

ALABAMA SHAKES' NEW SOUL POWER!

UNCUT

ASTRAL WEEKS & BEYOND

VAN MORRISON

'A lot of my songs
are difficult...'

The strange
secrets of his
best albums

IAN ANDERSON
ADAM CURTIS
CANNIBAL OX
XYLOURIS WHITE
THE HANDSOME FAMILY

40 PAGES OF
REVIEWS

KURT COBAIN

BILL FAY

TOWNES VAN ZANDT

D'ANGELO

GODSPEED YOU!
BLACK EMPEROR

AND MORE...

COMEBACK
EXCLUSIVES!

RIDE

'We were the
shoegazing
Monkees'

THE
REPLACEMENTS

'Hopefully
no-one will die!'

BLUR

'It's sci-fi folk music'

MOTÖRHEAD

40 years of
rock'n'roll
overkill

AND

BRYAN FERRY
TODD RUNDGREN
PORTISHEAD
LYNYRD SKYNYRD
THE B-52S

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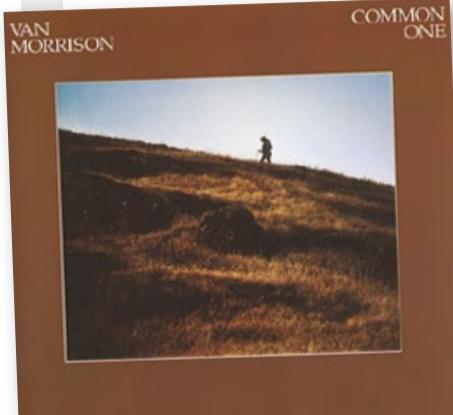
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Are we rolling?



THIS PAST WEEK or so, I've been reading Richard King's new book, *Original Rockers*, ostensibly a memoir of the author's years working in a Bristol record shop, Revolver, some 20 years ago. I first came across King around that time, when he used to play guitar in certain incarnations of Flying Saucer Attack, one of the most interesting bands to develop the gauzy, cacophonous possibilities suggested by My Bloody Valentine. At live shows, he played with a physical abandon somewhat at odds with the furrowed-brow concentration favoured by most of his bandmates; afterwards, he was equally vigorous and entertaining to talk with about music.

That nuanced, eclectic knowledge, it now transpires, was mostly garnered behind the counter in that Bristol store, and is something that makes *Original Rockers* (reviewed properly by Allan on page 117) far transcend the sentimental genre epitomised by *High Fidelity*. Time and again through the book, King goes off on long, meticulous reveries about specific records: a Can bootleg called *Horrortrip In The Paperhouse*; Keith Hudson's *Pick A Dub*; Virginia Astley's *From Gardens Where We Feel Secure*; Rod Stewart's *Every Picture Tells A Story*. These are romantic epiphanies, but they're also fine music criticism, written with clear-eyed precision as much as literary verve.

Anyhow, I'd just finished the book the other day, when I found myself hanging out at a record stall on Cambridge market, watching the owner sell a copy of *A Saucerful Of Secrets* – not the first, one suspects – to a student, and trying to remember which of the dozen Bill Evans albums in front of me I already owned. Flicking through the crates, I also came across a copy of *Common One*, an album which I often think might be my favourite Van Morrison record, and which is discussed at length as part of Graeme Thomson's engrossing cover story this month.

All my records are currently sequestered in a Hertfordshire barn (long, not remotely interesting, story...), so I had to enlist my family to stop me from buying another *Common One*. I could remember, though, buying my first edition from Woolworths in Retford, having been sent on a journey into the proverbial mystic by the '80s bands who learned so much from Morrison: Dexys Midnight Runners and The Waterboys chief among them. For many of us, I imagine, every trip into a vinyl cave – on April 18, for Record Store Day, maybe? – can trigger the same kind of forensic memories that King articulates so well. And hopefully, every issue of *Uncut* can do a similar job.

Since I took over here, I've had more reader requests for a Van Morrison cover than for any other artist. I've rarely been happier to oblige; it is, after all, too late to stop now...

Thanks, as ever,

John Mulvey, Editor

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INSTANT KARMA!

THIS MONTH'S REVELATIONS FROM THE WORLD OF UNCUT
Featuring GEOFF BARROW | XYLOURIS WHITE | ADAM CURTIS

STILL A TRUE STAR...

IN TODD WE TRUST!

Two new albums, a Roots collaboration, 'Bat Out Of Hell: The Musical', festivals in his Hawaiian back garden...
The current state of TODD RUNDGREN: hyperactive!

TODD RUNDGREN IS coming up for his 67th birthday but he shows no sign of retiring any day soon. He's currently on tour with Ringo Starr's All Starr band ("just played Sarasota, Florida – tomorrow is São Paulo, Brazil"). He's got two albums coming up within a few weeks of each other – *Global* (a solo synth-pop album, recorded on his laptop) and *Runddans* (a collaboration with Norwegian electronicists Hans-Peter Lindstrøm and Emil Nikolaisen). He's also right in the middle of recording another collaboration, this time with The Roots ("I guess it's a bit like the album they did with Elvis Costello – they've been sending me some of their instrumentals and I've been putting vocals

and guitar on"). He's even working on Jim Steinman's long-awaited stage adaptation of *Bat Out Of Hell* ("Jim's enlisted some ridiculously big choral section, so I've effectively signed on as the choirmaster").

Big-name production jobs like *Bat Out Of Hell* have effectively bankrolled Rundgren's wonderfully varied career for more than three decades: the royalties from that album alone have earned him what he describes as a tidy seven-figure sum, although he sold his royalty points to Meat Loaf a few years ago. "It's meant that I'm untethered from commercial pressure," he says. "I've never had to worry about my albums not selling."

Some of us would be quite happy if Rundgren

just carried on making the blissful, Stevie Wonder-ish blue-eyed soul of early '70s LPs like *Something/Anything?*. But Rundgren has spent the past four decades moving into a baffling array of genres – heavy metal, prog, trance, EDM, drill'n'bass, arena rock.

"I guess I've developed a pretty flexible audience," he chuckles. "There's a certain amount of churn, like a revolving door. If they don't like what I'm doing now, they know that I'm never going to record another album like that again. The next one will be completely different."

"I'm well into my sixties now and getting to the point where all my contemporaries are retiring – often retiring permanently, if you know what I mean – and also consuming less music. I don't

"I've always tried to stamp some element of me in everything..."
Todd Rundgren in 2015



want to be a retro artist. I think it's important to pay attention to what's happening in the broader market, and to try and get into that pocket.

"It doesn't necessarily mean you have to copy Katy Perry or Taylor Swift or whatever. There's always going to be something under the radar that's going to have an appeal for me – or at least something contemporary that I can bear to play! The key thing is that I've always tried to stamp some element of me in everything, whether it's in the harmonies, the chord changes, or the song structures."

Runddans, the "Norwegian project" recorded with Lindstrøm and Nikolaisen, emerged after Rundgren addressed the By:Larm music conference in Norway. "While I was there,

I figured that I might as well work with Lindstrøm, as I'd just remixed a song of his called 'Quiet Place To Live,' he says. "We ended up spending the next two and a half years collaborating by email, working on each other's pieces." The result is one long, continuous electronic groove, a warm bath of ambient sounds that blend seamlessly into pulsating techno beats, treated voices and burbling synths.

The *Global* album started as an offshoot from that. "I started one track, 'Global Nation', which didn't really fit onto *Runddans*. When Cherry Red gave me the chance to release an album, and a deadline to produce something for the end of 2014, I jumped at the chance. A deadline like that is often the spur I need."

Rundgren sees *Global* as being "like an '80s record, at the point where new wave moves into synth pop, like Depeche Mode or something". Lyrically, however, it's in a different place. "I wanted a state-of-the-world piece, a response to immersing myself in TV news programmes." As a result, there are references about global warming and environmentalism and the Middle East, and a feminist synth funk track that pays tribute to Rosa Parks and Malala ("*Got too much testosterone/Need a little more progesterone*").

"There is a bit of scolding but, the thing is, I wanted to make a cheerleading, upbeat album, which meant that I had to stop watching the news to finish the record! If you start to get too obsessed with the terrible things that are



happening around the world, you'll never make any art."

Rundgren is flattered that so many unlikely young artists have declared themselves fans of his work. "It does inspire me to check out new stuff. I try and check out new music in the same way that kids do now, which is on YouTube. You start up listening to, I dunno, Skrillex or

something, and end up exploring some arcane areas of electronic music. I found that if I liked anything too much, I'd stop listening to it, otherwise I'd just be trying to copy it."

Rundgren is also continuing with



"I found that if I liked anything too much, I'd stop listening to it, otherwise I'd just be trying to copy it"

his infamous "Toddstocks", where super fans will pay several hundred dollars to hang out with their idol.

"We had one in my home in Hawaii," he says, "where people camped on the lawn and drank my booze. Last year, we took everyone around some breweries in California, which was fun but a bit more touristy. I'm not sure when the next one will be – I'm hoping that we might end up in Havana. That'd be fun."

Does he ever get worried that he'll meet a fanatic like Mark Chapman, who claims he murdered John Lennon in fealty to Rundgren?

"Oh man, you can't live your life like that," he sighs. "If you're gonna make music that affects people, you inevitably have to deal with some weirdness."

JOHN LEWIS

Global is out April 6 on Cherry Red. **Runddans** is out May 5 on Smalltown Supersound

Geoff Barrow, 2015



BIG SCORER

EX_MACHINA

DIGITAL NARRATIVE SCORE BY GEOFF BARROW AND BEN SALISBURY

every note, every drumbeat is there to make an impact, to make a listener feel a certain way," he says. While film music is essentially the opposite – it has to be good, but it's not supposed to poke out!"

Despite this, the pair's soundtrack for *Ex Machina* is a fine example of a score that transcends its parent film. Echoes of *Drokk*'s pulp futurism remain, but this is a subtle, moving work, mixing synth arpeggios with gentle orchestral parts and Mogwai-like builds – an uncanny fit for Garland's cerebral tale of artificial intelligence in beautiful female form. "On most soundtracks, it's like here's an action scene, bring out the kodo drums," says Barrow. "Kind of obvious. But Alex was great. They gave us a very free hand to create an atmosphere."

"There are flashier scores out there, more showy ones," confirms Salisbury. "But we got a real buzz in being part of the film's emotional journey."

Barrow's love for movie soundtracks is well

documented, with Lalo Schifrin a key influence on – and sample source for – early Portishead. As a mark of Barrow's dedication to the medium, Invada have taken to licensing scores to the likes of Nicolas Winding Refn's *Drive* and HBO series *Hannibal* and pressing them to vinyl. "Not being funny, but soundtracks are more interesting than bands now," says Barrow. "The people buying soundtracks are the same people that would buy a Godspeed record, a Boards Of Canada record."

Barrow and Salisbury have embarked on a new soundtrack, currently under wraps – although Barrow can reveal that BEAK> have scored director Tom Geens' forthcoming *Couple In A Hole*. Meanwhile, Portishead have reconvened to play festivals this summer, and the recording of their fourth album continues. "With Portishead, I'm massively over-analytical – it's like being stuck in glue," admits Barrow. "But then you go work on something else and think, this could be a good way of writing a Portishead record." Great news. So a new album this year, perhaps? He laughs. "We're nowhere near." No matter: music's loss is, for now, cinema's gain. LOUIS PATTISON

Geoff Barrow and Ben Salisbury's *Ex Machina* soundtrack is out on Invada on April 10. Portishead play Latitude Festival on Saturday, July 18

“Someone gave me the whole of the BBC sound effects archive...”

The radical filmmaker (and ex-skinhead!) ADAM CURTIS on his use of sound, his dub reggae roots and why music was more progressive during the Cold War...

FOR MORE THAN 20 years, Adam Curtis has written, edited and directed some of the most fascinating documentaries on TV. And, since a “terrible battle” with a composer over musical bars in the early ’90s, the BBC journalist has laced his complex studies of geopolitical, economic and societal structures with his own equally complex soundtracks. In landmark series such as 2002’s *The Century Of Self*, 2011’s *All Watched Over By Machines Of Loving Grace* and this year’s hallucinatory, moving *Bitter Lake*, Bowie and Eno rub shoulders with Kanye West, Nine Inch Nails and Pye Corner Audio. Even Charles Ives and Shostakovich get a look in.

“I began to work out that you could create this incredibly complicated world,” Curtis explains of his method. “If you’re trying to engage people, you should make them look again at something and part of that is to use music in a surprising way. If you put Lotte Lenya over footage of Chairman Mao, you’d look again.”

His documentaries are full of startling, strangely emotional juxtapositions far from any of the usual ‘sad story/sad music’ tropes: in 2004’s Bafta-winning *The Power Of Nightmares*, Donovan’s “Colours” soundtracks footage of the Mujahideen. These heady combinations of sound and vision stem from an equally surprising source, however – dub reggae.

“That’s where I get it all from!” Curtis laughs. “From going to soundsystems on Balham High Road. The idea that you could slam things together and that they’d work. When I was a kid, I was a skinhead. I loved soundclashes... Bringing in a bit from an old reggae song, then a great industrial noise. I just thought it was so adventurous and unlike anything I’d ever heard.”

Despite his “magpie” enjoyment of many current artists, including Mogwai, country singer Elizabeth Cook, and even Meghan Trainor, Curtis believes music has been “stuck” since the early ’90s, a situation he links to the end of the Cold War and



“I loved soundclashes...” Documentary maker Adam Curtis

the subsequent disappearance of alternative ideologies and futures.

“The sad truth, probably, is that cultural forms in a society rather tend to reflect their time,” he says. “Between the ’50s and ’90s was a period of ideological alternatives, theoretically, and when

that went you got stuck with music that just went round and round – maybe we’re in it for the long run, I don’t know.”

Curtis is keen to be seen as a “hack”, rejecting any attempts to pigeonhole his work as that of an artist. And yet, he’s continually branching out from linear storytelling; take 2013’s *Massive Attack v Adam Curtis* event, or his work with Damon Albarn on 2009’s *It Felt Like A Kiss*, or even the narrative experimentation of *Bitter Lake*, which examines the West’s actions in Afghanistan, with clips from BBC news rushes, *Carry On... Up The Khyber* and the Afghan version of *The Thick Of It*. His next project could prove to be even more experimental, too.

“Someone gave me the whole of the BBC sound effects archive,” he enthuses. “I started to mix noises together, like sheep going past, and I wondered about doing a show in which there were no images... Complete darkness, speakers all around, and you’d have to stand there for an hour, as all these noises and music build up and up, until it becomes incredibly romantic, but still has pigs squealing...” **TOM PINNOCK**

Bitter Lake is available on BBC iPlayer until the end of 2015

END OF THE ROAD APPROACHING FAST...

My Morning Jacket and Mark Lanegan join the Uncut fest

YOUR MONTHLY REMINDER that, once again, *Uncut* will be critically involved with the idyllic End Of The Road festival this year. News just in is that **My Morning Jacket**, the **Mark Lanegan Band**, **Saint Etienne**, **Giant Sand**, **Ex Hex**, **Frazey Ford**, **Curtis Harding** and **Houndstooth** are among the latest tranche of fine acts who’ll be playing. They join **The War On Drugs**, **Tame**

Impala, **Sufjan Stevens**, **Future Islands**, **The Unthanks**, **Sleaford Mods**, **Jessica Pratt** and **Natalie Prass** at Larmer Tree Gardens, Dorset, between September 4 and 6. Tickets cost £195, from www.endoftheroadfestival.com. Keep an eye on www.uncut.co.uk, too: there are more big name additions to be announced, coming any day now...

END OF THE ROAD



Jim James of My Morning Jacket

A QUICK ONE

► A special request this month that you spend some time at www.uncut.co.uk, now revamped and much easier to read on your phones, tablets and so forth. Along with news, reviews and playlists, we’ve also added some key features from the *Uncut* archives. Have a look...

► A couple of beautifully curated festivals in the States this summer. Bon Iver’s Justin Vernon (below) and The National’s Aaron Dessner have put together the bill for the first Eaux Claires festival in Wisconsin (July 17-18), also featuring Sufjan Stevens, Low and Hiss Golden Messenger. Meanwhile, Wilco’s Solid Sound festival (North Adams, MA, June 26-28) also features Real



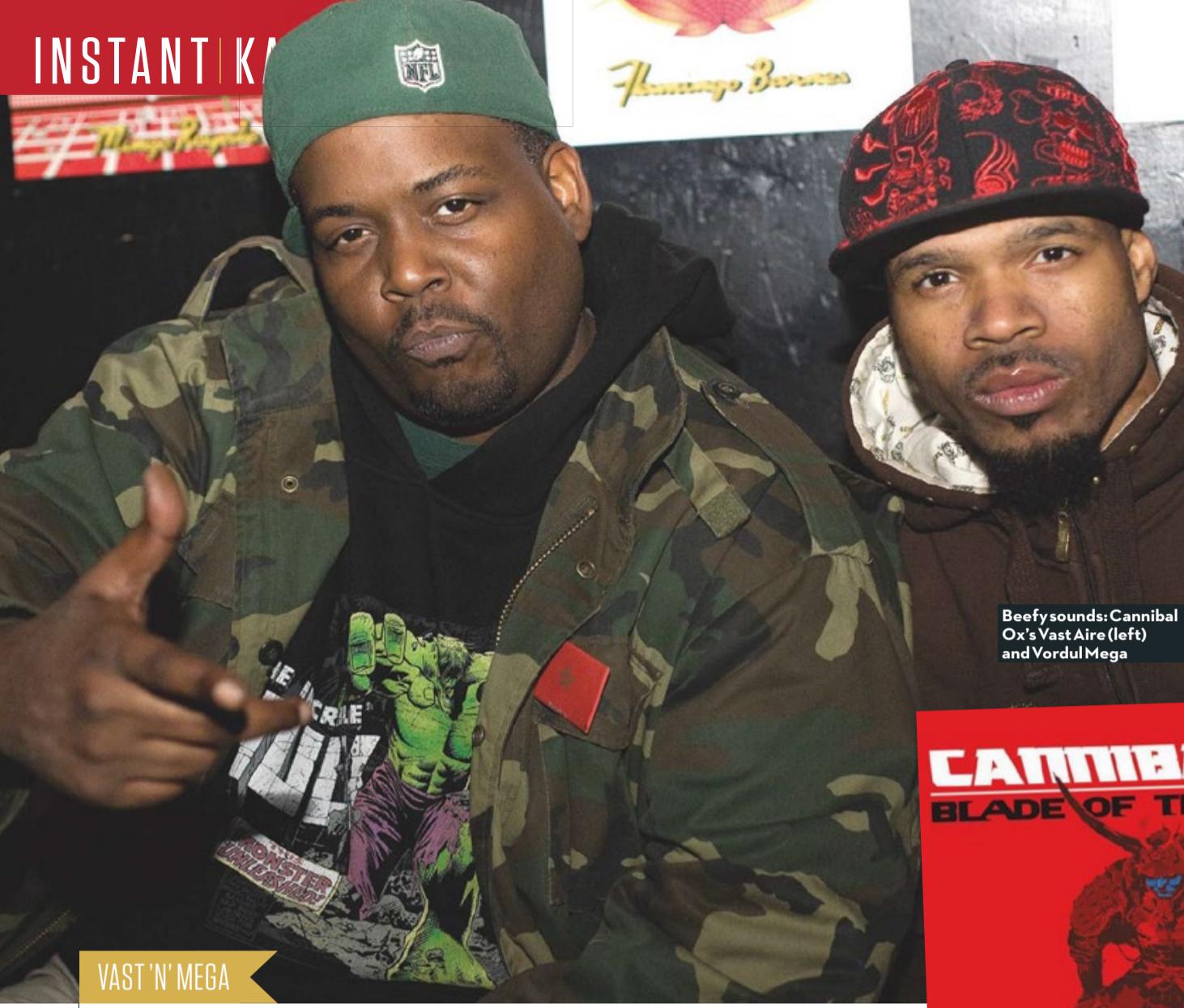
Estate, Jessica Pratt, Ryley Walker and Richard Thompson, whose next album has not coincidentally been produced by Jeff Tweedy.

► Hot on the heels of *The Endless River*, Dave Gilmour’s first solo album in nine years will arrive around the same time as an autumn solo tour.

The European jaunt kicks off in Pula, Croatia on Sept 12 and ends at London’s Royal Albert Hall on Sept 23, 24 and 25.

► Among Record Store Day goodies to brave the queues for on April 18: Bowie and Dylan seven-inches, a “More Roar” 10-inch from Robert Plant, and a new *Psychocandy* live LP from The Jesus & Mary Chain.

INSTANT K



VAST 'N' MEGA

THE YEAR OF THE OX

Welcome back, radical hip-hop legends CANNIBAL OX: "Physically we might be a pigeon, but we're gonna flap our wings and become a phoenix!"

IF YOU GOT this album any quicker than you did, it would have been fake. It would have been because people were begging for it – and that's not why we do music." The rich, rounded voice booming genially down the phone from Harlem belongs to Theodore Arrington III – better known as Vast Aire – who's explaining why he and partner Vordul Mega have taken 14 years to follow up their acclaimed debut as

Cannibal Ox. Released on Definitive Jux, *The Cold Vein* was a benchmark in progressive hip-hop, a gritty and humane reflection of the NYC duo's environment, which featured vivid, abstract raps and grimy soundbeds suggestive of an industrial Wu-Tang.

In the interim, Vast and Vordul have dropped several solo LPs and worked on side-projects, but they're together again – in the wake of old Def Jux boss El-P's renaissance in Run The Jewels – for *Blade Of The*

Ronin. Despite not meeting its financial target, a Kickstarter campaign did raise awareness of the CO reunion, prompting approaches from labels and distributors that have enabled the record's release on their own Iron Galaxy Clique imprint. "The shock that everybody is experiencing is that it's another full-length," considers Vast. "We buckled down. We were both in a broader crew known as the Atoms Family, so

when Cannibal first came out, it was sort of like ['90s New Edition spin-off] Bell Biv DeVoe. We always had our solo ideas, but with Cannibal, it took off. We're here again to push the bar."

In their development from *The Cold Vein* to *Blade Of The Ronin*, Vast sees "a refinement of the maturity that we already had. And there's a slightly different way of conveying lyricism – we understand what we can do with our voices, we understand what we can do with our cadences – but it's more than just the lyricism, it's the songs. Y'all have songs you could sit with and pick apart for the next 15 years. There are whole territories in a two-bar line. It's not just about spitting rhymes to a beat, it's about creating a universe."

Vast agrees that what marks Cannibal Ox out is being bound to neither a corporate master nor creative orthodoxy – hence the Ronin of the title. "We're outsiders, but we still have a code and a dignity. We're not the outlaw

Ronin who does whatever he wants, we're the warrior who doesn't have a feudal lord that tells us where and when to go. What's beautiful about Cannibal Ox is you can't really put a label on us. We can brag with the best of them but, at the end of the day, we're not afraid to talk about a political or spiritual situation. And that's where our phoenix imagery comes from. We physically might be a pigeon – things are going wrong, it's hard, we're living off the scraps of the city – but we're gonna flap our wings and ascend to become a phoenix." SHARON O'CONNELL

Blade Of The Ronin is out now on Iron Galaxy Clique/iHipHop

THE CLASSIFIEDS

THIS MONTH: What a choice of night out! Terry Reid, Fairport, Led Zep, Fleetwood Mac, Pretty Things, Hard Meat! – from *Melody Maker*, April 5, 1969

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KING'S HALL ROMFORD MARKET Easter Monday, 7th April

ROUNDHOUSE LODGE AVE., DAGENHAM Saturday, 5th April

TERRY REID DOORS OPEN 7.30 :: LICENSED BAR

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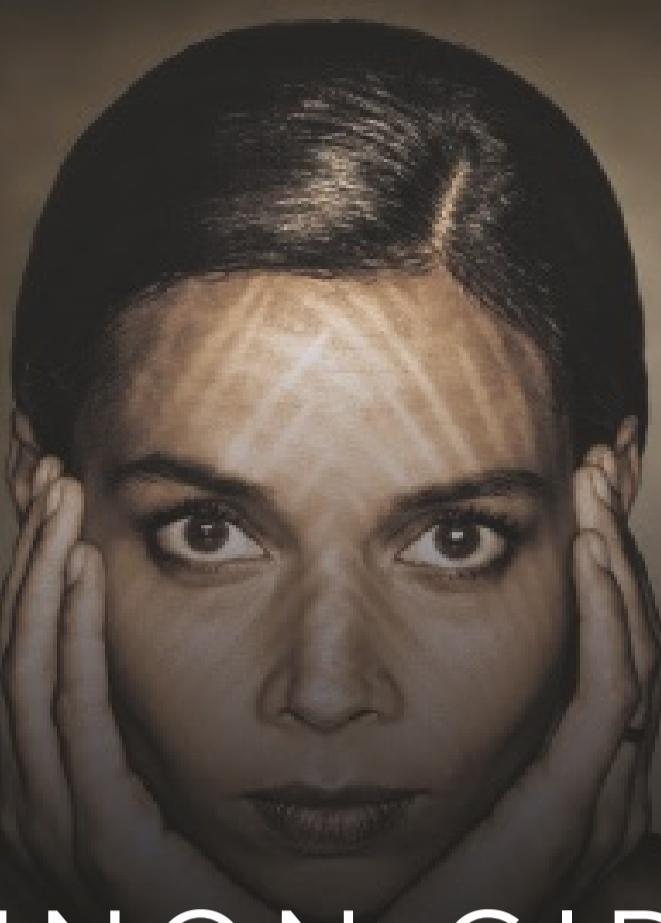
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RHIANNON GIDDENS TOMORROW IS MY TURN

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'Dolly Parton... Nina Simone... Odetta... A striking new American voice harnesses the power of her heroines. **Giddens' wide-ranging solo debut looks set to make the forceful singer a major star.**' *Uncut*

'The album is a showcase for Ms. Giddens' **glorious voice**, which merges an opera singer's detail and a deep connection to Southern roots. She can summon the power of a field holler, Celtic quavers, girlish innocence, bluesy sensuality, gospel exaltation or the pain of slavery. She can sing velvety, long-breathed phrases or rasp and yip like a singer from the backwoods long ago. For all her technical control, her voice is a **perpetually soulful marvel**.' *New York Times*

'The combination of great songs, T Bone Burnett's acoustic-based production and the sumptuous voice of Rhiannon Giddens makes for a classy album. Gorgeous. **An exceptional record**.' *Daily Telegraph*

'An alluring singer of scope and grace.'
Mojo

'Every now and then, an artist comes along whose voice transforms almost any kind of song. Giddens can sing blues and Gaelic jigs, Nashville ballads and vintage jazz, Appalachian laments and sassy R&B. She is a performer who thinks long and hard about how to approach material, yet manages to tap into the emotional core of everything she touches. **Tomorrow Is My Turn more than lives up to expectations. Giddens is utterly in command.**' *Sunday Times*

'Giddens has become **one of the most promising voices in American roots music**. **Tomorrow Is My Turn is a feminist tour of the canon**. Giddens imbues these classics with a freshness and vitality that feels right at home in 2015.'
Rolling Stone

AVAILABLE NOW ON CD, DOWNLOAD AND VINYL



rhiannongiddens.com
nonesuch.com



WE'RE NEW HERE

Greekchic... Giorgos Xylouris and Jim White (and dog)

Xylouris White

Recommended this month: Explosive folk jams from the Cave Of Zeus (via Melbourne)!

WHEN WE SPEAK, Xylouris White (a duo featuring Jim White's drums and Giorgos Xylouris' Cretan lute) have just finished a tour, with Swans, of "all the cold places" in the continental United States. "In Montreal, it was minus 27," Giorgos laughs. "But we loved playing to Swans' crowd."

To Swans fans reared on the apocalyptic doominess of Michael Gira's band, Xylouris White must have offered a glimpse of warmer possibilities, in sunnier climes. Theirs is a music born of the apparently unlikely meeting of White's free-roaming drum chops, honed over 20 years in The Dirty Three, and Xylouris' lute, which improvises on Cretan themes and dances, many hundreds of years old. Neither musicological exercise nor academic improv think-in, the music is spare but warm. You might well hear folk and jazz in it. You might even hear post-punk.

How does a collaboration between a Greek traditional musician and a hairy Australian rocker occur? Easy, they explain, through friendship. Xylouris has lived in Melbourne for a number of years (he has an Australian wife), playing with his own Xylouris Ensemble. When Dirty Three started in the early 1990s, Giorgos would occasionally get up with the band to jam. "Warren [Ellis] gave me space to do my part," he says. "He would stare at my feet and listen to me. I love it every time I play with them."

White discovered the "beautiful, energetic" music of Crete through Giorgos, never thinking he would play it, but when Giorgos performed at a Nick Cave-curated ATP in Australia with his father, the

revered Cretan musician Psarantonis, Jim sat in and the roots of Xylouris White were planted. For Giorgos, the fact that it's taken a long time for the pair to record together is of little consequence.

"All of this 20-25-year period, I wasn't looking for a drummer," he says. "It happened naturally because of Jim. I feel through all this time, we connected strongly – I always knew what he was doing, he was part of my tradition, somehow."

The album the pair have finally made has been produced by Fugazi's Guy Picciotto, and is called *Goats*. The process of making it began when Jim was staying with Giorgos on Crete, when the pair played in a studio owned by Giorgos' friend Marco. They recorded nearly 100 songs overlooking the island of Dia. Goats were everywhere.

"It is a national park for the wild goats of Crete. With horns," says Giorgos, who explains that the goat isn't just a point of wildlife interest, but also

a feature of Greek mythology. "Zeus gave the goat to the human to keep the human alive," he explains.

"Cronos was eating the children – he is Time. Every time a child was born, Cronos would eat him. Zeus escaped – his mum took him above my village, Anogia, and hid in a cave."

"We have a different understanding of *Goats*," smiles Jim. "George says it's a metaphor, an analogy for the lifestyle of the goats. But I just think we're goats. We agree to disagree on that one."

JOHN ROBINSON

I'M YOUR FAN
"Two of the most exciting and lyrical players out there. A rare breed in this day and age."
Warren Ellis



Xylouris White play Glasgow ABC (April 19) and London Shepherd's Bush Empire (20) with Swans, then headline London's Ace Hotel on April 21. *Goats* is out now on Other Music

THE UNCUT PLAYLIST

ON THE STEREO THIS MONTH...

THEE OH SEES

Mutilator Defeated At Last CASTLE FACE
 The busiest hiatus in rock history continues apace, with John Dwyer and co's second garage trance-rock classic since they announced an indefinite 'break'.

MICHAEL HEAD & THE RED ELASTIC BAND

Velvets In The Dark/Koala Bears VIOLETTE
 A second low-key comeback single from the quixotic Shack man, with some fine VU-related advice on heartbreak.

UNKNOWN MORTAL ORCHESTRA

Multi-Love
JAGJAGUWAR
 Ruban Nielson's lo-fi psychadelicists get a moderately funky makeover, with 1970s Stevie Wonder possibly an influence.



Unknown Mortal Orchestra

PAUL WELLER

Saturn's Pattern PARLOPHONE
 Another chapter in the middle-aged renaissance of Weller. Crunchy, soulful, psychedelic and a tiny bit Beefheart, too!

BONNIE STILLWATTER

The Devil Is People TEMPORARY RESIDENCE
 Will Oldham hooks up with a bunch of old post-rock friends for a tantalising glimpse of how things might have turned out if he'd kept Slint as his backing band.

LEON BRIDGES

Lisa Sawyer COLUMBIA
 While James Petralli reinvents himself as Bop English, his White Denim bandmates seem to have discovered, in Bridges, the new Sam Cooke. Not bad.

ROB ST JOHN

Surface Tension SURFACE TENSION
 The inspired sound artist/composer makes beguiling ambient music from field recordings of London's surprisingly bucolic, unsurprisingly toxic River Lea.

BLANCK MASS

Dumb Flesh SACRED BONES
 More martial, post-industrial techno from half of Fuck Buttons, secret stars of the 2012 Olympics Opening Ceremony.

DANIEL BACHMAN

River THREE LOBED
 Immersive new solo set from the Virginian guitarist, one of the most assiduous and gifted latterday John Fahey acolytes.

TODD RUNDGREN/EMIL NIKOLAISEN/HANS-PETER LINDSTRØM

Runddans SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND
 A cosmic disco summit, convened by ace producer Lindstrøm and chaired by the inexhaustibly out-there Rundgren.

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

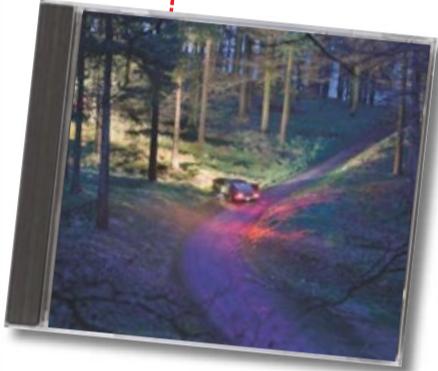
fresh produce



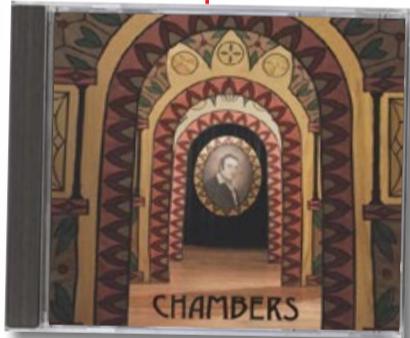
death cab for cutie
kintsugi
30/03/2015



drenge
undertow
06/04/2015



chilly gonzales
chambers
23/03/2015



the jon spencer blues explosion
freedom tower -
no wave dance party 2015
23/03/2015



the lilac time
no sad songs
06/04/2015



portico
living fields
30/03/2015

the prodigy
the day is my enemy
30/03/2015



eels
royal albert hall
13/04/2015



young fathers
white men are black men too
06/04/2015



toro y moi
what for?
06/04/2015



waxahatchee
ivy tripp
06/04/2015



polar bear
same as you
30/03/2015



suck it and see

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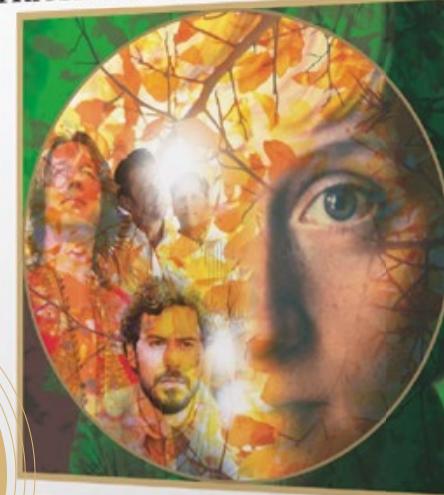
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INTO THE MYSTIC

Your guide to this month's free CD

1 THE JON SPENCER BLUES EXPLOSION

Funeral

"C'mon fellas, we get to pay respect!" Thirty years of testifying have not dimmed the raw power and excitement that Jon Spencer can still generate, and this opener from the Blues Explosion's latest LP is a great way to kick off *Into The Mystic*, too. Multi-faceted rock'n'roll abandon? Step right this way, folks.



2 DAVID CORLEY

Available Light

"Fuckin' up, mistakes, missteps and girls" are the subjects of his songs, David Corley tells Allan Jones on page 71. But as "Available Light" proves, this late-flowering, gravel-voiced singer-songwriter from Indiana can also touch on some spiritually elevated country-rock. A strong discovery, who sits neatly alongside Van Morrison in this month's issue.

3 CALEXICO

Falling From The Sky

Calexico are one of those rare bands who manage to keep stretching the parameters of their music while remaining instantly recognisable. "Falling From The Sky" finds them at their most widescreen and anthemic, trading off the border country brass with analog synth gurgles that never seem out of place. Band Of Horses' Ben Bridwell is an auspicious backing vocalist.

4 CANNIBAL OX FEATURING MF DOOM

Iron Rose (Skylab 3 Remix)

The deserved success of Run The Jewels last year has paved the way for this long-overdue return of Cannibal Ox, El-P protégés at the start of the 21st Century. A grandiose, atmospheric slice of

New York hip-hop, "Iron Rose" contains a wealth of knowledge – not least the revelation that their "favourite rock band is Iron Maiden". Hmm...

5 WAXAHATCHEE

Under A Rock

Much like kindred spirits Courtney Barnett and Angel Olsen, Katie "Waxahatchee" Crutchfield specialises in the kind of grunge-pop that some readers will remember fondly from the early '90s, at once fuzzy and more crafted than it might at first appear. Especially recommended for those who always preferred The Breeders to the Pixies.

6 BOP ENGLISH

Dani's Blues (It Was Beyond Our Control)

Heroic stalwarts of many an *Uncut* CD, Austin's White Denim are currently on hiatus, which has allowed frontman James Petralli the time to reconfigure himself as the roistering Bop English. There's much here to satisfy boogie-hungry fans of White Denim, though the carny/glam stomp of "Dani's Blues" is oddly – and not unappealingly – reminiscent of Supergrass, too.

7 BASSEKOU KOUYATÉ & NGONI BA

Siran Fen

A vet of sessions with Ali Farka Touré, Toumani Diabaté and, of course, Damon Albarn, Kouyaté might just be the most accessible Malian master for western rock audiences, thanks to the vibrancy with which he attacks his four-string instrument; the Hendrix of the ngoni, he's been called, with some justification. Robert Plant's drummer, Dave Smith, adds further heft and drive to this pulsating highlight from *Ba Power*.

8 TORRES

New Skin

If Sharon Van Etten came to the fore in 2014, then her friend Mackenzie 'Torres' Scott is a good bet to pull off a similar trick this year. "New Skin" is a characteristically

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English | Jon Spencer Blues Explosion | AND MORE
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fraught, dramatic highlight from *Sprinter*, the second Torres album, recorded by the NYC-based singer in Dorset with PJ Harvey's original rhythm section.

9 VILLAGERS

Courage

The easy pace, understatement and generally unself-conscious air of "Courage" is testament to a mature evolution of Conor O'Brien's schtick on *Darling Arithmetic*, his third album. Hints of John Grant and early Bon Iver can be detected, though here the Dubliner also recalls Devendra Banhart at his most attractively mellow.

10 GORAN KAJFES

SUBTROPIC ARKESTRA

Yet Again

Not much understatement on this, mind: Swedish trumpeter Goran Kajfes and his big band give a funky jazz makeover to a gem from the back catalogue of Grizzly Bear, of all people. An unlikely, but sensationally effective idea.

11 BILL FAY

War Machine

Who would have guessed that Bill Fay, one of England's most visionary and, for decades, neglected singer-songwriters, would re-emerge after 40 years for such a rewarding second act? The tender protest of "War Machine" comes from *Who Is The Sender?*, the fine follow-up to *Life Is People*, *Uncut*'s sixth favourite LP of 2012.

12 DEAN MCPHEE

Smoke And Mirrors

A master of pensive twang, Dean McPhee's solo Telecaster meditations mark him out as a singular, folk-inflected talent; a

descendant, perhaps, of Vini Reilly and The Durutti Column. A sort of uncanny Pennine analogue to Ry Cooder's *Paris, Texas* score.

13 THIS IS THE KIT

Bashed Out

The beguiling title track, here, from the new album by Hampshire-born Kate Stables, a folkish singer-songwriter who has fallen serendipitously into the New York orbit of Sharon Van Etten (a key patron this month, clearly) and The National: that latter band's Aaron Dessner produced *Bashed Out*, with no little sensitivity.



This Is The Kit... Kate Stables

14 XYLOURIS WHITE

Pulling The Bricks

As you may have learned on page 10, Xylouris White are a kinetic and transporting duo made up of the Greek lutist Giorgos Xylouris, and Jim White, the drummer best known for anchoring Warren Ellis' adventures in The Dirty Three. You can see their spectacular skills live in the UK with the Swans any day now.

15 TODD RUNDGREN

Rise

And finally this month, a new dispatch from the capricious and irrepressible Runt, at this point reinventing himself as a synthpop auteur. "Time's ticking away," he notes sternly on "Rise", "Time keeps ticking away..."



fresh produce



courtney barnett

sometimes i sit and think,
and sometimes i just sit
23/03/2015



ron sexsmith

carousel one
30/03/2015



beth hart

better than home
13/04/2015



the staves

if i was
23/03/2015



follakzoid

III
30/03/2015



calexico

edge of the sun
13/04/2015



wire

wire
13/04/2015



brian jonestown massacre

musique de film imagine
27/04/2015



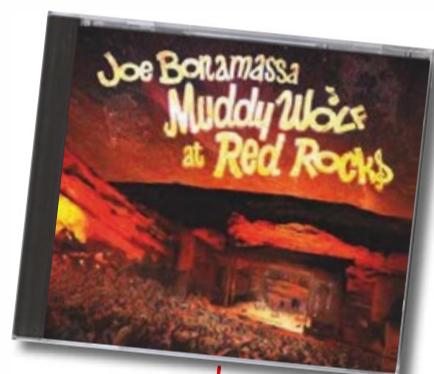
sufjan stevens

carrie & lowell
30/03/2015



joe bonamassa

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Ian Anderson

Interview: Michael Bonner
Photo: Alex Pavlou

Jethro Tull's leader on touring with Led Zeppelin, sharing a cigarette with Hendrix, and why he took up the flute... "It was a whimsical moment of self-indulgence!"

I

AN ANDERSON IS an early riser. "Regardless of time zone, I'm usually up around six," he tells *Uncut*. "But at the moment, it really depends what time the new kitten wakes up."

Today, it's shortly after 9am and Anderson has already put in a couple of hours in the office. He currently has several projects on the go. Apart from a 40th-anniversary edition of Jethro Tull's *Minstrel In The Gallery*, in September he embarks on a new touring project: a rock opera exploring the life of the 18th-Century agriculturalist from whom his band took their name in 1968. Music, it transpires, is Anderson's sole occupation since he left his other long-standing enterprise – salmon farming – before the recession. "I felt I'd rather be a musician full-time than spread my efforts across such a large area of endeavour," he explains. It also means he has enough time to answer your questions on subjects ranging from encounters with Hendrix and performing at the Stones' Rock And Roll Circus to touring the States with Led Zeppelin. "All fond memories..."

STAR QUESTION



What are your happiest memories of working with Fairport Convention? *Dave Pegg*

My happiest memory is certainly not the first time we shared a stage together. I think it was Birmingham Town Hall in 1969. At that point, Jethro Tull was a bit of a raggle-taggle band. So I was a little intimidated by the expertise of the Fairports and in particular their detailed, slick, confident presentation. Once, we both appeared on the same night at Fillmore West. Because there were no seats, the audience lay in a complete stupor and gave no signal that they were alive or interested in us, let alone Fairport. We'd come all that way to play to people who were completely out of it, but that's what you had to do. We used to

cross paths a lot with Fairport, and Dave played with both bands. We'd sometimes find ourselves in really unlikely and unwelcome situations; but it was a gig, it was a chance to be seen and noticed by a few who might actually be awake.



Blow by blow: Ian Anderson onstage with Jethro Tull, 1975

You played with the MC5 at the Fillmore West in 1969. How did that come about?

Carl Green, Denver

I think that was our first tour of America. You didn't have an awful lot of choice in who you played with, if you were a support band on your first tour of the States, you just went wherever you could get a gig. I remember the bass player took a dump onstage in a bucket. Apparently, it was a regular feature in their set. There was a little debate afterwards as to whether or not he really did have that unique talent for summoning up a giant poo into a bucket at a particular moment every night. They may have already carefully concealed something he scraped off the sidewalk from a passing poodle. I have no idea. But anyway it was part of their shtick. I mean, you can't really beat that.

Do you wish Tony Iommi had stayed longer in Jethro Tull?

Paul Schauerman

He was in a band at the time called Earth, who played with Tull. Because of an industrial accident where he'd lost the tips of his fingers, he couldn't play all the chords. When we parted company with our original guitarist Mick Abrahams, I said to Tony, "Hey, let's get together in the studio." He came down and I ran by him a couple of songs which ended up on *Stand Up*. But the chordal shapes and patterns didn't really fit in with his way of making music. With Tony, there

was a purity in his playing, it was what made him sound so good, but I don't think it was quite what I was looking for in that part of my life. So he went back to Earth, who of course became Black Sabbath. The wisest career move Tony ever made was not to pick up any more calls from me!

So why the flute? Alison, Bristol

I decided to quit guitar when I heard Eric Clapton in '66, early '67. I had a white Fender Stratocaster that I'd bought for £30 from Lemmy, when he was guitarist with Reverend Black And The Rocking Vicars. I part-exchanged it for a flute and a Shure Unidyne III mic. Collectively, I suppose they were worth less than £100. The guitar today would be worth 20, 30 grand, easily. The flute was a whimsical moment of self-indulgence. I wanted to find something to play that wasn't a part of the rock scene at the time. It sat gathering dust for about six months until I finally coaxed a note out of it in December '67 and by February 1968, Jethro Tull was born. Luckily, to this day, as far as I know Eric Clapton is a novice at flute and has no intention of competing with me.

What are your memories of playing at the Stones' Rock And Roll Circus?

Suzanne Speller, Chalfont-St-Peter

The Stones hadn't played together for a long time and, by then, poor Brian Jones was in a different place. He was amiable, but no-one in the Stones spoke to him at all. He said to me, "I don't suppose you've got a plectrum that I could borrow?" He didn't even know the music, it was awfully sad. I think the Stones were a little embarrassed and guilty that they'd lost a bandmate. So there

**“Our manager said,
‘I’m going to see if I
can get Eric Clapton to
join the band.’ Never
going to happen...”**



» was that awkwardness about doing the Rock And Roll Circus. It was clearly Mick's initiative, his drive, energy and expertise, and he pushed himself very hard during the rehearsals to keep it happening. I think he burned himself out by the time of recording, and The Who did their bit with high energy and confidence which maybe overshadowed the Stones. Seeing John Lennon and Eric Clapton jam with Keith Richards. Those were the highlights for me. Tony Iommi mimed the guitar part to "A Song For Jeffrey" because we didn't have a full-time guitar player. I remember Terry Ellis, our manager, saying, "I'm going to have a word with Eric, see if I can get him to join the band." That was never going to happen...

Do you regret turning down Woodstock? *May Osman, Purley*

We were in Loews Midtown in Manhattan when our manager Terry Ellis got the call. It was one of those hotels that accommodated rock bands. I mean, you wouldn't want to take ice from the ice machine, put it that way. Certain people had a habit of peeing in them! But we got word that this event was happening and we were invited to play. They said, "There's going to be lots of hippies. The weather forecast is for rain. There's going to be lots of naked girls wallowing in the mud taking drugs. It's going to be wild." So I said, "I don't think this is the right thing for us." Jethro Tull weren't ready for that level of exposure. But we'd probably have been forever defined as 'the Woodstock band', which would have been just awful.

STAR QUESTION



For epics such as *Thick As A Brick*, was there much collaboration with your fellow musicians or did you compose and arrange alone? *Geddy Lee*

I composed it in its entirety alone. In terms of fine-tuning the arrangements, people came up with their own parts sometimes and we would talk things through: try this, try that. It's like trying to figure out your way across London in rush hour. You have to know where you're going, but there are alternative routes – which is what makes it exciting. It's not like you've programmed it into a sat-nav and you have to go that way. The lyrics? In those days, I was embarrassed; it's only in the past 10 years that I've presented lyrics before the band came to rehearsal. But I've got to know where I'm going. There's nothing worse than coming up with



Tull around the release of *Thick As A Brick*, 1972: (l-r) Ian Anderson, Barriemore Barlow, Jeffrey Hammond, John Evan, Martin Barre

a song for which you've got a tune, a melody, an arrangement, and maybe even a recording of the backing track and then you think, 'Oh, what's this going to be about?' I mean, that's bad enough if it's a three-minute song. If it's a 40-minute piece... Boy, are you in trouble.

You played on bills with Jimi Hendrix a few times, including the Isle Of Wight. Did you ever meet him?

Sarah-Jane Pullman, Hever
Jimi was going through a bad patch at the Isle Of Wight. It wasn't the

"I learned it is much better to go on before Led Zeppelin than after..."

original band, he didn't want to play the hits or close the show. But the only time we had a conversation was when we opened for him in Stockholm in '69. We were staying at the same hotel, and there was a press conference in the lobby. I stood outside and lit a cigarette in the darkened corridor, then I noticed the glow of another cigarette. It was Jimi, nervously smoking. I said, "Aren't you supposed to be in there?" He said, "I don't wanna go in there, man. It's too loud..." So we chatted. He was there to do a job, but some of it he didn't like. After we'd finished smoking, we said, "OK, we've got to do it. Let's be brave." And we went into the lion's den.

What did you learn touring the States with Led Zeppelin?

Nick, Clapham, London
After an unfortunate occasion in



Philadelphia at The Spectrum, where we followed them onstage, I learned it is much better to go on before Led Zeppelin. But if you are to go on after, you've got to man up and face the music – or lack of. I always felt pretty good with Zeppelin. The only awkwardness lay between Robert and I. I probably didn't do enough to make him feel that I was a relaxed co-conspirator in the world of rock music. He probably saw me as being a bit remote and aloof and unwilling to chat. But I was intimidated, frankly. Jimmy was more at ease, a natural guy. John Paul Jones never spoke to anybody. Peter Grant was always a real gentleman with me. I used to watch Led Zeppelin and know there were things quite clearly that I could not do. In particular, Robert's performance. You'd have to put a cross in the box saying 'Don't try that'. In the Robert Plant department, there were a lot of crosses in my box. I was very jealous of his vocal abilities and his stage swagger. I bumped into Jimmy at an airport a few months ago and we had a nice catch-up. He was taking a break from all the Zeppelin reissues; polishing the crown jewels. Rather dejectedly, I was going back to work and he was going to kill some time in Morocco or wherever...

In what ways do you think Jethro Tull would have been a different band had either Mick Taylor or

Davy O'List joined?

Sheldon Goldstein, via email
After Mick Abrahams left, we saw a number of guitar players. I don't remember whether we seriously considered Mick. Davy struck me as being a bit off the wall. Part of the reason he left The Nice was he psychologically couldn't really handle being in a band and working with other people. He was quite idiosyncratic and didn't really want to learn what somebody else put in front of him. Finding a guitar player, it's like dogs sniffing each other's bottoms. You don't get too far into the relationship 'cos there could be a fight. An early bonding takes place that perhaps is inadvisable. It's all very polite! But Davy wanted to find his own niche. It was just as well.

What do you remember about your time on the British blues circuit in the late '60s?

Gerry, Wood Green, London
It all began with seeing Muddy Waters on TV. It was one of those early visits by a posse of American blues artists who came to Europe largely at the behest of my chums Fritz Rau and Horst Lippmann, two German promoters. I was still at grammar school then in Blackpool. What pushed me away from blues was that I knew this couldn't be a legitimate form of expression for me. Curiously, we didn't have any homegrown black blues artists in the UK. Instead, we had all these middle-class white boys from art school that became the blues artists of the era. It was quite weird. ☺

Jethro Tull's Minstrel In The Gallery: 40th Anniversary La Grandé Edition is out on May 4 on Parlophone

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



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THE REPLACEMENTS

A black and white photograph of two men, Paul Westerberg and Tommy Stinson, from the rock band The Replacements. They are both looking off to the side with serious expressions. Paul is in the foreground, wearing a plaid shirt, and Tommy is partially visible behind him, wearing a light-colored t-shirt.

LET IT BE!

Story: Nick Hasted

Photo: Dan Corrigan/Twin/Tone Records

BE!

Look ma, THE REPLACEMENTS are back, just about as rowdy and irrepressible as they ever were. Noted "old vaudevillians" PAUL WESTERBERG and TOMMY STINSON tell the complete, fraught story of the 'Mats reunion, from Slim Dunlap's hospital bed to the megafestivals of North America, from new recording sessions to imminent UK shows. "Stop taking life so seriously," says Westerberg, "change your damn mind, and go out and do it again!"

Getting higher: The Replacements in an elevator at Coffman Memorial Union, Minneapolis, 1983





The 'Mats in plaid: reunited backstage for a hometown show, Midway Stadium, St Paul, Minnesota, Sept 2014

THERE'S A 50/50 chance that we might not ever play another note, or it might last another five years," admits Paul Westerberg, as he considers what's next for The Replacements. "As of today, I don't even know who's in the band! My bet is that we'll finish this year out with the same four as last year, hopefully no-one will die, and we'll reassess. If it continues to be fun, we'll play. If it's not fun, we can at least get it up for the show. It's what I wanna do for now, anyway."

It has been two years since Westerberg reformed his old band. Since then, The Replacements have played a handful of high-profile festival dates across America, with two UK shows to come at London's Roundhouse in June. Evidently, these shows have reminded audiences of the band's remarkable aptitude for speed and aggression, tapered with Westerberg's talent for writing heart-rending confessionals. It's a far cry from the band's dreary ending, back in 1991, just at the point when they should have been enjoying the benefits of mainstream success. Westerberg remembers how divisive a time that was for the band.

"There was a pull from Chris [Mars, drummer] and Bob [Stinson, lead guitarist] not wanting to be part of that success, and Tommy [Stinson, bassist] kind of warming to it, and I was caught in between. So I would kowtow and do the interviews, and then stick a straw in my pocket and piss in the corner."

"They became poster boys for how fucked up you could be and still have people pay 20 bucks," explains current



"I'D KOWTOW AND DO INTERVIEWS, THEN PISS IN THE CORNER"

**PAUL
WESTERBERG**

Replacements guitarist David Minehan, a long-standing fan of the band. "The first time I saw them, at a club here in Boston called The Rat in 1984, their infamy preceded them, and I expected a shitty show. They stepped onstage, and it was white light heat of rock'n'roll for an hour straight."

Despite their haphazard live shows, what The Replacements delivered at the top end of the scale far outweighed their unpredictable qualities. Much of this was down to the thrilling dynamic between Bob Stinson's volatile guitar solos and Westerberg's ragged vocals. Much like Westerberg's own alcoholism during the '80s, Stinson's death – in 1995, aged 35 – helped enhance the band's notoriety in the years since they split up. Does Westerberg have mixed feelings now about that aspect of the 'Mats legend?

"Certainly," he agrees. "And a lot of them are legends. The songs were written sober, and recorded that way, and I played them that way for years. I've had a few drinks in the last two years, but I haven't gone out onstage in an Irresponsible Manner."

"Ask Tommy if he's done the same!" he laughs. "I don't feel the pressure any more of people expecting that of us. I feel like people are there because we're still alive. Whether we're sober, drunk, in wheelchairs or in hammocks, it doesn't matter. I listen to old Faces records now, because I find myself going back to the stuff that I used to like, and realising that's why people show up to see us."

"Because you go back and play the music that reminds you of when you felt good."

WHEN THE REPLACEMENTS split up, they did so with few regrets. Westerberg began an often brilliant solo career, with current Replacements guitarist David Minehan and drummer Josh Freese performing in his first touring band. Bob Stinson's brother Tommy, meanwhile, has enjoyed an unlikely second role as bassist for Guns N'Roses since 1988, additionally holding down the same job in Soul Asylum from 2006 to 2011; he even found time to release two strong solo albums in between his other duties. Elsewhere, Chris Mars actively pursued a career as an artist, meanwhile Slim Dunlap – who replaced Bob Stinton after he was fired in 1986 – began his own solo career, releasing two albums and playing regularly around the band's native Minneapolis. But despite their individual achievements, The Replacements never entirely went away. The band reconvened for two new recordings – "Message To The Boys" and "Pool & Dive" – on a 2006 compilation, *Don't You Know Who You Think I Was?*, which featured a subtly differentiated lineup of Westerberg, Stinson, Mars (on backing vocals only) and Josh Freese. That same year, Westerberg and Stinson also collaborated on the soundtrack for *Open Season*, an animated comedy about an imperilled grizzly bear that unexpectedly inspired some of Westerberg's best writing. After that, though, Westerberg's output became increasingly marginalised. He self-released a handful of punky, lo-fi albums, recorded in his basement, that in many ways evoked the makeshift spirit of the early Replacements. All the same, Westerberg – and Stinson – both seemed ambivalent towards the idea of reuniting The Replacements; out of self-respect, if nothing else. "Me and Paul were thinking about a reunion even before that compilation," reveals Tommy Stinson. "Seems to me that we had the conversation about once a year. The offers from places like Coachella to pay to dust us off have been pretty consistent. So it's been, 'Yeah, maybe we should do it.' Then the next day, 'Nah, I don't think we should do it. I'm not feelin' it. I'll go back to fucking Underwater Basket Weaving now,' or whatever was on TV."

But there was a perceptible shift in their attitude after Slim Dunlap suffered a major stroke in November, 2012. Peter Jesperson – the band's former manager and label boss – organised a series of limited edition, auction-only 7" singles to contribute towards Dunlap's medical bills. Inevitably, Westerberg and Stinson immediately offered to contribute as The Replacements (augmented by guitarist Kevin Bowe and drummer Peter Anderson). "We had asked them to do one song, on one side of the first 45," Jesperson remembers. "But Tommy called me up in Australia and said, 'Jeez, it went so well we let the tape roll and cut three more covers. Would you like an EP?' The last of those covers, Gordon Lightfoot's 'I'm Not Sayin', is about as good as any recording The Replacements have done. I played it for my wife and she teared up. The Best Of... tracks didn't have the vibe of the old band. These do."

RELEASED IN MARCH, 2013, the "Songs For Slim" EP brought into focus The Replacements' gifts for big-hearted music and ramshackle charm in one fairly explosive package. Aside from two Dunlap numbers and the Lightfoot song, it also included two other covers: "Lost Highway" and a version of Stephen Sondheim's Broadway hit, "Everything's Coming Up Roses". It also positioned The Replacements as an active concern for the first time in over 20 years. "That got the ball rolling somewhat," confirms Stinson. "But that ball stopped rolling before we got offers to play some shows." Later that year, though, another offer appeared on the table; this time from Chicago-based independent Riot Fest. Fortunately, its arrival coincided with a hospital visit by Westerberg to Dunlap; a social call that essentially gave clarity to discussions of a full-scale reunion.



The 'Mats, New York, 1988: (l-r) Dunlap, Westerberg, Tommy Stinson, Chris Mars

ART ROCKER

THE MISSING 'MAT

What happened to drummer Chris Mars?

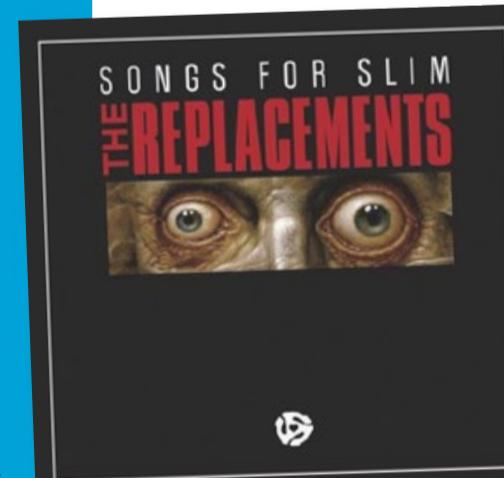
ORIGINAL Replacements drummer Chris Mars, now a successful artist, has kept his distance from the reunion, contributing a separate cover of a Slim Dunlap song and the sleeve design to "Songs For Slim" EP. "Chris wants really nothing to do with it," says Westerberg. "He's got his art, and would not come to play drums for a rock group for anything, I don't think. I ran it by him, and he was not interested. I miss Chris in the studio. Chris and I collaborated more. We were the schizophrenic twins who would have wild ideas, and fan each other's flames. Without having another member of the band who's crazy, I either fold easily, or fly off the handle. Tommy and I are performer-partners, but we were never musical collaborators so much, and I think we need to realise that."

You can find more details about Mars' work at chrismarspublishing.com

"Slim's doing poorly," Westerberg reports today. "He can't move, he can't speak. He hasn't eaten for three years, so he's hooked up to tubes. I walk the dog over and visit him every couple of weeks, and I get a smile out of him, and a little whisper, and I put my ear to his lips. You think you have it bad, and then you go and see him and you go, 'All of my troubles are insignificant.' That's part of the reason we got together. Not so much the making money, but for the reason that we could – we can stand, and we can play. Whether we're good or not is irrelevant. When I visited the hospital, a year or two ago when he could still speak, I asked him, 'What should we do, man? Should we play?' He looked at me right in the eye, and he said, 'Yes, go play.' There were tears. I felt like, 'All right, then. Who am I to say no?' It was frightening. I mean, I fought it in my mind. Because I had told myself I was done doing that. And I guess that in a way was liberating. To say, 'Stop taking life so seriously, and change your damn mind, and go out and do it again.'"

"It was emotionally overwhelming," Stinson continues. "The weird thing is I was here in Hudson, New York, where

I live, in a little bar down by the train station, and I was sitting there thinking of some other stuff, having kind of a shitty day. Either before or after Paul's call, I was hearing this music playing, and



Slim Dunlap, Metro Studios, Minneapolis, December 1990





EYEWITNESS!

PETER BUCK'S 'MATS MEMORIES

THEY WERE always a band who we waited with baited breath for their records, and we went to see them play a thousand times. The first time was in '82, at a festival in Minnesota. We saw The Replacements in the afternoon, in direct sunlight, and they smoked it, they felt completely different from every other band on the bill.

"They never really crossed over. I read an interview with Paul where he said, 'We saw how REM did it, they went and did every in-store and appeared on radio and were nice to the DJs and shook hands – and we never did any of that.' And it's true. I don't know if it was a choice or just the way they lived their lives, but without doing anything unethical, I'm sure they could have at least not hindered their career. They played Saturday Night Live and Paul yelled 'Fuck!'

"I got to see them in August in Seattle. I was afraid it would be real super-professional, but it was still loose, in a good way. It was great to see them."

INTERVIEW: TOM PINNOCK

"Fuck!" Saturday Night Live, New York, January 18, 1986

thinking, 'What the fuck is that?' We talked about doing the shows, and then I heard it was a cover version of 'Can't Hardly Wait', I think it was by Evan Dando or someone. I thought, 'Oh shit, that's some creepy cosmic thing to go do it.'

With guitarist David Minehan and drummer Josh Freese rounding out the lineup, The Replacements plugged in nervously at a Minneapolis rehearsal studio in August to prepare for Riot Fest. Minehan remembers "thrashy" early rehearsals that foregrounded the band's punkier edge. "We were giggling, playing these amphetamine-fast tunes, with the shouting and the blazing Bob Stinson leads. Fuck the slow stuff, this is a gas! Eventually, some voice of reason said, 'Yeah, but you know, a lot of the songs people want to hear are not that hardcore...'"

The Replacements played their first show in 22 years on August 25, 2013, at the Toronto leg of Riot Fest, followed by shows at the Chicago and Denver legs. The band's fee for the three dates didn't hurt, of course – "We're not broke," Westerberg acknowledges wryly, "but we're badly bent" – although there were other personal considerations for the singer, too. "It's not like I had a thriving solo thing happening at the time," he admits. After years of recording in his basement, working alone had finally become a self-defeating exercise. "I was pretty stagnant," he agrees. "The reunion was the kick in the ass that I needed. It felt good to be part of a group again, to get back with Tommy and get someone else's opinion. I also was divorced at the same time [from second wife, Laurie Lindeen], together with Slim's condition, and the sudden responsibility of being a single dad. So strap around the guitar, you know..."

THE REPLACEMENTS

can't hardly wait



"ME AND PAUL, WE ARE THE FUCKING 'MATS"

TOMMY STINSON

so much confidence."

Jesperson, a veteran of hundreds of 'Mats shows, saw the final Riot Fest appearance, in Denver. "They were like uncaged wild dogs," he marvels. "They ran onstage in matching orange cowboy hats, and Paul and Tommy had ankle-length red skirts, and they did figure-eights around the stage. They brought down the house before they even played a note." For Jesperson, though, there were several conspicuous differences from the old days. "Obviously it wasn't the original bandmembers, and I miss Bob Stinson dreadfully," he confirms. "Josh Freese is a completely different kind of drummer from Chris Mars, he's driving and pushing the band. Do I think the unavoidable change of lineup makes it less of a





Replacements show? I think it is. Bob's guitar-playing was unlike anything I'd ever heard, and Slim's was like a boy brought up in the woods by wolves. So you had two uniquely individual guitarists and, not to say anything negative about Dave Minehan, who's wonderful – it just didn't pack the same punch."

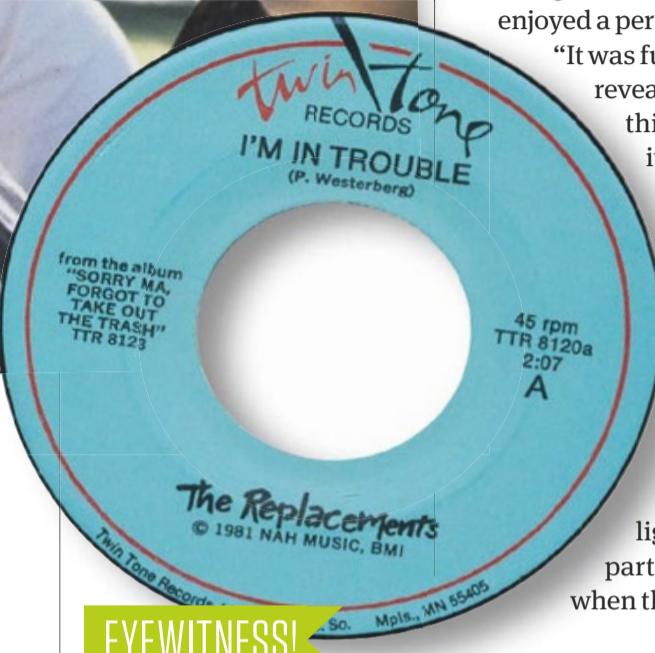
It's inevitable, of course, that Bob Stinson's absence would be felt most keenly; after all, he still looms large over the band's legacy. Both Westerberg and Tommy Stinson admit that to some degree, it's Bob's Stinson's spirit they hope to conjure up during the shows.

"The moment me and Tommy stand next to each other, it's like we're kids," begins Westerberg. "Anyone who thinks Bob is gone and not in the band, I got news for ya. He still lurks, between us. And that felt incredibly good. There's a love-hate between Tommy and I that is probably in the realm of Keith and Mick. There's a pain from Bob, the void and the loss between Tommy and I, in there too, that in a weird way bonded us closer than two brothers would be."

"When it's me and Paul, I feel like we are the fucking Replacements," Stinson argues, bullishly. "It wasn't exactly like it used to be. We saw some footage of last year's shows that looked like we were totally into it, and stuff that looks like we're fucking taking a nap. We don't play around with the middle too much. But when Paul starts whipping up solos, you can clearly see him channelling my brother right through his fingers, going somewhere he hadn't gone for himself in a long time. It is emotional being in a band together again. And if it wasn't, there wouldn't be enough money to make it really worthwhile."

While it is necessarily important for The Replacements to honour their absent bandmates, there is one new audience member who is equally important to Westerberg. "Being here at home for my son growing up was pretty important," he says, "and he still is 16. But it was time for him to actually see what all the hoopla was about. Him and his buddies came and saw us in Chicago, in front of like 50,000 people, and it probably came as a shock to him, to see Dad, the baseball coach. I asked him afterwards, 'What did you think?' And he said, 'The slow song that Dave fucked up was really bad.' He didn't fall far from the tree! I always look towards the back, whether it's a big room or an amusement park with 30,000 people. I'm always looking at the people who are leaving..."

LOOKING BACK ON The Replacements' earliest gigs, Paul Westerberg admits he was terrified of playing live. Now, though, he admits to feeling pressure from other sources when he performs. Particularly, Westerberg finds it hard to balance his outstanding domestic concerns with the business of a full-blown 'Mats reunion. "It's a feeling that I've never had to deal with before," he explains.



EYEWITNESS!

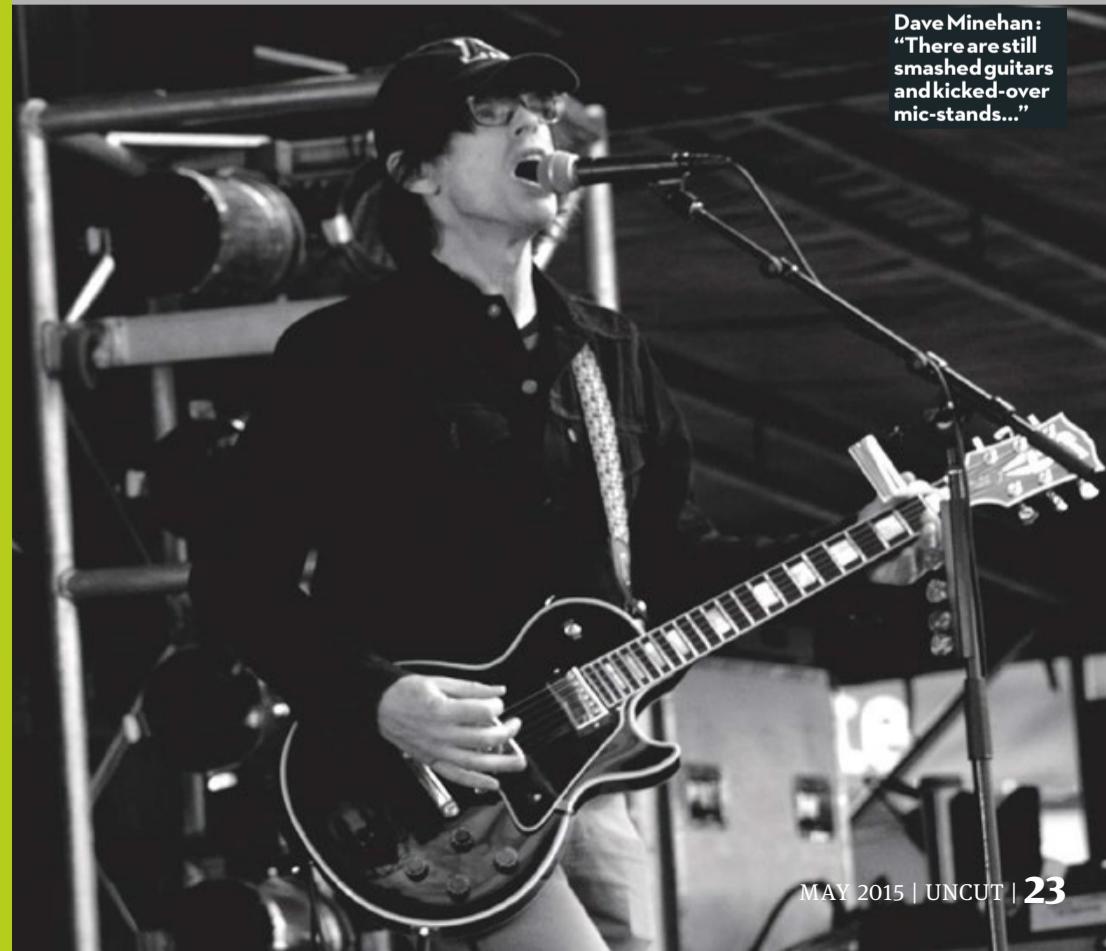
The Replacement Replacement

Introducing guitarist Dave Minehan...

"I'M A PRODUCER in my own studio near Boston. That's my real life. I run off and join the Replacements circus other parts of the year. I first played with Paul when he did his first, 14 Songs solo tour in '93. Very small theatres, 800-seaters. There was almost more pressure on him then. But it was pretty demure compared to what's going on now. Back in '93, Paul was a feral character. He still doesn't

like to accept anything on its own terms. We're all well into middle-age, and aren't excessive like we were. But there are still smashed guitars, kicked-over mic-stands; insults to the audience and to anyone near them. The biggest shock is how many young kids are at the shows. And you can see them shocked at what kind of disarray can happen onstage! In this world of *American Idol*, you can't find anything like it."

Dave Minehan:
"There are still
smashed guitars
and kicked-over
mic-stands..."





Kiss me on the bus:
Tommy Stinson and
Westerberg share an
intimate onstage
moment, Midway
Stadium, 2014

EYEWITNESS!

“POKE ME IN MY CAGE”

Inside the 'Mats jazz odyssey

THE ONLY NEW music to emerge from The Replacements' sessions at David Minehan's studio in October 2014 was a 24-minute jazz improvisation, "Poke Me In My Cage", which appeared online last December. "We were just messing around jamming," remembers drummer Josh Freese. "Paul had switched to bass, and Tommy was playing guitar. Paul doesn't know anything about jazz bass-playing, and I don't know anything about improvised drumming. But after about 20 minutes of this, they were looking around saying, 'Hey, I hope Dave's recording this!' Then a couple of days later, Paul rings me up, going, 'Man, you sounded like fuckin' Art Blakey!' Then I open my laptop one day, and they've released it. The thing I love about it is, they didn't let on it was a joke. It was just, 'Here's the new song from The Replacements.' I almost wanted to write in and make excuses for them. The perfect Replacements comeback? That's right. Raising the middle-finger again."

music used to be so simple. Conversely, they found the October 2014 sessions unexpectedly frustrating. "We cut some stuff there, and then we recorded some here in Minneapolis, too," says Westerberg. "I thought it would be dead easy to just capture them, and it wasn't. It was too much fuss about how everything sounded. I've always said that I can mean a song only once a day. I think that maybe the others in the band have different thoughts about recording than I do. I wasn't in the mood to overdub and do it that way. I'm a bit sick of that process. We're like a bunch of old vaudevillians, as cobwebby as that sounds, and it gives us an advantage over most of the stuff today, that is layered and affected. I wanted to capture what we were doing live, and we didn't quite capture it, so... maybe we'll try again, maybe we won't."

"We were playing in this professional studio," Josh Freese continues, "and Paul had to be told that we couldn't play all in a room, without headphones, because the instruments would bleed into each other. As soon as Paul realised that, the wind seemed to go out of his sails."

"Difficult is putting it mildly," adds Stinson. "There's the obstacle of fighting with yourselves about the way it's supposed to feel, to make it a true 'Mats song. We know what that feeling is. We've felt it a lot onstage in the last year. He and I have completely different problems with it in the studio. Paul's got a few really great songs that he's sitting on. But it's hard for him to compete with his past Replacements legacy, and I think that gets in his head too much. For me, I want it to be as fucking balls-out as it can be, and if it's not going to be as balls-out, it's got to be very special. We hold it very precious in different ways."

“I'M JUGGLING HOMEMAKER, SINGLE DAD, CIRCUS PERFORMER”

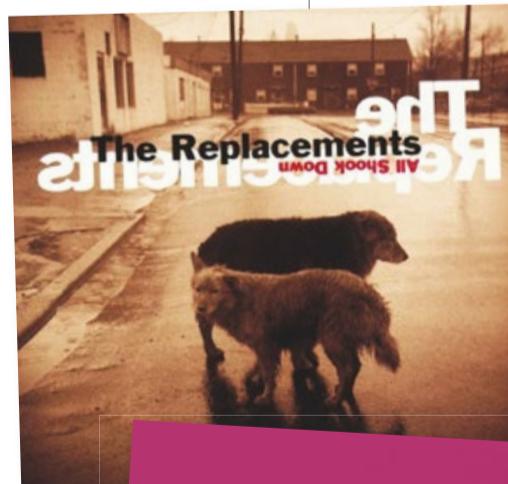
PAUL
WESTERBERG

— "You Wear Me Out Loud". We'll get it yet, goddamn it!" Stinson certainly thinks they need new songs soon. Otherwise, being a Replacement might become something that has previously been unthinkable: boring. "It's certainly my fear," he laughs. "We can't just play 'Bastards Of Young' every time."

For his part, Josh Freese is equally keen that The Replacements continue to preserve their cherished legendary status. "I think if they were to come around to your town again and you were thinking, 'Ah, well, we'll see 'em the next time,' if they were just another band on the circuit, like all the rest, then that wouldn't be good. They should keep some mystique. They should keep that legend."

"I don't think playing 10 more times is going to ruin the legend," Westerberg wryly concludes. "And if it does, I don't give a shit."

The Replacements: The Complete Studio Albums 1981-1990 is released by Rhino, April 13. **The Replacements** play London's Roundhouse, June 2 and 3



The fruit of those sessions turned out to be a 24-minute improvisational piece, "Poke Me In My Cage" [see panel], although Stinson is adamant that the band should revisit the methods of writing and recording that served them well at the beginning of their career. "We've got to get back to 1981, basically. 'Here's a song that goes like this...' Play along, maybe it'll fucking hold together, maybe it won't. The songs that Paul's brought us, he's already beaten into the ground in his home studio. I told him, 'Why don't you go hack up some ideas, and not put guitar, drums and bass on, just do a fucking cassette recording? Why don't we do it like we used to do? But it all goes back to how long Paul's been out of a band, and where his head's at about

collaborating in general. We had a great conversation about it a few weeks back, and he understood."

Then, there are The Replacements who are no longer in the room to consider. During an interview in the 1980s, Westerberg set out the balance that made the band work: "If it isn't a rocker, Bob doesn't like it, if it isn't tuneful, Chris doesn't like it. Tommy likes it simple, and I like things that are honest and emotional." With only the younger Stinson and Westerberg left, in what ways has Westerberg's analysis changed? "So, a simple, tuneful rocker that's emotional," he muses. "That would pretty much sum up the song that we could not get." He laughs, before tantalisingly revealing: "It was called 'You Wear Me Out'

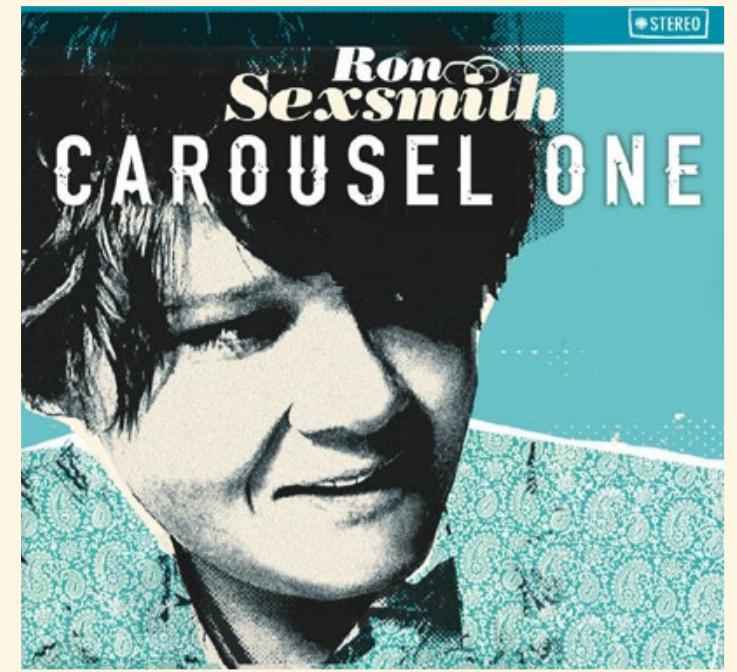
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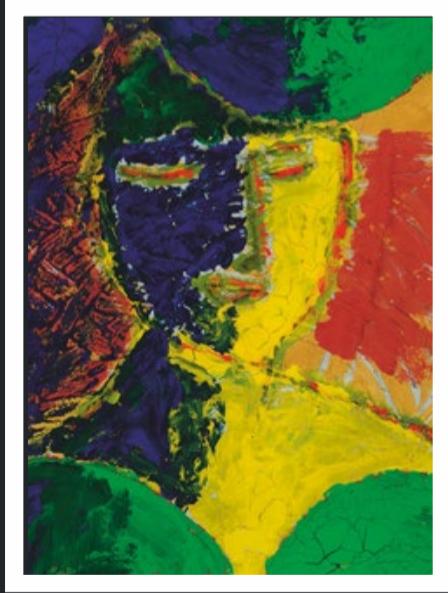
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GOING



The "Shoegazing Monkees": Ride at their rehearsal studio, January 20, 2015

BLANK AGAIN



“It was the last time people tried to experiment,” says Mark Gardener, of the heyday of RIDE. “It wasn’t rock’n’roll, it was much more than that.” Now, 20 years later, the young princes of shoegazing have returned. *Uncut* joins Gardener and his bandmates as they revisit the Oxford haunts of their youth, pick through the highs and lows of their career, and prepare to start all over again — in front of 70,000 people at the Coachella Festival.

Story: Michael Bonner

Photographs: Piper Ferguson

NRECENT MONTHS, Mark Gardener has found himself returning more frequently to Oxford’s South Park. These days, it is usually while out walking his 11-month old daughter. But this rolling green expanse overlooking Oxford’s city centre holds a significant place in Gardener’s heart. It was here, he explains, that the idea for his old band Ride first took shape. “I’m always nostalgic when I come up here,” he continues, looking out across the park towards the city in the distance. It’s a bright, crisp January afternoon and Gardener is guiding *Uncut* round several key locations in Ride’s history. Behind him through a gap in the trees is Cheney School,

where he first met Andy Bell, his chief co-conspirator in the band. “We’d come here in sixth form for a sneaky cigarette. I remember talking music and life dreams here with Andy.”

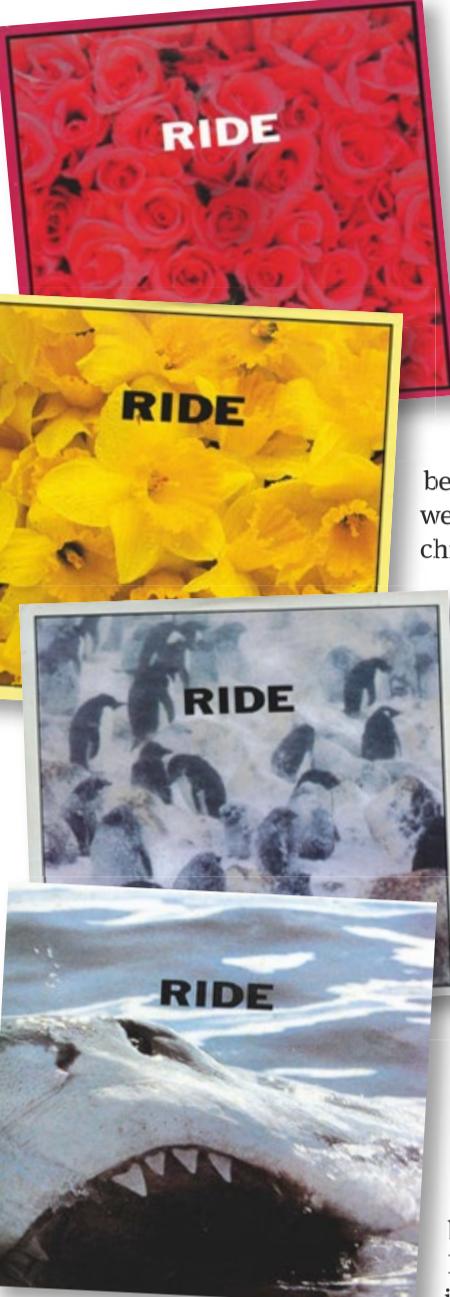
The reason for this trip through Gardener’s past is the business of Ride’s forthcoming reunion shows, which take place almost 20 years since the band split up. During their eight years together — from 1988–’96 — Ride pioneered a dreamy, English aesthetic concocted from firestorms of feedback and pristine, jangling melodies.

Critically, they bridged the gap between the sonic adventures of My Bloody Valentine and the muscularity of Britpop. “We were an exciting band,” he confirms. “It was the last time people tried to experiment with music. It wasn’t rock’n’roll, it was far more than that.”

“We were in awe of what they were doing, and what they’ve done since,” admits Philip Selway, whose band, Radiohead, followed Ride onto the Oxford music scene. Given this history, the Ride reunion is evidently much anticipated — it involves a comeback show at Coachella, followed by headlining slots at Primavera and Field Day as part of a rapidly expanding world tour. But there is another story playing out, too. Although Ride ended badly — Gardener compares it to “crashing a car together” — the gradual rapprochement between him, Bell, bassist Steve Queralt and

**“NOW
I SEE IT
WOULD BE
A SHAME
NEVER TO
PLAY WITH
THEM
AGAIN”**

ANDY
BELL



鼓手Loz Colbert有一份更个人的共鸣。这不仅仅是一群音乐家重聚来演奏经典歌曲，而是四名朋友庆祝共同的音乐遗产。“这是深厚的友谊，”Colbert同意道。“但不同的是，过去和现在，我们都长大了。我们有了孩子，婚姻，其他生活。”

“我总是回顾过去，因为它是一个完整的故事，与真正老朋友的人，”Andy Bell透露。“有某种东西，关于在六年内发布了四张专辑，然后在一场爆炸性的事件中结束。这是完美的结局，某种程度上。但随着我变老，我变得更加感性。现在我看到它，会觉得这是一个耻辱，再也不会和他们一起玩了。”

对于Gardener，Bell和Colbert来说，至少有一名成员对Ride的存在持谨慎乐观的态度。2015年及以后，Ride是否能成为现场表演的可行选择？“我内心深处仍然觉得Ride应该留在原地，”Steve Queralt承认。

“但同时，让我们

自私一点吧！我很高兴它正在发生。我告诉经理人，‘唯一可能出错的事情是如果The Smiths在六月决定这样做。’”

GARDENER CHOOSES A snug, boho café on Oxford's Magdalen Road for lunch. Posters and handbills cover the walls, carrying ads for yoga classes, reiki workshops and ante-natal massage treatments. Gardener has lived in this part of Oxford all of his life. Six doors down from the Oxford café, he explains, his uncle played him the Beach Boys' "Surf's Up". Later, he memorialised this area in Ride's song "OX4", written during a bout of homesick blues while on tour. Today, as he tucks into a plate of smoked salmon and scrambled eggs, Gardener remembers how a school production of *Grease* was pivotal in bringing him and Andy Bell together; he was cast as one of the T-Birds, while Bell played guitar in the school band.

For his part, when we meet a few weeks later in a rehearsal space near King's Cross, Bell vividly remembers Gardener wearing a turquoise tracksuit around school. "Mark and I were friends from the age of 12 or 13," he explains, sitting behind a drum kit, a Beatles cushion stuffed into the bass drum beneath him. "Our friendship is the longest. All your firsts – the first time you get drunk, the first cigarette you smoke, the first girlfriend – all that was our shared ground."

Gardener and Bell bonded over The Smiths during art classes at Cheney. Later, as students at Banbury Art College, they formed a close-knit group with fellow student Loz Colbert, and another Cheney alumnus, Steve Queralt. By the mid-'80s, they had begun performing together in various iterations – Bell has especially grim memories of playing in a local reggae band with Queralt. "We decided to move into a student house together on Bath Road," continues Bell. "We were the shoegazing Monkees. Mark's funny, he's really quick. He was confident, kind of cool. Steve was the older guy. He was really grumpy. Loz had a quiff, a white T-shirt, a black leather jacket and blue jeans



EYEWITNESS!

"EVERYONE SAYS THEY NEED A LUCKY BREAK..."

What happened when Ride appeared on *Snub TV*

RIDE appeared on *Snub TV* the same day the first EP came out," remembers Dave Newton. "They were filming *Galaxie 500*, who we were supporting, and they filmed Ride, as well. We nearly didn't make the gig [at London's *Subterranea*]. We were stuck in traffic on the



M40, moving so slowly that they got out and walked to the venue to let them know we were coming. We got there, loaded in and got onstage in about 15 minutes.

"We did 'Drive Blind,'" adds Mark Gardener. "A good version. Afterwards, the shows started selling out. Everyone says they need a lucky break..."

"They had the *ITV Chart Show* that same week as *Snub*," continues Newton. "Then the tour really kicked off. It ended up stretching to six weeks..."

Ride,
1989

with turn-ups and DMs. This whole James Dean vibe."

In the summer of 1988, meanwhile, they played together for the first time as a quartet; in admittedly less than salubrious surroundings. "Loz had a drumkit in his mum's garage," reveals Queralt. "We had a massive jam session," adds Colbert. "We didn't stop for about four hours."

"People would come and hang out when we rehearsed at the art college," remembers Queralt. "We felt like we were The Velvet Underground. When we played our first show, 30 people came along and that was good enough. The next time we were supporting someone at the Jericho Tavern, so there was a progression. We thought, 'Let's try and be the biggest band in Oxford.'"

That said, the Oxford music scene in the late '80s had relatively limited ambitions. "No band had left Oxford and made a big career out of it," confirms Queralt. "Apart from one of Supertramp. And Mr Big."

"The Jericho was one of the centres of Oxford music," recalls Philip Selway. "It felt like a landmark playing there, if you were an Oxford band." Adam Franklin, then a member of local group Shake Appeal, recalls seeing one of Ride's earliest shows there. "They were opening for a band called Satan Knew My Father, a joke fast metal band. I'd brought my Marshall head along for someone to use. We went to the bar while these young kids were setting up, soundchecking. Suddenly they burst into 'I Wanna Be Your Dog'. They were like The Stooges meets The Byrds. We looked over and thought, 'Fucking hell, this is all right.'"

The band's music at this early point was evolving principally through lengthy jams. Gardener and Bell would arrive with ideas – a lyric, perhaps, or a melody or chord sequence – that together the band would develop and finesse. The only member working full-time was Queralt, who worked in the Oxford branch of Our Price with Dave Newton, later the band's manager. "Steve was great at dropping into the mix really interesting bands," remembers

Gardener. "The House Of Love, My Bloody Valentine. Loop and Spacemen 3. I hadn't heard music like that before. It had an affect on us. It gave us a sensibility."

Looking back on the songs that comprise Ride's self-titled debut EP – released on Creation in January, 1990 – Andy Bell is quick to identify the specific qualities which resonated with their audience. "We were pretty similar to them and we distilled what was going on and fed it back to them. 'Chelsea Girl' was 'Destroy The Heart' by The House Of Love. 'Drive Blind' was 'Slow' by the Valentines. We had a Spacemen 3 type song. We ripped off the noisy bit in 'You Made Me Realise' and put it into 'Drive Blind' with a bit of 'How Soon Is Now?'. We were fans and we were enthusiastic about it enough to be infectious."

"I TOOK A WEEK OFF WORK TO BECOME A ROCK STAR AGAIN"

STEVE QUERALT

"Today Forever" – selling 68,000 copies. Shake Appeal's Adam Franklin, now leading Swervedriver, recalls enjoying Ride's rapid ascent. "We were recording our first EP, 'Son Of Mustang Ford', he says. "They'd released their second, 'Like A Daydream', and were on *Top Of The Pops*. We were having a dinner break on Thursday night watching the TV, thinking, 'Fucking hell, these kids we only discovered a year ago are now on *Top Of The Pops*! It was exciting, something new was happening.'

Undoubtedly, despite all the praise lavished on other Creation signings like My Bloody Valentine, House Of Love and Primal Scream during that time, Ride delivered a series of milestones for the label: the "Ride" EP gave Creation their first ever singles position (72), while the band's full-length debut album *Nowhere*, released in October 1990, gave them their first Top 20 album (11). "As far as I was concerned, it

EYEWITNESS!

"THEY OPENED EVERYTHING UP..."

Radiohead's Philip Selway on Ride

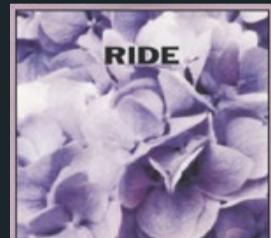
OXFORD had always felt a bit of a backwater musically. We [Radiohead] started in the mid-'80s, then we'd gone off to college, and in that time Ride went big. There was a good deal of envy, as well, looking at what they were doing, but also a lot of admiration. They opened everything up for a lot of bands to be able to legitimately come from Oxford. We benefitted from that, as did Supergrass and a whole collection of other bands... It felt intimate, as it was all based around east Oxford, around the Cowley Road. Everybody would go to the same pubs. Ride made that side of it possible. For us, we hadn't played outside Oxford before we were signed, so you could speculate that A&R men were prepared at that point to look to Oxford, because there was that connection. So it made it a much healthier music scene in Oxford."

INTERVIEW: TOM PINNOCK

HOW TO BUY...

THE BEST OF RIDE ON CD...

From melodies, riffs and drones to dubby vibes...



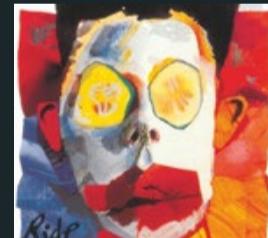
SMILE

SIRE, 1990
Overseas compilation of the first two EPs. Contains muscular riffs ("Chelsea Girl"), expansive drones ("Drive Blind") and pop thrills ("Like A Daydream").



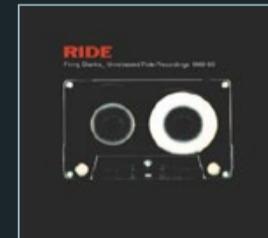
NOWHERE

CREATION, 1990
Sheets of white noise mixed with super strong melodies. Many standouts, but the majestic sweep of "Dreams Burn Down" and the blissful "Vapour Trail" are early peaks.



GOING BLANK AGAIN

CREATION, 1992
A career best. More ambitious than *Nowhere*. Highlights: the eight-minute "Leave Them All Behind", the infectious jangle of "Twisterella" and the dubby vibes of "OX4".



FIRING BLANKS

IGNITION, 2001
Outtakes and demos compilation. Includes early demo for "Chelsea Girl", a superior "She's So Fine" from *Tarantula*, and a dreamy version of *Nowhere*'s "In A Different Place".



WAVES

IGNITION, 2003
BBC Radio Sessions from 1990-1994. Lively versions of early songs – "Like A Daydream", especially – but also good for less polished delivery of *Carnival Of Light* and *Tarantula* material.



Ride, 1991: great white hopes

was all progressing as planned," says Bell. "I'd read the Beatles books. I knew what the score was. This was the blueprint and we're following it. It felt like it was the natural progression of things." *Nowhere* arrived at the end of a remarkably busy 12 months for Ride. Pivoting on the psychedelic interaction between Gardener and Bell's guitars, it is an incredibly focused album; from the melancholic curlicues of "In A Different Place" to the propulsive sweep of "Polar Bear" and the LP's beautiful coda, "Vapour Trail". "Nowhere was us as young men, going through college, making music, playing gigs and getting this excitement and the tension," notes Colbert. "It was this big, washy, noisy collage; an art statement. Then we were musicians! We're in a band! In a recording studio! And we have to do album No 2! It was completely different. We'd been around the world, maybe twice. So when it came to *Going Blank Again*, we were in a completely different place."

"At the start, songwriting felt more collaborative," reflects Gardener. "As time went on, Andy was bringing in more than his fair share of music. I was writing more on *Going Blank Again*. But even so, it felt that we were operating well as a band. I'd written 'Leave Them All Behind' and I recall sitting with Andy and he said, "Wheels turning round", that's good, stop the line there.' We did a lot of editing work like that on each other's songs. It always made them better."

Going Blank Again continued Ride's impressive trajectory into 1992. Such was the band's confidence in their new batch of material that they chose to lead off the album with an eight-minute single, "Leave Them All Behind"; it reached No 9 in the chart, while its parent album peaked at No 5.

"You're in your early twenties with four other people who were your best friends at the time," says Queralt. "Playing a different show every night, getting drunk, getting up late, sitting in a bus watching the motorway fly past, going to a new town, people wanting your autograph, signing record sleeves; it was fantastic. There's nothing I'd have rather have done in my early twenties than that."

All the same, Ride's schedule was arduous. Between





→ 1990-'92, they played 281 shows, and their 1992 itinerary took in 12 countries. "To keep that level of performance up is tough," admits Gardener. "It's not just you. There's three others and everyone's trying to do the best they can all the time. Steve had a baby, he couldn't even be there for the birth."

"We were in America," adds Queralt. "There was the question of leaving the tour to go back home to see my son born. 'No, I'll choose the band.' Which is a dreadful thing to say. I remember at the time thinking, 'I'm never going to get another chance to do this.' Play in America, that is. It was quite a selfish thing to do. I got the phone call and at that moment it dawned on me that this is the biggest thing in my life; my son's just been born."

THE TOURS CONTINUED; but what was once an exciting and refreshing

experience in new countries had, Steve Queralt considers, lost its allure by the band's second US tour. "It felt like we were going over the same ground," he confesses. "The shows were the same size as the previous tour. The first time we went to Japan we were met at the airport. The second time, there was one person and their dog there. I don't think anyone said it out loud, but there was a feeling maybe we'd reached a pinnacle."

Dave Newton has another take on events, which suggests Ride were essentially overtaken by a change in fashions. "Halfway through the US tour for *Going Blank Again*," he says, "it almost felt like grunge hit overnight. We started our way across the South and then on our way back to New York, the rep from the US label who was handling all our press suddenly wasn't on the road with us anymore. It felt like it hadn't quite exploded enough."

"We'd toured the first album and the second in two consecutive years, having done world tours," adds Andy Bell. "At that point, we realised we were a little burned out. Around then, in Japan, Mark said, 'I've had enough. I'm over it, I'm done with it.' He had to be persuaded to go onstage. All of us realised we had to take a break."

Bell reckons they took "two months off" before reconvening to begin work on '94's *Carnival Of Light*. By then, their working practices had changed. Instead of developing ideas organically in jams, Gardener and Bell were bringing in more polished pieces that required less complimentary work from their bandmates. "Things got more defined," confirms Gardener. "Me and Andy were writing more. Some of the magic from the jams was gone."

"It was all getting very '60s," continues Bell. "We were heading up a blind alley. It felt like it was broadening our horizons. But it's weird how you head down a road single-mindedly without thinking of any other options. There were almost no contemporary influences from then onwards."

"You can't kid yourself, you're only going to kid your audience," believes Gardener. "We played the Albert Hall around *Carnival Of Light*, and there were a few things going wrong. I looked at some people in the audience and thought, 'Even they can feel something is up.' Actually, *Carnival Of Light* was still quite an exciting time."



Ride, Oxford, 2015:
(l-r) Steve, Andy,
Mark and Loz

EYEWITNESS!

COMING UP FOR AIR

**The true story
behind the band's
2001 reunion...**

ANDY BELL: That was five or six years after the split. I was in Oasis and word came through, a Channel 4 programme called *Pioneers wants you*. I thought, 'Yes, we are pioneers. It's true!' Well, they're making something about Sonic



Youth being pioneers and they want you to cut a soundtrack! So we agreed to make some music as our little tribute to SY. *Daydream Nation* was a touchstone for early Ride.

LOZ COLBERT: We turned up at John Henry's and started jamming. We played for an hour, it was recorded, and we put it out as the "Coming Up For Air" EP. Then everyone went back to what they were doing!

Loz Colbert, for his part, considers the reasons why Ride fell apart; a process that all members agree began in the period between *Carnival Of Light* and their final studio album, *Tarantula*. "We were so good at working together, we forgot you've got to work together," the drummer insists. "The band was over by *Tarantula*. But we had to make a record. On the bus down, even before we did *Tarantula*, I was sketching together, 'How am I going to tell them I'm going to leave, that I don't think this is for me any more?' I never got around to finishing it. I thought, 'Let's just give it one last shot.' And that last shot was *Tarantula*."

"Nobody wanted to rock the boat," adds Queralt. "We could all see the end on the horizon, but no-one dared speak about it. There was a lot of paranoia. If I say I'm not happy, what's to stop the other two saying, 'Leave and we'll get a new bassist who'll be happy.' I was still a musician, I didn't want to stop being in the business. I didn't want to stop being in Ride. You clung to whatever Ride was at the time."

"I knew things were difficult, but in a weird way I wasn't taking it seriously," remembers Bell. "I wouldn't ever have thought it would have been enough to make Mark go, 'I want to leave.' So when he did, it was pretty shocking. We were round at Dave's house. We were supposed to sign a contract and Mark had obviously been sitting on this for a bit and said, 'I can't sign it. The truth is, I'm leaving. I'm moving to New York.' He came out with it all at once. 'I've got a deal and I've got a manager. Bye.' And off he went."

"Maybe a punch-up would've been good!" laughs Gardener today. "Sometimes that can be good to clear the air. Once the thing burst and we'd had time to reflect, it was a matter of months before Andy came round to buy my amp. Even then, there was a feeling – which I still feel – that it stopped at the right time. Maybe I was the one in the end who said, 'I'm out,' but we were all feeling it."

SITTING IN THE basement of The Jericho Café, on the opposite side of the road to the fabled Tavern, Loz Colbert considers the aftermath of Ride's split. "26 is very young to be feeling that your life is over. But that was it. What am I going to do next?" Andy Bell remembers the shock of Gardener's departure in July 1995 brought into sharp focus certain practical necessities. "I sat down and said, 'I'm fucked. I'm done for.' I felt retired. My first reaction was, 'Fuck, I better learn to drive because I'm going to have to get a proper job soon.' All washed up at 25."

Bell's post-Ride history is well-documented, taking in Hurricane #1, Oasis and latterly Beady Eye. Gardener, meanwhile, continued to make music, as a solo artist, with like-minded collaborators including Robin Guthrie and also as a producer. Colbert, for his part, played in a few bands –



EYEWITNESS!

"I'M PROUD TO BE A SHOEGAZER!"

Steve Queralt and Andy Bell on a genre that refuses to die...

MUCH MALIGNED over the years, 'shoegazing' has gone from a vaguely critical description of a group of bands (the phrase was reportedly coined by Blur's old label boss, Andy Ross), to holding a more reverent meaning for a subsequent generation of bands.

"When I first heard it, I wasn't that keen on it," admits Andy Bell. "I thought we were like The Who! I thought we were rock'n'roll maniacs. But looking back, they had a point. There was a lot of looking at pedals. It seemed like America caught onto it that few years later. They started referring to 'shoegaze' as a legitimate style of music."

"It's amazing how the term 'shoegazing' didn't die 20 years ago; when bands like us, Slowdive, Lush and the Pale Saints stopped recording," notes Steve Queralt. "It's lingered in the background and people know exactly what it means. It's become slowly more important over the last five or six years. It was a movement and a thing to be proud of. I'm proud to be a shoegazer!"

MARIA JEFFERIS/REDFERNS/VIAGETTY IMAGES; NATHANIEL CRAMP/SONICCATHEDRAL.CO.UK

including The Animalhouse with Gardener – before signing up to study music. Subsequently, he played with The Jesus And Mary Chain, Supergrass and most recently Gaz Coombes. Queralt, on the other hand, effectively retired from music. "I worked for Habitat," he confides. "I remember Thom Yorke coming in. It was awkward. There was no eye contact. He asked me a few questions about a product. I think he was buying the most expensive sofa in the store."

The band continued to have a business relationship – "There are still bills to pay," notes Colbert – and after a while the four members of Ride and Dave Newton began regular meetings, "yearly get-togethers where we drink real ale and go through sheets," as Bell describes it. Routinely, it seems, the subject of a Ride reunion has presented itself; especially ahead of the festival season. Finally, last year, a favourable set of circumstances for a reunion presented themselves. "I knew Beady Eye was going to be on writing time, and this spring would be pretty free," explains Bell. "I told the Beady Eye guys I wanted to do this. Later on, the news came through from Liam that he was calling it a day. So it meant that instead of being two weeks of gigs, it could be a little more."

The band announced a series of reunion shows on November 19 last year; two days



The Barcelona billboard to announce Ride's Primavera headline slot, 2015

"MAYBE A PUNCH-UP WOULD HAVE BEEN GOOD... TO CLEAR THE AIR!"

MARK GARDENER



The comeback acoustic gig, London's 100 Club, February 19, 2015

later, they met at Vale Studios, Worcestershire, for toe-in-the-water rehearsals. "It was easy to play with the other guys again," says Queralt. "I took a week off work to be a rock star again."

"All I wanted to get out of it was the feeling that the gigs will be OK," admits Bell. "I got way more than that. I realised there was something indestructible about the music if you can pick up where you left off after 20 years and it makes you feel that same way."

"To jam again, to be in a room again, it's a great feeling," confirms Gardener. "It feels like you've come home."

FEBRUARY 19, 2015. Mark Gardener and Andy Bell are performing as Ride for the first time in 20 years. This auspicious event is taking place at the 100 Club, as part of the annual War Child events. Coincidentally, it is also 25 years since the band released their debut EP. Tonight's acoustic show flows easily through the band's key songs – along with a couple of rarities – and the camaraderie between the two men is evident. Via email, Gardener later explains that they rehearsed for "a day in Oxford, then a couple of days in London. We were nervous... I pretended it was just another solo acoustic show to keep my anxiety levels down, then made the mistake of looking at social media on the way to London in the bus! It was anything but just another solo acoustic show!"

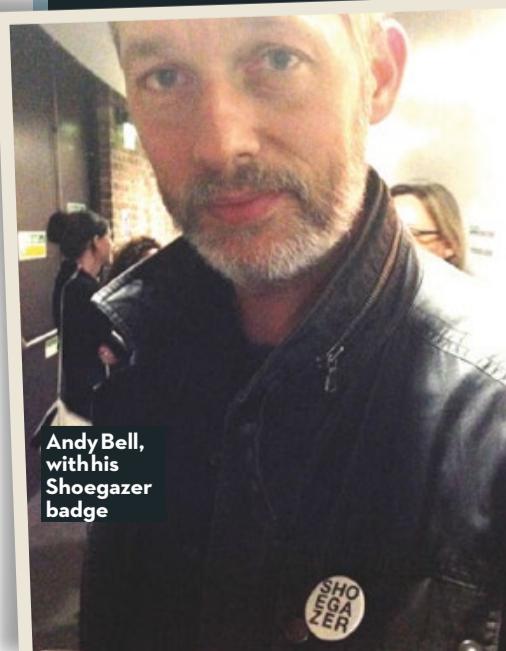
Evidently, it is a far smaller affair than their first official show, in front of 70,000 at Coachella in April. "I think the records have clearly stood the test of time," notes Slowdive's Rachel Goswell, whose successful 2014 reunion has proved the enduring qualities of her band's music. "Music always goes in cycles, doesn't it? Now is the time of that period of music."

"For now, we're just making sure these shows are amazing," says Mark Gardener. "We have to deliver. Beyond that... I think some great things will come out of this, because I know how good the feeling is. It's lovely to have a second run like this."

"I don't want to spook the horse, I'd like to see where it goes after the gigs," adds Andy Bell.

"With Ride, there were a lot of people who wanted to see us play together again," says Loz Colbert. "It feels like maybe we didn't get to fulfill some aspects of some things that we like to do. I hope we get a chance to do that. I'd be disappointed if that was all we did." **①**

Ride play shows in May/June, including Field Day on June 7. They're re-release OX4: The Best Of Ride on Record Store Day, April 18. Visit ridemusic.net for details



Andy Bell, with his Shoegazer badge

“It was
wild, deep.
It’s totally
about feel.
ESP.”

Transcendental telepathy. Mystical rushes of energy. Entire bands dismissed on Christmas Eve. A 33/1 bet on Celtic Mist... Meet the real VAN MORRISON. For some 50 years, Van The Man has been one of the most enigmatic heroes of the rock pantheon. Now, though, *Uncut* elicits the secret stories behind 10 of his greatest solo albums.

And to mark the release of his new *Duets* album, Morrison lifts the lid on his extraordinary art. “I don’t really know,” he says, “if there is any tradition anymore...”

Story: Graeme Thomson | **Portrait:** Elliott Landy



“I am from a bygone era...”

VAN MORRISON's complex musical evolution

IDON'T REALLY PONDER past songs unless I want to maybe redo it or do a different arrangement. I get a different experience, working with different people. If you have your own band all the time, then you become too fixed. You need to interact with different players. Well, I do anyway. Lots of people.

A lot of my songs are difficult, actually. Some people think it is easy. They hear me sing a song. ‘I can do that.’ Then they try it, and they realise, ‘There is more going on here than I really realised.’ The way I am doing it, it sounds like it is easy but it's actually not. The songs are quite complex.

I come from a different era than a lot of people. The people I would be hanging out with when I was a kid would have been much older than me, for instance. Some people my age were into jazz, blues, country music. There were a lot of people in my area, for some strange reason, who had recordings and were into this stuff. I don't know how that turned out, because it was a very small area. That was the kind of era I grew up in. It was more esoteric. Stuff you had to think about. You listened to jazz, it was an intellectual engagement listening. Blues, you had to listen to lyrics, you had to be engaged. You had to feel it. It wasn't like, turn on the radio and get the Top 10. So I was

brought up with that, thank God, rather than getting the perceived wisdom of BBC Radio; even though in those days they had some good music programmes, oddly enough. So that is where I was coming from. Nowadays that would be like a dinosaur, that era is completely gone. It was all kind of interconnected, jazz, blues, folk, the beat thing was going on. There was poetry and jazz. I am from a whole bygone era. I don't know if there is any tradition anymore. I was lucky to even meet, work and hang out with all these people. I remember the first time I saw Jimmy Witherspoon play in

London, it was unbelievable. Like a spiritual experience for want of a better word. I met him, it was '65 or something, hung out at the bar just like normal people.

It's all based on timing. Jazz and blues phasing is all based on playing with time. Some people may think a 12-bar blues is a jam. Jimi Hendrix-type people would think, ‘Jimi played really loudly, so that's what I am supposed to do.’ That is not 12-bar blues. It's not what it's

about at all. It's all about breaking it up. I don't know about loud guitar music, but for singers it's about playing with time; same for jazz. How do you carve up the time, stretch it out? How do you bridge it, how do you make space? It's all about creating space. It is only transmitted by listening and watching it, and being around it and absorbing it. The key is having musicians who understand this.

Sometimes, one is lucky and one will connect with musicians who understand what it's all about. That's when you can go somewhere. Unfortunately, most musicians don't understand this at all. They might be great technically; but they don't have the feeling. They don't know what you are trying to do, even though you tell them.

It's not something you can even tell people. They have to get it.

Duets: Reworking The Catalogue is out March 16 on RCA Records

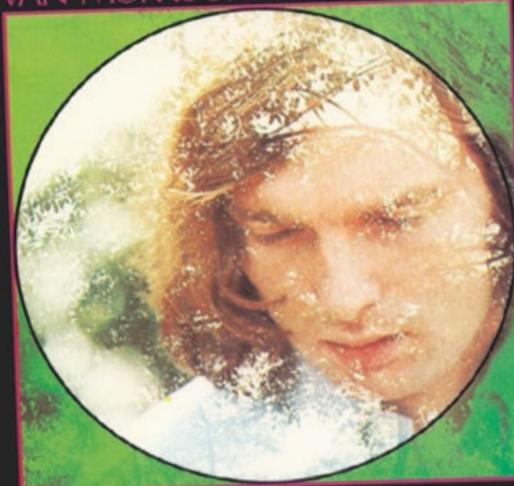
“I come from a different era... it was more esoteric”

VAN MORRISON

Van Morrison: “It's all about creating space and playing with time”



VAN MORRISON ASTRAL WEEKS



ASTRAL WEEKS

WARNER BROS, 1968

Them and Belfast are ancient history; Bang Records and “Brown Eyed Girl” a bitter memory. At 23, Morrison finds himself in Boston with a handful of extraordinary songs that nobody understands. Enter producer Lew Merenstein and a group of New York session men steeped in jazz. Together they create one of the most magical, mercurial albums in the rock canon.

LEWIS MERENSTEIN (PRODUCER): Van's

manager Bob Schwaid and I were friends. Van had signed to Warners but no producer wanted to touch him, so I went to Boston at Bob's request to hear him. He sat on a stool in Ace studios and played “Astral Weeks”, and it took me 30 seconds to know. I understood. The lyric went straight to my soul, it was immediately clear to me that he was being born again.

We took Van back to New York. I had an office with a little rehearsal room out back, and we'd sit around while he'd play tunes. I'd write down the songs I thought would go together for the album, because I sensed a story, like a little play. Van wasn't much of a conversationalist, and I never said, “What do you mean by this?” I don't know what transpired between Bang Records and Van coming to Boston, but he had obviously gone through a rebirth. I knew I needed people who could pick up that feeling. Richard Davis was a highly renowned bass player, Connie Kay drummed with the Modern Jazz Quartet, and Jay Berliner was a fine guitarist. They were all super pros, but also open souls who played from the heart.

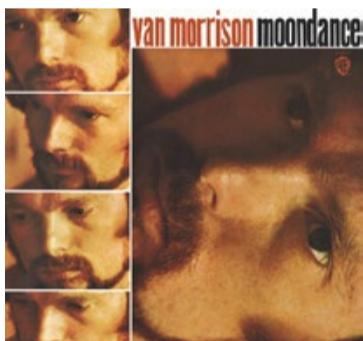
We went into Century Sound. It was a Union date. There was nothing sacred about it, but right away it was magical. It was so beautiful, it was hard to take. They would run through the first few minutes of a song, never the whole thing, and then do it. Everybody got the sense of what was being said musically, even if they didn't get what was being sung by Van. Everybody was into it. I remember Richard bent over his bass with his eyes closed, tuning into Van. It's hard to give the feeling a voice. It was beyond amazing.

JAY BERLINER (GUITAR): This little guy comes in and goes straight into the vocal booth. He doesn't have any contact with anyone. We could hardly see him. He must have been smoking something, because all you could see was white smoke in there! He sang and played in the booth, we followed, and these things just... happened. The first session was 7-11pm on September 25, 1968. We cut “Cyprus Avenue”, “Madame George”, “Beside You” and “Astral Weeks” in four hours. It was totally off the cuff. We couldn't make eye contact, but we were hearing each other through headphones and playing off of each other. Van said nothing.

Lew did all the communicating, and he seemed to be very happy. "Keep going, it sounds great!" Tunes like "Madame George" went on a long time, which was a chance to really open up. It was a very free session. On "Beside You" I was thinking of Rodrigo's 'Guitar Concerto', it had a similar kind of feel.

There was another session the following week, but I wasn't available. They brought in Barry Kornfeld, but that didn't work out. He didn't have a jazz background. [Only "The Way Young Lovers Do" was recorded at this session]. The final date was October 15, from 7pm-11.45pm. We did "Sweet Thing", "Ballerina", "Slim Slow Slider" and a song called "Royalty" that didn't make the final cut. And that was it. It was special, but back in those days you were running from day to day. I did a soap commercial the next day!

MERENSTEIN: "Slim Slow Slider" was originally much longer, but I don't recall what was taken out. Nothing terribly memorable. We overdubbed horns at Century Sound, and strings at Master Sound. It wasn't very intricate, but it was fulfilling. You know, I don't think Van had a clue how special it was. He was given the gift, as we all were. The album was like an ending. From there he was flying away, and out of that came a happier person, which was *Moondance*.



MOONDANCE
WARNER BROS, 1970
Living in Woodstock with new wife Janet Planet, Morrison recruits a band of vibrant young local musicians. Early in the sessions he breaks messily from Merenstein, but the record he delivers is a classic: a clean, punchy blend of soul, jazz, folk and country rock.



"It was like a holy person was in the room. He was looking for the spark..."

JEF LABES (PIANO, ORGAN): Van was living in a house on top of Ohayo Mountain. We'd rehearse in his living room, and you could look down for miles into this big reservoir. It was just a gorgeous place to make music. There was a simplicity to it. He'd come out of *Astral Weeks*, which had only sold 10,000 copies, so he was hanging by a thread. On the first session in New York we recorded with most of the guys on *Astral Weeks* – fantastic guys, all experienced jazz players – but it was obvious that everything was going to sound like *Astral Weeks* again, and there was a feeling among us that that was not going to wash. Van was pretty firm that he wanted to use us and not them, so there was a stand-off with Lew. After that, Van was running the show.

He definitely was trying to create something radio-friendly. He owed that to the record company and himself. A lot of the sound was kind of a tribute to The Band, because Van was very close to those guys and loved their music. Their very simple yet expressive work was the guiding principle of *Moondance*. I remember "Moondance" itself was a big question mark. It was jazzy, and didn't seem to belong in the pack. The first time we recorded it, it came out really well, but Van thought there must be a catch. So we did it about a dozen times, and ended up going back to the first one. He liked to sing live along with the track, because Sinatra did that. He loved having a first-take vocal. He was looking for the magic.

GARY MALLABER (DRUMS): I don't remember a bad moment. He was mellow, he was pleasant, flowing with everything. As soon as he hit that top falsetto on "Crazy Love", I said to Van, "Look, there's a set of vibraphones in the corner just screaming to be on this song," and he was gracious. "OK, go ahead. Sure." It gave it another texture. He let us sing the background vocals on "Caravan". On "Into The Mystic" he overdubbed the horn through a Leslie speaker. When Van began that song on the acoustic guitar and started singing, that's when I knew something extraordinary was happening. We'd messed with it a little bit in Woodstock, but it was nothing like going after it in

ESTATE OF DAVID GAHR



A Celtic soul: living in Woodstock, 1970

EYEWITNESS!

"YOU JUST HAD TO KNOW..."

Van Morrison's backing vocalist is a tough but rewarding gig. BIANCA THORNTON toured and recorded with him for six years in the '80s.

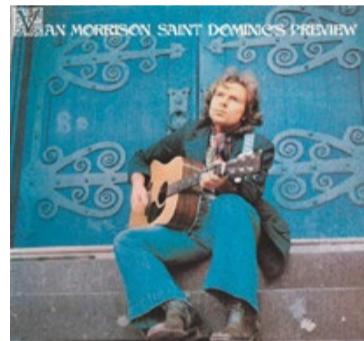


"VAN NEVER told you what he wanted. He'd just point at you and shout, 'Sing!' Sometimes he'd say, 'Cut back! I don't like that, too much vocals,' but if you asked him what he wanted, he'd walk away. You just had to know. Because of my extensive soul and gospel roots, I knew what made Van tick. He wanted that R'n'B texture in his music, repetition and call-and-response, but he didn't know how to say it. We improvised onstage. He'd do old songs without warning, and it would be a challenge not to get in his way when he was singing. It made it interesting. You weren't just hanging around for the next song, we tried to take it to the limit every night. Off stage he was quiet but powerful. You'd get in an elevator with him and it would be silent, everyone would hold their breath, then he'd get out and everyone would exhale. It was like an emperor walking in. Nobody would approach him, but if he told a joke, even if it wasn't funny, we'd all laugh to see if he'd relax!"

the studio. It was like the difference between a flight simulator and actually taking off! The hairs on my arms shot up. I was lost in listening to the cut and playing on it at the same time. It was like time-travelling.

JOHN PLATANIA (GUITAR): The high point for me was a jam called "Caledonia Soul Music", which was never released. Van was doing his stream-of-consciousness thing, it went on for about 15 minutes. I remember grabbing a beer bottle and using that as a slide. It was wild. The only direction he gave me on the whole album was, "Don't step on my vocals!"

ELLIOT SCHEINER (ENGINEER): He never said a word about sonics. He would never say, "I don't like that drum sound, or the way the guitar sounds." It wasn't as important to him as the actual notes. We finished just before Christmas, and there was a tight deadline on turning in the album. Van didn't want to be in New York over the holidays, so he went back to Woodstock and told me to mix it. I sent a copy up, and you could tell he was happy with what he had. There was no sense of, "Oh man, this is a seminal album," but everyone knew it was great.



SAINT DOMINIC'S PREVIEW

WARNER BROS, 1972

Having relocated to the San Francisco area, Morrison began recording regularly with a rotating cast of musicians. Alongside the classic "Jackie Wilson Said", his sixth album features three of his most intense recordings: "Listen To The Lion", "Almost Independence Day", and the title track.

GARY MALLABER (DRUMS): We had cut "Listen To The Lion" and "Almost Independence Day" during the sessions for his last album, *Tupelo Honey*. Sometimes certain tunes don't fit the sequence for an album, so you hold them over. "Listen To The Lion" was cut like a jazz tune, in two takes. He was taking off, and we took off with him. To me, it was Van's return to the mysticism of *Astral Weeks*. There's a reason every artist writes what they do, and with Van there were points of disturbance; great hurt

and disappointment. I lived in his studio for a while, and I questioned him about it. He said, "Oh, I use my childhood quite a bit." He was like this little lion caged up, and when things haunted him he just roared it out. In the end I played on about half the tracks on *Saint Dominic's Preview*. He was starting to go through musicians like McDonald's go through hamburgers! Everything was pretty vague, there was no touring schedule other than some local gigs while he was making the album.

DOUG MESSINGER (GUITAR): By January 1972 Van and I were living together at a hotel because he and Janet were fighting and she'd thrown him out. We started talking about a record, and he said,

"Well, I already have two songs. 'Listen To The Lion' and 'Almost Independence Day' are going to be on it, we have to do some more."

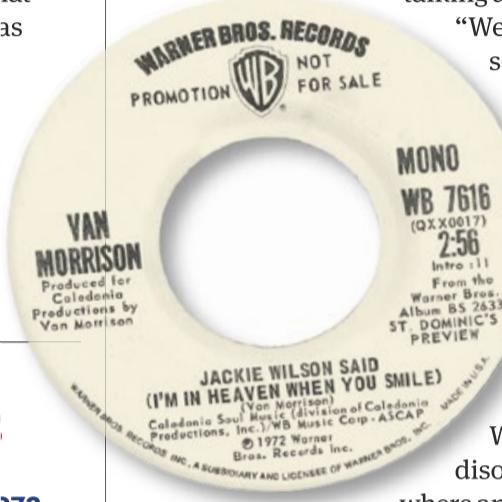
He hired Pacific Heights in San Francisco for the first session. We did "Gypsy", which went okay, but "Jackie

Wilson Said" was totally disorganised. He didn't know

where anything went, and no-one

really seemed to know what to do with it. Van went away, and the band worked out the basic structure. When he came back we went through it a couple of times and he was real happy because all of a sudden it seemed to be making sense. He said, "I think it's coming together," which is what he always said when he felt it was working. I remember he said to the drummer, Ricky Schlosser, "When I sing 'boom, boom, boom', hit the tom and the kick drum at the same time." We ran through it once or twice, and the first recorded take is what's on the album. It was all over the place, but somehow it worked. Even when he adlibbed at the end – "One more time" – somehow we all kept it together. At the end, Van was smiling like a Cheshire cat: "I think we got it!" We tried a second take and – of course – it fell apart.

By contrast, we beat "Saint Dominic's Preview" to death. It's an odd structure, and it was not coming together. Everyone was being a fucking studio musician on it, treading water. Van had five guitar players come up from





"It's Too Late to Stop Now", live at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, CA, May 19, 1973

"Van was starting to go through musicians like McDonald's go through hamburgers!"

LA and he hated all of them! Eventually I did the guitar overdub and Van ran out of the studio and said, "Now it's starting to sound like a song, but my vocal isn't good enough." He brought a mic out to the studio floor and sang it through once and nailed it. He changed stuff around to make it fresh. 'Wine' became 'wi-yee-ine', and 'no regret' became 'ne regrette rien'. I said, "What the fuck is that?" He said, "I don't know, but it's something." He was so happy, he hugged me. Once Van got the vocal he wanted on a song, that was it. He didn't care if the band screwed up.



IT'S TOO LATE TO STOP NOW WARNER BROS, 1974

A stunning document of Morrison's 1973 tour with the 11-piece Caledonian Soul Orchestra. Recorded at the Troubadour, Santa Monica Auditorium and the Rainbow - his first dates in London for six years - the double set remains one of the most electrifying concert albums ever.

JEF LABES (ORGAN, PIANO, BAND LEADER): That tour was a wonderful time. The band were great, and we played a wide array of material. We majorly rearranged a lot of his old songs, like "Cyprus Avenue", and he also was revisiting a lot of old blues and R'n'B. Ray Charles, Sam Cooke, Sonny Boy Williamson, he was blowing that stuff brilliantly. It was very easy to lead that band. There wasn't a lot of tension or sarcasm, everyone was into supporting Van's energy and being focused on him. He never liked to rehearse. I'd work the band up without him, which meant when he did finally step in it was almost like a holy person was in the room. He was looking for the spark. He was

that with anybody else. He didn't micro-manage the band, he left it to Jef and us. It wasn't very sophisticated, the stage setup was pretty simple. I don't even think we had monitors when we played the Troubadour, but we were a low-volume band with hardly any equipment, and we could hear each other pretty well. I really remember the Rainbow. The excitement around that was pretty extraordinary. The electricity was tangible. I found it quite startling what a big deal it was, him playing in London again. I think it was a big deal for him, too. He was coming home in a sense, and I'm sure he was aware of it.

JOHN PLATANIA (GUITAR): Especially in Europe, Van and I would hang out, have dinner. He liked his own space, but he wasn't anti-social as people sometimes perceive him as being. I didn't consider him to be a superstar. I was in awe of his talent, but I considered him more as a brother. I didn't walk on tiptoes around him on tour.

HAYES: There are no overdubs on the album. It's totally live, what you hear is what you get. We seemed to record every other show. There were as many songs again that were mixed but didn't get released. I remember listening to mixes with him and he had already narrowed it down. He passed over some of his biggest songs, like "Moondance" and "Brown Eyed Girl". He deliberately left 'em off. He was keen to do something different, to do something for himself.



**VEEDON FLEECE
WARNER BROS, 1974**
Burned out from the 1973 tour and newly divorced, Morrison takes a three-week break in Ireland and writes some of his most soulful, searching songs, infused with Celtic mysticism and deep longing. Back home, in under a week he makes one of his most potent, if under-appreciated records.

DAVID HAYES (BASS): Van had gone over to Ireland on holiday and he came back with a bucket of great songs. He had a little eight-track studio in his garage, and he called a few of us up there and he unveiled them as we went. The whole album was done in about three evenings. It was all

looking to the band for it, but actually he was the one who delivered it. When he connected with that spark he set everyone else on fire, and there wasn't a person in the room who wasn't struck by it. There was a lot of that on that tour.

DAVID HAYES

(BASS): If he went for it then the rest of us were drawn into that. The focus among all of us was sometimes so powerful that when we topped that wave on something like "Listen To The Lion" you could actually see it in the atmosphere! It was transcendental. I don't think I've ever gotten

EYEWITNESS!

"YOU'RE ALL FUCKING FIRED!"

Guitarist DOUG MESSENGER spends Christmas '70 in Woodstock with a weirded-out Van Morrison

HAVING BEEN hired by Van, sight unseen, to be his guitarist, on December 23, 1970, Messenger flew into Newark to meet his boss for the first time. "Mary Martin, his manager, picked me up," says Messenger. "The snow was so bad Mary couldn't drive up Ohayo Mountain, so she dropped me at the bottom around midnight. I finally made it to the right house, a very primal place, and knocked at the door. There was no reply, but there was a very dim light from a Christmas tree. I kept knocking - nothing - and eventually just walked in. There was Van, standing in the living room, arms crossed and his back to me, staring at the tree. I said, 'Hello, Van. Van?' No answer. I thought, 'Fuck this', and walked into the kitchen to make tea. I sat down at the Formica table, and all of a sudden Van sat down, leaned forward and said: 'I've got a problem. I've got to stop drinking.' First words he ever said to me! We talked a bit, and then I went to sleep in the guest room. Next morning I woke up and Van was sitting at the foot of the bed, with his entire band there. The first thing out of his mouth was, 'Doug and I are starting a band, you're all fucking fired!' It was the strangest thing."



"A very funny man": the 1979, *Into The Music* touring lineup, with violinist Toni Marcus, far left

cut at night. His house was his private place. I think we hung out there once after a session, but normally we'd just show up and get our heads down. There was no direction, he just left it to everybody to get orientated. I felt the writing process was similar to *Astral Weeks*. He was channelling, and we picked up on that. He had all his lyrics written on envelopes and napkins. He'd play half the song, until we understood how the different parts and sections tied together, and then usually it would be done in one take. [Drummer] Dahaud Shaar was engineering at Van's studio at that time, and his wife would be in the control room to push the 'record' button. It was really low-tech, we were all huddled facing each other in his garage.

I don't know if it was the timing, or because he was rested and anxious to get on with it, but it was like he could do no wrong on that whole project. It never let up, all the time we were doing it. It was an amazing experience. We recorded "Bulbs" and "Cul De Sac" in those sessions, in the same vein as the rest of the album. I think Van knew Warner Brothers wouldn't know what the hell to do with it, so he put together a session in New York to give them something more commercial to play with.

JOHN TROPEA (GUITAR):

We did "Bulbs" and "Cul De Sac" at Mercury Studios in New York. It was a double-date, from 10 until 5. Van would run down the music, we'd do one or two takes, then I stayed to do the solo on "Bulbs". He was very reserved, a little aloof. He wasn't rude or anything, but not over-friendly. Tell the truth, I was a little bit intimidated by him.

JEF LABES (ORGAN, ARRANGER):

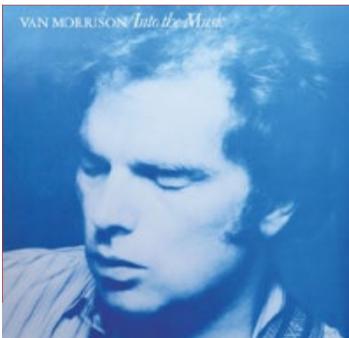
He definitely came back from Ireland with some new inspiration. He had already recorded most of the tracks out west, then we did

"Van was being influenced by Eno and Miles Davis"



"Bulbs" and "Cul De Sac" after everything else was done. In New York he handed me a 12-minute version of "You Don't Pull No Punches, But You Don't Push The River", and I found a way to edit it down to nine minutes. That was the first victory! Then I wrote strings and woodwind for it, and it really came together. I did the same for "Streets Of Arklow". It was exceptionally powerful stuff. For me, the whole album was harking back to *Astral Weeks*. It had that loose, jazz feel. At that time he didn't need to prove himself to anyone. The music could be whatever he wanted it to be.

HAYES: He hasn't ever played those songs live. They were really hard to perform after the fact, because they're basically unrepeatable. It took so much focus and concentration to make those things lift up, it's very difficult to recreate them. So *Veedon Fleece* really captures a moment in time.



INTO THE MUSIC MERCURY/WARNER BROS, 1979

On the first album to feature key collaborators Mark Isham, Peter Van Hooke and James Brown veteran Pee Wee Ellis, Morrison creates an upbeat and very fluid kind of funky folk-rock. Bookended by the breezy "Bright Side Of The Road" and a sky-scraping re-imagining of The Ink Spots' standard, "It's All In The Game".

DAVID HAYES (BASS): Van had been over in England, spending time in the country with [guitarist] Herbie Armstrong, and a lot of the writing was done there. The album has an English folk feel, but also a sunny side, because we recorded it at the Record Plant in Sausalito. He had new people involved. The violin is very prominent,

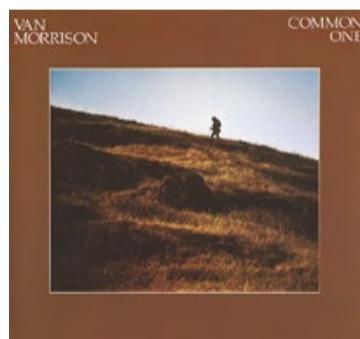
played by Toni Marcus. I don't know how he met her – it was like a leaflet on a telephone pole or something – and Van just kind of turned her loose! She was a real character. She was a Sufi, or a Krishna, always wearing pink and orange. Van was having a good time making the record. It felt like a new beginning. It was cut in about four days, all live, but he worked a little bit more on the arrangements with us. We even did a couple of days' rehearsing in a hall.

PETER VAN HOOKE (DRUMS): I came over from England and they were rehearsing with another drummer [Kurt Wortman]. I was a bit confused, I didn't really understand what was going on, so I just sat and listened. I wouldn't say it was typical Van, but if he wants to play and you're not there, he'll get someone else. I was bit savvier when it came to recording, so I was given my opportunity. It was a really good band. Toni Marcus was a very extrovert player, but everyone else was locked into something else. Van enjoyed having a few English people around, he likes that humour. He can be a very funny guy.

MARK ISHAM (HORNS): He was very much in Irish Bard mode at that time, but he always has a wide frame of reference. I was a specialist in the piccolo trumpet, and Van said that he wanted that "Penny Lane" sound on "Troubadours". He had left a hole in that track for it, he could hear it, so I improvised a part and it worked really well. He asked me if I knew a good sax player and I suggested Pee Wee Ellis. He laughed and said, "The Pee Wee Ellis?" That was it. We both worked with him for the next several years. He's very good at picking the right people to do the job.

HAYES: He really stretches out on that record. By the end of "It's All In The Game" we're all in a certain kind of space. When you get to that stage with Van, the telepathy just kicks in. You lose all those kinds of thoughts about, 'Am I locking in with Peter's kick drum?', or whatever. It's transcendental telepathy. I've done hundreds of records, and there are so few people who can do that.

VAN HOOKE: It was intuitive communication. "It's All In The Game" was actually much longer than that, it was edited down. There was a sense of great achievement from everybody when we finished the take. It happened because everyone was listening and ready to have a collective experience, and Van was willing to really open himself up. When he's on, you can be so adventurous.



COMMON ONE MERCURY/WARNER BROS, 1980

The deepest excavation of Deep Van was recorded high in the French Alps. Meditative and otherworldly, it's dominated by two improvised 15-minute tracks, "When Heart Is Open" and "Summertime In England". The latter became the catalytic highlight of his stage show for the next decade.

JEF LABES (ARRANGER): Van and I used to ride around the hills in northern California, in the watershed of Mount Tamalpais, and he was very much reminded of Ireland, Scotland and the Lakes. He had a favourite place, the Pelican Inn, an English pub where he would stop and get tea, shepherd's pie, bangers and mash. Even though he was living in California, he had a lot of that ancient Celtic-English stuff around him. It kept that spirit alive.

DAVID HAYES (BASS): We recorded in this unbelievable place, up above Nice in the Alps. We were all out of our element, which has a lot to do with how that album feels. The atmosphere... I don't know how to put it. It

EYEWITNESS!

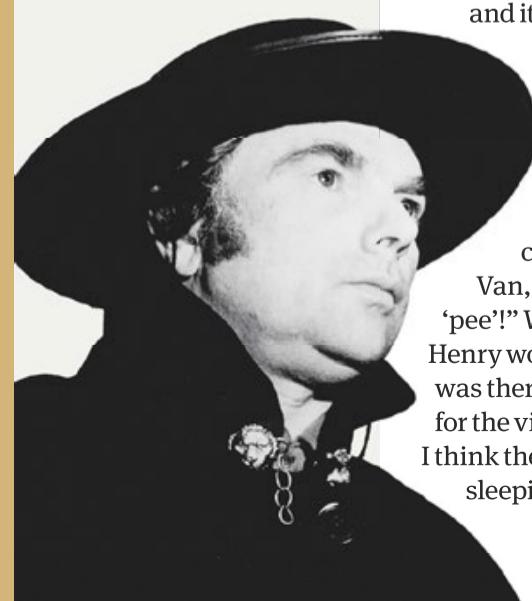
"HE'S LIKE MOZART..."

Keyboardist JEF LABES, who worked extensively with Van from 1969 to 2009, ponders the inner struggle behind the abrasive exterior.



"HE NEVER wanted to be a rock star. Van feels people look at rock stars as symbols, rather than

human beings, and he's always fought against that. To understand him, it helps to understand how he works. He once said to me that he sees all his work as variations on one piece of music that he channels. He doesn't sit down and work on songs, he gets a rush of energy. He'll grab a guitar and start playing, switch on a recording device, and whatever comes out, he'll write down. It arrives as an almost complete work. It's like Mozart. When it's happening, you'll see him the next day and he'll have a whole song written on an envelope. He's talked about it with me over the years, and how hard it is, because when that goes away he's sad and exhausted, and when it's there, when he's visited by the spirit, he's compelled to get it out. It's scary. He has no idea where it comes from."



was mystic and spooky at the same time. Van and I stayed in converted horse stables next to the studio, but he kept pretty much to himself. The spiritual stuff wasn't overt. We knew we were experiencing that, but then we'd watch *Fawlty Towers* and goof off. We memorised every episode. Van was more a fan of *Sergeant Bilko*.

JOHN ALLAIR (PIANO, ORGAN): It was rarefied air, and he was really open to it. He wouldn't talk about it, but you felt that vibe. Monastic, just like the album feels. He was seeing things! He was so quiet, man, he was really in that place. It wasn't a people-pleasing album, it was his own personal statement of where he was at. He had a hard time naming it, I remember. He was asking everyone what to call it.

We were booked for three weeks and we did it in a week. They ordered cartons of two-inch tape from Paris, and by the time it arrived, we were all done. We'd played a few gigs in California beforehand where we'd worked out "Satisfied", and "Wild Honey" was a major production number, like Frank Sinatra. But, really, it was total freedom. On "When Heart Is Open" he did this primal groan while playing harmonica at the same time, and when that

happened in fucking real time in the studio it was literally a hair-raising moment. It was wild, deep. It's never been about chords with Van, it's totally about feel. ESP.

PEE WEE ELLIS (HORNS):

We went to have coffee down in the village and the drummer didn't get back right away, so we did "When Heart Is Open" without him. I played flute, and I didn't have any idea what was going to happen. It was all improvised. You

just had to listen to the vibe. He didn't explain. He never does! He was being influenced by a lot of things a lot of us didn't understand.

MARK ISHAM (TRUMPET):

He was being influenced by Eno and Miles Davis. He played *In A Silent Way* for us before "Summertime In England", and the band were sophisticated enough to work out how to do that within Van's vocabulary. That became the song in his shows for years, the ultimate mountain to climb. He was a voracious listener, studier and reader. We had long discussions about spiritual things, though I don't think he was vocal about it in general. He was exploring different philosophies, self-improvement. He became very interested in ambient and New Age music, and *Common One* was the first push towards that: "What can I bring from that world into what I do?" A lot of New Age music lacks focus, but put Van and his magnificent poetry at the top of that pyramid and it's quite something. A lot of those ideas were

brilliant. It was a beautiful stage for Van to explore what he wanted to explore. I can still see him sitting silently at the Rhodes organ. You could tell something was just waiting to bubble out.

HAYES: [Co-producer] Henry Lewy was a character. On "Haunts Of Ancient Peace" he told

Van, "You've got to enunciate 'peace'. It sounds like 'pee'!" We'd finish these incredible performances and Henry would be asleep. I couldn't really figure out why he was there. The album was mastered at the wrong speed for the vinyl pressing. It was all a quarter tone slow, but I think they fixed it on the CD. That's what you get for sleeping on the job!

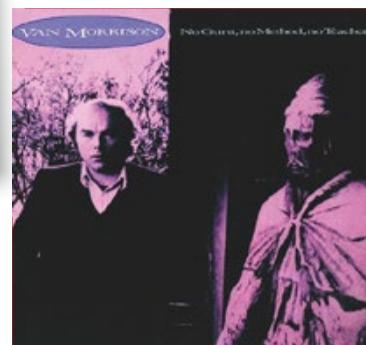


EYEWITNESS!

WOOL HALL

A peek inside Van's West Country lair

PREVIOUSLY OWNED by Tears For Fears, Van bought Wool Hall in the '90s, having used it to cut five albums. Situated in Beckington, 10 miles from his home in Bath, "it was an idyllic 16th-Century building next to a castle," recalls engineer Walter Samuel. "It was a great studio: an eight-bedroom cottage, a rehearsal room, good food. Van hates London, so he needed a local place. He ran his whole operation from there. He took over the pool-table space, not great for us! I spent eight months a year there. He'd write a couple of songs, we'd record them during the week, then he'd gig at weekends. That's how most of his '90s LPs were cut. It had an upstairs, and I think one reason Van didn't come into the control room much was that it was too far to travel up the stairs!" Following Morrison's relocation to Ireland, the studio closed.



NO GURU, NO METHOD, NO TEACHER

MERCURY, 1986

Ten unhurried, stately songs of contemplation, rooted in memories and evocations of Ireland. On one of his most rapturous pieces, "In The Garden", a meditative Morrison is transported back to the "garden, wet with rain" of Astral Weeks' "Sweet Thing".

DAVID HAYES (BASS): He was back and forth a lot. He still had his home in California, but he was spending a lot of time in the UK, and he definitely had his toes in that sensibility. They were really well-written songs, and he was prepared when he came in. He'd really got it together. He even had a little binder with all the lyrics typed out. I'd never seen him do that before – maybe he had a new secretary or something! He knew exactly what he wanted to create, but he didn't verbalise it. "In The Garden" is one of his great songs. He started playing and we rolled in and came up with parts really quickly. I found it really close to what he was saying on *Astral Weeks* and *Veedon Fleece*. I had the same feeling while I was doing it, because it was all coming off the phrasing and the lyrics. That's what you have to do with him, follow the words and the voice. On that album he was as connected to that space as he had ever been.

JEF LABES (PIANO, ORGAN): The material was an extension of *Common One* in many ways. Mystical, with that Irish-English theme running through everything. There was no rehearsing, no demos, we did it all in the studio. He gets a sense if it's going in the right direction, and fortunately it was all going in the same direction on that album. It's very subtle. It's not his rocking-out side, it's part of something else that he does that's much more spiritual. He was still searching for the magic.

BABA TUNDE (DRUMS): He wanted it right the first time. We played the songs through once and recorded them. Van always went for the magic, and if it wasn't there after two takes, he moved on. We did the whole thing in Studio D in Sausalito in three or four days. There wasn't a lot of banter or small talk, it was strictly business, but after we were done, he took us all out for lunch and he was a different person, just a total sweetheart. We talked about how messed up the business can be.

KATE ST JOHN (OBOE, COR ANGLAIS): There was an overdub session in London. Van was quite late, but

Mick [Glossop, engineer] said, "I'm not allowed to play you anything until he comes." When he arrived he was really friendly. "Got To Go Back" was the first one we did, it had a plaintiveness which was perfect for oboe. I was just noodling away, and he immediately said, "Oh, that's great! What sign are you?" We talked about astrology for a while and then we built a part. We also did "Foreign Window", which I loved. He said he wrote that song about Bob Dylan.

JOHN PLATANIA (GUITAR): Ry Cooder came in, but it didn't work out, so they brought me in. Ry sat through every song, he played and played, but I don't know what happened because he isn't on the album. I was there when Chrissie Hynde came in for backing vocals, and he didn't use those either! Chrissie was real nervous, she didn't know what to do and Van didn't help her out at all. I felt bad, but he just expected her to know.



IRISH HEARTBEAT

MERCURY, 1988

Morrison hooks up with The Chieftains and Clannad bassist Ciarán Brennan to record eight traditional Irish songs, by turns raucous and mournful, as well as radically reinterpreting two of his own. The results are an unexpected thrill.

BRIAN MASTERSON (ENGINEER): It was a strange coming together in many ways. Given the whole situation in Ireland at the time, here were two parties coming from two very different cultural ethoses, shall we say. Those two threads of Irishness don't usually overlap. The Protestant community in the north doesn't really have much to do with Irish traditional music, but I don't think those thoughts were ever on the table. Musicians can leave all that kind of baggage at the door.

I'd worked with Van a little, and a lot with The Chieftains. It was not a meeting that I thought would bear fruit, and yet it was a wonderful marriage. It was done at the 'little' Windmill Lane, our second studio near Stephen's Green, in two distinct halves. I think the idea was, "Let's try three or four songs, and if it goes well, we'll come back." We started in the autumn and returned in January to finish it.

It was full of energy and adrenalin, as nobody quite knew how things would go. Van could be volatile to say the least,

Irish heartbeats: Van (left) with The Chieftains in 1988





Hill of the Muses: with Bob Dylan in Athens, Greece, 1989

but I don't remember it being contentious. Paddy Moloney was the instigator, he was always looking for angles, but the conduit was [Chieftains multi-instrumentalist] Derek Bell. Derek and Van were very much kindred spirits, and Paddy had such respect for Derek, so if any oiling of the wheels were needed, Derek did it. He'd gather all Van's chords and make sure the band weren't transgressing.

CIARÁN BRENNAN (BASS): I'd get a chord sheet from Derek, Van would mutter, "Turn on the Grundig," and we'd do it in one or two takes. It was so spontaneous and uplifting. The way Van nodded or gestured drove the recordings. You don't say much to Van, you prove yourself, but it was fun. One time I placed a bet because The Chieftains weren't tuned up. I put a fiver on Celtic Mist at 33/1, and Van was more interested in the bloody horse than whatever we were playing. It came in last and he laughed his head off. On a couple of songs he and I were the rhythm section. I played bass and Van was singing and playing drums at the same

time. We had a Perspex screen in front of us, and someone mentioned 'spill'. He said, "Ach, that's what a cat does to milk." He wouldn't take no for an answer.

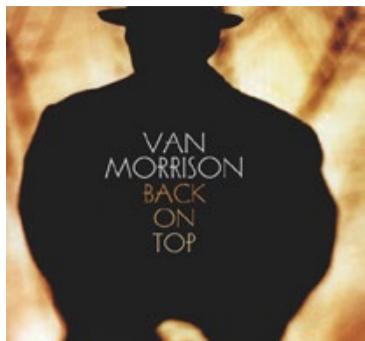
MASTERSON: There had been no mention at all of drums, then on "Irish Heartbeat", or perhaps "Raglan Road", you could see that Van wasn't quite happy with the way things were going. He looked at me and said, "I need drums. Drums! Drums!" He asked me to recommend a drummer, which was fine, but when the kit arrived he just said, "Oh, I'll play them myself," and plonked them down in the middle of the flipping band. I said, "I can't record them like that," and he said, "That's your problem, work it out." He was really bashing the high-hat, it was so loud. In the end I prevailed on him to move to the side of the room, but, oh God, the drums really were a nightmare. Then again, there was genuine magic. I've recorded "She Moved Through The Fair" with so many people, and I still think Van's version has it. Everything that that song should be is in that performance.

"I'm not sure how he does it... it just comes out of him. It just happens"

BURIED TREASURE NO STREAM, NO REISSUE, NO DOWN- LOADS...

The sad state of Van's back catalogue

MOONDANCE MAY HAVE got the double-disc deluxe treatment in 2013, much to Van's chagrin, but many of his albums are in a state of neglect. Universal's 2008 programme of remastered CD reissues stopped midway, allegedly halted by Morrison in protest at the label's lack of support for '08's *Keep It Simple*. The result is that many fine LPs, including *St Dominic's Preview* and *Irish Heartbeat* are out of print. Only *Astral Weeks*, *Moondance* and ...Street Choir are on iTunes, with 2012's *Born To Sing* and several cheap Bang comps. On Spotify the story's the same. A major canon, shoddily curated.



BACK ON TOP POINT BLANK/ VIRGIN, 1999

A rich distillation of Morrison's later work, featuring crisp R'n'B, warm soul, autumnal contemplation and even a Top 40 single in the ska-inflected "Precious Time". Recorded with an unstarred cast of rock'n'roll session men at Morrison's Wool Hall studio, near Bath.

WALTER SAMUEL (ENGINEER): Some of Van's later albums are patchy, but *Back On Top* he really did enjoy. The songs are good. In fact, "Philosopher's Stone" is one of the best things he's done. He was a bit more prepared. Rather than turning up on the day and it being, "Right, here we go" – which is how he normally worked – we did some demos with guitar and voice. Fiachra Trench played piano and was musical director, and he heard the demos. That's why it turned out so well. There was a bit more knowledge of when the chords changes were going to come, which doesn't hurt! Even so, it was 1999 but it could just as well have been 1973. Everything was first and second takes with everyone playing at the same time. From an engineering point of view, it was tricky, trying to get the balance with so many people playing live all over the studio. It could be quite chaotic. He never explains what he wants, it's up to the musicians to know.

IAN JENNINGS (BASS): I went to Wool Hall the day before the session and the other musicians were arriving. We were all on edge as nobody knew what we were going to record. Fiachra Trench was the MD, but he was sworn to secrecy. Nobody was allowed to see any of the notes about the songs, all he could say was that it would all be done live.



The next day, we started around noon and cut most of the album in one day. A couple of tracks were done at an extra session, but it felt like we did the whole LP back to back. Fiachra would come around with a chord chart – "There you go, there's the next one" – and

bang, bang, bang! Two takes of each song, then on to the next. The first thing we did was "Precious Time". Afterwards, we all trooped up the three flights of stairs to the control room to hear it back. That could be a long walk! Van was sitting on his own, and we all gathered around the mixing desk. When the track finished, nobody said anything. It was deathly quiet, then Mick Green said, really loudly in his Essex accent, "That sounds fucking great!" Van just started laughing and we felt like we were on a roll. After we'd finished for the day, everyone just sagged, because the concentration levels were so intense.

SAMUEL: Van was there when we cut the tracks, but he didn't really come in again. He'd moved office to Wool Hall and he was around a lot, but he wasn't one to come in the control room for days on end. You did the mixes and gave him a cassette, and he might say "more vocal" or "a bit more bass", that was all. He likes to hear the end product, but he's not that interested in the technicalities. I worked with him for eight years and I'm still not sure how he does it. It just comes out of him. It just happens. **①**

Rock Lobster

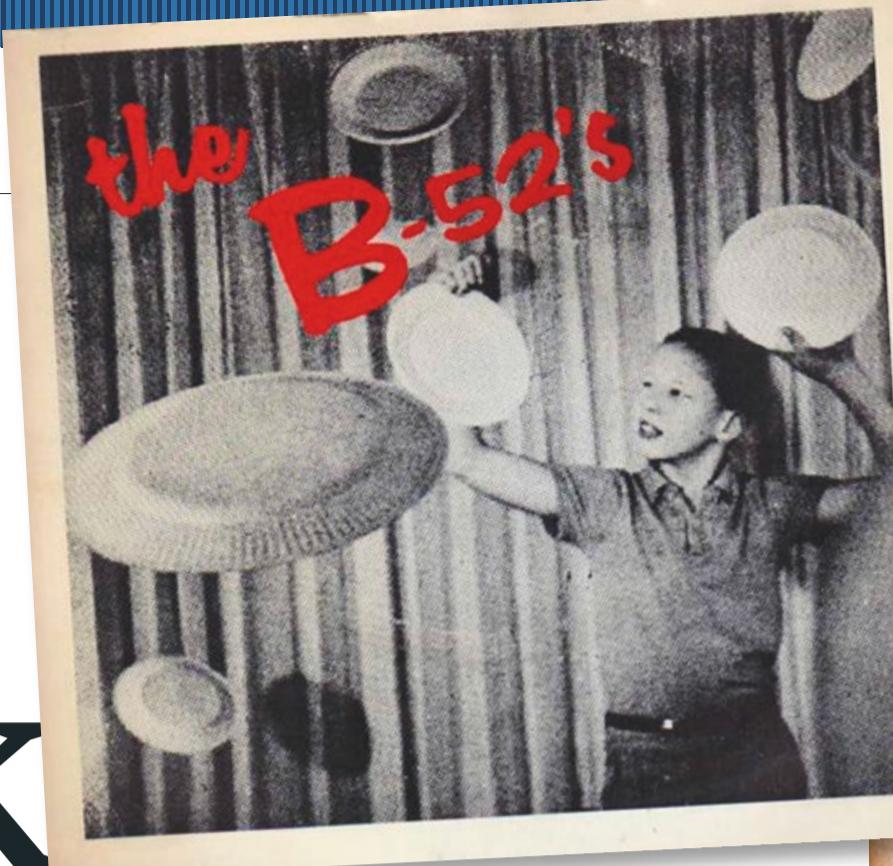
BY THE B-52s

1978: an offbeat quintet from Athens, Georgia create an unlikely surf-rock hit. “Yeah, this was the dangerous one... We had to stop shows because plaster was falling from the ceiling!”

EVEN IN THE melting pot of the American new wave scene, The B-52s’ debut single stood out. Equal parts funny, weird and artfully avant-garde, “Rock Lobster” is still the greatest nonsensical six-and-a-half-minute psychedelic surf-rock song about marine life. “Well, there’s not any songs like it,” laughs vocalist Fred Schneider. The quintet bonded over a flaming volcano cocktail in a Chinese restaurant in Athens, Georgia, in late 1976, and quickly pieced together the song that helped secure them an audience on New York’s alternative scene.

“Nothing with the band was ever thought out or calculated,” says drummer Keith Strickland today. “Even the way we dressed was just how we dressed when we went to parties before the band started. I think that’s what made it work, ‘cos it was just who we were.”

Formed from an open-tuned riff written by the group’s late guitarist Ricky Wilson and wry *sprechgesang* poetry from Schneider, all topped off with raucous fish impressions from Kate Pierson and Cindy Wilson, “Rock Lobster” even has the honour of having sparked John Lennon’s return to the studio in the late ’70s. Recognising Yoko Ono’s influence on Cindy’s wild screams, Lennon became convinced the music world was now ready for him and his wife, and swiftly began work on *Double Fantasy*. “We started out as a



“Pass the tanning butter...”
The B-52s circa 1979:
(l-r) Kate Pierson, Keith
Strickland, Cindy Wilson,
Ricky Wilson, Fred Schneider

party band,” says Schneider, “and we all had a good sense of humour. But we don’t do our songs in a funny way, we want to kick ass. We want to rock.” **TOM PINNOCK**

KEITH STRICKLAND: I’d been friends with Ricky since we were 16 in high school. I would play his guitar sometimes, but I would often break a string, and instead of replacing it I’d just retune the guitar to some open tuning. This was much to Ricky’s annoyance... I said, “Try playing it like this.” And he finally tried it. The next day I walked in, and he’s playing the guitar and laughing. I go, “What’s so funny?” and he says, “I’ve just written the most stupid guitar riff ever.” And he plays the “Rock Lobster” riff. He knew it was good, but he also thought it was funny – that was Ricky’s sense of humour.

SCHNEIDER: I first heard the riff when we started jamming. I’d had the idea for the title – I was at this disco in Atlanta, called 2001 Disco, and instead of a light show they had a really cheap, cheesy slideshow. They’d show slides of puppies, lobsters on the grill, hamburgers, children... I mean, it wasn’t a perty place [laughs], but it definitely wasn’t an expensive, deluxe

KEY PLAYERS



Fred Schneider
Vocals,
songwriting



Keith Strickland
Drums



Kevin Dunn
Production

place. And I just thought “rock this, rock that... rock lobster”. So we went into our studio, which was an unheated bloodletting room in the African-American part of town, in a funeral parlour.

STRICKLAND: I would just jam along with Ricky. Kate wasn’t playing bass on the keyboard yet, so it was just drums and guitar; very White Stripes!

SCHNEIDER: The way we worked was to jam for a long time. If we thought we had

something, Ricky and Keith would take it back on their tape recorder, and then they’d come back and play it for us, and show us parts and we’d see if it worked for us. I just thought, “Okay, so this is the title, imagine something and then just start singing about it...” Sometimes pot would help, too [laughs]. It just gradually grew and then it wound up at six and a half minutes long...

STRICKLAND: When Cindy goes into the scream, that was sort of a tip of the hat to Yoko Ono. We were all big fans of her music. I think the fish sounds and Fred going “*there goes a narwhal*” and “*here comes a bikini whale*” and all that stuff, that was just from the jams, and piecing it all together.



SCHNEIDER: "Pass the tanning butter..." That was probably a '60s reference, 'cos I lived near the shore, and there were constant ads for suntan lotion and all that stuff – I just threw everything into the mix.

STRICKLAND: The humour came out very naturally for us. That is Fred's genius in a way. He would just yell the stuff out... very sort of punk, you know? It was how he delivered it that made it work.

KEVIN DUNN: I first heard about the Bs when they were playing around at parties and they were the talk of the town, basically. I saw them when my band The Fans played with them in Atlanta – it was something to see. It was a singular sound, nothing like it, Ricky especially. He was one of a kind, a perfect, naïve genius. Honestly, I don't think I've ever seen anything like that in my life. It was like mass kinesis in the audience.

SCHNEIDER: We played New York before we ever played Athens. We'd done parties in Athens but there was no place for us to play, 'cos we were the only punk band in town. Somebody said, "You sound as good as a lot of the bands at Max's", so we got a gig there on December 12, 1977.

DUNN: The Fans were playing CBGB's a lot in '77 and we basically introduced the band to Hilly Kristal: "Here's a cute little band from Athens, perhaps you might like to book them sometime."

SCHNEIDER: And eventually we were one of the only bands they would allow to play both

Max's and CBGB's, because we said, "Look, we can't be driving 800 miles on alternate weekends." We started just totally selling out, and record labels came to see us, we were thrilled. We met Blondie, the Talking Heads...

STRICKLAND: I remember playing Max's the second time and The Cramps were there, and

"We were a band with a sense of humour, and a lot of uptight, probably straight, white guys didn't get it"

FRED SCHNEIDER

I was talking to Lux and Ivy after our set. In those days, everybody was putting out an independent single and we hadn't recorded ours yet. I remember Lux and Ivy asking, "What's your single gonna be?" And we were like, "Well, we haven't decided yet." They said, "It's gotta be 'Rock Lobster'!" I wasn't really sure, but it was always the last song at closing time.

SCHNEIDER: I guess it was the strongest, and got the most response. By that time, we had "Killer Bees", "Planet Claire", "52 Girls", maybe "Dance This Mess Around".

STRICKLAND: We went to Stone Mountain Studios, and basically set up live. Maybe we all played it live, so Kate played keyboards and keyboard bass at the same time.

DUNN: I came to produce the first version of "Rock Lobster" through Danny Beard [of DB Records]. He was sort of dating Kate, and was into the band a lot, and he decided that I knew something about recording. In a lot of ways I would always say I was the production chauffeur. I didn't add very much to the operation, which was pretty bare-boned. It was just like, here's the sound recorded. The engineer, Bruce Baxter, was a genius in that way, so uh... I directed traffic. That was basically it. I think it took the better part of two days.

SCHNEIDER: I don't think we added any reverb to the whole recording at all – we didn't think about it!

DUNN: The aesthetic back then was for dry drums. It was like, do as little to the core of the rhythm section as possible.

STRICKLAND: There wasn't a lot of production. There were no overdubs. Um, I think we may have overdubbed the gong, though, and kind of pitched it down.

DUNN: I tried, in the "down, down" section,

THE B-52s



Kate Pierson at The B-52s' first British gig, at The Lyceum, London, July 8, 1979

to get a ring modulator effect to be introduced to sound like bubbles. And they were like, "No." That notion was not accepted!

SCHNEIDER: We released it in the summer of '78, and it made its way to Australia and all these different places, and eventually it was one of the best-selling independent singles of that time.

STRICKLAND: A lot of people were very interested in producing us, including Frank Zappa. I love him but I just felt, it's going to go in that territory, you know – that sort of obvious, very sarcastic humour.

SCHNEIDER: I like British humour, you just come up with something that's intelligent and ridiculous, and keep a straight face. People were saying, 'They're camp' and shit like that. It's like, hello, camp means you don't know what you're doing, but you're funny 'cos you're ridiculous. All our stuff, we knew what we were doing. We were a band with a sense of humour, and a lot of uptight, probably straight, white guys didn't get it.

STRICKLAND: We liked that our music was more ambiguous, it wasn't tongue in cheek, because we performed as passionately as

FACT FILE

- **Written by:** Fred Schneider, Ricky Wilson
- **Performers:** Schneider (vocals), Wilson (guitar), Keith Strickland (drums), Kate Pierson (vocals, keys), Cindy Wilson (vocals)
- **Produced by:** Kevin Dunn; Chris Blackwell
- **Recorded at:** Stone Mountain Sound, Georgia; Compass Point, Bahamas
- **Released:** May 1978
- **UK/US chart:** 37; 56

STRICKLAND: I remember after we finished the album, we listened back to it and I just thought, 'This sounds horrible.' I just thought it was dreadful, the whole thing, the whole album... it was terrible. Because I just thought, you know, you go into a studio and you think you'll sound bigger and better or whatever, you know? And Chris really wanted to keep it stripped down and just sound the way we did it. I mean to me, to my ears, we never sounded that way. In the club, it's reverby, the acoustics are horrible and so there's a lot of splashing around with sounds, it always sounded much bigger to me when we



someone doing a very heartfelt, gut-wrenching song. It wasn't like, 'Here comes the punch line...'

SCHNEIDER: We signed with Warners in 1978. All these different labels kept courting us, 'cos we all figured like, hey, free meals! 'Cos we all had jobs that didn't pay well – 25 cent tips... Imagine, I'm washing pots and pans one week and flying down to the Bahamas to record our debut album the next. Keith and Ricky were working at the bus station. So it

was exciting.

STRICKLAND: We didn't spend too long recording the first album at Compass Point, maybe a couple of weeks. We recorded pretty quickly once we found a deal 'cos we just wanted to get the album out that summer. So I think we were down there for maybe two weeks. Things went pretty quickly, most of it was recorded live as well.

SCHNEIDER: Chris Blackwell wasn't really hands-on at all. Robert Ash basically produced the record and I think Chris just listened to it, and made some suggestions.

played live. And it was louder and bigger, but in the recording it doesn't sound that way, it sounds very stripped down and very minimal.

SCHNEIDER: I thought it sounded a little 'rinky dink', to be honest. I mean, I guess that's what we sounded like live, I don't know.

DUNN: The sound got a little sharp on the album version. I think the

somewhat primitive nature of the equipment involved in the original session made it warmer, more guttural.

STRICKLAND: Now, I get it and I like it, it's a document. John Lennon said a few times that he liked the song. Of course, this is something we didn't know until after he had been killed; so it was quite bittersweet to hear it. It blew my mind because The Beatles were the reason why I wanted to be an artist at all. I was just blown away that he had heard it and he'd heard Yoko through Cindy, and thought, 'Now they're ready for us.'

SCHNEIDER: We'd always been fans of The Beatles, John, Yoko... people still don't get Yoko, she's brilliant. So to hear they liked it... oh God, yeah. Yoko sang on "Rock Lobster" when we did our 25th anniversary show. Unfortunately I didn't have her in my ears, but *c'est la vie* [laughs].

STRICKLAND: It was just amazing. Yoko's just going; she's wailing, she was way into it. I remember thinking, 'Let's just keep it going, let's just jam out on this.' But I couldn't really get everyone on board in time, and the song seemed to end so quickly. But we could've just gone all night doing that! She and I sat down for a moment backstage and we talked about John and Ricky, and it was just blowing my mind that she knew all about Ricky and his guitar playing and everything [Wilson passed away in 1985], so it was a really sweet moment to have that with her.

SCHNEIDER: I would always say that we were good for all theatres, 'cos if we played, they could tell if they were structurally sound. The balconies would have a bit of give... and boy, did they start giving!

STRICKLAND: Yeah, "Rock Lobster" was the dangerous one, we had to stop a show in Minnesota in 1990 because plaster was falling from the ceiling, on to the people down below. That was probably one of the only times we didn't play "Rock Lobster".

SCHNEIDER: For some reason, I don't get bored with it, I don't know why.

STRICKLAND: It sounds like a children's record, if you think about it. It's like those children toys where you learn, like; 'This is the sound a pig makes...' I mean, we were aware of that, we were like, 'This is ridiculous', but it just made us laugh. So we just went for it! ☺

The B-52s tour the US throughout 2015

TIMELINE

Late 1976 The B-52s form in Athens, Georgia
February 14, 1977 The group play their first gig at a house party, with Strickland

on guitars and Ricky Wilson on bongos
December 12, 1977 The B-52s play their first real show at NYC's Max's Kansas City

February 1978 The first version of "Rock Lobster" and B-side "52 Girls" is recorded at Stone Mountain Sound, near Atlanta

March 1979 Recording for their self-titled debut album begins at



Compass Point in the Bahamas, with Chris Blackwell producing

BALTHAZAR THIN WALLS

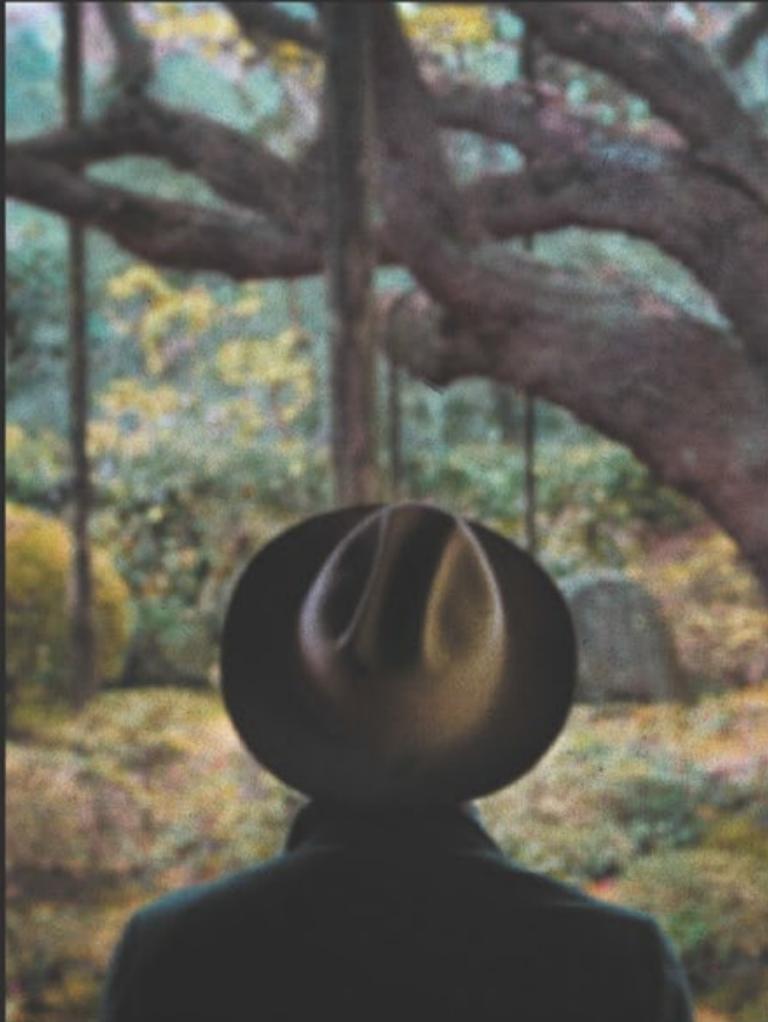
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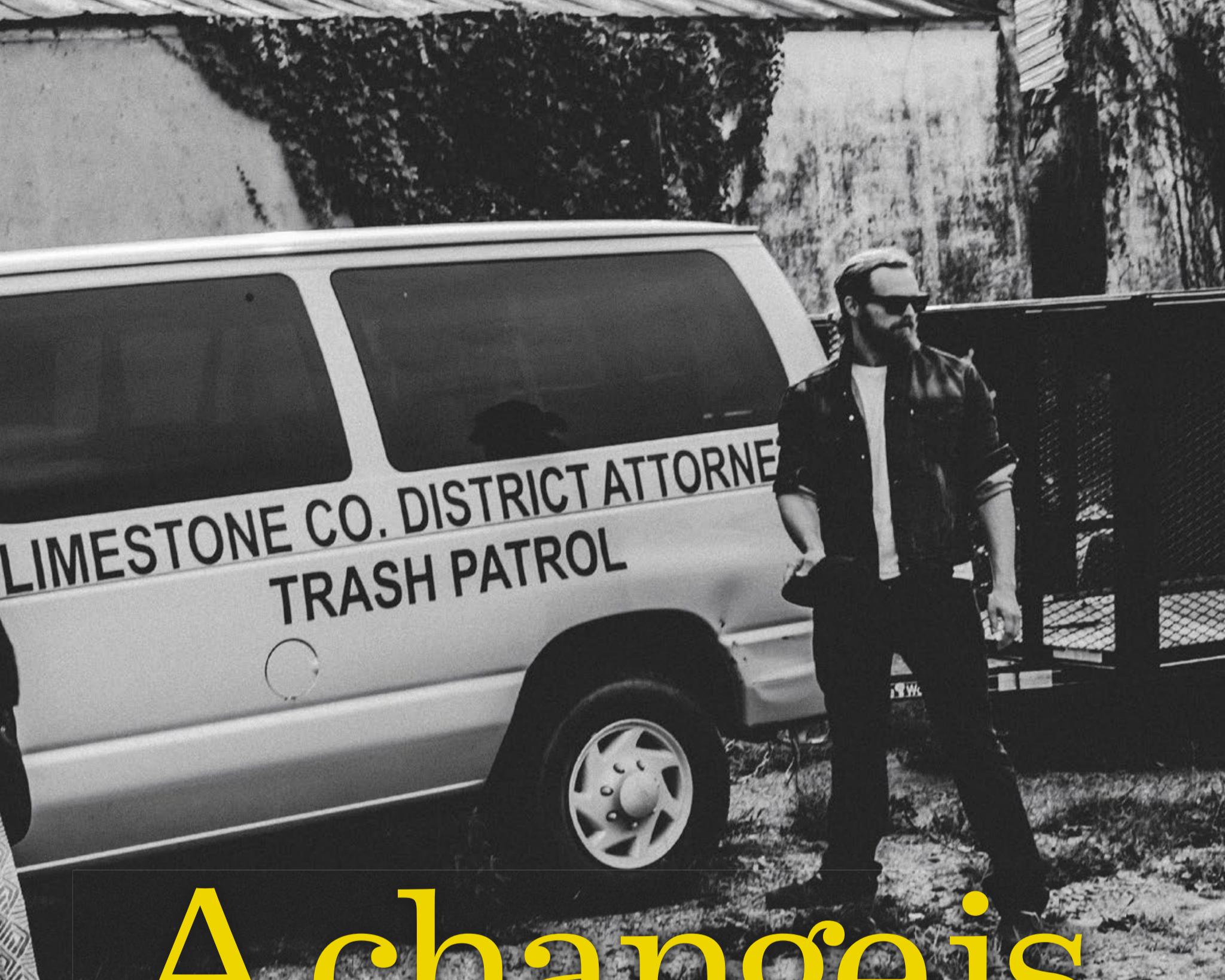
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A change is gonna come

In 2012, the ALABAMA SHAKES' euphoric garage-soul made them the most feted new group in the world. Three years on, *Uncut* heads down south to discover a band in flux as they unveil a brilliant and radical new album, and takes a tour of their haunted Alabama homeland – a landscape transforming as quickly as the band themselves. "Jeez," says Brittany Howard, "people are gonna think I lost my damn mind..."

Story: John Mulvey

Photographs: Elliot Ross



Alabama Shakes live in Boston, April 2012: (l-r) Brittany Howard, Steve Johnson, Zac Cockrell and Heath Fogg

B

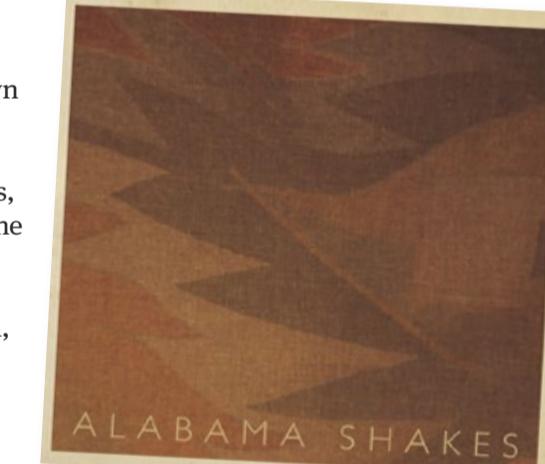
RITTANY HOWARD'S BACK yard stretches nine acres down through the forest to a creek, and is occasionally home to coyotes, armadillos, possums, foxes and owls, all of which she worries might one day attack her two pet cats. A family of deer sometimes pass through, by a pond that dries up for

much of the year. When she was buying the house, in the wake of the first Alabama Shakes album selling over a million copies, Howard wanted somewhere secluded and quiet. She also bought a place in Nashville, 100 miles up Interstate 65, but could never envisage permanently moving away from her hometown of Athens, Alabama.

"I'm pretty sure Nashville would kill me," she says. "I'm the type of person who loves to be involved in everything going on. So I go up there, have my fun and then, when I can't stand it anymore, I come back here. There's a duality to all of us. I think you gotta keep things in balance."

The living room of Howard's Athens house is calm and pastel-shaded. A few gold discs and French art deco prints are framed on the walls, and an acoustic guitar lies recently abandoned on an armchair. With characteristically informal diligence, she has been figuring out how to play Curtis Mayfield's "Think", from the *Super Fly* soundtrack. When she enters from the porch, she stubs out her cigarette. Smoking inside is forbidden – "Otherwise my couch would smell weird."

It is permitted, though, in the basement, a cold and expansive space that Howard has equipped as a rehearsal room and rudimentary recording studio. On one shelf, vinyl copies of Mayfield's first solo album and James Brown's *Live At The Apollo* are displayed next to an empty Jameson's bottle. There is a drumkit,



a \$100 upright piano, a clutch of Xbox games, a vintage whammy pedal, a rack of guitars. Beneath a crude painting of a black panther, a large old hi-fi cabinet that once belonged to Howard's grandfather has been playing "Future Primitive", from Santana's *Caravanserai*, at a selection of inaccurate and faintly disconcerting speeds.

Right now, Howard is reclining on a chair in front of her computer, a selection of cheap analog keyboards close at hand. On her chest, a cat extends itself languidly. She has cued up a series of demos that were recorded down here; spacey, Aquarian funk songs that, in their basic electronic form, recall Shuggie Otis' *Inspiration Information*, or one of Sly Stone's demos for his Stone Flower label – none of which, incidentally, Howard has ever heard. These are the songs that form the backbone of the excellent second Alabama Shakes album, *Sound & Color*, songs that retain a silvery otherworldliness even when they have been reconstituted with the guitar, bass and drums of her bandmates. Where a wallowing guitar solo sits on the finished version of "Gemini", for instance, there is a sci-fi voluntary, played on an old synth. "Lasers!" Howard shouts, cracking up.

"Brittany's probably the biggest influence on the experimental side of the band," says Blake Mills, the producer who gave them room to manoeuvre on *Sound*

& *Color*. "I got a strong *Maggot Brain* vibe from her demos, and also Curtis, because while she's a rambunctious musician on whatever instrument it is she's playing, the band don't play like her. They end up executing it with a little more finesse than she puts into the demos. So what comes out has the spirit of that psychedelic, untethered force, from a group of musicians who really care about that and cherish that, but who might not necessarily come from that world."

Howard's mop of curls, so familiar from Shakes performances around *Boys & Girls*, have now been shaved and sculpted into a precarious quiff. She also has a fresh tattoo, two months old, to go with the one of

Alabama on her right arm; Athens is marked on her map with a love heart. The new ink, mostly obscured by her glasses, traces two lines running straight and parallel away from her left eye. "I was just bored with my face," she laughs. "I'd been looking at it for a really long time and I just wanted to switch it up." She ponders for a moment the confluence of these adjustments to her image with the arrival of a new and surprising Alabama Shakes album; one that begins, appositely, "A new world hangs outside the window/Beautiful and strange."

"Oh Jeez, so many changes," she eventually sighs, theatrically. "People are gonna think I lost my damn mind."

LUNCH IN ATHENS is taken at a restaurant with a rosette in its window proclaiming "Best Fried Dessert", next door to a general store that prominently displays canoes, axes and wind chimes. En route, Howard gesticulates with a cigarette in one hand, toggles through songs on her iPhone with the other, and mostly leaves the driving to her truck's own intuition. "Oh my God, I ain't no singer 'til I can sing this," she announces, as Aaron Neville's version of "Ave Maria", starts up. She listens in silence, reverently, for a couple of minutes. "Gives. No. Fucks," she eventually decides, then moves on to another of her favourites, "Basketball Jones" by Cheech & Chong.

We drive past a dilapidated shack on the outskirts of Athens, sheets of rusted, corrugated iron balanced improbably on it for a roof. "There's people actually live there," says Howard, pointedly non-judgmental. "They don't have any power and they heat up water on a wood stove. And you can't offer them any money 'cos they don't want it, they just want to live that way. They're a couple in their seventies who collect government cheques and spend them on liquor. That's their life."

Howard, 26, once investigated her genealogy and discovered that her family, on both sides, had been in Athens since before Alabama was even a state; when it was called, she says, "unclaimed territory". Her old schoolfriend Zac Cockrell, bassist in the Shakes, lives on land where his great-grandfather once ran a junkyard. Nearby is the barn in which his grandmother was born, long graffitied with satanic symbols.

Since *Boys & Girls* became an international phenomenon in 2012, the Shakes have been cherished and championed by music fans with a historical and sometimes romantic belief in the idea of Southern Soul, as if a certain groove and drama was inherent in the local populace. Muscle Shoals, a quick glance at the map reveals, is only an hour's drive away. The Alabama Shakes' understanding of musical lore and tradition turns out, though, to be a little more acquired

than instinctual. Their tastes extend to an enduring appreciation of the first My Chemical Romance album, and the fact that their often powerful and resonant music can invoke Southern archetypes like Otis Redding – as it does on, say, "You Ain't Alone" on *Boys & Girls*, and "Miss You" on *Sound & Color* – is, they insist, nothing to do with geographical location. "Athens is a working town, and it was just by miracle that we got together," says Brittany Howard. "I didn't know until I was 19 years old that anything happened in Muscle Shoals, they don't teach us that. I was always like, 'This is a really great Clarence Carter song' – I had no idea where it was made."

If they evade easy definitions of a Southern band, however, the Shakes have a loyalty and connection to their hometown which goes far beyond music. Driving around with them can become a kind of Alabama picaresque, where haunted houses and abandoned country clubs seem to lurk round every bend in the road, where each vista is judged by how it looked before and after the last major tornado blew through Athens and East Limestone County.

"My ma used to tell us this story that a tornado jumps a railroad track," Howard says. "I guess she told it to us so we didn't get scared." Four years ago, the Shakes were meant to be driving to New Orleans for a gig with Hurray For The Riff Raff, when a major tornado gave them "the slightest glimpse" of what, as Howard describes it, "an apocalypse might be like." A postal delivery worker at the time, Howard rose at five the next morning, drove 10 miles to Elkmont for petrol, then went back to bed. Cockrell recalls waking up with no power. "I was," he recalls, with what proves to be typical drollness, "cooking hot dogs over a candle."

Howard, Cockrell, guitarist Heath Fogg and drummer Steve Johnson are the sort of four disparate characters who would never have ended up in a band together if they'd lived in a big city. Blake Mills describes them as "a group of highly individualised

individuals." "They're not a clique," he says, "they're not a band who all wear costumes and look alike. They're a strange group of people. Heath's this clean-cut, straight-shooting, earnest guy, Zac is this sort of loveable mascot. Nobody can make me laugh whenever they want to as much or as easily as Zac. If they hadn't plucked Steve out of the music shop he was working in, he may well have found himself on a varsity football squad. His background is not in funk or R&B. It's in Alice In Chains and Soundgarden.

"And Brittany is this powerhouse, she's this presence. To be in a room with her is to feel some sort of electromagnetic field that emanates from her."

Courteous and for the most part reserved, the Alabama Shakes do not generally appear to be an over-analytical band. Mills, for all his empathy in the studio, has a different perspective, and can examine them more objectively. "I have my own theories about how unhealthy democracy is when it comes to bands," he continues, a solo artist in his own right. "There's a desire for democracy in this band, yet there's also the reality of what each person brings to it. Everyone's not trying to bring the same dish to the potluck. Zac and Steve and Heath, they look to

EYEWITNESS!

2010: Southern rock avatar LEE BAINS III witnesses a formative Alabama Shakes in action...

THE FIRST TIME I saw the Shakes, we were playing at Egan's, a favourite dive-bar on Tuscaloosa's strip. I walked in to the sound of a band making their preliminary noises (no soundchecks here). In Egan's, there's no stage so, when it's full, it's likely you'll never lay eyes on whoever is shaking beer bottles that night.

"Talking to friends, I soon heard the unseen band crash into a cover of 'Spirit In The Sky'. Covers are a no-no at Egan's, as it's the only home to original, weirdo, scuzzy bands. But this song was such a potentially cheesy choice, rendered so gleefully, that I had to inch closer. Backed

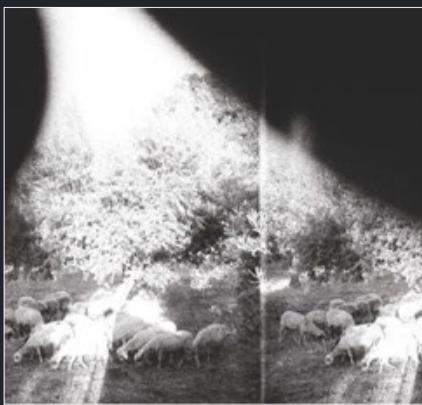


by three choogling, baby-faced white guys, a woman of colour led the charge, bedecked in a checkered gingham dress and red SG, hollering her head off, making more than one of us sincerely ask ourselves, 'Wait a minute. Do I actually like this damn song?'

"Watching the four of them interweave classic guitar-rock, Muscle Shoals soul, and garage revival, I thought to myself, 'Here is yet another band to add to my list of reasons why I love playing music in Alabama, and how the world at large will never get what goes on here.' Of course, in that moment, I pinned that Alabamian badge of proud obscurity to the wrong band. Within 18 months, they'd become the most famous band from the state in years."

ELLIOTT ROSS

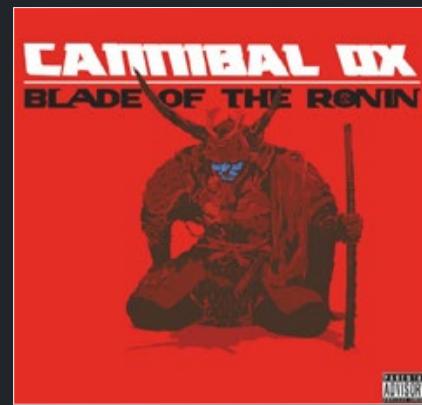




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**CANNIBAL OX
BLADE OF THE RONIN**

IHIPHOP CD

Cannibal Ox's *Blade of the Ronin* is the highly-anticipated follow-up to the group's seminal debut album *The Cold Vein*. The album features MF Doom, U-God of Wu-Tang Clan, Elzhi, Artifacts and more.



**MARRIAGES
SALOME**

SARGENT HOUSE LP / CD

Marriages *Salome* is a timeless 9-song monolith of a debut LP. Propulsive, frequently iridescent, the compositions find the band fully embracing their skill at crafting timeless songs with chillingly epic results.



**SURF CITY
JEKYLL ISLAND**

FIRE RECORDS LP / CD

New Zealand psychgazers Surf City return with an album of sticky summer jams, fuzzy swirls and out and out dream pop blasts.



STEARICA

FERTILE

MONOTREME LP / CD

Torino-based instrumental trio's powerful, adventurous 2nd album, inspired by the Arab Spring revolutions, features guests Colin Stetson (Tom Waits, Arcade Fire, Bon Iver), Scott McCloud (Girls Against Boys) & Ryan Patterson (Coliseum)



**SONIC JESUS
NEITHER VIRTUE NOR ANGER**

FUZZ CLUB 2LP / CD

Shindig Magazine have called them "one of Psych's best kept secrets". Their tremendous double debut album is out April 13th.



REPTAR LURID

GLOW

JOYFUL NOISE LP / CD

Synth-pop dance party band Reptar returns with their second album, *Lurid Glow*, which continues the exploratory and arousing spirit of their 2012 debut *Body Faucet*.



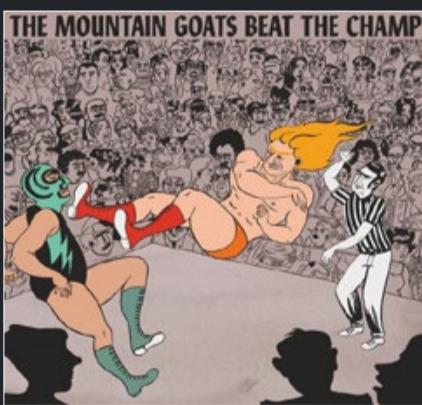
AVA LUNA

INFINITE HOUSE

WESTERN VINYL LP / CD

Pitchfork says "...this band rules", and DIY calls their last album "...a near post-punk masterpiece."

Dave Fridmann (Flaming Lips, Spoon, Sleater-Kinney) mixed the new album.



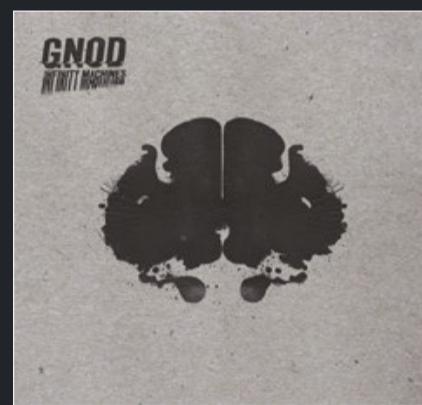
MOUNTAIN GOATS

BEAT THE CHAMP

MERGE RECORDS 2LP / CD

The long-awaited follow-up to *Transcendental Youth* is an album about professional wrestling and much more.

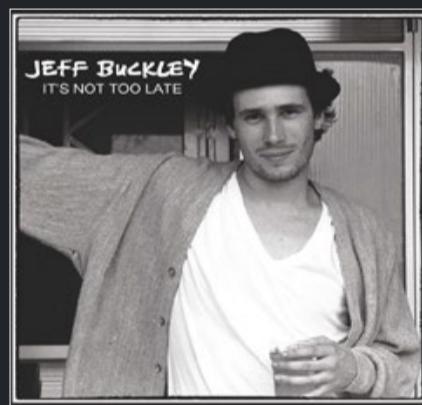
Includes printed lyrics, a Mountain Goats first.



GNOD
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(VOLUME 1)**

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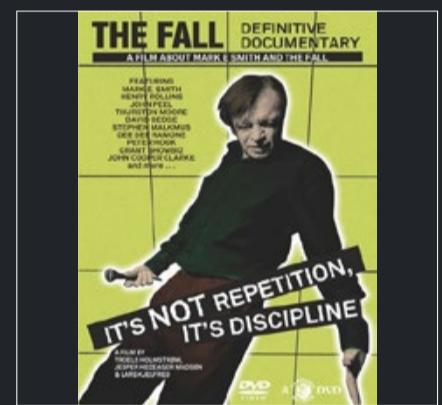


JEFF BUCKLEY

IT'S NOT TOO LATE

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THE FALL
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» Brittany for certain cues to react and emote to, to respond to. They're all fully aware of what Brittany can do when she has a mic, and they all celebrate it in the way they play. It feels like a natural dynamic; not hierarchical, but there's a workflow. They have an organic kind of nonchalance, and for me that's the most Southern thing about them. They're a soulful, heartfelt, unpremeditated group of musicians."

Brittany Howard is defiant and, perhaps, a touch anxious about the reception that awaits her new album, a radical expansion of the Shakes' modus operandi after the unadorned garage-soul of *Boys & Girls*. There are, for sure, relatively unadorned garage-soul songs on *Sound & Color* – "The Greatest" is even a punkish ramalam that Blake Mills compares with the Ramones, and with live Otis Redding performances – but they co-exist with a more warped, abstracted music that taps into a futurist strain of R&B running from Funkadelic, through Prince, to Erykah Badu. The sense of a band on a profound historical timeline remains, but it will be harder for the Shakes' critics to diminish them as a good-time retro act this time out.

"I'm not sure what people will be expecting, but they won't be expecting this," says Howard.

Brass, for example, has remained off the agenda, in spite of its potential affinity with the band's sound. Where a blaring horn section could have stepped in on "Future People", a distorted Farfisa arrives instead.

"It puts the song in a very different, more ambiguous genre," says Heath Fogg. "We all like that more than pigeonholing ourselves with the classic R&B thing that started building up around the last record."

"You don't get to be your creative self when you're just following a tradition," adds Howard. "The education I got in music was boundless, that's how I know music. Music is everything that ever is, ever was, and you can take from that what you will. It's like language. People say, 'There's no original anymore,' and I say, 'OK, but there's me.'"

An undercurrent of stress, or at least frustration, also seems to be present through much of *Sound & Color*, most notably on the lovely "Guess Who" – the album's most overt Curtis homage – when Howard sings, "All I really want is peace of mind." It's easy to assume that the pressure stems from trying to top such a garlanded and lucrative debut album. Howard, though, is adamant that's not the case. "It's just natural stress," she says. "I have a very busy mind anyway. I'm not a worrier, I'm a thinker, and I can sometimes work myself into a frizzle-frazzle, where things coming out of my mouth don't even make sense."

"I was told before starting the record that she's hard on herself when it comes to singing, and difficult to satisfy," says Blake Mills. "I think the real problem before was her not having a clear goal. Once she had that, she could sing in all these different ways, and it worked best when she'd take a chance. She also has to deal with the clumsy way people make comparisons; stupid shit like the references to Janis Joplin. You throw most of that away, there's still a stickiness that's hard to get off your fingers, or off the bottom of your shoe."

"She's aware of what she's capable of. But I think the frustration comes from her desire to not just be somebody who displays what they're capable of, but who actually has a discerning sense of what they want to achieve with that power. That's where her fire and ferocity emanate from. The smalltown upbringing and



"MISS YOU"

"I'm gonna miss you and your Mickey Mouse tattoo..."

Brittany Howard's uncharacteristically direct tale of junkies in love

AS A LYRICIST, Brittany Howard mostly deals in allusion and ambiguity. "I don't write specifically," she admits, "I don't think there's any fun in giving it all away. None of these songs are what they seem, I guess." "Miss You", however, is an unusually detailed song, a "Try A Little Tenderness"-like slow burn that begins, "I'm gonna miss you and your Mickey Mouse tattoo/And you'll be leaving in your Honda Accord."

"It's about this couple I used to know," explains Howard. "They were both addicted to drugs really bad, but they were both really in love with each other. It was so toxic and weird, and I wanted to write a love song that wasn't like a normal love song, that wasn't, 'I love you so much, we're together forever.' It's about two people ruining each other for everyone except for themselves."

Are the Mickey Mouse tattoo and the Honda Accord real?

"Well, the Mickey Mouse tattoo is. I had to change the car, because it was a very specific type and I tried not to give everything away."

But you didn't have to change the tattoo?

"No – it's such a good line..."

sheltered lifestyle, I think, was too small a fishbowl for her brain. She's a young adult, travelling the world and listening to new records, and all that culminates in her trying to make something new or futuristic, something that feels soulful, but not like soul music. Her fearlessness is something I hope doesn't run out."

ZAC COCKRELL IS a great bear of a man who can find unlimited nuances of hilarity in the word 'fracking'. He has an excitable Cavalier King Charles spaniel, a rather imperious cat, two Alaskan skunk pelts on his wall, and a disused country club swimming pool, where he catches frogs, abutting his backyard. He is also a connoisseur of avant-garde architecture and, as we drive around in his truck after lunch, '90s R&B singer Tevin Campbell on the stereo, Howard and Fogg in the backseat, it seems he knows a story about most every house in the sprawling area of seemingly unconnected communities that make up

Athens. There in the trees, he notes, is the Greek-inspired mansion he calls the Parthenon, designed by illustrious modernist Paul Rudolph. On the left, that place used to have a morgue in the basement and was supposed to be haunted. A third reminds him of *Tomb Raider*. A fourth, Heath Fogg chips in, had each stone allegedly dipped in buttermilk before it was built. "A

"AN ELECTRO-MAGNETIC FIELD EMANATES FROM BRITTANY..."

BLAKE MILLS

house with oak trees in the yard," pronounces Fogg, "is already a good house."

Near the town centre, a low grey building, looking as much like a warehouse as a home, sits on a patch of waste ground. This is where the Alabama Shakes used to rehearse and where Howard, for a time, lived with her mother. It was built by her great-grandfather, a man with no formal construction skills.

"They'd build rooms every time they had babies," says Howard, "until there were, like, five weird-ass rooms, some of them sunken into the ground. He had nine kids of his own and then they adopted four more – back in those days, in the aftermath of the Great Depression, people couldn't take care of their kids, so if you had a good income you could take care of someone else's kids. It wasn't like an official adoption."

When her great-grandmother died, Howard moved into half of the house – now split in two and, to a degree, renovated – with her mother; her parents had separated when she was eight. Howard was in her mid-teens, and had spent most of her life living in trailers. "If you had a ball, it would roll to the corner of the room," she remembers. The layout made no sense, a "weird labyrinth of doors", as Fogg describes it. It was also, Howard swears, haunted. "I moved back to my dad's cos I couldn't live there anymore," she says, "it was crazy. There was a crackhead neighbour, plus it was extremely realistically haunted. If you were in



Saturday
Night Live,
February
28, 2015

the kitchen trying to make some dinner, pop some popcorn or something, something would fuck with you. When I was asleep, something would fuck with my feet, 'cos I'm tall and my bed wasn't long enough, so my feet would hang off the end.

"My room was so creepy, I slept in the living room for years, on the floor on a little pallet. One night when I was going to sleep, I saw a weird flash of colour. Then the lightbulb in the living room dimmed, the air-con popped on and the power surged. I went to put my pants on and then the phone rang and I knew that something was really wrong; my Grandpa had died."

Some way out of Athens' centre, we come to the area where Howard spent most of her childhood; a succession of car lots and windswept yards that were once filled with trailers. "We used to live in a single-wide," she says, "and then we moved to a double-wide right down the street, and life was good. I thought we were rich when we moved down here, 'cos we had so much land. I was four or five."

Here, it transpires, is a woodland glade, with a house standing where a trailer used to be. Surrounding it are cars, hundreds of them, in various picturesque states of disrepair; her father sells used vehicles, and is a bail bondsman in his spare time. "My dad saves up cars 'til February and then he sells," she explains, "'cos that's when people get their tax cheque. There used to be a lot more cars, stacked on top of each other – it was like a little city. I used to have so much fun playing on them, not knowing that they could collapse on me and kill me."

A small girl, who Howard calls Porkchop, is running among the wrecks. "I don't know why she's called that. She's a super-cute little tomboy, always dirty. She reminds me so much of me, 'cos I was the same way, hanging out with mechanics and eating sauce on crackers."

Back down the road, a new gym has sprung up near another vacant lot, where a "cool couple" used to sell cigarettes to underage kids at a mark-up. Athens was a farming town, but now it is increasingly reconfiguring itself as a suburb of Huntsville, 25 miles away, where jobs proliferate in the military and in defence corporations.

"When I think about home, I think about how slow and quiet and comfortable it is," says Howard. "I love the South because people tend to be kind here. When a tornado comes and one of the neighbours needs help, if they've got a tree on their house, I know somebody with a chainsaw. Everybody just comes together. I'm proud of where I'm from. I mean, everybody has that; it's a community."

"If my family and my friends weren't here, I guess there would be no reason to be here," says Fogg. "It's not like I'm in love with the landscape: it's pretty generic and there are a lot of other places in the world that look similar. It's just where I feel like I need to be and want to be."

Cockrell parks the truck outside the bleak-looking fitness centre. Howard looks out of her window, and is briefly wistful. "Everything's moving so fast on this road, everything changes. There used to be fields. Breaks my heart a bit. I used to have a motorcycle when I was young, and this is where I used to take it."

A few days earlier, the Shakes had travelled over to Athens, Georgia, to play the first shows of the *Sound & Color* campaign. Alongside the four of them, their extended lineup features two keyboardists, and three backing singers. Soon enough, they will play a show in London that previews all 12 of the album's songs – raucous, transporting, mystifying, rousing – but not, audaciously, "Hold On", their signature song from *Boys & Girls*. Another week later, they bring the house down on *SNL* with "Don't Wanna Fight" and "Gimme All Your Love". Not for the first time, Howard dances with her guitar like Sister Rosetta Tharpe. Her earrings are in the image of Prince's face.

On the drive to Georgia, Howard says, she listened to Björk's new album, *Vulnicura*. "She has a really interesting way of mixing the record," she notes, "where songs usually start off very quiet, with her voice very small, but they build and suck you in. Before I knew it, I was in another space."

It was dusk, she remembers and, as she tried to work out the lyrics, there was something about how the string arrangements married up to the glare of the headlights on the freeway. It took Howard out of her situation, she says. "Wow, it was really ethereal," she laughs. "I mean, I swear I can hear Iceland..." ☺

Sound & Color is released on April 20 by Rough Trade

"I HAVE A VERY BUSY MIND... I'M A THINKER"

BRITTANY HOWARD

HOT SOURCE

"JUSTRAW, ALWAYS REALLY RAW..."

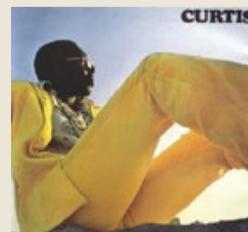
Four key records that influenced *Sound & Color*



DAVID AXELROD SONGS OF INNOCENCE

Capitol, 1968
David Axelrod's sumptuous orch funk is not an

immediately obvious influence on *Sound & Color*, but Brittany Howard's focus on the likes of "Holy Thursday" tends to be beyond the extravagant strings. "The bass and drum tones are so exciting," she says. "And the guitar tones are always amazing," adds Heath Fogg. "Just raw, always really raw."



CURTIS MAYFIELD CURTIS

Curtom, 1970
Howard appropriates Mayfield's lissom falsetto for

"Guess Who" and has been studying

everything from early Impressions sides to the *Super Fly* soundtrack: "Some of the material can be really dark and far-out. Whilst I was writing songs I thought I wanted to do that, but then I went elsewhere. You can be inspired by something and take it somewhere completely different."



FUNKADELIC MAGGOT BRAIN

Westbound, 1971

"I like Funkadelic – they blurred the lines of genre, a funk band with shredding, weird, fuzzed guitar solos that are super spaced-out. A good groove, laser beam keys. It makes me wanna dance and it makes me think."



ERYKAH BADU NEW AMERYKAH PART 2 (RETURN OF THE ANKH)

Motown, 2010

Disorienting nu-soul opus that's a clear precursor of liquid *Sound & Color* songs like "Over My Head". "Love Badu," says Howard. "I've been listening to Badu for years. If you look at my record stack, she's like No 2." A quick glance at her record stack suggests, at least today, No 1 is Miles Davis.

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- MOJO



- SUNDAY EXPRESS



- THE DAILY TELEGRAPH



- FINANCIAL TIMES

ALBUM BY ALBUM

Bryan Ferry

The Roxy Music maestro on his best solo work: “People like you to be difficult and weird...”

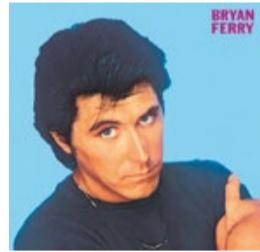
MUCH AS YOU'D imagine, Bryan Ferry's West London studio/office complex is a stylish and sophisticated place. Once through the main doors, a visitor must pass a row of sofas neatly strewn with *For Your Pleasure* cushions, then walls bearing pictures of models and a neon 'Roxy Music' sign, before descending a flight of stairs to Ferry's studio itself. There, the man offers insight into some of the more intriguing synths and keyboards on display. "What's the oldest one here? Hmm, either this Farfisa or the VCS3..." says Ferry, motioning nonchalantly to the EMS synth used by Eno on Roxy's first two albums. Today, though, we're here at Ferry's HQ to discuss his often spectacular solo career, from *These Foolish Things* right up to last year's *Avonmore*. "I don't write often," explains Ferry, as he relaxes in his office space upstairs. "So when I do, it feels special. If there's something happening I like the sound of, I'll record it, then I might listen to it a month later or a year or two later. So hopefully there's a few great things lying on a cassette that haven't been listened to yet!" **TOM PINNOCK**



Ferry today: "I don't write often, so when I do, it feels special"

THESE FOOLISH THINGS

VIRGIN, 1973



Ferry branches out after Roxy's second LP with a singular set of covers – including Dylan's "A Hard Rain..." and the "square" title track – influencing Bowie's *Pin Ups* in the process.

After *For Your Pleasure*, I just wanted to make another record. So I thought I'd make one like Elvis or Sinatra or Billie Holiday or Bing Crosby would. I loved the albums I had of great singers singing great songs, written by songwriters in teams. I did this really fast, in about two or three weeks, and it was such fun. It was good to just get out of the group, out of the group angst. Phil Manzanera guested on it and Paul Thompson played drums, so there was a bit of Roxy on it. I don't think Roxy minded me doing a solo album... I don't think I ever asked them. But, I don't know, it didn't do any harm. Bowie actually telephoned me. We must have done the [Finsbury Park] Rainbow show with him before that, and the Greyhound in Croydon, another show where Roxy supported Bowie. David rang me cheerfully one day and said, "Just to let you know, I've just done an album like yours." But it wasn't really, it was a covers LP, but all from the '60s, whereas mine was a more comprehensive take on pop, just lots of different people who were interesting to me, writers like Goffin & King, Leiber & Stoller, The Rolling Stones, Smokey Robinson, of course, and Dylan. The most important of all was the title track – that was the most adventurous, being a 1930s song. It was considered really square music at the time. This album opened up my audience to a more mainstream group of people who maybe hadn't 'got' Roxy Music. And singing

some of these great songs was a way of getting to them. The downside of it, of course, is that some more snobbish music people don't like you to do something that's more mainstream, people like you to be difficult and weird and underground.

ANOTHER TIME, ANOTHER PLACE

ISLAND, 1974



After *Stranded*, Ferry returns with another covers album, this time taking a more soulful tack and featuring the stunning "The 'In' Crowd".

The first record was a great success for me, and suddenly I had two careers. I went back and made *Stranded* after the first one, then I made this. With the same team as the first one, pretty much. Except I did one of my own songs on this, the title track. There was no big theory behind it. Once again we did another standard, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes", one of the best songs I've ever heard. And I had another Dylan song on there. Davy O'List played a great solo on "The 'In' Crowd". I'd seen him when I was a student in Newcastle. We used to have quite good bands playing there, and they had The Nice playing, and he was the guitarist. It stuck in my memory what a great player he was. He did some out-of-this-world feedback sounds on this... he's a strange cat. "You Are My Sunshine" is my Geordie sentimental side coming out – I don't know why I did that, it's not traditional, that's for sure. Some of the songs here are more off the wall. A couple of country songs, like "Walk A Mile In My Shoes". So this consolidated the solo career mainly because of "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" and "The 'In' Crowd".

THE UNCUT CLASSIC



LET'S STICK TOGETHER

EG, 1976

A grab-bag rushed out to capitalise on the title track's success, Ferry's third nonetheless features some classic tracks, including covers of early Roxy songs, alongside some equally classic tailoring...

We recorded the single, "Let's Stick Together", first – I love the original version by Wilbert Harrison, it's much better than the version I did. I love some of those early R'n'B records, quite rough and ready, warm, beautiful records, and I just fancied doing it. We had [Everly Brothers cover] "The Price Of Love", too, and a couple of tracks, and I think everybody around me thought, 'Let's see how the single goes, it's going to be a big record.' And I guess it was. So Polydor



A pool for love:
one very dapper
Ferry in 1974

said, 'Please, can we have an album?' So we quickly did these tracks and threw it all together. I covered myself for the first time – I did "Chance Meeting", "2HB", "Re-Make/Re-Model" and "Sea Breezes", all from the first Roxy album, and "Casanova" from *Country Life*. I just thought it would be fun to do them in a different style, in a different way. The same way that in my record collection I have several different versions of Charlie Parker playing the same song in different periods of his career, with different lineups.

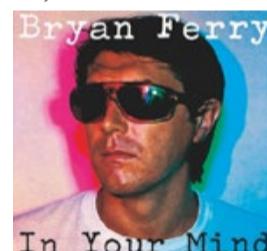
We were based in Air Studios in Oxford Circus, which was a great studio. They've got about four different rooms and all of the engineers there were very well-drilled – not quite wearing lab coats, but the next generation on.

Let's Stick Together was the first time I worked with Chris Spedding, who was, and is, a really great guitar player. He played a lovely Flying V guitar. It was all done very quickly, with a great spirit. Jerry Hall did that whooping on "Let's Stick Together" – she appeared in the video, which was also done very quickly. The clothes and set were designed by Antony Price, and it was directed by a friend of mine, Jonathan Benson, who was the assistant director on some of the Monty Python movies, and a very nice man. Yes, it was a good look I had in that video, with the moustache! It was a look I'd seen in many a movie – Clark Gable type of thing.

Movies have always been a big source of inspiration for me, with either songs or just looks. I like the way people looked in old black and white movies – everybody wore a hat and a suit. You'd see people walking down the street and everybody's wearing a hat. It's a terrible shame that people don't anymore.

IN YOUR MIND

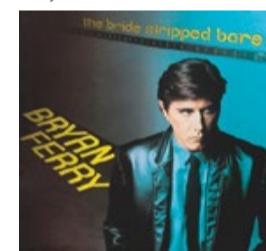
EG, 1977



With Roxy Music on hiatus, Ferry creates his first solo album of original songs, with more help from Chris Spedding, Phil Manzanera, Paul Thompson and former King Crimson bassist John Wetton. After *Let's Stick Together*, I went on my first world tour as a solo artist. I think I'd got fed up with being in a band, and wanted to try making an album of original material as a solo artist. I say as a solo artist, but it was more like being in a different band 'cos it wasn't just me on my own with a guitar, or piano. I think this is the first time I worked with strings. There's a great string arrangement on "Love Me Madly Again", which Ann Odell did, which was really beautiful, I think. Once again we did this in Air Studios. I remember the great solo Chris Spedding did on "Love Me Madly Again". I sort of tricked him, because it was one of those songs where it goes from one thing into a whole different mood, a different movement, really – and I just let it go on into the next part of the song, with completely different chords and everything, and he did the most incredible kind of recovery with this solo that was very beautiful! I've always tried to get people's initial responses from a piece of music. So I always like to record the first take, and I remember that was one time when it really paid off. You just get people instinctively responding to the music they're hearing for the first time, and that's very important.

THE BRIDE STRIPPED BARE

EG, 1978



Ferry hooks up with LA sessioneers in Switzerland for a confessional, bluesy response to his split with Jerry Hall. This featured a composite band. Neil Hubbard was one of the two guitarists, and I had met this American guitar player, Waddy Wachtel, when I was writing some of the songs for this record in LA. I met a drummer there, too, Rick Marotta, and I took them over to Switzerland, to this studio near Geneva called Mountain Studios. Ann Odell was the keyboard player as well as me, and Alan Spenner was the crazy bass player. So him and Neil Hubbard were the English guys, and so the friction between them and the two Americans was really exciting. I thought the results were fantastic. I was living out in LA with my friend Simon Puxley, who was a very important person in the making of all these records. He was the man in the background, who was my publicist and Roxy's. He had written the sleeve notes for the first Roxy album, and he became my close friend and confidant. He was a wonderful person. He was like the extra member of the band, and he's sorely missed to this day. There were a lot of things fermenting at that time. I had an assistant working for me who was into punk and he'd play me some of the things that were coming out of England; I was out in LA, absorbing all this American stuff, so I was in a very different headspace, but I did this track "Sign Of The Times", which had a kind of punk feeling to it. It was a way of getting Waddy and Rick to play in this aggressive kind of style. ↗



Ferry shooting the "Slave To Love" video in France, April 15, 1985

• BOYS AND GIRLS

EG, 1985



Following the final Roxy Music album to date, 1982's *Avalon*, Ferry returns with a chart-topping record that still remains a very sophisticated template for his work.

It was a strong album, but it was No 1 mainly because of the single "Slave To Love". It was as simple as that. It just caught the mood, I guess. I had some great people working with me by then. All these great people I'd worked with through all this time, plus new people like Nile Rodgers and Marcus Miller, who also played on *Avonmore* – it was a very important album for me.

There was a lot of New York in this record. We did some of this in Bette Midler's loft, down in Tribeca. She had an apartment which I rented, and I was living there. We made a studio in one of the rooms. It was great, it felt very fresh and different working in a place like that. David Gilmour, of course, is very good. I worked with him again on *Olympia*. He's a brilliant player, he's got a real sound. Quite distinctive, and he plays with feeling, it's good. It's very important that they play as if they mean it. From this album on, I'd found a way of working... It wasn't easy, but it just felt sort of special because nobody else took the trouble to spend months putting so many different parts from different players together like that. I was very into kind of sculpting all these different sounds to see what happened, see where it could lead you. You'd create solos which weren't just one guy playing, it would go from one to another, and that's very cool. One of the great moments of rock music is that solo in "Hotel California", where it goes from Don Felder to Joe Walsh and it just changes its mood, a beautiful moment.

MAMOUNA

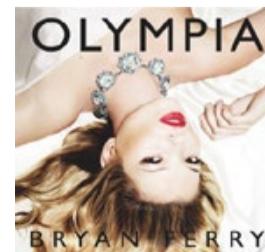
VIRGIN, 1994



'Comped' to perfection, this sumptuous album featured a co-writing credit with Brian Eno... *Taxi* and *Mamouna* were done mainly here [at *Avonmore*], and in Olympic in Barnes, which was another really good studio. I spent ages in Olympic. I went through fortunes, we really set up camp and did a lot of stuff there. It's great to have my own space now, it's perfect for this kind of work. We'll be working on lots of different tracks, especially now you have ProTools, you can just dial them up, and see, 'Ah, where are we with this one?' Certain tracks would be left for years to age, in barrels, and you'd go back years later and finish them off. I worked with Brian Eno again on this – that was great. He came here, we worked downstairs, and we actually co-wrote a song. I also went to St Petersburg where he was living. We started that there and I finished it off here. *Mamouna* was great, it had some good things on it – it wasn't terribly successful, but it has a great mood to it, I think. There are certain people you like working with, and yes, this had loads of people on it – including Carleen Anderson, who's a very good singer. Chester Kamen, Guy Pratt, all these English lads.

OLYMPIA

VIRGIN/ASTRALWERKS, 2010



The first collection of Ferry's own songs since 2002's *Frantic*, *Olympia* featured Kate Moss on the cover and a huge number of guest guitarists...

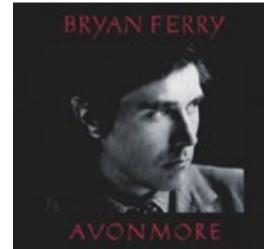
My songs go through a lot of stages, if I get fed up with how one sounds I just

take it off in a different direction. "You Can Dance" was rockabilly originally. Sometimes somebody will play something and you go, 'Ah', it shows you another way the song can go. Songs are very important to me, having a good melody. Melody is what I'm best at. Do I rewrite my lyrics? Sometimes I'll change the odd word, but by the time I bring it in to sing, I'll have it more or less what I want it to be. Sometimes it takes forever, and if it doesn't seem like the right lyric is coming, then I'll just wait and go back to it the following year. I got in contact with Jonny Greenwood to see if he wanted to play – I thought he was a very good player, very experimental, lots of different sounds, musically very adept, the real deal. Johnny Marr, obviously, is another great English guitar player. I worked with him first of all at Air Studios, on a couple of things, "The Right Stuff" on *Bête Noire*. I met him because John Porter produced The Smiths on their first LP. We wrote a song together on *Avonmore*, and he's terrific, he's got better and better.

Very versatile. He's a great fan of Nile Rodgers, too, so it's funny having them on the same tracks.

AVONMORE

BMG, 2014



After 2012's curio, *The Jazz Age*, Bryan reacts with his most uptempo set of songs in decades...

The Jazz Age didn't really influence this, other than that I wanted to make a record very different from it. It's nice veering from one direction to the other with records that follow each other. A lot of care goes into the making, especially now, as you're thinking, 'How many more records will I make?' So you don't want to put it out unless you think it achieves something. It's nice to think you're getting better at things. The more uptempo feel here is down to the fact I'd been doing so much live work the past few years, and festivals and stuff, where you're conscious of everyone playing very fast songs. I felt I needed more fast songs in my repertoire, that's for sure. *Avonmore* was going to be all original, but I had a couple of covers I thought made it a bit more expansive. "Send In The Clowns" is such a classic showbusiness song, and I like the strings on it that I did with Colin Good. "Johnny & Mary" had such a different sound to the others, too. I did that with Todd Terje, who's very talented and it added a new dimension to the record. There's still a lot of comping involved. You want to get that person to do what they do best – with Nile, it's beautiful rhythm parts. On the odd occasion he bursts into a solo, we say, 'No!', or let him go for a bit 'til he blows himself out... All these people I work with are clever, they're not show-offs. It's a treat to work with people of that quality or skill.

Bryan Ferry embarks on an extensive UK *Avonmore* tour, May 6; visit www.bryanjerry.com for full dates

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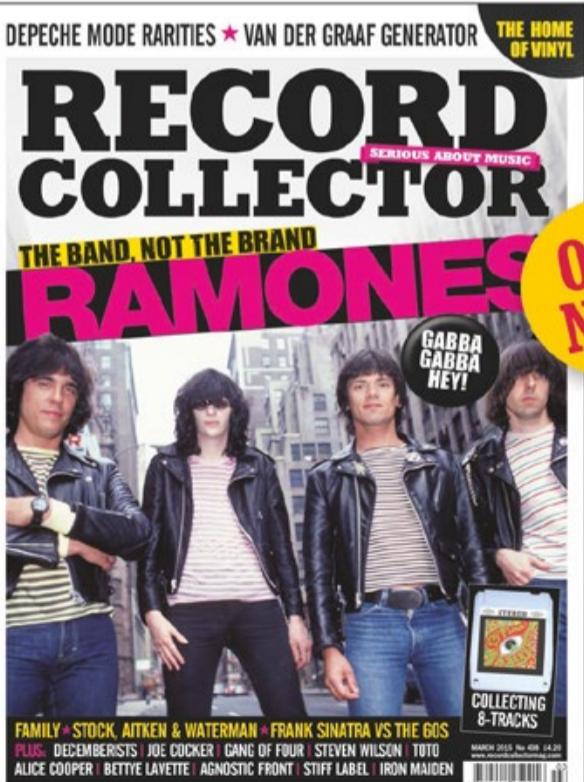
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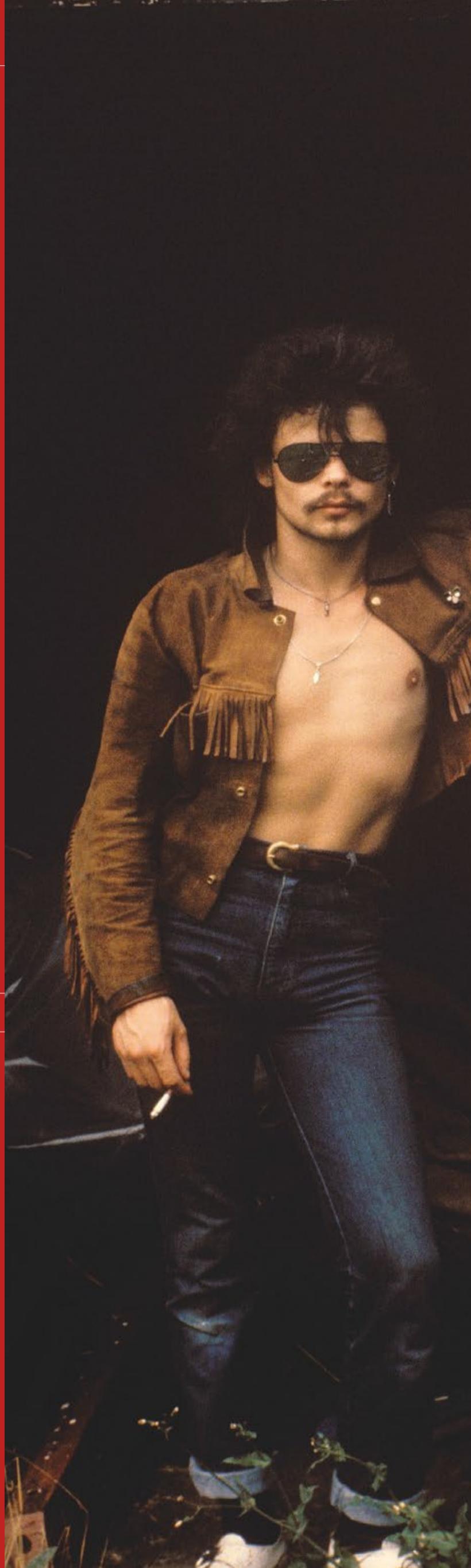


KINGS OF SPEED

From the benign chaos of underground London emerged something new and terrifying: part punk, part hippy, and moving very fast indeed.

Forty years on, LEMMY, “FAST” EDDIE CLARKE, PHIL CAMPBELL and original member LARRY WALLIS celebrate the magic of MOTÖRHEAD, recalling bad drugs, imperilled sheep, and the enduring power of their mighty “bend not stab” sound. “You’ve got to smack ‘em in the mouth,” says Lemmy, “then give yourself time to get away.”

Story: John Robinson
Photograph: Fin Costello



Racket of three: the
classic Motörhead
lineup, London, 1980
- (l-r) Phil 'Philthy
Animal' Taylor,
Lemmy Kilmister,
'Fast' Eddie Clarke





"This one's for all you speed freaks in the audience..."
live at Newcastle City Hall,
March 22, 1982

AS IN GUITAR, so in conversation. "Fast" Eddie Clarke tells a story about joining Motörhead which covers a great deal of ground, in a very short space of time.

Eddie's account covers his origins as TV repairman in West London, jam sessions in Ealing with someone called "American Jim", and stints with soul singer Curtis Knight ("like James Brown – he used to fine you if you did anything wrong"). There is a band, Blue Goose, and the tale continues apace. It covers a job as site foreman on a barge renovation on the Thames at Chelsea, and meeting there a casual labourer on the site, a drummer, named Phil Taylor.

Taylor brings to the site an idiosyncratic routine: the required sandpapering, but also tales of fighting,

**"I'M DOING
WHAT I
CAN. WHAT
THE FUCK
DO YOU
EXPECT?
I'M 69,
MAN!"
LEMMY**

drumming, and consumption of speed. Eventually, Phil disappears. Time mysteriously passes, but Taylor re-enters the narrative, contacting Clarke to reveal that he has now found an employment opportunity more suited to his unique portfolio of talents. "He phoned me up and said, 'I've joined Motörhead,'" says Eddie.

In late 1975, Motörhead was a three-piece comprising Taylor, alongside two musicians with a rich countercultural pedigree. From the Pink Fairies, a talented guitarist and songwriter: Larry Wallis. From Hawkwind, a bass player, vocalist, and man of laconic wit: Lemmy. The band had already recorded an album called *On Parole* for United Artists – but it was languishing unreleased. A chance encounter with Lemmy at a rehearsal studio led Clarke to audition for a job playing second guitar in the group.

Clarke was keen. He booked the studio, at Furniture Cave in Lots Road, Fulham, drove the gear, got everyone there on time. They played – but Larry Wallis was late. When Wallis eventually arrived, things didn't go at all well. Clarke could feel the bad atmosphere and went home. "I paid the bills and fucked off," he says. "I thought 'fuck it.'" He went home, and went to bed, crestfallen.

"Then Saturday morning I get a knock on the door at 8am," says Clarke. "I thought, 'Who the fucking hell's this?' So I go to the door in my fucking underpants, like, 'What the fuck's all this?' And it's Lemmy, standing there with a bullet belt in one hand and a leather jacket in the other. He gave them to me and said, 'You got the job,' and walked off."

BANDS COME AND go. Motörhead, built for speed not comfort, have remained – and this year they celebrate an unbelievable 40 years making their slightly anomalous heavy rock music. The band have never quite been hippies (though they have strong ties to the British



Fast Eddie Clarke
backstage with
his Strats and Les
Paul, circa 1980

underground), never quite been metal (though their albums have featured guest artists like Ozzy and Slash), and never quite been punk (though they found fellow travellers in the likes of The Damned and The Adverts).

"I always thought we had more in common with punk than with anything else, but we had long hair so we didn't fit in that box," says Lemmy today. "But that's the embassy talking, not the bands. We did a show at the Roundhouse which was The Damned and us supporting The Adverts – you can't get more of a mixed media show than that."

It's unbelievable because the band has kept up a very fast pace for most of that time, much of it spent on strong drink and bad drugs. Unbelievable also because the band very nearly quit before it properly began. Having been kicked out of Hawkwind (more properly, been left behind by Hawkwind, who didn't bail him out when he was busted for possession in Canada), Ian Kilmister, a veteran of Sam Gopal and Blackpool beats The Rocking Vicars, known as Lemmy, returned to England. On arrival, he rang Larry Wallis. "I jumped in a cab over to a rehearsal room in World's End, Chelsea," says Wallis, "and Lem put out a line of white powder. I asked, 'What is it?' He said, 'Amphetamine sulphate'. Five minutes later we were making a right old racket at 5,000 miles an hour."

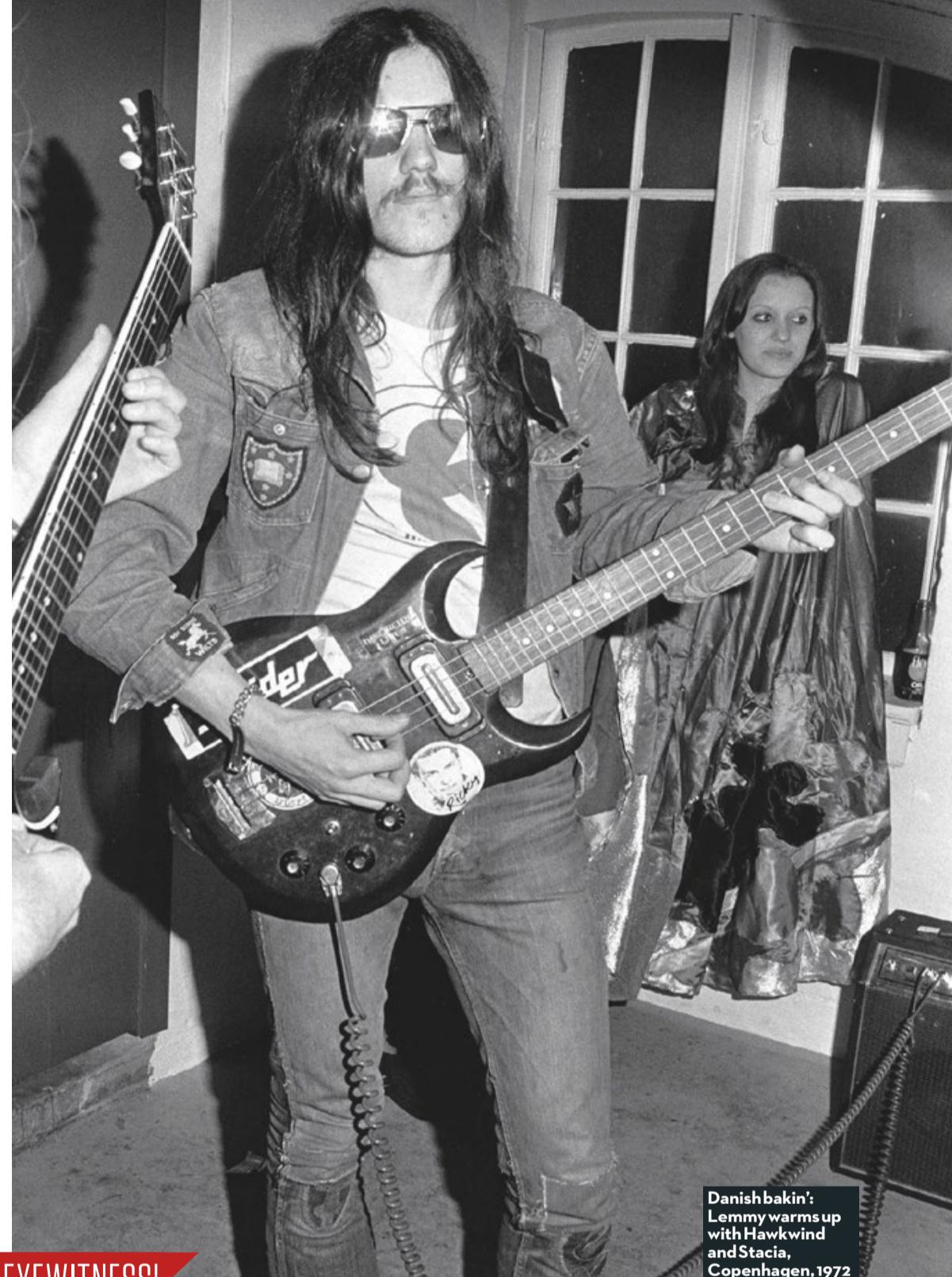
The constituent parts of that racket, not unlike that being made on the pub rock circuit, took inspiration from raw American R'n'B (in their early repertoire was "Leaving Here", a Holland-Dozier-Holland number), and also from the faintly psychedelic British interpretations of the same ingredients – what record shops now call "freakbeat". Ted Carroll, who at the time ran the Rock On stall at the top of Portobello Road recalls how Lemmy's record-buying was a barometer of his fortunes. "He had really good taste in

music," says Carroll. "When Hawkwind got a deal, I remember Lemmy coming in saying 'We got an advance from Atlantic – I've got a bank account!' He bought 50 quid's worth of records. Six months later he came in and said, 'I'm out of the band'."

To Motörhead, Lemmy brought his artful, paranoid compositions for Hawkwind ("The Watcher", "Lost Johnny" and "Motörhead" itself). Wallis brought work like "City

Kids" and "Fools", which grew out of his own experiences on the fringes of underground London. Writer/activist/head Mick Farren – a sometime collaborator of both Wallis and Lemmy – was also in the creative mix. The record, however, was not well-received by the record company, and after an intervention from on high ("Clive Davis told us we were 'free to seek another label,' Wallis remembers), Wallis quit. Motörhead were on the verge of collapse before they had even released a record.

IN MOST SENSES of the word, Motörhead's saviour was speed. Though downhearted, the band decided in 1976 that if they were going to quit, then they would at least leave a memorial to their talents, and release a live album of a forthcoming show at the Marquee club, set to be one of their final gigs. They approached Ted Carroll for money to hire the Rolling Stones mobile studio for the recording, which he gave. However, when the Marquee wanted additional money for recording in the venue, Carroll suggested they instead use the money to record a single, produced by Thunderclap Newman's Speedy Keen. Wired after the Marquee gig, the band drove directly to the studio in Kent, and began setting up. "That was Friday night, so we



Danish bakin':
Lemmy warms up
with Hawkwind
and Stacia,
Copenhagen, 1972

EYEWITNESS!

PINKWIND!

**When The
Pink Fairies
met Hawkwind.
By Larry Wallis...**

"I DIDN'T REALLY know Lemmy in those wonderful, crazy, days, but we used to do gigs whereby either the 'Wind or Fairies would go on first, then when the second set was over, we'd all get onstage as Pinkwind. Man, what a racket we used to make. On a good night, four drummers, two basses, two guitars, and a dozen lunatics going hell for leather through a dense fog of smoking dope. Or something a little more psychedelic..."

had all Saturday and Sunday," says Eddie Clarke. "We'd been playing these songs for a year, so we thought fuck it, we can do an album. In a few hours we had all the backing tracks down. Put the vocals down. Bit more speed, put some more guitars on. Few more beers – we were fucking steaming. Come Saturday night, we'd nearly finished it."

Carroll was driving down to hear the finished single on Sunday night. While the band went to bed, Speedy Keen and engineer Johnny Burns began the mix. When Motörhead awakened, they found that the pair had ventured deeply into the material, but not widely.

"We go in the studio and their eyes are out on fucking stalks," says Eddie. "They've done 45 mixes of 'Motörhead'. They'd given each mix a mark: three stars, four stars, eleven stars. They didn't know which one was which."

From this unpromising chaos began Motörhead's glory years. A run of albums from this 1977 debut until 1982's *Iron Fist* that defined their invulnerable, but strangely agile sound. "Bounce and swing," says Eddie Clarke. "Bend not stab," says Lemmy.

Their next two LPs (the ace *Overkill* and *Bomber*, both 1979) were produced by Jimmy Miller, "a nice man, a gentle man" by all accounts, but one who was self-evidently returning to heavy heroin use. The band debuted at No 1 in the charts with the 1981 live recording *No Sleep 'Til Hammersmith*, a highpoint even the No 1, '82's *Iron Fist*, couldn't quite match. After an argument over a recording of "Stand By Your Man" with Wendy O Williams, Eddie Clarke quit the band.



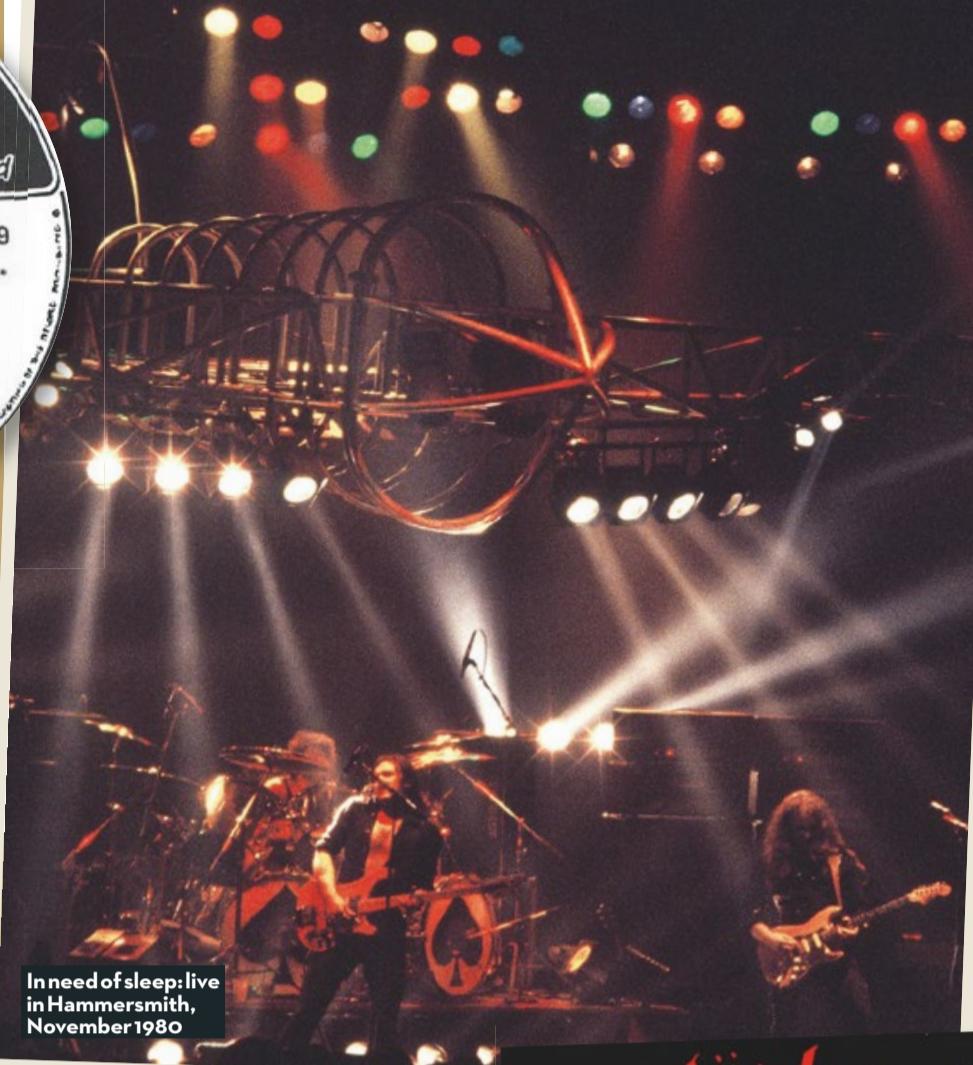
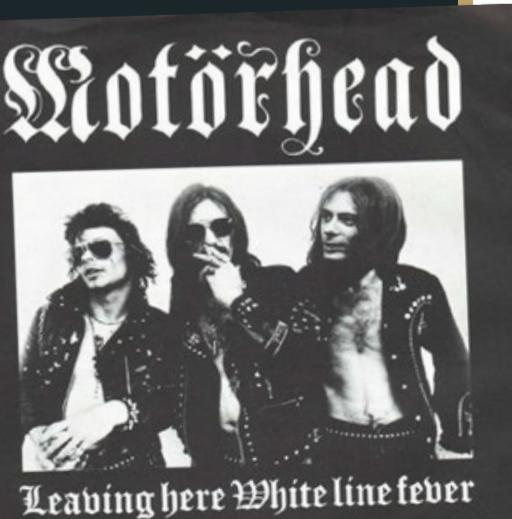
EYEWITNESS!

STIFFED!

Motörhead's mistreatment at the hands of Stiff Records

BY WINTER 1976, we had quite a big following so it made sense for someone like Stiff to put a record out," says Fast Eddie Clarke. "We did 'Leaving Here' and 'White Line Fever' on the B-side. Then they said, 'We're not going to put that out now, we're going to save that for our compilation album.' We said, 'You cunts...' We had a big fucking ruck with them. We were going to kill Jake [Riviera, Stiff label boss]. He came up to me one time and said, 'Why did Lemmy say all those horrible things in the paper?' I fucking hate Stiff for that. People thought they were a people's label - they weren't, they were just the same. They were like every other record company - let's make some money and fuck everyone over. They were quite prepared to do that. Jake gave us £30 for Christmas that year. There were four of us with the tour manager, so that's £7.50 each. Thanks, Jake."

TERASSON/DALLE/RETNA PICTURES



In need of sleep: live in Hammersmith, November 1980

• In 1980, they made the work which has continued to define them, *Ace Of Spades*. It was produced by Vic Maile - whose musicality, and eye for detail had helped bring success to the recordings of Dr Feelgood, and more recently Girlschool. The band proved strangely receptive to some of Maile's more left-field production ideas.

"He didn't drink, he didn't smoke, and he was very delicate because he was diabetic," says Eddie Clarke. "He had to have his Ryvita at six o'clock. We couldn't get heavy with him, couldn't fucking shake him, you know what I mean? He might die! So we had to listen to him."

To "Ace Of Spades" itself, shortly to become a headbanger classic, Maile added woodblock.

"If it was anyone else, we'd have told him to go and fuck off and die or tied 'em to the car and run round the carpark with them," says Eddie Clarke. "But because it was Vic we said, 'Oh, all right Vic...' So we're there with these blocks of wood banging them together. He put loads of reverb on and that's the sound you hear - 'dang dang dang dang dang CLACK'. We didn't want to upset him in case we killed him."

Classic as it was set to become, *Ace Of Spades* was difficult to write. The band went to Rockfield studios in Wales to come up with some tunes, but while Clarke and Taylor spent a lot of time playing, there was a notable absentee.

"We couldn't get Lemmy in the rehearsal room," says Clarke. "He can be a bit set in his ways. He was too busy

getting a blowjob, or reading his books, or getting pissed. We didn't get much done. I was fishing in the river at the bottom of the garden, there were people shooting sheep with fucking air rifles. It was a fucking nightmare - and that was just writing the tunes. We brought a little mobile in to record the last day of rehearsals and the poor guy turns up with his

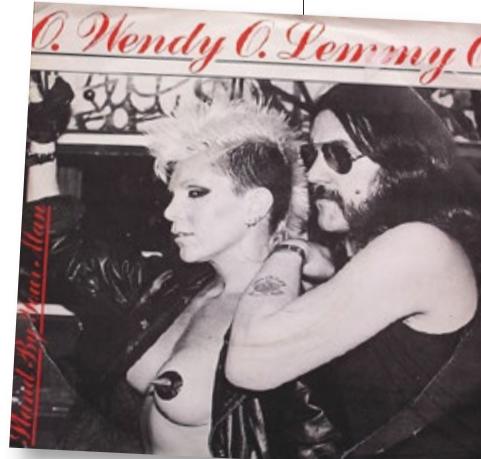


Lemmy's particular brand of endurance, and how it contributes to the band's character. "He's still a motherfucker," says Campbell. "But we know each other better. He's very intelligent, very humorous, very well-read. He's not a violent man, but he won't take shit off anyone. When he was pissed off with a promoter, I've seen him come off stage and pull a metal door off its hinges. You wouldn't want to mess with him. He's good to be around, a good laugh."

"When I joined, he told me one thing," adds Campbell. "Don't wear shorts on stage."

Though the sole original member, Lemmy is himself politely dismissive of the idea that he is the only significant part of Motörhead. "It's not just me, of course not," he says, "but I'm the only constant. I had an idea all those years ago that I wanted to do and I've been doing it ever since and it's worked out really well for me. I've been really lucky, you know? My ambition was to become the MC5 but we couldn't get the people, so we became the MC3."

First hand, he learned the importance of presentation. Hawkwind shafted him personally, but Lemmy is still loyal to the band's bigger picture. "Hawkwind did stuff no-one else had done," he remembers. "Consider: we had 18 projectors on gantries, out in the audience, flashing all this shit onto a screen above us. Then we had a synthesiser player who was reading the 'How To' manual while he was playing on stage. Everything in the band was going through the synthesiser. Which I suppose you could say was groundbreaking."



mobile, parks outside, and we shot all his tail lights out. He must have been in there thinking, 'Fucking hell, am I gonna live through this?'"

TODAY, LEMMY IS the veteran of half a century in rock'n'roll, whatever damage it has done him borne in a sanguine manner, this not being a person to succumb easily to regrets. "I'm still alive, so I think so far you can say I'm invulnerable," he says down the line from his apartment, recognisably himself. "I'm doing what I can. We have to slow down because I get tired. But what the fuck do you expect? I'm 69, man."

Hippy friendliness. Stern intransigence. A strangely courtly use of language (he will occasionally begin a sentence like a lecturer: "Consider..."). He's got a balancing remark to make even about people he doesn't particularly like. It's small wonder that when people think not just of Motörhead, but of heavy rock itself, they think of Lemmy - someone you can say has stamped his character on an entire genre of music. For some, it's a whole way of living. "It is a lifestyle," he says, "but I've come to not espouse it, really, as a lot of my friends die every year, y'know? [Lemmy has Type 2 diabetes and a pacemaker]. I don't want to advise anyone to do anything, apart from try and stay alive. That's my advice - don't die."

Phil Campbell, Motörhead's lead guitarist for the last 30 years has been able to witness at first hand

Lemmy's particular brand of endurance, and how it contributes to the band's character. "He's still a motherfucker," says Campbell. "But we know each other better. He's very intelligent, very humorous, very well-read. He's not a violent man, but he won't take shit off anyone. When he was pissed off with a promoter, I've seen him come off stage and pull a metal door off its hinges. You wouldn't want to mess with him. He's good to be around, a good laugh."

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First hand, he learned the importance of presentation. Hawkwind shafted him personally, but Lemmy is still loyal to the band's bigger picture. "Hawkwind did stuff no-one else had done," he remembers. "Consider: we had 18 projectors on gantries, out in the audience, flashing all this shit onto a screen above us. Then we had a synthesiser player who was reading the 'How To' manual while he was playing on stage. Everything in the band was going through the synthesiser. Which I suppose you could say was groundbreaking."

When Motörhead spent money on a stage show, the results could be spectacular (the “Bomber” lighting rig, shaped like a German Heinkel III), but they could also (the self-explanatory ‘Iron Fist’, the ‘Orgasmatrain’, to accompany the *Orgasmatron* album) go terribly wrong.

“None of it ever fucking worked except the bomber,” says Lemmy. “We had this huge Orgasmatrain thing and after we built it, we realised we couldn’t get it into most of the venues – isn’t that wonderful? The iron fist was even worse – it ended up making a very rude gesture to the crowd. We had to rely on our Motörheadness to get us through.”

The key ingredient of Motörheadness being?

“We shall not be moved. We shall not be swayed from our purpose. Am I surprised it’s lasted 40 years? Fucking hell man, I thought we’d be lucky if it lasted five. But it’s funny, time gets away from you. Someone says, it’s thirty-something years and you just say, ‘You’re joking.’ Because you’re just working, doing what you do. It must be much the same for people who get the gold watch. Like, ‘Already?’”

Lemmy has no pretence about rock’n’roll as anything other than rock’n’roll. Still, he approaches his role in Motörhead with evangelical purpose. When curious newcomers come to the band, he knows what they want.

“They want Motörhead. They’re after fierce music, they’re after no compromise,” he says. “In every kid’s life there’s about three or four years when you’re at liberty and after that you have to get a job because you’re getting married or you have to support your parents or whatever it is.”

“I was lucky, I didn’t get married so I didn’t have to have that responsibility. Therefore I’m very irresponsible, I love being on stage and I love being in the studio. I’ve been very lucky and I have to translate that into that kid’s life for three or four years, you know? That period when they think they can rule the world, when they think they’re invulnerable. That’s a great thing to give people.”

“Motörhead is a way of life for the fans,” Larry Wallis confirms. “With Lemmy, it’s not so much what he does, as what he is.”

Still, does Lemmy ever feel he might have given too much of himself to the mission, that he’s missed out on a more settled life? “I don’t know, I didn’t notice it, and I’m not complaining,” he says, the slight wheeze in his voice lending added gravity to his aphorism. “Rock’n’roll’s had a good time out of me – and I’ve had a very good time out of rock’n’roll.”

TOUGH PHILOSOPHICALLY

THE same, some aspects of Motörhead are gradually changing with the times. Historically, the band’s music has been written in exactly the same way: riffing in the rehearsal room, organisation of the material, then hasty writing of lyrics. “We have our own system,” says Lemmy, “which takes some getting used to.”

This time around, says Phil Campbell, there’s been a preparatory conference call, and an important tweak to the procedure. Rather than more pre-production, this time the band will be shooting for less. Forgoing writing and recording, the band are going straight into the studio to record what they come up with directly, in the white heat of creativity. Lemmy’s strategy for a good Motörhead album, meanwhile, is the same as it ever was. “You’ve got to have three killer tracks going in and going out – they’re the best tracks on the album.” He chuckles: “You’ve got to smack ‘em in the mouth and then give yourself time to get away.”

Close observers of the group, like Eddie Clarke, remain cordial with present-day Motörhead – he joined the band to play “Ace Of Spades” at a UK show last year, for example. Still, he laments the band’s move towards a more “graunchy, heavy metal” sound, that contrasts unfavourably with the



HOW TO BUY

MOTÖRHEAD: AN ALBUM FOR EVERY DECADE



OVERKILL
BRONZE, 1979
The first of two that year, their Jimmy Miller-produced second makes the trio

sound like a speedfreak Yardbirds. Riffs? “No Class” and “Limb From Limb” gave furious vent to the band’s ire.



ACE OF SPADES

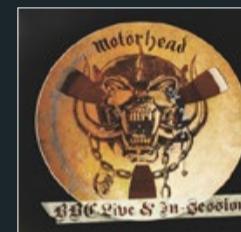
BRONZE, 1980
Contains the band’s signature number, but also many other supercharged riffs. “(We Are The) Road Crew”, makes heroic the lot of the gaffa-tape-wielding lag. “Desert scene” cover actually shot in sandpit, Barnet.



BASTARDS

ZYX, 1993
After the celeb mates in the LA schmooze of *March Or Die*, *Bastards* was a

back-to-basics speed rock behemoth. Still, it wasn’t afraid to mix things up a bit, with “Don’t Let Daddy Kiss Me” a ballad about a victim of child abuse.



BBC LIVE & IN SESSION

SANCTUARY, 2005
A comp, but a good one – showing the band’s changing contexts, from Peel Sessions to Kid Jensen to *The Friday Rock Show*. A spoken-word “Orgasmatron”, though? Really?



AFTERSHOCK

SPV, 2013
Though older, the band has never sounded so savage. What it lacks in swing, it makes up for in single-minded assault. “Good cover, too. Think that sold a lot of records,” says Lemmy.

“LEMMY CAN BE A BIT SET IN HIS WAYS... TOO BUSY GETTING A BLOWJOB OR GETTING PISSED”
FAST EDDIE CLARKE

older material. “At that show they started with six old tunes and it sounded fucking good, the crowd were on board,” says Clarke. “Then they did some of the other stuff and it dipped. We had a bounce and a swing that worked well. All the tunes since sound one-dimensional.”

“Motörhead needs a bit of flair,” he continues. “Motörhead is about the chemistry. We spent years making it work. We weren’t appreciated as musicians, but I saw us on *Top Of The Pops* the other week and it was fucking brilliant. The tunes hold up. I thought I looked like a fucking earwig at the time, but we looked great. We were brilliant but we never knew it.”

Lemmy, meanwhile, like a machine of war, keeps rolling ever onwards, powered by a uniquely rock’n’roll energy.

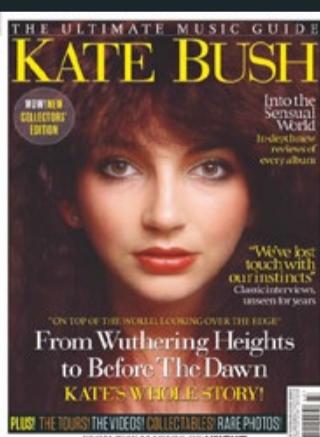
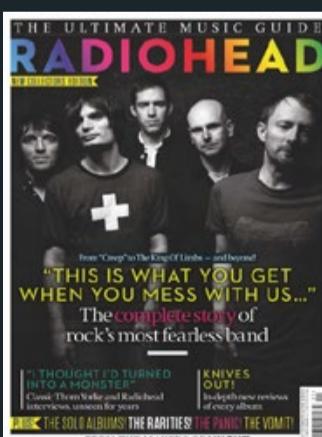
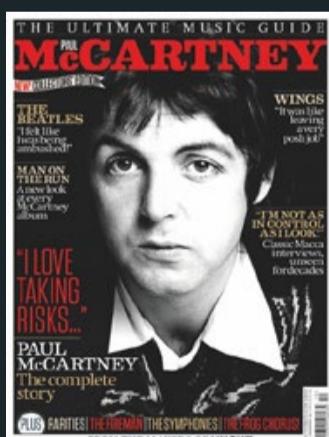
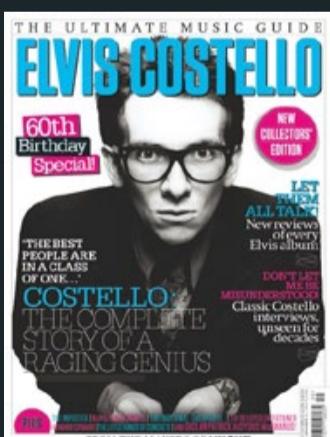
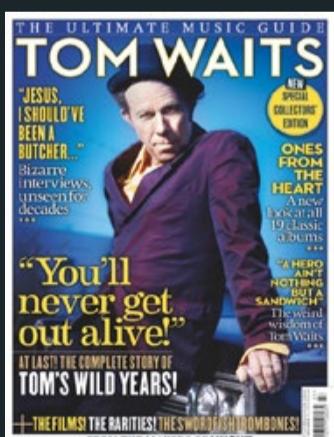
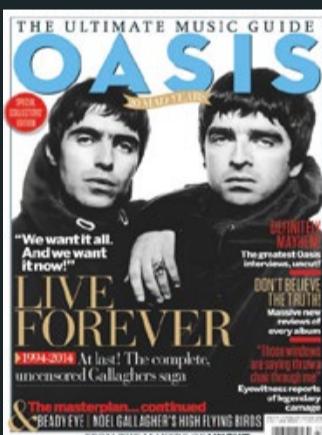
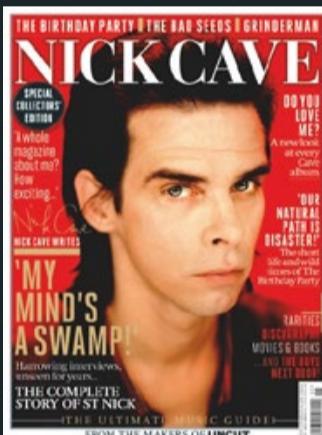
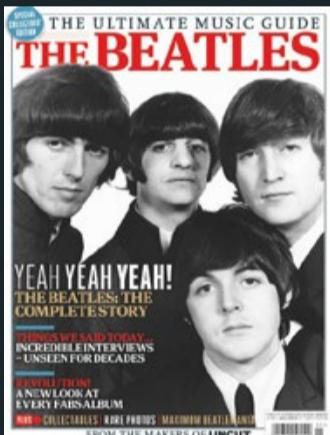
“It’s my fuck youness,” he says. “Ever since they gave us six months to live when we did our first show, I was determined they wouldn’t be right. Every year is a bonus, ‘cos I’m still here and they’re all gone. Fuck you, y’know?”

BMG and PIAS’ 180g vinyl reissue campaign of Motörhead albums begins in late March with Overkill, Bomber and Ace Of Spades. Six further albums follow in April

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New albums

OUR SCORING SYSTEM:

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

THIS MONTH: BILL FAY | GODSPEED | CALEXICO & MORE



LINDA BROWNLEE

**TRACKLIST**

- 1 Lonesome Street
- 2 New World Towers
- 3 Go Out
- 4 Ice Cream Man
- 5 Thought I Was A Spaceman
- 6 I Broadcast
- 7 My Terracotta Heart
- 8 There Are Too Many Of Us
- 9 Ghost Ship
- 10 Pyongyang
- 11 Ong Ong
- 12 Mirrorball

BLUR The Magic Whip

EMI

Woo hoo! Damon Albarn and co return for their first album as a four-piece in 16 years. *By Michael Bonner*

8/10

WHEN BLUR REFORMED in 2009, did we necessarily think they were going to record a new album? Evidently, these are busy men with active careers: solo albums, light operas, political campaigns, radio shows, artisanal cheese ranges for mid-price supermarkets. But although there were two warmly received singles – “Fool’s Day” and “Under The Westway” – that demonstrated they had lost none of their talents for writing leftfield pop songs, Blur seemed destined to roll themselves out only during times of collected high spirits: summer festivals, award

ceremonies and international sporting events.

So what changed? During May 2013, Blur spent five days in Hong Kong following cancelled shows in Japan and Taiwan. There, they bedded down at the city’s Avon Studios for some no-strings exploratory jams. Occasional tweaks aside, the recordings lay dormant until autumn 2014, when Graham Coxon decided to make a proper go of fashioning an album, in cahoots with the band’s early producer, Stephen Street. For his part, Coxon specifically sees his work on *The Magic Whip* as part of a healing process begun when he rejoined the band in 2009. →

Whipped into shape:
James, Rowntree, Albarn
and Coxon in 2015



→ The idea of Coxon completing some kind of perceived reparations by assiduously shaping and editing the Hong Kong sessions into Blur's first new studio album in 12 years makes for a persuasive narrative. But while that may suggest *The Magic Whip* is stylistically closer to either Coxon's own solo releases or the Blur album to most obviously foreground his talents – 1997's *Blur* – the vibes here are very much about looking forward. Admittedly, there are a couple of songs – "Lonesome Street" and "Go Out" – which explicitly revisit the 'la la la' chorus and twitchy guitar rhythms of 20th-Century Blur, along with what feel like passing nods to "Music Is My Radar" or "This Is A Low".

At its best, though, *The Magic Whip* thrums with ideas and possibilities. Palpably, Hong Kong provided a fresh context for many of Albarn's recurrent themes. Isolation and the

depersonalising qualities of modern living weave through the album's 12 songs, continuing ideas explored previously in Blur songs like "Yuko And Hiro" and his own "Everyday Robots". Songs on *The Magic Whip* mention internet hotspots, satellite showers, industrial light and glass arcades. In one track, you are required to "log in your name". Elsewhere, he sings excitedly of his admiration for "the airspace of another city/It's got your number and your blood type". As much as *The Good, The Bad & The Queen* was a melancholy love letter to London, so *The Magic Whip* depicts a bustling modern city where old cultures and emerging technologies exist cheek-by-jowl. As the album's sleeve notes comment, "Essex dreams are far away". Well, quite.

Albarn returned to Hong Kong in December last year to help shape his lyrics for the album. On

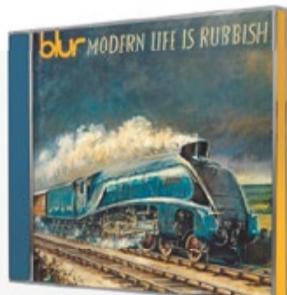
his way back to England after solo shows in Australia, he revisited many locations and journeys connected to the band's May '13 sessions; a *gweilo* [ex-pat aka 'pale ghost'] adrift in a city of seven million. The album's opener, "Lonesome Street", finds Albarn alive to the bustle of Hong Kong: "you have to go on the underground to get things done here". Musically, it feels a little like a reassuring sop to anxious fans; one of those rowdy numbers like "Stereotypes", complete with whistling and some

"oo-oooh"s. "New World Towers" recalls the dubby, spectral airs of *The Good, The Bad & The Queen* or *Everyday Robots*, while Albarn sings about "green neon... carved out of grey white skies", his wistful tone beautifully complimented by Coxon's warm guitar playing. Like "Lonesome Street", "Go Out" – first previewed in February – retains the snotty post-punk tension of Blur's mid-'90s incarnation, driven by choppy guitars and a jerky bass line. It ends in a nicely distorted solo from Coxon. "Ice Cream Man", meanwhile, arrives on loping, acoustic melodies and strange electronic burblings; it builds around a simple chord progression that hangs unobtrusively around Alex James' bassline.

Among the album's highlights, "Thought I Was A Spaceman" signals a shift in the band's ambitions. At over six minutes long, it arrives swathed in icy keyboard washes, a nagging

HOW TO BUY... THE ROAD TO THE MAGIC WHIP

The albums that signpost the way to Blur's return



BLUR *Modern Life Is Rubbish* 1993

A remarkable step-up after 1991's debut *Leisure*, *Modern Life Is Rubbish* found a band sharpening their ideas. On "Blue Jeans", "Miss America" and "Resigned", we can witness the emergence of a more melancholy strand to Albarn's songwriting, which features heavily on *The Magic Whip*.

9/10



GRAHAM COXON *Happiness In Magazines* 2004

Coxon's first work with Stephen Street since 1997's *Blur*, this – the guitarist's fifth solo album – was a perky, upbeat affair, reminiscent in places of his Blur song, "Coffee And TV". Critically, *Happiness In Magazines* focused Coxon's songwriting skills.

8/10



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

Albarn's psycho-geographically minded supergroup, convened with Paul Simonon, Tony Allen and Simon Tong. Their debut (a follow-up is already written, apparently) comprised dubby ballads about London, referencing The Clash (naturally) and the Specials.

8/10



DAMON ALBARN *Everyday Robots* 2014

Albarn's proper solo debut, *Everyday Robots* provided a platform for several autobiographical pieces ("Hollow Ponds", "You And Me"), though Albarn's rueful meditations on the anxieties of contemporary living (the title track, "Lonely Press Play") and long-term relationships ("Hostiles") are delivered with sharp insight.

8/10

xylophone melody and programmed drums across which drift Albarn's hushed, treated vocals. About two and a half minutes in, though, the song lifts off on shimmering Mellotron lines and Dave Rowntree's propulsive drums. Evoking images of climate change – “*The desert had encroached upon the places where we lived*” – it's elegant and sweeping in stature; vaguely reminiscent of Bowie's track “*Slip Away*” (from *Heathen*), though entirely its own beast. The rambunctious “*I Broadcast*” finds an adrenalised Albarn “*buzzing on another day*”. It's followed by “*My Terracotta Heart*”, one of the album's dazzling sad songs. Against a clanking drumbeat and gentle guitar filigrees, Albarn's voice is regretful and nostalgic: “*I'm running out of heart here/Just sitting out the constant doubt in my head/But I don't know what it is.*” Albarn can write songs like this in his sleep, but that doesn't diminish their emotive pull. For instance, the impressive “*There Are Too Many Of Us*” is ushered in on martial-sounding strings, building on waves of keyboard and swirling Mellotron effects.

SLEEVE NOTES

Produced by:
Stephen Street,
Graham Coxon and
Damon Albarn

Recorded: Avon
Studios, Hong Kong;
The Bunker, London;
Assault & Battery 2,
London; Studio 13,
London

Personnel: Damon
Albarn (vocals,
keyboards), Graham
Coxon (guitars,
saxophone, keys),
Alex James (bass),
Dave Rowntree
(drums), Stephen
Street (synths and
programming) and
Stella Page, Kontono
Sato, Isabelle Dunn,
Antonia Pagulatons
(strings)

“*Pyongyang*” finds Albarn's narrator contemplating separation and the passage of time – “*By the time your sun is rising there/Out here it's turning blue*” – against an elegiac backing of gently cascading guitar notes and sparkling keyboard motifs. It's a sharp contrast with the singalong “*Ong Ong*”, with its Faces stomp and beery chorus, “*I wanna be with you*”. There are even some “*shala la*”s. Things end in dignified fashion with “*Mirrorball*”, which arrives in the same woozy atmospherics as “*Miss America*”. It appears to find Albarn travelling from Jordan Road on the Hong Kong metro system to the Ocean Park theme park; “*Before you log out, hold close to me*” he murmurs. Sighing Oriental strings swish around Coxon's plaintive guitar; the tone is intimate, ruminative. As Coxon's final guitar note fades at the song's close, Albarn sings one last, “*Hold close to me*.” You might wonder whether he's addressing his formerly estranged best friend. Or, perhaps, even contemplating a new future for Blur.

The final quarter of the album finds a happy congruence between chipper Blur (“*Ghost Ship*”, “*Ong Ong*”) and sad Damon (“*Pyongyang*”, “*Mirrorball*”). Bobbing along on crisp, summer guitars and a relaxed saxophone refrain, “*Ghost Ship*” curiously resembles the dubby chill-out grooves of *Nightmares On Wax*, with Albarn singing “*I need a lantern in you to shine out bright rays*”. There's a gulf between its bouncy tone and the implausibly beautiful “*Pyongyang*”. Although its lyrics are elusive,

“*Pyongyang*” finds Albarn's narrator contemplating separation and the passage of time – “*By the time your sun is rising there/Out here it's turning blue*” – against an elegiac backing of gently cascading guitar notes and sparkling keyboard motifs. It's a sharp contrast with the singalong “*Ong Ong*”, with its Faces stomp and beery chorus, “*I wanna be with you*”. There are even some “*shala la*”s. Things end in dignified fashion with “*Mirrorball*”, which arrives in the same woozy atmospherics as “*Miss America*”. It appears to find Albarn travelling from Jordan Road on the Hong Kong metro system to the Ocean Park theme park; “*Before you log out, hold close to me*” he murmurs. Sighing Oriental strings swish around Coxon's plaintive guitar; the tone is intimate, ruminative. As Coxon's final guitar note fades at the song's close, Albarn sings one last, “*Hold close to me*.” You might wonder whether he's addressing his formerly estranged best friend. Or, perhaps, even contemplating a new future for Blur.

Q&A

Graham Coxon on recording in Hong Kong, mending relationships and making “sci-fi folk”

CAN YOU TELL us what happened in Hong Kong? We got there, and found that a Japanese festival had fallen through. Then something else fell through. So we had five days free. My heart leapt at the idea of having five days lolling about in a very nice hotel room with a circular bath. Then they said, ‘Damon says, how about finding a local studio and going in for five days and just jamming? He's got a few chords and that, a few ideas, and he's got a few scratchy things on his GarageBand on his iPad. Do you fancy it?’ I was like, ‘Yeah, great.’ Oh, shit. No resting up for five days. ‘That sounds really exciting. Deffo, let's do it!’

What was the studio like?
The studio was in this very ordinary block. We'd go up in this tiny lift. Then there was this studio corridor which was all black carpets – as usual – through a little live room into a control room. That's what we decided, for intimacy's sake and for communication's sake, that we'd crowd together there and jam. We tried Dave out in the live room to start with, but it was just rubbish, so we dragged him in. We set up a very simple little drum kit and chucked some mics in front of it. We really didn't do anything very carefully.

Was there an understanding that these sessions might lead to an album?

I'm not sure whether we actually said, ‘This is going to be an album.’ There were no songs finished enough to warrant saying that, anyway. There were no lyrics, no melody. Lines emerged, here and there. Enough for me to get some kind of grip on what Damon was saying. But it was pretty much what was coming out of his head. Some of them, we played over the top of stuff in his GarageBand. I had a saxophone and I honked along. I think he was doing a lot of filming and recording of the city. He seems to do that quite a lot. Just leans his iPad up on the window and lets it record.

“We were all scared to death. I was hoping that the recordings would inspire Damon...”

Can you describe the atmosphere in the studio? It was quite hard work, intense. We'd get there late morning and we wouldn't leave until well after tea time. It was tight and cramped. We had to stick ourselves behind the desk in the control room. Me and Damon were touching shoulders. The other side of the table Alex was there and Dave was to his right along a bit. We were all sitting in a square. My amp was in a cupboard. Damon had a bunch of instruments he likes to have around, funny old Russian things. I was using a new Stratocaster I'd made out of two bits of wood. Dave had this drum kit made up that was not really set up properly and Alex had this old fat Gibson. So we were making sounds that were not particularly Blur sounds in this very un-Blur city in a very un-Blur studio. We had 15 jams that were something like 20 minutes long in the end.

What happened next?

We went home. Damon had said, “I don't think anything will come of it. Lyrically, I wouldn't know where to start. I'm so disconnected now to Hong Kong and when we were there.” That made me more determined. It's a complicated, emotional thing. I wanted to make amends for the ups and downs we've had over the years. Our friendships have got better. The music side of it, I still thought I had some mending to do. Stephen Street had it for a few days. This was September, October last year. We spent about four working weeks on it, writing new parts to it, writing new chord sequences for melody lines that had appeared.

What did Damon think?

We were all scared to death. I wanted Damon to feel that it was nearly finished and I was hoping that it would inspire him. After the first track, he started to warm up. Then he started swearing. Then he started dancing around a bit. Then Dave and Alex shoved some bass on here and there where it needed to be redone because the sound wasn't that brilliant, the Hong Kong recordings. Damon started on vocals a few weeks ago. But not before dragging himself round Hong Kong on his way home from Australia for 48 hours to re-immerse himself in the place.

Where does *The Magic Whip* sit in the canon? It was made with no pressure, which I think is a good thing. It's experimental, not forcibly experimental. I got into this idea that it's sci-fi folk music. I had these ideas with “*New World Towers*” to make a sci-fi “*Greensleeves*” part in the middle. The world since we last made an album together has changed so radically. I think it reflects us at our age in this space and time.

Is it the start of a new chapter? Or the end of one..? I don't know whether it's the full stop at the end of a book or a full stop at the end of a chapter. I don't think any of us know that yet.

Damon is fully behind this?
Damon is? Yeah, yeah. He is.

Favourite tracks?

The melancholy ones. “*Pyongyang*” and “*My Terracotta Heart*”. I love them because I get this real proper sense of who we are.

INTERVIEW: MICHAEL BONNER





TRACKLIST

- 1 Strange Hellos
- 2 New Skin
- 3 Son, You Are No Island
- 4 A Proper Polish Welcome
- 5 Sprinter
- 6 Cowboy Guilt
- 7 Ferris Wheel
- 8 The Harshest Light
- 9 The Exchange

TORRES

Sprinter

PARTISAN

Brooklyn singer-songwriter heads to Dorset for exemplary second. By Louis Pattison

8/10

MACKENZIE SCOTT'S 2013 debut, the self-titled *Torres*, was one of those records that impressed, despite it being clear that what lay within may not quite be the finished product. It was recorded in five days while Scott was a 22-year-old student, in a Tennessee studio owned by Tony Joe White – a veteran Louisiana musician who last year jammed with Foo Fighters on *Letterman* and wrote the classic “Polk Salad Annie”.

Torres had the feel of a record made quickly, all emotional purge, bare electric guitar and raw emotion. The final “Waterfall” found her contemplating a suicide plunge. “*The rocks beneath they bare their teeth/They all conspire to set me free...*” Morbid, perhaps; but what was interesting is that it felt more like a beginning than an ending.

Torres' second album follows a process of maturing and uprooting. There was graduation

from university, in English and songwriting; tours with Sharon Van Etten and Strand Of Oaks; then a move from Nashville to Brooklyn. But *Sprinter* was made even further from home. Specifically, Bridport, Dorset, where she holed up in the studio of Rob Ellis, producer and sometime drummer for PJ Harvey. *Sprinter* also features bass from original PJ Harvey bassist Ian Olliver – which constitutes his and Ellis' first studio work together since 1992's *Dry* – not to mention guitar and synth from Portishead's Adrian Utley, in whose Bristol studio the record was completed. If *Torres* felt naked and pared back, this record is ambitious and multi-faceted, sometimes a thing of quiet, folksy restraint, but as likely to dive into a watery sonic netherworld, or strap on some grungy dynamics to get its kicks.

Not to dwell on PJ Harvey, but *Sprinter* shares some things with the oeuvre of Polly Jean. At first glance, it has the ring of a raw confessional, but

A to Z

COMING UP
THIS MONTH...

p70 DAVID CORLEY

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ALABAMA SHAKES

Sound & Color

ROUGH TRADE

Adventurous second set from garage-soul sensations

8/10

For all the raw charm of their 2012 debut, *Boys & Girls*, it was easy to wonder whether the prodigious Shakes had any further tricks up their sleeve. *Sound & Color* emphatically allays those fears, expanding on the garage-soul template with a rich, spacious production by Blake Mills that takes in psychedelic funk ("Future People"), lovely Curtis Mayfield homages ("Guess Who"), Badu-ish nu-soul ("Over My Head") and even Strokesy ramalam ("The Greatest"). Disparate but cohesive, and with an Otis-style showstopper in "Gimme All Your Love", as remarkable for the band's nuanced playing as it is for Brittany Howard's powerhouse vocals.

JOHN MULVEY



AVA LUNA

Infinite House

WESTERN VINYL

NY art-funkers transcend cool dads

Ava Luna vocalist/guitarist Carlos Hernandez is the progeny of Kid Creole sidekick Coati Mundi.

8/10

Female singer Felicia Douglass is the daughter of Atlantic soul production veteran Jimmy Douglass. But this Brooklyn quartet's third album sounds nothing like Ze label pastiche nor retro soul, revealing previously skronky post-punks come gloriously of age. Slipping effortlessly between neurotic funk, electro-soul, bookish pop and smooth grooves, *Infinite House* sounds like a less precious Dirty Projectors swaggering toward that rare place where unashamed intellect meets accessible pop. "Tenderize", "Steve Polyester" and "Best Hexagon" revive one's faith in music capable of moving head, heart and hips.

GARRY MULHOLLAND

on closer inspection, is plainly the result of some fastidious authorship, crammed with vivid vignettes surely rooted in life experience, but ringing like the best fiction. Standout is "New Skin", a ragged, theoric guitar lament that vacillates between exhaustion, guilt and steely resolve, and rallies with a repeated entreaty: "But if you've never known the darkness/ Then you're the one who fears the most." Too many good lines here, though, from the Southern states hedonism of "Cowboy Guilt" ("You had us in stitches/With your George W impressions/You sang of reparations/With the Native Americans") to "Ferris Wheel", in which a wallow in unrequited affection becomes a lonely fairground visit: "My friends just laugh and roll their eyes/When I tell them I don't mind the way it feels/ To ride an empty Ferris wheel."

The weight of a religious upbringing hangs heavy, leaving a sense of issues unresolved. On "The Harshest Light" she quotes the Yahweh of the Old Testament, while the title track contemplates a pastor who preaches to his students of Zacchaeus, the hated tax collector redeemed by Jesus; but the man of God receives no such redemption, sent down "for pornography". Such tantalising narrative glimpses nudge up against

Q&A

Mackenzie Scott

You've just moved from Nashville to New York. Why the change? I love Nashville, and it is a big music city. It just isn't a big city. At least, it isn't the big city. I've wanted to live in New York City since I was 14 years old. It was always my plan to move here once I'd earned my degree in Tennessee.

Many of your songs are almost fictional, but there's a strong sense of autobiography that runs through *Sprinter*, too. I'm dependent on my life experience. It provides a foundation for the writing. If I didn't have experience to speak of, I wouldn't be a credible source. I try to try out different interpretive lenses in viewing my experiences, because otherwise I think the writing would get stale.

Why did you come to the UK to record *Sprinter*? Rob Ellis lives in Bridport. We've known each other for a couple of years and I was willing to do almost anything to work with him on the record. So I travelled to him!

There seems to be more emphasis on atmosphere than on your debut... I got exactly what I wanted out of those handsome Brits! Seriously. I kept telling Rob I wanted the record to have a distinct atmosphere, and he kept assuring me that the friends he'd asked to play were right for the job. I had chills listening to Olly and Adrian play their parts. Also, Rob's one of those rare drummers that you just watch and become mesmerised. He uses his entire body when he plays.

blasts of raw feeling. "Strange Hellos" is an explosive Nirvana lope that shoves its chorus in your face like a scarred wrist: "I was all for being real/But if I don't believe then no-one will...". "Son You Are No Island", meanwhile, channels romantic revenge into audacious sonics. To a creeped-out drone, Scott multitracks her voice into eerie chorus, and at the denouement – "Son, you're not a man yet/You fucked with a woman who would know" – the voices suddenly scatter, like a flock of admonishing harpies.

An album that frequently feels to be about growing pains, *Sprinter* may, like its predecessor, not quite be Mackenzie Scott's defining moment. All the same, it shows enough promise that we should take that as a profound positive. Like *Torres*, it ends on a note of watery despair, albeit one so beautifully rendered it feels almost triumphant. Across its eight minutes, "The Exchange" contemplates the uncomfortable feeling of watching our heroes age, why lost souls choose the touring life, her mother's adoption, and a family tree severed at the bough. "I pray to Jesus Christ/ Incessantly/I shine my shoes for

the/Fat Lady" she sings, and at the end she's imagining herself underwater, calling out to her parents, sinking deeper and deeper into the murk. A certain morbidity may become a hallmark of Torres' writing; but then, it's in the darkness that she finds herself.

SLEEVE NOTES

► Recorded at:

Watercleaves

Nursery, Dorset

Produced by: Rob Ellis, Adrian Utley

Personnel: Mackenzie Scott (vocals, guitar), Rob Ellis (drums), Adrian Utley (guitar, synth), Ian Olliver (bass), BJ Cole (pedal steel), Scanner (electronics)

AVA LUNA

Infinite House

WESTERN VINYL

NY art-funkers transcend cool dads

Ava Luna vocalist/guitarist Carlos Hernandez is the progeny of Kid Creole sidekick Coati Mundi.

8/10

Female singer Felicia Douglass is the daughter of Atlantic soul production veteran Jimmy Douglass. But this Brooklyn quartet's third album sounds nothing like Ze label pastiche nor retro soul, revealing previously skronky post-punks come gloriously of age. Slipping effortlessly between neurotic funk, electro-soul, bookish pop and smooth grooves, *Infinite House* sounds like a less precious Dirty Projectors swaggering toward that rare place where unashamed intellect meets accessible pop. "Tenderize", "Steve Polyester" and "Best Hexagon" revive one's faith in music capable of moving head, heart and hips.

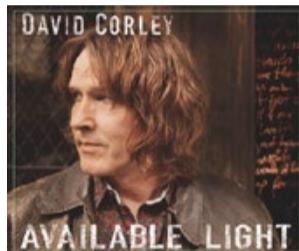
GARRY MULHOLLAND

DAVID CORLEY

Available Light

CONTINENTAL SONG CITY

Stricken laments from a striking new voice. *By Allan Jones*



9/10

ANYONE WHOSE MUSICAL tastes run to double malt woe with a longneck chaser will want to raise a glass to *Available Light*, the debut by Indiana singer-songwriter, David Corley, who delivers many of its best songs in the

downcast tones of a seen-it-all veteran of turbulent times exchanging bad luck stories in a bar whose other regulars include beermat laureates like Mark Eitzel, Tom Waits, Willy Vlautin, John Murry, Mark Lanegan and, over there with his back to the wall, possibly scowling at the rest of the room, Lou Reed.

The latter, meaning Lou, is noticeably recalled on *Available Light* on "The Joke", a song with a particularly bleak outlook, sung by Corley in a suitably sardonic growl over a crunching guitar riff whose two-chord root was surely planted originally in something like "What's Good" on *Magic And Loss* or "Dirty Blvd", from *New York*. You can hear Lou again, perhaps less obviously, on "Easy Mistake", a litany of bone-tired regret that recalls the haunted chambers and poignant languid drift of "Coney Island Baby". It's a desecrated hymn to friendship, old times, one or more lovers left behind, all that. "Even the colours we dreamed in fade," Corley muses mournfully, in a voice that sounds like it once had a life of its own, riotously led, but exhausted now, battered, beaten, charred at the edges.

At 53, Corley clearly has a lot of rough road behind him, hard times and a lot of hurt endured along the way. By an account he gives me, he grew up in Lafayette, rural Indiana. He was turned on to music when his uncle gave him a Beatles songbook. Through his parents' record collection, he then discovered Van Morrison, Neil Young and Dylan – "the icons", as Corley describes them – who inspired the songs he was soon writing. Dropping out of college at 20, he roamed. He delivered trucks, repaired roofs, tended bars, lived for a time in a remote cabin in the mountains of Georgia, before returning to Lafayette to recover from a heart attack. He was playing there in a "weekend band" called Medicine Dog when in 2014 he met Canadian musician and producer Hugh Christopher Brown, who not much later was producing *Available Light* at his studio, a converted post office on an island south of Ontario.

As a teenager, Corley experienced the first of the ecstatic visions that have continued to visit him, unbidden, hard to explain. These "glimpses of the mystic", as Corley describes them, find vivid expression in songs here like the album's handsome title track, whose funky country rock cadences make it sound like something wonderful recorded in Nashville, at Elliot Mazer's Quadrafonic Sound Studios, in about 1971, the chunky guitar lick that drives it bringing to mind "Heart Of Gold". Elsewhere, the sense of speculative wonder that replaces the record's prevailing disconsolation owes much to Van Morrison, especially on the long, ruminative "Beyond The



SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:** Hugh Christopher Brown
► **Recorded at:** The Post Office, Wolfe Island, Canada, and Green Door Studio, Brooklyn, New York
► **Personnel:** David Corley (vocals, guitar, piano, bass), Hugh Christopher Brown (Hammond B3, piano, clavinet, Wurlitzer, Casio, vocals), Tony Scherr (bass, guitar), Gregor Beresford (drums, percussion), Kate Fenner and Sarah McDermott (backing vocals, claps)

Corley sings, his voice framed by rolling piano lines, mournful backing vocals, weeping slide guitar lines. "I'm gonna make a play here," he goes on, "come hell, high water or blood."

The song's final minutes are wounded, a stricken lament, heavy with regret. "Would I do it again, now that it's all done?" Corley asks himself. "Oh man, that's hard to say, just hard to say, so hard to say," he confesses, sounding as weary as the world itself, a tired man with nowhere left to go.

Q&A

David Corley

Not many people release their debut album at 53. What took you so long? You gotta live a life to write about it. You can't make this stuff up. I've done my share of travelling around and I got lost in the world.

You've spent a long time on the road, then? I wasn't really on the road, just on the move. It was a hard life. I was writing and playing music constantly and I feel like I'm lucky life keeps happening in a beautiful way. But desperation

sets in and I have to find a way to deal with both desperation and beauty. Everybody does.

What are the recurring themes of your songs? Fuckin' up, mistakes, missteps and girls.

How would you describe Available Light to someone who hasn't heard it? I wanted to make a record that sounded like '70s gold. You listen to it and there are no fillers. Every song is alone and in its own right, but they fit together. You know, I guess I wanted to liberate some of these songs from my journals and get 'em in your ears. I want you to listen, and when it's done say, 'I gotta hear that again – what the fuck was that?' And then I'll disappear back into the woodwork.



BLANCMANGE

Semi Detached

CHERRY RED

Erratic fifth from

Neil Arthur's veteran synthpoppers

Blancmange's comeback got off to a wobbly start with 2011's insipid *Blanc*

Burn, but this latest set, arriving some 30 years after the oddball duo's last recognisable hit, sees Neil Arthur on wildly eccentric form – and the chintzy electropop reflects this. Eight-minute opener "The Fall" is a heartfelt number about his relationship with Mark E Smith's group, while "I Want More" is a pointless cover of the Can song. Equally, though Blancmange have seldom been hipper thanks to Minimal Wave's recent reissue of cult debut EP "Irene & Mavis", *Semi Detached* is stuffed with perverse gear such as acid shanty "Deep In The Mine".

PIERS MARTIN

6/10



THE BLOW MONKEYS

If Not Now, When?

BLOW MONKEY MUSIC

Fourth album in seven years since 1980s sophisti-pop veterans reformed

Monkeys mainman Dr Robert cites early rock'n'roll as the jump-off point for the swift follow-up to 2013's *Feels Like A New Morning*. You can hear what he means tactically, but in truth it's the thump and clatter of a 1950s backbeat filtered through the boogie of 1970s glam-rock. The opener "OK! Have It Your Way" stomps like Sweet; "The Sound Of Your Laughter" might've been something Roy Wood conjured for Wizzard; and you can hear trace elements of Bowie and Bolan on "The Guessing Game". Even better is "Shadow Boxing", which takes its prescription from Robert's un-glam fellow medics, Dr Feelgood.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

6/10



PETER BRODERICK

Colours Of The Night

BELLA UNION

Collective drift-songs, beamed via Switzerland

He might fly solo by design, but an invitation to Lucerne to collaborate with local musicians had Oregon-based composer Peter Broderick re-thinking the hermetic creative life. *Colours Of The Night* is mostly served well by the extra hands, the songs breathing with quietly assured movements. The choral sweep of "If I Sinned" is gorgeous, and the gently melancholy "More & More" drifts wondrously, but the album's highlight is a denuded cover of Stina Nordenstam's "Get On With Your Life". Maybe Broderick's songwriting needs yet more work: there's nothing else on *Colours Of The Night* quite so surprising or spectral.

JONDALE

7/10



CLIMAX BLUES

Broke Heart Blues

ANGEL AIR

Final posthumous release from under-rated axe man

After serving as lead guitarist with the

Climax Blues Band for two decades until he joined ELO II in the late 1980s, Pete Haycock came full circle in 2013 when he united with singer Robin George and saxophonist Mel Collins to return to the classic Climax 1960s/70s blues-rock template. He suffered a fatal heart attack shortly after, but his swansong reveals his virtuoso slide playing was still in top order. The unevenness of the material doesn't always do him justice, but a stinging cover of "Lonely Avenue" and "Gotta Get It Right", a smart riposte to Climax's 1976 hit, "Couldn't Get It Right", are a fitting memorial.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

6/10

HOW TO BUY... THE DAMNWELLS

Reunited alt.rockers' best work



Bastards Of The Beat

SIXTHMAN/EPIC, 2003

The Damnwells' debut wasn't shy about its influences – the Brooklyn group were another of many of the period, including the likes of Soul Asylum, Wilco, Whiskeytown or Slobberbone, who sounded something like a Replacements country tribute band. Alex Dezen's songs were/are glorious, however, especially "What You Get" and "The Sound".

7/10



Air Stereo

EPIC/ROUNDER, 2006

A cruelly overlooked classic of modern Americana, *Air Stereo* combined rugged alternative rock'n'roll with a lyrical sensibility of wry alt.country. "Louisville" and "Shiny Bruise" are exquisitely mournful ballads, and "I've Got You" an oblique but heartfelt homage to FM radio playlists, akin to Drive-By Truckers' "Let There Be Rock".

8/10



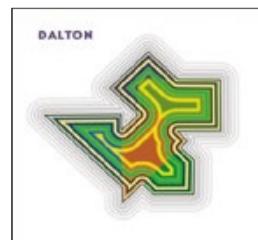
One Last Century

SELF-RELEASED, 2009

The Damnwells' original lineup – now reunited – disbanded after *Air Stereo* appeared to have run aground. Frontman Dezen kept the name, and gave away this album as a free download via Paste magazine. An unimpeachable bargain, especially for the confident Tom Petty-like rocker "55 Pictures" and the Jason Isbell-ish Muscle Shoals soul of "Jesus Could Be Right".

7/10

ANDREW MUELLER



DALTON

Dalton

FIERCE PANDA

Impressive debut by lo-fi LA-based singer-songwriter

This is a strong debut from Nate Harar, who combines intimacy and attention to detail with a genuine sense of melody and an occasional tendency to rock out. His plaintive voice is slight but endearing, carrying soothing melodies like "New Time" and "Bedford And Grand", which switches between simple piano and bristling guitars. There's real ambition on "Only Names", with the epic coiled grace of The National, the powerful and jubilant "For The Last" and "Second Life (Afterglow)", which has Oasis-like grandeur – but also room for low-key numbers: the catchy strum of "Autumnal" and yearning "So Long, So Well".

PETER WATTS



THE DAMNWELLS

The Damnwells

ROCK RIDGE

The gang gets together for one more job

The Damnwells' eponymous fifth album is all the more precious and welcome for its unlikelihood: it's seven years since the original lineup split, understandably crushed by a general failure to recognise their first two albums as the alt.rock classics they were. While the two subsequent efforts issued by Alex Dezen and others under the Damnwells name had their moments, *The Damnwells* reminds what they were lacking, from the echoes of late-period Replacements in "The Girl That's Not In Love With You" to the Tom Petty swagger of "Kentexas". It may be their best yet.

ANDREW MUELLER



DEATH

N.E.W.

TRYANGLE/DRAG CITY

Refreshingly simplistic new material from Detroit's lost sons

Three archival albums, one documentary and several tours

later, the reformed Death have managed to out-scale their original '70s form, several times over. But there's a risk inherent to a new album by reformed groups: relive old glories and sound nostalgic, or break new ground and risk falling flat. While some of *N.E.W.* feels a little undercooked, there are also fantastic moments: "Who Am I" and "Look At Your Life", in particular, are potent, the latter originating from Death's original tenure. It has the brutal simplicity of their very best material, and the playing is completely in the pocket.

JONDALE

7/10

AMERICANA



BEST
OF THE
MONTH



8/10

CALEXICO
Edge Of The Sun CITY SLANG

Calexico invite all back to theirs...

Over nearly 20 years of existence on the fringes of Americana, Calexico have not paid for guitar-shaped swimming pools for their constituent members. But they have become one of those bands that elicit especial admiration from other artists: odd, wayward, sui generis. *Edge Of The Sun*, Calexico's ninth, is where they call in those chits, enlisting a formidable supporting cast of admiring collaborators, including – but not limited to – Carla Morrison, Greg Leisz and Iron & Wine's Sam Beam. At no point, however, does *Edge...* feel, as such enterprises can, like an exercise in mutual ego-stroking, or an ill-disciplined rave-up. Every guest appreciates that Calexico's sound is sufficiently expansive to permit kindred souls all the space they might need. So *Edge Of The Sun* accommodates Band Of Horses' Ben Bridwell on the breezy, Jayhawks-like opener "Falling From The Sky" as generously as it does Greek traditionalists Takim on the sepulchral "World Undone", or Neko Case on the brooding anti-pop of "Tapping On The Line", redolent of one of the better album tracks from REM's wilderness years. And the guest cast do not occlude what remains a recognisable strain of Calexico's Ameri-Mexicana. The south-of-the-border component is arguably even more prominent than usual: some of "Edge Of The Sun" was written in the Mexico City district for which the instrumental interlude "Coyoacán" is named. "Cumbia de Donde", graced by call-and-response backing from Spanish singer Amparo Sanchez, is a sweet, trumpet-drenched shuffle. "Miles From The Sea" and "Beneath The City Of Dreams" also echo Calexico's ongoing journey along the US southern frontier. It ends with "Follow The River", an almost incongruously straightforward ballad, which channels the autumnal melancholy of Crowded House to the extent that Joey Burns ends up sounding something like Neil Finn. It's an elegant close to an(ther) illustration of the breadth and generosity of this remarkable group's vision. *ANDREW MUELLER*



THE AMERICANA ROUND-UP

► Texas veteran **Ray Wylie Hubbard** (left) has been fairly busy of late. April sees the release of *The Ruffian's Misfortune*, which pits his trademark growl and bluesy slide-playing

against the twin leads of Gabe Rhodes and Hubbard's 21-year-old son, Lucas. Hubbard explains that it's all about mixing "cool guitar tones and vicious nasty licks with lyrics that have a little depth, weight and even a little humour thrown in too, as life is pretty much like that." The LP comes just before the publication of his autobiography, dryly titled *A Life... Well, Lived*.

Due in May, *The Other Half* promises to be an intriguing collaboration between

country duo **My Darling Clementine** (Michael Weston King and Lou Dalgleish) and crime writer **Mark Billingham**. It tells the story of various couples who frequent a rundown Memphis bar, as seen through the eyes of an ageing waitress, Marcia. The album features contributions from Graham Parker and actor David Morrissey. Weston King also has his own volume earmarked for later this year: *The Complete Lyrics And Other Writings*.

On the live front, **Johnny Dowd** promotes mighty new album, *That's Your Wife On The Back Of My Horse*. He kicks off on April 11 at Nottingham's Guitar Bar and winds up four days later at The Musician in Leicester. Look out too for ex-Jayhawk **Mark Olson**, who tours the excellent *Good-bye Lizelle* that month.

ROB HUGHES



DICK DIVER
Trouble In Mind

Charming third album from Aussie pop quartet

Australian four-piece Dick Diver – named, perhaps unfortunately,

after an F Scott Fitzgerald character – split the songwriting four ways, but still manage to find a consistent tone, wedged in the 1980s somewhere between the New Wave jitter of Joe Jackson or Elvis Costello ("Waste The Alphabet", "Private Number") and the warmer, synthy feel of Magazine ("Percentage Point", "Year In Pictures"). Produced by Mikey Young of Eddy Current Suppression Ring, this third album also boasts that customary lazy Australian twang, but allied with some fine songwriting and a deft lyrical touch, most notably on the serene, lingering charm of "Boomer Class".

PETER WATTS



DOLDRUMS
The Air-Conditioned Nightmare

SUB POP

Probing postmodern pop from Canadian DIY maverick

Another product of Montreal's fertile loft scene, Airick Woodhead's 2013 debut album as Doldrums was stuffed with ideas but few of them well-executed enough to hold the attention. Follow-up *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* – named after Henry Miller's critique of modern American vapidly – is more focused; brilliant opener "Hotfoot" even boasts a shuddering industrial funk groove, bringing to mind Renegade Soundwave or even early Chemical Brothers. But after a promising start, the LP soon defaults to a brand of quirky, over-stimulated electropop that doesn't really do justice to Woodhead's smart, conceptual lyrics. Doldrums remains a work in progress.

SAM RICHARDS



DRENGE
Undertow

INFECTIOUS

Peak District brothers bulk up for grungier second album

In terms of bludgeoning Britrock duos, Drenge have been outflanked by Royal Blood and Slaves. Rory and Eoin Loveless' answer has been to expand their remit – not just with the addition of bassist Rob Graham on three songs, but by summoning up a more churning, cavernous sound, allowing them to perfect their *Nevermind* impression on "The Snake". At the same time, the wry, petulant rage of their early songs has evolved into something more complex and sinister. It's a shame that Drenge didn't have total confidence in this new direction; a couple of bratty, clunky bursts in the vein of the self-titled first album spoil the mood slightly.

SAM RICHARDS



EAST INDIA YOUTH

Culture Of Volume

XL

Pop! goes the Mercury Prize nominee's second
In 2014, singer-songwriter/producer William Doyle rose above the engulfing

swill of identikit digital soul with his debut LP, which married experimental electronics and alt.pop. Now, he takes a giant step closer to the latter. "Juddering" – all phased synths and intense, swarming noise – is the vocal-less opener, but EIY quickly repositions himself as a Marc Almond for the Clark generation. "The end result is not what was in mind," he croons at one point, suggesting he's as surprised by this set's contrasts – eg, between the Moroder-ish exercise in controlled delirium that is "Hearts That Never" and "Don't Look Backwards" (Paul Buchanan does Balearic chillwave) – as we might be.

SHARON O'CONNELL

7/10

ESKA

Eska

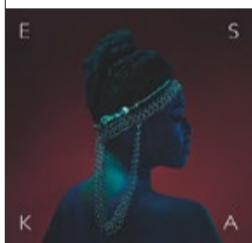
NAIM EDGE

Belated debut album from distinctive, well-connected singer

Eska Mtungwazi has been in the "ones to watch" pile since the millennium, guesting with dozens of jazz, hip hop and pop acts, from The Cinematic Orchestra to Gorillaz. Finally, after four years of sessions with producers including Matthew Herbert and David Okumu, comes this debut LP. It features a cappella workouts ("Gatekeeper", "Dear Evelyn"); nods to Joni Mitchell's cosmic folk ("Boundaries", "She's In The Flowers"); a quirky psych-soul belter that lifts from Gentle Giant ("Shades Of Blue"); and touches of reggae and gospel. But so distinctive and confessional is Eska's voice that she's created a British pastoral music that defies classification.

JOHN LEWIS

8/10



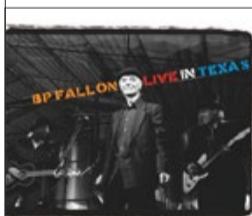
BP FALCON

Live In Texas

SAUSTEX

Eclectic live LP from DJ, journalist and publicist turned autobiographical singer-poet

Lyrical Irish ragamuffin



6/10

BP Fallon spent a career working in music as a DJ and publicist, starting with The Beatles in 1969, before moving on to Thin Lizzy, T.Rex and Led Zeppelin. Latterly he has reinvented himself as a performer, playing with members of Blondie, recording for Jack White and writing songs from life exploring the nature of celebrity and music. This live set from Austin opens with "Fame", a poetic theme-setter that's followed by the country swing of "I Believe In Elvis Presley", the Beat interlude "Time Is An Accordion" and the raucous, self-mocking "Does Anyone Care What Anyone Says In Rock And Roll?".

PETER WATTS



FÖLLAKZOID

III: Sacred Bones

Santiago, Chile's high-altitude psych masters

For those entranced by Goat, Chile's Föllakzoid provide a similar kind

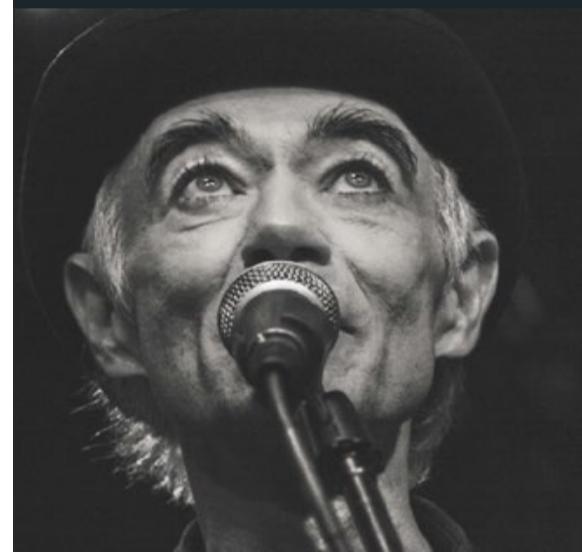
of ritual psych with what seems, at least, to be an extra frisson of authenticity: the dank, post-rockish grooves are allegedly influenced by the ancient Armonic ceremonial rhythms of the Andes. It's a usefully pungent backstory that enlivens this decent collection of head-nodders, occasionally prodded out of the dirge zone, as on "Electric", towards a kind of grim, guitar-heavy techno. Useful assistance, too, from the German electronic maverick Atom TM, who adds astral texture and historical resonance to the jams with the aid of one of Kraftwerk's old Korg synths.

JOHN MULVEY

7/10

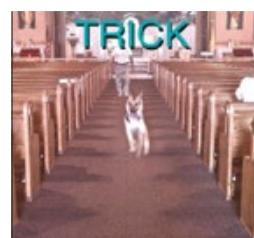
REVELATIONS

The uniquely magical BP Fallon: "Rock'n'roll still turns me on..."



► Asked to summarise his career in three words, BP Fallon settles for "Serendipitous. Magical. Unique." That seems a fair description of a life spent alongside The Beatles, Marc Bolan and Led Zeppelin. Now Fallon fronts an all-star band and, as *BP Fallon Live In Texas* shows, is as adept onstage as he was behind the scenes. "I love making music," he says. "In my moments of doubt, I've told myself that it must be okay because Jack White, Clem Burke, Lenny Kaye and, bless them both, Scott Asheton and Ian McLagan, were and are happy to give to me of their art and their heart."

Fallon is used to hanging out with stars. He worked for The Beatles as a publicist, when John Lennon asked him to join the Plastic Ono Band and Paul McCartney supplied "some of the best grass I've ever smoked". Memorable nights came with Led Zeppelin – "Whew! On and off for seven years" – and he counts his blessings for "being paid to turn people on to my friends making amazing music". Many of his songs now are about the rock life. "Rock'n'roll still turns me on," he says. "At school, in between caning me for reading the music papers, my housemaster would intone, 'You'll grow out of it, Fallon.' Well, I didn't, baby." PETER WATTS



ALEX G

Trick

LUCKY NUMBER

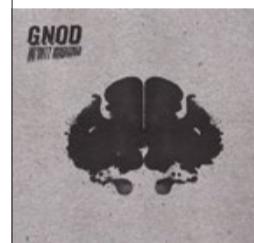
More from the prolific popster's Bandcamp archive

Last year, DSU introduced a newcomer with a keen ear for a pop melody

and a fondness for lo-fi atmospherics and fractured guitar lines. In fact, that record was Pennsylvanian student Alex Giannascoli's fifth full-length. Now, the 16-track *Trick*, which was also previously available only online and predates DSU. Less hazily fragmented and more tied to song structure – it reflects something of solo Mascis, Built To Spill and the Flying Nun roster – it's just as distinctive, opting for darkly honest lyrics and a trance-like intimacy over bedroom slacker clichés. Charms abound, but the skronky "Animals" and "Mary"'s eccentric take on Steely Dan prove the breadth of G's vision.

SHARON O'CONNELL

7/10



GNOD

Infinity Machines

ROCKET

Triple LP of avant head music from Manchester noiseniks

Gnod, it's probably fair to say, is about as close as you'll get to one of those separatist hippy cults you'll find in post-industrial Salford. Living and working in a former Victorian textile mill, this open-ended collective specialise in long, strung-out jams of experimental electronics, Krautrock repetition and free-jazz saxophone. Their fondness for 17-minute improvisations demands a certain stamina, but there's a strung-out beauty to *Infinity Machines* that eases you in gently: see the title track, morphing between twilit jazz and lonely melodica dub; or "Control Systems", a miasma of curdled electronics and bold horn blasts that locates a midpoint between Throbbing Gristle and Pharoah Sanders.

LOUIS PATTISON

7/10



GROOMS

Comb The Feelings Through Your Hair

WESTERN VINYL

Guitar effects-pedal maker shows off his wares

Written in response to Williamsburg's gentrification after rising costs broke up Grooms' last lineup, former Death By Audio employee, Texan Travis Johnson's third LP draws upon early '90s US indie and blends it with contemporary dreampop production. "Bed Version" and "Half Cloud" recall Deerhunter's hazier moments, while the title track's detuned guitars launch like Sonic Youth's "Silver Rocket". Elsewhere, the washed-out pastel shades and electronic frills on the likes of "Doctor M" and "Cross Off" help ensure that any latent familiarity with Johnson's influences is outweighed by reverberant production reminiscent of Broadcast's spooky psychedelia.

WYNDHAM WALLACE



BILL FAY

Who Is The Sender?

DEAD OCEANS

Death and wonder: metaphysical art, humbly sung. *By Jon Dale*



8/10

BILL FAY'S LEGEND, such that it is, rests on two very distinctive, equally moving albums – the autumnal pastorals of his self-titled 1970 debut, and its follow-up, the fierce, fearsome *Time Of The Last Persecution*, from 1971, where

Fay, almost incidentally, wrote another chapter in the history of free-jazz-meets-rock, by calling on players like guitarist Ray Russell to upset the balance of his songs, much as he was reflecting on a world unbalanced.

In the second phase of his career, from 2012's *Life Is People*, the focus sits fairly, squarely, on the paced, gentle songs he has more recently been writing. Indeed, once the smoke cleared on Fay's 'rediscovery', he came across as a man of great humility, living a quiet, religious life, where the song was part of the fabric of life, not the business of music.

It seems appropriate, therefore, that the title song of *Who Is The Sender?*, Fay's follow-up to *Life Is People*, deals with the very practice of songwriting, which for Fay is about receiving songs, almost through the ether, and in many ways, *Who Is The Sender?* is a tribute to Fay's own art. It's explicit in "Who Is The Sender", of course, but also implicit in the wonder that pervades some of the other songs. This wonder, however, is undercut by Fay's eschatological warnings – none more so than "Underneath The Sun", where a tableau of nature, in seasonal change, is sliced through, mercilessly, by Fay's observation about the way the "rain... waters the ground/Where people are shooting

at everyone/Including little ones."

It's something that Fay also touches on in "War Machine", the album's lead 'single' and a song that's a bit vague in its outline, something that also beleaguers the following "How Little", where lyrics like "it's all so deep... there's a reason," come across like gentle pamphleteering. But as the playing on the album gathers confidence and power, so, too, do Fay's words. There's a run of songs in *Who Is The Sender?*'s second half that are devastating in their powers: "Bring It On Lord", featuring backing vocals from Jason Pierce, rings out like a hymnal, while "A Frail And Broken One" and "A Page Incomplete" offer the perfect entry into this phase of Fay's songwriting, melodies slowly falling from his softly sounded voice while the playing see-saws on massed beds of organ tones. With "A Page Incomplete", piano, guitar and plangent double bass slowly give way to a glorious, full-band performance that has the rolling, grand glory of The Band at their peak, relocated to English climes.

Perhaps the most telling moment on *Who Is The Sender?*, though, is the re-recording of "I Hear You Calling". One of the signal moments from *Time Of The Last Persecution*, Fay records the song with many of the original musicians, but where its first airing had an almost evangelical fervour, here Fay

takes it at a much gentler clip, with massed vocals loaming the song's soil, a gentler melancholy sifting through the melody. It serves a double purpose – acknowledging the 44 years that separate the two albums, and the maturation of the song's composer, the narrative arc of Fay's life, while flagging a similar historical impasse, that *Who Is The Sender?*, like *Last Persecution*, broadcasts from uncertain, unyielding times.

The differences, then, often seem to lie in the way Fay's songs are dressed. He's someone who deals with eternal themes – recurring metaphysical questions, life's lessons unlearned, but also moments of peace and reverie – and on occasion, the production on *Who Is The Sender?* threatens to swamp the plain-speaking poetics of Fay's lyrics with soupy sentimentality. Those moments inaccurately read what lies at the heart of Fay's songs, mistaking a Pantheistic worldview for hippy platitudes. But just as often, producer Joshua Henry correctly gauges the tenor of these songs, and couches the songs in a coddling sea of strings and keys, with the core group of drums, bass and guitar surely guiding Fay's deceptively simple piano and melodies. It's a reminder that at their heart, Fay's songs are visitations, scared up from some greater collective consciousness.

Q&A

Bill Fay

How much has your life changed since *Life Is People* came out? Nil. The effect that it had on me was not so much to do with the outside world, but the fact Joshua [Henry], Guy [Massey] and the players produced a powerful, meaningful addition [to the songs] that is so much better than finishing a song roughly and having a home recording... it's another dimension.

Is it important to you that other people hear a song? I think so. But it's never been, "I've finished

a song, I'll send it to so and so." I've got them. I finish one and then work on another. It's meaningful that it's being shared, and that's hopeful. That's not why I write. I see it as "song-finding" rather than songwriting, that's what *Who Is The Sender?* is all about, the mystery of it.

Your songs don't proselytise, they're wonder-filled and instead of trying to win the listener over, they try to reflect how you feel, with this awe of the world. Is that fair? I have that instinct; I don't want to come across as a person who's trying to convert someone. These songs just happen. I may have a conscious belief system in me, but I've still got that sense of wonder as well as things I deeply believe in.



STONE JACK JONES

Love & Torture

WESTERN VINYL

Grand follow-up to 2014's *Ancestor*

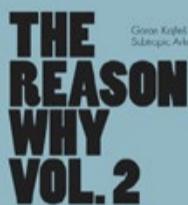
After the mercurial Southern Gothic grace of last year's *Ancestor*, Stone Jack Jones is quickly back to action on *Love & Torture*. This time round, it seems to take this unnerving singer-songwriter a little while to find his flow but, by third track "Q & K", he's revisiting the evocatively spooky spirit that made *Ancestor* such a good album. Deliciously weird takes on folk abound, from the unsettling but compelling "Circumstance", the wildly droning "Russia", the dissembling bluegrass of "Who" and the simply gorgeous "Song", which hops and flows, combining arresting vocals with a brilliant, insidious and sinuous melody.

PETER WATTS

8/10

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PETER WATTS



GORAN KAJFES' SUBTROPIC ARKESTRA

The Reason Why Vol 2

HEADSPIN

Eclectic Swedes give Grizzly Bear a jazz makeover

On *Vol 1*, trumpeter Kajfes and his group applied rumbustious jazz-rock treatments to tunes by Tame Impala, Soft Machine and Cluster, revealing themselves as a prejudice-smashing big band akin to fellow Scandinavians Jaga Jazzist. This time, the songbook's a little more obtuse, with vibrant attacks on Milton Nascimento (Brazil), Francis Bebey (Cameroon) and a clutch of old Turkish psych jams; Mahzar Ve Fuat's "Adimiz Miskindir Bizim", fuzztoned organ to the fore, is especially rewarding. Kajfes' arrangements are punchy and accessible. Nevertheless, a lyrical take on Grizzly Bear's "Yet Again" is a neat point of entry for those daunted by the exotic range. José González guests, inconspicuously.

JOHN MULVEY

8/10



KATZENJAMMER

Rockland

PROPELLOR

Infectious roots-folk from Scandinavia four-piece

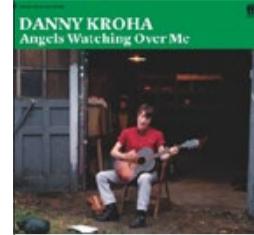
Katzenjammer are at the vanguard of a healthy new scene in their homeland, alongside fellow Norwegians Emilie Nicolas, Highasakite and Susanne Sundfør. This all-girl quartet are the rootsiest of the bunch, peppering their songs with country, folk, rockabilly and gypsy flavours. You certainly can't knock this third album for lack of vim or exuberance, especially on the Mumfords-ish "Lady Grey". But they're best when dialling it down a few notches, most notably on the banjo-driven "Old De Spain" (with echoes of The Handsome Family's "When That Helicopter Comes") and the twiggy slide blues of "Bad Girl".

ROB HUGHES

7/10

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ROB HUGHES



DANNY KROHA

Angels Watching Over Me

THIRD MAN RECORDS

Excellent covers of old American field classics by ex-Gories guitarist Released by Jack White's Third Man Records and as

emblematic of that label as it is possible to get, *Angels Watching Over Me* sees Danny Kroha, once of Detroit garage trailblazers The Gories, perform a mesmerising set of classic American folk, country, gospel and blues staples. Many of these – "John Henry", "Cannonball Blues", "Lonesome Valley" – have been played countless times, but Kroha celebrates their endless possibilities with primitive guitar and powerful voice, which hollers and howls with Pentecostal passion. Great stuff, especially the wicked drone of "Walking Boss", the heavy "Got To Move" and sinister original "Run Little Children".

PETER WATTS

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PETER WATTS

REVELATIONS

Danny Kroha: "I like songs about ghosts and the afterlife"



Having played guitar with The Gories, Rocket 455 and Demolition Doll Rods, Danny Kroha has long been a fixture of the Detroit rock scene. His debut solo LP, *Angels Watching Over Me*, still comes as something of a surprise, a haunting collection of classic folk and blues songs, recorded in singular and unnerving style. "I like songs about mortality and the afterlife," he says. "Songs that mention ghosts. The house I grew up in was haunted. I've always believed in an afterlife, and I find it's comforting to sing songs that talk about how things will be better there – if you don't get stuck here as a ghost, that is."

Kroha recorded the album in his own house. "I was going for a field recording sound, like so many albums on Folkways that I love," he says. "Spontaneous and raw. I played guitar and sang at the same time, then overdubbed other instruments – banjo, baritone dulcimer, diddley bow, harmonica, tambourine, jug, bass drum, and washtub bass – right after."

The collection has a palpable atmosphere, which Kroha describes as "elemental. Every definition of that word describes these songs. I also try to perform them with immediacy and conviction, which I think helps to breathe life into them, and makes them sound fresh."

PETER WATTS



POKEY LAFARGE

Something In The Water

ROUNDER

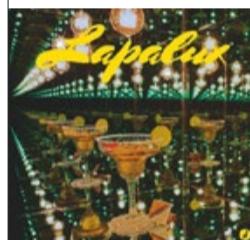
Midwesterner digs deep into the breadths and depths of American roots

From the bubbling jump blues of the title track

to the sleek, stripped-down evocations of "When Did You Leave Heaven", long a touchstone for Jimmy Scott, Pokey LaFarge's seventh long-player echoes and expands his mastery of bygone styles. Primordial '20s-style jazz, ragtime, country blues, Western swing, hillbilly pop – all left for dead in these troubled times – are inserted into timely original compositions of love, longing and mystery. "Knocking The Dust Off The Rust Belt Tonight" might have you doing the Charleston in your living room; the spidery "Actin' A Fool" – imagine Johnny Horton on a hard-blues bender – transcends.

LUKE TORN

8/10



LAPALUX

Lustmore

BRAINFEEDER

Fifty shades of shoegazing electronica

Young Essex native Stuart "Lapalux" Howard makes gloopy, lysergic, sensual electronica that owes

as much to high-end contemporary R&B as it does to cutting-edge post-dubstep sonics. He describes his second album as an attempt to meld the waking-dream sensation of hypnagogia with the throb of carnal longing and the textures of vintage movie soundtracks, which only goes halfway to explaining lush, opiated, seductively squelchy slow jams like "Puzzle" and "Sum Body". While his Brainfeeder label boss Flying Lotus remains a key reference point, Howard's early interest in reel-to-reel tape effects and Aphex-style disruptive euphoria shines through in the robo-funk blast of "Push N' Spun". Intoxicating.

STEPHEN DALTON

8/10



LIEUTENANT

If I Kill This Thing Then We're All Going To Eat For A Week

DINE ALONE RECORDS

Foo Fighters bass player goes it alone

The first solo offering

from Nate Mendel, recorded in between Foo Fighters sessions at the band's Studio 606 in California, comes with a lengthy roll call of guests, among them fellow Foo Chris Shiflett, Sunny Day Real Estate's Jeremy Enigk and The Shins and Modest Mouse drummer Joe Plummer. But despite this gaggle of helpers, *If I Kill This...* is a surprisingly muted affair. While "Belle Epoque" has an attractive minor-key moodiness, the likes of "Believe The Squalor" and "Some Remove" are dispiritingly subdued, with Mendel's reedy vocals struggling to raise them above the merely morose.

FIONA STURGES

5/10

New Albums



THE LILAC TIME No Sad Songs

TAPETE

First in six years for wizened folk-pop crew Stephen Duffy's always been an arch, knowing presence in English

popular music: over the years, he's done time as a founding member of Duran Duran, part of The Hawks with David Kusworth, '80s pop ingénue, Britpop raconteur and Robbie Williams collaborator. But his body of work as songwriter for The Lilac Time will be his lasting legacy: the group access an uncanny, bucolic melancholy, articulated from deep in the maw of English folk and popular song. *No Sad Songs* is close to their masterpiece, each song lovingly rendered, drenched in harmonic rainfall, corralled with sympathetic, gentle arrangements, each song poetic.

JONDALE

8/10



LITURGY The Ark Work

THRILL JOCKEY

Third from "transcendental black metal" pioneers

Hunter Hunt-Hendrix, founder of New York's Liturgy, is a Pseud's Corner column in waiting, fond of expounding philosophically on the topic of black metal music in a way that appears to have wound up anyone in earshot. His questing nature extends to his band's music, however, which loosely resembles black metal in its gnarly dissonance and charging tempos, but adds elements of sacred music, electronica and most improbably, bagpipes. There are missteps – the tinny horns of "Fanfare", or the mantra of "Vitriol", which is silly in the same way Kula Shaker were silly. Straighter moments hit, though, largely thanks to drummer Greg Fox's athletic disposition and some mighty crescendos.

LOUIS PATTISON

6/10



LONELADY Hinterland

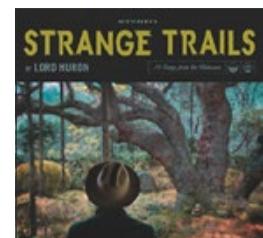
WARP

Heavenly post-punk grooves from urban Manchester

Julie Campbell's most recent effort, 2011's *Psychic Life*, found her collaborating to fine effect with ex-PiL stalwarts Jah Wobble and Keith Levene. A similarly edgy, industrial feel pervades this second solo album as LoneLady, though, as borne out by slippery floor-shakers such as "Groove It Out" and "Silvering", refracted through '70s P-Funk and '80s disco. And while it's certainly less guitar-centric than predecessor *Nerve Up*, there's still a clipped, agitated tone to "(I Can See) Landscapes" and "Red Scrap" that make this utterly wonderful record sound like a post-Factory hybrid of Section 25, Chic and Keren Ann.

ROB HUGHES

8/10



LORD HURON Strange Trails

PLAY IT AGAIN SAM

Intriguing band has difficulty capturing the sounds the players hear in their heads

Ben Schneider, frontman and producer of this LA folk-rock band, surrounds his earthy warble with keening harmonies amid plucked guitars and four-square drums, inviting comparisons to Fleet Foxes and Band Of Horses. The blend is rich and the performances spirited, but the thin, reverberant sound prevents the tracks from hitting the ear with impact, as if they were mic'd from a distance in a barn. That's a shame, because several of the songs and vocals on this LP, like "The Yawning Grave" and "Frozen Pines", possess undeniable emotional power. This appears to be a case of limited resources and/or dubious decisions undermining a potentially captivating album.

BUD SCOPPA

6/10

WE'RE
NEW
HERE

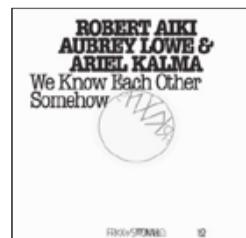
Dean McPhee



► While the US underground scene is currently replete with solo guitarists, there seem to be substantially fewer on the ground in the UK. Dean McPhee, though, has spent the past few years mapping the British landscape with the elegant twang and delay of his Telecaster. "When I was growing up," he says, "I always lived in quite remote rural places like the North Yorkshire moors, the East Lancashire countryside and the South West coast of Scotland, and the sense of open space and wildness made a strong impression on me. There's an undercurrent of mystical, rural psychedelia in British underground music I can really relate to; I spent a lot of time playing music outdoors when I was a teenager."

McPhee's graceful and unhurried way with an electric guitar is largely self-taught, though he did learn some fingerpicking techniques when he was about 10, living in Scotland. His general preference for playing alone matches up with a desire to remain elusive and hard to classify. "There are also some really great players who are carrying on the American Primitive/Takoma style," he says, "but I tend to be more drawn to outsiders who are working in a more singular, unusual space. That's an approach I fit in with better."

JOHN MULVEY



ROBERT AIKI, AUBREY LOWE & ARIEL KALMA FRKWYS Vol 12: We Know Each Other Somehow

RVNG INTL

7/10

A New Age meeting of minds

Brooklyn's RVNG Intl have long hooked up vintage and modern cult musicians for their *FRKWYS* series of LPs, and *Vol 12* feels very much a sequel to *Vol 8*, a New Age summit featuring Laraaji and Blues Control. Kalma's a cosmically inclined Frenchman, whose rare '70s synth work RVNG recently compiled; Lowe mixes solo electronica (as Lichens) with shifts in heavier bands like Om. Together, they tick many New Age boxes, with "Magick Creek" mixing in water sounds and birdsong beside timelag sax drones. As an entente between old and new takes on digital serenity, it works a treat, especially on "Strange Dreams", as pretty as Cluster's *Sowiesoso*.

JOHN MULVEY



LOWER DENS Escape From Evil

DOMINO

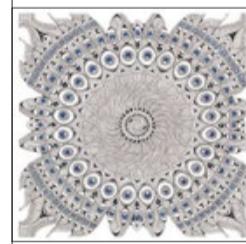
Sleek third from former folk queen's Baltimore ensemble

Last decade, Jana Hunter enjoyed a career as a folk singer, her eerie songs finding appropriate home on Devendra Banhart's Gnomonsong label. If those records seemed to delight in a certain contrived olde-tyminess, the music of her current band Lower Dens seems designed to blow away the cobwebs. "To Die In LA" and "Quo Vadis" offer a sleek and precise rock music that leans lightly on metronomic rhythms and glimmering, Eno-ish electronics. Hunter's voice has long since jettisoned that slightly hokey folksiness to reach for something more inscrutable. Still, *Escape From Evil* is a record about grief, and at times hits hard: particularly the tear-smeared synth cabaret of "I Am The Earth".

LOUIS PATTISON

DEAN MCPHEE Fatima's Hand

HOOD FAIRE/
BLAST FIRST PETITE

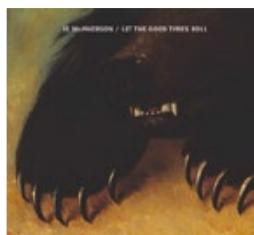


Serene guitar reveries from the West Yorks badlands

8/10

With his Telecaster and West Yorkshire postcode, Dean McPhee is something of an outlier among the current crop of guitar soli. Michael Chapman is an obvious kindred spirit, and McPhee has played live with that ornery, questing Yorkshireman. In general, though, McPhee's hermetic, electric folk meditations are closer in sound to those of Vini Reilly or, on the modestly ornate "Smoke And Mirrors", Sir Richard Bishop. As on his 2011 debut, *Son Of The Black Peace*, a sort of desolate twang predominates. Horizons expand once, magnificently, for "Effigy Of Clay", where delay moves McPhee toward the dappled vistas of Fripp & Eno's *Evening Star*.

JOHN MULVEY



JD McPHERSON
Let The Good Times Roll

ROUNDER

Postmodern "Sly Boy" hotwires genres and decades on killer second

On this flat-out sensational album – following his

revelatory 2012 debut, *Signs & Signifiers* – the Oklahoma native puts his mojo in overdrive. Visceral and cerebral in equal measure, McPherson internalises and reimagines the primal feels of Little Richard, Buddy Holly and Carl Perkins, much like Lennon-McCartney and Fogerty before him, on the slamming hook-fest "Sly Boy" and the erotically charged slow burner "Precious". Partnering with Mark Neill, who co-produced The Black Keys' *Brothers*, McPherson writes, sings and plays with a perfect balance of discipline and abandon, intermingling the deep past and the unfolding present with bold, deft brushstrokes.

BUD SCOPPA

9/10



MARCHING CHURCH
The World Is Not Enough

POSH ISOLATION

Lust, self-obsession and sweet soul from Iceage frontman

Copenhagen's Iceage have taken bold steps to escape their punk beginnings, embracing rockabilly and a Bad Seeds drama on last year's *Plowing Into The Field Of Love*. The debut LP by Elias Bender Rønnenfelt's new project feels more daring still. Here, Rønnenfelt emerges as a sort of apocalyptic soulman, intoxicated and on the edge of megalomania. "Hungry For Love" finds him testifying lustily over a glowing embers of strings and slide guitar, while the excellent "King Of Song" has him as a tyrant bequeathing music to his grateful followers ("They will rise for me/Put out their eyes for me...") over a sunny soul bassline and warm peals of saxophone.

LOUIS PATTISON

8/10



MARINA & THE DIAMONDS
Froot

ATLANTIC

Pop music for grownups

Three albums in, there appears to be little stopping Marina

Diamandis becoming an immense pop success but her own sensible refusal to quite allow that to happen. After *The Family Jewels* and *Electra Heart*, *Froot* is another big, unabashed pop album astutely balanced with sufficient melancholy and restraint to stop it from all getting too Katy Perry, although "Forget" veers perilously close. "Blue", "Can't Pin Me Down" and the title track in particular adroitly negotiate the precarious path between the less abrasive disco excursions of Nina Hagen and the literate whimsy of Regina Spektor.

ANDREW MUELLER

7/10



MARRIAGES

Salome

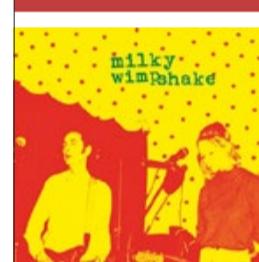
SARGENT HOUSE

Audacious full-length debut from former Red Sparowes duo

It now seems decidedly perverse that Emma Ruth Rundle's last band were an instrumental outfit, for as she proved on her 2014 solo debut *Some Heavy Ocean*, she's an extraordinary singer, whose vocal acrobatics span influences from PJ Harvey and Siouxsie to Elizabeth Fraser and Tori Amos without sounding quite like any of them. On *Salome* her guitar-playing meshes with Greg Burns' keyboards to create intense, reverberating textures, sometimes ambient and glacial, sometimes howling and fierce. Either way, it's a dynamic soundbed for her arresting singing on tracks such as "The Liar" and "Skin", although it's not always easy to make out her words. Post-punk. Post-rock. Post-everything.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

8/10



MILKY WIMPshake
Encore, Un Effort!

FORTUNA POP!

Return of the Newcastle upon Tyne underground lifers

Milky Wimpshake's Pete Dale has a long history in the indie-punk underground: he co-ran the quietly achieving Slampit Underground Organisation throughout the '90s, also playing in groups like Avocado Baby. Milky Wimpshake cleaves to the poppier end of Dale's songwriting, and each song on *Encore, Un Effort!* – the name's from Marxist sloganeering – is simple, yet deftly hewn, inhabiting the space between classic indie moves and punk-pop, guitars chiming out alongside Dale's bluntly endearing voice, and new member Sophie Evans' sweetly stinging vocals. Many of the songs are fiercely political, too, in a refreshingly upfront, unapologetic way. A welcome return.

JON DALE

7/10



MINI MANSIONS

The Great Pretenders

ELECTROMAGNETIC/ FICTION

An old dog learns new tricks from his young charges

No previous LP with T Bone Burnett's name attached to it has sounded like this one. Interestingly, this analog purist chose to make synth-heavy LA trio Mini Mansions the first signing to his Electromagnetic imprint, picking up a quality group light years removed from his sweet spot. Produced by the band, (T Bone takes executive-producer credit), *The Great Pretenders* inhabits that dreamily lysergic terrain staked out by The Flaming Lips ("Vertigo", with a cameo from Alex Turner) and early MGMT (the languorous "Any Emotions", with Brian Wilson on backing vocals), with seductive hints of The Beatles ("Heart Of Stone") and Pink Floyd ("The End, Again").

BUD SCOPPA

8/10



MODEST MOUSE

Strangers To Ourselves

COLUMBIA

Post-punks' overdue sixth; James Mercer guests

8/10

When news emerged that in 2011 MM had worked on three songs with Big Boi, rumours surfaced of rapping on their next album; two years later, they cancelled their UK/European tour in order to finish it; now, it seems four producers were involved. Signs of a fraught process, maybe, but if MM were struggling, it doesn't show. Their first since 2007 is a (rap-free) triumph on which they increase the swing and space in their complex punk-funk/alt.rock, dialling down the brusque intensity to admit notes of reflective soul and molten experi-funk. "Sugar Boat" is one of several highlights, a cabaret/oompah romp as irresistible as it is insane.

SHARON O'CONNELL



DENAI MOORE

Elsewhere

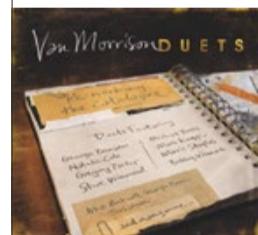
BECAUSE MUSIC

London torch singer balances alt.folk with Adele-sized anthems

Jamaica-born, East London-raised folk-soul singer Denai Moore is

blessed with a husky, wounded, imploring voice that elevates even her more generic lyrics of heartbreak and desolation. Still only 22, she has already attracted some heavyweight champions in the music industry. This sonically rich debut was mostly produced by Rodaidh McDonald, whose credits include Adele and The xx, with a little help from Ben Drew, aka Plan B. While the spectral, noir-ish ballads "Absent" and "Blame" are sometimes guilty of overly tasteful restraint, there are pleasing eruptions of Spector-ish melodrama in more impassioned numbers like "Feeling" and the rousing retro-soul belter "No Light".

STEPHEN DALTON



VAN MORRISON

Duets: Reworking The Catalogue

RCA RECORDS

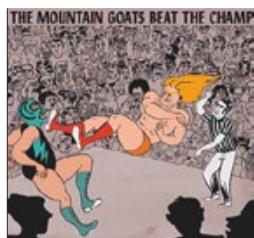
And the craic was not so good

For this trip through his capacious catalogue, Van

foregrounds a curious selection of songs weighted towards his albums from the '90s and beyond. The big-hitters – "Moondance", "Brown-Eyed Girl", "Gloria" – are absent, while *eedon Fleece* is represented by "Streets Of Arklow", recorded here with some authentic pipes and Mick Hucknall on melisma. Indeed, the wild, Celtic mystery is conspicuously absent. This is more Wilshire Boulevard than Cyprus Avenue, trading largely in a kind of light Vegas-y swing: Michael Bublé is on hand (for "Real Real Gone"). Highlights from Bobby Womack ("Some Peace Of Mind") and Mavis Staples ("If I Ever Needed Someone") redress the balance a little.

MICHAEL BONNER

New Albums



THE MOUNTAIN GOATS

Beat The Champ

MERGE

A full nelson: John Darnielle gets in the ring

7/10

This is not the first concept album in recent years to have reflected upon professional wrestling. To at least that extent, *Beat The Champ* is an American answer to Luke Haines' 2011 album, *Nine And A Half Psychedelic Reflections On British Wrestling Of The 1970s And Early 80s*. Mountain Goats' mainstay John Darnielle shares Haines' nostalgic affection for the stars of the martial pantomime, and deploys his deadpan indie rock and trademark wordiness to fine effect on such cuts as "The Legend Of Chavo Guerrero" and "Stabbed To Death Outside San Juan".

ANDREW MUELLER



GRANT NICHOLAS

Black Clouds

POPPING CANDY

Nourishing solo helping from Feeder frontman

This mini-album from Welsh rocker Grant Nicholas is billed as a

companion piece to last year's *Yorktown Heights*, which alluded to an unspecified personal crisis. As the title suggests, there's a similar seam of sadness running through *Black Clouds*, which movingly grapples with such thorny issues as trust and depression. That's not to say that the mood is unremittingly bleak: "Reminisce", which builds into Mumford-style folk knees-up, sees him contentedly "Thinking back to younger days, smalltown life, different ways," while "Everyday Society" is a twanging Tex-Mex stomper in which he pledges to "forgive and forget".

FIONA STURGES



PALE BLUE

The Past We Leave Behind

2MR

Immaculate collection from the DJ and his diva

As founder of New York label Troubleman Unlimited and co-founder

of Italians Do It Better, New Jersey disc jockey Mike Simonetti gave an early leg-up to celebrated avant-rock staples such as Black Dice, Wolf Eyes and Glass Candy. The latter underwent an unexpected metamorphosis from no-wave noiseniks to purveyors of a dreamy disco-pop, and that sound carries into Simonetti's new studio collaboration with vocalist Elizabeth Wright, Pale Blue. The title track is almost beatific in its hazy repetitions and rippling synths, but there is much to enjoy in *The Past We Leave Behind*'s darker moments: see "Tougher", a slow-burning acid pulse over which Wright hands her heart away.

LOUIS PATTISON

7/10



PILE

You're Better Than This

FIERCE PANDA

Fine fourth album from Boston punks displays admirably restrained anger

After incendiary opener

"The World Is Your Motel", a no wave hold-on-to-your-hats blaster, it seems as if Boston's Pile are going to drop an H-bomb in your ears. But while Pile are angry, they are never crass, and delight in producing the unexpected. There's a lot of space on this record, with tracks like "Mr Fish" and "Hot Breath" sounding a little like Silver Jews, and "Yellow Room" coming on like Pavement at their strangest and most majestic. There's always a sense of menace, but it's surprisingly restrained, to the extent that a song called "Fuck The Police" is actually a dainty acoustic number.

PETER WATTS

7/10



PORTICO

Living Fields

NINJA TUNE

Post-jazzers reinvented as icy electronicists

Even before the departure of Nick Mulvey – the Mercury-nominated singer-songwriter who

used to play a percussion instrument called a "hang" – the Portico Quartet were already moving heavily into electronic territory. The remaining trio have now completely jettisoned all of the interesting jazz textures to make icy dubstep, pitched between James Blake and Burial. They're assisted here by a shifting cast of sad-voiced male singers: Jono McLeery provides a reverb-drenched falsetto, while Joe Newman from Alt-J impresses on "Brittle" (medieval plainsong overlaid by spluttering drums) and "Atacama" (plinky-plonky funk with strings). But generally these doomy, comatose soundscapes all sound drearily similar.

JOHN LEWIS

5/10



MICHAEL PRICE

Entanglement

ERASED TAPES

Sherlock soundtrack co-composer finally gets physical

Inspired by a fascination with order, confusion and physics, David Arnold

collaborator Price's first solo release – the first conceived as an un-improvised album, anyway – combines formal composition and a low-key utilisation of electronic and tape effects.

Recorded with an orchestra, some passages betray his work as an Emmy Award-winning film and TV composer: the emotive tug of the Górecki-esque "The Attachment", for instance, or the romantic sweep of "Little Warm Thing". But Ashley Knight's soprano on the perfectly calibrated repetition of "The Uncertainty Principle", and the interwoven melodies of the title track, ensure this neo-classical treat repays immersion.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

8/10



THE PRODIGY

The Day Is My Enemy

TAKE ME TO THE HOSPITAL/COOKING VINYL

Grizzled punk-dance overlords, back and still barking

If there is something preposterous about The Prodigy we hear on *The Day Is My Enemy*, it is not entirely unwelcome. In six years between albums, if anything, they've *immatured*. Keith Flint romps around barking "Nasty nasty! Triple-X rated!", songs are called things like "Rok-Weiler", and the music is a mid-paced pummel of snarling electronic bass and beats through which Liam Howlett's nutty synths occasionally sail like a haunted bumper car. Their commitment to spleen is endearing, though, particularly "Ibiza", a rudely funny blast in which Sleaford Mod Jason Williamson pops up to spray expletives at superstar DJs and warn "Don't fall off the rock".

LOUIS PATTISON

7/10



BOP ENGLISH

Constant Bop

BLOOD AND BISCUITS

White Denim's James Petralli bops 'til he drops. By Sam Richards



8/10

post-rock and Afro-Cuban funk. There are still a few genres, however, they have yet to explore – which is where *Constant Bop* comes in.

While his bandmates Austin Jenkins and Josh Block have recently been helping to nurture the more conventional talents of retro soulman Leon Bridges, White Denim frontman James Petralli has been quietly cultivating his alter-ego, Bop English. In the amusingly deadpan promo photo accompanying this release, he can be seen playing a banjo with a snake on his lap while sporting a 1990 England football tracky top. If that suggests a foolhardy fusion of bluegrass and Britpop, then the truth isn't so far removed. At least, Petralli's usual rootsy raw materials are refracted more strongly than ever through an arch, Anglophile filter: witness the impish Bolan boogie of "Dani's Blues (It Was Beyond Our Control)" or the way that "Long Distance Runner" playfully subverts classic songwriting conventions in a manner reminiscent of '70s Macca at his best.

On the other hand, Petralli hasn't diverged too drastically from his previous body of work: "Sentimental Wilderness" resembles one of D's more serene moments (distinguished by subtle use of a Vocoder); "Fake Dog" harnesses some of the

frenetic daftness of "I Start To Run"; and "Trying" sounds like a frisky cousin to *Corsicana Lemonade's* "Pretty Green". It's no surprise to learn that the three other members of White Denim are among the dozens of contributors to *Constant Bop*, though they were never in the room at the same time, hence the priority of taut song structures over virtuosic flourishes and extended jams. Yet the album still rollicks and rolls like a White Denim record, with the addition of ribald brass and jaunty piano, giving the impression of having been recorded during a boozy studio all-nighter rather than on a sun-dappled Texan porch.

Certainly, Petralli hasn't fallen prey to the usual indulgences afflicting solo side-projects. There are no half-finished experimental sketches here, nor clumsy forays into world music or electronica. He's even managed to resist the opportunity for faux-humble soul-baring. In fact, Bop English – the moniker given to Petralli by a former roommate – turns out to be quite a slippery character: a skilled raconteur and dispenser of crooked homilies ("There ain't nothing free that didn't cost somebody something") whose waggish manner isn't always appreciated ("My intended hyperbole goes unnoticed at the counter") and who suffers from paranoid

visions of his own demise ("I like to imagine a killing spree where every victim is me"). By inhabiting this garrulous and charming yet over-analytical and vulnerable character, Petralli actually reveals more about himself than a straightforward confessional singer-songwriter record might have done. These quirky and compelling vignettes are clearly the

work of a man constantly trying to balance his pragmatic and creative sides, his duties as a new father with those of a rock'n'roll ringleader.

Handily, Bop can also do love songs, or at least songs that remind us that love requires constant, careful tending. If the psych-country shuffle of "Falling At Your Feet" is a teensy bit sentimental, then "The Hardest Way" – a hint of Nick Drake and even Bernard Butler to this one – is gloriously honest about the daily battle to suppress our own pride and pettiness so that love can prevail. He may dress like a cross between Davy Crockett and David Seaman, but when it comes to affairs of the heart, it turns out that Bop English knows exactly what he's talking about.

A fast-paced, multi-faceted, furiously entertaining record that reveals hidden emotional depths? Chalk another one up to the man in White Denim.

Q&A

James Petralli

Why did your college roommate dub you Bop English? I was studying English Lit and listening to Eric Dolphy and John Coltrane. Which technically is post-bop. But I was just happy to have a nickname.

Did you write these songs specifically for the album or have you been amassing them over a longer period? It's been an ongoing process for a long time. Some of the tunes were written for White Denim, but something wasn't right about them for the band. I didn't have a grand scheme or anything. It was actually 28 songs when I handed it into the label. They just said, 'Hey man, you can't put this out, nobody's going to listen to that!' It was going to be a double album where the first half was really trippy and haphazard and

the second half was more straightforward and romantic. So the final album is just selected works from the double I was making. I'll probably do a 'complete edition' in a very limited run at some point.

What did you learn from the acid trip described on "Struck Matches"?

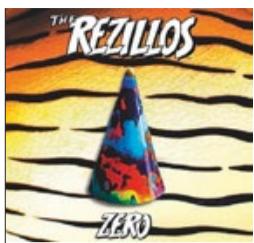
It was actually salvia. I was handed a pipe and it turned out to not be pot, so it blindsided me... It was a really intense out-of-body experience where I saw these little snapshots of my life. But my biggest takeaway was to be much more cautious about what I'm smoking in future.

Is there going to be a live Bop English show?

Yeah, we're coming over in May. I have a pretty cool band of freaky musicians. It's not quite as groovy as White Denim has gotten over the last few years – it's a little more aggressive and we do a lot of heady improv, which is fun.

INTERVIEW: SAM RICHARDS

New Albums



THE REZILLOS

Zero

METROPOLIS

The Harper Lee of Scottish punk survivors return

Thirty-seven years after the release of their debut album, *Can't Stand*

6/10

The Rezillos, Edinburgh's pop-punks return with a follow-up on which original members Eugene Reynolds and Fay Fife (though not guitarist Jo Callis) seek only to reanimate the spiky, sparky spirit of '78. They mostly succeed, primarily by channelling The Cramps and The B-52s, though "Number One Boy" is Blondie at their most direct and sassy, while the title track is a kitschy blend of robotic rockabilly and sci-fi punk. Nothing here has the irrepressible verve of their sole hit single, "Top Of The Pops", which reached No 17 in the UK, though "Sorry About Tomorrow" comes close.

GRAEME THOMSON

JOSH ROUSE

The Embers Of Time

YEP ROC

Nebraskan-cum-Spaniard's ruminations on life's sprawl, countrypolitan-style

Graceful and gentle, armed with velvet-lined melodies and an off-the-cuff self-regard, Rouse's 11th is deceptively simple, a from-the-heart record once de rigueur for singer-songwriters. It's brief – 10 three-minute vignettes – but the best cuts have staying power. The melancholy "Some Days I'm Golden All Night" sets the stage: quiet introspection amid an acute awareness of time. "New Young", with its harmonica and pedal steel, conjures *Harvest*, while "Jr Worried Blues" spins out its time-honoured lyric country-blues style. A happy reminiscence, closer "Crystal Falls" sends *Embers* down the road with an infectious, good-humoured kick.

LUKE TORN

8/10



TODD RUNDGREN

Global

CHERRY RED

Wayward pop genius, still being contrary

He could have spent the last four decades churning out heavenly AOR masterpieces like "Hello It's Me" and "I Saw The Light". Instead he always wants to explore idiosyncratic digital terrains: admirable but, as his 24th LP shows, not always convincing. "Holyland" is a piece of patterning synth-pop that recalls Paul McCartney; "Soothe" is a lovely, healing electronic ballad that would have sounded great on a mid-'80s Peter Gabriel LP; "Blind" sounds like a sly pisstake of climate change sceptics; and "Earth Mother" is a cracking piece of feminist synth-funk. Too often, though, the stabs at trance sound like the BBC news theme.

JOHN LEWIS

6/10



BEN SALISBURY AND GEOFF BARROW

Ex Machina (OST)

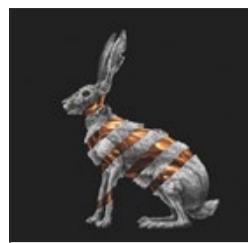
INVADA

Nature soundtracker and Portishead man turn out their first official film score

7/10

Geoff Barrow and fellow Bristolian Ben Salisbury first recorded together for 2012's *Dredd*, the score never making it to the screen, but transmuting into *DROKK: Music Inspired By Mega-City One* along the way. This time, though, it came off. *Dredd* writer Alex Garland is in the director's seat for *Ex Machina*, sci-fi that Barrow and Salisbury soundtrack in restrained but disquieting fashion. Glacial synth swells, industrial drones and muted arpeggios evoke Garland's tale of inscrutable AI while avoiding John Carpenter-style synth pastiche. Those eagerly awaiting a new Portishead album might want to consider taking up some sort of hobby.

LOUIS PATTISON



SAN FERMIN

Jackrabbit

SONY RED

Severely overcooked second album from the orchestral NYC octet On San Fermin's 2013 debut, primary composer Ellis Ludwig-Leone

4/10

showed off his uncanny talent for replicating the orchestral whimsy of New York's art-pop set (*Grizzly Bear*, *Sufjan Stevens*, *St Vincent* circa *Marry Me*). He's now apparently yoking that talent to another Big Apple institution: *Jackrabbit* is two songs and three interludes of grandiose, tuneless narrative better suited to Broadway. Allen Tate, Charlene Kaye and Rebekah Durham share vocals, unspooling florid worries about ageing amid dated romanticism (the male parts evoke a Disney prince's inner monologue). Meanwhile an orchestral cacophony shrieks noisily. Consider any good faith in future promise suspended.

LAURA SNAPES



BOZ SCAGGS

A Fool To Care

429

Soulful song interpreter takes a set of classics for a spin

On the second LP of a projected trilogy, following 2013's hickory-smoked

Memphis, Scaggs, producer/drummer Steve Jordan and their band of fellow veterans once again display consummate taste in material and seasoned chops in exploring it. This time out, Boz and co get under the skin of consistently evocative songs from the likes of Curtis Mayfield, Bobby Charles, Al Green and Bobby Charles, keeping the vibe laidback and righteously behind the beat. Bonnie Raitt's slide and voice thicken the sultry atmosphere of Scaggs' own "Hell To Pay", while Lucinda Williams' presence deepens the existential poignancy of their exquisite take on The Band's "Whispering Pines".

BUD SCOPPA

8/10

HOW TO BUY... DAVY HENDERSON

In the Fire Engines and beyond



FIRE ENGINES

Fond REV-OLA 1992

The live energy of Henderson's first band, Fire Engines, was never adequately captured and their love of a conceptual prank meant their mini-LP, *Lubricate Your Living Room*, was rendered an an instrumental accompaniment to household chores. Subsequent re-releases have added singles and Peel tracks. *Fond* is the most comprehensive, but *Hungry Beat* (Acute, 2007) is also decent.

8/10



NECTARINE NO. 9

It's Just The Way Things Are Joe, It's Just The Way Things Are

CREEPING BENT, 2006

After a failed flirtation with commercial pop in *Win*, Henderson added Beefheartian gnarliness to T.Rex style hooks and punk discord. This 1999 comp draws from Nectarine No 9's first three albums (*A Sea With Three Stars*, *Saint Jack* and *Fried For Blue Material*). The band recently reformed to perform *Saint Jack*, Henderson's most personal album.

8/10



THE SEXUAL OBJECTS

Cucumber

AKTION & SPASS, 2010

The first album by Henderson's current band is a mélange of his influences, with those Bolan-style hooks grafted onto a less confrontational version of his gnarly trash rock. It's not pure glam – there's some of Eno's melodic insistence lurking beneath the sparkly surface – and the vocals, as ever, emanate from an imagined corridor buried beneath Andy Warhol's Factory.

9/10

ALASTAIR MCKAY



THE SEXUAL OBJECTS

Cream Split Up

EYELIDS IN THE RAIN/ CREEPING BENT

More kinetic lubrication from Fire Engines leader

Davy Henderson certainly has form (in Fire Engines)

with unclassifiable, near-instrumental mini-albums. This brisk five-track 10" is a companion to *Marshmallow*, the Sexual Objects' second album, but that was pressed in an edition of one and remains unheard. It's a fierce listen, from the dense rock'n'roll chug of "Robert Quine" through to the collapsed concrete rhythms of "Ron Asheton", concluding with the surf-twang of "Tel-Ray Collins". "Fenella Fudge" is a muscular tribute to a Radio 2 voiceover artist, while the opener, "Cultural Supervisor" is fast and loose, like the soundtrack to a lost hotrod movie.

ALASTAIR MCKAY



NADINE SHAH

Fast Food

APOLLO

Darkly confident second effort from the Tyneside singer-songwriter

Combining the dark theatricality of Siouxsie Sioux with the

experimentalism of PJ Harvey, this terrific second album from the ex-jazz singer Shah carries with it a clear air of assurance. Written in just two months and produced by Ben Hillier (Blur, Elbow, Depeche Mode), it mulls over themes of love and heartbreak. Highlights include "Fool", which casts aspersions on a hapless lover, and the eponymous opener, whose stentorian guitar-and-drums intro might have been plucked from Anna Calvi's *One Breath*. Most captivating of all is Shah's voice that, veering between a gentle croon and a semi-operatic howl, sends tiny shards through the heart.

FIONA STURGES

8/10



SHIT AND SHINE

54-Synth-Brass 38 Metal Guitar 65 Cathedral

ROCKET RECORDINGS

Grubby noise doyen's freestyle boogie

Texan transgressor Craig Clouse has been making a racket as Shit And Shine for over a decade and with each new album – he does around one a year – his style of swampy riffs smeared across bludgeoned electronic blues becomes increasingly accomplished. As with last year's *Powder Horn*, the festering percussive grooves of 54-Synth-Brass... suggest that a better understanding of the mechanics of the dancefloor has replaced his desire to shock, but he'll never fully clean up his act. At its best, "Electric Pony 2" and "Cowboy Hat" wheeze and splutter like Alan Vega running a marathon. Elsewhere, "Egg McMuffin" is a dubbed-out delight.

PIERS MARTIN

7/10



THE SILENCE

The Silence

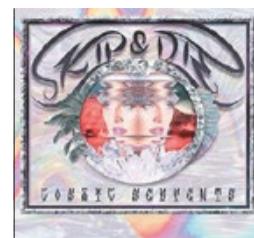
DRAG CITY

Former Ghost members tend the perfumed garden

Eight years after the last Ghost album, Masaki Batoh has reconnected with former bandmates Okano Futoshi and Kazuo Ogino to explore a more wistful and self-consciously retro strand of psychedelia. With flute and organ to the fore, The Silence's debut is a paisley-patterned paradise for lovers of Procol Harum and Traffic. There's also an excellent loungey cover of Can's "Tango Whiskeyman" while "Jewels In Tibet" surprisingly recalls Suede's *Dog Man Star*. Batoh's pained take on "Black Is The Colour Of My True Love's Hair" might unwittingly remind you of *The Fast Show*'s doom-laden painter, but otherwise you can't help but be charmed by the sincerity of these beautifully crafted homages.

SAM RICHARDS

8/10



SKIP&DIE

Cosmic Serpents

CRAMMED DISCS

Second LP from pan-tropical experimentalists

Based in Amsterdam, Skip&Die are fronted by South African oddball

Cata.Pirata, a singer and visual artist who looks a bit like Gwen Stefani but whose globe-trotting aesthetic is closer to MIA or Diplo. LP#2 sees her and multi-instrumentalist Jori Collignon shift focus from Brazil to Africa. "Maloya Magic" mixes spangly hi-life guitar with township melodies, "Perpetual War" is woozy, Africanised reggae, while "Mami Wata" sounds like ragga created in a Nigerian junkyard. Crucially, for all the admirable cut-and-paste trickery on show, tracks like the blissful ballad "Youth With A Skull" and the a cappella "El Apocalipsis" both show that Skip&Die can also write heart-melting melodies.

JOHN LEWIS

8/10



SLUG

Ripe

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

Another Music from a different Field...

Sunderland's Field Music have been steadily ploughing a unique furrow for years, blending prog virtuosity, punk brevity and therapeutic pop optimism with a lo-fi early '70s production style. Slug are essentially the same band, but led by bassist Ian Black instead, leaving Field Music head honchos Peter and David Brewis to helm the production and play. The result is pure pleasure as Black takes the trademark Brewis sound and ramps up the funk on groove-driven art-pop gems like "Eggs And Eyes" and "Greasy Mind". But, apart from Black's fondness for '80s R&B, it's difficult to hear what makes Slug... well... Slug.

GARRY MULHOLLAND

7/10



SPEEDY ORTIZ

Foil Deer

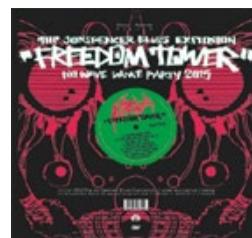
CAR PARK

Whip-smart second from Boston four-piece

Speedy Ortiz endured tireless comparisons to Pavement on 2013 debut *Major Arcana* thanks to singer/guitarist Sadie Dupuis' ornate wordplay. But where Malkmus trades in riddles, Dupuis doles out curses, and the Massachusetts four-piece's swaggering second LP bears a matching malevolent streak. "I'm not bossy/I'm the boss", she spits on "Raising The Skate", defining *Foil Deer* as an act of self-assertion in the face of the time-wasting deadbeats it confronts. These are the overt themes, mind: Dupuis' gnarled syntax is its own force-field, her cryptic overtones backed by a tapestry of Slint-like dread and Polvo's disquieting prog. *Foil Deer* is catchy, exhilarating and smart, qualities that indie-rock barely has all at once these days.

LAURA SNAPES

8/10



THE JON SPENCER BLUES EXPLOSION

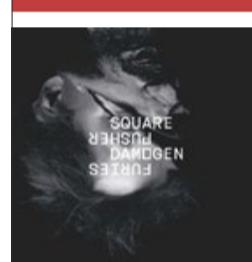
Freedom Tower - No Wave Dance Party 2015

BRONZERAT

7/10

Ignore the title's '2015' – the Blues Explosion appear refreshingly unchanged from their '90s prime. Attempts to expand that raw trio sound, around the turn of the millennium, have been shelved. As with 2012's comeback, *Meat + Bone*, *Freedom Tower...* showcases three men who grasp that great rock'n'roll can be at once rudimentary, virtuoso and preposterous. The litany of yowls and squalls, and Simins' funky belligerence, are crisply recorded at the Daptone House Of Soul. And while individual tracks are hard to pick out in the melee, "Crossroad Hop" is one of Spencer's best deconstructions of the Stones since Pussy Galore's *Exile*.

JOHN MULVEY



SQUAREPUSHER

Damogen Furies

WARP

Tom Jenkinson renews his commitment to nosebleed jazzpunk

Good news for fans of ear-shafting Warptronica who felt overwhelmed by Aphex Twin's unusually sedate Syro: the daddy of berserker electro-jazz is back on gnarly, knotty, sense-blasting form here. Following his purely electronic 2012 LP *Ufabulum* and last year's collaborative EP "Music For Robots", Tom Jenkinson recorded these eight tracks on his travelling studio set-up, each in a single take. Precision meets ferocity on "Kontenjaz", which sounds like Miles Davis arm-wrestling Daft Punk, while "Stor Eioglass" blends machine-gun drill'n'bass beats with sugar-coated rave-pop melody. Even if the attitude feels snarly and confrontational, the craftsmanship speaks of deep love and high-level musicality.

STEPHEN DALTON

8/10



RINGO STARR

Postcards From Paradise

UNIVERSAL

Fab thumper and All-Starr chums meet for good times

You know what you're getting with Ringo: a Who's Who of stellar musos – among them Joe Walsh, Dave Stewart, Todd Rundgren and Peter Frampton – providing slick backing to Starr's obdurate voice on a solid set of songs roaming through pop, rock'n'roll, blues and reggae. Nostalgia is deployed like a mallet, from the title track's lame litany of Beatles numbers to the perkier "Rory & The Hurricanes". The caustic "You Bring The Party Down", a simmering minor blues which would have suited Lennon and Ono's *Double Fantasy*, suggests Starr should show his claws more often.

GRAEME THOMSON





GODSPEED YOU! BLACK EMPEROR

Asunder, Sweet And Other Distress

CONSTELLATION

The End Is Nigh (Slight Return): the enduring glory of GY!BE. By John Mulvey



8/10

WHEN THEY
EMERGED, clandestinely, in the late 1990s, Montreal's Godspeed You! Black Emperor seemed less like an orthodox rock band, and more like a superbly orchestrated doomsday cult. Their pessimism was ill-defined but oddly

exciting. As technophobes fretted about impending millennial meltdown, Godspeed provided a soundtrack, apparently constructed from arcane prophecy, survivalist paranoia and the most expansive post-rock of the day.

It was hard to work out the precise nature of Godspeed's angst – or, indeed, a clear sense of what their solution to the world's problems might be. In the few interviews that they granted around the time, anarcho-syndicalism was tangentially discussed. But as the band strived to operate as a democracy, living communally at their "filthy, dirty" Hotel2Tango studio, it seemed likely the nine equal members would never be able to agree upon anything so reductive as a coherent statement of intent.

"The end of the world isn't coming. I don't think 1999 is any worse than 1952 or 1918," guitarist Efrim Menuck told *NME* for a rare and neurotic cover story. It did little, though, to detract from the mythologising that surrounded the band. Tortured inarticulacy and disdain for the mainstream had their advantages, intensifying the focus on Godspeed's sad, rousing, wordless music. With every crescendo and drone, their records and gigs suggested a band desperately – or at least creatively – aware of the end of days.

Sixteen years on, that still seems to be the case.

Asunder, Sweet And Other Distress is Godspeed's seventh awkwardly named album, if one counts 1994's *All Lights Fucked On The Hairy Amp Drooling* (a cassette limited, memorably, to 33 copies) and 1999's *Slow Riot For New Zero Kanada* (a 29-minute trinket originally classified as an EP). 1997's breakthrough *F# A#∞* began with a scorched statement of intent called "The Dead Flag Blues". Among the gloomily lavish packaging of *Asunder...*, there is a grainy poster of the Maple Leaf flag, flying at half-mast, captioned, "We love you so much our country is fucked."

In a perennially wretched geopolitical climate, though, there is a comfort to be had from Godspeed's glowering predictability. Before a hiatus that stretched through much of the '00s, the band's most notable change came in 2002, when the exclamation mark shifted from the end of their name to the middle. *Asunder...* is a relatively abbreviated album by their standards – four tracks, 41 minutes – and follows a familiar trajectory: martial climaxes and blackened ambient passages, bombast and afterburn.

Rarely, though, has that trajectory been charted so effectively. Much of *Asunder...* has been a staple of Godspeed live sets for the past few years, evocatively known as "Behemoth" by their followers, and the opening "Peasantry Or 'Light! Inside Of Light!'" (10 minutes, 28 seconds) might be as close to trad rock as they've ever come, a next step on from "Mladic", the highlight of 2012's *Allelujah! Don't Bend! Ascend!..* "Peasantry..." isn't exactly a radical departure, with its mix of

Mogwai, Amon Düül II and Ennio Morricone, but there's also something of an exotic swagger, a heaviness that's almost bluesy, which brings to mind Led Zeppelin and "Kashmir".

The closing "Piss Crowns Are Trebled" (13 minutes, 50 seconds), meanwhile, is the sort of widescreen drama that the band have been enacting for the best part of two decades, with Sophie Trudeau's violin urging the massed guitars on from one windswept summit to another. At least 15 years after post-rock's quiet-loud math became tedious for all but the most doughty fans, Godspeed's relentless ability to repeat and reinvigorate a very similar musical formula remains uncanny, perhaps even rather absurd.

They also persist in disrupting the cumulative sweep of their epics, so that while "Peasantry" and "Piss Crowns" could have rumbled magisterially into one another, the band's self-consciousness means that their flow is interrupted by "Lambs' Breath" and "Asunder, Sweet", together constituting 16 minutes of amp burn, approaching menace, brackish white noise and drone. The void opens wider when, on the vinyl version, the ending of "Lambs' Breath" is stretched indefinitely by a locked groove.

Even at this late date, however, there is something endearing about such contrariness. On every album, Godspeed compose a heroic ascending progression, then become tormented anew by its obviousness and seek to derail it in exactly the same way as they have always done. The marvel of *Asunder, Sweet And Other Distress* is how, once again, the band's constancy is ultimately an asset rather than a curse. In 1997, muting the TV news and playing a Godspeed record felt less like an act of adolescent futility, more one of heartfelt naysaying, an aesthetic

revolt against the world's iniquities. In 2015, for good and – much more significantly – for ill, nothing at all has changed.

SLEEVE NOTES

Recorded by:

Greg Norman

Recorded at:

Hotel2Tango and
The Pines, Montreal,
Quebec, and
The Fidelitorium,
Kernersville,
North Carolina

Personnel:

Thierry Amar (bass,
contrebasse), David
Bryant (guitar,
Portasound, organs,
drones), Aidan Girt
(drums), Timothy
Herzog (drums,
drones), Efrim Manuel
Menuck (guitar),
Michael Moya (guitar),
Mauro Pezzente
(bass), Sophie Trudeau
(violins, drones)



STEALING SHEEP

Not Real

HEAVENLY

Liverpudlian trio's exotic-pop second

The 2012 debut from this all-gal trio was a beguiling blend of pastoral folk, scruffy post-punk and shimmering psych-pop, but as the title suggests, *Not Real* moves them into dreamier, more intriguing territory. It features less guitar, more electronics and considerable post-production experimentation, with the likes of Delia Derbyshire and Gershon Kingsley providing inspiration. The spirit of Martin Denny is also evident, but Stealing Sheep sensibly guard their identity rather than go the whole retro hog. They pull off shifts in mood and tone with routine aplomb, although setting heavenly vocal harmonies in deep space along with flute, theremin and tribal beats (on "Greed") is a particular triumph.

SHARON O'CONNELL

7/10



STORNOWAY

Bonxie

COOKING VINYL

Oxford band embrace the great outdoors on third outing

Named after a Hebridean seabird, Bonxie starts with the low hoot of a ship's horn and is peppered with bird call and sea sounds. Though it's a decidedly al fresco affair it's not remotely woolly, with producer Gil Norton honing the band's breezy, literate folk-pop sensibilities. The sweeping strings and soulful rhythmic kick of "Man On Wire" signal a new gift for drama and attack, while the beautiful "Road You Didn't Take" ripples with heart-heavy regret. Between Brian Briggs' high, sweet voice, the ever-artful arrangements and an easel yet eccentric way around a melody, Stornoway have become a band to cherish.

GRAEME THOMSON

8/10



SUUNS & JERUSALEM IN MY HEART

Suuns & Jerusalem In My Heart

DEAD OCEANS

Canadian oddballs combine for an Arabic trance-rock summit

In which the Montreal Kraut/trance-rock quartet Suuns get into the studio with their pal Radwan Ghazi Moumneh, a Lebanese-Canadian oddball who has sung with assorted hardcore punk bands as well as with his own Arabic electronic project Jerusalem In My Heart. The resulting jams throw up a wonderful ragbag of styles, the highlight being a tribal drum stomp called "Metal", overlaid with distorted guitars that resemble kazoos. "Seif" suggests Tuareg heavy metal; "Gazelles In Flight" recalls an extended introduction from *Dark Side Of The Moon*; while "In Touch" is creepy acid house as it might have emerged from a medieval mosque.

JOHN LEWIS

7/10



THIS IS THE KIT

Bashed Out

BRASSLAND

Oddball yet elegant indie-folk

The Hampshire-born folk singer Kate Stables – these days an adopted Parisian – comes with a whole heap of admirers, among them Elbow's Guy Garvey, Iron & Wine's Sam Beam and Sharon Van Etten. Another is The National's Aaron Dessner, who has produced her third LP, which also features contributions from Beirut's Benjamin Lanz and The Walkmen's Matt Barrick. It's an understated yet absorbing work, full of delicate arrangements that are elegantly swept along by Stables' gloriously tender vocals. Best of all are her lyrics that veer from the poignant ("Blessed are those who see and are silent" she observes on the title track) to the completely bananas (check out the "lucky little fatties" in "Nits").

FIONA STURGES

8/10

REVELATIONS

This Is The Kit's Kate Stables, as produced by Aaron Dessner



► "Subterranean," is how folk singer Kate Stables describes her latest LP, *Bashed Out*. "I know that must sound weird," she says. "But if the last one was a sailing boat, this is a submarine. It's got a metallic, dark vibe, but hopefully not heavy. That was Aaron's influence. He definitely brought his own sound to it."

That's Aaron as in Aaron Dessner of The National, who produced *Bashed Out*. Before finding fame in a mega-selling indie-rock band, Aaron's twin brother, Bryce, was guitar teacher to Stables' sister, Jane, and the two families became friends.

In 2010 the Dessners came to a This Is The Kit gig at a café in Hackney, and Aaron was so taken with Stables' sound that he offered to produce her third LP.

"Naturally, things didn't move very fast," she recalls. "There's a whole world of complications when one of you is in a huge band with a ridiculous schedule."

But eventually, in 2013, Stables and her band made it to Brooklyn and began sessions in Dessner's garage. "Until now we've always done everything by ourselves so this was a case of letting go, of handing over the reins to see what he would do with it. And you know what? He did good."

FIONA STURGES



TORO Y MOI

What For?

CARPARK

Impressive retro soft-rock from hipster Renaissance man

South-Carolina born to African-American and Filipino parents, perhaps

Chaz Bundrick was destined to be rampantly eclectic. Having emerged as a pioneer of the chillwave sub-genre in 2010, Bundrick has since dabbled in R&B, pop and house. But this fourth album owes obvious debts to classic cerebral dream pop, from Todd Rundgren and 10cc to Scritti Politti and, particularly, Big Star. When the dreamy wash of vintage guitar and keyboard sounds coalesces into beautiful melodies like the short, sweet "Ratcliff", a special talent emerges. But the ear candy effect is undercut by so much studied pastiche of so many cult references.

GARRY MULHOLLAND

7/10

TURBO FRUITS

No Control

MELVIN

Nashville quartet's Patrick Carney-aided fourth album

After carving themselves a cultish reputation via three albums and reliably riotous live shows, Turbo Fruits have evolved into something more than just a goodtime, garage punk/slacker pop band. Steered by guitarist/singer Jonas Stein (ex Be Your Own Pet), they've delivered a less disposable, more reflective and yes, "mature" set with their latest. Both "Don't Let Me Break Your Heart Again" and "No Reason To Stay" are indebted to The Strokes, but the fizzy "Don't Change" betrays an early-Beatles core, made all the more appealing by Stein's sweet, thickened vocal. Equally poignant is "Big Brother", which suggests Big Star channelling Gene Vincent – a great idea, unsurprisingly.

SHARON O'CONNELL

7/10



TUXEDO

Tuxedo

STONES THROW

Mayer Hawthorne tries on some vintage evening wear, and it's a perfect fit

Turns out retro-soulman extraordinaire Mayer Hawthorne knows a thing or two about '80s funk as well as Motown and Philly soul. Forming the presumably one-off duo Tuxedo with producer Jake One (Drake, Snoop Dogg, fun.), Detroit native Hawthorne cedes most of the instrumental duties – analog synths, quantised drums, synth-bass and faux strings – to his partner in order to focus on lead and backing vocals. The resulting batch of picture-perfect recreations reveals *Tuxedo* as a one-trick pony, but it's a wicked-clever one; cuts like the bumpin' "Number One" and the silky "So Good" will slide seamlessly into a playlist of Shalamar, Cameo and Hall & Oates nuggets.

BUD SCOPPA

7/10

New Albums



CALE TYSON

Introducing Cale Tyson

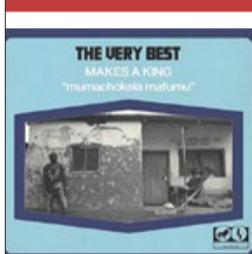
CLUBHOUSE RECORDS

Outstanding country debut from American tearjerker

8/10

Already making small waves in the US, where he's been labelled a new traditionalist alongside talents like Sturgill Simpson and Caitlin Rose, Cale Tyson is a classic country crooner and already a master of tears-in-beer, saudade-laden, pedal-saturated heartbreak waltzes and ballads. This UK release rounds up his two US EPs. There's a level of knowing nostalgia on display, but also genuine songwriting nous and total respect for the genre that enables him to produce self-deprecating gems like the swinging "Lonesome In Tennessee", the Chuck Berry jive "Can't Feel Love", the wonderfully woeful "Not Missin' You" and the stunning, maudlin "Oaxaca".

PETER WATTS



THE VERY BEST

Makes A King

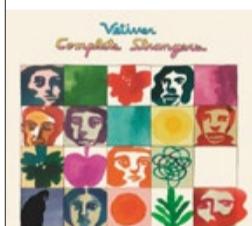
MOSHI MOSHI

Thrilling third outing from global electro-beat duo

8/10

labour under the considerable disadvantage of living on different continents, following Esau's deportation to Malawi. Recording in an African village with a laptop and local musicians lends a more organic feel than previous releases, although there's still a thumping, urban feel to the house grooves of "Sweka" and the electro-dub of "Hear Me", which features Vampire Weekend bassist Chris Baio. Elsewhere Esau's gloriously soaring voice dominates the exuberant Afro-pop of "Mwana Wanga" and the anthemic, Coldplay-like "Umasiye", resulting in a hybrid as thrilling as anything we've heard from Africa Express.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



VETIVER

Complete Strangers

EASY SOUND

Laidback gem from San Francisco throwback

Once known primarily as a charter member of Devendra Banhart's freak-folk posse, Andy Cabic has accumulated a solid body of work whose recurring reference point is the *Workingman's Dead/American Beauty* axis. Cabic's sixth LP under the Vetiver nameplate is his most companionable yet, unforced, liquid in its forward movement and refreshingly free of pretence or irony. In its intermingling of jazzy and folky elements, *Complete Strangers* feels closer to the music of David Crosby than Jerry Garcia. From the bossanova sway of "Time Flies" to the Real Estate-like gentle jangle of "Loose Ends", the record is as intimate and low-keyed as an evening at home with friends.

BUD SCOPPA

8/10



VILLAGERS

Darling Arithmetic

DOMINO

Dubliner's splendid, stripped-back third

"I took a little time to get where I wanted, I took a little time to get free,"

Conor O'Brien claims in "Courage". He's talking about his spirit, but might equally be referring to his shedding of the heavy metaphor and indie orchestral pop that characterised his previous LPs. *Darling Arithmetic* – which he recorded, produced and mixed at home – invites comparisons with Bon Iver's *For Emma, Forever Ago* in its occupation of a similarly hushed, intimate space and John Grant's *Queen Of Denmark*, although O'Brien's honesty is far less self-lacerating. Nine luminous, clean-lined songs focus on love's myriad complexities, the keening "So Naïve" a particularly lovely borrowing from Jansch, Drake and Buckley senior.

SHARON O'CONNELL

8/10

HOW TO BUY...

VETIVER

Exploring Andy Cabic's blissed-out world



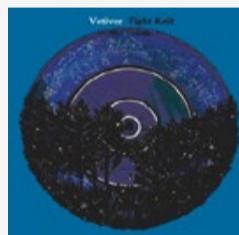
Vetiver

DICRISTINA, 2004

Appearing at the height of freak-folk, the first incarnation of Vetiver found the movement's central figure, Devendra

Banhart, playing guitar, yet there's nary a hint of freakiness in Andy Cabic's songs or the LP's idyllic, understated sound. "Amerlie" is graced by Joanna Newsom's harp, while Hope Sandoval harmonises on "Angel's Share".

8/10



Tight Knit

SUBPOP, 2009

Fast-forward five years and a 'Frisco-based Cabic has perfected his aesthetic, bringing an unforced self-assurance to his timeless take on Cali soft rock. Cabic's circle expanded to include such kindred spirits as Jonathan Wilson and Farmer Dave Scher, and the lineup brings a laidback tautness to the percolating "More Of This" and the Nilsson-like "Everyday".

8/10



The Errant Charm

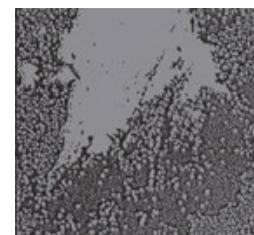
SUBPOP, 2011

Oblivious to trends, Cabic continues to add detail to the enchanted forest he's conjured up with co-producer/collaborator Thom Monahan, as

Jenny Lewis, Johnathan Rice and Neal Casal lend a hand. "Wonder Why" evokes a jingle-jangle morning in Laurel Canyon, and "Ride Ride Ride" is a road movie that winds along the Central Coast. Mood music for California: dreaming, inviting, atmospheric, immersive.

8/10

BUD SCOPPA



WALLS

Urals

ECSTATIC

Techno drifters' third and final report

This invigorating swansong by the Anglo-Italian duo finds Sam Willis and Alessio

Natalizia bowing out at the peak of their powers in order to focus on the solo career each has forged in the four years since Walls' last album, *Coracle*. In particular, the menacing Krautish groove of *Urals* owes much to Natalizia's industrial synth vehicle Not Waving – "Moon Eye" and "I Can Only Give You Anything But Love" percolate furiously – while the pastel prettiness of earlier outings has evolved into more direct forms of expression. It's not all gnarly kosmische, though: "Volata" and "Radiance" show Walls can still bring out the goosebumps.

PIERS MARTIN

8/10



WAXAHATCHEE

Ivy Tripp

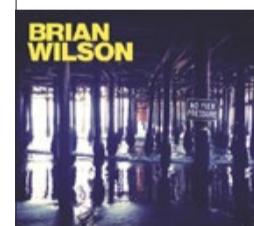
WICHITA

DIY stalwart makes electronic forays on appealingly nervy third LP

Katie Crutchfield coined the term 'Ivy Tripp' to describe the confusion that often strikes in one's mid-twenties, and the resulting titular album – the Alabama native's third as Waxahatchee – is full of naked uncertainty. "What do I want?/What do I think?/Nobody hears," she rails on the grungy "Poison", while guitar hymnal "Blue" and several others evanesce into nothing. On 2013's *Cerulean Salt*, Crutchfield worried about "dreams of loveless marriage and regret"; here she eschews regret by confronting a crumbling relationship with candour and empathy. It's odd to praise a record for lacking assurance, but her avoidance of contrived resolution feels appropriate.

LAURA SNAPES

7/10



BRIAN WILSON

No Pier Pressure

UNIVERSAL

Brian features old Beach Boys pals on 11th solo studio LP

This LP started as a Beach Boys project and still retains the services of old boys Al Jardine, David Marks and Blondie Chaplin. Their harmonies bolster Brian Wilson's Grandpa Simpson croak on many songs; the closing track, "The Last Song", is Brian's lament for the band's messy break-up; songs like "This Beautiful Day" and "Whatever Happened" sound like Beach Boys pastiches written for a '60s-set musical. But Wilson's chord changes are as heart-wrenching as ever, and bathed in heavenly harmonies: particularly on the Martin Denny-ish "Half Moon Bay" (featuring trumpeter Mark Isham) and the a cappella "Our Special Love" (featuring Peter Hollens).

JOHN LEWIS

8/10



BASSEKOU KOUYATÉ & NGONI BA

Ba Power

GLITTERBEAT

Powerful Afro-rock from the Hendrix of the n'goni. By Nigel Williamson



9/10

THE NGONI ISN'T much of an instrument to look at. Four strings, traditionally cut from lengths of fishing line, are pulled across a hollowed-out, canoe-shaped piece of wood with dried animal skin stretched over it like a drum. The neck is a fretless length of dowel and the entire instrument is barely two feet long. Its basic sound is gut-bucket raw and earthy, like a rudimentary banjo, the raspingly plucked notes possessing none of the stately elegance of its sophisticated multi-stringed cousin, the kora.

The n'goni's simplicity has made it the most ubiquitous instrument in West African music for centuries, but it wasn't until the new millennium that Bassekou Kouyaté realised its wider possibilities and began to revolutionise its sound. After a conventional apprenticeship backing desert blues guitar maestro Ali Farka Touré and kora poet laureate Toumani Diabaté, he launched his solo career with 2007's *Segu Blue*. For the first time the snapping strings of the n'goni, loaded with crisp, rapid melodies and funk-ed up cross-rhythms, were located at the centre of the sound. Indeed, Kouyaté's band featured four interlocking ngonis and when he added electric pick-ups, distortion and effects pedals, he was inevitably dubbed the Hendrix of his instrument. *Segu Blue* won album of the year at the BBC Radio 3 World Music Awards and the follow-up, *I Speak Fula*,

(2009) was nominated for a Grammy Award.

Yet for all Kouyaté's innovations, his first two albums were still essentially traditional African records, aimed primarily at the specialist world music market. His third album, 2013's *Jama Ko*, was a significant advance, rocking and grinding harder with a full-throttle roar, a conscious intensification driven by a new, younger band that included two of his sons, and lent a defiant edge by the desperate times in which it was recorded, with Mali in lockdown as Islamic fundamentalists overran its northern territories and imposed a ban on music.

Ba Power feels like another dramatic leap forward and a further landmark in the integration of African tribal rhythms and western rock'n'roll, pioneered by Damon Albarn's African Express and reaching

something of a high tide last year on Robert Plant's *lullaby and...*

The Ceaseless Roar. The parallel with that record is more than figmental: Dave Smith, drummer with Plant's Sensational Shape Shifters, plays on almost half of the tracks and, alongside more traditional calabash percussion, drives them with pneumatic power.

Further rock'n'roll heft is provided by guitarist Chris Brokaw (of Come and Codeine) and the dynamic production of Walkabouts' veteran Chris Eckman. But this is no corporate western takeover and the non-African contingent has a perfect understanding that its role is to augment Kouyaté's Afro-rock vision rather than to adulterate it.

Opener "Siran Fen" establishes the template, as Kouyaté's amplified n'goni duels thrillingly with Brokaw's lead guitar over a propulsive rhythm and call-and-response vocals led by the intense, keening voice of Kouyaté's wife,

Q&A

Bassekou Kouyaté

The kora is well known outside Africa, the n'goni perhaps less so. Can you tell us about your instrument?

It's the oldest instrument in West Africa. I learnt to play from my father and he learnt to play from his father and it goes back centuries. It's the family mission and now my sons are playing with me. That has changed the sound because the younger generation bring something new.

How do you feel the sound has changed?

I always tried to extend and develop the n'goni for our times. But on the last two records I wanted to bring in the energy of rock'n'roll. This album definitely has the toughest sound I've ever made.

As an African musician do you feel an empathy with Western rock'n'roll?

They say rock'n'roll came from the blues and that the blues came from Africa. The first time I met Taj Mahal he said I was playing the blues. I didn't know the blues; I was playing African music. So it must be true.

You've collaborated with a lot of non-African musicians now. Is that something you relish?

I've enjoyed making music with all of them. Playing with Paul McCartney and Damon Albarn on Africa Express was fantastic. But the one western musician who really stands out for me is Bela Fleck. The American banjo and the n'goni are close cousins, so we have a special understanding.

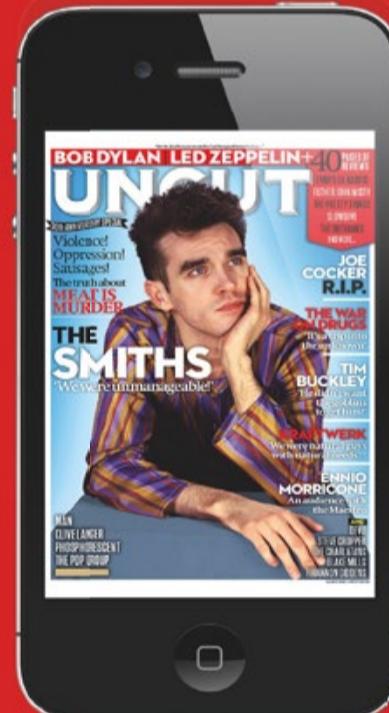
INTERVIEW: NIGEL WILLIAMSON

Amy Sacko. On "Ayé Sira Bla", a tribal praise song is piloted into Afro-prog territory with the assistance of Jon Hassell's trumpet and keyboards. "Fama Magni" is another traditional African melody, featuring haunting single-string fiddle (an instrument also prominent on Plant's *Lullaby...*) and with Samba Touré (whose recent Glitterbeat album *Gandadiko* is also worth exploring) adding modal lead guitar lines that contrast strikingly with Brokaw's more chromatic playing elsewhere.

On the pulsating "Waati", Kouyaté's n'goni spills shards of distorted notes over a razor-sharp riff that builds to a hypnotic climax and suggests the Hendrix analogy is not an idle one. Finally the rollicking swagger slows to a rolling strut on the melodic "Te Duniya Laban", an infectious Afro-pop anthem as Sacko sings of the transitory nature of life over a chiming chorus and the shimmering strings of Eckman's acoustic guitar and Kouyaté's more brittle notes. The album ends moodily with "Bassekouni", an Ali Farka-styled after-hours blues jam that fades tantalisingly after three minutes and leaves you gazing wide-eyed into the desert night and craving more.

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SCORING: THE ORIGINAL ALBUM

10 Masterpiece

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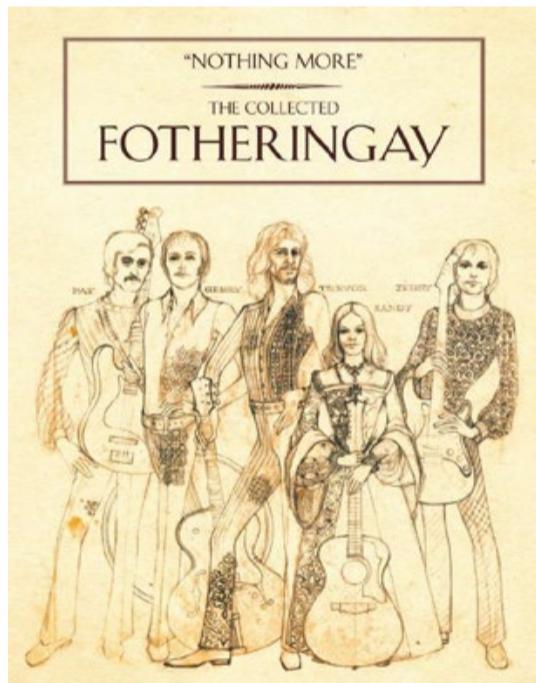
SCORING: EXTRA MATERIAL

10 Untold riches

1 Barrel-scrapings

Archive

REISSUES | COMPS | BOXSETS | LOST RECORDINGS



TRACKLIST

DISC ONE *Fotheringay (Expanded)*

- 1 Nothing More
- 2 The Sea
- 3 The Ballad Of Ned Kelly
- 4 Winter Winds
- 5 Peace In The End
- 6 The Way I Feel
- 7 The Pond And The Stream
- 8 Too Much Of Nothing
- 9 Banks Of The Nile
- 10 The Sea - Demo version
- 11 Winter Winds - Demo version
- 12 The Pond And The Stream - Demo version
- 13 The Way I Feel - Original version
- 14 Banks Of The Nile - Alternate take
- 15 Winter Winds - Alternate take

FOTHERINGAY

Nothing More – The Collected Fotheringay

ISLAND/UNIVERSAL

The final word on Sandy Denny's other band. By Jim Wirth

8/10

WHILE FAIRPORT CONVENTION toiled, Fotheringay idled. While the band Sandy Denny left in the wake of 1969's folk-rock landmark *Liege & Lief* gigged relentlessly, the group she put together with her boisterous Australian boyfriend Trevor Lucas swanned around in a vintage limousine. They retreated to a Sussex farmhouse to 'get it together' but rehearsed only once and spent most of their time messing about and getting drunk. They spent stupid money on a gigantic PA system nicknamed 'Stonehenge' – and by all reports that didn't work either.

Within a year, Denny, Lucas, his Eclection bandmate Gerry Conway, and co-conspirators Pat Donaldson and Jerry Donahue had frittered away a reported £30,000 advance and had only

one half-cooked LP to show for it. "We've had a terrible deadline to meet," Denny says, with dog-ate-my-homework air, introducing a BBC session on this surprisingly hefty document of Fotheringay's brief career. "All that material we've been working on must go on the album 'cause we don't have anything else to put on it."

The cupboards have been stripped bare for this four-disc boxed set – three CDs of studio recordings, demos, radio sessions and a live set, plus a DVD featuring un-broadcast TV footage – which features some of the best work of Denny's maddeningly unfulfilled career. Indeed, the rendition of the Napoleonic bloodbath ballad "Banks Of The Nile", which closed their self-titled album,



Fotheringay at London's Royal Festival Hall, March 30, 1970: (l-r) Donahue, Lucas, Conway, Denny, Donaldson



TRACKLIST Continued

DISC TWO *Fotheringay 2 (Expanded)*

- 1 John The Gun
- 2 Eppie Moray
- 3 Wild Mountain Thyme
- 4 Knights Of The Road
- 5 Late November
- 6 Restless
- 7 Gypsy Davey
- 8 I Don't Believe You
- 9 Silver Threads And Golden Needles
- 10 Bold Jack Donahue
- 11 Two Weeks Last Summer
- 12 Late November Joe Boyd mix
- 13 Gypsy Davey Joe Boyd mix
- 14 Two Weeks Last Summer Joe Boyd mix
- 15 Silver Threads And Golden Needles Alternative 2004 version
- 16 Bruton Town Rehearsal version
- 17 Bruton Town 2015 version (first Time On CD)

DISC THREE *Live in Rotterdam (Unreleased)*

- 1 The Way I Feel
- 2 The Sea
- 3 Too Much Of Nothing
- 4 Nothing More
- 5 I'm Troubled
- 6 Two Weeks Last Summer
- 7 The Ballad Of Ned Kelly
- 8 Banks Of The Nile
- 9 Memphis Tennessee
- 10 Interview/The Sea BBC Top Gear
- 11 The Lowlands Of Holland BBC Folk On One
- 12 Eppie Moray BBC Folk On One
- 13 John The Gun - BBC Sounds Of The 70s
- 14 Bold Jack Donahue BBC Sounds Of The 70s
- 15 Gypsy Davey BBC Sounds Of The 70s
- 16 Wild Mountain Thyme BBC Sounds Of The 70s

DISC FOUR DVD *Beat Club 28 Nov 1970*

- 1 Nothing More Previously Unreleased
- 2 Gypsy Davey Previously Unreleased
- 3 John The Gun Previously Unreleased
- 4 Too Much Of Nothing

→ released in June 1970, might well eclipse more celebrated Fairport classics like "A Sailor's Life", "Percy's Song", "Farewell Farewell" or "The Deserter".

Cursed with a voice of supernatural power, Denny knew when she walked out on Fairport at their peak that she did not want to spend the rest of her career belting out souped-up traditional songs. Her mentor and producer Joe Boyd was equally sure Denny could do better than retreating into a band whose easygoing style – a little bit country and little bit rock'n'roll – harked back to the early Fairport. However, while Denny (as she appears on German TV show *Beat Club*), a glowering thundercloud in a kaftan hunched over her piano, sounds like a solo star in waiting, she certainly doesn't look like one. Her eagerness to cede the spotlight to Lucas suggests she didn't feel like one either.

Denny's voice hugs every alpha-male curve of Lucas' on Fotheringay's live and studio versions of Gordon Lightfoot's "The Way I Feel", and by all accounts the monstrously insecure singer was utterly smitten with him. However, while Lucas' spade-is-a-spade baritone has its charms – "Peace In The End" is cheery enough and Denny's embellishments give his version of Bob Dylan's "Too Much Of Nothing" some

heft – his contributions only paper over the cracks between the clutch of songs Denny brought to the new band. But when Denny was inspired, so were Fotheringay.

As with "Banks Of The Nile", the band provide a beautifully measured counterpoint on "Nothing More" – Denny's attempt to reach out to her former bandmate Richard Thompson, quietly grief-stricken in the wake of the crash that killed his girlfriend Jeannie Franklin and Fairport drummer Martin Lamble. "My friend I know you've suffered, although you are still young," she sings. "Why was it you would not take help from anyone?"

The gentle swells that Fotheringay build under "The Sea" show a sympathetic subtlety, as the former nurse depicts the apocalypse coming to her home city: "Sea flows under your doors in London Town/And all your defences are all broken down." A distaff relative to Nick Drake's "One Of These Things First", its meaning is – like many of Denny's songs – smoothed away by wave upon wave of obfuscating rewrites.

Fotheringay are at their unobtrusive best again on the "The Pond And The Stream", Denny somewhat unfairly calling herself out for being an uptight urbanite compared to free-range folkie Anne Briggs. "Annie wanders on the

BURIED TREASURE

Err Indoors

Great records by ill-matched folk-rock couples



JOHN & BEVERLEY MARTYN
THE ROAD TO RUIN
ISLAND, 1970

Beverley Martyn quit music to focus on raising children after the couple's second record together, seemingly taking her husband's consonants with her. Her oddly ambivalent hymn to domesticity, "Primrose Hill", and his hellhound-chasing title track define its extremes, though the pair are in glorious harmony on Paul Wheeler's dope-smuggler's rhapsody, "Give Us A Ring".



SHIRLEY COLLINS & THE ALBION COUNTRY BAND
NO ROSES PEGASUS, 1971

The year after releasing a harrowing trad LP, *Love, Death And The Lady*, recorded by previous husband Austin John Marshall, Sussex siren Collins invited new beau Ashley Hutchings and heavy friends to Liege-&-Lief up her next outing. Features wistful Collins career-highs "The Banks Of The Bann" and "Poor Murdered Woman".



MR FOX
THE GIPSY
TRANSATLANTIC, 1971

Fronted by folk-rock Geoffrey Boycott, Bob Pegg, and his fiddling wife Carole, Mr Fox's Yorkshire variant on the Fairport sound reached its apex with the mammoth title track on their second and final album, *The Gipsy*. Listen as the Peggs take a psychedelic odyssey through the Yorkshire Dales, pursued by history's most irritating keyboard melody.



RICHARD & LINDA THOMPSON
POUR DOWN LIKE SILVER ISLAND, 1975

Flinching away from the bright lights following their conversion to Sufism, the Thompsons' most forbidding record may be the best of the lot. Recorded on day-release from a religious commune, *Pour Down Like Silver* blurs the boundaries between divine and earthly love, "Dimming Of The Day" typifying its quietly luminous intensity.

land, she loves the freedom of the air," Denny sighs. "She finds a friend in every place she goes/There's always a face she knows/I wish that I was there."

However, country living proved notably less inspiring when Fotheringay moved to Chaffinches Farm in Sussex, on a vague mission to log-cabin together their second LP. Fairport sparkled on their bucolic retreats – *Liege & Lief* came together at Farley Chamberlayne, near Winchester; *Full House*, their first post-Denny record, was born of communal living at The Angel, a former pub in Hertfordshire. Fotheringay's rural idyll, by contrast, largely involved playing cards and going swimming.

BOX CONTENTS

● Three CDs, including the original *Fotheringay* LP, the abandoned follow-up and related demos and alternate takes.

● A live set from Rotterdam, featuring several previously unreleased performances, plus BBC sessions unheard in 45 years.

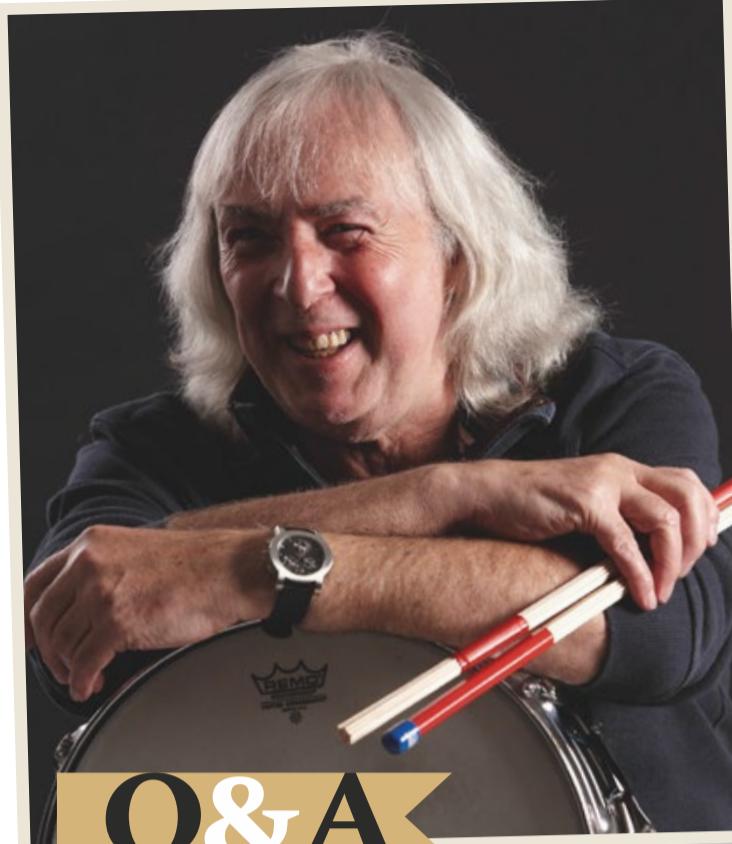
● A sleevenote from Denny's biographer Mick Houghton, and a booklet featuring unseen photos and sketches for the original album cover.

● A DVD featuring four tracks recorded for German TV in 1970, including the unbroadcast "Nothing More" and "John The Gun"

Boyd told Denny she was wasting her time. He had a point.

Fotheringay were dissolved, but Denny's solo career proved no more fulfilling. 1971's *The North Star Grassman And The Ravens* has a sullen charm, but no amount of string sections could cover up a shortage of top-class material as Lucas looked to steer her toward mainstream diva-dom on her final three LPs, *Sandy, Like An Old Fashioned Waltz* and *Rendezvous*. Drunk, drugged and disappointed, Denny unravelled, and motherhood only accelerated her decline. She died from a brain haemorrhage, aged 31, in April 1978, days after Lucas had spirited their baby daughter Georgia away to Australia – an extreme intervention which may have staved off further tragedy. Lucas died of a heart-attack, aged 45, in 1989.

In light of that unhappy ending, many pinpointed the Fotheringay-era as the period when the rot set in. What *Nothing More* suggests, though, is that 1970 might have been Denny's best year as a writer. The easy atmosphere and the security of having Lucas close by may not have eased her anxiety – Boyd wrote that Renée Zellweger's Bridget Jones was an accidentally perfect Denny – but it gave her the space to create some startling songs. What came after seemed too much like hard work.



Q&A

Drummer Gerry Conway charts Fotheringay's languid rise and fall... "Sandy did have quite a temper, bless her"

CAN YOU REMEMBER how Fotheringay first came about? It was beginning to be the end of Eclection; we'd had several lineup changes and Trevor and I weren't happy with the way it was going. Then there was a conversation one day in the kitchen of Sandy and Trevor's flat in Chipstead Street in which the plan to form another band was hatched – the three of us were in it together. We just had to look for a bass player and a guitar player.

Was it Sandy's band, Trevor's band or everyone's?

Sandy really wanted to have a vehicle for her own songs, so we did more or less concentrate on her material along with some traditional stuff and contributions from Trevor. Nobody cracked the whip. It was a friendly band. No-one had any ambition of storming the charts or getting rich. Money didn't come into it – there wasn't any.

What was the dynamic between Trevor and Sandy?

I think they were just in love, and from love comes great things – but we were all mates together. Trevor was very much a party type person. There wasn't going to be anything deep and meaningful going on – it was all going to be fun and we all got swept along on that sort of vibe.

They have been characterised as the Sid and Nancy of folk rock; was theirs a noticeably volatile relationship?

It did eventually become that way. Sandy did have quite a temper, bless her, so they would quarrel, but that never really included us – we just accepted that Sandy was that way. I remember backstage at a gig, Sandy was unhappy about something and I could hear her going on behind me, then suddenly she grabbed the bench I was

sitting on, not spotting me, and threw it across the room with me on it. It was more funny than anything else.

"Banks Of The Nile" is one of the performances of Sandy's career: can you remember much about recording it?

I remember it like yesterday. We did a few takes of it and we weren't happy, so we did what most people did in those days: stopped the session and went to the pub. And when we were a bit more refreshed we decided to come back and just jam it. It's something that we just did blind. Did we realise it was a special moment? No. We were never happy. It always could have been better.

Is it true that Fotheringay had a Bentley?

What we had was a couple of very dodgy Austin Princesses, which we didn't own. Our friend Jock had a car business and occasionally he'd take us to gigs in one of his Austin Princesses, so we were arriving in style but usually breaking down halfway home. The nearest Fotheringay came to a Bentley was when Jock asked me to take one to Chipstead Street for Roy Harper to pick up – I had it for about an hour.

Is the talk about 'Stonehenge' – Fotheringay's massive PA system – overstated?

It was true and it was silent. It was Trevor's brainchild – he went to WEM, who were making PAs, and laid out a plan to build a big system. Sure enough, they built it and it was enormous. The only problem was that when you set it up, you could put your head in it and you still wouldn't hear anything. It was a bit of a white elephant.

Fotheringay's country retreat to Chaffinches Farm seemed to involve more swimming than songwriting. True?

That's fairly accurate. We did do one rehearsal, but the rest of the time Pat Donaldson and I were gardening. Then our roadie at the time – his brother had a motorbike shop – got a couple of BSAs for us and we had time trials up the side of the house or would ride them over the sand dunes in East Wittering. I'm not sure what we were preparing to do – we were just there.

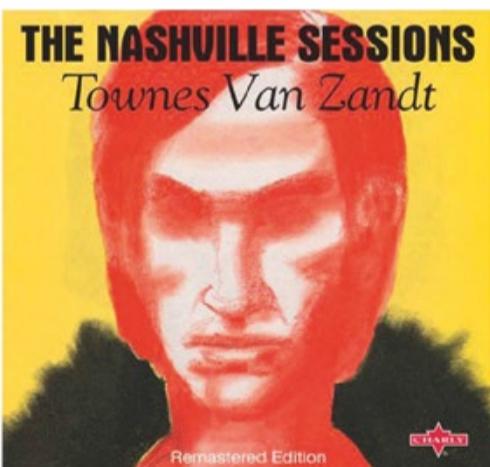
Sandy split Fotheringay to go solo. Can you remember how that came about?

Sandy came in in floods of tears to say that she had been persuaded to do the solo career and had to leave the band. After that we had a short meeting with the rest of us to decide whether we were going to carry on and get somebody else, but without Sandy it wasn't a goer. The band only really survived for a year. This is a four-disc set – I am amazed that there is that much material available.

"No-one wanted to storm the charts... Money didn't come into it – there wasn't any..."

Joe Boyd seems to have been fairly dismissive of Fotheringay.

He wanted either Fairport with Sandy or Sandy as a solo act, but what people failed to understand about Sandy was that her driving force in life was the sort of solidarity that came from being in a friendly band. She wanted to be successful – we all did – but I don't think it was top of her list. First of all was that life should be nice, and that she should have nice people around her.



TRACKLIST

- 1 At My Window
- 2 Rex's Blues
- 3 No Place To Fall
- 4 Buckskin Stallion Blues
- 5 White Freight Liner Blues
- 6 Snake Song
- 7 Loretta
- 8 Two Girls
- 9 Spider Song
- 10 When She Don't Need Me
- 11 Pueblo Waltz
- 12 Upon My Soul

TOWNES VAN ZANDT

The Nashville Sessions

CHARLY

Reissue of sort-of-lost album by the songwriter's songwriter. By Andrew Mueller

7/10

IT COULD HAVE been the record that made him; maybe, even the record that saved him. In 1972, the 28-year-old Texan prodigy Townes Van Zandt had released his sixth studio album in five productive years, *The Late Great Townes Van Zandt*. It was arguably his best album to that point, and certainly contained what would become Van Zandt's best-known song – “Pancho & Lefty”, since duetted upon by Merle Haggard

and Willie Nelson, and recorded or performed by Emmylou Harris, Hoyt Axton, Bob Dylan and Steve Earle, among uncountable others. Keen to keep up with songs pouring out of him, in early 1974 Van Zandt returned to the studio to begin work on his seventh album, surely the big breakthrough, to be entitled *Seven Come Eleven*.

Seven Come Eleven ended up being lost as collateral damage in a dispute between Van Zandt's manager Kevin Eggers, and producer

Q&A

Kevin Eggers

What was Townes' state of mind at the time he recorded what should have been "Seven Come Eleven"?

He was a junkie. At the time, he offered to sell me all his copyrights for \$200. I told him if he sold his share of 'Columbine' I would never talk to him again and Jack Clement got pissed off, told him he was going to beat the shit out of him and the boys rolled around on some old lady's lawn in Nashville for 10 or 15 minutes. It was a dark time in our relationship, our friendship was on the rocks and I was tired of dealing with all his shit. An ironic twist to the tale: Lefty Frizzell, the great country star, was stone drunk and passed out in a corner of the studio as I mixed the record. Talk about a heavy omen. The album was never titled

'Seven Come Eleven' – I have no idea where that came from.

Is it true that "The Nashville Sessions" only exists because you snuck into Jack Clement's studio one night and recorded the masters onto cassettes? No, that story's all bullshit. I'd sold the Poppy label to United Artists and they were responsible for all the recording costs. Which they refused to pay after *The Late Great Townes Van Zandt* was a flop. I left with the masters under my arm and took them up to New York. I suspect the bullshit story started with John Lomax and Jack Clement.

What difference do you think it might have made if the album had appeared when it should have? No-one was interested in Townes Van Zandt at the time. Not the public, and certainly not United Artists. I'd run out of gas and was in the hole for over \$500,000 at the time with Townes. *INTERVIEW: ANDREW MUELLER*

Cowboy Jack Clement. The label concerned, Poppy, went bust. Van Zandt wouldn't release another album for five years – an interregnum substantially spent living in a tin shack outside Nashville with a teenage second wife named Cindy and a wolf-husky crossbreed called Geraldine, passing his days drinking, shooting narcotics and guns, and watching reruns of *Happy Days*. Six tracks originally cut for *Seven Come Eleven* would eventually be reworked for that long-delayed next album, 1978's *Flyin' Shoes*; others would surface on the later *Live At The Old Quarter* and *At My Window*. *Seven Come Eleven* itself would languish unheard for 20 years, until released as *The Nashville Sessions* in 1993, by which time Van Zandt had barely three years left to live.

This re-release of *The Nashville Sessions* heralds a welcome programme of reissues of Van Zandt's recordings for Poppy, and its later reincarnation, Tomato. It includes a lavish sleeve featuring Milton Glaser's original artwork, an illustrated 12-page booklet, and splendid liner notes by Rob Hughes of this parish. It has also been remastered from the original tapes – work more urgent in the case of *The Nashville Sessions* than for most albums.

According to persistent legend, the record only exists at all because Eggers, afeared that a vengeful Clement was about to erase the master tapes, crept into Jack's Tracks Studios one night and transferred Van Zandt's semi-complete work onto cassettes.

As such, no amount of buffing, polishing and scrubbing is ever going to make *Seven Come Eleven* sound like much beyond a bunch of half-baked demos – the sound overall is muddy and crackly, esses fizz against the microphone, a background tape hiss is perceptible throughout, and Van Zandt's vocals, many of which are surely guide tracks, are far from his most adroit. But a forgiving listener can nevertheless

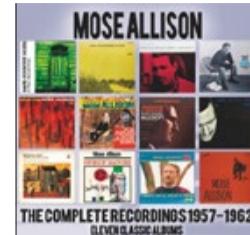
still enjoy this raw, lo-fi work-in-progress as, say, Van Zandt's *Nebraska*: certainly, the songs are good enough.

Some, indeed, rank high among his finest. The opening tune "At My Window", later the title track of Van Zandt's 1987 album, is an especially heartbreakingly hint of what might have been, 14 years earlier – "Living is sighing," croons Van Zandt, nailing one of his trademark nihilist aphorisms over a swell of sumptuous countrypolitan strings, "Dying says nothing at all." "No Place To Fall" waltzes between a knelling piano and a gently giddy accordion, Van Zandt pleading for pre-emptive forgiveness of the troubadour's unreliability: "I ain't much of a lover, it's true/I'm here then I'm gone/And I'm forever blue." "Loretta", a few tracks later, sounds a sketch of the infinitely tolerant ideal imagined recipient of such an apology: "Oh, Loretta, won't you say to me/Darling put your guitar on/Have a little shot of booze/Play a blue and wailing song." Between the whisper of rueful self-mockery in his delivery, and the upbeat zydeco swing of the melody, Van Zandt just about gets away with it.

Despite this, and the case made by bluegrass shuffle "White Freight Liner" and the closing gospel rave "Upon My Soul", upbeat was never Townes Van Zandt's natural habitat. As a general rule, on *The Nashville Sessions* as throughout Van Zandt's entire catalogue,

the more wretched he sounds, the better – and on the best parts of *The Nashville Sessions* he almost makes melancholy sound a condition to be envied. "Two Girls", a recognisable musical cousin to "Pancho & Lefty", is a surreal, hungover delusion ("All Beaumont's full of penguins/And I'm playing it by ear"), and "When She Don't Need Me" says all Van Zandt ever had to say, pretty much: "Cling to the darkness/Until you've turned to song."

On The Nashville Sessions, the more wretched Townes Van Zandt sounds, the better



8/10

MOSE ALLISON The Complete Recordings 1957-62

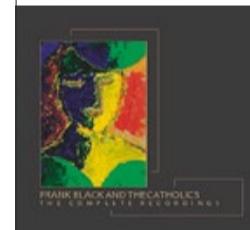
ENLIGHTENMENT

11 bluesy jazz LPs that influenced a generation of Brit rockers

For a mild-mannered, nerdy jazz pianist from Mississippi, Mose Allison has sure been an oddly influential figure in rock history, inspiring everyone from the Stones to the Pixies and being covered by The Who, The Clash and dozens more in between. This cheap-as-chips (eight quid!) boxset crams 110 songs onto five discs, collating every track from his first 11 albums – from 1957's *Back Country Suite* (recorded just after he moved to New York, and featuring the much-covered "Young Man Blues") to 1962's near faultless *I Don't Worry Bout A Thing* (featuring the hilariously bitchy "Your Mind Is On Vacation"). Mose always plays with a piano/bass/drums trio, each LP featuring around three instrumentals for every two vocal tracks. He's a wonderfully quirky pianist – idiosyncratically bebopish on "Let Me See", quizzically bluesy on "Crepuscular Air", often reminiscent of Vince Guaraldi or Dudley Moore. He even shows himself to be a serviceable trumpeter on "Trouble In Mind". But, on faves like "Parchman Farm", the USP remains that voice – straining at the top of his baritone register, as if he's forcing out those painfully witty truths under duress. Occasionally he sounds like Prince Charles singing the blues, which kinda suits those slightly surreal lyrics.

EXTRAS: None.

JOHN LEWIS



6/10

FRANK BLACK AND THE CATHOLICS The Complete Recordings

COOKING VINYL

As complete as it gets – with an extra disc of demos

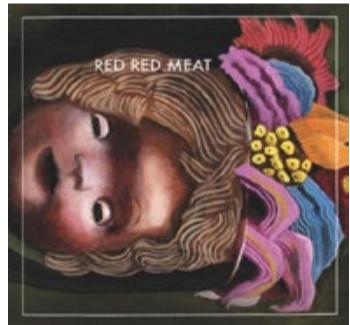
Frank Black's first outing with his new post-Pixies crew filled plenty of devotees with dismay. His three solo albums had kept them on side via the odd UFO mention, mean riffs with a hardcore bent and occasional waves of mutilated surf guitar, but suddenly all that was gone. In its place was a masculine alt.rock compound born of sweaty rehearsal rooms and an interest in myriad sub-genres, Christian rock included. Black had zero interest in revisiting Pixies' glories, as this seven-disc set attests. It features the six LPs from 1998's self-titled debut to 2003's *Show Me Your Tears*, all famously recorded live to two-track. The collection is organised alphabetically by song title so as to "get away from the preciousness of LPs" – a smart idea, if listening to the grimly pedestrian last record in one session is the alternative. Only those with blind faith could love everything here, but dipping in randomly produces gems such as the expansive "Western Star" (off *Pistolero*), "Stupid Me"'s sultry lounge blues and the Bowie-ish glam of "Blast Off", both from *Dog In The Sand*, easily the Catholics' best.

EXTRAS: *True Blue*, a 12-song disc of demos, recorded live to one-track and pulled from engineer Ben Mumphrey's archive.

SHARON O'CONNELL

Rediscovered! ▶

Uncovering the underrated and overlooked



RED RED MEAT Bunny Gets Paid

JEALOUS BUTCHER

8/10

Twenty years on, the defining document by Chicago outsider blues crew gets its extended vinyl reissue

There was a point when Red Red Meat looked like they might be a big deal. In 1994, grunge was booming and the Chicago group had an album, *Jimmywine Majestic*, on the coolest label in the land, Sub Pop. Tour dates with Smashing

Pumpkins paved the way for alt.rock ubiquity. But as opportunities opened up, Red Red Meat were turning away from success and following their music – a cranked-up update of 1970s country and blues-rock – down weirder avenues.

After Red Red Meat's split, several members went on to play in Califone, who have gone on to release some dozen records blending rootsy Americana with state-of-the-art technology. Actually, though, this sound began to coalesce earlier – most plainly on 1995's *Bunny Gets Paid*. "Bunny... was the record where we found our voice," recalls frontman Tim Rutili. "It felt like the first time in my life I was making good music, and found that I could write personal songs that fit with pieces built with the band out of captured, spontaneous moments. Some of the change in direction came from rejecting what we saw while touring the year before. It felt right to subvert what we had done in the past, stop worrying what everyone else was doing and how we would come over."

Bunny Gets Paid finds the four-piece's radio-ready sound unravelling like an old poncho, old roots sprouting in unlikely new directions. Opener "Carpet Of Horses" sets the scene, six minutes of simmering electronics over which Rutili picks out frayed acoustic chords and croons the occasional lyric that sounds like some old outlaw country song cut up and reassembled, Burroughs-style. Elsewhere, the scope is broad, encompassing Glimmer Twins caterwaul ("Rosewood, Wax, Voltz + Glitter"), somnambulant post-rock ("Variations On Nadia's Theme") and spaced, poetic ruminations on decay ("Gauze"). This 20th-anniversary edition pushes the boat out even further, its sundry lost tracks including a seven-minute dub track, "Mouse-Ish (Dub Remix)".

"We thought we were making a massive hit record like *Astral Weeks* or Big Star's *Third*," recalls Rutili. Instead, *Bunny Gets Paid* probably finished off their chance of mainstream success for good. But 20 years on, it's barely aged, a slanted and strange take on American music that still sounds rich with possibilities.

LOUIS PATTISON



EDDIE BO

Baby I'm Wise:
The Complete RIC
Singles 1959-62
ACE

22-track compilation
from legendary New
Orleans R'n'B king

8/10

The New Orleans singer and pianist born Edwin Bocage (1930-2009) was around 40 when he recorded the much-sampled funk hits for which he's best known – "Check Your Bucket", "Hook And Sling", "Lover And A Friend". He'd actually been making records since the mid-'50s, and these 24 tracks are singles from his spell on the family-run Crescent City label Ric & Ron. Bo was one of the last "junker"-style N'Awlins pianists, and it's curious that he hardly touches the piano on these singles. You can hear his twin-fisted jabbering on the Ray Charles-ish "Warm Daddy", but the real USP is his voice – a high-pitched, almost feminine tenor that simply soars above any setting. There are novelty singles which established mini dance crazes in 1962 – "Check Mr Popeye" and "Now Let's Popeye" – and there are uptempo shuffles with wayward drummers and Benny Hill sax solos ("Hey There Baby", "Ain't It The Truth Now"). Where the vinyl versions leap off the turntable, these soundfiles are a little flat and lifeless, but they are better quality than any Eddie Bo stuff you'll find on Spotify.

EXTRAS: Extras here include some previously unreleased tracks, including the wonderful 6/8 belter "I'll Do Anything For You".

JOHN LEWIS



THE BONNIWELL MUSIC MACHINE

The Bonniwell
Music Machine
BIG BEAT

10/10

The dark underbelly of the West Coast sound

With their 1 min 57 secs of immortality, 1966's "Talk Talk", the Music Machine ascended into the echelons of rock'n'roll untouchables. Unlike many a one-hit wonder, though, shaman Sean Bonniwell and his ever-mutating lineups presided over a true wellspring of top-drawer creepy-crawly material. "Double Yellow Line" and "Absolutely Positively" for example, with their intertwining keyboards and spooked electric guitars, are slithery masterpieces, augured by Bonniwell's looming, booming shadow of a voice. This set, spotlighting the group's oft-denigrated second (and final) LP, but also digging deep into unheard rehearsals, home demos, and a devastating, 1968 farewell studio session – see the apocalyptic tale of innocence lost, "Dark White" – is an embarrassment of riches. Early folk/rock from Bonniwell's proto-band the Ragamuffins lends context; a handful of impressive sketch demos hint at what could have been. In between, from Bonniwell's perch, overseeing LA's psych underground at its inception, he lets loose a barrage of inimitable lyrical surprises – funny putdowns and life in the foodchain, astrological visions and ecological treatises. "Does anyone know what the asking price of life is today?" he probes in "Point Of No Return" sounding, as ever, like Arthur Lee's slightly crazed, significantly less-respected black-sheep brother.

EXTRAS: None.

LUKE TORN



BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB

Lost And Found

WORLD CIRCUIT

Outtakes, extras and tasty leftovers from Cuba's ripest crew

It's almost two decades since a bunch of Havana pensioners came out of retirement to sell seven million albums and create a romantic legend. A couple of them are still valiantly touring but most of the head honchos – vocalists Compay Segundo and Ibrahim Ferrer, pianist Ruben González and bass supremo Cachaito Lopez – are long deceased. The only surprise is that the enterprising UK-based label behind the phenomenon has waited so long to raid the vaults for unreleased gems from their valediction. If these 13 tracks recorded between 1996 and the early 2000s can't match the perfect cohesion of the parent album, the collection's calling card is its diversity. The spritely "Macusa", sung by the ninetysomething Segundo, and the stately "Lagrimas Negras", a classy showcase for the diva-esque Omara Portuondo – both from the original Ry Cooder-produced sessions – are obvious highlights. But the last joyous piano effusions González cut before his death in 2003 and a jazzy, syncopated improv from a 2001 Cachaito solo session are full of timeless grace and elegance, while the elegiac bolero singing of Ferrer conjures an autumnal mood of tender regret not a million miles from Dylan's *Shadows In The Night*.

EXTRAS: None.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

ERIC CABOOR & DAVID KAUFFMAN

Songs From Suicide Bridge

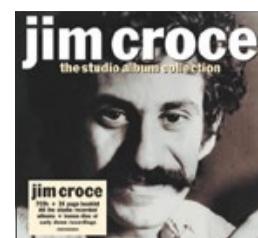
MODERN CLASSICS/LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

Private-press, loser-folk classic exhumed

David Kauffman moved to LA from Madison, Wisconsin in 1978, hoping to make his way as a singer-songwriter. LA had other ideas, and when Kauffman teamed up with like-minded soul Eric Caboor, their efforts were met with indifference by a town in the grip of new wave. By 1983, the two cashed in their chips, recording a selection of their most unpopular songs on a four-track and pressing 500 copies. It's an extraordinary record, opening with Kauffman's "Kiss Another Day Goodbye" (recently covered by William Tyler), which finds the song's narrator marooned on the beach, contemplating the end ("The California sun was all I had for breakfast, and it burned my mind"). It's not the only suicidal tune. Caboor's "Neighbourhood Blues" has the singer identifying with a lonesome loser, a thought which turns into a prayer on the lovely "Angel Of Mercy". The pain is unbearable on Kauffman's "Life And Times On The Beach", a "Bohemian Rhapsody" of suicidal depression running to eight minutes. Happily – well, that's overstating it – *Songs From Suicide Bridge* ends on a redemptive note: Caboor's "One More Day" is still deathly, but is delivered gently, with a glimmer of emotional resilience.

EXTRAS: None.

ALASTAIR MCKAY



JIM CROCE

The Studio Album Collection

EDSEL

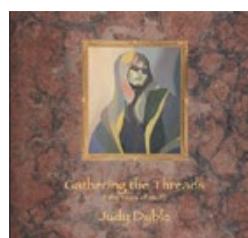
Doomed blue-collar troubadour's complete works spread over seven discs

When Jim Croce's aeroplane crashed in Louisiana in 1973, he was 30 years old and had just enjoyed his first major hit with "Bad, Bad Leroy Brown". Death propelled his career to fresh heights – the morbidly poignant "Time In A Bottle" made him the third posthumous artist after Otis Redding and Janis Joplin to top the singles chart, and his final album, *I Got A Name*, spawned three more hit singles. Listening to his entire output recorded between 1966 and 1973, and collected over six discs, is like an aural pageant of the American folk revival in microcosm, from the earnest Tom Paxton/Gordon Lightfoot stylings of his debut, *Facets*, through two discs of duets with his wife Ingrid in Ian & Sylvia mould, before he finally emerges as a masterful storyteller on 1972's *You Don't Mess Around With Jim*, strongly influenced by James Taylor but with a tougher, man-of-the-people blue-collar edge. By then, he had less than 18 months to live, and it seems tragically apt that the plane in which he died never got airborne, but crashed on take-off.

EXTRAS: A seventh disc of home-studio demos, **6/10** including lovely, stripped-down versions of hits "Operator" and "Time In A Bottle", plus a 36-page booklet.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

7/10



JUDY DYBLE

Gathering The Threads

STARCRazy

Bookish singer catalogues her work

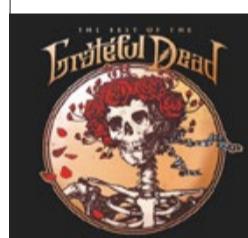
Explanatory subtitle '50 Years Of Stuff' is a little misleading since, after five

productive years in Fairport Convention, with Giles, Giles & Fripp and folk-psych duo Trader Horne, Dyble retired to the English countryside in 1972 for some 30 years. The first disc (of three) rounds up these early years, including the pre-Fairport Judy and the Folkmen and a mercifully edited improvised piece with boyfriend Richard Thompson. Since returning in 2004, Dyble has effectively recorded five albums and countless one-off projects; she's still modestly bemused by collaborators beating a path to her door. It's this later work which really fires the imagination, whether it's an atmospheric "I Talk To The Wind" from King Crimson's debut, or "Shining", with added Fripp soundscaping, recorded with Marc Swordfish, her partner on 'comeback' album *Enchanted Garden*. A 2008 single with The Conspirators revs up "One Sure Thing" from Fairport's early repertoire, giving Dyble a surprise Top 10 indie hit. *Gathering The Threads* closes with the swing time "Radiowaves", duetting with Jackie McAuley from Trader Horne. "Jenny May" from their sole album and Fairport's debut single "If I Had A Ribbon Bow", both performed live last year, complete the circle on an enchanting, esoteric collection.

EXTRAS: None.

MICK HOUGHTON

8/10



GRATEFUL DEAD

Best Of The Grateful Dead

RHINO

Brave but unbalanced attempt at an almost impossible task...

7/10

Few bands can be harder to anthologise than the Dead.

Many of their most cosmic moments came on extended improvs captured on a series of expansive and inviolable live recordings, and pragmatically enough, this two-disc, 32-track collection concentrates exclusively on their 13 studio albums. Sequenced chronologically, the cream comes on Disc One, running from the raw energy of their 1966 debut to 1977's *Terrapin Station*. The once-rare single version of "Dark Star", eight selections from the brilliant, semi-acoustic Americana milestones *Workingman's Dead/American Beauty* and the exquisite, complex mid-period invention of "Unbroken Chain" and "Estimated Prophet" offer abundant evidence that their studio songcraft was frequently as magical as their freewheeling jams. But Disc Two, drawn from the final four patchy albums, generates a lop-sided feel. From the Lowell George-produced attempt to commercialise their sound on 1978's *Shakedown Street* to their swansong, 1989's *Built To Last*, there are only tantalising flashes of the sublime stuff found on Disc One. It might be simplistic to suggest the change in the musical alchemy mirrored a switch in the drugs of choice from weed and acid to coke and smack; but it's probably not that far from the truth.

EXTRAS: None.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



IRON AND WINE

Archive Series
Volume No 1

BLACK CRICKET

Four-track origin stories from the singer-songwriter Sam Beam's songwriting has become ever more

sketched out over the years, now painted in rich oils with brass, strings and upbeat hoedowns. But it started as beautifully shaky pencil drawings, his voice soft and slightly obscured behind a screen door of lo-fidelity, his guitar hinting at John Fahey's sense of country realism touched by transcendence. Written while Beam was still a teacher at a Florida college and heard only by his family, these four-track recordings come from the same period as his debut *The Creek Drank The Cradle* (which went on to sell nearly 200,000 copies), and share their naïvety and romance. There are plenty – probably too many – pretty tales of couples whispering sweet nothings in each others' ears, and it's a bit of a relief when "Halfway To Richmond" arrives, full of frustration at a relationship decaying from when the couple were once "fucking with the lights left on/Til every ounce of strength was gone". But throughout, Beam shows off his ear for the kind of guitar part that, were it scaled up by someone like Coldplay, would fill stadiums – and then drowsily cycles it into reverent repetition.

EXTRAS: None, but keep an eye out for the live performances in accompanying film *Iron & Wine: Dreamers And Makers Are My Favorite People*.

BEN BEAUMONT-THOMAS



ALEJANDRO JODOROWSKY

The Holy Mountain OST/The Dance Of Reality OST

FINDERS KEEPERS

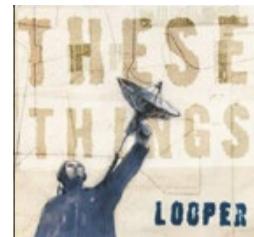
Legendary psychedelic soundtrack returns

In last month's *Uncut*, the Chilean filmmaker Jodorowsky recounted his experiences making his magic-realist fable *The Holy Mountain* under the influences of LSD. Evidently, many of his on-set practices filtered through to the recording studio, where he also directed proceedings. Recorded with jazz trumpeter Don Cherry and arranger Ronald Frangipane, *The Holy Mountain OST* is a vivid mix of psych folk, hard rock, jazz improv and less definable pieces involving bees humming, Tuvan throat singers and the sound of one man screaming. Although dating from 1973, legal tussles between Jodorowsky and Allen Klein, the film's producer, means this is the first full-scale release for the album. The director's score for 2013's *The Dance Of Reality* is a calmer experience, as befitting a man in his eighties. Recorded with his son and occasional Devendra Banhart collaborator Adan, the tone is reflective, the instrumentation more conventional. Despite promising titles like "Ibañez Orgasm" and "The Midget", it never matches the phantasmagorical levels of *The Holy Mountain*. But the wintry orchestrations and ruminatory vibes at least deliver a welcoming corrective to the bombast of many of today's film soundtracks.

EXTRAS: None.

MICHAEL BONNER

8/10



LOOPER

These Things

MUTE

Fresh filing system for the Scottish electro/ indie band

The Glaswegian outfit formed by Belle And Sebastian bassist-turned-novelist Stuart David and his partner Karn, have taken an unusual approach to the boxset. Where most bands re-release albums in their original form with a few cursory extras, Looper have re-sequenced their three LPs and spread them across five discs, each of them re-named and themed in terms of sound. The Davids have also scattered tracks from their new album *Offgrid: Offline* (their first release in 13 years) across the discs in a package that they describe as "repurposed, recycled and renewed... an attempt to make something new out of something old". If it sounds more like a ploy to make a lot out of comparatively little, this new filing system in fact works beautifully. While "Kinokraft" digs into the band's more propulsive dance and hip-hop numbers, "Lexiphonics" collates the lengthier spoken narratives such as the mournful "Images Of A Shipwreck", a wonderful reflection on time, memory and a life run aground. Even with this peculiar modus operandi, the band's signature sound – spoken word couched in sample-strewn ambient soundscapes and gentle instrumentals – remains, and re-establishes Looper as an innovative band that, 18 years into their career, still sound like no-one else.

EXTRAS: None.

FIONA STURGES

7/10



THE PRETENDERS

The Pretenders

WARNER

Eight-album collectors' edition from the band's Warner years

7/10

This handsome retrospective of The Pretenders' major-label years showcases the best and the worst of the band's back catalogue, chronicling as it does Hynde and co's journey from fiery post-punk rockers to MOR crowd-pleasers, and a partial return to form with their late '90s effort *Viva El Amor*. The real joy here is in the early work: *Pretenders* and *Pretenders II* find a band basking in their new wave and punk roots, and at their commercial and creative peak. This era yielded such swaggering classics such as "Stop Your Sobbing", "Talk Of The Town", "Mystery Achievement" and "Brass In Pocket", songs which stand the test of time and best demonstrate the cool cynicism of Hynde's songwriting and the power of that rough-around-the-edges vibrato. No long-lasting band comes without its creative troughs, however, and later LPs such as *Get Close* might politely be described as "for completists only".

EXTRAS: This bells-and-whistles package is bursting with B-sides, live recordings and bonus tracks (the demos of "Talk Of The Town" and "I Go To Sleep" are highlights). Each album comes with relevant promo photos, ranging from moody monochrome to eye-wateringly shoulder-padded Technicolor, alongside music videos and hilariously lip-synched appearances on *Top Of The Pops*.

FIONA STURGES



RON NAGLE

Bad Rice

OMNIVORE

Fascinating curio from renowned US sculptor

Artist Ron Nagle fell into a music career by chance. Keen to drum

up business for his first one-man show in San Francisco, he came up with "61 Clay", a heaving blues-rock tune named after the gallery's address. It was enough to broker a deal with Warners, who duly brought in Jack Nitzsche as producer and a tranche of back-up talent that included Ry Cooder and two members of the Beau Brummels. Issued in 1970, *Bad Rice* is a highly impressive set that serves to showcase Nagle's musical diversity. "61 Clay" (recut with Cooder on guitar) and "Capricorn Queen" posit him as a rowdy rock'n'roller, his vocals like a raspier David Crosby. "Frank's Store" and "Somethin's Gotta Give Now" are more painterly and vaguely exotic, closer to the lyrical psych-pop of Randy Newman or the young Van Dyke Parks. Elsewhere there are loping ballads, traces of country and the odd splash of tropicalia. Formerly of Bay Area oddities the Mystery Trend, Nagle was clearly a consummate songwriter. Barbra Streisand, The Tubes and Dave Edmunds were among those who covered his work in the '70s. He continues to record, though sculpture has always been his chief calling.

EXTRAS: Bonus disc of outtakes and demos.

6/10 ROB HUGHES

8/10

SPECTRE

Ruff Kutz

PAN

Disorientating NY mix

Illbient is a sound that couldn't have evolved anywhere but New York, an experimental DJ culture rising out of Brooklyn

7/10

that mixed up hip-hop turntablism, dub production values and pre-Millennial tension. At the centre of the scene was WordSound, a label and collective founded by Skiz Fernando, aka Spectre. Illbient has been largely forgotten now, but this 90-minute mixtape – recorded by Fernando in 1998, now reissued on double vinyl by Bill Kouligas' avant-garde imprint PAN – is a reminder of what it did right. There's no tracklisting, giving the work a frisson of mystery, but occasional familiar voices or styles – the lugubrious flow of MC Sensational, the industrial clang of Kevin Martin's pre-Bug project Techno Animal – popping out the mix like faces emerging from fog. Illbient's somewhat academic pretensions meant it never really caught on as club music, but on record the sense of disorientation is pleasing. Old-skool MCs are dipped in echo, jazzy horns and double bass are laced through skeletal breakbeats, and Fernando drops field recordings from the New York streets to heighten the sense of strangeness. One voice proposes robbing people to make records, like "revolutionary army"; others ponder the existence of aliens. Pre-gentrification, pre-9/11, *Ruff Kutz* sounds like the last gasp of a weird old New York.

EXTRAS: None.

LOUIS PATTISON

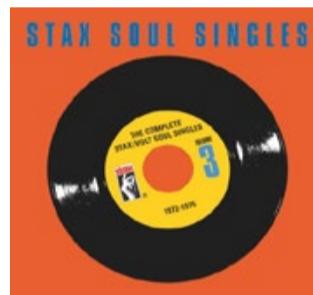
VARIOUS ARTISTS

The Complete Stax/Volt Soul Singles Vol 2 1968-71 The Complete Stax/Volt Soul Singles Vol 3 1972-75

UNIVERSAL

Reissued from 1993, 9- and 10-CD behemoths from the world's greatest soul label.

By Neil Spencer



8/10

back catalogue when Warner Brothers took over Atlantic Records, and lost its totemic star, Otis Redding, in a plane crash. Stax looked finished; instead it soared anew.

Like the rest of the music industry, the album would prove the future for Stax, with the company kept buoyant by the sprawling, million-selling 'symphonic soul' outings of Isaac Hayes. Still, even in the early 1970s, the golden age for albums by luminaries like Gaye, Wonder and Mayfield, the African-American market remained tuned principally to the 7" single, where love ballad and dance anthem held sway. Hit singles were no longer the *sine qua non* of rock music – consider Zeppelin or Floyd – but in soul, the breakout hit remained crucial.

Hence the sheer profusion contained in the two chunky boxes here, some 430 tunes in all, many without any parent album. It's a more diverse collection than the familiar finger-snapping Stax logo might suggest (in fact, many sides were issued on the subsidiaries of Volt, Enterprise, Respect and We Produce).

There is crisp Southern funk and deep soul aplenty from both Stax's star names – Johnnie Taylor, Rufus Thomas, The Staple Singers, The Emotions, Eddie Floyd – and from few-hit wonders like Veda Brown, Jean Knight and Shirley Brown. But there is also blues, 'northern' stompers, novelty offerings, Christmas records (including The Emotions' "Black Christmas"), film themes (Melvin Van Peebles' "Sweetback Theme"), country covers, and the blue-eyed soul of Delaney & Bonnie.

Such diversity, more apparent on Volume Two, reflected the ambitions of Stax's new driving force, Al Bell, elevated from head of promotions to Vice President by Stax founder Jim Stewart. Bell saw Stax as an emblem of black pride and empowerment, but he also harboured a vision of Stax as "a total record company" unrestricted by genre. The label's lifeblood had always been the productions of its McLemore studio, cut with the house band of Booker T And The MG's

WHEN STAX RECORDS re-emerged, phoenix-like, from the flames of corporate arson in mid-1969, it was with the simultaneous release of 27 albums. The label had lost its entire



Stax of facts: Isaac Hayes, and below, The Dramatics



The Soul Children

and the horns of the Mar-Keys, and drawing principally on local talent. No longer. Bell signed acts from all points of the compass, leased ready-made productions and increasingly sent Stax's acts to record at Alabama's Muscle Shoals, a studio that had lent its Midas touch to Aretha Franklin and Wilson Pickett before hosting the likes of The Rolling Stones and Paul Simon.

Bell's policy was not without success. The Staple Singers, one of the touchstones of the new Stax, sired masterpieces like "I'll Take You There" and "Respect Yourself" at Muscle Shoals, and among the cross-over hits here are buy-ins like Frederick Knight's wistful "I've Been Lonely So Long", but the family atmosphere and identity of Stax were broken, to the point where guitarist Steve Cropper, a lynchpin as writer, arranger and player, left in disillusionment.

Still, great singles and contenders for the R&B charts continued to roll out. Here you'll find blues classics like Albert King's "Crosscut Saw" and Little Milton's "Rainy Day" (alongside John Lee Hooker's less celebrated "Grinder Man"), intricate vocal harmony pieces like The Dramatics' "In The Rain", complete with elaborate aquatic effects, tough dancers like Veda Brown's "Short Stopping" and tearful slowies like Mel And Tim's gospel-soaked "Starting All Over Again" (modelled on Johnny Nash's "I Can See Clearly Now").

Infidelity and double-dealing are a constant theme, the narrative of Shirley Brown's "Woman To Woman", The Soul Children's "I'll Be The Other Woman", Johnnie Taylor's "Who's Making Love" (the first big hit of the post-Atlantic era), and William Bell's overlooked "Gettin' What You Want (Losing' What You Have)".

Though soaked in the church traditions of the South, the influence of rap-heavy bedroom crooning is often evident, not least on Bernie Hayes' "Tribute To A Black Woman" and on Ike

Hayes' edited-down single versions of "By The Time I Get To Phoenix", "Walk On By", et al.

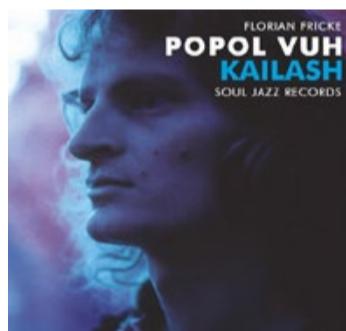
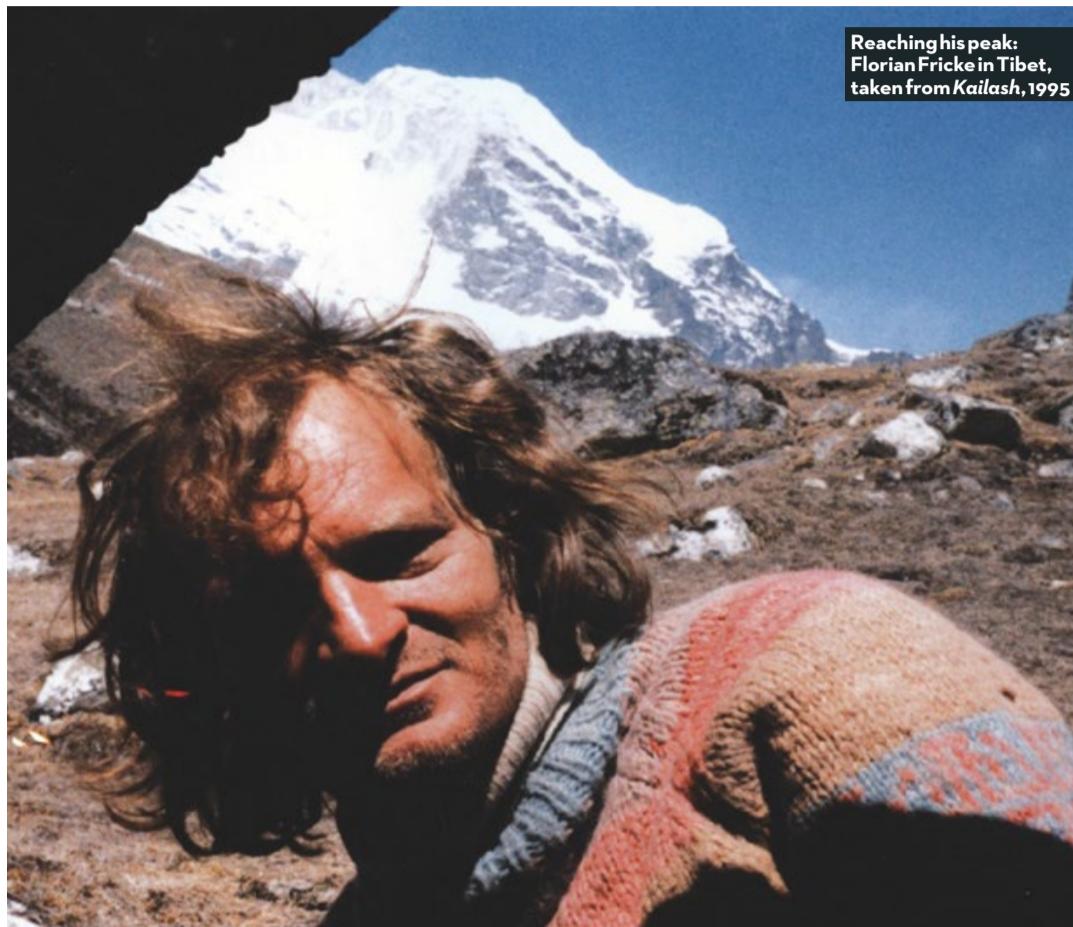
The call of the dancefloor is never far off, either. The irrepressible Rufus Thomas saw to that with "Funky Chicken" and "Funky Penguin", while "Singing About Love" by the obscure Jeanne And The Darlings is the kind of belter favoured by Northern Soul aficionados (though the group came from Arkansas). Other curios include Detroit's Black Nasty, a rock-soul amalgam partial to squealing guitars, and an impromptu grouping of Cropper, Albert King and The Staples for John Lee Hooker's "Tupelo".

Such in-studio inventions became increasingly uncommon once Cropper split; there would be no more MG's gems like "Soul Limbo" and "Time Is Tight". You can feel the energy draining from McLemore Avenue on Volume 3, which is notably lighter on hits despite the increased presence of Stax's major acts – William Bell, Emotions, Dramatics, Staples et al. The company, plagued by dubious fiscal dealings, wound up in 1975 with a whimper; the end of an era not just for Stax but for soul music, which would soon be eclipsed by disco.

EXTRAS: None.

The Specialist

Kosmische



FLORIAN FRICKE/POPOL VUH Kailash

SOUL JAZZ

8/10

Two CDs and a DVD collect lost material from Germany's kosmische mystic

Florian Fricke was of the generation of West German musicians involved in the movement that would become known internationally as Krautrock. Yet the music he made in his group Popol Vuh between the years 1970 and

his death in 2001 feels somewhat apart.

Groups like Can, Faust and Neu! were making music for a modern Germany, exploring new techniques, technologies and philosophies. In some ways Fricke was a modernist, too. He was among the first Germans to own a Moog synthesiser, which powered Popol Vuh's 1970 debut album *Affenstunde*, as well as the soundtrack he made for his friend Werner Herzog's feature film about Conquistadors searching for the mythical Inca city of El Dorado, *Aguirre, The Wrath Of God*. But Fricke would soon tire of the synthesiser, and albums from 1972's *Hosianna Mantra* onwards would focus on a spiritual, devotional music, using piano and more exotic instruments such as the oboe and tamboura. The guiding principle was not progress, but peace – or as Fricke put it: "Popol Vuh is a mass for the heart. It is music for Love. Das ist alles."

This new collection, sanctioned by Fricke's family, draws from two sources. The first disc collects eight solo piano recordings, a mix of unheard improvisations and sketches of more developed Popol Vuh pieces (three "Spirit Of Peace" pieces are test runs for the title track of the 1985 album of the same name; others appear to be prototypes of tracks from 1972's *Hosianna Mantra*). Fricke's playing is minimal but purposeful. As a youth, he practised Bach and Schubert, and surely could have been a concert pianist had the mood taken him. Indeed, he released an album of Mozart pieces in 1991.

Perhaps more interesting, though, is the DVD and accompanying soundtrack disc, which contain the long-lost *Kailash: Pilgrimage To The Throne Of The Gods*. A 53-minute film made by Fricke with Popol Vuh member Frank Fiedler operating the camera, it's a sort of travelogue charting the pair's journey up the mountain of the same name, a 21,000-foot peak in west Tibet considered holy by Hindus, Jains, Bonpos and Buddhists alike. Its slow pans across remote encampments, wandering yak-herders and pilgrims prostrating themselves as they make their ascent feel almost Herzogian in their craggy beauty. But the serenity of Fricke's vision shines through, in large part thanks to the music. "Buddha's Footprint" and "Valley Of The Gods" are billowing synthesiser pieces with subtle but effective ethnic flourishes that feel just one sheer face from the divine.

LOUIS PATTISON



THE STONES Three Blind Mice

CAPTURED TRACKS/
FLYING NUN

Lost Kiwi history, regained – clangy pop smarts

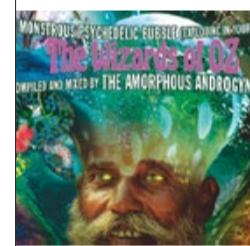
8/10

The Chills may have had the pop smarts, and

The Verlaines were more erudite, but of all the bands on the legendary "Dunedin Double" compilation, the landmark double-EP released by Flying Nun back in 1982, The Stones were the truest to a particular kind of music from New Zealand – rough around the edges, imperfectly poised between Velvets worship and punk DIY ethos, with just the right amount of laissez-faire. This might also be why they've slipped through the historical cracks: this is the first compilation of Stones material to be released, even though they were a significant part of the early Flying Nun story. Head Stone, the late Wayne Elsey, had been in Bored Games with Shayne Carter (of Straitjacket Fits), and he would later rejoin Carter in the Doublehappys. The Stones only released one EP, and of course, featured on one side of "Dunedin Double" – these recordings are compiled on *Three Blind Mice*, and make a case for The Stones as the most devil-may-care of the original Flying Nun cast, playing with bravado and insouciance, the better to access the rough-as-guts pop smarts at the core of their songs.

EXTRAS: Eight bonus live tracks on the CD **7/10** and download.

JON DALE



VARIOUS ARTISTS

A Monstrous Psychedelic Bubble Exploding In Your Mind – The Wizards Of Oz (Compiled And Mixed By The Amorphous Androgynous)

7/10

MONSTROUS BUBBLE/FESTIVAL

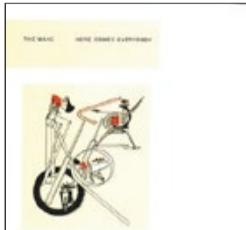
Seasoned heads summon the in sounds from way out Down Under

Australian psychedelic rock is going through a purple patch at the moment thanks to the likes of Tame Impala and Pond, so the timing of this 2CD compilation of deep-fried Antipodean freak-folk and cosmic exotica through the ages is, as far as these things go, impeccable. Assembled over two years by Brian Dougans and Garry Cobain of The Amorphous Androgynous – the duo behind Noel Gallagher's 'lost' album – *The Wizards Of Oz* is the latest instalment in their occasional *A Monstrous Psychedelic Bubble...* mix series.

Across 33 tracks, some of which are fairly sketchy, they unearth several gems from the psych-rock outback that was the Aussie prog scene of the 1970s and provide at least three answers to the question, who was the Australian Syd Barrett? It's SJC Powell, on the evidence of '75's "Governor Lane". Or possibly Pip Proud, whose weirdly nuanced "A Fraying Space" is one of the lighter finds here. Doug Jerebine's "Ain't So Hard To Do" riffs heavily on Hendrix, while vampire romp "Eyes Of The Witness" by Kongress is The Doors fronted by Arthur Brown. Respect, too, to the Aussie new-age outfit called Kanguru.

EXTRAS: None.

PIERS MARTIN



THE WAKE
**Here Comes Everybody +
Singles**
FACTORY BENELUX

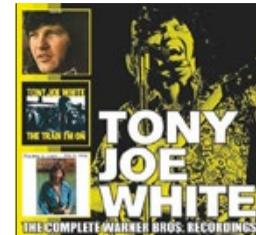
Deluxe version of
Glasgow Factory
act's 1985 album

7/10

Formed in 1981 after guitarist Gerard "Caesar" McNulty left Altered Images, The Wake were Factory Records also-rans, never quite escaping from the shadow of New Order, at least until they left the label for Sarah Records, where their more playful – some might say twee – sensibilities were allowed to surface. Their second album, from 1985, finds them itching to escape from the Martin Hannett template, and while the songs are at root quite conventional, austere atmospherics remain the core of the sound. The opening "O Pamela" has poppy elements, notably the insistent guitar, but the electronic drums, the walls of synth, and the reticent vocals locate it in a distinct time and place. Decades later, Nouvelle Vague would excavate the architecture of the song, remodelling it as an Astrud Gilberto-style shuffle. Various revivals of 1980s electronica make The Wake seem like pioneers. As such, *Here Comes Everybody* is their key release.

EXTRAS: It's the bonus tracks on this 2CD **8/10** set that make the strongest case for their talents, though. The breezy demo of "Crush The Flowers" is a gem of boy/girl pop, and the best thing here by a distance.

ALASTAIR MCKAY



**TONY JOE
WHITE**
**The Complete
Warner Bros
Recordings**
REAL GONE MUSIC

Bayou legend's early,
epochal years, collected

8/10

White's unique MO – a hard-knuckled mix of ragtag country, Southern soul and dirty, swampy blues, all governed by a husky baritone and the almighty groove – began at Monument Records, and his breakout hit, "Polk Salad Annie". By the time he graduated to Warners in 1971, label bigwigs, including Jerry Wexler, were grooming him for superstardom. The resultings, though, were perplexingly inconsistent (and commercial flops), mixing the transcendent with the mundane, immortal classics with the instantly forgotten. The eponymous Warners debut is at once tentative and intriguing, ranging from ho-hum bar-band fare ("My Kind Of Woman") to "Polk..." remakes, but highlighted by the inter-generational musings of "The Daddy" and "Change". *Homemade Ice Cream*, his Warners swansong, epitomised by a track called "Lazy", is almost fatally laidback, though not without scattered dark charms. Sandwiched between is White's secret masterpiece, *The Train I'm On*. Recorded in Muscle Shoals, its songwriting and execution are impeccable, highlighted by the pop-perfect "I've Got A Thing About You Baby" (later an Elvis No 1) and the ethereal beauty of "The Migrant".

EXTRAS: A half-dozen rarely heard non-LP **7/10** singles slam the door on White's most fertile, prolific era.

LUKE TORN

REVELATIONS

The Amorphous Androgynous
on Australasian psych



► Forgotten by the music mainstream and left to develop in its own weird way, there are parallels between Australia's 1970s prog scene and London's psych-rock specialists The Amorphous Androgynous, whose latest comp draws deeply from the well of zoned-out Antipodean gear. "When we played Oz in 2009 we joked that Rolf Harris and AC/DC were the sole exports of note," says AA's Garry Cobain, "but we were sent some tracks that opened our ears." Ordinarily, Cobain explains, AA are not restricted by geographical borders when assembling a mix. "That's what sets this volume apart. The Australasian music business is independent from its western counterpart, so little of the pre-'90s music has its place in the pantheon of cosmic space music." Citing Cybotron, Pip Proud, Sunset Strip and Geoff Krozier as acts worth investigating, Cobain has a soft spot for Aussie druids Kanguru. "I have an affinity for Christian psych – Jesus was a cosmic dude – but Kanguru was the only example of devotional Eastern-led mysticism we could find. We always insist on having that element in any mix." PIERS MARTIN

Richard Youngs
NO FANS COMPENDIUM
VHF

8/10

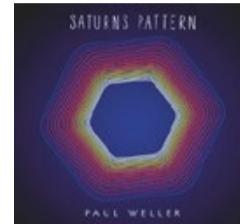
Mammoth seven-disc set of self-released obscurities

Though Richard Youngs started his No Fans private press back in 1990, to release his debut album, *Advent*, the imprint really came into its own in the mid-noughties: between 2005 and 2008, Youngs released 12 CD-Rs, in minuscule editions, selling them only at gigs or through Volcanic Tongue mail order (whose shopfront was down the road from Youngs' Glasgow home), which were uniquely personal documents of Youngs' working practices at their most bare. He eventually gave up on the medium due to its in-built obsolescence and degradation, but VHF – a label which has supported Youngs for many years – have pulled together some of those 12 albums for reissue in one seven-disc boxset. Taken together, the collection maps out the further reaches of Youngs' universe, from the live interventions and long-form freakouts of *20th... and 21st Century Jams*, through the electronic machinations of *No Home Like Place*, *Three Handed Star*'s oblique ruminations for accordion and chanted song, and perhaps the set's finest moment, *Garden Of Stones*' chiming, glinting, circular song suite. The compendium also features two unreleased albums, one head-scratcher from 1989, *Harpenden!*, and a recent 'New Age' set. Covers all bases, you might say.

EXTRAS: None.

JON DALE

COMING NEXT MONTH...



► A little under a year ago, **Paul Weller** met *Uncut* to discuss his new compilation, *More Modern Classics*. It was, he implied, something of a holding strategy – after three years of prolific

creativity, the cupboard, he said, was now pretty much bare.

Of course, that wasn't quite true, and at the end of the interview, he couldn't resist previewing a couple of new works in progress. Works in progress, it turns out, that were the foundation of *Saturn's Pattern*, the follow-up to the his impressive *Sonik Kicks*. Now as then, crunchy psych mod is the jumping off point. This being Weller, though, the album also nods to dub, funk and even Captain Beefheart – often at the same time.

You will want to hear cool new records by **Thee Oh Sees** and **Unknown Mortal Orchestra**, but particularly to the return of **My Morning Jacket** with **The Waterfall**.

Neither a head-jarring experiment nor a return to stirring country-rock jams, the album is sophisticated (by which we mean "80s-sounding"), but never at the expense of good tunes. Out near the bikes and lawnmower in the archive section, there's loads of good stuff: an 11-disc **Lead Belly** set, and a reissue

of what some might call the best **Super Furry Animals** album, their spectacular Welsh-language record, **Mwng**.

JOHN.ROBINSON.101@FREELANCE.TIMEINC.COM

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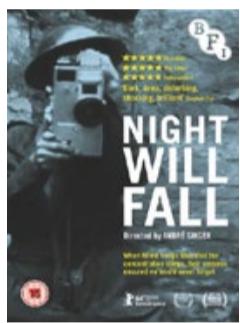
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THIS MONTH: SHERLOCK HOLMES | DEVO | EELS | FOO FIGHTERS

NIGHT WILL FALL

BFI

Harrowing Holocaust doc, restored. By Jonathan Romney



9/10

WHEN LISTS ARE drawn up of the great Holocaust documentaries, they are usually headed by Alain Resnais' concise but telling *Night And Fog* (1955) and by the exhaustive works of Claude Lanzmann, notably the encyclopedic *Shoah* (1985). A title until now missing from the canon is *German Concentration Camps Factual Survey*, a film only properly restored and shown last year. Filmed at the end of WWII by Allied forces at the liberation of Europe's camps, this project was designed to expose in full a horror that the world was then barely ready to confront in undiluted form. How that film was made and why it remained so long unseen is revealed in André Singer's remarkable new doc, *Night Will Fall*. Singer's film not only tells the story of the making of *Factual Survey* but also stands in its own right as a disturbing, moving and hugely important document about the Holocaust and its place in modern history. Commissioned by the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, *Factual Survey* set out to assemble in properly informative fashion the footage that was then being shot in various liberated camps by British, American and Russian camera teams. What is most painfully revealed by Singer's interviewees – among them, the cameramen and editors who worked on *Factual Survey*, as well as many camp survivors – is the horrific effect of these places' atrocities on witnesses who at that time could never have imagined what was being perpetrated there. The original commentary of *Factual Survey* speaks of British soldiers approaching Bergen-Belsen, and being charmed by surrounding vistas of "neat and tidy orchards [and] well-stocked farms..." – only for the impression to change when they came nearer the camp itself and were exposed to the charnel house smell emanating from it.

Factual Survey was put together under the aegis of producer Sidney Bernstein from Britain's Ministry of Information; Alfred Hitchcock was flown in from Hollywood as an advisor, and made two key contributions. One was his suggestion that the film needed to persuade its viewers that the horrors on display were absolutely real, by using long takes and panning shots without cuts. Another was the point that it was imperative to show that communities near the camps were fully aware of what was happening on their doorstep, and so complicit in it. Some of the most powerful footage shows well-fed local burghers being confronted with the reality of the camps, and

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Sgt Oakes and Lawrie
of the Army Film And
Photographic Unit

among the shocking contrasts on show are scenes of what appears an idyllic, pastoral Germany of lakesides and lederhosen, only a stone's throw from the death factories. There are also some bitterly poignant testimonies from camp survivors like Branko Lustig, then a Croatian child interned in Belsen, who grew up to produce *Schindler's List*: he recalls hearing the bagpipes of Scottish soldiers

and being convinced he was already dead and hearing angels.

Singer closely follows the making of Bernstein's film, with its literate voiceover scripted by future Labour minister Richard Crossman. Some of the most unsettling testimonies come from Bernstein's editors, who recall the shock of watching the raw material as it came in – especially the footage of Dachau which was first

viewed in negative, heightening the impression of watching images of hell. Not that much of the footage is less than infernal. Today we may consider ourselves hardened to the familiarity of sights shown in countless documentaries; even so be warned. The material here remains utterly disturbing – not just in the physical horror of the images of the living and dead, but in what they

SCORING:

10 A true classic 9 Essential 8 Excellent
7 Very good 6 Good 4-5 Mediocre 1-3 Poor



DEVO

Hardcore Devo

MVD VISUAL

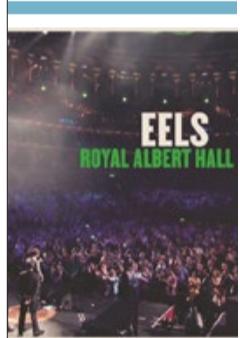
Mothersbaugh and Casale hit the basement in live concert film
Whether it's a celebration or a form of exorcism, here Mark and Bob Mothersbaugh and

Gerald Casale recreate their dank basement years, onstage at the Fox Theater, Oakland, and perform most of what they had written up until their 1977 breakthrough. So there's no "Whip It", of course, but instead we get thrilling, caustic versions of "Auto Modown", "Satisfaction" and the immortal "Jocko Homo", all in front of a devoted crowd.

EXTRAS: Alternate opening, the band's **4/10** guitar tech explains Mark Mothersbaugh's "Satisfaction" guitar.

TOM PINNOCK

8/10



EELS

Royal Albert Hall

EWORKS

E and friends hit London for a quiet take on their canon

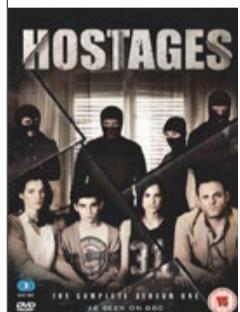
A visual accompaniment to the live album of the same name, capturing Eels' 2014 appearance at the titular venue. In a concession to the venerable surrounds,

it's a decorous performance. The members of Eels play in suits and ties, leaning largely on some gentler extracts from their canon – their "sweet, soft bummer rock", as leader Mark Everett describes it to the crowd. The genre has few more adroit practitioners, as demonstrated on the likes of "Parallels", "Where I'm From" and "It's A Motherfucker".

EXTRAS: None.

ANDREW MUELLER

8/10



HOSTAGES

ARROW

Against-the-clock TV thriller series from Israel

A Jerusalem surgeon is due to operate on the Israeli prime minister: the night before, masked men invade her home with a stark ultimatum: either the PM dies on her

operating table, or they kill her husband and kids. The setting renders this original 10-part Israeli series more intense and interesting than the American remake that starred Toni Collette, but the thriller business feels routine. It passes the time painlessly, but the pressure-cooker plot might have been better served by a tight, tense movie in the *Key Largo* mode.

EXTRAS: None.

DAMIEN LOVE

6/10



The Foos: they got history

FOO FIGHTERS

Sonic Highways

RCA

Grohl and co's surprisingly top-flight musical history doc

A LIVING REFUTATION of the "stupid drummer" joke, Dave Grohl has moved from the back of the stage with Nirvana to the front of his own band, the insistent, enormously successful Foo

Fighters. For the band's most recent album, *Sonic Highways*, Grohl moved somewhere less prominent again: behind the camera, becoming the producer/director/narrator of this 'making of' documentary with a difference. *Sonic Highways* follows the Foos as they record their upcoming LP in eight different American cities of musical note. Hang on, though. With quality research, first-hand knowledge gathered while schlepping around the country on tour, and an ear for both a scene and a story, this becomes both a personal geography and an extremely engaging history lesson.

A case in point would be Chicago. It's the home to Steve Albini's Electrical Audio, which serves as a gateway into Albini's enthusiasms, morality and history – not least with Nirvana. Of course, the city was also the laboratory of the electric blues, and duly Grohl gets brilliant, brilliant stuff from Buddy Guy, who tells an anecdote about Muddy Waters that will leave you beaming helplessly. The long-haired contextual authority is played by *Rolling Stone*'s David Fricke, while celebrity pals – including

Barack Obama – provide some additional colour.

Studios are more interesting than you'd think, it turns out. In New York, Fricke recalls walking past Electric Lady, Hendrix's bespoke facility, complete with – as Gene Simmons explains – underground river. Bowie is present anecdotally, via James Murphy.

Steve Rosenthal runs New York's Magic Shop, a sonically perfect cupboard in Hell's Kitchen, which has hosted recordings by Lou Reed, Patti Smith and Ramones. When the boyband wave broke in '98, the studio didn't try to compete, but went deeper into what it loved – launching a sound restoration business which has since performed Lazarine work on historic recordings by the likes of Woody Guthrie. Might Nora Guthrie be on hand to speak movingly on this topic, by any chance? Oh, of course, there she is.

There are, in among these joys, it must be added, the sequences during which Foo Fighters go through the process of recording their new compositions, and then play them in a full-tilt Reading Festival manner rather at odds with the sensitive work we've been watching. Nor can Grohl can't quite subdue his urge to clown cleverly in situations that excite him. In such moments he seems a little too pleased with himself, but then if you were him, watching this, you'd have every reason.

EXTRAS: Extended interviews with Dan Auerbach, **7/10** Chuck D, Billy Gibbons, Gibby Haynes, Joan Jett, Ian Mackaye, Dolly Parton, Carrie Underwood and Joe Walsh. **JOHN ROBINSON**



8/10

THE OFFENCE

EUREKA

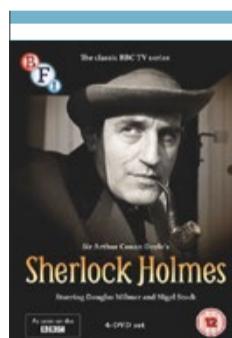
Sean Connery excels in hellishly downbeat Britcop drama

Shot after his reluctant return to 007 for *Diamonds Are Forever*, this small, curdled drama shows how keen Sean Connery was to experiment. Tautly directed by frequent

collaborator Sidney Lumet from a play by *Z-Cars* writer John Hopkins, Connery is the anti-Bond as a burned-out cop, engaged in a strange battle of wills during interrogation of suspected child-molester Ian Bannen (amazing). There are dim foreshadows of Lumet's despairing cop pieces *Serpico*, *Prince Of The City* and *Q&A*, but the bitter mood is brilliantly British.

EXTRAS: Extensive notes, archive Sidney **7/10** Lumet interview.

DAMIEN LOVE



SHERLOCK HOLMES

BFI

The BBC's original '60s series, rescued from the vaults

The Cumberbatch show takes the prize for smugness, but the definitive TV Holmes remains Jeremy Brett in Granada's sumptuous 1980s-'90s adaptations;

a performance less like acting and more like possession. The standard was first set, however, by Douglas Wilmer's reserved, upright Holmes in this fine 1964-'65 series, finally getting its UK home video debut. Shot on tape and largely studio-bound, it's slightly staid and stagey, but respect for the source material and guest stars like Peter Wyngarde exert a moody, monochrome spell.

EXTRAS: Commentaries, Wilmer doc, **9/10** missing episode reconstructions.

DAMIEN LOVE

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Films

BY MICHAEL BONNER

This month: Kurt Cobain's life is examined, Ben Stiller gets neurotic, the Western goes Dogme95 and Blade Runner returns...

Kurt Cobain: Montage Of Heck In the closing pages of her excellent memoir, *Girl In A Band*, Kim Gordon writes about performing with the surviving members of Nirvana last April, during their induction into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. Gordon describes the performance as an "explosion of grief", inspired in part by the breakdown of her own marriage to Thurston Moore, but especially "the furious sadness" she still felt at Kurt Cobain's death, 20 years previously. Cobain – and Nirvana – continue to exert a particular pull; indeed, one of the most surprising things about Brett Morgen's documentary is that this is only the first authorised film to appear since Cobain's death in April, 1994. What's also a surprise is how good *Kurt Cobain: Montage Of Heck* actually is. Filmed with unrestricted access to Cobain's archive – audio material, diaries, home videos – this film is the whole thing.

A thread running through *Montage Of Heck* concerns families. At first, this means Cobain's own relationship with his mother (good) and father (difficult); later on, the equally tricky one that he experiences with his wife, Courtney Love, and daughter Frances Bean. Cobain was raised in Aberdeen, Washington, described as "a lovely, awesome place to raise children" by his mother, Wendy. At this point, it would have been instructive to hear more from Cobain's estranged father, Don; if only to hear his side of the story in more detail. Like all teenagers, Cobain struggled to fit in. In his teens, there is marijuana – "the ultimate form of expression" – and then punk rock. "I was completely blown away," he says in a recording. "It expressed the way I felt, socially and politically." We follow Cobain's immersion into the underground, and the friendships and alliances he forms with likeminded souls; chief among them, Krist Novoselic, who becomes Nirvana's bassist. Novoselic is one of Morgen's key interviewees: an articulate man, whose relatively low profile since Cobain's death lends a freshness to the documentary.

Novoselic is a sympathetic guide through the first hour or so of the film, as Nirvana find an excitable and hungry audience for their music. Morgen's film considers the complex, self-conscious relationship Cobain and Nirvana had with their success. The arrival of Courtney Love offers a change of perspective. Considering the way Love and Cobain's relationship became embedded in the tabloid landscape, there's inevitably something uncomfortable about watching the home footage of



them larking about, semi-clothed, in bedrooms. They are not easy company to like: infantile and, considering their status, mostly embittered, they routinely goad each other into increasing levels of snark. The footage of Cobain, bouncing Frances Bean on his knee, mumbling The Muppets' "Mahna Mahna" to his infant daughter, is sad and shocking for the unflinching way it depicts the debilitating influence of heroin on Cobain. His face is covered in scabs, his eyes barely focusing. The film ends with Nirvana's performance of "Where Did You Sleep Last Night" on MTV's *Unplugged*. "I'll shiver the whole night through," Cobain sang, in doing so transforming this traditional American folk song into a haunting piece about addiction.

► **While We're Young** The writer and director Noah Baumbach's collaboration with Ben Stiller, which began with 2010's *Greenberg*, continues with *While We're Young*. In *Greenberg*, Stiller played a prickly fortysomething who starts an affair with a younger woman; here he plays another fortysomething who is similarly smitten by a youthful protagonist. Both films are preoccupied with the pull of youth and the challenges of ageing; but while *Greenberg* was quite a sad comedy about missed opportunities and personal failure, *While We're Young* is often played for broader laughs: it's less Woody Allen and more Judd Apatow, perhaps.

Stiller and Naomi Watts play documentary filmmakers whose marriage is significantly altered by a new friendship with a twentysomething couple (Adam Driver and Amanda Seyfried). Josh (Stiller), who has spent eight years working on a sprawling, unfocused film project, is flattered by the attention of Jamie (Driver), who presents himself as a fan of Josh's early work. Jamie and his wife, Darby (Seyfried), are loft-dwelling hipsters whose retro embrace of vinyl, board games, typewriters and a VHS collection is wittily contrasted with the older couple's reliance on current technology. One of the best scenes in *Greenberg* found Stiller's character attending a house party with a much younger demographic. "You're so sincere and interested in things," he cooed, while championing Duran Duran's "The Chauffeur" as the perfect cocaine song. This difficult, often cringeworthy courtship between the generations is very much the crux of *While We're Young*. Incidentally, Stiller, Watts and Driver are all terrific; though unusually for such a strong writer of female characters, Baumbach slightly undersells Seyfried's critical role. The dynamic between Stiller and Watts, especially, is solid: he is tightly wound and neurotic, while she is much looser. It's Watts' best work for a while. Props, too, to Beastie Boy Adam Horovitz, who plays one half of Stiller and Watts' baby-obsessed best friends.

Reviewed this month...



KURT COBAIN: MONTAGE OF HECK

Director
Brett Morgen
Starring
Kurt Cobain,
Courtney Love
Opens April 10
Cert 15
8/10



WHILE WE'RE YOUNG

Director Noah Baumbach
Starring
Ben Stiller,
Naomi Watts
Opens April 3
Cert 15
9/10



THE FALLING

Director
Carol Morley
Starring
Maisie Williams,
Florence Pugh
Opens April 24
Cert 15
7/10



THE SALVATION

Director Kristian Levring
Starring
Mads Mikkelsen,
Eva Green
Opens April 15
Cert 15
6/10



BLADE RUNNER: THE FINAL CUT

Director
Ridley Scott
Starring
Harrison Ford, Sean Young
Opens April 3
Cert 15
9/10



Kurt Cobain in one of the "uncomfortable" home movies in *Montage Of Heck*

► **The Falling** An interesting detour for Carol Morley into British folk horror, *The Falling* chronicles events at a girl's school in 1962. There, we meet best friends Lydia (*Game Of Thrones'* Maisie Williams) and Abbie (Florence Pugh), an older, more sexually experienced girl whose apparent pregnancy triggers off a spate of faintings that spread through the school. Morley, who has principally specialised in semi-documentaries including *The Alcohol Years* and *Dreams Of A Life*, focuses here on similar themes to Peter Yates' *Picnic At Hanging Rock* – another eerie film interested in female friendships, emerging sexuality and weird goings on – but also Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures*, about the volatile relationship between two teenage girls. Closer to home, it's possible to see elements of Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* at work here. But perhaps the most pertinent reference points for *The Falling* are the films of Ben Wheatley. Morley corrodes the film's realism with a growing sense of the unexplainable; much as Wheatley did with *Down Terrace* and, to some extent, *Kill List*. The whiff of something old and pagan – another favourite Wheatley trope – is strong here. A bible reading during class that leads to a fainting, for instance, is intercut with shots of the school grounds and weird, looped music. Essentially, this is a film that functions on atmosphere and mood. Scenes seem to jerk to life, as if from a static position. The whole thing looks like it's been shot on 1960s film stock, which imbues it with the qualities of a cult period piece. The Alternative School Orchestra perform chamber-pieces that sound better suited to *The Wicker Man* (there is a score by Tracey Thorn, but it is often distracting). The largely female cast are all excellent, with Williams and newcomer Pugh both strong, intuitive actors. Many of the adults react to

Kurt and Courtney are not easy company to like: infantile and embittered

original remains to be seen, of course. However, a big screen is always the best way to watch events unfold in Los Angeles 2019 – it's only four years away now! Scott's vision – somewhere between Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks* – still stands up, enhanced by the detailed model work and design, headed up by Kubrick veteran, Douglas Trumbull. The incredible layering of fabrics and furniture, for instance, inside the apartment of genetic designer JF Sebastian, resembles an update of Miss Havisham's cobweb palace in *Great Expectations*. As with the rest of Scott's superior film, the closer you look, the more there is to see.

the events unfolding in the school in disparaging ways – "Standards of behaviour must be kept," insists the headmistress. "This is a school, not a mental institution," objects a colleague.

► **The Salvation** Ostensibly a lean revenge Western, *The Salvation* is an interesting experiment in mixing different methodologies. The film wears its familiar influences comfortably – Ford, Hawks, Leone – but Danish director Kristian Levring was one of the original four members of the Dogme95 Collective, and accordingly, it shares some, though not all, of that movement's cinematic goals. The setting is the American frontier in 1870, where a former Danish soldier, Jon (Mads Mikkelsen), kills his family's murderers, in turn bringing down the wrath of the local despot Delarue (Jeffrey Dean Morgan). Terrified of Delarue, the local townspeople – headed by Jonathan Pryce's cowardly mayor – betray Jon and his brother (Mikael Persbrandt). What follows is fairly bloody and not a little predictable; but

not without its charms. With the town still largely under construction – often signified only by flimsy wooden frames – *The Salvation* recalls Lars Von Trier's *Dogville*. In a more tangential way, it also brings to mind Thomas Vinterberg's *Dear Wendy*; another violent, stylised film set in a tightly focused environment. Mikkelsen aims for a kind of Eastwood stoicism, while Morgan seems to be channelling the spirit of Powers Boothe. Meanwhile, Eric Cantona turns up as Delarue's stocky, bearded chief henchman, and Eva Green – as a mute survivor of an Indian raid taken in by Delarue – manages to do much with an admittedly limited part. *The Salvation* is the most self-conscious of the recent run of Westerns –

Blackthorn and *The Homesman* among them – ostensibly because it's shot by an outsider, looking in at the genre. At 92 minutes, it's brisk enough.

► **Blade Runner: The Final Cut** A welcome re-release for Ridley Scott's future noir, made all the more timely by the news that Harrison Ford will participate in the forthcoming sequel. Whether that film will prove the equal of Scott's 1982

original remains to be seen, of course. However, a big screen is always the best way to watch events unfold in Los Angeles 2019 – it's only four years away now! Scott's vision – somewhere between Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks* – still stands up, enhanced by the detailed model work and design, headed up by Kubrick veteran, Douglas Trumbull. The incredible layering of fabrics and furniture, for instance, inside the apartment of genetic designer JF Sebastian, resembles an update of Miss Havisham's cobweb palace in *Great Expectations*. As with the rest of Scott's superior film, the closer you look, the more there is to see.

Also out...

ALTMAN

OPENS APRIL 3

Reviewed last issue; strong doc about the great filmmaker behind *MASH*, *The Long Goodbye* and more.

FAST & FURIOUS 7

OPENS APRIL 3

Too speedy to even include the definite article in its title – now with added Jason Statham.

THE WATER DIVINER

OPENS APRIL 3

Australian farmer searches for his missing sons after the Battle of Gallipoli. Russell Crowe directs and stars.

HOT TUB TIME MACHINE 2

OPENS APRIL 10

John Cusack has elected not to return for the sequel, where his pals go into the future.

JOHN WICK

OPENS APRIL 10

Former hitman Keanu Reeves comes out of retirement to kill lots of people.

John Wick



JUAJA

OPENS APRIL 10

Drama set in 19th-Century Patagonia. Viggo Mortensen searches for his fugitive daughter.

THE TOWN THAT DREADED SUNDOWN

OPENS APRIL 10

Remake of a 1976 horror, in which a group of plucky and photogenic teens are killed, one by one, in gruesome but ironically funny ways.

CHILD 44

OPENS APRIL 17

Actorly work from Tom Hardy and Gary Oldman in this Soviet-era thriller about child murder; screenplay by Richard Price.

CRY OF THE CITY

OPENS APRIL 17

From 1948, black-and-white noir. Victor Mature and Fred Clark pursue cop killer Richard Conte. Vintage class.

AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON

OPENS APRIL 24

More superheroics from Downey Jr, Ruffalo and co, this time battling the supervillain Ultron, voiced by James Spader.

Live

ROCKING IN THE FREE WORLD



D'ANGELO & THE VANGUARD

HAMMERSMITH EVENTIM APOLLO, LONDON, FEBRUARY 21, 2015

There's a new riot goin' on! Third extraordinary coming of a soul messiah

IN THE AFTERMATH of Bob Dylan's speech at the MusiCares charity gala in February, most of the attention focused on his apparent hostility towards Merle Haggard, his enduring prickliness with those who would question the texture and timbre of that indefatigable voice. At the heart of Dylan's 30-minute disquisition, though, was a sentiment detectable in *Chronicles*, the *Theme Time Radio Hour* and, most recently, *Shadows In The Night*; a devotion to the music of his youth that was both nostalgic and forensic, and appeared deeply informed by a conviction that modern music could never measure up against the towering achievements of the mid-20th Century. "Very few rock'n'roll bands today play with rhythm. They

don't know what it is," Dylan claimed, though he gave no indication he'd heard or analysed any of these bands. Not for the first time, it was possible to be touched by Dylan's scholarly humility to those who went before him, and exasperated by his ignorance of those who came after.

I was thinking about this, though God alone knows why, at some point during a phenomenal show by D'Angelo & The Vanguard. The Virginian soul singer, it should be said straight away, is not remotely indebted to Dylan. But if anyone needed an example of the continuing, evolving potency of rhythm and blues, of how a 21st-Century artist can not just channel, but effectively match up against, the achievements of his forefathers, Michael 'D'Angelo' Archer works

perfectly. Take "Sugah Daddy", the last song The Vanguard play in their main set at the Hammersmith Apollo (though it turns out that they will return, soon enough, to continue for the best part of another hour). "Sugah Daddy" is a song from *Black Messiah*, the LP that D'Angelo released, with about 24 hours' notice, near the end of 2014: his third LP in 20 years, and his first since the 2000 nu-soul landmark, *Voodoo*.

On record, "Sugah Daddy" is a masterclass in fiendish syncopation, an intricate, infectious song that provides a jazzy spin on the kind of science worked by Prince circa "Kiss". This is more or less how it begins live, though the fluent urgency of The Vanguard have now accelerated it into something approaching a frenzy. D'Angelo

while the two star guitarists, Isaiah Sharkey and Jesse Johnson (an early Prince cohort, from Minneapolis veterans The Time) continue to play with phenomenal restraint, sublimated in the nuanced collective effort. Then, after another flamboyant caesura, Cleo 'Pookie' Sample generates a theremin-like wail from his keyboards and the whole thing ramps up another notch, into the tight abandon of peak Family Stone.

At some point, D'Angelo seems to be quoting Curtis Mayfield as he chants "Freddie's Dead" in the midst of it all, one more climax in a show that has so much going on: a staggeringly accomplished, historically resonant, conceptually progressive, socially aware, dynamic, erotic, unbridled and theatrical spectacle without recent equal. To those who have followed D'Angelo's story this past decade or so, the achievements of *Black Messiah* and this supercharged live show are even more remarkable. For most of the 21st Century, D'Angelo has been missing in action, an apparently lost genius, intermittently resurfacing in a cloud of rumour and innuendo; car crashes, substance issues, police scrapes, precious little music. All the time, however, it seems he was working on the songs that would become *Black Messiah* with a team focused around Palladino, Foster, Q-Tip and Ahmir 'Questlove' Thompson.

Black Messiah sounds like an insane amount of work was needed to create the impression of effortlessness, and one suspects D'Angelo would have continued finessing it indefinitely, had not the US political climate, in the wake of the Ferguson and New York shootings, provoked him into action. The context of the album's release, notwithstanding a *Saturday Night Live* performance when The Vanguard wore "I Can't Breathe" T-shirts, has slightly overplayed the actual political content of the album. Tonight, it

reverberates through the stuttering "1000 Deaths" (Funkadelic's "Wars Of Armageddon" might be a useful analogue here) and, in particular, the ravishing "The Charade", a Prince-like psychedelic rock song whose key lines – "All we wanted was a chance to talk/ Stead we only got outlined in chalk" – come punctuated with raised fists from The Vanguard. Mostly,

though, there's a sense that the personal and political, self-expression and community action, partying and protest, are intertwined in a fundamental way that is not always easy to parse. The throb of "1000 Deaths" is sticky, forbidding, and the first sequence of songs pass

by in an interlocking rush that has an unexpected restlessness and urgency. Where D'Angelo appeared still and dignified on *SNL*, it's a shock to see how he has regained the physicality, the energy, that rippled through sensational gigs around the time of *Voodoo*. "If you're wondering about the shape I'm in," he sings in "Back To The Future", "I hope it ain't my abdomen you're referring to."

As the show goes on, his aura of command intensifies at the same rate as his showmanship. "One Mo' Gin", in particular, is astonishing, the band falling into a kind of militarised funk slouch, then gradually being compelled towards a rapturous climax, with his keen manipulation of soul history moving into the terrain explored so enthusiastically by Marvin Gaye on "Let's Get It On". The performance of "Chicken Grease", meanwhile, could probably be dissected as an accelerated history of funk grandstanding, compacted into 10 or 15 minutes, but one

which has been so deeply absorbed by D'Angelo that it feels intuitive rather than studied. There are multiple false endings, successful attempts to take it to the bridge, soulclaps, mic-stand pivots, priapic yowls, mysterious hand signals to drummer Chris 'Daddy' Dave. The instructions reveal the rigorous management that goes into such delirium and point up how the most freakish auteurs have often been the most unstinting taskmasters.

There's a danger in all of this that such a depth of cultural knowledge can manifest itself as pastiche, so much so that it can lead to some strained speculation. During "The Charade", for instance, is D'Angelo really wearing a Stars'n'Stripes cape that has been specifically faded to match the flag on the cover of *There's A Riot Goin' On*? But for all the assiduous study, the show feels more like a kinetic updating of old traditions that transcends mere revivalism, with D'Angelo having cast himself emphatically as heir rather than imitator.

He has, critically, classics of his own to spare, none more resonant than the closing "Untitled (How Does It Feel?)", a song which takes the lubricious tenets of the slow jam and stretches them into something immensely calculated, but also moving to the point of absurdity. Tonight, "Untitled" lasts for about 15 minutes, the last seven of which see the band taking rare, microscopic solos and leaving one by one until, finally, D'Angelo is alone at the piano, singing a refrain he finally hands over to the audience. In keeping with the extraordinary standards of the evening, their performance is subtle and exceptional. "Times always change," Bob Dylan noted in that MusiCares speech. "They really do. And you have to always be ready for something that's coming along and you never expected it." JOHN MULVEY

SETLIST

- 1 Prayer
- 2 1000 Deaths
- 3 Ain't That Easy
- 4 Vanguard Theme
- 5 Feel Like Makin' Love
- 6 Really Love
- 7 One Mo' Gin
- 8 Alright
- 9 Brown Sugar
- 10 The Charade
- 11 Sugah Daddy
- ENCORE
- 12 Lady
- 13 Back To The Future (Parts I & II)
- 14 Left & Right
- 15 Chicken Grease
- 16 Till It's Done (Tutu)
- 17 Untitled (How Does It Feel)

is, initially, sat behind a piano as the groove bends around him, the swinging complexities underpinned by the bass of Pino Palladino, on leave from The Who, positioned to his right. After a while, D'Angelo emerges from behind the keyboard, bounces his mic-stand with the nonchalant grace of James Brown, and begins exhorting his band to faster, harder, higher goals. When the song finishes, he stands silent for what feels like a minute, becalmed after what has been a virtuoso maelstrom. Not for the first time, however, he appears to be toying with the expectations of his audience. He is, in fact, fulfilling the expectations of what the complete R&B bandleader can, and possibly should, do.

"Sugah Daddy", it transpires, is far from over. First it morphs into a massive JBs groove, with D'Angelo's creative spar, Kendra Foster, and two more backing singers pinballing across the stage

As the show goes on, his aura of command intensifies at the same rate as his showmanship

though, there's a sense that the personal and political, self-expression and community action, partying and protest, are intertwined in a fundamental way that is not always easy to parse. The throb of "1000 Deaths" is sticky, forbidding, and the first sequence of songs pass



The family that plays together... At St Giles-In-The-Fields church, London, March 6, 2015

THE HANDSOME FAMILY

ST GILES-IN-THE-FIELDS, LONDON, MARCH 6, 2015

Plague pits, snakes, fried beer and tiny horses...
Just another night in with Brett and Rennie Sparks

IT WOULD BE an exaggeration to say that the lives of Brett and Rennie Sparks were changed by one song, but the sudden success of "Far From Any Road", 11 years after its release, has opened doors. T Bone Burnett picked it as the theme for a cult cop drama, and The Handsome Family now receive fan letters from Iran. The song, says Rennie, used to be about the desert, "now it's about *True Detective*, which is OK by me."

It is, of course, a modest transformation: the husband and wife duo are not playing stadiums. St Giles-In-The-Fields, aka The Poets' Church, is a working chapel with its own peculiar history. "They have a plague pit," says Rennie, "like every good building."

St Giles is not, it must be said, a rock'n'roll venue. The pews were not designed with comfort in mind. Alcohol is banned. Dancing does not occur. But a mood of strained reverence seems oddly appropriate, throwing Brett's lugubrious vocal style into a new context. As he rumbles through "Weightless Again" – a love song disguised as a maudlin tale of Native Americans with TB, suicide and Moby Dick – he sounds

like a preacher, pulling moral uplift from dark material. At the end, Rennie makes an observation; inspired, perhaps, by the reverential mood in the hall. "My favourite sound is laundry being folded, with a microphone really close to it."

On record, The Handsome Family have tended to colour in the spaces

*One new song
is so widescreen
you could imagine
Bruce Springsteen
doing it*

between the prose-poetry of Rennie's words and the subdued twang of Brett's music. As a result, they've often been mis-categorised as an alt.country duo, as purveyors of Americana or standard bearers for Greil Marcus' old, weird America (which now includes every banjo player and trainee beard-wearer in the Northern hemisphere). Before "My Sister's Tiny Hands", they take

time to acknowledge, and dismiss, Marcus' suggestion that they were referencing the long tradition of 16th- and 17th-Century snakebite songs. "He couldn't have been more wrong," says Brett. "In America we don't like to sing about sex," adds Rennie. "But singing about snakes is fine."

Live, they are more intimate. Rennie plays a tiny bass, or an autoharp, while Brett cranks out depressed reveries on his guitar. The music is almost conversational, and sometimes haphazard. Drummer Jason Toth adds the shuffle of brushes, and occasional bells and glockenspiel.

There's no denying the weird part, though. They play two fine new songs. The first, "Gold", is an unusually widescreen affair – you could almost imagine Springsteen doing it – about a hold-up at a convenience store. The second, "Yellow/Tiny Tina", is a funny, sad tale about the time Rennie attended a State Fair, at which the array of attractions included a hypnotist and some forgotten country music stars, and the catering stretched to fried beer. Also present was Tiny Tina, the World's Smallest Horse. "Just a dollar to see her," they sing, as the tune

shuffles and twangs, "just a dollar to see that little horse".

The songs are funny and sad, but mostly sad. They inhabit malign forests and basements and bottomless holes. "My Ghost" is "basically a suicide note" which recalls Brett's two-week stay in a mental hospital. "It wasn't much fun," Rennie says with a laugh, "but at least we got a song out of it."

And so it goes on. Rennie and Brett chat absent-mindedly, as if they are encountering the songs for the first time. "You have an obsession with the edge of town," says Brett after "Whitehaven".

"I'm American," says Rennie. "Darkness..." says Brett.

ALASTAIR MCKAY

SETLIST

- 1 **Giant Of Illinois**
- 2 **Weightless Again**
- 3 **The Loneliness Of Magnets**
- 4 **My Ghost**
- 5 **Gold**
- 6 **The Sad Milkman**
- 7 **My Sister's Tiny Hands**
- 8 **Somewhere Else To Be**
- 9 **Far From Any Road**
- 10 **Yellow/Tiny Tina**
- 11 **Down In The Ground**
- 12 **Whitehaven**
- 13 **Bottomless Hole**
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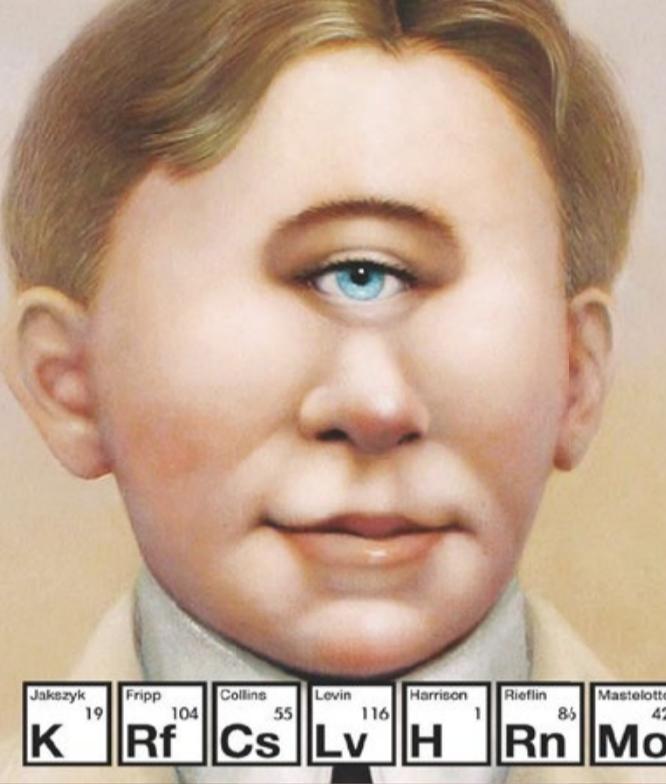
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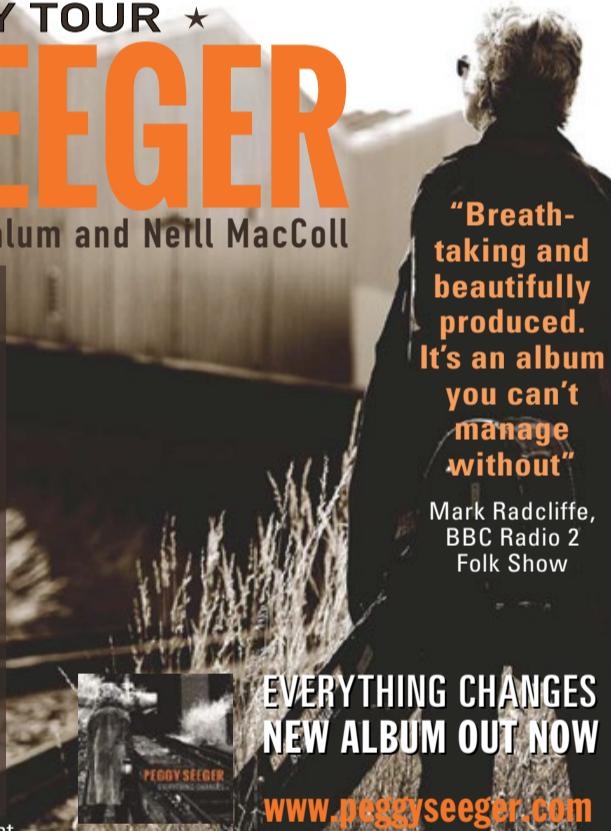
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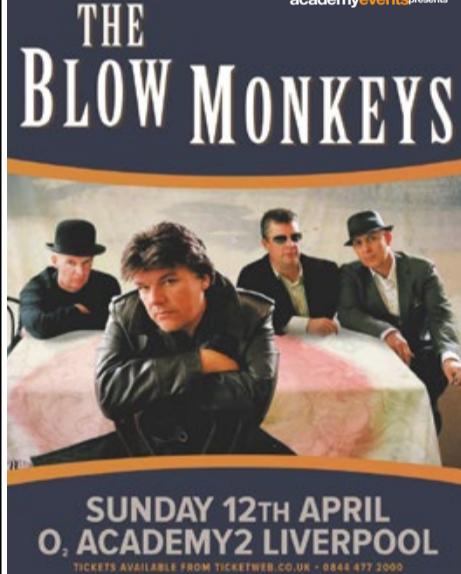
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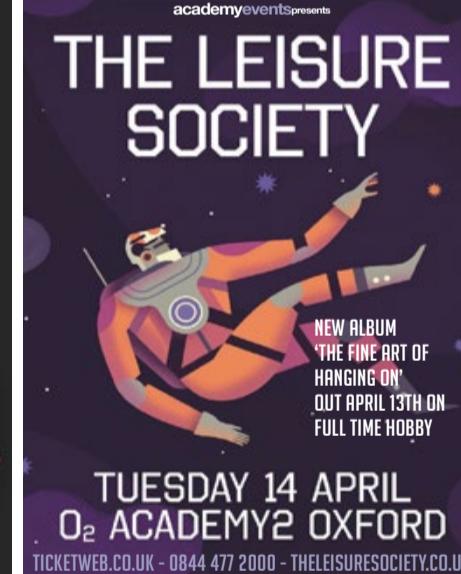
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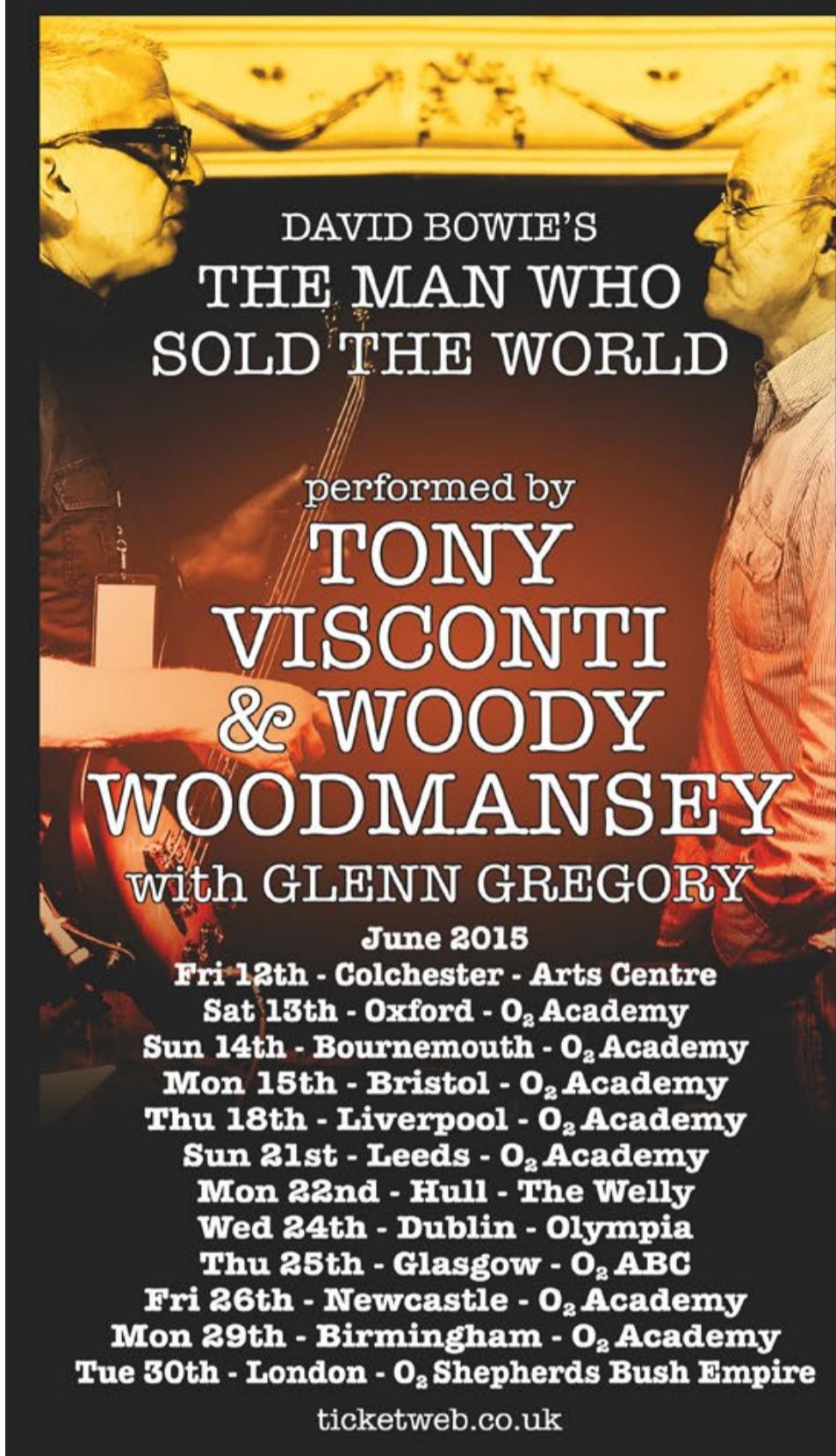
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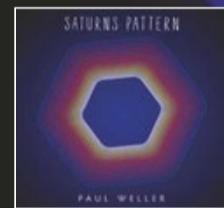
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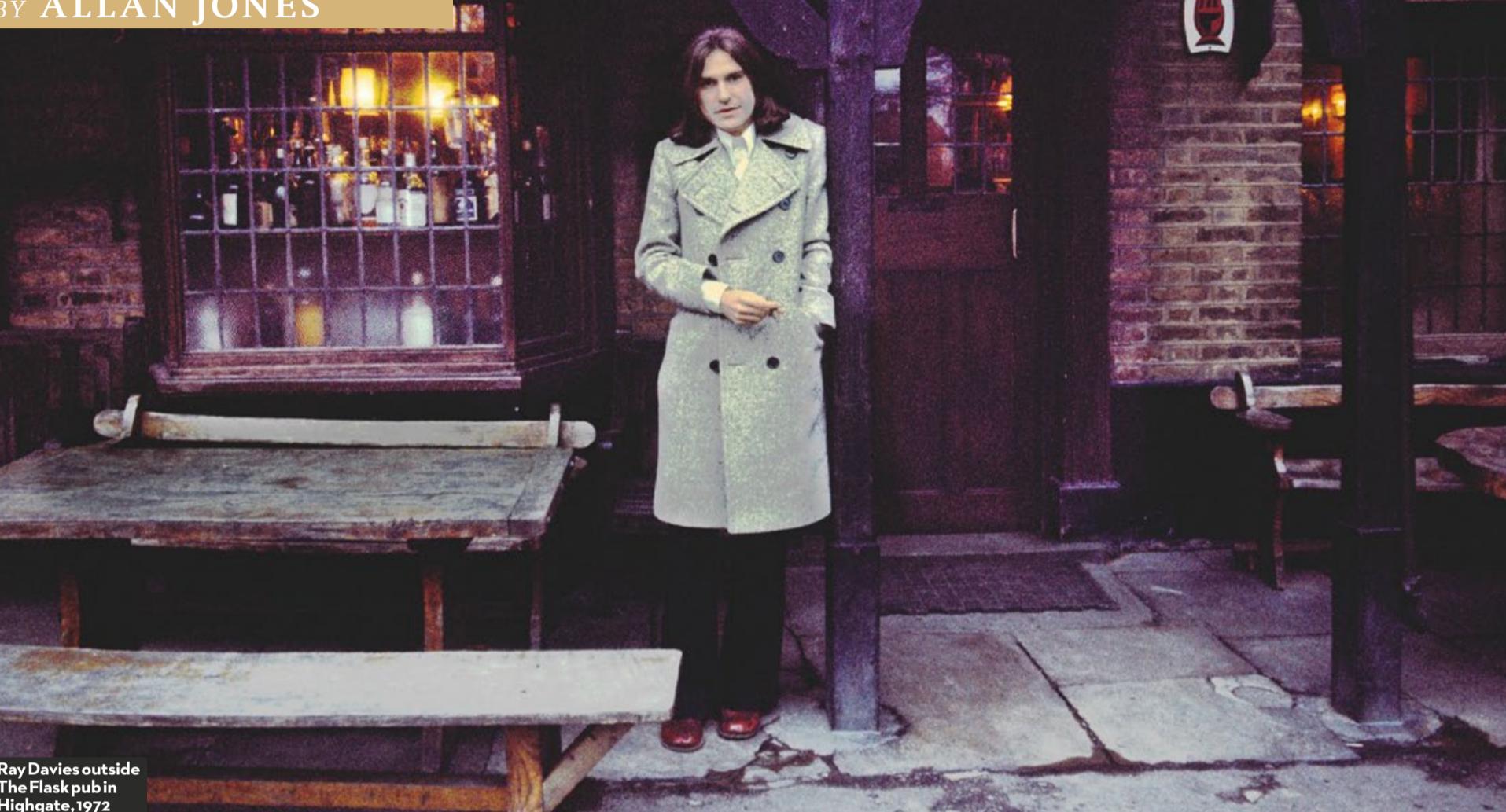
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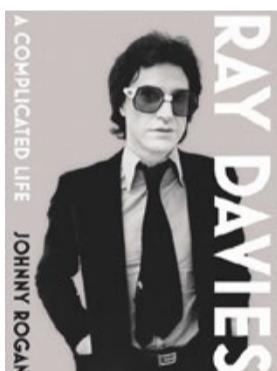
Books

BY ALLAN JONES



Ray Davies outside
The Flask pub in
Highgate, 1972

Reviewed this month...



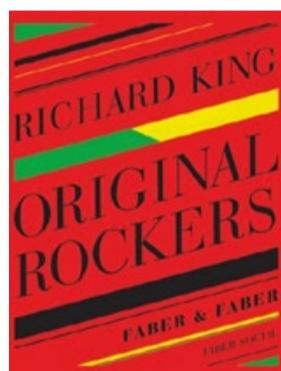
Ray Davies: A Complicated Life

Johnny Rogan
THE BODLEY HEAD

9/10

IT APPARENTLY TOOK Johnny Rogan more than 30 years to write *Ray Davies: A Complicated Life*. Potential readers made faint-hearted by its imposing bulk might wonder if it will take as long to read, while Kinks fans of a certain age will be especially concerned that if they start it they might not live long enough to finish the thing. The book is a little shy of 800 pages. Rogan's notes, acknowledgements and a discography alone run to over 100 of them, rolling on interminably like the credits at the end of a Michael Bay film.

This is brevity itself for Rogan, however. His last book, *Byrds: Requiem For The Timeless*, weighed in at over 1200 pages, with more to follow in a still unpublished second volume. He's the kind of biographer for whom no character in the story he is telling is too minor to be overlooked, no incident too small to be described at the fullest possible length, no anecdote, recollection, setlist or song too insignificant to be duly logged, documented and



Original Rockers

Richard King
FABER & FABER

8/10

discussed. *A Complicated Life*, therefore, teems with as much detail as a 19th-Century novel, an unbelievable early reference to Africa as "the Dark Continent" making Rogan more than ever sound like a fusty Victorian chronicler.

The Kinks' story was well told by Nick Hasted in his 2011 biography, *You Really Got Me*, and more elliptically by Ray Davies in two memoirs, 1995's *X-Ray* and 2013's *Americana: The Kinks, The Road And The Perfect Riff*. Whatever's been previously written about the band is rather overwhelmed, however, by Rogan's book, with its illuminating interviews with Ray and Dave Davies and an abundance of supplementary testimony from usually deeply disgruntled former bandmembers, managers, producers, agents, school friends, family and roadies, with especially telling contributions from Ray's first wife, Rasa, a 16-year-old Bradford schoolgirl when Ray met her.

Whatever his regard for Davies as a songwriter of occasional genius, Rogan is unsparing about the flaws in Ray's character that made him eventually insufferable to so many of the people who came into his ruinous orbit. At the heart of *A Complicated Life* is Ray's lifelong conflict with his younger brother, a dismal history of largely pointless and destructive enmity, almost unreal in its relentless hostility and violence, and catalogued here in grim and exasperating detail. Their behaviour was not confined to incandescent fraternal dispute. It may even be that their greatest talent was bringing misery to themselves and everyone around them. However much you might love the best of their music, by the end of this enormous, gripping and hugely readable book, you are eventually glad to see the back of them and their toxic hatreds.

► On an autumn morning in 2013, Richard King found himself outside what was left of Revolver Records, formerly an independent record shop in Bristol's Park Street, the shop's old premises derelict by then for nearly a decade. King had just started

writing *Original Rockers*, a follow-up to *How Soon Is Now?*, a much-admired history of post-punk UK independent record labels. His return to Revolver was a kind of pilgrimage.

King had worked at Revolver for three years in the '90s and, in his new book, the shop is invested with an almost occult significance as a place of hallowed learning, the dingy HQ of a mysterious cult, steeped in ritual and arcane lore. He'd come back to check out the vibes, stand once more in its rooms, let his memory roam through its shadows, recalling its iconoclastic heyday, which *Original Rockers* celebrates along with the music King first heard there, Revolver being the kind of record shop where the staff spent more time listening to records than selling them. Twenty years ago, there were many such shops in the UK, cloistered worlds, most of them now extinct, where the obsessive fan might be introduced to exotic new music, the stuff you couldn't buy then get anywhere else. To an extent, *Original Rockers* is therefore an extended elegy for the passing of such places, affectionate and funny, an eccentric cast of staff and customers evocatively remembered. More than this, it's often a highly personal memoir that vividly articulates the sheer thrill of musical discovery, the new or previously unheard record that attaches itself to a moment in your life, from which it becomes inseparable.

Original Rockers also works well as a terse social history of Bristol and its mutating music scene, from the St Paul's reggae bands and soundsystems through to the subsequent emergence of The Pop Group, The Wild Bunch collective, Massive Attack and Sarah Records. Less successful are some of the book's anecdotal set-pieces – a drugs raid, a ticket scam shakedown, a free jazz concert in Bath, the week spent with John Peel, in Bristol as part of a Radio 1 roadshow. King has many gifts as a writer, but comedy is not one of them, although he can be wonderfully droll. Elsewhere, in *Original Rockers*, however, he invariably finds words adequate to the serial epiphanies that inspired its writing.

Not Fade Away

Fondly remembered this month...

ALBERT MAYSLES

Rock filmmaker

1926-2015

BROTHERS ALBERT AND David Maysles shot over 30 documentaries in a career that bridged three decades, but are best known in rock circles for their fateful depiction of the Altamont Free Concert in 1969. *Gimme Shelter* captured the full horror of events, in which The Rolling Stones' US tour ended with the murder of Meredith Hunter by Hells Angels. The Maysles' *cinéma vérité* approach, which they referred to as 'direct cinema', only served to make it more shocking. Its tone was in direct contrast to *What's Happening! The Beatles In The USA*, their frolicsome diary of the Fabs' first Stateside visit in February 1964. "The weird thing is that each film pretty well represents the period in which it took place," Maysles told this writer in 2009. "We ended up having The Beatles and the Stones providing the bookends for the decade. You want to know the '60s? Watch those two films."

Born to Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, the Maysles were among the first filmmakers to make non-fiction features. Albert's first documentary, 1955's *Psychiatry In Russia*, followed the patients of various mental hospitals in the USSR. He and David, five years his junior, began their collaborative work by capturing famous names (1963's *Orson Welles In Spain*; 1965's *Meet Marlon Brando*), though their breakthrough arrived in 1968 with *Salesman*. A fascinating portal into the lives of four door-to-door Bible sellers in New England and Florida, it's since been included in the



Albert Maysles, centre, with brother David, and Mick Jagger, during the making of *Gimme Shelter*, 1970

Library of Congress' National Film Registry. Another film granted the same honour was *Grey Gardens*. Released in 1976, it chronicled the hermetic existence of the Beales, two faded socialites now consigned to squalor in a derelict mansion in the Hamptons.

Albert continued to make films after David's death in 1987 and was last year awarded a National Medal Of Arts by President Obama. "When I talk to people about the documentaries I make, I tell them it's one divine accident after another," Maysles offered. "I like to connect it with Alfred Hitchcock. He said that in a feature film, the director is God. But in a documentary, God is the director."

STEVE STRANGE

Visage singer and New Romantic pioneer

1959-2015

Steve Strange was arguably more influential as a scene-maker than a musician. Alongside DJ Rusty Egan, he began hosting a weekly 'Bowie Night' at Soho club Billy's in 1978. A year later they moved on to The Blitz in Covent Garden, where Strange's rigorous door policy – "I wanted creative-minded pioneers who looked like a walking piece of art" – led to him turning away Mick Jagger in favour of a whole peacock breed of New Romantics. Soon-to-be-famous 'Blitz Kids' included Boy George, Bow Wow Wow, Spandau

Ballet and various members of Sigue Sigue Sputnik. Strange and Egan had, by then, formed electro-pop outfit Visage, along with various members of Ultravox and Magazine. "Tar" failed to make any impression, but 1980's "Fade To



Steve Strange in London, 1981

Grey" (released three months after Strange featured in Bowie's "Ashes To Ashes" video) was a Top 10 hit that also scored big throughout Europe. The band issued three LPs before splitting in 1985. He briefly founded Strange Cruise, before heading off to DJ in Ibiza, holding court at the Double Bass club. Post-millennium, Strange attempted several Visage revivals, releasing *Hearts And Knives*, their first new album for nearly 30 years, in 2013.

TOD DOCKSTADER

Musique concrète composer

1932-2015

Tod Dockstader likened his fondness for found sounds and

electronica to being "confronted with a potential orchestra of thousands of instruments". He first started composing during downtime as a sound engineer in New York in the late '50s. The following decade saw a series of albums that showcased his fascination with *musique concrète*, beginning with 1961's *Eight Electronic Pieces* (commandeered by Federico Fellini as the soundtrack to *Satyricon*) and reaching an artistic peak three years later with *Quatermass*. From the late '60s onwards, he began making educational films for the American Heritage series, but returned to music in 2003, issuing a trio of albums entitled *Aerial*.

DANNY McCULLOCH

Animals bass player

1945-2015

Bassist Danny McCulloch had already played with Muddy Waters, backed Jerry Lee Lewis on *Ready Steady Go!* and been a member of Screaming Lord Sutch & The Savages by the time he joined the second incarnation of The Animals in 1966. Billed as Eric Burdon And The New Animals, McCulloch co-wrote some of the band's most enduring hits as they transitioned from R'n'B to psychedelia, including "San Franciscan Nights", "Sky Pilot" and "Monterey". His tenure lasted until 1968, after which he released solo LP *Wings Of A Man*, produced by ex-Animal Vic Briggs. He reformed a version of The Animals in 1993 and, two years later, issued a second album, *Beowulf*.

DAVE CLOUD

Nashville garage auteur

1956-2015

Lambchop's Matt Swanson may have been florid when he said that Dave Cloud held "a dusty mirror to pop music's tawdry conventions, deftly dismembering the Frankenstein's monster of modern musical excess". But Cloud was an undeniable presence who lit up the Nashville scene for over three decades. Backed by The Gospel Of Power, a loose conglomeration that, at one time or another, included Swanson, Tony Crow (Lambchop, Silver Jews) and Ben Martin (Lone Official, Clem Snide), Cloud built a reputation as an eccentric garage rocker with a love of Beat poetry. He issued five albums from 1999-2012 and also appeared in two Harmony Korine flicks: *Gummo* and *Trash Humpers*.

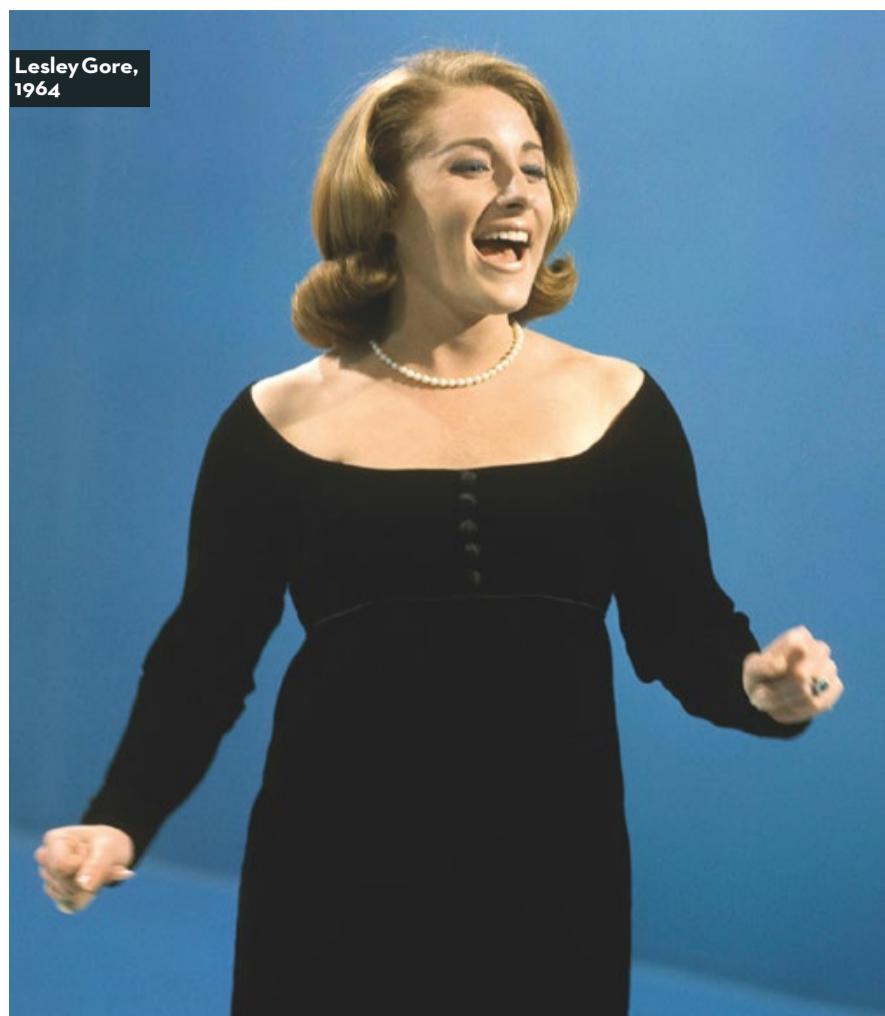
LESLIE GORE

"It's My Party" singer, songwriter

1946-2015

Leslie Gore was still at junior school when she recorded "It's My Party", a Quincy Jones-produced million-seller that became a US No 1 in the summer of '63. She quickly followed up with Top 10 singles "Judy's Turn To Cry", "She's A Fool" and "You Don't Own Me", which traced a path from pitiful heartbreak to defiant self-assertion. In 1965 she achieved another success with "Sunshine, Lollipops And Rainbows", written by a 21-year-old Marvin Hamlisch. By the end of the decade, however, the hits had dried up and she was

Lesley Gore, 1964



dropped by her label, Mercury. She relocated from her native New Jersey to California and, in 1972, released *Someplace Else Now*. Jones returned three years later to oversee *Love Me By Name*, though, despite the presence of Herbie Hancock and The Brothers Johnson, it failed to relight her career. Her final album, *Ever Since*, landed in 2005. In the interim, Gore wrote songs with her brother, Michael, for 1980's *Fame*, receiving an Oscar nomination for "Out Here On My Own". It became a Billboard Top 20 hit for Irene Cara. Ronnie Spector paid tribute by declaring her "a serious artist who was way ahead of her time".

BOBBY EMMONS

Session keyboardist, songwriter

1943-2015

Under the tutelage of producer Chips Moman, keyboardist Bobby Emmons was an integral member of the American Studios house band in Memphis. The group appeared on over 100 hits, including Dusty Springfield's "Son Of A Preacher Man", Elvis Presley's "Suspicious Minds", Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline" and Merrilee Rush's "Angel Of The Morning". Emmons was a consummate songwriter too, penning tunes for BJ Thomas ("Help Me Make It To My Rockin' Chair"), Waylon Jennings ("Luckenbach, Texas"), Tanya Tucker ("Love Me Like You Used

To") and George Strait ("So Much Like My Dad"), among others. He also recorded and toured with country supergroup The Highwaymen.

GAVIN CLARK

Singer and songwriter

DOB unknown-2015

Shane Meadows has compared the music of Clark, who has died aged 46, to that of Nick Drake and Tim Rose. His songs regularly appeared on the director's films, either under the auspices of '90s band Sunhouse, subsequent folk trio Clayhill or solo. It was enough to inspire 2007's *The Living Room*, Meadows' documentary about Clark's life and work. The singer-songwriter's other significant collaboration was with UNKLE, appearing on *War Stories, End Titles... Stories For Film* and, most recently, 2010's *Where Did The Night Fall*. Paying tribute, James Lavelle called him "a man of unimaginable talent, wit and spirituality. He had a voice like no other."

JOHN 'HOPPY' HOPKINS

International Times and UFO Club founder

1937-2015

Few people were better placed to observe the rise of the British counterculture than John Hopkins.

In 1965 he co-founded the London Free School, a community action group that led to the establishment of the Notting Hill Carnival. The following year he and Barry Miles set up underground magazine *International Times*, after which, with Joe Boyd, he opened the legendary UFO Club. The venue swiftly became the hub of the London alternative scene, playing host to house band Pink Floyd, Soft Machine, Tomorrow, Fairport Convention and others. "The Floyd were at the core of that whole movement," he told *Uncut* in 2008. "Then the whole thing had a mind of its own."

SAM ANDREW

Big Brother And The Holding Company guitarist

1941-2015

The combination of Janis Joplin and Big Brother And The Holding Company first bore fruit on their self-titled 1967 debut, which married her blues wail to the band's heavy psychedelia. Driven by the twin guitars of Sam Andrew and James Gurley, their defining moment came with the following year's *Cheap Thrills*, for which Sam also wrote the memorable "Combination Of The Two". In December '68, he and Joplin quit to form the Kozmic Blues Band, though he returned to the fold after *I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mama!* and remained until Big Brother split in 1972. Andrew and fellow co-founder Peter Albin reunited the band 15 years later.

CLARK TERRY

Jazz trumpeter

1920-2015

Writing in his autobiography, Miles Davis revealed that fellow St Louis trumpeter Clark Terry, five years his senior, was "my idol on the instrument. I decided I was going to be that hip, even hipper, when I got my [stuff] together." Terry's dazzling proficiency on both trumpet and flugelhorn, marked by melodic phrasing and impeccable technique, can be measured by the company he kept. Starting in the '40s, he played with Count Basie, Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, Quincy Jones, Herbie Hancock and more. His most enduring professional relationship was with Oscar Peterson, which lasted from 1964 to '96. Terry was also a member of the house band on NBC's *The Tonight Show*. *ROB HUGHES*

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JONI VS DYLAN: WHY?

Bit naughty of John Mulvey in his editorial [*Uncut, April 2015*] to try to sex up David Crosby's interview about Joni Mitchell into an "anti-Dylan rant". After all, Crosby starts by saying, "I don't think anyone is close to Joni or Bob in significance of songwriting." So far as Joni's current disposition towards Bob, I don't know where the negativity comes from. Bob was extremely complimentary to her on his *Theme Time Radio Hour* show – possibly it's something personal that we'll never get to know about. But it's all the more odd when one considers her Radio 1 "My Top 12" back in 1983 when, after picking "Stuck Inside Of Mobile..." she noted that "so many people take so much from him".

She's not the only one to have her issues with Bob: Lennon, Simon, Ochs and that idiot in *Manic Street Preachers* (don't know his name) spring to mind. Who knows why – envy? He bothers people, not least his fans.

Stewart Tray, Manchester

THE MISSING OF SUMMER LAWNS

I enjoyed your "30 Greatest Joni Mitchell Songs" [*Uncut, April 2015*] feature, but just want to bang the drum (loudly!) for her first two albums, which got – and often get – scant acknowledgment. The first album is full of incredible, inspiring songs, which David Crosby's production showcases perfectly. A warier, darker tone is evident on *Clouds*. There is so much knowledge of life's complexities in all of these songs, whose musical settings and chord progressions blend folk and folk-rock styles with elements of classical (Delius, Debussy), pushing back the boundaries of the possible in songwriting. One of the many great qualities of these two records, aside from their incredible melodies and guitar playing, is the almost complete absence of self-pity, which mars some of Mitchell's later work.

That said, my nomination for a great song is not going to be any of the ones mentioned above, great as they are. I'd like to go for "Eastern Rain", a heartstopping recounting of a passionate night that turns to doubts and disillusion in the morning as the rainclouds disappear and real life returns. Only a consummate, extraordinarily self-



aware artist could have created it – and she didn't even think it worthy of release. Fairport did a pretty version, but the real deal is Mitchell's own, on *Live At The Second Fret 1966* – taped before she'd even put out a record.

Alastair Dougall, Brighton

Well, right off... How can you have 30 of Joni Mitchell's best songs? And if you're going to have just 30, then make them *the* best. Yes, you have famous musicians picking their own choices, but really, when it comes down to the 30 best, in my humble opinion there are so many better songs that have been overlooked. For starters, "Shades Of Scarlett Conquering" from *The Hissing Of Summer Lawns* is phenomenal, way better than "The Jungle Line". It's almost a continuance of *Gone With The Wind*.

I started listening to Joni Mitchell as each album was released, and so many pieces thundered into me at that time and have stayed with me. The heartbreak of "The Last Time I Saw Richard" and the line about "*house lights left up bright*" says so much about that relationship in just those few words. Finally, "Woman Of Heart And Mind" (the best from *Miles Of Aisles*): "*You know the times you impress me most/Are the times when you don't try.*" Taught me a lot, those lines.

John Haslam, via email

"WHERE HAVE ALL THE GOOD TIMES GONE?"

Loved the Jerry Lee Lewis article in the February 2015 issue. Just to offer a couple of points: The *Live At The Star Club* album is not out of print. Fans can go online and there are several editions available – pick of the pack is the Bear Family CD, which includes the extra cuts that are usually left off this set. Also, I would add a couple of items to your choice of Jerry Lee Lewis CDs – first the *Southern Roots* album, especially the Bear Family deluxe set. I think Rick Bragg's recent book underrated it, especially since Lewis himself has been quoted telling its producer Huey Meaux, "You made the last good rock'n'roll album on me. I wish you'd do me another one." The recently released '70s *Knox Phillips Sessions* from Sun Studios makes a fine bookend to the recent (also Sun-recorded) *Rock & Roll Time* set.

I was privileged to see Jerry Lee play a couple of times here in New York, under very different circumstances. At one of the late '70s Richard Nader Rock Revival extravaganzas at Madison Square Garden, Ronnie Spector & The Ronettes (who I'd guess were a couple of girls from the beauty parlour) were on the bill. JLL, of course, was top of the bill, climaxing his show with "Whole

Lotta Shakin'...". Ronnie came back out and joined him on top of the piano, where they did the Dirty Boogie for 18,000 screaming fans. A couple of years later, I caught Jerry at the Lorelei Club (one of the short-lived, sporadic attempts at a country music venue in the Apple). For some reason, the promoters gave Jerry an electric piano, but it was still one of the greatest shows ever – like the time I saw Charlie Rich at Max's Kansas City (but that's another story). What more can I say but, "*Won't you tell me, where have all the good times gone?*"

Dan Nooger, via email

LESS KOZELEK, MORE DRUGS

I'm a massive fan of your magazine and have been a subscriber for many years. I treat *Uncut* like my music bible, as you have introduced me to many great bands over the years, including The War On Drugs. You interviewed Adam Granduciel in your latest edition and I found it interesting hearing him talk about the reaction to the success of *Lost In The Dream*, but very frustrating that over half of the interview was about Mark Kozelek's comments and the song "War On Drugs: Suck My Cock". I would have preferred to hear something more in-depth about the songwriting process or his influences, maybe his opinion on other bands around at the moment.

CROSSWORD

WIN!



Motörhead's Ace
Of Spades on
vinyl reissue

I feel that he was getting very pissed off with the Mark Kozelek questions too, and said that he was fed up with talking about it. It felt like it was a bit "gossip column" rather than your usual in-depth, informative questioning.

Will Odgers, via email

IN DEFENCE OF AVA GARDNER

So, Rob Jones of Huntingdon, while praising Frank Sinatra [*Feedback, April 2015*] you had to disrespect Ava Gardner; she "comes across as utterly destructive to all who encountered her", does she? Well, it's history now, but I encountered Ava, a lot. My parents were friends of hers and she was godmother to my eldest daughter. My experience of her was that she was kind, generous, tempestuous, intelligent and sweet. Don't vilify Ava just because Frank was miserable to the point of suicide – he wasn't too well-balanced at times, despite his talent. She had an undeserved hard time all of her life from the press, just for being herself. So leave the woman alone and show some respect for the dead.

Bridget The Defender, via email

THE LIGHT POURS OUT OF JIM KERR...

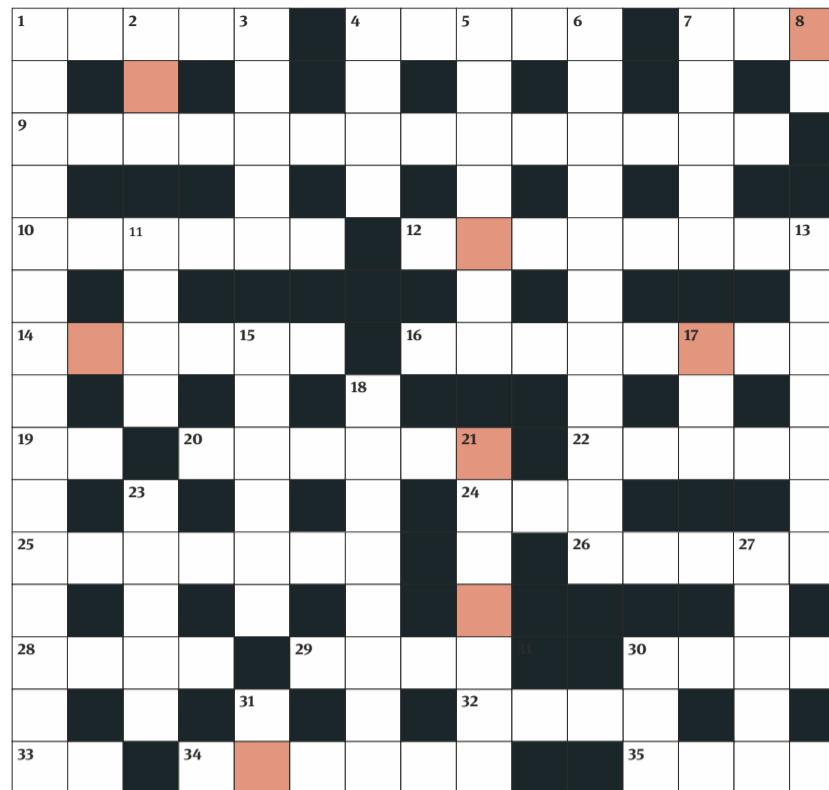
I'm surprising myself by writing to you, however I felt compelled after discovering Magazine's *Real Life* album via Jim Kerr and the My Life In Music page [*April 2015*]. Who knew that Jim's words, tucked away at the very end of the issue, would make me want to listen to something so fantastic? I ended up a little annoyed that it's taken me until now to hear it! *Real Life* is a gem and I agree with Mr Kerr when he talks of a "sophisticated, dangerous sound". I got the mag subscription as a Christmas present and I'm loving all the musical discoveries you're allowing me to make. Thank you.

Tom, via email

SONG TO THE SIREN

I have a problem with Andy Gill's dismissal of *Siren* by Roxy Music in last month's issue [*April 2015*] as he was reviewing the re-release of all eight of their LPs. I know lots of Roxy lovers prefer the so-called more experimental sounds made while Brian Eno was in attendance but, for pure skill at his craft, Bryan Ferry surely climbed to the pinnacle as a songwriter. I wish he'd kept "If There Is Something" for the *Siren* album, as it would have made it not just the best Roxy album by far, but possibly the best album ever. But hey, that's still my problem.

Tom Kinsella, Dublin



HOW TO ENTER

The letters in the shaded squares form an anagram of a song by Van Morrison. When you've worked out what it is, send your answer to: *Uncut* May 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, April 27, 2015. This competition is only open to European residents.

CLUES ACROSS

- 1+4A Laura Marling is making a video. She won't belong (5-5)
- 7David Bowie to take legal action against her (3)
- 9Fairport Convention's 30th studio album is a great achievement. Great stories. Great people (5-3-6)
- 10Repetitive sounds making up the entire second side of Pink Floyd's *Meddle* (6)
- 12+30A Tori Amos album had remixed tracks as well (8-4)
- 14(See 35 across)
- 16REM get in muddle with Decca over a Cabaret Voltaire album (3-5)
- 19+20A Keep going and finally a Blur song will come to you (2-3-3)
- 22Depeche Mode music heard during a Cult radio session (5)
- 24Split_____, featured a young Tim and Neil Finn (3)
- 25Our pope gyrates around to the music of Eiffel 65 (7)
- 26(See 23 down)
- 28Skid's song of a Scottish island that is partly national (4)
- 29Goo Goo Dolls' song is almost Irish (4)
- 30(See 12 across)
- 32"____ And Everyone", early single from Everything But The Girl (4)
- 33Plays, in the end, a Joanna Newsom album (2)
- 34Thrash metal band who spent *Seasons In The Abyss* (6)
- 35+14A David Gilmour getting away from it all for a solo album (2-2-6)

ANSWERS: TAKE 214

ACROSS

- 1+3A Big Music, 6 Camel, 9 Storytale, 10 Lorde, 11+6D Edwyn Collins, 13 Metric, 15 Non Stop, 17 Spain, 19+34A Let's Get It On, 20 Ypres, 22 Badge,

- 24 Up Around The Bend, 29 One Road, 32 Sun, 33+30D Way Out.

DOWN

- 1 Be Seeing You, 2 Goodwin, 3 May, 4+27A Storm Bringer, 5+7D Chestnut Mare, 8 Lies, 12 Notes, 14+16D

- Virginia Plain, 18 Plan B, 21 Reality, 23 Strong, 25 OK Go, 26 Eject, 27 Bow, 28 RSO, 31 Don.

HIDDEN ANSWER

"Handsome Devil"

XWORD COMPILED BY:

Trevor Hungerford

UNCUT

TAKE 216 | MAY 2015

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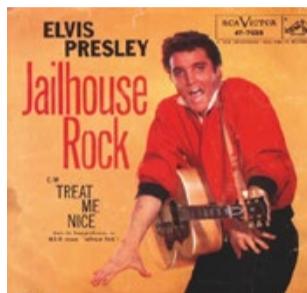
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MY LIFE IN MUSIC

Lynyrd Skynyrd

Gary Rossington reveals the British stars who inspired Southern Rock's founding fathers



A single I wore out

Elvis Presley
Jailhouse Rock

1957

I have to start with this... When I was a little kid, about five or six, I used to stand in front of the mirror with a broom and pretend like I was playing Elvis Presley songs. "Jailhouse Rock" was one of the first singles that I ever bought, and I played it 'til I wore it out. I still have that song as my ringtone on my phone.



An album that changed my life

The Beatles
Meet The Beatles! 1964

This was the first album that impacted my life. In America this record, the one with their faces on the black background, was like the beginning of everything, so to speak. The dawn of rock'n'roll to us, or to me. We were all so impressed that we all wanted to start a band. Not like The Beatles, just a band. I'm sure it changed everybody's lives in the rock'n'roll business.



An early Skynyrd staple

The Ventures
Sleep Walk 1960

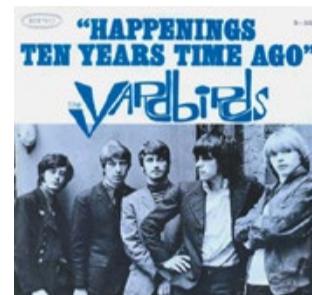
When this came out, I just really wanted to get down and play guitar, it was so cool! When we played in clubs, before we changed our name to Lynyrd Skynyrd, we used to play Ventures and all those songs. There was no singing, so it meant Ronnie [Van Zant] could rest a little bit. That was a great sound, I love the echo on a lot of this stuff, that slap.



An introduction to the blues

The Rolling Stones
Big Hits (High Tide And Green Grass) 1966

They were the bad boys of rock'n'roll, so we started listening to them. This really changed my life, and Ronnie and Allen's [Collins] too. It's strange, we weren't listening to [original] blues, it was for the older people. But when the English groups started playing the blues, then we heard it that way – it's funny how it came back and forth between the US and Britain.

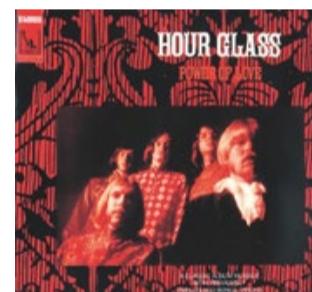


A song we rocked the clubs with

The Yardbirds
Happenings Ten Years Time Ago

1966

We all loved The Yardbirds. We copied them a little bit over here in America – or tried to. And that's what helped us make it, because a lot of bands in clubs would play American songs, the dance songs, "Knock On Wood" and "Soul Man" and all those. And we would play The Yardbirds 'cause we liked them, and people liked that, they didn't know what it was! That helped a lot.



A Southern inspiration

Hour Glass
Power Of Love 1968

Then along came Duane Allman... he blew our minds down South. This was in the early, early days before they were even the Allman Brothers... We used to love to watch them play around town and got really influenced by them. We were still in our mid-teens and they were in their early twenties so we were like, wow, they can drive and stay out late and all that stuff.

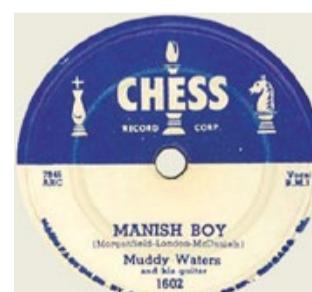


The record that made us work hard

Free
Free 1969

I went to see Free at a skating rink – people skated all evening to organ music and then a band would play.

Free were so late they had to set up their own equipment. God, they were so good. It made us go home that night and say, well, all right, we're gonna start really working. We quit high school so we could play music.



My blues hero

Muddy Waters
Manish Boy 1955

We opened for the Muddy Waters band in Louisiana, at a school. We got up in this balcony all alone, right over them, watching them – it was like we were onstage – it was unbelievable. Ronnie loved old blues. I'm speaking for all of them, too, that's what they listened to, as we were all in the same car or in the same room listening to it... That's where we all came from.

Lynyrd Skynyrd play Glasgow SECC (Apr 21), Manchester O2 Apollo (22) and London Eventim Apollo (23)



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