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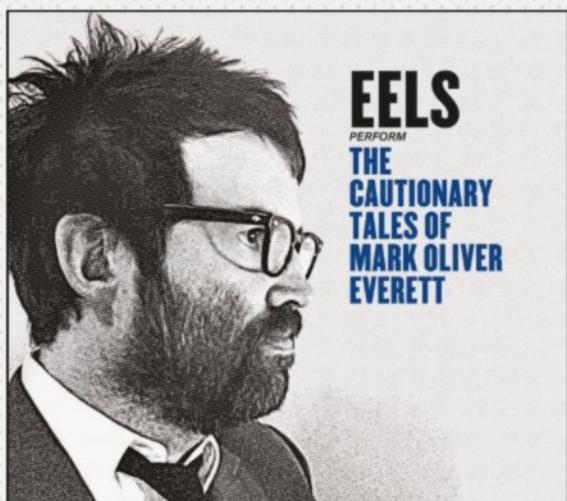
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magazine

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Chris Robinson

Are we rolling?



THE FEATURE ON William Burroughs in this month's issue by John Robinson made me think of some of the bands who took their names from Burroughs' books, most famously The Soft Machine, Steely Dan, and Grant Hart's Nova Mob. There was also Thin White Rope, a band from Davis, CA, named by a friend after the term used by Burroughs for male ejaculation in *Naked Lunch*. Largely forgotten now, it seems, TWR's 1987 LP, *Moonhead*, caused quite a stir at *Melody Maker*. We were so taken by them we ended up putting them on the cover a couple of years later, recklessly ignoring the fact that at the time no-one outside the office had even heard them.

Moonhead arrived unheralded, from a dark, uncharted place, somewhere off the map. The twin guitars of Guy Kyser and Roger Kunkel were torrential, terrifying, full of feedback, fury and dread, Kyser's voice on disturbing songs like "Wire Animals", "Wet Heart", "Take It Home", and "Crawl Piss Freeze" sounding like the dismal wailing of something not quite human from *The Hills Have Eyes*.

Not long after it came out, I called Kyser at Radio WDR in Davis. I don't know if Kyser was working at the station at the time, but I later found out he'd been an aspiring DJ before he started making music with The Lazy Boys, a local Saturday night bar band inspired by The Stooges and Captain Beefheart and one of the evolutionary distractions that preceded the then-current TWR lineup. The connection when I called him was bad and there was a delay on the line that meant we ended up either listening to each other's silences or shouting at each other simultaneously. One way or another, it was difficult to make much sense of the

conversation or the scribbled notes I'd made of what Kyser had to say, which wasn't a great deal to begin with. So I found out a little about not very much, except that "Crawl Piss Freeze" had been written about a friend diagnosed with cancer of the colon and given poor odds on pulling through. When I finally meet Kyser and Roger Kunkel in the bar of a west London hotel, in April 1988, the day after TWR's UK debut at a pub in Finsbury Park, where they bizarrely open for John Cooper Clarke, I ask after the girl for whom "Crawl Piss Freeze" had been written. "It was rough," Kyser says, rolling a cigarette, threads of tobacco falling through his fingers, into a pool of beer on the table in front of him. "But she didn't die. She'll just," he adds grimly, "have to shit in a bag for the rest of her life."

"I was so angry and depressed when I wrote that song," he goes on, and I feel like I'm teasing something from him he doesn't really want to talk about. "It was because Reagan had just been admitted to hospital with the same complaint. And of course everyone was making this big fuss. It was a real big deal. But she gets it and she's just another poor sucker and nobody really cares."

TWR have just put out a new LP, *In The Spanish Cave*. How does he think their music has developed? "Things have lightened up," Kyser says. "*Moonhead* barely had a grip on reality."

"A lot of *Moonhead* came across as gut-wrenching, dreadful, intense music," Kunkel adds. "But we've always wanted to play real good country swing. Typically, when it comes to it, we back off. But the new LP, the first guitar thing you hear is a direct steal from Marty Robbins."

I now recall Kyser telling me he liked Marty Robbins because in his songs everybody dies.

"That's right," Kyser says. "His songs always start with him singing, 'I'll tell you how he met his fateful end...' It's hysterical. Like Utah Carroll, riding off a cliff. A lot of our own stuff is just as funny." I wasn't so sure. Taking as an example, I mention the rather frightening "Wand" from *In The Spanish Cave*. It's about genetic mutation, isn't it?

"No," Kyser says. "It's OK" is about genetic mutation." So what's "Wand" about? "That's a real angry, scary song," Kyser says. "Wand" starts off with me talking about my guitar. Then it goes into this fantasy about all the things my guitar is going to do to change the world and in the end I realise my guitar is going to do about as much to change the world as my dick."

Enjoy the issue.

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THIS MONTH'S REVELATIONS FROM THE WORLD OF UNCUT
Featuring THE ROCKETS | RAYMOND PETTIBON | RYLEY WALKER

Scott Asheton, Iggy Pop
and James Williamson of
The Stooges perform live
a month before they split
at Bimbo's 365 Club in San
Francisco, California,
January 12, 1974





RAW POWER

I got a rewrite!

JAMES WILLIAMSON
goes back to work
on the Great Lost
STOOGES album

WHEN IGGY & The Stooges split in February 1974, a set of stunning new songs for a follow-up to *Raw Power* was left unrecorded. But spurred on by a year off for the modern incarnation of The Stooges, James Williamson has now recruited a host of famous fans, including Mark Lanegan, Jello Biafra and Ariel Pink, along with the current live Stooges band, to help him recreate this 'lost' album, written by him and Iggy Pop throughout 1973.

"We did *Raw Power*, and we still had a record contract with CBS for a second album," explains Williamson. "We were out touring the US like crazy, generating new material for what would have been a second album on CBS, but later on in the tour, they decided to not pick up our option, so those songs just kind of laid there. We were very prolific, and we were always moving on from the last thing – we didn't even play *Raw Power* live very much."

"Even post-*Raw Power*, all the bands that imitated us had not come around yet. So had we released it back in those days it would have been another failure. And it would have been another legendary album, because the songs are so good, and we would have sounded just like we sound on *Raw Power*. But it wasn't to be. The times were different – they were tying yellow ribbons around the old oak tree back then."

Live or rehearsal versions of these 'lost' songs,



including "I Got A Right", "Heavy Liquid", "Gimme Some Skin" and "Wild Love", have been immortalised over the years on various bootlegs, including *The Detroit Tapes* and *Metallic KO*, usually in a caustic, no-fidelity fashion.

"The songs are great, they hold up no matter what condition they're in," explains Williamson, "but it's a little bit painful to listen to some of them."

"Some were just ideas we were working on on the road, they weren't really completed, and so I figured, I've got the time this year, I'm just going to do it. It's been really encouraging how many

"The songs are great, but the old versions are a bit painful to listen to"

JAMES WILLIAMSON

TANYA ALEXIS; ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

JAMES WILLIAMSON OPEN UP AND CAROLYN WONDERLAND AND BLEED

which are set to be released as a double A-side for Record Store Day, and The BellRays' Lisa Kekaula is singing "I Got A Right" and "Heavy Liquid" for the June follow-up.

The full album, *Re-Licked*, currently being tracked with live Stooges Mike Watt, Toby Dammit and *Fun House* saxophonist Steve Mackay, is expected in the autumn, with more guest vocalists to be announced in due course. One James Osterberg is conspicuous by his absence, though.

"I discussed doing these with Iggy," explains the guitarist. "We decided there'd be no way we could do them as The Stooges and have it not be compared to the old Stooges – though I guess it's the other way around, 'cause we were new in those days and now we're old. So we opted to do a new record [2012's *Ready To Die*].

"Why don't I do it with Iggy now? I felt like this was my project, I didn't feel like he was particularly thrilled about jumping back into the

singers have come forward and wanted to sing on it."

So far, Jello Biafra has demanded that he take on "Head On The Curve", Ariel Pink is tackling "She Creatures Of The Hollywood Hills" and Mark Lanegan and Alison Mosshart are set to duet on "Wild Love". "Can you imagine the two of them?" says Williamson. "It's just gonna be, 'Wow!' Ariel Pink may be the only guy that could pull off 'She Creatures...' – you have to be so crazed to make that song work, and he did. You'll be amazed."

Soulful Austin singer Carolyn Wonderland has already recorded her parts on "Open Up And Bleed" ("one of the best songs I've ever been a part of writing," according to Williamson) and "Gimme Some Skin",

studio. Now I think he's hearing that it sounds pretty damn good, so hey, if he wants to sing on one or two of them I'd be thrilled to death to have him do it. So it's kind of open-ended at this point, but frankly I don't think he will."

It seems increasingly unlikely – a few days after *Uncut* spoke to Williamson, Pop's spokesperson told *Rolling Stone*: "Iggy was never given an opportunity to participate on the album. He found out about the project in December of 2013 after it was rejected by a Chicago label..."

After *Re-Licked* is released, the plan is for Williamson to reunite with Pop and the rest of The Stooges in 2015. "That's the plan as of today, but everything at our age is subject to change without notice, you know? We'll see what happens."

TOMPINNOCK

James Williamson & Carolyn Wonderland's "Open Up & Bleed"/"Gimme Some Skin" will be available at independent record stores on Record Store Day, April 19



JUST AS WE were finishing this issue of *Uncut*, Williamson's parting words took on an additional poignancy when the news arrived that Scott Asheton, fearsomely brutal drummer of The Stooges, had died. Asheton, 64, died on March 15 from an unspecified illness. Besides Iggy, Scott 'Rock Action' Asheton was the most resilient and longest-serving Stooge, adding his often thuggish beats to every Stooges record, from their 1969 debut, right up to 2012's *Ready To Die*.

"Scott was a great artist," Iggy Pop, now the last surviving original member, wrote on Facebook. "I have never heard anyone play the drums with more meaning than Scott. He was like my brother. He and Ron have left a huge legacy to the world."

UNCUT AT THE GREAT ESCAPE

THE HOLD STEADY top our bill for May's festival in Brighton

THE LINEUP FOR *Uncut's* residency at this year's Great Escape festival is nearly complete now, and this month we're proud to announce that our old friends The Hold Steady will be one of our stage's headliners, alongside the fine new Australian singer-songwriter Courtney Barnett.

They'll be joined at the fest, between May 8 and 10, by a strong lineup of fresh talent that features Arc Iris, the new project from Jocie Adams, formerly of The Low

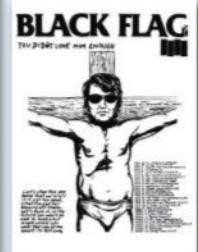
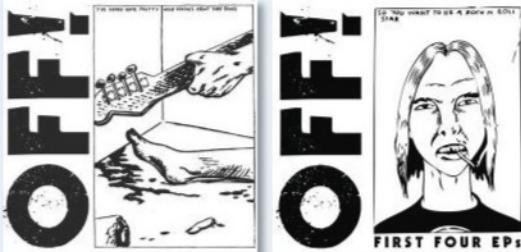
Anthem; Weller-endorsed torchbearers of Canterbury psych, Syd Arthur; The Rails (ostensibly a next-generation Richard & Linda Thompson); from Sweden, the haunting Alice Boman; and a rumbustious new Wisconsin band, PHOX, who've been recording in Justin Vernon's studio. We're also thrilled to host Ethan Johns again, after his great work for us at last year's End Of The Road festival.

Keep an eye on www.uncut.co.uk: we'll announce the last



few names for the bill any day now. In the meantime, you can buy three-day tickets for the whole festival for just £54: visit www.mamacolive.com/thegreatescape.





BACK ON IT

The Fine Art Of Hardcore

Off! the wall! American punk's premier artist, RAYMOND PETTIBON, returns to the record sleeve. "A crazed kook," says old Black Flag mate Keith Morris...

RAYMOND PETTIBON IS a visual artist whose career has come full circle. After starting out producing the striking black and white imagery used by Black Flag (the Californian punk band founded by his brother, Greg Ginn), Pettibon has become a gallery artist whose work commands vast sums. Now, for the first time since the 1980s, his art is again appearing regularly on record covers.

"I never really meant to stop doing them, it just turned out that way," says Ray, down the line from his West Coast studio. "I'll do them for anyone, literally. I don't get paid for it or anything – but it's a good form."

The recent resurgence of Pettibon's work on records (besides Black Flag, his most famous job was for Sonic Youth's *Goo*) is chiefly down to the forming of OFF!, the superbly laconic band fronted by Keith Morris – singer with the original and most joyful incarnation of Black Flag. Morris sang on their 1978 debut EP, "Nervous Breakdown". Pettibon drew the cover art.

"Raymond comes from [cultural references like] Batman, Superman, [Dodgers pitcher] Sandy Koufax... so a lot of his imagery comes from those things," says Morris. "Granted, some of his stuff can be a little bit twisted – when his brother pissed him off, every Black Flag cover was penises. He's pretty punk rock."

Pettibon has been sufficiently impressed

with OFF! to allow them to pick through his archive. "They can use anything that's not been used before," he says. It's a generous offer, but Morris suggests finding unused Pettibon work isn't easy, given his many publications and the work's extensive use on flyers and record covers. "It's amazing, but it's been dipped into," he says. "I don't know if you've eaten Buffalo wings, but it's like that, when you're trying for half an hour to get some piece of... tendon." Nonetheless, OFF! releases so far have featured top-quality late-'70s/early 1980s Pettibon images. One cover is of Neil Young, while new album *Wasted Years* bears a picture of a stoned surfer dude.

They're an unlikely pairing – OFF! a super-fast band, fronted by the garrulous Morris; Pettibon a profoundly wry and considered speaker – but their friendship has endured. "Raymond is a superfreak. A crazed kook. A sweetheart," says Morris. "We were party buddies." Other ties the pair once had have foundered, however. Since appearing with FLAG (a band playing Black Flag material, comprising former members), Morris has had legal tussles with Greg Ginn. After a falling-out stemming from unauthorised use of his work by Black Flag, Raymond has not spoken to his brother for nearly 30 years.

"We drank, Greg did his weed," says Raymond. "I haven't talked to him

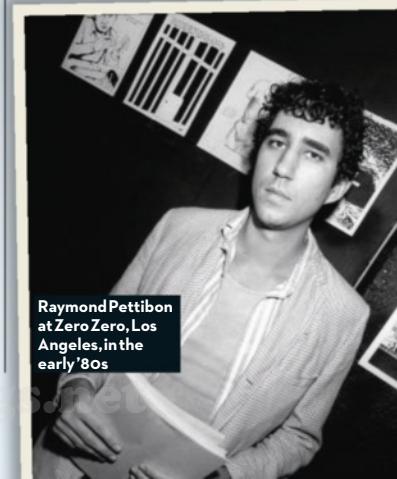
since... '86, '87. I finally figured [it] out, it's really not his fault – it's paranoid megalomania, and a certain percentage of the population will get it, especially when you're doing that much weed and acid."

With the archives nearly bare, Morris is excited that future OFF! releases will feature new Pettibon art. "It's gonna blow minds," he enthuses about the projected collaboration. Pettibon's comment is more characteristically understated.

"I don't remember that conversation," he says. "But why not? I mean, I think I can recreate the same style. I never really learned so much to draw anyway..."

JOHN ROBINSON

OFF!'s *Wasted Years* is out on April 7 on Vice



Raymond Pettibon at ZeroZero, Los Angeles, in the early '80s

A QUICK ONE

► In the unusual absence of a new **Will Oldham** album this month, perhaps sir or madam would like to try "Bonnie Billy", a new perfume from Sanae Intoxicants inspired by the maverick bard? Reminiscent of "a warm, Egyptian jasmine, tobacco night," they say. "It's what he likes his crotches to smell like," adds Oldham's label, Drag City...

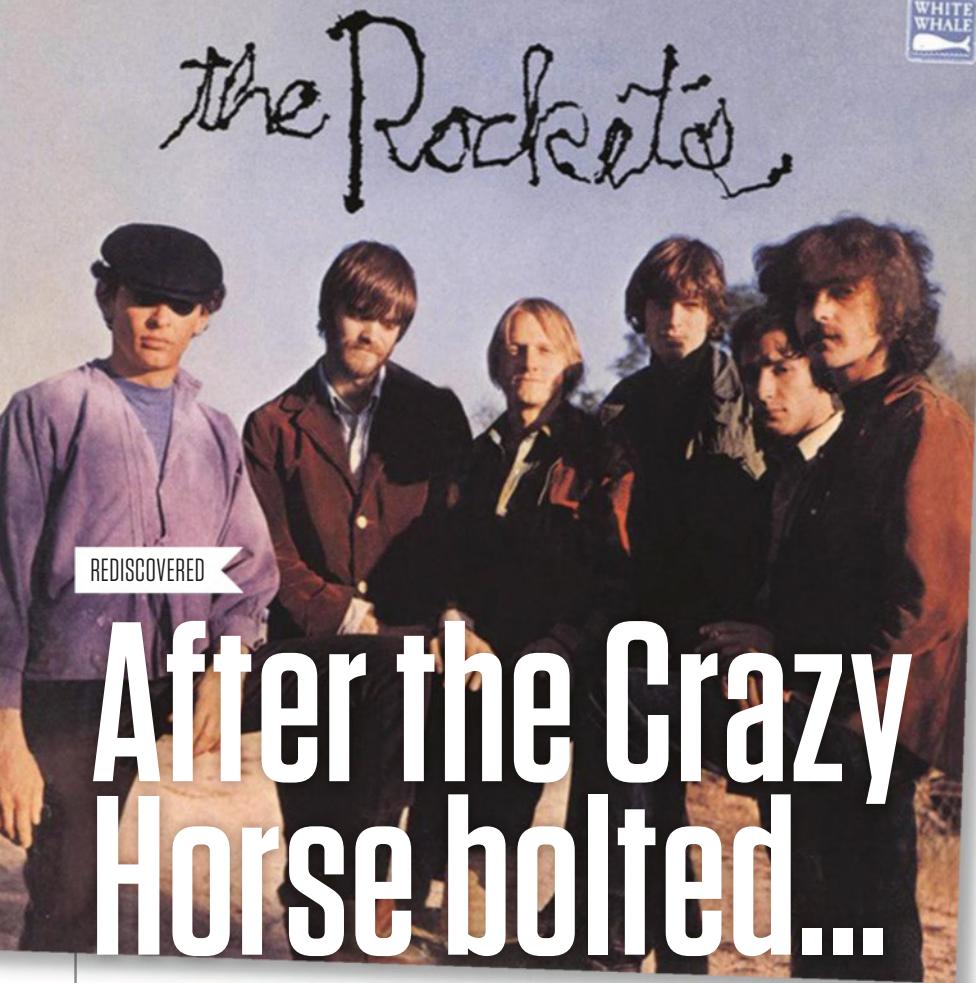
► And in other unlikely product news, **Keith Richards'** next release will be a children's book. *Gus & Me: The Story Of My Granddad And My First Guitar*, illustrated by Richards' daughter Theodora, is published on September 9.

► **Bob Dylan**, meanwhile, has been out and about, dropping in to an LA gym to watch boxer Manny Pacquiao spar. "Dylan posed for photos with anyone that asked and signed autographs," said Pacquiao's spokesperson, Fred Sternburg.

"Some of the other fighters took selfies with him. He accommodated everybody and smiled the whole time. But, my God, it was Bob Dylan."

► Returning '80s heroes dept. **Seven Dials**, **Roddy Frame**'s first album since 2006, will be released on May 5. And **Morrissey**'s *World Peace Is None Of Your Business* is due late June. The possibility of a strong Cliff Richard influence is yet to be confirmed.

► Visit www.uncut.co.uk for all the latest news



REDISCOVERED

After the Crazy Horse bolted...

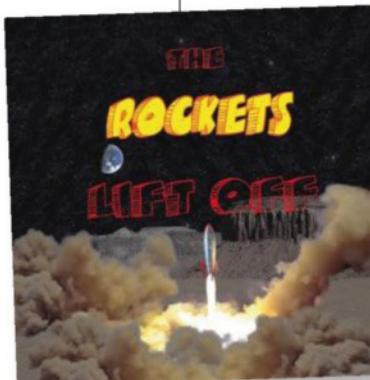
Whatever happened to the rest of the band stolen by Neil Young? GEORGE WHITSELL reconvenes THE ROCKETS

With any justice, 1968 should've been George Whitsell's year. His band, The Rockets, had just released their debut LP and were fast becoming cult heroes in LA. "They were calling us the 'American Rolling Stones,'" the guitarist recalls. "The sound was so big and raw, just smokin'. Everybody who saw us couldn't step out of the way of it."

By the summer, The Rockets – Whitsell and brother Leon, violinist Bobby Notkoff, bassist Billy Talbot, drummer Ralph Molina and singer-guitarist Danny Whitten – had secured a regular spot at The Pinnacle, later known as the Shrine Auditorium: "In August we got some gigs at the Whisky A Go Go and that's when Neil Young jumped onstage and jammed with us. The energy was just unbelievable."

Whitsell didn't know it then, but Young's arrival signalled the end. Within weeks he was jamming with Whitten, Talbot and Molina in Topanga Canyon, before whisking the trio into the studio to record *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere* the following spring.

Young rechristened them Crazy Horse and promptly took them out on tour. "We'd already started recording a second Rockets album," explains Whitsell, who was content to cool his heels in the interim, "and the word I'd gotten from Billy, Ralph and Danny was that



Neil was going to bring them back and help us complete it."

Whitsell quickly realised it wasn't going to happen. Whitten had sunk deeper into heroin and "could barely tune his guitar" during The Rockets' first rehearsal back. It was also apparent that Young wasn't going to stick around to produce, as Whitsell had hoped: "I was angry at Neil for taking my band, or what I considered my band, because I'd helped them along so much."

The guitarist had first met them in the early '60s, when Whitten and the others were trading as Danny And The Memories. Reconvening later at Talbot's house on Laurel Canyon Boulevard, soon nicknamed Rockets HQ, the six-piece would drop acid and lay waste to roaring blues jams for hours at a time. "Leon played the sitar, sitting on one note as a drone, the others would keep it really simple and Bobby and I would play leads over the top. My thing was to get as high as we could, so we'd be experimenting as much as possible onstage."

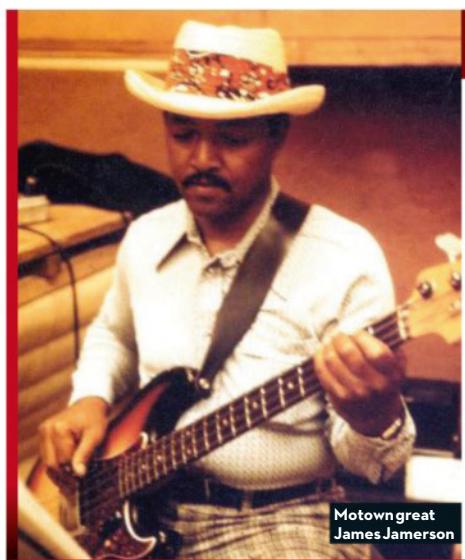
Still feeling aggrieved, Whitsell later cropped up on three of Young's solo albums, including *On The Beach*, adding guitar to "Vampire Blues". "I got a gold record for playing on that song, which made my mother happy," offers Whitsell. "So I couldn't be mad at Neil for much longer."

In 1972 he replaced the increasingly strung-out Whitten in Crazy Horse, taking over as frontman for second LP, *Loose*. But he soon followed brother Leon back to San Francisco. Whitsell has continued to write, produce and record over the years, but that 'lost' Rockets album never stopped gnawing away.

Now he's finally finished it. *Lift Off* sees him reunite with Notkoff in a new version of The Rockets. Included are two unheard Whitten songs, "Nobody" and "Share", originally recorded shortly before he died of an overdose in November '72. "I've kept in touch with Bobby and went out to visit him in Santa Fe," Whitsell explains. "We started to jam those songs and it sounded just like The Rockets. So we jumped on it."

Validation arrived when the band began gigging last year: "It was phenomenal, the same feeling I had back in the '60s when we played those Pinnacle shows. In my heart I will always be a Rocket. In fact, people still call me the Rocket Man."

ROB HUGHES



Motown great
James Jamerson

AND ON BASS... JAMES JAMERSON

UNCUT'S GUIDE TO ROCK'S GREATEST SESSION PLAYERS

► Regarded as one of the most influential bass players in pop, James Jamerson (1936-83) played on 95 per cent of Motown recordings between 1962-68 – including over 30 No 1 hits. Born in South Carolina, he moved to Detroit in his teens and was one of core Motown studio group, The Funk Brothers, who came from a jazz background. Post-Motown work included Hues Corporation's "Rock The Boat" and the 1975 Robert Palmer LP, *Pressure Drop*. Jamerson was posthumously inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 2000.



KEY SESSIONS: Marvin Gaye's "I Heard It Through The Grapevine", The Temptations' "Papa Was A Rollin' Stone", Martha & The Vandellas' "Dancing In The Street", The Four Tops' "Reach Out I'll Be There", The Supremes' "You Can't Hurry Love", Edwin Starr's "War", The Marvelettes' "Please Mr Postman", Mary Wells' "My Guy", The Miracles' "Going To A Go-Go", Diana Ross' "Ain't No Mountain High Enough", Smokey Robinson & The Miracles' "Tears Of A Clown" and Stevie Wonder's "I Was Made To Love Her". PHIL KING

ON THE STEREO THIS MONTH...

FENNESZ

Bécs EDITIONS MEGO

A masterpiece from the radical Austrian guitarist. Strongly recommended to My Bloody Valentine fans looking for a new challenge.

WATTER

This World TEMPORARY RESIDENCE

As the Slint boxset arrives, the band's most enigmatic member, Britt Walford, resurfaces. Solemn, cinematic post-rock proliferates.

SHARON VAN ETEN

Are We There JAGJAGUWAR

At once intimate and grandiose, SVE's (right) fourth consummate album consolidates her position as a kind of distaff Matt Berninger.



WOODEN WAND

Farmer's Corner FIRE

The prolific, eclectic singer-songwriter files his best set in a while, abetted by a crack backup team, including guitarist William Tyler.

IGGY POP WITH NICK CAVE

(FEATURING THURSTON MOORE)

Nobody's City GLITTERHOUSE

Exuberant highlight from forthcoming Jeffrey Lee Pierce tribute comp *Axels & Sockets*, also featuring Debbie Harry, Mark Lanegan and Primal Scream.

DYLAN SHEARER

Garagearray CASTLEFACE/EMPTY CELLAR

From the Bay Area garage rock scene, a substantially woozier and more wistful proposition, recalling early Robert Wyatt and other English psych curios.

THE HORRORS

Luminous XL

A trip back up on the catwalk for Faris Badwan and co, as they expand on the Simple Minds vibes of 2011's *Skying*.

GRACE JONES

Nightclubbing: Deluxe Edition ISLAND

The best of Jones' decadently funky Compass Point classics, remastered and expanded: rarely has a reissue been so suited to the 'deluxe' tag.

LEE BAINS III & THE GLORY FIRES

Dereconstructed SUBPOP

Broadly unreconstructed, to be more accurate: a blazing new Southern rock band from Birmingham, Alabama.

ROBERT ASHLEY

Private Parts LOVELY MUSIC

In a month of awful bereavements, this hypnotic 1978 album by the late avant composer has become an office favourite.

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

I'M NEW HERE



Walker:
weird tunings,
dissonant
sounds

Ryley Walker

Recommended this month: a phantasmagorical reincarnation of Bert Jansch. It don't bother him!

LISTENING TO RYLEY Walker's debut single, "The West Wind", you might find yourself doing a double take. It doesn't sound like 2014, with its cascading guitars and gnawed strings. There are heavy echoes of Bert Jansch, but they're superficial, because, while Walker touches base with psych-folk, he's a forward-looking musician; an experimental player caught in the slipstream of traditional music.

"I was always attracted to traditional English and Scottish music," says Walker, 24. "It's so beautiful. I try and make it work into my musical line. I come with a lot of respect for it, and I always try to take it to the future with me."

Now based in Chicago, Walker was born in Rockford, Illinois, on the border with Wisconsin. He started out playing in "crappy garage and punk bands" when he was 13, before graduating to jazz. "I went to university to play jazz music, basically. I got really into the free jazz stuff. Things like Derek Bailey and Sonny Sharrock, Pharoah Sanders – super-weird, harsh jazz music. I played with a lot of different units around town. Throughout that time I was always doing finger-style guitar at home. But I really started cracking at it in the last four or five years, and it majored into something that I do all the time."

Walker's forthcoming album, *All Kinds Of You*, is not his first release. There have been numerous cassettes, CD-Rs and the odd private press record, while an enterprising promoter issued a free download of a 2013 show at Galerie Rademann, Schwarzenberg. And there was a guitar duets album

with Walker's friend and hero, Daniel Bachmann, on the cassette label Plustapes.

"But this is the first full-length record under my name. I dig it. I'm really proud of it. I recorded it this time last year and I'm all ready to work on

another one. I have another dozen songs written and a fantastic backing band that's ready to roll."

Walker resists the American Primitive label, despite having moved through a period where his playing was influenced by John Fahey. Now everything is informed by jazz. "My band is usually composed of heavy-heavy jazz guys. They bring a real sonic element that just puts it over the edge. Rather than them doing a 1-2-3-4 standard skiffle folk song they keep stretching it out. Every time I play live it's a new song, totally informed by weird chord shapes, really weird tunings on my guitar, dissonant sounds."

Walker's own career received an unlikely boost two years ago when he was knocked from his bicycle by a car. He suffered bleeding on the brain, had to relearn how to walk, and was left deaf in one ear. "But when I came out of the hospital I was like, 'I'm not going to let some drunk asshole stop me, I just want to play harder and get better.'

I have one good ear, so it makes me listen twice as hard. It was strangely encouraging. But I don't recommend it!"

ALASTAIR MCKAY

All Kinds Of You is released by Tompkins Square on April 15

I'M YOUR FAN

"Ryley has a really beautiful, liquid, murmuring touch, not as aggressive as Bert Jansch.

I also love the dark sound of the band, completely in its own world, hypnotic and away from the usual folky trappings"

Bernard Butler



I have one good ear, so it makes me listen twice as hard. It was strangely encouraging. But I don't recommend it!"

ALASTAIR MCKAY

All Kinds Of You is released by Tompkins Square on April 15

WorldMags.net

KEEP THE FIRE BURNING

Your guide to this month's free CD

1 THE MEN Another Night

An apt kick-off for this month's CD, accompanying as it does a Bruce Springsteen cover story. On their fifth LP, *Tomorrow's Hits*, Brooklyn's constantly evolving, consistently Google-unfriendly Men seem to have morphed into a raucous, brassy new E Street Band: more ragged, perhaps, but every bit as passionate and invigorating.



2 HURRAY FOR THE RIFF RAFF

The Body Electric

Small Town Heroes, by Alynda Lee Segarra and her New Orleans collective, is one of the month's best new albums (see review p68), not least because of this outstanding song: an aesthetically sensitive, politically radical update on the long and often misogynous folk tradition of murder ballads.

3 AFGHAN WHIGS Algiers

"I think I'm giving people advice," a revitalised Greg Dulli told *Uncut* last month. "I'm also letting women know what men think." So it is on this swaggering and yet somewhat fraught selection from the Whigs' long-awaited comeback, *Do To The Beast*. There are arch flamenco and Spaghetti Western flourishes to "Algiers", and the never-knownly undramatic Dulli seems to be vocally channelling Bowie, too.

4 JOAN AS POLICE WOMAN Holy City

Some neat old soul homages are out

this month, notably from Kelis and, here, Joan Wasser, whose intimate songcraft has broadened on *The Classic*. Take "Holy City", an exhilarating meditation on the Wailing Wall that also features slippery Memphis horns, dub shivers and an abstracted but transporting scat from comedian Reggie Watts at the death.

5 THE DELINES

Wichita Ain't So Far Away

Willy Vlautin might be better known as a novelist these days (his latest book, *The Free*, is out now), but his musical gifts evidently haven't left him in the three years since the last Richmond Fontaine LP. The twist this time is that The Delines' exquisitely forlorn country-rock is delivered not by Vlautin himself, but by another tender and nuanced singer: Amy Boone, front-woman of Austin's Damnations.

6 EMA So Blonde

On the second EMA album, North Dakota's Erika Anderson has cleaned up her act to a degree, adding pounding electronics and a comparative pop gloss to her bruised confessional. The highlight of *The Future's Void*, however, is this seething but catchy throwback to early '90s buzzpop – suggesting, as it does, a Breeders reconfigured to include Courtney Love on lead vocals.

7 ARC IRIS Whiskey Man

Like The Delines, the unfamiliar name of Arc Iris acts as cover for an old *Uncut* friend, in this case Jocie Adams, a core member of The Low Anthem. Out of the shadow of Ben

KEEP THE FIRE BURNING

UNCUT'S GUIDE TO THE BEST NEW MUSIC
INCLUDING • AFGHAN WHIGS • HOWLIN RAIN • THE MEN • EMA
THE DELINES • JOAN AS POLICE WOMAN • BEN WATT • AND MORE



FREE
CD!

Knox Miller, Adams reveals she's not just an adept multi-instrumentalist (and former NASA researcher!) but also a gifted singer and chamber-folk songwriter; Joanna Newsom would probably be the closest reference point.

8 FANFARLO

Landlocked

No longer a straightforward indie-folk combo, London's Fanfarlo have undergone something of a spangling makeover for their third album, *Let's Go Extinct*. Take "Landlocked", a bouncy boy-girl anthem that places them in the vicinity of Talking Heads, latterday Arcade Fire and – given the '80s pop sheen of it all – Deacon Blue.

9 SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE

Distance Between

More 1980s vibes here, as Field Music's David Brewis resurrects his School Of Language side project for the first time in seven years. Cerebral, compellingly awkward art-funk is the order of the day. As with so many records by Brewis and his brother, though, what first appears forbidding is gradually revealed to be a meticulous, subtly catchy re-invention of the business of songwriting. "Don't make me explain/I could only lead you on..."

10 DAWN LANDES

Try To Make A Fire Burn Again

In an unusually intimate turn of events, it's been possible to hear both sides of Dawn Landes' recent divorce: first on ex-husband Josh Ritter's *The Beast In Its Tracks*; and now on her own fifth solo album, *Bluebird*. As "Try To Make A Fire Burn Again" shows, Landes' elegant

understated treatment of the break-up makes it all the more poignant.



11 MILAGRES

The Black Table

The sneaking undercurrent of 1980s pomp-pop on this month's CD comes back to the fore on this cut from the Brooklyn band's third LP; check those *Hounds Of Love* drums, for a start. Thanks to Kyle Wilson's portentous baritone, Milagres come across rather like a synth-rock National, though he could at times be mistaken for Ian MacNabb, too.

12 BEN WATT Spring

Like Willy Vlautin, Ben Watt is as much of an author as a musician of late. But the EBTG man's first solo LP in three decades reveals a finely matured singer-songwriter, abetted by a considerable guitar foil in Bernard Butler and, on "Spring", betraying a handy grasp of John Lennon's more reflective solo work.

13 HOWLIN RAIN

Roll On The Rusted Days

One last jam for the road. The new *Live Rain* set from Ethan Miller's inspirational California boogie unit might just be Howlin Rain's most crucial album yet. Here's a rousing highlight from the band's 2006 debut, given additional thrust by the current lineup in which a second shredding guitar hero, Isaiah Mitchell, faces off against Miller.

Ben Watt



PAOLO NUTINI

CAUSTIC LOVE



THE NEW ALBUM
OUT 14 APRIL 2014

INCLUDES THE SINGLES 'SCREAM (FUNK MY LIFE UP)' AND 'IRON SKY'

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Neil Innes

Interview:
Michael Bonner

The Bonzos and Rutles mastermind recalls hanging out with The Beatles, The Who and Jimi Hendrix: "We came onstage to see a herd of embroidered goats..."

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HERE'S A JAPANESE magazine called *Strange Days*," explains Neil Innes. "It only covers The Beatles, the Bonzos, Python and The Rutles." Uniquely, Innes can claim to have been a member of three of those outfits and to have close ties to the fourth. A founder of The Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band, he joined Monty Python full-time after John Cleese left and later went on to form The Rutles with Eric Idle. In May, a new version of The Rutles will tour the UK. Here, Innes answers your questions on subjects from filming *Magical Mystery Tour* to the Pythons' reunion. But his focus is on "the pre-Fab Four". "I'm haunted by a quote from Douglas Adams," he says. "He was once asked whether he thought Oasis were as good as The Beatles, and he said: 'They're not even as good as The Rutles.'"

STAR QUESTION



What are Neil's memories of my 30th birthday? I remember him being a very important part of it. Michael Palin

We were out on the road, in Birmingham. I remember Eric [Idle], wearing his MC's gold lamé jacket, announcing "It's Michael's birthday and here to present him with a cake, it's Mrs Mary Whitehouse." Now, Eric's mum looks exactly like Mary Whitehouse and she suddenly appears onstage, dressed like Mary Whitehouse wheeling a trolley with this cake on it. The audience bought it completely. Michael was dressed as a Gumby, with a hankie on his head and Wellington boots, and in that Gumby voice of his, he went: "Take the flowers and put them in the cake!" And smashed a bunch of flowers into the cake. The audience went, "He's done that to Mary Whitehouse!" It was a great moment, pure theatre.

How did you first come into contact with bands like The Beatles and The Who?

Martin Pitt, Birmingham

They used to come and see us, or we'd share bills with them. I remember Paul [McCartney] telling me when we did *Magical Mystery Tour* how much he enjoyed "Music From The Head Ballet" off the Bonzos' *Gorilla*. Viv and Larry became big friends with Keith Moon. We kept bumping into The Who all over the place. I remember once going to a party in America and John Entwistle was there. He had a big bottle of Ripple, which is screwtop Californian wine. He kept screwing the top on, which I thought was odd until later when I started feeling very light-headed. I didn't put it together until two days after: I'd been spiked. Anyway, there was suddenly a commotion as the police arrived and we all hid out the back. I thought this was absurd, so I shouted, "We're all hiding out the back!" I was hustled away to somewhere and I found myself sitting on the floor talking to Jimi Hendrix for hours on end about the world shifting its axis and making complete sense. So if you're at a Hollywood party, make sure you've got a bottle of screwtop wine. Jimi used to come and see us at the club



"An idiot with a duck on his head..." Innes performing with Grimms, Watford Technical College, March 3, 1972

we were playing in LA. I went to the gents and he was in there, there was just the two of us. He said, "You know, we're doing the same thing." I said, "What do you mean? Having a piss?" He said, "No, onstage." Setting his guitar on fire, he thought he was getting closer to the Bonzos than the Bonzos.

STAR QUESTION



You're not going to wear those trousers, are you?

Eric Clapton

This is backstage at Drury Lane, one of the Amnesty Concerts. 1980-something. I had a pair of dungarees that were knitted, gold and silver stripes, horizontal.

I'd worn them on 3, 2, 1!, and they were my Marcel Marceau, mucking-about attempt at show-business trousers. I wandered into the dressing room where Eric was. He looked at me and said, "God, you're not going to wear those trousers, are you?" So I squared up to him, as though "How dare you!", and then his minder squared up to me! "Stop it, stop it!" Later that night, Billy Connolly was onstage, it was getting on to four in the morning, and Eric and I are behind the curtains going, "Get off, you Scots git! We've all heard it..." A lot of really good musicians who are in the hearts of people for making good music, they couldn't have as much fun as we could. I remember Eric saying to me, "I wish I could go onstage with a stuffed parrot on my shoulder, but I can't."

He couldn't, with all those posters around with his silly afro saying 'Clapton is God'.

We all know that George Harrison was involved in *All You Need Is Cash*. But what did John, Paul and Ringo think of it...?

Lucy Martin, Dorking

John was the second biggest Rutle fan in The Beatles. When someone asked him what he thought of The Rutles in the street, he replied by singing "Cheese And Onions". He actually advised us that we might have trouble with the publishers with "Get Up And Go". Ringo wasn't troubled by it. Paul took exception to the way Eric portrayed him. I know he's fine about the music, though. He's always been kind to



“When the Bonzos played the Fillmore East, we came out in vests and did calisthenics!”

me, producing "Urban Spaceman", and the rest of it. He's probably got his eye on Eric, though.

The Bonzos played on bills in the States with The Byrds, The Who and The Kinks. What are your memories of those shows?

Bruce Carlin, San Francisco

We played the Fillmore East in New York. Spirit wouldn't open and The Kinks wouldn't open, so we said, "OK, we'll go on as a warm-up band." We got all these shorts and vests and plimsolls and did all these exercises – yes! Calisthenics – then they showed a Bugs Bunny film and we came out and did our thing. Bill was smitten and said, "You've got to play the Fillmore West!" We were on with Jefferson Airplane and The Byrds. The audience was so chilled. I remember most of them had these embroidered, flower power goatskin waistcoats with mirrors sewn on. So we came out and there was this herd of

embroidered goats. Our first song was "We're Normal And We Want Our Freedom". Suffice to say, by the end of the show everyone was on their feet.



God bless The Rutles: (c/wise from left) Dirk McQuickly (Eric Idle), Stig O'Hara (Ricky Fataar), Ron Nasty (Neil Innes), Barry Wom (John Halsey)

"John Lennon was shouting, 'Show us your tits, Larry!'"

they'll settle out of court!" What...? So eventually they settle out of court. They give me a quarter, and I give half my quarter to EMI. So "Whatever" is now credited 'Gallagher/

Innes'. It's paid for a holiday or two.

Did you listen to The Beatles when you were writing Rutles songs? Mary Piper, Cambridge

I thought if I listen to Beatles songs, I'm never going to get a note out. Eric came up with "Ouch!", which was a great help. But the others, I went back in my life to thinking where I was when I first heard them, school dances for the early songs. The excitement of the first time you put your hand in a girl's bra! The psychedelic stuff was too easy. But basically once I got a song I could play on a guitar or a piano – made sense, memorable tune, good beat – then you can listen to Beatles songs and see how they're produced. Which is an education in itself.

STAR QUESTION



What's the funniest song you've ever heard, other than one of your own? Ade Edmondson

The one without words is one of my favourite Bonzo tracks, which isn't really anybody's, which is "Jazz (Delicious Hot, Disgusting Cold)". It was decided to do this as a dada track, one take and whatever happened that was it. Viv picked up the trumpet, which he'd never played before. Rodney took up the trombone, which he'd never played before. Roger moved over to clarinet. And we steamed into this 32-bar sequence, as you hear it on the record. It makes me laugh every time I hear it. But the funniest song that's not my own? I better pick one of his. "I'm On The Train", Adrian.

What do you remember about the filming of *Magical Mystery Tour*? Mark Tyrell, Manchester

The Bonzos were really busy, so we only did the one day, in the revue bar, the striptease song, "Death Cab For Cutie". John and Ringo had Bolex film cameras and they did what they called 'The Weybridge Version'. When the breasts came out on screen in the film, you saw a big black rectangle. They probably got the real breasts. There was this wonderful Christmas party for *Magical Mystery Tour*, all fancy dress. Viv had come with a yellow cyclist's mac with joke fried eggs stuck on it. Paul was smitten with that. I'd come as Tiny Tim, as I'd done something to my knee and I had the crutches left over. People got up onstage. The Beach Boys

STAR QUESTION



Have you seen my copy of 'Boat Building In Lagos'? 'Legs' Larry Smith

Larry is always coming up with lovely book titles. He does amazing artwork, too. No, I haven't seen 'Boat Building In Lagos', Larry, have you seen my jacket of 'Boat Building At Flatford Mill'? I look forward to it. In fact, I shall waste no time in reading it. Do I see the Bonzos guys much? No, but there is another reunion coming up at the Bloomsbury for the anniversary of Viv's birthday. He needs remembering. It's a chance to savour Viv's absurd, wonderful use of words.

Whatever happened with 'Whatever'?

Chris Peacock, London

The phone rang, and it was Mike McCartney, and he says, "Have you heard Oasis' new record?" A couple of weeks later, I still haven't heard it but I ring up EMI and say, "What's this about an Oasis record that's meant to sound like 'How Sweet To Be An Idiot'?" They said, "Oh, yeah. We're on it." "What do you mean?" "We think

STAR QUESTION



Is there anywhere you haven't gigged that you wish you had, and why? Phill Jupitus

I've played the Fillmore West, the Hollywood Bowl, the Albert Hall... I'm happy in smaller gigs, 100-200 seaters, ideally. I like to be able to see the audience. But maybe the O2. With my band. On my 70th birthday.

were up there, I was on the piano, George was on saxophone and we played "Oh! Carol" for 40 minutes. Then the Bonzos played a bit. Larry had these false breasts and John sat on the floor in a leather jacket, with his hair greased back in a rockabilly DA, shouting, "Go on, Larry. Show us your tits! We've all seen them."

Were Mick Jagger's contributions to *All You Need Is Cash* scripted?

Steph, Twickenham

I don't think they were. He was telling true stories but changing the names. In a rather unfriendly way, Eric has put all the outtakes out there, on *The Rutles 2* or something, there's Mick going, "Well... er... no... er." Somehow, it's pieced together coherently in the finished film.

Will you take part in the Monty Python reunion shows this July?

Matt Butler, Exeter

Not as far as I know. It's a big production, they don't need an idiot with a duck on his head and a piano any more. Myself and Douglas Adams are the only two non-Pythons to get scriptwriting credits on the show. I remember it was suggested, "Maybe you could write with Graham [Chapman]." I used to go up to Highgate, where he lived, and he introduced me to Douglas. We went to the pub – if we didn't get anything written by 12.30, that was it – and I said to Douglas, what are you up to? He said, "I'm writing this book. An awful lot of brown liquid in it." That was *Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*, of course, and 'brown liquid' meant tea.

What's your favourite memory of George Harrison?

Becki Farmer, Isle of Wight

We'd walk around Friar Park and agree that humanity was a rough neighbourhood. One day, we were walking round and I started teasing him. "You know," I said, "you're a lazy bastard when it comes to lyrics, aren't you?" He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, you can't think of a rhyme so you stick a guitar lick in." He looked at me and said, "Yeah, but... oh," which was when he realised I was joking. Moments like that were really nice. He was an underrated songwriter. He was unlucky, George, to get a band with Lennon and McCartney in it. It's a bit like Karl Marx was unlucky to get Russia.

The Rutles tour the UK in May. For details, visit www.ents24.com/uk/tour-dates/the-rutles



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



CHILLY CHEEKS?

Dear Jean Claude, I have gotten close to the ice cold refreshment of a Coors Light.

I was skating at Lee Valley ice rink with my girlfriend Ingrid, when I tried to impress her with an axel jump backspin.

Wrong move.

I tumbled to the surface buttock first, my cheeks grinding along the ice like a baby seal on a frozen lake.

I had to stand up all the way home.

That Jean Claude, was closer to cold.

Love, Kevin - Leytonstone

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THE Wolf King of Cardiff Bay

...That's GRUFF RHYS, Super Furry Animal, quixotic adventurer, Welsh renaissance man. Deep in his Cardiff lair, *Uncut* hears about Rhys' 25-year rock odyssey and his latest project: the 200-year-old quest for a tribe of Welsh-speaking Native Americans that provoked a chaotic Stateside road trip, a book, a film and a brilliant new album. God! Show us magic!

Story: Piers Martin

Photographs: Chris McAndrew

ONA WINDSWEPT Wednesday in late February down by the barrage in Cardiff Bay, Gruff Rhys perches on the rocks, posing for *Uncut*'s photographer. For reasons that will become clear, the Super Furry Animals frontman wears a wolf headdress over his crumpled black suit and he clutches what appears to be a large cuddly toy that vaguely resembles The Count from *Sesame Street*.

As he stares out to sea he explains how the recent fierce storms battered the Welsh coastline, blasting away enough sand and silt from Cardigan Bay to reveal the tops of a prehistoric forest that folklore suggests is the site of the ancient sunken kingdom of Cantre'r Gwaelod. "It's the Welsh Atlantis," smiles Rhys. "Or so they say."

It is said that people from the country with the red dragon on its flag like tall tales, and few public figures in Wales these past two decades have been as devoted to constructing and promoting fantasy as Rhys, both in Super Furry Animals and in his solo career. Now a youthful 43, the prolific singer is set to unveil his most ambitious solo project to date, *American Interior*, an expansive multi-platform saga that's devoured the last two years of his life and looks likely to consume

the next 12 months, too. The story draws on Rhys' attempt to trace the incredible journey of his distant relative, the 18th-Century explorer and fellow Celtic dreamer John Evans.

"John Evans is a one-off and doesn't fit in any kind of history," says Rhys, slowly and softly, of his grandmother's great uncle. "Having toured in America quite a lot, I realised the scale of his journey, and *American Interior* is more about trying to verify and tell a family story. I wanted to bring it to life and celebrate the story but not overglorify Evans as a human. He had an extremely unusual life that was cut very short."

A poor farmhand from Waunfawr in Snowdonia, Evans made his way to America on his own in 1792 aged just 22 to search for a mythical tribe of Welsh-speaking Native Indians who were believed to inhabit the Great Plains. According to legend, the tribe were descended from the Welsh prince Madog who, it's claimed, had discovered America at the end of the 12th Century. In August 2012, Rhys set out with a small film crew on an "investigative concert tour", performing a mix of stand-up comedy, academic lecture and musical performance on a trip that headed inland from Baltimore and wound its way down to New Orleans via Pittsburgh, Omaha and



Gruff Rhys, with a felt model of his ancestor John Evans - the subject of his new album/film/book/app. Cardiff Bay, February 26, 2014

GRUFF RHYNS
ON RECORDSUPER FURRY ANIMALS
GUERRILLA

CREATION, 1999

9/10 The Furries' third and final report for Creation finds them at the peak of their powers, refracting calypso ("Northern Lites") and mushy Aphex melancholia ("Some Things Come From Nothing") through their irresistible psychedelic prism. Includes a song, "Citizen's Band", hidden before the first track.

SUPER FURRY ANIMALS
RINGS AROUND THE
WORLD

EPIC, 2001

9/10 A mind-expanding investigation into the possibilities of digital entertainment, at the time RATW's "multi-channel DVD" seemed positively futuristic. A precedent for *American Interior* in that there's a lot going on and all of it's very good.

GRUFF RHY
CANDYLION

ROUGH TRADE, 2007

8/10 After the excesses of SFA, *Candylion* is a bright and breezy affair sung mostly in English that presents Rhys as a serious solo artist. Mixed in Rio de Janeiro by Mario Caldato Jr, the sprawling groove of "Gyrru Gyrru Gyrru" and "Skylon!" belies the cute cover.

NEON NEON
STAINLESS STYLE

LEX, 2008

8/10 Rhys hooks up with LA pal Bryan Hollon - beatsmith Boom Bip - for a synthpop concept album on the life of auto futurist John DeLorean. *Stainless Style* underlines the pair's pop pedigree and was nominated for the Mercury Prize.

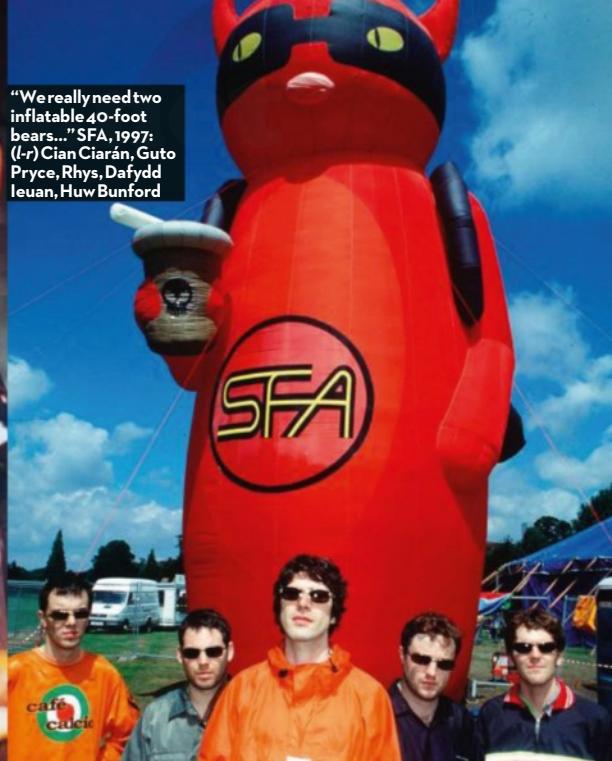
GRUFF RHY
HOTEL SHAMPOO

OVNI, 2011

8/10 This straightforward collection of disarmingly charming songs might not have set the charts alight, but it further enhanced Rhys' reputation as a cherished songwriter of considerable wit and depth.



Hair Venus! Gruff Rhys playing with Ffa Coffi Pawb at the Roc Ystwyth one-day festival, Aberystwyth, 1989



"We really need two inflatable 40-foot bears..." SFA, 1997: (l-r) Cian Ciarán, Guto Pryce, Rhys, Dafydd Ieuan, Huw Bunford

● Memphis, following in Evans' footsteps.

Presented as an album, documentary film, a 70,000-word book, DVD and app, each medium allows Rhys to tell his *American Interior* tale from a slightly different angle. Like most endeavours bearing his name, the documentary is warm, funny and poignant. And though the *American Interior* album stems from the same source – and features performances by members of The Flaming Lips and Bright Eyes whom Rhys met en route – the record is far more than a straight-up soundtrack.

"It's been a pretty over-the-top thing to be involved with," says Rhys, whose just-woke-up demeanour belies a formidable work ethic. He's already completed his next musical assignment, a 1950s-style jazz score for the upcoming Elijah Wood biopic of Dylan Thomas, *Set Fire To The Stars*. "I'm usually busy working on something new and excited about a record or idea. So in that sense, looking back on what I've done gets in the way. I don't have time for it."

GRUFF RHYNS HAS been writing songs for as long as he can remember. He wrote his first when he was five – "about a train driver who was getting old which I recorded on my brother's tape recorder" – and by the time he was 14, the soft-rock group he'd formed at school, Machlud ('Sunset' in Welsh), had recorded a track at Hawkwind's studio in Powys for a compilation of underground Welsh bands called *Cam O'r Tywyllwch* (or *A Step From Darkness*). He was raised in a Welsh-speaking family who moved from Pembrokeshire to the small slate-quarry town of Bethesda in Gwynedd when he was three. "Bethesda had a rich tradition of hymn writers and choirs," says Rhys, who learned his first English words from watching TV. "In the 1970s, hippies began moving to the town with their weird record collections that turned the ears of locals."

Between Rhys' father, a keen mountaineer who hated The Beatles but valued reggae and Welsh-language pop, and his older

brother, who played in punk bands and would go on to found the local festival Pesda Roc, Rhys found himself immersed, precociously, in imaginative, ideological music that asked questions. In particular, he connected with the Welsh-language punk band Anhreftn and their label Recordiau Anhreftn. "I used to buy their cassettes through mail order when I was about 11," he says. "There was a lot of interesting electronic music and punk rock being made in the Welsh language in the early '80s. It was a tangible, radical scene and very exciting for me as a teenager, as I could relate to it and it was rebellious."

Dafydd Ieuan, the Super Furry Animals' drummer whose family lived outside Bethesda, has known Rhys since they were both 13. "We met at a sort of rock school for local musicians in a school on the side of a hill in Bethesda," he says. "There was me, Gruff and one other guy having drumming lessons for the first time. We all had shitty school bands but the first band that was any good were Ffa Coffi Pawb. Gruff started that with his mate when he was 16 and I joined at 18."

As an early indication of Rhys' mischievousness, Ffa Coffi Pawb means 'Everybody's Coffee Beans' in Welsh but phonetically sounds like 'Fuck Off, Everyone'. Rhys had left school at 16 and was signing on in Bethesda for a year before going to

Bangor to do an art foundation course. In Bangor he befriended producer Gorwel Owen, who would later enrich the sound of SFA but first worked his magic on Ffa Coffi Pawb. "We did three albums as Ffa Coffi Pawb produced by this guy who was like the Brian Eno of Holyhead," says Rhys. "It was a real education."

In seven years, they achieved as much as any radical Welsh-language post-punk act could in Wales and before long they drifted down to Cardiff in the early '90s, where they began hanging out with the members of another former post-punk band called U-Thant (named after a UN Secretary General), whose ranks included Huw Bunford and Guto Pryce.

"Daf and Gruff came to Cardiff and



this coincided with the rave scene," recalls Pryce, the Furries' bassist. "Super Furry Animals came out of late nights listening to *Surf's Up* and messing about with synths and songs. It came out of friendship. We were very optimistic and empowered by the party scene."

At the height of Britpop in 1995, the nascent Furries released two Welsh-language EPs for Cardiff's Ankst and after just four shows were signed by Mark Bowen to Creation on the Alan McGee-issued condition that they sing (mostly) in English.

"Before signing us, Creation shoved us on a Heavy Stereo support tour of the West Country to get our shit together," says Ieuan. "Rhys Ifans came with us, I think his official title was 'tour morale'. We just fucking disintegrated."

"We were reacting to Britpop in a way, but, musically, we weren't a million miles away," admits Rhys, who, as the Furries' charismatic singer, became the de facto leader of the five-piece, whose youngest member, 19-year-old keyboard player Cian Ciarán, was Ieuan's brother. "We just hated the idea of making parochial, nationalist music. We felt Britpop represented a conservative, backwards movement in music.

But then when we started recording *Fuzzy Logic* we were in this old 1970s studio making this really flat '70s rock album. When we started touring it in Europe we were being sold as the last dregs of Britpop.

Nobody was interested at all. It was pretty funny."

Amused at the way success soon came to them with relative ease, the Furries' confidence grew and they looked to make the most of the Oasis lucre pouring into Creation. "We were very ambitious and we thought we could make a *Never Mind The Bollocks* and we could write our own *Great*

Rock'n'Roll Swindle and have lots of jacuzzis and hang out with our version of Ronnie Biggs, Howard Marks," says Rhys. "We were quite demanding and on some weird swindle trip. We had no respect for the industry. We could ask Creation for a tank and they'd say: 'Yeah, no problem.'

Ah, and we really need two inflatable 40-foot bears. 'Yeah, we can really see that.' They gave 100 percent of their passion."

BEWEEN THEIR RAUCOUS *Fuzzy Logic* debut in 1996 and 2005's funk odyssey *Love Kraft*, SFA released several extraordinary pop albums, including hits set *Songbook* and the Welsh-language affair *Mwng*, described by the *Jewish Chronicle* as "career suicide". As they pushed themselves in almost every musical direction, their post-Creation labels SONY and Rough Trade struggled to market the band, whose die-hard fanbase at least guaranteed later albums *Hey Venus!* and *Dark Days/Light Years* a brief chart placing.

As the recovery period for the Furries' mammoth tours grew longer for the hedonistic troupe, so did the gaps between SFA albums. Rhys took to filling this spare time with his own material, first with the Welsh-language collection of odds and ends *Yr Atal Genhedlaeth* in 2005, then the soft pop of *Candylion* in 2007 and, four years later, *Hotel Shampoo*, a good deal more alluring than its title. His sharp wit, Welsh burr and poetic grasp of a simple tune characterise each record. In addition, Rhys formed synthpop conceptualists Neon Neon with LA producer Boom Bip (Bryan Hollon), whose two albums explore the lives of car magnate John



Gruff in his office with John Evans, Cardiff, February 26, 2014

PHANTOM POWER

THE HISTORY BOYS

The real people who have influenced Gruff and SFA

JOHN EVANS (1770-1799)

Rhys' distant relative, whose journey across America in search of a mythical Welsh-speaking tribe of Native Americans inspired *American Interior* adventure. Evans died in New Orleans aged just 29, from malaria or yellow fever. His maps of the Missouri proved invaluable to Lewis and Clark's 1804 westbound expedition.

GIANGIACOMO FELTRINELLI (1926-1972)

The subject of Neon Neon's *Praxis Makes Perfect*, Feltrinelli was born into one of Italy's wealthiest families and ended his life fighting for

workers' rights. In between he published *Doctor Zhivago* and *The Leopard* and was the first person to mass-produce the famous Che Guevara poster following Che's death.

JOHN DELOREAN (1925-2005)

DeLorean's place in pop culture was secured long before Neon Neon based 2008's *Stainless Style*, on him - his iconic gull-wing car is the star of *Back*

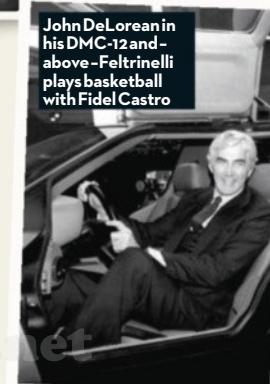
To The Future. A flamboyant GM executive, DeLorean was charged with drugs trafficking in '82 but found not guilty.

RENÉ GRIFFITHS (C.1950s-)

Another character loosely related to Gruff, Griffiths is a poncho-wearing, Welsh-speaking singer-songwriter born of Welsh ancestors in Patagonia, who first visited Cardiff in 1974. In *Separado!*, Rhys sets out to find the singer in Argentina. Key album: *Celtica Latina* (2005).



John DeLorean in his DMC-12 and - above - Feltrinelli plays basketball with Fidel Castro





Gruff in a scene from *American Interior*, with musician and descendant of the Mandan-Hidatsa tribes Keith Bear, 2013

• DeLorean and Italian activist Giorgio Feltrinelli. "I think I've done about 20 albums of songs and most of them have been about myself, and that's all right," he says. "But I like to have a holiday from myself sometimes."

"Gruff is impossible to categorise but his soul is a good one which always cuts through any distractions," says Nicky Wire of Manic Street Preachers, whose musical career has run parallel to Rhys'. "There's no-one who understands the inner and outer landscape of Wales better than him. The Super Furries' track 'Mountain People' is one of the greatest investigations of Welshness ever written. I think Gruff works like a true artist. He's someone who's unafraid, confused, engaged and somehow always humane."

The Furries have been silent since 2009's *Dark Days/Light Years*, reconvening once two years ago to perform at the

memorial concert for Wales football manager Gary Speed. Each member has their own thing going on, but with the band, always a five-way collective, the whole tended to be greater than the sum of its parts.

"I think we've done too much to not do more stuff," says Rhys when asked about SFA. "We've all got kids and I've been at home for two years – I've hardly had to tour, happily. I hadn't been off tour since I was 16. It's

healthy to not be part of an industrial touring life. But we're all extremely close and it's bizarre because we've never made a load of money, so it's not as if we can retire. It's hard keeping a living band together, and it reached the point where it was impossible to contemplate touring like that for a while."

Ieuan is equally pragmatic. These days his energy is taken up with his family and a new band, The Earth. He admits it's taken a while for him to adjust to being outside the Furries bubble. "It seems to be an indefinite hibernation, God knows when we'll start again," he says. "Everybody needed a break, the chance to try their own things out."

Pryce, whose new psych-pop outfit Gulp release their debut in the summer, is also optimistic. "I certainly hope we'll play again soon, I'm sure we will," he says. "We'll do something in a while, but I wouldn't like to say when."

SEAGULLS SQUAWK AND swoop over the imposing Victorian building in the mercantile district of Cardiff that houses Rhys' top-floor office. It's a small room stacked with books, LPs and dog-eared disco seven-inches, its shelves neatly filled with cassettes, postcards and mementos from his travels. The office adjoins the studios of the film production company where his partner Cat

FURRY FRIENDS

LUPINE EXTERIOR

Gruff on the significance of his wolf headwear in *American Interior*

"I WAS TRYING TO figure out how a Welsh radical should dress to approach the wilderness in America and I got interested in this guy, William Price, who was a 19th-Century Chartist revolutionary and a Welsh radical, a bit of an eccentric who wore animal skins on his head. "He was a vegetarian, an anti-vivisection campaigner, a proto-feminist who didn't believe in marriage because it enslaved women, a Welsh separatist and a druid. He was most famous for bringing cremation back to western Europe. His son, called Iesu Grist, which means Jesus Christ, died in infancy and he took him to the mountain in Llantrisant 15 miles from here and burned him.

"People were outraged and there was a big court case, but Price defended himself successfully. He said cremation wasn't illegal – just out of fashion – and after that, crematoriums came back. His great grandson runs Catapult record shop in Cardiff and puts raves on."

Ramasut, the mother of his two young children, and director and editor Dylan Goch work. Both are involved in *American Interior*; neither knew what they were getting themselves into, though they hoped it would be better organised than Rhys' investigative concert tour of teahouses and community centres in Patagonia in 2006, which formed the basis for 2010's successful surrealist road movie *Separado!*.

"These films are Gruff's visions and even though he's not a filmmaker, he knows what he wants. It's a joy to work with him, especially on a big project like this," says Goch, the director, editing extra *American Interior* content for the app.

"We went to Yale University to do the first gig and I didn't know what the fuck I was doing," says Rhys. "The cable kept coming out of the computer and I had a bunch of slides that didn't make any sense because I hadn't been on the journey yet. But by the end of the journey I had a full slideshow of John Evans in the landscape he would have done things in."

With no visual representation of Evans in existence, Rhys and regular Furries artist Pete Fowler pored over the documents the singer had sourced from archives to work out how best to bring the young adventurer to life onscreen. Fowler then designed the avatar of Evans which was made into the three-foot felt figure that accompanied Rhys in the States. "Gruff has always been telling stories in his songs, but for this *American Interior* project everything seems to

have crystallised," says Cardiff-born Fowler, whose partnership with Rhys began on 1997's *Radiator*. "He's a modern bard, as much a poet as he is a songwriter. He's always doing something new."

Rhys, certainly, aims to never repeat himself. After the hazy romance of *Hotel Shampoo*,

American Interior is a brashly tuneful album. "I was trying to convey the energy of the tour," he says. "It's thematically based in America and I was using American musicians but I was horrified by the idea of making a pure Americana record, which would have been disgusting and wrong."

Beyond the music, *American Interior* is rooted in anthropology and history and conceivably aligns Rhys with the likes of Damon Albarn and Jeremy Deller as a

popular multi-disciplinary artist able to reconfigure stories from the past in such a way that they engage with a contemporary audience on a number of levels.

"Well, I think it's all an extension of songwriting," he says. "There's no doubt I'll be affected by it in some way, even if it's reacting to it and making something much simpler."

Does he miss the democracy and quality control of the Furries? It seems so, a little. A band acts as a filter, he says. In a group, the things that

people are into will bubble to the top and a record will be made that five people can live with. He pauses to consider the *American Interior* adventure and his eyes light up.

"This," he adds, "could only have been a solo record because I would never want to put anyone else through the process of putting it together."

WHOA!

American Interior is released as an album on May 5, as a book on May 8, in cinemas on May 9, with an app to follow

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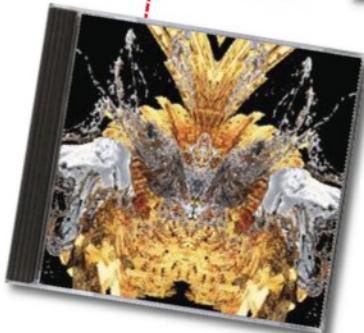
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Story: David Cavanagh**Photo:** Gijsbert Hanekroot

YOU DON'T PULL NO PUNCHES

1974. VAN MORRISON, back in California after a mystical sojourn in Ireland, embarks on one of the oddest phases of his career. It will involve spontaneous new bands, uncompromising festival spots, a strict diet of William Blake and Tony Hancock and a semi-forgotten masterpiece — *Veedon Fleece*. “It was a magic carpet ride,” remembers one of his bandmates. “We just couldn’t do anything wrong...”

IT'S AN AGE-OLD custom for tourists in Ireland. It involves leaning backwards and puckering one's lips while balancing precariously over a sheer drop from a castle wall. In 1973, while travelling through Ireland with his American fiancée, Van Morrison joined the ranks of those who risk serious vertigo by kissing the Blarney Stone. According to legend, their reward is instant eloquence — the 'gift of the gab'. Sadly, as journalists interviewing Morrison have found, the gift doesn't work on everybody. His holiday was well-earned. A three-month tour with the Caledonia Soul Orchestra, stretching from Santa Monica to London, had produced a brilliant live album (*It's Too Late To*

Stop Now) but left Morrison feeling shattered. The financial and domestic pressures mounted. His 21-year-old fiancée, Carol Guida from Marin County, had comforted him through a painful divorce, but ongoing custody issues with his three-year-old daughter, Shana, distressed and frustrated him. “Van’s a shy guy. He’s fragile in a way. Outwardly he may have a lot of bravado, but stuff gets to him,” remarks Daoud Shaw, the Caledonia Soul Orchestra’s drummer.

The vacation was Van’s first official visit to Ireland in six years. “It was a mega deal,” says Northern Ireland-born promoter Paul Charles, whose Asgard Agency would begin a long association with Morrison later in the decade. “Everywhere he went around the island, it was like Prince coming into London or Dylan coming back [in 1978] for the Earls Court shows.” But the trip was also significant for where Morrison *didn’t* go. It was the fifth year of the Troubles in the North, and Belfast — his home city — was considered too dangerous even for a brief stopover. He stayed south of the border. Some fans in the North took it as an unforgivable snub.

Once or twice, he did some work. He appeared on an RTÉ TV programme, *Talk About Pop*, where he sang several songs and appalled the producer with his rudeness. While in Dublin, he phoned his manager in California, summoning him to a meeting. “I said I could be there in 24 hours,” Stephen Pillster relates. “When I got to Dublin I found Van and Carol having lunch. Van looked at me and said, ‘What are you doing here?’”

IN HIS ARRIVAL home in Marin County, it became clear how inspirational Van's Irish holiday had been. David Hayes, his bassist, remembers: "He came back with all these songs that were a complete departure from what we were used to." The Caledonia Soul Orchestra's all-conquering live act was built on righteous horns, sock-it-to-me R'n'B and ecstatic preaching from the pulpit. But the new songs were dreamlike and abstract, and almost entirely acoustic. Daoud Shaw found them "kind of a shock".

In November, a small group of musicians – Hayes, Shaw, James Trumbo (piano), Ralph Wash (acoustic guitar) and Jim Rothermel (sax, flute) – assembled in an outbuilding of Morrison's house in Fairfax, where a studio had been installed. Their challenge was to interpret a series of pieces referencing specific places in Ireland that none of them had ever seen. They found themselves walking through the streets of Arklow, a coastal town in the east, where the grass grew spectacularly green and Van's head was "filled with poetry". They followed him to the dramatic cathedrals in the west, where the quest for the mysterious *Veedon Fleece* began. "It's like imagining what Shangri-La looks like," says Shaw, who wouldn't set foot in Ireland until Morrison played a pair of Dublin concerts the following March. "Sometimes *not* knowing is less constraining than *knowing*. That's what drove me through *Veedon Fleece* – my own misconceptions of these places, titles and narratives."

In the Caledonia Soul Orchestra, Shaw had watched Morrison like a hawk onstage, waiting for the behind-the-back hand signals that meant louder, quieter, slower, faster. In his Fairfax studio, the musicians had the advantage of seeing Van face-on, but that didn't always give them many clues. Shaw: "Everyone was glued to the vocal booth to see where the song was going to go... where he was going to take it. He'd be starting it off, but it was like, OK, familiarise yourself with it but don't over-rehearse it, because we've got to save a space for spontaneity." David Hayes, equally familiar with the onstage hand signals, doesn't recall being given any musical direction whatsoever on *Veedon Fleece*, nor asking for any. "He'd have some lyrics written on the back of an envelope," the bassist notes, "and he'd stick them on the music stand and off we'd go." Shaw likens it to working with a film director who encourages his actors to stray from the script (or even abandon it) if they can think of a better way to deliver the scene. For Hayes, the week of recording was "a magic carpet ride... we just couldn't do anything wrong".

At certain points in the songs, Morrison gives the listener

VAN MORRISON
VEEDON FLEECE



EYEWITNESS

WHO LET THE DOGS OUT?

That album cover explained...

During his Irish holiday of Oct-Nov 1973, Morrison's Dublin base was Sutton House in the city's Northside. Formerly the home of the Jameson family, celebrated manufacturers of Irish whiskey, it was later bought by Albert Luykx, an ex-Nazi/SS member controversially granted political asylum by Ireland in the 1950s. By the time of Van's visit it had been converted into a hotel. Sought-after for its views of Dublin Bay, it was also notable for a pair of huge Irish wolfhounds that belonged to the owner. Stephen Pillster, Van's manager in 1973, joined him for part of his holiday and stayed at the hotel. "I'd hear the floor-boards squeak as the dogs patrolled the halls in the pre-dawn

hours," he says. The cover of *Veedon Fleece* shows Van and the dogs, with the hotel in the background. He complained that his fans plagued him for years afterwards with questions about the dogs."



some idea of the reading matter he took with him on the holiday. He mentions Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales Of Mystery & Imagination* and alludes to William Blake's *The Book Of Urizen*. But there are other moods and atmospheres that don't seem to come from books. During the recording, Hayes and Shaw were reminded of the phantasmagoric aerial currents of *Astral Weeks*, which had become something of an underground classic by 1973, and a favourite among Bay Area musicians. Shaw talks of seeing "images in my mind" in the Fairfax studio that "conjured up a superreality". The drummer goes on: "It had a lot to do with the chemistry of the musicians. It was a special time on the planet for musicians coming together, cross-pollinating from different

backgrounds. Egos didn't get in the way. Everybody just gave themselves to the music as much as they could."

Morrison had a notorious aversion to over-thinking his songwriting. Besides disliking journalists generally, he disapproved of them scrutinising his lyrics for meaning, and would privately protest that he had little jurisdiction over what he wrote in the first place. He tended to produce large amounts of material in intense spurts lasting several weeks, which would often be followed by a long dry spell. "He used to describe it to me as this force that took over him," says Jef Labes, a pianist-arranger



EYEWITNESS

THEY SEEK HIM HERE...

What exactly is the Veedon Fleece?

A mysterious object buried or hidden somewhere in the west of Ireland, the Veedon Fleece makes several appearances in "You Don't Pull No Punches, But You Don't Push The River" – except that Van never finds it. Opinions differ on what the Fleece might have been. David Hayes (bass) thinks it's "a metaphor for a search for answers". For Daoud Shaw (drums), it combines "the Greek mythology of the Golden Fleece" with "an early Christian influence" derived from William Blake.

Van himself has said: "I haven't a clue about what the title means. It's a person's name." A family called Veedon show up in a Dublin census from the early 20th Century. Today, Veedon Fleece is the name of a company designing carpets for clients like Madonna and Elton John. Its founder, Adam Gilchrist, is a Van fan who sees the Fleece as "a quest for perfection". He adds: "My brother-in-law said it was a stupid name and we'd last only six months. That was 25 years ago."

Van live on the 'Too Late To Stop Now' tour, the Olympia Theatre, Dublin, as part of the city's Music Week, 1973

who first worked with him on *Moondance*. "When he's in the midst of it, it's a crazy energy that he has to get out. He hardly feels like he has control over it. It's just – get the music out. Get it out before it's gone."

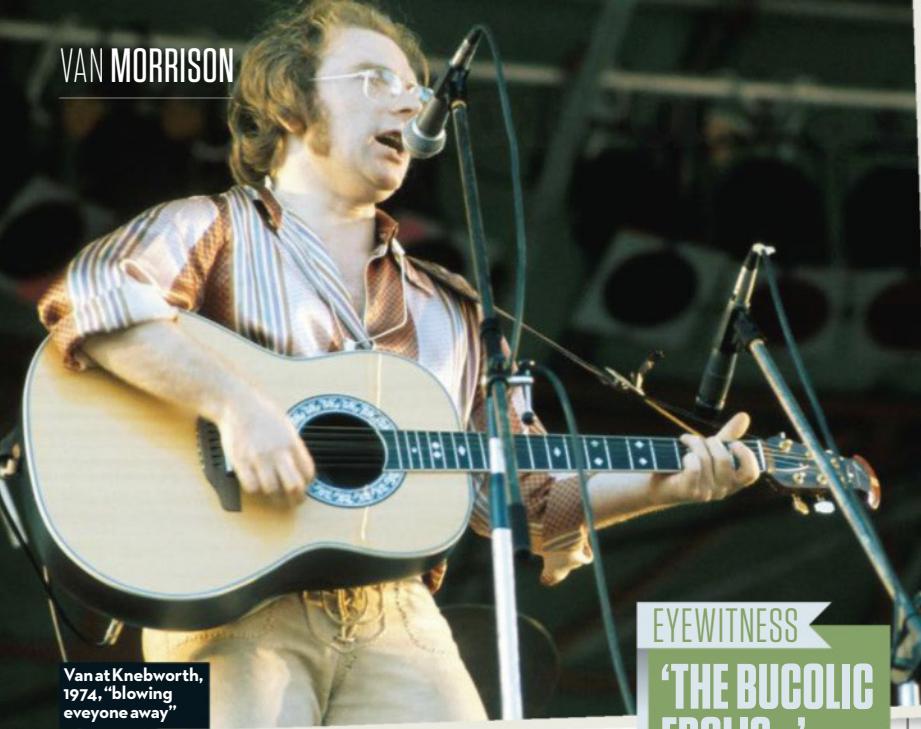
Labes was approached to play piano on two songs from the Fairfax sessions ("Bulbs", "Cul De Sac") that Morrison wanted to re-record in New York. Labes was also commissioned to write *Veedon Fleece's* string, horn and woodwind arrangements. These included the astonishing "You Don't Pull No Punches, But You Don't Push The River", an epic odyssey which takes Morrison to a part of Ireland where the local Sisters of Mercy appear to be channelling Blake, blurring themselves into the mythology of Urien and the Eternals. Meher Baba crops up in a fleeting namecheck. Morrison, it's clear, is merely the latest spiritualist to pass through the region in the centuries-old search for the Veedon Fleece. "Like all of Van's albums, it was revelatory and spiritual," comments Stephen Pillster. "Van was a seeker of spiritual knowledge. He thought of himself as a 'channel' rather than an author of those songs."

"When Van gave me 'You Don't Pull No Punches...',", remembers Labes, "it was 12 minutes long – half a side of a

"EGOS DIDN'T GET IN THE WAY... EVERYBODY JUST GAVE THEMSELVES TO THE MUSIC"

free-wheeling flute embarks on a zigzagging journey overhead. Sometimes they're separate travellers making for the same destination independently; sometimes they're a group in solemn convoy. "It became a magical piece," says Labes proudly. "It doesn't have a verse and a chorus like most songs. It just rambles on with all this wonderful development, going from one section to another, telling its story."

VEEDON FLEECE WAS received coolly by Morrison's label, Warner Bros, who seemed taken aback by its dissimilarity to his previous studio album, *Hard Nose The Highway*. They gave *Veedon Fleece* an October 1974 release date. Morrison, however, was too restless and agitated to sit around waiting for October. As if the songs were already out of his system, he mostly ignored them in his setlists that spring. After touring with a five-man



Van at Knebworth, 1974, "blowing everyone away"

● backing band (the Caledonia Soul Express), he surprised everyone by wiping the musical slate clean and turning up at the Montreux Jazz Festival in June without a band at all.

Claude Nobs, the promoter at Montreux, put together a makeshift trio for him, resulting in an unembellished, rather naked sound. The music swung viciously at times, but the audience were far from bowled over. Pete Wingfield, the pianist in the trio, recalls: "The music had a warmth, an unpretentiousness about it. I think we all felt it went really well. But Van, in true contrarian style, didn't play any of the hits." Looking for musicians to back him at the inaugural Knebworth festival in July, Morrison held onto Wingfield and Jerome Rimson (bass) from Montreux, bringing in a new drummer, Peter Van Hooke. Delighted with this band that had landed in his lap, Van based himself in England that summer. His new musicians became his buddies.

"We told jokes, went to all-night cafés, played a bit of music," says the musician and arranger John Altman, introduced to Morrison by his friend Van Hooke. "He seemed to enjoy socialising with us and being in a new environment. I don't know what was going on in his life at the time, but he seemed to have made a break with the band in San Francisco." Morrison, a heavy drinker in the past, avoided alcohol when he was with the Englishmen. Wingfield remembers "a lot of coffee". Altman's main recollection is the endless Tony Hancock videos they watched. "My first agent was Tony Hancock's brother," he explains, "so I had access to a lot of the programmes on video. We used to watch the classic episodes and quote great chunks. Van loved them. There are actually a few song titles of Van's that are lines from British comedy films. Nobody's ever picked up on them."

Morrison and his trio were billed at Knebworth, somewhat misleadingly, as the Van Morrison Show Featuring The Caledonia Soul Express. Fans who'd bought *It's Too Late To Stop Now* would have anticipated a super-drilled monster-band. They got the exact opposite. "We went on after the Mahavishnu Orchestra, who all wore white and looked like a cosmic cricket team," laughs Wingfield. "We crept on without a by-your-leave and went into a very slow blues shuffle. Van loved the idea of getting up in front of thousands of frenzied festival-goers and confounding their expectations." John Altman says it was one of the bravest things he ever saw. "Van walked onstage in front of – what was it – 250,000 people, with just piano, bass and drums. And it was amazing. He just completely blew everyone away."

His setlist that day included three songs from a new album that he and the trio had recorded in Holland a few weeks earlier. The album, which Van planned to call 'Mechanical Bliss', sounded nothing like *Veedon Fleece*. "It was a good

album," says Wingfield. "We did it very quickly, like in a day and a half. All the material was brand-new. But I think Warners were nervous because he was promoting an album that nobody had heard." Warners were not the only ones confused by Morrison's activities. As he bounced from band to band and from continent to continent, the release of 'Mechanical Bliss' would be cancelled while the label and the public alike tried to catch up with him.

VEEDON FLEECE EMERGED to mixed reviews and disappointingly low sales. "Every fan wants to hear the hits. There wasn't one on *Veedon Fleece*," Stephen Pillster remarks succinctly. It had been almost a year since the Fairfax sessions and Morrison's emotional allegiance to the songs from his Irish holiday had long since faded. Jef Labes, indeed, remembers Van barely bothering to attend the *Veedon Fleece* mixing sessions, so impatient was he to forget the album and move on. Whereas *Astral Weeks* had always had kudos in the counterculture, *Veedon Fleece* – a cryptic title for a cryptic record – would take many years to acquire the status of a major work in Morrison's canon. "It's my favourite Van record," says drummer Daoud Shaw. "Any excuse to listen to it, I will. It's a piece of art. All of the songs have magic in their narratives." Paul Charles, who would become Morrison's agent a few years later, considers it a masterpiece. "It was a stunning piece of work in terms of the references," he says. "But it's also an all-embracing sound. If you're not into it, you can't just have it on in the background. If you're not prepared to go with the flow of it, you have to take it off." Just as *Astral Weeks* does, *Veedon Fleece* summons up an awareness of different worlds and overlapping sensations – the vividness of real life; the memory of a place once visited; the vague outline of a dream.

Morrison's musicians offer varying theories as to why he seemed to hold *Veedon Fleece* in such little regard, almost to the point of disowning it. Jef Labes has a recollection of playing "Who Was That Masked Man" and "The Streets Of Arklow" in a later Morrison band, but adds that "they're not really performance pieces". David Hayes, who played with him between 1972 and 2010, can't recall more than one or two tracks from *Veedon Fleece* ever being attempted live. "They're difficult songs, for one thing, and they have a mood that's hard for him to recapture. It's much easier to play 'These Dreams Of You' [from *Moondance*] than '...You Don't Push The River'." Daoud Shaw agrees: "*Veedon Fleece* is risky business because it's all about vibe. His vibe, especially. It relies heavily on his presence at all times and maybe he might feel vulnerable doing it in front of an audience. Maybe he's set these songs aside as an area he doesn't want to go to now."

With his supply of Tony Hancock quotes ("A pint? That's very nearly an armful") and his John Denver granny glasses (a temporary affection), Morrison was unforgettable company in 1974. Pete Wingfield remembers him climbing onto the piano during one gig and singing "Twilight Zone" lying stretched out on his back. But he was approaching burnout. His complicated relationship with live performance and stage fright – "I can't go on, I'll go on", as Hayes characterises it, putting it in Beckettian terms – would coincide with a perfect storm of disillusion and weariness of the music business in 1975, leading to a two-year silence. Daoud Shaw, trying to remember the name of Morrison's 1977

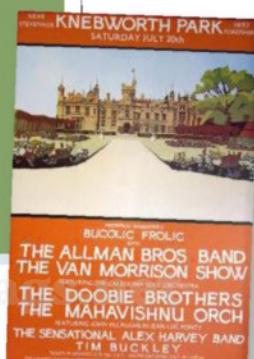
comeback album, sounds like he's saying 'A Series Of Transitions'. It was actually called *A Period Of Transition*, but somehow Shaw's title is more appropriate. Van Morrison's career is indeed a series of transitions. Perhaps, in spite of its magnificence, he considered *Veedon Fleece* to be nothing more than a transitional period between one period of transition and the next. ☀

EYEWITNESS

'THE BUCOLIC FROLIC...'

It's the very first Knebworth Festival. And the headline act's pulled out...

Van's stunning set with a small jazz combo at the first Knebworth Festival on July 20, 1974 was all the more remarkable as it was sandwiched between heavyweight guitar bands, the Allman Bros, the Doobie Bros and the Mahavishnu Orchestra. Also on that day were Tim Buckley and Alex Harvey's band. Yet the festival almost didn't happen, as prospective headliners Led Zep pulled out in anger at their name being leaked to the press. The supporting cast simply moved up one place, with the Allmans closing. John Altman, a friend of Morrison's, recalls: "The Allmans had big Winnebagos with their names on the sides. Van had a little caravan. There was a catering truck back stage and we all lined up for food. We got to the end of the line and the chef said, 'Allman Bros?' We said, 'No, Van Morrison.' He snatched the food back out of our hands!"



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WE SHALL OVERCOME!



On the road with a radical Boss! Direct from the heart of the E Street Band, new recruit and *High Hopes*' head honcho TOM MORELLO reports on BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN's 2014 manoeuvres: from "Sun City" in South Africa to "Stayin' Alive" in Australia... "Bruce puts his hand on the band's shoulder and says, 'This is what we're going to do, and it's going to be great.' It's a self-fulfilling prophecy."

As told to: Michael Bonner
Photograph: Mark Davis



PLUS: Springsteen's Top 30 Protest Songs! "Trust none of what you hear..."

IFIRST MET BRUCE in passing at a couple of Grammy parties over the years. I was not a casual Bruce Springsteen fan at the time. He was my favourite artist. I was very nervous and I think at one I said, "I'm the guitar player of Rage Against The Machine," and he said, "That's an exciting band." I said, "Thank you, thank you, Mr Springsteen..." But I was good friends with Bruce's sister, Pam. I knew her as a rock photographer, not even aware that she was related. I think the first time I met Bruce in that context was in '99 or 2000. What I think helped was that Rage Against The Machine covered "The Ghost Of Tom Joad" and we had to send our version off to him for approval because it was such a dramatic reworking of the song. We got word back that he liked it, so the next time I saw him we had that to talk about. He sounded surprised and pleased that a band like Rage Against The Machine knew his work – and it was work off an acoustic record, rather than something better known. So I'd see him at shows.

He'd sometimes come to my Nightwatchman shows. When it comes to the political overlap, we had a very interesting discussion on the last night of the Reunion Tour. He played 29 or whatever shows at Madison Square Garden – it was the last night of that. I think it was July 1, 2000. I had been on tour with Rage in Japan, flown home and just dropped my bags and flew to New York to go to the show. There was the big controversy over the song "American Skin (41 Shots)", about the fatal shooting of Amadou Diallo by the police, so there were these huge police protests at the show: pickets and boycotts and outrageous stories in the newspapers. But Bruce played the song at every one of the New York shows, and for the first time in the audience it wasn't people going "Brooooooce": there were some real boos out there. But he meant what he said in the song. I said to him, "I have police protests at every one of my shows, I have built a career on songs that are protested by the police." We had a laugh about that, but for Bruce, whose audience is very broad, I thought that was very brave in light of the controversy to stick to his guns and fearlessly play that song every night.

It wasn't until 2008 that we first played together and that was a brand new version of "The Ghost Of Tom Joad" at Anaheim, California. He was working on the *Magic* album in Atlanta when I was coming through on a Nightwatchman tour. He came to see my show there. He was working with Brendan O'Brien, who was a longtime friend and work partner of mine. He said, "Tommy, you should come up and play with us sometime." I was like, "That sounds good. I'm going to go to the internet to see when that might be." It turned out, in the not too distant future, they were playing in Anaheim, which is near my home in Los Angeles. So I called



BOSS FACTS

HIGH HOPES TOUR: THE STATS #1

From January 26-March 2

Shows played: 17

Total no. of tickets sold: 341,314

Box office gross: \$44.2m

Total number of songs played: 129

Biggest attendance:

Mount Smart Stadium, New Zealand, 73,958

Guests: Eddie Vedder, Mos Def, Jon Landau, Cooper + Koo string section

Longest show: 3 hr 43 min (Brisbane Entertainment Centre)

Albums played in full:

Born In The USA (x2), *Born To Run* (x2), *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, *The Wild*, *The Innocent...*



Axe murderers:
Springsteen and
Steven Van Zandt
onstage in Cape Town,
January 26, 2014

him up and said, "Hey, you remember when you said about me playing with you guys sometime? How about Tuesday?" He liked that idea, and we talked briefly about what to play. I can't remember, but I think I suggested playing "Tom Joad". He said, "Be ready to play acoustic or electric." I replied, "Do you want me to sing on it?" He said, "Of course I want you to sing on it." So I diligently went and practised. I'm always very excited and never nervous about

performing – except for that! I had been practicing with my rich, milk chocolate baritone voice the version off the acoustic record. When I arrived in Anaheim, I could hear the band doing an arrangement of the song. He had changed the key and moved it up about eight steps, so now it seemed to be well out of my range. Quickly figuring out transposing keys is not one of my strengths, so all of my good work had gone out of the window. I walked out onstage, nervous, I can't really say it right, I don't know how the voice is going to be in this new key and Little Steven is trying to talk me through it – "This is going to be so exciting" – and it's the worst night of my life. But they don't call him "the Boss" for nothing. Bruce puts his hand on my shoulder, looks me in the eye, and says, "We're going to play it in this key and it's going to be great." And sure enough, the tension dissolved, I had five or six shots of Jameson before

I went on, and something happened in that room that was pretty special that night. Bruce was right: we played it in that key and it was fucking great!

**"So far, in
15 shows
we've played
126 songs,
which is
a world
record..."**

TOM MORELLO

the audience was familiar with the original, the uplifting chorus of the song was immediately being sung, rafter to rafter. The next day, Pete Seeger died, such a gentle soul and such a great peaceful warrior for a better world. Bruce's immediate response when he heard the news was, "We're going to do something tonight." Then it was a matter of getting down to work: let's be great for Pete. We did "We

"To stand shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart..." Morello and Springsteen backstage at the 25th Anniversary Rock'n'Roll Hall Of Fame Concert at New York's Madison Square Garden, October 29, 2009



THE NEXT
RAGE

WHO IS TOM MORELLO?

The history of Bruce's newest recruit...

AS A HARVARD GRADUATE whose parents met during a pro-democracy protest in Kenya, Tom Morello was bound to have a broader take on the world than many peers who burst into the American mainstream thanks to the '90s alt.rock boom. The guitarist further benefited from a unique range of experience in the years before Rage Against The Machine's breakthrough in 1992, having supported himself both as a political aide and a male stripper.

Of course, music had been his focus since moving to Los Angeles in the mid-'80s. Disappointed by the premature demise of his funk-rock band Lock Up, he found a way forward after hearing Zack de la Rocha rapping in a club. After enlisting drummer Brad Wilk and longtime friend Tim Commerford on bass, Morello's new outfit soon developed a brazen merger of hip-hop and hard rock that was just as arresting as the band's radical political stance. Some openly wondered how a band whose lyrics were steeped in the ideas of Noam Chomsky could have a place in the Sony Corporation. Yet Morello - who soon earned a rep as RATM's sharpest wit and most affable member - believed that RATM could exist as

both a musical incendiary device and a marketable product as long as his band maintained creative control. "When you live

in a capitalistic society," he countered, "the currency of the dissemination of information goes through capitalistic channels."

Thanks to those channels, RATM's eponymous first album sold over four million copies worldwide. Three more followed before the band's original run ended in 2000, not long after a riotous appearance at the Democratic National Convention. In the years that followed, Morello clinched his guitar-hero status in Audioslave, essentially three-quarters of RATM with Soundgarden's Chris Cornell in

place of de la Rocha. Along with that personnel change came a greater degree of Zeppelin-style bombast - the band's three albums were rewarded with Grammy nominations and platinum sales.

Between 2006 and 2010, Morello offered a new take on rap-rock with Street Sweeper Social Club, a collaboration with The Coup's Boots Riley. RATM would also reconvene in 2007 for a series of tours (but no new music). But it's folk that really fired him up over the last decade. Inspired in part by Springsteen's Nebraska, Morello began performing solo as The Nightwatchman in 2003. He admits he was slow to realise that a folk song "could be as heavy as anything that comes through a Marshall stack". Clearly he won't rest until everyone else believes it, too. JASON ANDERSON

► HOW TO BUY TOM MORELLO



**RAGE AGAINST
THE MACHINE**
*THE BATTLE OF LOS
ANGELES*

EPIC/SONY, 1999

RATM's third studio album is their most focused effort, and an arresting showcase for Morello's growing fretboard dexterity.

9/10



AUDIOSLAVE
OUT OF EXILE
EPIC/INTERSCOPE,
2005

Free of the tentativeness that typically afflicts the first outings by supergroups, the band's second album boasts more cohesion and more swagger.

8/10



**THE
NIGHTWATCHMAN**
*WORLD WIDE REBEL
SONGS*

NEW WEST, 2011

On the third full set by Morello's "political folk alter ego", a beefier sound bolsters his ongoing efforts to inspire and edify.

7/10



Resting in the street: Bruce Springsteen in 1980

THE BOSS
ON FIRE

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN'S 30 GREATEST POLITICAL SONGS

1 | "Lost In The Flood" Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ, 1973

Touched by the over-eager prolixity of Springsteen's early work, but an effective sketch of a veteran struggling to recognise the country he was fighting for.

2 | "Racing In The Street"

Darkness On The Edge Of Town, 1978

A tale of two proverbial broken heroes on a last-chance power-drive; also an illustration of the thrill-chasing nihilism into which men can descend when nothing else is on offer.

3 | "The Promised Land"

Darkness On The Edge Of Town, 1978

On the face of it, another of his young-man-taking-a-shot-at-the-title rever-ups. Underpinning it, rage at the refusal of life to reward virtue: the title ironic.

4 | "Factory"

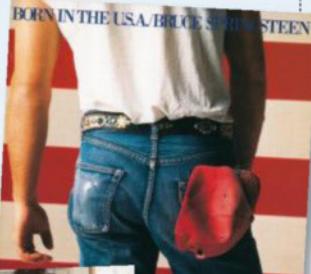
Darkness On The Edge Of Town, 1978

Springsteen's homages to the working man can drift into proletarian kitsch. This, however, is a

damning, knelling lament of the crushing monotony of manual labour.

5 | "The River" The River, 1980

Springsteen excels at telling a big story by telling a little one. This testimony of a bewildered blue-collar schlub whose life has been wrecked "on account



of the economy" is one of his most resonant portraits.

6 | "Mansion On The Hill"

Nebraska, 1982

Sharing the title with a Hank Williams song was surely no coincidence. In each, the lofty palace represents everything the narrator will never get.

7 | "Highway Patrolman"

Nebraska, 1982

Beneath the parable of obligation to one's kin versus fealty to one's duty is a tale of two men: one brother stays home and turns out fine, the other goes to Vietnam and comes back bad.

8 | "Born In The USA" Born In The USA, 1984

Springsteen's legendarily misunderstood story of an embittered Vietnam veteran. The contrast of the bleak lyric and bombastic music proved too subtle for many listeners, including Ronald Reagan.

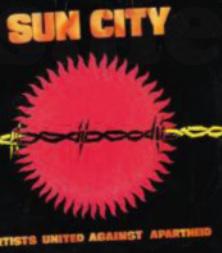
9 | "My Hometown" Born In The USA, 1984

Almost self-parodic employment of a small town's decline as a metaphor for America's post-war descent, as Springsteen often sees it, from a Norman Rockwell arcadia to a John Steinbeck dystopia. Cute tune, however.

10 | "The Klansman"

Unreleased demo from Born In The USA sessions

Could have been a highlight of Nebraska: a terse, bleak summary of the KKK's community outreach as seen by a potential recruit, decorated with an echo of "Dixie". (continues on page 37)

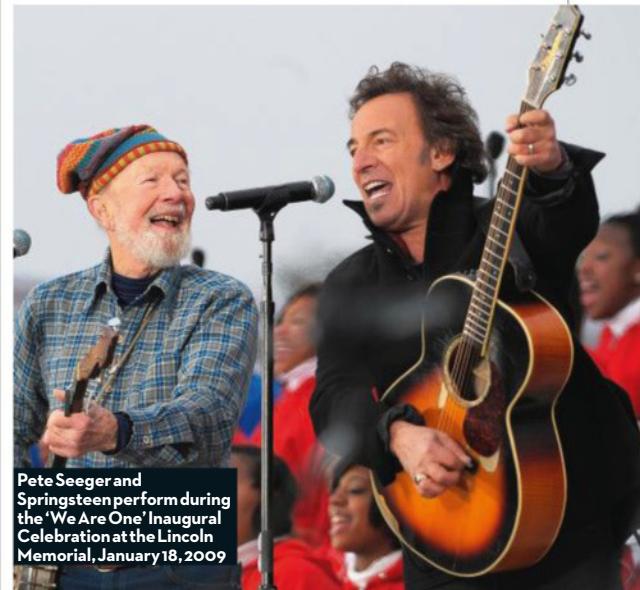


• Shall Overcome" and "This Little Light Of Mine". "We Shall Overcome"... it was hard not to bawl like a baby during that. The next night we played Little Steven's song, "Sun City", with Mos Def.

We've been opening shows

with a new song pretty much every night and sometimes there's no soundcheck. So there's a nine-minute rehearsal with an 18-piece band of a song we've never played before, and then we open a show in front of 25,000 people with it. This is what Bruce does. He puts his hand on the band's shoulder and says, "This is what we're going to do, and it's going to be great." It's a self-fulfilling prophecy.

When I was asked to replace Little Steven on the 2012 tour, when he was shooting his TV show, *Lilyhammer*, I'd played with the E Street Band maybe 15, 20 times. Whenever we were



in the same city, we'd play. It went from me playing on "Tom Joad", which was the first song I ever played with them, to maybe playing on five or six songs. But when we went to Australia on that tour, in my entire career as a musician, from my first garage band through my college bands to Rage Against The Machine, Audioslave, the Nightwatchman, I never performed as many songs as I did on that tour. I think in 10 shows we played 78 songs, which is conservative because on the tour that I'm on right now, in 15 shows we've played 126 songs, which is a world record. And we've got two more to go before this thing is done. So we may hit 200.

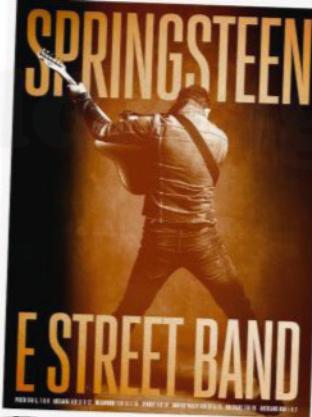
How do we decide what to play? Two examples. When we did "Stayin' Alive" [Brisbane, February 26], Bruce, Steve and I were sitting around the hotel and Bruce says, "I've got the opening song for tomorrow night. 'Stayin' Alive'." That looks on my face and Steve's were polar opposites. I was like, "That's fantastic." Steve was like, "...what?" Then we work it up. Bruce conducts the band through an arrangement that he had in rehearsal that day and we open the show with it. In Perth, I went to Bon Scott's grave the night before the show and we were sitting in the hotel bar after and I said to Bruce, "Do you think there is an overlapping territory between the E Street Band and AC/DC?" Without hesitating he said, "I'm sure there is." So we talked about a couple of songs and the next thing you know, we're opening the show with "Highway To Hell". We've also had the good fortune to overlap a couple of times with Eddie Vedder, who joined us onstage in Melbourne and Brisbane, which has been spectacular.

The band is amazing. It's like a guitar army onstage right now. Nils is spectacular, not just a great, great soloist, but

probably the most multi-faceted guitar player I've ever known. I often turn to him and say, "What key is this one in?", as Bruce fires off unknown song after unknown song. He's a great resource in that regard. Steve is the vibe guy. He's the Keith Richards of the E Street Band. Bruce has been playing particularly great lead guitar on this tour. Last night, on "Incident On 57th Street", he played one of the best solos I've ever heard him play. He's playing a song and performing. As a rhythm guitar player, I view my role very clearly: play the songs. Someone is going to be playing a straight-up A minor barre chord here, Nils is going to be doing some version of it, Little Steven's going to be mugging, Bruce is going to be swinging from the rafters, so I'm like: play the chord.

Am I a fully fledged member of the E Street Band? The way I look at it is, I'm an ally and comrade in arms. The E Street Band is an institution. People have been in the E Street Band for four decades. I'm beyond thrilled to have an E Street Band stamp in my passport and that they are great friends and musical compadres. The E Street Band is Bruce, Patti, Nils, Garry, Max, Roy, Steve, Clarence and Danny. Sometimes I just take a moment during the show where I act as an audience member and I turn and watch Bruce Springsteen sing "Born To Run" and just enjoy the fact that, somehow, I've parachuted onto the stage and I'm in the midst of the E Street Band, one of my favourite bands of all time.

My involvement with them has been a very, very, very gradual process. In 2008, I played one song. Then every once in a while I'd play one song or two songs. Then it's four songs. Then last year in Australia I played the whole set and on this tour I'm playing the whole set with four guitar players. Everyone's been so gracious and helpful. It's been the most drama-free, easy-going and professional situation I've ever been around. But you have to be ready, because if Steven played the solo in the song last night you might be playing it tonight when you get the nod from Bruce. The way I look at it, the E Street Band has been a great live band for 40 years. So rule No 1: don't fuck it up. They don't need me to be great,



BOSS FACTS

HIGH HOPES TOUR: THE STATS #2

From January 26–March 2

First song played: "Free Nelson Mandela"

Last song played: "This Hard Land"

Rarities: "Terry's Song" (Feb 8), "The Wish" (22)

Highest no. of tour debuts: 16 (Bellville Velodrome, SA, Jan 29)

Onstage marriage proposal: Tom Morello's brother to his fiancée; she says 'yes' (Bellville Velodrome, SA, Jan 29)

Cost to download show: \$9.99 (mp3), \$14.99 (flac)

In memoriam: William Melvin Clemons, Clarence's brother and Jake's father, February 18

they are already great. So play the songs, don't fuck it up and when Bruce gives you the nod, blow the roof off the place. Very simple.

In 1988, I saw Bruce play on a cable TV special of an Amnesty International concert from Buenos Aires. Up until then, I was a fan of metal music and punk and early hip-hop, and I only really knew Bruce's music through the "Dancing In The Dark" and "Glory Days" videos. But seeing that concert, the emotional depth of it and the thrilling heights of it propelled me immediately into buying *Darkness On The Edge Of Town* on cassette. It soon became one of my all-time favourite records. It spoke to the existential angst of my Midwestern upbringing. *Nebraska* was the next record I got. I got those two in quick succession. I've always been a fan of heavy music, but *Nebraska*, even though it's done just with acoustic guitar and harmonica on a four-track recorder, was as heavy as anything in the Metallica catalogue. It was the politics, with a lowercase 'p', the narrative sketches that were drawn in those songs that resonated with me. They felt like they were chapters in my own life. What he captures in songs like "Nebraska" and "Racing In The Street" is that desperation and hopelessness tinged with hope. Other voices like Chuck D or Joe Strummer had spoken to my internal political fire, and I identified with their lyrics. But those stories in those songs – I was surprised to hear Bruce was from New Jersey and not from Libertyville, Illinois where I grew up.

"The E Street Band is Bruce, Patti, Nils, Garry, Max, Roy, Steve, Clarence and Danny"

TOM MORELLO

Truckin' – the E Street Band in September 1984 at Philadelphia's Spectrum Stadium (l-r): Clarence Clemons, Garry Tallent, Roy Bittan, Patti Scialfa, Springsteen, Nils Lofgren, Danny Federici, Max Weinberg

DAVID GAHR/GETTY IMAGES



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THE BOSS
ON FIREBRUCE SPRINGSTEEN'S
30 GREATEST POLITICAL SONGS

11 | "Better Days"

Lucky Town, 1992

Kind of Springsteen's protest song against himself, a rebuke to a complacent millionaire: "It's a sad funny ending to find yourself pretending/A rich man in a poor man's shirt."

12 | "Streets Of Philadelphia"

Philadelphia OST, 1993

Sufferers of HIV/Aids haven't always been generally regarded with compassion; Jonathan Demme's 1993 film was part of the reason that changed. Springsteen's contribution was perfect: understated, more sorrowful than angry.

13 | "The Ghost Of Tom Joad"

The Ghost Of Tom Joad, 1995

Springsteen recasts Steinbeck's Okie itinerant against a backdrop of modern recession. A more raucous update, embellished by Tom Morello, appears on 2014's *High Hopes*.

14 | "Youngstown"

The Ghost Of Tom Joad, 1995

Quietly devastating memoir of an unemployed

steelworker whose hometown has been discarded by history. Crests on sombre j'accuse of the owners who closed the plant: "Once I made you rich enough/Rich enough to forget my name."



15 | "Sinaloa Cowboys"

The Ghost Of Tom Joad, 1995

Chronicling the unhappy end met by a pair of illegal immigrants from Mexico. A plea for compassion for those usually perceived as a faceless mass, the more potent for not telling the listener what to think.

16 | "Dead Man Walkin"

Dead Man Walking OST, 1996

From the film of the same name, a muttered protest against capital punishment. "Between our dreams and actions lies this world" could sum up the fate of many of Springsteen's characters. (continues on page 38)

17 | "Roulette"

Tracks, 1998

A River outtake. One of Springsteen's first-person views of a small man trying to understand a big situation, in this case the partial meltdown of a reactor at Three Mile Island in 1979.

18 | "Into The Fire"

The Rising, 2002

A hymn to the courage of the firefighters who climbed the World Trade Center stairs on 9/11, sung in the hope that America might summon similar strength to face whatever lay ahead.

19 | "My City Of Ruins"

The Rising, 2002

Originally written for a benefit show promoting the regeneration of Asbury Park, the times had other ideas. It was heard more often as a declaration of solidarity with a post-9/11 New York.

20 | "Devils & Dust"

Devils & Dust, 2005

What-are-we-fighting-for ballad written as American tanks rolled into Iraq. The narrator's struggle for moral clarity concedes that the US had good intentions – but in Springsteen's universe, the US usually does.

(continues on page 38)

Springsteen around the release of *Tom Joad*, 1995



At that time, I was in full political activist mode and one very important moment was seeing Bruce in Little Steven's "Sun City" video. The anti-apartheid movement was very near to my heart. I was one of the students at Harvard University who was propelling the anti-apartheid movement on campus there and we built shantytowns in Harvard Yard, and one of the soundtracks to our protest was "Sun City". This is probably before I was a fan of Bruce's music, but no-one sung more passionately and angrily about the injustices of apartheid.

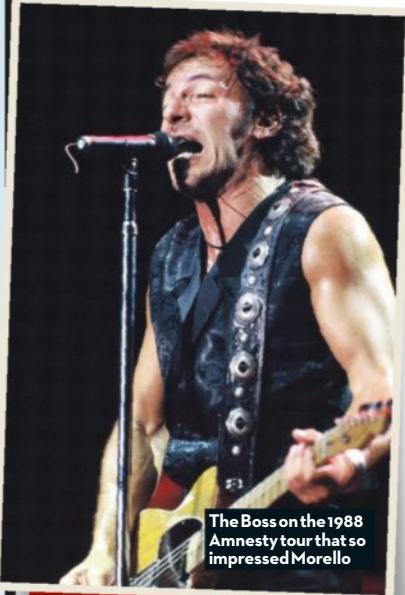
Even though he's got just a couple of lines in that song, it was impressive. It stood in sharp juxtaposition to my misunderstanding of what Bruce was about – the happy guy in the video for "Dancing In The Dark".

But even in "Dancing In The Dark" and "Glory Days", those are very dark lyrics dressed up in

these perfect pop songs – which is one of the reasons why Bruce's music resonates with so many people, the casual fans and fans of lyrics and fans of handsome lead singers and fans of leftist music. He very authentically speaks to all those different guys. At the time, Joe Strummer and Chuck D were my guys, and the character in those videos was very different. I just didn't understand it

until I saw that live concert from Buenos Aires. For many people the transformative experience is seeing Bruce live, and although I didn't see him live in a room until years later you could see the commitment and the passion in the Amnesty International show. I remember watching it in my living room. He played "The River" and it brought tears to my eyes, this TV concert, and then the stadium exploded at the end, it was hit after hit and the place was going wild and I thought, 'Man, maybe I should check this guy out.'

I worked my way through the back catalogue slowly because I was on a bit of a budget, so I lived with those two records [*Darkness On The Edge Of Town* and *Nebraska*] for a long time. Then there was "Born In The USA", which I hadn't paid close enough attention to, but clearly was an indictment of Reagan-era America. Taking it backwards, it wasn't until probably some years later, when I started to become a fan of the first three records, that I started immersing myself in the deep catalogue. When I'd go on tour I'd find bootlegs of the unreleased songs from *The River*, this huge catalogue of unreleased material that was available from bootleggers. There are some real gems in that. That's how the progression went. I first saw Bruce in '92, when he was playing with "The Other Band", not the E Street Band. That was a good show, but it wasn't a show that matched the skyrocket heights of



The Boss on the 1988 Amnesty tour that so impressed Morello

"No-one sang more passionately and angrily about the injustices of apartheid"

TOM MORELLO



The Seeger Sessions band, 2006

THE BOSS ON FIRE

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN'S 30 GREATEST POLITICAL SONGS

21 | "Bring 'Em Home"

We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions – American Land Edition, 2006

Pete Seeger's plaintive Vietnam anthem updated for another US military misadventure. Part of the power of this album was that these protest songs still seemed pertinent.

22 | "Gypsy Biker"

Magic, 2007

Springsteen's song of the unknown soldier, a family waiting for their son to come home from Iraq: "The speculators made their money on the blood you shed/Your momma's pulled the sheets up off your bed."

23 | "Magic"

Magic, 2007

Springsteen introduced this live as a song about living in times in which the truth can sound like lies, and lies can be truth. For all its musical calm, possibly the angriest song he has ever written.

24 | "Last To Die"

Magic, 2007

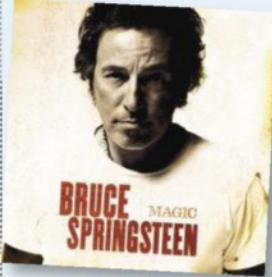
The question John Kerry asked about Vietnam, updated for Iraq: how do you ask a man to be the last to die for a mistake? Welded to a surging

chorus which could have been cribbed from "Born To Run".

25 | "Long Walk Home"

Magic, 2007

A pledge of faith in America. Its optimism is tempered, however: the "long" acknowledges, in keeping with the Boss'



ethos, that nothing comes easy, especially to the well-meaning.

26 | "We Take Care Of Our Own"

Wrecking Ball, 2012

"We take care of our own/Wherever this flag's flown", was one of Springsteen's ironic bluffs: the verses made the reproachful intent clear, snarling at the cavalry that "stayed home" in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

27 | "Death To My Hometown"

Wrecking Ball, 2012

27 | "Death To My Hometown" Wrecking Ball, 2012

In between excerpts of hymn "The Last Words Of Copernicus", Springsteen laments a town destroyed by economics as effectively as if by war – a companion to "Youngstown".

28 | "We Are Alive"

Wrecking Ball, 2012

Channeling the voices of the martyrs of America's domestic upheavals, from the Maryland railroad strike of 1877 to the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham in 1963.

29 | "American Land"

Wrecking Ball bonus track, 2012

Romping shout-out to America's immigrants, hinting at Springsteen's own roots – "Zerilli", mentioned amid a list of foreign surnames, is his mother's family.

30 | "American Skin (41 Shots)"

High Hopes, 2014

"41 shots" were what New York police fired at Amadou Diallo in 1999, when he reached for his wallet. Appeared on live albums and compilations before acquiring renewed currency following the 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin. ANDREW MUELLER

my memory of the Amnesty tour I saw on television.

But the next time I saw him was on the *Ghost Of Tom Joad* tour. That album and that show were a big deal to me. I couldn't believe how one guy with a guitar could for two hours put on a show that was so riveting. It was heavier than any metal show I'd been to: it was deep, it was dark. The things I looked for in my Sabbath world were eclipsed by this six-string guitar and this guy repurposing his back catalogue in an acoustic context. "Tom Joad" and "Youngstown" resonated with me and harmonised with my political worldview. "Tom Joad", speaks to the ever-present

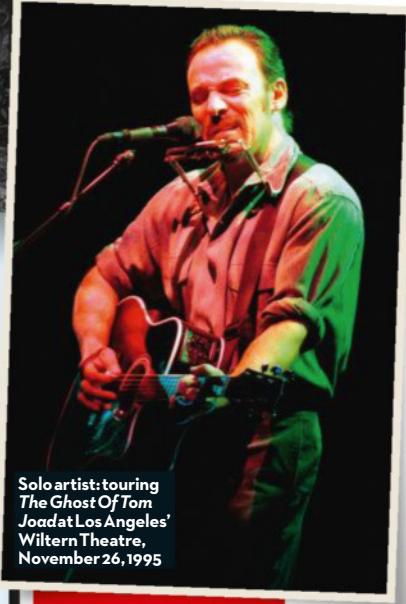
spark of rebellion in the human spirit and how it's passed from generation to generation, and sometimes it's the lonely deeds of resistance that are the way you move the chains of progress forward. Tom Joad's the main character in John Steinbeck's novel and the film, *The Grapes Of Wrath*. He's

an Oklahoma sharecropper who develops a political awakening and goes on at the end of the book to leave his family. He has this conversation with his mother, which Bruce paraphrases at the end of song, where she's afraid she'll never see him again and he says something like, "Wherever people are fighting for their rights, wherever babies are hungry and someone is trying to

fight to see that they have a more just world to live in, that's where I'll be." That sentiment in the book, in the film and in the song is at the core of my political beliefs: in your place, in your time, you stand up for what is right, and you swing with all your might and you may not be remembered for it or you may in congress with your fellow men and women change the world. Bruce Springsteen's "Ghost Of Tom Joad" is both a sad lament and a subtle threat and it really spoke to me.

"Youngstown" is the song that literally began my career as a political folk troubadour, the Nightwatchman. It was the first song I learned to strum and sing on a guitar. Some years later I began writing my own songs, but that was the first time I ever sat with an acoustic guitar and sang a song. Instead of writing a riff or singing along with the radio, it was like, "Ah!" It felt good. It was a bit of a mental hurdle to get over.

Is Bruce a comparable figure to Woody Guthrie or Pete Seeger? I look at it slightly different from that. I don't think you can ghettoise protest music or social justice music. I think that, yes, Bruce is another link in the chain of Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. But so too are The Clash and Public Enemy and System Of A Down and Rage Against The Machine. I don't think it's genre-specific. It's artists who are



Solo artist: touring *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* at Los Angeles' Wiltern Theatre, November 26, 1995

"He takes these deep, serious songs and has everyone dancing on the tables"

TOM MORELLO

Guitar army: Nils Lofgren, Springsteen and Tom Morello perform at the MusiCares Person Of The Year event at Los Angeles' Convention Center, February 8, 2013



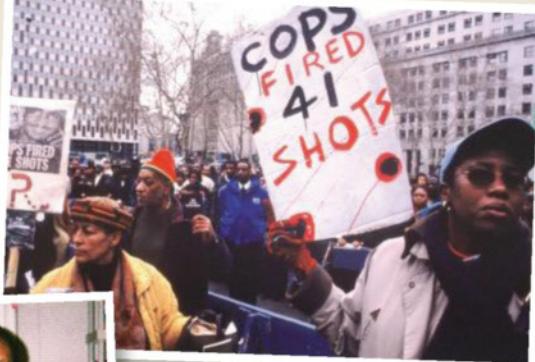
TRUE STORIES

AMERICAN SKIN (41 SHOTS)

The tragic tale of Amadou Diallo

JUST AFTER midnight on February 4, 1999, an NYPD squad car rolled past 1157 Wheeler Avenue in The Bronx. Outside was one of the building's residents, Amadou Diallo, a 23-year-old immigrant from Guinea. The four officers in the car believed Diallo matched the description of a wanted rapist, and challenged him. Diallo retreated inside, reached into his pocket and turned towards the cops with something in his right hand. The police fired 41 shots. They hit Diallo 19 times, killing him instantly. The object in Diallo's hand turned out to be his wallet.

Springsteen first played "American Skin (41 Shots)" at Atlanta's Philips Arena on June 4, 2000. This was three months after the officers had been acquitted of second-degree murder (the City of New York settled with Diallo's family in 2004 for US\$3 million). It was also eight days before the E Street Band bedded in for 10 nights at New York's Madison Square Garden, where "American Skin" featured in every show – and where reaction to it



was a reminder that Springsteen cannot always rely on the blue-collared folk he lionises in his songs to share his values.

The Patrolmen's Benevolent Association called on the NYPD to boycott Springsteen. Police Commissioner Howard Safir and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani expressed disapproval, and the head of New York's State Fraternal Order Of Police called Springsteen "a floating fag". (In fairness, one NYPD lieutenant wrote to *The New York Times* noting that Springsteen had always given generously to police charities).

That Springsteen himself was fretful about "American Skin" seems evident from the half-hearted manner in which it has been released. It appeared on 2001's *Live In New York City*, but it wasn't until *High Hopes* that Springsteen released a studio version – by which time "American Skin" had become about something else. Springsteen began playing it again in 2012, following the shooting of unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman. Zimmerman, too, was acquitted of murder. **ANDREW MUELLER**

WHILE WE WERE in Australia, in 2012, we made a record. Before we left for Australia, I was driving home one night listening to E Street Radio, which is a satellite radio station that just plays Bruce Springsteen songs, and "High Hopes" came on. It felt like a hidden



The E Street Band
on Late Night With
Jimmy Fallon,
March 2, 2012



BOSS FACTS

COVER ME!

The opening cover versions played by Bruce and the E Street Band on the High Hopes tour between January 26 and March 2, 2014

Special AKA, "Free Nelson Mandela"

Bellville Velodrome,
Cape Town, South Africa,
Jan 26 & 28; FNB Stadium,
Johannesburg, South Africa,
Feb 1

AC/DC, "Highway To Hell"

Perth Arena, Perth,
Australia, Feb 8; Aami Park,
Melbourne, Feb 15

Eddie Cochran, "Summertime Blues"

Adelaide Entertainment
Centre, Adelaide, Australia,
Feb 11

Martha & The Vandellas, "(Love Is Like A) Heat Wave"

Adelaide Entertainment
Centre, Adelaide, Australia,
Feb 12

The Easybeats, "Friday On My Mind"

Allphones Arena, Sydney,
Australia, Feb 19

Stick McGhee, "Drinkin' Wine"

Hope Estate, Hunter Valley,
Australia, Feb 22

Eric Burdon and War, "Spill The Wine"

Hope Estate, Hunter Valley,
Australia, Feb 23

The Bee Gees, "Stayin' Alive"

Brisbane Entertainment
Centre, Brisbane, Australia,
Feb 26

Lorde, "Royals"

Mt. Smart Stadium,
Auckland, New Zealand,
March 1; Mt. Smart Stadium,
Auckland, New Zealand,
March 2

Bruce has a tremendous amount of stored-up goodwill. For years, he was involved in Amnesty International and at every show there's the opportunity for people to contribute to local food banks and charities. That Robin Hood scene happens at every show. The first time Bruce got involved with electoral politics was the John Kerry campaign [in 2004], and certainly when someone with the gravitas of Bruce Springsteen for the first time enters that world, although it didn't win Kerry the election, it was certainly meaningful. It definitely showed a shift, that he was willing to put himself out there behind a candidate for president, which he'd never done before.

Does music make a difference? It made a difference to me.

Not a day goes by when I don't hear from and see in the street, or in hotel lobbies, or at the beach, someone comes up and tells me how *Rage* or the *Nightwatchman* has changed their life, and opened doors for them or encouraged them to pursue knowledge or pursue activism or try to get their hands on the wheel of history. Certainly Bruce has done that. Throughout his catalogue, when the right combination of lyric and rhythm and rock occurs



Springsteen at a John Kerry rally in Columbus, Ohio, October 28, 2004

it speaks a kind of truth that is deep in the human DNA, in a way that is different from film or literature. There's something in humans, in the reptilian part of the brain, when you hear that beat and there's something about a rhyming couplet that rings true... and the truth you feel in Bruce Springsteen is a combination of empathy with people experiencing the worst of times and a parting of the clouds and the ability to hope and dream and fight for something better. ☺

A MusiCares Tribute To Bruce Springsteen is released on DVD, Blu-ray and as a digital download on March 24; the "American Beauty" EP is released on April 26

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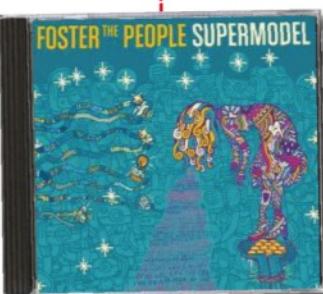
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Smash It Up

BY THE DAMNED

“You can stick your frothy lager!” In 1979, the reformed London punks were shunted off to a studio to “make some noise” – result: a hippy-baiting powerpop hit of complex proportions



WHEN THE DAMNED reformed in January 1979, after a nine-month break following the departure of original guitarist Brian James, nobody knew quite what to expect.

James had been the band's principal songwriter on their two albums to date, and it was unclear who from within the band's ranks could replace him. Recruiting ex-Saint Algy Ward on bass (Lemmy had briefly held the job), the band signed to Roger Armstrong's Chiswick Records, and were sent to a Croydon studio for a couple of weeks and told to “make some noise”, as Ward remembers. The results were impressive: Captain Sensible's “Love Song” gave The Damned a Top 20 hit, and he followed it up with the poppy, hippy-baiting “Smash It Up”, which although effectively ignored by the BBC, became a minor hit in winter 1979 and subsequently the band's unofficial anthem.

For such a simple powerpop song, “Smash It Up” was remarkably complex. For a start, Sensible had conceived it as the second section of a four-part suite, and although the first two sections appeared on 1979's *Machine Gun Etiquette* album, the last two didn't surface until 2004. And then there was the question of influences. How did a tribute to Marc Bolan – with whom The Damned toured in 1977 – fit in with a song that had lyrics scolding “Krishna burgers” and “Glastonbury hippies”? What did Abba have to do with all this? And

just how did The Clash's grand piano come to be so important? We persuaded Rat, Captain, Algy Ward and Roger Armstrong to spill the beans about Clash-caricaturing condoms, car crashes and frothy lager. David Vanian declined to participate.

PETER WATTS

CAPTAIN SENSIBLE: I was in a deckchair in my parents' garden catching up on some sleep when I was awoken by my mum saying, “Your mate, what's his name, Roley, Boley? He's died in a car crash.” I hoped she didn't mean Marc Bolan.

RAT SCABIES: We'd just been on tour with Marc. He looked after us. He was really good on the technical side of sound. I'm pretty sure he would have ended up producing us.

SENSIBLE: I locked myself in my room and picked up the guitar. The sad Part 1 of “Smash It Up” pretty much wrote itself and is a tribute to Marc. While other old-guard rockers like [Phil] Collins and [Keith] Richards loathed punk, he actually really dug it.

SCABIES: The day after Bolan died, I was sitting

round Captain's house, plonking around on the guitar and I came up with a few odd chords. Captain went, “Ooh, that sounds good.” And he and I wrote Part 1. That's the instrumental bit. Captain had a great ear for melody and helped turn Part 1 into a complete thing.

SENSIBLE: It's all a blur, but I thought Rat's involvement was more on Part 2. I recall Rat twanging away on the guitar and he came up with a usable riff which became the chorus.

ROGER ARMSTRONG: Part 1 was Captain's tribute to Marc Bolan. That's what he always told me. He then wrote the original song and tagged that in front.

SENSIBLE: Part 1 is the calm before the storm. It creates a dreamy vibe that will be shattered by Part 2's mania. Bolan died in a car crash and Part 1 is written for him. Part 2 wasn't, but with a title like “Smash It Up” it seems incredible that it wasn't intended to be about his car crash. I only realised this a few years ago. It was subliminal songwriting.

ALGY WARD: Part 2 of “Smash It Up” was something Captain and his brother, Phil Burns, had worked up.

KEY PLAYERS



Captain Sensible
Guitar



Algy Ward
Bass



Rat Scabies
Drums



Roger Armstrong
Producer



That's showbiz!
The Damned in
1979: (l-r) Algy
Ward, Rat Scabies,
Dave Vanian and
Captain Sensible

SCABIES: Captain wrote the music for the bulk of Part 2, we demoed it and then one of the Croydon punks, Ralph, came up with a lyric, the "smash it up" bit.

SENSIBLE: The shouty title may well have been contributed by whoever was at my mum and dad's house at the time. We had a crew who called themselves the Croydon Punks Ltd. Peter Lord, some chaps called Gent and Ralph were members.

ARMSTRONG: I booked them into a studio for two weeks and told them to come back with a bunch of songs. Most of *Machine Gun Etiquette* was demoed there.

WARD: They told us to go and make some noise and stop hanging around the record company offices. We went to a studio opposite Selhurst Park. That's where Captain did all four parts.

SENSIBLE: We virtually lived in RMS Studio. It became our musical laboratory. We'd demo every idea we had or recreate an old classic to see how it was constructed. "Chantilly Lace" would be dissected and reassembled with multi-layered backing vocals and mandolin. We were given a free rein – which is how we got a four-part "Smash It Up". Parts 3 and 4 never got the proper studio treatment, as the label only wanted the first two parts. They do meander towards Shadows territory a bit. I like instrumentals, though.

ARMSTRONG: We recorded Parts 1 & 2 in Wessex. Part 3 was demoed in Croydon and Part 4 we worked on in Sound Suite Studio in Camden. We put 1 & 2 on the album but didn't use Part 4 because

we'd never properly recorded Part 3. We put them all out in 2004.

WARD: Captain had to learn to write. Brian James was gone. They were desperate. Scabies came up with a couple of things, some good stuff, but they had to write and Captain would be in his room for hours playing along to Abba, learning every song.

SENSIBLE: We'd all – Rat, Vanian, myself – been burned by the experience of the first album. It was all written by Brian [James] so the rest of us got zero publishing royalties. Me and Rat had to bunk the train coming up to town as we had no dosh. Playing the Nashville once, we missed the soundcheck and Brian told us to get a cab next time. We were dumbfounded, we could only dream of such extravagance.

SCABIES: This is when Captain found his ear. He'd never really written before but he was a great one for running with the ball. He had a great sense of melody.

SENSIBLE: Someone remarked to me once that the more interesting punk bands were the ones who didn't necessarily listen to much punk music. We certainly didn't. Much as I loved the punk attitude, I never understood the two-minute restriction in song length. The tune wasn't finished until all avenues had been explored.

ARMSTRONG: Captain brought me the demo and we did a bit of rearranging. My feeling from day one was that it was a good pop song – something The Damned always had. They could do the 'Grr' punk thing but they had great melodic sensibility.

WARD: On the demo, Captain played drums, guitar, everything. Scabies wasn't too happy and Dave's never happy about anything. We went on tour in America in June 1979 and Captain kept playing it on the tour bus. I couldn't fathom out what I would play, it didn't feel like The Damned.

SENSIBLE: I thought that "Smash It Up" was a cracker.

SCABIES: It has real pop sensibility but is subversive enough to not be mainstream.

SENSIBLE: The Groundhogs were full of angst-ridden songs about feeling out of step with society and that's how I felt. The chords Tony McPhee was using were nowhere to be found in my Bert Weedon *Play In A Day* book and I had to work hard to learn the inversions and drone string chords he was employing. "Smash It Up" is in G and lets the open G string drone on unfettered by any finger work until the chorus kicks in. Then there's the timing. I am not *aufait* with technical matters but I was a bit of a Soft Machine fan and this song's verse has got a strange count before the chord change to C then back again. You need to ask a music theorist what we were doing 'cos I've not got a clue. Many musicians who've jammed the song with us over the years have been completely thrown by the oddball timing and things have ended in chaos.

ARMSTRONG: It was worked hard, that record. We cut it at Sound Suite and then took it to Wessex for overdubs. We were in Studio Two and The Clash were in Studio One doing *London Calling*. We'd sneak into their studio and use their equipment. ●



FACT FILE

The Damned in '79: "the musicians of punk rock..."

- **Written by:** Dave Vanian, Captain Sensible, Algy Ward and Rat Scabies
- **Released:** October 5, 1979
- **Performers:** Dave Vanian (vocals), Captain Sensible (guitar), Algy Ward (bass), Rat Scabies (drums)
- **Producer:** Roger Armstrong
- **Recorded at:** Sound Suite, Camden, and Wessex Sound Studio, Highbury
- **Label:** Chiswick
- **UK chart position:** 35
- **US chart position:** n/a

SENSIBLE: We got on well, doing backing vocals and handclaps on each other's albums. The Clash pottered away in a fog of dope smoke, taking ages to actually get anything down on tape, whereas The Damned were speed aficionados. Vanian had also discovered that a couple of gulps of helium made you sound like Mickey Mouse, so of course we ordered a cylinder, which was put to use one evening filling up a condom with Mick Jones' caricature drawn on it which floated up to the high ceiling in their studio after they'd gone home. Mick wasn't that amused next morning and they were chucking stuff at it for a good while before it came down and work could commence for the day.

ARMSTRONG: When it comes out of the middle-eight about the "blow wave hairstyles" the record dies for a second and with pop you cannot let it wane for a moment. We needed something in there. I suggested to Captain we put two big piano chords under the first notes of Dave's vocals, two really positive chords. Captain played it on The Clash's grand piano and it really held the piece up. The problem then was that there was no other piano on the record, so Captain hammered out a few chords rhythmically at the end of the middle eight which prepares you for the two big chords.

SENSIBLE: Organs put through fuzz boxes, playing the piano strings with drumsticks... It's a fair cop.

WARD: When we got to the studio I thought, 'I can't play this shit.' I didn't like the song. I'd played it God knows how many times live, but in the studio my heart wasn't in it.

ARMSTRONG: We had problems with sound on Algy's bass and Captain put the bass part on.

SCABIES: If anything, it was about the frustration of youth. We wanted to get rid of what was around and smashing it up is one way to go about it. The hippy thing hadn't gone away. Punk wasn't popular. People think everything changed when the first record came out, but we were still a minority.

ARMSTRONG: There was a story in a tabloid about how some punks had disrupted a middle-class suburban dinner party by singing "Smash It

Up" while they wrecked the place. The BBC said forget it, they wouldn't play it. It was a Top 10 record if it'd had radio play. It's not even that controversial, it's about frothy lager and blow-wave hairstyles. It's hardly a call to revolution. Nobody was going to man the barricades on the back of that.

SENSIBLE: The middle eight was probably inspired by "I Feel Much Better", the B-side of "Tin Soldier", my favourite Small Faces single.

I love the end of "I Feel Much Better" and you can actually sing the "frothy lager" bit over it to a certain extent. Lager was introduced just as I started frequenting pubs. We thought it was a joke and would never catch on. I blame Ralph for the "Glastonbury hippies" line. The song's actually saying bollocks to everyone, not only hippies.

SCABIES: The BBC didn't actually ban it, they were too smart for that. They knew that

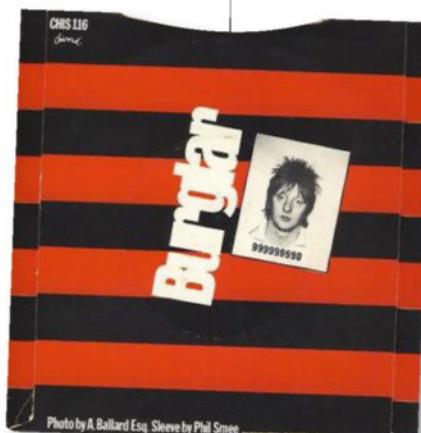
if they banned it we'd have sold a lot more. So they just didn't play it.

ARMSTRONG: They band did play it on *The Old Grey Whistle Test* along with "I Just Can't Be Happy Today". The organ broke down and they really did smash it up, wrecking their equipment. Dave had suffered a bout of nerves so had self-medicated with whisky. If you look closely, the mic is gaffertaped to Dave's hand.

WARD: Nah, we were just having fun. Then me and Scabies had words, more than words, there were a few broken noses, doing the "Smash It Up" video, and after that I lost interest. I enjoyed it up to then, it was good work, playing most days of the week, being famous, ha ha.

ARMSTRONG: They were the musicians of punk rock, streets ahead of the others, Captain and Rat especially. Punk rock had a 'playing is for ponces' attitude but musicians really got The Damned. That is the reason they are still around today. That, and the fact nobody died. ☺

The Damned are on tour in the UK this April. For full details, visit www.officialdamned.com



September 16, 1977

Marc Bolan dies, inspiring Captain Sensible (and possibly Rat Scabies) to write an instrumental in his memory.

March 1978 The Damned split up

January 1979 Reform and play the Croydon Greyhound with new bassist Algy Ward. They distribute free copies of "Love Song" to the audience.

March 1979 Sign to Chiswick and begin

demoing. All four parts of "Smash It Up" emerge from these sessions. Parts 1, 2 & 4 are recorded in the studio in summer 1979. Only the first two parts appear on the album, though.

October 1979 "Smash It Up" released as a single. The BBC refuse to play it. It stalls at No 35 but becomes a live favourite.

May 1995 "Smash It Up" is covered by The Offspring for the

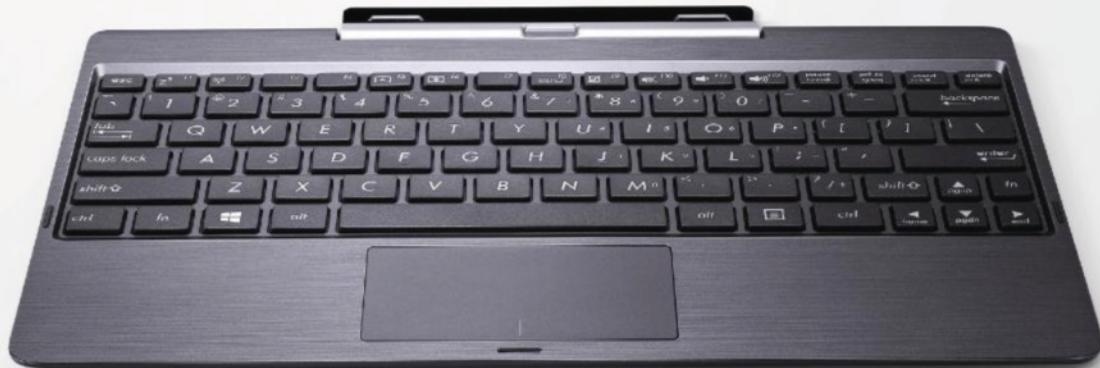
Batman Forever soundtrack, earning The Damned "a bloody fortune", according to Ward.

November 2004 Ace release all four parts of "Smash It Up" for the first time.

TIMELINE



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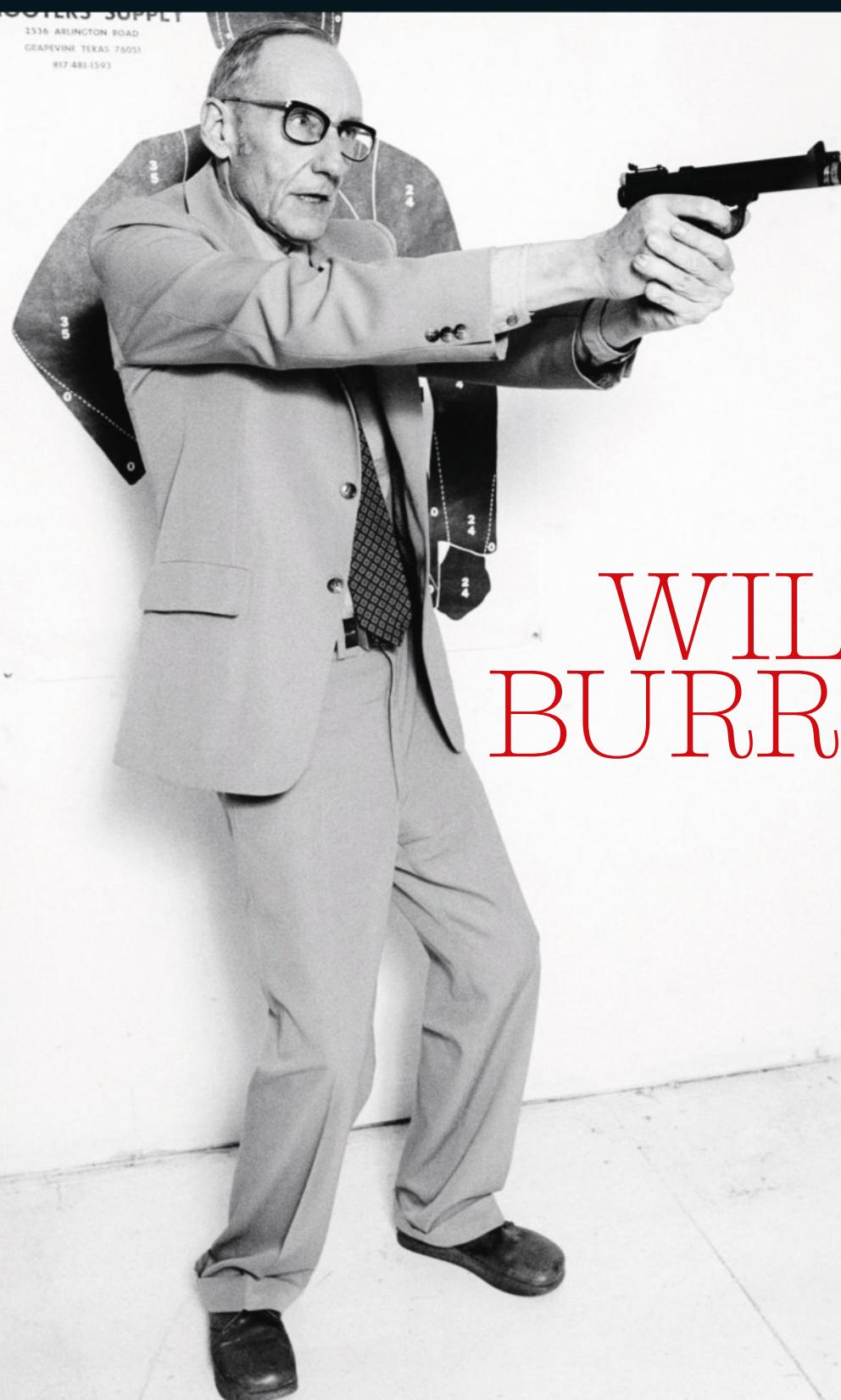
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William S
Burroughs,
The Bunker,
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He was
an outlaw
writer,
a junky,
and he shot
his wife.
So how did

WILLIAM S BURROUGHS

become a
rock icon and,
perhaps, “the
hippest man
who ever
lived”?



Story: John Robinson
Photo: Kate Simon

WHEN WILLIAM S Burroughs lay in his coffin, he did so surrounded by tokens from the life he had departed. He wore a Moroccan waistcoat given to him by his friend and collaborator, the artist Brion Gysin. He had on his best shoes ("New shoes" being CIA slang for a new identity). About his person, his friends had placed a pen (he was, of course, a writer), and a gun (of his 100 plus firearms this was his favourite .38, "the snubby"). According to the poet John Giorno, inside the jacket of this lifetime addict, there was a packet of heroin – secreted there by Grant Hart.

Today, Hart calls this alleged part in the 1997 funeral a "myth". Instead, Grant – a friend to Burroughs since Hüsker Dü's work on a 1985 album called *A Diamond Hidden In The Mouth Of A Corpse* – recalls the memorial as, if not a celebration, then at least an observance of a complex life. The person in the coffin had lately been a courteous senior citizen with whom locals in his adopted hometown of Lawrence, Kansas would pet cats, shoot targets and occasionally smoke pot. For much of the rest of his life, he had been a more divisive figure: a heroin addict, who shot his wife in Mexico, whose books were banned for obscenity.

For musicians, Burroughs is no less complex. His work provided a technique for David Bowie, lyrics for Iggy Pop, and a name for Steely Dan. There have been collaborative albums featuring Burroughs alongside Laurie Anderson, Kurt Cobain and Sonic Youth. But what is the true nature of their relationship – a benign exchange of ideas, or a rather grubby buying of kudos by virtue of association with this genuinely unique figure?

"When he lived there, Mexican street kids used to call him 'El Hombre Invisible,'" remembers the British poet Heathcote Williams. "Burroughs has now entered the region of total invisibility, and yet he's very present – achieving cult status as the hippest person that ever lived."

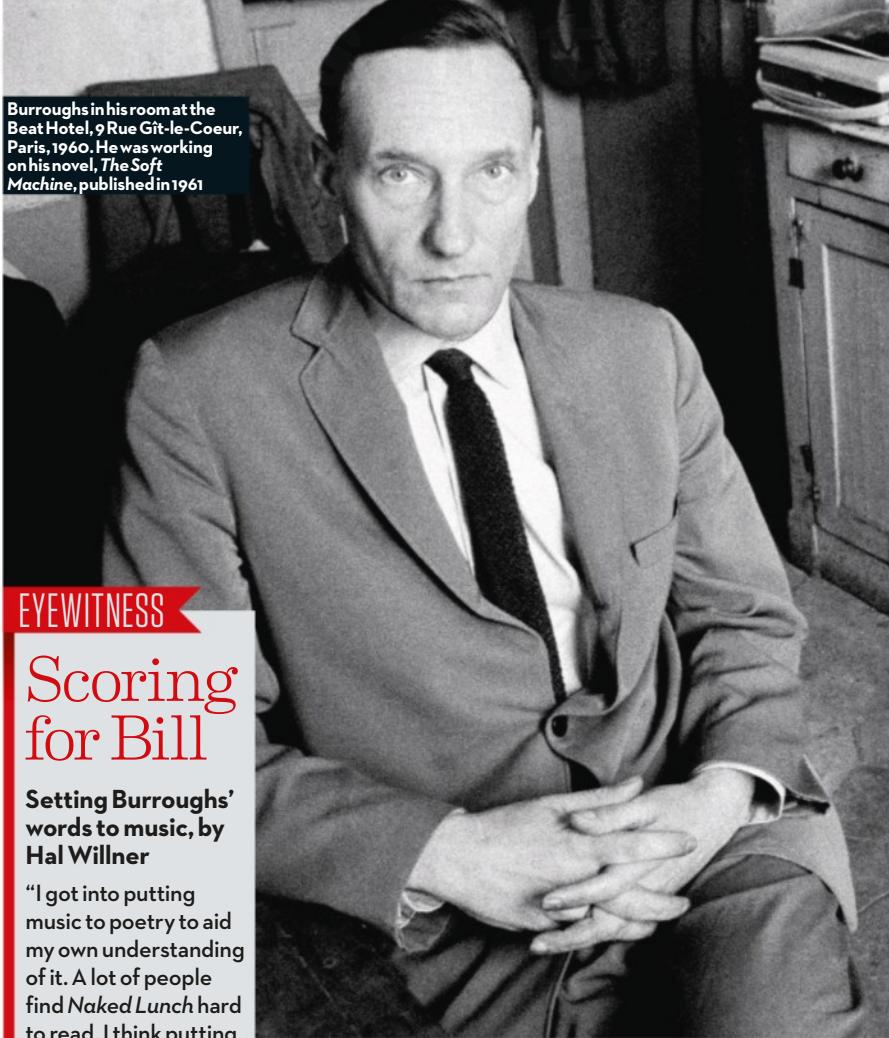
"I am part of a group who look on William as the ultimate in redeemed people," says Grant Hart. "He went from the lowest of the low, the accidental shooting of his wife, while dependent on drugs. He left Mexico, but didn't escape anything – he spent the rest of his life atoning."

"Socially, I've heard the remark: 'In 1951 WS Burroughs shot his wife accidentally and spent the rest of his life improving his aim,'" Hart continues. "We're not talking about his marksmanship, but about his aiming to do well, to do better."

BORN IN ST Louis, Missouri, 100 years ago, William Seward Burroughs III experimented not only with his literary work, but with his life. Rejecting the normality of his affluent family (though not to the extent of rejecting the \$200 a month stipend they paid until he was 50), by the time he was 30 Burroughs had immersed himself in a drug culture that dictated his itinerary for the next 30 years. From the United States, he went to Mexico, France and Tangier. He spent several years in London in the mid 1960s. He returned to the United States in 1974, by which point his work, lifestyle, and highly developed persona had made him an iconic figure not just of extreme literature, but of extremity itself.

His was an existence of high culture and low life. Early, reputation-building books like *Junkie* (1953) and *Naked Lunch* (1959) draw on – and with great humour and stylistic violence transform – the experiences of his addicted life. Suffice it to say, they were

Burroughs in his room at the Beat Hotel, 9 Rue Git-le-Cœur, Paris, 1960. He was working on his novel, *The Soft Machine*, published in 1961



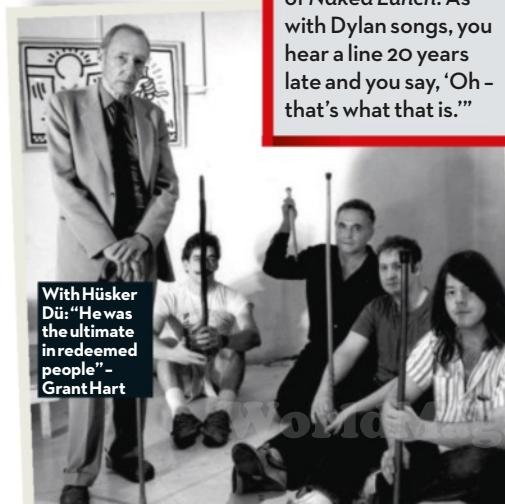
EYEWITNESS

Scoring for Bill

Setting Burroughs' words to music, by Hal Willner

"I got into putting music to poetry to aid my own understanding of it. A lot of people find *Naked Lunch* hard to read. I think putting Hitchcock music underneath gives you the vibe of it, just like a song."

"You can hear a song and not know what it's saying exactly but get the feeling of it, you go back to it and more gets revealed. How many people listen to Edith Piaf and don't understand what she's saying, but understand the emotions of it? My understanding of this grew and grew. Right now we're finishing up a record we started 18 years ago of the more obscene and unspeakable sections of *Naked Lunch*. As with Dylan songs, you hear a line 20 years late and you say, 'Oh – that's what that is.'"



With Hüsker Dü: "He was the ultimate in redeemed people" – Grant Hart

contraband in this country, and their ownership brought to the contemporary reader a frisson they have never lost.

For a reader like Barry Miles, who knew Burroughs well, later becoming his biographer, he and other "Beat" writers offered a glimpse of forbidden worlds.

"*Naked Lunch* was banned in Britain until it was published here in 1964," says Miles. "You had to smuggle copies in down the back of your shirt. You can't imagine how it added to the appeal. He was writing about subjects I didn't even know you were allowed to write about – the most modern book we did at school was *Memoirs Of A Fox-Hunting Man*."

"My favourite books were *The Third Mind* (with Brion Gysin, 1977/8) and *The Job* (1969)," says Genesis P-Orridge, who worked with Burroughs on several projects in the 1970s and 1980s. "They're combinations of experimental texts, explanations and interviews. The ideas and the concepts were really inspiring and intriguing. Breaking things down, and cutting things up – as William would say, 'to see what it really says'."

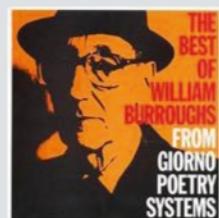
"His style is high modernism, really," says Miles. "I've always thought he belongs in company with *The Waste Land*, and *Nightwood* by Djuna Barnes, these texts from the 1920s. His work is a combination of that and a return to the picaresque: Rabelais, Richardson. There's no character development, storyline, plot – the pieces can be pretty much read in any order. *Naked Lunch* is like that, though it was written before he discovered cut-ups. It is cut up in a sense – it was sent to the printer in the order the sections were typed up by his friends. Completely at random."

IF THERE'S ONE thing everyone knows about William Burroughs, it's the idea of the "cut-up": Bowie used it on *Diamond Dogs*; Nic Roeg edited parts of *Performance* using the technique. It is, as Miles says, "part of a battery of weapons". However, as Burroughs was eager to explain, it was not his idea, but something discovered by Brion Gysin.



HOW TO BUY

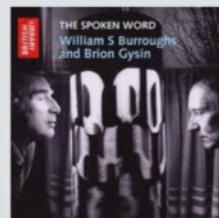
William S Burroughs



William S Burroughs The Best Of Giorno Poetry Systems

MERCURY, 1998
Major-label boxset compiling recordings for John Giorno's label, chiefly extensive and sensitively edited live performances. Also contains parts of *Nothing Here Now But The Recordings*, as compiled by Genesis P-Orridge.

10/10



William S Burroughs Dead City Radio

ISLAND, 1990
Hal Willner produces this collaborative recording. Features John Cale, Sonic Youth and others, but the stirring orchestral music by Frank Denning, however, provides the best juxtaposition to WSB's satirical declamations: "Thanks for 'Kill a queer for Christ' stickers..."

8/10



William S Burroughs And Brion Gysin The Spoken Word

BRITISH LIBRARY, 2012
Impressive archival collection. Features the pair's tape experiments from Paris in 1970, Gysin poems and a Burroughs performance from Liverpool in 1982, which finds him in impressively resonant voice: "Give me an old wall and a garbage can, and I can sit there forever..."

8/10

William S Burroughs/ Kurt Cobain The "Priest" They Called Him

TK RECORDS, 1993
Together at last. Kurt Cobain supplies the strafing guitar howls, and an approximation of "Silent Night". Burroughs reads a version of his story, "The Junky's Christmas". An interesting curiosity.

6/10

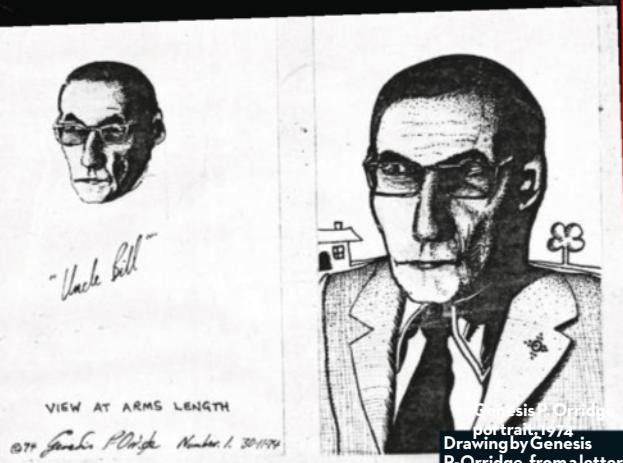
EYEWITNESS

23 Skidoo

The 'death number', by Heathcote Williams

"Bill had an odd belief in the significance of numbers. I was in a cab with him going down the Brompton Road when he announced that 23 was 'the death number'. My surprise transformed into astonishment when he pointed out a shop front and said, 'See that? Kenyon's Undertakers! It was 239 Brompton Road.

"Then Bill asked me for my phone number. I was living in the Transatlantic Review office at the time - KNI (Knightsbridge) 2389. This was all said in the most matter of fact way. He concluded by saying: 'Heathcote. Watch out for 23.'"



While the pair were resident at the 'Beat Hotel' (a poorly lit, low-rent flophouse in the Latin quarter of Paris) Gysin was cutting up drawing paper with a scalpel, when he unexpectedly cut into a newspaper beneath. He was delighted to find that he could re-arrange the cut words and sentences into unexpected sequences, a discovery that he immediately shared with Burroughs. Gysin was fond of saying that writing was 50 years behind modern painting. This new technique would allow writing to access some of the exciting juxtapositions being made in art, and in cinematic montage.

"There's a great recording from when he's at the Beat Hotel, where he gets a letter from a lawyer," says Genesis P-Orridge. "He's sat there with Ginsberg and [poet] Gregory Corso, and he says, 'Hmm. Let's cut it up and see what it really says.' You hear him cutting and then he says "Money... money... money... that's what it's really about."

"To him it was a tremendous breakthrough," says Miles. "All along, he had been trying to find the elements of control, things which were controlling him. He was particularly intrigued by the idea of language as a vehicle for ideas which you have not taken on board consciously. With your education you get preconceived ideas of nationhood, patriotism, religion. All of this stuff comes with your upbringing and how your language is structured."

"One of the things he said to me on my first visit to him," says Genesis, "was, 'I think you should have this task: how do you short-circuit control? Come back to me when you have

"He said to me, 'How do you short-circuit control?'"
Genesis P-Orridge

have become part of a more profound philosophy of life. Rather than be controlled by DNA, Genesis and his late wife Lady Jaye undertook surgeries to become – as far as possible – one being. Genesis still uses the pronoun "we". "DNA," he says, "is a recording device."

GENESIS P-ORRIDGE MET

William Burroughs through the post. A participant in the "mail art" scene of the '60s and '70s, Gen received a magazine called *FILE* – a spoof on *LIFE* – from a Toronto collective called General Idea. In it were small ad requests for images from individuals including one William Burroughs, of Duke Street, London. Genesis decided to write, but wanted to do so without appearing too fawning.

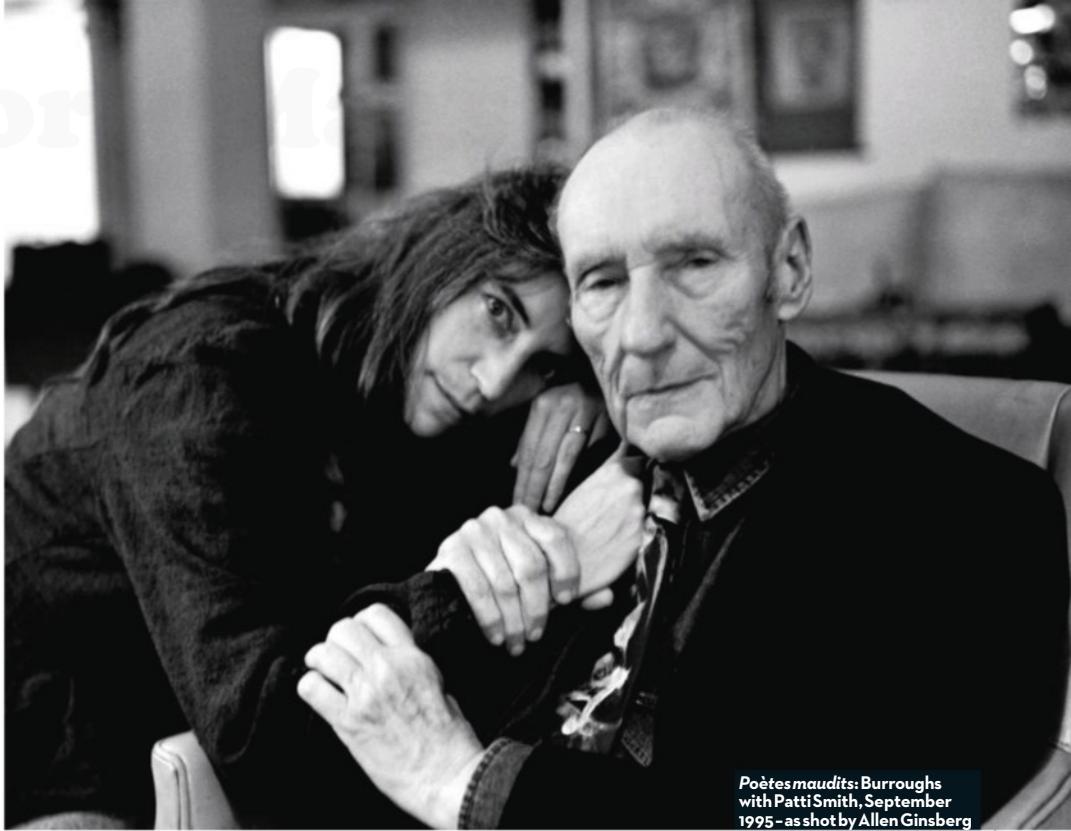
"So we wrote a letter," says Gen. "It started off: 'Dear William... I'm really tired of you and Allen Ginsberg pretending you know me just to get credibility... Please cease and desist from using my name.' And it worked: he wrote back, a postcard, saying 'Whenever you're in London just call this number and come over.' It was one of those flukes. That was 1971. We hitched to London, called the number, and heard the voice. He said, 'Get in a taxi – I'll pay for it when you get here.' So we went over, stayed up drinking whisky for hours. He showed me his magical journals, his notebooks, and we became friends."

As their friendship developed, Genesis and his collaborator Peter "Sleazy" Christopherson proposed to Burroughs the idea of releasing an album of his tape experiments. There had been a 1965 LP of readings (titled *Call Me Burroughs*), which had introduced listeners to the charismatic Burroughs voice, and the chaotic worlds of *The Naked Lunch* and *Nova Express*.

However, nothing was available which demonstrated his experiments with the medium of recording itself. As early as the 1950s, Burroughs had experimented with tape – assisted by his sometime lover and "systems advisor", a Cambridge graduate called Ian Sommerville.

"He didn't see the significance of them," says Gen. "He'd done them in the '50s and '60s and gone more into writing. We said to him, 'These are going to be really important.' In the sleeve notes to *Nothing Here Now But The Recordings*, the album we made, we say these will be more profound in their influence than even the books. Which has turned out to be true: cut-ups and samplers have made everyone much more aware of re-assembling things, random chance and so on."

BURROUGHS HAD ARRIVED in London in 1963 from Tangier, ostensibly to take the apomorphine heroin cure devised by Dr John Yerbury Dent. "It works as a total body emetic," Burroughs told Heathcote Williams. "If you even have a distant glimpse of heroin, your whole body throws up." He lived in various hotels (one found for him by



Poètes maudits: Burroughs with Patti Smith, September 1995 - as shot by Allen Ginsberg

"He hated rock'n'roll. None of it meant anything to him..." *Miles*

EYEWITNESS

Beats scene

Burroughs and the Beat Generation, by Miles

"The Beats were very different writers; the only connection was a friendship one. Stylistically they were very different from one another. Not until the 1970s really did Burroughs admit to being part of it. As far as he was concerned, they were some friends he had had in the '40s. His friendship with Kerouac was terminated in '58. But when he moved back to the US he realised he had to market himself, and part of the marketing was the Beat Generation. It was a brand invented by Allen Ginsberg basically, and he went for it. Anything to sell books."

Alex Trocchi; one, remembers Williams, "in Earls Court run by two elderly queens in wigs", before finally arriving at his famously Spartan Duke Street apartment.

"He hung out with a very aristocratic gang of gay guys," says Miles. "Robert Fraser and his circle, Lord Londonderry. [Filmmaker/collaborator] Antony Balch was in his

building, and he showed him what went on in Piccadilly Circus: the meat rack and all that sort of stuff. He didn't really do drugs in London. Most of the time he just got legal pot – when you got it on prescription."

"At Duke Street it sometimes seemed as if Burroughs was attracting a coterie of just the kind of people he satirised," remembers Heathcote Williams. "Even though Burroughs had renounced drugs, he would hold an allure for junkies. It was as if he gave their predicament some glamour."

While in London, Burroughs continued his tape experiments. In this, one of Miles' connections proved enormously helpful. "I used to work a lot with Paul McCartney, and lend him literary magazines like *Evergreen Review* and *Big Table*," recalls Miles. "There was a plan to do an audio monthly magazine, very cheap: conversations, modern poetry, rehearsals, whatever was going on in the avant-garde scene at the time."

Recordings would be kept low-key. In 1965 Ringo Starr had taken a lease on a flat at 34 Montagu Square in central London, but it didn't take long for fans to find out his address. An odd solution presented itself. In early 1966 Ringo moved out and McCartney took over the lease, installing a small studio in the flat. Ian Sommerville and his boyfriend Alan Watson moved in to run the tape machines.

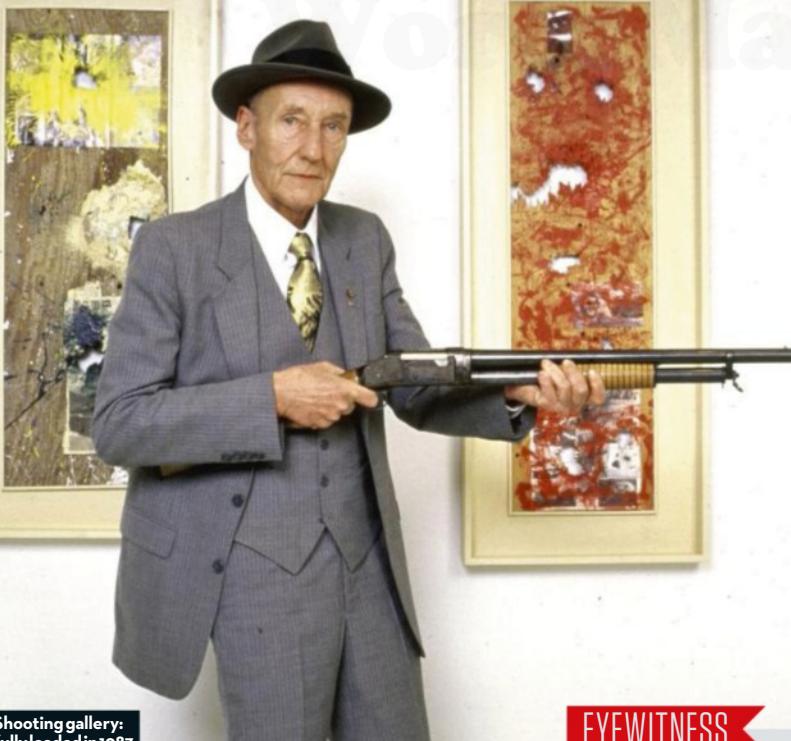
"Burroughs was one of the few people who used it," says Miles. "McCartney worked up 'Eleanor Rigby' there. Burroughs did a lot of tape experiments – mainly to do with stereo, and they worked in there a lot together."

It's arguable that some of the tape experiments at Montagu Square fed into the Beatles process for *Revolver* and *Sgt Pepper*. Certainly, Burroughs is a presence on the latter. Look up between the heads of Paul and Ringo. Left of Laurel and Hardy. There's Burroughs, leaning in front of Marilyn Monroe on the cover of one of the era's most widely circulated pop records. "Paul put him on there," says Miles. "It was on the strength of that friendship."

If reading his work could be a challenge, hearing him read was immediately involving. Having in 1974 returned to the

Burroughs with Jack Kerouac, NYC, 1953





Shooting gallery:
fully loaded in 1987

US to teach in New York, Burroughs quickly tired of the arrangement. He became close to James Grauerholz, who now manages the Burroughs estate, with whom a new plan was devised to secure his income. Grauerholz had been in rock bands in his native Kansas, and understood city-to-city promotion. With him as manager, Burroughs went on tour. Though not by nature a performer – he would suffer stage fright and occasionally drink too heavily before a reading – Burroughs had no problem developing a repertoire of performance-appropriate sections from his work. Some is thorny, philosophical and troubling. His accounts of the horrific exploits of “Dr Benway”, meanwhile, are hilarious.

“Once you’ve heard his voice you get where he’s coming from,” says Miles. “Astonishing juxtapositions. Allusions to 17th-Century English literature, Shakespeare – all mixed up with 1940s New York junky slang. All delivered in this pre-war accent. It’s a unique accent. It’s a bit like WC Fields, the same kind of humour. They both hated dogs and children.”

Hal Willner, who made two records with Burroughs in the ‘90s, is also minded of Fields. “The drawl, the intelligence, the cynicism. It’s interesting to approach him not as an avant-garde writer but as you would Lenny Bruce. We had him read the sermon on the mount – out of his mouth, it’s the most insane writing imaginable. Somewhere we have a recording of him reading [TS Eliot’s] ‘The Hollow Man’. He could have been a personality with that voice alone.”

Records and performances were the right medium for Burroughs in the 1970s, thinks Genesis P-Orridge. “The readings were the way that he spoke to the younger generation, the ever more illiterate, instant gratification crowd,” he says. “They didn’t read books. Things like *The Ticket That Exploded* are very difficult to read – they’re like *Finnegans Wake*. It’s a classic but no-one reads it. But travelling around and being invisible, readings became a bridge to all the different generations.”

When Burroughs was booked by Terry Southern to read on *Saturday Night Live* in 1981, Willner was musical director. “I had to put music to his readings,” he says. “It seemed appropriate to use patriotic music by Aaron Copland. He was a true American writer, a dark one. It made sense to approach him as if he were Mark Twain. It was beautiful.”

HIS PERFORMANCES helped establish Burroughs less as an author, more as a personality – the man in the suit and fedora; the junky with the dark jokes and extraordinary voice. It was

a controversial development. Some feel that events like the Nova Convention – a 1978 celebration in New York at which Burroughs was hailed as king of the counterculture by musicians like Frank Zappa, Patti Smith and (in absentia) Keith Richards – continued valuable dissemination of Burroughs’ work. Others argue it began a period in which Burroughs was co-opted by a new generation merely for the anecdotal colour he provided.

“He was dealing with a much younger crowd than he had been in London,” says Miles. “He became a cult figure more than a writer. By then, writing and poetry was playing a less important role in youth culture. They weren’t interested in the revolutionary side of stuff, or anything to do with the avant-garde experiments. In New York, he was seen more as someone who had experimented with a lot of drugs.

“He liked the attention, but didn’t know who these people were,” adds Miles. “He hated rock’n’roll. None of that stuff meant anything to him. People like Kurt Cobain (*The Priest* They Called Him, a Burroughs reading to which Cobain supplied feedback, came out in 1993) came over, he didn’t know who he was. He hadn’t heard his music and wouldn’t have wanted to. All he did was look at him and say, ‘There’s something wrong with that boy. He frowns all the time.’

“He went to very few rock concerts. He saw Led Zeppelin because he interviewed Jimmy Page for *Crawdaddy*. He saw them in terms of modern-day shamans – the power they had over this audience, which to him was astonishing.

“When he finally saw Patti Smith play, he related to her in the same way, he couldn’t understand how she had so much power over her fans. But rock’n’roll wasn’t his thing. He was born in 1914 – even when he was at Harvard the movies were silent. It was too loud and he couldn’t understand the words.”

Hal Willner, however, isn’t so sure. “I went to Lawrence, Kansas with Marianne Faithfull,” he remembers, “and I remember the effect her song ‘Brain Drain’ had on him. He wrote about it, and used some of those words – so I do think he got something out of it. Did he listen to music while at home? I don’t think all that much. But Burroughs was always more of an outsider in that group – his influences weren’t as pronounced as, say, Dylan’s were on Ginsberg.”

FOR THE LAST 16 years of his life, Burroughs lived in Lawrence, Kansas (“An island of liberality,” says Miles, “in a right-wing state”). Having wound down his programme of readings, Burroughs combined his last written works with a domestic life centred around cats, drinking and target shooting. Visitors like Hal Willner accompanied him on this last mission. “It was the only time I shot a pistol in my life,” says Willner. “That was the main outing when we were down there – I tried to get him to go bowling once, but he wouldn’t do that.”

“At the range I shot five bullseyes,” Willner continues, “...in the target next to the one I was aiming for. But I didn’t tell him this. He said: ‘You got in the kill zone! You’re in the kill zone!’”

Often, however, Burroughs simply enjoyed the quiet company of friends, much as any elderly man recovering from heart surgery might. “We would talk about his work, but that was a small part of the time we spent talking,” says Grant Hart. “We would talk about everyday things: guns, animals, plants, current affairs. Our friendship was pretty much the Bush and Reagan years, so there was a lot to talk about.”

Hart noticed how after a heart bypass in 1991, the way Burroughs dedicated books seemed to reflect, after a

turbulent life, a growing sense of his own mortality. “What he would write would get a lot heavier,” says Grant. “Like, ‘May you get through the land of the dead and find the western lands’... When you get to that age... in his own mind he’d probably already died many times.”

EYEWITNESS

Paint it, black

Burroughs’ shotgun art, by Grant Hart

“We did a lot of field shooting, hitting spraypaint cans with shot. I was fond of seeking out random images – we could get stoned and just look at them like, ‘Do you see the monkey that’s preaching?’ Artists aren’t always turned on by the people who purchase their stuff, but William knew people were buying souvenirs of a life when they were buying a Burroughs artwork. These were pieces made by a man known for having shot his wife. He kind of met in the middle: the strength of images and dark way of presenting them. He and James [Grauerholz] were gold-gathering by this time, which they could do very effectively with the art.”



Caravan

The witty melodists of the Canterbury Scene revisit their career highs: "We were having fun!"

L

IKE MANY OTHER Canterbury artists, Caravan's roots lie in The Wilde Flowers, the near-mythical group of teenage soul, jazz and beat enthusiasts that spawned Soft Machine and the careers of Kevin Ayers and Robert Wyatt. Formed by Pye Hastings, Richard Coughlan and cousins Richard and Dave Sinclair, Caravan were younger than most of their Canterbury peers, and often eschewed mammoth jams and bizarre time-signatures for a more wistful, folk-influenced sound and witty, highly melodic songs. Still led by the amiable Hastings, they've weathered punk rock, lineup changes and some chilly winter tent-dwelling with characteristic good humour. "We didn't know what we were bloody doing!" laughs Pye today.



And on guitar...
Caravan's Pye Hastings:
"I wanted more rock!"



CARAVAN

VERVE FORECAST, 1968

The free-flowing debut: stoned pop of the highest order.

Pye Hastings [guitar, vocals]: The Wilde Flowers were

playing soul covers, which I loved, but I'd just begun to write – "Place Of My Own" was the first song I wrote – and people seemed to like it. So we decided to reform the band [as Caravan] and start again, but with our own material.

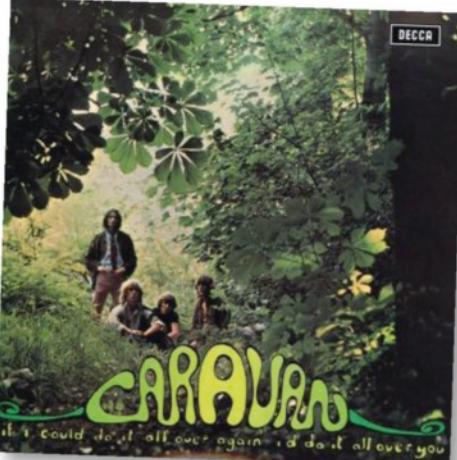
DAVE SINCLAIR [keyboards]: We rented this house in Whitstable, and on January 1, 1968, we moved in, the four of us, starting to rehearse our own music. Our first gig was at Middle Earth, and after that things started happening.

HASTINGS: The first LP was done at Advision, Bond Street. We did backing on a 16-track tape, which was huge to us in those days, then we added voices and solos. When it came to mixing, producer Tony Cox said, "Five people in there would be too complicated, I'll do it myself," so we had no control. It was a bit too echoey for us, but it produced a certain sound people liked.

DAVE SINCLAIR: During the recording, we were living in tents on a field outside the village hall in Graveney, where we rehearsed. Our roadie was driving us up to London every day and we were laying down tracks, then coming back to our tents at night. When we got paid we'd get the bus into Canterbury, about seven miles, and drink all the money for the week!

RICHARD SINCLAIR [bass, vocals]: As autumn came, it got too cold, so we pitched our tents inside the hall, over the fan heaters.

THE UNCUT CLASSIC



IF I COULD DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN, I'D DO IT ALL OVER YOU

DERAM, 1970
A psychedelic masterpiece, featuring pastoral gems like "And I Wish I Were Stoned" and the band's first epic, "For Richard".

HASTINGS: We produced it ourselves – we all had a say, and a fader! The whole thing became nonsense. You need control in these situations. It was thoroughly good fun, though. This took about two or three weeks... it was a nighttime recording, done in a studio on London's Balls Pond Road. It was just an upstairs room, a bit sleazy. We shot the cover in Holland Park; you just step off a pathway and it's there. It looks like we're in the depths of the country. We also

played the title track on *Top Of The Pops*. It was a big highlight for us – "Blimey, we're on *Top Of The Pops*, we're on our way" – but we never got any further than that!

DAVE SINCLAIR: We were finding our own direction much more, and we knew what we wanted from our music, it was a bit more challenging. I remember saying to Pye, "This really needs a guitar solo, there's too much keyboard," and I got fed up, picked up his guitar and started playing this solo, fiddling around. And Pye said, "Give it here," and played a really good solo! The early days were great, we weren't married, we didn't have mortgages or the responsibilities of more adult people. The first three albums reflected that. We shared all the royalties, too. After that, things changed – "Oh, that's my song, I should be getting all the money..." This thing always happens, especially in bands. It's a shame, really. My theory is once you start involving money, the whole feeling of music dies.

RICHARD SINCLAIR: The main thing I can tell you about the first four years with Caravan is that we were having fun – and it sounds like we were having fun. As the years went on, it was slightly different, as we weren't all getting blasted out of our tiny minds on a huge mound of hash and God knows what, and jumping about with no food, with girlfriends looking after us. We were all accidentally having babies, so Caravan started to play less music together as fun. It started to go a bit wobbly '69, as we weren't all living in the same house.



Branching out in '69:
(l-r) Pye Hastings, Richard
Sinclair, Richard Coughlan
and Dave Sinclair



IN THE LAND OF GREY AND PINK

DERAM, 1971

The band's biggest-selling LP - recorded at Air London and Decca's Broadhurst Gardens - was also curiously free of Pye Hastings' songs.

HASTINGS: I'd written the majority of the tunes on the first two albums, and it was a democracy after all, so I thought it was about time I gave way. And the batch I had at the time wasn't as strong as what Richard and Dave had. It was another night recording, from half-past-ten or eleven at night, all the way through to six or eight in the morning. We'd spend a fair bit of that time in the pub or getting food, while someone else was doing an overdub. It would take days to do some of Dave's solos, we'd be running 14 or 15 tracks and take one line from one bit, another line from another bit, and add it all in. All spliced by the producer, David Hitchcock, who was absolutely phenomenal.

RICHARD SINCLAIR: My dad had said to me, "If you're gonna be popular, you've got to write nursery rhymes for adults," - so there you go, *In The Land Of Grey And Pink*, nursery rhymes for adults!

DAVE SINCLAIR: Richard was prolific then, he did more singing on this than anyone else. I did one side of the vinyl [*the side-long "Nine Feet Underground"*], and on the other side I did a lot of arranging for Richard's songs like "Winter Wine" and "In The Land Of Grey And Pink". So I probably had more impact on the album than anyone else... which is a good feeling.



WATERLOO LILY

DERAM, 1972

Dave Sinclair departs and, along with new keys man Steve Miller, the band create their bluesiest, jazziest work.

DAVE SINCLAIR: With ...*Land Of Grey And Pink*, we knew we'd made a good LP, and we were hoping we'd get to America, but nothing seemed to happen. The management and label seemed very lax about the whole thing. On top of that, the band were getting more gear and louder amplification - I couldn't hear what I was playing onstage, and the beauty of the whole thing had started going out of it, so I left.

HASTINGS: To fill Dave's shoes is almost impossible, as he's such a great, distinctive player. Steve Miller was more of a blues piano player, so we had to move in that direction a bit on *Waterloo Lily*, which created a new sound. It came to a head with me and Richard shortly after, as he wanted more jazz and I wanted more rock, so there was a collision course.

RICHARD SINCLAIR: I get asked to play a lot of early Caravan stuff, particularly *Waterloo Lily*, as I think the people who listen to me are a bit more musically; they like my bass playing, my guitar chords. The first four years of the band were very free, but then Pye would tell you exactly what he wanted, which was a bit regimental for me. I think Pye's always wanted to be Eric Clapton, or Stevie Winwood, but he should be himself. He's very nice, Pye, very gentlemanly, but he wasn't playing music much by this point. I like to play 24 hours a day.



FOR GIRLS WHO GROW PLUMP IN THE NIGHT

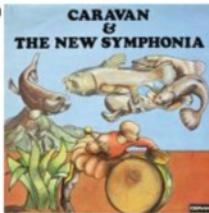
DERAM, 1973

Richard Sinclair is gone, but his cousin returns for this beefy, melodic offering - Pye's favourite, and the first to do away with joint songwriting credits - with new members Geoff Richardson, on viola, and bassist John G Perry.

HASTINGS: Whenever you change any band member, you get someone going, "Well, he's not Dave Sinclair," or whatever. But you win brand-new fans. We reformed and found Geoffrey, who's great and has been with us for 40 years. John Perry put a link in one of my songs, and said, "I want my royalty for that, you're crazy if you don't take yours." Up to that point, I'd shared everything with everyone else, but that was the reason for the change.

DAVE SINCLAIR: They'd already recorded these songs with some other keyboard players, but it wasn't working out. Then they went on a tour to Australia with Slade and Status Quo - a very strange mixture - and came back pretty despondent. They decided to re-record and asked me back in the band. I had the choice of coming back with a share of royalties or for session money, and I was strapped at the time, so I stupidly went with session fees. Pye started coming up with amazing riffs, quite heavy.

GEOFF RICHARDSON [viola]: Pye took control of the band for the first time on this LP, and it has been ever thus. I'd never been in a studio in my life, and I was boggled by it.



CARAVAN & THE NEW SYMPHONIA

DERAM, 1974

The band team up with an orchestra for a hastily organised run-through of some

old favourites and new compositions.

HASTINGS: We'd used a small orchestra on *Plump In The Night*, and Martyn Ford, who was the conductor, said it'd be great to do a live LP. I was given two weeks' warning that I had to write four new songs for it... It's a bit airy fairy in some places, but it was a landmark for us and we got a great gig out of it.

RICHARDSON: Retrospectively, it was mind-boggling due to lack of rehearsal time. As the orchestra was a union, we had two blocks of hour-long rehearsal for the whole thing. They had to read the arrangements and go. We just turned up at Drury Lane, sound-checked with a grumpy brass section, with a string section and bass players going on about how loud Richard's drums were... We also had lots of trouble with double mics and earthing. We were placed behind the orchestra, a long way from the audience, so we were a lot quieter and the connection with the audience was less than usual. I felt embarrassed playing with the string section, as I didn't have a good instrument, then... It went down really well, though, a massive sell-out, a bold move.



BETTER BY FAR

ARISTA, 1977

Produced by Tony Visconti, fresh from Bowie's Low, this was the group's last album before they

split for the first time, stung by punk and music industry machinations.

HASTINGS: It was great fun working with Tony Visconti, he's bloody good at what he does. You record and mix bass and drums, then everything slots into place on top of that.

JAN SCHELHAAS [keyboards]: Tony was a great martial arts enthusiast and used to have great punching bags hanging everywhere. He was into *wing chun* and very much taken with Bruce Lee. After recording *Better By Far*, Clive Davis at Arista in America didn't want to go with the LP because he was already latching onto new wave. It was as if we'd just overnight become dinosaurs. And [manager] Miles Copeland had left us with a bit of a messy legacy [financially]... we weren't really business-minded people then.

HASTINGS: When punk came in, we didn't last long. Our main market up to that point had been colleges, but if you were charging £1000 a night to put on a band like us, and you get a punk band that's new and exciting coming out for £100, which one are you gonna go for...? So our days were numbered. I got a job in an engineering firm, putting pipes under roads. I kept my past quiet – can you imagine going on a building site with an accent like mine and long hair... You keep your head down, talk like them – "Awright, mate?" – and get on with the job! But it cleared my head out of all the old crap I'd been going through in the music biz.



**A field in England:
Caravan in 1975 – (l-r)
Coughlan, Hastings, Mike
Wedgwood, Dave Sinclair
and Geoff Richardson**



THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS

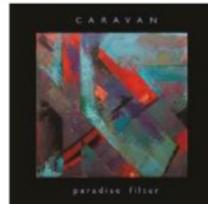
HTD, 1995

A Pye solo album in all but name, this record almost featured a cameo from a comedy legend...

HASTINGS: We made *Back To Front* in 1982 with the original members. I thought it would work, but it didn't, the old egos and problems were all still there, nothing had changed. I've had my moments with Dave, he's a very determined guy, but I have huge respect for him. He's mellowed with age and he's a really nice guy underneath it all. It's the same with Richard, but it's more awkward as there's more of an ego there. A few times over the years, I've got to the point where I've begun to start up again, and have approached people and said, "I want to do a Pye Hastings album." They all say, "Well, all the songs are good, but it sounds like Caravan, and if you do it as Caravan you'll reach a much wider audience." In a way it's a blessing, in a way it's a millstone.

DAVE SINCLAIR: Pye had written all the material for this album, but I had one number, "Travelling Ways", which we did with [bassist] Jim Leverton singing. It got playlisted on BBC Radio 2, it was covered in Ireland and went into the charts there. I think Pye was a bit miffed – after all that, it was my song that got played!

RICHARDSON: We did this in a studio just north of Hythe in Kent, called Astra. It's in a barn, and it was good fun. Vic Reeves popped in – he lives down that way, he's an old friend of the band and he used to try and play guitar with us for those sessions.



PARADISE FILTER

CARAVAN RECORDS, 2014

The loud, immediate new one, and the band's first LP without Richard Coughlan, who passed away in 2013, leaving

Pye Hastings as the only original member.

SCHELHAAS: Richard was too ill to play. But we kept thinking we'd just take a break and he'd recover, but he never did. We cut this in Womenswold and also at Geoff's little studio. Pye wanted a simulation of a guy going down a cell block, along the iron bars, so we tried Geoff's radiator... It wasn't exactly death row in Cincinnati; it was a store heater in Canterbury.

RICHARDSON: Pye's preference now is for short songs, so I wrote the title track for this and made it long, to redress the balance. The fans were saying they want long, rambling songs, bits and bobs, oddities... It's always in the back of my mind that that's the origins of Caravan.

HASTINGS: Fans are always asking for the next "For Richard" or the next "Nine Feet Underground". Dave wrote both of them, as individual pieces that got joined together. But fans seem to think they were conceived as one long piece, but it was just an arrangement thing. I can only write what I have in my head. I've tried to make my style more immediate, which I think I've succeeded with... the songs are rockier. I'd love the next thing to be even heavier, but you have to go one step at a time.

Caravan tour the UK in April, starting at Huntingdon Hall, Worcester (9) – officialcaravan.co.uk. Info about Richard Sinclair's Music Club 'start up' can be found by emailing richard.sinclair@alice.it



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www.fulltimehobby.co.uk



THE QUEEN OF LAUREL CANYON

Dedicated to the one they loved... Forty years after her death, the extraordinary and brief life of **MAMA CASS ELLIOT** is recounted by her friends and collaborators. Says John Sebastian, "You went to Cass for truth."

Story: Peter Watts
Photo: Henry Diltz/Corbis





Magic number...
The Big 3 in 1963:
(l-) Rose, Elliot,
Hendricks



The Mugwumps in the mid-'60s

ASS ELLIOT WAS many things, most of them remarkable. A powerful singer and performer, a great wit, a large woman who didn't fit in with the stereotypical gaminé '60s ideal, a folk singer who ended up in Las Vegas, a woman operating in a predominantly male

environment, an unexpected TV personality and a surrogate mother to dozens of stars. Elliot was a fabulous singer who found fame with The Mamas & The Papas; but she was also a presence around which the likes of David Crosby, Graham Nash and John Sebastian bonded. At the height of her success, she welcomed musicians and actors to her house on Woodrow Wilson Drive, a haven in the Hollywood Hills, where they'd gather through a shared love of music, conversation and drugs, to jam, joke and talk.

"Cass was the absolute incarnation of Gertrude Stein," says Graham Nash. "She was somebody who would bring together people from different disciplines, and have parties where everybody could talk. She introduced me to David Crosby and my life changed. That's why on 95 per cent of the records CS&N have released since she passed away there has been some mention of Cass. They are very subtle, practically invisible and you'll never find them; they are for us and for her, because without her none of it would have happened."

Nash and Crosby were not the only ones to benefit from Elliot's hospitality. "You could drop in at any time, there were always people around," says PF Sloan, guitarist on three The Mamas & The Papas albums. "Cass had a tremendous ear and love for music and a lot of charisma. New artists who were lucky enough to get into her orbit would be told of people she knew they could play with. That was a natural thing for her to do. She loved music and people so much. She was the queen of the scene, the queen of Laurel Canyon."

ELLEN COHEN WAS born in Baltimore in September 1941. She changed her name to Cass Elliot shortly before meeting banjo player Tim Rose in Washington in 1962. Elliot showed little interest in folk – her preference would always be Broadway – but Rose believed he had discovered another Mary Travers. With guitarist John Brown they formed a folk trio, the Triumvirate, harmonising on standards like "Delia" and "Pretty Little Horses".

"Cass came through Nebraska in February 1963," remembers singer and lifelong friend Jim Hendricks. "She was so funny, she'd sit down in front when I was

singing and make these funny faces, flash her eyes and tickle me to pieces. She said it wasn't working out with John Brown and invited me to join. I'd have given anything to sing with her. It was an absolute treat."

Renamed The Big 3 and with half-a-dozen songs in their repertoire – among them Ida Cox's bluesy "Wild Women", an early showcase for Elliot's voice and showmanship – the band headed for Greenwich Village, meeting like-minded souls including Barry McGuire, John Sebastian and

David Crosby. "She'd put on a song like a suit," recalls McGuire. "She was full of energy and happiness. She'd skip and hop and scoot around onstage, it was magic. Everybody was smoking marijuana and music was in the air. People were writing songs left, right and centre."

"The Village is where it was happening," confirms Hendricks. "We were all friends, we all shared songs and she developed this

Mama image even then. She loved you and mothered you. She had a great personality – friendly, extremely bright and funny. Everybody wanted to hang out with her because it was fun." Cass, says John Sebastian, was "somebody you went to for truth".

At this stage in her career, Elliot was beginning to demonstrate her knack for bringing people together. "Cass invited me over to watch The Beatles on *Ed Sullivan* and told me that Ringo was going to be there," remembers Sebastian. "She knew a lot of people and although I didn't understand why Ringo would be there I went with it. Now, at this point of

"There was a sad side to Cass, but she kept it very much inside"

Graham Nash

BUYERS' GUIDE

MAMA'S BEST

Choice cuts from Elliot's career



The Big 3
Featuring Mama Cass Elliot
COLLECTABLES, 2000
7/10

Compilation, with stunning performances from Elliot on "Wild Women" and "Nora's Dove".



If You Can Believe Your Eyes And Ears
The Mamas & The Papas
DUNHILL, 1966
9/10

Wonderful, fresh, warm vocals, but already Elliot is doing solo performances, such as her version of John Lennon's "I Call Your Name".



The Mamas & The Papas
The Mamas & The Papas

DUNHILL, 1967
The band's finest, with John Phillips inspired by Michelle's flings with Denny Doherty and Gene Clark.

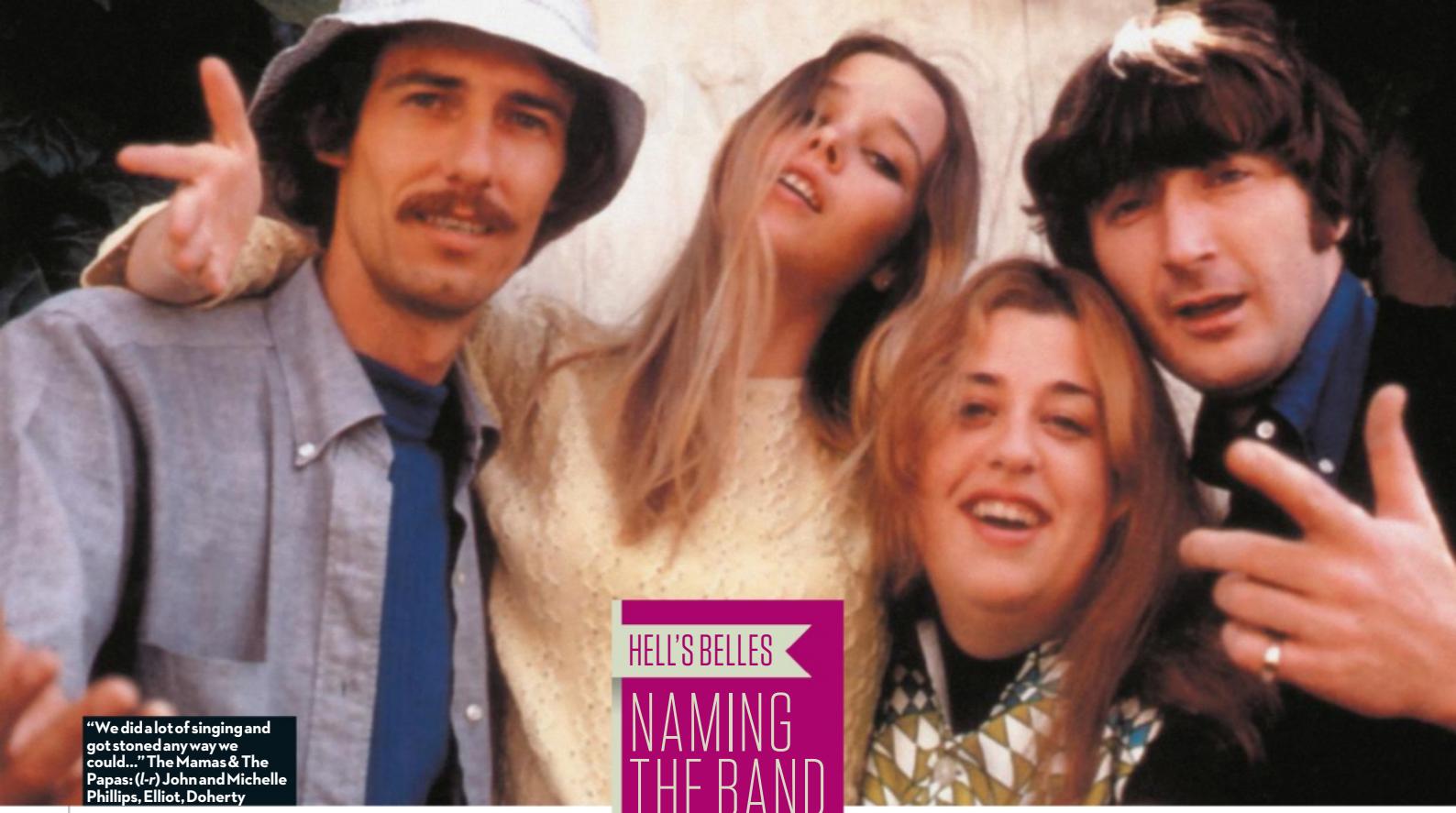


Dream A Little Dream
Mama Cass

DUNHILL, 1968
Elliot's solo debut, described as "goofy" by producer John Simon, with Elliot covering Nash, Sebastian and Cohen.



Cass Elliot
Cass Elliot
RCA, 1971
Elliot's best solo album, with terrific versions of Judee Sill's "Jesus Was A Crossmaker" and Randy Newman's "I'll Be Home".



"We did a lot of singing and got stoned anyway we could..." The Mamas & The Papas: (l-r) John and Michelle Phillips, Elliot, Doherty

his life Zal Yanovsky looked very much like a tall Jewish-Russian Ringo Starr – Ringo was his nickname. Zal and I began to play around with our guitars and realised we had something. Cass could always identify personalities that would operate well together. She did it again and again." The pair eventually formed The Lovin' Spoonful.

Although The Big 3 recorded two albums and were TV regulars, they split up soon after Rose discovered Hendricks and Elliot had secretly married. "I was going to be drafted, and found out I was exempt if I was married, so Cass said let's get married," laughs Hendricks. "I didn't tell my family, we kept it pretty tight."

Adding to the recurring problem was Elliot's habit of falling in love with her singing partners. "She was so in love with Tim Rose... nuts for him, but he didn't care for her much," says McGuire. "It just broke her heart." For Hendricks, it was more complicated. "She might have had a crush on Tim, but when I came along she had a crush on me," he says. "Then when Denny Doherty came along, she really had a crush on him."

Doherty was a handsome, charismatic Canadian tenor. In 1964, he joined Elliot, Hendricks and Yanovsky in Cass Elliot And The Big 3, later renamed The Mugwumps, a short-lived but pioneering folk-pop outfit. "We were slightly ahead of our time," says Hendricks. "If we'd been able to hang together it would have developed into something similar to The Mamas & The Papas. We really wanted to do Beatles-style songs but our manager wanted us to do more Jersey Boy-type stuff." Seizing the mood of the time, the band wrote some of their own material. "Cass wanted to play guitar so bad, but she had little short stubby fingers she couldn't put them round a guitar," laughs Hendricks. "But she was great with lyrics."

The Mugwumps lasted less than a year. "Warner Bros wanted to sign us, but they only wanted Denny, Zal and myself," explains Hendricks. "They said Cass was too fat. We said if Cass wasn't part of it, we wouldn't continue and that pretty much broke up the band. That was the first time her size was an issue, it was irrelevant in the folk days."

At some point in every interview with the men in Elliot's life, the issue of her weight comes up. Elliot developed strong friendships with many men, but at a personal cost. "There was a sad side to Cass, but she kept it very much inside," observes Nash. "Men liked her because she wasn't a threat, she was one of the guys. She might not have been happy to hear this, but there was no competing to go

HELL'S BELLES NAMING THE BAND

THE QUARTET of John and Michelle Phillips, Denny Doherty and Cass Elliot were originally known as the Magic Circle until Elliot saw a TV documentary about the Hells Angels. Barry McGuire recalls, "Cass heard that they called the ladies in the gang Mamas. She was lying on her back, kicking her feet in the air and saying, 'I want to be a Mama, I want to be a Mama!' John said he and Denny would be Papas, and that was their name." Elliot came to hate the Mama Cass moniker.

This isn't the first time Elliot showed lyrical dexterity. "She was always making up words," says Sebastian. "Like 'teenybopper'. That was invented by Cass to describe the crowds at the afternoon shows the Mugwumps played for Washington diplomats' kids. They were all nicely turned out, well-behaved children and she called them the teenyboppers."

to bed with her. She was very motherly, always there with advice, nudging you into different things."

This was hard for Elliot, especially with the likes of Doherty, who loved her deeply but not in the way she desired. "Cass was always, always, wanting to be loved," says McGuire. "The last time I saw her she was lying on the bed sobbing, deep heaving sobs. She said, 'Barry, nobody loves me.' I said, 'Cass, what do you mean, I love you.' She stopped crying and said, 'Ah, you don't count. You love everybody.' She wanted to be loved for who she was and I don't think she ever found that."

WHILE ELLIOT SANG solo, Doherty departed to the Virgin Islands in summer 1965 to get high with John Phillips, of folk trio The Journeymen, and his young Californian wife, Michelle. Getting wind the three might form a band, Elliot, determined to join them, travelled along too, bringing plenty of LSD. John Phillips, however, had reservations and later cooked up a yarn that he only allowed Elliot to join after she was hit on the head by a falling pipe, altering her vocal range. "The pipe?" guffaws Sebastian. "That's typical Cass, I can just picture her – 'the wildest thing happened to me, a pipe hit my head and now I sing differently!' But it was all to do with her determination. Joining The Mamas & The Papas meant a lot to her because John Phillips was a great arranger of voices. He didn't see a place for her, but Cass was determined to get into that group."

With Elliot's role in the band still unconfirmed, they headed to Los Angeles, moving in with Jim Hendricks and his girlfriend. "I was the first of the bunch to hit the West Coast," claims Hendricks.

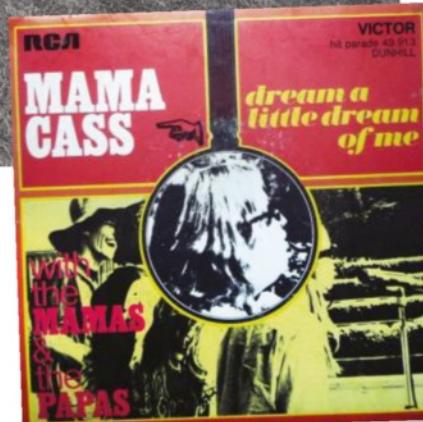
"I felt LA would be the next happening place. We all stayed in my one-bed apartment. They threw mattresses on the floor, did a lot of singing and we got stoned any way we could."

But when the four sang, they realised their combined





Stoned soul picnic in LA, February 1968: (l-r) Pic Dawson [see panel below], Eric Clapton, Joni Mitchell, David Crosby, Gary and Annette Burden (and daughter Amy), Elliot



The Mamas & The Papas were Fleetwood Mac with less money

John Sebastian

HENRY DILTZ/GETTY IMAGES

voices had something special. "John Phillips was a great arranger," says Graham Nash. "With voices, it's similar to the way families sing. There's a lot of skill involved but you have to blend as personalities. The joy is that once you've learnt the craft, which is hard work, you can forget about it, it becomes instinct."

Barry McGuire had recently scored a No 1 with "Eve Of Destruction", written by PF Sloan, when Elliot called. "She wanted me to go and listen to her friends," he says. "There wasn't a stick of furniture in the place, just four sleeping bags and an ironing board. I was the only working musician, so I brought some grass. They started to sing. I got on the phone to Lou Adler at Dunhill Records and held the phone out. He told us to come down to the studio."

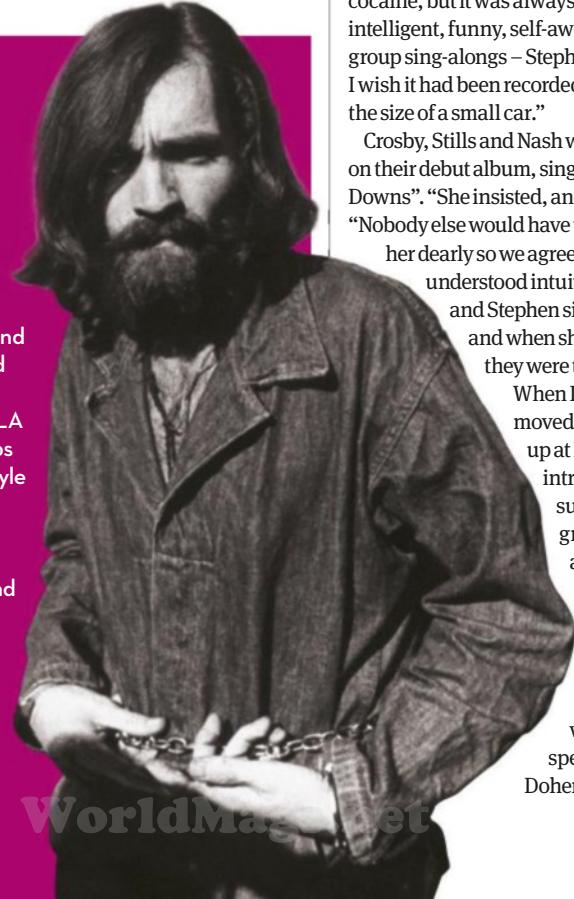
The original plan was for the quartet, calling themselves the Magic Circle, to record backing vocals for McGuire on "California Dreamin'", written by John and Michelle Phillips, but after hearing the playback, Phillips asked if they could release it themselves. McGuire agreed. "I said sure. He'd written it, and if it was a hit, he could buy the grass!"

In the studio, Sloan was impressed. "These were hippies,

FAMILY TIES...

CASS AND CHARLIE MANSON

IN MICHAEL CAINE'S autobiography, he writes that he was introduced to Charles Manson by Cass Elliot at a party attended by future victims, Sharon Tate and Jay Sebring. Elliot had several connections to the Manson murders. "At Cass' I saw a lot of Abbie Folger and Wojciech Frykowski until the Manson crew slaughtered them," says Dave Mason. "I doubt Cass knew Manson deeply, but it's possible they were at the same parties. LA was saturated with drugs and these strange little groups were always around." Two of Elliot's boyfriends, Billy Doyle and Pic Dawson, both dealers, were quizzed in the aftermath, having known those who died at Cielo Drive. John Phillips told police that the bloody 'PIG' daubed on the wall read 'PIC' and there were rumours that Doyle had sworn revenge after he was video'd being assaulted by Frykowski and Sebring. Ex-Yippie Paul Krassner recalls Cass talking fearfully about Doyle, thinks the Manson murders were a drug hit, and believes videotapes of sex parties, including some with Elliot, were seized in the aftermath by police. "After all," he says, "1969 was the peak of the sexual revolution with a side dish of drugs."



long-hair, scrappy, very rough but you could see they had it. Cass stood out like a sore thumb. She was wearing a muumuu, a sari for Hawaiian women, like a small tent made from very colourful material. And even then there was something about Cass that was fantastically unusual in that you have got this California goddess Michelle Phillips right next to her but Cass is the one you look at. And I think she had that because she knows there is more to herself than what you are seeing."

Rechristened The Mamas & The Papas, the four released "California Dreamin'" in December 1965; it peaked at No 4 on the Billboard Hot 100. The Mamas & The Papas were on their way to becoming one of the biggest acts in America. But nothing was straightforward. From the start, relationships were complicated. "Cass was in love with Denny," explains Sloan. "Denny was in love with Cass but didn't want to get serious because he had his pick of any woman in the world. John was also into every woman in the world while he was married to Michelle, then Michelle had a thing with Denny."

Things got so fraught that Michelle was briefly kicked out the band while they recorded their self-titled second album in 1966. In the middle of this highly charged situation, Elliot gave birth to a daughter, Owen, never revealing the name of the father. "It was a mess, they were Fleetwood Mac with less money," says Sebastian. "But it was a heady time." As McGuire explains, "We were all so young. It was like a litter of puppies. When you let them out the cardboard box they run around, knock the food over, bang into tables, pull the trash all over the floor – but they're just puppies. That's what we were like. You never knew where you would spend the night. One time I went round Denny's house and stayed for 18 months."

Elliot's house on Woodrow Wilson Drive became a focus for the burgeoning Laurel Canyon social scene. "You'd always meet interesting people," confirms Nash, who was a regular visitor. "Mainly music, and a few film people like Peter Fonda and Jack Nicholson. There were fascinating conversations about albums being recorded and musical trends, about who had the best lead guitarist. It was fuelled by pot, later cocaine, but it was always fun because she would gather intelligent, funny, self-aware people around her. We had group sing-alongs – Stephen, David, me, Cass and Joni. I wish it had been recorded but a tape recorder then was the size of a small car."

Crosby, Stills and Nash were so fond of Elliot she appeared on their debut album, singing backing vocals on "Pre-Road Downs". "She insisted, and with good reason," says Nash. "Nobody else would have the balls to do that but we loved

her dearly so we agreed. I've always thought that Cass understood intuitively what the sound of me, David and Stephen singing together would sound like, and when she introduced me to them she knew they were trying to put something together."

When Dave Mason left Traffic and moved to America in 1969, he ended up at Elliot's house. "Gram Parsons introduced me to Cass and it became a surrogate home," he says. "We had great times, lots of people floated in and out. The Wham-O people, who made the Frisbee and the hula hoop, were friends and they'd bring their latest toys up there. We ended up doing an album together [1971's *Dave Mason & Cass Elliot*]. It was an odd pairing that came out of spending so much time with her." Ned Doheny, another songwriting friend,



Cass and Cash on Johnny's TV show, September 1966

played on that album with Mason. "She had a way of making things happen, putting people together, alliances which would turn out to be propitious for all concerned," Doheny recalls. "I got to meet a whole slew of other people, courtesy of her. People were drawn to her because she was so intelligent and lovely, and nobody felt any kind of threat from her. She was a unifying principle in a chaotic period, where it was every man for himself."

BATTERED BY INTERNAL relationships, The Mamas & The Papas went out with a bang on 1968's "Dream A Little Dream Of Me", a hit tellingly credited to Mama Cass With The Mamas & The Papas. Cass began work on her solo debut, *Dream A Little Dream*, with The Band's producer, John Simon. "She didn't want to be a Mama anymore, she wanted to have fun," says Simon. "She told me that Lou Adler wanted to sue as he was very unhappy the album didn't capitalise on the success of the single."

Elliot had taken drugs ever since she was prescribed Dexedrine to control her weight in her teens. By 1968, she was using heroin, and while Simon doesn't feel it affected her performance, there were darker times ahead. Old friends were alienated. Barry McGuire notes, "She moved into an upper level of Hollywood royalty where they played a lot of head games. Drugs got heavier. Everybody was sleeping with everybody's wives and pretending they weren't. It was too murky for me and I don't know how happy it made Cass."

"Not everyone would take advantage of Cass," says John Sebastian. "But about one out of every three boyfriends were bad news and would never go away. There were a lot of leeches."

Elliot was now a television star, recording two TV specials and appearing on everything from *The Johnny Cash Show* to *Hollywood Squares*. She guested on Johnny Carson's *The Tonight Show* 13 times, even hosting when Carson was absent. After a false start in Las Vegas, she was also hammering out a career as a cabaret performer.

"She really wanted to be on Broadway, that's where she would have been happiest," admits Nash. "I watched footage of her in *The Big 3* and you can tell she was destined to be a singer on Broadway, like Sophie Tucker. It kind of happened at the end, when she played at the London



Palladium. She'd have been like Bette Midler if she'd lived." Others predict she would have been another Barbra Streisand or Eydie Gorme. Dave Mason, meanwhile, reckons she was funny enough to join *Saturday Night Live*.

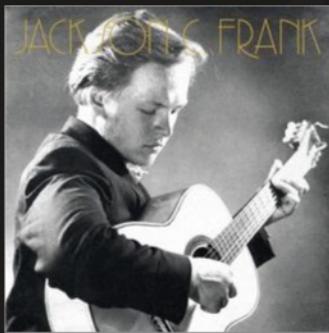
Elliot had just completed a two-week engagement at the London Palladium when she died on July 29, 1974 at 9 Curzon Place, a Mayfair apartment belonging to Harry Nilsson, having attended three parties the previous night, including Mick Jagger's birthday (four years later Keith Moon died in the same apartment). Despite rumours that she'd choked on a ham sandwich, the actual cause of death was heart failure. She was 32. "It was devastating," admits Nash. "There's a photograph of me with Russ Kunkel, our drummer who was married to Cass' sister, watching the news in Houston and the scroll coming across the bottom that Mama Cass had died."

John Simon's last memory of Elliot is a warm one. "Duke Ellington had just died and I got a bunch of kids from the local school to play horns and arranged Duke's 'Mood Indigo' for them while Cass sang," he says. "It was a party in a cabin in the woods in Woodstock. It was so sweet. She was so giving to these little kids, they were all so thrilled to be playing behind Mama Cass, but it gave her such a kick to do it."

And if she'd lived? "She'd definitely have become an American sweetheart," says John Sebastian. "I'm not sure she'd have stayed in rock but she would still have been the things she always was, and first of all that was a great singer. She'd hit every pitch, every note, first time, every time. She inhabited songs. And people's appreciation for that does not diminish. That doesn't go away and that never gets tired." 



What's Exactly The Matter With Me? by PF Sloan is published by Jawbone in June. **Dave Mason's** new EP is "Future's Past" and he is touring the US in June

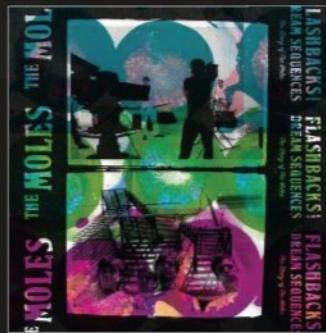


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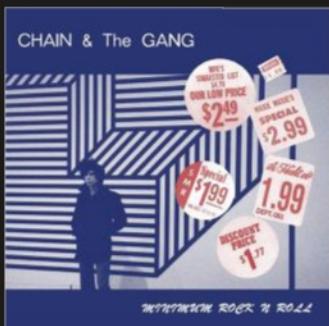


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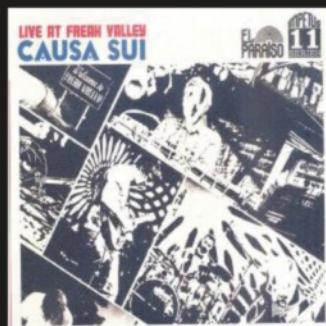


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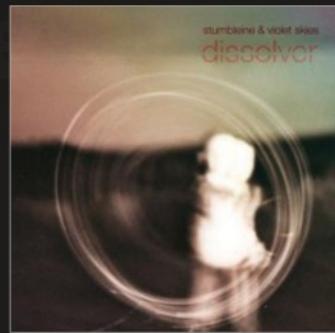


LIMB

LIMB

NEW HEAVY SOUNDS LP / CD

Riffs heavier than a super massive black hole. Limb bring you awesomely heavy doom sludge rock with moments of sleazy psychedelics, blasts of cosmic rock and brushes with hardcore.

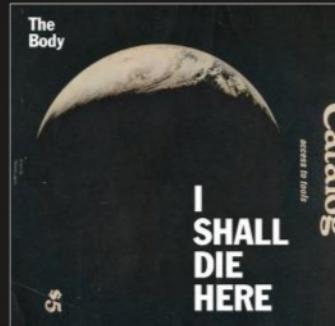


STUMBLEINE FEAT. VIOLET SKIES

DISSOLVER

MONOTREME LP / CD

Electronic producer Stumbleine and soulful vocalist Violet Skies deliver a gorgeous debut album that blends classic pop with modern R&B, electronica and 80's shoegaze indie. RIYL: Cocteau Twins, Burial, Rihanna



THE BODY

I SHALL DIE HERE

RVNG LP / CD

Sharing their heathen vision with The Haxan Cloak, The Body's known sound is mutilated by process and re-animated in a spectral state. I Shall Die Here sonically serrates the remains of metal's already unidentifiable corpse and splays it amid tormented voices in shadow.



SILO

WORK

NOVENNIAL PARALYSIS LP / CD

After releasing 2 albums – Instar (1998) and Alloy (2001) on Swim – and appearing live with Godspeed You! Black Emperor, Sigur Rós, Trans Am and Pole, Work is the first release for 12 years, Silo's immersive sound envelope recalls groups like My Bloody Valentine and Band Of Susans, while packing the punch of acts like Helmet or Dälek.



FAT WHITE FAMILY

CHAMPAGNE HOLOCAUST

TRASH MOUTH LP / CD

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

UNCUT

New albums

OUR SCORING SYSTEM:

10 Masterpiece 9 Essential 8 Excellent
7 Very good 6 Good but uneven
4-5 Mediocre 1-3 Poor

THIS MONTH: DELINES | AFGHAN WHIGS | THEE OH SEES & MORE



LINDA BROWNE



DAMON ALBARN

Everyday Robots

PARLOPHONE

Journey through the past... The songwriter's solo debut proper is his most personal statement yet. *By Andy Gill*

8/10

IRONICALLY, DAMON ALBARN'S most personal project so far doesn't open with the singer

himself, but with the whiskery bohemian tones of '50s jazz-rap cat Lord Buckley, renowned for his surreal beat monologues, often delivered while sporting military 'tache and pith helmet. "They, they didn't know where they was going," barks the Most Immaculately Hip Aristocrat, "but they knew where they was wasn't it."

Despite being an outsider's words, they are remarkably apt for Albarn, who despite his success has managed to remain something of an

outsider in the pop universe himself. Indeed, it could be the mission statement for his career. For wherever his interests lie at any particular moment – imaginary plastic beach, pan-continental musical hybrid, oriental fantasy, enigmatic historical polymath – the one thing you can guarantee is that it won't be the same impulse driving him next week, next month, next year.

Which makes *Everyday Robots* all the more surprising: because for the first time, this always forward-moving artist has chosen to hit pause and rewind on his life, scanning back

TRACKLIST

- 1 Everyday Robots
- 2 Hostiles
- 3 Lonely Press Play
- 4 Mr Tembo
- 5 Parakeet
- 6 The Selfish Giant
- 7 You And Me
- 8 Hollow Ponds
- 9 Seven High
- 10 Photographs (You Are Taking Now)
- 11 The History Of A Cheating Heart
- 12 Heavy Seas Of Love

→ through snatched glimpses of childhood, adolescence and problematic maturity to create a musical portrait of himself. Not a strict, naturalistic portrait – those are rarely successful, and too often degenerate into point-scoring retribution – witness Dylan's "Ballad In Plain D" and the bitchier entries in The Beatles' breakup – but a coded, semi-abstract picture in which musical shapes and lyrical images assume anthropomorphic forms and suggestive tableaux, whether it's children swimming in an East London pond, eight hours of "freedom taking cocaine" on a tour bus, Notting Hill vibrating with post-carnival energy, or "flying over black sands in a glass aeroplane", a particularly resonant line from "Photographs".

That track also features a proto-hipster soundbite, Timothy Leary warning some psychedelic initiate about being careful with photographs. It's a premise Albarn extends into the notion "When the photographs you're taking now are taken down again," an acknowledgement of the inevitable cycles of time that render all images transitory, even as the images freeze all motion: that frozen moment hurtles into the past, and is gone. Or at least, it used to be gone: now, just pressing "SEND" impales the subject on the spike of global ridicule, forever.

This is a subtext of *Everyday Robots*, the way that interpersonal communication is increasingly ceded from a world of fleshly bonhomie to a technological realm, one more methodical yet bewilderingly abstract – how can you tell that the "person" you're "chatting" with on social media is what they claim to be, or indeed, not just a cunningly programmed machine? "We are everyday robots on our phones," suggests the title track, "...looking like standing stones, out there on our own." A rickety mechanical gait carries a typically poignant Albarn melody picked out in a simple piano figure, with a curiously unsettling recurrent high-pitched violin squeak lending a discomfiting edge to the wistful strings.

That musical formula dominates the arrangements of Albarn and producer Richard

"...looking like standing stones, out there on our own..." Damon Albarn gets contemplative

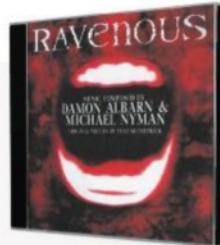


Russell, with songs suspended in a fragile net of glitchy found-percussion loops, field recordings, melancholy pastel melodies and tints of strings. It's beautifully designed to evoke both the reluctant abandonment of time in many songs, and the creeping alienation of "Hostiles" and "The Selfish Giant". The latter is especially haunting and memorable, typically Albarn in the way it blends the engaging and the

experimental, with delicate details of winds and glockenspiel picking out the sadness of the situation – "It's hard to be a lover when the TV's on, and nothing's in your eyes" – over Keith Jarrett-esque piano flourishes.

Elsewhere, wistful harmonium and swirling synth underscore "Photographs", while piano and acoustic guitar surf the keening decline of Eno's synth on "You And Me", its fading carnival

HOW
TO BUY...
**DAMON
ALBARN**
His ever-changing
forays



**DAMON ALBARN &
MICHAEL NYMAN**
Ravenous 1999

The soundtrack to a black comedy about cannibalism in 19th-Century America, *Ravenous* offers a wry balance between horror and humour. As it proceeds, more exotic instrumentation – zither, whistle, pump-organ and marimba – expands the range of emotions covered.

7/10



**THE GOOD, THE BAD
& THE QUEEN**
The Good, The Bad & The Queen 2007

In its elegiac mood, its pastel melodies, its wistful tone of regret for lost places, and its interest in community, *TGTB&TQ* is probably the most direct precursor to *Everyday Robots*. Quiet and subtle, it's a peculiar blend of disparate elements.

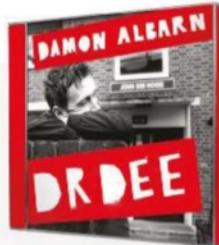
8/10



GORILLAZ
The Fall 2011

A solo album in all but name, *The Fall* was created on an iPad during a US tour. Again, geography figures heavily, in sketched impressions of the world passing by Albarn's tour bus, while the limited instrumentation and found-sound elements prefigure *Everyday Robots*, albeit with synths replacing strings.

7/10



DAMON ALBARN
Dr Dee 2012

Sketched in folksy early-music timbres, with classical singers shouldering much of the vocal duties, *Dr Dee* soundtracks a theatrical work about an Elizabethan polymath. Evoking Michael Nyman's early Peter Greenaway scores, it's best when Albarn blends in Eastern scales and kora.

6/10

glories condensed to a residue of steel pans about four minutes in. "I met Moko Jumbie, he walks on stilts through the All Saints Road," claims Albarn, referring to the African carnival spirit co-opted into the Notting Hill Carnival, but which he first encountered in the Congo. Another of his African encounters is celebrated in "Mr Tembo", the album's simplest, most joyous singalong moment. Dedicated (and first sung to) a baby elephant in Tanzania, it's a light, frisky ukulele number over a shuffle-rattle percussion groove, with a gospel choir from Albarn's childhood manor of Leytonstone brimming with upful exuberance on the hooky refrain. The elephant, apparently, was being transported elsewhere: "He's where he is now, but it wasn't what he planned," sings Albarn, creating a neat link back to the Lord Buckley quote that opens the album.

His Leytonstone roots are referred to again in another of the standout tracks, "Hollow Ponds",

perhaps the most ambitious attempt at telescoping time here. Brief glimpses whisk us back and forth: kids cooling in a pond in the heatwave of 1976; the road he once lived in being severed by the M11 link road in 1991; seeing the graffiti "modern life is rubbish" sprayed on a wall in 1993. Flugelhorn lends a touch of wan yearning over acoustic guitar arpeggios and organ, with evocative children's playground voices summoning us back to simpler times.

On a sometimes courageously candid album, perhaps the most revealing track is "The History Of A

Cheating Heart", where over delicately naked acoustic guitar and a poignant three-chord string figure, he admits the intrinsic infidelity of creativity: "I carry this upon my back always/If you fall, then I will put you back/I do love you, but it's just a fact/The history of a cheating heart is always more than you know." It's a moment of brave vulnerability characteristic of what is a predominantly melancholy album, which is perhaps an unavoidable corollary of retrospection. It's surely this realisation that leads Albarn to close the album with "Heavy Seas Of Love", where Eno's fulsome, cheery lead vocal drives home just how sad the rest of the album is by comparison. But the hopeful tone of this song of fellowship points to another aspect of Albarn's character – the outgoing, organisational spirit that pulls together diverse companies to create musical links between continents. For the most part here, however, *Everyday Robots* is a less ebullient, more intimate and reflective affair, as befits the tentative revelation of a man's soul.

SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:**
Richard Russell
Recorded at: Studio 13
Personnel: Damon Albarn (vocals, keyboards, guitars, etc), Richard Russell (percussion, drum programming, field recordings, samples), Dan Carpenter (trumpet), Ollie Langford (violin), Brian Eno (vocals, synthesisers), Jerome O'Connell (steel pans), Nicholas Hougham (French horn), Simon Tong (guitar), Natasha Khan (vocals), Kris Chen (spoken vocals). Backing vocals by Pentecostal City Mission Church Choir, Leytonstone. Strings by Demon Strings

Q&A

Damon Albarn on his childhood, working with Eno and baby elephants...

I WAS LISTENING to your album parked by a pond near Whips Cross, and realised that you were actually singing about the place I was sitting. It was quite creepy.

Oh really? My God! That's funny, 'cos my new drummer has been playing the song for nearly a week, and he turns round and says, 'That's not about the Hollow Ponds, is it?' Er – yeah!

I knew about the Essex you, but not about the Leytonstone you.

Yes, I lived there for the first 10 years of my life. I went from a multi-cultural, urban environment to a sort of Anglo-Saxon, rural, white conservative place. That transition is maybe what defines me.

I hadn't realised there was that suspension between the rural and the urban.

Well, you know, in a way the real motivation to get off my arse and make this record was to explain somehow that dichotomy in me. Because there has been an obsession with the rural, and also it explains a lot of my decisions since.

You have a forward-looking temperament musically, always moving on to new things, so what was it like to focus on looking back?
To do something completely retrospective, in the sense that it has this narrative that starts in 1976, with the heatwave, hanging out at the Hollow Ponds, was a new thing for me; I've made very personal records before, but none with this kind of chronology. There is a chronology to it, it doesn't stick to it but sort of flies all over the place. But in a way, it's my most narrative record, I suppose.

It has a very melancholic tone overall. Are you a melancholic person by nature?

I am musically, yes.

On the last track, the comparison between Eno's fruity vocal style and yours brings out just how melancholy the rest of the album is.

Yes, we talked about what we could do, listened to where Richard [Russell] and I were with the record, and he said he'd like to contrast our voices. And I was just excited to get him singing again, because I love his voice.

I know you worked with Richard before on the Bobby Womack album. What kind of a working relationship do you have with him?

A very good one. We were just finishing the Bobby record and thought we should do another – we even thought it might be good to start another band, be anonymous, all that bullshit – but then Richard came in one day and said, "What I would like to do is produce a record of you." So I let him be producer. Which, making a solo record, is an absolutely necessary thing to have on board – an editor, someone to talk about personal things with.

Tell me about "Mr Tembo".

That would never have seen the light of day if it hadn't been for Richard. That would have firmly



remained among the songs I write for family, kids' birthdays – in this case, a baby elephant. Over the years I've written loads of songs for my family, I sort of keep them separate, but I put it on a playlist of demos for the record, not for one second thinking Richard would pick up on it, but he did. And it's pretty much the same as it was the night I played it on a ukulele for this baby elephant in Tanzania.

It's rather like Woody Guthrie, he did a lot of songs for children, too.

That's a tradition that very English people, like The Beatles, did as well. I don't think it's unusual to put an innocent song in quite a dark narrative.

The gospel vocals on that...

They're from the City Mission on Colworth Road. It was the Pentecostal church literally at the end of my road, and it was a very bright childhood memory, standing outside, listening to the music coming out of there. I'm sure somehow it's connected to songs like "Tender", 30 or 40 years later.

Presumably, "You And Me" is about your Ladbroke Grove time...

Well, I'm still there, really. I live with the ghosts of it, so to speak. Always after Carnival, there's this enormous residue of energy that hovers around for a few days. It's a Post-Carnival Apocalypse song!

Who is Moko Jumbie?

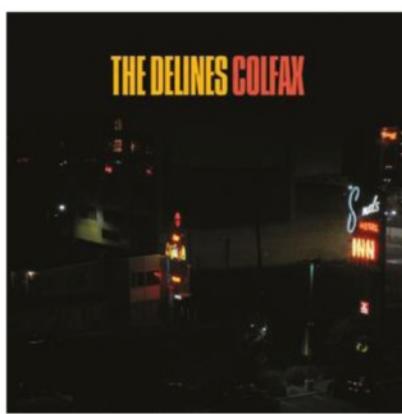
I've actually met the proper Moko Jumbie, when I went to Congo – he's represented in Carnival by the stilted people – that's a derivation of the Congolese Moko Jumbie spirit, a traditional tribal creature who travels around looking into people's houses.

I'm hearing stuff about Ladbroke Grove, tinfoil and lighter, and I'm thinking, 'Is it about a smackhead?' Is it about a smackhead? Well, there's definitely an element of that in there.

"The History Of A Cheating Heart" – do you think the pursuit of an artistic vision is damaging to emotional stability?

I think it definitely can be. Because, as a songwriter, you need to feel stuff for it to come out honestly. And how do you do that? You do that by being curious, and curiosity is a very open book for a lot of fuck-ups in life.

INTERVIEW: ANDY GILL



TRACKLIST

- 1 Calling In
- 2 Colfax Avenue
- 3 The Oil Rigs At Night
- 4 Wichita Ain't So Far Away
- 5 I Won't Slip Up
- 6 Sandman's Coming
- 7 State Line
- 8 Flight 31
- 9 He Told Her The City Was Killing Him
- 10 I Got My Shadows
- 11 82nd Street

THE DELINES

Colfax

DÉCOR

Richmond Fontaine's Willy Vlautin is back with a new band, a female singer and a rich collection of songs. *By Allan Jones*

9/10

THERE'S A COLFAX Avenue in Denver, in a notorious heyday the haunt of prostitutes, barflies and junkies. Jack Kerouac wrote about it in *On The Road*. Now the delinquent strip appears to have given its name to the title of this often-sublime suite of Americana heartbreak, written mostly by Willy Vlautin, as well-known these days as a prize-winning novelist as a songwriter, who's no stranger to places like Colfax Avenue. And if the one in Denver isn't the one he's writing about, there are many more like it that could be the setting for his songs, which across 10 albums since 1996 with Richmond Fontaine have been mostly located in places where a certain kind of American washes up, lonely, sour and lost.

The band's last album was 2011's ambitious song-cycle *The High Country*. Continuing a drift away from the country rock template perfected on much-admired 2006 album *Post To Wire*, the music was

dark, fractious, frequently undercut by turbulent distortion. Even by the glum standards of records before it like *The Fitzgerald*, *Thirteen Cities* and *We Used To Think The Freeway Sounded Like A River*, it was unforgiving, austere and intimidating enough at times to make you think about how much more of this kind of charred cheerlessness could reasonably be endured. There was also a sense of something here reaching the end of the line, much like the characters in so many of Willy's songs, that made you wonder where he could go next that wouldn't seem quite so much like somewhere he'd been before.

The answer is The Delines, a new band that retains only drummer Sean Oldham from Richmond Fontaine, and a set of songs – soliloquies, almost – written as a showcase for the terrific voice of Amy Boone, singer with Austin's The Damnations, whose sister Deborah Kelly appeared on *Post To Wire* and *The High Country*. Boone's got the kind of voice you



Q&A

Willy Vlautin



What was it like writing songs for someone else to sing? It was great. I was writing songs for a real singer. I don't have a lot of confidence as a singer and I write songs around my voice and what it can do. It's limiting. Amy's voice has all the things I like. It's beautiful, weary, tough, worn and pure. When she sings I just believe what she's singing, I always have. It also doesn't hurt that she's a damn cool woman, and that comes out in her voice too.

There's a lot of country soul here, which you don't hear so much elsewhere in your music. I've written a handful of songs like that over the years, but mostly I've just kept them at home. I've always wanted to play more stuff like that but I've never had the confidence to sing those types of songs.

You formed a new band to record and tour these songs. Where does that currently leave Richmond Fontaine? We all needed a break after *The High Country*. I was in the middle of my novel, *The Free*, and it was such a hard novel I needed time off. The truth is, taking breaks is what has kept us together and such good friends for so many years. But now we're back at it and we've just begun rehearsing again. My heart is always with RF so until those guys shoot me and drop me off on the side of the road somewhere, they're stuck with me.

INTERVIEW: ALLAN JONES

might hear in a bar that hasn't seen daylight since the roof went on, where it's always a long time ago on a jukebox that plays only country and western, five cents a teardrop. She can put as much hurt into a song as it can stand and then find room for more.

What a vehicle she turns out to be for Vlautin's new material, which casts her in a series of roles, most of which you can imagine being played by, say, Karen Black in an early-'70s New Hollywood road movie directed by Hal Ashby or Bob Rafelson, something downbeat and drizzly, full of wintery light; trailer parks, gas stations, motel rooms, truck stops and drab diners part of the film's frayed topography. The disparate characters to which Boone gives such plaintive voice are linked by loneliness and their fear of it. Their lives have all been diminished by the evaporation of hope, drugs, liquor, men of uneven temperament and unpredictable scary moods.

By turns, she's convincing as the young wife making a run from the dire circumstance her marriage has become on "The Oil Rigs At Night", and the middle-aged unmarried woman of "State Line", whose serial attempts to flee an oppressive family home only ever get her as far as the beckoning boundary of the song's title. You'll believe in her, too, as the

SLEEVE NOTES

Recorded at: Flora Recordings and Playback, Portland
Produced by: John Askew, Sean Oldham and Willy Vlautin
Personnel: Amy Boone (vocals), Jenny Conlee-Drizos (keyboards), Tucker Jackson (pedal steel), Sean Oldham (percussion), Freddy Trujillo (bass), Willy Vlautin (guitars)

night," as she sings, "in broken down cars with skinny friends with dying eyes, in the violence of a losing streak," Boone's voice carrying the sad news that as bad as things are, they have been worse and likely will be bad again.

A to Z

COMING UP THIS MONTH...

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p81 RYLEY WALKER

p82 BEN WATT



AOLE BLACC
Lift Your Spirit

XIX/INTERSCOPE

He doesn't need a dollar. Still wants one, though...

4/10

In 2010, Egbert Nathaniel Dawkins III was an

obscure hip-hop/soul artist on underground label Stones Throw. Come 2014, his alter-ego Aloe Blacc is Simon Fuller-managed major-label product, courtesy of a global recession breakthrough hit called "I Need A Dollar". Sadly, Blacc's third album resides happily in the land that irony forgot, where – the dark gospel-folk of "Ticking Bomb" aside – his leftfield takes on protest soul have been ditched in favour of pick'n'mix revivalism and banal inspirational platitudes. Pharrell Williams is among the producers presiding over Blacc's thrilling journey from "the new Gil Scott-Heron" to "the thinner Will.i.am".

GARRY MULHOLLAND



THE AMAZING SNAKEHEADS
Amphetamine Ballads

DOMINO

Hoodlum rockabilly from Clydeside

7/10

It must be somewhat frustrating for Dale Barclay's Glasgow ruffians, pouring out their hearts across 10 tormented tales, only to be told by world-weary hacks that it was all done 30 years ago by The Birthday Party and The Gun Club. It's like a caveman proudly unveiling his rickety prototype for the wheel as the guy from the neighbouring cave rolls his eyes in a passing Nissan Micra. Still, this stone-age jalopy has a definite theatrical charm – malevolent Nick Cave-ish narratives, vicious basslines, squalid guitar and touches of honking saxophone, all executed with a visceral energy that's almost painful to behold.

JOHN LEWIS

HURRAY FOR THE RIFF RAFF

Small Town Heroes

ATO

Prole art threat! Meet Alynda Lee Segarra, roots radical...

By John Mulvey



9/10

The Harrow And The Harvest) and its predecessor (2003's *Soul Journey*) ran to eight years, a follow-up may still be some way off.

It would be rather limiting to pitch Alynda Lee Segarra, the pivot of New Orleans' Hurray For The Riff Raff, as a mere Gillian Welch substitute, here to fill the days until Welch and David Rawlings configure a new batch of songs to their exacting specifications. For a start, Segarra is a compelling individual: a queer-identifying 27-year-old of Puerto Rican descent, who grew up at New York punk shows before living out a Woody Guthrie hobo fantasy, jumping boxcars and eventually fetching up in New Orleans. Initially, the Riff Raff's music was ragged and unfocused, so that two early, self-released LPs (compiled on the Loose label's useful 2011 set, *Hurray For The Riff Raff*) often find the band swaggering like gypsy boulevardiers.

It is not until 2012's fine *Look Out Mama* that a vision solidified: a spare, creative updating of the Southern vernacular. *Small Town Heroes* is the band's fifth and best album, one that presents Segarra as a serious and idiosyncratic artist, while at the same time pointing up some auspicious parallels between herself and Welch. There's the calm, tender authority of Segarra's voice, revealing her as another singer who – as in "Levon's Dream" – can tackle heartbreak with an unflustered emotional clarity. Segarra, like Welch, is a sometimes austere traditionalist in the way she draws on the essential folk musics and instruments of America – an acoustic guitar, a fiddle, a stomped boot for percussion – but a radical in the way she uses these tools to tell modern stories. "St Roch Blues", then, is a ghostly evocation of street corner doo-wop (a nod to her Bronx upbringing, perhaps) that laments a recent spate of gun violence in New Orleans, while the title track regrettably mythologises one of her outsider constituency, a junkie lover of whom Segarra says, "I just couldn't watch you stick it in your arm."

Two Gillian Welch songs featured on last year's low-key covers album, *My Dearest Darkest Neighbor*: "My Morphine" and "Ruination Day", the latter extensively rewritten as "Angel Ballad", and this folk art of adaptation is clearly something that Segarra cherishes. "The New SF Bay Blues" takes bluesman Jesse Fuller's "San Francisco Bay Blues" as its acknowledged base (trace elements of

TO BE A fan of Gillian Welch, as many *Uncut* readers will appreciate, requires an uncommon degree of faithfulness and patience. In 18 years, she has released just five albums; given that the gap between the last one (2011's



"Rollin' And Tumblin'" can be detected in there, too), but twists it into a requiem for a beloved, written-off tour van. Meanwhile, the album's centrepiece, "The Body Electric", is an inspired subversion of one of folk's most problematic yarns – the murder of a woman, specifically Delia Green of Savannah, Georgia, in 1900. As the killer dumps the body in the river, Segarra notes, "The whole world sings like there's nothing going wrong."

It's a song which captures a dilemma at the heart of Hurray For The Riff Raff's music – how do you reconcile a love for the brutal poetry of old murder ballads, while being morally progressive in outlook? In Johnny Cash's version of "Delia's Gone", the victim is "lowdown and trifling", "cold and mean", even "devilish". In "The Body

Electric", Segarra comes up with a great solution, an improbably harmonious mix of homage, feminist textual criticism and revenge fantasy; a mission statement that confirms Hurray For The Riff Raff as standard-bearers for a new, forward-thinking generation of roots musicians. "Like an old sad song, you heard it all before," she sings, measured and elegant as ever, "Yes Delia's gone, but I'm settling the score."

SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:**
Alynda Lee Segarra
Recorded at: The Bomb Shelter, Nashville
Personnel: Alynda Lee Segarra (vocals, guitar, harmonica), Yosi Perlstein (fiddle, drums, clogging), Casey McAlister (organ, piano, harpsichord, accordion, acoustic guitar, piano strings), Sam Doores (guitar, slide guitar, harmonica, drums, harmonies), Dan Cutler (electric and acoustic bass, harmonies), AP Baer (banjo, dobro, electric guitar, harmonies), Avery Bright (viola), Ben Tremble (slide guitar), Charles Garmendia (drums), Zack Young (slide guitar)

Q&A

Alynda Lee Segarra



Do you still enjoy life on the road? And is "Crash On The Highway" based on a real incident? It was based on an actual traffic jam. The road is my natural habitat. I've been travelling since I was a child, and in the past it was the journey I enjoyed more than the destination. These days, however, it's the show I look forward to, so that song is a lot about that change in my mindset. It's also about finally feeling at home in

New Orleans and how it feels to have a home base to miss while I'm on the road.

Do you find it hard to reconcile your feminism with the misogynistic elements of some of the old music you love? Yes, it's hard. It's a part of life as a woman, you have to choose what you will welcome into your consciousness or else a lot of toxic elements will get in there. It's difficult and tiring. Lately I've been trying to focus my energy on learning about female musicians of the past, there's so many who told their stories and gave us tremendous art. I'm choosing to pass on their legacies as well as all the male folk musicians who stood for social justice: Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, John Lennon. INTERVIEW: JOHN MULVEY

AUTOMAT

Automat

BUREAU B

Cool new grooves from old German hands

So deeply committed are Automat to the groove, you half expect a sticker warning of the absence of hummable tunes. The trio, whose guitarist Jochen Arbeit has done time with Einstürzende Neubauten and Die Haut have crafted a slow-burning debut that pays tribute to Berlin's airports (via "THF", "SXF", "TXF" and "GWW") and glides compellingly from the opener's juddering funk to the electronics fade-out of the closing track on runners of molten dread. The heavy dub/industrial-dance voodoo of the On-U Sound posse is an obvious touchstone, but there's also a calm here that's as reassuring as it is unsettling. Props too, to Lydia Lunch, Genesis Breyer P-Orridge and Blixa Bargeld for their underplayed vocal parts.

SHARON O'CONNELL

7/10



AVEY TARE'S SLASHER FLICKS

Enter The Slasher House

DOMINO

Animal Collective man's new group. There will be blood

Going on the name and visual aesthetic – skulls, rubber masks, knives – sported by Dave 'Avey Tare' Portner's new band, you might expect a music channelling the horror synth scores of John Carpenter or Claudio Simonetti. In fact, what we find within ...*Slasher House* is not so different to the last Animal Collective album, 2012's bristly *Centipede Hz*. Portner's delirious sing-song is front and centre, and he brings a pop sensibility to "A Sender" and "Little Fang". His collaborators invest the songs with prickly energy: ex-Dirty Projector Angel Deradoorian lacing "Strange Colores" with sharp keys, or Ponytail's Jeremy Hyman beating out wild, free crescendos on "The Outlaw".

LOUIS PATTISON

7/10



AYO

Ticket To The World

UNIVERSAL

Fourth outing for easy-listening diva Without any apparent artifice, German-Nigerian Ayo has

tapped into a commercial hot spot, the intersection between Tracy Chapman's socially concerned folk and Norah Jones' balladry. Jones' producer, Jay Newland, is again on board with a classy roster of players to supply simple, well-judged backings for songs that don't stray far from platitudes ("If we teach love, every heart will open up") but which breathe idealism. Ayo's singing is fetchingly straightforward. She hits a folk-soul groove for "I Wonder", and jumps into hip-hop ("Complain") and reggae lite ("Who") with easy grace. A hippy Adele then.

NEIL SPENCER

6/10



THE BASEBALL PROJECT

3rd

YEP ROC

Baseball is life: indie-rock supergroup angled towards the middle innings

The trick isn't that these seasoned rock vets – Scott McCaughey, Peter Buck, Mike Mills, Steve Wynn, Linda Pitmon – regularly come up with melodic, damn-near universal songs delving into the stats, storylines and minutiae of America's pastime. It's that so many of them double as metaphors for something bigger: "¡Hola America!" on immigration; "Larry Yount" on regret and lost opportunity; "From Nails To Thumtacks" on falling from grace. And while a talking blues about baseball cards edges into geekville, "To The Veterans Committee", sunshine pop supreme, might have you singing the praises of Dale Murphy without even knowing who he is.

LUKE TORN

8/10



BLACKBERRY SMOKE

The Whippoorwill

SOUTHERN GROUND

Bludgeoning Southern rock with few subtleties

6/10

Blackberry Smoke's third LP has been something of a surprise hit back home – a Top 40 US release that harks back to the heyday of Lynyrd Skynyrd and Charlie Daniels with its love of classic Southern rock. The band, five hirsute Georgians, certainly aim for the stadia, but good intentions are hampered by a leaden sense of rhythm that means rockers like "Six Ways To Sunday", "Sleeping Dogs" and "Ain't Much Left Of Me" never really get off the ground. Low-key ballad "One Horse Town" is more successful, but the lack of serious boogie is hard to stomach.

PETER WATTS

REVELATIONS

Dave 'Avey Tare' Portner's Slasher Flicks



I moved to Los Angeles about two years ago – two years in May. The idea for Slasher Flicks came into my head around 2012. I started getting sick quite a lot, and Animal Collective cancelled a few shows. I had a lot of quiet time around the house, and when I'm alone, I'll play acoustic guitar. I started writing some songs, and I got it into my head I'd like to do some things outside Animal Collective with other players helping me. Angel [Deradoorian, keyboards] and I date, we're a couple – we've known each other since about 2008, just running into one another when she was on tour with Dirty Projectors. She's known Jeremy [Hyman, drums] since 2007, and while we were writing the last Animal Collective album in Baltimore, I saw him play a whole bunch with Dan Deacon and The Boredoms. I was instantly struck by him as a drummer, he's powerful and really hard-hitting. I wanted to keep Slasher Flicks open-ended, a little bit free-sounding. I've been listening to a lot of free jazz, and I was looking for that raw energy. I like the idea of horror films, that kind of aesthetic, but Slasher Flicks isn't really that dark. I think of it more like a haunted house, a carnival ride.

LOUIS PATTISON

THE BODY

I Shall Die Here

RVNG INTL

Existential dread from doom collaboration

US drums/guitar duo The Body bring in The Haxan Cloak's Bobby Krlic for their fourth

8/10



album, and it makes for an inspired new take on heavy art-metal. Krlic's sound design is exquisite, throwing the wailing vocals, shredded static and unctuous doom chords into a terrifying aural 3D – nightmares vanish to the tiniest whisper before screeching back, immortal. "Our Souls Were Clean" is ass-kicking industrial techno collapsing into utter chaos, while "Alone All The Way" has a rumination on suicide building to a wardance. This is music that looks death square in the face and screams back at it, announcing its life.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS

THE BOTH

The Both

SUPEREGO

Initial effort from unlikely pairing snaps, crackles and pops

Following two refined, synth-powered solo LPs, Aimee Mann has opted to

rough up her sound in a collaborative effort with veteran garage rocker Ted Leo, with exhilarating results. The debut LP from the pair, tagged The Both, hearkens back to Mann's bracing 1990s LPs with producer/multi-instrumentalist Jon Brion, though the feel here is less mannered and more spontaneous, with Mann's trademark pristine melodies floating over Leo's squalling, guitar-driven grooves. The unlikely pairing works precisely because of the contrast between their approaches, as they locate a vibrant middle ground on rawboned yet tuneful rockers like "The Prisoner" and dynamic ballads like "No Sir".

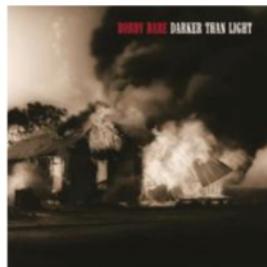
8/10



AMERICANA



BEST
OF THE
MONTH



7/10

BOBBY BARE
Darker Than Light

PLOWBOY

Seasoned campaigner yanks up his roots

Save for a 2005 solo LP and an unlikely recent collaboration with Petter Øien at the Norwegian heats of Eurovision, Bobby Bare has been pretty low-key since the early '80s. So where better to mount a comeback than Plowboy, the new label set up by Eddy Arnold's grandson to restore the profile of once-thriving country players?

There is something satisfyingly cyclical about *Darker Than Light*. Not only has the Nashville veteran returned to RCA's famed Studio B, scene of 1962's debut hit "Shame On Me", but he's also reached back into the folk-rooted songs that first inspired him.

One of them is "Tennessee Stud", which uses Arnold's '50s version as a template from which Bare canters off at a fair old clip, gut-twanging guitar in tow. It's one of the standouts of a highly engaging set, mostly covers, that finds him joined by ace guitarists Buddy Miller and Randy Scruggs, as well as Robert Plant's rhythm section from Band Of Joy. In truth, we could easily do without "House Of The Rising Sun" or his revival of U2's "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For". But the rest of it tips fresh blood into some of America's more picked-at traditional songs. Largely it's to do with Bare's sonorous voice, still a thing of sturdy authority at the age of 78, which gives the likes of "Shenandoah" and "Boll Weevil" the full weight they deserve. Conversely, the band often bring a lightness of touch, zipping through "John Hardy" and Merle Travis' "Dark As A Dungeon" with an immediacy that suggests these are songs still warm from the presses.

Not everything is antique. Alejandro Escovedo is at hand for harmony vocals on his own "I Was Drunk", a tune that the weathered Bare admits he can relate to more than most. And of the two originals, "I Was A Young Man Once" (co-written with producer Don Cusic) is as elegantly poignant as it is wistful and nostalgic. Let's hope he's here to stay this time. *ROB HUGHES*



THE AMERICANA ROUND-UP

► They say music can unite people when nothing else will. Take **Dave & Phil Alvin**, whose tenure in The Blasters was often marked by the kind of feuding peculiar only to wilful brothers. Yet

Common Ground: Dave Alvin & Phil Alvin Play And Sing The Songs Of Big Bill Broonzy, their first album together in 30 years, finds them putting aside any differences in tribute to the legendary bluesman. The project initially started out as an EP, but the boys' Yep Roc bosses nudged them along into a full long-player. Due at the beginning of June, the Alvins' band also includes onetime Blaster Gene Taylor on piano.

A month earlier sees the return of **Wovenhand**, led by former 16 Horsepower chief David Eugene Edwards (pictured left). Latest offering **Refractory Obdurate** stirs together country, folk and punk on a batch of tunes that explore the "louder roots hinted at on prior albums". Also due, in the States at least, is the new one from Nashville resident **Sturgill Simpson**, whose wonderful **High Top Mountain** came out here only recently on Loose. **Metamodern Sounds In Country Music** is, he tells *Uncut*, "a country record dealing with socially conscious themes. There's talk of cosmic turtles and aliens and all kinds of stuff." Finally, **Duets**, is a career-spanning compilation from **Linda Ronstadt** that sees her team up with Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris, Frank Sinatra, Aaron Neville and others. *ROB HUGHES*



STANLEY BRINKS AND THE WAVE PICTURES

Gin

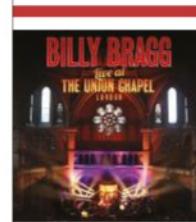
FIKA

8/10

The highly prolific Frenchman makes a splash

Since leaving his brother David to captain indie-folk oddities Herman Dune, Stanley Brinks has been churning out albums like a man who never sleeps. This third collaboration with David Tattersall's Wave Pictures finds his trembly vocals taking a wobbly walk over bony percussion and guitar on a set that's as wistful and charming as it is playful and self-conscious. He still sounds indebted to the mercurial pull of Jonathan Richman, especially on "Max In The Elevator", though at other times, as on "Light And Slow", he approaches a loping, avant-garde revival of The Cotton Club.

ROB HUGHES



BILLY BRAGG

Live At The Union Chapel, London

COOKING VINYL

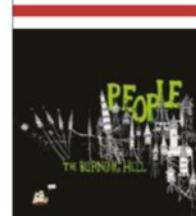
8/10

The Bard of Barking captured last year

The audio component

of a lavish new CD and DVD package, this 19-song show from June 2013 sweeps impressively over Bragg's 30-year career. The band cook and brood on the warm Americana of last year's *Tooth & Nail*, the spine of a set which includes three Woody Guthrie co-writes and a politicised solo interlude of "Never Buy The Sun", "Between The Wars" and "There Is Power In A Union". The 'hits' – "Sexuality", "You Woke Up My Neighbourhood" – sound fresh and joyous, while a rousing finale of "Waiting For The Great Leap Forwards" includes a zeitgeist-y nod to Pussy Riot.

GRAEME THOMSON



THE BURNING HELL

People

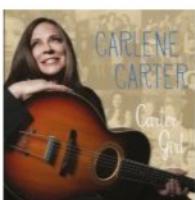
BB*ISLAND

7/10

Caustic Canadian songwriting (complete with ukulele)

Lyrics are the thing for Newfoundland-based songwriter Mathias Kom. His sixth album houses some extraordinary stories, not least the word-heavy "Amateur Rappers", which rattles along like an interior monologue in which the songwriter is losing his sense of why he writes. At times, the arrangements are fussy, with clarinets, lapsteel and ukulele clinging awkwardly to indie rock tunes. But the austere "Travel Writers" bears comparison with Bill Callahan, and the words of "Grown Ups" are a lesson in wit and nuance: "We used to take photos in the graveyards back when we were little goth idiots..."

ALASTAIR MCKAY



CARLENE CARTER Carter Girl

ROUNDER

Only the second album in 20 years for American musical royalty

8/10

She's taken a circuitous route – brushes with the law, loss of significant others – but here Carter's out to reclaim her considerable legacy. With producer Don Was supplying a gauzy, modern sheen and an all-star cast, including Elizabeth Cook (on shivering harmony vocals), Mother Maybelle's granddaughter tackles a raft of (mostly) AP Carter standards. She's in fine, eloquent fettle, sinking her heart into the ever-resilient material. A tearful original, "Me And The Wildwood Rose" slots right in, but the gospel-tinged Willie Nelson duet "Troublesome Waters", and "Tall Lover Man", a crazed June Carter Cash murder ballad, are stunners.

LUKE TORN



CHAIN & THE GANG Minimum Rock N Roll

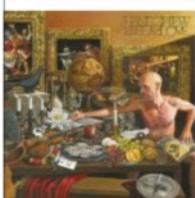
FORTUNA POP

Ian Svenonius' "crime rock" ensemble's fourth

6/10

Ian Svenonius dedicated his creative life to an exploration of the soul brother archetype, colliding James Brown, DC punk and Marxist philosophy with wit and conviction. With Chain & The Gang, he's exploring "aural austerity", stripping his sound back to brass tacks. Those who adored The Make-Up may find the skeletal drum machine thunk of "Stuck In A Box" a little demo-quality. But Svenonius' charisma is unflagging, and his commitment to the theme can thrill, too: see "Devitalize", an anti-gentrification anthem that finds Svenonius and Katie Alice chanting, "Peel the paint/Rust the rails/Close everything so nuttin's for sale!"

LOUIS PATTISON



HANS CHEW Life & Love

AT THE HELM

Soulful rock'n'roll piano man returns with fine second LP

7/10

Boogie-woogie pianist Chew follows 2010's superb debut *Tennessee & Other Stories...* (an Uncut Music Award nominee) with *Life & Love*, recruiting a band to help him out and bolster the piano-led songs into a fuller classic rock sound. At full pelt, this is invigorating in the extreme, with Chew's strong, soulful vocals and piano chiming with Dave Cavallo's guitar on rockers like "Tom Hughes Town" or providing acoustic accompaniment on the intimate "Goodnight". But the album may be even stronger when the guitar steps aside and lets Chew and his piano dominate, with the Southern boogie "Love" or religious ballad "The Wedding Song".

PETER WATTS



ROBERT CRAY In My Soul

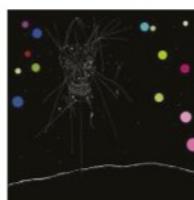
PROVOGUE

Grammy-winning blues guitarist turned new crown prince of soul

7/10

Over the years, Robert Cray has matured from an explosive young blues guitar-slinger into one of the most majestic soul singers of our times. A thrilling take on Redding's "Trick Or Treat" in 1997 was a career turning-point, and he again tackles Otis with total conviction here on "Nobody's Fault But Mine". His Albert Collins-influenced guitar licks retain their potent sting but it's his grit-and-velvet voice that commands attention on soul standards such as Bobby Bland's "Deep In My Soul" and Isaac Hayes' "Your Good Thing" while Steve Jordan's production exquisitely conjures the spirit of Stax/Hi Records circa 1970.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



CURRENT 93 I Am The Last Of All The Field That Fell: A Channel

COPTIC CAT

Guest-packed return from "apocalyptic" folk troupe

7/10

Founded in 1982 as a fairly daunting industrial group, the passing years have seen Current 93 mellow some, David Tibet's kinship with the likes of Shirley Collins and Comus inspiring the ensemble's drift towards a curious gothic folk. *I Am The Last...* has a wind in its sails, though, thanks to Tibet's preacher vigour, and an extraordinary guestlist: Tony McPhee of The Groundhogs, who adds clamorous guitar to the likes of "The Heart Full Of Eyes"; Antony Hegarty, who joins Jack Barnett of These New Puritans for piano nocturne "Mourned Winter Then"; and Nick Cave, who tugs down the curtain with the sorrowful "I Could Not Shift The Shadow".

LOUIS PATTISON

REVELATIONS

Carlene Carter, on being the loud one: "I was always put out front!"



► "My aunt Helen [Carter] knew every fact about the Carter Family, every story, every chord," Carlene Carter remembers. "But my mom [June Carter Cash] would elaborate things into her versions," she adds with a laugh. Both elders are sumptuously covered on *Carter Girl*, Carlene's latest, a stunning coming-to-terms as heir apparent of the First Family of American Music's epic legacy. "Yeah, my grandmother [Mother Maybelle] taught me how to play, hands-on." But not, as it turns out, how to harmonise. "Since I was the loudest one, I was always put out front. I never learned how to sing harmony." Carter spent the last five years – following her fine 2008 comeback, *Stronger* – learning that skill and digging through the Carters' monumental 30-track box *In The Shadow Of Clinch Mountain*, trying out well-known nuggets ("Blackjack David", "Gold Watch And Chain") and the barely rumoured alike. "Blackie's Gunman" and "Little Black Train", too [credited to AP Carter, both covered] were a couple that I had no recollection of," she observes. Meanwhile, Don Was, fresh off chart-topping production of John Mayer's *Paradise Valley*, supplemented by many studio pros, provides an up-to-date sheen, giving Carter (with soul sister Elizabeth Cook) room for their personal, interpretative stamp. "I never felt any pressure," Carter asserts, "but I've always felt a responsibility, to keep this music alive." LUKE TORN



DESERT NOISES

27 Ways

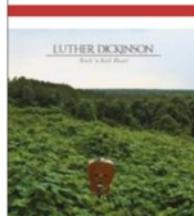
SQE MUSIC

Rousing, accomplished debut from a young band on a mission

With the yearning songs and eruptive, hyper-rhythmic sounds of their

debut album, the Utah-bred ex-Mormons of Desert Noises (one of them an Osmond) position themselves as the spiritual kinsmen of Kings Of Leon's evangelically reared siblings. As on KOL's early records, *27 Ways* plays out like a crucible wherein the effort of breaking away from constraints is palpable, trumpeted in exultant, crisply interwoven rockers like "Grandma Looks" and "Out Of My Head". This band traverses the wide-open spaces of the American West, crafting tales of restlessness ("Keys On The Table") while gazing back at their native culture still looming in the rearview mirror ("Follow You Out", the epic "Angels").

BUD SCOPPA



LUTHER DICKINSON

Rock 'n Roll Blues

NEW WEST

A humble, subjective footnote to the Dickinson Brothers' magnum opus

If the North Mississippi Allstars' 2013 album, *World*

Boogie Is Coming, was a lavish aural canvas encompassing the primal panorama of Hill Country blues, this acoustic effort more closely resembles a series of pencil sketches depicting his place in that rich legacy. On opener "Vandalize", the Allstars singer and guitarist recounts his days as a skateboard punk being sucked into the primitive, haunted surrounding terrain. With fife-and-drum blues as a backdrop, Dickinson puts himself into this narrative, communing with ghosts from Jimmie Rodgers to Robert Johnson, and eventually bringing past and present together into a heartfelt document, modest but expertly rendered.

BUD SCOPPA



THE AFGHAN WHIGS

Do To The Beast

SUBPOP

It will never be over. Greg Dulli's emotional return, by John Robinson



7/10

The band, of course, is the Afghan Whigs, a point probably much gratifying to the band's leader, Greg Dulli – an identification flattering simultaneously to the masculinity, cinematic aspirations and the musical passions of his band. "Soul band" was possibly a bit of a stretch, but from the late 1980s to their 2000 disbanding, Afghan Whigs spent time painting a funky and even menacing picture of love: in passion, Clavinet and compelling drama, if not always melody. In Dulli's hands cupid's arrow was an offensive weapon, and love a psychological illness. He summarised his position succinctly on "Neglekted" from their last LP 1965: "You can fuck my body, baby/But please don't fuck my mind..."

The band's return, 16 years after their ostensible split (guitarist Rick McCollum is not present here), serves to prove an important emotional lesson: that time isn't necessarily a great healer. On the opening track, "Parked Outside", enormous guitar riffs and strings announce a revenge on the point of being enacted. Elsewhere in the album, kisses are poison. Ex-lovers are stalked, seemingly only to

TED DEMME'S 1996 movie *Beautiful Girls* contains a scene in which two characters decide to go to a Massachusetts bar on the strength of the band that's playing there. "What kind of band is it?" asks one. "A soul band," says the other.

refine the observer's masochism. Key words include "fear", "burning" and "tourniquet". There are very few glimmers of consolation and offers of rest to be found here. One small example of such is "Can Rova", where a couple's moonlight flit is accompanied by an accordion drone and a distant dancefloor beat.

At a time of life, in fact, when no-one would condemn Dulli for making a mature, considered and inward-looking record, he has in fact made an untamed, passionate and occasionally brilliant one. "Matamoros", early in the album, shows a wonderful command of old and new modes. What begins with a version of the band's default guitar chop ends with a superb shifting up into a new palette, concluding with a swooning violin meltdown – it's Balkansploitation, in fact.

If there's consolation to be taken from *Do To The Beast*, above all, it's that the Afghan Whigs remain a high-stakes band, conducting business not with a eye on self-preservation, but in the heat of the moment. There's something to be said for the accomplishment of songs like the closing "These Sticks", which sounds a bit like Radiohead's "Street Spirit (Fade Out)", or "Lost In The Woods", with its U2-reminiscent chorus, but for a band who has made its bed in confusion, the plot feels a little too tidily wrapped up here.

On the ambiguous "Algiers", however, we get a fuller depiction of the band's blood-and-guts approach. The song commences with Dulli singing in a pitch that is clearly too high for comfort, but which he pursues to its painful and dramatic end. Ultimately, that's always been the band's larger point. You might objectively know something might not work out.

SLEEVE NOTES

Produced by:

Greg Dulli

Recorded at: Rancho De La Luna

Personnel includes:

Greg Dulli (guitar, vocals), John Curley (bass), Dave Rosser and Jon Skibic (guitars), Rick Nelson (multi-instrumentalist), Cully Symington (drums), Van Hunt, Joseph Arthur, Mark McGuire

Q&A

Greg Dulli



How did you name the record?

My friend Manuel had never heard beatboxing before and he thought I was saying, "Do to the beast what you do to the bush" – I loved the 'do to the beast' part. It's no deeper than that. Don't get me wrong – that the phrase landed on the word "beast"? Not unattractive to me.

Has your writing about love and passion changed? It's hard to step out of yourself and say, "You're more accommodating than you were as a 26-year-old." As a human being I've hopefully evolved to the point where I can understand both sides of the issue I'm speaking about.

What can you do with the Whigs you can't do anywhere else? I never feel constrained by the environment – I go for it equally in all of my groups. I have a long history with John Curley, there's telepathy there. There's a supernatural quality to proceedings, a comfort – to jump off the cliff, so to speak.

Are you happy to rock in your forties?

Absolutely! I will point to Nick Cave, a perfect example. Not only was he rocking out in his own band, he decided to form another band to rock out even harder. What are you supposed to do. Just shuffle off? Not going to happen.

INTERVIEW: JOHN ROBINSON

But since when has anyone been able to govern their passions as clinically as that? You go with your heart and do it anyway, whatever the consequences.

"Royal Cream", towards the album's close, digs just as satisfactorily into Dulli's paranoid but compelling beat, the fucked mind. A strange mixture of grinding alt.rock guitar (the verse) and an upbeat pop chorus (almost like the Pop/Bowie "China Girl", in fact), the song confronts a betrayal that feels positively Miltonian as Dulli seethes: "I know you're sleeping with another demon..."

Crimes of passion is what the Afghan Whigs have historically dealt in – the torment, the deed, the terrible consequences. Perversely, from all this disorder the band have created, whether by happy accident or high design, magnificent, and often conceptual work: the lyrical, cathartic *Gentlemen* from 1993, or their career-best *Black Love* from 1996. It's tempting – what with the runic artwork, songs like "I Am Fire" and so on – to imagine that this album is part of some novelistic, occult design. If anything, though, these songs seem too savage – and if we know one thing about Dulli's beast, it's that it won't easily be tamed.



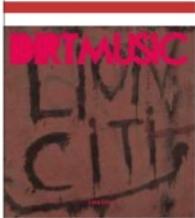
MAC DEMARCO
Salad Days
CAPTURED TRACKS

Loveable third from prolific Montreal indie rock urchin

7/10

Mac DeMarco is one of those curious breed of slackers, the sort that appear to be trying not very hard at all while keeping up a work rate that borders on the prodigious. His third significant solo release in a couple of years, *Salad Days* is goofy but sweet guitar pop in the vein of Jonathan Richman, occasionally somewhat lightweight – “Growing by the hour/Love just like a flower” he croons on “Let Her Go” – but delivered with a crooked smile that’s quite endearing. Signs of a gentle progression come on “Chamber Of Reflection”, a lovelorn slow jam that sees DeMarco channel his inner Shuggie Otis.

LOUIS PATTISON

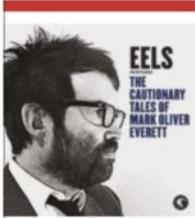


DIRTMUSIC
Lion City
GLITTERBEAT

Fourth album from Walkabouts/Bad Seeds African side-project Chris Eckman and Hugo Race's Dirtmusic is rivalling Damon Albarn's

Africa Express as a platform for western and African musicians to collaborate in an ego-free environment in which all are equal partners. Recorded in Bamako, a host of African artists including Tamikrest and Samba Touré join Eckman and Race on a set of atmospheric, dub-heavy tracks that's the antithesis of the Paul Simon approach. “Stars Of Gao” sounds like Hawkwind jamming in the desert with Tinariwen. Other tracks such as the lovely “September 12” featuring Senegalese signer Ibrahima Diouf offer more fully realised songs. Global fusion at its most democratic and exhilarating.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



EELS
The Cautionary Tales Of Mark Oliver Everett
E WORKS/PIAS

Elver statesman's words of warning

The Randy Newman of his generation, Mark

Everett's proclivities toward the crushingly acute and the Timmy Mallett quirky have made the 50-year-old something of a flawed masterpiece specialist. Lush and forlorn, and not unlike 2000's dreamy *Daisies Of The Galaxy*, much of his 11th Eels outing predates its amped-up predecessor, *Wonderful, Glorious*, with Everett returning to a set of demos he initially found too gloomy to release. The piercing “Parallels” – a quasi-tribute to the father that he lost young – and the lugubrious “Lockdown Hurricane” make up for any lapses of taste elsewhere. As frustratingly close to perfect as ever.

JIM WIRTH

8/10



ELLIS ISLAND SOUND
Regions

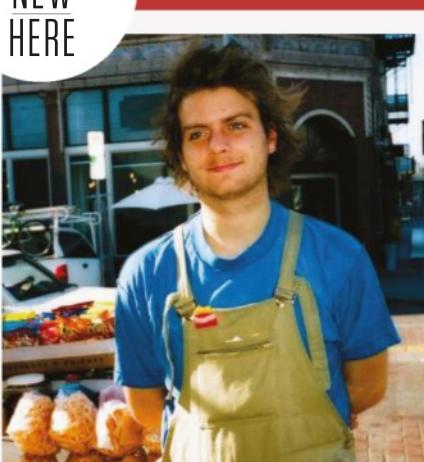
VILLAGE GREEN

The veteran duo embark on a Euro-African sound adventure on their first LP for seven years

The elegantly open-ended urban soundscapes of Pete Astor and David Sheppard draw from a vibrant melting pot of influences. The title of *Regions*' opener “Nairobi/Köln” is a prime clue: there's a Krautrock kick to the rhythm, flecks of African guitar and dubby brass, while “So Much Water Close To Home” nods to Talking Heads' *Remain In Light*, with its high-life high-line, syncopated bass pulse and gliding trumpet. Radiohead cohort John Matthias adds appropriately enigmatic vocals to half the tracks. The results are exotic, eccentric and highly evocative.

GRAEME THOMSON

Mac DeMarco



In Shakespeare's *Antony And Cleopatra*, Cleopatra recalls her impetuous youth, “my salad days/When I was green in judgment, cold in blood...” The term has since passed into the rock vernacular, used by Zappa, Minor Threat, and Young Marble Giants, although when Mac DeMarco picked it as the title for his second album, he only knew of the Bard. “People have been making it very clear to me about the others lately, though,” he says. “I just thought it was a funny term.”

Formerly of Vancouver indie trio Makeout Videotape, DeMarco went solo in 2011 with the *Captured Tracks* EP “Rock And Roll Nightclub”, a suite of playful glam songs slowed slightly to lend his vocals a sleepy Elvis drawl. The relative mellowess of his recorded output is not replicated live, however, with shows seeing Mac getting naked or engaging in sloppy kisses with his bandmates: “I think it's just more fun for me and the guys. For the crowd, too.”

Salad Days features some fresh sounds. “I've gotten a lot more into synthesisers lately,” he says. “A lot of sounds that I used to think were really cheesy I really enjoy now.”

So is this the new, mature Mac DeMarco? “Oh, I don't think my salad days are necessarily gone at all,” he grins, “but sometimes I need to remind myself of that.”

LOUIS PATTISON



EMA
The Future's Void

CITY SLANG

Accessible, still raw second from North Dakota no-waver

Erika Anderson's debut as EMA, 2011's *Past Life Martyred Saints*, startled

in its honesty, a vivid, unwavering testament to being young and fucked-up in red-state America. Crucially, though, its self-lacerating angst and extreme lo-fidelity made it a somewhat difficult listen, a quality neatly addressed here. Clanking drum machines and buzzing electronics power songs addressing technology and surveillance, but Anderson's voice – a curled sneer also capable of startling vulnerability – keeps songs like “Smoulder” feeling raw and human. She can do pop, too, of a fashion: see “So Blonde”, a strummy grunge caterwaul that could have easily have found a place on Hole's *Live Through This*.

LOUIS PATTISON



EMBRACE
Embrace

COOKING VINYL

First album in eight years and a change of direction for the Yorkshire band

5/10

Since we last heard from Embrace two World

Cups ago on 2006's *World At Your Feet*, Danny McNamara and company seems to have spent their time listening to all the bands they heroically used to not sound like. Gone, for the most part, are the aching ballads in favour of identikit stadium rock epics somewhere between Simple Minds and Coldplay, overlaid with '90s dance beats. On one track Danny – whose yearning voice has dropped half an octave – sings through a vocoder and sounds indistinguishable from Cher. A shame, because under the bombastic production there are some cracking songs trying to escape.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



CHEF FAKER
Built On Glass

FUTURE CLASSIC/OPULENT

Jazz and electronica-loving Aussie's slow-moving debut

Festooned with awards back home, Faker, aka Nicholas Murphy, is better

known north of the Equator for his sadcore take on Blackstreet's 1996 hit “No Diggity”, which featured on a beer commercial at last year's Super Bowl. His first full-length LP, recorded in a converted butcher's cold room in his native Melbourne, is similarly slow-moving, and characterised by electro-soul grooves and Murphy's laconic delivery. There are some nice details – the percussion on “Cigarettes & Loneliness” echoing the bell of a freight train, for instance – though daft lyrics such as “I kiss your knees and I try to be bold” (on “Blush”) threaten to undermine the flashes of brilliance elsewhere.

FIONA STURGES



THE FLESHTONES Wheel Of Talent

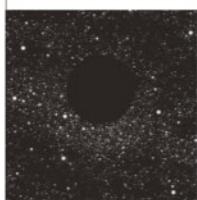
YEP ROC

The Big Apple garage gods get ready to enter their fifth decade on a bender

8/10

While virtually all their 1970s NYC peers have long since imploded or, literally, expired, The Fleshtones just keep plugging away. Album number 22, *Wheel Of Talent*, hardly changes up the formula (though Southern Culture On The Skids singer Mary Huff takes the mic on the girl-group riff "For A Smile"), rocking as if they inhabit a perpetual 1966. Serving up another bakers' dozen of piledriving, over-the-top rockers that veer from playful to silly, all pulsing with familiar nervous, goodtime energy, they touch on tribute ("Remember The Ramones") and spoof would-be hipper-than-thou youngsters on the rambunctious "Hipster Heaven".

LUKE TORN



GOLDEN RETRIEVER Seer

THRILL JOCKEY

Modular synthesis, off into outer space

Much recent American underground music has explored the not-exactly-underpopulated territory delimited by new age, ambient and kosmische. It's a field of music that's easy to do but hard to essay well, but Golden Retriever, the duo of Matt Carlson on modular synthesiser and Jonathan Sielaff on bass clarinet, are onto something with *Seer*. Carlson's touch is particularly deft, stippling the canvas with gorgeous arpeggios, while abraded drones undergird the five pieces here, interacting beautifully with raw blasts and breathy sighs from Sielaff, exploring similar territory to David Behrman's minimalist classic *On The Other Ocean*, or Harold Budd's "Bismillahi 'Rrahmani 'Rrahim".

JONDALE

7/10

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JONDALE



LIZ GREEN Haul Away!

PLAY IT AGAIN SAM

Expansive and beguilingly beautiful second album from Manchester talent

8/10

The alluring pull of *O, Devotion!*, Green's 2011 debut, was largely down to the contrast between her simple guitar figures and the otherworldly nature of her kinked voice. This time out she's expanded her musical remit somewhat, creating a more piano-centric record with judicious helpings of cello, flute and trombone. The overall effect is both dark and playful, with Green intoning over imagistic folk narratives like the frisky cousin of Josephine Foster or Karen Dalton. These are songs of harbinger crows and black rivers, set to cock-eared waltzes and a very English strain of Brechtian cabaret.

ROB HUGHES



PETER HAMMILL/ GARY LUCAS Other World

ESOTERIC ANTENNA

Van Der Graaf leader and Magic Band guitarist successfully team up

Tireless networker and long-term Hammill fan Lucas was the catalyst for this surprising collaboration. In an album built almost solely from the pair's layered and looped voices and guitars, "Built From Scratch" is roughly collaged helicopter-blade flutters and feedback is the sort of experimental result you'd expect. But this is contrasted with straight acoustic folk strums, and the strength of Hammill's lyrics on the devastation meted out by ageing ("Of Kith And Kin") and fame ("This Is Showbiz", "The Kid"). It all comes together on "Black Ice", as a hubristic star skates towards a heavy fall over abrasive, warped folk-rock twangs.

NICK HASTED

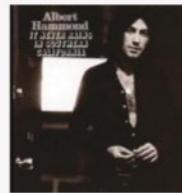
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NICK HASTED

HOW TO BUY... ALBERT HAMMOND

Singer, songwriter, producer, hitmaker!



It Never Rains In Southern California

EPIC, 1972

Backed by the Wrecking Crew at their smoothest, Californian soft-rock meets old school

Tin Pan Alley on 10 songs co-written with Mike Hazlewood. The title track remains the standout. But the autobiographical "From Great Britain To LA" and the original version of "The Air That I Breathe", two years before it was a hit for The Hollies, are classics in their way, too.

7/10



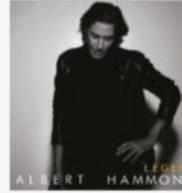
When I Need You

EPIC, 1977

Easy-listening at its most tasteful with Hal David and Carole Bayer Sager as high-class co-writers. Hammond's take on

the title track is pure MOR but thankfully less cloying than Leo Sayer's hit version. Other standouts include "To All The Girls I've Loved," "99 Miles From LA" and "Midnight Lady", as he makes his play for the Neil Diamond market.

7/10



Legend

SONY, 2010

Fourteen of the hits he wrote back in the day, plus one new composition, "Changing Me," performed touchingly with Albert Jr. But

this is not your bog-standard comp; rather they're fresh reworkings of familiar songs, many performed as duets. Ron Sexsmith, the Dandy Warhols' Courtney Taylor, Bonnie Tyler and Al Stewart are among the collaborators.

6/10

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



ALBERT HAMMOND Songbook 2013: Live In Wilhelmshaven

HYPERTENSION

You probably never knew he wrote so many hits...

6/10

Briefly eclipsed by his son while The Strokes were enjoying their five minutes as the world's favourite band, Albert Jr will be doing well if he's still selling out concert halls in 40 years' time, like his old man. This 30-song live set climaxes rightly enough with Hammond's two early '70s solo hits, "Free Electric Band" and "It Never Rains In Southern California". But along the way we get classy, piano-led acoustic ensemble versions of the hits he wrote for Diana Ross, Chicago, Leo Sayer, The Hollies, Whitney Houston and, er, Leapy Lee and The Pitkins, delivered in classic Neil Diamond-meets-Cat Stevens troubadour mode.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

HECKER Articulação

EDITIONS MEGO

Maddening, enthralling computer music

Florian Hecker's work can be forbidding at first blush, often being both conceptually hyper-

rigorous and uncompromisingly extreme.

Articulação is no exception: featuring two recitations of Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani's "Hinge", a text exploring the dialectical chimeras of nature and culture, with the first recitation, "Hinge*", by avant-garde vocalist Joan La Barbara. The pair are split by "Modulator (...meaningless, affectless, out of nothing...)", exposing the hidden wirings of "Hinge**". With each recitation further bifurcated across the stereo spectrum and "Modulator"'s contortions being some of the most potent computer music of recent times, it's surprisingly thrilling: real psychoacoustics.

JONDALE

JESCA HOOP Undress

LAST LAUGH/CURUJA RECORDS

Hoop revisits glories past with a little help from her friends

8/10



Following her terrific last album, 2012's *The House That Jack Built*, Jesca Hoop – the Californian singer-songwriter-turned-resident of Chortton, Manchester – has opted to revisit her second LP, *Hunting My Dress*, through a series of low-key re-recordings with vocal addendums from Willy Mason ("Whispering Light"), Iron And Wine's Sam Beam ("Haunting My Dress") and Elbow's Guy Garvey ("Murder Of Birds"). The additional voices and sparse instrumentation lend the proceedings an intimate, semi-improvised feel, much like you would find at Hoop's live shows. It's an effective idea and an enjoyable stopgap before her next masterwork arrives.

FIONA STURGES



TOUMANI DIABATÉ & SIDIKI DIABATÉ

Toumani & Sidiki

WORLD CIRCUIT

Father and son entwine koras in a cross-generational celebration. By Neil Spencer



8/10

OVER RECENT years we have become to used to pop as a dynastic calling, as assorted musicians with surnames like Dylan, Sumner, Simon, Thompson, Wainwright, Carthy, and Cohen seek to emulate the success of their esteemed parents. In West Africa, such generational transference has long been the norm, enshrined in the role of the griot, who functions as musician, bard, song-keeper, social historian and praise singer. Griots take pride in their ancestry; kora maestro Toumani Diabaté for example, traces his calling back some 70 generations, though ironically his father, himself a fêted kora player, didn't bother teaching his son the instrument. Nonetheless, Toumani took up the 21-stringed African harp at the age of five, quickly proved himself a prodigy, and has gone on to become its most famous exponent both at home and on the international stage, trailing an impressive roster of albums and cross-cultural collaborations (with Spanish group Ketama, Björk and Damon Albarn among others). In prestige, his younger brother Mamadou, another kora genius, isn't far behind.

It's no surprise, then, to find Toumani's son Sidiki (named after his grandfather) continuing the family trade. In Mali he's already celebrated in his own right as accompanist to Iba One, the country's leading hip-hop star, an example of how the role of griot is mutating with new times. "We're modern griots," says Toumani, "we live in the city, we're connected to the world."

Still, all but one of the 10 pieces on *Toumani & Sidiki* are traditional numbers, some of them dating back a century or more to Gambia, where grandfather Sidiki grew up (West Africa's ancient Mande empire crosses current national borders and its griots do likewise). Most are songs, but are delivered here as instrumentals, part improvised during sessions in London in the autumn of 2013.

Confusingly but also appropriately for modern griots, the original pieces have been renamed, so that a wedding song called "Chung Kamaba" now bears the title "Toguna Industries" in honour of an agricultural company that helped Mali's farmers during the recent incursion of Islamic militants into the country's north, an event that has provoked and coloured an outpouring of recordings by Mali's rich supply of musicians – Rokia Traoré and Vieux Farka Touré for instance. "Dr Cheikh Modibo

Diarra" is named in honour of a Malian astrophysicist and politician, while "Tijanyi" is a salute to the Sufi strain of Islam to which Toumani and Sidiki are committed. "Tolerance is what's important," says Toumani, "Islam came to Mali centuries ago, we don't need lessons."

The mood of the album is mostly reflective. It's a very different creature to Toumani's celebrated outings with the late guitarist Ali Farka Touré, where the two men sparred in contrasting styles – Toumani's rippling kora playing against Touré's clanging, bluesy lines. Father and son play in much more similar fashion, though Sidiki's lines are usually the more staccato. As on any album of twin guitars, there's fun to be had deciphering who is playing which part, and in catching the response of each kora to the other's initiative, and when each kora has said what it wants, the pair are quite prepared to close the conversation; tracks that clock in at three minutes (there are three here) are scarce on modern African albums.

Though everything is touched by a profound sense of melody and the sheer loveliness of its kora cascades, the temper of the pieces shifts

subtly. "Rachid Ouigini" (the name of an Algerian historian) is spritely, "Bansang" relies on an almost funk rhythm ("It really grooves," reckons Toumani), while "Claudia And Salma" (the names of Toumani's manager's daughters) is a stately mix of sweetness and farewell.

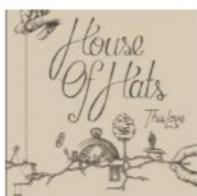
The stand-out track is the one original, "Lampedusa", written in commemoration of the 300 African migrants who perished off the Italian island of that name in late 2013. As one would expect, it's a slow, poignant affair, whose delicate melody is underpinned by the slow tolling of bass lines. A hushed lament to the lost, its four and a half minutes pass by like a whisper.

A subtle, unshowy set it may be, but *Toumani & Sidiki* shows that this particular family affair will endure...perhaps for another 70 generations.

SLEEVE NOTES

Recorded at: RAK Studios, London
Produced by: Nick Gold, Lucy Durran
Personnel: Toumani Diabaté (kora), Sidiki Diabaté (kora)

New Albums



HOUSE OF HATS This Love

WILLOW WALK

Soulful debut from Anglo folk-rock harmonisers

7/10

The title cut and opener is a love call delivered in swooning, Fleet Foxes-esque harmonies; a sparkling chunk of psych-folk with an uplifting middle eight – “*some day I'll love you better, someday I'll make you proud*”. Cult status and a soundtrack call. It proves a hard act to follow, though, on a nonetheless engaging debut that showcases crafted songs and fine male/female vocals in harmony and counterpoint. Its gentle mid-Atlantic acoustica, tempered by the odd Western gallop like “*Rivers Will Run*”, is well served by producer Pete Smith, who keeps things simple and bright. A welcome arrival.

NEIL SPENCER



HORSE THIEF Fear In Bliss

BELLA UNION

Impressive debut album from widescreen Westerners

Horse Thief make Big Sky Music. The five-piece hail originally from Denton, Texas, home of Midlake, now live in Oklahoma (they're pals with The Flaming Lips) and go on songwriting escapades to Colorado. They duly conjure an uplifting, widescreen folk-rock sound, brimful of hooks on the anthemic “I Don't Mind”, the crunching “Little Dust” and the sunnily sing-song “Devil”. But there's evidence here, too, of Anglophilia: Cameron Neal's wiry tones are oddly redolent of Salford, while a carnivalesque breakdown in “Human Geographer” reeks of late '60s English psychedelia. It's an easy, unchallenging ride, but a satisfying one.



HOWLIN RAIN Live Rain

AGITATED

Hurricane Ethan tears around the world Culled from various shows on Howlin Rain's 2012 world tour in support of their third LP, *The*

Russian Wilds, *Live Rain* finds Ethan Miller's country-psych vagabonds in imperious form, gleefully indulging their arena rock fantasies. The crunching opening chords of “*Phantom In The Valley*” really ought to be accompanied by a burst of pyrotechnics, while the interplay between Miller and the band's fellow guitarist Isaiah Mitchell is frequently gobsmacking. A clutch of the group's best songs are strangely omitted from the setlist (there's no “*Dark Side*”, sadly), while slower numbers like “*Beneath Wild Wings*” tend to expose a lack of subtlety. But at full pelt, Howlin Rain are a match for anyone.

SAM RICHARDS

7/10

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NEIL SPENCER



HTRK

Psychic 9-5 Club

GHOSTLY INTERNATIONAL

Alluring synthwave from Aussie pair

Noirish minimalists HTRK – originally Hate Rock Trio – were hit by

tragedy when founder member and bassist Sean Stewart died during the recording of their last album, 2011's grimly funky *Work (Work Work)*, leading Jonnive Standish and Nigel Yang to produce this slender, tender and possibly cathartic follow-up as a duo for the first time. If they were provocative in the past, then *Psychic 9-5 Club* finds them in an understandably contemplative mood, opening their hearts to roll out dubby and sensual cyberballads such as “*Give It Up*” and “*Chinatown Style*” like Sade nuzzling Burial. Their blue period, perhaps. It suits them.

PIERS MARTIN

Stone Jack Jones

WE'RE NEW HERE



If Stone Jack Jones' biography sounds like the plot of a movie written by Tom Waits, it doesn't get a whole lot clearer when you ask him about it. First, a fact. He was born on November 17, 1948, and has no idea how old that makes him now. His exotic working life came about because “I drove off the edge of a cliff in West Virginia, broke my body, danced to rebuild it. I became epileptic and could not finish a sentence, so street theatre made sense.” He wound up in Nashville, because “it's a workshop town, many dreamers abound. There are legends and ghosts at every turn.” He fell in with Patty Griffin at a place called Jack's Bar. “You could only play original songs there. If you deviated and played a cover, Jack would take out his gun and start shooting holes in the ceiling. He made his point.” The first band he heard in Nashville was Lambchop, “and I have been mesmerised ever since. Besides the music, Kurt Wagner is a remarkable person who seems to know how to live, produce golden music, entertain friends, walk dogs, throw down a feast and never break a sweat. How many fellows can live like that?”

ALASTAIR MCKAY



JOAN AS POLICE WOMAN The Classic

PIAS

Blue-eyed soul cure's Joan Wasser's blues Calling your album *The Classic* is asking for trouble. But New York-

based singer-songwriter Wasser has pulled off a spectacular coup, exchanging her smart but somewhat cold piano ruminations on loss for a wild trip into big-band soul, including vocal contributions from comedian Reggie Watts. From the opening “*Witness*”, the plucked R'n'B strings and essence of '60s girl-group mines a similar seam to Amy Winehouse's *Back To Black*. But “*Good Together*” marks out the difference, as an Amy-esque ballad expands into a storm of banked harmonies and art-punk noise. It sums up an album that feels joyously cathartic as well as musically stunning.

GARRY MULHOLLAND



STONE JACK JONES Ancestor

WESTERN VINYL

Rambling tales from Lambchop associate Jones has an improbable biography – carny, ballet dancer, escape artist,

professional lute player – but the pertinent fact is that this ramblin' man from West Virginia settled in Nashville, where his fractured sensibility found a sympathetic ear among the city's left-field performers. Patty Griffin and various Lambchop members guest, while producer Roger Moutenot provides a bleary backdrop for Jones' bruised melodies. Certainly, he inhabits the same cellar bars as Mark Lanegan, but the hangover jazz of “*State I'm In*” comes replete with a muted Badalamenti twang, and Griffin adds celestial harmonies to the gloriously ramshackle spiritual, “*Joy*”.

ALASTAIR MCKAY



KELIS

Food

NINJA TUNE

Edgy R&B queen goes indie with some help from Dave Sitek

The career of New Yorker Kelis Rogers has taken a few unpredictable

turns over the years. But it still comes as some surprise that she's signed to veteran UK alt.dance label Ninja Tune and working with arch TV On The Radio art-rocker Dave Sitek. Nevertheless, *Food*, her sixth full-length, is very much a pop album, albeit one with a more eclectic, brass-driven, '60s-meets-'80s sound than the maker of “*Milkshake*” is known for. It's also obsessed with, well, food, but once you get over the initial shock of Kelis' raw-throated take on country-rock on “*Friday Fish Fry*”, the culinary theme becomes another ingredient that never quite blends into a tasty dish.

GARRY MULHOLLAND



AIDAN KNIGHT

Small Reveal

OUTSIDE MUSIC

Tender but tough confessionalists from Canuck alt.folk novice Aidan Knight radiates a world-weary maturity that belies his tender years, spinning rustic dream-folk ruminations that stray into Sufjan Stevens or Will Oldham territory at times. The arrangements on Knight's quietly sublime second LP are richer than his slender 2010 debut *Versicolour*, with fully orchestral instrumentals, gorgeous brass and piano combinations on the warm-blooded lament "The Master's Call", and clanking post-rock drones in the absorbingly intense "You Will See The Good In Everyone". Drenched in melancholy yearning, finger-picking chronicles of doomed love like "Margaret Downe" will gently tug your heartstrings until they unravel into messy tangles.

7/10

STEPHEN DALTON

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STEPHEN DALTON

HABIB KOITÉ

Sôô

CONTRE JOUR

Sweet acoustic African soul...

While the deep desert blues of Tinariwen and Ali Farka Touré have dominated western

7/10

perceptions of Malian music in recent years, Koité represents the gentler melodic tradition of West Africa's griot culture, characterised by rippling acoustic guitars and lilting, drum-free rhythms, his mellow baritone backed by softly chiming vocal harmonies. But if there's a light airiness to the sound, the subject matter is weighty enough as he sings about the problems facing his country on songs such as "Démê", "Need You" and "Khafolé", a lament for a dead child laced with a lullaby sweetness. Toumani Diabaté adds some predictably gorgeous kora to "Terere".

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

LAIBACH

Spectre

MUTE

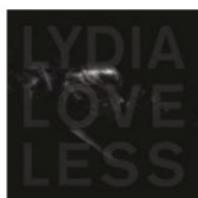
Slovenian veterans ramp up the camp

Last encountered scoring a film about Nazis in space, high-concept industrial rockers Laibach turn

7/10

their attention to matters closer to home on 15th album *Spectre*, as they pontificate about Europe, its economic crisis and the surveillance state via the medium of Lloyd Webber-style showstoppers and in-yer-face dubstep. Grim though that sounds, this is actually their most enjoyable record in ages, largely because it draws together recurring Laibach themes – national identity, religion, stadium pomp – and presents these, on the likes of "The Whistleblowers" and "Eurovision", as a political pop pantomime that's no less coherent than a regular session of Prime Minister's Questions.

PIERS MARTIN



LYDIA LOVELESS

Somewhere Else

BLOODSHOT

Bullish return of the country-punk Ohioan

7/10

European audiences came to Lydia Loveless via 2012's *Indestructible Machine*, a thrilling record that suggested a hurricane-voiced progeny of Loretta Lynn and Exene Cervenka. *Somewhere Else* is only marginally less tame, though certainly more rooted in punkish rock'n'roll than the twangy countrybilly of her last effort. Rage and intensity remain prime motivators when swinging the world by its tail on the title track and "To Love Somebody". Though she's actually more effective when slowing things down a notch, as on the terrific "Chris Isaak" and the burning declaration of love that is "Verlaine Shot Rimbaud".

ROB HUGHES



MARTINA MCBRIDE

Everlasting

VINYL RECORDINGS/KOBALT

Quintessential country singer's genteel takes on vintage soul hits

7/10

McBride's renditions of 14 R'n'B classics in front of a commensurately controlled Nashville-goes-Memphis band under the direction of producer Don Was, it's hard to imagine her ever working up a sweat or mussing her hair. *Everlasting* turns on the contrast between the deep grit of these songs and McBride's inherent restraint, italicised on her duets with soulful scenery chewers Gavin DeGraw ("Bring It On Home To Me") and Kelly Clarkson ("In The Basement"). This tasteful collection is best represented by McBride's cover of Harold Melvin & The Blue Notes' "If You Don't Know Me By Now", matching her satin to the original's velvet.

BUD SCOPPA



EDDIE MARCON

Kaminari Deng Gong

PONG KONG

Blissful chamber folk-pop from Japan

8/10

Taking refuge from the avant-rock blasts of her previous group Coa, Eddie Corman has spent most of the past decade honing her gorgeous folk-pop hymnals with collaborator Marcon. On *Kaminari Deng Gong*, they've reached a new level of poise and self-assurance. Corman's voice is as breathy and singular as peers like Chie Mukai, or Saya from Tenniscoats, and the arrangements – a weird, charming chamber-pop, all glinting piano and flighty, rambling saxophone – twist the melancholy of Corman's songs into new, curious shapes. Lovely, yet capable of unexpected twists, *Kaminari Deng Gong* bests long-term players like Linda Perhacs at their own game.

JONDALE



BEVERLEY MARTYN

The Phoenix And The Turtle

LES COUSINS

John Martyn's ex-wife returns after lengthy absence

6/10

Martyn's first album for over a decade was made with former members of Counting Crows and Los Lobos, who deliver crisp, direct folk-blues. The star attraction is "Reckless Jane", a song started with Nick Drake 40 years ago and only recently finished, with a glorious string arrangement in the style of Robert Kirby. Elsewhere there are songs about Dennis Potter ("Potter's Blues"), hard-drinking troubadours ("Women And Malt Whisky"), and a fiery version of "When The Levee Breaks". Martyn's voice has taken a few knocks, but the weathered quality adds character, particularly on the gutsy "Nighttime".

GRAEME THOMSON



NATALIE MERCHANT

Natalie Merchant

NONESUCH

Solid collection of grown-up confessionalists Putting aside 2010's *Leave Your Sleep*, on

which she wrote musical

accompaniments to 19th- and 20th-Century poems for children, this eponymous release is Merchant's first entirely new material for 13 years. As on previous records, it's an alluring mix of the political and the personal; the former is best exemplified on the brooding light funk protest of "It's A-Coming" and the soulful "Go Down Moses", while matters closer to heart and home are addressed on the fatalistic "Maggie Said" and the domestic turbulence of "Seven Deadly Sins". The arrangements are reserved and understated throughout, gently cradling Merchant's strident but intimate voice.

TERRY STAUNTON



PETER MULVEY

Silver Ladder

SIGNATURE SOUNDS

Veteran singer songwriter's Chuck Prophet-produced, career-assessing 16th

The eclectic range of Mulvey's tireless past

pays handsome dividends on this stylistically sweeping, LA-recorded album. A crack specially convened band (including regular Dylan drummer David Kemper) adhere to his well-established live and direct recording approach and allow the performer's deeply matured, naturally wry and hard-edged Americana to attain full, flowing life. From the raunchy melodic pop of "Sympathies" through suburban requiem "Remember The Milkman", the dizzying weirdness of "If You Shoot At A King" and even Led Zeppelin modal thunder on "Copenhagen Airport", Mulvey's troubled visions attain striking clarity.

GAVIN MARTIN

New Albums



OFF! Wasted Years

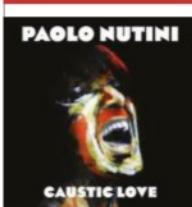
VICE

Hardcore! Keith Morris and co, live to tape, on album three

8/10

band composed of ex-Black Flag members, here Keith Morris returns to his high-concept punk supergroup. There's some righteous (maybe not unrelated) ire here ("You're a living punchline..." Morris yells on "Red, White And Black", "...and the joke's on you!"), but the band are no purists. Here, they pursue swing rather than an inflexible musical ethos, with songs like "Over Our Heads" as much AC/DC, or Rocket From The Crypt, as '80s hardcore. It's a surprisingly varied record, the mood darkening towards the close, the band even occasionally busting their habitual one-minute barrier.

JOHN ROBINSON



PAOLO NUTINI Caustic Love

ATLANTIC

Jools Holland's favourite folkie goes into soulman mode

6/10

Paolo Nutini's third album completes his mutation from acoustic guitar-toting folkie into full-on soul belter. He's always been assisted by a pair of impressive leather lungs and a strangulated howl, but he's finally been paired up with a band (James Gadson! Pino Palladino!) who are able to assist him in a game of classic soul dress-up. Nutini does a decent Bobby Womack impression ("Iron Sky"), reworks Lee Dorsey ("Watch It Fall") and tries on the robes of Stevie Wonder ("Looking For Something") and D'Angelo ("Diana"). But he's let down by the lyrics, which seem to have been assembled from a collection of fridge magnet soul clichés.

JOHN LEWIS



PINK MOUNTAINTOPS Get Back

JAGJAGUWAR

Canadian exiles set to prove rock's not dead Stephen McBean's Krautrocky sex-and-drugs synth-rock side-project

7/10

Pink Mountaintops are now on their fourth album, *Get Back*, an entertaining oddity which manages to recall both (mid-period) Bobby Gillespie and (late) Julian Cope in its reverence for over-the-top rock'n'roll excess. It's unclear exactly how seriously McBean is taking things, but there are some fine songs such as the drawling "Through All The Worry", which makes great use of McBean's languorous vocals, the shambolic Faces-rock of "Sell Your Soul", metal-edged "The Last Dance" and the barrelling punk echo of "Sixteen", while the honking porn-funk of "North Hollywood Microwaves" is extraordinary on several levels.

PETER WATTS



ÉLIANE RADIGUE Naldjorlak I II III

SHIIIN

Quietly exhilarating acoustic hypnosis from French minimalist

8/10

Having spent her time across the 20th Century working with electronics, minimalist Éliane Radigue began to turn her attention to acoustic instrumentation in the new millennium. Her music, premised upon teasingly slow development, and requiring incredibly attentive listening, must offer instrumentalists great challenges. And yet the players on *Naldjorlak III* take on these gorgeous, gently unfolding works with preternatural skill and patience. Over almost 150 minutes, *Naldjorlak* patiently explores the dromological capacities of the cello and two bassoon, a music of rare depth, but most definitely not of gentle, ambient lassitude. This is fiercely dedicated music indeed.

JONDALE



RATKING So It Goes

HOT CHARITY

New York's grittier answer to LA's Odd Future collective

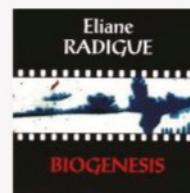
8/10

Ratking's original musical mission was to fuse Suicide with the Wu-Tang Clan but along the way the punk-rap trio have assimilated all kinds of other influences, developing a unique sonic palette that's vivid, almost psychedelic in places. It's matched by some equally dense rhyming from Wiki and Hak, though neither rapper has quite yet acquired the authority of a Raekwon or a Vast Aire. The appearance of King Krule on "So Sick Stories" is apt, since Ratking regard their city with the same youthful suspicion and display the same limitless poetic potential. An invigorating debut.

SAM RICHARDS

HOW TO BUY... ÉLIANE RADIGUE

Minimal epics, from France



Biogenesis

METAMKINE, 1996

Released as part of Metamkine's 'Cinema For The Ear' series, at just over 20 minutes long, *Biogenesis* is a great entry point to the deceptively static world of Radigue's *musique concrète*. Dating from 1973, *Biogenesis* sets a low, abrading hum under foot, with hollow, clocking heart-pulses and liminal flickers of electronics skating the ice.

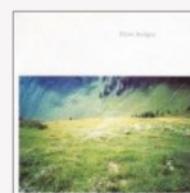
8/10



Trilogie De La Mort XI, 1998

Conversely, *Trilogie De La Mort* is one of Radigue's triple-disc epics (alongside the recently reissued *Adnos*). Born of difficult circumstances - the passing of Radigue's son in a car accident - these three hour-long pieces slowly unfurl, the process of mourning and bereavement etched finely in the humble yet unyielding emotional tenor of the compositions. Simply devastating.

10/10



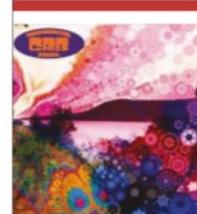
Geelriandre/ Arthesis

SENUFO EDITIONS, 2011

More archival material dating back to the '70s. Both pieces are worthwhile, but "Geelriandre", cut live in Amsterdam in '79, is particularly winning, with the muted drone of Radigue's ARP synth gently punctured by the metallic sonorities of Gérard Frémy's prepared piano. "Arthesis", a whirring, hypnotic solo study for Moog, is a reminder of the fierce individualism of Radigue's compositions.

9/10

JONDALE



THE CHRIS ROBINSON BROTHERHOOD Phosphorescent Harvest

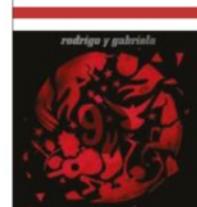
SILVER ARROW

Black Crowe streamlines his cosmic American music, fractionally

7/10

"Sideways, backwards, straightahead - it's all the same," notes Chris Robinson in "Shore Power", the opener to the third CRB studio LP. A fleeting freeform jam soon interrupts the boogie, but it seems that last year's Black Crowes reunion has focused his efforts towards a more straightahead sound. This time, then, the elevated bar band aspects of the Dead are most often referenced and, while Neal Casal co-writes nine out of 11 tracks, his guitar work is less expansive. Cosmic trim to these sturdy songs is mostly provided by keys man Adam MacDougall; odd, though, that his Moog gurgles are often closer to '70s novelty records than anything more notionally psych.

JOHN MULVEY



RODRIGO Y GABRIELA 9 Dead Alive

RUBYWORKS

Flamenco-flecked guitar duo ride again

A couple of myths inform the notion that Rodrigo Y Gabriela's records

6/10

all sound the same. First, it's untrue (2009's 11:11 album, for example, featured a Cuban orchestra). Secondly, anyone who thinks two unaccompanied acoustic guitars are sonically dull should check those early Bert & John albums. The Mexican duo aren't quite in the Jansch/Renbourn class, but they create memorable tunes full of clever variations of timbre, texture and tone. Each of nine instrumental pieces is dedicated to an historical figure, from Harriet Tubman to Dostoyevsky. In truth there's little discernible connection between music and subject - but when it's played with such brio, who cares?

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



THEE OH SEES

Drop

CASTLE FACE

Oscillating garage-rock weirdness from West Coast psychonaut. By Peter Watts



8/10

THERE'S ALWAYS been something restless about Thee Oh Sees. It's in the shimmering psych music they've been recording since 2008's *The Master's Bedroom Is Worth Spending A Night In*. It's in the speed with which they put out new releases, 13 in six years including

lives and comps, plus numerous EPs and seven inches. It's in the constant changes of musical emphasis, the switches between light and dark, pop and experimental, with the band's heaviness peaking on 2013's formidable, metal-flirting *Floating Coffin*.

And it's there in spades on *Drop*, the first album since ringmaster John Dwyer announced he was taking a break, a widely misinterpreted "hiatus" that lasted, oh, a couple of months, while Dwyer moved to LA and effectively became a solo artist, having left the band behind in SF. This is a band that refuses to settle down.

That isn't clear at first, when *Drop* sounds like a continuation of *Floating Coffin*, with the monstrous opening track "Penetrating Eye" playing out on an unsettling, industrial palette of wildly shrieking guitars and an evil 'na na na na' chorus that sounds a little like being aurally tortured by the Joker. Nothing else on the album is quite as heavy, even if it shares that discomforting atmosphere. "Encrypted Bounce" is a mite more relaxed – if sounding like Suicide can be considered thus – but even here

there's a semi-crazed Mellotron solo in the middle-eight before it locks into a wicked groove. *Drop* was created in a Sacramento studio by Dwyer and producer/drummer Chris Woodhouse, and carries an air of synth-heavy experimentation, as the pair take a song and then beat it boldly out of shape and back again. The joy is in how much of it there is to listen to, with constant changes of tempo, instrument and texture that manage to maintain an overall coherence while keeping anybody from getting bored.

The occult, mysterious "Savage Victory" ends in a buzz of fuzz that leads to the strange delights of "Put Some Reverb On My Brother". "I can't see you, you can't see me", the Lynchian lyrics repeat intensely against claustrophobic 8-bit guitars, before the song abruptly switches to blissed-out 1967 freakpop, with refreshing organ and acoustic guitar backing dreamy vocals that counter, "I can see you, you can see me". Then the cycle repeats, going back and forth for two-and-a-half seemingly endless, spiralling, minutes.

"Drop" is a more conventional piece of guitar-led garage-pop, and Dwyer probably could have recorded a whole LP like this, but it wouldn't have been half as interesting. This is one of the few songs

from the album you may hear live given that Dwyer has decided to ditch keyboards as he puts together a new touring band from LA-based musicians. Dwyer had lived in the Bay Area for 16 years, becoming a key part of the scene that spawned Ty Segall, Mikal Cronin and The Fresh & Onlys. He moved to

LA for reasons of space as much as anything, but was delighted to discover he's now neighbour to a stoned, 60-year-old drummer "who can't hear shit", so is free to make as much noise as he wishes.

Fittingly, "Camera" comes in thumping like a grunge "Stepping Stone" and wears well its menacing Link Wray strut, before we meet the ultra-weird "The King's Nose", that lulls you by beginning with a Pink Floyd-style haze until you realise every line of lyric will be met by a jolting guitar flourish, creating a stop-start effect that really pulls the rug out from under you. Once more, you don't quite know what to expect. "Transparent World" is abuzz with feedback, before Dwyer says goodbye with the lush "The Lens",

wrapping up a lyrical fascination with the human gaze – eyes, camera, lenses are recurring themes. It's a soothing ear bath after 30 torrid, tremendous, minutes of electrifying weirdness.

Q&A

John Dwyer



Is the hiatus over? That was a social media shitstorm and I decided to stay out of it.

People's memories are so short everything is relative. I just said I was taking a break while I moved to LA. It was a reboot of my life. I'm older, I need some elbow room. I have nothing bad to say about SF, it was just too damn full. There's still such an amazing scene there. There's Pow!, The Scrapers and a band with a terrible name who are so fucking good, Chad And The Meatbodies. They blew my head off, total shredders, like a psych-pop Iron Maiden.

Who played on Drop? Me and Chris Woodhouse worked on it together. I wrote a bunch of demos then brought them to him. We recorded in a studio in Sacramento, an old banana-ripening warehouse. He plays drums and we switch instruments throughout. We recorded 15 songs then cut back. Regardless of what people might think, I've tried to be a little bit better at editing.

Have you put a new touring band together? I'm working on a few things. I don't know how much of this will be played live. The future of the band doesn't hold much keyboard, I want to go more guitar. I'll still record with a keyboard, but I'm burned out with it live. I've been getting trapped in synth land, just surrounded by drum machines and keyboards while all my rock'n'roll stuff is in another studio. There comes a time where every guitarist discovers the keyboard. PETER WATTS



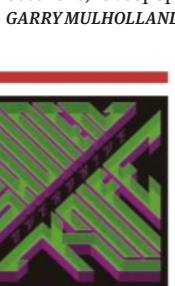
SCRAPS

Electric Ocean

FIRE

Inspired one-girl-band electro-pop

The current ubiquity of the synthesiser in corporate pop has quickly destroyed the lo-fi charms of the 21st-Century synth revival. Thankfully, Brisbane's Laura Hill hasn't noticed. *Electric Ocean* may just be the perfect bedroom electro-pop album; beautifully melancholy melodies, dodgy playing, adorably flat singing and an utter lack of ironic winking about its worship of The Human League and Young Marble Giants. With big production, tunes as strong as "Mushroom Gods" might sound cynical. But in this analogue world where everything sounds slightly, deliciously wrong, you instead feel invited directly into one woman's eccentric, robot pop-loving headspace.



SHONEN KNIFE

Overdrive

DAMNABLY

Osaka's original punk-popsters prove they've still got it

Now thirty-three years into their career, the long-serving Japanese trio

beloved by Nirvana and Sonic Youth have barely budged from their original fusion of the Ramones and The Shangri-Las, a sound which continues to filter through the generations (Best Coast and Dum Dum Girls are among the latest Shonen Knife pretenders). While the fuzz-filled punk vibe is still present and correct, there's also a hard rock thread running through *Overdrive*, with "Black Crow", about a bird that never shuts up, and "Ramen Rock", a thunderous ode to their preferred noodle dish, containing unmistakable nods to Thin Lizzy and Black Sabbath.

FIONA STURGES

7/10

SLEEPER AGENT

About Last Night

RCA

Precocious Kentuckians are growing up in public

The tightly blended voices of frontwoman Alex Kandel and guitarist/songwriter Tony Smith



7/10

bring a conjoined hormonal kick to the exuberant sound of this young sextet out of Bowling Green, Kentucky, indie-rock kids with big-league aspirations. Discovered and mentored by maverick Nashville producer Jay Joyce (Eric Church, Bowling Green's Cage The Elephant), Sleeper Agent rise to the occasion on their major-label debut, with songs that merge garage-rock scrappiness and calibrated chorus hooks that hit like haymakers. The album's centerpiece is "Waves", a chewy chunk of radio-ready bubblegum that finds these Southern kids dreaming of catching California waves and partying 'til dawn in New York City.

BUD SCOPPA



SMOKE FAIRIES

Smoke Fairies

FULL TIME HOBBY

English blues-folk duo toughen up on their harder fourth Favourites of Jack White, Jessica Davies and Katherine Blamire have

8/10

changed tack somewhat on the follow-up to 2012's *Blood Speaks*. The songs are more direct and arrive with a harder edge, the duo now using synthesisers, stark rhythm and fewer harmonies to create a sound which cuts much closer to the bone than their previous records. A slow, dark mantra, "Eclipse Them All" is closer to Fever Ray than pre-*Rumours* Fleetwood Mac. "Shadow Inversions" is scuzzily atmospheric, while the outstanding "Your Own Silent Movie" and "Drinks And Dancing" exemplify the burnished, dramatic melancholy which defines the entire album.

GRAEME THOMSON



SUN ARAW

Belomancie

DRAG CITY

Trippy seventh from cosmic dub explorer

From his Sun Ark studios in Long Beach, California, Cameron Stallones toils at a lo-fi

electronica high on exotic fantasy and good-quality sensimilla. *Belomancie* – named after a form of divination – strikes a similarly sunny tone to Stallones' 2012 LP with The Congos, *Icon Give Thank*. "Seven Lampstands" is a sweltering skank of dub bass and dotty drum machines, while the title track, with its wonky synth fanfares, strikes notes of bold exploration. When Stallones reaches for the mic, his euphoric sing-song recalling Animal Collective's Avey Tare. At two hours, it could use pruning, but *Belomancie* has a visionary quality, cue to sit back, roll up and lose one's self in reverie.

LOUIS PATTISON

8/10



SOHN

Tremors

4AD

Pristine techno-soul debut slightly marred by some painfully precious lyrics

8/10

A multi-instrumental studio boffin who has worked with the likes of Disclosure, Angel Haze and Lana Del Rey, the Vienna-based Londoner who lurks behind the Sohn alias coins a wintry brand of high-tech electro-soul on this striking debut. Sprinkled with desolate falsetto vocals, chamber-pop beatscape like "Tempest" and "Artifice" suggest a fruitful fusion between James Blake's sadstep balladry and Thom Yorke's sci-fi glumcore. Sohn's only real blind spot is his relentlessly self-pitying tone, reaching a po-faced nadir on the processed piano weepie "Paralysed": "Nobody can slit my throat/Nobody can leave me lying by the side of the road like you can..."

STEPHEN DALTON



TODD TERJE

It's Album Time

OLSEN

Oslo disco king's kitschy first full-length – featuring Bryan Ferry Over the course of numerous 12" singles and DJ sets, Norway's

Terje Olsen has established a reputation as a crowd-pleaser. Less cosmic than his friend and collaborator Lindstrøm, when Terje is freed from the constraints of the dancefloor he has a tendency to veer off into lounge-funk/exotica territory, as on "Preben Goes To Acapulco". Meanwhile, star guest Bryan Ferry is underused on an arch cover of Robert Palmer's "Johnny And Mary". Terje is at his best, as on "Delorean Dynamite" and the irresistible "Inspector Nurse", when he marries his kitschier instincts to driving, disco-house rhythms. Fun for all the family.

SAM RICHARDS

7/10



STEEL PANTHER

All You Can Eat

UNIVERSAL

Poodle-rock parodists surpass their satirical targets

7/10

Forget Spinal Tap's 30th anniversary, nobody does spoof heavy metal with quite the same note-perfect, forensically observed virtuosity as big-haired Sunset Strip revivalists Steel Panther. Having blown both Guns N' Roses and Mötley Crüe off the stage, Panther's poodle-rock parodies have clearly been embraced by their intended targets. This polished third album is a feast for fans of puerile humour and glam-metal guitar solos, like spandex-clad power ballads "Gloryhole" and "Fucking My Heart In The Ass". Still, with "She's On The Rag", satirical commentary on metal's bone-headed misogyny sails dangerously close to the real thing. Tricky thing, irony.

STEPHEN DALTON



TWIN FORKS

Twin Forks

DINE ALONE

The prongs remain the same

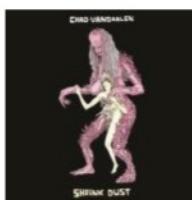
Covered In The Flood,

the 2011 solo debut by Dashboard Confessional's singer and guitarist Chris

Carrabba, found the assembled musicians, who would soon become Twin Forks, putting their own spin on favourite songs by the likes of John Prine and Justin Townes Earle. It served as a good primer for the spirited self-penned country and folk of this set; from the hoedown for telepathic lovers, "Something We Just Know", to the pensive campfire sway of "Reasoned And Roughened". Yet, while everything is played with gusto and the songs themselves are well constructed, the album perhaps lacks enough surprises or detours from its sturdy formula to make it especially memorable.

TERRY STAUNTON

6/10



CHAD VANGAALEN

Shrink Dust

SUB POP

Eccentric pop, comes with a book on frisbee moves

7/10

this his country record, and there's certainly a prairie melancholy to some of these tracks – “Weighed Sin” and “Cosmic Destroyer” waltz alongside mournful pedal steel, while “Cut Off My Hands” is the same but filtered through Animal Collective's kaleidoscope. But this is an album that twitchily turns away from a pat genre tag. There's scuzzy garage-rock, trudging '60s guitar pop, and pastoral indie in the vein of early Shins, all put to service around brilliant imagery that morphs with Sendak logic – as on “Monster” where hands grow out of VanGaalen's shoulders and hold open his eyelids.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Looking Into You: A Tribute To Jackson Browne

MUSIC ROAD

6/10

Double-disc homage to the definitively Californian songwriter

Jackson Browne's material has rarely been best-served by Browne himself. Whatever the torment underpinning his best songs, his preternaturally contented and tasteful delivery has far too often reduced them to lullabies. Unfortunately, few of the 23 artists involved here resist the shackles of taste. Among the exceptions are Bob Schneider, who wrings an appealing melancholy from “Running On Empty”, Lucinda Williams with an unsparing “The Pretender”, and Bruce Springsteen and Patti Scialfa, who make “Linda Paloma” sound like an outtake from *Tunnel Of Love*.

ANDREW MUELLER



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Dewar House Presents: Experimental Batch Number 26

CHEMICAL UNDERGROUND

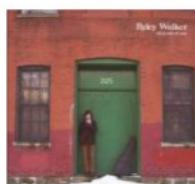
7/10

Instant album from Fence collectivists

(and a host of others)

A loose grouping of musicians assembled by Dewar's whisky for the 2012 TEDGlobal conference in Edinburgh with the aim of creating an album in a week. The results are diverse, but anchored in the experimental folk sounds you'd expect from James Yorkston, The Pictish Trail and King Creosote (whose duet with Suhail Yusuf Khan on “Piya” is a highlight). Yorkston's “Feathers Are Falling” strikes a note of hushed vulnerability, while Lomond Campbell's “The Lengths” has the epic feel of The Band, if The Band came from Pittenweem.

ALASTAIR MCKAY



RYLEY WALKER

All Kinds Of You

TOMPKINS SQUARE

A new guitar hero comes strolling down the highway

8/10

For the past couple of years or so, the Chicagoan guitarist Ryley Walker has been carving a small reputation for himself as a nimble folk explorer in the vein of John Fahey. On his finest and most prominent release to date, however, Walker's vision has switched, with his brackish fingerpicking now more closely resembling that of Bert Jansch (“On The Rise” is a particularly vigorous homage). Tim Buckley is a decent touchstone, too, on the soaring, jazzy reverie, “The West Wind”; the outstanding track on an album which, if never exactly transcending its influences, heroically measures up to them.

JOHN MULVEY



WALLS/ORAM

Sound Houses

ECSTATIC

Ambient dance duo tap the Daphne Oram archive

Walls trade in beatific Balearic techno pulsations with a ribbon of trouble

8/10

running through them; Daphne Oram was the mid-century electronic music pioneer who generated eerie sonics out of painted filmstock. Now the pair merge, with Walls plundering the late Oram's archive and building sinister, softly thunderous soundscapes out of it. This is the bombed-out dub techno realm of Basic Channel and Raime, though “A Very Large Metal Box” ups the tempo with cheeky, gangly legged post-punk. “Rendering The Voice I”, meanwhile, is like Arthur Russell's most fragile cello playing creeping back through time. A riveting collision.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS

REVELATIONS

Walls meet electronic pioneer Daphne Oram, kind of



► Walls' collaboration with electronic pioneer Daphne Oram, famous for her Oramics synth which uses painted strips of film as its input, originated with a Radio 3 commission but soon ballooned into something larger. “When we heard the material we had to work with we immediately realised that we wanted to make a proper album,” says Sam Willis of the duo. “Her music contains an otherworldly aspect which is quite unique. It differs from the other Radiophonic Workshop artists – it's a lot more layered and introspective.”

They built the tracks around digitised archive recordings, hundreds of hours of which are held at Goldsmiths College, and looked through the original tapes with their handwritten notes and diagrams. “Some of these recordings included melodies and motifs which we built around, whereas others we sampled directly and replayed them,” says Willis. “It wasn't easy, as we wanted to be as respectful as possible; for most of the songs we kept her sounds as central part of the piece and we built our parts around that. It was very inspiring being able to make music ‘with her’. It was extremely intimate – at times it was almost as if we could feel her presence in the room.”

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



J RODDY WALSTON & THE BUSINESS

Essential Tremors

ATO

Better than average beard-rock

The Tennessee-born

J Roddy Walston & The Business have hitherto been better known for their legendarily unhinged live performances than their records. *Essential Tremors*, the group's third album, may change that, and the best parts of it deserve to: “Marigold” suggests Led Zeppelin trying to play Creedence Clearwater Revival with Jerry Lee Lewis on piano, and “Black Light” radiates a Jack White-ish facility for wry Southern rock pastiche. It's unfortunate that these splendidly rumbustious tracks make the lumbering ballads even harder work by comparison.

ANDREW MUELLER



WE HAVE BAND

Movements

NAÏVE

Persistence pays off for electropop conceptualists

Having worked at EMI before forming functional art-pop three-piece We

Have Band, its thick-skinned members know how important it is to create your own luck in the music industry. Hence third album, *Movements*, arrives after six years of hard graft – We Have Band seldom make things look easy – and sees them achieve a kind of punk-funk perfection, regardless of fashion. Still adhering to their democratic pop-group ideal, it is this mix of riveting tunes and self-referential lyrics – “*Maybe we should go before they ask us what we are doing*”, sings Thomas Wegg-Prosser on “No More Time” – that makes We Have Band an increasingly curious proposition.

PIERS MARTIN



BEN WATT

Hendra

UNMADE ROAD

Stark, beautiful return for the solo Everything But The Girl man, says Alastair McKay



8/10

A LOT HAS happened in the 31 years since Ben Watt's first (last) solo album, *North Marine Drive*. Empires have fallen, musical revolutions have come and gone. Watt hasn't been idle, of course. He played with Tracey Thorn in Everything But The

Girl for 20 years, and did another decade as a club DJ and boss of the dance label, Buzzin' Fly.

Then there's the real-life stuff. Watt was being a father. He almost died from an auto-immune disease, which he chronicled in his book, *Patient*. He has just published a second book, *Romany And Tom*, which explores his mother and father's relationship, while containing much

autobiographical reflection. As he was writing that, Watt's sister, Jennie, died unexpectedly.

In the midst of this turmoil, Watt found himself retreating to his basement, writing songs. He did this on the guitar, mostly, changing the tunings to challenge himself. But he was also, it seems, trying to reconnect with his younger self, and see what might have happened if he hadn't teamed up with EBTG. That quest, as Watt surely knows, is impossible, but as fools' errands go, it's an interesting one. Amid all this loss and self-examination, it's easy to see why he might want to re-engage with the ghosts of youthful optimism.

It's also true that musical fashions have reverted. That stripped-down folk aesthetic couldn't be more contemporary (Watt counts Hiss Golden Messenger's *Bad Debt* as a recent favourite). What's new is the worldview, and that's what gives *Hendra* its stark power. These are beautiful songs, penned from midlife. "Young Man's Game" – "a folk song about DJ-ing" – tackles the subject head on: "Every mirror just tells the time/Can you name a great fighter over 45?"

Watt has always sounded older than his years, but he now has the life experience to suit his temperament. He's also more confident musically. Here, he employs Bernard Butler, casting him as the album's Mick Ronson. If Butler's stark guitar lines add splashes of blood to Watt's pallid canvas, they never threaten the sense of reserve which hangs over the project.

Q&A

Ben Watt

WHAT WAS your plan for the album? I wanted to somehow reconnect with the person I was in that pre-Everything But The Girl period. When I was a precocious 19-year-old on Cherry Red thinking I had the right to call up Robert Wyatt and ask him to be on my first EP. And to connect with the direction I might have gone in had I not teamed up with Tracey [Thorn]. When two colours merge, you're going to get a new colour.

Was it influenced by the book you wrote about your parents, Romany and Tom?

Lyrically, I definitely wanted to write a bunch of unsentimental songs. I wanted to write a set of songs that were very true. Quite a few of them came out of the process of thinking I went through when I was writing my book. Then towards the end of that, my sister, who I was very close to, died, quite unexpectedly. She was only 58. It all came to head, and I wanted to get some of this stuff down.

It's quite dark emotionally.

I always think I write songs about some form of resilience. There is some form of hope, even in the darker moments. I'm always looking for that in the characters in the songs. They have a tough exterior, even if they have a soft interior.

The title track sets the mood. It's a stark invocation of emotional resilience. In the words, Watt imagines the dreams of his late sister, a rural shopkeeper in Somerset. The lyrics are plainspoken and honest to the point where they produce a shudder of embarrassment. The sense of loss is palpable, and it slides into the second song, "Forget", which is musically brighter, but turns on the phrase "who am I fooling when I say I have no regrets?"

It's a very English-sounding record. The autobiographical detail means that the songs offer a tour of the landscape. "Matthew Arnold's Field" travels from Beaconsfield to Headington, as Watt prepares to scatter his father's ashes near Oxford. The funereal tone is maintained by Watt's delicate electric piano. "The Levels", with Pink Floyd's David Gilmour playing lovely slide guitar, is another exploration of grief, employing the flooded ditches of Somerset as a metaphor.

Two songs were inspired by an American road trip, but they employ the same emotional palette. "The Gun" makes an emotional case for gun control with a tale of an accidental shooting. The bluesy "Nathaniel" was inspired by a sign Watt saw painted next to a trailer in Oregon commemorating a boy killed in a road accident, and compares the contemporary fashion for "secondary grieving" with the piercing pain of familial loss. So, the mood is serious. But it's tough, rather than glum. The gently jazzy "Golden Ratio" is like John Martyn playing with Everything But The Girl. And then there's "Spring" written as a counterweight to the prevailing mood. Searching for ideas, Watt noticed a Bill Evans album on the studio floor, with the title *You Must Believe In Spring*. He borrowed the theme, and composed one of his loveliest songs; a gentle, Lennon-esque hymn to endurance and hope. Ironically, or not, it would sound great at a funeral.

SLEEVE NOTES

Recorded at:

Eastcote, London, with overdubs at The Square, London and World of Apples, Berlin

Produced by:

Ewan Pearson

Personnel: Ben Watt (vocals, acoustic guitar, keys), Bernard Butler (electric guitar), Martin Ditcham (perc), Steve Pearce (upright bass), Ewan Pearson (synths), Jim Watson (keys), Leo Taylor (drums), David Gilmour (electric slide guitar, bass, bk vocals)



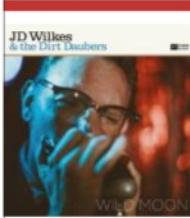
WHITE HINTERLAND Baby

Bold new voice, literally, from American singer-songwriter-pianist
The beautiful, feathery songwriting featured

8/10

on Boston-based Casey Dienel's previous album as White Hinterland has had a steroid pumping, now with a robust dose of saxophone, brass, and even – on "Metronome" – breakbeats. Her voice has deepened and strengthened, now somewhere between Florence Welch's strident tone and Fiona Apple's jazzy lugubriousness, and is using it on the best songs of her career: "Ring The Bell" and the irrepressible title track are blockbusting pop, "Live With You" is a classic piano ballad, and even the more meandering tracks feel their way with a cracked logic that's just right.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



JD WILKES & THE DIRT DAUBERS Wild Moon

PLOWBOY
Legendary Shack Shakers frontman with impressive electric return

8/10

Mercurial, multi-tasking Wilkes and wife Jessica have offered two albums of old-timey acoustic folk since hooking up in 2009. Musical identities and personalities established, they now embrace the feral fury of harmonica-blowing JD's former band. The results are contagious – bass-slapping Jess' runs add urgency while Tom Waits sax alumnus Ralph Carney highlights the edge of Wilkes' wired delivery. From straight-shooting, juke-joint floor-fillers ("French Harp Hustle") to star-crossed noir ("Angel Crown") and the title track's full-blooded unease, they cover vibrant territory with panache and conviction.

GAVIN MARTIN



CHRIS WILSON It's Flamin' Groovy!

**PROPER/TWENTY STONE
BLATT RECORDS**

Rock classicism 101: Chris Wilson gets the band back together

Conjuring the classic early '70s Flamin' Groovies guts-and-guitars sound from the get-go, Wilson (he replaced Roy Loney in 1971) here assembles erstwhile Groovies Loney, Mike Wilhelm and James Ferrell for the type of album The Rolling Stones have needed to make since 1985. Opener "All The Action" plays like a sequel to, arguably, the Groovies' best song ("Shake Some Action") mixed with the Stones' "Jumpin' Jack Flash", and the rest, from jangly folk-rock ("Semaphore Signal"), to swirling powerpop ("Heart In Her Hand", "Can't Let Go") – even the tongue-in-cheek, clichés-for-miles "Last Roll Of The Dice" – goes down in overly familiar yet inestimably fun fashion.

LUKE TORN

8/10



WITHERED HAND

New Gods
FORTUNA POP!

Folk-rock not folk-rock? Edinburgh boy gets earnest

5/10

Dan Wilson has called in some relative heavyweights to help out on *New Gods*, his second album – members of Frightened Rabbit and Belle & Sebastian, King Creosote and Eugene Kelly of The Vaselines all contribute, among other indie names. So *New Gods* is a well-played, well-structured thing: a collection of songs that waver between the crypto-anthemic and the slyly confessional. It's OK in measured doses – "Black Tambourine", for example, has a certain sweet pop charm – but the earnestness sticks in the craw, and the homogenous production gets bland real quick, meaning that, ultimately, it's hard to care either way about it all.

JONDALE

REVELATIONS

NY's Woods – from sun-kissed freakfolk to psych-pop wigouts



► Eight albums in, and New York's Woods are making some of the best psych-pop around, and getting better with each release. Their latest, *With Light And With Love*, offers a poppier take on their sun-kissed West Coast freakfolk sound, with only one song – the title track – stretching into the wigout territory that dominated early releases. "It might be our only wigout moment, but it takes up 25 per cent of the record!" laughs Jarvis Taveniere, Woods' multi-instrumentalist second-in-command. "It's probably my favourite thing we've done as a band."

The bulk of the album was, as usual, written by Jeremy Earl. "I wrote all of the songs but the core of the band – Jarvis and Aaron Neveu on drums – spent time at my home in upstate New York to flesh things out before we hit the studio," says Earl. "John Andrews played keys and Tim Presley [White Fence] also dropped in." Taveniere says he loves this part of the job. "The thrill comes from collaborating with musicians. Tim played for three hours with an electronic cigarette hanging out of his mouth the whole time. It was amazing. John Andrews from Quilt played piano and I don't think anyone else could have walked in to the studio and brought that vibe. He breathed new life into it."

PETER WATTS



WYE OAK

Shriek
CITY SLANG

Baltimore's other male/female duo ups its game
Following Wye Oak's 2011 breakthrough *Civilian*, singer/guitarist Jenn Wasner switched to bass,

while drummer/keyboardist Andy Stack began to experiment with electronics. The result is a kaleidoscopic fusion of Bacharach, EBTG and Tears For Fears, with Wasner's expressive voice – tailor-made for intimacies – floating in caressing settings that fit her supple alto like a silk glove. The LP is filled with entralling passages: the swinging yin-yang groove of "Before", Wasner's fuzzed-out basslines burrowing into the Cubist electric piano figures of "The Tower"; the dramatic buildups and delectable payoffs of "Glory" and the title track. *Shriek* is a sustained act of seduction, a deftly conjoined conjuring of song, rhythm and mood.

BUD SCOPPA



WOODS

With Light And With Love

WOODSIST

Gorgeous psych-pop from prolific New York quartet

8/10

Following the woozy *Bend Beyond*, Jeremy Earl's freakpop four-piece return with the gorgeous *With Light And With Love*, which opens with the wonderful space-country twang of "Shepherd" and never lets up thereafter. There's a great swing and confidence to this psych-pop set, through the excellent, chug-a-chug nine-minute title track, campfire blues of "Feather Man" and wickedly winsome indie pop of "Moving To The Left" and "Leaves Like Glass", as shimmering guitars combine with Earl's fragile vocals. There's a mellow late-Beatles vibe at play, especially on "Full Moon", and this may be the band's finest to date.

PETER WATTS



THALIA ZEDEK

Six

THRILL JOCKEY

Another haunted masterpiece of bruised blues from Boston-based rocker

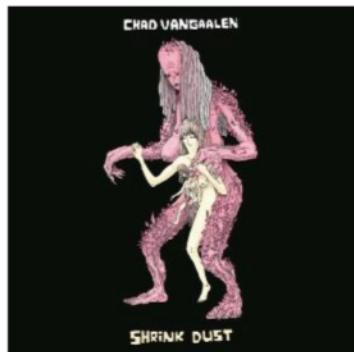
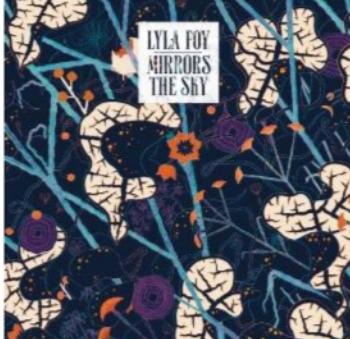
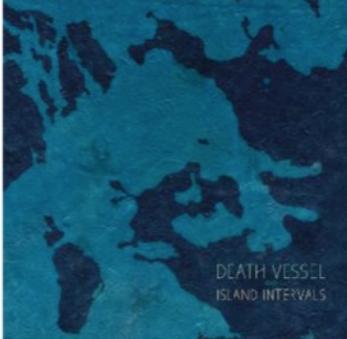
8/10

Although she's spent the past year or so playing again with Come, her legendary East Coast rock group from the '90s, Thalia Zebedee still has one eye to the future. On new mini-album *Six*, she's performing and singing at her peak, with a sympathetic backing group, fully in the pocket, scoring minimalism and drama in equal measure, as Zebedee's voice, one of the few remaining compasses for the blues, embraces the core of her heart-struck lyrics. The only trouble with Zebedee is that once you've accustomed yourself to the rich, bittersweet taste of her songs, it's rather impossible to settle for anything less.

JONDALE

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S•U•B
P•O•P



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DEATH VESSEL

Island Intervals CD/LP

LYLA FOY

Mirrors The Sky CD/LP

THE AFGHAN WHIGS

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CHAD VANGAALEN

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SCORING: THE ORIGINAL ALBUM

10 Masterpiece

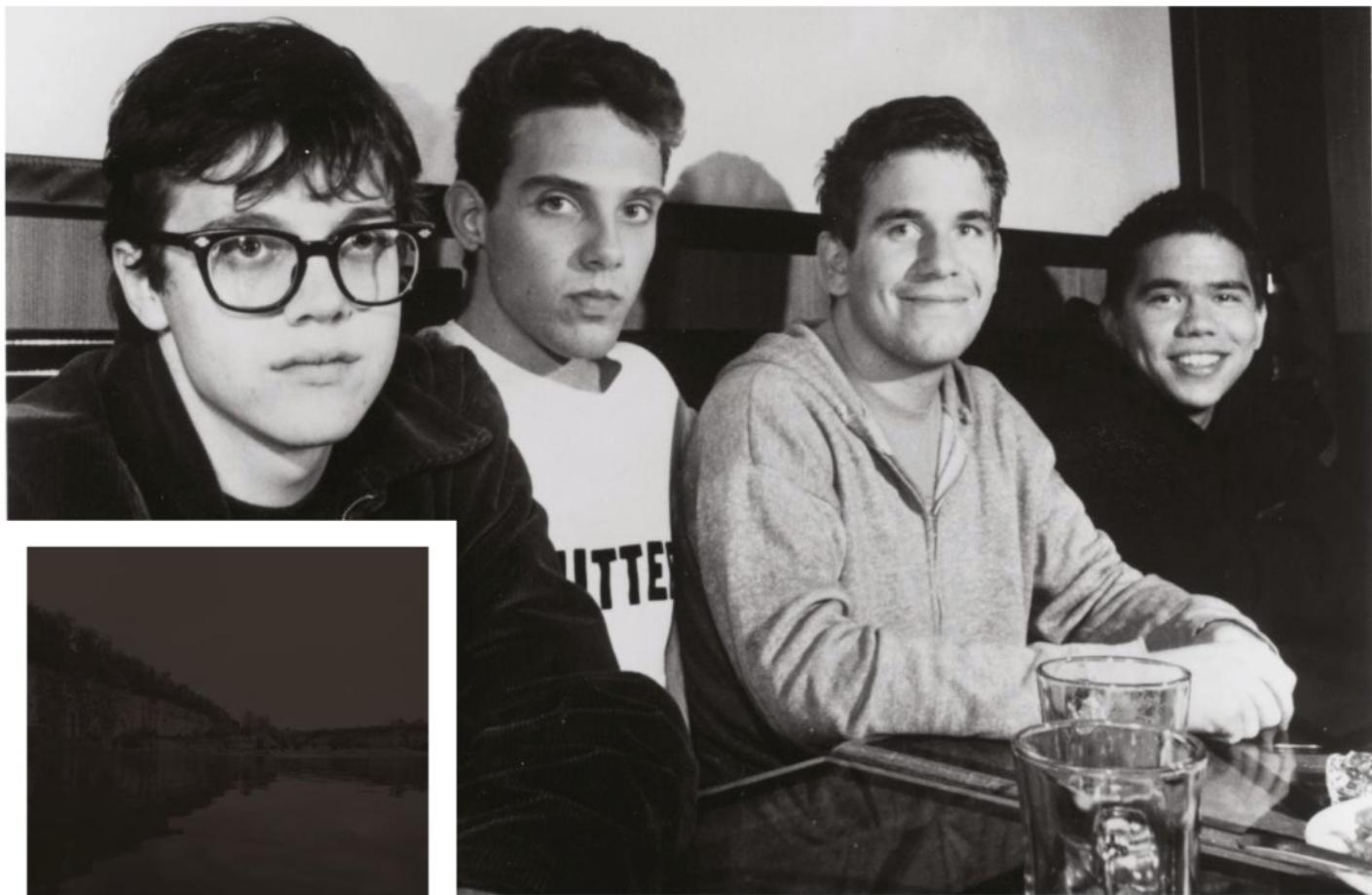
1 Poor!

SCORING: EXTRA MATERIAL

10 Untold riches

1 Barrel-scrapings

REISSUES | COMPS | BOXSETS | LOST RECORDINGS



TRACKLIST

SIDE A:

Breadcrumb Trail (remastered)**Nosferatu Man** (remastered)**Don, Aman** (remastered)

SIDE B:

Washer (remastered)**For Dinner...** (remastered)**Good Morning, Captain** (remastered)

SIDE C:

Nosferatu Man (basement practice)**Washer** (basement practice)**Good Morning, Captain** (demo)

SIDE D:

Pam (rough mix, *Spiderland* outtake)**Glenn** (*Spiderland* outtake)**Todd's Song** (post-*Spiderland* song in progress)

SIDE E:

Brian's Song (post-*Spiderland* demo)**Cortez The Killer** (live, Chicago 1989)

SIDE F:

Washer (four-track vocal demo)**Nosferatu Man** (four-track vocal demo)**Pam** (four-track vocal demo)**Good Morning, Captain** (Evanston riff tape)**Nosferatu Man** (Evanston riff tape)**Pam** (Evanston riff tape)

SLINT

Spiderland Boxset

TOUCH AND GO

Post-rock's crowning glory beautifully remastered, with bonus tracks, a film... and its mystery intact. *By Louis Pattison*

9/10

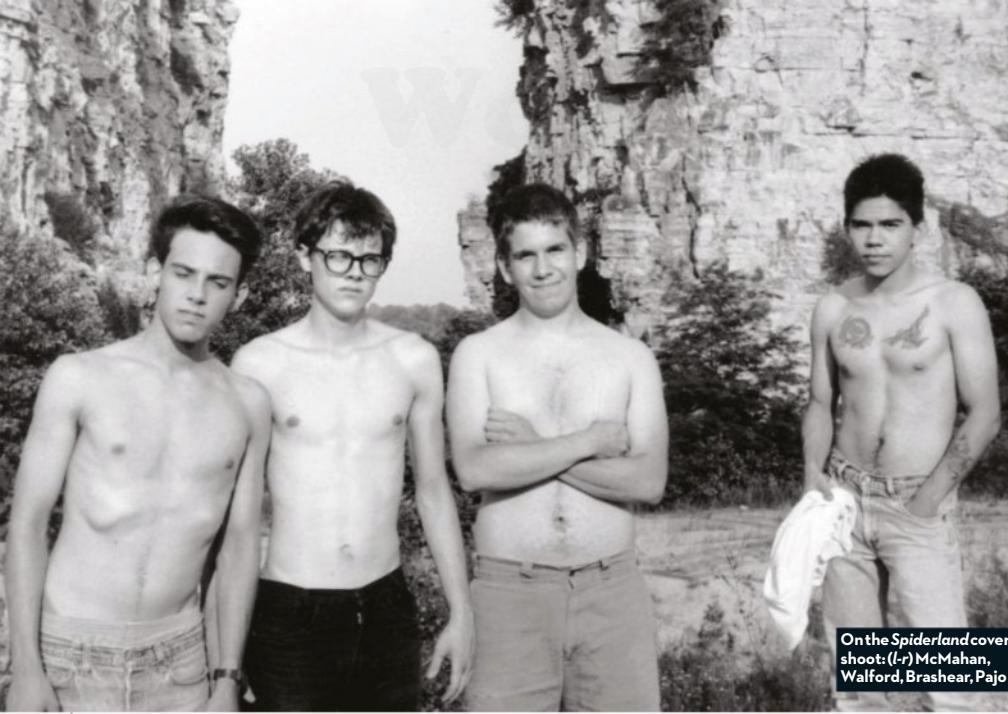
COME THE 1990s, among a certain constituency of alternative musicians, there was the increasing feeling that rock music was played out. Post-rock, a term coined in *Melody Maker* by Simon Reynolds, was used to describe a variety of diverse bands pushing at the edges of traditional rock form. In the UK, groups like Stereolab and Pram were reintegrating the lessons learned in electronic and Krautrock. In Chicago, Tortoise, The Sea And Cake and Gastr Del Sol were experimenting with dub production techniques, or drawing on the city's experimental jazz traditions. Before all of this, though, there was a band of teenage punk kids from Louisville, Kentucky. They were named after drummer Britt Walford's goldfish, and they were called Slint.

Slint, who existed between the years of 1986 and 1992, made two records. The first, the Steve

Albini-produced *Tweez*, was released in 1989 on the local Kentucky label Jennifer Hartman. But it's the second, *Spiderland*, that they're remembered for. Six tracks of nocturnal guitar wanderings slowly twine around hushed, evocative tales of fairground fortune tellers, vampire princes and bloody shipwrecks.

By the time it was released on Touch And Go in 1991, the band had already broken up, and rumours persisted some, or all, had checked themselves into a psychiatric hospital. The band's strangely abrupt end, coupled with a relative shortage of evidence testifying to their existence, meant that *Spiderland* took on the quality of urban myth: an eerie mystery passed on like whispers in the schoolyard, of something awful that happened to some young men in the town just down the way.

Afterwards, the participants moved onto other bands: Walford (as "Shannon" →



On the *Spiderland* cover shoot: (l-r) McMahan, Walford, Brashear, Pajo

→ Doughton") drummed on The Breeders' *Pod*; co-vocalist/guitarist Brian McMahan founded The For Carnation; guitarist David Pajo has pursued a fruitful solo career and played in groups including Tortoise, Interpol and Yeah Yeah Yeahs; and all, including bassist Todd Brashear, have played with their childhood friend Will Oldham. When trying to put your finger on the essence of Slint, you're still drawn back to *Spiderland*'s cover: a black-and-white shot of the four fresh-faced participants floating in a quarry, part submerged, as if about to sink into the inky depths.

Slint reformed in 2005 at the behest of Barry Hogan of concert promoters All Tomorrow's Parties, and have found a second life recreating *Spiderland* live, in crystal clarity, without ever stepping near a recording studio. They have, however, worked up this: a lavish triple-vinyl boxset that collects the album, affectionately remastered by Shellac's Bob Weston, with demos, outtakes and practice tapes, plus a booklet of photos and ephemera and *Breadcrumb Trail*, a 90-minute documentary by filmmaker Lance Bangs.

The remastered *Spiderland* material aside, it is the documentary itself that is the most remarkable part of this box: a fastidiously researched piece that blows away the smoke but somehow leaves the mystique intact. There are childhood photos, extensive interviews with bandmembers and fellow travellers (Steve Albini, James Murphy, friends and former bandmates such as Sean "Rat" Garrison of pre-Slint outfit Maurice and Jon Cook of Rodan), live footage from a Louisville Battle Of The Bands, and most unbelievably, VHS recordings of the band jamming away in the Walford family basement, mere slips of lads crouched on the lino, already playing this strange, uncanny music note-perfect.

There is fascinating trivia – look close at the cover of *Tweez*, that's Will Oldham in the front seat wearing a crash helmet. And there is vivid sense of the intensity of the group's partnership, particularly between Walford, mischievous and uninhibited, and McMahan, bookish and intense. Ian MacKaye of Fugazi, who hung out with Slint during a stay in Louisville, has a neat summation: "People from Louisville,

they're just fucking crazy... they're insane."

For all that Slint have been an influence on groups such as Shellac and Mogwai, it is pleasing to note that *Spiderland* has only got richer with age. In large part, this is thanks to their preternatural technicality. Pajo is already a hugely skilled guitarist, his style still steeped in hardcore, but radically pared down in a manner suggesting the influence of American Primitive guitarists like John Fahey, and employing all manner of curious tunings and fretboard tricks. Opener "Breadcrumb Trail" floats by like a lucid dream, queer twinkling harmonics shadowing McMahan as he drifts around a rickety fairground, befriending a fortune teller and taking a trip on a rollercoaster that commences a lurch of squealing riffs and roaring distortion. Walford, meanwhile, is the engine of the band, behind the unsettling 5/4 chug of "Nosferatu Man", and taking up guitar for the spare, skeletal "Don, Aman", the tale of a weird drifter that cuts off just before its moment of dramatic realisation.

McMahan, meanwhile, is the knot in *Spiderland*'s stomach, trying to put words to

the fearful sensations conjured into being by these cryptic guitar tangles. On the slow downward spiral of "Washer", he sings in a thin tremble, first threatening to leave, then begging his lover not to go, and declaring: "Every time I ever cried from fear/Was just a mistake that I made". The climactic "Good Morning, Captain", loosely based on Coleridge's *The Rime Of The Ancient Mariner*, offers an emotional climax that is one of the most wrenching in all indie rock: "I'm sorry... I miss you," mutters McMahan, and as guitars rise to a clamour he repeats the words at a bellow. In *Breadcrumb Trail*, Walford recalls McMahan returned to the control room having thrown up on himself.

Completing the *Spiderland* box is a collection of outtakes, offcuts and demos, much of which confirms just how great *Spiderland* sounded, and how diminished it would have been sans vocals. Essential, though, is "Pam", a brooding instrumental headbanger, presumably excised for reasons of mood and pacing (it also appears as a vocal demo with some somewhat daft lyrics); a take on "Glenn", slightly slower and more pensive than the version that eventually made it onto their posthumous 1994 EP; and a fairly reverent live take on Neil Young's "Cortez The Killer" recorded in Chicago in 1989 that neatly approximates the original's craggy endurance.

Intriguing but frustrating, meanwhile, is a pair of demos, titled "Todd's Song" and "Brian's Song". The former is a comparatively evolved, yet still unfinished instrumental that strikes a slightly lighter note than *Spiderland*; the latter, an arcane guitar scrawl set to a primitive boom-clack drum machine pointing ahead to McMahan's work with The For Carnation. Both are a reminder that Slint have work unfinished. Yet nine years since their reformation, they remain a zombie band, recreating past glories but collectively unwilling – or unable – to step back into the land of the living. This is a remarkable document of a remarkable band. Is it churlish to ask for more?

HIDDEN TREASURES

SPIDERLAND, BEFORE AND AFTER

SQUIRREL BAIT – SQUIRREL BAIT

1985, HOMESTEAD

Prior to Slint's formation, both Britt Walford and Brian McMahan passed through the ranks of this proto-emo Louisville hardcore band. Melodic Hüsker Dü-isms are the order of the day; Walford plays on "Disguise" and the raging "When I Fall", while McMahan is on the lot.

SLINT – TWEEZ

1989, JENNIFER HARTMAN

Little sign of *Spiderland*'s subtlety on Slint's debut, an Albini-produced nine tracks of noodly noise-rock and studio ambience ("Steve, these headphones are fucked up...") that occupies the mid point between Big Black and King Crimson. Eight tracks are named after the band's parents ("Ron", "Charlotte", etc). The last, "Rhoda", is named after Walford's dog.

THE FOR CARNATION – THE FOR CARNATION

2000, TOUCH AND GO

Much overlooked, Brian McMahan's second LP as The For Carnation feels like *Spiderland*'s true spiritual successor. Its simmering slowcore tempos lack Slint's complexity, but "Emp. Man's Blues" and "Moonbeams" make neat use of droning synths and bowed cymbals, and McMahan's vocals conjure a malign intensity. That's Kim Deal singing on "Tales (Live From The Crypt)".

PALACE BROTHERS – THERE IS NO-ONE WHAT

WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU 1993, DRAG CITY

A year after Slint's split, McMahan, Walford and Brashear play on the first album by Will Oldham. Wobbly backwater country songs like "Idle Hands Are The Devil's Playthings" and "(I Was Drunk At The Pulpit" reek of sin and alcohol, while "Riding" remains an Oldham standard to this day.

"Being able to play pretty good was actually important..." Walford, McMahan and Pajo in 2004



Q&A

Britt Walford discusses making *Spiderland*, fan letters from PJ Harvey and why recording with Slint again is "non-viable"

HOW WAS WORKING on the *Spiderland* boxset? It was fun. It was a lot of work. I guess it happened over the course of at least five years, maybe more even – there was a lot of stuff to dig through. It was really cool to hear the record remastered.

Was there much to do? In the film, *Breadcrumb Trail*, you get the sense that *Spiderland* didn't involve a lot of production, a lot of studio trickery. Right, yeah. I think it's just interesting and revealing to hear it put through modern-day mastering equipment. Maybe some remasters you hear are a little more revealing – there's no sense of, you know, it being shocking or uncomfortable, hearing things you've never heard before. But it sounds great. There's the sense of more sound information being conveyed.

There has always been a sense of mystery around Slint. I feel like the documentary does a good job of revealing the band without spoiling the mystique. Man, that's cool. I'm glad. I was just talking to Todd [Brashear] about that. Someone was interviewing him, and they asked him that exact question. I don't really know, I guess. [Laughs] It's not for me to say. It was definitely a weird thing, but I enjoyed the interviews.

How do you feel about the album, looking back? It's an unusual record. Yeah. I heard it maybe about six or seven years ago in a bar, and it seemed kind of cool to me how even it sounded. The pacing of it was really nice. But I guess I don't really think about it a whole bunch.

One thing that the documentary brought home is how important your band Maurice were to Slint's evolution. Oh, yeah. Maurice, for me, there was a lot of dumping of expression, we were putting a lot out there. You go back through it and you pick certain parts.

You grew up on hardcore punk, but there was the sense you were out to create your own musical language. Yeah. When we did *Twweez*, we

definitely had a vision of this clean organic sound that was very unaffected. As far as, you know, different guitar effects, or anything like that. But then when we recorded it, we really went haywire, did a load of funny weird stuff on there. We put a Saab on the cover of the record because we felt the band sounded like that kind of car.

And that's Will Oldham wearing a crash helmet in the front seat. Yeah, yeah [laughs].

Will nearly became a member of Slint. Why didn't that happen? He was slated to sing. But I think it's that he didn't know how to play guitar at the time... I think we thought maybe that wouldn't work out. He was only starting out at that stage. He started working on his own music a little after that.

Did you need to be able to play well to join Slint? I've always considered it a benefit if you don't know how to play. But where we were at, at the time, I think we had a vision of what we wanted to achieve – and being able to play pretty good was actually important.

Listening to *Spiderland*, the vocals feel key. But they were actually kind of an afterthought? I would say generally, they were the last thing we did. But we would keep the space in mind for where we would do vocals. As they were written, the songs would be altered to fit the vocals.

Collectively, did you discuss themes? No, I don't think so. Brian and I worked together on the lyrics for "Breadcrumb Trail". But I don't think we really talked about it. I would say we were naturally on the same page. There was a lot of that going on.

Is it true that PJ Harvey wrote to the address on the back of *Spiderland*, offering her services as a vocalist? She wrote a personal letter to the band,

but, um, I think I might feel a little bit uncomfortable of revealing the nature of a letter like that.

There are a couple of part-finished songs included on the boxset, "Todd's Song" and "Brian's Song". When do they date from?

This was music that was kicking around about the time we split up. I would say they're slightly later than the *Spiderland* material, but made when we were still together, or just after.

And you got back together in 1992 and 1994 for sessions? Yeah, there is some demo stuff from '92. And we worked on a song called "King's Approach" in 1994, which we played live in 2007. But that's it.

Will you record again at any stage? Uh, we do not have any plans.

And after Primavera, will there be more live shows? We're actually not sure about that either.

After Slint split, you, Brian and Todd appeared on the first Palace Brothers album. How was it, to work with Will? We recorded with him in

Bloomington, which was where Todd went to school. Then we recorded the first album with him. It was a collaboration of sorts, but Will by this stage was really directing – he definitely had a vision for the songs. Me and Todd, we really liked that old-time country music.

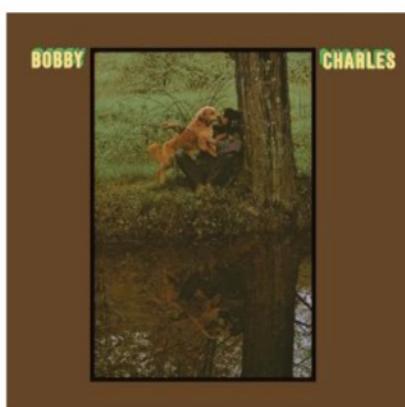
"There was unresolved potential... I felt like we could have gone on indefinitely"

How do you feel about the way Slint finished? Do you feel like it was a complete project, or do you feel like there was something unresolved there? Oh, man, I feel like there was unresolved potential, totally. I felt like carrying on. I feel like we could have gone on indefinitely.

Is it something you could pick up now? It feels like it's not really an option. It feels, uh, non-viable.

And why is that?

I guess maybe... we do things different ways. Or something. *INTERVIEW: LOUIS PATTISON*



TRACKLIST

- 1 Street People
- 2 Long Face
- 3 I Must Be In A Good Place Now
- 4 Save Me Jesus
- 5 He's Got All The Whiskey
- 6 Small Town Talk
- 7 Let Yourself Go
- 8 Grow Too Old
- 9 I'm That Way
- 10 Tennessee Blues

BOBBY CHARLES

Bobby Charles (reissue, 1972)

LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

Swamp-pop goes Woodstock: Louisiana legend's rarely heard '72 masterpiece with The Band. *By Luke Torn*

9/10

AS MUCH RUMOUR as album, vanishing for decades from the moment it was released, *Bobby Charles* is a mythic missing link—between Mardi Gras and hippy dénouement, the Crescent City's fabled "Second Line" and '70s singer-songwriter – a funky, bluesy, laconic masterpiece fusing genteel delta wistfulness with barbed wit and a sly, post-

apocalypse vibe. That it fell through the cracks isn't surprising: Charles' reclusive, waif-like personality and aversion to touring hardly hardwired him for rock stardom; that its sentiments resonate more in 2014 than in 1973 mark it as a timeless, enigmatic classic.

The irony is that had Charles not been on the lam from a Nashville pot bust, the record wouldn't exist. But Rick Danko and his

Q&A

Jim Colegrove, bassist

What kind of guy was Bobby Charles? Bobby was one of the friendliest guys I've ever met. As we came to know each other he told me, in his thick Cajun accent, that he'd been living with his wife and son in Nashville. He'd been busted for the possession of marijuana and charged with dealing, jumped bail and took flight to the north. I began to realise he was looking for someone with the power to make a deal for him to square the charges. It didn't take long for Bobby to see that that man was Albert Grossman.

What did you think of his songwriting?

Bobby wrote songs, but he didn't play an instrument. He'd start singing his songs and you had to find his key and find the changes by ear! If you made a wrong change, he would correct you until you got the right one. It was in this manner I learned the new songs he'd written... We weren't thinking so much about making a record as much as doing a songwriter's demo. It escalated to a full-fledged project as time passed.

Who organised the sessions?

Bobby wanted ND Smart, Amos Garrett and me to play with him. As you may or may not know, the three of us were in Great Speckled Bird together and ND and I had been playing together for seven years at that time. I don't recall how John Simon got into the picture, but Dr John was a friend of Bobby's from way back.

INTERVIEW: LUKE TORN

esteemed Woodstock circle – John Simon to Bob Neuwirth, David Sanborn to Geoff Muldaur, plus fine backing musicians from Ian & Sylvia's Great Speckled Bird: guitarist Amos Garrett, bassist Jim Colegrove, drummer ND Smart – were in on the secret. As Robert Charles Guidry, Charles had written some of the most exciting, enduring hits of the early rock era: "See You Later, Alligator" (Bill Haley), "(I Don't Know Why I Love You) But I Do" (Clarence 'Frogman' Henry), "Walking To New Orleans" (Fats Domino).

This later Bobby Charles, spending much of 1973 writing songs, sleeping on Colegrove's couch, recording at Albert Grossman's Bearsville Studio, was a different animal, though, a laconic, ramblingly philosophical soul who fit right in with the erstwhile Hawks, who'd spent their pre-fame years – think 1967-68 – concocting Bob Dylan's deep yet similarly off-the-cuff Basement Tapes.

As everyone duly discovered, Charles' songs were subtly devastating, powerfully deceptive, textured to disarm even the most sceptical detractor. Relaxed, stoned-out grooves, rustic easygoing yet quirky takes on New Orleans' classic sound, dominate the proceedings. The presentation is loose, airy, with plenty of room for Dr John's piano or Ben Keith's pedal steel to dance eloquently around Charles' serpentine melodies, or for Smart or Levon Helm to assert their downhome, funky, rhythmic stamp on things.

At times, like on "Street People", "Up On Cripple Creek"’s cousin, or the gentle, drop-dead gorgeous "Tennessee Blues", the sessions sound like The Band amid hearty rounds of red wine. On the latter, abetted by Garth Hudson's superb accordion, Charles sings with a longing for the ages. On others – the infectious "Grow Too Old", with crashing electric guitar and Sanborn sax – the combo trips along like a tipsy, high-on-life Bourbon Street bar band. "I'm gonna do a lot of things I know is wrong," Charles whoops in his backwoods, country-boy dialect.

Yet for all the Louisiana soul seeping into the grooves, Bobby Charles also doubles as The Band's (sans Robertson) lost album. The parent group was spent, heading out on a long sabbatical; but here sundry individuals could exit the rat race, invade the studio with old friends. Even if Danko/Hudson/Helm/Manuel weren't all always on board (true credits remain murky), their vibe is everywhere, the idyllic extended Woodstock musical family come to life.

Charles, meanwhile, is inscrutable. Deftly delivering deep-in-the-pocket vocals, seemingly offhandedly – even pulling off mic sometimes – he's the personification of less-is-more. Jabs of humour emerge, sly hooks land permanently in your cranium, and canny social commentary – on greed, hypocrisy, duplicity, blind ambition – bubbles up.

While the dreamy, floating-on-a-cloud love songs ("I Must Be In A Good Place Now") are uncomplicated, Zen in approach – "Oh what a good day to go fishin'" – he posits, ironically – the trouble starts when the power-mongers start throwing their weight around.

The bluesy "He's Got All The Whiskey" pricks at what we'd now call the one percenters, while "Street People" salutes those unwilling to play the rat-race game before leaning sardonically into the punchline: "Some people would rather work/We need people like that!" "Save Me Jesus" may be the most unconventional protest music ever, its message wrapped in seesawing, rocking R'n'B. "So when you take me Jesus," Charles pleads, "Please put me among friends/Don't put me back with these power crazy money-lovers again."

The minimalist "Small Town Talk", a Charles/Danko co-write, Dr John on skipping organ trills, boils it all down, echoing small truths Dylan and The Band danced around on the Basement Tapes: "Who are we to judge one another?" Charles coos in a lilting croon. "That could cause a lot of hurt."



ABBA
Waterloo
(reissue, 1974)
POLYDOR

Eurovisionaries revisit the scene of their defining triumph

7/10

"We would have wanted a cooler name," grumbles

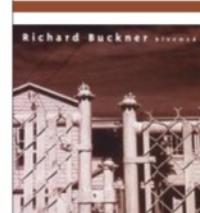
Björn Ulvaeus in the sleeve note to this 40th anniversary reissue of Abba's first album proper, Abba also being the name of a popular Swedish brand of tinned fish. "Something more along the lines of other contemporary bands: The Sweet, Mud, Wizzard." The smiley Swedes, as that suggests, did not initially set their musical sights that high, and had barely drained the schlager out of their systems when they won the 1974 Eurovision Song Contest in Brighton with hymn to persistence "Waterloo" – something of a "Blurred Lines" for that decade. The Bergman-esque depths Abba discovered in their later years are not much in evidence elsewhere, but cheese-lovers can gawp at the own-brand glam of "King Kong Song" and incongruous Byrds homage "Suzy Hang-Around", while wondering why guesting Free keyboardist John 'Rabbit' Bundrick's name might not (initially) have appeared in the credits for "Dance (While The Music Still Goes On)".

EXTRAS: Multi-lingual versions of the hits –

7/10

"Waterloo", "Honey Honey" and "Hasta Mañana" – plus a bonus DVD on their Eurovision big bang, where Abba are ordered to explain, at their Eurovision winners' party, why their song celebrates a battle where 40,000 were killed.

JIM WIRTH



RICHARD BUCKNER
Bloomed
(reissue, 1994)
MERGE

Opening salvo from 'Frisco-born outlier gets the double-disc treatment

9/10

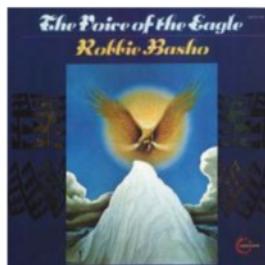
Armed with a batch of devastating, sad-sack, acoustic-based, Appalachian-style ballads delving deep into the psyche of love and desire, spirituality and existential restlessness, Buckner joined kindred souls from Jay Farrar to Gillian Welch circa early '90s in eyeing substantial new paths for country music. While *Bloomed* is a rough recording, a glorified demo really, Buckner's postmodern Merle Haggard of a voice is riveting. Cut in Lubbock by producer Lloyd Maines, Butch Hancock in the backing group, it's as hard-wired and literal as Buckner would ever get, but his penchant for dreamy, slippery melodies and a kind of muted intensity is well in place. "This is where it starts getting bad," he moans on one of *Bloomed*'s most gripping songs ("This Is Where"), and indeed a fatalistic cloud hangs over the entire proceedings. "Rainsquall", road song extraordinaire riding an unforgettable vocal riff, is among the disc's many highlights; "Surprise, AZ", a jawdropping mix of grief and wonder amid a beatific guitar hook, is genius.

EXTRAS: A second disc collects radio appearances and lost songs, including three with his early band The Doubters, plus a steel-guitar-drenched cover of Townes Van Zandt's "Still Looking For You".

LUKE TORN

Rediscovered!

Uncovering the underrated and overlooked



8/10

ROBBIE BASHO

The Voice Of The Eagle
(reissue, 1972)

ACE

Blanket coverage – the Native American influence on this guitar raga sage

While he was one of the first “American Primitive” guitar players – his music was released by John Fahey on his Takoma label; he was a University Of Maryland contemporary of Max Ochs – the work of Robbie Basho (1940-1986) was never primitive, and seldom exclusively American. A singer and 12-string guitar player, his work spanned east and west, from folk in the 1960s to new age in the 1980s, ultimately

as much of the air as the soil. “I have a love for China, Japan,” he said in one radio interview quoted in the sleeve notes here, “the Islamic thing, the American Indian...”

To confine himself was just not Basho’s way. His voice (which Fahey called “strange and compelling”) was an operatic bass rising to a high yodel. This, together with his tremulous whistling, and his guitar playing (filled with fluid gestures and entrancing repetitions) enact in his songs the free-roaming journey across musical cultures made by his records. “If you can crack one bag,” he said, “you can crack them all.”

True enough, 1972’s *The Voice Of The Eagle* (the first album Basho would record for the prestigious Vanguard label) is steeped in the sacred chants and anthropomorphic tales of the Native American, but refuses to remain there, aiming always for transcendence. There are many birds in these songs, and they are all flying towards the sun. The title track establishes Basho’s panorama. In his original sleeve notes, he called it a “Hopi raga” – although it includes more than that. Beginning with his striking chanted vocal, the piece goes on to broach the traditional ballad “Man Of Constant Sorrow”, and explore his own harmonic-laced guitar playing, all accompanied by the mdrangam drums of Rammad V Raghavan.

Both chanting and Raghavan appear again on “Omaha Tribal Prayer”, while the guitar playing runs from concise and understated (as on “Roses And Gold” and “Joseph”) all the way to wildly discursive (the 10-minute “Blue Corn Serenade”). It’s all great stuff, but it’s the singing that captures the truly unique aim of *The Voice Of The Eagle*. As Basho sings on “Joseph”, that aim is to, “keep on climbing towards the dove, with soft unbroken wings...”

JOHN ROBINSON



CHEETAH CHROME

Solo

PLOWBOY

Ex-Dead Boy Chrome’s lost solo tracks from 1996

A veteran of Rocket From The Tombs and the Dead Boys, Chrome was one of

6/10

Cleveland’s first generation punks, a drug-loving delinquent who was probably the snottiest member of one of punk’s toughest groups. The Dead Boys were the real deal, dousing themselves in drink, drugs and blood and getting into fights with the mob, as well as recording one of the era’s great 45s, “Sonic Reducer”. After the Dead Boys atomised, Chrome dipped in and out of the music business through the 1980s and 1990s, re-emerging to record several tracks in 1996 with Dead Boys producer Genya Ravan that were never released. Three tracks from that session appear on this mini-album, the only solo studio release Chrome has ever put out. The album is front-loaded with new tracks recorded in Nashville with old-stagers like Sylvain Sylvain and The Cult’s Lez Warner, with Chrome’s throaty lived-in vocals enlivening E-Street shuffle “East Side Story” and the grizzly “Rollin’ Voodoo”, while “Sharky” is a fine, surfy, instrumental. The 1996 trackers are harder, with the thumping “Stare Into The Night”, the very punk “No Credit” and the excellent confessional “Nuthin’” about his long-standing smack addiction (also covered in his autobiography, *A Dead Boy’s Tale*).

EXTRAS: None.

PETER WATTS



DANIELSON

A Prayer For Every Hour/Fetch The Compass Kids/Ships (reissues, 1994/2001/2006)

FIRE RECORDS

8/10

The freaky, far-out “Famile” turns 20

New Jersey’s Danielson project is a whimsy wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. The brainchild of Daniel Smith, it’s evolved from humble beginnings as an art-school thesis exhibit, via a family band expressing its costumed members’ Christian faith through music to a cherished alt.pop outfit attracting Deerhoof and Sufjan Stevens as collaborators. Buttered mist is easier to pin down than their sound, but Can, early Sonic Youth, Beefheart, Daniel Johnston and Bongwater are kindred spirits. This set of three albums (also reissued individually, on vinyl only) marks 20 years of idiosyncratic music-making and includes their debut as Danielson Famile, *A Prayer For Every Hour*, which features Smith’s four younger siblings, the (marginally) less weird-beard *Fetch The Compass Kids*, on which Smith’s wife joins the throng, and *Ships*, which might be the best place for the uninitiated to start. Titles like “Did I Step On Your Trumpet”, “Heimlich Remover” and “Fathom The Nine Fruits Pie” merely hint at the eccentricity here, but despite the fragmentary, sometimes cacophonous and seemingly random nature of many of the tracks, there’s wit, purpose, joyful communion and genuine innovation here in spades.

EXTRAS: None.

SHARON O’CONNELL



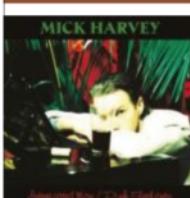
AL GREEN
Al Green Gets Next To You/ Livin' For You/ The Belle Album
 (reissues, 1971/1973/1977)
 FAT POSSUM

8/10, 6/10, 8/10 More reissues from Al's peerless Hi catalogue

Al Green records should be mandatory listening to every whooping, hollering *X Factor* contestant. There are no needless vocal acrobatics – instead he sketches the outline of each song with whispers and sighs, occasionally colouring in by leaping from a scratchy growl to a light falsetto. This latest round of reissues includes Green's 1971 breakthrough, *Gets Next To You*. It casts him as a kind of continuity Otis Redding, assisted by the Memphis horns and Al Jackson Jr's languid drums. It works magnificently on his woozy "Light My Fire", the bubbly wah-wah funk of "All Because" and his raw and rootsy take on The Temptations' psych-soul chart-topper "I Can't Get Next To You". Ignore the sickly strings of Green's December '73 LP, *Livin' For You* – a pale retread of its April '73 predecessor *Call Me* – and go straight to 1977's *The Belle Album*. This was the last LP before Green took holy orders and got Rev'd up, and his first record without producer Willie Mitchell or the Hi Rhythm Section. Against all odds, it's a triumph. Green steers clear of disco, instead treating us to the Sly Stone stomp of "Georgia Boy", the summery bounce of "All N All" and the Dexys horns of "I Feel Good".

EXTRAS: None.

JOHN LEWIS



MICK HARVEY
Intoxicated Man/ Pink Elephants

MUTE

Double dose of Gainsbourg in gatefold package

7/10

Gainsbourg's songs as "more like an intellectual exercise" than any of his other solo albums. Given the demands of translating the notorious Frenchman's lyrics into English, plus keeping the rhyming and metre of the originals in place, it's easy to understand why. But with 1995's *Intoxicated Man* and 1997's *Pink Elephants*, Harvey's aim was never exact replication, which is why he reworked some of the arrangements to his own taste. It's a confident musician who messes with the legacy of a cultish iconoclast, but Harvey has serious form and so these records sound confident and casually eloquent, the likes of Warren Ellis, David McClymont and vocalists Nick Cave and Anita Lane helping to show them off in a fresh, rather than self-consciously retro light. The discs line up Gainsbourg's best-known songs – "Bonnie & Clyde", "Harley Davidson", "The Ballad Of Melody Nelson" and the contentious "Lemon Incest" – alongside more obscure tracks such as the gloomy "To All The Lucky Kids" and "Jazz In The Ravine", which takes a droll liberty with translation by rhyming "bitumen" with "ditch with them". Serious and respectful, then, but played with a deft, interpretive hand.

EXTRAS: "Dr Jekyll" and "Run From Happiness" **7/10** – previously unreleased.

SHARON O'CONNELL



KATHY HEIDEMAN
Move With Love
 (reissue, 1976)
 NUMERO

8/10

Bare bones undiscovered country gem

A virtually unknown private pressing, *Move With Love* originally appeared in 1976 but only came to light when Andy Cabot found a copy and Vetiver covered "Sleep A Million Years", sung by Vashti Bunyan, on 2008's *Things Of The Past*. Although credited to Kathy Heideman, she was simply brought in as a singer-for-hire by equally mysterious San Jose songwriter Dia Joyce – real name Joyce Focker – to bring her songs to life. The sound is more Bakersfield than slick Laurel Canyon across 10 rough-hewn country ballads and slow-burning blues that benefit from a bare-bones sound. Country songs such as "Move With Love" and the maudlin "Bob" chug along nicely but it's Joyce's more despondent bluesier songs that shine. The yearning, atmospheric "Need" with its wonderfully spooky "Ballad Of A Thin Man" keyboards belies the recording's DIY approach while "Fine Street Woman" wouldn't disgrace an early Bonnie Raitt album. Heideman's voice has a soulful cutting edge, reminiscent of Tracy Nelson or Dianne Davidson; it's astonishing that she was never heard of again. Barely 20 minutes long, "Move With Me" is a triumph of incisive, emotive songwriting, a singer who gets to the heart of every song and ragged, rustic musicianship.

EXTRAS: None.

MICK HOUGHTON

**HOW TO BUY...
 NON BAD SEEDS
 MICK HARVEY**



ROBERT FORSTER
Danger In The Past

BEGGARS BANQUET, 1990
 Debut solo set of subtle alt.pop from the ex-Go-Between and Aussie treasure, which sees NH assisting on guitar, piano, organ, bass and vocals, as well as producing. It's a cultish gathering – Thomas Wydler of The Bad Seeds is on drums and Hugo Race (who served them for two years) plays guitar.

7/10



MICK HARVEY
Australian Rules OST

FINE LINE UK, 2003
 A tale of racial friction in rural Australia, specifically around the local "Aussie rules" team. Save for the strings, NH plays everything on 23 vignettes that reflect his rock and indigenous country leanings, as well as his orchestral chops.

7/10



PJ HARVEY
Let England Shake

ISLAND, 2010
 NH's third album collaboration with PJ. As well as co-production, he contributes guitar, vocals, piano, organ, bass, drums, perc and harmonica to an impassioned, inventive set that sources TS Eliot, Eddie Cochran and The Pogues in its tackling of issues of war and national identity.

9/10 SHARON O'CONNELL



JOHN'S CHILDREN
A Strange Affair: The Sixties Recordings

GRAPEFRUIT

7/10

Courting controversy over content

This exhaustive two-disc set rounds up John's Children's output between 1966 and 1970, including Andy Ellison's subsequent solo singles and three demos from formative band The Silence. A barely above-average, Small Faces-influenced mod band, John's Children is essentially only worthy of interest because of Marc Bolan's brief tenure with the group in 1967. It resulted in just two singles, the brilliantly outlandish "Desdemona" and instantly withdrawn "Midsummer Night's Scene". Bolan contributed to further outtakes and later resurrected B-sides including "Sara Crazy Child", a shaky group version of "Hippy Gumbo" and pre-T.Rex "Mustang Ford". In the end, manager and renowned self-promoter Simon Napier-Bell's shameless tactics stifled the group's development, coming up with titles – "Smashed Blocked", "Not The Sort Of Girl You Take To Bed" – that tried too hard to shock, as well as fashioning an awful pre-Bolan mock live LP, *Orgasm*, which was appallingly recorded and drowned out by screams from *A Hard Day's Night*. John's Children upped their game during Bolan's stint and created a handful of decent singles but too many unpolished outtakes and instrumental mixes, however comprehensive, expose the group's deficiencies.

EXTRAS: None.

MICK HOUGHTON



SONJA KRISTINA
Sonja Kristina
 (reissue, 1980)

ANGEL AIR

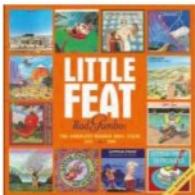
When prog went new wave...

6/10

Curved Air were one of many prog-rock outfits to call it a day in the face of the punk onslaught. But for Kristina, who fronted the band from '70-'76, punk felt like liberation rather than defeat. Together with Curved Air drummer Stewart Copeland (soon to be her husband) she took to hanging out at the Roxy with the Pistols and The Damned. By early '77, Copeland had joined The Police and Kristina had formed the symbolically titled Escape. Her solo debut, helmed by Police producer Nigel Gray, was effectively an Escape album comprising the band's late-'70s repertoire – and as such it's as schizophrenic as you might expect. The opening track, "Street Run", about the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival riot, is pure punk, with Kristina in Poly Styrene/Ari Up mode. The new wave-ish "Breaking Out In Smiles" sounds like OMD and "Roller Coaster" is white reggae in a Police-style. But "The Comforter" is unreconstructed prog, "Full Time Woman" could easily be Mott The Hoople, the acoustic "Colder Than A Rose In Snow" harks back to her folkie days when she briefly sang with the Strawbs and – most bizarre of all – "Fade Away" sounds like an Abba pastiche.

EXTRAS: None.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



LITTLE FEAT

Rad Gumbo: The Complete Warner Bros Years 1971-1990

RHINO

13-album box mixing genius and mediocrity

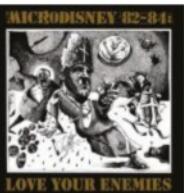
6/10

For a while, in the early 1970s, Lowell George and Little Feat were contenders. Bluesier and funkier than Californian contemporaries like the Eagles, they rivalled the loose-limbed raunch of the Stones and had better songs, most penned by the charming, enigmatic George, who had done time with Zappa's Mothers and brought a zany strand to their synthesis of rock and New Orleans R'n'B. The band survived personnel ructions but George's descent into hard drugs and departure left them a routine boogie band. *Little Feat* (1971), *Sailin' Shoes* (1972), *Dixie Chicken* (1973) and *Feats Don't Fail Me Now* (1974) sold poorly but remain classics, with superb ensemble playing and enduring songs like "Willin'" and "Cold Cold Cold". *The Last Record Album* (1975) and *Time Loves A Hero* (1977) mark time, with an ill-advised slide into jazz-rock. They still had their chops on the live *Waiting For Columbus* (1978) but the decline on *Down On The Farm* (1979), the last with George, is precipitous. A 1988 reunion delivered *Let It Roll* and the glossy *Representing The Mambo* (1990), but smacked of desperation. *Hoy-Hoy!* (1981) is an agreeable collection of snippets and lives, *Outtakes From Hotcakes*, here distilled from 2000's four-disc set, less palatable.

EXTRAS: Bonus disc of live album *Waiting For Columbus*.

5/10

NEIL SPENCER



MICRODISNEY

Love Your Enemies/Everybody Is Fantastic/The Clock Comes Down The Stairs (reissues, 1984/1984/1985)

CHERRY RED

7/10, 7/10, 7/10

The Cork odd couple's

Rough Trade years reissued

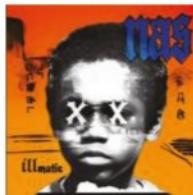
Too smart and cynical for their native Ireland, too skint and desperate to pass for happening in Thatcherite London, sweet-and-sour soul boys Microdisney's unfortunate speciality was not quite fitting in. Caustic-tongued lyricist Cathal Coughlan and Beach Boys-nerd instrumentalist Sean O'Hagan were Scrutinised Politti on a starvation diet early on, as heard on "Helicopter Of The Holy Ghost" on *Love Your Enemies*, a comp of early recordings (original title: *We Hate You South African Bastards*). More robust by the time they moved to England, they found solace in heavy irony on *Everybody Is Fantastic*, Coughlan drinking "gin like a 1960s wino" to blot the world out on "Sun". Poisoned love and yuppie hate congealed on XTC-ish indie No1 *The Clock Comes Down The Stairs*, featuring the singalonga-Philip Larkin of "Birthday Girl" and closer "And", both prefiguring the bipolar tendencies of the duo's later years and Coughlan's confrontationally ugly work with the Fatima Mansions. Not love, not hate, but somewhere inbetween.

EXTRAS: B-sides, Peel sessions, and interviews

6/10

with both main protagonists, a penitent Coughlan admitting: "When I look back on my rage against the industry at that time I ask myself, 'Fuck, what was I thinking?'"

JIM WIRTH



NAS

Illmatic XX

SONY LEGACY

Legendary debut album from Queens hip-hop icon

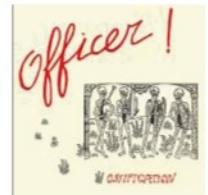
Despite 20 million albums sold and a slew of Grammy nominations,

Nasir Jones – the subject of Amy Winehouse's "Me And Mr Jones" – has struggled to match the impact of his 1994 debut. *Illmatic* was forced to carry the weight of New York rap's sour grapes antipathy toward West Coast gangsta's commercial ascendancy in the early '90s. Consequently, critics projected a little too much highbrow approval onto Nas' ability to evoke the blasted streets of the New York projects while presenting his remarkable way with words as his way out of Hell. NY's hippest producers – Q-Tip, Large Professor, Pete Rock and Gang Starr's DJ Premier – queued to provide Jones with a jazzier kind of street beat, but the son of jazz trumpeter Olu Dara really did define the hip-hop times on singles "Halftime", "It Ain't Hard To Tell" and the stunning "The World Is Yours", an anthem of intellectually driven, mystically inevitable self-empowerment that set the template for every young MC's initial stance for the next two decades.

EXTRAS: Bonus disc dominated by eight dull and dated UK single remixes, but redeemed by a firing 1993 radio freestyle and the previously unreleased, gangsta-mocking "I'm A Villain".

GARRY MULHOLLAND

8/10



OFFICER!

Ossification (reissue, 1984)

MEGAPHONE/KNOCK 'EM DEAD

Rock In Opposition masterpiece – Hobbs goes pop!

9/10

Mick Hobbs has history you can't argue with. An occasional member of the oddball Family Fodder collective, Hobbs made his mark with early '80s group The Work, who took the refusals of Rock In Opposition and the melancholy of Canterbury prog into tougher territory, and he's also done time with Half Japanese, and in late '80s RIO crew The Momes. But his two albums and four cassettes as Officer! are the under-acknowledged fulcrum of his catalogue, each release an idiosyncratic blast of pop-not-pop movement. *Ossification* was recorded at This Heat's Cold Storage Studio, which makes perfect sense: much like This Heat, or other post-punk outliers who recorded at Cold Storage, Hobbs' music is concerned with the weird nestled inside the seeming-normal, the uncomfortable revelation placed in the midst of the seductive pop moment. To that end, songs like "Some" and "Tunnels", moving between chorus chants that follow their own illogic, everyday observations ("you scare the living daylights out of me when you dust the furniture like that") pushed through neurotic melody, and percussive clatter that's like a gang of drunks falling down the Cold Storage stairs, are perfect examples of Hobbs' ability to make magic out of surreal old bones.

JONDALE

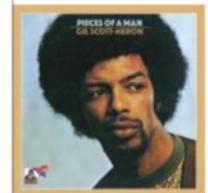


REVELATIONS

Microdisney's strange times



► Half-starved in Kensal Rise at the peak of the yuppie boom, exiled Corkmen Microdisney sculpted the abrasiveness of *The Fall* and the lushness of Scott Walker into something disconcertingly close to mainstream pop. Their early Rough Trade albums are not perfect, but Coughlan is just happy that they exist at all. "It seems like a miracle that we got anything done at all given the plethora of views that we had," he told *Uncut*. "It all feels guileless and irresponsible with hindsight. We were not particularly productive members of the creative industries." Having lasted two years as a medical student before realising his dreams of being Racine or RD Laing with a sideline in surgery were woefully ill-conceived, Microdisney were Coughlan's escape route, and while their records never gained him mass approval, they occupy their moment superbly. "You were still aware that cops were watching you because you were associated with Rough Trade," he sighs almost nostalgically. "It was a strange and fractious time." **JIM WIRTH**



GIL SCOTT-HERON

Pieces Of A Man (reissue, 1971)

ACE

Vinyl release of Gil's finest album

9/10

Let's get the negatives out of the way first: track two of this LP is the worst thing Gil Scott-Heron ever recorded. "Save The Children" predates the Marvin Gaye song of the same name and prefigures a whole slew of similarly slushy, politically illiterate anthems by other soul artists that would later be so accurately parodied by *Flight Of The Conchords*. Ignore it and skip straight from the hilariously savage "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" to the joyous hymn to jazz that is "Lady Day And John Coltrane". Elsewhere, GSH's chocolate baritone surveys wrecked men: the title track views an unemployed man from the POV of his child; "Home Is Where The Hatred Is" explores heroin addiction (a premonition of Gil's own later demons); while "The Prisoner" is a 10-minute epic drawing parallels between incarceration and slavery. Label boss Bob Thiele, who produced the likes of Mingus, Coltrane and Blakey, assembles Gil's finest ever band: drummer Bernard Purdie adds a funky flutter, Ron Carter's bass prowls and fidgets, while Hubert Laws' flute sprinkles some glitter upon the bleak ghetto realism.

EXTRAS: Three extra tracks: "Chains", "Peace" and an early version of "A Toast To The People", recorded with his college band, Black & Blues.

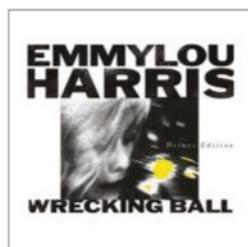
JOHN LEWIS

EMMYLOU HARRIS

Wrecking Ball

NONESUCH

1995 masterpiece reissued with disc of outtakes and making-of DVD. By Andrew Mueller



9/10

point, while formidable, also conformed to a certain type: orthodox Nashville country lightly doused with essence of Laurel Canyon folk-rock.

It was a template that had served Harris well more or less up to *Wrecking Ball*'s immediate predecessor, 1993's *Cowgirl's Prayer*. While very much the kind of thing that people expected of Harris, from the title downwards – and actually not a bad album – *Cowgirl's Prayer* was not, at least by Harris' standards, successful. The choice ahead of her seemed stark: resignation to a long dotage as a heritage act trading her considerable past glories, or reinvention.

She chose the latter – to a degree which, she later admitted, caused some of her fans to wonder if the real Emmylou Harris had been kidnapped by aliens. She assembled the sort of all-star ensemble that you can really only summon if you are, in fact, Emmylou Harris, including Steve Earle, Neil Young, Lucinda Williams, Larry Mullen Jr and Kate and Anna McGarrigle. Besotted by Daniel Lanois' production of Bob Dylan's 1989 album *Oh Mercy*, and by Lanois' debut solo album *Acadie*, she enlisted him as producer. With her career-long ear for a great song, she and Lanois chose tracks by various members of her new backing group, as well as cuts by Gillian Welch, Julie Miller and Jimi Hendrix.

Anybody who still expected another helping of Harris' usual sweetheart-of-the-rodeo trundling was served more or less instant notice to quit by the opening track, Lanois' "Where Will I Be". For possibly the first time in Harris' career, a track on which she appears is dominated by something other than her own vocals (even when she appeared as a backing singer, as on Gram Parsons' solo albums, she had a tendency to occlude everything else, as a voice like hers will). "Where Will I Be" is a Lanois production in more than the literal sense, echoing both the epic sweep of his work with U2 – Lanois himself provides an Edge-ish shimmer of guitar and Adam Clayton-like grumble of bass – and the cavernous gloaming of the backdrops he created for Dylan. Harris herself

UPON ITS ORIGINAL release, *Wrecking Ball* prompted acclaim and bewilderment in equal measure. It was, unquestionably, a great record. It just didn't sound very much like the sort of great record that Emmylou Harris made. Her canon of great records to this



TRACKLIST

DISC TWO Deeper Well: The Wrecking Ball Outtakes

- 1 Still Water
- 2 Where Will I Be (alt vers)
- 3 All My Tears
- 4 How Will I Ever Be Simple Again
- 5 Deeper Well
- 6 The Stranger Song
- 7 Sweet Old World (alt vers)
- 8 Gold
- 9 Blackhawk (alt vers)
- 10 May This Be Love (acoustic)
- 11 Goin' Back To Harlan
- 12 Where Will I Be (alt vers)
- 13 Deeper Well Guillotine

sounds unusually fragile, her voice a trebly whisper at the top of her range.

The same approach is taken to the cuts on *Wrecking Ball* which had already appeared elsewhere. Steve Earle's "Goodbye", released earlier in 1995 on *Train A-Comin'* as a gruff, sparse acoustic blues, is turned into a stately, shuffling, almost trip-hop ballad (something Earle surely recalled as he flirted with electronica on 2007's *Washington Square Serenade*). The arrangement of Dylan's "Every Grain Of Sand", which originally closed Dylan's *Shot Of Love* in 1981 – and sounded like Dylan was making it up as he went along, in a shed – is similarly polished: again, Harris plays against it with a haunted, almost cracking vocal which amplifies the song's vulnerability (in company with Sheryl Crow, she sang "Every Grain Of Sand" at Johnny Cash's funeral in 2003). Weirdest of all is the version of Jimi Hendrix's "May This Be Love",

all backwards-sounding guitars, and with Daniel Lanois' backing vocals elevated almost to the status of duet partner, providing effectively portentous counterpoint.

The extras included with this reissue are a documentary, *Building The Wrecking Ball*, which explains how *Wrecking Ball* came to be, and an extra disc of outtakes which mostly demonstrate how *Wrecking Ball* could have ended up had the nerve of all concerned not held. The versions of the songs that made the finished album – including "Where Will I Be", "All My Tears" and "Deeper Well" – are much closer to what most early purchasers of *Wrecking Ball* would have expected from Emmylou Harris, and now serve mostly as a reminder of how ambitious and audacious the album was. The versions of Richard Thompson's "How Will I Ever Be Simple Again" and Harris' own "Gold" – which later surfaced on 2008's *All I Intended To Be* – are, however, magnificent.

EXTRAS: *Building The Wrecking Ball* documentary, **8/10** disc of outtakes.

The Specialist

Tabu Records



The SOS Band:
Chic-tastic
dancefloor hits



7/10

VARIOUS ARTISTS The Tabu Records Box Set

TABU

Six-CD, 93-track '80s soul extravaganza

Like most classy independents, Tabu ended in the record business' corporate maws, but for a while the creation of founder Clarence Avant bloomed with breakout hits by the SOS Band, Brainstorm and Lalo Schifrin, later siring Cherelle and Alexander O'Neal. Anyone who spent time on a dancefloor in the 1980s owes a debt to Tabu.

Clarence Avant was a music business mogul with form stretching back to the 1950s and managing Sarah Vaughan. With his Sussex Records (home of Bill Withers) in bankruptcy,

Avant began the label in 1976. Its original formula was classy disco – the SOS Band's "SOS (Dit Dit Dit Dat Dat Dit Dit Dit)" is the single that Chic never made, while Manfredo Fest's "Jungle Kitten", a jazz-funk workout, retains cult status.

Yet Tabu only hit the heights after Avant hired the hungry production team of Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis in 1983. Armed with a Roland 808 synth, the duo recast the sound of young black America, accommodating the tougher beats of hip-hop and adding dramatic keyboard sheens to hits like the SOS Band's "Just Be Good To Me". Minneapolis-raised Jam and Lewis also ushered in the former singer of their old band, The Time, Alexander O'Neal – this after a tiff with Prince – whose smooth, besuited romanticism proved a winner for aspirational times. "Saturday Love", a duet with another Tabu mainstay, Cherelle, is close to the heart of the 1980s dancefloor. Jam and Lewis sometimes wore their Minneapolis influences brazenly – Cherelle's "I Didn't Mean To Turn You On" is a ringer for *Purple Rain* Prince.

While Jam and Lewis went on to deliver for Janet Jackson, Tabu found itself part of Sony in 1987, a change that paralleled its creative decline. Though the

SOS, Cherelle and O'Neal kept busy (oh so busy) the hits tapered off. O'Neal's balladry became mannered, and offerings like Demetrius Perry's "Breathless" and Kathy Mathis' "Now That You're Gone" are echoes from a decade previous. Later still, in 1993, Tabu re-emerged as a Motown offshoot, though the label's slightly odd signings (reggae star Lucky Dube included) aren't represented here. Its 6CD smörgåsbord of broken-hearted balladry and aspirational funk anthems is copious and cutely compiled – "At The Dance", "Mellow Grooves", etc – though one suspects most folks could get by with a double album. A wondrous time capsule nonetheless.

EXTRAS: DVD of original videos, 7/10 interviews. 7" single of Sharon Ridley's "Changin".

NEIL SPENCER



JOHN SEBASTIAN

**John B Sebastian/
The Four Of Us/
Tarzana Kid/
Welcome Back**
EDSEL/RHINO

8/10

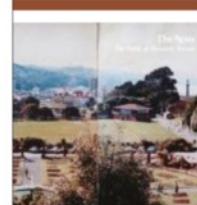
Some solo spoonfuls
served up on two discs plus a live DVD

After leaving the Lovin' Spoonful, frontman and chief songwriter John Sebastian didn't radically alter his MO, and even occasionally revisited his old band's catalogue on the four solo albums he released in the '70s. However, free from the demands of a group set-up (albeit aided by A-listers like Crosby, Stills, Nash, Dr John, Ry Cooder, Lowell George and Phil Everly) there's a greater intimacy to his winsome paean to love won and lost. The eponymous 1970 offering is graced by the sombre "The Room Nobody Lives In", Sebastian accompanied only by harmonium, and the delicately pastoral "She's A Lady", while the following year's *The Four Of Us* is dominated by its ambitious 15-minute title "suite". *Tarzana Kid* (1974) finds him struggling to write substantive material himself, but covers of Jimmy Cliff's "Sitting In Limbo" and Little Feat's "Dixie Chicken" keep the party popping. The title track of *Welcome Back* (1976) provided his biggest post-Spoonful hit, courtesy of its use as the theme to a top-rated sitcom, and the jazzy "She's Funny" and the heartbreaking "I Needed Her Most When I Told Her To Go" help make the album the most consistent since his solo bow.

EXTRAS: Bonus tracks, DVD of a 1970

7/10 BBC concert.

TERRY STAUNTON



THE SPIES

**The Battle Of
Bosworth Terrace**
SILTBREEZE

Larceny and home-spun psychedelia: just another day in post-punk New Zealand

9/10

Why don't any modern groups have back-stories as fantastic as this? The Spies were an underground gang from New Zealand, extant in the late '70s, whose music went unreleased in its day, and is only now being scoured out of history's archives, doubtless largely due to presence in their membership of one George Henderson, the songwriting genius behind The Puddle. These recordings came about, though, thanks to some seriously illicit behaviour: a member of the group 'found' a cheque book, which was used to buy recording equipment. Then, seeing a two-track Revox for sale (in a whiteware supplier, no less), two Spies acted cover while a third stole the recorder. It was all going well until another Spy was arrested, while stoned, in a stranger's house, and the group's cover was broken by a squad of detectives. This all makes for great liner note action, but we wouldn't care if the music wasn't so great: a tough blend of post-punk pop, lo-fi Syd Barrett-isms, the buzzing of a dinky old keyboard – shades of Una Baines in The Fall, here – and perfectly deformed DIY psychedelia. Of all the recent archival action focused on New Zealand music, The Spies shine the brightest.

EXTRAS: None.

JON DALE



ROD STEWART

**Live 1976-1998:
Tonight's The Night**

RHINO

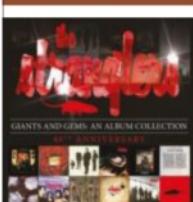
Four discs, 58 tracks and 23 years of arse wiggling...

7/10

Unlike The Rolling Stones, with 10 live albums to their name and still counting, until now there's been just one genuine concert album in Stewart's solo catalogue – and that was way back in 1982. The suspicion was always that Rod onstage was more about showmanship than musicianship and wiggling his backside was more important than hitting the right notes. This multi-disc catch-up set suggests otherwise. Arranged chronologically, the highlight probably comes at the beginning with a storming set from his Christmas '76 UK tour which finds him in magnificent voice on the likes of "Sweet Little Rock'n'Roller" and "(I Know) I'm Losing You", backed by a band of crack session musicians who do an energetic job of capturing the rowdy bonhomie of the Faces but with all the mistakes and sloppiness cut out. But the quality control remains high throughout and into the '90s he's still delivering early hits like "Stay With Me", "Mandolin Wind" and "Cut Across Shorty" like he means them. Even the late-'90s covers of Oasis' "Cigarettes & Alcohol" and Primal Scream's "Rocks", which seemed so wrong at the time, sound surprisingly fine. And best of all, the Great American Songbook is nowhere in sight.

EXTRAS: None.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



THE STRANGLERS

Giants And Gems: An Album Collection

PARLOPHONE

7/10

The other Guildford four at full throttle

The Stranglers gained a reputation in their speed-head Doors phase for cutting up rough when detractors failed to recognise the "irony" in their grisly lyrics, leaders Hugh Cornwell and Jean-Jacques Burnel outraged, perhaps, that savvy twentysomething graduates could be mistaken for misogynist rednecks. "We all regret being cunts to people," Burnel conceded recently, and this anthology of their first six studio albums and related material is released to mark the 40th anniversary of their formation, tracking their belated transition to adulthood. The supercharged machismo wanes around 1978's *Black And White*, to be replaced by dungeons and dragons quirkiness and heroin-induced paranoia for *The Raven* and *The Gospel According To The Men In Black*, and something almost romantic on 1981's *La Folie*. At their most brutally effective on the ratty dread of "Five Minutes" and "Tank", "Goodbye Toulouse" and "Non Stop" expose their softer, puppyish underbelly.

EXTRAS: The real men in black seemingly 6/10 having erased memories of the intervening 25 years, *Giants And Gems* ends with the Cornwell-free band's last two albums. Most glaring omission within classic-era date range: welly-booted disco classic "Bear Cage".

JIM WIRTH

JOHN LEWIS



THE UPSETTERS

The Good, The Bad And The Upsetters (reissue, 1970)

HOT MILK

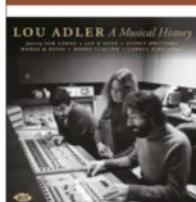
7/10

Long-lost early Scratch classic

As with so much in Lee Perry's world, there's a strange tale behind this album, one of the most obscure in his chaotic canon. In 1970, two years after Perry had launched himself as a producer, the UK-based Trojan Records released an album titled *The Good, The Bad And The Upsetters*, recorded in London by members of his Upsetters crew. Although the record bore Perry's name, he had nothing to do with its conception or its frigid-sounding production and he countered by putting out his own Jamaica-recorded album a year later with the same title and artwork but with totally different songs. Mostly instrumental and never previously released outside Jamaica, it presents a fascinating prototype of what was soon to become the classic Black Ark sound. Many of Perry's maverick trademarks are already in evidence – the off-kilter steel pans on "Big Ball" and "If You Don't Mind", the spooked keyboard effects on "Dracula", the choppy guitar skank of "It's Alright" and the keyboard stabs on "On The Rock". The one-drop rhythm section of Carly and Family Man Barrett previews the beat The Wailers were to perfect on *Catch A Fire*, and Perry's sparse and spatial arrangements would soon lead all the way to a dubbed-up revolution.

EXTRAS: None.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Lou Adler: A Musical Story

ACE

8/10

25-track overview of an industry icon

Lou Adler, now 80, is one of those grizzled industry guys whose fingerprints are all over American pop culture: he founded the Dunhill and Ode labels, set up the Monterey Pop Festival, and stumped up the cash to make *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and the Cheech & Chong movies. He was also a canny producer, and this compilation collates 25 tracks he helmed between 1958 and 1974. Adler could do pop epics: Barry McGuire's "Eve Of Destruction" rubs shoulders with Peggy Lipton's space-age hippy version of Donovan's "Wear Your Love Like Heaven". But he was most comfortable with R'n'B: he co-wrote and produced two Sam Cooke classics ("Wonderful World" and "All Of My Life") and added a funky bounce to even the daftest novelty singles (Johnny "Guitar" Watson's "Deana Baby", Sam Butera's "Bim Bam", Danté & The Evergreens' "Alley Oop"). There are two tracks from Carole King's squillion-selling *Tapestry*, and another from King's jazzy 1968 trio The City, along with hippy faves by The Mamas & The Papas and Scott McKenzie. Best of all are the oddities, including a track from Adler's gospel version of Dylan songs, two tracks by Darlene Love's Blossoms, and Merry Clayton's insane version of "Gimme Shelter".

EXTRAS: None.

JOHN LEWIS

COMING NEXT MONTH...



► A good month, May, for the eagerly awaited follow-up.

The new album from **Sharon Van Etten** continues to journey along the dolorous path that she took on her great, National-assisted *Tramp* album of 2012. *Are We There* sounds at this stage epic indeed, with tasteful strings, but with Van Etten's spectacular voice very much the guiding light.

The Horrors continue their engaging trip through '80s stadium pop, with new oneLuminous. *Parquet Courts*, whose *Light Up Gold* album of 2013 introduced us to their prolix, Pavement-like punk-pop, follow their enjoyable *Tally All The Things You Broke* EP with a new full-length: *Sunbathing Animal*. Amusing songs! With better tunes! The quirky Strokesy magic continues! There are several ways to experience *American Interior* by **Gruff Rhys**, but the soundtrack is as melodic and entertaining as the movie looks deep and intriguing.

Among the senior service, there are also new albums from guitar hero **Jeff Beck**, guitar hero turned sparkling wine don **Carlos Santana**, and **Brian Eno**'s collaboration with Karl Hyde. **Dolly Parton**, meanwhile, returns with *Blue Smoke*, where she contributes all new original compositions save one traditional, a Bob Dylan cover ("Don't Think Twice") and a song with Richie Sambora and Jon Bon Jovi (don't ask).

JOHN ROBINSON

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Films

BY MICHAEL BONNER

Willy Vlautin's novel adapted; unflinching violence in an Irish village; a rival to Alan Clarke's *Scum*; and Richard Ayoade's latest

THE MOTEL LIFE This wintry adaptation of Richmond Fontaine singer Willy Vlautin's debut novel comes shot through with the elegiac qualities you'd traditionally associate with an outlaw ballad. It finds Emile Hirsch and Stephen Dorff cast as brothers Frank and Jerry Lee Flannigan, orphaned as children and who have effectively existed on the margins for most of their lives: a hopeless, downbeat cycle from which Frank and Jerry Lee retreat through their own stories and illustrations. Their predicament is exacerbated by the fact Jerry has a prosthetic leg as a result of falling from a train as a child. The situation finally becomes untenable for the Flannigan brothers when they become involved in a fatal road accident.

The Motel Life deals in a pretty familiar array of themes – familial love, redemption, survival in desperate circumstances – and it shares a sensibility with films like *My Private Idaho* and *Drugstore Cowboy*. But what's perhaps most intriguing here is the absence of an adversary for the Flannigans. Considering their desperate environment, you could be forgiven for thinking they'd find themselves pursued by one of the usual bad guys you'd find in these kind of movies – hustlers, maybe, loan sharks, an aggrieved love rival or simply some guys they crossed in a bar. In fact, for all the Flannigans' increasingly diminished luck, first time directors Alan and Gaby Polsky have crafted a surprisingly warm-hearted film. Far from being the kind of bickering, dysfunctional pair you might expect, the Flannigans are held together by a tight bond of brotherly affection. Hirsch and Dorff do good work as the Flannigans – boys essentially dealt a rum hand by fate and struggling as best they can to deal with it. A sub-plot concerning Hirsch's tentative attempts to reconnect with his ex girlfriend – an understated turn from Dakota Fanning – is handled without sentiment. Kris Kristofferson comes as the well-meaning surrogate father figure for the brothers. The soundtrack confirms the film's Americana credentials: Calexico, Richmond Fontaine, Dylan and Cash.

► **Calvary** It's not often you get to see Brendan Gleeson enjoy top billing in the movies. The first indication of his leading man status came when he played Dublin crime boss Martin Cahill in John Boorman's boisterous 1998 caper, *The General*. It made full use of Gleeson's teddy-bear build and doughy face, his mischievous, almost anarchic temperament that seemed capable of both big-hearted warmth and unflinching violence. The kind of man you could happily spend several hours with in the pub, but whom you would most certainly not wish



to cross under any circumstances. Incredibly, it was a decade before Gleeson got another lead role – as a tremendous double act with Colin Farrell in playwright Martin McDonagh's comedy noir, *In Bruges*. Gleeson and Farrell played hitmen ordered to lie low in Belgium: Gleeson a man of sombre decency next to Farrell's none-too-bright big kid.

But it's Gleeson's relationship with McDonagh's brother, John, that continues to prove creatively profitable. First in *The Guard* (2011) and now with *Calvary*, McDonagh and Gleeson have set about exploring the rich landscape of Ireland and the idiosyncratic characters one might encounter there. The events of *The Guard* took place in Galway while the setting for *Calvary* is a village close to Sligo. The population are drug addicts, nymphomaniacs, arsonists and wife-beaters, going about their business untroubled by discretion or morality. In the middle of this is Gleeson's priest, Father James, the only notionally 'good' man for miles around, who is marked for death by one of his parishioners: "There's no point in killing a bad priest. I'm going to kill you because you're innocent." What ensues is a kind of whodunnit as father James traverses his parish, and we meet the potential suspects – including Dylan Moran's alcoholic country squire, Aiden Gillen's embittered doctor and Chris O'Dowd's cuckolded butcher. Father James knows them all, arguably better than they know themselves: "You're too smart

for this parish," he is told. As in any work of fiction set in rural Ireland that concerns itself with ecumenical matters, there is a pleasing *Father Ted* reference in the form of actor Pat Shortt, who plays a publican here but is better known for his sterling work as Craggy Island's unibrowed village idiot, Tom.

McDonagh's script – a more substantial and mature piece than *The Guard* – is preoccupied with Catholicism, its impact or its absence. We learn early on that the would-be killer was abused as an altar boy and is seeking revenge, father James' parishioners are comprehensively indifferent to the Church (and lack any kind of moral compass), while the old priest himself retains a quiet dignity throughout. Father James is a character of extraordinary grace and pragmatism. Grizzled, looking uncannily like Orson Welles at times, he moves through emotional beats spanning exasperation to resignation. It is a rich and believable performance from Gleeson who, at 58, appears to be doing the best work of his career.

► **Starred Up** Superficially, this is close to the work of Alan Clarke, Ken Loach and the socially minded grandees of British cinema. Initially, Clarke's *Scum* appears to be a key reference – both films open with the arrival of a new inmate whose passage through the prison system provides the film's narrative motor. But critically, director David Mackenzie appears less interested in pursuing Clarke's other, more politically

Reviewed this month...



THE MOTEL LIFE

Directors Alan and Gaby Polsky
Starring Stephen Dorff
Opens April 4
Certificate 15

7/10



CALVARY

Director John McDonagh
Starring Brendan Gleeson
Opens April 11
Certificate 15

8/10



STARRED UP

Director David Mackenzie
Starring Jack O'Connell
Opened March 21
Certificate 18

8/10



EXHIBITION

Director Joanna Hogg
Starring Viv Albertine
Opens April 25
Certificate 15

7/10



THE DOUBLE

Director Richard Ayoade
Starring Jesse Eisenberg
Opens April 4
Certificate 15

7/10



minded concerns, in particular exposing conditions in the UK penal system and, by extension, how that might be an indictment of an incumbent government. Another, more recent reference would be Jacques Audiard's *A Prophet*. The heart of Mackenzie's film – surprisingly, considering the violence, the swearing, the swearing and the violence – is the relationship between young Eric Love, who's been 'starred up' from a juvenile facility to a maximum security penitentiary, and his estranged father, Neville, a career criminal who is incarcerated in the same prison. It doesn't take much to work out that part of the reason for Eric's history of anti-social behaviour lies with his dad's absence: Neville has been in jail since Eric was five. In keeping with the tone of the rest of the film, their reunion's characterised by much swearing, interrupted by bursts of violence.

In fact, *Starred Up* is so relentless and intensely bleak it's possible to find yourself inadvertently bursting out laughing as yet another con gets their face slashed open, or a group of guards hang an inmate. The script is by Jonathan Aker, a former prison therapist, who uses his own intimate experiences to give authenticity to what is,

essentially, a family drama set against a detailed backdrop of the British prison ecosystem. There is a subtext here about the nature of prison life – how, rather than rehabilitating characters like Eric and Neville, it has instead taught them how to get stronger. But more interesting is the way Aker and Mackenzie find subtle parallels between Eric and Neville, in particular the way they both utilise rage as a defence mechanism against external pressure to address their own feelings. As Eric, former *Skins* actor Jack O'Connell displays the same level of commitment to the role that – yes – the young Ray Winstone brought to Carlin in *Scum*, while Rupert Friend – presumably

playing an analogue of Aker himself – is cast as the prison therapist who attempts to engage with Eric. The Australian actor Ben Mendelsohn – perhaps best known in the UK for playing the psychotic 'Pope' Cody in *Animal Kingdom*, as well as supporting roles in *The Dark Knight Rises* and *Killing Them Softly* – is entirely convincing as Neville, a man whose shambling gait and hangdog expression only seem to enhance his sense of menace.

► **Exhibition** Joanna Hogg came late to directing. She started her career in the late '70s, making Super 8 films at the encouragement of Derek Jarman. At film school, she'd cast the then-unknown Tilda Swinton in her 1986 graduation piece before she was diverted from a promising career in avant-garde cinema by music promos and stints on the TV circuit. But *Casualty*'s loss is surely UK cinema's gain: three films into her directorial career and the 53-year-old Hogg has already found her niche mining the angst and tensions of middle-class life. Set in the West London home of the late architect James Melvin, *Exhibition* finds Hogg once again focusing on the travails of the middle class: in this instance a married couple – both artists, and called H and D – who decide to move from their beloved home after nearly 20 years. As H, Hogg casts Liam Gillick, a former Turner Prize nominee, while Slits guitarist Viv Albertine plays D. Both first-time actors, they're joined by Hogg regular, Tom Hiddleston, who cameos as an estate agent. A close analogue for *Exhibition* is Harold Pinter's *A Slight Ache*, a similarly claustrophobic, faintly malevolent piece addressing themes of isolationism and insecurity in a middle-aged couple. Hogg's film is lean, rigorously structured and excellently acted, and despite the sense of something nasty lurking in H and D's past, the film resonates with compassion for their plight.

► **The Double** Richard Ayoade has always had a fascination with outsiders. Previously, he has given us the ultra-geek Moss, who he played for four years in *C4's The IT Crowd*, and Oliver Tate, the neurotic teen protagonist of Ayoade's directorial debut, *Submarine*. *The Double*, Ayoade's second film as director, focuses on Simon James, a mild-mannered office drone played by Jesse Eisenberg, who is low on self-esteem and all but ignored by his work colleagues. Simon's world – such as it is – gradually gets dismantled with the arrival of a new employee, James Simon (also Eisenberg), who is everything this interloper isn't: smart, funny, outgoing. Before long, James has got the kudos and the girl (Mia Wasikowska) Simon craves.

The Double, based on a Dostoyevsky novella, isn't as straightforwardly likable as its predecessor. Much of that, inevitably, is to do with the dullness of Simon and the arrogance of James; neither of which are commendable qualities in a main character. Beyond that, it's possible that the

film's tone – deliberately downbeat, everything shot in a perpetual, fog-shrouded night – might prove too claustrophobic for audiences expecting something as accessible as *Submarine*. With its heavy sense of Orwellian menace and bureaucratic tedium, *Brazil* is a touchstone here,

although *The Double* lacks the anarchy or lightness of touch at work in Gilliam's film. Other reference points include *Eraserhead* and the dry comedies of Aki Kaurismäki. Though some might find *The Double* too arch, one can admire the intelligence with which Ayoade constructs every detail of the film's narrative and the almost mathematical thought processes behind the film's gradual build into inspired absurdist farce. Among many cameos – Chris O'Dowd, Paddy Considine – perhaps the appearance of Chris Morris finally gives us a clue where Ayoade is going here. In the end, with its nightmarish surrealism it resembles an extended sketch from Morris' late-night series, *Jan*.

Drug addicts, arsonists and wife-beaters are going about their business in *Calvary*...

Also out...

HONOUR

OPENS APRIL 1

Paddy Considine plays a hitman hired by a British Asian family to commit an "honour killing".

NOAH

OPENS APRIL 1

Yes, Russell Crowe is Noah in Darren Aronofsky's biblical thriller. Nick Nolte apparently plays a fallen angel.

THE QUIET ONES

OPENS APRIL 10

Hammer's revival continues as professor Jared Harris attempts to create a poltergeist. No good will come of this!

THE RAID 2

OPENS APRIL 11

More Indonesian martial arts gear, this time our hero risks life and limb undercover in Jakarta's underworld gangs.

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 2

OPENS APRIL 18

Basically, some more web-slinging shenanigans, a bit like the last one but with more villains.



The Amazing Spider-Man 2

EAST OF EDEN

OPENS APRIL 18

Reissue programme for James Dean's three movies, kicking off with this 1955 adaptation of John Steinbeck's *World War I* novel.

LOCKE

OPENS APRIL 18

Experimental drama, shot in real-time and taking place entirely within the confines of a car, starring Tom Hardy.

WE ARE THE BEST!

OPENS APRIL 18

Lukas Moodysson's coming-of-age comedy finds three teens forming an all-girl punk band in 1980s Stockholm.

THE INFORMANT

OPENS APRIL 25

Crime thriller about an informant who works for French border patrol. Gilles Lellouche stars.

TRANSCENDENCE

OPENS APRIL 25

Science-fiction gear, where mad scientist Johnny Depp downloads his mind into a computer. Also features Morgan Freeman, Rebecca Hall and Cillian Murphy.

DVD & Blu-ray

THIS MONTH: LOU REED | THE WHO | ROWLAND S HOWARD

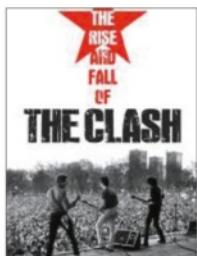


The Clash MkII in 1984:
Vince White, Paul Simonon,
Joe Strummer, Pete Howard
and Nick Sheppard

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE CLASH

UDR

...but mostly, the fall. An awkward, insightful account of how it all went sour for Strummer & Co. By Damien Love



7/10

WE DON'T NEED another Clash documentary. There will never be a better profile than Don Letts' superb *Westway To The World*. The story has been told and retold to death. All the same, every year some new Clash cash-in pops up. Here's another. Miraculously, it turns out to be vital.

The first directing effort by Spanish Clash fan Danny Garcia, *The Rise And Fall...* scores because it's about the messy, inconvenient part of the story Letts' great film shies away from. Specifically: the end. And, more specifically, after the end, when that other Clash thing staggered on zombielike for a while, releasing *Cut The Crap*, the awful 1985 album which, true to stubbornly contradictory form, contained the

last great Clash song, "This Is England". Garcia's film is no great shakes as a cinematic experience. Mostly, it's meat-and-potatoes rock-doc stuff, low-budget talking heads interviews, interspersed with archive footage. It should also be noted it is no place for your Clash neophyte to begin. Those unacquainted with names like Kosmo Vinyl, or unfamiliar with the elusive ways of Svengali-like manager Bernie Rhodes, may find it heavy going.

For those who know, though, Garcia's film overcomes its rudimentary style because the substance becomes so involving. He begins in 1981, with Rhodes being begged to return to manage the band he'd helped create, having been sacked in 1978.

In his absence, The Clash had recorded arguably their greatest album, *London Calling*, and their most ambitious, *Sandinista!*. With America beginning to break, they stood poised to become one of the world's biggest groups – but they also, it's claimed, were half-a-million dollars in debt. The

SCORING:

10 A true classic 9 Essential 8 Excellent
7 Very good 6 Good 4-5 Mediocre 1-3 Poor

pressing issue became how to make money, while still talking the radical talk.

The new Rhodesian era began in triumph, with the fabled Bonds residency in New York, but soon fell apart, first with the sacking of Topper Headon, then, as the group tried to reconcile their espoused beliefs with the realities of playing Shea Stadium alongside The Who, the notorious ousting of Mick Jones, for "rock star tendencies".

This is well-worn territory, but Garcia teases life from it, focusing on the band's inner split: Joe Strummer and Paul Simonon in a Bernie-led Stalinist bootcamp on one side; Mick Jones on the other, in a huff. Of the surviving members of the classic lineup, only Jones agreed to be interviewed, and, while funny, careful and gentlemanly, he gives away something of the bad moods and division. Not to mention his balking at Rhodes' plan for them to start playing "New Orleans music".

Rhodes refused to participate, but he can be heard in enigmatic audio clips, and his presence is everywhere, as contributors debate whether he is a maverick pop Situationist genius, or, as Clash security man Ray Jordan suggests, "an asshole".

It's the second half that becomes compulsive, as Garcia builds a sobering, picture of life in the post-Jones Clash Mk II, through the weary, vivid testimony of drummer Pete Howard, and Nick Shepherd and Vince White, the hapless guitarists drafted to fill Mick's shoes. We learn details of Rhodes' heavy manners management, and Strummer's curious willingness to go along with it, despite rising despair about where it was going.

While public bollocks were spouted about getting "back to basics" and the new band being all for one, White recalls the new members being treated by "The Clash machine" as hired help, there to "sweep the floors", and handed weekly wages of £150. As rhetoric and hypocrisy flew about their heads, and Rhodes issued diktats on approved rebel rock attire ("A checked shirt, what do you think this is, Big fucking Country?"), Howard recalls how he and White secretly shared the love that dared not speak its name in Clashland, by both being fans of Yes.

How did it happen? Ever-insightful Strummer biographer Chris Salewicz points to Joe being in crisis – his father had died, his mother was dying – and clinging to Rhodes' manifestos and manipulations as the pressure of his own legend mounted, hoping against hope it was the right thing. "Joe was naïve," Salewicz sums up, nailing a simple truth often unrecognised, one that explains as much about why Strummer was great as it does his flaws.

Garcia ends with a brief account of how, following Strummer's departure, Rhodes seriously considered keeping a Clash going, putting together new bands under the brand name, and running things like a football manager. None of this is official Clash history; *Cut The Crap* itself was airbrushed from existence on the canonical *Sound System* boxset. But Garcia's film is a useful supplement to *Westway To The World*. It's important to remember this thorny, shabby, sad and stupidly funny flameout. It was never slogans or even ideals that mattered, so much as The Clash's very human passion, the messy confusion that drove them to try, to fall, and to try again.

EXTRAS: None.

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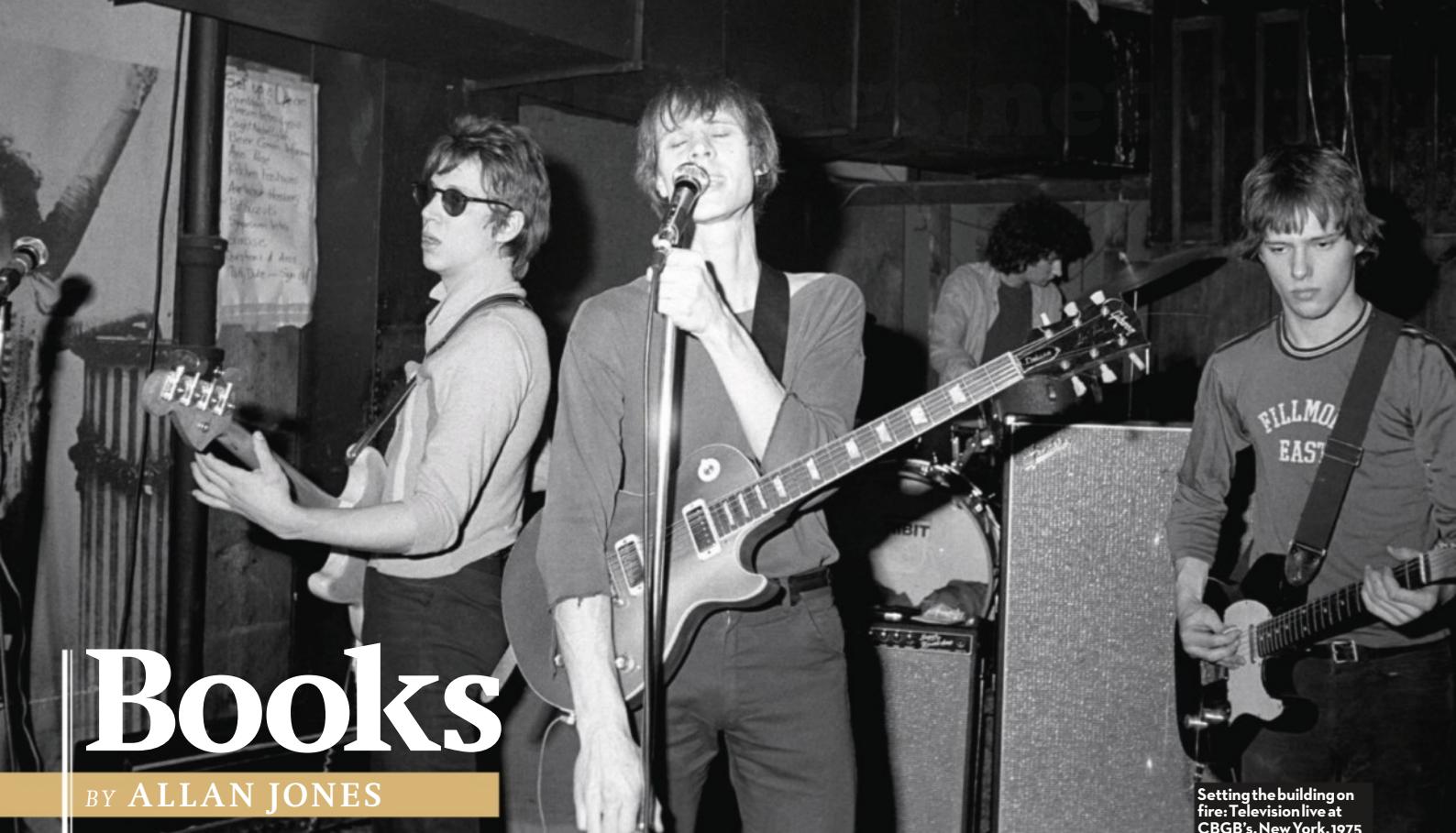
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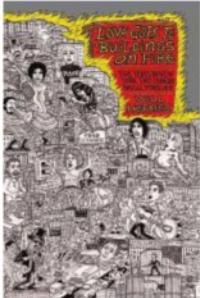


Books

BY ALLAN JONES

Setting the building on fire: Television live at CBGB's, New York, 1975

Reviewed this month...

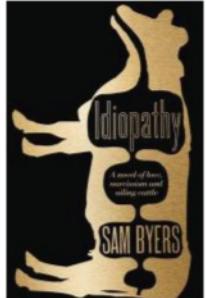


Love Goes To Buildings On Fire: Five Years In New York That Changed Music Forever

Will Hermes

VIKING

8/10



Idiopathy
Sam Byers
4TH ESTATE

9/10

WILL HERMES' *Love Goes To Buildings On Fire* is a history of New York music between 1973 and 1977, told at a furious narrative clip across 300 pages that are often so dense with detail that reading it, you may more than once want to pause, catch your breath, your head spinning a little at the amount of information coming your way.

"There remains a myth that the early '70s – post-Aquarian revolution, before punk and hip-hop begot the new age – was a cultural dead zone," Hermes writes in an introduction brief enough to make you think he's in a hurry to get on with a righteous debunking of a prevailing opinion he clearly doesn't share. Whatever the moribund condition of music elsewhere, it could not in Hermes' passionate opinion be said that in New York things weren't happening, on several different fronts simultaneously, with seismic repercussions.

The book appropriates its title from Talking Heads' first single, "Love Goes To Building On Fire" and is packaged as if it's primarily a history of New York punk. It opens, in fact, with the New York Dolls headlining a show in the early hours of January 1, 1973, the Dolls seeing in the New Year at the Mercer

Arts Centre, supported by the Modern Lovers and due attention is subsequently paid to the generation of bands in some instances directly inspired by the Dolls' brazen example who gathered around CBGB's, the Bowery bar that became synonymous with Television, Patti Smith, The Ramones, Blondie and Talking Heads.

Hermes negotiates a sprightly enough path through their overlapping careers, although this is of course familiar ground, hardly undocumented, and the same can be said of his account of kindred spirit Bruce Springsteen's early career – *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ* came out a few days after the Dolls played the New Year's show at the Mercer. But punk is far from *Love Goes To Buildings On Fire*'s solitary focus and is perhaps most fascinating when it addresses what else was happening in New York in these exciting years, the parallel histories of salsa, disco, hip-hop, the loft jazz scene, the uptown and downtown club scene, jazz rock, the Minimalists, their pursuit of a new classical music and their various collaborative avant-garde excursions into musical theatre. New York at the time was a nation of iconoclasts, a crucible for artists who recognised few rules or boundaries, were dedicated to the idea of transformation, innovation, cross-cultural immersion.

Hermes was growing up in the New York borough of Queens when all this was happening, a distant witness to the goings on in Manhattan and elsewhere, and allows us only glimpses of his teenage self, with little reference to his own later journalistic career on *Rolling Stone*, where he is now a Senior Editor. *Love Goes To Buildings On Fire* is therefore greatly a product of exhaustive archival research, many hours spent reviewing microfilm files at the New York Public Library and the Library For Performing Arts at the Lincoln Centre, more than six years of toil going into the book's writing, according to its author. It's also the product of more than 30 years of attentive listening to the panoramic musical spread with which the book engages, Hermes bringing an expert view to everything he writes about, from Patti Smith's "Piss Factory" to the wildest free jazz, from disco to Eddie Palmieri's salsa mind-blower, *The Sun Of Latin Music*.

► **Idiopathy** is the startling debut of young English novelist Sam Byers, a novel awash with the kind of caustic comic bile you might find elsewhere

only in the pages of something by American masters of somewhat unhinged and usually outrageous humour like Sam Lipsyte or Shalom Auslander.

The book's title comes from a medical term, idiopathic, which is used to describe "a disease or condition which arises spontaneously or for which the cause is unknown". In immediate context, it refers to an outbreak of a mysterious, inexplicable syndrome, hilariously invented by Byers, called Bovine Idiopathic Entrancement, widespread among cows as the book opens, farmers up and down the country "finding lone members of the herd at the edges of fields staring blank and unblinking into the middle distance, starving and dehydrating to death".

What's been happening to the cows is now spreading to sheep, mutating into Ovine Idiopathic Entrancement. The book's human cast is alarmed that they too will soon be infected, although as Byers makes hilariously clear, their idiocy has been long-since confirmed, their conditions probably fatal, victims as they are of a collective emotional myopia that makes them more stupid than any dumbstruck cow or addled sheep.

Katherine and Daniel, a former couple, now bitterly separated, are reluctantly brought back together by the reappearance of the troubled Nathan, a friend who'd disappeared from their lives after trying to carve off the tattoos from his body with a camping knife at a rave, now released from psychiatric care. Their fraught reunion is the trigger for the well-aimed and hilarious satire that follows.

Byers viciously dissects the lives of these largely despicable characters – Katherine is a spectacularly awful creation, mean-spirited, self-destructive and the wheedling, needy Daniel is no more likeable – and with Drone-strike accuracy targets, among other things, potty environmentalists, eco-activists, sex addiction, the dim narcissism of the permanently self-absorbed, Brits on holiday, the open warfare of modern office life, media inanity, instant celebrity, self-help gurus (Nathan's horrendous mother has reinvented herself as "Mother Courage" and written a misery memoir called *Mother Courage: One Woman's Battle Against Maternal Blame*, in which she blames Nathan for ruining her life).

Hilariously misanthropic, but underscored by a surprising poignancy, *Idiopathy* announces the arrival of a major new talent.

Live.

ROCKING IN THE FREE WORLD

For the Win... The Butlers and co get bigger, sexier and bolder...



SETLIST

- 1 My Body Is A Cage
- 2 Reflektor
- 3 Flashbulb Eyes
- 4 Neighbourhood #3 (Power Out)
- 5 Rebellion (Lies)
- 6 Joan Of Arc
- 7 Rococo
- 8 The Suburbs
- 9 Ready To Start
- 10 Neighbourhood #1 (Tunnels)
- 11 We Exist
- 12 No Cars Go
- 13 Haiti
- 14 Afterlife
- 15 It's Never Over (Hey Orpheus)
- 16 Sprawl II (Mountains Beyond Mountains)
- ENCORE**
- 17 Ban Marriage
- 18 Normal Person
- 19 Young Lions
- 20 Here Comes The Night Time
- 21 Wake Up

ARCADE FIRE

AIR CANADA CENTRE, TORONTO, CANADA, MARCH 13, 2014

Reflekted glory! Win Butler's ever-expanding groove machine invite their Canadian neighbours to a fancy dress party...

IT TAKES A brave band to encourage their audience to try and out-dress them. Looking to promote "a fun carnival atmosphere" in halls and arenas that typically attract a less eyecatching clientele, the Arcade Fire raised the hackles of some fans last fall when the band announced a dress code of "formal wear or costume attire" at their upcoming shows in support of fourth album *Reflektor*.

Yet judging by the evening's array of mask-wearing courtesans, creepy skeletons, glittery flappers, power-suited dudes and very excited children in last year's Halloween outfits, the challenge has been met by a good many of the fans who've assembled for the Reflektor Tour's Toronto stop. Even the Canadians

wearing the traditional jeans-and-hoodie ensemble look like they put some extra effort into colour coordination. "You look very beautiful, Toronto," says frontman Win Butler as he surveys the throng halfway through his band's two-hour set. He may very well say that to every city, but it's still nice to hear.

Besides giving the room a high standard of fabulousness and a jubilant air, the tactic has one other important result. That's throwing a spanner into the traditional dynamic between performer and spectator – in other words, it's hard to know who to watch when everybody looks like a star and the spotlights flash in all directions. The issue is further confused by the mirrors and other reflective surfaces that dominate the

lavish stage design, as well as the use of a smaller platform positioned at the opposite end of the arena floor.

Indeed, this is where Butler, wife Régine Chassagne and two bandmates – plus the eerie figure covered in mirror shards seen in Anton Corbijn's video for "Reflektor" – open the show with an acoustic rendition of "My Body Is A Cage" from *Neon Bible*. Being a song about feeling too anxious to make like Daft Punk and lose yourself to dance, it's an ironic choice to launch a shockingly funky performance, one that swiftly erases any doubts about the band's rebirth as art-disco provocateurs.

After regrouping on the main stage for *Reflektor*'s title track, an expanded version of the band demonstrate a force and prowess that was sometimes



missing on their recent album, despite the guiding hand of former LCD Soundsystem mainman James Murphy. The sound tonight is bigger, sexier and bolder, as well it should be since there are 12 players in silvery skirts and Nudie-style suits up there working hard to please.

Here, on the fifth date of the tour's North American leg, the core sextet of Butler, Chassagne, Win's brother William, Tim Kingsbury, Richard Reed Perry and William Butler – all of whom trade positions and instruments throughout, further complicating the matter of focal points – are augmented by longtime collaborator and arranger Owen Pallett, former regular turned touring member Sarah Neufeld, two horn players and two percussionists.

The impact of the additional personnel on *Reflektor* tracks like "Flashbulb Eyes" and "Afterlife" is dramatic. As transformations go, it's akin to what happened to Talking Heads – another band that somehow retained their art-school sensibility and critical cachet even after becoming arena-filling unit-shifters – when the Afrofunk

experimentation of *Remain In Light* was fleshed out by the nimble groove machine heard on 1982's live *The Name Of This Band Is Talking Heads*. Whereas the incorporation of Caribbean rhythms has seemed a touch tentative on Arcade Fire's recordings to date, the steel drum and hand percussion parts tonight are seamlessly integrated into the exuberant flow of "Haiti", a highlight of their 2004 debut, *Funeral*, that features one of Chassagne's rare turns at centre-stage. Moving as always like a marionette with tangled strings, Chassagne's equally arresting whether she's joining a pair of undulating skeletons on the smaller platform to sing "It's Never Over (Hey Orpheus)" or losing herself in "Sprawl II (Mountains Beyond Mountains)", which tonight sounds like the collaboration Jane Birkin and Giorgio Moroder never made.

A clear departure point for *Reflektor*, the latter song is also one of the set's few selections from *The Suburbs*. With Win taking a spell at the mirror-covered piano, the title track gets a mesmerising treatment, as slow-motion fragments from Spike Jonze's video play on the screen above the stage. The same fans who grumbled over the dress code may be equally aggrieved by the absence of much more from the band's 2010 Grammy winner, or anything from *Neon Bible* besides "My Body Is a Cage" and "No Cars Go".

The fact is, the more brooding, widescreen rock sound of those discs seems out of step with Arcade Fire's new quest for dancefloor epiphanies. On the plus side, the indie-rock glee-club singalongs of *Funeral* fit in just fine. "Neighbourhood #3 (Power Out)" and "Rebellion (Lies)" are as exuberant as ever, possibly even more so due to the greater number of people onstage hammering the hell out of whatever they get their hands on.

The band cap off the five-song encore with another *Funeral* favourite, "Wake Up". And while the climactic cannon bursts of confetti and streamers are plenty startling, they aren't as surprising as some of the finale's other curveballs, like a goofy mockery of the city's infamous crack-smoking mayor Rob Ford and tributes to two underrated Toronto acts with whom the Arcade Fire often shared stages in earlier, less glamorous days. The encore opens with The Reflektors – the papier-mâche-headed cover-band alter ego that Arcade Fire introduced to an understandably bewildered public last fall – performing a spirited version of The Hidden Cameras' "Ban Marriage" on the far stage, before Butler and co wrest control back from these pretenders. Two songs later, Win adds unnecessary inches to his height by donning an oversized head for a rendition of the Constantines'

"Young Lions", the closest thing Toronto has to a homegrown "Born To Run".

In the show's final moment, Arcade Fire further acknowledge their debt to both groups, fellow travellers in a bustling Canadian indie scene whose celebration of community and thirst for new adventures are clearly reflected in the grooves of *Reflektor*. When Butler tells the crowd that "our band wouldn't be here without them", it's a gracious end for the most glittery of evenings. JASON ANDERSON

Tonight erases any doubts about the band's rebirth as art-disco provocateurs

Trans

THE LEXINGTON, LONDON, MARCH 6, 2014

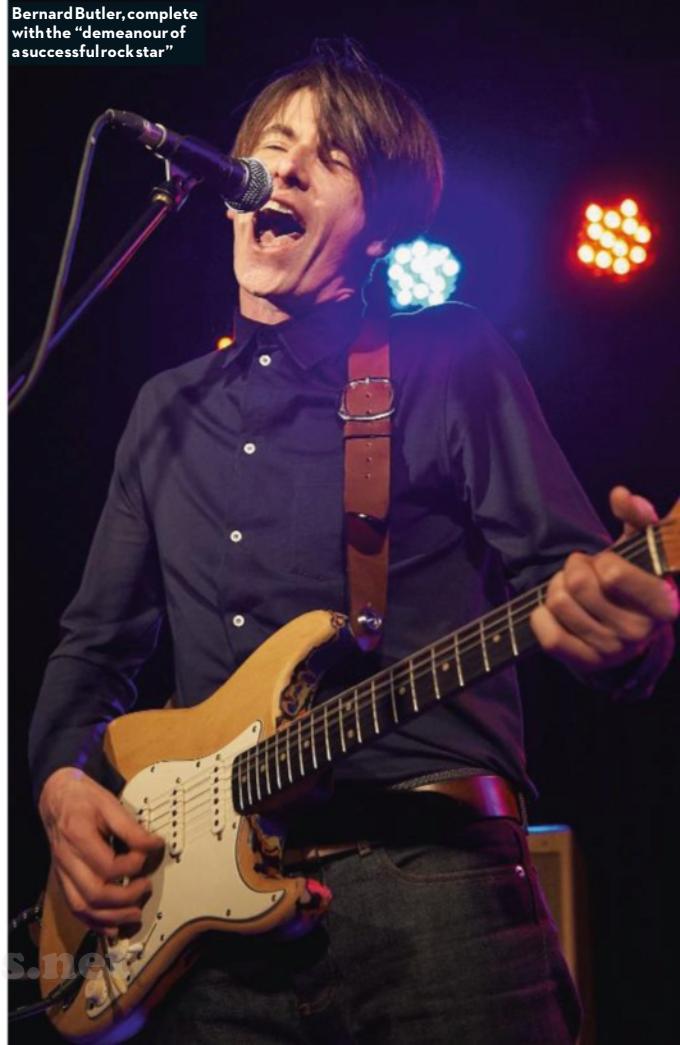
You give me friction! The elevating return of Bernard Butler

Tin case you were wondering, there's four of us," says Trans co-frontman Jackie McKeown, as he coaxes bassist Igor Volk from his place by the side of the speakers into a more prominent position on the stage. You could, however, interpret McKeown's comment as a wider observation about Trans itself: that this is simply Bernard Butler, plus three. Certainly, to look at, Butler is the only one who has the demeanour of a successful rock star: dressed in a smart black shirt and dark jeans with a John Cale bob cut, he looks a little like Will Sergeant circa 1984, while McKeown, Volk and drummer Paul Borchers plump for a scruffier combination of jeans, striped T-shirts and trainers.

Whatever their apparent disparities, it transpires that this is very much a group effort. Although things begin awkwardly – Butler's guitar isn't properly plugged in and there are some jumps early in the set – by the time the four musicians are locked in the middle of an impressive 10-minute Krautrock-style jam, everyone is pulling their weight. Butler, for his part, seems quite circumspect in front of his microphone, while his fellow bandmates exchange frequent nods and glances as they bob around the Lexington's stage. As a vocalist, Butler's thin falsetto occasionally recalls Robert Wyatt or, when he drifts into affected Estuary vowels, Graham Coxon. But what is most interesting is the dynamic between Butler and McKeown, formerly of the Yummy Fur and the 1990s. The first few numbers – "Dancing Shoes", "Rock Steady" – are tightly focused around pulsing motorik riffs. But as the evening develops, songs like "Tangerine" and "Jubilee" begin to sprawl outwards and, with McKeown impressively matching Butler's tense and propulsive guitar lines, start to resemble nothing less than Television's expansive jams.

MICHAEL BONNER

Bernard Butler, complete with the "demeanour of a successful rock star"





DAVE & PHIL ALVIN

CONTINENTAL CLUB, AUSTIN, TEXAS, MARCH 13, 2014

Dang and Blasters! The Alvin brothers reunite on *Common Ground*

IF THERE'S ONE thing me and my brother can agree on," Dave Alvin announces, one song into their first show together for a decade, "it's Big Bill Broonzy. So this is a celebration of him. And," he adds hastily, with a devilish grin, "of brotherly love."

Dave and Phil have not made an album together for 30 years, since the former left The Blasters. Now, though, they have reunited for *Common Ground*, an album of Broonzy songs including "How You Want It Done", a sex-drenched 1928 ditty that, Dave theorises, just might be the first ever rock'n'roll song.

Brotherly love, improbably, is in full bloom at this South By South West show, with both sharing smiles, memories, kind words. It's some 20 months since Phil Alvin's heart flatlined during a Valencia, Spain concert – he was pronounced dead, before somehow being resuscitated. Looking dapper in black leather jacket, strumming an acoustic guitar, he appears a bit frail at 61. All doubts vanish, though, when he opens his mouth to sing. That voice – smoky, masterful, overpowering – is in showroom form, leading the charge into a plethora of Broonzy gems,

starting with the breezy, super-confident "I Feel So Good".

Broonzy (1893-1958) is a transitional figure, a gritty stylist who bridged folk and country blues, acoustic and electric approaches, across a 30-year career. He subbed for Robert Johnson at a John Hammond-produced concert in the 1930s, before becoming a respected mentor to Greenwich Village's 1950s folk intelligentsia.

In the Alvins' grasp, Broonzy's songs are fortified and electrified. Dave, decked out in neckerchief and cowboy hat, is a picture of the gunslinger-cum-guitarslinger, hot-rodding "How You Want It Done" with rumbling skit-skat rhythms, firing off spidery runs under every line. Phil delivers the tumble rush of verses with relish, craning his neck stage-right every so often to admire his brother's guitar runs. It's a firecracker of a set, resting on

the solid rhythmic foundation of Dave's backing band, The Guilty Men: Chris Miller (slide guitar), Brad Fordham (bass) and Lisa Pankratz (drums). "Key To The Highway," Broonzy's best-known song, has been covered to death, but here possesses a rare ebullience, both singers trading verses, Phil wailing harmonica, full-bore harmonies toward the end.

By the time of "Southern Flood Blues", Broonzy's terrifying account of the 1937 Mississippi/Ohio River flood, the brothers really hit their stride. "I love me some imagery," Dave declares, ratcheting up the song's apocalyptic visions with guttural vocals and a series of

Brotherly love, improbably, is in full bloom, with both sharing smiles and kind words

ominously stinging Stratocaster leads. It's akin to Dylan's "High Water (For Charley Patton)", on steroids: "I was hollerin' for mercy, and there weren't no boats around," Dave growls.

SETLIST

- 1 I Feel So Good
- 2 How You Want It Done
- 3 Key To The Highway
- 4 Southern Flood Blues
- 5 Trucking Little Woman
- 6 Border Radio
- 7 What's Up With Your Brother?
- 8 Johnny Ace Is Dead
- 9 Marie Marie
- 10 American Music

At this point, the band lightens the load, stepping back into their own illustrious history. Broonzy's "Trucking Little Woman" sounds almost like an early Blasters outtake, while staple "Border Radio" chugs with a pounding fervour. Phil pours everything into the song, taking it into an eerie higher register, embellishing its loneliness with an edge of urgency and desperation.

On "Marie Marie", Dave stretches the celebratory guitar riff well past closing time, with Phil's harp bringing everything full circle. Before "Johnny Ace Is Dead", though, Dave has one tidbit of advice for the thousands of festival-playing musicians in town: "For you youngsters, playing maybe your first SXSW," he says, "just remember if you're going to play Russian roulette backstage before your gig, be sure to take out *all* the bullets."

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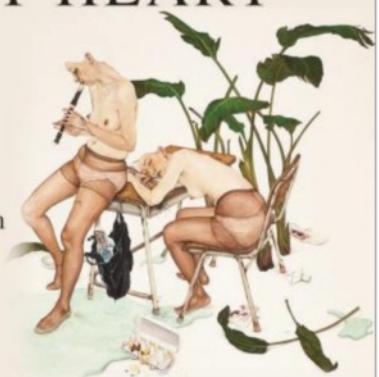
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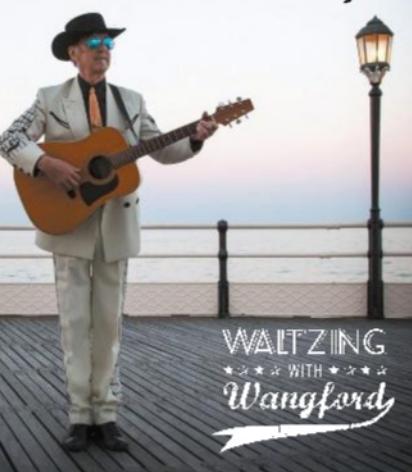
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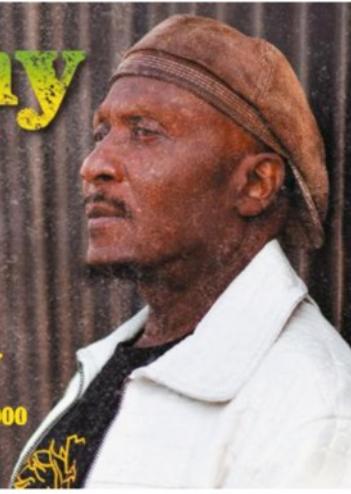
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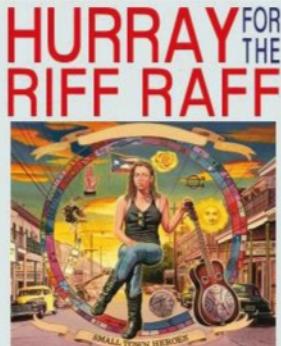
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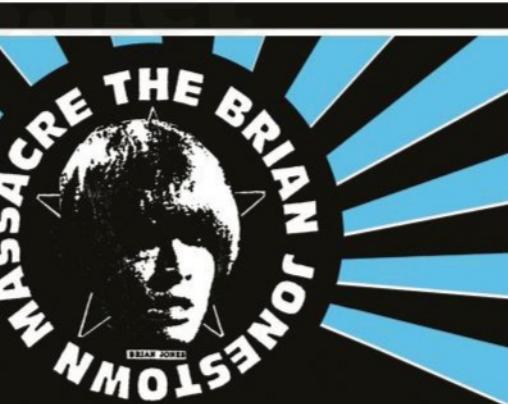
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BOB CASALE

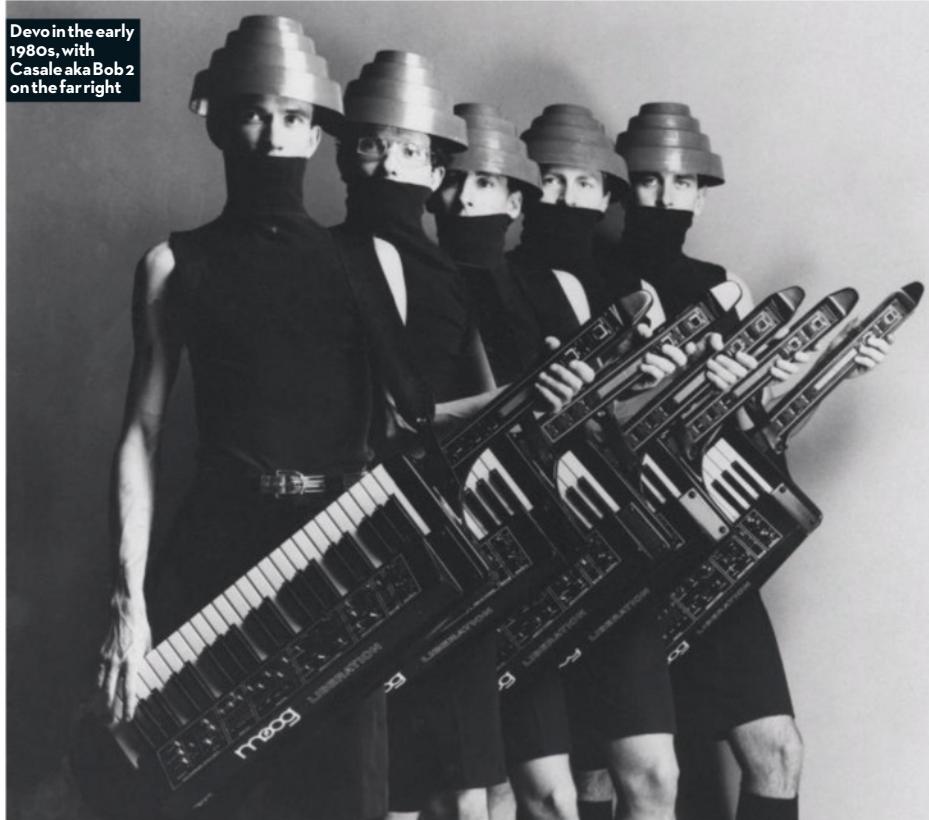
Devo guitarist/keyboardist, sound engineer

1952-2014

BOB CASALE WAS destined for life as a radiologist technician before he became sidetracked by a musical career. In 1972 elder brother Gerald convinced him to balance his chosen vocation with a berth in the newly formed Devo. It was an appealing proposition. Part pop group and part satirical project, the band began their assault on what they perceived to be a hopelessly dysfunctional American society that was becoming ever more regressive. "We came of age in the middle of a huge cultural war," Casale explained to *Under The Radar* in reference to the Kent State shootings in their native Ohio. "This country was basically in the midst of a new civil war. The lines were drawn very clearly."

As guitarist and keyboard player, Casale was a key ingredient in the development of their oddball funk and surrealist strain of jerky electro-pop. He featured on every Devo album, from 1978 debut *Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!* through to *Something For Everybody*, their 2010 comeback. By 1984 he had also become their sound engineer, a skill he extended to Andy Summers' first solo album, *XYZ*, three years later. When Devo split in 1991, Casale joined bandmembers Mark and Bob Mothersbaugh as central figures behind commercial production studio Mutato Muzika. His work for film and TV included *Happy*

Devo in the early 1980s, with Casale aka Bob 2 on the far right



Gilmore, The Royal Tenenbaums, Four Rooms and Rugrats Go Wild.

"Bob was one of the five gears of Devo that made the engine run," said Gerald in tribute to his brother, who died of heart failure. "He

helped create a body of work that put the 'new' in new wave and changed the way a lot of people thought about music and a lot of ideas they had about culture. He was integral in the creation of our music."

DUFFY POWER

Blues and rock'n'roll singer

1941-2014

IMPRESARIO LARRY PARNE first spotted Ray Howard at a jive competition in Shepherd's Bush in late 1958. Discovering he had the voice to match the moves, Parnes signed him up, changed his name to Duffy Power and packed him off in leopardskin jackets and gold lamé waistcoats. Uninspired versions of "Dream Lover" and



"Ain't She Sweet" failed to chart and, by 1961, Power left Parnes to try elsewhere. Within two years he'd fallen in with Graham Bond, Jack Bruce, Ginger Baker and John McLaughlin to record "I Saw Her Standing There", becoming only the second person to cover a Beatles tune, and found his true métier in the blues. But despite a Parlophone deal and a stint with Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated, success proved elusive. He contributed to the soundtrack of *The Italian Job* and issued a self-titled solo LP in 1972, after which Power spent much of his time in obscurity.

MARTY THAU

New York punk producer, manager and label boss

1938-2014

"HERE WERE THESE guys decked out in leather and leopardskin with

bouffant hairdos, black nail polish, lipstick, six-inch platform boots, chopped jeans, feather boas, armbands and pantyhose," Marty Thau recalled of his first encounter with the New York Dolls in 1972. "It was a style beyond femininity and thrown together in such a way as to appear natural." Formerly a successful record plugger and A&R man for Paramount, Thau became the band's co-manager. After they split three years later he brought his experience to bear on the emerging New York punk scene, overseeing the Ramones' first demos and, through his production company Inherent, recording Blondie's debut single, "X Offender". He founded the Red Star label in 1977 and issued the first Suicide album, which he also co-produced. At the time of his death, Thau was working on a memoir, *Rockin' The Bowery (From The New York Dolls To Suicide)*.

PACO DE LUCIA

Flamenco guitarist, composer and producer

1947-2014

HAILED AS A "titanic figure in the world of flamenco guitar" by Eric Clapton, Paco De Lucía also enjoyed the fandom of John McLaughlin and Roger Waters, among others. He started playing guitar in his native Spain aged five, before going on to become the most influential flamenco picker of his generation, fusing together elements of salsa, jazz and classical music. In the 1970s he began a series of projects with the likes of McLaughlin, Al Di Meola, Chick Corea and Larry Coryell. Though perhaps his most celebrated collaborator was late flamenco singer Camarón de la Isla, with whom he recorded 10 albums.



Haley and the Comets in 1956 - with Beecher, right

ROBERT ASHLEY

Avant-garde composer

1930-2014

EXPERIMENTAL COMPOSER
Robert Ashley saw TV, rather than the stage, as the ideal medium for his elliptical 'operas'. Not that he made any concessions to populism. 1984's surreal *Perfect Lives*, for example, was a fractured orchestral narrative that told the tale of two jobbing musicians embroiled in a bank heist. A music theorist of psycho-acoustics, he launched his first mixed-media works at the ONCE Festival in Ann Arbor, Michigan during the '60s. Other pieces, like *Automatic Writing*, incorporated the use of speech patterns as compositional tools. The world premiere of Ashley's latest opera, *Crash*, takes place in New York this April.

WAYNE SMITH

Reggae musician and singer

1965-2014

STONER ANTHEM "Under Me Sleng Teng" not only gave Wayne Smith the biggest hit of his career, but also revolutionised the mechanics of reggae. Issued in 1985, it was co-written with musician Noel Davey on a Casio keyboard and, under the production of Prince Jammy, became the first dancehall record to be made entirely with digital technology. Smith, who began on soundsystems and released debut LP *Youthman Skanking* in 1982, based the song on a pre-set Casio riff of Eddie Cochran's "Somethin' Else". He later founded his own label in New York, Sleng Teng Records, before returning to Jamaica last year.

JERRY CORBITT

Youngbloods guitarist and producer

1943-2013

JESSE COLIN YOUNG was an aspiring folk singer with two LPs to his name when he met guitarist-pianist Jerry Corbitt in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1965. They began touring as The Youngbloods, adding guitarist Lowell Levinger and drummer Joe Bauer to the lineup. The band enjoyed one major US hit, "Get Together", before Corbitt quit in 1969. Two years later he teamed up with ex-Youngbloods producer Charlie Daniels, a partnership that yielded four LPs as Corbitt & Daniels. He also worked with Don McLean, Janis Ian, Pete Seeger and Ramblin' Jack Elliott.

FRANNY BEECHER

Comets guitarist

1921-2014

FRANNY BEECHER HAD already served as guitarist with Benny Goodman by the time he replaced the late Danny Cedrone in Bill Haley & His Comets. He'd begun with Goodman's Orchestra in 1948, helping the bandleader's transition into bebop, and also played on a couple of 45s for pianist Buddy Greco. Accepting Haley's invite to join the Comets in the autumn of 1954, initially as a session player, Beecher was told to "play a more basic style than I was used to, more country really. They called it rockabilly."

His technique and agility was such that he became Haley's lead guitarist during the group's golden era. He appeared when they made their *Ed Sullivan* debut in August 1955 with "Rock Around The Clock", the studio version of which was cut with Cedrone, and also featured in the movies *Rock Around The Clock* and *Don't Knock The Rock*. Beecher's most notable recorded work included "See You Later, Alligator" and "Rock-a-Beatin' Boogie", while "Blue Comet Blues" and "Shaky" were among his own songs.

In 1958 he and his fellow Comets began releasing singles as The Kingsmen, before leaving to join The

Merri-Men two years later. He returned to work with Haley in 1961, quitting again within 12 months. Beecher hooked up with the Comets for a number of reunion dates after Haley's death in 1981, though survivors of the classic lineup didn't begin touring and recording in earnest until '87. He remained there until his retirement in July 2006.

STEVEN FROMHOLZ

Outlaw country singer-songwriter

1945-2014

TEXAN SONGWRITER Steven Fromholz, who has died of an accidental gunshot wound while hunting, was a forerunner of country's Outlaw movement. Recorded with Dan McCrimmon as Frummox, 1969's *Here To There* included "Texas Trilogy", a literate portrayal of post-war rural life. He toured with an early version of Stephen Stills' Manassas before Willie Nelson scored a major country hit in 1976 with Fromholz's "I'd Have To Be Crazy". Hoyt Axton and Jerry Jeff Walker also covered his songs.

SAMANTHA JUSTE

Top Of The Pops 'disc girl', designer, former wife of Micky Dolenz

1944-2014



Juste in the 1960s

SAMANTHA JUSTE WAS immortalised as "the being known as *Wonder Girl*" by Micky Dolenz in The Monkees' 1967 hit, "Randy Scouse Git". The couple had met on *Top Of The Pops*, where Juste was the resident 'disc girl', cueing up singles on the turntable as each artist began to perform. In 1968 Juste and Dolenz married in Laurel Canyon. After divorcing seven years later, Juste, who'd also had a short-lived '60s pop career and performed on *Top Of The Pops* in 1966, devoted herself to her fashion and jewellery business.

TABU LEY ROCHEREAU

Congolese rumba singer, songwriter and politician

1937-2014

NO-ONE DID more to popularise soukous, the Congolese form of rumba derived from Afro-Cuban music, than singer and bandleader Tabu Ley Rochereau. He began his career in the late '50s with Rock-a-Mambo, before founding his own troupe, African Fiesta, and eventually racking up over 250 albums. By the '80s he'd reached an international audience as the frontman with Orchestre Afrisa International, though his career took a fresh turn in 1997 when he became a minister in President Laurent Kabila's new government.

GEORGE 'PORKY' CHEDWICK

Pioneering radio DJ

1918-2014

BO DIDDLEY ONCE commented that "any entertainer of my era who say they don't know who Porky Chedwick is – they're damn lyin'. That's the cat that played the records." During the late '40s and early '50s, Pittsburgh DJ Chedwick (the self-styled 'Daddio Of The Raddio') was one of the first white presenters to play doo-wop, R'n'B, gospel and other "race records". In 1998 he was inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in Cleveland.

GERT 'KRALE' KRAWINKEL

Trio guitarist and songwriter

1947-2014

TRIO'S 1982 ELECTRONICA hit "Da Da Da" was easily the most commercial expression of the group's simplistic brand of 'New German Cheerfulness'. Co-written by guitarist Gert Krawinkel and singer Stephan Remmler, who'd first played together in the '60s as MacBeats, the absurdly catchy tune sold 13 million copies worldwide. Krawinkel's more curious claim to fame was his 1998 induction into the *Guinness Book Of Records* for undertaking the longest horse ride, from Seville to Hamburg.

ROB HUGHES

Feedback...

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FEAT OF ENDURANCE

While I enjoyed the feature on Little Feat in your last issue [April], I feel writer Jon Dale fell into the well-worn trap of not seeing *The Last Record Album* for what it was – the last great Feat record. While it lacked the harder, rockier edges of *Feats Don't Fail Me Now*, it took Feat into their finer funk, New Orleans territory, started on *Dixie Chicken*. It honed what they had done previously into a finely tuned album, full of great songs, as Dale acknowledges in "All That You Dream" and "Long Distance Love", and fabulous playing, epitomised by the syncopated genius of album closer "Mercenary Territory", a wonderful Lowell George/Richie Hayward collaboration. True, Lowell was not as prolific as he had been in previous years, but the quality of the three songs he brought to the album stand up against his best, contrary to Dale's assertion that "only the lachrymose 'Long Distance Love' merits mention alongside the best of George's previous Feat songs". Just listen to the second side of the album, starting with the Payne/Barrère/Gradney song "One Love Stand", Feat funk at its finest, going into one of Lowell's finest lyrical moments, "Down Below The Borderline". Who else could come up with the genius of "onomatopoeia symmetry in motion/They heard about that girl clear across the ocean/To love her is a thrill, so tell me it's for real/She'll break away and leave you crying at some stop sign/Down below the borderline". Bill Payne's eerie "Somebody's Leaving" follows with its great piano work before the aforementioned finale "Mercenary Territory" and you've witnessed one of THE great sides of music in popular music (well, on the vinyl version anyway!). It's certainly an album worthy of 8/10 and stands proud alongside its predecessors, as any discerning Feats fan will tell you. The five LPs that encompass their debut *Little Feat* through *The Last Record Album* represent a body of work very few artists have ever matched in my time listening to music. **John Graveling, via email**

...I was at the Rainbow in 1977 for the Little Feat gig, and remember Lowell George leaving the stage for



Little Feat live on the Warner Bros Music Tour of Europe, Jan 1975

"Day At The Dog Races", and if my memory is correct, doing his own spot with "Willin'". In fact, the tensions within the band were obvious. I was there with a friend from Norwich, the wonderfully named Ben Smiley, and we had been given passes to the artist's bar, courtesy of another friend, Mick Cater, who was part of the promotion team for the show. We duly went there after the gig and, almost predictably, the only member of the band there was Lowell, still in his candy stripes, accompanied by a lady who I assumed was his wife. The rest of the band was noticeably absent. Lowell stayed only a few minutes, leaving just myself and Ben as the only patrons apart from Eric Idle and Phil Lynott who were deep in conversation with two young ladies. The only other person present was the barman who, assuming we must be celebrities of some sort and claiming to recognise Ben's face, quizzed us obsequiously but to no avail as to our identities. Ben particularly got great pleasure stringing him along, and when we left explained that the guy was himself from Norwich, hence the recognition, and had always been a "wanker". We left him no wiser as to which (non-existent) band his mysterious patrons belonged.

Chris Harrison, via email

TANX, BUT NO TANX

A grouse! I usually find myself agreeing with your reviewers but I was amazed at Graeme Thomson's *T.Rex* reviews in last month's *Uncut*. *Tanx* is a better album than the wonderful *A Beard Of Stars*? Only six out of ten for what was to these ears the best of the four *Tyrannosaurus Rex* offerings? And seven out of ten for the patchy *T.Rex* disc? Listen again, Mr Thomson. The songs on *A Beard Of Stars* still stand the test of time and, along with *Unicorn*, the album to my mind was never bettered by any of the *T.Rex* LPs. There! That's off my chest. Now, keep up the good work. **Keith Bell, via email**

TUB-THUMPING LEFTIES!

Reading your obituary of Pete Seeger [April issue] reminded me of the old jazz musician's joke: "What do you call 1,000 banjo players under the sea? A start." And it was interesting that his death coincided with the publication of *Singing From The Floor* and the possible return to public consciousness of Ewan MacColl. For the two men had much in common: they produced some of the unloveliest music in the history of popular music and they were active communists at a time when Western democracy was engaged in an existential fight against global totalitarian

socialism. To say they were on the wrong side of that argument would be quite an understatement. But really, thinking about the two of them reminded me what a disaster it is for any popular musician to embrace mainstream politics or start campaigning for parties or causes. Music is at its revolutionary best when it is subtle, mocking and subversive, driving social change by cultural change, not tied to ideology. And it is at its worst when it goes pious, self-righteous and tub-thumpingly leftie, up on stage at Carnegie Hall or at Live Aid. History should not be kind to either of them; history could start now! **Jon Grocock, Glastonbury**

MAGIC BUS MEMORY

Uncut's enlightening article on Johnny Cash's 'lost '80s' [April issue] reminded me of one of my favourite stories about my beautiful late sister, Amanda. In the early '80s Amanda was swept off her feet by Steve Michaels, the lead singer of the house band at Gilley's, the "world's biggest Honky Tonk" – a Texas C&W nightclub the size of a small town which featured in the John Travolta film, *Urban Cowboy*.

Although ultimately as good a husband as found in many C&W songs, Steve had a great voice and knew his way round a tune and did get the odd good gig outside of Gilley's. One of those gigs was



MY LIFE IN MUSIC

Chris Robinson

“Fuck robots!” The eclectic psychedelic pleasures of the Black Crowes and Brotherhood head...

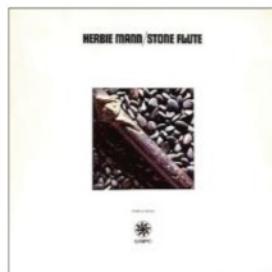


A record that leads to other worlds

Gábor Szabó

Dreams 1968

An incredible gypsy junkie guitar player, his music is an indoctrination into some otherworldly feeling. There are great jazz players with more chops, but Gábor had such an atmosphere! For the last eight or ten years, I've never travelled far without Gábor in my head. Being a Hungarian gypsy, he had a certain Eastern take, but early on, he played straight bop-jazz, too. He was super-innovative.



A psychedelic Sunday morning record

Herbie Mann

Stone Flute 1970

The guy played eastern music, soul, folk, pop... every music form, and he had such a great ear for cover tunes. *Stone Flute* is his psychedelic record – and when I say psych, I mean drugs; you're not psychedelic unless you're on psychedelics. The third track is his version of The Beatles' “Flying”, it's sublime. *Stone Flute* is a great last record you put on a Saturday night, and the first you put on a Sunday morning.



A perception-changing collaboration

Broadcast And The Focus Group

...Investigate Witch Cults Of The Radio Age 2009

It's such a sad thing that Trish [Keenan] isn't here to keep singing and making music. This record as a collaborative effort is magic... it's infinitely interesting and expansive. Psychedelic music is a perception changer; it can take a white, four-walled room and turn it into some exotic menagerie of colour or shape or form or anything.



My favourite blues record

Champion Jack Dupree

Blues From The Gutter 1958

I was talking to Derek Trucks about how if I had to pick one blues record, mine would be this. It's just super-down, super-dirty, a real portrayal of a culture and life I imagine would be euphoric, and nightmarish, but either way it's alien. Dirty, nasty songs of drugs, women and disease... it's called *Blues From The Gutter* for a reason! It's the dark side of that experience at its most glorious musical representation.



My favourite current band

White Fence

Family Perfume, Vol 1 & 2 2012

For the past three years, I've been blown away by Tim Presley's band. I'm so in love with the ramshackle, drugged-out beauty of this... like *The Basement Tapes* with Syd Barrett sitting in, and The Circle Jerks come over for two songs. It's inspiring – the CRB are more roots-driven, not as jagged, but White Fence have put things in my mind and musical language that would be different than before I heard them.

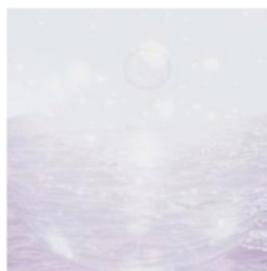


A record by a jazz master

Chico Hamilton

The Dealer 1966

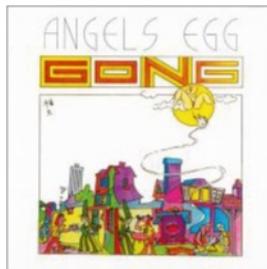
People are at Abbey Road Studios today, punching things into a computer, and I don't get it – fuck robots! Chico is just a master, the premier jazz drummer. I can't get enough. “The Dealer” is one of the funkiest grooves, with incredible guitar playing by Larry Coryell, sassy horn section, smart arrangements, impeccable recordings! And Ringo was into Chico Hamilton, so there y' go.



The Brotherhood's tourbus soundtrack

Dolphins Into The Future ...On Sea-Faring Isolation 2009

This record is really synthed out, with loops and new age sounds, like a sonic sculpture. We're really into that sort of stuff in the CRB – we say we're like a covered wagon with a warp drive in the back. This record is played on the bus quite a bit, often when we wake up. It's just so beautiful, so mesmerising. I like everything that's true to the essence, especially when it comes to psychedelic music.



An out-there song by a hero

Gong

I Never Glid Before 1973

I just picked one song, as I can't even begin to get into my love for Gong. You can imagine putting this on back then, when every other band sounded like, whatever...

The Grateful Dead, the great psychedelic, supreme weird being that that band was, were still playing country music, but Gong were way out there in outer space. I find it so beautiful and Daevid Allen is such a hero of mine.

*The Chris Robinson Brotherhood release their third studio album, *Phosphorescent Harvest*, on April 28 via Silver Arrow.*

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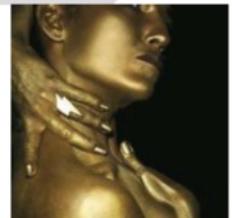
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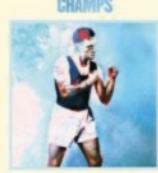


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