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40 PAGES OF
REVIEWS

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TAME IMPALA

LLOYD COLE

MILES DAVIS

SLEAFORD MODS

AND MORE...

EXCLUSIVE!

DAVID BYRNE

Inside the
giant brain of
rock's premium
TALKING HEAD

PLUS!

50 GREATEST
NEW YORK
ALBUMS

BB KING

...and the death
of the blues

THE JAM

"I was always
scorched earth!"

SLY & THE FAMILY STONE

"People couldn't
figure us out!"

**NEW
INTERVIEWS!**

MERLE HAGGARD

THE MONKEES

EZRA FURMAN

THE ONLY ONES

AND

MARY WILSON

THE KINKS

DANIEL ROMANO

GORDON LIGHTFOOT

FLYING SAUCER ATTACK

THE
DESLONDES
JASON ISBELL
FRASER A
GORMAN
THE DREAM
SYNDICATE
JOHN LENNON

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THE MONSANTO YEARS

THE NEW ALBUM
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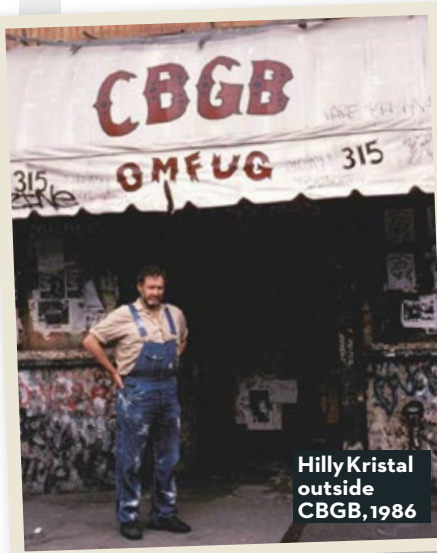
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Mary Wilson

Are we rolling?



Hilly Kristal outside CBGB, 1986

THE FIRST TIME, I think, that I went to New York, I fetched up with a band at CBGB one quiet soundcheck afternoon. This would have been in the early 1990s, some time after the club's heyday, when it was more likely to be hosting a major label showcase of some gauche Britpop aspirants rather than the unmediated voice of the New York streets.

Nevertheless, the club still had a certain cachet, however historical, which was why the band (and the *NME* journalist trying to put a new spin on an optimistic plot to take America by storm) were at CBGB in the first place. That day, Hilly Kristal and his dog were encountered, fleetingly. The toilets seemed more like a museum installation about punk interior design than actual functioning WCs. The critical moment occurred,

though, when the photographer and I tried to have a game of pool on the worn-out baize table near the door. As I leaned over to take my first shot, a fat cockroach scuttled out of one pocket, swerved the cueball, and disappeared down another. It was a magically horrible moment: a tale of mythic squalor where nothing really bad happened and no-one got hurt.

The legends of New York, of course, and the phenomenal music that's been made there, often come intertwined with grimmer details. The city's old, edgy reputation is fetishised so much, you'd be forgiven for thinking the only good art to come out of the place was dependent on a climate of risk. "New York felt so much more real," Kim Gordon reminisced in *Girl In A Band*. "When people would ask why Sonic Youth's music was so dissonant, the answer was always the same: our music was realistic, and dynamic, because life was that way, filled with extremes."

The truth, then, is probably a bit more complex than the stereotypes, something we've strived to take into account while compiling a list of 50 great New York albums for this issue. It would be disingenuous to pretend that seediness hasn't had a role to play – if we'd been so daft as to try and rank these 50 vivid records, I'm sure *The Velvet Underground & Nico* would have ended up somewhere near the top. But it's a city, and a list, that contains multitudes: from George Gershwin to Nas; the Fania All-Stars to Jeff Buckley; Sinatra to Hendrix; Woody Allen to Talking Heads. "New York, you're safer/And you're wasting my time," James Murphy crooned, ruefully, on LCD Soundsystem's "New York, I Love You...". "Our records all show/You are filthy but fine."

Until next time,

John Mulvey, Editor
Follow me on Twitter @JohnRMulvey

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INSTANT KARMA!

THIS MONTH'S REVELATIONS FROM THE WORLD OF UNCUT
Featuring THE JAM | GORDON LIGHTFOOT | DANIEL ROMANO

TOPLESS POSERS

DEAD END STREET!

The Kinks smile for the kamera, as a major new exhibition opens

IT'S 1967. THE Kinks are in the midst of an extraordinary run of singles: "Sunny Afternoon", "Dead End Street", "Waterloo Sunset". Dave Davies has embarked on a successful solo career, and has a fetching new hat. There are fracas: "Dave got very annoyed with me last week when I said he was playing too loud," Ray Davies told *NME* that May. "He picked up ashtrays and things in the dressing room and threw them at me. Then he knocked me over and tried to kick me. He missed and kicked this iron table and went hopping out of the room holding his foot..."

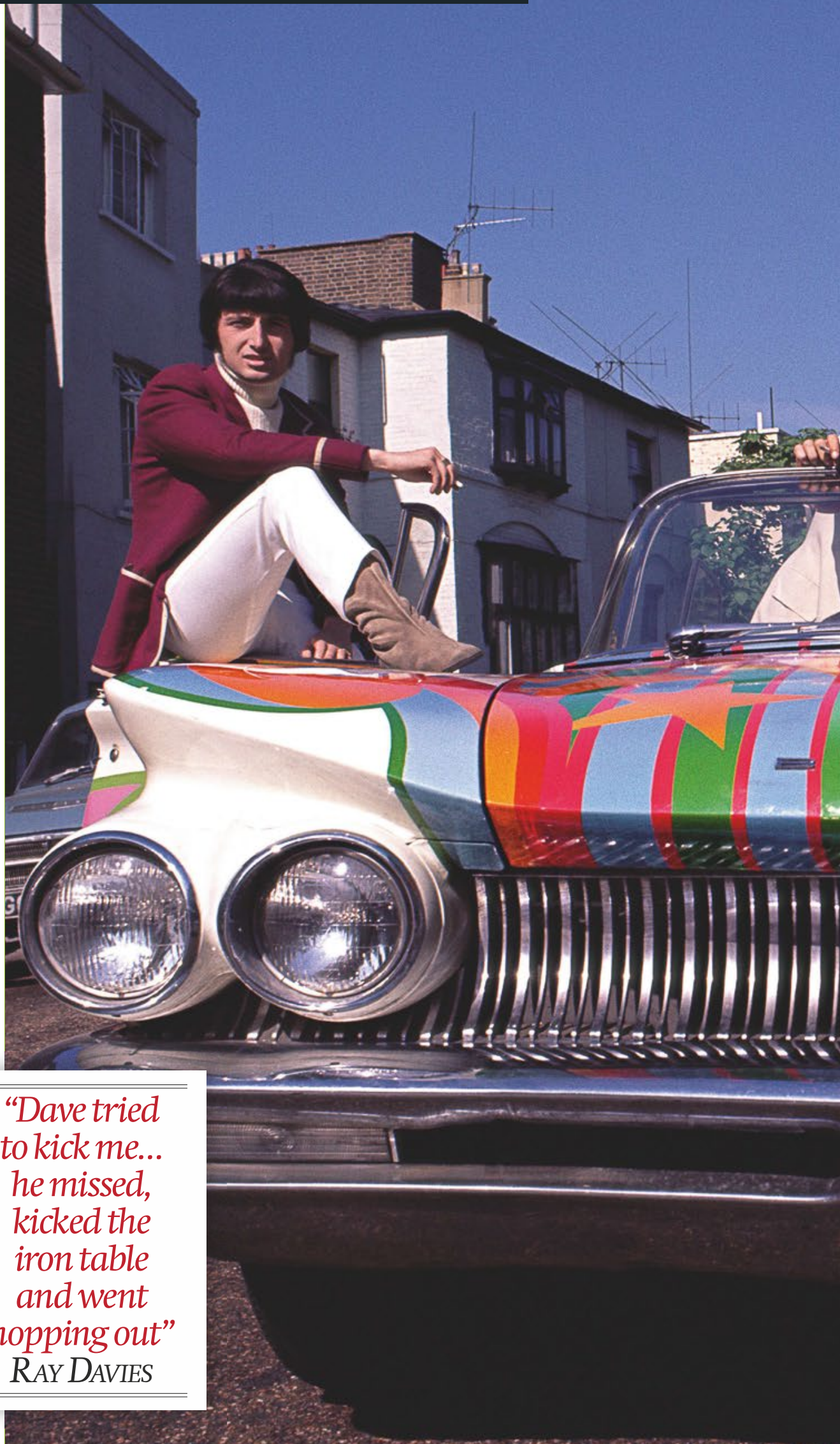
When the photographers arrive, however, The Kinks are masters at disguising their enmity. Here's a choice outtake from a Mike Leale session that ended up on the cover of the *Sunny Afternoon* comp. The psychedelic Buick convertible may not be the most emblematic vehicle of Swinging London but the sense of a band capitalising on their moment, embodying the spirit of the age, is inescapable. Leale's picture is one of the highlights of *The Kinks: Photographs And Artefacts*, a new exhibition at London's Snap Galleries. It brings together a treasure trove of classic Kinks images taken between 1964 and '68 by the likes of Val Wilmer, Dezo Hoffmann, Barrie Wentzell and Bruce Fleming, who was behind the lens at the band's first professional shoot in February, 1964.

Leale, meanwhile, captured a little extra in this shot: a twitching net curtain, an observer stationed behind it in the top right corner. The clothes might suggest West End flamboyance, the car signal rock star excess, but, as so many of these shots illustrate, Ray Davies and The Kinks' hearts remained in the residential backstreets of the city.

Mike Leale's photograph 'Konvertible Kinks' is one of a number previously unseen images featured in the exhibition *The Kinks: Photographs And Artefacts*, which runs at London's Snap Galleries until August 8, 2015. Further information at www.snapgalleries.com

MIKE LEALE

"Dave tried
to kick me...
he missed,
kicked the
iron table
and went
hopping out"
RAY DAVIES



Konverted: (l-r) Pete Quaife, Dave in his fetching hat, Ray, and Mick Avory



A QUICK ONE

➤ A couple of *Uncut* spin-offs to plug, swiftly. The deluxe remastered version of our *Ultimate Music Guide* to David Bowie is now in the shops. And it's followed on July 9 by the first monthly edition of *The History Of Rock*. Each issue of *The History Of Rock* draws on the riches of the *NME* and *Melody Maker* archives to tell the momentous story of the music we love, one year per issue. We begin in 1965: look out for it.



➤ Don't hold your breath for that Replacements reunion album. A couple of months ago, Paul Westerberg told *Uncut*, "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." On June 5, however, Westerberg announced the end of the band, mid-set at the Primavera festival in Porto. He noted that the rest of the band – who reformed in 2013 – had stayed at their hotel rather than soundchecking, calling them "lazy bastards to the end".

➤ The final frontiers of boxset excess are about to be challenged by – inevitably – the Grateful Dead this autumn. September 18's *30 Trips Around The Sun* contains no less than 80 CDs; 30 live shows from 1965-1995, and more than 73 hours of music. Lightweights may prefer an abbreviated version – the highlights squeezed onto a measly 4 CDs – released the same day.

➤ Visit www.uncut.co.uk for daily news, reviews, playlists and the best longreads from the archive.

The Jam in 1977. Below, John Weller's 1974 business card, and a band poster from '75



JAM COLLECTION

THE YOUNG MODS' FORGOTTEN STORY

"I didn't keep anything!" PAUL WELLER finally revisits his past for a major JAM exhibition

PAUL WELLER HAS never been that keen on looking back, which makes his enthusiasm for a new exhibition on The Jam at Somerset House particularly noteworthy. "It's amazing what they've uncovered," enthuses Weller of About The Young Idea. "My sister helped organise it and she's come up with loads of stuff I didn't know existed, notebooks and things. It's quite weird seeing all that stuff again."

Nicky Weller, Paul's younger sister, has co-curated the exhibition with her partner Russell Reader, professional curator Tory Turk and collector Den Davis. "The motivation comes from Den," she says. "He has an archive of Jam material going back 30 years. He approached us a few years back and it started to come together. It fills 11 rooms, from the start of The Jam at Stanley Road to the end in Brighton. It's not just posters and photos, we've tried to get memorabilia from every period, like old art from Polydor, lyrics, guitars that Paul gave away, suits, boots, the drumkit from the last show. The band have got involved. Rick [Buckler] and Bruce [Foxton] have lent clothes, photos and school reports."

The show presents The Jam in a wider context of fashion, culture and politics. One influence was the David

quite as unromantic. Much has been salvaged by the family, all of whom were involved in The Jam. Paul and Nicky's dad John was the band's manager, while Nicky ran the fan club. Later, their mother helped Nicky and also kept as much of Paul's stuff as she could. "We went through my dad's archive after he died [in 2009] and also went through Paul's shed and found loads of schoolbooks he probably forgot about years ago," says Nicky. "There's a bundle of them that say Maths and English on the front but inside is poetry, doodles and cartoons. He's a good cartoonist and was already thinking about The Jam as a band, so that was what he drew. He even designed album covers." Among the highlights is a cartoon strip depicting the adventures of Paul The Mod. "There's also a drawing of him on a scooter with a list of all the parts he wants to buy," says Nicky. Other unseen items include photographs and film. "My dad made home movies and we've got an old reel of an early gig that's never been seen before."

The exhibition is the first of several events marking The Jam's 40th birthday. It will be accompanied by a documentary and album, both called *About The Young Idea*. Nicky Weller has also published a book. "It's called *Growing Up With The Jam* and has more than 100 celebrities and fans talking about the band – people like Ray Davies, Pete Townshend, Glen Matlock, Mick Jones, Noel Gallagher," she says. Paul contributed to the documentary and Nicky is pleased that her brother is involved. "He'd never have talked about this a few years ago," she says. "But now he's realised there's a legacy people want to explore."

PETER WATTS

About The Young Idea is at Somerset House, London, June 26 to August 31

"We have an archive of Jam material going back 30 years. It fills 11 rooms!"
Nicky Weller

Bowie exhibition at the V&A, which has opened the door to exhibitions of this type. But while Bowie carefully retained items from his past, Weller took a different approach. "I didn't keep anything," he admits cheerfully. "I used to destroy my notebooks after every record, burn them or rip them up. I was always scorched earth, almost ceremonial. It's been and done. I don't like to collect things I'm not going to use, it clutters things up. Maybe records and clothes I still play and wear. But nothing just for the sake of it."

Fortunately, his relatives were not



WARNING: DRONES OVERHEAD!

Heroic feedback
explorers **FLYING
SAUCER ATTACK**
return from the
outer limits

IT HAS BEEN 15 years since Bristol's Flying Saucer Attack last released any new music, and 13 since we last heard from the band's visionary frontman, David Pearce. We could be forgiven for thinking, then, that Pearce had retired from music – but next month sees the unexpected return of FSA with a new album, *Instrumentals 2015*. “I knew I’d done what I could with music, such as I could,” explains Pearce. “It took a long time before I had, or realised I had, something to say again.”

Across four albums and a clutch of singles released between 1993 and 2000, Flying Saucer Attack's recordings – mostly made between Pearce and Rachel Brook – used repetitive drones and expansive jams to conjure up a kind of hissy, psychedelic haze. “What struck me was how they took noise and feedback into an entirely new terrain,” says director Peter Strickland, who used FSA's “Three Seas” in his latest film, *The Duke Of Burgundy*. “Their sound was sublime, feral and painterly. They could go into this dreamy, bucolic realm, but they were also capable of some of the best guitar riffs out there.” It is what author Richard King – a long-standing associate of

David Pearce,
with sequins



Flying saucer attack

the band – describes as a “conflation of harsh feedback and traditional English folk tunings”.

Reflecting on his own lengthy absence, Pearce explains, “I did stop making music for periods of a number of years. I wasn’t even listening to music much for long periods. Slowly, very slowly, I worked on some bits of music, and also some songs. I could get never get any words for the songs, but some of the instrumentals stuck in my mind over time. At some point, I realised if there was going to ever be something, it was going to be instrumental. But I wasn’t sure there would ever be something.”

Pearce says Strickland's use of his music in *The Duke Of Burgundy* gave him “the confidence to come out of my stupor and record the final tracks for the record.” As with FSA's previous output, *Instrumentals 2015* – a solo project for Pearce – is a home recording using cassette players and CD recorders. King acknowledges the importance of using “such basic equipment to create songs of such depth and scale.” Such working practices are

*“Their sound was
sublime, feral and
painterly – with
some of the best
guitar riffs”
Peter Strickland*

central to FSA's sound; indeed, *Instrumentals 2015* revisits the eerie, elemental qualities of Pearce's best work. “With this record,” he says, “however short or long the track, they are all instances of those kinds of ‘magical’ moments where you’re not really thinking, and not really thinking about what you’re doing while you’re playing, and something happens.”

There is a video – directed by Strickland – for one track, but otherwise *Instrumentals 2015* is very much business as usual. “In many ways it’s a return to the original idea,” says King, “of the music appearing out of the ether, then withdrawing again into an unexplainable hinterland.”

“I would like to make another record,” adds Pearce. “But it might take a bit of time.” **MICHAEL BONNER**

Instrumentals 2015 is released by Domino July 17; Richard King's book *Original Rockers* is out via Faber

THE CLASSIFIEDS

THIS MONTH: MC5! Supported by Jake Thackray!
Taken from the *Melody Maker*, July 1, 1972

CLEMEN PULL
Admission free.
LORD NAPIER, Thornton Heath.
GEORGE MELLY
with Bill Brunskill.
MAGIC ROCK CLUB, Merlin's Cave, Margery Street, WOI.
BLUNDERPUSS
+ ZONE
for free
OSTERLEY JAZZ, Rugby Club, Tentelow Lane, Norwood Green.
BOB KERRS
WHOOPEE BAND
Next week George Melly.

**DADDY STOVEPIPE
CALLINAN-FLYNN**
Three Tuns, High Street, Beckenham.
GEORGE KAYE vibes 4, Falconwood Station, Hotel (A2).
GILL'S BAND, Big band jazz
DERBY ARMS, Upper Richmond Road, Sheen. Every Sunday lunchtime.
JAZZ at Kirks Penthouse Restaurant, 7 Leicester Place, WC2 (above Prince Charles Cinema). THE JOHN WILLIAMS QUARTET plus THE NEIL ROGERS TRIO, 8-11 pm, admission 30p.

TUESDAY
BARNET, SOUTHERN STOMPERS
star guests The Salisbury, High Street, Barnet, 8-11 pm.
CHELSEA KINGS ROAD, The Trafalgar.
**MAX COLLIE
RHYTHM ACES**
Lunchtime, 12.30-3 p.m.
Dobells have our new LP.
EVERY TUESDAY at Jolly Cockney, Black Prince Road, S.E.11.
PHIL SEAMAN TRIO
plus this week
RONNIE ROSS

SCARECROW
THOMAS-A-BECKETT, OLD KENT ROAD, 9.00.
THE JAZZMAKERS, Plough, Stockwell, SW9. Tasteful Jazz. Versatile soloists.

BEDFORD COLLEGE
Regent's Park, N.W.1
MIDSUMMER MADNESS
JUNE 30th, 10 p.m.—6 a.m.
M.C.5
BROTHERHOOD OF BREATH
BITCH • JAKE THACKRAY
PEELERS
CHAMPION JACK DUPREE
BLOSSE-ELIOT • BONNIE DOBSON
TIGHT LIKE THAT • DAGON

FOX at GREYHOUND Park Lane CROYDON
SUNDAY, JULY 2: D.J.: RICK HAWKINS
GENESIS
+ SNAKE EYE
Sunday, July 9th: AL STEWART + TRAPEZE

THE GREYHOUND
175 FULHAM PALACE RD., W.6
THURSDAY, JUNE 29: BROWN'S HOME BREW
FRIDAY, JUNE 30: GRAND PARK FROG
SATURDAY, JULY 1: CLEAR BLUE SKY
SUNDAY, JULY 2: J S D BAND
MONDAY, JULY 3: DEMMICK & ARMSTRONG
TUESDAY, JULY 4: SNAKE EYE
ABERNETHY

PHIL HAINES presents
EDGAR BROUGHTON BAND
SUPERTRAMP AUBREY SMALL
Sunday, July 2—SOUTH PARADE PIER, PORTSMOUTH

Lightfoot plays
nine UK gigs
next year

SEE THE LIGHTFOOT

"The emotional stress has been beneficial..."

Alcoholism, strokes onstage, three marriages, endorsements from Dylan – GORDON LIGHTFOOT, master singer-songwriter, has survived it all...

BOB DYLAN OBSERVED that when he heard a Gordon Lightfoot song he wished "it would last forever." In a different sense, the Canadian troubadour's songs are well on their way to such longevity: it is now 50 years since Peter, Paul & Mary launched his songwriting career with their 1965 cover of "Early Morning Rain". His first international hit under his own name came five years later with "If You Could Read My Mind".

Lightfoot recently announced his first concerts in Britain in more than 30 years and, at 76, it's almost half a lifetime since he last played here. "I guess I've been through a lot, but

I think I've written a few good songs since then," he tells *Uncut*. "Back then, I was still an alcoholic. I finally gave up about a year later. And I nearly died in 2002, which changes you. I had an aneurysm and was in a coma. That knocked me out for two and a half years."

He eventually returned to the road in 2005 with the *Better Late Than Never* Tour, and then suffered a stroke onstage. "I lost the use of my right hand, which is quite a thing for a guitar player. But I never stopped practising and after six months I got most of it back." Then there was a death hoax that went around the world in 2010; Lightfoot was driving

when he heard the announcement on his car radio, and had to pull over to call his friends and family: "So I'm very thankful to be able to walk on stage and play these songs for people."

Lightfoot's impressive songbook led Dylan to note, "I can't think of any of Gordon's songs I don't like." Had he listed them, in addition to "Early Morning Rain" and "If You Could Read My Mind", he might have mentioned the likes of "Carefree Highway", "Sundown", "The Wreck Of The Edmund Fitzgerald", "The Way I Feel", "Canadian Railroad Trilogy" and "Rainy Day People".

Few writers can boast of having the same song covered by Dylan and Elvis Presley, who both recorded "Early Morning Rain". Lightfoot describes Elvis' cover as "a great honour", but adds that the compliment is doubled when it's a

fellow songwriter acknowledging your work. "Bob has always been very generous in his praise. We shared the same manager, Albert Grossman, in the 1960s and we hung out in Greenwich Village and other places. I saw him play in London in 1966, too." Is there one Dylan song above all others he wishes he'd written himself? "Ring Them Bells." I recorded it soon after it came out on *Oh Mercy* and we still do it in concert. It's incredibly relevant today."

Unlike many other Canadian songwriters, Lightfoot never moved to the States and has lived all his life in Toronto. The closest he came to joining the Laurel Canyon set was a short rental in the '70s: "I took a place in the canyons for two months to inspire songwriting and that worked well. But then I went home.

"I lost the use of my right hand, which is quite a thing for a guitar player. But I never stopped."
Gordon Lightfoot

It would have felt like deserting."

In the '70s he was part of a Warner Bros stable of singer-songwriters that included Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, James Taylor and Van Morrison. Did he feel a sense of community or competition? "There certainly was competition, but it made you want to do better."

Like many of the great troubadours, there's a strongly autobiographical thread in his work. "If You Could Read My Mind" was written in the turmoil of divorce and several of his other best-known songs reflect personal crises. "I've been married three times and soothed it with alcohol and it all came out in the songs," he says. "So you could say the emotional stress has been beneficial." **NIGEL WILLIAMSON**

Gordon Lightfoot plays across the UK in May 2016

UNCUT

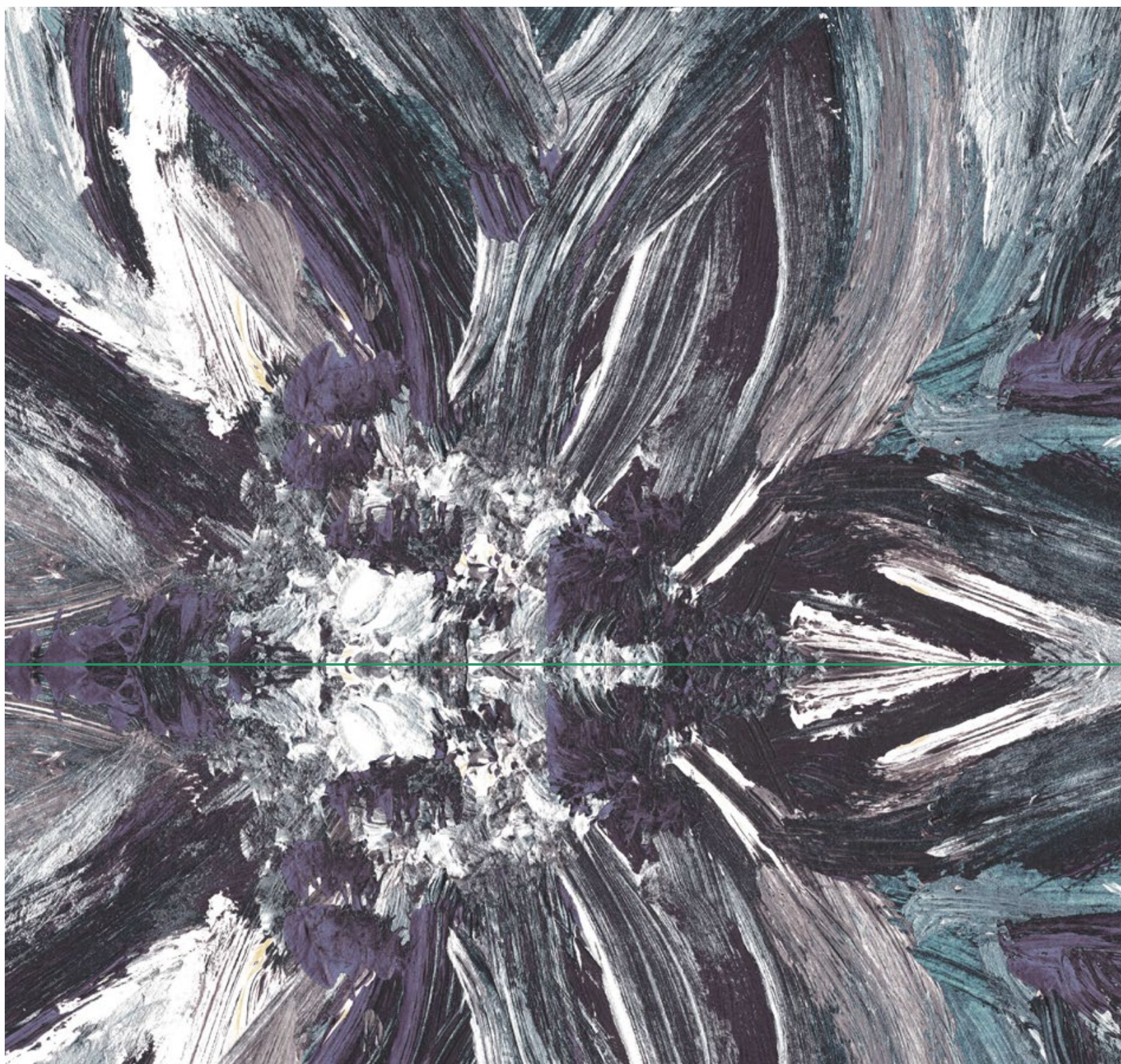
AT THE END OF THE ROAD

UNCUT'S FAVOURITE festival, End Of The Road, is almost upon us now, beginning as it does on September 4 at Larmer Tree Gardens in Dorset. **Sufjan Stevens, The War On Drugs, Tame Impala, Laura Marling, My Morning Jacket and Low** (pictured left) head up the bill. And, as in previous years, *Uncut* will be hosting Q&A sessions over the weekend with some

of the festival's key acts. Keep an eye on uncut.co.uk for further announcements. In the meantime, End Of The Road tickets are still available for £195: the place to go is www.endoftheroadfestival.com...

END OF THE ROAD

flying saucer attack
instrumentals 2015



17 july 2015

Daniel Romano:
he doesn't care
about your
stupid life

I'M NEW HERE

Daniel Romano

Recommended this month: an ambitious new country storyteller... "I'm not a confessional songwriter. That stuff is so fucking whiney!"

DANIEL ROMANO IS so wary of labels that he's invented his own. 'Mosey' music, explains the Canadian songwriter, is all about contrasts. "There's glitz and grit, revelling and wallowing, wretchedness and showmanship," he says, alluding to the kind of emotional trials that were once the preserve of Buck Owens, George Jones and Hank Williams. "I'm pretty seriously afraid of classification. I like writing in the classic country formula, but once the music takes over, it could go in any direction."

As evinced on fourth LP *If I've Only One Time Askin'*, the spiritual seat of his music lies somewhere between Nashville and Bakersfield. The record is studded with country classicism, from its twangy guitars and weepy steel to its cold-truth sentiments and the stoic warmth of

Romano's voice. And while the themes may be familiar – break-up, regret, the solace of a bottle – this intuitive grasp of country's raw appeal is invested with an articulate, very modern sensibility. "Lyrically, there are no illusions," he states. "It's very real. Even the more poetic realms of country and western evoke a very human emotion. Telling a story or crafting a feeling with words has always been an interest. I'm not a confessional songwriter. That stuff is so fucking whiney. I'm like, 'Who gives a shit? I don't care about your stupid life.'"

The son of folk musicians, Romano grew up in Welland, Ontario, where he was exposed to his grandparents' collection of Merle Haggard and George Jones records. But it was hardcore punk

that stirred his teenage self into action, forming Attack In Black in 2003. The quartet issued three albums before falling out with their record company: "That band was ever-changing too, which was maybe our demise. People in the industry don't know how to work with bands who aren't the same on every album, so we were just kinda left in the dust. And that drove us all apart."

The upshot was that, in 2009, Romano co-founded his own label, You've Changed Records. He swiftly made an acoustic folk album with Julie Doiron and Fred Squire and began overseeing releases by fellow Canadians Apollo Ghosts, Shotgun Jimmie and The Weather Station. His work with the latter included co-writing, producing and playing an impressive spread of instruments. "Dan's talent is more

complex than great musicianship," says The Weather Station's Tamara Lindeman. "He finds things so deep in the pocket that you don't notice they're innovative and unusual."

The label also allowed Romano to make solo records, reaching back into his country roots. Aside from *...One Time Askin'*, he already has another album (provisionally titled *Mosey*) ready to go. This one, he says, draws from late-'60s Everlys: "I'm trying to cover my ass so I don't end up in some club I don't want to be a part of. I want to make the kind of country that doesn't exist anymore and, at the same time, hasn't existed yet. That's the ultimate goal." **ROB HUGHES**

Daniel Romano's If I've Only One Time Askin' is out July 31 on New West

I'M YOUR FAN

"Dan makes the rest of us look like amateurs. He's a top-rate singer, songwriter, player, performer, producer, visual artist and dude."

CAITLIN ROSE



THE UNCUT PLAYLIST

ON THE STEREO THIS MONTH...

PHIL COOK

Southland Mission THIRTY TIGERS

After work with Justin Vernon, Matthew E White and Hiss Golden Messenger, the gifted sideman moves into the spotlight for an uplifting, Ry-inflected country-soul set.

THE CAIRO GANG

Goes Missing DRAG CITY

Another notable accomplice – Will Oldham guitarist Emmett Kelly – finesses his jangle. Recommended for Rickenbacker fetishists.

ELEVENTH DREAM DAY

Works For Tomorrow THRILL JOCKEY

A fraught, crunchy comeback that ranks as one of the strongest albums in the Chicago veterans' 30-year career.

THE JESUS AND MARY CHAIN

Live At Barrowlands DEMON

The Reid bros reconstruct *Psychocandy* in Glasgow, its finely wrought cacophonies just as potent 30 years on.

BEIRUT

No No No 4AD

Less of the Balkan brass this time out, as Zach Condon recovers from divorce with a string of sunny, stealthily groovy new songs from behind the Fender Rhodes.

LIQUID LIQUID

Optimo SUPERIOR VIADUCT

Neatly timed for our NYC issue, the pick of an intoxicating shipment of 12" reissues from the punk-funk trailblazers.

BOB MOULD

Workbook 25 EDEL

Beyond Hüsker Dü and Sugar, is this belligerent folk album Mould's finest? A 2CD reissue makes a strong case, with "Shoot Out The Lights", live, emphasising the debt to Richard Thompson.

JARVIS COCKER

20 Golden Greats RED BULL MUSIC ACADEMY

Eerie, harp-strafed ambient soundtrack to the Pulp maestro's new Paris exhibition revolving around gold discs. "Gold can be used in food, and has the E number 175..."

ARTHUR'S LANDING

Second Thoughts BUDDHIST ARMY

More New York stories, as Arthur Russell's friends and collaborators gracefully rework songs from his silvery back catalogue.

ADRIAN YOUNGE/GHOSTFACE

KILLAH 12 Reasons To Die II LINEAR LABS

Following up from the LA producer's comp (reviewed p97), Younger hooks up again with the Wu's most distinctive voice for another baroque Blaxploitation odyssey.

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



fresh produce



neil young + promise of the real
the monsanto years
29/06/2015



richard thompson
still
29/06/2015



rickie lee jones
the other side of desire
29/06/2015



joy williams
venus
06/07/2015



leon bridges
coming home
22/06/2015



micheal head + the strands
the olde world
29/06/2015



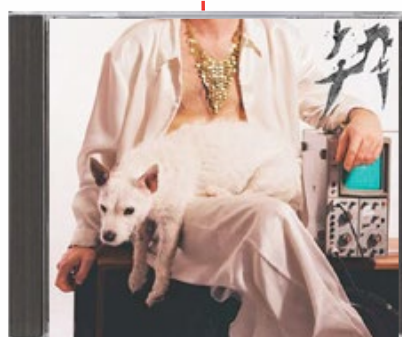
tess parks + anton newcombe
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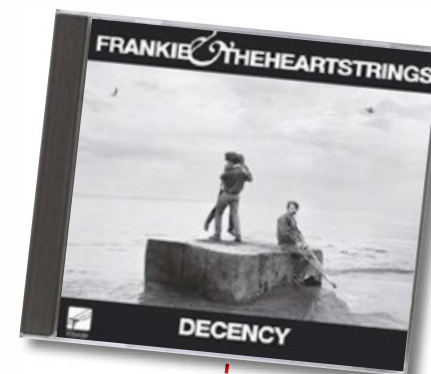
gill landry
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THE NAME OF THIS BAND IS...

Your guide to this month's free CD

1 JASON ISBELL Speed Trap Town

Maybe it's the critical involvement of a state trooper in the narrative, but there's something of *Nebraska* to this tough, plaintive yarn from the fifth Jason Isbell LP since he left the Drive-By Truckers. "It's possible for me to inhabit these characters because I have a good memory of the times when I was adrift," he tells *Uncut* on p79.

2 SLEAFORD MODS Face To Faces

A gentle warning to prepare yourself for Jason Williamson's unflinching verbal onslaught; as John Lewis puts it in his review on p70, he "curses more entertainingly than anyone in pop since *The Troggs Tapes*". The latest righteous Mods invective features a physical attack on Boris Johnson and a bassline that pleasingly recalls Steve Hanley in the mid-'80s Fall.



3 EZRA FURMAN Lousy Connection

"It's late at night, it's time to tell you my secrets," Furman begins, and he spills plenty in our interview (p24) this month. Here, though, is a key example of the music that makes the Chicagoan such a compelling new star in our world: literate, super-catchy doo-wop that begins at a '50s drive-in and progresses to somewhere bolder and stranger.

4 SHELBY LYNNE Son Of A Gun

We reviewed Lynne's *I Can't Imagine* a couple of issues back, to coincide with its US release. To mark the UK arrival of the country-soul stylist's latest, though, we've added "Son Of A Gun" to this month's selection – a slinky Bayou groove refracted through hazy atmospheric.

5 SONNY VINCENT & ROCKET FROM THE CRYPT Through My Head

Something of a jolt after Shelby Lynne's languor, here's a platoon of Rocket From The Crypt troops backing Sonny Vincent, an undersung veteran of the '70s CBGB cohort. Fervid stomps proliferate on their delightful *Vintage Piss*, none better than "Through My Head". This month's most belligerently anguished break-up song, by some distance.

6 DUKE ELLINGTON & HIS ORCHESTRA Afrique (Take 3, Vocal)

A lost tune from the jazz master, recorded in 1970 at a session engineered by the legendary architect of Krautrock, Conny Plank. Mystery surrounds the identity of the ululating singer on this take of "Afrique": is it a Scandinavian lover of the Duke, or even Conny Plank's wife?

7 SAMANTHA CRAIN Kathleen

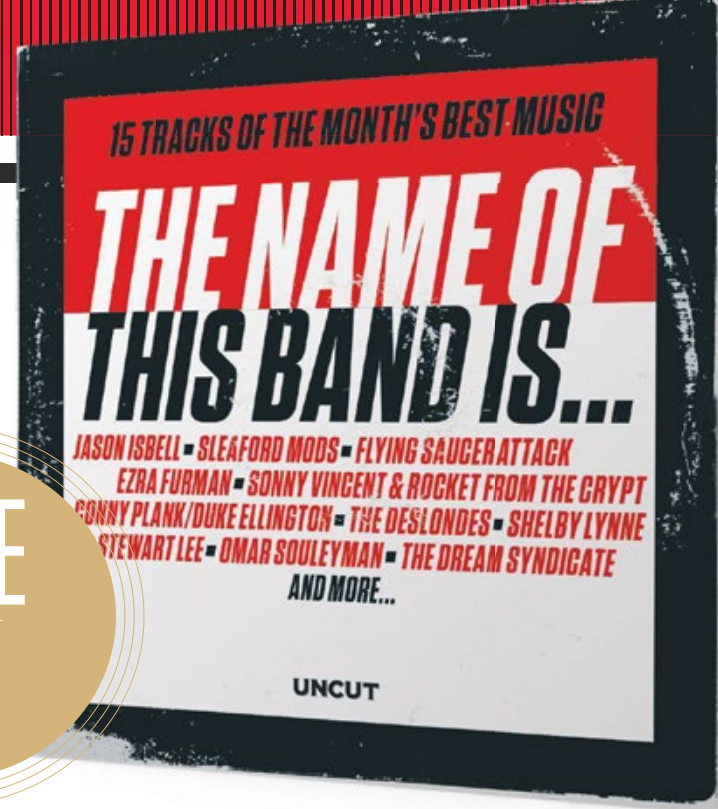
Samantha Crain's "Kathleen" comes from the Oklahoman's fourth, very fine solo album. Like much of *Under Branch & Thorn & Tree*, "Kathleen" is understated, subtly funky, and a good showcase for Crain's lovely voice – one that recalls Joanna Newsom moving out of the salon and into the wilderness.



8 FLYING SAUCER ATTACK Instrumental 7

For much of the 1990s, David Pearce and FSA provided solace for music fans who, emboldened by their MBV records, craved further, wilder experiments with feedback, drone and leftfield beauty. Like Kevin Shields, Pearce also went AWOL for a time, but "Instrumental 7" comes from the first new FSA LP in 15

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years. And as you'll hear, Pearce's aesthetic remains miraculously unaffected by the timelag.

9 DANIEL ROMANO I'm Going To Teach You

One for Sturgill Simpson fans now, in the shape of Canadian singer-songwriter Daniel Romano and his ornate, tears-in-beer take on old-school country. This track, from *If I've Only One Time Askin'*, is a prime example of his 'Mosey' music: "There's glitz and grit, revelling and wallowing, wretchedness and showmanship," he tells us on p10.

10 STEWART LEE & STUART ESTELL Polly On The Shore

Who knew that, besides being one of Britain's best comedians, Stewart Lee would turn out to be a decent folk singer, too? Long a scholar of arcane music, Lee tackles the traditional "Polly On The Shore" like a tender, Midlands Billy Bragg, as part of the 80th birthday tribute to Shirley Collins, *Shirley Inspired*.

11 THE DREAM SYNDICATE Like Mary

A Paisley Underground landmark, *Days Of Wine And Roses* is one of this month's key reissues, with the 1982 LP remastered and extended. Among six previously unreleased tracks from Steve Wynn's combo, "Like Mary" is an epic gem; strafed VU ramalam, chugging with no little art and enterprise into Neu!-like motorik stretches.

12 THE DESLONDÉS The Real Deal

Uncut first stumbled across The Deslondes when on assignment in New Orleans to interview their sister band, Hurray For The Riff Raff. Their debut album has been hammered pretty hard in the office of late, especially this spirited sing-



along that captures the quintet's knack of mixing country twang with the vintage R&B rhythms of their adopted hometown.

13 RACHEL GRIMES The Herald

Like Flying Saucer Attack, Rachel's were one of the most slippery outliers in the '90s post-rock firmament, hatching a kind of neo-chamber music out of Louisville, Kentucky. Pianist Rachel Grimes was central to the project, and the band's bewitching legacy lives on in her solo work, with "The Herald" throwing sax man Jacob Duncan – like Pharoah Sanders at his most meditative – into the baroque mix.

14 FRASER A GORMAN Shiny Gun

From Courtney Barnett's labelmate, *Slow Gum* is a richly crafted debut album that owes a little to The Go-Betweens, and quite a lot to mid-'70s Dylan: check the ramshackle Rolling Thunder vibes of "Shiny Gun" as a strong taster.

15 OMAR SOULEYMAN Enssa El Aatab

Souleyman's journey from the Syrian wedding circuit to worldwide acclaim has taken a strong turn, marrying his serpentine grooves to electronic producers such as Four Tet. Exhibit A: "Enssa El Aatab", on which Modeselektor slip into sync with the elaborate knees-ups favoured by Souleyman and his regular crew.

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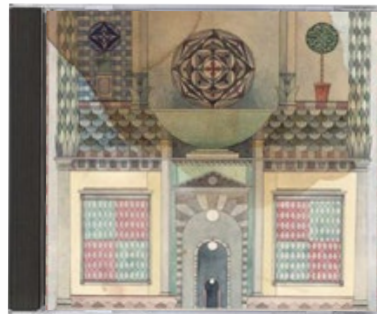


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KATHRYN WILLIAMS
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Interview: Michael Bonner
Photo: Myriam Santos

Merle Haggard

The country legend on misunderstandings with Bob Dylan, playing model trains with Gram Parsons and being seen as an 'outlaw'... "I wanted to be what I was"

"I GOT A DOG out here excited about something," says Merle Haggard. It's mid-morning near Redding, California and the Haggard home is filled with the sound of yapping. "There's nobody here but me and I'm sitting here wondering why they don't shut that dog up," he explains. "We got two toy fox terriers, Fanny and Sally. They're little females and they run the cats around the yard. I think there's a cat out there now." Haggard momentarily wanders off to see to his dogs. He is speaking to *Uncut* ahead of the release of his new album, *Django And Jimmie*, recorded with old friend Willie Nelson. Among its songs are a cover of Dylan's "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right", an outlaw stoner anthem, "It's All Going To Pot", and a tribute to late comrade Johnny Cash. Once he's silenced the rowdy pooch, Haggard readies himself for your questions. "I got up a little early this morning," he reveals. "I'm wide awake now." For a man who had lung surgery after a cancer diagnosis in 2008, Haggard is in good spirits: "I haven't had a check-up in a while, but I think I'm all right – if a body can feel all right at 78 years old! Y'know..." he adds, ruminating on his remarkable life and times, "we go through one valley to the next. I don't think for anybody it's always a good life. You see other people having a perfect life, but I doubt they feel that way about it. I'm just thankful, in the highest way, for the life I've been given."

I don't think I've ever been jealous of him. He's an American icon. I toured with him for two years. I went to almost every one of his rehearsals. I was knocked out. Then he had the goddamn nerve to say I didn't like him [*at the MusiCares Person Of The Year Award in February*!] Yeah, I don't understand that. I haven't talked to him since then.

STAR QUESTION



You're a hero to many singer-songwriters, myself included. I loved the tribute albums to Jimmie Rodgers and

Bob Wills. Is hero worship a good thing?

Loudon Wainwright III

Yes, it gets your eyes off yourself. Those albums were exciting because of the admiration I had for both men. It was exhilarating to do their songs with the great musicians that I had at that time. It was two different deals: Jimmie Rodgers was done one way, Bob Wills was done another way.

Growing up in Bakersfield in the '30s, did you get to hear much music? Bruce Yardley, Leeds

Music was really big in our lives. My father was a real good singer and he sang at church, where my mother played the organ. Then radio was in its heyday when I was growing up. There was a lot of great music of all kinds. Back in those days, one station would programme a variety of things all day long. At 8 in the morning, they'd come on with an hour of Bob Wills. Then at 12 noon, you'd get another hour of Bob Wills. That's how hot he was. It was great because it was live from the studio. A real personable thing. People got wound up in them just like they do in these soap operas nowadays. There was a show once a week. Bing Crosby had musicians on there like Joe Venuti and Satchmo, people that we all know. I wanted to be a guitar player before I thought of being a singer. So I was watching these musicians and listening to Bing sing. Crosby was awful good and quite an influence.

What do you remember about seeing Johnny Cash perform at San Quentin prison in 1958?

Steve Barnard, Whitby

I was at a low ebb in my life. I was there to see him come and do one of the bigger things in his life. He performed for 5,000 male prisoners and had no voice. He'd lost it the night before. But he was able to capture those people who were in thrall to Johnny Cash, to the point where they accepted him without a voice. He could barely whisper. I thought it was tremendous how he handled the crowd. We felt like Johnny Cash was a lot like us and

STAR QUESTION



When you wrote "Silver Wings" did you know it was a classic as soon as you finished it, or did it become clear in the

recording that it would be one of those that would last for all time?

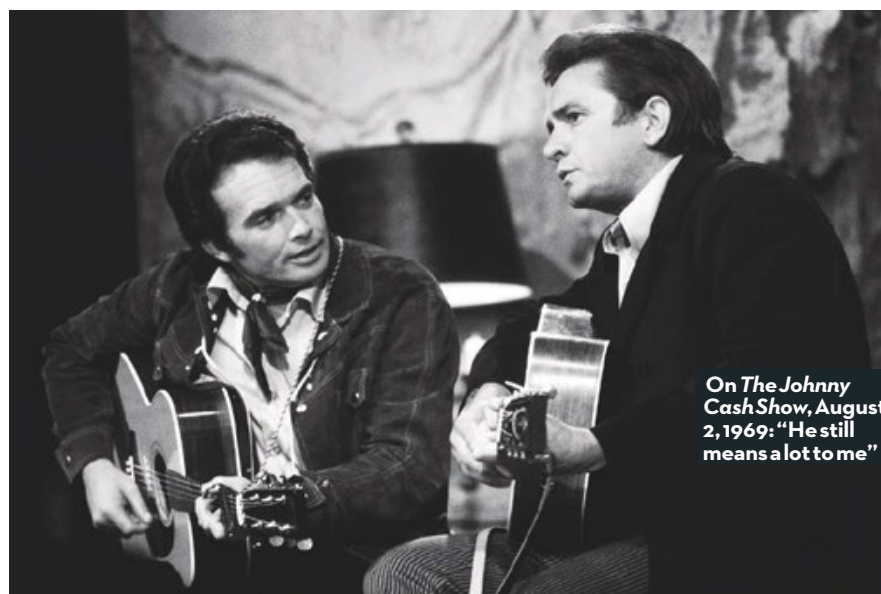
Rosanne Cash

It was written on a plane – a 707 coming out of Phoenix, Arizona, going to LA with Bonnie Owens. I looked out and those silver wings were just gleaming. I thought, 'What a great premise for a song.' I wrote it on that flight. I thought it was an interesting void, somebody hadn't written "Silver Wings", I thought what a great title. I was suspicious of it being a real winner. But no-one knows.

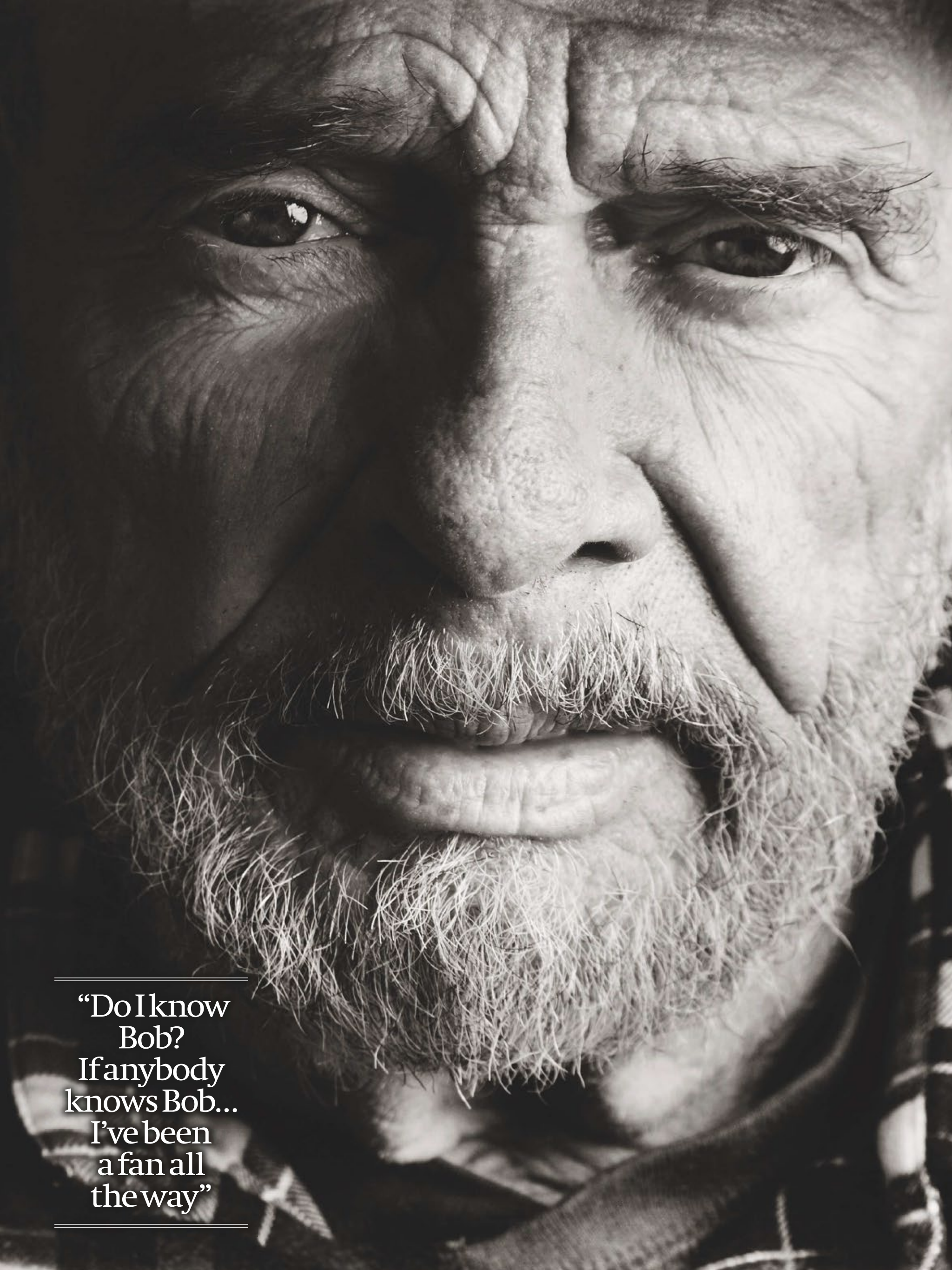
Why did you decide to cover "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" on your new album?

Keiran Clayden, Chatteris, Cambs

We wanted to do a Dylan song and that was something we both knew. Do I know Bob? If anybody knows Bob! [*laughs*] I've been a fan, all the way. I've never been mad at him.



On The Johnny Cash Show, August 2, 1969: "Hestill means a lot to me"



“Do I know
Bob?
If anybody
knows Bob...
I’ve been
a fan all
the way”



Merle and Willie during Willie Nelson And Friends: Outlaws & Angels at the Wilton Theatre, LA, May 5, 2004

to see him succeed and have that ability to do what he did to a bunch of dirty-ass prisoners was inspiring. Many years later, we were in a back room and he was talking about that San Quentin show, and from nowhere I said, "You know, you didn't have any voice." He jerked his head round and said, "How did you know that?" I said, "I was there, John. In the audience, watching you do that." It knocked him down. He still means a lot to me. Some people make such a mark in life that when they pass on... I don't accept the fact he's gone. I just put him on the other end of the country and I can't get hold of him right now.

STAR QUESTION



Hi Merle, this is going back a bit, but I dug your turn as Cisco Calendar in the TV series Centennial, and I loved how you

sang John Denver's "I Guess He'd Rather Be In Colorado" at the close of it. I've searched for your version on a record forever but have never found it. Will it ever be released? *Mike Scott*

I don't think I ever recorded it in the studio. It might be a good idea to do that song on the show. I got to spend three weeks in a pick-up truck with Andy Griffith. That was like some special gift. Do I wish I'd done more acting? I don't think I was good at it. I didn't study. I never gave it a lot of serious thought. It wasn't my forte. I wanted to be what I was.

When did you get your first guitar? *Jade Sibley, Epsom*

My brother was running a filling station, and he took in a guitar and gave a guy a couple of dollars worth of gas when I was about 10. He brought it over my house and set it there in the closet, and it stayed there for a while. My mother got it

out and showed me a couple of chords my dad had showed her. He'd passed away by that time. When did I start writing songs? There's history of that in my report cards from second and third grade. Probably, early on, I might have started when I was seven or eight years old, trying to write things. No, I don't remember any of them!

"Johnny Cash still means a lot to me. I don't accept the fact he's gone..."

You lived in a boxcar in Oildale, Bakersfield. Tell us about the inspiration for the track, "Oil Tanker Train".

Sam Butler, Southampton

It used to come by every day and rattle the ground. We were in earthquake country, so when the ground starts moving, you look up. When that old oil train would go by – it done that every morning, it done that every evening – it grabbed your attention. They was doing it with steam engines back then. You got the old "choo choo" going by and you got the whistle. It added the background to life that don't exist anymore.

What is the enduring appeal of "Okie From Muskogee"?

Helen Wright, St Neots, Cambs

It's a song people use to express pride. You're proud to be who you are. It's one of the selling points of the song. Do I think its message has become stronger down their years? It's never had a bad period. The audience have always accepted it

for their own reasons and for different reasons as time evolved. It's one of the songs people ask me about the most. I've just received four awards. I've had 20 songs that have been played one million times in America. "Workin' Man's Blues" gets a lot of attention. And "Mama Tried", people have tattooed that on their body. It's amazing how seriously they take that song. You know, prison is not the only way to fail. We live in a terrible world. Our future could be awful bleak. I grew up in a tough time, but it's tougher now. The increased population, it's a big problem. The problems in the US, our police problems, are at a peak. I think they're going to put cameras on the chests of the police officers to record what they're doing, which is a step in the right direction. There's good cops and bad cops.



What's the best piece of advice Willie Nelson ever gave you?

Sarah-Jane Pullman, Goudhurst

Willie Nelson is a mysterious man, to say the very least. But I've had the fortune to be with him several times over the last few years. I really like Willie. I first met him in a poker game in 1964 in Nashville. Who won? Don't remember. Our

friendship just came to be over the years. We've admired each other's work, I think. We've had so many damn things happen in our lives. Both of our mothers are from Harrison, Arkansas. It starts right there and the similarities don't quit.

The adjective most used to describe you is 'outlaw'. Do you take it as a compliment?

Sarah Holmes, Croydon

It means we rebelled against the system and did it our way. I loved Nashville, but it wasn't my place to record. I tried it, we did all right, but we didn't do as good as with our own thing out on the coast. The coast gave us vivaciousness, a youthful sound, a fresh attempt that was not evident in Nashville. It was too perfect there. They had the greatest players in the world, but were too good for the average guy.

What did you think when younger artists like The Byrds and The Grateful Dead started covering your songs in the '60s?

Nick Edwards, Newcastle

It was another feather in my cap. It made me proud to have these rock groups admire my music. I didn't know Gram Parsons. I met him. He was extremely impressed with our music. He came to our house in Bakersfield and wanted me to produce his record. We played some model trains. People don't realise how much time it takes to be successful in this business. You can cut a hit, but to cut several you are a busy human being. And I was doing that and wasn't really into what was going on with the Dead or Gram. I was trying to figure out how to follow up "Workin' Man Blues".

What do you do with your downtime? *Chloe, New York*

Not much. There's not a lot of things I can do any more. I've got a lot of recordings we're working on and I'm doing a new album by myself. I try to tour about 10 days a month. By the time you put the travel into the mix, I'm on the road half the time. I'm not without something serious to do all the time, really.

What wisdom would you pass on to your 18-year-old self?

Alison Goodman, Bristol

Wear a seatbelt. You never know what's going to happen. ☺

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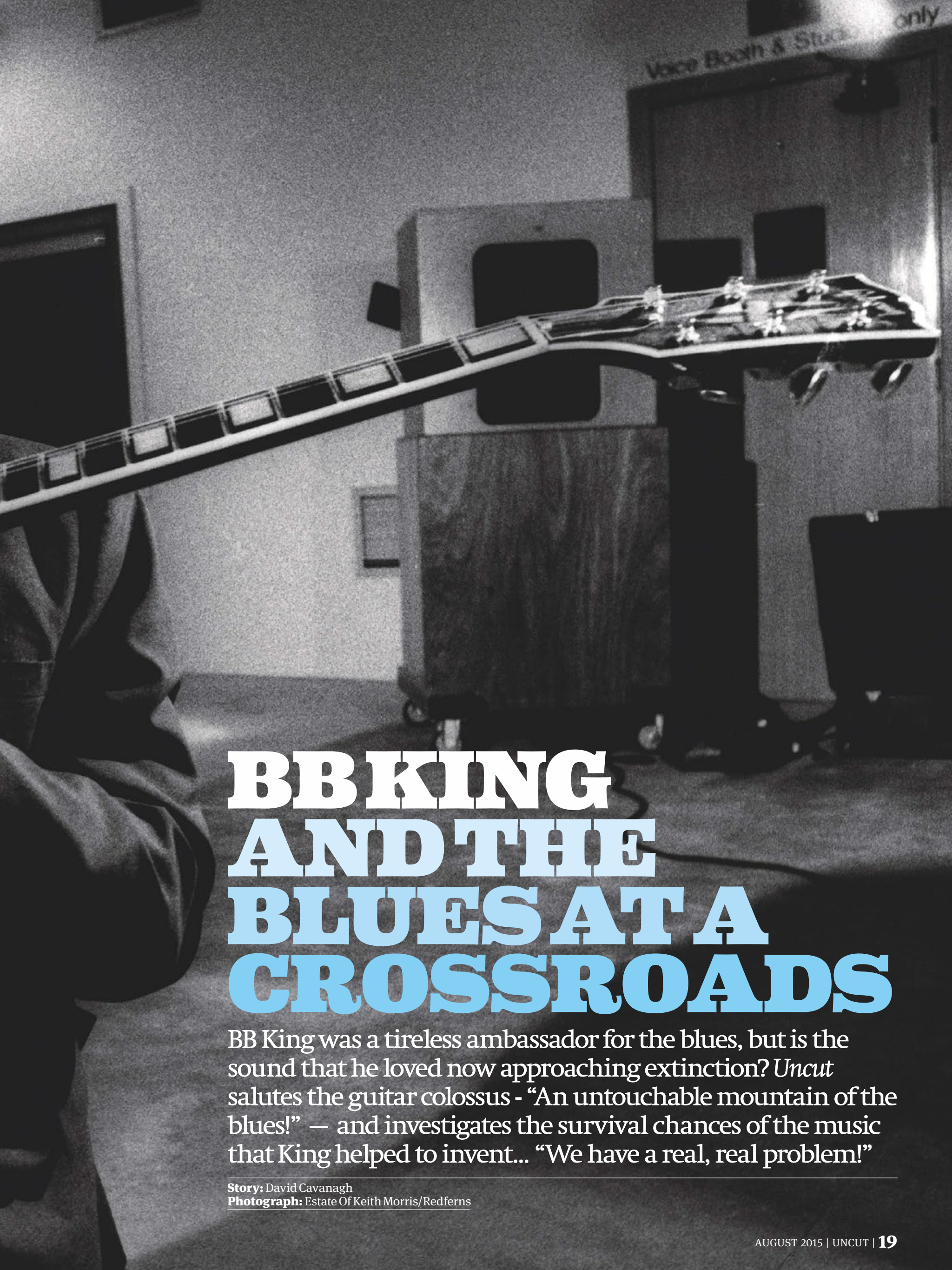
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Presidential, benevolent,
elegant: BB King in the
studio, October 18, 1971





BB KING AND THE BLUES AT A CROSSROADS

BB King was a tireless ambassador for the blues, but is the sound that he loved now approaching extinction? *Uncut* salutes the guitar colossus - "An untouchable mountain of the blues!" — and investigates the survival chances of the music that King helped to invent... "We have a real, real problem!"

Story: David Cavanagh

Photograph: Estate Of Keith Morris/Redferns



BB King performs on radio station WDIA, Memphis, Tennessee, 1948



voted the third best guitarist of all time in *Rolling Stone*.

The American blues guitarist Walter Trout, who first met King as a teenager in the '60s (see panel), speaks of him in terms that are positively Nelson Mandela-esque. Presidential. Benevolent. Elegant. An inspirational

man who had a kind word for everybody, no matter how lowly or unknown. A black Afro-American blues colossus who never scoffed at middle-class white teenagers for wanting to play his music – and who, quite the opposite, encouraged them to devote their lives to it. A bear-like man comfortable in his own skin. An approachable giant exuding humanity and warmth.

“You cannot overstate the impact that he had,” Trout says. “He’s the guy, really, who invented what we all do. He was an untouchable mountain of the blues.”

KING LEAVES BEHIND a towering catalogue of music which began in 1949 with a single, “Miss Martha King”, recorded in Memphis. Thanks to the internet, his music will always be accessible to future generations. John Mayall chuckles down the phone line from California as he thinks about how much has changed: how the legacy of the blues, the vocation that has dominated his entire adult life, is now to be found not on obscure vinyl in dusty basements, but on Wikipedia and YouTube. Mayall first heard King’s music “after coming out of the army in 1955”. He loved the way King’s voice and guitar seemed to come from the same place inside him. “He’d sing a line and answer it with the guitar. And as you heard more and more of him, he had such a distinctive style that you’d recognise him within two notes.”

But if King’s best solos are a mere two clicks away on any laptop from here to Mississippi, that doesn’t necessarily mean the blues as a genre is guaranteed another century of survival. By talking to

musicians who play it for a living, one begins to get a sense of what a huge hole King’s death will leave at the heart of this venerable, oddly vulnerable music. To step into the role of figurehead, everyone will look expectantly to 78-year-old Buddy Guy, who still tours and records and was onstage with King at the White House when Obama hesitantly joined in on “Sweet Home Chicago”. But as much as he

THE DAY I MET BB

Three blues guitarists recall first meeting the great man, starting with...

WALTER TROUT, SOUTH JERSEY, 1968



“I used to work in a department store in a mall when I was about 17.

It was right next to a record store, and one day BB walked in there and started looking at albums. I ran in and asked for an autograph. I told him I played guitar and wanted to be a musician. He said, ‘Well, if you’re in it for the money, you’ll never get rich playing the blues. But remember, son, you don’t choose the blues. The blues chooses you. You play it because you have to.’ I always remember that when I hear young blues guitarists today. The ones I admire are always in it for the right reasons. Just like BB said: the blues chooses you.”



John Mayall on King: “You’d recognise him within two notes”

BB KING, WHO DIED on May 14 at the age of 89, took an unimaginable journey through American life and culture that led him from a cotton plantation in 1920s Mississippi to the White House in 2012, where he performed an ad hoc blues (“Sweet Home Chicago”) with President Barack Obama. King, a guitarist famous for his emotional solos and black

Gibson guitars all called Lucille, was already 86 by then – and though he could no longer maintain an energetic aggregate of 250 shows a year, he still held firm to a work ethic that many rock bands would have found gruelling.

King’s death was not a complete shock – he had suffered diabetes-related health problems for eight months and had spent his last two weeks in hospice care in Las Vegas – but it comes as a serious blow to the blues world, for which he was a global ambassador and one of the last surviving links to the Mississippi Delta. “You expect people like BB to live forever,” his friend John Mayall tells *Uncut*. “Everyone knew that he wasn’t in the best of health, but he was such a larger-than-life figure.”

Riley B King, as he was born on September 16, 1925, endured formative experiences that still seem cruel and astonishing no matter how many times blues historians have chronicled them. Born in a wooden cabin to desperately poor parents, he worked in cotton fields at the age of seven. “When I was picking cotton they paid 35 cents a hundred,” he told the British journalist Mick Brown in 2009, “and I learnt to be pretty good – I could pick over 400 in a day. Then I learned to drive tractors and I was very good at it. Driving a tractor on a plantation, you’re kind of a star, because you’re doing something that not everyone can do.”

By the end of the 20th Century, King was an instantly recognisable superstar, a man estimated by *International Business Times* to have earned more than \$100 million during his career. Not the least of his extraordinary talents was his ability to fill his solos with all the sorrow he must have felt since boyhood, while carrying himself in public as a humble, forgiving man who claimed only modest gifts. In the interview with Brown, he wished he could be as good a musician as Eric Clapton or George Benson. He’d just been

admires Guy, Walter Trout worries that King's mantle may simply not be transferrable. The only other living American bluesman of equivalent stature is 80-year-old Otis Rush, but he's been effectively retired since suffering a stroke in 2004.

Are we about to reach a critical point in the evolution of the blues? Gradually, it has become more of a white genre than the black one it started out as. A few black artists such as the Texan guitarist Gary Clark Jr and the Harlem-born singer Shemekia Copeland have received widespread attention, but in Britain and Europe it's rare to see black faces in the audience at blues gigs and festivals, let alone a black musician onstage. There may come a time, and it could happen within the next decade, when the senior gatekeepers of the music's legacy are white Englishmen like Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page. And what sort of blues will we be talking about by then? What kind of age group will gravitate towards it? And how many concessions will it have to make to be heard? Tellingly, Buddy Guy's most recent album, *Rhythm & Blues*, included collaborations with Kid Rock, Keith Urban and Aerosmith. His A&R man could scarcely have made it clearer that the blues urgently needs to find a new audience by cross-pollinating with more popular genres.

At the moment, as we look around the blues circuit, what people seem to mean by 'blues' is 'blues rock'. The language is one of electric guitars, growling voices, prolonged solos, two-man rhythm sections and occasional harmonicas. You could argue that not much has changed in half a century.

"I think, fundamentally, the blues is somewhere between where it was in 1950 and where it was in 1967. That's 1950 in Chicago and 1967 at the Marquee in London," comments Joe Bonamassa, an American guitarist who toured with BB King as a 12-year-old virtuoso (see panel, p22). Bonamassa's words carry weight not just because he's an abiding disciple of the '60s British blues boom, but also because his career over the last few years has rewritten the rulebook of how to be a professional blues guitarist.

Now 38, Bonamassa

appears to be living proof that the blues is still a commercially viable form of music. Last year, his album *Different Shades Of Blue* charted in the *Billboard* Top 10, two years after its predecessor, *Driving Towards The Daylight*, narrowly missed the Top 20. But Bonamassa's success is deceptive. He works completely outside the framework of the major label record industry, and he's amassed a fanbase not through radio play or marketing, but through word-of-mouth enthusiasm for his pyrotechnical guitar soloing. If the blues has a modern-day Eddie Van Halen, it's Joe Bonamassa. He describes his *Billboard* breakthrough as the result of "building a house over the course of many years, bricks and mortar, starting with the foundations". His chart positions are phenomenal, but they tell us little about the current health of the blues. "Don't do what I'm doing," he cautions would-be emulators. "There's only one PT Barnum. You have to figure out something different, something that will make people want to come out and see you on a rainy Tuesday night."

In a sense, the blues is all around us. The theme tune to *Better Call Saul* is a guitar blues. No chat show in America gets very far without the house band playing a 12-bar

BB, Eric Clapton and Elvin Bishop live in NYC, 1967



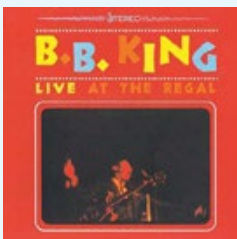
5 BEST BB KING ALBUMS



SINGIN' THE BLUES

(1957)

King's debut compiled some of his most successful singles to date, including four R&B No 1s: "3 O'Clock Blues", "You Know I Love You", "Please Love Me" and "You Upset Me Baby". It may say "Singin'" on the sleeve, but guitar playing is really what's going on as this strong primer for King's early work amply illustrates.



LIVE AT THE REGAL

(1965)

A conspicuous highlight among many strong live albums (Live In Cook County Jail is also recommended), this was recorded on November 21, 1964 at the Regal Theater in Chicago. Even King himself noted, "On that particular day in Chicago everything came together." ...Regal demonstrated the resilience of King's inventory as well as capturing his considerable stage presence.



COMpletely WELL

(1969)

King's 17th studio album, *Completely Well*, included "The Thrill Is Gone": a breakthrough hit on the R&B and pop charts. Musically, it privileges

the intuitive interplay between King, veteran Atlantic Records bassist Gerald 'Fingers' Jemmott and Hugh McCracken, who later played with both Lennon and McCartney. A companion album, *Live And Well*, features Al Kooper on keys.



BLUES ON THE BAYOU

(1998)

BB King's output slowed down in the '90s - he only released six studio albums, down from the 14 he recorded during the '60s. *Blues On The Bayou* was King's first outing as producer - aged 73. Recorded in four days in Louisiana with his regular touring band, it comprises 14 slow and mid-tempo originals: a strong selection, particularly the graceful and defiant "I'll Survive".



ONE KIND FAVOR

(2008)

King's final studio album, produced by T Bone Burnett, finds him in excellent company - Jim Keltner and Dr John lead his backing band - and on fine form. Working through standards including Blind Lemon Jefferson's "See That My Grave Is Kept Clean", John Lee Hooker's "Blues Before Sunrise" and Howlin' Wolf's "How Many More Years", the tone is elegiac and understated. MICHAEL BONNER



With the young Joe Bonamassa

blues. Led Zeppelin's deluxe remasters make instant headlines in the media every time a new batch is rumoured – but nobody says the word “blues”, even though that's where the roots of the PR stealth campaign lie. Jack White, the Black Keys, Hozier and George Ezra – among others – have different configurations of blues influences in their music. Ezra, who at 22 is well on the way to selling a million copies of his debut album (*Wanted On Voyage*), has cited Lead Belly – a blues legend dead since 1949 but easily available to him on YouTube – as a major inspiration on his precociously gruff singing voice.

But Ezra is careful not to market himself as a blues singer. If he did, his record sales would be more likely to be in the low thousands, if not the high hundreds. “The blues is a dirty word,” Paul Puccioni, a British blues promoter, says flatly. “There's no interest from radio or the media. What you constantly hear from the BBC is that the blues is ‘too niche’ – a music that appeals only to middle-aged men. We have a real, real problem.”

TO EXAMINE HOW the blues has become an underground genre enjoyed primarily by men in their fifties, *Uncut* talks to two English blues guitarists aged 21 and 25 respectively. Laurence Jones, the younger of the two, was voted Young Artist Of The Year at the 2014 British Blues Awards. He comes from Staffordshire and his heroes include Rory Gallagher and Albert Collins. Oli Brown, from Norfolk, has played with John Mayall and won several British Blues Awards since emerging on the scene in his mid-teens.

Both of these young artists – along with 30-year-old singer-guitarist Joanne Shaw Taylor, another highly rated star of the British blues – grew up in households where a blues-loving father took his children to local blues clubs and encouraged their interest. For Taylor, going to school in Solihull in the '90s, this meant swimming against the tide of all the prevailing pop music that gripped her friends. “I mostly remember a lot of East 17 and Take That fans,” she says wryly. “I managed to convert one or two of them, but I was considered a bit of a novelty at school.”

Jones, who wrote a respectful obituary of BB King for the *Sunday Express*, has a lot of hopes riding on his shoulders. If any young British blues musician can appeal to young people, it may be the baby-faced Jones, who looks like he could belong in a boy band. Jones, however, is in the blues for the long haul. “What I love about the music,” he says, “is that it's all about feeling.” Trained in classical guitar, he's been listening to BB King since he was 10. Jones is the quintessential example of a YouTube blues fan, watching, listening and studying. The challenge he now faces is to convince people his own age that the blues is not an obsolete genre with no relevance to their lives. But until such time as he can do that, he's likely to see the same front row of 55-year-old men in the audience every time he walks onstage. “It's a hard life,” says Puccioni. “The gigs

THE DAY I MET BB

**JOE BONAMASSA
ROCHESTER,
NEW YORK, 1989**

“I THINK HIS TOUR manager must have told him that his support act was a little 12-year-old kid. He got to the show early while I was still playing. I could see him watching me from the side of the stage. Afterwards, we met and he was very intrigued about how I'd got into the blues. He was very nice and we kept in touch, and I ended up doing 15 or 20 shows with him that summer. I always lent him my amp – and my drum-kit. He never had a single backline tech, or any gear, or any front-of-house monitors. He had the kind of voice where he could probably sing without a microphone. The best advice he ever gave me? ‘The road is hard. Keep doing what you're doing. Watch the money.’”



they play tend to be small. It's an uphill struggle to even get noticed.”

Oli Brown is more bullish. As a teenager, he fell in love with “the stories, showmanship and lifestyle” of the blues. He particularly admires the stagecraft of Buddy Guy: “He captivates people in a way that I've never seen a frontman do. He rules it. You're hearing stories from a guy that's been there and done it. It's real. It's total entertainment.” But it's interesting that Brown, after several albums in the blues idiom, has recently formed a hard rock trio – RavenEye – in which his Iommi-like riffing and Jeff Buckley-style vocals may have a much better chance of translating to his peers. In the UK blues community, they fear that Brown is trying to run before he can walk. Joe Bonamassa, who used to front an Anglo-American heavy rock band called

Black Country Communion with Glenn Hughes (ex-Deep Purple), would probably tell Brown running and walking are just two different ways of going in the same direction.

Brown, like Jones, is conscious that he comes from a comfortable middle-class home far removed from the origins of the men who inspired him. He admits there are songs he wouldn't dare to sing, songs about picking cotton and praying in church. He points out, though, that even a middle-class Brit understands what it's like to have his heart broken. Joanne Shaw Taylor, too, has written songs about

her broken relationships. It seems fair enough to call these blues songs. What else would you call them? As for Jones, nobody needs to explain the concept of pain to him. He has Crohn's disease – an incurable illness of the bowel – which requires him to take 15 tablets a day and submit to a monthly blood transfusion.

“I've written some very deep songs about my disease,” Jones says. “People joke about it with me, saying ‘It must be the reason you've got the blues.’ I've definitely been through the mill and back. It's basically ulcers on the stomach. There are various complications with it, including colostomy bags and the risk of developing cancer. Music is my healer.”

Jones, to put it mildly, has suffered for his art. There are times when he needs to lie down on the stage for an hour.

The reputations of Jones, Brown and Taylor have made it to America, where Walter Trout considers Jones “a genius” and a guitarist worthy of comparison with early Clapton. It's the sort of compliment that blues guitarists tend to bat back and forth across the Atlantic, but Trout, a heavy hitter in the blues world, is adamant that Britain is where we should look for many of the heirs-in-waiting. Jones hopes that Clapton may have heard of him by now, but even if he has, the 21-year-old looks certain to have a much smaller-scale career than the revered Slowhand. Even getting a record deal in Britain is difficult for Jones. There are no specialist blues labels that he could sign to. Instead, he followed Brown and Taylor to Ruf, a German label founded by the manager of late American blues guitarist Luther Allison.

And whereas Clapton has been putting out his albums on Warner Brothers and Polydor since he was in his twenties, nobody on the British blues circuit seriously imagines the



Fans: Laurence Jones (above) and Oli Brown (below)



major labels turning up at today's blues clubs to check out the young talent. Joanne Shaw Taylor, as it happens, received a bit of interest a decade or so ago, but quickly grew disillusioned at the offers on the table. "One of them wanted me to be the Norah Jones of the blues, and the other wanted me to be the Avril Lavigne of the blues." In other words, dilute your music and hope that the public focuses on your sultry image rather than your guitar-playing. She turned down both offers, unwilling to bear such a compromise.

IT MUST BE stressed that none of the musicians that *Uncut* speaks to complains about their lot. From the British contingent, there are no protests about being treated unfairly by radio or neglected by the press. They've chosen the blues path and that means doing what BB King taught them to do: go out on the road and stay there. Taylor is booked solid until late October. Jones will rack up an incredible 360 shows in 2015, according to his manager, playing doing two gigs a day when he gets to Europe. Only his Crohn's disease, which needs constant NHS treatment, prevents him from embarking on a long tour of the US.

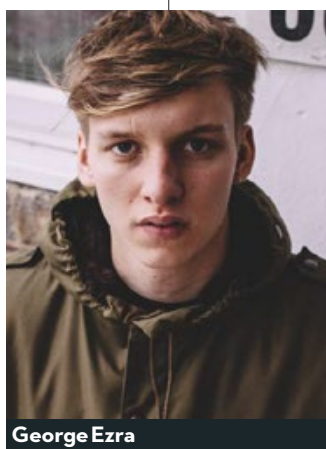
But Walter Trout is older. At 64, he's a veteran of Mayall's Bluesbreakers and Canned Heat, and he also served an eye-opening apprenticeship in the backing band of John Lee Hooker. (Hooker, for him, was the master of primitive blues where BB King was the maestro of sophistication.) Trout partied as hard as he played, it transpires, and last year he had a liver transplant. After spending 40 years earning 10 times less as a blues guitarist than he might have earned in the rock arena, his hospitalisation and year-long recuperation could easily have spelled financial disaster. The blues community rallied round him, holding benefit gigs and fundraisers in Nashville, Philadelphia, Oregon City, New Jersey, London and Durham. Trout's voice cracks as he talks of how overwhelmed he felt – about how the blues is a family that looks after its own – and maybe there's an understandable edge to his tone as he says, soon afterwards, what a damn shame it is that kids nowadays would rather listen to Kanye West and Iggy Azalea.

"We've lost a generation," warns Paul Puccioni, one of the organisers of Lead Belly Fest, a Van Morrison-headlined concert at the Albert Hall, where Trout was due to make his comeback as *Uncut* went to press. "At the moment, if kids aren't led to the blues by their parents, we'll end up never seeing them at a blues gig. The word 'blues' means nothing to them."

Something significant, evidently, needs to happen if the blues is going to mean anything in the future as a live music proposition. And it'll take more than a kid in Norfolk or Stafford listening to Lightnin' Hopkins and cultivating a fascination for the troubadour lifestyle. "There needs to be a crossover," Puccioni goes on. "If someone like George Ezra recorded a Lead Belly song, and said, 'Hey, look, the blues is where my heroes came from,' then maybe that would make it seem cool, somehow, to his young audience. Because at the moment the blues isn't cool to them at all."

When I put this suggestion to Ezra, he sounds amused by it. Speaking a few hours before taking the stage at a sold-out

BB at the 2014 Big Blues Bender, Rivera Hotel & Casino, Las Vegas, September 26, 2014 – a week before his final concert



George Ezra

O2 Apollo in Manchester, Ezra has no qualms about calling himself a Lead Belly fan – and he acknowledges that he's been influenced by the blues tradition of storytelling. But he doubts he could rescue it as a genre by recording

"Goodnight Irene" as his next single. "I find Lead Belly a very interesting singer and guitarist, and he was a great entertainer as well. But could I sing one of his songs? I don't know. I mean, Nirvana have done it..."

If it might lead to a surge of interest in the blues among a generation of young listeners, would he do it?

"If I thought I had that power, yes, I would."

Ezra is puzzled to hear that people like Puccioni view the blues as being under threat. He receives feedback from his fans letting him know that they've checked out the bluesmen he's mentioned in his interviews. But Ezra – like his fans, no doubt

– is not a follower of the contemporary blues scene.

"The majority of times that I find myself listening to live blues," he says, "there's something about it that rubs me up the wrong way. It tends to be someone wailing on a Fender Stratocaster for far too long, and often the emotion is lost for me." It's a damning indictment. If it's representative of

Ezra's generation, it could be near-fatal.

And it shows us we have a clear dividing line. The blues is healthy, hip and has never been within such easy reach – providing we're talking about historical blues recorded by Lead Belly, Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters. But the live circuit where Laurence Jones and Walter Trout ply their trade is a zone of utter disinterest for new fans discovering the history of the blues. And that means the average age in the clubs will never get any lower. You wouldn't expect a lifelong blues evangelist like John Mayall to be down-hearted, and he isn't. "The blues always holds its own," he reminds us. "It has a longevity that never quits."

Mayall has been saying as much since 1965 and has never been proved wrong so far. But

there's a ticking clock, now, on the life expectancy of the blues, and not even BB King at his most ambassadorial could perform the miracle of turning back time. A recent edit to Joanne Shaw Taylor's Wikipedia page informs readers that, 16 years into her career as a blues artist, she has been going in more of a "guitar driven rock" direction. And nobody would blame her in the slightest. **🎸**

THE DAY I MET BB

JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR BIRMINGHAM, 1999

"He was one of the first live shows I ever saw, when I was 14. At the end, he threw plectrums to the crowd. My dad and I didn't have the best seats, so I ran to the front of the stage. By the time I got there, BB's minders were putting his coat on him. He saw me, came over, bent down and shook my hand. I told him I wanted to be a blues guitarist. He had a necklace on – a BB King necklace – and he took it off and handed it to me. He told me I was going to do really well. I walked on air for about the next 10 years. Artists aren't as classy now as he was, but he was everything you wanted him to be. I still have the necklace and I take it with me to every show."





“I’m gonna have unresolved issues until I’m dead.”

Devout Jewish faith and gender fluidity. Drink, drugs and self-destruction. An extraordinary singer-songwriter, with a sax player who acts as his psychiatrist in the middle of live gigs... Meet the remarkable EZRA FURMAN, a new star in perpetual motion. Will he become the next Jonathan Richman? A reborn Lou Reed? Or will he give it all up and become a rabbi?

Story: Laura Snapes
Photograph: Elizabeth D. Herman

TWO DAYS BEFORE the last date of Ezra Furman’s UK tour, the 28-year-old Chicagoan appears on *Later... With Jools Holland* with his backing band, The Boy-Friends. It’s their first televised performance outside of an Illinois public access show

hosted by a puppet rat, and Furman rattles through new single “Restless Year” – a song about being a lifelong outsider – in a sleeveless crimson dress, matching lipstick, zebra-print tights and a long string of chunky plastic pearls. The influence of The Velvet Underground, Violent Femmes and Jonathan Richman is obvious in Furman’s music, but he makes it crackle with his own manic showmanship. “I’m just another savage in the wilderness and if you can’t calm down you can listen to this,” he belts in a frenzied rasp.

“I always felt like there’s a part of me that’s a little embarrassed not to be as arty as some people I admire,” he says, sitting in the empty downstairs bar of North London venue The Lexington. It is the afternoon before he finishes his tour. “But the three chords, they’re so good!” Furman searched his name on Twitter after the TV performance. “There was one that was really good,” he says, compulsively

scratching varnish off the wooden table with his red fingernails. “It was like, ‘Ezra Furman wins my “worst ever” award by a country mile, lad’s got issues too, he’s all done up in his big sister’s gear with pearls and things.’”

It’s a word-perfect recollection. Furman gets off on negative responses to his music, which he wants to be “un-ignorable”. His earliest gigs were acoustic performances at obnoxious frat house parties when he was a student at Massachusetts’ Tufts University; the “depths of despair” he felt in those rooms taught him to scream to be heard. “I was always in some sort of fight with my audience,” he says, popping his finger joints. “Some push and pull really gets me off with performing.”

That goes beyond his audience. Furman’s new album, *Perpetual Motion People*, is, he says, his most honest yet, confronting his devout Jewish faith versus his hedonistic lifestyle; his fluid gender identity and bisexuality; drink, drugs, depression, self-destruction and death. But if you don’t listen to the lyrics, which Furman sings with a zeal that distracts from their weight, the record sounds just as much like a blazing carnival, drunk on raucous saxophone and hooky guitar fuzz. “I’ve been noticing just how much anger and joy has always gone together for me,” he says. “I feel the new record is really kind of joyful. Despite the despair songs and the total anxious or angry songs, the whole thing adds up to a joy. Letting those feelings breathe is like a sign of mental health and great happiness.”



Furman with
The Boy-Friends
The 100 Club,
May 18, 2014



PERPETUAL MOTION PEOPLE is Furman's sixth record – three with Ezra Furman & The Harpoons, and now three billed solo – but the first that's met with an audience of any real size. Bella Union founder Simon Raymonde fell in love with Furman after seeing him at London's 100 Club last November, and went to America to sign him soon after. "He's playful but never for the sake of just being clever," says Raymonde. "People speak of that Jonathan Richman-type eccentricity he possesses, but I am more struck by his ability to write classic songs at such a young age."

"Restless Year" is now all over BBC 6Music, and Furman's current tour sold out in a matter of hours. "There's an odd corollary between being personally honest about who I am and some kind of increased exposure," says Furman. "I feel like in the past couple of years, I've become more of a whole and honest person, and there's been some jump up in attention. Maybe the records are getting better, it's probably true. It's kind of a mind-fuck, though."

Last November, he tweeted about being "creeped out by the increasing tendency in myself and others to act like our aesthetic choices are what constitute ourselves". What with *Later...* and a tour of significantly bigger British venues booked for the autumn, Furman knows that being watched will inevitably have an effect. His candour could be compromised as a marketable character – or he could actively exploit it. "I'm not naïve enough to think some work hasn't gone into that persona," says Art Brut's Eddie Argos, a huge fan. "But I've spent enough time around him to know that he lives and breathes his art."

During tonight's gig, Furman begins a monologue about the depression he started experiencing in his mid-teens: how he withdrew from social life, prompting his parents to

send him to a psychiatrist. Then saxophonist (and producer) Tim Sandusky adopts the role of the shrink, turning what seemed like a candid moment into a dark sideshow. "Do you relate to the monkey who has never experienced the outside world?" Sandusky asks. "Or the monkey who lives in the outside world and has never been trapped?"

"I would say that I do relate, Doctor, except that the monkey is out of the cage and doesn't go anywhere," says Furman. He leaps into "I Wanna Destroy Myself", the opening track of 2013's *Day Of The Dog* and the last song in tonight's main set, yelling with such force that his lips peel back. He high-fives the entire front row on the way back to the dressing room. "There's something really important to me about showing up in front of people and trying to perform some sort of realness, but you have to perform it," he said earlier. "Being effortless is the road to being boring and inauthentic. But it's an odd thing – if you're trying to perform honestly, it's a contradiction in terms. It can make you crazy."

"I WANNA DESTROY MYSELF" would seem like a wry embodiment of rock'n'roll nihilism if it weren't for the rest of *Day Of The Dog*, whose bleak lyrics lack the possibility of redemption and empowerment offered amid the crises of *Perpetual Motion People*. Stagnant and cynical, Furman experiences lapses in faith as he's swept up in the crests and chasms of depression. "It's clear to me that it's painful just to be," he rages on "Anything Can Happen", over heavenly, cooing backing vocals.

"Self-harm and suicidal thoughts used to be a very huge part of my life," he reveals in a halting fashion – he's prone to taking a full, fairly disquieting minute to formulate his answers. "Still are, actually. That song is rooted in wanting to destroy my life, wanting to get rid of this self that's not working for me any more. I think that's where some of the

self-harm and the self-destructiveness was coming from – a really sincere and urgent need to stop being this person that wasn't working, that wasn't true."

Ever since he was 11 years old and first realised he was attracted to men, Furman "learned this constant dishonesty", he says. "I spent much of my life being a very meek, halting person who doesn't want to impose anything on anyone. What I didn't notice is that in not wanting to impose or ruffle any feathers, I was just lying to everybody all the time. I've noticed this theme of closetedness that's about everything to do with who I actually am."

Prompted by a budding love of Green Day, The Clash and the Sex Pistols, Furman asked for his first guitar as a Bar Mitzvah present from his parents, who sent their four kids to a private Jewish day school but otherwise weren't overly observant: Friday night dinners, Passover, synagogue, "but not all weekends". At 14, they transferred Furman to regular public high school, where he didn't fit in – and didn't really want to. He met his girlfriend, Kat, who introduced him to Lou Reed and The Velvet Underground on long, aimless drives. "That shit was really important for me, 'cos that guy was really ambiguous and not on the team," says Furman.

Furman started becoming more interested in Judaism after meeting an older Orthodox boy. "I thought, maybe that's me, even though I'm super into punk rock," he recalls, but realised that traditional Judaism was more appealing. As he became properly observant, Furman, bored and annoyed by his peers' underage drinking, made a personal vow to remain straight-edge. "I thought, maybe there's something to trying to have a little discipline about how we live," he says. "Which is not very cool when you're 16."

It doesn't take Sandusky's psychiatrist act to see the comfort of these governing principles in contrast to Furman's state of mind. His mental health, religion and anti-hedonistic principles made him feel like an outsider, "not to mention the whole secret in-the-closet bisexual gender-wobbly thing," he says, rotating the long string of pearls around his neck. He started laying down more rules: he was steadfastly against writing personal songs (or so he thought) and refused to join a band. "I felt like there was all



Ezra Furman & The Harpoons, 2011

"SELF-HARM USED TO BE A VERY HUGE PART OF MY LIFE" EZRA FURMAN

these dumb bands trying to get into a sound and look cool and have an attitude, and I just wanted to write songs, only rely on the chords," he recalls, taking a break from scratching the Lexington's table to pound it with his fist. "There was an intensity with which I insisted on certain things."

ONCE HE FINISHED high school, Furman wanted to go to a Yeshiva in Israel for a year. Fearful that they might lose their son to religion, his parents initially dissuaded him from attending the school but still encouraged him to make the pilgrimage. Ultimately, Furman decided to allay their fears altogether and go straight to Tufts to study English in 2004. He worked at the music library, where the compilation *No Thanks! The '70s Punk Rebellion* caught his ear. "I started realising there was all these punk bands that weren't even that good but were just really fun to listen to, who might have made one single," he says. It convinced him that joining a band wasn't necessarily a terrible idea.

At Tufts, he met bassist Job Mukkada, who played in the "frat party band" Moksha that gave Furman those early support slots. Within a year, Mukkada and the band's

BUYERS' GUIDE

as EZRA FURMAN & THE HARPOONS...

BEAT BEAT BEAT

(SELF-RELEASED, 2006)

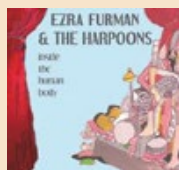
Recorded in their university dorm-rooms and given away on their first ever tour (spanning Boston to Chicago), the scratchy *Beat Beat Beat* has a ramshackle, disconcerting charm. Original copies are so hard to come by that Furman doesn't even own one.



BANGING DOWN THE DOORS

(MINTY FRESH, 2007)

On that debut tour, Furman and The Harpoons met Jim Powers, founder of Minty Fresh records in Evanston, Illinois, who offered them a deal. *Banging Down...* is essentially a reissue of *Beat Beat Beat* with an extra song.



INSIDE THE HUMAN BODY

(MINTY FRESH, 2008)

The Harpoons go electric: produced by Red Red Meat's Brian Deck, the amiable garage-rock of *Inside The Human Body* accompanies more focused songwriting. "I'm not a monster, I'm a human being!" Furman yells on opener "We Should Fight". "And I'm the greatest thing you've ever seen!"



MYSTERIOUS POWER

(RED PARLOR RECORDS, 2011)

A more personal – desperate and misanthropic – side of Furman starts revealing

itself on The Harpoons' final album, where they take a shot at becoming the E Street Band. "I'm gonna self-destruct/I don't see a problem with it," Furman spits on "Teenage Wasteland".

as EZRA FURMAN...



THE YEAR OF NO RETURNING

(BAR/NONE, 2012)

Crowd-funded through Kickstarter, Furman's debut solo LP takes a brassy, almost cabaret turn to address the consequences of his self-destructive behaviour. On "Lay In The Sun", he fashions himself as a non-judgmental saviour for the wretched and regretful.



DAY OF THE DOG

(BAR/NONE, 2013)

Named as a tongue-in-cheek reference to his half-decade of underwhelming achievement,



Day Of The Dog boasts the Boy-Friends' first appearance, and contrasts Furman's lyrics about failure and broken existence against the louche influence of New York Dolls and the Ramones' more orchestrated moments.

PERPETUAL MOTION PEOPLE

(BELLA UNION, 2015)

Furman reveals a more defiant side: while he's still singing about confusion and depression, the roaring "Wobbly" and jaunty "Body Was Made" are self-empowerment anthems, and "Hark! To The Music" a rallying cry for the disaffected.

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TAME IMPALA ⚡ STURGILL SIMPSON ⚡ THE DECEMBERISTS ⚡ A\$AP ROCKY
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JOSÉ GONZÁLEZ ⚡ GRIZ ⚡ DAUGHTER ⚡ HOUNDMOUTH ⚡ BØRNS ⚡ RHIANNON GIDDENS
BOOTS ⚡ STRAND OF OAKS ⚡ UNKNOWN MORTAL ORCHESTRA ⚡ RYN WEAVER
ALBERT HAMMOND JR. ⚡ MOON TAXI ⚡ HALSEY ⚡ CLASSIXX ⚡ AND MANY MORE

SAMSUNG
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original guitarist, Jahn Sood, were helping Furman make bedroom recordings of his nascent solo material. “Most people, especially his age and with an acoustic guitar, write songs about pretending to be old coal miners or Depression-era farmhands,” says Mukkada. “Ezra’s writing was poetic and interesting, but it also sounded like it came from the mind of a teenager.”

Furman started talking about forming a band, but Mukkada wasn’t sure whether he could play with other people. “When we used to have these acoustic guitar jams, Ezra didn’t seem to pay attention to what anyone else was doing. He marched to his own beat, so to speak. But he assured me that if he made an effort, he could listen to others and function in a band. That was enough for me.”

Ezra Furman & The Harpoons formed in 2006, and released their dorm room-recorded debut *Beat Beat Beat* that year. “Most people with their own name ahead of a band’s would probably be a tyrant,” says Mukkada. “But I knew that Ezra had a real low ego. The other reason for having his name at the front was that we weren’t sure how long the band would exist. If Ezra’s name was there out front, he could easily transition to a solo career without having to start over with making a name. A

“MAYBE THIS IS JUST WHO I AM...A RESTLESS PERSON”
EZRA FURMAN

big goal for us was to make sure that he kept making music even if the rest of us stopped. He also had great stage banter.”

Furman turned up to their first practice wearing a Strokes T-shirt, jeans ripped up to his thighs, and a bowler hat. “The hardest part was getting Ezra to reveal songs,” says drummer Adam Abrutyn. “At that time, he literally had hundreds of them stashed away on tapes.

He’d bring us 10 or 20 that

seemed ready to record for an album. But then you’d stumble across a tape hidden under his bed and be completely blown away by what you’d find – like some incredible song he’d written when he was 16. It was so frustrating because you’re thinking, ‘Man, can’t you just bring us the good songs, ideally ones that people outside of this band would enjoy?’ But he didn’t really think that way. He had other motivations that are arguably more important – like what the song meant to him, why he had to get it out.”

Just as Furman joined The Harpoons, he and his high-school girlfriend Kat – the Lou Reed evangelist – broke up, which triggered a period of anxiety. When Reed died last year, Furman wrote a beautiful eulogy on his blog that outlined how his music had made him a braver, freer person, guiding him through his first panic attacks. “I turned on ‘Vicious’ and turned the volume all the way up and thrashed around until it passed me and I could breathe again.” He explains today that “the onstage catharsis of playing in a band seemed to happen at the same time as some increased mental freakout tendencies. Especially loud bands, I tend to think of the noise as a physicalised response to intolerable internal circumstances.”

ON THE HARPOONS’ first few albums, *Beat Beat Beat* (which was re-released as 2007’s *Banging Down The Doors*, with an extra song) and 2008’s *Inside The Human Body*, Furman



The Boy-Friends, 2013: (l-r) Ezra Furman, Ben Joseph, Tim Sandusky, Sam Durkes, Jorgen Jorgensen

EYEWITNESS!

PROTEST MUSIC'S NOT DEAD!

Furman on writing a song for Ferguson

“I’M A politically aware person and I’m freaked out and disgusted weekly by any number of things. I was following the situation in Ferguson by the minute on social media, and feeling this sort of panic at some people’s close-minded first responses to it, and others tweeting while being tear-gassed. For me, the death of Trayvon Martin was the moment of realising how bad non-white people have it in the States. As musicians, we have a responsibility to be aware. People who ask, ‘Where has all the political music gone?’ are people who don’t have really political problems! If you have a problem with the world, you find the political music.”

fooled himself into thinking that he was writing in character – the idea of becoming a James Taylor-style singer-songwriter irked him. “But it was very obviously confessional,” he admits. On “I Wanna Be Ignored”, from The Harpoons’ debut: “*I don’t want people to see/I just wanna make everybody happy/And nobody else to look at me.*” The second record’s “Big Deal” castigates the burgeoning tension between his public and private persona: “*All your little actions are just tourist attractions/And the kids are gonna gobble you up/They’re gonna stand in a crowd/They will yell very loud/And they’ll think that they’ve fallen, fallen in love.*”

Furman wrote “I Wanna Destroy Myself” between his first two records with The Harpoons, but never showed it to them because “*it was too close to the bone*”. He had started to loosen up about his dogmatic principles, and abandoned the straight-edge lifestyle: “I was in a process of getting out of this all-or-nothing mindset about a lot of things.” But for all that he had discarded, he was still living much of the dishonest life he wanted to destroy. “Mental illness and suicide, that’s easy to talk about as a musician,” he says – unlike disclosing his gender identity and beliefs. He tentatively started wearing women’s dress onstage, taking the opportunity to express his true identity in a context that he felt would be accepted thanks to the way artists like David Bowie and Kurt Cobain had queered rock decades earlier. “Other than that, it was this private, occasional and frightened-to-be-found-out kind of thing.”

The Harpoons survived graduating from university, after which Furman floated aimlessly around Massachusetts for a while. “*One September in Boston, I lost the will to live,*” he sings on *Perpetual Motion People*’s “Ordinary Life”: he had been fired from his cinema job because he kept having panic attacks at work and going home. Without money to pay the rent, he lost his apartment and slept on friends’ sofas. “It was right around then that I was like, maybe I’m not going to feel at home anywhere ever,” he says. “Maybe this is just who I am, a restless person.” He moved to New York briefly and then back to Chicago, where he moved in with Tim Sandusky for a year in late 2010. His old bandmates craved normal lives, and The Harpoons split a year later.

“To be honest, he wasn’t the easiest dude to get to know,” says Sandusky, who produced Furman’s solo debut, 2011’s *Year Of No Returning*. “At first, he mostly kept to himself and stayed in his own world. Especially at that point, he had a unique social style that kinda came off as despondent, unfriendly and not interested in new people. I later learned that this impression was not completely accurate, but merely reflective of a greater displacement and estrangement he felt within society as a whole.”



Strong performer: Furman in 2015

THE HARPOONS' SPLIT prompted Furman to figure out where he was at in life. Nobody seemed to have a problem with his now-public embrace of women's clothing – and no other patrons at the Lexington blink when they walk past him, even the older ones – which prompted him to open up about spirituality and the importance of Jewish observance. “That took longer, actually,” he says. “That was harder.”

The difficulty was logistical in part: he felt awkward telling his old bandmates that he didn't want to play on the Sabbath. Maybe he would get over “this religion thing”. “But with the gender presentation before it, I had that model of like, no, this is not going away, you can't push this inconvenient thing about yourself down 'cos it's gonna kill you, you're gonna burn out.”

Reconciling his faith with his craft was harder. Furman talks about the overlap between prayer and rock'n'roll, but acknowledges the important antagonism between the two. “Rock'n'roll had – and still has – a lot of important anti-religion stuff to do,” he says. “Like, anti-stultifying oppressive religion, it's an important thing rock'n'roll has fought against. That narrative is so strong and compelling and marketable, but then sometimes religion is a lifesaving and radical and nonconformist and highly meaningful thing. So I don't really wanna give that the middle finger.”

The old acoustic blues players he used to be into were a cautionary tale: hard-drinking, womanising touring musicians who'd come home, find God and become priests. “Then they'd go back on tour and start drinking again,” he says. “I felt like I was in danger of that. It seems unhealthy to me. I'm trying to integrate this whole self into one thing.”

Perpetual Motion People's gentlest moment is “Watch You Go By”, where Furman sings like Gordon Gano melting into Leonard Cohen, while buoyant organ suggests a gospel choir that never arrives. It's a tale of destiny at the bottom of a bottle, dropping out of life as it's easier than getting to know your own mind. “I've got a bright future in music as long as I never find true happiness,” Furman drawls, but he doesn't buy into the myth of the tortured muso.

“You wanna feel yourself pushing against the wall, because that's what makes you feel alive as an artist,” he says. “But I'm getting better at songwriting the happier I am. This thing that you need misery or drama to make good art does not at all ring true to me, it never did. When there's real problems in my life, that's when nothing happens, I'm not creating anything.”

Writing songs is a painful process regardless,

EYEWITNESS!

ANALYSE THIS

Tim Sandusky on Ezra Furman's psychiatrist act

“WHILE THE general premise of the broader story is based on truth, I invent different questions every show. I challenge Ezra as he channels the teenage version of himself to better describe the struggle at stake. Over many shows, it reveals an even truer version of the worldview that Ezra has been slowly destroying since. It's more like time travel than history. This is the luxury of performance versus biography and it allows for something more honest. Even our memories deserve to be questioned ... that's an important way to find the tools to destroy the ideologies that burden us.”

though Furman says he's completely satisfied with *Perpetual Motion...* and *Day Of The Dog*, both recorded with Sandusky, who became a full-time member of the Boy-Friends in 2013. *Day Of The Dog* was almost the perfect swansong. After a decade flying under the radar, Furman was on the verge of quitting music when End Of The Road founder Simon Taffe approached Furman with the offer to manage him and try to take things up a notch. He was hesitant, until Taffe convinced him that he could integrate both sides of his life: if he didn't want to play on Friday nights, nobody was going to make him. “Turns out you tell people what you want and they're like, ‘OK,’” says Furman.

Even though it looks like *Perpetual Motion...* will find the kind of attention Furman's been craving, he still might walk away. “I was and am thinking about going to school for Jewish studies, getting a degree in education and becoming involved in Jewish life in some way,” he says. “Or rabbinical school to

become a rabbi. I've thought about that idea and rejected it and come back to it a few times in the past four years.”

Dedicating himself to religious life at home in San Francisco would give Furman the sense of community his adult life has lacked. He thinks he and his girlfriend might have a baby, and he has no intentions of leaving her to raise their child while he tours. But he's mindful of his old tendency towards extreme responses. “Right when I was finally getting up the courage to do this other non-music

career, it seemed a little bit silly to leave this now,” he says. “But also, if you're making a bit more money, it becomes easier to say, ‘No, here's five months where I'm not going to tour.’ I don't think it's actually a binary.”

While mustering courage to say ‘no’ more often, Furman is still driven by the holy grail of making music that feels like the perfect integration of his true selves. “I feel like I gotta be good enough that if I do quit, the records might have an afterlife for a while,” he says.

“At really exhausted moments, some of which have been in the past few weeks, I've thought, maybe I can do a die-young thing and become a legend without actually dying. Maybe I'll figure that out. Significant possibility that I'll go into seclusion and not make records any more. Or maybe I'll do it every year for the rest of my life and see if I run out of ideas.”

Whichever path, Furman's undoubtedly sincere equivocation doesn't hurt the myth that he's consciously creating as he goes. He spells out to *Uncut* the unsatisfying lack of resolution within his story. “It would be more fun [for you] to write about this guy who works through his problems, these albums come out of it, and now he's had a big turnaround in his life and he's all right again. But it's more of a daily discipline: stop lying to people. Just because you put on the yarmulke or the dress, now you're just wearing a dress and lying to people. It's more of a your whole life problem. I'm gonna have unresolved issues until I'm dead.”

Perpetual Motion People is out July 6 via Bella Union; Ezra Furman tours the UK from July



Onstage with Tim Sandusky, September 2014



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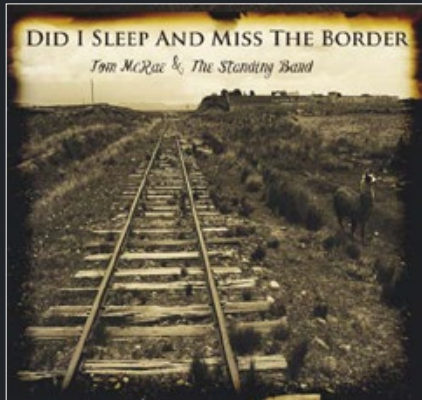


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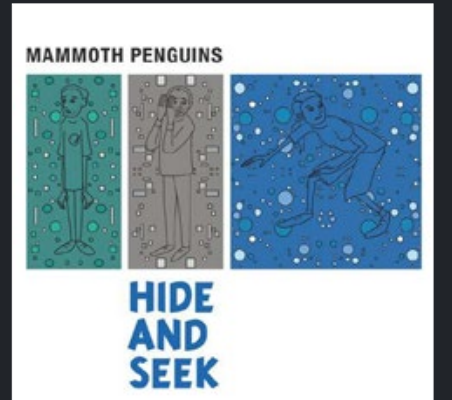


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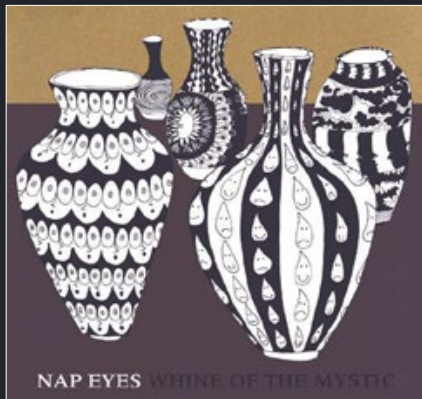
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THE MAKING OF...

Another Girl, Another Planet



BY THE ONLY ONES

Almost four decades on, this high-velocity cosmic puzzler remains one of the great post-punk singles. “It wasn’t about drugs,” says frontman Peter Perrett. “At that time, I was more addicted to sex...”

IT’S NOT THE song that I think is my best,” admits Peter Perrett today, pondering the legacy of his best-known creation. Many, however, would disagree with his assessment of “Another Girl, Another Planet”, not least The Replacements, who last month ended their first British gig for 24 years with their own rowdy version.

On its original release, The Only Ones’ second single failed to chart – likely too psychedelic for punk and too weird for the mainstream – but the song has grown in stature over the years, being covered by acts as diverse as Blink-182, Pete Doherty, Belle & Sebastian and The Ukulele Orchestra Of Great Britain.

“We were lucky that so-called punk happened, ’cos the rulebook had been ripped up,” says Perrett, who is now clean of hard drugs after a lengthy struggle. “The one thing I had in common with punks was that I was quite angry. A lot of our early gigs ended in me smashing things.”

Even so, the group also had a foot firmly in the ’60s. Drummer Mike Kellie played with Spooky Tooth, while the young Perrett attended Syd Barrett-era Pink Floyd gigs, factors that no doubt conspired to gave “Another Girl...” its more cosmic, psychedelic edge.

“Peter always had an aura,” explains bassist Alan Mair, still marvelling at the songwriter’s

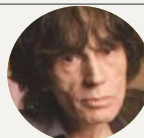
work. “From the start, he came over as someone who was very artistic, as someone who had an individual aura, an individual charisma.”

TOM PINNOCK

PETER PERRETT: I can remember what caused me to write “Another Girl, Another Planet”. It would have been about April ’77, because we had it recorded by June. It was inspired by this girl from Yugoslavia. I didn’t go out with her, but she was like a total space cadet, which when I was really young I found interesting. She was just a bit weird – she’d say crazy things, and it just got me thinking that every girl has something different to offer. It would have been written on my Guild acoustic. I think any good song should sound all right on an acoustic guitar.

JOHN PERRY: Peter never explained his lyrics. I never asked. The band rarely talked about music. We’d push a new song down the slipway, see if it floated, and see where it went. When a band is working well, there’s little point talking about it – everyone speaks more eloquently with their instruments.

KEY PLAYERS



Peter Perrett
Vocals, guitar,
organ, songwriting



John Perry
Lead guitar



Alan Mair
Bass guitar



Mike Kellie
Drums

PERRETT: It’s not about heroin. I mean, I’d started experimenting with heroin at that time – I was probably on it about once a month – but I didn’t think of myself as a junkie until 1980 or ’81, after the band broke up. Everyone thinks that they have it under control and they’re stronger than the idiots who fall prey to it. I always enjoyed writing ambiguous lyrics that could be taken on two or three different levels. You know, it’s like “Love Is The Drug” or “Addicted To Love”. I put in drug-related imagery, but it wasn’t about drugs. At that time I was more addicted to

sex and infatuation than I was to drugs.

MIKE KELLIE: Taking Peter’s wonderful songs, as he presented them, and turning them into what was The Only Ones was a very organic but intense process.

PERRETT: I used to be very definite about the structure. I would always have the song conceived in the writing stage, and I wouldn’t allow any suggestions for changing of structure.

ALAN MAIR: The intro to “Another Girl...” was developed with everyone playing together. The



The Only Ones in 1978: (l-r) Alan Mair, John Perry, Peter Perrett and Mike Kellie

thing about The Only Ones is that nobody ever told somebody what they should play. Peter would show us a song and we would just listen to it and develop our own part without it being questioned by each other. That's the way we worked right from the beginning.

PERRETT: There was a bit of reluctance by one member to play at the speed that I started playing it – I won't say who, because it's not fair on them. It is the most perfect arrangement that the band ever got for a song, though.

PERRY: In the studio was where it emerged as such a powerful piece.

PERRETT: We had three days demoing at Escape Studios [*in Kent*] – two days getting fucked up and one day of actually recording. We recorded “Another Planet...”, “Oh No”, “The Whole Of The Law” and “Special View”.

PERRY: By the time we recorded “Another Girl...” I knew the shape, the form of the guitar solo and the intro, if not the actual phrases. I knew it would start low and work upwards, but I hadn't

“The key to The Only Ones is that the three of us were chasing Peter the whole time”

MIKE KELLIE

settled on completed phrases. The guitar was all one take, the first take. I thought I was doing a run-through to get levels, so after one pass I went into the control room to see if we were ready to try a few, and everyone was jumping around saying, “No, no, that's the one! You've got it!”

PERRETT: Most of the debut album was recorded at Basing Street Studios after that. Apart

from after we signed to CBS, when they asked us to try out Whitfield Street, which was CBS's studio. But we didn't like the studio for some reason. What I remember most about that is Sandy Denny coming to the session and saying that if I ever wanted any backup vocals, she'd love to sing. I didn't take her up on that, which I really regret, 'cos I was a big of Fairport Convention fan until the third album. But I was very full of myself back then and I didn't think that I was a fan of anyone anymore.

MAIR: The atmosphere was fantastic at Basing Street. Bob Marley & The Wailers were in the studio below us, recording *Kaya*. We kept on trying to record “Another Girl...” again. But it wasn't really working. Eventually we played the original 16-track Escape demo and everything we needed was there. So we decided we would just transfer the 16 tracks into the 24-track, but the machine at Escape was out of alignment, so it was all muffled. The roadies first of all thought to bring the machine up to Basing Street, but the

THE ONLY ONES



The Only Ones' Peter Perrett and John Perry at the Hammersmith Odeon, April 17, 1978



engineer, John Burns, said, “No, we’re not moving the machine in the back of a van.” He said we should bring the tape in and he’d put a tone on it. So we matched the heads up and then played it at Basing Street, and it was another story. But then we found we couldn’t get enough separation on the bass drum and the snare. So Kellie said, “I’ll just put another kit on top of it.” And I said, “What, just the bass and the snare?” And he said, “No, the whole thing.” On the second take, he put the whole drumkit, perfectly, on top of the track – every little idiosyncrasy, all spot-on, right on top of it.

KELLIE: I do remember everybody being quite flabbergasted, but I don’t remember the actual thought process. I just did it. It had to be done. I was always astounded, still am, that it was so impressive. The easiest person to play with has to be yourself, though, surely.

PERRETT: I recorded the vocals again after a gig. It was the night before we signed to CBS, in December 1977. Steve Lillywhite was working as an assistant to Ed Hollis, and they came to a gig at the Rock Garden. Afterwards we went back to Island in Hammersmith to do the vocals, and it was literally just one take. It’s the only thing I can remember doing one take of. But it was quite a

good time to do it, after a gig, ’cos you feel quite good about things – there’s a certain amount of adrenaline.

PERRY: Later on I double-tracked that guitar intro, downstairs at Basing Street. You can hear there are two guitars, mostly playing in unison but occasionally breaking into harmony. I used a Telecaster and my old ’55 Les Paul Special.

PERRETT: I like the Hammond on this. I played it, you can only hear it in certain places ’cos when I played out of tune we faded it down and faded it up in the good bits!

MAIR: Peter’s said “Another Girl...” is not about drugs, but you know, it was perceived

as being about that, which is really why it didn’t get the airplay it should have got. Capital FM wouldn’t play it because of ‘drug content’. We never really sat down and said, “This is really a bummer that it didn’t break into the Top 10 or Top 20,” but personally I remember thinking it was bizarre. Deep down, there was definitely some disappointment. Though, to be honest, I kind of think the song has got the success it deserves now. In some ways, this is better than it being a hit back then and then disappearing, because it’s now part of rock history – it’s a track that’s stood the test of time.

PERRETT: I prefer the Peel Sessions versions. I think the way the band sounded live was more exciting and true to what we represented. Because we didn’t have a producer, most of the decisions about instrumentation were taken by me and I’m a perfectionist – so I’m usually not happy at all.

them. Now I’ve got two songs ready to release, and there’s part of me that wants to just get them out there before any more fans die.

KELLIE: As long as all four of us are alive, there’s always a possibility we could play together again. The key to The Only Ones is that the three of us, whether anybody likes to admit it or not, were chasing Peter the whole time. Peter was the singer, songwriter, the driving force, and that’s the key to The Only Ones. When we reformed, we were carrying him. He was not in good health at the time, and that changed the whole chemistry of the band. That changed everything and made that comeback very, very difficult. We accepted

plaudits to begin with, it was all wonderful. But when it came to the rubber meeting the road and things happening to produce something new, it wasn’t the same demographic and it showed. It caused frustrations all over in different areas. Now Peter’s 100 per cent fit and driven again. Whether or not he works with us or does something solo, it’s so good for him and so good for his audience. So there is hope.

PERRETT: At one time I resented having to do “Another Girl...” at every gig – there was one gig where I didn’t do it and people complained. At some gigs in the ’90s, I used to start with it to get it out of the way!

But as I got older, I appreciated

that it’s better to have one song like that than not have any songs that get across to a large audience. If people discover the best of my work through that one song, then great. ☺

Peter Perrett plays London’s Garage on July 24

FACT FILE

- **Written by:** Peter Perrett
- **Performers:** Peter Perrett (vocals, guitar, organ), John Perry (lead guitar), Alan Mair (bass), Mike Kellie (drums)
- **Engineered by:** John Burns, Robert Ash, Ed Hollis, Steve Lillywhite
- **Recorded at:** Escape Studios, Kent; Basing Street Studios and Island Studios, London
- **Released:** April 14, 1978
- **UK chart peak:** 57 (on re-release in 1992)

PETER STILL/REDFERNS

TIMELINE

August 13, 1976

Alan Mair joins on bass, completing the band’s lineup – six months of intense rehearsals

begin before their first gig

April 1977

Peter Perrett writes “Another Girl...”, with

the band recording it at Escape Studios, Kent,

two months later

December 1977

After overdubs at

Basing Street, Perrett adds his vocals in one take at Island Studios in Hammersmith, just before signing to CBS

April 14, 1978

“Another Girl, Another Planet” is released as a single, but fails to chart



UNKNOWN MORTAL ORCHESTRA

Multi-Love

"Frisky, rainbow-coloured optimism" 9/10 UNCUT

"An intoxicating brew" ★★★★★ Q

JAGJAGUWAR

DAVID BYRNE

TAKE ME TO THE RIVER



A once-in-a-lifetime interview with the great DAVID BYRNE, as the intrepid musical explorer prepares to curate this year's Meltdown festival in London. To be discussed: Talking Heads, Brian Eno, Imelda Marcos, "fake Mormon hymns", St Vincent and how Byrne invented hip-hop by accident...

Story: Andy Gill

Photograph: Danny North

PLUS! WE ♥ NY:
THE 50 GREATEST NEW YORK ALBUMS

DAVID BYRNE HAS always had a striking sense of appearance, from the proto-preppy understatement of his early Talking Heads persona to the legendary Big Suit of *Stop Making Sense*. Today, his hair now strikingly silver, he's dressed in a cool seersucker suit, a sort of cross between upscale country cowpoke and intrepid safari-suited explorer.

It's an apt look that hints at his exploratory cultural attitude, always searching out the unexpected and unusual.

We're in a room at the Royal Festival Hall, adjacent to an elevator programmed by Byrne's friend and frequent collaborator Brian Eno to produce keening choral glissandos depending on whether you're ascending or descending. Today, we're at the very upper limit of Eno's register, in a penthouse boardroom affording a marvellous



David Byrne on the roof of the Royal Festival Hall, London, March 2015

widescreen vista of the Thames and across to the dome of St Paul's. Not that Byrne's paying the view too much attention. Like the untouched food on the table, it's ignored in favour of a preoccupation with the work at hand, which concerns his curating of this year's Meltdown, the scheduling of which he likens to Tetris, trying to get all these different acts in different venues at different times to fit in a harmonious sequence.

It is, you suspect, something Byrne enjoys: a tricky puzzle as much to be savoured as it is solved. Much of Byrne's remarkable career has similarly involved projects that enable him to push his own boundaries, taking him out of his comfort zone to work alongside musicians from different disciplines and corners of the world. In Talking Heads, he moved from art rock, through funk and African rhythms, while his solo

career includes excursions into Latin pop, film soundtracks and a musical about Imelda Marcos. His Luaka Bop label, meanwhile, unearthed interdisciplinary world music like Indian psych, Brazilian tropicalismo and Southern gothic. All told, it is a remarkable, wide-ranging body of work – one that continues to evolve as Byrne's restless spirit brings him into contact with a new generation of collaborators such as St Vincent, Dirty Projectors and David Sitek. Above all, it underscores his continuing importance in an ever-changing musical landscape.

His cultural journeys often take Byrne into areas outside the purely musical: he has an impressive CV of dance and theatre work and art installations, and was miraculously able to get funding to co-write, direct and star in his own film, *True Stories*, whose quirky narrative was

inspired by outlandish newspaper stories he had collected on tour with Talking Heads. "I was only able to raise the money for *True Stories* because Talking Heads were having pop hits," he admits. Times, though, are significantly tougher for the inspired independent auteur. "Nobody lost money on *True Stories*," he says. "But it would be harder for me to do that now. I did a documentary in Brazil, but even the financing for that had to come from several different countries, just to do something as small as a one-hour documentary."

An avid proponent of cycling, Byrne designed a series of location-specific bicycle-racks for various parts of New York, and has written widely on the subject, not least in his 2009 book, *Bicycle Diaries*. His other publications have included an anthology of his tree drawings, *Arboretum*, and most pertinently, *How Music Works*, a



Talking Heads, The Netherlands, June 1977: (l-r) Chris Frantz, Tina Weymouth, David Byrne and Jerry Harrison

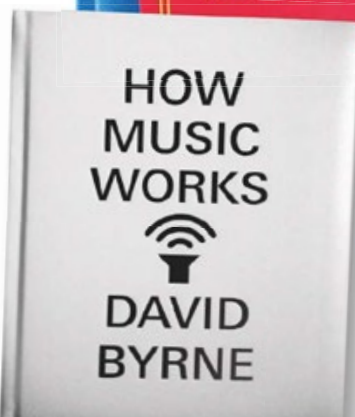
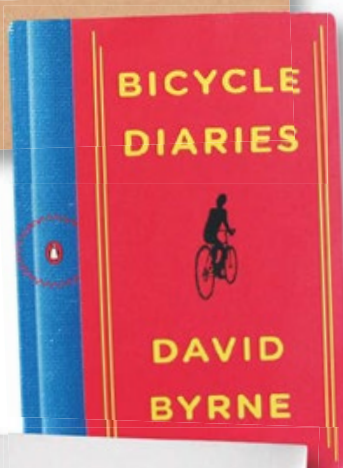
● fascinating reflection upon his core business which discusses the social uses of music, the modes of performance, the history of recording, and the thorny relationship between music and emotion: “Making music,” he claims, “is like constructing a machine whose function is to dredge up emotions in performer and listener alike.”

Which leads one to wonder at the variety of emotions that might be dredged up by Byrne’s lineup for Meltdown Festival, which ranges from flamenco singer Estrella Morente to miasmic metal dronists Sunn O))), and from confessional songwriter Benjamin Clementine to Tibetan throat-musicians Phurpa; with performances as varied as Young Jean Lee’s song-cycle about pain and death, ‘We’re Gonna Die’, John Luther Adams’ contemporary classical work, ‘Across A Distance’, and Atomic Bomb!’s presentation of the rediscovered electro-funk of William Onyeabor.

As with his record label, it tries to re-focus attention on artists and performers, particularly those operating outside a mainstream increasingly colonised by corporate forces – an impulse which also recently led to Byrne joining the board of SoundExchange, an independent digital income collection organisation. “At the moment it’s almost impossible for an artist to find out how many streams were sold, to calculate how much they’re owed,” he explains. “Consumers have no problem with paying Apple, or having their stuff watched over by Google; but to actually pay for the content...? The creator, in many cases, has been left behind, and other people are just cashing in. There needs to be some corrective.”

UNCUT: You’ve become a serial collaborator...

DAVID BYRNE: I have! I was surprised to read some interviews with younger musicians about collaboration, and quite a few just didn’t like the idea at all. There was a sense that collaboration is compromising your vision, your unique sense of what makes you, as an artist or writer, special. That to collaborate is to compromise. And to some extent it is; but sometimes you get something from the other side that goes beyond what you’d have come up with. It’s a kind of mutual gain.



Are you ever overwhelmed by the prospect of a particular partner? Does it ever restrict or place a brake on the freedom?

No, just sometimes in a technical way. Sometimes the brake is helpful: all right, this is what they do, this is what I do, we have to work within these parameters. It’s helpful in defining the area we’re working within. I did one recently that hasn’t come out yet, with the hip-hop group De La Soul: they asked if I could do something on one of their tracks that had some sections at one speed and others in a different tempo. I did something, and told them, I don’t know whether this works with what you’re doing, I have no idea how you’re going to get these tempo-changes to work – you guys might be able to pull this off, but it’s pretty tricky!

I read your introductory explanation for your choice of Meltdown performers, and was struck by your acknowledgement that it was financially impossible to have too many American acts.

Oh yeah. No surprise, there’s a budget consideration. Thankfully, I’m not the one that has to juggle those figures – but we’re in constant communication with the people at the Southbank. If I recommend someone, and they want to bring other players along with them, it could add to the budget to the point where, even if we sell out their night at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, it’s not going to pay for the plane fares. I completely get that. If you have to take a bit of the profit from one act to cover the loss on another, that can be done. It’s a whole Tetris thing, of shuffling blocks around until they fit.

I get the impression at a lot of live shows nowadays that it’s all in the computer, that everything has to follow the lighting cues. There’s very little room for the music to explore. I imagine your performances are a bit looser?

I’ve done both. Usually I’m a little bit looser, like with the Atomic Bomb! stuff, that’s just get a groove going and don’t let go. But the tour I did with St Vincent a year or two ago, we worked with a large brass section, and some of the songs, she wanted them to be on a click track – which I don’t think people would have noticed, as the brass was live. She has a set-up where, when she’s doing things with her guitar pedals, the computer triggers all the effects

changes. She's an amazing guitar player, and this way [snaps fingers], right on cue, the sound of the guitar changes completely. But so much of the rest of it was live – the guitar playing, the drums, eight brass players. It was the poor drummer who suffered, having to play with a click.

Whose idea was the brass on that collaboration? It was her idea. I thought it was brilliant. Not only because we both like that sound, but it took us to places that sounded like neither of our bands – although there are elements in both our works. It didn't sound like any band that I'd worked with, it meant it would sound like some third thing. Plus, with a group like that playing, it kind of mixes itself: if the arrangement is good, if you have the right numbers of people playing trombones and whatever, if the balance is right, it'll just acoustically come off the stage the way it's supposed to sound, as opposed to being created in the mix.

What, for you, was the essential difference between the two album collaborations you did with Brian Eno? The process was quite different. On the *Bush Of Ghosts* record it was like playing ping-pong: one person would create a track, then the other would respond to it, back and forth,

back and forth, until we had enough stuff built up to say, "Oh, we can construct an arrangement out of this." And at some point, after working on it for a bit, we both decided that if either one of us sang on a song, people would assume that song was written by them, as people tend to do: they assume the voice is the authorial voice, and it's not always that way. So we thought, 'OK, let's make it neutral, let's use found voices, recordings or whatever – let's make that the theme, that neither of

"NOW, IT'S A PLEASURE TO STEP ONSTAGE. WITH NO DESPERATION!"
DAVID BYRNE

us sings, we use the voices as the vocals.'

Public Enemy's Hank Shocklee cited *Bush Of Ghosts* as one of the roots of hip-hop. I know! Isn't that amazing!?

It also struck me, listening to the reissue recently, how much more difficult it must have been to do an album like that in the pre-sampler era. Oh Jeez, yeah! There was a lot of trial and error! You sometimes had to play an instrument as if you were a loop, the same part over and over. Which is fine – but as it's a little inaccurate, you get this kind of slipperiness, which you don't get when everything is rigid perfection.

So if you had tapes of the vocal sources, were you editing them in as you went along? Sometimes editing, sometimes flying them in, almost like a performance in the studio, where you press record, play them, stop it and see what you've got, and whether you can fix the ones that don't work so well.

How did that process differ from the later collaboration with Eno on *Everything That Happens Will Happen Today*? It was very different. Brian said, "I have these tracks that I haven't been able to turn into songs." I said, "Pass a few to me, I'll try, and if you don't like it,

EYEWITNESS!

"THEY DIDN'T NEED ANY ADVICE..."

ED STASIUM recalls engineering Talking Heads' earliest recordings

"GOT THE CHANCE to work with them through my old friend Tony Bongiovi, who produced their early recordings. I bumped into him for the first time in years at a gig in NY, and he told me he was going to build a new studio, Sundragon, and would I like to be chief engineer? The first band I worked with there was The Ramones on *Leave Home*; but it was Spring 1977 when I first worked with Talking Heads, at the Power Station, when Seymour Stein asked Tommy Erdelyi and Tony to produce 'Love → Building On Fire'. Then later, we cut the basic tracks for 77 at Sundragon.

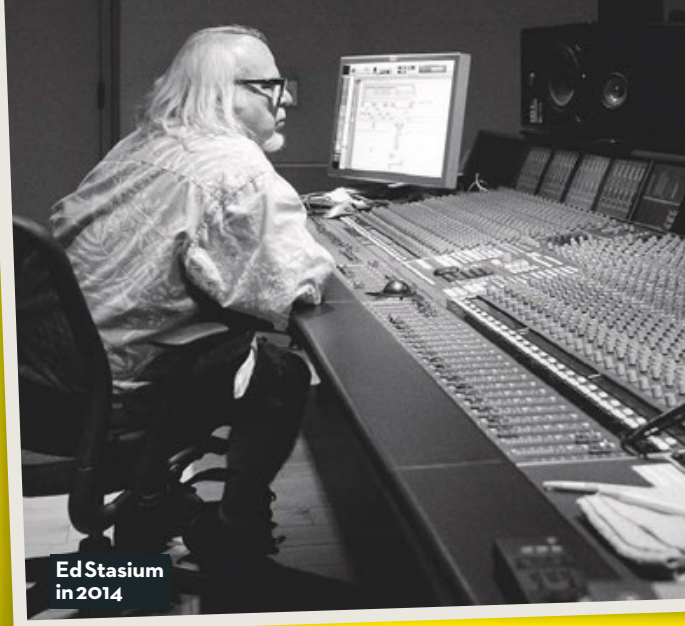
"The band were very sparse. When we started doing the album, Jerry Harrison was not even in the band, he was still one of The Modern Lovers. He came in later and overdubbed his parts. There were no particular instructions, and they didn't need any advice: they all had their parts down, and they didn't get any guidance from Tony Bongiovi, who was mostly just sat in the corner of the booth with his nose in an airplane magazine! It all came from the band, there was no producer telling these guys what to do. The sparseness was a reflection of their minimal style – we did just a few overdubs, mostly on vocals. It was all done live – Chris is a fantastic drummer, a real human metronome. The only edit I made in mixing was in the intro to 'Psycho Killer', which Tina suggested I should elongate. And the

only time Tony gave his opinion was about David's singing – so David refused to do vocals with Tony in the room, just me! David is David, and like any great artist, needs free rein.

"I wasn't that familiar with the New York scene at that time. I'd been in Canada for a few years, and when I moved back, the first time I heard The Ramones was in the studio. And the first I heard of Talking Heads was a demo tape, though I did go and see them live before recording them. They're totally different bands: the biggest difference in their cases was attitude. The Ramones were truly a bunch of punk guys from Queens, while Talking Heads were more intellectual – which is not to disparage The Ramones, but their approaches were dissimilar.

"The band's sound started to change when Eno got involved on *More Songs About Buildings And Food*. Chris was in awe of him, the way he designed the sound differently. His new textures provided a stimulant, broadened their musical spectrum. I love the way they go from that sparse first album to the bigger, more complex sound they developed later.

"I know they had their differences later on, but when I was working with them everybody was getting along just fine. They were truly a band. My only mediation was in booting out Tony Bongiovi when David wanted to do his vocals!"



Ed Stasium in 2014

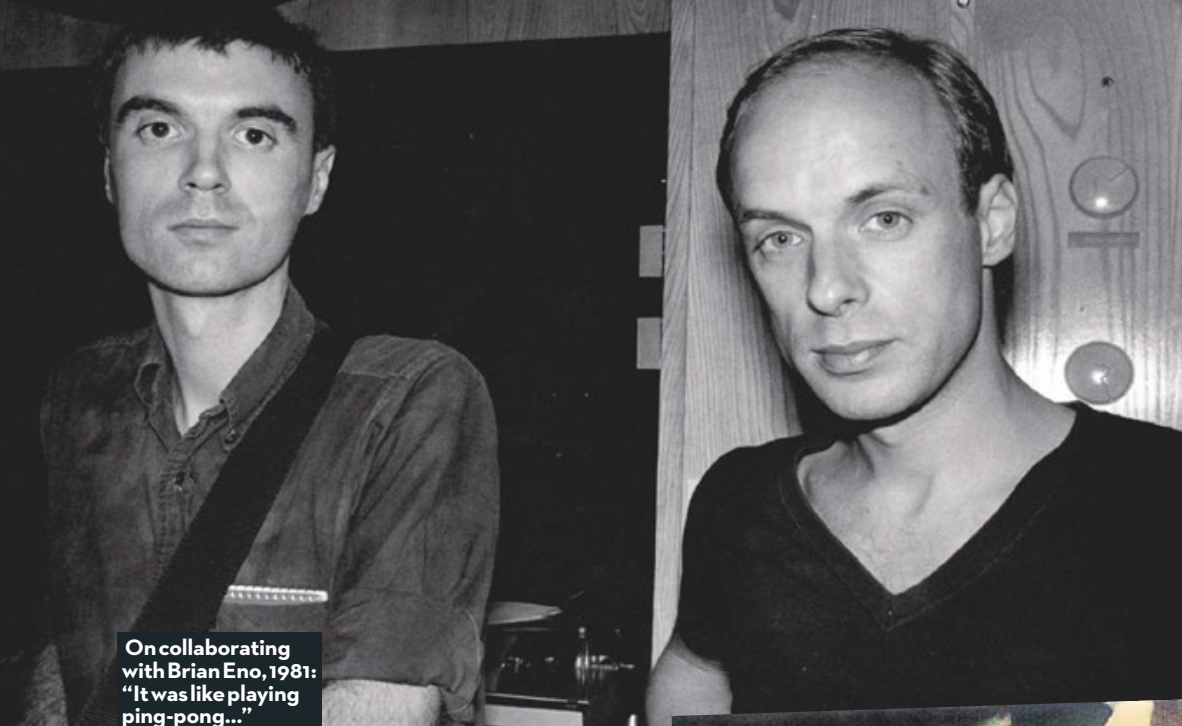


With St Vincent, Whitney Hall, Louisville, Kentucky, July 2, 2013

no-one has to know; if you do like it, we keep going, and no-one has to know until we reach something that we like." That was more of a clean division of labour: he had these tracks, and I added words and melodies, and ended up singing them. But we seem to have escaped the authorial voice issue on that, too. It was plain that it was a collaboration, and that we were both writing the material, you could hear that. But it was different from the other record. Some of it was electronic, parts of it were kinda folkly – they don't sound like folk songs, but when you look at the melody, or some of the words I wrote, they're like old-fashioned folk songs, in a way.

Thematically, there seemed to be an apprehension about ageing: a lot of the songs were about dealing sympathetically ●

STEPHEN J. COHEN/GETTY IMAGES



On collaborating with Brian Eno, 1981: "It was like playing ping-pong..."

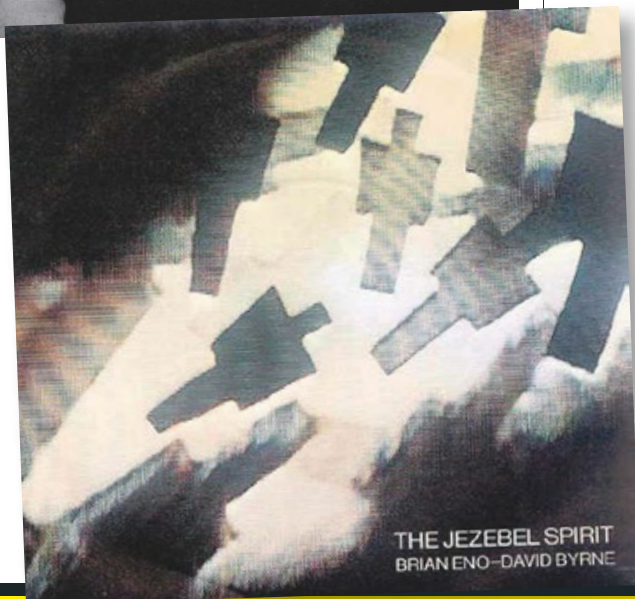
➔ **with the ageing process.** Wow!? I wasn't aware of that! My parents have both passed on, and they were getting very old, and showing it, by that point, and that might have been on my mind. I don't know.

Were you a natural performer as a kid? No, I don't think so. I started performing in high school when I was 16 or so, in pop bands with friends, or at folk clubs. I took to it, but at that point I was more driven to do it: it was almost like I felt so socially inept that this was the only way I could express myself, by getting up on a stage and doing something, often somebody

else's song, but getting up onstage and asserting myself. And then retreating back into my shell the minute I'd step off stage. It was a curious kind of schizophrenic relationship. But if you don't feel comfortable communicating any other way, if there's an avenue open to you, you'll take it. Then over the years, that whole thing lessened. And now, it's a pleasure to step on stage. There's no desperation. So there was some kind of weird edginess that got lost in that process, but something else was gained.

I understand you were rejected from your school choir because you were "off key and too withdrawn"...? That's true. Most encouraging!

"Off key and too withdrawn" could be a definition for a certain kind of performer. Bob Dylan, for instance. I guess that that kind of rejection pushes you into "I'm gonna show you!" territory.



THE JEZEBEL SPIRIT
BRIAN ENO - DAVID BYRNE

When you ran a record label, was it a difficult gear-change from thinking as an artist – having to think more like a businessman, while looking out for other artists' interests? Some of it is really different, but some of it is really familiar – because as an artist you understand what another artist's hopes and aspirations might be, and what they expect from a record label, how they'd like to be treated. You kind of get all that, sometimes in a way that other labels don't. The rest of it, some of the bumping up against the business contingencies, I would like to say that I can do it, it's not like I'm incompetent at it, but it's not where most of my

BUYERS' GUIDE



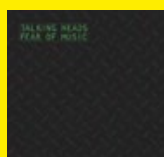
TALKING HEADS: 77 (1977)

8/10 Stark, skeletal and melodic, a debut a world away from punk mores, with its own odd take on emotions, books, the government and psycho killers.



TALKING HEADS MORE SONGS ABOUT BUILDINGS AND FOOD (1978)

8/10 Enter the Eno: with a warmer, more muscular variant of their distinctive staccato sound, the band were able to explore various tributary strains feeding into their music, such as country, funk and plastic pop.



TALKING HEADS FEAR OF MUSIC (1979)

9/10 The consummation of the band's first chapter, with wiry disco rhythms laced through punchy rock grooves, and songs built around dystopian anxieties: the oppressiveness of air, urban guerrilla paranoia, the boredom of heaven.



TALKING HEADS REMAIN IN LIGHT (1980)

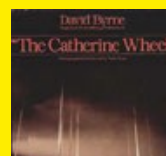
9/10 The innovative groove breakthrough, with the

usual musical "narrative" of melody and chord progressions downgraded in favour of cyclical funk and Afrobeat figures, realised through a larger cast of helpers.



DAVID BYRNE & BRIAN ENO MY LIFE IN THE BUSH OF GHOSTS (1981)

9/10 Byrne and Eno's innovatory collaging techniques here effectively invented sampling. Harnessed to lock-tight rhythms, the densely layered montages of sonic bric-à-brac reflect the audio-social hubbub of a world shrinking through communications tech.



DAVID BYRNE THE CATHERINE WHEEL (1981)

7/10 Byrne's score for a dance piece choreographed by Twyla Tharp, typically blending elements of funk, Afrobeat and collaged vocal samples. Musically interesting, let down by drab lyrics.



TALKING HEADS THE NAME OF THIS BAND IS TALKING HEADS (1982)

8/10 Designed to track their progress from new-wave combo to Afro-funk big band, a live album with a difference.



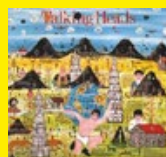
TALKING HEADS SPEAKING IN TONGUES (1983)

9/10 Harnessing the broader musical palette of their expanded live band, this effected Talking Heads' breakthrough through the Top 10 success of "Burning Down The House".



TALKING HEADS STOP MAKING SENSE (1984)

9/10 Soundtrack to the definitive pop performance film, building from Byrne's solo boombox version of "Psycho Killer" to the irresistible closing funk-pop sequence.



TALKING HEADS LITTLE CREATURES (1985)

9/10 A return to charming pop songcraft, this became the band's most successful LP, with two million US sales on the back of the deliriously inventive video for "Road To Nowhere".



DAVID BYRNE MUSIC FOR THE KNEE PLAYS (1985)

6/10 Composed to accompany Robert Wilson's theatrical

production, *The Civil Wars*, these jaunty and drifting brass and percussion pieces were inspired by The Dirty Dozen Brass Band.



TALKING HEADS TRUE STORIES (1986)

8/10 The power of a proper band: Talking Heads brought a heft and propulsive conviction to these songs from David Byrne's engagingly quirky movie. Often underrated. Provided Radiohead with a band name, too.



DAVID BYRNE SOUNDS FROM TRUE STORIES (1986)

7/10 Incidental music from Byrne's movie, performed by eclectic talents including Terry Allen and the Kronos Quartet. Sadly, a planned album of songs by the actors never materialised.



DAVID BYRNE, RYUICHI SAKAMOTO & CONG SU THE LAST EMPEROR (1987)

8/10 Byrne's contributions to the OST of Bertolucci's acclaimed film – scrupulous creations of Chinese instrumentation and scales – netted him an Oscar, Grammy and Golden Globe. (Continues on page 42)

skills lie. I love the part of introducing the artist, and being an advocate for their music, but spending hours untangling knotty business problems – it's not much fun for me. I think my time might be more wisely spent writing some songs.

And at least you did some great archival work: the Os Mutantes record, for example. Oh yes, they're amazing.

I've been re-reading your book *How Music Works*, and in parts of it you deal with the differences between performing live and working in the studio. Do you have a preference? No. It used to be, in the early days, that I didn't like being in the studio at all. Talking Heads started as a live band, and I felt that what I heard on the recordings didn't sound like what I heard onstage. But later it was more balanced, and I realised there was a different type of creativity involved in each world. Then for a while there was a more typical record-business kind of thing, where you make a record, then tour behind it, which I would try and mix up as much as possible, for my own excitement and inspiration. That's been fun, but now I don't know if that cycle has as much meaning as before. For certain big pop artists, it does: when they release a record that they hope is going to sell tons of copies, the whole machine cranks up,

“I LIKE TOO MUCH BEING ABLE TO DO DIFFERENT SORTS OF THINGS”
DAVID BYRNE

the videos and the TV and the events and the tour; but for the rest, it's turning into something else, where it's an ongoing sense of work and performance, and I think some of my audience comes to my shows with almost no expectations! God bless them!

Pete Townshend once complained about how, following a year's touring, the other band members went off on holiday while he had to stay home and write the next album. Did you ever

feel that way in Talking Heads? Yeah, a little. I sometimes felt, like, they're all going out there partying, they're going to the beach, while I have to get my little pencil out and my Walkman recorder, recording ideas and working on stuff for our next record. But then, that's the work I love, it's not a horrible job by any means, so I can't complain. And as a songwriter, you're getting all the publishing money.

Did expectations change when things like “Burning Down The House” and “Road To Nowhere” were becoming popular? Ah, yeah, but I didn't respond to all of them. The good side was that I could be more ambitious with the stage shows, and so there was a certain level of indulgence: people would say, “Oh, you want to try that? OK, let's try it.” Whereas before it might have been either “No, that costs too much” or “What gives you the right to think you can try that?” There was a bit more acceptance, and I could do other things, like directing the music videos. But there was also this temptation to really get into the pop machine and take it to the next level of pop arenas – and you start building up this huge infrastructure which you then have to write and record to support. I sensed losing some freedom there, as regards what I can do; and I like too much being able to do all of these different sorts of things.

You were part of the initial MTV roster, through those videos. Presumably that played a major

EYEWITNESS!

“THERE WAS SO MUCH EXCITEMENT AND ENERGY...”

Director JONATHAN DEMME on *Stop Making Sense*...

“IT WAS ACTUALLY me who approached the band with the suggestion to film their performance, rather than the other way round. I'd seen their show at the Hollywood Bowl, and thought, ‘There's a movie in this, this should be captured on film.’

When I saw the Big Suit, I just went, ‘Wooww!’ We met and discussed the project, and Warners came up with the money. David was pleased as it was an opportunity to record the performance in virtual monochrome. Usually, there's a lot of ambient light sources – exit signs, people opening and shutting doors – but we were able to control the environment to a high degree.

“Everything about the show, the sequencing, the way it builds, the staging, is entirely David's. Byrne was the auteur of that show, and deserves huge credit for it. I loved the way it built up gradually, especially the bits where the stage crew wheels on equipment as the band grows. We opted to ignore the audience – usually there are cutaways to audience reactions, but I thought, who wants to look at the audience when you could be looking at these beautiful performers onstage? And we didn't worry about the crew being in shot – they're an integral part of the show, after all.

“My director of

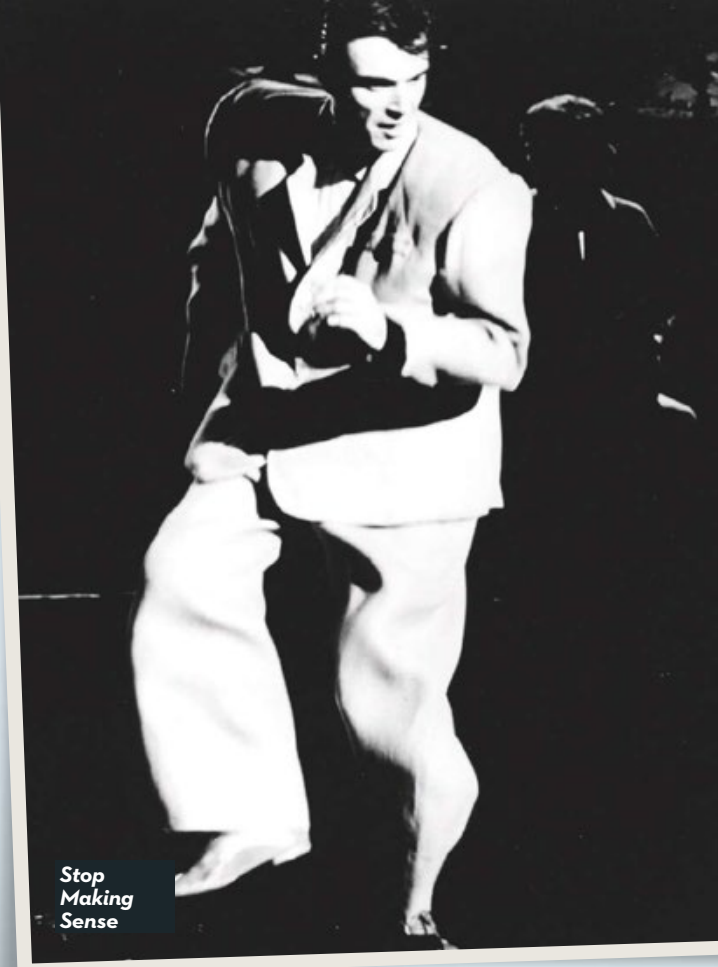
photography, Jordan Cronenworth, also deserves credit – he did a brilliant job of lighting and filming it. Some of the sequences were planned ahead of time and worked out beautifully, but some of the best stuff was just things we'd caught in passing – there was so much happening onstage, such excitement and energy; we were very fortunate the way it worked out.

“When it came time to edit the movie, I wanted to get away from all that quick-cut editing prevalent at the time. I used long-held shots that focused on the performers' faces – which is what you want to see at a concert. As a result, it still looks great today, it hasn't aged. One thing that often gets overlooked is that these were the last shows Talking Heads ever did: they never toured together again after that, so we were fortunate enough to capture the band's final performances on film.

“I wasn't at all surprised when David made his own film, *True Stories*. He has so much inspiration, in so many different media: he truly is the modern Renaissance Man!”

part in disseminating your work? Yes. Though there were some songs that were perceived to be hits that weren't getting played on the radio, because people were seeing the videos. It was a time when MTV was desperate for material, and they played videos 24/7, so they needed stuff to fill up the time. So as fast as you could make stuff, they'd put it on.

You changed tack completely with *Remain In Light*, particularly in having no chord changes. Where did the idea come from? From *Bush Of Ghosts*. They came out in reverse order, as we had to clear a lot of voice recordings on that: it was done before *Remain In Light*, but came out after. So Brian and I learned that technique, and had a practice run with *Bush Of Ghosts*, then we realised, “Oh look, we can do songs this way, why not bring the rest of the band into the process and use it to do actual songs?” Not that the *Bush Of Ghosts* things weren't songs...



☛ **There was a fairly heavy Afrobeat flavour to parts of *Remain In Light*. Was that one of your first non-western influences?** Yeah, I was hearing some of that material, whether from Kenya, Nigeria or South Africa – Fela, and some pop groups – although there was no way to find out that much about them. But there was a sense that here were people taking elements – guitars, bass, drums, whatever – that you were totally familiar with, the vocabulary being used, but they were organising it in a different way, so that it seemed like, ‘Wow, we don’t have to imitate them, but there’s more than one way to skin a cat.’

The *Big Love: Hymnal* album, with its “fake Mormon hymns”, was like a different, homegrown kind of Ethnological Forgery. In a way, yeah. I was asked to do a score for this HBO series, and I had this odd idea to give these characters spiritual underpinning, because the odd stuff you’re seeing – the polygamy, and this guy jumping from house to house because he has a wife in each – to them has a spiritual justification. I thought that by having the music reflect that underpinning, as odd as what you’re seeing is, to them it all makes sense, there’s something holding it all together. It didn’t entirely work, but I managed to get some of that in there.

I thought it was interesting in offering almost an overview of American classical music, with elements of Ives and Copland and minimalism in there. Why, thank you.

David Byrne in *True Stories*, 1986



You’ve done a lot of theatre work, with the likes of Robert Wilson. How do those kinds of collaborations work? Is it their theatrical ideas that you have to align with? It depends. They’re very different. With Bob Wilson there was one piece called *The Knee Plays*, a series of short things, where – unusual for Bob – he had a kind of story; so my wife at the time and I made a kind of structure and imagined a way to tell the story silently, then I wrote this music with a narration to run parallel with it. Another one I did with Bob was called *The Forest*: Bob said, “There’s money to be made in Germany for something theatrical.” I

BUYERS' GUIDE



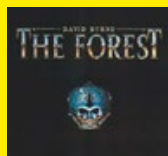
TALKING HEADS NAKED (1988)

Disappointing swansong cut with dozens of extra musicians in Paris, based on earlier improvisations. Lyrics and melodies added later, and various elements don’t combine with their usual panache.



DAVID BYRNE REI MOMO (1989)

A guided tour of Latin American and Afro-Cuban forms, from cumbia to samba, with Kirsty MacColl joining a host of Latino legends alongside the gringo groover.



DAVID BYRNE THE FOREST (1991)

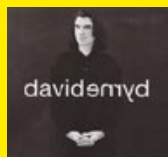
Orchestral ethnological forgeries for an archaeo-mythical theatre piece based on ‘The Epic Of Gilgamesh’, but set in the industrial revolution: imagine Sun Ra relaxing at the Penguin Café.



DAVID BYRNE UH-OH (1992)

A less “worthy” world-music hybrid, in which the Latin influence subsists more as a fount of energy, adding

spring in the singalong songs’ steps and spice in their arrangements.



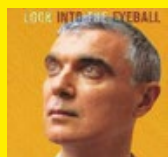
DAVID BYRNE DAVID BYRNE (1994)

The more stripped-down approach here didn’t work to the LP’s advantage: stripped of froth and fripperies, the songs struggled to engage.



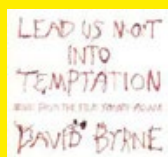
DAVID BYRNE FEELINGS (1997)

Byrne gets his groove back, aided by Morcheeba: their laidback style mellows out his jerky rhythms to produce slinky grooves reflecting the undertow of playful hedonism.



DAVID BYRNE LOOK INTO THE EYEBALL (2001)

Despite including Byrne’s first Spanish-language song, Latin-American influences are assimilated here into a more eclectic, mature style with elegant string and wind arrangements.



DAVID BYRNE LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION (2003)

Byrne’s soundtrack to the *Young Adam* film was made in

collaboration with members of Belle & Sebastian and Mogwai, whose improv skills lend themselves to the LP’s sombre charms.



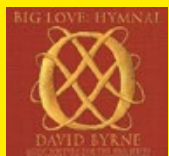
DAVID BYRNE GROWN BACKWARDS (2004)

Even by Byrne’s eclectic standards, this is all over the map: country music, gamelan percussion, Gallic accordion, even a couple of arias from Bizet and Verdi, which test his upper register.



DAVID BYRNE & BRIAN ENO EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS WILL HAPPEN TODAY (2008)

A more demarcated collaboration, with Eno’s unfinished grooves developed and sung by Byrne, whose lyrics treat decrepitude and death with maturity and warmth. A beguiling, consolatory work.



DAVID BYRNE BIG LOVE: HYMNAL (2008)

Music for a drama series on Mormon polygamists, ingeniously evoking the wistful flavour of old pioneer hymns in an upscale Americana palette of brass-band horns, genteel strings

and minimalist repetitions. Think teatime with Van Dyke Parks and Sufjan Stevens.



DAVID BYRNE & FATBOY SLIM HERE LIES LOVE (2010)

A 22-track disco-opera about Imelda Marcos which doesn’t mention shoes once. Despite sterling work from vocal talent (Florence, St Vincent, Tori Amos and others), it’s simply too long to spend at the disco with a dictator’s wife.



CAETANO VELOSO & DAVID BYRNE LIVE AT CARNEGIE HALL (2012)

Veloso returns the favour for Byrne’s earlier patronage by having him share a 2004 acoustic showcase. A joyous show, including “Road To Nowhere” filtered through a bossa nova temperament.



DAVID BYRNE & ST VINCENT LOVE THIS GIANT (2012)

A harmonious union of cerebral talents, their more icily artful tendencies thawed by using brass as lead instrument. Ebullient, infectious, touching and intelligent.

said, “What if we do the Gilgamesh story, which is the oldest story known to man, and re-set it during the Industrial Revolution in Germany, because during that period the same questions – man versus nature, the city versus the country, all those questions get raised anew, and we can re-set it that way.” He agreed, but of course Bob being Bob, a story is just an inspiration for him, he doesn’t feel like he has to adhere to a narrative or anything. He’ll stick with it, but it’s more of an underpinning than something in the forefront for the audience. Which is a fun way to work.

How did *Here Lies Love*, the musical collaboration with Norman Cook about Imelda Marcos, come about? What was the attraction of Imelda? At first, it might have just been this outrageous person who lives in this bubble-world, and loves going to clubs – there’s a connection between the hedonistic dance-club vibe and someone being as powerful as she and her husband were. That was a nice start to get you into that world, then I discovered there was a lot more going on – a relationship that just fell into my lap, the main opposition to her husband, Aquino, who was assassinated when he returned to the Philippines, she dated him when they were young, so there was this other parallel thread going with him: she got him out of prison, and he was sent into exile. And it all ended with this peaceful revolution, the precursor of those in Egypt and other places; though none of them end up quite as hoped.

How do you go about developing a musical like that? It evolved in stages: I had the songs written, but I could never get support to do it theatrically – I always wanted it be done in a disco. And I wanted it to be all songs and no dialogue, so you couldn’t have someone come on and say, “I’m such-and-such.” The director Alex Timbers is great at the non-verbal narrative, where you understand the relationships between characters by their positions onstage, or clothing. It ran at the National last year, and now I’ve written another one. It’ll take time, but I’m onto a second draft.

Any clues about a theme? It’s another historical woman, where there’s a lot of information in the historical record. Which is good for me: I’m not making this story up, it’s exactly what was said, on the record.

You realise that Eva Peron’s been done? Yes, that’s been done, that’s been done. The Imelda thing was compared to that, but the feeling was very different.

You’ve worked on a lot of narratives, notably your film, *True Stories*. What’s the main difference between working on an album and a film – it’s a much more collaborative process, presumably? Yes, it is. As a musician, I started to become more comfortable... not being bossy as such, but in making my intentions clear. Rather than ordering people to “Do this!”, I’d talk with them about it so they’d understand – and they end up helping you achieve what you want. It’s vastly more complicated, but super fun to do.

I was intrigued to learn that Windows used a sample of yours as part of their operating system. Oh yeah! One year their new operating system included an audio/video player, and they used a song I’d done [*“Like Humans Do”, from 2001’s Look Into The Eyeball*] as a demo of how their audio player worked – so that when you opened up the player, there was something in there already. I thought, ‘This will be a clever way to get a song from my new record to millions of people, to create awareness of the new recording.’ It didn’t really have that effect!

New York seems very amenable to creativity. Do you think you might have

EYEWITNESS!

“WE MADE IT A PARTY!”

BERNIE WORRELL
remembers bringing the funk to Talking Heads

“FIRST MET TALKING Heads sometime back in the early ’80s. It was them that made contact with me. Jerry Harrison called me and asked if I’d be interested in joining them. I didn’t know who they were! I didn’t follow new wave. But we met up at a studio and jammed, and we enjoyed it, so I joined up.

“I’d been with P-Funk about 10 years, and I think Talking Heads modelled their larger lineup around ours; they told me they used to sneak into our shows, they were all fans of P-Funk. They took the concept of multi-rhythms, integrated it, got the rhythm thing more energetic, got more people involved. Jerry didn’t play funk: that’s what they wanted, the black rhythms. So I brought my feel into things, like the clavinet intro to ‘Life During Wartime’, and I’d suggest things they could do on guitars. I’d been musical director of P-Funk for years, so it was good to be able to sit back and just play.

“Nona Hendryx joined up too, and I brought in Lynn Mabry from the Brides Of Funkenstein, we made it a party! Talking Heads were a bit stiff when they started, they admitted it. That’s why we injected the brotherhood. It became a unique combination of David’s quirkiness – he’s a conceptualist, like George Clinton – and the rhythms.

“I played with them for about four years, through the *Stop Making Sense* period. I was on the live album *The*



With Bernie Worrell at the Rock'n'Roll Hall Of Fame induction

Name Of This Band..., and I also played on *Speaking In Tongues*. I put my own flavour on ‘This Must Be The Place (Naive Melody)’; and everybody loved what I added to ‘Making Flippy Floppy’, one of the synth or clavinet lines. While writing and composing, coming up with material, we’d jam, but not onstage; when we played live it was already a piece, the solos were all worked out.

“When Talking Heads stopped working together, I stayed in touch with the individual members, and I played on two or three things that Chris and Tina did – I seem to remember playing ‘Soul Train’ with The Tom Tom Club. Then when they reunited for the final one-off performance at their induction into the Rock’n’Roll Hall Of Fame – I had already been inducted with P-Funk – David requested the presence of Steve Scales and I. Because they couldn’t have done ‘Burning Down The House’ without us!

“There was some friction there, I could sense it, but I tried to stay out of it, as I’ve seen that before, with P-Funk and others. But the friction was already there before they expanded the group, I suspect. Each of the others, Chris, Tina and Jerry, would come and ask me to talk to David, and I didn’t want to get involved, as I knew he wouldn’t change his mind; but I tried all the same. It’s a shame, but that’s part of the business.”

developed in a totally different way if you’d lived in Los Angeles? I did try living in Los Angeles for a time in the mid- to late-’80s, at the time I was making that film, and obviously a lot of the producers and technical people are based in LA, and they’re the best in their field. But I found that when you weren’t actively involved in something there, you spent so many hours in your car, just going from place to place, and you think, ‘Where are the years going here?’

I remember that line you wrote about London being “a small city”, and I thought, Jesus, has he ever tried to get across it in rush hour? Oh yeah, I get that! I think I meant that it was made up of lots of small villages, and people sometimes never ventured out of their little village. ☺

David Byrne’s Meltdown runs at London’s Southbank Centre from August 17-30



KMAZUR/WIREIMAGE; PETER M VAN HATTEM

OVER THE PAGE! THE TOP 50 NEW YORK ALBUMS

50 Greatest New York Albums

DAVID BYRNE IS on the cover and, to celebrate, the *Uncut* team have compiled a Top 50 of the greatest New York albums. Perhaps inevitably, it is a wide-ranging list that covers many genres and a remarkable 80 years in the city's musical life. Our chronological survey begins at a concert called An Experiment In Modern Music; in many respects, that is a phrase you could apply to all the albums here, from early explorations in form and structure at the city's jazz clubs through punk's rowdy shenanigans at CBGB or Max's Kansas City and onwards – our list includes doo wop, folk, disco, soul, hip-hop and indie, and reaches deep into the new millennium. Our journey takes us from Birdland to Studio 54 via East Village coffeehouses, from addresses in Queens' Kew Gardens Hills and Ditmas Park in Brooklyn to a brownstone on the Upper West Side, the Chelsea Hotel and a chapel on a university campus. Here, then, is *Uncut*'s pick of the finest albums born of the city's five boroughs...

WILLIAM GOTTlieb/REDFERNS



Ol' Blue Eyes at Columbia's Liederkranz Hall Recording Studio, October 1946



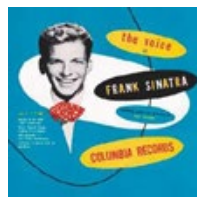
1 Rhapsody In Blue GEORGE GERSHWIN

1924

On February 12, 1924, New York's Aeolian Hall hosted a concert called An Experiment In Modern Music. Clustered into sections with titles like 'Contrast: Legitimate Scoring vs. Jazzing', the programme included a new 18-minute piece by Brooklyn-born Gershwin: "A Rhapsody In Blue". Written between Broadway commissions, Gershwin's piece became an early blockbuster – the initial recording was one of the first records to sell over a million copies. Critically, the success of "Rhapsody..." helped legitimise jazz – the dominant musical idiom in New York for the next 30 years.

2 FRANK SINATRA THE VOICE OF FRANK SINATRA

1946



Though most of his classics were recorded in LA, Ol' Blue Eyes' first proper album – a set of four 78s – was mostly tracked in the city that Sinatra thought of as home. The eight compact songs here, from "You Go To My Head" to "Paradise", still conjure up images of mid-century New York in the mind of the listener, from the sparkling grandeur of Midtown's hotel bars to

the murky, violent underworld of the Italian-American Mob that then still held the city in its grip. Sinatra's voice already sounds sublimely world-weary here, despite the fact he hadn't yet reached 31.

3 ART BLAKEY A NIGHT AT BIRDLAND VOL 1

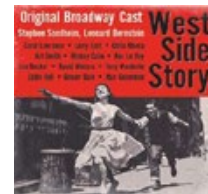
1954



Originally located at 1678 Broadway, Birdland wore its achievements modestly: the club's marquee carried the legend, "Jazz Corner Of The World". Accordingly, the venue attracted the movement's biggest names from its opening night on December 15, 1949: Charlie Parker, Lester Young and Stan Getz among them. A number of remarkable live performances were recorded at Birdland, especially Art Blakey's landmark set from February 21, 1954; crisply produced by Blue Note founder Alfred Lion, it captures the intricate interplay between hard bop pioneers, trumpeter Clifford Brown and pianist Horace Silver.

4 LEONARD BERNSTEIN WEST SIDE STORY ORIGINAL CAST RECORDING

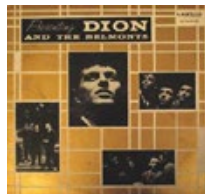
1957



Relocating *Romeo And Juliet* to New York's blue collar Upper West Side during the 1950s was an inspired move by lyricist Stephen Sondheim and composer Leonard Bernstein. Mixing everything from Tin Pan Alley to jazz, Latin and classical, Bernstein's impressively eclectic score echoed the urban stew of the city itself. "America", meanwhile, playfully juxtaposes the ideal of living in the States

with the actual experience of new immigrants: “Skyscrapers bloom in America/Cadillacs zoom in America/Industry boom in America/Twelve in a room in America.”

5 DION & THE BELMONTS PRESENTING DION & THE BELMONTS 1959



A meeting between Dion DiMucci and fellow Bronx-born Italian-Americans The

Belmonts, their heyday ran from 1957-60, when they were the city’s pre-eminent doo wop heartthrobs. The first of four albums they recorded together, *Presenting...* showcased their infectious, finger-popping talents, including singles “I Wonder Why”, “Where Or When” and “A Teenager In Love”. Their impact on New York citizens was not inconsiderable. “I have always listened to Dion’s voice,” said one notable New York resident, Lou Reed. “It’s inside my body and head forever.”

6 MILES DAVIS KIND OF BLUE 1959



Originally from Illinois, Davis moved to New York in 1944. He had already achieved a great

deal by the time he recorded *Kind Of Blue* at Columbia’s 30th Street Studio. An instinctively brilliant recruiter, the band on this LP was assembled from the best musicians



James Brown at the Apollo with The Famous Flames, 1964

playing the city’s jazz clubs, including John Coltrane, Bill Evans, Cannonball Adderley, Jimmy Cobb and Paul Chambers. Brainstormed with pianist Evans in Davis’ Upper West Side brownstone, the hip rhythms and pulses of *Kind Of Blue* presaged the next era in jazz.

7 ODETTA AT CARNEGIE HALL 1960

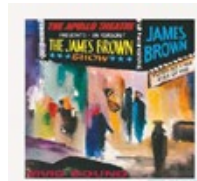


“The first thing that turned me on to folk singing was Odetta,” Bob Dylan told *Playboy* in 1966.

Dylan missed Odetta’s engagement at Carnegie Hall – he didn’t move to New York until the following year – but this April 8, 1960 concert by the

Alabama-born Ms Holmes captured her varied repertoire – “Gallows Pole”, “Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child”, “If I Had A Hammer” – and strong, soulful persona. She’d first performed in the city in 1953 at the Blue Angel club, and after *At Carnegie Hall* she returned to the city three years later to record *Odetta At Town Hall*.

8 JAMES BROWN LIVE AT THE APOLLO 1963



One of the most fêted live LPs of all time, and a key document of Brown and

The Famous Flames’ drilled, inexhaustible R&B power, *Live At The Apollo* also captured a New York institution at it zenith, a Harlem theatre whose discerning, passionate audiences empowered black artists like Brown as much as the performers empowered them. Check how the band left space for the screams, and how Brown fed off them in “Lost Someone”, a classically imploring soul slow-burn extended into an outrageous 10-minute provocation. “Gee whiz, I love you!”

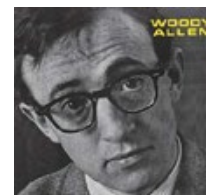
9 BOB DYLAN THE FREEWHEELIN' BOB DYLAN 1963

Dylan’s self-titled debut captured the sound of New York folk clubs at the start of the ’60s, but it was the follow-up that best illustrated what could evolve from those storied coffee shops. *Freewheelin’...* showcased a talent that was at once archetypal and transcendent: an angry young man grappling with

the city, with politics and love, and trying to find a unique way to articulate it all. Unlike most others, he succeeded. And how better to sell an album about your lover leaving New York than by putting a picture of the two of you, near your West 4th Street apartment, on the front cover?



10 WOODY ALLEN WOODY ALLEN 1964



Equally capable of free-roaming and improv work, jazz musicians and stand-up comedians often

shared NY stages during the 1950s and ’60s. Allen mastered both. A former TV sketchwriter, he made his stand-up debut at the Blue Angel in October 1960. Sample joke: “My parents were too poor to buy me a dog, so they got me an ant.” This, the first of Allen’s three stand-up LPs, was recorded outside the city but it showcased an act honed in NYC clubs, rich in the wistful futility that became a critical component of his film work. ☺

Larry Kert and Carol Lawrence as Tony and Maria in *West Side Story*, New York, 1957

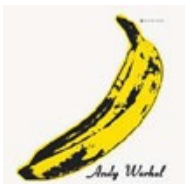




Laura Nyro in New York, circa 1969

11 THE VELVET UNDERGROUND & NICO

1967



Despite being primarily recorded in Los Angeles, the VU's debut perfectly evokes the

seediness of Manhattan in the mid '60s. The spirit of the city's counterculture is everywhere – Warhol produced the album, managed the band and provided the cover, while Factory superstar Nico delivered suitably dead-eyed vocals on three cuts; most famously, “I’m Waiting For The Man” depicts a trip “up to Lexington – 1-2-5” to a Harlem brownstone to score heroin. What’s more, the scree of atonal noise conjured by Reed and John Cale set the blueprint for New York’s later waves of noise-rock.

12 JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE ELECTRIC LADYLAND

1968



Jimi Hendrix's relationship with New York began in the mid '60s as a member of Curtis Knight

And The Squires; then as a Greenwich Village regular with Jimmy James And The Flames. He returned to the city to record the

bulk of his final album with the Experience at the newly opened Record Plant studios. Credited on the sleeve as “produced and directed by” Hendrix, Electric Ladyland took shape while he was living at New York’s Drake Hotel. Combining live jams with psychedelic epics, the album satisfactorily reflected Hendrix’s wide-ranging ambitions; the album also gave its name to the Electric Lady Studio he built in a former Greenwich Village fixture, The Generation Club on West 8th Street.

13 LAURA NYRO NEW YORK TENDABERRY

1969



Born in the Bronx, Nyro quickly established herself as one of the city’s

most potent songwriters before becoming a performer herself. Her third solo album, *New York Tendaberry*, was a more intimate document than what had gone before, being mostly a collection of stark and soulful piano ballads that expressed Nyro’s typically complicated relationship with her unforgiving hometown: “There’ll be no mercy on Broadway,” she noted. Ultimately, though, love triumphed: “Sidewalk and pigeon,” she sang on the magisterial title track, “You look like a city/But you feel like religion to me...”



14 SIMON AND GARFUNKEL BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER

1970

NYC resonated in the music of these former classmates from Queens’ Kew Gardens Hills neighbourhood. They finessed their act in Greenwich Village coffee houses; later, Simon explicitly referenced his home city in “Bleecker Street”, “The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feel’n Groovy)” and “The Only Living Boy In New York”. Their final studio album, *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, contains “The Boxer”; a typically New York yarn of a smalltown boy defeated by the big city, the vocals for the chorus were recorded in St Paul’s Chapel at New York’s Columbia University.

15 LEONARD COHEN SONGS OF LOVE AND HATE

1971

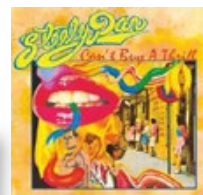


Like many a good poet, Leonard Cohen rarely rushed his songs. This third album might have been

recorded in Nashville and London, but plenty of the material it drew on dated from earlier phases of Cohen’s life, from a time – specifically in the case of “Joan Of Arc” – when he had holed up in the Chelsea Hotel. “Famous Blue Raincoat”, meanwhile, compounded Cohen’s reputation as chronicler of the intelligentsia and their romantic intrigues. The Lower East Side might be cold, but there’s still “*music on Clinton Street all through the evening...*”

16 STEELY DAN CAN'T BUY A THRILL

1972



Back in the '60s, Donald Fagen and Walter Becker had attempted to make it as

pop songwriters, touting their wares around Broadway’s Brill Building. Some of these songs made up their debut, full of the snark and wit of New York – “Brooklyn (Owes The Charmer Under Me)” profiles Fagen’s seedy neighbours, while “Midnite Cruiser” evokes the later *Taxi Driver* movie with its portrayal of a disaffected cabbie. Elsewhere, the vivid rhythms of the city’s Latin population are present in “Do It Again” and the majestic “Only A Fool Would Say That”.

17 FANIA ALL STARS LIVE AT THE CHEETAH VOL 1

1972



The Fania record label was born in the early 1960s, a partnership between Johnny Pacheco (a

Dominican-born bandleader) and Jerry Masucci (an Italian-American lawyer) that began with them selling records out of a car boot in Spanish Harlem. The music they handled was an ecstatic, virtuosic fusion of musics from Cuba, Puerto Rico and Dominica that became known as samba, epitomised by Pacheco’s own work leading the expansive Fania All Stars. On this live set, critical solos from big hitters like Willie Colón and Ray Barretto never detract from the indestructible groove. A classic example of New York City’s melting pot culture in rapturous full effect.

18 BOBBY WOMACK ACROSS 110TH STREET 1972



During the '70s, inner city New York was the go-to setting for Blaxploitation films including *Shaft*, *Super Fly* and *Black Caesar*. Named after the boundary between Harlem and Central Park, director Barry Shear's film *Across 110th Street* followed two detectives from the NYPD's 27th Precinct as they pursued the perpetrators of a bank heist through Harlem. The soundtrack was split between Womack's tough rock-soul grooves and JJ Johnson's more conventional orchestral score, and Womack's title track proved to be his most enduring single, a grim snapshot of less salubrious urban living: "Harlem is the capital of every ghetto town."

19 NEW YORK DOLLS NEW YORK DOLLS 1973



Recorded in eight days at the Record Plant and produced by New York resident Todd Rundgren, the Dolls' debut album summed up the wide-eyed wonder of suburban boys (the various Dolls hailed from Queens, Staten Island and The Bronx) let loose in the metropolis to pursue wild lifestyles. The album was essentially a diary of life on Manhattan's margins, with its protagonists equally damaged and glamorous. Though some dismissed the Dolls as Stones copyists, their amped-up, strutting

rock'n'roll would inspire a generation of outsiders.

20 PATTI SMITH HORSES 1975



Few artists capture the quintessential New York blend of high-flying aesthetics and street-level epiphanies better than Patti Smith. Punk, in retrospect, seems a bizarrely reductive classification for her debut album.

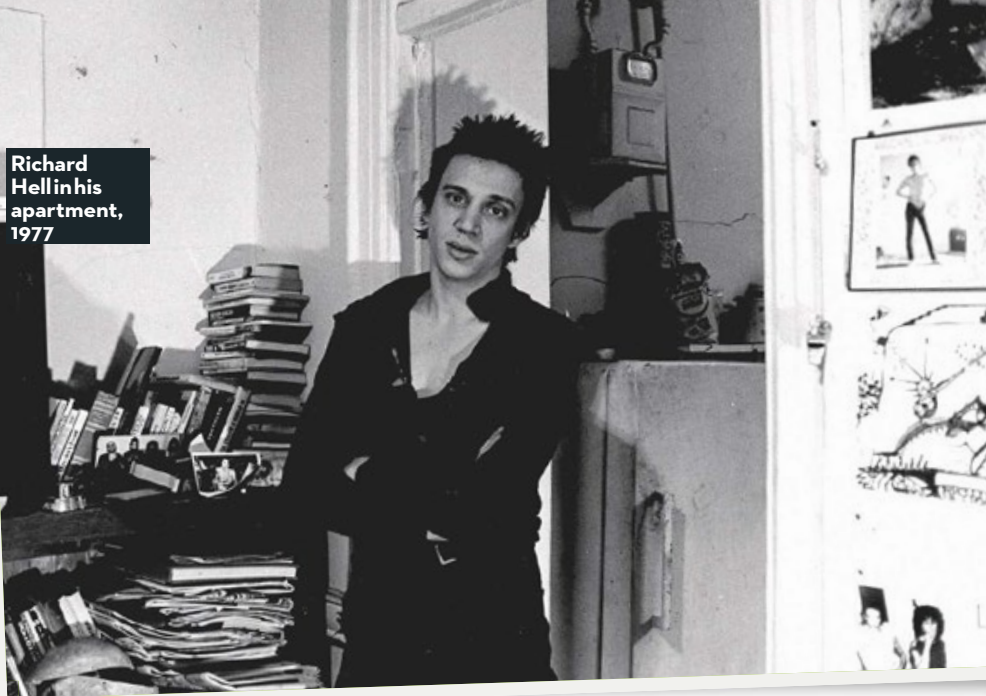


Recorded at Electric Lady, its visionary, fervid mix of poetry and music, of family and icons, introduced a performer (and, of course, her great band) that epitomised the city's lawless intellectual glamour. Worth considering, too, as an album that magically, lyrically transformed a city in a way comparable to how Van Morrison had presented Belfast on *Astral Weeks*.

21 RAMONES RAMONES 1976

Along with New York Dolls' debut, the Ramones' first album provided the catalyst for much of the city's

Richard Hell in his apartment, 1977



ensuing punk revolution. Stripped down, raw and honed at scuzzy Lower East Side venues like CBGB, it captured the brutal, nasty side of Manhattan in a way no-one had since the VU. Raucous highlight "53rd And 3rd" details murder among Midtown's rent boys, while the cartoonish "Beat On The Brat" was reportedly inspired by Joey Ramone seeing a Queens mother going after her son with a baseball bat.

22 TELEVISION MARQUEE MOON 1977



While Tom Verlaine's troupe sprang from the same art-punk scene as Ramones, they mixed their angular riffs and raw delivery with another strain of New York music: avant-garde jazz, audible in the band's lengthy jamming and Verlaine's biting, modal soloing. The impressionistic lyrics, too, portrayed the rougher areas of lower Manhattan as some kind of psychedelic playground,

with the singer and guitarist channeling his favourite French poets in tribute to the island. "Broadway looks so medieval," he mutters on standout "Venus".

23 RICHARD HELL & THE VOIDOIDS BLANK GENERATION 1977



Six months after Television unveiled *Marquee Moon*, their former bassist Richard

Hell released his own *Blank Generation*, recorded with a new band including the wild, avant-garde-inspired Robert Quine on lead guitar. While Tom Verlaine worked with refined elegance, Hell headed straight for the gutter, preaching nihilism in ripped clothes and spiked hair, duly inspiring the punk scene on both sides of the Atlantic. "Love Comes In Spurts" is two minutes of visceral, streetwise frenzy that could only have come from Manhattan's mean streets.

24 TALKING HEADS TALKING HEADS: 77 1977



Though Byrne, Frantz and Weymouth had attended Rhode Island School Of Design, they

formed Talking Heads in New York, developing their arty, brittle funk in venues such as CBGB and the Mudd Club, sharing bills with the Ramones. Aesthetically very different to the noisier end of NY punk, with songs like "Psycho Killer", Byrne and co practically invented the nervy, jerky and intellectual brand of art rock that for a time, with the rise of The Rapture and Liars in the noughties, would come to define New York. ➔



Television at CBGB, 1977: (l-r) Fred Smith, Billy Ficca, Tom Verlaine, Richard Lloyd



John Travolta as Tony Manero in *Saturday Night Fever*, 1977

25 THE BEE GEES SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER – ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK 1977



A sound (and film) synonymous with New York, *Saturday Night Fever*

documented events on the streets and dancefloors of Brooklyn's Bay Ridge neighbourhood. It was along such streets that John Travolta's Tony Manero would strut to the beat of "Stayin' Alive" on his way to the 2001 Odyssey nightclub or an assignation at the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. The Bee Gees soundtrack – interspersed with other great disco staples – did much to not only revitalise the Gibbs' ailing career but also helped shape the cultural identity of both the decade and New York itself.

26 VARIOUS ARTISTS NO NEW YORK 1978



While the likes of Television and Talking Heads ascended into the mainstream from Lower

Manhattan's art scene, a host of others were too uncompromising to move much beyond the underground – or in most cases even record albums. Groups like DNA, the Contortions and Mars, all profiled on this seminal comp

curated by Eno, deconstructed rock music, leaving only blocks of dry, brutal sound, punctuated by atonal vocals, syncopated rhythms and otherworldly noise. The perfect reflection of the dystopian, decaying New York of the late '70s.

27 CHIC C'EST CHIC 1978



With NY gripped by hard times in the late '70s, the endeavours of the Chic Organisation

did much to provide a positive counterpoint. Assembled by native New Yorker Nile Rodgers from the Sesame Street, Apollo Theater and Radio City house bands, Chic had shored up their formidable songwriting skills by their second album. Written after an altercation outside the city's Studio 54 club, the album's first single "Le Freak" sold seven million copies, encouraging listeners to "Just come on down to the '54/ Find a spot out on the floor." New York club culture had never sounded so swish.

28 BLONDIE PARALLEL LINES 1978



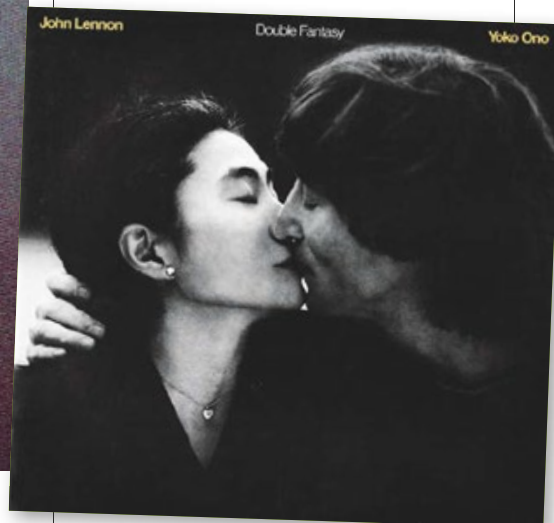
Debbie Harry, Chris Stein and co firmly left behind

the Downtown scene of CBGB and Max's Kansas City for chart-topping new wave on their sugar-coated, sophisticated third. As usual, they were firmly in touch with the zeitgeist, dabbling with disco on "Heart Of Glass", and paying tribute to the club scene of Studio 54 in its video. There were lighter moments, such as the girl-group pop of "Sunday Girl", but Blondie left room for a nod to NY art-rock with the menacing "Fade Away And Radiate", featuring reptilian guitar from Robert Fripp.

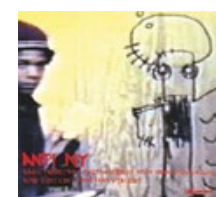
29 JOHN LENNON DOUBLE FANTASY 1980

Lennon moved to New York in August 1971; the city subsequently inspired his solo work, evidently on

1972's *Some Time In New York City*, but also on *Double Fantasy*. Lennon spent five years as a stay-at-home father raising son Sean in their Dakota apartment and accordingly many of the songs on *Double Fantasy* reflect Lennon family life: "Woman" and "Beautiful Boy" among them. Recorded at the Hit Factory on West 48th Street, it was Lennon's final studio album, released on November 17. He was shot outside the Dakota three weeks later on December 8.



30 VARIOUS ARTISTS ANTI-NY 2001



Closely related to the no wave scene, groups such as Gray, highlighted here alongside other

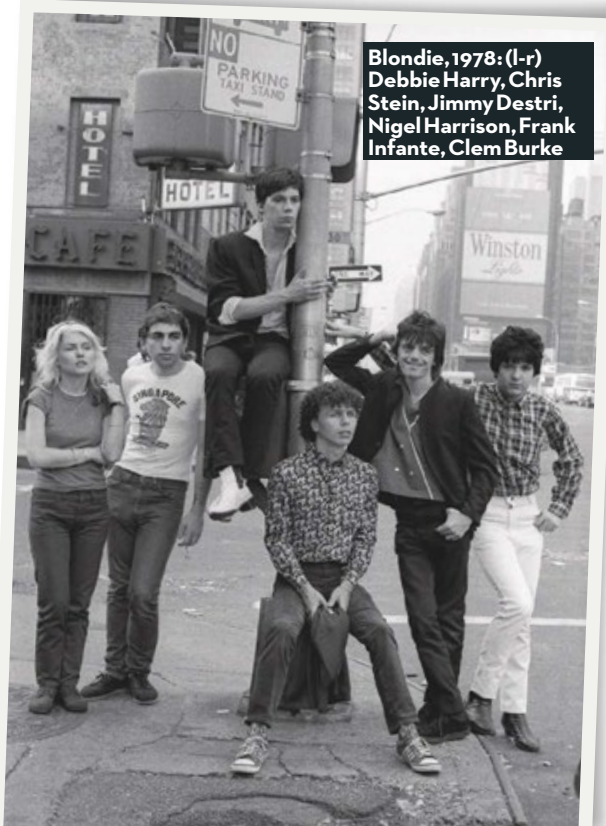
noisy, arty types from the early '80s, spilled from the fertile art and performance art scenes of Lower Manhattan. Gray are now known best for the individual work by notable members – painter Jean-Michel Basquiat and filmmaker Vincent Gallo; their industrial "Drum Mode", included here, is unsurprisingly uncompromising. Elsewhere, Sexual Harassment's "If I Gave You A Party" is a lo-fi slice of pioneering electronic funk, while Ike Yard's "NCR" is minimal electronica years before the Warp label, proof that New York has always been ahead of the times.

31 GRANDMASTER FLASH & THE FURIOUS FIVE THE MESSAGE 1982



Kool Herc might have got there first, but it was Joseph

'Grandmaster Flash' Saddyler who emerged from the Bronx to

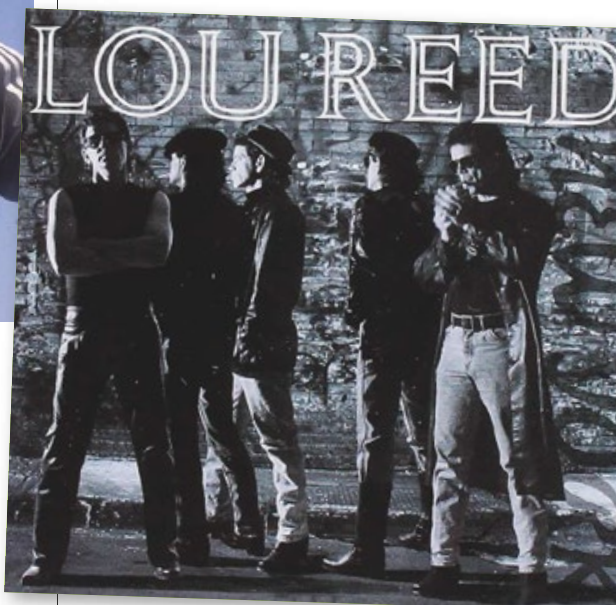


Blondie, 1978: (l-r) Debbie Harry, Chris Stein, Jimmy Destri, Nigel Harrison, Frank Infante, Clem Burke

Run-DMC in
May 1985

36 LOU REED NEW YORK 1989

An avid chronicler of city life, in *New York* Reed scrutinised his hometown with an ambitious new perspective. Released as Ronald Reagan's eight years in office were drawing to a close, Reed raged against the misfortunes that had befallen his city: chafing against racial violence in "Romeo Had Juliette", social injustice in "Dirty Blvd" (featuring a spot from an early Reed hero: Dion) and AIDS ("Halloween Parade"). He bid adieu, too, to his former patron Andy Warhol on "Dime Story



take the New York art of DJing into the mainstream. The title track, both sweeping and precise in its vision, obviously dominated proceedings on the debut album from Flash and his rapping cohorts. But search out latterday reissues, which supplement the tracklisting with the still-startling 1981 single "The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel", a scratching and mixing masterclass on three turntables.

32 MADONNA MADONNA 1983

Suburban misfits seeking to recreate themselves in the big city



should take reassurance from Madonna's arrival in New York from Michigan in 1978. Working in the city's Downtown music scene, she signed to Seymour Stein's Sire label in 1983. Informed by collaborations with Danceteria DJ Mark Kamins and Funhouse resident John 'Jellybean' Benitez, her debut captured the final

vestiges of the city's pre-AIDS Downtown culture: a raw quirkiness and bouncy R&B grooves evident in "Borderline", "Holiday" and "Lucky Star" that her later albums airbrushed over for a more polished sensibility.

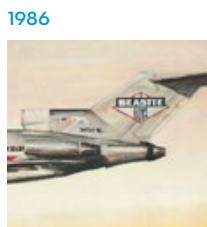
33 RUN-DMC RUN-DMC 1984



"In case you wonder what all this means/We're funky fresh from Hollis, Queens..." What Run-DMC's

crunchy, raw debut album meant was actually a whole lot more; it was the first rap album to go gold in the States, and one which introduced a streamlined version of hip-hop that was brutal in its directness, with refrains that were catchy as hell – "It's Like That", most notably – while circumnavigating anything that much resembled conventional musicality. It launched a New York dynasty, too: production was handled by Run's brother Russell Simmons, soon to co-pilot the Def Jam label into musical history.

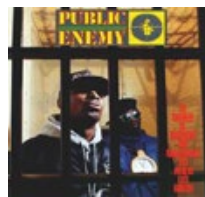
34 BEASTIE BOYS LICENSED TO ILL



Formed as a hardcore punk group – they even played Max's on its final night – Mike Diamond, Adam Yauch and Adam Horovitz got interested in New York's rap

scene in the early '80s and soon enlisted a young Rick Rubin as a DJ. After a handful of hip-hop-inspired releases, the trio toured with another Manhattan upstart, Madonna, in 1985 before releasing *Licensed To Ill*, a pile-driving, pioneering mix of rock, sampled beats and sometimes unsavoury rhymes. Throughout, the city is central – "You're from Secaucus, I'm from Manhattan," they boast on "The New Style".

35 PUBLIC ENEMY IT TAKES A NATION OF MILLIONS TO HOLD US BACK 1988

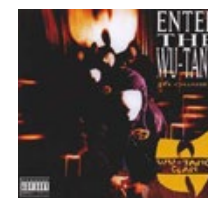


The polemical intensity of Public Enemy remains striking nearly three decades down the line, their insurrectionist ardour providing a commentary on local and world affairs from the perspective of African-Americans in Long Island. "Shame on a brother when he dealing/The same block where my 98 be wheeling," intoned the stentorian Chuck D, "And everybody know another kilo/From a corner from a brother to keep another – below." The second album's sound design was just as revolutionary, however: The Bomb Squad's meticulously orchestrated melee of sirens and samples captured the sensory bombardment of city streets – chaotic, sometimes dangerous, relentlessly exciting.

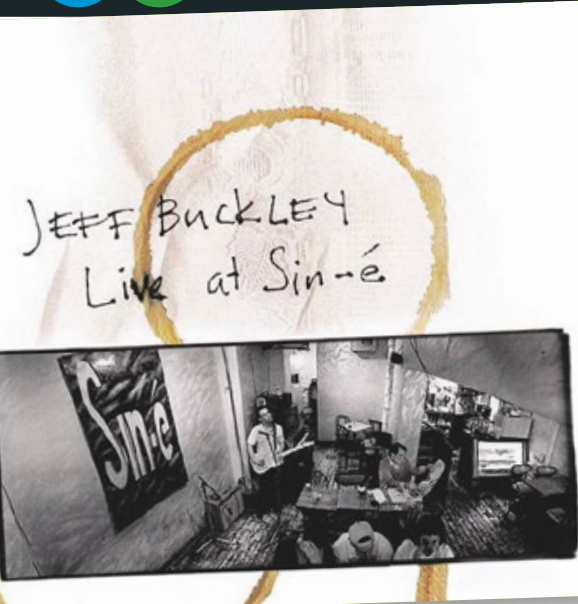
Mystery" – though he paid lengthier tribute, along with John Cale, on *Songs For Drella* the following year.

37 WU-TANG CLAN ENTER THE WU-TANG (36 CHAMBERS)

1993



Led by The RZA, an enigmatic connoisseur of the most slurred and muggy beats, the nine-strong Wu-Tang Clan emerged from the hinterlands of Staten Island as a fierce, hermetically tight force. Like many of their contemporaries, the Wu-Tang Clan's stock in trade was street narratives, but these were street narratives infused with a mythology pieced together from superhero comics, kung-fu yarns and gangster movies. The RZA's empire-building production project soon birthed a sequence of great solo albums (notably from GZA, Ghostface Killah, Raekwon, Methodman and Ol' Dirty Bastard). None, though, matched the antic camaraderie and arcane menace of this collective debut. ➔



38 JEFF BUCKLEY LIVE AT SIN-E 1993

If his father Tim's musical free spirit remains forever associated with Southern California, Jeff Buckley's New York profile was established by this debut release: a four-track solo EP recorded in an East Village coffee house, satisfyingly expanded into a 34-track, 2CD set in 2003. It captured the range and virtuosity of a singer-guitarist working through his influences (Nina Simone, Dylan, Led Zeppelin, Billie Holiday) and making something new out of them – something which in turn inspired wild, romantic compositions like “Mojo Pin” and “Eternal Life”, both premiered here.

39 NAS ILLMATIC 1994



At a time when LA hip-hop appeared in the ascendant, a new generation of New York

rappers began vigorously asserting themselves in the mid '90s: Jay-Z, The Notorious BIG (a victim of the East Coast-West Coast spats by 1997) and, perhaps best of all, Nas. His debut album introduced an eloquent voice from the Queensbridge Projects, articulating the dreams and realities of ghetto youth with an authenticity that became an article of faith to his contemporaries and followers. “Nothing's equivalent,” he noted ruefully, “to the New York state of mind.”

40 DAVID MANCUSO PRESENTS THE LOFT 1999



On Valentine's Day 1970, David Mancuso hosted a party at his Broadway apartment that



New York City Cool: The Strokes in 2001

heralded the beginning of a New York institution – The Loft – and a private club scene that would have a radical impact on the world of music. The records Mancuso played through a magisterial soundsystem were as eclectic as his guests (including future DJ legends Frankie Knuckles, Larry Levan and Nicky Siano). Nuphonic's 1999 2CD compilation neatly captured the celebratory scene, not least thanks to the inclusion of “Is It All Over My Face”, a mutant disco masterpiece created by another crucial New York mover, Arthur Russell.

41 THE STROKES IS THIS IT 2001

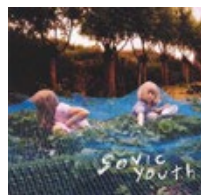


Just before Manhattan fully gave itself over to gentrification, five young men fresh out of Swiss

finishing school gave it one last musical hurrah. The Strokes, led by Julian Casablancas, took all that was coolest about the NYC of the '70s, '80s and '90s – Lou Reed's twisted storytelling, Tom Verlaine's needle-sharp guitar, Thurston

Moore's insouciance and the Ramones' ‘last gang’ image – and distilled it into effervescent songs like “Last Nite”, “Hard To Explain” and “New York City Cops”, all rich with Casablancas' wry, snotty lyrics. The bawdy cover even looked like a Warhol-esque creation.

42 SONIC YOUTH MURRAY STREET 2002



Almost every album Sonic Youth released is a tribute to the city they formed in, and fed off,

and their 12th album is perhaps the most potent. Recording sessions in their own studio in the financial district's Murray Street were disrupted by 9/11, with bassist and guitarist Jim O'Rourke in the studio when the planes hit a few blocks away. Completed the following year, the album was by then repositioned as a paean to the city Sonic Youth loved, Murray Street's sign adorning the back cover and some unexpectedly

elegiac, beautiful tones infusing the stately songs.

43 BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN THE RISING 2002

Much of *The Rising* was written in response to 9/11: songs like “You're Missing”, “Into The Fire” and “My City Of Ruins” conspicuously addressed themes of loss, faith, fear and, most importantly, hope. Indeed, Springsteen's first album with the E Street Band in 18 years foregrounded individual emotions and spiritual concerns – “*May the living let us in/Before the dead tear us apart*,” he sang on “Worlds Apart”, gracefully and eloquently



navigating a path through the trauma left by the World Trade Center attacks.

44 INTERPOL TURN ON THE BRIGHT LIGHTS 2002



Like The Strokes, Interpol have their roots in Ludlow Street's Luna Lounge, a breeding ground

for the groups of New York's early noughties indie boom. The four-piece took their inspiration from the monochrome post-punk of Joy Division and The Cure, yet still encapsulated the angular, dour sound so prevalent in the Big Apple at the turn of the century. “*The subway she is a porno/The pavements they are a mess*,” sings Paul Banks on “NYC”, as reverbed, droning guitars mass in the background.

45 ANTONY & THE JOHNSONS I AM A BIRD NOW 2005

The journey of Chichester's Antony Hegarty is one of those transformational New York parables, as a smalltown outsider finds creative and personal fulfilment in the city's bohemian milieu. A photograph of Candy



TV On The Radio, Brooklyn, 2006

Darling adorns the cover of this, Antony's second and best album, wherein most listeners first encountered her uncanny voice. Numerous auspicious guests dropped by, too, most notably Lou Reed, anointing Antony as a successor of sorts: an artist whose internal emotional narratives are critically contextualised by her environment; a poignant spirit liberated by her adopted hometown.

Berninger's lyrics conjured up the romantic pull of New York life: "I've got \$500 in twenties and I've got a ton of great ideas," he sang on "City Middle".

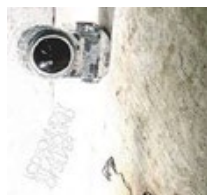
47 TV ON THE RADIO RETURN TO COOKIE MOUNTAIN 2006



By the time TV On The Radio released their 2004 debut *Desperate Youth, Blood Thirsty*

Babes, the centre of alternative culture in New York had shifted to other boroughs, notably Brooklyn. The album picked up plaudits from the likes of longtime NYC resident David Bowie, who then provided backing vocals for "Province" on the quintet's mightier follow-up, *Return To Cookie Mountain*, two years later. Mixing psychedelic textures, anthemic funk and ecstatic vocal interplay, "Wolf Like Me" and "Let The Devil In" showed that the cultural kaleidoscope of New York continues to spawn innovative, euphoric music.

48 LCD SOUNDSYSTEM SOUND OF SILVER 2007



James Murphy and his DFA label fomented a major dance-punk revival in early-noughties

New York, and this second LCD Soundsystem album crystallised a certain local mindset: at once snarky, hedonistic – even in

early middle age – and unflinchingly self-aware. Straddling the worlds of rock and disco, *Sound Of Silver* found Murphy on tour, yearning for his hometown as the only place in the States where the Christians are kept off the streets ("North American Scum"). "New York I Love You," he sang on the Bowie-ish closer, "but you're bringing me down"; the conflicted urbanite made great crooning flesh.

49 VAMPIRE WEEKEND VAMPIRE WEEKEND 2008

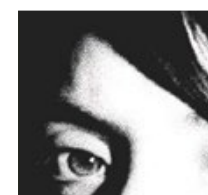


Graduates of the prestigious Columbia University in northern Manhattan,

from the start Vampire Weekend knowingly played with the imagery of the East Coast's privileged, preppy subculture, both in their appearances and in their lyrical preoccupations ("Oh, your collegiate grief/Has left you dowdy in sweatshirts/Absolute horror..."). The more upmarket areas of New York City are always present, too; amid harpsichord and strings on "M79", singer and guitarist Ezra Koenig describes a bus ride across Central Park, even remarking on a "pollination yellow cab" that he spots.

50 SHARON VAN ETTEN TRAMP

2012



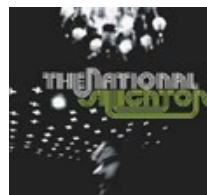
Jersey-born Sharon Van Etten's third album offered a lucid snapshot of Brooklyn's

music scene in the 2010s. Produced in Aaron Dessner's Ditmas Park studio, it featured cameos from many of the borough's storied residents, including Bryce Dessner, Beirut's Zach Condon and Julianna Barwick. But evidently Van Etten's album was more than the sum of its collaborators. A nuanced exploration of a toxic relationship, Van Etten's songcraft was charged with bracing one-liners – "I had a thought you would take me seriously," and "You're the reason why I'll move to the city/Or why I'll need to leave."

Reviews written by **Michael Bonner, John Mulvey and Tom Pinnock**

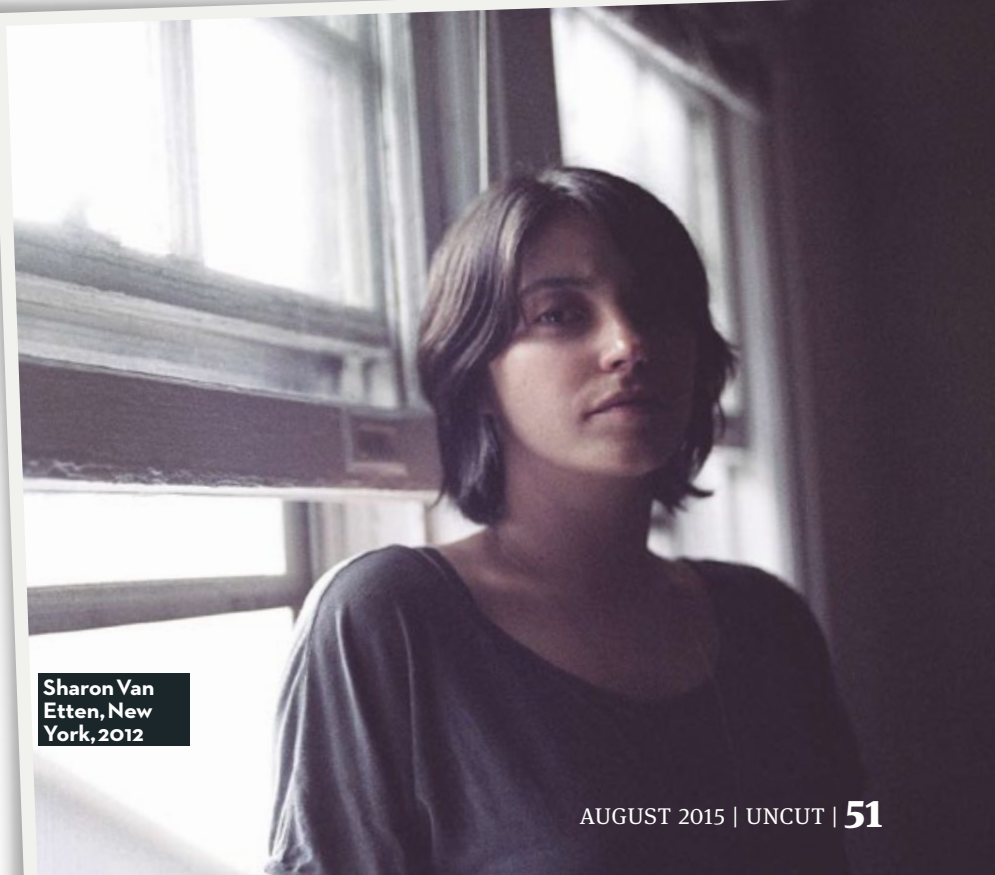
ROMAN BARRETT

46 THE NATIONAL ALLIGATOR 2005



Much like their adopted home in Brooklyn's Ditmas Park enclave, The National's

trajectory has been one of steady upcycling while retaining a liberal, offbeat spirit. *Alligator* – their third album – saw the band make a leap to a bigger label, Beggars Banquet, but still privilege their best-known quality: a nocturnal, melancholic mood. "The Geese Of Beverly Road" was named after a Ditmas Park street, while elsewhere Matt



Sharon Van Etten, New York, 2012

ALBUM BY ALBUM

The Monkees

“We were essentially a garage band,” says Micky Dolenz, “but we had no control...”

E

VEN 50 YEARS after their formation, Peter Tork marvels at the sheer thrill of being in The Monkees. “It was a lot of fun,” the singer, bassist and keyboardist says. “I mean, you’d wake up every day like, ‘Oh boy, oh boy, it’s another day!’ Eyes all shiny and bright – who wouldn’t want to do that?”

Four very different individuals forced together for a TV show, Tork, Micky Dolenz, Mike Nesmith and Davy Jones became a real band, performing their own material alongside songs written for them including “Pleasant Valley Sunday” and “Daydream Believer”. They also pioneered countercultural independent film-making with *Head* and introduced John Lennon to the delights of the Moog synthesiser’s “flying saucer sounds”.

“You know, though, The Monkees were essentially a garage band,” says drummer and singer Dolenz. “Even on the television show, remember, we never made it – we never got any success. It was that struggle for success that was so important, and I think that’s what made it so endearing to so many kids around the world.”



The Monkees: (l-r) Peter, Davy, Mike and Micky in 1966

THE MONKEES

COLGEMS/RCA VICTOR, 1966



The band’s huge-selling debut, featuring “Theme From The Monkees” and “Last Train To Clarksville”. **MICKY DOLENZ:** I love those first two albums. I think they’re just

wonderful. I mean, God, just think about the songwriters that we were blessed to have writing for us. With Boyce and Hart, but also Carole King, Gerry Goffin and David Gates. It’s just mind-boggling. It’s no wonder the records sold so well, and they still do. They’re still brilliant.

PETER TORK: This really stands up. Looking back, I see that I didn’t know anything about the process and how it was done, but being young and a bit stupid, I got a little shirty about it. Don Kirshner, who was in charge of the music, did not have a clue how to deal with people, but he really did know what he was doing in the music department. Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart didn’t know anything about us or the idealism of the folk-hippy world, but they knew how to make pop records. Apparently, they got the four of us into the studio and we did so much cutting up and goofing around that they thought, ‘Let’s not have all four of them in the studio at the same time anymore,’ and they just invited us one at a time to come in and do lead vocals.

DOLENZ: Sometimes we would all try the leads, but it was usually David and I that were chosen. David tended to do the ballads, and had a couple of big hits, too. I ended up singing the theme song for instance, “Last Train To Clarksville”, “Pleasant Valley Sunday”, “Steppin’ Stone” and “I’m A Believer”. I guess they just considered that I had some sort of a commercial voice.

MORE OF THE MONKEES

COLGEMS/RCA, 1967



The best-selling album of 1967 in the US, The Monkees’ second was a pop tour de force, despite having very little input from the band aside from their vocals.

TORK: When the first album did well, that created a budget for a lot of producer types to go into the studio and make songs and charge it to The Monkees. So they may have made 30 songs for this – a lot more than the 12 on the album, I’ll tell you that. This album was awful for us, personally; Don Kirshner released it without ever having played it for us. He didn’t think we were anything. After this, Don got fired. The sad thing about that was, from my point of view, I didn’t want Donny out of the picture.

I wanted him to go on choosing songs and bringing them to us. I wanted to avoid the silliest bubblegum things if we could, but Donny knew a lot about music, he had his finger on the pulse.

DOLENZ: I didn’t have a problem with the lack of control at the time. I understood the process. I wasn’t a very prolific songwriter. I was happy to take guidance and instructions. It was mainly Mike who said, “I want my songs to be on some of these albums, I wrote them, I’m one of The Monkees.” He had every right to say that. I think, frankly, that he may have been misled slightly in the early days. He would go in with some of his material, and the producers would say, “Well, thank you very much, but we just don’t think that’s a Monkees song.” Funnily enough, The Monkees were the group that got the most static for using session musicians, the most criticism for it. And we were the ones who had the least control over it. We had absolutely no control.

THE UNCUT CLASSIC

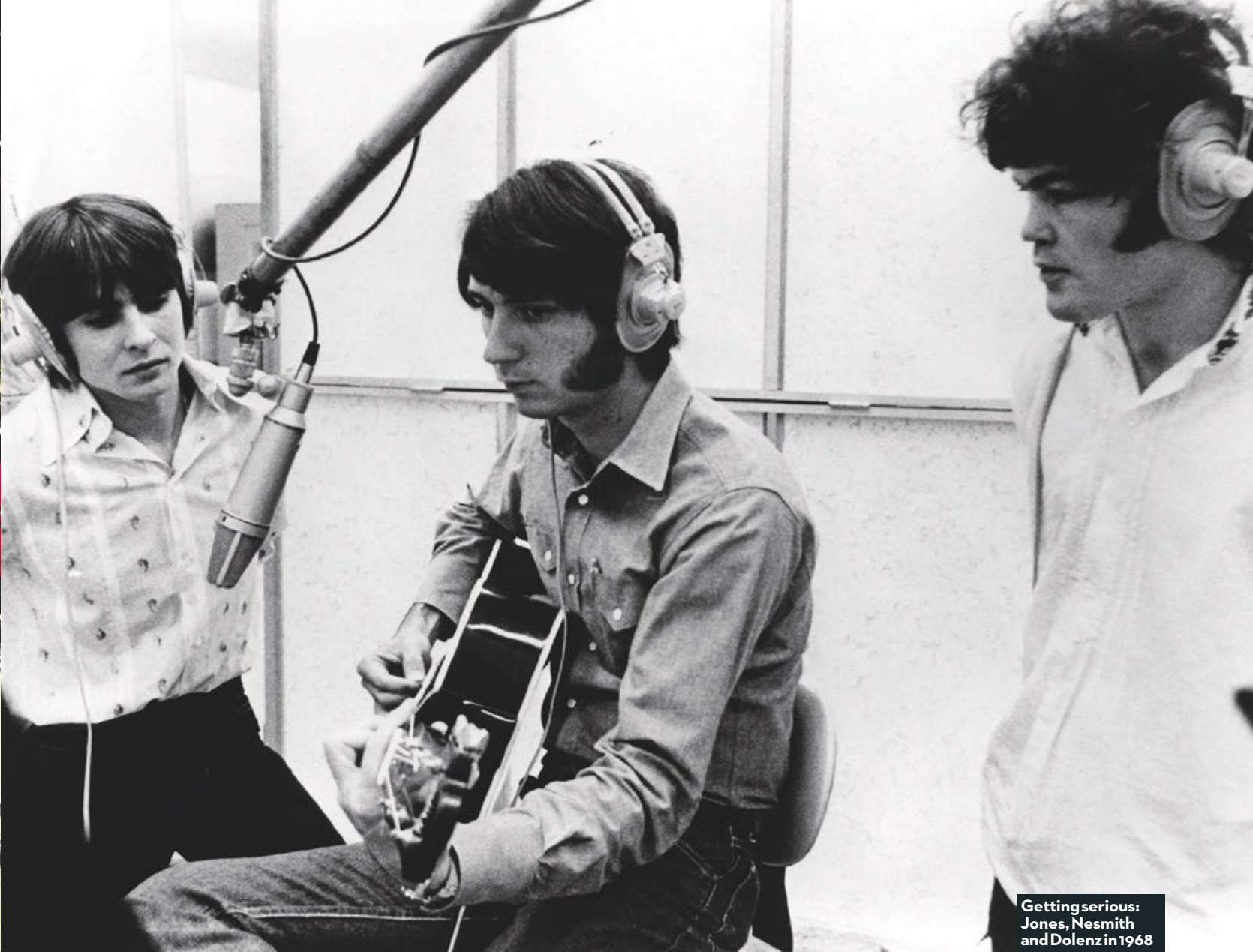


HEADQUARTERS

COLGEMS/RCA VICTOR, 1967

The Monkees take over, playing and writing almost everything on this louder, rawer third album. Highlights include Nesmith’s “You Told Me” and Dolenz’s “Randy Scouse Git”.

TORK: All I wanted us to do was to be the musicians on the album, to be performing the music. I didn’t care too much about who was writing the songs. I wrote a song for that album, so did Micky, and Mike wrote a lot, and then we got some from the producer and then we dashed off a Chuck Berry-style rock’n’roll tune. Micky and Mike went off into the corner and wrote several nonsense verses in no time. The stuff came together that way, but the most important thing from my point of view was that we were in the studio together making that album.



Getting serious: Jones, Nesmith and Dolenz in 1968

DOLENZ: This to me really was one of the real feathers in our cap. The way I look at it is that The Monkees that were on the first two albums were The Monkees of the television show, and The Monkees on *Headquarters* were a different band. It was the four of us as singer-songwriters and musicians. It's almost like two different bands to me.

TORK: I don't know what the album sounded like for the average listener when it came out, the third album, and as for myself I recognise that it wasn't as polished. The musicianship just wasn't as tight. We weren't as good musicians as the pros that had made the first two albums, but there is a lot more life and action and energy. The album has a lot more unity – it's certainly more spontaneous. To me, it sounds much more organic than the first two, but it wouldn't have hurt us to have Donny [Kirshner] handing us songs.

DOLENZ: I don't think *Headquarters* is necessarily any better or worse than, say, the first two albums, it's just very different and very homegrown. Mike's the one that really encouraged me to start writing because I wasn't writing much. He saw a couple of things that I did and he said, "That's good stuff, you should write more," so I did, and I became very proud of the stuff. *Headquarters* is just a wonderful, wonderful album. You know, it is so raw, it is so us and it showed a garage band, which was what The Monkees was! I started learning drums properly as soon as I got the part. But I wasn't starting from scratch, don't forget – I'd been a musician and I'd been in rock bands. Right before that, I was in folk groups playing the guitar, and the guitar is my first instrument.

PISCES, AQUARIUS, CAPRICORN & JONES LTD

COLGEMS/RCA VICTOR, 1967



A return to session musicians, with the band members recording and producing their songs separately. Perhaps the first pop record to feature the Moog, however...

DOLENZ: After *Headquarters*, we decided each of us would have three songs on a 12-song album – you go off separately and deliver your three songs. We'd have each other in the studio, singing and playing, but I was producing my three songs on this album. And I really liked that.

TORK: Going our separate ways was a grave disappointment to me. I was hoping we had something as a band, but I didn't know how to make it happen. The most obvious example is Davy who sat in the studio, bless his lovely heart, and banged a tambourine every take. After we did *Headquarters* he said, "I've got my part on the first or second take, you guys are going up to 40, 50, 60 takes. I can't do this any longer, I can't just be the perfectionist." Micky's got genius and when he does something with inspiration and it works for him, it scares him. He knows he couldn't do it again as well a second time, so he refuses to try. Michael was starting to do better than everyone else and he didn't want us dragging him down, he thought he could do it much better if he did it with his own people. So that was that.

DOLENZ: I had the first Moog synthesiser on the West Coast, and I believe I was the first to use it in a pop record. One night I had a party and John Lennon came over, and he sat there at the Moog all night long making flying saucer sounds!

THE BIRDS, THE BEES & THE MONKEES

COLGEMS/RCA VICTOR, 1968



Released just after the TV series ended, the band's fifth album was their last straight-ahead pop record as a four-piece for decades.

DOLENZ: When you come down to it, The

Monkees were made up, musically, of four lead singers. Four singer-songwriters. I can't think of another group where that was the case. Usually it's one person, maybe two, you know, that do the songwriting and sometimes singing. In the case of The Monkees, it was four. It made for a lot of diversity, but it also made it difficult sometimes to figure out, what is The Monkees, then? What is the sound? As soon as we stopped filming the show, things quietened down a lot. Before that, it was intense. People ask me all the time, "I bet you guys partied all the time, and did this and that," and I'm like – no! The typical day for a couple of years was 10 hours a day on the set, from 7 o'clock in the morning until the evening, then I would go into the studio and sometimes record two or three lead vocals in a night, then at the weekends we were rehearsing for tours. There wasn't a lot of time to do anything else, including just be with my family, so it wasn't until way after The Monkees that I took a deep breath and went, "What the hell was that?" It was a rollercoaster ride. I joke about it and say that I'm told I had a good time, but it wasn't for the typical reason people talk about that – you know, the old joke if you remember the '60s you weren't really there. I don't remember a lot, but it's just because I was so busy. It was insane.

THE MONKEES



Hanging around to film *Head* in 1968

➤ HEAD

COLGEMS/RCA VICTOR, 1968



The far-out soundtrack to The Monkees' psychedelic movie of the same name – both conceived by Jack Nicholson!

DOLENZ: This must be one of the best

soundtrack albums ever made. Carole King wrote two songs, I love singing those, like “The Porpoise Song”. Peter wrote two killer tunes on that album, too. Mike wrote “Circle Sky”, which is great. And of course, Davy sang “Daddy’s Song” by our friend Harry Nilsson. The movie was interesting too – still not sure what it’s about. It’s definitely weird!

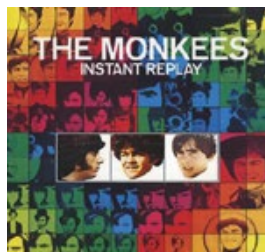
TORK: I’ve got two tunes on there and I think they’re both really good. We did “Circle Sky” live to film, and I think we rocked it.

DOLENZ: It was our intention to move away from pop. Someone suggested we don’t just do a 90-minute version of the TV show, but that we stretch out and do something more reflective of our age or whatever. So they brought in this actor, who wanted to be a writer, to come in and write it with Bob Rafelson. And that guy was Jack Nicholson. He came and hung out with us for months. Then we all got together in LA for a weekend, and Jack went away and wrote a wonderful screenplay.

TORK: I’ve come to a rather unhappy conclusion about the film in the intervening years, that the message was: “You don’t get out.” The movie starts with us jumping into the bridge and it ends with us caught in a tank of water, underwater. It’s circular. I thought there was some great stuff in there, I thought it was wonderful to try and make a commercial movie that is as surreal as that was. But the overarching point of the movie, I think, was a bad message.

INSTANT REPLAY

COLGEMS/RCA VICTOR, 1969



Peter Tork departed, leaving the band as a trio for this set of reheated tracks from their archive.

TORK: Micky didn’t want to play as a real band anymore, because he was scared to – he’s not a fearful man, but he was startled into not wanting to go back. And Michael, if he’s not in charge he doesn’t want to do it. So I was left on my own. I would’ve gone on merrily making Monkees records with those guys ’til the end of my days, if we’d been a band. But I didn’t get the chance to find out, because of what I saw as Michael’s inability to join and Micky’s reluctance to continue the process, and Davy feeling a little left out because he wasn’t an instrumentalist particularly at the time.

DOLENZ: Almost all the stuff on the *Instant Replay* album had already been started when the show was on the air, they wanted at least a couple of new songs every week, so the producers and us were told, “Just get in there, and make stuff!” So we ended up with a library, and there’s really good stuff to this day still sitting in the vaults. When Peter quit, we had to decide what we were gonna do live. There was this band in town here called Sam & The Goodtimers who we would go and see. We thought, ‘We’ll have them as our opening act, and then they can back us up.’ So we became sort of ‘Three Dog Monkee’, with Mike and David and I upfront, and this all-black R’n’B band backing us up wearing tuxedos – it was just wonderful, and the music started taking on a very different flavour. The fans, of course, thought we had gone out of our fucking minds, but we had a great time.

POOL IT

RHINO, 1987



After a long gap apart, Tork, Dolenz and Jones reunite for a smooth set of covers, with a song by Wreckless Eric!

TORK: This was in some ways made in the same way as the first two albums. When it was my songs, I made sure the production was along the lines of what I had in my head, but in truth it was the producer who made the background tracks and then the singers came in.

DOLENZ: This was done with a great producer, Roger Bechirian, and it was a compilation. I’d brought in some songs that I’d always wanted to do, and Davy and Peter had done the same. Again, we were on the road and so came in and did the vocals. I thought there was some really good stuff on it. But I wasn’t able to be as involved as I’d have liked, it was just impossible – I was on the road. I remember flying in to town and going straight in the studio and doing vocals. I really liked the songs, especially the ones I

submitted, of course, like “Heart And Soul”, Wreckless Eric’s “(I’d Go The) Whole Wide World” – that was a cool song!

TORK: I remember I had a couple of songs on that one too, one of them was written by a friend of mine and I wrote the other one. Davy didn’t like Roger Bechirian, but I thought we could not have had a better producer for us for that album.

JUSTUS

RHINO, 1996



The final album by the original four, and a satisfying sequel to Headquarters – every song is written and performed by The Monkees alone.

DOLENZ: When Mike got back involved, of course, we now had a guitar player! And of course Mike’s sensibility as a singer-songwriter and producer... we were able to go back in like we had on *Headquarters* and do it all. It was wonderful. “Admiral Mike” is such a great tune that he wrote. It was tough for me to go back on the drums after so long, but I remember working very, very hard to get my chops up for that album. I had a lot of songs on this – I’d done a lot of writing over the years by that time. I’d gone through a divorce, and there’s nothing like a good divorce to make you write!

TORK: This didn’t do very well, as you might imagine. But I loved it. We did “Circle Sky” again, Michael wrote another set of lyrics for it. That was one of the strongest songs we ever played live. There’s some wonderful stuff. I like my song “Run Away From Life”. It’s eerie and spooky, and just clammy, which is what it’s supposed to be. It’s very atmospheric. Not a bad album for a bunch of garage-band actors being thrown together out of the blue. 🎸

The Monkees feat. Micky Dolenz and Peter Tork play *Hammersmith Eventim Apollo* on Sept 4

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FROM **Amateur Photographer**

HIGHER!

“SLY STONE reinvented pop music in his own image,” says the FAMILY STONE’s Cynthia Robinson. “He took the whole of the band on an amazing voyage. Sometimes it was terrifying. But hell, those first few years were exciting.” As a boxset of their epochal Fillmore East shows from 1968 emerges, *Uncut* revisits the genre-destroying, prejudice-smashing early days of Sly & The Family Stone...

Story: John Lewis

Photograph: Legacy Recordings Sony Music Archive

WHEN SLY & The Family Stone travelled round the American Deep South in 1968, it was not always evident what kind of reaction they would provoke.

Stepping off their tourbus at a rural service station, for example, they made an eye-catching bunch. There was Sly Stone himself, with a giant afro and huge sideburns, wearing a garish yellow blouse, a floppy cowboy hat and patchwork trousers. Accompanying him would be his more conservatively dressed father, Daddy KC, along with his teenage brother Freddie, sister Rose, a black girl in hotpants called Cynthia, a tall and dapper African-American called Larry, and two white hippies with shoulder-length hair – Jerry and Greg. Their entourage also included the band’s manager, a gay Jewish dandy called David. “You could see these rednecks glaring at us as soon as we entered,” recalls drummer Greg Errico, one of the longhairs. “They’d do a double take every time. Thing is, we were so out of the box, these guys didn’t know how to do their normal nasty thing! They simply didn’t know what to do with us. And we knew how to mess with their heads.”

Messing with heads was very much the order of business for Sly & The Family Stone. By the end of 1968, they had two Top 10 hits under their belt as well as a number of headline shows at New York’s auspicious Fillmore East. While their upward trajectory continued uninterrupted into the next decade, it came at a time when the civil-rights coalition was

breaking apart and liberal ideals were transforming into armed struggle. “Before anybody had even heard a note, our existence was political,” confirms band saxophonist Jerry Martini. “1968 was a year of race riots, of the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. Some nights we were driving through cities like Detroit that were literally on fire, with the National Guard hauling us out of our tour truck at gunpoint. This wasn’t an easy time to be travelling the US as a multiracial band.”

But Sly & The Family Stone were not only mixed race and mixed gender. A mind-expanding mix of soul, funk and psychedelic rock, their music transgressed boundaries, negotiating flower power and race riots, civil rights and psychedelia, blurring the distinction between black and white pop; Stone’s galvanising lyrics included anthems for togetherness, sly satires on bourgeois conformity and paranoid flights of fancy.

“They were The Beatles and Motown, all in one,” commented one admirer, George Clinton. “They were clever, funny, political and sassy. And you could dance your ass off to them.”

“Sly reinvented pop in his own image,” says the band’s trumpeter, Cynthia Robinson. “He took the Family Stone on an amazing voyage. At times it was terrifying. By the early ’70s it was something of a nightmare. But hell, those first few years were exciting.”

**“THEY
WERE
THE
BEATLES
AND
MOTOWN,
ALL IN
ONE”
GEORGE
CLINTON**

SLYVESTER STEWART WAS already a star, long before he’d rechristened himself Sly Stone. The son of two amateur musicians, he’d appeared on a 78rpm gospel record with three ➔





of his siblings at the age of eight, in 1952. Before he'd even reached his teens, he was proficient on piano, guitar, bass and drums, and was playing in various high-school bands. By 1961, aged 17, he'd made his first TV appearance on Dick Stewart's *Dance Party*, an *American Bandstand*-style pop TV show broadcast on San

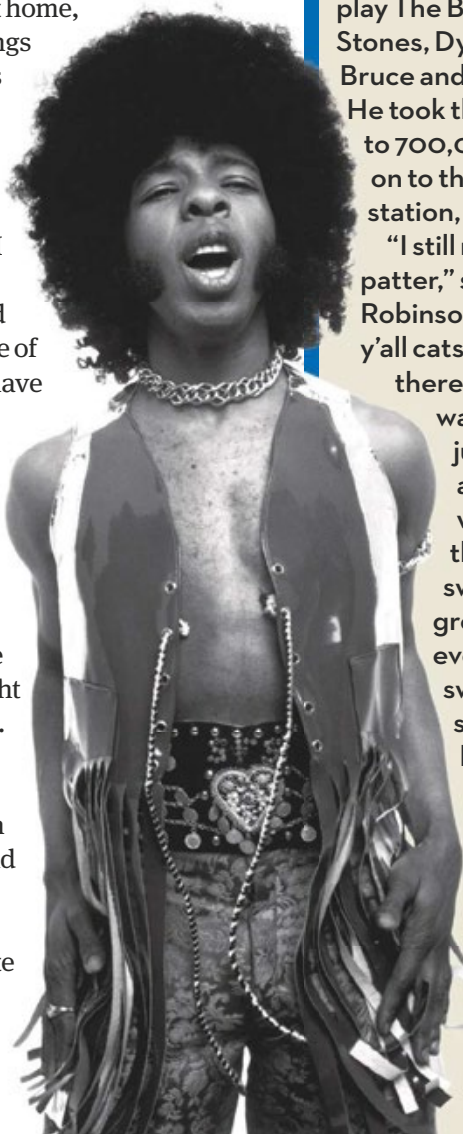
Francisco's KPIX channel – playing with a largely white doo-wop band called The Viscaynes. “I played sax on one of those *Dance Party* shows,” says Jerry Martini. “Me and Sly had known each other since we were 16 or 17. He always had that swagger about him. Sly had the most intense look in his eyes. He wanted you to know that he was a very strong person, with strong vibes. I took to him immediately.”

By the mid '60s, Sly was also a local celebrity around the Bay Area as a disc jockey on an R&B AM station, KSOL. “All the hip kids would listen to Sly's show,” confirms Cynthia Robinson. “Sly was freeform, spontaneous and hilarious on air. I only discovered that he was the same Sylvester Stewart I'd met in high school when I took a record by my group – The Chromatics – to the station for him to play!”

Besides his DJ commitments, he also worked as a staff writer and producer for Autumn Records, a San Francisco label run by radio mogul Tom Donahue. In 1965, aged only 21, Sly was involved with several big nationwide hits: writing “C'mon And Swim”, a US Top 5 hit for local R&B troupers Bobby Freeman, and producing a further three Top 40 hits for Bay Area Beatles copyists The Beau Brummels. He also produced the earliest material by Grace Slick's first band, The Great Society. “Those songs made him a fair bit of money,” reveals Martini. “Especially ‘C'mon And Swim’, which went gold. Sly moved with his parents from Vallejo, which was on the fringes of the Bay Area, and bought them a house in the Ingleside district of San Francisco, closer to the action. I used to visit him in that home, and I saw that he'd been writing songs for years. He had books full of lyrics and chord sequences and arrangements, written out on music manuscript paper.”

He had also recorded a clutch of singles for Autumn. “Scat Swim”, “I Just Learned How To Swim” and “Buttermilk” – released in 1964 and 1965 but out of print until the release of the *Higher!* box set in 2013 – might have sunk without trace at the time, but they are a fascinating glimpse of the embryonic Family Stone: jerky R&B with a bubblegum-pop sensibility that borrowed heavily from The Beatles and the Stones. “Sly didn't see music in black and white terms,” explains Martini. “He and his brother Freddie were brought up in an integrated neighbourhood. They had black and white friends growing up. They always worked with white and black musicians. On his radio show, Sly played Dylan and The Beatles alongside R&B acts. He listened to all kinds of pop music.”

Sly began assembling his favourite players on the Bay Area scene



EYEWITNESS!

THERE'S A RECORD GOING ON

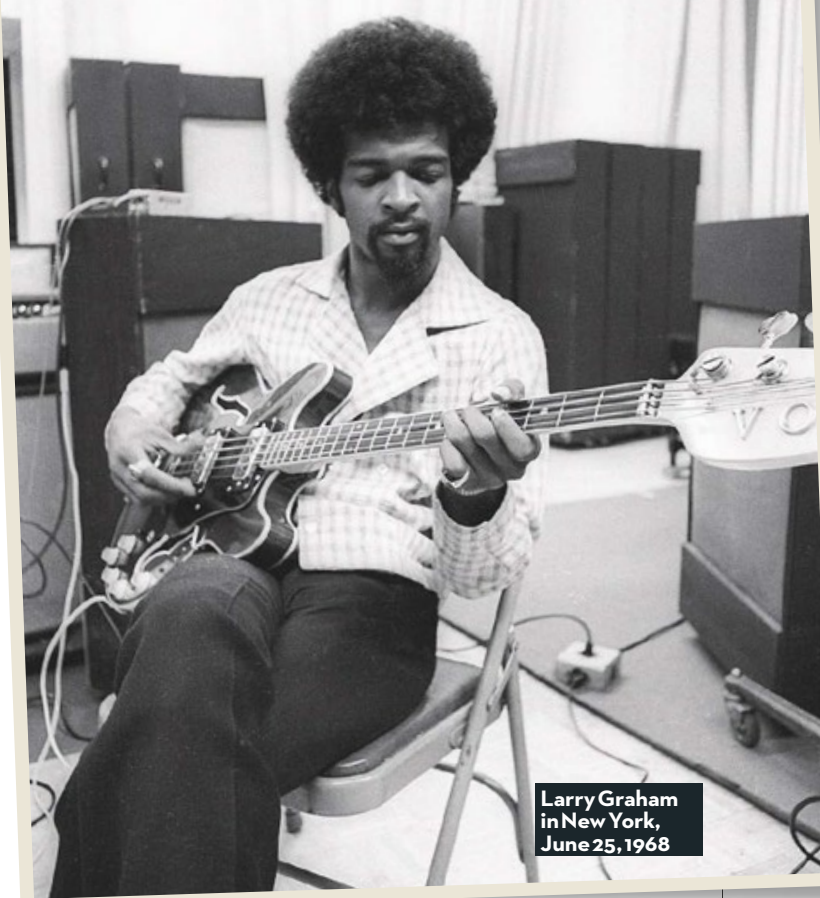
How Sly's early career as a DJ paved the way for future musical greatness

SLY WASN'T THE first or last musician to gain fame as a DJ – Willie Nelson started out on KCNC in Fort Worth; Waylon Jennings at KLLL in Lubbock; Ike Turner on WROX in Clarksdale; while BB King and Rufus Thomas both DJ'd on WDIA in Memphis. But he was one of the most innovative.

“He'd play a piano in the studio,” says Cynthia. “singing ad jingles and making up songs for callers. He was crazy. Even before he'd formed the band he was a Bay Area celebrity.”

KSOL was an R&B station at the time but Sly – in the 7pm-midnight weekday slot – would also play The Beatles, the Stones, Dylan, Lenny Bruce and Lord Buckley. He took the audience up to 700,000, and moved on to the bigger local station, KDIA.

“I still recall his on-air patter,” says Cynthia Robinson. “Listen up all y'all cats and kitties out there, whipping and wailing and jumping up and down... well here's the coolest, swingiest, grooviest cat that ever stomped this sweet, swinging sphere.” Then he'd play this little sting with harmonised voices shrieking the words: ‘Sly Stone!’ Hilarious.”



towards the end of 1966. They included saxophonist Martini and another teenage friend – trumpeter Cynthia Robinson – along with his sister Rose and members of his younger brother's band. “I had been playing with Sly's brother, Freddie, in a band called Freddie and the Stone Souls,” says drummer Greg Errico. “I turned up to the Stewart house for a rehearsal one day and it was just Freddie and Sly having dinner with their mother. ‘Oh yeah,’ said Freddie, kinda sheepish, ‘Me and Sly are starting a new band. Are you in?’”

The final recruit was bassist Larry Graham. “I was playing a residency with my mother at a venue called Relax With Yvonne, right on the corner of Haight and Ashbury,” he recalls. “She played piano and sang, I sang and played bass. I used to play guitar and play the bass pedals on the organ but, when the organ broke, I switched to bass guitar. I'd developed a way of slapping the lower strings and pulling on the higher strings, to compensate for not having a drummer. One of the listeners to Sly's radio show had rung up KSOL and recommended that Sly come down and see us! That's when he asked me if I wanted to join his band.” The first meeting of this new group took place in December 1966. “We didn't play a note, we just discussed what the band stood for,” recalls Errico. “Obviously, being a mix of black and white was unique, as was having male and female members! But it was also clear that, while Sly was the leader, we weren't just a backing band. This wasn't Motown or Stax. We were a family. A gang, like The Beatles.”

IN THEIR EARLIEST rehearsals, the band's members recall that they'd cover soul standards and Top 40 pop songs, while Sly worked in new material as he wrote it. “But we were never a copy band,” insists Martini. “We'd do songs our style. And we'd all share the lead vocals.” Larry, in his lugubrious baritone, sang “Tobacco Road” or “The Shadow Of Your Smile”; Freddie howled through Otis Redding's “Try A Little Tenderness” and “I Can't Turn You Loose”. Meanwhile, Sly growled through Ray Charles's “I Don't Need No Doctor” and James Brown's “There Was A Time”; Jerry shined on Junior Walker's “Shotgun” and Cynthia played trumpet and sang on “St James Infirmary”.

“Elements from those original covers stayed in our live set for years,” notes Errico. “The Otis Redding songs would turn into ‘Turn Me Loose’ on the first album, for instance, or the James Brown tune turned into ‘Are You Ready’.” Before they'd even rehearsed, the band landed a gig at the Winchester Cathedral, a hip new venue in Redwood City, halfway between San Francisco and San Jose. The club usually hosted white, student-friendly rock bands, so owner Rich Romanello took a chance by giving Sly & The Family

Stone a late-night residency on Friday and Saturday nights. “Those shows were crazy,” remembers Cynthia Robinson. “The band used to come out one by one: first Greg on the drums, then Larry on bass. It was like ‘Memphis Soul Stew’, introducing each band member. The band knew how to improvise. Particularly Sly, Larry and Freddie – if one of them started improvising, the other two would jump on it. They knew how to veer from the norm.”

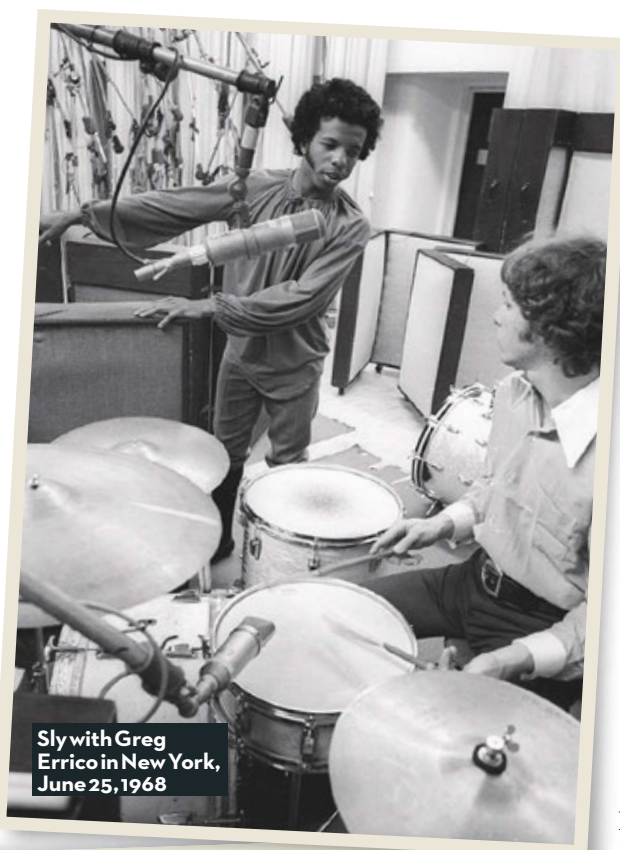
By early 1967, these late-night shows had caught the attention of David Kapralik, a CBS executive, who flew over from New York to check out the band. Impressed, he sought out Sly and – after hanging out with him for a week – signed him, to his management company and his label. “David was both head of Epic Records *and* our manager,” notes Errico. “That’d be deemed a conflict of interests nowadays! But, somehow, nobody minded in those days.” Kapralik secured gigs in other San Francisco venues, as well as a lucrative three-month residency at a Vegas casino-cum-disco, Pussycat A Go-Go. “We were playing the Vegas club six nights a week,” explains Martini, “working on our first set of original songs, and on our day off we’d fly to LA to record the first album.”

Released in October, Sly & The Family Stone’s debut, *A Whole New Thing*, enjoyed a wide-ranging brief, from the Stax-style funk of “Underdog” to the psychedelic whimsy of “Run, Run, Run”. But it failed to break the band, with CBS boss Clive Davis telling Kapralik that he needed something more commercial. “There were great tracks on it, but it was too unfocused,” admits Martini. “What record labels want is a massive hit single and a bunch of tracks that sound just like that.” The band delivered exactly that with their second album, *Dance To The Music* (April, ’68). The title track was a blissfully simple one-chord jam that became the band’s breakthrough, reaching No 8 on the *Billboard* chart when it was released as a single in early 1968. In staunchly democratic fashion, each member of the band enjoyed a moment in the spotlight. “*All we need is a drummer, for people who only need a beat*,” yells Freddie Stone. “*I’m gonna add some bottom, so that the dancers just won’t hide*,” growls Larry Graham, before launching into a ferocious fuzz-bass groove. “*All the squares go home!*” yells Cynthia. “In some ways, it was like a three-minute version of those early gigs,” reveals Errico. “Everyone coming onstage and introducing themselves. It was a simple instruction for everybody to get up and dance, and it spoke to everybody. Sly realised that nobody was going to take notice of his political songs unless he’d created



“IT WAS CLEAR THAT WE WEREN’T JUST A BACKING BAND”

GREG
ERRICO



Sly with Greg Errico in New York, June 25, 1968

an audience and get them listening. Only then can you take them deeper.”

Reflecting on Sly’s qualities as a bandleader, Jerry Martini affirms that Stone “had it all. Not only could he play half a dozen instruments well, but he could sing, write, produce and arrange. He’d even studied orchestration in junior college – he used to credit his music master, David Froehlich, on sleeve notes and chat shows.”

“Sly used to write for each person’s character,” says Cynthia Robinson. “He considered their personality and range – the kind of thing Mingus or Ellington used to do. He’d assign specific mics to create different textures. And he’d always scope every venue, check out the wattage of the speakers, the acoustics, where we needed to stand. He had that knowledge.”

While the band tapped into a similar brand of funk to James Brown, Sly was a less autocratic bandleader. “The rhythm section had a pretty free hand,” says Larry Graham. “Sly was the songwriter but part of his genius was to allow each player to contribute their own ideas.”

The band’s intricately written pop symphonies truly took shape on the third album, *Life* (September ’68). “That was a terrific album,” says Martini, “but it didn’t get shit for sales. CBS really dropped the ball on that. Today, it’s probably been sampled more than any album in the history of hip-hop.” *Life* mixed uptempo hit singles (“Fun”, “M’Lady”) with bourgeois-baiting satire (“Plastic Jim”), while the opener, “Dynamite!” – with its refrain “Miss Clean” – also had a hidden meaning.

“‘Miss Clean’ was a reference to mescaline,” confirms Errico. “We all tried it in Canada and we were in the tour truck, out of our heads. When we got stopped by a Canadian Mountie, we thought we were going down. Luckily, the Mountie was a fan of the band!”

Musically, the group were also moving into more experimental areas. “Sly didn’t go for the Motown-style parallel harmonies that were prevalent at the time – and still are,” notes Martini. “The voicings he used to give us were almost avant-garde. The horn arrangements are full of minor seconds and irregular resolutions. People’d come up to Sly and say: ‘Man, that sounds great, what did you do?’ He’d just smile and say, ‘You gotta figure it out!’ And most people couldn’t figure us out. Or copy us too good.”

“Also, most R&B bands had three horns,” adds Martini. “We only had two, me and Cynthia. It meant Sly had to be even more inventive with arrangements. Sometimes Freddie’s guitar, or Sly’s organ, is playing the third part of the horn harmony. Remember, Freddie was also a classically trained musician, who played even more instruments than Sly.”

Sly, a proficient drummer himself, would often suggest rhythmic quirks. “The joke among musicians was always that black people were hip and clapped on the 2 and 4, but that white people clapped on the 1 and the 3,” explains Martini. “Sly thought that was bull. ‘You can be funky on the 1 and the 3,’ he’d say. And, as if to prove his point, if you listen to ‘I Want To Take You Higher’, he puts in an extra coupla beats after the ‘hey, hey, hey, hey’, and the whole backbeat shifts from being on the 2 and the 4 to being on the 1 and the 3. It keeps wrapping round on itself. It’s very disorientating. Sly’s messing with us, playing with ideas of what white people and black people think of rhythm!”

“When I heard Sly, I was spooked,” says Herbie Hancock. “I was supposed to be some big jazz musician, but I couldn’t play funk like that. The rhythms, the interplay between the backbeat and bass, the micro tensions, the syncopations – it was like nothing I’d heard. It took me three or four years to get to the point where I was on top of what Sly was doing.”



Cynthia Robinson, Rose Stone and Jerry Martini on TV show *Music Scene*, 1969

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Sly and Freddie onstage at the Fillmore East, May 23, 1969. Inset left: Black Panthers march in NYC to protest at the trial of member Huey P Newton, July 22, 1968

RIOT GOIN' ON

SLY AND THE PANTHERS

By 1969, as one of the country's biggest African-American stars, Sly started attracting the attention of the separatist Black Panther Party.

“THEY WERE bugging Sly for donations,” says Martini, “demanding he chuck me and Greg out the band. I had death threats, bottles thrown at my head and violence at gigs. Sly intervened four or five times to save my ass. It got crazy.”

Cynthia Robinson recalls other hairy moments. “Nation Of Islam representatives threatened some white guys who worked for the group,” she says. “And a Black Panther threatened to turn up at a gig with a gun and shoot Sly. Daddy KC eventually found out who he was: he really did have a loaded gun.”

Manager David Kapralik concurs. “By 1970, Sly was under huge pressure to get rid of me – the whitey Jew manager – and align himself with the voices of despair, nihilism, parochialism and separatism,” he says. “I pulled, with all my energy, to stop him becoming a spokesman for those things. And Sly stood shoulder to shoulder with me. That poor kid was torn apart. And when you are torn apart, that means a lot of pain. One of the clinical ways to ease pain is cocaine.”

➤ Gradually, the band began spending more time in New York. “We’d spent a few months there in the fall of ’67, playing a residency at the Electric Circus nightclub on St Mark’s Place,” says Martini. “But we were more at home in the city when we returned in 1968. We were staying at the Gorham Hotel on West 55th Street, where the rooms were more like apartments, with little kitchens. Jimi Hendrix was also staying there. New York was a playground for us. Me and Sly would rent motorbikes and get into the CBS studios on 6th Avenue – through the cargo doors at the back – and we’d ride our bikes inside, to freak people out!”

While in the city, the band undertook several engagements at Bill Graham’s Fillmore East. On May 5, they played two shows with The Jimi Hendrix Experience and Clarence Carter. Then on October 4 and 5 they played four shows: two shows per night. These have now been collected on *Sly & The Family Stone – Live At The Fillmore East October 4th & 5th, 1968*, a 4-disc set that showcases the band’s formidable strengths as a live act. “The October show is the band at its peak,” observes Jerry Martini. “We never played the same song in the same way twice. You can hear us using each song as a springboard for improvisation, stretching it out, slow it down. We might take an uptempo funk song and turn it into a blues, or into some psychedelic voyage.”

Leaving New York, the band returned to San Francisco to record their next album, *Stand!*; in November ’68 came the breezy lead single “Everyday People”, their first US No 1. The momentum continued on to the album. “That really pushed us to the next level,” admits Cynthia Robinson. “For the first time, we started getting radio play, even from the black stations that used to ignore us. You noticed more African-Americans in the audience.” The album’s many highlights included the thrilling psychedelic soul of “I Want To Take You Higher”, the taut funk of “Sing A Simple Song” and the wah-wah-driven blues of “Don’t Call Me Nigger, Whitey”. Beneath the accomplished musical endeavours, however, it was possible to observe Sly trying to hold together the utopian ’60s counterculture dream, despite growing social upheaval: “*Don’t you know that you are free/ At least, in your mind, if you want to be*”.

Enjoying the success of *Stand!*, Sly & The Family Stone were booked to appear at Woodstock, in August 1969. Up against the cream of Anglo-American rock’n’roll, they nevertheless emerged as one of the festival’s stars. “No-one



knew Woodstock was going to be so huge,” recalls Larry Graham. “But everything took off after that. For Sly, it was like the moment when Michael Jordan took off from the free-throw line, when he leapt up in the air for that dunk contest in ’88. It was like, oh, I can do that?”

“Our slot was meant to be about 8pm on the Saturday night,” continues Greg Errico. “So we were getting psyched up to perform at that time. But there was only one stage, and they hadn’t accounted for the fact that the crews had to change equipment

between each act, and some bands were having trouble getting in on time. So our slot kept being put back half an hour, then another hour, and we were all falling asleep.” The band eventually appeared on stage at 3.30am on Sunday, August 17, between Janis Joplin and The Who. “By this time it was raining, and these kids, who’d been there since Thursday, were all asleep,” recalls Errico. “All you could see were candles in the crowd. Slowly people started emerging from their tents as we started.”

The band’s 50-minute set included “M’Lady”, “Sing A Simple Song”, “You Can Make It If You Try”, “Stand!” and “Love City”; the songs driven by Larry Graham’s grinding fuzz bass, Errico’s taut drumming and the interplay between Sly’s organ and Freddie Stone’s chicken-scratch guitar. Meanwhile, the 15-minute medley of “Dance To The Music”, “Hey Music Lover” and “I Wanna Take You Higher” made it onto Michael Wadleigh’s *Woodstock* film and the soundtrack album. “It wasn’t until we came to a break in the performance that we got the first round of applause,” says Martini. “That’s when the sheer number of people in the crowd hit us. To hear half a million people clapping and cheering was sensational.” Cynthia Robinson has other memories of their set. “The rain was torrential,” she says. “The equipment was crackling. But Sly was like a preacher. He had half a million people eating out of the palm of his hand.” Indeed, it is possible to get a sense of Sly in full flow on the soundtrack LP, where the songs are interspaced with fierce, onstage rhetoric: “What I’d like y’all to do is say ‘Higher’ and throw the peace sign up!”

“There’s an iconic photo of Sly at Woodstock,” says the band’s manager, David Kapralik. “He’s lit from above by a huge spotlight, wearing a bright white leather jacket with fringes hanging from the sleeves. The spotlight looks like the sun and the jacket looks like wings of wax. I thought, ‘Oh, my God. Sly is Icarus. He’s flown too close to the sun.’” ➤

SLY & THE FAMILY STONE

Indeed, for the rest of the band, Woodstock represented the point where Sly's behaviour began to turn. "Until Woodstock, it was a unified band," confirms Martini. "Pretty much immediately after that, it was just Sly Stone. The Family Stone was an afterthought."

Greg Errico recalls Sly gathering everybody for a band meeting shortly after Woodstock. "He said, 'Guys, I'm gonna move to LA.' We all thought, is this the beginning of the end? We were a pretty tight-knit family. We all lived in the Bay Area and looked out for each other. It was clear that Sly moving to LA was a problem."

"LA is where all the doctors, lawyers and Indian chiefs started to surround Sly," says Martini. "When he moved to Los Angeles, he moved to Babylon."

BABYLON, FOR SLY, was an apartment in Griffith Park, near Hollywood; then, later, a four-bedroomed mock Tudor pile at 783 Bel Air Road, Coldwater Canyon that previously belonged to John Phillips from The Mamas And The Papas. At a Bay Area concert in late 1969, Sly distanced himself from his home town. "You're over," he said to a baffled audience. "You thought you were cool, but your arrogance was your undoing, and San Francisco is now over, officially."

LA was also where Sly re-established his connection with Hamp "Bubba" Banks – a childhood friend who'd just been released from prison. A former hairdresser and pimp, Bubba chose Sly as best man for his first marriage in 1964, and became Stone's bodyguard, minder and enforcer, together with another childhood friend, James "JB" Brown. Later, Bubba married Sly's sister, Rose. "Can I be quite frank?" asks Martini. "I don't want to talk about those guys. For me, they were the most negative influences that could possibly have been on Sly's life. He was from a churchgoing family. His father – KC Daddy – was his road manager, he'd come out on the road with us! Sly was well-read, intelligent. He and Freddie could handle themselves – they'd taken karate classes – but they weren't gangsters. However, Sly did have a fascination with that world. Maybe that's what attracted him to Bubba and JB."



"Sly would hang with anybody," confirms Cynthia Robinson. "His idea was that he'd try to help Bubba and JB to go legitimate, to straighten them out. He even gave Bubba a production credit on the next album, even though Bubba knew jack shit about producing records! But it didn't work out like that."

"I couldn't possibly blame Bubba or JB for anything that happened to Sly," adds Errico. "If you'd removed either one of them from Sly's orbit, it could even have been worse. We've all been around bad influences but, at the end of the day, you make your own decision."

The band's drug use had been light until late 1969, when things started to change. Freddie Stone first used PCP at a New Year's Eve party at Sly's apartment in 1969; two other partygoers ended up in hospital. "That was when everything went downhill," confirms Errico. "Throughout 1970, certain people in the band became increasingly unreliable." Of the 80 shows that the band had booked for that year, they managed to miss 26 of them. "We developed a bad reputation," sighs Martini. "Everyone knows what it was and who it was. There were just too many negative influences on us. Great bands attract great criminals, and great snakes and great sharks."

"There's lots of great music that came after *Stand!*," continues Martini, acknowledging *There's A Riot Goin' On*, among the band's other achievements during the '70s. "Greg and I stuck it out for a long time. But I don't think you'll

ever capture the sheer brilliance of the band in '68, '69. We were on fire, man."

"Sly was in an impossible position," adds Cynthia Robinson. "We were a family and, like any family, the siblings want to do their own thing. They have little bust-ups. And Sly was like a father, trying to please everybody, but also the kind of father who'd let you make your own mistakes. He's only flesh and bone. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't hold the band together." ❦

Sly & The Family Stone release *Live At The Fillmore East* October 4th & 5th 1968 through Sony Legacy on July 17

"OH MY GOD, SLY IS ICARUS. HE'S FLOWN TOO CLOSE TO THE SUN"

DAVID KAPRALIK

ANIMAL ATTRACTION

PITBULLS, WHIPPETS & BABOONS...

"WE WERE all attracted to big dogs," says Jerry Martini. "On the road, we'd all get *Dog World* magazine and read out the description of a breed to see who could identify it first!"

The band members had 21 dogs between them. "I had a Great Pyrenees," says Jerry Martini.

"Freddie had an Irish wolfhound, an Airedale and a Giant Schnauzer. Rose had an Afghan and a French Bouvier. Greg had a miniature pit bull and a St Bernard. Larry kept whippets, a Great Dane and a Russian wolfhound."

"I had a Rottweiler and a Malamute," says Cynthia. "Sly had a bullmastiff, a Great Dane and pit bulls. One of those pit bulls was fine with women, but not so good with men. He'd go crazy if someone had a suit. Or a hat. You'd never go to Sly's house in a hat."

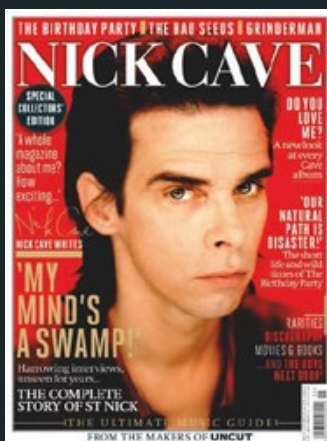
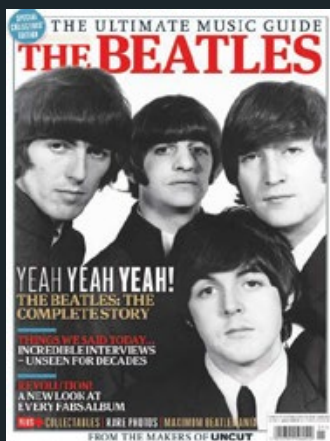
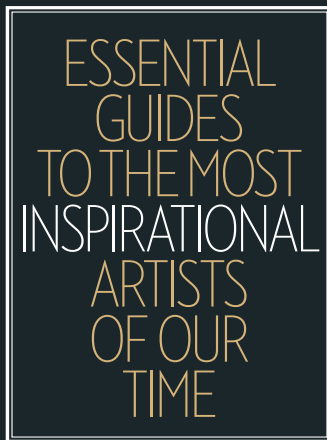
By the time Sly moved to LA, he'd also acquired a baboon. "Sly wanted to dress him in a dinner jacket and answer the door," says Cynthia. "But the baboon was a vicious guy. He'd throw his shit at you, and he'd tease Sly's pit bull, Gun, by leaping into its compound, hit it on the head then clamber over the fence to safety. One day the baboon slipped. The dog ripped his guts out."



Beginning of the end: Sly at Woodstock, 1969

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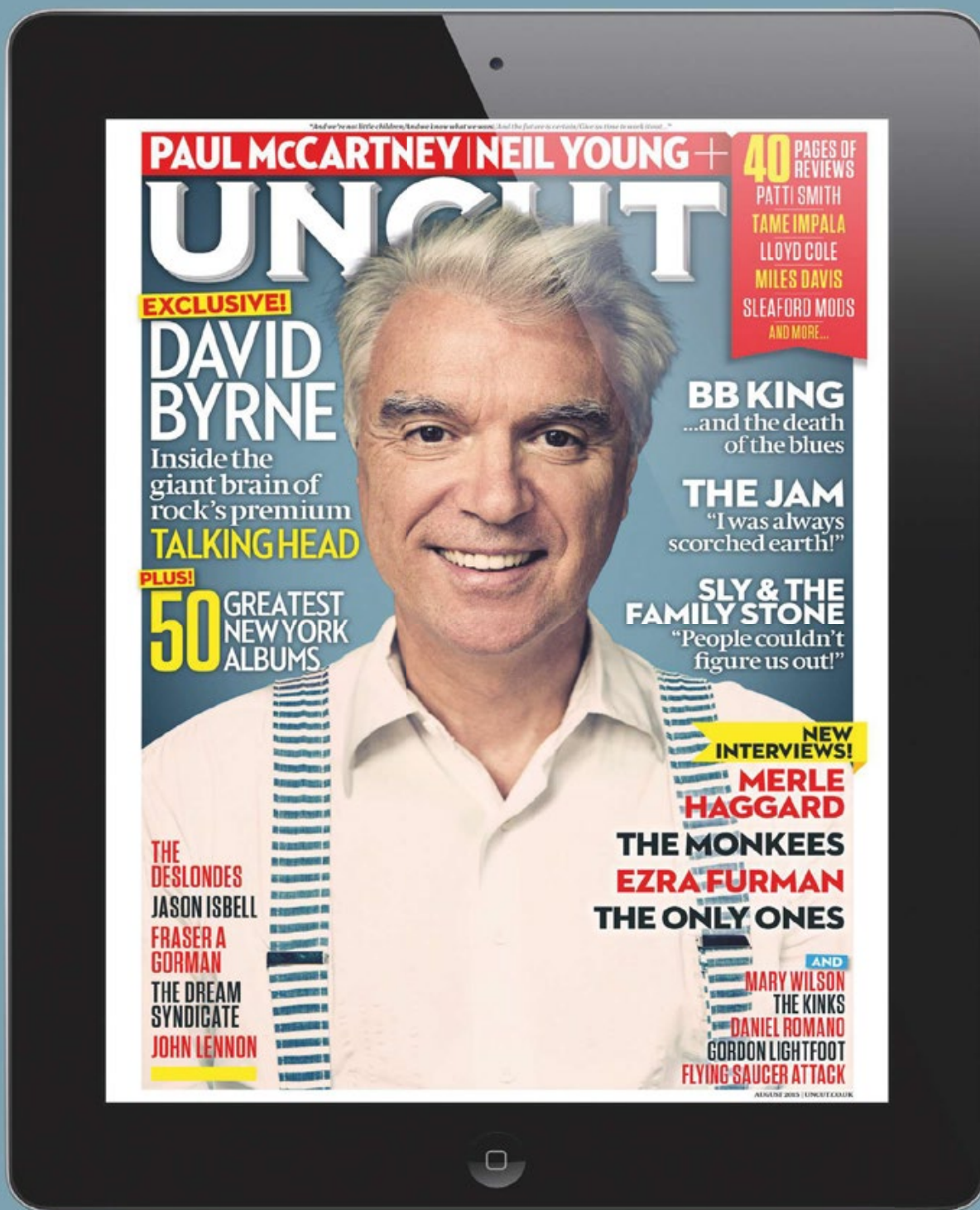
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OUR SCORING SYSTEM:

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

New albums

THIS MONTH: NEIL YOUNG | SLEAFORD MODS | JASON ISBELL & MORE



TRACKLIST

- 1 Let It Happen
- 2 Nangs
- 3 The Moment
- 4 Yes I'm Changing
- 5 Eventually
- 6 Gossip
- 7 The Less I Know The Better
- 8 Past Life
- 9 Disciples
- 10 'Cause I'm A Man
- 11 Reality In Motion
- 12 Love/Paranoia
- 13 New Person, Same Old Mistakes

TAME IMPALA

Currents

FICTION

The Aussie psych-rock genius moves on. *By Jason Anderson*

8/10

"EVERYTHING FLOWS AND nothing stays." So said Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who might have found a good place for his most famous maxim in song had there been any shoegazer bands in 500BC. In any case, the notion is a discomfiting, possibly even scary one, for anyone who may struggle to handle all this flux.

That attitude may have been closer to what Tame Impala's Kevin Parker was feeling when he wrote "Apocalypse Dreams" on 2012's *Lonerism*, a work whose prevailing state of blissed-out exuberance often belied the anxieties simmering underneath. "Everything is changing and there's

nothing I can do," he sang, sounding rather less accepting of the situation than Heraclitus did. "My world is turning pages while I'm just sitting here."

Tame Impala have hardly been what anyone would consider a stationary object, but nevertheless, their rate of change is rather more dramatic on *Currents*. Parker returns to themes of personal transformation here again and again – indeed, they're plain as day in the lyrics and even the titles of songs like "The Moment", "Reality In Motion" and "New Person, Same Old Mistakes". As Parker sings in "Yes, I'm Changing" – his already breathy falsetto sounding even dreamier than before – "Yes,

New Albums

Floored genius Kevin Parker:
“Yes, I’m changing, yes, I’m
gone, yes, I’m older...”



➤ *I’m changing, yes, I’m gone/Yes, I’m older, yes, I’m moving on/And if you don’t think it’s a crime, you can come along with me.”*

Though the song is directed at a lover who may soon be left behind, the last phrase in the chorus suggests that the 29-year-old Australian understands the challenge that *Currents* poses to some fans. It’s the third and by far the gentlest album that Parker has made under the moniker of Tame Impala, a one-man recording project that has done double duty as a five-man, globe-conquering, synapse-scrambling psychedelic-rock juggernaut over the last five years.

Anyone who has experienced this burlier incarnation of the group – captured in full flight on 2014’s *Live Versions* – may be especially startled by the music they find here. The celestial sound of layers upon layers of vintage synths has largely replaced Parker’s displays of six-string wizardry and chunky riffage on 2010’s *Innerspeaker* and its acclaimed follow-up. The previously aggressive swirls and surges have abated, with Parker now filling the space with hazy, Gallic grooves that bear a distinct air of Air.

And whereas the woolliest moments of *Innerspeaker* and *Lonerism* conjured a fantasy of

what The Beatles may have sounded like if they ever shared a bill with Pink Floyd at the UFO Club, *Currents* dives deeper into later, less hip reference points, like the more limpid balladry of 10cc and Supertramp, the latter of which Parker has repeatedly cited as one of his very favourite bands.

Close students of Parker’s art may have anticipated this radical shift given the orientation of other recordings, however, like the mix of ’60s yé-yé, jangly psych and dance-pop he developed with former girlfriend Melody Prochet for her band Melody’s Echo Chamber, or his playful and soulful contributions to Mark Ronson’s fourth album, *Uptown Special*. (Parker devotees may also be less worried that the travelling incarnation of Tame Impala has undergone a similarly dramatic overhaul – beefier live renditions of recent songs suggest they fit very well into the existing repertoire.)

What *Currents* most strongly shares with its two

predecessors is Parker’s ability to pursue a wide variety of musical tangents without losing the through-line. That exploratory bent comes most prominently to the fore in “Let It Happen”. Unfolding over the course of almost eight

minutes, *Currents*’ opening track marries a woozy slice of sun-dazed pop to a robotic dance groove that ought to be derailed by the unexpected sound akin to a CD skipping halfway through. Instead, it culminates in some heretofore never-attempted hybrid of Air’s “Sexy Boy”, Daft Punk’s “Da Funk” and Steve Stevens’ riff on

Michael Jackson’s “Dirty Diana”. Somehow it all still sounds like Tame Impala. That’s largely because of Parker’s flair for melody and his multi-tracked and eminently unruffled vocal style, which is likely to draw fewer comparisons to John Lennon’s thanks to the significant change in musical context.

One of several songs to surface in the months

This is by far the gentlest album that Parker has made under the moniker of Tame Impala

THE ROAD TO CURRENTS

Tame Impala’s inspirational friends, heroes and countrymen...



SHUGGIE OTIS
Inspiration Information EPIC, 1974

It took a few decades for Otis’ psych-infused soul-pop masterpiece to get the veneration it deserved. Though its influence can be discerned in many of *Currents*’ pretty moments, it’s most palpable on “Cause I’m A Man”, the new LP’s sly, soft and sweet first single.

10/10



AIR
Talkie Walkie VIRGIN, 2004

The French duo’s fourth LP was a return to form after an erratic pair of follow-ups to *Moon Safari*. It’s no surprise Parker cites *Talkie Walkie* as one of his fave discs given *Currents*’ comparable abundance of analog-synth fantasias, hazed-out vocals and sprightly pop melodies.

9/10



TAME IMPALA
Elephant (Todd Rundgren Mix) MODULAR, 2012

One of Parker’s heroes lives up to his eccentric rep by equipping *Lonerism*’s glam-pop standout with a throbbing, Moroder-worthy rhythm and a glitch-y breakdown that heralds the machine malfunction in *Currents*’ “Let It Happen”.

8/10



POND
Man It Feels Like Space Again CAROLINE, 2015

Parker lets the freak flag fly even higher when on production duties for his former and current bandmates in Perth’s giddiest psych-pop band. Pond’s sixth full-length is another marvel of trippy textures and hairpin turns.

8/10

before *Currents*' release, "Eventually" has a similarly unlikely yet exquisitely integrated combination of elements, its sense of blissed-out drift being accentuated rather than disrupted by the rhythmic swagger or the squiggly, pitch-bent note used as a final flourish. "The Moment", "Yes, I'm Changing" and "The Less I Know The Better" see Parker continue his efforts to create music that matches the most sumptuous pleasures that could be found on an AM radio

SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:** Kevin Parker
Recorded at: Parker's home studio, Fremantle, Western Australia
Personnel: Kevin Parker (all vocals and instruments)

dial circa 1975, albeit with the occasional Day-glo smear or other rude sonic intrusion that the likes of Seals And Crofts would've never allowed to muck up such pristine surfaces. Parker throws several more curveballs on "Past Life", *Currents*' oddest track yet the one that may best demonstrate its synthesis of the airily delicate and the gloriously askew. As a narrator with an electronically distorted voice relates the tale of an ordinary day that takes a turn toward the uncanny due to an encounter with "*a lover in a past life*", Parker ladles a loping groove with effects until it threatens to collapse under the weight. Yet this suitably daft cousin to Daft Punk's "Giorgio By Moroder" (or possibly The Orb's "Little Fluffy Clouds") still has room for another gorgeous vocal refrain by Parker.

Currents' first single as well as Tame Impala's first stab at a boudoir-ready slow jam, "'Cause I'm A Man" demonstrates the buttery goodness that Parker achieves by embracing the softest qualities of his voice and his wider musical sensibility. Evoking the minimalist soul-pop of Shuggie Otis' "Aht Uh Mi Head", Parker offers a not-terribly-adequate apology on behalf of his often lunk-headed gender. "'Cause I'm a man, woman/Don't always think before I do," he croons before lamenting "*It's the only answer I've got for you.*" Though he also confesses that "*My weakness is the source of all my pride*", the sly attitude demonstrated here is a needed counterbalance to lyrics elsewhere on the album that have the faint ring of a new-age guide to self-actualisation.

"Love Paranoia" also offers an unexpected degree of bite, the song's 10cc-calibre prettiness being undercut by Parker's description of the anxieties released alongside the ecstasies of a romantic fling. "*If only I could read your mind, I'd be fine,*" he notes before conceding how all the emotional turbulence brings out "*the worst in me*". More familiar hang-ups return in "New Person, Same Old Mistakes", though the narrator here works harder to fight off the voices of negativity that swell up from deeper in the mix.

As he is in so many other moments here, Parker is too keen to revel in the freedoms he's created to ever let himself feel defeated. *Currents* may be equally exhilarating to any listener willing to adjust to Tame Impala's new paradigm, which – what with new paradigms being as ephemeral as everything else in this life – you may be wise to savour here in the present.

Q&A

Tame Impala's Kevin Parker: "I get a buzz out of doing the impossible!"

WHAT DID you make of the early reports that *Currents* was going to take a dance-oriented direction? "Let It Happen" certainly puts a big emphasis on groove.

The backbone of Tame Impala has always been groove. I never wanted to do a song that you couldn't dance to – or groove to at least, whatever the difference is between those things. I heard a few people say it was going to be more dance- or club-oriented, and "Let It Happen" is a song where I was flexing that fantasy. But I wouldn't say that the rest is like a dance album, not in the slightest. At the same time, I hate to say the album is this or that – I prefer people to judge it themselves.

Would you say you were going for more of a soul-pop, Shuggie Otis-style vibe on "'Cause I'm A Man"? That's the number one ingredient I hoped people would pick up on. With that song, I wanted to do something that was more sultry, more sensitive and minimal. It was one of the things that I wanted to try: to force myself to create songs with more minimal arrangements. I've always been into minimal music, whether it's Serge Gainsbourg or electronic music – I love it when there's just a couple of ingredients in a song and then that's it. But I can never help myself! Especially on *Lonerism*, I gave into my every urge to pack in sounds and synths and guitars and drumbeats and fill every crack. That's an extremely dense album. So for this one, I wanted to see if I could resist the temptation and make a soundscape that remains quite sparse.

You've always used synths in Tame Impala but they come to the fore more strongly here – why the shift in emphasis?

It was about embracing that clean synth sound while still having weird and wonderful things. I've always loved the grit of synths but I wanted to embrace that silkier edge they can bring rather than have them be this rumbling, distorted boulder. I noticed that with *Lonerism* – you could never turn it up to 100 decibels on a pair of huge speakers. I'm sure live it was a different story, but the album was so distorted, it hurt your ears. I wanted to make something that was soft and nice at a low volume, but when you turned it up, it had maximum chest-rumbling impact! That's what it came down to a lot of the time with the new songs: "How loud can I turn it up before it hurts my ears?"

It took you two years to wrestle *Lonerism* into shape... Did that more minimal approach make *Currents* any easier to handle? No, it was no less torturous to put together sonically. The songs came together for me as I allowed myself to indulge in an easier way than I have in the past. But yeah, it was no less of a headfuck, that's for sure.

Personal transition is a big theme in your songwriting here – did you feel like those lyrics complemented the change in musical tactics? That was precipitated by what I found

myself singing about. I usually just follow my instincts when I start writing and then I'll notice a theme emerging. I'll try to amplify that so I can make a cohesive album, one that has a message and story. And yeah, this theme of this personal transition and moving on really went together with the music. I wanted to explore this idea of feeling like you're turning into the kind of person you thought you'd never become or starting to appreciate things you never did before. You set these rules and standards, then one day you feel like you want to embrace other things and the only way to do that is to abandon your previous self. And so I wanted to tell that story lyrically but I wanted it to happen musically, as well.

Was there a song where you felt that all start to cohere? Well, not to be too obvious, but "Yes, I'm Changing" was the first time I managed to string together the right words to bring home what I'm trying to say. I'm proud of myself for the music, too. It's quite minimal – there are no raging solos or drum fills. It's quite subtle.

What's been the challenge in adapting these songs for the live band? I used most of the same equipment as for the album before. We all know how to play together and get into the headspace. The key for us is keeping an open mind and

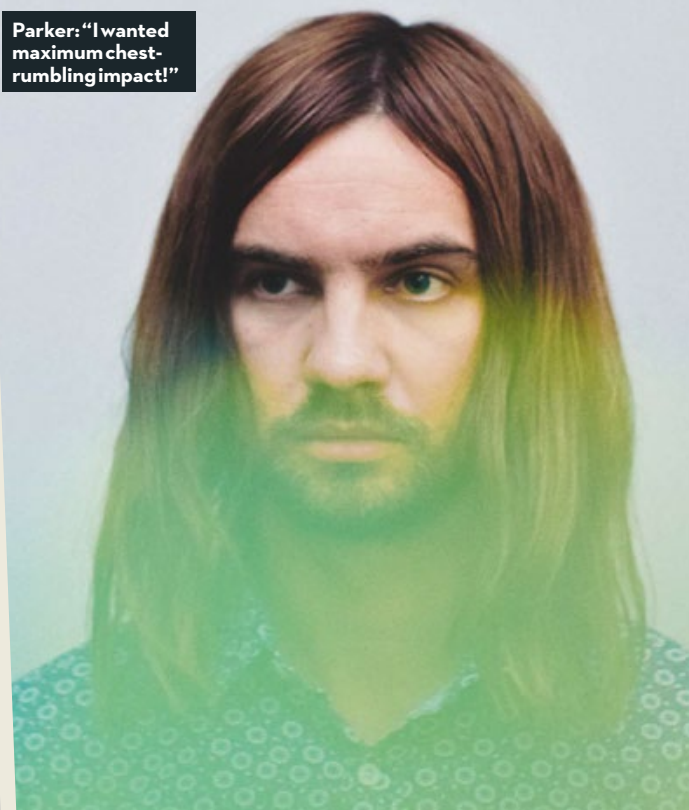
figuring out the best way to do it, as the live experience is always going to be a different beast to recording. The recordings are just me multi-tracking up to 60 times, but onstage, it's just five of us so we have to find the best way to transfer it.

What with all the synths here, are you reaching out for a guitar less often? Not necessarily, there are guitars all over the new

songs – sometimes they're just disguised as synth parts! I guess my hands are freed up a bit more to do weird effects trickery onstage. It's kind of my hobby to make things like that happen – I get a buzz out of doing the impossible!

"Tame Impala's backbone is groove. I never wanted to do a song you couldn't dance to"

Parker: "I wanted maximum chest-rumbling impact!"





TRACKLIST

- 1 A New Day For Love
- 2 Wolf Moon
- 3 People Want To Hear About Love
- 4 Big Box
- 5 A Rock Star Bucks A Coffee Shop
- 6 Workin' Man
- 7 Rules Of Change
- 8 Monsanto Years
- 9 If I Don't Know

NEIL YOUNG + PROMISE OF THE REAL

The Monsanto Years

REPRISE

Shakey takes on Big Business. Plus! A new band revealed... *By Michael Bonner*

8/10

NEIL YOUNG IS evidently a man who still likes surprises. Patrons at the SLO Brewing Co in San Luis Obispo, California, found themselves enjoying an unbilled show by Young in April this year. There, he not only unveiled a new album – *The Monsanto Years* – but a new backing band, too: Promise Of The Real, fronted by Willie Nelson's sons Lukas and Micah. Ardent Neil watchers will have already spotted that Young previously played with the Nelsons at last year's Farm Aid, the Harvest For Hope benefit in Nebraska and the Bridge School event. But despite this influx of new blood, much of *The Monsanto Years* itself finds Young pursuing familiar goals. Ostensibly, he is championing the ecologically aware message of *Greendale*, *Fork In The Road* and

"Who's Gonna Stand Up", delivered with the urgency of *Living With War*.

The Monsanto Years was recorded in six weeks between January and February at Teatro Studios, a converted movie theatre in Oxnard, California owned by Daniel Lanois. The album's nine songs share their rough-hewn, country punk qualities with Young's liveliest studio recordings, while Promise Of The Real resemble a less expansive Crazy Horse. There is, perhaps, an understandable pragmatism on Young's part in hooking up with these younger players, particularly since Billy Talbot's stroke and the deaths of Rick Rosas and Tim Drummond last year depleted his pool of regular musicians – the last time Young engaged a group of musicians outside his regular collaborators was with Pearl Jam on 1995's *Mirror*

AtoZ

COMING UP
THIS MONTH...

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AERO FLYNN

Aero Flynn

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

Worthwhile addition to the burgeoning 'Bon Iver and related' section

An old pal of Justin Vernon's from the University Of Wisconsin –

7/10

Eau Claire, Josh Scott was highly regarded by his peers but turned his back on music for 10 years while suffering from kidney disease and depression. Coaxed back into the studio by Vernon, this is Scott's debut solo album. Understandably there is a tense, troubled air to many of these songs, the combination of tightly coiled guitar or piano figures, glitchy rhythms and Scott's high, keening vocals inviting comparisons with Alt-J and various Thom Yorke projects. But the likes of "Plates2" and "Moonbeams" mirror the story of the album by unfurling gloriously into expansive soft-rock vistas.

SAM RICHARDS

ALTERNATIVE TV



OPPOSING FORCES

ALTERNATIVE TV

Opposing Forces

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Rare sighting of music 'zine pioneer

Editor of epochal fanzine *Sniffin' Glue*, Mark Perry's punk everykid reputation disintegrated

7/10

fast, his band Alternative TV's first two albums proving wilder, weirder and more uncomfortably intimate than anything his year-zero contemporaries produced – *Metal Box* included. His first new release since 2001, *Opposing Forces* is less oblique than those late-'70s works, but candlelit ramble "The Visitor" and the title track's apocalyptic "realisation that nothing really matters" typify Perry's very personal flavour of dread. "The rambling of madmen will one day be sacred texts," Perry asserts elsewhere; long a wanderer in the wilderness, posterity might yet judge him a visionary.

JIM WIRTH



Neil with POTR
(Lukas Nelson,
second right)

WHO ARE PROMISE OF THE REAL?

LAST YEAR, LUKAS NELSON outlined to *Uncut* his long history with Neil Young. "I've known him for most of my life," he told us. "I remember I had just written a song, so I had my brother Micah come sing it with me, and we played it for Neil. He said, 'Oh, man! That's some good guitar picking.' I must've been 10 or 11..." Of course, both Nelson brothers are now gainfully employed backing Young on *The Monsanto Years*, along with the rest of Lukas' band, Promise Of The Real (of which Micah is an 'honorary member').

Promise Of The Real came together on October 30, 2007, when Lukas Nelson met

drummer Anthony Logerfo at Young's show at Nokia Live in Los Angeles. The band themselves take their name from Young's song, "Walk On": "Sooner or later it all gets real."

In 2010, the band released their self-titled debut album – featuring a guest slot from Nelson Snr, Willie – an expansive combination of country and blues they refined further for 2012's *Wasted*. Regarding their current employer, Lukas Nelson told us, "He's like Yoda or something. Dad's like that, too. I think people who are connected to that source realise that it's a gift and that you have to honour that, and just keep working."

time at Walmart/Never getting the benefits."

Despite its lighter tone – there is whistling, no less – for "A Rock Star Bucks A Coffee Shop" Young draws our attention to ongoing events in Vermont, where industrial food companies are challenging a legislation requiring the labelling of genetically modified food products. "Mothers want to know what they feed their children," insists Young. Over a raucous backing track, "Workin' Man" follows the case of Vernon Bowman, an Indiana farmer who was accused of infringing on Monsanto's patent for its GM soybeans. Such social commentary adds immediacy to *The*

Monsanto Years; but Young drops this tenacious approach for the gentler "Rules Of Change", where he sings wistfully of the "sacred seeds". Incidentally, the sleeve for *The Monsanto Years* appears to depict Young and his partner Daryl Hannah as farmers in a psychedelised take on Grant Wood's painting *American Gothic*. Young further aligns himself with the farming community on the title track, which charts the lifecycle of a GM soybean from soil to store. Grinding away on Old Black, Young laments, "The seeds of life are not what they once were/Mother Nature and

God don't own them any more." The album closes with the melancholic "If I Don't Know", which features some strong free-roaming guitar interplay between himself and the Nelson brothers.

To gauge the strength of Young's commitment to his cause, it's instructive to look at where he was this time last year, veering between different projects: ongoing solo acoustic shows, a lo-fi covers album, a new audio system and an impending Crazy Horse tour among them. By comparison, this year seems relatively focused, his intentions pretty clear. Indeed, Young's message on this album is hardly subtle; after 28 mentions of Monsanto, you suspect he is keen to make his point as simply as possible. "If the melodies stay pretty and the songs are not too long," he sings on "If I Don't Know", "I'll try and find a way to get them back to you, the earth's blood."

SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:**

John Hanlon

Recorded at:

Teatro Studios,
Oxnard, California

Personnel: Neil Young (vocals, guitar), Lukas Nelson (vocals, guitar), Micah Nelson (vocals, guitar), Corey McCormick (bass), Anthony Logerfo (drums), Tato Melgar (percussion)

Ball: another bunch of eager acolytes sympathetic to Young's cause.

The result of their endeavours, *The Monsanto Years* is occasionally rambling, frequently sentimental and sometimes moving. Young opens the rough-and-tumble "A New Day For Love" on a positive note – "It's a new day for the planet/It's a new day for the sun" – but soon allies himself with those fighting to "keep their lands away from the greedy".

The warm acoustic tones and discreet pedal steel on "Wolf Moon" recall the bucolic charms of *Harvest Moon*, as Young grieves for the "thoughtless blundering" the "seeds of life" endure. "People Want To Hear", meanwhile, criticises a general lack of engagement with Big Issues like – deep breath – political corruption, environmental disaster, civil liberties violations, world poverty, pesticides and voter apathy. It is a long list, and *The Monsanto Years* doesn't entirely benefit from such a broad strokes approach: the album is at its strongest when telescoping in on specifics. Admittedly, Young gets close on "Big Box" – which comes with eight minutes of thundering Old Black action. The lyrics itself cleave close to "Ordinary People", Young's attempt to frame the plight of working Americans against the hostile challenges of living with late-'80s Reaganomics. Here we learn of "main streets boarded up", "display windows and broken glass/Not a car on the street" and "people working part

SLEAFORD MODS

Key Markets

HARBINGER SOUND

Typically angry eighth album from the lairy, swearsy Nottingham duo. *By John Lewis*



8/10

IF SLEAFORD MODS didn't exist, one gets the impression that the music press would probably have invented them. Journalists of a certain age love interviewing people like Jason Williamson – a mouthy, entertaining fortysomething with a

hinterland and a life before music – while Andrew Fearn's minimal backing tapes draw from every critical hobby horse of the past 40 years: the DIY urgency of punk, the laptop expediency of rave, the minimal thunder of early hip-hop.

And then, of course, there's the lyrics: state-of-the-nation poetry that grabs you by the lapels and demands your attention. Grimly satirical, horrifying and hilarious, this is a coked-up voyage through the arse end of Austerity Britain, a bathetic tour of dead-end jobs, benefit offices and lairy confrontations in provincial Weatherspoon pubs.

Williamson can be very, very funny – he curses more entertainingly than anyone in pop music since *The Troggs Tapes* – but his motivation is toxic anger and frustration. "If it makes us laugh, then it's probably an idea that's worth exploring," he tells *Uncut*. "But comedy is never the inspiration. I'm more passionate about the rant as a viable artform."

"Face To Faces" is as close as Williamson gets to a political statement on this album ("Boris on a bike?/Quick, knock the cunt over"). "Rupert Trousers" starts by mocking the image of "Boris with a brick" (when the Mayor of London declared his solidarity with builders at last year's Conservative Party Conference by holding a brick) and continues with a splenetic, scattershot assault on the upper classes who are "Spitting out fine cheese made by that tool from Blur".

But the politics is critical rather than constructive, despairing rather than utopian; indeed the perky, breakneck "No One's Bothered" berates Middle England for its political apathy ("You're trapped/Me too/Alienation?/No-one's bothered").

There are some wonderfully Wildean aphorisms here ("Variety is the lie of life") but if Williamson's poetry recalls anybody, it's William Blake. Where Blake sought to observe beauty in detail – "The world in a grain of sand, the heaven in a wild flower" – Williamson sees horror, despair and drudgery in the same fragments. Even hedonism seems like a chore. "Skunk? I've got to be pissed up to smoke that shit, you cunt."

Williamson is good at painting Hogarthian grotesques in a few brushstrokes. And, like Hogarth, he sometimes expends great energy on ridiculing somebody he finds hateful. "Giddy On The Ciggies" directs its venom to the male model David Gandy ("ripped-up Tory cunt"). "Cunt Make It Up" – the c-word in this instance being a provocative transcription of "couldn't" – is an extended character assassination of some



leatherjacket-wearing local band from a Nottingham suburb. "Riding motorbikes from the '50s?/You live in Carlton, you twat/You're not Snake fucking Plissken/You're shit/You look like Rocket From The Crypt." "Bronx In A Six" sees Williamson rail at length against an old boss who ran a shoe shop (the "Bronx" being an upmarket footwear brand, the "six" being the size). He eviscerates the shop keeper ("I'll fucking tie your veins around your Vans limited editions") and mocks the ambitions of these budding capitalists ("I'm laughing my head off at the old cows that grazed on grass from the boom/It soon turned its jets on your face...").

This is a band who are unlikely to hire a string section or a gospel choir – sonically, Sleaford Mods

SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:** Sleaford Mods
Recorded at: Rubber Biscuit Factory, Nottingham
Personnel: Jason Williamson (vocals), Andrew Fearn (music)

can't really move on too much. The music is still minimal and brutal: relentless drum loops and fingerbleeding post-punk basslines, like Martin Rev's Suicide on a Nottingham City Council budget. If there's any development, it's that Williamson sometimes takes a break from rhyming in his chewy East Midlands *sprechgesang* and starts to sing. "Tarantula Deadly Cargo" sees him howling near the top of his register, Shaun Ryder style, while "The Blob" sees him enunciating a three-note whine like John Lydon.

As Ryder or Lydon have found to their cost, it's sometimes tempting for a brave and intelligent satirist to play the court-jester. But Williamson's spleen will always keep those tendencies in check.

Q&A

Jason Williamson



How have things changed since you gave up your job as a benefits adviser last year? It was a bit of a shock to the system, to be honest. I miss the routine of getting up. And I felt guilty. Why am I jetting off to Switzerland? Why aren't I in that shit £15 white shirt, sitting behind a desk, eating donuts from Asda? I'm trying to look at it constructively, without any self-pity.

Your earlier work often told stories. Here the lyrics seem more fragmented. Yeah, there's a lot more randomness. A few tunes tell a story. With other tracks, you'll get a couple of lines that sum it up, the rest is snapshots. A lot of words relate to things that are going on in my head that I really don't want to explore. There's some comedy, but more "what the fuck is he on about?"

How did you vote in the General Election?

Green, which I regret. I'm one of these twats who voted Green and wanted a Labour government. I should've voted Labour. I hated their manifesto – so fucking vague, it could have been a recipe for a Bakewell tart. But they'd have brought some compassion. I've seen the people bearing the brunt of Tory policy – disabled people, single mothers who've lost benefits trying to survive on 17 hours work a week. I mean, fuck off.

What's your beef with David Gandy on the track "Giddy On The Ciggies"?

He's this fantastically handsome male model with this fucking great body who is purportedly a Tory supporter. Hence "ripped-up Tory cunt". In a sense, he's probably a really nice guy, like a lot of the people I have a go at. But, in a sense, fuck off. When he did that underwear campaign for M&S, it was like some fascist notion of male physique. It just drew you to his bollocks and his cock and his tits. You didn't know whether you were supposed to buy some Y-fronts or have a wank.

INTERVIEW: JOHN LEWIS



AQUEDUCT Wild Knights AQUEDUCTMUSIC

Transplanted Tulsan's dark Seattle song cycle
"I can't help myself/I've tried it before," Aqueduct's David Terry laments near the beginning of his

7/10

first album in eight years, a set devoted to struggling with anxiety. Wild Knights' protagonist is an underdog buried under a trash heap of misfortunes, and he narrates his unravelling with a litany of self-mocking wisecracks, amid wheezing synths that sound as trashed as he does – most blatantly on "Paranoid Much?" the boozy "Falling Down" and the defeated "Loose Molars". What makes the record bearable is Terry's melodic gift and the disarming, Brian Wilson-like quaver in his voice, both most dramatically evident in the damaged beauty of "Legend Of Kage".

BUD SCOPPA



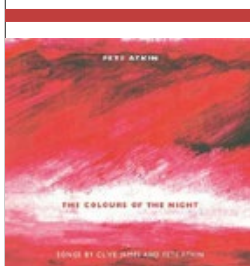
A\$AP ROCKY At.Long.Last.A\$AP RCA

Narcotically assisted second from Harlem MC
Rakim Mayers is the New York rapper du jour, a well-dressed pretty boy with just enough thug in

8/10

him to sit in the lineage of Biggie, 50 Cent, et al. His second long player is guest-packed, with Danger Mouse, Kanye and Mark Ronson on production turns, and Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys adding guitar to "Everyday", which means a drug album – and a psychotropic one. Dreamy of atmosphere, and often screwed of tempo, "West Side Highway" and "Holy Ghost" explore some smoked-out soul and gospel, while the Gaspar Noé-influenced "L\$D" samples Bobbie Gentry's "Ode To Billie Joe" into a twinkly, sensual haze, Rocky crooning like a young Terence Trent D'Arby.

LOUIS PATTISON



PETE ATKIN The Colours Of The Night HILLSIDE

Songwriting duo's last hurrah

This represents the final chapter in the almost half-century songwriting partnership of Pete Atkin

7/10

and Clive James, a union that produced at least one masterpiece in *Driving Through Mythical America*. The literacy, emotional intelligence and musical aptitude that marked their best work is evident here in songs like "The Closer Someone Is", about the way we seek memories of old lovers in new partners, and the title track's recognition of the poor bloody infantry. Chris Spedding's back to lend force or filigree, as required, and Alan Barnes' sax wreathes sultry smoke around some songs. The best lines, though, come from the 1970 song "The Beautiful Changes": "Too late is the way a man finally learns/The light of salvation recedes and returns." How did Clive know, so long ago?

ANDY GILL



AUTOMAT Plusminus BUREAU B

Heavy bass and rolling rhythms from German veterans
Like B-list celebrities drawn to reality-TV shows, serious,

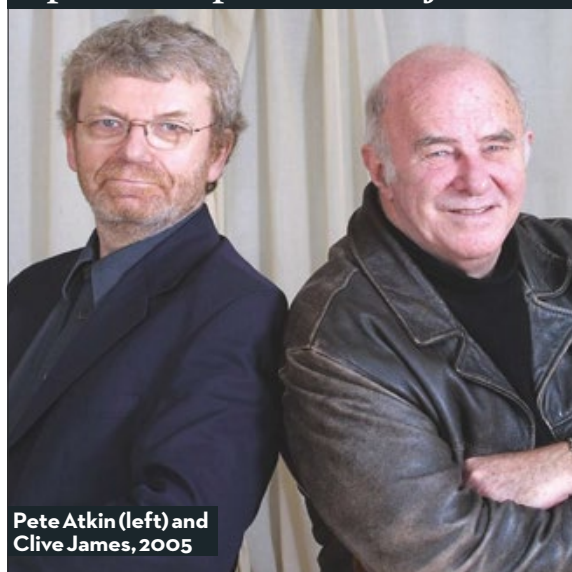
7/10

middle-aged, male musicians often gravitate to dub, and Jochen Arbeit (Einstürzende Neubauten), Achim Färber (Philipp Boa & the Voodooclub) and Georg Zeitblom (Sovetskoe Foto) are no different. Recorded in the imposing surroundings of Berlin's former Nazi airport, Tempelhof, and forsaking the old-school guest vocalists of last year's debut, *Plusminus* is full of oscillating backbeats ("RE201"), and creaks and groans ("SST282"), all set against a slowly shifting backdrop of drones and effects. "Mono" and "H910" sound like a serious-minded Orb, while "EMT140" recalls Labradford's finest work.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

REVELATIONS

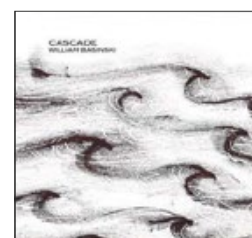
PETE ATKIN on his songwriting partnership with CLIVE JAMES



Pete Atkin (left) and Clive James, 2005

➤ "We've been writing songs together since 1967," Pete Atkin says of his long partnership with Clive James. "But our productive collaboration has now come to an end as a result of Clive's health." Diagnosed with leukaemia, emphysema and kidney failure, James announced in 2012 that he was "near the end". But he's hung on to publish a translation of Dante's *Inferno*, a volume of verse about his own imminent mortality and to reconnect with Atkin, with whom he collaborated on six albums in the 1970s and a further set of new compositions in 2003. Atkin describes their final work as a collection of "entertainments", his music animating James' literate lyrics about change, obsession, divorce and mortality: "There's a strong narrative element to the songs, setting up a situation and exploring it. Everything Clive does, he does to the highest standard. He's never just tossed off a lyric in his life. He's very serious about it." Despite the circumstances, he insists there was nothing sad or maudlin about their final collaboration: "I still can't believe my luck hooking up with Clive all those years ago. He's spoilt me and I'm going to have to start writing my own lyrics from now on."

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



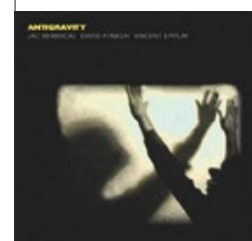
WILLIAM BASINSKI Cascade 2062

Melancholy ambience from New York avant-garde composer
Among many fine achievements, William Basinski is probably the

8/10

only minimalist sound artist to have a parody Twitter feed – one which posted nothing but the repeated message, "Making tape loops". This, crudely, is what Basinski does, in the case of *Cascade* letting a Satie-esque piano fragment recorded in '82, cycle and decay over 40 minutes. The formula – showcased most strikingly on the 4CD *Disintegration Loops* (2002-03) – remains potent, with "Cascade"'s minuscule variations operating in a humid ambient space somewhere between Tim Hecker and Gavin Bryars. A live manipulation based on the same tape, "The Deluge", adds orchestral interference at the death, for a fractionally more unsettling version.

JOHN MULVEY



JAC BERROCAL/ DAVID FENECH/ VINCENT EPPLAY Antigravity

BLACKEST EVER BLACK

Surrealist sound-art and serious play from France

7/10

Trumpeter Jac Berrocal's legend rests on his 1976 LP, *Parallèles*, which included his best-known song, "Rock'n'Roll Station", featuring British singer Vince Taylor, who'd achieved fame on the Continent with The Playboys, and later covered by Nurse With Wound. It reappears on *Antigravity*, in a typically unpredictable, sidereal version, Berrocal now joined by occasional collaborator Fenech and artist Epplay. The rest of the album is just as surprising: witness an unbolted cover of Talking Heads' "The Overload", Berrocal's trumpet like Jon Hassell through the looking glass, or the tense, tagliatelle-like guitar/trumpet study, "Solaris".

JONDALE



HEATHER WOODS BRODERICK Glider

WESTERN VINYL

American musician and composer's atmospheric second solo outing

6/10

Since Woods Broderick released her 2009 solo debut, *From The Ground*, the Maine native has moonlighted in Efterklang and been a permanent part of Sharon Van Etten's band. Her second album, *Glider*, matches her shape-shifting musical identity with nine thickly atmospheric songs that draw from all over. Woods Broderick's singing voice mostly recalls Marissa Nadler's mannered, haunted tone, until she embraces Stevie Nicks' dreamy soar on the title track; there are dub echoes on "Mama Shelter" and light jazz drums on "A Call For Distance", in among the constant gloomy guitar and languid spaces. Like all perfumes, its impact fades.

LAURA SNAPES

AMERICANA



SAMANTHA CRAIN **Under Branch & Thorn & Tree**

FULL TIME HOBBY

Wonderful fourth from rising Oklahoman

For many, last year's European debut *Kid Face* served as a compelling introduction to the work of Samantha Crain. Though she's been making records for the best part of 10 years now, picking up plaudits from sympático touring partners like First Aid Kit and Deer Tick, *Under Branch & Thorn & Tree*, while less directly autobiographical than *Kid Face*, is a deft patchwork of stories and impressions largely drawn from first-hand experience, both in her native Oklahoma and beyond. Her folksy arrangements favour the minimal, the graceful plasticity of

Crain's voice framed by acoustic guitar, percussive strings and discreet rhythms. She calls this her underdog album. "Killer" was inspired by the Occupy Movement, while the very lovely "Outside The Pale" alludes to her own Choctaw heritage: "You and I tell the stories the TV won't release/They keep us in the wild/Under branch and thorn and tree."

There are existential echoes of Jason Molina, a key inspiration, on many of these tracks. "When You Come Back" or "If I Had A Dollar", for instance, wouldn't feel out of place on a *Songs: Ohia* album. But the spirit of Joanna Newsom also pervades Crain's work, particularly in the unusual phrasing and her habit of stretching a vowel until it finds the perfect place to alight.

Most striking of all, perhaps, is her gift for a convincing narrative. "Elk City" tells the true tale of a 17-year-old girl who arrives in a new town with her boyfriend, only for him to scarper when boom turns to bust. She consoles herself with a fling, only to find that "that night turned into nine months sittin' on my ass/Waiting for a baby/My first and my last." And nothing quite prepares you for "You Or Mystery", the story of a lonely neighbour who ends up dead in his own kitchen. As with everything Crain does, the profound and the tragic is to be found in the tiniest detail. **ROB HUGHES**

8/10

BEST
OF THE
MONTH



THE AMERICANA ROUND-UP

➤ August sees the return of **Iris DeMent** (left) with *The Trackless Woods*, her first album in three years. Never one for the well-trodden route, the Southern songstress

has taken 18 poems by Russian poet Anna Akhmatova and set them to music. Mostly centred around piano and DeMent's descriptive voice, the album was recorded in the singer's front room in five days with co-producer Richard Bennett. Akhmatova's was a traumatic life, spanning the Bolshevik Revolution through two world wars and into the post-Stalin era, the poet losing friends and family to political purges and labour camps along the way. DeMent told

NPR: "It's given me the opportunity to put a beautiful, much-needed example of victory over inhumanity out in to the world."

Elsewhere, the Americana Music Association has announced the nominees for its annual Honours & Awards bash in September. Chief among them are **Sturgill Simpson, Rhiannon Giddens, Lucinda Williams, Jason Isbell, First Aid Kit** and **Shakey Graves**.

On the live front, Kentucky songwriter **Angaleena Presley** tours her fine solo debut, *American Middle Class*, in late July. And Gateshead's SummerTyne Americana Festival celebrates its 10th birthday between 17-19 July with **Emmylou Harris & Rodney Crowell, Rosanne Cash, Dan Penn & Spooner Oldham, The Felice Brothers** and plenty more.

ROB HUGHES



BULLY **Feels Like**

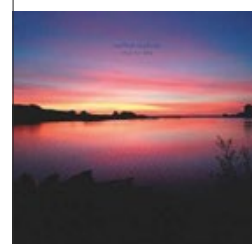
SONY

Brilliant grungey debut from Nashville-based quartet

8/10

An invigorating reminder of what great grunge-pop can sound like, *Feels Like* is the debut from Nashville four-piece Bully and it's indeed a thrilling blast, right from the introductory drum salvo of "I Remember". Much of the fun derives from the sharp, honest lyrics of their frontwoman, Alicia Bognanno – her stand-out line comes from the excellent "Trying": "I've been praying for my period all week." The demonic "Trash" and sleazy "Picture" are also particular highlights, but the passion and quality rarely dips, recalling elements of early Lemonheads, Weezer, the Pixies and Belly, but in a 21st-Century setting.

PETER WATTS



CARLTON MELTON **Out To Sea**

AGITATED

Robust double from the Californian space-rock pirates

7/10

Andy Duvall and Rich Millman of Carlton Melton once toiled in raucous Sub Pop garage heavyweights Zen Guerrilla, but towards the end of the last decade, you might have tracked them down to a geodesic dome in rural California, working out a dreamy – but still heavy – new direction. *Out To Sea* is their first "studio" album, recorded in San Francisco with Trans Am's Phil Manley. Approaching 80 minutes of instrumental rock, they keep things interesting through gear changes, from the lysergic noodling of "Diamond In The Rough" to chunky Blue Cheer lumbering of "Amfmpm". It's an unusual state they've evolved to: somewhere between spacemen and cavemen.

LOUIS PATTISON



THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS **Born In The Echoes**

VIRGIN EMI

Few surprises on veteran ravers' reliably banging eighth

6/10

20 years on from their invigorating debut, *Exit Planet Dust*, it's inevitable that The Chemical Brothers would opt to consolidate. Featuring returning guest vocalists Q-Tip and Ali Love, plus the familiar spectacle of indie-rock singers (Beck, St Vincent) pressed into uncomfortable service as rave ringmasters, *Born In The Echoes* feels a bit Chemical Brothers by numbers. At least that means you're guaranteed a couple of indomitable, whooshing stadium-techno anthems in the form of "Reflexion" and "Sometimes I Feel So Deserted". "Just Bang" even suggests they've cocked an ear to the footwork scene. But genuine block-rocking thrills are scant.

SAM RICHARDS



THE CLASSICAL Diptych

TIME SENSITIVE MATERIALS

Bay Area duo combine post-punk clatter with free-jazz splatter

A collaboration between actor-turned-singer Juliet E Gordon and free-

8/10

jazz drummer Britt Ciampa, The Classical make a fissile racket that is both abrasive and compelling. An uncompromising trade-off between chaos and precision, the pair's second album is full of drones and clonks, dubby digressions and skeletal electronics, the post-rock sonics of Deerhoof washed down with a hefty shot of latter-day Scott Walker. On syncopated grooves like "Shovel & Bevel" or "Younger Days", Gordon trills crazy-paving bebop poetry while Ciampa provides percussive wallop and rhythmic rupture. Pretentious and exhilarating in equal measure, *Diptych* is a curate's egg, but rich in energy and ideas.

STEPHEN DALTON



ANNELI DRECKER

Rocks & Straws

RUNE GRAMMOFON

Norwegian Kate Bush goes back to her roots with Arctic avant-pop

Half of Nordic ambient rock duo Bel Canto, singer

6/10

Anneli Drecker has performed with the cream of Scandi-pop, from A-ha to Röyksopp, and served on the jury of Norway's *Pop Idol*. Drecker's latest solo album is a tribute to her native Tromsø and celebrated local poet Arvid Hanssen, whose work she adapts into English-language lyrics full of stark maritime imagery and quasi-spiritual nature worship. There are electrifying echoes of Kate Bush and Liz Fraser in the singer's frosty, impassioned, piercing vibrato warble on siren songs like "Alone" and "Come Summer's Wind", even if the swirling electro-orchestral arrangements behind her sometimes descend into Enya-style middlebrow tastefulness.

STEPHEN DALTON



DUCKTAILS

St Catherine

DOMINO

Real Estate's Matt Mondanile breaks the spell with humdrum fifth

As Ducktails completes its transformation from lo-fi

6/10

fantasy to big studio affair, complete with string quartets and guest vocalists, is the loss of woozy intimacy offset by an advance in songwriting flair? Sadly not. While the title track is a skilled piece of craftsmanship, successfully employing ancient religious fervour as a metaphor for the madness of falling in love, most of these songs remain too simple to bear the weight of their fuller, more conventional arrangements. As a result, *St Catherine* often feels stodgy, exposing the limitations of Mondanile's thin voice. Julia Holter adds a welcome dash of dreamy otherness to "Heaven's Room" but it's not enough.

SAM RICHARDS



EVERYTHING EVERYTHING

Get To Heaven

SONY

Exhausting third from hard-working art-rockers

Manchester indie titans Everything Everything

7/10

have made their career thus far look anything but plain sailing. Their tendency to overthink and squeeze every drop of pleasure from their work does them few favours, particularly when they showcase such innovative songcraft on a record like *Get To Heaven*. Under divisive frontman Jonathan Higgs' stewardship they've grown into a confounding proposition, and here pop producer Stuart Price gives the itchy Talking Heads funk of "Distant Past" and "Get To Heaven" a boost. Kudos, too, for hanging the album around "No Reptiles"'s startling chorus: "Oh baby, it's all right to feel like a fat child in a pushchair."

PIERS MARTIN

HOW TO BUY... CHEMICAL BROTHERS

Superstar DJs, here we go...



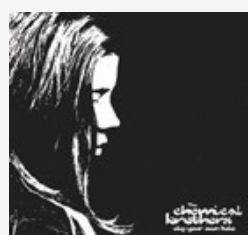
Exit Planet Dust

JUNIOR BOY'S OWN/
VIRGIN, 1995

Using their DJ residency at London's Heavenly Social as a springboard to crossover success, Ed

Simons and Tom Rowlands became Britpop's remixers of choice. Their debut's bracing blend of hip-hop beats, acid house thrust and rock attitude provided the template for big beat, while Tim Burgess became the first of many indie blokes to experience a Chemical epiphany on "Life Is Sweet".

7/10

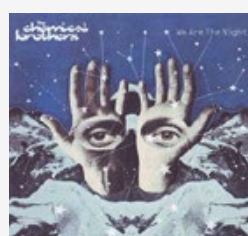


Dig Your Own Hole

VIRGIN, 1997
Fresh from confusing 100,000 Oasis fans at Knebworth, the Chems conjured up their masterpiece. Harder, faster and tripper than

their debut, it pushed into headier territory with Mercury Rev collaboration "The Private Psychedelic Reel". It also yielded two No 1 hits in the form of "Block Rocking Beats" and "Setting Sun".

9/10



We Are The Night

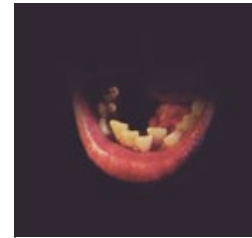
VIRGIN, 2007

Best of the Bros' post-millennial offerings prioritised thumping, streamlined techno with festival-friendly hooks. "All Rights

Reversed" even allowed Klaxons to briefly make good on their new-rave boasts, while Midlake's Tim Smith assumed the Beth Orton role, adding wistful vocals to comedown anthem "The Pills Won't Help You Now".

8/10

SAM RICHARDS



FAITH HEALER Cosmic Troubles

MINT

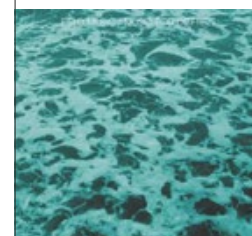
Admirably restrained psych-pop from Canadian songwriter

Jessica Jalbert opens her debut LP as Faith Healer with "Acid", declaring,

7/10

"You can have my acid/I don't want it on my tongue." *Cosmic Troubles* is a record of dreamy, Velvets-indebted guitar pop licked with psychedelic touches, but Jalbert refrains from embarking on the full trip, never letting the warped guitar or airy organs become the main event. Like Wales' Cate Le Bon, Jalbert maintains a sweetly imperious remove from the temptation to go all-out, making more from less: the hypnotic spaces that linger within her songs leave room for her lyrics about bruised skin and washed linens to carve their own disquieting presence against the dreamy backdrop.

LAURA SNAPES



FIELD MUSIC

Music For Drifters

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

Art popsters go to the (silent) movies

Not, in fact, the Sunderland band trying their hand at hobo blues, but the

7/10

Brewis brothers' original score for the 1929 documentary by John Grierson, which tells of a day in the life of a North Sea fishing fleet. Wholly instrumental and largely improvised, it shuns the clichés of oceanic atmospherics, instead taking its cues from the film's experimental jump-cut and montage style – a natural fit for their trademark time-signature wranglings. Former member Andrew Moore's keyboard work is vital to a set piece that calls to mind Tortoise, Ralph Vaughan Williams and various modern Scandi-jazzers, and is as light and playful as it is skilfully arranged.

SHARON O'CONNELL



FLYING SAUCER ATTACK

Instrumentals 2015

DOMINO

Bristol's heavy ambient drone outfit return to business

15 years on from their last album, *Mirror*, little has

8/10

changed for Flying Saucer Attack. Overseen by Bristol's David Pearce – now the sole member – FSA's music is still concerned with rustic, lo-fi experimentations. Given numbers instead of titles, these 15 tracks run from the ghostly drone of "4" to the melancholic tones of "7". Recorded, as usual, on the most rudimentary equipment – a cassette player and CDR – Pearce creates cadenced passages that alternate between mellow minimalism and gusty bursts of feedback. There's rich melodies buried in many of these tracks, too, particularly the intricate guitar motif teased through "3" or the beautiful, spindly phrasing evident on "15".

MICHAEL BONNER



FRASER A GORMAN

Slow Gum

MILK!/HOUSE ANXIETY/MARATHON

Aussie newcomer shows Kinksian country flair. *By Tom Pinnock*



8/10

WITH ITS EMPTY highways, lonesome deserts and frontier culture, it's no surprise that country music seems to make sense down under. While Australia has spawned mega-selling, Nashville-gazing artists like Keith Urban, country has

also been a source of influence for some of its most exciting and literate artists outside the mainstream.

Hailing from the seaside town of Torquay, 60 miles from Melbourne, 24-year-old Fraser A Gorman is the latest young Aussie songwriter to follow in the footsteps of The Triffids and The Go-Betweens, who both dabbled with elements of country.

Strangely, though, one of the records that his debut *Slow Gum* most resembles is The Kinks' *Muswell Hillbillies*. Released in 1971, the band's ninth album saw Ray Davies take some of the tropes of country music – fiddles, pedal steel and the like – and mangle them into a statement that both reflects and emanates Englishness.

Similarly, Gorman works these same hallmarks into an unmistakably Australian style. Where The Triffids had "Wide Open Road", Gorman has "Big Old World", which opens the album in surprisingly intimate style, just the singer and his guitar, rising out of background buzz. And while David McComb sang of "crying in the wilderness", Gorman deals with a more urban angst. "I know about the guy from North Melbourne," he croons softly. "He

nearly killed himself/Sipping life from a lead-paint-filled balloon."

The musical horizons soon widen, with "My Old Man" crashing in with gypsy fiddle and some Crazy Horse-style chugging guitar, Gorman singing enigmatically about a heartache "bigger than Goliath's beard". He channels The Velvet Underground on "Dark Eyes", both in its title and its "Sunday Morning"-like electric strumming; soon, though, the chugging guitars are joined by a chorus of saxophones. The trippier "Mystic Mile" also builds to an ornate climax, the opening acoustic guitars blossoming into a haze of organs, pedal steel, Mellotron and airy backing vocals.

Perhaps taking inspiration from Bob Dylan – as he surely has with his hairstyle – Gorman has a skill with simple, touching metaphors. "Hey, my old boy," he sings on "My Old Man", "I can see your eyes for miles/They're like two birds flying in the sun." On "Broken Hands", the most immediate song here, he describes his lover shaking "like a six-year-old's wobbly tooth/String on the door knob..."

Like his friend Courtney Barnett, who starred in the video for "Shiny Gun" (repaying his appearance in Barnett's "Avant Gardener" promo), Gorman

makes this all look rather easy, as if the words are tumbling from his head straight onto tape, an honesty he shares with the best country music. On most of *Slow Gum*, too, Gorman works with well-worn chord sequences and yet manages to conjure

up melodies that feel arresting and new, a feat that The Go-Betweens' Grant McLennan often managed.

The songwriting is a joy throughout, and yet the 10 tracks here are also aided by consistently excellent production. Every track is coated in gorgeous reverb and echo, moving the whole very much into the present, while the potent arrangements never overwhelm Gorman's voice as it lazily floats its way through his strummed reveries.

At the end of *Slow Gum*, though, we're fittingly left back where we started, with just the songwriter, his acoustic guitar and a harmonica, picking his path through "Blossom & Snow". He recalls returning to his hometown, where there's "nothing

left" for him, and alludes to the death of his father when he was a boy. "So little bird sing," he entreats. "Sing it to me, sing it sweetly, on my way down." It's a moving end to a confident debut, a record that is greater still than the sum of its impressive parts.

SLEEVE NOTES

➤ **Recorded by:** Callum Barter (most tracks), Davey Lane, Casey Hartnett, Nick Huggins
Recorded at: Newmarket Recording Studio, North Melbourne
Personnel includes: Fraser A Gorman (vocals, guitar), Davey Lane (guitar, bk vocals), Jarrad Brown (bass, bk vocals)

Q&A

Fraser A Gorman

What's country music like in Australia?

In America, it's like pretty much 95 per cent of country is really shit, but the five per cent that's good is absolutely incredible. Townes Van Zandt and Steve Earle and Guy Clark, that kind of stuff... Country is a bit like that over here... mainstream country is pretty awful. If you went into rural towns and mentioned Townes Van Zandt, no-one would know who the fuck you were talking about. I just kind of lean on country music a bit because I like the songs.

How was the recording process for *Slow Gum*?

It was recorded with a few band lineups, it took a while. I sort of didn't really know what I was doing. The record was also written over a long time, as well. It was a long yet enjoyable experience and I learnt a lot about lots of things making it, but it was all really positive. I'm kind of glad that it came out how it came out.

Having the two solo acoustic tracks bookend the album really works... I wrote pretty much all the songs on the record sitting on my bed in this shitty shared house in Melbourne that was really cold and the roof was caving in and all that shit. So I suppose the first and the last song are as close as you can get to listening to me playing on the end of my bed. *INTERVIEW: TOM PINNOCK*



EZRA FURMAN
Perpetual Motion People
BELLA UNION

Misfit twenty-something's ever-changing moods
"I've got the world's

8/10

ear, I'm all fucking mumbles," sighs Ezra Furman on "Lousy Connection", the Chicagoan worrying that he's destined to be misunderstood. However, even when he's describing his breakfast routine on "Haunted Head", his devilish smartness as a lyricist speaks loud and clear. Furman's bug-eyed passion and yen for old-world rock'n'roll has invited comparisons to Jonathan Richman, but his sax-heavy third solo album blows its own horn; *Glee* kid gone bad on "Restless Year", and walking very much on the Lou Reed wild side of Bruce Springsteen on "Ordinary Life".

JIM WIRTH



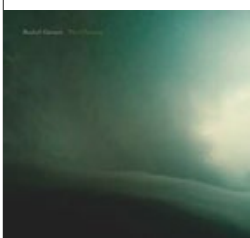
ROBERT GLASPER
Covered
BLUE NOTE

Kendrick Lamar's pianist files live covers set
Besides being one of the finest hip-hop LPs in years, *To Pimp A Butterfly* show-

7/10

cased a bunch of striking jazz tyros. Saxophonist Kamasi Washington's 3CD *The Epic* surfaced last month and, now, Glasper steps into the spotlight, less ostentatiously, with a live trio album. Glasper has long had tight links with the nu-soul crowd, rescoring Musiq Soulchild and Bilal songs here, and humming along, Glenn Gould-style, to a Macy Gray co-write, "I Don't Even Care". Elsewhere, Damion Reid's slithering breakbeats usefully subvert the Mehldau-ish vibes, there's a touching Harry Belafonte spoken-word piece, and a take on Radiohead's "Reckoner" emphasises how closely Glasper's part on Lamar's "How Much A Dollar Cost" echoed "Pyramid Song".

JOHN MULVEY



RACHEL GRIMES
The Clearing
TEMPORARY RESIDENCE

Rachel's pianist returns with a dramatic second solo album

It's 20 years since Louisville's Rachel's debuted with *Handwriting*

7/10

on punk label Quarterstick, introducing noise fans to their haunted neo-classical. While artists like Nils Frahm have made popular careers from Rachel's' groundwork, the group's own pianist, Rachel Grimes, continues to make challenging, tense music that isn't about to find a home on the BBC 6Music playlist. 2009's glimmering *The Book Of Leaves* recalled Rachel's' *Systems/Layers*, but *The Clearing* is more dramatic: Liberation Prophecy's Jacob Duncan plays sax that veers between mourning and hysterics on "The Herald", while "Transverse Plane Vertical" recalls Kronos Quartet experimenting with Middle Eastern tones.

LAURA SNAPES



GWENNO
Y Dydd Olaf
HEAVENLY

Smudged psych-pop melodies from one-time Pipette

As if Gwenno Saunders' transition from music-hall throwbacks The Pipettes

8/10

to politicised psych-pop dreamer signed to Heavenly wasn't eyebrow-raising enough, her solo debut channels Broadcast and Boards Of Canada via fragrant kosmische grooves as she sings a socialist manifesto inspired, in part, by Welsh writer Owain Owain's '70s dystopian novel, *Y Dydd Olaf* (*The Last Day*). Wrapped in sweetly curdled melody, Saunders sings in her native Welsh – the album was first released by Cardiff label Peski last autumn – and in Cornish on "Amser", based on a poem written by her father. Seldom is the personal married to the political in such an enchanting fashion.

PIERS MARTIN

WE'RE
NEW
HERE

Gwenno



➤ In a past life, Gaelic diva Gwenno Saunders shared the stage with Elton John and Michael "Riverdance" Flatley and once hosted a cooking show on Welsh-language channel S4C. These days, however, the 34-year-old from Cardiff finds herself preoccupied with dystopian science-fiction and last year made a quietly astonishing album on the theme called *Y Dydd Olaf - The Last Day* – that conjures the notion of a Welsh Broadcast.

"I became really interested in exploring other ways of existing culturally," says Saunders, who was taught Cornish and Welsh by her linguist father, Tim Saunders, and became a top Irish dancer in her teens. She collaborated on the record with her husband, Rhys Edwards, whose Peski label put it out last autumn only for Heavenly to give it a wider push this month. "That's the beauty of this project – Rhys and I said, 'What music do we really like?' and it just happened naturally. When you sing in your mother tongue, communication becomes more direct."

Indeed, *Y Dydd Olaf* is a world away from the kitsch girl-group stylings of The Pipettes, whom Saunders fronted for seven years while based in Brighton and London. "I was 22 and wanted an adventure. It was like The Shangri-Las and KLF – conceptually anyway."

PIERS MARTIN



HAIKU SALUT
Etch & Etch Deep

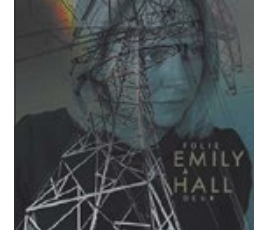
HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE LOVED?

Instrumental folktronica from ex-winners of the Green Man Rising competition

8/10

This Derbyshire trio, made up of the sisters Gemma and Sophie Barkerwood, and Louise Croft, bring a pleasing experimentalism to their second LP. Building on the idiosyncratic instincts of its predecessor *Tricolore*, Haiku Salut (who are known for remaining mute during gigs) have returned with a slightly bigger sound that nonetheless revels in its tiny details – a tinkling bell here, the crackle of a turntable there. Among the highlights is the terrifically titled "You Dance A Particular Algorithm", its blend of accordion, drums and oddball electronic tics making it sound both warmly familiar and completely, fearlessly new.

FIONA STURGES



EMILY HALL
Folie À Deux
BEDROOM COMMUNITY

Electro-acoustic concept album... with electro-magnetic harp

Emily Hall is best known in the arcane world of contemporary composition

7/10

for her orchestral and chamber works. *Folie À Deux*, however, is an intriguing electro-acoustic song-cycle written with Icelandic writer and Björk collaborator Sjon, and featuring brittle beats from Mira Calix. It's fronted by Swedish singer Sofia Jernberg (whose yelps and rhotic Rs add a curious folksiness) and Allan Clayton (an operatic English tenor): songs like "Wonderful Things" and "Mantra" see their voices collide in a particularly thrilling way. But the most haunting trope is Hall's electro-magnetic harp, which can sound like a koto, zither, ukulele or African kora.

JOHN LEWIS



AJ HOLMES AND THE HACKNEY EMPIRE
Soft Power

SINGING DUNE

Bold Afro-pop offering from East Londoner's exploratory second LP

There's an awful lot going

7/10

on in AJ Holmes' second, which mixes indie-pop with dance and world music – particularly West and Central African – that Holmes absorbed during his upbringing on the multicultural estates of East London. "Martyn's Elephant Charm" is the pick, a memorable anthem that sees ringmaster Holmes reciting Cockney folk superstitions ("Never start a journey on a Friday") against a West African calypso beat. Elsewhere, Holmes explores epic electro balladry on "Mein Liebster Feind" and heavy disco sleaze with "CLA", but his larger-than-life personality manages to dominate everything – some achievement when the music is this busy.

PETER WATTS



INSTITUTE

Catharsis

SACRED BONES

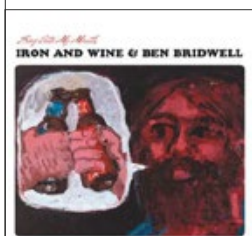
Austin, Texas punk debut both thunders and sprawls

With titles like “Admit I’m Shit” and “I Am Living Death”, you’d expect

7/10

Institute to favour the incoherent shrieks beloved by most hardcore acts, but singer Moses Brown is almost apologetic in his delivery, giving songs like “Perpetual Ebb” and the explosive “Cheaptime Morals” a curious understated power. There’s traces of both Mark E Smith and Ian Curtis in the way Moses enunciates and blurs, offering savvy asides while the band executes faultless gloomy punk and post-rock, slamming together Hüsker Dü, Slint and The Fall in an intriguing gloop. And while the band love a regulated thrash, they also produce “Christian Right”, a sprawling, splenetic Krautrock jam.

PETER WATTS



IRON AND WINE & BEN BRIDWELL

Sing Into My Mouth

CAROLINE INTERNATIONAL

Temperate folk-pop covers from kindred souls

7/10

The twinning of Iron & Wine’s Sam Beam with Band Of Horses’ Ben Bridwell makes sound sense, given that they’ve been trading songs with one another for years. The overriding tone of *Sing Into My Mouth* – warm acoustic vibes, folksy harmonies, gentle cries of pedal steel – won’t come as much of a surprise. But their choice of covers is pretty eclectic, from Sade to Spiritualized via obscure ’70s rockers Unicorn. They’re best when more animated, as on John Cale’s anguished “You Know More Than I Know” and the blowsy version of Pete Seeger’s “Coyote, My Little Brother”.

ROB HUGHES



JAY-JAY JOHANSON

Opium

KWAIDAN

Tastefully Scandinavian trip-hop crooner benefits from Cocteau Twin cameo

6/10

balladeer Jäje Johansson (aka Jay-Jay Johanson) sticks mainly in his comfort zone of romantic melancholia, suave crooner vocals and polished trip-hop beats on his fragrant but underpowered 10th LP. Urbane sophistication is his aim with lyrics like: “Dancing barefoot on broken glass/Contemplating modern jazz.” He sadly lacks the wry wit and melodic finesse to be a Nordic Cole Porter, but he can at least call on famous friends. Regular collaborator Robin Guthrie guests on the stand-out “Scarecrow”, a lush torch song with old-school Bond theme overtones, while electronic duo Funkstörung add jaunty bossa nova swing to “Be Yourself”.

STEPHEN DALTON



SONNY LANDRETH

Bound By The Blues

PROVOGUE/MASCOT

Re-infusing the blues: regal guitar showcase from the King of Slydeco

8/10

With his lively, instantly identifiable slide-guitar tone, Louisiana’s Landreth has inimitably graced the grooves of artists from John Mayall to John Hiatt. Here, he reconnects to his roots, and lets the blues fly. While the repertoire is surprisingly rote – standards by Skip James, Elmore James, Big Bill Broonzy – the playing is anything but. *Bound...* is consistently transcendent, full of dynamic, elastic leads. While the jump-step on the Robert Johnson nugget “Walkin’ Blues” sets off sirens from the first note, the growling, gurgling tangle made of “Dust My Broom” is an undeniable tour de force.

LUKE TORN

REVELATIONS

Iron And Wine & Ben Bridwell: “We have an interwoven history”

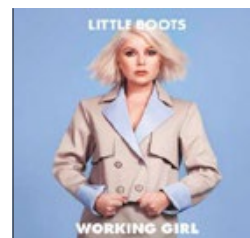


➤ The artistic paths of Sam Beam and Ben Bridwell have often run parallel. Both natives of South Carolina, each began their recording careers on Seattle’s Sub Pop label during the noughties – Beam as Iron And Wine and Bridwell as frontman for Band Of Horses. Bridwell’s brother Michael also helped Beam find an audience for his earliest demos.

“Ben and I have such an interwoven history,” says Beam. “We’d meet on tour and would always talk about how we should make music together. Finally we managed to clear the schedule.” The upshot is *Sing Into My Mouth*, a covers collaboration that reinterprets such disparate talents as Talking Heads, Spiritualized, the Marshall Tucker Band, Pete Seeger, Unicorn and Sade.

“One of the main things our friendship was born of was sharing and enjoying other people’s music,” adds Beam, who also reveals that he’s just cut a duets album with US singer Jesca Hoop, due early next year. “So it was kind of going back to that era in our lives. We used to sit around with Ben’s dad, listening to Sade, which made it fun to put a different signature on ‘Bullet Proof Soul’. Some of these songs have walked with me for a long time.”

ROB HUGHES



LITTLE BOOTS

Working Girl

ON REPEAT

Plenty of pop – little snap or crackle

Despite being knocked out of early *Pop Idol* rounds as a teen,

6/10

Lancashire singer-songwriter Victoria Hesketh went on to enter the British albums chart at No 5 in 2009, with her debut as Little Boots. That her follow-up failed to dent the Top 40 is an indication of how radically the dance-pop landscape changes in four years, so she’s moved faster for her third outing – a mix of updated Kylie, a less turbocharged Goldfrapp and mid-’90s house pop à la Everything But The Girl, with Ariel Rechtshaid among the producers. The spangled frostiness of “Help Too” stands out, but given the talent on show, it’s a rather bloodless and oddly dated set.

SHARON O’CONNELL



LOOP

Array 1

ATP/R

Welcome return for South London’s drone-rock kings

It’s been 25 years since Loop released their last album, *A Gilded Eternity*,

8/10

a dark star that coaxed listeners slowly, inexorably, to its coal-black corners. Since then, leader Robert Hampson has recorded as Main and Chasm, and now makes musique concrète under his own name; a recent Loop reformation didn’t last the distance, but Hampson’s since reformed the group with new members. *Array 1* hints at unfinished business, picking up almost where *A Gilded Eternity* left off: martial drum patterns and shivering, shard-like guitar phrases weave through “Precession” and “Aphelion”; “Radial”’s mesmeric riffs grow out of dronological confusion.

JONDALE



MAJOR LAZER

Peace Is The Mission

BECAUSE

Diplo’s dancehall project shows off a softer side

7/10

Thomas ‘Diplo’ Pentz produced MIA’s best singles and turned modern clubland on to *baile* funk, a club sound spawned in the Rio favelas. In doing so, Diplo become one of the world’s most in-demand producers, working with Britney, Beyoncé and Madonna, and attracting a full minibus of guest vocalists – among them Ellie Goulding, Ariana Grande and repeat offender 2 Chainz – to his third Major Lazer album. The cartoonish skank of “Too Original” is business as usual, but *Peace Is The Mission* is often reflective – a side best explored on the Eurosynth reveries of “Lean On”, featuring Swedish vocalist MØ.

LOUIS PATTISON



RHETT MILLER
The Traveler
ATO

Ambitious seventh outing from Texan roots-rock veteran; assorted Decemberists provide backing

7/10

Toggling from solo work to leader of The Old 97's, Miller has amassed a hefty catalogue across 20-plus years. Nothing therein quite prepares listeners for *The Traveler*, though, an organic-sounding set of playful roots/pop backed by Portland roots quartet Black Prairie. Rich with amped-up fiddles, mandolins, accordions and harmonies, it's vibrant, hook-laden and addictive. Though "Fair Enough" is a little too cute, the powerful "Kiss Me On The Fire Escape" is like a countrified Paul Westerberg, while "Most In The Summertime" boils over with a back-porch-party vibe.

LUKE TORN



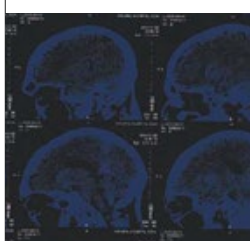
ANTON NEWCOMBE & TESS PARKS
I Declare Nothing
A RECORDINGS

"Strung out in heaven" again – slight variation
Given the premier-league delinquency apparent in

6/10

2005's *Dig!*, it's no surprise that the image of Anton Newcombe, troubled soul, has largely obscured the man's music. Unfairly, because as well as steering The Brian Jonestown Massacre, he's done some creditable experimenting. Now he's hooked up with Canadian newcomer Parks, whose voice has a slow-burning power that suggests a darker, edgier Hope Sandoval and is the perfect foil for Newcombe's smoke-shrouded, quasi-mystical guitar lines, in psych jams that move at an unvarying, narcotised pace. "Cocaine Cat" tilts at "Ballade De Melody Nelson" in a set that drifts by agreeably, but is too slight to make any real impression.

SHARON O'CONNELL



THE NIGHTINGALES
Mind Over Matter
LOUDER THAN WAR

Post-punk veterans deliver in spades
Knowing when to quit has never been

8/10

one of The Nightingales' strong points. Dumped by their label a couple of years ago, 2014's *For Fuck's Sake* was a minor masterpiece that proved Robert Lloyd's post-Prefects combo still had plenty to offer. This terrific follow-up is even better, the quartet unloading a clamorous set of songs full of pique, provocation and waspish humour. Punk rock at its core, *Mind Over Matter* also takes detours into psychedelia, avant-noise, Booker T-soul, glam (the ace, Sweet-referencing "Taffy Come Home") and, on the deliciously deadpan "Gales Doc", the realm of mockumentary.

ROB HUGHES



O'CONNELL & LOVE
Minesweeping
MOUNTMELICK

Folksy meeting of Alabama 3 singer and songwriting partner Brendan O'Connell

7/10

This takes Larry Love away from his usual funky blues-house grooves into folkier territory. His scorched baritone recalls Mark Lanegan on tracks like opener "Like A Wave Breaks On A Rock", and "It Was The Sweetest Thing", a country-soul ballad with melodic echoes of "I Shall Be Released". Built around resonant strums and circular arpeggios of acoustic guitar, with Rumer, Buffy Sainte-Marie and June Miles-Kingston on harmonies, it's a sweet, gently soured series of songs about fallen friends and forgotten loves, its poignant passage only interrupted once, by jaunty singalong shanty "Where Silence Meets The Sea" – and even that's about contemplating suicide.

ANDY GILL



THE ORB
Moonbuilding 2703 AD
KOMPAKT

Episodic, space-age concept album from the ambient masters

7/10

Recent albums have seen Alex Paterson and Thomas Fehlmann getting into bleepy, dub-tinged dancefloor tunes. Here, however, they ditch the notion of the proper pop song and re-enter the world of episodic, immersive soundscapes, with four lengthy tracks lasting between 10 and 15 minutes. Each is assembled like an audio drama, starting with static noises and amusing spoken-word fragments before frequent musical plot changes. "Lunar Caves" is a virtual film soundtrack which has some oddly compelling shifts in mood, but the title track – which lurches from wah-wah funk to hauntological burbles – is the pick of the bunch.

JOHN LEWIS



FIONA & GORWEL OWEN
Releasing Birds
YAMOOSHI/OFN

Seasonal greetings from Welsh producer's experimental folk project

8/10

Though best known for his work with Super Furry Animals, Gorky's Zygotic Mynci and Datblygu, producer Gorwel Owen has also been making his own similarly adventurous music for years. The haunting *Releasing Birds*, the result of Owen and his wife Fiona writing and recording one song a month for a year, proves that his music deserves wider recognition. From the wintry opener, "Can Never", with Fiona Owen's haunting voice swallowed by organ and manipulated field recordings, to the more robust "Across", which mixes banjo licks with a drum loop and abstract electronics, this is a quiet triumph.

TOM PINNOCK



TOM & BEN PALEY
Paley & Son
HORNBEAM

Traditional family values from old-time folk luminary

8/10

At 87, Tom Paley is one of America's folk greats, a man who played with Woody Guthrie and Lead Belly before recording his first album in 1953. Alongside fiddle-playing son Ben, Tom's dexterity on guitar, banjo and fiddle is still remarkable and uplifting. His honeyed, lived-in vocals combine enticingly with Cerys Matthews' fetching tones on a racy update of "This Train". "Little Sadie" is another standout, both enlivened by the twinkling humour and wordplay which characterised Paley's performances with the pioneering New Lost City Ramblers before relocating to Sweden, then London in 1965, where father and son continue to keep old-time music alive.

MICK HOUGHTON



PEACERS
Peacers
DRAG CITY

Sic Alps man in psychedelic pop heaven

8/10

The new group for Mike Donovan, ex-Sic Alps, arguably the finest songwriter from the American scene that gifted the world Thee Oh Sees, Ty Segall and Mikal Cronin, Peacers has Donovan following the gently psychedelic thread of his 2013 solo set, *WOT*. Segall's in the production chair for *Peacers*, which gives it the same, slightly glazed, reverbed-out mood of his most '60s-reverent sides, and Donovan's songs are still queerly wired, taking unexpected detours, blasting out into destructo-guitar-solos (as on "Laze It"), stomping T.Rex blues ("Super Francisco"), and drenching acoustic guitar in slapback echo and ghostly vox ("Heirless Chilton").

JON DALE



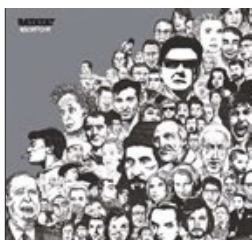
PREFUSE 73
Every Color Of Darkness
TEMPORARY RESIDENCE

More eclectic beats from prolific American producer
Guillermo Scott Herren is on something of

8/10

a roll. Four years after his last proper release as Prefuse 73, and now on Brooklyn's Temporary Residence label rather than his one-time home of Warp, he's this year given us an album and two EPs; to include this much quality material on what his new label calls an "epic triptych" is quite a feat. Though rooted in instrumental hip-hop, this eclectic mini-album is close to a kind of electronic post-rock: comprised of impeccably assembled fragments, the effect is akin to a pointillist painting. Through staring hard into the darkness, Herren has managed to create something incandescent.

MARCUS O'DAIR



RATATAT **Magnifique** BECAUSE/XL

More naff noodling on American goofballs' fifth outing

New York novelty rockers Ratatat are wise to leave five years between this

6/10

latest effort, *Magnifique* and 2010's *LP4*. Their syrupy soft-rock instrumentals, here in abundance, stacked like fluffy breakfast pancakes, are moreishly, but the gimmick wears thin pretty quickly. This time Evan Mast and Mike Stroud have tweaked their formula to focus more on the guitar, and now glossy riffs and iridescent melody spill elegantly across a pub-rock backbeat on the likes of "Cream On Chrome" and "Abrasive". It takes skill to write songs this catchy, and there's no doubting their sincerity, but sometimes you want the rollercoaster to stop.

PIERS MARTIN



SHARON ROBINSON **Caffeine** FLOATING WORLD

Second solo outing from Leonard Cohen collaborator

Having sung and written with Leonard Cohen for

6/10

much of her career, it's no surprise Sharon Robinson's work has similarities to her colleague's: closely worked lyrics about the vicissitudes of romance and slow, deliberate melody lines – though unlike Len she can always hit the high notes. Using a small group palette – brushed drums, gurgling keyboards – she casts an effective spell of small-hours introspection on the best songs here, among them the title track and Cohen co-write "Lucky". There's little variation, however, and one waits in vain for a less mournful mood or a lyric with real bite. A cocktail too far.

NEIL SPENCER



DANIEL ROMANO **If I've Only One Time Askin'** NEW WEST

Countryopolitan bliss on old-school Canadian's fourth outing

8/10

Like Sturgill Simpson, Daniel Romano is primarily a disciple of old-school country, upholding the kind of nuanced craft that served as the hallmark of Buck Owens and George Jones. There's plenty of the latter on this edifying fourth solo album, with Romano crying hurt on "The One That Got Away (Came Back Today)" and "Learning To Do Without Me", both of which might have been written for Jones by Bobby Braddock. The straight-backed settings – twangy guitar, piano, pedal steel, a little fiddle – bring a familiar warmth, while the other standout track is "Strange Faces", a terrific duet with Caitlin Rose.

ROB HUGHES



LUCY ROSE **Work It Out** COLUMBIA

Second album from singer made famous by those mobile phone ads...

After singing backing vocals with Bombay

7/10

Bicycle Club, Rose's 2012 solo debut *Like I Used To* cast her gently quavering voice in hazy, pastoral-folk territory, a sensibility largely abandoned on the follow-up, which soars into a decidedly more pop orbit. The high-life guitars might have come from a Vampire Weekend record, the arrangements suggest a desire to become the female Ed Sheeran and the electronic twitches recall her work with Jack Steadman and BBC. In places she sounds surprisingly like Andrea Corr, but she's a winningly melodic songwriter, and the soaring "Like An Arrow", the jittering "Köln" and the irresistible swoon of "My Life" are outstanding.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

HOW TO BUY... **BUFFY SAINT-MARIE** Native American magic afoot



It's My Way!

VANGUARD, 1964

What was most remarkable about Sainte-Marie's debut was not her striking vibrato-laden voice or the cultured folk

arrangements, but the potent songwriting. In "Universal Soldier" (a hit for Donovan), "Cod'ine" (covered by Janis Joplin), the title track and "Now That The Buffalo's Gone", the set included at least four compositions destined to become standards.

8/10



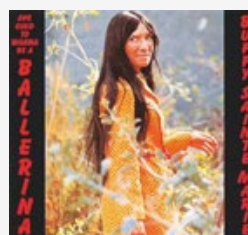
Illuminations

VANGUARD, 1969

Abandoning what she called the "Pocahontas-with-guitar" image, Buffy experimented with an early Buchla synth. The LP bombed

but today its dramatic, eerie soundscapes can be seen as innovative, in the spirit of, say, Tim Buckley's *Starsailor* or John Martyn's *Solid Air*. Highlight: "God Is Alive, Magic Is Afoot", an alchemical setting of words from Leonard Cohen's novel, *Beautiful Losers*.

9/10



She Used To Wanna Be A Ballerina

VANGUARD, 1971

A more mainstream, soft rock-inflected album produced by future husband Jack

Nitzsche and featuring Ry Cooder, Neil Young and Crazy Horse. The LP's big hit was "Soldier Blue", commissioned for the movie; but it's just one of several powerful original compositions, augmented by well-chosen covers of songs by Young, Cohen and Carole King.

7/10

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



BUFFY SAINTE-MARIE **Power In The Blood** TRUE NORTH

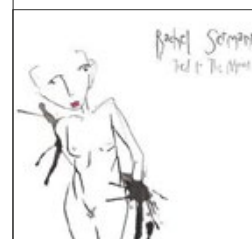
Audacious return by outspoken veteran

Sounding extraordinarily urgent and vital at 74, the

8/10

dual themes of continuity and progress characterise what is only Sainte-Marie's fourth original studio set in 40 years. Opener "It's My Way" revisits her 1964 signature song, but the addition of synth grooves to the chiming folk guitars tell us immediately the world has changed. The title track is even more dramatic, a cover of the Alabama 3 song with her own added anti-war lyrics. The new songs are equally striking, ranging from sensual lullabies ("Ke Sakihitin Awasis") to strident protest ("Uranium War"), delivered with a righteous spiritual and political conviction in a muscular voice full of spit and pungency.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



RACHEL SERMANNI **Tied To The Moon** MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

Sophisticated storytelling from Scottish indie-folk singer

There's something of the teenage Laura Marling

7/10

about Rachel Sermanni, a preternaturally talented singer-songwriter who balances atmospheric folk with the kind of emotional honesty that suggests a musician twice her age and experience. *Tied To The Moon* is her second LP and was written in an apartment in Nova Scotia belonging to the Juno winner Old Man Luedecke, and later recorded in her native Highlands. Most impressive here is the seam of storytelling found in "Old Lady's Lament" in which a mother reflects on her soon-to-be empty nest, and in the ominous "Ferryman", inspired by Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*, about a troubled man's path to salvation.

FIONA STURGES



DAVID JOHN SHEPPARD **Vertical Land** VILLAGE GREEN

Beautifully discreet music from Brian Eno biographer

David Sheppard's been releasing music in various

8/10

guises for years – as State River Widening, for instance, or alongside Pete Astor in *The Wisdom Of Harry* – but his first solo album is more entrancing than anything he's recorded to date. Listeners might point to occasional similarities to Tortoise's crucial *TNT* – largely through its judicious use of mallet instruments – but its pastoral instrumentals display an unusually English quality, their melodies rolling like the hillsides that inspired them. From the Reichian loops of "A Thumbnail Sketch of Infinity" to "Vertical Land 2"'s muted acoustic dub, this is a panoramic journey.

WYNDHAM WALLACE



JASON ISBELL

Something More Than Free

SOUTHEASTERN

Ex-Trucker confidently approaches the greats. *By Andrew Mueller*



9/10

2013's *SOUTHEASTERN* WAS, give or take the odd playful moment, a gripping description of the self-dug pit from which its composer had recently hauled himself. Now sober, married and grateful, Jason Isbell was reporting where he'd been, and what he'd

seen. Its connection was instant and unsparing, and it was always going to be a tough act to follow. Sensibly, Isbell hasn't.

Though *Southeastern* was a redemption song, it also emitted an undertone of anxiety, the sound of someone waking somewhere unfamiliar and unexpectedly comfortable, wondering if they're really supposed to be here. *Something More Than Free* finds Isbell sounding surer of himself, as a songwriter and a man. There's a confidence about his character sketches, leavened with wise humility: any of this cast of anxious itinerants could have been him, had his luck run a little lousier, his talent not been quite so irrepressible.

That said, it picks up, kind of, where *Southeastern* left off. That album closed with "Relatively Easy", a thanks for the small mercies of a happy home and enjoyable work: more than many ever get. *Something More Than Free* opens with the gospel-laced "If It Takes A Lifetime", narrated by someone putting a spring in his daily trudge by reminding himself that you can spend a long time looking for what was right here all along ("I thought that I was running to/But I was running from"). Not for the last time on the album, there's something of the terse Springstonian sermon about it ("A man is a product of/All the people that he ever loved").

On the basis that Isbell seems unlikely to bristle at Springsteen comparisons, *Something More Than Free* has something of *Nebraska* and something of *The Rising* about it – the curt, elegant poetry of the

former, the deadpan rock'n'roll ecstasies of the latter, and sometimes, as on "24 Frames" and "Palmetto Rose", both. But it says much that all of the album leaves one grasping for measures against other inhabitants of the pantheon – the tightly wrought, Paul Simon-ish detail of the sparse "Flagship", in which the occupants of some fleapit hotel are drawn as lessons in life and how not to live it, or the unfettered Neil Young-esque guitar solo that illuminates the gently

up some of the credit that the titular group were refused by an indifferent world.

Isbell's studio discography already now comprises five albums – eight, if his stint in DBTs is included. Still in his mid-thirties, he has the kind of voice – in both singing and writing – that only seems likely to improve with age. It's already a significant canon. Little seems beyond him.

SLEEVE NOTES

Produced by:

Dave Cobb
Recorded at: Sound Emporium, Low Country Sound, both Nashville

Personnel: Jason Isbell (vocals, guitar), Jimbo Hart (bass), Chad Gamble (drums), Derry DeBorja (keys), Amanda Shires (violin, vocals), Sadler Vaden (gtr, vocals), Dave Cobb (percussion, guitar)

epic "Children Of Children".

Like the aforementioned greats, whose ranks Isbell sounds more and more poised to join, he understands the value of his own story, his own lexicon. Though familiarity with his previous works is not a prerequisite, those who have been listening will wonder whether the lovelorn drifter crooning "The Life You Chose" into an empty glass is the same guy who sang "Alabama Pines", on 2011's *Here We Rest*. Those whose association with Isbell's works reaches back to first contributions to Drive-By Truckers will hear something of sublime father-to-son ballad "Outfit" in the title track, also a caution against resignation to destiny.

Though Isbell's principal interests are failure and regret – rightly so; they're much more interesting than triumph and hubris – he filters both through a humour as warm as it is

bitter. So "How To Forget", a return to a favourite theme of settling accounts with the past, is a mid-tempo country shuffle told as an unexpected meeting with an over-exuberant ex ("She won't stop telling stories, and most of them are true/She knew me back before I fell for you"). Closing track "To A Band That I Loved" – a stately, gorgeous Americana ballad drawn from the same vein as Dawes' recent "All Your Favorite Bands" – is a heartfelt attempt to make

the most: work as service, as a labour of love in the truest sense.

The characters in the songs generally seem kind of lonely and adrift ("Flagship", "Speed Trap Town", "Hudson Commodore") – do you see yourself in them?

I'm not lonely in any permanent sense, but I still feel like a person on the fringes of society in a lot of ways. I love travelling, I crave it sometimes, but I'm not delusional enough to believe it's a natural and healthy way to live. It's possible for me to inhabit these characters because I have a good memory of the times when I was adrift, and I still feel like a bit of a castaway.

Is "Children Of Children" in any respect about your own parents? Or is it in some respect a preparation for fatherhood?

It is about my parents, and my wife's parents. Both sets were very young when we were born. The time my mother spent raising me likely cost her a lot of opportunities, and even though she'd never be resentful of that and it's obviously not my fault, I've benefited from it, so I've felt guilty. I think my wife Amanda [Shires] has at times felt that way about her mother. The song is my way of looking those things in the eye and dealing with them. *INTERVIEW: ANDREW MUELLER*

Q&A

Jason Isbell

Are you surprised by how such an obviously personal catharsis like *Southeastern* resonated with people?

How do you feel about that album now?

I wouldn't say I'm surprised, but I'm certainly grateful. I've always had faith in the power of an honest story well told. Honestly, there aren't too many different stories to tell, so if you pick the right details, songs can be broad in scope and purpose, but not vague. People latch on to that.

There's an echo of "Outfit" in the title track – the line about loading boxes for someone else evoked the bucket of wealthy man's paint. To what extent are your songs about ordinary hardship a gesture of thanks that you escaped that kind of work?

Both those songs were inspired by conversations with my father. He's worked very hard his whole life, as did his father and mother. I work very hard myself, but there are obvious rewards to what I'm doing. Dad's only reward is a family that's well taken care of, and that seems to be enough for him. Those stories are the ones that interest me



ANDREW SKEET **Finding Time** SONY

Solo debut from classically trained but multi-faceted composer
A former Divine Comedy member and prolific film/

7/10

TV orchestrator who is on a mission to tramp down artificial barriers between multiple musical worlds, Skeet is equally at home working with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, arranging for George Michael and Sinéad O'Connor or collaborating on drum'n'bass projects. The 10 exquisitely textured orchestral compositions here range from the Nyman-esque piano minimalism of "Killing Time" to the hypnotic, Ligeti-like atmospherics of "Pursuing The Horizon", taking in a myriad of influences including The Dirty Three, Terry Riley, Jan Garbarek & The Hilliard Ensemble, and Philip Glass.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



LANGHORNE SLIM & THE LAW **The Spirit Moves** DUALTONE MUSIC

Cutting straight to the bone; Pennsylvania roots rocker's soul-searching fifth

8/10

With his trembling lonesome quiver of a voice, Slim has always possessed the ability to explore the lines separating faith and hope, optimism and cynicism, and emotional carnage. *The Spirit Moves* zeroes in on these in bare, existential terms, from whispery ballads ("Airplane", the heart-on-sleeve "Changes"), to slinky R'n'B, to barrelling, wailing walls of sound ("Put It Together"), with the ferocity of a soul singer pushed to the edge. Every song grapples with the meaning of life, but "Life's A Bell" sums it up best: "You got to live it, lest you regret it."

LUKE TORN



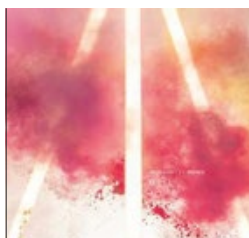
SOAK **Before We Forget How To Dream** ROUGH TRADE

Vaulting pop ambition meets stage-managed transcendence

6/10

Since she first appeared, aged 14, Bridie Monds-Watson's evident talent has been weighted with expectation. This big-production, debut full-length presents spectral and trippy songs majoring in intimacy and anguish. The echoey soundscapes, awash with treated strings, forge a lineage to the Cocteau Twins and vintage Björk. The effects are over-stylised, however, rendering her impressive vocals precocious, and the uniformly mid-paced tempos can become wearying. Even so, the catchy "Sea Creatures" and "Hailstones Don't Hurt", broadly referencing Coldplay's "Fix You", seem to assure mainstream success.

GAVIN MARTIN



SON LUX **Bones** GLASSNOTE RECORDINGS

Deconstructed electro-pop torch songs from multi-tasking New Yorker
NYC-based Ryan Lott is a prolific musician, ad and

7/10

film-score composer whose track record includes collaborations with Sufjan Stevens, Lorde and Nico Muhly. Lott's fourth LP under his heavily electronic Son Lux alter ego continues his drift away from timid minimalism to vivid maximalism. In a pained whine somewhere between Robert Smith and Brandon Flowers, Lott croons plaintive lyrics over weaponised sci-fi soundscapes fizzing with post-dubstep beats, bleeps and electro-classical string flourishes. Dense in sonic detail, digital-age musique concrète collages like "Change Is Everything" and "White Lies" are technically dazzling, if a little lacking in warmth or humour.

STEPHEN DALTON

HOW TO BUY... **LANGHORNE SLIM** Roots rock par excellence



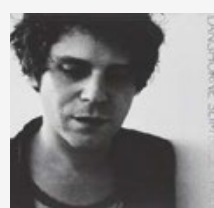
When The Sun's Gone Down

NARNACK, 2005

Like a once-traditional bluegrass band displaced in time, and running amok psychically and

sonically, Langhorne and company raise quite a racket on their full-length debut, trampling through musical tradition as if they're late for the party on Thunder Road. Yet, for all their quirky effervescence and startlingly childlike sensibilities, they truly hit their stride on an age-old theme - going home - on the infectious "Checking Out".

7/10



Be Set Free

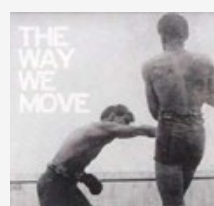
KEMADO, 2009

Armed with profound, sweeping melodies and a studio group playing gracefully to his strengths, this finally sets

the Pennsylvanian on a fresh, dynamic sonic plane. The style veers from Appalachia, but Slim's writing retains its penchant for lyrical directness ("Blow Your Mind"). And, along those lines, no-one ever quite conceived a love song like "I Love You, But Goodbye".

9/10

The Way We Move RAMSEUR, 2012

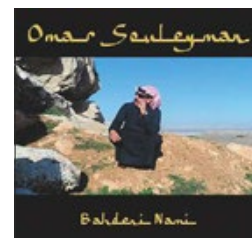


After nearly a decade in the trenches, Slim & co broke into international consciousness and the charts with this career-defining LP, a faultless mix of bitter loss, innocent joy and

vulnerability, spanning a kaleidoscope of roots styles. Alternately soul-searching and joyful, it's at its best when Slim ups the intensity, as on the bluegrass "Someday", wherein the band come off like a Pennsylvanian Pogues.

8/10

LUKE TORN



OMAR SOULEYMAN **Bahdeni Nami** MONKEYTOWN

Prolific Syrian's second 'proper' album

Omar Souleyman started out on the wedding circuit in his native Syria - not the

8/10

most obvious start for a man now signed to a label founded by Berlin duo Modeselektor. But there's something in the pounding, stomping beats Souleyman favours, not to mention his celebratory spirit, that resonates profoundly with electronic music. This album manages to feature both dance-indebted producers (Modeselektor, Gilles Peterson, Four Tet) and longstanding collaborators such as saz player Khaled Youssef without feeling incoherent. It works because Souleyman has never been a purist, instead perfecting a kind of global fusion that is slamming and mesmeric rather than naff.

MARCUS O'DAIR



JOSS STONE **Water For Your Soul** STONE'D RECORDS

Multi-million-selling soul singer goes ganja mad

Following her outing four years ago as part

6/10

of SuperHeavy, the dub-loving supergroup comprising Mick Jagger, Dave Stewart, AR Rahman and Damian Marley, Joss Stone has gone the full reggae on her seventh album, embracing both Jamaican grooves and the country's best known extra-curricular activity. "A friend in need is a friend indeed, but a friend with weed is better," she sings in "Harry's Symphony" like a student who's just had their first tok. The weed doesn't seem to have dented Stone's vocal prowess, however, and the pop-reggae vibe isn't necessarily unpleasant. Someone should probably have had a word about that daft Lilt-man accent, though.

FIONA STURGES



STRANGE WILDS **Subjective Concepts** SUB POP

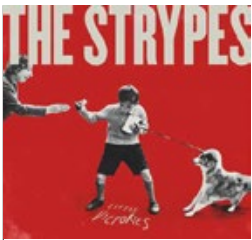
Debut album from Pacific Northwest grunge revivalists

Though a world of musical inspiration is now at

6/10

anyone's fingertips, some groups are still staunchly loyal to their musical roots. An angsty power trio from Olympia, Washington, Strange Wilds certainly sound a lot like that other trio from nearby Aberdeen, Nirvana. From the sour, growled melodies on "Autothysis", to the thundering drums and watery Small Clone chorus-laced guitars on the "Breed"-esque opener "Pronoia", there's not much here that departs from the blueprint Cobain established. Still, though, it's an undeniably exciting listen, with the Unwound-esque rush of "Terrible" and the more expansive, darker "Lost And Found" suggesting greater, more original things to come.

TOM PINNOCK



THE STRYPES **Little Victories**

VIRGIN EMI

R'nB revivalists get (sort of) up to date

While their songs remain dominated by teen love problems, The Strypes have shifted musical focus on this

7/10

follow-up – though it's really no different from the move made by their '60s forebears, from R'n'B to hard rock and psych. The closest here to that earlier sound is "Status Update", a Diddley-esque rocker with wailing blues harp; elsewhere, there's a new muscularity to Pete O'Hanlon's basslines, while guitarist Josh McClorey employs a broader range of techniques to stretch the band's sound. Their influences are becoming more recent: "Cruel Brunette" switches between Zep-esque riffing and Jam-style terseness, while "(I Wanna Be Your) Everyday" includes piano and what sounds like Mellotron en route to a psych-rock wah-wah freak-out climax. Hea-vee! **ANDY GILL**



SUMMER CAMP **Bad Love**

MOSHI MOSHI

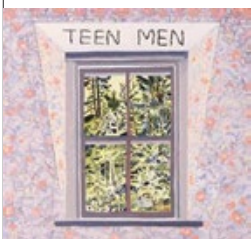
Indie popsters' lukewarm third

London duo Summer Camp are cheerfully out of time and place. So much so that with their 2011 debut, they

6/10

created a complete, Californian alternate reality ("Condale") – including a 'zine featuring interviews with non-existent bands – soundtrack by their sunny, throwback electro-pop. A second LP and movie score may have cured them of their Cali-philia, and *Bad Love* takes a less romantic view of life, but sonically, the retro filter is still very much on. It opens promisingly, with a mix of adrenalised shoegazing (imagine MBV minus the abstraction) and punkish power pop, but mostly, their channelling of St Etienne and The Sundays via Hot Chip is wet, rather than wistful.

SHARON O'CONNELL



TEEN MEN **Teen Men**

BAR NONE

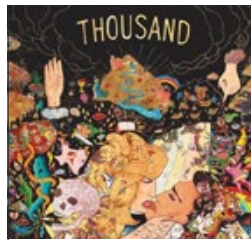
Experimental, dreamy pop from Delaware-based four-piece

Teen Men describe themselves as an audio-visual outfit – the four-

6/10

piece features two members of Wilmington, Delaware indie-rockers The Spinto Band and two visual artists, and when they perform live they synchronise the set so the music responds to a video they've made – making it feel as if this album is only half the intended project. It's a strong half, fortunately, filled with clever, gentle electro-pop songs that have a mildly gothic vibe on tracks like "Adventure Kids", flirt with reggae on "It's All Rushing Back" or unfold in a dreamy opiate haze on the short, sweet "Los Angeles" or excellent, nostalgic "Kids Being Kids".

PETER WATTS



THOUSAND **Thousand**

TALITRES

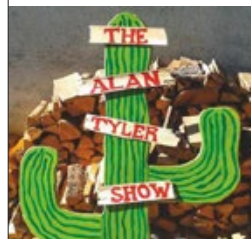
Stylish Frenchman's post-modern Postcard

"We're mostly water," sings Thousand auteur Stéphane Milochevitch in "Song Of Abdication" – a

8/10

conclusion on humanity so damning that it tempted tormented Texan Josh T Pearson (Lift To Experience) to cover the Frenchman's effort. However, the electronically enhanced indie pop of the second Thousand record wears that darkness lightly, Milochevitch warping his love for The Supremes, Bill Callahan and Fela Kuti into something wry, smart and twinkly. Floppy-fringed disco number "The Flying Pyramid" could have been a parallel-universe hit for Orange Juice, while the cool-jazz twists of "A Swallow" are Aztec Camera with a bit more swearing. Simply thrilling.

JIM WIRTH



THE ALAN TYLER SHOW **The Alan Tyler Show**

VIA BANDCAMP

Companionable covers and originals from Rockingbirds frontman

Dwelling on a Thames-

7/10

moored houseboat, Camden country exponent Tyler has gained a keen sense for the psychogeography of the capital's riverways. Accompanying subtle rearrangements of songs made famous by George Jones, Gram Parsons (a beautifully turned "Grievous Angel") and Townes Van Zandt, his previously unreleased 'river songs' finesse Tyler's long-nurtured London/Nashville connection. Spry fiddle, banjo and guitar interplay highlight the nuanced observation on "Dark River", honest wonder in "The Fields Beneath" and the homespun philosophy of "Down On Deptford Creek". A persuasive, illuminating departure.

GAVIN MARTIN



CATH & PHIL TYLER **The Song-Crowned King**

FERRIC MORDANT

Newcastle couple point up raw affinities in UK and Appalachian folk

Cath & Phil Tyler's *Dumb*

8/10

Supper (2008) stands as one of the best British folk records of the last decade, one whose unvarnished aesthetic straddled the worlds of traditional and experimental folk in much the same way as contemporary records by Alasdair Roberts. A compact and haunting six-tracker, *The Song-Crowned King* operates in similar territory, with the opening take on Child Ballad "Bonnie George Campbell" a standout. There's also an increased focus on Appalachian music, especially on two instrumentals, "Puncheon Camps" and the droning fiddle jig, "Boys The Buzzards Are Flying", that recall Transatlantic fellow travellers The Black Twig Pickers.

JOHN MULVEY



UNTIL THE RIBBON BREAKS **A Lesson Unlearned**

KOBALT

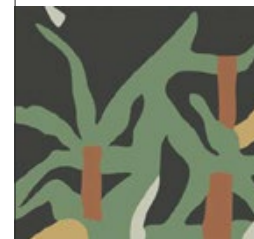
Former troubadour gives himself a cinematic future-soul remix

Four years ago, grainy-voiced singer-songwriter

6/10

Pete Lawrie Winfield was being touted as the next major-label pop-soul sensation in the Paolo Nutini mould. Now this former film student from Cardiff has reinvented himself as frontman of an LA-based electronic R&B trio with cinematic ambitions and mid-Atlantic accents. Fusing breathy falsetto ache with mechanised beats and cameos from leftfield American rappers, tracks like "Revolution Indifference" blur the lines between James Blake beauty and Mark Ronson-style retro-soul pastiche. While Winfield's pompous lyrics and over-earnest tone sometimes grate, the supple disco-funk of "Sparks" shows definite promise.

STEPHEN DALTON



VALET **Nature**

KRANKY

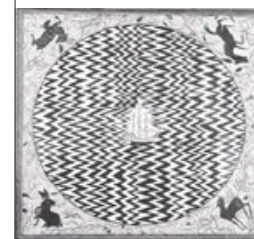
Intimate, balmy third from Honey Owens and family

After six years making house music in Miracles Club, the birth of her

7/10

first child has prompted Honey Owens to revive her transcendental desert-rock guise Valet. Now fuelled more by oxytocin than psilocybin, the overall vibe – summoned in conjunction with life and musical partner Rafael Fauria – is naturally more intimate than before, closer to the lilting, spectral shoegaze of Slowdive and their successors Mojave 3 than the exploratory space blues of Valet's last album, *Naked Acid*. Yet lest it all gets a little too cosy, Owens calmly deploys some arresting imagery of fires, explosions and "upside-down police cars".

SAM RICHARDS



VARIOUS ARTISTS **Shirley Inspired**

EARTH RECORDINGS

Triple CD set pays tribute to Albion's wandering folk queen

Her live appearances these days are rare as hen's

8/10

teeth, but in her 80th year, Shirley Collins finds herself in the fortunate position of being fondly remembered, while still being with us. This album, in which contemporary musicians tackle traditionals that Shirley made her own, exists as a means of drumming up funds for a forthcoming documentary film. The cast list is enviable – Will Oldham leads Bitchin Bajas through a sombre "Pretty Saro", while Graham Coxon picks gamely through "Cruel Mother". But perhaps inevitably, it's female voices that fare best: Meg Baird's pristine take on "Locks And Bolts", or Angel Olsen, little more than a pale spectre on the shattering "The Blacksmith".

LOUIS PATTISON



SLEEVE NOTES

Produced by:

Andrija Tokic
Recorded at: The Bomb Shelter, Nashville

Personnel:

Sam Doores (vocals, guitar), Riley Downing (vocals, guitar), Dan Cutler (vocals, stand-up bass), Cameron Snyder (vocals, percussion), John James Tourville (pedal steel, fiddle)

sorts here in the shape of “Heavenly Home”, where harmonica and pedal steel are underpinned by a heart-like beat akin to that of “Be My Baby”. Doores, meanwhile, reshuffles an aphoristic bunch of lyrics – involving a rambling life, men who “kill for greed”, a girl with a “heart of gravel”, humility in the face of the inexorable, and so forth – with showstopping artfulness.

The Deslondes, then, is a rich,

nuanced, fantastically enjoyable album that understands great music is often the product of a historical continuum rather than radical innovation, and which saves its best trick ‘til last. It’s late, the bars are closed, and “Out On The Rise” pictures Doores near his place at the end of Deslondes Avenue, in the Lower Ninth ward of New Orleans that was decimated by Hurricane Katrina. He is reflecting on life on the road, and loneliness, and how he’s always struggled to “take it slow”. The barrelhouse piano is muted, the drums are brushed; eventually, there is a clarinet solo, as if carried on the wind from Royal Street. “I’m a hard-working man/But I ain’t got a thing,” protests Doores, exquisitely weary, “Cause I can’t keep no job/That won’t let me sing.” As long as he and his bandmates keep writing songs as good as this one, that business of existence should just about look after itself.

THE DESLONDES

The Deslondes

NEW WEST

The Real Deal! A democratic band of drifters mix old-time country with New Orleans R’n’B. *By John Mulvey*



8/10

IN MAY OF 2014, I found myself in the First Presbyterian Church of New Orleans, watching a concert by the exceptional Alynda Lee Segarra and her band, Hurray For The Riff Raff. Segarra is besotted with the traditions of country music, and with the

musical culture of New Orleans. But as a revolving cast of local musicians hopped on and off the altar to augment the band, Segarra’s songs, suffused with gender politics and social documentary, never felt less than utterly contemporary.

The support act, however, initially seemed a different proposition. The Deslondes had deep ties to the Riff Raff; at least two of them, Sam Doores and Dan Cutler, had served time as members of that band. Their own group, though, looked like a defiant anachronism, all Stetsons and dungarees, a pantomime of roustabouts and hayseeds. The Deslondes’ music implied a mostly disdainful attitude to the 21st century, and yet their old-school take on country, alternately rowdy and elegiac, felt oddly refreshing, too. Four harmonising bandmembers took turns at singing lead, on songs that sometimes had the twang of Sun-era Johnny Cash, sometimes the drifter romance of Woody Guthrie, but which were imbued with a love and craftsmanship that transcended any accusations of pastiche.

That love and craftsmanship is writ large on The Deslondes’ self-titled debut, an album which includes one song – “Time To Believe In”, performed by the enchantingly gruff Riley Downing – that may cause listeners of a certain age to wax nostalgic about the theme from *Rawhide*. Of the four frontmen, Downing provides most of the rueful good times, channelling George Jones on the traffic jam epiphany “Less Honkin’ More Tonkin’”, or swaggering from the wreckage on the self-explanatory opener, “Fought The Blues And Won”.

Doores, Downing and Cutler previously figured in a similar band called The Tumbleweeds, whose

Holy Cross Blues album from 2012 is well worth tracking down. *The Deslondes*, however, broadens their canvas, thanks to the inclusion of another singer (Cameron Snyder, who also drums) and the graceful adoption of some vintage New Orleans touches. “Fought The Blues And Won” owes much of its roistering insouciance to Fats Domino’s piano line on “Blueberry Hill”, while “The Real Deal” is a wonderfully rickety Crescent City R’n’B number that would sit neatly on a playlist alongside Ernie K Doe and Allen Toussaint’s “Mother In Law”.

It’s at times like this that The Deslondes reveal themselves as every bit as sophisticated and complicated a band as Hurray For The Riff Raff, not least in the way they make their listeners rethink the lines of division between country and R’n’B. One of Segarra’s finest songs is a doo-wop-infused lament for the dead of New Orleans called “St Roch Blues”, co-written with Sam Doores, and it finds a sequel of

Q&A

The Deslondes

Do you think R&B and country music are much closer than most people assume?

CAMERON SNYDER: There’s a long history of songs being shared between country and R’n’B artists. Jimmie Rodgers, the father of country music, played with Louis Armstrong, who later recorded a country album; Fats Domino covered Hank Williams. Some people would call us throwbacks. But country, R’n’B, blues and jazz have been interacting and producing new forms for decades. Nothing’s completely new; nothing’s completely old. That’s how music forms are born: influences come together, diverge for a while, then recombine.

A lot of the lyrics betray a love of classic simplicity, a sort of historically resonant and direct language that could be seen, at times, as cliché?

SAM DOORES: I certainly agree that we have a lot of respect for simplicity, and timeless direct language. Hank Williams and Woody Guthrie are two of my favourite songwriters and they boiled big ideas down into their essence so that people from all walks of life could relate to their music. I recently stumbled on my old High School poetry notebook and, if you were to make an attempt to decipher a page from it, you’d soon realise it hasn’t always been so simple. I had good reason for changing my style up a bit.

Do you ever worry that your love for ’50s and ’60s music and culture might make you seem anachronistic?

DAN CUTLER: We don’t worry about being anachronistic because we consider ourselves and our music to be contemporary. That being said, we do admittedly cherry-pick certain musical ideas and concepts from the past, including the ’50s and ’60s. There were some good ideas that came about then, and we’re gonna run with them.



SONNY VINCENT & ROCKET FROM THE CRYPT

Vintage Piss

SWAMI

'70s punk veteran hooks up with Speedo's mighty army

8/10

Never the most predictable band, Rocket's first new release since their 2013 reformation is this blistering curio. Vincent was a CBGB habitué who served time with Moe Tucker and Scott Asheton as well as with his own band, The Testors. In 2003, Speedo and Rocket's rhythm section backed Vincent on these 13 heads-down ramalams. Unreleased until now, taut punk songs like "Sharp Knife" are closer to one of Speedo's other bands, Drive Like Jehu, than Rocket. That said, "Dream" could have used the Rocket horn section, and it's telling that the outstanding title track is the only one that features Speedo's characteristically pinched, urgent vocals.

JOHN MULVEY



TONY VISCONTI AND WOODY WOODMANSEY'S HOLY HOLY

The Man Who Sold The World Live In London

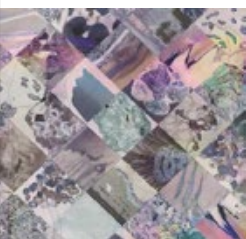
MANIAC SQUAT

7/10

Onstage together for the first time since 1971

Tony Visconti has done a staunch job deputising for Bowie. He led PR duties around *The Next Day*; now it seems TV is also DB's live replacement. Here he reunites with Woody Woodmansey to play *The Man Who Sold The World* in full at O₂ Shepherd's Bush Empire from September 2014. The craft is strong – Visconti's a fluid bassist, Woodmansey's drumming is commendable. Underscoring the well-intentioned qualities of this project, they're joined by Mick Ronson's daughter Lisa, sister Maggi and niece Hannah. From the first generation of fans, Glenn Gregory delivers some passable Bowieisms. At the very least, it sounds like it was a lot of fun.

MICHAEL BONNER



WHITE POPPY

Natural Phenomena

NOT NOT FUN

Canadian science-fiction pop psychedelia

7/10

Based in Vancouver, White Poppy's Crystal

Dorval makes blurry, abstract pop that fits the ethos of the Not Not Fun imprint perfectly, bridging as it does all kinds of dichotomies: vague yet ecstatic, drifting yet honed, leaping from murky greens and blues to striplight glare in seconds. For *Natural Phenomena*, Dorval's obsessiveness has paid off handsomely with a set that's filled with brittle melancholy, all neon light glow and dappled arpeggio patterns. It peaks with the sci-fi library electronics of "Aurora", whose glamorous poise is followed by the whispered chorale and pointillist, Durutti Column-esque guitar of "Telepathic Love".

JONDALE



DIE WILDE JAGD

Die Wilde Jagd

BUREAU B

Düsseldorf duo's lysergic Krautrock

8/10

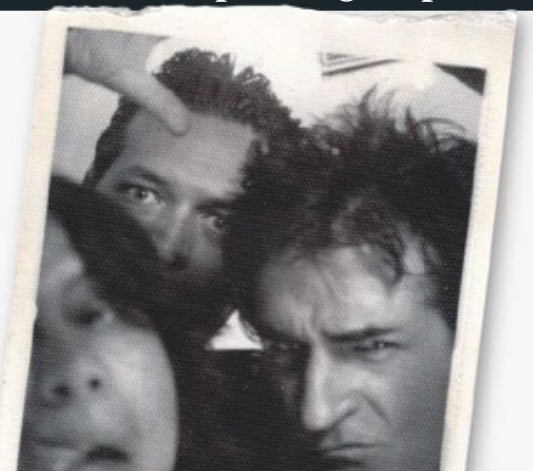
Die Wilde Jagd means 'the wild hunt' in German,

but Ralf Beck and Sebastian Lee Philipp did not have to venture far for source material when assembling this tantalising debut. Having met at Düsseldorf's hip speakeasy Salon des Amateurs, the pair have put together a suave set of industrial new wave that nods to such Rhineland luminaries as Neu!, DAF and Liaisons Dangereuses in its cavalier blend of heads-down Krautrock and simmering electronics, gilded, on "Der Elektrische Reiter" and "Der Meister", with rococo synth licks. Heavy, rhythmic and witty, *Die Wilde Jagd* knows what it's after – and hits the spot every time.

PIERS MARTIN

REVELATIONS

Rocket From The Crypt's John Reis: "Lots of planning, no plans"



➤ Although John Reis reformed Rocket From The Crypt in 2013, his US garage-punks haven't released a record since 2002. But now comes *Vintage Piss*, a bone-rattling curio recorded in 2003 with '70s punk Sonny Vincent of the Testors. Is this a lost RFTC LP or an interesting detour? "Well, maybe neither," says Reis. "It's not a Rockets record, but it's not a detour. No obstacles changed our direction. I get ideas and sometimes I follow through on them."

The record was recorded in a frenzy at Reis' San Diego studio at the conclusion of a tour, but was unfinished when the studio shut down. Hearing Vincent wanted to release a version, Reis went back to the damaged tapes.

"They needed to be baked," he recalls. "They were wet and messy. But I was really surprised with how good it sounded." The recording sessions had been a blast. "Sonny has a couple quirks – no red microphone cables – but we moved fast and freely. Everything was based on instinct. Sonny would grab his guitar, crank the amp and start hammering. I started thinking of the process as if I was working with someone like Jerry Lee Lewis. It was Sonny's job to be Sonny and our job to cast it in a flattering light." And will RFTC be recording new material? "Lots of planning but no plans," says Reis. "Hopefully we will get around to something."

PETER WATTS



JOY WILLIAMS

Venus

SONY

Grammy-winning, chart-topping Civil Wars casualty goes solo

6/10

"I'm a very ambitious person," Williams said when the Civil Wars

acrimoniously split up. Now we can hear where her postbellum ambition lay – away from the gothic country-folk sensibility she essayed with John Paul White in favour of sleek, adult-oriented pop. Sassy power ballads such as "Before I Sleep", "Sweet Love Of Mine" and "Not Good Enough" sit somewhat uneasily between Celine Dion and Stevie Nicks. Yet as the album progresses, there's just enough to retain the interest of former fans: "Till Forever" recalls the gauzy sound Daniel Lanois once conjured for Emmylou Harris and the melancholic Celtic airs of the closer, "Welcome Home", are positively Enya-esque.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



VINYL WILLIAMS

Into

COMPANY

Pastel drifting from Californian dreamer

The son of CSNY drummer Mark Towner Williams – and

6/10

grandson of *Star Wars* composer John Williams, no less – Lionel "Vinyl" Williams is an LA artist whose softly psychedelic aesthetic informs the cloudly electronics and fractal funk of *Into* as well as his recent visuals for Unknown Mortal Orchestra and Tori Y Moi, whose label is releasing this. On *Into*, his second, Williams frustrates and delights in equal measure, concocting Rhodes-shaded nuggets of sugary shoegaze like "Zero Wonder" and "World Soul", easily the best track here, that lie buried beneath too much wispy drifting. New age, clearly, is still all the rage.

PIERS MARTIN



THE WYNNTOWN MARSHALS

The End Of The Golden Age

BLUE ROSE

More songs about jetplanes, radios and slag heaps

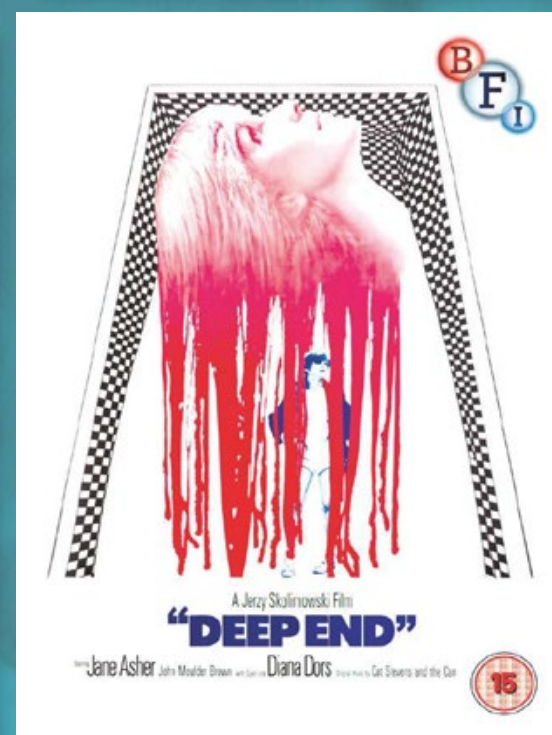
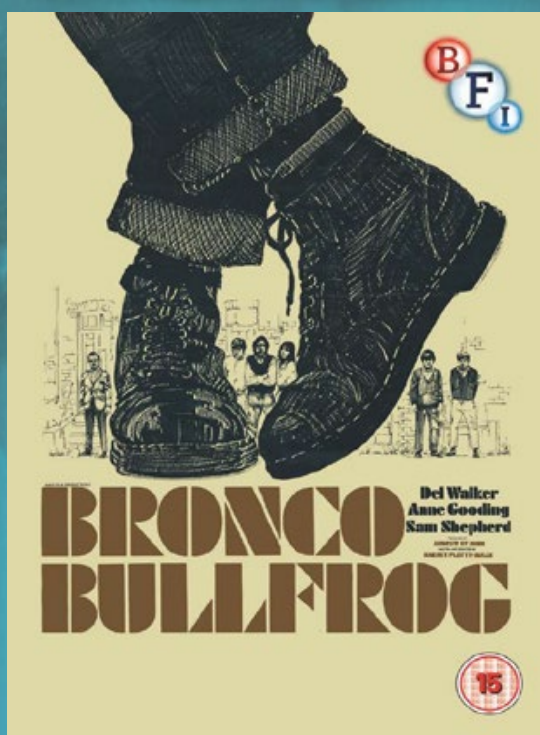
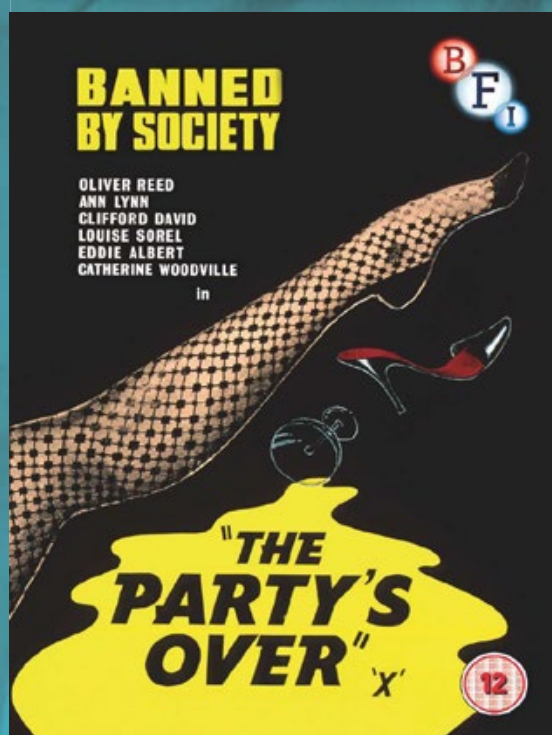
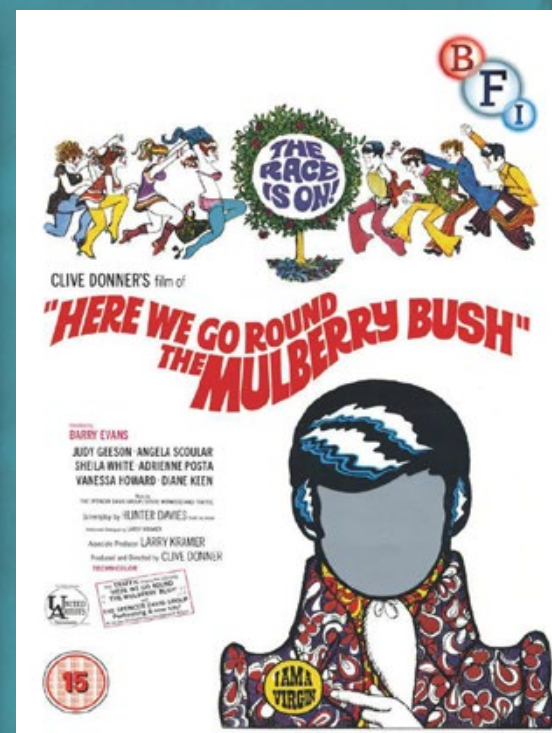
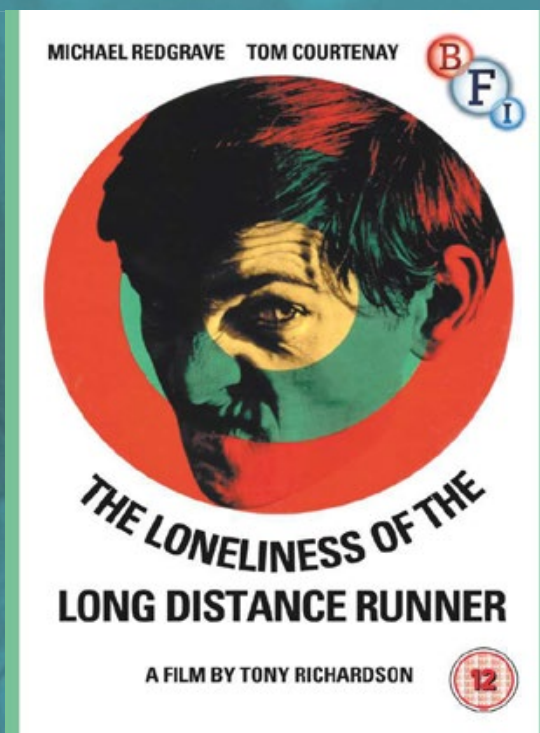
8/10

On their first two albums (*Westerner* and *The Long Haul*), Edinburgh's Wynthtown Marshals redrew Americana with a Caledonian sensibility, if not a Scottish accent. Following the addition of Richie Noble on keyboards, the sound has broadened, with downcast lyrics hauled into optimism by plaintive harmonies. It's not all bleak: the title track makes a stab at emotional resilience, while the epic, twanging "Red Clay Hill" has the narrative pull to conjure romance from an industrial wasteland, colonising the shadowland that lies between Tom Petty and Teenage Fanclub.

ALASTAIR MCKAY



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SCORING: THE ORIGINAL ALBUM

10 Masterpiece

1 Poor!

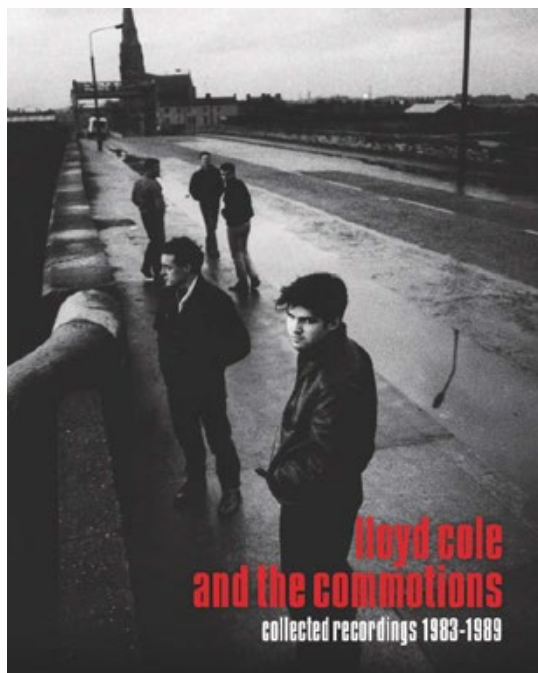
SCORING: EXTRA MATERIAL

10 Untold riches

1 Barrel-scrappings

Archive

REISSUES | COMPS | BOXSETS | LOST RECORDINGS



LLOYD COLE AND THE COMMOTIONS

Collected Recordings 1983-1989

UMC/POLYDOR

Definitive boxset of the '80s aesthetes. *By Graeme Thomson*

TRACKLIST

DISC ONE *Rattlesnakes*

- 1 Perfect Skin
- 2 Speedboat
- 3 Rattlesnakes
- 4 Down On Mission Street
- 5 Forest Fire
- 6 Charlotte Street
- 7 2cv
- 8 Four Flights Up
- 9 Patience
- 10 Are You Ready To Be Heartbroken?

DISC TWO *Easy Pieces*

- 1 Rich
- 2 Why I Love Country Music
- 3 Pretty Gone
- 4 Grace
- 5 Cut Me Down
- 6 Brand New Friend
- 7 Lost Weekend
- 8 James
- 9 Minor Character
- 10 Perfect Blue

8/10 THE CAREER OF Lloyd Cole And The Commotions began with a fortuitous false start. Their first 45, "Down At The Mission", was pulled at the eleventh hour when they signed to Polydor, and one can only assume they've been counting their blessings ever since. Heard here (officially) for the first time, this frantic slice of blue-eyed funk reveals a subsequently unexplored fascination with cheesy synths, shrieking falsetto and slap bass. Imagine early Spandau Ballet fronted by a drunk Edwyn Collins and you're still only halfway there.

It's not pretty, but then that's partly the point. *Collected Recordings 1983-1989* is a warts'n'all excavation of one of the most idiosyncratic and sporadically brilliant bands of the '80s. Running to 66 tracks and five CDs, it includes remastered versions of the group's three albums – *Rattlesnakes* (which has never sounded better), *Easy Pieces* and *Mainstream* – plus two further discs, *B-Sides, Remixes & Outtakes* and *Demo Recordings And Rarities*. All but two tracks on the

latter are previously unreleased, while six songs have never been heard before in any form. There's also a DVD of videos and television performances, and a 48-page hardback book.

This is, then, very much the final word on a band which formed in 1982 in Glasgow, where Buxton boy Cole was studying English Literature and Philosophy. A 21-year-old who had read a few books and was keen for everyone to know it, Cole's aesthetic was hewn from the milieu of New Journalism, Leonard Cohen songs and the French New Wave. Much of the action here takes places in basement rooms littered with paperbacks, art magazines, red wine, unfathomable women, strong cigarettes and unfinished first novels.

Majoring in undergraduate chic, Cole strolls through the extended narrative in his black polo neck and floppy fringe, alongside Julie and Jim (a nod to Truffaut), Arthur Lee, Joan Didion, Sean Penn, Truman Capote, Grace Kelly, Norman Mailer, Jesus, Eva Marie Saint and Simone de Beauvoir. The romantic yearning – which is

TRACKLIST CONTINUED

DISC THREE *Mainstream*

- 1 My Bag
- 2 From The Hip
- 3 29
- 4 Mainstream
- 5 Jennifer She Said
- 6 Mr Malcontent
- 7 Sean Penn Blues
- 8 Big Snake
- 9 Hey Rusty
- 10 These Days

DISC FOUR *B-Sides, Remixes & Outtakes*

- 1 The Sea And The Sand
- 2 You Will Never Be No Good
- 3 Andy's Babies
- 4 Glory
- 5 Sweetness
- 6 Perfect Blue *Hardiman mix*
- 7 Jesus Said
- 8 Brand New Friend
- 9 From Grace *Unfinished 1985 Wessex Studio*
- 10 Her Last Fling
- 11 Big World
- 12 Nevers End
- 13 Mystery Train *live New York, 1986*
- 14 I Don't Believe You *live New York, 1986*
- 15 Love Your Wife
- 16 Lonely Mile
- 17 Please
- 18 My Bag *Dancing Mix*

DISC FIVE *Demo Recordings & Rarities*

- 1 Down At The Mission *Unreleased single*
- 2 Are You Ready To Be Heartbroken? *Unreleased single B-side*
- 3 Patience *Demo recording*
- 4 Eat My Words *Demo recording*
- 5 Forest Fire *Demo recording*
- 6 Perfect Skin *Demo recording*
- 7 Poons *Demo recording*
- 8 Old Hats *Demo recording*
- 9 You Win *Demo recording*
- 10 Old Wants Never Gets *Demo recording*
- 11 Another Dry Day *Demo recording*
- 12 29 *Demo recording*
- 13 Jennifer She Said *Demo recording*
- 14 Hey Rusty *Demo recording*
- 15 Everyone's Complaining *Unreleased*
- 16 Mr Malcontent *Unreleased recording*
- 17 Jennifer She Said *Polished Rough Mix*
- 18 Hey Rusty *Unreleased recording*

DVD *Promotional videos & TV performances*

PROMOTIONAL VIDEOS

Perfect Skin, Forest Fire, Rattlesnakes, Brand New Friend, Lost Weekend, Cut Me Down, My Bag, Jennifer She Said, From The Hip, Mainstream

TELEVISION PERFORMANCES

Perfect Skin *Top Of The Pops, 1984*
 Rattlesnakes *Old Grey Whistle Test, 1984*
 Speedboat *Old Grey Whistle Test, 1984*
 Brand New Friend *Wogan, TOTP, 1985*
 Lost Weekend *Top Of The Pops, 1985*
 Mr Malcontent *live Glasgow, June 1986*
 My Bag *Wogan, September 1987*

"1984 was our year!":
 The Commotions (l-r)
 Lloyd Cole, Blair Cowan,
 Lawrence Donegan, Neil
 Clark and Stephen Irvine



acute – is buried beneath a protective layer of verbosity; for Cole, love is a girl who can spell “audaciously”. To what extent this represented autobiography rather than a richly imagined internal life doesn’t much matter. As a lyricist, Cole presented a fully formed worldview from the off, delivered in a vibrato-heavy voice somewhere between a nervy gulp and an affirming swallow.

The four Commotions – Neil Clark (guitar), Blair Cowan (keyboards), Lawrence Donegan (bass) and Stephen Irvine (drums) – animated this vision most successfully on *Rattlesnakes*. There’s nothing indie about the band’s 1984 debut. This is pop classicism, a blend of sparkling guitars, sighing female singers and elegant strings. Drawing on The Byrds, The VU, Dylan, Postcard and a smattering of blues, folk and soul, *Rattlesnakes* pivots on its triffecta of instant classics. Demos of “Perfect Skin”, “Forest Fire” and “Are You Ready To Be Heartbroken?” reveal them to be fully formed masterpieces at an early stage, but the LP’s greatness endures as it holds the line from top to bottom.

The title track is a glorious blend of quicksilver acoustic guitar, Anne Dudley’s vaulting string figure and Cole’s literate smarts. The lovely, lovelorn “Patience” is as good as anything they ever recorded, and while Springsteen was singing about ’69 Chevys, Cole prefers the “2cv”, hymned over a gentle acoustic backing which vaguely recalls Big Star’s “Thirteen”. “Four Flights Up” reanimates the helter-skelter blues of ’65 Dylan, while the wonderful “Forest Fire”, a masterclass in understated dynamics, ends with

the postmodernist conceit of Cole commenting upon his own working process – “*It’s just a simple metaphor, for a burning love*” – which manages to be funny, clever-clever and oddly touching. Contemporary B-sides like “The Sea And The Sand” and “Andy’s Babies” convey an admirable strength in depth, while the previously unheard “Eat My Words” finds Cole crooning like a callow Scott Walker. As Cole tells *Uncut*, “1984 was our

year.” *Rattlesnakes* was widely lauded, spawned three modest hit singles and stayed in the Top 100 for 12 months. It proved a hard act to follow. *Easy Pieces*, released in November 1985, met with a more muted critical response, but although its flaws are obvious, it holds up rather better than its low-key rep suggests. Producer Paul

Hardiman, so innovative and accommodating on *Rattlesnakes*, was replaced by Clive Langer and Alan Winstanley, who steered the band towards a more obviously commercial sound, instantly heralded by the punchy horns on opener “Rich”. The strings remain, alongside prominent accordion, smoothly soulful backing vocals, and burbling synth drums on the rather limp lead single, “Brand New Friend”. Recorded by a band already second-guessing its natural instincts in the pursuit of commercial traction, there is plentiful evidence of Second Album Syndrome. “Minor Character” and “Grace” are not just poor songs, they find Cole already flirting with self-parody, but such moments are in the minority. The headlong rush of “Lost Weekend” recounts a disastrous sojourn to Amsterdam over chiming

Romantic
 yearning is
 buried beneath
 a protective layer
 of verbosity

Lost Lloyd... Four previously unheard gems unearthed on the new boxset

POONS *Demo*

Performed live only once, at a Greenpeace fundraiser held at the Albert Hall in 1985, this long-lost demo was finally found deep in the Universal archives. A fiery, four-square folk-rocker shackled to a pounding Motown beat, it finds Cole down in Mexico mumbling winningly about mescaline, before concluding: “*This is a confession.*”

YOU WIN *Demo*

One of several songs that fell by the wayside

between *Easy Pieces* and *Mainstream*, this melodic, minor-chord guitar track has the feel of early REM. A classic his-and-her break-up narrative, Cole emerges from the moody bass-and-drum breakdown in unforgiving mood: “*Where d’you find the tears? Don’t waste another...*”

ANOTHER DRY DAY *Demo*

Another *Mainstream* offcut. “*Oh mother, you have ruined me,*” wails Cole, seemingly preoccupied with the ups and downs of the drinking life. Over a riff

partly purloined from “(Don’t Fear) The Reaper”, our hero spells out that he is “*T-R-O-U-B-L-E*”.

OLD WANTS NEVER GETS *Demo*

An unusually funky oddity inspired by Prince, and, in hindsight, an indication that Cole’s writing was heading to places where the Commotions were ill-equipped to follow. It’s a lovely, eccentric find, with its slinky guitar riff, stabs of kitschy keyboards and a chorus that sticks instantly. *GRAEME THOMSON*

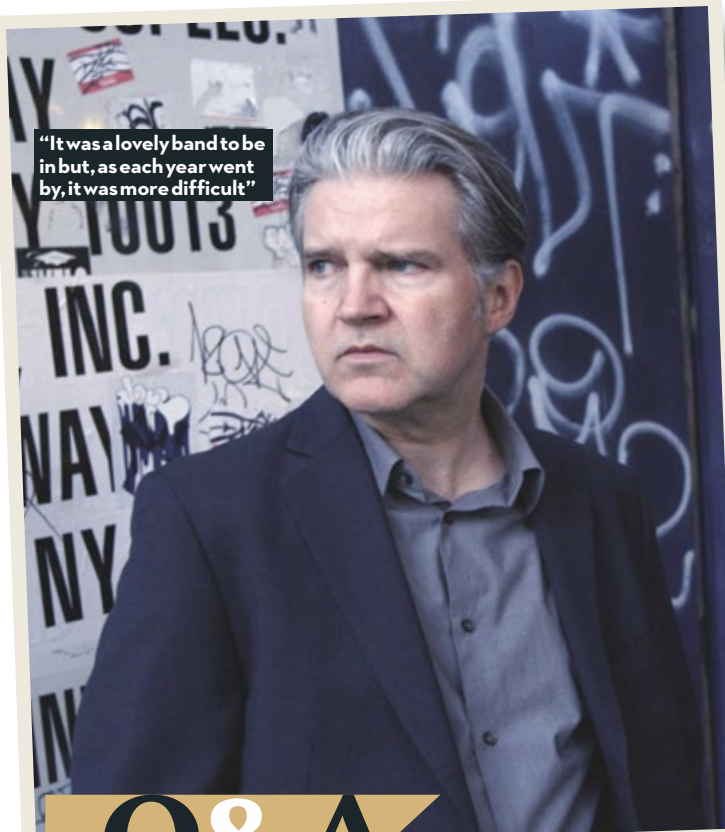
Rickenbacker. Second single “Cut Me Down” is simple and affecting, while the sombre “James”, an empathetic dig in the ribs to an “impossible” acquaintance hiding from a “thoughtless, heartless world”, is a quiet highlight, drifting on a sound bed of martial drums, mournful organ and chiming guitar.

The Rarities brief of *Collected Recordings* is at its most instructive sketching in the detail of the two-year gap between *Easy Pieces* and 1987’s *Mainstream*. There’s a fine alternate version of “Jennifer She Said”, recorded with Stewart Copeland and Julian Mendelsohn, and pickings from sessions with Chris Thomas, including the excellent and unreleased “Everyone’s Complaining”, meatier than anything on *Mainstream*. This generous rump of unheard material includes the pleasingly odd “Old Wants Never Gets”, on which, says Cole, “Blair and I are trying very hard to be Prince.”

The number of producers tried out for *Mainstream* – the band eventually settled on Ian Stanley – speaks of its somewhat compromised nature. The title is a knowing wink. A calculated tilt at a bigger, smoother rock sound, *Mainstream* is sleek and mid-paced, but although the frantic energy of old may have dissipated, it has its moments. “Jennifer She Said” is punchy pop, “My Bag” flashes by in a blizzard of cocaine-themed puns and pithy put-downs of the executive life, while “29” is an ambitious departure, an atmospheric ballad which nods to Cole’s long-standing love of David Bowie. Too often, however, the songs play second fiddle to the sound. “Sean Penn Blues” – perhaps the most ’80s song title ever – has little discernible shape or purpose; “Hey Rusty” aims for the E Street Band but settles for Deacon Blue; the title track meanders before setting its sights on an epic, U2-shaped climax.

Mainstream didn’t shift the requisite seven-figure numbers and Cole split up the group in 1989. Their concluding experiment in maturity failed partly because the Commotions excelled at making young man’s music: occasionally clumsy and anxious to show off, as young men tend to be, but also brimming with words, ideas and the propulsive energy of precocious youth. *Collected Recordings* bears deep and eloquent testament to Cole’s view that “We did one thing really well for a little while.” It’s not a bad epitaph.

“It was a lovely band to be in but, as each year went by, it was more difficult”



Q&A

Lloyd Cole on failing to find superstar status and why the band split up...

HOW HANDS-ON were you in putting together the boxset? There are 769 emails in my mailbox to do with making this record. It took at least as much work as making a normal album, it was a massive undertaking. We found everything, all the rare tracks, things I didn’t have or had forgotten. There’s stuff from between *Easy Pieces* and *Mainstream* where you can hear us trying to see what we could do next. It makes quite a fun story.

Did it make you reassess anything about the band? Our strength when we began was that I had an aesthetic that everybody else was willing to buy into. The longer we existed, the more we became democratic, and to be honest I can’t really complain about that, because I had less ideas. We were up against Thatcher, democracy seemed like a good idea! It was a lovely band to be in but, as each year went by, it was more difficult. It was natural that it only had a limited lifespan, but I think the body of work we managed to put together is pretty great.

Your initial trajectory was rapid. What were the high points?

Writing “Are You Ready To Be Heartbroken?” in September ’83 was the moment where I thought, ‘Oh I can do this.’ The following month, I took home the Portastudio we shared and wrote the essences of “Forest Fire” and “Perfect Skin” in one weekend. Then I knew we were onto something. Being in *NME*, being on *Top Of The Pops*, those were the yardsticks. That’s where David Bowie had been, that’s where Morrissey already was, that’s where we wanted to be.

Did you suffer from the curse of the classic debut album? I don’t think that was the problem. The problem was we grew up with

Bowie, thinking that we had to reinvent ourselves with every record, and that’s a curse. So rather than doing *Rattlesnakes Mk II*, we decided to make more of a pop electric record. I think the good tracks on *Easy Pieces* are great and the bad tracks are awful.

Were you under external pressure to follow *Rattlesnakes* with a hit?

There was no expectation with *Rattlesnakes*, from a business point of view. Five months later we did a gig in Bristol, and every record company from the Polygram group worldwide was there. I guess their eyes lit up with dollar signs. It wasn’t just the record company. There was this strange period in my life when it looked like I was going to become some kind of superstar – I never did – but what happened as a consequence was that we allowed ourselves to be persuaded that, if we

didn’t meet the Christmas ’85 release date, there would be a chance that we’d be forgotten. I think that was the beginning of the end. People waited five years for [the Blue Nile’s] *Hats*, and people would have waited five years for the next Commotions record, but we were insecure in our position.

***Mainstream* sounds like a compromised album.**

We basically thought we could make something better than a Simple Minds record. It’s possibly the most sonically beautiful record I’ve put my name to, but there’s not many actual songs. I think “My Bag” and “29” are great songs, but there’s also some excuses for songs, and a lot of long play-outs. Ian Stanley had come from producing *Songs From The Big Chair* by Tears For Fears, and we allowed ourselves to get into this position of thinking that selling less than a couple of million albums was failure.

What do you remember about breaking up?

It was very sad, and I was splitting up with my girlfriend at the same time. We weren’t childhood friends who grew up with a gang mentality, we became friends through playing music together, but you can’t not be close to a bunch of blokes you play with for years. It was upsetting and difficult. If there had been a great idea for a fourth Commotions

record we would have made it, but there wasn’t. As a consequence, all the aspects of the lifestyle that made me unhappy weighed on me more. I felt that my being there was necessary for everybody else to make a living, and I didn’t like that.

“Our strength when we began was that I had an aesthetic that everybody else was willing to buy into”

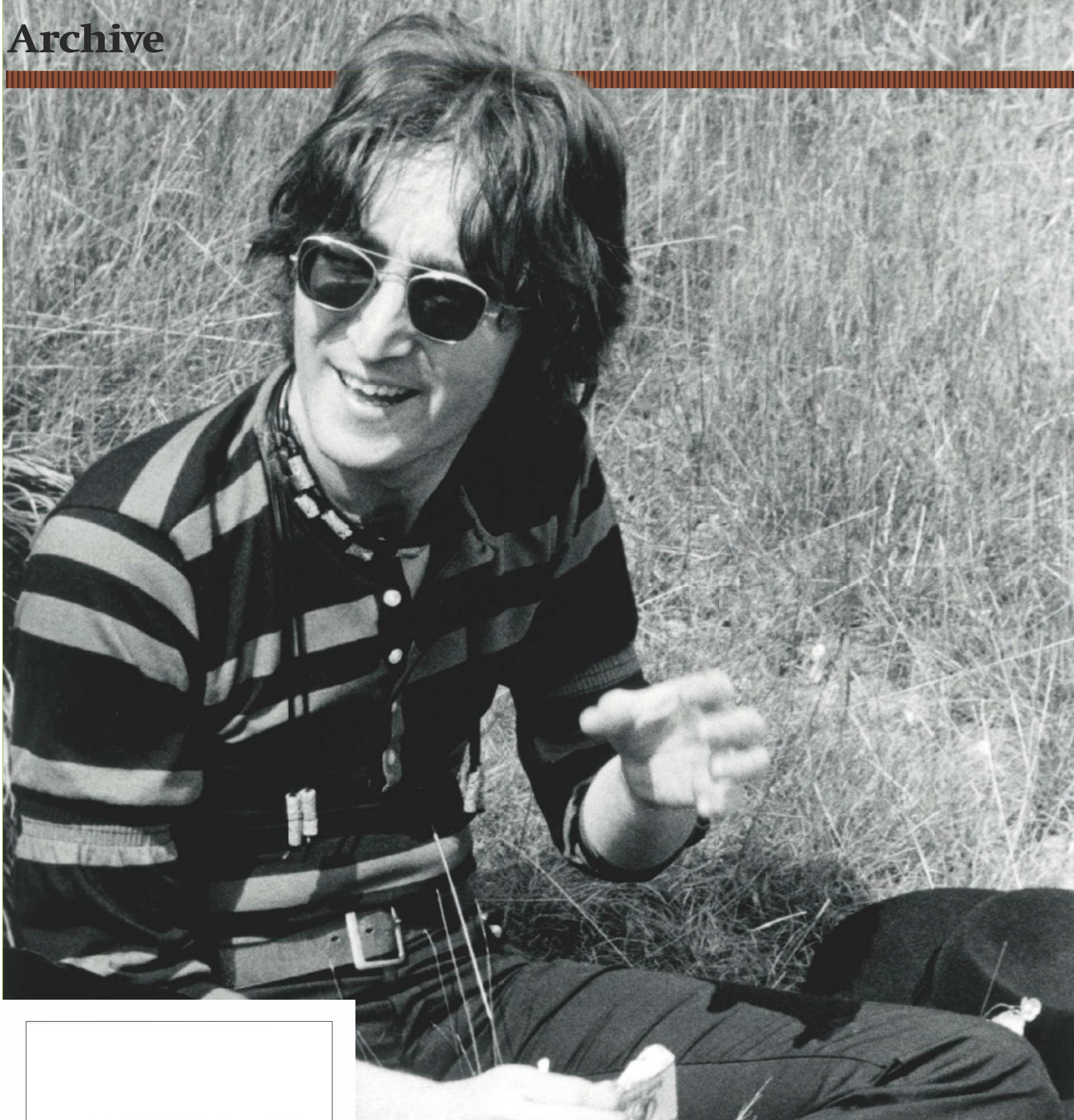
You reformed to tour in

2004. Is there a temptation to do so again for the boxset?

They wanted me to do some solo shows, but I’m not sure I’ll be able to, I’ve got other stuff going on. It’s too late for the five-piece. When we got together in 2004 it was a lot of fun, but I was at my limit. It required a different type of energy to that which I have these days. I don’t think it would be possible now, but I don’t think any of us have any regrets.

INTERVIEW: GRAEME THOMSON





LENNON

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JOHN LENNON/PLASTIC ONO BAND 1970

IMAGINE 1971

SOME TIME IN NEW YORK CITY [2LP] 1972

MIND GAMES 1973

WALLS AND BRIDGES 1974

ROCK'N'ROLL 1975

DOUBLE FANTASY 1980

MILK AND HONEY 1984

JOHN LENNON

Lennon: Vinyl Box Set

LEAD LABEL

All eight albums remastered on vinyl, from ...*Plastic Ono Band* to the posthumous *Milk And Honey*. By Andy Gill

6/10

DESPITE HIS CLAIM that he considered himself part American since the first time he heard Elvis, in the final analysis, America was not good for John Lennon. He may have left Britain seeking freedom from the small-mindedness and the racism directed at Yoko, but the impact on his creativity was often catastrophic, as this boxset of vinyl reissues

demonstrates in the contrast between the vicious purity of his solo debut, *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band*, and the sweeter pop perfection of the follow-up, *Imagine*, with anything that followed.

Influenced by undergoing Primal Scream Therapy, *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* presents the singer peeled to his core, dredging up tormenting traumas – notably,

parental abandonment – and dispelling them through cathartic bursts of honesty rarely heard in pop music. This confrontational approach involves Lennon being progressively scoured of illusions, notably in the angry “I Found Out” and bitter “Working Class Hero”, eventually culminating in “God”, a litany of iconoclastic demurral rejecting not just religion but all the bogus pillars supporting his previous worldview, leaving him utterly alone, save for a single buttress: “Just believe in me; Yoko and me.” It’s a brutally selfish album – the long-held first syllable of “Isolation” is what the project’s all about, ultimately – and it’s never an easy listen: the backings, with Lennon accompanied by just Ringo Starr and Klaus Voormann, are likewise pared-back to match the material, leaving just his voice, carefully treated by Phil Spector, to occupy the foreground.

By comparison, *Imagine* is a joyous reaffirmation of pop naïveté, for all the hard-edged bitterness of “I Don’t Want To Be A Soldier” and “Gimme Some Truth”, and the wilful spite of the McCartney-baiting “How Do You Sleep”, all of which are more readily listenable than the previous album. There’s a delight and uplift about “Oh Yoko!” that’s utterly infectious, and even the emotional palsy of “Crippled Inside” is dealt with in jaunty, singalong style. The innocent charm of “Imagine” has sustained better than most utopian anthems, but the clincher here is “Jealous Guy”, as sweet as anything Lennon wrote: the whistling is a masterstroke, at once vulnerable and apologetic, tender and unthreatening.

But then, it all starts to go pear-shaped, with the crude sloganeering and rabble-rousing of *Some Time In New York City*, where the couple’s wafer-thin insights on contemporary issues like feminism, black power and the Troubles are set to generic rock music with nothing remotely revolutionary about it – even the Zappa/Mothers contributions on the live tracks are limp by their standards. A year later, *Mind Games* was written and recorded just as John and Yoko were splitting, and Lennon was under constant FBI surveillance – though the stress doesn’t seem to have prompted any sharp response beyond a few anodyne aphorisms, patronising homilies and bland apologies. And

tellingly, the mantra-like title-track, the clear standout here, dated from the *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* era.

Things went from bad to worse with *Walls And Bridges*, which features the worst opening track on any ex-Beatle album (“Going Down On Love”) and a tranche of uninspired, self-pitying funk-soul cuts, the best of which – “Scared” and “Steel And Glass” – ape Bobby Bland’s contemporary R&B style. But perhaps the saddest aspect of the album is that Lennon needed a little of

Elton John’s charisma to score the only No 1 solo single of his lifetime with “Whatever Gets You Through The Night”, whose cheesy, sax-riffing effervescence hasn’t aged at all well.

The oldies album *Rock’n’Roll* was better, but still patchy. “Peggy Sue” sounds too thick, “Rip It Up/Ready Teddy” too thin, and the reggaefied “Do You Wanna Dance” is an abomination. But “Be-Bop-A-Lula” stalks along nicely, and “Stand By Me” shifts engagingly from folksy opening to soul climax. The LP was partly legal payback for Lennon using a line from “You Can’t Catch Me” in “Come Together”, though rather than whisking lightly along like the Chuck Berry original, the version here is mired in lolloping boogie brass.

Following five years of house-husbandry raising his son Sean, *Double Fantasy* was better than expected, but still mediocre. The air of domestic tranquility, while rather irritating, was well conveyed in “Beautiful Boy” and “Woman”, the simplicity of the sentiment echoed in the melody and arrangement. But it was a patchy affair, despite the clear improvement in Yoko’s contributions. By the posthumous *Milk And Honey*, four years later, her tracks display a greater variety and charm than

Lennon’s, which are sadly more meat and potatoes than milk and honey: to be generous, possibly demos denied their due development.

He may have left the UK seeking freedom, but the impact on Lennon’s creativity was catastrophic

LENNON



RYAN ADAMS

Ten Songs From Live At Carnegie Hall
PAX-AM/COLUMBIA

Solo years reconsidered, from “Come Pick Me Up” to “Gimme Something Good”

8/10

Cherry-picked by Adams from the 42-song mothership recorded at the venerable Manhattan venue last November, *Ten Songs...* forgoes nearly all of the self-deprecating comedy and functions instead as a stripped-down, focused career overview. Impeccably recorded, consummately performed and intensely intimate, the album is a reminder that very few artists are capable of keeping an audience in their thrall for an entire evening in a format this naked and unforgiving. These 10 selections draw heavily on his first two solo albums, 2000’s *Heartbreaker* and 2001’s *Gold*, and his most recent, 2014’s *Ryan Adams*, and these performances, masterfully poised between vulnerability and control, make the 13 years between those LPs – and all the tumult Adams experienced during that stretch of time – seem to disappear. *Ten Songs* keeps his audacious past and redemptive present in balance with the inclusion of the previously unrecorded “This Is Where We Meet In My Mind”, which Adams introduced during a 2013 solo show at London’s Royal Albert Hall, and the recently penned “How Much Light”. Both, like everything here, are achingly luminous.

EXTRAS: None.

BUD SCOPPA

TONY BANKS

A Chord Too Far

ESOTERIC RECORDINGS/
CHERRY RED

Mixed four-disc set from the Genesis keyboardist

6/10

You have to feel for Tony Banks, watching his past and present colleagues enjoy roaringly successful solo careers while his 10 solo LPs sank without trace. Banks has a rather anonymous singing voice, one that comes slathered with effects to make it more interesting on 1983’s *The Fugitive*, the only album where he takes lead – elsewhere, though, he’s at the mercy of guest vocalists. Nik Kershaw works well on 1991’s Scritti Politti-ish “Red Day On Blue Street”, Kim Beacon provides the guilty pleasure that is 1979’s “For A While”, while people called Jayney Klimek, Alistair Gordon and Andy Taylor add the requisite mid-Atlantic sheen. The better tracks see Banks successfully ape his colleagues: 1995’s “Charity Balls” (with Jack Hues from Wang Chung) is a ringer for “Solsbury Hill”; 1986’s “Lion Of Symmetry” (featuring Toyah Willcox) might fit comfortably on *Face Value*, while Marillion’s Fish plays a mean Peter Gabriel on “Shortcut To Somewhere” and the episodic “Another Murder Of A Day”. Annoyingly, promising instrumentals are marred by some teeth-rotting digital piano voicings.

EXTRAS: Some pleasant synth demos on Disc Four.

JOHN LEWIS



ALICE COLTRANE **Universal Consciousness** (reissue, 1971) SUPERIOR VIADUCT

9/10

Exhilarating, startling cosmic jazz, strings'n'all
Her own recording career

may not have begun until after the 1967 passing of her husband, the great jazz saxophonist John Coltrane, but the albums Alice Coltrane released between 1968 to 1978 still stand as one of the most progressive, ecstatically rendered bodies of work within the jazz ferment. Her legend often rests on the more becalmed, melodic side of her music – as in the see-sawing grooves and drift pulses of albums like *Journey Into Satchidananda* – but, on albums like *Universal Consciousness* and 1972's *Lord Of Lords*, Coltrane stretched her music out to the celestial, rivalled only by Sun Ra's in its ability to gesture toward the cosmic, even as it somehow maintained an intimate, meditational cast. *Universal Consciousness* is perhaps the fulcrum of her career, where she brought gnawing, sea-sick string arrangements into her music – laid out by free-jazz pioneer Ornette Coleman – which swoop, bend and oscillate around the two-chord organ vamp that structures “Oh Allah” while, elsewhere, Coltrane's organ and harp make for the ascendant, reaching a heady peak on the closing “The Ankh Of Amen-Ra”, where she's accompanied by Rashied Ali, one of free jazz's most fluid, tactile, sensual drummers.

EXTRAS: None.

JON DALE



DAWN OF MIDI **Dysnomia** ERASED TAPES

8/10

Lithe, adventurous post-jazz earns a belated British release

For some of us, there are few better bands in the world currently than The Necks, an Australian group who stretch the possibilities of an improvising piano/bass/drums jazz trio into fresh and thrilling new territory. Necks albums don't come along too often, though, so there's an imperative of sorts to try and find music of a comparable feel. To quite a useful degree, the Brooklyn-based Dawn Of Midi scratch that itch, being three men – Aakaash Israni (bass, Indian by birth), Amino Belyamani (piano, Moroccan) and Qasim Naqvi (drums, Pakistani) – with an idea that moves way beyond the usual parameters inhabited by a jazz trio. Indeed, on this third album (originally released in the United States on Thirsty Ear in 2013), it's often tough to definitely identify their music as jazz: the taut, spacious extrapolations of these nine instrumentals being closer, perhaps, to the most interesting early work of Tortoise. There's a sense, too, of a group that is re-scoring the pulsating repetitions of peak Warp techno for a twanging, all-acoustic set-up. “Atlas”, especially, highlights that what could be a gimmick is, in fact, a workable and elastic concept.

EXTRAS: None.

JOHN MULVEY



DONOVAN **Retrospective** UNION SQUARE

8/10

For 69th birthday, 2CD celebration from Scots wizard, plus new track
British pop history has treated Donovan Leitch roughly, in part because

his flower-child persona has remained unreconstructed, fey and unfashionable. Further, contractual problems skewered the UK release of *Sunshine Superman* and *Mellow Yellow*, albums that made him a star in the US, where he didn't have the ‘Dylan copyist’ tag he unfairly suffered at home. This 29-track comp is a reminder that he was, albeit briefly, a real innovator. With producer Mickie Most and classy sessioners (Jeff Beck, John Paul Jones, Danny Thompson) he created sleek psychedelia like “Season Of The Witch”, “Barabajagal”, and “Hurdy Gurdy Man” and elegant jazzy vignettes like “Hampstead Incident” and “Sunny Goodge Street” (“Violent hash smoker shakes chocolate machine”). At times, as on “Hey Gyp”, he even rocked. His early incarnation as beatnik folkie also had its moments with “Colours” and “Catch The Wind”, with his mastery of finger-picking guitar passed to The Beatles during their shared Maharishi sojourn. Whimsy and faux Arthuriana took over his later work – absent here, though the earlier “Guinevere” is present – and his mannered vocals can grate, but Donovan carved his '60s niche well.

EXTRAS: New track “One English Summer”
5/10 is jokey, reggaefied nostalgia, but forgivable.

NEIL SPENCER

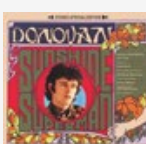
HOW TO BUY... DONOVAN Flower power on CD



1965 SANCTUARY, 2014

Don, for sure, had his Dylan borrowings – the cap, the harmonica holder, the Guthrie songs – but his early work (he was still a teenager) owes as much to the English folk scene. This double CD gather his first two albums with EP extras. Alongside stalwarts like “Candy Man” are winsome originals like “Josie”, and sharp protest songs like “The War Drags On”.

7/10



Sunshine Superman
PYE, 1966

A giant leap on from his previous output, this remains a milestone of psych-folk, its standouts (title cut and “Season Of The Witch”) balanced by the contemplative “Writer In The Sun”, the gritty “The Trip” and “Guinevere”, best of his Arthurian series. Recent stereo version raises the bar.

8/10



HMS Donovan DAWN, 1971

A double-album that was a better version of 1968's stifflingly twee *A Gift From A Flower To A Garden*. Acoustic, it was principally for children, with versions of Lear, Carroll etc, though its best moments were grown-up poems; his versions of Yeats' “Song Of Wandering Aengus” and Shakespeare's “Under The Greenwood Tree” have never been bettered.

9/10

NEIL SPENCER



DURAN DURAN **Rio (reissue, 1982)** PARLOPHONE

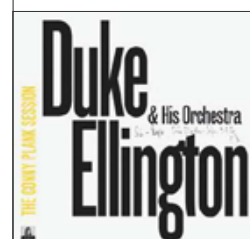
8/10

Expanded reissue of Birmingham Boys' global breakthrough

To many, Duran Duran – beloved back then of luminous teenage girls, despised by scruffy Clash- and Cure-loving males – remain the quintessential '80s band: an extravagant triumph of style over substance. Their regular critical rehabilitations – thanks first to Nile Rodgers, then Mark Ronson – have never fully shaken off their image as glossy playboys, but their second album confirms they nonetheless packed a significant punch. Andy Taylor riffs his way through the predatory “Hungry Like The Wolf” and mildly sinister “New Religion”, while Nick Rhodes' keyboards provide an atmospheric, glossy glaze, especially on the woozy “Save A Prayer”. Simon Le Bon's lyrics may veer between absurd (“*Strut on a line, it's discord and rhyme*”) and sublime (“*The sun drips down, bedding heavy behind the front of your dress*”), but they're delivered with a convincing vigour, albeit one that swerves between passionate virility and the sound of a man lugging a heavy suitcase. Alternative versions for the US market, delivered by producer David Kershenbaum, add further muscle to lesser known but valuable album cuts like “Hold Back The Rain”.

EXTRAS: 2CD version offers rare B-sides, four
7/10 album demos, American remixes, and a revealing acoustic early take on “The Chauffeur”.

WYNDHAM WALLACE



DUKE ELLINGTON & HIS ORCHESTRA **The Conny Plank Session** GRÖNLAND

7/10

Neu Duke! Lost 1970 German sessions from the jazz maestro

The concept is tantalising: a jazz behemoth and his band falling under the influence of Conny Plank, Krautrock's studio architect, jamming out radical new music at around the same time as Kraftwerk were working with Plank on their debut LP. The reality, perhaps inevitably, is a little more prosaic. According to the sleevenotes of *The Conny Plank Session*, it seems Duke Ellington dropped in to the Rhenus Studio in Cologne while on tour, recording a couple of tunes with Plank discreetly manning the desk. Avant-garde interventions were non-existent. Instead, Plank straightforwardly captured an astonishing band trying out three versions each of “Alerado” and “Afrique”. The results are strong – kin of other exotic, post-Strayhorn Ellington sets like *The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse* – and pleasingly varied. The takes on “Alerado” push Wild Bill Davis' organ to the fore, its needling interventions a little reminiscent of Sun Ra. The self-explanatory “Afrique” is the real keeper, though – especially on “Take 3”, where the rumbling tribal groove and brokeback piano are complemented by the ethereal ululations of a nameless female singer. A Scandinavian lover of the 71-year-old bandleader? Like many other details of these sessions, her identity remains obscure.

EXTRAS: None.

JOHN MULVEY

MILES DAVIS

At Newport 1955-1975: The Bootleg Series Vol 4

COLUMBIA LEGACY

4CD set charting a pioneer's evolution. *By Richard Williams*



10/10

SHARES IN MILES Davis' career, had they been available, would not have fetched much of a price the day before he took the stage at the Newport Jazz Festival in the summer of 1955. Only a handful of years after his youthful blossoming alongside Charlie Parker and with his own innovative nine-piece band, Davis' playing and professional reputation had been badly damaged by the effects of heroin addiction. Now, clean for a year and a half, he pleaded with George Wein, the festival's producer, for a place on the bill. Wein squeezed him in as a last-minute addition to a jam-session group featuring the saxophonists Zoot Sims and Gerry Mulligan, with Thelonious Monk on piano. Their short set, only three tunes and less than half an hour long, would change the trumpeter's life.

Davis chose to wear a white tuxedo that made him stand out among the lounge suits flanking him on the stage, and he had clearly come to play. Taking the stage after the Count Basie Orchestra, and introduced by Duke Ellington, he managed to negotiate Monk's characteristically eccentric accompaniment on "Hackensack" with unruffled poise before taking charge on another of the pianist's compositions, the classic ballad "'Round Midnight". Pushing the bell of his trumpet right up against the microphone, he cast a spell over the audience with an improvisation that showed off a confident new beauty in his tone and phrasing. The watching George Avakian, a powerful A&R man, made up his mind at that moment to sign Miles Davis to a Columbia Records contract that would see the trumpeter produce 20 years' worth of classic albums, including *Kind Of Blue*, *Sketches Of Spain* and *Bitches Brew*.

Although the recording of Davis' Newport debut has been released before, it is the only possible way to open the latest volume of the *Bootleg Series*, which consists of four discs devoted to the trumpeter's appearances under the festival's banner. Ranging from the original Rhode Island home to a temporary home in New York City and various Newport-branded European tours, the set covers a period of 20 years in which Davis' music

SLEEVE NOTES

► **Personnel:** Miles Davis (trumpet), Zoot Sims, Gerry Mulligan, Cannonball Adderley, John Coltrane, Wayne Shorter, Dave Liebman, Gary Bartz, Sam Morrison (sax), Thelonious Monk, Bill Evans, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett (keys), Pete Cosey, Reggie Lucas (gtrs), Percy Heath, Paul Chambers, Dave Holland, Michael Henderson (bass), Ron Carter (double bass), Connie Kay, Jimmy Cobb, Tony Williams, Leon 'Ndugu' Chanler, Al Foster, Jack DeJohnette (drums), Don Alias, James Mtume (perc)

"The group's solidarity is hampered by the angry young tenor of Coltrane."

The second disc is devoted entirely to two previously unreleased performances, in 1966 and 1967, by what is generally known as Miles' second great quintet, but which deserves recognition as the most astounding small group in the history of jazz. Davis himself never received inspiration

underwent a series of celebrated, and sometimes controversial, evolutionary leaps.

Three years after that first appearance, he returned with a sextet, featuring Cannonball Adderley and John Coltrane on saxophones, Bill Evans on piano, Paul Chambers on bass and Jimmy Cobb on drums, that would record *Kind Of Blue* a few months later. This six-tune set, particularly remarkable for the uncharacteristic explosiveness of Cobb's usually imperturbable drumming, saw the light of day on *Miles Davis At Newport 1958*. Unsurprisingly, the music continues to defy the opinion of *Down Beat* magazine's disapproving critic, who wrote that

from his sidemen to equal that offered by Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter and Tony Williams, whose five years together produced music of astonishing creative density, reaching peaks of collective transcendence in which they seemed to be able to bend metre, harmony and melody to their will, a kind of musical equivalent of gymnastics, acrobatics and ballet combined.

The problem of where to go next was solved when Davis' girlfriend turned him on to Hendrix and Sly. He wanted to stay current and share their audience, which meant a new funk-based groove and an interest in distortion. The 24-minute 1969 performance, with Miles alone in front of a new rhythm section (Chick Corea, Dave Holland, Jack DeJohnette) when Shorter got stuck in traffic, offers sanctuary in a halfway house, while a 70-minute set from a 1971 Newport concert in Switzerland, with Keith Jarrett on electric keyboards, Michael Henderson on bass, Leon 'Ndugu' Chanler on drums and two percussionists, shows a firmer commitment to the new sounds. In Berlin in 1973 and New York in 1975, the guitars of Pete Cosey and Reggie Lucas having replaced keyboards, the transformation is complete. Time is squeezed and stretched in new ways, exotic timbres are distilled on the spot, and this freeform funk still scorches the air.

TRACKLIST

CD1:

- 1 Hackensack
- 2 'Round Midnight
- 3 Now's The Time (1955)
- 4 Ah-Leu-Cha
- 5 Straight, No Chaser
- 6 Fran-Dance
- 7 Two Bass Hit
- 8 Bye Bye Blackbird
- 9 The Theme (1958)

CD2:

- 1 Gingerbread Boy
- 2 All Blues
- 3 Stella By Starlight
- 4 RJ
- 5 Seven Steps To Heaven
- 6 The Theme (1966)
- 7 Gingerbread Boy
- 8 Footprints
- 9 'Round Midnight
- 10 So What
- 11 The Theme (1967)

CD3:

- 1 Miles Runs The Voodoo Down
- 2 Sanctuary
- 3 It's About That Time/The Theme (1969)
- 5 Turnaroundphrase
- 6 Tune In 5
- 7 Ife
- 8 Untitled Original
- 9 Tune In 5 (1973)
- 10 Mtume (1975)

CD4:

- 1 Directions
- 2 What I Say
- 3 Sanctuary
- 4 It's About That Time
- 5 Bitches Brew
- 6 Funky Tonk
- 7 Sanctuary (1971)

Rediscovered!

Uncovering the underrated and overlooked



FANNY

Fanny Hill (reissue, 1972)

REAL GONE MUSIC

7/10

All-female Cali rock band's third reissued

Over 40 years since Fanny's original lineup split, the California quartet are still best known for being forgotten by history. They weren't, as their label Reprise sold them, the first all-female band to sign to a major, but they were the most successful, touring with

the likes of Van Morrison and the Isley Brothers, and championed by David Bowie. They wrote all their own material – individually, with only *Fanny Hill*'s raw "Rock Bottom Blues" written together. And yet, despite their trailblazing and obvious songwriting acumen, Reprise allowed them very little say in the sound of their records.

Richard Perry (Captain Beefheart, Harry Nilsson) produced Fanny's first three albums: 1970's self-titled, '71's *Charity Hill* and '72's *Fanny Hill*, all choogling guitar and romping vocals. "Richard was very much pop-oriented," said frontwoman June Millington years later. "And frankly, I don't think he did the band justice on record because we would cut these tracks that were really biting and big and then Richard would 'pop-ify' them."

By *Fanny Hill* – the name of their house overlooking Sunset Strip – the band's energy is notably flagging: the result of fighting for their sound, enduring a gruelling schedule, and bearing the pressure of being lone women. Their stature commanded them sessions at Abbey Road and Bobby Keys on baritone sax, but the band loathed the brass and strings that Perry brought in. It often sounds like he was angling to get them on a Bond soundtrack: the syrupiness of "Knock On My Door" and "Hey Bulldog" jars with their indomitable performance.

Fortunately, he couldn't marginalise their vocal turns: "We're clearing the way for a new order!" they belt on "Blind Alley". Their lyrics, too, are gently radical: "Think About The Children" is a pacifist anthem, while "You've Got A Home" is a lilting acoustic devotional from a single mother to her son. "Sound And The Fury" should be an insurrectionist anthem, but it's a mid-tempo wash: when they sing, "Now the sound and the fury have some place to go," it sounds more like resignation than a redirection of the anger they felt at being marginalised.

Todd Rundgren was brought in to produce 1973's *Mother's Pride* in the hope that he would actually listen to the band, but he too shut them out. In '74, Millington quit, citing a breakdown and her exhaustion with the question, "What does it feel like to be a girl guitar player?" If Fanny's legacy had been given its rightful stature, you wonder if female musicians wouldn't be enduring the same trivialisation today.

LAURA SNAPES



THE FALL

The Wonderful And Frightening World Of The Fall/ This Nation's Saving Grace (+ extras)

THE ARKIVE

9/10

Another vinyl reissue for two 'imperial period' peaks and assorted rarities

With new member Brix Smith edging the group towards increasingly accessible territory, and Mark E Smith digging deeper into his leftfield fascinations (*Quatermass*, DIY and various supernatural forces all appear here), 1984's *The Wonderful And Frightening World Of The Fall* and the following year's *This Nation's Saving Grace* are two of the band's most essential albums. The highlights on these vinyl reissues are many – *Wonderful...* closer "Disney's Dream Debased" paved the way for hushed gems like "Bill Is Dead", while the second side of *This Nation's...* sees the band moving further out with the tape machinations of "Paint Work" and the thundering Can homage "I Am Damo Suzuki".

EXTRAS: *Wonderful...* and *This Nation's...* each come with an additional LP, compiling singles, B-sides, Peel sessions and rare cuts – *The Wonderful And Frightening Escape Route To The Fall* and *Schtick – Yarbles Revisited*, respectively, the latter for the first time on vinyl. Though there's nothing previously unreleased here, this is The Fall at their dense and enthralling best.

TOM PINNOCK



GUITAR SLIM GREEN

Stone Down Blues (reissue, 1970)

BGP/ACE

7/10

Rare, understated curio from unheralded, Texas-born bluesman

Norman 'Slim' Green was hardly a prolific recording artist, his legacy mostly resting on a handful of 45s cut in post-war California and two singles for bandleader Johnny Otis during the '50s. And it wasn't until he and Otis reunited in 1970, for this solo LP on the prestigious Kent label, that he finally got around to making a solo album. Green's guitar-playing is unfussy yet effective, providing a country-blues backdrop to his crusty, assured vocals. But despite the name over the door, *Stone Down Blues* is very much a three-way effort. Producer Otis not only co-wrote nearly everything here, he also plays drums and piano. Perhaps the most telling contribution, however, is that of Otis' teenage son, Shuggie, who goesos things up with lyrical electric guitar, springy bass and, on "My Little Angel Child", some inspired piano. The standout is "Shake 'Em Up", a slippery R'n'B tune marked by bawdy lyrics and Shuggie's fizzing licks. Aside from a little boogie, the rest of it is understated blues, each man allowing the others ample space in which to move around the notes.

EXTRAS: Two previously unheard bonus tracks, "My Marie" and "Rock The Nation", both co-written with Johnny Otis.

ROB HUGHES



HAWKWIND

This Is Your Captain Speaking... Your Captain Is Dead: The Albums And Singles 1970-1974

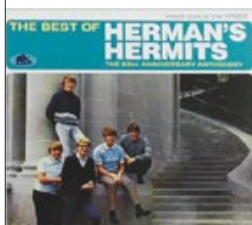
PARLOPHONE

7/10 The ritual repackaged... Brock and co's UA works

There's something faintly ironic about seeing Hawkwind's United Artists years tidily filed into a clamshell box. Later, the band's science would become more streamlined, but in these years the band operated by bad chemistry, and trial and error, an experimental policy which led to explosions, but also squibs. Still, progress of a kind was rapidly made. The band's folky debut sounds like the work of buskers, but by their second, the great *In Search Of Space*, it appears as if these buskers have been abducted by a UFO. The album plotted the band's course for the next three years: a hairy, radioactive blend of numbing repetition, science-fiction and primitive rock'n'-roll, a plan which reached its highest orbit with *The Space Ritual Alive*, recorded in Brixton and Liverpool, and at which Lemmy was apparently so incapacitated by drugs he had to ask how many steps he could move from his amp before falling offstage. Interestingly, "Orgone Accumulator" from this album may be the most swinging, expansive performance he has ever given.

EXTRAS: This box adds two live LPs, the stodgy **6/10** *Greasy Truckers Party* from 1972, and 1974's 1999 *Party*, and a useful singles comp, but you wonder if including the Barney Bubbles-designed, slickly edited *Roadhawks* wouldn't have done the job better.

JOHN ROBINSON



HERMAN'S HERMITS

The Best Of Herman's Hermits: The 50th Anniversary Anthology

BEAR FAMILY

8/10 Unabashed pop galore from the Beat era's perkier band; most in stereo for the first time

In context, competing with the spectacle of The Who and Jimi Hendrix, they were laughed off; that became even easier in the wake of insufferable novelties like "Mrs Brown You've Got A Lovely Daughter" and "I'm Henry VIII, I Am". Fifty years on, though, and heard with new ears, Herman's highlights peg them as one of the Beat era's sprightliest, most spirited exemplars. Radio airplay was the goal, and the search for the hook cuts across this set at every available juncture. Beyond certain lowest-common-denominator overtures, they had some great ones – pegging them as pioneers of powerpop: "No Milk Today", with its dark and glorious bridge, compares nicely to early Kinks or Zombies; "It's Alright", the ferocious rocker you didn't think they had in them; or "Here Comes The Star", wonderfully subversive, with an orchestral buildup worthy of prime-time Bee Gees. Even some of the more innocuous numbers – "Can't You Hear My Heartbeat" – for all their simplicity, exude a rather magnetic charm.

EXTRAS: As the first example of Bear Family **9/10** delving into '60s rock'n'roll, this exemplary package features a 140-page booklet, reminiscences by Peter Noone and photos galore.

LUKE TORN



THE JAM

About The Young Idea - The Very Best Of The Jam

POLYDOR

All the usual mod cons + two rarities

There are now almost three times as many

compilation albums dedicated to The Jam as there are original studio albums. What makes this one worth buying? There are two 'new' pieces of content. The first is a 33-second radio ad for "In The City", which features an edit of the song over which an uncredited male voice announces, "It's 'In The City', it's a new single by The Jam. It's 'In The City', it's in shops now." The second is a previously unreleased demo of *In The City* album track, "Takin' My Love". This rawer version foregrounds Weller's choppy guitar riffs and Foxton's fierce bass moves – it's very Dr Feelgood – but otherwise there's little to differentiate it from the finished album version. These two rarities aside, this 47-track collection – released to coincide with a Jam exhibition at London's Somerset House – reminds us of Weller's remarkable achievements between 1977 and 1982. It's not just marquee hits that count – "Town Called Malice" and so on – but the quieter moments like "Liza Radley", the folky, melancholic portrait of a girl prone to "Creeping 'cross summer lawns at midnight" or the charming "English Rose" ("Caught the first train home/To be at her side") which throw forward to the maturity of his later work.

EXTRAS: None.

MICHAEL BONNER

HOW TO BUY... KATHLEEN HANNA

From riot grrrl to electroclash



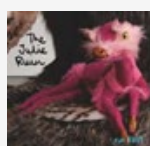
BIKINI KILL

Pussy Whipped

KILL ROCK STARS, 1988

Seething scene anthem "Rebel Girl" – produced by one of the band's heroes, Joan Jett of The Runaways – is a song of queer grrrl solidarity, while "Lil Red" takes symbols of feminine beauty and refigures them as tools of threat: "These are my long red nails/The better to scratch out your eyes."

9/10



THE JULIE RUIN

Run Fast

DISCORD, 2013

Hanna takes the title of her 1998 solo LP and turns it into a band. Falling somewhere between the grrrl garage of Bikini Kill and the arch electroclash of Le Tigre, it's a hit regardless. There's slinky girl group call-and-response ("Just My Kind"), some B-52s-style silliness ("Party City"), and some fabulously tart lyrics: "Just like Jim Jones you're charismatic," goes "Ha Ha Ha".

8/10



The Punk Singer

DIRECTOR: SINI ANDERSON, 2013

Docu-film charting Hanna's life and work, from her troubled childhood and early activism, through Bikini Kill and Le Tigre, to her 2005 disappearance – due to a struggle with Lyme disease. Great archive footage and interviews.

8/10

LOUIS PATTISON



LE TIGRE

Le Tigre (reissue, 1999) WIJJA

Feminist party songs from Kathleen Hanna and friends

Two years after the dissolution of riot grrrl progenitors Bikini Kill, frontwoman Kathleen Hanna convened a live group to play the songs of her solo project, Julie Ruin. But *Le Tigre* soon matured into a quite different beast. Armed with cheap electronic equipment and samplers, Hanna and her bandmates, filmmaker Sadie Benning and 'zine writer Johanna Fateman, conspired on 12 tracks of hooky electro-punk that smuggled in grrrl politics amid the hip shimmies and hand jives. "Hot Topic" lists feminist pioneers from Yoko Ono to Gertrude Stein to genderqueer artist Vaginal Creme Davis over girl-group chorusing and a grooving drum break. "What's Yr Take on Cassavetes" ponders the legacy of the filmmaker ("Genius! Misogynist! Messiah! Alcoholic!") over fuzzy guitar scrawl. And the strident caterwaul Hanna adopts on "Deceptacon" suggests that some of Bikini Kill's righteous fire remains, even when Le Tigre's samplers are set to "fill dancefloor". As an album, *Le Tigre* is undeniably frontloaded, with most of the best songs out the door come the second half – although the Northern Soul-tinged "My My Metrocard", an NYC hymn in which Mayor Giuliani is called "a fucking jerk", is a definite highlight.

EXTRAS: None.

LOUIS PATTISON



GARNET MIMMS

Looking For You - The Complete UA & Veeep Singles

KENT

Twenty-eight-track best-of from overlooked '60s soulster

Mimms is one of the overlooked voices in the land of plenty that is 1960s soul. He hit big and early with 1963's "Cry Baby", a mid-tempo sobber that lingered throughout the decade, being later covered by Janis Joplin (a big fan), but thereafter his output was fitful. Mimms had a smooth, gospel-soaked style but lacked the personality of a Solomon Burke or Wilson Pickett, and relied on others to generate his songs. His move from Philadelphia to New York to work with producers/writers Bert Berns and Jerry Ragovoy was his passport to the charts, with the duo delivering forceful material like "A Little Bit Of Soap" and "It Was Easier To Hurt Her"; slick urban soul with elaborate orchestration and an unusually powerful female backing trio that included Cissy Houston and Dionne Warwick. This collection cuts to the chase; no album fillers, just the work the team had faith in. Early outings like "Don't Change Your Heart" and "Baby Don't You Weep" have a sultry, almost doo-wop feel, which mutated into brasher pieces like "My Baby" (also covered by Joplin) and "As Long As I Have You", a Northern soul standard (and early Led Zeppelin favourite). Patchy but, at best, still classy.

EXTRAS: None.

NEIL SPENCER



MISSION OF BURMA Signals, Calls, And Marches/ Vs (reissues, 1981, 1982)

FIRE

Bostonian post-punkers' earlier triumphs

Prophetically, the tape ran out in the closing seconds of "That's How I Escaped My Certain Fate" – the final song on Mission Of Burma's 1982 debut LP. The noisy Bostonians deactivated soon afterwards, co-lead Roger Miller unable to stave off tinnitus, despite wearing rifle-range earmuffs onstage.

Clint Conley and Miller's bookish urgency was, in retrospect, the next step on from the ghostie groove of Pere Ubu: a less Byrdsy weirdness than the early REM – who later covered the band's 1980 debut single "Academy Fight Song". That features on this expanded version of debut EP, "Signals, Calls, And Marches", which owes something to Wire – and on the twinkly "All World Cowboy Romance" – a little more to Television. The full-length Vs, meanwhile, is bigger and cleverer: arena rock in dub on "Trem Two" and the Modern Lovers' "Roadrunner" gone bad on "The Ballad Of Johnny Burma", the great barrier riff at the end of "Einstein's Day" suggests Mission Of Burma might have been commercial contenders, too, had the tape kept rolling.

EXTRAS: A clutch of single sides and some

8/10 contemporary detritus on both discs.

JIM WIRTH



PROCOL HARUM Procol Harum (reissue, 1968)

ESOTERIC

They skipped the light fandango and the crowd cried out for more...

Released in January 1968 six months after "A Whiter

Shade Of Pale" had defined the Summer Of Love, Procol Harum's debut album was shoddily produced by Denny Cordell in mono – a strange decision for a musically ambitious band who were among the earliest prog-rock pioneers. Newly remastered and now presented both in the original mono mix and in stereophonic glory, the album perhaps shines more brightly today than it did at the time. The kaftan-ed prog-isms are heard at their rococo best on the allegorical "Conquistador" and the layered "Repent Walpurgis". But the epic tendencies are leavened by a surprisingly tough blues-rock vibe on "Cerde (Outside The Gates Of)" and "A Christmas Camel", dominated by Robin Trower's stinging guitar, Matthew Fisher's moody Hammond and Gary Brooker's soulful singing, which in places sounds remarkably like Steve Winwood.

EXTRAS: Expanded to two discs, the original

7/10 album is augmented by a generous 27 bonus tracks, including the classic singles "A Whiter Shade Of Pale" and "Homburg", rare B-sides, alternate takes and a brace of never previously released BBC sessions from 1967. The group's second, third and fourth albums are also being reissued in similarly expanded edition.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE Live At The Fillmore East, October 4th & 5th, 1968

EPIC/LEGACY

8/10 Proto-funk pioneers captured in full flower

just as they were about to take us higher

Sylvester Stewart had nearly perfected his recipe for populist psychedelic soul when he brought his band, which had been together for a year and a half, to the East Village bastion of eclectic cool shortly after the release of *Life*. What they had going for them was the irresistible recent hit single "Dance To The Music" and giddy reports from the West Coast about their electrifying live performances, and those two factors were enough to draw curious New Yorkers to their four-show headlining run. Stone had yet to write many of the band's classics, but the myriad innovations he'd dreamed up with his talented cohorts – including the hot-potato trading off of staccato horn riffs, Larry Graham's bass, celebratory lyrics espousing community and diversity, racing rhythms and acid-rock flourishes – were all delectably present that weekend. The release of the chart-topping "Everyday People" a month after the Fillmore shows resulted in the scrapping of a planned live album; these four crisply recorded shows comprise what Epic would have had to draw from. The entirety of it finally appears 47 years later, a super-funky artefact.

EXTRAS: None.

BUD SCOPPA



THOMAS JEFFERSON SLAVE APARTMENTS Straight To Video (reissue, 1997)

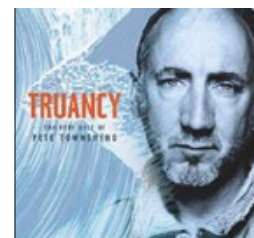
ANYWAY RECORDS

8/10 Long-needed vinyl re-up for lost underground gem

As a key member of American gutter-punk gang Great Plains, Ron House helped build the underground that fostered now-legendary labels like Siltbreeze; Great Plains also birthed a number of excellent '90s outfits, like Don Howland's Bassholes, or Mike Rep & The Quotas (Michael Hummel and friends). But House has always felt like the overseer of the scene, the litmus test and ideologue. So when Thomas Jefferson Slave Apartments reared their heads, releasing a clutch of obscure singles on various indies, they mustn't have expected to eventually be headhunted by an imprint of Rick Rubin's American Recordings: in the post-grunge fall-out, though, anything briefly seemed mad enough to be possible. *Straight To Video* was the outcome of this unholy union and it's always felt like a record that slipped ungracefully through the cracks, despite being close to the band's finest hour. Everything that makes a great Ron House LP is here – guitars that chime and grunt with equal vim, a no-nonsense rhythm section that plays with the rigorous minimalism of peak-era Wire, House's wound-up vocals and droll lyrics. It's a thrilling listen, none more so than when the Apartments hit maximum velocity, on scouring listens like "Rump Government".

EXTRAS: None.

JON DALE



PETE TOWNSHEND Truancy

UNIVERSAL

Who guitarist's solo highlights collected

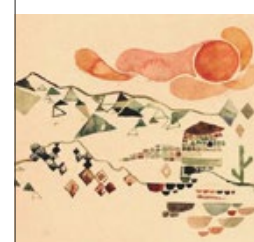
The cutely titled *Truancy* is a compilation of Pete Townshend's

7/10 solo highlights, which effectively condenses the 2005 double-album *Anthology* down to a single disc, with a couple of new tracks added as bait. The themes remain fairly consistent throughout – the struggle for self, explorations of the spiritual realm and examinations of the alienations of life – as does Townshend's penchant for amalgamating simple, direct riffs with convoluted arrangements, as ranging here from the unused *Lifeshouse/Who's Next* demo of "Pure And Easy", through the David Gilmour co-write "White City Fighting" to "English Boy" from *Psychoderelict*. The best tracks include a louché, longer "Let's See Action" demo, and the sexually ambiguous Pistols tribute "Rough Boys".

EXTRAS: New tracks "Guantanamo" and

5/10 "How Can I Help You". The first is a gritty, bluesy drone-rocker mixing acoustic guitars with drum loops and pulsing electronic tones, Townshend growling "Down in Guantanamo, they still got the ball and chain... There's smoke in the forest/And the tumour is growing large." "How I Can Help You", meanwhile, is a solicitous entreaty to a "valued colleague", according to Townshend.

ANDY GILL



WILLIAM TYLER Deseret Canyon

MERGE

2008 solo debut of a subtle guitar hero, rescued from obscurity

Once the dust has settled after Record Store Day, and the limited-edition Red

8/10 House Painters boxsets have been flipped multiple times on eBay, there may still be some excellent, less heralded albums still lurking out there in the racks. In 2014, one such gem was a flaming live album by Chris Forsyth's Solar Motel and, this year, there's a decent chance you might still be able to track down this lovely, understated instrumental set by another modern guitar master. Tyler's solo career is reasonably well-established now, thanks to expansive post-Fahey meditations like 2013's *Impossible Truth*. In 2008, however, he was a more anonymous figure in the background of Lambchop and Silver Jews sessions, with a solo album, on an obscure German label (Apparent Extent), released under the name of The Paper Hats. *Deseret Canyon* is that album, belatedly reissued under Tyler's own name, and a critical part of a stealthily impressive solo catalogue. As with *Impossible Truth*, moments recall David Pajo's dreamy rewiring of "Turn, Turn, Turn" (cf: "Parliament Of Birds"), but there's a satisfying range here: stately Takoma School fingerpicking; scrabbling, fuzzed-out electric jams; even a phased ambience that further emphasises the widescreen possibilities of Tyler's strikingly evocative music.

EXTRAS: None.

JOHN MULVEY

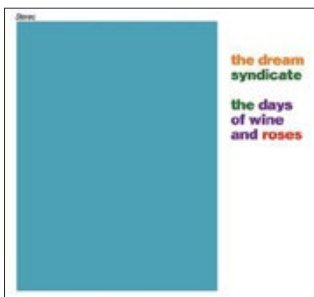


THE DREAM SYNDICATE

The Days Of Wine And Roses

OMNIVORE RECORDINGS

Steve Wynn's leaders of the Paisley Underground pack remastered, plus unreleased rehearsals. *By Nick Hasted*



8/10

In the US, where The Replacements, Hüsker Dü and hardcore were at least forging an underground response to the times, Steve Wynn remembers even punk already feeling “about a million years ago”, as its energy splintered into inward-turning ghettos.

LA's '60s-pining Paisley Underground, creatively led by Wynn's The Dream Syndicate, with The Rain Parade and nascent Bangles in its ranks, was a radical movement because it reactivated a scorned past. When The Dream Syndicate's first UK single “Tell Me When It's Over” was played on Radio 1 it sounded like a sudden beacon of hope, as did REM's “Radio Free Europe” and, soon, Green On Red. More than The Doors and Love records encoded in the Bunnymen's DNA, The Dream Syndicate threw a shameless life-line to the sharpest '60s and '70s music: “CCR, Crazy Horse, and Bob Dylan”, their US label's ad noted; the VU, every review added, and Big Star and the Stones. Wynn's obsessive purchase of every Postcard record he could find in LA absorbed Young Scotland's ransacking of recent history, too.

These influences seem so obvious now. They weren't then. These days, when outrunning rock's past is a full-time job few are applying for, The Dream Syndicate's debut LP should sound embarrassingly redundant, their mission having succeeded all too well. In fact, benefitting from only having the budget for a single small-hours session, *The Days Of Wine And Roses* is as timelessly potent as the records that

IN 1982, GUITAR music's lights seemed to be blinking out all over Europe, as an ascendant synth-pop declared the sound dead. Nostalgia for the '60s was a laughable idea barely a decade after its end, as pop continued its apparently ceaseless drive into the future.

inspired it. A snare-snap like a starter-pistol opens “Tell Me When It's Over”, which guitarist Karl Precoda's fuzz-heavy riff tunnels through, while, with “Stuck Inside Of Mobile...” surely on his mind, Wynn wearily repeats the title phrase. What that phrase's “it” might be is left mysterious, on an album whose lyrics Literature major Wynn leaves oblique, though the unhealthy habits and affairs they allude to in LA after dark seem plain. The music's power starts with a rhythm section, drummer Dennis Duck particularly, which shapes every song with a streamlined, sharp momentum more of its time than the '60s. The Paisley Underground was tagged a psychedelic revival, but punk's example means the pace here rarely relents.

Precoda's guitar meanwhile indulges the band's fantasy that John Coltrane and Archie Shepp's jazz explorations were theirs to command, as well as garage rock's rowdy treasures. “Definitely Clean” is

TRACKLIST

- 1 Tell Me When It's Over
 - 2 Definitely Clean
 - 3 That's What You Always Say
 - 4 Then She Remembers
 - 5 Halloween
 - 6 When You Smile
 - 7 Until Lately
 - 8 Too Little, Too Late
 - 9 The Days Of Wine And Roses
- Previously unissued rehearsal tapes
- 10 Is It Rolling, Bob?
 - 11 A Reason
 - 12 Still Holding On To You
 - 13 Armed With An Empty Gun
 - 14 Like Mary
 - 15 Outside The Dream Syndicate

some sort of Stonesy 20th nervous breakdown, until Precoda's seesawing solo comes on like a speed-freak's electric misunderstanding of modal jazz. Then the climactic title track unfurls The Dream Syndicate's whole, wild repertoire: psychedelia at punk pace, barely disguised chunks of “Subterranean Homesick Blues”, a guitar blast like a foghorn in morse code, and the drawled, half-ironic nostalgia of Wynn, a

young man in the age of Reagan, not Aquarius.

The six 1982 rehearsal tracks which replace the extras on Rhino's 2001 edition obviously lack the on-the-fly pop perfection that instinctively disciplines the album's experiments. Songs destined for 1984's Sandy Pearlman-produced *Medicine Show* instead gain a raw, echoing toughness. Among several unreleased, unremarkable songs, the eight-and-a-half-minute “Like Mary” is a motorik jam with garage explosions.

The Dream Syndicate led the way into the '80s “post post-punk universe”, Steve Shelley declares in a booklet of peers' testimonials. The rehearsals show they had more common ground with the East Coast experiments of Sonic Youth (barely recorded in 1982) than was obvious back then. But the alchemising of the '60s' most exciting moments into a lucid '80s classic is The Dream Syndicate's singular achievement.

Q&A

Steve Wynn



Had you heard these rehearsal tracks since you recorded them?

Not since I took the cassette back home that night. Tapes deteriorate, and sometimes good ideas, as well. But it shocked me how modern it sounded. One reason is we were into all the good stuff. People look back and think The Dream Syndicate was this forerunner of Americana. I was as enamoured as anything by what was happening in England. And I can hear it when I hear that record now. There's a way I'm singing that I never really did again, that has a bit of Julian Cope and Ian McCulloch and Mark E Smith.

1982 was the high-water mark of synth-pop, when many people thought guitar music was on the way out. Were you making a stand with this music? Definitely. In interviews, a question that came up way too often was, “Now, why are you playing guitars? Are you trying to make a statement?” It was seen as this anachronistic, perverse choice.

What do you remember of recording the album? To me it seems like yesterday. There was no budget. And we got cheaper rates starting at midnight. We got going then and finished the whole record at eight in the morning, and all went straight to work at our day jobs. That wasn't a weird time to be up at that point in our lives anyway. And it adds this weird fuzziness and haziness, and took the preciousness off. It caught us on a good night.

INTERVIEW: NICK HASTED

Specialist

Karin Krog



KARIN KROG

Don't Just Sing: An Anthology: 1963-1999

LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

9/10

Gorgeous, lamp-lit jazz, improvisation and electronics, Norwegian-style

She may be the most respected jazz vocalist in Norway, but word of Karin Krog's fluid, freewheeling approach to the genre seems to have stopped, mostly, at the edges of the continent. Save for a few potential crossover moments in the

noughties – Crippled Dick Hot Wax! released the *Raindrops, Raindrops* retrospective in 2002, accompanied with a remix EP from British house/electronica master Matthew Herbert – and some appearances on ECM, Krog's a relatively unknown quantity, something that might change with *Don't Just Sing*.

Born in 1937 in Oslo, Norway, Krog released the first solo jazz album in Norway, *By Myself*, in 1964, but her most startling music was made across the late '60s and the '70s, with records such as 1968's *Joy* – which featured saxophonist Jan Garbarek in one of his earliest appearances on vinyl – 1974's *We Could Be Flying*, with American pianist Steve Kuhn, and 1978's *Cloud Line Blue* collaboration with English multi-instrumentalist John Surman.

Indeed, these three albums form the backbone of *Don't Just Sing*, and compiler Pat Thomas has selected some of the most compelling music from these albums: *Joy*'s "Lazy Afternoon" gives us Krog as an exploratory vocalist, as in love with the sound of the words as their meaning. "That was the first album I released myself," Krog recalls, "I thought the music was interesting, but it was a bit too far out for the ordinary companies... Well, I didn't even ask them, really."

Krog was also a quiet pioneer, playing with early electronics like Echoplex units and Oberheim ring modulators to place subtle stress and nuance onto her recorded voice. By the time of 1974's *We Could Be Flying*, these were fully integrated, and she had assembled a particularly great band – Kuhn on keyboards, Steve Swallow on bass, and Jon Christensen on drums – for a career-defining record.

"Yeah, I agree," she chuckles, "it's a fantastic band. I still, of course, work with Steve Kuhn... He was living in Sweden at the time, and we worked a bit, over the border, and then Steve Swallow came, so I said, 'Couldn't we do an album?' It went very well."

You could do little better than listen to the album's title track, a gorgeous, oceanic flood of texture, Krog draping a rich melody across the sky and then swooning into the night air, Kuhn's piano splintering beneath her.

EXTRAS: Interview with Krog and liner notes in booklet.

7/10 JON DALE



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Dust On The Nettles

GRAPEFRUIT

Vast sampling of British folk's late-'60s evolution

The lumpen coverall "British folk scene"

7/10

obscures a hefty developmental narrative, with its myriad splinterings into sub-genres, its revivals and lapses, its crosscurrents of influence both within the genre and across contemporary rock and pop, its clashing/complementary orthodoxies and its mixed cast of lauded leading lights and overlooked eccentrics. *Dust On The Nettles* sensibly chooses to focus on just one chapter of this complex history – the six years from 1967-'72, when the underground embraced keepers of the traditional flame and progressive types, acoustic and electric alike – but it still requires 63 tracks (over three CDs), plus a 36-page booklet, to do the job. Luminaries like Pentangle, Fairport Convention, The Incredible String Band, Steeleye Span, Vashti Bunyan, Bill Fay and Anne Briggs all feature, alongside rare cuts from the obscure likes of Dry Heart and Oberon, whose "Minas Tirith" is off their 1971 album, of which just 150 copies were pressed. Various local scenes are represented, too, including Bristol (by Folkal Point) and the Isle Of Wight (reissue faves Shide & Acorn). Nuggety enough to satisfy folk freaks, *Dust...* should also please the casually curious, the attention paid to balancing its content making a one-sitting listen surprisingly easy-going.

EXTRAS: None.

SHARON O'CONNELL



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Miniatures (reissue, 1980)

MEGAPHONE/KNOCK 'EM DEAD

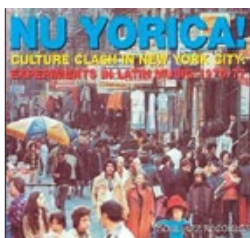
Fifty-one tiny studies, a snapshot of the early '80s underground

7/10

You couldn't make it up: before realising *Miniatures*, an edited suite of 51 one-minute pieces, keyboardist Morgan Fisher had formed his own prog rock group, Morgan, with Queen's original singer Tim Staffell, briefly joined the Third Ear Band, spent some time with Mott The Hoople, appearing on "All The Young Dudes", before going solo, releasing a beautiful, underrated ambient set, *Slow Music*, and his wild *Hybrid Kids* record. But *Miniatures* still feels like his most audacious concept. Fisher's ears were strange receptors, picking up on the undercurrents coursing through the underground – European RIO, weirdo American electronic punk, post-Canterbury prog, free jazz and pop renegades. And while there are plenty of 'big' names – Andy Partridge, Robert Wyatt, Thunderclap Newman, Neil Innes, Robert Fripp, Quentin Crisp, Pete Seeger – some of the best miniatures come from the LP's stranger corners: a surprisingly gorgeous acoustic lament by John Otway; Ivor Cutler's droll "Brooch Boat"; David Cunningham's "Index Of Ends", which sounds like it fell off the back of a Flying Lizards album; and Half Japanese's brutalised, bruised cover of The Rolling Stones' "Paint It, Black".

EXTRAS: None.

JON DALE



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Nu Yorica! Culture Clash In New York City: Experiments In Latin Music 1970-77 SOUL JAZZ

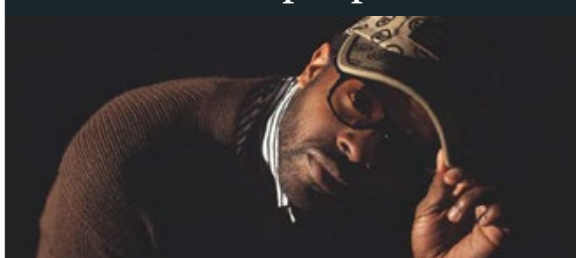
9/10 Expanded re-release of landmark Latin comp

When this two-disc collection was first released, nearly two decades back, it was something of a revelation for many of us. We'd heard jazz musicians plodding through Cuban pastiches, and watched grotesque parodies of salsa on *Come Dancing*, but we'd never heard Latin music like this. The tracks here are a result of the crosstown traffic among New York's black and Latino populations in the '70s, mixing up funky bugalú, son and salsa with big-band funk and psychedelia. There are wah-wah-heavy funk workouts from Joe Bataan and Cortijo; frenetic Cubop masterpieces from Cachao and Machito; and Afro-Cuban percussion workouts from the likes of Stone Alliance. Each disc ends with a lengthy masterpiece: Eddie Palmieri's 1973 track "Un Dia Bonito" is a 15-minute prog salsa epic which starts as a modernist piano sonata, drenched in futuristic reverb and laced with bebop flourishes, while the Machito Orchestra's 14-minute "Macho" starts as an anthropological field recording and ends up as a space-age, big-band jazz symphony.

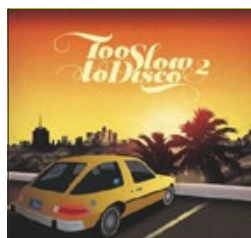
EXTRAS: This reissue omits some tracks from **7/10** the original and bolts on five bonus tracks, including Ricardo Morera's fearsomely funky "My Friend" and some tightly arranged workouts from Ocho and the Palmieri brothers. **JOHN LEWIS**

REVELATIONS

Adrian Young: the Tarantino of orchestral hip-hop



➤ Adrian Young specialises in cinematic soundscapes that mix contemporary beats and rhymes with knowingly retro arrangements steeped in the warm, organic, analogue richness of late '60s and early '70s soul. Outside his work writing and producing for R&B royalty including Jay Z, Ghostface Killah and Bilal, the LA-based polymath is also a soundtrack composer and connoisseur of vintage European movie scores. As his new retrospective *Linear Labs: Los Angeles* shows, Young often crafts his LPs like audio movies. Ennio Morricone, he argues, was heavily influenced by black American soul, jazz and pop. Young initially combined music with a career as an entertainment law professor, but something had to give. "Much as I love the law, I honestly can't do both any more." Though he's still awaiting a call from his dream collaborator Quentin Tarantino, he is busy with many projects including *Twelve Reasons To Die II*, which he calls "the type of Wu-Tang album that would have been released circa '74 had RZA been procured to create a blaxploitation horror score." Now that sounds like a soundtrack worth hearing. **STEPHEN DALTON**



VARIOUS ARTISTS

DJ Supermarkt: Too Slow To Disco Volume 2

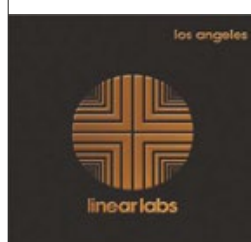
HOW DO YOU ARE

Retro-kitsch revivalist welcomes you back to the Hotel California

7/10

If you like piña coladas, and getting caught in the rain, then Berlin-based DJ Supermarkt's second archive anthology of lightly funky yacht rock from the '70s and '80s will be a sunny delight. Vintage West Coast soft-rock has increased in retro-hipster currency lately, partly thanks to the knowing appropriations of Daft Punk and Phoenix. Indeed, the liquid guitar surges that propel Eric Kaz's "Come With Me" and Dave Raynor's "Leave Me Alone Tonight", two rarities included here, would slot effortlessly into *Random Access Memories*. But behind the sunshine lie some dark stories: preacher's son Jimmy Gray Hall, who beatifically croons the obscure Northern Soul favourite "Be That Way", later became a drug casualty and bank robber, dying in a police shoot-out at 35. R&J Stone, the British husband-and-wife pair who duet on the soft-soul smoocher "Keep On Holding Me", fell victim to alcoholism and terminal illness. There is plenty of frictionless funk-pop and inessential Instagram nostalgia here, but also irony-free gems like the sumptuous orch-disco workout "If You Want It" by one-hit wonders Niteflyte, or Michael Nesmith's trippy "Capsule", the kind of psych-art-funk novelty record David Byrne might have made if he was a recovering Monkee. **EXTRAS:** None.

STEPHEN DALTON



ADRIAN YOUNGE

Linear Labs: Los Angeles

LINEAR LABS

LA producer bridges the gap between Stereolab and the Wu-Tang Clan

7/10

More than most hip-hop producers, Adrian Young is probably aware of the challenges regarding sample clearance – when not in the studio, he worked as a professor of entertainment law. His practical solution to licensing the right beat, a few years ago, was to teach himself to play a range of instruments and create his own soundbeds, showcased on this useful compilation of past and present projects. Young is an eclectic facilitator in the vein of Dan The Automator or, perhaps less appealingly, Mark Ronson. So while his R&B and hip-hop roots are well-represented – "Return Of The Savage" is a strong, organic reconstruction of the Wu-Tang aesthetic, featuring Ghostface Killah, Raekwon and RZA – there are also baroque instrumentals like "1969 Organ" that have something of Portishead's crepuscular charm. The retro-futurist fetish is further emphasised by a guest turn from Stereolab veteran Lætitia Sadier on the harpsichord-and-breakbeats gem "Memories Of War"; a nice addition, alongside guest spots with Common and Tyler The Creator, to her career as unlikely hip-hop muse. **EXTRAS:** None.

JOHN MULVEY

COMING NEXT MONTH...



➤ August can be a quiet month in the schedule, but this year there are a host of exciting releases in store. After the lush atmospheres of *Bloom* and *Teen Dream*, **Beach**

House return with the sparser *Depression Cherry*, while **HEALTH** take a break from soundtracking video games to release *Death Magic*, their first album for six years.

Destroyer unleash more sax appeal with *Poison Season*, with early signs suggesting less yacht rock, more classic rock, than on 2012's acclaimed *Kaputt*. In the psychedelic corner, White Fence maestro Tim Presley teams up with Cate Le Bon as **Drinks**, whose *Hermits On Holiday* album promises to be a lo-fi, trippy delight.

On a quieter note, **Yo La Tengo** release a sequel to 1990's hushed *Fakebook*, entitled *Stuff Like That There* – it tantalisingly includes a version of The Cure's "Friday I'm In Love" – while **Iris DeMent** sets texts by Russian poet Anna Akhmatova to music on *The Trackless Woods*.

It's also a bumper month for archive releases. **The Who** continue their seven-inch singles series, **Bert Jansch's** *Live At The 12 Bar* gets its vinyl debut, and **Led Zeppelin** are set to

complete their reissue saga with *Presence*, *In Through The Out Door* and *Coda*. Expect some serious extras.



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10 A true classic 9 Essential 8 Excellent
7 Very good 6 Good 4-5 Mediocre 1-3 Poor

THIS MONTH: ORNETTE COLEMAN | 3 WOMEN | THE GAME

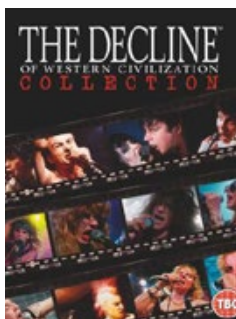


Hardcore! Director Penelope Spheeris

THE DECLINE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

SHOUT! FACTORY

Lauded LA trilogy finally gets its own boxset. By Rob Hughes



9/10

Civilization (Parts I-III) ultimately rests on Spheeris' candid and highly contrary depictions of the hardcore punk movement and the emergence of hair-metal.

Shot between December 1979 and May 1980, the first film features a scrum of hardcore bands – Black Flag, Germs, X, Circle Jerks, Catholic Discipline, Fear – and the chaos that surrounds them. It's a fascinating, if gruelling, insight into a nihilistic world of fierce noise, crowd violence and its attendant characters. Germs singer Darby Crash (dead from a heroin overdose before the film was released) cuts a fairly pitiful figure, be it loaded on stage, frying eggs in his squalid apartment or playing with a pet tarantula. Exasperated Germs manager Nicole Panter likens her job to being a mother of three-year-olds: "Sometimes I want to batter my children."

THIS VIVID SERIES of documentaries from director Penelope Spheeris, examining three distinct facets of Los Angeles subculture across two decades, has taken on an almost mythic status over time. That's partly down to the films' unavailability – until now that is – on DVD; but the reputation of *The Decline Of Western*

The punk scene itself appears to have very little direction, cohesion or, it has to be said, sense of community. Lee Ving, for instance, incites a full-on riot at a Fear gig, hurling homophobic insults at anyone within spitting distance. It's a formless aggression that finds an echo in interviews with some of the fans, including a skinhead called Eugene and a chain-wielding character with an 'X' shaved onto his scalp. LA hardcore proved to be hugely influential, but at this point it merely seems intent on burning itself to the ground.

By contrast, *The Decline Of Western Civilisation Part II: The Metal Years* (1988) is a hedonistic romp through the heavy metal milieu of the Sunset Strip. It's a place where rock'n'roll and sex are twin pursuits, peopled by bands with names like Wet Cherry, Sex and Dirty Dawn. As Kiss frontman Paul Stanley puts it, while reclining on a bed with three doe-eyed groupies in various states of undress, rock'n'roll is "made by people who think with their crotches."

It's also a realm where comedy (often the unintentional kind) flirts with tragedy. From beneath vast canopies of hair, the rhythm section

gutterpunks of late-'90s LA, most of whom weren't born when Spheeris shot the first documentary. These are runaways from broken and abusive homes, reliant on each other for communal ballast and united by their outlier status in society and a devotion to neo-punk bands like Naked Aggression and Final Conflict.

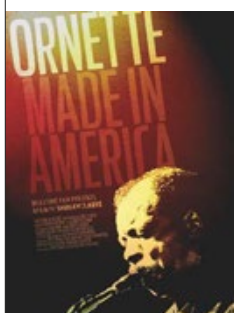
One of their number, an 18-year-old boy who lives in his van, is killed in a fire while drunk.

Nearly all of them admit to starting each day with a drink and no-one knows where they'll be in five years' time. Many are convinced they'll be dead. It's a profoundly moving piece of work and one that directly led to Spheeris becoming a foster parent. And, like all three of these extraordinary films, it's a remarkable portrait of both a musical climate and recent social history.

EXTRAS: The bonus disc 7/10 includes two Q&As

with Penelope Spheeris and various extended interviews. Each disc also comes with extras: footage of Fear, X and Germs, audio commentary by Spheeris and Dave Grohl, interviews with Lemmy, Aerosmith, Alice Cooper, Ozzy, Gene Simmons and more.

An extraordinary life: Ornette Coleman



ORNETTE MADE IN AMERICA

MILE FILMS

An impressionistic portrait of the free jazz giant

8/10

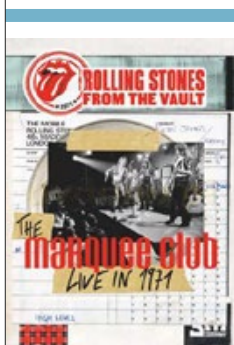
includes a landmark occasion. The film opens in the musician's hometown of Fort Worth, Texas and the declaration of that day (Sept 29, 1983) as Ornette Coleman Day. A local dignitary duly presents Coleman with the keys to the city in the form of a tie clip: "But you're not wearing a tie."

The easefulness with which Coleman (who died just as *Uncut* was going to press) confronted such occasions, indeed dealt with everything, is the tacit subject of this reissued film. Notionally rooted in Fort Worth, where Coleman is playing an orchestra date with his band, the film travels far and wide musically, geographically and philosophically, incorporating surprisingly digressions into the thinking of Buckminster Fuller, meetings with Brion Gysin and William Burroughs, and topics as far removed as castration, education and space travel. The mingling of the '80s footage with scrolling pixel subtitles and earlier archive material is strangely satisfying. Maybe as interesting as the playing are several informal conversations. Whether he's reminiscing with old friends about how Fort Worth sax man King Curtis was already "making heavy money" in New York by the time

Coleman arrived there, or chatting to journalist and musician Bob Palmer or his own son Denardo, what emerges is a great warmth and openness to new things. Denardo is an especially important figure here. It's one thing to see him playing drums with his dad in the hectic but strangely groovy freebop that was Coleman's 1983 mode. More surprising is to see him in rehearsal with his dad and bassist Charlie Haden in 1968, aged 10. It's not an issue – just a question of Coleman recognising his son's talent and embracing his potential.

There are some boggling moments to this open-mindedness. So keen to explore fidelity was he that Coleman approached a physician with a view to his castration. No less interesting was his '70s purchase of a former school on the Lower East Side where he hoped to develop a creative workshop and performance space. It was a rough area and Coleman was robbed, tied to a chair and beaten. "He crawled across the floor to phone me," Denardo recalls evenly. During another similar assault in the building, he sustained a punctured lung.

Still, he'd try anything. Perhaps it's the case that in spite of his unassuming manner (he spoke softly and with a lisp), Coleman's belief in his talent was such, he knew he could bring something powerful to any musical situation. Whatever, it's also been the recipe for an extraordinary life. **JOHN ROBINSON**



THE ROLLING STONES

From The Vault: The Marquee Club Live In 1971

EAGLE VISION

The Stones. Live. In 1971

The Stones conducted a short, sharp UK tour in March '71, a month before releasing *Sticky Fingers*, because they

planned to be out of the country by April for tax purposes. Filmed for US TV but rarely seen beyond murky bootlegs, this intimate final date sees them bidding farewell in their slinking, shirtless, shaggy satanic pomp, unveiling three tracks from the as-yet-unheard new album, including a monster "Bitch". Untouchable. (And untaxable.)

EXTRAS: Alternative takes, handsome 9/10 notes, plus the show on CD.

DAMIEN LOVE

10/10



CEMETERY WITHOUT CROSSES

ARROW FILMS

A fistful of fine French spaghetti

Also released as *The Rope And The Colt*, this 1969 French-Italian job is a tale of desolate desert revenge that rips off Leone, but it's also an admirable spaghetti

western in its own right. And it comes with a hefty bonus of cult trivia: it's directed by taciturn star Robert Hossein (previously one of heist classic *Rififi*'s hopeless hoods); it's written by Dario Argento; and it boasts a twanging Euro-cowboy theme song by Scott Walker: "My gun spells hope in the land where the rope and the Colt are king!"

EXTRAS: New Hossein interview, archive 9/10 interviews and making-of, trailers and a booklet.

DAMIEN LOVE

8/10



THE GAME

2 ENTERTAIN

Superior spy drama

From *Being Human* creator Toby Whithouse, this '70s-set six-parter artfully uses familiar genre tropes – the Cold War, double agents, a mole in MI5 – without falling into pastiche. A strong cast includes Brian Cox as the gruff agency head 'Mother', *Friday Night Dinner*'s Paul Ritter as his weasly No 2 and Tom Hughes (Chaz Jankel in *Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll*) as the young operative leading the charge to expose a dastardly plot launched by those pesky Soviets. Taking his cues from Le Carré rather than Fleming, Whithouse delivers story, character and dialogue with satisfying results.

EXTRAS: None.

MICHAEL BONNER

8/10



1864

ARROW FILMS

Goodbye Nordic noir, hello Nordic war

An eight-hour lesson on The Schleswig-Holstein Question – the complex, bloody 19th Century turf war between Denmark and the German Confederation – seems a hard sell. But this

sumptuous series makes it breathe, honing in on little moments spread across the historical canvas. The smallest details here are the biggest emotionally: two lowly brothers and the girl they both love, caught in the maw of events. With familiar faces from *Borgen*, *The Killing* and *The Legacy*, Scandi-fans will also relish the opportunity for Danish Bingo.

EXTRAS: None

DAMIEN LOVE

8/10



3 WOMEN

ARROW FILMS

Altman in the art house

Robert Altman has stated that he based his 1977 (dissolving) character study on a dream, but it's a fair bet he also chucked in a little Federico Fellini (specifically *8½*) and a bunch of Ingmar

Bergman (*Persona*). Sissy Spacek and Shelley Duvall are the two main women, Texans working in a California spa who share an apartment and then, mysteriously, their personalities. Altman has a cruel view of his characters, but weaves a bizarre, murky spell; Spacek and especially Duvall are terrific.

EXTRAS: Archive interviews, original 8/10 trailer, galleries and an extensive booklet.

DAMIEN LOVE

7/10

**“STUNNINGLY MOVING AND POWERFUL.
A MASTERPIECE”**



GQ



THE GUARDIAN



THE TIMES

“BRILLIANT”



THE INDEPENDENT

“AWE-INSPIRING”

SHORTLIST

“UNMISSABLE”



STYLIST



HEAT



HEYUGUYS



GRAZIA



EVENING STANDARD



FROM THE AWARD-WINNING TEAM BEHIND SENNA

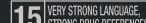
AMY

THE
GIRL
BEHIND
THE
NAME

PREVIEW & LIVE SATELLITE Q&A ON TUESDAY JUNE 30 - VISIT AMYFILM.CO.UK FOR PARTICIPATING VENUES



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IN CINEMAS JULY 3



Films

BY MICHAEL BONNER

This month: A fine Damned documentary, a life of Brian Wilson, Wilko Johnson's death-defying recovery, and the tragic story of Amy Winehouse...

The Damned: Don't You Wish That We Were Dead Watching Wes Orshoski's excellent new documentary about The Damned, you might wonder why no-one's ever made a film about them before. "They always gave the impression something bad could happen at any moment," says a former associate of the band, and as one anecdote (usually involving alcohol, violence, or most likely both) rolls into another, the story of The Damned emerges as one of punk's more compelling, lesser-told yarns. Orshoski charts the band's trajectory from the toilets of Fairfield Halls, Croydon ("One day, I found a turd that just would not flush," reveals former cleaner Captain Sensible) through the earliest days of punk ("They didn't think we were up to it," admits Mick Jones, a onetime band mate of guitarist Brian James) up to the band's recent US tour. The picture that emerges is of a band who thrive on a certain kind of chaos. The band's many personnel changes make for a colourful, if convoluted history, while conflicts continue today – particularly acrimony between Sensible and original drummer Rat Scabies. Interviewed by Orshoski, the four original members – Dave Vanian, James, Sensible and Scabies – sound a little like Pete and Dud characters by way of *The Young Ones*. Recalling an "average night" on The Damned's 1979 US tour, drummer Rat Scabies remembers, "There'd be fire engineers, police, dogs, and in the middle there'd be us, throwing water over each other." It is a rambling, complicated narrative, enlivened by complimentary interviews with the likes of Glen Matlock, Nick Mason and Lemmy, while Ian McKaye, Jello Biafra and Chris Stein provide an American perspective. The NY-based Orshoski does a good job outlining the UK punk scene for US audiences; along the way, perhaps inadvertently, he helps illustrate just how out of step with their contemporaries The Damned's larks were. "Can't do the dole queues of discontent, that's just not me," admits Sensible. Their antics might account for the way they never quite achieved the notoriety or success of the Pistols or The Clash; a fact Orshoski's film might go some way to rectifying.

► **Love & Mercy** Even by the standards of his contemporaries, Brian Wilson has lived an eventful life. While a less intuitive filmmaker might try and squash the full life story into a biopic, director Bill Pohlad and screenwriter Oren Moverman opt for a more nuanced take on their subject. *Love & Mercy* cuts between 1966 and in 1985, attempting to show how Wilson got from 'there' to 'here'.



Paul Dano plays '60s Brian, his head full of wonder, and John Cusack as the older version, still very much a "little boy in a man's body". We meet Dano's Wilson as he is becoming constricted by the band's early hits; he can already hear in his head the music that eventually coalesces into *Pet Sounds*. The sequences recreating that album's recording sessions are especially strong. We find Wilson bustling around the studio with the Wrecking Crew, evidently at his happiest, finessing notes on sheet music or bringing in his two dogs, Banana and Louie, to provide backing vocals. Later, a 360 degree panning shot during the sessions for "Good Vibrations" shows how far Wilson has moved away from his fellow Beach Boys: while he intently discusses the tempo of the strings, his brothers and cousin are pictured staring at magazines, on the 'phone or looking bored. It's all too much for Mike Love: "You're letting us down!" By the time of *SMiLE*, it has all become too much for Brian, too.

If Dano's iteration of Wilson is predicated around a kind of puppyish enthusiasm for music, Cusack's older model is inevitably more damaged. Or "Lonely scared frightened", as he writes on the back of a business card. Cusack does well here; he artfully navigates Wilson's medicated tics and mumbles in a way that allows for warmth throughout. Cusack is joined by Elizabeth Banks as Melinda Ledbetter, who becomes Wilson's second wife, and Paul Giamatti as Eugene Landy. Ledbetter is presented as the rescuing angel who prides Wilson from Landy's

pernicious control. Admittedly, this might be simplifying the truth but it provides Pohlad and Moverman with the narrative resolution they require. Banks and Giamatti do the best with their roles, though this is conventional drama when compared to the conspicuously more inspired handling of the '60s period.

► **The Ecstasy Of Wilko Johnson** Julien Temple's new film about Johnson takes its title from an unexpected state of euphoria the guitarist first experienced walking home after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. As he explains, Johnson felt "vividly alive... everything was tingling... present, future, past, it was all concentrated down into that moment." Since being given 10 months to live in January 2013, Johnson admits he has never felt so good. Indeed, Temple's follow-up to *Oil City Confidential* finds Johnson reflecting on his life and current circumstances with gleeful aplomb. Indeed, for much of the film, Johnson quite literally looks death in the face: in a nod to Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*, Temple shoots Johnson on the jetty at his native Canvey Island, recounting his extraordinary story over a game of chess with a hooded opponent. Footage from *A Matter Of Life And Death*, *Hamlet At Elsinore*, *Nosferatu* and *Orphée* offer complimentary views on death, meanwhile readings from Traherne, Marlowe, Blake and Milton underscore Johnson's former career as an English teacher. "It takes eight

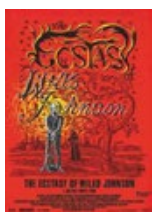
Reviewed this month...



**THE DAMNED:
DON'T YOU
WISH THAT WE
WERE DEAD**
Director Wes
Orshoski
Starring Captain
Sensible, Rat
Scabies
Opens tbc
Cert 15
9/10



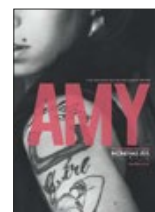
LOVE & MERCY
Director Bill
Pohlad
Starring Paul
Dano, John
Cusack
Opens July 10
Cert 12A
8/10



**THE ECSTASY
OF WILKO
JOHNSON**
Director Julien
Temple
Starring Wilko
Johnson, Roger
Daltrey
Opens July 17
Cert 12A
8/10



IRIS
Director Albert
Maysles
Starring Iris
Apfel, Carl Apfel
Opens July 31
Cert U
9/10



AMY
Director Asif
Kapadia
Starring Amy
Winehouse, Mitch
Winehouse
Opens July 3
Cert 15
8/10



The Damned at The Roxy, London, February 1977

and a half hours with a break for lunch to read *Paradise Lost*,” he mentions in passing.

While some of the film inevitably overlaps with *Oil City Confidential* – in particular, the histories of Canvey Island and Johnson’s old band, Dr Feelgood – the focus is on Johnson and his own wide-ranging interests, including astronomy and Viking lore. Naturally, it is inspiring stuff. Given his deadline, Johnson embarks on a farewell tour, beginning in Japan – “A great piece of showbusiness,” he observes approvingly. “Everybody’s crying and that. It’s fantastic!” A final encore of “Johnny B Goode” assumes talismanic properties. An LP with Roger Daltrey is hastily convened and becomes a success: Johnson finds himself on the chat show circuit. It seems, despite the predictable outcome, great fun. But though there is a happy ending – dear reader, he lives! – at the same time, Johnson’s survival presents another set of problems. The life-saving surgery leaves him a diabetic; the mental impact of surviving is equally stressful, as he wrestles with loneliness and melancholia. Johnson’s conclusion – “I wasn’t supposed to be here at all, so it’s all a bonus” – at least provides an uplifting coda to Temple’s film.

► **Iris** When Iris Apfel was a young woman making a start in the fashion industry, New York department store founder Frieda Loehmann took her to one side and said, “You’re not pretty and you’ll never be pretty. But it doesn’t matter. You have something much better. You have style.” Apfel – now aged 93 – still has style. The subject of Albert Maysles’ penultimate documentary, she can be found dispensing hard-won practical wisdom to aspiring models during on-stage Q&A sessions, reminiscing about the luxury fabric company she founded with her husband who redecorated the White House for nine presidents, or simply shopping for trinkets in Harlem clothing stores.

“I don’t have rules,” she explains with salty New York candour, “because if I did, I’d always be breaking them.” An adventurous mind with an uncompromising dress sense, Iris is a fascinating subject for Maysles (who died in March, aged 88). She was well into her ’80s when she became an It girl, the subject of an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2005. Prior to that, she had enjoyed a successful career at Old World Weavers, along with her husband Carl. They began working at the White House for Truman: “Had a problem with Jackie,” frowns Carl before being shushed by his wife. Today, Iris’ clothes and accessories fill several rooms in the Apfels’ Park Avenue apartment as well as their Palm Beach condo and her mother’s house. Early in the film, she explains how she mixes and matches outfits: “I like to improvise. I always think I like to do things as though I’m playing jazz.”

As she goes about her business, fashion luminaries including Dries van Noten and Bruce Weber provide glowing tributes. But the core of Maysles’ inquisitive film is the relationship between Iris and Carl. “He was cool, he was cuddly, and he cooked Chinese, so I couldn’t do any better,” she reminisces, explaining, “I never wanted a wedding. I wanted to elope. I said I’d rather have the money.” For his part, Carl is still smitten: “It’s a trip with her!” he exclaims, dressed in a pair of gaudy red trousers. Evidently, *Iris* is a warm, joyous film: a rich character study touched with a deep humanity. “If you hang around long enough,” admits Iris with a smile, “everything comes back.”

► **Amy** For an artist whose talents were in constant demand, Amy Winehouse meant different things to the many people around her. To one, she was “the truest jazz singer I have ever heard”; another saw her as “an old soul in a young body”, while a third describes her as “a humble person caught up in a bad situation”. Add to that, perhaps: she was not a good judge of character, particularly where men were concerned. Watching Asif Kapadia’s film, from her childhood in Southgate, North London through her success up to her death in 2011, aged 27, you can see how badly she was let down by the male figures closest to her: an absentee father, an exploitative husband, a manager who seems out of his depth. Assembled from home video and mobile phone footage, and contemporaneous

interviews, *Amy* opens at a 14th birthday party in 1988, where Winehouse is mucking around with her friends, Juliette Ashby and Lauren Gilbert. She’s a huge, bubbly personality, and the early footage of Winehouse, manager Nick Shymansky and guitarist Ian Barter larking around in downtime between touring engagements is among the warmest in the film.

As it progresses, we learn how her father, Mitch, began an

affair when Winehouse was 18 months old. Regrettably, Winehouse is serially drawn to men like Mitch: they appear strong but ultimately prove to be weak. It is her father who later advises her not to attend a drying-out facility, and if one is looking for a moment that best sums up the part played by her husband Blake Fielder-Civil in Winehouse’s story, it is the scene filmed in a bar on their wedding day where he asks the camera, “Who’s paying for this? I’m broke. Amy? Get us a bottle of Dom Perignon.” Her promoter-turned-manager, Raye Cosbert, meanwhile, seems to think nothing of sending her on a European tour days before she died. Much as with Kapadia’s previous film, *Senna*, *Amy* relies on diligently researched archive footage. But it is the involvement of Ashby, Gilbert and Shymansky who are perhaps the film’s strongest asset: with no particular agenda, theirs feels the most unfiltered version of events.

“I wasn’t supposed to be here at all, so it’s all a bonus!”
WILKO JOHNSON

Also out...

MAGIC MIKE XXL

OPENS JULY 3

Neither Steven Soderbergh nor Matthew McConaughey return for this sequel; a kind of American *Full Monty* with Channing Tatum flexing his abs.

TERMINATOR: GENISYS

OPENS JULY 3

Innovative spelling aside, Arnie is back (again) as the T-800, with Matt Smith and *Game Of Thrones*’ Emilia Clarke joining the noisy, time-travelling shenanigans.

SONG OF THE SEA

OPENS JULY 10

Irish animation: a contemporary update on familiar Celtic myths, with Brendan Gleeson and Fionnula Flanagan leading the cast.

TED 2

OPENS JULY 10

Sequel to Seth MacFarlane’s successful comedy about a foul-mouthed toy bear: Mark Wahlberg returns as his human buddy.



TOUCH OF EVIL

OPENS JULY 10

Ongoing celebrations of Orson Welles’ centenary continue with this splendid 1958 noir about murder and corruption in a seething Mexican-American border town.

ANT-MAN

OPENS JULY 17

Marvel fun with Paul Rudd able to shrink in size but increase in strength. Michael Douglas and Hayley Atwell add support.

SALT OF THE EARTH

OPENS JULY 17

Wim Wenders documents the remarkable career of lensman Sebastião Salgado across Africa, the Middle East and South America.

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE - ROGUE NATION

OPENS JULY 17

The Usual Suspects’ Christopher McQuarrie takes over directing duties for Tom Cruise’s latest blockbuster: stuff gets blown up.

SOUTHPAW

OPENS JULY 24

Originally a project for Eminem, this stars Jake Gyllenhaal as a retired boxer who has to return to the ring for One Last Bout.

CUB

OPENS JULY 31

Some nasty business occurring in the woods of Belgium, as a scout troupe come under attack from a sinister poacher and his feral son.

Live

ROCKING IN THE FREE WORLD

A swell bunch of
guys: McCartney
at the O₂



PAUL McCARTNEY

LONDON O₂ ARENA, MAY 23, 2015

A multi-faceted genius reasserts himself one more time. Infinite thumbs-up!

PAUL McCARTNEY IS a swell bunch of guys. Nor is that necessarily a criticism – simply a reflection that in 2015, he has a number of public images and historic responsibilities which he must try and reconcile. He’s the modern recording artist not afraid to try new things (leaving aside his most recent album, *New*, he’s

got a song in the charts with Kanye and Rihanna). Then of course he’s the composer of timeless song, not to mention the sound fella.

As we take our seats and showtime approaches, we’re left in no doubt that this is someone also keen to remind you of their many qualities and accomplishments. In the lobby, PETA have a stand to deliver their anti-animal cruelty

message, while as the audience file in, we are serenaded by a tape of artists covering Macca songs. When the house lights go down, a video montage of Macca’s life begins. Family pictures, “the boys” of course, Linda, Jamaica, lots of yachts and swimming and quite a lot of winking to the camera, which brings us up to speed somewhere around 1975.

If it’s all a bit strange, it’s certainly not unrepresentative of what follows. For one thing, the visual element is reliably eccentric throughout the show. He plays a song called “Hope For The Future” which occasions gameplay footage from the video game that commissioned it. Then, when he plays “Lady Madonna”, the screen shows a montage of deceased famous women: Princess Diana, The Queen Mother, Mother Teresa among them. Equally, we’re in a setlist that with very few



exceptions doesn't stray much beyond 1980.

Which is part of the contract that McCartney has with his audience. As much as his most recent album – produced by younger guys like Paul Epworth, Ethan Johns and Mark Ronson – seemed determined to show McCartney could still compete in the modern market, he's not in any hurry to push the idea down anyone's throat. When he drops new songs, he does so felicitously into his own musical context. After the opening "Eight Days A Week", the rock blowout of "Save Us" from the new album seems to clear the pipes, while the excellent "My Valentine" from the *Kisses On The Bottom* album fits nicely into the piano

section of the show. He wrote it for Nancy Shevell, his wife of four years, and she's in tonight, he tells us warmly. When you're Paul McCartney and you're also playing the Linda-occasioned "Maybe I'm Amazed", it's clear that your setlist is a sophisticated job of diplomacy that needs to satisfy more than just your back catalogue.

And sure enough, the show is palpably a family affair. Not only are Macca's grandkids here, as he tells us, plenty of others are besides: whole families standing and dancing together to the massive volume of classic music that this person has written. Whatever your own feelings may be about it, "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" may be the night's biggest song. You are prepared perhaps seeing McCartney live that there will be Beatles numbers played, but to be honest, the novelty of that wears off pretty quickly, in the sheer volume of music played.

Like a film, it is seamlessly broken up into acts. The first, rock'n'roll ancient and modern. The second, the piano compositions. Third, the accomplished acoustic songwriter, atop a telescopic podium ("Who here has tried to learn 'Blackbird'...?" he asks. Then... "How are you getting on?"). Fourth, the full-band run-up to the big finish. The thing is, what with the classic nature of the material and the fact that Macca lifts his guitar above his head after most songs (he is alarmingly hale – he looks as if he could lift the piano, too) every song is pretty much like a big finish. He has played with this current band (guitarists Rusty Anderson and Brian Ray, drummer Abe Laboriel Jr and keyboard player Wix Wickens) for longer than he did with The Beatles, and they're not a bad combo either.

You're prepared also for the naffness, and there

is quite a lot of this, some bits better handled than others. People write signs for Macca to read, and he uses some debatable funny voices here. There is a bit where he signs an autograph on someone's wife onstage, which is a bit weird, but people seem to love it.

While mindful of the coolness of someone like Bob Dylan, always changing his

SETLIST

- 1 Eight Days A Week
- 2 Save Us
- 3 Can't Buy Me Love
- 4 Listen To What The Man Said
- 5 Temporary Secretary
- 6 Let Me Roll It
- 7 Paperback Writer
- 8 My Valentine
- 9 1985
- 10 The Long And Winding Road
- 11 Maybe I'm Amazed
- 12 I've Just Seen A Face
- 13 We Can Work It Out
- 14 Another Day
- 15 Hope For The Future
- 16 And I Love Her
- 17 Blackbird
- 18 Here Today
- 19 New
- 20 Queenie Eye
- 21 Lady Madonna
- 22 All Together Now
- 23 Lovely Rita
- 24 Eleanor Rigby
- 25 Being For The Benefit Of Mr Kite
- 26 Something
- 27 Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da
- 28 Band On The Run
- 29 Back In The USSR
- 30 Let It Be
- 31 Live And Let Die
- 32 Hey Jude
- ENCORE 1
- 33 Another Girl
- 34 Hi Hi Hi
- 35 I Saw Her Standing There
- ENCORE 2
- 36 Yesterday
- 37 Helter Skelter
- 38 Golden Slumbers/Carry That Weight/The End

songs up, evading the capture of the definitive, McCartney couldn't be more unlike him. Rather than imprisoned by his catalogue, his many selves, his performance achieves a fusion of who he was then and who he is now. Whether cool and uncool, neither is less interesting than the other, and it's all the more remarkable for achieving the reconciliation.

"Let's hear it for John!" he says, before playing *Tug Of War*'s "Here Today" in which he muses on his friendship with the then recently deceased Lennon. "Let's hear it for George!" he says a bit later on. There's no mention of Ringo, but he's maybe more implied.

It's not objectionable (and what are you going to cheer if it's not the memory of a dead Beatle?), but it's also an unintentional reminder of that utterly steely side of McCartney that is determined to get his due, to remind you, as if we didn't know, that he was there too. Of late, he's been saying he co-wrote "...Mr Kite", long-regarded as a solo John composition, and he now plays it and tells a story about that. He also plays "Something", mentioning a time when he played it to George on the ukulele. He makes it sound like a casual get together – but then you realise he's talking about when the pair were filming *Anthology* in the early '90s.

Still, all of this pales into insignificance compared to the energy and the warmth of the performance, in which you're constantly asking "Great – but how's he going to follow that?" The pyro during "Live And Let Die" is thunderous, but not remotely louder than the noise made by the family in front of me when Dave Grohl arrives to help out on "I Saw Her Standing There" for the first encore. For the second, there's "Yesterday" and then (with a sense of "You want more? Well, you asked for it...") a less family-pleasing but impressively hellacious "Helter Skelter". In a show of supremely well-judged pace, it's telling that McCartney has been saving just the right song for the close: something about love, legacy, that everyone can get behind completely. He's got "Golden Slumbers"/"Carry That Weight"/"The End", the last song on the last Beatles album.

True enough, even he can't follow that. But in fairness, nor can anybody else. *JOHN ROBINSON*

*His
performance
achieves a fusion
of who he was
then and who
he is now*



The power:
Smith and
Lenny Kaye



PATTI SMITH

FIELD DAY, VICTORIA PARK, LONDON, JUNE 7, 2015

The Compleat *Horses*: “Oh, she was so good/And oh, she was so fine.”

“I’M SORRY THAT I’m wearing dark glasses,” says Patti Smith, as the final notes of “Free Money” fade out. “I’m not trying to be cool. It’s just the sun. The sun is not yellow... it’s chicken!” It is shortly after 7pm and Patti Smith and her band are in the middle of playing the *Horses* album in full. Even at this hour, the thermometer is nudging 70 degrees and the sky is a perfect blue. Admittedly, a sunlit park in East London seems an incongruous setting for *Horses*. After all, the LP is explicitly a New York record, written in the Chelsea Hotel and Smith’s MacDougal Street apartment then finessed at several of the city’s storied venues, from St Mark’s Church to CBGB. Yet we find Smith and band celebrating the 40th anniversary of their debut album with a tour of the European festival circuit.

The question of how to present this characteristically New York album in the outdoor spaces of Europe seems not to have overly concerned Smith and her co-conspirators. Critically, the spirited, wide-ranging qualities of the material are as strong as ever,

even in this setting. After opening with a rousing version of “Gloria” and the good-natured skank of “Redondo Beach”, “Birdland” veers off into different territory. A nine-minute excursion into incantatory poetry over improvised noise, it is closer to performance art than rock gig; but commendably, the audience

“I never do anything perfect,” she claims. “I only fuck up perfect.”
The crowd cheers

remain fully engaged. Even the occasionally lengthy gaps between songs – when Smith sips from a mug of tea or talks to a member of the road crew – are met with tolerance rather than impatience. Throughout, Smith herself is unfailingly polite. After “Free Money”, she helpfully explains that they’ve reached the end of

Side 1; later, after she botches the intro to “Break it Up”, she claims, “I never do anything perfect. I only fuck up perfect.” The crowd cheers enthusiastically.

The second side of *Horses* is dominated by the “Land...” sequence, which provides the transformative highlight of tonight’s set. The heavy lifting falls initially to Smith’s band, especially Lenny Kaye and drummer Jay Dee Daugherty – the two veterans of the *Horses* album sessions – who are there to interpret the song’s complex, rhythmic intensity. Smith’s delivery, meanwhile, alternates between witchy invocations and the fire and brimstone shrieks of a tent revival preacher, energised by the music’s electrifying current. *Horses* concludes with “Elegie”, her tribute to Jimi Hendrix. Many more friends, she says, have died since, and she encourages the audience to shout the names of lost loved ones while the song plays – she names Joe Strummer, Johnny, Joey and Dee Dee Ramone and Sid Vicious, her brother Todd Pollard Smith, husband Fred ‘Sonic’ Smith, Robert

Mapplethorpe, bandmate Richard Sohl, Lou Reed and John Nash.

Such a gesture – warm, inclusive – highlights the earth mother aspect of Smith’s personality, as does her sweet request that the audience sing “Happy birthday” to bassist Tony Shanahan. But there are serious moments, too. After dedicating “Dancing Barefoot” to Polly Harvey and a rousing “Because The Night”, she reaches a peak with “People Have The Power”, exclaiming: “We are free people and we want the world and we want it now!” Finally, Smith and her band leave the stage after an explosive version of “My Generation”: Kaye’s guitar lines spitting and arcing into the darkening evening sky.

MICHAEL BONNER

SETLIST

- 1 Gloria
- 2 Redondo Beach
- 3 Birdland
- 4 Free Money
- 5 Kimberly
- 6 Break It Up
- 7 Land: Horses/Land Of A Thousand Dances/La Mer(de)/Gloria
- 8 Elegie
- 9 Dancing Barefoot
- 10 Pumping (My Heart)
- 11 Because The Night
- 12 People Have The Power
- 13 My Generation

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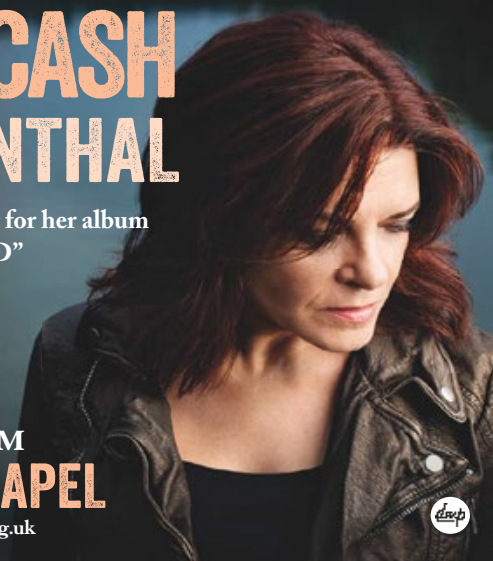
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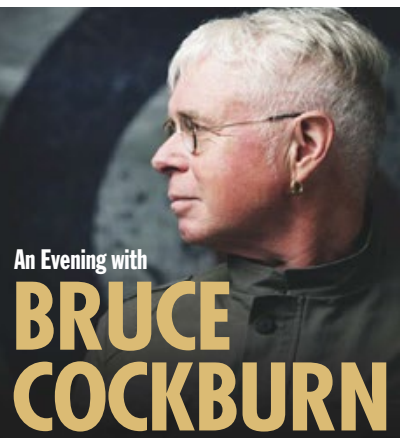


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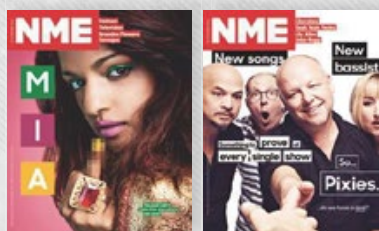


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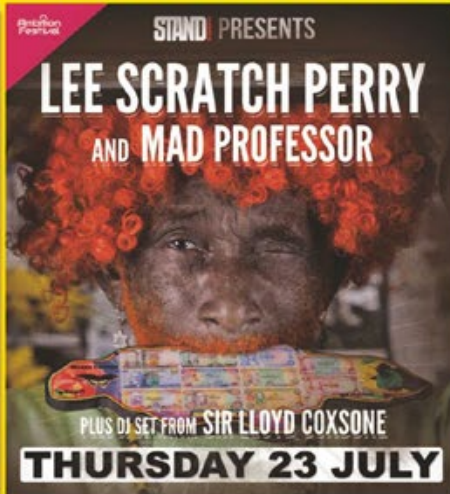
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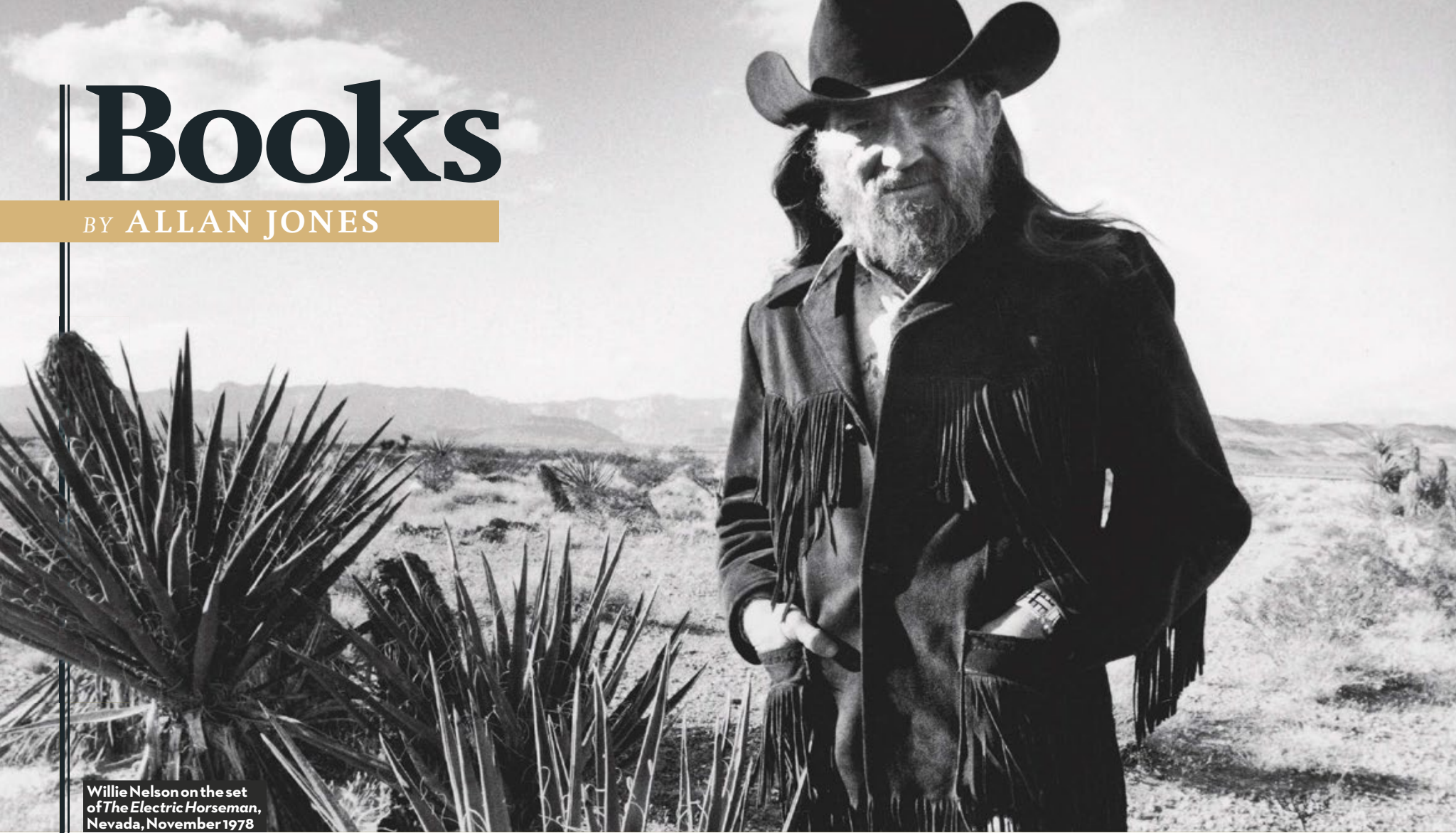
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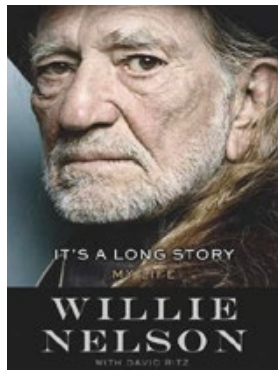


Willie Nelson on the set of *The Electric Horseman*, Nevada, November 1978

Reviewed this month...



How Music Got Free
Stephen Witt
BODLEY HEAD
9/10



My Life: It's A Long Story
Willie Nelson
with David Ritz
SPHERE
6/10

STEPHEN WITT'S **How Music Got Free** is a history of digital music piracy and the technology that brought the music business to its knees. By such plain description, the book may sound dryly investigative, with much baffling science and parsing of intellectual copyright legislation. Hats off to Witt, though, because the book he's delivered is sensational: lucid, informative, breathlessly exciting, with the pounding narrative tempo of a first-class thriller.

It opens in 1995, in Germany, where Karl Brandenburg and his research team have invented a data compression system, subsequently named the MP3, that massively reduces the enormous amount of superfluous information on compact discs without a loss of audio quality, thus making it possible to store or stream high-fidelity, endlessly replayable music files on home computers.

The implications for the music industry were vast, but went ignored. Brandenburg, meanwhile, was struggling to monetise the MP3, due to much shady industry intervention. To promote the system, one of his engineers wrote a PC application to encode and play back MP3 files. The L3Enc, as the application was called, was freely distributed online. Within a year, the L3Enc was being used by hackers to create

thousands of illegal music files, introducing an era of piracy that shocked both the scientists and music business moguls.

With accelerating download speeds and the introduction of new software created by tech-savvy music fans, filesharing became frenzied. Shawn Fanning launched Napster in June 1999. Within months it had 20 million users, with up to 14,000 songs downloaded every minute, all of it free. As Witt contests, Napster took filesharing from the outlaw underground into the mainstream, peaking at 60 million users. For old-school record company executives like Universal CEO Doug Morris, however, Napster's user base was just a bunch of criminal racketeers profiting from the illegal duplication of copyrighted material, much of it leaked from Universal's own CD manufacturing plant in Kings Mountain, North Carolina, by another of the book's principal protagonists, Dell Glover. As a member of the elite Rabid Neurosis pirate crew, Glover was the ultimate source over the next five years of hundreds of millions of illegally cloned MP3 files – including releases from Eminem, Jay-Z, Madonna, Neil Young, Pearl Jam, Kanye West and Taylor Swift – before Rabid Neurosis was eventually infiltrated and closed down by the FBI in 2006. By then, it had illegally leaked over 20,000 albums, ravaging profits at record companies already reeling from a 50 per cent fall in CD sales by 2007.

When Witt started accumulating pirated music files in 1997, he assumed they'd been uploaded by a vague network of individual music fans. The majority, however, had been posted by just a few highly organised piracy groups, a dark subculture to which Witt is a fascinating guide. Most of the so-called pirates were music fans with no interest in illicit profiteering. Other groups, like the notorious Pirate Bay, were more openly ideological, dissident fraternities whose free dissemination of music was partly motivated by the obscene overpricing of CDs by rapacious labels. As far as Morris was concerned, they were all racketeers, who should be duly prosecuted. He was a prime mover behind Project Hubcap which, in an attempt to eradicate piracy, sued individual file-sharers, the bulk of them naively unaware of the copyright infringements of which they were now accused. The campaign was

vicious, ill-advised and cast the major labels as crass and vindictive.

In the short term, even the most elusive pirate groups were closed down. They were replaced eventually by industry-sanctioned streaming sites like Spotify, Rhapsody and Deezer that in the long run further decimated CD sales and offered poor reward to disillusioned artists, who weren't much better off than when Dell Glover had been leaking their albums free via Rabid Neurosis. Digital piracy had reduced the record industry to parlous disarray, but in Witt's damning final analysis, it wasn't a German boffin's MP3 or Dell Glover's serial thieving that ruined it. That was something the music business managed on its own.

➤ **My Life** is meant to be Willie Nelson's story in mostly his own words, but it's so heavily ghost-written that the final manuscript probably demanded attention from an exorcist rather than an editor. Nelson's co-author, David Ritz, has previously collaborated with Ray Charles and Buddy Guy and appears to be well-enough respected. Whatever the merits of anything else he's published, though, he fails here to find a 'voice' for Nelson that's adequate to the achievements of an extraordinary career, which is seen mostly in soft focus. The essential details of Nelson's life are all included – brought up poor in rural Texas by doting grandparents, early struggles as an itinerant songwriter and troubadour, DJ and encyclopaedia salesman, the big breakthrough when Patsy Cline recorded "Crazy", his battles with the Nashville producers who drenched his records in country sentimentality, the crucial move back to Texas, his reinvention as a country outlaw, the landmark recording of *Red Headed Stranger*, the album that sealed his iconic status in American music. There's a lot, too, about pot, golf and God.

It's all perfectly warm-hearted, but often rather bland, with Nelson's frequently raucous life reduced to homily and benediction, a kind of cheery inconsequence, all exacerbated by hugely irritating one-sentence paragraphs that make the book read like a bulletpoint presentation. For a better telling of his story, best seek out Joe Nick Patoski's *Willie Nelson: An Epic Life*, or Graeme Thomson's *Willie Nelson: The Outlaw*.

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Not Fade Away

Fondly remembered this month...

TWINKLE

'60s teen star

(1948-2015)

LIFE AS A pop singer wasn't the most obvious career choice for Lynn Ripley. The daughter of the deputy chairman of London County Council, and an attendee of the exclusive Queen's Gate school in South Kensington (where fellow pupils included Camilla Shand, future Duchess of Cornwall), Ripley was expected to follow the prescribed route of the society girl. Instead she immersed herself in the local beat scene, regularly joining London combo The Trekkers onstage at the nearby Esmeralda's Barn. Still just 14, Ripley also began writing her own songs. One of them, a teenage psychodrama about a leather biker called Terry who roars off to his death after a quarrel with his lover, brought her to the attention of the record business. Ripley's older sister, Dawn, a music journalist, introduced her to The Bachelors' Dec Cluskey, who began dating her and took a demo of "Terry" to his manager. Decca duly offered Ripley a contract and, as Twinkle, she recorded the song in Denmark Street. Among her fellow studio musicians were top-drawer session players Jimmy Page, Big Jim Sullivan and Bobby Graham.

"Terry" shot up the charts in December 1964, unhampered by a contentious BBC ban over its status as a so-called 'death disc'. One MP denounced the single as "sick, dangerous drivel". The song peaked at No 4 and sold over 250,000 copies. Twinkle was promptly packed off on tour with The Rolling Stones and Herman's



Twinkle in 1966: she wrote "Terry", her biggest single, aged 14

Hermits, during which she was the subject of a jealous spat between Mick Jagger and Brian Jones. "I didn't bother with sex," she said later, "and I never touched drugs."

Another original composition, "Golden Lights", was issued in early 1965, stalling just outside the Top 20. A steady procession of others followed, but none of them charted. By 1966, the

18-year-old Twinkle elected to retire from the industry. A chance encounter with Immediate boss Andrew Loog Oldham, three years later, briefly brought her out of exile with "Micky". Again, though, success proved elusive. She attempted the odd comeback over the years and, in 1986, The Smiths covered "Golden Lights" on the B-side of "Ask".

RONNIE GILBERT

New York folk singer

(1926-2015)

Ronnie Gilbert considered herself "a singer with a social conscience" rather than an activist. As a founder member of The Weavers – alongside Pete Seeger, Lee Hays and Fred Hellerman – the New Yorker helped broaden the reach of folk music by performing politically charged songs in the postwar years. Her striking contralto was a key feature of the quartet's output, before the original group was forced to disband in 1952 after being blacklisted by an anti-communist Senate committee. They reunited and continued, in one form or another, until 1964. Beginning in the '80s, Gilbert also recorded three albums with folk activist Holly Near.

NICK MARSH

Flesh For Lulu frontman

(1962-2015)

Flesh For Lulu found greater fame in the US than in their native UK, largely due to the success of "I Go Crazy", a hit from the soundtrack of 1987 film *Some Kind Of Wonderful*. Co-writer Nick Marsh formed the band in '82, and their mix of goth-rock and New York Dolls glam got them a following in underground circles. They also had a minor hit in the US, "Postcards From Paradise"



Nick Marsh

(later covered by Paul Westerberg), before Marsh formed Gigantic in 1996. In recent times, he revived Flesh For Lulu and also played in Urban Voodoo Machine.

DENNIS SHEEHAN

U2 tour manager extraordinaire

(1946-2015)

Dennis Sheehan left a career as an architect to become tour manager for Jimmy James & The Vagabonds in the mid '60s. He went on to work for Iggy Pop, Lou Reed and Led Zeppelin, but his defining move came in 1982, when he started work with U2. He rose from bus driver to coordinator of a vast operation that involved set designers, sound and lighting, merchandise and transport. "He wasn't just a legend in the music business," said Bono. "He was a legend in our band."

JOHNNY GIMBLE

Texas fiddler

(1926-2015)

The distinctive tones of fiddle player Johnny Gimble graced recordings by Dolly Parton, Marty Robbins, Merle Haggard and more, though he'll forever be remembered as an integral member of Bob Wills' Texas Playboys. He began with Wills in 1949, playing both mandolin and five-string fiddle, and remained there until the early '60s. Gimble, whose style moved eloquently between western swing, honky-tonk and jazz, later settled in Nashville and was an in-demand sessioneer. He cut the first of several solo albums, *Fiddlin' Around*, in 1974. His last, 2010's *Celebrating With Friends*, featured longtime buddies Haggard, Willie Nelson and Vince Gill.

OBITUARIES

JEAN RITCHIE

Singer and mountain dulcimer player

(1922-2015)

JEAN RITCHIE WAS a firm believer in the universal right to music, insisting that it wasn't solely the preserve of the tutored. Speaking to *Newsday* in 1980, she chided those who thought otherwise. "I want to take them by the shoulders and shake them," she said. "I never would have had any lullabies sung to me if my mother had to study first."

The youngest of 14 children, Ritchie was born into a noted singing family in rural Kentucky. Her formative years were spent absorbing the trad ballads of their Celtic ancestors and performing at local dances and fairs. After graduating in sociology from the University of Kentucky in '46, she moved to New York and met folklorist Alan Lomax. Struck by her clear soprano and a rare facility on her preferred mountain dulcimer, Lomax began making recordings of Ritchie. Her '52 debut, *Jean Ritchie Sings Traditional Songs Of Her Kentucky Mountain Family* set the tone for her life's work: a nimble dialogue between the authentic and the scholarly. The same year saw her and filmmaker husband George Pickow travel to Britain and Ireland on a Fulbright Scholarship, where they collected hundreds of folk songs in an attempt to trace the link between forms. An album of their findings was issued in 1954.

Aside from traditional tunes, Ritchie also wrote songs of her own. "Black Waters" was a stinging commentary on the effects of strip-mining in her



Jean Ritchie:
"Folk music is
always there"

native Kentucky. Johnny Cash covered "The L&N Don't Stop Here Anymore", Emmylou Harris would later do "Sweet Sorrow In The Wind" and a young Bob Dylan, who cited her as an influence, took her arrangement of "Nottamun Town" for his own "Masters Of War". Ritchie's quest to keep folk music alive also extended to producing

literature. Her works included *The Swapping Song Book* (1952) and 1955's *They Sang The Moon Up: Singing Family Of The Cumberlands*. "I see folk music as a river that never stopped flowing," she once told *The New York Times*. "Sometimes a few people go to it and sometimes a lot of people do. But it's always there."

LOUIS JOHNSON

Bassist with Michael Jackson

(1955-2015)

The Brothers Johnson scored several US hits from the mid '70s, chief among them "I'll Be Good To You", "Stomp!" and a cover of Shuggie Otis' "Strawberry Letter 23". Of the two siblings, who began by backing Bobby Womack and Billy Preston, bassist Louis enjoyed greater success away from the group. His characteristic slap-bass lines, which prompted the nickname 'Thunder-Thumbs', can be heard on albums by Stanley Clarke, Herb Alpert, George Benson and Quincy Jones, among others. The Jones connection also led to

high-profile work with Michael Jackson, for whom Johnson was bassist on *Off The Wall*, *Thriller* and *Dangerous*.

DARIUS MINWALLA

Seattle drummer

(1976-2015)

Drummer Darius Minwalla replaced Brian Young in Washington power pop darlings The Posies in 2001. He featured on two albums, 2005's *Every Kind Of Light* and *Blood/Candy* (2010), the first of which saw him share songwriting credits with Jon Auer, Ken Stringfellow and Matt Harris. Minwalla had also worked with Stringfellow and Auer prior to The Posies, as well as Super Deluxe and Tiz. In August last year he toured with a reunited version of the band and, in recent months, he had been playing dates in Japan as part of Hugh Cornwell's live lineup.

DEREK CHINNERY

Radio 1 controller

(1925-2015)

Former RAF man Derek Chinnery brought a certain formality to BBC

radio management, not least by using the term 'gramophone records' during playlist meetings. Yet Chinnery, who joined the corporation as a teenager in 1941 and became a producer in the early '50s, helped oversee the transition of Radio 1 during his time as the station's controller from 1978-'85. His insistence on a more personality-driven set-up led to him employing Steve Wright, Gary Davies and Bruno Brookes. Another of his charges from that era, Mike Read, paid tribute by calling him "a principled leader who ran a tight ship with a kind heart."

MARTY NAPOLEON

Pianist with Louis Armstrong

(1921-2015)

Comedy legend and bandleader Chico Marx gave Marty Napoleon his first break when he employed the 20-year-old as pianist during the war. Napoleon went on to play with a raft of jazz greats, including Gene Krupa, Teddy Powell, Benny Goodman, Buddy Rich, Coleman Hawkins, Red Allen and Charlie Ventura – but his most enduring tenure was as valued sideman with Louis Armstrong. Napoleon

replaced Earl Hines in Armstrong's All Stars in 1952, thus beginning a professional relationship that lasted, on and off, for the best part of 20 years. Among his best known contributions are "Hello Dolly" and "It's A Wonderful World."

RUTGER GUNNARSSON

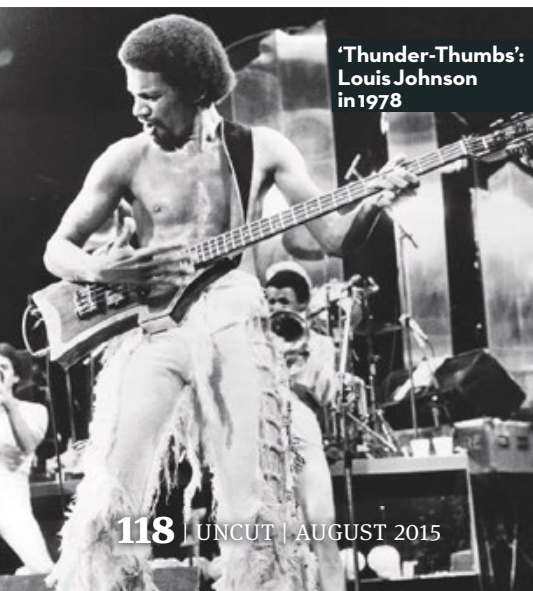
ABBA bassist, arranger

(1946-2015)

In 1972, a fellow student at Stockholm's Royal College of Music tipped off Rutger Gunnarsson to the audition that would change his life. The classical guitar major duly got the job as bassist with Swedish folk group The Hootenanny Singers, a band which included Björn Ulvaeus and was a precursor to ABBA. Two years later, ABBA became international stars when they won the Eurovision Song Contest and Gunnarsson played on every subsequent ABBA album and tour, often writing string and horn parts. He went on to work on a variety of big musicals – including *Chess*, *Les Misérables* and *Mamma Mia!* – and played with Elton John, Adam Ant and Gwen Stefani.

ROB HUGHES

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'Thunder-Thumbs':
Louis Johnson
in 1978



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FOR PETE'S SAKE!

As a fan of The Who almost from the beginning, I am used to Pete Townshend's mordant comments about the fans [*Uncut*, Take 217]. It started a long time ago, mid 1970s. He seemed to resent that fans had expectations of him he wanted to surpass as an artist. Some of the lyrics of "New Song" or "However Much I Booze" make this clear. It probably started with "Punk And The Godfather", where he saw himself as stuck in a performing flea kind of role. In Jeff Stein's biographical film, he states to Keith Moon it is inevitable that the band will become a "circus act".

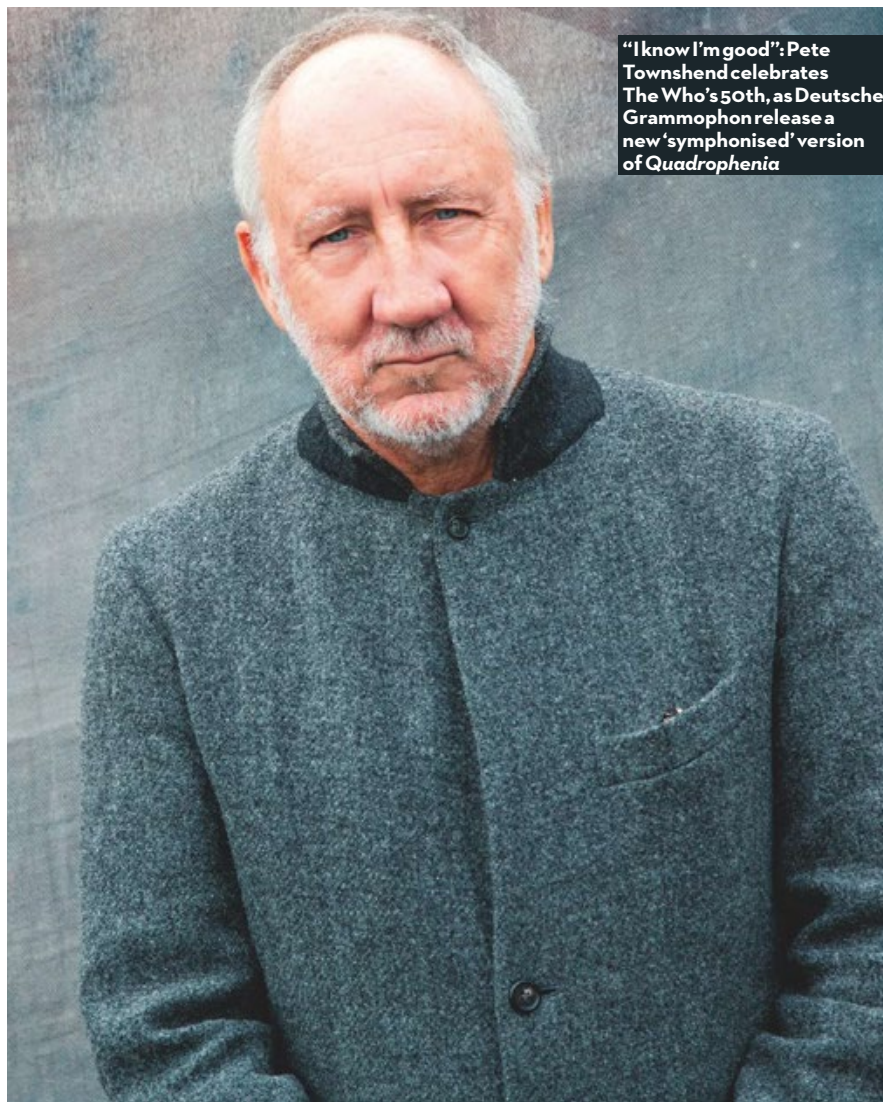
However, this current interview exceeds anything I can recall reading or hearing on record. To call his fans "fucking cunts" beggars belief, ditto to say things such as he wants to do a show for them that is "crap" and then tell them "fuck off" and "don't come back". There are limits to the irony mode, and I don't believe such comments were meant as a joke. It's as if he's come full circle, writing about solidarity with fans and taking inspiration from them, only to finish by this sour and frankly insulting talk.

His comments about still being brilliant at performing seemed rather hubristic, as well. Let the sales figures and reviews speak for themselves. I can't imagine any other rock star of his calibre talking in such terms. The current cant, "cringeworthy", applies well here.

At this point, it won't affect anything, the current shows will be well-attended and people will come away very satisfied, I'm sure. And of course, The Who are a revelatory band with enormous contributions to rock'n'roll history. That's all that matters; crazy-sounding interviews like this are just a sideshow. Still, it doesn't mean I have to like it, and I don't. **Gary Gillman, Toronto**

PETE TOWNSHEND: A RESPONSE

When I did my interview with *Uncut*, I was asked what might change when I turned 70. I replied that I want to stop telling lies. I laughed and said that, for example, I would play crap gigs and tell Who fans to fuck off. I don't want to do that today. I hope it's clear that I have not done that yet on this tour. I have done it many times in the past



"I know I'm good": Pete Townshend celebrates The Who's 50th, as Deutsche Grammophon release a new 'symphonised' version of *Quadrophenia*

(especially in the late '70s) and it didn't make much difference to Who fans – I think they knew I was playing a role. I have no intention of doing that after my birthday on May 19. I'm out here on our 50th because I am sincerely pleased to see old faces, old friends, and do my best to be as much of an asshole as ever. I know I'm good. I don't need to play games. I really hope I'm not playing one now! I really don't want Who fans to think that the 'truth' for me is that I hate them. I have sometimes hated the fact that The Who were so successful, and nothing I can ever do can top that, but that isn't the same. Some shows are tougher than others. Funnily enough, you might see me appear to have a better time during what is a harder show, that's because I sometimes find what we find so serious onstage to be ridiculous. Who cares if we sound like shit? We are The Who.

So, to all Who fans who are coming out to see us, front rows or back rows, you are all welcome, and I am happy you are there. I've come too far now with my old buddy

Roger to pick holes in what happens when I do interviews – but if I've upset anyone, I apologise.

As for *Classic Quadrophenia*, it's different. It needs to be approached with an open mind. If I have any truth to speak about it, it is that I think it is amazing. Remember this is not my work, it is Rachel Fuller's and Alfie Boe's. I'm stunned by it and I hope that, despite the fact many of you may always prefer to hear the 1973 Who album, you will enjoy this version, too.

Pete Townshend

"I'LL BE WRITING MORE IN A WEEK OR TWO..."

I have seen Ringo Starr twice. The first time he was exiting a black cab with Barbara Bach and he looked so miserable I did not bother him. The second time he was a foot away and seemingly less unhappy. I tried to approach him, but he totally ignored me. He did not say, "Sorry but this is not the right time," or, "I don't give autographs, do you fancy a picture together on your smartphone?"

Instead he made it abundantly clear that he did not want to speak to a fan. From my experience with Ringo, it would appear that after 53 years of fame he now resents his fans and, rather than give autographs, he uses his story of people profiteering from selling them on eBay as a justification to stop interacting [Take 218].

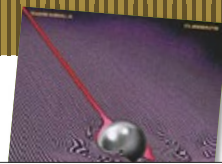
I collect Beatles music and memorabilia. I have a vinyl copy of *The White Album*, I also bought the original CD release, then the HMV boxset special edition, and later a special 25th Anniversary replica CD edition. Lately I have purchased the remastered Beatles back catalogue in stereo, mono and in the Capitol format. Ringo does not like to be taken advantage of, but where does he stand on the issue of fans getting exploited? I have not bought these CDs to sell on eBay at an inflated rate, but because I am a genuine fan and that is what we tend to do – and I'd like Ringo to know that if any of my Beatles artefacts were autographed they would be put on display in my house and treasured.

Ringo states that his mother, Elsie, used to encourage him to sign everything. Possibly it was because she understood that when you are in the public eye and you become part of the fabric of someone's life, they perceive you as a friend and that is why they continue, 46 years past your heyday, to buy albums like *Y Not* and *Liverpool 8*. It would appear that Ringo would be best advised to still heed his mother's advice. **Lawrence Elf, via email**

WISH YOU WERE HEROES

Thanks for the compelling piece on Hipgnosis [Take 218]. I was fascinated to read Aubrey Powell confirm that I'd always misinterpreted a tenet of rock iconography: the cover of *Wish You Were Here*. I had believed the image was a leading man shaking hands with his stunt double: one man taking risks to make the other look good, enhance his rep and increase his wealth. I suppose this is not so far removed from the correct interpretation explained by Aubrey (two parties shaking hands on a record deal, one party being burned) but, to be honest, I still prefer my own.

Paul McGowan, Glasgow



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SUBSCRIPTION RATES: One year (12 issues)
including p&p: UK £62.60; Direct entry (USA)
\$131.85; Europe €128.88; North America \$196.14;
Rest of World £120.07. We regret that the free cover-
mounted CD is not available to EU subscribers
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Uncut, 1368-0722, is published monthly by Time Inc.
(UK) Ltd, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St,
London, SE1 0SU, England. Airfreight and mailing in
the USA by agent named Air Business Ltd, c/o
Worldnet Shipping Inc, 156-15, 146th Ave, 2nd Floor,
Jamaica, NY 11434, USA.
Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica NY 11431.
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“GOOD BOOTIE!”

In his review of the Little Richard set, *Directly From My Heart: The Best Of The Specialty & Vee-Jay Years* [Take 218], Bud Scoppa refers to singer Billy Price as being an influence on Richard. Erm... it was actually Billy Wright, an Atlanta R&B artist who recorded for Savoy from 1949 to the mid 1950s and was known as “The Prince Of The Blues”.

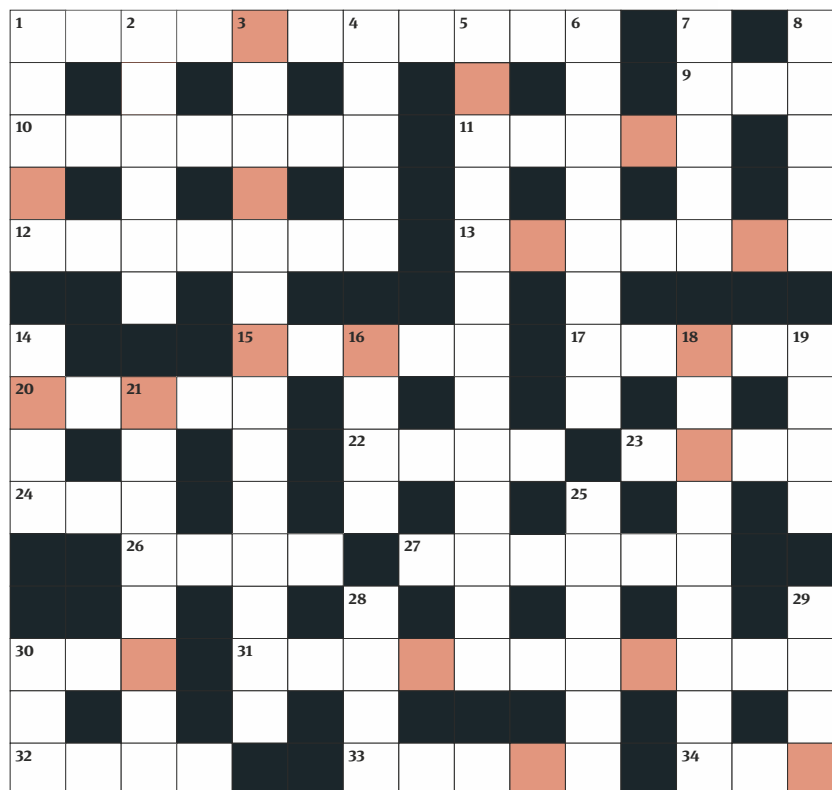
Wright was a gay, flamboyant female impersonator who began performing in travelling tent shows in the chorus line. Among the songs Billy performed was one which Richard ‘cleaned up’ to become “Tutti Frutti” – when it was originally performed by Wright (and by Richard) it contained lyrics such as “*Tutti Frutti, good bootie, if it don’t fit, don’t force it, just grease it, make it easy.*” Wright and DJ Zenas Sears introduced Richard to RCA Records; Scoppa dismisses Richard’s music on RCA as “undistinguished” and says it was difficult to understand why Specialty owner Art Rupe signed him.

Richard’s RCA 1951-1952 sides are fine R’n’B jump blues sides. They did not chart at the time but, along with his sides for Peacock Records a year later (supported by the Johnny Otis band) with The Tempo Toppers, they are performed by an excellent gospel-influenced singer and set the template for Richard’s legendary Specialty sides starting in 1955.

I must agree, though, that Richard’s Vee-Jay recordings, waxed between 1964 and 1966 (including the remakes of sides from his Specialty glory days) are sub-standard. As Charles ‘Dr Rock’ White, Richard’s biographer said, “blinded by commercial considerations, [Vee-Jay] rushed the session without concern for quality. The result was dreadful.” **Tony Burke, via email**

“OLD IMPERIALIST THEFT” CORNER

Nigel Williamson, please desist from the age-old imperialist theft of Irish culture as British. In your review of *Twice Told Tales* by 10,000 Maniacs [Take 217] you ridiculously reference several Irish songs as part of Britain’s folk heritage (incredibly including ‘Song of Wondering Aengus’ by WB Yeats, a great Irish poet). I have noticed this worrying trend in recent issues of *Uncut* and I will end my 10-year subscriber status if this ignorant practice continues. As Christy Moore sings, “*The Quarehaws are still sucking the wee small birds’ eggs dry...*” **Dr David Hughes, Dublin**



HOW TO ENTER

The letters in the shaded squares form an anagram of a song by Talking Heads. When you’ve worked out what it is, send your answer to: *Uncut* August 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, July 27, 2015. This competition is only open to European residents.

CLUES ACROSS

- 1** Graham Parker has no explanation for this new release? Well, he can stick it (7-4)
9 “*It ain’t nothing but a heartbreaker*”, 1970 and 1986 (3)
10+11A Known for their extended cover versions including “Ticket To Ride” and “People Get Ready” (7-5)
12 Posies 1998 album just had to be a hit (7)
13 (See 1 down)
15 “*Daddy’s _____ in my hand felt reassuring*”, Neil Young aiming for a hit (5)
17 They were found “Asleep In The Back” when debut album was released (5)
20 Both Joan Armatrading and Don Partridge have sung about her (5)
22 A bit of an advantage in naming new band who ask “Do You Know Me?” (4)
23 Jacques _____, Belgian singer/songwriter whose songs have been covered by Scott Walker and David Bowie (4)
24 The second person to have named a song by George Harrison (3)
26 (See 28 down)
27 (See 8 down)
30 A bit of banjo expertise from The Inspiral Carpets (3)
31 Nice mild hit turns into a classic for Deep Purple (5-2-4)
32 (See 7 down)
33 South coast band whose four albums have all been No 1 (5)
34 “*I heard that you like the _____ girls/Honey, is that true?*”, from Lana Del Rey’s “Video Games” (3)

ANSWERS: TAKE 217

ACROSS

1 The Magic Whip, 10 Tracker,
13 Faces, 15 Otzi, 16 Tin
Soldier, 20 Post, 21 Ash,
22+12A Marc Cohn, 23
Everyday, 25+30D China Girl,

DOWN

2+8D Heathen Chemistry,
3+11A Make Believe, 4
Garlands, 5 Cable, 6 Holy, 7
Pretty Odd, 9 Stick To Me, 14
Streets, 17 Sacrifice, 18 Layla,

27 Rees, 31 Reni, 33 Lou, 34
Friends, 35+25D Blue Cheer.

CLUES DOWN

- 1+13A** Having sung with her family’s gospel R&B group she went on to become a legend with *The Voice* (5-7)
2 Sounds like a US garage rock band who first formed in 1960 and reformed in 2007 (6)
3 She formed a songwriting partnership with Jeff Barry (5-9)
4 (See 16 down)
5 “*I have a mansion, forget the price/Ain’t never been there, they tell me it’s nice*”, Joe Walsh (5-4-4)
6 Gene’s mad to reform ’80s new wavers (8)
7+32A Slams LP we had remixed for ’70s experimental rock group (5-4)
8+27A Paul McCartney CD that came complete with operating instructions (5-2-4)
14 “How To Save A Life” with group involved in brawl (4)
16+4D “*...saw you in a nice cream parlour, drinking milkshakes cold and long*”, (4-5)
18 He was found “Guilty” along with Barbra Streisand (5-4)
19 Erasure performing in a state of extreme emotional intensity (4)
21 Dupes ELO somehow into performing a Box Tops number (4-4)
25 Fair to say this word appears twice in title of a Bob Dylan album (6)
28+26A Former member of Brinsley Schwarz, Rockpile and Little Village (4)
29 In 1967 they came “From The Underworld” (4)
30 “Dig The New Breed” was a collection of their live performances (3)

19+32A I Hear You Knocking,
24 Age, 28 Eagle, 29+26A
Sigur Rós, 32 Kid.

HIDDEN ANSWER
“One Life’s Enough”

XWORD COMPILED BY:
Trevor Hungerford



MY LIFE IN MUSIC

Mary Wilson

I hear a symphony! The Supremes survivor chooses her favourite records...



My favourite album

Marvin Gaye
What's Going On 1971

The LP cover captures him in all his beauty as a man and as a thinker, and the songs take us into the new generation that was at hand. They touch me in my very core. I could feel the pain in the words and realised I was not the only one who felt the heaviness of what was going on in the world. Marvin's was not a common trait found in the industry – he was a philosopher trapped in his own beliefs about the world and life. It should be rated as the greatest album of the 20th Century.



A song that opened my eyes

Booker T & The MG's
Green Onions 1962

After graduating high school in Detroit, I got a job at a record shop on the east side, not far from Motown. When "Green Onions" came out, it was the only record selling. People were lining up around the block. I'd never thought about our group making money. We were just in it to make music. This opened my eyes to what was to come if we got a hit, if it was possible the 'no hit Supremes' could make money just doing what we did naturally.



My favourite song

Doris Day
Qué Será, Será (Whatever Will Be, Will Be) 1959

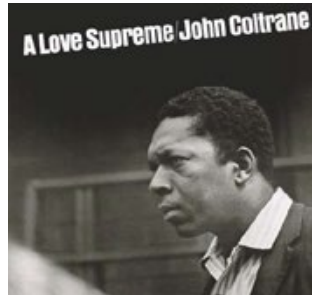
I loved her movies, but fell more in love with her when she came out with this. That was the year that The Primettes [early Supremes] started singing. This has been my favourite song whenever I burst out singing, even today. I would put my younger cousins to sleep with this song. For me, it was a lullaby. I was one of the first black women to start wearing a blonde wig, before Tina Turner even, and that was because of Ms Day.



My introduction to rock'n'roll

LaVern Baker
Jim Dandy 1957

I grew up loving this lady. This was one of the first rock'n' roll records I ever heard, I sang it every day. It was my first introduction to rock'n'roll. I got the chance to meet her when we were on tour, around '65. We were doing a lot of shows in army bases in Asia, and someone said, "LaVern Baker is in the audience and she wants to see you." And I'm like, "The LaVern Baker?!" She came backstage and she and I became friends.



An album touched by God

John Coltrane
A Love Supreme 1965

The liner notes written by Mr Coltrane are a testament to God. He wrote that he had experienced a spiritual awakening, which led him to a richer, fuller, more productive life. This album is a humble offering to God. For all of us listeners, it is a beautiful musical experience of a man touched by God. When I first heard it, I fell in love with its melody and the truth of his motives to give to the world this music.



An album by a genius

Stevie Wonder
Innervisions 1973

I remember when Stevie came for his audition at Motown when he was nine, something like that. Mr Berry Gordy said, "I have some young genius coming to audition today." We were just 16 or 17. But anyway, we never met a genius that we knew of, so we stayed and we waited. Stevie arrived, went in Studio 8, jumped on every instrument and started playing it! He taught me what a genius really was. Years later, when this LP came out, it was phenomenal. I listen to it a lot now.



My introduction to jazz

Nancy Wilson
Guess Who I Saw Today 1960

This was one of the first jazz songs that I really got into. I heard it once and I memorised every single line from just hearing it that one time. And I would sing this song all the time. She and I met later and became like sisters because of the Wilson thing, and I still call her, even now she's retired. I loved her interpretation of it. A lot of people have sung this, but no-one does it like Nancy Wilson. Her version was perfect.



An album by my favourite group

The Four Tops
Four Tops Live! 1966

People don't think of singers as groupies of other singers, but I'm a groupie of The Four Tops. If you look at the photo on the flipside to this album, The Four Tops are onstage and you see me jumping up to join them! It shows that I am a groupie of theirs. I just love their harmonies – "I Can't Help Myself (Sugar Pie Honey Bunch)", "Reach Out (I'll Be There)" and "7 Rooms Of Gloom" are my favourites of their songs.

Mary Wilson will be on the Legends Live tour with Dionne Warwick, Roberta Flack and The Drifters in October

IN NEXT MONTH'S UNCUT: "He produced a beautiful purple light while smoking joint after joint of the best Hawaiian grass"

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