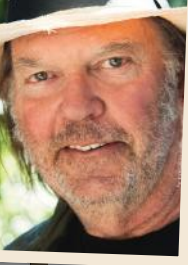


"From the bottom of your heart, the relegation zone/I saw this coming from the start/The shake, rattle and roll..."



NEIL YOUNG SPEAKS! UNCUT

OASIS
THE CURE
RODDY FRAME
SHARON
VAN ETTEN
39 PAGES OF
REVIEWS

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

"THE BEATLES, NICK CAVE, BOWIE... AND US!"

ARCTIC MONKEYS

...on their quest for
rock'n'roll immortality

KATE BUSH

Uncovered! Her
most revealing
interview ever

WARREN ZEVON

The true story of
The Excitable Boy

THE BLACK KEYS

"It's fun to try and
outdo yourself"

THE UNSEEN SYD BARRETT!

PLUS

ISAAC HAYES
BOB MOULD

TOUMANI DIABATÉ
THE HANDSOME FAMILY
JOHN SEBASTIAN

AND
XTC
ARC IRIS
PF SLOAN
MATT BERRY
JENNIFER HERREMA
WILLIAM ONYEABOR



#DammeCold

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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Matt Berry

Are we rolling?



WE'VE GOT REVIEWS in this issue of two Wreckless Eric albums that you may have missed when they were originally released, and which are now being re-released to coincide with Eric's 60th birthday in May, when he will also be having a celebratory bash at the Lexington on May 17.

I was duly reminded of the excitement of hearing his first single for Stiff, "Whole Wide World", rarely off the turntable when it was released in August 1977, and me shortly after it came out on my way to meet him in a pub in Wandsworth.

Anyway, I walk into his local and Eric's sitting over there in a corner wearing a white mac and dark glasses, patting the head of – what's *this*? His guide dog, apparently, though no-one had told me he was blind. And of course he's not. As I realise when the dog, harness trailing behind him, trots off to sit at the feet of an old chap in a parka, tapping the leg of the table at which he's sitting with a white stick.

It looks like Eric's had a few to drink, possibly more, but I get us a couple of pints, the first of rather too many for our own good, the afternoon going on for what seems a very long time indeed. I sit opposite Eric, who takes off his sunglasses and looks at me with some intensity.

"I was born in Newhaven, lived next to the railway station," he suddenly announces, taking me by surprise. I ask him why he's telling me this.

"Because I've never been interviewed before and I don't know what I'm supposed to tell you," he says. "Ask me a question. I'll tell you anything you want to know." OK. What was he doing before signing to Stiff and making "Whole Wide World", with Nick Lowe at the controls? "I was a quality control inspector in a lemonade factory," he says, and I wonder if he's making this up.

"But I had to leave because I was going deaf. The bottles made such a noise coming down the conveyor belts. There'd be three miles of bottles, rattling. I'd go home every night shaking, with the noise ringing in my head."

Previously, it now transpires, Eric had also been an art student in Hull.

"I had ambitions to be a sculptor," he says. "But I spent most of my time playing rock'n'roll or on the council rubbish tip, collecting things. I've got a letter that says I have the freedom of the Hull Corporation Rubbish Tip."

At art school, he was in a '60s covers band called Addis & The Flip Tops and also worked with free jazz drummer Eddie Prevost: "I knew a lot of free jazz musicians then. I played guitar in a trad jazz band, delved a bit in freeform and that. They thought I was a bit strange, though. One day, I threw a chair at a wall and after that I didn't go back."

Moving to London, he got a job as part-time cleaner at BHS, followed by the gig at the lemonade factory. This is when he decided it was time to launch his pop career by getting a recording contract. "I read about Stiff," he says, "and they sounded pretty gullible so I spent the weekend getting pissed and made this demo on the Monday morning."

Then he went back to the pub, got even drunker and later that afternoon went off in search of Stiff's west London HQ. "I thought they'd have a big office in a big office block, but when I got there it was only this grotty little shop front, full of these people. So I walked straight past. But they'd all seen me. They were gawping out the window. I was trying to act sensible, but I was a bit pissed. But they'd seen me, so I couldn't go away. I walked in like a clockwork man. This big bloke came up and said, 'What can I do for you?' And I looked up at him and I just said, 'I'm one of those cunts who bring tapes into record companies.' Then I turned around and walked out."

Two days later, Stiff called and not long after that he was in the studio with Nick, cutting "Whole Wide World". We talk a little about what gives him ideas for songs.

"I read a lot," he says. "And I get inspiration from that. Have you seen this week's *Woman's Own*? There's an article on Max Bygraves, who I think is marvellous. The trouble is," he adds, "I tend to read things as I find them. Last week, I caught myself reading a copy of *The Daily Express* from April 1974. I found it at the bottom of the wardrobe. Still," he says, "it's nice to keep up with what's going on in the world." Enjoy the issue...

Wreckless Eric
(guide dog
not shown)



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INSTANT KARMA!

THIS MONTH'S REVELATIONS FROM THE WORLD OF UNCUT

Featuring SYD BARRETT | JENNIFER HERREMA | PF SLOAN | ARC IRIS

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

“There are no rules to music!”

A handy update from Mr NEIL YOUNG on forthcoming projects. Including: the “historic art project” of *A Letter Home*, *Time Fades Away*, *Archives Volume 2*, live activity. Oh, and Pono...

IT'S APRIL 3, the night after Neil Young's fourth and final solo acoustic show at LA's Dolby Theatre, when he calls *Uncut* from his Broken Arrow ranch in Northern California. As with January's solo shows in New York and Canada, the LA sets have been a seductive mix of populist choices and leftfield surprises: on three nights out of four, Young performed *Rust Never Sleeps*' “Thrasher” again after a gap of 36 years.

Young's return to acoustic shows – centring, what's more, on the *Harvest* and *After The Gold Rush* songs which secured his stardom – is part of a typically packed and unpredictable slate. A science-fiction novel, a sequel to *Waging Heavy Peace*, a boxset of CSNY's 1974 tour, *Archives Volume 2*, the reissue of 1973's long-deleted *Time Fades Away*, the launch of a digital player and store, Pono, and July's live reconvening of Crazy Horse are all on the horizon.

First, though, comes what must be one of Young's weirdest ever recording projects: *A Letter Home*, cut straight to vinyl in the 1947 Voice-o-Graph recording booth at Jack White's Third Man Records in Nashville, Tennessee. At the same time as he's pushing Pono's possible digital future, Young has returned to the technology used by Elvis Presley on his first recording.

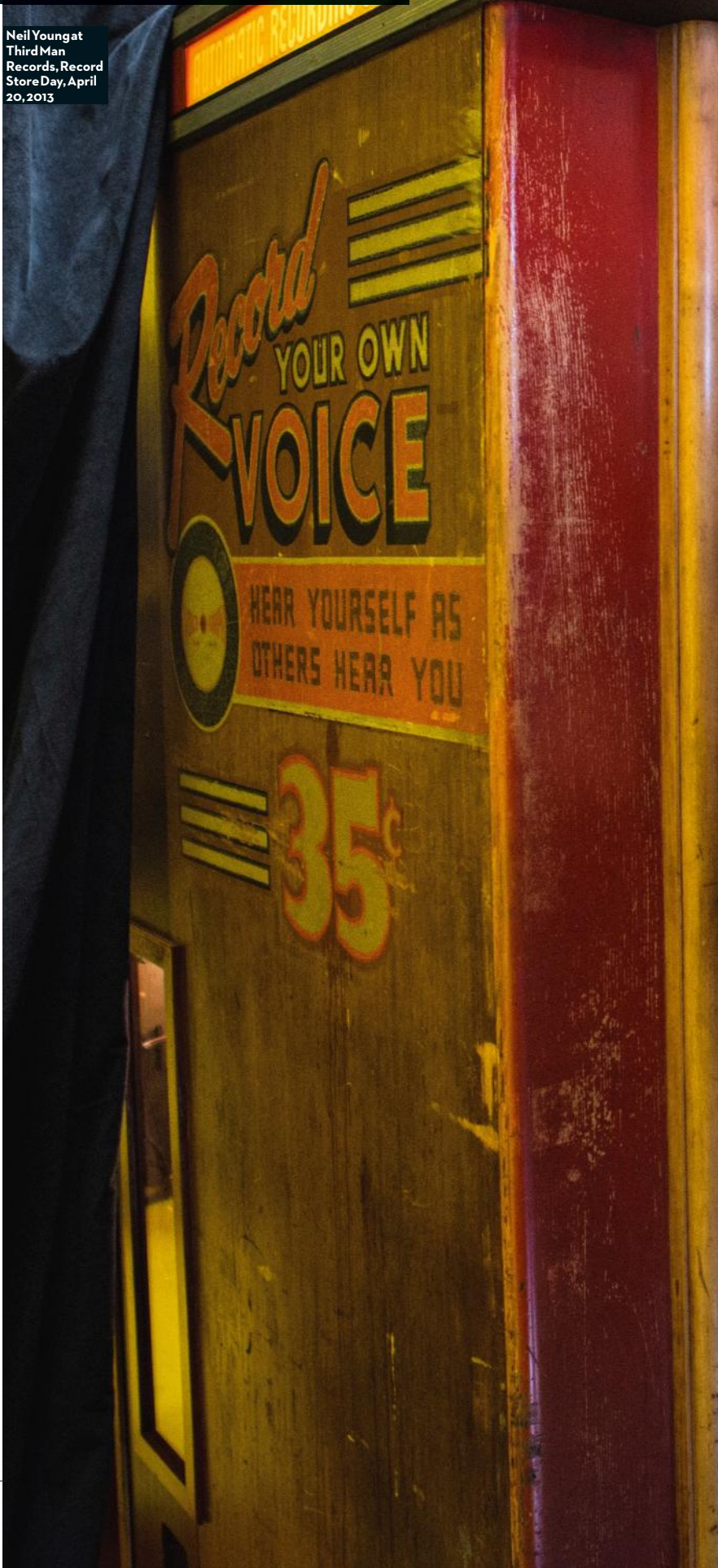
“He made one like that,” Young agrees. “*A Letter Home* in a '40s recording booth is an historic art project. Actually, in all ways it's superior to a CD, or an MP3. Because it's an analogue, full-fidelity production.” Did it feel like going back in time – like Young was making the sort of record he listened to as a kid?

“When you listen to it, it sounds like it was made a long, long time ago,” he promises. “We had a good time, and it was fun to work with Jack as a co-producer. Jack is a very talented man.”

Young deadpans that he's “not sure” about *A Letter Home*'s tracklisting, though its release was thought to be imminent as *Uncut* went to press. It's expected to be a folk covers album, probably including several songs played in LA, such as Gordon Lightfoot's “If You Could Read My Mind”, Phil Ochs' “Changes”, Tim Hardin's “Reason To Believe” and Dylan's “Blowin' In The Wind”.

Young used only an acoustic guitar and harmonica in the phone-box-sized booth. It's the sort of sparse approach he's kept to live so far this year. Was this any sort of reaction to last year's feedback-drenched, crowd-dividing Crazy Horse tour? “No, I don't think so,” he says. “Music is music. Some nights are great. Some nights aren't. You do the best you can with everything you have. There are no rules to music. There's no separation.”

Neil Young at Third Man Records, Record Store Day, April 20, 2013







Neil at the Dolby Theatre on April 1, 2014, Los Angeles

What, then, moved him to play so many of his early and best-known songs in his current shows?

"Just the fact that I have never done them together," he says simply.

Young's autobiography, *Waging Heavy Peace*, will have two print follow-ups. *Special Deluxe*, focusing even more than its predecessor on "my life as regards to my transportation", is due in October. More startlingly, he's writing a "fucking weird" science-fiction novel. Young has also mentioned his desire to make an album with an opposite yet similar ethic to *A Letter Home*, singing with a "full-blown orchestra", mono to one mic, "the way it was done in the past".

But it's Pono that's most on Young's mind. Since launching it with a speech at South By South West on March 11, he has been on the hustings for his answer to high-resolution, lossless digital listening. Young's Ponomusic company will offer a well-stocked, iTunes-style store and special, Toblerone-shaped digital players for its high-res sound from October. Whatever its merits, the

stubborn idealism behind it is of a piece with Young's other projects.

"It was fun to work with Jack White as co-producer. He's a very talented man..."

"This makes it possible for the listener to experience what the artist created in the studio," he says.

"Never being able to hear it, I found to be unacceptable. The whole idea is so people can get more of the soul

of the music – the space between the notes, the end of the echoes, all of these things that are not available on MP3s."

Of more immediate interest may be the digital availability of the holy grail of lost albums, *Time Fades Away*. Its release as part of the vinyl boxset *Official Release Series Discs 5-8* has been put back to November. The month before, "every record I've ever made" will be on Pono, Young says. That'll include *Time Fades Away*, then? "Yes, it will." *Archives 2* is also on the distant horizon. "Archives 2 still has a year to go before it's released, and it'll be released in a digital format, and it will have a lot of the same content that the Blu-ray [of the first *Archives*] had."

However we hear it, a whole lot of Neil is heading our way.

NICK HASTED

Neil Young & Crazy Horse play *Cork Live At The Marquee* (July 10), *London Hyde Park* (12) and *Liverpool Echo Arena* (13)

VETERAN OF DISORDER!

Welcome back JENNIFER HERREMA, and Black Bananas. What's she been up to with The Avalanches, and could a Royal Trux reunion really be on the cards?

"MY FRIENDS ARE always saying, 'you get so much stuff done,' but I consider myself pretty slow and lazy," laughs singer, songwriter and producer Jennifer Herrema, in her distinctive, smoke-cured drawl. "I don't work well with deadlines; I get stressed out and feel pressure and then things don't get done. So, I create my own world. I'm not very driven or ambitious, but there are things I like to do and I do them on a regular basis – although there's never any end game."

She's explaining her MO down the line from her home in Sunset Beach, California, where she's lived since 2004, helming first RTX – her post-Royal Trux project, who released three albums that spiked sleaze-rock with '80s metal and US classic-rock tropes – and now Black Bananas, whose second album, *Electric Brick Wall*, is out in June. Other "things" on Herrema's creative burner lately include designing denim lines for a large US clothing brand, launching a limited-edition jewellery company and exhibiting her (mostly collage-based) art works in Copenhagen and New York. Music, though, takes centre stage. Black Bananas recently remixed Liars' "Mess On A Mission" single and Herrema has written a song for the long-awaited second Avalanches album, on which she also sings. "They asked for a song about a kid that was kind of lost," she explains. "They wanted teenage, street-kid melancholy and they thought that'd be up my alley." As to when said record might see the light of day: "They seemed like they had a lot done

last year, so I hope this year. But inevitably they'll do something with the track I sent them – add stuff or cut it up – so I'm interested to hear what it turns into, as well."

Whenever it may surface, it's safe to say that track will reflect Herrema's distinctively degraded aesthetic, which characterised Royal Trux's attitudinal scuzz-rock and also informs *Electric Brick Wall* – a seductive hybrid of heavy funk, psychedelic jams and whacked-out R&B. When asked what thread runs through each of her projects, "the obvious answer is me," she decides. "I'm the common link. It's about things that touch me, and my taste. It's a bitches' brew – I take all the things I've admired and assimilate them into my own language and repertoire."

Reminders of Royal Trux's cultish impact have been issued via a series of re-releases since 2010 and in May, their "Radio Video" EP from 2000 will be added to the list. Which begs the question: is a reunion on the cards? "I don't think it's impossible, but it wouldn't be a reunion, as such. Neil [Hagerty, RTX's guitarist, who co-wrote two songs on the new BB album] and I have talked

about maybe setting something up, but I don't think we'd ever go back and

pretend we're the people we were then. It would be a fresh collaboration. We've talked about it and been offered big money, but I'm just not into the idea. It rubs me the wrong way, and it's the same for Neil. But we have discussed playing together, possibly. You never know."

SHARON O'CONNELL

Electric Brick Wall is released by Drag City on June 23



Strange fruit... Black Bananas' Jennifer Herrema

Talkinghead...
Barrett in a still
from 1969's
Psychodelia

David Bowie were regular visitors. He was introduced to Barrett by Mick Rock. "Syd was part of the scenario," Whitney recalls. "Anybody that would agree, I got to appear in the film, like Rupert Webster, who was in *If...*... I just had a camera and some psychedelic lighting. It was very amateur and everyone was very stoned. I'd tell people to do what they wanted. Some took their tops off,

some stared at the camera, talked, had a cup of tea... and I filmed it because they were fabulous people."

Barrett nearly didn't feature. "I took him to filming but when we got there I realised my camera didn't have a cassette," says Whitney. "We agreed to do it the next day in Old Church Street.

When I called Syd's flatmate, Duggie Fields, to check Syd had got back OK, Duggie told me he'd gone to Ibiza. He got back a few days later and we did the shooting. I knew Syd as well as

anybody could. He definitely wasn't on this planet but he was lovely, very charming. Most people were too much in awe of Syd to ask to film him. I think that comes across in the film. People who knew him said he looks so happy. He was a very troubled mind and this wasn't a great time."

Whitney screened the film at Chelsea in 1970 and then moved on to painting. "I gave my camera to Derek Jarman," he says. "I was living with [actress and artist] Luciana Martinez who said, 'Derek's a lousy painter, so why not give him your camera.' The rest is history. In my work now there are still hints of psychedelic imagery." The film has been screened once since, at a small film festival in 2007. Shutes says, "Kevin said it had been sitting under the bed since 1970 and now he was ready for somebody else to look after it. It's been valued at £10,000 by the BFI. It won't be a formal screening, but I'd like to loop it on a monitor as the ICA are keen to do something unusual."

PETER WATTS

See *Psychodelia* at Room & Book, ICA, June 6-8

REDISCOVERED

'His majesty was in command...'

SYD BARRETT unseen: the madcap caught on film in 1969. "People who knew him said he looks so happy."

A LOST FILM FEATURING Syd Barrett will be screened when it goes on sale this month at a London book fair. *Psychodelia* was made by artist Kevin Whitney in 1969 when he was studying at Chelsea College Of Arts. Barrett appears for one minute of the 22-minute film, which features faces on two reels of silent Super-8 film to be screened simultaneously while listening to The Velvet Underground's "Sister Ray".

Will Shutes, an expert on Barrett's art, will be

selling the film at the ICA on behalf of Whitney. He says, "Syd was so well-known but there's very little footage and Pink Floyd usually buy it. This was made in 1969, he was already in a bad way and so it's extremely difficult to find anything like this. It's quite stoned, very laconic, and it has a pretty remarkable effect when Syd's face appears."

Whitney, now the official artist of the Olympics, made the film in the basement of a house in Old Church Street, Chelsea, where Marc Bolan and



Andy Newmark collects a gold disc for sales of Roxy's *Avalon* at the Pullitzer Hotel, Amsterdam, September 5, 1982

AND ON DRUMS... ANDY NEWMARK

UNCUT'S GUIDE TO ROCK'S GREATEST SESSION PLAYERS

➤ New Yorker Andy Newmark (born 1950) first starting playing at the age of nine, was performing paid gigs at 15 and was the drummer for Sly And The Family Stone in 1972 and '73. Newmark played on David Bowie's *Young Americans* the next year and would go on to appear on John Lennon's final albums, *Double Fantasy* and *Milk And Honey*, two of Roxy Music's later albums, numerous Bryan Ferry solo albums, one track on *The Final Cut*, the last Pink Floyd album with Roger Waters in the

lineup, and David Gilmour's third solo album, *On An Island* (2006).

KEY SESSIONS: Sly And The Family Stone's *Fresh*, Pink Floyd's *The Final Cut*, John Lennon's *Double Fantasy* and *Milk And Honey*, Yoko Ono's *Season Of Glass*, David Bowie's *Young Americans*, Roxy Music's *Flesh & Blood* and *Avalon*, Bryan Ferry's *Boys & Girls*, *Bête Noire* and *Taxi*, David Gilmour's *On An Island*, George Harrison's *Dark Horse*, and Laura Nyro's *Season Of Lights*. **PHIL KING**



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WE'RE NEW HERE

ARC IRIS

Recommended this month: one of the stars of *Uncut's* Great Escape lineup – liberated from *The Low Anthem*!

IN THE SUMMER of 2007, Jocie Adams had a sudden change of heart. A clarinetist and music graduate from Rhode Island's Brown University, she was preparing to do a PhD in classical composition. Her application forms were filled in and a professor had been appointed to oversee her studies.

"Then the day came to send off all the paperwork," she recalls. "I drove to the post office, and stood in line. And then just as quickly I walked out, threw the papers in the trunk of my car and drove home. I suddenly knew that working in such isolation was not a good lifestyle choice for me. So I joined a band instead."

That band was The Low Anthem. Adams had been playing with them for several months and, by the autumn, they asked her to be a full-time member. Then last year, after six years and two albums, came another career change. Adams announced she was leaving to start her own project, Arc Iris, who are this month playing the Uncut

I'M YOUR FAN
"Think *Holiday* beyond the blues/
Ghetto girl with brand new shoes/
Think the Nile without the Virus/
Check out her spark with this Arc Iris."
Van Dyke Parks

Limb and her: Arc Iris' Jocie Adams

Stage at Brighton's Great Escape festival.

"You work in a band long enough and you start writing your own songs," reflects Adams. "I thought I'd be in The Low Anthem forever. But people grow in different ways. I wanted a change and I needed artistic freedom. We had freedom

but there was a limit to it. It seemed there was always someone there saying no."

The crunch came during sessions for the band's fifth, still-untitled album last summer. "I felt like my vision was out of place. I needed an outlet, and doing my own thing seemed the best way."

Doing her own thing meant exploring a

dizzying array of musical styles and drawing on her love of, among others, Chopin, Miles Davis, Genesis, Dirty Projectors and Grizzly Bear, all on one album. It also meant assembling a group of musicians, many of them childhood

friends, each with similarly eclectic musical backgrounds (between the eight of them, they've shared stages with Butthole Surfers, Vampire Weekend, TV On The Radio, Perry Farrell and Slash).

The resulting self-titled LP is a joyous, ambitious exploration of Adams and co's obsessions, moving between mournful alt.country, rollicking ragtime, shoo-whop harmonies and orchestral melodrama.

"We have a policy whereby if someone has an idea, we try it no matter what," says Adams. "Even if it doesn't sound good you learn something from it. It makes for an exciting and creative atmosphere." Adams was also keen to work her classical training into Arc Iris: "I have an opportunity here to reach a lot of people and I want to share this music with people who might not think of exploring it. It's something I have a gift for and I don't want to leave it behind."

FIONA STURGES

Arc Iris' self-titled debut is out now. They tour the UK in May, ending at the Uncut Stage at The Great Escape festival on May 9



A QUICK ONE

➤ In anticipation of the allegedly forthcoming 4:14 *Scream* album, our next *Uncut Ultimate Music Guide* focuses on **The Cure**. Inside: revelatory interviews from the *NME* and *MM* archives, forensic new reviews of every album, and scrupulously minimal references to 'Goth'... On sale May 15.

➤ A notably desirable reissue package imminent, as Sony dusts down **The The's** *Soul Mining* for the remastered/expanded vinyl treatment. Matt Johnson's 1983 masterpiece is scheduled to return on June 30.

➤ Connoisseurs of **John Lydon's** esoteric recent career will be delighted to hear he'll be joining Incubus' Brandon Boyd, Destiny's Child's Michelle Williams and 'N Sync's JC Chasez in a US touring production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* this summer. Lydon plays Herod, inheriting the role from its recent UK incumbent, Chris Moyles. A new autobiography – "about the life of a serious risk-taker" – is also promised.

➤ Meanwhile, trying not to get carried away here, tantalising news has broken of **Tom Waits** signing to a booking agency (namely, William Morris Endeavor) for the first time in 20 years. Could this mean a long-awaited return to touring? The Waits camp, as ever, remain inscrutable.

➤ Visit www.uncut.co.uk for all the latest, essential news, reviews and features from the world of *Uncut*.

CHRIS MCANDREW



Transjams: Bernard Butler and Jackie McKeown

UNCUT AT THE GREAT ESCAPE

Our final headliner confirmed for 2014: **TRANS!**

ALONGSIDE ARC IRIS, we can now reveal the other 11 artists who'll be playing the Uncut Stage at The Great Escape festival in Brighton this month (between May 8 and 10). Thursday night's show will be headlined by our redoubtable old friends **The Hold Steady**, with support from Kamila Thompson and James Walbourne's folk-rock project **The Rails**, finely ethereal Swede **Alice Boman**, and a rumbustious new Wisconsin band, **PHOX**, who've recently finishing recording in Justin Vernon's studio.

Friday night begins with the eccentric and beguiling singer/songwriter/harpist **Serafina Steer**, features sets from Weller-endorsed torchbearers of Canterbury

psych **Syd Arthur** and the terrific producer-turned-troubadour **Ethan Johns**, and ends with **Courtney Barnett**, whose *The Double EP: A Sea Of Split Peas* LP made such an impact on us last year.

Saturday, meanwhile, features **Arc Iris**, and two creative shapeshifters on the British folk scene, **Lisa Knapp** and **You Are Wolf**. Closing the show will be a much-anticipated set from Bernard Butler's new band **Trans**; motorik jams and rearing Television-style guitar face-offs should be eagerly anticipated.

Join us, please, at the Dome Studio. Tickets are still available for the whole festival at www.mamacolive.com/thegreatescape: £54.

RAY LAMONTAGNE
SUPERNOVA

THE NEW ALBUM
MAY 5TH



COLUMBIA

THE UNCUT PLAYLIST

ON THE STEREO THIS MONTH...

CAN

From The Rockpalast Archive

YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?v=VY5Q-6HSSM

Oh yeah! Now on YouTube, 79 mins of the freeform wonder-workers live on TV in 1970, with new recruit Damo Suzuki.

WILLIAM TYLER

Lost Colony MERGE

New EP from Nashville's ever-improving guitar adventurer. Epic cosmic Americana jams galore!

JACK WHITE

High Ball Stepper

THIRD MAN/XL

Crackling, menacing instrumental sets the juices flowing for the master's second solo LP, *Lazaretto*, due in June.

NEIL YOUNG

Thrasher YOUTUBE.COM/

WATCH?v=XTLOWNL93GO

A highlight of Neil's increasingly unpredictable 2014: the *Rust* nugget revived in LA for the first time in 36 years. Sketchy clip, but the sound's good.

KIM DEAL & MORGAN NAGLER

The Root VIMEO.COM/89355190

Skip the shabby Pixies reunion and dig this rumbling lo-fi gem, and its joyous guerrilla vid. The Breeders are back in the studio, too.

LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

The Long Goodbye (Live At Madison Square Garden) PARLOPHONE

An extravagant treat from the Record Store Day hoard, as LCD's entire four-hour farewell gig arrives as a 5LP boxset.

MIKE COOPER

Places I Know/The Machine Gun Co

With Mike Cooper PARADISE OF BACHELORS

Rediscovered: an early-'70s English folk singer in the vein of Bill Fay, with a predilection for wild jazz digressions.

OLGA BELL

Krai ONE LITTLE INDIAN

From Moscow via Alaska; one of the talented multitudes of Dirty Projectors goes acrobatically alone. In Russian.

GRANDMA SPARROW

Grandma Sparrow & His Piddletractor Orchestra SPACEBOMB

How can Spacebomb follow Matthew E White's debut? With a deranged whimsy that sounds like Zappa rescoring *Charlie & The Chocolate Factory*, obviously.

YOU ARE WOLF

Hawk To The Hunting Gone STONE TAPE

A potentially unheralded highlight of our Great Escape lineup: imagine Björk working her magic on the English folk tradition.

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



WELCOME BACK!

"You have to laugh or you'd throw up"

The remarkable stories of PF SLOAN. Ever heard the one about Dylan, Zorro and the topless pirates?

PF SLOAN STARTED young. His first guitar lesson was from Elvis Presley, he released his debut single at 14 ("All I Want Is Loving" as Flip Sloan in 1959) and by 16 was head of A&R and staff songwriter at Screen Gems. In 1965, still just 19, he moved to Dunhill, where he wrote "Eve Of Destruction" and played guitar for the Wrecking Crew. So it's no shock that *What's Exactly The Matter With Me?*, Sloan's autobiography, begins at a fair lick. By page 55 he's already met Elvis, written several hits, invented the fuzz guitar (perhaps) and become the first American to hear The Beatles and the Stones.

"Reading Keith Richards' book I realised I wasn't interested in his childhood, I just wanted to know how he came up with the riff for 'Satisfaction'," says Sloan from LA. "That's why I got straight to the stuff that was interesting."

There's plenty of that. The book follows Sloan's dual existence as Phil Sloan, songwriter for hire faking an English accent on things like "Meet Me Tonight Little Girl", and as PF Sloan, the protest singer behind "Eve...", "Let Me Be" and "This Mornin'", writing about social and psychological concerns at a time when much folk was swathed in allegory.

This contradiction caused complications for the naïve prodigy: folkies thought him fake, publishers were horrified he might be a Communist. "All those PF Sloan songs escaped," says Sloan. "It was the opposite of what it's supposed to be. It was like 'how dare you write this song?' The publishers wasn't interested in this type of consciousness."

Sloan records significant meetings with Elvis Presley, John Lennon and Bob Dylan. Elvis seems to know things about Sloan he couldn't possibly know; Dylan is attended by two topless blonde

pirates and Zorro. "That really happened," says Sloan. "This was a time when there was a lot of negativity about Dylan being an arrogant asshole. Then this story came out, how Dylan had set all this up as a practical joke, a comic opera, and people thought maybe there was more to him."

Other stars – Hendrix, Donovan, The Byrds – appear, but the book is also an attack on a rapacious industry that wishes to milk Sloan's talent and leave him for dead. At times, it's Kafkaesque, with Sloan, denied royalties and in the throes of a breakdown, having to prove he actually existed. "There was no safety net," says Sloan, who withdrew from public

life in 1972 for three decades, something addressed by Jimmy Webb's song, "PF Sloan", recently covered by Rumer. "When you realise nobody cares if you live or die, that's an eye-opener. The myth they still employ is that you are part of the family. I want to dispel that. If somebody says you are part of the family, think twice because it may be the Manson family."

Sloan laces this ugliness with absurd humour. "You have to laugh or you'd throw up," he says. "There were parts of my story I thought I had erased, but having to re-encounter it allowed me to see the golden thread that ran through it all. I learnt that I was there to be a witness, and I began to appreciate the importance of the consciousness that was in these songs and I saw I was prepared to fight

to the death to protect that. It caused me nothing but hardship, but when I meet people who tell me the songs had an impact, I know it was worth it."

PETER WATTS

"When you realise no-one cares if you live or die, it's an eye-opener"
PF SLOAN



What's Exactly The Matter With Me? by PF Sloan and SE Feinberg (Jawbone) is out June 24. PF Sloan will appear with Rumer at St James' Piccadilly on June 23

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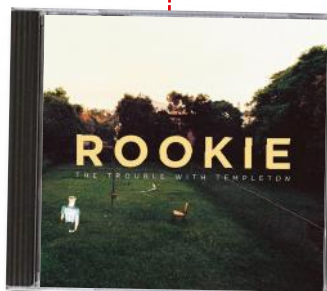
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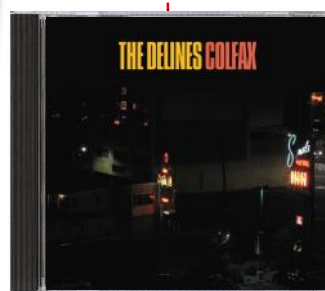
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ONE FOR THE ROAD

Your guide to this month's free CD

1 LEE BAINS III & THE GLORY FIRES

The Company Man

A rousing start this month, Lee Bains III & The Glory Fires are limber, ferocious Southern rockers from Birmingham, Alabama, who provide a literate, liberal update of the Lynyrd Skynyrd tradition. Their second LP, *Dereconstructed*, is reviewed on p77.

2 JD WILKES & THE DIRT DAUBERS

No Rest For The Wicked

The Dirt Daubers, too, sound like they've just been dragged out of a roadhouse, with their shitkicking garage blues. Kentucky Colonel Wilkes has previous as leader of The Legendary Shack Shakers, and here he's focused on mighty harmonica work, leaving vocals to wife Jessica. "No Rest..." is produced by Dead Boys legend Cheetah Chrome.

3 WYE OAK

Glory

Jenn Wasner was last sighted as a key constituent of the No Other Band, reconstructing Gene Clark's classic with Beach House and Robin Pecknold, among others. For Wye Oak's fourth, Wasner and Baltimore compatriot Andy Stack have moved from '02's indie-rock *Civilian* towards a gleaming electropop that recalls a more understated Eurythmics.

4 SMOKE FAIRIES

Your Own Silent Movie

Like Wye Oak, the UK duo Smoke Fairies have added gravity, polish and electronics to a folkish base for their fourth LP. "Your Own Silent Movie" is typically windswept; a subtly grandiose and gauzy ballad with a little Stevie Nicks in its DNA.



Wye Oak

5 THE BASEBALL PROJECT

Hola America!

Three concept albums into their odd run, the self-explanatory Baseball Project's love of the game remains fervid. Sporting agnostics may, however, still be interested in the personnel behind these rumbustious songs: Scott McCaughey, Steve Wynn, Peter Buck and Mike Mills, here turning baseball fandom into a rocking parable about immigration.

6 LAKE STREET DIVE

You Go Down Smooth

Fronted by terrific jazz singer Rachael Price, this bunch of alumni from Boston's New England Conservatory create rootsy soul-rock that stands comparison with that of the Alabama Shakes. Guest slots on the Letterman and DeGeneres shows indicate they might be as successful, too.

7 LIZ GREEN

Where The River Don't Flow

Liz Green's 2011 debut, *O, Devotion*, pegged her as an unlikely but beguiling Manchester analogue to Karen Dalton. That uncanny aspect remains on follow-up *Haul Away!*, but her remit has now expanded to a quaint take on Brechtian cabaret – as this track proves so strikingly.

8 CHUCK E WEISS

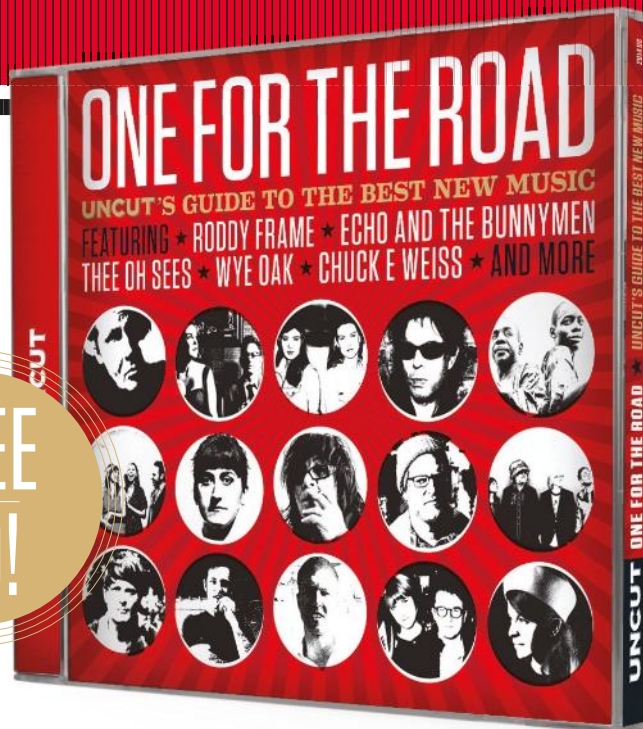
Bomb The Tracks

Weiss has long been one of Hollywood's most interesting musicians, albeit covertly. Here's proof; a dirty and exotically rhythm slice of R'n'B that indicts allied leaders

Lee Bains III & The Glory Fires



FREE CD!



for not doing more to prevent the Holocaust. Quirky, groovy, impassioned – and exec produced by Tom Waits and another of Weiss' boho compadres, Johnny Depp.

9 WOODEN WAND

When The Trail Goes Cold

James Jackson Toth's latest fine album, *Farmer's Corner*, finds his songwriting craftsmanship evolving with the help of, among others, guitarist William Tyler (Lambchop, Silver Jews, a clutch of stellar solo records). Bassist Darin Gray is prominent, too, on this gracefully unravelling stand-out track.

10 TOUMANI & SIDIKI

Diabaté Hamadoun Touré

A pan-generational kora jam from master of his craft Toumani Diabaté and his son, generating an elevated state comparable to that of Diabaté's two essential duo sets with Ali Farka Touré. *Uncut's* Andrew Mueller travelled to Bamako, Mali for the full story on the *Toumani & Sidiki* album (see p24).

11 RODDY FRAME

Forty Days Of Rain

The Aztec Camera man's new *Seven Dials* LP is his first in eight years. Nevertheless, he remains adept at making meticulously constructed songs sound effortless: "Forty Days Of Rain" is typical, hitching Frame's enduring gift for a melody and satisfyingly matured voice to a rich, Band-like backing. "I was lost but I'm found," he notes, having serendipitously arrived at a new home on Edwyn Collins' AED label.



Wooden Wand

12 JESCA HOOP

Featuring Sam Beam

Haunting My Dress

In an eccentric but rewarding career swerve, the Cali-raised/Manchester-based Hoop has revisited her 2009 *Hunting My Dress*, recasting the songs in acoustic settings, often as duets. A wise move, clearly, when she manages to improve on the originals and, in the case of the title track, rope in an auspicious foil of the Iron & Wine frontman's calibre.

13 HAMILTON LEITHAUSER

11 O'Clock Friday Night

Another player in the No Other project with Jenn Wasner, Leithauser's solo debut mostly presents the singer in a new light, as a Nilsson-style crooner. This track, though, is more reminiscent of Leithauser's day job as frontman of undervalued New York stalwarts The Walkmen.

14 ECHO AND THE BUNNYMEN

Burn It Down

Lavish strings usher in this highlight from the band's 12th album, starry-eyed anthemic rock with neat hints of their intoxicating formative years: Will Sergeant's serrated guitar line on the chorus; a last passage that evokes, tantalisingly, *Ocean Rain*.

15 THEE OH SEES

Encrypted Bounce

The garage-rock mavens have upped the psych quotient, so that the needling "Encrypted Bounce" has an air of early Pink Floyd before locking into the sort of throbbing, elongated groove that's made Thee Oh Sees one of rock's great live acts.

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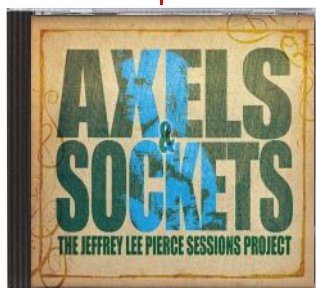
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AN AUDIENCE WITH...

Bob Mould

Interview: Michael Bonner
Photograph: Jay Blakesberg

The Hüsker Dü and Sugar man on band tensions, personal rage, professional wrestling, coming out in public and the wonder of Marks & Spencer sandwiches!

B

OB MOULD IS telling *Uncut* about his live appearance the previous night, at none other than New York's prestigious Carnegie Hall. "It was a tribute show," he explains. "Every year, they pick a musician and bring people in to do the songbook, and this year it was Paul Simon. I did 'Fakin' It' from *Bookends*. There was a lot of good stuff last night. John Doe, Judy Collins, the

Wilson sisters from Heart..." The presence of Mould on a bill alongside Heart's Nancy and Ann Wilson – and covering Paul Simon, no less – might seem incongruous for those who remember him as one-third of hardcore pioneers Hüsker Dü or even the indie rock mastermind behind Sugar. But 11 albums into his solo career – the latest, *Beauty & Ruin*, is out next month – Mould has mellowed with age. "As I get older, anger is a secondary emotion," he says. Mellow, yes, but busier than ever, it seems. "It's been a wild stretch since two years ago," he explains. "I had Sugar issues, and [2012 album] *The Silver Age*. We toured non-stop, finished up in South America, took a couple of days off and then went to Chicago to start *Beauty & Ruin*. Then I had the *Workbook* reissues..."

Fortunately, Mould has found a spare hour in his morning to answer your questions, covering everything from the current status of Hüsker Dü's back catalogue to his experiences as a scriptwriter for World Championship Wrestling and precisely how Marks & Spencer's sandwiches revolutionised touring in the UK.

"Let's do this properly," he says. If you insist...



HÜSKER DÜ

photo: Isaac Peterson

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Bands like the Pixies came along and referenced some of those ideas, and then that got passed to Nirvana – and then fortunately I happened to have a rock record ready! It was just, you know, sheer luck, good timing and hanging around that was the thing.

You were signed to Creation as they reached their peak as a commercial force in Britain: it was a boozy/druggy scene – how did you fit in with that?

Martin Bainbridge, Liverpool

We did pretty good. It didn't knock me off the

People were very curious to see what would happen. Like, "Woah, let's watch this. Let's see what Warners does to these guys." In the mid-'80s, that was the motif in the business. The A&R people could still shape-shift bands. I worried a lot about it. I remember writing this long pre-emptive apologist piece for *Maximum Rock 'n' Roll*. But nothing changed in the band, musically. Going to a major, it caused different kinds of friction in the band, but as far as the output? No. I was worried about it more than anybody else.

Sugar were a properly successful band: did it feel like vindication after years as an alternative act?

John Wiltshire, London

I was surprised that I got to hang around that long [laughs]! As we all know, talent is the first way into this business, but once you're in, then it's luck and timing. Hüskers did a lot of good work and we were grateful to make an impression.

wagon, so that's a testament to my will-power. Those were great times. I'm always grateful for the chance that Alan McGee took with my stuff. Especially after the two Virgin records, people were wondering what I was gonna do next and Alan was a fan and a supporter. One of the things I look back on fondly was the relationship between the label, the artists and the press. It would be, "Right then, you guys are coming over. We're gonna put you in a hotel, you're gonna start doing press at 9am, but at 4.30 we all have to go to this pub 'cos that's where everybody's gonna be." It's funny, when I was down in Austin a couple weeks ago I finally met Damon Albarn. We just did the obligatory photo and the "saw you last year at Coachella, loved you blah, blah", but I wish we had had more time to sit, because I'd like to know how he perceived that Blur/Oasis thing. For me, it was exciting to be near that, or sometimes in it.

STAR QUESTION



You have a lot of great songs that seem to come from a place of anger. After reading your autobiography, it sounds like you've found peace and acceptance with a lot of things, but your music remains furious. How do you tap into that place to write these songs? Or is it always there? *Craig Finn*

Yeah. The anger, rage, confusion. I think it's the same with a lot of musicians. You get raised in a chaotic house and music is a solace. I heard punk rock, got on a stage as a kid. I've got all this confusion from my childhood and with my sexuality. And it's the Reagan era...

All that made it tough for me to understand things clearly. That's what my rage in the early days of Hüsker Dü was about. But it gets harder as I get older. The physicality of it is hard and I hope I'm in a better place spiritually or emotionally. In the last year, I've been through a lot with family, with friends. Just yesterday, Dave Gregg from DOA passed on, and Frankie Knuckles. As I get older, when things like that happen, it's not a primary emotion for me any more, other than the anger of why the fuck do we have to leave so soon sometimes?

Hüsker Dü were the first band from the US hardcore scene to get a major-label deal: was that something your contemporaries regarded as a success or a sell-out? *Beatie Paul, Stockport*

A portrait of Bob Mould, a middle-aged man with a grey beard and glasses, wearing a yellow and brown plaid shirt. He is holding a large bouquet of yellow and white daffodils. The background shows a body of water and a concrete pillar.

“As I get older,
anger is not a
primary emotion
for me any more”

Bob Mould,
San Francisco,
February 20,
2014

❖ **Did you ever finish your degree? Any regrets if you didn't?** *Tony Ferguson, Bodmin*
One semester short and no regrets. My major was Urban Studies and '82 would have been my graduating year. I was keeping notes on the road for my thesis. I was emulating the writings of a sociologist named Howard Becker who'd written a book in the late '50s, *Outsiders*. It dealt with the subculture of jazz musicians. They had a lexicon and methodology different from the rest of culture and I used that as a template and applied to it my punk-rock experience. I wish I had my degree, but I think I made the right choice by following up on that *Land Speed Record* thing.

STAR QUESTION



How in the hell did you get started writing scripts for pro wrestling? Did your songwriting experience help?

Jason Isbell

The songwriting didn't help. As a kid, I grew up in snow country, so I used to be a hockey fan. But wrestling was my thing. I read magazines, learned as much as I could, and when I moved to Minneapolis I got to meet people in the business. They smarted me up to how the mechanics work. I was hooked when I saw how the magicians did their tricks. As time went on, I got to know other people in the business and started giving suggestions. In fall '99, a friend from one of the big companies called up and asked if I wanted to help with ideas, storylines and characters? I did that for seven months. It was great. Pro wrestling and rock'n'roll are similar in a lot of ways. The touring, the spectacle...

I get the impression from your book that you have infinitely more of a problem with Greg Norton than Grant Hart?

Simon Graham, Newcastle

It's superficially in the book, yes. But Greg's a great guy. When I spent the years looking at the band, the prevailing sentiment was that Bob Mould and Grant Hart are mortal enemies. It couldn't be further from the truth. I have had problems with things Grant has said publicly. It's stuff that bounces off now. Over the past year and a half, the three of us have had conversations. Things are moving forward. We're all on the same page as far as doing stuff. At the time, I had frustrations with Greg drifting away, but maybe he knew more about how the band was gonna end than I did. But with Grant? Only one person can fly the



Wonders of Creation:
Sugar in the early '90s
- Mould, centre

plane. Co-pilots are great and we swapped chairs for eight years. But I like flying the plane and I think he does too. It was a win-win in a way when it ended. But I'm happy for Grant. His recent LP [*The Argument*] got him back up and going.

Do you 'jam econo' like the Minutemen these days?

Richard Thwaites, Penrith

Do I drive my own truck to gigs? We're probably going back to that this year. I don't do tourbuses over here. In America lately, the touring has been flying into a city, renting a van, doing a loop and flying home. Every time I see an econo van, I think of Minutemen. In the US, with

"Co-pilots are great, but I like flying the plane, and I think Grant does too"

the distances, it's the same if not cheaper to fly. It's strange, touring's not what it used to be, but I know the drill. I've done it many times. The UK's better now, too, as there's all those Marks & Spencer roadside food stops. The sandwiches are good, and there's Costa Coffee. Not to be plugging chains, but it's better than it was when you'd pull over and go, "Where is food?" [laughs].

Will the Hüsker Dü records that came out on SST be re-released?

Luke Mumford, Halifax, Canada

There's been back and forth between SST and the Hüsker Dü estate, trying to figure out what's going on. There's been agreements and some things still up in the air.

There's non-disclosure, so I can't get into it too deeply, but there's been dialogue and I'm optimistic.

Your parents were shopkeepers, and you were seen as a great organiser in the early days of hardcore. Were those basic values of thrift and enterprise useful in your pop career?

Patrick Hart, Liverpool

Absolutely. When I was six, my dad bought a grocery store and my mum worked for a phone company, so we all worked in the store and learned how to ring up customers and keep the inventory stocked. That skill set was very useful getting into music, knowing the value of money and keeping things organised. To give Greg Norton his credit, if you go to the Experience Music Project in Seattle they've got some of the original ledgers on display from the early Hüsker Dü days that Greg used to keep. Some of the entries are always good: "gas \$5, beer \$8".

You were outed by *Spin* in the '90s. Were there any negative consequences, and are you still angry about your sexuality becoming public property?

Sylvia Lena, London

In 1994, Sugar was a big band in the UK and the US, and *Spin* went to Rykodisc and said, "We want to do a big feature on Bob, but we want to talk about his sexuality." Coming out was different than it is now and I'd always placed a premium on privacy. I didn't feel comfortable identifying myself as a gay musician. I wanted to be a musician and if I happened to be gay, that's great too. It's very different than someone like Jimmy Somerville, who did all the hard work. Dennis Cooper was a big fan and *Spin* asked him to do the piece. He came to Austin, Texas, where I was living, and spent a couple days with me

and my partner. We had a lot of good conversations but *Spin* led with a saucy byline, something like "I'm not a freak". I was like, "Oh, of everything I said, that's what you're gonna put on the cover? The gay community's gonna kill me." That's not me. I'm not a freak. I'm a normal person. Again, I worried about it way more than anybody else. It didn't really make much difference.

Do you still suffer from bad tinnitus? *Hedy West, Zurich*

My head rings all the time, but I've learned to live with it. I figure, the US military, they're on the leading edge of concussive hearing loss because of the troops in the field. So I'm guessing in 10 years they're gonna have a device I can snap on my ear and it'll retrain the muscles. I think those things may exist, but there's no point now. I'm going on tour in a couple of months!

Minneapolis is a friendly city: was there any cross-pollination between the punk scene and other music scenes? Did you get to hang out with Prince?

Mark Chaplin, Granchester

Minneapolis was amazing. I often reference '60s Detroit, where there was Motown, but also The Stooges and MC5. In Minneapolis the punks would play the Entry club. First Avenue was where *Purple Rain* was made. The north side was Prince, Terry & Jimmy, the south side was us, the Replacements, Soul Asylum. Everyone played the room, everyone met everyone, but it wasn't like Prince was getting up to play "New Day Rising" with us! ☺

Beauty & Ruin is out June 3 on Merge

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

ECLIPSES THE ORDINARY

2013 Ultimate Spirits Challenge, Finalist.
2012 World Whiskies Awards, Best Island
Spirits Challenge, Silver. 2011 International
2011 International Spirits Awards, Bronze.
Awards, Silver. 2010, Ultimate Beverage
2010 Ultimate Beverage Cocktail
2010 Ultimate Beverage Cocktail
(and Sand). 2010 Ultimate Beverage
(Scotch Sour). 2008 San Francisco
Gold. 2008 San Francisco
Best in Show Whisky.
& Spirit Competition,
World Spirits Competition,
(Best Packaging). 2007
Competition, Double Gold
Wine & Spirits
2006 International
2005 Spirits Journal
Distilled Spirits, 12 year



2013 The Scotch Whisky Masters, Silver.
12 years and under. 2012 International
Wine & Spirits Awards, Bronze.
2011 International Wines & Spirits
Cocktail Challenge, Finalist (Rob Roy).
Challenge, Finalist (Rusty Nail).
Challenge, Chairman's Trophy (Blood
Cocktail Challenge, Chairman's Trophy
World Spirits Competition, Double
World Spirits Competition,
2007 International Wine
Gold. 2007 San Francisco
Double Gold Medal
San Francisco World Spirits
Medal. 2006 International
Challenge, Silver Medal.
Spirits Challenge, Gold.
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HIGHLAND
ESTD PARK 1798
SINGLE MALT SCOTCH WHISKY

BLACK MOSES

The slaughterhouse prodigy who changed soul music forever, *Uncut* pieces together the long, lavish tale of ISAAC HAYES... From Stax songwriting genius and mind-expanding arranger, to revolutionary performer and extravagant potentate. "It was massive overkill of everything: cars, women, gold this, gold that..."

Story: Graeme Thomson

Photograph: Anthony Barboza

BILLED AS THE Black Woodstock, on August 20, 1972, Stax Records took over the final day of the annual Watts Summer Festival at the LA Coliseum for Wattstax. Ostensibly a fund-raiser for local community causes, the concert was also a PR tool for Stax and a show of the strength for the black community. The show ran from three in the afternoon until 11 at night, and for an admission fee of a dollar, the 112,000-capacity audience enjoyed a bill featuring the brightest stars on the Stax label – the Staple Singers, Eddie Floyd, David Porter and Carla and Rufus Thomas. Late into the night, however, a gold-coloured station wagon made its way towards the stage, carrying the event's headliner. Introduced by Jesse Jackson as one "bad, bad brother", Isaac Hayes exited the car and strolled onstage to the strains of "Theme From 'Shaft'" shrouded in a huge cape, which he stripped off to reveal a vest of gold chains. "He made this grand entrance," says Terry Manning, who recorded the show for the subsequent film and album. "He was a massive star at the top of his game."

Indeed, when he took the stage at Wattstax – on his 30th birthday – Hayes was deep into the imperial phase of his astonishing career. During his journey from in-house songwriter to the biggest star in black music, he broke a remarkable amount of new ground. His 1969 album *Hot Buttered Soul* transformed soul music from a three-minute thrill into something lushly cinematic, boldly experimental and long-form: Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On* and Stevie

Wonder's *Music Of My Mind* are among numerous albums which owe it a significant debt.

In 1972, the "Theme From 'Shaft'" made Hayes the first black musician to win an Academy Award. Hayes' work was revolutionary to the extent that his nickname, "Black Moses", seemed only moderately sacrilegious. "He wasn't singing about grits and getting funky, he was singing gorgeous, beautiful music, putting classical pop songs into a soul idiom in a way that no-one else

"Stax had its formula, but Isaac Hayes had other things he wanted to play..."

MARVELL THOMAS

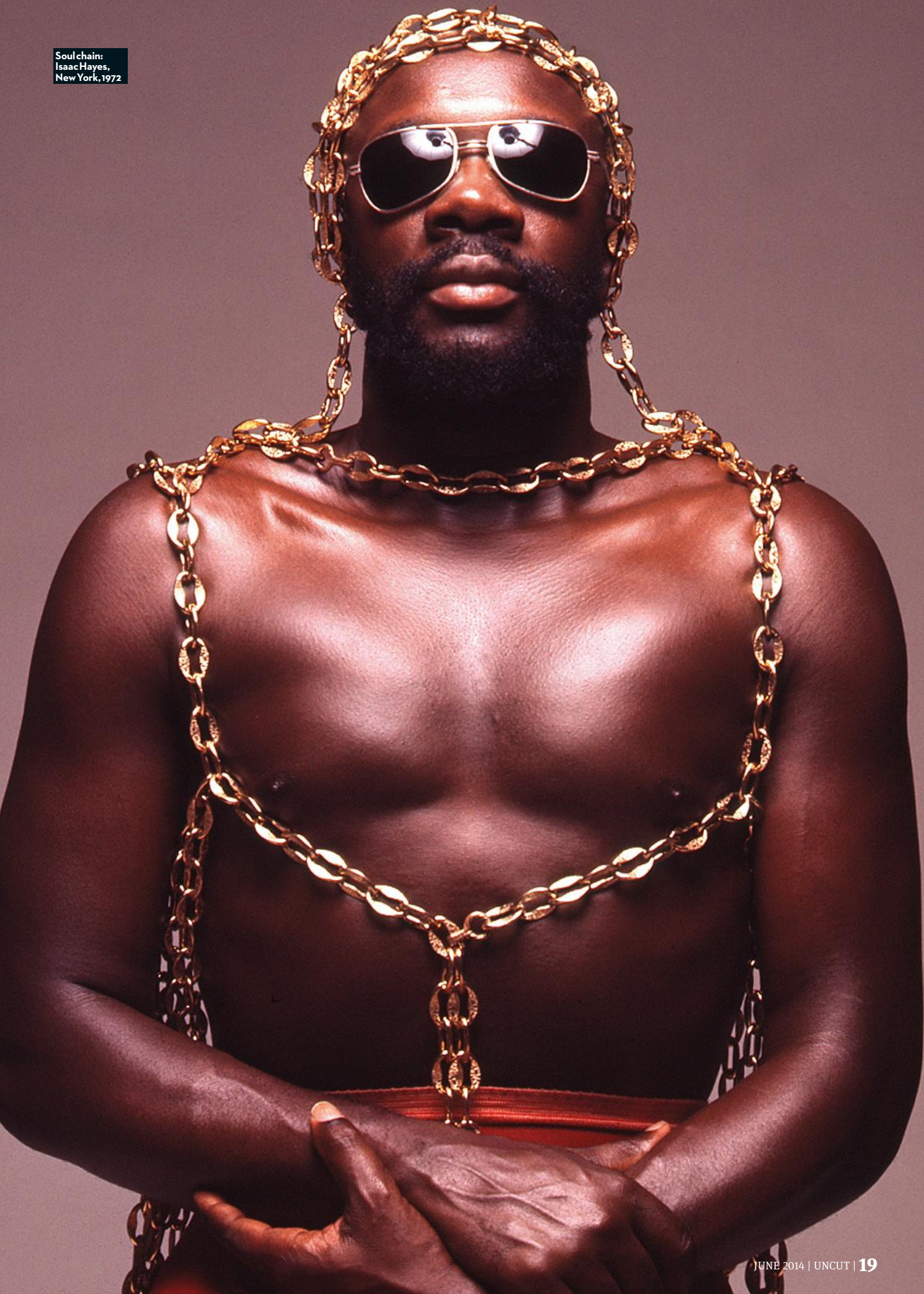
ever had," says Manning. "That kind of makes you a Moses, I guess, and boy, he took it on! Massive overkill of everything: cars, women, gold this, gold that, whole floors of hotels. But he was also a very deep musician. He could do a lot of things incredibly well." Looking back on the life and career of his friend Isaac Hayes, Al Bell, the former executive vice-president of Stax Records, says, "There was nothing like Isaac Hayes before Isaac Hayes."

HAYES' ROOTS WERE as humble as they come. Born to poor parents in the Memphis suburbs, his father quickly vanished, while his mother died in a psychiatric institution when he was 18 months old. On "Help Me Love", from 1971's *Black Moses*, Hayes sings, "I never had a mother's touch, or a father's hand". More than one friend believes his hyperactive private life – he had four wives and 12 children – was part of a life-long quest to fill the void. Raised by his grandmother in North Memphis, Hayes caught the music bug early. By 19 his income from working in a slaughterhouse was being supplemented by stints in local bands. When Stax's regular session keyboardist Booker T Jones wasn't available for sessions, Hayes started getting the call. By 1964, aged 22, he was working with David Porter, a staff writer at the label.

The pair knew each other from the days when Hayes had sung bass in local gospel quartet the Morning Stars and doo-wop group the Teen Tones. "He had a beautiful tone, and I knew he was talented," says Porter. "We talked, we were comfortable, and we decided to form a writing-producing relationship. I wanted us to have our own niche. Motown was effective but light, so we talked about creating songs with a heavy emphasis on the low-end and the church vibe. We stayed true to that. There was a method in the madness! Initially I'd say his greatest strength was music, and mine was telling the stories, but we both came up with musical and lyrical thoughts. The chemistry was unbelievable."

Between 1965 and 1968, Hayes and Porter wrote and produced a slew of classic Stax 45s, among ➔

Soul chain:
Isaac Hayes,
New York, 1972



➔ them “B-A-B-Y” for Carla Thomas and “Hold On, I’m Coming” and “Soul Man” for Sam & Dave. Although essentially shy, Hayes was his own man with a unique style. Sam Moore recalls their first meeting. “From down the street came a guy who had on a pink shirt, green pants, white belt, pink socks and white shoes. To myself I went, ‘Whaaaat?’ Like a rainbow coalition. I didn’t know who he was, but he was introduced as Isaac Hayes, and we were told that he and David were going to be our producers. I went, ‘Oh shit, I want to go home.’ But he was the sweetest, nicest guy you’d hope to find. He was patient and fun, and he taught me so much.”

Hayes also had relatively advanced musical tastes. “Stax had its formula, but Isaac had other things he wanted to play,” says Marvell Thomas, son of Rufus, brother of Carla, and a producer and musician at Stax. “Orchestral textures, Bacharach, Jimmy Webb. Material that was technically much more musical than standard R’n’B.”

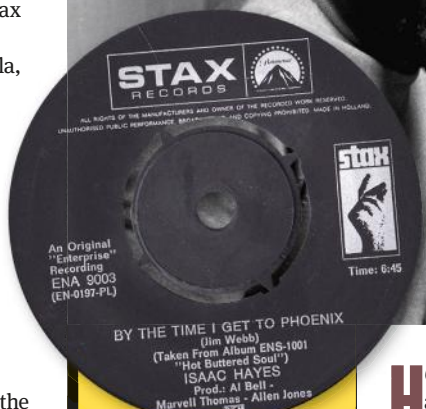
Yet his metamorphosis into a recording artist happened by chance. If the death of Otis Redding in December 1967 left Stax without its biggest star, the end of their distribution deal with Atlantic Records the following year was an even bigger blow. Not only did the label lose Sam & Dave, but due to a catastrophic contractual oversight, it deprived them of almost their entire back catalogue. Bell took drastic action, announcing the release of 27 albums. “I wanted to show the world we’re still here and we’re a major label,” he explains. Hayes was one of those recruited to the cause, but there are conflicting views over how ambitiously he pursued a solo career. Porter says he and Hayes never talked about making their own records. Sam Moore concurs. “I never thought that bubba would become an artist. He wasn’t looking for no deal. He was a producer. He could play sax and organ, but vocally he was no Brook Benton. Come on! His voice, I could take or leave. He could sound as if he was going out of key.”

According to Terry Manning, however, Hayes had ambition. “Isaac kept saying, ‘I want to make an album,’ and people laughed: ‘You look different, you’re not really artist material.’ Not putting him down, but kind of good-natured ribbing.”

The first album Hayes made for Stax reflected his lowly standing in the label’s list of priorities. *Presenting Isaac Hayes* was cut on August 20, 1968, during celebrations for his 26th birthday. Hayes, who didn’t drink, loosened up with a little Asti Spumanti and Bell set the tapes rolling. “Everybody had had a party that afternoon, so it was like, ‘Let’s go in the studio, have fun, and whatever winds up on the tape winds up on the tape!’” says Thomas. “It was very loose.”

Featuring Hayes, Duck Dunn on bass and Al Jackson on drums, *Presenting...* is a trio album offering an almost comically offhand mix of blues (“Rock Me Baby”), jazz standards (“Misty”) and two originals. It contains the spark of something unique, which it’s too sloppily conceived to deliver. “It wasn’t a big record,” says Porter. “Al was just trying to get some music done. After, Al wanted another record, and Isaac’s attitude was, ‘If I’m going to do another one, let me do it the way I want to do it.’”

Hayes with David Porter at the Stax studio, Memphis, 1968



COVER STORY

“IT WAS A MAJOR OPUS”

Jimmy Webb on Hayes’ “By The Time I Get To Phoenix”



“WHEN IT CAME out, I thought, ‘Wow, that’s unusual!’ It took up virtually the whole side of an album, but I really liked it.”

The whole talking blues thing at the beginning was like a novel – a major opus! It was to do with the Delta blues tradition, that way of telling a story, although people sometimes forget he did a great job of singing the song, too. I’d produced The Supremes, I understood R’n’B and soul artists, so it wasn’t so far-fetched to me. Isaac was a precursor to rap and hip-hop, he was trying to create something new. We later became friends, and I thanked him for doing the song. I told him it was a blessing for me.”

HOT BUTTERED SOUL had its roots in late-night jams at Memphis nightspots like the Tiki Club and Club La Ronde, where Hayes began working up the version of Jimmy Webb’s “By The Time I Get To Phoenix” that defined the direction of his career. “One night at Club La Ronde, we did ‘When Something Is Wrong With My Baby,’” Porter recalls. “Isaac was on a roll, he was on the B3 organ and he went off into talking, setting up ‘Phoenix’. Folks went nuts.” Holding onto a single organ note, joined by a cymbal and a throbbing bass pulse, he prefaced the song with a rap about “what the power of love can do”. Night after night, this story grew. “He used it to talk to the girls, and it worked,” says Bell. “He would always leave with one or two girls with him.”

“He’d constructed a story based on the lyrics and he had the kind of voice that could make it compelling,” says Terry Manning. “Nobody had done that with any focus before. He was serious about it. He really developed his style in the clubs. He learned timing, how to relate to an audience, and when to pull the trigger. He went back to Al Bell and said, ‘I’m getting this together. I think I’m an artist now.’”

Hayes’ slow-burning reinvention of “By The Time I Get To Phoenix” became the key track on *Hot Buttered Soul*, alongside Bacharach & David’s “Walk On By”, which he stretched into a 12-minute fusion of psychedelic rock, funk, jazz and soul. He recorded both tracks at Ardent Studios with Stax’s in-house band, The Bar-Kays. Marvell Thomas played keyboards and co-produced. Bell was executive producer and Terry Manning engineered. “It was fun, we had nothing to prove,” says Thomas. “We weren’t some hot-shot group following up a hit album. It wasn’t heavy, we just did it.”

“It was three or four evenings, from seven until midnight,” says Manning. “Pretty quick. He was going for the live feel, playing organ, singing and directing all at once. I can still see him bringing his head and his left arm down on ‘Phoenix’ and watching all the players fall in, going down off of a gentle cliff into a downbeat. Just magic.”

The length of the tracks was as much a matter of expediency as artistry. “I wanted them as long as possible because he only had two songs and I had to get me an album,” says Bell. “I told Marvell to keep him playing and keep the excitement going. We ended up with 18 minutes on ‘Phoenix’ and 12 minutes on ‘Walk On By’, but we still needed something else.” After recording the relatively conventional ballad “One Woman”, Hayes and Bell wrote a song which fused the feel of Rosco Gordon’s “Just A Little Bit” and a phrase Bell had coined in high school for “people who use and abuse long words” – “Hyperbolicsyllabicsesquedalynistic” (misspelled on the album as ‘...mistic’), a funky 10-minute blues with



Hayes with The Bar-Kays at the release party for the group’s “Son Of Shaft” single, 1972



a touch of Hendrix in its DNA.

With four songs spread over 43 minutes, Bell had his album. He

stumbled on the title phrase after seeing an advert for “Hot Buttered Rum” in a Jamaican in-flight magazine. Released on September 23, 1969, the lush, unhurried, late-night suite joined the dots between orchestral rock, Southern soul, jazz, classic pop and funk. “It was understood from the very beginning that this was a different type of album,” says Manning. “Not on the pop or soul map, not following anybody. We didn’t see how it could get played on the radio.”

Slowly, however, DJs at jazz stations began playing the entire album in the early hours. It broke in Detroit, word spread and it was picked up by mainstream radio. Eventually, the album sold three million copies, reached No 8 in the US charts and spawned two entirely unlikely Top 40 singles. Even edited down for radio, “Walk On By” and “Phoenix” lasted over four minutes and almost seven minutes respectively. “It was unique,” says Bell. “After that, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye and others started doing albums seriously. Stevie really went crazy with it. It was stratospheric, and Isaac became the talk of the industry.”

HAYES’ FIRST GIG was at Detroit’s Masonic Temple Hall. He was paid \$25,000, a hefty price tag for someone who didn’t regard himself as a natural frontman. “Isaac was basically an introvert,” says Marvell Thomas, his piano player and musical director on the road. “The first few performances, he stayed out of the spotlight, over on the side of the stage hiding behind a Hammond B3. I said one day, ‘Look, man, you’re the star here. The attention should be on you. We need to put you out front.’ It took him a while to get over the stage fright, but he came around.” His shows gradually became more lavish and theatrical, his image increasingly larger than life, as he took to the stage bare-

chested, covered in huge gold chains. Hayes followed *Hot Buttered Soul* with *The Isaac Hayes Movement* and *...To Be Continued*, sticking with the template of his breakthrough album. Featuring just four and five tracks respectively, they included two more mammoth reinterpretations of Bacharach & David tunes: “I Just Don’t Know What To Do With Myself” on *...Movement*, and an 11-minute rendition of “The Look Of Love” on *...To Be Continued*. The albums reached the Top 10, but Hayes’ status as America’s most iconic black artist was sealed by *Shaft* and *Black Moses*, both released in the second half of 1971. Directed by Gordon Parks, *Shaft* followed the private detective through the crime-riddled streets of New York. Al Bell had been trying to manoeuvre Stax into the film world for years, and indeed Hayes had hoped to land the lead role. In the end John Shaft was played by Richard Roundtree, a decision which Hayes admitted left him “crushed”.

“We had to fight for Isaac to do it,” says Bell. “MGM wanted Quincy Jones to do it as a normal black movie soundtrack. They told me, ‘Blacks don’t sell soundtrack albums.’” Reflecting the low priority MGM placed on what they considered just another cheap, disposable flick, Hayes was given only three days to cut the music for the movie at a Hollywood studio. When it came to recording the album, however, no expense was spared, with Stax paying for additional sessions in Memphis. “We hired top-notch musicians,” says Bell. “We visualised it as a high-quality album which could stand on its own two feet.”

Hayes’ music not only enhances the mood of the film, it makes for a beautifully produced, richly atmospheric double-album on its own terms. The unforgettable theme song, with its hi-hat and wah-wah hook, is a masterpiece of suspense and release.

“Soulsville” proved Hayes hadn’t lost his knack for classic Southern soul balladry or extended funk workouts, but what makes *Shaft* so thrilling is its range, as it moves from Wes Montgomery jazz on “Walk From Regio’s” to the sensitive orchestrations of “Ellie’s Love Theme”.

“The music fit right into everything Richard Roundtree was doing,” says Porter. “Yet when you take away the visuals

“Next thing I knew, Isaac was suing Stax... I’d say he was briefly insane”

AL BELL

BUTTERED JAMS

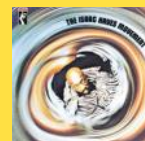
EPIC IKE

Hayes’ top five extended workouts



PRECIOUS, PRECIOUS
(PRESENTING ISAAC HAYES, 1968)

Originally edited to under three minutes, the full version of Hayes’ debut opener is an entertaining oddity. Yes, it’s 19:08 of half-cut groaning and unfocused jamming, but it’s a tantalising clue to where he’s heading.



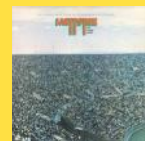
I STAND ACCUSED (THE ISAAC HAYES MOVEMENT, 1970)

Prefaced by a trademark rap in which he makes his – pretty persuasive – plea to a woman promised to another, Hayes’ take on Jerry and William Butler’s soul classic is 11:39 of slow-burning longing.



DO YOUR THING
(SHAFT, 1971)

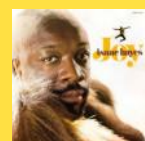
The edit became a hit single, but the full 19:31 version is one of Hayes’ greatest grooves, given wings by Charles Pitts’ stratospheric guitar.



AIN'T NO SUNSHINE/ LONELY AVENUE

(WATTSTAX, 1973)

Running to 17:06, this powerful, prowling fusion of classics by Bill Withers and Doc Pomus is an awesome example of Hayes at the peak of his powers as a performer.



JOY (JOY, 1973)

Sixteen minutes of liquid funk, Hayes’ paean to a new lover is more than just a groove. The strings and horns whip into one of the most, well, joyous choruses in his entire catalogue.

and just listen to the songs, the emotion also manifests itself on its own. It's genius. He created each piece of music off of the visual energy, and yet it works on its own."

"Theme From 'Shaft'" won the Oscar for Best Original Song, and Hayes also won a Golden Globe, a Grammy and a Bafta for the score. Both the single and LP went to No 1, the album staying on the charts for 60 weeks. Most importantly, laughs Bell, "We out-grossed the motion picture."

The film's central character played into Hayes' evolving perception of himself. "We'd started presenting him as this black Mandingo," says Bell. "The muscular black guy, straight, drug-free, virile. The chains on him were slave chains, but they were gold, so there was freedom vested in that whole thing." Hayes started work on *Black Moses* at the same time as the *Shaft* soundtrack. It's a consummate piece of myth-making. The sleeve folds out into a three-foot-high cruciform depicting the singer in full-length robes, standing by the water's edge. His head is tilted heaven-ward and his arms are outstretched. The message was manifest. Bow down, believers, to the saviour of soul.

"In Memphis we had a little mantra we used to recite around the studio: never, ever believe your press clippings," says Thomas. "But he had a whole new group of people working with him by then, the entourage had gotten a lot larger. He was living up in the Hollywood Hills in the house that Sly Stone used to own. He became infatuated with stardom, and the black Moses thing."



Shaftstar Richard Roundtree and Hayes chat during a break from the recording session for "Shaft", 1971

"It was hard not to get carried away," says Bell. "He was human, and it was coming like it had never come before. He always was attracted to the ladies, and the ladies were attracted to him, and that just exploded. He felt real good about himself, to put it mildly."

Hayes was going through a divorce from his second wife, Emily, which informed the desperate pleading on songs like "Ike's Rap II", later sampled on Portishead's "Glory Box". His royalty rate was huge – "he was making crazy money," says Porter – and he was surrounded by unsavoury characters, notably Johnny Baylor, reputedly a member of New York's Black Mafia and an ex-sparring partner of Sugar Ray Robinson. With his sidekick Dino Woodard, Baylor was there to ensure Hayes got paid on tour, but was soon throwing his weight around indiscriminately. Guns were pulled on musicians, pistol-whippings doled out, and an atmosphere of intimidation permeated his entourage. "There were times when I thought Isaac turned a blind eye to all that," admits Manning. "I was never quite sure what his feelings were about Johnny and his usefulness."

By 1972, Hayes suspected that Baylor was ripping him off. Baylor responded by marching into Stax and holding his boss at gunpoint. Outside, heavies from both camps were lined up with weapons drawn. Eventually the police arrived and the situation was defused. "You don't want to talk about Johnny Baylor," sighs Marvell Thomas. "He was the single worst thing that ever happened to Isaac. It deteriorated very rapidly,

THE RACE WAR

SUPERFLY GUY

RACE WAS A key element in Hayes' image and music.

"The songs we wrote had a motivational aspect for African-Americans," says David Porter. "When Isaac saw that it worked, it gave him inspiration to be comfortable in his skin in his solo thing." The assassination of Martin Luther King (below) in April 1968 at the Lorraine Motel, a favourite hang-out for Stax artists,



hardened his stance. Until then, blacks and whites had worked and socialised oblivious to racial divides, but things changed after the murder. Hayes later admitted he became "bitter and angry". "The magic that was the private world of Stax popped open after Dr King was killed," says Manning. "Isaac became more aware of the horrors of race

discrimination. He was more amenable to becoming the Black Moses, to lead and do something."



Heavy manners: Johnny Baylor, left, Dino Woodard and friend at the Stax Christmas party, December 20, 1968

he got really crazy and dangerous."

The stand-off seemed to symbolise the beginning of the end. After *Black Moses*, Hayes headlined Wattstax in LA on August 20, 1972, but by the release of *Joy* in 1973 the magic was slipping away. "It became formulaic," says Manning. "I would have liked to have seen a little more direct creativity." Hayes' wild extravagance were also coming home to roost. The huge debts he had accrued over the past five years would shortly lead to bankruptcy, the loss of his home and all future royalties on his back catalogue. First, though, they destroyed his relationship with Stax. In 1974, Hayes sued the label for \$5.3m. "Isaac owed the banks money, and they were trying to pit him against me," says Bell. "I won't go into all of that. They used him and he allowed himself to fall into it. It separated the two of us and the next thing I knew he was suing me and Stax, and all kinds of nasty things. I'd say he became temporarily insane. Years later I embraced him and said, 'Hey man, I forgive you.' We both knew what I was talking about."

The settlement of the suit allowed Hayes to leave Stax with a six-figure sum in his pocket. The loss of the money and their leading artist effectively sunk the label. Stax went bankrupt in 1975, the same year Hayes released the underwhelming *Chocolate Chip* on ABC. His star was also on the wane. Although he continued releasing albums through the late '70s and early '80s, flirting with disco and working with Millie Jackson and Dionne Warwick, they proved no match for his Stax releases, either artistically or commercially. For much of the '80s and '90s, Hayes focused on acting, essentially playing himself in *Miami Vice*, *The A-Team*, *The Fresh Prince Of Bel-Air* and *Escape From New York*. Latterly, his fame rested as much on voicing Chef in Comedy Central's *South Park*, and for his controversial commitment to Scientology, as for his music, although there was one last attempt to rekindle former glories. *Branded*, released in 1995, was no *Shaft*, but it somehow managed to transport The Lovin' Spoonful's "Summer In The City" to Soulsville.

Hayes continued to perform following a stroke in 2006, but he never fully recovered. "After the stroke he couldn't remember a lot of things that had happened to him," says David Porter. "That had a devastating effect on him." He died on August 10, 2008, aged 65. Porter, his close friend and writing partner for 45 years, believes the

man who transformed soul music remains badly under-appreciated. "Here's someone who sold millions of records as a producer-writer, then as an artist,

won an Academy Award and made some of the greatest records ever," he says. "Isaac still doesn't get enough kudos for his talent, or the change he brought about in the music industry from an artistic standpoint. What he did was simply amazing." ❶

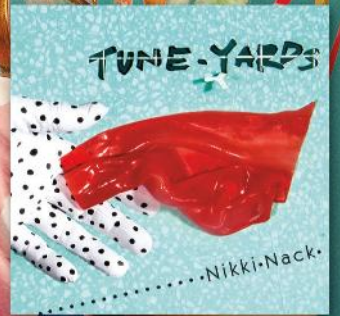


TUNE-YARDS



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Kings of the kora:
Toumani Diabaté
and his son, Sidiki



Bamako, Mali. A courtyard of rubble. A state of emergency. “Don’t give up the fight!” An audience with two generations of the country’s most storied musical dynasty; **Toumani Diabaté** and his son Sidiki.

Story: Andrew Mueller

Photograph: Youri Lenquette

TOUMANI DIABATÉ’S NEW house is about half there, he reckons. At the moment, it’s a two-storey L-shaped shell of concrete and grey brick, enclosing a courtyard of rubble. In this space, a few deckchairs surround a blue and gold prayer mat, upon which a small gathering of Diabaté’s friends take turns. It’s early evening, darkness descending, Bamako’s 40-degree daytime heat mercifully tapering. A group of young workmen, done for the day, listen to a hip-hop track by Toumani’s son, Sidiki Diabaté, on a mobile phone. When this building is finished, Toumani explains, it will be a family home and a guesthouse – accommodation for visiting friends, musicians and journalists. There aren’t many people coming to Mali now – a half-decade of headlines about a Tuareg revolt, an Islamist insurgency, a coup d’état, an attempted counter-coup, another sort-of coup and a French-led military intervention is tough on anyone’s tourist trade. As such, it’s difficult not to perceive metaphor in Diabaté’s choice of this hopeful project as an interview location. “I know,” he says, “that everyone around the world was talking about Mali, and everyone here was very sad; we’d never seen something like what has happened here. So I’m trying to share what I have with the people, what I can bring from outside, from Western countries. Talking with the people. Telling them to be themselves, don’t change, don’t give up the fight.”

Diabaté, 48, is plausibly Mali’s most famous living citizen, by most estimations the finest exponent of the 21-string West African harp called the kora. Certainly, he wears one of Mali’s most famous names. He is the son of Sidiki Diabaté, the legendary King Of The Kora, the brother of Madou Sidiki Diabaté, another famous kora player and, more recently, the father of another Sidiki Diabaté, one of Mali’s biggest hip-hop stars, and no slouch on the kora either. As such, Diabaté takes seriously a self-imposed duty to his country. He doesn’t have to be here. He holds a diplomatic passport, is admired all over the world, and judging by his means of transport, is not short of a quid – rare are the likes of Diabaté’s tinted-windowed Chrysler 300 on Bamako’s dusty streets, which are mostly choked with dilapidated, umpteenth-hand jalopies, and cheap, chunky Chinese-made motorcycles. He doesn’t even have to be in this rugged part of downtown Bamako, where open sewers run alongside unsealed roads; there are nicer suburbs. “I can go anywhere,” he agrees. “But if I stay, I get a chance to be a representative, to communicate. And I prefer to stay in my country. Mali is the heart of Africa’s culture.”

Diabaté’s defensiveness is understandable, amid Mali’s recent circumstances. Mali’s music, so long its most celebrated export, has been among the victims of Mali’s recent troubles and not merely as incidental collateral damage. To the (mostly) foreign Islamist militants who

EXPLAINING THE NAMES...

Toumani Diabaté introduces the people and places acknowledged in the titles on *Toumani & Sidiki*



HAMADOUN TOURÉ (ABOVE)

Mali-born Secretary-General of the International Telecommunications Union.

"When people left the north to get away from the terrorists, he gave computers to people to make communications easier. He helped a lot."

CLAUDIA & SALMA

Daughters of Diabaté's manager, Saul Presa.

"We tour a lot and we miss our families. So that song is to let them know that while we're on the road, we're thinking about them, always."

RACHID OUGUINI

Algerian historian and a champion of Malian music.

"He helped Algeria and Mali to become friends again."

TOGUNA INDUSTRIES

Innovative Malian agricultural corporation.

"After the coup d'état, there was so much rubbish in the streets. So the company moved the rubbish outside Bamako."

LAMPEDUSA

Italian island, often a target destination for African emigrants on illegal, unreliable boats.

"This story happened at the same time as the crisis in Mali. 300 people died in one boat. This is too bad. Too bad."

BAGADAJI SIRIFOULA

A district in Bamako.

"It's where the big market is, and the big mosque. The families there are very religious, and they did a great job in the crisis time. They helped keep people calm, and I appreciate that. They held meetings, and told people not to fight. This is a very special thing."

TIJANIYA

The strain of Sufi Islam to which Toumani and Sidiki subscribe.

"Islam today has a bad reputation. The bad people put on Muslim clothes and then go to kill, and give Islam that bad reputation. But the clothes cannot make you religious."



DR CHEIKH MODIBO DIARRA (ABOVE)

Former NASA astrophysicist and chairman of Microsoft Africa, briefly Prime Minister of Mali in 2012.

"At that time, no money was coming from outside to Mali. So they worked for nothing."

ACI 2000 DIABY

A new suburb of Bamako - and one of its inhabitants.

"ACI 2000 is a very modern, expensive area. There's a guy there called Mamadou Diaby, a marabout [holy man]. He's a good example."

BANSANG

A town in Gambia.

"It's where my father came from, and where he learned to play the kora."

seized swathes of the country's north in 2012, music was an affront and a target: as their instruments and studios burned behind them, hundreds of musicians fled. The festivals which used to attract thousands from all over the world – Festival sur le Niger in Segou, Festival au Desert, outside Timbuktu, were cancelled (the former returned this year, the latter remains in exile). In Bamako, a state of emergency closed the venues on which the city's music scene depended. "For 20 years now," says Diabaté, "if I'm in Mali, I play every week, usually on a Friday night, for free, for my fans. But for one and a half years, if I wanted to play the kora, I had to play it inside." Diabaté's new album, *Toumani & Sidiki*, recorded with his son, feels therefore like two records. Most straightforwardly, it's a tour-de-force by a pair of dazzling virtuosi. More subtly, it can be heard as a protest record – a protest in favour of its very right to exist.

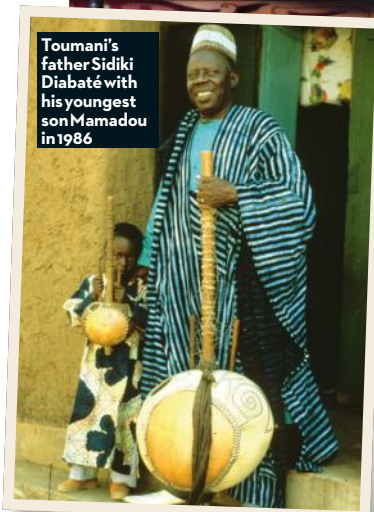
MORE THAN MOST musicians, both Toumani and Sidiki Diabaté can claim to have been born to their art. They – and, according to Toumani, 70 generations before them – are heirs to a hereditary caste of cultural custodians known as griots. It is an exclusive calling – only male descendants of griots can call themselves griots. "Seven centuries ago," explains Toumani, "there were no books, no writers. So the griot people took care of the history, and passed it from father to son, until now. Today we have internet and mobile phones, but griot men know the histories. So the music is talking about Malian histories. All the songs in the griot repertoire are about something. Like if a king makes a peace between two nations, the griot people compose a song to give a date. But in the griot repertoire we have thousands of songs – some composed for peace, some composed for war, some for children, for farmers, for water, for the Sahara. All the things we have."

For Toumani, the griot's vocation includes a certain ambassadorial role. He ticks off a few of his collaborations with non-Malian artists – Björk, Damon Albarn [see panel right], Herbie Hancock, Taj Mahal, the London Symphony Orchestra. These are, he says, his way of telling the world about

The Diabatés relaxing at home: heirs to a hereditary caste of cultural custodians – the griots



Toumani's father Sidiki Diabaté with his youngest son Mamadou in 1986



Mali, and the kora – but also, he emphasises, a means of sating an unusually restless muse. Malian singer Rokia Traoré agrees: "Of all the musicians I know, Toumani is most curious about music. He listens to everything, which is not so common in African music, where there's such a rich culture that most

musicians, especially from the griot tradition, don't have time to be curious about the other – they never finish learning their own stuff. But he's not just playing the kora and inviting people to follow him. He's also learning."

The songs on *Toumani & Sidiki* are all instrumental duets – Toumani's kora in the left speaker, Sidiki's in the right – and many of them are decades, even centuries old. But *Toumani & Sidiki* ties them explicitly to Mali's more recent past by naming the tracks for people and places significant in the country's current turbulence. Toumani admits to liking the idea of non-Malian listeners hearing the record, and then taking to Google to find out what, or whom, has inspired him. Lucy Duran, the SOAS musicologist – and kora player – who produced *Toumani & Sidiki* and several of Diabaté's previous albums, says, "I think any music that comes out of Mali is a political statement nowadays, after what's happened. The shock of having music potentially silenced. How can you possibly play music in that environment and not connect it?"

In keeping with the griot tradition, the songs on *Toumani & Sidiki* tend to be offerings of thanks or praise. The



qualification for homage appears to be taking a stand on behalf of moderation and decency. The opening track is entitled “Hamadoun Touré”. This was originally a Gambian song, a century or more old, recalling an especially splendid fast-breaking spread laid on one Ramadan by a generous merchant called Jula Jekere. The version on *Toumani & Sidiki* instead honours the titular Mali-born Secretary-General of the International Telecommunications Union. “Very intelligent man,” enthuses Diabaté. “During the crisis time in Mali, he did a lot of things. This is a special person, and he needs to be encouraged. And this is my way of saying thank you. Because you find out who your best friends are when there is a problem.”

It’s desperately difficult to imagine such a subject being addressed in Western rock’n’roll, which is entirely to rock’n’roll’s discredit, if possibly inevitable of a genre so attracted to rebels, poseurs and extremists. And it may be that the experience of living in a country actually threatened by rebels, poseurs and extremists makes one more grateful for people who quietly do an honest and constructive day’s work. “His vision of his religion,” explains Nick Gold of World Circuit Records, “is one of tolerance. He might be very quietly spoken, but he’s appalled by this version of Islam which has come into the country, outraged by these outsiders trying to tell them what to do.” Hence “Toguna Industries”: a bridal march repurposed as a hymn to a local agricultural exports and waste management company.

“See, this is the griot’s job,” says Toumani. “Thanking people, and appreciating what they are doing. The griot is someone who can say, this is good, or this is not good.”

The Diabatés say the latter on “Lampedusa”, the only wholly original work on *Toumani & Sidiki*. It is, Toumani confirms, intended as an elegy to the (at least) 359 people who drowned when a fishing boat, packed to the gunwales with would-be migrants from Africa, sank off the Italian island in October 2013. “I’m trying,” he says, “to ask why when Western countries like African music, Malian music, we all still have problems with the visa. Why? You appreciate what we have. We are bringing education, we are bringing culture, we are bringing soul. When I am playing a concert at the Barbican centre, I can see people closing their eyes, and meditating, and enjoying. So I feel that I’m bringing something that those people don’t have. So why do I still have problems getting a visa? Why do 300 people have to die?”



Damon Albarn with Toumani Diabaté and Afal Bocoum, working on the *Mali Music LP* in Bamako, March 2002

BLURRED BOUNDARIES

“IT’S SUCH A MAGIC THING...”

DAMON ALBARN on performing with Toumani

“FIRST MET Toumani on my first full day in Bamako. I was equipped only with my very modest melodica, and I sat in his very plush front room with this huge TV on in the background, having tea. And he started playing the kora, which was somewhat overwhelming. It’s such a magic thing, and in his hands has a touch of the divine. It doesn’t seem possible to play the notes he’s playing. He’s almost in a trance; some strange, intangible portal seems to open.

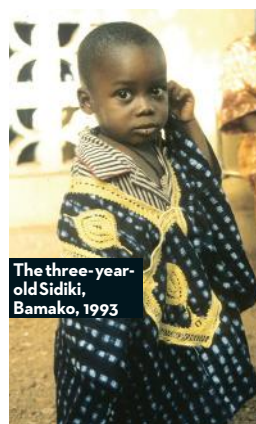
“Considering I’d turned up with a melodica, which wasn’t even in tune, it was excruciating for me – I didn’t know

where to start, which was probably good for me, as it made me realise how much I had to learn. But he was incredibly open to working. He’s always had that ambassadorial role. It’s the traditional role, which has been imposed on him by his standing as one of the senior griots in West Africa. Within Mali, the imposition of Sharia law in the north by outsiders was never going to be welcomed. The idea that music could be banned – something which is so integral to all people in that part of the world – is just nonsensical. Islam in West Africa is very different to Islam in the Middle East, and especially the Saudi Arabian version.

“I’ve played with him many times, and it’s never short of remarkable. He’s very intuitive. He can translate the essence of what he does to almost anything – he feels where the music is going, and weaves the kora into it. So he’s a traditional and a modern musician, which is a difficult line to balance.”

“I prefer to stay in my country. Mali is the heart of Africa’s culture”

TOUMANI DIABATÉ



The three-year-old Sidiki, Bamako, 1993

At least one other song on *Toumani & Sidiki* also appears to be an explicit protest song, to the extent that something strummed on two harps can be. “Dr Cheikh Modibo Diarra” is based on a rarely heard kora piece, probably originally Gambian. It is dedicated here to a recent Malian prime minister, a former NASA astrophysicist and Chairman of Microsoft Africa who was appointed to the job as a unifying figure shortly after the March 2012 coup, and then forced out of it at gunpoint eight months later.

“There’s not many African-Americans working for NASA,” says Toumani. “He studied in France, then went to the USA, and worked for NASA. And then came back to become prime minister. I think this is something very special. So a song like this is meant to be a surprise for them. When the album comes out, I will be very happy to bring a CD to them, and say, look, this is to say thank you in the name of Mali for what you did for Mali. Keep doing it. Don’t give up.”

SIDIKI DIABATÉ IN conversation is less expansive than his father – a combination of a 23-year-old’s shyness and the necessity of speaking through an interpreter (for the record, I suspect his English is much better than my French). He is touchingly surprised by the existence of *Toumani & Sidiki*. “Toumani never had much time for me,” he says, without bitterness. “Sometimes he was touring, or he had things to do here – rehearsing with his groups, playing at weddings and ceremonies, even for the president of the republic. So there wasn’t much chance for one-on-

one lessons. So when he said, let's go and play, I thought it would be a way to learn more from him."

Sidiki began playing the kora at 10: a journey chronicled, incidentally, in an entirely delightful children's book, Ryan Thomas Skinner's *Sidikiba's Kora Lesson*.

"When I started," he explains, "I took traditional Malian songs and tried to play them on piano, but playing the piano like it was a kora – first with two fingers, then with four. Then I started changing the traditional songs to raps."

In the last few years, Sidiki has become a superstar in Mali – in cahoots with his regular musical partner, rapper Iba One, he has filled Bamako's 20,000-capacity Modibo Keita stadium. As the Islamist insurrection in Mali's north gathered pace in 2012, the pair corralled their peers in Mali's hip-hop scene onto an all-star single called "We Want Peace". "The jihadi," he says. "They make Islam look bad. They were putting people in jail for playing concerts. For someone who lives for music – imagine not being able to play. Everyone was worried. Nobody knew what was going to happen tomorrow. Our Malian army took guns to fight them. Our music is our guns."

Sidiki looks the modern musical aristocrat, sporting snappy blue moccasins and white polo-neck, each hand a fistful of silver rings. He is missing his right little finger, the result of a boyhood mishap with a car door; this digit is fortunately unnecessary for playing the kora. The combinations of Sidiki's birthright and his talent place him at an interesting crossroads – trustee of an ancient tradition, and a significant figure in a musical form undreamt of by his forebears. Sidiki doesn't see why he can't be both.

"First," he says, "I am a griot. Then a musician, a composer, an arranger. But I have a dream. I want to take the kora places my father hasn't. Imagine the kora with a big musician like Jennifer Lopez, imagine the kora with Mary J Blige, or with One Direction, or Alicia Keys."

Sidiki is livelier the following afternoon on his own turf – his small studio in the suburb of N'Tomikorobougou, in Bamako's north. His windowless workspace is a rudimentary set-up, consisting of a computer, a small keyboard, speakers, a bed for sleeping off overnight sessions. The only decorations are gold-framed photos of his parents – Toumani, and Toumani's first wife, the singer Nene Koita. Sidiki treats his visitor to an impromptu demonstration of his working methods. First, he reduces a traditional Malian melody to a backwash of '80s-sounding synth, which briefly sounds weirdly like Don Henley's "Boys Of Summer". To this, he adds a skittering hip-hop beat and a bassline not a million miles from Stevie Wonder's "Master Blaster". At which he plugs in his kora and begins gently plucking and strumming, at which the thought occurs he'd be doing Alicia Keys the favour: he's an astounding player, conjuring cascades of melody

SIMON RAWLES

HOW TO BUY...

TOUMANI ON CD



KAIRA

HANNIBAL, 1988

Formal debut of Diabaté and also his instrument: no-one had ever made a full-length solo kora LP.

7/10



DJELIKA

HANNIBAL, 1995

With Keletigui Diabaté, Basekou Kouyate, and Spanish flamenco band Ketama (with whom Diabaté also recorded as Songhai).

8/10



NEW ANCIENT STRINGS

HANNIBAL, 1999

Diabaté and Ballaké Sissoko's homage to the classic 1970 album of kora duets by their fathers, Sidiki Diabaté and Djelimadi Sissoko.

8/10

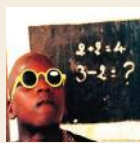


KULNAN

HANNIBAL, 1999

Diabaté and Taj Mahal reconnect the blues to their African roots: a fave of Barack Obama, no less.

9/10



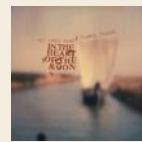
MALI MUSIC

HONEST JON'S, 2002

Diabaté falls in with guitarists Afel Bocoum and Lobi Traoré and ngoni player Ko Kan Ko

9/10

Sata Doubia on Damon Albarn's big-hearted West African adventure.



IN THE HEART OF THE MOON

WORLD CIRCUIT, 2005

Grammy-winning collaboration between Diabaté and Malian guitarist Ali Farka Touré.

9/10

Ry Cooder guests on guitar and piano.



BOULEVARD DE L'INDEPENDENCE

WORLD CIRCUIT, 2006

An exuberant survey of West African music by Diabaté's Symmetric Orchestra – an assembly of dozens of musicians from all over West Africa.

8/10



ALI & TOUMANI

WORLD CIRCUIT, 2010

A revisiting of the partnership with Ali Farka Touré, cut shortly before the latter's death.

8/10



AFROCUBISM

WORLD CIRCUIT, 2010

Diabaté and a posse of Malian musicians join forces with the Cuban players of the Buena Vista Social Club.

7/10



TOUMANI & SIDIKI

WORLD CIRCUIT, 2014

Father and son play duelling koras: the griot torch is passed to the next generation.

9/10

"I want to take the kora to places my father hasn't. Imagine the kora with Mary J Blige..."

SIDIKI DIABETÉ

with no more apparent effort than someone wringing water from a sponge. He finishes, shrugs, deletes the track: no big deal. "Not everyone," he says, "has the chance of having a father with a Grammy. My father works hard. So for a son like me who has a father like that, my dream is to play like him, or do even better."

Their thinking is as congruent as their playing. The night before, Toumani had said, "I didn't make the LP with my son because he's my son. Thanks God, he's a great and talented musician. And I want him to have a chance."

TOUMANI STILL PLAYS the kora every day. "Of course," he nods. "It's part of me. This is my soul." He's hopeful that Bamako's music scene is recovering, now that the Islamist rebels in the north, who he dismisses as "drug-dealers and jihadis", appear to have been seen off. He knows that *Toumani & Sidiki* is, almost by definition, a political record, but also wishes that it didn't have to be. "It's a greeting," he says. "I don't care about politics. It's just to say we are what we are and we can't be anything else. You can tell me to change my name; tell me you don't like this name Toumani. Can you change Toumani to Omar? Can you change Toumani to James, or Abraham? Or you can tell people to change their clothes. But you can never take the culture of the people." ☺

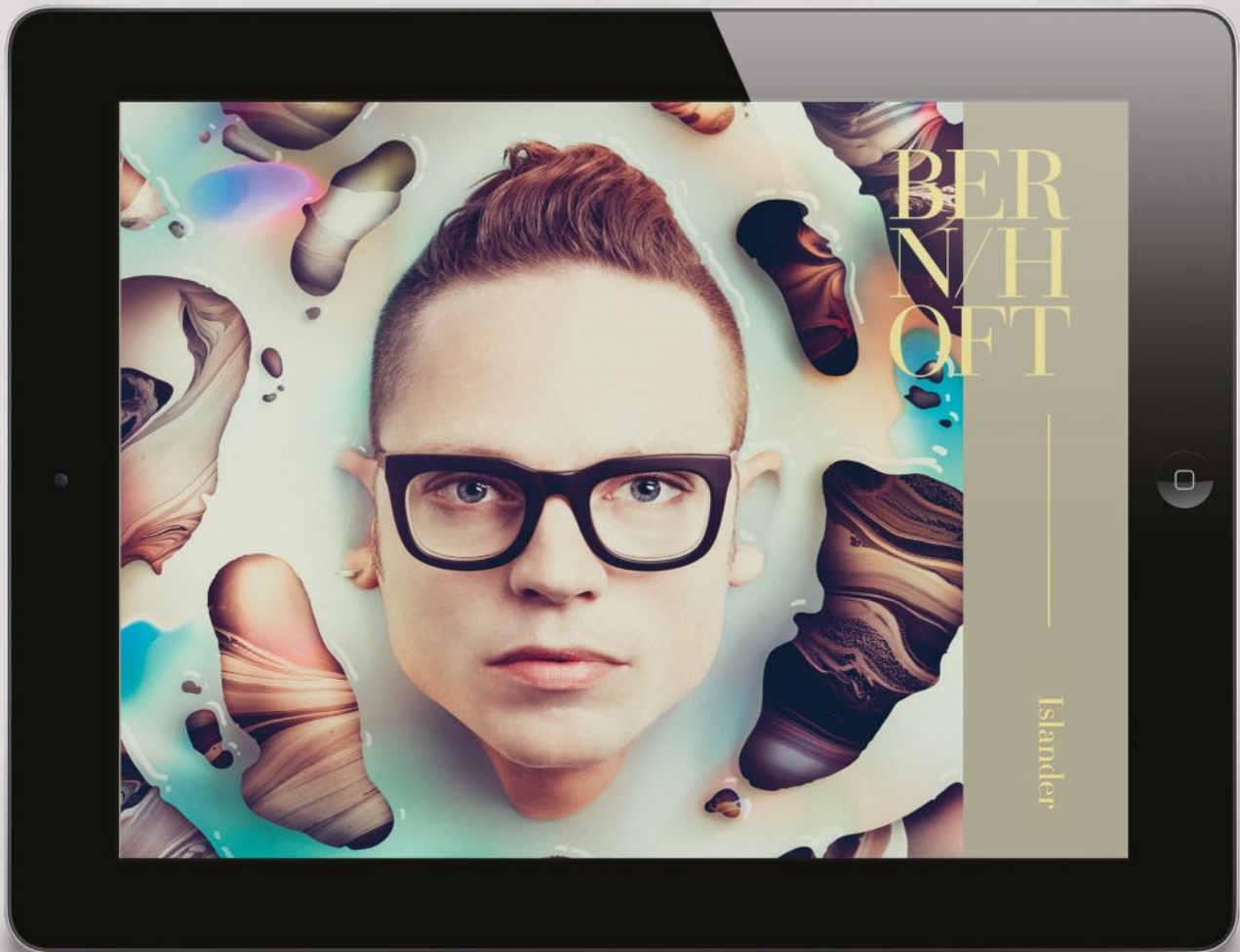
Toumani & Sidiki is available now on World Circuit Records

Korakora: recording the *Toumani & Sidiki* album at RAK studios, London, November 2013



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19 May 2014 - O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire





Turner

Arctic Monkeys, St Pancras
Renaissance Hotel, London,
June 13, 2013: (l-r) Matt
Helders, Nick O'Malley,
Alex Turner and Jamie Cook

Story: John Robinson
Photograph: Guy Kokken

Overdrive!

Five excellent albums. An inflammatory speech on the future of rock'n'roll. America for the taking. And now, this month in London, their biggest ever gigs... Has the time come for the ARCTIC MONKEYS to take their place in the rock pantheon? "It feels like a quest, it doesn't feel like there's a beginning or end to this thing," says Alex Turner, as *Uncut* interviews the band, their collaborators and their heroes to discover the secrets of their success. "I'd put them in the same line as Ray Davies," says John Cooper Clarke. "It's their world, but they make it magical."

RATHER THAN THE many songs he had written, for a few days earlier this year Arctic Monkeys frontman Alex Turner was more notorious for 127 words he improvised on the winners' rostrum at an awards ceremony. His tone – swaggering, cocky – wasn't to everyone's taste. But having stormed the citadel, it would be churlish not to have permitted the Arctic Monkeys the moment to raise their flag.

The fine details of his words (“Rock’n’roll... is always waiting round the corner... ready to smash the glass ceiling”) became a news item, were deconstructed, frowned on, seized upon as a call to arms, but largely ignored for what they were: a personal statement of belief. The guitar music favoured by Arctic Monkeys isn't a genre decision, but a challenging, empowering force, a form whose rules they've mastered out of respect: the better to break them and advance the medium's ineffable spirit. It can change, and mutate, but as Alex Turner put it that night, rock’n’roll “will never die...”

“It's the feeling that anyone can do it,” says Nick O'Malley, the group's bassist. “It's not controlled and polished. It



Alex Turner delivers that speech: the Brit Awards, Feb 19, 2014

excites me that four friends can grow up in the same village, making some noise in a mate's garage, and go on to win two Brit Awards.”

That, in essence, has been the Arctic Monkeys' journey: from the Sheffield suburb of High Green to the centre of the music business establishment. If that journey has been an unexpected one, it has also been one the band have mirrored in their music. Rather than following a predictable route, Arctic Monkeys have for over a decade instead pursued the eccentric and passionate lines of enquiry that have been the lifeblood of rock’n’roll from the very beginning.

The poet John Cooper Clarke has long been an inspiration to Alex Turner, and a version of his composition “I Wanna Be

THE STATEMENT

ALEX TURNER'S BRIT AWARDS SPEECH

“THAT ROCK ‘N’ROLL, EH? That rock’n’roll, it just won't go away. It might hibernate from time to time and sink back into the swamp. I think the cyclical nature of the universe in which it exists demands it adheres to some of its rules. But it's always waiting there, just around the corner, ready to make its way back through the sludge, and smash through the glass ceiling, looking better than ever. Yeah, that rock’n’roll. It seems like it's faded away sometimes but, uh, it will never die. And there's nothing you can do about it. Thank you very fu... much for this. I do truly appreciate it. Don't take that the wrong way and, uh, yeah... Invoice me for the microphone if you need to.”



Yours” is the final track on the band's current album, *AM*. Like most of us, he watched the Brits ceremony at home.

“I thought his acceptance speech was terrific. I think it was the most lucid thing I've ever heard a drunken person say,” says Clarke a few days afterward. “He paraphrased Danny And The Juniors there, didn't he? ‘Rock’n’roll is here to stay...’

“It was right in 1957,” Clarke adds, “and it's right now.”

TWO DAYS AFTER his Brits appearance, Alex Turner escorts one journalist out (“I want to make sure he goes...” he smirks), declines a cigarette break, and returns to his seat in the bar/restaurant of a swish central London hotel. A jetlagged rock’n’roller (like the other members of his band, he is now based in Los Angeles), Turner has been up since 5am researching vintage motorcycles and emailing his soundman about a possible microphone configuration (“Diagrams, the lot”). He is dressed – biker boots, biker jacket, Ray-Bans – to menace society in 1961.

He talks a little differently to how you may remember. Once a witty and self-effacing artful dodger, these days Turner is tempered by an ironic detachment that occasionally stops him in his tracks. His recent speech, rather than an embarrassment to him, proves to be the tip of the iceberg, the establishing shot in a well-scripted screenplay about the possibilities of what his music is all about.

“Rock’n’roll is a beacon in your peripheral vision. You can't draw a map to it”
ALEX TURNER

“I don't step up to accept a trophy for a race I didn't know I was running,” he begins, “and act as though it's something I've been dreaming of since I was a little boy, because it's not the truth.

“If that is the truth for you, fine,” he continues, “but it's not ever been about that – I think any sort of victory in this trek comes

with the conception of a song or an idea, not with a trophy or a pat on the back.”

Rock’n’roll, as Turner tells it, is Johnny Burnette. It's Ike and Tina Turner. It's Bowie and The Beatles. More often than not, it's a music that he describes in philosophical terms: absolutely more about the journey than the getting there; more about the chase than the catch. Such is rock’n’roll's elusive nature, it's something about which you need to have faith, and beware false idols. Turner talks the talk, but all of Arctic Monkeys walk the walk with him.



The red mist
descends at
Glastonbury,
June 28, 2013

"Attitude is part of it," says guitarist Jamie Cook, "but it can only take you so far."

"People can have a rock'n'roll attitude and never be in a band," remarks drummer Matt Helders. "You can dress like it."

"It's easier to say what it isn't..." Turner continues, "...a haircut or a belt buckle. It doesn't even occur to some people that there is a rock'n'roll – so me saying that might give someone an idea. It's a beacon in your peripheral vision. You can't draw someone a map to it."

AWARE OF THIS elusive ideal, for the last decade the Arctic Monkeys have followed their instincts to the ends of their own charted territory, and it has changed them. Once a mad scramble, a rush of information, an Arctic Monkeys live show has become a dramatic and finely tuned series of reveals, their accomplishment measured by their comfortable command of a large crowd. You may have witnessed their poise at Glastonbury 2013. This month, they will play two shows at London's Finsbury Park, where they will play to 100,000 people.

"We've always played to the ends of our abilities," explains Matt Helders. "Back then, we were just doing what we could. Where we are now, we're more confident we can entertain people."

"Ten years ago it was tightly wound," says Turner. "It was pure energy. But as time went on we realised that you can't really fake that energy, so we were going to have to figure out another way around it."

That way has been to become more considered, and dramatic. At the centre of this is Turner himself, now a showman of considerable accomplishment. No longer the diffident frontman of 2006 (this was someone who opened up their first promo video instructing viewers, "Don't believe the hype..."), Turner's persona is now, depending on who you talk to, "collar up" (according to AM co-producer Ross Orton) or "cocky" (producer

BARD VIBES

THE WEDDING BAND

JOHN COOPER CLARKE on his "I Wanna Be Yours", as transformed by Arctic Monkeys

"ALEX HAS TAKEN what was already, blowing my own trumpet, a wedding favourite. He's added a couple of hooks that turn it into a song: that's the genius there. By using his affecting baritone, he's converted it into a heartfelt love ballad, and that's a tough thing to do.

"Sight unseen, I knew it would be good. I'm so proud to be involved with the last track, 'cos that's as important as the first one. If you look at an album as a larger version of a single, then the rules of Phil Spector still apply – you introduce something at the end that makes you want to put it on at the beginning again."

James Ford). "He has more fun with it," says Matt Helders. As Turner perceives it, there's no real change in what he does. "Even putting on a trackie top to do a show back then was as contrived as me doing me quiff now," he says. "You can't get up onstage in front of any amount of people without putting on an act. Otherwise I wouldn't be able to do it. Speaking without a load of songs in front of you... That's almost my worst nightmare. I don't like being the centre of attention."

"I think a lot of people give him some stick about trying to be a character or whatever, because he started off as this quietly cocky northerner," says Nick O'Malley. "I think a lot of people would have liked him to continue doing that. But it would be doing my head in by now if he were trying to be Mr Yorkshireman every night."

"Personally, I've always liked frontmen who seem like they're from another planet," says O'Malley, "like David Bowie or Nick Cave – it's more interesting watching that than watching someone be themselves. I think he's getting more into that – he puts on



John Cooper Clarke presents Helders and Turner with one of five NME Awards, Feb 2014

“a performance and is grander with his expression. I’m all for that.”

Change is what Arctic Monkeys are all about. As Turner explains, it’s what he admires in other artists (“The Beatles, David Bowie... the big ones”). Duly, the poise and drama of their shows and current music hasn’t happened overnight, but is part of their DNA, their gradual evolution over the past 10 years. Nor is their journey over.

“It feels like a quest,” says Alex Turner. “It doesn’t feel like there’s a beginning or end to this thing.”

THE DISTANCE TRAVELLED by Arctic Monkeys can be expressed with gestures. When they speak of their debut, 2006’s charismatic, classic *Whatever People Say I Am That’s What I’m Not*, the band’s members lean forward and clench their shoulders as if on the point of miming that record’s hectic guitar strumming. 2013’s *AM*, says Alex Turner, making a discreet hand flourish, “is a bit more like this.”

Along the way, their work has taken unexpected turns. In

“I’d put Alex in the same line as Ray Davies: they sing about the world they know”

JOHN COOPER CLARKE

James Ford calls the band’s “love affair with America”.

“They change, they try new things,” says the band’s friend Richard Hawley. “That’s what I like about them: they don’t seem to be scared. Like, ‘Ooh, that was a No 1 album, we’d better stick with that formula.’”

“I’m definitely as frightened as everybody else,” says Alex Turner. “But I think if you try to create something that you think is going to fit radio or whatever, everyone’s going to see straight through that.”

Arctic Monkeys set out on the right foot. When he started to write songs, Turner feels he was “more malleable”, but was encouraged – particularly, he says, by Jamie Cook – to pursue his own vision, and the band have followed it ever since. Before he joined Arctic Monkeys, Nick O’Malley saw one of their earliest gigs. “I remember being jealous,” he remembers. “We expected them to not be very good: they did covers and a couple of their own songs. I remember thinking, ‘Shit, they’re better than us already.’ They’d been working hard.”

Even at this early stage, this was a band who took things seriously. Richard Hawley recalls playing a gig at Sheffield Boardwalk with his dad’s rockabilly band The Hillbilly Cats, and afterwards being quizzed by Turner, then the venue’s barman, on the finer points of the show. O’Malley, who went to school with Turner, remembers he brought a certain artistic seriousness to everything.

“I was in the same media studies class with Matt and Alex, and they had this knack when they worked together of making things that were good. They used to film each other, doing daft things, like *Jackass* when they were 17. They always knew what they were doing:

spite of the media frenzy surrounding their first album (then the fastest-selling British debut of all time), the band’s second, *Favourite Worst Nightmare*, was miraculously not all about the music business. Their third, *Humbug*, moved their indie rock to another level via a collaboration with Josh Homme from Queens Of The Stone Age. 2011’s *Suck It And See* turned back inland to British guitar music. Their current set, *AM*, fully embraces what producer

INSPIRATION

LET THE LOVE-IN IN

The greatness of NICK CAVE AND THE BAD SEEDS, by Alex Turner

ALEX TURNER: “Nick Cave, we’re a massive fan of in every way. What seems like 12 Aussies onstage, shit’s coming unplugged, a guy’s on fire... there’s a violin bow whistling past the drummer’s ear – that’s what it’s all about. “We got to see them in Poland. We once covered ‘Red Right Hand’ and he said ‘...made famous by the Arctic Monkeys, for which we are... eternally grateful’. Like, such a dick about it, but in the best way. It was like, ‘Yes – finally!’”

whether it was bike riding, darts or music – they always had a way of doing it really well.”

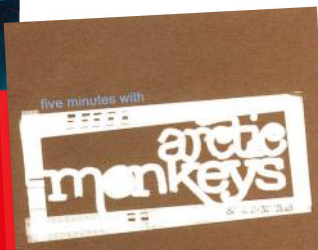
In their music, and the business outside it, Arctic Monkeys were fast learners. Alan Smyth, who recorded the band’s first demos, recalls seeing the band again after the first rush of media interest in them in 2005. They said hello outside his studio when they came in to record a B-side. “We shook hands,” Smyth remembers. “They’d clearly shaken a lot of hands since we last met.”

BETWEEN THEIR FIRST session in September 2003 to their fifth in November 2004, Smyth watched Arctic Monkeys develop from the high-voltage R’n’B of “Curtains Closed” to the accomplished likes of “Dancing Shoes” and “Fake Tales Of San Francisco”. When he started work with the band, they couldn’t even field a full team. By the time he finished, he was working on songs that would appear on a classic debut album. “When they came into the studio, Cooky was a tiler, or was training to be one,” Smyth remembers. “He was working ’til the afternoon, so we had to put him on later.”

What Smyth (and eventual album producer Jim Abbiss) recorded were songs that dripped with hyperlocal colour (“Fake Tales...” mentions the Yorkshire town of Rotherham, and uses

the derogatory expression “fucking wank”) but painted a picture with a huge reach.

“I think it’s part of a tradition that goes back to the turn of the century,” says John Cooper Clarke. “Alex is a writer of popular songs, and it’s a long and varied tradition. I’d put him in the same line as Ray Davies: they sing about the world they know. It’s not gritty, it’s not folk music. It’s their world,



“They don’t seem to be scared”: Richard Hawley with Alex Turner, July 2007





Primate enterprise: with original bassist Andy Nicholson outside the Boardwalk, Sheffield, 2005

but they make it magical – they make it of interest to someone who doesn't live there."

"That first album could have been about any town," says Nick O'Malley, "could have been about everybody's weekend. Everyone can say that they feel as though those experiences have happened to them."

A musician who moved to the US from Mexico, who was born in Chile and raised in Geneva, *Humbly* engineer Alain Johannes is a good test case for O'Malley's contention. "I absolutely got it," says Johannes. "The thrill of it, imagining the nightlife... It's poetic, but of the street. There's something about Alex's delivery: there's nothing unclear about the intensity of what he's delivering."

"It ain't area specific," says John Cooper Clarke. "The word 'Sheffield' never crops up, and that's the great thing about it. Salvador Dalí says, 'By the ultra-local shall you achieve the universal', and nobody does it better than them."

JOSHUA TREE, CALIFORNIA isn't local to many places. Gram Parsons would disappear here. Ecologists commune with the environment here. Psychedelic adventurers take peyote in the desert here. "It's quiet at night," remembers Nick O'Malley, fondly. "Except for all the people making rock music at three in the morning."

Joshua Tree is the site of Rancho De La Luna – a recording studio with strong associations with the "desert rock" scene based around Queens Of The Stone Age's Josh Homme. It's not quite correct to say that it's off the map – there's a satellite reference – but it's certainly a long way from Yorkshire.

"It was a question of 'get out of your comfort zone'," reflects Alex Turner today, "or bust."

Arctic Monkeys came to Rancho De La Luna to extend their range. With *Whatever People Say I Am...* having established them as romantic chroniclers of a nation's weekend

EYEWITNESS

5 PIVOTAL ARCTIC MONKEYS LIVE SHOWS

SHEFFIELD THE GRAPES, 2003

ALAN SMYTH: "It was a shambles, but there was something majestic about it. Some of their songs were covers, some their own, and I didn't know which was which – they had a load of personality. Alex looked like he didn't care – but he obviously did. When he started singing, I heard his voice and went, 'Fucking hell...'"

SHEFFIELD BOARDWALK, 2005

MATT HELDERS: "It was the first time we heard people singing our songs back to us – and before we knew how it happened. We'd burned some CDs and given them away. This kid [photographer Mark Bull] said, 'I put them on my website and a lot of people have downloaded it.' That was a big moment, we knew people were interested."

GLASTONBURY MAIN STAGE HEADLINE, 2007

MATT HELDERS: "We only had two albums out. We had to fill the biggest slot we've ever filled, time-wise and crowd-wise. At the time we thought it was a triumph, but having done it again, we realised how much better it was this time [2013]. But that's from experience – playing another few hundred festivals between then and now."

BLACK KEYS TOUR SUPPORT, 2012

JAMIE COOK: "There were people there who didn't give a shit – it was the first time and we realised they're not there for you. That you're gonna have to do something to make them turn round. I think that did us some good."

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, 2014

MATT HELDERS: "When we did it, supporting The Black Keys, I thought, 'We'll never be able to do this.' So when the grown-ups suggested we might want to, we were like, 'Are you sure?' They knew what they were doing: it sold out pretty quickly. You think about everything that's happened there when you play there: from sport to Sinatra."

pastimes, they rapidly followed it up with 2007's *Favourite Worst Nightmare*. That album (another No 1) was, thinks producer James Ford, one that the band wanted "to get out of the way... to prove the first one wasn't a fluke".

Rather than continue in the same bankable vein, Laurence Bell, boss of Domino Records, made a suggestion for their third. If you're such big fans of Queens Of The Stone Age ("We play them in the van," Turner told me in 2007. "They're the only thing we can agree on..."), why not go and work with Josh Homme?

It was a decision befitting a band with broadening horizons. Having been previously all about new music, Jamie Cook recalls the period as one of "digging back" into records from the past. He got into Creedence Clearwater Revival, and the solo records of Roky Erickson.

"Then you go back to 13th Floor Elevators," he recalls, "you find out the whole story. Then you're in that world and listen to those bands. I'd never really heard heavy psych music. Why would I? I'm 20 and from Sheffield! But it's another world altogether – there was tons of stuff to listen to."

Having previously been all about delivering the songs, Arctic Monkeys now experimented with the whole immersive business of how a record might not just be heard, but experienced. The third Arctic Monkeys LP, 2009's *Humbug*, isn't everyone's favourite, but as people have told Turner, that's because they're not engaging with it properly.



"My mate Bill Ryder-Jones says that people not liking *Humbug* is just one of those things people get in their heads," says Turner, "like, 'Ringo can't play the drums,' when in fact he's amazing. I'm not saying it's amazing... but it has merit."

The album provided a eureka moment. Not that the personnel at the studio were the kind of people who were into labels like that. "The Rancho has a vibe," says Alain Johannes, the Queens Of The Stone Age guitarist who worked alongside Homme on the album. "There were always unusual pieces lying around. Everything is the opposite of a, quote-unquote, professional studio: 'What is this – are you sure it's a mic? It looks like a grenade...' You plug it in... find out if it goes off."

The Rancho mood is about abandoning preconception, about blurring boundaries.

"When Josh is producing, he folds inside the paradigm," explains Alain Johannes. "When cool artists work together, everyone walks away with a little piece of the other person's perspective inside them – kind of like a holographic thing."

After having made records featuring songs that were brought to the studio in near-complete form, with Homme's guidance, Arctic Monkeys embraced a seat-of-pants approach. "There was a cool exchange about the sonics," recalls Johannes. "Sometimes we would track stuff outside. There's the [Joshua Tree National] park outside, which is fantastic – you couldn't possibly have a deader space."



SIMIANISED

TEN GREAT ARCTIC MONKEYS COVERS

1. **THE STROKES:** "Take It Or Leave It", "Reptilia"

2. **AMY WINEHOUSE:** "You Know I'm No Good"

3. **BARBARA LEWIS:** "Baby I'm Yours"

4. **SHIRLEY BASSEY:** "Diamonds Are Forever"

5. **THE BEATLES:** "Come Together"



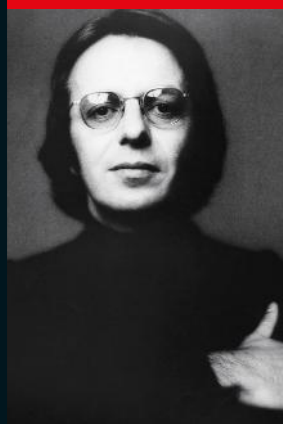
6. **PAT FARRELL AND THE BELIEVERS:** "Bad Woman"

7. **NICK CAVE AND THE BAD SEEDS:** "Red Right Hand"

8. **DION:** "Only You Know"

9. **PATSY CLINE:** "Strange"

10. **ROD MCKUEN:** "The Lovers"



"The thing evolved organically," he continues. "There was some talking about it, but as far as I was concerned we were talking about something after it had happened. It just kind of flowed really well. It was a tremendous amount of fun."

"Josh made us believe in ourselves, really," says Jamie Cook. "He's got a charm, he can persuade you to do things. We'd never done slow, heavy rock songs. It was a different

world to us. I don't know if we'd have gone there if it hadn't been for Josh. He used to tell us, 'It's harder to play slow.'"

"After *Favourite Worst Nightmare* there was a conscious decision not to do the same thing again," says Nick O'Malley, "and Josh had a big influence on it."

When we were recording it, he said he didn't want us to sound too much like the desert. He was worried he was going to make us sound too much like Queens. We said, 'Great!' but he's not that vain – he knew it would be a bad idea."

"I thought the third album was their bravest," says James Ford, who "helped finish off" *Humbug*. "They were big fans of Josh's, so it made sense to work with him. It really helped define the sound of that record: the grimy, low-slung guitars. It's Morricone-esque, a cinematic feeling. That's in the sound and in the songs. It was the start of their love affair with America."

It is sometimes said that in life it's not a question so much of where you're from, as where you're at – at Rancho De La Luna, Arctic

Monkeys had started to fully explore that idea.

"We said, 'Is this too weird?'" says Matt Helders. "But we got constantly reassured by Josh: 'This is you – this is Arctic Monkeys.' He was the one who made us believe that – whatever we do, it's still going to sound like us."

"I remember getting there, being as far from home as I'd ever felt," Turner says, "but also very much at home. You start thinking of what are people going to think about it. But it all went away and we were able to just do this..."

For a revelatory excursion, Alex uses a mind-expanding phrase. "...The doors of perception swung open."

WITH HIS BAND, Alex Turner told me last year, it's about ups and downs. "It's peaks and troughs with an A and an M," he said, stating the typographical facts. Up and down implies a bumpy ride, but for a band who became a phenomenal success so young, Arctic Monkeys have embraced what has followed, rolled with the punches and avoided the pitfalls.

There's been some good management, all agree, and a good record label. The band are also, as labelmate Bill Ryder-Jones says, "sensible lads", but as he also remarks, "You want there to be more to it than them just being lads from Sheffield..."

"You think about everything that's happened there": the sold-out show at Madison Square Garden, Feb 8, 2014

EYEWITNESS

PUMPING IT UP

Attractions drummer Pete Thomas on his work on *AM*

“IT WAS A nice couple of weeks – a treat, like being 25 again. It was very reminiscent of the early Elvis Costello sessions,



lots of ‘Let’s try this’, ‘Let’s try that’, ‘Let’s all play this bit’. And they’re a nice lot. Plenty of tea and biscuits.

“You get there in the morning and Cooky arrives on his vintage Triumph motorbike looking like something out of *The Victor*. And they’re good. The bass player, Nick, you go, ‘He’s got it, he’s really got it.’ You’d be playing along, and suddenly you’d be like, ‘Fucking hell, this sounds like the Arctic Monkeys!’”

Really, though, the grounding and understanding (for which you are encouraged to read “constant pisstaking”) that goes along with that long friendship is not to be overestimated. “We’ve got more in common than just the band,” says Matt Helders. “After a gig, the band and the gig are probably the last thing we’ll be talking about. One of us will have been thinking of something stupid from when we were younger. Like, ‘Remember when Chris fell off his bike?’ It’s more than just our jobs.”

“It must have simplified things as we were mates before,” says Nick O’Malley. “You hear about frontmen who are divas and they’re not even that successful – so it’s refreshing that we’re quite successful and Al’s not a nightmare.”

“They’re all aware of the absurdity of it all,” says Bill Ryder-Jones. “It’s all about drinking Boddingtons and watching Wednesday play with them. That’s a joke – but I’ve never seen any of them eat houmous, ever.”

“They weren’t formed from, like, a ‘bass player wanted’ ad,” says John Cooper Clarke. “They don’t seem to be part of any prevailing youth tribe, any more than The Beatles and The Kinks were, really. I think Arctic Monkeys fall into that. It’s hard-wired into them. They couldn’t follow a trend if they wanted to. You can only piss with the tackle you’ve got.”

This kind of grounding has seen them through 10 years, and looks likely to see Arctic Monkeys into the future. The band have no longterm plans (“It’s foggy out there,” says Turner. “Maybe I’ll go off and make furniture...”), but the examples of David Bowie, Nick Cave and The Stooges are inspirational in how a long career might be interestingly conducted. At Glastonbury last year, the band watched The Rolling Stones. “You hear all these stories, but they looked like they were having an amazing time,” remembers Jamie Cook. “Having a proper buzz. You’ve got to admire that.”

RATHER THAN UP and down, the band’s career since *Humburg* has been about a movement from side to side. Alex made with James Ford a low-key solo record for the soundtrack to Richard Ayoade’s film *Submarine*, and the band embraced that simpler, classic British indie-rock sound for their next album, 2011’s *Suck It And See*, as Nick O’Malley remembers it, also as a response to a resurgence of interest in The Stone Roses and the Pixies.

With their latest album, *AM*, the band has done something different again. Whether their movements are quite as perverse as they sometimes appear is a different matter.

“It seems erratic to me,” says Turner, “but I think to most people those shifts don’t register quite as dramatically.”

“There are different vibes to the albums,” says James Ford. “I can see why people would think they were different. But

for me, Alex’s writing and voice are so definitive, they can almost do anything at this point and it’ll sound like them.”

In his own modest way, Turner supports James Ford’s view. “With this new one, we were asking, have we gone too far? Does it sound too much like Dr Dre or something? Then you play it to someone and they wouldn’t even pick up on that. But they can tell it’s us...” He looks for the right words. “...as soon as I start waffling on.”

AM bears out precisely what he and Ford are saying. This is a band of such strong identity, they can throw a huge amount at their music and still have it sound like the Arctic Monkeys. Nick O’Malley bluntly recalls the band wanting to avoid “the same old indie bullshit”. If a record that occasionally sounds like Justin Timberlake fronting Black Sabbath and at others like John Lennon can be said to avoid that, then they’ve certainly managed it.

Revelation came to the band in the desert. Working again at Rancho De La Luna, but this time with Sheffield

EYEWITNESS

MAD SOUNDS!

The strange journey of PETE PREDICTABLE’S “Mad Sounds”



ALAN SMYTH:

On that first session [Sept 2003, at Alan’s 2Fly Studios

in Sheffield], we talked a bit about what they liked – and they asked about what I’d done. I’d done several sorts of things – in the ‘70s and early ‘80s I’d done synthpop. I told them and they said, ‘You what?’ I only had one keyboard –

a WASP – and I used to build up tracks with that.

“All the band was there and they said, ‘Go on, put it on!’ So I did and they all went mad about it – and they never forgot. The song is called ‘Mad Sounds’ and the opening line is ‘Mad sounds in your ears/Makes you get up and dance/Make you get up...’ Alex took that little couplet. He sent me a text saying, ‘We’re putting out Mad Sounds’. It was like, ‘Ahh’ – a really nice, 10-year anniversary moment.”



➔ engineer/drummer Ross Orton, the band worked on songs that set the tone for the whole of the album: the heavy-riffing opening tracks “Do I Wanna Know?” and “R U Mine?” (first demoed at Orton’s Sheffield studio). Turner recalls “Do I Wanna Know?” was a particular breakthrough.

“Listening to that, that night in the desert, that was a victorious moment. We were all dancing round. That’s what it’s all about for me.”

“It sounded nothing like anything any of us had been involved with before,” recalls Ross Orton. “We went, ‘Fucking hell, this is right good.’”

THEIR VICTORIOUS TRIP to the desert behind them, the band returned to L.A. Having gone looking for a rehearsal room near their homes, they ended up finding the “B” studio of Sage & Sound, a facility off Sunset Strip that had seen better days; those days being the 1970s. There was, recalls Elvis Costello’s drummer Pete Thomas, who played on the sessions for two weeks, “plenty of wood and hessian”. “It was like something out of *Boogie Nights*,” remembers James Ford. “There were fake Grecian pillars.”

The decor notwithstanding, the space proved to be pivotal

to the band’s new work. Having brought in an engineer from New York to fix technical issues, it became evident that the studio would work just as well for recording the album as for writing and demoing it. Writing to loops, then over-dubbing, they arrived at an eloquent, simple statement of their lives as American residents: a concise heavy rock, providing the sound beds for falsetto R&B-style vocals. It was a risky endeavour.

“It could have been

terrible,” says Matt Helders. “It could have sounded like Limp Bizkit.”

“It’s not an easy alchemy,” Alex Turner concedes. “It always seems like on every record we’ve ever made there’s a moment when it all feels like a complete mess, disconnected. James Ford usually talks me down. I know every band since the dawn of time thinks this, but it felt pretty out there when we were doing it.”

“The hooks were very R&B,” says Nick O’Malley, “which is a lot more easily absorbed in America than going on about Sheffield bike clubs or whatever. Alex is the same feller, he’s just not having his weekends in Sheffield any more.”

“You make the kind of music to reflect where you are at the time,” says Ross Orton. “If they’d stayed here in Sheffield, maybe it would have been 10 ‘R U Mine?’s. Which wouldn’t have been a bad thing but it would have been different – a heavier, rockier kind of thing. It wouldn’t have been as slick.”

When Matt Helders injured his hand in the early stages of writing the LP, Attractions drummer Pete Thomas sat in for a few weeks while the band continued working on demos.

“It’s a proper group with a proper style,” says Pete. “It reminded me a bit of us as well, our first few albums – lots of bits. It’s very civilised. They sit around, and it’s like, ‘What do you reckon, then?’ ‘Will I double that on the guitar?’ ‘Let’s have a fucking crack at it, then...’ They got me in to bash away. They work on it, then record it and go and listen. There’s no jiggery-pokery. They go in, get the tea on, work on it and suddenly it’s great. Alex goes off inside his head writing: he’s like Elvis. He’s just pulling it out of the air.”

AM favourite Iggy with the Stooges at Bimbo’s 365 Club, San Francisco, 1974



PLAYLIST

MONKEY HEAR

A conversation with Alex Turner about what’s on his iPod



JIM FORD
HARLAN COUNTY

“It’s just got that thing. A few heads play on that, don’t they? Like Dr John...”



BILL FAY
TIME OF THE LAST PERSECUTION/FROM THE BOTTOM OF AN OLD GRANDFATHER CLOCK

“‘Camille’, I’ve been playing that a lot... and ‘Plan D’. It’s miserable; you’re not going to pull listening to that one.”



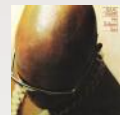
MICHAEL CHAPMAN
FULLY QUALIFIED SURVIVOR

“This was a big one for me while I was writing this last album. I wanted to have some of that quality in this record. I’m not really listening to that any more, but *Wrecked Again* has a song called ‘You Say’ on it or something [actually on *Rainmaker*]... You’ve talked to him... Is he cool?”



IGGY AND THE STOOGES
RAW POWER

“Before the Brits we had *Raw Power* on really loud to get us there. It’s like, ‘Come on, Iggy, we need you now...’”



ISAAC HAYES
HOT BUTTERED SOUL

“‘Walk On By’. It’s on that Wu-Tang sample, ‘I Can’t Go To Sleep’. It’s a heavy groove for 20 minutes.”



BLACK ANGELS

“It was on the *True Detective* series. Have you seen that? All the music’s incredible. T Bone Burnett did it, I think.”



ALAN HULL
SQUIRE

“I quite like that folkie thing when there’s a groove as well. The bass sounds like *Melody Nelson* or something, those Gainsbourg records.”



WARPAINT

“It’s the new one. Good to have something new on there...”

“Alex is the same feller, he’s just not having his weekends in Sheffield any more”
NICK O’MALLEY

AM is a spectacular record of where Arctic Monkeys are at now, born out of a contradictory environment: conceived in Sheffield, grown in the desert, born in L.A. It’s a swaggering hard-rock record about emotional uncertainty; a series of bold and eloquent statements about personal grey areas. The search for contentedness, Alex Turner decides, isn’t unlike the search for good music. It goes on. “It’s never resolved, is it?” he says. “You’re looking for this thing, but you don’t really know where you’re going to find it. But I have a reverence for that process, that trek. It’s not some bullshit like ‘I want to put beautiful things in the world’. But there is some of that, you know, the way ‘Happiness Is A Warm Gun’ does that to you. I remember hearing The Beach Boys in a car, hearing those harmonies. It gets you down there somewhere.

“That’s what my dad told me about music; it’s about feelings,” Turner says. “There’s a set of rules you can follow. But at the end of the day, you’ve got to feel it in your soul.”

Arctic Monkeys play outdoor shows at London’s Finsbury Park on May 23 and 24

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THE MAKING OF...

Far From Any Road

BY THE HANDSOME FAMILY

How the cult duo made their Southern desert noir masterpiece – and how, thanks to HBO's *True Detective*, it brought them global success 11 years later... "It's a fairytale!"

OVER THE LAST two decades, Brett and Rennie Sparks have carved out a steady niche for themselves – 10 albums, numerous tours, cult acclaim. This year, though, everything

changed, when an 11-year-old song from *Singing Bones*, one of their worst-selling albums, was chosen as the theme to HBO's hit series *True Detective*. "Far From Any Road", a subtle, mariachi-flecked gem, hardly stands out as striking theme-song material. Yet, selected by the programme's musical director, T Bone Burnett, the track perfectly captures the show's brooding Southern noir. Written by lyricist Rennie Sparks just after the duo had moved from Chicago to Albuquerque, New Mexico, this hymn to the majesty and darkness of the desert has now become a worldwide success, racking up sales in countries including Israel, Poland, Ireland, Hungary, Greece and Tajikistan. "We've had a lot of people over the years talking about how strange we are," says Rennie. "You know, oddballs, way out, left-field..."

"All of that, you know, Gomez and Morticia bullshit," adds Brett.

"But it turns out we're not really that weird," she continues. "We just needed the right context. People have said one reason they like the show so much is that it mentions things in the mainstream that haven't been mentioned there before. Things

like us, and Beefheart, things that people thought can't be appreciated by the mainstream – but it turns out people love that stuff, they've just been waiting for somebody to admit it!"

TOM PINNOCK

RENNIE SPARKS: I'm from New York, so it's a very alien landscape to me here in the desert. I find it fascinating everyday. I see things that I just can't believe are real.

BRETT SPARKS: Like giant worms... I'm a native New Mexican and I grew up all over the Southwest, but this is the first time Rennie has lived here, so it was at the top of her mind while writing the songs for *Singing Bones*.

RENNIE SPARKS: I learned about desert insects. They're very big and very strange. I got viciously bitten by these fire ants in our driveway – it was very, very painful – and I was convinced I should develop some kind of ant superpowers after that. I started thinking about the queen of the ants out in the desert and, you know, if I listened at night would I hear her calling? She speaks to the other

KEY PLAYERS



Brett Sparks
Vocals, guitar,
bass, percussion,
songwriting



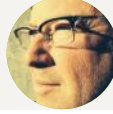
Rennie Sparks
Vocals,
songwriting



Darrell Sparks
Drums



David Gutierrez
Mandolin



David McChesney
Trumpet

ants so, you know, why can't I hear? Everything in the desert has a thorn or a spike it will share with you because it's so hard to survive here, and everything has its little drop of moisture to protect.

BRETT SPARKS:

Everything has a protective shield. Just like everything has its own period of time in a year when it appears and then disappears.

RENNIE SPARKS: Here we have a lot of jimson weed. It's a horrible hallucinogenic and poisonous. During the day these buds just look like a little pile of weeds, but at night, as soon as the moon comes up, you see these enormous white trumpets appearing from them. They always grow in the strangest places, on the sides of

highways or in abandoned lots. There's a special kind of moth that comes out at night that has a beak like a hummingbird and it goes and sips down that trumpet. It's very sexy. In June they suddenly appear en masse and they're each as big as a hummingbird. Then a month later they're all gone. I wrote the lyrics for "Far From Any Road",





"A lot of our songs are connected by themes of sex and death..." Brett and Rennie Sparks in New Mexico; far left, Woody Harrelson and Matthew McConaughey in *True Detective*

inspired by all this, then I probably told Brett I had some ideas for the music that he ignored...

BRETT SPARKS: That's the way we almost always work. I just kinda read the lyrics over and over again until something sprouts in my head.

RENNIE SPARKS: I did want it to be lush and big and beautiful, and I think Brett captured those feelings of something menacing, but also something sensual and gorgeous.

DAVID GUTIERREZ: Rennie has that quality that the best lyricists do. She's able to paint a picture without telling you exactly what it's about. For *The Handsome Family*, the lyrics are the reason for the music.

BRETT SPARKS: It was just one of the songs on the record to us. The desert feeling was kind of a theme for the record, like Calexico, Lee Hazlewood and Nancy Sinatra, and Miles Davis and Gil Evans' *Sketches Of Spain*. "Far From Any Road" was the first time I used a lot of effects, weird things you never think about doing when you're working with a four-track or an eight-track.

RENNIE SPARKS: There were a lot of cicada sounds outside when we were recording and Brett kept saying, "I can't get rid of these cicada noises" [laughs], then he said, "Well, we should work with that." The cicadas were trying to tell us something: "Listen, this could work."

BRETT SPARKS: I do simple demos with acoustic guitar and a drum machine. Then I just throw stuff at the demo, usually in Midi form, on a keyboard. It's almost just trial and error.

DAVID GUTIERREZ: The studio at their house is more than a little chaotic. There are wires everywhere on the floor, picks scattered like snowflakes, amps and Telecasters stacked on the walls and on shelves, lots of art from thrift stores. I remember one painting that pictured a Huck Finn-type character lying near a stream with a fishing pole. Very romantic and corny all at once. The bathroom off of the studio is filled with guitars, even in the bathtub. The entire place

"Everything in the desert has a thorn it will share with you 'cos it's so hard to survive here..."

RENNIE SPARKS

exudes creativity and music. If weren't real you'd think it was impossible fiction.

BRETT SPARKS: There's something like 11 castanets on it – I knew that I wanted Latin percussion. If you listen to the first measure of *Sketches Of Spain*, it has this beautiful sound of a chorus of castanets, it sounds like cicadas, like the Spanish night. I just loved it, so obviously I wanted to steal it [laughs]. And that's the perfect

way to create the frame for that song, for the place the song lives – the desert, at night. So I listened to that over and over, trying to figure out how they got that sound. You just have a bunch of people firing off castanets at random, so I did the same on Pro Tools. They're always moving around and going down in the mix and coming up at different points. I went fucking crazy with the percussion, there's cowbell and guiro too. Obviously, the classical guitars are evocative of the desert too. Then I tried a trumpet on the keyboard and was like, "That's cool." So I told my friend David McChesney that I needed to find a trumpet player and he was like, 'Oh, I can do it'...

DAVID MCCHESENEY: What I didn't tell him, and honestly, it didn't really occur to me, was that I hadn't played trumpet since high school. So, I take the horn over one afternoon. Brett is in recording mode – he's a little more edgy than usual, his hair is plastered oddly to his head and he's mumbling a bit. I lift the horn to my mouth, and blow... and nothing but air comes out of the bell. I try again. This time it's more of a hideous screeching sound. Brett is giving me the one-eyed eyebrow look... Eventually I have the part worked out, but when we record, the trumpet is painfully out of tune. I start adjusting the valves, to little avail. So we roll, and roll again, and punch and cuss and drink until we've got a horn line and a harmony line. Brett played it for me a few days later and it was like magic. It may have been the world's first Auto-Tuned trumpet. ➔



Handsome devils: the stars of *True Detective*

➤ **BRETT SPARKS:** I wanted mandolin, too. I was thinking about Greek music where they have choirs of bouzoukis, and the sound reminded me of that fluttering sound of insect wings.

RENNIE SPARKS: That's when all the moths arrive.

GUTIERREZ: I think we layered my part six or seven times, maybe more. The nice thing about the mando is it's never completely in tune, which gives it that rich sound. Stack mandolins like Brett did on that track, and you get a cool timbre and vibe. When I heard the final mix, he had stripped away the mandolin on the verses and left the wash on the chorus. With the trumpets, that helped give the song a unique flavour.

DARRELL SPARKS: The feel of the song has an odd gallop to it too. I did two or three takes on the drumkit – I probably would've done five to 10 takes if I would've known it would make it to a Hollywood studio with T Bone Burnett and Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson...

BRETT SPARKS: I don't know where those breaks came from. I wanted each section to be distinct – the guy tells his story, stop, the girl tells her story, stop, and then it comes together, so it's like new paragraphs.

RENNIE SPARKS: I like to imagine that there's a thousand years taking place during the breaks. That's a normal timeframe in the desert. My voice doesn't work on everything, but here I thought it made sense, like a man and a woman meeting up in the desert either for sex or death or both. To me all the songs on *Singing Bones* are connected by certain themes of nature and romance, sex and death. A lot of the songs take place far from any road, that's the way I see it.

BRETT SPARKS: Thematically, yeah, but musically it's totally different. "Far From Any Road" was kind of an anomaly style-wise. It's essentially a tango or a rumba.

MCCHESNEY: It was like nothing they'd done

before, that Morricone via Calexico thing.

DARRELL SPARKS: It's an homage to Southwestern culture – Brett had gotten his BA in Music History at the University Of New Mexico. Maybe they'll start doing more Latin or Mariachi songs now!

RENNIE SPARKS: Did we think it could be a popular song? Well, we didn't put it first on the album!

BRETT SPARKS: We got an email last year that said, 'We wanna use the song for *True Detective*.'

RENNIE SPARKS: I don't know really how T Bone Burnett found it. We've never spoken to him and it's all been very mysterious. There are situations where you hire people to push your songs to places, but none of that's ever happened with us. So it's lovely that the only reason they picked the song is because they like the song. We had no idea what the show was gonna be until it came on. I thought it might be a reality show until I heard about the actors. My fear was that it was gonna be a normal cop show and our song really wouldn't make much sense with it, but I feel like they completely understood the song, and it really does fit well with what they're trying to do.

BRETT SPARKS: There was a big scare. They were like, 'Do you have the multi-tracks?'

RENNIE SPARKS: We'd had a hard drive fail and we'd lost all the tracks from those sessions. They decided they'd use the song anyway. It was such a great, great moment to hear it on the first episode. We were sitting on the couch, holding each other, waiting for it to happen. There's very few moments in a musician's career that can feel full of unbridled joy, and that was one of them.

FACT FILE

- **Written by:** Brett and Rennie Sparks
- **Released:** October 6, 2003
- **Performers:** Brett Sparks (vocals, guitar, percussion, production), Rennie Sparks (vocals, bass), Darrell Sparks (drums), David Gutierrez (mandolin), David McChesney (trumpet)
- **Producer:** Brett Sparks
- **Recorded at:** Brett and Rennie's home studio, Albuquerque, New Mexico
- **Label:** Carrot Top/Loose

BRETT SPARKS: And the show turned out to be really good! I listened to the song every week when it was on and I was like, 'Too much reverb on the vocal...' Maybe it was the reverb that scored it for us, though? It gives it that murky feeling.

MCCHESNEY: I get giddy every time I see it, and feel a lot of pride that I played some part in it. The show didn't disappoint either – top notch.

DARRELL SPARKS: It works well as the theme – there's almost a David Lynchian sensibility to it. It adds to the mystique of the series, ultimately.

RENNIE SPARKS: Since the show, we're charting in Namibia and Kazakhstan and all sorts of places. It's beyond belief.

BRETT SPARKS: It's followed a pattern that's really satisfying – at first you get hundreds of emails and letters from people that are like 'I love your song.' Then they're like, 'Where have you guys been forever? I wanna get all of your records

on vinyl.' So we're redoing stuff on vinyl. We've made 10 records, and I thought some of them were pretty much lost, except to the few thousand that bought them, but now it's cool that people are picking them up, and we can do it on vinyl now.

RENNIE SPARKS: And we know people don't have to buy anything nowadays. So the fact that people are ordering them is just such a nice thing.

BRETT SPARKS: I have a reputation for bitching about the digital revolution and how people don't buy records anymore, but this has been a kick in the head for me, in that, you know what, people do still buy records, you just have to give them something they want!

So people aren't as selfish as I thought they were, like, "all these bastards, they want everything for free, goddamn kids and their little phones..."

RENNIE SPARKS: We've seen the same progression in the UK – the first time the show was on we got maybe 100 iTunes downloads...

BRETT SPARKS: ...and by the fourth episode, it was thousands a week. Half our UK shows are sold out, and we're moving to bigger venues.

RENNIE SPARKS: Just the fact that we survived for 20 years as a band is a miracle in the music world, and to have something new and exciting happen after 20 years is amazing.

BRETT SPARKS: It's a fairytale.

RENNIE SPARKS: They're allowed to use it for series two, we just don't know for sure that they will! It should fit the theme of the show, which is about the mysteries of life more than about solving crimes. The mysteries of sex and death. So, you know, we could provide that service...

BRETT SPARKS: On iTunes, if you type in 'Handsome Family Karaoke', there's a pretty kick-ass karaoke version of the song. I don't know who did it, I didn't approve it, but I found it yesterday and I was like, 'Oh, this is awesome!'

RENNIE SPARKS: *Singing Bones* was the forgotten album, but now it's probably the best-selling. I had a whole pile of *Singing Bones* in our closet that I couldn't sell for years and years, just covered in dust. Then, all of a sudden, in one week, they were all gone! ☺

True Detective Series 1 is available on June 9 from HBO Home Entertainment

REX © HBO/EVERETT

TIMELINE

2000 Brett and Rennie Sparks move from Chicago, Illinois, to Albuquerque, New Mexico, creating a studio in their home

October 2003 *Singing*

Bones, featuring "Far From Any Road", is released

January 2014 *True Detective*, its opening sequence sound-tracked by the song, is

broadcast in the US

February 2014 On iTunes, the song reaches No 2 in Kyrgyzstan and 19 in Israel, among other worldwide entries



ENO • HYDE

SOMEDAY WORLD

AN ALBUM BY BRIAN ENO AND KARL HYDE

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Story: Allan Jones | Photo: Contour/Getty

LIFE'LL KILL YOU

At last: how WARREN ZEVON negotiated a gangster father, alcoholism, drugs, guns and boundless extremes of unhinged behaviour, collaborated with Dylan, David Gilmour, Springsteen and REM, “took everything to the edge and usually over it,” and made some of the greatest albums of our time. All hail Mr Bad Example!

THE FORMER GOLDEN boy of West Coast rock is backstage at a dingy north London venue, standing in dim light, alone, at the far end of a corridor down which he might have swept in his '70s heyday, flanked by a pampering entourage.

It's September 1992, however, and we find Warren Zevon in somewhat reduced circumstances. He's just played a show at a sparsely populated Town & Country Club, drawing extensively on a breath-taking back catalogue of songs that when they were recorded featured luminaries galore, including fans Bob Dylan, Neil Young and Bruce Springsteen. Those glory days have long-since ridden out of town, taking with them the lavish budgets and advances that bankrolled them. Tonight, he didn't even have a band. “They're gone,” he says of those high times. “This is who I am now.”

From the cut of his duds – a Prada overcoat, a cashmere scarf that looks like it might have cost

as much as a small car – he's not exactly on his uppers. But in the gloom of this corridor, water from a dripping pipe gathering in a puddle at our feet, he looks like someone used to much better than this dire circumstance.

“I don't have a band,” he says, sounding a bit raw about it, “because my records don't sell and I don't have any money.”

How much would he need to put a band on the road? He looks at me with an eyebrow raised and a pirate's grin. “How much money do you *have*?” he asks, looking disappointed when I tell him not enough, actually, for my cab fare home. “That's too bad,” he says as a light bulb somewhere further down the corridor flickers and dies. “I guess that means

we're both shit out of luck.”

“WHO HAS BEEN
THAT GOOD?
DYLAN HAS,
BUT NOT TOO
MANY OTHERS”
ANDY SLATER

“AS FAR AS I was concerned, he was one of the great writers of our time,” says Andy Slater, the former music journalist who rescued Warren Zevon's career in the mid-'80s, after it had been derailed by alcoholism and



Zevon recording his self-titled album with producer Jackson Browne, 1976

EYEWITNESS

"A WHOLE DIFFERENT PERSON WHEN HE'S SCARED..."

Warren's literary fan club

As a documentarian of LA's gorier aspects, it was clear from the start that Warren had more in common as a writer with James Ellroy than James Taylor. Zevon's influences, in fact, were mostly literary, Hemingway, Mailer and Chandler to the fore. He was a close friend of Ross Macdonald and Thomas McGuane – Chet Pomeroy, hero of McGuane's *Panama*, is clearly reminiscent of Warren's talent for mayhem. Later, he would become close to writers Carl Hiaasen, Dave Barry, Amy Tan and Stephen King and play in their garage band, The Rock Bottom Remainers. Hunter Thompson, with whom he raised occasional hell, was also a fan.

"Warren Zevon is a poet," Thompson wrote. "He has written more classics than any other musician of our time, with the possible exception of Dylan. He is also a crack shot with a .44 Magnum and an expert on lacrosse. I have learned not to argue with him, about hockey or anything else. He is a dangerous drinker and a whole different person when he's scared..."

much unhinged behaviour. "I was horrified when I came to California in 1983 to work at the management company that represented him and at our first client meeting the guy who ran the company went down the client list that had names on it like the Eagles and Steely Dan. When he got to Warren, he said, 'Warren Zevon. He's \$180,000 in debt to the IRS, he has no deal, he doesn't want to work, he's drunk and he's living in Philly. We're terminating him. He's off the roster.'

"I just jumped up and said, 'You're kidding. Warren is the best writer we have. We can't terminate him.' The guy who ran the company said, 'OK. You manage him.'"

Slater called Warren in Philadelphia, breezily announcing himself as Warren's new manager. Warren hung up on him.

"I naively thought we'd been disconnected," Slater recalls. "So I called back and just got the answering machine. This went on for four or five days. Eventually, I get him on the phone and he says he can't talk because he's just been to the dentist. He was drunk, completely loaded. But I thought he could still be great and I wanted him to be working again. I convinced Warner Bros to give me \$5,000 to make some demos and called Peter Buck, who was a friend from college, and asked if REM, who were not a big band at the time, would back Warren on some demos, knowing Peter was a fan. I called Warren and said, 'Have you got any songs? I've got 5,000 bucks to make some demos and a great young band to play on them.' He said, 'You've got five grand? Give me that money. I need it.' He sounded pretty desperate, but I said, 'No, Warren. I can't just give you the money. Go down to Atlanta and make a demo with these guys.' He said, 'Will you fly me first class?'

Slater flew him down to Atlanta where he cut four songs in three days with REM. "Warren wasn't in the best shape," Slater goes on. "But one of the tracks he gave me was a song called 'Reconsider Me' and when I heard that, I knew his power as a writer was undiminished by what he'd been through – the drink, the drugs, the guns. I brought him back to California and although he was still deep into what he called his 'chemical engineering' phase, I was determined to get him sober and put his career back on track."

How had it come to this desperate pass for Zevon, whose early career had been so full of bright promise?

"The '70s were like a decade-long Lost Weekend that a lot of

people were devoured by," says Jordan Zevon, Warren's son.

"My dad was one of them. I have an early memory of my grandmother taking me to see him in LA at the Universal Amphitheatre. We had to buy our own tickets. We got backstage and I was taken into this room to meet him. He was just sitting there, barely said a word, just stared at me. Then he got in his limo and left. He was totally fucked up."

"When Warren was drinking, he was crazy and that caused problems," says Jorge Calderón, whose 30-year friendship and songwriting partnership with Warren started when Jorge, as a favour to Warren's girlfriend, Crystal, who Zevon later married, picked Warren up from an LAPD drunk tank where he'd spent the night after being arrested. "He was out to lunch a lot, did a lot of wild things. He drank too much. He was reckless. He took everything to the edge and usually over it."

WARREN ZEVON'S LIFE in headlines would up to a point read like this. Warren William Zevon is born in Chicago on January 24, 1947. His father, Stumpy Zevon, a Russian-Jewish immigrant and former boxer, is a gangster with fond memories of Capone and connections to infamous Mob overlord Sam Giancana. His mother, Beverly, comes from a Mormon family who are appalled when their daughter takes up with the raffish, possibly dangerous Stumpy. Warren would write about his parents' fractious relationship on "Mama Couldn't Be Persuaded" on his first *Asylum* album.

He grows up mostly in California – Fresno, San Pedro, San Francisco and Los Angeles. He has formal tuition in classical piano, meets Stravinsky at his home in the Hollywood Hills. He drops out of high school at 16 and heads for New

York, intending to become the new Bob Dylan. Back in LA, he writes advertising jingles, plays sessions (he's on Phil Ochs' *Pleasures Of The Harbor*). By the mid-'60s he's signed to label White Whale as part of a boy-girl pop duo called lyme & cybelle, who have a minor hit with "Follow Me", produced by Bones Howe, who's just had great success with The 5th Dimension and The Turtles, who put a song of Warren's, "Like The Seasons", on the B-side of their monster hit "Happy Together".

"White Whale weren't sure what they had with Warren so they asked me to meet with him to see if



Fan and friend, Hunter S Thompson



I thought he could make a pop record," says Howe, who would later produce Tom Waits. "When I first met him he was still searching for who he was, artistically. He was an extremely intelligent young man, extremely articulate and a gifted classical pianist. I thought in fact that his future might be in classical music, but he was very clearly taken with the idea of becoming a pop music star of some kind. I got on very well with him but he was already rehearsing with a bunch of guys out in West Hollywood. They were a screaming rock'n'roll band and I'm more of a pop guy, but I helped Warren get a deal with Imperial and put him in touch with Kim Fowley."

Fowley, the infamous LA entrepreneur, has one question for Warren: "Are you prepared to wear black leather and chains, fuck a lot of teenage girls and get rich?" Warren is, unsurprisingly, and the pair start work on the little-heard *Wanted Dead Or Alive*, which does nothing for Warren's career. He gets a gig as bandleader, pianist and arranger for the Everly Brothers, hiring guitarist Waddy Wachtel, who becomes a lifelong collaborator. He's already drinking heavily, but the songs he's writing bring him to the attention of Jackson Browne, an early champion who becomes a long-suffering friend. Browne recommends him to David Geffen, who's just launched Asylum Records, but nothing happens. In 1975, a disillusioned Zevon splits for Spain with his wife, Crystal. They settle in the small coastal town of Sitges, where Warren plays guitar in a bar run by a colourful ex-mercenary named David Lindell, with whom Warren writes one of his most famous songs, "Roland The Headless Thompson Gunner". The he gets a message from Jackson Browne, who seems finally to have got him a deal with Asylum.

The album that follows in 1976 is *Warren Zevon*, which Browne produces. It's a measure of the esteem in which Warren is held by LA's rock aristocracy that they turn out in droves for the session. The album's full of handsome ballads, including "Hasten Down The Wind" which is prettily covered by Linda Ronstadt. But the songs that stunned were the ones with a whiff of cordite. These included bleakly hard-boiled songs like the coruscating "I'll Sleep When I'm Dead", "Mohammed's Radio" and "Desperados Under The Eaves" – a song about personal Armageddon, looming catastrophe and an unpaid hotel bill – that cast Warren as the cynical laureate of the LA scene, an heir to the sardonic likes of Nathaniel West, Billy Wilder, Howard Hawks, Ben Hecht and Raymond Chandler, who he idolised, in whose fast-talking company you imagine he would have been at home.

The album is well-received and a modest hit, but even as Zevon's career is taking off, he is increasingly in the grip of a fearsome alcoholism that eventually costs him his marriage, a large part of his career and very nearly his life. The latter at this point is descending into often violent chaos, but he manages at least to write the songs for his second album, *Excitable Boy*, another collection of songs that much like Warren at the time are frightening and hilarious, among them "Lawyers, Guns And Money", "Roland The Headless Thompson Gunner", "Accidentally Like A Martyr" and the deranged title track. "Even on the first album, the vodka was a problem, but his drinking got progressively worse," recalls Jorge Calderón. "The sessions for *Excitable Boy* were more out of control. Jackson and Waddy were producing, trying to rein

in Warren's wild, drunken side and trying to keep him straight. But they were doing a lot of stuff themselves, cocaine, pot. We used to smoke a lot of pot. It was like a big party and people were in and out all the time. You never knew who was going to be there."

The big names of LA rock were again in attendance. What brought them out to support Warren? "He was just unique," says Calderón. "Jackson told me after Warren passed: 'He was the best of all of us', meaning him and Henley, all those people. They were great, but Warren's songs went deeper. He dug a deeper ditch, as we say, he threw himself in it and came out with these



"HE JUST STARED
AT ME, THEN
GOT IN HIS LIMO.
HE WAS TOTALLY
FUCKED UP"

JORDAN ZEVON

songs that described an LA that was dark, romantic and full of hurt, like something out of Chandler, who we loved, along with all those hard-boiled writers, like Ross Macdonald."

EXCITABLE BOY IS Warren's biggest success. He even has a hit single from it with "Werewolves Of London". Meanwhile, his drinking is escalating. There are blackouts, memory loss, violence. He seeks help, ignores it. He promises to stop drinking, appalled by his own behaviour, and then almost immediately is drinking again. His periods of sobriety are brief. These are what he later calls his "cowboy days". Was he playing the role of legendary hell-raiser, hard-drinking, unrepentant, who might have stepped out of one of many of his own songs? "Every generation has its Barrymore, its legendary drinker," says Jordan. "There was part of my dad that saw himself in that tradition. He loved The Rat Pack, the idea of these really cool guys, always with a drink in his hand. But my dad didn't drink for effect. He drank to get drunk. He was an alcoholic. ➔

HOW TO BUY...

WARREN ZEVON ON RECORD PART 1



WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE

IMPERIAL, 1969

5/10

This primitive curio, instigated by Kim Fowley, is essentially a one-man-band exercise in psycho blues, outlawry, and country schtick. It looks good on paper but it was early days. Only the heartbreak of "Tule's Blues" and the dark, chaotic "Traveling In The Lightning" truly deliver.



WARREN ZEVON

ELEKTRA, 1976

10/10

The madness begins. Produced by Jackson Browne with cameos from The Eagles and Fleetwood Mac, Zevon hits his stride. Every line dazzles, from drug-weary pleas ("Carmelita") to sleazy LA noir ("The French Inhaler"). Anthem-of-eternal-energy "I'll Sleep When I'm Dead" and "Mohammed's Radio", spiritual ode to the majesty of rock'n'roll, are immortal highlights.



EXCITABLE BOY

ELEKTRA, 1978

9/10

Though marred by the stray throwaway, *Excitable Boy*, from Zevon's 'Bezerko' period – as Browne coined it – establishes his legend. Everyone knows "Werewolves Of London" and "Lawyers, Guns And Money", yet the haunting, lovelorn "Accidentally Like A Martyr", the rock'n'roll classicism of "Johnny Strikes Up The Band" (signature Waddy Wachtel guitar), shine too. The knives come out on both the homicidal title track and "Roland

The Headless Thompson Gunner", a mercenary's bloody revenge.



BAD LUCK STREAK IN DANCING SCHOOL

ELEKTRA, 1980

8/10

Warren had a stockpile of songs at hand for the first two albums, but sustaining that calibre proved challenging. *Bad Luck Streak* evidences the strain – its mercenary/outlaw themes seem forced, its classical pretensions intriguing but discordant. Still, it has moments: "Wild Age", on the mythos of burnout, and "Gorilla, You're A Desperado", the best-ever jag on rock-star ennui. "Play It All Night Long", showcasing David Lindley's transcendent slide, is Zevon's all-time best rocker.



THE ENVOY

ELEKTRA, 1982

9/10

Warren Zevon's mainstream moment was fast fading in the MTV age. Newly sober, though, he returned with a faultlessly sharp effort. The vulnerable "Let Nothing Come Between You" was the shoulda-been hit, but a character-driven mix of regret, nihilism and his slickest, driest humour ("The Hula Hula Boys") made for a winning, sonically stunning disc.



SENTIMENTAL HYGIENE

VIRGIN, 1987

8/10

The big comeback, *Sentimental Hygiene* clutched at what made Warren special – the explosive tribute to boxer "Boom Boom Mancini", the comic skewering of celebrity rehab in "Detox Mansion". Overly slick – even REM are rendered as anonymous backers – the strength of sardonic songwriting prevails. Neil Young's guitar on the title track helps spark a respectable return to form.

WARREN ZEVON ON RECORD PART 2

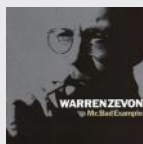


TRANSVERSE CITY

VIRGIN, 1989

Zevon's dalliance with cyberpunk, aided by superstar support (Gilmour, Garcia), is ambitious but overwrought. The black-as-night "The Long Arm Of The Law" transcends, as do occasional prescient insights amid surprisingly bouncy arrangements. Best song "Splendid Isolation" – about the bliss of solitude – stands on its own sweet groove.

6/10



MR BAD EXAMPLE

GIANT, 1991

Shunned in the time of hip-hop and Nirvana, *Example* reunited Warren with the Elektra-era crew, including producer Wachtel. Zevon's nastiest rockers ("Finishing Touches", "Angel Dressed In Black"), rub shoulders with his last stab at the mainstream, "Searching For A Heart" – out-Eagling the Eagles – and "Suzie Lightning", his sweetest love song ever.

8/10



MUTINEER

GIANT, 1995

A homemade job, this is his best post-Elektra set of compositions. By now leaning hard into literary influences (Martin Amis, Carl Hiaasen), he also presents "Monkey Wash Donkey Rinse", an outrageous Zevonian preview of the afterlife.

9/10



LIFE'LL KILL YA

ARTEMIS, 2000

If "Monkey Wash..." held one view on expiration and its repercussions, this late-career masterpiece – opening salvo in a trilogy essentially portending his own early death – essayed variations galore. This was Zevon coalescing a lifetime of dark visions, across a wide range of characters, with wicked humour and a folk-rock beat, led by "My Shit's Fucked Up" and "Porcelain Monkey".

10/10



MY RIDE'S HERE

ARTEMIS, 2002

Considering the strengths of its predecessor, *My Ride's Here* is a letdown. A pastiche of sorts, though not without subtle pleasures and madcap narratives ("Basket Case", "Lord Byron's Luggage"), several indulgences tip the scale downward. The title cut, though – death arrives in a Western fever-dream, cameos by everyone from John Keats to John Wayne – is a masterpiece.

7/10

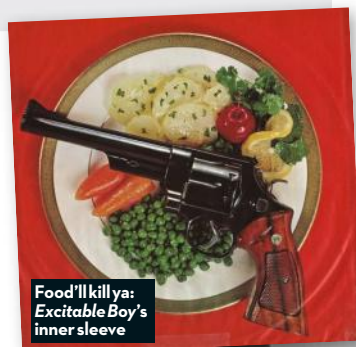


THE WIND

ARTEMIS, 2003

The Wind's heroic last stand, art racing death to the end, is an incredible final chapter, Zevon saying his goodbyes, cracking jokes, voicing regrets. While the more personal expressions are almost too intimate to bear, Warren's playful side is all smiles: "Disorder In The House", uplifted by Springsteen's cosmic guitar solo; "Numb As A Statue", benchmark Lindley slide; and the piquant, self-mythologising "Dirty Life And Times", an unapologetic, self-accepting summation. **LUKE TORN**

9/10



Food'll kill ya: *Excitable Boy's* inner sleeve

☞ Alcoholism is a disease. He was sick."

"I heard all the stories about him before I worked with him," says Niko Bolas, who co-produced *Sentimental Hygiene*, Warren's 1987 'comeback'. "I was completely enamoured. I thought he was the coolest guy on the planet. He was like a cowboy. I don't think he was acting at all. The Warren I knew was the Warren you read about. He really was that smart. He really did drink that much. He really did take all those drugs. He was really that guy. A lot of the time he didn't want to be him, but that's who he was. If you told him the river is too deep to cross he'd get a wet suit 'cos he was still going in. That was him."

"I met him at a time in his life when he was a reformed wild man," says Noah Snyder, the young engineer who first worked with Warren on 2002's *My Ride's Here* and went on to produce his last album, *The Wind*. "So I never had to deal with that Warren, who was sorry about a lot of the things he'd done, especially when he was drinking and doing all those drugs. I think he felt he'd sacrificed his young family and some of his most important relationships to his desire to ultimately be famous. He had a lot of regrets."

"He was tormented, he was insecure," says Jorge Calderón. "There was a lot of anger, especially as his career went down

and he started thinking nobody cared about him. Someone would call and he'd get mad at them, phones would get thrown at walls. He was out of control a lot of the time. When he actually cleaned up, I thought he became more prolific and a better musician," says Calderón. "But in the old days he was crazy. The worst time was when he ended up living in this sleazy place on Sunset with John Paul Getty III, the kid who was kidnapped. I don't know how he met him but they had this place together and they had something going on with these girls and there were a lot of drugs, guns, all sorts. I don't know what was going on over there, but it was crazy."

WARREN STARTS AND aborts numerous periods of detox and rehabilitation. By 1980, he's well enough to release *Bad Luck Streak In Dancing School*, which opens with two gunshots and includes his mercenary epic "Jungle Work" – "We parachute in/We parachute out!" – as well as one of his most profane songs, "Play It All Night Long". The same year sees the release of an outstanding live LP, *Stand In the Fire* (dedicated to Martin Scorsese), recorded over five rollicking nights at the Roxy in L.A. But Warren's no longer troubling the charts or the people who compile them.

The Envoy (1982) is another fine collection of songs about fractured lives and geopolitical dread, but it's the last album he makes until Slater gets him a deal with Virgin for 1987's *Sentimental Hygiene*, his comeback, which in part reflects with a mix of apology, astonishment, extremely black humour and bracing candour on his hell-raising heyday on songs like "Detox Mansion", "Trouble Waiting To Happen", "Even A Dog Can Shake Hands" and "Reconsider Me", which three years earlier had so excited Andy Slater. There were appearances by his regular West Coast cronies, but also valuable contributions from REM, Neil Young and Bob Dylan.

"The great thing about working with Warren was you could call *anyone* and they'd come play on his record," says Slater. "He was the ultimate songwriters' songwriter. He represented all those things we love about rock'n'roll – rebellion, living on the edge. Then there were the songs. How many people have been that good? Dylan has, but not too many others."

How did Neil Young and Dylan end up on the record?

"We had a session called for two o'clock," Slater recalls. "At noon, I get a call from Warren. 'I'm at the studio. You've got to get down here right now.' I said, 'Warren, the session's not 'til two.' He just said, 'Andy, now. Bob Dylan's here.' I'm like, 'What? Do you even know him?' Warren says, 'No. Just get down here. He just turned up and no-one knows why.' I get down there and Dylan's sitting there with this kid, his son.

They're just sitting around. We played some songs then he split. I thought, 'We've got to get him on the record!' I said, 'Why don't we call and ask him to play harmonica on "The Factory"?' We were doing overdubs at a studio on La Brea. He came in, played three or four passes on the song and that was it. He didn't stay long. He did his solo, was super-gracious and was gone. Warren loved him. He was Warren's hero.

"We were recording at Record One, which was like a house, two studios on either side of a living room, and Neil



Zevon with REM's Bill Berry, Mike Mills and Peter Buck



Laststand: Zevon at his final UK gig, Shepherd's Bush Empire, London, May 30, 2000

was working across the hall from us. Niko knew him and was working on a record with him. He came in and we asked him to play on 'Sentimental Hygiene'. He picked up Warren's guitar, this Blackknife guitar with a moulded graphite neck that didn't have the same resonance as a wooden guitar. I said to Niko, 'He's got to play on this track. But we've got to get him back with his own rig.' So he came in with his guitar, Old Black, and his red pedal board. He told us to turn the speakers up and play the track as loud as we could. He stood in the middle of the studio facing the speakers and blew through three ferocious solos like he was onstage. When he finished, Warren looked at me and said, 'That was like Woodstock.'

Sentimental Hygiene isn't the commercial success Warren and Slater have been hoping for but sells well enough for Virgin to bankroll a follow-up, the somewhat grandiose *Transverse City*, an LP about perestroika, shopping, traffic jams and the end of the world, partly inspired by Thomas Pynchon and the cyber-punk novels of William Gibson.

There's another stellar lineup of musicians, among them Jerry Garcia, Little Feat's Richie Hayward, Jorma Kaukonen and Jack Casady from Jefferson Airplane. The soloists include Young, again going splendidly amok on "Gridlock", Chick Corea on "The Long Arm Of The Law" and on the apocalyptic "Run Straight Down", Pink Floyd's David Gilmour.

"We were recording the *Momentary Lapse...* album and had moved to LA because our deal with [producer] Bob Ezrin was that we would do part of it in LA," Gilmour tells *Uncut*. "We were in the big A&M complex which had two or three studios. Warren was recording in one and asked if I'd play on a track, so I did. That's it. Nice guy. Only met him the once. Bob Dylan dropped in while I was there."

After *Transverse City*, Zevon records sporadically. There's 1991's wonderfully acerbic *Mr Bad Example*, the *Learning To Flinch* live album (1993) and *Mutineer* (1995), then a five-year silence, many people figuring that Warren had either died or retired. Then in remarkably quick succession, there's *Life'll Kill Ya* (2000) and *My Ride's Here* (2002), a pair of albums whose songs are mostly about death. Because of what Warren is soon going through, the albums are retrospectively seen as somehow prophetic.

IN MAY 2000, a show Warren's due to play at London's Shepherd's Bush Empire is cancelled when he's taken ill. He's still complaining about feeling unwell at the re-scheduled concert, but people are laughing so hard at his songs, patter and Tom Waits impersonations no-one really pays attention. Back in LA, friends are worried by his declining health, a dread of what might be wrong with him, which turns out to be mesothelioma, a rare form of lung cancer that also killed Steve McQueen.

GALLOWS HUMOUR "IT'S GETTING DARK, TOO DARK TO SEE..."

Warren records "Knockin' On Heaven's Door" for *The Wind*

"It took me a minute to warm to the idea," says Noah Snyder of Warren's suggestion they cut a version of Dylan's "Knockin' On Heaven's Door" for *The Wind*. "We did it on a whim. Billy Bob Thornton had offered us the use of his studio, The Cave, in the basement of the house Billy Bob had bought from Slash. Warren was hanging out there and said, 'Let's do a version of "...Heaven's Door".' The dude was just like that. The morbid was not out of bounds. I thought initially it was a bit much, but they cut a fantastic version. Warren found a truth in those lyrics. This really was a man at heaven's door and to face what he faced and be able to stare back at it and poke fun at it and not be paralysed by it showed incredible strength. I've seen people weep the first time they hear that track."

"CANCER GAVE HIM THE CHANCE TO BE LIKE ONE OF HIS TOUGH-GUY HEROES"

JORDAN ZEVON

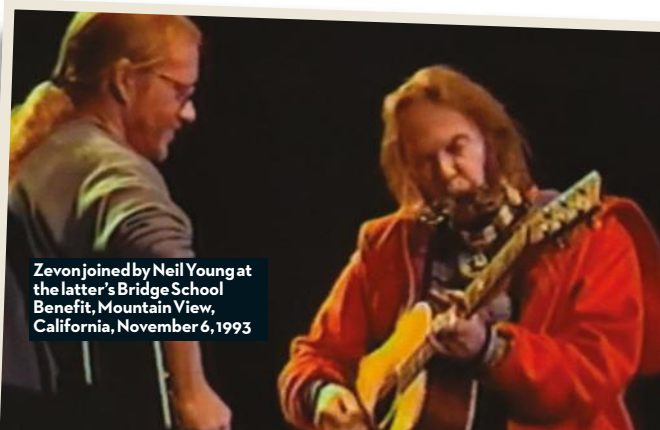
As in his heyday, LA's rock elite gathered to him. Among those at the sessions for the album that would become *The Wind* are Ry Cooder, Jim Keltner, Tom Petty, Jackson Browne, Don Henley, Joe Walsh, Dwight Yoakam, Timothy Schmidt, T Bone Burnett, Emmylou Harris, Billy Bob Thornton and Bruce Springsteen, who blows in to play on a song called "Disorder In The House".

"We sent him a rough of the track and he came up with a guitar part and an idea for a solo and flew in to do it," says Jorge Calderón. "It was insane. We had a rented amp, a Fender Twin, very powerful. When he finished that solo, the speakers were blown, it was so raucous. He loved Warren, they had a great time together. It was one of the better days."

"I was in awe of Springsteen," Noah remembers. "He was in the middle of, like, a 120-date tour. He flew in on his own dime. He took his own private jet and flew in overnight from Minneapolis or somewhere, came straight to the studio and played. His solo killed the amp, which kind of reached the pinnacle right there of being an amp. There was nothing left for it to do. It just died. He played this awe-inspiring solo and Warren just turned to me when he was done and said, out of the side of his mouth, 'Did anyone know Bruce Springsteen could play guitar like that?' It was very emotional. He was just a tornado of joy that blew through the studio and left. I don't

"We went to see a Clint Eastwood movie and he asked me to slow down, not walk so fast, he was out of breath," recalls Jorge Calderón. "I told him to go see a cardiologist. He called me a week later and he'd been to the cardiologist, who'd sent him to another doctor. I said, 'What did he say?' Warren said, 'He told me I have lung cancer and there's no cure.' I fell to my knees. I was devastated. I said, 'Take care of yourself, go somewhere with your kids, get some treatment.' He called me back and said, 'No. I want to make this album and I want to do it with you.'

"He said, 'We're going to have to work fast as I don't know what's going to happen.' He told me that the chemotherapy would kill him quicker than the cancer. He said he'd rather make this LP then go to the happy hunting ground, as he put it. He said, 'If I start chemo, I'm not going to be able to do anything and I need to make this record.' So we started writing songs, furiously."



Zevon joined by Neil Young at the latter's Bridge School Benefit, Mountain View, California, November 6, 1993



Final years... Zevon after his diagnosis, with son Jordan and daughter Ariel

● think he was in town for more than 12 hours. It meant a lot to Warren at a very bad time.”

In October 2002, the album still unfinished, Warren makes his last public appearance, on *The Late Show With David Letterman*. His performance gives the impression he’s wise-cracking his way to the grave.

“It was the role he was preparing to play all his life,” says Jordan. “It gave him the chance to be like one of his tough-guy heroes. He got to be John Wayne, at last. But a lot of the time he was depressed, scared. He was on powerful painkillers, liquid morphine. He started drinking again.”

“People don’t know how close we came to not getting the record done,” says Jorge Calderón. “Warren was putting on a brave front, laughing, making jokes about dying. But I saw him getting more and more depressed, especially when he started drinking again after all those years. He was afraid. He was trying to hide his drinking from me. I said, ‘Dude, I don’t care. But at least get the album done, be there for the sessions.’”

“He locked himself away, eventually. We had four songs without vocals and he went home and wouldn’t come out. He wanted me to put the vocals on. I said, ‘Are you kidding me? I can’t sing these songs.’ He disappeared for three months. Eventually, his kids, Ariel and Jordan, and some people went to his apartment and confronted him.”

“A friend who used to leave groceries outside his door called to say she was worried as the groceries weren’t being taken in,” says Jordan. “I basically camped outside his door until I got in. The place was a mess and so was he. The apartment was blacked-out and all the grocery bags were lined up against a wall. The food hadn’t been touched, but there were empty bottles everywhere. I got him cleaned up and organised nursing help for him. He was in terrible shape.”

“He pretty much disappeared for three months,” says Noah. “We kept working as long as we could. We polished every song we had and then ran out of stuff to do. He was drinking, yeah. I think the doctor made two terrible mistakes. First, he told Warren he only had six months to live, when in fact he had longer. He also told him, ‘You know all those rules you have for yourself about these things you don’t do because they’re bad for you? They don’t matter anymore.’ I think that was a dangerous thing to say to a recovering addict. He didn’t just disappear down a bottle, though, that’s not quite what happened. He did have some days when he was out of it. There were days when he was not well, when he was just not there, when he was drunk. But it wasn’t every day. And certainly the last times I saw him, he was himself. He wasn’t fucked up. He wasn’t high. He was Warren.”

“HE UNDERSTOOD
HOW DARK THINGS
CAN BE, BUT HE
STILL REJOICED IN
THE LIGHT”
NOAH SNYDER

“Warren got himself together but was too ill to get to the studio,” says Jorge, “so we went to his place to record his last vocals. We still had ‘Keep Me In Your Heart’ to do and he called me and said he couldn’t do it. But guess what? When we got there, he sang it. I knew he could. But he was in such a hole and was so scared and afraid of what was happening to him. All I could do was comfort him. I was his friend, his brother.”

“It was an immensely difficult time,” says Noah Snyder. “He did it in the end and he was great. But it took a lot of effort. He said, ‘I can’t sing now. I’m done.’ We had

to nurse him through those final sessions. But we did it. He sang them. We had an album.”

The Wind is released in August 2003, to the kind of ecstatic reviews Warren hasn’t enjoyed in 20 years, and wins two Grammys. And now there was nothing left for Warren to do but die.

“TOWARDS THE END,” says Jordan, “I’d go around to his apartment, lie on the bed next to him and watch terrible movies and TV shows, hold him. As he got worse, he didn’t want me to see him. His hands had started to swell. He wanted to spare me, so I stayed away.”

“I last spoke to him a few months before he died,” says Andy Slater. “He was very funny. He reflected on the things he wished he’d done differently and the mistakes he’d made. It was a very difficult moment. I loved the guy. It was never about business and all that bullshit for me with Warren. It was about something much deeper, and now, he’s in the wind.”

“I think I saw him one more time after the last session,” says Jorge Calderón. “But we continued to speak on the phone when we could. The last time I was at his house, we never got to a place where we said goodbye. We knew what was going to happen. He was extremely afraid and he hugged me and said, ‘Man, I’m so scared.’ And I hugged him like a brother and said, ‘Dude, it’ll be OK.’ We were family.”

“He was one of the most unique songwriters the United States ever produced,” Calderón goes on. “The way he looked at life, his humour, he was always pushing things to a different level. He wrote many wonderful things. He was the best of them all.”

“I saw him at his place just after the record came out,” says Noah Snyder, “maybe six weeks before he passed. That was the last time I saw him. There wasn’t

much to say. There was nothing left unsaid between us at that point. Life is fragile. If there is someone you love, let them know. Because you don’t know what’s going to happen. He had been such a mentor and I learned so much from him in such a short period, it was insane.

“Warren was not just one person in the sense that different people who met him at different points in his life met different people, they met a different Warren. He was a very complex man and he understood how dark things can be, that this is a dark world. But that didn’t stop him from valuing and rejoicing in the light that shines in all that darkness and that’s what I’ll always remember about him.” ●

EYEWITNESS

“ENJOY EVERY SANDWICH...”

Warren on *The Late Show...*

On Wednesday, October 30, 2002, a month after he was diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer, an entire edition of *The Late Show With David Letterman* was devoted to Warren. Letterman was a long-standing fan, and had appeared on *My Ride’s Here*, bawling away on “Hit Somebody! (The Hockey Song)”.

“You look and seem remarkably healthy,” Letterman said. “Don’t be fooled by cosmetics,” Zevon told him, his features clearly gaunt beneath his studio make-up, but his gallows humour still intact. Letterman wondered if his former hell-raising lifestyle had contributed to his current illness, which made Zevon laugh out loud. “I think I chose a certain path and lived like Jim Morrison and then lived for 30 more years,” he said.

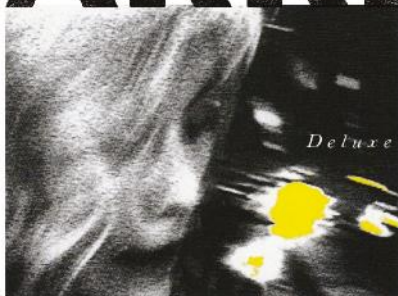
From his ‘current perspective’, did Zevon know more about life and death than the chat show supremo did? “Not unless I know how much you’re supposed to enjoy every sandwich,” Warren replied with a hard-boiled grin, before playing “Genius”, “Mutineer” and a rousing version of “Roland...”, which ends with the valedictory holler: “Talkin’ about the man!”



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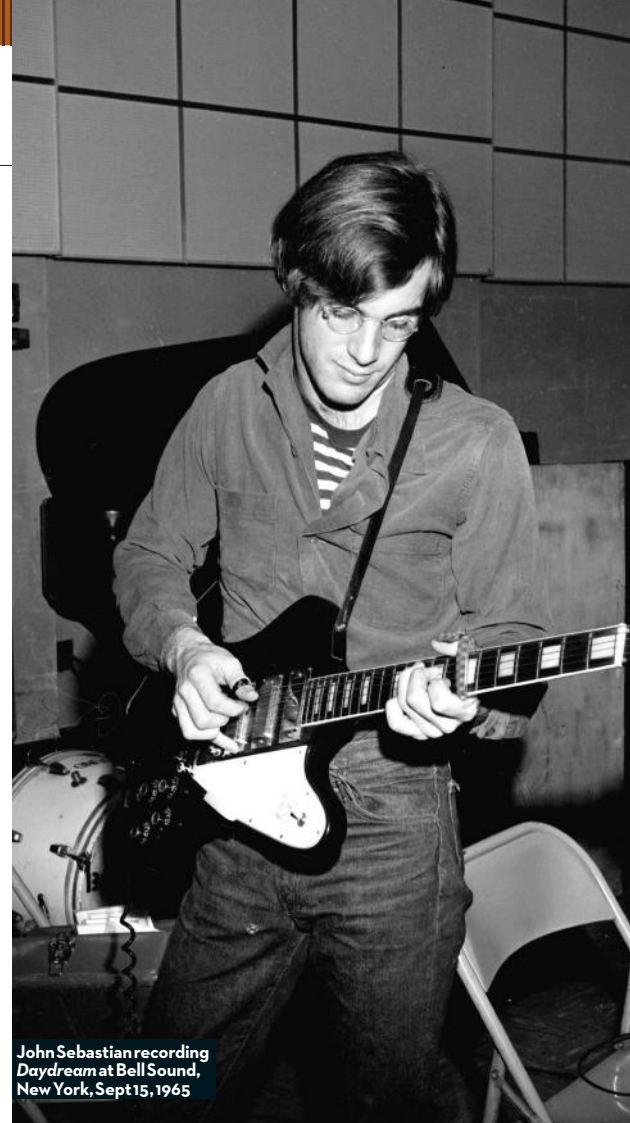
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John Sebastian

The Lovin' Spoonful's 'prototypical hippy' revisits Greenwich Village, Woodstock, and his best LPs...

THE SON OF a classical harmonica player, John Sebastian grew up steeped in the diverse music culture of New York's Greenwich Village. He spent his teens carrying guitars for passing blues legends and falling in with the likes of 'Mama' Cass Elliott, Maria Muldaur and Tim Hardin, before forming The Lovin' Spoonful in 1965 with Zal Yanovsky. For a couple of heady years Sebastian's breezy songs of innocence captured the sunny side of the hippy dream. He went on to forge an eclectic solo career, kick-started at Woodstock and now anthologised in a new release collecting four of his post-Spoonful albums. "I've always felt like what I was doing wasn't that heavy," Sebastian tells *Uncut*. "All the time we were just trying to write good songs and have some fun."



John Sebastian recording *Daydream* at Bell Sound, New York, Sept 15, 1965



THE EVEN DOZEN JUG BAND

ELEKTRA, 1964

The teenage Sebastian joins with several other future Village luminaries for a good-natured album of rough and ready jug music.

I grew up in Greenwich Village, and one summer I got a word from [folk guitarist] Stefan Grossman: "Hi, you're in a jug band. Just come in and play the blues." Harmonica was my main thing, professionally, but my real excitement was the guitar. I carried guitar for Lightnin' Hopkins and I never took my eyes off of his fingers. I went into this little rehearsal, and it was mostly people I knew like Maria Muldaur, Steve Katz and David Grisman. We sat down with [producer] Paul Rothchild, and he said, "We should make a jug band record, I think it's going to be a craze. A Thing." It was a lovely little accident. I'd had an inkling of a session or two by that point and Paul spotted that I was session-friendly, that I felt comfy in the studio. We struck up a friendship. After making that record he asked me if I would play harmonica on a Fred Neil album, *Bleecker & MacDougal*, and I began playing live with Fred and Vince Martin. I also played on what would eventually come out as *Tim Hardin 4*. Eventually Zal Yanovsky and I started logging time together, collaborating and getting better, and we began interviewing different players for what became the Spoonful.



THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL DO YOU BELIEVE IN MAGIC

KAMA SUTRA, 1965

Joyfully irreverent debut includes the pop-gem title track, a Fred Neil cover, plus idiosyncratic takes on blues and folk. We got turned down by every record company in New York. We were pitching the demo of "Do You Believe In Magic", which became the hit single. I don't think we ever re-recorded it. Eventually Phil Spector showed up at our nasty little club in the Village, The Night Owl. He listened to a couple of sets, and that set off some amazing repercussions, with these secondary record company guys coming to see us. That went on for a while and we eventually got a deal and could put a record out. I was still learning how to write songs. I'd gotten real lucky a couple of times, but I wouldn't get up in the morning and start writing great songs. Our Long Island rhythm contingent, Steve [Boone, bass] and Joe [Butler, drums], hadn't really been exposed to a lot of folk music. I was showing them that, and jug band stuff, and thinking we could add it all to our sound. Besides that general rock'n'roll thing, we were incorporating things from guys that I'd played with in the past, like "Mississippi" John Hurt. "Fishin' Blues" was by a Texas bluesman called Henry Thomas. The ...*Magic* album wasn't perfect, but it was a point of departure.



THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL DAYDREAM

KAMA SUTRA, 1966

Sebastian steps forward as a lead composer of style and diversity, writing or co-writing all but one song on an album which includes the classic title track, breezy single "You Didn't Have To Be So Nice", and trippy blues "Warm Baby". When we got "Daydream", it was one of those things where I thought, 'Woah, we may be still in the saddle here!' We started off in a world of 45 singles, so our only game still was three minutes of heaven every time out. That was all. We thought of it as four-man Phil Spector music. We wanted it to have that big quality, but we didn't want to hire the Wrecking Crew. Our producer Eric Jacobsen understood something about this funny hybrid that we were working on. Things like the chimes on "You Didn't Have To Be So Nice" were our attempts at creating that kind of vibe: harmonica, slide whistles and penny whistles. I hate calling it folk-rock. They called The Byrds folk-rock and then they were too lazy to come up with something else for our band, but we weren't really drawing from the Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan catalogue. It was a time of a lot of seriousness, and a lot of fake seriousness, and people talking about Important Things. The Lovin' Spoonful didn't really go for that. We were just trying to entertain.



Sebastian (right) with The Lovin' Spoonful in 1967: "We were in the sweetheart phase... soon after it all went to shit!"



THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL WHAT'S UP, TIGER LILY

KAMA SUTRA, 1966
The soundtrack to Woody Allen's directorial debut, a

bizarre re-dubbing of two Japanese spy films, written and recorded in two days.

I was already a big Woody fan. Nobody really knew him, but I lived six blocks from the Bitter End and I could see him there every night. I'd take my mum's friends down there to gauge their reaction. Some people loathed him, others thought he was the most funny, transgressive thing they'd ever heard. It's a very '60s film. It was a simple enough idea that it didn't intimidate Woody. I found out later he'd been very nervous about putting a good-timey rock'n'roll band in his movie. I think he thought he might lose his slim thread of credibility. We hired a movie producer, Jack Lewis, at the suggestion of Woody's people. He was a cool old pothead jazzbo guy, with a very non-specific approach. He knew little tricks, like putting silly music beneath scary scenes to make it more scary, and changing tempos. There was a lot of experimentation going on. Zal particularly thrived on that. I was enjoying it too, every bit of it. There were times when I missed the collaborative qualities Eric Jacobsen and I had, but Jack and I also became very good friends. A few months later we did the soundtrack for *You're A Big Boy Now* for Coppola. It was a different process from Woody. Francis was almost every minute during the creative process, showed me the movie, talked me through each scene. I learned a lot from him.

THE UNCUT CLASSIC



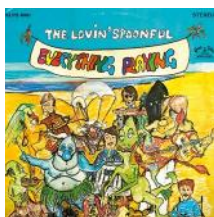
THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL HUMS OF THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL

KAMA SUTRA, 1966

Rated by Peter Buck as an overlooked '60s classic, their fourth album features four great, diverse hit singles, including "Summer In The City". The writing and playing capture a band at the top of their game, sliding with ease between rock, pop, country, blues and folk. On *Hums* it starts to be a little more diverse. We wanted to be Buck Owens at the same time as we wanted to be a big, bad rock'n'roll band on "Summer In The City". That song came from an idea my brother Mike had. He had this great chorus, and the release was so big I had to create some kind of tension at the front end to make it

even bigger. That's where that jagged piano part comes from. Steve contributed the middle eight, which I thought sounded like Gershwin, so we hired a radio sound effects engineer to come in with records of horns and traffic, a real NYC thing.

I was listening to lots of country music and blues. As an accompanist I'd been exposed to a lot of finger-picking, Doc Watson, all that, and it came out on "Darlin' Companion" and "Nashville Cats." "4 Eyes" heavily borrowed from Robert Johnson, and "Voodoo In My Basement" is our take on Howlin' Wolf. I used to take great pleasure in trying to imitate Geoff Muldaur, and I think "Bes' Friends" had a bit of that Muldaur moan to it. It was a more expansive sound. The music business was changing, which allowed an entire album to be digested at one time. That was a big thing. And the technology was doubling every two years, from two-track, to four-, to eight- to 16. That really helped, too. I guess it's our most successful album, artistically. It's pretty good! It was a happy camp. We were still in the sweetheart phase, but soon afterwards it all went to shit. Steven and Zal had been busted in San Francisco, and in order for Zal not to be deported to Canada he had to tell the cops where he got the pot. It created an entirely different dynamic. One week he was the hippest of the cultural heroes; now he's a fink. It was horrible, I hated watching it. It was killing him. He began to drink more and developed an antithesis for the whole band process, and eventually we said, "You know, we can't do it this way." That relationship took a good 15 years to fully repair, but in the end we were pals again. ➔



THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL EVERYTHING PLAYING

KAMA SUTRA, 1967

With Zal Yavonsky
gone, newcomer Jerry
Yester oversees the

ambitious orchestral pop arrangements on Sebastian's underrated Spoonful swansong. Features the New York Philharmonic and Ray Charles' brass section.

Jerry Yester was working very hard to fill Zal's shoes. He couldn't do it by being a mad Jewish crazy-comedian type guy, he knew he was going to have to do it with his own skills, which were arranging – vocal arranging, especially. It was an ambitious record, with different dynamics. We never did anything the way anyone else did. We're at 16-track by now, and we're working with producer Joe Wissert, which was a real transition from Eric. On previous albums, you'd finish a take with all four guys, and then Eric would say, "OK, Zal, now do a take where you pay no attention to anything else that is going on." Whereas Joe would say, "Well, what should we do now?" And we thought, 'Gee, we thought producers were the guys who told you what to do now!' It wasn't a total failure, but there was such a different mood to it, and I'm not sure people could connect to it so easily. I felt it was the end for me. I felt like I had explored it as far as I could. I said, "Keep the name, make some more records, I won't stand in anybody's way."



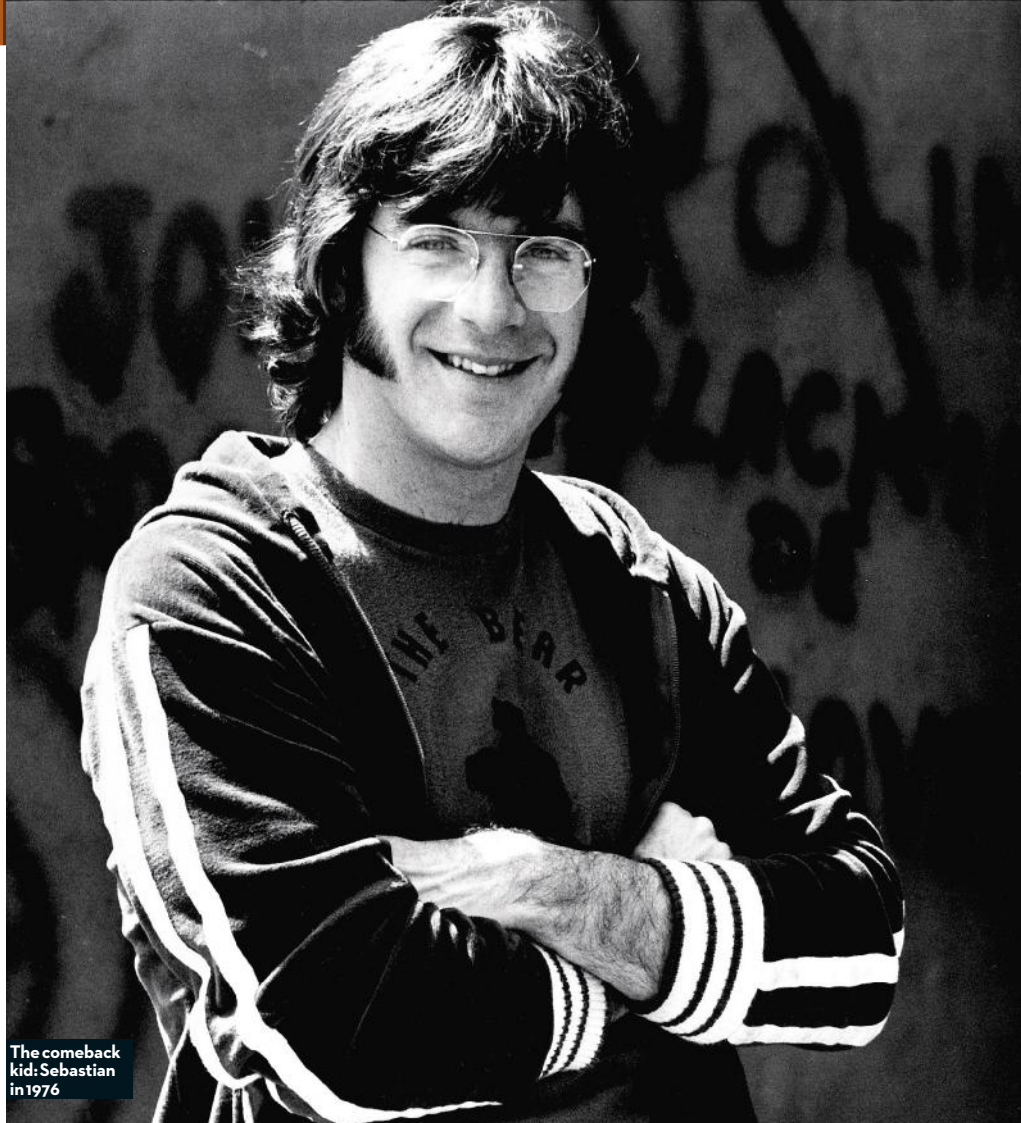
JOHN SEBASTIAN JOHN B. SEBASTIAN

REPRISE, 1970

Released shortly
after his iconic solo
appearance at

Woodstock, Sebastian's solo debut is a finely wrought singer-songwriter record featuring a host of hippy stars.

I had continued to play with other people as an accompanist, and I had a desire to record with some of these virtuoso guys. If I wasn't tied down to a band, I wanted to go completely the other way. The main idea was this: let's cast musicians to serve the individual song. That wasn't a luxury I had ever had previously. So we got in Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Bruce Langhorne, and I wanted Dallas Taylor, the baddest little Texan motherfucker drummer I'd ever heard, with some twisted internal mambo. Paul [Rothchild] and I had all this background together, so it was logical for him to produce. I recorded it in 1968 but it didn't come out until 1970 because all of a sudden MGM decided that I was still The Lovin' Spoonful, and owed them a record as The Lovin' Spoonful. I said, "Guys, there isn't a single member [of the band] on any of these tracks." It was a drag to deal with. In the meantime I played the Woodstock festival. All I'd done was take a white Levi's jacket, dip it in tie-dye and gone to the festival for recreation, and all of a sudden I'm labelled the prototypical hippy for the next three years or so. It helped my profile but it also trapped me a bit.



The comeback
kid: Sebastian
in 1976



JOHN SEBASTIAN WELCOME BACK

REPRISE, 1976

A career in the
doldrums is resurrected
by a hit theme for the

ABC comedy series *Welcome Back, Kotter*, resulting in sessions for a hastily arranged new album.

It was a big, bad music scene by 1976, with the Les Paul-stuck-on-10 world, and here I was with these light little ditties. I saw a poster of Alice Cooper at Warner Brothers and thought, 'Boy, it's a hard time to be John Sebastian!' Then I got a call from a guy called Alan Sacks from Brooklyn who was writing a TV show with Gabe Kaplan. He wanted New York guys to do all the writing. I saw a pilot and read some early scripts, and went away thinking, 'I could hit this out of the park!' I came back with the song, "Welcome Back", and their reaction was to change the name of the show from *Kotter* to *Welcome Back, Kotter*. As soon as the show went out, people wanted to buy the theme song. The record company's reaction was to get me into the studio with Steve Barri, who had produced the *Happy Days* theme song, and some great players. It had to be made very fast – after no attention at all for two years, they had to have it by next week! – but we probably had three or four interesting pieces of music on there. There was no promotion for the album. It was really all about the single, but there are a couple of other good songs for people who want to go hunting.



THE DOORS LIVE IN NEW YORK

RHINO, 2009

Having played blues
harp on the recording
of "Roadhouse Blues",
Sebastian guests at the

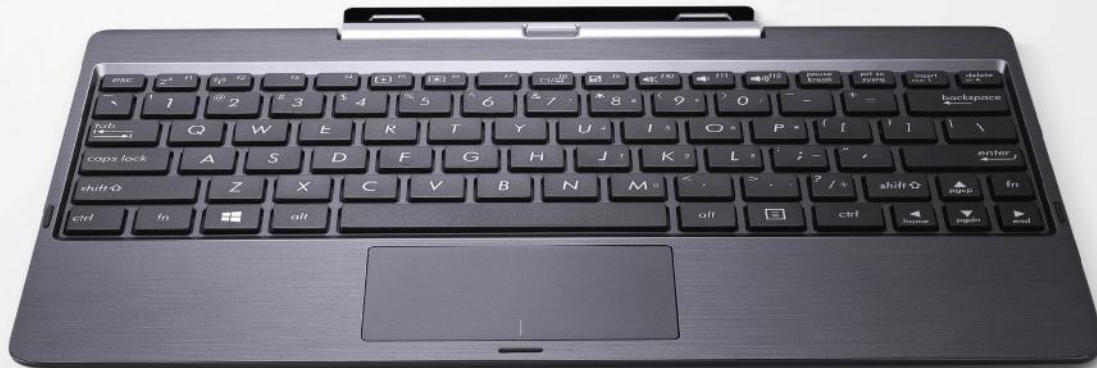
band's two January 1970 shows at New York's Felt Forum.

Again, I owe this huge debt of gratitude to Paul Rothchild. He called up one day and said, "We're getting to have a little trouble in the studio with Jim [Morrison]. For some reason he has a kind of respectful attitude to you, and I think he'll behave better if you're there. Will you come in and play harmonica?" We had a lot of fun at that session. Lonnie Mack played bass, who impressed me more than anyone in The Doors! Later I did shows with them in Detroit and New York, playing on "Little Red Rooster" and some other old blues tunes, which were taped. *Live In Detroit* is my original performance, I think, but I got this call 20, 30-odd years later from Bruce Botnick, who was making a Doors live album from the New York tapes. He told me that halfway through the show someone had stepped on a wire and my microphone going into the recording truck was cut off. But they had bootlegs of the same concert, with my entire performance on them. So about six years ago we went into the studio, listened to the bootleg tape for the content, and I redid it. That's what came out eventually on that album. ☺

John B. Sebastian, *Four Of Us*, *Tarzana Kid*, *Welcome Back* and the *In Concert* DVD are available now from Demon



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“I don’t know why people bother with me.”

Story: Steve Sutherland

Photograph: John Carder Bush

“It’s awful what’s happening to people’s sense of their own sexuality...” As the world prepares for KATE BUSH’s live comeback, we reprint in full a revelatory *Melody Maker* interview from October 1989, in which a frank Bush divulges the secrets of her Sensual World and is uncannily prescient about our relationships with computers.



AN HOUR BEFORE she tells me I have a lovely energy and just about makes my year, she apologises for keeping me waiting. “I just had to have a fag,” she says, dogging a butt in the ashtray. “I was just dying for one.”

Something isn’t right here. I mean, I don’t know who I thought Kate Bush would be when I walked into the downstairs room of Durrant’s Hotel where she is drinking tea, but

I didn’t think Kate Bush would smoke.

I think perhaps I was expecting her to be like Emma Thompson, a woman whose precocious talent has been critically downplayed because it springs from a privileged background rather than one of strife or suffering; a woman not so much otherworldly as cocooned from the weird old world for her own safety and sanity.

I think I still expected to meet a hippy nymph despite the evidence of my ears. Sitting in the foyer under the influence of her new LP, watching the first, solitary autumn leaf blow in off the street onto the Axminster, and reading symbolism into the American photographer asking for the price labels to be removed from the olde worlde mementoes on show in the Regency cabinets, I must have ignored the fact that only

Prince has been more consistently intriguing, more exuberantly experimental, more willing to take risks for the sake of pure music in the ’80s. Only the pneumatic *Purple Rain* pumped blood faster than *Hounds Of Love*, only *Around The World In A Day* repatterned the embroidery of pop with the same haughty disregard for convention as *The Sensual World*, her seventh LP if you count the greatest hits compilation.

I think I thought Kate Bush would be Green and ozone-friendly – all ballet shoes and Laura Ashley frocks. The St. Michael’s blouse and slacks, the tiny navy socks and no shoes, the Benson & Hedges freaked me out.

I think I thought of Kate Bush as a precious oasis in a tarnished world, a pearl cast before the swinish hordes. I guess I forgot Kate Bush is a genius.

“I think most people tend to think of me as the weird ‘Wuthering Heights’ singer – that is definitely the image that’s stuck with most people, which I find extraordinary because it’s... so long ago.”

She laughs and, when she laughs, her cheeks dimple like a Disney chipmunk.

“Extraordinary is a very good word, I think. I don’t know why people are still keen on... I don’t know why people bother with me.”

Really?

“Really.”

She’s so small, it’s extraordinary.

“I think most people tend to think of me as that weird ‘Wuthering Heights’ singer”





IT TOOK KATE BUSH four years to make *The Sensual World*, and we've been given an hour to talk about it. Great.

I think about telling Kate how surprised I am she's so small, or how shocked I am she smokes, but time is not on my side so I decide, instead, to tell her how delighted I am that she's come to the conclusion that the past and the future aren't beyond changing. The album sounds so optimistic in an era when absolutely everything appears to be falling apart.

"Oh, thank you! Thank you so much! That's really how I wanted it to be but, talking to a lot of friends and that, they feel it's a dark album."

I didn't think that at all...

"Oh, great."

...I thought some of the situations were dark, but the way they're resolved is optimistic.

"Oh, that's great. Thank you. Yes. That's really great. I'm so pleased you heard it like that. You see, for a lot of people it's so complicated to listen to, and that worries me, because I like the idea of people being able to listen to it easily and... uh... I don't want to confuse people but, for some people, it's very hard for them to even take it in, let alone sort of get anything out of it.

"I do think art should be simple, you see. It shouldn't be complicated, and I think, in some ways, this has come across a bit complicated."

Maybe that's because, for me, the LP's about relationships

– the relationship between language and emotion, the relationship between language and music, the relationship between emotion and music and how all this expresses, or more crucially fails to express, the relationship between people. And relationships, as we know, are never ever easy.

"How interesting. Could you give me an example?"

Well, in "Love And Anger" you say, "*It's so deep I don't think that I can speak about it,*" as if language betrays your aims, and then you go on to say, "*We could be like two strings beating/Speaking in sympathy,*" which suggests that music, rather than language, comes closest to expressing our emotions.

"Yeah! Actually, 'Love And Anger' was an incredibly difficult song for me to write and, when people ask me what it's about, I have to say I don't know, because it's not really a thought-out thing. It was so difficult for me to write that: in some ways, I think, it's about the process of writing the song: I can't find the words; I don't know what to say. This thing of a big, blank page, you know: it's so big... It's like it doesn't have edges around it, you could just start anywhere."

She studies her socks for a moment.

"Yes... um... I don't think I was conscious of it, but it's something I'm aware of when writing songs. There's such a lot you need to say through words. And it's a beautiful thing, language: actually being able to put words together and say something... maybe say two things in one line. But, like you say, it misses the mark so often."

You create your own language, too, don't you? It seems

"I do think art should be simple, you see. It shouldn't be complicated"

when you're at your most sexual, your most emotional, you emit... the only word I can find for it is 'noises', but that sounds too crude. Your "Mmh yes" on *The Sensual World* (the most heavenly sound ever on *Top Of The Pops*) and your "Do-do-do-do-do" in "Heads We're Dancing" are like cries that language has deserted you or, more positively, an attempt on your behalf to merge words and music, to create a new emotional language from a combination of meaning and sound. I remember you used to go "Wow!" when words failed you. It shivers me. It's thrilling.

"Well, I think that's a lovely thing to say... Yes, often words are sounds for me. I get a sound and I throw it in a song and I can't turn it into a word later because it's actually stated itself too strongly as a sound. Like, in 'Love And Anger', the bit that goes 'Mmh, mmh, mmh' was there instantly and, in itself, it's really about not being able to express it differently. Do you know what I mean?"

Indeed I do. Liz of the Cocteau Twins does it all the time. She never sings a lyric as such, it's all noises. But somehow, the way you burst language, the tension that leads to the victory of sound over sense whips your music into another dimension. It's the frustration that gives your songs dynamic, and the way you remedy it that makes them attractive. Most of the *Sensual World* LP seems to be saying, "This can be worked out."

"Between A Man And A Woman" is almost a soap opera situation, with you trying to drive off any external interference which might ruin the chances of a relationship's natural growth. It's like you're saying we live in a fast culture – fast food, fast-edit TV, disposable pop, disposable sex – and, if we don't get instant gratification, we're not interested. You seem angry and determined.

"Well, that's nice, because when people ask me about this song, in terms of having to talk about it, it's rubbish. But yes, I think you're right, it is perhaps about how you actually have that choice sometimes, whether to interfere or not. You know, there's this tendency to want to leap in and take over and control: 'Oh, I know best!'; when I think a relationship is a very delicate balance: it's very easily tipped, and then needs to be refound again."

No matter how precarious, though, you think love's worth it, don't you? "Reaching Out" is full of danger – the child reaching out to feel the fire, for the hand that smacks... You endorse the instinct.

"Rocket's Tail" probably sums up what I'm getting at best. In the beginning you scoff at someone else's romantic notion. They say they want to be the glorious rocket, and you say you only see "A stick on fire/Alone on its journey/ Home to the quickening ground/With no-one there to catch it". But a verse later, you're putting on your pointed hat and strapping the stick to your back. It seems to me that love triumphs over cynicism and, whether you're dashed to the ground and destroyed by throwing yourself into a relationship or whether you survive doesn't matter. The risk, the vulnerability's worth taking. It's the only way you're alive, and anything's better than the loneliness of, say, "Deeper Understanding".

"Yeah! Yeah! There's a lot of that going on the album, and I'm really pleased that you should hear it: like, 'It might not be easy, but there is a way of getting out of it, so try not to worry too much.'"

Perversely, you seem to revel in the mess our emotions can get us into. Having said all that about language wanting to be music, you then take some poor soul and allow music to mislead her into the most dangerous relationship of all. In "Heads We're Dancing", the girl surrenders to the rhythm and ends up dancing with Hitler!

(It's OK – she survives. The man wasn't Hitler when she danced with him, he was just a man. He became Hitler later. We all have the capacity for infinite evil. And infinite good.)

Even under these extreme circumstances, there's no regret.



"You're right – most of my songs are about relationships, probably always have been..."

Again you're saying it's worth giving yourself up to another because anything's better than being alone. There are so many images of loneliness on the album...

"Yes, I think there are. I suppose, in relationships, there's a lot that can go wrong very quickly, and you have to work at them, which, I think, is something a lot of people aren't aware of until they grow up a bit. These things gradually reveal themselves to you, don't they?"

"You're right – most of my songs are about relationships, probably always have been, really. That feels to me how things are, really: relationships towards other things and people, and how we actually manage to make these forms of contact..."

"Deeper Understanding" is the most extreme song on the album. How do you feel about the character who's so desperately, pathetically lonely, (s)he's formed an addictive relationship with a computer?

"Well, wherever you live, chances are you won't know your neighbours, you won't even know the person who lives next to you. But I see this song set in America, just because it's so much more extreme out there: people don't go out of their houses, they watch the television, they can shop from the television, they speak to people on the phone. If they want, they needn't have any form of human communication of a real kind at all, and I think that's being encouraged.

"You know, a couple of years ago there was a lot of news about how women were divorcing their husbands because they were spending all their time with their computers –"

TEAM KATE

FIVE KATE BUSH COLLABORATORS...

Trio Bulgarka? Big Country? Rowan Atkinson...? Kate Bush has worked with a number of other performers over the course of her career. Here's five of the most significant...

David Gilmour

An early champion, Gilmour helped her cut her first professional demo and connected her with Andrew Powell, producer on her first two albums. He later received an 'executive producer credit' on "The Man With The Child In His Eyes" and "The Saxophone Song" on her debut, *The Kick Inside*, and contributed to *The Dreaming* and *The Sensual World*. She performed live with him at London's Royal Albert Hall in 2002.

Peter Gabriel

Another longterm collaborator, they first appeared together covering Roy Harper's "Another Day" for Bush's '79 Christmas TV special. She sang backing on "Games Without Frontiers" and "No Self Control" from Gabriel's 1980 album *III* and duetted with him on So's "Don't Give Up".

Roy Harper

After covering "Another Day" from

Flat Baroque And Berserk with Gabriel, Bush eventually worked with Harper on his 1980 album, *The Unknown Soldier*, where she duetted on "You" (The Game Part II) – a song Harper co-wrote with Dave Gilmour. Gilmour and Bush also appear on the title track to Harper's 1990 album, *Once*.

Rolf Harris

Rolf Harris first brought his digeridoo to the title track of *The Dreaming* in 1982. He then guested on two songs on 2005's *Aerial* – "An Architect's Dream" and "The Painter's Link". An '09 duet of "She Moves Through The Fair" is rumoured to exist.

Stephen Fry

The eloquent British comedian and compere enunciated all "50 Words For Snow" across a number of languages and idioms on the title track of Bush's 2011 album.



With Peter Gabriel at the Brits, Grosvenor House Hotel, London, 1987



God-given voices:
Kate with the Trio
Bulgarka in 1988

➔ they were in there all night. I suppose it's still happening. And this song is about this very intense relationship that developed, where this person spends all their time with computers. They talk to the computer and the computer talks back.

"I suppose I really liked the idea of deep, spiritual communication – deep love which should come from humans – coming from the last place you'd expect it to, the coldest piece of machinery. And yet I do feel there is a link. I do feel that, in some ways, computers could take us into a level of looking at ourselves that we've never seen before, because they could come in from outside all this... I'm not really sure what I'm saying..."

She laughs and takes a sip of tea.

"I think a lot of things in nature are almost programme-based, and a lot of things that we do are very mechanical, so maybe somehow going right through a computer, almost so that you come out the other side – going through all that science – will take us to something very spiritual but very earthy.

"I was very inspired by Stephen Hawking – have you heard about this guy? I think he was an Oxford scientist. He's very ill and, basically, he's coming up with how everything is created... or not created, as he sees it.

"I saw him on television, and it was so moving: this guy who's so close to the answer of it all, in a body that was desperately... it was going, and quickly. And he was fighting against the time he had left, and yet... here was this guy who was probably the closest to knowing it all, and he was speaking through this voice-processor. It was almost, for



"The Sensual World" was a chance for me to express myself as a female in a female way"

me, like hearing the voice of God.

"What he was saying was so spiritual, it was not like a scientist. It was someone saying, 'Well, look: it wasn't ever created and it won't end, it just is.' You know, this wonderful conceptualism is almost beyond words, because he's gone so far through the process. Words can't explain what he's discovered."

I find that a bit scary. I wonder if we want the answer?

"Well, I wonder if we'd understand it! Even if we knew the answer, we probably wouldn't understand it."

But if we ever found out, definitely, whether there's a God or not, it would be like definitely finding out there are aliens from outer space: the human race couldn't handle it, couldn't cope with not being the centre of the universe.

And what if we found out there definitely isn't a God, what then? The truth would be too

much to bear. The idea of death being an inconceivable nothing would drive us mad with the contemplation of extinction.

"We seem to be very much in the era of reason, and science is the ultimate example of that. The other side is the instinctive, which is not logical on any level. Perhaps it's the putting together of the two. You know, like what you were just saying there about aliens? Most people's response would be that it is just not possible because their reason says so, but then an instinctive person might feel, 'Yes, this is so', because it just feels right."

"Maybe we've lost touch with our instincts, so it's become very important for us to work out logical explanations for things all the time, which I think is a bit of a shame, really."

AFTER MONTHS OF experimentation, Kate Bush decided the Trio Bulgarka were the closest thing she'd ever heard to the voice of God. She first heard Yanka Rupkhina, Eva Georgieva and Stoyanka Boneva – Bulgaria's foremost vocal trio – just after she'd finished *Hounds Of Love*, when her brother, Paddy, played her one of their few recordings available in the Western world.

"I was devastated. Everyone I know who hears it is. At the time I didn't really think in terms of us working together but, the more I listened to it, the more I thought how wonderful it would be, and it seemed to gradually make more and more sense to try and get them involved in the album. Still, I needed a lot of time to gather the courage to do it. I was scared about it not working."

Did you think you might cheapen their gift?

"Oh God, absolutely. It was a big responsibility. And what was so nice is that they really enjoyed the experience. I mean, when we first met them, they asked us into their house, and they'd made a big meal for us: it was a big social event, and yet we'd never met. And within minutes, someone said, 'Oh, why not sing them a song?' So Eva, the eldest one, picked up the phone, listened to the dialing tone, went 'Mmmmmh,' and they all tuned to that, and just burst into song!

"They were sitting over the kitchen table and, within minutes, I was just completely taken by them and the tears just... And they loved this, because it meant that they'd got through. Everyone who was with me was really moved – you could see people just trying to wipe the tears away.

"When I was working on the song 'Deeper Understanding', the idea was that the verses were the person and the choruses were the computer talking to the person. I wanted this sound that would almost be like the voice of angels: something very ethereal, something deeply religious, rather than a mechanical thing. And we went through so many different processes, trying vocoders, lots of ways of affecting the voice, and eventually it led to the Trio Bulgarka.

"It made absolute sense – you know, this loving voice – because they have a certain quality: their music feels so old and deep. It's really powerful; such intense, deep music that, in some ways, I think is like the voice of angels."

It's as if they're possessed of it, rather than it's theirs.

"The Trio Bulgarka's music feels so old and deep... it's like the voice of angels"

"Yeah! Absolutely! Beautiful music! Old music like that is magical, and it can be preserved and kept. We must have lost so much of it all over the world. It must have just gone!"

If we take it as read that the album is concerned with relationships and the problems of communication and how these problems aren't insurmountable, I imagine working with the Trio Bulgarka must have put this to the test and enriched the LP through the experience of recording. I mean, I assume you couldn't talk to each other. I assume you had no mutual language, and yet you created together through music.

"Yeah, and it was extraordinary. They didn't speak a word of English and we didn't speak any Bulgarian, but we could

communicate through music, so that absolutely transcended barriers. There were things we needed to translate but, generally, we communicated emotionally, and I just loved that. They'll come up and give you a big cuddle. They'll just come up and touch you and cuddle you, and you can go up and give them a big cuddle, and I really enjoyed that kind of communication, it felt very real and direct to me. I'd never experienced that kind of communication before. It's something we could do with more of. It's a lovely thing.

"They were over not long ago, and we hadn't seen each other for a while and, when the translator went out of the room, we all

started chatting. I don't think any of us knew what the other one was talking about but everyone was talking at the same time, and we were all chatting away, about six of us in a room. Then the translator walked back in and suddenly everyone felt really self-conscious and shut up. It all went quiet and we all sat and looked at the floor. It was a really great moment, really great!"

A PART FROM THE Cure's sumptuously creepy "Lullaby", "The Sensual World" is surely unrivalled as the most seductive single released this year. Like her very first release, "Wuthering Heights", its inspiration lies in literature, but it expands on its theme with an insight and maturity which would have been unthinkable to the girl who rewrote Brontë.

"The Sensual World" is about Molly Bloom, the fountain of lust and life in James Joyce's dauntingly super-realist novel, *Ulysses*. It's a book that's defeated my attempts to read it again and again, and I confess to Kate that it gives me a hell of a lot of trouble.

"God, yes!"

Why Molly Bloom?

"Well, I just thought it was such an extraordinary piece of writing. It's so... ooh!... it's such a beautiful style. It's like trains of thought continually tumbling... you know, tumbling speech, and not kind of... 'stopped'. I first heard her speak being read years ago by... I'm pretty sure it was Siobhán McKenna. And it had such a femininity about it. That was my first exposure to it.

"And it just came together with this song. We'd written this piece of music in the studio, and I thought, 'What about putting the Molly Bloom speech together with this?' So I went and grabbed the book, and it worked perfectly. It just scanned – the whole song. But, unfortunately, when I applied for permission to use the words, they wouldn't let me.

"Obviously, I was very disappointed. It was completely their prerogative, you know, they don't have to give their permission. But it was very difficult for me, then, to reapproach the song. In some ways I wanted to just leave it ➔

WOW!

A GLITTERING CAREER

IF THE STATISTICS are anything to go by, then Kate Bush's live comeback – 80,000 tickets for 22 concerts sold out within 15 minutes of going on sale – proves that she remains a totemic presence in British music. But how does this extraordinary achievement compare with her previous accomplishments? Surprisingly, out of Bush's 10 studio albums to date, only two (1980's *Never For Ever* and 1985's *Hounds Of Love*) have reached No 1. Her last two albums – *Director's Cut* and 50 *Words For Snow* – are certified as silver (60,000 copies sold) and gold (100,000) by the BPI; as her most successful album *Hounds Of Love* is certified double platinum (600,000) in the UK. But times are very different, of course. In comparison to the near-reclusive life she lives today, her schedule in the months leading up to the 1979 *Tour Of Life* found her juggling TV spots (*Saturday Night Live*; *Multi-Coloured Swap Shop*; an Easter ABBA Special), awards ceremonies (*Melody Maker*; *Capital Radio*), news programmes (*Thames At Six*; *Nationwide*) and a video shoot ("Wow"). She has, in recent years, only conducted a few interviews and made two public appearances: at an album award's ceremony in 2011 and to collect an MBE in April 2013.

Busy Bush: on *Multi-Coloured Swap Shop* in 1979



LIVE KATE

TOUR OF LIFE

LAST MONTH, Kate Bush announced Before The Dawn, her first live shows since 1979, to take place this coming autumn at London's Eventim Apollo – the same venue she performed at a mere 36 years ago. In 1979, the singer – then 20 years old – embarked on the six-week Tour Of Life, beginning officially on April 3 at the Liverpool Empire. It visited Oxford, Manchester and Sunderland among others – as well as 10 dates in Europe – before climaxing with three shows at the then Hammersmith Odeon. The 24-song, two-and-a-half-hour set concentrated on material from her first two LPs, *The Kick Inside* and *Lionheart*, and featured 13 performers and 17 costume changes! The set was dominated by a large ribbed screen on to which slides and film footage could be projected. Unashamedly theatrical, the tour embraced poetry, dance and special effects. Reviewing the tour, *MM's* Mike Davies hailed it as “the most magnificent spectacle in the world of rock”. Although critically and commercially a hit, the tour was marred by the death of lighting engineer Bill Duffield, who suffered a fall at a warm-up show at Poole Arts Centre, Dorset.

Since the final date of the Tour Of Life on May 14, 1979, Bush has rarely performed live. She duetted with Rowan Atkinson at the 1986 Comic Relief concert (on a song called “Do Bears Shit In The Woods”, of course) and joined David Gilmour in 2002 at the Royal Festival Hall for a version of “Comfortably Numb”.



On the 'Tour Of Life' in 1979. Below: the cover for “This Woman’s Work”, 1989



off the album. But we’d put a lot of work into it – the Irish musicians had worked hard – so it was a matter of trying to rewrite the lyrics so it kept the same rhythmic sense, because the words are so rhythmic; and to keep the sense of sensuality as well, without using the Joyce lyrics. So it all kind of turned into this piece where Molly Bloom steps out of the book into real life, where she can actually reach out and touch things in the real world. In a lot of ways, because of their lack of co-operation, it transformed the track into something else.”

When you say the Joyce piece had a “femininity” about it, what do you mean?

“It’s difficult to put into words, but I think, on the last album, *Hounds Of Love*, particularly in the production, I wanted to try and get across a sense of power, and the way I related to that was very much what I consider very good male music – the kind of power I found there was not what I found in a lot of females’ music.

“It’s not that I was trying to write like a man or anything – but there was this level of approaching the album, soundwise, that I think had a male energy. But I didn’t want to do that on this album. I wanted to do it as a woman, not as a woman working around a man’s world. This all sounds awful!”

It’s making sense.

“Oh, is it? Good! ‘The Sensual World’ was very much a chance for me to express myself as a female in a female way, and I found that original piece very positive female talking... That’s the only way I can describe it.”

It’s like a sister piece to “This Woman’s Work”. “The Sensual World” is completely self-absorbed in its own erogenous pleasure, while “This Woman’s Work”, plaintively, over stark acoustic piano, reviews the man’s side of the relationship and, really, pities him.

“John Hughes, the American director, was doing a film called *She’s Having A Baby* – a great film, very nice and comic. And he had this scene which he wanted me to write a song for where it gets very heavy. The film’s about this guy who gets married and he likes being a kid, really – very much up in the clouds – and she gets pregnant and they go into hospital, and she’s rushed off because the baby’s in the breach position.

“And suddenly there he is, just left in the waiting room by himself. It’s probably the first time in his life he’s had to grow up.

It’s a lovely piece of film, where he’s looking back on their times together – there are scenes where they’re decorating their flat, going for walks and things – and it was very much just a matter of telling the story in words – how, at times like that, you tend to go into something akin to guilt mode and think of all the things you should have done and you just didn’t.”

I think men are bigger babies than women. I don’t think we grow up so fast.

“Maybe men can avoid more situations than women in terms of facing things. I guess there are things for women that are different and they tend to deal with life situations rather than the business world. God, this sounds so sexist...”

Not at all. Women give birth, they are physically part of the creative process. It’s as if their orgasm grows and bears fruit, whereas men fuck and that’s it – it’s a release, something we get rid of rather than something we gain. Then it all builds up again, and we can’t handle it. I think women are far stronger emotionally. Men can’t cope with emotions. We get frustrated and aggressive and destructive because we can’t express ourselves, whereas women seem to embody their feelings better. Something positive grows from them.

“Yes, I think you’re right. It’s very hard on all of us but, yet, through the process of giving birth, I’m sure that women are much stronger than men, and it’s incredibly hard on them that they should not be able to show their emotions when actually it’s OK to be weak.”

KATE BUSH LIVE ON STAGE
BEFORE THE DAWN

We men are confused. The trouble with the invention of the notion of sexism and the paranoia surrounding it is that the only way we can deal with it is based on a fallacy. We think that, just because women should quite rightly have equal rights and equal opportunities, the sexes are the same. But we're not – women are aliens to us, we don't understand you at all. You speak a different language altogether. We're different creatures entirely.

"Absolutely, I'm with you 100 per cent. I couldn't agree more. I think it's awful what's happening to people's sense of their own sexuality. Women are made to feel awkward about expressing themselves as women in a man's world, so, subconsciously, a lot of the time, they're behaving like men because they don't know how strong they're supposed to be.

"Then again, women's lib has left men in a lot of areas where they don't know how to behave in case they get called sexist, a pig, or whatever. We are different, and we should be helping each other. Unfortunately there was such a lot of shit to get through, it was a battle, but I don't think it need be."

THE ALBUM SEEMS to be saying, "If you find yourself in a tricky situation, follow your instincts – just behave the way it feels right and at least you're being true to yourself, irrespective of the outcome."

"Yes, absolutely... and what an incredibly difficult thing to apply to life. I think there are some very good things going on to help us through. I must say, for me, the comedy in this country has been really educational. You know, Ben Elton and The Comic Strip – all those people you can't really call alternative comedians anymore because they've become mainstream. I think they've really done a lot to stop it being fashionable to be humorous with sexist overtones.

"It used to be very hip to make fun of women. Old comedy was all about treating women as a threat and, therefore, making fun of them. And they've really changed a lot of that. They've done so much for men and women because now, in most circles, among people our age, if you make a sexist joke, it's considered tasteless. That's a fantastic step forward. And to see people like Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders out there doing comedy being women as women is brilliant.

"They're just out there doing it and, the more women can be strong enough to do that, the more it'll help everybody. It used to really scare me the way women were portrayed in comedy, and the way they behaved: either they were bitching off other women and being sexist themselves, or they were allowing themselves to be used as sex objects, either positively or negatively – they were either very beautiful or very stereotypically ugly. Women would just be batted around from these extremes, but that hold's been broken now and, as comedy's so much a part of our nature in this country, so much a part of our roots, to break old things like that is an incredible step."

What you've achieved musically is pretty incredible too – the way you can do exactly what you want exactly when you want without anyone interfering. You're very much admired for your independence, and most of the women I know who aspire to make a living making music would rather be you than, say, Madonna.

"Oh, really! Ha!"

You seem to live the life you want to, almost in a world of your own, whereas Madonna's constantly playing corporate games. She has to compete, you don't.

"I think I'm incredibly lucky to be in this position now, although it's not something I'm aware of without people sparking off my realisation. I think Madonna's very clever, and I think she's very aware of what she's doing, don't you?"



With Dave Gilmour at the London Palladium, March 1987

"God, I'd love to think my music could move people, because it doesn't happen to me often"



I think that's the game she wants to play, and she seems to have her heart stuck on being an actress, and absolutely good luck to her because she's really... talk about on the frontline! She's such an exposed person. I would find that so difficult to live with.

"I guess I have fought for what I want, but you always have to do that. I am very lucky. But it's hard to keep up that level of concern, particularly when you feel the music business becoming very mercenary – there are so many things that encourage you to abuse it. It's so horrid. It's such a shame."

Do you listen to much pop music?

"Not much when I'm making albums. In the evenings I probably watch a film or comedies or something visual to take me away from my ears. But, in between albums, yeah – there's some great stuff. Johnny Lydon's new album is great, and I heard some tracks off the new Jeff Beck album and they were great, too. I think there's been some good, good music out there. Everyone in the music industry's been wearing black for, what, the last four years? I think everyone's in mourning for good music. It's a show of mourning – 'Look, here we are,

where's the music?' And there's little snatches now, and that's exciting."

Are you hypersensitive to music? I mean, just because you make music that moves other people, that doesn't necessarily mean that music moves you.

"God, I'd love to think that my music could move people, because it doesn't happen to me often, but, when it has, it's a lovely experience. The Bulgarians did it to me, and Nigel Kennedy (who also plays on the album) sometimes makes me cry."

There are so many musical clichés, and you're breaking them down. Using Davey Spillane's Uilleann pipes and Dave Gilmour's guitar and the Trio, you've succeeded in creating a new, uncategorisable sort of music which isn't anything, it's just music. I think that's important, because it makes people open their ears to stuff. It enriches their lives.

"Well, that's lovely. What a really nice thing to say. Um...

I think everything seems too easy to categorise, and...

I think that's just such a lovely thing to say..."

It's like what you were saying about relationships – you've done it with music. You've given it time to grow, to see if it's compatible. It sounds natural, not cosmetic.

"Well, I think that's fantastic... that's just such a nice thing to say, that's really great... wonderful, absolutely wonderful. Because I think this is really what music is – a continual process of people experimenting, taking this and that and putting them together: all these experimental marriages. And when they work, I think that's such an important step, because then they've created a new music of a sort which then goes on to evolve.

"And, if it doesn't work, that's absolutely fine, too, because that shows you what doesn't work. So, if you feel this is a natural union, that's really good. I suppose I'd like to think that, as long as I care about making music, there will always be people out there who want to hear music that's cared for."

The hour's up and Kate thanks me for saying such lovely things about her album. I thank her for making such a great album, and she thanks me for thanking her, and says I have a lovely energy, and... shucks... we blush a bit and shake hands, and I shuffle out of the room, out of her life, elated and embarrassed.

Another relationship we just couldn't handle. ☹

Kate Bush will play 22 shows at the Eventim Hammersmith Apollo in August and September this year



KISHI BASHI

LIGHT

JOYFUL NOISE LP / CD

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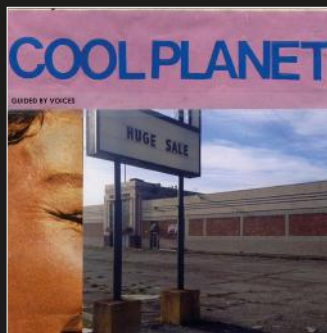


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JACK RUBY

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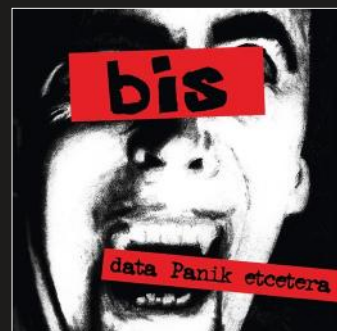


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PROCESS

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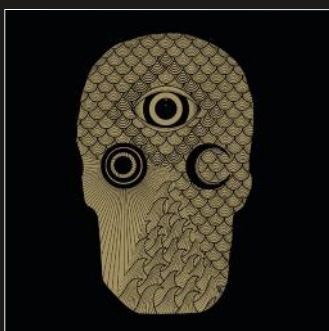
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HER NAME IS CALLA

NAVIGATOR

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HE WASN'T JUST A FIFTH MEMBER OF JOY DIVISION :

A FILM ABOUT MARTIN HANNETT

OZIT DANDELION DVD

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New albums

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JOSHUA BLACK WILKINS



THE BLACK KEYS

Turn Blue

NONESUCH

Following the triumph of *El Camino*, Auerbach, Carney & Danger Mouse roll the dice, play it where it lays. *By Bud Scoppa*

8/10

FROM THE HUMBLEST imaginable beginnings at the turn of the century as a bare-bones guitar-and-drums duo from the decaying industrial town of Akron, Ohio, The Black Keys have improbably become one of the biggest American bands, topping the Kings Of Leon and Foo Fighters franchises in record sales, airplay and sold-out arena tours. Their ascent has been gradual but steady since those formative days when guitarist/singer Dan Auerbach and drummer Pat Carney were jamming on the blues in the basement of Carney's rented house, as the DIY duo forged a viable career the old-fashioned way, criss-crossing the Midwest and then the country in their beat-up '94 Chrysler van, selling copies of their self-made records in clubs after their sets and building a

fanbase of true believers, night by night.

It's a rock'n'roll variant on the classic rags-to-riches story, made even more compelling by virtue of the fact that these two unlikely rock stars have succeeded not despite the fact that they've consistently gone against the grain of what's fashionable or what the conventional wisdom dictates, but precisely because of it. Categorically refusing to play the game, they just follow their instincts and people respond, because what they deliver is immediate, honest and unpretentious. You root for them, because they never let you down.

The Black Keys began defying expectations with the Danger Mouse-produced "Tighten Up", from 2010's *Brothers*, the band's first big hit, which, with its happy-go-lucky bounce and whistled overhanging melody, presented a radically

TRACKLIST

- 1 Weight Of Love
- 2 In Time
- 3 Turn Blue
- 4 Fever
- 5 Year In Review
- 6 Bullet In The Brain
- 7 It's Up To You Now
- 8 Waiting On Words
- 9 Lovers
- 10 In Our Prime
- 11 Gotta Get Away



Auerbach and Carney: their first record for lovers?

→ different sound and feel than the blues-based guitar rock Auerbach and Carney had built their rep on. In late 2011, the Keys went in a different direction altogether with *El Camino*, on which, in league with co-producer Danger Mouse, aka Brian Burton, they unleashed one slammin', infectious rocker after another, scoring their first platinum album on both sides of the Atlantic and elsewhere.

With *Turn Blue*, their eighth long-player, Auerbach, Carney and Burton have made yet another sharp left turn, choosing not to try to make an *El Camino* sequel – which their record label undoubtedly would have been delighted to receive – but once again going for something completely different. The new album is largely midtempo, moody, lush in places and deeply soulful, with keyboards featured as much as guitars. Though musically ambitious, this abrupt shift from in-your-face, one-listen rockers to something more challenging would appear to be commercially hazardous as a follow-up to the Keys' breakthrough album; its nuanced soundscapes are certain to confuse many of the newbies who became aware of the band via "Lonely Boy", and it's the kind of album that reveals itself over time – hardly a winning strategy in an era when so many people have the attention span of a gnat. On the other hand, Auerbach and Carney's instincts, their refusal to paint by numbers, have yet to let them down.

The partners' impulse to go wider and deeper in their stylistic purview first became apparent itself

on album number five, 2008's *Attack & Release*, their initial go-round with Burton, which found them incorporating R'n'B elements into their electric blues, slowing down the tempos and ramping up the mood quotient. Listening to the two albums back-to-back now, *Turn Blue* sounds like a natural progression from the earlier LP, playing out like an ardent love letter to soul music, Motown in particular. The touches are omnipresent: the Marvin Gaye-evoking sultriness of the title track, the Smokey Robinson-infused purr of the languid "Waiting On Words", the Four Tops-like throbbing urgency of "Year In Review", the summery thrum of Martha & The Vandellas coursing through "Zero", and the pocket symphony "In Time", which plays out like an homage to Norman Whitfield & Barrett Strong's late-'60s Motown classics with The Temptations.

With its mix of downhome grit and uptown flourishes, first-generation urban soul is a rich form to conjure, requiring ornamentation beyond what the electric guitar can provide. Burton is a master of retro keyboard effects, and his presence, as dictated by *Turn Blue*'s stylistic thrust, is more obvious than on past collaborations with Auerbach and Carney; in a signature move, he even drops a string sample

from a '60s Italian film score into "Year In Review". But Auerbach is equally involved in this sonic broadening, making extensive use of his growing collection of esoteric keyboards on the records he produced for Ray LaMontagne, Dr John and others in his own studio, Nashville's Easy Eye, where *El Camino* was recorded. "Fever", *Turn Blue*'s lead single, one of three cuts laid down during the initial sessions early last year without Burton's involvement, features a churning Auerbach Farfisa riff that resembles Steve Nieve's memorable turn on Costello's "Pump It Up", demonstrating that he's becoming as adept at keys as he is at guitar.

Not that Auerbach has abandoned his primary instrument – far from it. Amid the aural panorama, with its buttery churns of Hammond organ and cloud formations of Mellotron strings, the meat-and-potatoes directness of two other non-Danger Mouse entries serve as primal change-ups. Auerbach's snarling fuzztone attacks Carney's rumbling Bo Diddley beat on "It's Up To You Now", while his Creedence-like rhythm guitar riffing powers the exhilarating highway cruiser "Gotta Get Away", which closes the LP as it wouldn't fit anywhere else. But *Turn Blue*'s most striking moments bring these two vectors into synchrony, providing a rich context for the most elegant and ecstatic soloing Auerbach has ever laid down in the studio.

The nearly seven-minute epic "Weight Of Love", which opens the album and stands as its crowning achievement, introduces itself with the dreamlike interplay of strummed acoustic, chiming keyboard notes and low-lying organ, but the sense of serenity is shattered by a taut, swelling electric guitar line that coils and strikes cobra-like before ceding the foreground to Auerbach's wounded, yearning vocal. As the track expands in scale, the raging electric, which occupies the right channel in Tchad Blake's intricate mix, is joined by its twin on the left, and they twist and turn upward in orgasmic harmony until spent. If *El Camino*'s "Little Black Submarine" was the Keys' "Stairway To Heaven", "Weight Of Love" stands as their "Layla". And if *El Camino* was the Keys' catchiest album, *Turn Blue* turns out to be their sneakiest, subtlest and most seductive. It might be the first *Black Keys* record for lovers, in fact.

SLEEVE NOTES

➤ **Produced by:** Danger Mouse and The Black Keys, except "It's Up To You Now" and "Gotta Get Away", produced by The Black Keys
Recorded at: Sunset Sound, Hollywood; Key Club, Benton Harbor, MI; Easy Eye Sound, Nashville
Personnel: Dan Auerbach (vocals, guitars, bass, keys, etc), Patrick Carney (drums, keys, percussion, etc), Brian Burton (keys, piano, etc), Regina, Ann and Alfreda McCrary (bk vocals on "Weight Of Love", "Turn Blue" and "Lovers")

HOW TO BUY... THE BLACK KEYS

The blues and beyond...



The Big Come Up 2002
 Auerbach and Carney turned their limitations – makeshift gear and the inability to enlist other players – into strengths on a debut that sounds as primitive and authentic as the blues records that inspired them. Highlights include the punchy "I'll Be Your Man" and a brutally raw cover of the Fabs' "She Said, She Said".

8/10



Chulahoma: The Songs Of Junior Kimbrough 2006
 The Keys' tribute to the late bluesman is as in the pocket as anything by the North Mississippi Allstars. Their respective renditions of "Meet Me In The City" show how closely the bands are aligned. Kimbrough's widow says, "You're 'bout the only one that plays like Junior..."

9/10



Dan Auerbach Keep It Hid 2009
 Recorded during a brief estrangement from Carney, Auerbach's solo album finds him stretching stylistically from Randy Newman-style balladry to Lennonesque rock'n'roll. Carney's absence underscores what Bonham-like primal power and distinctive feel he brings to the band.

7/10



Brothers 2010
 Auerbach initially feared that "Tighten Up", Danger Mouse's lone contribution to the Keys' Muscle Shoals LP, was "too clean", but when the band broke it out on tour, he found out what fun it was to perform. "Tighten Up" became their first alternative hit, while *Brothers* as a whole cemented the Keys' status as latter-day blues-rock titans.

8/10



Q&A

Dan Auerbach on soul, expanding his instrumental arsenal, and the pressure of following up a hit record

I HEAR A lot of soul flavours on *Turn Blue*, Motown in particular. What inspired you to go in this direction? Those are influences that we've always had, and sometimes they show their face more than other times. We didn't really think or talk about anything ahead of time; we just went in and did it and that's what happened. We never do demos, we never plan ahead, we never talk about a direction. That's just how we do it as a band, so anything you hear on our records is really a snapshot from that moment in time, where we were in the studio improvising. And that's what happened with this album.

You've said that you hadn't written any songs prior to going into the studio for *El Camino*. Was that the case with *Turn Blue* as well?

Yeah. For *Brothers*, a lot of the songs were loosely written ahead of the time, but the arrangements were mostly improvised. But with *El Camino* and this record, there was nothin'.

What's behind the increased prominence of keyboards on this record? Whatever keyboard I grab, it's like a completely new sound to me. Whereas, with a guitar, there's ways you can dress it up, but it's always a guitar. We love the process of experimentation, and keyboards are fun to experiment with; they're all so different. I'm not a keyboard player, so when I sit down, I really simplify my mind and think about things

differently, and I like that. You can almost get too good at something, and then it gets in the way. So keyboards help me keep it simple.

What keys did you play yourself on this LP?

The Hammond with the spring reverb, the Farfisa and the Ace Tone – a strange '60s keyboard – are some of my favorites. We use the Mellotron and Optigan a lot. We've got a couple synthesizers that we use for liquid analogue sounds. They're all keyboards that you can get a million and one sounds out of.

Typically, how would you begin a track in terms of instrumentation? It varies.

But whether it's drums and bass, drums and keyboards or drums and guitar, there's always a foundation to every song of a live performance, and then we add to that. Bass and drums is how we started almost every song on *Brothers*. We've used that formula a lot. You have to keep things simple when you're playing the bass, and I like being able to lock in with Pat on the kick drum. He's a very unorthodox drummer, and sometimes it sounds best when you start with the rhythm section.

Sounds like some of the drum parts are processed on the new album. We've always manipulated our drums since our first record. We don't like straight-up dry drums; we like them kinda gnarly and messed up, like those rap records that we used to try to copy the sound of.

Your bass is also featured. It certainly is on the first single, "Fever". The single was recorded in Benton Harbor, Michigan, and that was drums and bass to start. We spent two weeks in Benton Harbor recording; that was before Sunset Sound. "Fever", "Gotta Get Away" and "It's Up To You Now" were all recorded in Benton Harbor at a studio called Keyclub Recording Co., which is a really amazing place. They've got Sly Stone's old Flickinger console, and it's filled with amazing and weird and fun instruments.

You're following up a big hit album. Do you feel the pressure? We think about it as inspiration and a challenge, and it's fun to be challenged, to try to outdo yourself. But at the same time, it's weird because it's not like we go into a record trying to duplicate the hit. Bands have a hit, then they go in the studio and try to do the exact same thing. We've never done that. We had a hit on *Brothers* with "Tighten Up," and then we went in the studio and we recorded a completely different album. I don't know if that's smart or not, but I think in the long run it'll probably be smart, although it would keep most record labels scratching their heads as to why we would do that. Same with this record: we didn't go in and make another *El Camino*. Our attention span is too short. I mean, we're into so many things, and there's too much to enjoy about music to get stuck on one thing.

The original perception of The Black Keys as a blues duo has been obliterated at this point. Did Brian [Burton]'s role change or expand on this record?

No, it was the same. There are absolutely no rules. We go in and we just go at it and try to come up with something that we all really love. That's it. Those are the only parameters. If we hear something like "Fever" and we think it's catchy, we might say, "That sounds like it could be a single." But at the same time, we don't really listen to the radio, so we aren't really qualified to pick a single. We let the labels [*Nonesuch* and *Warner Bros*] pick our singles, and if it happens, great. We love that, because that means more people will hear our music and more people will come to our shows, which is ultimately our goal. But

I'm not going to try to do that, because that would just feel wrong. I don't know why, but it doesn't seem appealing.

It's unusual to open an album with a down-tempo seven-minute song. Immediately after we recorded "Weight Of Love" in LA, we said, "Ah, that's the first song." We just love how hushed it began, and how raucous it ended. That

was fun for us, and we thought it would be a great way to start a record.

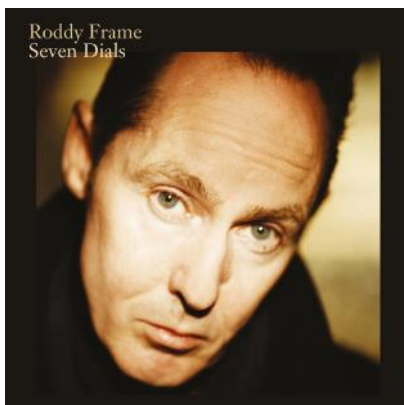
The main difference between *El Camino* and *Turn Blue* is that you have to spend time with this one before it opens up. Yeah, it's not an obvious record, and we hope that the listener pays attention. It's a lot to ask in this day and age, but that's our goal.

INTERVIEW: BUD SCOPPA

"We didn't go in and make another *El Camino*. Our attention span is too short"



Roddy Frame
Seven Dials



TRACKLIST

- 1 White Pony
- 2 Postcard
- 3 Into The Sun
- 4 Rear View Mirror
- 5 In Orbit
- 6 Forty Days Of Rain
- 7 English Garden
- 8 On The Waves
- 9 The Other Side
- 10 From A Train

RODDY FRAME

Seven Dials

AED RECORDS

The Aztec Camera-man relives his early-'80s glories – slap bass and all. *By Graeme Thomson*

8/10

IT'S BEEN EIGHT years since Roddy Frame's last album, *Western Skies*, and over 30 since

his arrival as a precocious prodigy from East Kilbride, the boy wonder whose remarkably worldly songs put Aztec Camera at the vanguard of the Sound Of Young Scotland alongside Postcard labelmates Orange Juice and Josef K.

Though their 1983 debut, *High Land, Hard Rain*, remains arguably the crowning achievement of that vibrant cultural moment, Frame swiftly ditched the arch aesthetic and Cali-donian jangle to indulge what seemed at times a wilful contrarian streak. He outraged indier-than-thou sensibilities by working with Mark Knopfler on Aztec Camera's second album, *Knife*, while *Love* –

with its pop hit "Somewhere In My Heart" – was a slick pop-soul confection employing veteran US sessioners Steve Gadd and Steve Jordan. Later releases bounced from Mick Jones to Ryuichi Sakamoto, before Frame ditched the band brand and went solo with 1998's *The North Star*.

It's been slow work since. *Seven Dials* is Frame's fourth solo album in 16 years, evidence not just of a perfectionist streak, but also of someone who has occasionally seemed burdened by the expectations wrought by his exceptional early promise. On "English Garden", a ballad of heartbreaking fragility and one of several stand-outs here, he contemplates swans on the Thames while paraphrasing LP Hartley: "*The past is like another place, it's a foreign land*". Yet at 50 Frame

Q&A

Roddy Frame

Eight years. Explain yourself. I've always been like that! I remember being a kid at school and the teacher saying, "When you start work you're not going to be able to look out the window all day." I was 12, and I said to her, "I'm not going to be working, I'm going to be a pop star." Now people are asking why I've got gaps in my CV, but I didn't think making music was ever about working to a schedule. Frankly, with some of the people I love, I wish they'd take more time and not make so many records.

You've signed to Edwyn Collins' record label, AED.

Yeah, Analogue Enhanced Digital - his little in-joke. I was wary at first. We've known each other since we were teenagers and we're so close, but this is his turf. I was wondering if it would work, but [Edwyn's wife] Grace said, "Look, I'll never ask you to do anything you don't want to do. You say no and that's it." I thought that sounded amazing, and I said, "Well, I promise I'll never ring up and ask you why the record isn't on the radio." It's a sensible arrangement. We're old enough to know that the most important thing is that we stay friends.

INTERVIEW: GRAEME THOMSON

radio pop of "Postcard", with its glistening guitar line and sun-ripened backing vocals, makes a neat meta-textual nod to the source of its inspiration as it travels "from San Francisco to Sausalito, where they started Rumours".

Elsewhere, the words hint at confession while remaining essentially impressionistic studies of time, place, memory and love. "From A Train", the latest in a line of nimble finger-picking songs running from "Down The Dip" to 2002's magnificent voice-and-acoustic album, *Surf*, concludes, "Here's the view: love is pain, rushing through." There's also much spiritual contemplation on the record, with its talk of Jesus' children, the washing of hands, faith tested and often found

wanting. "Forty Days Of Rain" pits the album's most jaunty musical setting - a Dylanesque folk-rock rush of harmonica, organ and accordion - against its most explicitly racked lyric. Drenched in the quasi-biblical imagery of floods, ancient kings and swords, it depicts Frame as a "wretch", broken by a period of crisis, stumbling into salvation: "I fall and I pray, I was lost but I'm found."

A triumph of economy at 10 songs and 38 minutes, *Seven Dials* succeeds in being both instantly accessible yet full of detail and depth. The apparently nourishing life/work balance Frame outlines in its hook-laden opener, "White Pony" - "Sometimes you've got to stop and look around" - may lead to increasingly lengthy pauses between releases, but smelling the flowers along the way has clearly done him the power of good.

SLEEVE NOTES

► **Recorded at:** West Heath Yard, London
Produced by: Roddy Frame and Sebastian Lewsley
Personnel: Roddy Frame (guitars, vocals, harmonica, bass), Mark Edwards (piano, keyboards, accordion, glockenspiel), Adrian Meehan (drums), Carwyn Ellis (bass and mandolin), Sebastian Lewsley (Wurlitzer)

seems more at ease with returning there. He marked *High Land, Hard Rain*'s 30th birthday last year with a handful of gloriously nostalgic shows, and there are moments on *Seven Dials* which directly confront former glories. "Once, like the kid I reigned/King of all I surveyed," he reflects on "The Other Side", while "Postcard" - a knowing title - features a twanging one-note acoustic guitar solo which plants its tongue firmly in the cheek of "Oblivious".

Seven Dials seamlessly weaves many of the best elements of Frame's past into a work of consummate craftsmanship which also references the likes of Steely Dan, The Cure, The Beatles, Bowie, Fleetwood Mac, Van Morrison and Bob Dylan. Within an orthodox pop/rock axis it exhibits admirably egalitarian and sometimes eccentric tastes. In "On The Waves", the syncopated '80s rhythm track features slap bass. At the end of "The Other Side", a soulful, slow-rolling showstopper with rippling piano arpeggios à la *Hunky Dory*, Frame's unabashed guitar solo pays explicit homage to Brian May. "Rear View Mirror", a seductively swaying bossa nova with a tough lyrical edge, finds him channelling his inner João Gilberto, while the sparkling West Coast

AtoZ

COMING UP THIS MONTH...

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9BACH

Tincian

REAL WORLD

World music's new frontier: Snowdonian trip-hop

Where their 2009 debut was stuffed with traditional Welsh balladry,

Tincian (meaning 'dazed') is almost all original work by singer Lisa Jen and musician Martin Hoyland. The duo have refined their approach too, matching Jen's crystalline voice to equally spare arrangements of harp, guitar, drums, keyboards, and electronic toy box. They have a distant cousin in Portishead, but 9Bach's flavours are lighter, more mysterious and more uplifting. The traditional "Pa Le?" gets the full harp and finger cymbals treatment, while on "Plenty'n", Jen turns Bushesque against a female chorus. Despite some ponderous moments, *Tincian* is a captivating original.

NEIL SPENCER



LILY ALLEN

Sheezus

REGAL

Postmodern popster's pallid "mumbuck"

Last month on Twitter, Lily Allen agreed with one fan's dismissal of her new songs as "docile", herself

describing them as "beige". Whether that was an attack of genuine, pre-release nerves or a sly exercise in reverse self-promotion, it's hard to disagree. Her long-awaited third LP is contemporary in its cultural references (Katy Perry, *Vice*, dubstep, Instagram...) and attitude, but the songs drift listlessly on a becalmed sea of sanitised R&B-pop, spiked with kwassa kwassa and (oddly) zydeco, grabbing attention only when the "f" bombs drop. She's a frank lyricist, but Allen's light, limited voice can't provide the punch tracks like "Our Time" and "Hard Out Here" demand. Plenty of mouth, then, but lacking in trousers.

SHARON O'CONNELL



SHARON VAN ETTEN

Are We There

JAG JAGUWAR

Heart-on-sleeve missives on excellent, self-produced third from National associate. *By Laura Snapes*



9/10

SHARON VAN ETTEN offered a few words alongside the announcement of her fourth album, *Are We There*: “I really hope that when someone puts my record on that they hear me.” Obvious stuff, you’d think, for a solo artist who’s had over five years to

establish herself. But it’s quietly profound. The 33-year-old Jersey native moved to New York in 2005 – having escaped a long, abusive relationship in Tennessee – and got a nose-skimming bowl cut so she could avoid making eye contact. The first words on her 2010 mini-album, *Epic*, where she welded unsettling drones to country-indebted melodies, are, “*To say the things I want to say to you would be a crime*”. It took her four years to let anyone hear “Serpents”, the pummelling lead single from 2012’s *Tramp*, because she was unnerved by its aggression. Her place at the head of a post-Cat Power firmament isn’t a place she’s come to naturally.

Are We There is Van Etten’s first self-produced album: The National’s Aaron Dessner produced the breakout *Tramp*, which also boasted several other indie rock luminaries. They amplified the initial attention around it, which in turn ended up denting Van Etten’s confidence again – was she liked for her talent, or her famous friends? (Scan the liner notes and names from The War On Drugs and Shearwater appear here, but they’re hardly focal points.) In fact, her instincts as a producer prove confident and pleasingly individual.

The record’s newfound musical diversity comes at the expense of the big-hearted Americana she was known for. It’s still present on the likes of “Taking Chances”, where guitars bark and howl in the chorus, but it’s statelier than before. It works, though: she’s referenced Sade, but her version of

shoreline quiet storm is warped and discomfiting. It takes conviction to pull off naked, Leonard Cohen-meets-Jeff Buckley-style piano ballads like “I Love You But I’m Lost” and “I Know”. They successfully reach further than she ever has before: her voice is breathtaking throughout the record, altering to inhabit every emotional extreme.

Listening to the often brutally honest *Are We There*, it’s hard to believe Van Etten ever had a hard time expressing herself – or it’s testament to the way she refers to songwriting as therapy. These 11 songs concern her extant relationship, on and off for nine years, which she gets into with the precarious precision of open-heart surgery rather than a post-mortem’s safe distance. On “Your Love Is Killing Me”, her voice bleeds a rich Maria Callas red over woozy organs, tattooing drums and striking guitar, as she requests that her partner, “*Burn my skin so I*

can’t feel you/Stub my eyes so I can’t see”. Logic would suggest calling time. But although it’s melodramatic, the overt sadness in Van Etten’s songs is seldom luxuriant.

Are We There’s subtler songs point to a painfully well-honed understanding of what drives and degrades long-term love: the challenge of knowing

someone well enough that routine has smothered surprise, knowing how to hurt each other exquisitely, but also – mercifully – being able to take comfort in common ground. “*You were so just... looking across the sky...*”, she tails off on the lazily romantic “Tarifa”, where Dave Hartley’s indelible saxophone part turns the chorus magnetic. “I Know” confronts the gulf between her role as half of a relationship and the detached luxury of being able to write songs about it – “the narrator with all her kisses and mimicry and tidying up”, to quote Lorrie Moore – and learning that one sometimes comes at the expense of the other.

Is it really worth it? *Are We There* seems to ask. Van Etten sneaks the best

song at the end, the burring guitars and kindling drums of “Every Time The Sun Comes Up” – an admission of her star-crossed relationship to love and songwriting (she recorded it while drunk in the studio). She happily resigns herself to the lack of resolution, but recognises the power she wields, proving her mettle as a singular songwriter not afraid to hold hot coals with bare hands.

SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:** Sharon Van Etten
Recorded at: The Shinebox, New Jersey
Personnel: Van Etten (vocals, guitar, piano, Omnichord, autoharp), Heather Woods Broderick (vocals, piano), Zeke Hutchins (drums), Dave Hartley (sax), Mary Lattimore (harp), Mackenzie Scott (backing vocals)

Q&A

Sharon Van Etten

I feel voyeuristic asking you about some of this.
I’m still learning how to talk about it.

When were these songs written? When I started touring *Tramp*. Christian and I committed to each other for the first time right before the record came out – the stupidest thing! I’m kidding. It was amazing. But it put us through the wringer – I was gone nine months out of the year, I toured for almost two years. I was writing during that time, so of course that’s what this record’s gonna be

about. I had no idea, but I did, ‘cause that’s what I do. It’s bizarre.

Does he like the record? Yeah, he was an integral part in helping me listen to mixes, helping with sequencing. He was the one who encouraged me to reach out to Stewart Lurman, just to find the studio. Christian was like, “You guys are friends, he’s a nice guy. He might even want to work with you.” [They had worked together on Sharon’s contribution to the *Boardwalk Empire* OST.] I was like, no, but he pushed me. He came by the studio, but for the most part he respected my space. Even though the songs were personal, he could still give me his opinion. He has a really good ear. **INTERVIEW: LAURA SNAPES**



RODRIGO AMARANTE
Cavalo
MAIS UM DISCOS

Sensual lo-fi songwriting; Kristen Wiig guests
Brazilian singer-songwriter Amarante

7/10

has played with Devendra Banhart, and this is very much in the same vein as his romantic hippy cosmopolitanism. "Hourglass" has a pacy groove with Amarante singing in English, like a lo-fi Phoenix; but he also uses Portuguese and French, full of the languor of Céu, Bebel Gilberto and Lucas Santana where melodic lines roll like a melancholy walk around town without purpose. Some arrangements, like "Irene" or "Fall Asleep", feature totally spartan acoustic guitar or roughly recorded, exhausted piano; but a sly fullness creeps into others through organs and electronic gurgles.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



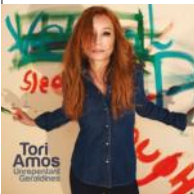
AMBARCHI, O'MALLEY, DUNN
Shade Themes From Kairos
DRAG CITY

Drone epics from a perfectly balanced trio
Sunn O)))'s doom guitarist

8/10

Stephen O'Malley has one of the best sounds around: a flayed beam of light shining from the Delta into the cosmos. But it can be a little haughty and masculine, and so the dynamic, sensual drumming of Oren Ambarchi is the perfect foil. Five long pieces allow for the tussle of improv – on "Temporal, Eponymous", stern O'Malley lines become tempered into more reflective keys by Ambarchi's pummelling, but on "Circumstances Of Faith", the drums whip him into a jazzy frenzy. "Sometimes" is a gorgeous ballad with bell-clear vocals from Ai Aso, leading to a beatless, windswept meditation in "Ebony Pagoda".

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



TORI AMOS
Unrepentant Geraldines
MERCURY CLASSICS

Pop pixie returns to piano and voice
After a Christmas collection, two orchestral albums for Deutsche

7/10

Grammophon, and last year's ambitious musical for the National Theatre, Amos' 14th LP removes all the symphonic bombast and returns to basic songcraft. Stripped back to voice and piano, it's difficult not to recall early Kate Bush, but Amos' lyrics maintain a multi-layered depth that is uniquely hers. "Giant's Rolling Pin" hides a scathing attack on state surveillance behind a jaunty nursery rhyme, while the techno-tinged "16 Shades Of Blue" is a meditation on ageing using metaphors of computer hardware. And, as always, behind that superficial AOR sheen is a militant riot grll.

JOHN LEWIS



ARC IRIS
Arc Iris
BELLA UNION

Genre-bending album by Low Anthem multi-instrumentalist

Arc Iris is the latest project of Rhode Island's Jocie Adams, a one-time

8/10

NASA researcher, classical music scholar and, until last year, longterm member of The Low Anthem. After years spent lurking in the shadows, there is an unmistakable air of liberation here as Adams gleefully hopscoches across the genres without ever losing her footing. From the orchestral prog-fest of "Lost On Me" and the fizzing New Orleans ragtime of "Sing So Sweetly", to "Whiskey Man", a mournful tale of a hard-drinking wanderer complete with weeping cello and acoustic finger-picking, *Arc Iris* has a lot going on but it's rarely less than thrilling.

FIONA STURGES

REVELATIONS

Tori Amos on art, her new album and her Cherokee ancestry

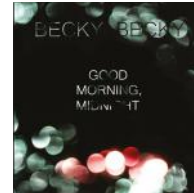


► "I've got this etching by an Irish artist called Daniel Maclise," says Tori Amos. "It's of this woman called Geraldine, looking all penitent, like Titian's paintings of Mary Magdalene. And it got me thinking about why wayward women in art have to be penitent. I'm sure Geraldine was one helluva gal! She'd have been fun to hang out with. Why does art have a problem with female hedonism? Why can't we have unrepentant Geraldines?"

Tori Amos' albums often have overarching themes. One explored all 50 American states, one put a female twist on male rock songs, others have explored Greek or Celtic mythology. Each track on *Unrepentant Geraldines* is inspired by a work of art – from Cezanne to Rossetti to Diane Arbus – but each uses it as a starting point to explore sex, relationships or politics. Most striking is "Wild Way", which draws parallels between gender relations and the treatment of Native Americans.

"I've always been aware of my part-Cherokee ancestry," says Amos, "the idea that I'm both conquered and conqueror. 'Wild Way' explores how violent, manipulative men will fetishise women as they abuse them, just as Pilgrims fetishised Indians while they were committing genocide. And society hasn't really confronted either."

JOHN LEWIS



BECKY BECKY
Good Morning, Midnight
FEINT

Pecker up; Becky L Williams regenerates
"I just felt her heartbeat stop," wrote Gemma L Williams somewhat

7/10

melodramatically last September, announcing the death of her Woodpecker Woiliams persona after a naked performance at 2013's End Of The Road festival. Resurrected as half of Becky Becky – a collaboration with ex-boyfriend Peter JD Mason – the former trainee midwife has curbed her experimental leanings into the totalitarian synth-pop of *Good Morning, Midnight*, fusing themes plucked from the dissolute desperation of Jean Rhys' novels with dead-eyed electroclash. "I Remember, I Remember" is the loved-up podium moment; "Tigers Are Better Looking" its "Fade To Grey" black-out. A gripping voyage in the dark.

JIM WIRTH



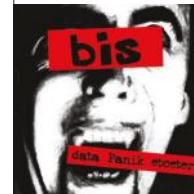
MATT BERRY
Music For Insomniacs
ACID JAZZ

Toast Of London star's therapeutic synth odyssey

8/10

After fine turns in *Toast Of London* and *House Of Fools*, Matt Berry returns to the more serious business of music by following last year's folk set *Kill The Wolf* with this enchanting suite of long-form synthesiser movements composed during numerous sleepless nights. Informed by *Tubular Bells* and *Oxygène*, *Music For Insomniacs* allows Berry to fully explore his analogue hardware and experiment with harmony and sound effects, even giving *Kill The Wolf*'s "October Sun" a cosmic revision. The results, restrained, immersive and quite beautiful, suggest Edgar Froese scoring Chris Morris' *Blue Jam* show. Suits him, this role as a new-age guru.

PIERS MARTIN



BIS
Data Panik Etcetera
DO YOURSELF IN

Return of Glasgow's Britpop-baiting twee radicals

6/10

Around 1995, Manda Rin, Sci-Fi Steven and John Disco both delighted and irritated indie kids with a prescient DIY post-punk pop aesthetic rooted in the US riot grll scene. The trio's surprise comeback album carries an air of triumph, combining analogue synth, angular guitar, plastic tunes and shouty slogans with a familiar blend of throwaway plasticity and political anger, and refusing to grow out of it. The likes of "Minimum Wage" and "Too Much Not Enough" sound like a youth-club band who've simultaneously overdone on Haribo and the Gang Of Four, which is both preposterous and admirable behaviour from people in their thirties.

GARRY MULHOLLAND

AMERICANA



BEST
OF THE
MONTH



STURGILL SIMPSON **Metamodern Sounds In Country Music** LOOSE

Anyone for metaphysical prog country? Nashville songwriter heads for the stars

He might have the hard-hit voice and the classic outlaw sound, but Sturgill Simpson is anything but predictable. The swift arrival of this year's second release, following on from debut *High Top Mountain*, is evidence of both a febrile mind and keen work ethic. As Simpson told *Uncut* prior to its arrival: "Making conceptual pieces is a goal for me. I'm sitting on about five albums, but people are gonna think I've lost my mind with this next one." "Turtles All The Way Down" lets you decide from the off. Informed by the work

8/10

of Dr Rick Strassman, who explored the para-psychology of people on DMT, it's a suitably cosmic meditation on life, the multiverse and anything left over. The song itself sounds like Jimmy Webb taking liberties with "Suspicious Minds", Simpson musing on a realm "where reptile aliens made of light/Cut you open and pull out all your pain". It's a wonderfully disarming way to begin.

Not that fans of his previous album, with its echoes of Merle Haggard and Waylon Jennings, will be short-changed. Simpson may have been devouring the works of Carl Sagan and Terence McKenna lately, but this record's beauty lies in the contrast between time-baked country tropes – loneliness, the road, broken hearts – and his starry adventurism. "It Ain't All Flowers", for instance, is an anguished Nashville ballad coated in distorted guitar and backwards FX. At its core Simpson reveals himself to be a writer rooted in tradition, but refusing to be tamed by it.

He's no slouch when it comes to interpreting others either. His version of "The Promise", originally by '80s synth-wave types When In Rome, is one of the most striking things here. In Simpson's care it becomes a tender hymn with a surging coda worthy of George Jones. It's just one of many high spots on an album that reaffirms his status as an outstanding new talent. **ROB HUGHES**



THE AMERICANA ROUND-UP

► Fresh from his collaboration with Nick Cave and Warren Ellis on the bluegrass/rock'n'roll soundtrack to the Cave-scripted, Tom Hardy-starring feature film *Lawless*

(signature quote: "Ralph don't do 4/4..."), the redoubtable **Ralph Stanley**, now in his 87th year, has kept up the pace. He's lately collaborated with his son, Ralph Stanley II, on *Side By Side*, a project which comes ahead of Stanley Snr.'s farewell tour of the States later this year. Also due is *WE*, the latest from **The Weber Brothers**, Ronnie Hawkins' longtime backing band. "If I'd had The Weber Brothers with me in 1952, says

the Hawk, "Elvis would've been my roadie." And **Emmylou Harris**, due here to play dates in late May, has inked a deal with Blue Rider Press to write her memoirs. The book's expected to land in late 2015. Buoyed by the success of "Far From Any Road", their theme song for HBO series *True Detective*, **The Handsome Family's** European tour reaches Belfast on May 5 and goes through to Newbury on the 16th. **Ethan Johns**, best known as producer of records by Ryan Adams, Kings Of Leon, Laura Marling and others, also flies in that month. His 16-date solo jaunt, ahead of new Adams-helmed album *The Reckoning*, winds up at Kings Place in London at the end of May.

ROB HUGHES



BLACK BANANAS **Electric Brick Wall** DRAG CITY

Gutter-rock queen gets into the groove

8/10

Since the dissolution of Royal Trux, Jennifer Herrema has emerged as quite the renaissance figure, designing jewellery, styling *Playboy* centrefolds, and continuing to rock out, first as RTX, and now as Black Bananas. RTX tended towards a schlocky hair metal, hardly ironic but far from orthodox. *Electric Brick Wall*, however, finds Herrema expanding the synthier streak debuted on 2012's *Rad Times Xpress IV*. "Physical Emotions" and "Give It To Me" take cues from the '80s-tinged electro boogie of the likes of Dâm-Funk, but caked in a production muck that glistens greasily. Meanwhile, "Ride The Chump" is pure "Walk This Way" in both sound and spirit. A racket, but a charismatic one. **LOUIS PATTISON**



DEBORAH BONHAM **Spirit** SPECTRA

First album in six years from Led Zep drummer's lil' sis

6/10

There are plenty of Zep reference points on only

Bonham's fourth album in 30 years, from the mandolin stomp of "Fly" (think "Battle Of Evermore") to Robert Plant's harmonica on "What It Feels" (echoes of "Custard Pie"). But there's a whole lot more going on here, too, with a strong country and roots flavour on the Eagles-styled "Take Me Down", a ringing Byrdsian jangle on "I Won't Let You Down" and a gorgeous cover of Sparklehorse's "Pain Birds". "Recorded in Chichester and Nashville", says the sleeve; it's a perfect geographical metaphor for Bonham's home counties British blues-rock meets burnished Americana hybrid.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



BO NINGEN **III** STOLEN RECORDINGS

Guests join cultish crew on diverse third

Just 18 months on from their second album, this London-based Japanese quartet dedicated to the

7/10

making of "pure music" return. With *III*, they shift their intense focus on '70s motorik rock, psychedelia and heavy drone to admit furious post-punk, industrio-dub grooves and the odd open space. Not that they've turned their back on their trademarks; the murmurous "Mukaeni Ikenai" and delicately shuddering "Ogosokana Ao" might build on the bliss-pop steps taken in 2012's *Line The Wall*, but "Slider" (with King Midas Sound vocalist Roger Robinson) and "CC" – which features guest singer Jehnni Beth of Savages and builds to an almost deranged intensity – prove that the dark, compelling drive will always be Bo Ningen's guide. **SHARON O'CONNELL**



BROKEN RECORDS
Weights & Pulleys
J SHARP RECORDS

Epic third album by Edinburgh sextet
The intense, anthemic barrage of Broken Records fits into a

7/10

venerable tradition of Scottish rock. Their sweeping grandiosity and folky fringes suggest early Waterboys, the tightly wound guitars recall Frightened Rabbit, and Jamie Sutherland's soulful vocals evoke The Blue Nile's Paul Buchanan. They succeed, however, in fashioning something vital from these familiar touchstones. Opener "We Weren't Ready" and the roaring "Winterless Son" set the tone for a dark but stirring ride, culminating in "Leave You In The Dark", its fiery brass and soaring dynamics soundtracking an irresistible leap into the abyss.

GRAEME THOMSON



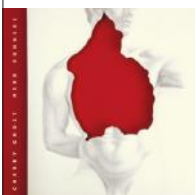
ARCHIE BRONSON OUTFIT
Wild Crush
DOMINO

Still on Domino, ABO continue their arty, cult voyage

7/10

While much has changed for the Bronsons – not least, international renown for frontman Sam Windett and his paintings, and the departure of bassist D Hobday – their fourth album is reassuringly familiar. They've turned down the DFA-isms of 2010's *Coconut* and revitalised their original crunching blues-rock on most cuts here, while the Bowie-esque "Love To Pin You Down" (like the rest of the album, laced with Duke Garwood's bleating sax) and the "I'll Be Your Mirror"-ripping "Sweat & Flow (Dreams)" continues their artier, archer streak, Windett's wail switched for a croon. The song remains the same, but it's a solid one.

TOM PINNOCK



CHERRY GHOST
Herd Runners
HEAVENLY

Adult pop masterclass from Bolton's star-in-waiting

7/10

Simon Aldred specialises in Big Songs. Mining a rich seam of post-Jimmy Webb, country-tinged pop-rock, often combining the best elements of Richard Hawley, Turin Brakes and Ian McCulloch in ballad mode, Aldred's third album as Cherry Ghost is so unashamed in its embrace of the warm croon, the twinkling keyboard, the swelling orchestra and the poignant chorus that its 10 songs might stretch the patience of anyone who wants some jagged edge in their melancholy MOR classicism. But the likes of "Clear Skies Ever Closer" and the title track, with their patent belief in the healing power of song, are lovely enough to melt the hardest indie heart.

GARRY MULHOLLAND



CHICAGO UNDERGROUND DUO
Locus
NORTHERN SPY

Wildstyling jazz meets seductive electro-acoustics
If your memories of

7/10

Chicago Underground Duo are their early cornet/drums duos for Thrill Jockey, you might want to play some serious catch-up. With *Locus*, their seventh album, Rob Mazurek and Chad Taylor are all over the shop, often thrillingly so: the opening trilogy of "Locus", "Boss" and "The Human Economy" locates them somewhere between Detroit techno, fusion and minimal electronics, an alternate universe where Miles Davis got down with freestyling electro-acoustics. There's a lovely cover of Ghanaian folk tune "Yaa Yaa Kole", and an update of Don Cherry's *Organic Music Society* on "Kabuki". *Locus* is a messy delight indeed.

JONDALE



REVELATIONS
Archie Bronson's Sam Windett on balancing painting and music

➤ Sam Windett finds himself in a strange position – the band he fronts, the Archie Bronson Outfit, release solid psychedelic indie records for an appreciative cult audience, while his painting is receiving increasing recognition around the world, with recent years seeing exhibitions in New York, London and Dusseldorf.

"The last few years have been great for my art," he explains. "A lot of time spent alone can be a weird existence sometimes, but on the whole I'm happy with my own company. My painting doesn't influence my music a great deal. Both rely on a similar intuition that probably comes from the same place and they share an aesthetic that you could call psychedelic, but I see them as very separate.

Windett has never experienced hostility from anyone in the art world sniffy about his double-life – "There are always people crossing disciplines: Steve McQueen making Hollywood films or Takashi Murakami making handbags for Louis Vuitton, or even Tracey Emin doing M&S adverts" – but stepped aside when it came to providing the cover for the band's latest release.

"I actually made a few things that we considered for the album artwork, but when I saw the drawing Stevie Gee had made it felt right to illustrate *Wild Crush* with a talking boob." TOM PINNOCK



DAN CLEWS
Tourist In My Own Backyard
VISTA

Folk-tinged debut album from a farmer's boy

7/10

Having cut his teeth playing low-key festivals on his parents' strawberry farm in Kent, Clews came to the attention of Beatles producer George Martin. The mentorship led to support slots with such diverse turns as Level 42 and Tim Minchin, the enthusiastic support of Radio 2's Bob Harris, and ultimately this assured album of melodic, catchy folk pop. "I Still Feel" and "Broken People" pick over the bones of romantic debris, and there's a wiser, more cynical mindset to the prairie gallop of "That's Enough For Me". An upward career trajectory, proving the strawberry fields weren't forever.

TERRY STAUNTON



CLOUD NOTHINGS
Here And Nowhere Else
WICHITA

Young punk revivalists' fizzy, fierce third
In the US, '90s revivalism has a definite, punk-centric

6/10

focus. Whether it's Cymbals Eat Guitars, Fidlars, The Men or any of countless others, although all have their own drum to bang, there's a timeline consistency to their shared faith. Cleveland's Cloud Nothings look to...Trail Of Dead, Green Day and Nirvana, wrapping fizz-bomb pop melodies in gnarly, complex guitar workouts and firing them off at a furious pace. 22-year-old singer and songwriter Dylan Baldi still sounds like an angst-wracked teen, despite claiming this time "the approach was more positive and less 'fuck everything'." Given the larynx-shredding "Just See Fear", you wonder how things might have played out if he'd been feeling negative.

SHARON O'CONNELL



KAROL CONKA
Batuk Freak
MR BONGO

Imperious debut from Brazilian hip-hop queen

6/10

The puzzle is why Brazil took so long to spawn a rap star like this 27-year-old, who spent a decade fighting her way through the ranks before "Boa Noite" struck gold (winning a place on FIFA's 2014 EA game). Her vocal style comes via US rap-singers like Azealia Banks, with lots of self-empowering sentiments (in Portuguese) but the backings are a wondrous mash-up of electro-beats and Brazilian; folksy flutes on "Gandaia", batucada drumming on "Gueto Ao Luxo". Excursions into dub and the fractured electronica of "Mundo Loco" make for an unusual, relentless onslaught.

NEIL SPENCER



SLEEVE NOTES

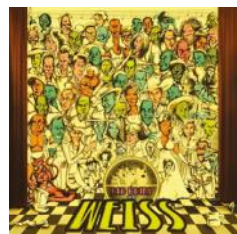
► **Produced by** Chuck E Weiss; “Hey Pendejo” and “Dead Man’s Shoes” co-produced by Don Heffington
Executive producers: Johnny Depp and Tom Waits
Recorded at: Studio 1480; The Village; Electronic Recording Services
Personnel: Chuck E Weiss (vocals, drums, percussion), Don Heffington (drums, percussion), Tony Gilkyson (guitar), Will MacGregor (bass), Cece Worrall-Rubin (saxophone, clarinet), Janice Markham (violin), Johnny Depp (guitar, bass, drums, backing vocals), Carlos Guitaños (guitar), Bill ‘Beano’ Hanti (drums, backing vocals), JJ Holiday (guitar), Bruce Witkin (bass, backing vocals), Steve Nelson (bass), Nick Vincent (drums), Michael Murphy (keyboards); Jimmy Roberts (saxophone), Mike Bolger (trumpet), Judy Brown, Jack Depp, Joey Malone and Starling Jenkins (backing vocals)

CHUCK E WEISS

Red Beans And Weiss

ANTI

SoCal boho’s “alternative jungle music” finds its groove. *By Andy Gill*



8/10

FIRST HOVING INTO the wider rock consciousness via his titular appearance in Rickie Lee Jones’ hit “Chuck E’s In Love”, Chuck E Weiss is a longtime SoCal bohemian stalwart whose varied CV includes drumming for Lightnin’ Hopkins and

Willie Dixon, deejaying on station KFML, hanging out with Marshall McLuhan, and establishing Hollywood’s legendary Viper Room back in 1993 with his chum Johnny Depp. His own music draws heavily on the kind of louche Americana Weiss covered in the History Of American Music class he used to teach at the University Of Colorado, enticingly titled “Flipsters, Hipsters & Finger-Poppin’ Daddies”: a blend of R’n’B, jazz, cajun, jump-blues, rumba, Tex-Mex and rockabilly that he dubbed “alternative jungle music”.

The belated follow-up to 2006’s splendid *23rd & Stout*, *Red Beans And Weiss* was executive-produced by Depp and another of Chuck’s old chums, Tom Waits, though the latter’s influence is slightly less evident here than on previous albums. It features a more condensed approach, still eclectic but less eccentric – an engaging distillation of Weiss’ rumbustious style that locks the listener into a groove and doesn’t let go. “Tupelo Joe” opens the album with bathtub-amphetamine grace, a blast of raucous rockabilly R’n’B with a berserker edge that recalls The Cramps. A bastard child of Bo Diddley and Hank Mizell, it features dizbuster guitar licks of twangsomeness over

simple, driving drums, while Chuck sings of how “Tupelo Joe went to the show, Tupelo Joe ain’t no shmoe,” and suchlike jive, the lyric eventually breaking down into staccato-stutter syllabic nonsense, like he’s talking in tongues.

In stark contrast, “Shushie” shifts into a 3am lounge-bar groove of loping double-bass jazz guitar and sultry sax, Chuck’s intimate croon deriving much sensual promise from the name as he murmurs his affection for the coolest of feline companions: “Shushie, Shushie, she’s hiding under the house/She’ll be in labour soon, without a spouse”. It’s the most relaxed thing here, the majority of the tracks cleaving to a more earthy groove, as exemplified by the lumpy, rolling funk-blues of “The Knucklehead Stuff”, or the low-slung rumba-rock R’n’B of “Bomb The Tracks”, which finds Weiss in unusually political mood – albeit filtered through a boho sensibility – as he chides Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt for not trying harder to stop the Holocaust death-camp deliveries: “Why didn’t you bomb the tracks, Jack? Why didn’t you stop the trains, James?...Hey, you know I’m a devout coward, and I would have bombed them tracks”.

Elsewhere, “Hey Pendejo” is a Doug Sahm-style Tex-Mex two-step, while Weiss gets to indulge both his scat-singing fancy in the jazzy “Oo Poo Pa Do In The Bobop”, and his Little Richard wail on the swinging boogie “Dead Man’s Shoes”. The raw, gritty R’n’B of “Boston Blackie”, meanwhile, brings to mind Tom Waits’ *Heartattack & Vine* with its scarified slide-guitar stomp. Emulating the eponymous pulp-fiction gumshoe’s claim to be

“friend to those who have no friends”, it’s an opportunity for Chuck to extemporise a lengthy litany of names that gets more ludicrously amusing the longer it extends: “Freddie, Eddie, Mary, Sarah...”, and so on, and on.

Chuck’s time playing with Dr John pays dividends on “The Hink-A-Dink”, a distinctly un-PC portrait of dancing jungle natives led by “a cool native chieftain with a bone through his nose” that perhaps best conveys his notion of “alternative jungle music”. With violin slithering snake-like through an undergrowth of low, sinister humming and wordless female backing wails, it sounds like nothing so much as an outtake from *Gris-Gris*. Another satisfying encapsulation of the Weiss aesthetic comes on a great version of the Stones’ outtake fragment “Exile On Main Street Blues”, which starts out as a basic Memphis piano blues, Chuck’s voice strained and distant, as if heard through an antique speaker, before the drums and riffing horns roll in after the first verse and drive it up to Chicago in a sleek sedan: a brilliant musical allegory of the northward drift of black Americans seeking liberation from Southern poverty and prejudice, evoked with a proud, empathic swagger.

Q&A

Chuck E Weiss

What did Tom Waits’ and Johnny Depp’s “executive producer” roles extend to?

Johnny was hands on in the studio which was great when some of the guys didn’t show up, I needed Johnny to play on some things because he can play any instrument and he was very, very helpful and inspirational to me. Tom was away at home and I sent him the tracks to listen to. He has been looking forward to helping promote the album during the release.

Who was Boston Blackie, and why was he a friend to those who have no friends?

He was a fictitious character in movies and television [created by Jack Boyle]. He was a private eye [formerly a jewel thief and safecracker] very similar to a Raymond Chandler character or a Dashiell Hammett character and his slogan at the beginning of his show was “Boston Blackie... a friend to those who had no friends.”

What did you learn from working with the likes of Lightnin’ Hopkins and Willie Dixon?

Not to drink gin!

INTERVIEW: ANDY GILL



HOLLIE COOK
Twice
MR BONGO

Lovers rock from the well-connected diva
The comparisons with Lily Allen are obvious: the famous parents (Sex Pistol Paul Cook; Jeni

7/10

Cook, formerly in Culture Club), the antique reggae samples, the blank-voiced suburban London sigh. But, unlike Allen, Cook hasn't deviated from her initial USP, and her second proper LP is a full-on pop-reggae confection. These are all minor-key tracks at roughly the same tempo, but the joy is in Prince Fatty's exquisitely detailed old-school reggae production, featuring the likes of Dennis Bovell, Omar and Winston Francis. Highlights include "Ari Up" (a heartfelt tribute to her late mentor), "Desdemona" (all James Bond strings and baroque vocal harmonies) and the wobbly Diwali dancehall stylings of "Postman".
JOHN LEWIS



COPELAND
Because I'm Worth It
SELF-RELEASED

Inscrutable diva's patchy debut
Alongside Dean Blunt, Inga Copeland achieved a kind of notoriety as part

6/10

of screwball duo Hype Williams, the press-shy outfit better known for their weird promotional stunts than their opiated funk. With Blunt now carving a role as a boozy blues preacher, Copeland caps a couple of years crafting murky house white-labels with her solo debut, *Because I'm Worth It*, a string of primitive, hallucinogenic rhythm tracks that slather another layer of mystery on top of the enigma. "Advice To Young Girls", a collaboration with Actress' Darren Cunningham, sets the menacing tone: Copeland's fidgety doodles steeped in drowsy drones paint a dreary picture.
PIERS MARTIN



CUZ
Tamatebako
BLEEDING HEART RECORDINGS

Don't ask why or how; it's Watt

If there was ever any common ground between the bassist of US mutant

7/10

punk/progressive hardcore heroes the Minutemen and the guitarist and drummer from hip-hop-loving UK retro-popsters The Go! Team, you would have needed an Ordnance Survey map to find it. But Mike Watt and Sam Dook's Cuz project – launched from a festival friendship and developed via demo sharing – forges a taut, noir-ish pop sound that's more than just the sum of their parts. Japanese folk, kosmische and processed noise are in the mix, alongside driving post-punk and funk, with topspin provided by the moody beat prose of "Song For Ronnie", which features Ginsberg and Burroughs cohort Charles Plymell.
SHARON O'CONNELL



CARA DILLON
A Thousand Hearts
CHARCOAL

Confident fifth outing from the Derry folk lark
It's been 20-odd years since a teenage Dillon won a singing contest,

7/10

and she hasn't faltered since, refreshing over-familiar tunes from the canon with uncanny ease; a low-key "As I Roved Out" and bright opener "Jacket So Blue" here are cases in point. With partner Sam Lakeman again producing, the arrangements come with drive and sparkle (there are piles of acoustic power strum here), and, one suspects, a shrewd eye on a mainstream audience (after all, if Mumford & Sons can do it...). However, "River, Run", by US indie act Suddenly, Tammy!, could be a glum piano ballad too far. Otherwise, a lovely creation.
NEIL SPENCER



MINUTEMEN
Double Nickels On The Dime

SST, 1984
Explosive, expansive and dizzying in its infinite saminess, the

Minutemen's career-defining 45-song double-album strikes a perfect balance between Watt's reflective side (hear his touching account of the Minutemen's formation: "History Lesson - Part II") and D Boon's mastery of barked confrontation: "Do You Want New Wave Or Do You Want The Truth?", "This Ain't No Picnic" et al.

9/10



FIREHOSE
If'n

SST, 1987
Distraught after Minutemen frontman Boon's death in a car crash in '85, Watt and drummer George Hurley

were ready to quit, only re-emerging as fireHose when singer/superfan Ed Crawford persuaded them to reconsider. Their second LP – featuring Hüsker Dü on the cover and the barbed "For The Singer Of REM" – epitomises their spindly indie take on US classic rock.

7/10



MIKE WATT
Contemplating The Engine Room
COLOMBIA

Colombia didn't try to wash their hands of Watt after fireHose's

Flyin' The Flannel (1991) and *Mr Machinery Operator* (1993) failed to shift units. "Jamming econo" (living thriftily in Minutemen speak), Watt clung on for two solo LPs, peaking with this "punk rock opera", a hymn to the Minutemen and their naval hometown of San Pedro (Watt's sailor father is the cover star).

8/10

JIM WIRTH

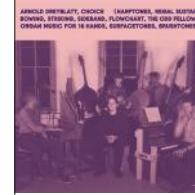


BLAIR DUNLOP
House Of Jacks
ROOKSMERE

Son of Fairport co-founder Ashley Hutchings unveils accomplished second
The acclaimed, (Radio 2 Folk) award-winning 2012

8/10

debut *Blight & Blossom* introduced Dunlop as a keen-eyed songwriting talent in minimal settings. This time the compositions are still thoughtful and exploratory and, although a tendency to emphatic angst dulls on the over-earnest "45s (c.'14)", producer Mark Hutchinson is fully attuned to Dunlop's musical resourcefulness. The lucid finger-plucking of instrumental "Viola's Reverie" and the caustic electric guitar drive of "Different Schools" highlight the compelling flair and spirit nurtured during Blair's apprenticeship fronting The Albion Band. Consider the family tradition in good, forward-thinking hands.
GAVIN MARTIN

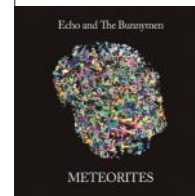


ARNOLD DREYBLATT
Choice
CHOOSE

Selections from 30 years of live minimalism
Like his contemporary La Monte Young, Arnold Dreyblatt is an American

6/10

minimalist composer with an interest in the drones and tuning of Indian raga, using extended notes and heavily percussive downstrokes to try to generate spiritual transcendence – with some success. On Side One, the clang of metal strings dominates, going from "Heroin"-style intensity to the more lulling style of James Blackshaw, while harmonium slowly heaves itself through, and gamely knocks at the doors of perception. Better still though is the second side, with far more sparse arrangements, where each strum and moan of string is given space to sing.
BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



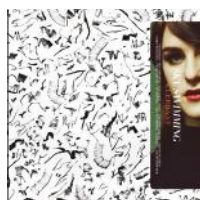
ECHO & THE BUNNYMEN
Meteorites
429

Album 12 yields mixed results

If there's one thread that's run through the Bunnymen's 36-year

6/10

history, it's Ian McCulloch's unshakeable conviction that they're the greatest band in history. Such confidence is admirable, although not entirely accurate – as anyone who heard 2009's *The Fountain* will confirm. *Meteorites* finds traces of the old magic in Will Sergeant's evocative arpeggios and those moments where McCulloch successfully gets his croon on. "Constantinople" and "Lovers On The Run" come close to recapturing the grandeur of the Bunnymen in their pomp. After that, the promising flourishes of "Burn It Down" and "Explosions" give way to "Meteorites" and "Is This A Breakdown", mediocre indie rock plods.
MICHAEL BONNER



ELEPHANT

Sky Swimming

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

Hopeless romantics' airy opening gambit

The Liz Taylor and Richard Burton of two-bob London dream pop,

8/10

Elephant's Amelia Rivas and Christian Pinchbeck were 'on' before they recorded their debut album, but are now very much 'off', a situation which adds a fraught edge to the woozy *Sky Swimming*. Their debut depicts a similar world of daytime TV poverty and twentysomething gloom as Kenickie's mighty *Get In*, with the pull towards Brill Building gloss and Beach House anaesthesia on "Skyscraper" and "Ants" placing Elephant on a similar trajectory to the supremely twinkly Frankie Rose. Perfecting their Instagram sad faces, but damn them if they don't look gorgeous.

JIM WIRTH



ENO HYDE

Someday World

WARP RECORDS

Eno's collaboration with Underworld frontman

Eno and Hyde previously collaborated on the hyperactive "Beebop Hurry", from Underworld's

5/10

2009 mix album *Athens*, and this is similarly too busy with ideas for its own good. "A Man Wakes Up", for instance, works through sampled guitar chords, Hyde's multi-tracked vocals and Eno's "funk synth" before detouring into Afrobeat riffs and a gospel chorus. Guests include Coldplay drummer Will Champion, whose band provide a useful reference point here: a taste for stadium-sized minor chords, evident on "Witness" and "Who Rings The Bell". Another reference point is Freur, the art-pop band Hyde fronted in the mid-'80s, whose expressive synth work is a dominating feature here.

MICHAEL BONNER



ERON FALBO

73

WORKING BRILLIANTLY

'Songs From A Room', 2014 edition

You can't make this stuff up: Brazilian-born singer-songwriter obsessed with the

7/10

early records of Dylan, Cohen and Simon & Garfunkel tracks down Bob Johnston, who produced classic LPs for all three, and persuades the semi-retired septuagenarian to helm his debut album. Echoes of Falbo's heroes are all over 73, especially on "What I Could've Been", with its Scrabble board of gleeful Simon and Dylan lifts (he also covers a *Bookends* outtake). Falbo's theatrical delivery can be over the top, and Johnston's kitchen-sink production threatens to sink under their own weight at times, but there's no mistaking the sheer joy that animates this improbable collaboration.

BUD SCOPPA



FENNEZ

Béc

EDITIONS MEGO

A gorgeous, gaseous masterpiece from Austrian avant-guitarist

The Viennese sound artist Christian Fennesz came to prominence in 2001 with

9/10

his third album, *Endless Summer*, in which guitar feedback and processed electronics hung like a heat-haze over discreetly nostalgic tunes. In the subsequent 13 years, Fennesz' status has increased as an experimentalist who privileges warmth and romance over clinical austerity, without quite recapturing the same serenity. *Béc* (Hungarian for Vienna) remedies that, being an entirely ravishing aesthetic experience. The title track is a highlight among many: as the stately melody cuts through great billowing clouds of noise, in the manner of "To Here Knows When", Fennesz emerges once more as Kevin Shields' most auspicious peer.

JOHN MULVEY

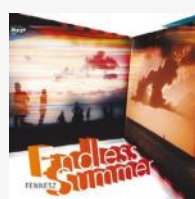
HOW TO BUY... FENNEZ

The Austrian's best work



FENNEZPLAYS MEGO, 1998
A critical single that brought Christian Fennesz to a broader rock audience beyond avant-garde circles. Two great covers: "Paint It Black" is atmospheric and totally unrecognisable; "Don't Talk (Put Your Head On My Shoulder)" a ghostly take on the Beach Boys classic that retained its bittersweet aesthetic and pointed the way forward to...

8/10



FENNEZ Endless Summer MEGO, 2001
After some daft and brutal laptop jams with Jim O'Rourke and Mego boss Peter 'Pita' Rehberg (as Fenn O'Berg), Fennesz expanded on his "Don't Talk" cover with the evocative, blurred soundscapes of *Endless Summer*. A fractured extrapolation of Brian Wilson's most dappled and melancholy tendencies, and one of the key electronica-related albums of the past 15 years.

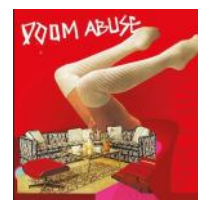
9/10



FENNEZ Venice TOUCH, 2004
Endless Summer's grandly meditative follow-up, introducing into the mix the vocals of a key latterday collaborator, David Sylvian (other accomplices have subsequently included Ryuichi Sakamoto, Sparklehorse and AMM's Keith Rowe). "Circassian" is, perhaps, the most MBV-like of all Fennesz tracks.

8/10

JOHN MULVEY



THE FAINT

Doom Abuse

SQE MUSIC

First album in six years from Omaha synthpop terrors

However seriously The Faint might take

7/10

themselves, it's sometimes been hard to do the same: their studied gloom and fetishised '80s stylings seem a little cartoonish, as if manufactured for an 'edgy' LA cop show's nightclub scene. Even their comeback's title, *Doom Abuse*, sounds contrived, but its hard-edged synth-punk is grittier and harsher this time round, perhaps their best collection since 2001's *Danse Macabre*. "Help In The Head" is a furious Duran Duran nightmare, "Damage Control" a dark Depeche Mode horror soundtrack, while even the potentially comic "Evil Voices" finds them more committed than ever.

WYNDHAM WALLACE



LEE FIELDS & THE EXPRESSIONS

Emma Jean

TRUTH & SOUL

Stunning Southern soul from '60s veteran, recorded in Nashville

Elmer 'Lee' Fields has been releasing records for 45

9/10

years, but surely none as good as this. Dubbed 'Little JB' for his vocal similarities to the Godfather Of Soul, Fields began his career with a succession of dirty, hot funk 45s – the kind of records cratediggers would sell kidneys to own. *Emma Jean* is mellower, mournful and unimpeachably authentic. Shit, this guy can sing, and the 11 tracks here constitute a magnificent piece of work, underlined by note-perfect arrangements by producer/label boss Leon Michels. There's a countrified vibe, too: the cover of JJ Cale's "Magnolia" is excellent, but "Paralyzed" – written by Dan Auerbach – may be the best four minutes you've heard all year.

MARK BENTLEY



MARC FORD

Holy Ghost

NAIM EDGE

Atmospheric country-rock from low-flying Black Crowe

As a guitarist, it was Ford who brought some country cool to the Crowes' best

6/10

stuff, and he's worn many hats since leaving in '97, as sideman (Ben Harper, Booker T) and producer (Ryan Bingham and Phantom Limb, the Bristol country-soul collective who provide backing here). This fifth solo album might have been recorded at Monmouth's Rockfield Studios, but the sound is low-slung, lugubrious Americana: *Holy Ghost* exists in the same space – if not the same class – as John Stewart's *California Bloodlines*, Smog, Ron Sexsmith and latter-day Springsteen. Ford's voice is broken with bar-floor regret, but his tasteful songs are less striking – "Call Me Faithful" and the loping "Badge Of Descension" are the pick.

MARK BENTLEY



LEE BAINS III & THE GLORY FIRES

Dereconstructed

SUBPOP

Pronounced 'Lee-'nérd Skin-'nérd'? A radical, literate update of Southern rock. *By John Mulvey*



8/10

DEEP INTO 2001'S *Southern Rock Opera*, there's a point where Patterson Hood produces a mission statement for the Drive-By Truckers – and for an enlightened generation of bands from below the Mason-Dixon line. “*You think I’m dumb, maybe not*

too bright,” he sings, “*You wonder how I sleep at night/Proud of the glory, stare down the shame/Duality of the Southern thing*.”

Lee Bains III, a native of Birmingham, Alabama, has a good story about sneaking into a Truckers show with a fake ID when he was 16. He talks about how his father had taught him to love Lynyrd Skynyrd, about how “they so easily evoked in me a pure love for my home and culture, though a line of faceless, n-bomb-dropping, rebel-flag-waving dudes made Skynyrd lose their lustre in my teenage years.” At the Truckers gig, though, Bains saw “scuzzy rocker dudes in cowboy boots and ballcaps hollering along to words about the duality of the Southern identity, and [segregationist governor of Alabama] George Wallace burning in Hell. I remember feeling a sense of solidarity and thinking, maybe this is what Daddy experienced with those bands when he was in high school.”

For “*the duality of the Southern thing*,” read *Dereconstructed*, the second Lee Bains III & The Glory Fires album and a potent, articulate attempt at reconciling Southern traditions – regional pride, faith, virility, massed keening guitars – with a more

progressive political outlook. “*We were raised on ancient truths, and ugly old lies*,” begins the agenda-setting title track, two-and-a-half minutes which encapsulate the Glory Fires’ ferocious and economic approach to Southern rock.

Virtuosity proliferates, but you won’t find a “Mountain Jam” in the taut 36 minutes of *Dereconstructed*. Following an apprenticeship playing guitar in The Dexateens (bandmate Matt Patton now plays bass in the Drive-By Truckers), Bains struck out on his own with 2012’s *There Is A Bomb In Gilead*, a rowdy and soulful take on the Muscle Shoals sound that put most of The Black

SLEEVE NOTES

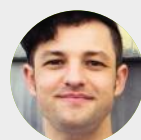
➤ **Recorded at:** Battle Tapes, Nashville, Tennessee
Produced by: Tim Kerr
Personnel: Lee Bains III (vocals, guitar), Eric Wallace (guitar), Adam Williamson (bass) and Blake Williamson (drums), plus John Wesley Myers (piano), Matt Patton (bass) and Tim Kerr (harmonica)

Keys’ similar efforts to shame. “We Dare Defend Our Rights” upgrades that concept on *Dereconstructed*, in a generally tighter, harder and more anthemic set. Besides the omnipresent spirit of Skynyrd, a firm grasp of The Rolling Stones remains prominent: “What’s Good And Gone” betrays particularly assiduous study of “Gimme Shelter”. But the pace is often wilder and rooted in punk – references to The Replacements and early Jason & The Scorchers seem plausible – so that “Flags” delivers its indictment of old Southern bigotries at virtual hardcore speed. And while “Mississippi Bottomland” might have the air-punching clout of an old AC/DC track (“Hell’s Bells”, maybe?), Tim Kerr’s garage-rock production aesthetic means that the Glory Fires are unlikely to be mistaken for the mainstream’s latest Southern rock archetypes, Blackberry Smoke. Southern rock has always poeticised and ennobled the plight of the working man: Blackberry Smoke’s “One Horse Town” is typical, even if it sounds rather like a countrified Bon Jovi. Bains, though, goes deeper into exposing the reasons for that plight. “*Hear the poets and professors/Postulate how we all got so robbed*,” he notes amidst the biblical imagery and anti-corporate rhetoric of “The Company Man”, before nailing Southern poverty as a direct result of the region’s historic political intransigence in “What’s Good And Gone”: “*We dug in to our sin ‘til we were drinking muddy water and eating shoestrings*.”

The record company biog that posits Bains as “Ronnie Van Zant under the tutelage of Noam Chomsky” might be pushing it a little. With his fine band, Bains is a defiant romantic as much as a realist, one who mythologises the honeysuckle vines and Queen Anne’s Lace flowers of his hometown while ruefully admitting “*the new architecture’s largely depressing/And the politics are pretty regressive*”. As “The Weeds Downtown” goes on, though, and twin lead guitars rear up one more time, Bains finds droll solace in improving crime statistics and the fact that the population decline is, at last, “*stagnating*”. “*I know that Birmingham gets you down*,” he sings, a master of qualified pride, “*but look what it raised you up to be*.”

Q&A

Lee Bains III



Can you explain the meaning behind *Dereconstructed*?

This album is an attempt to dismantle the overarching linear, teleological narrative that has worked to keep the Southerner

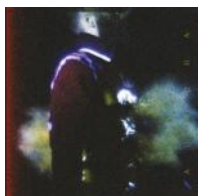
stuck between a rock and a hard place: this dichotomy of reconstructed/unreconstructed. It’s an attempt to smash that narrative’s definition of what constitutes a Southerner. In that old monolithic story, where are the black, Native American, Tejano, multi-racial and female Southerners who have been integral to our region’s development? I want to deconstruct

that reconstructed/unreconstructed false duality, because it only leaves us stuck in the mud.

Do you get frustrated with people’s stereotypes of the American south? Not nearly as frustrated as I get with Southerner’s stereotypes of the American South.

What do you love about Alabama? What do you hate about it? I feel about Alabama the way I do about a family member; completely, and with a great sense of duty. We disagree about plenty, but I’m secure enough in that love to talk about it civilly and honestly. But most of the time, I just shut up, eat my supper, talk football and enjoy the good company.

To read Lee Bains’ full interview, visit www.uncut.co.uk



BEN FROST

Aurora

BEDROOM COMMUNITY/MUTE

Aussie composer takes an axe to the post-classical scene

Although the music produced by Ben Frost and his Bedroom Community

7/10

cohorts Nico Muhly and Valgeir Sigurðsson is often tagged “post-classical”, that seems far too polite a term for what’s going on here. Although recorded in Frost’s adopted hometown of Reykjavik, *Aurora* was largely written while he was working on a video installation in war-ravaged eastern DR Congo. While there’s little evidence of African rhythms or instrumentation – *Aurora* is an entirely synthetic affair – there is a turbulence and defiance to these alternately screeching and growling compositions that seeks to challenge highbrow European complacency. It’s hard-going at times, but “Nolan” and “Soda Fide” are oddly stirring.

SAM RICHARDS



FUJIYA & MIYAGI

Artificial Sweeteners

YEPROC

More aesthetically correct boffin-pop from Brighton trio

6/10

Singer David Best reckons

that his very smart synth-pop-meets-Krautrock veterans have made a “record that goes for the jugular”, with a particular emphasis on making people dance. But, disappointingly, F&M’s fifth album reinforces the trio’s constant strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, an ability to update immaculate references like Neu!, Moroder and Eno with a throbbing power that is hard to resist. On the other, everything they do favours arch art-pop theory over heart, as Best whispers every clever-clever but ultimately shallow lyric with as much emotional distance as he can muster. The acid house one is called “Tetrahydrofolic Acid”. Case rested.

GARRY MULHOLLAND



FULL UGLY

Spent The Afternoon

BEDROOM SUCKS RECORDS

Laidback Aussie four-piece's charming slacker-pop debut

8/10

Full Ugly are the latest arrivals from the fertile

Aussie scene that includes Scott & Charlene’s Wedding and Bed Wettin’ Bad Boys, who share more than a penchant for terrible bad names. The delightfully shabby, can’t-be-arsed *Spent The Afternoon* has that same Replacements-meets-Lemonheads-on-the-beach vibe, obscuring some pristine pure pop and great songwriting behind a façade of intoxicating laziness and occasionally half-arsed musicianship. Principal songwriter is Nathan Burgess, and tracks like the febrile “Nervous”, drawling “Hilly Street” and generation-defining shrug that is “No Plans” suggest this is a talent worth watching.

PETER WATTS



LUKE HAINES

New York In The '70s

CHERRY RED

Impish former Auteur gets the CBGBs heebie-jeebies

7/10

Following on from his album about *World Of*

Sport wrestling and the one about the adventures of Jimmy Pursey the frisky fox, Luke Haines’ trilogy of rock follies concludes with this perverse meditation on New York punk. Documenting Cerne Abbas man’s quest for “mythic motherfucking rock’n’roll”, it finds the former Auteur Cheree-picking his way through from the Velvets to the Voidoids, celebrating his pantheon of the righteous – Jim Carroll, Alan Vega, Lou Reed, et al. “We’re gonna have some fun with the scary transvestites,” he beams excitedly on the Go Kart Mozart-ish title track, elegaic, stern and silly as ever.

JIM WIRTH



PAUL HEATON & JACQUI ABBOTT

What Have We Become

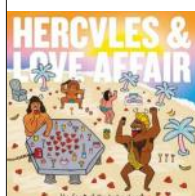
VIRGIN/EMI

Facebook reunion spurs spirited return of the Beautiful South frontpersons

7/10

Social networking make-ups resulted in Heaton’s first work with the retired singer Abbott since her abrupt Beautiful South departure in 2000. The results have fire in the belly and attitude to spare, perhaps the return of producer John Williams (The Housemartins’ *London o’ Hull* 4 debut) helping to focus Heaton’s talents. Abbott is a compelling foil for the gleeful cynicism of the Motown-propelled opener “Moulding Of A Fool” and the crashing, faded glory of the title track. The towering “One Man’s England”, a long overdue indie anthem riposte to Morrissey’s “Bengali In Platforms”, deserves a special mention.

GAVIN MARTIN



HERCULES & LOVE AFFAIR

The Feast Of The Broken Heart

MOSHI MOSHI

Uninspired disco revivalists get extra sparkle from John Grant

5/10

Butler’s ever-changing New York collective for their third album. Retro-disco and proto-house pastiche are the modes here – harking back to the icy production and amyl-fuelled ambience of an era when nightclubbing was a heavily gay, semi-underground subculture rather than mainstream entertainment. In truth, Grant’s croon provides the album’s only real essential moments, musing darkly on love and lust over throbbing pianos on “I Try To Talk To You” and the acid-heavy ripples of “Liberty”. But overall, Butler’s pedestrian appropriation of the clunky beats, tinny handclaps and squelchy vocoder effects of yesteryear sound stale and repetitive.

STEPHEN DALTON



JOLIE HOLLAND

Wine Dark Sea

ANTI

Inventive sixth solo album from Be Good Tanyas founder

9/10

Jolie Holland has travelled a long way from the sweetly

traditional pleasures of the Tanyas, but 2011’s *Pint Of Blood* seemed to find her drifting. A complete rethink has resulted in the most uninhibited and visceral album of her career, on which she carves out a unique position somewhere between Lucinda Williams’ Southern Gothic (“Route 30”), Rickie Lee Jones’ jazzy bohemianism (“Out On The Wine Dark Sea”) and the feral blues of Polly Harvey (“Dark Days”). Electric guitars squall to make your speakers shake (“On And On”) and the earthy rhythms of “Waiting For The Sun” throb with raw, gospel intensity. Magnificent.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



THE HORRORS

Luminous

XL

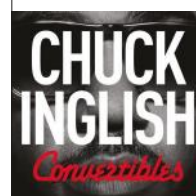
Bold pop reinvention just lacks that killer tune

7/10

The Horrors continue to accelerate away from their gothy beginnings with an unashamedly poppy

fourth album, marked by shuffling dance beats, strafing synths and Faris Badwan’s vocal range gaining an extra octave. You can hear where they’ve drawn from Krautrock, dub and noise influences, but for the most part they sound like the kind of floppy-fringed dreamers you would have seen pouting from the front cover of *Select* circa 1991 (“Chasing Shadows” is a dead ringer for Ride’s “Leave Them All Behind”). The album’s highlight comes when “I See You” wriggles free of its ’90s indie-disco moorings and shoots at the moon; *Luminous* could have done with a few more of those moments.

SAM RICHARDS



CHUCK INGLISH

Convertibles

FEDERAL PRISM

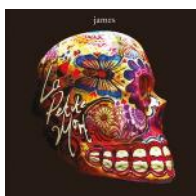
Trendy but empty leftfield rap on Dave Sitek’s label

5/10

Inglish is one half of hipster rappers The Cool Kids, now on his own

but backed up by a series of quality guests. Most appropriate of all are Chromeo, whose electro-funk dovetails perfectly on one of the many nu-soul and boogie productions, and these leftfield backings peak with the loose and Roots-y highlight “Glam”. But Inglish gets outclassed on it by Chance The Rapper, and the straightforward rap tracks merely show up his generically braggadocio lyricism and deflated hooks, using charmless trap cliché and bringing out the leaden, smoke-headed worst in the likes of Action Bronson, Mac Miller and Ab-Soul.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



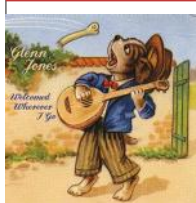
JAMES
La Petite Mort
BMG/COOKING VINYL

Powerful paeans to those who have passed on
The spectre of mortality hangs heavy over James' first album of new

7/10

material for six years, due in no small part to Tim Booth addressing the deaths of both his mother and his best friend. These are no sombre eulogies, however, but rather uplifting celebrations of lives well lived; the anthemic "Moving On" ponders meeting loved ones again in a better, brighter place, while the piano-led ballad "All In My Mind" celebrates the riches that the dear departed left us with. Producer Max Dingel (The Killers, Muse) fashions a crystal clear sound, full but never overblown, bringing an attractive universality to some very personal emotions.

TERRY STAUNTON



GLENN JONES
Welcomed Wherever I Go
THRILL JOCKEY

Limited vinyl side – a stream of soli
Glenn Jones' conception of guitar soli has always been one of

7/10

the most reverent of his peers; he may not stretch the parameters of the form like some other players, but instead he focuses in on clear, fluid articulation, and playing of almost preternatural depth. *Welcomed Wherever I Go* is a mini-album released especially for Record Store Day, and its three tracks include a live medley/reverie, a beautiful stream of finger-twisting steel string, and a lovely live duo with Cian Nugent, "The Orca Grande Cement Factory At Victorville", which is gorgeously simpático, both players stretching and breathing as one.

JON DALE



KISHI BASHI
Lighght
JOYFUL NOISE

Stradovarius artist's prog-pop fantasia
The Electric Light Orchestra as fronted by Arthur Russell, Kishi Bashi is the baroque'n'roll

7/10

alter ego of sometime Regina Spektor and Of Montreal sideman Kaoru Ishibashi, who retreated from New York to Vermont to create music of almost oppressive euphoria. The follow-up to 2012's similarly flamboyant *151a* album, *Lighght* is a giddy rush where the 38-year-old's innocent pursuits and guilty pleasures collide head on; "The Ballad Of Mr Steak" is Christopher Cross' "Arthur's Theme" playing in Kubla Khan's pleasure dome, while "Hahaha Pt2" might be Violinski's 1979 glam-prog novelty hit "Clog Dance" rebooted for Vampire Weekend-literate times.

JIM WIRTH



RAY LAMONTAGNE
Supernova
RCA

Dan Auerbach gives the troubadour a welcome kick in the pants

8/10

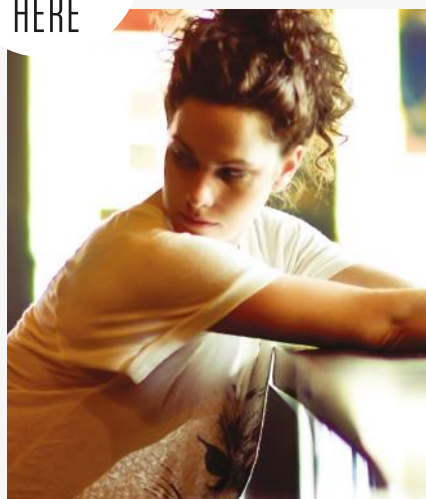
Since slouching out of the Maine woods a decade

ago, LaMontagne has gradually softened his presentation: from the urgency of 2004's *Trouble* to the Laurel Canyon gentility of 2010's *God Willin' & The Creek Don't Rise*. He's pulled himself out of this cul de sac by hooking up with The Black Keys' Dan Auerbach, who restores the edge to his introspectiveness. This inventively arranged collection of Barrett-like psych ("Lavender") and rawboned garage rockers ("She's The One"), set off by cuts recalling Mink DeVille ("Airwaves"), early Van ("Supernova") and America ("Ojai"), throbs with the fanboy obsessiveness of Bowie's *Pin Ups*. Unexpectedly exhilarating.

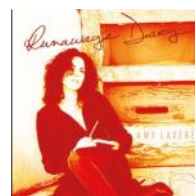
BUD SCOPPA

WE'RE
NEW
HERE

Amy
LaVere



➤ Sometime actress (she played Wanda Jackson in Johnny Cash biopic *Walk The Line*), former Sun Studios tour guide, and exotic combination of lead singer and double-bassist, Louisiana-born Amy LaVere pitched up in Memphis in 1999 at the tail end of a peripatetic childhood. Her parents were both musicians and "I just assumed that was what I was going to do," she says, though it's been a slow burn. Local legend Jim Dickinson produced her second album, 2007's *Anchors And Anvils*, which "was like sitting at the feet of a guru. It was a real mentor-student thing." Following its widely praised successor, *Stranger Me*, probably the only heartbreak record to include a cover of Captain Beefheart's "Candle Mambo", comes the "more soulful and organic" *Runaway's Diary*. It was partly inspired by another mentor, Seasick Steve, who toured with LaVere in 2008. "I ran away from home briefly when I was a teenager," she says. "The song 'Rabbit' is me imagining I'd stayed on the lam and hoping I would have run into a character like Steve, because he's such a nurturing person. That got me thinking that I wanted to explore that part of my life, and it all started to piece together." GRAEME THOMSON



AMY LAVERE
Runaway's Diary
ARCHER RECORDS

Winning nostalgia from the Memphis singer and double-bass-slayer

9/10

Amy LaVere's last album, 2011's *Stranger*

Me, eviscerated the end of an affair. The follow-up, produced by Luther Dickinson, son of the late and legendary Jim, is also loosely conceptual, centring on her going AWOL, aged 15, after her parents' divorce. The rite of passage is masterfully told – LaVere's kittenish voice conceals some sharp claws – via a seamless hybrid of country, folk, blues and swampy rock'n'roll. Throw in covers of John Lennon's "How?" and Townes Van Zandt's "Where I Lead Me" and *Runaway's Diary* is a record with hugely impressive depth and emotional range.

GRAEME THOMSON



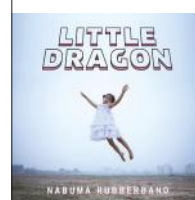
LITTLE BARRIE
Shadow
TUMMY TOUCH

Brit trio's garage-grade indie funk, recorded chez Edwyn Collins
Think Serge's *Histoire De Melody Nelson*, reimagined by Ride.

7/10

For their fourth album, Nottingham's Barrie Cadogan, Lewis Wharton and Virgil (son of Steve) Howe have stirred up a strange brew of buzzsaw atmospherics, loping soundtrack psychedelia and slightly snotty indie. Citing Can, Ty Segall and Funkadelic as influences, Barrie's boys have actually arrived somewhere closer to White Denim on a downer. But it works, man, with "Stop Or Die" and, particularly "It Don't Count" hitting the straps. Howe doubles as the 'link' drummer for Amorphous Androgynous, and his authentic beats bring the requisite darkness to *Shadow*.

MARK BENTLEY



LITTLE DRAGON
Nabuma Rubberband
BECAUSE MUSIC

Gothenburg band's fourth album of grown-up pop
Little Dragon frontwoman Yukimi Nagano has

7/10

collaborated fruitfully with everyone from Damon Albarn to SBTRKT to Outkast's Big Boi, although her own band's brand of quirky electro-pop has always felt a little fussy in comparison. *Nabuma Rubberband* rectifies that failing. Like the '90s R&B productions that they fetishise, the likes of "Mirror" and "Paris" are melodically and emotionally direct but with plenty going on beneath the surface, while the restrained tempos serve to show off Nagano's nicely maturing voice. There's nothing here that is likely to offend or amaze but it's a classy affair from start to finish.

SAM RICHARDS



LYKKE LI

I Never Learn

ATLANTIC

Swedish singer returns with tear-stained indie-pop

8/10

Billed as the final part of a trilogy that began with 2008's *Youth Novels* and continued with 2011's *Wounded Rhymes*, Lykke Li's third album digs further into heartbreak, often tipping over into outright fury. As the title suggests, *I Never Learn* is heart-on-sleeve stuff though it rarely takes its eye off the pop prize, as evidenced by "Gun Shot" with its gut-busting chorus and echoing '80s drum beat. Elsewhere "Love Me Like I'm Not Made Of Stone" strips away all embellishment, focusing on Li's singing – more a plaintive moan here – and her singularly bruised romanticism. You'd struggle to find a more affecting ode to the selfishness of love than this.

FIONA STURGES



DAN LYTH AND THE EUPHRATES

Benthic Lines

ARMELLODIE

Fife sound designer's outdoor adventure
Dunfermline-based Lyth's decision to record an album entirely outdoors

7/10

was either foolhardy or adventurous. It certainly caused logistical problems; the album took five years to record, in woods, churches and parks around Scotland, but also taking in a Turkish beach, a Moroccan rooftop, Sydney Harbour Bridge, and the equator. In truth, the atmospheric influences are marginal. The sound is dominated by an interest in Steve Reich's minimalism. Lyth uses acoustic instruments to mimic electronic programming, with his voice – somewhere between Paul Buchanan and Thom Yorke – bringing a note of plaintive vulnerability, notably on the opener, "All My Love".

ALASTAIR MCKAY



ZIGGY MARLEY

Fly Rasta

TUFF GONG

Fifth solo studio album from Bob's first-born

7/10

If Bob Marley had lived, would he have stuck righteously to the roots-reggae template – or would he have spread his Rasta wings and flown like his eldest son? For *Fly Rasta* is not so much a straight reggae album as a contemporary pop/rock/funk record with a reggae tinge. "I Don't Wanna Live On Mars" sounds like Bruno Mars. "Lighthouse" has a touch of Robbie Williams, and the acoustic "So Many Rising" sounds more like Cat Stevens than the old man's "Redemption Song". The best moments tend to come where the reggae is at its most full-on, particularly the title track on which he duets with U-Roy.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



JOHN MAYALL

A Special Life

FORTY BELOW

Boss Bluesbreaker celebrates his 80th birthday in style

8/10

The remarkable thing is not just that John Mayall has endured so long but that he sounds so little diminished by the years. He's still wailing in the slightly strangled voice of 50 years back, still blows a useful harp, still leads a fine band, whose guitarist, Rocky Athos, recalls the young Eric Clapton. Here he mixes pieces by heroes like Albert King with originals, the title track being no retrospective but a charming, low-key reflection on solitude. CJ Chenier shows up to blast squeezebox on the opener "Why Did You Go Last Night" – written and previously recorded by his father, 'King Of Zydeco' Clifton Chenier – while Mayall delivers everything with utter conviction.

NEIL SPENCER

HOW TO BUY... JOHN MAYALL

Messin' with the blues



JOHN MAYALL WITH ERIC CLAPTON

Blues Breakers

DECCA, 1966

The calling card for Mayall, a soon-to-leave, *Beano*-reading

Clapton and, indeed, for the Brit blues boom. Producer Mike Vernon leant the LP a murky atmosphere in which Mayall's anguished falsetto and Clapton's stinging solos shone. Originals like "Double Crossing Time" fit snugly alongside standards by Freddie King, Otis Rush and Robert Johnson.

8/10



JOHN MAYALL

Bare Wires

DECCA, 1968

Mayall goes psych... almost. An oddity that reflects the era, its original A-side is a 23-minute song

suite, and the rest is all original material. For accompaniment to Mayall's harp and keys (including harmonium and harpsichord) there's a young Mick Taylor on guitar and a jazzy brass section. Mayall's experimentation was rewarded with a UK No 3.

7/10



JOHN MAYALL & THE BLUES BREAKERS

Wake Up Call

SILVERSTONE, 1993

Mayall's ability to attract talent has helped burnish his career. Here he has Mavis Staples helping on the soul-styled title track, Mick Taylor lending guitar, Buddy Guy duetting on a fine cover of Junior Wells' "I Could Cry", and Albert Lee chiming in impeccably on two Mayall originals.

9/10

NEIL SPENCER



META META

Metal Metal

MAIS UM DISCO

Cutting-edge Afro-Braziliana from São Paulo

7/10

It's easy to imagine a jazz-rock mix like this from Britain – serpentine saxophone, intricate electric guitar and wild female vocals – but what it wouldn't have are rhythms and themes from Brazil's African legacy. Drawn from the effervescent São Paulo scene, its core trio are all devotees of the Candomblé religion, with tracks devoted to its deities: Yemanjá the sea goddess, Oxossi the hunter, and so on. Greats like Baden Powell have taken the same path, but Meta Meta add the squall of city life, punkesque on "Man Feriman", full of stop-start prog tricks on "São Jorge". It's semi-improvised and often raw, but bursting with vim and surprise.

NEIL SPENCER



NICK MULVEY

First Mind

FICTION

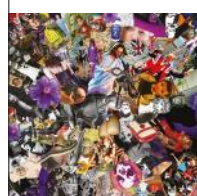
Alt.folk strummer with rich musical hinterland

Formerly with alt.jazzers Portico Quartet, neo-folk balladeer Mulvey brings virtuosity, intelligence and

8/10

a lightly experimental agenda to his rich and crafted solo debut. An ethnomusicology graduate who studied music in Cuba, Mulvey's cerebral exoticism pays dividends on perfumed mantras like "April" or "Juramidan", where supple Afro-Latin funk meets bluesy, finger-picking Americana. Recontextualising Olive's rave-pop classic "You're Not Alone" within the lush fairground-folk folds of "Nitrous", this magpie minstrel is more playful than his earnest highbrow-busker image suggests. His warm, grainy voice is a compelling instrument on its own, even if his more mellow musings veer close to Paolo Nutini-esque blandness in places.

STEPHEN DALTON



THE NIGHTINGALES

For Fuck's Sake

BIG PRINT

Poisonous racket from arsey post-punks

The Nightingales have been pretty prolific since reforming in 2004.

8/10

This fourth studio effort was recorded at Faust's studio, with bassist Andreas Schmid also doubling as producer. A flamingly belligerent thing it is too, Robert Lloyd rucking his way through songs that somehow manage to be caustic, funny and slightly scary all at the same time. "Bullet For Gove" aims a blunderbuss at the Education Secretary; the brusque "Toasted On Both" is Beefheart prog-punk; Adam and Eve go rock'n'roll on the distorted clatter of "Dumb & Dumber". Thirty-five years on, they genuinely sound more vital than ever.

ROB HUGHES

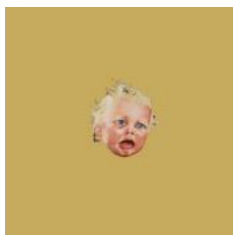


SWANS

To Be Kind

MUTE

Another set of pulverising epics from Michael Gira. *By Louis Pattison*



8/10

IN 2006, WHEN asked about the possibility of a Swans reunion, Michael Gira was unequivocal. "Absolutely not, never," he announced. "Dead and gone. I have more interesting things to do." It certainly looked that way. Since Swans' dissolution in

1997, Gira had found new, rather hippyish kin in the shape of Akron/Family and Devendra Banhart, whose early albums he released on his label Young God, and was himself making new and worthwhile music with Angels Of Light, a project rooted in a more narrative, acoustic folk idiom.

This was all a long way from early '80s Swans albums like *Cop* and *Greed*, grinding and assaultive noise symphonies forged in the white heat of New York's no wave scene. But for Gira, there was something beautiful to Swans. While writing for a new Angels Of Light album, Gira noted a recurring theme, of "the narrators' desire to dissolve, or be subsumed – to completely disappear into something greater than themselves". In the end, they didn't function as Angels Of Light songs, but they were *something* – and with that, Swans' 2010 comeback, *My Father Will Guide Me Up A Rope To The Sky*, was born.

When discussing Swans, Gira returns over and over to this sense of numinous, quasi-religious sublime. Certainly, scale, a sense of hugeness, seems key. Like its predecessor, 2012's *The Seer*, *To Be Kind* clocks in around two hours, with one of its 10 songs, the 34-minute "Bring The Sun/Toussaint L'Ouverture", feeling like a mini-album in itself. Still, much like, say, Can or the Grateful Dead, Swans only really hit their stride when sprawling out. The band currently exist as a seven-man ensemble, with veterans like guitarist Norman Westberg and drummer Thor Harris, and as with

Swans albums like 1996's *Soundtracks For The Blind*, there is some intricacy of instrumentation here: "Screen Shot" and "Nathalie Neal" build shimmering lattices of lap-steel and dulcimer, mandolin and harpsichord, vibes and bells. But these are not delicate symphonies. Nor do Swans jam, or employ anything as rhythmically complex as syncopation or tricky time signatures. Instead, these songs roll in like dark clouds, heave and grunt like a galley slave under the lash, or beat relentlessly, like a forehead hammering against a wall.

It is much to Gira's credit that he manages to make such music not just tolerable, but gripping. "Just A Little Boy (For Chester Burnett)" is a dedication to one of Gira's oft-stated influences, the bluesman Howlin' Wolf. It is grotesque, a sinister swing daubed with squalls of electric slide, Gira gargling "I'm just a little boy!" to chilling canned laughter. "Bring The Sun/Toussaint L'Ouverture", titled in honour of the revolutionary leader that freed the slaves of Haiti, rides over four mighty crescendos. In one of the valleys, we hear the hammering of nails and the whinny of horses, Gira roaring "*Liberté! Egalité! Fraternité!*" Here and there, it grooves: see the hobbled lurch of "Oxygen", or the strutting "A Little God In My Hands", which periodically erupts in a squall of horns and synthesiser.

SLEEVE NOTES

► **Recorded at:** Sonic Ranch, Tornillo, Texas
Produced by: Michael Gira
Recorded and mixed by: John Congleton
Personnel: Michael Gira (vocals, electric/acoustic gtr), Norman Westberg (electric/acoustic gtr, vocals), Phil Puleo (drums, perc, dulcimer, piano, keys, vocals), Christoph Hahn (lap steel, vocals, electric gtr), Thor Harris (drums/perc, vibes, bells, wind instr., handmade viola, vocals) Christopher Pravdica (acoustic/bass gtr, vocals) Bill Rieflin (drums, perc, piano, bass, guitar, synths, keyboards)

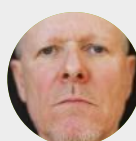
Yet as the name suggests, *To Be Kind* does feature a quality hitherto rare in Swans: that of tenderness. Seven of the 10 songs here contain the word love, and there is a clear feminine presence. On "Some Things We Do", Gira and Little Annie duet huskily over Julia Kent's sinister, suspended string arrangement: "We heal, we fuck, we pray, we hate/We reach, we touch, we lose, we taste..." St Vincent sings backing vocals on four tracks, most notably the protean sensuality of "Kirsten Supine", while on the closer, we hear Gira in something close to romantic bliss, "*in a bed, painted blue, touching you...*"

Like Jim Morrison and Iggy Pop, Michael Gira belongs to that rare category of rock frontmen, the visionary. But whereas Morrison's route to transcendence was through debauchery, Gira's is in feats of extraordinary discipline. If Iggy, meanwhile, was to come out now with a song of the calibre of "She Loves Us", a malevolent mantra born up on a chant of hallelujahs, it would

constitute one of rock's greatest returns to form. This is all a way of saying that, 32 years on from Swans' formation, Michael Gira is not only still moving forward, but making some of the albums of his career. It only remains to be seen where Swans go next.

Q&A

Michael Gira



When were you interviewed while touring *The Seer*, you were talking about 'tender' music...

Exactly, that's "To Be Kind". It's a song written for my fiancée.

But whatever I'm doing, whatever I'm reading, whatever I'm watching, it all goes into the records. When I am blessed with a subject or a string of words that feel coherent, I get down on my knees and lick the ground in gratitude. For

me, it isn't an easy thing to write. Subject matter isn't really an easy thing for me to control. I find it builds gradually over the course of the record.

Is "Just A Little Boy (For Chester Burnett)" about Howlin' Wolf?

It's not about him, no. I just kind of felt he was there with me as I was singing it. I don't know what those words are, except me reaching back into this inner child place, which is not a sweet place necessarily. I noticed when I was singing, I was doing what the Wolf did, a bit – reaching into this unbridled id. And he did some really stupid things onstage, as did I. He'd do things like get down on the floor, get under some woman's skirt, and go like, a-woooo! So I dedicated it to him.



OLD 97'S Most Messed Up ATO

Reckless youth revisited

Old 97's frontman Rhett Miller is a sharp-eyed chronicler of the human comedy, and on the

8/10

band's 10th studio LP, he throws himself into the role of a young knucklehead with a one-track mind who manoeuvres through life by steering with his dick, as the dude's compadres might say. The song titles telegraph the album's party-hearty vibe, its dark undercurrent and the shit-kicking performances the Dallas vets deliver: "Let's Get Drunk & Get It On", "Wheels Off" and the inevitable "Intervention". This study of youthful misadventures gives the 97's ample opportunity to re-immersing themselves in the punk-fuelled exuberance they brought to the alt.country movement two decades ago.

BUD SCOPPA



OWLS Two POLYVINYL

First in 13 years from Chicago math-rockers Chicago's Owls had appeared a one-off, a short-lived project that stood as a path between

6/10

the influential emo group Cap'n Jazz and its members' involvement in a string of projects including Joan Of Arc, Owen and Ghosts And Vodka. The appearance of *Two*, though, suggests unfinished business, and results bear that out. Vocalist Tim Kinsella strikes an intriguing balance between raw emotion and lyrical enigma: on "This Must Be How...", we hear him trying to articulate his state of mind with recourse to photosynthesis and "dry spaghetti". And while, as a unit, the group are more orthodox rock than, say, Slint or Tortoise, guitarist Victor Villareal's pointillistic noodling offers a cerebral sort of thrill.

LOUIS PATTISON



THE PHANTOM BAND Strange Friend CHEMICAL UNDERGROUND

Inventive Glaswegians hone their excellence

Following singer Rick Redbeard's terrific solo album last year, The

8/10

Phantom Band return with a record which streamlines past eccentricities, honing a more user-friendly version of their pulsing, multi-stranded rock. "Clapshot" and "The Wind That Cried The World" shimmer with retro-synths and glistening melodic hooks, but while the oddness has been dialled down it hasn't disappeared. "Staccato" revisits the bastardised garage-disco of Simple Minds' *Real To Real Cacophony*, while "Doom Patrol" lurches towards a massively entertaining metal meltdown. *Strange Friend* marks a measured step towards accessibility for one of Britain's most inventive bands.

GRAEME THOMSON



PIXIES Indie Cindy PIXIESMUSIC

Deal or no Deal? 23 years on, an expedient fifth album

It may seem churlish to identify one reunion as especially cynical, but recent Pixies activities have felt notably artless – a situation emphasised by *Indie Cindy*. Kim Deal's absence is critical: one Jeremy Dubs mimicking her vocals on the standout "Bagboy" is hardly recompense. Elsewhere, the odd scabrous crunch from Joey Santiago can do little to mask the fact that this is ostensibly another batch of bland Black Francis solo songs, dressed up with a few needy tilts at the macabre. Disappointed old fans are redirected to Deal's new music for the spark, spontaneity and poignancy that the Pixies now lack: search for "The Root" on www.vimeo.com.

JOHN MULVEY

4/10



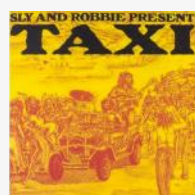
Dynamic duo's boss grooves

GREGORY ISAACS Soon Forward FRONT LINE, 1979

Sly & Robbie became a presiding force via mid-'70s vocal outfits like The Mighty

Diamonds, helping create the 'rockers' rhythms of the time – much of their best work is on the dub-sides of 45s. They are in well-oiled but restrained form on this set from the Cool Ruler, shining on the boss groove that drives the title track to dancefloor heaven.

8/10



VARIOUS ARTISTS Sly & Robbie Present Taxi ISLAND, 1981

Elevated from killer rhythm section to producers, the duo

issued a string of hits on their Taxi label. This comp captures assorted gems: Dennis Brown's "Sitting And Watching", Sheila Hylton's "Bed's Too Big Without You", and General Echo's "Drunken Master" – the sound fat and echo heavy, and not so metronomic as later.

8/10



SERGE GAINSBOURG Aux Armes Et Cætera PHILLIPS, 1979

Installed at Bahamas' Compass Point studios, S&R

became guns for international hire; Dylan and Joe Cocker were among the callers. More unlikely was gruff-voiced badboy Gainsbourg, yet he walked out with a fine set of S&R rhythms, syndrums shimmering, dressed with vocals by the I-Threes.

7/10

NEIL SPENCER



GRUFF RHYSS American Interior TURNSTILE

Sometime Super Furry hails ancestor with musical concept piece

In 1792, John Evans, a Snowdonia farmhand, voyaged to the Great Plains of America in search of a mythical tribe of Welsh-speaking Native Americans. 222 years later, Evans' descendent Gruff Rhys has immortalised his journey with a saga in documentary, book, app and CD form. Rhys has a talent for presenting such material with the right mix of pathos and play. Rollicking ballad "100 Unread Messages" relates Evans' travels – malaria, volcanos, mapmaking – to dizzying key changes, but "Walk Into The Wilderness" and "Liberty (Is Where We'll Be)" are prettily orchestrated things that celebrate Evans' feats and commiserate his failures. Ambition, clearly, runs in the family.

LOUIS PATTISON

7/10



DAN SARTAIN Dudesblood ONE LITTLE INDIAN

Anglophile punk'n'roll from Birmingham, Alabama

We can all think of British artists who long to have been born American, but

7/10

Alabama's Dan Sartain seems desperate to make the opposite journey. *Dudesblood* is filled with London-accented howls of anarcho-punk rage ("Smash The Tesco", "Love Is Suicide") that sound like they've been spray-painted onto the Roxy's toilet walls circa 1977. Even his flirtations with Americana – the junkyard swing of "Marfa Lights", the whipcracking doggerel of "Rawhide Moon", the reformed lothario in "HPV Cowboy" – recall *Combat Rock*-era Clash. The highlight is a creepy, prowling, marimba-driven take on The Knife's "Pass This On", which retains the female gaze of the original.

JOHN LEWIS



DYLAN SHEARER Garagearray CASTLEFACE/EMPTY CELLAR

Sweet lo-fi from a dedicated student of "O Caroline"

Dylan Shearer's ingenuousness is undermined, a little, by

7/10

how closely he appears to have cultivated it from the '60s Canterbury set. Shearer is part of the San Francisco garage rock milieu; Thee Oh Sees' Petey Dammit plays bass and Noel Von Harmonson from Comets On Fire is on drums, while Eric Bauer, who's previously worked with Ty Segall and Mikal Cronin, produces. *Garagearray*, though, showcases a mildly psychedelic singer-songwriter with the mournful timbre of Robert Wyatt. No bad thing, of course, and while titles like "Meadow Mines (Fort Polio)" might signal whimsy, Shearer's actual work is modest, understated and often rather beguiling.

JOHN MULVEY



SLEAFORD MODS
Divide And Exit
HARBINGER SOUNDS

Grumpy old Menswear; East Midlands Brit-poppers gone feral
Ex-Paul Weller wannabe Jason Williamson emerged

7/10

as the voice of the middle-aged downtrodden with Sleaford Mods, the “electronic munt minimalist” crew he founded with Andrew Fearn. Their seventh album, *Divide And Exit* explores similar themes of impotent rage as 2012’s *Wank* and last year’s *Austerity Dogs*, from the ignominy of exposure to workmates’ faeces on “Liveable Shit” (“every morning I get in it’s the same time, same trap, same stink”), to GG Allin-fixed faux-tough trendies and, on “Smithy”, “muggings after ten by the angry underclasses”. The Streets’ *Original Pirate Material* crossbred with The Fall’s *Grotesque*, it’s nasty and brutish, but mercifully short.

JIM WIRTH



SLY & ROBBIE
Underwater Dub
GROOVE ATTACK

Jamaica’s veteran riddim twins doing what they do best
In 2012, Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare released *Blackwood Dub*,

7/10

their first dub album in years. It went down so well that they’ve returned to Harry J’s famous Studio to fashion a sequel. The 10 minimalist instrumentals may not strictly fit the original definition of dub, in that for the most part they’re newly recorded grooves rather than radically whacked-out remixes of existing tracks. But the effect is similarly hardcore and hypnotic, with vast, echoing acres of space between Robbie’s skittish bass notes and Sly’s syndrums and rimshots, buttressed by plangent delayed piano and, choppy, clanging guitar to create some sublime sub-aqueous frequencies.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



JESSE SPARHAWK & ERIC CARBONARA
Tributes & Diatribes
VHF

At last! The year’s best 38-string guitar/harp duets album is here!

8/10

The title of the Philadelphia duo’s first LP, *Sixty Strings* (2011), gave a clue to their unusual setup: Sparhawk plays 38-string lever harp, Carbonara 22-string upright Chaturangui guitar (plus banjo and nylon-string guitar). A Chaturangui turns out to sound rather like a sitar, and the excellent *Tributes...* starts off as pretty straight raga. As it progresses, though, the elaborate manoeuvres become wider-ranging, if still meditative. So the outstanding “Alemu” feels like a folk recontextualising of Alice Coltrane’s *Journey In Satchidananda*, and the cosmic jazz vibes are compounded by drummer Peterson Goodwyn playing breaks on “Twilight Lamento”.

JOHN MULVEY



HÅKON STENE
Lush Laments For Lazy Mammal
HUBRO

Dreamlike chamber ambience from Norway
Basic info about *Lush Laments...* reads

8/10

intimidatingly to those outside modern classical circles, Stene being an elevated percussionist tackling work by Gavin Bryars and a bunch of lesser-known, avantish composers. In fact, it’s a lovely and approachable minimalist album, all gentle and tremulous configurations of vibraphone, marimba, guitar and keyboards. Laurence Crane’s droning “Riis” and Bryars’ discreetly rhapsodic “Hi Tremolo” are highlights, but *Lush Laments...* works best as a seductive whole. Imagine Necks pianist Chris Abrahams conspiring with Eno to make a late addition to the Ambient series, and you’re close to the essence of what Stene’s label calls, appealingly, “meditative asceticism”.

JOHN MULVEY



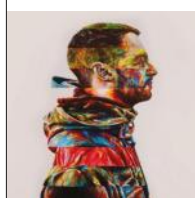
WILL STRATTON
Gray Lodge Wisdom
TALITRES

Not just a cancer survivor album
The Brooklyn-based songwriter/composer wrote this album during

8/10

a year of chemotherapy and surgery, having been diagnosed with testicular cancer. He convalesced in Washington State; repeated re-viewings of *Twin Peaks* suggested an ominous symbolism, with hospital representing an in-between state. Though the songs are reflective, the title track (a melancholy duet with Tamara Lindeman) establishes a resilient mood which permeates the album. “Wild Rose” is a delicate, Nick Drake-ish romance, yearning for simpler times while noting the benefits of experience. “Fate Song” completes the cycle, being a celebration on survival, and a farewell to morphine and pills.

ALASTAIR MCKAY



THE SUNSHINE UNDERGROUND
The Sunshine Underground
ABSOLUTE

Sunny delight as former nu-ravers streamline their sound

7/10

Surviving the “nu-rave” non-boom of the mid-noughties, Leeds-based dance-rockers TSU adopt a glossier electronic sound on their third album, aided by Arctic Monkeys and MIA producer Ross Orton. Sequenced into an almost seamless tapestry, most of these tracks flow along in a pleasant but unremarkable vein of propulsive, melodic, Hot Chip-style synth-pop. That said, “Battles” stands out with its crisp matrix of pointillist percussion and minimalist twinkletonica, while “It Is Only You” packs an anthemic punch with its sly nods to an archly retro aesthetic, evoking everyone from OMD and Eurythmics to Trio’s Europop earworm “Da Da Da”.

STEPHEN DALTON



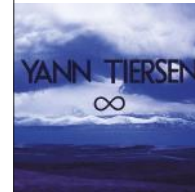
TEEN
The Way And Color
CARPARK

Brooklyn quartet’s seductive second
Their 2012 debut was an exploration of psychedelic pop and drone rock,

8/10

agreeably dazed if overly in thrall to Spacemen 3. Since then, Teen – fronted by former Here We Go Magic gal Kristina “Teen” Lieberman and featuring her two sisters – have developed a far more musically accomplished, adventurous and soulful expression of their kaleidoscopic synth pop. *The Way...* is a terrific, club-attuned set that renders them barely recognisable. Groovy opener “Rose 4 U” lines them up alongside Little Dragon, but then they’re off, via “Not For Long”, which taps Frank Ocean and Prince’s paisley peak, slow R&B jam “Sticky” and the soft-shoe shuffle of “All The Same”, which suggests Laurel Canyon-era Joni reared on D’Angelo.

SHARON O’CONNELL



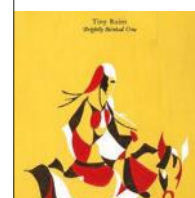
YANN TIERSEN
∞ (Infinity)
MUTE

Breton island dweller delivers stone-cold masterpiece
Though soundtrack commissions continue to overshadow his other

8/10

work, Tiersen’s eighth album, *∞ (Infinity)*, is bold enough to change that. Inspired by the bleak landscapes of Iceland (where initial recordings took place), the Faroe Islands, and his French island home of Ushant, it seamlessly blends his classical talents with an avant-garde flair and experimental rock dynamics, its songs embellished by his trademark toy instruments, plus subtle electronic trickery and the presence of Amiina (formerly Sigur Rós’ string section). “Ar Maen Bihan” – delivered in Faroese – swells stormily, while Aidan Moffat’s narration on “Meteorite” provides drama at its most understated.

WYNDHAM WALLACE



TINY RUINS
Brightly Painted One
BELLA UNION

More elegant minimalism from hard-gigging New Zealanders
Newcomers to the Bella Union roster, Tiny Ruins,

7/10

led by singer Hollie Fullbrook, have nevertheless been knocking around the live circuit for some time, providing support for Joanna Newsom, Fleet Foxes and Calexico. *Brightly Painted One* is their second LP of acoustic sparseness, an album that both bruises the heart and lifts the soul. “Me At The Museum, You In The Wintergardens” plots the distance between would-be lovers on their lunch break while “Reasonable Man” finds Fullbrook searching hopelessly for a partner. If the acoustic backdrop sometimes lacks texture, there are no such qualms with the songwriting that demonstrates a novelist’s eye for detail.

FIONA STURGES

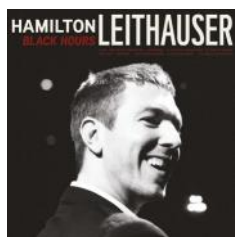


HAMILTON LEITHAUSER

Black Hours

RIBBONMUSIC

Strings, swooning, good humour. "White collar Americana" from the former Walkmen singer. *By John Robinson*



8/10

THREE SNAPSHOTS FROM the career of The Walkmen provide pertinent background to the first solo collection by their former singer, Hamilton Leithauser. One finds the band in fancy dress to promote their cover of Harry Nilsson's *Pussy Cats* album. Another captures a young couple embracing – having got engaged onstage during a London Walkmen gig in 2006. The last image is on the reverse cover of the final Walkmen album, 2012's *Heaven*. Here the band, now older, are pictured with their children.

Droll humour, high romance, a certain mature wisdom... you'll find all of these on *Black Hours*. In The Walkmen (a post-hardcore band based in New York whose career peaked commercially with a magnificent 2004 single, "The Rat"), Leithauser's voice was often an instrument of power – his delivery all about the conviction. Such was the benignly unsteady nature of their music, however, it became natural for the band to use it to explore romance: their blurred musical edges completely in

tune with the untidy situations they described. At their best, they sounded like a wedding band for whom the event had awakened old memories, prompting overindulgence in drink.

Black Hours doesn't rock as The Walkmen did, but it certainly doesn't shy from love, romance or the band's other influences. "I Retired", in the second half of album, is a wonderful, slow-rolling take on the millionaire R'n'B of albums like Nilsson's *Pussy Cats* or Lennon's *Rock 'n' Roll*. To a tune not unlike "Auld Lang Syne", Hamilton delivers a mock-heroic resignation: "I retired from the fight/I retired from my war/No-one knows what I was fighting for..." It's a song well suited to a rock'n'roll veteran.

Elsewhere, you'll find other vignettes of defeat and vaguely petulant angst. A song like "I Don't Need Anyone" sets Hamilton in a more robust band context: "I don't know why I need you/I don't need anyone." The opening song, "5am", meanwhile finds the singer caught in a romantic/existential crisis as, against dolorous piano, he questions not only his romantic status but also the very form he uses to bemoan it. The ache and nuance that he puts into the song's key line ("why do I sing these love songs?") poses a question that *Black Hours* investigates, even if the answer is superbly self-evident.

It would be wrong to describe it as a concept, but

Q&A

Hamilton Leithauser

Is the solo record a result of the Walkmen hiatus? It's been brewing in my mind for a while. We lived in Harlem and would practise after work, like the guys club. But when people move away, getting together becomes more of a formality – you have to fly and drive to band practice. I miss seeing the dudes, but being alone in the room to work was very familiar to me.

How did you write the album? I write a lot with Paul, which involves him coming up with a guitar part and sending it to me – and we back and forth with it. I started working with Rostam Batmanglij – he just wrote to me out of the blue. That was the closest thing I had to a band: two dudes, a lot of instruments and a laptop.

What were your inspirations? The obvious ones are two Sinatra records: *September Of My Years* and *In The Wee Small Hours*. I needed to get away from loud rock'n'roll. I started writing a lot of string parts. So "5am" – I thought that was going to be the whole record, but then I wrote "Alexandra" and "I Retired" with Rostam. He made it fun to play rock songs. By the end, Paul was writing riffs. *INTERVIEW: JOHN ROBINSON*

Black Hours knowingly and passionately charts a journey through male songwriting archetypes, from doomed fatalist to well-adjusted realist. Here you

will find the romantic, nursing a drink and wallowing in his loneliness. You can observe the jubilant innocent – buoyed up by the head-spinning rush of new love. You will find shades of Nilsson, and of Rufus Wainwright, consumptive on a divan. In the course of the album's programme rock music is abandoned, and then incrementally rediscovered.

For sure, some elements of The Walkmen's unsteady classicism remain (Paul Maroon, who played their guitar and piano, does so here), and the likes of "11 o' Clock Friday Night" and "Bless Your Heart" recapture their likeable, noir-ish mode. Really, though, this is an album all about showcasing the voice, and Leithauser here confidently travels between swooning Nick Cave-style melodrama (it's hard to imagine the words "Summer's coming..." sounding

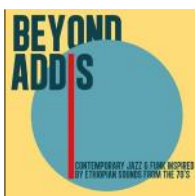
less joyful than they do amid the strings of "5am", through the jaunty pizzicato of "The Silent Orchestra", and the upbeat township vibes of "Alexandra" – written/produced with Vampire Weekend's Rostam Batmanglij.

As convincing as all these departures from rock are as evidence of Leithauser's range, it would be wrong to imply that he requires special treatment. Grainy and earnest, Leithauser's voice is that of a passionate, but reasonable man: his songs projecting an intelligent, emotional veracity. It's Americana with a white collar, not a blue one.

Having made its gradual journey back to rock, the final track on *Black Hours*, "The Smallest Splinter" may well be its best, but it's the very opposite of a big finish. Having caused the singer to bang off the walls, by the album's close love has become a matter of empirical argument, the singer a flawed but reasonable person. "Show me the man," Leithauser sings rhetorically, "who never disappoints..." That day of disappoinment may come, of course, but for now, we're all good.

SLEEVE NOTES

Produced by: Hamilton Leithauser, Paul Maroon and Rostam Batmanglij
Recorded at: Vox Studios, LA, CA; Vox Studios and Inner Ear Studios, Washington DC; Plymouth & Adams, Brooklyn, NY
Personnel includes: Hamilton Leithauser, Paul Maroon, Morgan Henderson, Hugh McIntosh, Richard Swift and Rostam Batmanglij



VARIOUS ARTISTS **Beyond Addis** TRIKONT

The new global sound of Éthiopiennes

Just as Fela Kuti's back catalogue has inspired endless modern Afrobeat

8/10

bands far beyond Nigerian shores, the intoxicating sounds of Ethio soul-jazz from the 1960s/'70s have spawned a generation of young imitators, turned on by the Éthiopiennes series or the soundtrack to Jim Jarmusch's *Broken Flowers*. This comp collects 14 Ethio-revivalists from across Europe, the US and even Australia. London's Heliocentrics and Geneva's Imperial Tiger Orchestra lend the sound a jazzier twist. New York's Budos Band add a taste of psych-doom, Munich's Karl Hector & The Malcons a funk makeover and Paris' Les Frères Smiths rock up the haunting, pentatonic scales. Every which way, there's not a dud among them.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



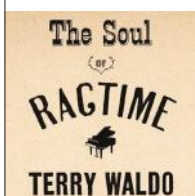
VARIOUS ARTISTS **Late Night Tales: Django Django** LATE NIGHT TALES

Bright young things' sophisticated mix

7/10

One key to a successful mixtape is the cultivation of a consistent mood – perhaps why the Late Night Tales series has had such a high hit-rate – and pop eclectics Django Django's set is here bound by a suitably nocturnal unity. The sparse opener from Leo Kottke is a red herring, as the mix soon settles into a landscape of lush strings and glimmering Rhodes. The '70s soft-funk of Bob James and Seals & Crofts works well alongside new artists such as Gulp, though – who knew – "Surf's Up" is not improved by dub effects. As with most mixtapes, the thread is temporarily lost, but recovered by Django Django's own closing Technicolor version of The Monkees' "Porpoise Song".

TOM PINNOCK



TERRY WALDO **The Soul Of Ragtime** TOMPKINS SQUARE

Doin' that rag: piano virtuoso's joyous history lesson

7/10

It would be disingenuous to pretend that *Uncut* has kept abreast of advancements in ragtime piano these past 70 years or so, but it seems that the New York-based Waldo is a long-serving scholar of the art, with a key textbook – *This Is Ragtime* – to his name. *The Soul Of Ragtime* is hardly a radical artefact, and there's little here, one suspects, that would disconcert Scott Joplin (a track titled "Proctology", perhaps?). Still, as a reminder of one of Americana's more roistering and neglected strands, it has substantial charm: a mischievous fantasia on Mozart, "The Turkish Rondo Rag", places Waldo serendipitously halfway between grand salon and speakeasy.

JOHN MULVEY



WATTER **This World** TEMPORARY RESIDENCE

After the Spiderland box – the return of Britt Walford

Lance Bangs' terrific *Breadcrumb Trail* documentary might be about Slint, but it often seems

7/10

focused on the band's enigmatic drummer – and, it transpires, creative pivot, Britt Walford. Walford's post-Slint career is sketchy: a stint in The Breeders; a period baking "erotic cakes". With uncharacteristic good timing, though, he's re-emerged in Watter, a surprisingly orthodox project, helmed by Grails guitarist Zak Riles, that deals in cinematic, kosmische-tinged post-rock. The blasted atmospherics of Savage Republic are invoked, while "Small Business" is oddly bombastic, a "Kashmir" for Mogwai fans. Subtlety suits them best, as on the title track, a chamber study that showcases the piano of Rachel Grimes from another landmark Louisville band, Rachel's.

JOHN MULVEY

HOW TO BUY... **SURLY SYNTH** Electro's dark corners



CABARET VOLTAIRE **Red Mecca**

ROUGH TRADE, 1981

A volley of seething mechanical post-punk bookended by samples from Henry Mancini's 1958 score for Orson Welles' *Touch Of Evil*, *Red Mecca* finds the uneasy alliance of tape operator Chris Watson, electronics guru Richard H Kirk and fruitcake frontman Stephen Mallinder perfecting their ruptured future-shock. Sounded ahead of its time, but quickly dated.

9/10



IN AETERNAM VALE **Dust Under Brightness**

MINIMAL WAVE, 2012

One of several long-lost 1980s synth outfits resuscitated by Minimal Wave, Lyon's In Aeternam Vale self-released dozens of cassettes that joined the dots between industrial techno, misanthropic electropop and dark ambient fare. This comp handpicks eight cuts ranging from murky chugger "Dust Under Brightness" to the delicate "Annie".

8/10



GARDLAND **Syndrome**

RYNG INTL, 2013

A contemporary example of young men attempting to express themselves via technology they don't fully understand, this difficult and strange set of off-beam industrial electronics by Sydney's Alex Murray and Mark Smith is easy to admire but hard to love. Deliberately perverse at times, but capable of terrific psychedelia when they get their act together.

7/10

PIERS MARTIN



WHITE FANG **Full Time Freaks** METAL POSTCARD

Fifth album of wit and wisdom from Portland garage rockers

There's something about this Portland four-piece that suggests they take

7/10

their laidback, lo-fi, slacker aesthetic awfully seriously but still manage to have a lot of fun doing so. While there's more than a hint of self-consciousness about the throwaway angst of "Goodbye To Bedtime" and "High On Life", there's also real verve and an increasing musical inventiveness. Less punk than before, *Full Time Freaks* sees White Fang more reminiscent of Dirtbombs and The Make-Up on some sensational, disparate songs including countryish instrumental "Talkin' To The Apple", bullish "Gonna Get It", mock epic "Pass The Grass" and surly, seditious "Shut Up".

PETER WATTS



WOODEN WAND **Farmer's Corner** FIRE

Kentucky-based singer-songwriter goes from strength to strength

James Jackson Toth is one of those semi-underground figures whose productivity

8/10

can be exhausting – last year involved one acclaimed album (*Blood Oaths Of The New Blues*), another jammier band set (*Wooden Wand And The World War IV*), and a heroic attempt to rank all Neil Young's albums (www.stereogum.com). "I have hit upon an uneasy peace," Toth sings, unexpectedly, on one of *Farmer's Corner's* standouts, "Uneasy Peace". The mood, then, is mellow, fractionally less simmering than on *Blood Oaths*, with Toth's insidious, folkish songs underpinned by William Tyler's exploratory guitar (cf "Adie"). One to file alongside *Second Attention* (2006) in Toth's vast and increasingly noteworthy catalogue of cliché-free Americana.

JOHN MULVEY



WRANGLER **LA Spark** MEMETUNE

Old-timers' surly synth convention

Whether or not a band comprised of Cabaret Voltaire's Stephen Mallinder, Tunng's

7/10

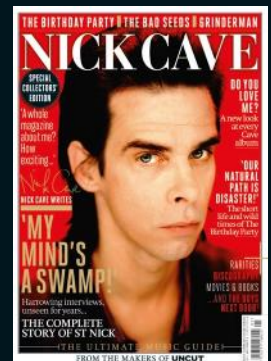
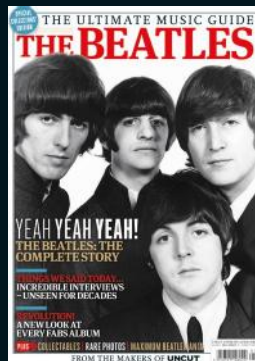
Phil Winter and John Foxx collaborator Ben 'Benge' Edwards qualifies as a supergroup, it's clear this trio of analogue extremists' new venture could only be hardwired to excel at one style of music. Paranoid and sinister, Wrangler's *LA Spark* is textbook industrial electropop – nothing wildly new but at its best on "Lava Land" and "Space Ace" it's a compelling listen. Former Cabs vocalist Mallinder seems stuck on a loop in 1985, sneering on the imperious title track, "I don't need this interaction/Answering your fucking questions". He's still got it.

PIERS MARTIN

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SCORING: THE ORIGINAL ALBUM

10 Masterpiece

1 Poor!

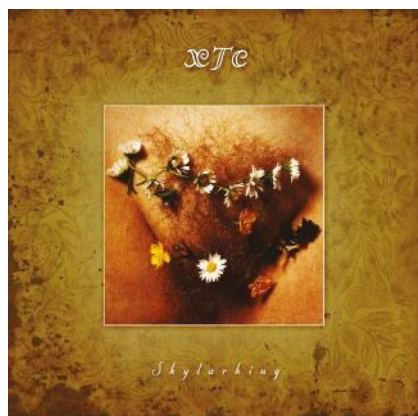
SCORING: EXTRA MATERIAL

10 Untold riches

1 Barrel-scrappings

Archive

REISSUES | COMPS | BOXSETS | LOST RECORDINGS



XTC Skylarking

APEHOUSE

Field music: Swindoners' pastoral epiphany, finally as nature intended. *By Jim Wirth*

TRACKLIST

- 1 Summer's Cauldron
- 2 Grass
- 3 The Meeting Place
- 4 That's Really Super, Supergirl
- 5 Ballet For A Rainy Day
- 6 1000 Umbrellas
- 7 Season Cycle
- 8 Earn Enough For Us
- 9 Big Day
- 10 Another Satellite
- 11 Mermaid Smiled
- 12 The Man Who Sailed Around His Soul
- 13 Dear God
- 14 Dying
- 15 Sacrificial Bonfire

9/10 NEVER IN QUITE the right place at the right time, XTC might have only ever delivered near-misses, had a miserable experience not thrown up a definitive recording. A pastoral symphony recorded several thousand miles away from the band's Wiltshire comfort zone, in a two-storey shack down the hill from producer Todd Rundgren's Woodstock home, the undulating curves of *Skylarking* evoke hillside drowse, buzzing meadows and sunboiled afternoons. The reality on the ground was a prolonged battle of wills between Rundgren and XTC's twinkly-genial but mule-stubborn frontman Andy Partridge. "Todd and Andy were like chalk and cheese as personalities – they didn't hit it off from the start," recalled guitarist Dave Gregory. "Things just went from bad to worse.

Andy was saying how much he hated the album, and when we returned home, he was very depressed about it – but having said that, *Skylarking* is probably my favourite XTC album." Partridge won't go quite that far. This bucolic idyll is his second favourite. Maybe his third, after *Apple Venus Volume 1* and *Nonsuch*. Formerly a glam band called Star Park, XTC's fast and bulbous-eyed take on punk rock was a bit too *Tiswas* for contemporary hipsters, with their mildly countrified Swindon accents casting them unfairly as a new wave Troggs with art-rock ideas above their station. The fact that XTC had two singers and songwriters – the manic Partridge, and Beatle-Paulish bassist Colin Moulding – further confused their pitch, and while they had proper hit singles – Moulding's "Making





Recording *Skylarking* with Todd Rundgren in 1986: "This man's arrogance has no end"

Plans For Nigel" in 1979, and Partridge's mildly regrettable "Sgt Rock (Is Going To Help Me)" in 1980 – there was always the sense that the wrong people were buying them. A Top 10 smash with "Senses Working Overtime" in February 1982 heralded a career-defining crisis, with chronic stagefright, blackouts and seizures prompting Partridge to retire XTC as a live act. Whatever commercial momentum they had built up dissipated; tellingly, the increasingly intricate albums that followed 1982's *English Settlement* – 1983's *Mummer* and 1984's clanky *The Big Express* – were comprehensively outsold by 1985's *25 O'Clock*, the patchouli-fog novelty record XTC put out as The Dukes Of Stratosphear. Virgin Records and Geffen in the US were nonetheless unwilling to give up on XTC, promising a serious effort at promoting their next album provided Partridge shut up and allowed himself to be produced. It was not an experience he was to enjoy. Lanky former Nazz man Rundgren pushed his buttons in more ways than one, and invaded his personal artistic space remorselessly; as Partridge told *Uncut*, the *Something/Anything?* auteur worked out the running order of 1986's *Skylarking* before

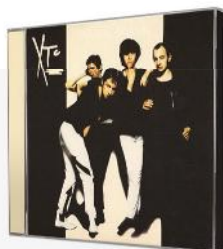
the recording sessions had even begun, conceiving it as a day-to-night song cycle, a metaphor for mortality and life eternal. He also came up with a – rejected – album title and cover concept, and responded to studio disagreements by calmly walking out, inviting the band to "dick around" until they realised he was right. However, if his arrangements on *Skylarking* are anything to go by, he was right more often than not. The chirping cricket and pylon hum mulch under "Summer's Cauldron"; the rapturous segue into the woozy "Grass"; the dazzling Stravinsky meets Tollund Man curlicues around closer "Sacrificial Bonfire" – all give XTC's songs an unprecedented scope, with this 'corrected polarity' edition casting warm sunlight into previously shady corners. The credit is not all Rundgren's, though. As Partridge acknowledged, *Skylarking* may be the only XTC album where Moulding and he seemed to be on a genuine musical par. Regarded by Virgin as the band's best bet in commercial terms, Moulding's writing never had the undercurrent of mania, or the excitable twists of Partridge's, but his weirdly inconsequential non-songwriting – simple,

guileless, uncluttered – hits a lifetime-peak here. His *À La Recherche Du Temps Perdu* bits about summer trysts in the countryside, "Grass", and stolen moments of passion during lunch hour, "The Meeting Place", are situated near the beginning of Rundgren's cycle, and two more Moulding songs end it. "Dying" is dispassionate but beautifully weighted, and if the birth-death-renewal metaphor "Sacrificial Bonfire" sounds like something Moulding cribbed out of *Reader's Digest*, his John Barleycorny chorus is – in every respect – a killer: "Change must be earned/Sacrificial bonfire must burn up the old/Bring in the new." With meaningful competition on both sides of the mixing desk, Partridge did not slouch either. The lachrymose "1000 Umbrellas", Zombies/Simon & Garfunkel mélange "Season Cycle" and "Summer's Cauldron" – a hedgerow tour de force which memorably finds him "floating round and round, like a bug in brandy" – perfect the meandering melodies and juddering turns of tempo he played for fun with the Dukes. Even "Earn Enough For Us" – a reasonably straight depiction of the struggles of a family making ends meet – fits perfectly here. For while the concept is high, *Skylarking*'s drama is low; small certainties and microscopic revelations predominate – which might explain why "Dear God", with its everyman assault on theology, still doesn't quite belong. Transfixed – like Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks* or The Incredible String Band's *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* – by the simultaneous bigness and smallness of everything, *Skylarking* discovers eternal truths in the everyday. "A song as new as new moon, as old as all the sands," chirrups Partridge with ecstatic urgency on east-west rhapsody "Mermaid Smiled". Timeless, in other words.

EXTRAS 8/10 An extra track whichever side of the Atlantic you are on; "Mermaid Smiled" was not on the original US LP, while "Dear God" was left off the English version. The 'corrected polarity' redraft fixes a 28-year-old wiring problem and makes the undergrowth in which *Skylarking* luxuriates lusher and deeper.

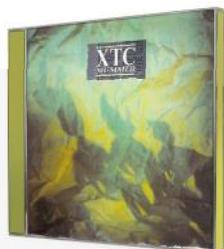
HOW TO BUY... XTC

The greatest records from Andy Partridge's Wiltshire troupe



XTC
White Music VIRGIN, 1978
Their first of three albums in 18 months, debut *White Music* is all Talking Heads 77 bug eyes, but XTC were ultimately more tech college than art college. Mighty debut single "Science Friction" misses the cut, but the brickies' Isaac Asimov of "Into The Atom Age" and "Neon Shuffle" provide adequate compensation.

8/10



XTC
Mummer VIRGIN 1983
Fractured and frustrating, *Mummer* lacks the easy charm of its predecessor *English Settlement*, but Partridge's most dissonant songs – "Beating Of Hearts", "Great Fire" – exemplify his willingness to cut loose, safe in the knowledge that, having permanently retired from touring, he will never have to reproduce them live.

8/10



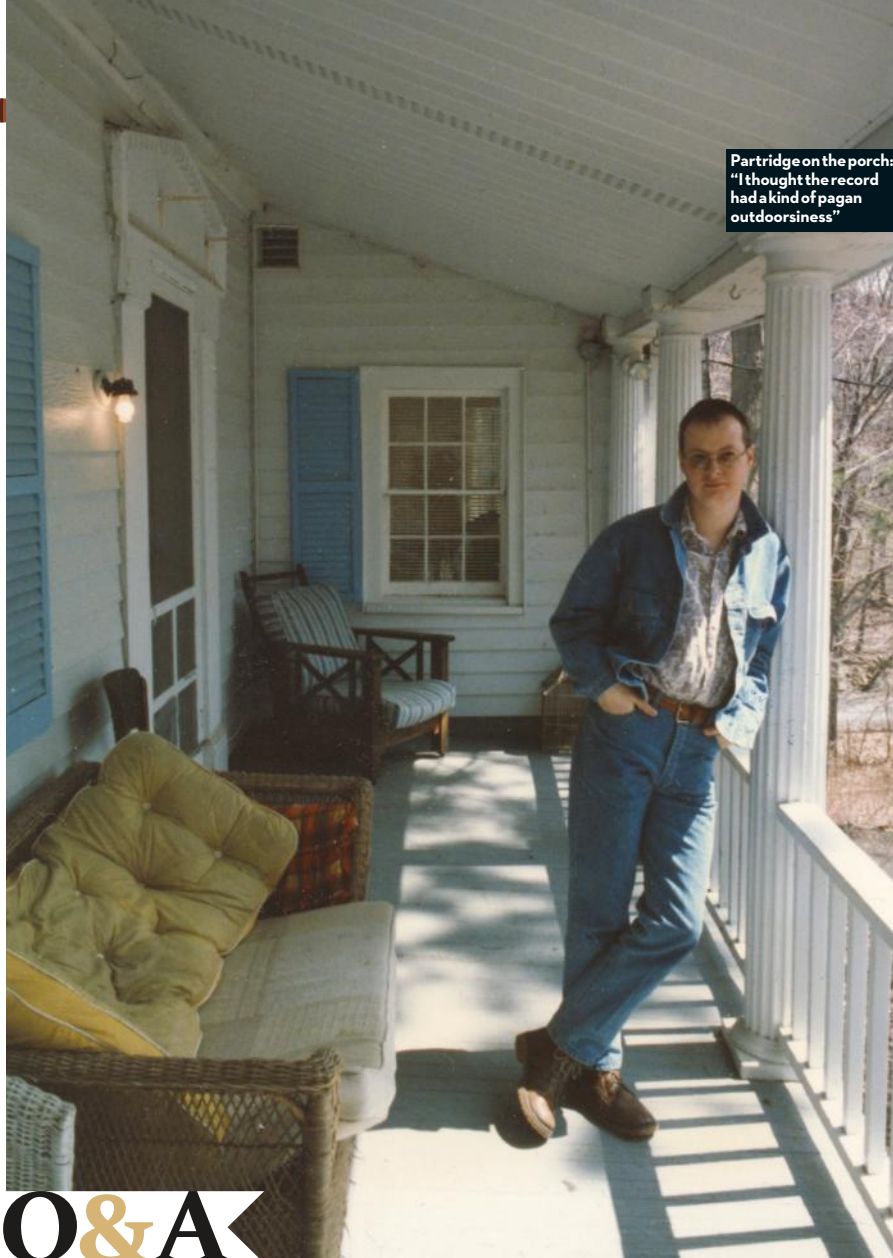
DUKES OF STRATOSPHEAR
Psonic Psonspot VIRGIN, 1987
Skylarking came out between the two Dukes records – with the second having the edge thanks to *Smiley Smile* rapture "Pale And Precious". The remaining XTC albums all sound more like the work of the pseudonymous Sir John Johns and The Red Curtain than Partridge and Moulding.

8/10



XTC
Apple Venus Volume 1 IDEA/COOKING VINYL, 1999
On strike for seven years after 1992's *Nonsuch* due to issues with Virgin, XTC eventually returned with Partridge's personal favourite LP. His Judee Sill fixation in full flow on "Knights In Shining Karma", seasonal specialties include the luscious "Easter Theatre" and "Harvest Festival".

8/10



Q&A

Andy Partridge on *Skylarking*, the evolution of XTC and why producer Todd Rundgren is like Hermann Goering...

HOW DID YOU link up with Todd Rundgren for *Skylarking*?
Virgin were desperate for something to happen in the States so they gave me a list of American producers and asked me to pick someone on that list. And I hadn't heard of any of them – it was all like Randy Dinklerferber III: the sort of names that Groucho Marx would have made up. They sent me another list and Todd Rundgren was at the bottom of it. I mentioned it to Dave Gregory and he was an ultra-fan so he said: 'We should do this, it'll be great.' Ironically, he made us sound more English than we ever sounded.

You really didn't get on well?

No, we didn't. It was very difficult for me because Virgin basically told me to shut up and be produced, "because you'll only ruin it and make it weird". Todd wanted to process us through as quickly as possible, and we'd be fighting about the quality of takes. I hate sarcasm and he's extremely sarcastic. He produced the New York Dolls – I think they were the only people who have ever worked with him twice. His ego matches the size of the man. It was like one Brian Clough stood on the shoulders of another – with a wig. It obviously got everyone down cause we were fighting and we never usually did, and then we got barred from mixing, so it took quite a few years to realise he

did a fantastic job. His people skills are like Hermann Goering's.

Was the 'morning until night' concept his idea?

Me and Colin [Moulding] sent him the demos and he called me one night just to introduce himself and he said: "I've got the running order." I was a bit surprised because you don't usually have that until you've recorded everything. He had this idea that it was all happening morning to night, like a summer's day, or like the order of someone's life. At one point during the recording, he leaned over the mixing desk and said, "I've drawn your cover for you", and I thought, 'God, this man's arrogance has no end.' He'd drawn two railway tickets, and he said these are two railway tickets and the album should be called "Day Passes".

You have reverted to the rejected 'cock and fanny' cover.

I thought the record had a kind of pagan outdoorsiness, and I wanted a *Lady Chatterley's*

lover thing of like meadow flowers woven through male and female pubic hair. Virgin had a mock-up sleeve made and all the big chains and they all said they wouldn't stock it. As a last minute panic I did a parody of a poster by a fellow called Hans Erni – it was something to do with the Swiss tourist board. The original title was "Down And Butter Sun Field Magic" 'cause that was all the things I thought it sounded like. "Plateful Of Paradise" was another title it had for a while. "Skylarking" was a phrase my father used all the time – he was a navy man and it meant messing around in the rigging.

You and Colin Moulding are on a par for who has the best songs on *Skylarking*.

This is the most songs that Colin ever had on an album, and the reason is that it's probably his best batch of songs. He doesn't write that many. The two singles ["*Grass*" and "*The Meeting Place*"] were his, but Virgin were still in the 'everything that Colin does is magic' cos of the hits mindset. I was the weird one with the glasses who just made weird music. I thought Colin had a great sense of melody – a little more refined than mine – but his lyrics weren't as good.

"Dear God" has been incorporated into the record; is that still a song you are uncomfortable with?

It's a great subject and I really wanted to write a song about it, and I thought to myself I might have failed; you could do a boxed set of it and not scratch the surface. Our A&R man at Virgin, Jeremy Lascelles, asked for it to be taken off the album "because it'll upset the Americans". It was a B-side, then an American DJ started playing it and the switchboard lit up like a Christmas tree. It pleased and upset equal amounts of people. I got hate mail for it – a lot of hate mail and a couple of nice books trying to save my soul.

The albums XTC made before and after you quit touring are completely different. Why was that?

We never intended to be like that – we just kind of became like that. When we started it was all very noisy and futuristic, but that soon wears off and you start to sing with your voice, and you stop worrying about whether things have been done before. It doesn't matter. Human beings have been done before in every possible way – I don't feel like I was copying anyone, I was just being me, finally. There's huge dollops of psychedelia in my make-up 'cos of the things I listened to growing up.

How do you feel about the new mix of the *Skylarking* album?

It's like 40 per cent or more better. I got it to a masterer called John Dent – his ears are fantastic – and he said the polarity is wrong on this record. It's a very common problem. He said at some point in the mix – probably from the multitrack down to the stereo – there's been some mis-wiring in the studio, and we were like 'whoah – that would explain it', because when the album first came over to us in the '80s we all said, 'Oh no, this is horrible – mix it again.' So Todd Rundgren did it again and then refused to do it a third time. We thought it sounds thin with no bass and it's distant. Now it sounds like it did in Todd's studio. At the time I said it was like one bunker with two Hitlers – we were like rams butting our heads together. It was unpleasant but the bastard did a great job. Except he should have done his soldering properly.

INTERVIEW: JIM WIRTH



GRACE JONES / NIGHTCLUBBING



TRACKLIST

DISC 1

- 1 Walking In The Rain
- 2 Pull Up To The Bumper
- 3 Use Me
- 4 Nightclubbing
- 5 Art Groupie
- 6 I've Seen That Face Before (Libertango)
- 7 Feel Up
- 8 Demolition Man
- 9 I've Done It Again

DISC 2

- 1 Demolition Man 12" version
- 2 Pull Up To The Bumper Long version
- 3 I've Seen That Face Before (Libertango) 12" Version
- 4 Walking In The Rain Remixed version
- 5 Pull Up To The Bumper Remixed version
- 6 Use Me Long version
- 7 Pull Up To The Bumper US party version
- 8 Feel Up UK 12" version
- 9 Pull Up To The Bumper 1985 remix
- 10 Peanut Butter 'Pull Up' instrumental version
- 11 If You Wanna Be My Lover
- 12 Me! I Disconnect From You
- 13 Esta Cara Me Es Conocida (I've Seen That Face Before [Libertango])

GRACE JONES Nightclubbing (Deluxe Edition)

UNIVERSAL/ISLAND

Pull up to her bumper! Disco diva's new-wave classic pimped out with B-sides and unreleased material. *By Piers Martin*

9/10

GRACE JONES HAD already been typecast as a supernatural being by the fashion world in the 1970s while she held court in the bohemian hotspots of New York and Paris. Still, it took a leap of faith by Island Records' Chris Blackwell and Alex Sadkin to launch the

Jamaican diva as a radical new artist at the turn of the '80s.

Released in 1981, *Nightclubbing* is the album that came to define Jones as the complete performer, in her own way, as singer, muse, actress, alien and androgyne. Its sound, a sublime mix of reggae, funk, new

Q&A

Wally Badarou, *Compass Point All Stars* keyboard player

What was the atmosphere like at *Compass Point* when you joined? A bit tense at the beginning, as apart from Chris (Blackwell) and Alex (Sadkin), no-one really knew what was going to be in the game: disco or reggae? Luckily, things unfolded without verbal or written explanation.

What are your enduring memories of making the *Nightclubbing* album?

The smile on Sly's face when I improvised the keys on "Pull Up To The Bumper"; Chris' astonishment when he realised I did the solo on "Walking In The Rain" with a synth; Alex and Chris' relief when I came up with the high-pitch introduction to "I've Seen That Face Before"... Each song had its special moments.

How did the sessions unfold?

We would start at sunset and carry on until we felt we were not productive anymore. No drinking, barely smoking, nothing unusual for the times. Concentrated and relaxed.

What do you remember about the Gary Numan cover?

I had plans for overdubs, but never did them because the song was no longer scheduled. It still sounds unfinished to my ear. It is always interesting that people might like what you felt was unfinished: it is all about where we place the cursor in purposefulness. Fans love it, so be it.

Was there a sense that you were making something special with *Grace*?

At the time, no. So many massive hits from the US and UK were attracting so much attention worldwide, we hardly had a clue about making any durable impact.

INTERVIEW: PIERS MARTIN

wave and disco, was as arresting as its cover image, a painting of Jones by her partner Jean-Paul Goude, her sinuous masculinity accentuated by a flat top hairstyle and modern Armani tailoring. The indigo mood, cool gaze and cigarette suggested Marlene Dietrich, the gender-bending a touch of Bowie. No-one had seen or heard anything quite like this, though.

She had form, of course, having made, in tandem with her modelling career, three decent disco albums with master mixer Tom Moulton, but by the end of the '70s it was time to step off that treadmill. Sensing her potential, Blackwell invited Jones to his studio, *Compass Point*, near Nassau in the Bahamas, and assembled a band who, under his charismatic stewardship, would interpret contemporary hits and compose original material for Jones.

Though *A Certain Ratio* had been considered for the gig, it quickly became apparent that Blackwell's boys were no ordinary outfit. The backbone of countless dub and reggae grooves, bassist Sly Dunbar and drummer Robbie Shakespeare could claim to be the finest rhythm section in the world, while alongside guitarists Mikey Chung and Barry Reynolds (ex-*Blodwyn Pig*) and percussionist Uziyah 'Sticky' Thompson, Parisian keyboard player Wally Badarou brought continental flair to the mix. Dubbed the *Compass Point All Stars*, they eased themselves into the task at hand with fairly orthodox covers of *The Pretenders*, *Roxy Music* and *The Normal* for 1980's *Warm Leatherette* before hitting their stride on the edgier material that would form *Nightclubbing*.

Only 12 months separates the two albums – Jones' altercation with chat show host Russell Harty, in December 1980, occurred midway between releases – yet they're very different beasts.

Perhaps the *Compass Point All Stars*, by now a well-oiled unit, had sussed out what

Blackwell and Sadkin were after because on *Nightclubbing* they're cavalier enough to dismantle *Flash And The Pan*'s "Walking In The Rain" and Bill Withers' "Use Me", and rebuild them in Jones' image: exotic, sensual, funky and – uniquely for a woman who devoured the spotlight – somehow endlessly mysterious.

On "Nightclubbing" they construct a synth-funk chassis over which Jones decadently drapes her long limbs, transforming Iggy's neurotic narrator into a champion athlete. "Demolition Man", a song Sting wrote for Jones and later recorded with *The Police*, is gobbled up and spat out over a booming, rubbery groove.

There are lighter moments that highlight the breadth of the producers' tastes – the snaking, sultry "I've Seen That Face Before (Libertango)" and "I've Done It Again", written by Reynolds and Marianne Faithfull, on which Jones sings rather than commands – but it's the *All Stars*' "Pull Up To The Bumper" that will always be the real head-turner. A raunchy post-punk dub underpinned by a classic Sly & Robbie riddim, "Pull Up..." is supposedly about parallel parking, but when Jones instructs, "Pull up to my bumper, baby/In your long black limousine/Pull up to my bumper, baby/Drive it in between", she's not thinking about the Highway Code.

Five extended versions of "Pull Up To The Bumper" appear on Disc Two amid sundry other 12-inch mixes. The key track here is the unreleased cover of Gary Numan's "Me! I Disconnect From You" which finds Jones coasting on a warm, rolling groove, the original's angst thawing beneath a palm tree. This didn't feature on 1982's *Living My Life*, the passable final instalment of Jones' *Compass Point* trilogy, but it wouldn't have fitted. Even by then, Jones had moved on, her sights set on Hollywood. The nightclub veteran knew just when to make the perfect exit.



THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Dylan's Gospel
LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

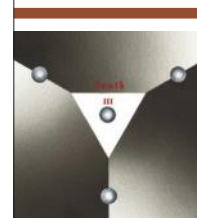
Praise be! Long-out-of-print cult curio is born again

8/10 In July 1969, *Rolling Stone* ran a story headlined

"Dylan gets gospel treatment in LA". Alas, Dylan himself, in the early stages of plotting *Self Portrait*, was nowhere in sight. Instead this was the brainchild of producer and Monterey Pop impresario Lou Adler, who hustled together 27 backing singers he christened *The Brothers And Sisters of Los Angeles*. Among the lineup was Merry Clayton, four months away from the Stones' sessions for "Gimme Shelter", and "Tainted Love" singer Gloria Jones [future girlfriend of Marc Bolan], who recorded a clutch of Dylan's songs in the roof-raising style of a Baptist church gospel choir. Under Adler's auspices, the arrangements are smartly done. Witness the creeping menace of "All Along The Watchtower", or "The Times They Are a-Changin'" presented here as a joyous celebration of emancipation. Elsewhere, Adler and his team use "jingle jangle morning" as an a cappella intro to "Mr Tambourine Man", full of hope and hosannas. Those looking for some serious testifying should skip straight to "Chimes Of Freedom". Adler's great skill here is not just in capturing the fluid qualities of Dylan's songwriting, but also presenting them in a way that is both entirely of its time and timeless.

EXTRAS: None.

MICHAEL BONNER



DEATH Death III DRAG CITY

Ace archive anthology covers final chapter of cult Detroit funk-rockers

A tragicomic story so deliciously cinematic it can only be true, *Death*

8/10

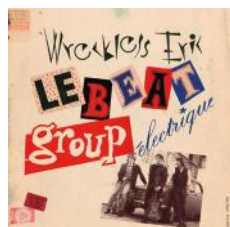
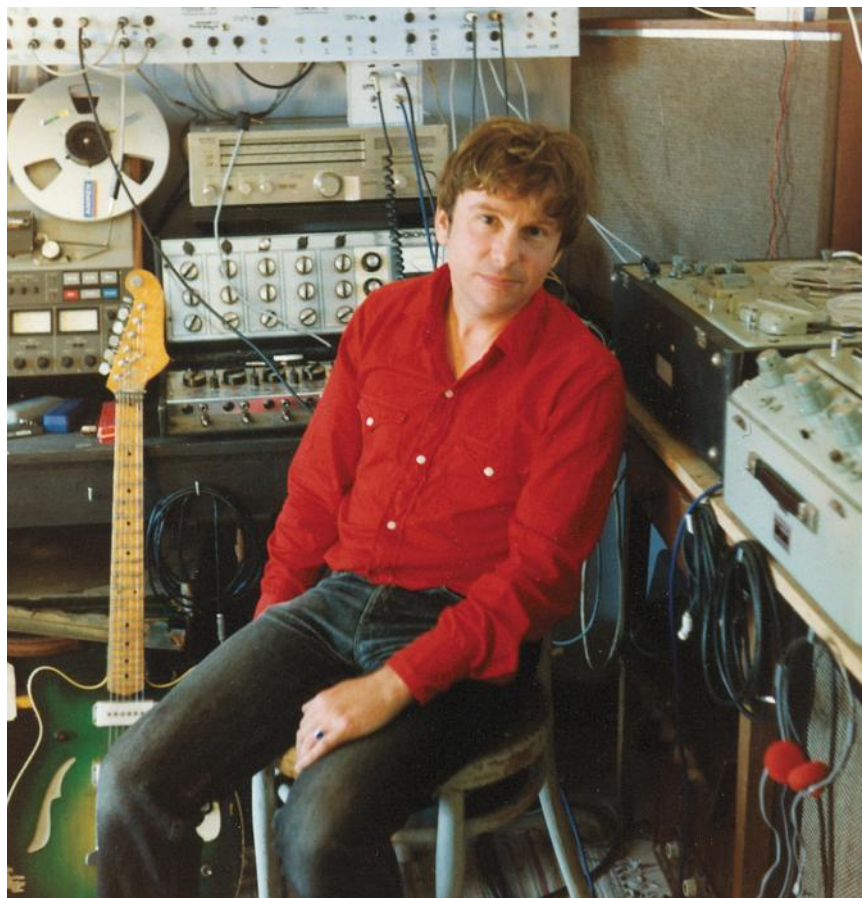
was the proto-punk trio formed by three African-American sons of a preacherman in 1970s Detroit. Their embryonic rock career was cut short when they refused to change their name for *The Man*. The band lost their visionary prime songwriter David Hackney to lung cancer 14 years ago, but enjoyed belated rediscovery partly thanks to the excellent 2012 documentary, *A Band Called Death*, a kind of cosmic garage-funk version of *Searching For Sugar Man*. Having released the trio's half-finished debut LP as *...For The Whole World To See* in 2009, and offered another outtakes collection, *Drag City* have now collected stray recordings spanning 1975 to 1990. Whether all these tracks are technically *Death* originals is arguable, since the band officially split in 1977. But no matter, as even back-porch sketches like "Free" and plaintive instrumental "First Snowfall In Detroit" radiate a warm, freewheeling, unforced beauty. "Yes He's Coming" has the rawness of a demo, anticipating the trio's post-split excursions into gospel and reggae. But the real buried treasures here are "We Are Only People" and "We're Gonna Make It", sloppy-soul groove anthems of spiritual brotherhood that suggest Sun Ra jamming with Funkadelic and prime-time Keith Richards.

EXTRAS: None.

STEPHEN DALTON

Rediscovered!

Uncovering the underrated and overlooked



9/10



8/10

WRECKLESS ERIC

Le Beat Group Electrique FIRE (reissue, 1989)

The Donovan Of Trash FIRE (reissue, 1993)

The whole wide world, captured via the lo-fi blues

He wasn't as career-savvy as Elvis Costello, or as prolific as Nick Lowe, but on the (admittedly slim) body of evidence, Eric Goulden, aka Wreckless Eric, was the pop heart of Stiff Records back in the early '80s. Not that he's particularly bothered by the way things panned out: "Obviously Nick, and Elvis particularly have had the kind of huge commercial success that some say has eluded me. But I think that's the wrong way to look at it – if there was any eluding being done it was me that was doing it – I was eluding commercial success."

By the time of 1989's *Le Beat Group Electrique*, then, Goulden was definitely on the path lesser travelled: he'd stopped singing from his bedroom out to the world, and instead, now sang about the world of his bedroom. This meant a clutch of swooning love songs, coupled with studies that dissect sex with an almost forensic eye, and reflections on recent personal turbulence: "The songs were pretty much reflections on the aftermath of a nervous breakdown, me rebuilding my life. Falling in and out of love, going crazy, seeking retribution." *Le Beat Group Electrique* was recorded on four-track,

extending the rough-as-guts quality of its preceding Len Bright Combo albums into even more personal territory.

Albums like *Electrique* and its wilder, rougher follow-up, *The Donovan Of Trash* are Goulden at both his best and most direct; with none of the obfuscation of studio recording that occasionally blighted his early records for Stiff, the lo-fi sensibility of these records paradoxically sharpens the tongue of his songs. Indeed, *The Donovan Of Trash* feels like a particularly smart self-acknowledgement on Goulden's part. We can thank a gig from 1991 for his assumption of the mantle: "It was a great show, complete mayhem, tenderness, poetry, brutality in equal parts – the guitar was almost vibrating itself to pieces, and in between frenetic bursts of electric harmonica I found myself shouting: 'I AM... THE DONOVAN OF TRASH!' And I thought, 'Hey, that's a good album title!'"

JONDALE



JOHN DOE

The Best Of John Doe: This Far

YEPROC

Collection of the X-man's rootsy solo rambling

7/10

John Doe and Exene Cervenka divorced in

1985, but the X bandmates remain locked in each other's orbit; the quintessential Los Angeles punk band still play and record together sporadically, with Cervenka saying of her ex: "John and I are soulmates. His daughter and my son were born in the same hospital delivered by the same doctor on the exact same day. You can't plan something like that." Such is that natural affinity that neither of them have ever sounded complete without each other. On this guided tour of his John Steinbeck-indie-rock solo work, the one-time John Duchac tries out other female foils – Kathleen Edwards on the twinkly "The Golden State"; Aimee Mann on "This Far" – but none can quite match Cervenka's witchy keen. His work is nonetheless a significant tributary flowing through the '80s roots revival and grunge on towards the manly bookishness of The National, "Telephone By The Bed" and "7 Holes" epitomising Doe's short-story writer's eye for detail. Fine as far as it goes.

EXTRAS: A new acoustic version of "Take 52", originally released on his solo debut *Meet John Doe* ("because I hated the original so much," according to Doe), plus a Woody Guthrie version of X's sweetly disorientated "Poor Girl".

JIM WIRTH



NED DOHENY

Separate Oceans

NUMERO GROUP

The nearly man of Laurel Canyon gets a second chance

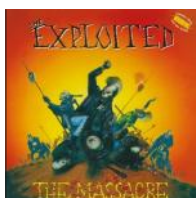
7/10

Though well-mapped, it is still possible to get lost in Laurel Canyon, as Ned

Doheny will attest. The heir to a family oil fortune, Doheny ran with Jackson Browne and Don Henley and was one of David Geffen's first signings to the Asylum label. But while his closest friends became household names, Doheny gradually slipped off the radar. This compilation, drawn together from his first decade as a musician, goes some way to explaining what happened. "I Know Sorrow" and "Standfast" find Doheny flexing his singer-songwriter chops, but "I Can Dream" is closer to Fleetwood Mac's '70s pop: a more apposite reference point than Joni, Jackson et al. The six tracks here from his second album, 1976's *Hard Candy*, offer evidence of Doheny's true calling: yacht rock fantasia. "Get It Up For Love" is carried along on sun-baked mid-tempo rhythms – the perfect soundtrack for gently navigating passage out of the Marina del Rey harbour. Relationships are assessed: from beginning ("I've Got Your Number") to end ("When Love Hangs In The Balance"). Of the 19 songs here, eight have "Love" in the title. Disco is another facilitator for Doheny's songwriting skills: Chaka Khan had a 1981 hit with "What Cha' Gonna Do For Me".

EXTRAS: None.

MICHAEL BONNER



THE EXPLOITED

The Massacre/ Beat The Bastards/ Fuck The System

(reissues, 1990/'96/'03)
NUCLEAR BLAST

7/10

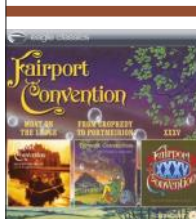
Edinburgh punks' latest hits

"In St. John's I was hospital

waiting to get transferred to the royal think am getting a triple bye pass (sic)" read a message from Wattie Buchan on The Exploited's Facebook page. "Yeah am not shitting it (MUCH) lol." For those who regarded the writer of "Fuck A Mod" as the ultimate cartoon punk, it was something of a shock when the last of the mohicans suffered a heart attack onstage in Portugal in February – punk not dead, but showing evidence of mortality. This reheated trio of post-metalmorphosis releases stirs middle-aged paranoia into ex-squaddie Buchan's usual mix of weary rage and man-in-pub 'politics' (typically, Buchan once attempted to damp down long-standing accusations of racism by explaining that he simply doesn't like anybody). "Porno Slut" and Lockerbie conspiracy epic "Blown Out Of The Sky" define *The Massacre* (1990), while 1996's *Beat The Bastards* is faster and only marginally less silly. "You're A Fucking Bastard" and "I Never Changed", meanwhile, sum up the unlikely pall of romantic despair which hangs over 2003's *Fuck The System*.

EXTRAS: Assorted bonus tracks, plus a free live DVD for purchasers of *Fuck The System*, filmed – true to globe-trotting form – in Saint Petersburg.

JIM WIRTH



FAIRPORT CONVENTION

Moat On The Ledge/From Cropredy To Portmeirion/XXXV

EAGLE ROCK

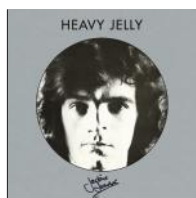
6/10

Budget-priced package of offerings from down

the years – two live, one from the studio Although they'd officially disbanded in 1979, Fairport reconvened a little over two years later for the live *Moat On The Ledge*, recorded at Broughton Castle, a precursor to regular reunions at the Cropredy Festival. The big draw here is a guest spot from Judy Dyble ("Both Sides Now") and the return of Richard Thompson to the line-up for the first time in a decade, cutting a rug on Jerry Lee Lewis' "High School Confidential" and contributing a new song, the cross-dresser hoedown "Woman Or A Man". A twanging canter through Bob Dylan's "Country Pie" is another addition to the set, nestling comfortably among lusty readings of bygone favourites "Matty Groves" and "Poor Will And The Jolly Hangman". *From Cropredy...* is another live collection, recorded on various dates of the band's 1990 tour, but much more pedestrian. 2002's *XXXV*, as the title suggests, is the band's 35th anniversary studio release, with fresh takes on "The Deserter" and "I Wandered By A Brookside". It may lack the urgency or variety of live Fairport, but the relaxed mood is especially persuasive on a reworking of Thompson and Dave Swarbrick's "Now Be Thankful" and the traditional "Banks Of Sweet Primroses".

EXTRAS: None.

TERRY STAUNTON



HEAVY JELLY

Heavy Jelly

ANGEL AIR

6/10

Unreleased 1970 album finally sees the light of day

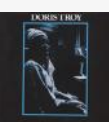
After the failure of his '69 George Harrison-produced solo album, *Is This What*

You Want?, and the dismemberment of the Apple roster, Jackie Lomax formed Heavy Jelly with former members of The Animals and Aynsley Dunbar's Retaliation, borrowing the band's name from a *Time Out* spoof review. Lomax and his cohorts recorded a debut album for the Head label, which was promptly injunctioned by Apple where Allen Klein was enthusiastically playing the bad cop. The unresolved contractual issues were not settled until Lomax's death last year, finally enabling Heavy Jelly's solitary album to get its first official release 44 years after it was recorded. To hail a lost classic would be an overstatement. But it's an album that can hold its head high alongside most British blues-rock of the period, with early Free circa *Fire And Water* perhaps the closest analogue and guitarist John Morshead sounding remarkably like Paul Kossoff in places. The horn section of Bobby Keys and Jim Price on "Too Complicated" take the band into funkier Delaney & Bonnie territory, but the showpiece is the seven-minute closer "Take Me Down To The Water", a thrilling hybrid of sledgehammer riffing and ethereal harmonies supplied by fellow Apple refugees Badfinger.

EXTRAS: None.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

HOW TO BUY... LESSER KNOWN APPLE ALBUMS



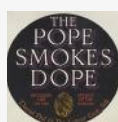
DORIS TROY

Doris Troy APPLE 1970

Clapton, D&B, Billy Preston, Leon Russell, Stephen Stills and Ringo

guested on the soul singer's only Apple LP. George Harrison produced and co-wrote four songs including fiery standout "Ain't That Cute"; his arrangement of trad gospel "Jacob's Ladder" pointed the way to "My Sweet Lord".

7/10



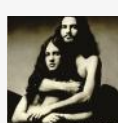
DAVID PEEL & THE LOWER EAST SIDE

The Pope Smokes Dope

APPLE 1972

A countercultural manifesto by the NYC street activist, accompanying himself on rudimentary guitar and percussion on titles such as "Everybody's Smoking Marijuana" and "F Is Not A Dirty Word". Produced by John and Yoko, the record's strident attitude influenced *Some Time In New York City*.

6/10



LON & DERREK VAN EATON

Brother APPLE 1972

George Harrison produced the NJ duo's Beatles-esque debut single "Sweet Music", convinced it would be a No 1 hit. It failed to chart and he handed over production of this album to Klaus Voormann.

6/10

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



JACK RUBY

Hit And Run

SAINT CECILIA KNOWS

Remarkable lost New York punks rediscovered

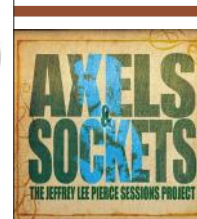
In the sleeve notes, Thurston Moore writes of how when he was compiling *No Wave*, his

8/10

book about 1970s New York music, Jack Ruby were "a whispered rumour" and he "searched under whatever remaining Bowery bum we could locate to find information about these cats" to no avail. This remastered comp brings together 21 tracks recorded by Jack Ruby between 1972 and 1977, mainly focused around 1974 when they were briefly considered a recordable proposition and played CBGB's and Max's. Described as "almost wilfully experimental" by Jon Savage, Jack Ruby – led by Randy Cohen, and also featuring Chris Gray, Robin Hall and future Contortions bassist George Scott III – hit a scuzzzy, schizoid, disconnected punk/sax Stooges-like fury on tracks like the audacious "Hit And Run", insane "Mayonnaise", brilliant "Bored Stiff" and chaotic "Bad Teeth", all collected from demos recorded for Epic in which they sound like a cross between Suicide and The Fugs. By 1977, they had more focus and context, and rehearsal tapes capture them doing a passable imitation of a hard rock act on "Out Of Touch" and "Neon Rimbaud". The second CD is mad, featuring gonzo, feedback-and-synth, avant-garde compositions recorded between 1972 and 1974.

EXTRAS: None.

PETER WATTS



THE JEFFREY LEE PIERCE SESSIONS PROJECT

Axels & Sockets

GLITTERHOUSE

Iggy Pop, Nick Cave, Mark Lanegan and Debbie Harry all feature

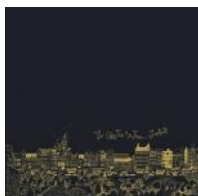
8/10

in tribute to Gun Club singer Pierce

The intriguing art-meets-archeology project to rework songs from scraps and riffs left on tapes and notebooks by Jeffrey Lee Pierce after his death reaches its third and final outing, with 18 songs featuring friends, admirers, collaborators and imitators of the Gun Club singer. The esteem with which Pierce, who died in 1996, is held can be seen from the opening track, a joyous blues number featuring a duet from Nick Cave and Iggy Pop, with Kid Congo and Thurston Moore laying down guitar. Also featuring is Mark Lanegan, in awesome form on "Constant Limbo" and "Desire By Blue River", while Primal Scream pump out a death-disco epic, "Goodbye Johnny", thanks to Andy Weatherall's typically dark remix, and Cornish country-punk newbies Honey lay down a wicked Gun Club covers band version of "Thunderhead". Pierce himself appears, a ghost on closing wracked blues "Shame And Pain" or reciting prose in Lydia Lunch's soundpiece "The Journey Is Long". Pick of the lot is "Kisses For My President", a touching piece of wish fulfilment as Debbie Harry croons a sweet/creepy piece of power pop Pierce wrote about her when he was president of the Blondie fanclub.

EXTRAS: None.

PETER WATTS



JOSEF K The Only Fun In Town (reissue, 1981)

LES DISQUES DU
CRÉPESCULE

Debut album from
Postcard's Edinburgh
existentialists

9/10

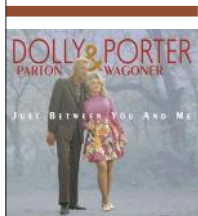
Though guitarist Malcolm

Ross played in both Orange Juice and Aztec Camera, Edinburgh's Josef K always seemed like outsiders on Glasgow's Postcard label. They had more in common with Factory Records, though the angst was delivered with a scratchy energy that was all their own. *The Only Fun In Town* was their second attempt at an album. The first, *Sorry For Laughing*, was scrapped on the advice of Postcard Svengali Alan Horne, and re-recorded at an eight-track studio in Brussels, making the final product rawer than the initial recordings. The album disappointed some Postcard aficionados, but has weathered well, partly because of the inverted production, which highlights the jittery rhythms (drummer Ron Torrance played to Ross' guitar, rather than Davy Weddell's bass), leaving singer Paul Haig to deliver the melody in an anxious croon. They are capable of beauty – see the single, "It's Kinda Funny" (here without syndrums) – and hindsight reveals a debt to Bowie (the cut-up funk of "Heart Of Song"). There's humour behind the existential façade: Haig namechecks Charles Atlas on "Sorry For Laughing", which is like Chic turned inside out.

EXTRAS: CD includes the *Sorry For Laughing* LP.

9/10 Double vinyl includes Postcard singles and Peel sessions.

ALASTAIR MCKAY



DOLLY PARTON & PORTER WAGONER Just Between You And Me: The Complete Recordings 1967-1976

BEAR FAMILY

9/10

The golden era of country
duets: Nashville's glitziest couple collected,

across 6 CDs, 160 tracks

They had plenty of competition (George & Tammy, Conway & Loretta, Gram & Emmylou), but the imaginary, immersive world Dolly Parton and Porter Wagoner constructed in song – countless variations on affairs of the heart, from true love forever to heartbreak overnight, from tender family ties to no-good boozers and cheaters – stands as a kind of gold standard of country's classic era. A testament to chemistry, sincerity and the epochal Nashville Sound (see, especially, Pete Drake's ever-present steel guitar), the duo played their roles to the hilt. Soap opera and melodrama, impoverished upbringings and working-class strife, husband/wife squabbles and sexual innuendo, all slathered with generous dollops of sentimentalism, begat a consistent, if slightly predictable, body of work: the faultless "Holding On To Nothin"; Jack Clement's handdog "Just Someone I Used To Know"; the chart-busting, country-politan treacle of "Please Don't Stop Loving Me". This set traces it all, from folksy innocence to an embarrassment of riches (emerging songwriting savvy on the part of both) through to a tense, high-wire dénouement – Dolly headed to '70s pop super-stardom, Porter, unfairly for sure, to a stint in the where-are-they-now file.

EXTRAS: None.

LUKE TORN



REM Unplugged: 1991, 2001 - The Complete Sessions

RHINO

Two sets that bookend
a commercial
golden decade

7/10

This is a deluxe 4LP

release for Record Store Day, but certainly a worthwhile one rather than a mere nostalgia cash-in. Although you wouldn't know it from Miley Cyrus' recent tilt at the format, MTV's *Unplugged* series could bring out rich new sides to bands as it did with Nirvana – and REM. In 1991, as "Shiny Happy People" was making the group fully mainstream, they consolidated their sweetness by allowing their whimsy to shine with honeyed harmonies and careful pacing. Highlights include a cleanly psychedelic "Fall On Me" (Stipe introduces it as his favourite in REM's repertoire) and a cover of "Love Is All Around" unencumbered by irony. Ten years later and they're stadium-sleek, but songs such as "Imitation Of Life" and "Electrolite" that work as studio confections sound wan in this format, and Michael Stipe delivers a vocal performance that's so professional it almost tips into bloodlessness. But there are still some gems here: "So. Central Rain" is wonderfully vulnerable, while "Country Feedback" is sturdy and handsome.

EXTRAS: Eleven songs that weren't included

7/10 on the original TV broadcasts, including "World Leader Pretend" in 1991 and "The One I Love" in 2001.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



REVELATIONS

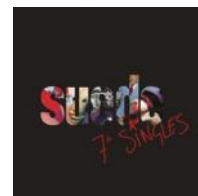
Flip out! How Suede valued the
B-side, from the start

BRETT ANDERSON: The B-sides were possibly more important. "To The Birds" – we wanted it to be a double-A-side with "The Drowners". Then "My Insatiable One" took on a life of its own, again possibly because there were a lot of sexual references in it.

BERNARD BUTLER: To me they were odd – up until recording I was uncertain what was going to be the A-side. Really, it was a double A-side with "To The Birds", which was much more of a sort of a plaintive lyric.

BRETT ANDERSON: It was really important to us that all of the tracks were really strong. Looking back, it was a bit of a waste, because I would have loved it if "My Insatiable One" and "To The Birds" had been on the album, they're much stronger than songs like "Animal Lover" and "Moving". We wrote them, and said, "We've written another great song – we'll use it as a B-side. Never mind, we'll just write another great song."

JOHN ROBINSON



SUEDE Singles Box

EDSEL

Handsome 24-disc
collection of prime
As and Bs

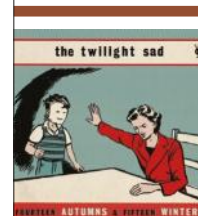
8/10

Suede always seem to have
conceived of themselves as
a singles band, a decision

in keeping both with Brett Anderson's lyrical world: the romance of the fleeting encounter, the small consolation of the cheap and cheerful. This obligatorily handsome collection of CD singles won't be cheap and isn't especially cheerful, but it illustrates the range of the Anderson/Suede vision. The lead tracks, from the classic opening trio up to "It Starts And Ends With You" are nearly uniformly excellent. It's on the many B-sides, however, that the band reveals how deeply it could mine its inspirations. Having operated during the era of the two-part CD single, this was a time in which the cupboard, rather against Suede's ethos, could not afford to be bare. There are some interesting diversions – the expensively uneventful 16-minute Eno "Introducing The Band"; "Implement, Yeah!" their nod to The Fall – but the honour code that made Suede deliver proper songs yields great moments, even when heading to a "dogshit world" quite beyond parody. 1997's "Jumble Sale Mums" might advertise itself as just that, but Anderson's deftly thrown grubbiness ("Jumble sale dads/Boil in the bag/Said some things I can't repeat") makes him sound, much as he will have hoped, like the David Bowie of the daytime TV era.

EXTRAS: None.

JOHN ROBINSON



THE TWILIGHT SAD Fourteen Autumns & Fifteen Winters

(reissue, 2007)

FATCAT

7/10

Scottish trio's debut
album gets a vinyl
makeover especially

for Record Store Day

Kilsyth's The Twilight Sad are specialists in sorrow. A cursory glance at their remarkably assured 2007 debut, with song titles such as "That Summer, At Home I Had Become The Invisible Boy", "Last Year's Rain Didn't Fall Quite So Hard" and "Walking, For Two Hours", (the comma in the latter adding a dash of petulance) gives the would-be listener a clear sense of what lies ahead: safe to say, the likelihood of it being all oompah bands and kazoos is slim. And yet, seven years on, there is a bracing quality to The Twilight Sad's brand of misery, funnelled as it is through thick curtains of guitar noise reminiscent of Mogwai and, on occasion, My Bloody Valentine. There is a pleasing ambition, too, in singer James Graham's lyrics, which dig considerably deeper than the regular anxieties of most twentysomething songwriters and bring a subtlety and eloquence that is less apparent in the thundering tumult found elsewhere.

EXTRAS: Unseen artwork and assorted

7/10 unreleased songs including "Untitled #4", an inordinately heavy-duty loud-soft-loud track that appeared on the band's first demo from 2005.

FIONA STURGES

OASIS

Definitely Maybe: Chasing The Sun Edition

BIG BROTHER

The reissue Liam asked you not to buy: remastered and expanded with demos, lives and B-sides. Gin 'n' tonics all round! *By Michael Bonner*



8/10

strategising a debut album, in whatever form, since his teenage years. With such apparent forethought, it's no wonder that when *Definitely Maybe* appeared in August 1994, it redrew the parameters of indie rock, filling a void left by The Stone Roses and gave Alan McGee's Creation Records a world-class act.

But, as this triple-CD 20th-anniversary set shows, there's more to this great album than that. The band's evolution forms the rump of this reissue, which presents the finished (remastered) album alongside two additional CDs of demos, B-sides mixes and live versions, running bafflingly in a non-sequential order from the band's 1993 *Live Demonstration* demo up to the isolated string track for "Whatever". In March this year, Liam Gallagher took to social media to advise fans to boycott this reissue, tweeting "HOW CAN YOU REMASTER SOMETHING THAT'S ALREADY BEEN MASTERED. DONT BUY INTO IT. LET IT BELG X". But it's possible that Liam has other problems with this reissue. The earliest demos here demonstrate that Liam's persona and delivery as of 1993 is very much a work in progress. There's none of the elongated vowel business on the (undated) "Cigarettes & Alcohol" demo: no "sunshyiiiine" or "white llllline" to give the song that bit of heft. Liam's cocksure attack on "Rock'n'Roll Star" – a critical component in setting out the album's stall – is instead rather passive on the early version here. At this point, it's fair to say, Liam has yet to make contact with his inner Liam.

The process by which Oasis morph from indie foot soldiers to the swaggering generals spearheading the Britpop charge occurred under the guidance of a number of different producers – Dave Batchelor, Mark Coyle and Owen Morris. You might wonder whether this extra view behind the curtain undermines the magic of the finished album. It doesn't. For one, it provides an amusing corrective to the

LIKE EVERYTHING else, Noel Gallagher had an opinion about debut albums.

"*Definitely Maybe* was the young, eager, wanting to get out there and fucking blow the world away album," he told *Uncut* in 2000. As Gallagher claimed on many occasions, he'd been

creation myth peddled by the likes of Alan McGee, that the band emerged fully formed as the saviours of rock'n'roll onto the stage of King Tut's Wah Wat Hut, where he first saw them on May 31, 1993. Beyond that, it's often a fascinating piece of archaeology, tracing the arc of Oasis' development, as demonstrated by the three versions of "Columbia" here. The first in its spring 1993 incarnation recorded at the Real People's Porter Street studios in Liverpool (baggy groove, reedy-sounding guitars), then in Mark Coyle's March 1994 mix at London's Eden Studios (bigger, tighter, yes; but Liam still not quite "Liam" enough), and finally, in the album version, all the ducks in a row, the guitars at full tilt and Liam in his swaggering pomp.

However much this peels back the layers, the issued *Definitely Maybe* remains unshakeable, fulfilling Noel's desire to "fucking blow the world away". Against the introspection of shoegazing, the defiance of the LP and the blithe arrogance of the young Gallaghers ushered in the '90s in all its cokey,

New Lad braggadocio.

Listening back to "Rock'n'roll Star", "Shakermaker", "Supersonic" and especially



TRACKLIST

DISC 2

- 1 Columbia (White Label Demo)
- 2 Cigarettes & Alcohol (Demo)
- 3 Sad Song
- 4 I Will Believe (Live)
- 5 Take Me Away
- 6 Alive (Demo)
- 7 D'Yer Wanna Be A Spaceman?
- 8 Supersonic (Live)
- 9 Up In The Sky (Acoustic)
- 10 Cloudburst
- 11 Fade Away
- 12 Listen Up
- 13 I Am The Walrus (Live Glasgow Cathouse, June 1994)
- 14 Whatever
- 15 (It's Good) To Be Free
- 16 Half The World Away

DISC 3

- 1 Supersonic (Live At Glasgow)
- 2 Rock'n'Roll Star (Demo)
- 3 Shakermaker (Paris in-store)
- 4 Columbia (Eden Studios Mix)
- 5 Cloudburst (Demo)
- 6 Strange Thing (Demo)
- 7 Live Forever (Paris in-store)
- 8 Cigarettes & Alcohol (Live Manchester Academy)
- 9 D'Yer Wanna Be A Spaceman? (Live Manchester Academy)
- 10 Fade Away (Demo)
- 11 Take Me Away (Live Manchester Academy)
- 12 Sad Song (Manchester Academy)
- 13 Half The World Away (Live, Tokyo hotel room)
- 14 Digsy's Dinner (Paris in-store)
- 15 Married With Children (Demo)
- 16 Up In The Sky (Paris in-store)
- 17 Whatever (Strings)

"Columbia", it's easy to see how the mix of punk spirit, glam stomp and indie penetrated so deeply into the consciousness. Musically, it offered a kind of populist 'best of British' sound, delivered with closing time, arms-round-your-mates choruses. "Live Forever" and "Slide Away" represent key components of Oasis' arsenal. Pregnant with emotional resonance ("Maybe you're the same as me/We see things they'll never see" ... "Let me be the one that shines with you"), but essentially meaningless, Noel later refined this kind of songwriting with "Wonderwall" and "Don't Look Back In Anger" on Oasis' second LP, *(What's The Story) Morning Glory?*. Elsewhere, the oft-repeated claim that Noel could pen classics in his sleep is mitigated by "Cloudburst" (a "Live Forever" B-side) and the previously unreleased "Strange Thing" (from March 1993), which both sound like by-numbers late-'80s British indie. Still, Noel's solo acoustic B-sides "Sad Song" and "Half The World Away" are still pleasing moments of tranquillity between Liam's 'mad for it' jollies.

If *Definitely Maybe* still sounds pretty much as Noel envisaged, that's certainly to do with the quality of the songs, the delivery and the timing. But it is also untainted by the later decline and fall: the multi-tracking, the cocaine bloat and the imitators that followed.

EXTRAS: The standard CD reissue, a 8/10 Special Edition 3D set with demos, lives and B-sides, a limited-edition deluxe box of vinyl album, hardback book, art print, tote bag, keyring, badges, postcards and live 7" of "Supersonic" b/w "Cigarettes & Alcohol".

The Uncut Ultimate Music Guide: Oasis is on sale now...



The Specialist

The blues revolution, and the evolution of the blues



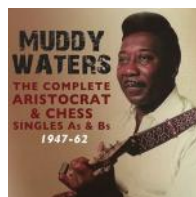
Muddy Waters: raucous, restless, riveting...

► FOR A BIRD'S eye view on the electrification of the blues after it traipsed up from the Southern Delta, settling into Chicago's Southside, one would be hard-pressed to top Acrobat's new four-disc, 98-track **Muddy Waters** summation, *The Complete Acrobat & Chess Singles As & Bs 1947-62* (9/10). Though scores of others (including Muddy's truest rival Howlin' Wolf) brought passion and vision to this subaltern post-war terrain, Waters, especially with his rough-cut band (notably, Otis Spann's indelible piano and Little Walter's burning harp leads) caught that raucous, restless, riveting, lascivious desperation – aka, the pure spirit of rock'n'roll – better than virtually anyone.

Specked with countless tracks of iconic influence ("Got My Mojo Working", "I Just Want To Make Love To You" and, of course, Jagger, Jones and company's favourite, "Rollin' Stone"), it's a sprawling, consistently obsessive body of work. Laconic yet forceful, subtle yet authoritative, Waters' dark rolling variations on a sound ("Trouble No More", to cite the current obsession, is pure genius) cast a blanket of influence on popular music for decades to come.

Acrobat's vintage blues series includes more fine collections: comprehensive sets on hokum bluesman Washboard Sam and jump-blues specialist Bull Moose Jackson, plus a three-disc set covering Delta bluesman **Charley Patton** *The Complete Recordings 1929-34* (9/10), which offers a budget option for anyone who missed out on Revenant's 2001 *Screamin' And Hollerin'* set. Skipping ahead to the late-'60s, though, white kids morphing blues into psych, pub and prog, many original blues giants scrambled just for work, with much less cultural relevance. Bob Thiele, a Brooklynite who recorded everyone from John Coltrane to Louis Armstrong, failed to accept time's passing them by, though. Ace Records' attendant trilogy, documenting late-career, Thiele-produced efforts from Texas guitarist **T-Bone Walker** *Every Day I Have The Blues* (7/10), R'n'B pioneer **Joe Turner** *The Real Boss Of The Blues* (7/10), and Muddy's right-hand man **Spann** *Sweet Giant Of The Blues* (8/10), reprises long-buried, out-of-print sessions.

These are curious to be sure, but musically intrepid ones – Walker going topical with a Thiele composition called "Vietnam" (not bad!), Turner revisiting familiar turf ("Shake, Rattle & Roll"), but also conjuring the soul-stir of Van Morrison on "Lonesome Train". Spann, only months from his sad death of liver cancer at 46, is simply superb, in prime, silky form on piano runs both versatile and deeply moving. Soul and rock elements surface, but "Bird In A Cage", a six-minute tour de force of piano-and-guitar interplay, is an unjustly forgotten masterpiece. **LUKE TORN**



THIRD WORLD
Now That We've Found Love: The Best Of Third World
UNIVERSAL

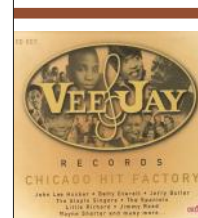
7/10

Timely memories of reggae's second-biggest act of the 1970s

The death of Bunny Rugs in February this year robbed reggae of one of its most soulful singers, as this collection reminds us in poignant fashion. All 19 tracks are taken from the five albums the group recorded for Island between 1976-80 when among reggae acts only labelmates Bob Marley & The Wailers were shifting more units than Third World. That means one or two later gems are missing, such as "Try Jah Love", their 1982 collaboration with Stevie Wonder, but most of their finest work is present. Third World weren't rude boys from the Kingston ghetto like the Wailers; Rugs was the son of a high churchman and guitarist Cat Coore's father was deputy prime minister. Their origins helped create a slick, sophisticated sound that made Chris Blackwell's job a lot easier in selling them globally but didn't always appeal to the hardcore who preferred their reggae with a tougher, dubbier edge. But they made all the right radical Rastafarian noises on the likes of "Freedom Song", "Jah Glory" and "Prisoner In The Street" and there's no denying the rapturous quality of performances such as "Cool Meditation", "1865 (96 Degrees In The Shade)" and, of course, their monster hit, "Now That We've Found Love".

EXTRAS: None.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



VARIOUS ARTISTS
Chicago Hit Factory: The Vee-Jay Story 1953-1966
CHARLY

9/10

A comprehensive history of Windy City wonders

The hijacking of the "hit factory" tag for this 10-disc compilation is presumably a sly dig at the boastful claim of Detroit neighbours Motown. Before Berry Gordy opened shop in 1959, Vee-Jay was considered the premier black-owned independent record label in the US, churning out choice cuts of blues, gospel, R'n'B and doo-wop. Jimmy Reed and John Lee Hooker were among the earliest successes, while the '60s saw them hit paydirt with the soulful likes of Gene Chandler, Betty Everett and Jerry Butler, all well represented among these 269 tracks. Ironically, however, the label's biggest mainstream hits came courtesy of white acts; early 45s by The Four Seasons and, famously, The Beatles' first US releases. The securing of Fabs rights signalled a broader A&R policy, with space on the roster for country kickers like Hoyt Axton and saccharine chanteuses such as Shelley Fabares. It's also interesting to hear a pre-Motown Gladys Knight & The Pips in jazz ballad mode on "Every Beat Of My Heart", and a post-prime Little Richard discovering his soul chops on Don Covay's "I Don't Know What You've Got", backed by a young Jimi Hendrix. Ultimately, Motown writ the legend large, but these are less heralded chapters it's hard to ignore.

EXTRAS: None.

TERRY STAUNTON



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Too Slow To Disco

HOW DO YOU ARE?/
CITY SLANG

Disturbing celebration of '70s yacht rock

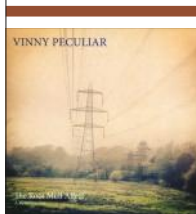
Blame Daft Punk and their rose-tinted visors:

6/10

yacht rock is cruising back into fashion, or so the compilers of *Too Slow To Disco*, fingers tightly crossed, would have you believe. The 90 per cent of *Random Access Memories* that you never play is indebted to the crystal-clear Californian soft-rock of the 1970s that sprung up in Laurel Canyon in the shadow of *Hotel California*, much like, say, the numbing coke-cophany paraded on recent albums by Haim and Phoenix. If everyone's at it, does that mean it's good? Well, no, and in attempting to capture the mirror-shaded spirit of that carefree era, this high-gloss round-up of FM also-rans mainly serves as a stark reminder that a lot of terrible music was made during this period. There's a good reason why no-one but the guiltiest pleasure-seeker plays smarmy gear such as Brian Elliot's "Room To Grow", Don Brown's "Shut The Door" or "Steal Away" by Photoglo for fun these days. So knowingly pedestrian is the selection that even a 1975 Fleetwood Mac album track – Christine McVie's solid "Sugar Daddy" – stands out a mile, while the closing "Don't You Know" by Jan Hammer Group, a burbling sci-fi lullaby, might as well be from outer space.

EXTRAS: None.

PIERS MARTIN



VINNY PECULIAR

The Root Mull Affect: A Retrospective

CHERRY RED

Outtakes and remixes from Alan Wilkes' first decade and a half

7/10

Genuine English eccentrics, capable of projecting a nicely skewed view of the sceptered isle over the long haul, are uncommon. This career-spanning collection shows Manchester-based Vinny Peculiar to be a natural. VP's droll insights and hangdog paces welcome expansive folk, rock and ambient influences. On the Rourke- and Joyce-assisted "Man About The House", meanwhile, he's captured in full flow, like a warm-hearted Morrissey. Both the psychedelic and earthbound are natural habitats for his playfully inclined sensibility – "A Vision" depicts John Cooper Clarke joining The Beatles, and the wry, Bowie-acknowledging "Judy Wood" is Kevin Ayers raised on electropop, while the sleaze-ridden, swinging confessional "Dirty Weekend" offers a curveball of rib-tickling listlessness. This 'Indie Hancock' approach also captures the loneliness in the "brave new world" of artificial insinuation on "Confessions of A Sperm Donor", while the immovable imprint of childhood memory coils through the dolorous elegance of "Everlasting Teenage Bedroom". All told, *The Root Mull Affect* makes a well-measured introduction to an undersung national treasure.

EXTRAS: None.

GAVIN MARTIN



WOO

When The Past Arrives

DRAG CITY/YOGA

Siblings' enchanting homespun psychedelia

Anyone smitten with the recent reissues of Woo's

9/10

It's Cosy Inside and *Whichever Way You Are Going, You Are Going Wrong* would be aware of the volume of unreleased material that brothers Mark and Clive Ives amassed in the '70s and '80s as they recorded in fairly idyllic circumstances at the family home in Wimbledon. *When The Past Arrives* delves into that archive, bringing to light for the first time a dozen sparkling soft-pop gems that drift dreamily in Woo's realm of sun-dappled exotica. Put together with the benefit of hindsight, this is in many ways a more satisfying record than their '80s efforts because the Ives have chosen to focus on fully realised pieces and ignore the experimental sketches and skits speckled about those older albums. Left to their own devices late at night, Woo created a naïve and intimate musical world where Polynesian ragas like "1001 Decisions" and "Om Shanti" dissolve into lysergic, *Alice In Wonderland* miniatures such as "H2O" and "Teddy Bears", the closest analogue to the garden-party pop of fellow English eccentrics Penguin Café Orchestra. Tucked at the end is a rare vocal number, an uplifting hippy spiritual called "The Garden Path". A second volume addressing this side to Woo would be welcome.

EXTRAS: None.

PIERS MARTIN



YES

The Yes Album (reissue, 1971)

PANEGYRIC

Genuinely the definite article. Riffs, jams and interstellar pastorals: Yes!

8/10

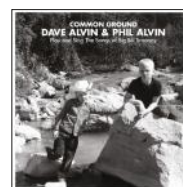
The progressive group occasionally seemed to be operating under the terms of a musical pre-nuptial agreement – forever determining whose was whose, ringfencing portions of albums for individual ownership. Later releases by Yes (like the same year's *Fragile*) investigated this anti-social development, and while it worked better for them than it had, say, for Pink Floyd on *Ummagumma*, on hearing a remastered version of *The Yes Album*, you have to wonder why they bothered. Pre-Roger Dean, pre-Rick Wakeman (in lieu of Moogy fugues, Tony Kaye, later a Bowie sideman, brought post-mod guts on Hammond B3), on their third album Yes weren't afraid of the concept (the tripartite "Starship Trooper" is a highpoint), but never at the expense of Jon Anderson's obscure, pastoral songs. Or as "Würm" explores, the stellar jam. Throughout, new arrival Steve Howe kills on guitar – his admiration for Davy Graham and the Bakersfield players a key component of the band's rootsy sound. Later would come some impenetrable Tibetan philosophy, ecology and surprising chart hits. Here, Yes play something you might not instantly associate with them: a thrilling and folky, widescreen rock'n'roll.

EXTRAS: Blu-ray 5.1 mix; extras include a studio

7/10 version of Howe's instrumental "Clap".

JOHN ROBINSON

COMING NEXT MONTH...



► The driving force behind **The Blasters** – the fiery, bibulous, genre-straddling Californian purveyors of "American Music" who persist to this day – **Dave And Phil**

Alvin were very much in the grand tradition of battling brothers in rock'n'roll. Dave left the group in 1986, and while relations are apparently now cordial between the pair, they have not made a record together for 30 years.

"We argue sometimes," says Dave Alvin. "But we never argue about Big Bill Broonzy." Hence, the imminent appearance of **Common Ground** – a selection of Broonzy covers from the desolate to the eye-wateringly ribald. And "Key To The Highway". Other new releases include new works by the **Manic Street Preachers**, the rootsy production genius turned singer-songwriter **Ethan Johns**, by **Jack White** and dark troubadour **John Fullbright**.

Up in the vaulted gallery of the archive section, meanwhile, the glass cases open to reveal the long-awaited remasters of the first three **Led Zeppelin** albums. As befits the band's jetset nature, these appear in economy, business and private jet formats: containing at the one end, the classic album remastered on CD, the middle, an additional CD of



extras (including unheard tracks) and at the top end, boxed sets with vinyl and CD music, as well as funky extras like replica press kits and art prints.

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Films

BY MICHAEL BONNER

Frank Sidebottom transplanted to Kansas; a Super Furry shaggy dog story; John Turturro turns gigolo; and a rather sad revenge movie

FRANK Four years on from the death of his creator Chris Sievey, Frank Sidebottom has finally found the international platform that eluded him during Sievey's lifetime.

But although *Frank* is a film about an eccentric musician who wears an outsized papier mâché head, there the direct connection to Sievey and his character ends. Lenny Abrahamson's film involves a Viking burial, sex in a jacuzzi and a gig at South By South West, while Frank himself, "on the way out there in the furthest corners", is played by a Hollywood A-lister, Michael Fassbender.

So what are we to make of *Frank*? Is this a film that simply takes unforgivable liberties with a man's life and career? Or, on the other hand, does Abrahamson take the bare bones of a fictional character with only limited reach and repurpose them in a way that will appeal to an international audience? Alternatively, you might conclude that Abrahamson's film addresses notions about the cult of personality in the same wayward spirit as Sievey himself.

Abrahamson's film is loosely based on the experiences of the broadcaster Jon Ronson, who as a student during the 1980s played keyboards in Sidebottom's band. Ronson co-wrote the screenplay, and appears here analogously as Jon Burroughs (Domhnall Gleeson), while the story is now set in the present day. As with Ronson, Burroughs is invited to play keyboards in Frank's band; but the story heads off in a different direction afterwards. Rather than being from Timperley, Abrahamson's Frank is a Yank, from Bluff, Kansas, and has spent time in institutions: the head is less a comedic affectation and instead a device for distancing himself from the real world. This Frank is a mentally troubled individual mistaken by his peers for a visionary.

With Burroughs on board, the band (surly, black-clad Jamie Hince types) decamp to a remote lodge in Ireland where Frank sets about recording an album. This chunk (the best part of the film, incidentally) depicts Frank as a kind of benign Captain Beefheart, encouraging his band to design their instruments, record the sound of water, and so on. Amusingly, we discover that Frank keeps his head on while in the shower. We also discover that there is some friction between Burroughs and Clara (Maggie Gyllenhaal), the band's icy theremin player and Frank's closest lieutenant.

When the head finally comes off, Fassbender does plenty of staring awkwardly at the floor, Very Troubled. It's rather disappointing to find mental illness used as a narrative device. At least, Ronson

Eccentric or headcase?
Maggie Gyllenhaal,
Michael Fassbender and
Domhnall Gleeson in *Frank*

is commendably honest with his own alter ego. As the film progresses, Burroughs' desire to shift Frank's music towards the mainstream significantly misjudges the man and his art. It's a criticism that I suspect Sidebottom's fans would similarly lay at the doors of Abrahamson and Ronson.

➤ **American Interior** As Gruff Rhys outlined to *Uncut* last month, the Super Furry Animal's latest is a multi-platform project tracing the journey taken by his distant relative John Evans from Wales to America in 1792 in search of a lost tribe of Welsh-speaking Native Americans. Gruff is an agreeable guide – early on, he tells of being approached in 1999 by a drama company to contribute music to a play based on Evans' life: alas, his songs were eventually rejected. He has had better luck this time. *American Interior* consists of an "investigative concert tour" across the States. It is, of course, the shaggiest of shaggy dog stories. "We may find there's little truth in it, we may find there's no truth in it," says the late historian Gwyn Alf Williams in archive footage.

He's talking about the legend that a Welsh prince called Madoc had discovered America in 1170, which inspired Evans' expedition, but he might just as well be talking about Rhys' engaging journey. In 2010, Rhys and director Dylan Goch collaborated on *Separado!*, a magic-realist documentary about the 19th-century Welsh diaspora who emigrated to Patagonia. As its sister film, *American Interior* is a more substantial work. It would be hard, admittedly, not to make a gripping documentary about a figure whose story includes wrestling alligators, mapping the Missouri Basin, surviving malaria and hunting bison. Falling somewhere between gig, comedy show, PowerPoint presentation and travelogue, *American Interior* finds Rhys, accompanied by a felt puppet of Evans, relishing all aspects of his ancestor's colourful tale. "I'm not sure if all of it is supposed to be funny," concludes one audience member. "I think some of it is kind of sincere."

➤ **Fading Gigolo** It's hard to watch Woody Allen's portrayal of an elderly Brooklyn pimp without feeling at least a little uncomfortable after

Reviewed this month...



FRANK
Director Lenny Abrahamson
Starring Michael Fassbender
Opens May 9
Certificate 15
6/10



AMERICAN INTERIOR
Director Dylan Goch, Gruff Rhys
Starring Gruff Rhys
Opens May 9
Certificate 12A
8/10



FADING GIGOLO
Director John Turturro
Starring John Turturro
Opens May 23
Certificate 15
7/10



THE CANYONS
Director Paul Schrader
Starring Lindsay Lohan
Opens May 9
Certificate 15
3/10



BLUE RUIN
Director Jeremy Saulnier
Starring Macon Blair
Opens May 2
Certificate 15
8/10



Hollywood. The reality is slightly different. In part Kickstarter funded, *The Canyons* finds Lindsay Lohan as Tara, the girlfriend of wealthy trustfunder Christian (porn star James Deen), who dabbles in filmmaking and hooks himself and Tara up in group-sex sessions. Tara, meanwhile, is having an affair with an aspiring actor who – coincidentally – Christian has just cast in his latest film. What follows involves sex, lying, sex, intrigue, sex, psychotic behaviour and sex. It's a strange film, full of dead-eyed, disconnected people drifting round a sterile version of L.A. You might see them as typical Ellis creations, descended from the bored, alienated teens in his debut novel, *Less Than Zero*. But these characters are merely incompetent and torpid. You might envisage this as a satire on the vapidness of Z-list celebrity, starring Z-list celebrities. But Ellis' script is too thin. Lohan, though, is weirdly compelling as she makes an attempt to climb back up the greasy ladder of celebrity after her stints in rehab. She looks old and tired and bored. Remember how incredibly sexy Schrader's *Cat People* was, with Nastassja Kinski in her prime and Bowie on the soundtrack? Well, *The Canyons* is nothing like that.

► **Blue Ruin** Dwight (Macon Blair) is not the kind of man you

would immediately have pegged as an avenging assassin. When we first meet him, he is homeless, sleeping in an elderly blue Pontiac on the Virginia coast. He's been reduced to these circumstances following the murder of his parents, and now drags his gaunt, haggard frame round the beach hunting for junk to sell. Learning that the man who killed his parents, Wade Cleland, is being released from jail, Dwight cleans up and heads off for revenge, something he achieves remarkably quickly: what follows is the tense, darkly comic escalation of violence between Dwight and the rest of the Clelands. Writer/director Jeremy Saulnier makes

good use of Blair's hangdog looks – Dwight is an unusual antihero, stumbling as he clumsily executes his revenge strategy. Indeed, much of the strength of *Blue Ruin* is the way it upends expectations of what a revenge film should be. There are moments where

the bloodlust is sated – a knife in the head in a toilet, a crossbow bolt through the leg, some exploding skulls – but Saulnier isn't aiming for a superior kind of *Rambo*-style wish fulfilment. Saulnier makes moments of horror out of Dwight's slip-ups – where are his sister's kids? When the violence comes, it is unexpected and gruesome, yes, but tinged with a sad inevitability. In fact, this is a quieter, darker film than you might expect. Convenient reference points would be the Coens, in particular the mordant humour of *Blood Simple*; but also *No Country For Old Men*, another film about a protagonist who gets bad breaks and is in too far above his head for his own good.

fresh controversies. On February 1, his estranged stepdaughter Dylan Farrow wrote an open letter to *The New York Times* alleging Allen had molested her when she was seven years old. A week later, Allen authored a reply headlined "Dylan Farrow Was Brainwashed By Her Mother, Mia Farrow", claims which were roundly dismissed by Dylan. How, then, are we to feel as we watch Allen sizing up middle-aged women in the park or leeching over a young French girl in a coffee shop? Regrettably, it rather taints this otherwise breezy comedy, which finds writer/director/star John Turturro's mild-mannered florist discovering a profitable second career as a male prostitute, providing an exclusive service for some of Manhattan's wealthiest women (headed up by Sharon Stone and Sofia Vergara), an undertaking facilitated by Allen's former bookstore owner, Murray. The film is really quite a sweet piece about loneliness, and hinges on the touching relationship that develops between Turturro's Fioravante and Avigal, a widowed Hassidic Jew played by Vanessa Paradis. The idea of casting Allen and allowing him a wide-ranging brief to improvise and kvetch as he wishes is, in principal, sound. Indeed, some of Allen's banter with Turturro is very funny, as you'd expect. It's just a shame that this 78-year-old man has to behave so pruriently.

► **The Canyons** On paper: yes. Paul Schrader and Brett Easton Ellis collaborate on a contemporary noir about sex and the dark side of

Remember how sexy
Schrader's *Cat People*
was? Well, *The Canyons*
is nothing like that

Also out...

BRICK MANSIONS

OPENS MAY 2

Paul Walker (in one of his last films) as an undercover cop sent into a near-future Detroit to bring down RZA's crime lord. From a Luc Besson screenplay.

POMPEII (3D)

OPENS MAY 2

On loan from *Game Of Thrones*, Kit Harington is a gladiator trying to save his lady from marrying the wrong man. Sooner or later, Vesuvius will erupt.



BAD NEIGHBOURS

OPENS MAY 3

Comedy from *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* director (and *Muppets* writer) Nicholas Stoller, with Seth Rogen and family moving next door to a frat house.

SABOTAGE

OPENS MAY 7

Members of a DEA task force find themselves being taken down one by one after they rob a drug cartel safe house. Arnie stars.

BEFORE THE WINTER CHILL

OPENS MAY 9

Filmmaker Philippe Claudel puts the middle classes under close scrutiny. Daniel Auteuil and Kristin Scott Thomas topline.

THE WIND RISES

OPENS MAY 9

Miyazaki's last film, we learn, focuses on Jiro Horikoshi, the man who designed Japanese fighter planes during World War II.

GODZILLA

OPENS MAY 15

It's been 16 years since the last *Godzilla*. This time out, Aaron Taylor-Wood and Bryan Cranston lead the puny humans' charge against the mighty sea beast!

X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

OPENS MAY 22

Massive mutant crossover here, with Hugh Jackman travelling back in time to meet his X pals in earlier days.

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER TIME

OPENS MAY 23

A film of the 2013 NYC concert to launch the Coens' *Inside Llewyn Davis*, starring Jack White, Patti Smith and T Bone Burnett.

JIMMY'S HALL

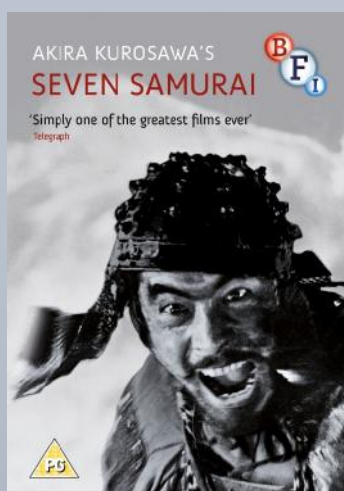
OPENS MAY 30

Another grandee of cinema retires: this is Ken Loach's last feature film, about the deportation of Irish political activist Jimmy Gralton during the 1930s.

NEW RELEASES

THAT SINKING FEELING

Bill Forsyth's (*Gregory's Girl*, *Local Hero*) cult debut film – the original version, remastered and on DVD/Blu-ray for the first time.

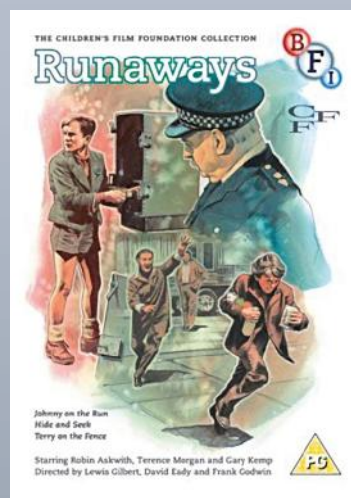


SEVEN SAMURAI

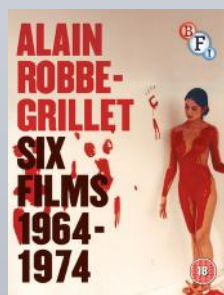
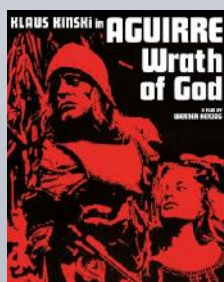
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CHILDREN'S FILM FOUNDATION COLLECTION – RUNAWAYS

Three thrilling British kids films from the CFF archive – including Lewis Gilbert's (*The Spy Who Loved Me*, *You Only Live Twice*) *Johnny on the Run*.



COMING SOON



Bernard Sumner and Hannett recording the first version of "Love Will Tear Us Apart", January 1980, Pennine Sound Studio, Oldham



HE WASN'T JUST THE FIFTH MEMBER OF JOY DIVISION: A Film About Martin Hannett

OZIT MORPHEUS/DANDELION RECORDS

The disorderly story of the architect of the Factory Records sound. *By Alastair McKay*



7/10

MARTIN HANNETT'S GRAVESTONE is inscribed with the legend "Creator of the Manchester Sound", but the fact that he lay in unmarked ground for 17 years shows that he hasn't always been revered. This ambivalence to his artistic single-mindedness was shared by the artists he produced. Joy Division,

whose two albums can be viewed as Hannett's most significant legacy, were nonplussed by the sonic surgery applied to their 1979 debut *Unknown Pleasures*. And U2, who sought him out for their 1980 single "11 O'Clock Tick Tock", swiftly moved on, fearing they might become just another Martin Hannett group.

Needless to say, time has softened attitudes. Peter Hook notes in this lo-fi documentary that "without Martin, [*Joy Division's music*] would definitely not have lasted, because we would have made it upfront, punk, all fast and no depth, no atmosphere". Factory boss Tony Wilson puts it more simply, saying Hannett was aware of the way music was changing and "he changed music".

With hindsight, it's clear that Hannett's contribution was to hijack the energy of punk and apply a pre-punk sensibility. His approach endures in dance music, partly because of his influence on New Order, who couldn't help inhaling his methods, but also because of his interest in rhythm. He had dabbled in various improvisational combos, jamming with the likes of Magazine's Dave Formula and The Durutti Column's Bruce Mitchell in a style that betrayed an interest in the Grateful Dead. Even then, he tended to view the bass as a lead instrument – a trick that would define Joy Division's sound. He played it with a Zippo lighter.

Hannett was a hi-fi buff. "He would starve just to get money to buy his expensive Quad bollocks," Mitchell observes. He studied chemical engineering, and applied his studies recreationally, using – as Wilson noted elsewhere – "every fucking drug". Prior to Factory, he was involved in a musicians' co-op, and Rabid Records, which released Jilted John's first single before morphing into Absurd Records, whose releases included an unplayable picture disc, decorated with pictures cut from *The Dandy*. He managed John Cooper Clarke, and played in The Invisible Girls, enhancing the punk poet's voice by recording him shouting into a lift shaft.

The significant part of the story begins with the austere sound he brought to Buzzcocks' DIY EP "Spiral Scratch". Hannett's association with Tony Wilson began when he urged him to go and see Slaughter And The Dogs (in an odd pre-echo, one of their posters had the slogan "Slaughter and the Dogs Will Tear You Apart"). The producer's influence on Joy Division is obvious. His approach to recording them was painstaking, with the emphasis on pain. Stephen Morris' drums were literally deconstructed, because Hannett claimed he could hear the springs inside. By the time of *Closer*, the group's patience was wearing thin. Hook – the only band member who owned a cassette player – had to borrow petrol money to let the rest of the band hear "Love Will Tear Us Apart" in his car. "It sounded bloody awful."

There was a fall-out with Factory – not explored – and a reconciliation. He recorded *Bummed* with the Happy Mondays, and had a tilt at The Stone Roses ("He was five per cent sound and 95 per cent aesthetic," they note). Creatively, thanks to his drug and alcohol intake, he faded out, dying in 1991.

It's a messy tale, and with a four-hour running time, it sprawls. Filmmaker Chris Hewitt follows his own interest in sound, so while there is much talk of echo plates, the human story is sometimes forgotten. The picture and sound quality are poor, but there is valuable archive footage, some of it rescued from an abandoned documentary by Anthony Ryan Carter, for which Jon Ronson interviewed Tony Wilson.

The key to the Factory sound? That would be the sound of a factory. Hannett apparently became fascinated by the beats he heard in the air-conditioning units at a Ferranti plant, and was inspired to locate music in unusual places: footsteps, lifts, cups smashing. Probed by Wilson, he offers a simpler explanation. The snare drum, he suggests, is the essence of rock'n'roll. "Playing the offbeats with a good deal of vigour."

EXTRAS: None.



ACE IN THE HOLE

EUREKA

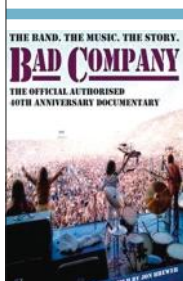
Classic portrayal of a hard-nosed hack
Largely dismissed as a by-the-book noir-ish pot boiler on its original release, Billy Wilder's 1951 drama has grown in stature down the years, its theme of cynical media manipulation striking

9/10

ever more resounding chords. Kirk Douglas is superb as washed-up small-town journalist Chuck Tatum, covering the story of a man trapped in a desert cave. By controlling (and conniving to delay) the rescue mission, Tatum spies a way back to the big league, his exploitative scheme gnawing away at fellow newsmen's idealism.

EXTRAS: Photo gallery, featurette, vintage 7/10 Wilder interview.

TERRY STAUNTON



BAD COMPANY

The Official 40th Anniversary Documentary

UNIVERSAL

Career of 1970s rockers assessed
These Free and Mott veterans made basic hard rock that dwarfed their former bands' success, but quickly burnt out creatively. The surviving members

5/10

contributed to this meat-and-potatoes, music-light doc during a 2009 reunion convened to protect their trademark, and look awkward on the same sofa. The tale of their late bassist Boz Burrell, an alcoholic Schoenberg fan who, his widow Cathy recalls, responded to Bad Company's split by happily taking to his hammock for six years, sounds more promising. **EXTRAS:** Extended interview, band tourist trip 5/10 to Woodstock.

NICK HASTED



THE BIG MELT

BFI

Jarvis-soundtracked steel industry doc
Koyaanisqatsi vs the Bessemer Process, *The Big Melt* marries silent BFI National Archive footage of steel and the men and women who made it to a Jarvis Cocker-devised live soundtrack. Cloth caps notwithstanding,

8/10

recognisably modern human hands underpin all the metalwork, but as wistful black and white gives way to furious colour on a final journey to the heart of the crematoria-like forges, the steelworks are transformed into a fiery metaphor for mortality. Pulp's "This Is Hardcore" sweeps over the final moments. Sex, steel, death – it's ultimately all the same: that goes in there, and that goes in there, and then it's over.

EXTRAS: Live At The Crucible; interviews, rehearsal, trailer, booklet. 7/10

JIM WIRTH



Journalist Peter Verås uncovers financial fraud and grim family secrets

MAMMON

ARROW FILMS

Another Scandi crime drama, but several shades darker. *By John Robinson*



8/10

IN THE OPENING scene of *The Killing*, the Danish drama that kicked off the wave of interest in "dark" Scandinavian drama, our heroine Sara Lund is investigating a hugely creepy scene. She stumbles around a grubby-looking warehouse location in the near-dark, the camera scrutinising her torchlit

efforts, the tension mounting – until the whole set-up is revealed to be a prank devised by colleagues for her leaving party.

Viewers of such dramas will recognise a similar sensation. Essentially, just how quickly one realises that these – admittedly suspenseful, and well-shot – dramas reveal themselves to be something a bit cosier than they first appear. That's to say, not an unplumbed resource of edgy drama, being more comparable to well-shot, vaguely suspenseful domestic series like *Midsomer Murders* or *Bergerac*.

Mammon, a Norwegian six-parter, forces a rethink on that. Our point of entry is Peter Verås, a journalist running an investigation into corruption and fraud in a financial institution. He wants to publish his findings straight away – but he works in an industry (unlike those

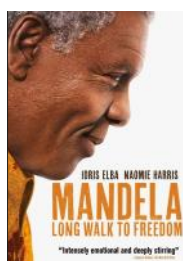
barbarous swine in the financial industry, we infer) held back from the abyss by a system of ethics and a code of practice.

What he sets in motion with his story results in his brother's death, and a journey into their ambiguous childhood relationship, with its own sinister trapdoors. This runs alongside Peter's baroque horror trip into the titular "mammon": the power that wealth commands to make people behave appallingly. We meet some wonderfully horrible people in the course of this journey: one of whom will tell you where that *Usual Suspects* line about the devil tricking people into thinking he doesn't exist comes from.

Snappily shot and light of touch, the show offers no refuge: no idiosyncratic cops, no iconic knitwear, no love interest. Rather than dark, *Mammon* is bleak, nasty and intelligent. As you might expect when the main character is a snarky, hamster-faced journalist investigating top-level financial misdoing, it's not exactly long on warm, empathetic characters.

Never mind. In the big picture an investigation of loyalty, motivation and sacrifice, in the fine detail it's plain chilling: a locked box of family secrets, suicides, horrible allegorical paintings, video footage of housefires. At the centre of it is a greed so powerful, humanity disappears into it like tiny asteroids into a black hole. Irresistible and – yes – very dark.

JOHN ROBINSON



MANDELA: LONG WALK TO FREEDOM

FOX

Solidly respectful biopic of a modern icon

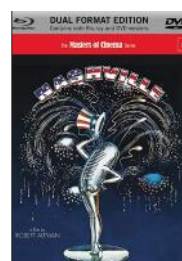
Nelson Mandela's death was announced during the royal premiere of Justin Chadwick's reverential adaptation of the former South African president's autobiography, so

6/10

consideration of the film's merits was mixed up with the blanket coverage of the life of its subject. With hindsight, it plays like an educational film, admirable rather than thrilling, but kept alive by Idris Elba's sturdy performance as Mandela. Tricky points are addressed – see Winnie Mandela's approval of political violence – but there is a sense that this is a biography of a reputation rather than a man.

EXTRAS: Trailer. 2/10

ALASTAIR MCKAY



NASHVILLE

EUREKA

Finally: Robert Altman's 1975 masterpiece

Astonishingly, this dual Blu-ray/DVD marks the UK home video debut for Altman's movie, arguably the defining work of his impressionistic, overlapping, anti-narrative style. Long, semi-improvised, deceptively

9/10

loose, it follows 24 characters – musicians, politicians, promoters, fans, hangers-on, has-beens, wannabes – intersecting, and glancing off one another over a weekend in the country-music capital, as both a music festival and political rally come to town. Taking the city as a metaphor, it's no documentary portrait, but a penetrating American tapestry, ambiguous yet political, and never less than brilliant.

EXTRAS: Archive Altman commentary, 8/10 interviews, handsome booklet.

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17E

Live

ROCKING IN THE FREE WORLD

A very long course of treatment... Reeves Gabrels, Robert Smith and Simon Gallup



SETLIST

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1 Plainsong | 25 Want |
| 2 Prayers For Rain | 26 The Hungry Ghost |
| 3 A Strange Day | 27 Wrong Number |
| 4 A Night Like This | 28 One Hundred Years |
| 5 Stop Dead | 29 Disintegration |
| 6 Push | ENCORE |
| 7 In Between Days | 30 If Only Tonight We Could Sleep |
| 8 2 Late | 31 Shake Dog Shake |
| 9 Jupiter Crash | 32 Fascination Street |
| 10 The End Of The World | 33 Bananafishbones |
| 11 Lovesong | 34 Play For Today |
| 12 Mint Car | 35 A Forest |
| 13 Friday I'm In Love | ENCORE 2 |
| 14 Doing The Unstuck | 36 Catch |
| 15 Trust | 37 The Lovecats |
| 16 Pictures Of You | 38 Hot Hot Hot!!! |
| 17 Lullaby | 39 Let's Go To Bed |
| 18 High | 40 Freakshow |
| 19 Harold And Joe | 41 Close To Me |
| 20 The Caterpillar | 42 Why Can't I Be You? |
| 21 The Walk | ENCORE 3 |
| 22 Sleep When I'm Dead | 43 Boys Don't Cry |
| 23 Just Like Heaven | 44 10:15 Saturday Night |
| 24 From The Edge Of The Deep Green Sea | 45 Killing An Arab |

THE CURE

ROYAL ALBERT HALL, LONDON, MARCH 28, 2014

"If Only Tonight We Could Sleep..."

A 45-song testament to the eternal majesty of Robert Smith and chums

SHORTLY BEFORE THE CURE take the stage for this, the first of two nights in aid of the Teenage Cancer Trust, the charity's patron Roger Daltrey warmly introduces Robert Smith as "a true British original" and The Cure as "one of the greatest bands of their generation". Generous praise for sure, although it poses an interesting question about what The Cure's currency is in 2014. After all, they haven't released a new album since 2008, busying themselves instead on grand tours of festivals and Reflections sets where they play their first three albums in full (former member Laurence Tolhurst was briefly reinstated in 2011 to play his first gigs with The Cure in 22 years).

Tonight's show – their first of 2014 – spans three decades of music, from The Cure's 1978 debut single "Killing An Arab", through

stately dirges and mischievous pop songs, up to the expansive post-rock of their most recent studio album, *4:13 Dream*. The evidence is that, despite the many times Smith and his co-conspirators have reinvented the band, often radically, down the years, they still sound reassuringly like The Cure.

But anyone expecting the crowd to consist of middle-aged goths reliving their youth might be surprised. Although the median age of tonight's audience looks to be around mid-forties, they are surprisingly varied – a testament to the far-reaching impact of the band during their '80s and '90s peaks. Rather touchingly, there are whole families here this evening. You can overhear French, Italian and Spanish spoken at the bar, as well as a slew of American accents. I count five different Bob Dylan tour T-shirts during the night.



As they meander through hits and deep cuts, The Cure become a kind of goth E Street Band

As sprawling as the set might appear, there is some kind of logic to it. Pivoting around their peerless run of mid-'80s/early '90s albums – *The Head On The Door*

(represented by four songs), *Kiss Me Kiss Me Kiss Me* (5), *Disintegration* (7) and *Wish* (5) – it reconnects The Cure to the charged period where they made the transition from cult favourites to superstars: out of the bedsits and into the arenas. As if to remind us that this marvellous transformation happened on Smith's own terms, they open with "Plainsong" and "Prayers For Rain" from their biggest-selling album, *Disintegration*: long and elegant songs that had little to do with anything else that was going on in 1989.

"It's a slow-burning set this one," admits Smith, although the cluster of lighter songs that follow – "A Night Like This", "Push" and "In Between Days" – demonstrate otherwise. Smith, aged 54, is a genial if reserved host. Dressed in black, with his hair showing signs of grey, he rarely speaks, but when he does his self-deprecating introductions and asides are full of warmth. He admits that "2 Late" (a 1989 B-side, only now receiving its live debut) is the only Cure song he sings round the house; alas, he recently discovered he'd been singing the wrong lyrics to it for all this time.

On occasion, Smith even allows himself a little bop under the dense wash of purple and blue lights. Next to him, Simon Gallup looks more straightforwardly like a rock musician. Smith's longest-serving lieutenant, the lithe bassist sports an impressive rockabilly quiff and wears a bright red neckerchief, a splash of colour in an otherwise dark ensemble. He isn't shy of the stage, corralling his bandmates and throwing shapes with his low-hanging bass while Smith remains, for the most part, close to his microphone. Elsewhere, keyboardist Roger O'Donnell, dressed in grey jacket and trousers, hair centre-parted, looks a little like a younger Bill Nighy. Drummer Jason Cooper is all but invisible behind his kit. Meanwhile, the band's latest recruit – the 12th through the door – is Tin Machine alumnus Reeves Gabrels, who with his grey goatee, receding crop of white hair and glasses resembles an elder statesman of prog. At any rate, he practically chews through guitars (Smith restricts himself to four black, custom-built Schecters; one can buy copies of the Robert Smith UltraCure VI for \$1,399.00).

As the night's main set meanders through its slew of hits ("Lovesong", "Friday I'm In Love", "The Walk", "Just Like Heaven"), deep cuts (1990 B-side "Harold And Joe" is given its first live airing for 23 years) and assorted album tracks from *Wild Mood Swings*, *The Top* and *4:13 Dream*, you could be forgiven for thinking The Cure had become a kind of goth E Street Band. Both are enduring outfits whose key players have known each other since adolescence and who could now comfortably play sets stretching past the three-hour mark. In fact, last year's 17 Cure shows featured 638 songs – an average of 37.5 songs a night – which reads like the kind of

mind-bending statistic that comes out of a Springsteen tour (The Cure hold the record over the Boss for longest show: 50 songs in four hours and 15 minutes in Mexico last April).

As it is, The Cure give a fine account of themselves over tonight's 45-song set. The three encores – 16 songs in total – are as good a run of songs as they have in their canon. Although

Smith describes the first encore as "a very strange set of songs", they nevertheless include the heady thrills of "If Only Tonight We Could Sleep", "Shake Dog Shake" and "Fascination Street" before swerving into "Play For Today" and "A Forest" from *Seventeen Seconds* – excellent reminders that the knack for delicious, off-kilter pop songs was in place even in the band's earliest days. A second encore showcases the varied material on *Kiss Me...*, with a delirious "Lovecats" thrown in for good measure. For a curfew-busting finale, they tear through "Boys Don't Cry", "10:15 Saturday Night" and "Killing An Arab". Presumably, being a Cure fan requires an exceptional degree of patience in the long, dark years between albums – *4:13 Dream*'s belated sequel, *4:14 Scream*, is tentatively promised for later in 2014 – but a show as rich as this is surely reward enough.

MICHAEL BONNER

Uncut's Ultimate Music Guide: The Cure will be on sale May 15

Wild Beasts

BRIXTON ACADEMY, LONDON, APRIL 1, 2014

Animal magic, as passions run Wild in Brixton...

HALFWAY THROUGH WILD Beasts' biggest ever UK gig, the Kendal four-piece dip into 2009's *Two Dancers* for "Hooting & Howling", a satire of how certain British men spend weekends laying waste to parochial cities and their women. During the middle-eight – an anxious guitar part pinged between Ben Little and frontman Hayden Thorpe – the audience sings along, as if Brixton's sloping floor were a football terrace.

It's an incongruous moment. While their male peers are caught in a perilous bind between machismo and twee, Wild Beasts maintain a subtler obsession with how human sexuality is driven as much by fear as desire, as they put it in tonight's opener, "Mecca", from the recent *Present Tense*. The new record has brought them to Brixton for the first time, elevating their production means, too – a lighting installation flashes behind drummer Chris Talbot, while green lasers swoop in for the sinewy "Daughters".

Present Tense is sleeker than their previous records, but more energised than 2011's downtrodden *Smother*. Tonight they bring the older material into their present tense, smattering "Reach A Bit Further" with glassy glitter and elevating "The Devil's Crayon" (from 2008's *Limbo, Panto*) to higher camp. And while their reference points have moved from Roxy Music, to The Blue Nile, to avant-producer Clams Casino, Talbot's snaky-armed pitter-patter has remained their seductive centre.

Much of *Present Tense* recognises the sincerity in gesture, which is treated as a revelation after *Smother*'s focus on dehumanised relationships: "I can tell by the feel," Thorpe sings in the airy "A Simple Beautiful Truth". It's also crucial to their performance – he and Fleming sway pendulously, eyes closed, clearly still feeling these songs wholly. There's something genuinely erotic about Fleming's whinnies in the encore's "All The King's Men".

It's interesting that *Present Tense* is filling rooms like this while Wild Beasts' American counterparts Future Islands, also on a torrid and tender-hearted fourth album, are converting everyone from David Letterman down. If they're a sign that audiences want something more than lumpen baying, all the better.

LAURA SNAPES

Hayden Thorpe: clearly still feeling the Beasts' songs





Paying tribute to Afrobeat's lost legend: The Lijadu Sisters with Damon Albarn and Money Mark

ATOMIC BOMB: WHO IS WILLIAM ONYEABOR?

BARBICAN HALL, LONDON, APRIL 1, 2014

A celebration of Nigerian electropop's man of mystery. Featuring Damon 'Fantastic Man' Albarn...

WERE WILLIAM ONYEABOR here to witness this mammoth all-star tribute to his music, he might have seen that Money Mark can Cossack dance, that Damon Albarn is an inept melodica player but an infectiously enthusiastic Afrobeat frontman, and that veteran Nigerian duo the Lijadu Sisters sound a bit like the '90s pop duo Shampoo. Above all, Onyeabor would have seen that his futuristic brand of electronic Afrobeat, all but ignored 30 years ago, has the power to get a concert hall filled with 2,000 Londoners on their feet and dancing like idiots.

Onyeabor – now aged around 70 – wasn't here because he's disowned the eight remarkable albums he recorded between 1977 and 1985, and is possibly not even aware that this concert is taking place. He found God, made lots of money (he's rumoured to run a flour mill) and lives in splendid isolation in his rural "palace" where, according to a recent documentary, he spends his days watching TV evangelists. As a nod to Onyeabor's faith, tonight's concert programme is a pastiche of a Pentecostal handbill, and the gig starts with a Nigerian preacher emerging from the audience and leading an impromptu sermon, encouraging us to embrace "the

healing power of music", until he is eventually drowned out by the funky burlblings of the band.

The house band is led by Sudanese-American vocalist and synth player Ahmed Gallab, along with members of his Brooklyn-based outfit Sinkane. In order to replicate the layers of synths that Onyeabor used on his records, Gallab is assisted by the Beastie Boys' charismatic keyboard player Money Mark. The latter is like a hyperactive cartoon character, gyrating and throwing ridiculous shapes as he plays; by the fourth number he is carrying a synth around the stage while breakdancing.

Many of these songs are simple one- or two-chord grooves, based around call-and-response vocals, but Gallab skilfully identifies the sonic details – the harsh synths, metallic pianos and complex drum patterns – and brings them to life. The hypnotic polyrhythms are provided by three kit drummers and another percussionist on a Yoruba

talking drum. Two saxes honk out Fela Kuti-ish riffs, while the synths are bolstered by guitar and bass.

There's also a rolling cast of guest singers, all wearing the regulation Onyeabor-style white stetsons. Alexis Taylor from Hot Chip brings his blank tenor voice to proto-electro anthems such as "Good Name" and "Atomic Bomb"; Kele Okereke from Bloc Party lends his richer baritone to the shanty-town disco of "Heaven And Hell"; while Ghostpoet gives a wonderfully theatrical reading of "Love Me Now", all chopped-up

reggae skanks and bee-sting synths. Damon Albarn provides an agreeably manic turn on "Fantastic Man", bouncing from one side of the stage to the other and hijacking Money Mark's ELKA organ. He also duets with

the Lijadu Sisters, identical twins from Ibadan, performing for the first time in 30 years, whose conversational speech-song has a pleasingly clumsy post-punk air.

This is retromania at its best. It's

The musicians create an alternate universe, one where Depeche Mode grew up in Lagos...

SETLIST

- 1 Body And Soul
- 2 Why War
- 3 Good Name (with Alexis Taylor)
- 4 Atomic Bomb (with Alexis Taylor)
- 5 Love Me Now (with Ghostpoet)
- 6 Heaven And Hell (with Kele Okereke)
- 7 Danger (with the Lijadu Sisters)
- 8 Life Gone Down Low (with the Lijadu Sisters)
- 9 Fantastic Man (with Damon Albarn and the Lijadu Sisters)
- 10 Love Is Blind (with Kele Okereke)

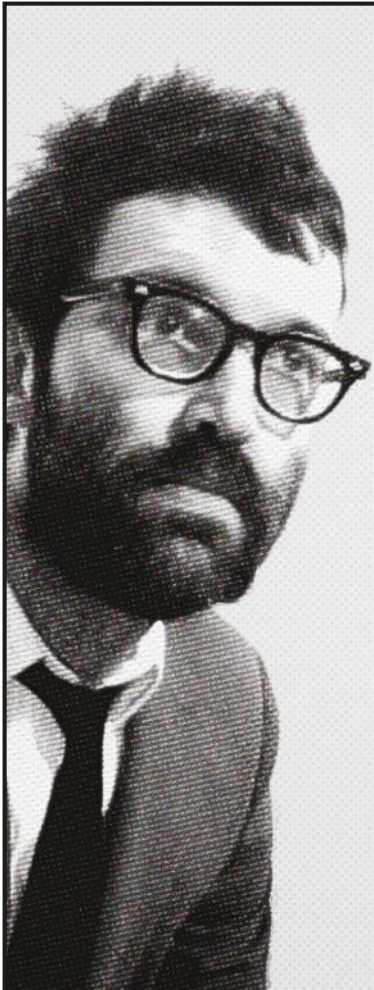
ENCORE

- 11 Better Change Your Mind (with Alexis Taylor and Kele Okereke)
- 12 Smooth And Good (all)

not a slavish recreation, but a world where Onyeabor's mysterious backstory is used as a means of interrogating musical history. Rather like the inspired projections at the back of the stage (which take old photos of Onyeabor and use them as the basis for nifty animations), the musicians are able to create an alternate universe, one where King Sunny Adé jams with Giorgio Moroder, or where Depeche Mode have been raised in a Lagos shanty town. Maybe Onyeabor will return from Salinger-esque seclusion to play live again. But it's difficult to imagine that it could be as much fun as this spectacularly shambolic tribute.

JOHN LEWIS

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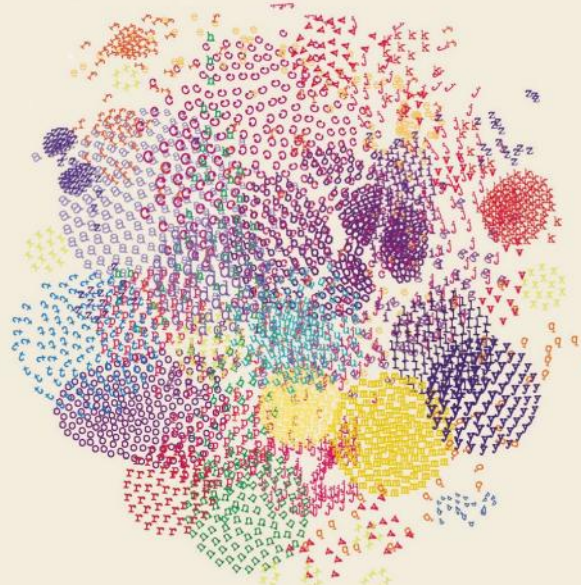
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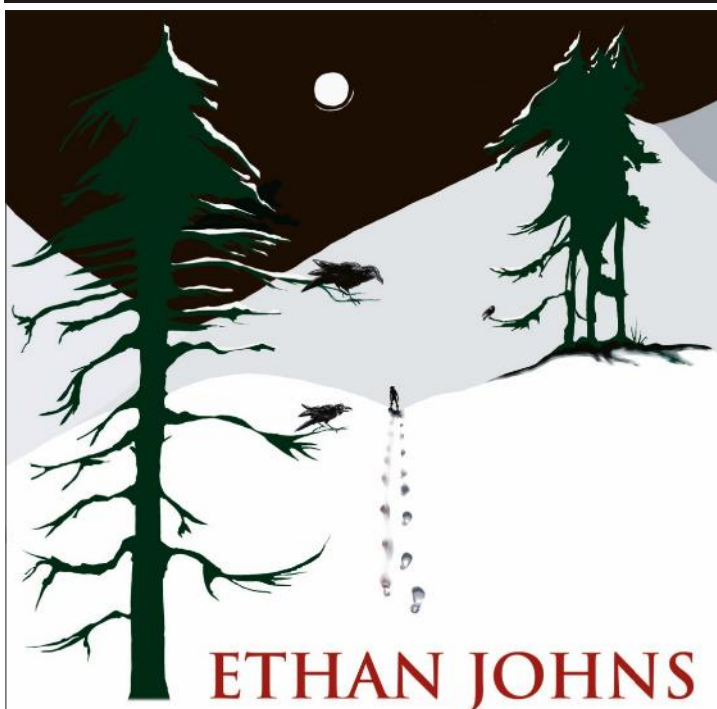
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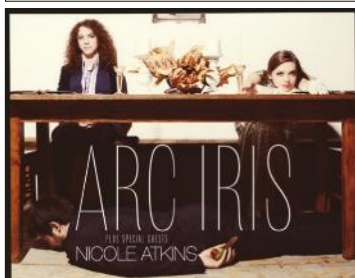
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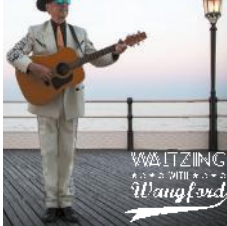
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Not Fade Away

Fondly remembered this month...

FRANKIE KNUCKLES

Chicago house pioneer

1955-2014

AS DISCO'S POPULARITY began to dip in the early '80s, DJ Frankie Knuckles enlivened the format by creating new edits of soul and R&B 45s, ramping up the beats with drum machines and mixing in obscure electronica from Europe. This percussive new spin on dance music fanned out from Chicago and became known globally as house music. It took its name from the Warehouse, the club where he was resident from 1977-'82. "When it comes to the foundation, the bottom end, the kick and the bassline and how they work," he reasoned, "my theory is it should be felt and not heard."

Knuckles' pioneering style earned him the title of "godfather of house music". His influence was such that, in 2004, the city of Chicago commemorated the street where it all started by renaming it 'Frankie Knuckles Way'. Barack Obama, then an Illinois state senator, was instrumental in making it happen.

Born in the Bronx as Francis Nicholls, the DJ learned his trade under the stewardship of Larry Levan at New York's Continental Baths. There they dreamt up ways of presenting records that would make people listen with fresh ears. "To



us," said Knuckles, "it was an art form." After moving to Chicago and making his reputation at the Warehouse, he set up his own club, The Power Plant. Knuckles returned to New York in 1988 and co-founded Def Mix Productions, which specialised in house remixes for heavyweight artists like Chaka Khan and Michael Jackson.

By 1991 he was releasing his own music. Debut LP *Beyond The Mix* included "The Whistle Song", a Top 20 hit in the UK whose hook also provided

the basis for the Def Classic version of Lisa Stansfield's "Change".

The rest of the decade saw lauded remixes of Diana Ross, Electribe 101, Luther Vandross and Toni Braxton, among others. Knuckles' second LP, *Welcome To The Real World*, arrived in 1995, two years before he won a Grammy for Remixer Of The Year. His final DJ appearance was at London's Ministry Of Sound, just days before his death from complications relating to diabetes.

GARY BURGER

The Monks' frontman

1942-2014

Beat combo The Five Torquays were just another jobbing covers band before they decided on a radical overhaul of their sound in the mid-'60s. A bunch of American GIs based in Germany, their raw garage-rock drew its destructive power from liberal use of feedback, electric banjo and the declarative howl of vocalist Gary Burger. They completely revised their image too, rechristening themselves The Monks, shaving their heads into tonsures and playing shows in cassocks and neck nooses. *Black Monk Time*, the sole album they recorded before splitting in 1967, has since become a proto-punk milestone. Burger later insisted they had no intention of creating a new movement. Instead, he said, "We were thinking that we were playing rock'n'roll with a twist." He rejoined the band in New York for a



brief live reunion in 1999, and on sundry occasions in Europe over the next decade.

DAVE GREGG

DOA guitarist

1960-2014

The drillhammer riffs of guitarist Dave Gregg provided DOA with much of their fearsome reputation. His was a kinetic presence in the Vancouver hardcore band during the '80s, from debut *Something Better Change* through to '87's *True (North) Strong And Free*. "He was an attention-getter," said DOA leader

Joe Keithley, recalling the band's most influential era. "[He played on] the Hardcore '81 tour, which now everyone regards as the template for this stuff." Unhappy at the sacking of manager and ally Ken Lester, Gregg quit in 1988 and set up companies that sold merchandise for major rock acts.

DAVE BROCKIE

Gwar leader

1963-2014

Mutant barbarian Oderus Urungus served as the alter ego of singer Dave Brockie for over 30 years. As leader of sci-fi metal band Gwar, Brockie's character – caked in fake blood and clad in devil's horns and cuttlefish loin-piece – mirrored the cartoonish vulgarity of the group's lyrics and performances. He featured on a dozen LPs and also played in side-projects like X-Cops and The Dave Brockie Experience. The cause of death, which comes three years after lead guitarist

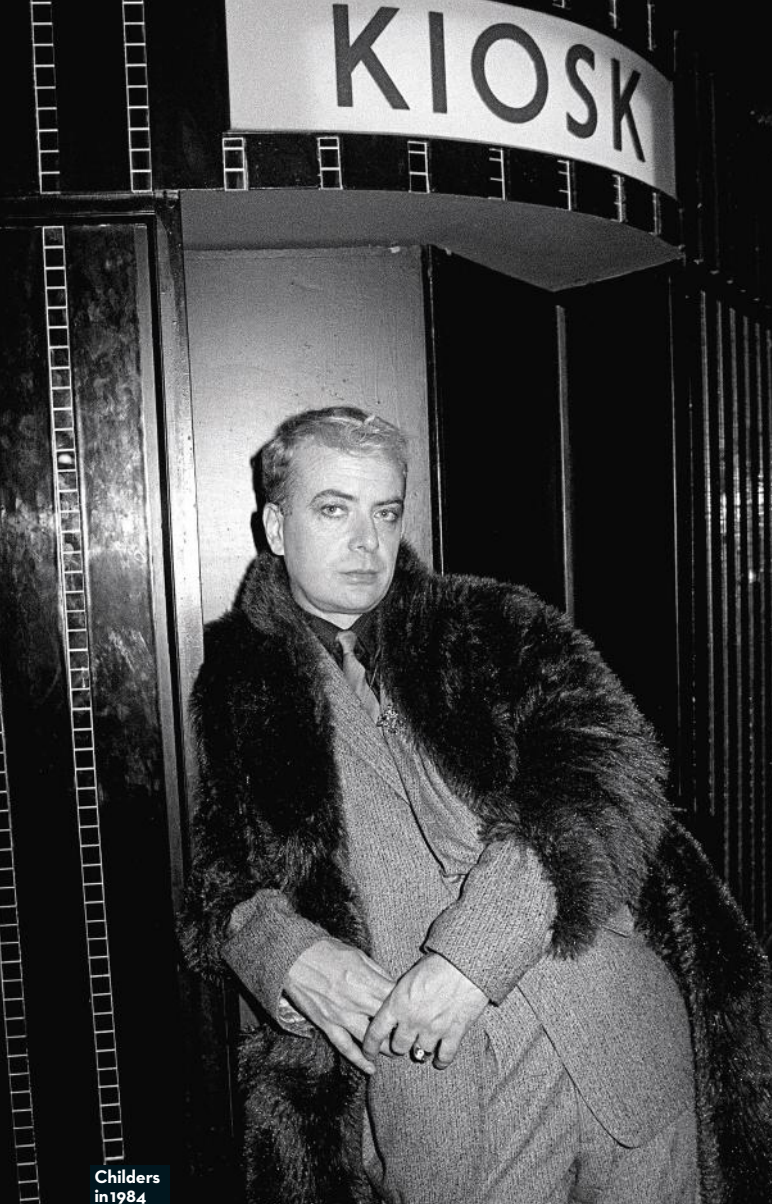
Flattus Maximus expired on Gwar's tourbus, has yet to be established, though police have ruled out foul play.

PETER CALLANDER

Lyricist and producer

1939-2014

Alongside composer Mitch Murray, lyricist/producer Peter Callander co-wrote a number of hits in the late-'60s and early '70s. Their best-known compositions included Georgie Fame's "The Ballad Of Bonnie And Clyde", Cliff Richard's "Goodbye Sam, Hello Samantha" and Tony Christie's "Avenues And Alleyways". By 1972 he'd hooked up with Geoff Stephens to pen "Daddy Don't You Walk So Fast", which became a million-seller for Las Vegas entertainer Wayne Newton. Callander also had a talent for translating foreign-language songs into chart gold, most notably Cilla Black's "A Fool Am I" and Dusty Springfield's "Give Me Time".



Childers
in 1984

OBITUARIES

LEE BLACK CHILDERS

Photographer, manager,
Warhol associate

1945-2014

PHOTOGRAPHER LEE CHILDERS was a key witness to New York's underground scene of the '70s, chronicling the rise of glam and punk from his beginnings with Andy Warhol's Factory crowd. Not only that, his skill set ran to PR, tour duties and, as with The Heartbreakers and Iggy Pop, artist management. The Stooges' move from Detroit to LA was said to be particularly challenging. Paul Trynka's *Open Up And Bleed* claims that Childers learnt to swim through the act of repeatedly pulling Iggy's inert body from the pool of the band's Hollywood house.

Kentucky-born Childers first achieved a degree of notoriety as assistant stage director of Warhol's *Pork*, the explicit avant-theatre piece that ran at London's Roundhouse in August 1971. The trip saw him attend a small David Bowie gig – joined by fellow *Pork* players Cherry Vanilla, Tony Zanetta and Wayne County –

after which he invited the singer to a performance of the show. It was the start of a fruitful professional relationship, with Childers eventually becoming vice president of the US arm of Bowie's management company, MainMan. Part of his remit involved drumming up publicity and booking venues for the Dame's US tour of late '72. He remained by his side until the following year, when MainMan boss Tony DeFries ordered him to babysit The Stooges on the West Coast.

Aside from taking candidly informal shots of Bowie, Iggy, New York Dolls, Patti Smith, the Ramones and Debbie Harry ("She was wonderful to photograph 'cause she was living her fantasy"), Childers managed The Heartbreakers for a time. His long alliance with Warhol meant that he was also able to photograph the human circus that regularly paraded through the Factory. His career work can be seen in the 2012 collection, *Drag Queens, Rent Boys, Pick Pockets, Junkies, Rockstars And Punks*, which gave rise to exhibitions in London and LA. "The word 'legendary' is thrown about a lot," said fellow snapper Chalkie Davies on hearing of Childers' death. "But there is no question that Lee truly deserved the title... He was one of the most original of punks, he brought us many fabulous images."

JOE LALA

Manassas/CSN drummer

1947-2014

The missing ingredient in Manassas, as Stephen Stills explained to *Sounds* during the band's early '70s heyday, had been the right drummer: "I desperately wanted to find a 'Spanglish', a Latin-Cuban player, 'cause I was going absolutely crazy trying to play that kind of music with those turkey white drummers." Enter Joe Lala, who he chanced upon one night at a Blues Image show in LA. Stills was immediately taken with his rhythmic dexterity, citing him as "an answer to a prayer". Lala joined Manassas for the duration of their short career, before becoming an in-demand sessioneer for CSN, the Allman Brothers, the Eagles, The Bee Gees, Eric Clapton, Neil Diamond and others.

He'd co-founded Blues Image in his native Florida in 1966. Three years later, apparently on the advice of Frank Zappa, the quintet moved to the West Coast and secured a spot as house band at the Whisky. In 1970 they hit big with



Lala in the
early '70s

"Ride Captain Ride", which went Top 4 in the US, though they split the following year. When carpal tunnel syndrome eventually forced him to quit music in the '80s, Lala enjoyed a second career as a film and TV actor, racking up nearly 60 credits.

PAUL COLBY

Bitter End club owner and booker

1917-2014

Paul Colby had already served as a record plugger and promoter by the time he was hired to manage

legendary New York folk den The Bitter End in 1965. When he bought the club outright nine years later, he began booking performances from the likes of Stevie Wonder, Jackson Browne, Woody Allen, Patti Smith and many more. His 2002 memoir *The Bitter End: Hanging Out At America's Nightclub* included a foreword from Kris Kristofferson: "On behalf of all of us in the business of moving the emotions with our imaginations, special thanks to Paul Colby for being one of us."

JILL SINCLAIR

ZTT co-founder, pop manager

1952-2014

It took Jill Sinclair to convince Trevor Horn that he wasn't suited to being a frontman. When Horn took a demo of Buggles' "Video Killed The Radio Star" to Island's Sarn West Studios, which Sinclair ran, she bought the rights, paid for recording time and eventually became the guiding force behind his transition to the '80s' most sought-after producer. The couple, who married in 1980, went on to

co-found ZTT, which enjoyed its biggest success with Frankie Goes To Hollywood. As co-head of the SPZ Group, a studio-label-publishing empire, she also negotiated the rights for Stiff Records in 1987.

WAYNE HENDERSON

Jazz-funk trombonist, producer

1939-2014

"We were the co-creators of funk music," trombonist Wayne Henderson once told the *Kansas City Star*. "Other guys started the jazz-funk thing, too – Cannonball Adderley, Herbie Hancock – and we started selling records just like the pop guys." Heading up The Jazz Crusaders, the group he co-founded after moving from Houston to LA in the late '50s, Henderson bridged hard bop, soul and R'n'B. By the '70s, truncated to The Crusaders, they enjoyed dance-friendly successes with "Scratch" and "Keep That Same Old Feeling". Henderson quit in 1975 to concentrate on producing others, but revived the band 20 years later. **ROB HUGHES**

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SCOTT ASHETON RIP

It is bitterly ironic to see the tributes to Scott Asheton following his recent death referring to his skills as a drummer. After all, he never got the accolades in his relatively short lifetime. I have been following Iggy Pop for nearly 40 years (since Friday, December 15, 1975, when I first heard "Search And Destroy" in a record shop in Twickenham), but I never saw his name in any list of great rock drummers. Then again, The Stooges never appeared in any lists for their musical abilities. At the time of their original incarnation, they were deemed as a joke. Even with James Williamson, the rush for the dreadful likes of ELP, Barrett-free Pink Floyd, Eagles and Yes ensured their appeal would only be towards a minority. But as time eventually revealed, Scott was a magnificent drummer. He may not have had the acclaim that Bonham, Moon or Baker frequently received, but I doubt they could have matched his power on tracks such as "TV Eye", "I Got A Right" or "Death Trip". Anybody who was fortunate enough to see The Stooges perform at Hammersmith in August 2005, will tell you that was a once in a lifetime performance. They were the finest live act I have witnessed, which is due partly to Scott and Mike Watts as the rhythm section. The fusion of free jazz, James Brown and sheer rock'n'roll attitude has not been matched before or since, although their 2010 set at the same venue came a close second. Even on the overlooked *Ready To Die* set of last year, even in ill health Scott could still pull it off on "Burn", the magnificent title track and "The Departed", with its images of mortality which now takes on an eerily prophetic air.

Iggy has now called time on future Stooges activities. It is a wise decision. He has said in many interviews that Scott was the heart and soul of The Stooges. It is possible that Ig himself may no longer return to live performances. At least Iggy and The Stooges will leave as champions after so many decades of neglect. As for Scott Asheton, he has left his mark on some immortal recordings and that is the greatest tribute of all. Raw power, indeed.

Rob Jones, Huntingdon



WE SHALL OVERCOME

As a long-time reader of *Uncut* I was disappointed that you saw fit to print the vituperative and offensive diatribe from Jon Grocock in the Feedback pages in your May issue. Other readers are better qualified than me to defend the memory of Pete Seeger but suffice to say that I believe he will be remembered by all fair-minded people as a good-hearted man with a passionate belief in social justice and civil rights and the creation of a kinder, more compassionate, more tolerant and more peaceful world. I have to admit that it did not occur to me until now that the sort of jaundiced bigots who subscribe to the *Daily Mail* might also be readers of your excellent magazine.

John Belchamber, via email

FEAT OF ENDURANCE

Re: your recent Little Feat feature. On those wonderful nights in our nation's capital when Little Feat had finished their set and the audience wanted more, the crowd would chant the name of the band over and over until they reappeared for the encore. I was privileged to usher over a dozen of their shows at both the Warner Theatre and Lisner Auditorium in Washington DC, including ones used for the live *Waiting For Columbus*, and Lowell George's last ever performance. From night to night, the setlist and

staging were almost exactly the same, but like the crowd I always wanted to hear more. The energy traded between band and audience has seldom been equalled.

Ten years on, we heard that Little Feat had gotten back together. A bunch of us had tickets to see the Grateful Dead at Oxford Speedway in Maine in early July, and Feat were opening! How cool was that?!? About an hour before show time Little Feat wandered onstage and announced that they were going to do their soundcheck. Several of us who had seen Feat Mk I had tears in our eyes hearing them after so long, and after Lowell's passing. Their set far surpassed what we imagined, and the new "Hate To Lose Your Lovin'" and "Let It Roll" would have fit right into their best '70s sets.

One thing missing from their band biography is induction into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. Without Lowell George's mentoring, Bonnie Raitt's (inducted, 2000) slide guitar style would have been very different, as would Robert Palmer's two biggest albums. Thanks again for a great issue, with a great blend of articles about the old and the new.

Larry Pryluck, Amissville, Virginia

BOLD CLAIMS...

I'm used to journalists attempting to deify Lowell George, but I had to laugh when *Uncut's* Little Feat

feature claimed that Lowell and John Sebastian "shared a manger". **Michel Faber (not "Michael", as in the *Uncut* review of the film based on my novel, *Under The Skin*), via email**

MAMA MIA

Loved the article on Cass Elliot – Peter Watts got some great quotes. There was one minor error, however. While researching for my e-book on The Lovin' Spoonful (lame plug), I discovered that The Mugwumps who recorded for the Sidewalk record label had no connection to Cass. They were in fact a "bogus" group concocted by music mogul Mike Curb, presumably to cash in on the success of the Spoonful and The Mamas & The Papas. This Mike Curb later secretly recorded John Sebastian for an MGM album without informing John, before a successful career in Republican politics. He is still with us so we best leave it there. *Uncut* is still the best – keep doing what you're doing.

Simon Wordsworth, via email

PUNK AND DISORDERLY

Let me start out by saying that I dig your mag – but with that said, I cannot believe you left *Wild Gift* by X off your recent list of the 50 best American punk albums. Everybody knows that not only was *Wild Gift*

better than *Los Angeles*, it should have been in your Top 5. Without that album it almost makes your list pointless. I dig Talking Heads as much as anybody else but I'm sorry, they ain't punk. And neither were Blondie or The Runaways (you're just pulling our leg, right?). Anyway, I've been told you don't print letters that do anything but brown nose you fellows at *Uncut*, so I guess I'll have to wait to find out. That said, all would be forgiven if you guys would get around to doing an article on X and that whole scene. Also, while I'm bitching, how about an article on Dave Alvin or do you guys on that side of the pond just want to keep pulling up tired articles on The Smiths?

David Dale, Sonoma, California

...I guess all "Top Whatever" lists are there to provoke debate, and I saw some strange stuff on your Top 50 Punk Albums list, along with a lot of brilliance. It was terrific that you put The Dictators' "Go Girl Crazy!" on the list. I used to cover "Baby Let's Twist" in my college band. Tons of perfect choices here, but Blondie's first album (and second) were far more worthy selections than their so-so third. Also, where was X-Ray Spex's *Germ Free Adolescents*? No "Top Greatest Punk Albums" list is complete without it. Overall, well done, lads!

Johnny Pride, Atlanta GA

The absence of X-Ray Spex is rather easily explained, Johnny. It was a list of the Top 50 American punk albums. - Allan

THEY DO IT RIGHT

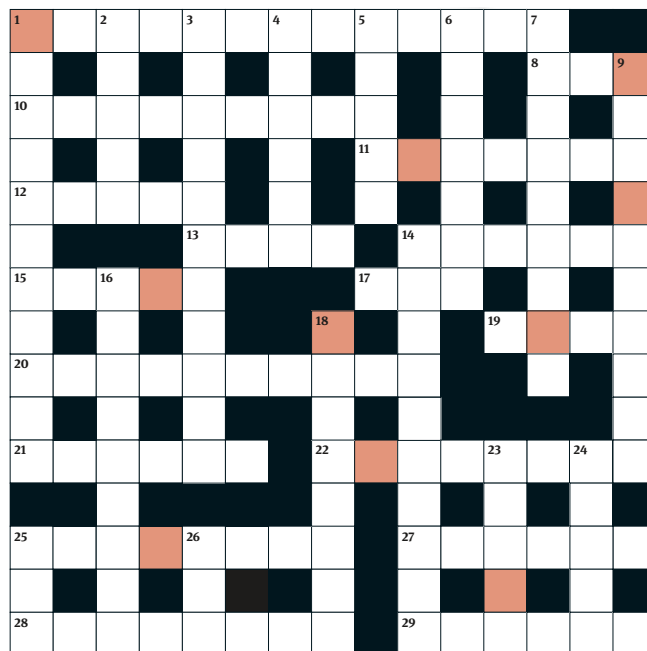
Wow! Have Wilko Johnson and Roger Daltrey just recorded the best Dr Feelgood album since *Malpractice*? Roger and Wilko are surely as perfect a combination as Brilleaux and Johnson were in the 1970s. Even more sacrilegious thought: do Rog's powerful vocals top Lee's on the the Feelgood songs on the album? Working together Roger and Wilko sound rejuvenated and reinvigorated. Record more songs, boys - NOW!!

Bob Edmands, via email

ROPE SPRINGS ETERNAL

When checking what the upcoming issue of *Uncut* had in store, I couldn't believe my eyes! More than excited, I read Allan Jones' editor's letter where he took the Burroughs-inspired chance to pull Thin White Rope, one of the greatest and most special bands ever (for me at least), out of oblivion for a moment. Thank you for that!

Jörg Passarge, Germany



HOW TO ENTER

The letters in the shaded squares form an anagram of a song by the Arctic Monkeys. When you've worked out what it is, send your answer to: *Uncut* June 2014 Xword Comp, 9th floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St, London SE1 0SU. The first correct entry picked at random will win a prize. Closing date: Thursday, April 24, 2014. This competition is only open to European residents.

CLUES ACROSS

- 1+10A+9D** They had to build a rocket boys, and it all went up and it all came down (3-4-3-3-7-2-10)
8 Tina Turner's one-time other half (3)
10 (See 1 across)
11 Part of the circus act that Glen Hughes belonged to before joining Deep Purple (7)
12+18D Bonnie 'Prince' Billy's own gloomy outlook for his album (1-3-1-8)
13 A confused and bewildered piece from Coldplay (4)
14 Admiral _____ was a partner to Uncle Albert on Paul McCartney's *Ram* album (6)
15 A bit of a meagre choice that includes Blind Faith's bassist (5)
17+23D Spanish name that means 'the wolves' (3-5)
19 Aimee Mann and Ted Leo, the two considered together, with eponymous debut album *The _____* (4)
20 "Well everyone knows down Ladbroke Grove you have to leap across the street", 1974 (3-3-4)
21 "Some people get up at the break of day/Gotta go to work before it gets too late", 2005 (6)
22 Police crowd control procedure for Bloc Party performance (8)
25 Hot Elvis moves made by Maroon 5 (4-4)
27 "I'll be waiting in the photo booth at the underground station",

2005 (6)

- 28** Stephen Stills' band involved in a German assassination (8)
29 Agrees that a terrible start was made by member of The Lovin' Spoonful (6)

CLUES DOWN

- 1** Speaking of an album, here's one written by Stevie Wonder (7-4)
2 Irene upset with one of The Isley Brothers (5)
3 A beastly beat heard on Nina Persson's album (6-5)
4 Band that formed after originally getting together as back-up to Linda Ronstadt (6)
5+7D Byrds album that went beyond space and time (5-9)
6 Santana album featuring "Samba Pa Ti" (7)
7 (See 5 down)
9 (See 1 across)
14 Sadly do the twist to an American band (4-6)
16 U2 can somehow play a note live (9)
18 (See 12 across)
23 (See 17 across)
24 Alicia Keys without a single person to sing about (2-3)
25 "____, get your plane right on time", from Simon And Garfunkel's "The Only Living Boy In New York" (3)
26 Band that were at the very heart of The Clash (3)

ANSWERS: TAKE 203

ACROSS

1 Morning Phase, 11+12A Cheap Thrills, 13+4D All Or Nothing, 14+15A Idle Race, 17 Cop, 18 Edge, 19 Sexy MF, 22+24A It's A Fine Day, 26 Lorca,

29 Stars, 31 Them, 32 Heart, 33 YMCA, 34 Help, 35 Soup, 36 Kidd

DOWN

2 One Slip, 3 No Parlez, 5 Purple, 6+21D All I See Is You, 7 Ecstasy, 8 Grace, 9+23D Scratching The

Surface, 16+28A Metal Guru, 20+27D Marc Almond, 24+10A Fast Car, 25 You Talk, 29 Stop, 30 Axis

HIDDEN ANSWER

"Art Decade"

Xword compiled by: Trevor Hungerford

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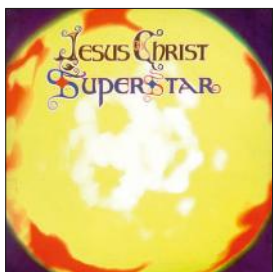




MY LIFE IN MUSIC

Matt Berry

What's your Beef? The master comedian and prog titan reveals the '70s reverb classics that rock Reynholm Industries...



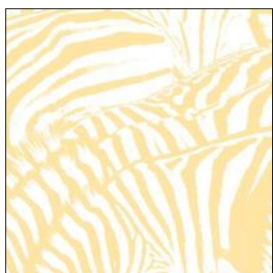
My favourite mix of orchestra and rock

Andrew Lloyd Webber & Tim Rice

Jesus Christ Superstar 1970

When I heard this, at 14 or 15, I didn't know anything about musicals, so I listened to it for what it was. I was impressed with his use

of orchestra along with very credible rock. It was Joe Cocker's Grease Band on this, and they were incredible. You've got to forget all the badness that comes with Lloyd Webber and just listen. I still think it's extraordinary.



An album that moves me to tears

Beach House

Teen Dream 2010

I love the fact that it's done on cheap Yamaha home keyboards. All the songs get to me, they're all that perfect bittersweet sort of melancholy, a balance of euphoria

and a tear in your eye. My favourite is "Lover Of Mine" – Victoria Legrand has got two incredible melodies going on at once in that song. But the whole album is completely faultless and beautiful from start to finish.



My favourite Brian Eno work

Roxy Music

Roxy Music 1972

A lot of my favourite songs have Eno involved, but I love the work he does on the first two Roxy Music albums. He's creating atmospheres as opposed to composition

and it's a beautiful mixture with everything else in that band. "Ladytron" is my favourite – to hear oboe and synth together is not the norm, I guess. I wasn't so interested when he left, but the first two albums are exceptional.



An incredibly atmospheric album

Fleet Foxes

Fleet Foxes 2008

It's very atmospheric and that's always important for a group. There's not a duff moment on the whole record – you wouldn't be buying individual tracks off this album,

you know? I love the plate reverb that's on absolutely everything – all the mid frequencies are up and it's sort of infinite-sounding, like it's been recorded in a cathedral or something. I tend to be drawn to '60s and '70s reverb!



An unashamedly electronic album

Jean Michel Jarre

Oxygène 1976

It's a fantastic album, showcasing early naked synths without shame. It's not trying to make them sound like anything else. It's uplifting but also has a kind of sadness, and

that's what attracts me. It was done in his bedroom on an eight-track. I've been collecting synths since the late '80s. They weren't very fashionable then, so you could pick up pretty cool stuff for a few hundred quid.



A beautifully recorded album

Pink Floyd

The Dark Side Of The Moon 1973

I listened to this in my teens not knowing who the band were, whether it was one man and his band or 50 people. The sequencing of it is so important, the songs

cannot be taken out of context – it's a 43-minute experience. It also still sounds fucking brilliant. Because it's not hurried, you can hear every instrument, there's a beautiful appreciation for everything.

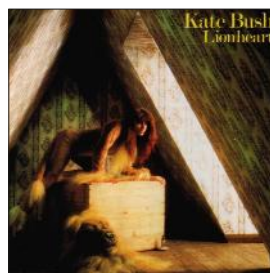


My favourite album

Mike Oldfield

Tubular Bells 1973

Again, I listened without prejudice at the age of 14. It wasn't like anything I'd heard, it sounded like there was no point to it, like no record company had asked for it. When you're 14 and you don't know your arse from your elbow, something like this really sticks on you because it just sounds like there is someone else who is very much at odds with everything. This was all of his guns being fired at once. I never get bored of listening to it.



An album by a 'terrifying' artist

Kate Bush

Lionheart 1978

The songs are all great, I love the production, the sound, the playing. Watching Kate Bush staring down the lens on *Top Of The Pops* playing "Wuthering

Heights", it fucking terrified me as a kid. I fancied her as little kids do, but at the same time I thought she was a witch, so you mix those and you've got fascination – I just thought she was extraordinary. You know, I still do.

Matt Berry's fifth album, **Music For Insomniacs**, is released by Acid Jazz on May 19.

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"I'm lazier in my old age. If I have an idea before sleep, I don't rush to get a guitar. I'm too fucking tired!"

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