definitely the centre of his world but he was not so outwardly demanding. The one was not going to bend to the other. Ingrassia would show up at his house at nine in the morning and want to get to work. David was appalled. He did things at his own speed."

Theatre was also, crucially, not Bowie's medium. When Orwell's widow Sonia Brownwell ruled out the possibility of granting theatrical rights to her late husband's novel, it was a blessing in disguise. True enough, Bowie "played characters", and used mime and dramatic voices in his work, but it was his use of them in pop music that made them so remarkable.

"His way of working wasn't to sit down and write a script," says Tony Zanetta. "He was coming from rock'n'roll. His way of working was to go into the studio and work on music."

IN THE STUDIO was where Bowie came together. Ken Scott recalls that Bowie's signature quality during the albums they made together was a growing confidence in "his music, the way he wanted it to be done", and as the *Diamond Dogs* sessions commenced, he revealed just that. At Olympic Studio 2 in Barnes, London, Bowie was improviser, editor, and lightning rod for his many influences.

"His process is like no process," says pianist Mike Garson, who first worked with Bowie on *Aladdin Sane* and remains associated with him today. "He follows what he hears in his mind's ear – he goes with his intuition and his gut. That might be based on his environment and his reading. He's tuned in. But the inspiration comes from a genuine place."

As Garson remembers it, *Diamond Dogs* found Bowie working in new ways, but however difficult the territory might have appeared, this was someone who instinctively knew where to head.

"I remember seeing Bowie with words and a scissor actually cutting things up, so I knew we were moving outside of the normal way to make songs," he says. "But it didn't faze me at all. David was always doing something original and free that he heard in his head."

Diamond Dogs found Bowie employing a little apparent madness, but also a great deal of method. Freeing himself of his past, Bowie had dispensed with trusted professionals like Ken Scott and Mick Ronson. He would now produce, and play the majority of lead guitar himself.

With these stalwarts gone, he hired musicians he knew, but who predated his success. First, he engaged Herbie Flowers, who had played bass on "Space Oddity", and entrusted him to suggest sympathetic others. Flowers

SOUL LOVE

WHO WERE THE ASTRONETTES?

“The Astronettes was very soulful," says Andy Morris, who worked with Bowie on some demos for them prior to working on *Diamond Dogs*. "They were almost like the Manhattan Transfer."

A group comprising Ava Cherry, Warren Peace and Jason Guess, the outfit was essentially a vehicle for Cherry. The backing band comprised Bowie, Herbie Flowers, Aynsley Dunbar and Bowie's friend Mark Carr Pritchett (who also guested with Bowie at *The 1980 Floor Show*) on guitar. They were like the Arnold Corns, Part II.

The sessions were scrapped, but their "I Am A Laser" was rewritten by Bowie as "Scream Like A Baby" from *Scary Monsters...* and the phrase "People From Bad Homes" (another song) incorporated into "Fashion" on the same album. When the album sessions were released in 1995, with any Bowie content removed, Cherry was mystified. Geoff MacCormack (Warren Peace) is more forthright. "I don't really want to talk about it," he says today. "It was a pile of poop."

suggested his session colleague Alan Parker on guitar – both had worked on '60s Bowie demos at Morgan Studios. To play drums, meanwhile, Flowers suggested Tony Newman, formerly drummer of Sounds Incorporated, who had supported The Beatles at Shea Stadium. One-on-one with Bowie, the musicians began what would be the album's signature operation: overdubbing raw tracks that Bowie had made with Flowers and Aynsley Dunbar.

"They said they were making this album and they weren't happy with the drum tracks – and would I go in and go over it all?" remembers Tony Newman. "So that's what I did. I really like Aynsley's playing – so my thought was, 'Where the hell are you coming from? He's a great drummer!'"

"David's like a great casting director," says Garson. "He knew who to have on these albums. He always knew what he was looking for. And because of the way the Spiders stuff went down, it made sense that it would be that way."

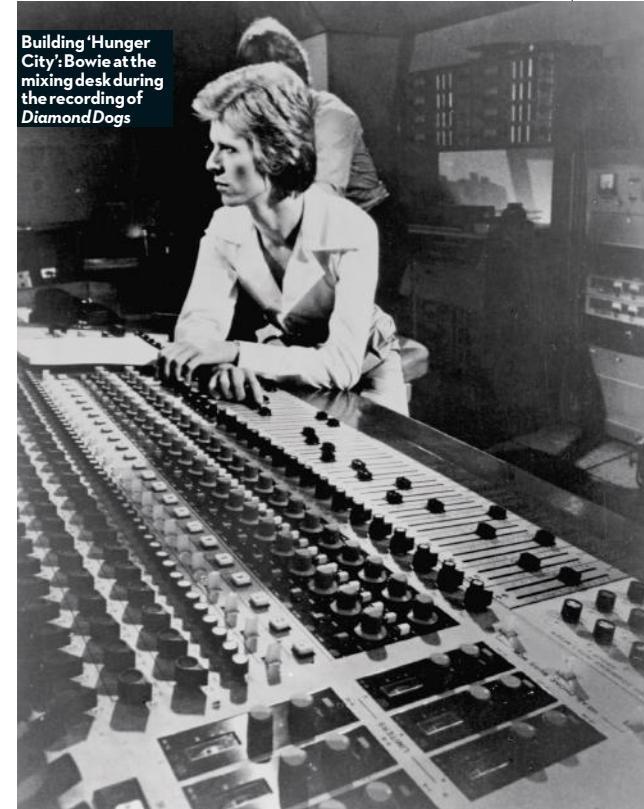
"It's like what Andy Warhol was doing," agrees Herbie Flowers. "The speed he worked, he could get the right people in to help him."

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Big Brother employs the power of slogans: "War is peace"; "Freedom is slavery";

"Ignorance is strength". With *Diamond Dogs*, Bowie was his own Big Brother, with his own oxymoronic process. For every musical freedom, there was a painstaking redaction, as line-by-line he built and rebuilt his exhilarating vision of a debilitating future society.

"There was a lot of backwards and forwards in the recording and in the writing," recalls Jon Astley. "I had a copy of the 'Candidate' lyrics – and you can see all the crossings-out. He would sing and then re-sing. It was often just how the mood took him; he would just say, 'I'll put some sax on that...' He just felt like playing the saxophone."

"I think on that album he had a lot of the songs in place,"





The man behind the mask: Bowie onstage during the *Diamond Dogs* tour, 1974

says Mike Garson, "but working within that, you get a lot of potential freedom."

Alan Parker, who played lead guitar on three songs, recalls how the process worked for "1984", one of the few tracks that was recorded and arranged pretty much live. Rather than overdubbing, Bowie conducted the session, effectively editing it as it went along.

"It seemed the song was a bit more completed," says Parker. "He said: 'I want funky guitar there. Then we just sort of loomed around for half an hour and he would say, 'I like what you're doing there. Can you do that... over there?' He lets you do your thing, no ranting and raving – maybe a 'No, I don't like that'..."

The album contains magnificent music, created in a painstaking way. "Rebel Rebel", the album's No 5 hit, however, was a nearly spontaneous composition.

"He said, 'I've got this riff and it's a bit Rolling Stony – I just want to piss Mick off a bit,'" remembers Alan Parker. "I spent about three-quarters of an hour to an hour with him working on the guitar riff – he had it almost there, but not quite. We got it there, and he said, 'Oh, we'd better do a middle...' So he wrote something for the middle, put that in. Then he went off and sorted some lyrics. And that was us done."

"With 'Rebel Rebel' they may have kept the original vocal track. They certainly kept the original bass and drums," says Herbie Flowers, "cos it's all over the shop."

Bowie's instructions could be surprising. "On 'Sweet Thing' he asked me to imagine myself as a young, French drummer who was witnessing his first execution," says Tony Newman. "It's the only time I've ever been asked that."

"Even if it was the wrong thing," remembers Herbie Flowers, "he wouldn't say, 'You're playing it fucking wrong...' He'd say, 'Thank you very much' and then he would in the most tactful way replace what they did. He would, like all the greats, build their house exactly how they wanted it."

"On tour, sex was king, certain people would want to go gay for a few days"

Tony Newman

BOWIE HAD PLAYED much of the lead guitar on *Diamond Dogs* himself. When it came to promote the album, however, it was clear he would require a second to emulate his studio work onstage. Frank Madeloni, then a 21-year-old guitarist working under the punning pseudonym Earl Slick, was called to RCA Studios in New York to audition. The guitarist entered the studio to find the Marshall amplifier he had requested set up, but no band waiting.

The control room was dark, and he heard a voice through the intercom telling him to put on headphones. "The voice, which I guess was Tony Visconti, said, 'We're going to play some tracks. No, I don't know what key. Just play along,'" Slick recalls. He played two or three numbers (Slick is adamant that he does not, as some sources claim, feature on the final record). The studio door then opened to reveal David Bowie. It was quite an entrance.

"After three songs, David walked in the room, said 'nice to meet you,'" says Slick. "We sat down on a couple of amps. He had an electric, and we noodled around for a little while, and that was it."

Slick found out the next day he had got the job. "I went to where he was staying at the Sherry Netherland Hotel and just chatted," he says. "We talked about the outfits. I was measured for my suit, and then they cut off all my fucking hair, which completely freaked me out."

During the month-long technical rehearsals for the tour, Bowie took the opportunity to explore more deeply in New York the music that fascinated him. "He said to me, 'I want to do a funky thing. Where should I start?'" recalls Ava Cherry. "So we went to the Apollo Theater in Harlem – he was checking out how you would put together a soul band, and how to get that vibe."

"People were like: 'Wow.' This was a really white guy, in a powder blue suit. They were kind of digging it, but didn't know what to make of it."

Even if Bowie's ambitions for the theatre had

EYEWITNESS

THE MANAGERIAL STYLE OF TONY DEFRIES

Tony Zanetta: "He's one of these people you don't meet that often in your life. My impression of him was that he was super-intelligent. He had a rhythm that was quite different to other people. You listened when he spoke, but he listened to you, too. I was in my early twenties – I don't think I had had anyone listen to what I had to say before. He didn't have any self-doubt. He was fearless in dealing with the record companies. He and David, although they had very different styles, were very similar people: very focused and ambitious. They got on extremely well. For two or three or four years, they could talk for hours, plotting."





Bowie emerges from his perspex pod during "Time" and, right, gets tied up by Geoff MacCormack

ended with the demise of the *Nineteen Eighty-Four* musical and the start of the *Diamond Dogs* sessions, a series of meetings with interesting people had left MainMan reluctant to let the idea drop completely.

"We would be playing theatres, because we couldn't get arenas," says Tony Zanetta, "and we wanted to create a set that would be more visually interesting. It wasn't meant to be that literal – like 'this is Hunger City'."

A meeting with lighting designer Jules Fisher, who had recently mounted a successful *Jesus Christ Superstar*, changed that. "They came up with the whole concept together," says Tony Zanetta, "and this was like a Broadway set, which was not what we intended in the beginning."

The full show was quite an undertaking ("We had four trucks," remembers Geoff MacCormack. "Today it would be 16..."). The set featured two towers, connected by a moveable bridge, from which Bowie would sing "Candidate". During "Space Oddity", Bowie was suspended over the crowd in a cherry picker. For "Time" he emerged from a perspex pod.

Backstage too, it was a far cry from beer and sandwiches with the Spiders From Mars. "You had to be very open-minded," says Tony Newman. "Sex was king, certain people would want to have a transvestite for a day, go gay for a few days and come back. I was open to all and everything. It wasn't like, 'I can't do this because there's a lot of bugging going on.' This is being on the road with David Bowie."

"It was pretty much par for the course in the '70s," says Geoff MacCormack. "We weren't lairy. We weren't like rockers, we were more aesthetic than that. We misbehaved very badly, but not the archetypal rock'n'roll thuggery."

The musicians thrived during the first part of the tour (as the *David Live* album testifies – see panel), but were not a prominent feature of the show. "Though we were not behind screens, as some people think," says Earl Slick.

Space onstage was primarily for the use of backing singers Gui Andrisano and Warren Peace. There was business with ropes, and a staged boxing match, complete with boxing ring.

"It was very choreographed," says Geoff MacCormack. "One night I had a toot of spliff and forgot all the moves."



There was meant to be a point where Gui and I beat David up and carry him off. I stood there like an idiot and watched Gui single-handedly beat him up and single-handedly carry him offstage. I just followed them off like an idiot. If you're going to take any drugs: take something to speed you up rather than to zonk you out."

That advice would have been preaching to the choir. "David started doing coke during the recording of *Diamond Dogs*," says Tony Zanetta, "but it was thought of as a fuel for creativity. It wasn't looked on as a serious drug but as something that made you smarter, more creative, to accomplish work."

ACCOMPLISHING MORE WORK was precisely what Bowie had in mind. The full *Diamond Dogs* tour, with Jules Fisher's elaborate set, travelled across the country throughout June and July 1974. Now, during a tour break, Bowie summoned musicians he had met on his forays into Harlem club culture: guitarist Carlos Alomar,

his wife, the singer Robin Clark and her friend, Luther Vandross. In August, this new band made a trip to Sigma Sound Studios in Philadelphia, the source of the sound Bowie had been trying to emulate with Ken Scott the previous year.

During sessions in August, while still promoting its predecessor, Bowie and this band laid substantial groundwork for a whole new album. His change of personnel coincided with

a change of heart about the *Diamond Dogs* stage set.

"It was phenomenal, but it was also a real dead-end trap," says Tony Zanetta. "It was very difficult and expensive. Plus, David knew he wasn't really this theatre guy, and now he had this huge theatrical set. It was worse than being encumbered with Ziggy. It overly defined him. So he got rid of it."

"We were driving round the country listening to Aretha Franklin and everything shifted," says Mike Garson. "What someone else might take two years to do, he accomplishes it in six months. Most people would do a show over and over – he ditched it and starts a whole new thing."

The full *Diamond Dogs* stage set was used for the last time over seven dates at the Universal Amphitheatre in LA at the start of September. Tony DeFries was left fuming at the unrecouped expense of the staging. But as Klieg lights outside the venue scanned the Californian sky, he couldn't deny that his speculation on Bowie's creativity had worked spectacularly well. During the tour, a Bowie album had gone gold in America – even the fact that album was *Ziggy Stardust* couldn't take any shine off the achievement.

"*Diamond Dogs* really established him as a major artist in the US," says Tony Zanetta. "Before that, Bowie was something of an illusion. He was getting tons of press but not really selling. But now he was. It cemented his artistic credentials and put him into the stratosphere he remains in."

The album he had started to make in Philadelphia would strive to take him higher still. **①**



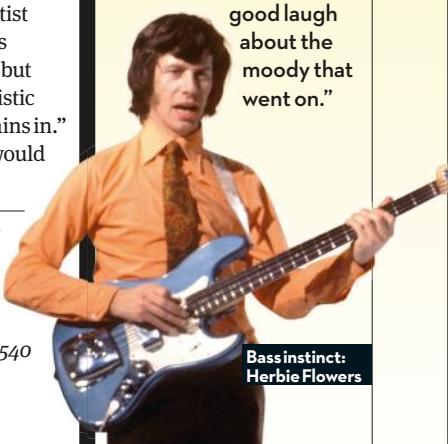
DAVID LIVE: THE PHILADELPHIA STORY

While Alan Yentob's *Cracked Actor* is the definitive record of the later stages of the *Diamond Dogs* tour, it's *David Live* that captures the tour as it was originally conceived. However, the Philadelphia shows recorded for the album (July 8-13) nearly didn't happen. No-one had informed the musicians the shows were to be recorded. Herbie Flowers noticed extra microphones on the stage, and threatened a strike – unless more money was forthcoming.

"I was a whingeing pom," shrugs Flowers today. "Only because I thought someone should have told me – I'm a member of the Musicians Union and a leftie and a Luddite. But I'd be heartbroken if I'd done anything to upset David."

"David got really angry about it," laughs Tony Newman. "He said, 'If you don't want to do it, I'll do it on my own...' Still, we all ended up onstage. He turned round and laughed – we had a

good laugh about the moody that went on."



From Station To Station, by David Bowie & Geoff MacCormack, the signed limited-edition book of 2,000 copies from www.genesis-publications.com; Tel: +44 (0) 1483 540 970; price £295

Bass instinct: Herbie Flowers

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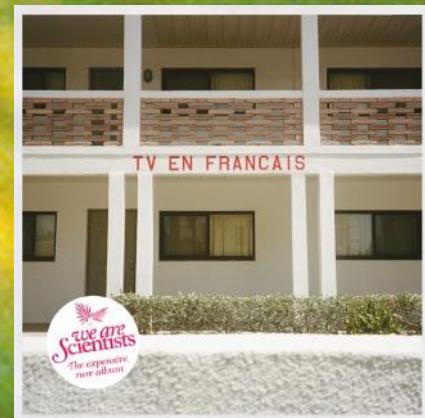
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FEAT DON'T FAIL ME NOW

“It was this great stew or gumbo,” says Paul Barrere about LITTLE FEAT’s eclectic and thrilling blend of rock, blues, country, funk and soul. From roots in the LA fur trade and the orbit of Zappa, through wild times, seminal jams and “bitter, seething hatred”, the surviving Feat tell their story — and the story of their first leader, the brilliant and turbulent LOWELL GEORGE. Willin’, to be movin’...

Story: Jon Dale | **Photograph:** Peter Mazel

BILL PAYNE REMEMBERS the first time he met Lowell George, the guitarist, singer, principal songwriter and founder of Little Feat. Payne was an aspiring young keyboard player from Waco, Texas, living at the time in Santa Barbara. He’d come to Los Angeles hoping to audition for Frank Zappa’s Mothers Of Invention. “I initially met a guy named Jeffrey Simmons from a band called Eureka,” Payne recalls. “He heard a little bit that I played and said, ‘There’s a guy named Lowell George you should be talking to.’ So I called Zappa’s record company and a secretary gave me Lowell’s number. She said Frank was going to be in Europe for a month, but I should call Lowell.”

Visiting George in spring 1969 at his home in the affluent LA suburb of Los Feliz, Payne found himself in an unexpected social situation, though arguably one not unfamiliar in such laid-back times. “The door was wide open,” he says today. “There was a young lady, blonde, listening to Erik Satie. She was sitting on the floor in the living room, on the rug, and she goes, ‘Oh, you must be Bill. Come on in. Lowell’s expecting you. He’ll be

back in four or five hours.’ And I’m thinking, ‘What the hell? What if he *wasn’t* expecting me?’

“I got a pretty good idea who he was, looking at the various things in his house,” Payne goes on. “He had a sitar over in the corner. He’d apparently studied with Ravi Shankar. He had a samurai sword up on one of the walls, so he’s into the martial arts. He was well read, with a good record collection including *Om* by John Coltrane and this Smithsonian Institute blues series. You can learn a good bit about people by their book and record collections.”

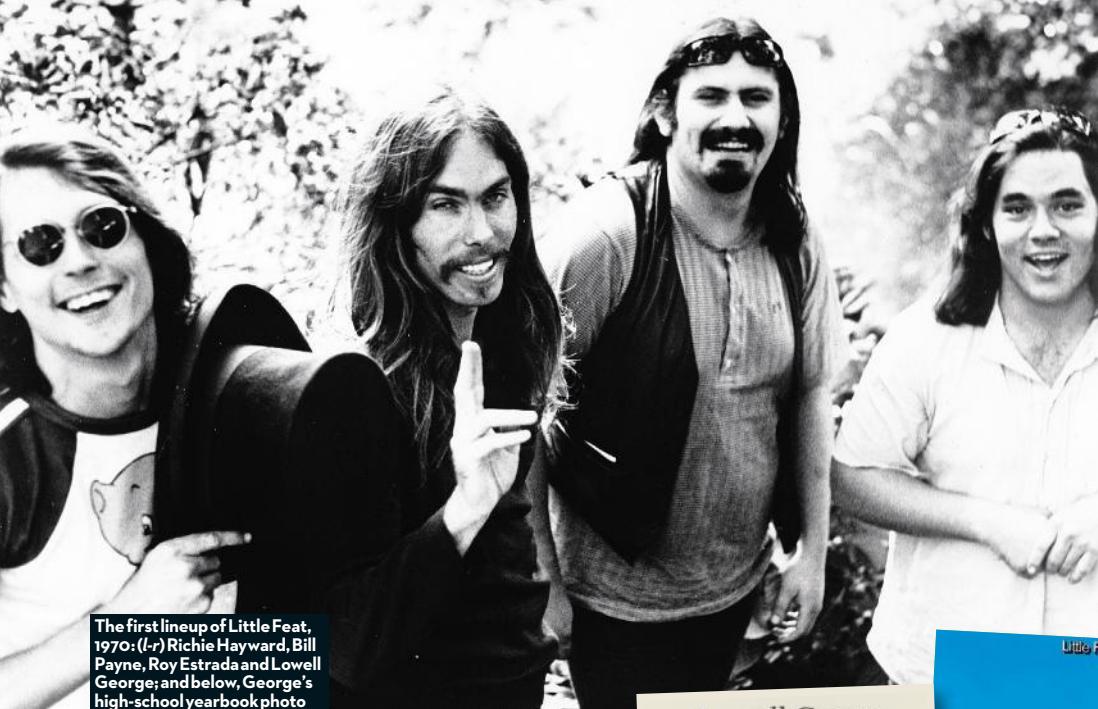
It turned out George had recently been fired from the Mothers, the group Payne had come to LA to join, and was now putting together a new band, which he duly invited Payne on board, the pair quickly forging a bountiful songwriting partnership and for the next decade presiding over an often turbulent crew whose alchemical mix of rock, blues, country, funk and soul made them at their peak one of the untouchable American bands of the ’70s, peerless and unique. By the time of George’s premature death in 1979, however, what had once been such a flourishing creative relationship had soured. Lowell, worn down by years of keeping the band together in the face of popular indifference and an increasingly chronic drug dependency, was by then losing his grip on his own band, even as their fourth album, 1974’s *Feats Don’t Fail Me Now*, gave them the hit they had so long deserved. Things between George and some of the band at that point had become fraught and rancorous.

“They often didn’t get along, and there were points where Lowell and Bill were close to fistcuffs,” says George Massenburg, who

“There was something about Lowell George’s writing... He suffered for a song...”

GEORGE MASSENBURG, ENGINEER





The first lineup of Little Feat, 1970: (l-r) Richie Hayward, Bill Payne, Roy Estrada and Lowell George; and below, George's high-school yearbook photo

engineered the sessions for the album. "It was sometimes just bitter, seething hatred."

LOWELL GEORGE WAS a Hollywood boy, a Lauren Canyon native, embedded within the Hollywood film community from an early age. His father, William George, was known as the "furrier to the stars". Lowell's mainline to cultural nirvana sidestepped the city's key industry, though, and aimed for the beat counterculture. After early teenage epiphanies learning harmonica, flute and guitar and frequenting the city's jazz clubs, his first serious connections came with primitive garage group, The Factory, regarded well enough within the scene to be scouted by Herb Cohen, who took them into the studio to cut a demo, aided by Frank Zappa. The Factory soon ended up on bills with The Mothers of Invention, and in time George, after a stint with garage rockers The Standells, briefly became a de facto Mother, appearing on 1970's *Weasels Ripped My Flesh*.

As Lowell later told it, he was sacked from the Mothers after Zappa, notably anti-drugs, heard a demo George had recorded with Ry Cooder of a trucker's ballad he'd written called "Willin'". The song's several references to dope smoking and pill popping provoked Frank's prohibitionist wrath and Lowell was out, his departure the cue for him to form Little Feat with Payne, another Mothers émigré, Roy Estrada, on bass and one-time drummer with The Factory, Richie Hayward, then playing with The Fraternity Of Man, best-known for "Don't Bogart Me", their contribution to the *Easy Rider* soundtrack. The recruitment of Hayward introduced Payne to Lowell's hucksterism.

"Lowell says, 'Why don't you play on their record, and then we'll get Richie?'" Payne recalls. "I go, 'Wait a minute. I'm going to play on The Fraternity Of Man's second album and then Richie's going join us? Why would they make a record if he's going to join us?' Lowell says, 'No, they'll get the money to make it, they'll make it, and then they'll split up. Welcome to Hollywood.'"

Signed to Warner Bros by Lenny Waronker, Little Feat Mk I were soon in Western Recorder Studios with producer Russ Titelman, working on their self-titled debut album. *Little Feat* was released in January 1971 to sensational reviews, critics blown away by the band's songs and musicianship, especially the duelling slide guitars of George and Ry Cooder, who guested spectacularly on "Forty Four Blues" and played lead on the original version of "Willin'" after Lowell had injured his hand.

"We were writing all kinds of crazy stuff, material-wise, that first year," Payne recalls fondly. "We played some of it for Ahmet Ertegun. Ahmet listened to it, and he goes, 'Boys,

it's too diverse.' So we went back to the drawing board and started writing what was effectively going to be on the first Little Feat record, which was 'Truck Stop Girl', 'Brides Of Jesus', 'Strawberry Flats', 'Hamburger Midnight', 'Crazy Captain Gunboat Willie', all that stuff. It was a very experimental time."

Critics may have swooned over *Little Feat*, but sales were poor, as were the turn-outs on the band's subsequent tour, when the expected adoring crowds proved non-existent. Undaunted, however, Little Feat were quickly recording a second album, *Sailin' Shoes*, with producer Ted Templeman, a welcome replacement for Titelman,

with whom the hugely opinionated Lowell had been at constant loggerheads. The results far out-stripped the tentative beginnings of Little Feat, with a broader musical palette and a clutch of songs that would become Feat classics, including the searing surreal blues of "Cold Cold Cold", "Tripe Face Boogie" and "A

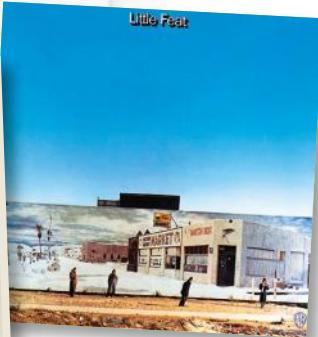
"Apolitical Blues", a second, definitive take of "Willin'" (subsequently covered by Linda Ronstadt and The Byrds), the phantasmagoric title track and the ferocious garage band blast of "Teenage Nervous Breakdown". The album was also the first to feature a sleeve designed by artist Neon Park [see panel] and was again sensationally well-received by critics but largely ignored by the general public. Estrada became so disillusioned he quit the band for – hilariously – what he considered the "more secure environment" of Captain Beefheart's Magic Band. "I don't know that Captain Beefheart was that environment," Payne says, laughing. "But there you go."

ESTRADA'S DEFLECTION TO The Magic Band prompted rumours that Little Feat had split up, with George apparently set to join John Sebastian [they shared a manger, Bob Cavallo] and Phil Everly in some kind of supergroup. In fact, George and Payne were putting together a new-look, six-piece Little Feat that would bring a whole new aesthetic to bear, heavily grounded in the Southern, swampy R'n'B of New Orleans.

"We got [guitarist] Paul Barrere, who was from a blues background," Payne recalls. "Then Kenny Gradney who'd



Lowell George



"There were no rules. We didn't want to be handcuffed to one genre"
BILL PAYNE



The keys to it all: Bill Payne onstage, 1976

The main Feat-ure: live on a TV show in LA, July 1974: (l-r) Payne, Barrere, George, Hayward, Clayton, Gradney



played bass with Delaney & Bonnie, and Sam Clayton, a percussionist, also from D&B. That kind of Southern thing came into our music then. Even though we were basically Southern Californians at heart, we were influenced by Clifton Chenier, by all those blues guys."

Paul Barrere had known Lowell since the early '60s when they were both students at Hollywood High School. They'd stayed in touch and Barrere had even auditioned as bassist for the first incarnation of Little Feat. Since Estrada's departure, the band needed a new bassist. But George had some other ideas, too. "Lowell decided to add a second guitarist," Barrere says. "He brought me *Sailin' Shoes* and said that if I could learn the songs on it, I could be in the band. You know, like one of those older brother things: 'If you can do this, then you can be in the band.' And I did and my first recording with them was *Dixie Chicken*."

Gradney and Clayton joined through admittedly more circuitous routes. Clayton had been fired from Delaney & Bonnie after taking time off to nurse a broken knee; Gradney had left in protest against the dismissal. "Basically, we were just hanging out," says Gradney. "Dolph Rempp [from Studio Instrumental Rentals] called me and said there was a band there that had been auditioning bass players for a while. He said, 'They're a really good band, they're signed to Warner Bros, and you'd be perfect for them.' I was looking for a band and I thought, 'Great!'"

Clayton soon joined him in Little Feat, although he was initially a little more hesitant. "I had never heard of Little Feat," he reveals. "I was trying to get a bigger band, like Chicago or Christopher Cross."

"What Little Feat began to do at that point was edge more into the New Orleans thing," confirms Payne, "which was represented by *Dixie Chicken*."

Produced by George, Little Feat's third album, released in February 1973, signalled a major shift from the tightly structured songs on their first two albums towards freewheeling improvisation, built on markedly funkier grooves and Louisiana-influenced riffs, with Payne revealing a flair for the kind of rollicking keyboard embellishments more usually associated with Dr John or Allen Toussaint, a version of whose "On Your Way Down" was an album highlight, alongside irresistible band originals like the riotous title track, "Two Trains", "Roll Um Easy" and the droll "Fat Man In The Bathtub".

"It was this great stew or gumbo if you will," Barrere says



of *Dixie Chicken*, singling out the contributions of Gradney and Clayton, whose presence liberated drummer Richie Hayward. "Gradney was raised in LA, but his family was all from New Orleans, so he had that whole R'n'B feel. He and Sam had played with Delaney & Bonnie, so there was soul music pervading us. When you think of songs like 'Two Trains', 'Dixie Chicken', you're more into a groove than you are a formula. But then Richie would always tell us: 'Remember, if you get too deep into a groove, it becomes a rut.'"

HOW TO BUY...

The Best Of Little Feat



8/10

SAILIN' SHOES

1972

The band's first lineup really cohered on *Sailin' Shoes*, where Lowell George's songwriting hit an early peak - the title track is a gem, and "Willin'" gave Little Feat one of their signature tunes.



8/10

DIXIE CHICKEN

1973

The expanded lineup charges out of the gate with the surreal New Orleans grind of the title track. A formative LP, with the six-piece feeling out the territory, heading towards...



9/10

FEATS DON'T FAIL ME NOW

1974

Great rock'n'roll songs from the doctor and his sidekick ("Oh Atlanta"), Barrere writes one of his best ("Skin It Back"),

and even an uninspired medley/retread at the album's end can't kill the magic.



THE LAST RECORD ALBUM

1975

The cracks are beginning to show, with Barrere and Payne gesturing toward the fusionoid jams at certain points. But they also provide one of the album highlights, "All That You Dream". George is starting to slowly fade, but "Long Distance Love" is a heartbreaker.



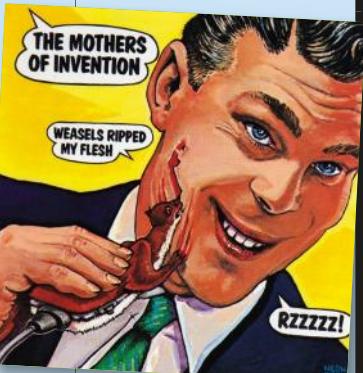
WAITING FOR COLUMBUS

1978

Live double album and what should really be the model for the format everywhere. The playing is near telepathic, the Tower Of Power horns are on fire, and the songs stretch and breathe, endlessly pliable, and liable to switch on a dime.

WHO WAS NEON PARK..?

ONE OF THE more significant figures in the Little Feat story is the artist Neon Park, nom de plume of one Martin Muller. Lowell George was initially drawn to Park's work thanks to his cover art for The Mothers Of Invention's *Weasels Ripped My Flesh*, where Park cribbed an advertising image of a man shaving, and replaced the electric razor with a weasel. Park's artwork for the Little Feat covers drew on a similar surrealist vibe



to the Weasels cover, pulling together odd juxtapositions, visual gags and, occasionally, making trenchant observations about the group, as with the thunder'n'lightning bolting through the Feats *Don't Fail Me Now* cover, a car in the foreground hazarding its way around a perilous cliff. Gradney remembers Park fondly: "He was a very well-spoken guy, good friends with Lowell. They lived in Topanga Canyon and I wasn't a Topanga guy. Those guys were hippies! [Laughs] I wasn't. But I became a hippy with these guys. Because he lived up in San Francisco, I didn't see him a whole lot. But he was a very nice man, a wonderful artist... He would listen, and then he would go and paint the cover. It was amazing." Muller died on September 1, 1993, aged 53.

CHALKIE DAVIES/GETTY IMAGES



IN THESE YEARS, the Little Feat story unfolded like so much great, unappreciated rock'n'roll: release album to critical acclaim and low sales; tour album; return home broke. By the end of 1973, Little Feat were coming to the end of the line. Barrere could see it playing out: "When we went on the road, we had no promotion, or what we did have was followed up with no records in stores. Lowell got really upset, and broke the band up. He was like, 'We're not gonna do this if we're not gonna have the backing of the record company.'"

George duly went off to play on Robert Palmer's *Sneakin' Sally Through The Alley*, Payne briefly joined The Doobie Brothers and the rest of the band worked on an album with Kathy Dalton for Zappa's DiscReet label. George reconvened the band, however, when Bob Cavallo found Blue Seas Recording Studios, nestled far away from LA in Hunt Valley, Maryland, owned by John Sebastian's bandmate in the Lovin' Spoonful, bassist Steve Boone. Cavallo brokered a deal: for \$5,000 a month, Little Feat could block-book the studio. No interruptions, no intrusions. The band descended on Blue Seas in spring 1974. They took up residence in a local apartment complex. "It was big, 10 or 15 buildings with apartments in each one of 'em," Clayton recalls. "A lot of school teachers there, a lot of women, I'll tell you that! And they were very educated, college graduates... It was great, man. They threw us off into a playground!"

Holed up in Blue Seas, the band began work on their fourth LP, *Feats Don't Fail Me Now*. "It was kind of a literal title," Barrere says. "If we didn't get something going for that record, we were just going to hang it up."

"The title was my idea," recalls Van Dyke Parks, who had been influential in persuading Warner Bros to keep the band on. "For a short while, my relationship with Lowell was the slender thread on which Little Feat relied for a future there."

"The sessions were very loose," Barrere remembers. "We

knew we had all the time in the world. It wasn't like recording in Hollywood, where the money's flying out of the window. We had the place to ourselves for three months."

Blue Seas reinvigorated Little Feat. Lowell was especially inspired by the unlimited studio access, spending untold hours, often well into the night and beyond, chipping away at songs, running take after take as he honed the material, a craftsman, a perfectionist.

"On *Feats...*," engineer Massenburg recalls, "Lowell on occasion would say, 'I'm going to work on something, just set me up.' So I'd set him up so he could play guitar, sing and run the tape machine. I have this picture in my head of Lowell at the console, smoking a Kool, those menthol cigarettes, with headphones and guitar, smoke lazily drifting."

"There was something about Lowell's writing," Massenburg continues. "He suffered for a song. In the way Jimmy Webb used to suffer for a song or the way Ry Cooder would suffer for a performance. We all remember Ry yelling at his guitar, trying to squeeze beautiful tones out of his guitar, yelling at his amp, forcing a song out." His voice trails off, wistfully. "I miss that."

With initial sales of 150,000, *Feats Don't Fail Me Now*, released in November 1974, was

the long-overdue hit Little Feat needed, a lifeline. "That was huge for us at that point," Barrere recalls. "We were like, 'Oh, maybe we do have a future!'" It was also the last great album Little Feat would make, despite belated accolades from the likes of Jimmy Page, who in a 1975 *Rolling Stone* interview described them as his favourite American band.

Lowell at the time was still the band's driving force, opener "Rock'N' Roll Doctor" one of his finest ever songs, with a sensational slide guitar solo and the title track featuring the band at their most euphoric. Barrere and Payne weighed in with good material, too, respectively the slithering funk of "Skin It Back" and the roistering "Oh Atlanta". Rather

“They told me Lowell had passed, I could not believe it. He seemed invincible...”

SAM CLAYTON

Lowell George recording in his room at the Montcalm Hotel, London, 1977



worryingly, however, was the band's need to stretch out the album with re-worked versions of two songs from *Sailin' Shoes*, "Cold Cold Cold" and "Tripe Face Boogie", evidence perhaps that as a songwriter Lowell was starting to struggle.

On their 1975 follow-up, *The Last Record Album*, he was credited on just three songs, of which only the lachrymose ballad "Long Distance Love" merits mention alongside the best of George's previous Feat songs. Lowell was fading out of the picture, even as Barrere and Payne's jazz-rock inclinations took the band in an unhappy new direction. George seemed even more absent from '77's *Time Loves A Hero*, the distance between him and the band especially marked on Payne's sprawling fusion instrumental, "Day At The Dog

Races", which the band had worked up without him. "Lowell was a little upset," Ted Templeman, restored as producer, recalled of George's reaction to the track when he heard it. "He said, 'What is this, fuckin' Weather Report?'"

"The only rule was there were no rules," Bill Payne says of Little Feat's abiding aesthetic. "But it was bigger than that. We didn't want to be handcuffed to one genre. That bit Lowell on the ass because when we did 'Day At The Dog Races', Lowell was not a fan of that kind of music. So he'd walk offstage when we played it. We're like, 'OK, go ahead.'"

On the tour to promote *Time Loves A Hero*, Lowell often seemed marginalised. When they played London's Rainbow in August 1977, he seemed barely there at all, grossly overweight, disconsolate. The shows were taped for the following year's *Waiting For Columbus* double live album, for which Lowell's parts had to be over-dubbed later in the studio. His cocaine addiction was by now taking an enormous toll on his health, making him unreliable and unpredictable.

Gradney recalls Little Feat playing the Budokan, Japan in 1978. "Lowell was big by now. He had his hair long. He was real into Japanese stuff, he studied martial arts. He takes his shirt off. He's sweating. He put his hair up like a sumo wrestler, pops one side of his overalls. Comes out onstage, drops into the sumo position and starts to chant. The fuckin' place erupted. The police, the whole time, they were making everyone sit down in the Budokan, 'cos you're not supposed to stand. When he drops down and does that, the police threw their hats up, everyone started screaming and he did this chant: it was unbelievable."

A split seemed inevitable and it came during the recording of what would have been Little Feat's seventh album, *Down On The Farm*.

George announced he was breaking up the band and abandoned the sessions to promote his solo album, *Thanks I'll Eat It Here*, which was glossy but disappointing, though the version of Allen Toussaint's "What Do You Want The Girl To Do?" was burnished to perfection and "20 Million Things" was a beautifully poised ballad with a faint echo of "Willin'". The album didn't even make it into the US Top 50.

On June 29, 1979, in a hotel room in Arlington, Virginia, on tour behind the record, Lowell George died of a heart attack, his health ruined by drugs, lots of them. He was 34. "He called me the night before he died," Sam Clayton recalls. "He was on the solo tour and he said, 'Don't worry, everything's going to be cool, man. Even if it's just you and I, we're gonna get this thing together.' Then the next morning they called me and told me he had passed. I could not believe it. It seemed like he was invincible. I never thought nothing like that would have happened to him. He was just a great guy."

THE SURVIVING MEMBERS of Little Feat finished *Down On The Farm*, which was released less than six months after Lowell's death. As an epitaph to George's career it could in the circumstances have been much worse. The heart seemed to have gone out of the band, however, and before the end of 1979, they had officially disbanded, a decade of solo albums and session work in front of them before they got back together again in 1987, with former Pure Prairie League vocalist Craig Fuller and guitarist

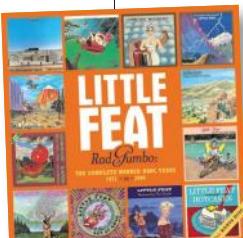
Fred Tackett, who had played on *Dixie Chicken*, added to the lineup. The new band's first album, *Let It Roll*, released in July 1988, was, astonishingly, their most successful to date, which may have appealed to Lowell's wry humour. Fuller stayed with Little Feat for another two albums

– *Representing The*

Mambo (1990) and *Shake Me Up* (1991) – before he was replaced by blues shouter Shaun Murphy, latterly a singer with Bob Seger's band, with whom she had toured with Tackett and Payne. Five more albums followed, before Murphy left in 2009, the year Richie Hayward was diagnosed with the liver cancer that within a year would kill him. He was replaced by Gabe Ford for 2012's *Rooster Rag*, Little Feat's last album to date, although they continue to tour.

This month a 13-disc boxset, *Rad Gumbo: The Complete Warner Bros. Years 1971-1990*, brings together their complete studio catalogue and live recordings. But it's the run of mid-70s' albums – with George, the irrepressible bandleader, firing on all cylinders – that endure. "Like all bands, we loved each other and hated each other," says

Bill Payne, looking back on the conflicts that inspired so much great music in the band's unforgettable heyday. "I don't remember a Little Feat record ever being easy to make. But the legacy is the music, which some folks fortunately are interested in, and I think, 'Why not?' There's honesty to that music. We weren't trying to make hit records. We were just trying to make good records. Great records, if we could." **①**



Rad Gumbo: The Complete Warner Bros. Years 1971-1990 is out on Rhino on March 3

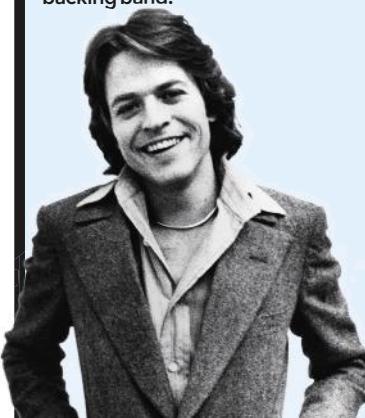
IN THE STUDIO

LITTLE FEAT AS SESSION MUSOS

ONE OF THE ways Little Feat made a dime during fallow periods was through their sideline as session musicians. George was particularly profligate, his session CV ranging from Ivan Ulz to former Stones Mick Taylor and Bill Wyman, Jimmy Webb to English soul singer Linda Lewis, JD Souther to Seldom Scene head honcho John Starling and Bonnie Raitt's 1973 album, *Takin' My Time*. "Face Of Appalachia", George's co-writing credit on John Sebastian's 1974 solo LP, *Tarzana Kid*, has good claim to being one of both George's and Sebastian's finest moments.

George was a pivotal presence on Van Dyke Parks' *Discover America* (1972), where Parks takes on George's own song, "Sailin' Shoes". George also guested on Jack Nitsche's soundtrack to Nicolas Roeg's 1970 film *Performance*, while George and Bill Payne both appear on John Cale's 1973 LP, *Paris 1919*.

One of Little Feat's most enduring studio relationships was with Robert Palmer (below). His first album, *Sneakin' Sally Through The Alley*, was recorded with Lowell George and The Meters; its follow-up, *Pressure Drop*, went one further, with the whole of Little Feat acting as Palmer's backing band.



Paul Rodgers

The Free and Bad Company frontman's musical adventures: "I was very hungry!"

REFLCTING ON 45 years in music, Paul Rodgers concludes, "It's been a wonderful journey. I left Middlesbrough as a teenager with a cloud over my head, with a lot of tension and aggravation inside of me that I wanted to understand, and music has enabled me to get to a point where I'm peaceful now. I feel on top of my career at the moment. I feel actually free. In the past, it got unwieldy, with too many cooks. I like to be in control of my own destiny." With *The Royal Sessions* – his first solo release in 14 years – out soon, Rodgers weighs up the key albums in his career, from his early work with rock'n'roll titans Free and Bad Company to his collaborations with Jimmy Page and Queen.

Of all of his many, marvellous musical adventures, Rodgers says, "I look back on the early days of Free with Paul Kossoff with the most fondness of any of my bands. Because I met him at a time when I was in London and very hungry, and we believed in each other." *NICK HASTED*



Free, backstage in 1972: (l-r) Paul Rodgers, Andy Fraser, Simon Kirke and Paul Kossoff



FREE FREE

ISLAND, 1969

For this, their second album, Free dispensed with the heavy blues vibes of their debut, *Tons Of Sobs*. Singer Rodgers and bassist Andy Fraser came to the fore as songwriters, while the band developed a more personal, soulful sound.

PAUL RODGERS: It was felt, by the record label and everyone, that [Tons Of Sobs' producer] Guy Stevens was a bit too out-there. So this next LP was cleaner, more thought about and produced. Chris Blackwell was in the studio quite a bit. I did a lot of my writing on acoustic guitar, as I lived in bed-sitters, and that was really all you could play in rooms like that. So I'd bring something like "Mouthful Of Grass" along and we'd electrify it with the band, then I started to visualise how it would be with the band as I wrote. Some of the songs remained acoustic, like "Mourning Sad Morning". If it sounds hymnal, that might be my Catholic upbringing as a choirboy! I double-tracked my vocal for the first time on that song. I was learning about being in the studio. The idea is you negate all outside noise, booth everything off. But the danger is you lose the band feel. We wouldn't go in another room, so we could still vibe with each other. I'd close my eyes and imagine I was onstage in front of a crowd, as that's the real telling time. Paul and I would listen to the way Albert King would sing then answer with a guitar line, and we did that together a lot. We were learning to put something together that was totally original. That was the direction on this album. We were a rock band with soul.

THE UNCUT CLASSIC



FREE FIRE AND WATER

ISLAND, 1970

"All Right Now", a No 2 hit in spring 1970, prepared the ground for Free's career-defining album, also a transatlantic smash. Fire And Water balanced the folky melancholy of "Oh I Wept" with wailing soul-blues, showcasing Rodgers' voice and Kossoff's guitar.

We produced it, with Roy Thomas Baker's help. We were all in it together, we felt. We didn't need someone with a producer's chair. We'd balance ourselves every night onstage and find the right place to be and get in the groove. That's what we wanted the record to do. Very often a producer might crank the vocal up so it's drowning out everything else. That wasn't where we wanted it to be, we wanted it to sit right, where we heard it onstage. So that was the production we did.

I think we'd learned more about songwriting by *Fire And Water*. Wilson Pickett had a hit with "Fire And Water", and I can't even tell you how cool that was. Because that was exactly my intention – "I wanna write something that one of those soul guys could sing." I didn't think they actually would! In those days, I held them as if they lived in Paradise and I would never get to be in touch with them. "Mr Big" is a very tough lyric, I'm amazed I got away with. I used to listen to BB King, and I think I was inspired by his approach to womanhood, if you like [laughs] – his manly stance! And that song's a lesson in simplicity. Because the simpler the song, the bigger it sounds. The notes have room to echo. "All Right Now" was the climax of all our efforts. We did it in the small studio downstairs in [Island studio] Basing Street that everybody used to call the Crypt. The guys put the track down first. I went out to put the vocal on, and I could see Chris Blackwell and his entourage come into the control room. It was a nice vibe, actually. I could tell by the way their jaws dropped that we had something. Success took us by surprise, though. The Blind Faith tour that followed knocked the wind out of us. 'Cos from being the headliners and packing out clubs all over Europe, literally on word of mouth – we were underground, you know – our gear was suddenly being flung on these huge stages, and it was just bedlam. We were exposed to the politics of the business, just thrown to the lions. It ripped the lid off our underground pretensions, and there we were, a big commercial band all of a sudden. I don't think we were quite up for it. We were demoralised.



Keeping Bad Company: (l-r) Mick Ralphs, Paul Rodgers, Boz Burrell and Simon Kirke



FREE HEART-BREAKER

ISLAND, 1973

Free split in 1971, demoralising Paul Kossoff, who developed a serious drug habit.

The band reunited for this last album, with a new lineup. Kossoff played on it, but wasn't credited as a bandmember. He died of cerebral and pulmonary edema during a flight from LA to New York in March, 1976.

I don't really want to go into all of Koss' problems, because I always think of him as a really together guy. He was the whole time I knew him. When I first met Paul, he was driving a car round London and I didn't even have a driving licence. Free's initial split did hit Koss very hard. But I'd moved out to the country. He was fine when I left him. Were those lines in "Wishing Well", "throw down your gun you might shoot yourself/Or is that what you're trying to do?" directed at Koss? No, they were absolutely not. It's just a song that I wrote about an imaginary person. I don't know who would have taken the decision not to list Paul as a member of the band on the album, that's really weird. He was absolutely still in the band, and he played fantastically on *Heartbreaker*. But there was a different lineup. Now we had John "Rabbit" Bundrick's keyboards, and in many respects it was a richer sound. But if you fill everything with sound, you don't have those lovely gaps that you can step into emotionally. When I listen to "Seven Angels", I was going through a very depressed stage myself, that lyric was very dark. It was sad to lose Free, but the infighting – a lot of it between myself

and [Andy] Fraser, I admit – was unpleasant and unnecessary. I just didn't need it.

BAD COMPANY BAD CO

ISLAND, 1974

Bad Company were managed by Peter Grant and signed to Led Zeppelin's Swan Song label in the US, with ex-Mott guitarist Mick Ralphs as Rodgers' songwriting foil in this more straightforward rock outfit.

This debut topped the US charts.

It was nice to be in a band with great management. Peter Grant said to me, "Led Zeppelin have been delayed [making their record]." So he set us up at Headley Grange with Ronnie Lane's mobile studio outside of this huge old mansion. We'd get up, somebody would make breakfast, somebody would light the fires, someone would pick up a guitar, we started the music, and suddenly we'd be recording. It was very organic, it was very hippy-like and relaxed, and we all had our wives there. We'd set up the instruments in various different parts of the house, so we could record them clean. I sang "Bad Company" in the middle of a field at midnight under a full moon, to get that atmosphere. That was possibly one of our strongest albums musically. "Can't Get Enough", "Rock Steady", "Ready For Love", "Bad Company" – most of the songs I can still include in my solo set today. We had a similar situation to "All Right Now" with "Can't Get Enough" [US No 5] and "Bad Company", but everybody was prepared for the onslaught. We'd be flying in

a private Vickers Viscount, Rolls-Royce-engined aeroplane, and we'd be met on the tarmac by limousines. And in a way I can thank what happened to Free for being ready for it then. Although 'thank' is not quite the right word, because it really damaged Koss, ultimately. *Bad Co*'s got that simplicity. I do like space. We were basically back to stripped-down rock'n'roll.



PAUL RODGERS CUT LOOSE

ATLANTIC, 1983

Disillusioned with Bad Company after 10 successful years, Rodgers split the band.

Retreating to his home studio, he played every instrument on this belated solo debut.

I was very frayed round the edges, and we were getting too far away from the music at the end of Bad Company, it had shifted to getting stoned. I thought we were basically arsing around in the studio, and I cut out. At that point in my life, I'd had it with touring, and the whole craziness. Everything was *cray-z*y. I'd come off the road, but I didn't want music to be very far from my life, so I put a studio in my house. So eventually I recorded *Cut Loose*, I thought that title was apt, because I had cut myself loose from Bad Company. I played all the instruments. It was an experiment for me, and I learned a lot. One of the things I learned was, it probably is better to play the songs with a band. There's more spirit and fire to it than if you're layering. But I think I did OK. I had the studio in the attic, it ran the full length of the house, it was quite big and shaped like the roof, and I could go up there at any

PAUL RODGERS



Rodgers today: "I'm getting back to the pure, real deal of where I started"

time of the day and night and play, so it was quite wonderful, really. I had a lot of guests who came in, though they didn't feature on the songs I released. Bill Wyman came down, a lot of people visited and jammed. Jimmy Page did, and that led to the next thing...

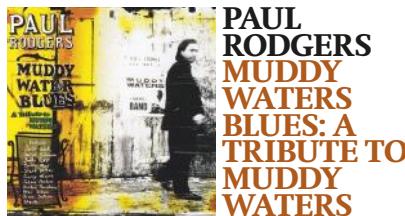


THE FIRM THE FIRM

ATLANTIC, 1985

Both at loose ends, Rodgers and Jimmy Page casually started recording together. This first of two

albums released as The Firm is heavy on '80s production but light on memorable songs. I didn't think Jimmy and I had any plans to do anything together. We were just socialising. Jimmy would come round, we'd listen to stuff. The first song we wrote together was "Midnight Moonlight Lady". One day he brought round a cassette and said, "Would you like to write some lyrics to this?" It was 19 minutes long, it was absolutely fantastic! I said, "I don't know that I can, can we shorten it?" So we got it down to nine minutes, and he was happy with the results. I said to him, "It's funny, the chorus seems to have an extra bar in it." And he goes, "Well it does. It's in 9/4." That's the kind of thing he threw in with Led Zeppelin. It was great, actually. Later Jimmy said, "Name one song in the world that you'd like to record." I said, "You know, I've always loved the Righteous Brothers' 'You've Lost That Loving Feeling', and I've always wondered if I could sing it," because it took two singers to manage the octaves on it. It was a completely off the wall cover for us, and that went on the record. Maybe there is a tendency to sing a little like Robert [Plant], if you're singing with Jimmy. There may be some intonations with The Firm that I leaned on from Robert's era. We agreed between us that we would do two albums over two years and stop, and that's exactly what we did.



VICTORY, 1993

Rodgers' solo career gained new impetus with this classy all-star album, with guests including Jeff Beck, Buddy Guy, Steve Miller, Slash, Gary Moore, Brian Setzer and David Gilmour.

I was given the opportunity to do anything I wanted as far as a blues album was concerned. That was just what I needed at that time in my life. I chose Muddy Waters because when I was living in London when I was 17, before I was in Free, before I was anything, I went to the Marquee to see him, and I held him in such high esteem, I wouldn't have minded if he'd just been totally cold, and sat and played like the records. But he wasn't. He was like a father-figure, and included everybody in the crowd in the warmth and the beauty of his music, and I felt, "I love you, man!" It was so good to feel that, I'll never forget it. For this album we had Jason Bonham on drums and Pino Palladino on bass, what a great rhythm section. We just had a blast. We did two versions of "Good Morning Little Schoolgirl". Before we started, I mentioned to Jason, "We could do it like this," [croons slowly] "Good mor-ning little schoolgirl". We didn't even know the engineer pressed the button.

With the guests, for some tracks we had to duplicate the masters in L.A., and send them to, say, David Gilmour in London. It was like Christmas, opening it – "What did he play?" But I was almost wetting my pants, to be honest, when I sat in a studio playing a song that I had written about Muddy Waters with Buddy Guy. He had a smile a mile wide the whole time. Those were wonderful sessions.



QUEEN + PAUL RODGERS THE COSMOS ROCKS

PARLOPHONE, 2008
After successful joint tours with Brian May

and Roger Taylor, playing each other's hits, the three collaborated on a one-off studio album. I can't say I bought Queen records, but whenever I heard, [sings] "I Want To Break Free", I thought, 'Wow!' There was a lot about Queen I loved, from a distance. So we played together, and I thought, 'We have a connection here, we do rock.' And then we finally found ourselves in the studio. So now was the testing time, to make an album of new material. We went in with no bass player, which sort of surprised me. But I didn't feel I could say anything about it. Politically, Brian and Roger were calling the shots. They have their style and I have mine, and we tried very hard to come together, and this is the best we could do. One of the things that was interesting was how they got their harmonies. Brian would say, "OK, everybody, we'll all sing this note", then another, and we layered and layered, and the faders went up and I was, "Whoah! It sounds like Queen." When I played the song "Voodoo" for them, Brian kept saying to me, "Oh, I can't play blues" – "Yes you can, just play!" And he'd do it, and when he'd put a harmony on it he'd be very happy. We did some amazing shows. We played Latvia, and the President came up and played drums on "All Right Now"! I thought, 'Wait'll I tell the folks back home.' I honestly don't think we were quite ready to go into the studio. We could have done it better.



PAUL RODGERS THE ROYAL SESSIONS

429 RECORDS, 2014
Rodgers reconnects with his roots for his first solo album in 14 years, recorded live in Memphis' vintage Royal Studio with veteran Southern soul musicians.

The studio is in a depressed, derelict area – kids hanging around, almost ghetto-like. But we had such a great welcome. The studio was originally a smallish cinema, and it has a great atmosphere. It's so dead and soundproofed, like being wrapped in a blanket, and Albert King and all kinds of my heroes recorded there. This music is the authentic root of everything I am musically. I'd be in Middlesbrough in my little room upstairs aged 13, listening to what these guys were creating then.

They had deliberately not been told who I was when I arrived. I told them, "I'm a little bit nervous here." I decided to start with "That's How Strong My Love Is", and they gave me the nod: "OK, you'll do." At the Royal, everything is the way it was. The stuffing is coming out of the soundproofing. It's funky, very real. I've been running on gas, on the energy of my earlier years of listening to all this soul. That energy has driven me so far. And to step back into the real power of its source has re-energised me. I've bought a record player, and in Memphis I went down to Beale Street and bought loads of Booker T & The MG's on vinyl, and soaking that up is revitalising me. I'm getting back to the pure, real deal of where I started. ☩

Paul Rodgers' 'The Royal Sessions' is out now

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A photograph of two men standing in a room with red curtains and a chandelier. The man on the left is wearing a dark coat and looking to the right. The man on the right is wearing a dark shirt and has his arms crossed. The background is dark with red curtains and a chandelier.

FLIP YOUR WHIGS!

Sixteen years after their last album, grunge-soul titans THE AFGHAN WHIGS have returned, as debonair and dissolute as ever. In the company of GREG DULLI, rakish bar magnate and sometime frontman, *Uncut* charts the rise, fall and reinvention of the mighty Whigs. “I’m giving people advice,” says Dulli. “I’m letting women know what men think.”

Story: Jaan Uhelszki

HE DRIZZLE IN Silver Lake, California, is leaving a fine mist on the 43 stone steps that lead up to Greg Dulli's home, carved into the foothills of the Santa Monica mountains above Sunset Blvd. Last year, Silver Lake was named one of the Best Hipster Neighbourhoods by *Forbes*, but somehow it's hard to imagine Dulli fitting in among the locals with their ironic T-shirts, skinny jeans, fitted hoodies and witty eyewear. Although the eyewear is duly accounted for – the 48-year-old Dulli sports a pair of oversized reading glasses – an old-world elegance sets the Afghan Whigs frontman apart. In his pressed black slacks, fine black leather loafers and black buttoned-down pima cotton shirt, he looks as if he plucked his entire outfit from Dean Martin's closet, circa 1965 – incidentally, the year that both he and Afghan Whigs bassist John Curley were born, and the name of their last album before the band disbanded in 2001.

There's something about that time that has underpinned everything the Whigs have done, from their covers of vintage R&B – Tyrone Davis, the Supremes, Curtis Mayfield – to a rather anachronistic code of honour, associated with the tough-but-big-hearted characters in any of the *noir* mysteries Dulli reads, where men do what men have to do. Over the Whigs' six albums, he's just done that, writing songs that settle scores, fan the flames of the war between the sexes, and explore his heart of darkness, while compiling a training manual for men, showing them it's not only all right, but necessary, for them to be unapologetically male. A little unenlightened? Perhaps. "I think I'm giving people advice," Dulli says, when asked to explain the Whigs' appeal. "I'm also letting women know what men think."

"He's a man's man and a lady's man," explains Megan Jasper, VP of Sub Pop Records. "I think he knows if he can get the ladies to show up, the guys will follow."

"Mostly, I write about what I know," Dulli admits. "I have a vivid imagination, and I rely on that just as much as what I've been through. When people asked me when I was going to write something like *Gentlemen* again, I said never. I have no interest in doing something I already did. Besides, it was my *Blood On The Tracks*. I listened to that album the whole time I was writing *Gentlemen*. It gave me an impetus to tell the truth. It was a very naked, very transparent album. When it started getting incredibly personal, I said to the rest of the guys, 'I'm kind of dragging you guys into my thing.' John Curley said, 'No, don't worry. Just do it. People connect with the pain.'"

Which is perhaps the secret to the Whigs' success. "It was a unique mix of personalities and musical styles that happened at the right time," explains Curley, Dulli's longtime friend. "Greg's lyrics and his willingness to say things honestly and in some cases brutally, people respond to that. I know when I listen to music, when I feel it's honest and true and maybe a little bit uncomfortable sometimes, that appeals to me."

FOR DULLI, THE RAIN IN Silver Lake is a cause for celebration. "It's so important that this happened," he enthuses as he looks up into the moody sky, pulling open the heavy carved door to let me enter his house. From the street below, Dulli's home looks like just another boxy hillside dwelling among a warren of similarly constructed homes. But inside, you're in another reality altogether. "He's created his own jungle paradise," reveals his friend and co-conspirator Mark Lanegan. The house is painted a deep teal green, with a teak door that resembles the ones in Beijing's Temple of Heaven. The small stone porch reveals a white sandstone gargoyle and a tall stately rendering of Quan Yin, the Tibetan goddess of compassion. There is a working fountain, with a faun-like creature in the middle, cradling an animal. Celadon green bamboo trees grow in a little copse, lending an air of serenity. Which is not what one expects from this often confrontational and bombastic performer, who can reduce hecklers into quivering messes, or just as likely pluck a willing fan out of the crowd to kiss at the end of a particularly



WHIG OUT!

10 GREAT AFGHAN WHIGS COVER VERSIONS

Dulli and co frequently peppered their sets with amazing cover versions; here's 10 of the best...

BEWARE - AL GREEN
("UPTOWN AVONDALE" EP)

CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF YOUR LOVE, BABE
BARRY WHITE
(BEAUTIFUL GIRLS OST)

CREEP - TLC
("BONNIE & CLYDE" EP)

CREEP - RADIOHEAD
("HONKY'S LADDER" EP)

DARK END OF THE STREET - JAMES CARR
("WHAT JAIL IS LIKE" EP)

I KEEP COMING BACK
TYRONE DAVIS
(GENTLEMEN)

LOST IN THE SUPERMARKET
THE CLASH
(THE CLASH TRIBUTE ALBUM, BURNING LONDON)

BAND OF GOLD
FREDA PAYNE
("UPTOWN AVONDALE" EP)

IF I ONLY HAD A HEART
THE WIZARD OF OZ
("HONKY'S LADDER" EP)

WHEN DOVES CRY
PRINCE
("TIME FOR A BAVARIAN DEATH WALTZ - BOOTLEG")

stirring song. Or the guy who had sex with a stripper underneath the stage during Aerosmith's set when the Whigs toured with them in 1998. "Yeah, no doubt about it, that's the most rock thing I've done," laughs Dulli.

Because of his reputation as a latter-day Lothario, you might assume Dulli resides in a swinging bachelor pad, but he's much more subtle than that in his seductions. His home is furnished with fine wood floors, draped windows and clubby couches, set at inviting angles around a circular coffee table, littered with scented candles and a vase of Gerber daisies. Three bookshelves are crammed full, from the *Tibetan Book Of The Dead* to *On The Road*, travel guides to Buenos Aires and San Francisco, *Animal Farm*, plays by George Bernard Shaw, *The Screwtape Letters*, and books by Roberto Saviano and Elmore Leonard. The house is a showcase of art and objects culled from Istanbul bazaars, eBay, or gifts from his friend and fellow art collector Lanegan. There are iconography, voodoo renderings, and photos of his mother and a cat named Clyde, who he had for 13 years before Clyde went "on safari".

"He went missing for about four days, and I found him in a nearby park, crouched over something he'd just obviously killed. He just looked at me and went back to what he'd killed."

Did you make him come home with you?

Of course not, you can't control a cat's behaviour."

Dulli's current roommates are two black-and-white cats: Claudette, named for '40s actress Claudette Colbert, and Pervis, named after former NBA star Pervis Ellison whose nickname, "Never Nervous Pervis" could equally be applied to Dulli himself. Mike Estes, a high school friend and guitarist in Dulli's first band – a Lynyrd Skynyrd covers band called Helen Highwater – recalls Dulli as supremely confident and resourceful. "That guy was just born knowing. When we started the band, he went to the University of Miami library, got a Jacksonville phone book, and looked up Lynyrd Skynyrd and Rossington-Collins. He actually found a number for Rossington-Collins and told me to call it. I did, eventually talking to Allen Collins, who named the band."

Dulli says Estes fired him from the band because he spotted another singer who looked like the late Ronnie Van Zant, even though Helen Highwater had won Battle Of The Bands in Cincinnati in 1982. "No, that's not the way it was," reveals Estes. "This was in 1983, and he graduated that year and was going to go to college in Cincinnati. Nobody else in the band had been to college, and that might have been part of it. But it wasn't that he got fired because of this other guy. The thing with Greg is he's one of those guys like Mick Jagger, no matter

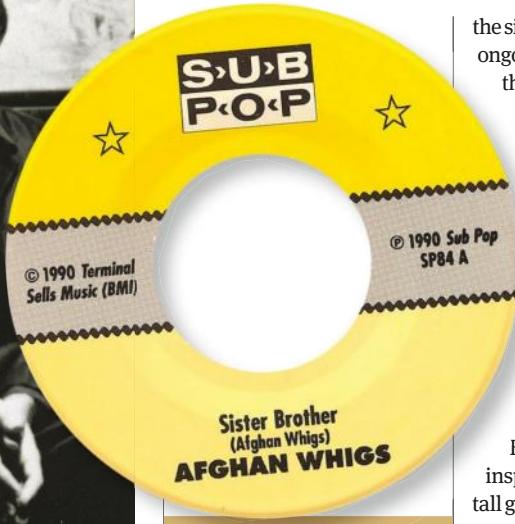


The Afghan Whigs in 1996: (l-r) Curley, Dulli, Buchignani, McCollum; and inset below, in 1990

what he's singing, he sounds like himself. He was not nailing those Skynyrd vocals. Greg did the right thing; he followed what he thought he should do, for artistic reasons or whatever. It worked for him. It still does."

THE ONLY CONCESSION to the image of the swinging bachelor is a set of golf clubs propped against one of the paned windows in Dulli's house. He plays quite regularly with Buzz Osbourne, after Dulli and his engineer ran into the Melvins frontman playing solo on a golf course. "He's a good golfer and was generous about giving us tips. Such a good guy," Dulli trails off, looking over my shoulder, distracted by the rain streaking his windows. "It's been gray a couple of days and when I woke up I said, 'Please give it up this time.'"

His wish was granted, for finally there was a break in what is the driest year on record since 1877 in California: a situation that has caused



"There's nothing you can do about ghosts... there are things we're never gonna know"



AFGHAN WHIGS SUB POP

Sub Pop Records
PO Box 161
3472 Beverungen
West Germany

BUYER'S GUIDE

THE AFGHAN WHIGS ON CD

The wild and wonderful works of Dulli and co, from home studio to 2014 rebirth

BIG TOP HALLOWEEN

ULTRA SUEDE, 1988



Essentially written by Dulli during night shifts as a photo developer in Phoenix, Arizona.

Cut in Curley's home studio in mid-'87, and self-released. While a little messy, it showed enough promise and a singular sound to get Sub Pop to sign them.

UP IN IT

SUB POP, 1990



A visceral blast of raw power, with the emphasis on heavy sonics and Dulli's tales of self-loathing and excess. "Retarded" is enough proof that the band belonged on an all-grunge label.

CONGREGATION

SUB POP, 1992



The Whigs' third album shows the band to be more sure-footed. Dulli writes fully formed lyrics with the eye of an English major, and sings them like Rob Tyner. "Conjure Me" is the perfect distillation of every soul record that Dulli ever listened to.

GENTLEMEN

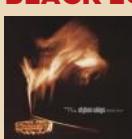
ELEKTRA, 1993



Their first major label release is a sophisticated song cycle about a break-up. Autobiographical and self-castigating, it follows the many emotional responses to heartbreak, from loneliness to malice, and its quiet aftermath.

BLACK LOVE

ELEKTRA, 1996



Named after the brand of incense Dulli used to burn as a teenager, it's a dark, unrepentant record. "Crime Scene Part 1" is inspired by a friend's death, and one of the most harrowing songs about grief since Neil Young's "Tonight's The Night".

1965

COLUMBIA, 1998



The most fully realised Afghan Whigs album, it deserves a more exalted place in rock history, from the sultry insinuating piano on "Something Hot" to the provocative unease of "Crazy".

DO TO THE BEAST

SUB POP, 2014



On the heels of their reunion tour, Dulli has made the Afghan Whigs album he has always wanted to. Smart, dangerous, unsettling, it's an exorcism, a rebirth and as close as he'll ever be to making his own Led Zeppelin album.

the singer no small amount of angst. Not content with his ongoing musical commitments, or his role as proprietor of three bars and a small six-room hotel, it transpires Dulli is also an avid gardener. "I built the wall of trees that blocks the house from the street," he explains as he takes me down a steep staircase and out a back door.

"Ficus on the south side, podocarpus and ficus on the west side, and bamboo on the north side. But the soil was so great, the exposure is great, the sun travels around the house never getting too hot, and I have a great irrigation system, so I kept going."

"I grew weed here for the first time last year, and five plants gave me a pound," he says proudly, stopping in front of a kitchen garden that sports turnips, squash, Romaine lettuce and strawberries.

He bends down and picks up a large red strawberry and inspects it. Peering down at it, he frowns and tosses it in the tall grass. It's all about quality control, and that goes a long way to explain why the Afghan Whigs called it a day in 2001.

Good enough was never good enough for Dulli. It is rare to find anyone who admits to having seen a bad Whigs show. Even when the band resorted to fisticuffs, it usually pushed their shows to greater emotional heights. "We fought about who was driving the band or where to eat," explains John Curley. "It's the classic schoolyard story where two guys butt heads and throw down on the playground, then they're best friends after that. We are stubborn and passionate, and we didn't know how to articulate that as well as we could have."

"Nope, it was nothing more than creative friction," explains Dulli. "John Curley's like my brother, and I never had a brother. So I got to beat up that brother. He gave as good as he got."

The two have been friends since they met when Dulli was a film student at the University Of Cincinnati, and Curley a photographic intern at the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. Rick McCollum, a friend of Curley's, added chemistry to the outfit; although sometimes that chemistry got a little unruly, so that even that deep bond between Curley and Dulli couldn't keep the band together. To hear Dulli tell it, the three men – along with drummer Michael Horrigan – "drove the wheels off" the band. The band split up on February 5, 2001, after 14 years and six LPs. Dulli didn't think about trying to fix it; it made more sense to let the Whigs fall apart. Time and again, he'd claim there'd never be a reunion. Or so he thought. "I didn't

think we'd get back together. At least that's what I believed at the time," he says carefully. "For a long time, actually. After the Whigs were over I didn't pick up my guitar for a year. I worked at the bar. Did a lot of drugs. It doesn't matter, because I did it and it's done. I also found out I wanted to do it [make music] again, and that's what really happened during that time."

He also made friends with Elliott Smith, a regular at the Short Stop, one of the bars Dulli co-owns. "Some people knew it was me bartending. Some people didn't. I started noticing Elliott coming in. One time he asked me, 'Do people ever ask you what you do all day?' I said, 'Yeah.' He goes, 'What do you tell them?' Before I could answer, he goes, 'I think people just assume I'm fucking around all day.' At the same time we both said, 'You're planning what's going to happen.' You're working up to an event and you have to be alone to come into a communion with it. Only you can understand it. You can't be hanging out, doing something else. That's kind of metaphysical, but in that way, it's something that few people understand. Elliott did."

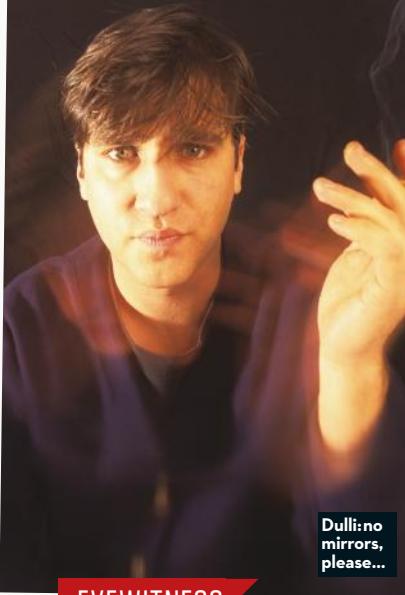
After two years, Dulli made The Twilight Singers' album, *Blackberry Belle*, which he believes is his best work. He also formed the Gutter Twins with Lanegan, and played with an Italian band called Afterhours. But none of these outfits had the wallop of the Whigs for fans; a band many people have a strong attachment to. Especially Sub Pop's Jonathan Poneman, who first signed the Whigs in 1989. At the time, there was much internal discussion as to whether the label should sign this band from Ohio, given its focus on bands from the Northwest. But seeing the Whigs at a tiny club in Seattle's Capitol Hill pushed aside their reservations.

"Oh my God, that show was so good," recalls Poneman. "Greg was already a fully formed rock star. They had an eclectic, some would say eccentric, quality about them but they were also electrifying. They did a Sinéad O'Connor cover, I think it was 'Mandinka'. I remember being shocked that they would do it and even more shocked that they would do it so righteously. At that moment we not only fully embraced them as a Sub Pop band but Bruce [Pavitt, Sub Pop co-founder] and I became pretty dogged devotees, if I may frame it that way."

So why do people like the Whigs so much? According to Poneman it's because Dulli is a soul man. "He's a master of many guises. He comes off as the soul crooner, and some say he's a misogynist, but it's his visceral ability to connect with people. He brings his experience and his soul to bear in music. There's a lot of empty craft in this industry... but love it or hate it, Greg gives you what's up. I not only find it entertaining, but I find it critical to my ability to relate to an artist, knowing there's integrity and that what I'm listening to is real."

Which is probably why the Afghan Whigs dedicated their first album in 16 years to Poneman, who is putting it out on Sub Pop. "Greg sees Jonathan as someone who has been there throughout all of the Whigs stuff," explains Megan Jasper. "Jonathan was the person who was shepherding the Afghan Whigs into Sub Pop. He has been Greg's advocate for his entire career. While Greg hasn't used these words, the feeling I get from speaking to him about it is it's like coming home."

OVER THE YEARS, Dulli claims he thought little about re-forming the band, but adds, "You need to walk away to have perspective." That perspective came during his debut acoustic tour in 2010, when he found he enjoyed performing some of the old songs. He even convinced Curley to join him onstage. "I played in Cincinnati with him," says Curley, "and I played a couple of Whigs songs with them when the Twilight Singers and Gutter Twins came to town. When he came through Cincinnati on the acoustic tour, it wound up being seven songs. I went up to Chicago the night after that and he asked if I'd come out and do the four West Coast shows to close out the tour a month later. I did that, and I came home and told [my wife] Michelle, 'It's kind of



Dulli: no mirrors, please...

EYEWITNESS 10 THINGS WE'VE LEARNED ABOUT GREG DULLI...

- **Dulli is addicted to Orbit gum, and always chews two pieces.**
- There are no mirrors in his house.
- **He follows the Blood Type Diet and is Type O-Negative. Yes, it works.**
- He goes to the gym three times a week and does the elliptical machine, watching TV on his iPad. He just finished the seventh season of *The Shield*.
- **His favourite singer is Marvin Gaye. Prince is a close second. David Ruffin is a closer third.**
- Dulli began playing drums as a child, and now plays drums to enhance his creativity.
- **There is a painting of Edgar Allan Poe hung in his downstairs closet.**
- Dulli helped Wayne Kramer build a hot tub in West Palm Beach where Kramer was living. He was unaware who Kramer was at the time. Years later he was a guest vocalist on the 2004 MC5 reunion tour.
- **He has season tickets to LA's Clippers. He usually goes with Mark Lanegan.**
- The first song he learned to play on the guitar was "Heroin".

dangerous, but I got the feeling I could do this again.'

"I didn't think much about it until six months later, when Greg and I went out to lunch in LA and had our first real conversation about it... I was a little reticent, but Greg just said, 'Let's do it. I promise it's going to be great.' As you know, he can be very persuasive."

The opportunity came when ATP asked Dulli to reunite the Whigs, to fill in for Guided By Voices, who pulled out of the I'll Be Your Mirror festival. Dulli convinced his ex-bandmates to perform for the first time in 13 years, at London's Alexandra Palace in May 2012 then on the festival's US leg in September. The chemistry was still there, so they expanded the dates. But Dulli made no promise about a future, or even a follow-up to 1998's *1965*. Until his birthday last year, when he started working on the LP in earnest.

"I finished it on New Year's Eve, 2013. I needed an end point," says Dulli. "John and I wanted to do a record together. I've known him since I was 20 – when we stopped the band it was for many reasons, but our friendship never wavered. We knew we wanted something more."

"We never said this is it, or this is not it. I was in Australia and my manager called and said, 'Fader magazine wants you to play SXSW with the Whigs', and I said no. So he said, 'They want you to play with Usher', and I said, 'Tell Usher to call me', and Usher called me."

Playing with Usher seemed like a good augury to continue the Whigs' time together. "It was incredibly fun, and without the distraction that Rick had brought the band. We decided to move forward. Sub Pop had made it clear they wanted to work with us and I'd piled up a bunch of sketches of songs. But once we started anew, I started making it a singular experience."

As in a singular vision? Like a solo album?

"Well, not exactly, but I brought in the initial material. Then as we started playing together, I started to tailor the experience to what was happening in the now. I had 'Parked Outside', 'The Lottery'. I had the pieces that became 'Lost In The Woods', my favourite. I had a sketch of 'Can Rova'. 'It Kills' just came to me late one night in Joshua Tree. I wrote a lot of the songs there."

John Curley appears on a number of songs; Rick McCollum, however, is absent. "Rick was a unique and great guitarist," explains Dulli. "Maybe someday he will be again, but not until he gets out of his way. Whatever he had, just evaporated, and he gave up on himself. You can't help someone who doesn't want to be helped," he says, snapping his mouth shut.

The title, *Do To The Beast*, came from Dulli's friend, After-hours' Manuel Agnelli. After hearing Dulli sing "Matamoros" over a beatbox track, he said, "Wow, that was crazy. It sounded like you were saying 'Do to the beast what you do to the bush.'" We all looked at each other and I said: 'There's the name!'

"I'll tell you why we named that song 'Matamoros,'" explains Dulli. "Manuel was telling us a story about how years ago he went on vacation with a girl to Tulum, and they met a guy who hung out with them. The two of them got really sick, and later, when they got back to Italy and developed their photos, it was as if the guy in the pictures had a melting face. He was from Matamoros – in the late '80s, there was a series of satanic murders there. They figured he could be the guy."

Does Dulli believe in the unseen? "My cat Claudette sees somebody in this house that I don't. I'll watch her. Her ears go up and she'll start following something. I can't snap her out of it. I've been here 13 years and if there was any negative energy, I'd know by now. I put some negative energy in this place early on, which has been expunged. The only time I ever did anything ceremonial in here was when I transitioned from living my life one way into living my life a different way."

When you stopped doing drugs?

"Yeah," he says, simply. "As for the ghosts, first of all there's nothing you can do about them. You just have to realise there are things we're never gonna know."

The Afghan Whigs' *Do To The Beast* is out on Sub Pop, April 15

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Mirror In The Bathroom

BY THE BEAT

How the Birmingham punky reggae mavericks fought the National Front and the Isle Of Wight jazz-funk scene to create a pioneering hit... "We took John Peel out for a balti!"

WE USED TO put on these house parties in Birmingham," says The Beat's frontman, Dave Wakeling. "You'd get all sorts there – Boy George, UB40, even members of Dexys – long before any of us had released anything. We had a reggae DJ at one end, playing dub plates, alternating with a punk DJ at the other, playing brightly coloured punk singles. And the dancefloor never emptied. One night Andy [Cox] said to me, wouldn't it be great if you could get both the punk and reggae DJs in one three-minute single? A-ha! Eureka!"

The Beat's third single, "Mirror In The Bathroom", saw them nail that punky reggae party. The first digitally recorded single, it came belting out of radios in April 1980, a disorientating clash of dub bass, neurotic post-punk guitars, calypso drums and a bossa nova sax solo, all set to a highbrow lyric about male narcissism and mental illness.

Nowadays, Wakeling, who has lived in LA for two decades, leads a US incarnation of the band called The English Beat; vocalist Ranking Roger leads a UK-based Beat; while drummer Everett Morton recently split from the latter band to form his own outfit, Beat Goes Bang. Saxa, now 84, is retired in Birmingham, while guitarist Andy Cox and bassist David Steele, the reclusive pair who left to form the even more successful Fine Young Cannibals (with two US chart-toppers) are involved in other musical

projects. All agree that "Mirror In The Bathroom" was the band's high point.

"It's a timeless single," says Ranking Roger. "It could have been recorded in 1965 or 2035, it would still sound amazing."

JOHN LEWIS

DAVE WAKELING: For me, The Beat was about blending Toots & The Maytals and The Velvet Underground. I wanted a sinuous, urban angst, a manic insistence mixed with a sense of sinuosity. I mean, Motown had a dance music to go with car factories, why not Birmingham? We had heavy rock, which was all right, but I wanted something you could dance to. Something that celebrated how gorgeous life is, not just railing against it.

EVERETT MORTON:

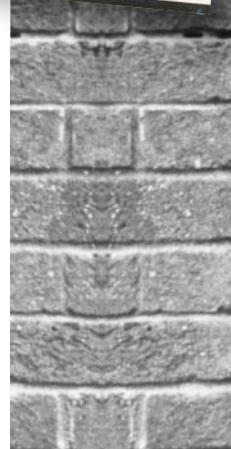
There were a lot of ska bands at the time – The Specials, The Selecter, Madness – and we were always put in the same category as them. But we weren't quite ska. We were more of a punky reggae band.

DAVID STEELE: Dave and Andy had been playing guitars together for a while, while working

THE BEAT

MIRROR IN THE BATHROOM
JACKPOT

GO FEET RECORDS



KEY PLAYERS



Dave Wakeling
lead vocals,
rhythm guitar,
lyrics



Ranking Roger
Backing vocals



Everett Morton
Drums



David Steele
Bass guitar



John Mostyn
Manager

on building sites. They got a job installing solar panels on the Isle Of Wight, where I grew up. While they were there they put an ad in the *Isle Of Wight County Press* for a bass player. I was the only person who answered it! The Isle Of Wight had more of a jazz-funk scene: [Level 42's] Mark King was a couple of years above me at school! Dave and Andy's music was a bit different. I played them some basslines and they liked them. They were a bit surprised when they went back to Birmingham and I turned up to meet them. They thought, shit, we'll have to form a proper band now! So I moved to Birmingham and got a hospital job to pay the rent.

MORTON: My girlfriend was a nurse in a psychiatric hospital where David [Steele] was a male nurse. He put out

the word that he was looking for a drummer, so I turned up to play with them. It was all a bit messy, but I think we all clicked.

STEELE: Our songwriting process was quite chaotic. We didn't really understand bridges and middle-eights. We just shoved ideas together!



"We wanted to celebrate how gorgeous life is..." (l-r)
Saxa, David Steele, Dave Wakeling, Andy Cox, Everett Morton, Ranking Roger

MORTON: The way we wrote was collaborative, which is why we shared the royalties. David [Steele] and Andy [Cox] would start jamming, I'd join in and try and make sense of it. Then Dave [Wakeling] would provide lyrics. He was a fantastic writer. He'd hear us jamming, and make a song out of anything.

WAKELING: I wrote lyrics while working on building sites. I'd been a fireman, but I preferred "neck-down" jobs, which left your mind free to write. One day I woke up, hungover, and realised I'd forgotten to hang up my work jeans to dry. So I took them into the bathroom, hoping the steam from the shower would at least warm them. I was shaving in the mirror, pissed off at having to wear these wet clothes to work, and started talking to myself. Hence the phrase, "*the door is locked, just you and me*." And that got me thinking about reflections, your perception of yourself. When David played me this amazing, ridiculous bassline he'd written, the only phrase that fitted was "*mirror in the bathroom*".

STEELE: It was one of the first basslines I ever wrote. At the time I was listening to a lot of dub and reggae like Dr Alimantado and Dennis Brown, and lots of punk – Public Image Ltd, The Fall – so there's probably an element of that.

RANKING ROGER: I think Dave wrote "Mirror In The Bathroom" as a punk song. But it ended up very different after it went through the rest of the band.

WAKELING: On "Mirror" I played rhythm guitar. I used a DADADAD tuning and just played barre chords, very muted, eight to the bar. Andy's playing these really weird, jazzy chord shapes over the top

of that. My theory is that David's bassline is in 2/4 while all the rest of us are playing in 4/4. That's why it sounds so dislocated.

MORTON: My drumming on "Mirror" is a mix of stuff. I'd played with reggae and calypso bands, but I was also obsessed with Buddy Rich and Billy Cobham. I remember, after I'd joined, Dave taking me to a pub to hear some punk drummers. I agreed, but only if he'd come with me to a pub called the Crampton Arms in Handsworth to hear some jazz and reggae! It was there that we saw Saxa. He was a saxophonist who used to just jam with whoever was playing on stage. He'd been a hero and an inspiration for me. And he ended up in the band.

STEELE: Birmingham was an odd place at the time, musically. Less ghettoised than London. Everything was all mixed up, everyone would end up listening to reggae and heavy metal and punk.

ROGER: I was playing drums in a punk band from Birmingham called the Dum Dum Boys. We played a lot of Rock Against Racism gigs, had a bit of a following around Birmingham, but we needed a headlining date. So we got a gig at a venue called the Matador, in the Bullring Centre. One day Dave, David, Andy and Everett asked if they could support us. It was their first gig. At the end of the night we knew we'd been blown offstage. "Mirror" was in their set already, and I thought, Jesus, this is good.

JOHN MOSTYN: I was helping to manage The Specials and The Selecter at the time, and someone asked me to check out The Beat. I first saw them at a Birmingham pub on their third gig. They were

energetic and very innovative, with a rhythm section to die for and a good-looking lead singer with a cheeky smile. And Roger was this manic presence who'd just jump onstage and join in! Roger was already a recognisable face on the Birmingham punk scene, with a history of leaping onstage: I remember going to a Damned gig a year earlier, where there were a lot of NF supporters in the crowd. I recognised Roger as the guy who got up and started chanting: "Fuck the National Front! Fuck the National Front!" And the crowd joined in, and silenced the NF supporters!

ROGER: The Beat ended up inviting me to their next few dates and I'd come up on the stage and start toasting and MC-ing over their tunes. The punks from the Crown pub in Birmingham loved that! Around that time, I was made homeless, so Dave Wakeling – credit to him – invited me in to join the band and share his flat. I stayed with him for six months and in that time we really started gigging.

MOSTYN: I started managing them and got them a residency at a pub called the Mercat Cross. First Friday: 50 people turned up. Second Friday: 150. Third Friday: it was so rammed we had to call the police! I invited the social secretary at Aston University down, and she was impressed enough to book them for a club night. Only thing is they needed a big name DJ, so I contacted Radio 1 and got John Peel to do a roadshow there, with The Beat as his "support" act. It was basically an elaborate way of getting Peel to hear the band.

WAKELING: We did our 45-minute set and



Having a punky reggae party: (l-r) Andy Cox, Ranking Roger, Dave Wakeling

then John Peel announced: "I bloody love this band. I'm getting paid £300 for this gig and the band are only getting £100. I'd like to swap cheques with them if they'll play their set again!" So we did, and we took him out for a balti on the Ladypool Road in Balsall Heath. We were dead chuffed. And he offered us a session, which is where we first recorded "Mirror In The Bathroom".

ROGER: After that Peel session, we started to get offers. Jerry Dammers asked us support The Selecter in Wales and turned up with his briefcase and signed us to 2-Tone for a one-single deal, which was great. He wanted "Mirror In The Bathroom" as the single, but we were a bit wary of giving away our material, so we let 2-Tone have "Tears Of A Clown". It was a cover that always went down well.

MOSTYN: Dammers offered us an album deal, but the band thought it'd be better to have their own semi-independent label, similar to the deal 2-Tone had with Chrysalis. So we signed to Arista and set up Go Feet, with the logos and labels designed by local cartoonist Hunt Emerson. And we got as producer Bob Sargeant, the in-house BBC guy who'd done our Peel sessions. He was great.

WAKELING: We started recording our first album at Ridge Farm, this residential studio in rural Surrey. We got most of the rhythm tracks down and then got an odd phone call from Gerry Bron, who managed Uriah Heep and ran Bronze Records. He said he'd built this revolutionary new studio in Camden, the Round House. "It's digital, there's no tape wear, no distortion," he said. "The only thing is that the machine occasionally makes these clicking noises, so you can use it for half price."

ROGER: That's why it was the first ever digitally recorded hit single in the UK. Digital recording made the bass sound thinner – it wasn't as warm as analogue. But it made everything else clinical – you could hear every percussive sound, every breath, every beat. Everything was clean. Maybe too clean!

WAKELING: Bob Sargeant was great for us, 'cos he was a purist. Our inclination might have been to play things on synths if it was easier, but he was fastidious. Everything had to be classic. Steinway grands, Hammonds, condenser mics...

MOSTYN: I remember the most difficult thing to record were Saxa's solos. He never played the same thing twice! And he did like a drink...

STEELE: Some people think that there was too much saxophone on that track. I wanted more! I love Saxa's solos.

MORTON: Saxa was a wonderful presence in the studio. He was like an Old Testament prophet. Kids would sit and hear his wisdom, like reading a book!

ROGER: That album took about six weeks, which seemed like ages. But the second LP took three months, and the third six months! I think, at our peak, me and Dave were the English equivalent of the Everly Brothers! Seriously. Our harmonies were unique and somehow effortless.

MOSTYN: It's still amazing to think of the age range in that band. Saxa was in his 50s. Roger was only 16 or 17. For the promotional tour for "Mirror In The Bathroom", Roger was still technically a minor – under the Children And Young Persons Act of 1963 I had to take him down to Bow Street Magistrates' Court before leaving the country and report him to every foreign embassy!

WAKELING: The video was directed by Juliet McKoen, a film student me and Andy knew from Bournville sixth-form college. The live footage was filmed at the Rum Runner, the glitziest venue on Broad Street. We wanted some counterpoint to the glamour, so Juliet found this old doss-house around the back of Broad Street, which is where we filmed the bits of us looking into mirrors. We also filmed these shoe shops opposite C&A at the corner of New Street and Corporation Street. They had dozens of shiny

FACT FILE

- **Written by:** The Beat
- **Released:** April 1980
- **Personnel:** Dave Wakeling (vocals, guitar), Ranking Roger (vocals), Andy Cox (guitar), David Steele (bass), Everett Morton (drums), Saxa (sax)
- **Recorded at:** Ridge Farm, Surrey; Round House, London
- **Label:** Go Feet/Arista (UK), IRS (US)
- **UK chart position:** 4
- **US chart position:** n/a

mirrors, which chimed with the line "*a thousand reflections of your own sweet self*".

MOSTYN: Arista hated that video! They wanted something glamorous with a West End director, not something filmed in a Birmingham doss-house by someone who made public information films! But it worked well. That's where having our own semi-independent label helped.

WAKELING: The video emphasised the lyric, which was about self-absorption and narcissism. I was fascinated by the myth of Narcissus and the

Nymphs, how a self-absorption with beauty leaves you with little perception of anyone else in the universe. I always thought when you were dancing to a song, your limbic system processes the information better. The lyrics start going 3D on you. So you can get away with cryptic lyrics if the song makes you dance enough!

ROGER: It was only later when we toured the States that people would nudge and wink and say, ah, mirrors in bathrooms, eh lads? I swear it had nothing to do with cocaine! We couldn't afford it. Not then, anyway...

STEELE: "Mirror" has had quite a shelf-life. Tricky loves it.

"Just thinking about it makes me happy," he says. Believe it or not, Robert Plant used to cover it at gigs for a while! It's been used in films.

WAKELING: We were strict that our songs should never be used to promote sexism, racism, militarism or the use of violence to resolve problems. We made an exception with *Grosse Pointe Blank* because they said it was a spoof fight scene and they pleaded – they'd filmed the scene to synchronise with the music. Joe Strummer was the music supervisor – it's difficult to say no to a hero! I know Americans who love that scene and think it's terribly satirical, but I'm not thrilled to see my song being used to illustrate someone being stabbed in the throat with a screwdriver. That's why I left Birmingham and started writing songs!

ROGER: The song still sounds great, 35 years on. When I play it now, the band extend it with psychedelic dub sections. We did it a few weeks ago and it was 17 minutes long! And the audience sing along with every word! ☺

Dave Wakeling's English Beat tour the UK from March <http://englishbeat.net>. The Beat continue their UK and European tour in February onwards <http://www.thebeatofficial.com>



TIMELINE

1978 Written and performed by early version of The Beat
November 1979
 Recorded for a John

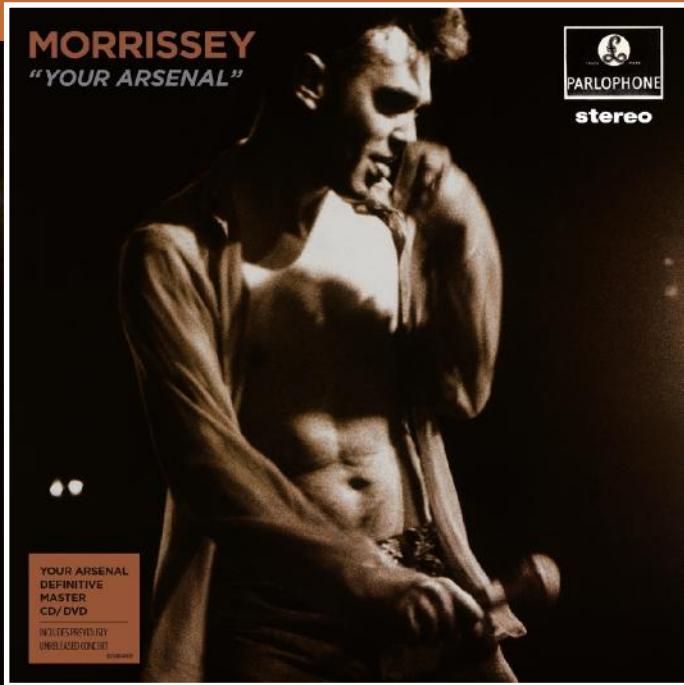
Peel session
December 1979
 Release debut single, "Tears Of A Clown"
January 1980 Band

start recording debut album
February 1980 Release second single, "Hands Off She's Mine"

April 1980 "Mirror In The Bathroom" is released
May 1980 Album *I Just Can't Stop It* released,

hits 3 in UK, 142 in US
January 1996 "Mirror In The Bathroom" is re-released, reaching 44 in the UK

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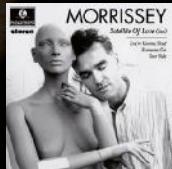
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THE MEN TOMORROW'S HITS

SACRED BONES LP / CD

The fifth full-length in as many years by Brooklyn's THE MEN sees them exploring higher fidelities and more classic rock-leaning arrangements than ever before.



VERTICAL SCRATCHERS

DAUGHTER OF EVERYTHING

MERGE LP / CD

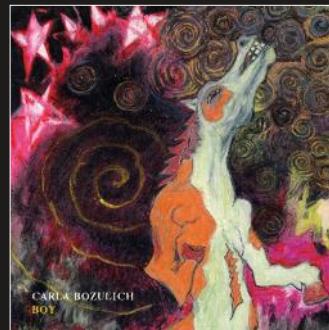
Vertical Scratchers is John Schmersal (ex-Brainiac/Enon, live Caribou, and Crooks on Tape) and Christian Beaulieu (ex-Triclops!/Anywhere). Think the Kinks with a Buzzcocks brevity.



STONE JACK JONES ANCESTOR

WESTERN VINYL LP / CD

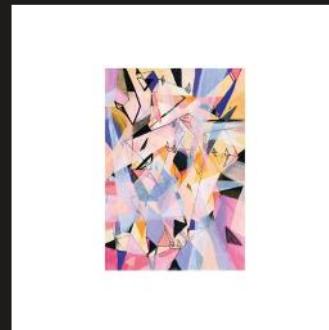
Ancestor features collaborations with Patty Griffin, members of Lambchop, and Courtney Tidwell, as it distills a lifetime of experience into what Pitchfork calls "...apocalyptic mountain music."



CARLA BOZULICH BOY

CONSTELLATION LP / CD

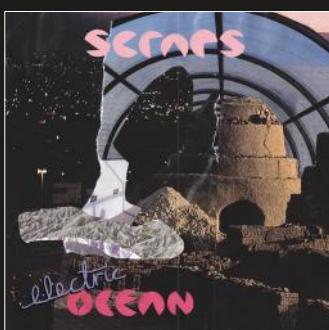
One of artpunk's strongest, most original and poetic voices returns. A brilliant new 10-song album that Carla calls her pop record (add sparkling grains of salt!).



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According to SPIN, "...Ava Luna has infectious, minimalist, ESG-style beats for days." Pitchfork describes it as "...itchy art-funk..." with "...future-perfect R&B..." and "...slip-sliding harmonics..."



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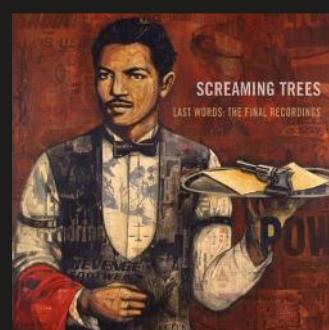


STANLEY BRINKS AND THE WAVE PICTURES

GIN

FINKA LP / CD

Stanley Brinks (Herman Dune) is joined by The Wave Pictures for their first album together in 4 years: a jam, a calypso, some indie rock, a groovy mantra, a little voodoo rhythm and some good old regular country.



SCREAMING TREES LAST WORDS: THE FINAL RECORDINGS

SUNYATA RECORDS CD

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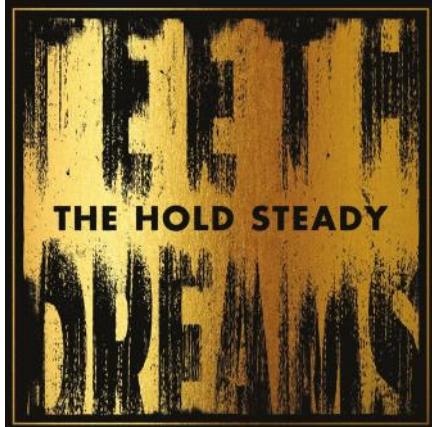
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THIS MONTH: ELBOW | WILKO JOHNSON | METRONOMY & MORE



TRACKLIST

- 1 I Hope This Whole Thing Didn't Frighten You
- 2 Spinners
- 3 The Only Thing
- 4 The Ambassador
- 5 On With The Business
- 6 Big Cig
- 7 Wait Awhile
- 8 Runner's High
- 9 Almost Everything
- 10 Oaks

THE HOLD STEADY

Teeth Dreams

POSITIVE JAMS/WASHINGTON SQUARE

A leaner, keener Hold Steady return from hiatus.

By Andrew Mueller

8/10

IT HAS BEEN four years since we last heard from The Hold Steady. This has been an uncharacteristically protracted silence: the same length of time in which they issued their first four albums, in that feverish, urgent burst between 2004's *Almost Killed Me* and 2008's *Stay Positive*. During this layoff, The Hold Steady's lineup has been slightly reshuffled – guitarist Steve Selvidge, late of the under-regarded Lucero, has been promoted from touring adjutant to full member. This completes a significant evolution in The Hold Steady's sound, from a heavy reliance on the thunderous keyboards of Franz Nicolay – who left before the recording of 2010's *Heaven Is Whenever* – to a triple-guitar attack including incumbent lead player Tad Kubler and frontman Craig Finn. It suits them: *Teeth Dreams* is The Hold

Steady's least fussy, least mannered, least arch album. Not coincidentally, it's possibly their best.

Fine though The Hold Steady's previous albums have been, there's always been something somewhat over-eager and over-anxious about the group, a self-consciousness that made them sound too keen to impress, and therefore – as is the cruelly paradoxical way of these things – less likely to actually do so. Listening to them often prompted the same unease as watching Finn's frenetic, hyperactive stage demeanour: an admiration for the energy being brought to bear on proceedings, competing with a somewhat exhausted wish that he'd just settle down and let the songs – and their audience – breathe a little.

If there's one song on *Teeth Dreams* emblematic of this looser-limbed incarnation of The Hold Steady, it's the second track here,



Picture perfect: (l-r) Craig Finn, Bobby Drake, Galen Polivka, Tad Kubler, Steve Selvidge

SLEEVE NOTES

► Recorded at:

Rock Falcon Studios, Franklin, Tennessee

Produced by:

Nick Raskulinecz

Personnel:

Craig Finn (vocals, guitar), Tad Kubler (guitar), Steve Selvidge (guitar), Galen Polivka (bass), Bobby Drake (drums)

→ “Spinners”. In some respects it’s another great big Hold Steady anthem, in the manner of “Massive Nights”, or “Stay Positive”, but it lopes and slouches amiably where its predecessors were clenched, sweaty and seething. It’s not the last point at which *Teeth Dreams* reminds uncannily of *English Oceans*, the imminent and surprisingly pretty new album by The Hold Steady’s former touring companions, Drive-By Truckers.

Similarly, the fantastic “On With The Business” sees The Hold Steady sounding less like they’re giving some sort of lecture in how to be a literate, intelligent rock’n’roll band, and more like they’ve settled in to just being one. Kubler’s solo here is sensational unreconstructed: another defining delight of *Teeth Dreams* is his resignation to his status as an old-school guitar hero: he has already admitted that the Elvis Costello-joins-Aerosmith rocker “Wait Awhile”, another highlight here, was a consequence of fiddling around with the opening riff of Joe Walsh’s “Life’s Been Good”. At which point one recalls that Kubler is possibly the

only guitarist who has unironically deployed a twin-neck Gibson in the past 40 years, and one wonders if this is the album he has always wanted to make. It sounds like it, especially on the likes of “Runner’s High”, which Kubler closes with a gleefully Skynyrd solo.

Finn’s words are also noticeably less forced and prolix than previously – usually an indication of a solidifying confidence. It’s visible in the very tracklisting. Only one song has an instantly recognisable Hold Steady title – the opening “I Hope This Whole Thing Didn’t Frighten You”, which sounds something like a choking, claustrophobic Thin Lizzy (a compliment, in this context). Every other title is barely a fistful of syllables, Finn no longer so determined to tell the whole story in the headline.

Finn’s lyrical preoccupations haven’t evolved significantly. He’s still drawn to the lost and lonely, like the damaged drifter “sleeping at a storage space by the airport” in the swaggering,

Gaslight Anthem-ish “The Only Thing”, or the barfly losing her buzz in the stately ballad “The Ambassador” – an establishment in which “The nights were hot and hissing like an iron/The days spent climbing walls like a vine.” But he’s more content than previously to let the characters stand (or, often the case in Finn’s universe, fall) on their own merits: *Teeth Dreams* never feels oversold, not even the nine-minutes-and-change closing epic “Oaks”, the fade-out of which suggests that there was plenty more where it came from.

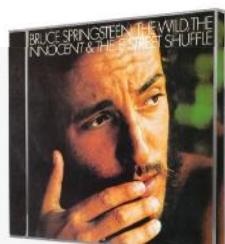
None of which is to suggest that Finn has embraced a regime of clipped, Elmore Leonard-esque terseness – the lyric sheet for *Teeth Dreams* comfortably clears 3,000 words, few of them repeated. And this is a good thing – Finn remains one of very few rock lyricists whose voice is audible from the page as well as the record. If a song begins, as “On With The Business” does, with the line “I’m really sorry about that prick in the parking lot/I wanted this to be our year,” you want to find out what happens next (in this case, a hint of what might result were Buffalo Tom commissioned to write *Breaking Bad: The Musical*). And when, on penultimate track “Almost

Everything”, The Hold Steady permit themselves the indulgence of the acoustic lament of life on the road, they evade hubris deftly with a hallucination of humility: “The bus it rolled up into Franklin at dawn and everything seemed super slo-mo/The Waffle House waitress that asked us if we were Pink Floyd.” It’s a lovely moment, though by this point on such a musically exuberant album the lack of a head-back, scrunch-eyed “Wanted: Dead Or Alive” solo by Kubler seems rather a shame.

Another absence from *Teeth Dreams* is more significant. Give or take the refrain of “I served my purpose” on “Big Cig” – far and away the most old-school Hold Steady song here – there are none of the band’s signature oh-woah-woah singalong choruses. Crucially, triumphantly, they’re not missed. Now that The Hold Steady have stopped clamouring for our attention, they deserve it more than ever.

THE PATH TO: TEETH DREAMS

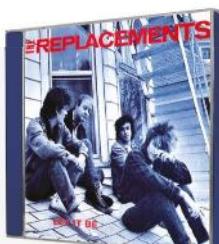
Four great albums that influenced The Hold Steady...



BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
The Wild, The Innocent & The E Street Shuffle CBS, 1973

The wordy studies of lonely, bewildered characters on the Boss’ first two albums are perhaps the most resonant influence on Finn – though it’s hard to imagine him writing anything as celebratory as “Rosalita”.

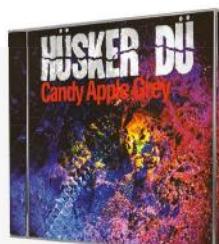
9/10



THE REPLACEMENTS
Let It Be TWIN/TONE, 1984

Finn has often cited this LP by his fellow Minneapolitans as his favourite of all time. It’s not hard to see why: this is one of the places The Hold Steady learnt that words could sound all the more heartfelt and vulnerable for being soundtracked by glorious noise.

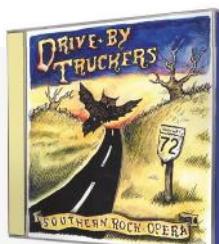
8/10



HÜSKER DÜ
Candy Apple Grey WARNERS, 1986

Hüsker Dü were more punk than The Replacements, but also more pledged to melody, especially on their later LPs. “Sorry Somehow” and “Hardly Getting Over It” are plausible templates for, respectively, The Hold Steady’s loudest and quietest moments.

8/10



DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS
Southern Rock Opera SOIL DUMP, 2001

Finn once told *Uncut* that it was seeing DBTs touring with their epic 2001 concept album that made him want to form The Hold Steady. The two bands share a faith in rock’n’roll as a primal animator of the head as well as the heart.

8/10



Q&A

Craig Finn on covering Kiss, throwing beer and why *Teeth Dreams* is so rocking...

WHY "TEETH DREAMS"? They're anxiety dreams, and a lot of people have them. I was thinking a lot about anxiety, and these anxious times, and whether all times are anxious and that's just the human condition.

It has been four years. Was there a point at which you doubted there'd be another Hold Steady album?

Before we made *Heaven Is Whenever*, we'd released so much music in such a short time, and everyone was kind of fatigued, which showed its head on the last tour. The shows were starting to suffer, everyone had spent too much time on a bus, and physically, singing-wise, things felt like a strain.

Did your solo album and touring acoustically – by yourself and with Patterson Hood and Will Johnson – teach you anything you could bring back?

The Hold Steady are really loud, and I'm pretty much just the lyricist, so when we go and blow it out, and I can't hear the vocals, I can end up feeling like I'm serving no purpose. So going out and doing these quiet shows allowed me to cut through and deal with the storytelling. But it did get me excited about playing loud again. You play quiet, and crowds react quietly. Nobody throws beer in the air – and after 10 years in The Hold Steady, you kind of need that for validation.

On the subject of 10 years, you recently celebrated that anniversary by returning to the first venue you played at [Brooklyn's Music Hall Of Williamsburg, previously known as Northsix]. Thinking back to that show, did you have a 10-year plan then?

There was no plan. We were literally having conversations: we were never going to make a record or play a show, because those are no fun. The only fun is drinking beer in a practice space. I'm not sure there was a plan for a second show.

So we exceeded our expectations after about three weeks.

Did you decide to make such a big rock album on *Teeth Dreams*, or did it just work out that way?

The addition of Steve [Selvidge, ex-Lucero], who joined to tour the last record, makes everything much bigger. Also, the producer, Nick Raskulinecz is a big rock guy [his credits include Foo Fighters, Alice In Chains, Rush, Deftones, Evanescence] and he brought his own sensibility. And at 42 years old and six records in, making a mellow record would have been obvious.

You do allow yourself the gently strummed acoustic lament for life on the road, on "Almost Everything".

That was originally an electric thing, but Nick, the producer, said we should do it acoustic. It hopefully has a level of self-awareness. There's so much character-driven stuff on the album, it was nice to have one song to say, here's where we're at.

On the subject of characters, this isn't The Hold Steady album where you suddenly start writing about confident, fulfilled, self-assured winners.

No, it's not. But that's also partly because the album became this big rock thing, so when I wrote the words, I wanted to write something cinematic. I'm still attracted to people making those decisions which lead to dramatic outcomes, those dislocated people who are just trying to get ahead, or trying to escape things.

How did the actual writing work? Did someone call someone to end the hiatus,

or had work always been going on?

It varied. Steve lives in Memphis, and we all live in Brooklyn, so we'd fly him up here and say 'Write', but that felt too formal. So when I did my solo tour, the other guys went to Memphis and wrote, and sent me stuff, and then we eventually got together and wrote a tonne more. We played the producer 20, he chose 13, and I think there were another 10 we didn't even play him.

You've also been working on a covers EP.

We have. It's called "Rags". It's for our fan club, The Unified Scene, trying to raise money for the family of a friend of ours, a promoter in Harrisburg, who passed away and left two kids. We each brought in a song. So there's Dr Feelgood's "All Through The City", "Hard Luck Woman" by Kiss – we had to do a Kiss song – "I Gotta Get Drunk" by Willie Nelson and "Closer To The Stars" by Soul Asylum. My choice was Those Bastard Souls' "The Last Thing I Ever Wanted Was To Show Up And Blow Your Mind".

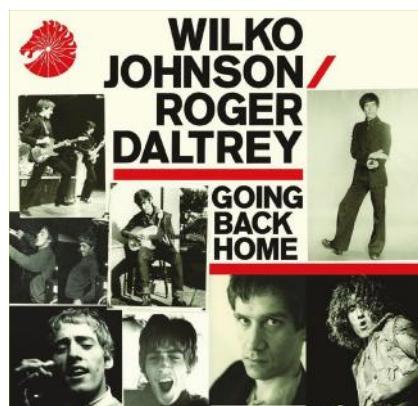
"We never planned to make a record or play live. The only fun is drinking beer in a practice space"

I noticed that as well. It does have a lack of long titles. It's just how it worked out. Some of the ones we ditched might have sounded more familiar.

Are you personally thinking of future projects beyond The Hold Steady?

Eventually, yes. But I'm hoping I won't have time for any of them this year. I just want to go out with The Hold Steady, and go hard.

INTERVIEW: ANDREW MUELLER



TRACKLIST

- 1 All Through The City
- 2 Sneakin' Suspicion
- 3 Going Back Home
- 4 Everybody's Carrying A Gun
- 5 Keep It Out Of Sight
- 6 Keep On Loving You
- 7 Some Kind Of Hero
- 8 Turned 21
- 9 I Keep It To Myself
- 10 Ice On The Motorway
- 11 Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window

WILKO JOHNSON & ROGER DALTRY *Going Back Home*

CHESS

Down but not out: Wilko revisits his catalogue in good company. By Nigel Williamson

Q&A

Wilko Johnson & Roger Daltrey

HOW DID you choose the material?
ROGER: Finding out Wilko's condition, I just said to him "You choose the songs and I'll have a go at singing whatever you throw at me." It was all done in a real rush. But so much modern music is over-polished and this album has a freshness. Fast, three-minute R'n'B songs. No bullshit. Just great songs.

WILKO: Imagine Roger Daltrey saying to you, "I'll sing whatever you like." So I took advantage...

Did you feel you had to work so fast because there wasn't much time left?

WILKO: Well, I was meant to be dead in October! I accepted it. I wasn't going to fight it and decided I'd just enjoy my time. But it's

going on and on and having gone past October, now I don't know. I haven't been back to the doctors since last year when they said I'd be dead in eight months... My spirit has been very good. Making the record I thought, 'This feels really nice. I'm really sorry I've got to die because I want to do a lot more of this.' It was a great atmosphere.

What do you take from the project?

ROGER: I've such admiration for Wilko. I think in some ways our post-war rock'n'roll generation taught people how to live and enjoy their lives. Now here's Wilko showing us how to die. We should be more accepting of the reality of death.

WILKO: Death ain't so bad, you know...

INTERVIEW: NIGEL WILLIAMSON

7/10

IT WOULD BE impossible not to feel distress at the prospect of losing Wilko Johnson, who was diagnosed with terminal cancer in January 2013. An equally understandable reaction would be to seek solace in those fizzing early Dr Feelgood records and recall with rheumy-eyed nostalgia the youthful verve of a life lived to the full and now drawing to a close. But Johnson himself has favoured a more practical approach. Told that he had only months to live, he resolved to make the most of his time and headed out on the road for a tour that everyone – including Wilko and his doctors – anticipated would be his last. When he confounded medical science and was still around to see in 2014, he declared that he'd had "a brilliant year" and announced another tour, taking in dates in both Britain and Japan.

In between these intended farewells, last November he went into the studio with Roger Daltrey to record *Going Back Home*. If there is an intimation of mortality in the album's title, there is no hint of it in the music, which is vibrant and vigorous with all its vital signs pumping. Recorded in a tiny studio in Sussex near Daltrey's country estate with Johnson's touring band of Blockheads bassist Norman Watt-Roy and drummer Dylan Howe, the sessions were concluded in seven days. The briskness may have been partly enforced by the knowledge that the sands in Wilko's hourglass are running out; but in truth it was all the time two such seasoned old pros needed to crunch their no-nonsense way through a collection of 10 Johnson originals from his Dr Feelgood days and solo years, plus a robust take on Bob Dylan's sardonic "Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window".

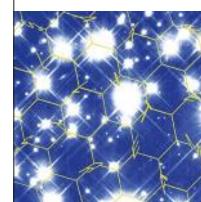
The idea had been vaguely kicking around since Daltrey and Johnson found themselves sitting together at an awards ceremony in 2010. Bonding over a mutual admiration for Johnny Kidd & The Pirates they mused that it would be a wheeze one day to collaborate

on a raw and unvarnished old-school R'n'B album. Such conversations, you'd imagine, are not uncommon and are usually soon forgotten, the muso's equivalent of 'let's do lunch'. Three years later they still hadn't broken bread when Wilko's grim diagnosis seemed to confirm that they never would. But when Daltrey had finished with The Who's 2013 tour and found that Wilko was not only still around but ready to roll, realising the project took on a sense of urgency.

It's a collaboration that makes perfect sense, for there is a maximum R'n'B shiver here that runs down the backbone of three generations of British rock'n'roll, from the Pirates to The Who to the Feelgoods, emanating from a traditional powerhouse trio of guitar, bass and drums, all fronted by a charismatic and characterful lead singer.

Daltrey's full-throated roar on the Pirates' 1960 hit "Shakin' All Over" was a showpiece of The Who's set when Johnson saw the band as a student in the late 1960s. Six years later, Johnson teamed up with the Pirates' guitarist Mick Green to write "Going Back Home" for the Feelgoods' second album, 1975's *Malpractice*.

The song makes for a talismanic opener and title track, Johnson's trademark choppy chords and tough, terse solos sounding as invigorating as ever. Daltrey, consciously or not, adopts a clipped, deeper register closer to Lee Brilleaux's muscular R'n'B growl than his familiar Who rockisms and adds wailing blues harmonica to several tracks, including the Dylan cover. Feelgood classics "All Through The City", and "Sneakin' Suspicion" and the title track from Johnson's '81 solo debut, *Ice On The Motorway*, are stirringly revived, as is the rockabilly-tinged "Everybody's Carrying A Gun" from Johnson's under-rated post-Feelgoods '78 album with the Solid Senders. Not so much a last will and testament. More a case of business as usual, for as long as he still can.

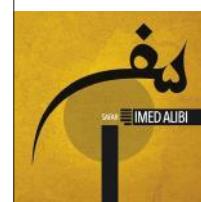
A to Z**COMING UP THIS MONTH...****p68 REAL ESTATE****p69 BONNIE 'PRINCE' BILLY****p70 RODNEY CROWELL****p70 JACK BRUCE****p72 ELBOW****p73 SIMONE FELICE****p75 METRONOMY****p79 LINDA PERHACS****p82 DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS****ACQUAINTANCE****Satellite Stream**

ANTI-GHOST MOON RAY

Balmy art-electro from Brighton aesthete

Scritti Politti's Green may well be the role model for maverick synth-popster

Chris Griffin. This gorgeous debut album looks back to the subversive 'new pop' of the early '80s, layering bubbling drum machines, analogue synths, tinkling pianos and even the odd fretless bass into an immersive wall-of-synth, topped off with Griffin's creamy, androgynous, multi-tracked harmonies. But while the music suggests that these are blissed-out love songs, the lyrics are disquieting observations on the links between telepathy and surveillance, gossip and secrecy. The outstanding "Living Memory", "Open Secret" and "Telepathic" throw acid and deep house pulses into the mix, finding a unique link between elegant Balearic disco and bookish intimacy.

8/10**IMED ALIBI****Safar**

WAYWARD

New adventures in desert blues helmed by Robert Plant's guitarist

The metronomic guitar boogie of Tinariwen has come to define the North African desert sound and with the producer who brought the band to the world in charge, one might've expected more of the same. But Justin Adams and percussion maestro Alibi have fashioned something more layered and ambitious as ancient Berber rhythms and an epic dynamic borrowed from Led Zep's "Kashmir" combine to rock the casbah on the two most monumental tracks, "Maknassy" and "Bounawara". Elsewhere, Zied Zouari's soaring violin adds a touch of oriental mystery and the keyboards and electronic effects of French arranger Stéphane Puech lend Vangelis-like pomp and grandeur.

7/10



SLEEVE NOTES

► Recorded at:

The Wilco Loft,
Chicago

Produced by:

Tom Schick

Personnel: Martin Courtney (vocals, guitars), Matt Mondanile (guitars), Alex Bleeker (bass, vocals), Matt Kallman (keyboards), Jackson Pollis (drums), Julian Lynch (clarinet)

closer to a melodic guitar solo than a riff, recalling Deebank's mazy work on "The Day The Rain Came Down". *Atlas* is dominated by a saturated prettiness that seems at once virtuosic and effortless. The bright immediacy of "It's Real", from 2011's *Days*, has been toned down, giving more room to Real Estate's autumnal shades. If *Days* and 2009's eponymous debut described a perpetual smalltown summer evening, plucked from memories of late adolescence, *Atlas* is fractionally more wistful. The cover art references a mural by the Polish artist Stefan Knapp, that adorned the side of Alexander's department store in Paramus, New Jersey, near the childhood homes of Courtney, Mondanile and bassist Alex Bleeker.

Knapp's mural – 200 feet long, 50 feet deep, once presumed to be the world's biggest – is now in storage, the department store long demolished. The 10 songs, correspondingly, are peppered with images of change, distance, separation and attendant anxieties. "Past Lives", hitching Real Estate's beatific melancholy to the faintest echo of bossa nova, is the key text here, beginning as it does, "I cannot come back to this neighbourhood/Without feeling my own age." If it was once a place where the urban and rural merged into one another, now his old town has changed so that Courtney "can't see the sky" any more.

The tune, though, is one of the band's loveliest and most subtle, and it expedites this suburban romantic's gently profound conclusion; that even in unpromising landscapes, beauty can still be

located. "This is not the same place I used to know," he notes, in a beguiling, fey tone that recalls Ian Brown at his most satisfactorily undemonstrative, "But it still has that same old sound/And even the lights on this yellow row/Are the same as when this was our town."

Similarly, Real Estate's music seems to be incrementally refined, never radically overhauled. A well-equipped studio – Wilco's loft, in Chicago – doesn't overwhelm their artisanal charm. A new keyboardist (Matt Kallman, formerly of Girls) provides a little extra depth, and comes to the fore on the instrumental "April's Song" (a bobbling cousin of The New Seekers' "I'd Like To Teach the World To Sing", weirdly). In *NME* recently, Courtney described the discreetly swinging "The Bend" as having "this big bombastic classic rock outro that makes us feel like Black Sabbath". Listeners, one suspects, are unlikely to interpret the mellow drop in pace as anything so disruptive (10 seconds of mildly distorted guitar at the end of "Crime" come as a bigger surprise).

Real Estate might have moved to the city and left

New Jersey behind, but they remain reassuringly embedded in their old aesthetic realm. For all the talk of change, *Atlas* mostly feels as if time and life

have been suspended, as the 10 songs elide into

a gorgeous 38-minute blur. What's happened?

Nothing much, ultimately, but it's the exquisite

attention lavished on the little things that matter.

And so, at the very end, *Atlas* reveals its essence:

"I have no idea," Courtney observes, calmly,

"where the day's been."

REAL ESTATE

Atlas

DOMINO

Greetings from Bergen County, New Jersey... A ravishing third album from jangling romantics. *By John Mulvey*

Real Estate
Atlas



8/10

BACK IN THE 1980s, there were plenty of attempts, not all of them complimentary, to name the indie-pop scene that emerged out of post-punk. One tag that stuck around for a while was "shambling", crystallising the assumption that this was music made by

wimpy, for wimpy; privileging a kind of low-fidelity incompetence to define itself against mainstream slickness. Real Estate, a Brooklyn quintet whose roots lie in the suburban sprawl of New Jersey, have spent the past few years making records that explicitly recall this era.

As their third album begins with a typically insouciant jangle, though, Martin Courtney's band put the music they evidently love in a different context. Like The Feelies, there's a rhythmic thrust that underpins even the most languorous passages. And like Felt, the serpentine paths taken by Courtney and fellow guitarist Matt Mondanile are rich, musically and far from amateurish.

The musical brilliance of Felt is often overlooked in favour of the aesthetic vision and marked eccentricities of their singer, Lawrence. Courtney, though, recalls one of Felt's terrific guitarists, Maurice Deebank, in the way he adds filigree detailing to songs, while still sounding more nonchalant than florid. On "Primitive", for instance, he anchors the song with something that's

Q&A

Martin Courtney



The lyrics of "Past Lives" in general seem especially significant. That song sticks out as being the most backward-looking song on the album, but it's written from a perspective rooted in the present. I wrote the music for that song in my parents' attic, where I had a little studio set up for a while in the fall of 2012, before

we got our own practice space in Brooklyn. The lyrics are inspired by sitting in the attic of the house I grew up in, recording demos in the middle of the afternoon, a month after I got married. Just feeling weird and old, I guess.

Tell us about the Stefan Knapp mural featured on the cover. I used to see it from the back seat of my parents' car. The store itself was closed down and vacant for the entire time its existence overlapped with my own. The landscaping surrounding the building was all overgrown, and the parking lot crumbling, but this massive, colourful abstract painting remained.



AUGUSTINES

Augustines

VOTIV/CAROLINE
INTERNATIONAL

Stadium-ready, redemptive songs on Brooklyners' second
Augustines were forged by an unusually dramatic

7/10

back-story, including the suicide of singer-guitarist Billy McCarthy's brother. The acceptance of their debut (made as We Are Augustines), *Rise Ye Sunken Ships*, after years of striving, makes Augustines a band that now sound energised by palpable relief, an already epic sound hitting the steroids on the likes of "Nothing To Lose". There's a case for dialling some of this down. But intimate emotions are being worked through, as when McCarthy mourns "days fade away like ghosts in the fog" on "Don't Look Back", giving its massive chorus meaning. It's the sound of Springsteen or U2 just starting out, and suffering an existential crisis.

NICK HASTED



BARZIN

**To Live Alone
In That Long
Summer**

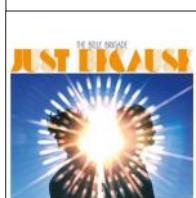
MONOTREME

Melancholic fourth album from Canadian singer-songwriter and poet

7/10

Barzin's spare, melancholic music has shifted through the years from unanchored atmospherics to more crafted songwriting. The sound palette of low strings, reverbed guitar, shuffling drums and his soft, polite voice whispering about "bella donna" and "the secrets of grace" still recalls Red House Painters ("In The Morning"), Talk Talk ("In The Dark") and Mazzy Star ("It's Hard To Love Blindly"), but elsewhere it steers closer to Villagers territory. Though sometimes a tad one-dimensional, at its best this music is as warm, sad and effortlessly beautiful as a midsummer sunset.

GRAEME THOMSON



THE BELLE BRIGADE

Just Because

ATO

Another young sibling band inventively embrace LA's musical legacy

8/10

Like their friends the Haim sisters, The Belle Brigade's Barbara and Ethan Gruska are LA natives from musical families with an affinity for Fleetwood Mac. If the sunny SoCal folk rock of the band's 2011 self-titled debut owed a debt to *Fleetwood Mac*, the darker, quirkier, more adventurous *Just Because* seems decidedly *Tusk*-like. On the dusky "Miss You In My Life" and the celestial "Everything For A Stone", the Gruska siblings' blood harmonies evoke Don'n'Phil more than Lindsey'n'Stevie, while Barbara's treated drum work intensifies the undertows of the urgent rockers "Ashes" and "When Everything Was What It Was". DNA plus inspiration can be a potent combination.

BUD SCOPPA



BLOOD RED SHOES

**Blood Red
Shoes**

JAZZ LIFE

7/10

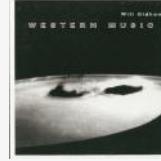
Brighton duo cling valiantly to their youth on fourth outing

Ten years into their career, drummer Steve Ansell and singer and guitarist Laura-May Carter have lost little of the stroppiness and swagger that defined their early shoutathons. If, since their debut, *Box Of Secrets*, their sound has been somewhat streamlined, their fourth album, self-produced and recorded in Berlin, finds the smart hooks and spiky lyrics all present and correct. The opening track "Everything All At Once" – "give me all of it, everything all at once" – is terrifically petulant while "Grey Smoke", a paean to the joys of nicotine, expertly illustrates the Shoes' marriage of fuzz-filled alt.rock and classic pop.

FIONA STURGES

HOW TO BUY... WILL OLDHAM

Three neglected curios from the Bonnie/Palace canon



WILL OLDHAM

Western Music

OVNI/ACUARELA, 1997

One of the few releases in Oldham's vast and bewildering catalogue to bear his own name, "Western Music" is an EP of odds-and-ends that contains at least two neglected classics: "Always Bathing In The Evening", a Steve Albini session featuring two-thirds of The Dirty Three; and "Western Song For JLL", a solo field recording that sounds old, weird and haunted even by Oldham's standards.

7/10



BONNY BILLY

More Reverie

TEMPORARY RESIDENCE, 2000

A straight-faced, eclectic mini-album of covers that takes in PJ Harvey, John Phillips, Bill Withers and Tim McGraw. Also recommended: 2007's *Ask Forgiveness*, another covers set which culminates with Oldham – backed by Espers – essaying a remarkable version of "The World's Greatest" by R Kelly.

7/10



BONNY BILLY & THE PICKET LINE

Funtown Comedown

SEA NOTE, 2009

Through 2008/2009, Oldham released a series of live albums with notably eccentric backing bands (*Is It The Sea?*, with Scottish folk band Harem Scarem, is also good). This hook-up with a rowdy Louisville country band is the pick, though, capturing an atmosphere that's more hootenanny than recital. A great version of "Ohio River Boat Song", too.

8/10

JOHN MULVEY



BOHREN & DER CLUB OF GORE

Piano Nights

PIAS

Doom jazz enigmas make it back from *Twin Peaks* Roadhouse residency

Loose descriptions of Bohren & Der Club Of Gore

makes them sound a gothically forbidding enterprise: a German quartet who apply the aesthetics of avant-metal to cocktail jazz. But as their eighth LP proves, their methodically slothful hybrid of Angelo Badalamenti, Bill Evans and Sunn O))) is much prettier and more restful than one might imagine. Sustained Mellotron notes imbue the spare sax, piano and brushed cymbal manoeuvres with a fetching grandeur, the equal of 2008's career-topping *Dolores*. And while "Fahr Zur Hölle" ("Driving To Hell") is a predictable track name, the outstanding "Segeln Ohne Wind" ("Sailing Without Wind") is a more serendipitous one.

JOHN MULVEY



BLACK LIPS

**Underneath The
Rainbow**

VICE RECORDS

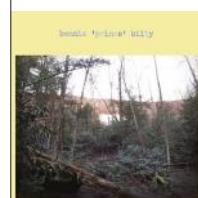
Oddball garage punks' righteous seventh

Given the onstage nudity, vomiting and urination, the bannings (from

7/10

Canada) and expulsions (from India), it's not so surprising that Black Lips' music has often been sidelined. But the Atlantans deserve serious props for their railroading of punk, blues, C&W, gospel and '60s rock'n'roll into a sound that's too feral and impassioned to be judged as pastiche. Co-produced by Patrick Carney, their latest returns them to (some of) their sources – 13th Floor Elevators, The Velvet Underground, the Stones circa *Let It Bleed* and The Cramps. Whether it's the ramalama of "Dorner Party", sleazy synth jam "Funny" or the brooding "Do The Vibrate", revved up and slightly ramshackle is how BL roll across this superior barroom set.

SHARON O'CONNELL



BONNIE 'PRINCE' BILLY

Bonnie 'Prince' Billy

SELF-RELEASED

Will Oldham's latest ruse; a classic released on the sly

8/10

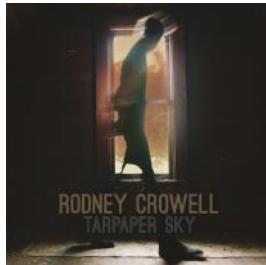
In 2009, Oldham promoted *Beware* with an unusually busy interview schedule; his avowed aim being to prove that media amenability wouldn't make a difference to his sales figures. Is the clandestine release of this vinyl-only curio designed to show he can sidestep conventional distribution, too? Perversely, of course, his more-or-less 20th long-player is his best in a while: a solo guitar-and-voice affair in which we learn that his dad was a bear, his mum was a skunk and that a "filthy spotted pig" is hidden at the foot of his bed. Intimate and macabre, lofty comparisons to 1994's *Days In The Wake* seem valid. Perhaps, as with that initially eponymous set, the real title of this fine album will emerge in, say, 2019?

JOHN MULVEY

AMERICANA



BEST
OF THE
MONTH



8/10

RODNEY CROWELL
Tarpaper Sky NEW WEST

Americana master, songwriter du jour, strikes while iron is hot
Hot on the heels of a Grammy Award win for *Old Yellow Moon*, his collaboration with Emmylou Harris, the ever-prolific Crowell starts here to inch away from the memoir style dominating his solo output throughout the 'oughts' (starting with 2001's *The Houston Kid*). Rather, *Tarpaper Sky* brings Crowell full circle of sorts, back to his 1970s/1980s prominence as a stylistic wizard, an auteur, a seamless, affecting roots-rock-Americana jack-of-all-trades.

Zigzagging through a wide range of moods and settings, reunited with erstwhile Eagles guitarist Steuart Smith, Crowell here is the consummate professional, hewing toward write-to-order yet none the worse for wear: 1950s-style tearjerker balladry ("I Wouldn't Be Me Without You"), inspiring visions of a retro cover by, say, Ernest Tubb or Ray Price; Cajun homage, borrowing from the ancient as dirt "Jole Blon" riff for the insidiously catchy "Fever On The Bayou". There is R&B-specked honky-tonk shuffles ("Somebody's Shadow"); breathless balladry ("God I'm Missing You"), plus rockabilly workouts, jukebox jitterbugs and odd gospel-style turns. That's not to say *Tarpaper Sky* is bereft of reminiscence; just that it's painted with broader, more general strokes. "Grandma Loved That Old Man", for instance, stakes out familiar territory, a character sketch of archetypal figures – a reckless man and his long-suffering wife. The gospel-tinged "Long Journey Home", in fact, the LP's flagship tune, is nothing if not a long look back – an optimistic peering out at one's twilight years ahead after a good run: "The simple life now tastes sweeter/You have no need to roam," he sings, his malleable voice curling up into the lyric. "The Flyboy & The Kid" might be the best of a great bunch, a snappy feelgood, love-of-life paean – echoing, and building upon, Dylan's "Forever Young". Throughout, Crowell's versatile, impassioned voice is in fine fettle, a mix of goofiness and longing, anticipation and excitement, sadness and sentimentality, as if he's just now entering a new prime. He might well be. LUKE TORN



THE AMERICANA ROUND-UP

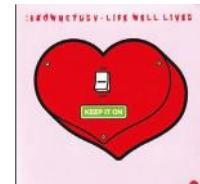
► This spring sees the return of **Carlene Carter**, whose Carter Girl burrows deep into her rich heritage. Covering three generations of Carter Family songcraft, the Don Was-produced

set includes cameos from Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson and Elizabeth Cook. Plus archive harmony vocals from mother June Carter Cash and stepdad Johnny. On a sporting Americana tip, **The Baseball Project** are back with 3rd. Comprising REM types Peter Buck and Mike Mills, alongside Steve Wynn, Scott McCaughey and Wynn's drummer Linda Pitmon, the 'supergroup' take 17 swings at America's national pastime with tunes about Babe Ruth, Hank Aaron and some of the lesser-known characters of

the game, like acid-head pitcher Dock Ellis.

Back on rootsier ground, **Steve Martin** and **Edie Brickell** follow up their recent Grammy win with the prosaically titled *Steve Martin And The Steep Canyon Rangers Featuring Edie Brickell Live*. It's a concert CD/DVD from the historic Fox Performing Arts Centre in Riverside, CA last autumn. Meanwhile, Martin features on *Great Big World*, the solo LP from his friend, producer and foremost banjo-plucker, Tony Trischka. Among his other guests are actor John Goodman, Ramblin' Jack Elliott and Dylan/Levon Helm guitarist Larry Campbell.

Worthy of mention on the live front, **Howe Gelb** stops off during his European tour at Islington Assembly Hall on March 7. The Giant Sand man's crack band includes Gabriel Sullivan on guitar, Thøger Lund on upright bass and Sonic Youth drummer Steve Shelley. ROB HUGHES

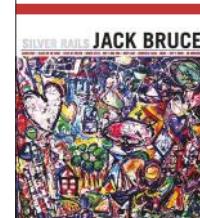


:BROWNSTUDY
Life Well Lived
THIRD EAR RECORDINGS

Jazzy rapper with deep musical roots
Dazzling verbosity pours out of Jason Hogans in his sonically challenging guise as dubtronic jazz-rap

7/10

stoner-shaman :Brownstudy. Emerging from the Detroit techno scene, Hogans later developed a more homespun mix of DIY beats and stand-up rhymes that jump between acerbic social commentary and surreal wordplay in the space of a wonky groove. While marathon self-help sermons like "Towards Improvement" recall the Daisy Age playfulness of De La Soul crossed with the sharp tongue of Michael Franti, Hogans has his less wordy moments, too, from the blunt simplicity of "Bitchslappin Motherfuckas To Hell" to the dense, dubby lounge-skank instrumental "Red Dressed Stepchild". An acquired taste, but an undeniably serious talent. STEPHEN DALTON



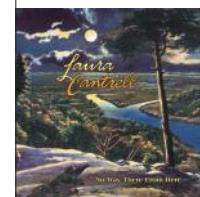
JACK BRUCE
Silver Rails
ESOTERIC ANTENNA

First album in a decade from legendary Scots musician and songwriter
Since 2003's *More Jack Than God*, Bruce has

7/10

fought cancer, undergone a liver transplant, reunited with Cream and recorded a tribute to jazz drummer Tony Williams. Now 70, his voice has the richly worn patina of a life well lived on a set that includes several compositions that reunite him with Cream lyricist Pete Brown. There are carefully cultivated echoes of those days of former glory, too, in the bludgeoning blues-rock power of half a dozen tracks, including "Hidden Cities", "No Surrender" and "Keep It Down", Robin Trower substituting ably on guitar for you-know-who. Jazzy piano ballads "Don't Look Now" and "Industrial Child" offer a moody, more reflective contrast.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



LAURA CANTRELL
No Way There From Here
THRIFT SHOP RECORDINGS

First all-original effort in nine years from under-the-radar country chanteuse

8/10

Historian, DJ, indie instigator, singer/interpreter/songwriter Laura Cantrell has taken a quite unconventional career path. This album, though, follow-up to her from-the-heart 2009 *Kitty Wells* tribute, feels like a new beginning. With an all-star cast of various Lambchoppers and Calexicos backing, the songs – persistently focused on Cantrell's crystal-clear soprano – wind melancholy-like through myriad moods and colours, especially, situations of romantic longing and disappointment. Topping even those, though, is "Starry Skies", Cantrell chasing after a Zen-like peace of mind, and finding it. LUKE TORN



S CAREY Range Of Light

JAGJAGUWAR

Lily-livered pastoralia from Bon Iver drummer S Carey plays in Bon Iver, but whereas Justin Vernon employs

3/10

earnestness to hurl universal human truths into the hearts of thousands, Carey's brand is just painful. The blandly lovely instrumentation of chimes, piano, acoustic guitar and pashmina electronics recalls Sufjan Stevens' most fluttery moments, but they're so soft that even the ukulele-fondling milksops from Match.com adverts might find them a bit meek. Amid the maddening waft comes hope in "Alpenglow"'s sturdy melody, quickly undermined with the terribly polite lyric, "I was wondering if you'd be my wife". No range of light here, just a wan glow that denies the need for shade.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



COLOURMUSIC

May You Marry Rich

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

Oklahoma drifters' sprawling psych-rock bodes well

7/10

Calling your band Colourmusic means you either have U2-sized ambition or you've taken, like, a bucketload of pharmaceuticals, man. Given that this is their third album of murky dreampop – and the last one was titled *F, Monday, Orange, February, Venus, Lunatic, 1 Or 13* – it's safe to say this obtuse four-piece won't be playing the Super Bowl anytime soon. But there are enough moments of mercurial brilliance on *May You Marry Rich* – the lysergic funk of "Satyricon", for example, or "Object"'s curdled sigh – to suggest that the core duo of former student buddies Ryan Hendrix and Nick Turner are finally on to something.

PIERS MARTIN



COVES

Soft Friday

NETTWERK RECORDS

Atmospheric first effort from Warwickshire psych-rockers

Coves are singer and lyricist Beck Wood and multi-instrumentalist

7/10

John Rigard from Leamington Spa who sound as if they'd be better suited to a trailer in a sun-baked canyon in Nebraska, ideally with David Lynch hovering with a camera nearby. Following tours with Echo & The Bunnymen and Eugene McGuinness and a remix courtesy of Toy, they have finally assembled a terrific debut full of scuzzed-up guitars, dirty synths, nihilistic lyrics and Wood's magnificently bored – though never boring – vocals. Highlights include the undulating, reverb-filled "Beatings", and "No Ladder", in which Eastern strings are underpinned by a lolling baggy-style groove.

FIONA STURGES



DEAD RIDER Chills On Glass

DRAG CITY

Enjoyably deranged third from Chicago sleazebags

7/10

Having served time in stubbornly obtuse post-rockers US Maple, Todd Rittmann is using Dead Rider to make his peace with down'n'dirty rock'n'soul – though it remains a volatile truce. The band's arch, apocalyptic howl – roughly, Jon Spencer meets TV On The Radio – is frequently interrupted by industrial pummelling and passages of heads-down skronk, to the point where you genuinely have no idea what they're going to do or say next. "Would you like to see me do the donkey, children?" leers Rittmann, gleefully on "Of One Thousand". "Can you do the hungry clock? Can you do the angry calendar cock?" Lock up your daughters.

SAM RICHARDS



DENA

Flash

NORMAL SURROUND/K7

Sassy Berliner gives lo-fi beat-pop a kick in the Balkans

Bulgaria-born, Berlin-based Deniza "Dena"

Todorova became an

online sensation in 2012 with "Cash, Diamond Rings, Swimming Pools", a hyper-infectious thrift-shop rap pleading for escape from winter drudgery to summer luxury. Thankfully her debut album proves this track was no fluke but a crisp distillation of her sassy musical persona, which falls between the militant electro chatter of M.I.A., the pure-pop swagger of vintage Sugababes and the fuck you cheek of early Lily Allen. Rapping in endearingly patchy English, Torodrova addresses mean-girl bravado, social-media spats and boyfriend put-downs in "Total Ignore" and "You Wish". Juvenile subject matter, but immensely fresh and charming.

STEPHEN DALTON

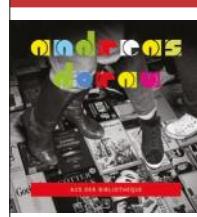
ANDREAS DORAU

Aus Der Bibliothèque

BUREAU-B

Back to the books for NDW electro-popper

A giant in analog fetishist circles for



7/10

"Fred Vom Jupiter", the giddy space fantasia he wrote for a school project as a 16-year-old back in 1981, Andreas Dorau ultimately proved too odd to sustain a sensible pop career, but his faux-naïf schtick – arch-y Momus with trace elements of Tiny Tim and Plastic Bertrand – endures. *Aus Der Bibliothèque* is a celebration of Hamburg's central library, the eternally boyish Dorau marvelling at the free access to the latest CDs and DVDs on "Hühnerposten", and producing a tinpot version of Can's "Mother Sky" to celebrate the wonder of hydrogen on "Wasserstuff". File under: Go-Kart Goethe.

JIM WIRTH

KEVIN DREW

Darlings

CITY SLANG

Broken Social Scene's resident bedsheets-ruffler

7/10



Kevin Drew is the wry songwriter formerly of Broken Social Scene who once sang "you're too beautiful to fuck", and who locates his craft around rumpled but upbeat ruminations on love, sex, friendship and the blurred spaces in between. And this is another uplifting, honest set. "Good Sex" is one of the year's best songs so far, a simple, surefooted anthem where Drew slips into a glorious cruise control chorus from a soaring moan; "Mexican Aftershow Party" is another of his scatty yet oddly forthright psychedelic romps; and few songwriters, Drew included, could make a song called "You Gotta Feel It" feel anything other than trite.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



JACK BRUCE Out Of The Storm

RSO, 1974

After the lame bludgeoning of his failed power trio with Leslie West and Corky Laing, Bruce headed to California where top US sessioners Jim Keltner, Jim Gordon and Lou Reed's guitarist Steve Hunter joined him on a set of melodic inventiveness that was largely overlooked at the time – with the exception of a glowing *Melody Maker* review by a certain Allan Jones...

7/10



JACK BRUCE More Jack Than God

SANCTUARY, 2003

Latin-jazz producer Kip Hanrahan lends a seductive Afro-Cuban groove to Bruce's best album in 25 years. Potent new compositions mingle with remakes of Cream standards including "I Feel Free", "We're Going Wrong" and "Politician". Bernie Worrell adds moody B3 and Jack's son Malcolm contributes guitar and piano; but it's Bruce's soulful vocals and jazz-funk bass playing that command centrestage.

7/10

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



ELBOW

The Take Off And Landing Of Everything

FICTION

Sombre and sparse, but not in the least bit sober: Guy Garvey and co's classy sixth. By Andy Gill



8/10

FOR THEIR SIXTH album, Elbow opted for a new working method, recording in small combinations rather than all together, with the remaining members chipping in their two penn'orth later. Not that you'd notice: the results are as homogenous as any earlier Elbow album – indeed, if anything, there's a sustained congruence about the rhythms and textures that makes *The Take Off And Landing Of Everything* seem like an extended meditation on certain musical and lyrical themes.

"This Blue World" sets the tone through the gentle organ intro and slow patter of snare and tambourine, opening up with gently arpeggiating guitar. It's soft and quiet, like a world asleep in snow, as Guy Garvey ruminates upon the persistence of emotional attachment. "While three chambers of my heart be true and strong with love for another," he sings, "the fourth is yours forever". It's perhaps the first of several pieces prompted by Garvey's split from his long-term partner, an apparently amicable separation that has allowed affection to linger poignantly, rather than curdle.

The separation took him to New York, where he was able to recover in relative anonymity, developing an attachment to a city other than Manchester. Built on a descending piano motif that develops through anthemic repetition, "New York Morning" celebrates the brusque enthusiasm of "the modern Rome, where folk are nice to Yoko", and the way that "everybody owns the Great Idea, and it feels like there's a big one round the corner". This new

transatlantic pond-hopping lifestyle is itself reflected in the title track, a slow but propulsive Krautrock slouch of organ, drums and tambourine, and in "Fly Boy Blue/Lunette", a tableau of airport lounge barflies and disaffected glimpses of modern life suddenly charged with a sax riff that recalls the tone and texture of early King Crimson. Three minutes and, presumably, several pints in, however, the track slips into a languid jogging bass groove of calm serenity, Garvey reflecting how "I'm reaching the age when decisions are made on your life and your liver".

Health concerns are less uppermost in "My Sad Captains", a celebration of the after-hours drinking culture that sustains so many fellowships, through so many generations. A Terry Riley-esque cycling keyboard figure establishes a processional gait, as of a commemoration, with gentle glints of trumpet draping a cloak of nobility around the later stages. "If it's so we only pass this way but once," sings Garvey, "what a perfect waste of time". But of course, the glory of being in one's cups is but a sip away from the bitterness of the curmudgeon in the corner depicted in "Charge", railing against the young who never acknowledge their debts: "Glory be, these fuckers are ignoring me/We never learn from history". Set to sombre organ and sparse drums, with voice

SLEEVE NOTES

Produced by:

Craig Potter
Recorded at: Blueprint Studios, Salford; Real World Studios, Box, Wiltshire
Personnel includes: Guy Garvey (vocals, guitar), Mark Potter (guitar, vocals), Craig Potter (keyboards), Richard Jupp (drums, percussion), Pete Turner (bass, vocals), Peter McPhail (saxophone)

and piano declaiming in unison, it's based, Garvey says, on an old teddy-boy he knew, whose grouchy antipathies he grew to understand more deeply the further he moved from his own glory days.

Elsewhere, the same kinds of gently pulsing grooves and sparse rhythm skeletons drive tracks like "Real Life (Angel)", an exultant acclamation of deep love ("And on that hallelujah morning, in the arms of your love, the peace that you feel's real life"); and "Honey Sun", the most honest assessment of the "broken devotion" that shot him across the ocean to New

York. With humming carrying the main melody over a puttering drum-machine tick, Garvey acknowledges both the impulse to flee, and the realisation that "she and I won't find another me'n'her".

The album concludes with "The Blanket Of Night", another anthem of inter-zonal ambiguity, this time employing oceanic, dreamlike sheets of synthesiser to evoke the perilous journey of stateless refugees in search of a new life in less perilous environs. "Paper cup of a boat, heaving chest of the sea/Carry both of us, swallow her, swallow me," sings Garvey, intoning a prayer of deliverance that, one can't help feeling, is heartfelt not just for them, but himself, and you, and me – a fifth chamber of his heart, beating for us all.

Q&A

Guy Garvey



I understand the band adopted a different working method for this album.

It was more of an experiment than anything – the idea of everyone having a different day off, throwing up different combinations of bandmembers, definitely changed the way we were writing. It wasn't that we'd reached any kind of creative impasse. I voiced a documentary on The Beatles' 'White Album' for the BBC, and there was this Abbey Road engineer who said that towards the end, bring any three Beatles together and the work ethic was the same as it ever was, exciting and vibrant; but when all four were in the room, there was a spirit of lethargy, something was slowing them down.

How did it work for you?

For instance, all the music for "Fly Boy Blue/Lunette" was pretty much a live take, by Mark, Pete and Jupp, who were the original members of Elbow – they got together at school, doing Queen covers and such. It created a bit of a challenge for me, lyrically: to throw something different into the mix, I read the lines from the cover of a magazine, then I used that rhythm to write my own images. That was loads of fun, and threw up something that I normally wouldn't do.

There's a theme of fellowship, the comforts of companionship, running through several songs.

Oh yeah, absolutely. I've always written love songs to friends, and to Manchester – I suppose this is the first record that I've written a love song to another city! I've always had that fondness for inanimate things: like, I still use the first touring bag I had, when we started 20 years ago. I've had it re-zipped and re-handled at least three times. I do develop, what is it, an anthropomorphic love?



EACH OTHER *Being Elastic*

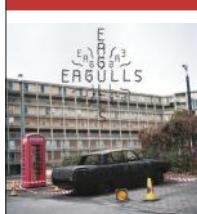
LEFSE

Inventive, dislocated debut from Canadians based in Montreal

7/10

North American tours, *Being Elastic* is testament to what Each Other singer Mike Wright calls “the sense of otherness” that he perceives in bands from their hometown of Halifax, Nova Scotia. If anything, the record’s most defining trait is its dislocation: Suicide-like reverie flips into warm jangle and awkward spiny guitar without a second’s notice, the only constant being singer Mike Wright’s vocals, splayed into spacey layers. The effect is something like Deerhunter’s entire career compressed and spliced across 40 minutes: admirably inventive, if exhausting.

Laura Snapes



EAGULLS *Eagulls*

PARTISAN/KNITTING FACTORY

Leeds hardcore punks swagger and sweat on gritty debut

8/10

recent times have made a pose of not caring, which is what makes hardcore punks Eagulls – the antithesis of that – so appealing. The dripping nihilism at the heart of the Leeds five-piece’s debut feels honest, undercut by lyrics about bodily failure and drug addiction that get at just how degrading society can be right now. *Eagulls* will make their peers of Merchandise, Savages and Iceage, and descendants of Killing Joke, Joy Division and My Bloody Valentine, but while they’re not doing anything particularly new, the mixture of bile and valedictory swagger here is exhilarating.

Laura Snapes



EKOPLEKZ *Unfidelity*

PLANET MU

Bristol blogger turned evocative beatmaker

In his former guise as the blogger Gutterbreakz, Nick Edwards provided thoughtful context to developments on the UK bass scene. He brings all that curatorial knowledge to bear on *Unfidelity*, an album steeped in dub science as well as the strident electronica of mid-'90s Warp Records. *Unfidelity* is too turbulent to be purely scenic in the Boards Of Canada sense, its plaintive melodies hemmed in by the gurgles and clanks of some sinister, unmanned waste disposal plant. This duality is encapsulated by the wonderful “Severn Beach” – which isn’t really a beach at all, but an estuary mudflat where wildlife and industry have been forced into an uneasy coexistence.

Sam Richards



EVIAN CHRIST

Waterfall

TRI ANGLE RECORDS

Trap nightmares from young producer

Evian Christ was one of the ultra-hip producers hired to craft Kanye West’s industrial *Yeezus*, creating a pornographically harsh backing for “I’m In It”; this four-track EP is in the same vein, with bleakly perfect trap snares, claustrophobic breaks and cloudbursts of static. It’s like walking through smoke and mirrors towards an utterly empty dancefloor, a kind of nightmarish inversion of TNGHT’s rave exuberance: “Propeller”’s reedy digital melody spirals funky into nowhere, while the title track is a dancehall mechanoid with a glitch in its algorithm. They feel a little like they’re waiting for MCs, but are chilly, steely inversions of molly-popping rap production.

Ben Beaumont-Thomas

7/10

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Ben Beaumont-Thomas



FANFARLO

Let’s Go Extinct

NEW WORLD

Erstwhile indie-folkies now living in the ‘80s on third LP

8/10

Fanfarlo have tightened up their act. Epic opener “Life In The Sky” evokes the fizz and punch of Phoenix and Camera Obscura, and elsewhere there are nods to Brian Wilson and Afropop, but the key influence on the band’s third album is arch, art-school rock from the early ‘80s, shuttling between the library and the disco. Singer and principal songwriter Simon Balthazar does a more than passable Lloyd Cole impression on the bristling “Landlocked”, while “A Distance” sounds something like Talking Heads’ “Once In A Lifetime” meeting Orange Juice. The results are sparkling, upbeat and infectious.

Graeme Thomson

REVELATIONS

Simone Felice – inspired by Hendrix, ghosts and hypnotism



► Jimi Hendrix used to have a place in the Catskills, close by where Simone Felice recorded his second solo album. “Every morning in the half dark I’d walk through the woods, over the stream and past Jimi’s place, working out lyrics and melodies in the cold air, alone along the dirt track. Me and the ghosts,” he says. Along with the wraiths of the woods, he drew inspiration from the sense of mountain tranquillity.

“Making *Strangers* was unique among the records I’ve worked on in that it was all done in one place: a good friend’s studio at the top of a dead-end mountain road. The quietest enclave, an Indian hunting ground in days gone by, you can hear the hawk beat a path above the pines, hear every falling leaf.”

One morning near Hendrix’s old house, he met a woman who said she’d hypnotise him for five dollars. He gave her the money and when he opened her eyes, she’d gone. He asked at the local gas station who she was and was told, “Man, that’s Spacy Stacy. Acid casualty. You’ve been robbed.” Felice didn’t see it quite like that. He went straight to the studio and recorded the album’s standout closing track, “The Gallows”.

Nigel Williamson



SIMONE FELICE

Strangers

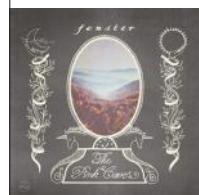
TEAM LOVE

Sublime second solo outing by the boldest brother

A close brush with death during open-heart surgery in 2010 sparked an

extraordinary creative surge by the former Felice Brothers drummer/Duke And The King frontman, as an acclaimed first novel (*Black Jesus*, 2011) was followed by a perfectly formed self-titled debut solo album (2012). *Strangers* finesse Felice’s vision, his lovely, quavering voice married to burnished songwriting of exquisite melodicism. From the carefree pop of the opener “Molly-O” to the aching, canyon-rock classicisms of “If You Go To LA” via the gospel-tinged “Running Through My Head”, the heart-rending piano’n’strings ballad “Bye Bye Palenville” and the hymn-like “Bastille Day”, these are songs to be treasured.

Nigel Williamson



FENSTER

The Pink Caves

MORR MUSIC

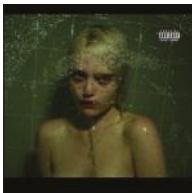
Strange and spooky hauntology from East Germany

7/10

German-American quartet Fenster play a dreamy, synth-led, head-in-clouds pop that seems to slow down time as it unwinds sensuously on tracks like the minimal “Sunday Owls” and delicate, woozy “Cat Emperor”. The band recorded their third album in a cabin in East Germany, incorporating found sounds from the house – doors, clocks, wells – while channelling a prevailing ghostly spirit of comfortable decay, of things coming apart in slow motion. It makes for an odd, but rewarding listen, with songs like “The Light” and “Mirrors” sounding like something from the soundtrack to a lost 1970s film about a poltergeist. Creepy but beautiful.

Peter Watts

New Albums



SKY FERREIRA

Night Time, My Time

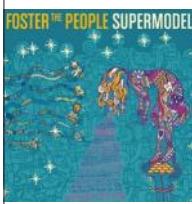
POLYDOR

Stunning maturation from Miley's strutting tour pal

8/10

Once marketed as a gamine 16-year-old pop doll, Sky Ferreira has transmogrified, via drug busts, Dev Hynes and a wonderful self-assurance, into a very different kind of star. This is an album of strutting power chords, punkish noise and, on "You're Not The One", a kind of sugary shoegaze. And throughout, killer melodies conjure '80s scenes: "Boys" has a Debbie Harry insouciance, and "24 Hours" the big hairbrush-in-the-mirror moment. There are a couple of duds, but songwriters Ariel Rechtshaid and Justin Raisen, a kind of grungy hipster take on Sweden's pop factory, still have a tremendous hit rate.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



FOSTER THE PEOPLE

Supermodel

STARTIME INT'L/COLUMBIA

Independent spirit plays in the big leagues

Mark Foster is a maverick who delights in hacking into the mainstream to mess with the conventions of high-end recording. For a follow-up to FTP's breakthrough 2011 album *Torches*, Foster enlisted Brit hitmaker Paul Epworth (Adele/Florence), and the sound they've fashioned is glossy and supersaturated while still exhibiting the subversive impulse that yielded the supremely catchy but subtly sinister smash "Pumped Up Kicks". Along the way, these clever chameleons morph into shapes resembling Phoenix (the sumptuous "Coming Of Age"), MGMT (the trippy "Pseudologica Fantastica") and Jamiroquai (the pumping "Best Friend"), using state-of-the-art sonics to frame Foster's barbed observations on present-day existence.

BUD SCOPPA

8/10



LYLA FOY

Mirrors In The Sky

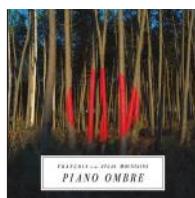
SUB POP

London electro-folk chanteuse sings of lost love and wanderlust

The first British female artist ever to sign to the legendary Seattle label Sub Pop, Lyla Foy used to release singer-songwriter folk-pop as WALL, but now seems to be rebranding herself as a kind of London-based Lana Del Rey with a flair for classic heart-twanging torch songs in softly pulsating, lightly electronic arrangements. Her silken, sultry, breathy voice is barely there at times, and yet commands great emotional power, from the desolate swooning of "Honeymoon" to the voluptuously tragic "Warning", a tearjerking ballad of childhood sweethearts who have grown apart emotionally and physically. It may be a little too restrained in places, but this is a quietly confident debut.

STEPHEN DALTON

7/10



FRANÇOIS & THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS

Piano Ombre

DOMINO

Melancholy Frenchman reveals split personality

6/10

Sung both in French and English and recorded in the countryside outside Bordeaux, the fourth album by the Gallic group led by François Marry – the follow-up to 2011's *E Volo Love* – is inspired by an unspecified yet difficult period in the singer's life, while drawing together the band's typically diverse inspirations including French chanson, '80s funk, indie-rock and electro-pop. The result is alternately maddening and satisfying, one minute embracing gratingly cutesy dance music, ("Summer Of The Heart" and "La Vérité") and the next more brooding textures, as found on the significantly more interesting, jazz-speckled "Bois".

FIONA STURGES

WE'RE
NEW
HERE

Future Islands



► In the video to Future Islands' "Seasons (Waiting On You)", filmmaker Jay Buim turns his lens to the people of the American heartland. A gentle montage of country dances, cattle ranches and cowboys riding the plains, it paints an affectionate portrait of an area of the country that couldn't be further removed from the conventional indie-rock preoccupation with hipster, metropolitan cool. A hint that Future Islands are aiming for something universal. "It's a song about the human experience," says vocalist Samuel T Herring. "It's about love, letting go, learning from your mistakes and always feeling that pull – yearning for a certain love, as time goes by and seasons change."

Future Islands are closely associated with Baltimore, coming of age as part of the city's Wham City scene. But the band's genesis dates back to the early '00s, where Herring, bassist/guitarist William Cashion, and keyboardist/programmer Gerrit Welmers came together in Greenville, North Carolina to play in the electro-punk group Art Lord & The Self Portraits. For new album *Singles*, Future Islands returned to their home state, writing and rehearsing in a humble hunting cabin in Wayne County: a rural locale that fed directly into tracks like "A Song for Our Grandfathers" and "Back In The Tall Grass". "It's about real things," says Herring. "Love, loss, nature." LOUIS PATTISON



FUTURE ISLANDS

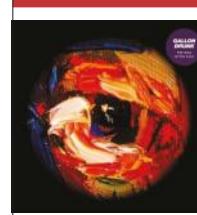
Singles

4AD

Idiosyncratic Maryland synth-punks' fourth Baltimore's Future Islands grew out of the same Wham City community

that spawned Dan Deacon – a warehouse party scene that matched DIY ethics with a sense of lurid, cartoonish performance. Early releases saw frontman Samuel T Herring's melodramatic proclamations draw comparison to Meat Loaf, and while he's hardly softened his approach, on 4AD debut *Singles* his vocals swing closer to urgent hyper-sincerity than theatrical parody. He's all but chewing the scenery on "Fall From Grace" and the romantically infatuated "Back In The Tall Grass", but bassist William Cashion and keyboardist Gerrit Welmers match him for breathless passion, whipping up a stirring synth-pop writ in bold emotional colours.

LOUIS PATTISON



GALLON DRUNK

The Soul Of The Hour

CLOUDS HILL

London veterans' honourable umpteenth Through the 1990s, Gallon Drunk's swarthy blend of blues, R'n'B, punk and rockabilly won them a sizeable cult following. They even bagged a Mercury nomination, but their profile gradually faded due to frequent lineup shuffles and periods of inactivity. Which makes their fourth LP of the noughties all the more impressive. Now manifesting more of an intense, slow burn than a fierce blaze, they sound no less anguished – whether summoning the spirits of The Stooges and Faust (on "The Exit Sign"), carving deep, psych-drone grooves ("The Speed Of Fear") or playing radically against type with soft vocals and funereal pacing ("Dust In The Light"). Proof, then, that a stop-start career isn't necessarily suicidal.

SHARON O'CONNELL



JIMI GOODWIN

Odludek

HEAVENLY

Long-awaited solo record from Doves mainman

8/10

Four years after Doves' last album, after which the band announced they were going on hiatus, frontman Jimi Goodwin has opted to step out of his comfort zone and go it alone with an album that is startling as it is likeable. While "Terracotta Warrior" ("I know who you are but who am I?") finds the guitarist/singer cleaving to the sad, swooping melodrama beloved by Doves, elsewhere there are some unexpected curveballs, from the unexpected easy-listening vibe of "Keep My Soul In Song", to the disco and carnival flourishes in "Man V Dingo" that suddenly gives way to freewheeling Black Grape-style silliness.

FIONA STURGES



METRONOMY

Love Letters

BECAUSE MUSIC

Joseph Mount and co head to Toe Rag for analogue equipment and mild anxiety. By Ben Beaumont-Thomas



7/10

ON THEIR LAST album, *The English Riviera*, which sold quarter of a million copies and was nominated for the Mercury prize, Metronomy seemed to have finally tied down their eccentric English songwriting. Their first record

fussed its way around scuzzy rock, videogame brightness and electroclash sleaze, while 2008's *Nights Out* still had an air of mania even as the hooks got stronger. *The English Riviera*, and wonderful transitional single "Not Made For Love", took a much-needed deep breath – their songs were still brittle and nervy, but often slower, and a little more at ease.

That restless energy still hums away, however, only now they're diverting it into a change of production rather than songwriting. Like *The English Riviera*, these are cool, sad lounge-pop songs that fret about love, but rather than being slick digital arrangements, they were recorded at Toe Rag Studios, the all-analogue base for The White Stripes, Tame Impala and others. Frontman Joseph Mount has been writing with a guitar, and

has cited The Isley Brothers and The Zombies' *Odyssey And Oracle* as influences. If you were cynical you might see this as retrograde, but the fact is that Toe Rag fits Metronomy perfectly.

You can hear the room echo in Mount's vocals, a sound of immediate vulnerability, and the smudgy

synths soften their tendency towards the inscrutable and wacky. The backbeats are the pre-808 drum machines that you might find perched atop a shopping mall church organ, so cute in their dogged bossa nova pulsing – "The Most Immaculate Haircut" doesn't even chop off the sound of the machine warming up, slowly speeding up like a record with a needle left on it, while it stutters to a pathetic stop at the end of "The Upsetter". It's the beta-male version of the swaggering drumkit, but is humbly resilient, matching the protagonists of the songs who are easily hurt, flawed and yet not entirely spineless.

"The Upsetter" opens the album, a lovely ballad where Mount wheedles "you're really giving me a hard time tonight" over acoustic strumming and softly modulating seasick synths, that swell into an exceptional guitar solo reminiscent of Neil Young. The mood darkens on the next track "I'm Aquarius", even the boom-tsk of the drum machine sounding more harried; the backing vocals are all sung rather than sequenced, and you can hear the singer grimly smiling after the nth shoop-doo-doo-doo-ah. It's perhaps their greatest song yet, a deftly told tale of the various poisons that seep into modern relationships: passive

aggression, spite, narcissism and an emotional articulacy that paradoxically means a total lack of communication. "Never saw just how much you thought I meant to me," Mount raps, taking the language of love song and twisting it into baffling anti-logic. He eventually lapses into a desperate repetition of the title, blaming the stars instead of himself.

The rest can't quite match this opening brace (indeed, Italo instrumental "Boy Racers" is plain annoying), but there are gems throughout. The title track is a big Roxy/Abba white disco number, while "Reservoir" uses a slightly silly backing – the kind of thing you might hear in a '70s infomercial for carpet cleaner – on a Jarvis Cocker-style slice of freewheeling smalltown storytelling. There's more wry emotional weakness on "Call Me", as Mount promises "we can try anything" before immediately adding a caveat: "we can say we'll try anything". And throughout there's a marked psych influence, half Byrds and half West Coast, and nowhere more than "Month Of Sundays" with its chorus line ringing with a Grace Slick hauteur.

Mount has said that the Toe Rag trip was a one-off, so perhaps Metronomy will never cure their itchy feet. But they're thriving in their constant meandering – be it around a mixing desk or affairs of the heart.

It's a different level of care: pre-production versus post-production, and it means that everything you're doing with intent rather than as a reaction to something.

The lyrics are quite frank...

You're laying yourself bare – I've always been quite aware of that and worried that people will take things the wrong way, or laugh. But I realised you can kind of say what you want and people will listen and not judge. I was travelling when I was writing, and the only stuff I felt I had the authority to write about was being away from people, mildly upsetting people by being unreliable. But there are other tracks where I took a little bit of inspiration from what I experienced and ran with it. So if maybe in some songs I sound like a flawed person, I can assure you I'm not, I'm just singing a little story [laughs].

INTERVIEW: BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS

Q&A

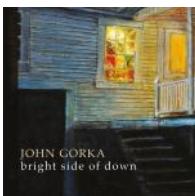
Joseph Mount



Why did you head to Toe Rag?
The last record was the first time I'd been in a proper recording studio, but in the end I was still quite heavily relying on a computer to edit and arrange.

My only all-encompassing thought was to do a record that forced me to write songs in a more traditional way, and get a different sense of achievement. People of my age always feel like computers help you cheat a little bit in certain things you do; the feeling you get [at Toe Rag] is more that you've made something out of nothing. Making music in that environment is much more laborious, in a workmanlike way...

New Albums



JOHN GORKA Bright Side Of Down

RED HOUSE

Glass half full? First true solo effort in four years for *Fast Folk* alumnus

7/10

writer, Minnesotan Gorka is both stellar and predictable on this, his 14th album. Quiet strums and gentle melodies provide the backdrop, Gorka working through a mix of myth and meditation, storytelling and philosophizing. Among the highlights are the brooding, bluesy, downbeat “Procrastination Blues” (“We’re all gonna go the way that water runs” he bleats) and the uptempo, accordion-laced “Holed Up in Mason City”, with its breezy on-the-road feel, reflections on mortality, and a heartwarming Buddy Holly sighting at an Iowa locale called the Big Bopper Diner.

LUKE TORN



NOAH GUNDERSEN *Ledges*

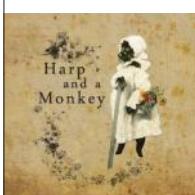
NOAH GUNDERSEN MUSIC

Excellent, confident country-folk with biblical undertones

7/10

up in such a religious family the closest he got to rock music was Bob Dylan’s Christian albums. A rich sense of spirituality remains a core part of his beautiful, country-tinged music – even “Cigarettes”, which compares love with nicotine, and boasts some ferocious harmonica, has a strangely, confessional vibe – making him at times a laidback kin to David Eugene Edwards. There are many fine moments here, from the gospel lament that opens “Poor Man’s Son” to the epic, intricate “Separation”, the deathly “Poison Vine” and the gorgeous piano-led Waitsian lullaby “Times Moves Quickly”.

PETER WATTS



HARP AND A MONKEY *All Life Is Here*

MOONRAKERUK

Sophomore outing from the quirky folktronica trio

7/10

The cliché about having one foot in the past, the other in the present is for once true. It isn’t just that Messrs Purdy, Smith and Jones recycle antique folk tales with an unorthodox array of glockenspiel, banjo, melodica, harp and dabs of electronica – they also deftly update the lyrics of stalwarts like “Molecatcher” and “Bowton’s Yard”. Most material here is new, however; there are heartfelt tributes to 1930s ramblers, family seaside holidays, fallen soldiers and Lancashire cotton towns on their uppers. Plainly sung with droll, deeply Mancunian sensibilities, the album’s charms are low-key but persistent.

NEIL SPENCER

JOHN GORKA Bright Side Of Down

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LUKE TORN



HAUSCHKA *Abandoned City*

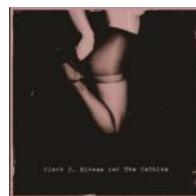
CITY SLANG

Avant-classical concept album offers musical tour of ghost towns

German pianist-composer Volker “Hauschka” Bertelmann clearly refreshed his muse on *Salon Des Amateurs*, his 2011 experiment with chamber-music rearrangements of techno and house tracks. Once pastel-shaded, his sonic palette has certainly livened up on his seventh album. As the title suggests, each piece is allegedly named after a ghost city – which may come as shock news to residents of Stromness, a thriving town on Orkney. All the same, Bertelmann conjures up textured moodscapes and modernist collages, with electro-acoustic processions like “Agdam” standing in sharp counterpoint to the hauntological sound painting “Pripyat”. Inspired concept, superlative execution.

STEPHEN DALTON

8/10



MICAH P HINSON

Micah P Hinson & The Nothing

TALITRES

The gruff-voiced Tennessean returns

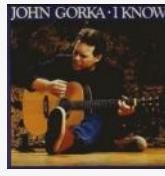
7/10

To say that Hinson’s history reads like a rulebook for country-blues credibility is not to trivialise his troubles. To his jail time, drug addiction and homelessness, in 2011 he added hospitalisation and recovery following a road accident in Spain. Written before the crash, these songs were transformed by it via reassessment of his demos, plus collaboration with members of *The Twilight Sad* and musicians from Santander, where the LP was recorded. It’s an (other) essay in alt.country/gospel and leftfield Americana, tipping its hat at Guthrie, Cash and Dylan while flexing punk muscle on “How Are You Just A Dream?”. Standout is “The Quill”, a Sunday school hymn turned quietly ominous.

SHARON O’CONNELL

HOW TO BUY... JOHN GORKA

New folk, fast folk, old folk



JOHN GORKA *I Know*

RED HOUSE, 1987

Cut in the white heat of the late ‘80s version of New York City’s *Fast Folk* movement – a rekindling led by Jack Hardy and Dave Van Ronk producing artists from Shawn Colvin to Steve Forbert, Suzanne Vega to Richard Shindell – *I Know* revealed a rich, meticulous, eloquent songwriter (see the stunning “Love Is Our Cross to Bear”) not afraid to delve in between life’s messy lines.

8/10



JOHN GORKA *Land Of The Bottom Line*

WINDHAM HILL, 1990

Though his debut was varied and auspicious, its follow-up – *Land Of The Bottom Line* – stands as

the darkest, most gripping record of Gorka’s career. Sounding like the mutant offspring of Gordon Lightfoot and Richard Thompson, the songwriting is jagged, brooding, full of questions and contradictions. The song title “Armed With A Broken Heart” says it all.

9/10



JOHN GORKA *Writing In The Margins*

RED HOUSE, 2006

Assured, nuanced, subtly tuneful, *Writing In The Margins*, from its perch-like perspective, feels like a career album, full of melancholy and regret, narrative and realism – ie, a strong, embattled statement of purpose and place. A pensive cover of Townes Van Zandt’s “Snow Just Fall”, Nanci Griffith pitching in on vocals, is surprisingly effective. The Bakersfield country shadings of “I Miss Everyone” is just surprising.

7/10

LUKE TORN

KOEN HOLTZAMP

Motion

THRILL JOCKEY

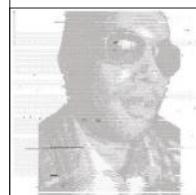
Mountains man takes off, goes solo

7/10



It must be getting crowded out there in the kosmische universe, with every hipster clutching an analogue synthesiser in one hand and a clutch of ancient New Age tapes in the other. Contrary to belief – or at least, recent reissue programs – new age and kosmische were never really about artistic visionaries, so much as the hermetic consistency of the ever-changing same, something Koen Holtzamp understands: Motion files nicely alongside Fripp & Eno, or Klaus Schulze, a set of rippling, drowsy circuitry, laminated with silvery guitar drones. The CD package includes a second, rather lovely disc compiling Holtzamp’s recent vinyl-only releases.

JON DALE



HOWIE B *Down With The Dawn*

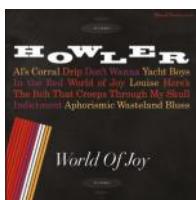
HB RECORDINGS/PIAS

The trip-hop/techno pioneer maps attractively varied soundscapes

6/10

Past work with Soul II Soul, Tricky and Björk has given Howie Bernstein lucrative cachet in the movie soundtrack and online advertising market. Its also left his antic sense of exploration and adventure free to fire this first solo outing in five years. Where its predecessors have tended to sameness, *Down With The Dawn* revels in abundance – the slo-mo stun gun dynamic of “Run Always”, the epic but ominous title track and the string-driven loops of “Heaven Part 1”. It’s an increasingly compelling journey, although drab, low-key Gavin Friday-featuring finale “Summer’s Flower” proves decidedly anti-climactic.

GAVIN MARTIN



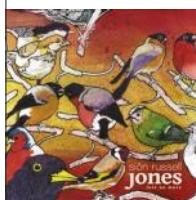
6/10

HOWLER
World Of Joy
ROUGH TRADE

"The new Strokes" return – rejigged
Just two years after their hyped debut – a lo-fi homage to Hüsker Dü and The Jesus And Mary

Chain – Minneapolis' Howler return as a four-piece. If that album marked them out as youthfully energetic punk disciples in search of their own identity, then *World Of Joy* is both a sharper assimilation of their influences and a continuing celebration of the eternal power of what 21-year-old singer/guitarist Jordan Gatesmith calls "bratty rock'n'roll". Satisfying his aim of providing the same experience as a dive-bar jukebox stacked with classics, its 10 originals flash by in 27 minutes – via TJAMC, Cheap Trick, The Replacements, Ramones and The Pretenders. No prizes for adventurism, but bracingly fat-free, with attitude in spades.

SHARON O'CONNELL



7/10

SION RUSSELL JONES
Lost No More
SARJ

Second album of reflective folk-pop
Cardiff-born singer-songwriter Jones' 2010 debut *And Suddenly...*

found favour at both BBC Radio 2 and 6 Music, the former's tastemakers likening his eloquent folk-pop to Simon & Garfunkel, and the latter's making comparisons with Elliott Smith. *Lost No More* is destined to bring more of the same, but while there are no great leaps and bounds made in the overall sound, the songs themselves are at once both more far-reaching and disciplined. The weary resignation of doomed love on "Guillotine" is dressed in a deceptively jaunty strum, and the navel-gazing continues unabated on the sombre tones of "Despite My Burdens" and "Unholy Ghost".

TERRY STAUNTON



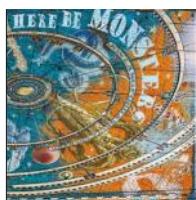
8/10

BARB JUNGR
Hard Rain: The Songs Of Bob Dylan & Leonard Cohen
KRISTALYN

Peerless interpreter's takes on Bob and Len's protest sides

On her two previous albums of Dylan material Jungr gave a masterclass in understanding and inhabiting a songwriter's work. These versions of politically and spiritually engaged standards by the maestros shows both her authority and sensitivity have deepened. The commanding and rhapsodic singing brings connection and insight while superlative arrangements – majoring in opulent blues jazz noir settings – refresh songs as daunting as "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" and "First We Take Manhattan". To give such standards precious new life is quite some achievement.

GAVIN MARTIN



JON LANGFORD & SKULL ORCHARD
Here Be Monsters
IN DE GOOT

Erstwhile Mekon/Waco Brother's first studio solo in four years

8/10

World-weary but fighting it all the way down the line, Langford's "Summer Stars", the violin-speckled lead track on *Here Be Monsters*, pines for simpler, off-the-grid times: "And when the engines stop/There's nothing else to do/But count the stars/And name them like we used to do." He swerves from snappy rockers ("Gone Without Trace") to conscientious kicks in the teeth. In "Drone Operator", Langford recounts, first-person metalloid Warren Zevon-style, a horrific US drone attack on wedding-goers in Yemen. "What Did You Do In The War" is his coruscation of war profiteers, and Langford, as ever, masterfully mixes the personal, the political and the poetic.

LUKE TORN



LIARS
Mess
MUTE

Experimental trio's splendid seventh

By singer Angus Andrew's own admission, Liars are prone to sonic extremism and have a reactive MO.

8/10

Their pendulum's swing has seen them through punk funk, wry drone, psychedelic noise-pop, illbient electronica and no-wave disco – always at the vanguard, never running with the pack. Despite its title, *Mess* is absolutely not that, although it sounds looser and more confident than 2012's *WIXIW*. Analogue synths and electronic drums combine with distorted tribal chants to darkly compelling effect, revealing Liars as kindred spirits of Demdike Stare and Tim Hecker as much as DAF and Trent Reznor. Their usual twisted humour surfaces on "Mask Maker", where Andrew directs "take my pants off... smell my socks... eat my face off."

SHARON O'CONNELL



THE MEN
Tomorrow's Hits
SACRED BONES

Superb rocking fifth album from Brooklyn ex-punks

9/10

The Men have come a long way in a short time, evolving from punkish bedlam to wickedly catchy classic rock in just a couple of years. *Tomorrow's Hits* has that neatly tailored raggedy Replacements vibe from the get-go, kicking off with the wicked *Highway 61 Revisited* swirl of "Dark Waltz", while a horn section lends a woozy Springsteen touch to "Another Night". And while this is a tremendously assured album, beautifully paced and full of great rockers like "Sleepless" and the febrile, Hüsker Dü-ish "Going Down", the wild mini-epic "Pearly Gates" offers a zonky Stooges-like take on their older, more chaotic, style.

PETER WATTS



DAWN LANDES
Bluebird
WESTERN VINYL

Brooklyn-based singer-songwriter's elegant break-up LP
Josh Ritter detailed the emotional fallout from

his recent divorce from Dawn Landes on last year's *The Beast In Its Tracks*. "I hope you've got a lover now," he sang, "hope you've got somebody who can give you what you need like I couldn't seem to do." Now his ex-wife presents a collection of largely acoustic folk songs that make plain her own inner turmoil. The overall tone may be sombre – "No matter how hard I try, the pain lingers/Our love's gone dry like grease on my fingers", she sings on "Cry No More" – but it's expressed with such a weightless delicacy, shaded with occasional harmonica and piano (courtesy of Norah Jones), that it's hard not to feel transported.

ROB HUGHES



GEORGE MICHAEL
Symphonica
VIRGIN/AE

Live set from the ill-fated 2011/12 tour
If only the crazed trajectory of George

Michael's private life (from boy-next-door to spliffed-up, toilet-cruising, death-defying delinquent) had been replicated by his music. Alas, no: Michael's first album in a decade is an ultra-gentrified karaoke set, featuring seven of his own songs (including "Praying For Time" and "Cowboys And Angels") alongside 10 covers (Rufus Wainwright, Sting, Elton, some old jazz standards), all backed by a full orchestra. Yogi's smooth, frictionless and slightly chesty voice remains serviceable but, where his lack of grain wasn't a problem in the beige '80s, it sounds oddly characterless these days.

JOHN LEWIS



MINIBUS PIMPS
Cloud To Ground
SUSANNA SONATA

Adventures in electronics from former Zep bassist
A man of diverse parts, when John Paul Jones isn't playing mandolin at bluegrass festivals, you'll likely catch him performing computerised avant-garde improvs with Norwegian electronic composer Helge Sten. After Jones' 2012 dates with Supersilent, their debut as Minibus Pimps was recorded live at concerts in London and Scandinavia. Splintering glissandos of guitar, keys and bass refracted by a Kyma computer so that the sound sources are almost unrecognisable are set against a vast, reverberating backdrop of ambient noise, heard to best effect on the four-part suite "Black Aurora", a 16-minute gaseous journey into outer/inner space of breathtaking intensity that's more Ligeti than Led Zep.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



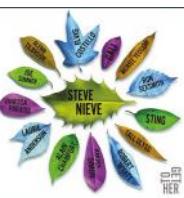
MY SAD CAPTAINS
Best Of Times
BELLA UNION

More exquisitely sad songs from London-based four-piece who also make films

6/10

Named after a poem by Thom Gunn, My Sad Captains are four young men who sometimes moonlight as visual artists and filmmakers and who wear their hearts on their perfectly pressed sleeves. Melancholy textures and subdued lyrics shape these nine songs that open with the graceful "Goodbye", which combines understated MOR guitars with a gently quacking synth and in which Ed Wallis sings: "I've been dreaming of some company, a little tenderness to set me free." You wish the pace would pick up after a while but then again, what My Sad Captains do, they do beautifully.

FIONA STURGES



STEVE NIEVE
Together
EARMUSIC

Delicate pop balladry with famous friends

Away from his work with Elvis Costello & The Imposters, keyboardist Nieve has focused on self-penned low-key rock operas and instrumental albums, but on *Together* he reaches out to various former collaborators to add vocals to a selection of stand-alone songs. Recording the singers at their homes across Europe and North America, Nieve then weaved the results into an intriguing whole at his own home base in Paris. Laurie Anderson's spoken narration flits across Nieve's laconic vocal on "Vertigo", Sting goes for sparse operetta on "You Lie Sweetly", while Costello embraces Gershwin classicism on "Tender Moment". Top marks, however, go to Robert Wyatt's ethereal whisper on "La Plus Jolie Langue", a duet with Nieve's partner Muriel Teodori. TERRY STAUNTON

7/10

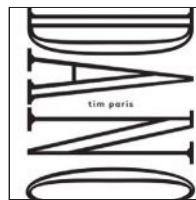
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NOTHING
Guilty Of Everything
RELAPSE

Pennsylvania punks try the shoegaze on for size In a past life, Domenic Palermo sang for Philly's Horror Show, a hardcore

8/10

punk group whose taste for gritty subject matter gained alarming authenticity when Palermo was briefly incarcerated after stabbing an assailant in a brawl. As frontman of Nothing, though, he's reaching for something softer. The breathy vocals and throbbing, overdriven guitars of "Get Well" and "Bent Nail" gesture towards the noisier end of shoegaze, recalling Swervedriver or the Pumpkins' *Siamese Dream*. The soul-baring title track finds Palermo dealing explicitly with his troubled past, and while traces of heaviness remain – see the cacophonous climax to "B&E" – *Guilty...* really finds itself in tender moments: see the slo-mo swoon of "Somersault". LOUIS PATTISON



TIM PARIS

Dancers

MY FAVOURITE ROBOT

Mixed bag of noirish disco from French electro producer in London

7/10

A seasoned electro producer yet to settle on a distinctive style, Tim Paris hotfooted it to London from the creative desert of Paris several years ago and ended up ensconced in Andrew Weatherall's Shoreditch web, from where he embarked on an edifying venture with fellow Frenchman, Parisian DJ Ivan Smagghe as It's A Fine Line. A mixed bag of surly punk-funk and throbbing boogie (see "Outback, Stones & Vinyl"), his debut album *Dancers* might well be his boldest statement yet, but without a juicy personality to grab hold of, it has the innocuous feel of a collection of seamy-sounding catwalk tracks.

PIERS MARTIN



PATTEN
Estoile Naint

WARP

Dreamy, psychedelic electronics from Warp's new auteur

London producer 'patten' conforms to a number of qualities de rigueur in

modern electronic music: an insistence on anonymity, a taste for blurring genre lines, and an approach to interviews that obscures as often as it elucidates. Even so, his debut LP for Warp may prompt bewilderment. A lysergic collage of hazy synths, strobing repetitions and shifting layers, it recalls Four Tet's cosmic excursions, but with more of an impulse towards dreamy abstraction. Where it works, *Estoile...* makes a virtue of confusion: see "Drift", a reshuffle of Chicago house tropes, or "Gold Arc", which spins mottled analogue textures à la Boards Of Canada into something gently euphoric. As a whole, though, demanding of patience.

LOUIS PATTISON

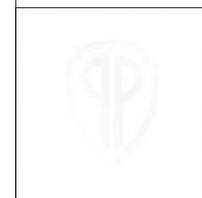
REVELATIONS

Steve Nieve on working with Robert Wyatt



► "I used to go along to casual midnight sessions at Clive Langer's studio where he'd be working on various bits and bobs, and he had this piece of music he'd written specifically for Robert Wyatt," says Steve Nieve of the germs of one of the 1980s' most celebrated songs. "Robert's voice is amazing and you wouldn't want to give him something ordinary, so Clive sent the music to Elvis [Costello] to add lyrics, and it became 'Shipbuilding'. I'd recorded my piano part separately, then Robert came to a later session and did something incredible, one of the most emotional vocals I've ever heard. He's an amazing guy, and I make a point of visiting him whenever I'm back in the UK." Nieve enlisted Wyatt's services on the 2007 recording of his bilingual opera *Welcome To The Voice*, and the pair are reunited on Nieve's new album, *Together*. "I gave Robert the French track, 'La Plus Jolie Langue', because I know he enjoys singing in other languages. Although I've lived in France for about 15 years I'm still not 100 per cent fluent, and the first thing he did was correct the grammar in my lyric!"

TERRY STAUNTON



PERFECT PUSSY

Say Yes To Love

CAPTURED TRACKS

Abrasive but deep punks from Syracuse

As all the best punk bands are wont to do, Perfect Pussy exploded from

nowhere – now they continue the template of their superb *I Have Lost All Desire For Feeling* cassette last year. Flurries of post-hardcore insanity shunt into passages of incandescent storm-damaged chords, while frontwoman Meredith Graves delivers diatribes of meandering thought that come into alarming clarity. You can imagine her grabbing your wrist and telling you her life story in a house party bathroom queue, and she gives the band's bracing wail a quicksilver edge. On the final tracks they stunningly devolve altogether, first into eerie quiet, then into howling noise.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



POEMSS

Poemss

PLANET MU

Canadian couple's cyberdelic new age

It's not often that you wonder what Aaron Funk has been up to – as Venetian Snares, the

39-year-old has knocked out 30 albums of mind-bending electronics in little over a decade – but this dreamy collaboration with fellow Canadian Joanne Pollock is, for a man who once released a drill'n'bass set called *Winnipeg Is A Frozen Shithole*, a curiously tasteful affair that raises a few questions. Over baroque electropop, Pollock and Funk sing her diary-entry poetry ("Your love is clouded in smokescreen confusion", runs "Moviescapes"), conjuring a vibe of crushed velvet and dried flowers. Exposed and vulnerable, Funk has seldom sounded so sensible.

PIERS MARTIN

LINDA PERHACS

The Soul Of All Natural Things

ASTHMATIC KITTY

Psychedelic folk, eschatology, spirals and choirs: welcome back, Linda Perhacs. By Jon Dale



7/10

over the past decade has moved Perhacs out of the footnotes of psychedelic history and re-positioned her as one of the era's more influential spirits. Daft Punk included "If You Were My Man" on the soundtrack of their 2006 film, *Electroma*; Julia Holter and Devendra Banhart adore her; the late Trish Keenan, of Broadcast, marvelled over *Parallelograms*' titular epic, a dream-song split apart by electronics: "[the] simple idea of a list of shapes as a song... it's really special."

Indeed it is. Perhacs' own story is as unexpected and odd as the album itself. Working as a dental hygienist, she was quizzed by one of her patients, "I can't believe this is all you do." That patient happened to be film composer Leonard Rosenman, who, after hearing of Perhacs' double-life as a Topanga Canyon songwriter, opened the doors for Perhacs to record *Parallelograms*. After the album's disappearance, she returned to her dayjob, seemingly unfazed, though her slow-release discovery of her new millennial cult status has led her both back to the stage, performing with Holter and other collaborators in tow, and back into the studio. *The Soul Of All Natural Things* mostly captures the articulate mysticism of *Parallelograms* and beds it down with becalmed musicianship, and quietly gorgeous songs. These kinds of returns to visibility, the long-awaited follow-up, are fraught with risk. Lost in technology, and corralled by muso types, they often sell short the weirdness that built the myth, replacing it with ersatz easy listening. *The Soul Of All Natural Things* doesn't entirely skirt this: there are a few moments where the performances are sickly-sweet, such as the astral muzak of "Intensity", where the "living on the edge/Playing on the edge" sentiments of the lyrics are sold well short by glossy, smoothed-out production and 'tasteful' playing.

But if *The Soul Of All Natural Things*, at times, courts lugubriousness, it's just as often perfectly poised. The gentleness of the album's acoustic ambiances suits Perhacs' world-view (a kind of benign, elder-statesperson, post-hippy eco-politics), and on songs like the soft driftworks of "Freely", or the stately, encircling guitar figures of "Children", the combination of Perhacs' simply stated songwriting and the chamber-music resonances of the arrangements sit together naturally. The voice is in fine fettle as well: Perhacs' mature voice has a lighter cast, and what it lacks in stridency – the understated fierceness that made

OF ALL THE strange, unexpected records to slip through the cracks during the late 1960s, few have endured like Linda Perhacs' 1970 album, *Parallelograms*.

Quietly released by the Kapp label, and then lost to time, the album's resurgence over the past decade has moved Perhacs out of the footnotes of psychedelic history and re-positioned her as one of the era's more influential spirits. Daft Punk included "If You Were My Man" on the soundtrack of their 2006 film, *Electroma*; Julia Holter and Devendra Banhart adore her; the late Trish Keenan, of Broadcast, marvelled over *Parallelograms*' titular epic, a dream-song split apart by electronics: "[the] simple idea of a list of shapes as a song... it's really special."

Parallelograms songs like "Paper Mountain Man" so starkly compelling – it gains in kindness.

This tenderness plays to the Apollonian aspects of Perhacs's music, and *The Soul Of All Natural Things* sometimes scans as deceptively gentle, feather-light, as though a few errant breaths would send it scuttling off its rails. But this reading of the album underestimates its powers, particularly the two songs that form the album's core: "River Of God" and "Prisms Of Glass". The latter, in particular, is a gem: reaching back to 1970's "Parallelograms", it very clearly echoes that song's balance between acoustic filigree and electronic disturbance. On "Prisms Of Glass", Perhacs spins out "spirals of windows and spirals of stairwells" in a surreal, eschatological vision. One of her guests, Holter

SLEEVE NOTES

▶ **Produced by:**
Chris Price, Fernando Perdomo, Linda Perhacs
Recorded at: Reseda Ranch Studios, CA
Personnel includes:
Linda Perhacs (vocals),
Julia Holter (vocals, Minikorg), Chris Price (vocals, guitars, percussion, keys), Fernando Perdomo (guitars, bass), Kaitlin Wolfberg (strings)

herself, gives an equally bravura performance, her occasionally mannered voice disarmed and freed in such company, and even better for it.

It's no surprise that Holter informs the more widescreen visions of *The Soul Of All Natural Things*, given the ambitions of her own *Loud City Song* from last year, and the microscopically exploded pop songs of Michael Pisaro's *Tombstones*, another album Holter was deeply involved with. Elsewhere in *The Soul Of All Natural Things*, there are a few moments of longueurs, where the songs come off a little too session muso. But this new, becalmed Perhacs reveals a clear eco-political message articulated with subtlety and nuance. For Linda Perhacs, the road back to the garden is gently lit.

Q&A

Linda Perhacs

During the sessions for *The Soul Of All Natural Things*, you worked with other artists, such as Julia Holter. How do you feel these new presences changed the way you make and think about music? The recording sessions were pure magic. I loved how everyone brought their own thoughts and ideas to the table. The best answer I can give you is the same one I have seen in some of our performances and recordings. And that is, sometimes people are in your life and they make

you feel clumsy, [and] then there are those rare moments when things are so harmonious and so good, the only thing you can do is say in amazement and gratitude that this has to be "sent and meant"...

Much of the album suggests a 'stepping out of the world', not as retreat, but as a 'step forward'. I feel the purpose of my music is to heal. Perhaps that is the forward step. My compositions come as an energy flow that starts above me and flows through me like a fast flow of rain. This only happens when I am grateful to the universe for all its beauty, when I am in a prayerful and thankful state of mind. Then it comes so quickly I can't catch it fast enough to write it all down.



New Albums



POLAR BEAR In Each And Every One

LEAF

Psych-jazz epic from the inventive Brit quintet

8/10

Is Seb Rochford Britain's most adventurous musician? The go-to percussionist's jaw-dropping CV (from McCartney to Rokia Traoré) argues as much, aside from his four albums leading Polar Bear. Producing for the first time, he delivers the Bear's most varied set to date, opening with sheets of ambient electronica before moving onto the fractured funk of "Be Free" and the Afro-tinged intricacy of "They're All Ks And Qs". "Lost In Death" presents the more familiar squalls of the two-tenor lineup, but a pulsing soundscape that emotes anguish, mourning and delight is full of surprises.

NEIL SPENCER



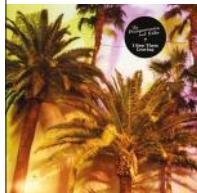
PRINCE FATTY VS MUNGO'S HI-FI Prince Fatty Vs Mungo's Hi-Fi

MR BONGO

7/10

UK dub soundclash pits south against north *Prince Fatty Vs...* is the brainchild of Mike "Prince Fatty" Pelanconi, a Brighton-based producer who lent his dub talents to the making of Lily Allen's *Abrill, Still*. Here, we find five tracks by Pelanconi's Prince Fatty band remixed by Scottish soundsystem Mungo's Hi-Fi, and the Scots returning the favour. As well as a clash of regions, this is a meeting of sensibilities, Fatty's analogue '70s skank relatively orthodox in comparison to the more contemporary, electronic Mungo's. Vibes get a boost with a busy guestlist, including UK MC Top Cat ("Herbalist"), the late Sugar Minott ("Scrub A Dub Style") and Hollie Cook of The Slits, an urchin presence on "Sugar Water".

LOUIS PATTISON



THE PUSSY-WARMERS AND REKA I Saw Them Leaving

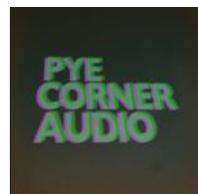
WILD HONEY

Life is a cabaret for raucous Swiss-Hungarian collective

6/10

Behind their ominously zany name, The Pussywarmers from Lugano in Switzerland make a surprisingly potent lounge-jazz garage-junk surf-punk racket, peppered with unlikely blues explosions where Brechtian cabaret meets Balkan brass, and Beach Boys harmonies blend with Bonzo Dog-style retro-spoofery. They are joined on their third album by Hungarian singer Réka, who sulks winningly over the doomy fairground rumblecore of "Sunrise" like Nico gatecrashing The Shangri-Las, then adds exquisitely languid harmonies to the Theremin-haunted weepie "There Are Always Two Answers", which arrives in a Lynchian haze of gothic horror.

STEPHEN DALTON



PYE CORNER AUDIO Black Mill Tapes Volumes 3&4

TYPE

Hauntologist taps into a '90s electronica revival

8/10

A degree of subterfuge and whimsy surrounds British producer Martin Jenkins, not least his generally anonymous role as "The Head Technician" of Pye Corner Audio. Jenkins has strong affiliations with the '70s TV theorists who populate the Ghost Box label. *Black Mill Tapes Volumes 3&4*, however, indulge in another kind of nostalgia: for the point 20-odd years ago when Warp artists started appropriating German kosmische and Detroit techno for their own uncanny ends. Aphex Twin's *Selected Ambient Works* is an obvious antecedent, as is Boards Of Canada, but Jenkins reboots that sound and aesthetic – right down to titles like "Dystopian Vector" – so elegantly, it seems churlish to complain.

JOHN MULVEY



THE RAILS Fair Warning

ISLAND

Second-generation folk-rock royalty-in-waiting

A husband-and-wife folk-rock duo where one half is the daughter of Richard & Linda Thompson has a

lot to live up to, especially with Kami and her guitarist spouse James Walbourne making their bow on the same label exactly 40 years after the senior Thompsons' debut. The parallels are unavoidable (although the pop sensibilities of "Breakneck Speed" more closely reference Walbourne's time in The Pretenders), familiar folk tropes given an articulate modernist sheen on "Send Her To Holloway" and "Younger", but The Rails survive them with strong voices of their own. The traditional "Bonnie Portmore" leans more towards the bygone balladry favoured by guest fiddler Eliza Carthy on her own albums.

TERRY STAUNTON



WE'RE NEW HERE The Rails

RALEIGH Sun Grenades & Grenadine Skies

RALEIGH SOUND

Ambitious prog-folk from Calgary trio

Live, Canada's Clea Anais, Brock Geiger and Matt Doherty play an unusual

mix of cello, guitar and drums. But this second Raleigh album widens the palette to include bass, piano and Who-like horns within their freewheeling brand of modern folk. Both Anais and Geiger provide restrained lead vocals, and sometimes struggle to focus the complex, quasi-symphonic structures of songs like "Inside Lines" and "Carebear". But the earnest prettiness of "Still Light" and "Astray" proves that tunes lurk beneath the lo-fi virtuosity, and *Sun Grenades & Grenadine Skies* ultimately convinces as a more androgynous, bucolic contrast to the restless nu-prog of Field Music and Dutch Uncles.

GARRY MULHOLLAND



SABINA Toujours

NAIM EDGE

Engaging solo debut from the ex-Brazilian Girls chanteuse

7/10

Talk about eclectic. Born in Italy, brought

up in Germany and now resident in France after making her name in New York, Sabina Scuibba sings in several languages and sets her Nico-esque vocals to settings that veer from the title track's faux bossa to punkish rock-out ("I Won't Let You Break Me"), tinny dance grooves ("Viva L'Amour") and balladry ("Going Home"). Uniting the dozen cuts is her playful, wilful personality – part Björk, part Ari Up – and some sharp writing; you can't help but smile at a swelling chorus of "And now we have no money" or a song that likens cinema to "an old whore who's lost her charms". A Dietrich pour nos jours.

NEIL SPENCER



SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE

Old Fears

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

Fresh sounds from the Field Music factory

The first School Of Language collection in six years clocks in at just 35

8/10

minutes, but that's very in keeping both with the shrewd economy of David Brewis' music, and that which he plays with his brother, Peter, in Field Music. *Old Fears* is art-rock on a budget, close-shorn but of striking compositional sophistication. The clipped funk of "Distance Between" locates the midpoint between Robert Wyatt and early Justin Timberlake, while the title track is an enigmatic synth piece appearing to imagine a bumbling English constable transplanted into a bloody giallo. Brewis' songs are smart in a way that's sometimes stand-offish – viscera is fairly rare – but *Old Fears* is entirely worth your concentration.

LOUIS PATTISON

SHIT ROBOT

We Got A Love

DFA/PIAS

You can take the boy out of New York...

Marcus Lambkin was a member of the original DFA crew, using his carpentry skills to

6/10

help build the collective New York studio. He's actually spent much of the last decade living in a small town outside Stuttgart, though precious little Krautrock bucolia is detectable here. *We Got A Love* rarely deviates from DFA's tried-and-tested disco-punk template, so when LCD's Nancy Whang and The Rapture's Luke Jenner report for vocal duties, it does feel a little bit like we're trapped in 2004. Ironically, it's actually the retro house offerings – "Do It (Right)", featuring original Trax star Lidell Townsell, and the Inner City-ish "Feels Like" – which sound freshest.

SAM RICHARDS



JOHN SINCLAIR

Mohawk

IRON MAN

Jazz and poetry united with pizzazz by the Detroit counterculture icon

Former MC5 manager John Sinclair's tribute

8/10

to Thelonious Monk is a mixture of poetry and jazz, with Sinclair's gnarled voice whispering the story of Monk's contribution to jazz, "building new music from the bones of the old", over light be-bop that never gets in the way of the poems (all named after Monk compositions, such as "Bloomin' Dido" and "Nobody Knows (Nobody Cares)"). This combination is never easy to pull off and Kerouac's work with Steve Allen was a model for Sinclair, whose knack for storytelling, wordplay and a warm voice carry sufficient wit and energy to ride the jazzy undercurrent.

PETER WATTS



THE SOFT HILLS

Chromatisms

TAPETE

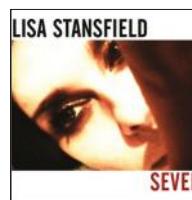
Seattle masters of melancholy indie soft-rock

The making of this third Soft Hills album saw singer-songwriter

8/10

mainman Garrett Hobba escaping rainy Seattle by spending spells in Europe and Southern California. The result is a move away from the rootsier sounds of earlier albums towards a rockier take on his '70s-FM-influenced balladry. It's a world where Bread and Pink Floyd find common ground with Red House Painters and Galaxie 500, and where Hobba's accomplished croon and elegantly expressed misery recalls John Grant's old band The Czars. Hobba's own expansive production ensures that "Black Flowers" and the gently psychedelic "White Queen" are his finest songs to date.

GARRY MULHOLLAND



LISA STANSFIELD

Seven

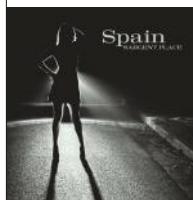
MONKEYNATRA

Rochdale diva returns after a 10-year absence

6/10

Trends come and go, but La Stansfield remains resolute. *Seven*, unsurprisingly her seventh full-length, features 10 slick, slightly synthetic slices of Brit soul which pay scant heed to any advances made during the past 25 years. "Can't Dance", "So Be It" and "Carry On" are beamed in from some sticky provincial dancefloor circa 1988, though she does shuffle the pack on the smoky "Why", which channels Peggy Lee. Whether you regard *Seven* as cheesily dated or appealingly vintage, Stansfield still knows the way to the heart of a memorable melody, and her distinctive pipes are in fine fettle.

GRAEME THOMSON



SPAIN

Sargent Place

GLITTERHOUSE

More songs about angels and death

Best known for Johnny Cash's cover of "Spiritual" (from 1995's *The Blue Moods...* album), Josh

8/10

Haden's band have broadened their approach since returning from a 10-year furlough in 2012. They still sound like Julie London's gothic godchildren, playing ballads so slowly that they topple backwards, but on "Love At First Sight" and "Sunday Morning" they've added some sass and swagger. That said, melodic ennui is Haden's trump card, and "The Fighter", "Let Your Angel" and the gorgeous "To Be A Man" are beautiful examples of his gloom-fuelled resilience. Josh's dad, jazzier Charlie Haden, makes a guest appearance, adding bass to the funereal "You And I".

ALASTAIR MCKAY



SUDDEN DEATH OF STARS

All Unrevealed Parts Of The Unknown

AMPLE PLAY

7/10

Arch record-collector pop from France

As the folky psych opener "The Void" comes on like a horizontal Syd Barrett, it strikes that this sextet from Rennes must be the least French-sounding band in France. The one clue, perhaps, is the deep, thunking Serge Gainsbourg bass, and this second Sudden Death Of Stars album soon becomes a stroll through a hipster record collection, with a little Velvets here ("Over The Top"), a great deal of Nuggets garage there ("All About You") and a whole lot of early Creation label everywhere. They play spot-the-reference well, though, keeping it lo-fi and vintage in a pointless but cute way.

GARRY MULHOLLAND



SPEEDVARK

Speedvark

CHESTNUT

Subtle, homespun charms from Hemel Hempstead duo

Fourteen years in the making, Ben Raudnitz and Pedro Flatt's second

7/10

album of folksy indie-pop is an appealingly understated, suitably unhurried collection. Opening with images of "kids... with apple cores in their hands", it offers a Morrissey-esque, English nostalgia, if lacking both his humour and self-pity. Uncluttered arrangements instead allow glimpses of suburban, commuter-belt life in characters like "Bill Giles" – "No smiles/Office day/Feels bored" – and "April Ashby", who takes to the motorway to escape her humdrum existence. "Here We Go" is the highlight, its optimism nestling humbly within a cunningly memorable chorus.

WYNDHAM WALLACE



TYCHO

Awake

HOSTLY INTERNATIONAL

Instrumental dreampop producer plays it safe

That San Francisco producer and visual artist Scott Hansen remixed Ulrich Schnauss last year

7/10

comes as little surprise: both share a fascination for decorative, uplifting, shoegazer-friendly swirls of synth. Hansen's third LP also shares Schnauss' recent shortcomings, however: though beautifully produced, over 40 minutes these spacious, electronic soundscapes sometimes lack bite, blurring comfortably but unimaginatively into one another, their euphoric ambitions too often thwarted by their meandering. Nonetheless, there's still plenty to admire in these undeniably pretty vignettes, including the shimmering surfaces of the pleasantly lethargic "Awake" and the relatively compact, oddly U2-via-Eno rattle of "Spectre".

WYNDHAM WALLACE

DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS

English Oceans

ATO

Alabama's finest return, recharged, and with a brilliant, balanced blast of rock'n'roll. *By Peter Watts*



9/10

YOU WOULDN'T WANT to be a character in a Drive-By Truckers song. Whether it's the frustrated titular timebomb of "When Walter Went Crazy", the miserable housewife of "When's He Gone" or the unnamed political fixer/arshole of "The Part Of Him" ("He never worked an honest day, just kissed up to a better way"), few bands are as adept at painting deft studies of seething losers, loaded with sympathy, shorn of romance. But while *English Oceans* carries its quota of Truckers staples, there's also much that sets this fantastic 10th studio album apart from its predecessors.

The band took a break after 2011's *Go-Go Boots*, allowing chief strategist Patterson Hood to rethink his approach. Having previously adopted what he admits was a 'throw it all in and see what sticks' attitude to albums, Hood decided to edit this one more succinctly. *English Oceans* subsequently sweeps through a graceful arc, from Mike Cooley's brassy opener "Shit Shots Count" through the gentler territory that marks the bulk of the album's second side and ending with elegant epic "Grand Canyon". Brilliantly paced, it really holds together as a piece, in some ways surpassing even *Decoration Day*, the band's brooding 2003 masterpiece. Further consistency comes from the fact Hood and Cooley are now the only songwriters, bassist Shonna Tucker having left to form her own band (and leaving behind a noticeably tighter rhythm section). To fill her shoes, Cooley has been busier, writing six songs to Hood's seven and even singing the hell out of one of Hood's, the smouldering "Til He's Dead Or Rising", an unprecedented act in the Truckers canon.

Balance is the key and another change in personnel saw John Neff depart, allowing keyboard player Jay Gonzalez to double up on third guitar, making the songs a little leaner and providing better harmony between the band's bludgeoning power and their superb, and often overlooked, technique. Gonzalez is a quietly critical presence throughout, even arranging horns on the brassy *Exile*-like "Shit Shots Count", which sets up the rocking first half. Here, the Truckers' triple guitar attack is at full force on Hood's growling "When He's Gone", the paisley jangle of Cooley's "Primer Coat" and Hood's excellent, insistent "Pauline Hawkins" ("Love is like cancer"), with "Layla"-style piano break. This first half ends with a magnificent brace of songs about politics, Hood's splenetic march "The Part Of Him" ("His own mama called him an SOB") and Cooley's abstract, folksy "Made Up English Oceans", ostensibly about Republican attack dog Lee Atwater, although with lyrics so oblique few would notice. Hood admits that both he and Cooley took a



SLEEVE NOTES

► Produced by:

David Barbe

Recorded at: Chase

Park Transduction

Studios, Athens, GA

Personnel: Patterson

Hood (vocals, guitar),

Mike Cooley (vocals,

guitar), Jay Gonzalez

(guitar, keys), Matt

Patton (bass), Brad

Morgan (drums),

George Davidson

(tenor sax), Adam

Courson (trumpet)

more intuitive view to lyrics. "I know what most of our songs are about, what inspired them," he says, "but on this record there are multiple songs I don't understand. We decided to let go lyrically and figure it out later."

Languid soft metal rocker "Hearing Jimmy Loud", featuring the classic Cooley couplet "She's like a talking leather couch/Warm between the cushions where she hid whatever treasure fell out", signals a change of pace and is followed by Hood's sprawling "Til He's Dead Or Rising", with Cooley on vocals. That flows into the acoustic "Hanging On", Hood's immense, touching song about depression, strangely reminiscent of Blur. "You put it in a song that suddenly the whole world wants to sing", he

sings, "But sometimes in the silence of the night/That voice might try to tell you it's not right/So you close your eyes and try with all your might/To hang on".

Did Hood write this about himself? Maybe, he says, but he really doesn't know, yet. It's followed by the equally outstanding "Natural Light", Cooley's warped country/Vegas torch song that recalls Howe Gelb and features

a great drunken piano part from Gonzalez. The understated "When Walter Went Crazy" and gorgeous Willie Nelson country shuffle "First Air Of Autumn" reduce the intensity before Hood finishes with "Grand Canyon", a quietly devastating elegy to the friend whose death inspired this invigorating album.

Q&A

Patterson Hood



How did you use your break?

We spent a lot more time at home and went months without seeing each other. It made us realise that part of this job is to have fun and when it's not fun, you're not doing your job. We needed to miss it. We had been on the treadmill so long.

There's a lot more Cooley on this album.

I wanted him to be more a part of it than he had on the last few records. Cooley had come through a period when he wasn't writing at all and he beat himself up a little bit, which made it

worse. So he came in with all those songs and that made me want to write extra hard because if I was putting a song between two of his, it had to be good or people would skip my track.

How would you summarise *English Oceans*?

A lot of our records have been anachronistic, songs and stories set in the past. This is our 'right now' record. It's dedicated to Craig Lieske, who did our merch and had a heart attack in January 2013. We had to go on tour two days later with his empty bunk on the bus. It was brutal and I wrote "Grand Canyon" for him. That redefined the record. We were really hard on ourselves. If anything was lacking, we wanted to know now rather than find out a year later. We were openly critical of anything that came up short because we wanted to make something Craig would be proud of. *INTERVIEW: PETER WATTS*



VARIOUS ARTISTS
Bob Dylan In The 80s: Volume One

ATO

Another generation of troubadours falls under Bob's enduring spell

8/10

Explaining the premise for this ambitious undertaking in his liner notes, novelist Jonathan Lethem points out that by the early '80s, Dylan had realised he "now had to become part of a small tribe inventing what it was to be an aging rock'n'roller". Rather than buckling under the weight of his legacy, Dylan nimbly sidestepped it, and these 17 covers by mostly younger artists explore the eclecticism and restlessness of this transitional phase of his career. Remarkably, almost every performance resonates, but some of the most captivating takes – Craig Finn's "Sweetheart Like You", Elvis Perkins' "Congratulations" – turn out to be the most rapturously Dylanesque.

BUDSCOPPA



VERMONT
Vermont

KOMPAKT

Renowned producers unite for pristine ambient electronica

Had Kraftwerk spent the 1980s enjoying Ibiza comedowns rather than

8/10

cycling, they may have sounded much like Vermont, a new collaborative project from Innervisions' Marcus Worgull and acclaimed house producer Danilo Plessow (Motor City Drum Ensemble). Born of (presumably late-night) studio jams, their debut's genesis and subdued atmospherics belie the focused intent at its heart, something that perhaps persuaded Can's Jaki Liebezeit to guest on the gently ticking "Cocos" and the edgier "Macchina". Like fellow Germans To Rococo Rot, Vermont find unexpected warmth in the almost mathematical precision of these restrained but seductive instrumentals.

WYNDHAM WALLACE



JAMES WALSH
Turning Point

SOLO

Single-handed voyages on a confessional course

After four albums at the helm of Starsailor, James Walsh's solo

7/10

debut proper dials down the guitar anthemics for a collection geared towards the more personal and introspective. The title track may recall the blue-eyed soul of Hall & Oates, but the more delicate hues of "Broken You" and "Fading Grace" take their lead from the young Van Morrison. When he does crank up the amps, it's with one ear for the everyman rock of Bruce Springsteen ("That Man") or the soul-searching aggression of John Lennon ("If I Had The Words"), his affecting, plaintive vocal draped across sturdy if not especially groundbreaking melodies.

TERRY STAUNTON



DEAN WAREHAM
Dean Wareham

SONIC CATHEDRAL

Ex-Galaxie 500 frontman's Jim James produced solo debut

7/10

At this late stage in the game, expecting sudden aesthetic changes from a lifer like Dean Wareham feels not just unfair, but slightly irresponsible: he's someone who's so deftly carved out a niche in the world of independent music, it's difficult truly to begrudge him the simple pleasures of writing beautiful songs, year in, year out. But tightrope walking between familiarity and homogeneity carries its own risks. On *Dean Wareham*, his first properly solo album after 2013's *Emancipated Hearts* mini-LP, he mostly navigates it well: songs from the wellspring of third-album VU; a few nods toward New Order; some charming turns of phrase. And on it goes...

JONDALE

REVELATIONS

Dean Wareham on Lou Reed and the death of the music industry



► "It was revealing to see the outpouring of emotion after he passed away," Dean Wareham says, reflecting on the passing of Lou Reed, whose music – particularly the third Velvet Underground album – was one of the guiding lights for Wareham's first two groups, Galaxie 500 and Luna. "Some idiot wrote a piece for the *Daily Mail*, calling him a 'niche singer who had produced little of note for decades' and wondering why people made such a big deal about the passing of a 'celebrity' who wasn't even that famous. I guess that's how they view him, as a celebrity. But in truth he touched so many lives from 1966 forward, his influence radiating outwards over the decades."

Indeed, if it weren't for figures like Reed, there may not have been the groundwork for Wareham's career – as songwriter, guitarist, occasional actor, and author – to gain traction. His book, *Black Postcards*, is particularly sober and eloquent when articulating the negotiations of said career after the alternative explosion of the '90s. "I didn't realise it at the time, but now I see that the book is about a music industry that no longer exists, at least not in the same way," he reflects. "In Luna, we had our own sound and we did our own thing, soldiering on through the grunge years. We hated almost everything on 'alternative' radio." JONDALE



THE WAR ON DRUGS
Lost In The Dream

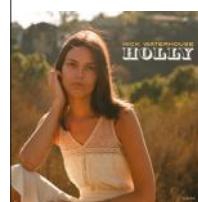
SECRETLY CANADIAN

Gorgeous, fully realised third from Adam Granduciel's ambient rockers

Though half of the

musicians in Philly (including, famously, Kurt Vile) seem to have been in The War On Drugs at one time or another, the lineup has finally stabilised. As a result, *Lost In The Dream* is calmer and more confident than previous efforts, songs stretching out beyond the six-minute mark if the feeling is right. Those long nights in the van mainlining Fripp & Eno have resulted in a gently persuasive sound that's part classic-rock road movie, part ambient sunrise. Granduciel has been compared to Springsteen but *Lost In The Dream* also recalls Don Henley's poignant post-Eagles efforts, a guilty pleasure we can all now admit to.

SAM RICHARDS



NICK WATERHOUSE
Holly

INNOVATIVE LEISURE

Allah-Las producer – none more fidelity!

The best rhythm and blues has always been

about tension and release, real or implied: the ever-building energy of great performances, and their highly charged, sexual frisson. Nick Waterhouse clearly understands this, intellectually; his music's historically informed and tight with the right signifiers, and he's a tasteful producer. But tastefulness does not make for great rock'n'roll, and *Holly* lacks the heat and fire that makes the best so damn thrilling. Waterhouse's anodyne voice doesn't help, either. It can be pleasurable enough in passing, but *Holly* trades in period perfection at the expense of the wildness, the physical force of breathless R'n'B.

JONDALE



WAY THROUGH
Clapper Is Still

UPSET THE RHYTHM

"Pastoral punk" document from London duo

With its shakily enthusiastic vocals and general spirit of tinpot

invention, Way Through's second album fits quite neatly into the UK DIY tradition that reaches back to Swell Maps, The Homosexuals, et al. *Clapper Is Still* has its eye on somewhat older traditions, too though. Each of the album's 13 tracks is based in a different English locale, with Chris Tipton and Claire Titley winding field recordings, traditional folk songs and local history into their electric canter. The result is playful, idiosyncratic, and always intriguing, a shambolic but vivid psychogeography of plague villages, ancient barrows, and on "Westonzoyland", "70s bungalows, chain-link fencing and pedestrian chicanes".

LOUIS PATTISON

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SCORING: THE ORIGINAL ALBUM

10 Masterpiece

1 Poor!

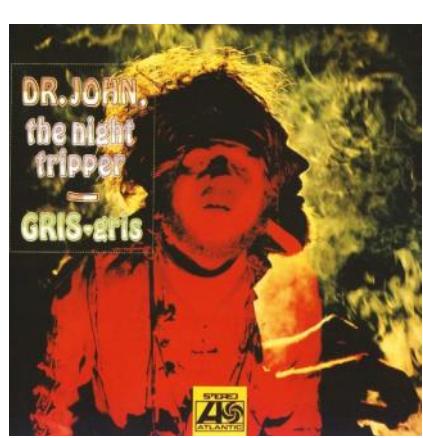
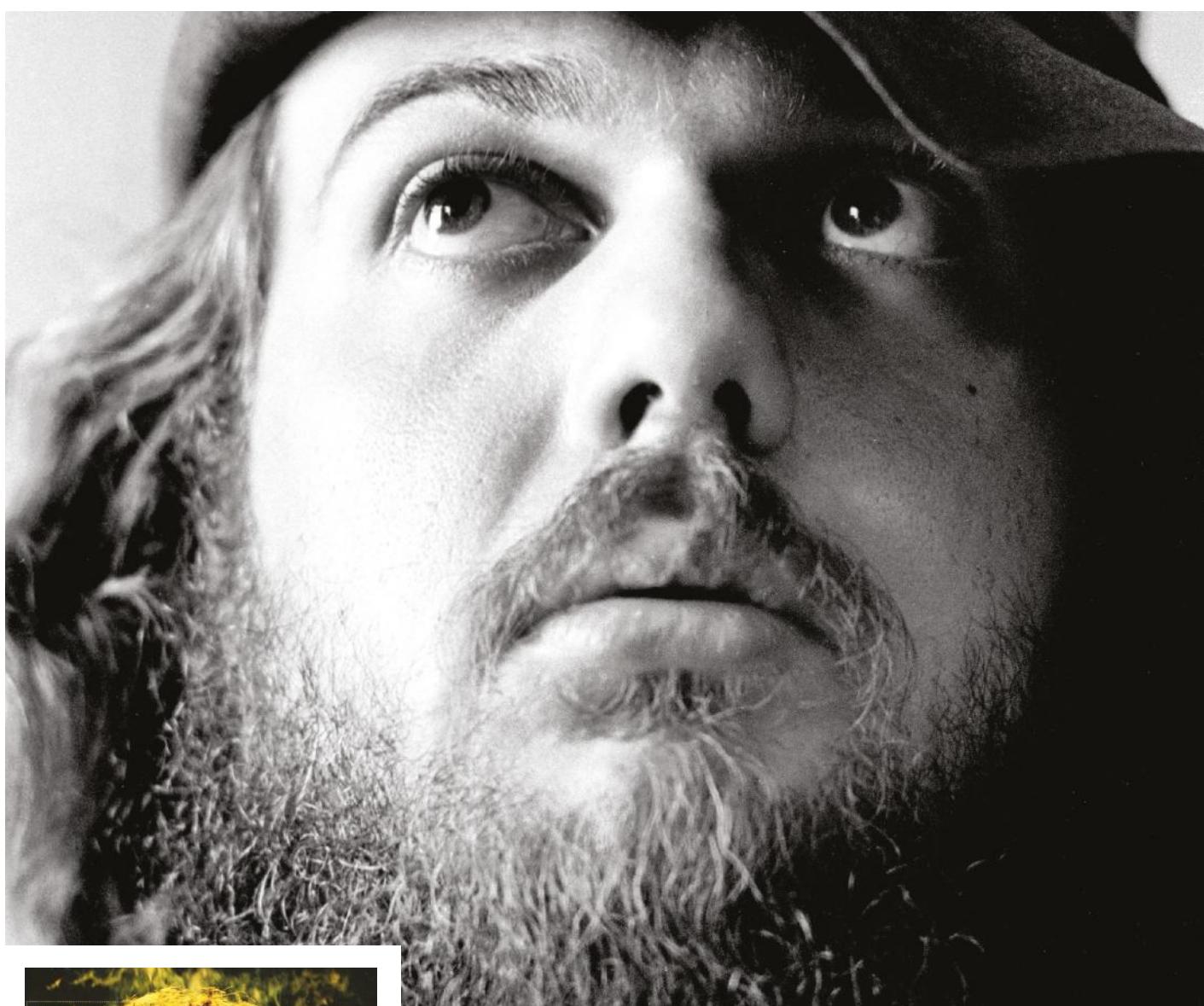
SCORING: EXTRA MATERIAL

10 Untold riches

1 Barrel-scrapings

Archive

REISSUES | COMPS | BOXSETS | LOST RECORDINGS



TRACKLIST

- 1 Gris-Gris Gumbo Ya Ya
- 2 Danse Kalinda Ba Doom
- 3 Mama Roux
- 4 Danse Fambeaux
- 5 Croker Courtbullion
- 6 Jump Sturdy
- 7 I Walk On Gilded Splinters

DR JOHN, THE NIGHT TRIPPER

Gris-Gris (reissue, 1968)

REAL GONE MUSIC

Mac Rebennack's brilliant debut. By David Cavanagh

9/10

ROCK HAS TRADITIONALLY looked to Louisiana with an envious eye. The history. The imagery. The swamps. Songwriters who didn't know one end of an alligator from the other used the Mississippi as their prime location (John Fogerty), sang inconceivably of "catfish pie in a gris-gris bag" (The Byrds) or wrote about a Cajun queen raising her baby "in the bayou with a Bible round his

neck" (Airport Convention). The hip glossary of New Orleans, with its John the Conqueror root and mojo hands, is as magnetic as the mythology surrounding the devil and the crossroads.

The ultimate statement of late-'60s hoodoo vérité is the enduringly brilliant *Gris-Gris*. A deeply mysterious album full of disembodied voices hanging like skulls from trees, it lends itself to apocryphal stories and far-



A steaming genius:
Dr John in a *Gris-Gris*
cover shoot outtake

→ fetched claims about the original Doctor John of New Orleans, a Haitian or Senegalese healer who appeared in the city in the 19th century. Mac Rebennack has said that his great-great-great-grandfather was arrested with Doctor John for "running a voodoo operation in a whorehouse in 1860". Other sources suggest that Doctor John was almost certainly dead by 1860 – or that he never existed in the first place. "Many years later," one paranormalist website relates, "Marie the Second [the daughter of New Orleans voodoo queen Marie Laveau] was heard referring to Doctor John, but not as a person, instead as an African spirit that could assist with rituals."

Just as the slavery-era songs on The Band's second album come to us from the incongruous setting of Sammy Davis Jr's pool house in Los Angeles, *Gris-Gris* was created not in New Orleans but in the heart of Hollywood. The 1967 sessions at Gold Star Studios were the idea of Rebennack, a sought-after pianist on R'n'B and pop records, and producer-arranger Harold Battiste, who'd worked with Lee Dorsey and written the

arrangement for Sonny & Cher's "I Got You Babe". Both Rebennack and Battiste were New Orleans natives who'd moved to LA earlier in the '60s. Together they concocted the idea of a psychedelic Cajun crossover music with Rebennack playing the part of a sinister master of ceremonies, Dr John Creaux. The gris-gris of the title is a small cloth bag of African origin that wards off evil spirits. For Rebennack, it was the start of a totally new career.

Dr John would enter popular culture as the inspiration for a Muppet (Dr Teeth) and can be heard most mornings singing the theme tune of *Curious George* on Disney Junior. But Creaux was a far from child-friendly proposition in 1967 as he and his backing singers itemised the remedies in his little satchel. Mumbling and leering as though completely

out of his brain, he listed potions including dragon's blood (medicinal resin), "balls fix jam" (to be eaten with breakfast) and "sacred sand". Not all of his terminology was so recondite. His clients came from miles around, he boasted, establishing a hard drug subtext to *Gris-Gris* that

reflected Rebennack's real-life heroin addiction.

Rebennack has tended over the years to recall *Gris-Gris* as a musical brainwave on his part – let's combine *this* with *this* and see if it sells to the rock audience – but the incantations and juxtapositions on *Gris-Gris* were so bizarre that even Ahmet Ertegun, whose Atco label released it in January 1968, had no idea what genre it fell into. Aficionados of the furthest-out psychedelia would struggle to find a precedent for Battiste's arrangement of "Gris-Gris Gumbo Ya Ya", an eerie shadow print of mandolins and ominous drums. "Danse Kalinda Ba Doom" is like a demented dance band trying to play the second half of Pharoah Sanders' "Upper Egypt And Lower Egypt" while an assortment of berserk singers repeatedly interrupts. "Mama Roux", perky and toe-tapping, is the first of a pair of more accessible tunes – the other is "Jump Sturdy", a banjo-led chant – but the enchanted persona of Creaux ensures that the vibes remain extremely potent even when he disappears for six minutes (the duration of Battiste's fantastic, mostly instrumental "Croker Courtbullion") while a wandering flute and a Sonny Sharrock-style guitar take prominent roles.

On an album teeming with outlandish names and inversions of familiar phrases ("Jack be nimble, Jack be slick... Old King Cole had a whole lotta soul"), "Jump Sturdy" weaves together some of the central themes, referencing Marie Laveau and mentioning Bayou St John where she practised some of her voodoo rituals. We're also introduced to two secondary characters, a rival voodoo queen named Julia Jackson and a local character known as Zozo La Brique. Whatever the truth about Doctor John, these women did exist. Zozo was a street merchant who starved to death because she was too miserly to buy food, according to *Gumbo Ya-Ya: A Collection Of Louisiana Folk Tales*, published in the 1940s.

The most famous song on *Gris-Gris*, covered by everyone from Marsha Hunt to Paul Weller, is "I Walk On Guilded Splinters", the seven-minute closing track. The voodoo queens step aside and The Night Tripper returns to stake out his territory, emerging from his coffin like Screamin' Jay Hawkins to "put gris-gris on your doorstep". The spells he casts abandon the English language for French. Battiste doesn't so much arrange the music as scatter its bones beneath a full moon. Possessed to the point of being scary, it's easy to hear its influence on "Sympathy For The Devil". Jagger must have played it to death.

Real Gone's *Gris-Gris* reissue adds no extra tracks and provides nothing spectacular in remastering terms; it'll always be a strange-sounding album with an exaggerated stereo mix. Then again, it hardly needs improvement. The album's mysteries lead both inwards and outwards, taking the researcher on an odyssey that leads to figures like Père Antoine, an 18th-century Louisiana priest with links to the Spanish Inquisition, and Robert Tallant, a newspaper columnist who co-wrote the aforementioned *Gumbo Ya-Ya*. Ten years after publishing a book about Marie Laveau, Tallant inexplicably died while drinking a glass of water. They all find their way into *Gris-Gris* somehow, pollinating it with their superstitions, their lore, their magnificent dubiousness.

the VAULT



"I shall be a medicine man dressed as a spider..." Dr John in 1970

MAY, 1972: There's a special place in the Doctor's heart for wicked Mick (Jagger)...



NME
27/05/1972

"I REALLY NEVER expected him to amount to much when he was hopping about like a junior flicker star," said Mac, "but now he's really got into the R'n'B satchel and his feeling for soul is getting stronger and stronger. That's why I like the Stones' new album [Exile On Main St] so much."

"Maybe living out in America for a while has helped him some, too. He took me to see Chuck Berry one night in LA and Keith Richards and I were invited to sit in. Berry was awful. Keith managed to sneak in a few little guitar riffs but Berry was icing everyone off the stage, and eventually I just got up from the piano and walked off. The Stones' road manager, Stu, took my place and he got the same treatment. Berry threw everyone offstage."

"Afterwards I took Mick down to a little soul club where Bobby Bland was playing and, far from laying back like most dudes who see these bloods working out, he got up there with him and did a duet. Most guys I take down to those things don't join in because they figure they are going to get shot down, and most of them do."

"Most of the pop scene doesn't move me at all. I find I just lose touch with the whole thing. People say to me that I've got to hear this one or that one, and it doesn't move me."

Singers tend to lose their real selves in that Top 40 thing. The only people who move me in that area are gospel singers like Aretha when she sings things like 'I Who Have Nothing' and 'What A Friend I Have In Jesus', and albums like the new one from Roberta Flack and

Donnie Hathaway I worked for a while with Alice Cooper in the States and his theatrics are really great and his music is bloody awful. If I could get an act like that going I'd use it until I wore it out. At one gig I bought a baby grass snake just as a joke to upstage him during my act – it was only a little baby snake. His manager came screaming into my dressing room in Vegas yelling, 'You can't use the snake – no-one uses snakes but Alice...'"

Next on the agenda from Dr John should be a live album which he hopes to produce in New Orleans on July 24, which is St. John's Eve when all the clans gather to make a little magic. The Brazilian Macumba, The Wild Magnolias, The Mumbo San Dimingo and Mac's own tribe, the Chipaka Shawee. "The theme this year is brotherhood and the mingling of the bloods," said Mac. "I shall be a medicine man dressed as a spider, which is this year's theme – next year I'm going as a crawfish. I shall have beautiful coloured spikes all over and a huge spike coming out here," he indicates, "and another out here" – he indicates his rear.

"We'll make some music with people like Professor Longhair and all the old New Orleans musicians – maybe do a little voodoo by the river, and if the weather is right I'll be able to get it all down on tape."

"People get the crazy notion that voodoo has only got something to do with curses and black magic – all that crap you see on movies. There is a more positive side to the magic, which involves the power of good."

"See my new gris-gris bag," said John proudly pointing to a tapestry bag hanging on his door.

"Where did you get it?" I asked.

"King's Road," he said. **KEITH HALTHAM**

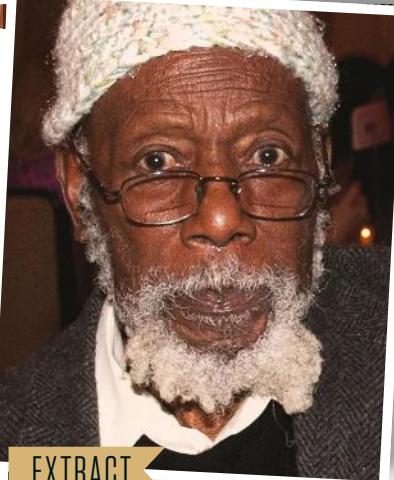
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EXTRACT

Harold Battiste – producer, arr., bass/clarinet/perc – on the birth of Dr John

MACT TOLD ME he'd been reading up on this character called Dr John from the New Orleans voodoo tradition and wanted to work something around that. In late summer 1967 I booked time at Gold Star studios and got a cat called Soulful Pete to engineer the sessions. We collected our cast of New Orleans refugees who understood the spirit of what was going down. This was not to be a proper production with arrangements... we would have to create and develop a vibe in the studio where the Spirit led the way.

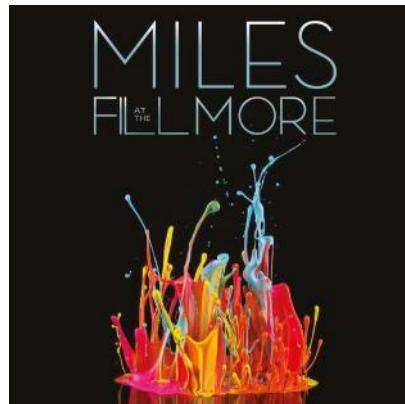
"The cast included Mac on guitar, keys and vocals; John Boudreaux on drums; Bob West on bass; Ronnie Barron, keys (and vocals); Ernest McLean, guitar/mandolin; Steve Mann, guitar; Plas Johnson, sax; Lonnie Boulden, flute; and singers Tami Lynn, Shirley Goodman, Joanie, Dave Dixon, Jessie Hill and Al Robinson. I filled in on bass and vocals. On percussion was a guy called Didymus... he was one of those cats who was so well known in the music community that no-one ever asked for his full name. He was also a partner of Mac's in the drug life."

"Looking back at this mixed bag of characters, it seems amazing we got anything done. The studio was like a Mardi Gras reunion, everybody laughing, telling stories all at the same time. But once we got settled, the vibe was there and the music just flowed. I became more involved than I had expected, it became more than a production to me."

"When the music was all done and the master tapes sent to Atlantic Records, I focused on getting a release date for fall 1967. That didn't happen. The execs at Atlantic didn't quite know what to make of this stuff I sent to them. When I talked to Ahmet Ertegun, he wanted to know what to call this type of music. 'What am I gonna tell my promotion men? What radio station's gonna play this crap?...'"

"The greatest effort was on the photo session for the cover. I got Sadie, Cher's seamstress, to make a costume for the Doctor from odd pieces of animal skins tacked onto colourful clothes. She made him a snakeskin crown, and he found various trinkets and accessories to validate his voodoo status. The photographer, Raphael, who did work for Sonny & Cher, set up his studio late one evening, and, as we had for the recording, we created an atmosphere that welcomed the Spirit; subdued lighting, incense burning, Dr John music playing, Raphael creating – the image was fixed!"

From Unfinished Blues: Memories Of A New Orleans Music Man by Harold Battiste Jr & Karen Celestan, published by The Historic New Orleans Collection and available in the UK through Unicorn Press. Extract appears by kind permission of the publisher



TRACKLIST

DISC ONE

Fillmore East, Wednesday, June 17, 1970

- 1 Introduction by Bill Graham
- 2 Directions
- 3 The Mask
- 4 It's About That Time
- 5 Bitches Brew
- 6 The Theme

Bonus tracks (Fillmore West, April 11, 1970):

- 7 Paraphernalia
- 8 Footprints

DISC TWO

Fillmore East, Thursday, June 18, 1970

- 1 Directions
- 2 The Mask
- 3 It's About That Time
- 4 Bitches Brew
- 5 The Theme
- 6 Spanish Key (Encore)
- 7 The Theme

DISC THREE

Fillmore East, Friday, June 19, 1970

- 1 Directions
- 2 The Mask
- 3 It's About That Time
- 4 I Fall In Love Too Easily
- 5 Sanctuary
- 6 Bitches Brew
- 7 The Theme

Bonus track (Fillmore West, April 11, 1970):

- 8 Miles Runs The Voodoo Down

DISC FOUR

Fillmore East, Saturday, June 20, 1970

- 1 Directions
- 2 The Mask
- 3 It's About That Time
- 4 I Fall In Love Too Easily
- 5 Sanctuary
- 6 Bitches Brew
- 7 Willie Nelson
- 8 The Theme

All previously unissued.



MILES DAVIS

Bootleg Series Vol 3: Miles At The Fillmore 1970

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Miles in 1970: expanded, and expanding all the time.
By Richard Williams

8/10

THE SUMMER OF 1970 was

enlivened by the strong rumour that what promised to be the supergroup to end all supergroups was about to make its debut: Eric Clapton and John McLaughlin on guitars, Jack Bruce on bass, Larry Young on organ, Tony Williams on drums and Miles Davis on trumpet. The fusion of Cream's blues-rock with the jazz-rock explored by Davis' groups over the previous couple of years promised to realise an ambition, shared by many, of linking the raw energy and audience appeal of one idiom to the intellectual richness and sophistication of the other.

According to stories in *Rolling Stone* and *Melody Maker*, the unveiling was due to take place at the Randall's Island Festival in New York. But, like

Davis' long-mooted collaboration with Hendrix, it was destined never to happen, aborted not so much by the musicians' own desires as by the conflicting interests of those who took care of their business. Clapton carried on with Derek And The Dominoes, Bruce joined McLaughlin and Young in Lifetime, under Williams' leadership, and Miles accepted an offer from Bill Graham to return to New York for four nights at the Fillmore East, supporting Steve Miller ("a sorry-ass cat", in Davis' later estimation).

He had played there earlier in the year, opening for Laura Nyro. At that point Wayne Shorter, his saxophonist for six memorable years, had been on the brink of quitting, and the band – increasingly under the influence of pianist



Chick Corea, bassist Dave Holland and drummer Jack DeJohnette – was edging closer and closer to free improvisation, making music that was magnificently risky but didn't suit Miles' intention to expand his audience rather than contract it.

When they played the original Fillmore in San Francisco a few weeks later, with the Brazilian percussionist Airto Moreira added to the group and the teenaged saxophonist Steve Grossman replacing Shorter, their leader was pleased to encounter a warm reception not from the usual set of jazz fans encountered in clubs or at festivals but from five thousand young white hippies who had turned up to hear the bill-topping Grateful Dead. Some of them would never have heard of Davis, but others had the newly released *Bitches Brew* at home, stacked next to *Aoxomoxoa* and *Volunteers*. At a time when he was desperate to cast off the old image of a man who played "My Funny Valentine" while wearing an Italian suit, a new audience beckoned, and a successful appearance at the Fillmore East would confirm his transformation.

In the meantime, Keith Jarrett – a former bandmate of DeJohnette in the Charles Lloyd Quartet, the first jazz combo to play at the original Fillmore three years earlier – had been added to the lineup. Jarrett would be playing

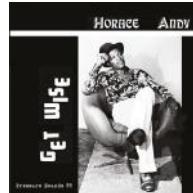
organ while Corea concentrated on electric piano, both men utilising echo devices and ring modulators to distort the timbre of their instruments, creating textures might have been produced by an adventurous guitarist, which was perhaps what Miles – who loved Hendrix and had failed to persuade McLaughlin to join the band – was after.

Teo Macero, Davis' producer, recorded all four nights before boiling down the results for release later that year on a double-album called *Miles Davis At Fillmore*. Each of its four sides was devoted to a 25-minute précis of one night's music, labelled "Wednesday", "Thursday", "Friday" and "Saturday", with no identification of the individual tunes that Macero had cut and pasted together to create a false unity. Now the four performances can be heard in full, restored to their unedited state, allowing us to share the enjoyment of audiences who experienced the way the music evolved over the course of each evening's hour-long set.

This was a band that never felt the need to begin or end its performances with conventional gestures. Davis' young sidemen might be wearing hippie headbands, but they had taken their leader's habits of behaviour onstage – affecting detachment by never acknowledging the audience and disappearing into the wings while other musicians took their solos – as a template for a new, beyond-cool mode of self-presentation. But their full engagement in the creative task was never in doubt, and more than 40 years later the result compels close listening. Although they hack a straighter path through the jungle of sound created for *Bitches Brew*, there is no shortage of variety, from an oozing swamp of exotic electronic and percussion effects to a driving 4/4 funk rhythm anchored by jolting bass-guitar riffs, foreshadowing the evolution that would occur when Michael Henderson, with his grounding in the music of James Brown and Stevie Wonder, took over from Holland.

After leading a quintet that went unchanged from 1964 to 1969, now Davis was supervising a band seemingly in constant transition. Grossman, who had joined up just after his 19th birthday, would be gone by the time the band played to 600,000 young white hippies at the Isle Of Wight in August, but his solos here show character and inventiveness as he drives the music into late-Coltrane territory.

As an ensemble, the musicians could swerve and drift with a deceptively offhand fluency through their repertoire – a nightly permutation from "Sanctuary", "Directions", "Miles Runs The Voodoo Down", "Bitches Brew", "Spanish Key", "It's About That Time", "Footprints", and an unexpected nod to former glories in the ballad "I Fall In Love Too Easily" – in order to create a series of mood-platforms on which their employer could display every facet of his genius, from squarely high-note explorations to pensive balladry. For whatever was going on around him, whatever costume he chose to wear in the search for a bigger audience, he was still and always Miles Davis.



HORACE ANDY
Get Wise
(reissue, 1975)

PRESSURE SOUNDS

Rootsy Phil Pratt-
productions
resurrected

7/10

Famously styled as "the brother cool as candy" by deejay Jah Stitch on the memorable "Greedy Girl", the menthol-voiced Horace Andy's combination of Philly soul trill and austere spirituality brought him to international attention as a guest vocalist on all five Massive Attack albums. Not untypically for Jamaican artists of the era, his back catalogue remains a free-for-all, but Pressure Sounds have done sterling work in resurrecting this 1975 album, in practice a patchwork of single sides recorded for producer-turned-North London café owner Phil Pratt from 1972-'74. Old before his time, Andy shakes his locks in anguish at local bad boys on one of three versions of "Youth Of Today", but his tone is somewhat less righteous on the Max Romeo-like "Sexy Jean", and he gives an unusual extra incentive to would-be Rastamen on the title track, noting: "If you're not dread then you can't get no skirt." A recent sideline in "Adam and Steve" homophobia might overshadow Andy's assertion that "the word love is a holy word", but *Get Wise* remains a smart purchase.

EXTRAS: Dubs, alternative cuts and a suitably **7/10** impish Jah Stitch cameo on a version of the dread-serious "Root Of All Evil".

JIM WIRTH



JOHNNY CASH
**Out Among
The Stars**

LEGACY RECORDINGS

Unreleased album
from the Man In Black's
1980s career slump

6/10

Cash's catalogue has been extensively raided, so the discovery of an unreleased album is a surprise. The 1981 sessions come from a commercial lull, with Columbia Records attempting to revive Cash's career by pairing him with producer Billy Sherrill. One album from the collaboration, *The Baron*, was a modest success, but didn't arrest the sense that Cash was a man out of time. The tapes have been subject to posthumous titivation. Guitarist Marty Stuart re-recorded his parts, and contemporary shading has been added by Buddy Miller and Jerry Douglas. They don't completely erase the synthetic qualities of the sound, but it's clear that Cash was in fine voice even if the material didn't always suit him (see "After All", in which he struggles to emotive over an electric piano). Waylon Jennings joins a lively run through Hank Snow's "I'm Movin' On", while "I Drove Her Out Of My Mind" is a great tragicomic song about a suicidal drive over Lookout Mountain. Cash wrote the confessional closer, "I Came To Believe", and he's joined by wife June Carter Cash on a frenetic run through Richard Dobson's "Baby Ride Easy", bridging the gap between Cash the mainstream entertainer and the darker Rick Rubin period that was to follow.

EXTRAS: None.

ALASTAIR MCKAY

Rediscovered!

Uncovering the underrated and overlooked



LAVENDER COUNTRY

Lavender Country

PARADISE OF BACHELORS

6/10

The first gay country album, still kicking at Nashville's closet door

When he wrote the songs for what is now acknowledged as the first openly gay country album, Patrick Haggerty wasn't being arch. Country was the music he grew up with, on a dairy farm in rural Northwest Washington State. "Making a gay country album in 1973 was so unlikely, it was ridiculous to even try, and I knew that," he says. "And considering I knew that, it opened the door wide for me to say what I had to say."

The group, Lavender Country, was a collective (with Michael Carr, Robert Hammerstrom and Eve Morris), organised through Seattle-based gay rights support group Gay Community Social Services. "Seattle was a hotbed of gay liberation activity on a par with New York and San Francisco," says Haggerty. "We were a bit smaller but we were just as hot."

"Because it was a community-based project and I wasn't interested in being a star, we didn't have to make any pretences. It allowed us to be completely open, and say our truths at that moment, which was a great advantage. I set out to write an album that covered the territory of what we were going through personally and politically at that time; to write our story in song. To cover the love stuff, and the inter-personal stuff, and the political stuff. At that time, Lavender Country was screaming a real truth that all of us that were doing the movement needed to hear. We needed that validation."

The album was marketed through small ads in gay newsletters and sold out its pressing of 1000 copies. Songs such as "Cryin' These Cocksucking Tears" and "Back In The Closet Again", addressed the concerns of their audience in a way that was radical in 1973, and would still raise eyebrows in Nashville today. "There wouldn't have been a snowball's chance of playing to a mainstream country audience," says Haggerty. "There's barely a chance now. The closet doors still need to be busted open."

ALASTAIR MCKAY

CHARLES COHEN

A Retrospective Of Early Works, 1978-1989

MORPHINE

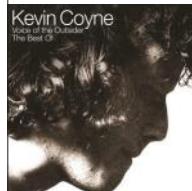
TMD

9/10

Unassuming Philly synthesiser veteran Charles Cohen has been around long enough to be considered something of a heavyweight of electronic music, but the ephemeral nature of his artistic performance – since the early '70s he has restricted himself to improvised sets, occasionally unplugging his gear mid-flow when the time's up – means that few beyond those who've attended his admittedly numerous stateside shows have ever heard his enchanting material. Until now, there has been no official record of his free jazz compositions, even though he is a master of the rare Buchla Music Easel, a vintage synth that he caresses to elicit extraordinarily rich and gut-rumblingly primitive radiophonic sound. Having contacted him about a remix, Lebanese producer Rabih Beaini's Morphine label has ended up releasing three LPs of tracks from Cohen's archive, *Group Motion*, *Music For Dance And Theatre* and the compilation *The Middle Distance*. This last one is a good entry point because it presents a range of styles that capture Cohen in various states of harmony with his machines, blissfully lost, on the likes of "Dance Of The Spirit Catchers" and "Sonomama", in a zone of pulsing and burbling.

EXTRAS: None.

PIERS MARTIN



KEVIN COYNE

Voice Of The Outsider

UNIVERSAL

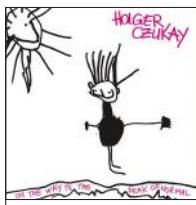
Well-chosen introduction to the late, singular singer-songwriter

9/10

The description 'unique' is much overused in rock criticism, but Coyne was the real deal. His influences ran from George Formby to Howlin' Wolf and the likes of John Lydon and Will Oldham were in turn influenced by him. But he sounded like none of them and no-one was ever crazy enough to try to sound like him. Although he continued recording prolifically until his death in 2004, the core of his best work came on the albums that he recorded between 1973 and 1980 for Virgin and from which these 20 tracks are taken. His experience as a social worker and psychiatric nurse gave him insights into the human condition few could match, heard on caustic, uncompromising tales such as "Marjory Razorblade", "Eastbourne Ladies" and "House On The Hill". But if many of his most acute observations were about the people that you might not sit next to on the bus, he was equally sharp when dealing with the other end of the social spectrum. At a party hosted by Richard Branson in 1977, Rod Stewart casually asked him how many gold discs he had. Coyne's response was to write "Having A Party", perhaps the most viciously acerbic song ever recorded about the fakeness of celebrity culture.

EXTRAS: None.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



7/10

HOLGER CZUKAY
On The Way To The Peak Of Normal
(reissue, 1981)

LES VAMPYRETTES

Les Vampyrettes
(reissue, 1980)

GRÖNLAND



6/10

Can man rolls out the supernatural Krautfunk

It's no secret that Can lost whatever bearings they had when Czukay left in 1977, but this was no guarantee of musical excellence to come on his part. After a playful debut, *Movies*, Czukay amused himself with Conny Plank on a series of dub exercises, here reissued by Grönland. At one meeting in Conny's kitchen, Czukay suggested a series of singles on the theme of "horror with comfort", which soon led to "Biomutanten", an effects-addled spoken-word piece about a motorist attacked by monsters that would become the lead cut on a one-off Vampyrettes EP. More substantial is "Witches' Baleq", a brass-spiked dub that shares an echo chamber and occult agenda with "Witches' Multiplication Table" from the slender *On The Way To The Peak Of Normal*. "Fragrance" is the key track here, a lolling groove graced with Neu!-ish riffs, Vocoder and a heavenly crescendo. No wonder it was big on the Balearic scene and remains one of Czukay's finest moments.

EXTRAS: None.

PIERS MARTIN



6/10

DETROIT EMERALDS
Let's Get Together
(reissue, 1978)

ACE

Swansong for soul men who no longer felt the need

Forever distinguished by the 1973 global smash "Feel The Need In Me", the Detroit Emeralds had chalked up a healthy run of medium-sized dance hits over the previous five years, but splintered into warring factions by the time they regrouped for this last album. Founding member James Mitchell had jumped ship to form The Floaters, while two separate lineups were using the band's name on the US cabaret circuit. If *Let's Get Together* was an attempt to patch up their differences, it was only partially successful, as although the title track and the sublime ballad "I Just Don't Know About This Girl Of Mine" hark back to the seductively smooth soul of yore, much of the album gives the impression of makeweight filler. Part of the problem is solid but comparatively uninspired tracks outstaying their welcome; case in point the nearly seven-minute "(Call Me) The Travelling Man". It's all expertly played by some of the best session musicians from the Hi Records stable in Memphis, but the pedestrian nature of the bulk of the album's eight songs, not to mention a flat, one-dimensional production sound, suggest a reunion not everyone was fully committed to.

EXTRAS: Extended 12-inch mix of "I Just Don't Know About This Girl Of Mine".

5/10

PIERS MARTIN



ELTON JOHN
Goodbye Yellow Brick Road
(reissue, 1973)

UMC

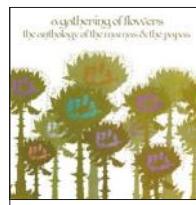
Suitably overblown 40th anniversary edition

9/10

As Elton the showman grew ever bigger and brasher, his eighth album – a double – was his most ambitious to date, while paradoxically containing some of his and lyricist Bernie Taupin's most introspective songs. Hollywood, as both a wish-fulfilment destination and a poisoned chalice, is a recurring theme, referenced directly on the title track and "I've Seen That Movie Too", and from a distance (the young cinema-goer mourning Marilyn on "Candle In The Wind", the blue-collar Joe escaping into a world of late-night TV Westerns on "Roy Rogers"). Elsewhere, the hymn to hookers, "Sweet Painted Lady", and the outlaw obituary "The Ballad Of Danny Bailey (1909-34)" read like scripts waiting to be filmed, but there's also space to hark back to the low-key musings of earlier albums ("This Song Has No Title", "Harmony"). The larger-than-life Elton of the live stage gets a workout on "Saturday Night's Alright For Fighting" and "Bennie And The Jets", pounding rockers on the most impressively diverse collection in his catalogue.

EXTRAS: Deluxe boxset versions includes 9/10 B-sides and bonus tracks, live CD, period documentary DVD, hardback book, and nine specially recorded covers of key GYBR tracks, among which John Grant's "Sweet Painted Lady" stands out.

TERRY STAUNTON



THE MAMAS AND THE PAPAS
A Gathering Of Flowers: The Anthology Of The Mamas And The Papas
REAL GONE MUSIC

7/10

Hits, misses, sessionology, and more, documentary style

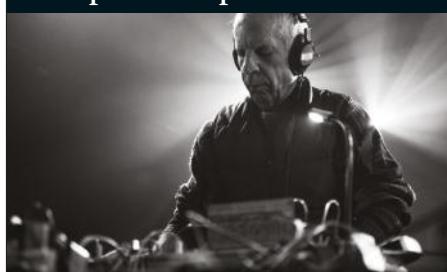
Appearing at first as yet another garden-varieté anthology – of which there are many – of this sterling and influential '60s harmony group, *A Gathering Of Flowers* picks up all the high points – from "Monday, Monday" to "Creeque Alley", but in fact holds a twist: it's a kind of audio vérité memoir, replete with interview snippets, studio chatter, rehearsals and outtakes. As for the latter – of which there are precious few in this group's catalogue, a complete take of "Once Was A Time I Thought", extending the snippet that appears on their second LP, is a rare treat. Others, like album cut "I Can't Wait" – primetime LA folk-rock sound in microcosm – find them working out vocal and harmony parts, in decidedly Beach Boys style, but bearing unmistakable traces of their folkie, coffeehouse backgrounds. Hardly earthshaking, in part a rehash, *A Gathering Of Flowers* (with historical notes provided by Andy Wickham) nevertheless provides a bit of entertaining, contemporaneous perspective, and serves as playful, fan-oriented footnote, capturing John Phillips and company just at the moment they were receding into folklore.

EXTRAS: None.

LUKE TORN

REVELATIONS

Charles Cohen's pioneering "beeps and boops"



► Charles Cohen has been making extraordinary improvised electronic music for 40 years, yet it is only now that the Philadelphia native is receiving the attention he deserves, but which he has never courted. "Charles said he did two major interviews and he thinks he said almost everything he needed," says Rabih Beaini, explaining Cohen's decision not to speak to *Uncut*. Beaini's Morphine label recently released three albums of Cohen's free-jazz synth excursions and is now compiling these spirited "beeps and boops", as Cohen calls them, on a 2CD round-up. This is the first time his music has been properly presented and released. It's not that Cohen is elusive – on the contrary, he performs regularly with his eccentric '70s Buchla Music Easel, and increasingly in Europe. It's more that he prefers his music to be participatory and spontaneous, in the moment, as he told *Resident Advisor*: "My idea about performance is I show up, I play, I try and enjoy myself and then I forget it."

PIERS MARTIN



MARINE GIRLS
Lazy Ways/ Beach Party
CHERRY RED

Tracey Thorn's indie roots highlighted

"Marine Girls ended badly, and to be honest we've never really recovered," admitted Tracey Thorn of her pre-Everything But The Girl band's demise. Band leader Alice Fox had a rather more strident line: "Tracey was too square. Tracey wanted to write ballads for estate agents." Such raw emotions jar with the gawky wistfulness of the music Hertfordshire's top drummer-less all-girl post-punkers produced. Not as strident as The Raincoats, or as eagerly tuneful as Dolly Mixture, their foal-like charm shines through this catch-up of their officially recorded oeuvre regardless. They sleepwalked through second album, *Lazy Ways* – produced by Young Marble Giant Stuart Moxham – but dubby debut *Beach Party* remains deliciously awkward. Recorded in a shed in Ilford when the band were still teenagers, Kurt Cobain favourites "In Love" and "Honey" showcase Thorn's already striking voice, while "Flying Over Russia" and the group's signature tune "Marine Girls" encapsulate their meek brand of suburbanite defiance.

EXTRAS: B-side "The Lure Of The Rock Pools"

6/10 plus a video for "A Place In The Sun". Two Peel sessions (one including a brill Buzzcocks cover), a Lyceum live show and cassette-only debut *A Day By The Sea* remain tantalisingly off catalogue.

JIM WIRTH



ANN PEEBLES

I Can't Stand The Rain

FAT POSSUM

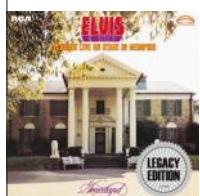
Stand-out album of five re-releases by hit-making Southern soul belle

8/10

No-one was going to steal Aretha's Queen of Soul crown in the mid-'70s, but Ann Peebles arguably served up a better run of hits. 1973's "I Can't Stand The Rain" – hailed as "the greatest record ever" by John Lennon – remains a jewel of Southern soul, sultry as a Tennessee Williams scene, a perfect marriage of aching vocal and minimalist funk. Peebles and producer Willie Mitchell pulled off the same trick on "I'm Gonna Tear Your Playhouse Down" (co-written, like "...Rain", with her husband). If ...Rain is her most consistent album, *Tellin' It* (1976) is close, with Mitchell's sinewy Memphis sound (honed with Al Green) at its best, producing another fine hit in "Dr Love Power". Sexual double-dealing was a consistent theme in her music, not least on 1978 album *Handwriting On The Wall* with "Bip Bam Thank You Mam" a great put-down song ("You're a regular one-minute Sam"). *If This Is Heaven* (1977) is a misguided lurch into neo-disco, made without Mitchell's regular team, while *Part Time Love* (1971) is a skimpy introduction to a voice that could deliver loss, contempt and longing with equal ease.

EXTRAS: None.

NEIL SPENCER



ELVIS PRESLEY

Recorded Live On Stage In Memphis [Legacy Edition]

RCA/LEGACY

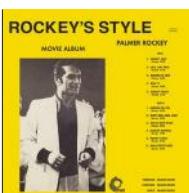
6/10

Bringing it all back home, finally: Elvis' first home-town shows in 13 years

By 1974, the world was beginning to be flooded with Elvis product, and in particular live Elvis product. Still, as the fifth live album released in five years, *Live On Stage In Memphis* holds its own as a reasonably strong performance, a kind of last stand, and a level of competence which would drop precipitously as mid-decade approached. While the corny humour, staid showmanship, and laugh-offs persisted, his band, especially guitarist James Burton, is top-notch, and Presley's voice – when he wanted it to – could still transcend. The setlists were hardly adventurous, though: the big '50s-era hits, rushed through ("Teddy Bear", "All Shook Up", "Hound Dog", rushed through, medley-style), a few gospel nuggets, fine if predictable contemporary pop interpretations ("Funny How Time Slips Away", "Polk Salad Annie"), the ever-present "American Trilogy". "Trying To Get To You", for one, though, Elvis engaged and reaching back to his Sun roots, is nigh on perfect, while the King pours his all into James Taylor's "Steamroller Blues".

EXTRAS: This edition collects the entire **8/10** homecoming concert, meaning 10 previously unreleased tracks; a second disc presents the lesser-known run-through of two days earlier (in glorious reverbed mono), plus a handful of loose August '74 studio rehearsals.

LUKE TORN



PALMER ROCKEY

Rockey's Style

TRUNK

Deluded film impresario's spectacular folly

The events that led to this private-press soundtrack album *Rockey's Style* are even stranger than the record itself, a schlocky blend of cruise-liner lounge, rockabilly and shagpile disco. Composed and crooned by one Palmer Rockey, an insanely driven Italian-American would-be movie magnate, it is the musical companion to his 1974 Dallas-set "adventure-suspense" romp, *It Happened One Weekend*, a disastrously received film that he promoted, produced, directed, wrote and starred in. This Trunk reissue is notable for Rockey obsessive Jonny Trunk's illuminating sleeve notes, which reveal that Rockey likely extracted \$100,000 from wealthy Texan backers (housewives?) to fund what he was convinced would be an Oscar-winning movie and what they believed had a Christian focus. He hired a local cinema for the premiere in October 1974, showing up in a silver Cadillac and gold suit. The 300 people he'd persuaded to attend mostly laughed throughout the screening. Rockey's unswerving vision encompassed the film's music, too, and so he hired a highly competent Dallas session band to help him record unrehearsed, delirious lullabies like "Feelings Of Love" and "Scarlet Warning 666". "He was an amateur at both singing and writing songs," lamented the LP's arranger Don Zimmers in a Dallas paper. Perhaps so, but this only adds to its unusual appeal.

EXTRAS: None.

PIERS MARTIN

7/10



SID SELVIDGE

The Cold Of The Morning

OMNIVORE

Expanded version of lost Memphis folk-blues classic

8/10

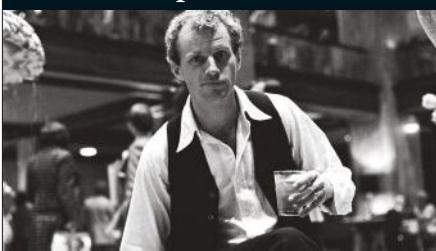
A central figure in the Memphis music scene due to his 17-year stewardship of the syndicated radio show *Beale Street Caravan*, Selvidge's own music is worthy of re-evaluation. He had a fine tenor voice, and was a skilful interpreter of folk/blues material, though his understated approach on this 1975 album led to him being dismissed at the time as "only a craftsman" by critic Robert Christgau. That said, it is beautifully crafted, by Big Star producer Jim Dickinson (who also played with Selvidge in deconstructionist blues band Mud Boy And The Neutrons). And it has a William Eggleston portrait on the cover. But the album stalled when the label got cold feet, leaving the singer to distribute copies from the boot of his car. Selvidge subsequently released albums by Alex Chilton and Cybil Shepherd on his own label, but this expanded reissue (produced by his son, Steve, of The Hold Steady) highlights his versatility and good taste. He can yodel ("The Outlaw") and deliver the blues in a smooth croon ("Boll Weevil"), but he can also do a turn with a standard such as "Miss The Mississippi And You". The self-penned "Frank's Tune", is like a sweet, weary cousin to Fred Neil's classic "The Dolphins".

EXTRAS: Six extra tracks.

7/10 ALASTAIR MCKAY

REVELATIONS

The Hold Steady's Steve Selvidge on his "folk-punk" father, Sid



➤ "At its core," says Steve Selvidge, *The Cold Of The Morning* is "just a great record that I've grown up with". Steve's father, Sid (who died last May) was an important figure in the Memphis music scene, working as a DJ and an anthropologist. "The folk tradition is ideal to look at through the eyes of an anthropologist," says Steve, "so that dovetailed nicely with his music." In the 1960s, Sid helped promote forgotten bluesmen, notably Furry Lewis, and in 1979 was behind the release of Alex Chilton's *Like Flies On Sherbert*. But he was a fine singer, too. "I don't think he had any regrets," says Steve, "I think he realised that in *Cold Of The Morning* he had made his statement as an artist." The critic Robert Gordon called Sid a "folk punk", though that doesn't quite convey his range. "My dad always identified with the hipsters from back in the day," says Sid. "Not the skinny, bearded, tattooed kids that people call hipsters these days. These were the people that followed the beatniks and preceded the hippies." ALASTAIR MCKAY



STATUS QUO

Piledriver (reissue, 1972)

UMV

The boogie template takes shape

7/10

The 1970 hit single "Down The Dustpipe" may have signalled an initial shift in Quo's modus operandi, the pop psychedelia of "Pictures Of Matchstick Men" giving way to a no-nonsense four-four rock sound that owed a sizeable debt to Creedence Clearwater Revival, but it was on *Piledriver* two years later that Rossi, Parfitt et al fully honed the denim-clad boogie that would consistently bother the charts for the rest of the decade. The thinly veiled sexual metaphors of "Paper Plane" brought a return invitation to *Top Of The Pops*, although it's a fairly lightweight rocker when held up against the bluesy, head-shaking "Don't Waste My Time" and the maniacally crunchy "Big Fat Mama" with its suspiciously prog-like extended guitar solo. There are, nonetheless, diversions from what was to become their signature sound. "Unspoken Words" is a reserved slow-tempo blues piece with late Beatles overtones; the folksy, baroque "A Year" (one of only a handful of songs ever contributed by bassist Alan Lancaster) is less palatable. A foot-stomping cover of The Doors' "Roadhouse Blues" may outrage Morrison purists, but it was to become a staple of the Quo live set for many years to come.

EXTRAS: Two period John Peel sessions, and **7/10** eight tracks from a BBC *In Concert* radio broadcast.

TERRY STAUNTON



TYRANNOSAURUS REX / T. REX

A Beard Of Stars / T. Rex / Tanx / Zinc Alloy And The Riders Of Tomorrow – Deluxe Editions

UMC/POLYDOR

The rise and fall of Marc Bolan and his glam phenomenon. By Graeme Thomson



6/10



8/10



7/10

takes: 159 tracks in total.

It's a moot point whether *A Beard Of Stars* gains much from 28 additional songs, mostly home demos, given that the album is pretty rough to begin with. It's a quietly auspicious record, what with the arrival of Mickey Finn on percussion, and the addition of electric guitar to the mix. The result

AT FIRST GLANCE, these four expanded reissues trace a familiar arc, from eager ascendancy to hubristic decline. The fourth Tyrannosaurus Rex release, *A Beard Of Stars*, and the first, eponymous T. Rex album, both dating from 1970, find Bolan in rapid evolution from fairy-folk poet to glam god. Within three years, following the star-making success of *Electric Warrior* and *The Slider*, the jig is all but up. Somewhere between *Tanx* (1973) and *Zinc Alloy And The Riders Of Tomorrow* (1974), the crown was whipped from atop Bolan's corkscrew curls and tossed to the next piece of teenage wildlife.

There is, then, much to digest. As well as the original albums we get stray singles, B-sides, John Peel *Top Gear* sessions, TV performances, studio outtakes, home demos and alternate

is an odd, repetitive, but not displeasing collision between fey folkabilly – princes, moons and dragons remain consistent preoccupations – and the seeds of something meaner and leaner. In particular the wah-wah burst at the end of "Pavilions Of Sun" and the (admittedly underpowered) electric raunch of "Elemental Child" point onward.

Within months Bolan had shortened the name of the band and tightened up the sound. Although the general approach on *T. Rex* deviated little from *A Beard Of Stars*, there is more electric guitar, harder bass, less clutter and greater focus. Meaty updates of 1968 single "One Inch Rock" and a gargantuan version of "The Wizard", originally recorded by Bolan's old band John's Children, capture the progression.

Extras include the full 15-minute rendition of "The Children Of Rarn Suite", already available, 17 previously unreleased demos and alternate takes, as well as the song that changed everything. Though "Ride A White Swan" wasn't on *T. Rex*, their first hit single is included here in both its original version and the *TOPP* performance from November 1970.

After it became a hit, the world opened out. These reissues leave Bolan on the cusp of *T. Rex* stardom and rejoin him and the band – now a full-blooded four-piece – in 1973, still on top of the world but beginning to teeter. Though derided at the time, *Tanx* is a fine record, even without contemporaneous singles "Children Of The Revolution" and "20th Century Boy", included among copious extras. (The additional tracks on

Tanx and *Zinc Alloy...* overlap significantly with previous Edsel re-releases, although there is sufficient new material to tempt fans.)

By *Tanx* the quality control is waning slightly, but Bolan's shunting grooves remain well-oiled on "Shock Rock" and "Born To Boogie". "Electric Slim And The Factory Hen", with its lush strings and slurpy sax, and glam-soul showstopper "Left Hand Luke", point towards *Zinc Alloy...* (7/10), on which Bolan, newly enchanted with singer Gloria Jones, gives fuller vent to funk and R&B influences, predating by several months Bowie and Elton John's interest in disco and Philly soul. A shame, then, that the album title reeks of a desperate Ziggy Stardust knock-off.

Though Bolan was still clearly capable of inspired creativity – the dark, twisted "Explosive Mouth" and "Change" are particularly great – *Zinc Alloy...* is where the wheels really start to come off. Any band spirit had long gone – the album was credited to Marc Bolan and T. Rex – and drugs and ego were taking their toll. The enjoyably sub-Dylan melodrama of "Teenage Dream" – which ended an unbroken run of ten *Top 10* singles – tacitly acknowledge that Bolan's imperial phase is over.

The results may not be as spectacular, or as coherent, as *T. Rex* at their '71-'72 peak, but they're still pretty fine. The real problem lay in the fact that Bolan's shtick had become so formulaic that no amount of genre window-dressing could quite obscure a fatal lack of progression. He had come a long way since "Woodland Bop", but not, perhaps, quite far enough.

The Specialist

Quincy Jones



► BEFORE HE STARTED writing for Hollywood, and long before his protégé Michael Jackson was even born, Quincy Jones enjoyed a colourful career. He spent his 1950s playing trumpet with Ray Charles and Lionel Hampton, writing arrangements for the likes of Sarah Vaughan, Count Basie and Dizzy Gillespie, and charming his way into senior management positions at major labels. But even the most diligent jazz collectors will be surprised at quite how many albums he released under his own name in between the mid-'50s and mid-'60s – LPs undocumented by most jazz encyclopaedias, most remaining out of print long after *Thriller* had made Quincy the most successful producer on the planet.

It makes these two box sets particularly welcome releases, especially given that both comprise out-of-UK-copyright recordings and retail for the criminally cheap sum of £7. **Complete Recordings 1955-59** **ENLIGHTENMENT** 8/10, crams the first seven albums he recorded for ABC-Paramount and Mercury onto four CDs. Best of the bunch is 1956's *This Is How I Feel About Jazz*, a mix of bop swagger and West Coast cool-school featuring stellar names (Charles Mingus and Hank Jones are all on board). There are a couple of bombastic big-band LPs with Art Farmer and

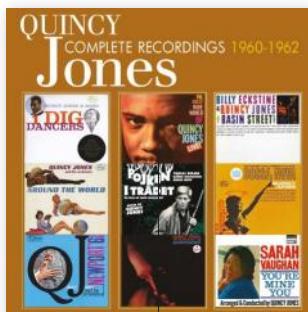
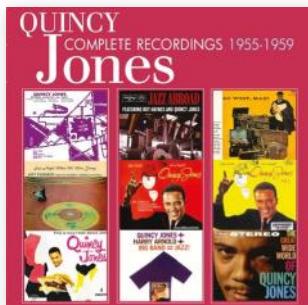
Harry Arnold but, by 1959, the hard bop was being adulterated with daft novelty arrangements and pedestrian reworkings of standards.

By the 1960s, the movie world proved to be Quincy's salvation, both financially and creatively. **Complete Recordings 1960-62 ENLIGHTENMENT** 9/10, contains his first soundtrack – *Pojken I Trädet* (*The Boy In The Tree*) is an obscure 1961 Swedish movie about a rebellious rural teenager, and Quincy's dramatic orchestral score seems to alter the way he worked, even with ostensibly mainstream jazz sessions. Although albums

like 1961's *The Quintessence* feature some breezy work from top players (Freddie Hubbard, Clark Terry, Phil Woods), the improvisation has been replaced by tighter, more elaborately arranged charts. Quincy had an ear for hip trends – confronted with 1962's bossa nova craze, he removed the pianos, the acoustic guitars and any pretence at subtlety and invented *Big Band Bossa Nova*, the results either comical (Austin Powers' fave, "Soul Bossa Nova") or thrilling (the rambunctious version of Mingus' "Boogie Stop Shuffle").

A package of albums like this contains too much overlap. But one can't really complain too much – this is one of the 20th Century's finest canons of work.

JOHN LEWIS



THEE OH SEES Singles Collection Volume 3

CASTLE FACE

John Dwyer & co bow out ... until new LP, *Drop*, released this April

6/10

Floating Coffin, an album that saw the Bay Area garage overlord and his band fuse breakneck ramalamama and flower-power prettiness while diluting neither in the process. By comparison, *Singles Collection Volume 3* betrays its genesis as something of a grab bag. Salvaging its tracks from a variety of compilations, flexi discs and split seven-inches, it suffers from a lack of guiding principle, with moments feeling somewhat gimmicky in their quick attempt to impress. Still, there is entertainment to be found in the collection's spirited scope, 11 tracks encompass seedy beat group romance ("Ugly Man"), goofy proto-Can motorik ("FBI2"), treble-soaked Monks freakery ("Crushed Grass") and straight-faced, straight-laced acoustic pop ("Wait Let's Go"). But they only really catch fire on the comp's closing two tracks. "Block Of Ice" (from 2008's *The Master's Bedroom Is Worth Spending A Night In*) is extended to a delirious seven minutes, while the CD issue wraps with a highwire medley of "Destroyed Fortress" and "No Spell", Dwyer and band whooping and wailing as they pin each song down, slice open its belly and pull out its guts.

EXTRAS: None.

LOUIS PATTISON



THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS Flood/Apollo 18 (reissue, 1990/92)

EDSEL

East Coast kooks' major-label makeover

7/10

After two albums of well-received college rock quirkiness, there was clearly more at stake when John Flansburgh and John Linnell inked their big-bucks deal with Elektra in 1990. The self-styled geekiness remains largely intact on *Flood*, especially on oddball character studies like "Particle Man" and "Someone Keeps Moving My Chair", but a more fleshed-out and slick production comes courtesy of Brit duo Clive Langer and Alan Winstanley (Madness, Dexys) on the tracks chosen for single release, "Birdhouse In Your Soul" and "Istanbul (Not Constantinople)", the former turning the Giants into bona fide chart-scaling pop stars. The end result is a disjointed collection, one foot in shambling indie and another in mainstream gloss, while attempts at social commentary ("Your Racist Friend") feel out of place among the rest of the album's frivolity. *Apollo 18*, released two years later, is equally as busy and schizophrenic, but with a sharper focus of pop hooks, most notably the jangly "My Evil Twin" and the stomping power pop of "The Statue Got Me High".

EXTRAS: Nine bonus B-sides and remixes

6/10 across the two albums. The band's subsequent releases, *John Henry* and *Factory Showroom*, are also reissued as a twofer this month.

TERRY STAUNTON

Films

BY MICHAEL BONNER

Wes Anderson celebrates the Belle Époque, Scarlett Johansson plays an alien, backing singers hit the spotlight, and Terry Gilliam is back to his dystopian tricks

THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL Without giving too much away here, one of the main characters in Wes Anderson's new film works in a patisserie. There, she helps the owner concoct elaborate and sumptuous-looking pastries and cakes for the locals in *l'entre deux guerres* Lutz, a sleepy, Alpine town in the Republic of Zubrowka. These fabulous confections act as a reliable metaphor for Anderson's film itself: colourful and delightful, rich with handcrafted detail. Anderson, of course, has habitually set his films in their own self-contained environments – an elite prep school, a New York brownstone, a submarine, a train car, even an island – but here he has gone one step further to create an entire European state, populated by ancient aristocratic dynasties and eccentric but well-meaning civilians. At the centre of this fuddy Ruritanian analogue lies the Grand Budapest Hotel, a splendid dolls' house of a building overseen by the particular but kindly concierge, Gustave H (Ralph Fiennes). In a typical Anderson flourish, M. Gustave's antics are presented to us via a number of leapfrogging narratives (distinguished by different aspect ratios, naturally): a girl reading a book in the present day called *The Grand Hotel Budapest*, a to-camera address by its author in 1985, a flashback to a 1969 meeting in the Hotel which inspired the book, and finally to 1932, where we find the Hotel in its imperial phase and Gustave in full pomp.

What follows – this being a Wes Anderson film – involves a secret code, mysterious societies, a murder and a priceless painting, with the plot skipping gamely from hotel to prison and up into the snowy peaks of Zubrowka. As you'd expect, the colour palette and composition of every shot is exquisite, the attention to detail fastidious. Certain scenes rendered in stop-frame animation – a ski chase, a ride on a funicular – blend imperceptibly into the live action. It is utterly artificial and yet wholly beguiling. A lot of that, I think, is to do with the impressive work done here by Ralph Fiennes – admittedly, not an actor known for his comedy work, but who is terrific as M. Gustave, all prickly hauteur and prissy imperiousness, yet also an incorrigible libertine who seduces the hotel's elderly female guests ("84? I've had older"). Fiennes' nimble performance anchors the film – though props are due to the usual high-functioning cast Anderson has assembled for this exuberant caper, including Bill Murray, Willem Dafoe, Jeff Goldblum, Ed Norton, Tilda Swinton, Harvey Keitel and Adrien Brody. The film has a



deepening melancholic edge to it: an awareness that this wonderfully preserved Belle Époque world is facing the ravaging vicissitudes of the era: towards the film's end, the Hotel is requisitioned as a barracks for troops in dark uniforms; certain travel permits are no suddenly longer valid. While Zubrowka is a mittel-European fantasia, nevertheless Anderson has decided that the very real intrusion of war is valid, the era to be trampled underfoot by the invading fascist army. The key, perhaps, to understanding the film lies in the 1969 setting. There, the book's author – played by Jude Law – hears the story of M Gustave's exploits from Zero Moustafa (F Murray Abraham), who was once Gustave's protégé (played by a pencil-moustachio'd Tony Revolorio) and is now its owner. In the years since the war, the Grand Budapest Hotel has become "an enchanted old ruin", run down and shabby. Although Anderson's film announces itself as a whimsical construct, its artifice continually reinforced by literary devices, narrators, time periods and 'Chapter' headings, the murmurings of European conflict become increasingly hard to avoid. This celebration of the final, glory days of a dying world order are finally, subtly overwhelmed by genuine sadness.

► **Under The Skin** For those of you who miss Jonathan Glazer's abstract black and white videos for Radiohead – "Street Spirit (Fade Out)", anyone? – then *Under The Skin* is surely the film for you. It stars Scarlett Johansson as a nameless alien driving round the streets of Glasgow in a van while looking for single men to harvest for, we assume, sinister purposes. Not that you'd know it: the dialogue is scant, motivations hidden, the film's 'what-the-fuck' qualities operating at full tilt. It is, perhaps, *Species* as directed by Scottish filmmaker Lynne Ramsay, whose 2002 film *Morvern Callar* was as mesmeric, startling and frequently baffling as *Under The Skin*. Just as Ramsay's film followed a luminous, inscrutable Samantha Morton round wind-swept Scotland, so Glazer's film traces Johansson's passage through Glasgow's schemes and A-roads, her behavior equally unfathomable. (*Under The Skin* is based on a 2000 novel by Michael Faber, and it is perhaps advisable to read a plot summary in order to fill in the many blanks Glazer deliberately leaves in his narrative.) It's perhaps best to consider Glazer's film to be an avant-garde midnight movie, using familiar genre conventions to explore conceptual philosophical ideas. As we watch Johansson trawl Glasgow's boondocks in search of prey, the film

Reviewed this month...



THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL

Director
Wes Anderson
Starring Ralph Fiennes
Opens March 7
Certificate 15
9/10



UNDER THE SKIN

Director
Jonathan Glazer
Starring
Scarlett Johansson
Opens March 14
Certificate 15
7/10



20 FEET FROM STARDOM

Director
Morgan Neville
Starring
Darlene Love, Merry Clayton
Opens March 28
Certificate 12A
6/10



SVENGALI

Director
John Hardwick
Starring
Jonny Owen, Vicki McClure
Opens March 21
Certificate 15
6/10



THE ZERO THEOREM

Director
Terry Gilliam
Starring Christoph Waltz, Matt Damon
Opens March 14
Certificate 15
6/10



assumes the quality of a bizarro feminist allegory; later, after an incident that sparks curiosity about her human form, the hunter becomes the hunted deep in the Highlands. Glazer's film has a chilly, austere quality to it. He shoots plenty of vérité footage of Glaswegians that at times suggest this is an anthropological study (perhaps being conducted by Johansson's fellow aliens?); the sections in the Highlands, with the landscape shrouded in damp mist, is on the other hand remarkably beautiful. Johansson herself proves a game accomplice for Glazer. With a black bob, fur coat and British accent, she mostly resembles *Tiswas'* Sally James; nevertheless, she's extremely good at communicating her character's beautiful otherworldliness, a disconnection from the people she meets that imperceptibly shifts into something approaching an understanding of the human condition.

► *20 Feet From Stardom* Muchas Standing In The Shadows Of Motown

foregrounded the unsung backroom musicians behind a peerless run of '60s and '70s soul hits, so *20 Feet From Stardom* attempts to replicate that feelgood charm with the stories of a number of backing singers for whom credit, this doting documentary argues, is long overdue. It's a fair-dos proposition, helped along by contributions from Bruce Springsteen and Mick Jagger, who claim that without the likes of Darlene Love, Merry Clayton and Luther Vandross a number of key records would be significantly diminished. But Morgan Neville's film is *Oprah*-ready and frequently lapses into *X Factor* verbiage, with talk about "the journey", endless melisma and woeful humblebrag.

Wes Anderson has created an entire European state, filled with ancient dynasties and eccentric civilians

The most robust story here belongs to Darlene Love, the lead vocalist on a number of Phil Spector singles that he released under the name of The Crystals, a group she wasn't part of; in the film, she is cleaning houses in Beverly Hills to make ends meet. Elsewhere, Merry Clayton tells us how she recorded her vocals for "Gimme Shelter" pregnant and in her pyjamas. In one of the film's best yarns, Springsteen tells us about visiting David Bowie during the *Young Americans* sessions and being impressed by Luther Vandross' impeccable vocal arrangements. But beyond that, it's hard to muster much interest in the stories of Sting and current Stones backing singer Lisa Fischer or Judith Hill, who warbled for Michael Jackson. One particular subtext concerns the way many of these women, raised in the church, negotiated the rapid music and social change in the 1960s and '70s; one of them, 83-year-old Mable John, a former Stax-Tamla artist and chief Raelette, has gone full circle and is currently a pastor in Los Angeles.

► **Svengali** This started out as an internet series following the mis-adventures of aspiring band manager, Dixie, who leaves South Wales to make a name for himself in London. Fleshed out into a full-length movie by creator Jonny Owen – who also plays Dixie – this includes cameos from Vicky McClure, Matt Berry, Katie Brand and Michael Smiley, along with Martin Freeman and Alan McGee, who appeared in the original web series. The appearance of McGee is something of a clue to the film's ideological position, which is broadly that this is still 1994 and the streets of London are paved with cocaine. Hilariously, music execs are clueless berks running on lager and gak, promoters are rapacious creeps and everyone is trying to scam the band, the Premature Congratulations – who are, when it comes down to it, very much 'for real', good-hearted types with some banging tunes that will triumphantly woo 'the kids'. The soundtrack features The Stone Roses, Miles Kane, Jake Bugg and The Coral: artists whose adherence to a specific guitar-based aesthetic identifies them as reassuringly authentic in this particular environment. Leaden.

► **The Zero Theorem** Terry Gilliam continues to frustrate. Riffing on 1985's *Brazil* – still his cinematic high-water mark – this is another dystopian future yarn, powered by shaky steampunk technology, overseen by a totalitarian state and featuring an institutionalised main character who suspects there is a deeper truth buried in the details. Qohen Leth (Christoph Waltz) is a computer hacker employed by Management to crack the elusive Zero Theorem, an equation that will essentially prove that "everything adds up to nothing". The first half-hour fizzes with a delirious anarchy and is fired by the director's righteous anger at all things Orwellian. After that, the film flounders. Waltz is very good at doing neurotic – in much the same way Jonathan Pryce was in

Brazil – and provides a sympathetic, if befuddled lead. Around him orbit a number of supporting characters including Management (Matt Damon, with white hair and a suit that changes colour and pattern depending on what he's standing next to), a computer-generated therapist (a buck-toothed Tilda Swinton), an online sex worker (Mélanie Thierry), the boss' son (Lucas Hedges) and Leth's manager at work (David Thewlis). There are some great ideas, but as with much of Gilliam's work the end result is scattershot. It lacks the charm of *Brazil*, too, or the ambition of *12 Monkeys* – another of Gilliam's films it has some relationship with.

Also out...

300: RISE OF AN EMPIRE

OPENS MARCH 7

More buff, scantily clad men take turns to fight each other. This time, in 3D! Some people from *Game Of Thrones* star.

ROME, OPEN CITY

OPENS MARCH 7

Roberto Rossellini's legendary neorealist drama from 1945 remastered.

NEED FOR SPEED

OPENS MARCH 12

Post-*Breaking Bad* Aaron Paul stars as a street racer who joins a cross-country race out for revenge.

PETER GABRIEL: BACK TO FRONT

OPENS MARCH 20

Concert from Gabriel's O2 shows last year, revisiting material from the *So* album. Very much one for the fans.

HALF OF A YELLOW SUN

OPENS MARCH 21

Nigerian-set drama about two sisters during the Biafran War. Chiwetel Ejiofor and Thandie Newton star.



Labor Day

LABOR DAY

OPENS MARCH 21

Kate Winslet gives a ride to fearsome escaped convict Josh Brolin. Big mistake! The latest from Jason Reitman.

STARRED UP

OPENS MARCH 21

British crime drama from David Mackenzie: a troubled teen is upsized from young offenders to big prison. Tough gear.

CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER

OPENS MARCH 28

Some bad dudes do some bad things: hurrah, then, for Cap'n America. Robert Redford joins the four-colour fun.

MUPPETS MOST WANTED

OPENS MARCH 28

Surely even Ricky Gervais can't derail the sheer brilliance of Kermit, Piggy and co, back for more after the peerless *Muppet Movie*.

THE PAST

OPENS MARCH 28

The cultural and personal differences between an Iranian man and his French wife are explored in Asghar Farhadi's drama. Bérénice Bejo stars.

DVD & Blu-ray

SCORING:

10 A true classic 9 Essential 8 Excellent
7 Very good 6 Good 4-5 Mediocre 1-3 Poor

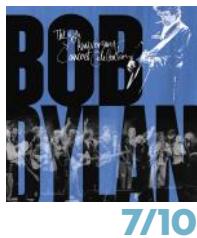


Masters of song: Dylan with Johnny Cash, June Carter Cash and friends

BOB DYLAN 30TH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT CELEBRATION

COLUMBIA LEGACY

Dylan's star-studded rejuvenation. By Richard Williams



THE BOBFEST, AS Neil Young christened it, was born out of a desire on the part of Dylan's label to pump life into a career that, near the end of 1992, seemed to be becalmed, if not moribund. His last album, in 1990, had been the unremarkable *Under The Red Sky*, a dampener

to the hopes raised a year earlier by *Oh Mercy*. In 1991 he received a lifetime achievement award at the Grammys, which his most recent biographer, Ian Bell, describes as tantamount to presenting him with his own obituary. The world did not yet know that Dylan had been working on two albums of material drawn from traditional sources; the first, *Good As I Been To You*, would be sprung on the public a couple of weeks after the show at Madison Square Garden, but time would need to pass before his admirers could see that those sessions had given him a new sense of direction.

If *The 30th Anniversary Concert Celebration*, as it was officially titled, seemed like a marketing wheeze then, at least the show contained moments that turned it into something more than an all-star love-in or, indeed, another obituary. And when it seemed in danger of choking on its own goodwill, an eruption of drama reminded us of the existence of a harsher world outside the bubble of privilege, as Dylan himself had done three decades earlier.

The mood in the Garden crackled with the sort of anticipation normally accompanying a big fight. Filmed during rehearsals, a poignantly youthful and cheery Lou Reed sets the mood. "There I was, playing guitar," he says. "I look to my left, there's Steve Cropper. To my right is Duck Dunn. Booker T is on keyboards. It's so much fun that how can it be legal?" He also namechecks GE Smith, Dylan's guitarist for the previous couple of years and now, in his electric blue suit and New Romantic haircut, the evening's overactive musical director.

The concert went out live on pay-per-view, and a sign that the TV director was not entirely attuned to the evening's nuances comes when he virtually ignores the presence of Al Kooper at the Hammond B3 in John Mellencamp's brash, opening "Like A Rolling Stone". But Reed returns to provide an early highlight, peering through wire-framed specs as he reads the words of "Foot Of Pride" from an autocue, phrasing the lines with great ingenuity.

No prompting is necessary for Eddie Vedder on a soaring "Masters Of War" – other impeccable performances include Willie Nelson's "What Was It You Wanted?", Richie Havens' "Just Like A Woman", Neil Young's "All Along The Watchtower", Chrissie Hynde's "I Shall Be Released", Eric Clapton's "Love Minus Zero", The Band's "When I Paint My Masterpiece", George Harrison's "Absolutely Sweet Marie" and a duet between Roger McGuinn and Tom Petty on "Mr Tambourine Man".

The moment of high drama comes from Sinéad O'Connor, who had planned to sing "I Believe In You" but, having torn up a photo of the Pope on

Saturday Night Live while performing Bob Marley's "War" two weeks earlier, is received with mixed cheers and boos, the sounds of disapproval intensifying as she stands there in silence before spitting out the lines of "War". Kris Kristofferson, having introduced her as "an artist whose name is synonymous with courage", leads her gently away.

Some of the cuts made in order to squeeze a four-and-a-half-hour concert into a three-hour film – Sophie B Hawkins, George Thorogood, Harrison's "If Not For You" – don't matter. But it's a shame they haven't included Dylan's own rendering of "Song To Woody", the first thing he sang on the night and a nod to the ostensible reason we were there, to recognise the anniversary of his Columbia debut, on which it had appeared, the first recorded evidence (discounting a talking blues) of the talent of the greatest songwriter of his era.

He performed it with the aid of just a Martin D-18 guitar and a proper measure of seriousness. In the film his first contribution is "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)", prefacing the return to the stage of McGuinn, Petty, Young, Clapton and Harrison, who share the verses of "My Back Pages". Focused and succinct, it's everything the later version of "Knockin' On Heaven's Door", in which the whole company – including the Cash and Clancy families – assembles for an interminable singalong, is not. Then the stage clears, leaving Dylan to finish with a perfectly judged "Girl From The North Country".

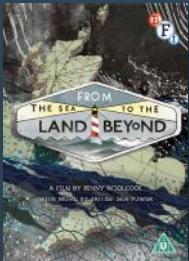
It's funny to think that as we left the Garden that night, our heads filled with songs and thoughts of the past, the second half of Dylan's career was about to begin.

EXTRAS: The Blu-ray and DVD includes three bonus tracks: "Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat" by John Mellencamp, "Boots Of Spanish Leather" by Nanci Griffith with Carolyn Hester and "Gotta Serve Somebody" by Booker T & The MG's. Also includes 40 minutes of previously unreleased rehearsal footage, interviews and more. The CD includes Sinéad O'Connor's "I Believe In You" and Eric Clapton's "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right", both taped at soundcheck.

THE BIG MELT

How Steel Made Us Hard

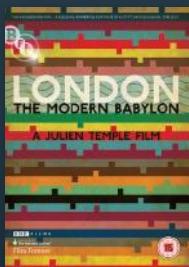
ALSO AVAILABLE



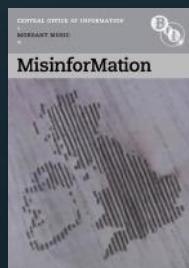
FROM THE
SEA TO THE
LAND BEYOND
Music by British
Sea Power.



A LONDON
TRILOGY
The films of
Saint Etienne.



LONDON
THE MODERN
BABYLON
Directed by
Julien Temple.



MISINFORMATION
COI films re-scored by
Mordant Music.



A film by Martin Wallace and Jarvis Cocker.
Soundtrack recorded live at 2013 Sheffield Doc/Fest.

'A remarkable marriage of music,
film and British history'

★★★★★

INDEPENDENT

Live

ROCKING IN THE FREEZE



SETLIST

- 1 Badlands
- 2 Out In The Street
- 3 Sherry Darling
- 4 Two Hearts
- 5 High Hopes
- 6 Just Like Fire Would
- 7 Light Of Day
- 8 Death To My Hometown
- 9 Hungry Heart
- 10 Girls In Their Summer Clothes
- 11 Save My Love
- 12 Atlantic City
- 13 Youngstown
- 14 Murder Incorporated
- 15 Johnny 99
- 16 Pay Me My Money Down
- 17 Shackled And Drawn
- 18 Waitin' On A Sunny Day
- 19 The Ghost Of Tom Joad
- 20 The Rising
- ENCORE 1**
- 21 Heaven's Wall
- 22 Rosalita (Come Out Tonight)
- 23 Born To Run
- 24 Dancing In The Dark
- 25 Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out
- 26 Twist And Shout
- ENCORE 2**
- 27 I'll Work For Your Love
- 28 Thunder Road

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

PERTH ARENA, PERTH, AUSTRALIA, FEBRUARY 7, 2014

Darkness on the edge of the world... Bruce, Little Stevie, Nils and the new guy – they're all here, finally!

PERTH IS THE world's most isolated city. It's two or three days drive east through desert before hitting another metropolis; head west and there's nothing but Indian Ocean until South Africa. Overseas artists touring Australia regularly omit Perth from their schedules, an endless source of frustration for locals. When Bruce Springsteen's Wrecking Ball tour of Australia last year did not include Perth, uproar ensued. Approximately 5,000 fans ('Perthsteens' in local parlance) flew east to see him in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. They also took to social media, online petitions and talkback radio, demanding that the Boss include Perth in his itinerary next time.

Amazingly, it worked. Now, for the first time ever, the Springsteen juggernaut has arrived. He's playing at the Perth Arena, a controversial new structure in the centre of town

whose award-winning design was inspired by the Eternity Puzzle. Opinion remains fiercely divided over its exterior, all sharp white edges and blue angular protuberances.

In tonight's sunset, though, it glistens like an iceberg. Two 15,000-capacity shows sold out in minutes; the Boss has flown in a few days earlier to accommodate a third. This gesture alone could have secured him the Keys to the City, but he's been for a dip in the aforementioned Indian Ocean, praised Perth's beauty, and said it reminds him of home. Perth is in a Springsteen swoon, and it's made headlines across the country.

A week earlier, the High Hopes tour kicked off in South Africa, also virgin territory for Springsteen, and particularly significant given the anti-apartheid cultural sanctions of which Steven Van Zandt was famously an orchestrator. Tom Morello, former Rage Against The Machine guitarist

and the E-Street Band's newest recruit, has credited "Sun City" and the attention it focused on South Africa as the spur for his political activism, in turn an ongoing point of connection between himself and Springsteen.

Nevertheless, tonight's set features only four songs from *High Hopes*. That includes "Just Like Fire Would" by Australian punk legends The Saints, which benefits from a full-throttle treatment highlighting its baroque-influenced brass parts. Thematically, it sits easily in the Springsteen catalogue, and follows hot on the heels of album opener "High Hopes", which explodes in a shimmering wall of noise, and sounds fantastic. Much of this is due to Tom Morello, whose inclusion and influence have been the source of much rumbling and debate. Although his technoflash guitar style (does anyone really need to play with their teeth anymore?) is not to everyone's

The Boss and his
"comedy foil",
Steve Van Zandt

routine, spinning in ecstatic reverie. A segue into "Murder Incorporated", and Lofgren is still blazing, trading blasts with Springsteen as the latter beats waves of feedback from his guitar by bashing it against his ribcage. It's guitar heaven, and these two songs back-to-back are enthralling, transcendent masterpieces. "Light Of Day", requested via placard, also produces one of the most exciting moments of the evening, a blistering flash of high-end notes followed by a squalling, feedback-drenched sheet of Telecaster noise.

And Van Zandt? Never far from the action, sharing the mic constantly with Springsteen, as well as guitar duties and occasional mandolin. For much of the evening, it's the Bruce and Little Stevie variety show, as he plays comic foil, hamming it up with wild hand and facial gesticulations, tickling his boss' neck and pulling his ear, as well as whipping the crowd into action. It's hard not be moved by the ease and familiarity between these two battle-scarred warhorses, imbued as it is with a palpable degree of love and trust.

As Springsteen loyalists beyond Perth can imagine, it's an extraordinary performance, three hours long, with regular excursions into the crowd to be touched, tugged and pulled at, and to gather up the banners on which fans have requested songs. Springsteen shows are legendary for their audience participation, but in allowing actual setlist input, he's achieved an inclusiveness that goes well beyond handclap singalongs. In addition to keeping the ad-hoc setlist full of surprises, it ensures

a particular brand of fervent devotion among his fans, already evident in the intense lobbying that got Bruce to Perth in the first place.

Input from fans has also helped fine-tune a new service from the Springsteen camp: audio downloads of complete shows from the High Hopes tour, made available for purchase within a few days of each show on the official Springsteen website. It's a smart move, simultaneously

discouraging unauthorised recording and recouping a small percentage of revenue otherwise lost through non-payment of royalties. Of mixing-desk quality and lowish cost (around US\$10), these are effectively authorised bootlegs, and the tantalising possibility exists that earlier archival recordings might one day be made available in this manner.

On one occasion this evening, Springsteen returns to the stage via the crowdsurfing mode of transport, somehow managing to maintain his grip on a gift bag containing a jar of Vegemite and a packet of Tim Tam biscuits, lovingly bestowed upon him by a fan. "The Tim Tams survived!" he shouts from the stage, waving the packet triumphantly, to screams of delight from his audience.

It's only February, but in Western Australia, 2014 is already The Year Bruce Springsteen Came To Perth. And if nothing else happens here for the next 10 months, it probably doesn't matter a great deal.

LISA MACKINNEY

It's hard not to be moved by the ease and familiarity between these battle-scarred warhorses

taste, it's clear that his input has added a range of expansive facets to the E-Street dynamic. It's an integral new component of the immersive sonic, as are the vocal contributions of the E Street Choir. Experiencing "High Hopes" live at thundering volume, their vocals bring an otherworldly element to what is already a complex and multi-layered arrangement.

Besides an encore of "Heaven's Wall", the other *High Hopes* number to make an appearance tonight is the reworked "Ghost Of Tom Joad", a raucous, atmospheric delight which works better live than it does on record. It's a fascinating dynamic, with Springsteen and Morello sharing vocals and swapping lead batons. Morello's influence is apparent, but his role as temporary custodian is fleeting, and his explosions out of the blocks seem carefully monitored.

Nils Lofgren, by contrast, is a calm, understated presence, and all the more powerful for that. Stepping into the limelight during the rarely performed "Youngstown", his guitar is a strangulated howl indicting the furnaces of the capitalist machine that swallow the song's protagonist. In a simple but captivating piece of theatre, a long piece of fabric dangles from the headstock of his guitar. Suddenly, he's a nimble woodland sprite in the midst of a ribbon-twirling gymnastic

Bill Callahan

ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL, LONDON, FEB 8, 2014

The Smog clears, and a master songwriter enters the big time. Still weird, mind...

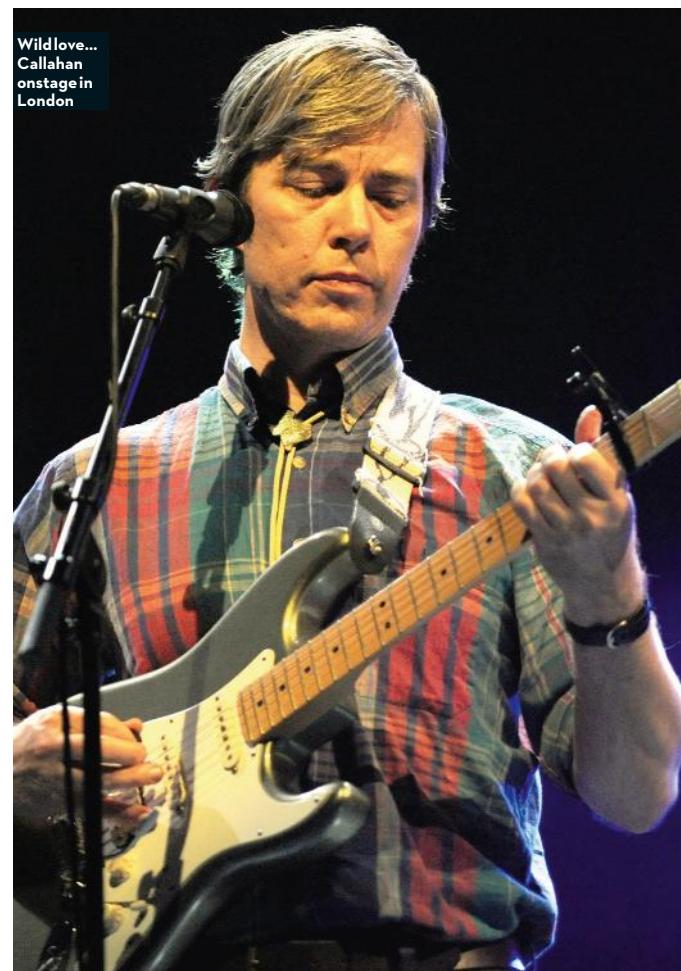
RECT OF POSTURE and authoritative of voice, middle age has endowed Bill Callahan with a surprisingly trustworthy, near-governmental bearing. Where once he used to regard audiences with a withering mooncalf stare, he is politeness incarnate at this second Royal Festival Hall show. Here, it seems, is an idiosyncratic artist who has slowly manoeuvred his way sideways into the songwriting elite.

Callahan's bands have often been discreet to the point of invisibility, but the 15 songs this trio work through in two hours are as remarkable for their musical flourishes as for his lugubrious philosophising. A lot of it is down to guitarist Matt Kinsey, who circles Callahan with a flexible repertoire of styles, from ambient swells on the opening "Let Me See The Colts", through the fluent, dancing lines of "Javelin Unlanding", and on into staticky bouts of pure, controlled noise in the extended vamp of Percy Mayfield's "Please Send Me Someone To Love".

Even in the band's wildest moments, though, there is a subtlety to the music which still gives due deference and gravity to Callahan himself. In greying maturity, his cruelty and melancholy have turned into a kind of generally serene, wry acceptance of things, so a magnificent version of "Riding For The Feeling" is now revealed as his own "Try A Little Tenderness". Still, he cannot help playing with traditional dynamics. "Winter Road" makes for a logical conclusion to affairs, with its closing exhortation that, "*I have learned when things are beautiful/To just keep on, just keep on.*"

The song does not end there, though, and its sentiments are derailed by an improvised passage in which Callahan recounts a visit to the Tate Modern. "*Too much abstraction for this man,*" he sings, not traditionally an artist of unflinching realism. "*I wanna see a face.*" It isn't a neat way to end, but it might be a fitting one: for all the canonical acclaim, the relatively relaxed demeanour, Callahan's taste for the perverse remains. He can draw more people in these days, but he'll still make sure he wrongfoots a good few of them by the end.

JOHN MULVEY



Fox got the
Byrd: Robin
Pecknold
pays tribute
to Gene Clark



GENE CLARK'S NO OTHER

FLORISTREE, BALTIMORE, JANUARY 24, 2014

A Fleet Fox, a Grizzly Bear and a Fairport join forces with Beach House to reconstruct the lost Byrd's masterpiece

BY THE TIME Victoria Legrand applies her smoky burr of a voice to Gene Clark's "Hear The Wind" during a three-song encore, her appearance feels like a victory lap. As one half of the Baltimore dream-pop duo Beach House, Legrand and bandmate Alex Scally put together a group to cover Clark's 1974 country-rock album *No Other* in its entirety for five US shows. For its second stop, this large ensemble have rolled into a Baltimore warehouse space on a cold Thursday night to deliver a warm interpretation of the late Byrds member's masterpiece, tackling the songs as if they'd played them their whole lives. *No Other*, like Dennis Wilson's *Pacific Ocean Blue* or Tim Buckley's *Starsailor*, hits the ears like a dispatch from a heavy soul. Over its eight songs, Clark sings about

navigating a cosmic, pastoral loneliness, and wraps his lyrics in stirring melodies that swirl country music's lilt around gospel majesty to create a baroque, psychedelic-tinged decadence. A commercial flop upon release, its cult status grew over the intervening years.

Beach House show their respect for the album by mostly staying out of the way. Scally plays bass in the seven-person band, Legrand spends the night as one of four backup singers, alongside Wye Oak's Jenn Wasner, while four vocalists takes turns at the microphone. Fleet Foxes' Robin Pecknold eases into album lead-off "Life's Greatest Fool", and from the very start the band revere the album without resorting to mimicry. Guitarist Stephen Strohmeier embellishes the electric lead lines without overshadowing

the song's acoustic guitar backbone, and the backing vocalists harmonise with a church choir's power.

Neither Pecknold nor the other singers – Grizzly Bear's Daniel Rossen, The Walkmen's Hamilton Leithauser, and Iain Matthews, once of Fairport Convention – have Clark's world-weary voice, but they bring different nuance to the songs. Pecknold's sweetness nicely contrasts the bittersweet melancholy floating through "Strength Of Strings", while Rossen's polished tenor provides a smooth rudder to the heavy take on the album's title track. Leithauser, who can be a throaty howler, displays a surprising folksy twang for the gorgeous "From A Silver Phial" and "Lady Of The North". And Matthews' soft, coarse voice brings experience to "The True One" and evening standout, the

SETLIST

- 1 **Life's Greatest Fool** – Robin Pecknold
- 2 **Silver Raven** – Iain Matthews
- 3 **No Other** – Daniel Rossen
- 4 **Strength Of Strings** – Robin Pecknold
- 5 **From A Silver Phial** – Hamilton Leithauser
- 6 **Some Misunderstanding** – Daniel Rossen
- 7 **True One** – Iain Matthews
- 8 **Lady Of The North** – Hamilton Leithauser

ENCORE

- 9 **I'll Feel A Whole Lot Better**
- 10 **Hear The Wind**
- 11 **Eight Miles High**

haunting elegy, "Silver Raven".

Clark, who passed away in 1991 at the age of 46, never experienced the career reboot that CD reissues brought other almost-forgotten 1960s and 1970s artists such as John Fahey and Vashti Bunyan when their music was rediscovered by younger generations. This concert offers a different resurrection. The night begins with excerpts from *The Byrd Who Flew Alone*, the 2013 documentary that lodges Clark as an overlooked genius who never got his due. Beach House and friends prove that, in the right musicians' hands, *No Other*'s songs sear the heart now, even if they didn't then.

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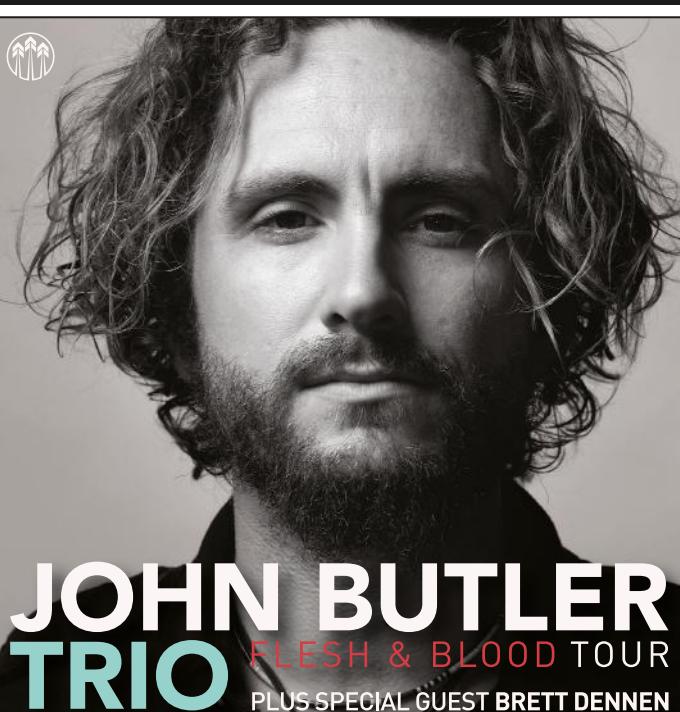
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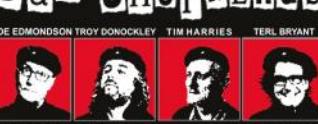
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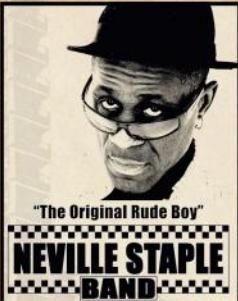
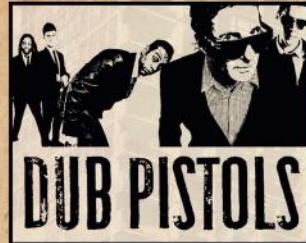
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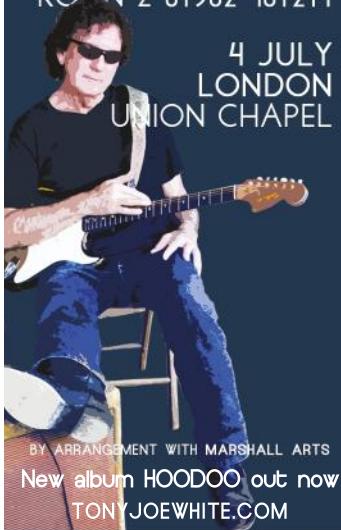
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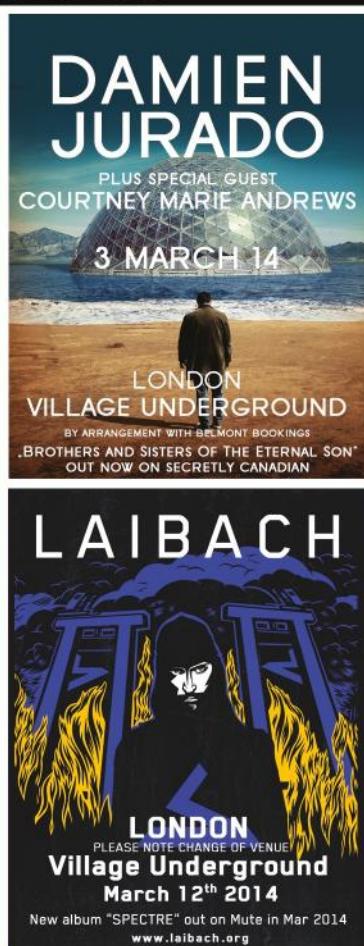
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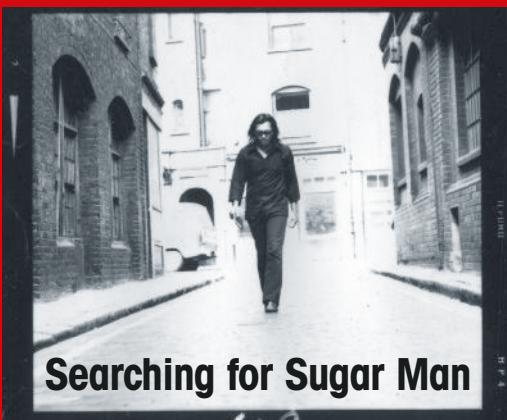
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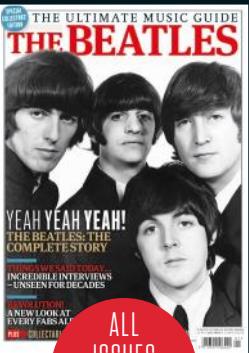
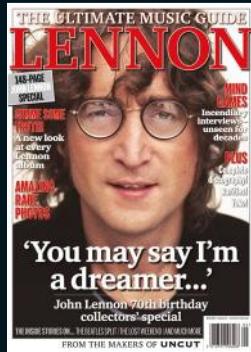
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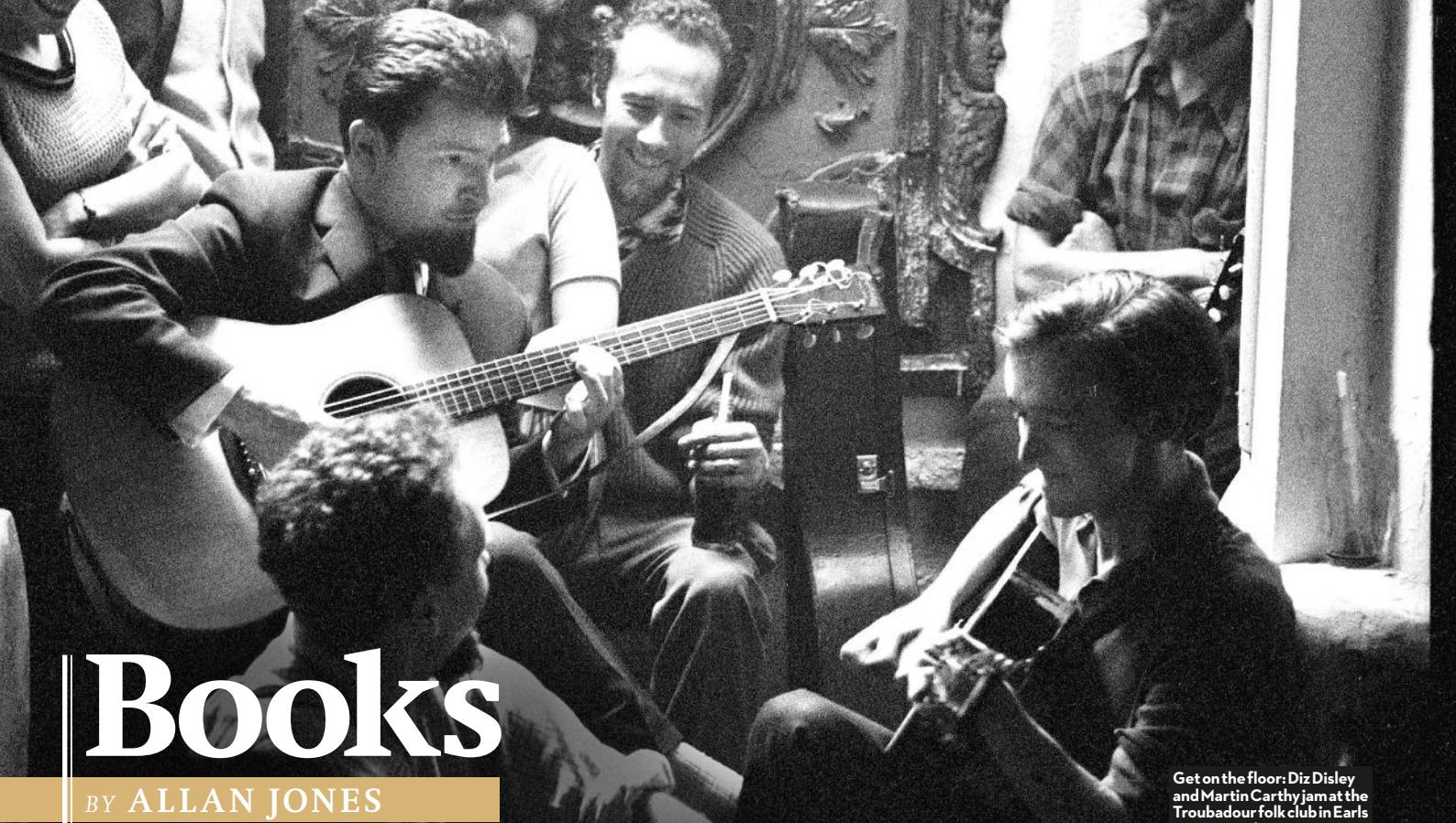
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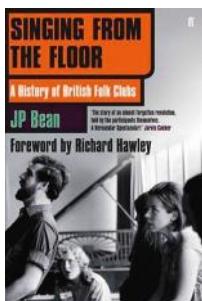
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Books

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Reviewed this month...

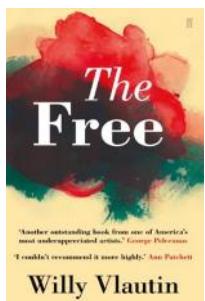


Singing From The Floor: A History Of British Folk Clubs

JP Bean

FABER

9/10



The Free
Willy Vlautin
FABER

8/10

JJP BEAN'S *Singing From The Floor* is a 400-page oral history of British folk clubs, perhaps not a subject that will unilaterally set hearts racing. Indeed, the wary reader might anticipate a somewhat earnest and possibly dour account of pipe-smoking bearded types in unappealing sweaters, upholders of a venerable tradition gathered in the dingy, cramped back rooms of pubs, thick with cigarette smoke, carpets sodden with spilled ale, no stage or sound system, just stout-voiced singers and songs about mole hunting, weasel trapping, working down the mines or in the shipyards, mills and factories of the grim north, the odd sea shanty thrown into the mix with a few rebel songs, the evening ending with a maudlin singalong, that sort of thing.

Bean acknowledges this staunch and unflinching stereotype, even as he is appalled by it and as a corrective eagerly reminds us of the formidable talents fostered on the folk circuit across nearly six decades, among whom the most widely known, familiar even to those with no participatory interest in the folk revival and the venues where it occurred, are Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, The Watersons, Martin Carthy and Dave Swarbrick, Shirley Collins, Davy Graham, Maddy Prior, Bert Jansch, John Renbourn, Billy Connolly, John Martyn, Christy Moore, Sandy Denny and Richard Thompson.

Bean's elected format – he prefers “printed-word documentary” to “oral history” – allows for anecdotes galore from these surviving folk scene principals, but many of the most colourful and evocative memories are supplied by names who will be less recognisable to the non-specialist, who in turn offer further introduction to performers who are not known at all outside the traditional folk scene and the circuit that supported it, some of whom you might feel genuinely sorry to have missed. Who, for instance, could possibly have resisted Seppy Broughton and his dancing dolls, as recalled by Jim Irvine of Tyneside's Marsden Rattlers, whose shows he used to open with a 15-minute set. “He was an old man, a gravedigger,” Irvine remembers. “He'd sit on a board and vibrate the board by thumping it with his hand and the dolls would dance. He got that popular,” Irvine adds ruefully, “we had to leave him because he was getting more attention than us.”

The book is especially fascinating about the first stirrings of the folk revival and the rapid spread of folk clubs in the '50s and early '60s and their connections to CND, the Workers' Music Association, various socialist societies and the Young Communist League, which led on several occasions to the clubs and the committees who ran them being investigated as subversives by the Special Branch and local police forces who suspected the clubs were hotbeds of radical fervour where revolution was being plotted. The first notable folk clubs appeared in London as early as the mid-'50s. By the end of the decade, there were hundreds in London alone and many hundreds more across the UK, in pubs mostly, but also in municipal assembly rooms, colleges, village halls, basements, even occasionally people's homes.

They were run by amateurs and no-one played them to make money. For many years even the most popular only ever had enough money to pay the artists they booked travelling expenses, which the performers tended to pocket, hitch-hiking to the clubs at a time before motorways, when getting anywhere in Britain involved taking what might euphemistically be called the scenic route. There are tales a-plenty, then, of penury and hardship, of sleeping on couches, floors, under tables and bridges, in doorways, even the most celebrated of the scene's performers often living like dossers. Dave Swarbrick recalls arriving with Martin Carthy for a booking in Manchester in the back of a vegetable

lorry and facing further ignominy when the organiser fined them £10 for being late. These people weren't motivated by money, fame or celebrity. What kept them going, caused them to endure, was their attachment to the folk scene as a community, a shared passion for the music – which survived much dogma and insularity, much of it inspired by the didactic example of cultural authoritarians like MacColl. For many of the book's contributors, the rare excitement of playing to packed rooms with little or no distance between performer and the people who'd come to see them has never been repeated. “It was magic, an astonishing moment,” recalls Martin Carthy, without overstatement.

► WILLY VLAUTIN HAS written no end of heart-breaking songs across 10 albums since 1996 with his band, Richmond Fontaine. On great records like *Post To Wire*, *The Fitzgerald*, *Thirteen Cities*, *We Used To Think The Freeway Sounded Like A River* and *The High Country*, Vlautin's songs have wrenchingly described people who have been driven to the dark margins of American life, where they lurk, lost and disconsolate. Nothing on these albums, however, quite prepares you for the greater sense of loss, estrangement and general sadness you'll find in his novels, which generally hum with hurt.

This is his fourth book and contains some of his best writing to date, even if it doesn't eventually have quite the devastating impact of 2010's award-winning *Lean On Pete*, by which even readers hardened to the kind of fiction in which Vlautin specialises – think also of Richard Ford, Denis Johnson, Raymond Carver – tended to be overwhelmed.

In *The Free*, brain-damaged Iraq War veteran Leroy Kervin's attempted suicide leaves him on life support in a hospital where he's cared for by a stoic nurse, Pauline Hawkins, and visited by Freddie McCall, the night orderly from the home where Leroy tried to kill himself. The diminished lives of Pauline and Freddie are evoked with a lack of sentiment that makes their separate stories all the more moving, but the sections in which Leroy fantasises about being on the run from a vigilante death squad called The Free in an America in which dissidents are hunted down and killed are perhaps less satisfying. The character of Pauline, by the way, has inspired a song named after her on the new Drive-By Truckers album (*English Oceans*, see review, p82) that deftly captures her raw sorrow.

Not Fade Away

Fondly remembered this month...

ANNA GORDY GAYE

Record executive, songwriter and muse

1922-2014

THE EXTREMES OF Marvin Gaye's relationship with Anna Gordy Gaye were mapped in song. Married in 1963, Gaye wrote "Stubborn Kind Of Fellow", "Pride & Joy" and "You're A Wonderful One" for his wife, who was 17 years his senior and the elder sister of Motown boss Berry Gordy.

By 1975, however, it was all over. Gordy filed for divorce, leading to an acrimonious legal wrangle that led to Gaye being forced to submit a portion of royalties from his next album for child support and Anna's upkeep. The resulting *Here, My Dear*, issued in 1978, included such bitter meditations as "You Can Leave, But It's Going To Cost You". Gordy was apparently so appalled by the record's candour that she threatened to sue for \$5 million, citing invasion of privacy.

The couple first met in 1959, when the 20-year-old Gaye began working as a session musician on Gordy's Anna label, co-founded with sister Gwen and Billy Davis. The company predated Berry's Tamla imprint by a year, with Anna using her prior experience as a record distributor to oversee her younger brother's first national success, Barrett Strong's "Money (That's What I Want)".

Anna also emerged as a capable songwriter, co-composing "Baby, I'm For Real" and "The



Gordy Gaye in New York City, June 1963

Bells" with Gaye, both of which were hits for R&B quartet The Originals. It was a creative union that extended to Gaye's landmark 1971 opus, *What's Going On*, on which she shares a credit for "God Is Love" and "Flyin' High (In The Friendly Sky)". The

couple reconciled in the early '80s. Berry Gordy, who described Anna as "the glamour girl of the family", called her a major inspiration, stating that she "backed me up on everything I tried to do and gave me the confidence to be what I wanted to be".

JOHNNY ALLEN

Motown/Stax arranger

1917-2014

THE DEFINING MOMENT of Johnny Allen's career was a Grammy Award for the classic "Theme From Shaft", which he shared with co-arranger Isaac Hayes. But his contribution to the development of American soul went far deeper. He started out in the '40s as a pianist and musical director at Detroit nightspot Club Congo, backing visiting stars like Billie Holiday. By 1959 he'd signed to Motown, writing arrangements for The Originals, The Temptations, The Supremes and Stevie Wonder, most notably the ecstatic horn section on "Uptight (Everything's Alright)". The late '60s saw him move to Stax, where he left his imprint on key recordings by The Staple Singers ("I'll Take You There"; "Respect Yourself") and Hayes (*Hot Buttered Soul; Black Moses*).

BUNNY RUGS

Third World vocalist

1948-2014

WILLIAM 'BUNNY RUGS' Clarke was already a veteran of the JA reggae scene by the time he became Third World's lead singer in '77. He began with Charlie Hackett & The Souvenirs in the mid-'60s, before joining Inner Circle and, after a brief time in New York, recording with Lee 'Scratch' Perry at his fabled Black Ark studio. Clarke cut sides as one half of Bunny & Ricky, but it was his return to the Big Apple that proved a turning point. Having seen Third World at the Bottom Line, he signed up for second LP '96° In The Shade and remained for the rest of his life. He's perhaps best

known for 1978's major international hit, "Now That We Found Love".

THE MIGHTY HANNIBAL

R&B singer, songwriter, producer

1939-2014

THE MIGHTY HANNIBAL'S signature anthem, "Hymn No 5", was inspired by a TV news item on drug-addicted soldiers in Vietnam. An R&B hit in '66, it marked the point where the Atlanta-born singer reinvented himself as the "father of

message music". Other socially conscious funk songs followed, including "The Truth Shall Make You Free", before his career faltered in the mid-'70s. "Hymn No 5" later became the basis of Elton John and Leon Russell's "There's No Tomorrow", from 2010's *The Union*.

SHIRLEY TEMPLE

Actress, singer, diplomat

1928-2014

ONE OF THE more curious aspects of Temple's life was her connection to the US grunge scene. Her youngest daughter Lori was once bassist with the Melvins, whose CV included 1991's *Bullhead*. Lori also dated the band's singer-guitarist Buzz Osborne, who recalled a visit to her mother's house. "She had a recording of her playing drums when she was a kid," he said of Temple Sr. "And she sounded like fucking Buddy Rich." **ROB HUGHES**



Shirley Temple and her daughter, Lori, meet The Beatles in San Francisco, 1964

Feedback...

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DRIVE-BY SHOOTING

It's inevitable that *Uncut* would rate Jason Isbell's latest as superior to the Drive-By Truckers' masterpiece *The Dirty South*, the mag always having been slow on the uptake where the Truckers are concerned. Back in 2001, when *Uncut* was chasing the coattails of that fake rock'n'roll photographer's model Ryan Adams, the Truckers' brilliant *Southern Rock Opera* album didn't even make the Top 60 best albums of the year. The next one, the great *Decoration Day* suffered the same fate. Anyone would think that during those years, the mag had taken offence at something the witty Mike Cooley may have said. What else could explain being apparently so slow on the draw when the real article shows its unapologetic face? *The Dirty South* should have muscled past all bar none but didn't crack the Top 20 of its year. Finally, the Truckers and Isbell are knocking on the door with acuity of vision that bit less sharp and so seemingly more palatable to those who're employed to appreciate these things.

Simon Turner, via email

PUNK'D...

Great to see the Ramones on the cover of last month's *Uncut* (March 2014). Back in the day I had far more time for the US bands than their British counterparts. A few additions that would have made your 50 Greatest American Punk Albums faultless include Jimmy Bell's *Still In Town* by the confusingly named 15.60.75 aka The Numbers Band. David Thomas called it "one of the great moments of our culture", and the "the only good album ever recorded by anyone". Sort of Television doing the blues, with some great Stooges sax from Terry Hynde (Chrissie's brother). Other contenders include George Brigman's *Jungle Rot* (Iggy meets The Cramps, with a Groundhogs obsession), and Debris' loopy *Static Disposal*, both of which emerged in early '76. And surely Destroy All Monsters' *Bored* is worth a mention, especially as their numbers were swelled by both The Stooges' Ron Asheton and Michael Davis from the MC5. And what happened to The Gun Club, guys, c'mon?

Nick Watt, via email



MISSING IN ACTION

I generally despair when seeing your hallowed pages padded by yet another list, but your 50 Greatest American Punk Albums is particularly poor. The Dictators' *Go Girl Crazy!* is "rarely accorded iconic status" because it is a joke record that does not repay repeated listening, and the joke was mainly perpetuated by the *NME* due to Handsome Dick Manatoba's alarming similarity at the time to Charles Shaar Murray.

The Runaways is not a punk album. It's a turgid rock album that I recall gleefully swapping for the first Blondie album when it came out. The Blondie album is worth the entrance fee for "Rip Her To Shreds" alone, before you even take into account tracks such as "X Offender".

Parallel Lines is not a punk album; period. It is a very good pop album. And I can only assume that the New York Dolls were left off the list to attract indignant letters like this?

Graham Plant, Wadhurst, East Sussex

As was made clear in the introduction to the feature, Graham, the albums in our Top 50 were drawn specifically from the period 1975-1983, which made the Dolls, as wonderful as they were, ineligible. - Allan

FOR THE LOVE OF PETE

Of course the world knows all about Pete Seeger's compassion for and commitment to humanitarian work but this is a personal story which reflects the genuine warmth of the man. Like every other banjo player I learned from Pete's book, *The 5-String Banjo Instructor*, which is not only a how-to guide but also a collection of vignettes and banjo lore that reads as if the great man is sitting across from you giving gentle encouragement and sage advice.

Some years ago when Pete turned 90, I wrote to him, snail-mail, care of "Beacon, New York" to wish him a happy birthday and to ask, if he



Published by the author

Beacon, N.Y.

could find the time and he wasn't too busy, would he please sign my copy. I told him how useful it had been to me for more than 30 years and thanked him for his inspiration. I then said I'd pay the postage both ways and provide the envelopes; and I forgot all about it.

Until two weeks later when the postman pushed a large packet through my letter box. Pete had sent me a hand-signed, brand-new, pristine copy of his book. He even added one of those banjo doodles that I'm told he did if he liked you. I never met him and it's only through the grace of the US Postal Service that my letter got to him, but I know he was a top, top man. He's reunited with Toshi now; RIP, Pete.

Paul Johnson, via email

STAIRWAY TO HELL

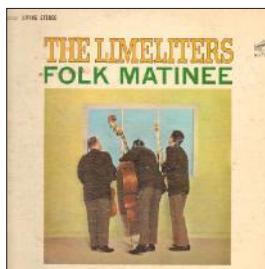
Steve Shaw (Feedback, Take 202) really is full of it. He wants Robert Plant to go on a world tour wheezing out "Stairway To Heaven" (an octave lower, no doubt) every night for a year so he can be personally thanked for making Led Zep what they were? Good grief. I adore Mr Plant's reinterpreted versions of old numbers, his healthy attitude towards that whole Golden God period and the clever path he's taken in the past decade. Perhaps Mr Shaw could Google 'Led Zep tribute band' and spirit himself off



MY LIFE IN MUSIC

Simone Felice

The rogue Felice Brother on the Lord Byrons of the gas stations, and the guitarist who makes him “want to check into a mental hospital...”



A song by the Hudson River's patron saint

Pete Seeger

Turn! Turn! Turn! 1962

Everything he turned his hand to, every song he sang and adapted, it was for the people. Obviously The Byrds' cover of “Turn...” is amazing, but I came to love his version – it's so raw and just real, like he was. He was really the patron saint of the Hudson River and I know his influence extends all over the world. He will be sorely missed but he's always with us in every song we sing.



A song that finds beauty in the grime

The Kinks

Waterloo Sunset 1967

I've been through Waterloo Station many times and the last word that would come to mind is paradise [laughs] – but that's the mark of a great song, when you can transcend the drudgery and grime of life and make it into something holy. It's like when you're holding the hand of that special one, as long as you can see the sunset, then that is paradise, no matter what's happening in your life.



A song that's made me cry

Joni Mitchell

Little Green 1971

This was an important healing force for me as a child – *Blue* was my mother's favourite record when we were going through a tough time in the late '70s. Later I remember it coming on the stereo with one of my best buddies when we were touring Norway. It was dark and snowing, and it dumbfounded us. We had to pull over the car and we were both openly weeping on this Norwegian highway.



A great song by an evil band

Dire Straits

Romeo And Juliet 1980

It's like that perfect, weird, cosmic rock alignment where an unquestionably evil band – you know, some of those drum breaks and Knopfler's guitar lines make me want to check into a mental hospital – and honest, gritty poetry collide. And it's just perfect, one of my favourite all-time songs ever. You can hear the Dylan influence, but he does his own skanky thing with it. It's magical for sure.

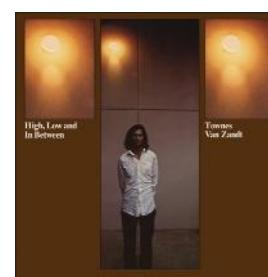


A song that's like a time machine

Big Star

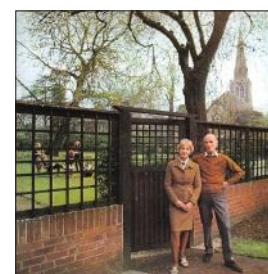
Thirteen 1972

Oh wow... The recording, the arrangement, the harmonies... everything is just mind-blowing. But I think, most of all, it's the distillation of the lyric – we are all 13 when we close our eyes and listen to that song, it's like we're all awkwardly and painfully in love. It's like a time machine. It's your first foray into that devastating, magical journey that's called love and it's just a masterpiece.



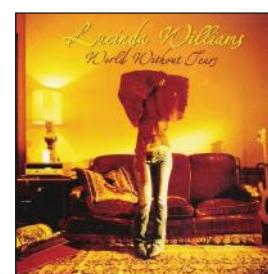
A perfect song
Townes Van Zandt
To Live Is To Fly 1972

When the Felice Brothers first started writing, this song really set the bar for us. Some of these songwriters are like lighthouses on the shore, you know, you're just constantly crashing your frigate against the rocks even trying to get to the bottom of the stairs, trying to get to that lighthouse. I can't think of a more perfectly written song. To me Townes transcends country – he's a poet. And at the end of the day, that's what moves me the most about songwriting, the poetry.



A mystical song
Fairport Convention
Who Knows Where
The Time Goes 1969

To me, this is crippling in its beauty. Isn't Sandy Denny a tragic heroine, isn't she an unsung songstress of the haunted beyond? She's like a ghost to me, every time I listen to her she's one of those artists that's like a ghost in the room. She's beyond a singer, there's something mystical about everything she turns her hand to. It's that same kind of vulnerability that Joni Mitchell also has... she lets you in, into that locked room.



My favourite love song
Lucinda Williams
Fruits Of My Labor 2003

This is quite possibly my favourite love song of all time. Every single line is devastating. The melody... the only word I can think of is transcendent. Songwriters like Lucinda Williams, it's as if they're writing high poetry on the same plain as Yeats and Shelley, but they don't know it. They're scribbling it on a napkin in a parking lot of a gas station, they're Lord Byron but they don't know it... It all collides in that cosmic way. It elevates the poetry on the page.

Simone Felice's new album, *Strangers*, is released March 24 on Team Love Records.



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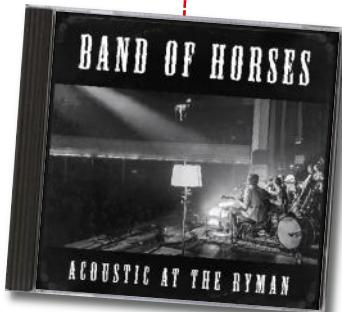
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