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40 years on: the
inside story of

YOUNG AMERICANS



JACKSON BROWNE
LIAM HAYES
SONS OF BILL
THE JOHNNY CASH TRAIL
THE PARAMOUNT BLUES
MOTHERLODE

40 PAGES OF
REVIEWS
THE GO-BETWEENS
PUBLIC ENEMY
BELLE & SEBASTIAN
THE DECEMBERISTS
SLEATER-KINNEY
AND MORE...

GRATEFUL DEAD

"I'd take drugs
forever..."

GIANT
2015
PREVIEW
PAUL WELLER
NEW ORDER
LAURA MARLING
MY MORNING
JACKET
+ MORE

JOHN GRANT

"I was like a
pig in garbage"

THE WATERBOYS

Mike Scott on his
greatest albums

IN BED WITH JERRY LEE LEWIS!

PLUS
UNSEEN WOODSTOCK
FATHER JOHN MISTY
MARK LANEGAN
And introducing...
NATALIE PRASS



PANDA BEAR MEET THE GRIM REAPER



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John Grant

Are we rolling?

HAPPY NEW YEAR, everyone, and many thanks for starting 2015 with us. After my rant about music business short-termism in the last issue, I'm aware of a certain hypocrisy this month, as *Uncut* consigns 2014's musical riches to the dustbin of history – at least for a while – and concentrates on the many exciting records due in the next few months. As you'll see from the reviews section, it's a busy January, and I can especially recommend the extravagant country-soul of Natalie Prass, Jessica Pratt's somewhat more minimal, candlelit psych-folk, and a stirring comeback by Sleater-Kinney, for starters.

Perhaps the most desirable release of the month, though, is of a very different vintage. On page 97, Neil Spencer cracks open Jack White's latest "Cabinet Of Wonders", a polished aluminum case which houses, among other treasures, 800 songs from the catalogue of Paramount Records. Volume 1 of this ludicrously thorough project came out 12 months ago, but the material that packs Volume 2, dating from 1928

to the label's demise in 1932, is even stronger: a blues motherlode that includes the work of Skip James, Charley Patton, Blind Lemon Jefferson and Geesie Wiley, whose strange story was uncovered by the essayist John Jeremiah Sullivan in a piece for *The New York Times* last year.

One way or another, Paramount has inspired a lot of fine writing recently. The best music book I've read in a long while has been Amanda Petrusich's *Do Not Sell At Any Price*, which talks about old 78s and the people who collect them, and has a lot of profound things to say about how we treasure and fetishise what was once ephemeral. In one of the book's most absurd and compelling sections, Petrusich learns to dive so that she can comb the Milwaukee riverbed in Grafton, Wisconsin, in search of lost 78s that had been frisbeed out of the nearby Paramount plant by bored workers.

Musical history can be messy and contrary. Great records and songs are neglected and misplaced, sometimes go missing forever. But they can also persist, endure, subtly cause reverberations nearly a century down the line. As we were finishing this issue, we received the debut solo album by Rhiannon Giddens, who you might have come across in the Carolina Chocolate Drops and as part of T Bone Burnett's *New Basement Tapes* working party. Giddens' *Tomorrow Is My Turn* is a collection of old songs, all written or popularised by women: Patsy Cline, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Dolly Parton, Nina Simone. It opens, though, with "Last Kind Words", the potent and uncanny Geesie Wiley song that stands out even among the hundreds around it in the Paramount box. "If I get killed, if I get killed, please don't bury my soul," sing Wiley and Giddens, united across the decades, "I prefer just leave me out, let the buzzards eat me whole..."



John Mulvey, Editor.
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INSTANT KARMA!

THIS MONTH'S REVELATIONS FROM THE WORLD OF UNCUT
Featuring JOHNNY CASH | SONS OF BILL | JOHN CARPENTER

"A tribal gathering of sorts..." Scenes from Woodstock, 1969



'We are stardust, we are golden (slight return)...'

Back to the garden! BARON WOLMAN dusts down his unseen images of Woodstock

IT'S HARD TO imagine, at this late date, that there's much new to learn about the first Woodstock festival. Nevertheless Baron Wolman, *Rolling Stone*'s first chief photographer, has just published a tranche of his Woodstock pictures that have never previously appeared in print. As our spread shows, they often provide a human, intimate perspective on a seismic countercultural event, an understanding that the real action mostly took place some miles from the stage.

"By this time I was kind of bored with shooting the bands onstage," the eminent Wolman says in *Woodstock*, "because that's all I had been doing in San Francisco for years up to that point... I always considered myself a photojournalist rather than strictly a music photographer, which is why I focused mainly on the people and culture of community that weekend. Keep in mind that there had never been a crowd like this before, and the music felt less interesting to me than what appeared to be a tribal gathering of sorts."

Wolman's recollections can be understandably romantic, but they're often usefully underpinned by the images rediscovered from the 20 or so rolls he shot over the festival's duration. So he can mention that "Everyone getting naked and swimming together so

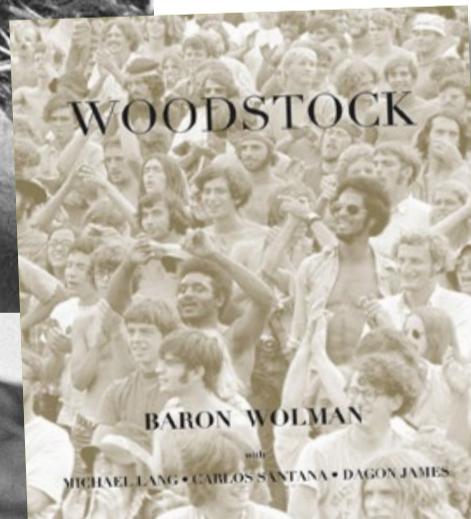
freely without inhibition is an important part of the Woodstock mythology", but also include a photo [bottom left] that gently suggests the bathing party might have repercussions. "No soaping, shitting, pissing, swimming etc in the drinking water or you might come down with the shits..."

As the festival progresses, of course, you can measure the impact of the elements on Wolman's increasingly mud-encrusted subjects. A rare trip backstage, though, captures The Band's Robbie Robertson and Rick Danko

protecting their pioneer threads with sensible plastic macs. As Wolman proves time and again in his images, the enduring myths of Woodstock remain potent – and so do some more nuanced realities.

Woodstock, by Baron Wolman with Michael Lang, Carlos Santana and Dagon James is published by Reel Art Press and is available now

The Band's Rick Danko and Robbie Robertson with Albert Grossman backstage at Woodstock



BRIGHT PENNY TURNS UP

A RUSH AND A PLUSH!

Welcome back Mr LIAM HAYES, secret maestro of baroque pop, busier than he's been in 20 years

FOR SOMEONE CAST as a mysterious, painstaking pop genius, Plush's Liam Hayes is particularly charming and down-to-earth on the other end of a Friday afternoon phone line. Hayes came through in Chicago in the early '90s, appearing on key early Palace Brothers sides like "Hope" and *Viva Last Blues*. But he made his decisive mark with his debut single, 1994's "Three-Quarters Blind Eyes", whose B-side, "Found A Little Baby", was so lushly dewy-eyed and sadly beautiful that it singlehandedly trounced anything in the loosely parallel 'orch-pop' movement. When *More You Becomes You* appeared three years later, its confessional piano ballads struck somewhere between Laura Nyro, and Paul McCartney's "Waterfalls".

Eighteen years on, Hayes has belatedly entered a surprisingly prolific phase, releasing two albums in the space of six months. The upswing is clearly making him less guarded (though questions about everyday details, like why he recently moved from Chicago to Milwaukee, still receive short shrift: "It was a personal decision, it was time for something else"). That both albums are gorgeous, seductive creations – last year's *Korp Sole Roller* the autumnal, melancholic cousin to this month's *Slurrup* and its wide-eyed riffs on soul and '60s pop – must be helping, too.

When I interviewed Hayes in 1998,

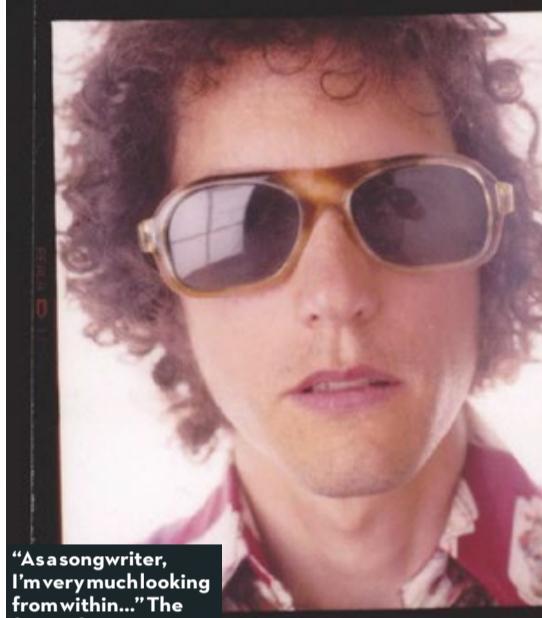
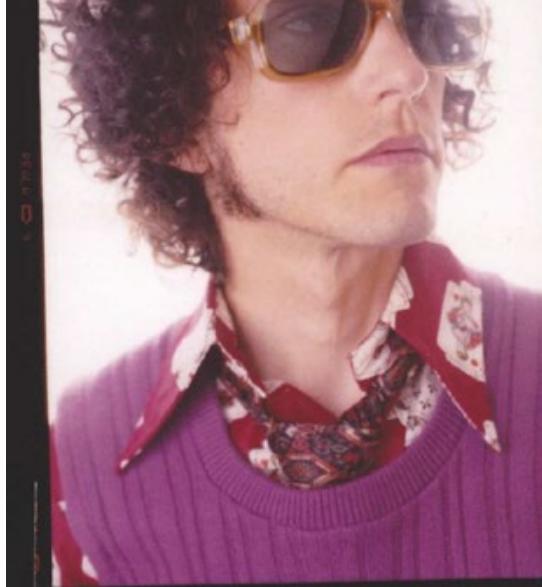
he told me to "imagine the orchestra" on *More You Becomes You*. By 2002's opulent, overblown *Fed*, a pop masterpiece, the orchestra was real, and Hayes had transcended his indie roots, calling in the services of Tom Tom MMLXXXIV, who'd made his name arranging for groups like Earth

Wind & Fire. But the album's expense was so great that the only label to offer enough money to secure its initial release was Japan's After Hours. Ask Hayes how he reflects on *Fed*, and he's sanguine: "I'm not looking at it through a critical lens. I'm enjoying it more as a listener and looking at it in the larger context of what I'd done

"Movies have so many moving parts, it makes recording an album look easy"

LIAM HAYES

"As a songwriter, I'm very much looking from within..." The faces of Liam Hayes



and what I'm doing now. Whatever it took to get it done was worth it."

2009's quietly celebratory *Bright Penny* followed, before Roman Coppola approached Hayes to work on his film, *A Glimpse Inside The Mind Of Charles Swan III*. It wasn't Hayes' first time in film – he made a cameo appearance in *High Fidelity* – but it was the first time he'd been so involved with soundtracking. "You kinda have to throw all your ideas about being a songwriter out," he nods. "As a songwriter, I'm very much looking from within, but when you're writing for a movie, you have to try to get outside of yourself and into the world of the movie. It was fascinating and fun."

The experience seems to have regenerated Hayes, who admits "with movies, there are so many moving parts, it makes recording a

record look easy, by comparison." But his songs are as seductively anachronistic as ever. Back in 2005, Hayes said that *Fed* was made in a "drought-stricken landscape", calling it "an attempt to grow an orange grove in a musical desert". Ask him about *Slurrup* and *Korp Sole Roller* in relation to modern music and, if anything, he's retreated further into his own space, a quietly defiant one-off. "Whatever idea I had when we last talked about that, I'm probably less keyed in to things that are happening around me," he says, pausing before signing off, simply, "I'm still going to do my thing."

JONDALE

Slurrup is released by Fat Possum on January 12. Hayes plays the Servant Jazz Quarters in London the day after

THE CLASSIFIEDS

THIS MONTH: Turn on, tune in, drop out... Middle Earth, 'Magic Mixtures' and psychedelic all-nite happenings... from *Melody Maker*, January 20, 1968

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BLUES BAND • JEFF DEXTER
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MUSIC IN THE DARK

"I WANT TO TURN EVERYBODY CRAZY..."

JOHN CARPENTER, cinema's Dark Star and synth overlord, makes his first album proper. "Why would I be an influence? I can barely play!"

MOST DAYS, YOU'LL find John Carpenter at home enjoying his two great passions: NBA basketball and video games. He is a lifelong fan of the Los Angeles Lakers, while lulls in the basketball season allow him to exercise his trigger finger: he currently recommends immersive shoot-'em-up, *Far Cry 4*. Carpenter, it seems, is evidently making the most of his downtime. Best known as the director of science fiction and horror classics including *The Thing* and *Escape From New York*, Carpenter hasn't directed a film since *The Ward* in 2010. "But I'm enjoying not getting up at four in the morning," he admits. "Not walking around on set and having the stress of movie-making, which is quite profound."

Despite his absence from our screens, Carpenter has found an outlet for his creative impulses. With a storied history scoring his own films, he's finally decided to release his debut album, *Lost Themes*.

"A couple of years ago, my son Cody would come over to my house and we'd play video games," he explains. "Then we'd go downstairs to my Logic Pro computer set-up and we'd improvise some music. That kept going.

Suddenly, we realised we had about 60 minutes' worth of music done."

Reassuringly, *Lost Themes* isn't a significant departure from Carpenter's haunting scores for *Assault On Precinct 13* and *Halloween*. As

the album's titles suggest – "Abyss", "Obsidian", "Wraith", among them – Carpenter's sonic palette hasn't diminished; nor his sense of humour. "It feels like a continuation of the work I've been doing for the last 40 years," he says. "But this is the first music I've done that has

nothing to do with image. It has simply to do with the music and joy of playing and improvising. It reflects all the years I've been doing this. It also reflects my son's abilities, and my godson, Daniel

Davies. So I've taken these two young guys, exploited them and tried to make myself rich."

Carpenter's earliest forays into music were influenced by his father. "He was a music professor, he graduated from

Eastman School Of Music and was a virtuoso violinist. He decided it was time for me to learn the violin. Unfortunately, I had no talent... I played for a while, but carrying a violin case made me a mark for any of the bullies in high school. So, I went from there to keyboards, to

"This album is for the movie that's playing in your head. So turn down the lights"

JOHN CARPENTER

guitars and such."

While studying at Western Kentucky University, Carpenter played bass and sang with a rock band, Kaleidoscope. "I loved rock'n'roll. But I loved Bernard Herrmann, Dimitri Tiomkin and some of the low-budget, science fiction and horror scores. Herrmann, because of his chord progressions, his use of simplicity to get across a mood, I really responded to that because simple music is all I can basically do! When I got to USC film school, I began to score student films because none of us had money to hire somebody to score for us. In low-budget movies, we still had the same problem – no money. But I was cheap and fast. That just kept going."

From his 1974 debut *Dark Star* onwards, Carpenter's synth-driven soundtracks became a distinctive feature of his films. "It's a process of discovery," he says. "I'll suddenly find I'm playing something I like and I'll be like, 'Wow! Where did that come from?' I have no idea, probably from another movie..."

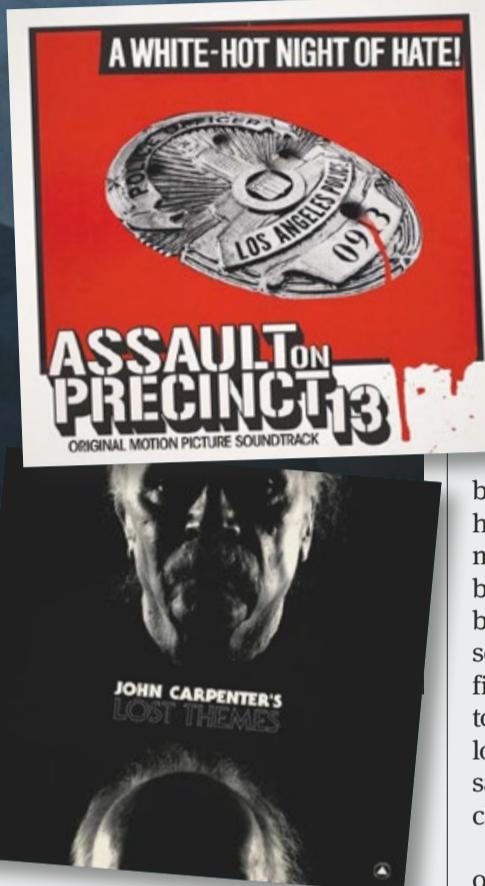
Carpenter cites Hans Zimmer and Trent Reznor as contemporary film composers whose work he admires; though he bats away suggestions his own scores have been an inspiration to musicians. "Why would I be an influence? I can barely play!"

Such self-deprecation aside, Carpenter is nevertheless palpably excited about *Lost Themes*. It more than compensates, he considers, for his hiatus from movie-making. "If something comes along that I love, I'll do it," he says. "But I'm an old man. What do you want from me? I'm 67 this month! I'll continue to live my life. Making music like this, it's fun and it's awesome. It's something I never dreamed would happen. Maybe we'll make another album or two, maybe not."

"This album," he continues, "is for the movie that's playing in your head. So turn down the lights, put the album on and let that movie inside you go. I'll be the music for it. I want to turn everybody crazy..."

MICHAEL BONNER

Lost Themes is released by Sacred Bones on February 3





WE'RE NEW HERE

Prodigal Sons: (l-r) Abe Wilson, Seth Green, Sam Wilson, James Wilson, Todd Wellons

Sons Of Bill

Recommended this month: a reconstruction of the fables, with Virginia's scholarly heirs to REM

IT IS NOT, concedes James Wilson, very rock'n'roll to name your band in tribute to your dad. Even less so when the dad in question, Dr William Wilson, is professor emeritus of philosophical theology and Southern literature (at the University of Virginia). But then, Sons Of Bill – James, Sam and Abe Wilson, plus Seth Green and Todd Wellons on bass and drums – are happy to align themselves with the more thoughtful aspects of Southern culture.

The group was formed in 2005, when James left college in Nevada, and visited Sam in New York, where he'd been playing jazz. Abe was in a group at architecture school, but growing dissatisfied with it. The three hatched a plan to form "a really un-conceptual band based on the music that we grew up with, and all the rock and jazz that we'd grown to love".

The Wilsons had grown up in a musical household, learning piano, guitar and banjo, and singing in church. "My dad's not a big rock fan," says James. "The Band was the one rock band he could get behind. In the house it was just country, Gregorian chants, Bach and Handel."

The record which made the Sons more than a popular act around Virginia was their third, 2012's *Sirens*, produced by Cracker's David Lowery, though James now says he can detect a sense of anxiety on it. "We felt like this needed to be our big record or we weren't going to get to play music anymore." Their latest, *Love And Logic*, came after a re-evaluation, and the coaxing of

producer Ken Coomer (ex-Uncle Tupelo/Wilco) who invited them to his Nashville studio.

"Ken was a big part of us letting go. He was like, 'You don't owe anything to anybody, let's sit down and make something we all think is beautiful.' We're all fans of different kinds of music – that's one thing we look to Wilco for, a band that mined its influences very deeply in a way that's not always apparent. So it was OK to be an American roots band but to let our British influences show."

The Beatles and Pink Floyd are the most frequently cited of those influences, but James also mentions Peter Gabriel and The Cure, while joking that his own passion for Iron Maiden has yet to be fully exploited. But there's also a debt to REM, which he is happy to acknowledge.

"There's an intellectual side to the South that I don't think always finds expression in popular music. That's the tradition we come from – we grew up reading and studying, listening to classical music and reading literature. When you think about Randy Newman's *Good Old Boys* or REM's *Fables Of The Reconstruction* – those are great Southern records that were smart and challenging, and not what people might expect from a band from the South." *ALASTAIR MCKAY*

I'M YOUR FAN
"This is a record that takes me back to some of the creative heights we achieved in Wilco. It's unmistakeably the real thing."

Ken Coomer
 (producer, ex-Uncle Tupelo, Wilco)



Sons Of Bill play Oxford Bullingdon (Feb 14), Winchester Railway Inn (15), Bristol Tunnels (16), Leeds Brudenell Social Club (18), Glasgow Stereo (19), Newcastle Cluny (20), Nottingham Maze (21), London Hoxton Bar & Kitchen (23)

THE UNCUT PLAYLIST

ON THE STEREO THIS MONTH...

MATTHEW E WHITE

Fresh Blood SPACEBOMB/DOMINO

As the Spacebomb empire expands, its founder returns with a second dazzling solo album. "You said you'd found the soul of rock'n'roll..."

BADBADNOTGOOD & GHOSTFACE KILLA

Sour Soul LEX

The Wu-Tang's arch-mythographer continues his productive streak, hooking up with what appears to be Toronto's answer to The Bar-Kays.

THE CLANG GROUP

The Clang Group EP DOMINO

Nearly 40 years after Deaf School, Clive Langer forms a new art/pub rock band with Roxy's Andy Mackay. Nice version of his own "Shipbuilding", too.

THE UNTHANKS

Mount The Air

RABBLE ROUSER

Jazzy, expansive return from Rachel, Becky and co, moving ever further from old, restrictive definitions of folk.



The Unthanks

BILL FAY

Who Is The Sender? DEAD OCEANS

A second comeback LP by the legendary and reclusive singer-songwriter, invested with even more profound spiritual gravity.

THE GRATEFUL DEAD

Houston, Texas 11-18-1972 RHINO

More '72 gold surfaces, on vinyl, for last November's Record Store Day. NB: "Playing In The Band" (25: 49)

DUKE GARWOOD

Heavy Love HEAVENLY

The itinerant Brit bluesman finally pieces together a magnum opus, out-Laneganing his old duo partner in the process.

CHRIS FORSYTH & THE SOLAR MOTEL BAND

Live In Lafayette, Indiana (SOUNDCLOUD.COM)

Reliably levitating jams from Forsyth and co, including epically Verlained takes on "Cortez The Killer" and Richard Thompson's "The Calvary Cross".

THE POP GROUP

Citizen Zombie FREAKS RUS

A 35-year recording hiatus has not, it's fair to say, mellowed the post-punk agitators, either musically or politically. Adele henchman Paul Epworth produces.

ÁINE O'DWYER

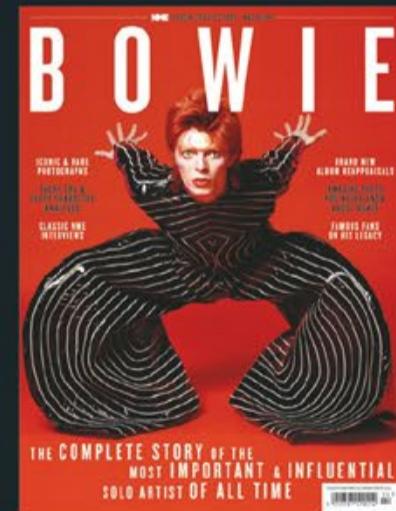
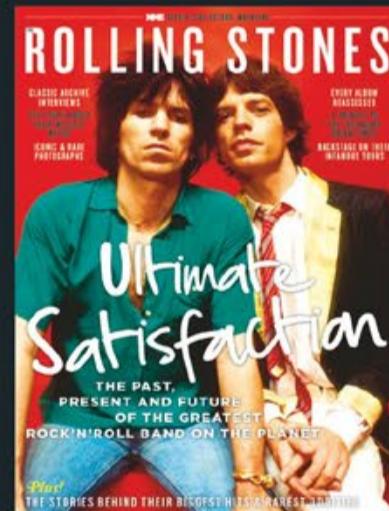
Music For Church Cleaners Vol I & II MIE

Irish improviser messes with an Islington pipe organ while the cleaners are in. Oddly soothing, notwithstanding the hoovers and minor arguments O'Dwyer also records.

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

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REBEL WITH A CAUSE

ON THE TRAIL OF JOHNNY CASH

Folsom welcomes a park dedicated to the Man In Black. "I shot a man in Reno, just to watch him hike..."

JANUARY 13, 1968 was a crucial day for Johnny Cash. Playing to inmates at Folsom Prison, a maximum-security facility just north of Sacramento, Cash recorded the album that simultaneously revived his career and cemented his own myth. Issued four months on, *At Folsom Prison* established him as rebel voice of the downtrodden, a champion of the common man in purgatory. It also became a huge hit. After nearly a decade of falling sales, drug addiction and crises of faith, Cash had found his purpose. It was, as daughter Rosanne put it, "the watershed moment in his life and career".

Now, 46 years on, Rosanne Cash has officially opened the first phase of Folsom's Johnny Cash Trail And Overpass, a \$3.8m pedestrian and bike bridge whose two pillars echo the prison's east gate guard towers. When the ambitious 2.5-mile project is fully completed in five years' time, it will encompass a two-acre park and a series of Cash-centric art installations, one of which is a 40ft steel statue. The whole thing will serve as a monument to Cash's association with Folsom. "I'd been working many years with representatives from Folsom Prison to purchase land to build a bike trail and bridge over a major

roadway here," explains Senior Planner Jim Konopka, who first hatched the idea. "And the naming of the Johnny Cash trail just seemed like a natural fit. We just wanted to recognise the significance he had on the Folsom community."

San Luis Obispo's RRM Design Group will design the park and main statue, while Sacramento-based Adan Romo has

"It was all about compassion... he felt sorry for anyone down on their luck"

CINDY CASH

been assigned six different artworks. These include sculptures, a granite wall, smartphone app and a 'Ring Of Fire' amphitheatre, from which live shows can be piped into the prison. "There was a real danger of making it a Disney-type experiment," Romo says. "It's a sensitive subject as you've got the prison, the music, Johnny Cash's legacy and various needs of the city. Ultimately, I whittled it

A captive audience: Cash at Folsom Prison, January 13, 1968

A QUICK ONE

► Uncut's next *Ultimate Music Guide* arrives in UK shops on January 15. Our subject this time is **Radiohead**, and we've written extensive new reviews of all their albums (and all their solo albums) to go with many classic interviews from the vaults. Serendipitously, it seems the band are back in the studio, if a photo of Thom Yorke and Jonny Greenwood, posted by Nigel Godrich on Twitter, is anything to go by.

► There's still time to help fund a new film drama about **Steve Marriott**, if you head over to www.crowdshed.com. *Midnight Of My Life* finds Marriott playing a



down to how empathetic he was and his ability to connect on a human level. That's what drew him to the prison.

He went through this dark period and it seemed like his visit to Folsom was as much about his own redemption as it was for the inmates. It's the idea of discovering himself by reaching out to people who were deemed untouchable."

Perhaps the most striking of Romo's works is a series of 17ft steel-and-aluminium towers, arranged to look like jail-cell bars. As the viewer approaches at an angle, Cash's profile gradually reveals itself. Romo calls it "a perfect metaphor for what happened there".

The entire process has been overseen by Cindy Cash, one of Johnny's four daughters from his marriage to first wife Vivian Liberto. "Pulling up to the prison for the first time brought back a lot of memories," she recalls. "I was nine or ten when dad went to Folsom and I wanted him to take me with him. He just said: 'One day you'll understand, honey. You just can't come with me on this trip.' I was so hurt, but I grew up and realised it wasn't quite the place to bring four little girls. Dad had never been in prison as an inmate, but that concert made half the world believe he *had* been. It changed his life and gave him the bad boy image. But at the same time he kept that respect and dignity. It was all about compassion, he felt sorry for anyone who was down on their luck. It went from prisons to battered-women's shelters to anything where people were hurting." ROB HUGHES

Putney pub in 1985 on the night of Live Aid, and is set to be directed by the fine actor Phil Davis, who first came to prominence in *Quadrophenia*...

► Talking of mods, **Paul Weller** heads off on a tour of lesser-visited UK towns, starting at Plymouth Pavilions (March 5) and ending up at Edinburgh Playhouse (22).

► Optimists may hope for a new **PJ Harvey** album in 2015, but she has at least confirmed a poetry book for autumn. *The Hollow Of The Hand*, with lensman Seamus Murphy, charts the pair's travel between 2011-14, including visits to Kosovo, Afghanistan and Washington DC.

► Oh, and please keep an especially close watch on www.uncut.co.uk this month...

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Your guide to this month's free CD

FIRST OFF, a brief word of apology. As you may have worked out by now, the tracklisting printed on the sleeve of our CD this month is incorrect. The songs are actually in the order as listed here. Apologies for any confusion this may have caused.

1 THE DECEMBERISTS

The Wrong Year

It's an unusually rich January for new releases this year, but few are more significant than the seventh album by Colin Meloy and The



Decemberists. As "The Wrong Year" proves, their Oregon folk-rock grows more dappled and reflective with each release; note, too, a guitar line that could easily pass as the work of another sometime Portland resident, Johnny Marr.

2 POND

Waiting Around For Grace

Heavier and more productive fellow travellers of Tame Impala, Pond have spaced out in most senses of the word for their sixth album. Exhibit A: the cosmic extravaganza of "Waiting Around For Grace", a lavishly synthed opener that moves dazedly in the terrain between Pink Floyd and MGMT.

3 SONS OF BILL

Lost In The Cosmos (Song For Chris Bell)

New to us, Virginia's melodious Wilson brothers are actually on to their fourth LP. And while *Love And Logic* is produced by onetime Wilco drummer Ken Coomer, "Lost In The Cosmos" showcases a delicate and erudite band who sound rather like REM mixed with another of Coomer's old acts, Uncle Tupelo.

4 JUSTIN TOWNES EARLE Round The Bend

A companion piece to last year's *Single Mothers*, the new album from Steve Earle's boy is called, perhaps

pointedly, *Absent Fathers*. Brawny country-soul predominates, not least on the grooving "Round The Bend", a swift channelling of vintage Muscle Shoals vibes.

5 THE WATERBOYS Destinies Entwined

Some unexpected shared territory between Earle and Mike Scott's latest caper, thanks in no small part to veteran Swamper David Hood playing bass in the latest Waterboys lineup. From the upcoming *Modern Blues*, "Destinies Entwined" sees Scott fetch up in Nashville, adding local soul and a renewed Dylan kick to his usual epic brew.

6 JIM WHITE VS THE PACKWAY HANDLE BAND Sorrow's Shine

First in three years from the eccentric *Wrong-Eyed Jesus* storyteller, here hooked up with a roistering Georgian bluegrass troupe, The Packway Handle Band. *Take It Like A Man* is our Americana Album Of The Month and on p74 our reviewer places "Sorrow's Shine", one of the less jaunty tracks, in the tradition of Dock Boggs.

7 CURTIS HARDING Keep On Shining

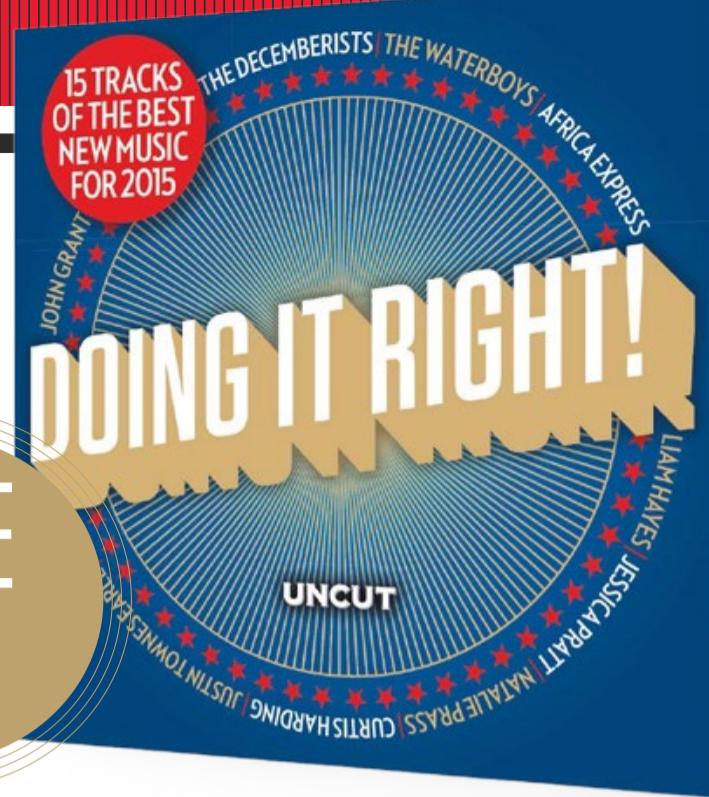
A collaborator with both Cee Lo Green and The Black Lips, Atlanta's Curtis Harding keeps a neat balance between R&B slickness and raw garage punch on his solo debut, *Soul Power*. It's a great trick that "Keep On Shining" illustrates well; no prizes for hearing why Jack White has employed Harding to open for him on recent US dates.

8 NATALIE PRASS Why Don't You Believe In Me

Matthew E White and his big band back up this month's most



FREE
CD!



auspicious newcomer, Natalie Prass, on her instant classic debut album. It's our album of the month, thanks to ravishing work like "Why Don't You Believe In Me", all about breaking up romantically with the song's co-writer.

9 JAKE XERXES FUSSELL Raggy Levy

Fussell, from North Carolina, is the son of an eminent blues folklorist. But while his approach to trad pieces like "Raggy Levy" is hardly iconoclastic, he's clearly too spirited and imaginative to treat these resilient old tunes with kid gloves. The uncanny background guitar is provided by an old friend of *Uncut*, William Tyler.

10 LIAM HAYES Fokus

Something of a baroque-pop auteur for the past 20 years fronting Plush, Hayes has often been seen as an underground Burt Bacharach to complement his old collaborator Will Oldham's Dylan. Here, though, Hayes is revitalised as a punchy, Beatlesy power-pop merchant. Unexpected, but mighty effective.



11 JESSICA PRATT Back, Baby

The San Franciscan's debut album, a couple of years back, was one of the most intimate, beguiling psychedelic folk records to come out of the United States in years, so it's a relief to point out that Pratt's follow-up, *On Your Own Love Again*, is just as low-key and effective. Fans of the first Joanna Newsom album, and Karen Dalton, may be especially intrigued.

12 AFRICA EXPRESS PRESENTS

Africa Express Presents... Terry Riley's In C Mali [Edit]

Just under five minutes of ecstatic jamming lifted from Africa Express' 41-minute new version of the minimalist masterpiece, cut in a Bamako youth club by a lively mix of Western and Malian talent. A fine and radical idea that's turned out better than anyone might have reasonably expected.

13 ALASDAIR ROBERTS Artless One

Roberts' calm consistency means it can occasionally be easy to take him for granted. The Scottish folk singer's new self-titled album is a real beauty, though, full of work like "Artless One" that showcases both a homespun simplicity and a certain courtly elegance.

14 VIET CONG Continental Shelf

While Gang Of Four and The Pop Group have new LPs imminent, Calgary's Viet Cong – featuring a couple of ex-members of Women – are proving themselves to be just as effective at a doomy 21st-Century update of post-punk. Compellingly bleak atmospherics hide, too, a surprisingly catchy tune.

15 JOHN GRANT Where Dreams Go To Die

And so we come to the grandstand finale, as the redoubtable John Grant brushes up his best Elton John croon for a live showstopper with the BBC Philharmonic. "This is like a well-oiled machine/Could I please see that smile again?"

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NME

Mark Lanegan

Interview: Michael Bonner
Photo: Steve Gullick

The gravel-voiced singer recalls his career as a repo man, pheasant'n'trotter pies, and Screaming Trees punch-ups: "There won't be a reunion any time soon!"

I

IT'S 9AM IN LA when Mark Lanegan answers the phone to *Uncut*. "I'm at home," he explains. "How's my day going so far? It's too early to tell, but I think it's going OK."

Evidently, these days, mornings are a good time for Lanegan: over the next hour, he chats at length about his pre-music career as a repo man, collaborations with Kurt Cobain and Josh Homme, a brief, best-forgotten flirtation with acting, and the best restaurants he's eaten at in Britain. Lanegan has a busy schedule for the coming months, as he prepares to take his latest album, *Phantom Radio*, out on the road.

"I'm gonna be touring a lot," he confirms. "The UK in January and then the rest of Europe until late March. Then South America, Australia, back to Europe. There's gonna be a lot of touring."

Then, presumably, another record...? "Presumably. God willing!" And with that, Lanegan readies himself to answer your questions...

STAR QUESTION



Who's your favourite Gutter Twin? **Greg Dulli**

There's only two to choose from! I guess that would be Greg. We first met in 1989, at a show we did in Boston. It's a long working relationship, yeah. He's a great songwriter, great singer and whatever makes people friends – shared sense of humour, shared likes, dislikes. I enjoy working with him because, first of all, I'm a big fan of what he does. There's a touch of *Ishtar*, but I'm referring to the amount of times we spent making up joke lyrics and joke scenarios when we were supposed to be writing... 90 per cent of it is just fuckin' around, 10 per cent of it was actually doing something good. We're planning to make another Gutter Twins record. Not sure when.

You've got amazing tattoos on your fingers. What are they about? **Sally Robinson, Sussex**
Youthful over-enthusiasm. I had a

girlfriend who had her fingers done. I picked up the trend and never stopped until my hands were totally done. I don't anticipate getting more tattoos... in my old age I might. I like having them fine; I'm just over getting them.

What are your memories of growing up in Ellensburg?

Peter Bumphrey, Cambridge
It's in Washington, between the



**The Gutter Twins:
Lanegan and Dulli**

mountains and the desert, a rural farming community, with a lot of cattle ranching and stuff. When I went back as an adult, it had some charms, but it wasn't a place I enjoyed being when younger. For one thing I didn't meet anybody 'til I was 18 who was listening to the same kind of music, including punk rock, classic rock, any kind of good rock. Nobody even listened to Hendrix, for instance. So I guess I felt a bit like an island. The most edgy radio show we got there was Casey Kasem's *American Top 40*, once a week. My family were music fans. My sister played piano, still does. The Trees tried to make me the drummer, as I had half a kit. I had a floor tom, snare and ride cymbal. It got traded in for weed.

You started Screaming Trees with the Conner brothers when you worked for their parents as a repo man. What do you think qualified you for that position?

Ivy Rodgers, Brighton

Yeah, I was repossessing TV sets, VCRs and microwave ovens. I went round people's houses, local trailer parks. But, yeah, it was a bummer taking back stuff people wanted to have but didn't have the money for in the first place. How did I get into it? I was friends with

one of the Conners brothers and met his parents who thought I was qualified due to the way I look and my personality. They thought I was imposing enough for people to want to give stuff back [laughs].

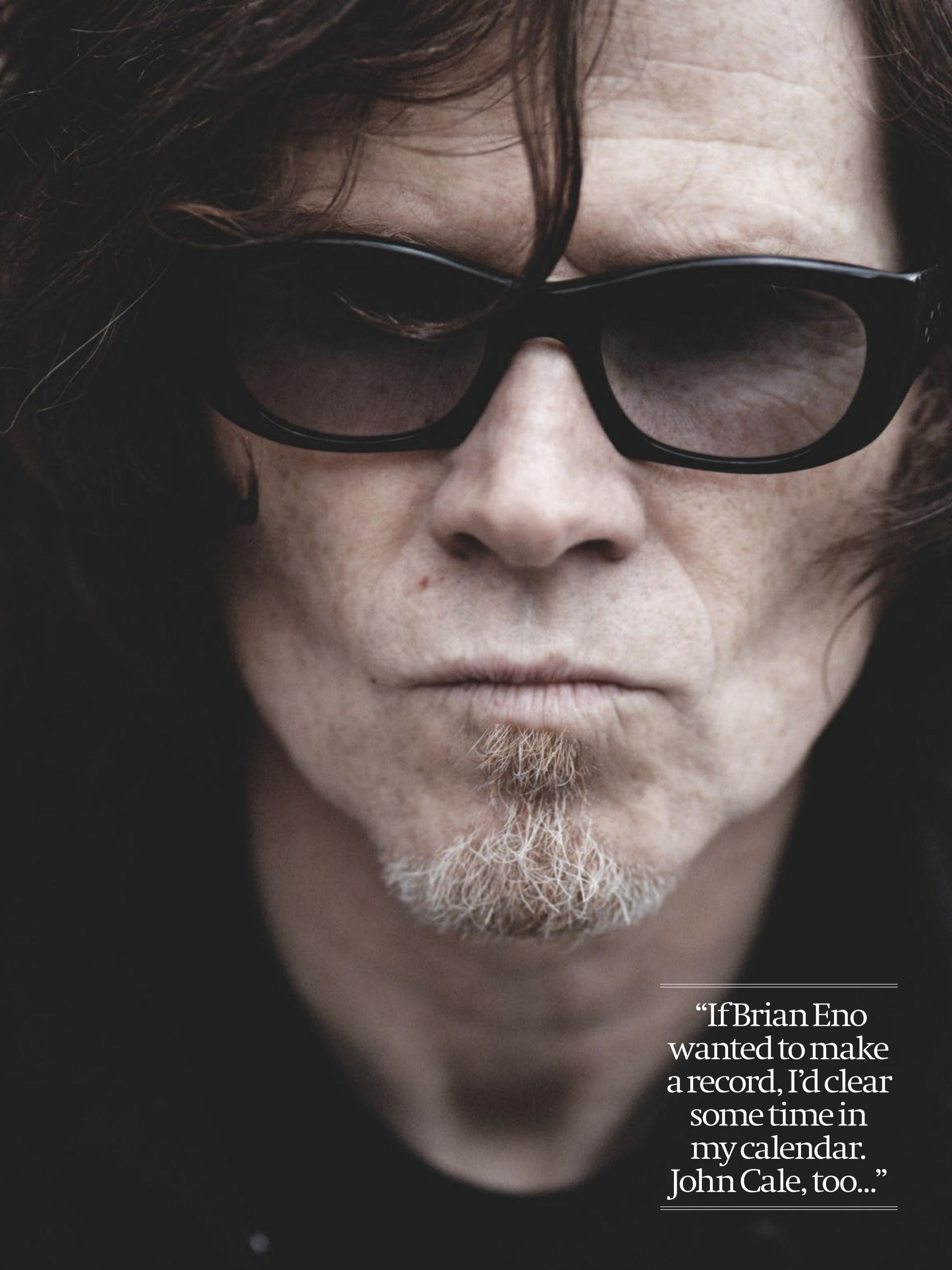
Did it feel strange to you that a band like Screaming Trees was on a major label for a long time?

Rose Breton, via email

We were on a major for quite a time but only made three records in maybe the eight years we were there. I think it was a matter of trying to eventually get something out of us that might take off, but of course, ultimately it never did. But I was always shocked anyone would want us to make records for them. I remember we signed before Nirvana happened. We'd made records for an indie and I wasn't really interested in going further. But then a chance came along to make records for a major. We signed in '89 to Epic; Nirvana happened in '91, maybe. So of course, we jumped the gun, signed a terrible contract with no money!

You made your first solo albums while still in Screaming Trees.

How did you manage to juggle both careers? **Jacqui Brown, Leith**
Yeah, I did *The Winding Sheet* and *Whiskey For The Holy Ghost* while I was still in the band. Kurt Cobain and I had been talking about recording an EP of Lead Belly covers. We cut a couple of songs and then sort of lost interest. I was at Sub Pop one day, visiting Trees drummer Mark Pickerel who worked there, and I ran into Jonathan Poneman. He said, "What's going on with this blues EP?" I said, "I don't think we're



“If Brian Eno wanted to make a record, I’d clear some time in my calendar. John Cale, too...”

↳ going to finish it." He said, "Why don't you make a solo record?" I told him I wasn't interested. Then he came back with a formal offer that was 10 times the amount of money I'd ever been paid to make anything before. So it was like, I'm going to have to write some songs! It was the only incentive I had at the time. Those sessions with Kurt? We took one day in the studio and recorded three songs, four maybe. A couple of them ended up with vocals or instruments that have ended up on a Nirvana boxset. One of them ["Where Did You Sleep Last Night?"] ended up on *Winding Sheet*. It was just friends messing around.

Did you have a lot of fights in the Screaming Trees?

Emma, Southampton

There was definitely an amount of inter-band violence. It was pretty heavy dysfunction from start to finish... 15 years of dysfunction! I just saw Van Conner a couple of weeks ago, when I was playing in Seattle, and I also had a long phone conversation with Lee Conner. I made a covers record last year or the year before and Barrett Martin and Mark Pickerel both played on that, so we're all still friends. But there won't be a Screaming Trees reunion any time soon. I think we're all happy with what we do now and are happy to have done that. But also happy to leave it in the past.

STAR QUESTION



You know a good plate of food when you see one. What's your favourite place to eat and the best thing you've had there? **Rich Machin, Soulsavers**

I really like St John in London. I believe me and Rich shared a pheasant and trotter pie that was outstanding. There's a lot of good places to eat in the States, but per capita there's probably a larger percentage of British places that totally kick ass. Rich and I once took a trip down from Edinburgh, four days of driving down the UK, eating at places on the way... gastro pubs. Yeah, I've seen *The Trip*. There was a touch of that to it. Who does the best Al Pacino impression? That would be Rich.

Given how many people you've collaborated with, is there anyone else you'd like to record with? Seth, Bishop's Stortford

If Brian Eno wanted to make a record, I'd definitely clear some time in my calendar. John Cale, too. Those guys consistently make great records, always doing their own



Who wants a fight, then?
Screaming Trees backstage
at the Fulham Greyhound,
London, 1989 (Lanegan, left)

thing. What do I look for in a collaborator? Pretty much anyone who asks me to do something [laughs]. If it's something I'm into already, and I can see my part in it, I'll say yes. In fact, if I don't, it's usually because I don't have time, but I rarely get asked to do stuff I don't think is cool.

You co-wrote "Kimiko's Dream House", from 2001's *Field Songs*, with Jeffrey Lee Pierce. What was he like?

Amina Jindani, Tooting

I remember him showing me videos

"Screaming Trees was 15 years of pretty heavy dysfunction!"

of him throwing bottles at people's heads from the stage. He was like: "Man, I can't believe I did that." I was a fan before we became good friends. Probably my favourite singer of all time. Through knowing him, I really learnt how to write. He'd show me nuts and bolts. Play the bass part of *Hot Buttered Soul* backward to start a song, things like that. Pretty much all the stuff I ever loved was never popular in its day. The Gun Club had one brief period of semi-popularity after *Mother Juno*. I think most people who were into them ended up having bands of their own.

What was it like living with Dylan Carlson? Peter Brenx, Paris
We shared a house in the late '80s and also the late '90s. Dylan's got the biggest heart I've ever known. He's one of a kind and a great



musician. He was putting Earth together and we lived with Joe Preston, who was later in The Melvins, and Slim Moon, who later had the Kill Rock Stars label. Those guys were in Earth with Dylan. We lived in a three-storey house, my bedroom was at the top and they rehearsed in the basement. They'd vibrate my entire room. It was two basses and Dylan's guitar playing the lowest, slowest grumble. I even learned to sleep with it. Yeah, good times! I finally got to sing on an Earth record this year.

How did your collaborations with Josh Homme evolve?

Harry Sharpe, Luton

He was in the Trees from 1996 until we ended in 2000. It just started out with that, becoming friends. He asked me to sing on the first Queens record, but I was unable to. When the second one came round, he was doing that in LA where I live, so I was able to take part. Then one thing led to another. I did one Desert Session, too, just for a day.

STAR QUESTION



Enquiring minds wish to know more about *The Fertilichrome Cheerleader Massacre...* **Jack Endino, producer**

Dude, come on. Give me a fuckin' break. It's something Steve Fisk, a guy who produced the early Screaming Trees records, was involved with. I shot a couple of scenes I'm pretty sure never came out. What do I remember about it? I just remember I'd rather not remember. Thanks Jack. Yeah, Jack's responsible for a number of very great records in his time. But a number of crappy questions also. At least one I can count.

How has your writing process changed over the years?

Sheldon Marker, Toronto

When I started making that first record for Sub Pop, I was working in a warehouse. At the end of every day I'd come up with a vocal melody in my head then go home and try to find chords to go along with it, which of course always ended up being the same two or three chords in every song. That was a backwards way of doing it. If I'm at home I use a guitar, a keyboard or something. Then usually I record it into my phone and send it to my laptop. I use GarageBand. I guess the plan is that you come out with music, more music and then the voice – and not the other way round. Which I think is a lot easier to do this way. ☺

Phantom Radio is available now on Heavenly; Mark Lanegan's UK tour starts on January 16

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the hot-seat next month
and to post your questions!

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2015 ALBUMS PREVIEW

One album features drums that sound like Amazonian paddles. Another was recorded after its maker had designed a sports car. A third's sessions ended in time for *Emmerdale*...

Welcome to *Uncut*'s essential preview of 2015, featuring

PAUL WELLER, LAURA MARLING, BOB DYLAN, DAVID GILMOUR, KEITH RICHARDS, ALABAMA SHAKES, MY MORNING JACKET, MATTHEW E WHITE, GRAHAM NASH, BILL FAY and many more...

LAURA MARLING

Title Short Movie | **Label** Virgin | **Released** March

The LA-based singer-songwriter goes electric (sort of) on her Jodorowsky-inspired fifth

LAURA MARLING: I've been living in LA the last two years. I think a lot of this record is about feeling – not consciously, but in retrospect – desperately lost in translation. I had an old mentor, an American chap, who kept saying to me, "It's a short movie, man", which I thought was quite funny, so there are lots of Americanisms like that in it. There's one track called "A Small Poke". It's about the terminology I've begun to use while living here, those little things you have to rearrange like 'downtown' or 'trash' or 'cell phone'. I wrote "A Small Poke" a long time ago, but seem to have forgotten about it. It was when I was in New York during Hurricane Sandy. The horror of being in an enormous metropolis with no power, the apocalyptic nature of that, must be horrible for everyone involved – but there's a general feeling of fear in America. Well, America induces this fear in me. It's so vast and so complicated. I feel like I'm here as a weird voyeur, watching it in a really strange way to make sense of it. Like the landscape of the desert, then you go four hours further north and

you're in the lush mountainous forests. You feel dwarfed by the country, which I don't think I felt in England. So quite a lot of the record is about that.

I wrote the album in America at the beginning of

2014, but we recorded it in London. My long time drummer Matt [Ingram] runs Urchin Studios in Hackney. It's absolutely teeny-tiny. There was me, Matt – also engineering – and Nick Pini,

who plays bass in my band. He's quite in demand. He's definitely too highbrow for my band, he's really good! On strings, I had Tom Fiddle, who's played in Noah And The Whale for a long time, and Ruth de Turberville, who's been my cello player forever. I wrote the record on electric guitar, but I play electric like I do acoustic. It's not gonna be groundbreaking. I've managed to resist the EDM!

I think we did 14 songs and there's 11 on the record. So yeah, only three didn't make the cut. What's the criteria for making the cut? This is the first record that I've done without a producer; it's more of a three-way effort between me, Matt and Dan [Cox; *Urchin*]. So we sat down and put a lot of care into ordering the record once we'd done it all. There were things that clearly didn't fit into the narrative or didn't jump out as being relevant to the record, so that was it, really.

I always get into things quickly and then I get over them and I don't pursue them. So last year while I was making the record, I decided that if I was going to get into a certain writer, I was going to read everything they'd done, so I can just really understand what they're about. So I did all of Jodorowsky's films and books.

A lot of the ideas on the album are filtered through him, and then I also read Rilke and Walt Whitman and a couple of female poets.

The opening track is called "Warrior". It's a story about a horse throwing off his warrior – or her warrior – and the horse deciding that the warrior is not noble enough. "Warrior" is a Jodorowsky reference. There's a song called "Gurdjieff's

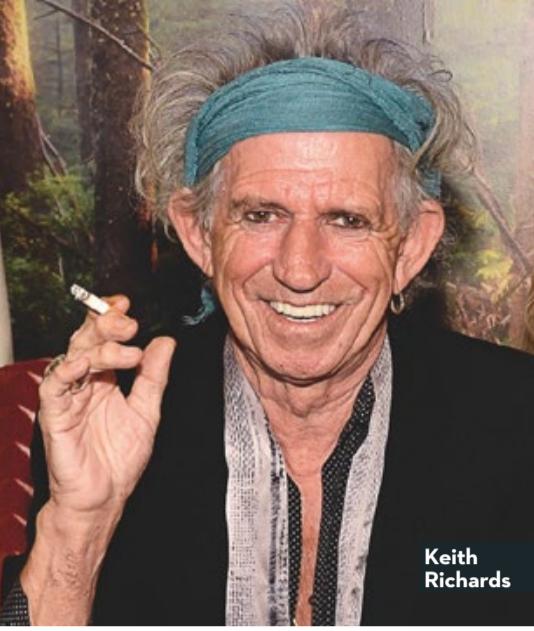
Daughter". I was reading Jodorowsky's biography, and there's this absolutely brilliant moment where he meets Gurdjieff's daughter. Gurdjieff is like a spiritual teacher, a philosophical cult leader, and his daughter tracked Jodorowsky down at a premiere of *El Topo* in Mexico City to tell him he needed to brush up on his metaphysical skills because he was going to be a really important part of humanity. She said, "I've been sent to teach you all these things." They ended up in a hotel room together, and she reeled off this list of his sayings, his rules for living, of how to be a moral human being. I pretty much turned that verbatim into a song. Like one of them is 'Don't share orders for the pleasure of being obeyed' and another is 'Don't be impressed by big personalities'.

One interesting thing in the way we recorded the album was me and Matt did all of the takes, all in a row, then we got the strings in and we did two blind takes with them. We told them the key and where the chords were going. Then we panned the strings left and right, so they sounded like strange background noise. Then there's a melodic take where they were more accustomed to the songs. My idea was to have a metallic, urban sound. Living where I've been living, there's always a fucking helicopter, there's always the sound of a city behind you. So I wanted to have that weird background disturbance all the way through the record.

"My idea for this album was to have a metallic, urban sound"

**"It's not gonna be
groundbreaking..."**
Laura Marling in Los
Angeles, November 2014





Keith Richards

KEITH RICHARDS

Title: *Unconfirmed*
Label: *Unconfirmed*
Release date: *Autumn*

Stone's long-awaited third solo album is on the horizon

It's been 22 years since Keith Richards last released a solo album. It would be churlish to accuse him of tardiness, after all, his day job – not to say the occasional literary endeavour – have otherwise kept him busy. We know for certain that he first broached this latest album in 2011, when he revealed to American chat show host Jimmy Fallon that work with X-Pensive Winos conspirator Steve Jordan was "starting to blossom". Fast forward to September 2014, and Richards was in a position to talk more about the record. He told Associated Press that the album, recorded at New York's Germano Studios, was finished; he intended to wait for the Stones to wind up their latest batch of touring commitments. "We had

no rush. I think we spent a couple of years. Steve and I are always working somewhere else, but every month or two we'd come down here and do a couple a day and knock off a couple of tracks... Nearly every record I've made is... 'You've got another five days,' but this one we're taking our time."

COURTNEY BARNETT

Title: *Sometimes I Just Sit And Think And Sometimes I Just Sit*

Label: *Anxiety/ Marathon*
Release date: *March*

Australian singer-songwriter follows up her acclaimed EPs with a "fresh" full-length...

COURTNEY BARNETT: Where does the title come from? When I was a kid, there was this poster at my grandma's house. We used to fly down or drive to Melbourne from Sydney to have Christmas with my grandma and grandpa and I always liked it. I was visiting her last year and I saw it again and wrote it down. It's pretty much a collection of songs from the last year, since I released the second EP. Some of the songs are a tiny bit older, but I was never able to finish them, frustratingly. The band is a lot more solid. The album was recorded in 10 days, as opposed to the first two EPs which were all different musicians and a lot of different time and place. This feels a bit more cohesive. I only showed the boys the songs a week or so before we

started recording. I like to keep it fresh and interesting. The songs are a pretty good mix; some are happy and positive and some of it's pretty dark. There is a song about having a crush at the swimming pool, called "Aqua Profunda". There's another song called "Pedestrian At Best", which is about expectation and perceptions. The chorus is, "Put me on a pedestal and I will only disappoint you".

in 1970 and '71, that's something I'm thinking about – but that'd be a harder project than 1974, and I don't have the heart for it right now.

During the CSN tour last year, I started to write a lot of lyrics. I would hand them over to Shane Fontayne, our other guitar player in the CSN band. I would send him lyrics at two in the morning, and by ten o'clock in the morning he'd write back with a melody. We wrote nine songs in two weeks. Songs haunt me inside my head until they're out there, and then it leaves a lot of room for more. Shane and I have got a great band together. It's Jay Bellerose and his wife Jennifer Condos, who are the main rhythm section for T Bone Burnett, and Patrick Warren, incredible piano player, and Todd Caldwell, who is the organ player in the CSN band. I'm very happy with it, it's a very funky sound for me. Several of the songs are the very first take we did. We've been in the studio for four and a half days so far and we've already cut 14 tracks.

"We've been in the studio for four days and cut 14 songs!"

GRAHAM NASH

GRAHAM NASH

Title: *Unconfirmed*
Label: *Unconfirmed*
Released date: *Unconfirmed*

A "very funky" solo album is in the works, along with ideas for more CSNY archive sets

GRAHAM NASH: After the CSNY 1974 boxset, there are a couple of other things that could happen. We filmed and recorded CSNY at the Fillmore East

NEW ORDER

Title: *Unconfirmed*
Label: *Mute*
Release date: *September*

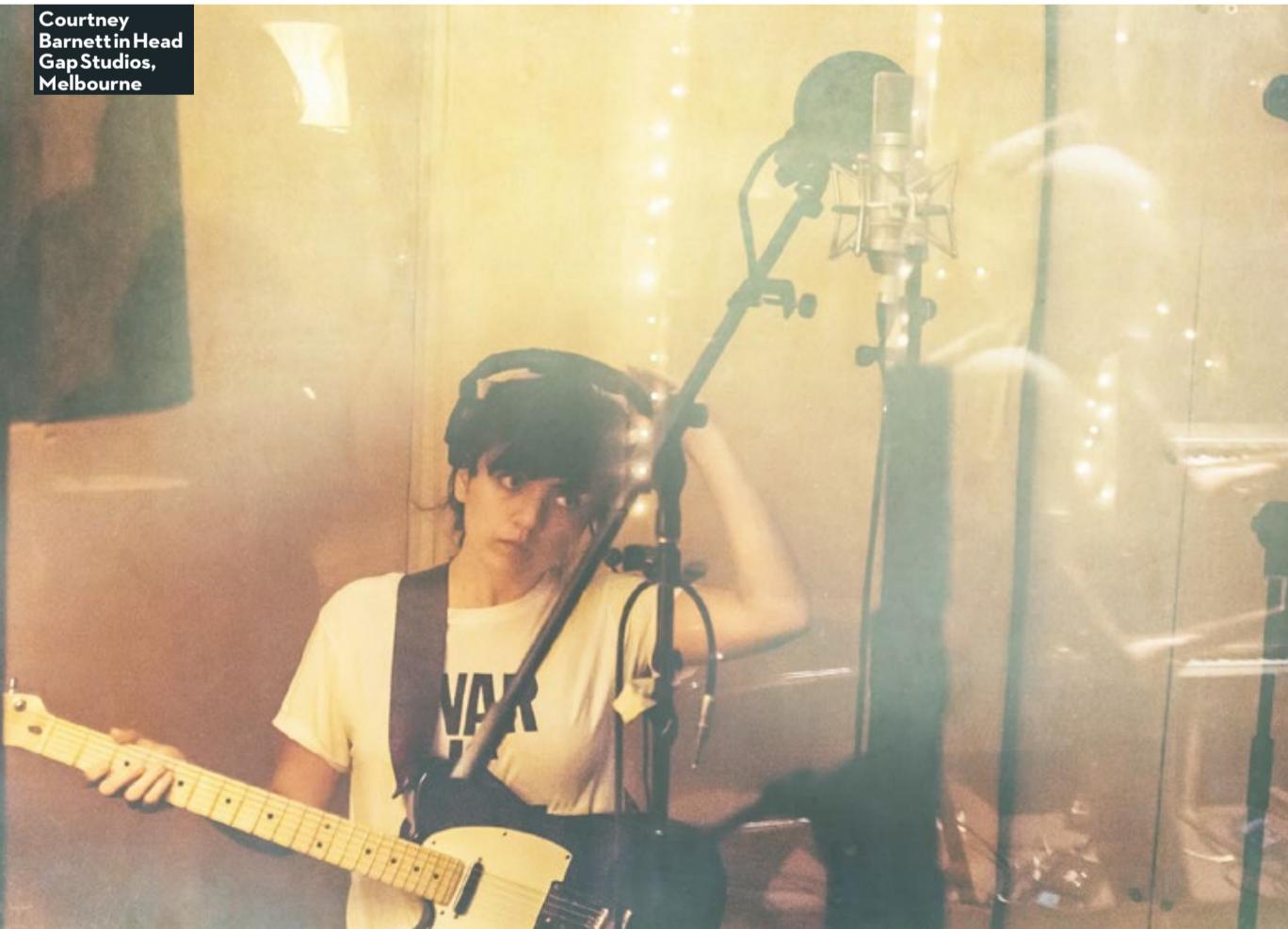
Some synth songs, some guitar songs... and jazz?



STEPHEN MORRIS: I live in the studio. In the good old days, you had to spend money to go to the place with

a mixing desk. They gave you sandwiches and stuff. Now you have to provide your own bloody crisps. I get up at 6 o'clock. I come in and record some drums. I finish at 12. Then the guitar's down from 12 'til 6, then I'll probably have a cup of tea and watch *Emmerdale*. Bernard [Sumner] has written some synth songs and Tom [Chapman] and Phil [Cunningham] have written some guitar songs. There's one called "The Game", but it might not be called that anymore. It started off as a folk song but then it turned into a jazz song. That's the ones where you can see where they're going. "Tutti Frutti" is a kind of Chic-y one, but that's just a working title. Why did we sign with Mute? Everybody felt like it would be good to go back with an indie label. We've known Daniel Miller for ages. He's done all right. He never opened a club, which was probably a good idea.

Courtney Barnett in Head Gap Studios, Melbourne





PAUL WELLER

Title **Saturn's Pattern** | Label **Parlophone** | Released **Spring 2015**

The sonik adventurer explores multi-part epics on his “defiantly 21st-Century” new LP

PAUL WELLER: I think it's one of the best things I've done.

And it's been a pleasure doing it. There's been no headaches.

There's nine tracks, but it's still 45 minutes of music or something like that. I can't compare it to any of my other albums. I think it's different – not just for me, but different from what else is around. It's been pretty quick, really. We did a bit of work before the summer, then I took a break because I was out on the road. We started back in October. It's taken us a couple of months, maybe.

The tracks are quite long, but with some of them there's almost like two or three different movements going on within one song. There's a track called “Pick It Up” which starts off with a funk groove but then it's got some other sort of weird changes in it, and it ends up with this anthemic chorus. There's another tune called “In The Car” which has three or four different parts to it. Is it my prog album? It's certainly progressive in

the literal sense of the word. It's defiantly 21st-Century music.

Let me talk you through a track. There's one song called “I'm Where I Should Be”.

Before we quit one night I put down this bass riff and I left it at that. Stan [Jan Kybert; co-producer] put a beat behind it a few weeks later and we both realised then that it could go somewhere. We built on that,

adding some chords and some different instruments and finding different little sections for it. We used Pro-Tools as well. The whole editing on that is fucking brilliant. Some of the possibilities, you couldn't do it with tape, it would take years to do. But I think we used

that to capacity, in a good way. So we just tried different sections then inserted them into the song, just built the

arrangement up and then put a melody on it and the lyrics.

There's three or four really lovely love songs on the album, too. Lyrically, a lot of it is quite abstract... well, at first it appears abstract, but I started seeing different meanings in some of the songs over the course of the last few weeks or months.

Do I have any examples? To be honest, people have to find their own meaning of the words. Some are apparent, some aren't. Some I just like the sound of the words. It's a mixture of all those things.

The band is pretty much the usual people: Steve Cradock, Andy Lewis, and who else... Raven Bush from Syd Arthur played a bit of violin and the Syd lads did some backing vocals on a couple of tracks. Steve Brookes, my old mate from Woking, is on “City Streets” and he's also played some

great slide guitar on “In The Car”. It was all done at Black Barn. We mixed there as well. We got the sound together down there now.

Are there any interesting instruments? Not that I can think of. You can always make one up though. The kazoo through a fuzzbox – that was an interesting sound. But, no. I'm playing a variety of different things really. Guitar and bass and keyboards. Then Ben Gordelier, who's our percussion player and drummer in The Moons, he played pretty much on all the tracks. Fucking great drumming.

Most of the writing was done in the studio. I still enjoy starting with nothing – or very little – and building it up, just seeing where it goes. I wasn't really trying songs out with the band particularly. The band have played on the record, of course – but a lot of it is left to chance really, or serendipity. I've probably got two notepads worth of lyrics and ideas and words for this record. Most of them won't get any further than the page. But I dip in and out of it. Almost like a cut-up thing but different, just picking things out. There's always a paragraph or a couplet or whatever it may be. It's all just trial and error. But at the moment, it fires me up more than traditional songwriting.

“The album's certainly progressive in the literal sense of the word”

Brittany Howard
in Nashville's
Sound Emporium
studio, 2014



ALABAMA SHAKES

Title **Unconfirmed** | Label **Rough Trade** | Released **April/May**

The rootsy rockers look to the future and embrace Funkadelic and Western soundtracks

BRITTANY HOWARD: We did a bunch of the record in Nashville, at the Sound Emporium, and we mixed it at Ocean Way in Los Angeles. As of now, we have about 18 songs, and we have to figure out what's going to go on the record. I feel like when we sit down and listen to the record, the one we pick will make sense. We started working on it a year ago, and we've been in the studio here and there. We've done a few things that are independent of this album – a song for *12 Years A Slave* and we put out a new song with Mercedes. We had "Makin' Me Itch" lying around so we recorded it for this little commercial in a friend's house.

For the album, we're working with Blake Mills. I was really into his first record [*Break Mirrors*], and when we were thinking about using a co-producer, Blake was the first person who came to mind. I'm glad because he got it, he sees the vision

we're going for. That's what you want. It's like working with your pal.

This time, my songwriting has really been tested. I wanted to write something interesting that I'm excited about; not necessarily, you know, writing the same words over and over again. One thing I've always been fascinated with is the future. Do you remember in the '60s, when everybody was really excited about space travel? They had all this idea of what the future

looked like, even though it was completely inaccurate. So it's like writing songs for that. We have a lot of working titles, but one song we definitely have a title for is "Gemini".

The story here is that I'd set my studio up in the kitchen, because it's too cold in the basement. I'd be fooling around on my computer, trying to find something that I can dig into. I've got this little Midi keyboard, I can't stop playing with it. Anyway, I started writing music. Then I went and got a short story I had written and I tried to fit as many

words in there as I could. I took the demo when we went to the studio, showed it to the guys. They thought it was really cool, so "Gemini" was the first song we cut in the studio for this record.

There's also a song called "Get To", which I guess is a bit like, if ET was in a band what kind of music would they play? It's also inspired by R'n'B music from the '60s. We wrote the music first together, then I had to come up with

words for it, which is more difficult because I never had a clear vision of what the song was going to be about, all I knew was that it sounded cool.

The album is all sorts of music. I've been listening to Funkadelic, composers like David Axelrod. I really like when soul singers cover opera, like how does Aretha Franklin or Aaron Neville sing opera? I'll always listen to Curtis Mayfield, but sometimes you wanna hear something that's really far-out. I've been getting into soundtracks, like old spaghetti Westerns. There's some punk tracks on the record I'm very excited about.

We never just go to the studio and jam. Usually there's an idea, even if it isn't totally fleshed out. Because if I'm writing on a Midi keyboard, I don't want to make an electronic album, I wanna make a real organic instruments album. The real thing always sounds better. So then it's figuring out which instruments are going to go with this. It's been really cool because our last record wasn't written like that so much. Because the last record took three years to write, we had three years to figure out what we wanted to do. But this one was like, "OK, we need some songs." I guess it's a different process doing a sophomore album.

"One song sounds like the music ET's band would play"

BRITTANY HOWARD



MMJ in Panoramic House Studio, Stinson Beach, California, 2014

MY MORNING JACKET

Title: **Unconfirmed**

Label: **ATO**

Release date: **Spring**

An epic sojourn in the studio, which could lead to two brand new albums

JIM JAMES: About a year ago, we got together out in Stinson Beach, California, which is about an hour north of San Francisco, and starting working on this. It's the longest it's even taken us to make a record. We were out in Stinson Beach for about a month recording and then in Louisville, and then in Portland. We've been mixing in Portland for about a month. We recorded 24 songs, ten are going to be on this record. We divided them up into what we feel are two really cool records. We are trying to focus on this one for now because we know this one feels good, but in about six months from now we are going to get together and see how the other half feels. We've never done it like this. Because this album took a year to make, I see a lot of the seasons in this record. There is a song called "Spring", which doesn't take a lot to work out. I see waterfalls and I see leaves blowing and I see plants dying. I see those kinds of images throughout this record. I'm producing it and Tucker Martine is co-producing with me like he did on *Circuital*.

"It's the longest it's ever taken us to make a record!"

JIM JAMES

GANG OF FOUR

Title: **What Happens Next**

Label: **Membran**

Release date: **March**

The caustic post-punks examine London, the "capital city of the world"...

ANDY GILL: The album is to do with identity, what we are and what we think we're doing. I wrote the bulk of "First World Citizen" in the '80s. That's about someone coming from the undeveloped world to the First World and what that experience is like. "England's In My Bones" is about what it means to live in England now, against a backdrop of splintering identities. The other theme is railing against fixed ideologies – particularly religious and political ideologies that don't accept subtleties and complications and the finer shades of grey.

We started work on it about two and a half years ago. It's very much

a London record. But the thing about London, it's a very diverse place. Money, capital, ideas and cultures flow through London to a greater extent than anywhere else. It is almost like the capital city of the world. Initially, I wanted the river on the sleeve because the Thames is almost like an analogy for the flow of wealth and ideas and culture and people in and out of London. But in the end it crystallised around the Shard. It somehow encapsulates both the excitement of all this stuff going on and also the terror of it. It's both a London and international album, for the reasons mentioned.

HOT CHIP

Title: **Unconfirmed**

Label: **Domino**

Release date: **May**

Trainers, tractors and fried chicken all promised on the Londoners' sixth...



ALEXIS TAYLOR: It's more expansive, more R&B, more breezy than *In Our Heads*. We started first recording in a

break from touring the last record and quickly had two songs that are pretty central to this record. Then we've been recording in short bursts throughout the year. There are songs about love, wine, fried chicken, nightclubs, trainers, but no caps or hoodies. "Why Make Sense" sounds like a weird overloaded rock song full of chimpanzees banging on bongos. We hit a tractor with big sticks and fed Midi into an upright piano. Are there any guests on the album? Zero Mostel and Gene Wilder produced it.

DANNY CLINCH; STEVE GULLICK





BOB DYLAN

Title *Shadows In The Night*

Label Columbia | Released February 3

Bob fulfils an ambition and records a full set of Sinatra covers

Writing in *Chronicles Volume 1*, Bob Dylan noted, “I used to play the phenomenal ‘Ebb Tide’ by Frank Sinatra a lot and it never failed to fill me with awe... when Frank sang that song, I could hear everything in his voice – death, God and the universe, everything.”

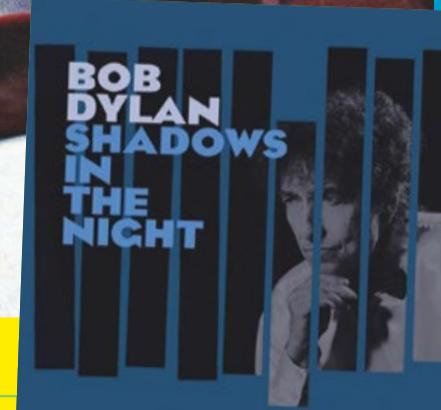
Evidently, Dylan continues to be a fan of Ol’ Blue Eyes. For *Shadows In The Night*, his 36th studio album, Dylan and his band have recorded 10 songs popularised by Sinatra during the 1940s. But although it features standards including “The Night We Called It A Day” and “Some Enchanted Evening”, Dylan himself insists it’s not a covers record.

“It was a real privilege to make this album,” he explains. “I’ve wanted to do something like this for a long time but was never brave enough to approach 30-piece complicated arrangements and refine them down for a five-piece band. That’s the key to all these performances. We knew these

“Me and my band are lifting these songs out of the grave and into the light”

birthday tribute in 1995.

Back to *Shadows...* and Dylan says, “I don’t see myself as covering these songs... They’ve been covered enough. Buried, as a matter of fact. What me and my band are basically doing is uncovering them. Lifting them out of the grave and bringing them into the light.”



Under covers:
Bob Dylan

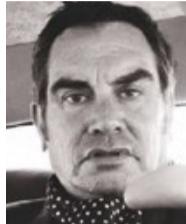
THE POP GROUP

Title: *Citizen Zombie*

Label: *Freaks R Us*

Release date: February

The Bristol avant-punks recruit Paul Epworth to helm their first LP in 35 years...



MARK

STEWART: We always said if we were ever gonna reform and re-release the old stuff, then we

wanted to do something new that was interesting to us now.

I’ve been checking Paul Epworth’s stuff since he was a kid, and it’s a very, very interesting juxtaposition, him producing us. But the thing is we always thought we were a pop group. For me, Paul’s stuff is weird in its own way, even that James Bond stuff [Adele’s “Skyfall”]. He was really, really into experimenting. Basically, Paul is the best producer in the world, and he helped us experiment to the millionth degree, and for me it’s like a dream come true.

As soon as we got in a room, it was like four Staffordshire bull terriers and sparks just immediately started to fly. We had no preconceptions... the point of The Pop Group was not to be The Pop Group again. I’m really shocked at what has come out... Paul gave us the strength to make some of our mad ideas into reality – me and Gareth would be saying, ‘we want the drums to sound like Amazonian paddles’ or something... The weirdest thing we used? This weird noise generator from the New Zealand air force from the 1950s or ‘60s. They had to get this special generator to run it. It just looked so cool. We processed a lot of things through it.



Kurt Vile in Philadelphia’s Uniform Recording, 2014

STEVE GUNN & KURT VILE

Title: *Steve Gunn & Kurt Vile*

Label: *Three Lobed*

Release date: Spring/Summer

The two Philly guitarists cover Nico and Newman, and try a couple of their own cuts



STEVE GUNN:

We put together the album in our friend Jeff Ziegler’s studio in Philadelphia. He worked on a lot of

Kurt’s previous albums, he helped record the last War On Drugs record. We did some covers. I

covered a Nico song, “Sixty Forty”.

Kurt did some covers as well. He did a John Prine cover, “Way Back Then”, and a Randy Newman song called “Pretty Boy”. I wrote a

longish, pretty repetitive song called “Spring Garden”. It’s a street where Jeff’s studio is on. I grew up in Philadelphia and I knew that

street particularly well when I was in my late teens. When I was trying to come up with this song for the

project, I was thinking of being at this place and some of the fun stories of previous experiences when I was that age. I just laid it

down and Kurt plays on it, and our friend Mary Lattimore, a harp player, who played on my last album and Kurt’s album. She

helped us with a lot of the instrumentation, so it was the three of us and Jeff cutting the



Teenage Fanclub’s Norman Blake and engineer David Henderson record in Provence’s Studio Vega, 2013



Beirut's Zach Condon in his basement studio

songs. We were all taking up different instruments.

TEENAGE FANCLUB

Title: *Unconfirmed*
Label: Pema
Release date: Summer

Fuelled by Provence's finest wine, the Fannies channel the Buzzcocks and bossa nova

NORMAN BLAKE: It's well on the way to being complete, though we still have to mix it. We started recording about a year and a half ago, at a fantastic place in the South of France. They have an old EMI desk which apparently the Stones recorded with in the early '70s. We went there for about a month, and got lots of backing tracks recorded, drank lots of great wine. It was in the foothills of Mont Ventoux, there was a local musician cooking for us and bringing us wine, so the whole experience was fantastic.

The plan was to reconvene about six months later, and of course that became a year, because that just seems to be the way we do things. But it's almost done. It will be five years since our last release, and the plan is we'll tour it extensively, so I'm looking forward to that. I think we're all keen on being a bit more productive and getting albums out every couple of years in the future.

On one song I'm channeling the Buzzcocks, it's a fast punk rock song, and then I've got something that's quite heavily orchestrated with strings and a harp. There's a bossa nova-influenced one too, with lots of Latin percussion, so some of the tracks are quite different! I'm pretty happy with it.

BILL FAY

Title: *Who Is The Sender?*
Label: Dead Oceans
Release date: February

The singer and pianist follows up 2012's return with a very thankful new record



BILL FAY: The title track is really a tribute to music itself. I see myself as a song-finder rather than a songwriter. All the chords are there before any singer-songwriter comes along. The starting point is the chord sequence and the feeling you get from it. There is a sort of mystery involved in that. The title track is shifting the credit from the writer on to that mysterious thing called music.

Sometimes I found going back to the topline on an older [unreleased] song, a completely new topline can appear, and with that completely different words – but some of the songs are completely new.

This album is really down to Joshua Henry [who produced 2012's *Life Is People*]. He set up a café in Nevada City, then emailed me seven months ago and said, "I need a break, Bill, can we do another album?" The label financed 13 days at Konk Studios. Fortunately, the same personnel that were on the last album became available. We also had Ray Russell and Alan Rushton on a rework of "I Hear You Calling" [originally on 1971's *Time Of The Last Persecution*] too.

The album's not a major departure. The subject matter is still spiritual, yes, all my songs have lyrically reflected where I was

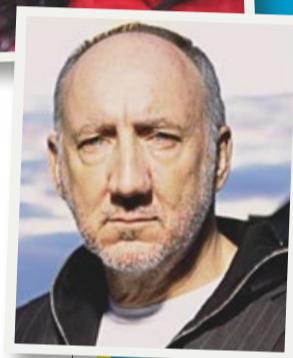
at inside. People rediscovering my music is touching, but I just carry on finding songs.

BEIRUT

Title: *Unconfirmed*
Label: Unconfirmed
Release date: Autumn

Condon's food-related fourth album is slowly taking shape...

ZACH CONDON: Maybe two years ago, we rented a house for Coachella. The band spent an entire week there writing and playing songs. We've just been touring ever since. Have I been stockpiling songs since? Yes and no, I never really stopped writing. But the truth is I did for a minute. That's because for the most part I've been in Istanbul, jumping in and out. I met a very sweet Turkish girl who I'm engaged to. So now I came home and all my shit is strewn out across New York, but that's fine. I've got a studio in Dumbo and one here in East Williamsburg: a piano here, a pump organ there, and I also have hard drives in both. I basically have songs scattered. I have about 12 or 15 that I'll stick with. When I go to the studio I name the songs, just as placeholders, after meals I ate on the way there. I have one song called "Dim Sum", a song called "Kebabs". I have three songs that are named after burgers. It's kind of funny because a few days ago, our bass player had to take my hands off the Space Echo on one of the songs. I love it to death but it can be abused.



ON THE HORIZON...

INCOMING...

Although we might have to wait a little longer than anticipated for a follow-up to *Let England Shake*, **PJ HARVEY** will release her first book of poetry – *The Hollow Of The Hand* is due October and is a collaboration with Seamus Murphy, who created films for *LES...*

NOEL GALLAGHER'S HIGH FLYING BIRDS

return in March with *Chasing Yesterday*, produced by Mr Gallagher himself: expect saxophones and "space jazz"...

Clearly never tiring of his storied 1973 rock opera, *Quadrophenia*,

PETE TOWNSHEND

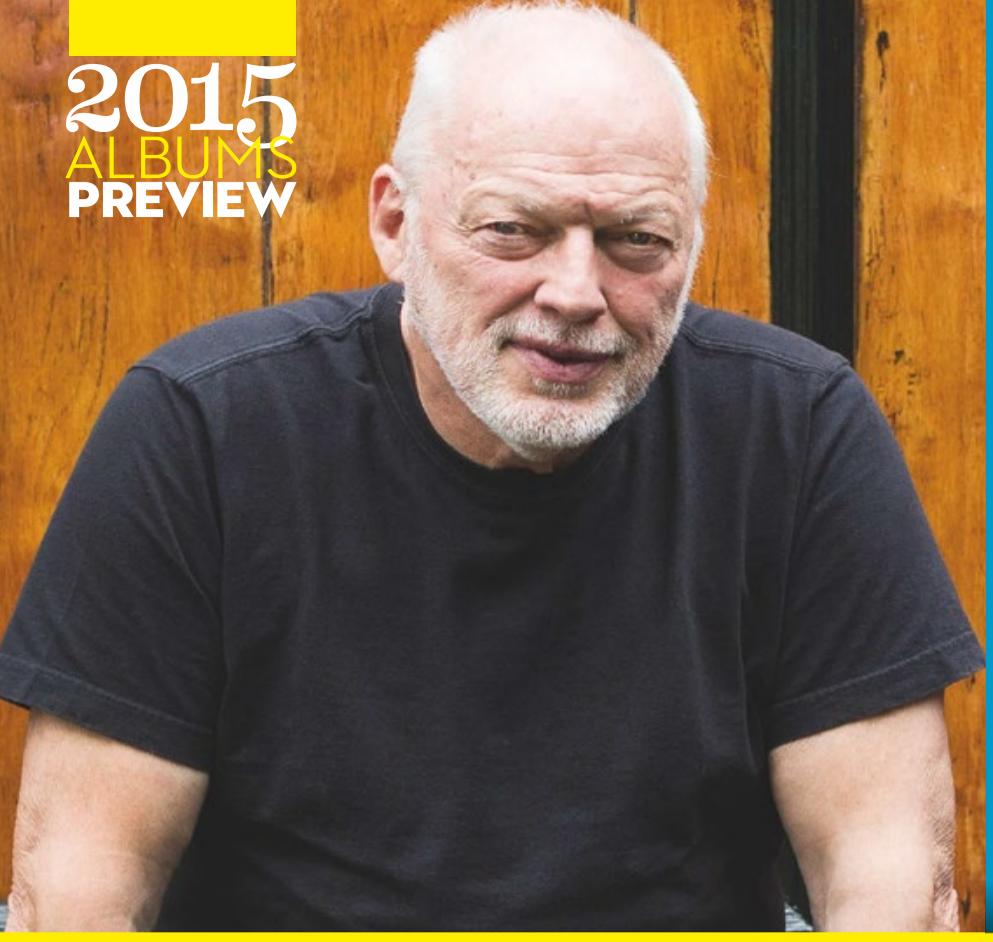
has reinvented it for orchestra, opera singer and choir. "A lot of major symphony orchestras are in trouble

because their audience is getting old and the younger audiences prefer softer stuff," he explains. "I think that *Quadrophenia* would reinvigorate their audiences and bring in people who might not otherwise go to see an orchestra perform without lights and fireworks and a movie screen." The album is due in June, with a premiere on July 5 at the Royal Albert Hall...

SEASICK STEVE reveals *Sonic Soul Surfer* in March, which was recorded in the front room of his farm, "just me and Dan [Magnusson; drummer] sitting there drinking and playing"...

DON HENLEY's long-delayed *Cass County* is tentatively due in the summer. "The material on it is a reflection of a part of my musical foundation," he explained to Canada's Jam!

Music in 2013. "Songs I heard on the radio and on my parents' record player in the '50s and '60s."... **MARK KNOPFLER** releases his ninth, *Tracker*, in March. There will also be new LPs from **PRIMAL SCREAM**, **RAY DAVIES**, **MODEST MOUSE**, **THE ZOMBIES**, **METALLICA** and more...



DAVID GILMOUR

Title: *Unconfirmed*
Label: EMI | **Released:** Late 2015

After *The Endless River* closed the book on Pink Floyd, their leader is readying his own solo album

It's been an uncharacteristically busy period for Gilmour lately. In April 2014, he played guitar on Ben Watt's *Hendra* album; a few months later, in July the story broke of Pink Floyd's first studio album in 20 years, *The Endless River*. Next for Gilmour is his own new album: his first solo release since 2006's *On An Island*. The first mention of Gilmour's latest project came in November 2013, where Graham Nash revealed during a TV interview that he and David Crosby were due to visit Gilmour's home studio near Brighton to contribute vocals to a new album (the pair had previously appeared on the title track of *On An Island*). Aside from Nash and Crosby, Phil Manzanera has also confirmed his involvement in the record. More recently, on September 4, Gilmour's wife Polly Samson tweeted a further update: "Husband very trusting this afternoon: 'Can you just engineer me for a moment? Now, see that red button...'" Gilmour himself finally broke silence about the new record in October 2014, telling *Rolling Stone*, "It's coming along very well. There are some sketches that aren't finished, and some of them will be started again. There's a few months' work in it yet." Gilmour also spoke of his plans to undertake a tour of smaller venues; "Places like Radio City Music Hall sound like the right sort of vibe for me."

MATTHEW E WHITE

Title: *Fresh Blood*
Label: Domino
Release date: March

The hard-working Virginian tackles death and darkness on his soulful second album

MATTHEW E WHITE: I started writing in late December 2013, doing some light writing and stuff, but then I had to dig in, in March. I'd wake up in the morning and work all day on the record as long as I could. There's 10 songs. The first song on the record is called "Take Care, My Baby". The album's title, *Fresh Blood*, is from a

lyric in the song: "I'm pumping fresh blood for you". It goes all the way from being soft and orchestral in places to being very Marvin Gaye, almost psychedelic R&B: a combination of Burt Bacharach and *There's A Riot Goin' On*. There's a song about Philip Seymour Hoffman and his drug overdose called "Tranquility". I don't think there's been a celebrity death that's affected me more in my lifetime than his. I took it to heart, I don't remember being sad like that for a celebrity or public figure dying in my life. I had a friend whose mum killed herself. That was close to me, but far enough away where I could write about it a little bit. It's called "Circle 'Round The Sun". There's also one about

Matthew E White,
Richmond,
Virginia



"It's like Burt Bacharach meets *There's A Riot Goin' On*"

MATTHEW E WHITE

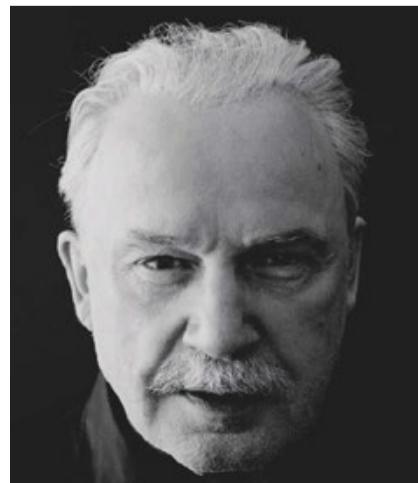
sexual abuse in the church called "Holy Moly". I wouldn't say the record is dark as much as those things are pretty rough, but there's a lot of celebration of joy and hope.

GIORGIO MORODER

Title: *Unconfirmed*
Label: Sony
Release date: March

Invigorated by his Daft Punk work, the producer returns with some disco... and EDM

GIORGIO MORODER: In the early '90s, I faded away from music a little bit. I had so many things I was working on. I designed a sports car, made some short movies, played a lot of golf. I was happy until Daft Punk and the DJ world got me back into music. I came back to LA in 2013. I have a small studio here. I make demos. I do drums, bass, keyboards, some



strings. When I worked in the '70s and '80s, I had the musicians in the studio. Now I have my guys, my musicians, some in LA, two guys in Germany. I send them the demo, they send me the first two minutes, I send back, we talk, it's almost like being in the studio. The new album has a good combination of some traditional disco sounds, like the violin, and some songs that are like EDM, with the more metallic, new sounds. I have maybe five or six songs at 128 tempo, the dance tempo, then some that are at 100, 115.

THE DEAD WEATHER

Title: *Unconfirmed*
Label: Third Man
Release date: *Unconfirmed*

After some stirrings, Jack White is preparing to get behind the drum kit again

It's been almost five years since Jack White's other band released *Sea Of Cowards*; though the group have kept eager fans busy in the interim. First, they released "Open Up (That's Enough)" and "Rough Detective" through Third Man Records' Vault subscription service; they then premiered a third track, "Buzzkill(er)". The message was reassuring: blistering riffs, howled vocals, hard-hitting choruses, everything pretty much as you'd expect from White and his pals. In a July 2014 concert at Detroit's Masonic Temple Auditorium, White was joined by fellow Weatherites Alison Mosshart and Dean Fertita for "I Cut Like A Buffalo", from the group's 2009 debut, *Horehound*. It was an excellent reminder of The Dead Weather's thrilling live skills, and a welcome taste of what to expect from their third studio album... 

INTERVIEWS BY MICHAEL BONNER AND TOM PINNOCK

fresh produce



sleater-kinney
no cities to love
released 19/01/2015 £10



the waterboys
modern blues
released 19/01/2015 £10



enter shikari
the mindsweep
released 19/01/2015 £10



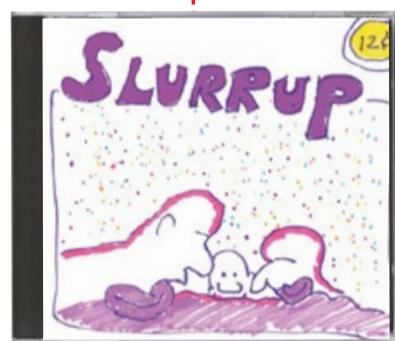
aqualung
10 futures
released 19/01/2015 £10



marilyn manson
the pale emperor
released 19/01/2015 £10



liam hayes
slurrup
released 12/01/2015 £10



panda bear
panda bear meets
the grim reaper
released 12/01/2015 £10



justin townes earle
absent fathers
released 12/01/2015 £9



mark ronson
uptown special
released 19/01/2015 £10



natalie prass
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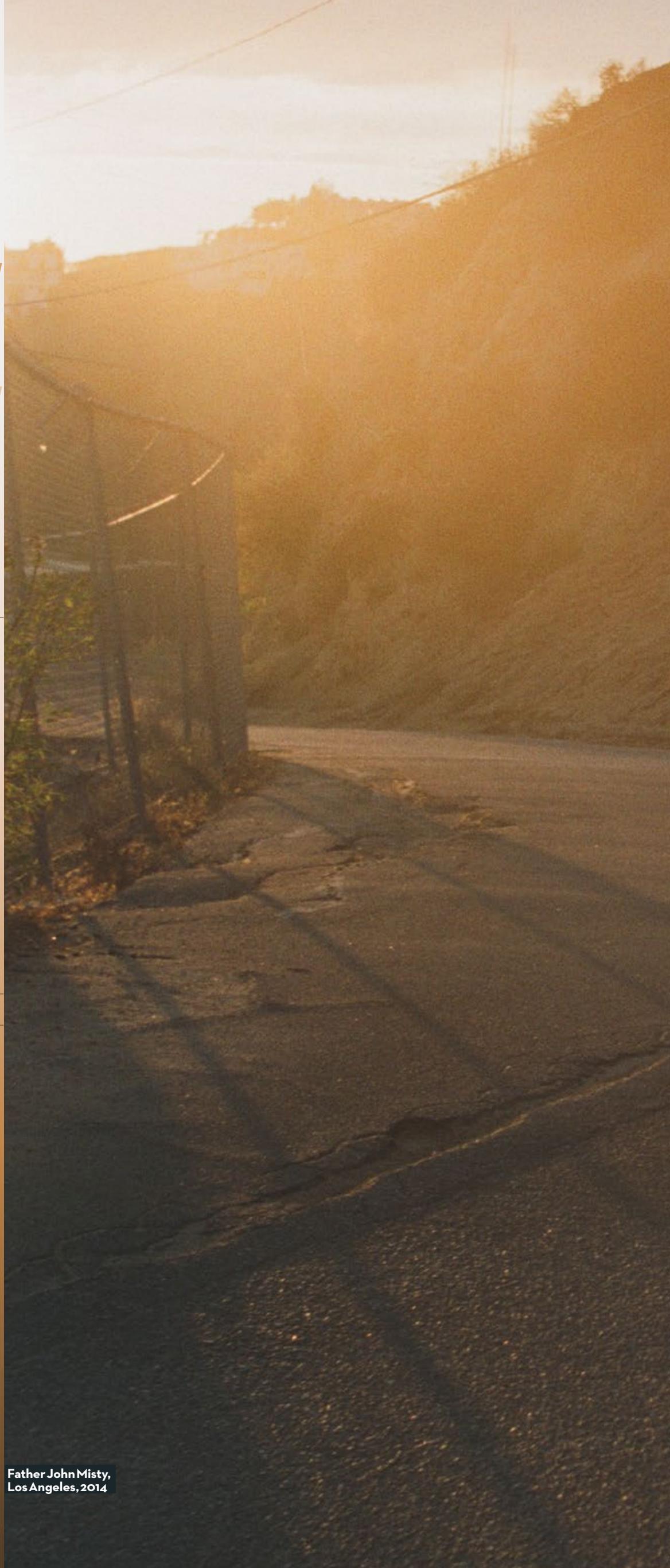
Play Misty for me

The strange tale of how Josh Tillman, hirsute drummer of the Fleet Foxes, became dapper solo sensation

FATHER JOHN MISTY.

Involves threesomes in LA, ghosts in New Orleans, naked mushroom epiphanies in Big Sur, and a healthy dose of "Mascara, blood, ash and cum". "I'm here," he claims, "to help liberate people. Maybe to liberate myself most of all."

Story: Jaan Uhelszki | **Photo:** Emma Tillman



Father John Misty,
Los Angeles, 2014





Hotel California:
the Chateau
Marmont, LA, 2014

A

LMOST EXACTLY ONE year ago, Josh Tillman, former Fleet Foxes drummer and full-time Father John Misty, and his new bride, Emma, moved to New Orleans. There was very little forethought, other than just a feeling they might like it there. "Why did we move here?" Tillman asks rhetorically, folding his tall 6ft 4in frame into a brown leather couch in his living room. Raking a hand through his beard and cracking his knuckles, he takes a long time to answer. "No good reason, really. I think the reason for moving is still revealing itself. I've only ever moved with an earthly ambition before," he says, putting extra emphasis on the last word, a signifier that this is something else altogether.

The couple – who only married in September 2013 under a cover of redwood trees in Big Sur, each with a crown of white flowers – didn't know anyone in New Orleans. They had no ties to the place – Tillman is from Rockville, Maryland, while Emma is an only child from Santa Barbara, California – but in the way of all genius ideas, it came to them in a moment's flash. Not the first one that Tillman ever had, either – it's usually how he travels from one place to another.

"The thing that makes Josh pretty extraordinary is he has these epiphanies and then he'll act on them," explains Casey Prescott, Fleet Foxes' former keyboardist and Tillman's best friend. "It's how he got to Seattle. It's how he got to LA, and how he moved to New Orleans. Most people just think about what they want to do. Josh always takes action."



With Emma Tillman,
outside the Late Show
With David Letterman,
The Ed Sullivan Theater,
New York, May 1, 2012

"I moved to Seattle to pursue music," continues Tillman. "Then I moved to LA to blow up my life, then we moved here just because we could. There was just a feeling that we could do whatever we wanted. And the prospect of moving was symbolic of that, especially moving somewhere where we didn't know anyone," he says, incessantly clicking the top of a ballpoint pen, emphasising every word. He is never at rest; and it's possible to understand why his parents got him a drum set at 11, to drain off some energy. This restlessness first afflicted him at Nyack College, a Christian university in upstate New York. "There was nothing I wanted to study. I couldn't engage. I took a perverse pleasure in failing," he says. By 2004, he knew he had to leave. "All I wanted to do was to play my music. I figured Seattle was the place to do it. There was a lot of fear and trembling that went into me leaving there and extricating myself from Christianity, which had been my entire world. But an epiphany that size requires leaving your family, moving to the other side of the country, all that. I do feel a responsibility to my internal world to act on those kinds of things when they come up."

So far his instincts have been correct. No matter that he didn't know anyone in Seattle. He got one of his demos to Seattle indie legend Damien Jurado, who brought him out on tour with him about a year later. He began a romance with Aja Pecknold, sister of Fleet Foxes leader Robin. When the band fired their drummer, the job was offered to Tillman. For the next four years, he was in one of the most successful folk ensembles of the past decade, with Fleet Foxes heralded as the spiritual descendants of CSN. But the trouble was, Josh Tillman didn't connect with the external pastoral world the Foxes inhabited, so after three albums he quit the band by email in January 2012 [see panel], following it up with a simple announcement on his Tumblr account: "Back into the gaping maw of obscurity." Hardly. Four months later, he'd released his ninth solo album, *Fear Fun*, the first recorded under the new moniker Father John Misty, all but instigating his own religion. "I'm not sure he'd tell you

this," begins his friend and producer Jonathan Wilson, "but I think Josh took his name from Father Yod, the guy who started the Source Family. He was searching for a way to bust out and become himself."

TILLMAN AND HIS wife moved to New Orleans on little more than an intuition. "When we got here, we had this fantasy that we were going to move to this haunted palace," he explains. "We found an unheated, haunted barn that's 10 blocks down the way from here. That might have been OK had we not moved in the middle of the polar vortex."

The couple signed a lease, moved in. Almost immediately, they moved out. "We lived there for three weeks and it had some really negative vibes," explains Emma, who looks unnervingly like a mythic sea nymph, with her dark curling hair, her bare feet as slender and bony as a ballerina's, and her blood-red lipstick. The newly-weds found friendlier spirits in the Marigny district, near a section of the city that the *New York Times* has taken to describing, somewhat accurately, as the Williamsburg of the South. But no matter how gentrified New Orleans may become, there's something of a spiritual miasma permeating the place, as befits "The Most Haunted City in America", a moniker that inspires many of its 9.28 million annual visitors to come looking for ghosts. Josh Tillman, on the other hand, came here to leave his ghosts behind. Just like all the other times. Or to quote Emily Dickinson: "One need not be a chamber to be haunted."

"The improbability of me living here made it more appealing," says Tillman. "That this isn't a place I'd normally belong." They live on a street filled with neat

rows of small wooden structures tiny as doll houses, all painted in primary colours. There is a 1972 black Chevy hearse with California license plates parked in front of a Cézanne-blue house. Very Neil Young circa 1963. Dark shutters and wrought-iron bars cover all the windows of the house. The interior is long and cavernous, filled with dark wood and jewel-coloured rugs

running the expanse of a hallway that gives you the sense of being inside a train. Each room feeds into the next, without dividing walls, ending in what looks like a billowy white tent, which hides a claw-foot bathtub. There's a Persian rug in the bathroom, atop it a pair of brown leather Moroccan slippers you could imagine Jimmy Page wearing. One wall is bright blue, and houses an oversized gardener's sink where you could either efficiently chop up a body or trim roses.

"We don't know anyone here. This is the extent of our world, pretty much," Tillman admits. "Emma wrote her first feature-length script this year. While she was doing it I was losing my goddamn mind, I was unable to..." he lets the words hang in the afternoon air, as if it's hard to continue. "Well, I wasn't able to do anything. It's only now, within the last few months, I'm able to do anything. My body moved here but my spirit was still back there [in LA]. A painting hangs in the foyer of the house, with a mirror embedded in the centre. Running across the top, in quaint, old-fashioned psychedelic script, the words "You Are Here".

"That was painted for us by the guy who painted the sign for the Laurel Canyon Country Store," Tillman says. "He [Spike Stewart] gave it to us as a wedding present." The market, a meeting place for the Canyon's glitterati in the

BUYERS' GUIDE

FUN, FEAR & FAITH

Josh Tillman on CD...



7/10

J TILLMAN
I WILL RETURN
KEEP RECORDINGS,
2004

Released first as a CD-R limited to 150 copies, Tillman's debut was a spare, stark affair, with his Southern Gothic yarns accompanied by minimal guitar plucking and occasional understated cello refrains. Later reissued on Keep Records as a twofer with its similarly austere follow-up, *Long May You Run, J Tillman* (2005).



J TILLMAN
VACILANDO TERRITORY BLUES

WESTERN VINYL, 2009

7/10 After the similarly low-key releases *Minor Works* (2006) and *Cancer And Delirium* (2007), Tillman's fifth was also his first since joining Fleet Foxes. It shares a similar, deep woods sound; subtly melodic, full of richly harmonised vocals.

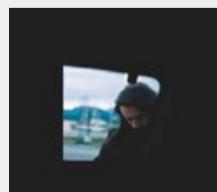


7/10

J TILLMAN
YEAR IN THE KINGDOM

WESTERN VINYL, 2009

Tillman's second LP in a year, it consists of more reflective, acoustic songs - key references include Neil Young and Will Oldham. More orchestrated than its predecessors, his sixth is nevertheless striking: "I possess a holy fear," he intones on the witchy, backwoods horror of "There Is No Good In Me".



8/10

J TILLMAN
SINGING AX

WESTERN VINYL, 2010

Recorded in three days by Steve Albini, Tillman's bleakest record is typically hot on apocalyptic

visions and biblical imagery. "Who will love a loveless thing/Betrayed by God/Exiled by beasts?" he asks on "Diamondback". Elsewhere, the haunting beauty of his guitar playing is discreetly complimented by Mellotron and soft, scurrying beats.



8/10

FATHER JOHN
MISTY
FEAR FUN

BELLA UNION, 2012

Produced by Jonathan Wilson, this captures some

of the mystique of Laurel Canyon when it sizzled - but it's the fractured memories, the metaphysics and blurry dream sequences, that gives this album its genius. Autobiographical to a fault and damn the fall-out, the former J Tillman may sound like Harry Nilsson, but he parties like Jimmy Page.



6/10

JOSH TILLMAN
HISTORY OF
CAVES

SUB POP, 2013

Sparse, moody soundtrack for the low-budget horror film written and

directed by his wife, Emma. The tale of a promiscuous father and his two children who keep devising supernatural ways to get rid of the women he romances, it relies on the music to set the mood - which it does beautifully, hinting at some of Tillman's hidden talents. Deft, understated and unnerving.



FATHER JOHN MISTY
I LOVE YOU, HONEYBEAR

BELLA UNION, 2015

8/10 More literal than its predecessor, Tillman has tried and succeeded in making his version of *Two Virgins*, chronicling his own unorthodox love story, complete with what he was doing the night before he met the future Mrs Tillman. Standout track: "When You're Smiling And Astride Me". He sings like Marvin Gaye, or at least a Chi-Lite.

"There was a lot of fear and trembling in extricating myself from Christianity"

JOSH TILLMAN

running the expanse of a hallway that gives you the sense of being inside a train. Each room feeds into the next, without dividing walls, ending in what looks like a billowy white tent, which hides a claw-foot bathtub. There's a Persian rug in the bathroom, atop it a pair of brown leather Moroccan slippers you could imagine Jimmy Page wearing. One wall is bright blue, and houses an oversized gardener's sink where you could either efficiently chop up a body or trim roses.

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"That was painted for us by the guy who painted the sign for the Laurel Canyon Country Store," Tillman says. "He [Spike Stewart] gave it to us as a wedding present." The market, a meeting place for the Canyon's glitterati in the

➔ early '70s, is where Tillman first met Emma in September 2011. It's at this storied location that Joni Mitchell wrote "Ladies Of The Canyon" and Graham Nash wrote "Our House". Jim Morrison, who lived close by, on 8021 Rothdell Trail, wrote 1968's "Love Street" about the market. Meanwhile, Tillman immortalised his own momentous encounter there with his future wife in "I Went To The Store One Day", from his new autobiographical homage to love and marriage, *I Love You, Honeybear*. "We met in a parking lot/I was buying coffee and cigarettes/Firewood and bad wine long since gone/But I'm still drunk and hot/Wide awake and breathing hard/And now in just one year's time/I've become jealous, rain-thin, prone to paranoia when I'm stoned/If this isn't true love someone ought to put me in a home".



DIFFERENT DRUM

"Everyone was on some weird ego trip..."

Tillman on why he left Fleet Foxes

After four years behind the drum kit, Tillman quit the Fleet Foxes in 2012. "It confounded me," he says now. "Everyone was on some weird ego trip. Myself included. There were certain aspects of the band I was just not jiving with. I felt the sentimentality about the wilderness and otherness and these external worlds was just symptomatic of a certain type of affluence. I just thought that was just kind of played out and I wanted to get more out of my creative time and how I expressed myself."

How did you really feel about the CSNY comparisons? "Never cared for CS&N. Neil Young, now he's all right."

You quit the band by email...

"That realisation was a very small step towards where I am now. Just being like, 'Oh, I'm just a monster. OK, I'll just live that way. I wanted to be like a noble savage or wanted to justify and redeem certain all-consuming, destructive aspects of myself and to like fully engage with those. But real monsters don't think about it that way. They don't have a conscience about it. There's something kind of ludicrous about that email. 'Look, guys, I'm just a selfish monster. And it's best for everyone if I just engage that.' You know, like best for everyone? Like what does a monster care about that?"

TILLMAN HAS HAD minor breakdowns before: once at university, and then during his final show with the Fleet Foxes. Both times he couldn't stop sobbing. But in this womb-like space, with its subdued lighting, old world charms, and lack of TV, he seems spectacularly sane, his eyes clear, his thoughts coherent and erudite. He sips tea from an earthenware mug and it's noticeable that the man who has made smoking onstage an artform on a par with Ian McCulloch hasn't had a single cigarette. The Tillmans have eschewed drugs, the very things that helped accelerate some of his more trenchant observations on 2012's *Fear Fun*. "I never viewed it [drugs] as amusement. I don't view my experience with it as a failed experiment whatsoever. But I don't want to stay there. I want to keep pulling layers back, and while this doesn't have a whole lot to do with this record per se, the last year has been the process of de-polluting my body and being able to have clarity. It seems like natural extension from a self-destructive place. I was so polluted with low-grade addictions like drinking, smoking, all of these self-soothing kinds of habits, that it took amphetamines, hallucinogenics just to have some degree of vital energy. It was like finding the most complicated way possible to skin a cat."

"Now I'm just trying to simplify everything," he says, his hands splayed out dramatically as he gestures around the room. "This LP is far less obtuse, and the subject matter is simpler. The structures of the tunes are, too. I'm also finding some excitement in the idea that the process can simplify. What it comes down to is, I want to live like an artist and work like an accountant."

On 2012's *Fear Fun*, Tillman artfully arranged a breadcrumb trail to where he was in his life, and where he was going next, and it's that trail that connects the two LPs. Tillman had an epiphany, sitting naked in a tree in Big Sur after ingesting mushrooms. He realised the best things he was doing were the things he did between his songs, and that he needed to incorporate that wry, self-mocking, offbeat humour into his material. In his words, he was done with making "wound-licking" music. "It's funny; I thought I'd found my authentic self when I allowed the humour into my songs on my last album," Tillman reveals. "I get some cheap thrill out of analysing myself, and I like intimidating other people. And those are aspects of myself that if you're with someone who's not going to listen to bullshit, that skill set, it shrinks and shrinks and shrinks. And mine has already withered, on the way to dying, I hope."

While "Every Man Needs A Companion" on *Fear Fun* seemed to circle the same ground as Neil Young's tribute to Carrie Snodgress, "A Man Needs A Maid", Tillman introduced Emma in the video for "Nancy From Now On", where we witness him submitting to her will and getting shorn of his hippy hair. "That song should have been on this album. It certainly foreshadows it," allows Tillman. As for the shearing, it was just a small part of what has been something of a cycle of rebirth. When Tillman was in Seattle, he was a mountain of a man, burly, hirsute, wearing oversized jeans and shirts. Then something happened. It was as if he unzipped a bear suit and came out like a model for *Vogue Hommes*. "Josh has always been handsome, give or take a haircut or two," argues Casey Wescott.

"It was a synchronistic thing where we both gave up the dude beer vibe and became paleo [following the Paleolithic diet]," explains Jonathan Wilson. "But he went from the long-hair Seattle guy to a more dapper guy. It was the time for that version of himself. He suddenly started showing up every day in suits. Weird thing is, it didn't seem strange."

"I do know I'm a handsome person," says Tillman. "But I never liked the way good-looking people get treated. Didn't trust it. Why be valued for that? So for a long time I put a mask on. A long beard. Long hair. Bad clothes. It was part of not liking who I was. Trying to find my way to myself."

This handsome man: live at The Theatre at Ace Hotel, LA, August 8, 2014



JUST AS *FEAR FUN* was Tillman's own personal travelogue that traces his journey from Seattle, leaving the Fleet Foxes, to finding his place in Hollywood, on *Honeybear* he's not afraid to explore what he found out about himself – whether it's about drugs, sexual proclivities or his defense mechanisms. "OK, you got me. That's where I tell the truth," says Tillman. "Even if I've sung them 100 times before, there's more personal truth in my lyrics than there are in most anything I could say to an acquaintance.

"I think it's almost impossible to suss out what someone believes with a direct line of questioning," Tillman explains as he begins to fold in on himself. His steely blue eyes become more grey than blue, narrowing a bit.

"The direct questioning thing is a lot better at determining what people fear than a belief *per se*," he continues. "I understand what people mean by beliefs. It's a placeholder for imagination. And just in my personal experience, I feel like I've gotten a whole lot more clarity out of disbelief or in killing beliefs."

One of his beliefs was that relationships and monogamy were bourgeois. In fact, in an effort not to make this album predictably cloying about romance, he included a pair of songs that he'd written right before he'd met Emma, one of them about a rather shrill threesome in "The Night Josh Tillman Came To Our Apartment".

"A different title for that song could have been 'The Night Before The Night I Fell In Love'. That's exactly when it happened. There were a lot of songs from that time period, and there was a whole other album that could have been made around that time, and that album went up in smoke very quickly after meeting Emma. There were a few good songs, but there was no humanity to it. It was certainly a reflection of what my life was like before Emma. 'Nothing Good Ever Happens At The Goddamn Thirsty Crow' is another one of those songs. The album is not an advertisement for love. It's closer to like *Portnoy's Complaint*. The point of putting a repellent song on an album is not to be repellent, it's to demystify it. And ['The Night Josh Tillman Came To My Apartment'] is funny. It's not so much about this girl or this episode so much as it is about my self-hatred. It's like this is the only place you end up,

singing 'Silent Night' in three-part harmony in a bathroom with two naked women.

"People ask me if meeting Emma changed anything," he continues. "It changed everything. But not at first. At the start of our relationship I was thinking I knew it all. Both of us thought that relationships were idiotic. We were really connecting on that, and that fed my vanity. I liked the idea of us as the two misanthropes in love. Then pretty early on we had been hanging out, and she left in the morning, and I had the worst anxiety all day long. She came back to my house and she was like, 'Oh, I just had the worst anxiety all day long.' And I thought, this is the woman for me.

"Emma was a big part of this album, besides being an inspiration behind it. You know the line in 'Honeybear' that goes, 'Mascara, blood, ash and cum'. One morning I got in the shower and she said to me, 'The sheets are covered in....' And it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever heard. I wrote the Rorschach part. That was all me," he crows. Does she get a writing credit? "She needs more than a writing credit. A producer credit, easily. When nobody else cared, including me, she told me the truth. The best thing she did was tell me I needed to not be afraid for these songs to be beautiful. I was afraid of shedding a version of myself I'd become comfortable with. Like OK, wry, sarcastic works for me. That will fill seats. I was like a Republican senator, the guy going around telling

everyone about personal revolution and growth while desperately clinging to this previous incarnation."

But what about the next incarnation? "I'd like to get to a point musically where I'm onstage in the foetal position in a diaper screaming, and just being like that's what I do now. It's a male voice. There are no lyrics. I'm trans-lyrical. I get quite a bit from the music and from the performance. I'm trying to disrupt things. I've never thought of myself as being a musician. I see myself as a proselytiser, to some extent. A secular preacher. I'm here to help liberate people. Maybe to liberate myself most of all." How will you know? "I'll know. I even sign autographs, 'Yours Eventually.'" **①**

I Love You, Honeybear is out on Bella Union, February 9

FATHER JOHN MISTY

JOHN, HE'S ONLY DANCING...

Father John Misty is becoming well known for rather unorthodox dancing, by way of early Jim Morrison and a young Scott Walker...

“**T**he thing is, I am a good dancer,” he admits. “If I was a shitty dancer it wouldn't work. But it's not like I just invented this for the Father John Misty show. I danced before that. At parties and



stuff. It was always this thing that people who knew me were well accustomed to. I think those same people can't believe it was happening in a professional context. In hindsight I can go back and try to break it down, but it's a shaman dance. It's meant to hypnotise. But there was no forethought. It wasn't until I got to *Letterman* [in 2012] and it happened during the rehearsal. I found I couldn't do the song without doing the dance. My ego tells me I do it because I'm sick of these narcoleptic indie rock performances, and I'm going to be a culture warrior or whatever... but I don't actually have any real interest in being a culture warrior.”



Jonathan Wilson, 2011

Story: John Robinson

Bowie in 1974,
in a shot from the
rejected cover
session for *Young
Americans*

HEART AND SOUL



August 1974, and **DAVID BOWIE** is a man carrying a heavy burden. Management problems, extravagant stage set, a whole wardrobe full of personae. Soul music was his rescue: it poured balm on his problems, and pointed the way ahead. In exclusive new interviews, Carlos Alomar, Andy Newmark, Earl Slick, Geoff MacCormack, Ava Cherry, David Sanborn and Mike Garson recall how Lulu, Luther Vandross and 10 days of “freaky soul” in Philadelphia helped Bowie lay the groundwork for **YOUNG AMERICANS**, and a whole new direction. “It may be his best album,” says Mike Garson. “It was straight to the music.”



Bowie and Ava Cherry
rehearsing in '74:
"David was really
trying to dig, dig, dig..."



WHEN THE LIMOUSINE pulled up on 125th street, it wasn't obvious which was the party of sightseers. Was it David Bowie, and his protégée Ava Cherry, there to check out some music? Or the customers of Harlem's Apollo Theatre, stunned by what they saw emerging from the car: a black woman accompanying a white man with orange hair, in an electric blue suit. "We pulled up outside the theatre," Ava Cherry remembers of their visit to the venue in 1974, "and people were like, 'Woah, who is this guy? What's he doing here?' I said, 'You'll see...'" The couple stepped inside.

"The Apollo was an R'n'B revue," says Carlos Alomar, then a regular at the venue as guitarist with Cuba Gooding Sr's band, The Main Ingredient. "You got a lot for your dollar. There would be a B-movie, opening acts, a comedian like Pigmeat Markham or Moms Mabley, or Richard Pryor. Then there would be the headliner: The Temptations, The Spinners, The O'Jays – cultural giants, all these classic forms. If you wanted to be immersed in black culture, you couldn't do better than a show at the Apollo Theatre."

Immersion was what Bowie had in mind. On his *Diamond Dogs* album of that year, "1984" and "When You Rock'n'Roll With Me" offered inklings that heartfelt passions ran beneath the album's intellectual constructs, soul bubbling under his rock. Now, his presence in New York to rehearse for a tour to promote that album allowed him to explore his passion for black culture more fully: hear the music, attend the shows, even wear the clothes. Ava Cherry's jazz musician father lent Bowie a suit and tie he had worn in the '40s so he could use it for a photo shoot. When the shoot was over, Ava suggested Bowie now return the suit to her father.

"He said, 'No, it's mine. It's me,'" laughs Cherry. "Whatever he touched at that moment, he owned it, do you know what I'm saying?"

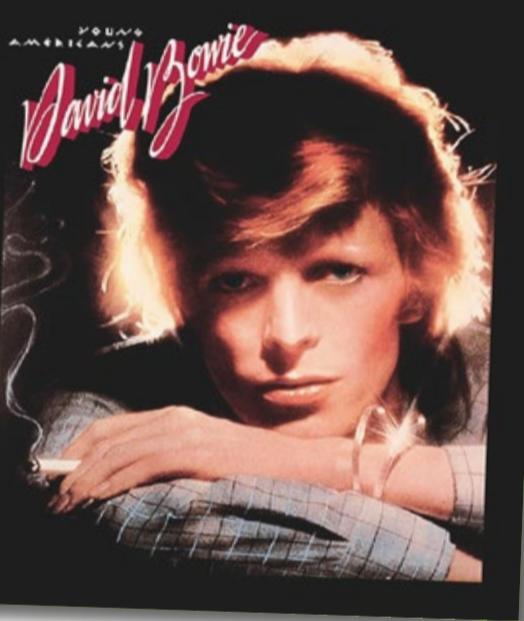
A new suit of clothes. As far as it went, it was a nice metaphor for David Bowie's career to that point, in which he had explored masks and characters, trying them on for size then moving to the next. Now, after Ziggy and Halloween Jack, thanks to Ava's dad, Bowie had a new costume for a whole new cool cat: the '40s "Gouster", a romantic, slow-dancing, lucrative sideline in something he'd rather not discuss kind of a guy. It seemed to suit his new direction, which some chose to see in nakedly commercial terms: repackaging contemporary American soul and selling it back to the Americans. But was that really what he was doing? If so, what kind of rube would fall for it?

"This music was in the air and in the culture," says Mike Garson, who'd play keyboards on the new recordings. "But you could tell it resonated with him on a very deep level."

"I didn't see him as changing up his style to be an R'n'B singer, says Andy Newmark, formerly in Sly Stone's band, who would play drums. "He just sounded like himself."



Cutting edge: Bowie on *The Dick Cavett Show* with David Sanborn, Earl Slick and Carlos Alomar, November 1974



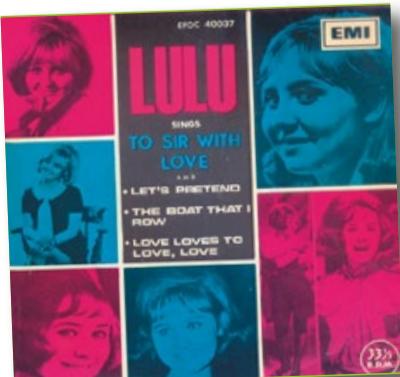
Later, Bowie would refer to the music as a "snapshot of America" and most notoriously, as "plastic soul". For those involved in making it, however, it sounded more as if the mask had slipped – and that this, as heard on his 1975 LP *Young Americans*, was the real David Bowie.

EARLY IN 1974, Carlos Alomar was told by Main Ingredient singer Tony Silvester about an upcoming session opportunity at RCA studios in New York: an English rock star was coming in to town to produce another British singer. Maybe he wanted to play guitar on the session? The rocker, Alomar didn't know about – but when he heard the name of the singer, he went straight over. "I took the job because of Lulu," says Alomar today. "She had a song called 'To Sir With Love' – I'd seen the movie with Sidney Poitier, and I thought what a great blue-eyed soul song that was. That girl can sing... she had so much soul. But I got to the session, there was no Lulu – she wasn't going to be there until we had done the tracks."

Alomar's disappointment at not meeting the Scottish vocalist was moderated by his rapport with the producer, David Bowie. Alarmed by his skeletal appearance, Alomar invited him home for something to eat. There, Bowie discovered more about the guitarist's background, and both men entered a new phase in their careers. Alomar had put boots on the ground in parts of black cultural life that had hitherto been for Bowie as powerful, but insubstantial, as myth. He had played in James Brown's band and been fined \$40 by the singer for failing to "hit" on his "hit me!" cue. He had played in the Latin All-Stars, and on the fabled "chitlin' circuit", the network of venues which hosted African-American performers across the USA.

"You would play places like the Burning Spear in Philadelphia," says Alomar. "Or you'd go out into the middle of the country to a chitlin' house: the bars would close at 1am, and we'd start at 2, and play until 6 in the morning. Some of these things were scary; sometimes the tour manager would have to get his gun to collect the money from the promoter. There were situations. Once I was working with a group and the tour promoter thought we were going to ask for more money. They weren't going to give us a raise, so we came down to the lobby in the morning, and we found the bus had left."

Bowie drank it all in. "He was really curious about James Brown and jazz guys," Alomar continues. "I really respected the fact that some Brits, they do their homework as far as American music culture is concerned. He knew so much about jazz cats, Thelonious Monk and all" ☺



BOWIE'S YOUNG TEAM

Who's Who in UNCUT's **YOUNG AMERICANS** feature...

CARLOS ALOMAR

Guitar. Appeared on albums from *Young Americans* all the way to *Reality* in 2003. www.carlosalomar.com

AVA CHERRY

Vocals. Ava (left) has new recordings pending and has latterly represented the *David Bowie Is* exhibition in Paris.

JEAN FINEBERG

Vocals. Jean plays and teaches saxophone, flute and drums. www.jeanfineberg.com



MIKE GARSON

Keyboards. Mike (left) continues to play and record, and is subject of Clifford Slapper's biography *Bowie's Piano Man* out in 2015.

GEOFF MACCORMACK

Vocals. A longtime friend of Bowie, Geoff has a photo/memoir *From Station To Station* via www.Genesis-publications.com. His limited-edition prints are also on www.rockarchive.com

JEAN MILLINGTON

Vocals. Jean still plays and records occasionally with her sister June. www.ima.org

ANDY NEWMARK

Drums. Andy Newmark is a freelance drummer. He has recently been heard on Bryan Ferry's *Avonmore* album.

DAVID SANBORN

Saxophone. David's new LP will be out March 2015 on Okeh. www.davidsanborn.com

EARL SLICK

Guitar. Earl Slick has a range of guitar products available at: www.guitarfetish.com

DAVID THOENER

Engineer. He is also a producer. www.davidthoener.com



Geoff MacCormack (left) with Bowie on the Diamond Dogs tour, the Universal Amphitheatre, California, October 1974

EYEWITNESS!

**Geoff MacCormack
accompanies Bowie
to the Harlem Apollo**

“REMEMBER BEING in a limo with David going to see BB King (May 1974). He was doing his blues schtick, and it was a bit sad as there were all these young, hip black guys there and they were kind of taking the mickey – I suppose the music was



changing, and to them, blues maybe seemed old hat. Gods to us... maybe to them, they were old-school ideas.

“Even the journey was eye-opening – going from the bright lights to a dingy place with guys hanging around on street corners. What if the limo broke down? We had a very good driver called Tony Mascia, who became a friend of David’s – he was like a character from a Scorsese film. You felt pretty safe with him...”

→ this stuff – I found it extremely refreshing.

“I thought he was sincere in his questioning,” says Alomar. “He wanted to translate it in his terms, a way of fact-checking what he’d read.”

Impressed with what he’d heard from Alomar at the Lulu session, and in conversation, Bowie suggested they work together again: Alomar joining his touring band alongside Earl Slick. Alomar, however, had some reservations. He was making good money at the Apollo with The Main Ingredient, which Bowie’s management MainMan was unwilling to match – and besides, he now had other responsibilities. “One of the reasons I turned down Bowie was that I was newly married,” says Alomar. “I was making good money, so it was like, ‘Unless you can top it, I have a higher power to answer to.’ To go touring with some Brit that just came to America with his pasty face and his orange hair – it was too much out of my comfort zone.”

DYSTOPIAN MIME. BIG Brother in fancy dress. Scissors and cocaine. Burroughs and Orwell, on ice. Take all of this and put it into a stage set too large for the venue, which might anyway fall apart with the artist inside it, or leave him cupped on a crane arm, stranded over the auditorium – no-one on the multi-platform Diamond Dogs American tour of 1974 was entirely comfortable. Even at four decades remove it still vexes the participants. “It was borderline insanity in terms of finances and hard work.” (Says Mike Garson, keyboards). “A massive undertaking.” (Herbie Flowers, bass). “Fucking ridiculous.” (Tony Newman, drums).



Every British promoter wanted the show – but so eager was Bowie’s manager Tony DeFries to cover his massive costs, no-one could afford to buy it. For an artist who prided himself on freedom of movement, the joy of losing himself in a theatrical conceit was for Bowie now replaced by a distinct sense of being lumbered.

As Mike Garson saw it, the only way to make the set make sense was to pitch camp in a venue for two-week residencies. Sitting tight for any length of time, however,

was a chemical impossibility for the artist. When a truck transporting a portion of the set crashed into a ditch filled with rattlesnakes en route to Tampa in July, to everyone but the driver, it must have seemed a blessing in disguise.

Bowie had anyway been breaking free of his initial conceit. The Floyd/Cropper composition “Knock On Wood” had been added to the setlist, and if it sounded a little armour-plated in Earl Slick’s rock chording and Bowie’s unyielding delivery, it signposted that soul was an avenue the singer wished to explore. For some, the end of the road, anyway, was coming up fast.

“I left because I was too coked out of it,” says Tony Newman. “I had a nasty drug habit going. That was when they changed the format to the soul tour.”

Soul and R’n’B had been on Bowie’s agenda for months. With his former producer Ken Scott, he had tried to urge the Spiders to the ecstasies of Barry White, only to come up short in October 1973. More recently, on the long boat trip over to America in the spring, in the company of his schoolfriend Geoff MacCormack (now his backing singer Warren Peace), the pair had been playing R’n’B favourites, ancient and modern.

“On the ship we’d be playing Bobby Womack, Holland-Dozier-Holland stuff, and Philip Wynne...” says Geoff, “...the singer with The Spinners. His voice was glorious.”

Much like everyone else in America at the time, they embraced the ‘Philadelphia Sound’.

“It’s not a raw soul thing,” says Geoff. “Like Ike Hayes, it had a great degree of sophistication in terms of content and approach. It was quite a natural hit in a club. It’s slick – if you listen to some of it now, it’s too slick – but it was a definite American sound and didn’t reach these shores until later.”

In August 1974, Tony Visconti, who had mixed *Diamond Dogs* and produced *David Live*, had just finished producing Thin Lizzy. Carlos Alomar could make himself available. Bowie had 10 days free as a Midwestern promoter had cancelled, unable to meet MainMan’s extortionate



At the Gramercy Park Hotel with Ava Cherry (left), and Tony Visconti (far right)

demands. Perhaps, in the meantime, there was a logical place they could meet?

THE SOUND ACHIEVED by a studio, says Andy Newmark, is more a discussion for the technicians. Given decent recording professionals and quality equipment, it's a level playing field – a sound achievable in one good facility should be easy enough to replicate in another. The vibe? That's a different matter altogether.

"Like The Rolling Stones wanting to be down in Muscle Shoals," says Newmark, "it was all about wanting to be where records were made that they loved."

"You couldn't play a wrong note there," says Mike Garson. "There was probably 10 other studios in Philly that could get the same sound. But this one had the magic."

The studio was Sigma Sound, at 212 N.12th Street, Philadelphia, the recording base camp of Philadelphia International Records. Here, under the stewardship of producers Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff, a 40-strong roster of session players ("The MFSB" – interpretations of the acronym vary) created expansive soul and disco.

The music was romantic, the widescreen string arrangements bringing to the uptown night-out something of the drama of the Western movie theme. The O'Jays came from Ohio, and Archie Bell & The Drells from Texas, but their music left luxuriously dressed in strings or horns, and with a hissing hi-hat: the sound of Philadelphia.

The sophisticated sound emerging from the studio had a deep, but also broad appeal: "T.S.O.P", featuring The Three Degrees, was for 30 years the theme tune to *Soul Train*, the black music television show of the period. It was covered by The James Last Orchestra in one direction, and Dexys Midnight Runners in the other. Philadelphia offered soul's raw passion, in expensive silk pajamas. "Everything Gamble and

Huff touched was a hit," says Ava Cherry.

When Bowie visited Sigma in August 1974 with his new collection of musicians, the label and studio was entering its imperial phase. Carlos Alomar had previously worked with The O'Jays and writer/performer Van McCoy, and knew that in the engine room of this music different rules applied.

"Don't lead with the piano, lead with the rhythm section," Alomar recalls. "It wasn't just bass and drums, it was congas and percussion. It's a signature bassline. When Motown cats like James Jamerson or Chuck Rainey put down the bassline, you know the song. It's not like in rock'n'roll."

"Bowie said to me, 'We're not going to have a lead guitar on this record,'" says David Sanborn, who played saxophone, "You're going to fill the role of lead guitar."

"Every other part of society was quashing black musicians," says Mike Garson. "Philly used the best studio guys around, who had been playing clubs their whole life. It was an escape. It was right. It had to happen."

Bowie was himself primed for escape, even a momentary one. When he was last in Philly, a month earlier, playing a residency at the Tower Ballroom (the set recorded for *David Live*), he and his band were doing their damnedest to square a circle of dark thematic rock, hippy whimsy and blue-eyed soul, with a closing flourish of stack-heel boogie. It was a lot of bases to touch. The record he now embarked on would have obligations to no-one but himself.

"One of the ways you can look at his music is as a



"Whatever David touched at that moment, he owned it..."

AVA CHERRY

"I'm a little bit of a chameleon..."

LULU on becoming Bowie's protégée in 1973-'74

"I WAS IN a hotel lobby in Sheffield. David walked in, said he was doing a gig, and he'd like me to come. After the gig, everybody went back to the hotel. He was having a party on the top floor – that's when he said that he wanted to work with me. He said he loved my voice and wanted to make a hit record with me. He was the new cool dude on the block. I certainly didn't feel like I was very cool, so I was very flattered.

"He had a vision, and it was so exciting and so fresh I thought I should just follow his lead. He played me some stuff, and he said, 'What do you think of that?' I used to lose battles with record producers, but I thought he had such a strong vision, I thought I'd let him be the mentor. He didn't want me to sing so much..."

"I didn't do any sessions in New York, I just arrived and put my voice on. As I recall, he said he wrote "Can You Hear Me" for me. I did a vocal with him – I'd sing [sings the opening lines]. He'd do it his way [sings with different stress], slightly like Elvis. But it was Bowie when he did it. He directed me, and I liked to be directed – I'm a little bit of a chameleon.

"That one never came out, though.

I have the picture of me going to New York, him being very involved with a crowd of people that, honestly, I found a bit off the wall. So much so that I felt uncomfortable. You do a session, you turn up at the studio and the producer and the musicians are there. Then, you'd go to the hotel – they're still sleeping. He had a nocturnal existence – that's what his life was like at that time.

"He was on a whole new trip... I was a fish out of water. It was an awkward experience. After that, nothing happened. I think it was because Tony DeFries took the track and they fell out. I don't know the financial situation, but he was the manager, they had an argument, they kept his stuff. I was in amongst it."

"I loved *Young Americans* – it surprised me, but it delighted me. A short album. I wonder why? I thought his interpretation of soul was great. 'Fame' was so new – a new way of doing it. Then I heard 'Can You Hear Me' and I thought, 'That's that, then...' I hoped we'd continue to work together, but stuff happens, you know..."

Lulu tours throughout May: Salford Lowry (10); Liverpool Philharmonic (11); Glasgow SECC (12); London Theatre Royal Drury Lane (15). Full dates at: www.luluofficial.com

WHO WAS LUTHER VANDROSS IN 1974?

CARLOS ALOMAR: "He was my best friend – he introduced me to Robin [Clark, Alomar's wife]. When I met Luther he had a composition book filled with song titles and music. He and Robin met because he said to Robin, 'Hey, sing this...' and she sang it, and they were inseparable after that. We had joined a troupe called Listen My Brother at the Apollo Theatre, and that's where we had got our start in the late 1960s. You know the movie, *Fame*? We were trained by Peter Long at the Apollo Theatre to be who we would come to be. In 1974, Luther already had his group and was starting to develop his sound. Luther and Robin were already doing jingles and background sessions in the city. He had songs which would later be big hits for him."

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JOE STEVENS

commentary on the time. He really reflected what was going on," says David Sanborn. "It was articulate and expressed verbally and non-verbally the tenor of the times. Change, the idea of fame, image... there were a lot of levels. He was taking the totality of the rock'n'roll experience and making it an artistic statement, in a very personal way."

"It may be his best LP," says Mike Garson. "In terms of a singer pulling in a great band and singing his ass off, there's not too many albums like it. It was straight to the music."

FREE-FLOWING, COLLABORATIVE, passionate, the music that Bowie made at Sigma in the second week of August 1974 is the sound of someone following their gut. What ultimately became known as *Young Americans* was for a while known by a number of different titles, then buzz phrases at the studio: 'The Gouster', 'Dancin', 'Shilling The Rubes'. Similarly, the personnel on the album was dictated by feeling. When Carlos Alomar's wife Robin Clark came to visit him at the sessions, she brought along their friend Luther Vandross (see panel, left). Vandross and Clark had always sung harmony together. As they listened to a playback of "The Young American", one of the first songs cut at the sessions, they sang along. Rather than be annoyed, Bowie encouraged them. "They were laughing their asses off on the couch," says Alomar. "Singing with this British accent... *All... right-ah!*" Bowie peered over the console at them and said, "Would you do that in the studio?" They were embarrassed, but he loved it."

Although in the middle of a tour geared towards his current album, Bowie gave himself up completely to the music that had been distracting him. As Ava Cherry explains it, creating new songs was a way of climbing inside his new obsession. "He wanted to understand how the animal worked," she says. "It wasn't like 'I'm gonna be into that.' It was very reverent. It was, 'This is what I hear and what I like, so I'm going to draw every possible creative conclusion from that.'"

Geoff MacCormack can see her point, but also

acknowledges that things might have turned out differently. "I knew something was afoot," he says. "David was writing stuff that was away from what we'd been doing. When you go into the studio, things can either go swimmingly well or not so. But it all became quite exciting quite quickly."

Some players in the studio at Sigma recall material being written on the hoof ("He's good at winging it," says Ava Cherry), but Bowie already had ideas for numbers that might be appropriate. From his production sessions with Lulu, he already had the excellent "Can You Hear Me", while archived songs from previous projects like "John, I'm Only Dancing" and "Laser" (slated for The Astronettes, but now rebooted with "Gouster"-themed lyrics) were attempted in the new format. This music was a departure from rock, but also a return to some of Bowie's earliest musical interests.

"I remember him from early days, when I would go to see him at Justin Hall in West Wickham [in 1963, with his band The Konrads] and he would do Little Richard stuff," remembers Geoff MacCormack. "It was always in his vocabulary."

It was news to Geoff, that "a white guy could sing soul without apeing it – I'd describe that as a freaky, white soul."

MacCormack is talking about when Bowie introduced him to Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks*. But he might as well be

talking about Bowie himself.

LUTHER VANDROSS BECAME key to this freaky soul. At Bowie's suggestion, he took charge of backup vocal arrangements, drafting in Anthony Hinton and Diane Sumler from his own eponymous vocal trio to work beside Gui Andrisano, Geoff MacCormack and Ava Cherry. "It was like being in a choir," says Geoff MacCormack.

Luther also contributed material: his "Funky Music Is A Part Of Me" was rewritten by Bowie as "Fascination". When a session tape discovered at a Philly street market was auctioned on eBay in 2009, some of the mood in the studio was revealed to the world: ideas jovially exchanged, tempos ratcheted up, good spirits manifest.

"David would have created that music with or without drugs..."

MIKE GARSON

Luther Vandross (left) onstage with Bowie, Anthony Hinton and Geoff MacCormack, Young Americans Tour, November '74



"I loved Luther," says Earl Slick. "He was a funny motherfucker. I was using a lot of cocaine, so I was up all night. He would say, 'What are you doing?' I said, 'I dunno, getting high – what are you doing?' He'd say, 'I'm hungry. Let's go and get something to eat...'"

"We got four or five tracks pretty quickly," says Andy Newmark. "Everybody was world-class, really – Michael Garson, Earl Slick, David Sanborn. It's important you get people in there who can make something out of nothing."

"We were on the vampire shift," says David Sanborn. "We'd work through the night. I don't think I saw noon except from the other side."

"I was very impressed with Bowie," Newmark continues. "Big ears. Meaning that he hears a lot, he could pinpoint different things in different people's parts. He could articulate and give instructions rather than standing by and letting a producer do it. He was producing the record, no question. I was impressed with his whole handle on the music, his authority in forming the music and guiding the musicians. He knew exactly what he wanted."

"What it felt like was that we went into the studio, he gave us a general outline of what the tune was like and just said 'Play,'" says David Sanborn. "At that point, I don't even think he'd written a lot of the words. Or maybe he had and we were not aware of it. It felt like we were just jamming in there. In retrospect I don't think that's the case, and think that's one of his real gifts: to bring out the best in people, make you feel like you're really making this stuff up."

"Everything was going so fast," says Carlos Alomar. "We were constructing these songs from these tiny little grooves, and little sections. You'd finish two songs in one night – he hadn't even written any words. He has an acute ear. He knows what he wants when he hears it."

Though a raw rock'n'roll album, *Diamond Dogs* had taken months of painstaking micromanagement – redacting and then re-recording parts on a second-by-second basis with different personnel. At Sigma, this far smoother-sounding collection of music was painlessly coming together over the course of just a few days. *Diamond Dogs* is like a whole other world, the inside of someone's brain," says Garson. "Young Americans is more about the heart."

AS IT WAS in the bigger picture of the album sessions, so it was in the dynamic of the songs: calm. "In 'Somebody Up There Likes Me' or 'Win', everything has its place," says Carlos Alomar. "The voice takes over. Then, as the song progresses, the instruments come in. Bowie doesn't want to hear the same thing in the beginning as at the end – there has to be development in the song."

"David's like a director," says Mike Garson. "It's a different kind of head. Most producers micromanage, but those who let you do your thing and maybe point to some particular parts – those are the best."

"It wasn't apparent how he was shaping this. I have no idea what his internal process was," says David Sanborn. "He gave us a basic framework, chord changes, there would be open sections. In retrospect I now think it was more structured than I thought at the time. It felt loose, like he listened to us – used that to shape the tone of the music. But structurally I think there was more stuff in mind than I was aware of."

Only on the superb "Right" ("Doing it one time...") does the music sound as if it might have

Police protection: Bowie in Philly, after his gig at the Spectrum, November 1974



YOUNG AMERICANS OUTTAKES

Some more damn songs to make you break down and cry

FOOT STOMPING

The roots of "Fame" lie in the Carlos Alomar riff that powered a Bowie cover of this doo-wop classic.

WHO CAN I BE NOW (RELEASED 1991)

Not a million miles from "Young Americans" itself. A romantic swooner with a great hookline: "No, you've found me..."

IT'S GONNA BE ME (RELEASED 1991)

Huge strings, and an incredibly sad song – the vocal swaps between heavily reverbed and very dry. Personally, I'd take this over "Across The Universe".

AFTER TODAY (RELEASED 1991)

Could almost have been on *Low*, were it not for the Sanborn sax. A falsetto vocal and very good too. "After today... fortune will find you... fame will fly you away..." There's an outtake taken at an even harder clip.

JOHN I'M ONLY DANCING (AGAIN)

"I'm dancing in the street..." The 1972 number, reworked. Has its merits, though it's a bit long and loses some of the humour.

SHILLING THE RUBES

Only a minute or so of synthesiser and drums are out there. Bleak mattress on the floor kind of vibes, which may have been a bit *Diamond Dogs*-y in vibe to proceed with.

LASER

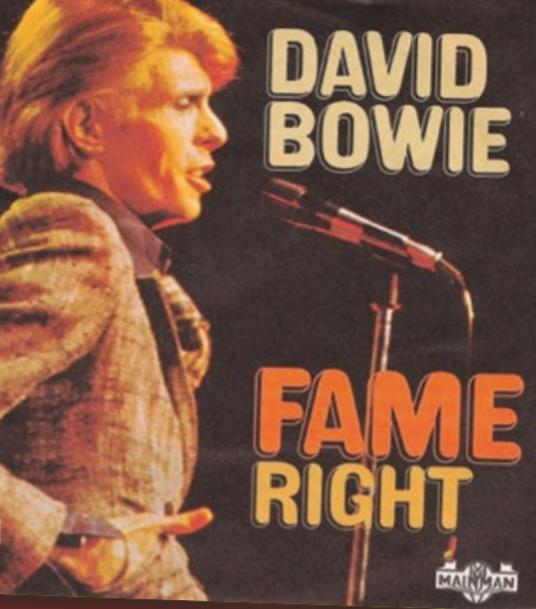
"Let's hear it for the Gouster..." A jazzy take on this previously attempted song. There's only a little bit on bootlegs, but it sounds good.



been painful to create. Requiring a complex series of calls and responses from the backing singers, today Ava Cherry screams when reminded of it. Bowie created a "dots" system to map the song's syncopations: sing in two and three, out on four, back in on five and six. Off the rhythmic clock and through the looking glass of Bowie's numerology, the singers just had to count, sing, think, and hang on in there.

"A total clusterfuck," says Alomar. "But they nailed it every time. When you have musicians who can give you what you want, your mind goes crazy with thought. David had ideas that he might have had but not been able to use, but now he had the people who could help him do that. You can understand why he was so excited about the outcome of this album."

Bowie was in extraordinary voice. On the upbeat, piano-driven "After Today", he populates a place between Solomon Burke and Madness, remarking to the room off the mic at the end of the song, "I was getting into that...". "It's Gonna Be Me" finds the singer wearied by a role as penthouse suite lothario, confronting "another girl weeping over the breakfast tray...", his eye for detail sharp as his vocal orchestra swells around him. "On so many of those songs," says



"We've met..."

Earl Slick is on "Fame" – but only knows because John Lennon told him

EARL SLICK: "I was there, but that's a complete blank. The only thing that convinced me I was there was John. When I went to do *Double Fantasy*, I was a little nervous. I said, 'I'm gonna get there early, get set up.' I'd met icons, but John was different. My goal was to get there beforehand, but I get there and the only person there is John. I walked in, said 'Hi' and he said 'Nice to see you again.' I thought, 'What the hell is that all about?' I said, 'Where did we meet?' He said, 'On that Bowie session.' I said, 'I don't remember.' It became an ongoing joke during *Double Fantasy*. He'd say, 'Do you remember now?' But I didn't."

Earl Slick has just finished recording with Glen Matlock and Slim Jim Phantom; an album is due in 2015



The mark of cane: Bowie on *The Dick Cavett Show*, 1974

→ Ava Cherry, "you can really hear how he's trying to dig, dig, dig..."

On "Who Can I Be Now?", meanwhile, he falls to his knees and talks about abandoning roles, and being real, now that someone has seen through to the heart of him. For Carlos Alomar, Bowie was going beyond his customary role as avatar/lightning rod for the concerns of his audience, to investigate deep within himself.

"David really embraces the platform," he says. "But I think that at the moment of *Young Americans*, theatrics were not necessary. I think it was, I'm looking for the soul of Bowie on this record, I don't need theatrics, I don't need a mask. I am able to say what I want, say who I am and be who I am. 'Who Can I Be Now?? There's no hidden meaning there.

"He really did reflect on himself and open himself," Alomar continues. "I'm not saying he purged himself, but he made himself vulnerable in expressing himself."

In late November, Tony Visconti returned to London to perform a final mix and add strings to this and other songs on Bowie's new album. Whatever that album was, though, it certainly wasn't *Young Americans*. "When the album came out we were devastated," says Alomar. "We're session musicians – we know that sometimes your favourite song ends up on the cutting room floor. But I don't think that any of these cut songs would have diminished the impact of *Young Americans*."

Finally, the three excised songs came out a reissue of *Young Americans* in 1991. But by then, it was all so many David Bowies ago.

CONFUSED? WHEN THEY turned up to see a concert by David Bowie in September, his fans must have felt they had missed a meeting. Where was the stage set they saw in the summer? Why was Mike Garson opening the show playing cocktail jazz? And who were all these singers?

"I remember seeing an egg landing between me and Luther, like 'Get the fuck out of here!'" remembers Garson. "Most places were respectful. But you're still an opening band, and they're waiting for David Bowie."

They wouldn't have to wait long: this new David Bowie was moving mighty fast. In November he was

back at Sigma for more work on the new record ("Bruce Springsteen turned up in his camper van," recalls Geoff MacCormack. "Then he left again, in his camper van."). The same month, he appeared on *The Dick Cavett Show*, for a performance broadcast in December. There, he gave a spectacularly abstract, snort-filled interview, and played a short set including "1984" and "Young Americans".

"He was on rare form," Mike Garson remembers. "He was weird then, but the good music always sticks. He would have created that music with or without drugs. It just so happened he was on drugs."

Most significantly, on *Cavett*, Bowie played a song that the band had latterly attempted unsatisfactorily in the studio: a version of "Foot Stomping", a doo-wop song by The Flares. If the version attempted at Sigma hadn't

worked, it would achieve a new lease of life due to a new Bowie enthusiasm: editing. "I'd play parts and I wouldn't know if my part was still going to be on there after I went home," says Carlos Alomar, "or if it was gonna be on the cutting room floor. Then I hear the record in its completed form, and I think – 'There's my part: I love it!' Or, 'That's my part being played by a sax!' David uses his creativity to decide who David is, not who we are."

An encounter in New York dramatically altered the course of the final record. After bumping into John Lennon at a nightclub, Bowie persuaded him to come and play on a version of "Across The Universe". With Lennon in the room, Bowie, Lennon and Alomar then also jammed on a version of

"Foot Stomping" – which Bowie had instructed producer Harry Maslin to cut into pieces.

"When I came in, Harry had already taken the song and cut it up into a 12-bar blues, which allowed me to look at it in a different way," says Alomar. "I didn't want to do a blues. The funk is about laying it down on the one. Boom!"

Lennon and Bowie continued jamming for a while, but eventually went to dinner. Alomar remained in the studio, multi-tracking guitar parts. When Lennon and Bowie returned, the latter was delighted with what had been done, adding a savage distorted guitar, which cut across Alomar's minimal funk. The other features of the song we know and love (the pitch-shifted vocals; the flute solo) arrived later that night.



Earl Slick today

TODAY, JEAN FINEBERG is a multi-instrumentalist and educator living on the West Coast. In January 1974 she was a New Yorker hanging out with her friend Jean Millington – bassist in all-female rock band Fanny – for an evening in the city. Millington knew Bowie, knew he was in town recording, and suggested to Fineberg that they visit Electric Lady Studios to say hi. Their evening took an unexpected turn when they discovered Bowie resoundingly alert, and in the mood to create.

"There was a very jovial atmosphere, a lot of kidding around, a lot of laughing," Fineberg remembers. "He was in the control room listening to some tracks and... drinking a lot of coffee. Which was shared with us, liberally."

Bowie discovered that Fineberg played saxophone, and asked if she had her horns with her. She said no, but that she had her flute. Alive to the possibilities his new guest brought, Bowie suggested she go into the studio and play on the track, which she did, putting down "a wild flute solo". The pair then helped tape a part of the descending "Fame" vocal progression. They then joined Bowie at his rented Chelsea brownstone to listen to the tracks.



With Lennon and Yoko Ono at the 17th Annual Grammy Awards, March 1, 1975

Coffee was served.

"Philip Glass was there, and a couple of other people," recalls Fineberg. "We stayed up all night, listening to the track from the studio, and remaining alert. I don't think we listened to 'Fame' all night, but it's not too hard to imagine. David would pick out little things. It was fun, but he was single-mindedly working. He was into the project and wanted nothing more than to be listening to those songs."

While some coffee drinkers can be wrapped up in themselves, Bowie's associates discovered that was not always the case. A while after their evening in the studio, Fineberg got a call from Bowie's office asking for her union details. "The album comes out, and there's no flute solo on it, but I'm listed under vocals," she says. "Which was very nice of him. I still get the cheques – I got one this week."

"I don't remember a flute solo," says David Thoener. Today, Thoener is known as Mixing Engineer on other small records like *Born To Run* and *For Those About To Rock*. In January 1975, he assisted Harry Maslin and Bowie on final stages of *Young Americans*. There, he too experienced Bowie's openness to new ideas and his willingness to acknowledge where they came from. "David was looking for a way to start 'Fame' other than with the drums," says Thoener. Maslin and Thoener recall things differently. Maslin recalls Lennon striking the piano chord that runs backward at the start of the record; Thoener thinks it was Bowie. Whichever, Bowie was keen to show his working. "We flipped the



Fanny, November 1971: (l-r) bassist Jean Millington, drummer Alice de Buhr, keys player Nickey Barclay, and guitarist June Millington

EYEWITNESS!

FANNY's JEAN MILLINGTON observes Bowie's post-Ziggy evolution close-up...

HE WAS TOURING the Ziggy album, and Fanny was also touring. We were staying in the same hotel in Liverpool, and he sent an invitation to us to attend Trevor Bolder's birthday party, and we were invited to some London shows.

"He was for me the epitome of the rock'n'roll star, the costume and the persona – what he had created with Ziggy I thought was brilliant. So it was great to be able to meet him and hang out. He was extremely gracious.

"We were, shall we say, dating, even though it was an unusual situation as he was married to Angie. I'd flown to France when he was doing *Pinups*... we'd continued a friendship by phone and he'd come to the States. It was over a period of a year, a year and a half.

"It seemed like a natural evolution for him to go from glam rock to *Young Americans*. He was always searching. When we first met him, my sister hung out with him, and he proceeded to show her all these old German movies. He was always interested in all forms of art.

"We did 'Fame' in NYC. My band had broken up, and my sister June had moved to the New York area, I was visiting her – I called up David and he invited me down to the studio for the vocal session. He said, hey, you're here – why don't you come and sing? It was one of those spur of the moment fun kind of things. David's focus had changed somewhat. When I met him in the UK, he was doing absolutely no drugs. A different part of his personality was coming up. He wasn't quite as jovial, present, easy-going.

"The 'Fame' band was Carlos Alomar, Emir Kasan and Dennis Davis – the cutting edge of the music scene at that time. I'm a diehard R'n'B fan – when I heard it in the studio, it made you want to jump up and dance."

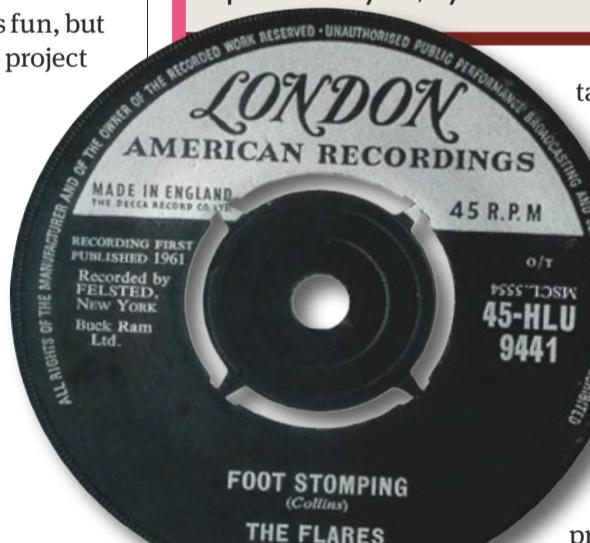
tape back to normal playback mode and it is as you hear it on the final mix," says Thoener. "Bowie then asked my name so he could include it on the album credits."

"'Fame' was the kind of song you changed your plans for. Perhaps 'Across The Universe' wasn't worth sacrificing the deep compositions Bowie had recorded at Sigma. 'Fame', however, undoubtedly said more about what Bowie wanted from *Young Americans*. This wasn't so much an album about soul music per se, as his creative soul – finding a new way to take the initiative and lead the way forward. Still, the soul part of it worked pretty well, too."

"The response he got from black folks was the clincher," says Ava Cherry. "People would say to me, 'You're with David Bowie? Woah! That 'Fame' song is hot!'

"It defied description," says Carlos Alomar. "A lot of people didn't know Bowie was white. Sometimes you just fall for something, you don't care what they look like."

"He was, I think, going through a certain amount of human revolution, and what he needed was heart and soul. David doesn't care if you get the meaning – he only cares if you get the feeling. *Young Americans* is like a sign of the times."





The One I Love

BY REM

Killer riff, cynical lyrics, even a guitar solo! “I never saw it as a hit single,” says Peter Buck. Twenty-eight years on, REM recall the ‘love song’ that finally put them on the road to megastardom

“That riff, you couldn’t get it out of your head...” REM in Athens, 1987: (l-r) Buck, Stipe, Mills and Berry

I

JUST ALWAYS ASSUMED that we would never actually have a real hit single,” confides Peter Buck. “We would write these songs and record them and go, ‘Well, you know, I like it...’”

But in fact, in the years since the release of their 1981 debut single, “Radio Free Europe”, an increasing number of people were also enjoying the work of this Athens, Georgia quartet. Through mercurial albums such as ’83 debut *Murmur* and *Reckoning* (1984), and relentless touring, Buck, singer Michael Stipe, bassist Mike Mills and drummer Bill Berry were gradually building a devoted fanbase. Now all they needed was that elusive hit single.

“I just remember standing there in awe,” recalls the band’s longtime lawyer, manager and confidant Bertis Downs, of the first time he heard “The One I Love”, the song that set REM on the path to global fame. “That riff, you just couldn’t get it out of your head...”

With its sour, oblique lyrics about “*a simple prop to occupy my time*”, and – an REM rarity – a guitar solo, the song’s enigmatic video became an MTV mainstay, laying the ground for parent album *Document*’s success, the band’s subsequent deal with Warners, and the global success of *Out Of Time* and *Automatic For The People*. Such was its flexibility, “The One I Love” even experienced a second life as a mournful, acoustic version,

showcased on the recent *REMTV* boxset.

“We were concentrating on making strong records,” remembers Mike Mills today, marvelling at the single’s success. “We wanted to make albums that were as good from the beginning to the end as we possibly could.” **TOMPINNOCK**

PETER BUCK: I remember coming up with the riff on my porch. We played it on the [*Lifes Rich Pageant*] tour of ’86. We always liked putting new songs in the set, it felt like an organic process. You play a song for 30 shows, you get a feeling of how it goes without having to beat it to death in the studio for hours.

MIKE MILLS: I remember Peter showing me that riff and thinking it was pretty cool, and then the rest of the song flowed from there. We played the whole song as an instrumental until Michael [Stipe] came up with some vocals for it.

BERTIS DOWNS: I first heard it at the County Bowl in Santa Barbara, California [September 27, 1986]. I remember standing right in front of Peter, and hearing that first riff and just going, “Wow, this is going to be a massive song!” It sounded,

KEY PLAYERS



Peter Buck
Guitars



Mike Mills
Bass



Scott Litt
Producer



Bertis Downs
Lawyer, later manager

even at the time – I hate to use the word – classic. It was very concise, simple and straightforward, with lyrics which, of course, were misinterpreted for the next 30 years...

BUCK: It took me a while to realise the lyrics were undercutting what the song felt like. We’d play the song and see people holding hands with each other, and we were kind of thinking, ‘Hmmm, this is not exactly what this is all about...’ I don’t know if there was any person or event that influenced the lyrics, you’d have to ask Michael. But he wouldn’t tell you anyway.

MILLS: If you hear it as a love song then it’s a love song. I don’t feel the need to disabuse anyone of their notion of romance. I would see couples hug each other closer when it came on, and I might smile to myself. But I’d never mock anyone for it, because it’s all about joy. If the music gives you joy then I’m certainly not going to mess with that.

DOWNS: For *Document*, we hired a new producer... Scott Litt came in and made what turned out to be the first of six records – he made every REM record for the next decade. It just



clicked, it was very healthy and productive.

BUCK: It was great working with Scott. We did a song for a soundtrack first to see if we worked together well, "Romance", that ended up in a movie that I don't think anyone's ever heard of [Alan Rudolph's *Made In Heaven*]. When we got to the album, we knew what we were doing with "The One I Love", where all the parts went.

SCOTT LITT: It was one we could experiment a little bit with because they knew it so well, so that was the start of our album sessions. A lot of people have always said, "Oh, it's not actually a love song, it's cynical." Which I guess is true in the literal sense... but in the musical sense, I don't think it is.

BUCK: We found a studio that looked interesting in Nashville, it was owned by Cowboy Jack Clement. There's stories that he looked at the furniture in his favourite brothel in France and brought all the stuff back. There were lots of weird paintings of naked women done badly, and velvet couches and stuff. But it was a great studio and working with Scott, he definitely just integrated into the team immediately. He was trying to hype us up, to get us excited about doing things, which is half of the process, feeling the energy level, and he was good at building that up.

LITT: The song already had such a distinctive sound. For some reason, I was thinking of a soft first verse before the band kicked in, and I remember thinking about the song "As Tears Go By", by the Stones, which had a harpsichord-y

thing at the front end. So I think I asked them to try one that way first. But as I recall, the final version was very similar to what they were doing live at the time. We always recorded with the three instrumentalists together. On some songs later on, it was all four of them live, like on "Drive" on *Automatic For The People*.

"The video was better for MTV. The previous one was 8mm film of a quarry upside down..."

PETER BUCK

MILLS: The ending of the song was kind of ironic for us, because we didn't really do the big, massive ending thing. It was tongue in cheek, but it was also compositional, in the sense that it's a chromatic walk-up at the end, and so for us it was somewhat amusing, but it also fit the song.

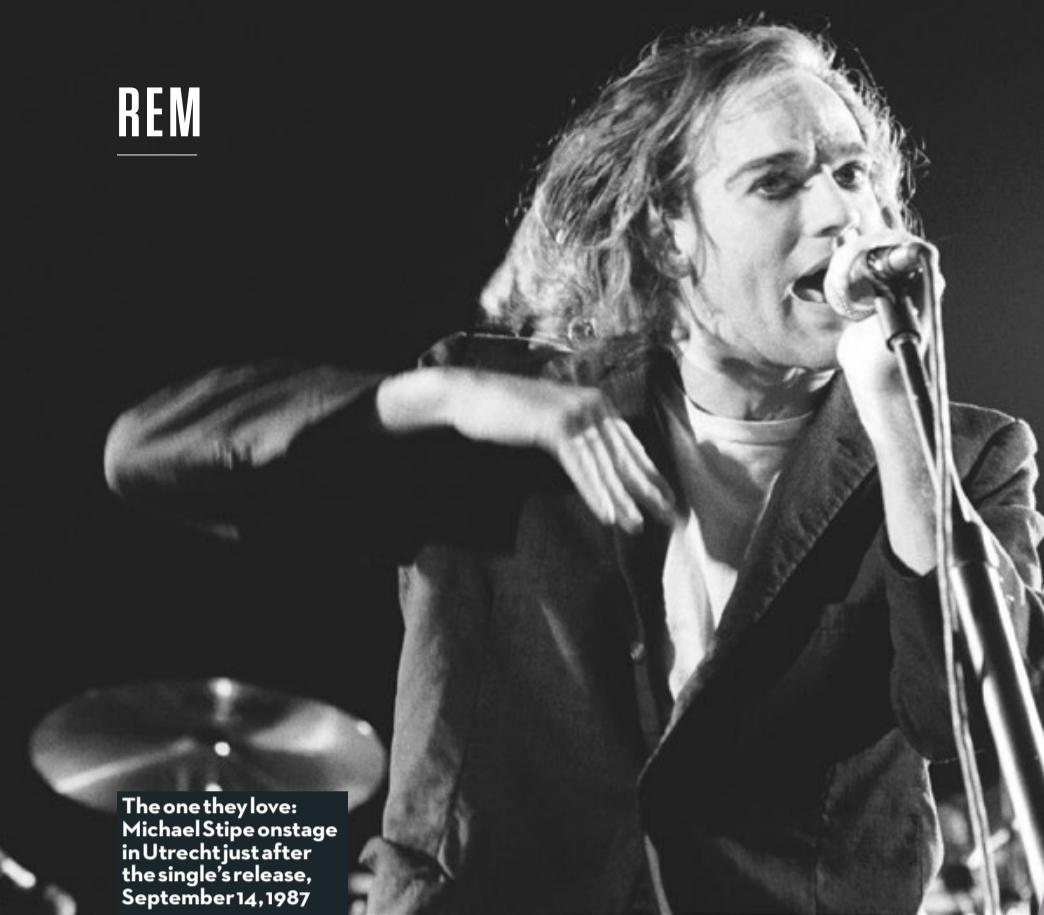
LITT: I could tell once we started working together that Peter wasn't a solo type of guy. But

I guess there is a solo here! But it's a solo in the way The Byrds with a Rickenbacker had solos, it was more instrumental solos than just one instrument.

MILLS: Peter hated guitar solos and the only way he would play one was if it made the song better, rather than showed off his guitar chops – which he has, but he's very modest about it. It was OK if it was a constructed melody, if it wasn't an improvisation, if it wasn't noodling, or wanking, as Peter might have described it. The solo here was composed, it sounded great, and it suited the song very well. It wasn't self-indulgent, it was actually in the service of the song, and for us that was fine.

BUCK: It's kind of note-for-note "Smokestack Lightnin'" played in a different rhythm. I don't know if anyone really notices that! It's also the riff in "Primitive" by The Groupies and The Cramps, and it's been in every blues song. I like the fact that it was a tongue-in-cheek cliché musical statement that's been in a million blues songs. I used the black Rickenbacker I've used for everything, it's been my main guitar since I bought it in 1980.

MILLS: My vocal part doesn't necessarily have anything to do with the rest of the song, but I thought it seemed to fit. It's "coming down on your own now". I'd say 90 percent of the time I came up with the counter-parts, or occasionally Michael would have an idea or a suggestion that I could play with, but most of the time melodies would pop into my head and I would just try to find some words that weren't too out of place.



The one they love:
Michael Stipe onstage
in Utrecht just after
the single's release,
September 14, 1987

➲ **LITT:** In the old doo-wop song "Under The Boardwalk", each time, the melody in the chorus changes a little bit. I was thinking that with Michael's vocal, the way he came in with "fire". We tried some "oohs" in the B-section of the verse once or twice to see if that worked, too, and I would end up leaving the echo of it in, so there are little texture-y things going on. Recording *Document* was easy, I think it was six weeks recording and two weeks mixing, and album done. It was a really creative time for us. We were running videos in the control room and Michael was knocking out lyrics on his typewriter and taking photographs. It was a kind of visual and aural experience.

DOWNS: This was one of the few times where there was absolutely no discussion about what song to release first – what other song could possibly be the first single from that record? They were cresting in popularity, they were definitely getting new fans every time they put a record out, every time they toured.

BUCK: You know Prince could walk in and cut a single, knowing it would be a hit? I never felt like that, we just write a bunch of songs and if one of them is popular, great, but I don't really know how or why. "The One I Love" fits perfectly on the record, but I never saw it as a hit single.

LITT: People who had seen them live knew it. That, along with the fact that it just sounded so punchy. It was the right length and arrangement for pop radio, too. That's sort of my thing, mixing things like a pop record. I wasn't cool enough to be able to bury shit, you know. I would know the mix of "The One I Love" was right because when I would play it against Whitney Houston or something else that was currently alive on the radio, it matched up perfectly! For me it set a tone for the whole album, because I think the album is very linear in the same way as the song, in a very black and white way.

DOWNS: Back in those days there were three ways people heard about songs – they saw the band live, they heard it on the radio, or they saw

them on MTV. Period. That was the only way music got exposed.

MILLS: We were lucky that we had a visual artist in the band, in Michael Stipe, that he was able to make videos that we felt represented the band as well as it could be done. But Peter and I were always pushing Michael to make them with as little of the band in as possible.

BUCK: This was the point before Michael would lip sync. We had turned in some super-uncommercial videos to MTV. They used to come to us and say, listen, show us a film of y'all singing and playing and we'll play it once an hour. I hated videos and Michael didn't like them much better, he wanted to make little films, which I think was great, but "The One I Love" was a little bit more playable on MTV. The previous video, for "Fall On Me", was black and white 8mm film of a quarry shown upside down. Show that to MTV, they'd look at it and go "What the fuck is this?" I don't blame them.

DOWNS: I remember it as being the first time we really 'made' a video. Our videos before, we were proud of them, but they were very low-budget affairs, definitely more of an indie film approach. It was done by Robert Longo, who was an artist from New York. We thought it came out great and it was a big hit on MTV.

BUCK: If memory serves, it's kind of a travelogue of Athens. I don't remember much about the process, except that it was hot.

MILLS: It's a pretty arresting video, and I was happy to see it well-received, but I think

the video was well-received because the song is so good. Had the song been mediocre I don't think anyone would have really cared about the video. "The One I Love" was the first single of ours to get on Top 40 radio, so that opened some doors, programmers started seeing the possibility of us actually getting played on the radio. It wasn't something we were striving for, but it's not something you're gonna say no to either.

DOWNS: The popularity and sales were like a stair-step. We were very lucky with that. They toured all through the '80s, they really never had the concept of time off.

BUCK: After *Document*, we'd had five albums out with IRS, and the main problem was, the records weren't getting distributed anywhere but the United States. It was really depressing to tour Germany, and play to all American servicemen. The idea of Warner Brothers was that as long as we had creative control and could be in charge of our career, having the records distributed overseas would be nice. And it did work, our records starting selling outside the US.

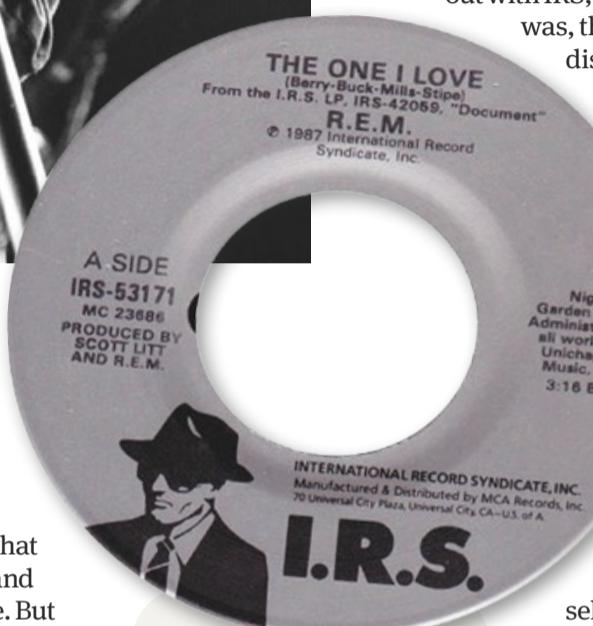
MILLS: We played it many times as an acoustic version... it really worked on a quieter scale. Piano and acoustic guitar, that worked very nicely.

DOWNS: There's an acoustic version from MTV *Unplugged* from 2001 and it's just beautiful, it's just the three guys [Berry had left after 1996's *New Adventures In Hi-Fi*]. It's a slightly different melody, and by slowing it down they did what Clapton did with "Layla", they made it a different song. It's a tour de force in its own soft way. I think there's 12 versions of "Losing My Religion" on the new *REMTV* boxset, and probably a similar number of "The One I Love".

LITT: Everything worked great on *Document*, it had a big effect on our futures together. It did get harder later on, but it was only, for the most part, trying things that we hadn't done, and searching for stuff that showed growth, trying new things.

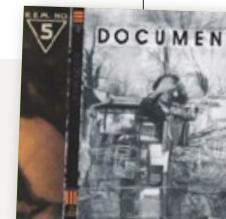
DOWNS: Every step of their career, they followed their own collective muse and their own internal muse. They were aware of the impact these things might have and what the pitfalls might be, but they also just wanted to be artists, wanted to be creators, that was their job. ☺

REMTV and IRS singles boxset, 7IN-83-88, are out now on Rhino and Capitol/IRS, respectively



FACT FILE

- **Written by:** Bill Berry, Peter Buck, Mike Mills, Michael Stipe
- **Performers:** Bill Berry (drums, vocals), Peter Buck (guitars), Mike Mills (bass, vocals), Michael Stipe (vocals)
- **Producer:** Scott Litt and REM
- **Recorded at:** Sound Emporium, Nashville
- **Released:** August 1987
- **UK/US charts:** 51/9



April 1987 The band team up with producer Scott Litt to record their fifth album,

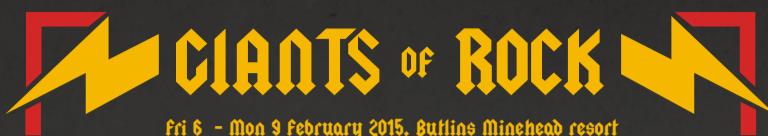
Document, in Nashville
August 1987 "The One I Love" is released before *Document*, reaching No 9 in the US and breaking the band on MTV

TIMELINE

April 5, 1980 REM play their first ever show, in Athens, Georgia
April 1983 Debut album *Murmur* is released – *Reckoning, Fables Of*

The Reconstruction and Lifes Rich Pageant follow in consecutive years
September 27, 1986 "The One I Love" is

debuted in Santa Barbara, California, during the tour in support of *Lifes Rich Pageant*



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QUOTE

UNCUT

BOOK BY WED 4 FEB

KILLER IN THE HOME

A Harley-Davidson in the dining room. Wildcat skin rugs. Three Chihuahuas. And walls of gold records that mark one of rock's fiercest and longest-running careers. *Uncut* pays a home visit to the indestructible JERRY LEE LEWIS, and finds the Killer in his bedroom watching *Gunsmoke*. "You know, I could have been bigger than Elvis Presley," he says. "Except I'm unmanageable!"

Story: Jaan Uhelszki





Jerry Lee Lewis
performs "Whole Lotta
Shakin' Goin' On" on
Don't Knock The Rock,
March 19, 1964

IT WEREN'T for the colour of the dirt, you wouldn't know that you'd crossed the State Line from Tennessee into Mississippi. It's not until you fork off the highway that you know you're someplace else. Someplace very different. Not 50-feet off the Interstate is another kind of geography altogether, a stillness, almost a secret garden hidden away from civilisation; an impossibly green countryside dotted with horse ranches, U-Pick-It berry farms, and places that breed quail. There isn't a gas station, a restaurant or a drugstore for miles, and you get the feeling of utter isolation on the way to Jerry Lee Lewis' house. But you get the feeling he likes it that way.

Behind a thick copse of tall pines sits Lewis' rambling, curiously unpretentious home. The property, which he bought in 1972, is marked by a long white board fence that goes on for nearly an eighth of a mile. It is regularly whitewashed because fans come by in the dead of night and scrawl messages to The Killer — usually in German, his longtime road manager JW Whitten explains. That speaks volumes about his fan base and the longterm effect of *Live At The Star-Club*, recorded in 1964 in

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; ROB SHANAHAN/FILMAGIC; STEVE ROBERTS



Killer at the keys:
Jerry Lee,
mid-'60s



Hamburg, Germany. Out of print for decades, though heavily bootlegged since, it showcases Lewis at his best: unhinged, unrepentant, raw, raunchy and irreverent, lit from within by a demon energy that fuels the very essence of what we think of as rock'n'roll.

Fired by that energy, he's lived hard and rough, but for every misstep there's been a miraculous recovery. He's burned through six wives and he lost two sons. He's crashed dozens of cars, including one Rolls-Royce — indeed, one friend said he wouldn't drive with him anymore because Lewis insisted on driving his Rolls like a racecar. Along the way, he's outwitted the IRS, hornswoggled promoters, fallen in love with other men's wives and no-one ever wanted to go on after him.

"If I couldn't do it my way, I'd best stay at home, is what I always say," he explains when we meet, fixing me with his steel-blue eyes, the colour of thunderclouds about to storm. "Nothing about me is phony. Everything is what you see is what you get."

WO HOURS BEFORE our interview, Jerry Lee fell out of his car, a specially-ordered Inca Gold 2005 Ford Thunderbird hardtop. Now, he greets me in his bedroom, where he lies in a king-sized bed, flat on his back wearing a grey muscle T-shirt that looks similar to the one he was wearing in his 1976 mug shot after he got arrested outside Graceland. Lying on a bag of ice cubes, his attention wanders to a large TV in the corner of the room tuned to the Encore Western channel. While an episode of *Gunsmoke* plays, he gently plays air piano, his fingers plucking at imaginary keys. "Sometimes he plays keys on my back when we're lying in bed," said Judith Lewis, his seventh wife, whom he married in March 2012.

Even without the complication of his injured back, an audience with Lewis follows a number of procedures. He has a rather rigid and decorous code of conduct he lives by — much of it extracted from the Westerns he loves. It was a simpler time — a God-fearing time — and one that Jerry Lee Lewis evidently finds easier to live in. Accordingly, before entering his presence, one must agree to abide by certain key protocols. You must address him as Mr Lewis — unless he explicitly asks you to call him Jerry Lee. You cannot ask to pose for a photograph with him. You must not use large words. Finally, because seven decades of screaming and hollering over his piano have taken their toll, you have to speak at high volume.

But there are other, less visible rules. He reportedly rejected a co-author for his latest autobiography because she had the audacity to turn down the TV so she could make her pitch to him. He is said to have fired an employee who had the temerity to sit on the edge of his

EYE WITNESS!

IN THE STUDIO WITH JERRY LEE!

Jim Keltner on The Killer's recording sessions...

HERE, SESSIONS START around noon. Little did we know Jerry Lee was more on Keith Richards time. Early Keith Richards time, I should say; I doubt he's like that now. He'd show up around seven or maybe even eight. He arrived in this big Cadillac, and sort of padded in, in his pajamas, a bathrobe and house slippers. Not a tacky bathrobe, a very nice, dressy-looking bathrobe. But he was ready to get down to business. There were a few things you have to know about working with him. Jerry Lee tends to run away with a song. He's always been known to be a real heavy-duty rusher. He would start the tempo and then just immediately go to the moon. So it scared me a little bit each time I was going to play with him. I learned early on that you play with him and you have faith in him that he knows what he's doing, and he's



going to be listening to you to some degree. In the days when everybody was drinking too much, whatever, there was less listening to each other than there should have been. But it's different now.

"You never know where he's going to go. If you're playing bass or guitar, he may have his own version of where this chord is supposed to be; at the top or in the middle of the chorus. Not where you might think it should be. You've got to be fast on your feet. Really, some people asked to be on it, like Ronnie Wood. Keith happened to be in town so that's how we got him on it. But he just played on one song and that was 'Little Queenie'."



bed. And that's even before you get to bandmembers who have suffered his wrath through the years.

"Playing with Jerry Lee is like riding a horse," says drummer Jim Keltner, who's produced Jerry Lee Lewis' last two albums. "You have to be able to let him go a little and then you gotta wheel him in just a little bit, but you can't let him feel it too much that you're reining him in 'cos that will start a fight. You may not end at the same tempo you started with. But then none of our favourite records from back in the day ended where they started, so that's a non-issue."

One of the cues you learn to pick up quickly in Jerry Lee's presence is the small shake of the head – signifying that he's gone as far as he is willing to go on a certain subject. The trick, it transpires, is to keep him talking.

"How much longer did you say this is going to take?" he asks, with the merest lift of his eyebrow. I ask whether he ever doubted he would be wildly successful. "I had a God-



given talent," he explains. "That's something you can't take away. I always knew I was going to make it. It was just a matter of how long it was going to take me."

When young Jerry was only eight, he displayed such a formidable talent picking out songs on a relative's piano that his father, Elmo Lewis, mortgaged the family home to buy his young son his own piano. It was that same single-mindedness that impelled his father to drive his flatbed truck with Jerry Lee playing piano in the back around his home in Ferriday, Louisiana, to drum up interest for his son, then 14 years old. It was with the same spirit that he and his father ventured to Memphis, to the fabled offices of Sun Records. No matter that they arrived unannounced. He opened the door as if he'd been invited, and brashly walked up to the receptionist, Marion Keisker, and told her he had come to see Sam Phillips.

"Where'd I get the guts?" Lewis asks rhetorically. "Well, I knew that if Mr Phillips heard me, he'd like it and he would release a record on me. And it happened exactly that way."

Well, not exactly. Phillips was away in Florida that day – it fell to Sun's engineer-cum-producer, Jack Clement, to hear Jerry Lee play Ray Price's hit, "Crazy Arms", which he recorded for Phillips to hear. Between mid-1957 and the summer of 1958, Jerry Lee scored four consecutive hits: "Whole Lotta Shakin' Going On", "Great Balls Of Fire", "Breathless" and "High School Confidential". These cornerstones of rock'n'roll helped revive Sun's fortunes following the loss of Elvis Presley to RCA. Elvis was always Lewis' lodestone, eventually his friend and peer, and finally his *bête noir*. Even 37 years after Presley's death, the score still hasn't been settled.

"You know, I could've been bigger than Elvis Presley,"

BUYERS' GUIDE

KILLER CUTS

Jerry Lee Lewis on CD...



JERRY LEE LEWIS

SUN, 1957

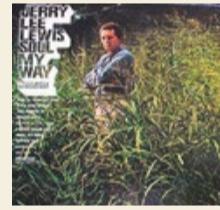
His debut introduced the knowing sneer and out-of-control piano. It's that brutal and careless confidence that allows him to cover Elvis Presley's "Don't Be Cruel" like he was laying down the gauntlet for dominance of the very soul of rock'n'roll.



THE RETURN OF ROCK

SMASH, 1964

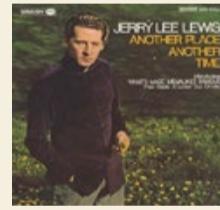
Includes, among others, three Chuck Berry covers, plus Joe Turner, Hank Ballard and Roy Hamilton staples. His version of "Corine, Corina" is one of the best out there, and his take on Berry's "Roll Over Beethoven" is incendiary.



SOUL MY WAY

SMASH, 1967

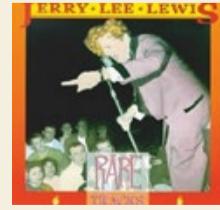
Not so much a soul album as a sampler of what the man could do in all genres, and significant since it's his last album before he "went country". Roy Head's "Treat Her Right!" is prime JLL fodder, and he attacked Mickey Newbury's "Just Dropped In" well before Kenny Rogers.



ANOTHER PLACE ANOTHER TIME

SMASH, 1969

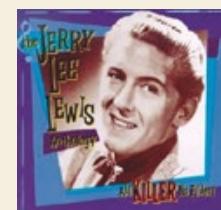
Unadulterated country, with JLL reinventing himself as a wounded balladeer. This new track took him to the top of the country charts with the album and singles, "What's Made Milwaukee Famous (Has Made A Loser Out Of Me)" and "Another Place Another Time". Not a single bad song here.



RARE TRACKS

RHINO, 1989

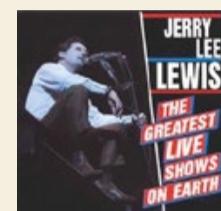
All the cuts are from Lewis' Sun years. Every song is of high quality, especially one of his rare originals, "Hand Me Down My Walking Cane", and an alternative reading of "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On".



ALL KILLER, NO FILLER

RHINO, 1993

Almost all the Sun classics, plus good surveys of the Mercury and Elektra years, and a few terrific stray rockers, this 42-track double-CD is the perfect compendium of his long career.



THE GREATEST LIVE SHOWS ON EARTH

IMPORTS, 1994

Down but not out in the early '60s, Lewis demolished all in his path in performances from Alabama and Texas. An essential document of his live shows.



THE (COMPLETE) SESSION

HIP-O SELECT, 2005

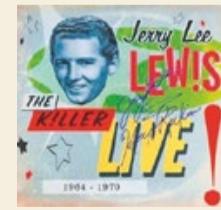
Lewis' stellar backing band includes Eric Clapton and Peter Frampton, who tear through early rock hits like "Sea Cruise" and "What I Say". He also performs quality versions of "Satisfaction" and "Bad Moon Rising".



LAST MAN STANDING

ARTIST FIRST, 2006

His first album in a decade finds The Killer dueting with luminaries like Jagger, Richards, Neil Young, Willie Nelson and Bruce Springsteen.



THE KILLER LIVE - 1964-1970

HIP-O-SELECT,

2012

Drawn mostly from performances at a Hamburg Star-Club show in 1964 with the clearly outmatched Nashville Teens as his backing band, Lewis rules the stage like a war lord accompanied by his jittery piano and a leering growl.

⇒ Lewis says dryly. "Except I'm unmanageable. And of course, I didn't have Colonel Parker."

"All Memphis really cares about is Elvis," grumbles Judith Lewis. While the city gave Lewis a parade last year when he opened his latest club, Jerry Lee Lewis Café & Honky Tonk, on Beale Street, and he cut his biggest hits here, Memphis has never embraced Jerry Lee as its own. For his part, Mississippi – albeit only 25 miles south of Memphis – is his home.

But Elvis isn't the only one of his peers that Jerry Lee has fallen out with. There is a story dating from March 1958, when Jerry Lee and Chuck Berry both appeared on Alan Freed's 44-date Big Beat package tour. On the first night – March 28 – at the Brooklyn



Best of friends: Jerry Lee on *This Is Tom Jones*, March 28, 1969



KILLER FACTS

10 THINGS YOU NEVER KNEW ABOUT JERRY LEE...

1 He considers Tom Jones one of his best friends. He is the only person who is welcome to call the Lewis residence at any hour of the day or night.

2 He collects antique fountain pens.

3 In 1968, Jerry Lee was in a rock musical called *Catch My Soul*, a version of Shakespeare's *Othello*. The schedule was so rigorous that he begged to be let out of the movie version.

4 His father, Elmo, was born on the same date as Elvis Presley. Brian Jones used 'Elmo Lewis' as an early stage name.

5 Once, Jerry Lee and Elvis Presley reportedly rode naked on motorbikes

through the streets of Memphis. In *Jerry Lee Lewis: His Own Story*, Lewis refuses to confirm or deny it. "I'd just rather not get into that. I don't think Elvis would appreciate that. And he's not here to defend himself."

6 Jerry Lee's kitchen is decorated with Coca-Cola wallpaper.

7 His favourite horror film is *The Thing*.

8 Janis Joplin once punched Jerry Lee after he badmouthed her sister at her high school reunion.

9 Although he has a full bar in his home, Jerry Lee doesn't drink. He enjoys NuGrape soda in bottles, canned macadamia nuts and Juicy Fruit gum.

10 "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On" was the first song played on the national edition of *American Bandstand*. During its 37-year run, the only performers on the show who did not lip-synch were BB King and Jerry Lee himself.

Paramount Theatre, Freed chose Berry over Lewis to close the show. Jerry Lee played a wilder and more charged set than usual. For the *coup de grâce*, during "Great Balls Of Fire", he doused his piano with a mixture of gasoline and Coca-Cola smuggled to him in a bottle by a stagehand. He lit a match, tossed it on the piano and continued to bang away as flames rose around him. Needless to say, Berry didn't play that night. "He completely ignored it," Lewis says, nearly 60 years later and without a trace of remorse in his voice. "It's never been brought up in any conversation after it happened."

Were you afraid you'd get hurt when you set the piano on fire? "No, not at all," he says, his eyes dancing a little. "I've had some experience with gasoline, and I knew to stand back when I threw the match on it." You know he's not kidding.

BUT IT'S NOT just artists he's had beefs with. He battled the IRS for a decade before moving to Ireland for 12 months, then finally filed for bankruptcy. He opened up his house for tours at \$15 a pop in 1994 to help whittle down a \$4 million tax bill. Ten years later, he closed his ranch to tours around the time he divorced Kerry – wife number 6 – who used to call herself Killerette. While a gift shop is long gone, the house is furnished simply, with good rugs and polished wooden floors. There's a piano in the

corner of the room near big bay windows; it's no longer painted gold, as it was during his last wife's tenure. There are home-decorating magazines piled on stools and pale balsa-wood sculptures that spell out 'Love' and 'Dream', a cut crystal frame with a wedding photo of Lewis and Judith, and a finger-painting from his grandson Kolton that says: "To Meme and Hehe, Love You

Forever." A small business-sized envelope is on the counter of a full bar reading "Fan Mail". There are long black leather couches and small ceramic lamps that throw a soft light in the late afternoon. A large TV is turned way down low. A wildcat-skin rug lies in the corner of the large dark wood-panelled room. His gold records and various awards take up most of the wall space, except for a small alcove where there is a large clock and an oil painting of Topaz, his favourite dog, who died a few years ago. Incidentally, the Lewises have three Chihuahuas right now – Little Jerry Lee, Little Judith and Coco – and three rescue dogs in pens outside.

"You want to know why I like Chihuahuas?" He says. "Well, they are small but very aggressive... they think they're as big as any other dog out there." Which, perhaps, goes some way to explaining Jerry Lee Lewis himself.

The dining room is sparsely furnished. A 1958 Harley-Davidson rests on a Persian rug. Only two bikes were made – one of Jerry Lee, the other for Elvis. To JW Whitten's eternal delight, Lewis got the first model and Elvis the second. According to Whitten, Jerry Lee fires it up every day, but there are no gas fumes in the dining room. His original piano resides in the hallway in front of Lewis' bedroom: a talisman, a reminder, and a link to his own past, its keys a dirty brown, some tipped, the wood pitted and dry.



Jerry Lee at home, with his picture of Topaz (behind), 2014: "Chihuahuas think they're as big as any dog out there..."

"While Jerry doesn't play the other pianos all that much, there's not a single time that he goes by this one and doesn't pick out a chord," explains Judith.

"Yeah, she's right. It's like me, I've gotten a little older," he says. The piano has a lot of character, much like Jerry Lee himself. He is, though, in better shape than the instrument – his secret, he reveals, is "good Southern cooking". Still handsome, his teeth even and white, his arms are toned and his hands are unnervingly young-looking. He has a chiseled profile, and still has that shock of hair, thick, curly and a little unruly. He keeps a black fine-toothed comb by his bedside. He sees me looking at his comb, so I ask whether he thinks that iconic blond pompadour was critical to his success.

"Yes, it is," he says simply. I wonder, in the early days, when it came forward over his face, how did he achieve that look?

"All I did with my hair was wash it, wet it down, comb it, and let it dry, and I go from that. I don't do anything with it."

I back up, suspecting he thinks I'm suggesting he had someone style it for him. "Everything with me, from my hair, my clothes, or my socks or my feet or my boots or my shoes – nothing about me is phony." Which is one hundred percent true. And he intends to keep it that way as long as he can. "Would I ever retire?" he reflects. "Nah, never would. I don't feel like I can retire or just quit. I'd be lost. It just wouldn't be right."

He doesn't do too much now: apart from watching Westerns in his bedroom, he enjoys taking rides in the country with his wife. He took his first vacation in 40 years when he and Judith went to visit his son Jerry Lee Lewis III a few months ago. But he hasn't abandoned touring. "I can't see myself not entertaining folks occasionally. I don't have to do it every night, every night, every night. But I can do it two or three times a month, you know."

Memorably, last May he played at Memphis' Beale Street Festival. He was in rare form: full of piss and innuendo, even insulting his band, whom he accused of rushing him.

You can barely make out what he's saying in the YouTube video, but you can see the derision on his face. For all his trials, he still goes on. His will is formidable, his constitution stronger than anyone, even himself, imagined. Mostly because he's just not finished yet. Or in other words, God isn't finished with him. "Jerry Lee is living so long 'cos he's afraid to die. He knows he's going to hell," confides one of his intimates.

Did Jerry Lee realise he was making history?

"I didn't think we were changing the world, but I knew we were stirring things up," Lewis says sanguinely. "I knew it could be something, and I knew that I had the talent to back it up with, and I knew if I could ever get somebody to release a record on me, nothing could stop me."

ASTONISHINGLY, JERRY LEE has just released his third LP of the decade – *Rock & Roll Time*. Along with Jim Keltner, it features a host of top-flight musicians including Neil Young, Keith Richards and Nils Lofgren. The album includes covers of such tunes as Skynyrd's "Mississippi Kid", Dylan's "Stepchild" and Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues" that finds Jerry Lee playing guitar. "At one point Jerry started playing guitar during a recording session, and I have a front-row seat," says Lofgren. "It gets even better. Here I am playing lap-steel with Jerry Lee Lewis. We are doing the second take to 'Blues After

Midnight' and Jerry says in the middle of the song,

'Play that steel, Killer!' I'm like, 'Is he talking to me? I'm the only steel-guitar player; he must be talking to me.' [Laughs] To have that on tape is hilarious and beautiful."

Although Lewis wasn't always in the best of health during the sessions, Keltner was amazed by his abilities. "He still does this amazing thing with his hands. Steve (Bing; co-producer) has always said he sounds like he's got three hands. And when you're recording with somebody like Jerry Lee, it's gonna be so much fun to hear playbacks, because there's all these jewels, little things that happen with his voice or usually his piano. You go, 'How in the world did he do that? There's only one guy playing.' But then you realise

he's always been an amazing player. You can't forget he was the guy could play those fast things faster than anybody. And he prided himself on that."

Keltner is quick to commend Jerry Lee's professionalism. But I ask Jerry Lee if he wonders whether his reputation ever did him a disservice: "You know what surprises people about me?" he asks. "That I'm quiet offstage. But you're probably right, my reputation sometimes got in the way of my music. That's just not the way I am. I'm not a killer. I never killed anyone dead. I've helped more people than I've killed. Ha ha."

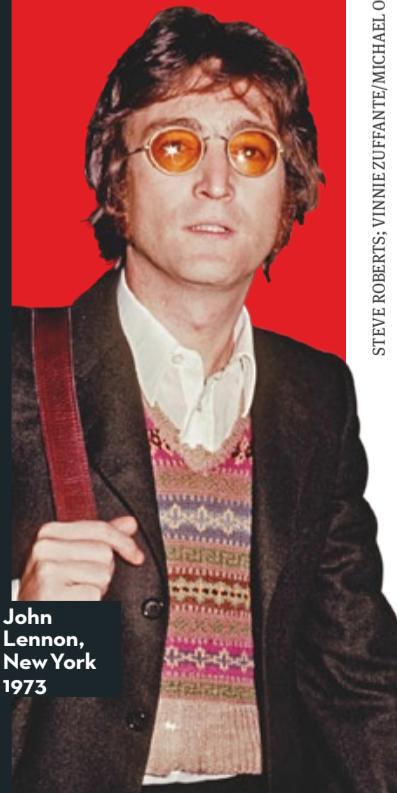
Maybe he's just mellowing. On the cover of "Folsom Prison Blues", he substitutes the line, "I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die" for "I shot a boy in Memphis, Mama, but I couldn't watch him die". After all, this is a man who grew up on Gene Autry Westerns, benign, pastoral tales where the good guy always won. "I was a big fan of Gene Autry," he tells me. "We have the same birthday, as a matter of fact, September 29." Did you watch Autry's movies and think, 'I can do that?' "Nah," he looks at me like I've eaten a bug. "I knew I could do anything I wanted way before I started watching Gene Autry movies. I always knew."

Rock & Roll Time is released by Vanguard Records. *Jerry Lee Lewis: His Own Story* is published by Canongate Books

WHEN JERRY MET JOHN

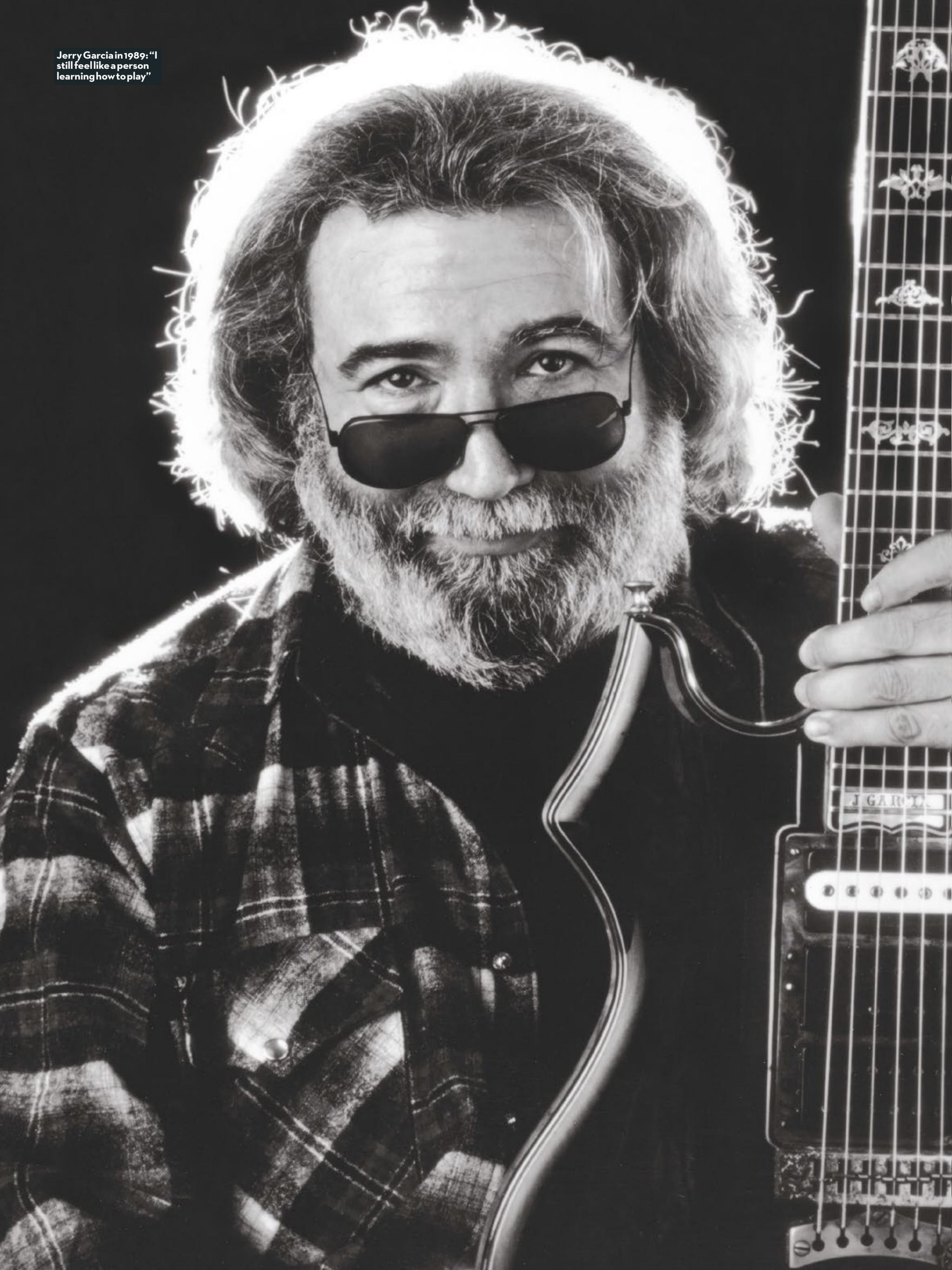
Jim Keltner recalls taking John Lennon along to see The Killer in concert in 1973...

"JOHN called and said, 'Let's go to the Roxy and see Jerry Lee,' he begins. "He was really excited. And for John Lennon to be excited to go and see somebody was a big deal. Jerry Lee was amazing. He was on fire that night. I remember saying to John, 'I've heard Jerry Lee many times, but this was the best I've ever heard.' And John agreed totally. We went backstage, and to tell you the truth, John was a little nervous to meet him. People are funny like that when they're in the presence of certain people, and Jerry Lee has that thing. So John didn't know what to say. How Jerry Lee would react to him. I think John got down on his knees and kissed his boot mostly, because he was nervous. He was all over himself about being in Jerry Lee's presence."



John Lennon, New York 1973

Jerry Garcia in 1989: "I
still feel like a person
learning how to play"



“We’re one of the few adventures you can still have in America. . .”

2015 marks the 50th anniversary of the Grateful Dead and, to kick off a year of extra-sensory celebrations, we've uncovered a seminal 1989 *Melody Maker* interview with Jerry Garcia and his engaged, ultra-hospitable bandmates. Over a week in San Raphael, a tale unfolds of George Bush, David Crosby, the rainforest, Bob Dylan and, of course, acid. “For kids, our drug stories are like our fathers’ war stories. . .”

Story: Steve Sutherland



Michael Fane, aged 19, was shot dead by cops last weekend for causing a disturbance in a restaurant. His mother said he'd been acting kinda strange since he took 100 tabs of acid nine months earlier at a Grateful Dead concert, an experience that convinced him Jerry Garcia was God.

“Jeez, nobody’s called me God lately,” says Garcia, examining the newspaper clipping on the wall of the Dead’s San Raphael office. “And anyway, nobody takes 100 tabs anymore. I mean, how would they know? ...98 ...99 ...100! You’d never get to counting!”

The article goes on to say that Michael Fane’s mother considers the Grateful Dead as an evil organisation that trades off a drug-taking myth, encouraging youngsters into their thrall for profit. Garcia considers writing to her – “You had him for 19 years, lady, we had him for one night, who the hell is to blame?” – but is counselled against it. Still, the middle-aged woman manning the switchboard

is moved to say, “The strongest thing we take around here anymore is coffee.” Then she gets down to organising tickets to see Duran Duran.

As I examine the other clippings on the wall – Greenpeace posters, a flyer for Garcia’s solo show tomorrow night at the Frisco Gift Center, an article explaining how the Oakland Kaiser Convention Center has cancelled a Dead show because the authorities fear that the fans will camp out, a letter from a gay Deadhead who’s HIV positive thanking the band for their support and urging them to undertake further benefits, the story of a guy who’s embezzled four grand from a bank account by impersonating Bob Weir – various members of the Dead’s 75 employees bustle by. Everybody greets everybody else and Garcia shares their gossip.

This is the nerve centre of the Grateful Dead, America’s (perhaps even the world’s) most established anti-establishment. This is where the band who started out 24 years ago as the riotous musical accompaniment to pioneering author Ken Kesey’s infamous Acid Tests (captured for posterity in Tom Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*) still attempt to maintain their principles of organised anarchy. They may have relinquished control of their own record company over a decade ago and *In The Dark* (their 1987 album, their first studio offering for over six years) may have gone platinum on Arista, but the Grateful Dead still pride themselves on self-sufficiency, on providing a workable alternative lifestyle for the business setup they refer to as their extended family.



The Grateful Dead
in 1967: (l-r) Lesh,
Kreutzmann,
Garcia (seated),
Weir and Pigpen

→ **A** COMBINATION OF LUCK, nostalgia, rehab, progressive radio programming, determination, personal chemistry and an abiding adventurous musical yen to push things "FURTHER" – the message emblazoned across the front of the Merry Pranksters' bus in the photo on the office wall is still, it seems, their motto – have conspired to shove the Grateful Dead into the '90s on a wave of astonishing success. While they're working on their as-yet-untitled new LP, the six band members are taking a break to hit the road as one of the biggest live attractions in rock. Forget Springsteen, forget U2, the kids flock to the Dead live in droves, in *caravans* – every show metamorphosing into a festival, an event as the crowd clamours for a part of their legendary mystical action.

From this office in San Raphael, the Dead deal with all their own concert ticketing and, last New Year's Eve, they blew the switchboard for the whole surrounding area, such was the multitude calling in to see them play.

"We're one of the few adventures you can still have in America," says Garcia by way of explanation. "For kids, our drug stories are like our fathers' war stories. Y'know, they can go on the road and it's like, 'Remember the time we were trying to get to that Grateful Dead concert and we blew out two tyres and we had to hitchhike and remember that guy with the face and...' Following the Dead around is one of the few things they haven't legislated against – y'know, it's not totally illegal. We're still falling through the cracks."

JERRY GARCIA, THE most celestial guitarist alive, is a veritable bear of a man, greying, scruffy, tanned, always chuckling. On July 10, 1986, he lapsed into a five-day diabetic coma after years of pretty heavy drug abuse (the doctors said his blood was like mud!) but he recovered, virtually learned to play guitar again from scratch and he relishes the Dead's current problems.

"It's kinda weird to *succeed out*. I mean, this is it. This is as far as you can go. Now we don't do one-nighters in the 18-20,000-seat coliseums, we do two or three and that's starting to be a problem because our fans come and camp out. It's not as if Deadheads are terribly destructive, it's just that, in some of the places we play, the Rosemont, which is a suburb in Chicago with a stadium, the residents are unhappy about people camping on the lawn and all this other stuff."

The last time the Dead reached a plateau of success was in 1974 and they couldn't handle it. Bob Weir, the rhythm guitarist who was 16 in 1963 when he co-founded Mother McCree's Uptown Jug Champions (the embryonic Dead) and who the fates seem to have preserved in the same way they preserved Cliff Richard, says they couldn't maintain the giant Alembic sound system

they'd built to satiate their desire for amplified perfection. "We'd pull into town, set up, play, sell the place out, leave and move on to the next place having lost money. We were having to pay to play and, y'know, that's an untenable situation."

Their solution then was to quit touring a while, probably a mistake in retrospect.

"I think maybe, if we've learned anything, it's that perseverance furthers," says Weir. "So a small element of our following is kinda footloose. They tend to follow us around and camp out wherever they land and many of them are a little on the... uh... blissed-out side and, y'know, their civility by normal standards, is a bit in question, which causes friction between us and local communities. We'll just have to come up with a solution."

Garcia is characteristically philosophical: "We've been here before on other levels, so this is really a metaphor for everything we've done in a way. We're in a place that we never expected to be and there's nothing defined here. So, at this point, we have to define what success means in some other way. We don't just wanna play outdoor stadia and restrict our audience to no fewer than 70,000 people at a shot and we wanna keep up the quality of the show and so on..."

"The way I view it, we're kind of a utility service. You go there and you wanna do the best you can. You don't wanna burn anybody and y'know, it should be fair. The idea that our audience is at risk of being busted or taken away because they camp out, strikes me as terribly unfair. It remains for us to come up with any kind of good, conclusive direction. We almost always broadcast our shows now to alleviate the local crush, which takes up a certain amount of slack, but that's not really a solution. We've even thought of playing tremendously unattractive music for a few years and thinning out the crowd! Those are the kind of ideas you start coming up with! We don't really know what we're doing, but we're determined to keep on playing. We're not about to quit."

SOME OF THE Deadheads – as the diehard fanatics are universally known – are co-operating by bringing garbage bags to the shows and cleaning up afterwards but, as Garcia says, "It's still really a matter of figuring out a way to do it where we don't turn into cops."

The outlaw ethos is still of immense importance to the Dead. They've been busted a fair few times over the years and have duly celebrated their scuffles with the law in song. Even the name – surely one of the sweetest cosmic accidents ever (Garcia found the words juxtaposed in a dictionary at bassist Phil Lesh's house while smoking DMT) – has served to locate them on the outside. While they're still keeping on, a small flame of rebellion burns in the heart of every freak who traded in his kaftan for a career in accountancy.

"We're not threatening enough to hang yet, but they don't really like us," admits Garcia, jubilantly. "When the Grammies come up and the showbiz stuff, we're not part of it and we don't care. It sucks, it's lame – y'know, the music business, let's face it, is like carpet sales. Music is a wonderful thing and the music business really eats it."

I find the Dead's abiding popularity positively encouraging in a country which re-elected Reagan in the form of Bush.

"Oh! Give me a break! I was shocked when Reagan was elected Governor of California! God damn! And then, as President, we were embarrassed by the guy. I mean, he wasn't even a good actor. And Bush is a total idiot. God, it's amazing to me, but that's not what America's about. The government falls into the hands of the people who love power and who are not bright enough to be rich and that's the way it's gonna be here. It doesn't work, really."

"America is still that experiment about how much can we get away with? The whole notion of whatever freedom is –



"Y'know,
the music
business,
let's face it, is
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sales"
JERRY GARCIA



we're still part of that. If the Grateful Dead get to define this next level of success, if we actually come up with some notion of how to deal with it, it will be a real boon for what America's really about in a sort of spiritual sense."

Such is the purity, perhaps the naivety with which the Grateful Dead face reality.

"Yeah, well, I guess it is naïve. But, for us, it's everyday. It's our lives. It's already gone way past any of our personal expectations, so we're out in dreamland. The Grateful Dead has turned into something totally incredible and it hasn't been us steering it that way. It seems that, as long as there are people who want to experience something extraordinary and believe that it's possible, it is possible!"

"I can't go against that, but I'll tell you, for the first 18 years I was sceptical – I always reserved something of myself just in case, y'know. But it's one of those things that, after a while... I dunno. I dunno what happens to people. When somebody reports to me that they have some wonderful experience connected to the music, I can relate to it because my finest moments have been in the audience listening to someone great play. It's just hard to relate being on this side of it."

"There really isn't anything fundamentally mysterious about what I play, but there's something about what the Grateful Dead does musically and something that the audience finds resonant and, I mean, nobody is more surprised than me that they don't walk out. Ha ha ha!"

"For me, music is still very difficult. I still feel very much a person who's learning how to play, not a person who *plays*. Every time I take something new on, I realise how little I know and how much more there is. There are guys down there, kids who play 10 times as good as I do, eeeeargh – they're all over the place, sight reading through this complicated... y'know, it's intimidating. The whole level of technical excellence in the music world has gone bang."

It keeps you on your toes, I guess.

"Toes! I'm on my knees struggling to keep up! Still, it's nice that the band are in a place where everybody's surviving nicely – we've gotten through our substance abuse era relatively intact and we're doing OK pulling into the '90s, y'know, into the millennium. It's remarkable."

I was recently talking to David Crosby about his book, *Long Time Gone...*

"...terribly depressing... ha ha ha! Crosby's a good guy, he really is. A bright guy, a funny guy, but he's like all the rest of us, if you get more than you can deal with, what's to stop you from taking it all the way?"

Is the transition from use to abuse inevitable?

"I don't know. It may be, in some people's lives."

Crosby claims he has an addictive character.

"Yeah, I have one, too. I totally sympathise with him, but I'm glad to see he survived it."

Having been through it yourself, do you at all regret that the band were and, indeed, still are considered a propagation of the drug lifestyle?

"No, not really because, for me, there was a certain positive side about it. I mean, I certainly learned more about *something*... ha ha... than I ever would have if I'd never taken any psychedelics. This is not a black and white thing. I can't condemn drugs wholeheartedly. I know a lot of people who take 'em and then stop or take 'em once in a while and it never affects them, y'know. I'm just one of those people who, if I had a chance to, I'll take 'em forever, ha ha ha."

"But it's also one of those things I feel I've used up in myself. You can only go so far and then you start to realise, 'I'm not learning anything from this anymore.'

"It becomes more of a habit – it's controlling every waking moment. And, when it gets to the point where your friends are spending most of their time worrying about you, then it's really time to do something about it."

The really horrific thing is, it took almost dying to stop you and Crosby doing it.

"HE WAS AT EASE WITH HIS LEGEND..."

Steve Sutherland recalls the time he spent with Jerry Garcia for his *Melody Maker* feature...

AS WE PULLED up outside the Fillmore West, he was waiting for us on the steps. Grinning, he took my arm and, walking into the hallowed venue, stopped in the foyer and chuckled. "Jeez," he said, "I've lost some brain cells in this place!"

As perfect moments go, they don't come any better.

This was typical Garcia. It seemed to me he was always chuckling, a wheezy, hearty chortle wreathed in perpetual cigarette smoke, totally at ease with his considerable legend but still somewhat bemused by the sheer absurdity of it all.

He played guitar. Big deal. That was his philosophy. But if others chose to elect him some sort of generational leader, he wasn't about to turn his back on the responsibilities and opportunities that came with the territory. Nor, for that matter, the trappings of wealth that accompanied the fame.

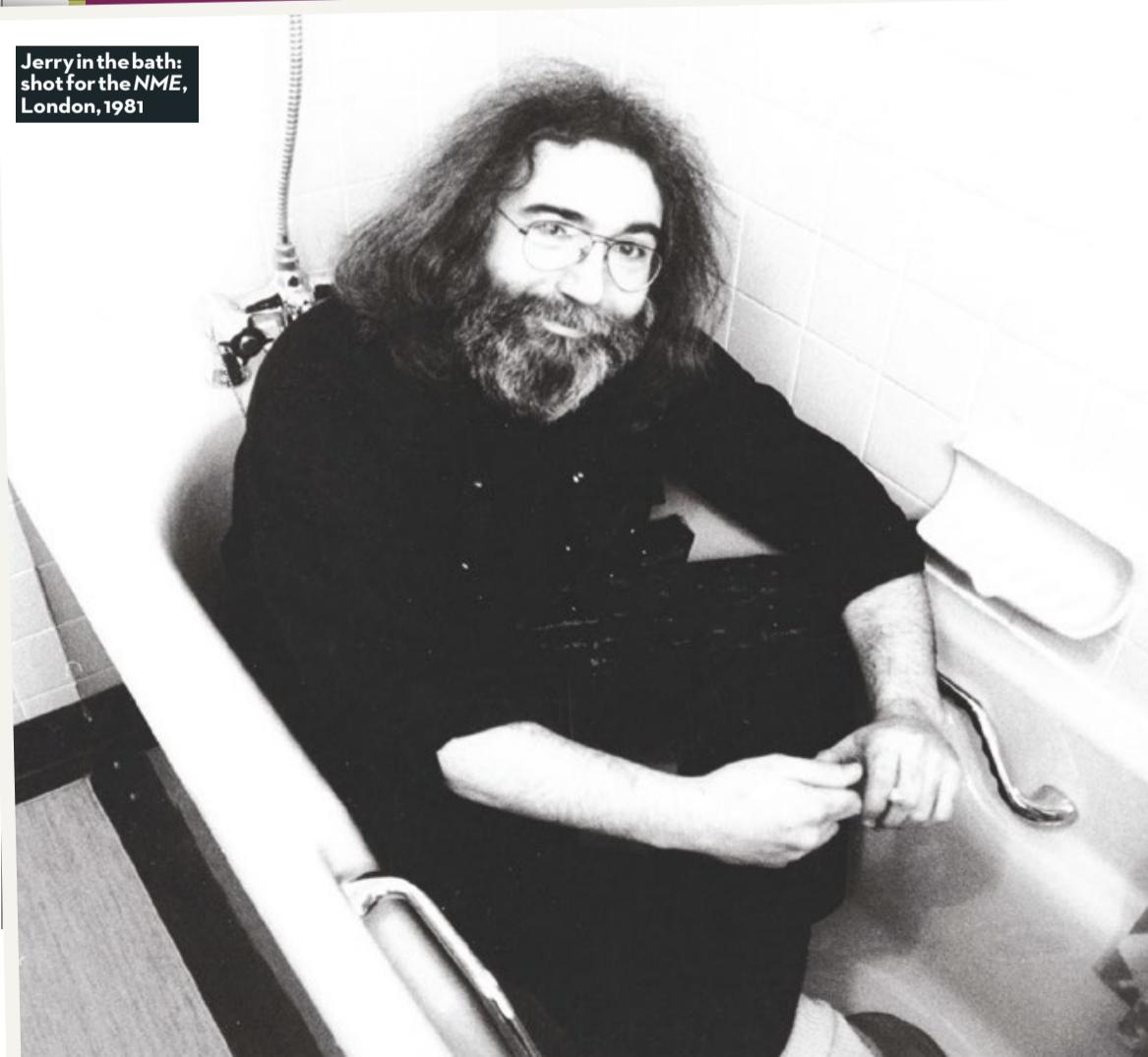
Certainly (apart from Bowie and Richard Butler of The Psychedelic Furs) he was the only rock star I ever

met who was genuinely interested in what I had to say. You 'interview' most people. You had a 'conversation' with Jerry. And I got the feeling on this particular occasion that the Dead were in the unfamiliar position of searching for allies. The authorities were on their case and the UK press somewhat baffled them.

Garcia came back to one incident again and again. Paul Morley had interviewed him for *NME* when he'd been in London a while ago and not only had he made Garcia out as some kind of hippy imbecile but he'd coaxed him into having his photo taken in the bath in his hotel room which only served to enhance the impression. Garcia was genuinely puzzled by this, couldn't understand why anyone would want to stitch someone up the way he felt he'd been done. What, he asked with sincere concern, was the guy's problem? Did I know him? Was he OK? Was he unhappy or something?

I stayed out at San Raphael, with the Dead, for a week all told – unchaperoned; the kind of access that no-one gets anymore in these days when publicists do exactly the opposite of what their title suggests and are hired precisely to shield their clients from the likes of me. Despite the UK bruising, I was made to feel I was on their bus so I was lucky enough to get to know, just a little, one of those rarest of breeds: a good man who (he'd chortle at this!) sought in his own humble way to make this world a far better place.

Jerry in the bath: shot for the *NME*, London, 1981



“That’s the other part of this awful thing – you can’t tell anybody anything. All you can do is say, ‘I’m your friend and I’m worried about you.’ You can’t say, ‘Hey, stop it!’ It doesn’t work. You can only hope that the person is going to be able to see it somewhere. And if you’re lucky, they do.”

Does it make a great difference to the way you play now?

“I don’t think it does. It makes a difference to the way I *feel* about the way I play. But, in terms of my actual playing, I don’t think it makes a huge difference. I think the most significant chemical change in my playing was the thing of having psychedelic experiences – not that I can say it directly affected my playing in some specific way, but it changed my perception of what playing is in some way.”

“I’m not good at analysing this. It’s kind of like reading a really great book – you haven’t really been there but you now have these pictures from some other life and it enriches you. And for me, the psychedelic experiences were more convincing than this life, do you know what I mean? I’ve never lost that thing of being convinced that there’s much more to whatever consciousness is than what we experience in a day-to-day way.”

“And I’ve been lucky enough to meet people like Kesey who’ve been able to illuminate some sense that this is not just a drug-induced fantasy, but part of the larger picture of the consciousness we’re all making an effort to map and... we’re making an effort to evolve in some sense. Y’see, my own personal bent is more cynical and sceptical – I tend to not believe the voice I hear is the voice of God, ha ha! I tend to think, ‘It’s probably the drugs’, y’know?”

“Left to my own devices, I would discount most of it. But my life experience as a member of the Grateful Dead in this high-energy environment and the people that I’ve met as a result of it and the kind of feedback I’ve gotten has made me a different person, so that part of drugs and my own personal development has been totally positive. That’s why I’ll never be one of those guys who says, ‘Don’t ever take drugs under any circumstances.’”

“I think it depends on the individual. If you’re called in your life to seek a little farther, to go a little farther in some direction and that direction leads you to psychedelics and you benefit from it or are enlarged by it in some way, I think that’s good.”

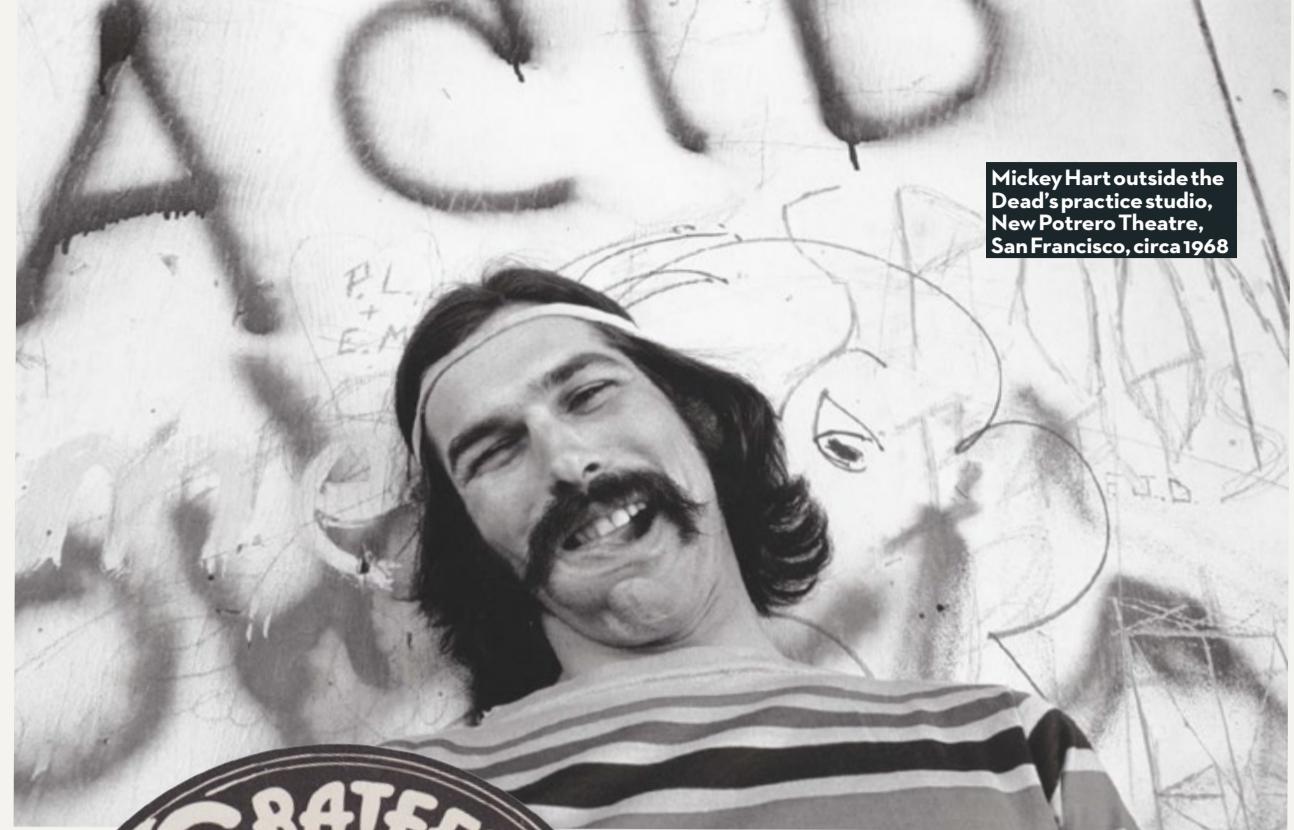
“I mean, I’ve never heard of anybody dying from marijuana overdose and, as far as I can tell, alcohol is probably the worst drug out there...”

Do you carry the acid experience as a vivid memory?

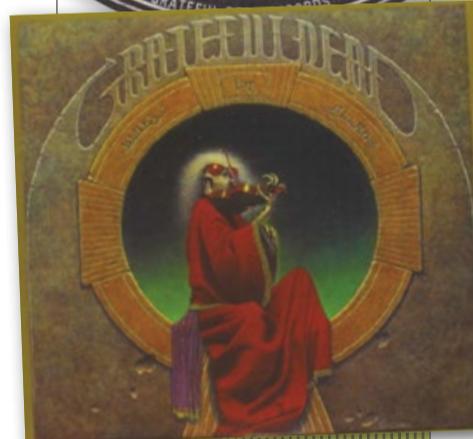
“It’s part of my present consciousness, yeah, very definitely because, for me, the whole psychedelic experience had a sequential quality. When I took my first acid, then my second, each time they would take off where they left off and I had this continuous quality until finally it got to a point when I realised, ‘This is as much as I’m gonna learn this way,’ and it stopped working, it stopped happening for me. I started just having mindless, weird bummers.”

So you remember your very first trip?

“Oh yeah, I remember every one of them. Every one of them is burned on every DNA molecule in my old being, hahaha... Yeah, they’ve burned in. That experience is not very far from me at any time... every once in a while, I like to revisit, y’know, but I prefer mushrooms and gentler psychedelics, something that’s easier to handle. The world is too paranoid now. I mean, then you could just get incredibly high, wander out into the world and, at the very worst, they would dismiss you as a loon, y’know, they didn’t even know what LSD



Mickey Hart outside the Dead's practice studio, New Potrero Theatre, San Francisco, circa 1968



“If I had a chance to, I’d take drugs forever, ha ha ha...”

JERRY GARCIA



was. That was the charm and beauty of being right at that moment. That was real luck on our part.”

You knew something that they didn’t... “Right! So it was a huge giggle, but now it’s the encroachment of the Bush era, the sirens, the grrrr... ha ha ha...”

It’s bound to turn bad...

“That’s right. The big fright. So for me, it’s not as much fun – that’s why I prefer the mushrooms because they’re gentle and you can usually stay on top of it if that’s what you need to deal with. We’re all changing. We’re growing older, obviously, and, when you get older, you get a little more cautious in some ways, but you also get more selective.”

Despite the fact that the Dead have cleaned up their act, there’s further evidence that they will forever call upon their psychedelic past to warp their music and their listeners’ minds. For example, percussionist Mickey Hart, who, with drummer Bill Kreutzmann, created and plays a monstrous array of paraphernalia known as The Beast, is currently writing a book called *Drummer At The Edge Of Magic* which examines the primal effect and influences of percussion. “It’s what the Grateful Dead does – it has transformative power,” says the wiry Hart, a lean enthusiast, with the karma and demeanour of a cheekier version of David Carradine in *Kung Fu*.

“It does that thing that makes you change your attitude. It’s entertaining, It’s music, but its business is transformation.”

It was in this spirit that, in the mid-’70s, Hart organised what amounted to a drum orchestra, called The Diga Rhythm Band and recorded *Diga*, the only drum-oriented LP I’m wholly absorbed by – a project that took three months’ solid rehearsal in a barn and, at one stage, four days and nights of non-stop playing. It was in this spirit that he formed The Rhythm Devils and recorded the soundtrack for Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* by building a jungle of percussion and playing along to the whole, crawling through the debris of drums to reach his own heart of darkness.

And it was in this spirit that *Blues For Allah*, perhaps the most extraordinary of the Dead albums recently re-released in Britain through Ace Records, was created.

“It was during the year we weren’t performing,” says Garcia. “Every day, the whole band went to Bob’s house and we’d just sit around and play. It was us on our own – there was nobody there looking after us... ha ha ha... so we had a chance to do some really crazy things.”

“Mickey went out and got this cardboard box full of 500 live crickets and we were sticking microphones in, y’know, recording them. We slowed

the tape down and it was incredible. We learned amazing things. Each time you slowed it down, the acoustic space of the cardboard box and the reflections would expand geometrically. Crickets slowed down to half speed sound like seagulls on a beach. Slowed down another half, they sound like horses in a canyon somewhere, and then whales on the ocean floor!

"We wanted to create this picture of the desert – y'know, dryness and brittleness and the wind and so forth. But, at the end of the thing, there were crickets everywhere! They all escaped! So we were in this little studio and I'm mixing and there's crickets crawling on every place you put your hand. Ha ha! It was incredible – totally mad. We just had a crazy time making it."

Bob Weir laughs: "We're always like that. We're constantly gonna be doing things that will make people wonder just exactly what we're up to, why are we going for this and that? Have we lost it? Chances are we will have..."

THREE WERE PLENTY of occasions when he'd start playing a song and I had no idea what he was doing."

Bob Weir flinches, then smiles, remembering the summer of '87 when the Dead backed Bob Dylan during a series of concerts which, earlier this year, were captured for posterity on *Dylan & The Dead*, a lively if loose testimony to their mutual love for making the moment happen.

"We've always had the utmost respect, fondness, whatever for Dylan's work. I mean, he is the voice of God in my estimation, whether he likes it or not... I'm not sure where the suggestion that we play together came from, but when it came my way, I was real excited at the prospect."

"It was our idea to record it," says Garcia. "We thought, 'Who knows if this is ever going to happen again? And, even if neither of us wants to put it out in the event that it's a catastrophe, even if the tapes just sit in the vaults, some musicologist of the future may enjoy going through them.'"

Both Dylan and the Dead are legendarily erratic performers so it must have been a marriage made in heaven... or in hell, however the night turned out.

"Yeah, there were good shows and bad ones," admits John Cutler, who recorded all the gigs on a mobile studio and helped Garcia produce the album. "To my ears, Dylan's sense of time is rather strange. Y'know, 'Knocking On Heaven's Door' on the record? He's really singing the verses in the places where he normally doesn't sing. I'm sure there was no plan on his mind and certainly no plan in the band's mind for that to happen, it just happened and we found it interesting."

"We're used to playing it pretty loose, so his style fits ours

pretty well," says Weir. "He might play a song that we'd rehearsed but in a completely different way. Still, after a few bars, somebody would figure it out and put in some sort of signature riff from the way we'd been playing it before, adapted to this new way, and we'd be off.

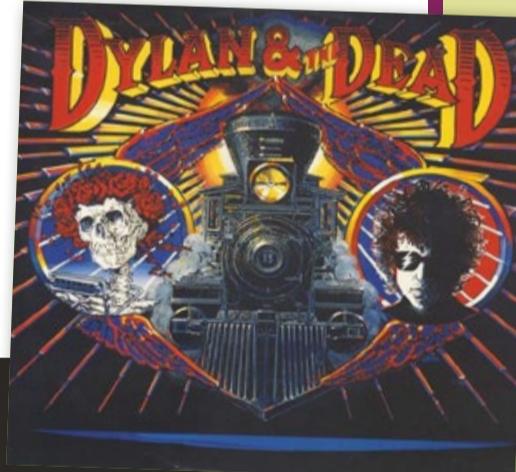
"I really like that way of doing it because you're not gonna take anything for granted. Every note counts when you're playing like that. Every second is a little achievement."

Cutler maintains it was Dylan's idea to release an album as a souvenir of the shows, essentially because they had performed "Slow Train", "Gotta Serve Somebody" and "Joey", songs he had never released live before. But, as Garcia and Cutler began listening back over the six performances, they also discovered sterling versions of "All Along The Watchtower" and "Knocking On Heaven's Door", songs which Dylan had already put out as live versions, albeit in drastically different forms. So the album ended up a mixture of both old and, as it were, new.

"Bob's famous as a sort of interventionist," laughs Garcia. "Y'know, I've heard some of his records have been mixed 90 times or something, so I thought, 'Oh God, is that the way it's gonna be or what?' But actually it was very good and we conferred with him over every step – tune selections, which performances and so forth, and he was very giving. The whole thing worked out pretty well."

"We had this funny experience when we were working on it. We went over to his house in Malibu which is... I don't know where the hell it is... it's out in the country somewhere... And he has these huge dogs which are like mastiffs, about seven of 'em. And so we drive up and these dogs surround the car and Dylan's kinda rattling around in the house, this rambling structure, and he takes us into this room that's kinda baronial – y'know, big fireplace and wooden panelling and steep roof. And there's this big table and about four or five chairs around it – no other furniture. And on the table is about a \$39 ghetto blaster about yeah big, y'know, and he's got the cassette and he sticks it in there and he says, 'Don't you think the voice is mixed a little loud in that one?'

"So we just sat and listened to it on this little funky thing and he'd say, 'I think there ought to be a little more bass,' and I'd take notes and it was just a matter of changing the mixes. Just a matter... ha... For me, mixing is like



Dylan and the Dead, summer 1987: "His style fits ours pretty well..."

IT WAS A VERY GOOD YEAR...

T1989 PROVED TO be a classic year for the Dead. The band toured extensively, playing 73 shows – two proved to be among the most revered by fans. On Oct 8 and 9, the Dead played the 13,000-capacity Hampton Coliseum billed as The Warlocks. During the sets, the band dusted down rarities including "Attics Of My Life" and "Help On The Way" and, after a five-year absence, the mighty "Dark Star". The shows were captured in a six-CD bootleg box, *Formerly The Warlocks*. But it wasn't just about celebrating the past. After a creative lull, 1989 also saw the band introduce new songs – including "Victim" and "Foolish Heart". Other live highlights included

guest spots from old pal Clarence Clemons (who once suggested he, Weir and Garcia get a bachelor pad together).

Essentially, the Dead were moving ever closer to their '91 live peak, where they became the world's highest-grossing touring band, playing to 1.6 million. The band also released two LPs that year: *Dylan & The Dead*, cut on the road in '87, and their 13th and final studio LP, *Built To Last*.

Outside music, in July, Garcia, Weir and Hart continued their long history of social and political activism by highlighting the destruction of the rainforests. "I'm an Earthling on this planet," said Garcia, "and it's my problem as much as anybody else's."

THE GRATEFUL DEAD AT 50!

2015 promises to be a momentous year for the Grateful Dead. The band will celebrate their 50th anniversary throughout the coming 12 months, and *Uncut* will be there every step of the way.

WHAT we can tell you so far is that the band's story will be immortalised in a new documentary produced by Martin Scorsese. No stranger to rock docs, he will oversee the career-spanning picture, which will be directed by Amir Bar-Lev.

"The Dead were more than just a band," says Scorsese. "They were their own planet, populated by millions of devoted fans. I'm proud to be involved." As surviving members Mickey Hart, Bill Kreutzmann, Phil Lesh and Bob Weir explained, "Millions of stories have been told about the Dead over the years. With our 50th anniversary coming up, we thought it might just be time to tell one ourselves and Amir is the perfect guy to help us. Needless to say, we're humbled to be

collaborating with Martin Scorsese. From *The Last Waltz* to *George Harrison: Living In The Material World*, from *Dylan to the Stones*, he has made some of the greatest music docs ever with some of our favorite artists. We're honoured to have him involved. The 50th will be another milestone to celebrate with our fans and we can't wait to share this film."

We are sworn to secrecy on the Dead's other plans to mark their 50th, but we can confirm there will be plenty of surprises over the coming months. Check www.uncut.co.uk!



The Dead in 1989:
"Recording, for us,
is like pulling teeth"

➔ taking a picture. When this music is in focus, that's the way it's in focus – it's almost finite. So, when somebody tells me to mix something *wrong*, I'm in trouble.

"So I told him. I said. 'Listen, if you don't hear the vocal, you can't make out the lyrics...' and so on. And we went back and forth like that a couple of times and his input was... well, that was the weirdest part. There was a couple of places there where it was like, 'Woah! I don't know what's happening. I don't know what I'm doing any more!'"

Dylan gets a lot of criticism for re-interpreting his songs vocally. Some people have even suggested he's throwing them away as a comment on the people who treat him as an idol and consider his every word gospel.

"That's not true," says Garcia. "That's not the kind of guy he is. He's a really strange person. I mean, I can't pretend to know him even a little, but I feel friendly toward him and I feel he's as open with us as he is with anybody. He's real tough to pin down. But it's funny, he's also a really charming guy."

Reactions to the album were as varied as expected – both Dylan and the Dead have always tended to polarise public opinion on account of their uncompromising attitudes to their art. Neither has ever made a record with commerciality in mind. Neither has ever been anything but maverick.

Garcia reckons the album boasts a few gems, Weir considers it a little loose, no-one seems to know Dylan's opinion and Mickey Hart calls it an aberration. "We were trying to back up a singer on songs that no-one knew," he says bluntly. "It was not our finest hour, nor his, I don't know why it was even made into a record."

This is typical of the candid combination that has kept the Grateful Dead vital, while many of their contemporaries have become embarrassing MOR rockers or time-warped hippies.

"I don't think we've ever made a really good studio record, either," continues Hart. "We never really pay that much attention to it in a way because we're a live band and we pride ourselves on live performance."

There's a school of thought that the recording process is actually the complete antithesis of the Grateful Dead ethos. While getting it down in the studio establishes a definitive version and can effectively kill a song, the Dead have always thrived on putting their songs through complex, instinctive transformations which serve to keep them alive

over many years. "We can't control that," says Garcia. "It's just that we're constitutionally unable to play exactly the same thing night after night. It won't happen! There's no way – it's just the way we are as players. We tend to find parts but only to have something to deviate from.

"I can't remember a time when I was able to tell what somebody else was going to play during a tune, I've given it up years ago. Even now Weir plays some part or some *thing* in a tune I've never heard before and I've no idea what he's getting at. But you learn to trust each other.

"Mostly, recording, for us, is like pulling teeth. We've never been able to find a way to make it fun. For me, the hard part is being a producer and a performer; finding that objective ear used to drive me crazy especially the way the Dead works. We'd always be at take 900 and I'd be listening to it and I'd think, 'Well, if I splice take 743 into the first two verses...' I hate to do things that way now, so working on our new record, we've developed this approach which is actually a bit mechanistic but coughs up better results.

"We start off with a take of the tune and assume 'This is the tune, this is what we're working on. This is its length. This is its structure,' and we just work on it and it still gives us

"Dylan is a strange person, tough to pin down, but really charming"

JERRY GARCIA

enough of the interaction that we play with onstage. And, if this record turns out good – which, of course, there's no way of knowing – then maybe we'll be able to make more records and they'll be better than they have been. But, of course, if it doesn't work, we're back to square one, stabbing around in the dark again."

MICKEY HART IS sitting in his home studio, busily burying more of the Dead's past – specifically the early Arista years when their own label had folded and they allowed themselves to be manhandled in the studio by the likes of Gary Lyons ("a plumber"), Keith Olsen (who ruined *Terrapin Station* – "He's lucky he's small!")

and poor old Lowell George who didn't even produce his own Little Feat – when he's interrupted by Dead biographer and all-round good egg, Dennis McNally.

"Sorry to butt in, but you've got a wonderful phone call going on your machine. Your cousin or whoever it was that was pregnant, she came through, she had the baby and everybody was listening to your tape."

Hart excuses himself and rushes to the phone. When he returns, he's gushing: "This is great! This guy is Walter

Kronkite's producer, Tom Donaldson. I did some work with him on the America's Cup programme – he's a good friend – and they used the music I composed for my son Taro's birth. I recorded his heartbeat before he was born, in Mary's womb, and brought it back to the 16-track and overdubbed it.

"It's called 'Music To Be Born By'. I've been giving out tapes of it for years and I usually get a recollection of how it went down and a picture of the baby. One lady had twins and she was in labour for 18 hours and listened to the music all that time... it just repeats every four bars so you can breathe – it's constant and relaxing. It's out on Ryko in a couple of weeks."

The Grateful Dead has always been enriched by its members' extracurricular activities. Garcia has released several solo ventures, including *Almost Acoustic*, a country thang he recently put together with some old buddies, and he says he plans to record his electric band real soon. Weir was in Kingfish for a while and is messing with a pal who plays upright bass. And then there's film. The Dead have already made their own concert movies but now it seems some Hollywood types are interested in this abiding phenomenon.

"We know what we'd like the film to be, but it's way too weird for them," says Garcia. "They're settling on stuff like, 'Well, there's this couple who have a Deadhead son or daughter that...' You know what I mean? One of those real straight stories where we're sorta furniture."

"Some movie like that will undoubtedly get made somewhere but, in the meantime, it's got us thinking about another Grateful Dead movie and, if we do one, it's gonna be *Citizen Kane* or nothing. It'll be weird enough for Deadheads and weird enough for us to be able to watch when it happens. But the movie world is worse than the music business. They lie to you all the time. They just tell you what you wanna hear, so it's impossible to take any of it seriously."

"Still, somebody really wants this film to happen which is kind of embarrassing as I've been trying to sell a screenplay for years and I can't get anywhere with the damn thing. I bought the film rights to *The Sirens Of Titan*, Kurt Vonnegut's book, and me and a friend, Tom Beevis, wrote a wonderful screenplay. I'd love to direct it because it's one of my favourite books of all time and it would make such a good movie."

"I'm in no rush, though, I don't want somebody to make a bad movie of it, that's the thing. I have a protective relationship to it so maybe one day I'll find some Saudi Arabian... heheheh... who has \$30 million to throw away and I'll put out a hell of a movie!"

Meanwhile, Hart has his deal with Ryko, a label that willingly releases his *The World* series – a collection of recordings from around the globe including the music of upper and lower Egypt which he took time out to record after the Dead's infamous shows that took place at the foot of the Great Pyramid in Cairo to coincide with a total eclipse of the moon in 1978. He's on the board of directors of The Smithsonian Institute, too, in charge of transferring the rich but rotting collection of recorded folk music from analogue onto digital. The first public release of this work was "A Vision Shared", performances by Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie, processed through a computer for a cleaner, durable sound. Miraculously, he also finds time to do soundtracks.

"Apart from *Apocalypse Now*, I did 79 episodes of *The Twilight Zone* as sound designer and musical director. Then I did a 13-part Vietnam series. Just now it's *Greed, Guns And Wildlife*, a National Autobond special on poaching on PBS.

"Y'know, they're wiping out our wildlife. These poachers, professionals are coming into the Smokies and taking mountain lions, bald eagles, it goes on and on – they're just raping our wildlife. Thirty dollars here makes 'em 4,000 in South East Asia, man. I had no idea until I saw this thing and I said, 'Wow! This is real! They're just kicking our ass!' There won't be any more animals for kids to see. They're just wiping



**"The Dead
is Santa
Claus... it
gives a lot
and it
doesn't
take..."**

MICKEY HART

them out – bears are gonna be all wiped out, cougars, eagles... I understood there was poaching but I didn't understand it was on a big, professional scale... I mean, networking. Now it's being exposed. In fact, it's in the paper today, this very thing, about the poachers."

PHILANTHROPIC AS EVER, the Dead have lately been involved in some heavy causes. On May 27, they play a concert in Oakland Stadium with Huey Lewis, Tracy Chapman and Los Lobos to help money for AIDS awareness and they're also becoming increasingly influential in the Rain Forest Project. Following a benefit they played at Madison Square Garden last September for The Rain Forest Action Network, Greenpeace and Cultural Survival, they've been inundated with enquires about how other people can help. "I don't know why it always ends up being us," laughs Garcia. "I mean, of all the incompetent fuck-ups that have to end up dealing with this serious problem, why it falls into our hands I'll never fucking understand. We can barely get onstage and play, so doing this other stuff is amazing to me! But, as long as it keeps falling our way, I guess we have to deal with it. We have no choice, really."

"The rain forest issue is cut and dried," says Weir. "If we don't halt the destruction of the rain forests, that problem is going to swallow life as we know it on earth. It won't be possible for us to live here. It's a matter of survival and something's gotta be done about it, because the direct result of these circumstances will inevitably come within our lifetimes unless we halt the current trends. This particular disease is already advanced to the point where it's taking its toll on our daily lives and it will, in the end, put an end to us if we don't face it squarely."

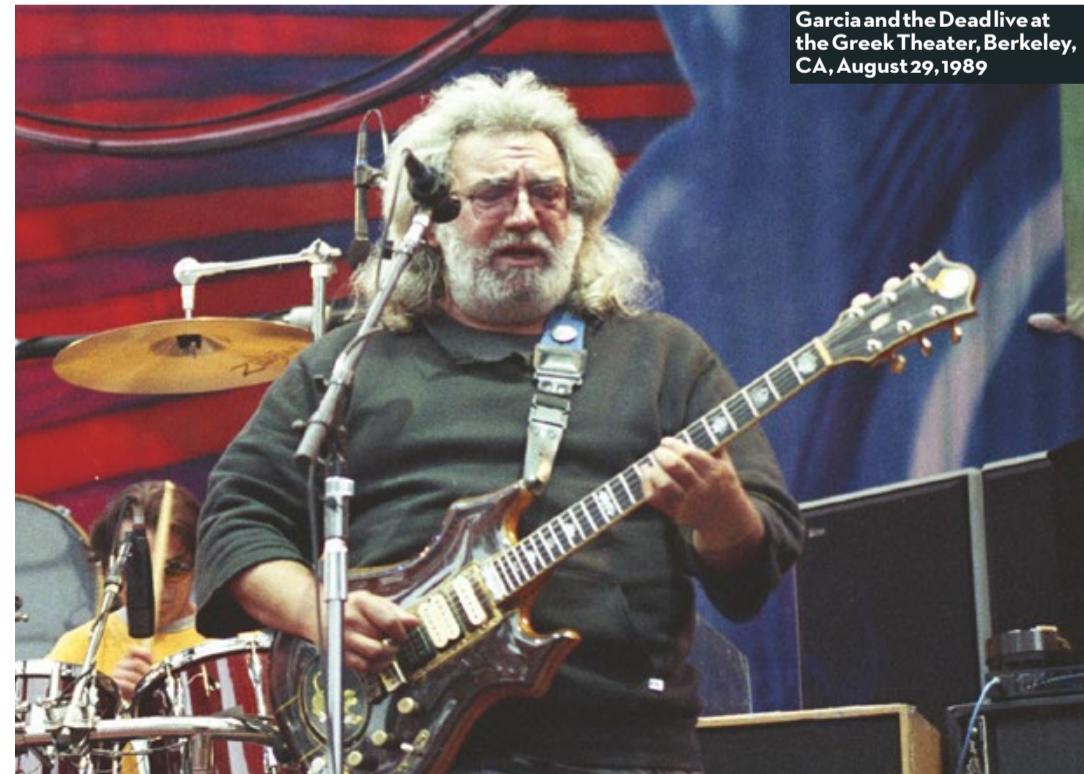
There is already a drought in California as a consequence of the earth's atmosphere being altered by the raping of the rain forests and the reduction of their vital role as processors of oxygen and, as the earth inevitably warms and dries up, the Dead, among many, are determined to raise as much money as possible to lobby the government and purchase the land rights for the forest Indians.

But it's rare for the Dead to air their views so publicly. Normally they go about their charitable business more quietly, dispensing funds via their Rex Foundation, a board comprising the band and many close friends and associates. Money from the Dead regularly finds its way to the local needy, to, according to Hart, "the old folks, the child care thing, the salmon fishing... y'know, the Indian rights or soup kitchens in Petaluma or music in the schools or whatever."

"Y'know, the Grateful Dead really is Santa Claus in many ways. It's a good thing – it gives a lot and it doesn't take."

I think of Garcia in a red hooded cloak and, yeah, I can almost hear reindeer. ☺

Garcia and the Dead live at the Greek Theater, Berkeley, CA, August 29, 1989



The Waterboys

Mike Scott unravels the long, tangled tale of his extraordinary band. "My way was to follow the music..."

FOR WELL OVER 30 years now, Mike Scott's quixotic musical spirit has ensured that it's a mistake to try and guess what he'll do next. There have been solo demos that flowered into skyscraping epics; a career path that looked destined for stadiums taking a sudden turn into Irish folk; heady adventures that have taken him from his birthplace of Edinburgh, to London, to Dublin and then the West Coast of Ireland, to New York and beyond. A year ago, Scott reconvened the *Fisherman's Blues*-era Waterboys for a triumphant reunion tour but, by March, he was in Nashville with a new group of soul-infused musicians. The resulting album, *Modern Blues*, is out this month and the current lineup will tour in March. But Scott already has plans for what might happen next. "We're very likely to make an album that follows on from the *Fisherman's Blues* tour," he says. "I've already got the songs stockpiled for that." *JOHN MULVEY*



The Waterboys, 1984:
Martyn Swain, Karl
Walling, Mike Scott,
Kevin Wilkinson,
Anthony Thistlethwaite

THE WATERBOYS

EN SIGN, 1983



Late 1981: Mike Scott, frontman of an underachieving band called Another Pretty Face, records a few solo demos. The Waterboys are born, sort of...

In Another Pretty Face I had a songwriting partner called John Caldwell but our songwriting had dried up, and I found myself writing stuff that didn't suit the band. I went and did some demos on my own, which was not unusual, I was often doing that. Usually, my demos were piano and vocals and nothing else, but on this occasion I went in and played multiple guitars, I used drum loops to give the impression of it being a full band, and it became clear to me that I needed to break up the band and go solo, or start a band where I was the undisputed author of the musical direction. "December" and "The Three Day Man" were two of those tracks, and those demos became the basis of the first Waterboys album. "December", "Savage Earth Heart" and "Gala", I knew those were the ones, they were epics that I would do on my own in the studio, playing all the instruments myself, all one takes, and I was thrilled with how they came out. They set the direction. "Savage Earth Heart" is my first Pannish song, with that Earth power in it. "December" is the first of what I think of as my non-Christian spiritual songs. "A Girl Called Johnny" was a hit in France, by the way.

The first Waterboys band was formed for *The Old Grey Whistle Test* in the summer of '83, the month the album came out, and that was me and Anthony Thistlethwaite on sax, a couple of members of Another Pretty Face as a hired rhythm section, and a new keyboard player called Karl Wallinger.

A PAGAN PLACE

EN SIGN, 1984



In which Scott formulates the epic, elemental rock that becomes known as The Big Music. They could be as big as U2, speculate the critics.

I recorded a lot of what became the second Waterboys album at the tail end of 1982. I had both the first two albums recorded, more or less, when the first one came out, and I had perpetual arguments with Nigel Grainge, my mentor at the label, as to which songs should go on which LP. The first album and *A Pagan Place* are a mish-mash, they don't hang together as proper albums. It should've been three albums: the first should be the one-man music that I made; the second should be the stuff recorded in late 1982 like "Red Army Blues", "All The Things She Gave Me", "The Thrill Is Gone" and "I Will Not Follow"; and then the third album should have been "A Pagan Place", "Rags", "The Big Music" and "A Church Not Made With Hands", which were recorded later.

I know a lot of people love that album, regardless of what I think about how it was compiled, but it will always seem like something cobbled together from compromises between me and the record company. Everything that's on it deserves to be on an album – I just think it sounds like two albums.

It must have been *NME* who coined the phrase 'The Big Music' to describe the sound and scale of the music, but that wasn't my intention. I liked that they picked a phrase which was mine and used it – that's flattering. But it wasn't about music, it was a metaphor about having a spiritual experience, about feeling called to a new way of looking at the world.

THIS IS THE SEA

EN SIGN, 1985



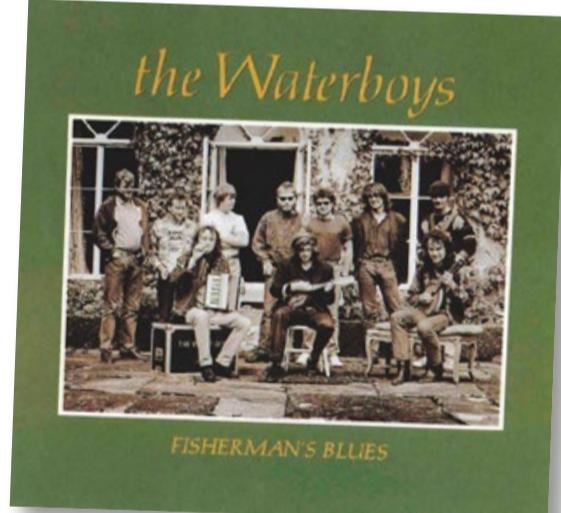
The Big Music gets even bigger, as Scott completes his first "coherent" album and has his first hit. "Every precious dream and vision underneath the stars!"

It's the first one recorded as a whole album. *This Is The Sea* always strikes me as a very coherent record – there were some great songs that didn't get used that came out later on reissues, but I still think I got the tracklisting right. I was following my instinct. I'd taken the music that had begun with "December" and "Savage Earth Heart" to its culmination. There was a myth about me that I didn't want to be successful. I wanted to do things my way, which isn't the same thing. My autonomy in the band was never really challenged; it was an unbreakable covenant, really. I was the guy with the vision and the record deal, the others guys were my band. Karl [Walling] was very vocal and opinionated, but I made the decisions and he understood that, and it was great to have such strong members of the band. But it was very difficult reproducing "The Whole Of The Moon" or "This Is The Sea" live. It wasn't possible onstage, because I'd have needed to clone myself three or four times. By the time of the *This Is The Sea* tour, I was fed up playing versions of the songs that weren't the music that had been recorded. Some of the accompanists – not Walling, not Thistlethwaite – but some of the drummers, in particular, couldn't play like the record had felt. I know a lot of people loved those various "Big Musicky" lineups, but I was never happy. And then, in a hotel room in Detroit, Karl announced that he was going to leave, two months after *This Is The Sea* came out.



Scott recording
Fisherman's Blues, 1987

THE UNCUT CLASSIC



FISHERMAN'S BLUES

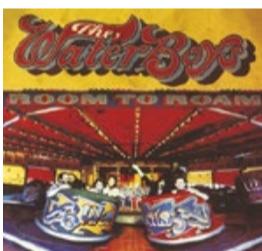
ENSIGN, 1988

Three years, endless sessions across Britain, Ireland and America, myriad bandmembers and hundreds of discarded songs produce a folk-rock landmark. 2013's 7CD boxset, incidentally, may now be the definitive edition. My way was to do what the music told me, to follow the music. The great mythical moment in The Waterboys' history, at least where writers are concerned, is what happened three months after *This Is The Sea*, when I moved to Ireland. That was the opening of a lot of new musical windows. I needed to do something different, I needed to make a more improvised, spontaneous music, and everything in me was bent on that. Of course the label wanted me to continue making the widescreen, layered, considered rock music of *This Is The Sea* and *A Pagan Place*, but I wanted to make *Fisherman's Blues*, do country & western songs and improvise with a mandolin and a fiddle, and I had to; it was life or death for me.

When Steve Wickham [fiddle] joined, suddenly there was this mercurial layer in the mix, and a man who could play gorgeously with me, acoustically, in a hotel room. Suddenly a lot of new possibilities began to sparkle. I had that lineup with Wickham and Thistlethwaite, and Trevor Hutchinson [bass], who's a spectacularly good improviser, and it was like being freed. Suddenly I could turn the music on a dime, and I loved that. Instead of assembling players and directing them and creating an end result that conformed to something that had begun in my head, it was totally different. I was working with different tools, I was working with players who could come up with their own parts, and my job as bandleader was to create the space and the inspiration where we would explore together and come up with something that was bigger than the sum of us all. And when it worked, on "We Will Not Be Lovers", or our version of [Van Morrison's] "Sweet Thing", or "And A Bang On The Ear", it was fantastic. In rock, when people take a long time making a record, usually it's because there are problems. Look at the predecessors of *Fisherman's Blues*, like *Darkness On The Edge Of The Town*: for three years Bruce [Springsteen] was held up because of his legal battles, and because of constantly changing his mind. But for *Fisherman's Blues* we just recorded too much music as we were having such a great time. The only pathology in there was my inability to make a decision, after a while, because I had so much to choose from. On the world tour that followed *Fisherman's Blues*, we had no management and I had the whole edifice on my shoulders. By the time the tour was over at the end of '89, I was exhausted, and I could have done with a year off before thinking about making a new record.

ROOM TO ROAM

ENSIGN, 1990



Scott's Celtic folk odyssey continues, as his expanded raggle-tangle band journey deeper into tradition.

Maybe we went a step too far. I was very burnt-out after *Fisherman's Blues*, but we went straight into making *Room To Roam* because the band were still evolving. Late 1988, everybody in the band apart from Vinnie Kilduff, the piper, was a rock musician. But by summer '89 the balance had tilted towards an acoustic ensemble. We had Sharon Shannon on accordion, and Colin Blakey on flute. They were folk musicians primarily, and that was new.

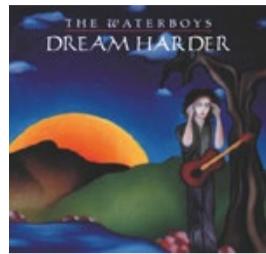
I wanted to keep moving, so we went back to Spiddal House and spent six months recording *Room To Roam*. We had a whale of a time, but I can hear that I'm tired on the record; my voice isn't strong. I've still got a lot of songs coming through me, but I'm not in my power.

Steve Wickham had been the glue that kept the rockers and the folkies together, but he was getting estranged in the band, and finally he left. Without him, there was no place in the sound for Sharon or Colin, so I let both of them go and we got a tougher drummer, Ken Blevins, from John Hiatt's band. I'd had this vision of the *Room To Roam* band touring the Highlands and Islands in a big top. We'd turn up in cheerful little Celtic towns, put up the tent and have a carnival atmosphere, but it wasn't like that at all. We were a four-piece without the fiddle, without Sharon, without all that magic onstage, without the music in the bus. We'd been this travelling musical explosion, and suddenly we're playing in the rain in a tent in a car park on the outside of town... Oh no!

THE WATERBOYS

• DREAM HARDER

GEFFEN, 1993



A flawed return to rock, as the questing Scott relocates to New York.

I finally took time off after *Room To Roam*, as I was just shattered. I got myself a manager, got a new record deal, and took about a year off. When I went to New York in '91, my intention was to put together a new band, and Thistlethwaite was going to be involved, but I didn't find the right combination of players. I'd been through so much in Ireland, and New York probably wasn't the right place for me to be. I didn't find musicians who'd been through anything like that experience.

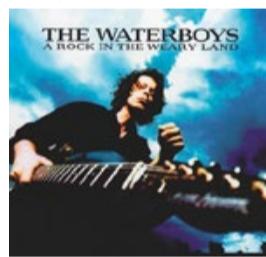
There's a lot of strangeness about that record. It was a very slow record to make and I wasn't at my best. My confidence had been knocked by the reception of *Room To Roam*, and I knew some of the criticism was absolutely right. I'm not one of these guys who just dig a hole and say, "Fuck the world!" I knew I needed to prove myself again.

I had some good songs, but I found it very difficult to get back to the kind of confidence I'd had during the early records. I co-produced with Bill Price, a fantastic record-maker, but we never saw eye to eye. I never quite felt we had the same taste. I think the record falls between the cracks, with me not stepping up and taking authority.

My favourite is "The Return Of Jimi Hendrix". It was a demo I'd recorded in Dublin before I went to New York, and all the keyboards and guitars were done by me in the same spirit as the first Waterboys album, playing one track after another in the studio, one take each, and then improvising. And then I just added Jim Keltner...

A ROCK IN THE WEARY LAND

BMG, 2000



After two understated solo albums, Scott reclaims the Waterboys name for a heavy, technologically-upgraded take on The Big Music.

A Rock In The Weary Land was where I finally got my production confidence back. Because the two solo albums hadn't done so well, I had this burning feeling to make something great, that would claim back for me the attention and the audience that I felt I'd lost. And part of that was bringing back The Waterboys' name. *A Rock In The Weary Land* was made over about two years, and several of the tracks, again like "The Return Of Jimi Hendrix" and the early album, were demos with me playing all the instruments, which I would upgrade by overdubbing a real drummer. "A Rock In The Weary Land" itself, "The Charlatan's Lament", those were done that way.

I loved the productions that were happening at that time in music, like the Chemical Brothers and Beck, I loved all the effects and the treatment of things. I had a lot of fun making *A Rock In The Weary Land* deploying those tools and techniques; a lot of effects pedals. But I was also listening to a lot of very old gospel music when I was making the record, real old 1920s/1930s field recordings. The title is from a gospel song, "The

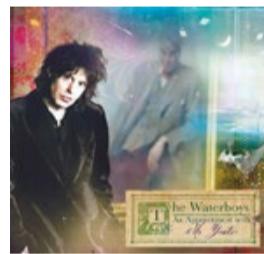


Mike Scott in Dublin, 2011:
"I lived Mr Yeats for years..."

Lord Is My Rock In A Weary Land", and then "Crown", the closing track, has lots of gospel influence like the line, "I've been up and I've been down, sometimes almost level with the ground," straight from an old gospel field music recording. I always felt when I took gospel elements that I was filching them from Christianity and using them for my own heretic purposes.

AN APPOINTMENT WITH MR YEATS

PUCK, 2011



Following on from "The Stolen Child" on *Fisherman's Blues*, Scott sets a clutch of WB Yeats poems to music.

I had *Mr Yeats* nearly ready to go in 2006, but I had a bunch of other songs burning a hole in my pocket. I couldn't get clear to my next stage of writing until I got them out of the way, so I made *Book Of Lightning* [2007], a bit of a stopgap, and that bought me time to write another half-dozen tracks for *Mr Yeats*. I remember travelling around Ireland with my girlfriend around 1990, taking notes for an album of Yeats' poems set to music. We'd get Van Morrison, we'd get Christy Moore, we'd get U2, all these top Irish artists. But I had too many other things to do and it would've been like herding cats. I kept going back to Yeats' poems and suddenly it hit me, I could do the whole thing myself and present it as a stage show.

I wanted to put it on at Dublin's Abbey Theatre which Yeats founded, the most potent place to make the statement that his poems stood up as rock'n'roll lyrics. We did that in 2010, and the album was recorded almost a year later. Unlike most Waterboys records, it had been played live first, so the songs had really been kicked into shape. I'm Yeated out now. It's a big year for Yeats in 2015 in Ireland, 150 years since his birth, and I've been asked to do this and that, but my

mind is on the new record. I lived *Mr Yeats* for years and put everything I had into it. But, a bit like after doing The Big Music and then needing to change, I need to do something different now.

MODERN BLUES

HARLEQUIN AND CLOWN, 2015



Scott decamps to Nashville, and taps into the country soul grooves of the Southern States for yet another new Waterboys direction. Muscle Shoals legend David Hood figures prominently on bass.

I've got a place in New York and I spend a lot of time there. I love the way American musicians play and I love old soul music: Marvin Gaye, the Family Stone, Stax. For the last few years that's been my diet of listening, so I wanted to make a record with a bit of that feel. I don't like many studios in the UK and Ireland, yet Nashville has kept its studio industry. It still has countless world-class studios that don't cost an arm and a leg, and there are great musicians, everywhere.

So I had the idea of recording in Nashville, and I knew that the songs I'd stockpiled since about 2008, when I started writing this record, would suit that environment. We recorded very fast, I think we recorded all the tracks in seven days and then did a week of overdubs. I mixed it once myself, with the engineer and Brother Paul, our keyboard player, but when I got home I didn't like the sound, so I fired myself and sent it to Bob Clearmountain, which was a very good move. David Hood has joined the band, it's going to be his first tour since Traffic in 1972. He was such a big part of the team. We were gonna tour with someone else on bass, but every time I listened to the mixes I kept thinking, 'I wonder if David will do it?' Our manager asked him and he said yes. He's a wonderful man and a wonderful musician. He knows that silence is a note. **•**



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THIS MONTH: BELLE & SEBASTIAN | SLEATER-KINNEY | POND & MORE



RYAN PATTERSON

**TRACKLIST**

- 1 My Baby Don't Understand Me
- 2 Bird Of Prey
- 3 Your Fool
- 4 Christy
- 5 Why Don't You Believe In Me
- 6 Violently
- 7 Never Over You
- 8 Reprise
- 9 It Is You

NATALIE PRASS

Natalie Prass

SPACEBOMB/CAROLINE

Matthew E White's Spacebomb crew introduce a new star. *By John Mulvey*

8/10

MARCH 2013, RICHMOND, Virginia. Matthew E White's *Big Inner* album has become a minor word-of-mouth sensation: a country-soul fantasia, saturated with lavish horn and string arrangements, mostly recorded in the attic of his Richmond house. Today, though, White and the other core members of his Spacebomb musical collective are gathered in his dining room, previewing a few of their other productions. There is a glossy single by Howard Ivans, redolent of upscale '80s soul. Another ornately deranged piece of work, a child's nightmare as if

scored by Zappa, will be eventually credited to Grandma Sparrow & His Piddletractor Orchestra.

Then, there are a clutch of songs by a singer-songwriter called Natalie Prass, a schoolfriend of White's from Virginia Beach who currently lives in Nashville. Prass' voice is mostly calm, and she sings of heartbreak with undemonstrative candour, leaving the grand romantic gestures to the instrumentation which surrounds her. Horns and strings seem to be in constant dramatic motion, but the extravagances are always anchored by the steady funk of the rhythm section, by a nonchalant pianist. It is



New Albums

ambitious music, even compared with *Big Inner* – references to Gamble & Huff, Charles Stepney and Curtis Mayfield's kinetic arrangements seem apposite – and it also sounds rich with potential; if Feist can sell a million records, then why shouldn't Natalie Prass? The Spacebomb quartet are a generally discreet crew, but as string arranger Trey Pollard gleefully conducts along to the iPod, it's clear they know what treasure they have. The question is: what are they going to do with it?

For a long time, the simple answer appears to be, very little. A couple of Prass' tracks sneak out on *A Spacebomb Family Sampler*, a bonus disc bundled with the copies of *Big Inner* that are sold by Rough Trade around Christmas 2013. The Howard Ivans single and Grandma Sparrow album are released in the first half of 2014, but the only traces of Prass are the odd YouTube clip of a folk singer with an acoustic guitar; beguiling enough, if not exactly representative of the scope that White recently described to *Uncut*. "She has the charisma, singing style and vibe of Diana Ross," he says, "this really wonderful, sensitive voice with a lot of strength behind it. But she writes like [New Orleans songwriter] Earl King. I think she's brilliant."

As it turns out, Prass has been busying herself recording a couple more LPs' worth of material, and playing keys in Jenny Lewis' band. It was only at the end of last summer that a single emerged. "Bird Of Prey" found Prass exercising her best Ms Ross coo over a limber piano and bass groove that owed much to G-funk, or at least the '70s records that Dr Dre once sampled. The string and horn arrangements (by Pollard and White respectively) were rococo, rapturous, but they never overwhelmed Prass' lightly expressed tale of separation: "You, you don't leave me no choice/But to run away." The B-side was a smoked cover of Janet Jackson's "Any Time, Any Place". For some of us who heard it, there wasn't a better single released in 2014.

Now, to begin the new year, Spacebomb – via the Caroline label – have finally deigned to release *Natalie Prass*, some three years after it

Prass: "Finding my voice took a lot of exploring"



SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:** Matthew E White. **Co-Produced by:** Trey Pollard. **Recorded at:** Spacebomb, Richmond, Virginia. **Personnel includes:** Natalie Prass (vocals), Pinson Chanselle (drums), Cameron Ralston (bass), Matthew E White (guitars, horn arrangements), Trey Pollard (pedal steel guitar, string arrangements, horn arrangements on "It Is You"), Daniel Clarke (piano)

was recorded. As the singer herself notes, this is broadly timeless music, and the delay hasn't made it an anomaly in 2015. "It's important to

find the right context, the right time, the right team and the right way to get music to listeners," says White. "Releasing records is a skill, just like making records is a skill. We're a really small label, and we wanted to have the right things in place to support a record that we felt was really worth supporting."

Natalie Prass features "Bird Of Prey" and eight other tracks. One song, "Your Fool", appears twice: as a delicate, catchy vamp that elicits those Feist comparisons; and as "Reprise", an abstracted instrumental flurry, over which Prass reads the lyrics with the measure – though not quite the stentorian gravity – of Isaac Hayes. If the music is predominantly rooted in the lusher end of '70s soul, there are a couple of flighty, beatless confections, "Christy" and "It Is You".

The former is a tale of infidelity that became weirdly prophetic when Prass broke up with her boyfriend and co-writer Kyle Ryan Hurlbut during the recording of the album. Designed as a homage to the Brazilian singer Gal Costa and one of Spacebomb's abiding heroes Rogério Duprat, the orchestrator of *Tropicália*, you might also spot (inadvertent) similarities with the work of Dory Previn and, perhaps, Joanna Newsom's collaboration with Van Dyke Parks, *Ys*. "It Is You", meanwhile, is a preposterous recreation of vintage Disney scores; so much so that one imagines Prass singing it to animated songbirds perched on her arm, chipmunks and raccoons clustered adoringly at her feet. Artful, whimsical, a little cloying – and easily enough avoided, sat as it is at the end of the 40-minute album.

Before that, there are a clutch of gorgeously rendered pop-soul songs that climax with "Violently", the apotheosis of Prass and Spacebomb's style. It begins with an easy grace and strong Muscle Shoals vibes, the offhand excellence of pianist Daniel Clarke, a vet of sessions with kd lang and Ryan Adams, very much to the fore. Gradually, the layers of orchestration accumulate, and Prass' words, at least, ramp up the intensity. "I just want to know you violently," she sings, "I've had enough of talking politely/The red is there, it's all over me."

Rarely, though, has a singer delivered such a vigorous message with such stillness. Ardent discretion is Prass' trump card, that and the way she allows her musicians to do the impassioned heavy lifting. Who needs belligerent melisma when you have, on "Violently", a jazz drummer like Pinson Chanselle playing escalating, cymbal-heavy fills that do the same job with so much more elegance? "This record is a community," says Prass; a community, it seems, clever enough to share out even the most meaningful emotional responsibilities.

"I was blown away..."

Matthew E White on Natalie Prass



"I've known Natalie a long time. Natalie and I, we're both from Virginia Beach. I met her at a Battle Of The Bands when she was in 8th grade and I was in junior high. I was playing

harmonica, she was playing pop music. We both left Virginia Beach and we both take work seriously, but I hadn't heard her in a long time. So when she played her songs for me I was blown away. She's an incredibly fresh, exciting talent.

"We're a really small label and *Big Inner* took us on a crazy ride. It took us some time to learn from *Big Inner* and tighten up things. This is just a good time: it makes sense for Spacebomb, and it

makes sense for Natalie. There are so many records that we have on our shelf, incredible records that never end up heard. And there are so many records that are out in the world that are complete shit. To me, it's very clear that the common denominator for people hearing music is not always the music, it's the people behind the scenes getting that music into the right people's hands, getting it magnified and reflected in the right way. I don't say that to come down on anybody, it's just this is the reality we're in, so it's important to match an artist and a piece of art with the team that will support it appropriately. As a small business, it takes a while to get the right things in place. That's how good Natalie's record is."

INTERVIEW: MICHAEL BONNER

Q&A

Natalie Prass' inspirations: Diana Ross, Dionne Warwick and Altman's *Popeye*

WHEN DID YOU start recording the album? In 2012, I sent Matthew E White a bunch of songs and he was very thorough at discussing exactly what we were going to do. One of his main strengths is planning – he really helped me put everything together. We recorded it in about a month. We mixed it later, mastered it later, but tracked everything all at once.

Have you been frustrated that it's been on the shelf for so long?

It's been very emotional, but you can't worry about that too much now. What's great is that it's such a classic-sounding record. I wanted to write music that could be from any time. But of course, I wanted it to come out when I was 25, not 28.

You must have written a lot of music in the meantime?

Oh yeah, I've recorded two more records... what else am I gonna do? I did one in Burlington, Vermont with my friend, Seth Kaufman, who played on Lana Del Rey's new record and with Ray LaMontagne. And then I recorded another record in Nashville, where I played everything. I don't know what's going to happen with those. I don't know if I'll release them as full-lengths. I'm constantly writing and I like to be busy, but I know this record needed to come out first.

In Nashville, you can make a record like this, but everybody wants a ton of money if they're any good. This record would've cost 70 grand or something, maybe more. It wouldn't have been possible.

Is this the kind of record that you always wanted to make?

Yeah. The music I grew up listening to – that I still listen to and will never tire of – has this kind of community sound. Sometimes it's better if the singer-songwriter doesn't have to play everything and doesn't have to produce. Sometimes more ideas come to life when many people have all these great ideas and talents. Matt [White] will tell you he wouldn't be able to make his records by himself, it's a whole bunch of people bringing what they've studied for years. Even though I love being in charge – these are my ideas – sometimes it's better to open up and let people help with what you're trying to do. Everyone has their moments on this record. This record is a community.

Can you be specific about the music that inspired you, growing up?

I grew up listening to Motown; my dad is a huge Motown fan. The very first female voice I ever fell in love with was Diana Ross. The first CD I ever bought with my own money, in second grade, was by The Supremes. I've always been a huge Dionne Warwick fan, I really connect with that kind of delivery and

overall musical vibe. I love Sly And The Family Stone, Gal Costa. Those are the people I've been studying. Finding my voice, finding my singing style took a lot of exploring, and those girls I've mentioned, they had a huge part in how I wanted to deliver my songs.

When you're a singer and growing up in Virginia Beach, where both Matt and I grew

up, it's a navy town and it's a tourist town, and there's not much culture there. So many amazing people came out of this weird beach town, and I think it's because we all had to work a little harder to find stuff. We didn't have anything. We just had to keep going. I didn't even know girls could play electric guitar. The very first time I ever saw a female playing an electric guitar was Jenny Lewis, when she was in Rilo Kiley. I was in ninth grade and now I'm in her band, it's kinda cool. I thought girls played acoustic guitar and piano, girls didn't rock out.

Do you feel like you've emotionally moved on? Because a lot of the songs feel very emotionally specific to what was now a long time ago.

I co-wrote "Christy" with Kyle Ryan Hurlbut, the guy I was dating. And at the time, the song didn't have any sort of narrative to my personal experience. But then a couple of years later, that song sort of came true. And the girl's name is almost 'Christy'. We split up in the middle of recording the album. I didn't have lyrics for "Why Don't You Believe In Me?": I wrote the lyrics the night before we recorded it, and that's obviously about Kyle. The songs became even more personal, took on new meaning. It's pretty crazy.

"Is It You?" is very Disney...

Yeah, but I feel this style is beyond Disney, it's ingrained in us growing up. Everybody knows that style of music and writing, but no-one really does it. I got kind of obsessed with "He Needs Me" by Harry Nilsson from the *Popeye* movie and I started writing a whole bunch of music like that. Not everyone's gonna like it, there's gonna be a lot of people confused maybe, but I feel like it's music that's undeniably in your blood. I like it closing up the record, for sure. *INTERVIEW: JOHN MULVEY*

"The first female I saw playing an electric guitar was Jenny Lewis... now I'm in her band!"





TRACKLIST

- 1 Nobody's Empire
- 2 Allie
- 3 The Party Line
- 4 The Power Of Three
- 5 The Cat With The Cream
- 6 Enter Sylvia Plath
- 7 The Everything Muse
- 8 Perfect Couples
- 9 Ever Had A Little Faith?
- 10 Play For Today
- 11 The Book Of You
- 12 Today (This Army's For Peace)

BELLE AND SEBASTIAN

Girls In Peacetime Want To Dance

MATADOR

Stuart Murdoch returns in mature style on eclectic ninth. By Garry Mulholland

8/10

THE OPENING SONG of Belle And Sebastian's ninth album proper is about the darkest time in Stuart Murdoch's life. Towards the end of the 1980s, as his teens turned to student twenties, the singer, songwriter, guitarist and, more recently, screenwriter and director, was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis). For seven years, Murdoch was isolated and suicidal, consoling himself with '60s pop and heavy metal, dreaming of being able to go out with girls, pondering the existence of God. It's a pit of youthful despair he writes about, for the first time, in "Nobody's Empire", crediting "my father" and an unnamed female best friend for saving his life and allowing him to "leave that vision of Hell to the dying".

Murdoch has spoken in public about the CFS years many times. But it's significant that only now, 18 years after he formed Belle And Sebastian over cups of tea in a Glasgow café, has he chosen to write a song so nakedly autobiographical. In the four years since the mediocre *Belle And Sebastian Write About Love*, the band have parted company from Rough Trade and fully signed worldwide for their third label, the perennially hip US imprint Matador, while Murdoch published a collection of his online diaries, *The Celestial Café*, and, wrote, produced and directed his first film, *God Help The Girl*. The band's leader is now a 46-year-old husband and father with a portfolio career and a band who, with the crucial part they played in Murdoch's recovery to rude health, perfectly dramatise the healing power of making music.



Girls In Peacetime Want To Dance feels like a creative rebirth for a band who were beginning to feel like nothing more than the day job. A plaintive couplet from "Nobody's Empire" sets the tone for an LP that feels horrified by the modern world yet simultaneously convinced that creativity is solace, solution and hiding place: "If we live by books/ And we live by hope/Does that make us targets for gunfire?"

The themes that Murdoch himself suggests define the album are "the power of music and how much we need it. But also how the individual is affected by politics and media and the pressure that comes from the 24-hour news cycle." In that context, the "bombs in the Middle East" and "knives in the city streets" of the soft-rocking "Allie" and the "grubby little red MP/ Yellow flapping hopelessly" while the Tory remains "The Cat With The Cream" over an ominous, unlikely fusion of Abba and The Velvets, are juxtaposed with the sheer wonder of making art celebrated in "The Everlasting Muse", whereby hints of Getz/Gilberto are employed to sum up Murdoch's career-long insistence that everything

SLEEVE NOTES

► Produced by:

Ben H Allen III

Recorded at: Maze Studios, Atlanta; COD Studios, Glasgow; Humans Win!, Minneapolis

Personnel includes:

Stuart Murdoch (vocals, guitars, keys), Stevie Jackson (vocals, gtrs), Chris Geddes (keys), Richard Colburn (drums, perc), Sarah Martin (keys, gtrs, vocals), Bobby Kildea (gtr, bass), Dave McGowan (bass)

like state-of-the-art pop. New producer Ben H Allen III does a sterling job of making B&S' most stylistically eclectic record into something coherent and crunchily satisfying. *Girls...* is one of those records which sees the artists going back to the past – even if it means revisiting bad memories – to remind themselves why they bother, and move forward. It's the collective's best since *Dear Catastrophe Waitress* (2003), and sees off the potential chronic fatigue syndrome of being Belle And Sebastian for just a little too long.

Q&A

Stuart Murdoch



Where does the album title come from? It's a line from a poem... sort of a spare song title we had lying around. It felt like the right title to put with the images for the album cover, which came to me in a dream. The weird robot girl.

"The Everlasting Muse" sounds like an attempt to sum up all your many songs about wanting to understand and worship women. If it does, it wasn't intentional. It was the first song that came along. I was in Switzerland at the end of a tour with the band thinking, 'God... I have to write! I have no idea where these songs are gonna come from.' And I felt like appealing to 'the muse'. It's not far away from the sentiment of an Abba song: you know, "Thank You For The Music". I'm flirting with the spirit of music.

You took time off from B&S to make your debut as a screenwriter and director. Now *God Help The Girl* is out in the world, how did you find the process? In some regards, I fit more into the film world than the music world. With movie people you can discuss the whole gamut of life and emotion. But I do feel bruised by launching something I thought was so precious and guiding it through a commercial release without the support of a record or film company. That could be dispiriting. So I'm happy to be back in the fold. *INTERVIEW: GARRY MULHOLLAND*

good about the world is inevitably feminine. "Enter Sylvia Plath" and "Play For Today" are bookish, smart and elegantly British over

a disco beat, and you wonder why you never saw the B&S/Pet Shop Boys comparison before.

Meanwhile, fellow B&S members complement Murdoch's strong material with some of their best contributions to date. Stevie Jackson's "Perfect Couples" is resonant observation over kitsch lounge-funk, as our hero watches role model couples collapse and loses faith in everlasting love. But the major earworm is Sarah Martin's "The Power Of Three", which has a synth and strings hook that breaks your heart. It fine-tunes B&S's knack for conjuring fantasies of Swinging '60s girl-beat while sounding

A to Z

COMING UP THIS MONTH...

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THE ADVISORY CIRCLE

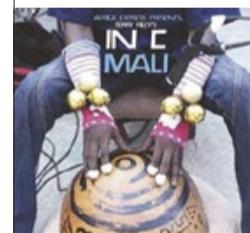
From Out Here

GHOST BOX

Oxfordshire native's third LP of hauntological investigation

At a casual listen, Jon Brooks' music as The Advisory Circle has the feel of a synth interval that might have popped up during *Tomorrow's World* to denote some quaintly utopian future. But *From Out Here*, in time-honoured Ghost Box form, is spiked with eerie disquiet. Electronic suites like "Vibrations And Waves" are Boards Of Canada-style meldings of the cosmic and the rustic, but Brooks' music displays an artisanal care: see "Upon Oakston"'s deft cross-stitching of gurgling synths and acoustic guitar. Occasional interludes – echoing number recitations; bumbling English voices on crackly wax cylinders – feel integral, while smart Julian House artwork completes the package.

LOUIS PATTISON



AFRICA EXPRESS PRESENTS...

Terry Riley's In C Mali

TRANSGRESSIVE

A minimalist classic, re-imagined in a Bamako youth club

For 50 years now, Terry Riley's "In C" – an open-ended piece made up of 53 short musical phrases – has been a popular vehicle for big improvising collectives. Ideal, then, for the Africa Express project, corralled here by the conductor Andre De Ridder. A bunch of generally unknown Malian musicians lead this 40-minute systemic jam on Riley's themes, with Africa Express regulars Damon Albarn (melodica) and Brian Eno (vocals) keeping notably low profiles. It's an inspired rather than gimmicky conceit, too: who'd have guessed koras and kalimbas would turn out to be the perfect delivery mechanism for this most ecstatic and flighty of minimalist compositions?

JOHN MULVEY

PANDA BEAR

Panda Bear Vs The Grim Reaper

DOMINO

Great fifth album of next-level techno yawping. By John Robinson



8/10

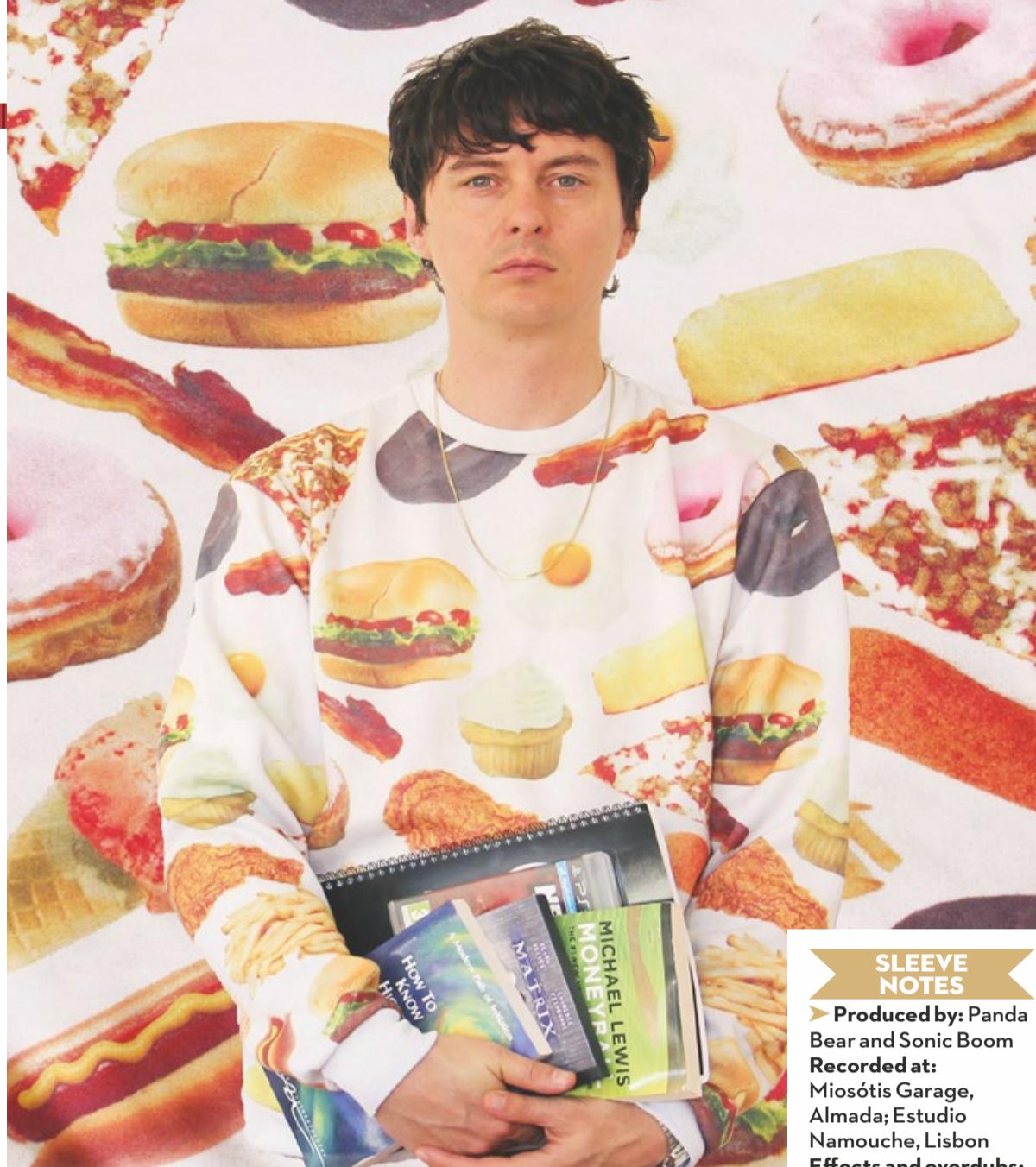
FROM FOLK, VIA drugs and jazz, to somewhere considerably weirder. The journey made by Animal Collective – with a bit less jazz and a lot more synthesisers – isn't completely unlike that made by The Byrds in the middle 1960s. In that context, there's a case to be made for Panda Bear – 35-year-old Noah Lennox – as Animal Collective's David Crosby. This is a man as yet without a cape, yacht or moustache, but there remain some powerful similarities: namely, a feel for the vibrations in a harmonious world, and of the visionary possibilities of the human voice.

In that respect, *Panda Bear Vs The Grim Reaper*, his fifth album, isn't dissimilar to his work with Animal Collective or his own previous solo work, particularly 2007's excellent *Person Pitch* or 2011's *Tomboy*. A standout Lennox song, like "My Girls" from Animal Collective's *Merriweather Post Pavilion*, is a symphony of digital sequencing, ecstatic singing, and heartfelt sentiment: the song is about wanting to provide a house for his young family. Whether it fronts abstract folk strumming, or slick post-disco grooving (he was among the featured singers on Daft Punk's *Random Access Memories* album of 2013), he's the kind of singer whose voice you instinctively trust.

It's a resource that brings continuity to a fifth album touching on greed, death and – more often than you might imagine – dogs; and moves between reference points as remote as the Prodigy, Howard Jones, The Beach Boys and 1960s girl group pop. At times it's a wonderfully playful album. After the opening "Sequential Circuits", a fanfare of melancholic chording, we face the mighty single "Mr Noah" where, over churning beats, Lennox declaims a minimal text turning the words "*That dog got bit on the leg*" into a euphoric exhortation.

Like a mantra, and like Crosby, Panda Bear can make a little go a long way, revisiting a word or a short phrase, and taking it somewhere quite beyond its origin. On the lovely "Come To Your Senses", a stirring and beautiful song about a learning experience, and not making the same mistakes repeatedly, he opens the song with a repeated question, "Are you mad?", which grows by his treatment into something of considerably greater impact than it might appear baldly on the page.

True enough, Panda Bear is no longer completely alone in exploring the possibilities of raw electronica and the human voice, as good gallery rave records in the past couple of years by Maria Minerva, Holly Herndon and Laurel Halo will surely testify. Still, his work is possibly the most interesting as a collision point between hippy music old and new. *Vs The Grim Reaper* has room for pro-human peace riffing ("Selfish Gene" comes over like *Withnail And I* with its talk about a "total shift in



SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:** Panda Bear and Sonic Boom

Recorded at: Miosótis Garage, Almada; Estudio Namouche, Lisbon

Effects and overdubs: New Atlantis, Rugby

Personnel includes: Noah Lennox and Pete Kember

the unconscious" and how wigs, and "making noise not songs" just "ain't it"). Likewise, the restless detail of "Sequential Circuits" or "Butcher Baker Candlestick Maker" moves the game on from the crusty didgeridoo vibing of Megadog-era techno.

For all its being named like a cartoon strip/Scientist dub album, however, there's reason to suppose that the death alluded to in the title is often a real issue here. In the last two thirds of the album, "Tropic Of Cancer" is followed by "Lonely Wanderer". Both are sung in the remote and melancholic voice that has been heard echoing through timeless soda fountain dramas from Phil Spector girl group productions, through The Beach Boys, and even the Ramones.

Here, though, it tackles death, beginning with an electronic last post, and being accompanied by heavenly harps. The tune reaches something like the vulnerability of The Beach Boys' "In My Room",

a fragile epic, which concludes "You won't come back/You can't come back..." a choir of

Panda Bears sorrowfully answering each other. "Lonely Wanderer" then asks a kind of post-mortem life review/customer satisfaction questionnaire. "If you look back," it asks in the same vulnerable voice. "Was it worthwhile...?"

This is the big ask behind Panda Bear's ecstasies, the yawping *carpe diem* of his music. As much as this resists being pigeonholed as a concept album, you can't deny the power of the closing "Acid Wash". The song declaims images of natural beauty in joyful voices reminiscent of The Proclaimers, and rises to a victorious electronic crescendo, announcing finally "You've won against the dark". Was it worthwhile? Panda Bear has surely answered his own question.

Q&A

Noah Lennox

What comes first with you – your vocal melodies, or developing the track? Or is it all a bit more complex and evolving than that? It depends on the set of songs, but this time round all the songs save two (the two floaty ones towards the end of the album) began as rhythms. As I developed the sounds and pieced together the framework of the rhythms over several months, the singing parts materialised sort of like a Polaroid picture oozes into focus. The words came last.

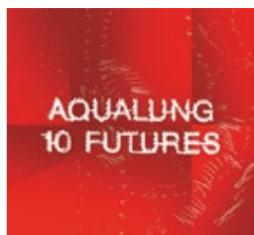
What did Sonic Boom/Pete Kember bring to

the project? How do his ideas chime with yours?

Pete and I tend to hear things in different ways and our skill sets are varied in ways that complement each other. Many of the intros are his alone, although I'd often have an image or a movement in mind. He's very good at finding the points at which sounds coalesce and he has a keen ear for balance.

Was there anything about the experience of working with Daft Punk last year that fed into how you approached this record? The track with Daft Punk was made while I was in the thick of these songs and perhaps more than anything felt like proof of concept. Making a track with them was a dream come true and a wave of inspiration for me.

INTERVIEW: JOHN ROBINSON



AQUALUNG

10 Futures

BMG CHRYSALIS

Songwriter to the stars goes back to his roots

It was a song on a car ad that jump-started Matt Hales' career over a

decade ago. Next came a major-label deal and a series of Aqualung LPs, though five years ago he swapped the London suburbs for California, writing for, among others, Jason Mraz and Paloma Faith. Now he has decided to go it alone again, albeit with the help of guest vocalists including Luke Sital-Singh (on "Be Beautiful") and Sweet Billy Pilgrim (on the gorgeous, hymnal "Clean"). Hales keeps an instinctive eye on the mainstream here, though *10 Futures*' propulsive blend of soul-pop and electronica sees him indulging a more experimental side, making it a satisfying proposition all round.

FIONA STURGES

7/10

ARCHIVE

Restriction

DANGERVISIT

Stadium-loving South Londoners with an identity crisis

This mega-collective, founded 20 years ago by Darius Keeler and Danny Griffiths, find themselves in the odd position of being feted all over Europe, where they regularly sell out stadiums, while being ignored back home. The reason for this is clear on their 10th album which, on the likes of "Feel It", finds them at their most broodingly likeable, but on "Ride In Squares" and "Crushed" finds them at their most blustering and naff. The main problem is their insistence on ticking too many stylistic boxes, from trip-hop and electronica to histrionic pomp-rock. *Restriction* certainly has its moments, but you have to wade through a lot of dross to find them.

FIONA STURGES

6/10



AUSMUTEANTS

Order Of Operation

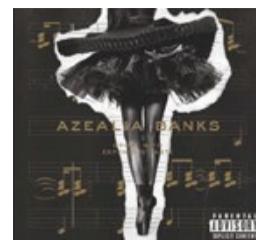
GONER/AARGHT

Synth-punk, south of the equator

Ausmuteants hail from Geelong, a satellite city 75 kilometers south-west of Melbourne, Australia. That distance has given Geelong its own cultural powers; there's a good argument to be made for Geelong as the secret motor of much great music from Melbourne over the past few decades. But Ausmuteants sound like they've spent more time huddled over those legendary Killed By Death and Homework compilations, looking for synth-punk to vibe on, as much of *Order Of Operation* could have slipped off one of those sets. Not to undersell Ausmuteants' own peculiarities: their clangy and unpredictable playing masks heavy, hilarious anti-social tendencies.

JON DALE

7/10



AZEALIA BANKS

Broke With Expensive Taste

PROSPECT PARK

Controversy-prone New Yorker releases debut album, finally

7/10

Albums have been longer in the works than *Broke With Expensive Taste*, but the four years that passed between Banks' cuss-heavy breakout single "212" and her debut have been more notable for Twitter spats and shucked-off labels than anything resembling artistic advance. In this context, *Broke...* is a pleasant surprise. The Harlemiter's lipsmacking flow is present and correct on serrated electro numbers like "Yung Rapunzel" and "Heavy Metal And Reflective"; elsewhere, there's well-laid wild cards, like the Latin sashay of "Gimme A Chance" or "Nude Beach A-Go-Go", an Ariel Pink cover-cum-collaboration which isn't good, exactly, but at least proves she's still enjoying herself.

LOUIS PATTISON

WE'RE
NEW
HERE

BC Camplight



► "I was probably one to two months away from being dead or in jail. Things were so bad. I was homeless and living in an abandoned church. And getting more and more bitter with the music industry. So I basically said to myself, 'Are you giving up or are you going to do one more thing?'"

Thankfully, Brian Christinzio answered this personal crisis by challenging himself to do the latter. Opting to leave Philadelphia for northern England, the artist known as BC Camplight set up home in Manchester in 2011. "I had absolutely no plan and since then it's just been a crazy sea change," he continues.

The fruit of his endeavour is *How To Die In The North*, his first effort for new label Bella Union, following two albums for One Little Indian in the mid '00s. It's a gorgeous union of melodic pop and ravaged experience, with keen echoes of Brian Wilson, Emitt Rhodes and Grandaddy.

"I'm pretty shit at most stuff in life and I'm not convinced of myself as a person in general," reckons Christinzio. "But I know exactly what I'm doing when I make records. Hopefully, it's the start of my golden period."

ROB HUGHES

AZEALIA BANKS

Broke With Expensive Taste

PROSPECT PARK

Controversy-prone New Yorker releases debut album, finally

7/10

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LOUIS PATTISON



JO BARTLETT

9 By 7

STRIKE BACK

Genre-defying solo outing from Green Man founder and scene-maker

7/10

Bartlett's second solo album isn't as folksy as the bucolic loveliness she explored over four albums with *It's Jo And Danny*, nor is it as freaky as the music she's been making recently with her psych quartet The Yellow Moon Band. Rather it takes traces of both and adds further diverse influences, including a trip-hop vibe on "Dying Kiss", folk-rock classicism on "Highway Found" and tantalising hints of The Waterboys, The Sundays, Low, Joanna Newsom and Saint Nick Drake, to sound rather wonderfully like the album you'd hoped Beth Gibbons might've made if she'd ever followed up her *Rustin Man* project – which is high praise, indeed.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

BC CAMPLIGHT

How To Die In The North

BELLA UNION

Layered psych-pop from Brian Christinzio

8/10

In exile from Philadelphia's indie-rock scene, BC Camplight is now based in Manchester and has returned with an album of sunshine-y '60s psych-pop, full of lush dynamics and stacks of honey-glazed harmonies. The showstopping "Why Doesn't Anyone Fall In Love Anymore" is three parts Harry Nilsson to one part John Grant, the bouncy "Thieves In Antigua" is The Beach Boys doing Motown with a Mariachi twist, while there are echoes of Todd Rundgren on the sweet soul hooks of "Just Because I Love You". An out-of-time treat.

GRAEME THOMSON



BEAT SPACEK

Modern Streets

NINJA TUNE

Mos Def-approved future-soul don's latest

Perhaps an older head guards against regurgitating currently hip music tropes. Maybe having a history that's both wide and deep helps. Or it could just be that Steve "Spacek" White's recycling skills are superior. Whatever – over 20-odd years, the bassist and vocalist-songwriter has wrangled a style of atmospheric, electronic soul enriched by personal experience – from the gospel bands and reggae soundsystems of his childhood to rave, drum'n'bass and recent post-dubstep explorations. Into the rich, smoky stew that is this debut, he chuck's deep vocal house ("Compact 'n' Sleep") and astral UK bass ("Alone In Da Sun"), with the title track crucially offsetting a tendency to overly tasteful restraint.

SHARON O'CONNELL

AMERICANA



BEST
OF THE
MONTH



8/10

JIM WHITE VS THE PARKWAY HANDLE BAND

Take It Like A Man YEP ROC

Existentialist songwriter gets happy, sort of

Jim White isn't a man known for frivolity, at least on record. As one of the more restive talents on the American roots scene, the 57-year-old's back catalogue offers an unflinching portal into everyday humanity, often fired by his own struggles with religion and the grey areas between right and wrong. So why the hell team up with a good-time bluegrass band from Georgia? The idea, it turns out, took hold when he went to a Parkway Handle Band show a couple of years ago. Stirred by their sheer verve, he found himself wondering why he couldn't have that much fun playing music.

Take It Like A Man is the result of a collaboration that began when the quintet asked White to produce their next record, only for it to become a 50-50 endeavour. The beauty of the album is that it draws its charm from the natural collision of styles: White's sour Southern fatalism versus the Parkway Handle Band's upbeat mountain reels. There's also a healthy dose of irreverence. "Smack Dab In A Big Tornado" is a climatic allusion to one of White's best-known early songs, "A Perfect Day To Chase Tornados". Another White gem, "Wordmule", is reinvented as rutting bluegrass after the original's appearance in the final season of *Breaking Bad*.

Not that *Take It Like A Man* is some corn-pone knees-up. They might be all fiddles and banjos, but the Parkway Handle Band present a disquieting worldview. The protagonist of "Not A Song", for instance, resorts to desperate measures – "This is a suicide mission/Gonna crash into your house/Just to make you listen". White has the most memorable tunes, though. Stripped down to voice and banjo, "Sorrow's Shine" (see free CD) is a throwback to the raw candour of Dock Boggs. And "Jim 3:16" finds him picking apart his own gospel, concluding that "A bar is just a church where they serve beer". Like most everything White does, *Take It Like A Man* is a discourse that demands attention. ROB HUGHES



THE AMERICANA ROUND-UP

► It's already shaping up to be a busy 2015 for **Steve Earle** (left). A new studio effort, **Terraplane**, arrives in mid-February, backed by The Dukes and recorded at the House Of Blues in

Nashville. The album, some of which was written during his solo tour of Europe, finds him delving into the blues as patented by Texan legends Freddy King and Lightnin' Hopkins. Also expect a memoir, *I Can't Remember If We Said Goodbye*, plus acting roles in forthcoming flicks *The World Made Straight* and *Dixieland*. Before all that though, Earle will be in starry company (Kris Kristofferson, Mavis Staples, John Hiatt, Lucinda Williams, Rodney Crowell,

Iron & Wine, Joan Baez and more) at a tribute gig in Washington DC. 'The Life And Songs Of Emmylou Harris', with Emmylou joined by said special guests, takes place at the DAR Constitution Hall on January 15. The concert will be taped, though no release date has been given as yet.

Another Nashville great worth celebrating is **Loretta Lynn**, whose latest deal with Sony will see the release of a number of albums in the very near future. All have been produced over the last seven years by John Carter Cash and Lynn's daughter Patsy L Russell, at the Cash Cabin Studio in Hendersonville, Tennessee. The first one, a long-overdue follow-up to 2004's Jack White-helmed **Van Lear Rose**, is slated for sometime in 2015. ROB HUGHES



RYAN BINGHAM

Fear And Saturday Night

HUMPHHEAD

Cathartic fifth album from ex-rodeo rider turned Oscar-winning songster

8/10

Bingham's grainy songs of cowboy desolation seem to have walked straight out of a Cormac McCarthy novel, making it easy to imagine that the wicked world of hurt and suffering he conjures is a carefully constructed alt.country fiction, like the movie *Crazy Heart*, in which Jeff Bridges sang his Oscar-winning "The Weary Kind". But given that his mother drank herself to death and his father committed suicide, there's nothing fake about the purgatorial narrative of songs such as "Nobody Knows My Trouble" and "My Diamond Is Too Rough". His rock'n'roll heart is real, too, shot through with true Texan grit as he sings to purge the pain.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



MAGGIE BJORKLUND

Shaken

BLOODSHOT

Luminous desert-noir elegance from Danish dame

8/10

Jack White fans may recognise Björklund as both pedal steel player on *Lazaretto* and as part of all-female backing band The Peacocks. This elegant second album features some starry help – John Parish, Jim Barr of Portishead, Kurt Wagner and Calexico's John Convertino – and exudes a minimal sense of rootsy noir, helped along by cello, upright bass and loping jazz drums. It's not unlike the work of the aforementioned Calexico or Howe Gelb (she's also a floating member of Giant Sand), though the whole gorgeous package is glazed with a filmy, very European sense of exploration.

ROB HUGHES



THE CALLSTORE

Save No One

TALITRES

Powerful, intriguing debut from French enigma

7/10

There is a certain degree of contrived mystery about this debut from a London-based French songwriter, who previously contributed to the 2010 compilation *Telescopage 3*. He's from Brittany, trained in piano, but taught himself guitar, and programmed the drums on his PlayStation. Now in his thirties, his singing voice has apparently deepened over the years into a Leonard Cohen moan, which suits the torment of his songs. Sometimes the electronics outshine the sentiment, but when he keeps it simple, as on "The Letting Go", the emotional power is undeniable.

ALASTAIR MCKAY



THE CHARLATANS

Modern Nature

BMG CHRYSALIS

Hardy perennials return with vigour after troubled times

7/10

The first Charlatans album since the untimely death of drummer Jon Brookes in 2013, *Modern Nature* (which borrows drummers from The Verve, New Order and Factory Floor) seems determined to radiate optimism in the face of adversity. "So Oh" rolls on a fat sunshine groove, the slinky "Come Home Baby" boasts a ridiculously upbeat chorus, while the band's trademark Hammond-drenched sound flows on "Emilie", the trippy "Talking In Tones" and loping soul-funk of "Let The Good Times Be Never Ending". *Modern Nature* is close to classic Charlatans – no mean feat after their recent tribulations.

GRAEME THOMSON



CHARLI XCX

Sucker

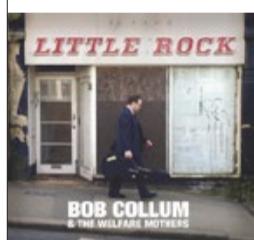
ASYLUM

High-flying popster's brash, upbeat third album

6/10

Whoever the titular sucker may be, it's not Charlotte Aitchison. The synth-pop singer-songwriter who launched herself on London's underground party scene aged 16, has gone on to co-write hits for Icona Pop and Iggy Azalea, and has signed up Stargate and Vampire Weekend's Rostam Batmanglij, among others, for her new LP. It's a shouty, attitudinal set that connects Ke\$ha to Britney Spears and Cyndi Lauper, adding an injection of grungy punk via the L7-styled "Breaking Up". And while it's disingenuous for any 22-year-old hot talent to yell, "I don't want to go to school, I just want to break the rules", "London Queen" strikes a more truthful autobiographical note.

SHARON O'CONNELL



BOB COLLUM & THE WELFARE MOTHERS

Little Rock

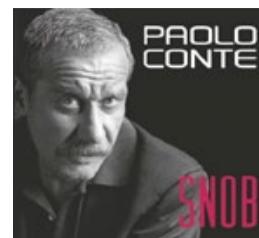
HARBOUR SONG

Anglophile Americana from the Basildon-based Okie singer-songwriter

7/10

Hailing from Tulsa, Oklahoma and now based in Essex, Collum specialises in a brand of Americana viewed through an exile's perspective. "Johnny Held Em Down" is a Southerner realising how sinister a Confederate flag ("a hateful, dirty rag") looks to the outside world; while "Good Thing We're In Love" is a knowingly daft Kenny-and-Dolly-style duet with fellow expat Marianne Hyatt, featuring fine pedal steel from Alan Kelly. Elsewhere, there's the wonderfully wistful, Springsteen-ish country rock of "Little Rock", while "Locust Grove" is a spooky, spartan ballad about the 1977 murder of three girl scouts.

JOHN LEWIS



PAOLO CONTE

Snob

UNIVERSAL

Existential cabaret from Italy's 77-year-old jazz poet

With his grainy voice, sardonic wit and air of weathered romance,

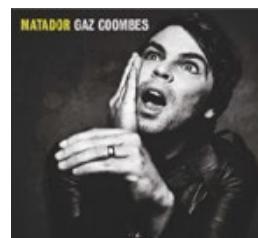
Conte combines the chanson spirit of Brel and Brassens with the lyrical sensibility of Leonard Cohen. Over dark, piano-led arrangements, his latest set of compositions muse ripely on past loves, brief encounters and the rhetorical fancies of a fecund imagination. Although translations are helpfully provided, the language barrier means something of the poetic fertility is lost; yet it's not hard to imagine that a non-English-speaking Italian listening to Cohen and a non-Italian speaker hearing Conte for the first time might experience a similarly existential connection from the profundity of their shared aesthetic.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

6/10

With his grainy voice, sardonic wit and air of weathered romance, Conte combines the chanson spirit of Brel and Brassens with the lyrical sensibility of Leonard Cohen. Over dark, piano-led arrangements, his latest set of compositions muse ripely on past loves, brief encounters and the rhetorical fancies of a fecund imagination. Although translations are helpfully provided, the language barrier means something of the poetic fertility is lost; yet it's not hard to imagine that a non-English-speaking Italian listening to Cohen and a non-Italian speaker hearing Conte for the first time might experience a similarly existential connection from the profundity of their shared aesthetic.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



GAZ COOMBES

Matador

HOT FRUIT RECORDINGS

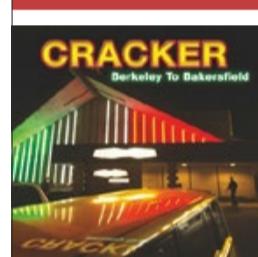
Hot fuzz! Strong second from ex-Supergrass

Although a contemporary of Radiohead, Gaz Coombes' has never conducted his career –

cheery pop hooks, demonstrative sideburns, John Lewis ads – in a like-minded manner. But Coombes' 2012 debut, *Here Come The Bombs*, suggested his maturing musicianship wasn't entirely antithetical to his Oxford peers after all. Recorded at Radiohead's Courtyard Studios, *Matador* draws further comparisons. Opener "Buffalo" arrives in minor piano chords and gauzy glitches; "20/20" shivers with treated acoustic guitar lines and scrunched beats. But for all the haunting, dislocated atmospheres here, Coombes still has an ear for melodies: the warm, bustling "The Girl Who Fell To Earth" and vigorous "Detroit" among the highlights.

MICHAEL BONNER

7/10



CRACKER

Berkeley To Bakersfield

429 RECORDS

Geopolitical double-album concept gem from erstwhile Camper Van man

On the stronger half

of their first outing in five years, Cracker singer-songwriter David Lowery reunites the band's original 1992 lineup for a cutting, driving, defiantly hook-happy set (mostly) focused on survival amid America's income-inequality nightmare – highlighted by the perfectly piquant "March Of The Billionaires". The steel-drenched, written-to-order twang-comprising Disc Two can't quite compete – though the haunting "Almond Grove" and Lowery's charming character sketch of a good ole boy gaming the system in "King Of Bakersfield" should be an inspiration to all.

LUKE TORN

8/10

REVELATIONS

Former rodeo rider Ryan Bingham on dealing with loss through song



► "I came from a Texan ranching family and started riding in junior rodeos as a kid," Ryan Bingham recalls. At 16, he left home to travel the rodeo circuit. "I was riding bulls and it was fun, but I wasn't good enough to make a living." Homeless and sleeping in his truck, he took to playing guitar in bars. "My parents were bad alcoholics and drug addicts and I was lost and confused. Writing songs got it off my chest." Texan troubadours Joe Ely and Terry Allen took him under their wing and in 2007 he released his major-label debut on Lost Highway. Two years later he teamed up with T Bone Burnett on the soundtrack for Scott Cooper's movie, *Crazy Heart*, about a down-and-out country singer. An Academy Award followed for best original song, although the triumph was bittersweet: "What people didn't realise when the Oscar stuff was going down was that my mother had drank herself to death and my father shot himself." Yet if *Fear & Saturday Night* is haunted by loss, the mood is one of defiance rather than doom. "You can't hide from the past," he says. "But you deal with it and find your own way to overcome."

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



RICHARD DAWSON

Nothing Important

WEIRD WORLD

Cherubic Tyneside troubadour lets rip

Storytelling wildman Richard Dawson's homespun blues has

attracted a cult following over the course of a dozen ramshackle albums and self-released CDRs, on which he documents his pretty ordinary life in weirdly thrilling detail. *Nothing Important*, his first for Domino's Weird World imprint, offers more of his idiosyncratic "ritual community music", as he calls it – unlikely local tales stuffed with trivial minutiae half-sung and occasionally bellowed over some fairly audacious electric guitar playing. Key cut here is 17-minute saga "The Vile Stuff", which unravels into a Northumbrian raga as Dawson riffs on dog-bitten solicitors and a nasty coconut-cracking incident.

PIERS MARTIN

7/10

SLEATER-KINNEY

No Cities To Love

SUB POP

Peerless post-punk trio's incendiary rebirth. By Sharon O'Connell



8/10

company for a rendition of Neil Young's "Rockin' In The Free World" – in practice, Sleater-Kinney are reuniting for the first time since their final tour seven years previously. They're also kickstarting a thrilling rumour.

In *Start Together*, the boxset that last October collected their complete albums (1995-2005), the trio included a white seven-inch single of a new song, "Bury Our Friends", bearing the inscription "1/20/15". As it turns out, that date has proved to be the release date of this new album, confirming what was hinted at in an enigmatic Instagram post by Brownstein around the same time last year and then casually announced by her on Twitter: Sleater-Kinney had reformed.

Why the fuss? Frankly, it's impossible to overstate Sleater-Kinney's place in the pantheon of post-Nirvana alt.rock. Their impassioned, avowedly feminist expression focused the raw and eruptive energy of riot grrrl and directed it at dissections of identity, relationships, power and belief – in muscular, post-punk pop songs. Now, a decade after they bowed out with *The Woods*, they're back with the John Goodmanson-produced *No Cities To Love*.

During those 10 years, Tucker started her own band and raised a family, while Brownstein launched and folded Wild Flag (with Weiss) and made her name as a writer and actor with the cult comedy *Portlandia*, but not a microwatt of the band's earlier energy has burned out. If anything, they sound – thrillingly, terrifyingly – even more amped up than ever. "We're wild and weary, but we won't give in," they declare on "Bury Our Friends". That line may refer to S-K's collective fears for the future in what they call "our own Gilded Age" and their willingness to fight for something better, but alongside anxiety, a deep, fierce love also surges through the album. "We sound possessed on these songs," Brownstein has admitted, "willing it all – the entire weight of the band and what it means to us – back into existence."

It's this primal creative force that pushes the record through its 31 exhilarating minutes. Clarion opener "Price Tag" addresses punch-the-clock drudgery and questions the spiritual cost, as well as the literal high price of consumerism, via cartwheeling, Banshees-style rhythms and some gleefully discordant guitar work. In the closing "Fade", S-K flash their heavy rock and grunge credentials, while urging everyone faced with the dying of the light to "shake it like never before".

Throughout, their balance of the tense and clangy with the urgently poppy is impeccable:

NOVEMBER 2013.
PEARL JAM are playing Portland when they are joined onstage for their final encore by guitarist Carrie Brownstein, singer/guitarist Corin Tucker and drummer Janet Weiss. On the face of it, they're joining Eddie Vedder and



SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:** John Goodmanson
Recorded at: Tiny Telephone Recordings (San Francisco), Kung Fu Bakery Recording Studios (Portland), Electrokitty Recording (Seattle)
Personnel: Carrie Brownstein (guitar, vocals), Corin Tucker (vocals, guitar), Janet Weiss (drums)

"Fangless" is anything but – a groovy ride hitched with Gang Of Four, powered by Weiss' pummelling on "Surface Envy", Tucker's elementally pure yelp both counters and underscores the song's crush-everything-in-its-wake momentum. The strutting riff in "Bury Our Friends" is strikingly similar to Franz Ferdinand's "Take Me Out" (although, if anyone shares their aim of making records that girls can dance to, S-K surely do). And both the title track and "Hey Darling" underline the fact that for all they've inherited from Patti Smith and Poly Styrene, these

first-generation MTVers have also been touched by the music of Pat Benatar.

There's barely a pause for breath in the whole half-hour – which makes it easy to mistake these clamorous songs for anthems, their indefatigable fervour for certitude. But one of the reasons *No Cities To Love* hits so hard is that its spirited defiance gives voice to what the three don't know, and what they fear, as much as to what they do know and are thankful for. It's also a celebration of what it means to be Sleater-Kinney once more. As "Surface Envy" has it, "We win, we lose; only together do we break the rules."

Q&A

Corin Tucker



What convinced you all to make a new record? We got together and started jamming and writing in 2012. We just wanted to experiment and see if we could write together again, and if we felt the material was worth pursuing. It was.

How different does the S-K of 2015 feel from the S-K of say, *Dig Me Out*? S-K today feels stronger and more strategic. We are more experienced at navigating difficult waters than we were in the past. We still have a great chemistry, but are able to channel it in a more focused direction.

Was any single issue galvanising, lyrically? The idea of reinventing ourselves after almost a decade of not being a band was a thrilling challenge. Who are we again, why are we doing this? All the big questions came into play. There didn't seem to be any reason to hold back.

What makes you "sick with worry, these nervous days"? To be clear, that's Carrie's lyric. We all have our own particular worries. We aren't young any more; we have lived through seeing some of our friends face their own mortality. We know it's ahead of us, but we also know we need to live to the fullest while we're here.

What was your aim with "Hey Darling"? That song came together in the practice space; it's meant to be a message to our fans, a way of trying to explain our hiatus and to reconnect at the same time. *INTERVIEW: SHARON O'CONNELL*



DELS Petals Have Fallen

BIG DADA

5/10
Bright social realism on Brit-hopper's promising second album

Like much British hip-hop, this falls short of supplying the totally universal crossover smashes that big American rap albums shoot for – but there's a huge amount to love anyway. DELS' flow jogs along at a mid-tempo that crucially never quite leans back – it makes his ruminations on blackness and grief feel uncomfortable, and his jokes about So Solid Crew feel dry and pithy, while he drifts into an earworming sing-song for the choruses. Production-wise it tips a brim to the jazzy psych of the Brainfeeder crew, with some very nice gnarly riffs chopping through the boom-bap.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS

DESPERATE JOURNALIST Desperate Journalist

FIERCE PANDA

5/10
Indie guitar raptures from London four-piece

Britpop's been the subject of fond reminiscence of late, though perhaps because it was a cultural moment rather than a musical movement, the revival is yet to really start. Desperate Journalist may be equipped to light the touch paper. The North Londoners fit sartorially (vintage clothing, mascara, DMs) and sonically (bracing guitars, kitchen sink chucked at the chorus), with vocalist Jo Bevan doing her best stentorian Siouxsie/Savages thing throughout. A string of songs with single-word titles ("Cristina", "Hesitate", "Remainder") are dispatched with gusto, but as a whole it's a bit of a mulch, never quite bettering opener "Control", a breathless romance bent around a horse-racing metaphor.

LOUIS PATTISON



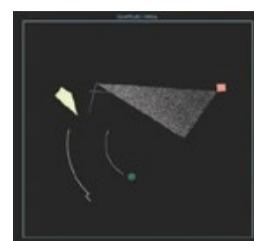
DIAGRAMS Chromatics

FULL TIME HOBBY

7/10
The subtle sounds of former Tunng frontman Sam Genders

Diagrams' second album marks a move away from the programmed music of 2012's *Black Light* to something more intimate and traditionally crafted, exploring the highs and lows of human interaction. It's typified by the track "Phantom Power", a crisp acoustic pop song framed by bubbling electronica and Genders' appealingly plain Northern burr. As a writer, Genders has both warmth and range. The title track is a ruminative electro-waltz, "Dirty Broken Bliss" a fine slice of priapic synth-pop, while "Just A Hair's Breadth" has a similar burnished romance to that found in the ballads of I Am Kloot's John Bramwell.

GRAEME THOMSON



DISAPPEARS

Irreal
KRANKY

5/10
Precise but uninviting fifth by shadowy Chicagoans

It takes guts to do what Disappears do in such financially straitened times. *Irreal* is a hard and cold avant-rock, obsessive-compulsive in its avoidance of anything resembling a pop hook or rock'n'roll showmanship. The lurking "Another Thought" conjures up a palpable tension with its sustained tom rolls, careful panning and Brian Case's blank, zombified vocal; "Halycon Days" is a murky dub lurk that imagines Slint dipping into PiL's *Metal Box*. The musicianship is on point, the recording – by John Congleton at Chicago's Electrical Audio – crystal clear. But as a listener, it feels difficult to penetrate the album's inky darkness, and you suspect they like it that way.

LOUIS PATTISON



DISTANCE, LIGHT & SKY Casting Nets

GLITTERHOUSE

8/10
Melancholic collaboration between two disparate singers and a percussionist

It's not clear who provides the distance, the light or the sky in this collaboration between, Chris Eckman (of The Walkabouts), Chantal Acda (Sleepingdog, True Bypass) and avant jazz percussionist Eric Thielemans (of EARR Ensemble), but the trio is beautifully balanced. "Souls" has the ethereal restraint of Low, with instrumental subtlety lurking beneath the surface, but the album's emotional power resides in the contrast between the voices of Eckman (sandpaper) and Acda (melting ice) – see the opening "Son", the understated country strum, "Cold Summer Wood", or the simply gorgeous "Still On The Loose".

ALASTAIR MCKAY

REVELATIONS

Chris Eckman on punk, his new projects and the banjo's history



► Chris Eckman has travelled a distance since 1984, when The Walkabouts became the first non-grunge artists on Sub Pop. Now resident in Ljubljana, Slovenia, he calls The Walkabouts 2011 album, *Travels In The Dustland*, "a reasonable ending point". Instead, he is concentrating on Distance, Light & Sky, a collaboration with singer Chantal Acda and percussionist Eric Thielemans. While the group's ethereal duets seem a long way from Eckman's Seattle beginnings, his approach is still informed by punk ideals.

"Punk was never about a particular set of musical sounds or orthodoxies. It was about DIY and making music without compromise." In recent years, Eckman has also released a solo album and two records with Dirt Music (with ex-Bad Seed Hugo Race), and now plans to concentrate on his label, Glitterbeat, which specialises in "vibrant global sounds", inspired by his exploration of the music of Mali. "The vectors from country music to the blues to the music of Mali and the Niger Delta are not hard to establish. All these musics are deeply entangled. The banjo seems not to have been brought to America by white immigrants, but rather from Africa via slavery. The banjo is probably a bastardised version of the ngori, a West African traditional instrument."

ALASTAIR MCKAY



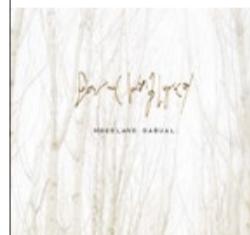
THE DØ Shake Shook Shaken

SIAMESE SQUIDS

8/10
Stylistic about-turn from French-Finnish duo

The third album by The DØ's Olivia Merilahti and Dan Levy brings with it an intriguing change in sound, the mellow guitar-led ditties of their last two efforts giving way to computers and keyboards (during recording the pair issued a ban on "real" instruments). It's a risky move that has nonetheless reaped rewards. From the upbeat majorette drum patterns on "Keep Your Lips Sealed" to the melancholy strings 'n' synth textures on "Sparks", *Shake Shook Shaken* is a pop record at heart, though underpinned by the pair's clear ear for a melody. Meanwhile, Merilahti's voice, similar to Joanna Newsom's, stays just the right side of cuteness.

FIONA STURGES



DOMINIC WAXING LYRICAL Woodland Casual

TENEMENT

7/10
Surrealist poet beefs up his backing band

The first album in 18 years from Edinburgh oddball Dominic Harris sees him upgrade from lo-fi baroque folk to a rock band featuring members of Aberfeldy, whose mix of medieval prog and surrealist post-punk is every bit as eccentric as Harris' lyrics. He performs like a declamatory poet, narrating each song from an outsider's point of view – a janitor, a nightwatchman, a mentally ill patient, a fly on the wall, even a scarecrow. Even when you've no idea what he's on about, the pulsating heavy metal of "Hell On Earth", the Casio tone bleeps of "Thursday" or the complexity of "Colonial" can be quietly thrilling.

JOHN LEWIS

New Albums



JUSTIN TOWNES EARLE

Absent Fathers

LOOSE

Son of Steve forgoes parental guidance Recorded at the same sessions as 2014's

Single Mothers, Earle's intended double album has instead landed in two halves. Unsurprisingly, *Absent Fathers* shares the same tone as its predecessor: plenty of country-soul, a little blues, the odd splash of gospel, bound together by the grainy warmth of his voice. Earle's default subject is heartbreak and uncertainty, songs like "Why" and "Day And Night" drawing comfort from weepy pedal steel and mournful slide guitar. A very fine record, for sure, but Earle has a nagging habit of stopping just short of the hands-down classic he's capable of.

ROB HUGHES

7/10

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ROB HUGHES

JAKE XERXES FUSSELL

Jake Xerxes Fussell

PARADISE OF BACHELORS

Finest worksongs reworked

Georgia-bred North Carolina native Jake

Xerxes Fussell is the son of folklorist Fred C Fussell, who documented the blues/old-time music of the Southeastern United States. No surprise, then, that his debut album reworks traditional material, much of it obscure, yet sounding familiar thanks to the vibrancy of the playing, notably from William Tyler on guitar. Tyler also produced the record, capturing beautifully loose arrangements of playful, resilient songs, notably the spry "Raggy Levy" with its joyful chant of "Ooh-oh sweet potato", and the dreamy, rambling "Push Boat".

ALASTAIR MCKAY

8/10



M GEDDES GENGRAS

Collected Works Vol 2: New Process Music

UMOR REX

Twitchy kosmische synth workouts from LA

A prolific leftfield musician, Gengras' most notable release to date has been 2012's *Icon Give Thank*, an inspired collaboration with Jamaican harmony group The Congos and another LA producer, Sun Araw. *New Process Music*, as the title signifies, is quite a different beast: layered modular synth compositions with scant resemblance to reggae, even in its most altered states. Fidgety ambience predominates, reminiscent of Cluster at times. The billowing fuzz and twisted but sepulchral melodies of "Slider" and "The Last Time We Were Here", though, suggest Gengras' best mode may be an oddly serendipitous mix of Tim Hecker and the Aphex Twin.

JOHN MULVEY

7/10



JOHN GRANT

With The BBC Philharmonic Orchestra: Live In Concert

BELLA UNION

GMF on the BBC

Grant's show recorded in London in October

and broadcast by 6 Music was a bit of a rush job, the singer having had less than three hours of full rehearsals with the orchestra. Not that you can particularly tell, as the results are gracefully lush versions of material from *Queen Of Denmark* and *Pale Green Ghosts*, like "GMF". The latter album's synth-led numbers are especially effective in their new setting, Grant's longtime collaborator Fiona Brice's wild arrangement of the title track lending it the drama of a Henry Mancini film score. It's also charming to hear Grant's intros, explaining the origins of the songs with self-mocking humour.

TERRY STAUNTON

7/10



GRACE GRIFFITH

Passing Through

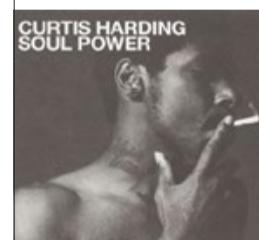
BLIX STREET

Ballads and bravery from Washington-based Celtic folkie

To say that it took a heroic effort for Griffith to record her first album since 2006's *My Life* is more than music biz hyperbole. Advanced Parkinson's disease meant sessions were sporadic and painstaking, although fortunately her haunting, gentle voice appears to have been unaffected by the degeneration. Like Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt, both fervent champions of her work, she's an interpreter rather than a writer; but she's a rich and moving one and trad songs such as "I Wish My Love Was A Red Rose" and "Down By The Sally Gardens" are sung with a poignancy that recalls her late friend, Eva Cassidy.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

6/10



CURTIS HARDING

Soul Power

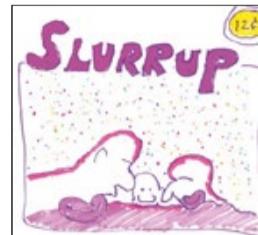
ANTI-

Assured debut from Atlanta, Georgia soul bro

This might be Curtis Harding's debut, but it's the culmination of an already impressive career arc. The young Atlanta vocalist attended gospel church and sang backing vocals on Cee Lo Green's debut before hooking up with drinking buddy Cole Alexander of the Black Lips in Night Sun. You can hear all the above in *Soul Power*, a confident take on sleek, horn-powered Philly soul with a hint of garage muscle. On the raggedly upbeat "Surf" he gives The Dirtbombs a run for their money, but it's the weepies where he excels: the closing one-two punch of "I Need A Friend" and "Cruel World" will put you on the mat.

LOUIS PATTISON

8/10



LIAM HAYES

Slurrup

FAT POSSUM

Enigmatic Chicagoan songwriter on a rocking roll

The rambling career path of Hayes, aka Plush, seems to have

straightened out of late. Hot on the heels of last year's *Korp Sole Roller* comes *Slurrup*, a further honing of his appealing ability to execute classical pop songwriting with a studied garage band sloppiness. The homemade Stonesy strut of the title track, the rocking "One Way Out" and sweet-toothed glam stomp of "Keys To Heaven" are sharp and righteous, while "Nothing Wrong" and "Get It Right" recall the young Costello's melodically hyperactive blend of '60s beat influences. There's nothing revelatory here, but it's good to see Hayes being so productive.

GRAEME THOMSON

7/10



DARREN HAYMAN

Chants For Socialists

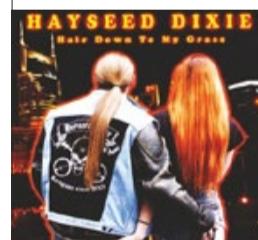
WAIWYA

Essex songwriter gives life to Victorian's political lyrics

Darren Hayman's an artist – much like The Flaming Lips or Luke Haines – that seems to have projects rather than albums. Following LPs based on Essex and 17th-Century witch trials, his latest release is inspired by the political lyrics of Victorian polymath William Morris. The results are fascinating. Morris' passionate words, devoid of modern irony and free of the fear of sounding trite, combine with Hayman's subtle but contemporary melodies to deliver songs of coiled, sincere power, like the stark "March Of The Workers", the languid "The Voice Of The Toil" and the beautiful, Lennon-esque "A Death Song".

PETER WATTS

8/10



HAYSEED DIXIE

Hair Down To My Grass

HAYSEED DIXIE

Predictable hillbilly rock monster makeovers

The Tennessee troubadours who have spent the last dozen years dishing up bluegrass arrangements of AC/DC songs broaden their canvas here, although not by much. This time round other mainstream stadium rockers (Def Leppard, Journey, Bryan Adams) are given a fiddle 'n' banjo makeover, but the band's MO is so ingrained that you know exactly how most of the tracks here will sound before you've played them. Exceptions to the rule are a fun chug through Aerosmith's "Dude Looks Like A Lady", which takes on the air of a Little Feat out-take, and a pleasing prairie howl on Pink Floyd's "Comfortably Numb".

TERRY STAUNTON

5/10



ETIENNE JAUMET

La Visite
VERSATILE

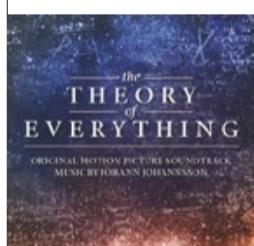
First solo jaunt in six years for French techno's crepuscular saxman

The imminent arrival of John Carpenter's solo

debut album might cause a career rethink for Zombie Zombie, a French duo whose music has often been indebted to Carpenter's old scores. A good time, perhaps, for one Zombie, Etienne Jaumet, to relaunch his solo career. *La Visite* is broadly in the tradition of 2009's excellent *Night Music*, being moody synth meditations that sit somewhere between Klaus Schulze and strung-out Detroit techno. Jaumet mutters, inscrutably, over a few tracks, but it's his saxophone playing that elevates the likes of "Moderne Jungle" above contemporary cosmic chaff; a forlorn analogue to the timelagged drones of Terry Riley circa *Reed Streams*.

JOHN MULVEY

6/10



JÓHANN JOHANSSON

The Theory Of Everything: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack

BACK LOT MUSIC

7/10

OST to the upcoming Stephen Hawking biopic

This Icelandic composer is part of a loosely affiliated "post-classical" school (including Max Richter and Peter Broderick) who blend Steve Reich-ish minimalism with a lyricism that recalls Arvo Pärt. It works well on soundtracks, and this score for the new Hawking biopic is an effective series of piano-based miniatures sweetened with strings and harp. "Cavendish Lab" suggests Ligeti, "A Game Of Croquet" invokes Bach's preludes, while "Domestic Pressures" recalls Nyman's score for *The Piano*. These are simple themes, often in waltz-time, but there's a detail that's both mathematical and celestial – which rather suits the subject matter.

JOHN LEWIS



MAX JOHNSTON

Dismantling Paradise

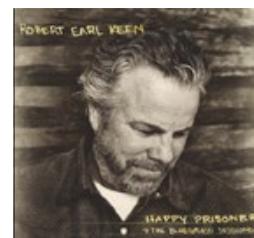
HIGH PLAINS

Well-connected alt. country veteran finally takes the solo plunge

Johnston's impeccable pedigree in high-quality Americana includes spells playing guitar/fiddle/Dobro/banjo/mandolin in Uncle Tupelo, Wilco, Freakwater and The Gourds. Why the ace sideman has taken more than two decades to make his own album is a mystery, for *Dismantling Paradise* is an authentic gem, from burnished opener "Lonely You", which sounds like 1963-era Beatles filtered through pedal-steel country heaven, to the Burritos-style "Rolling Over". Backed by fellow Gourds and Big Star's Jody Stephens, rich songs marinated in a lifetime playing cosmic American music and an atmospherically plangent voice deepen the puzzle of his previous reticence.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

8/10



ROBERT EARL KEEN

Happy Prisoner
DUALTONE

The grass is blue-ish: Texas troubadour turns toward his Appalachian roots

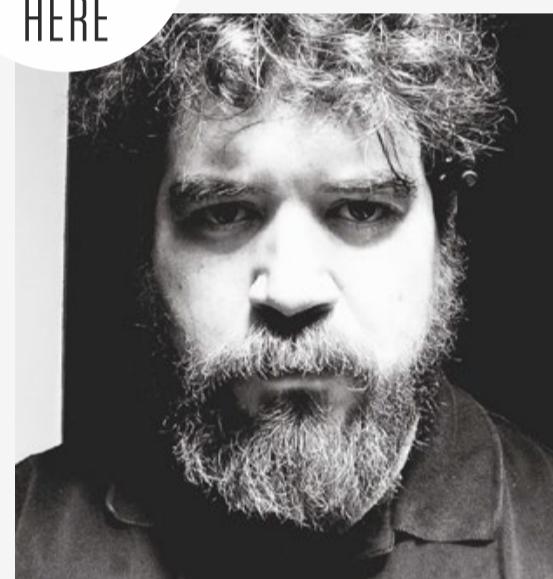
8/10

Though the repertoire of Keen's first true pay-respects covers album borders on too-trodden pathways—"T For Texas", "Long Black Veil" – songs any self-respecting folk revivalist could play in their sleep, he delivers everything with such swing, panache, and good cheer – and Danny Barnes' signature unconventional banjo play hardly hurts – that it's easy to give him the benefit of the doubt. While one might characterise a weak stab at Richard Thompson's "1952 Vincent Black Lightning" a mistake, a nicely nuanced and harmonised "East Virginia Blues" and, especially, "Walls Of Time", co-writer Peter Rowan on guitar, more than balance things out.

LUKE TORN

WE'RE
NEW
HERE

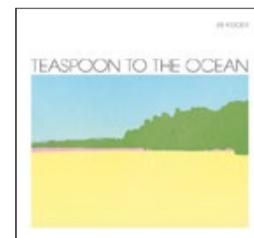
Daniel Knox



► The ghosts of the past always find a way of sneaking up on you. That's what Daniel Knox found in the midst of recording his self-titled third solo album, a sublime blend of cinematic songscapes and time-travel nostalgia. A former film student with a sideline as a movie projectionist, Knox conceives music in visual terms, but resists the notion that each song is a mini-movie. "I liken songs to the language of trailers more than films," he explains. "The films that interested me the most growing up were by people like Wim Wenders and David Lynch, films that moved very slowly, with long passages of nothing happening much."

A Chicago-based score composer and multi-media collaborator, Knox drew inspiration for the album from two joint projects with photographer John Atwood. "The defining link was that most of these songs and the pieces I did with John were primarily about my hometown of Springfield, Illinois," Knox explains. "It's a uniquely beautiful and deceptively bleak kind of place but, like a lot of Midwest towns, it's kind of eating itself alive. It's been taken over by parking lots and these built-in-a-day, disposable, Walgreens-type architecture. But you grow up finding a beauty in that, as well."

STEPHEN DALTON



JIB KIDDER

Teaspoon To The Ocean
WEIRD WORLD

Multi-media maverick's clever, cut-up pop Louisville native Sean Schuster-Craig traces his sampling obsession to a

7/10

high-school habit of making collages on the library photocopier, driven by a desire "to recode things, not decode them". To the same end, he ditched his guitar for a computer and has been busy with his dreampop (re) assemblages for the past decade, although he's picked up the guitar again for *Teaspoon....* Featuring guest vocals from Julia Holter, it's neither pastiche nor parody, corralling '60s psychedelia, prog, Indian ragas, country rock, '50s lounge music and Javanese campursari into his vision, "Wild Wind" revealing Kidder as a likely fan of Kanye West as well as Brian Wilson and The Beatles.

SHARON O'CONNELL



KLOZAPIN

Klozapin
CONQUEST OF NOISE

Youthful, proudly primitive psychedelic indie rock

Hailing from Oneonta, a small city in New York State, Klozapin are

unlikely to eclipse its most famous resident, Bill Pullman, but the quartet's swirling, trebly sound deserves fans beyond its borders. Like an early lo-fi experiment in shoegaze, their debut finds Mitchell Todorov's breathy vocals buried in an admittedly murky mix of shrill, echoing noise, but what it lacks in resources is compensated for by commitment: "Distortion" sweeps past in a blur of vaguely Middle Eastern guitar solos, like Dinosaur Jr without Lou Barlow's bass, while "Head" is so enthusiastic it eventually topples over.

WYNDHAM WALLACE



DANIEL KNOX

Daniel Knox
CARROT TOP

Magical Midwestern memoir from the US

Richard Hawley

Chicago-based singer-songwriter and film score composer Daniel Knox has

worked with an impressive constellation of collaborators including David Lynch, Rufus Wainwright and Jarvis Cocker. Knox's third solo album is an achingly lovely exercise in vintage, chrome-plated, wood-panelled Americana. Revisiting the old haunts and landmarks of his childhood, Knox's voluptuous baritone croon is buoyed along by jaunty piano, mournful strings and light-touch electronics on the slow-burn "High Pointe Drive" and the dreamy, avant-jazz ballad "David Charmichael". Imagine John Grant singing a collection of Raymond Carver stories, or Richard Hawley if he had been raised in the Illinois suburbs.

STEPHEN DALTON

New Albums



MARK KOZELEK Sings Christmas Carols

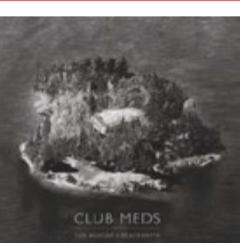
CALDO VERDE

Ho? Ho? Ho? An artfully understated Kozmas album

7/10

For those who view the festivities with a mixture of awkwardness and distaste, Low's *Christmas* album has been an at least partially soothing corrective in the 15 years since it was released. Kozelek's latest aims for a similar kind of dolorous charm, plus Spanish guitar, and often succeeds: the *Peanuts* staple, "Christmas Time Is Here", with Kozelek very much inhabiting the role of sadsack archetype Charlie Brown, is an obvious highlight. Some multitracked vocals can be too chintzily angelic (cf "O Come All Ye Faithful"). But in the wake of the absurd War On Drugs spat, it all makes a handy showcase of Kozelek's sweeter, least grouchy, instincts.

JOHN MULVEY



DAN MANGAN + BLACKSMITH Club Meds

CITY SLANG

Much-garlanded Vancouver folkie plugs in, to thrilling effect

8/10

Singer-songwriter Mangan made his name as a bearded, acoustic-guitar-toting folk troubadour, but has rather expanded his palette in the four years since his last album. Not only has he co-written an orchestral film soundtrack (to *Hector And The Search For Happiness*), but LP No 4 sees him add some intriguing post-rock textures to his songs. Here the clawhammer guitar parts are played on woozy, FX-laden electric instruments, the rhythm sections are propulsive, and each song takes on a widescreen shimmer. Standout tracks are "Vessel" (Blur-ish whimsy laced with free-jazz trumpet squalls) and "Mouthpiece" (urgent, atmospheric post-punk), but this is all very impressive stuff.

JOHN LEWIS



MARILYN MANSON The Pale Emperor

COOKING VINYL

Return of the goth-metal thin white duke

Brian Warner has slipped a long way from multi-platinum shock-rock major-label superstar to fringe indie signing and bit-part actor. But the fall seems to have improved his music, trading nu-metal bombast for more nuanced, less sensationalistic work. Co-written with new guitarist/Hollywood score composer Tyler Bates, Manson's ninth album has a spacey, percussive, new wave feel that recalls vintage Bauhaus and Iggy Pop, especially the orch-glam prowl of "Killing Strangers" and the croaking, burnt-out power ballad "The Mephistopheles Of Los Angeles", which may well be Warner's "Hotel California". A paucity of strong tunes remains his Achilles heel, but no-one else does wasted decadence with such persuasive panache.

STEPHEN DALTON

7/10

MARC NADER



AMIRA MEDUNJANIN Silk & Stone

WORLD VILLAGE

Career-defining third album from Bosnia's finest export

8/10

The leading exponent of the dark and melancholic traditional Balkan soul music known as sevdah, Medunjanin's voluptuous voice hovers enticingly between East and West, like a cross between the Arabic singer Oum Kalthoum and Billie Holiday, the emotional intensity fuelled by the pain of her own upbringing, sleeping in a coal cellar in the siege of Sarajevo during the murderous ethnic cleansing of the Bosnian War. A hybrid mix of jazzy piano and double bass and Arabic oud and kanun sympathetically underpins the thrilling poise of her singing on an exquisite album that affirms her status as Eastern Europe's most potent contemporary voice.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



MENACE BEACH Ratworld

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

Chirpy grunge-pop from Leeds lowlives

Menace Beach take their name from a '90s Nintendo game, and their key

influences are of a similar vintage: The Breeders, Pavement, Boo Radleys – pretty much anyone from said era, in fact, capable of balancing guitar fuzz with copious tunes. Co-frontpeople Ryan Needham and Liza Violet sing-drawl their way through slanted rockers like "Dig It Up" and the dementedly catchy, feedback-spiked "Come On Give Up" backed by an all-Leeds cast including MJ of Hookworms and Nestor Matthews of Sky Larkin. It's all likeable, seldom revelatory – although the dreamy, Cocteau Twins-esque "Blue Eye" is lovelier than any song on an album called *Ratworld* really deserves to be.

LOUIS PATTISON

6/10



MIND FAIR Mind Fair

GOLF CHANNEL

British disco veteran's psych-funk romp

Dean Meredith first made waves in the early '90s in Top 10 rave outfit Bizarre Inc – remember

"Playing With Knives"? – and has spent the ensuing years concocting various strains of cosmic disco (as Chicken Lips, White Light Circus, Big Two Hundred), each project fixated with prowling bottom end and endless grooves. *Mind Fair*, his latest outing with producer Ben Shenton, brings a deep-fried carnival atmosphere to proceedings, pairing campfire boogie ("Cursed") and tumblin' blues ("Sunny Carter") with more traditional low-slung gear such as "Deutsche Bag" and "Voodoo Train". As ever, Meredith is searching for something he knows he'll never find.

PIERS MARTIN

7/10



► Flint, Michigan isn't your traditional country musician territory, but Whitey Morgan is the real deal, belting out classic honky-tonk and Bakersfield country with his band, The 78's. Morgan hasn't released an album since 2010, but *Born, Raised & LIVE From Flint* is the first of three he plans to put out in 2015. "The live album was supposed to come out two years ago," he says. "Red tape held it up. It captures the energy and tight sound we have, and the interaction with the crowd. It's a big party and I'm the drunken, loud host with a great band behind me. I come up with the cover ideas. Mainly it's songs that I like to sing and pick on my acoustic. We take it to the stage one night and never look back."

Morgan learnt country music from his grandfather. "He taught me to pick and sing when I was young," says Morgan. "He is from the South and I spent a lot of my childhood with him. I came back to country music when he passed and I inherited his Gibson acoustic."

The focus now will be on shows to promote a new studio album, *Sonic Ranch*, which comes out early in 2015.

PETER WATTS



WHITEY MORGAN AND THE 78'S Born, Raised & LIVE From Flint

BLOODSHOT

8/10

Fresh outlaw country from Michigan

Hairy as a bear and tattooed to the brim, Whitey Morgan looks like a biker and sings like an outlaw, revisiting Waylon and Willie from his home town of Flint, Michigan in this live album. Like all good country folk, Morgan pays his dues, covering Cash ("Bad News") and Dale Watson's blistering "Where Do Ya Want It?", but also blasting out strong originals ("Buick City", "Turn Up The Bottle") and interesting covers, like Springsteen's "I'm On Fire". It could be hokey, but the superb band work up a wicked two-step while Morgan's charismatic vocals and sharp lyrical eye brings freshness to age-old themes.

PETER WATTS



SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:**
The Decemberists and Tucker Martine
Recorded at: Flora; Playback, Portland
Personnel include:
Colin Meloy (vocals, gtrs, bouzouki, harm),
Chris Funk (gtrs, banjo, bouzouki, mandolin),
Jenny Conlee (piano, accordion, Hammond),
Nate Query (bass),
John Moen (drums)

“Long summer days can lead to lazy vices/Boys all at idle left to their own devices” – while “Make You Better” is more evidence of Meloy’s affinity for a certain kind of indie aesthetic (The Catchers or perhaps a rockier Field Mice spring to mind). Later, with “The Wrong Year”, Meloy explicitly mirrors the deft melodic lilt of Johnny Marr in his Smiths heyday.

Meloy’s singing is at its best on “Lake Song” and “Till The Water’s All Long Gone”, both of which find him adopting a softer, more intimate delivery. On “Lake Song”, strip away the Morrisseyisms (“I, 17 and terminally fey”) and you’re left with a

wry, bookish yarn about the narrator’s formative romantic fumblings: “You, all sibylline, reclining in your pew, you tattered me, you tethered me to you”. Another highlight is the understated country blues of “Carolina Low”, which comes couched in violence – “Did you crack your lip? Did you skin your knee?” – while the fate of the narrator remains ominously unspecified: “I’m bound for the hilltop”. Meloy has a tendency to overwrite, but “Carolina Low”, with its compact narrative, benefits from smart self-editing skills. Less successful is the ersatz folk of “Better Not Wake The Baby”, with its wheezy accordions and Mumfordized chorus. “Anti-Summersong” – a companion piece to “Summersong” from *The Crane Wife* – has pleasing touches of early, alt.country Wilco. “Easy Come, Easy Go” is another opportunity for Meloy to flash his chops as a lyricist – “It was a moonless night, the stars a limning light” – for a pulpy, cautionary tale about lives lost through casual mishap.

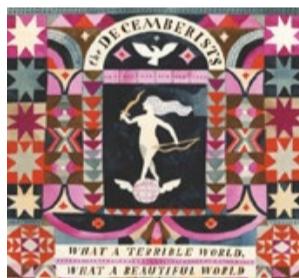
Previous Decemberists albums have often been tied to a concept – none more so than 2009’s *The Hazards Of Love*, a fairytale about a maiden and her misadventures with vengeful forest sprites. If anything links *What A Terrible World...*, though, it’s more ruminative, first-person pieces like “Mistral” and “12/17/12”. In the former – a big song with a warm, uplifting chorus – the narrator finds himself abroad and “ekeing out a little joy from what awaits back in the States”. “12/17/12”, apparently written after watching Obama address the nation after the Newtown school shootings, is carried on exquisitely simple, country-inflected melodies. “O my God, what a world you have made here”, Meloy half-whispers. It is the most straightforward and affecting song on the album, shorn of elaborate wordplay and quirky arrangements. You might wish he’d tackled more of the record in this way.

THE DECEMBERISTS

What A Terrible World, What A Beautiful World

ROUGH TRADE

Their seventh studio album. Less words, more heart, says Michael Bonner



7/10

IN APRIL 2007, *Uncut* reported on the rise of a new generation of North American college rock bands. Responding to the successes of bands like Arcade Fire, The Shins and Modest Mouse, we asked how literate, theatrical, geeky indie rock bands were all of a sudden taking

charge of the charts and selling out arenas. Among the bands featured were Portland, Oregon’s The Decemberists, led by Colin Meloy, who had recently released their major-label debut, *The Crane Wife*. As it transpired, things continued to progress propitiously for The Decemberists: their last album, 2011’s *The King Is Dead*, reached No 1 on the *Billboard* charts, selling 94,000 copies in its first week of release.

At their best, the earliest Decemberists recordings were playful and roguish, full of seafaring yarns and shape-shifting demons, whose detailed storylines and demanding arrangements often concealed a potentially popular sound beneath. But *The King Is Dead* tempered some of their fussier aspects; the album even featured extensive cameo work from Peter Buck, a musician not known for idiosyncratic noodling. The album’s success paid off: following its release, the band contributed to the *Hunger Games* soundtrack, and appeared on both *The Simpsons* and *Parks And Recreation*. What greater accolades could an indie band from the Pacific Northwest possibly want...?

Since then, the band have been on hiatus following multi-instrumentalist Jenny Conlee’s recovery from breast cancer treatment and Meloy’s burgeoning sideline as the author of a successful young adult fantasy franchise. They return with *What A Terrible World, What A Beautiful World*. The relative simplicity of *The King Is Dead* suited Colin Meloy’s strong melodic gifts; and *What A Terrible World...* continues to sharpen the band’s sound. The rough-and-tumble folk is suffused here with girl

group “doo doos”, indie jangle, and even reaches for the loose, jazzy vibes of *Astral Weeks* – on the beautiful “Lake Song” and “Till The Water Is All Long Gone”.

The album opens with “The Singer Addresses His Audience”, a sardonic take on the slippery nature of rock’n’roll success and the compromises made along the way, in which a fictitious frontman confesses, “We’re aware that you cut your hair in the style that our drummer wore in the video/But with fame came a mounting claim for the evermore”, topped off with the wryly disingenuous caveat: “We did it all for you”. It spins off into suitably histrionic string arrangements, Jim Steinman-style choirs and squawking guitar solos. So far, so droll. “Cavalry Captain” foregrounds the romantic aspect of Meloy’s songwriting – “We’ll be away on the light brigade/And if only for a second, if only for a time, and if only for a second/We’ll be alive” – set against thrilling brass arrangements. The Spectorish swoon of “Philomena” finds Meloy at his most Morrissey –

Q&A

Colin Meloy



In what ways do you see *What A Terrible World...* as a progression from *The King Is Dead*? I’m not sure. Some of the songs could’ve been on *The King Is Dead*, I suppose. Some feel like they’re very different. I tend to think of *The Hazards Of Love* and *The King Is Dead* being sibling records; this one might be an only child.

Are you referring to anyone specifically in “The Singer Addresses His Audience”? No. It’s an anonymous entertainer at a crossroads in his life.

There’s a touch of Van Morrison on this album, in particular “Lake Song”. Are there any

particular artists you were listening to while you were writing and recording this album?

That’s very perceptive. Van Morrison, in particular *Astral Weeks*, was a big guiding force for that song in particular. These songs were written over a four-five year period, so, needless to say, I listened to a lot of music during their writing. I listened to Leonard Cohen, Bert Jansch, Alvvays, Phosphorescent, Sharon Van Etten and Serafina Steer. I listened to Little Feat and a bit of the Stones. I listened to a lot of stuff.

As ever with Decemberists records, there’s a lot of nature and weather on this album; what’s the continued fascination? Tucker Martine, our producer, tells a funny story in which his wife, the great Laura Veirs, is approached after a show by a fan who says, “You like nature a lot, don’t you?” What’s the continued fascination with nature? What is this, an email interview?

INTERVIEW: MICHAEL BONNER

New Albums



NOVELLER *Fantastic Planet*

FIRE

Austin-based guitarist's rapturous soundscapes

After starting out as an experi-noise exponent and serving time with both Parts & Labor and (very briefly) Cold Cave, musician and filmmaker Sarah Lipstate has fine-tuned her solo electric guitar work as Noveller. Hers is an eloquent, sensual and intensely evocative instrumental language that counters all "soundtrack to imaginary movie" clichés, aligning her with Rhys Chatham (in whose Guitar Army she's played), Oneohtrix Point Never, Vini Reilly and Eno. The aptly titled *Fantastic Planet* is a dynamically nuanced, nine-song set that conjures real-world wonders as convincingly as a doomed voyage to some imagined, far-flung galaxy – although the synth-pumped, mutant African highlife of "Sisters" is a sweet wild card.

SHARON O'CONNELL

8/10

PARRA FOR CUVA *Majouré*

LENIENT TALES RECORDINGS

Berlin-based producer in 'not techno' shocker

Despite the tougher electronic sounds of his birthplace, Cologne, and adopted home, Berlin, Nicolas Demuth favours a downtempo, mainly instrumental approach that, 10 years ago, would have won instant favour at The Big Chill. This back-handed compliment, however, overlooks the seductive delicacy of "Under Yellow Woods" and the Lemon Jelly-like opener "Devi", which swaps their children's TV samples for LA-based rapper Nieve's laidback delivery. "Champa", too, features the ghostly falsetto of India's Monsoonsiren, and it's a distinct improvement on Demuth's cringeworthy – fortunately absent – 2013 cover of Chris Isaak's "Wicked Games". Quietly comforting, then, if seldom challenging.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

7/10

THE PHANTOM BAND *Fears Trending*

CHEMICAL UNDERGROUND

Terrific sister album to last year's *Strange Friend*

Mostly recorded during the sessions for 2014's excellent *Strange Friend*, the seven tracks on *Fears Trending* (it's an anagram) constitute a darker, less streamlined and arguably more enthralling counterpoint to their last album. "Olden Golden" revisits the epic Gothic folk of debut *Checkmate Savage*, the prowling "Kingfisher" evokes Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds at their most brooding, while the Spaghetti Western flourishes of "Denise Hopper" build to a ferocious climax. Belying its off-cut origins, *Fears Trending* is a fully realised album which stands equal to anything this consistently inventive band have done thus far.

GRAEME THOMSON

8/10



PINKSHINY- ULTRABLAST

Everything Else Matters

CLUB AC30

Shoegazing revolution arrives in Russia

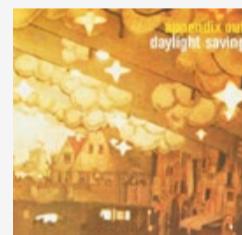
7/10

Wait long enough and all pop movements come around again, the same but different. The shoegazing revival has now been building long enough to spawn its own niche labels and third-generation bands, with elder statesmen like Slowdive reforming to ride the comeback wave. Youthful St Petersburg quintet Pinkshiny-ultrablast reinvent those shimmer-pop effects with charming freshness, invoking everybody from Lush to the Cocteaus to MBV on the spangle-jangle starburst of "Wish We Were". But their best work moves beyond pastiche into broader sonic terrain, from the radiant electro-throb architecture of "Metamorphosis" to the crashing symphonic fade-out of "Marigold".

STEPHEN DALTON

HOW TO BUY... **ALASDAIR ROBERTS**

The Bard's best releases

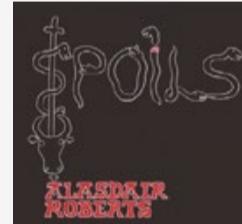


APPENDIX OUT *Daylight Saving*

DRAG CITY, 1999

Appendix Out's debut single was released by Will Oldham, suggesting aesthetic kinship, but by *Daylight Saving*, Roberts' first group were closer to ghostly, lamp-lit Brit psych-folk. This beautiful LP pivots on two mordant epics, "Merchant City" and "Exile" – the former featuring Kate Wright from Movietone on fragile backing vocals.

8/10



ALASDAIR ROBERTS

Spoils DRAG CITY, 2009

Roberts' masterpiece. Here, he steps up his game, writing gnomic, oblique songs steeped in multiple traditions, from prophetic prose through to surrealist

folklore, from cautionary tale to barbed harangue. The playing on *Spoils* is gnarled and ornery, resulting in a full, tough group sound that burns with an incandescent intensity.

10/10



ALASDAIR ROBERTS & FRIENDS

Too Long In This Condition

DRAG CITY, 2010

Off the back of *Spoils*, Roberts called in some mates and laid down a set of traditional folk songs. On *Too Long In This Condition*, he proves that he has facility with tradition, respecting its tenets while making loose with the details, slyly experimenting with structure and arrangement.

9/10

JON DALE



ALASDAIR ROBERTS

Alasdair Roberts

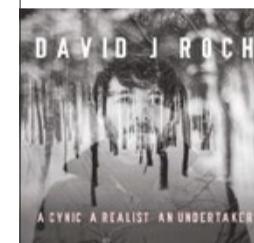
DRAG CITY

Scottish folk singer hones his craft

In contrast to his last album, 2013's sprawling double record, *A Wonder*

Working Stone, Roberts' latest solo outing is closer to the measured song-craft of 2007's *The Amber Gatherers*. It's a calm, precise and very beautiful record, the 10 songs here built around his courtly voice and fluid finger-picked guitar playing, augmented by clarinet, tin whistle, flute and choral vocals. Drawing fruitfully on the myth, darkness and archaic poeticism of traditional music, the likes of "Honour Song", "Artless One" and "Roomful Of Relics" cast a densely woven spell. It's yet another display of excellence from an artist in consummate control of his art.

GRAEME THOMSON



DAVID J ROCH

A Cynic, A Realist, An Undertaker

DRAM MUSIC

South Yorkshire songwriter dabbles with the devil

Cut from the same cloth as Iron & Wine's

Sam Beam, Sheffield's David J Roch deals in understated folk songs about love, heartbreak and death. Championed by Richard Hawley and produced by Jim Sclavunos, of Bad Seeds and Grinderman fame, Roch has yet to match the acclaim of his mentors, though his second album, the follow-up to 2011's *Skin & Bones*, would suggest their faith is well placed. Roch is an undertaker by trade, which would account for the gothic melodrama in the likes of "Hell To Pay", a cruel tale of love gone bad in which a feckless beau is sent to a watery grave.

FIONA STURGES

RONIIA

Roniiia

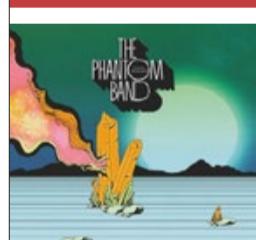
TOTALLY GROSS
NATIONAL PRODUCT



Absorbing debut from Midwestern electro-folk beatscape trio

There is an incongruous but intoxicating chemistry between alt.folk singer Nona Marie Invie and her two collaborators in Minneapolis trio Roniiia, who weave hypnagogic siren songs from amniotic drones, reverb-heavy beats and psych soundscapes. Invie's woozy incantations sound both lysergic and liturgical, often sliding off-key in a way that feels more right than wrong. While overall quality levels barely dip, peaks include the dreamy processional "Fool's Game" and the voluptuously intertwined vocal layers of "Slow Daze". There are echoes here of vintage Spector, post-punk and trip-hop, but Roniiia already have a strong sui generis aesthetic that shakes off any obvious ancestry.

8/10



THE PHANTOM BAND *Fears Trending*

CHEMICAL UNDERGROUND

Terrific sister album to last year's *Strange Friend*

Mostly recorded during the sessions for 2014's excellent *Strange Friend*, the seven tracks on *Fears Trending* (it's an anagram) constitute a darker, less streamlined and arguably more enthralling counterpoint to their last album. "Olden Golden" revisits the epic Gothic folk of debut *Checkmate Savage*, the prowling "Kingfisher" evokes Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds at their most brooding, while the Spaghetti Western flourishes of "Denise Hopper" build to a ferocious climax. Belying its off-cut origins, *Fears Trending* is a fully realised album which stands equal to anything this consistently inventive band have done thus far.

GRAEME THOMSON



RAZIA SAID

Akory

CUMBANCHA

Madagascan singer takes the global stage

Now based in New York, Said digs deep into the traditional music of her native Madagascar on her second album, but gives her roots an accessible, contemporary makeover, layering the native instruments with percolating guitars, horns and strings to put her alongside Angélique Kidjo and Rokia Traoré among the most effective global ambassadors for African music currently on the circuit. The throaty radiance of her voice ranges from dulcet Sade sweet to soulful Winehouse roar, while lyrics railing against environmental destruction and political corruption are juxtaposed against vibrant, swelling dance rhythms, creating a robust and assured Afro-pop globalism of the most inclusive kind.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

7/10



SILK RHODES

Silk Rhodes

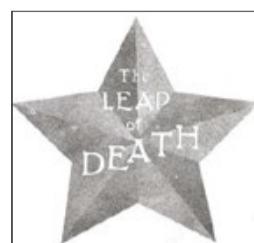
STONES THROW

Thrifty soulman moves from Baltimore duo

Like many of their soul forebears, Silk Rhodes come with a hardscrabble backstory. Theirs is, however, very 2015. Producer Michael Collins and singer Sasha Desree started recording music together in a Honda SUV, a mic and loop pedal run into the car's cassette adaptor. Musically, the pair geek out for a particular vintage of lush '70s soul – Sly Stone, The Delphonics – although their lo-fi approach sees such influences rendered with a pared-back minimalism. There's a psychedelic, sedated quality to disco strut "Face 2 Face" and "Barely New", with its loverman testifying and spindly, phased guitar. But Silk Rhodes are no ironists, their take on the genre sharply-observed and utterly sincere.

LOUIS PATTISON

8/10



ROBERT STILLMAN

Leap Of Death

ARCHAIC FUTURE

Brassy, magical score for a 1928 circus melodrama

An arcane and lovely piece of work, *Leap Of Death* is based on a lost FW Murnau movie about trapeze artists (*4 Devils*, from 1928) and comes with booklets, posters and so forth in a lavish edition of 50. The music, fortunately, works just fine in isolation (from www.bandcamp.com). Stillman is a US-born, UK-based composer with an innovative way of rethinking a creaky, generally neglected strain of Americana. As with the excellent *Machine's Song* (2011) and *Station Wagon Interior Perspective* (2012), Van Dyke Parks and Moondog seem useful names to drop. But the brass-heavy ensemble also suggests Albert Ayler, at once jaunty and melancholy, working the carnivals of a long-gone America.

JOHN MULVEY

7/10



ANDY STOTT

Faith In Strangers

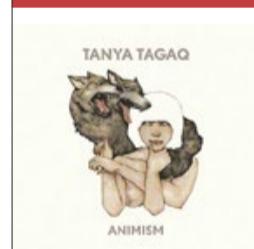
MODERN LOVE

Humid, fungal techno, and more, from English producer

Though he's best known as a techno producer, Andy Stott's music has always offered much more to listeners: on *Faith In Strangers*, he mutates through mournful drones, fuzzed-out ambience and hints of electronic pop, all while staying true to an approach to techno that's simultaneously rhythmically driving and texturally drowsy, at times almost sluggish. But that's part of what makes *Faith In Strangers*' alluring: the repressive weight of the production creates a micro-climate that's compelling to move through. By the time you reach the abstracted pop of the title track, you've completely surrendered to *Faith In Strangers*' unique emotional cast.

JO DALE

8/10



TANYA TAGAQ

Animism

SIX SHOOTER

Polaris Prize-winning Canadian Inuk singer

Tanya Tagaq is one of those vocalists who you'd hesitate to describe as a "singer": instead she spends much of this album howling, grunting, humming, groaning and yodelling. Some of these pieces are more like performance art works than songs; preparatory sketches based around electronic babbles and orchestral scrapings – indeed, the final track, "Fracking", sounds like Mother Nature being tortured alive (which is, presumably, the idea). But it's on her version of the Pixies' "Caribou", the episodic "Tulugak" and the tribal blues of "Damp Animal Spirits" that Tagaq successfully blends Inuit vocal techniques with strong melodies.

JOHN LEWIS

7/10



R SEILIOG

In Hz

TURNSTILE

Young Welsh Krautrocker's absorbing debut

Cardiff cosmonaut Robin Edwards has so far kept his fledgling operations close to home – he shares a label with Gruff Rhys and recently remixed Manic Street Preachers – though *In Hz*, his impressive debut as R Seiliog, suggests his mannered take on kosmische – loosely, Neu!'s circular riffs mixed with the gauzy techno of Jon Hopkins – won't remain a local concern for long. Some of the analogue fumbling that made Edwards' first EPs so appealing has been ironed out – "Constellation Drip" has a certain slickness – but it's the rugged rural rave of "Wow Signal" that will endear him to followers of, say, James Holden.

PIERS MARTIN

8/10



SOUTHERN TENANT FOLK UNION

The Chuck Norris Project

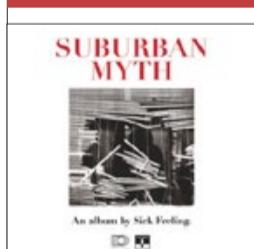
JOHNNY ROCK

Politicised sixth album by Edinburgh folk collective

Each of these 13 songs is named after a Chuck Norris movie, but such japey turns out to be a Trojan horse for a fierce polemic which vents, not always elegantly, on political themes. Gun control, ideological extremism, fiscal greed and unfair labour laws are picked over in an ambitious suite of songs which, though deploying the band's all-acoustic blend of guitars, double bass and strings, expands STFU's folk origins by drawing on funk ("Delta Force"), deep soul ("Martial Law" is Isaac Hayes taking the high road) and film-score atmospherics.

GRAEME THOMSON

7/10



SICK FEELING

Suburban Myth

COLLECT RECORDS/TERRIBLE RECORDS

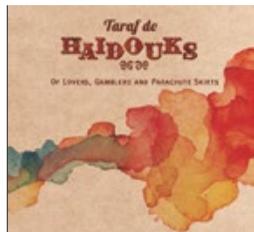
Howling hardcore from punkish newbies

Debuting Yank punks Sick Feeling howl in like a tornado on "Gave Back (Suburban Myth Pt 1)", but soon let more air into their act, via the hardcore minimalism of "Not No (Sick Feeling)" and the textural turns and tweaks of "I'm Chafing", with its billowing guitars and practically audible lyrics. It's these breaks from their otherwise pummelling assaults on the ears that gives this debut legs, and is best heard on a song like "Ambition" or the excellent "Natural Ice", which rage and broil with sinister intent, but still give the odd pause so everybody can piece their brains back together.

PETER WATTS

7/10

New Albums



TARAF DE HAÏDOUKS

Of Lovers, Gamblers And Parachute Skirts

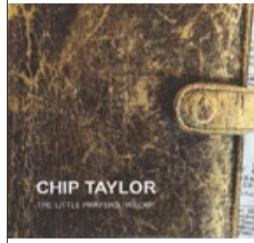
CRAMMED

Tipsy gypsies celebrate their silver jubilee in raucous style

7/10

They may have lost several of their veteran vocalists in recent years, but Romanian gypsy-punks Taraf de Haïdouks still explode with life, lust and passion on this 25th anniversary LP. Effusive stomp "The Fields Are Blooming", a frenzy of frenetic fiddling and machine-gun ragtime piano, plays up to tourist clichés about full-blooded Balkan melodrama. Likewise tragic, tear-stained, quartertone-quivering laments like "Cold Snowball". But this is no one-dimensional museum music, also straying into Tom Waits or Warren Ellis territory on more emotionally and sonically complex ballads like "The High Balcony In Ciolpan".

STEPHEN DALTON



CHIP TAYLOR

The Little Prayers Trilogy

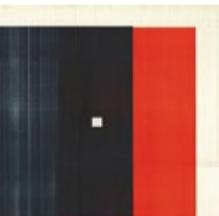
TRAINWRECK

Brilliant triple-album from gnarled veteran

Chip Taylor has been turning out superb country/folk albums for decades, but this could be his late masterpiece. The three discs ostensibly offer subtly differing vibes but collectively capture a man bringing both the experience and the intensity of age to the table, whispering gripping songs about life, full of wisdom and humour, celebrating Taylor's life through characters and glimpsed moments. "Czechoslovakian Heaven" is an early highlight, "Merry F'n Christmas" is a blast while "Joan's Song" is poignant in the extreme, but it's the entirety that impresses, with Taylor holding court and maintaining focus across many minutes of absorbing music.

PETER WATTS

9/10



JOHN TEJADA

Signs Under Test

KOMPAKT

Synth scholar keeps things leisurely on 10th album

After almost two decades of acclaimed releases, you'd think Austrian-born, Los Angeles resident Tejada would sound more cheerful. With his third album for Kompakt, however, the former Plug Research alumnus maintains his penchant for melancholic, Detroit-inspired tech-house better suited to the home than club environment. There are hints, too, of his preference for hardware over software in the variety of vintage synth sounds employed: "YO Why", in fact, could be Aphex Twin's Polygon Window alias, while the pared down melody and percussion of "Beach" sit between James' ambient work and Boards Of Canada.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

7/10



JOZEF VAN WISSEM

It Is Time For You To Return

CRAMMED

Dutch lutist pipes up

Since the year 2000, Jozef Van Wissem has released a dozen or so albums documenting his refined fusions of renaissance music and 20th-Century minimalism. *It Is Time For You To Return* is unique in his catalogue, though, capturing as it does Van Wissem singing for the first time. The circling, chanted "Love Destroys All Evil" conjures up a sense of sweeping courtly tragedy, but Van Wissem can't suppress his modernist tendencies for long: "Confinement" is ghosted by skittering electronic tones, while the closing "Invocation Of The Spirit Spell" adds Lebanese singer Yasmine Hamdan and wisps of electric guitar courtesy of the filmmaker Jim Jarmusch.

LOUIS PATTISON

8/10



VIET CONG

Viet Cong

JAGJAGUWAR

Potent first from former Women players

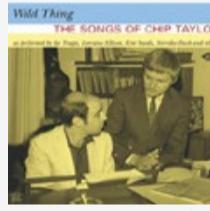
It opens with an ominous rattle, like the shaking of a giant, sheet-metal wobble board, but Calgary's Viet Cong are drawn more to compellingly repetitive rhythms and wiry melodies than industrial raw power. Formed by Matthew Flegel (vocals, bass) and Michael Wallace (drums) following the collapse of Women, they've developed a needling, post-punk style that nods to Joy Division, Gang Of Four and Shellac, although "Continental Shelf" could be Interpol, shorn of their pop-star aspirations. "Death" is the winner here; it powers along with such determinedly skronky ferocity, VC sound spent by their own efforts, scraping minimally at strings before finding a second wind to complete their 11-minute charge.

SHARON O'CONNELL

7/10

HOW TO BUY... CHIP TAYLOR

Golfer, gambler, country-folk soulman



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Wild Thing: The Songs Of Chip Taylor

ACE, 2009

Born James Voight and brother of actor Jon, Chip Taylor - the nickname came from his brief career as a golfer - spent the '60s working as a songwriter. This comp features songs performed by Dusty Springfield, Evie Sands and Aretha Franklin as well as "Wild Thing" by The Troggs, "Angel Of The Morning" by Merrilee Rush and "Try (Just A Little Bit Harder)" by Lorraine Ellison.

8/10



CHIP TAYLOR

This Side Of The Big River

WARNER BROS, 1975

Starting with *Chip Taylor's Last Chance*, Taylor made several country albums in the '70s, the best being this deliciously slow effort, featuring idiosyncratic folk pioneer Sandy Bull. Taylor's lived-in voice brought a Kristofferson vibe to songs like "Getting Older, Lookin' Back" and "Same Ol' Story". Taylor then became a pro gambler for most of the '80s.

8/10



CHIP TAYLOR AND CARRIE RODRIGUEZ

Red Dog Tracks

TRAINWRECK, 2005

Taylor returned to music in the late '90s and has produced several fine albums, including three with Carrie Rodriguez. This gorgeous folk-country album could be the best of them, with the pair combining beautifully on tracks like "Oh Set A Light", Rodriguez as much muse as singing partner.

9/10

PETER WATTS



VIOLET WOODS

Violet Woods

MEADOWS

Fuzzy Lights frontman goes gloriously psych

Those who form quintessentially English psychedelic combos in Cambridge are doomed to be compared to Syd Barrett. But Xavier of folk mavericks Fuzzy Lights shoulders the burden lightly on this fabulously entertaining side-project. It's a cunningly constructed album, with each successive track broadening the fuzz guitar and piping organ classic psych sound into something more artful and modern. The "do-do-do" girly harmonies on "Over The Ground", the Bunnymen/House Of Love touches on "Here" and the almost Beck-like mix'n'match pop of "The Dancer" all impress, while single "Raw Love" is such a great song you'd swear it's a cover.

GARRY MULHOLLAND

8/10



VLADISLAV DELAY

Visa

RIPATTI

Resourceful Finn turns travel troubles into lush electronic symphonies

8/10

Turning pent-up frustration into creative inspiration, Vladislav Delay - aka Finnish electronic composer and classically trained percussionist Sasu Ripatti - wrote and recorded *Visa* in just two weeks after he was denied a work permit for a planned US tour. Though billed as Ripatti's first ambient album in a decade, it quickly overflows the tasteful parameters of beatless chillout music with its throbbing, sensual, complex mini-symphonies, especially the 22-minute "Visaton". Alive with sonic undercurrents and slabs of vivid colour, this lush hybrid of electronica, jazz and modern classical forms is one of the most beautiful accidents in Ripatti's long and prolific career.

STEPHEN DALTON



POND

Man It Feels Like Space Again

CAROLINE

Less guitar, more synth, on ever-evolving psych-rockers' playful sixth. By Tom Pinnock



8/10

OVER THE PAST decade much has been written about the music industry denying bands the chance to experiment and grow. That may be true on major labels, but on the fringes there are still groups churning out great records in fits of creativity, following whatever crazy ideas appear in their heads at that moment. Nowhere is this truer than in the current Australian scene, where bands like Total Control, Eastlink and, especially, Pond are doing just that. Led by frontman Nick Allbrook, a touring member of Tame Impala until 2013 (all are, or have been, involved with Kevin Parker's project), each of Pond's five records so far have pushed the boundaries of the band's sound. Many of their albums have been recorded quickly, capturing the group's eccentricities (psychedelic flute solos are a speciality), with 2012 breakthrough *Beard, Wives, Denim* cut in just one week.

Their last album, 2013's *Hobo Rocket*, was their heaviest yet, a maelstrom of acid rock guitar riffing, bizarre synth interludes and excellent, if oblique, song structures. *Man It Feels Like Space Again* is the polar counterpart to *Hobo Rocket*. Instead of "man rock", as drummer Jay Watson described their sound on KEXP recently, the tracks here, written over the same period, are much more accessible and subdued. In contrast to their usual speedy studio style, the band spent time sculpting the sounds and production, even agonising over mixes with Impala's Kevin Parker – hence 2014 being the first year without a Pond LP release since they formed.

Where *Hobo*'s opener came on like Rage Against The Machine jamming with Cluster – exciting but very, very awkward – the first track on *Man...*, the splendid "Waiting Around For Grace", is a silver-toned, synth-led stomper, jammed with so many euphoric moments that it might have been created for a hook-writing competition. The drums are crisp and processed, the synths buzz beautifully and the guitars are brittle with chorus effects, yet the group have lost none of their sense of free-ranging melody present since their 2009 debut, *Psychedelic Mango*. "Don't it make you wonder how God found the time?" deadpans Allbrook in the Mercury Rev-esque introduction.

Lead-off track "Elvis' Flaming Star" is the most immediate moment on the album, another lysergic glam gallop. One major touchstone here, and throughout this playful album, is Supergrass, especially *Life On Other Planets*, their underrated 2002 album which explored '70s synth tones and glam rhythms. Coincidentally, or not, it even featured a track, "See The Light", which referred to Elvis. *Man...* is, according to Allbrook, the first time the band have gone minimalist, paring back tracks until each song shines. This turns out especially well on slower pieces such as the psych-soul of "Holding Out For You", which sounds like The Flaming Lips covering the *Abbey Road* medley (and not making a hash of it à la *With A Little Help From My Fwends*).

older albums were unevenly thrilling. The question is, though, where do Pond go from here? We have no idea and, gloriously, Pond probably don't either. The well is not yet dry – stay tuned.

The least immediate, but perhaps most rewarding song here is the closing title track, which, across eight and a half minutes, spans prog, funk, kosmiche and folk. What's more, it doesn't feel stitched together for a laugh, like some of their earlier work, but properly mapped out, branching sideways to woozy, Beatles-esque climes but always returning to the same cleansing, crystalline guitar and synth melody. At times, the elfin Allbrook sounds almost identical to MGMT's Andrew VanWyngarden, his lyrics reaching a similar peak of impressive, nonsensical profundity; though it's hard to distinguish many of the gnomic lines under all those Space Echo repeats.

For all the plaudits that Tame Impala receive, then, Pond have proved that they're possibly the braver band, willing to squeeze out ideas as soon as they have them, with playful abandon. Their influences are clear, but they combine them in a unique, joyful way, as they endlessly evolve their sound. Here, the extra care and attention to production and arrangements has paid off, making *Man It Feels Like Space Again* as consistently enjoyable as their

SLEEVE NOTES

► **Recorded:** At home, and unnamed studio, Collingwood, Melbourne, by Lukas Glickman
Produced by: Pond
Mixed by: Kevin Parker
Personnel include: Nick Allbrook, Jay Watson, Cam Avery, Joe Ryan, Jamie Terry

you're on your deathbed, and maybe the moments of wonderment and inspiration that you've let get stagnant for so many years being an old boring bastard come back to you and you have one last moment of grace. But it can mean whatever to anyone. Or nothing.

How was your working process compared to *Hobo Rocket*? With *Hobo Rocket*, if it didn't sound right we just put something else on it, instead of the opposite, which is a lot better if you can do it right! Although it's hard not to make it sound layered with Pond – you put three, five or six drunk ADHD teenagers in a room all heaping ideas on ideas... Pond kind of spirals out of control very easily! *INTERVIEW: TOM PINNOCK*

Q&A

Nick Allbrook



You use a lot of synths on *Man...* If you spend ages making and listening to guitar-based music, strumming chords on a guitar gets boring. We were just trying to make it sound more alien.

What does the album title mean? It was a cool phrase that Joe said that we thought was really fucking funny. I ended up seeing it as the idea of that final release of dream juice, DMT, when

JESSICA PRATT

On Your Own Love Again

DRAG CITY

Fine second helping of an ageless voice. By Louis Pattison



8/10

THAT JESSICA PRATT is releasing music at all feels like an accident of fate. A few years back, wholly by coincidence, she was living in the same house as Sean Paul Presley, brother of Tim Presley of San Francisco psych revivalists White Fence. It was there, in their shared kitchen, where she first came across, and fell for White Fence's music. But it wasn't until Pratt's boyfriend played Presley a few of her four-track recordings – intimate voice and guitar pieces, made merely for curiosity and play – that she ever considered they might even be releasable. Presley was smitten, and founded a label, Birth Records, just to put these strange, beautiful songs out into the world. "I never wanted to ever start a record label," he wrote. "Ever. But there is something about her voice I couldn't let go of."

A couple of years on from the release of *Jessica Pratt*, and many would count themselves similarly enchanted. Pratt's voice is indeed something special – a curled, spry thing that, like that of Joanna Newsom, feels oddly ageless, somewhere between childlike and crone-like. But whereas Newsom is by nature a belter, Pratt's songs have a close intimacy, nearer to a Vashti Bunyan or Sibylle Baier. It lends her music an odd, otherworldly feel, leaving the impression that she's too delicate for this world, or floats a couple of inches off the ground.

As a mark of the warm reception afforded to her debut, its follow-up comes to us on a rather more established imprint, Drag City. But while *On Your Own Love Again* finds Pratt writing with an audience in mind for the very first time, there's no drastic overhaul. Arrangements are slightly more involved, with subtle guitar layering, and collaborator Will Canzoneri adding organ to "Wrong Hand" and clavinet to "Moon Dude". The fidelity is much the same – on four-track, to analogue tape – although it feels not so much an affectation as crucial to the whole enterprise, a way of best capturing her voice's queer grain.

As well as a distinctive singer, Pratt is a talented songwriter. "Wrong Hand" is a tranquil thing guided by Leonard Cohen-like chord changes that subtly shift the song's shade from light to dark. "Moon Dude" is a dreamy reverie in the vein of Nick Drake's "Hazey Jane I", addressed to some out-there dude who can't or won't come back down to earth. Her command of language is poetic. "People's faces blend together/Like a watercolour you can't remember," she purrs on "Game That I Play".

"I've Got A Feeling", meanwhile, commences circling on some forbidden, Satanic chord that

SLEEVE NOTES

► Recorded at: Home recording, San Francisco
Produced by: Jessica Pratt, Will Canzoneri (mixing), Drew Fischer and Rob Barbato (additional sonic processing)
Personnel: Jessica Pratt (voice, acoustic guitar), Will Canzoneri (organ, clavinet)

recalls the dissonant tunings of Jandek, before Pratt's multi-tracked voice sweeps in to bathe everything in warmth. It's a love song, but pensive, uneasy: "Well here I am/Another thousandth sister to the night/And mouthing tricks into my ears/The cigarette you light."

Loneliness and distance are recurring themes: a tale of severed friendship on "Jacquelyn In The Background", the line of girls left "empty handed" on the title track. But Pratt's music isn't bereft, exactly: rather, there's the feeling that she thrives off of solitude, the measured, steady fingerpicking of "Strange Melody" and "Greycedes" weaving a cocoon to keep the world out. Perhaps for this reason, right now it's hard to imagine her hitching these peculiar, private songs to a band, à la Marissa Nadler or Angel Olsen. But maybe these are unhelpful points of comparison. In interview, Pratt has expressed admiration for Ariel Pink, another artist whose music is rooted in a home-recorded, four-track sensibility. *On Your Own Love Again*'s analogue genesis is alluded to midway through "Jacquelyn In The Background", where Pratt's voice slows and slurs, and the guitar slides out of tune, as if being played on a turntable that might be just about to give up the ghost. It gives you a little jolt – the musical equivalent, perhaps, of an actor breaking the fourth wall and addressing the audience.

Used here, it feels like a sort of acknowledgement that these are new songs that sound like the old songs, the kind you might treasure 'til your vinyl is pockmarked and warped. That you can easily imagine playing *On Your Own Love Again* to death in precisely this way should be taken as the highest of compliments.



Q&A

Jessica Pratt

How did it feel when people turned out to like *Jessica Pratt*? **Nice? Weird?** The whole thing was quite surreal. Tim [Presley] sort of just materialised out of thin air like Glinda The Good Witch, ready to put it out, so when it was well-received by an audience, it was just another layer of pleasant strangeness.

So presumably this time, you had to think in terms of a body of work for the first time... It's definitely the first time I've approached songwriting with the idea of some collective whole in mind. It's a different state of mind, creating things for a tangible audience versus habitual idea spewage for your own private pleasure or sanity maintenance. Having an intended purpose has lent me confidence and made me a bit more self-aware, in good and bad ways. It's important to keep the dream gauze fixed tightly to your head.

There's a lot of loneliness on the record – the "lonely boy" on "Greycedes", the "Moon Dude" in outer space, "You're just a lonely ride" on "You've Got A Feeling". Any thoughts on why these sorts of lyrics recur? The way that songs utilise the mind's own lexicon of symbols and imagery is very similar to the processing of those things in dreams, in the way that themes will reappear until you've dealt with them, or move on to more relevant ones. I think it's easy to imagine the sort of scenario responsible for the content of these songs. A majority of the record functions like an altar of trinkets, constructed for a frosty and unreachable muse. *INTERVIEW: LOUIS PATTISON*



THE WATERBOYS

Modern Blues

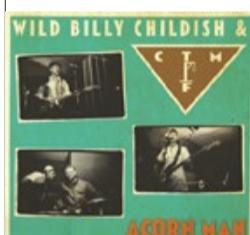
HARLEQUIN AND CLOWN

Mike Scott's Nashville adventure

7/10

Fisherman's Blues, you might have expected Mike Scott to revisit his Celtic roots. But, unpredictable as ever, Scott opted to record in Nashville with Bob Clearmountain, and Steve Wickham adding fuzz to his fiddle. The sound is monumental ("Beautiful Now" has echoes of Boston), the lyrics discursive. "Still A Freak" is a swaggering mini-manifesto, and there's a tip of the beret to the Beats in "Nearest Thing To Hip", while rock'n'roll is hymned beautifully in "I Can See Elvis", with Scott visualising The King hanging out with Joan Of Arc and Plato.

ALASTAIR MCKAY



WILD BILLY CHILDISH & CTMF

Acorn Man

DAMAGED GOODS

Bard of Medway on rollicking good form

8/10

years back, Billy Childish is arguably more recognised as artist than musician. Still, the albums keep coming, with little stylistic variation, nor significant lapse in quality. Topics of discussion include integrity, punk and smart clothes. The brawny garage of "It's Hard To Be Happy" welds the riff from The Beatles' "Day Tripper" to a Troggs drum stomp. Billy's wife Julie contributes backing and occasional lead vocals, best heard on "What Is This False Life You're Leading". The highlight is "Punk Rock Enough For Me", a rowdy list song of things Billy deems appealing: Lead Belly, "Billie Holiday on a piano", a cup of tea.

LOUIS PATTISON



WRAY

Wrays

COMMUNICATING VESSELS

Excellent dreamy debut from Alabama trio

8/10

neatly against David Swatzell's impassive vocals, Wrays are a tantalising prospect. Although they dwell close to the world of shoegazing and flirt with Krautrock and even a sort of nervously upbeat goth, there's also a Stone Roses-like flush to songs like "Swells" or "Graved", which come bathed in fuzz but holding the melody and rocking along at a proper lick. And despite the dreamy vibe of tracks like "May 15", the drawing centrepiece, this is an impressively tight, focused album which on the superb "Bad Heart" recalls War On Drugs at their majestic best.

PETER WATTS



WU-TANG CLAN

A Better Tomorrow

PARLOPHONE

20th-anniversary reunion from rap's most admired posse

8/10

Staten Island's finest have been publicly squabbling for over a year about whether a sixth Wu album would appear at all. So the major surprise is that it's a coherent set that stands as the crew's best since 2000's *The W*. All the founding members spit their trademark mystical, martial arts-influenced street rhymes, including the 10-years-dead Ol' Dirty Bastard, uncomfortably. But the band's leader/producer Robert 'The RZA' Diggs is the star, updating his traditional queazy orchestral samples with a more 'live' psychedelic funk feel on the likes of "Mistaken Identity" and the rugged symphony that is "Ruckus In B Minor". An unlikely triumph.

GARRY MULHOLLAND

REVELATIONS

Wu-Tang Clan: after the public squabbles, at last, the sixth LP



► Can it all be so simple? Not when it comes to reforming Staten Island's legendary rap crew for an album celebrating the 20th anniversary of their iconic *Enter The WuTang: 36 Chambers* debut. In June 2011, Raekwon The Chef announced early work on a new Clan album. By the following April... nothing, except a denial of the project from Genius/GZA: "We haven't been on the same page in years," he says.

A brief announcement that the album is imminent appears on the Wu Facebook page in January 2013. But by November 2013 (the official 20th anniversary), Method Man gripes "Niggas didn't like the concepts RZA was comin' with." RZA himself says: "I invested thousands of dollars... only a few good brothers showed up."

Raekwon comes out swinging at RZA in April 2014, saying of new Clan single "Keep Watch", "I hate that fucking record." He insists he is "on strike" in protest at "somebody that's not an artist telling me what the fuck they think is hot."

Oddly, this tirade of abuse gets everyone on "the same page". May 2014 finally sees the announcement of a December 2 release date for *A Better Tomorrow*.

GARRY MULHOLLAND



RICHARD YOUNGS

Red Alphabet In The Snow

PRESERVED SOUND

Albion's folk reverse, illuminated beautifully

9/10

If Richard Youngs' recent releases, like *Calmont Breakdown* and *Regions Of The Old School*, play to his experimental side, on *Red Alphabet In The Snow*, he's returned to the expanded, gentle song suites that made up earlier records like *Sapphie* and *Making Paper*. With *Red Alphabet...*, Youngs has written two side-long fantasias for a clutch of acoustic instruments, subsequently subjecting them to subtle electronic treatments, occasionally taking to the air with a blissed-out chorus which moves like classic '70s prog: think Yes and Genesis. It's completely faithful in its love of the genre, and plays out like a dream.

JON DALE



YO ZUSHI

It Never Entered My Mind

EIDOLA RECORDS

London-based Anglo-Japanese nu-folkie returns

This is a gentle zephyr of a country-folk record, full of harmonica and time-worn chord changes, its mood alternating between callow melancholy and spritely well-being. Zushi's slight, boyish voice adds poignancy to the lovely "Send Your Love To Me" and "No Use Waiting Any More", but it's less winning on the faux-naïf hoedown "Bye Bye Blackbird", where he sounds like a youthful Robert Smith crashing into the Texas Playboys. It's pleasant fare, but its innate slightness is exposed by "Moonlight", a glacial excursion into Red House Painters territory which stands head and shoulders above everything else here.

GRAEME THOMSON



ZUN ZUN EGUI

Shackles' Gift

BELLA UNION

Afro-fusion quintet hits the heavy groove

It's reckless to claim geography as a stylistic determinant in music, but for decades Bristol has been a fertile ground for the kind of "fusion" that extends beyond welding jazz or funk signifiers onto rock. ZZE are ardent cross-pollinators and improv adventurers, but theirs is a structurally savvy kind of post-punk, stuffed with hooks and grooves that shift them from Japanese psych-punk to Mauritian reggae, via kosmische, funk, dub, Tropicália and Afrobeat. Now, with their second LP – and Andy Hung of Fuck Buttons producing – they've unleashed the rock monster within, dipping into saturnine industrio-disco with "Ruby" and suggesting Kyuss covering "Kashmir" on "I Want You To Know". Neat move.

SHARON O'CONNELL

CARGO RECORDS BEST OF 2014



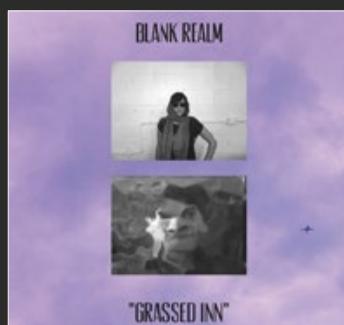
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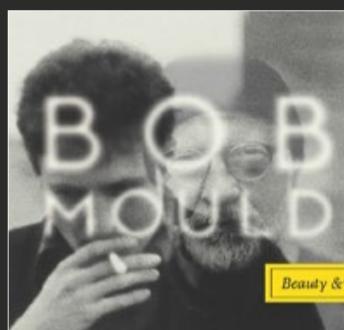
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IT TAKES A NATION OF MILLIONS TO HOLD US BACK (3-disc Deluxe Edition)

DISC ONE Original album

DISC TWO Bonus Tracks:

- 1 Bring The Noise (No Noise Version)
- 2 Bring The Noise (No Noise Instrumental)
- 3 Bring The Noise (No Noise A Cappella)
- 4 Rebel Without A Pause (Instrumental)
- 5 Night Of The Living Baseheads (Anti-High Blood Pressure Encounter Mix)
- 6 Night Of The Living Baseheads (Terminator X Meets DST And Chuck Chill Out Instrumental Mix)
- 7 Terminator X To The Edge Of Panic (No Need To Panic Radio Version)
- 8 The Edge Of Panic
- 9 The Rhythm, The Rebel (A Capella)
- 10 Prophets Of Rage (Power Version)
- 11 Caught, Can We Get A Witness? (Pre Black Steel Ballistic Felony Dub)
- 12 B-Side Wins Again (Original Version)
- 13 Black Steel In The Hour Of Chaos (Instrumental)
- 14 Fight The Power (Soundtrack Version)

DISC THREE (Fight the Power...Live DVD)

- 1 Countdown To Armageddon
- 2 Public Enemy Number One
- 3 Miuzi Weighs A Ton
- 4 Night Of The Living Baseheads (Live)
- 5 Fight The Power
- 6 Bring The Noise
- 7 Don't Believe The Hype
- 8 Black Steel In The Hour Of Chaos
- 9 Rebel Without A Pause
- 10 Terminator X To The Edge Of Panic
- 11 Night Of The Living Baseheads (Video)
- 12 Prophets Of Rage



RONNIE RANDALL/RETNA

PUBLIC ENEMY

It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back

DEF JAM/UNIVERSAL, 1988

Fear Of A Black Planet

DEF JAM/UNIVERSAL, 1990

Chuck D and co's political, lyrical and downright pioneering peaks re-released and expanded. By Jon Dale

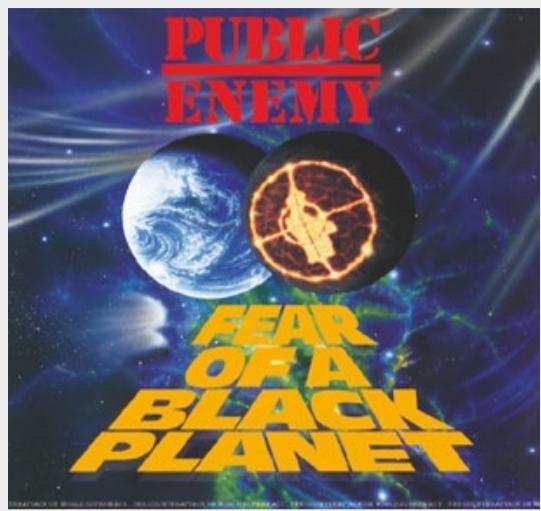
9/10

IT'S RECEIVED WISDOM now, but in the late '80s, when things weren't quite so clear-cut it, felt revolutionary to declare that Public Enemy were the "greatest rock'n'roll band in the world". If the comment, often spilling from the pens of earnest music-crit types, feels like the kind of hype PE were urging us to disregard, drilling further down into Public Enemy's history, motives and influences reveals its wisdom. Producer Hank Shocklee set his sights on rock's energy and mid-frequency range, and created a noise to reflect the chaotic nature of the times.

9/10

With *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back*, *Fear Of A Black Planet*, and indeed their

precursor, 1987's *Yo! Bum Rush The Show*, Public Enemy managed the near-impossible: music that convincingly, articulately, held a mirror up to its multi-faceted, complex, media-saturated times, speaking with equal measures of righteous fury and retribution. Shocklee and leader Chuck D came up and met through studying at Adelphi University – Chuck D earned a degree in graphic design – but they were also involved in New York's hip-hop underground. An early effort from Chuck D, the Shocklee brothers and Eric Sadler, Spectrum City's "Lies", led Rick Rubin – whose label, Def Jam, is celebrating its 30th anniversary – to headhunt Chuck D, desperate to sign him to his label. →



FEAR OF A BLACK PLANET

(2-disc Deluxe Edition)

DISC ONE Original album

DISC TWO Bonus Tracks:

- 1 Brothers Gonna Work It Out (remix)
- 2 Brothers Gonna Work It Out (dub)
- 3 Flavor Flav
- 4 Terrorbeat
- 5 Welcome To The Terrordome (Terrormental)
- 6 Can't Do Nuttin' For Ya Man (Full Rub mix)
- 7 Can't Do Nuttin' For Ya Man (UK 12" Powermix)
- 8 Can't Do Nuttin' For Ya Man (Dub Mixx)
- 9 Burn Hollywood Burn (Extended Censored Fried to the Radio version)
- 10 Anti-Nigger Machine (Uncensored extended)
- 11 911 Is A Joke (instrumental)
- 12 Power To The People (instrumental)
- 13 Revolutionary Generation (instrumental)
- 14 War At 33 1/3 (instrumental)
- 15 Fight The Power (soundtrack version)
- 16 Fight The Power (Powersax)
- 17 Fight The Power (Flavor Flav Meets Spike Lee)
- 18 The Enemy Assault Vehicle Mixx (Medley)

With the benefit of rewritten history, early Public Enemy comes across as invincible, inevitable – and yet, their debut, *Yo! Bum Rush...*, for all its innovation, only sold 300,000 copies in its year of release. Perhaps the production's deceptive minimalism, pulsing noise, threaded together to create The Bomb Squad's "sonic walls", was too distilled for broader consumption. Yet this approach to production would become



Invincible... Public Enemy in 1988: (l-r) Professor Griff, Flavor Flav, Terminator X, Chuck D and a member of the Security Of The First World

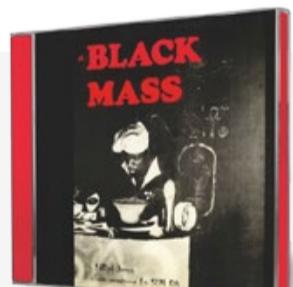
Public Enemy's sonic imprimatur, something they'd ramp up on subsequent albums.

Indeed, listening back to *Millions* and *Fear Of A Black Planet*, the eloquence of the production still startles. The Bomb Squad's manipulation of noise is a process of alchemy, transmuting base elements through careful distillation and arrangement. This also echoes the intensification of the mass media-scape that Public Enemy both

reflected and were part of. Before Public Enemy, Chuck D was a radio broadcaster, presenting the Spectrum City Radio Hour on university station WBAU, and Public Enemy's albums come across as deftly woven broadcasts, using samples as earworms, pulled together with a jump-cut logic that suggests *musique concrète* just as much as it does the magpie aesthetic of hip-hop. Not unreasonably did Chuck D

HOW TO BUY... BLACK RADICAL ACTIVISM

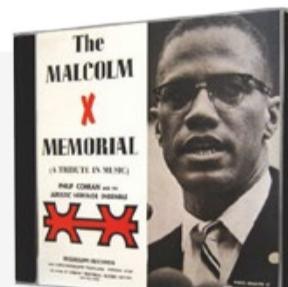
The pioneers who mixed politics and poetry with funk and free jazz



LEROI JONES/SUN RA A Black Mass JIHAD, 1968

Late, great poet Amiri Baraka, born Everett LeRoi Jones, was one of the great voices of black radical arts. On *A Black Mass* he joins Sun Ra and his Arkestra – the lines connecting free jazz and politicised poetics are strong – for an extended mass, sometimes furious, elsewhere surreal.

8/10



PHILIP COHRAN & THE ARTISTIC HERITAGE ENSEMBLE

The Malcolm X Memorial is a deeply felt tribute, with the ensemble sending riffs to the skies in "El Hajj Malik El Shabazz", then joined by blues guitarist Pete Cosey on the deep growl of "Malcolm Little".

8/10



THE LAST POETS

The Last Poets Rightfully legendary, the debut Last Poets album is correctly read as a precursor to hip-hop, but there's even more going on – an embrace of street smarts crossed with black oratory traditions. It's completely enthralling, turning a critical eye on every aspect of culture.

9/10



SARAH WEBSTER FABIO & DON'T FIGHT THE FEELING

Jujus/Alchemy Of The Blues Webster Fabio released three LPs in the '70s, delivering her poetry over heavy funk, as she does here on "Alchemy Of The Blues", hymning Ray Charles over a circular rhythm that plays on deep into the horizon.

8/10

claim that rap was "black America's CNN".

Feeding into this was Chuck D and the group's canny reading of the political turmoil of the time, and their ability to historicise this political awareness. As Shocklee says, "There was so much going on with the black community, a lot of tension, racial tension was happening among the races at that time, and crack had devastated our community... [So] that was a big part of it, to give black people a sense of hope, a sense of pride, a sense of the fact that we can get through, and we can become greater than what we're being programmed to be." This understanding of the complexity of race relations in the United States was further cross-wired with an in-depth reading of histories of black criticism and activism, from the Black Panther Party and Black Nationalist Marcus Garvey, through to the Nation Of Islam organisation and its leader, Louis Farrakhan.

It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back is in many ways the defining moment for Public Enemy, often considered their classic set, and the one that brought them their first taste of wider success. In truth it lacks some of the pure shock factor of *Yo! Bum Rush The Show*, and the concept of a one-hour album, no breaks, 30 minutes each side, which plays out with the heavyweight implications of Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*, doesn't always convince. But these are minor criticisms, and *Millions* has a number of PE classics in its armoury, and if anyone needs convincing that Public Enemy rocked harder than 99 per cent of rock music of its time, just turn to the breathtaking "She Watch Channel Zero?!", whose scaffold is built from Slayer's "Angel Of Death".

Elsewhere, "Black Steel In The Hour Of Chaos", later covered by Tricky, is stentorian and unrelenting, while "Bring The Noise" is all sparking noise, a magnesium flare of a track. Throughout, Chuck D fine-tunes his vocal delivery: drawing from a rich black oratory tradition, it's a voice that has the same wall-shaking authority as Prince Far I. But if the reality of *Millions*, at times, is overshadowed by its legend, there are no such problems for *Fear Of A Black Planet*, which is even more tightly constructed. It allows Flavor Flav to come into his own, particularly on "911 Is A Joke", has the group playing at a heightened pitch on classics like "Brothers Gonna Work It Out" and "Burn Hollywood Burn", and features their most thrilling five minutes, with the panic rush drone – almost Wild Pitch in its powers – of "Welcome To The Terrordome".

Closing down the first, wildest phase of Public Enemy's career, *Fear Of A Black Planet* was a peerless summary both of the possibilities of hip-hop, and of the conflicts and intensities that the group manifested through their music. Reflecting on Public Enemy in their prime, music critic Simon Reynolds once wrote that they "did what no rock band... could: not just comment on, but connect with real issues and real stakes in the outside world: aggravating the contradictions and making the wounds rawer and harder to ignore." It's hard to disagree with such an observation: but just as much, Public Enemy were the weapon salve, the powder of sympathy applied to the powers that created the wound.

EXTRAS: Each album comes with an extra disc of **8/10** contemporaneous remixes, B-sides, etc.

Q&A

The Bomb Squad's Hank Shocklee on discovering Chuck D and creating the sound of Public Enemy

WHAT CAN YOU tell me about the pre-Public Enemy days – your time with Chuck D at New York's Adelphi

University, for example...

I had a DJ outfit called Spectrum City, and I was DJing for years. I ran across Chuck when I was throwing one of my events. He was interested in doing design work for the flyers. From that point we developed a relationship, at least from a friendship perspective. I didn't ask him to join my crew until later.

[Eventually] I wanted to add an MC component to my DJ crew, so I was on the hunt for MCs. I went to Adelphi University, and they'd have these parties late at night. These parties were a magnet for attracting a lot of wannabe MCs, because at the time, that was the only place you could go where you could grab the mic. There was a whole herd of people who were trying to show their skills.

I heard a lot of MCs who weren't really all that good, but then I heard this guy grab the mic and make an announcement for an upcoming party that was happening. He wasn't MCing or anything. I just heard his voice, and fell in love with his voice. I approached him to be part of my DJ outfit. It took me two years to convince him!

Chuck was a graphic design major at Adelphi, which makes sense given the visual impact and importance of presentation for Public Enemy.

Chuck and I did the Public Enemy logo. I did the letters, Chuck did the logo... Originally there were two separate group logos that we made, one was Funky Frank & The Street Force, one was Public Enemy. Public Enemy had a different logo, and Funky Frank & The Street Force had the target. So Chuck said, "You know what? I'm gonna take this target, because it works better, and put it with Public Enemy." So Public Enemy came from the concept first, before it became anything else.

At the time, there was a black consensus that hip-hop was being targeted, by mainstream America, mainstream radio, mainstream press. It was being targeted said that it really

wasn't music, it was a bunch of kids sampling and stealing beats, the chord structures were wrong, the fact that there were no melodies was wrong. Everything was wrong about rap. There was this big thing about rap not lasting, "It's a fad, it's gonna die out."

The Bomb Squad called their production style "organised noise".

I started working with Eric [Sadler] first, and I started coming up with sound design concepts, ideas for a sound. I brought Eric up because he was a musician. He could play a little guitar, a little drums. I needed somebody that had an understanding of chord structure, musical scales, because I had ideas of sound.

Since I had a library of over 10,000 records, I started experimenting with creating ideas and tracks, because the records that I had gave me the knowledge of understanding a lot about intros, breakdowns, turnarounds. I ripped records apart in terms of how they build up their arrangement structures, what is the most exciting part of the record...

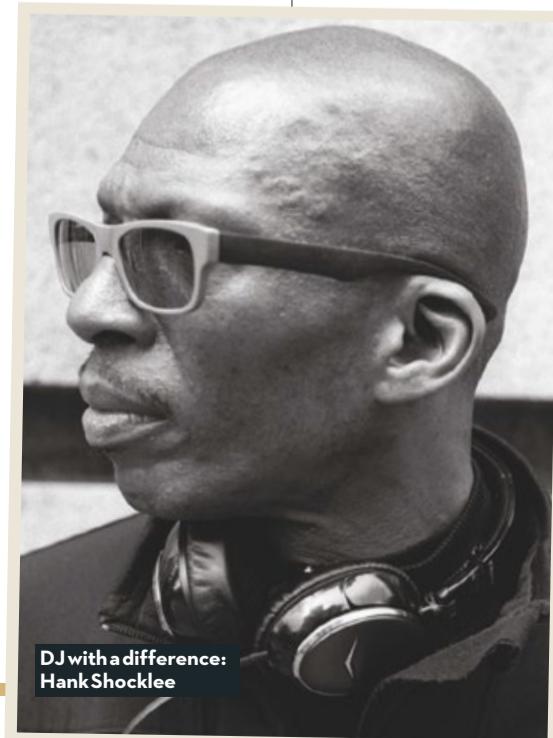
I wanted to take this rap thing and push it. I wanted to push it almost to the point where you keep the pressure on it – kind of like if you look at something being pressed against glass: I wanted to create a sonic signature that represents something being so pressurised that it's being pushed up against the glass, and has no room. I didn't want too much relief – I wanted all tension.

How did you feel about Public Enemy being called the 'greatest rock'n'roll band in the world'? Because you drew inspiration from rock'n'roll for your production...

Nobody could sound like Public Enemy, because it doesn't sound like a dance group. It comes from my rock'n'roll background. I didn't want to produce rock'n'roll that had guitars in it, because that would be clichéd. I wanted to create the same kind of intensity, going back to the pressure – because that's what rock does, rock is real compressed, and the pressure is constant. I wanted to speak that language with other instruments.

There are two things that Public Enemy were patterned after, there were two main groups I loved the most. One was Iron Maiden, and the other was Megadeth. The reason why is because those two particular groups, every record that they put out was a continuation of the last. So they created, in my mind, sequels.

Every record, to me, has to have a sequel event. So, *Yo! Bum Rush The Show*, the sequel to that would be *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back*. After we bum rush the door, it's gonna take a nation of millions to hold us back. Now that we're taking over the spot, now it's *Fear Of A Black Planet*, now we've taken it over.



DJ with a difference:
Hank Shocklee



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THE GO-BETWEENS

G Stands For Go-Betweens

Volume 1: 1978-1984

DOMINO

The first three albums, the first five singles, outtakes, demos, radio sessions and a live show. By Graeme Thomson

8/10

IN THE 1980S, Australia's Go-Betweens were the dark horse among all those sharp-edged, sweet-and-sour guitar bands with literary pretensions. For those who found the cult of Morrissey too messianic and Lloyd Cole too self-satisfied, here was a connoisseurs' choice: a band who namechecked Jean Genet while blending '60s pop nous, '80s indie elegance, the brittle intensity of post-punk and the wayward non-conformity of The Modern Lovers.

A vehicle for the songs and voices of Robert Forster and Grant McLennan, The Go-Betweens formed in December 1977 in Brisbane and ended their first act

in 1989. Six years into a fruitful post-Millennial reunion, they finally ceased trading in 2006 following McLennan's sudden death from a heart attack. Forster has been plotting this gargantuan eight-disc slab of cultural excavation since shortly after that unhappy event; the first of three planned anthologies, it's a beautifully conceived exploration of the band's origins and early evolution.

Included are the first three Go-Betweens albums, *Send Me A Lullaby* (1982), *Before Hollywood* (1983), and *Spring Hill Fair* (1984), as well as all 10 sides of their first five 45s, collected here on a new stand-alone LP titled *The First Five Singles*. Running

Q&A

Robert Forster

**How hands-on were you on this project?**

It turned into my *Lord Of The Rings*! I was really hands-on because I thought it was a great opportunity to represent, and re-present The Go-Betweens, whose reputation on a broader scale is not necessarily secure. I wanted to get involved to help secure it. A lot of love and attention has gone into it. It's a wonderful treasure box from another time and another place.

What did you learn?

We were better than I thought! Grant and I were always quite dismissive of our first album, but going back into it, and listening to the live record from 1982 and the demos, I can hear that we are powerful. The songwriting might not be where I'd like it to be, but the band is good: tight, like elastic, on a knife edge. There's nothing lazy about it, it's very visceral and intense. You hear three people throwing everything they've got at it. And I'm very

proud of the *First Five Singles* album, which was put together especially for this. I think it can really join our other nine albums.

What's your favourite album from this time?

I really like *Before Hollywood*. It was a huge jump and I'm not sure we ever made a jump again as big as that. There were only a few months between making the first two albums, but it was a huge step forward sonically and in terms of songwriting.

Was there much hidden treasure?

Some tapes were found, demo sessions for *Send Me A Lullaby*, which I never knew about. There were a couple of songs by Grant on there that I wish were on that album.

I was struck by the fact that your songwriting partnership with Grant should, by rights, still be ongoing.

Yes, it should be, but The Go-Betweens made nine albums, which is a substantial amount of work. I don't mean this in terms of Grant's passing, but at least there's a fair amount of work there. The fact that we can do something like an anthology over three volumes, I find very satisfying.

INTERVIEW: GRAEME THOMSON

parallel to these four vinyl albums are four CDs, arranged chronologically, consisting of outtakes, hard-to-find and unreleased demos, radio sessions and a complete (and excellent) live concert, recorded at the Mosman Hotel, Sydney, on April 23, 1982. There are over 100 tracks in all.

Meeting as fellow arts students at the University Of Queensland, Forster and McLennan named their band after LP Hartley's 1953 novel, and throughout its lifespan the group's music was characterised by a darting intellectual curiosity. Debut single "Lee Remick" is a faux-naïf piece of fan mail directed at the actress ("She was in *The Omen*/With Gregory Peck/She got killed/What the heck"), but its dumbness is studied and self-aware; on the B-side, "Karen", a song clearly in thrall to Patti Smith's "Gloria", they're already name-checking Brecht, Joyce and Chandler.

By 1980, and third single "I Need Two Heads", the music had started to catch up with the words. Released on Postcard Records following trips to London and Glasgow, the song is an assured blend of The Cure and The Gang Of Four, giving The Go-Betweens their first Top 10 indie hit in the UK. Orange Juice drummer Steven Daly guested on the track, but by the time they started recording *Send Me A Lullaby*, Lindy Morrison had joined on drums. As a settled three-piece, The Go-Betweens' house sound began to emerge: brittle and sharp, with lots of air between Forster's guitar, McLennan's bass and Morrison's idiosyncratic rhythm. "Careless" has the compulsive twitch of early Orange Juice, and the urgent jangle of "Hold Your Horses" has shades of REM's "Chronic Town" EP, but any sweetness is balanced by a sour twist. The vivid psycho-sexual drama of "Eight Pictures" creeps and crawls, the waspish digs at some thespian love-rival ("Same publicity shots

for six years") barely lightening the mood, while "It Could Be Anyone" recalls the neurotic funk of Talking Heads.

Released the following year, *Before Hollywood* marks a leap forward in both composition and execution, excising any lingering hints of ramshackle amateurishness. Robert Vickers joined as bassist, McLennan moved to guitar, and piano became a more prominent texture, notably on the lovely "Dusty In Here". The album includes the masterful "Cattle And Cane", a taut, minimal, bittersweet reflection on McLennan's Cairns childhood, written on Nick Cave's guitar. A slightly reconfigured version of the song features on the fourth CD of rarities.

On *Spring Hill Fair*, The Go-Betweens' sound shuffles towards something lusher, more pop-savvy. A serrated edge remains on "Five Words" and the lowering "River Of Money", but by now the band were lining up against the great song stylists of the mid-'80s. Washed with synthesisers, "Bachelor Kisses" is animated by the same restrained romanticism as Prefab Sprout's "When Love Breaks Down" (if anything, the demo is even more swoonsome), while "Part Company" – from its quivering emotional urgency down to its intricate, concentric weave of bass, vocal and fluid guitar lines – is a kissing cousin to The Smiths' "Reel Around The Fountain".

Parts of *Spring Hill Fair* point towards the glossier, more measured elegance of The Go-Betweens' next phase, bookended by 1986's *Liberty Belle And The Black Diamond Express* and 1988's *16 Lovers Lane*. But that's another story, for another anthology. For now, Volume One of *G Stands For Go-Betweens* is a giddy treat, marking the spot where the headlong rush of new beginnings meets the steady hand of accomplishment.

**CREAM****Cream: 1966-1972**

UNIVERSAL

Vinyl boxset of the catalogue – heavyweight in every sense

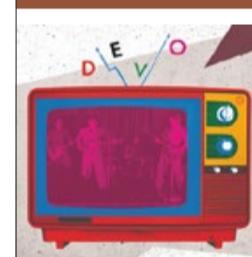
Cream weren't only improvisers onstage – their catalogue had its ad hoc moments too. The inclusion of the posthumous albums *Live Cream* and *Live Cream Vol II* in this boxset illustrates how continued exploitation of the band's March 10, 1968 Winterland show was no bad thing. Rather than "King of the blues cliché" as he was crowned, first album numbers like "NSU" and "Sleepy Time Time" find Eric Clapton in far more resourceful conversation with Ginger Baker and the late Jack Bruce than the endless soloing his dubious honorific would have you expect. Bruce is particularly well-served by the booming low-end of these remasters, but the point about Cream, band and catalogue, was always that it was more than the sum of its parts: studio and live, discipline and freedom, pop and jazz. *Disraeli Gears* is a fine album, which Martin Sharp's packaging helped make iconic, but it doesn't access what the band got up to in full flight. The band's subsequent *Wheels Of Fire* (1968) and *Goodbye*, (released in early 1969 after the band's split) attempted to resolve the issue with conceptually troublesome studio/live splits, but total immersion is undoubtedly best. Whatever, you'll enjoy Cream for far longer than the two years they could stand each other.

EXTRAS: None.

JOHN ROBINSON

DEVO**Miracle Witness Hour**

FUTURISMO

**Early live show from Cleveland weirdoes in their pre-Eno days**

Finally rescued from the vaults, this much bootlegged live recording captures Devo in performance with their classic lineup – but before Brian Eno had got his glittery hands on them. It was made in May 1977 at the Eagle Street Saloon in Cleveland, a venue Gerald Casale winningly describes in the sleeve notes as "dank, dingy, moldy and sad", and shows the band as they stepped away from their more provocative art school-origins, now dressing in jumpsuits as they developed a more straightforward approach. Although such things are relative in Devo-world. So while "Be Stiff", "Uncontrollable Urge", "Mongoloid" and the frantic, urgent "Praying Hands" are clearly identifiable as Devo's singular take on rock, albeit slower than the versions that they would later record, the set still contains examples of the band's more experimental side. The jittery, semi-improvised jazz-like "Polyvinyl Chloride" captures one challenging element of this, but so does the brilliant, gibberish Ramones-y "Huboon Stomp", which went unrecorded for 20 years before surfacing on a *South Park* album. "Smart Patrol/Mr DNA" brings it all together, mixing a driving rock beat with squalls of feedback and vocal yelps as an oddball but compelling set reaches a thrilling climax.

EXTRAS: None.

PETER WATTS

Rediscovered! ▶

Uncovering the underrated and overlooked



RADIO BIRDMAN Radio Birdman Box Set

CITADEL

9/10

Complete retrospective of the Detroit-inspired Aussie rock rebels

When Radio Birdman began delivering Stooges-inspired hard rock to Sydney in 1974, they were alone. "We started in a vacuum," says guitarist Deniz Tek. "It was post-hippy depressed electric boogie blues or Celtic druid rock. We had

to invent a cottage industry, running our own shows."

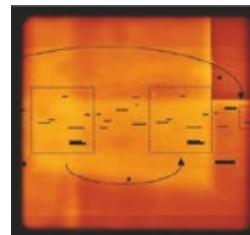
This box summarises the thrill of the Radio Birdman experience, containing studio albums, terrific outtakes and wicked live recordings. Birdman were smart, imaginative players of fuzzy, frantic, ferocious rock. Tek was raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and brought to Sydney a love of The Stooges and the MC5. "Those albums flopped in Australia," he recalls. "You could always find copies in the discount bin, so I'd hoard them until I found somebody who might appreciate it. I was like a Jehovah's Witness."

With singer and fellow Stooges fan, Rob Younger, he formed Radio Birdman. After building a cult following – fans sported the Birdman logo as a tattoo – high-energy debut *Radios Appear* was recorded "gratis and piecemeal". Sire's Seymour Stein came to Australia to see The Saints, popped into a Birdman show and "was dancing on the table", recalls Tek. Confusingly, Sire released a brilliant second take on *Radios Appear*, with re-recorded and different songs. Sire took them to London. A pummelling farewell show in Sydney was recorded for posterity, but the tape was lost: it's released here for the first time.

Hard rockers with a keyboard, Birdman struggled in a punk-obsessed UK. "One review ended 'They should pack their Qantas kit bags and head back to kangaroo-land,'" says Tek, who notes they won some converts. While recording the lean *Living Eyes* LP in Wales, Sire "ran into trouble and had to drop everyone," says Tek. The album wasn't released until 1981, by which time the band had split but were being hailed as the godfathers of Australia's alternative music scene. "We became a link in the chain," says Tek. "And the songs are still good. They haven't reached a use-by date yet."

EXTRAS: Three studio albums, four CDs of outtakes and live performances, DVD, booklet with 8/10 sleeve notes and photos.

PETER WATTS



BRIAN ENO
Neroli (reissue, 1993)
ALL SAINTS

The most fragrant of Eno's '90s studio albums, all now reissued

9/10

In July 1992, Brian Eno presented an 'illustrated lecture' at Sadler's Wells theatre in London. Titled *Perfume, Defence And David Bowie's Wedding*, Eno began the talk by outlining a previous attempt to compose a map for explaining the relationship with smells. Evidently on a roll concerning matters olfactory, the following year he released his 14th album, *Neroli*, named after an oil distilled from orange blossoms. Digressions into aromachology aside, *Neroli* marked a critical point in Eno's sonic experiments. By 1993, artists including Richard James, Tom Middleton and Peter Namlook were developing new approaches to ambient music; 'chill out' would soon come. *Neroli* found Eno paring back the soundscapes of his *Ambient* series to create a delicate, highly minimalist work. Lasting just shy of an hour, it's essentially a series of notes played out as soft droplets. At 19:32, it's possible to notice that some notes begin to ring a little longer than others, creating subdued harmonic variations. Critically, *Neroli* anticipates Eno's imminent engagement with digital music; the start-up theme he'd devise for Microsoft in 1995 and the 'generative music' programmes that would evolve into iPad apps. It's accompanied by the unreleased long-form drone piece, "New Space Music", which does what it says on the cosmic tin.

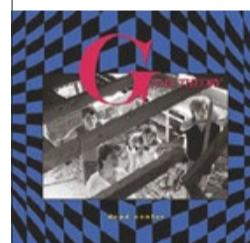
EXTRAS: None.

MICHAEL BONNER

GAME THEORY

Dead Center Deluxe Edition

OMNIVORE



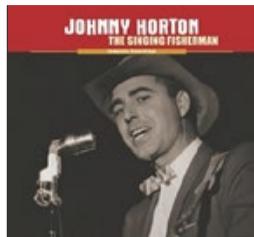
7/10

Prime paisley popsters' secret second album; plus 11 bonus tracks

Though their true masterpieces – *The Big Shot* *Chronicles*, *Lolita Nation* – were still a couple of years off, Scott Miller and his Davis, California pop combo were surely turning heads circa 1983-84. Two EPs, stepping stones of sorts – "Pointed Accounts Of People You Know" and "Distortion" – were collected by French record label Lolita, fleshed out, and voilà, there was *Dead Center*, Game Theory's second album. Despite (partial) production by The Three O'Clock's Michael Quercio, an appearance by legendary guitarist Earl Slick, and glimmers of Miller's oncoming songwriting prowess, it remains an inconsistent set. Nonetheless, the high points are pop perfection indeed, like his demystification of a love affair in the chiming, meta-melodic "Penny, Things Won't", and the infectious, zigzagging guitars framing "Shark Pretty", templates of sorts. A wild, down-and-dirty payment of dues, the Alex Chilton/Box Tops hit "The Letter", previews a pack of covers among numerous live bonus tracks, ranging from brave (Roxy Music's "Mother Of Pearl"), to true-blue soulful (Badfinger's "No Matter What"), to shocking (a ragged yet somehow right-in-the-pocket take on REM's recently released "Radio Free Europe"). All in all, a feast for fans and a gap-filler deluxe.

EXTRAS: None.

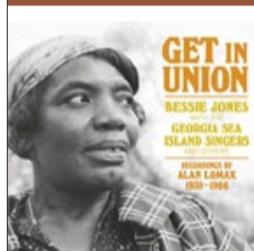
LUKE TORN


JOHNNY HORTON
The Singing Fisherman: Complete Recordings
 BEAR FAMILY
9/10**296 tracks, mountains of rarities**

Now remembered, if at all, for his 1960 novelty smash "The Battle Of New Orleans", Johnny Horton (d. 1960) has a backstory which defies both convention and easy analysis. Infinitely more fascinating than hordes of Nashville boozers and straight-lacers to follow, Horton's talent, too, transcended easy pigeonholes: a practitioner of some of the corniest cornball imaginable ("Hooray For That Little Difference"), he could turn on a dime into a rockabilly whirlwind ("Honky Tonk Mind"); a romantic balladeer ("Whispering Pines"), he also minted an all-new genre – nouveau country-pop historicism. Theoretically a clean-cut outdoorsman, he was hounded by demons and, many say, predicted his own death. In wading through this all-inclusive labour of love, Horton's hard rockabilly stuff holds up best – the ballads veer from icky misographies to sweet vulnerabilities – and his singing is a marvel throughout. Within three discs of stripped-down songwriter demos, Horton goes all *Basement Tapes* – dozens of informally recorded Southern snapshots, a unique confluence of one man's musical vision, incorporating blues, boogie, folk, jazz, pop, downhome country – in short, Americana.

EXTRAS: None.

LUKE TORN


BESSIE JONES WITH THE GEORGIA SEA ISLAND SINGERS AND OTHERS
Get In Union
 TOMPKINS SQUARE
9/10**Heavenly US gospel from the Civil Rights era**

Folklorist Alan Lomax first visited the Georgia Sea Island of St Simons in 1935, during which time he recorded hours of music from the Spiritual Singers Society. When he returned nearly a quarter of a century later, the group's ranks had been swelled by the remarkable Bessie Jones, a South Georgia native with a rich voice and an extensive knowledge of roots tradition. The bulk of this absorbing 2CD set dates from Lomax's second trip and on through to 1966. It finds the Georgia Sea Island Singers tackling folk, gospel, blues, spirituals, work songs and the like, the accent on deep-soul harmonies and handclaps. The Singers became a hit on the US campus scene, their profile raised by appearances at the Newport Folk Festival, the Poor People's March on Washington and, in 1977, Jimmy Carter's Presidential inauguration. It's Jones who dominates proceedings though, at her imperious best on unaccompanied songs like "Plumb The Line" and "Got To Lie Down". Fans of Moby's *Play*, meanwhile, will recognise the source material of "Sometimes". The casual air of many of Jones' performances, often interspersed with random noise, childhood memories and the odd herbal healing recipe, only adds to the album's unforced appeal.

EXTRAS: None.

ROB HUGHES


THE KORGIS
....By Appointment
 ANGEL AIR

Neglected master pop craftsmen fondly remembered...

After Peel favourites Stackridge broke up in 1976, one of many victims

of the punk revolution, Andy Davis and James Warren re-emerged two years later as The Korgis. It wasn't entirely clear where they fitted in the new, much-changed musical firmament, but their amalgam of power-pop melodicism and new wave quirkiness briefly hit a popular nerve and gave them a Top 20 hit with the ineffably lovely "If I Had You", which sounded like the best song Badfinger never got around to writing. The follow-up, "Everybody's Got To Learn Sometime", was an even bigger hit, but a refusal to tour meant they never built on their initial success and failed to attain much visibility. Yet as this 18-track compilation shows, they continued to create classic three-minute pop gems on-and-off for the next dozen and more years. Some of the tracks here are originals, some 1990s re-recordings, others presented in alternative 'unplugged' versions re-recorded in 2005. Ultimately the provenance doesn't really matter; it's all about their underrated songwriting artistry, as the covering of their material by Beck, Rod Stewart, Erasure, Tracy Ullman and the Dream Academy among others testifies.

EXTRAS: The heartfelt homage "Something

6/10 About The Beatles", previously only

available as a 2006 single.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

7/10

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NIGEL WILLIAMSON


THE NEW JAZZ ORCHESTRA
Le Déjeuner Sur L'Herbe (reissue, 1969)
 DUSK FIRE

9/10
The Rosetta Stone of British pastoral jazz re-released...

It's a genuine coincidence

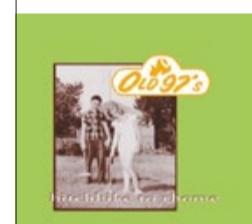
that this long-deleted rarity gets reissued not long after the death of Jack Bruce. Recorded in September 1968, Bruce took time out during Cream's messy implosion to sit in with this free-floating collective of Brit-jazz royalty and certainly holds his own, but he's almost incidental to the revolution that's going on around him. Here, for the first time, homegrown jazz musicians are rejecting their American elocution lessons and playing in a variety of British accents. This is a band that can swing in the American vernacular – check out drummer John Hiseman's pulsating groove on "Dusk Fire", or Neil Ardley's swaggering big-band arrangement of Miles Davis' "Nardis" – but, for the most part, the mood here is pastoral, bucolic and only tangentially bluesy. Mike Taylor's setting of a study by Polish composer Alexandre Tansman is a very European take on gospel jazz, while Mike Gibbs' "Rebirth" is an English vision of the West Coast cool-school. Alongside fine solos from trumpeters Harry Beckett and Ian Carr and saxophonist Barbara Thompson, tenorist Dick Heckstall-Smith freaks out on Neil Ardley's title track, and Dave Gelly ruminates on Mike Taylor's "Ballad". A beautiful, memorable album, and a long overdue re-release.

EXTRAS: None.

JOHN LEWIS

REVELATIONS
Step into the 'spook room' with Johnny Horton and Johnny Cash


► Johnny Horton was known as a keen angler, but his other obsession was spiritualism. In his final years he became a devotee of channeller Edgar Cayce and built himself a meditation shed at home, where his children charged friends to enter Dad's 'spook room'. It was a passion shared by fishing buddy Johnny Cash, with whom he'd attend spiritualist conventions and perform thought-transmittal experiments. Songwriter Howard Hausey recalled, "Horton and Cash used to try to get me to go to séances with them in Mississippi, but I never would. Horton believed he was reaching the ghost of Hank Williams." Horton's interest was also reflected in a love of Native American culture, revering the spirits of animals and plants. It's a fascination addressed in *The Life Of Johnny Gale Horton*, a 250-page memoir written by mother Claudia after his death. Unseen until publication in the new *The Singing Fisherman* anthology, she wrote that Johnny "made many appearances in New Mexico and those Indians would come from far and near to see him... They made him an honorary chief." ROB HUGHES


OLD 97'S
Hitchhike To Rhome
 OMNIVORE

Expanded edition of 1994 debut

Old 97's are definitely one of those bands who've improved with age. Their

last few albums – this year's *Most Messed Up* and the two volumes of *The Grand Theatre* – have shown them to be rootsy descendants of The Replacements or The Bottle Rockets, full of punky bravado, dark humour and dry narratives. There are traces of all three on *Hitchhike To Rhome*, now celebrating its 20th anniversary, albeit fuzzier and less defined. Several songs have stayed the distance in their live set, namely "Drowning In The Days", the fantastically trashy "4 Leaf Clover" and all-round crowd-pleaser "Stoned". Others, however, are less great, as if the Dallas foursome were more concerned with bashing out sufficient product than with sharpening their songcraft. As with the album title itself, many of the tunes reference their home state, while their country credentials are boosted by covers of Merle Haggard's "Mama Tried" and the Mel Tillis-Webb Pierce choker, "Tupelo County Jail".

EXTRAS: 12-track bonus disc of rare and

6/10 unreleased tunes, including demo

cassette takes of "St Ignatius", "Drowning In The Days" and "Stoned". Among the album

session outtakes are "Crying Drunk" and a

Spaghetti Western version of singer Rhett

Miller's "Old 97's Theme".

ROB HUGHES



REM 7IN-83-88

UNIVERSAL MUSIC
CATALOGUE

All hail the band's
peerless run of
early singles

It's possible to get
sufficiently lost in the

bewitching otherness of the band's IRS years; as Elvis Costello once confessed, "I preferred REM before they started giving you the words." But that would mean missing out on their oblique sense of humour: like their version of Roger Miller's karaoke standard, "King Of The Road" – B-side to "So. Central Rain (I'm Sorry)" – with its prodigious use of cowbell and Michael Stipe's deathless instruction to Peter Buck: "Take it, slim." Incidentally, 7IN-83-88 is the band's 14th compilation; and, after 1994's *REM Singles Collected*, the second time this material has been gathered together in this sequence. Still, these songs provide a persuasive argument for REM's formative brilliance; a precarious, alluring hybrid of Buck's omnivorous classic-rock inclinations and the dream logic of Stipe's lyrics. The surging chorus of "Radio Free Europe" gives way to cryptic visions of the American South – "(Don't Go Back To) Rockville", "Driver 8", "Wendell Gee" – before the clouds lift to reveal the potent, angry politics of "It's The End Of The World As We Know It (And I Feel Fine)". "The One I Love" found them ready to make the move to Warner Brothers: their 10th single, it was also the first to feature a guitar solo.

EXTRAS: None.

MICHAEL BONNER

8/10

SPARKS

**Kimono My
House**
(reissue, 1974)
UMC

Displaced pop
music with a
disquieting edge

"It's Hitler on the telly,"

was John Lennon's alleged exclamation when he first saw Sparks performing "This Town Ain't Big Enough For The Both Of Us" on *Top Of The Pops*. The rest of the watching nation probably said much the same when the relocated Californians first announced themselves over here in March 1974. *Kimono My House* soon followed, the duo's debut for Island Records confirming a new era for the label already ushered in by Roxy Music. Sparks' spirited, prog-tinged, glam power-pop sound was tailor-made for the times, but it was a sharp lyrical undercurrent that set them apart as well as a creepy, androgynous appearance and Russell Mael's aberrant falsetto. "Amateur Hour" tackled the hazards of adolescent sex with a killer couplet: "It's a lot like playing the violin/ You cannot start off and be Yehudi Menuhin", while "Here In Heaven" offered a rewrite of Shakespeare where Juliet reneges on the deal with Romeo. Sparks have never made a better album, but they've never stopped trying, even 23 albums later.

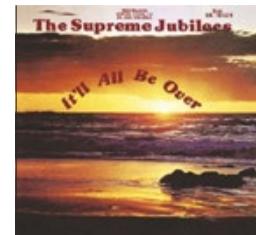
EXTRAS: Ron and Russell Mael's unplugged 7/10 1973 demos, seven unheard recordings including viperous future B-side "Barbecutie" and *Propaganda*'s "Alabama Right", among others they never revisited.

MICK HOUGHTON

9/10

All hail the band's
peerless run of
early singles

It's possible to get
sufficiently lost in the



THE SUPREME JUBILEES

It'll All Be Over
(reissue, 1980)

LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

Dark nights of the soul:
apocalyptic gospel
funk from Fresno's
band of brothers

7/10

When it comes to reissuing 'lost' music – often impossibly obscure private pressings from never-quite-made-its – the hard-luck backstory can be better than the music. It's the Lord's will, perhaps, that it's not the case here, where scarifying Old Testament preaching is bonded to bold, come-to-bed '70s soul, to startling effect. The Supreme Jubilees were formed of two sets of brothers (cousins, to boot) who grew up singing at the Witness Of Jesus Christ church in Fresno, California. This nine-track album of hypnotic gospel funk, first released limited to just 500 private pressings on their own label, was the sole testament of a brief career playing venues across America's West. Recording was tough (including the ignominy of being kicked out of the studio by an unnamed Grammy-winning C&W producer), touring proved tougher, and day jobs swiftly beckoned. Musically, it's downright bizarre to hear religious fervour framed by such a mess of beats, with the title track and "Thank You Lord" excelling in their oddness. Atop loose, languid grooves, lead singer Dave Kingsby calls and coaxes like a doomy Donny Hathaway; behind him the kind of righteous gospel harmonies that only come with hard work, hard faith and shared DNA.

EXTRAS: None.

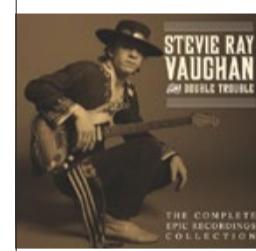
MARK BENTLEY

8/10

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN & DOUBLE TROUBLE

**The Complete
Epic Recordings
Collection**

EPIC



Double, doubled again, then tripled – the ultimate 12-disc collection

When Vaughan came busting out of Texas in the early '80s, the blues had already been reduced to a heritage industry whose main remaining purpose seemed to be soundtracking jeans ads. SRV's early approach was hardly new but his energy and charisma briefly made the blues meaningful again to the MTV generation. But heard back-to-back, his four studio LPs showcase not merely the fastest guitar slinger in the west traversing a well-travelled road, but a significant creative development from the Hendrix-influenced blues-rock of '83's *Texas Flood* to the mature, post-rehab blues-jazz-soul fusions of '89's *In Step*. Within a year he was dead, but that final studio release boasts a freshness and imagination that suggest his best days may still have been ahead and, as with Hendrix, leaves you wondering in what new directions he might have soared. No fewer than six concert discs recorded between 1980-'85 emphasise that the SRV phenomenon was probably best tasted live.

EXTRAS: First official release of *A Legend In The 7/10 Making: Live At The El Mocambo*

Toronto Concert, a 12-track disc of a 1983 concert long sought by collectors, featuring such SRV standards as "Texas Flood" and "Lovestruck Baby" and a brace of burnished Hendrix covers.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



VARIOUS ARTISTS

**Black Fire! New
Spirits! Radical And
Revolutionary Jazz
In The USA 1967-82**

SOUL JAZZ

8/10

There's a riot goin' on:
2CDs of potent,
inspirational jazz and fusion

The cultural impact of the Civil Rights movement is not new territory for the diligent curators at Soul Jazz, and this 2CD set was very much prefaced by the *Freedom, Rhythm & Sound* comp a few years back (Archie Shepp, Joe Henderson and the flautist/academic Lloyd McNeill appear on both sets). Nevertheless, *Black Fire! New Spirits!* tells a compelling musical tale with great artfulness, combining key figures Yusef Lateef and Don Cherry ("Utopia And Visions", from his 1972 masterpiece, *Organic Music Society*) with deeper finds from the unheralded likes of David Lee Jr and The Creative Arts Ensemble (their *Attica Blues*-like "Flashback Of Time", from 1981, is a major discovery). The use of "radical" in the title suggests free jazz, but *Black Fire!* focuses more on the idea of musicians forging a radical black identity by fusing funk, African and Eastern influences with political and poetic ones. The funk strain is particularly strong: "Dealin'" by Richard Davis (1974), bassist on *Astral Weeks*, wouldn't be out of place next to Curtis Mayfield. "Angela's Angel", meanwhile, by Shepp's sometime trombonist Grachan Moncur III and The Jazz Composer's Orchestra, swings like it could have been released on NY salsa label Fania.

EXTRAS: None.

JOHN MULVEY



VARIOUS ARTISTS

**I'm Just Like You:
Sly's Stone Flower
1969-70**

LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

8/10

Sly Stone's pre-Riot sonic experiments

After four albums of rainbow-coloured psychedelic soul and a triumphant Woodstock appearance, Sly Stone appeared to go AWOL for more than two years. As it happens, 1969 and '70 were feverishly productive years for him, as he ditched his backing band, set up the Stone Flower label and started pursuing a new direction in electronic funk. Working out of a squalid West Hollywood studio, Sly sounds like a nightmare producer. One of his signings, a multi-racial funk band called 6ix, didn't even play on their own records, with Sly overdubbing his own wah-wah guitar, fidgety basslines and jerky organs. Joe Hicks, an Otis Redding-style baritone belter from San Francisco, finds his voice unrecognisably pitchshifted on an epic two-part single called "Life And Death In G&A". Little Sister, led by Sly's sister Vaetta, are either reworking old Family Stone tracks or being used as sonic lab for the upcoming *There's A Riot Goin' On*. What unites most of these remarkable experiments in funky minimalism is the Maestro Rhythm King, an early drum machine whose hypnotic, frictionless presets Sly would artfully mutate by starting the pulse on a different beat of the bar. It adds an eerily futuristic air to music that's nearly half a century old.

EXTRAS: Four Sly demos, 52-page booklet.

7/10 JOHN LEWIS

VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Rise And Fall Of Paramount Records Vol 2

THIRD MAN

Jack White curates USA's greatest blues label with a 'cabinet of wonders'. By Neil Spencer



10/10

cause of authentic sounds and authentic music. A drop-in to his Third Man site reveals some of his charity initiatives – swapping vinyl releases for blood donation in his adopted Nashville hometown, for example.

White's decision to curate the sprawling catalogue of Paramount Records, the hugely popular 'race label' of the 1920s and '30s, has already delivered an 800-track first volume, centred on the pioneers of the jazz age – King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton – and a host of lesser lights. Volume 2 likely cuts closer to White's heart, a cavalcade of country blues acts including such founding fathers as Blind Lemon Jefferson and Charley Patton. Their songs still echo; consider Cream singing Skip James, Dylan homaging Patton.

Public recognition on the scale gained by Patton was not shared by many of the 175 acts here. Mostly we know little more about them than the records they left – that White calls "chasing ghosts".

Physically, Volume 2 repeats the formula of the first and is an experience in itself. For 400 bucks you get six albums of milk-white vinyl, 800 tracks on a flashy USB stick with its own app, a pair of handsome books, all housed in a polished aluminium case the size of an Aero trailer, what Jack The Upholsterer calls the Cabinet Of Wonders.

It's an almost unlistenable amount of music, enough for a fortnight all-day, but it's definitive and fascinating, a labyrinthine crawl through the bars, back streets and country shacks of a bygone black America. It's a huge slice of USA cultural history, evoked both in music and in the sumptuous, scholarly books (Jack didn't do it all on his own), which combine erudite commentary (lots of literary flourishes) with rare photos and a fascinating parade of ads that's a chapter of US illustration in itself.

Paramount's story is particular and surprising. Though the label released a torrent of 'race' (ie



black) music, much of it from the Southern states, it was based in snowy Wisconsin and was an offshoot from a furniture company that had found its way into the music business via the manufacture of 'phonograph cabinets'. At first the label issued routine pop to little commercial success, but noticing the healthy sales of jazz, blues, religious and the rest (the company did a mail order service) it began specialising in the 'race' market. Its ads for *The Chicago Defender* often evoke a lurid but romantic world of speakeasy life, full of boar-adorned belles and dapper Dans. At other times they are comic, an arty step on from the 'funnies' in American newspapers. Together with the biographies of the men and women who blew into a studio, cut four sides of shellac and vanished, you can practically smell the era. The sound may be archaic but you're reminded that these are records made largely by and for young people.

Paramount's ace card was its label boss, the charismatic Mayo 'Ink' Williams, justly termed America's first black record executive. Williams mopped up talent, leasing records from the Deep South (from where many folks in Northern cities had emigrated), signing acts direct to Paramount (hence his middle name) and overseeing productions. Though he never got a piece of the company, Williams kept Paramount alive until the Great Depression took it down in 1934.

What still stands is the music. The bounding piano of Meade Lux Lewis and the sly sexual innuendo of Ma Rainey and Blind Blake. Charley Patton's primal moan and Son House's tricky picking. Fats Waller's genial backchat and the proud defiance of Lottie Kimbrough on "Rolling Log Blues", a much covered Paramount gem of whose gifted singer we know little. That she's a good woman with a sad song isn't in doubt.

As it's put here: "This is what America sounded like in the 1920s and '30s – on its street corners, at its fish fries and country suppers, in its nightclubs and dancehalls and show tents."

It's a great place to visit.

Q&A

Interview with Dean Blackwood of Revenant Records



What was Jack White's involvement in this mammoth enterprise?

The project takes its contours from him. We sat there agog at the run of performers housed under this one roof in a single eight-year period: all the giants of the age. And perversely, it had to be said that Paramount cared the least about the quality of its product – the poor sound of its records is notorious – and had little understanding of its mostly black audience. Which made it all the weirder that this purely profit-minded enterprise created the most important (albeit inadvertent) repository of this young nation's greatest art form.

Tell me about the package...

Jack articulated this vision about leveraging Paramount's furniture-making pedigree (echoing his own) and setting up a backstory for the set – "What Paramount would've done if they gave a shit". This set us off looking to a rival company – RCA-Victor – who did give a shit. We zeroed in on two of their products

that seemed representative of both their commitment to design and craft, 1924's Victor Victrola VV-50 and the John Vassos-designed RCA-Victor Special Model series that started in 1934.

It's quite a story.

Jack was also emphatic about the narrative – the Paramount story has this natural drama to it, and part of our job involves simply getting out of the way to allow the artists to speak for themselves. Some of it is recognising that it's all – the design form, the images, the words – to some degree, in Jack's words, the "witchcraft" that lures people into this important stuff. It's the music, stupid! *INTERVIEW: NEIL SPENCER*



The Specialist

T.Rex



Last of the teenage idols: Bolan in '73 - from the *Tanx* cover session

► "WHAT'S HAPPENED TO Donny Osmond and David Cassidy now?" sneered boogie knight Marc Bolan in 1976, in the certain hope of his own commercial resurrection. "I'd be insulted if I was written off with them. I never was a puppet. There's a difference between being a teenage idol and teenybopper idol."

The eight **T.Rex** albums recirculated in **The Vinyl Collection** DEMON may confirm that Bolan was the dippy Donovan to the shape-shifting Bob Dylan of David Bowie – the man who ended up paying his son's school fees after Bolan's oft-mocked last hit in 1977 – but gold abounds among the glitter.

Bolan's electrically enhanced surge into the mainstream was a 'Judas' moment for those enamoured of the leaky teapot acoustic psychedelia of Tyrannosaurus Rex, but John Peel understood how readily his elfin protégé embraced glam celebrity, noting: "He was certainly always an ambitious lad."

I-Ching sugar sweetens the Tolkien blues intro/outro "Children Of Rarn" on 1970's

T.Rex 7/10 – the first post-abbreviation album – but the squelchy "Beltane Walk" and "Seagull Woman" presage imminent "Ride A White Swan" success.

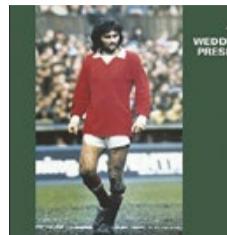
Hippy gumbo



is then expunged for 1971's **Electric Warrior** 7/10 (closing with stomp supreme "Rip-Off") and glam apotheosis **The Slider** 8/10 the following year.

Waistline and ego expanding, Bolan lost focus for 1973's **Tanx** 6/10, but with the teens moving on, simultaneously peaked and troughed on the opulent but spooky **Zinc Alloy And The Hidden Riders Of Tomorrow** 8/10 the following year. Clock the dead-eyed front-cover resemblance to Syd Barrett – ex-boyfriend of Bolan's wife, June Child, and the man Stamford Hill's ace face once cited as his "main influence" – and you can fathom something of its opium den darkness. "Her nose is smashed, her frame is bent," he madcap laughs on "Venus Loon". "She's covered in flies." His awful, awful crawl through his back catalogue on the manic "Sound Pit" ("Metal Guru's in the loo with my glue") and street gang fantasia "The Leopards" ("King Kong built a car inside his brain") are no less unhinged.

Things calmed down thereafter; **Zip Gun** 6/10 is OK, 1976's **Futuristic Dragon** 7/10 is enlivened by the "frog in her hand" whimsy of "New York City", while the cheekbones are sharp again on 1977 swansong, **Dandy In The Underworld** 7/10. Captain Sensible recalls a track-suited Bolan jogging around service stations while support act The Damned ate their fry-ups on tour that year; delusional maybe, but a teenage idol in training once more. **JIM WIRTH**



THE WEDDING PRESENT

Deluxe Box Sets

EDSEL

First eight LPs get the boxset treatment

There's a grim irony in the news that The Wedding Present – that most indie of

8/10

bands, the reductionist flexidisc and fanzine made flesh – now find themselves the recipient of the deluxe, *Taste The Difference*, four-disc box. Most of these have already been reissued before, but each has now been lovingly repackaged across four discs – the first featuring the LP and contemporary single tracks; the second featuring sessions for John Peel and likeminded European radio shows; the third featuring contemporary live dates recorded at all points from Detroit to Den Haag. Disc Four features a DVD of promo vids, TV appearances on *Top Of The Pops*, *Club X* or – indeed – *The Esther Rantzen Show*, and latterday interviews of Gedge with journalist Keith Cameron. Highlights are too numerous to list but the acoustic versions of "It's A Gas" from *Watusi*, and the acoustic tracks featuring Jayne Lockey on backing vocals are tremendous, and there are also plenty of enjoyably daft covers – not just on their *Hit Parade* motherlode of 1992 chart smashes, but dotted across the additional tracks. Oddly, it's the later albums – 1994's US-honed *Watusi*, and the sophisticated songcraft of 1996's *Saturnalia* – that contain the most interesting revelations.

EXTRAS: The mega-bundle ('The Complete **8/10** Collection') brings together all eight sets and two 7in singles: 34 discs in total!
JOHN LEWIS



WILD BEASTS

Present Tense: Special Edition

DOMINO

Kendal's finest append sumptuous fourth with disc of remixes

8/10

Beginning as a playfully pretentious take on the dandyish art-funk of Orange Juice, Wild Beasts have carefully developed their sound with electronic textures, a little on 2011's *Smother*, and rather more on 2014's *Present Tense*. By and large, these days their songwriting tends towards the intimate and sensual, although with the occasional flash of insurrection – see the "Mis-Shapes"-tinged outsider anthem "Wanderlust", which finds Hayden Thorpe singing "They're solemn in their wealth, we're high in our poverty/We see the things they never see", to a turbulent chorus of electronics. This Special Edition feels like an extension of *Present Tense*'s experimental urges, adding an extra disc on which four of the LP's tracks are passed over to an army of remixers, including The Field, Juan Atkins and Foals. It would be misleading to claim everything here succeeds entirely on such terms – nothing wrong with the hard electro stylings of Factory Floor's "Wanderlust" rejig, but it works by dispensing with practically all of the original. Most effective are the numbers that build ornately around the vocal: see Steve Moore's progressive synth remix of "Palace", on which Hayden Thorpe attains the dramatic gravity of a great torch singer, an Alison Moyet or Antony Hegarty. A new way forward, perhaps.

EXTRAS: None.
LOUIS PATTISON



Films

BY MICHAEL BONNER

This month: Paul Thomas Anderson's Pynchon adaptation; Iñárritu's Hollywood backstage satire; and Steve Carell as a dangerous, delusional plutocrat

INHERENT VICE Interesting news recently in the *Los Angeles Times*, which reported that the LA apartment occupied by Elliott Gould's Philip Marlowe in Robert Altman's great 1973 film *The Long Goodbye* is now available for rent. Serendipitously, Altman's film is a critical reference point for Paul Thomas Anderson's latest, *Inherent Vice*, adapted from Thomas Pynchon's novel. While both films share a setting and decade – California in the early '70s – Anderson depicts his as a crazy, out-of-whack principality, where Nixon, Manson, Vietnam and riots have replaced the funky hippy vibes of the previous decade. Anxiety and remorse are the principal emotions. There's a sticky, faintly claustrophobic tone to the film, with its talk of "karmic thermals" and heroin addicts, midday naps and shapeless days. As one character says in voiceover, "American life was something to be escaped from." In the middle of all this, mutton-chopped private investigator Larry "Doc" Sportello (Joaquin Phoenix) wears what look like a succession of Neil Young's cast-offs from the Buffalo Springfield days. Sportello is befuddled by weed, with his love life in freefall. After having sat through Phoenix shouting his way through Anderson's previous film, *The Master*, it's quite a relief to watch him mumble his way through *Inherent Vice*. This being Pynchon, there's a number of digressive plots threaded through the story and enough of a fizz of ideas for several books. What follows includes neo-Nazis, a shadowy cabal of dentists, anti-Communist subversives and other splendid examples of the counterculture at its strung-out and goofiest. Around Phoenix, Anderson has assembled a fine supporting cast: Benicio Del Toro, Martin Short and Reese Witherspoon. The best work is done by Josh Brolin, modeling a spectacularly officious flat-top, as Sportello's nemesis on the LAPD – and Joanna Newsom, who is terrific as Sortilège, a wise-owl astrologer friend of Sportello and Shasta, who also delivers the film's voiceover. Meanwhile, regular Anderson collaborator Jonny Greenwood provides the film's soundtrack: a beguiling mix of his own compositions alongside Can and Neil Young.

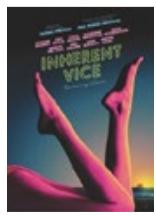


Birdman Michael Keaton plays Riggan Thomson, a veteran film actor eager to rebuild his rep. Like Keaton, Thomson is largely remembered for playing a superhero 25 years ago. And, like Keaton, he's spent much of the intervening quarter of a century explaining why he abdicated from that role – in Thomson's case, *Birdman*; Keaton, meanwhile, turned his back on *Batman*. Along with Keaton, the cast includes Edward Norton and Emma Stone, also veterans of superhero movies. Robert Downey Jr's fee for *Iron Man 3* is broached. Woody Harrelson, Michael Fassbender and Jeremy Renner are all sought by Thomson; but, alas, they are too busy with their respective franchises. Writer/director Alejandro Iñárritu's hall-of-mirrors revels in such postmodernism; indeed, you may be forgiven for thinking that without such referential conceits would the film even have cause to exist?

Initially, the plot is straightforward enough: a backstage satire, set over a few days, as Thomson directs and acts in a Broadway adaptation of a Raymond Carver's short story in a bid for artistic credibility. The first hour is essentially a Ray

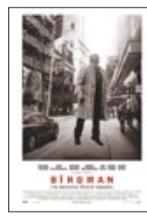
Cooney bedroom farce, full of rutting egos and romantic entanglements. Thomson's co-star, Mike Shiner (Norton), is the epitome of strutting, Method-acting excess; he is also involved in a fraying relationship with the play's leading lady, Leslie (Naomi Watts). Even as Shiner upsets the production, Thomson learns his girlfriend is pregnant, while his daughter is fresh out of rehab and struggling. Gradually, strange kinks assert themselves in the narrative: moments where Thomson levitates cross-legged in mid air, or takes flight across the New York rooftops. Along the way, the film appears as if unspooling in a single take. It's a nice piece of artifice; but much like *Birdman* itself, it is a superficial rather than substantial attraction. The actors' digs at narcissism, ambition and the "cultural genocide" of Hollywood verge on the indulgent. "The play is starting to feel like a deranged, deformed version of myself," Thomson says at one point. Ha, ha, yes; we get it! The second hour strips back every outstanding plot point to focus entirely on Thomson's hard-to-engage-with plight: he is depthless and self-absorbed, and Iñárritu's film isn't half as clever as it thinks it is.

Reviewed this month...



INHERENT VICE

Director Paul Thomas Anderson
Starring Joaquin Phoenix, Josh Brolin
Opens January 30
Cert 15
8/10



BIRDMAN

Director Alejandro Iñárritu
Starring Michael Keaton, Edward Norton
Opens January 1
Cert 15
6/10



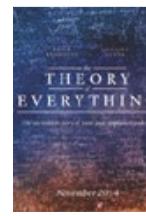
FOXCATCHER

Director Bennett Miller
Starring Steve Carell, Channing Tatum
Opens January 9
Cert 15
8/10



WHIPLASH

Director Damien Chazelle
Starring JK Simmons, Miles Teller
Opens January 16
Cert 15
7/10



THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING

Director James Marsh
Starring Eddie Redmayne, Felicity Jones
Opens January 1
Cert 12A
6/10



Joaquin Phoenix and Owen Wilson in *Inherent Vice*

► **Foxcatcher** In director Bennett Miller's last film, *Moneyball*, Brad Pitt played Billy Beane, the real-life general manager of the Oakland Athletics baseball team who turned round the fortunes of his impoverished club. *Foxcatcher* is similarly based on a true event in sporting history; in which John DuPont (Steve Carell) bankrolled America's national wrestling team to win gold at the 1988 Seoul Olympics. But while Beane was a star player gone to seed who acted from philanthropic impulses, DuPont's motives are entirely different. He lives on Foxcatcher Farm, the sprawling Pennsylvanian seat of the DuPonts, one of America's richest families, with his cantankerous mother (Vanessa Redgrave) and a number of deep-rooted personal issues. Meanwhile, up in Wisconsin, we meet wrestler Mark Schultz (Channing Tatum), who won gold at the '84 Summer Olympics but his edge has since dulled: he lives alone on a diet of Pot Noodles and computer games, earning cash by giving inspirational talks at local schools. Critically, Mark lives in the shadow of his elder brother Dave (Mark Ruffalo) – another Olympic gold medal-winning wrestler, who is considerably easier-going than his brother, and enjoys a happy life with his wife and children. DuPont convinces Mark to move to Foxcatcher and help him assemble a wrestling team to compete first in the World Championships and then the 1988 Olympics. But DuPont is surreptitiously using Mark to lure Dave – the greater athlete – along. Miller's

Buried beneath a cavernous prosthetic conk, Steve Carell is entirely unreadable...

film is often unsettling – and although it's hard to like, it has much to commend it. Principally, it is anchored by terrific performances from Tatum and Ruffalo. As Mark and Dave, they share a profound brotherly affection for one another, but once at Foxcatcher find they experience conflicting emotions, both towards one another and towards DuPont. Carell's plutocrat, meanwhile, is an extraordinary figure. Lonely, tetchy and arrogant, a self-proclaimed author, ornithologist and explorer, DuPont is a dangerous, delusional man. Not that you'd know it at first: buried beneath a cavernous prosthetic conk, Carell is entirely unreadable.

► **Whiplash** No, not a drama about the travails of personal injury lawyers, Damian Chazelle's film charts the sadomasochistic relationship between aspiring 19-year-old drummer (Miles Teller) and his authoritarian professor (JK Simmons), who runs a jazz ensemble at a swish New York conservatory. *Whiplash* takes its title from a piece by jazz composer Hank Levy, which here the two principals wield in battle against each other. Simmons' black-clad, bullet-headed Fletcher dispenses emotional and physical brutality against Teller's Andrew Nieman, driving his pupil with the lacerating skills of a drill sergeant. The sullen Nieman, for his part, is weirdly complicit in this: it becomes apparent that he is concerned not so much about music, as about pure, competitive ambition.

A warm and likeable character actor in films like *Juno* and *Burn After Reading*, Simmons raises his game here, playing the seething Fletcher with intense focus and commitment. Fletcher's rehearsal room is a snake pit, where a late arrival or bum note will end in a litany of abuse. *Whiplash* doesn't offer any insight into music or the nature of genius; it's a rather dark film about the nature of ambition and perfectionism, the antithesis of *Glee*-style shows about fame academy kids who just... wanna... sing! You suspect they wouldn't last five minutes in the blood and sweat of Fletcher's rehearsal room.

► **The Theory Of Everything** A sort of companion piece to last month's *The Imitation Game*, this is another period-set biographical drama about the travails of a mathematical genius. In the case of *The Imitation Game*, this involved

Benedict Cumberbatch cracking the Enigma code; here, it is Stephen Hawking, played by Eddie Redmayne, struggling to achieve scientific breakthroughs and hold together a marriage while his Lou Gehrig's Disease

progresses. It is glossy fare, foregrounding the romance with his wife Jane (Felicity Jones) rather than the boring old science stuff. Redmayne and Jones deliver strong, nuanced performances that far outweigh the limitations of the otherwise programmatic screenplay. Inevitably, there are problems associated with mounting this kind of film – especially when the key protagonists are all still alive, one of them a major public figure. All the same, the subjects deserve deeper psychological investigation.

Also out...

TAKEN 3

OPENS JANUARY 8

Liam Neeson creaks his way into this third franchise instalment: he's still angry, and he's still going to shoot some people.

INTO THE WOODS

OPENS JANUARY 9

Sondheim adaptation, weaving together a number of Grimm fairy tales. Meryl Streep hoofs it up as a witch. Johnny Depp is a wolf.

NATIONAL GALLERY

OPENS JANUARY 9

Veteran documentarian Frederick Wiseman goes deep inside the great British museum.

AMERICAN SNIPER

OPENS JANUARY 16

Clint Eastwood directs Bradley Cooper in a true story drama about a US Navy SEAL in the field and at home. A bit *Hurt Locker*.

WILD

OPENS JANUARY 16

Reese Witherspoon hikes more than a thousand miles of the Pacific Crest Trail on her tod. *Dallas Buyer's Club*'s Jean-Marc Vallée directs.

EX MACHINA

OPENS JANUARY 23

Remember Alex Garland? He writes and directs this *Black Mirror*-style drama about a computer programmer involved in an unexpected experiment in AI. Oscar Isaac stars.



THE GAMBLER

OPENS JANUARY 23

A remake of the James Toback 1974 film, with Mark Wahlberg replacing James Caan as the college professor with a gambling addiction.

MORTDECAI

OPENS JANUARY 23

Caper, with Johnny Depp as a roguish art dealer involved in the international chase for Nazi gold. Paul Bettany co-stars as a character called Jock Strapp.

A MOST VIOLENT YEAR

OPENS JANUARY 23

More Oscar Isaac, here playing opposite Jessica Chastain as an immigrant couple enduring troubles in New York, circa 1981.

KINGSMAN: THE SECRET SERVICE

OPENS JANUARY 29

Kiss-Ass team of director Matthew Vaughn and writer Mark Millar regroup for another comic book adaptation: a bit *Avengers*, with Colin Firth doing Her Majesty's covert biz.



No dazzling
lightshow required...
Leonard in Dublin,
September 12, 2013

LEONARD COHEN Live In Dublin

COLUMBIA LEGACY

Wah-wah scatting, grandad-dancing and fedoras... three hours in the presence of a legend. *By Andy Gill*



9/10

THERE'S A LOVELY moment, midway through "Tower Of Song", when Leonard Cohen finishes picking his way through that song's stumbling electric piano break, and the audience bursts into applause. As the band vamps quietly behind him, Cohen regards the crowd with a wry smile and asks, "Are you humouring me?", immediately adding, "I accept it, thank you. If these are the crumbs of compassion that you offer to the elderly, I am grateful." It's another variant of a line he's been using for a few years now, but it's such a sweet sentiment, and so elegantly phrased, emblematic both of the mutual fondness radiating between performer and audience, and the shared degree of politesse assumed by both parties. And of course, the crowd responds with a massive cheer when he gets to the line about having been "born with the gift of a golden voice".

He may be "a lazy bastard living in a suit", as acknowledged in another well-received line from "Going Home", but as he sails into his eighties, Leonard Cohen still puts in a serious shift: a generous 30 songs, spread over three hours, drawn from all but a few corners of his career, shot in

gorgeous high definition on September 12, 2013. And while several of his musicians play seated, Cohen's on his feet the entire time, save for the moments where he drops to his knees in supplication, beseeching the audience, or urging a player to greater heights of artistry. He runs on stage, clutches the mic like an alkie's bottle, supping its emotional draught through opener "Dance Me To The End Of Love", and even manages to skip gaily off the stage at the end of each set, as if confirming that the older one gets, the more one reverts to childhood.

His band are all dressed like Cohen, a legion of Leonards in grey suits and fedoras; but the colour is all in his imagery, and in their playing, particularly the rhapsodic violin of Alexandru Bublitchi and the exotic textures of Javier Mas. The latter's brief but telling bandurria flourish accompanying the line in "Everybody Knows" about there being "so many people you just had to meet without your clothes" is typical of the expressive fluency involved – it's like a little raise of eyebrows at the joke, no more, but wittily effective. And Mas' tremulous archilaud solo that serves as an overture to "Who By Fire" is quite devastating, as befits this elegant valediction.

Elsewhere, guitarist Mitch Watkins inserts a deftly sensitive blues solo into "Bird On The Wire", while keyboardist Neil Larsen furnishes the backing tones for Cohen's recitation of the poem "For Those Who Greeted Me", an ongoing rumination that was the root source of "A Thousand Kisses Deep". Drummer

Rafael Gayol, meanwhile, steals the band solos section in "I Tried To Leave You" by halting momentarily mid-solo, leaning towards the camera and blowing us a kiss, before coming back in smack on the beat. The show is studded with moments like that, tiny gestures or musical flourishes that decorate the measured poise of the performance. These songs don't need a dazzling lightshow or pyrotechnics to impress, and it would be perverse to expect more complex choreography than the sedate steps back and forth of backing singers Sharon Robinson and The Webb Sisters, generously accorded solo spots with "Alexandra Leaving" and "If It Be Your Will", respectively.

Apart from his jaunty departures, Cohen restricts his physical output to a subdued grooving, a grandad-dancing shuffle on the spot. He acts with his eyes, keeping them shut then opening them wide for lines like those in "The Future" about murder and repentance, like some blazing-eyed preacher castigating his flock. That song's mordantly delivered cynicism about the declining moral certainties of modern life now seems like the seed of the concerns addressed in more recent albums; and although the concert pre-dates *Popular Problems*, the *Old Ideas* songs here, such as "Amen" (kneeling) and "Darkness" (Cohen indulging in wah-wah scat-singing) stand up well alongside classics like "First We Take Manhattan" and "Suzanne", the latter sounding as much like a hymn as any of the more overtly religious-themed pieces.

"Famous Blue Raincoat" ushers in a tranche of encores, culminating in a charming singalong cover of "Save The Last Dance For Me". It's a fitting conclusion to a beautiful union of souls, a concert with the warmth and fraternal devotion evident in Cohen's sweetly caring salutation, the kind of sentiment that just wouldn't occur to less zen-conscious performers: "May you be surrounded by family and friends all your life; but if this is not your lot, may the blessings find you in your solitude."

EXTRAS: "Show Me The Place", "Anyhow" and **5/10** "Different Sides" from Canadian shows.



DEPECHE MODE

Live In Berlin

COLUMBIA

Anton Corbijn documents 2013's Delta Machine tour

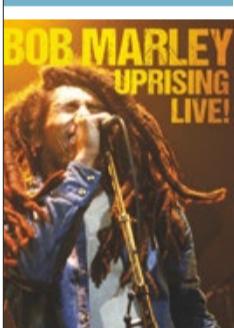
This film might flirt with classic Corbijn tropes – the Mode are painted in reds and blacks; video walls project atmospheric abstractions – but it's essentially a straight rock movie, capturing a band

in rude creative health. All the landmarks are here, from a singalong "Just Can't Get Enough" to a thundering "I Feel You", while a lively Dave Gahan proves an entertaining focal point. Half electro-rock Messiah, half Nasty Nick Cotton, he wriggles and writhes through these hardy hymns of alienation.

EXTRAS: Second disc featuring behind the scenes footage, interviews and acoustic performances.

GRAEME THOMSON

7/10



BOB MARLEY

Uprising Live!

ROCKPALAST

Marley's final tour, caught by German TV in June 1980

Bob Marley's 1980 tour was aimed at consolidating his many European triumphs and then conquering black

America, an ambition sadly ended by Bob's collapse three months after this show (Marley would die in May the following year). Magnetic to the last, his commitment here is never in doubt, though you can see the strain, while the Wailers' arena reggae is often sluggish. A solo turn on "Redemption Song", newly unveiled on *Uprising*, steals the show.

EXTRAS: None.

NEIL SPENCER

6/10



MONTY PYTHON LIVE (MOSTLY)

One Down, Five To Go

EAGLE VISION

Palin, Cleese etc reconvene. Beautiful plumage, etc

Much like watching a great rock band reconvene for one final tour, the Python's 10-date stand at London's O2

Arena was a 'greatest hits' trawl. Indeed, this was a case of 'and now for something reassuringly familiar', as audience favourites "Nudge Nudge", "The Argument Sketch" and "The Parrot Sketch" rub shoulders with deep cuts like "The Death Of Mary, Queen Of Scots Sketch". While each of the participants trousered a large pile of cash, one hopes the family of the late Graham Chapman also enjoyed the benefits of these shows.

EXTRAS: None.

MICHAEL BONNER

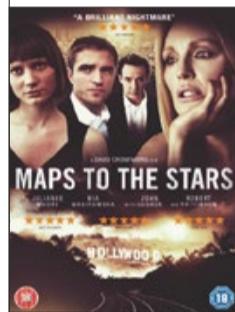
7/10



Tinseltown tales: Julianne Moore as Havana

MAPS TO THE STARS

ENTERTAINMENT ONE



8/10

Cronenberg takes a bleak look at the fame game

EVEN IN HIS days of blowing up heads and infesting apartment blocks with parasites, David Cronenberg was always a satirist at heart, and *Maps To The Stars* is probably his most openly satirical exercise to date. This very black movie-biz comedy is scripted by novelist-screenwriter Bruce Wagner, creator of the very outré 1993 TV mini-series *Wild Palms*, which had Oliver Stone as executive producer and was directed by Kathryn Bigelow, among others. But before he moved in such elevated circles, Wagner worked in Hollywood as a limo driver, and that experience fed very directly into *Maps To The Stars*.

This story's limo driver, Jerome, is played by Robert Pattinson, and it's his stint working with a strange, fire-scarred young woman named Agatha (Mia Wasikowska) that guides us through the various twists of this cheerfully morbid ensemble piece. Julianne Moore plays Havana, a fading star perversely keen to remake a movie that starred her late mother (Cronenberg regular Sarah Gadon). Then there's loathsome, Bieber-esque teenage actor

Benjie (newcomer Evan Bird, mesmerisingly obnoxious), the pampered star of comedy franchise *Bad Babysitter*; Benjie's mother Christina (Olivia Williams) is his pushy manager, while dad Stafford (a malignly silky John Cusack) is a self-help guru. Everyone here is as mad, vile and needy as each other, except perhaps Jerome, who at least has one foot in the world outside the Tinseltown bubble.

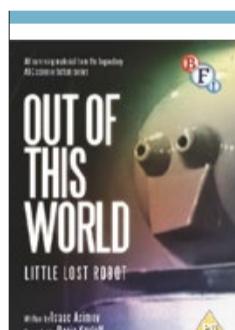
A superb cast makes all these people interesting even while we mostly recoil at their company. Moore is magnificent here – and game as ever for any acting situations, regardless of the usual considerations of dignity. Her Havana has an extraordinary toilet scene, and another you won't easily forget – a bisexual three-way which takes a nightmarishly Freudian bad turn.

Maps To The Stars is brisk, witty and polished, with cinematographer Peter Suschitzky and designer Carol Spier bringing a luxurious sheen to the glacial styling that's a Cronenberg trademark. This is a smart, hugely enjoyable film, although it hardly offers novel insights. So Hollywood people are infantile, self-obsessed and riddled with neuroses? A cameo appearance by Carrie Fisher only serves to remind us that the terrain is well covered, not least in Fisher's autobiographical novel *Postcards From The Edge*.

Still, *Maps* still stands up as bracingly brittle entertainment, and it's nice to see its director letting his hair down for a change. Because, even when he seems to be miles away from his familiar territory, Cronenberg is still Cronenberg, after all.

EXTRAS: None.

JONATHAN ROMNEY



OUT OF THIS WORLD

BFI

Single surviving episode of seminal, lost sci-fi series

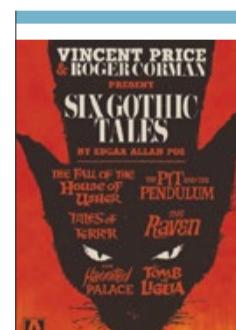
Not to be confused with the BBC's *Out Of The Unknown* (also released as a fantastic BFI set), this earlier anthology of grown-up sci-fi, boasting Boris Karloff as host, ran

on rival ABC in 1962. But it's the template for the BBC classic; pioneering producer Irene Shubik was behind both. Sadly, of 13 episodes, only one survives, "Little Lost Robot", one of Isaac Asimov's seminal Laws Of Robotics stories, adapted by Terry Nation with a strength that overcomes low-budget, studio-bound limitations. The robots are crap, in a good way.

EXTRAS: Audio recordings of two lost episodes, script of a third, booklet.

DAMIEN LOVE

7/10



VINCENT PRICE IN SIX GOTHIC TALES

ARROW

A limited-edition fistful of Poe

The tales are all culled from Roger Corman's 1960s cycle of Edgar Allan Poe adaptations – *Fall Of The House Of Usher*, *Tales Of Terror*, *Pit And The Pendulum*,

The Raven, *The Haunted Palace* and *The Tomb Of Ligeia*. Souped-up for this beautiful-looking Blu-ray box, those comic-book colours crackle like never before, half doomy elegance, half trippy pop hallucination.

EXTRAS: This limited-edition box boasts **10/10** a plethora of extras; the best are a 1984 German doc on Peter Lorre, and the sumptuous booklet, featuring reproductions of the movies' tie-in comics.

DAMIEN LOVE

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As a rule, we're a little awkward when it comes to marketing ourselves at Uncut. Nevertheless, it falls on me from time to time to assert the ongoing virtues of our magazine: the exclusive interviews and deep retrospectives; the vast and insightful reviews section; the way we try and provide a continuum between the great music of the past, and the new things that we're excited by in the office each month. You probably know the drill.

This month, under the banner of a January sale, it seemed time to provide a strong incentive for you to take out a subscription to the mag. As a consequence, not only will you receive each issue delivered to your door but, by hooking up with us, you'll be able to save nearly 50 per cent. We exist, one way or another, to bring you as close as possible to the music and musicians you hopefully care about most. An Uncut subscription, I think, brings you that critical little bit closer. Don't be a stranger...

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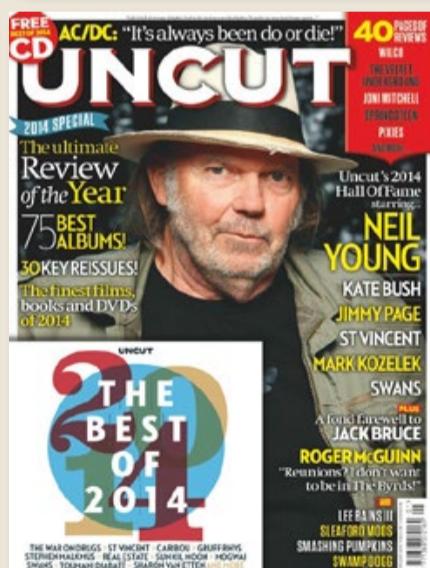
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- 3 Staircase At The University
- 4 World Peace Is None Of Your Business
- 5 Kiss Me A Lot
- 6 I'm Throwing My Arms Around Paris
- 7 Istanbul
- 8 Smiler With Knife
- 9 The Bullfighter Dies
- 10 Trouble Loves Me
- 11 Earth Is The Loneliest Planet
- 12 Neal Cassady Drops Dead
- 13 Meat Is Murder
- 14 Scandinavia
- 15 Kick The Bride Down The Aisle
- 16 I'm Not A Man
- 17 Speedway
- ENCORE**
- 18 Asleep
- 19 Everyday Is Like Sunday

MORRISSEY

O2 ARENA, LONDON, NOVEMBER 29, 2014

The victim returns. “Who hears when animals cry?”!

TAM PRIVILEGED beyond my wildest dreams,” Morrissey bows low just as the opening chords of “The Queen Is Dead” swirl round The O2. Previously, giant screens around the stage have carried clips of the Ramones, New York Dolls and Dame Edith Sitwell. Just before the lights dim, “Ding! Dong! The Witch Is Dead” blasts through the PA and – evidently never one to let the passage of time get in the way of sustained vitriol – the message runs across the screen: “Margaret Thatcher is dead. LOL.” The demise – real, or imaginary – of Morrissey’s *bêtes noires* naturally

extends into “The Queen Is Dead”. To reiterate his trenchant views on the monarchy, the song is accompanied by images of Elizabeth II, photographed at her grumpiest-looking, middle finger extended, and William and Kate, with the words “United King Dumb” printed underneath. LOL! The images themselves look like they were cobbled together on a wonky photocopier, while their delivery is especially clunky. It’s funny, yeah. But what would Oscar say?

Dodgy snaps aside, it’s a strong opener for Morrissey’s first UK show in two years. Since he last played here, of course, he has enjoyed a remarkable

upswing in his fortunes. Indeed, for an artist whose default setting for many years has been one of indignant defence, the last year or so has pretty much kept Morrissey on his toes. After all, when did things last seem to go so resoundingly right for the singer? Buoyed along by the success of his autobiography – which sold 35,000 copies in its first week on sale – he found a new home on Harvest Records and celebrated his highest chart placing in eight years with *World Peace Is None Of Your Business*.

But barely weeks after *World Peace...* reached No 2 in the UK, Morrissey fell out with Harvest, accusing them of not



Royal bloodshed...
Morrissey (and
special guests)
onstage in London

**Morrissey is
able to play
what he wants –
tonight, that's
the bulk of his
recent album**

promoting the record properly (though Morrissey himself declined all interview requests around the album's release). Presumably, had Harvest read the singer's extensive diatribes against Geoff Travis and Rough Trade in *Autobiography*, they might have got wind of how things might pan out. As it is, Harvest can perhaps console themselves with joining a formidable list of ex-managers, record labels, bandmates and collaborators who have all been roundly and publically derided for some old slight or other. "It is quite true that I have never had anything in my life that I did not make for myself," Morrissey wrote rather grandly in *Autobiography*; casting himself defiantly as a self-made man despite compelling evidence to the contrary.

Nothing quite inspires Morrissey like a little self-righteous venting – as tonight's show demonstrates. He arrives on stage wearing what looks like a white karate outfit (with 'animals don't smoke' emblazoned on both shirt and trouser pockets), a few of the shirt buttons undone to reveal a medallion. His hair is greying fast now and beginning to recede, although his bushy eyebrows are still quite dark, unexpectedly reminiscent of Sean Connery in the early '80s, circa *Never Say Never Again*. He looks in good fettle, despite the ill-health that has dogged him over the last few years; "They have scraped

cancerous tissues four times already," he admitted to Spanish-language newspaper *El Mundo* in October last year. All the same, he appears restrained onstage. His theatrical flourishes are at a minimum, essentially limited to the occasional flick of the microphone cable, hands perched on hips, or hoisting his maracas aloft.

Instead, he directs his energies elsewhere. Harvest receive the biggest kicking of the night. His band are decked out in T-shirts emblazoned with the words "Fuck Harvest Records" (available at the merch stall). Introducing the song "World Peace..." itself, he says, "That was the title track from our last CD album, which was immediately deleted by a very clever record label." Cue boos from the audience. No matter, then, that Harvest claimed they had removed *World Peace...* "from all services... out of deference to his request."

Morrissey is often at his most resilient when on the back foot, and there's something electric about his bilious onstage admonishments of Harvest. Equally, his decision to follow "The Queen Is Dead" and "Suedehead" with 11 songs lifted from *World Peace...* suggest a snook being cocked in the direction of his former record label. Whether or not this is a good thing depends entirely on what you think of *World*

Peace... But, looking around The O2, there are few people here who need converting to the cause. Morrissey is in the satisfying position of being able to play whatever he wants – a set consisting of B-sides and deep album cuts would be as warmly received as a 'greatest hits' one or, as in tonight's case, the bulk of his most recent album. Fortunately, for the most part, *World Peace...* is Morrissey's strongest record since 2006's sprightly *Ringleader Of The Tormentors*. A fantastic version of "Istanbul" – about an errant father looking for his missing son – is an early highlight, its narrative carried along by juddering T.Rex grooves, while Morrissey thumps his chest like Matthew McConaughey in *The Wolf Of Wall Street*. "Smiler With Knife", meanwhile, showcases all that's best about *World Peace...*, built around a nagging acoustic refrain and some of Morrissey's best lyrics in a long while.

"Sex and love are not the same," he laments, while Jesse Tobias plays an elegant guitar solo sympathetic to the song's sentiment. Tobias, incidentally, is a sharp performer, alert to the nuances of the individual songs. Elsewhere within the band, Boz Boorer "from the Ball's Pond Road", is now the singer's longest-serving lieutenant, an unobtrusive and diligent musical foil. Key to the show is the band's newest recruit, the multi-instrumentalist Gustavo Manzur, who brings a cosmopolitan flavour – mariachi horns, Tex-Mex accordion, flamenco guitar – to tonight's proceedings.

On its own, *World Peace...* is not sufficiently strong enough to sustain the rump of the set. In between, Morrissey works in "I'm Throwing My Arms Around Paris", from *Years Of Refusal*, and *Maladjusted*'s "Trouble Loves Me". But the centrepiece is "Meat Is Murder", played out against a gruesome PETA film shot in abattoirs. Morrissey still favours the red lighting wash originated on The Smiths' 1984 tour: a simple but effective treatment of a powerful, resonant song that is then entirely undermined by "Scandinavia", a bonus track on the *World Peace...* deluxe edition. Its dire punnery – "I was bored in a fjord... Pinned to a crime in Trondheim" – is matched by turgid backing. "Kick The Bride Down The Aisle", meanwhile, is just a spiteful, truculent business.

Things take an intriguing turn, however, for the encore. Morrissey closes the main set with *Vauxhall And I's "Speedway"*, then returns for a spine-tingling "Asleep", standing at the microphone, hands in his pockets, accompanied only by the piano. "Everyday Is Like Sunday" climaxes with Morrissey taking off his shirt and throwing it into the audience, who fall upon it like a shoal of piranhas. Before "Asleep", though, there is a pause in the music and the invective, as Morrissey delivers a few lines from "Dido's Lament". "I would only ask," he reads, "remember me, but forget my fate."

MICHAEL BONNER





Browne: still a student of the human condition



JACKSON BROWNE

ROYAL ALBERT HALL, LONDON, NOVEMBER 24, 2014

The quintessential LA liberal states his case...
“Democracy just doesn’t work!”

AT A LEAN 66, in a grey, semi-paisley shirt, Jackson Browne remains more aesthete than rocker, a student of the human condition here to report his findings with scrupulous honesty. His tasteful, long-serving band have a little fire in the tank, especially big, golden-haired guitarist Val McCallum. But in a three-hour set interspersing old favourites with most of the recent *Standing In The Breach* album, this close compadre of Warren Zevon and the Eagles sings a lot more about regret than excess.

Browne's been doing this since he was 16, when he wrote the prodigiously rueful “These Days”: “*Don't confront me with my failures,*” he sings, “*I have not forgotten them.*” The softly delivered hard truths keep coming. Switching to piano to pick out the chords of “Late For The Sky”, his strong, grainy voice dredges up another elegant aperçu: “*Such an empty surprise/To feel so alone.*” “For A Dancer” weighs life and death, gospel organ and backing vocals

finding some redemption as Browne grimly concludes there “*may be a reason you were alive, but you'll never know.*”

These highlights from Browne's '70s commercial heyday are unusually thoughtful, but to the cynic, still essentially amount to Lotusland philosophising. Browne's reinvention as the Me Generation's polemicist-in-chief provides a necessary balance. If his sun-softened rock isn't the most obvious incitement to man the barricades, it is, he once laughingly confessed, “the only kind I know how to make”. *Standing In The Breach* maintains the

activism begun in earnest with *Lawyers In Love* (1983). Browne's status as a literal student, taking advantage of his position to join scientists on a Galapagos research trip, lies behind “If I Could Be Anywhere”. “The first verse is about surfing,” he explains, “and the rest of it is about the health of the ocean. Anybody can write about surfers. It needed to go somewhere – well, somewhere more permanent.” It helps that he's remembered a decent chorus to go with lyrics that concisely describe tumbling empires and indestructible plastics, and that he ends by swapping glistening guitar lines with McCallum and pedal-steel master Greg Leisz. “Which Side?” is also genuinely rousing, starting similarly to Dylan's “Gotta Serve Somebody” and drawing battle-lines as absolute as any early '60s folk-singer. There's an element of exasperated defeat, though, as he talks between songs, admitting that the Fox-watching masses of America are people “you can't really talk to”, and declaring, “We've gotta admit that democracy just doesn't work.”

Browne may only speak to the faithful, but his life-lessons remain worth hearing

SETLIST

- 1 The Barricades Of Heaven
- 2 Looking Into You
- 3 The Long Way Around
- 4 Leaving Winslow
- 5 These Days
- 6 Late For The Sky
- 7 I'm Alive
- 8 You Know The Night
- 9 Fountain Of Sorrow
- 10 For A Dancer
- 11 Your Bright Baby Blues
- 12 Rock Me On The Water
- 13 If I Could Be Anywhere
- 14 Which Side?
- 15 Standing In The Breach
- 16 Looking East
- 17 The Birds Of St Marks
- 18 Sky Blue And Black
- 19 In The Shape Of A Heart
- 20 Doctor My Eyes
- 21 The Pretender
- 22 Running On Empty
- 23 Take It Easy/Our Lady Of The Well
- 24 Before The Deluge

The home strait focuses on Browne's less political virtues, getting through the crowd-pleasers the crowd have been calling for all night. “Doctor My Eyes” (improbably covered by The Jackson 5) benefits from “Let It Be”-style epic organ and McCallum's piercingly sharp riffs, while “The Pretender” and “Running On Empty” nail the hippy era's aftermath. Browne's Eagles co-write “Take It Easy” avoids the obvious to spotlight Leisz's pedal-steel, and segues into the low-key “Our Lady Of The Well” – an artful anti-climax, added to by “Before The Deluge”, here a peaceful, easy gospel song. Browne may only speak to the faithful, but his life-lessons remain worth hearing. *NICK HASTED*

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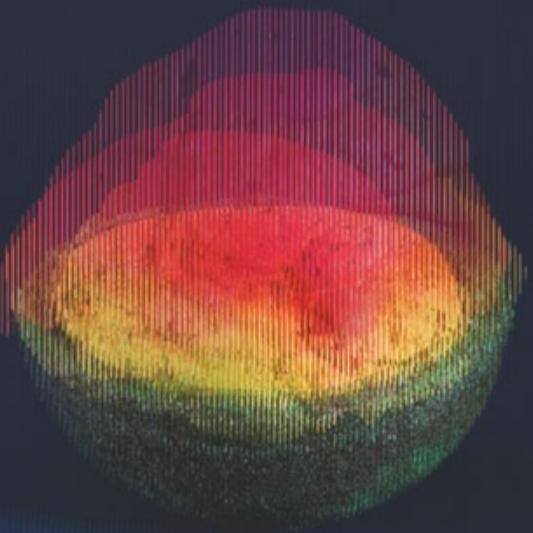
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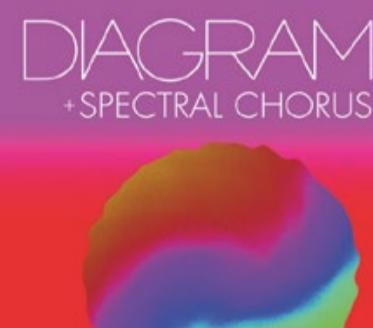
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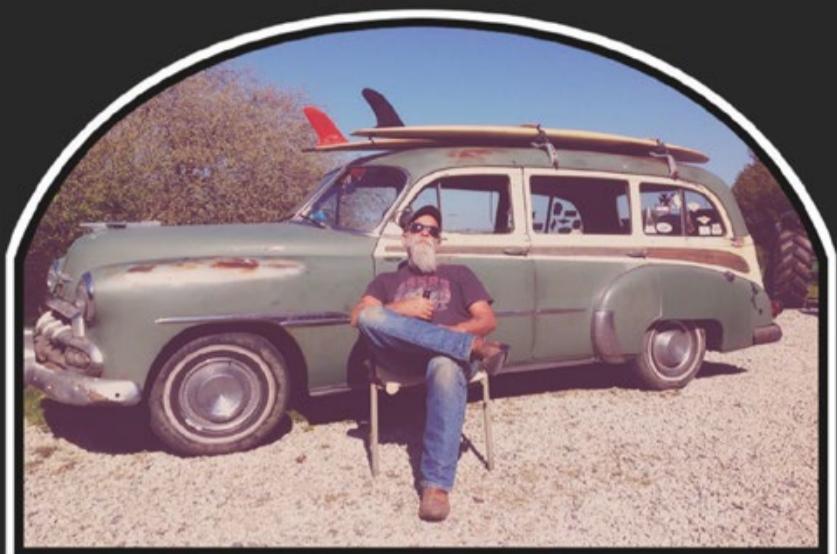
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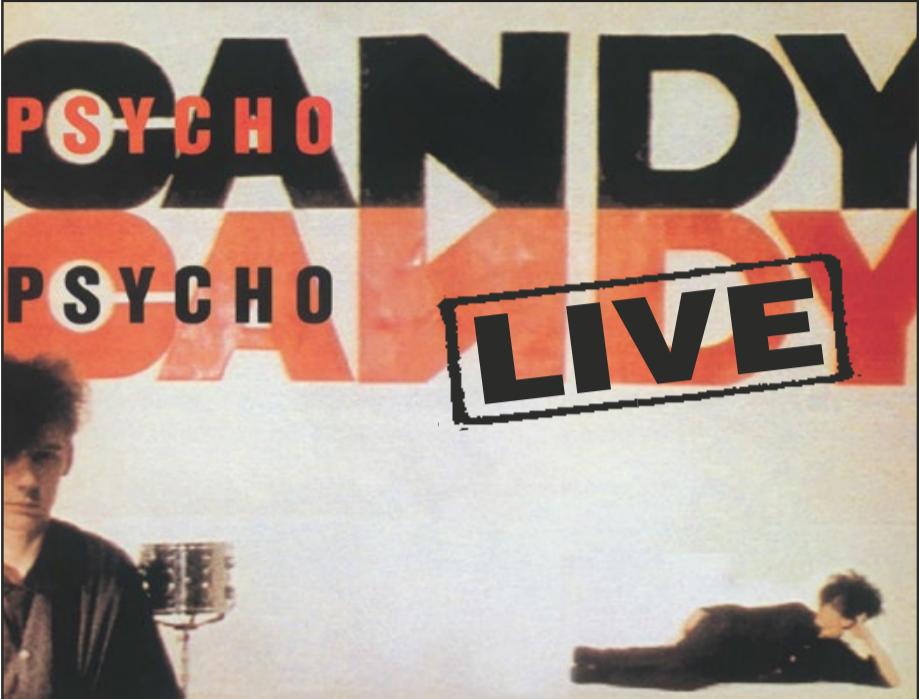


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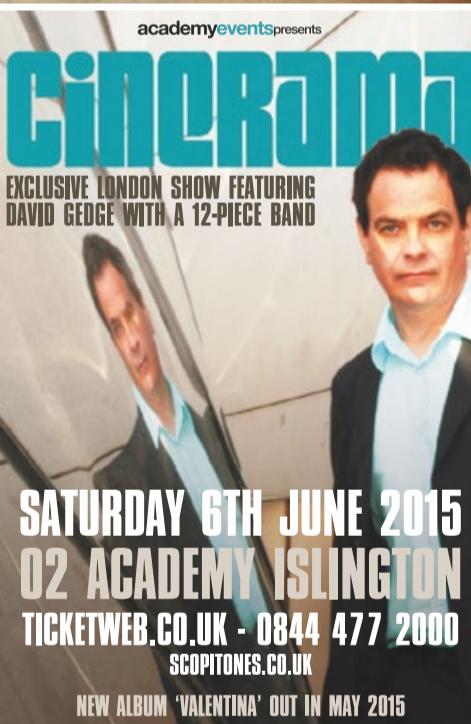


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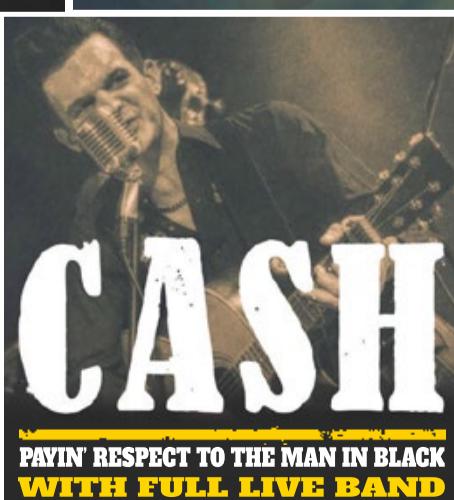
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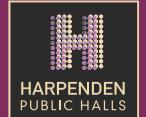
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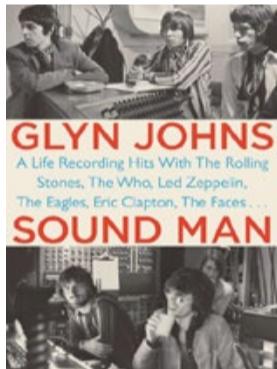
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Books

BY ALLAN JONES

Reviewed this month...



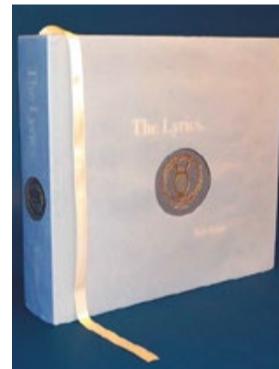
Sound Man: A Life Recording Hits With The Rolling Stones, The Who, Led Zeppelin, The Eagles, Eric Clapton, The Faces...

Glyn Johns

BLUE RIDER PRESS

8/10

GLYN JOHNS WAS 17 when, in August 1959, he started work as an assistant engineer at ICB, then London's leading independent recording studio. Nearly everything at the time was still recorded in mono, stereo mixes and multi-track consoles yet to come, along with many other innovations that would revolutionise the way records were made. Johns, of course, went on to engineer, mix or produce landmark albums by many of the biggest names in rock music, but not the least of **Sound Man**'s many pleasures are his descriptions of the pioneering early days of his apprenticeship and the studio protocols of the era. There was, for instance, a rigid dress code, from which no-one was exempt. Engineers and their assistants were expected to always wear a jacket, collar and tie. Studio technicians wore white coats, as if they were in a laboratory. The various formalities may have



The Lyrics: Since 1962
Bob Dylan

Edited by Christopher Ricks, Lisa Nemrow and Julie Nemrow

SIMON & SCHUSTER

7/10

rankled, but what Johns learned in this often strict environment proved invaluable as his career took off, even as many of his original mentors floundered, unable to meet the challenges of recording rock bands at unprecedented volume, when previously, as he wryly observes, "the loudest sound anyone had recorded was the cannon in the 1812 Overture."

The book is rich with wide-ranging anecdotes about the many artists and bands Johns has worked with – who in addition to those mentioned in *Sound Man*'s lengthy subtitle include Bob Dylan, The Beatles, The Kinks, Neil Young, The Band, Steve Miller, The Clash, John Hiatt and, more recently, Ryan Adams, Band Of Horses and Benmont Tench – but he's often a little tight-lipped. You often wish for greater candour, less polite opinion of the musicians who've tested his patience, like Keith Richards, whose anarchic timekeeping he clearly found exasperating. What, as an example, provoked the row with Keith 10 days into the recording of *Black And Blue* that ended up with Johns walking out on the band? Johns is tantalisingly vague.

In fact, there are few people he's worked with about whom he is openly critical, among them the Eagles' odious Glenn Frey and, surprisingly, Mick Taylor, who after only a short time with the Stones was "an insufferable egomaniac". After one petulant strop, Johns had him thrown out of the studio by an embarrassed Mick Jagger, for whom as a favour Johns was mixing a track from *Exile On Main Street*, an album engineered by his younger brother, Andy, whose time in the band's decadent orbit led directly to his heroin addiction, something that Johns acknowledges without further comment.

The book ends ruefully, Johns largely disillusioned by what the music business has become, unsure by now even of his own place in it, quietly yearning for a time of greater adventure, free of corporate restriction, now gone, never, he thinks, to be repeated. "I may well have had the best of it," he writes, in sober reflection, looking back at over 50 extraordinary years, clearly not expecting contradiction.

► **The Lyrics: Since 1962** follows three previous volumes of Bob Dylan's collected song lyrics – *Writings And Drawings* (1973), *Lyrics 1962-1985* (1985) and *Lyrics 1962-2001* (2004). This sumptuous new edition updates the content to include the lyrics from *Modern Times*, *Tell Tale Signs*, *Together Through Life*, *Tempest* and *Another Self Portrait* and claims to be the most comprehensive gathering of the words to Dylan songs as sung on the original recorded versions and the changes subsequently made to these words, usually in performance, but also in alternative versions of the songs that have appeared on the Bootleg Series.

For the money-no-object Dylan fan with cash still to spare after happily coughing up over £100 for *The Basement Tapes Complete*, the book may prove just as irresistible. It's a beautiful thing, a limited edition of 3000 copies, 500 of which will be on sale in the UK, at £125 a pop. Be warned, though. You'll need a shed to keep it in. It's roughly a foot square, six inches thick, over 1000 pages, with the original lyrics printed on the left-hand page and alterations discreetly printed on the opposite page, which is left blank when there have been no revisions, which means there's often enough white space for it to be mistaken for the wall of an igloo. It also weighs as much as a car battery, and so is useless in its enormous bulk as a handy reference, something you could easily hold and leaf through.

And despite their scrupulous attention to the songs' variant incarnations, the editors admit that it is hardly definitive. How many changes to these lyrics, minor or otherwise, have there been in performances they have not listened to? And how to render the impact of changes to the songs wrought not only by amendments to the original texts but also via the variables of Dylan's delivery of the songs in concert? The version of, say, "Tangled Up In Blue" on 1984's *Real Live* is startling not only because of the heavily revised third-person lyrics but also the feverish eccentricity of Dylan's vocal performance, which several times borders on a hysteria impossible to replicate on the page, however elegant the typeface in which the words are printed.

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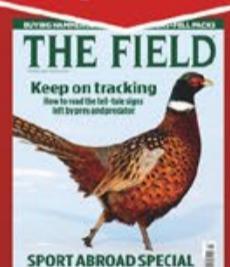


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Not Fade Away

Fondly remembered this month...



IAN McLAGAN

Small Faces, Faces and Stones keyboardist

1945-2014

“THE SMALL FACES were four characters who really got on well, and we found the same thing with the Faces,” Ian McLagan told this writer in 2011. “We were lucky, really. I always laugh when I hear about bands having fights with each other, because for us it was all just lots of fun. And that’s how I live. There’s something to be said for playing music for money,

but that’s not the ultimate point of it.”

An engaging presence in both the Small Faces and the Faces, McLagan typified the boozy bonhomie of British rock in the latter half of the '60s and early '70s. A highly talented keyboardist, bringing fat helpings of soul and R'n'B to the Small Faces' impish mod-pop, McLagan's creative opportunities nevertheless tended to be limited in the Small Faces, largely due to the songwriting dominance of Steve Marriott and Ronnie Lane. It wasn't until 1968's psychedelic concept piece, *Odgens' Nut Gone Flake*, that he fully came to the fore on memorable tunes like “Happydaystotown”, “The Hungry Intruder” and the entirely self-penned “Long Ago And Worlds Apart”, on

which he also sang lead. There was stiff competition in the Faces, too, in the shape of Lane, Rod Stewart and Ronnie Wood, but McLagan co-wrote a number of key tracks, among them “Cindy Incidentally”, “You're So Rude” and “Three Button Hand Me Down”.

Like many suburban youngsters in post-war Britain, Hounslow-born McLagan was first stirred by the possibilities of rock'n'roll. But it was the warm, swirling sounds of Jimmy Smith, Booker T and Georgie Fame that made him want to take up the Hammond organ. He began his professional career with The Muleskinners and then The Boz People (fronted by future King Crimson/Bad Company bassist Boz Burrell), before Small Faces manager Don Arden recruited him in November 1965. Ronnie Lane later told McLagan that he'd been poached as Jimmy Winston's replacement after the band had read a rave review of a Boz People show in *Beat Instrumental*.

When Marriott quit to form Humble Pie in 1969, McLagan, Lane and drummer Kenney Jones brought in Wood and Stewart from The Jeff Beck Group. The Faces' good-time rock'n'breeze found success in both the UK and the US, where live gigs would invariably finish with the band in a drunken heap after a mass rendition of “We'll Meet Again” or The Marx Brothers' “One Last Sweet Cheerio”. McLagan also played on most of Rod Stewart's early solo LPs, from his 1969 debut to 1974's *Smiler*.

The Faces' dissolution in 1975 hardly slowed McLagan's workrate. Keith Richards asked him to tour as the Stones' sideman soon after, while his most telling recorded contribution was the Wurlitzer piano that underpinned 1978's “Miss You”. Interestingly, McLagan claimed in a 2004 interview that Pete Townshend had asked him to join The Who around the same time, but he was already committed to the Stones.

His own work, beginning with 1979's *Troublemaker*, coincided with the formation of his backing troupe, the Bump Band. It was no surprise that McLagan was much in demand as a session player in the '80s and '90s, lending his skills to the likes of Bob Dylan, Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt, Bruce Springsteen and Paul Westerberg, as well as several tours with Billy Bragg's band, The Blokes. The last decade found him especially prolific on the solo front, issuing a series of well-received albums, the most recent being this year's excellent *United States*. Paying tribute after McLagan's death in his adopted home of Austin, Texas, Rod Stewart declared himself “absolutely devastated. Ian McLagan embodied the true spirit of the Faces.”



BOBBY KEYS

Rolling Stones saxophonist

1943-2014

KEITH RICHARDS' LIFE wasn't always generous in its appraisal of those he'd played with over the years, but Bobby Keys was a notable exception. The imposing Texan, a "great saxophone player and my closest pal", was hailed as "a soul of rock'n'roll, a solid man, also a depraved maniac". Keys proved an ideal foil as member of the Stones' extended family. He and Richards shared a similar appetite for drugs, drink and all-round excess, as well as a fierce love of American R'n'B, blues and rock'n'roll.

Beginning in 1969, Keys' association with the Stones lasted for the rest of his life, broken only by an enforced departure entirely of his own doing. The story goes that he failed to show for rehearsal during the Belgian leg of the Stones' 1973 tour of Europe. Richards found him in his hotel room, blithely unconcerned, bathing in

Dom Pérignon champagne with a French groupie. Despite sporadic appearances over the next few years, the fallout with Mick Jagger wasn't fully resolved until 1982, when Keys was finally accepted back as a permanent member of the touring party.

Perhaps his most famous moment with the Stones was the buzzing solo on "Brown Sugar", though other notable examples of Keys at full tilt include "Can't You Hear Me Knocking", "Rip This Joint", "Emotional Rescue" and his recording debut with the band, "Live With Me". Charlie Watts also credited him with devising the rhythm of "Ventilator Blues". Indeed, Keys made vital contributions to the superior end of the Stones' catalogue: *Let It Bleed*, *Sticky Fingers*, *Exile On Main Street* and *Emotional Rescue*.

His career would've been impressive enough had he never even met them. Keys started out on the road aged 15, touring with Bobby Vee and Buddy Holly. Entirely self-taught, he never learned to read music. "I come strictly from feeling," he explained later. "And that feeling comes from rock'n'roll." The first half of the '70s

found him appearing on albums by Joe Cocker (*Mad Dogs & Englishmen*), George Harrison (*All Things Must Pass*), Dr John (*The Sun, Moon & Herbs*), the Faces (*Long Player*) and Lynyrd Skynyrd (*Second Helping*), as well as being a serial performer on works by his drinking buddies Harry Nilsson and John Lennon. Keys was also a member of the entourage that recorded famous bootleg *A Toot And A Snore In '74*, the last known studio session between Lennon and Paul McCartney. Meanwhile, his own discography ran to a self-titled instrumental LP in 1972 (featuring Eric Clapton, George Harrison, Leslie West and others) and 1975's "Gimmie The Key" on Ringo Starr's Ring O'Records. Keys' highs and lows were chronicled in the 2012 autobiography, *Every Night's A Saturday Night*.

Most recently, he played with the Stones on this year's 14 On Fire tour. "The Rolling Stones are devastated by the loss of their very dear friend and legendary saxophone player," said a statement. "Bobby made a unique musical contribution to the band since the 1960s. He will be greatly missed."

NICK TALBOT

Gravenhurst singer and songwriter

1977-2014

Nick Talbot, who has died suddenly at the age of 37, was better known as Gravenhurst, under whose moniker he released four albums on Warp. He began in Bristol in the mid-'90s, exploring his love of dream-pop with Assembly Communications. At the turn of the millennium he co-founded Silent Age Records as a repository for his own music as well as artists like SJ Esau, War Against Sleep and Exercise One. Talbot's ever-evolving work with Gravenhurst was informed by various strains – '60s folk, '90s

shoegaze, electronica, '70s space-rock – best served on 2005's *Fires In Distant Buildings* and *The Western Lands* (2007). At its heart lay Talbot's delicate voice and intricate guitar textures, perhaps most explicit on his final release, 2012's *The Ghost In Daylight*. He was also a respected freelance journalist and maintained a weblog, *The Police Diver's Notebook*.

BOB MONTGOMERY

Songwriter, producer

1937-2014

Texans Bob Montgomery and Buddy Holly first hooked up at

Hutchinson Junior High School, in their native Lubbock, in 1949. Billed as Buddy & Bob, the pair began performing at local gatherings, which eventually led to a weekly radio slot on KDAV and a series of demos. Alas, the partnership floundered when Decca offered Holly a solo deal in 1956. Montgomery nevertheless co-wrote a handful of Holly's most enduring songs, chiefly "Heartbeat", "Wishing" and "Love's Made A Fool Of You". After moving to Nashville in the '60s, he founded publishing company House Of Gold Music (overseeing hits for Alabama, Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers) and produced Bobby Goldsboro's mega-selling "Honey".

BIG BANK HANK

Sugarhill Gang rapper

1956-2014

Aspiring New York rapper Henry Lee Jackson was working at an Englewood pizzeria when fellow employee Joey Robinson Jr invited him to audition for his mother. Sylvia Robinson, an ex-soul singer turned record executive, was looking for an act to showcase her new hip-hop label, Sugar Hill. As Big Bank Hank, Jackson duly became one-third of the Sugarhill Gang, whose debut single, "Rapper's Delight", was released at the back end of 1979. The song, based around a sample of Chic's

CLIVE PALMER

Incredible String Band co-founder, solo artist

1943-2014

JOE BOYD'S FIRST encounter with banjoist Palmer was a memorable one. As recalled in memoir *White Bicycles*, the producer saw Palmer and Robin Williamson at an Edinburgh folk club in 1965, performing traditional Scottish music as if it had been dragged over the Appalachians via Morocco and Bulgaria. It was an exotic combination that, with the addition of Mike Heron, begat the Incredible String Band. Having signed them to Elektra, Boyd helmed their self-titled debut in '66. Soon after, Palmer, "a true rebel who didn't care a fig for my ambitions", left to travel to Afghanistan and India. He returned to Britain in 1968, moving to Cornwall and founding the Famous Jug Band. *Sunshine Possibilities* arrived the following year, though Palmer then quit to form the Stockroom Five and, in 1970, the Indian-scented Temple Creatures. Clive's Original Band (COB), lasted longer and issued two early '70s albums, both now venerated as psych-folk classics. Palmer reunited with the ISB for gigs in 1999. There followed two solo LPs, *All Roads Lead To Land* (2004) and 2008's *The Land Of No Return*, before he started up The Clive Palmer Band. Former COB bandmate Mick Bennett called him "skilful, dogged, creative, artistic, one-minded, charismatic, authoritative, unconventional and masterful", while noting that "none of them quite do him justice".



The Incredible String Band, 1966: (l-r) Clive Palmer, Robin Williamson, Mike Heron

"Good Times", became rap's first commercial hit, making the *Billboard* Top 40 and landing them a No 3 success in the UK. It went on to sell over two million copies.

JIMMY RUFFIN

Soul vocalist

1936-2014

It was only through dogged persistence that Jimmy Ruffin came to record the song that made him a superstar. "What Becomes Of The Brokenhearted" was initially written for The Spinners, signed to Motown offshoot VIP, but Ruffin persuaded co-writer James Dean that his would be a better voice for

the lovelorn anguish of its lyric. Issued in 1966, the ballad made the Top 10 at both ends of the Atlantic and established him as one of Motown's premier soul singers. He swiftly followed up with further US hits "I've Passed This Way Before" and "Gonna Give Her All The Love I've Got". Yet it was the UK market that proved the most durable. Ruffin, elder brother of The Temptations' David, landed three more British successes between 1968-'70: "Farewell Is a Lonely Sound", "I'll Say Forever My Love" and "It's Wonderful (To Be Loved By You)". Robin Gibb and Blue Weaver co-wrote and produced 1980's *Sunrise*, which spawned another Top 10 hit with "Hold On

(To My Love)". Ruffin set up home in Britain later in the decade, leading to collaborations with Paul Weller (miners' benefit "Soul Deep"), Heaven 17 and Maxine Nightingale, before returning to Las Vegas.

MIKE BURNET

Wizzard saxophonist

1944-2014

Inspired by Roland Kirk and Junior Walker, saxophonist Mike Burney began his professional career in 1968 with Billy Fury. By the early '70s he'd joined Roy Wood's Wizzard, for whom he also played clarinet and flute. Burney's sax riffs were a key element of the group's busy sound across three albums and numerous hit singles, including festive chestnut "I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday". The B-side, incidentally, was Burney's own "Rob Roy's Nightmare (A Bit More HA)". His other major gig was an eight-year stint in The Syd Lawrence Orchestra, while an impressive CV included work for The Beach Boys, Memphis Slim, Steve Winwood, Sonny Boy Williamson and Chaka Khan.

STONER

Doctors Of Madness bassist

1949-2014

Hosting his *Planet Rock* show in late November, Def Leppard's Joe Elliott paid tribute to Doctors Of Madness bassist (and occasional vocalist)

Stoner by playing "Mainlines", an avant-rock epic from 1976's *Late Night Movies, All Night Brainstorms*. A month earlier he'd joined him and the band for a reunion show at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall. Stoner, aka Colin Bentley, recorded three albums with Doctors Of Madness, seen as a crucial link between prog and punk, until they split in 1978. He later formed the Explorers (with TV Smith) and, most recently, Malvern-based trio, The Pull. Ex-colleague Richard Strange said his "contribution to the Doctors was immeasurable and defined our sound".

CHERRY WAINER

Lord Rockingham's XI organist

1935-2014

"I was entirely self-taught," explained organist Cherry Wainer in one of her last interviews, "mostly by applying what I knew on piano to organ. I wanted to be the female Jimmy Smith." Perched behind a white-leather Hammond studded with diamantés, South African-born Wainer was a flamboyant fixture of Lord Rockingham's XI, the house band on '50s TV show *Oh Boy!*. The ensemble, mostly session players led by Harry Robinson, scored a UK No 1 in 1958 with "Hoots Mon", a rocked-up version of an old Scottish folk tune. *Oh Boy!* chief Jack Good negotiated a solo deal for "the female Liberace", but success proved oddly elusive. ROB HUGHES



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LISTEN TO WHAT THE MAN SAID?

A big thankyou for the latest *Ultimate Music Guide* on Paul McCartney. An excellent and long-overdue assessment of his hugely underrated solo career. One little grumble, though. While I appreciate the album reviews are based on the subjective opinions of individual writers, some of the songs' star ratings are bizarre. Are half-arsed, repetitive jams like "Mumbo" and "Really Love You" (both given four stars) really vastly better than gorgeous, richly melodic and immaculately constructed songs like "Tomorrow", "Love In Song", "Beautiful Night" (all two stars) and "Heaven On A Sunday" (one star)?

While the variety of Macca's output is one of the many things which sets it apart, it seems some of your critics have fallen into the hipness trap of valuing his more goofy, off-the-wall numbers way more than the stellar songcraft which has made him such a heavyweight. It's a viewpoint which today sees the sketchy, erratic *McCartney II* lauded to the skies, while majestic, fully realised albums like *Tug Of War* and *Flowers In The Dirt* are largely forgotten. But really, it's like saying "Wild Honey Pie" or "Why Don't We Do It In The Road" are better than "Here, There And Everywhere". Nonsense.

But this is a minor quibble – I'm here to praise, not bemoan. The edition was otherwise fantastic from start to finish, a joy to read. I've got literally hundreds of books and magazines on The Beatles, and this is probably the first even-handed, comprehensive look at Macca's solo output I've seen, putting it into proper context and acknowledging how great a lot of his work really is. The interviews were a treat, too. Well done to everyone involved in putting it together.

Jonathan Slater, via email

THIS WHEEL'S NOT ON FIRE

It's remarkable in all the press hoopla about the release of the complete *Basement Tapes* that everyone still clings to Dylan's James Dean-esque telling of how



his life-altering motorcycle accident occurred – "wheel locked, I went flying" – when a more realistic account is right under their noses. At the end of chapter five of longtime Dylan colleague Victor Maymudes' recently-released memoir, *Another Side Of Bob Dylan: A Personal History On The Road And Off The Tracks* (constructed posthumously from audio tapes by his son Jacob), he tells his version of what happened that day:

"Bob and his wife, Sara Lownds, were using the Ford station wagon to move some things over to their new place. The car was packed and Sara was at the wheel, Bob was in front on his motorcycle and, in slow motion, simply fell over. He was going about one mile an hour, not fast enough to sustain his balance. When he tipped over he tried to compensate by turning the wheel sharply into the direction he was

falling, but that only amplified his descent into the ground. He hit his head, hurt his neck and was fairly banged up from such a simple accident."

So much for the mystique of the crash. As they said in ...*Liberty Valance*, best print the legend. **Stephen Conn, Las Cruces, New Mexico**

ALL THROUGH THE CD

Clearing out an old residence of mine recently, I found boxes full of old issues of *Uncut* – I've been buying the magazine almost from its inception. That's a lot of print, and a lot of free CDs, all of which are still on my shelves. Like many a correspondent to your letters pages, I have been introduced to a great deal of wonderful music through your magazine, music I might otherwise have missed. And it continues. The current

issue has an excellent piece on the great Jesus And Mary Chain, among other treats, and on the CD, fine tunes from Hookworms, Greylag, Meatbodies and particularly Sleater-Kinney, who I will definitely be investigating much more. One thing – I think it was the rockiest and best cover CD for a while, so perhaps more noisy stuff, and a little less Americana? **Seán Hickey, Sligo, Ireland**

...It made my day when I read that you were getting a new editor. The magazine had become stale and needed a good kick up the arse. However, I see the old editor is still putting together the free CD each month. C'mon guys, same old tosh and personal preferences of that guy. You need a new approach with focus on some genuine new music and bands. Sure, there are the odd new gems there, but they are far outweighed by the usual drivel. I expect more from my favourite music magazine – it's why I started buying it back in the 1990s.

Daniel Caruso, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

IT WON'T BE WRONG

After reading the review of Roger McGuinn's gig at Manchester, I was pleased that I decided not to invest a lot of time and money attending at least one of the recent UK gigs. I have done so for as many years as I can remember, but have become more than a little bored with the same old Byrds stories. They are told on every tour, and appear on his CD/DVD *Stories, Songs & Friends*. The recent sets contain 50 per cent Byrds material, and yet he is not interested in one final 50th anniversary tour with Messrs Crosby and Hillman. This would be an opportunity to erase the disappointment of the 1973 reunion album and to play Byrds material with two other original members.

Grahame Reed, via email

I KNOW WHAT I LIKE...

The Genesis article in the December 2014 issue was quite interesting. Fans of the band seem pretty divided as to which "version" of

CROSSWORD

WIN!



Three copies
of REM's IRS
singles boxset

the band they admired the most. The analogy to Monty Python made me think, "Yes, we all loved the original version, and then followed the subsequent versions and spin-offs whether we liked them or not."

For me, the apex of prog rock has always been "The Cinema Show" from *Selling England By The Pound*. The playing is simply breathtaking, especially Tony Banks' fluid keyboards and Phil Collins' athletic syncopation. Absolutely beautiful by all the band members. I stayed with them for a while, found *Lamb* had its moments, but was ultimately impenetrable, and finally lost interest in anything after *Wind & Wuthering*. Ten years back, I was working at XM Radio's HQ in Washington DC. Steve Hackett came in for a live appearance on air. I brought in all my vinyl sleeves to have him autograph. When I presented *Selling England...*, Steve sighed and said, "Thanks for bringing that one in. I've always thought that was the band's finest moment." I couldn't agree with him more.

Roger Williams, via email

2014 REVISITED

I really enjoy your magazine and I always look forward to the January issue with all the 'best of' lists. 2014 – in my humble opinion – has not been a remarkable year, with a lot of so-so releases, some OK ones, and one towering above all else, namely the Swans' *To Be Kind*, with its beauty of discipline/discipline of beauty, its scale and vastness. Reading your list, I miss records like Hamilton Leithauser's *Black Hours*, Syd Arthur's *Sound Mirror* and The Phantom Band's *Strange Friend*. Anyway, lists are not to be taken seriously!

Poul Jupont, Denmark

...I agree on the whole with your top 20, including Swans, Sun Kil Moon, Sharon Van Etten, War On Drugs etc. I'm also pleased by the lack of U2 anywhere in the Top 75. However two of my favourites from this year were nowhere in sight – *The Silver Globe* by Jane Weaver, and *Last War* by Haley Bonar. Both fit the description noted in your editor's letter, of artists who've been making music in the margins for a while and produced breakthrough records in 2014, which I think is an encouraging sign against the commercial short-termism of the industry machine.

Iain Carey, via email

...I think you forgot Alt-J's album?
Louise Hunter, via email



HOW TO ENTER

The letters in the shaded squares form an anagram of a song by David Bowie. When you've worked out what it is, send your answer to: *Uncut* February 2015 Xword Comp, 8th floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St, London SE1 0SU. The first correct entry picked at random will win a prize. Closing date: Monday, January 26, 2015. This competition is only open to European residents.

CLUES ACROSS

- 1 Could this be music? Could this be their big break? It can't be both for AC/DC (4-2-4)
- 8 Don't let go of singles by Alabama Shakes or Twin Atlantic (4-2)
- 9 Is this our destination, to be at a Sharon Van Etten performance? (3-2-5)
- 10 Nirvana type music on album by The Walkmen (6)
- 12 "_____ and open deep conversations, they get me nowhere", 1991 (3-5)
- 15+17A+24D XTC album that enabled them to bang out their message (5-3-5)
- 18 (See 4 down)
- 20+35A "Gonna have fun in the city/Be with my girl, she's so pretty", 1966 (6-2-2-4)
- 21+2D San Francisco rockers could be her clue, perhaps (4-5)
- 22 Producer for Brian Eno, The Orb and Embrace takes part in the lottery (3)
- 23 Their albums include C'mon and The Invisible Way (3)
- 25 Alex Chilton's album included in the cassette (3)
- 27 Having that bloodshot look from The War On Drugs (3-4)
- 30 (See 25 down)
- 31 Happy Mondays disc displayed in the showflat (3)
- 32 Don't keep hold of albums by Nada Surf or Avril Lavigne (3-2)
- 34 It's that time of the year for a Patti Smith album (6)
- 35 (See 20 across)

ANSWERS: TAKE 211

ACROSS

- 1 Popular Problems, 9 Abandon, 10+25A Country Girl, 11 Let Me Pass, 12 Brave, 13 Name, 14 Shady Lane, 18 Mama, 22 Animals, 24 E.C., 29 Cud, 30+33A City

To City, 32 Remi, 34+31A Yes I Am.

DOWN

- 1 Playland, 2 Phantom Radio, 3 Lodger, 4 Rentals, 5 Rocks, 6 Blue Bayou, 7+19A Extra Texture, 15 Anxiety, 16 Americans,

17 Barat, 19 Testify, 20+27A Hold Out, 21 Baker, 23 Music, 26 Rum, 28+8D Poly Styrene.

HIDDEN ANSWER
"Drifter's Escape"

XWORD COMPILED BY:
Trevor Hungerford

UNCUT

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MY LIFE IN MUSIC

John Grant

Dear God! A master singer-songwriter reveals the records that changed his life

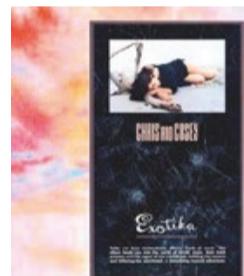


A formative synth experience

Vangelis

Blade Runner (Main Titles) 1982

I heard this when I first saw *Blade Runner*, in that opening scene when they're flying over Los Angeles. I was already smitten with the first couple of Eurythmics records, and Abba's "Eagle", but I knew from the time I heard this that I couldn't get enough of those synth pads. It's one of those things that becomes part of your musical vocabulary. I'm always trying to get back to that in some way with the synth solos in my songs.



A life-changing album

Chris And Cosey

Exotika 1987

This entire album was a life-changer for me. Since I heard it when it first came out, I really haven't gone through any periods in my life where I have stopped listening to it. It's just amazing. The first track, "Confession", is currently my favourite on the album. There's a beautiful drum machine beat going on, very gorgeous. I love the simplicity of Chris And Cosey's stuff, the addition and subtraction of sounds and the creation of space and tension.

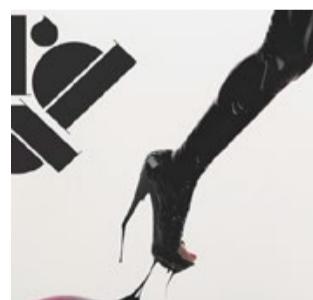


A masterpiece of an album

XTC

Skylarking 1986

This is a love affair that has never stopped. It introduced me to "Dear God"... For me, growing up, there was never any question [of whether God existed], and this was the first time I heard somebody challenging God and saying, "What's up with all this bullshit?" I love the bossa nova beat on "Another Satellite", it might be the reason that I always want that beat on my records. The entire album is a masterpiece, though.

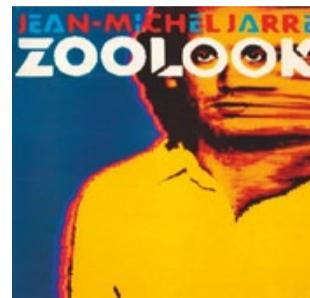


A comforting record

Bernard Fevre

Black Devil Disco Club Presents The Strange World Of... 2009

This guy has been making electronic music since the '70s. This is an update of an album he did back then [1977]. I was going through this breakup that I have written about, and I listened to this constantly. It just comforts me, the most beautiful synth sounds put together in strange ways. When people connect to music it's through feeling like one is being understood – and that's what I feel here, like I could have made this record.



A song I lost for 25 years

Jean Michel Jarre

Ethnicolor 1984

I heard this in the garage of my parents' house sitting in the car when I was 16 or 17. It was one of the most epic things I'd ever heard. It's a melancholy mix of classical and cinematic. But there was no labelling on the cassette so I had no idea what it was. It took me 25 years to find it again. I was always looking for that song. Finally, I made it to this album, *Zoolook*, and when I heard "Ethnicolor" after all that time it was just as incredible as when I heard it 25 years before.



An autumn soundtrack

Cocteau Twins

Athol-Brose 1988

I'd listened the shit out of *Victorialand*, *Treasure*, *Head Over Heels*, *Garlands*, "Tiny Dynamite" and "Love's Easy Tears". When this came out, I was living in Germany. Heidelberg is really beautiful in the autumn, the city is surrounded by fields, it's built on either side of a river and there are these two mountains – in the autumn it looks like this metallic quilt. "Athol-Brose" never fails to give me that feeling of autumn. It was the perfect soundtrack for me at the time.



A 21st-Century album that blows me away

Goldfrapp

Black Cherry 2003

I've looked forward to every Goldfrapp album the way I did to new Abba records when I was a kid. When I first heard *Black Cherry*, I felt like someone had taken all the things that I love and smooshed it together into this beautiful ball of music. I was like a pig in garbage. It's classical, cinematic, really stark, and there could be no more beautiful combination than that. They're one of those groups who can do no wrong.



A soundtrack for driving in the city

Kondo IMA

Brain War 1991

In the liner notes, this is described as music for living in the big city. So I always imagined driving around in this old-school, muscle car convertible listening to this. It's quite jazzy, and the singer sometimes sounds like David Bowie. It sounds like a Japanese James Bond soundtrack! I have never heard anything like it and you can definitely hear this in my music too. Even if it's not obvious, it's in there.

John Grant & The BBC Philharmonic Orchestra's *Live In Concert* album is out now on Bella Union



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