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UNCUT

2015

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OF THE Year

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WELLER  
goes on a wild  
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AN  
AUDIENCE WITH  
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JOHN MISTY

ROGER  
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looks beyond The Wall

AND

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Natalie Prass

# Are we rolling?

NOT TO OVERSTATE matters, but putting together a Best Albums Of The Year list, at least before autumn has fully blown through, seems an increasingly perilous business. Twelve months ago, for instance, *Uncut*'s extended family of staff and writers diligently submitted their favourites, unaware that an album which might have surpassed most of their choices – D'Angelo's *Black Messiah* – would suddenly materialise on December 15.

Something similar might happen again in the time between my writing this letter and this issue of *Uncut* arriving in the shops; these, I guess, are the gambles we have to take as part of putting together a monthly magazine. For a brief period of intrigue, possibility and anticipation, it even looked as if a new David Bowie album might sneak artfully into this calendar year. As it turns out, *Blackstar* is scheduled for release in January 2016, but inside these pages you'll find a first, forensic review of one of Bowie's most audacious albums to date, plus a revelatory piece on the making of the album from Donny McCaslin, the jazz saxophonist who has taken on the role of Bowie's key collaborator for the project.

Last-minute surprises notwithstanding, our list of this year's top 75 new albums feels like a particularly fresh and eclectic one – and one which hopefully reflects *Uncut*'s continuing commitment to find exciting new music. My thanks to everyone who contributed, and who've worked so enthusiastically and tirelessly for *Uncut* in 2015 – not least over the past few weeks, while I've been a bit incapacitated after a

cycling accident. Sincere thanks, too, for all your continuing support and encouragement over the past 12 months, not just for *Uncut* itself, but for our website, our rapidly expanding portfolio of *Ultimate Music Guides*, and for our new monthly *History Of Rock* project (we've just reached 1969; for much more information, and subscriptions, please do visit [www.uncut.co.uk](http://www.uncut.co.uk)). It's been a fruitful year and, corny though it may sound, we couldn't have done it without you.

Peace, and I'll see you back here in 2016,

John Mulvey, Editor. Follow me on Twitter @JohnRMulvey

# UNCUT

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# INSTANT KARMA!

THIS MONTH'S REVELATIONS FROM THE WORLD OF UNCUT  
Featuring MIRACLE LEGION | JANIS JOPLIN | GWENNO



LIVE SURPRISES

## YOU KNOW HOW TIME FADES AWAY...

“Vampire Blues”! “Hippie Dream”! “Alabama”! How NEIL YOUNG spent 2015 taking an esoteric journey through his past

Photograph: Jay Blakesberg

NEIL YOUNG'S REBEL CONTENT tour of this year was full of surprises. The 23 shows, split over two legs in July and October, were for some the finest Neil performances for decades. It wasn't just the number of songs performed by Young and his cohorts, Promise Of The Real, nor the length of the shows themselves – many three hours or longer – but the treasure trove of songs that had seemed to be gathering dust somewhere in Young's vaults, never to be revived and tended to again.



There was no doubt just how deeply into their host's repertoire the Promise Of The Real were – the seeds of the band's formation were sown at a Neil Young gig Lukas Nelson and drummer Anthony LoGerfo attended in 2008. There was little doubting, too, just how much Young was enjoying having a band who could take him to places many never expected him to go again.

Critical to the success of the shows were the many rarities the band played – so here are the 10 deepest cuts from Young's Rebel Content tour, beginning with one that appeared during a marathon three-hour-and-20-minute show...

### 10 "HIPPIE DREAM"

(LANDING ON WATER, 1986)

July 11, Lincoln, Nebraska. The longest show of the tour, three hours plus, and one where the first encore caught Neil watchers off guard, the proto-metal of "Hippie Dream" cascading from the stage. The song was played regularly with Crazy Horse on their '86 US tour but lay fallow for 11 years, resurrected with the Horse in 1997. Often regarded as a pointed message to David Crosby, the one-off appearance 18 years on may have been connected to a fallout with Crosby over comments about Daryl Hannah.

### 9 "LOOKIN' FOR A LOVE"

(ZUMA, 1975)

This Zuma cut was played once with Bob Dylan at the SNACK Benefit in San Francisco and with Crazy Horse on the Northern California Bar Tour of December '75. A decade later it emerged on the International Harvester tour, played 29 times on the haul across North America. A single showing followed in 1996 and then nothing until July this year, in Vermont. It stayed in for the next two shows and then was gone once more; 35 outings in 40 years. Rare indeed.



Neil Young at Farm Aid 30 on September 19, 2015, Chicago, Illinois

## 8 "BURNED"

(BUFFALO SPRINGFIELD, 1966)

In the liner notes of *Decade*, Young wrote that the Buffalo Springfield allowed him his first vocal only after "the boys gave me some uppers to get my nerve up". It took 43 years to find the nerve to play the song live, debuted in Dublin in 2009 (popping up in Nottingham soon afterwards) with nine outings following during the aborted tour with the reformed Springfield in 2010-11. Emerging as another eye-opener from the vaults, it featured twice towards the end of the second leg, in Vegas and LA, just the 12th and 13th performances ever.

## 7 "TIME FADES AWAY"

(TIME FADES AWAY, 1973)

Not the rarest of songs, but a significant surprise as the tour wound down. "Time Fades Away" was part of the arduous '73 tour, but then lay dormant. Fast forward to a soundcheck in Oberhausen in '08; Ben Keith begins playing the song's opening bars on pedal steel. Young likes it and that night, a version that could have leapt off the record hits the German air. The second performance of the last 42 years came within the beautiful surroundings of Santa Barbara Bowl, popping up as an encore in San Diego three nights later...

## 6 "WHITE LINE"

(RAGGED GLORY, 1990)

"White Line" has an interesting history with Neil Young. Originally named "River Of Pride" and intended to appear on the still-unreleased

Homegrown LP, the song was re-recorded (as "White Line") with Crazy Horse in 1990 and released on *Ragged Glory*. Debuted in December 1975, the song surfaced the following autumn with Crazy Horse, then vanished for 23 years; popping up at a solo show in Texas in June 1999. An airing in Hawaii in May this year was followed by two "full tour" appearances, in Milwaukee and Red Rocks, only the sixth and seventh performances ever.

## 5 "ALABAMA" (HARVEST, 1972)

Before the 2nd leg began, the band played Farm Aid in Chicago and "Alabama" emerged for the first time in 38 years. Five outings followed including, in Portland, performances of "Alabama" and "Southern Man" within the same set for the first time since '73. Much has been written about both "Southern Man" and "Alabama" – and Lynyrd Skynyrd's response. Fittingly, the song's most recent outing prior to 2015 was at Miami's Bicentennial Park, on Young's 32nd birthday in November 1977, three weeks after the fatal Skynyrd flight in Mississippi, Young segueing from "Alabama" into "Sweet Home Alabama".

## 4 "WESTERN HERO"

(SLEEPS WITH ANGELS, 1994)

"Western Hero" also appeared at Farm Aid – the

## NEIL YOUNG & PROMISE OF THE REAL "REBEL CONTENT TOUR" IN NUMBERS

First leg of the tour:  
July 5-July 24 - 12 shows

Second leg of the tour:  
October 1-October 17 - 11 shows

565 songs played across the 23 shows

63 different songs played across the 23 shows

Most songs in one show:  
Pinnacle Bank Arena, Lincoln, NE - 29 songs

Numerous shows on or above the three-hour mark...

STATS: Tom Hambleton and [www.sugarmtn.org/](http://www.sugarmtn.org/)

deepest cut to date, having only been played live once before, by Young and Crazy Horse at a benefit in Washington DC in January 1995. The song featured twice more, in Montana and Oregon, at the start of the second leg, a total of just four performances ever. "Western Hero" has a twin on *Sleeps With Angels*' "Train Of Love", which is almost as rare: five outings, and not one since '94.

## 3 "L.A."

(TIME FADES AWAY, 1973)

Those who staked an early claim to head "up the hill" in Santa Barbara on an eye-wateringly hot October Californian afternoon got the first glimpse of this particular deep cut, soundchecked along with "Time Fades Away". Once dusted down, "L.A." came along to the Forum, Inglewood for the first time in public since April 1973, and only its 23rd live performance.

## 2 "HERE WE ARE IN THE YEARS"

(NEIL YOUNG, 1968)

This delicate track from Young's eponymous debut was unveiled in Seattle for the first time in 39 years. After 13 plays during the Time Fades Away tour, the song appeared for one night only in Atlanta, with Crazy Horse, in 1976 and then nothing. That the Seattle version morphed into the instrumental break of another ultra rare Young cut, "Pushed It Over The End", wasn't lost on those who heard it, but that cornerstone of the '74 CSNY tour remains in the locker, for now...

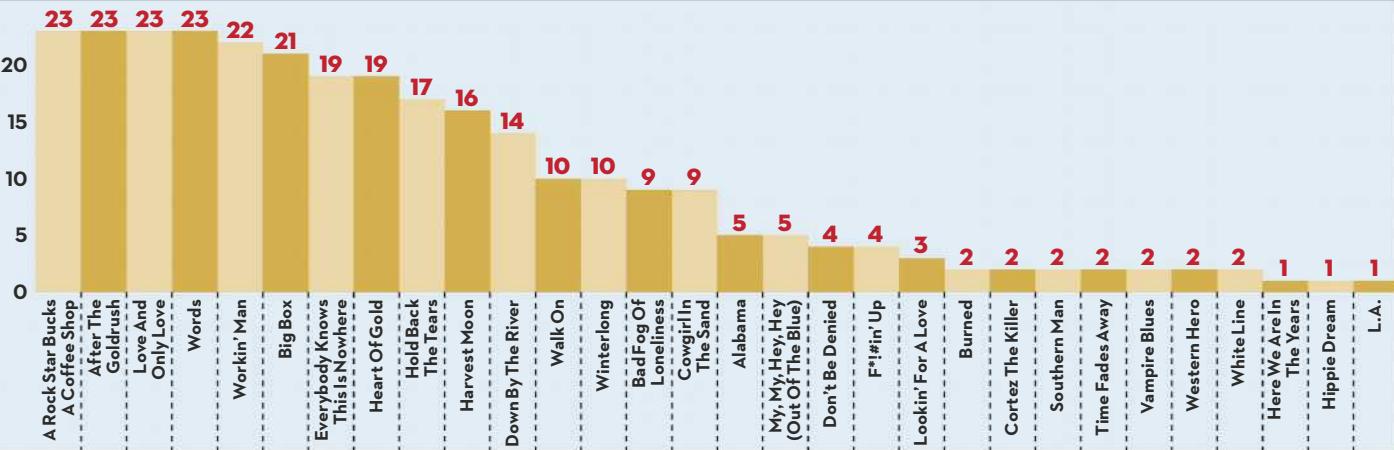
## 1 "VAMPIRE BLUES"

(ON THE BEACH, 1974)

Perhaps the Holy Grail of deep cuts, played as the encore to an unsuspecting crowd in Eugene, Oregon. For only the second time (and the first with an electric version), here was this fabled track, from one of Neil Young's most respected records. The first performance in more than 41 years, after a debut at Cuesta College, San Luis Obispo in March 1974 (played at a fundraiser with the Eagles), the third performance followed in LA six nights later... MARK GOLLEY

## BUMPER HARVEST

Most and least-played songs on the Rebel Content tour





JANIS ON FILM

# “She felt people’s pain so deeply”

**The secret life and letters of JANIS JOPLIN, revealed in a new documentary: *Little Girl Blue***

**S**HORTLY BEFORE HER death in 1970, Janis Joplin returned to her hometown of Port Arthur, Texas, to attend a high-school reunion. In footage from that visit, the singer is interviewed about her school days. “I didn’t go to the prom,” she confessed. Pressed by reporters whether she was invited, she replied, “No, I wasn’t. I don’t think they wanted to take me. And I’ve been suffering ever since!” This footage appears in Amy Berg’s new documentary, *Janis: Little Girl Blue*, and – the director explains – is key to understanding Joplin’s psychological make-up. “Janis went from being this adorable, bouncing, sweet kid to a kind of angst-ridden teenager/adolescent,” says Berg. “The transition was really, really difficult for her. Success and fame don’t really erase the pain of a troubled childhood.”

The chaotic push-and-pull between Joplin’s flamboyant public life and her deeper insecurities provides the narrative for Berg’s film. The director – whose previous documentaries have explored child abuse in the Catholic Church (*Deliver Us From Evil*) and the American criminal justice system (*West Of Memphis*) – began the project in 2007, although contractual and financial issues stalled it for two years. During the hiatus, Berg worked on it intermittently. “I grabbed interviews when I could, as a couple of key people in her life passed away,” she says.

While strong footage exists of Joplin performing and in interview, Berg found a path into the singer’s private self through “thousands” of letters she wrote to her family. “The themes of this documentary had to do with validation and [Janis] trying to be proud of herself,” says Berg, “and to straddle a line between her childhood and adulthood – so those were the letters I used.” The letters act as the film’s core narration, read in voice-over by Chan Marshall. “It was a beautiful way to include Janis’ voice in the film,” says Berg. “I wanted to make her world feel relatively small so people could get a glimpse of what it was like to be her.”

Alongside the correspondence, the documentary contains sharp memories of Joplin from former bandmates, friends and family. “One of the things I noticed was the difference in the memory recall of the people who were more known for LSD than heroin,” laughs Berg. “There was a big difference!” Significantly, Berg isn’t shy from illustrating Joplin’s drug use. “It was such a decadent time,” she says. “Janis and Sam [Andrew, *Big Brother And The Holding Company*’s guitarist] liked to drink and do heroin and have intellectual conversations. What progressively happened to Janis over her drug-using years was that she didn’t know how to turn off. She felt people’s pain so deeply. She took it all in, so this was a way to distance herself from it.”

Historically, Joplin has not been well served on film. “As a woman in the ‘77 club’, as people refer to it, she is remembered differently from the men,” admits Berg. “I think Janis suffered from her legacy having to do more with her drug overdose than her career and musical abilities. She just got the star on the Walk Of Fame, I think, two years ago.”

But frequently *Janis: Little Girl Blue* showcases Joplin’s remarkable musical gifts. Although footage often proved hard to find – “The people who were managing her archive weren’t part of her musical career, so it was just kind of spread out all over the place” – Berg still managed to acquire some quality rare material, including *Big Brother* in the studio recording “Summertime”. “There’s also a powerful ‘Me And Bobby McGee’ from the Festival Express, never before seen, which captures where she was emotionally at that point. She was happiest when she stepped onto the stage and she was with her people. That was something that she couldn’t match in her everyday life, but that was the essence of what made her happy in her short years as a singer in bands.”

**MICHAEL BONNER**

*Janis: Little Girl Blue* is released in the UK in February 2016

## A QUICK ONE

► Has the devil got a hold on you? With their headline slot at 2016’s Isle Of Wight now confirmed, the timing couldn’t be better for us to launch our *Ultimate Music Guide* to Queen.



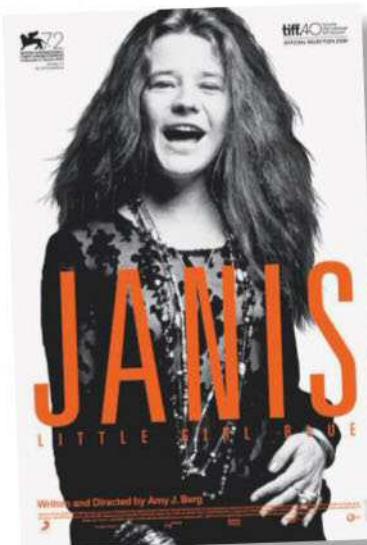
Usual format: deep new reviews, crazy archive interviews, and so forth. Our *History Of Rock* monthly series also continues apace: the 1969 edition has Mick Jagger on the cover and, like the Queen special, is in shops now.

► The bard of the Big Apple, Dion, returns next February with a new album, *New York Is My Home*. The title track, featuring Paul Simon, is available online.

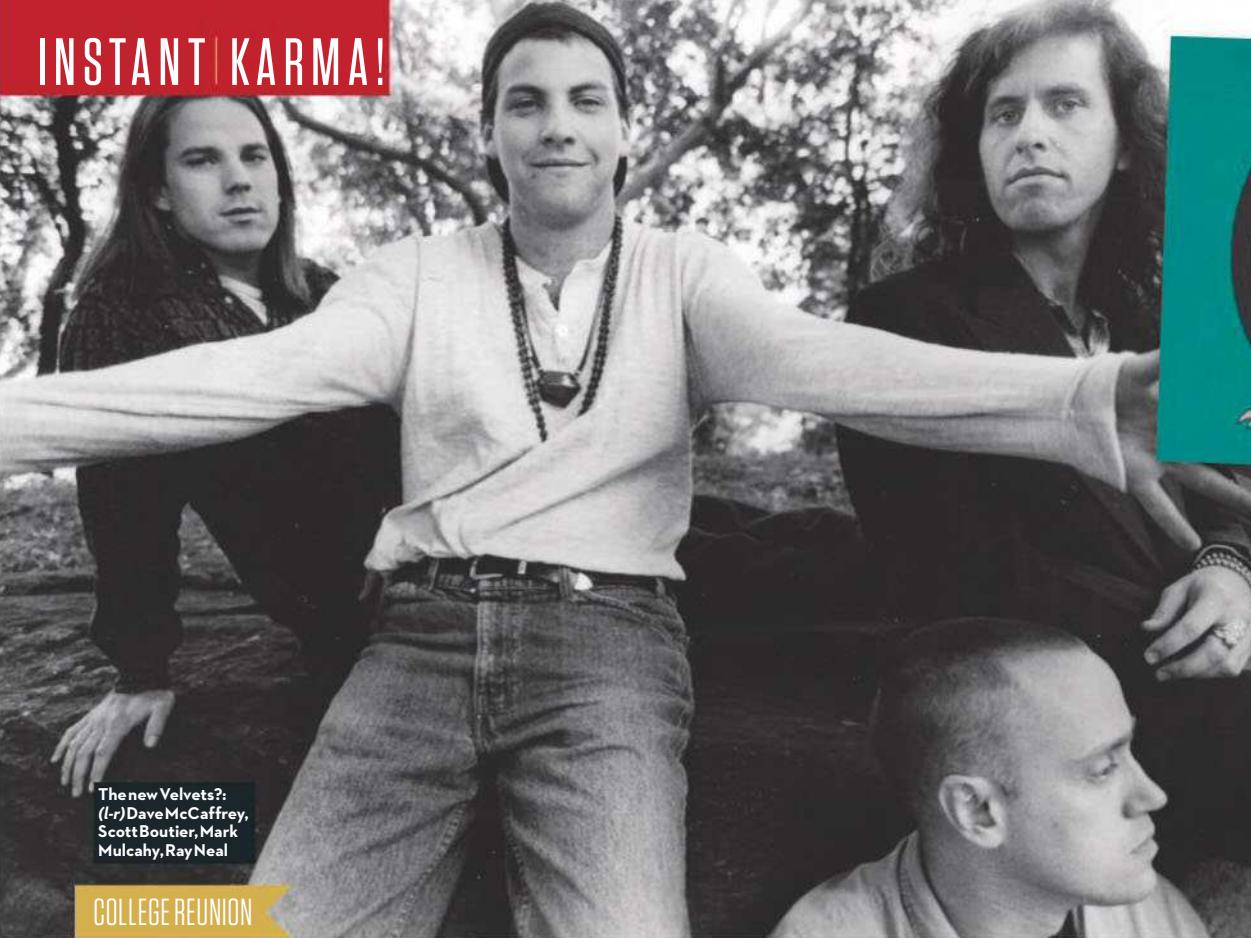
► Jeff Lynne is taking the reconfigured ELO on tour in the wake of his recent *Alone In The Universe* album. The dates kick off on April 5 in Liverpool and culminate with a couple of nights at London’s O2 on April 20 and 22.

► Also returning to the rock’n’roll fold is Ritchie Blackmore, who puts aside the medieval falderal of Blackmore’s Night in June to revisit the music of Rainbow and Deep Purple. Blackmore plays Birmingham Genting Arena on June 25, 2016. “I’m doing it,” he says, “for the fans.”

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# INSTANT KARMA!



The new Velvets:  
(l-r) Dave McCaffrey,  
Scott Boutier, Mark  
Mulcahy, Ray Neal

COLLEGE REUNION

## Promised You A Miracle

**At last! Mark Mulcahy and Ray Neal plot the second coming of MIRACLE LEGION**

**P**LENTY OF BANDS don't get the breaks they deserve, though Miracle Legion were unluckier than most. Post-punk contemporaries of REM and The Replacements, the Connecticut quartet were a big draw on the college rock scene of the '80s and beyond, driven by the arpeggio'd guitar bluster of Ray Neal and the yearning tones of charismatic frontman Mark Mulcahy. Yet their four-album career was undermined by a series of record company disasters. "It was like the old Velvet Underground story," reflects Neal. "They supposedly only sold 3,000 records, but everybody who bought

one started a band. We were the college-rock version of that."

It began promisingly. On the strength of debut EP "The Backyard", Geoff Travis signed Miracle Legion to Rough Trade after seeing them at CBGB's in 1987 ("He came to our hotel room the next day with a cassette of The Smiths' *Strangeways Here We Come*, as proof of who he was," Neal recalls). Two albums in, however, Rough Trade America went belly up, leaving the band to join the newly formed Morgan Creek Records.

*Drenched* followed in 1992, but, on the eve of a follow-up, the label ceased operations. What's more, Morgan Creek refused to release

Miracle Legion from their contract. "It was like a cage match," says Mulcahy. "So I found a small studio in a furniture factory near my mom's house and we made another album, *Portrait Of A Damaged Family*, which just sat in a box for well over a year until they finally let us go. It ended up being the first release on my own label, Mezzotint [1996], but nobody heard it."

Worn down by the experience, Miracle Legion split. Neal retired to Scotland, while Mulcahy and the

*"Whenever we played live it was like a scrum; we'd go hard at the audience and never let up"*

others became Polaris, the house band for Nickelodeon TV show *The Adventures Of Pete & Pete*. The singer/guitarist then embarked on a quietly spectacular solo career that's thus far yielded four albums and a 2009 tribute LP, *Ciao My Shining Star: The Songs Of Mark Mulcahy*, rammed with famous admirers like Thom Yorke, Michael Stipe, Frank Black and Mercury Rev.

Now, tentatively at least, Miracle Legion are back on the agenda. "Next Record Store Day we're putting out *Portrait Of A Damaged Family* on vinyl," says Mulcahy. "Then we'll see what happens. There's a legacy in my head that Miracle Legion did something good. Whenever we played live it was like a scrum; we'd go hard at the audience and never let up. Maybe some festival promoter might read this article and be interested in doing something. I'd love to play again, that's the part that works."

"There were times when playing with Miracle Legion was just the most intense experience I've ever had," adds Neal, who hasn't ruled out the possibility of a new album at some point. "I've been moved to tears onstage with Mark. Not only does he have an open-ended way with lyrics, but as a singer he's just mind-blowing. Miracle Legion was unique and I think we're all up for doing it once more." ROB HUGHES

## THE CLASSIFIEDS

**THIS MONTH: 'Tis the season to see the Pink Fairies in Dagenham, while Black Sabbath spread their own brand of festive cheer. From NME, December 22, 1973**

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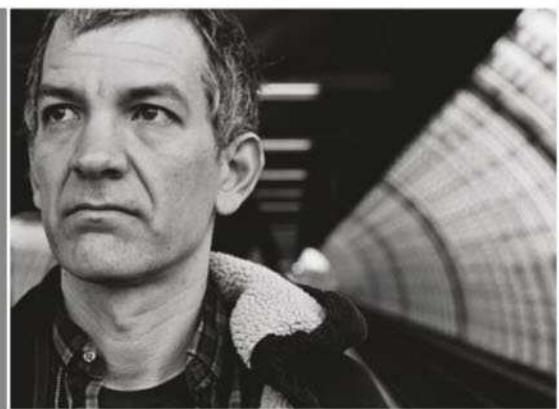
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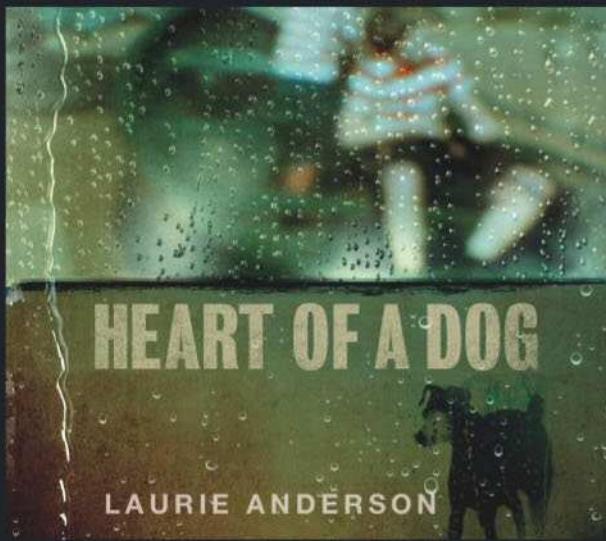
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*Hollywood Reporter*

ALBUM OUT NOW





I'M NEW HERE

# GWENNO

**Recommended this month: the woman behind 2015's breakout Welsh-language, science-fiction, left-wing, kosmische album!**

**T**HE YEAR 2015 HAS BEEN a pivotal one for Gwenno Saunders, in more ways than one. Not only did she widely release her first solo album, the Welsh-language *Y Dydd Olaf*, to considerable acclaim, but she's about to give birth to her first child. "Pregnancy has been brilliant, it's given me time to reflect and think about what to do next," she explains. "I've been doing a lot of solo gigs this year, but not on my own, really, as I've got a little person hanging around."

The Cardiff-born singer and songwriter must be in need of a rest – *Y Dydd Olaf* ('The Final Day'), made with no thought that anyone would hear it, has become something of a surprise success. Sung entirely in Welsh (and Cornish on "Amser"), the record is a concept album based around a '70s Welsh-language science-fiction novel of the same name, written by nuclear scientist Owain Owain.

That the album combines this conceptual framework so successfully with feminist and left-wing themes on the likes of "Chwyldro" ("Revolution") and "Patriarchaeth" ("Patriarchy"), backed by kosmische synth-pop that recalls Harmonia, Kraftwerk and Stereolab, was something of a surprise to many, especially those that only recalled Saunders from her time fronting meta-girl-group The Pipettes. "It's been insane, hasn't it?" she laughs. "Next year is 10 years since [Pipettes debut] *We Are The Pipettes*. The only thing you can hope for artistically is that you're evolving."

Gwenno returned to Cardiff a few years ago with her husband Rhys Edwards, who also records as Jakokoyak and produced *Y Dydd Olaf*. The homecoming put Gwenno back in touch with her Welsh-language roots, while discovering Owain's book provided a concept that renewed Saunders' confidence in her own songs. Set in a *Brave New World*-like future where people are being turned into machines, the

novel's story is told through diary entries written in Welsh, this being the only language the overlords can't understand.

"One of the things I found frustrating about moving back to Wales," explains Gwenno, "was that it was in the midst of an enthusiastic push with [Welsh-language] folk; a lot of it was grant-funded, it wasn't an organic thing. It frustrated me – I think folk is fantastic, but I was searching for an alternative narrative or perspective within Welsh-language culture, which can at times be quite conservative, Victorian and traditional."

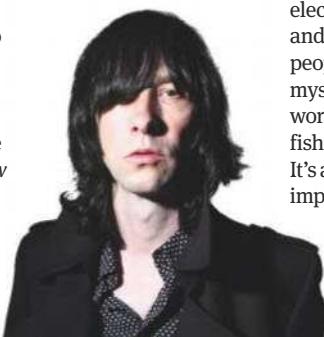
Gwenno's debut first appeared in a limited run on Cardiff's tiny Peski label in 2014, but finally received a wider release on Heavenly in July. Since then, its mix of eerie synths, Linn drums, Saunders' own icy, reverbed vocals and Edwards' grooving bass guitar has caught the ears of many, and propelled the record to No 22 in *Uncut's* albums of the year list [see p27] and onto the BBC 6 Music playlist. After the small matter of giving birth is over, she's planning on making a follow-up – like her debut, recorded at home – again using Welsh and Cornish. "I feel privileged I have other languages I can write in," she says. "It's exciting, like if you've been using watercolours and you try oils. Though I didn't imagine I'd play this music in front of people who wouldn't understand Welsh!"

"When you make a Welsh-language album, it's not always a folk album about the land and pixies. I'm not saying I'm the first person to disregard that, but it's great to be able to embrace electronics and examine the future and 'the now' within a culture that people perhaps view as something mystic, when it's actually about working people, coalminers, fishermen and factory workers. It's all of that, which I think is important in music."

TOM PINNOCK

WE'RE YOUR FANS  
"We love this.  
'Chwyldro'  
was our  
fave psych  
dream  
song of the  
summer!"

PRIMAL SCREAM



## THE UNCUT PLAYLIST

ON THE STEREO THIS MONTH...

### CIAN NUGENT

#### Night Fiction WOODSIST

Perhaps following the lead of fellow guitar adventurer Steve Gunn, Dublin-born Nugent steps up to the mic for the first time on this low-key, dusky set that at times recalls Cass McCombs backed by The VU.

### SAVAGES Adore Life MATADOR

The London post-punks return with their stranger, slower second – Banshees influences reduced, eerie reverb turned up.

### CIRCLES AROUND THE SUN

#### Interludes For The Dead RHINO

A collection of Neal Casal's epic jams, conjured up for the Grateful Dead's Fare Thee Well shows – time to "Hallucinate A Solution", as the opening piece commands.

### TINDERSTICKS

#### The Waiting

#### Room CITY SLANG

For their 10th LP, Stuart Staples and his crew expand into dub and even Afrobeat jams on the Fela-like "Help Yourself".



### TORTOISE

#### The Catastrophist

#### THRILL JOCKEY

Sounding sprightlier than they have for a while, the Chicago collective even cover David Essex's "Rock On" on their first LP in six years.

### FRANÇOISE HARDY

#### L'Amitié LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

One of the highlights of her early career – reissued in 2016 – this 1965 gem sees Hardy moving away from yé-yé to lusher pastures.

### ELEANOR FRIEDBERGER

#### New View FRENCHKISS

Friedberger's third album since The Fiery Furnaces' 2011 hiatus is another straightforward yet beautifully executed take on classic '70s singer-songwriter rock.

### TY SEGALL Ty Rex (Deluxe) GONER

A welcome comp from California's busiest man ahead of his new *Emotional Mugger* LP – and this time, his full set of Bolan boogies includes a new take on "20th Century Boy".

### GUADALUPE PLATA

#### Guadalupe Plata EVERLASTING

'Big in Mexico', this Andalusian trio's first UK release comes on like a swampy mix of John Lee Hooker, Los Lobos and Billy Childish.

### MOUNT MARIAH

#### How To Dance MERGE

Mining a seam of sassy, lush Americana, the North Carolina group's upcoming third album is a close cousin to Spacebomb's more cosmic country-soul.

For regular updates, check our blogs at [www.uncut.co.uk](http://www.uncut.co.uk) and follow @JohnRMulvey on Twitter



## WE FOUR KINGS

### CASS McCOMBS "A FOLK SET APART Rarities, B-sides and Space Junk, Etc."

An alternate retelling of the last decade in the life of the extraordinary songwriter Cass McCombs.

A glimpse behind the studio curtain at one of the greatest songwriters of the 21st century.

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### BEAT HAPPENING "LOOK AROUND"

A remastered, career-spanning anthology. Handpicked by the band and a great starting point for the uninitiated, as well as a refreshing reminder to those who caught the wave the first time around

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### THE TRIFFIDS "BORN SANDY DEVOTIONAL"

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Includes lyric sheet, printed inner sleeve and download code.

180gm vinyl LP (inc. download) / DL



dominorecordco.com

# Father John Misty

Interview: Michael Bonner  
Portrait: Emma Tillman

The folk maverick preaches to the converted about Icelandic cuisine, his perfume brand and that mooted 'Christmas Neu-Jazz Double Album' – "I made it up!" he says

**T**HE BEST THING about being on tour is how much time I have to watch movies," says Josh Tillman. "The worst thing about being on tour is just how much time I sit around watching movies." Tillman – aka Father John Misty – is talking to *Uncut* from his hotel room in Iceland. He is currently in the final stages of a European tour before heading off to Australia for his last remaining shows of the year. "Just last night, I went out and had this smashed fish on toast and rye-bread ice cream. Incredible! I could eat the Icelandic thing every day."

He returns to the States in two weeks, where he will begin a hiatus he anticipates will run through to March. "I've got a bunch of things I've been putting off," he explains. "Yeah, I've got to clean the rain gutters..."

There is, however, the small matter of how he will follow up *I Love You, Honeybear* – his second studio album recorded under the Father John Misty moniker and one of *Uncut*'s albums of the year. "I can't say when there will be new music," he admits. "I just have to record this thing. In terms of after this cycle? When I'm ready to get back on the horse? That is a whole other question."

Meanwhile, he readies himself to answer your questions before leaving his hotel to sample more of Iceland's marvellous cuisine. "Yeah," he says enthusiastically. "We're going to venture out for some more food tourism tonight!"

## STAR QUESTION



Is social media a harmless artefact of the digi age or a reductive agent of ineffable experience

and an undoing of collective imagination? **Beck**

Good lord! OK, whether or not something is harmless is difficult to prove, because it's so contingent on the context. Like a Twinkie or something. It's much easier to turn yourself into a paranoid conspiracy theorist, than it is to prove the harmlessness of a Twinkie. But we aren't talking about Twinkies, we're talking about social media. I had a Twitter account for a few years and I deleted it for a few years, now

I have one again. I have some joyless theories on it all, but I think people are sick of hearing about it. I think my joyless theories are as toxic for the collective imagination as social media is.

What's your favourite memory of your time with Fleet Foxes?

**Jeannie Stewart, Dundee**  
When I first joined, everyone in the band was so talented. There was a real feeling that we could do anything we wanted to do, this unbelievable potential. That was thrilling. For me, it was a little different as I was a hired gun; I didn't make that album, I got brought on to do the touring. So I was self-conscious about that fact that, in my mind, I didn't deserve the success. I was just happy to be playing music I liked. But, Casey Wescott and I were very, very close,



and that friendship for me was the highlight of the whole thing.

## STAR QUESTION



Do you live far outside of... wherever we are now?

**Jonathan Wilson**  
I don't even know what that means!

What does Jonathan bring to a working relationship? He's a really good problem solver and I guess I'm the kind of person who can get lost in abstractions. Sometimes your perspective and your sense of humour are the first things to go in the studio, and I think it's useful having someone who is one step removed from the thing. But outside of that, I just love him as a player. It's like having a friend in there that you trust. But there's really no higher praise for someone than in terms of letting them into your creative orbit – it's just such an intimate space.

What's the worst job you ever took to make ends meet?

**Craig Baker, Eastbourne**  
I donated plasma for about a year when I first moved to Seattle. I was living on dumpster bread. I was having a hard time finding a job and I went to donate plasma with a friend of mine and I just fell in love with it. I just realised I had a real passion for donating plasma. You can go twice a week and the first visit you make 15 bucks and the second you make 30 bucks. I took it on with such commitment! I got a job in a bakery, working from 4am to noon. I've done primarily unskilled jobs, like washing dishes. There were so many musicians in Seattle, but no-one wanted to hire musicians, 'cos you'd go on tour, and so every job, I'd have to lie and say that I wasn't a musician. Then later, I'd get offered a tour and have to create some scenario where, within the previous three months or however long, I'd have learned how to play guitar and put an album out.



“If anyone could provide a fragrance experience that would encapsulate what it means to be a young woman today, it was me”



Shepherd's Bush Empire, thou shall not want: live in London, October 28, 2015

### STAR QUESTION



#### What David Lynch character are you?

*Lana Del Ray*

The Log Lady.

She's somewhere equidistant on a continuum between the man behind the dumpster in *Mulholland Drive* and the dancing man in the Red Room. I'm very much looking forward to the new series of *Twin Peaks*. If there is anyone who is capable of reprising something that is so beloved like that show, it's David Lynch. I don't think there's any cynical reason for him to do more episodes. There must be something in the story that needs to be told, so in that respect it's really exciting.

**What happened to your proposed 'Christmas Neu-Jazz Double Album'?**

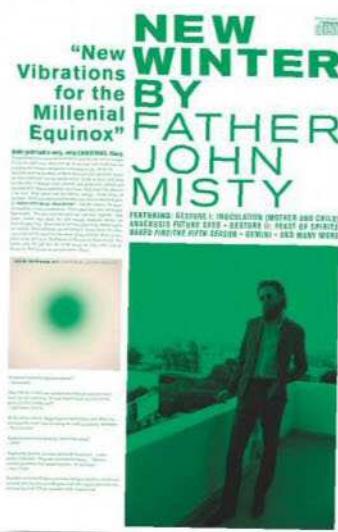
*Charlotte Palmer, Massachusetts*  
The budget just ran dry. It's really just in a holding pattern right now, because I want the right resources to be there. It's very important that it be fully realised and I can't make any concessions... Yes, it's something I made up for my website. It's just a poster. If I remember correctly, the poster features some really portentous song titles with Roman numerals, colons and everything. In my mind, conceptually it's heavily indebted to Cecil Taylor. "Anacrusis Future Seed". "Gesture II: Feast Of Spirits". "Naked Fire/The Fifth Season".

**I think "The Night Josh Tillman Came To Our Apt." is a great song. Great tune, amazing lyric. I love it, but I don't get it – what's the point of view in the song? Who is talking?**

*Phil Newman, Hove*  
It's pure male impotent rage. It's a portrait of wounded narcissism.

It's not so much about this girl or this episode so much as it is about my self-hatred. It's like this is the only place you end up singing "Silent Night" in three-part harmony in a bathroom with two naked women. The episode itself was fairly singular. I can't say that I'm totally sure what it was exactly about that incident that made me rush home and write a song about it. But it is the darker aspects of my experience that inspire me to write. I think it's sort of a bait and switch, because maybe at a first listen it just appears to be this indignant, self-righteous dressing down of this poor girl. But on repeated listens, you realise it's the narrator here who is the total asshole. I was in a low place, trying to bolster my esteem. It's a despicable song!

*"It is the darker aspects of my experience that inspire me to write"*



### As an artist who's released his own perfume, what's your favourite signature rock-star product?

*Becca Swift, Cambridge*

The perfume... You know, all I'll say about it is, I was convinced that if anyone could provide a natural fragrance experience that would really encapsulate what it means to be a young woman today, it was me. Signature rock-star product? The Kiss Kasket [coffin], that's really the only one. Now you know that exists, it means everybody else can just go home.

### STAR QUESTION



I know you collaborate a lot with your wife, Emma. I collaborate with my wife, too. Is that a good idea?

*Matt Berninger*

I would say a marriage is a collaborative situation. But, it can be very risky to collaborate with the one person who can hurt you the way no-one else is capable of doing. But yes, it's exciting, too. I wish she was collaborating with me right now on these questions.

### Has Neil Young ever heard "I'm Writing A Novel" from the first Misty album?

*Stian Svehagen, Oslo*

There's a verse in the song about being on a dune buggy with Neil and he says, "You're going to have to drive me down to the beach if you ever want to write the real". It's a reference to my great reverence for him. And the fact you have to ceremoniously murder in your mind the people you have the most reverence for if you want to make your own thing. Anyway, one of the first times I played that song, a friend of mine who promotes shows in California asked me to open for

Pegi Young at a 150-person show in San Francisco. I got there, and Neil was playing guitar with her. I was playing the song, I looked over and Neil was there in the wings. I was like, 'Oh, my God. Here comes the verse.' The next time I looked over, he wasn't there. So I can only speculate. I've never been asked to play Bridge School, so you tell me.

### STAR QUESTION



When you're on the road, what fast-food establishment do you get excited about and which one bums you out the most? Would you let either one use your music for a TV commercial?

*Pat Carney*

If I ever find myself in an airport in a window of time where McDonald's breakfast is served, I take that as tacit permission to eat it. But I would let McDonald's use one of my songs for a commercial if they agreed to give me total autonomy in directing this commercial myself. What would that envisage? A family gorging on McDonald's in extreme slow motion.

### How did a Christian upbringing affect your music?

*Iain Harper, Leeds*

I think the effect it had on the J. Tillman output was fairly obvious. The verbiage, and whatever, the imagery, resonated with me in a precocious, immature way. Now it's a lot harder to pin down. But also a lot more time has passed. With Christianity, when you are raised with a concept that says the world we inhabit is not real, that can embolden someone to make the kind of reckless, fantasy-based decisions required to undertake a career in music. It does give you some kind of propensity for idealism or otherness. I think there is something about my particular scorched-earth view of the world – whether it's condemning social media, or pop music, or whatever it is – that is a manifestation of some kind of, like, inherited, conservative viewpoint. I'm not so delusional to think that it has no effect on my life, but the effect may be more covert than I realise. ☺

*I Love You, Honeybear* is available now on Bella Union



**UNCUT.CO.UK**

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

FROM THE CREATOR OF THE CLASSIC PINK FLOYD ALBUM  
A FILM BY ROGER WATERS AND SEAN EVANS

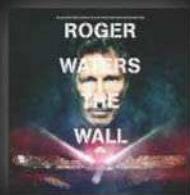
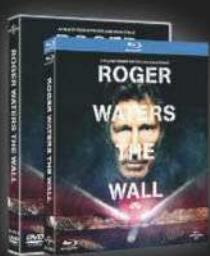
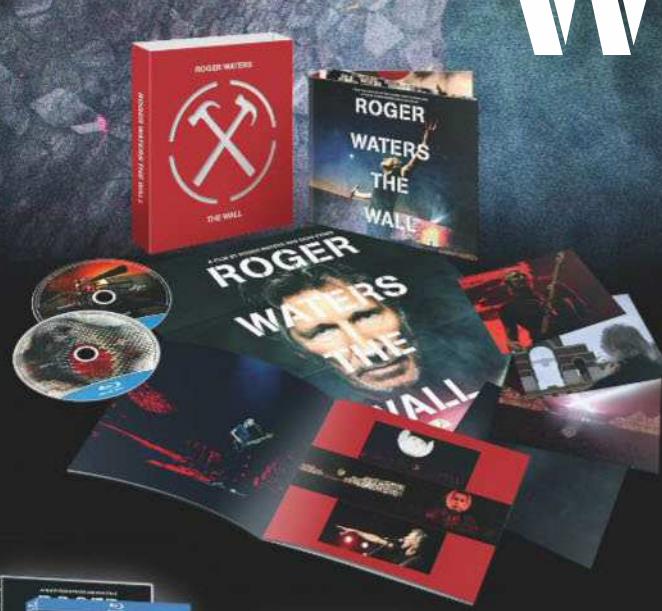
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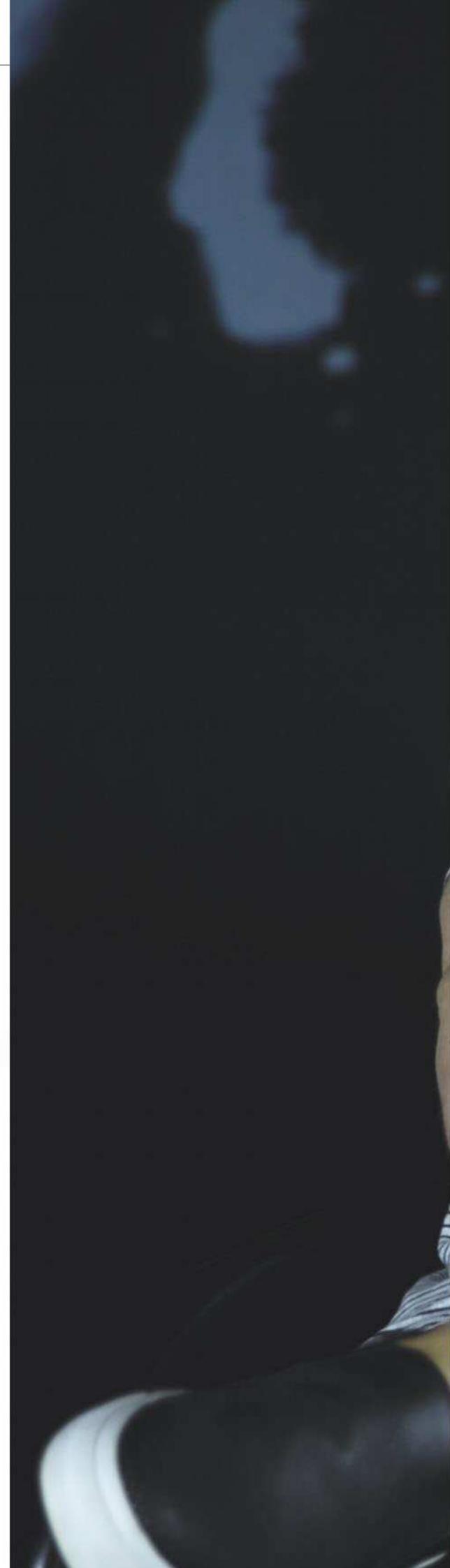


# “HOW ABOUT FLYING A LITTLE MORE...?”

After DAVID BOWIE's extraordinary career resurrection with *The Next Day*, he is preparing to release *Blackstar* (strictly speaking ★) — an album of “big concepts”.

Here, *Blackstar*'s bandleader, DONNY McCASLIN, reveals all about Bowie's remarkable working practices, including jazz solos, conceptual feedback and sushi lunches. “He leaves no stone unturned,” we learn...

**Interview:** Michael Bonner  
**Portrait:** Jimmy King





Donny McCaslin  
and Bowie, during  
the "Sue" sessions



I FIRST MET DAVID through Maria Schneider. I've been in her group for about 10 years or so. She and David were talking about collaborating. Then she called me up, looking for recommendations about different aspects of what they were doing. We did two small group workshops for "Sue (Or In A Season Of

Crime)", with David, Ryan Keberle – a trombone player from Maria's band – myself and the rhythm section. I recommended the drummer from my band, Mark Guiliana, to play on it. This was June 2014. After the first workshop, David came with Maria and Tony Visconti to hear my band play at the 55 Bar, a local spot in New York. The next morning he emailed me and said that he had written a song based on what he'd heard last night and wondered if I'd be interested in recording it. After I picked my jaw up off the floor – he was so polite about it, just so generous in what he said – I said, "Absolutely, love to." So he sent me a demo version he'd made at home. He had programmed the drum, the bass, he had played the saxophone solo on it. That was "Tis A Pity She Was A Whore". Then pretty quickly it was, "How about we do two or three tunes?" Then Maria suggested to him, "Why don't you have Donny's band do a whole record with you?" That was how it started.



The first time we got together to record, we planned four or five days of rehearsal, then a week of recording. But things got busier on his end. The timetable got pushed back. Then it was just, "Let's record for six days." That was January this year. At that point, I thought it was going to be a few songs. David said, "I have no idea how this is going to go, let's just go for it and see what happens." He'd sent me, say, six or seven songs. He had written out some parts. I transcribed and orchestrated some things that were on the demos, and I added other parts to what he had written.

We'd arrive at the studio around 10 or 10.30am and tuned up. David would arrive at 11 and we would usually work until about 4pm. The Magic Shop, the studio where we recorded, is in the SoHo neighbourhood in New York. It has a very unassuming front door. You walk in, there's a desk on the right, a very narrow hallway and at the end a set of big doors leads into the control room where they have this vintage [Neve] console. Then you go into the studio itself. It's not a huge room.

We had Mark's drums set up at the far end. Then next to Mark was Jason and his keyboards. Tim was closest to the control room, with his back to it, facing Mark who's at the other end of the room with Jason on his left. Then David was to Tim's right where he had some guitars set up and a vocal mic. I was set up in a booth next to David. We were working as a live band and David was recording with us. It was all

very intimate. That was good, because you can hear that it's recorded in a live room. It makes it feel real.

We recorded two songs a day and maybe only one on the last day. I remember Tony and David both saying, "Wow, this is going so fast. You're doing a great job." David took everything we did during the day home at night and listened intently to it, trying to figure out what he wanted and so on. His attention to detail that way was eye-opening. By the end of the week, as we had got more momentum going, David said, "OK, I want to go back and record this one and this one again." We celebrated his birthday in the middle of the sessions. Because it was New York City, we had sushi. Really fancy sushi. On a typical day, David would come in and we'd listen to what we'd done the day before. He might say, "Let's try this or let's try that." Or "Let's try this song." We'd rehearse a little, then just roll tape. Usually within the first two or three takes, we'd go back and listen and he'd say, "OK, we've got it." Then maybe he'd go in and refine the vocal, and maybe Tim [Lefebvre, bass] or Mark [Guiliana, drums] might fix something. Then I would go in and do the rest of the woodwind in addition to the basic track. David would say, "How do you guys feel?" He was very democratic,

always soliciting our opinions. He's taking in the whole thing. Maybe I'd play a solo and say, "What do you think, David? How is that feeling?" He was usually super-positive. The way he would give feedback was cool. It was kind of conceptual. It wasn't, "Well, on bar 4 instead of playing B flat, play B natural." It wasn't that kind of thing.

I guess the week went pretty well, because at the end of it David said, "Let's do this again."

**D**AVID PRESENTED ALMOST every song as a demo. Most of them he had recorded by himself at home, but I think he had recorded some with

Tony and a drummer sometime before. There were a couple he taught us in the studio, but I don't think those made the record. We probably recorded 15 or 16 songs. Some I had in advance of the recording session, but then on the second go around, when we reconvened in February, he hit me with five or six songs a few days before. It seemed like they came to him quickly. I think "Blackstar" was one he'd demo'd the night before we went to the studio.

It was a pretty open and collaborative process. Generally, the song you hear is what he brought in. There may have been a tiny bit of improvisation, but for the most part, the length of the song, the verse, the chorus format, all that was pretty clear from the demos. That said, he wasn't dictating to us. He'd never say, "You have to play this drum groove," or, "The bassline has to be exactly like this." He was open to our interpretations of the demos – a lot of the horn lines, the

## TIMELINE

**JUNE 9, 2014:**  
First workshop for "Sue... (In A Season Of Crime)"

**JUNE 18, 2014:**  
Second workshop

**JUNE 24, 2014:**

"Sue..." recorded at The Magic Shop, New York

**NOVEMBER 14, 2014:**  
"Sue..." released as a 10in for Record Store Day

**JANUARY 3-8, 2015:**

First album sessions at The Magic Shop

**JANUARY 8, 2015:**  
David Bowie turns 68

**FEBRUARY 2-6, 2015:**  
Second album sessions

at The Magic Shop

**MARCH 20-24, 2015:**  
Third album sessions at The Magic Shop

**APRIL, 2015:** Overdubs, Human Worldwide, NYC

**NOVEMBER 20, 2015:**  
"Blackstar" 45 released

**DECEMBER, 2015:**  
"Lazarus" 45 released

**JANUARY 8, 2016:**  
Blackstar LP released



## "THE ALBUM HAS SOME BIG CONCEPTS IN IT"

Designer Jonathan Barnbrook on the look of *Blackstar*

**W**ORKING WITH DAVID is a very collaborative process. He sees and is kept up to date with everything and there are many discussions about the direction and many roughs over a number of months. It is a very exciting, uncertain time, not only as I am one of the few in the world that has heard the album and have to keep it a secret, but also I am always unsure of how well I will respond to the music. It is a very rewarding process. David always gives you time to do 'your thing'. As for how he responds through the project, he is serious as well as humorous at the right moments, respectful of people's creativity, honest when he doesn't like something, full of praise when he does, interested in the whole and the details, and very trusting and gets every intellectual/literature/his-own-history reference immediately.

"For this album, David and I listened to it together, discussed concepts, how they relate to contemporary life. Some of them are quite heavy. I spent time turning his thoughts over in my mind. The album has some big concepts in it and it always helps to allow them to come to the surface.

"There is a similarity to *The Next Day* in that it is a strong, simple graphic shape. I am a great believer in using the basic abstract forms for recognition. One fundamental thing, I have had it



pointed out that this is also the first Bowie LP without a picture of Bowie on, which made me feel quite strange, as I worry his fans wouldn't like it. The reason for this was because of the dark feeling around the album, and the fact David doesn't appear publicly nowadays. It didn't feel appropriate to have him 'smiling on the front'. The role of the LP cover is different today – it's no longer the main focus, but there are publicity shots and articles. The cover has to complement all this, be robust on different technologies, quickly identifiable and stand up to all of the noise around it.

"The Bowie logo is made of black stars, but it is also about Bowie's heritage. The stars used in the logo are also '70s glam and Ziggy Stardust. I tried to balance old and new, and keep it minimal without being kitsch. A lot of people will say it isn't legible, but once you understand the structure of the forms and the way they represent the letters then it can't say anything else other than his name.

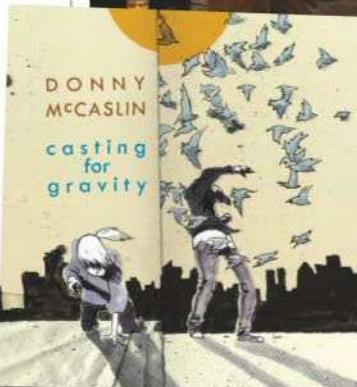
"It's going to be interesting to see the reaction. With *The Next Day*, it was polarised, very healthy for discussion. It was great people cared; cover design had slipped into insignificance of late. The *Blackstar* graphics are less controversial, but I'd like a bit more of a dialogue with people. They can download the font and use the Bowie logo for non-commercial use. This is the way record design should be now – less of the label releasing stuff from on high, more appreciating the fans to help them feel part of the release."

orchestrations I did, the way I added different instruments. If I wasn't sure, I'd say, "I'm just going to try this and we'll see [if it works]." Then I'd ask David, "What do you think?" He was totally affirmative and into it. When the sax is soloing, that's me improvising; that's all happening in the moment. But to be clear, David would say, "This will be a spot for a solo." It felt like he was really trusting our instincts, or my instincts. It felt really cool that way. It was the jazz idea of a collaborative democracy, where we're passing the ball back and forth, yet it was in the context of what he had written and the forms he'd come up with.

David is super-focused in the studio. He'd come into the live room and we'd get ready to track, he would sing a little bit – and I mean a little bit. We would do a warm-up rehearsal to get it going, but when it was time to go, he was ready to go. When he was fixing up his vocal part, it would go quickly. He would add harmonies, or double-track. Often, he knew what he wanted to do, or maybe it was a conversation between him and Tony – but it happened fast. They have all this history together; they understand each other. They had a very good rapport. Let's say we recorded a track, we'd do one or two takes, we're listening to it, and then David would say, "OK, that's the one, let's go with it." Then maybe he would go in and work on the vocal. So Tony really knew exactly what to give him and how to get it to



The Donny McCaslin Group performs at The Jazz Standard, NYC, December 4, 2012: (l-r) McCaslin, Jason Lindner, Tim Lefebvre and Mark Guiliana



The Last Panthers title sequence

## "DARK, BROODING, BEAUTIFUL"

How Bowie's "Blackstar" became the theme for a TV series...

UNUSUALLY FOR BOWIE, he allowed a segment of the LP's title song to be used on the opening credits for a new heist series, *The Last Panthers*. The show's director, Johan Renck, also shot a video for "Blackstar", which debuted on Sky One on November 19. Bowie fans will remember the last time they crowded round the TV to watch a Bowie video debut: Julian Temple's 1984 short film, *Jazzin' For Blue Jean*, late one night on Channel 4. The Swedish filmmaker Renck, who's also directed videos for Madonna, Suede and New Order, said, "I was looking for one of the icons of my youth to write the music for the title sequence, but was presented with a god. His first response was precise, engaged and

curious. The music he laid before us embodied all aspects of our characters and the series itself – dark, brooding, beautiful and sentimental (in the best incarnation of this word). All along, the man inspired and intrigued me... I was overwhelmed with his generosity. I still can't fathom what actually happened...

"I showed Mr Bowie two episodes in a rough state and he liked them. We discussed aspects of the show; the plot, but also the currents of guilt. We talked about the dark heart of Europe, biblical aspects of human nature. I showed him a concept board of the title sequence – images laced with demons from the worlds of Bosch and Grünewald. Then he said go – it all fits. Then he played me his new song, 'Blackstar'."

him. He was working with Kevin Killen, the engineer, who's great, but Tony, I felt, was really quick to identify what section David wanted to work on, how to give him what he needed in the headphone mix. All the little details. Tony would say, "Start here. Give David more kick drum" – or whatever it is. With David, Tony was really on top of it. This whole process, from start to finish, was not that long. We're not talking about three hours of vocals here. David knows what he wants to do and then Tony is great at facilitating that on the technical side. The whole process goes pretty quick because David delivers. But David was never consumed with his own part. He would also listen to what we're doing – our overdubs or whatever – so he's able to take in the whole picture.

WE NEVER DID a lot of takes. Between one and three, and that was it. When we got together for that first week, David said he wanted to re-record "Tis A Pity She Was A Whore". We were playing hard, going for it. That just happened in, like, 10 minutes. That might have been the first take. The new version of "Sue" took the longest. Because the original we recorded with Maria is so specific, with all the orchestration, I said to David, "Why don't we do a version that's more open, where we're just jamming, the guys are jamming, and there's David Bowie singing that first part. Then we'll all just cue the sections." So we did one or two passes at that which were really wild, but it didn't work. I went back to Maria's score and reduced it to clarinet, alto flute, tenor. I came back the next morning and said, "Tony, I've got an idea of 'Sue'." Then I put those parts on and everybody felt it was feeling complete. I was trying to push to have those guys play more open and to get it edgier and let loose.

I remember the demo he sent me for "Girl Loves Me". It was one he'd done entirely on his own. He had string parts in the version that I scored out for flutes. There's a really lyrical melody in the middle of the song, an interlude, that was also strings. I played an alto flute and a C flute. Then James Murphy became involved. James took it to his studio and did this whole other thing with it. Mark and Jason both heard snippets of it when they were over there working. Mark was saying it was really different from how he recorded it. I don't know if that's the version that ended up on the record or if that's going to be a remix or something.

On the last run, in March, Ben Monder came in on guitar. He was set up between David and Tim. I remember he sounded great on "I Can't Give Everything Away". There was a saxophone solo, a guitar solo; there may have been a keyboard solo, too. But I love this one. I think the horn stuff that I did on this one had chords that were there on the

got so much going on lately." David's been super-busy with *Lazarus*. But hopefully that will happen soon.

What did I learn from working with David? He leaves no stone unturned. He listens intently to everyone and is totally present in every moment. David could be very conceptual. When giving us feedback, it was never as black and white as, "I want this to sound like Motown, 1967." He'd say things to engage the imagination. You could think about it and figure out what it means to you. I recall him saying, "That sounds

great. How about flying a little more?" Looking back, I was inspired by David's songs, by how imaginative he was with the lyrics, and how even the demos had all the elements in place; strong melody, harmony, bass line and drum groove. Seeing how he lives, he's gracious and generous and doesn't spend time doing things he doesn't want to. He'd go over everything we recorded, 'til he got the music where it felt right. It reaches so far. He is such a deep artist. You know how it is. 

★ is reviewed  
on page 67

"HE'D GO  
OVER EVERY  
THING 'TIL  
HE GOT  
THE MUSIC  
WHERE IT  
FELT RIGHT"  
DONNY  
MCCASLIN

demo. I may have added a voice or two, but in terms of the part that I played, David had it all there.

I was so inspired by how much music and literature David's checked out; he is constantly looking for new things, to listen to and to read. The concept with my band, it's this idea of electronica music mixed with improvisation. I think David was particularly drawn to that. For instance, when describing one of the first songs we recorded, "Somewhere", David referenced the Boards Of Canada song "Alpha And Omega" [which McCaslin recorded for *Casting For Gravity*] as an approach. It's just amazing how he processes information. We'd talk about Death Grips, this band in California. We talked a lot about sax players, but he didn't bring his horn. That would have been fantastic. But his horn is all over the demo for "Tis A Pity..." and one called "The Hunger" ["Lazarus" on the album]. Did David ever indicate whether there was a connection between *Blackstar* and *Lazarus*? No, but it's funny, at one point he mentioned the guy who's the musical director on *Lazarus* – a good friend of mine, who subs in my band for Jason. He said, "Oh, you know Henry Hay? He's working on another project for me." I didn't know what it was, he didn't go into it. Then we recorded a song that I'm sure didn't make the record called "Wistful". David sent me a demo with a singer and a piano player playing this arpeggiated thing. Beautiful. We recorded it in January, but David wasn't feeling it. He sent me a different version for the March session. It was the piano player and a singer, and the singer had a kind of musical-theatre approach for it. I thought, 'Wow, that sounds like it could be for a musical.' And lo and behold it was! The piano player on that demo was Henry Hay.

**I**N APRIL, I did a day of overdubs at Tony's place [*Human Worldwide*], some flute on "Blackstar" and another saxophone part for "Tis A Pity She Was A Whore". David and Tony spent a lot of time there, after we did that first round, listening to the stuff over and over and sifting through the material to make it what it is. I know David did some more vocal stuff. One way to think of it, when we were together, David and Tony were gathering information, laying it down, then the two of them comb through everything.

For instance, we recorded "Blackstar" in two different pieces at Magic Shop. It might have even been on two different days. At the time, David and Tony were talking about how they were going to bridge the gap between the parts, and I think they put it together at Tony's. When I went in April, they'd added strings and drums. When I heard the snippet used on the TV show [*The Last Panthers*], I was like, "Yeah, that's definitely different from what we did."

We didn't have a wrap party, but I think a big part of that is that *Lazarus* has been a consuming project for him. We've been in contact over the summer and various times he's said, "I want to organise a listening party, I've

"A MAN  
UNABLE  
TO DIE...  
HAUNTED BY  
A LOST LOVE"

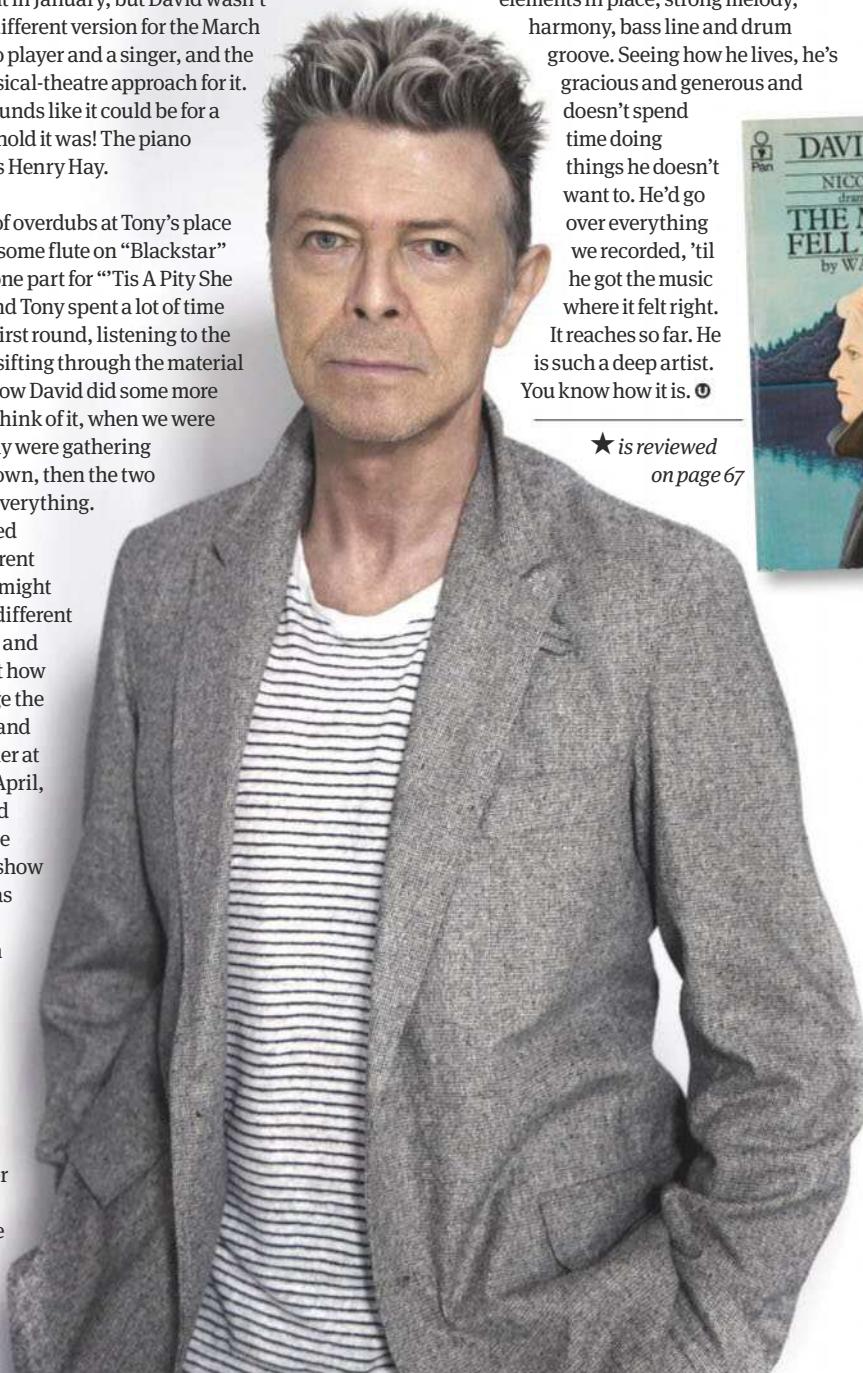
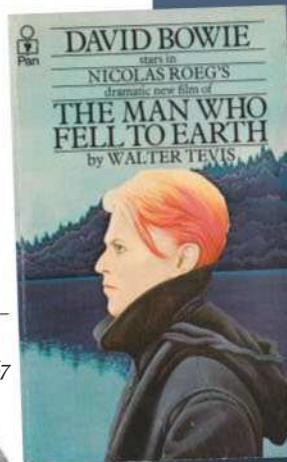
Who – or what – is  
*Lazarus*?

**B**OWIE IS NO stranger to the theatre – he attempted to mount a musical based on George Orwell's 1984 in the early '70s and played John Merrick in *The Elephant Man* in 1980/1 – but *Lazarus* is the first piece Bowie has written for theatre. A collaboration with Irish playwright Enda Walsh (*Once*), and directed by Ivo van Hove, the musical runs at the New York Theatre Workshop until January 17.

It is a sequel of sorts to Walter Tevis' novel *The Man Who Fell To Earth* (filmed by Nic Roeg with Bowie as the alien lead, Thomas Jerome Newton). Speaking to *The New York Times*, van Hove said, "*Lazarus* focuses on

Newton as he remains on earth, a man unable to die, his head soaked in cheap gin, and haunted by a past love." Michael C Hall (*Six Feet Under*, *Dexter*) has been cast as Newton, while the musical features new songs by Bowie – at least one, "Lazarus", appears on *Blackstar* – as well as new arrangements of eight previously recorded songs, including "This Is Not America".

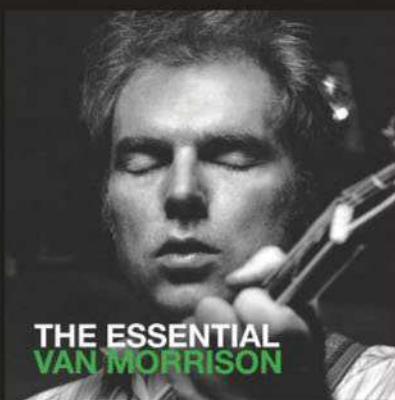
Perhaps Bowie would be kind enough to release some of those soon; although he is presumably busy on his next theatrical project: writing a song for the forthcoming *SpongeBob SquarePants* musical...



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PRESENTS

# THE REVIEW OF

# 2015

## THE ESSENTIAL ALBUMS FILMS, DVDS & BOOKS OF THE YEAR

The final, definitive word on 2015, as the *Uncut* team rank the key releases of the year. Once you've worked your way through all our charts, please send us your own thoughts: [uncut\\_feedback@timeinc.com](mailto:uncut_feedback@timeinc.com)

**23 THE TOP 75 ALBUMS OF THE YEAR**

**35 THE BEST REISSUES & COMPS**

**38 2015'S FINEST FILMS**

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## 50 YO LA TENGO *Stuff Like That There* **MATADOR**



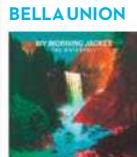
Having covered themselves and others on 1990's *Fakebook*, here Yo La Tengo covered their own idea. Low-key charm predominated as the band employed the mode of The Velvet Underground's eponymous third album: acoustically rendering driving but gentle versions of Sun Ra, Hank Williams, and especially The Cure's "Friday I'm In Love". Moving, consistent, and generally lovely.

## 49 SONGHOY BLUES *Music In Exile* **PIAS**



The Islamist uprising in Mali impacted on musicians who were forced to flee the new, oppressive regime. The debut by Songhoy Blues is thematically a response to that, being recorded after leaving northern Mali. Musically, however, it's exuberant, the band offering compelling shuffles in the vein of Canned Heat. On the expanded edition, meanwhile, they tackle "Should I Stay Or Should I Go?"

## 48 MY MORNING JACKET *The Waterfall* **BELLA UNION**



Jim James's band can do most things – Crazy Horse jams and '80s disco to name but two – so it was no surprise that their first

album for four years should begin with an anthemic driving song that seemed to be sampling early Kraftwerk. Some tropes of anthemic '80s rock were flirted with, from U2 to Van Halen, but such is the band's over-arching vision, they made them their own.

## 47 MIGUEL *Wildheart* **RCA RECORDS**



Kendrick Lamar wasn't the only artist this year to make a Californian record of Technicolor brilliance. With assistance from the top-flight likes of Salaam Remi and Benny Blanco, R&B artist Miguel made an intense and sexual record, in textures from heavy synths to smooth soul. At times, it was like a less artsy Frank Ocean – old gangsta Kurupt and Lenny Kravitz were both along for the ride.

## 46 OLIVIA CHANEY *The Longest River* **NONESUCH**



Not for Olivia Chaney a topspun folk. Her songs tapped into the rawest themes of the oldest ballads

(broken romantic contracts; death), but also engaged with observational material on modern life (flights to New York and so on). Ultimately, it meant this very British singer occupied an unthought-of space between Ann Briggs and Kate Nash. The sad stuff was the best stuff, but it was all sung beautifully.

**ON YOUR FREE CD TRACK 10**

## 45 PANDA BEAR *Panda Bear Vs The Grim Reaper* **DOMINO**



The Grim Reaper in question was apparently Sonic Boom, who worked on this fourth album by Animal Collective's Noah Lennox. As with the classic *Person Pitch*, this worked its magic through the layering of Panda Bear's voice – a Panda Bear record will imagine a choir of digital Beach Boys singing the melancholy of a future Byrds – but entropic beats like "Mr Noah" moved the game on.

## 44 LAURA MARLING *Short Movie* **VIRGIN**



While her music expresses vulnerability, Laura Marling's songs have been expressed in increasingly robust form. *Short Movie* (which makes it sound more like a mini-LP than a 50-minute roam through cities and styles), continues that policy – confidently charging from tough urban rockers ("False Hope") to searching things in the vein of Tim or Jeff Buckley. Restlessness, fittingly, was the album's thematic core.

## 43 EZRA FURMAN *Perpetual Motion People* **PIAS**



"I want the universe," sang Ezra Furman, "God knows I've been patient!" This was

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very much the kind of tragicomic tone you could expect from the second (strictly speaking) solo album from the Chicago singer-songwriter. A trip through styles and poses, *Perpetual Motion People* was as picaresque as early Dylan with the charm of Violet Femmes. The universe? Maybe next time...

## 42 JD MCPHERSON Let The Good Times Roll

ROUNDER



McPherson plays rock'n'roll as Little Richard played it, pretty much. But while you'll

recognise his mode instantly in songs like "All Over But The Shouting", some kind of retro facsimile clearly isn't his plan. As the Oklahoman's album continues, you'll feel his rock rhythms are part of a minimal aesthetic – the better to allow dynamic guitar flourishes and soulful vocals to shine.

ON YOUR FREE CD TRACK 13

## 41 JESSICA PRATT On Your Own Love Again

DRAG CITY



The first material by Jessica Pratt – an unadorned guitar and vocal address to the listener – sounded classic, like late 1960s, early '70s music you'd known for years. Pratt's second album inhabited that idea further. The songs were still direct, but the production also offered sensitive arrangement and a ghostly hiss, as if Pratt truly was being beamed in from another time altogether. Strange and beautiful.

## 40 BOB DYLAN Shadows In The Night

COLUMBIA

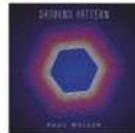


You wouldn't like to guess what Bob Dylan might be into. Announced last year but delayed to coincide with the centenary of Frank Sinatra's birth, *Shadows* finds Dylan covering songs Sinatra made famous – the legendary vocalist covered by an increasingly idiosyncratic one. It's vulnerable and touching, sumptuously arranged and – especially when he puts the lights down to play the stuff on tour – dramatic, too.



## 39 PAUL WELLER Saturns Pattern

UNIVERSAL



In the year when the Modfather addressed the legacy of The Jam on film, Paul Weller couldn't have been writing music with a looser relationship to his past. After a run of eclectic albums, *Saturns Pattern* found Weller less *Heavy Soul*, more heavy psych – embracing guitar madness with the Amorphous Androgynous, and absorbing influences from everyone from Captain Beefheart to Morocco's Master Musicians Of Joujouka. A brand new start, once again.

## 38 DAVE RAWLINGS MACHINE Nashville Obsolete

ACONY



A sensitive accompanist on work by his partner, Gillian Welch, Dave Rawlings is equally content to reverse the arrangement and take the spotlight himself. A work of elegant classicism and quality songwriting, this album finds Rawlings' influences – particularly Neil Young, Loudon Wainwright, "Wild Horses" – matched by an intelligent ear for original arrangements (his strings are pure Philly, for example) and some songwriting conceits quite his own.



## 37 LOW ONES AND SIXES

SUBPOP



It's not about how slow Low are, or even about how sad. The release of their 11th album

demonstrated that the Minnesotan band's music is all about the space – what the listener fills that with is up to them. *Ones And Sixes* still worked with harmony and electric guitar to create its mood – but a crunchy electronic ambience was also key to the record's chilly allure.

## 36 DESTROYER Poison Season

MERGE/DEAD OCEANS



A sometime New Pornographer, Dan Bejar has prolific indie-rock in his genetic code. After mounting interest in his own work since 2011's *Kaputt*, *Poison Season* took things a bit further. Combining Bejar's wry and oddly Anglophilic observational material with an attractive chamber pop, the album sits somewhere between Nick Drake, Lawrence and Genesis P-Orridge, a romantic mode unafraid to let reality interject into the moment.

## 35 YOUNG FATHERS White Men Are Black Men Too

BIG DADA

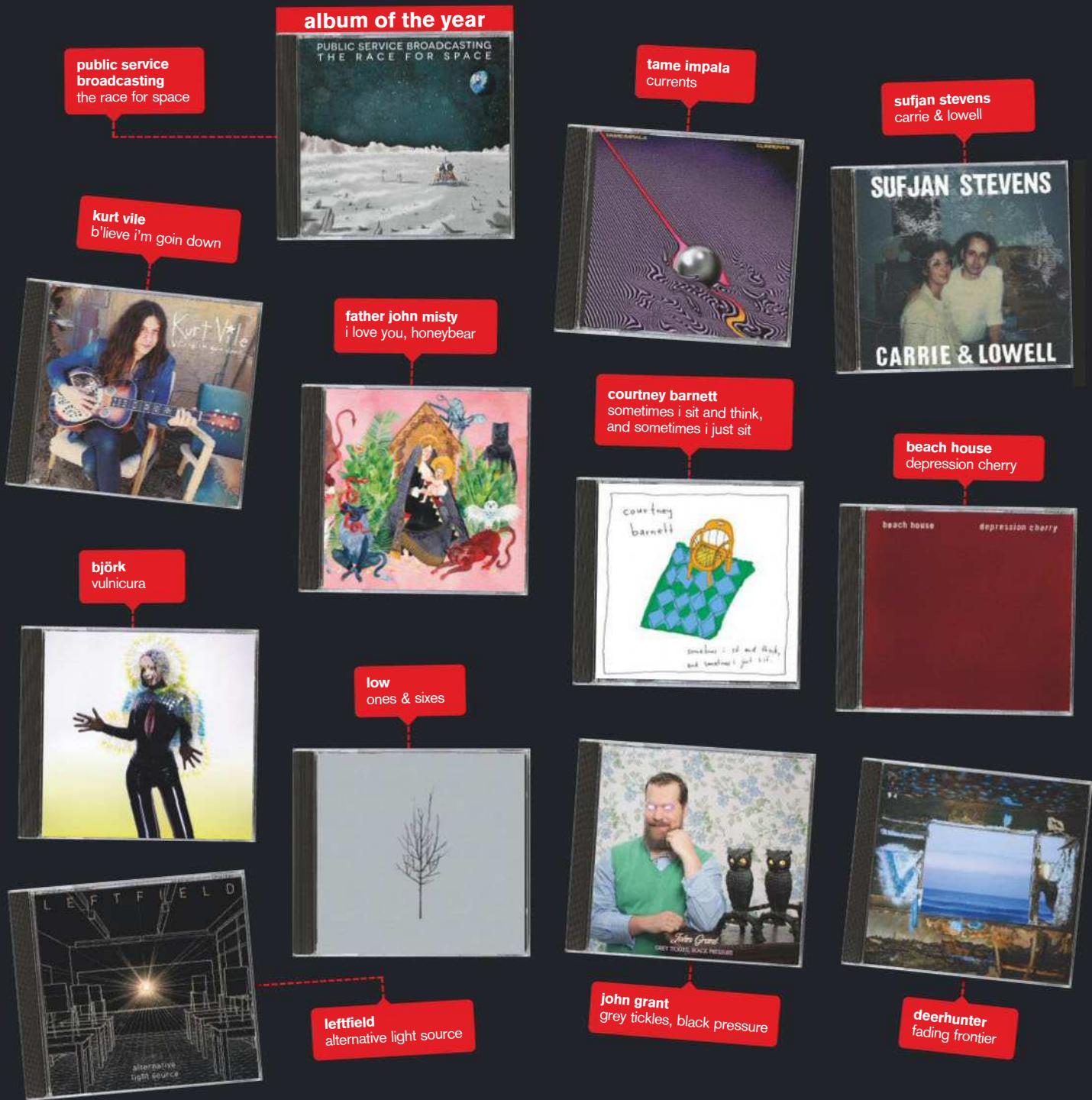


Unlikely winners of the 2014 Mercury Prize, Young Fathers are notionally hip-hop – but only in the same way that you might say are Suicide, TV On The Radio or Sleaford Mods. A turn for the accessible after their Spartan, theatrical debut, *Dead*, this turns inland somewhat to atmospheric alternative rock – the band now being as much about their music as about what they actually say.

## 34 FFS FFS DOMINO

Proving conclusively that, in fact, quite a few people like a smartarse. A dream come true for anyone who dared to imagine a supergroup that joined Franz Ferdinand and Sparks, FFS has been a shot in the arm for both parties, creatively speaking. Those unprepared for pop self-referential ("Collaborations Don't Work") and arch will blanche, but the LP is full of exuberance.

# best of 2015



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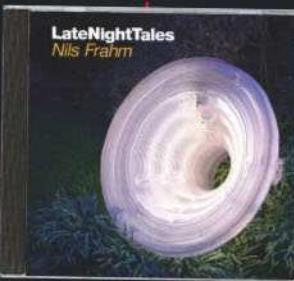
jamie xx  
in colour



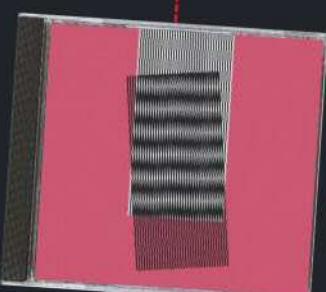
jon hopkins  
late night tales



nils frahm  
late night tales



hot chip  
why make sense?



seaford mods  
key markets



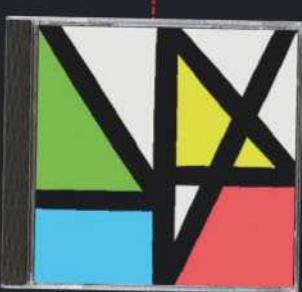
róisín murphy  
hairless toys



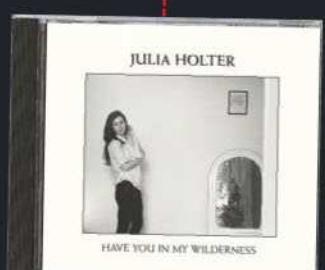
ghostpoet  
shedding skin



new order  
music complete



julia holter  
have you in my wilderness



everything everything  
get to heaven



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collaborative works: 2cd



dave gahan & soulsavers  
angels & ghosts



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# REVIEW OF 2015 | NEW RELEASES

## 33 MATTHEW E WHITE *Fresh Blood* DOMINO

Matthew E White talked a good game. And who, hearing his country-soul extravaganza *Big Inner*, produced in his attic, wouldn't fall for his theory of low-key, high-quality productions. *Fresh Blood* didn't just repeat the trick; it moved the game on, as songs like "Rock & Roll Is Cold" turned White's philosophy into music that was as soulful as it was hip. And it was pretty hip.

## 32 SUN KIL MOON *Universal Themes*

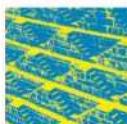
CALDO VERDE

 Publicly, Mark Kozelek didn't exactly cover himself in glory this year.

Still, the personality that can cause a person to be somewhat a dick to women, other musicians, etc., can also make for interestingly seething and churning records. A disorderly interior monologue that ultimately revealed itself to have structure and purpose, *Universal Themes* mined Kozelek's obsessions, diaries and dirty laundry, and extracted occasional gold.

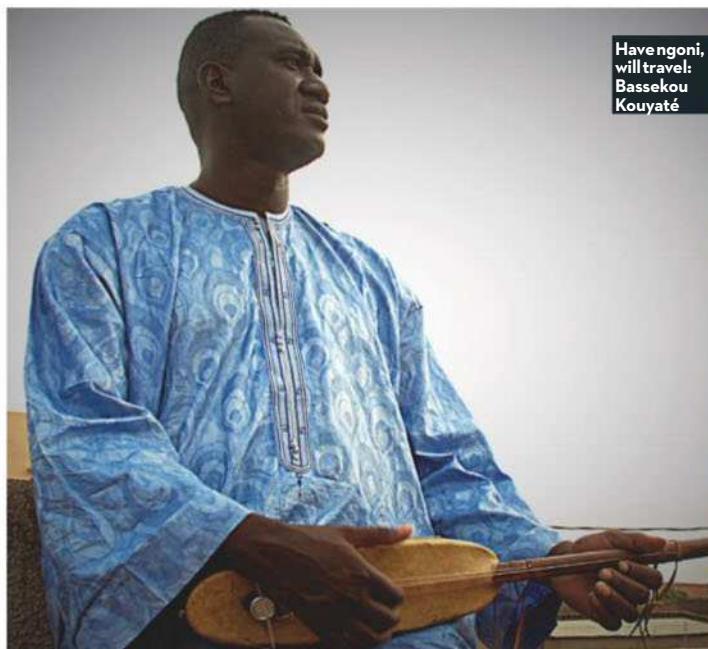
## 31 FOUR TET *Morning/Evening*

BANDCAMP

 Although he is the father of "folktronica", Kieran Hebden's latest work was born in the city. Time spent playing long DJ sets in London clubs helped the producer discover more about mood and dynamics and his findings resulted in this – two 20-minute pieces ("Morning" and "Evening") that combine his findings with the mood of the traditional raga form. Spellbinding stuff.

## 30 KAMASI WASHINGTON *The Epic* BRAINFEEDER

 Not many of the guests on Kendrick Lamar's album had a bad 2015 – Los Angeles jazzier Kamasi Washington was no exception. A tenor sax player, often compared to John Coltrane, Washington's music on *The Epic* travelled far and wide, with influences ranging from jazz



Havengoni,  
will travel:  
Bassekou  
Kouyaté



I'm a b'liever:  
Kurt Vile

orchestra to Blaxploitation funk to Afrobeat and the Soft Machine. Another Lamar guest, bass player Thundercat, provided much of the continuity and drive.

## 29 KURT VILE *b'lieve i'm goin down...*

MATADOR

 A lower-case dude in a capital letters world, Kurt Vile won't shout for your attention. Rather, he works by insinuation, his cyclical guitar playing and gentle musing growing familiar – as a loved record will gather surface noise. His sixth studio album, duly, was slyly engrossing and began with no greater drama than getting dressed

("Pretty Pimpin"), entering your affections by the side door and taking up residence.

## 28 BASSEKOU KOUYATE AND NGONI BA *Ba Power*

GLITTERBEAT

 "The less intervention, the better" was the plan for this Bamako-recorded album by Bassekou Kouyaté and his band, which might imply a raw album. Not so. Kouyaté is the Jimi Hendrix of the ngoni, tricking its taut, ukulele-like sound out with effects, so this is a pretty slick affair. Still, for all the glossy paintwork, it's clear that Kouyaté's mesmeric playing is the engine of the vehicle.



Saxmachine:  
Kamasi  
Washington

## 27 JAMIE XX *In Color* YOUNG TURKS

 As one of The xx, Jamie Smith has created gnomic but emotional works for the crestfallen urban citizen to empathise with at night. On his debut LP, it's a different kind of night in question – as he subjects formative experiences of jungle and hardcore to his thoughtful minimalism. *In Colour* was both rave and after-party, abandon and reflection, peak and trough.

## 26 JOANNA NEWSOM *Divers* DRAG CITY

 Joanna Newsom's transition from fringe concern to film and fashion muse has not been painful. As her fourth album proves, she remains a magnificently un contemporary musician, her work skipping unaffected from arcane reference to arcane reference. *Divers* gave equal weight to Van Dyke Parks and Percy Bysshe Shelley, in a work worthy of both high praise and detailed footnotes.

## 25 JOHN GRANT *Grey Tickles, Black Pressure* BELLA UNION

 At the start of Grant's third album, a love poem descends into shrill and troubling chaos. It's probably a representative measure of how he feels, but his general mode is infinitely more enjoyable: a

swooning melodicism into which his baritone wryly attempts to rationalise his inner life, in mid-life. Sexuality and bitter experience are his tools, and *Grey Tickles* among his very best creations.

## 24 RICHARD THOMPSON Still Proper



Everyone has a favourite Richard Thompson. The stiff-backed chronicler of emotional issues.

The killer guitarist. The eccentric wit. The ethereal folkie. It's to the strength of Thompson's 16th solo album that producer Jeff Tweedy would take care to expose the man's many qualities. "All Buttoned Up", being bawdy but frustrated, tight but loose, stealthily gave us Thompson in a contradictory nutshell.

## 23 SLEATER-KINNEY No Cities To Love

SUBPOP



With the band reconvened after a seven-year lay-off, Sleater-Kinney's music – uncovering unsuspected links between prog and post-punk; a highly theatrical kind of rawness – proved to have thrived during hibernation. Their debt to their past paid by a boxset, this was a 31-minute blast of hopes and fears, fired by emotional energy. "We win, we lose," they sang. "Only together do we break the rules..."



## 22 GWENNO Y Dydd Olaf

HEAVENLY



A hallucinogenic makeover. Once a member of The Pipettes, playing retro-girl-group pop alongside Rose Elinor Dougall, with her debut solo album, Gwenno Saunders ventured into more adventurous regions. In part inspired by a Welsh dystopian novel, *Y Dydd Olaf* remained enchanting and accessible: painting sun-dappled textures with bucolic electronica, drifting psych and a non-threatening, high-street haontology.

ON YOUR FREE CD TRACK 11

## 21 ALABAMA SHAKES Sound & Color

ROUGH TRADE



From a garage-rock duckling emerged an attractive R&B swan. After capturing the public imagination with the exuberant rock'n'roll of their debut, *Boys & Girls*, here, under the direction of guitar guru Blake Mills, the band contrived to reinvent themselves. Their energies duly reconfigured, as if by a life coach or mechanic, what resulted was a more efficient machine, delivering more impact for more accurately focused exertions.

## 20 HOLLY HERNDON Platform 4AD



As much conceptual artist as musician, Herndon makes installation techno. Her work can be disquietingly intimate, focusing on the suspenseful operations of the body, particularly the mouth and breath. *Platform* placed some of that practice in a wider context, exploring humanity and its harmony with media and technology – an online *Bush Of Ghosts*, perhaps.

## 19 MBONGWANASTAR From Kinshasa

WORLD CIRCUIT



After their more traditional work in Staff Benda Bilili, when Coco Ngambali and Théo Ntsituvuidi left the group, they set their sights

on something more adventurous. A rebuttal to anyone who might think that modernity corrupts "authenticity", *From Kinshasa* blended their vocals with spacey electronics, part Africa Express, part PiL at WOMAD. Featured Konono No1 on occasion, too.

ON YOUR FREE CD TRACK 9

## 18 WILCO Star Wars db

Always with the new tricks, this old dog. Never ones to simply settle into Americana (their imagined default), Wilco continue to be ruled by whim and imagination. Dropped without warning like a high-profile R&B record, *Star Wars* was similarly alive to modernity and possibility. Zany indie rock, fizzing noise and '70s glam all coalesced under Jeff Tweedy's playful direction.

ON YOUR FREE CD TRACK 3

## 17 BLUR The Magic Whip

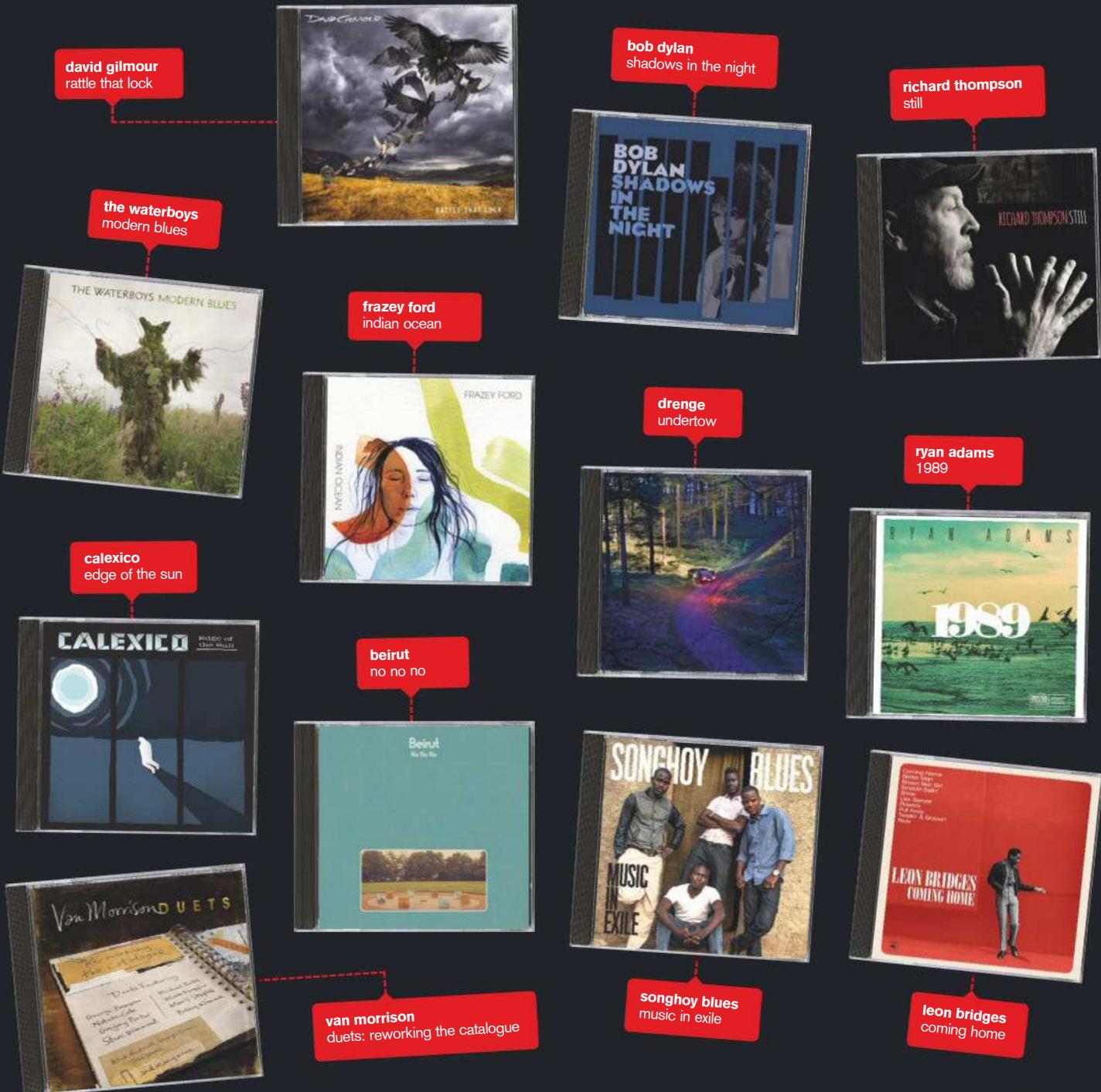
PARLOPHONE

Demoed during an unexpected layover in Hong Kong, *The Magic Whip* reunited Blur with Graham Coxon – balancing their latterday melancholia (extensive flashbacks to the iPad anomie of Albarn's *Everyday Robots*) with ragged, charming references to the pre-Blitzpop Blur of 1992. In "Lonesome Street" and "There Are Too Many Of Us" (essentially Massive Attack do *Jude The Obscure*), they delivered two new classics.



Sleater-Kinney: back after a seven-year hitch

# best of 2015



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16 THE WEATHER STATION  
*Loyalty*

PARADISE OF BACHELORS

A working actress, as The Weather Station, Tamara Lindeman plays herself. A Canadian guitarist/singer of great chops, on this third album she surrounded herself with warm arrangements, the better to articulate chilly emotional truths. A singer in the line of Joni Mitchell and Laura Marling, on the title track she pledged allegiance to a "Love/Which was only ever a kind of distance..."

15 JASON ISBELL  
*Something More Than Free* SOUTHEASTERN

## PREVIOUS WINNERS

1997 BOB DYLAN  
*Time Out Of Mind* COLUMBIA1998 MERCURY REV  
*Deserter's Songs* V21999 THE FLAMING LIPS  
*The Soft Bulletin* WARNER BROS2000 LAMBCHOP  
*Nixon* CITY SLANG2001 RYAN ADAMS  
*Gold* LOST HIGHWAY2002 THE FLAMING LIPS  
*Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots* WARNER BROS2003 WARREN ZEVON  
*The Wind* ARTEMIS/RYKO2004 BRIAN WILSON  
*Smile* NONESUCH2005 ARCADE FIRE  
*Funeral* ROUGH TRADE2006 BOB DYLAN  
*Modern Times* COLUMBIA2007 LCD SOUNDSYSTEM  
*Sound Of Silver* DFA/EMI2008 PORTISHEAD  
*Third* ISLAND2009 ANIMAL COLLECTIVE  
*Merriweather Post Pavilion* DOMINO2010 JOANNA NEWSOM  
*Have One On Me* DRAG CITY2011 PJ HARVEY  
*Let England Shake* ISLAND2012 LEONARD COHEN  
*Old Ideas* COLUMBIA2013 MY BLOODY VALENTINE  
*m b v* MY BLOODY VALENTINE2014 THE WAR ON DRUGS  
*Lost In The Dream* SECRETLY CANADIAN

It's a tough one. Is Isbell's increased popularity down to a world in which his bereft songs suddenly seem more appropriate? Or because he is on a streak, his records getting better and better? *Something* made it feel like the latter, running as it did from observational Americana referencing motel rooms and automobiles, to Fleet Foxy ethereal melancholy, via moving Springsteen-style Heartlandia. Impressive.

ON YOUR FREE CD TRACK 8

14 ROBERT FORSTER  
*Songs To Play* TAPETE

"I'll stop for petrol, and I'll stop for Dylan," Robert Forster wrote on his sixth album, "but that's the limit when I get moving..." A representative line on an LP that wasn't just confident, mature work, but much aware of it. Forster – musician, aesthete, critic – was here playful and serious, confident in his work and its reality. "A poet walks," he sang, "shits and talks..."

ON YOUR FREE CD TRACK 12

13 JIM O'Rourke  
*Simple Songs* DRAG CITY

Arranger and producer par excellence, Jim O'Rourke (collaborator/member of bands as diverse as Wilco and Sonic Youth) is a Jack Nitzsche for our times. As *Simple Songs* (his first song album since 2001) reminded us, he is also a

Midas touch:  
Kendrick Lamar

writer of taste and range. From a base in 1970s radio rock, O'Rourke referenced the earnestness of Bob Mould and the playfulness of Harry Nilsson, while remaining unhurriedly himself.

12 UNKNOWN MORTAL ORCHESTRA  
*Multi-Love* JAGJAGUWAR

In the past there were break-up albums. Perhaps it's a reflection of changing times that there should now be an album about a complex international polygamy. A true story, but just one feature of Ruban Nielson's evolving work with the Unknown Mortal Orchestra – a band moving from cool, labyrinthine guitar rock into cool and labyrinthine electronic work. Head-turning stuff, all round.

ON YOUR FREE CD TRACK 14

Björk found catharsis on break-up LP *Vulnicura*11 BJÖRK  
*Vulnicura* ONE LITTLE INDIAN

The stages of grief at a relationship's end include shock, denial, anger and guilt, before eventually arriving at "acceptance". *Vulnicura* ("cure for wounds") is a musical expression of that journey, as the singer explored the end of her relationship with Matthew Barney like a forensic scientist at a crime scene. Shattering and cathartic for her, the LP was less abstract than *Biophilia*, tuneful and relatable.

ON YOUR FREE CD TRACK 5

10 NEW ORDER  
*Music Complete* MUTE

Guitars and dance, melancholy and ecstasy, man and machine... these have historically been conflicts New Order have resolved best with pop records. This new album – their first proper LP for a decade, and their first without Peter Hook – was an apt time to show they still could. The music returned to first principles, while singer Bernard Sumner had never sounded in more confident voice.

ON YOUR FREE CD TRACK 7

9 SLEAFORD MODS  
*Key Markets* HARBINGERSOUND

"Eucalyptus? You can fuck off!" Jason Williamson was in demand as a guest vocalist this year – most memorably on "Ibiza" by the Prodigy – but kept bile in reserve for

# REVIEW OF 2015

# NEW RELEASES

his own release. Boris Johnson, bankers, bad bands... there was plenty to assist Williamson in elevating rant into art. More unexpected, perhaps, were the album's reflective moments: on drink, architecture and the lifestyles of the rich.

## 8 NATALIE PRASS

**Natalie Prass** SPACEBOMB



A discovery (in fact a schoolfriend) of Matthew E White, Natalie Prass – a sometime member

of the Jenny Lewis band – was a suitable recipient for the Spacebomb programme of works. Prass's debut showcased her Diana Ross-style vocal in a soundbed of strings, brass and warmly funky arrangements. That it was recorded a couple of years ago offers a tantalising hint of where Prass may be now.

## 7 COURTNEY BARNETT

**Sometimes I Sit And Think And Sometimes I Just Sit**

MOM AND POP/MARATHON/MILK!



Double EP "A Sea Of Split Peas" introduced Barnett as a deadpan wit, a Lou Reed for resourceful Melbourne youth. Her debut album proper capitalised on the interest generated by that release – a wry selection of angular grunge pop. A Barnett song will often start small and find her taking a fantastic journey. Which may be a coincidence – or it may not.

ON YOUR FREE CD TRACK 2

## 6 TAME IMPALA

**Currents** FICTION



Psychedelia has never seemed so aspirational as it is in the hands of Kevin Parker. From TI's starting point as a rock band, Parker has evolved their music to the point where it's as likely to be heard in a dance club as a rock club. *Currents* is more Daft Punk than Syd Barrett, but a trip for those with open minds.

## 5 FATHER JOHN MISTY

**I Love You, Honeybear**

BELLA UNION



Sometimes the good guys finish first. Other times, it's guys like Josh Tillman. That, give or take, is

the narrative of *I Love You, Honeybear*, in which an artist whose strongest qualities are cynicism and slick self-assurance attempts to reconcile them with the vulnerabilities of romantic love. Great tunes and warm production (thanks, Jonathan Wilson) diffused the misanthropy. Love (and everyone else) won big.

ON YOUR FREE CD TRACK 4

## 4 RYLEY WALKER

**Primrose Green**

BELLA UNION



"The more I drink," John Renbourn wrote to Ryley Walker, "the smoker I get to enjoying you." Drunk or sober, stoned or not, however you listened to *Primrose Green* there was something to be found in it. A record in the spirit of work by Van Morrison and Tim Buckley, this was guitar folk played with a jazz mind and a big heart.

ON YOUR FREE CD TRACK 1

## 3 SUFJAN STEVENS

**Carrie & Lowell**

ASTHMATIC KITTY



After works variously low-circulation and conceptual, *Carrie & Lowell* found Stevens exploring personal material (Carrie and Lowell are the names of his mother and step-father) but instantly reaching his widest audience since *Illinois*. Witty and melodically delightful, the album recalled Elliott Smith in its sound, and in its ability to make the smallest detail a point on which a world might turn.

ON YOUR FREE CD TRACK 6

## 2 KENDRICK LAMAR

**To Pimp A Butterfly**

TOP DAWG ENTERTAINMENT

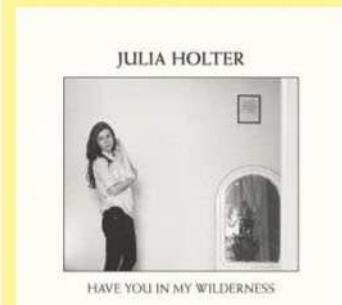


Kendrick Lamar's third album became nothing less than a summit meeting of Californian music past, present and future. From G-funk (Snoop, Dre, even Tupac were involved), to jazz (the excellent Kamasi Washington), through the visionary productions of Flying Lotus, ...*Butterfly* was busy and self-involved, but Lamar's charisma helped it all make sense. Personal and political, serious and funny, its tunes will draw you in, but its detail will keep you coming back.

Julia Holter:  
architect of  
epic space



## ALBUM OF THE YEAR



JULIA HOLTER

## JULIA HOLTER

**Have You In My Wilderness**

DOMINO

**A** N ARTIST OF conceptual thinking and compositional rigour, Holter makes music that feels a lot less forbidding than

that might sound. In her best work, you'll hear her harmonised voice suspended in tuneful and melancholic electronic spaces. It's chamber electronica: a place where nostalgia embraces the future, songwriting embeds with technology, Aphex Twin meets the Beach Boys. The path to fourth LP, *Have You In My Wilderness*, has been an interesting one. After classical study and music teaching work, Holter began recording at home, making the Euripides-inspired *Tragedy*, and playing live with Linda Perhacs – another Cali musician knowing how to create a secular mass for multi-tracked voices. Holter's breakthrough, 2012's *Ekstasis* – again with the classical Greek reference – was a delightful record, which, like MBV, explored a mysterious, sensual world in which songs were set to roam in vaporous atmospheres, highly charged with meaning.

This pregnant sound continued with 2013's *Loud City Song*, recorded in a studio with an ensemble of musicians, but which was no less intimate and original. A close-mic'd affair, the album took place in an imagined Paris and positioned the singer as an observer enthralled by the people around her. At times it seemed to be Holter's attempt to transform pre-existing styles, from '40s jazz balladry to glossy '80s night-time pop. An enjoyable enterprise, but some missed the eerie flight of her previous records.

...*Wilderness*, with its massed voices, strings and harpsichord, abundantly restores and expands on that mode. At heart it is a classic singer-songwriter album, but Holter's additional influences – jazz, electronica, sound art – conspire to take things somewhere else. There is a sense of space on an epic scale. When Holter hit a high note in highlight "Vasquez", there was a feeling of a grand design revealing itself, of light emerging through cloud, everything magnificently coming together.

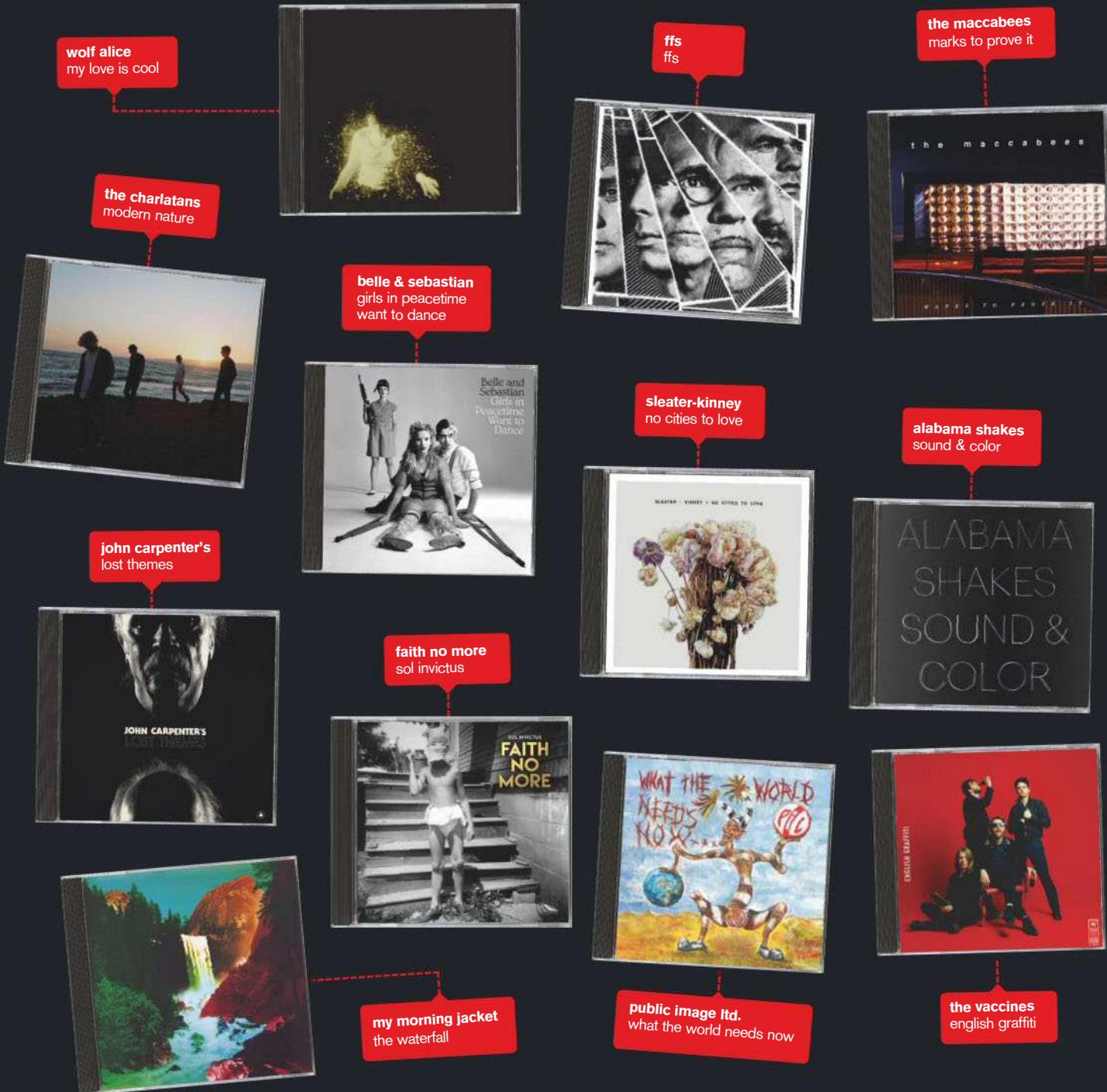
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TONIE THILSEN

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went away.

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## 30 RIDE

**Nowhere** SONY

 Shoegazing never had a Beatles or Stones – but in Ride, at least it had a Byrds. The Oxford band's reformation in 2015 met with huge enthusiasm, as did reissues of their albums. The youthful candour on their debut – energetic, chiming, effects-laden – remains infectious.

## 29 RED HOUSE PAINTERS

**Box Set** 4AD

 Mark Kozelek was grateful to 4AD's Ivo Watts-Russell for signing him when no-one else would. This vinyl box is heavy both literally and metaphorically. In the context of the luxurious melancholia of the early albums (vacated landscapes; dead friends), the arrival of the succinct *Ocean Beach* in 1995 almost feels like light relief.

## 28 FACES

**1970-1975: You Can Make Me Dance, Sing Or Anything...** RHINO

 There's always room for another Faces comp. Reformed this year, in spite of (possibly as a consequence of) Ian McLagan's death, The Faces were shown over the five discs here to be not just an ebullient live band, but one growing in confidence in the studio.

## 27 ROBIN GIBB

**Saved By The Bell**  
1968-70 RHINO

 Outside the perceived canon of 1960s artists, The Bee Gees are revered by a committed band of aesthetes. Within that collective, the solo works of Robin Gibb are particularly venerated. This collected Robin's debut solo album alongside the unreleased *Swing Slowly Sisters* and a further disc of previously unreleased material.

## 26 KARIN KROG

**Don't Just Sing: An Anthology 1963-1999**

**LIGHT IN THE ATTIC**

 Karin Krog is a jazz singer from Norway, and this compilation illustrates her considerable range,



Nowhere  
boys: Ride

drawing heavily on the three LPs she made between 1969-'79. Krog made albums with jazz greats like Jan Garbarek and John Surman, but the mood she hits on "Lazy Afternoon" from 1974's *Joy* is immediately engaging: where Alice Coltrane meets Amy Winehouse, both spiritual and sensual.

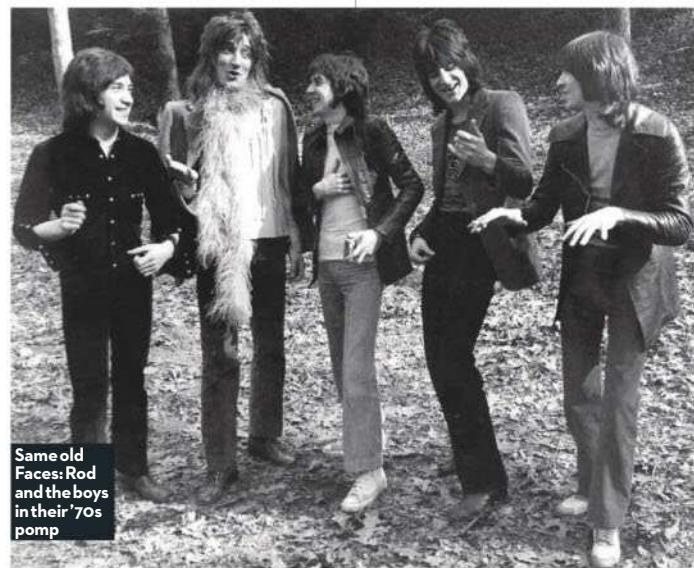
## 25 DR JOHN

**The Atco/Atlantic Singles 1968-74**

OMNIVORE



After he left sessions behind and emerged with his 1968 persona Dr John Creaux and the classic *Gris-Gris*, Mac Rebennack seemed more an albums cat. This compilation flips that impression, and very enjoyably so. *Gris-Gris* staples like "Mama Roux" and "Gilded Splinters" are here, but they sit alongside hits such as "Such A Night", "Right Place, Wrong Time" and great B-side "Wang Dang Doodle".

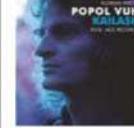


Same old  
Faces: Rod  
and the boys  
in their '70s  
pomp

## 24 FLORIAN FRICKE

**Kailash**

SOUL JAZZ RECORDS



As composer of *Popol Vuh*, Florian Fricke was a man whose default mode was as epic as landscape. Named after a Tibetan peak, *Kailash* featured solo piano works of a pacific calm – neither land nor space, but somewhere breathtaking in between.

## 23 LINK WRAY

**3-Track Shack**

ACE



In '58, Wray's "Rumble" redefined the possibilities of electric guitar. Thirteen years on, this innovator's stock was at a low, playing in bars. At the titular shack – a chicken coop on the Wray farm, Maryland – Wray was encouraged to attack folky material. It was a project low in fidelity and commercial promise, but birthed something like a primitive Americana.

## 22 GRATEFUL DEAD

**30 Trips Around The Sun**

RHINO



Fifty years on, a jug band turned cultural phenomenon finally closed up shop with a series of shows called Fare Thee Well. Available to deep heads with deep pockets was an 80CD box of 30 complete shows. This, over a more manageable four discs, presented live highlights from down the years, concentrating on the band's vernacular songcraft more than their instrumental voyages into uncharted space.

## 21 THE PRETTY THINGS

**Bouquets From A Cloudy Sky**

SNAPPER



Behind the headlines – "Contain a founder Rolling Stone"; "Signed to SwanSong" – this substantial boxset creditably addressed the music, containing their 11 studio albums. It also addressed their legend, with sleazy live recordings, a "court case record" and other diversions.

## 20 TOWNES VAN ZANDT

**The Nashville Sessions**

CHARLY



Van Zandt, no stranger to trouble, tried to make an LP called *Seven Come Eleven* in 1972. An argument between manager and studio means that only these hastily dubbed tapes of the original material survive. Audiophile it's not, but it's the only record of the songs as Van Zandt conceived them.

## 19 PUBLIC ENEMY

**It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back**

DEF JAM



"Don't Believe The Hype" – not for nothing have Public Enemy lyrics entered modern usage.

While producers The Bomb Squad created music that approximated the confusion of modern life, Chuck D declaimed his view: thoughts simultaneously controversial and recognisable as common sense. His co-MC Flavor Flav offered an absurdist counterpoint. Here this funky, futuristic classic now came with an additional disc of mixes. We considered ourselves warned. 

# REVIEW OF 2015 | REISSUES & COMPS

## 18 BERT JANSCH *Bert Jansch*

TRANSATLANTIC/PIAS



A mixture of accomplishment and youthful attitude, 1965's *Bert Jansch* helped define what qualities a classic debut album might possess, from Brian Shuel's cover image of the 19-year-old Bert, to the game-changing folk/blues/jazz finger-style songwriting inside. Now add "pristine remastering".

## 17 JULIAN COPE *Fried* CAROLINE



A big ask to fuse Cope's personal enthusiasms (LSD, English folk song, psychedelia) with the production of the period. *Fried* – eccentric, magnificent, referencing Worcestershire – pulled it off. This expanded edition went some way to explaining how it came about via BBC sessions and B-sides.

## 16 MILES DAVIS *At Newport 1955-1975* SONY



So rich was the material on which to draw, this set was able to offer complete performances of shows hitherto truncated on sides of LPs, or confined to boxsets. Here also was an opportunity to witness in one place the evolution over 20 years of one man and his music.

## 15 SUPER FURRY ANIMALS *Mwng* PLACID CASUAL



An occasion for a reunion tour, *Mwng* was a welcome reissue of a highpoint in the



He's gonna blow! Miles Davis at Newport, '69

band's career. Supplied with contemporaneous sessions and live stuff, this documented when the band returned to the Welsh language of their earliest records. Released on their own label, it sold well, made money – and contained some of their most beautiful music.

## 14 VARIOUS ARTISTS *Olk Records: New York, New York* NUMERO GROUP



Terry Ork was one of the hubs around which punk New York turned. His record label was driven by enthusiasms, and the crackle of anticipation around a debut single was the predominant

sound provided here. From Richard Hell's "...Another World" to Television's "Little Johnny Jewel", Ork made sure the Blank Generation was not also an invisible one.

## 13 VAN MORRISON *Astral Weeks* RHINO



The dreamy, jazz-folk suspensions of the second Van Morrison album remain inspirational to this day – see Ryley Walker. This newly remastered edition managed to shine an additional dappled light on familiar songs. Morrison's meditations on past memories would continue to evolve – here alternates and extended takes on "Slim Slow Slider" and "Ballerina" mapped some different routes.

## 12 THE GO-BETWEENS *G Stands For Go-Betweens Vol 1* DOMINO



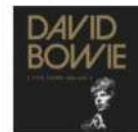
Charting the band's first six years (1978-1984), this vinyl box (the first three albums; an LP of singles; CDs of demos) watched Robert Forster's partnership with Grant McLennan develop from enigmatic post-punk to lush and literate pop. The bookish angle extended to a long essay by Forster, while early orders came with a book from McLennan's personal library.

## 11 BROADCAST *Tender Buttons* WARP



Vinyl reissues seemed like an appropriate way to enjoy Broadcast again – a band for whom the medium was never without a message. 2002's *Tender Buttons*, the duo's last full album, found Trish Keenan and James Cargill continuing to write laconic electronic pop, the sounds and delivery crystalline but the meaning obscure. One now scrutinised them more closely to extract their – political, otherworldly – content.

## 10 DAVID BOWIE *Five Years* PARLOPHONE



Never one for extras, Bowie's latest catalogue release (*Nothing Has Changed*, a comp, arrived in 2014) didn't have a wealth of new material. What it did have was a rendering of five years in which Bowie transformed himself from longtime trier to pop star, and, having started the process, kept on transforming. A new compilation, *RE:CALL1*, was a major enticement.

## 9 MICHAEL HEAD AND THE STRANDS *The Magical World Of The Strands* MEGAPHONE



As much as critics and fans wanted it to "happen" for Mick Head in the 1990s, it never did. Still, it was all happening on his records. This one was no different. A visionary take on Liverpool and on Head's own reduced circumstances, *Magical World* saw a better place, hymned in magnificent psychedelic shanties.

## 8 THE ISLEY BROTHERS *The RCA Victor and T-Neck albums* SONY



A truly huge collection, this wasn't so much an artist boxset as the tale of one strand of American R'n'B. From beginnings in doo-wop, Ronald, Ernie and Rudolph Isley made pop, political soul, classic funk and disco. All major albums from their career were here. As if that wasn't incentive enough, a bonus disc, *Live At Bearsville Sound Studio*, added a classic 1980 performance.



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## 7 LEAD BELLY Smithsonian Folkways Collection

SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS



Huddie Leadbetter resists the traditional musician biopic formula. He was not admirable (being a double murderer), but his repertoire is heroic. This authoritative collection runs to five discs, with weighty contextual notes: from prison recordings to his topical songs about British Royalty (true).

## 6 THE VELVET UNDERGROUND Loaded

UNIVERSAL



Proving again how the care received by the Velvets after their demise far outweighed the attention they received in their lifetime. This 45th anniversary edition collected audiophile mixes, 20-plus demos and a remaster of the notorious *Live At Max's Kansas City*, plus a previously unheard show from Philadelphia earlier in 1970.

## 5 PERE UBU Elitism For The People 1975-1978

PROJEX



When the seminal Rocket From The Tombs split, one half headed for the New York scene, CBGB's

Suited and bootlegged: a goodyear for Dylan diehards



and the Dead Boys. The other half stayed in Cleveland, Ohio and took inspiration – if that's the word – from their surroundings, self-releasing work that offered a snappy dystopian vision. This attractive boxset marks ironically the gentrification of their enterprise, but proved how well it has endured.

## 4 HARMONIA Complete Works

GROENLAND RECORDS

The group formed by Cluster's Dieter Moebius, Hans-Joachim Roedelius and guitarist Michael Rother (Neu!, Kraftwerk) made a spacious ambient music: tuneful, electronic and organic, finding shifting rural moods within mechanical pulses. This 5LP vinyl set collected their two studio albums, a live album from 1974, *Tracks And Traces* (made with Brian Eno in '76) and the enticing *1975 Documents*. Bowie reaped the benefit – now so could we.

## 3 LED ZEPPELIN Physical Graffiti

SWANSONG/RHINO

The Zep reissue campaign saved its revelations to last (have you heard the Bombay sessions on *Coda*?), but all provided insight into the working methods of Jimmy Page. *Physical Graffiti* was effectively a boxset in 1975 (it drew material from sessions going back four years to bulk out 1974 recordings to a double album), but unheard stuff like "Everybody Makes It Through" ("In The Light") was revelatory.

## 2 BOB DYLAN Bootleg Series Vol 12: The Cutting Edge 1965-1966

SONY

They might have called it *The Bottomless Well*. Gathering material from the sessions that gave us *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde On Blonde*, this collection of studio outtakes found Dylan bottling lightning, then moving on. Available in two, six and 13-disc versions, according to the level of your obsession, this offered a glimpse behind the glass, if not behind the shades.

Finger-lickin'  
good: Mick and  
Keef in 1971



## REISSUE OF THE YEAR



## THE ROLLING STONES Sticky Fingers

UNIVERSAL

CONTINUING THE BAND'S imperial phase, 1971's *Sticky Fingers* found the Rolling Stones

cherry-picking material recorded over the past couple of years at Olympic Studios, Barnes and Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Exquisitely played and arranged, but brimming with sweat and feeling, the album defined the band's raw sophistication, the air-conditioned, business-class R'n'B that delivered their most intoxicating music.

Two Rolling Stones albums had been planned for 1969 – the material deriving from the seemingly ceaseless sessions the band embarked on before their Hyde Park appearance in July. Even before *Let It Bleed*, "Sticky Fingers" was being kicked around as a title for one of the collections. However, the band's precarious circumstances (a tragical farce featuring appearances from Brian Jones, Allen Klein, Ned Kelly, various Hells Angels) conspired to foil their plans.

The album that emerged two years later contains a peerless sequence of music, from raw rock'n'roll ("Bitch") and Stax soul ("I Got The Blues") to the extraordinary "Can't You Hear Me Knocking". This re-imagines the rock song as espionage, via the spectral interventions of Mick Taylor. The album starts with "Brown Sugar", as you may already know.

If you saw the Stones in London in 2012, you would have seen the esteem in which the band still hold this material: Mick Taylor and sax man Bobby Keys recalled to the band to apply their unique fingerprints to this sound. No wonder they wanted to reissue it.

The additional material couldn't hope to improve the experience, but it did hint at a process. On the two-disc set there was a selection of alternate takes ("Brown Sugar" with Eric Clapton; an extended "Bitch") and several live tracks (though none actually from *Sticky Fingers*) from their show at the London Roundhouse in 1971. The three-disc set brought the full Leeds show, once bootlegged as *Get Your Leeds Lungs Out!*.



## 7 WHILE WE'RE YOUNG

DIR: NOAH BAUMBACH

 The second film this year from Baumbach was a sharp account of life in the trenches of fortysomething couple, Ben Stiller and Naomi Watts. The arrival of a pair of twentysomething urban hipsters (Adam Driver and Amanda Seyfried) offered plenty of generational comedy. Props, too, to Beastie Boy Adam Horovitz, who plays one half of Stiller and Watts' baby-obsessed best friends.

## 6 BIRDMAN

DIR: ALEJANDRO IÑÁRRITU

 Iñárritu's comedy about a faded superhero movie actor trying to establish himself as a serious stage actor was full of poignancy and panache. Michael Keaton was ideally cast, of course, as the neurotic ageing star. But besides its thick post-modern streak, *Birdman* worked best as a vigorous backstage farce, brashly digging at actorly narcissism, ambition, insecurity and the wages of celebrity.

## 5 MAD MAX

DIR: GEORGE MILLER

 One of the year's unexpected blockbuster hits was George Miller's return to the post-apocalyptic Outback franchise after an absence of 30 years. Tom Hardy replaced Mel Gibson as the seemingly indestructible road warrior, but even the imposing Hardy couldn't compete with Miller's extraordinary scenes of automotive chaos. A heavy metal fantasia so heavy and so metal, even the credits were in molten red lettering.

Hot and heavy metal: Tom Hardy in *Mad Max*



## 4 CAROL

DIR: TODD HAYNES



Haynes is a skilled chronicler of woman's emotional pain – from *Safe* to *Mildred Pierce* – and this stylish melo-drama about a lesbian relationship between a suburban housewife and a shop assistant in '50s New York was his best yet. Haynes was also reunited with the 'electric' Dylan from biopic *I'm Not There* – Cate Blanchett – who conveyed a heavy-lidded sadness behind her immaculate, movie star looks.

## 3 LOVE &amp; MERCY

DIR: BILL POHLAD



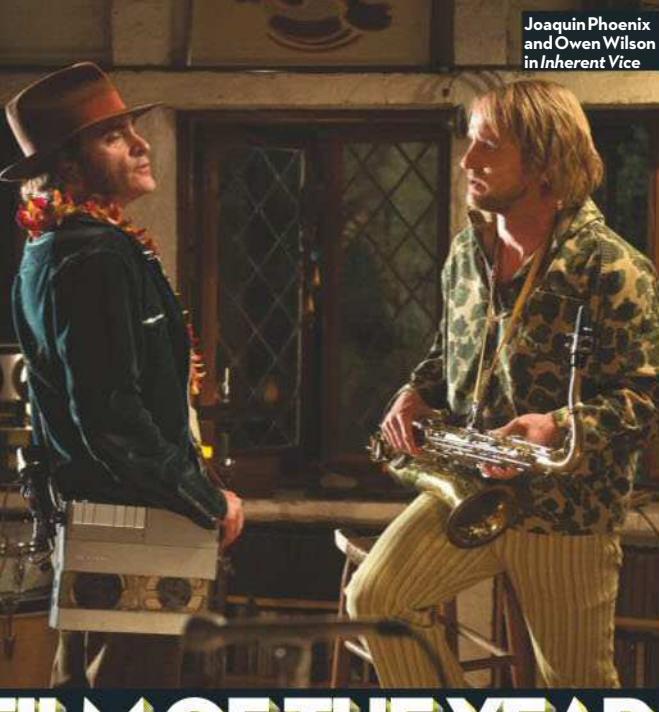
Leading a strong year for music films – including *Amy* and *Montage Of Heck* – this biopic of Brian Wilson cut between Wilson in 1966 and in 1985, exploring resonances between the two stages of his life with Paul Dano as '60s Brian and John Cusack as the older version. Impressively thorough in recreating the *Pet Sounds* sessions, *Love & Mercy* was an eloquent tribute to Wilson's genius.

## 2 THE DUKE OF BURGUNDY

DIR: PETER STRICKLAND

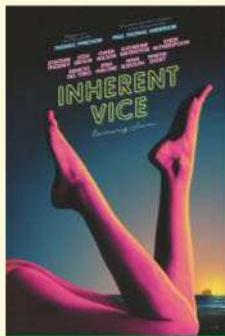


A wry corrective to *50 Shades Of Grey* – released in UK cinemas a week earlier – Strickland's latest film focused on a lesbian S&M relationship between an insecure middle-aged protagonist Cynthia (*Borgen*'s Sidse Babett Knudsen) and the younger Evelyn (Chiara D'Anna). Like Strickland's previous film, *Berberian Sound Studio* – one of our Films Of The Year in 2012 – *The Duke Of Burgundy* bristled with weirdness and idiosyncrasies.



Joaquin Phoenix and Owen Wilson in *Inherent Vice*

## FILM OF THE YEAR



## INHERENT VICE

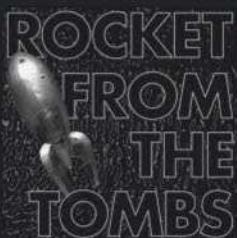
DIR: PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON

A BUSY YEAR for Anderson, who also directed music videos for Joanna Newsom and travelled to India with Jonny Greenwood. He opened 2015, though, with this woozy, inspired Pynchon adaptation, starring Joaquin Phoenix as a muttonchopped PI who finds himself out of his depth as he tried to solve a case. Anderson – and Pynchon – conjured up a crazy, out-of-whack California in the '70s, where the funky hippy vibes of the previous decade have been replaced by Nixon, Mason, Vietnam, assassinations: anxiety and remorse are the principal emotions. The film has a sticky, faintly claustrophobic tone, with its talk of "karmic thermals" and heroin addicts, midday naps and shapeless days. As one character says in voiceover, "American life was something to be escaped from."

*Inherent Vice* had pretty impressive antecedents, too. There were echoes of classic California noirs including *Kiss Me Deadly*, *The Long Goodbye* and *Chinatown*; but also the hippy noir of *Cisko Pike*. Into such a rich stew, Phoenix was terrific as Sportello. A man of professional bravado but personal confusion: befuddled by weed with his love life in freefall. It was a far simpler, and more enjoyable, performance than he gave in Anderson's previous film, *The Master*. The film also had a strong music connection. Joanna Newsom played Sortilège, a wise-owl astrologer friend of Phoenix' PI, Doc Sportello. Meanwhile, Jonny Greenwood, a regular Anderson collaborator, provided the soundtrack: a beguiling mix of his own compositions alongside Can and Neil Young. Young's "Journey Through The Past" proved critical to the film, serving to articulate a deeper subtext about the times. Of course, Anderson has previously depicted the darker side of '70s Californian life in *Boogie Nights*, but *Inherent Vice* was closer to *The Master*. For that film, the director focused on the aspirations of '50s America, while *Inherent Vice* showed how those dreams came asunder in the strung-out counterculture of the following decade. "Eggs break, chocolate melts, glass shatters," says one character, a marine lawyer, as he explains the legal term that gave both the book and film its title. Namely: everything falls apart, even the times in which we live.

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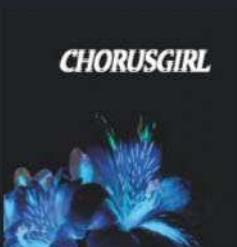


## ROCKET FROM THE TOMBS

### BLACK RECORD

Loud, hard and fast, every track is an assault. Breaking the rules forty years ago, they are back and still fighting mad.

FIRE RECORDS LP / CD

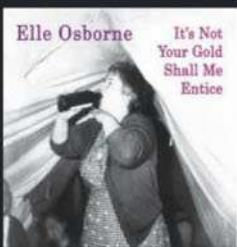


## CHORUSGIRL

### CHORUSGIRL

Blends the shimmering dreaminess of 4AD bands like Lush, the noir pop of The Cure and the bittersweet electricity of The Breeders.

FORTUNA POP! LP / CD



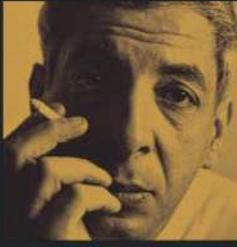
## ELLE OSBORNE

### IT'S NOT YOUR GOLD

### SHALL ME ENTICE

Elle's 3rd solo album is the first to feature her own songs. Featuring Alasdair Roberts, Alex Neilson & Mike Hastings (Trembling Bells). Still the voice of the outsider, and now with added touches of Americana to her FOLK heritage, it's Elle's most accessible record to date.

9TH HOUSE RECORDINGS CD



## TARIVERDIEV

### FILM MUSIC

The Russian Gainsbourg? Perhaps!

'Film Music' encompasses the works of this seminal composer, alongside a book of extensive notes and images.

EARTH RECORDS 3LP / 3CD

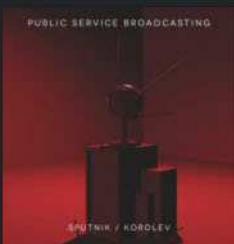


## THE CHILLS

### SILVER BULLETS

The influential New Zealand band return with first full album in 19 years which sees their chiming Dunedin-pop "revert to a spikier sound" (MOJO).

FIRE RECORDS LP / CD

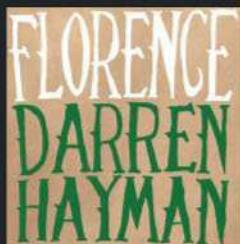


## PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

### SPUTNIK / KOROLEV EP

Exciting new release from PSB which includes brand new track 'Korolev' to accompany 'Sputnik' and 4 stellar remixes from Blond:ish, Eagles & Butterflies, Petar Dundov & Plugger.

TEST CARD RECORDINGS 12" / CD



## DARREN HAYMAN

### FLORENCE

Darren Hayman returns with a beautifully delicate & touchingly honest album simply titled "Florence" after the city in which it was created. Florence is another incisive, observational & beautiful album, and is his first truly solo effort.

FIKA RECORDINGS LP



## TEETH OF THE SEA

### HIGHLY DEADLY

### BLACK TARANTULA

A fearlessly coherent assault of post-everything dementia in all its malevolent glory. Its monochrome psychedelia is as stylish as it is savage.

ROCKET RECORDINGS LP / CD



## MASERATI

### REHUMANIZER

The veteran psych-disco-rock hybrid pushes forward with their most eclectic album to date; a perfect marriage of Man and Machine.

TEMPORARY RESIDENCE LTD LP / CD



## MY DISCO

### SEVERE

The acclaimed minimalist Australian post-punk trio return with one of the bleakest, most disturbingly heavy albums released this year.

TEMPORARY RESIDENCE LTD LP / CD



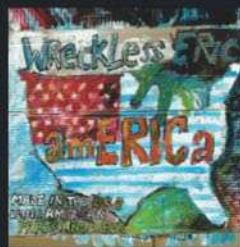
## CONSUMER ELECTRONICS

### DOLLHOUSE SONGS

The trio return with an all new studio album of their vicious and relentless electronica.

The album chronicles their travails through the seedy thoroughfares of crumbling Tory Britain.

HARBINGER SOUND LP



## WRECKLESS ERIC

### amerICA

First album in over a decade, 'amerICA' - it's about Eric and America - a country he's toured since the late 70's and now lives in.

FIRE RECORDS LP / CD

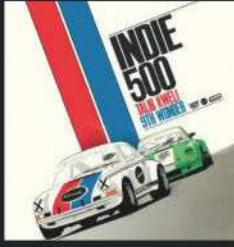


## CIRCUIT BREAKER

### MY DESCENT INTO CAPITAL

A new album from the London-based brotherly duo Circuit Breaker, who deconstruct their post-punk, minimal synth and industrial influences using the tools of contemporary electronica.

HARBINGER SOUND LP / CD

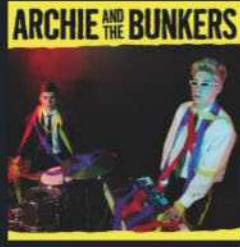


## 9TH WONDER & TALIB KWELI

### INDIE 500

Hip Hop icons Talib Kweli and 9th Wonder bring you Indie 500 featuring Problem, Slug, Rapsody, Pharoah Monch, Brother Ali, Hi-Tek, NIKO IS and more.

IT'S A WONDERFUL WORLD MUSIC GROUP 2LP / CD



## ARCHIE AND THE BUNKERS

### ARCHIE AND THE BUNKERS

Two Cleveland, Ohio schoolboys combining Jimmy Smith and the Screamers, a sound that's been dubbed 'Hi-Fi Organ Punk' but which they call 'rock'n'roll peeled back to its raw foundation'.

DIRTY WATER LP / CD

**IRELAND:** BESIDE HEAD **SCOTLAND:** AYR BIG SPARRA VINYL / EDINBURGH VOXBOX / EDINBURGH UNDERGROUND SOLU'SHN / GLASGOW LOVE MUSIC **WALES:** ABERYSTWYTH ANDY'S RECORDS / CARDIFF HEAD / CARDIFF SPILLERS / NEWPORT DIVERSE / SWANSEA DERRICKS **NORTH WEST:** BLACKBURN HEAD / CHESHIRE A & A DISCS / LIVERPOOL PROBE / MANCHESTER PICCADILLY RECORDS / PRESTON ACTION RECORDS **NORTH EAST:** CAMBRIDGE LOST IN VINYL / DERBY TALL BIRD / HUDDERSFIELD VINYL TAP / LEEDS CRASH / LEEDS JUMBO RECORDS / NEWCASTLE BEATDOWN RECORDS / NEWCASTLE JG WINDOWS / NEWCASTLE REFLEX / SHEFFIELD RECORD COLLECTOR / STOCKTON ON TEES SOUND IT OUT **MIDLANDS:** BURSTWICK HARDCORE HOBBIES / BURSTWICK STEDMUNDNS **VINYL HUNTER / HANLEY MUSIC MANIA / BRISTOL HEAD RECORDS / LEAMINGTON SPA HEAD RECORDS / LOUTH OFF THE BEATEN TRACK / NOTTINGHAM MUSIC EXCHANGE / NOTTINGHAM RISE / OXFORD TRUCK / SHREWSBURY CAVE RECORDS / SHREWSBURY LEFT FOR DEAD / STOKE ON TRENT STRAND RECORDS / WORCESTER RISE SOUTH: BEXHILL ON SEA MUSIC'S NOT DEAD / BRIGHTON RESIDENT / BROMLEY HEAD / DEAL SMUGGLERS RECORDS / EASTBOURNE PEBBLE / GODALMING RECORD CORNER / LEIGH ON SEA FIVES / LONDON CASBAH / LONDON FLASHBACK / LONDON IN TOXICA / LONDON THE LP CAFE LTD / LONDON ROUGH TRADE EAST / LONDON ROUGH TRADE TALBOT RD / LONDON SISTER RAY / SOUTHEND ON SEA SOUTH RECORDS / SOUTHSEA PIE & VINYL / ST ALBANS EMPIRE RECORDS / WIMBORNE SQUARE RECORDS **SOUTH WEST:** BRISTOL RISE / CHELTENHAM BADLANDS / CHRISTCHURCH THE VAULT / FALMOUTH JAM / FOLKESTONE HOT SALVATION / STROUD - TRADING POST / TAUNTON - BLACK CAT / TOTNES - DRIFT MAILORDER AND INTERNET ONLY STORES: BOOMKAT.COM / COVERSVINYL.CO.UK / NORMANRECORDS.COM / SPINCDS.COM / BLEEP.COM**



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## 10 I'VE ALWAYS KEPT A UNICORN: THE BIOGRAPHY OF SANDY DENNY

**Mick Houghton**

Faber &amp; Faber

Mick Houghton's biography of the ill-fated Sandy Denny was the best account yet of a career of largely unrealised promise. There were many new and revealing interviews and great use of extensive access to the personal archives of Denny and her husband, the Australian folk musician Trevor Lucas, usually cast as an opportunistic womaniser but more sympathetically treated here.

## 9 ORIGINAL ROCKERS

**Richard King**

Faber &amp; Faber

*Original Rockers* drew evocatively on the years Richard King worked at Bristol's Revolver Records, one of those incredible old record shops, now extinct, where the musically obsessed gathered in cult-like atmospheres to be introduced to exciting new sounds. The book was an extended elegy to such places and also a highly personal memoir that vividly articulated the thrill of musical discovery.

## 8 SICK ON YOU: THE DISASTROUS STORY OF BRITAIN'S GREAT LOST PUNK BAND

**Andrew Matheson**

Ebury Press

This was the story of flamboyant no-hoppers The Hollywood Brats, the band Matheson fronted in the early '70s, supposedly London's answer to the New York Dolls, with whom they shared a taste for sub-Stones trash-rock, eyeliner and dressing up. Their brief career was a car wreck of missed chances, drunkenness and drugs, hilariously recalled in the year's funniest music book.

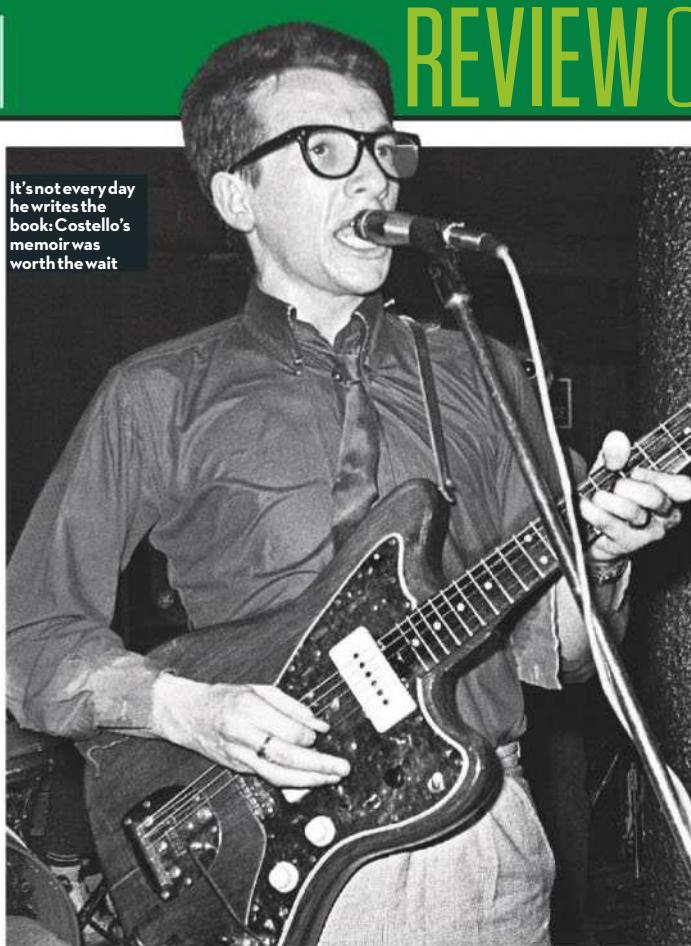
## 7 RAY DAVIES: A COMPLICATED LIFE

**Johnny Rogan**

The Bodley Head

Whatever Rogan's regard for Ray Davies as a songwriter of occasional genius, this massive, gripping biography was unsparing about the behaviour that made Davies insufferable to many,

It's not everyday he writes the book: Costello's memoir was worth the wait



including his own brother, Dave. Their lifelong conflict is at the heart of the book, a dismal history of largely pointless and self-destructive enmity, grim but grippingly told.

## 6 GIRL IN A BAND

**Kim Gordon**

Faber &amp; Faber

Most of the heat in Kim Gordon's autobiography came from her toxic break-up with Thurston Moore, her husband and Sonic Youth bandmate for nearly 30 years. There was more to the book than post-marital bitterness, including an evocative account of growing up in 1960s LA. But it was her seething indictments of Thurston's tawdry infidelity that grabbed the attention.

## 5 ON THE SNAP

**Brian Case**

Caught By The River

Curiously, this slim volume wasn't a collection of the veteran jazz writer's many excellent published pieces. The stories here of his meetings with sundry great musicians, actors, writers and film directors were transcripts of taped interviews. When Case, a brilliant raconteur, achieved full anecdotal lift-off, however, the results were

as spectacular as the best of his writing.

## 4 BILLIE HOLIDAY: THE MUSICIAN AND THE MYTH

**John Szwed**

Heinemann

Billie Holiday's life was so consumed by personal tragedy, many of her biographers have made her suffering indivisible from her art, diminishing her standing as one of popular music's

most innovative vocal stylists. Szwed's book was more attentive to the music she made than the life she led and was rich in learning, anecdote and revelation.

## 3 UNFAITHFUL MUSIC & DISAPPEARING INK

**Elvis Costello**

Viking

**ELVIS COSTELLO**  
*UNFAITHFUL MUSIC*

Abandoning linear narrative like a more garrulous version of Dylan's *Chronicles*, Costello's vast memoir was a fractured mosaic, often wonderfully well-written, Elvis looking back at his career with candour, humour and a general lack of rancour. His enormous self-regard was a bit of an obstacle, but there were revelations aplenty for even lapsed fans to relish.

## 2 GOOD NIGHT AND GOOD RIDDANCE: HOW 35 YEARS OF JOHN PEEL HELPED SHAPE MODERN BRITAIN

**David Cavanagh**

Faber &amp; Faber

**GOOD NIGHT AND GOOD RIDDANCE**  
*HOW 35 YEARS OF JOHN PEEL HELPED SHAPE MODERN BRITAIN*

Whatever life John Peel had outside the radio station was barely mentioned in this brilliant book, effectively a bio of Peel as a broadcaster and groundbreaking tastemaker, told through the chronological history of nearly 300 of the shows he presented between 1967 and 2003. Packed with marvellous detail, this was a fitting tribute to Peel's vast and enduring influence.

## BOOK OF THE YEAR



## HOW MUSIC GOT FREE

**Stephen Witt**

The Bodley Head

**HOW MUSIC GOT FREE** was a history of digital music piracy and the technology that brought the music business to its knees. Such plain description makes it sound dryly investigative, with much baffling science and unfathomable discussion of international copyright legislation, little of which was likely to set the reader's pulse racing. The result, however, was sensational: lucid, informative, with the pounding narrative tempo of a first-class thriller. The book was a fascinating guide to a dark subculture of digital pirate crews who reduced the record industry to parlous disarray. But in Witt's damning final analysis, it wasn't the MP3 or illegal file-sharers that ruined the music business. Its own intractability and greed saw to that.

# “I DON’T REGRET ANY OF IT”

It's been a long, strange trip for PAUL WELLER and America.

*Uncut* joins the touring party in San Francisco, and finds Weller five years sober, “enjoying the clarity” of playing to enthusiastic crowds, and breaking the country, his way. It's all very different to when he came here with The Jam. “They were sat on the floor, smoking dope,” he recalls.

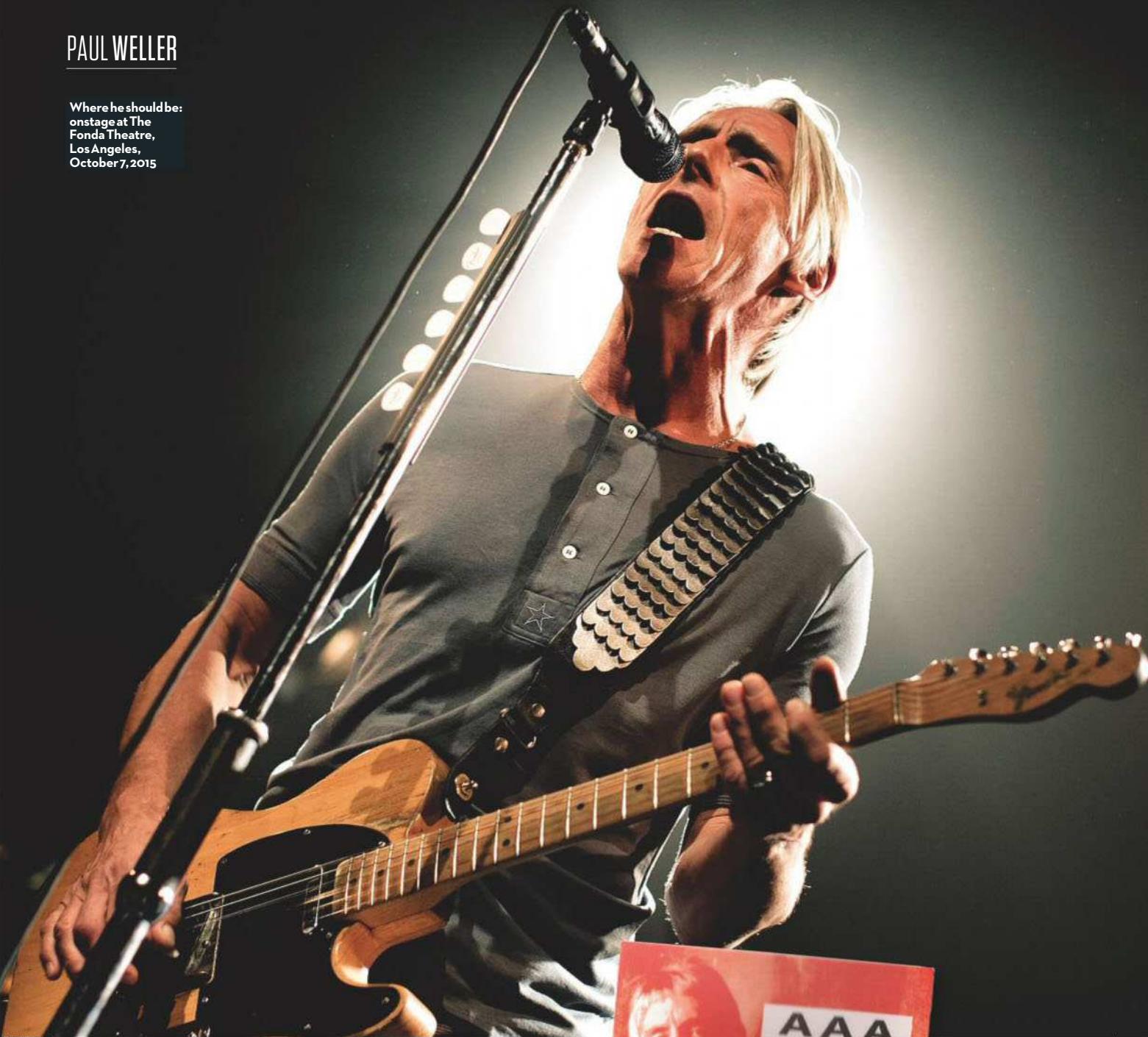
**Interview:** Peter Watts  
**Portrait:** Andy Crofts



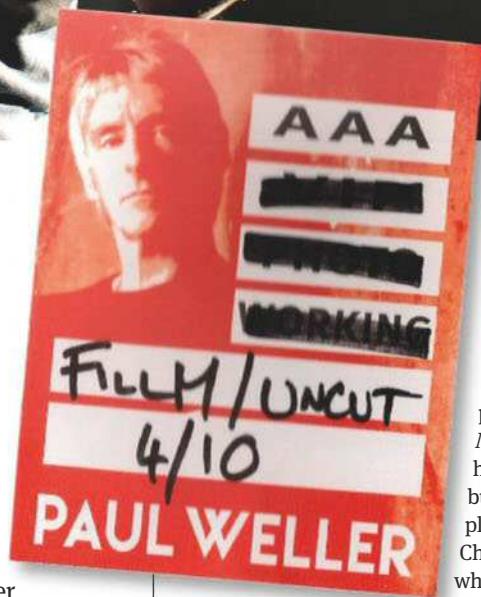


Poster boy: Weller abstains in the Fillmore bar, San Francisco, October 2015

Where he should be:  
onstage at The  
Fonda Theatre,  
Los Angeles,  
October 7, 2015



**P**AUL WELLER is sitting at a pavement bench outside a San Francisco coffee shop reminiscing about the first time he visited America. It was October 1977, and he was on a short tour to promote The Jam's debut album, *In The City*. "We played LA, San Francisco, Boston and New York," he recalls, as he sips at a coffee in the sunshine. "We played the Whisky and CBGB's. This was when they were trying to sell UK punk to America. It was very frustrating because they didn't get it. We were really looking forward to coming here because so many of our influences were American, but we were amazed at how musically backwards it was. It was still a hangover from the '60s, especially here on the West Coast. We came out again in spring the following year touring with Blue Öyster Cult – that was our agent's idea – and it was fucking horrendous. The crowd were still sitting on the floor smoking dope during shows." Even now, he seems appalled. "The club shows we did were OK, but it was difficult and frustrating. The press didn't get us. It took a long time for Americans to catch up with punk in a mainstream way. They had their own idea of punk, but they were mainly cult bands. The Ramones never had a hit, did they?"



"There was another time we were in that English pub in Santa Monica, the King's Head," he continues, referring to an LA pub popular with expats. "The label hired it to promote *This Is The Modern World*. They even had this double decker bus and everybody was playing darts. It was like Chas & Dave. Do you see what I mean? They just didn't get it."

Today, Weller finds himself in slightly different circumstances. Although no superstar in America, he has built up a loyal fanbase over the years. Currently, he's in the middle of a short tour, which has already seen sold-out shows in Vancouver, Seattle and Portland and will continue down to San Diego and Los Angeles. In San Francisco, he is scheduled to play two gigs over one October weekend – a free festival in Golden Gate Park and a show at the Fillmore. Over our two days in the company of Weller and his band,

*Uncut* will enjoy the benefits of tour-bus travel and dressing-room banter, receive a sneak preview of demos for the next album and accompany Weller on a post-gig celebration at San Francisco's finest – or possibly only – \$11 all-you-can-eat Indian buffet. Between such engagements, Weller talks at length about his relationship with America, alcoholism, retirement and his plans for 2016 – which include an "avant-garde, experimental" film soundtrack, a TV series in his Surrey recording studio and also recording a new album "that has a soully, R'n'B vibe".

The key song on *Saturns Pattern*, Weller's outstanding 2015 album, is "I'm Where I Should Be", in which he croons almost languorously that, "I only want what's mine/I know exactly why/I'm where I should be". It's a message of relaxed self-determination that Weller espouses with typical passion, the latest step on his journey from impatient young punk through to today's more sober, reflective performer. At 57, Weller appears content with his place in the world, but he's not ready to slow down. "I love playing music. I couldn't imagine giving it up however much I love

my home life," he says. "I still need that, whether I'm playing live or recording. I can't imagine stopping. I can't imagine that passion ever stopping."

FOR *UNCUT*, THE tour begins outside the band's Japantown hotel on a warm, cloudless Saturday afternoon. Weller is outside smoking a cigarette while band and crew mill about waiting for transport to Golden Gate Park, where they are due to play a 40-minute set at the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival. The core travelling team is tight, consisting of Weller, his five-man band, tour manager Bill Wheeler and his dad Ken Wheeler, a

long-time Weller accomplice and now something close to a surrogate father, and Mark, a massive Brummie minder whose main preoccupation often seems to be how to get a decent cup of tea. "I dunno what rock'n'roll is coming to," he mutters. Mark recalls a different Weller, one he refers to as "the firestarter" such was his unpredictable behaviour on tour. Those days are gone; rather than lying in bed with a hangover, Weller began his day with a jog around the nearest park.

"We're all called Steve or Andy, apart from Ben," announces guitarist Steve Cradock, as he introduces Weller's live band. While the group largely came together in 2008, Cradock has known Weller since the 1980s, acting as a musical foil as well as drinking partner. Weller comes over to say hello and hand out the set list – "A little bit of everything," he promises. When compiling the set list, Weller leads, but the others have input. "It does help that there are two or three people in the band who know my stuff really well," he says later.

The crew arrived in San Francisco the previous day, only to discover their hotel had no hot water and that San Francisco has an awful lot of hills. Amid largely good-natured grumbles, two minibuses arrive, laid on by the festival organisers, and everybody piles inside. It's a 15-minute drive from the hotel to Golden Gate Park, a thin green strip that stretches for three miles from the centre of

"I LOVE  
PLAYING  
MUSIC.  
I CAN'T  
IMAGINE  
THAT  
PASSION  
EVER  
STOPPING"



Weller flanked by (l-r) Ben Gordelier, Steve Cradock, Andy Lewis, Steve Pilgrim, Andy Crofts

## PAUL'S PEOPLE

### STEVE CRADOCK

Weller's long-time guitarist and former drinking companion. A friendly and approachable Brummie exiled to the south-west, he plays in several bands including Ocean Colour Scene.

### ANDY LEWIS

Tall, earnest bass player, serious about music, politics and clothes. Also plays in Spearmint and is a DJ and producer.

### ANDY CROFTS

Shaggy-haired keyboard player from the Midlands. Performs with Gordelier in The Moons and also takes photographs and makes videos.

### STEVE PILGRIM

Genial, dry-witted Scouse drummer, once of The Stands, who has also

played with John Power and Cast.

### BEN GORDELIER

Second drummer and sample player, who also plays in The Moons with Crofts. Joined the band in 2012 and started playing live this year.

### KEN WHEELER

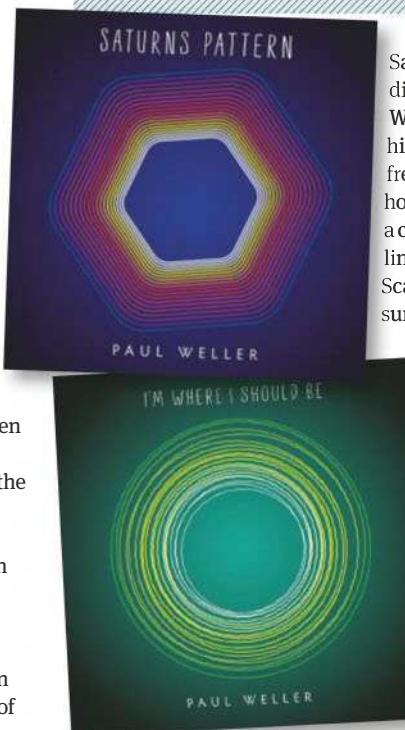
Weller sidekick for 37 years, having started as security and moved on to tour manager, a duty he now shares with his son. "Ken is one of my oldest friends. He can stay for as long as he likes," says Weller.

### BILL WHEELER

Ken's son and current tour manager, having taken over from his dad five years ago as everything moved increasingly online. Rarely resting.

### MARK

Weller's bodyguard for 11 years. A gigantic Brummie who has also worked for Robbie Williams and The Strokes.



San Francisco to the Pacific Ocean. The time is spent discussing the previous night's meal, shoes, the Brian Wilson biopic *Love & Mercy* – Weller approves – and the history of the Golden Gate Park, with its association with free festivals during the Summer of Love. But this former home of hippies is now the location for what is ostensibly a country music festival and, scanning the three-day lineup – Gillian Welch, Laura Marling, Steve Earle, Boz Scaggs, Emmylou Harris, Neko Case – Weller isn't entirely sure what he's got himself into. As the two vans enter the park, Weller glimpses the first members of the audience – half-a-dozen women in their sixties in Stetsons. ("Country is not my music to be honest," says Weller the next day. "I like some country tunes. There's always something good in every genre – I like Flying Burrito Brothers, I like 'White Line Fever' by Merle Haggard, I love Kenny Rogers' voice. But it's often a bit oversentimental for my liking. I don't really like country rock. I've never liked the Eagles.")

As Weller waits for the hospitality golf carts that take musicians through the park to the stage, a fortuitous meeting relieves the fish-out-of-water nerves. Carl Hayes and Janet McCartney are fans from Lancashire who are following the tour down

the West Coast and then on to Japan, where three more dates are booked. Weller visibly relaxes as he poses for a photograph next to Carl, who wears a Weller tour T-shirt. "Somebody just offered me \$1m for my T-shirt," Carl tells Paul proudly. "You should have taken it," says Weller.

Hayes has seen more than 100 Weller gigs, starting with The Jam, whom he saw 15 times. He explains that several fans have made the trip from Britain. "We prefer these shows because they are more intimate; he plays much smaller venues than in England," he adds before acknowledging, "Paul does have a fanbase over here. We know people who are coming from places like Philadelphia and Florida."

Weller is phlegmatic about his standing in America, where crowds can number hundreds rather than the tens of thousands back home. "People ask if I'm frustrated that I never made it over here, but I'm not," he says. "You make it if you want to make it, if you put in the time. I've always liked my creature comforts and it wasn't top of my list of things to do. I was never desperate to break America, I knew that was where the money was, but I wasn't career-minded enough. But I love playing over here. Nothing has changed. I don't have any misconceptions that I'm going to suddenly make it here, but I play because I like playing here – they are great crowds. It would be nice if there were a few more of them and we could make some money, but I come here because I want to."

After a short wait, two golf carts arrive to take band and crew to the Swan Stage. As the carts whip along John F Kennedy Drive, the smell of weed rises from the back seats and Weller launches into a brief burst of. "If you're going to San Francisco...". "We're having a party on the golf cart," says the driver, a friendly Californian, who talks about San Francisco's sympathetic pot laws and points out some of the park's historic features while we drive past a number of stages, all of roughly the same size. "It's a gathering," says Cradock approvingly. "That makes a different vibe. It means you can play music for music's sake."

**“**I'M PRETTY SURE I got the job because of my clobber," says bassist Andy Lewis as he changes into his stage gear outside the tiny two-tent backstage area. Lewis has a bottomless enthusiasm for obscure seven inches, having founded the Blow Up club night in Camden and later DJed for Blur during the Parklife tour in '94. He's looking forward to today's gig. "There's no



Weller and Cradock at the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival

cultural baggage for us over here. You get people from all musical backgrounds at festivals but the American fans seem to have a different take on Paul; they don't just expect to hear Jam songs. It's not just mods and ex-punks, but they are like-minded people – I've seen a lot of Bernie Sanders badges on this tour." And travelling fans like Carl and Janet? "There are some friendly familiar faces at nearly every show," he says. "But whoever we are playing to, you can never have a night off with Paul. He demands the best and we give it."

As the clock ticks towards stage time, the preceding act – Dave & Phil Alvin – have finished, but Weller is told he can't go on until Joe Jackson's set on a neighbouring stage has finished. The nerves start to bite and Weller can't stand still, hopping from foot to foot, like a footballer in the tunnel. "I still get nervous before every show," he admits. "That doesn't go away. It starts to fade during the first song, when you realise it's going to be OK, but sometimes, if things aren't quite right, it's there all the time. I've always been like that. I was that shy as a kid that my mum didn't believe me when I said I was playing my first show."

The tension escalates when a gust of wind lifts a backstage gazebo from the ground over the fence into the crowd – fortunately nobody is hurt. Weller eyes the speakers swaying from the stage ceiling with suspicion.

Then Bill Wheeler comes over and tells them it's time. The band exchange fist bumps with each other and the Wheelers and then march on, launching straight into grizzly rocker "White Sky" and quickly finding a groove. Weller plays a set that takes in The Style Council ("My Ever Changing Moods"), The Jam ("Man In The Corner Shop", "Start!") and solo standbys ("The Changingman", "Peacock Suit", "Friday Street"), but uses the new album as its backbone. This year's live innovation has been the addition of Ben Gordelier as a second percussionist and sample player, who combines with the main drummer, Steve Pilgrim. "Ben came into the studio when we were doing *Sonik Kicks* because we needed extra sound and he's been brilliant, he's really opened it up for us," says Weller. "He'd been in the studio for a couple of years, but we were watching a James Brown documentary about a year ago and that kind of decided it for us, that we'd go with two drummers onstage."

Out in the crowd, amid the cowboys, hippies, dogs and dancing children, the set goes down well, although it's

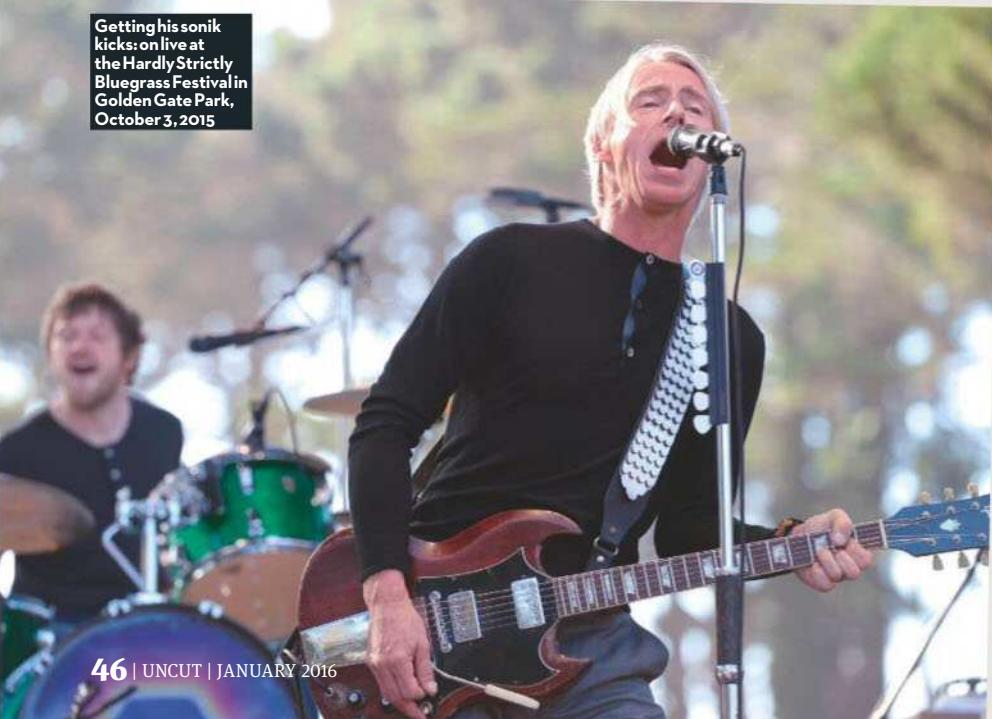
noticeable that the baseball caps outnumber stetsons by ten to one. Front right the British hardcore are gathered, arms raised and clutching a banner insisting that "The Jam Lives". Further back, a West Ham flag flutters, while to the left a man climbs a tree and lies back contentedly in the branches as the band break into "I'm Where I Should Be". A white-haired man wearing a tie-dyed polo shirt enthusiastically sings along. He's American, he says gruffly, and has been a fan of Weller for years but he doesn't get to see him very often. Meanwhile, Annie and Jill – both in their forties and Californian natives – had never heard of Weller before today, although The Jam and The Style Council rang a faint bell. "We saw this show named in a local paper as the best thing to see today at the festival so we thought we'd check it out," explains Jill. "We didn't know what to expect, but this is good."

The set starts to build towards a climax, hitting a psychedelic jam for "Into Tomorrow" that leads into the organ swirl of "Friday Street", before the one-two punch of "The Changingman" and "Start!" brings things to an end one song early, the set having

## HARDLY STRICTLY BLUEGRASS SET LIST

- **White Sky**
- **Peacock Suit**
- **Long Time**
- **I'm Where I Should Be**
- **Man In The Corner Shop**
- **Pick It Up**
- **Saturns Pattern**
- **Going My Way**
- **My Ever Changing Moods**
- **Into Tomorrow**
- **Friday Street**
- **The Changingman**
- **Start!**  
*(No time for planned finale of "These City Streets")*

Getting his sonik kicks on live at the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival in Golden Gate Park, October 3, 2015





In the city:  
The Jam in San  
Francisco, 1977

overrun before "These City Streets" can get an airing. As clouds of weed billow overhead, the crowd breaks into a stilted, stoned version of a pogo. "Peace and love," shouts Weller, swept up in the occasion, as he reluctantly relinquishes the stage.

Backstage, Weller is chuffed at having won over an unfamiliar audience. "I really enjoyed it, the crowd were great. We could have played for longer, they were getting into it." The following day, Weller talks in more detail about the show. "I was a bit concerned when I saw all the cowboy hats, but I love that thing where you play to people who don't know who the fuck you are and all you've got are the songs. That's all you can win them over with and it's great to still be able to do that, which is how we all started out in the business. Our touring life, it's different everywhere we go. This year we played Glastonbury to 100,000 and then a week later we played Munich to 350 people. And that keeps things interesting. It's a very different dynamic, playing a festival to a small club, and every day is different. I personally think that we are good enough to play anywhere."

One person who evidently agrees is Blondie drummer Clem Burke, who pops by the Swan Stage to say hello. "I'm at the festival just hanging out," he says. "It's a great festival and I thought it was a great set. I've known Paul for years so thought I'd just say hi. I told him that sometimes it can be a better show when you have less time to play." Weller says he's known Burke since his first US tour with The Jam in 1977, when Blondie came to watch them play CBGB's and then visited the dressing room afterwards.

The band head back to their hotel to change before heading out to dinner at the nearby Indian restaurant Gordelier has spotted, nestling incongruously in this Japanese outpost of sushi, bento and karaoke bars. In the universal décor of an all-you-can-eat Indian buffet, the band – except Cradock, who has opted for an early night – chat happily about boxing, films, music books, foreign food, the problem with Disney behemoth *Frozen* ("She can't bloody sing," says Weller) and jet lag. It's convivial and, while the local curry house vibe is surreal, it also seems strangely appropriate. For all his success, Weller can sometimes look as if he is just a signet ring short of a suburban semi. The communal meal, he insists, was a common occurrence as

"I WAS NEVER DESPERATE TO BREAK AMERICA. I WASN'T CAREER-MINDED ENOUGH"

"IT'S KIND OF EXPERIMENTAL"

WELLER BEGAN work on his first film soundtrack two years ago, creating a sound collage for the boxing film provisionally titled *The Ballad Of Jimmy McCabe*. With filming set to begin in 2016, this soundtrack promises to be unlike anything he's ever done before. "A mate of mine,

the band regularly socialise together on tour. "It's a nice unit, they are good people," says Weller. "Even on nights off, we hang out together. I've never really had that before, the tour usually breaks into camps – it used to be me and Cradock, especially when I was drinking. That was the mad camp. But we all get on. They're the sort of people I'd have as friends if I wasn't working with them."

THE FOLLOWING DAY, Weller tells *Uncut* about an incident that took place around the time of The Jam's first two American tours. Weller was informed by an American executive that if he wanted to break the States, he had to get in a bus and tour for six months. He wasn't interested. "We never wanted to do that," he says. "I knew that even then. It's so vast and so culturally different everywhere you go, you have to really want to do it. Bands like U2, they really went for it, they worked hard at it, but it's not for me. I didn't have the motivation to do anything other than what I wanted to do. I get homesick. I've never been tempted to move to America; I've never been tempted to move anywhere. I love England and London especially."

the actor Johnny Harris (pictured), has been trying to get this film together for the last two years," says Weller. "It's a semi-autobiographical piece about a boxer who has it all, loses it and then gets it together again."



"It's my first complete soundtrack – I've done the odd song here and there – so I want to try something really different. We had the first meeting about two years ago, and I went away and did a long piece of about 27 minutes that was kind of avant-garde and experimental."

## ANDY CROFTS IN FOCUS

**K**EYBOARD PLAYER Crofts doesn't just play notes onstage, he also presses buttons as an unofficial backstage photographer. "I've been taking pictures all my life," he says. "But it was only when I got hold of a quality camera that had proper focus that I realised how much I loved it." Crofts has also carried a video camera with him since he joined the band in 2008, and in the past year has been filming more studiously with the intention of creating an intimate tour film. "There hasn't really been a Paul Weller fly-on-the-wall documentary before, so I've been shooting a video that shows what nobody has seen before," says Crofts, who has also shot videos for Weller's recent singles, including "These City Streets". "It won't be *Gimme Shelter*; it's just the day-to-day stuff of us on the bus, in the dressing room, playing shows. The plan is that we put it online for free on the website on Boxing Day. It'll last about an hour and will be like you were there with us. I think the fans will dig it."

• I couldn't imagine being anywhere else." There's no chance, then, that Weller will follow John Lydon and Morrissey into West Coast exile. "It's so strange with those two," he says. "I can't imagine Morrissey or John going out in the sun, they always look so pale. I dunno what they do over here."

With two young children at home, Weller has no desire to put in the months of roadwork demanded for long American tours, preferring to work in two- or three-week bursts. This West Coast tour, he says, is also a way of getting the band "match fit" for a forthcoming UK arena tour that will close out another busy year. As ever, Weller is a man with many projects on the go: this year has seen several tours, a new album, a boxset of Jam live shows called *Fire & Skill* and a Jam exhibition at Somerset House, curated by his sister and which he says may travel to Brazil and Japan. How long can he keep it up?

"I think about that all the time: when would be a good time to retire?" he says. "But I love it so much, I don't know what else I'd do. I'm not really after anything more than finding a way to prolong this, to keep playing and making music. I'm in control of this, and I like that. If I had to do a two- or three-month tour of the States – that's hard work, especially at my age. I don't know if I have the stamina. As it is, I can continue to express myself with something I love doing. I get freedom now, which isn't something I ever really had before. The label ask me to do press and TV, that's fine, but they don't tell me what to write or release. If you're successful, you get left alone."

This independence is something he values after so many years in the music industry. "There was one time with The Jam when the label started talking about getting the guy from 10cc to write a song for us because they thought we needed a single. It was after

*All Mod Cons*, when we hit a dip, and they were talking about us getting dropped so they got 10cc to write a song for us. Luckily it was shit."

There will be no let-up in 2016. Weller is planning to write his first soundtrack, produce a TV show filmed at his Black Barn studios and record a new album. The soundtrack particularly excites him: he is looking forward to taking the musical experiments of *Sonic Kicks* beyond the parameters of the pop format. He talks enthusiastically about soundtracks by Roman Polanski's composer Krzysztof Komeda (*Knife In The Water*, *Cul-de-Sac*) and Jonny Greenwood's soundtrack for *There Will Be Blood*, as well as avant-garde compositions like "Revolution 9" and *Metal Machine Music*. "When I first bought *The White Album* back in the day I hated that song. I thought it ruined the album. But I played it recently and thought how wonderful it was. I could hear the composition of it, the sound

Weller backstage, photographed by Andy Crofts



**"IF I'D CARRIED ON DRINKING, I DON'T THINK I'D STILL BE HERE. BUT I DO MISS THE CHAOS"**

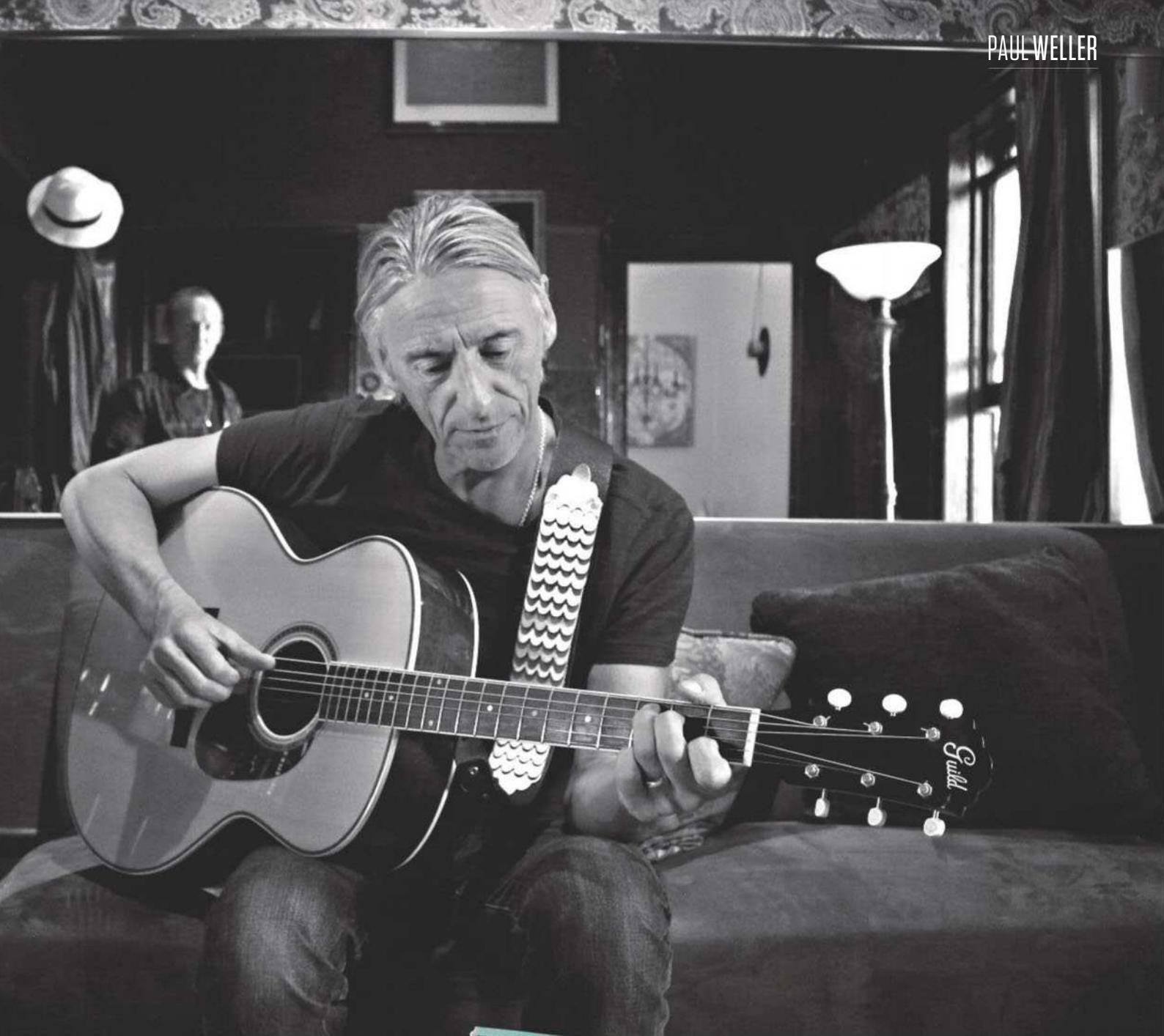
Sharpshooter: Andy Crofts



of revolution. It's like *Metal Machine Music* – I don't play it every week, but every now and then in the right mood, I can enjoy that."

Weller's increasing late-career adventurousness is helped by having an enthusiastic young band to work with, who are not shy to share ideas about music. In return, Weller often lends his name to their songs by singing or playing guitar – he's spent the morning before the interview recording a vocal track in the hotel room for Cradock's new album – and he has sympathy for anybody starting out in the industry today. "I see my mates in club bands, they get paid something like £200 a night, which is what we got when we started out," he says. "But that's the way it is. What do you do? Stop making music? The whole idea is that people can make up for what they don't get selling records with live receipts, but that's only true if you can play at a certain level. It doesn't help if you are starting out. Things like lights, PAs, wages – they're not getting any cheaper."

Bands tell Weller there isn't much they can do other than keep playing. "It seems much harder than when I was a kid, and it was tough then," he explains. "It's not an enviable position for young bands. The only thing you can do is be solid. You can't listen to too much advice, you have to go with what you want and know that it'll be tough. It's tough enough just holding a band together."



His current band first played together on *22 Dreams* and they have since recorded three more albums together. Weller seems taken aback when it's pointed out this might be the longest time he has ever worked with the same group of musicians. But critically, the last two albums – *Sonik Kicks* and *Saturns Pattern* – were both recorded since Weller stopped drinking. "If I'd carried on, I don't think I'd still be here," he admits. "I was an alcoholic. I used to think that meant somebody who drank every day, but now I know it's not like that. With me, it was once I had one drink, I couldn't stop. I went to see a therapist, who was very good. He helped me understand myself, but I knew it was the right time. I couldn't handle it, man, the dark moods, the hangovers. I don't need that shit. They say that drink unleashes the demons inside you, but I think the demons are in the bottle. The demon was actually in the bottle; it didn't come from anywhere else. I wasn't drinking because I was depressed, I drank because I liked to get drunk, I loved the chaos and adventures. Not any more, but I did. I still miss the chaos – not all the time, but now and then. But I like to be sober, I know where I am, I know what I'm doing tonight."



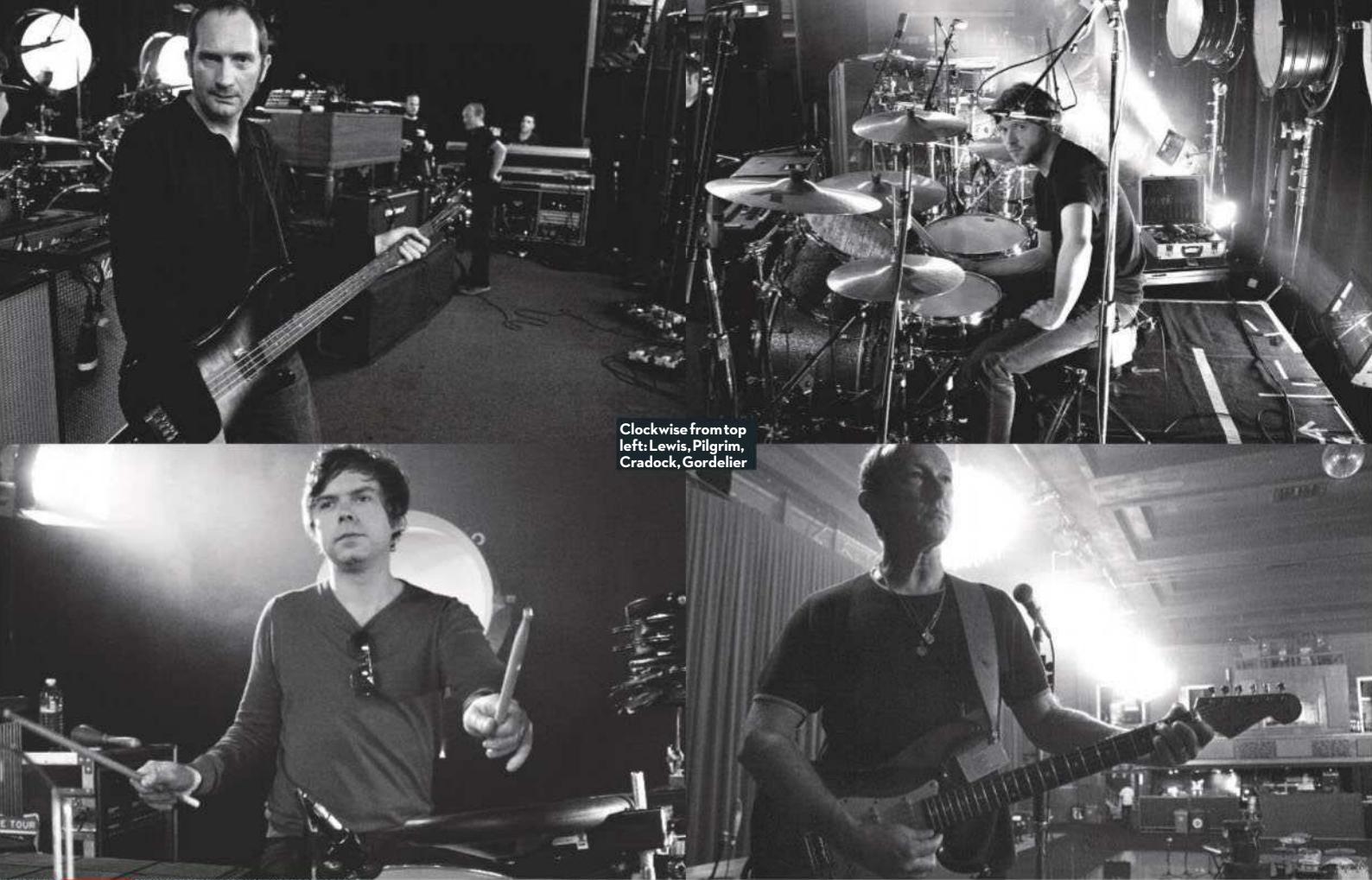
Weller stopped drinking five years ago. The first two years were particularly difficult, especially with former drinking partners Cradock and Ken Wheeler around. "On

tour, after a gig, you naturally want to reach for a drink to commiserate or celebrate, so I miss that with the boys," he says. "But I love having the energy and the clarity. I can remember the gigs, take everything in. Before it was about lying in bed all day waiting for when we left for the gig,

so I could start drinking again. The gigs were still good, but you couldn't remember them afterwards. You're not enjoying it because you're barely conscious of it. I drank alone as well, I'd go off on binges for a few days and nobody could get hold of me."

Any regrets?

"I don't regret any of it. Fuck no. I've done that, I survived it, I did it for 40 years and most of it was good. That was my only thing really. I did coke in the '90s, but everybody was doing coke then. It's a shit fucking drug, that. Nobody's fun on that. Nobody says, 'That coke really improved things.' It just makes you a cunt. It's not good for music either. When you first take coke, you get all this energy and think it makes you creative. But the more you abuse it, that creativity goes out the window and all you



Clockwise from top  
left: Lewis, Pilgrim,  
Cradock, Gordelier

## "A PROPER TV SHOW"

WELLER HAS WANTED to make a TV show at his studio for a while but believes this might finally come together early next year. "I've been trying to do a TV show for about two years," he says. "At first, I wanted to do a series of half-hour shows and put them on the internet, but it would be a proper TV show with guests. Now we're going to try to do a one-hour special early next year. We'll use my studio [Black Barn in Ripley in Surrey], set up the gear, I'll do a few songs and then we'll get guests to play a few songs. I've got to make a list of people I want to ask - I'd ask Robert Plant and Paul McCartney if they want to do it, but it'll be whoever is around at the time. It'll be quite raw, but the sound will be good and we'll get a proper director. We'd like to get TV interested and we're talking to people, but I want to make it first, because I don't want the TV people to interfere with how it comes together."

do is sit in your room with a big pile, taking more and more. With the drink, it's hard to say if it interfered with the music as there was always that standard I wanted to meet. I do sing and play better now, though."

Those standards are important to Weller and chime with his earlier comments about creating space for his own independence, especially now he is in better control of his professional and personal life. It hasn't always been the case. "There have been times when I've put out a record 'cos I felt I had to and I've always regretted it," he reveals. "Sometimes you just have to let them go, but it's not something I'll let happen again. You need to have some kind of standard. It's not just work, it's more than that. And I think it's improving all the time."

As the interview draws to a close, a man walks up the hill pushing a baby buggy. A Welsh expat who has lived in San Francisco for 10 years, he stops to tell Weller he thinks "he's a total genius". He's followed shortly afterwards by Johnny, a Scot living in Canada, who follows Weller around North America. Johnny saw the show at Golden Gate Park and tells Weller that on the way in, he talked to a couple of English girls. "They thought it was a Paul Weller tribute band," he says, laughing.

Weller is approached by fans several times over the weekend and always finds time to chat, sign autographs and ask questions about their lives. Indeed, the only time his good mood comes close to snapping is when an American starts badgering him for smoking outside the coffee shop. Weller mutters annoyance, but puts out the cigarette, only for the American to question "his attitude". It's a moment of slightly pompous hectoring that would stretch anybody's patience, but Weller shakes it off, something that might not have been the case a few years ago. Weller, everybody says, has mellowed. As for the fans, "it's definitely nice seeing fans who've come out here," he muses. "I'm surprised to hear people are going on to Japan - that's a lot of money to see a band. I'm not sure there's any band I'd go see every night. I'm a fan of a lot of bands, but I'd never want to see them every night."

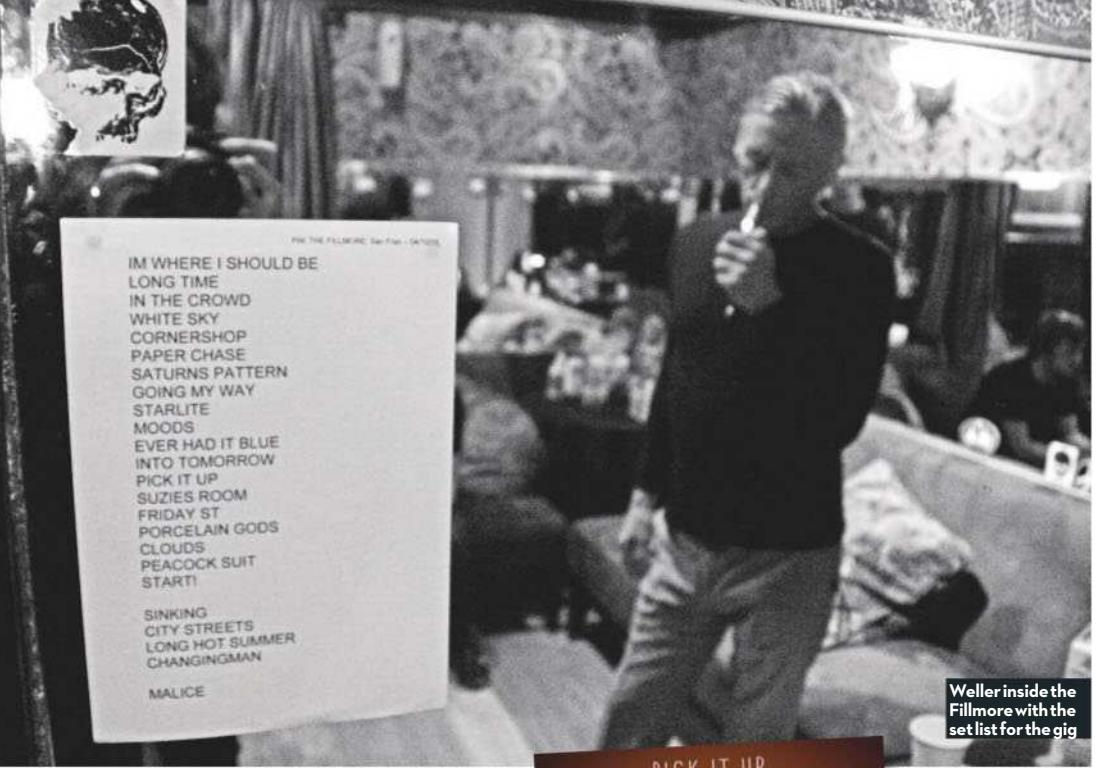
**"I GET FREEDOM NOW. IF YOU HAVE SUCCESS, YOU GET LEFT ALONE"**

And with that, he finishes his second coffee and heads off to prepare for the evening's show at the Fillmore.

IVEN THAT IT is one of the most famous venues in rock'n'roll, there's something rather disappointing about the exterior of the Fillmore, a drab brick building occupying an undistinguished corner of Fillmore and Geary. Inside, it is a different matter, with the venue

oozing louche elegance. From the ceiling hang 10 chandeliers and a mirror ball, while red velvet curtains surround the low stage and balcony. The crowning glory is the first-floor bar, with walls covered in psychedelic posters by Wes Wilson and Rick Griffin advertising shows by Zeppelin, Hendrix, Creedence, Cream, The Who, Lenny Bruce, Aretha Franklin as well as dozens by Bay Area legends Jefferson Airplane, Big Brother And The Holding Company and The Grateful Dead. A portrait of Jerry Garcia looms over the main staircase like a shrine. A poster is prepared for every band before big shows even today, with Weller impressed by his Saturn-themed offering.

While the band admire the posters, none have particularly warm feelings towards West Coast 1960s psychedelia. "I was never into that stuff," says Weller. "I preferred the English style of psychedelia; the American version just sounded like country rock to me. I liked the harder stuff, like Love, but I was quite disappointed when I first heard some of those San



Weller inside the Fillmore with the set list for the gig

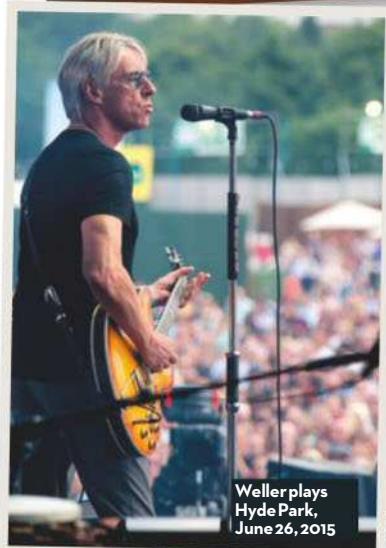
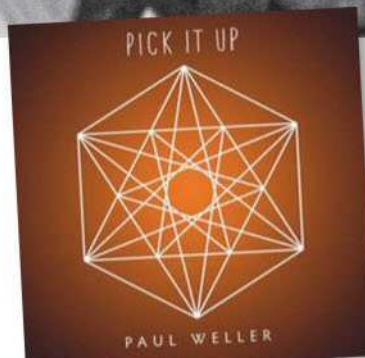
Francisco bands. They weren't as far out as I'd been led to believe." He's still pleased to be playing the Fillmore. "Playing an important venue, that still excites me," he says. "When you know about the sort of bands that have trod the boards. When we played the Apollo at Harlem, that was amazing, all our heroes have played there. Those places with a history attached mean something."

As the band perform their soundcheck, Carol is getting the venue ready. She has worked at the Fillmore since the '80s, "when music was good", and one of her jobs is to distribute red apples, a huge bowl of which sits in the foyer next to a faded framed sign saying "Have One Or Two...". Carol explains this is the original sign for a tradition that dates back to when Bill Graham ran the club. "They're good for the kids, maybe if they're high and need to eat or they've been sweating too much. They're here for every show unless it's a band the crowd like to throw shit at."

Several of Weller's fans were at the Fillmore long before the doors opened, some having perhaps witnessed the tour bus do a Spinal Tap-esque one-minute drive round the corner from the hotel. After parking up, Weller stays in the bus to chat with the Wheelers and make excellent tea in a Hardly Strictly Bluegrass mug. He talks football – the Wheelers are Spurs fans, Weller grew up watching Chelsea – and reminisces with Ken Wheeler on their drinking days in airport bars ("Chicago," says Wheeler proudly, "we were on double doubles").

Outside the club, fortysomething Mark is waiting for Weller with two dozen other fans. A Californian who was into The Jam and Style Council in the 1980s, Mark hadn't listened to Weller's solo stuff until he stumbled across it in the mid-2000s. "I loved how he was developing and went back and got all his solo stuff," he says, opening a record bag crammed with Weller vinyl. Fortunately, he only asks Weller to sign one record before Mark hands over his phone, insisting *Uncut* snap a picture of him and Weller. There are other American fans there, plus several Brits and expats, asking for autographs and handing out gifts – Weller is given a handmade necklace and a thin box that, curiously, contains a panama hat. This is the first time Mark has seen his idol perform, and he's vibrating with anticipation as he shows Paul's autograph to other fans.

Inside the dressing room, Weller is finalising the set list. It ends with "Malice" – "They'll get that if they've been good," Weller smiles. Now the tension starts to mount and every five minutes a patient but frazzled Bill Wheeler, bent



Weller plays Hyde Park, June 26, 2015

## “HYDE PARK, WAS GREAT”

**A**LTHOUGH WELLER doesn't intend to tour next year, he imagines he will continue to play festivals. He has mixed feelings about the festival mania that has built over recent decades. "I've enjoyed them this year, but I don't always, because you have no control over things. That can put you off. But we played some wicked shows this year: The Who at Hyde Park was great, Glastonbury was good, and we played a few in Europe. I do like having a roof

over his laptop trying to book hotels for the UK tour, is asked how long they have to wait. The band spend much of their time in front of the mirror, as hair is styled and clothes smoothed down. "You need to work out a tour clothing rota," explains Lewis, who takes to the stage with a Bernie Sanders badge pinned to his lapel. He's looking forward to playing a smaller venue. "We can get a bit sweaterier and rowdier," he says.

Support act Villagers are observed approvingly, before Weller pulls out a couple of CDs containing demos of new songs. He plays four tracks, exchanging ideas with Crofts and Gordelier for how to improve and finalise each tune. Weller and Crofts agree the new songs have a Curtis

Mayfield vibe and that's evident in the first three – one has a clear Philly soul feel, another is more jazzy while "New York" has an almost Afro-Cuban beat. Pick of the lot is "The Cranes Are Back", with an amazing vocal backed by piano. "It's special that one," says Crofts. Weller hopes to start recording in spring but the LP is unlikely to appear before 2017.

And then it's showtime. Weller has promised it will be "the same as yesterday only more of it and better", and the band accordingly power through a two-hour set that starts with "I'm Where I Should Be" and touches on every point in Weller's career before closing with a blistering second encore of "A Town Called Malice", the audience clearly having met Weller's expected standards.

The band come off buzzing, but there's no time to celebrate. After a quick change of clothes, Weller hands over a CD to listen to (*Y Dydd Olaf* by Gwenno) and, shouting farewell, disappears down the stairs followed by the band. Last to go is Steve Pilgrim, who takes a final lingering look from the balcony at the roadies who scurry back and forth like worker ants clearing the stage. "All this, for a rock show," he muses. And then he joins the band on the bus for the overnight drive to Los Angeles. ☀

**Paul Weller** is currently on tour in the UK. He releases "Pick It Up" as a single in December

TOM NICHOLSON/REX SHUTTERSTOCK

on my gig, though. There are so many festivals and so many bands on each one. I liked the one yesterday [Hardly Strictly Bluegrass], I liked the size of the stages and the fact it was free. It's nice to get the chance to play to a different audience. It's good to feel uncomfortable to a certain extent."

Weller has only attended one festival as a punter. "I went to a free festival in Windsor when I was about 16. I don't remember anything about it; I was tripping on acid. We went down for the day, laughed a lot and went home. We met these hippy guys with a massive block of hash and that was it. That was what it was all about."

THE MAKING OF...

# 30 Seconds Over Tokyo

BY PERE UBU

Screaming, synth noise, static... the Cleveland art-rockers' debut single was post-punk before its time: "We were clearly not going to get played on the radio"

**T**HE DEBUT SINGLE by Ohio's Pere Ubu is an uncompromising listen: nearly seven minutes of apocalyptic synth storms, metallic guitars and unnerving, ranting vocals about a real-life bomber squad's "suicide ride". In fact, the 1975 single had originally been written by Rocket From The Tombs – the infamous Cleveland rock band who counted among their number future Ubu men David Thomas and Peter Laughner, alongside Cheetah Chrome, who would soon form the Dead Boys.

Post-punk in sound, yet made in a pre-punk world, "30 Seconds Over Tokyo" was unlike much else – perhaps the bluster of the MC5, the experimentalism of Beefheart and the doomy portent of Sabbath could be discerned in its sonic stew, alongside some more surprising inspirations. "Most people are startled by the fact that for us, the number one rock god in the world was Richard Thompson," David Thomas explains. "That album, *I Want To See The Bright Lights Tonight*, was huge. It was up there with Roxy Music and the Velvets and all that stuff for us."

The single set the framework for a band that's still going strong today – bizarrely now operating alongside a reformed Rocket From The Tombs, whose lineup includes Thomas and bassist Craig Bell.

"Everybody said, 'You are so angry,' but what we were angry about was the ordinariness of

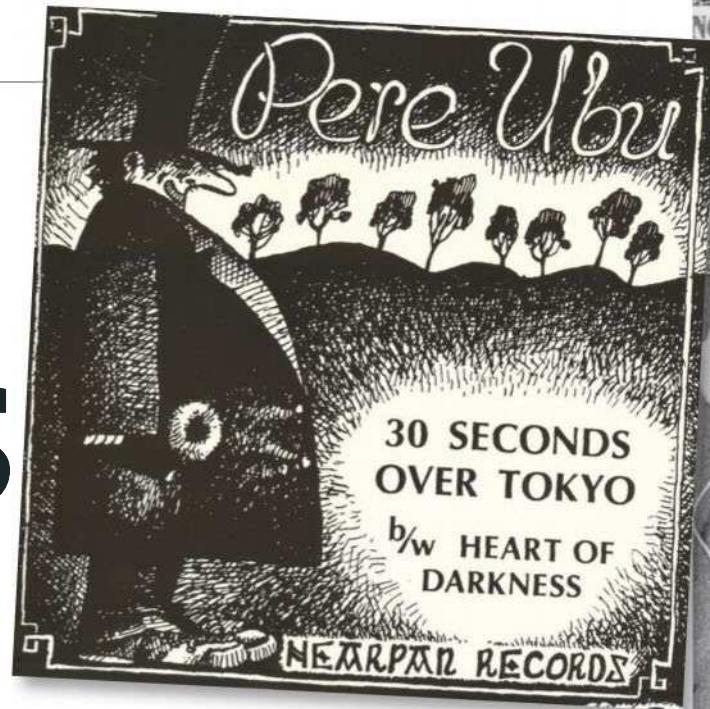
everything," adds Thomas. "All the normal, regular rock bands were just so damn ordinary and didn't seem to have any ambition to do anything that was 'extraordinary'."

**TOM PINNOCK**

**DAVID THOMAS:** For a pop song, "30 Seconds..." is a relatively complex piece of music. Rocket From The Tombs didn't have any aspirations to be something that you might call punk. Cheetah [Chrome, aka Gene O'Connor] was really into the New York Dolls, and all of us were into The Velvet Underground.

**CRAIG BELL:** Cheetah had a riff, and Peter [Laughner] had an answer for that riff, then everything just seemed to come together. It had the magic on its own.

**THOMAS:** I suspect because of the way it was written that I came in with it as a set of lyrics. It's probably the last time I ever wrote in a straight narrative form. The title was taken from a book [by Ted W Lawson and Robert Considine, about the 1942 Doolittle Raid]... There was a movie [based on the book] in the '40s.



## KEY PLAYERS



**David Thomas**  
Vocals



**Scott Krauss**  
Drums



**Allen Ravenstine**  
Synthesiser



**Tom Herman**  
Guitar



**Craig Bell**  
Rocket From The Tombs bassist

**BELL:** The song is based on a true story, and it goes from the moment of taking off to the moment flying over the city to the moment of just drifting back off into history – because some of those guys didn't come back. It was a one-way ride.

**TOM HERMAN:** I had heard Rocket play several times live so, yeah, I was familiar with them. It didn't strike me as something different – everybody was doing crazy stuff, so, you know, it kind of fitted in – but it struck me as something cool.

**SCOTT KRAUSS:** I saw Rocket's last show, apparently, at a place called The Piccadilly, which Peter Laughner brought Television in for – it was Television's first gig out of New York City.

**BELL:** When Rocket split, it was down to frustration and youth. I mean, we were young and we didn't know what we were doing. I think the fact that nobody was the peacemaker in the band was a factor, too – when we hit a wall, no-one said, "Look, despite all this, let's keep moving forward."

**THOMAS:** I wasn't that interested in the future, but we had done this work and it seemed to be of



Band ahoy!: Pere Ubu at Pirate's Cove in Cleveland, 1976

an exceptional quality to me, and it seemed like it would be silly not to go ahead and at least document what had been done. So when it came time to divvy up the songs at the end of *Rocket*, I wasn't looking to the future. I just had the idea that we'd do "Final Solution" and "Tokyo" as a single, so those were the only two *Rocket* songs I had my eye on. I told Peter what I was going to do, that I was going to call it Pere Ubu and it was going to be just a 'studio band', and before I'd even finished the sentence he'd said he wanted in, and we talked about other people that would be good for the group.

**ALLEN RAVENSTINE:** I owned a building in the inner city of Cleveland, called The Plaza – a very unusual old apartment building. It soon became a place where a lot of people ended up living, and one of those folks was Peter Laughner, so I met David through that connection. Before I had that building, I was living out in the country, fooling around with synthesisers and tape recorders. I made this one piece called "Terminal Drive" that was probably 20 minutes long. And that got me the invitation to be involved in Pere Ubu.

**KRAUSS:** I was living at The Plaza and Peter Laughner knocked on my door and said they were going to do a recording session. And he wanted to know if I wanted to be involved. I said, "Who is going to be on this session?" So he gave me the low-down and I was like, "Yeah, I know these people, I can work with these people."

**RAVENSTINE:** When the band first formed, it was sort of an experiment – if you took some

people that maybe saw the world in a similar kind of way or had some kind of core connection as people, so that it didn't matter whether they really knew how to play an instrument or not, they could come together and play something interesting. And it was that idea, that notion, which was why I wanted to be involved in it.

**HERMAN:** In the early days it was very much a collective, kind of a communist thing. Everyone pretty much was in charge of themselves.

**RAVENSTINE:** The deal was we were going to

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**"We had to assure the pressing plant that that was what the song was supposed to sound like"**

DAVID THOMAS

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make this record and then disband. I don't know if that was what David really had in mind – I mean, David is a chess player in real life, but he's also a chess player on about every level there is. But the notion was we were going to make this record and then that was going to be the end of it.

**HERMAN:** To some extent, Allen was the whole point of the thing. I mean, all the music was

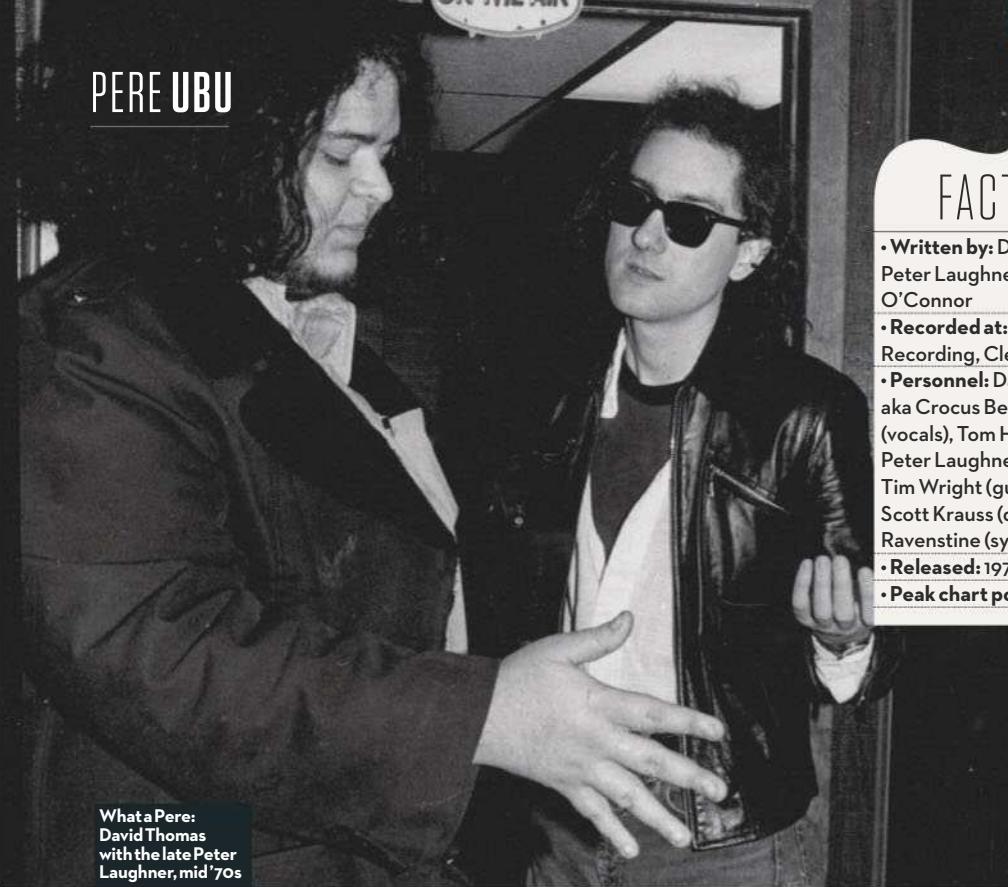
based more or less on rock'n'roll, but it was the sonic differences that really to me had a lot to do with what made it important. The synthesiser pushed the energy level up higher, and I think that's what really made Pere Ubu somewhat distinctive – we used electronic music to push the energy level, rather than just mixing in some ambient mood.

**RAVENSTINE:** The synthesiser that I was using, an ElectroComp 200, didn't have a keyboard – it looked like a phone bank from the 1930s. There was one trigger switch that was actually just a button, and that was the only way you could trigger anything, everything else was just manipulating knobs.

**THOMAS:** We rehearsed for three days and, during a jam, "Heart Of Darkness" came along, and we began to see that this was moving to something else, that this group of people was playing these songs in a unique way. So we dumped "Final Solution" as the B-side and went to "Heart Of Darkness".

**HERMAN:** We recorded "30 Seconds Over Tokyo" and "Heart Of Darkness" in one night, including mixing, so I'm not really sure how much time went on each. I'm sure more went to "30 Seconds".

**THOMAS:** Studio time was very expensive, and we were just a bunch of kids working dirt jobs, so I don't know how we ended up in Audio Recording – I suspect I looked in the phone book and Audio, beginning with an 'a', came first [laughs]. In the studio all we did was turn up, set up the stuff and play. In those days, all the



What a Pere:  
David Thomas  
with the late Peter  
Laughner, mid '70s

• singles were recorded and mixed within two to three hours, there was not a lot of overdubbing. I do remember at the session that [engineer] Bill Cavanaugh was telling us about this other “weird band” he’d been recording that played trash cans... So I said, “Well, what are they called?” and he said, “It’s D-something.” [Laughs] That’s the first time we had actually run across Devo.

**KRAUSS:** I remember the engineer totally flipping out when he realised what he’d got himself into. He put all kinds of filters on my cymbals so he could marginalise whatever bled through. He tried to harmonise my cymbals! And he had a huge problem with Ravenstine – he was like, “What is this?” He’d never heard anything like it. There was a lot of him scratching his head.

**RAVENSTINE:** I was always interested in airplanes – I’ve just retired from being an airline pilot – and I especially like the sound of a rotary engine. And those Second World War airplanes with those big rotary engines, it’s just a lovely sound. So the minute I heard the title of the song and what was going to be involved, the only thing that ever occurred to me was the sound of an airplane engine and also the radio bit at the end, that notion of a radio transmission with the frequency being in and out of tune, the static... I used just my ElectroComp 200 synth – it would’ve been the only thing I had.

**HERMAN:** I pretty much played rhythm guitar through the whole thing. Tim [Wright] played bass through the song-y parts and Peter played bass through the more noisy parts, if I remember correctly. And then Tim overdubbed some guitar throughout the song also, so there were lots of guitars going on. Then in the open parts it was just every man for himself, especially the third noise section, which wasn’t mapped out. I had a Morley wah-wah pedal, and I was using that.

I don’t remember what my amp was, but I remember that it was borrowed and it was dying throughout that entire session. It had a neat squishy break-up that you don’t normally hear, and luckily it lasted through the whole thing.

**THOMAS:** We sent the record off to the pressing plant and they called us back with great concern saying, “There’s noise all over this,” so we went back to the engineer and he said, “No, this is what you recorded.” We had to assure the pressing plant that that was what it was supposed to sound like.

**HERMAN:** Was it a brave single? No, we were just stupid, we assumed everyone would love it.

**THOMAS:** At that time the only place you would find used records was in Salvation Army thrift stores – one of our big thrills was rummaging through these places to find these strange unknown records... some of it would be really wonderful. I know this sounds romantic, but my entire ambition was that we’d put this out and there’d be enough of them that some of them would end up at the Salvation Army and at some point;

20 years in the future, some kid would run across our records and say, “Wow!” That was the entirety of my plan [laughs]. It failed, of course... at least that’s one failure that I’m happy with. When we finished the record, we all got together at Tim’s apartment and talked

## FACT FILE

- **Written by:** David Thomas, Peter Laughner, Gene O’Connor
- **Recorded at:** Audio Recording, Cleveland, Ohio
- **Personnel:** David Thomas aka Crocus Behemoth (vocals), Tom Herman (guitar), Peter Laughner (guitar, bass), Tim Wright (guitar, bass), Scott Krauss (drums), Allen Ravenstine (synthesiser)
- **Released:** 1975
- **Peak chart positions:** n/a

about whether we wanted to keep making music. That’s when we began to think in terms of a future.

**KRAUSS:** I totally agreed with David at that point, which was that you would find it in Salvation Army bins! With all this noise and everything, you know, David screaming, we were clearly not going to get played on the radio.

**THOMAS:** I had boxes of the singles in my room, and I’d ship them out – we were getting a lot of sales in London, Paris and Minneapolis. There’s a long tradition of putting stuff out on your own label, but at that point in time that tradition had died out a bit. I think “Little Johnny Jewel”

by Television beat us by a couple of months, but there wasn’t anything else out there at that point.

**RAVENSTINE:** I was surprised that it still holds up when I listened to it. I still like it, it’s good.

**THOMAS:** When Rocket reformed, we did the Rocket version, which is far more – for want of a better term – ‘heavy metal’ than the Pere Ubu version. In fact, some writer at *Creem* magazine back in the '70s claimed that “Tokyo” was either the first heavy metal song – I don’t think that’s true – or the best heavy metal song written to that point. Something like that...

**HERMAN:** In that original band configuration it was wonderful to play live. And Allen, or whoever was the synth player at the time we were playing live, just had a free rein to be as wild as they wanted, and it was lovely. It had immense power. I loved playing that live back then.

**BELL:** To this day it’s a showstopper; it’s the centrepiece of the show. Forty years on, when that song starts, that’s when everybody’s paying attention. I remember playing it in Brooklyn not too long ago, and it was almost like the air went out of the room – everyone gasped at once – and the riff would start back up and the place would just explode. It’s that kind of song. It’s more of a feeling than anything else.

**KRAUSS:** One of Allen Ravenstine’s favourite statements was, “Let’s not do it, but say that we did.” And that was the stuff that I totally loved about Pere Ubu. The oblique strategies, to quote Brian Eno, I think that we were on that as much as he was on that. ☺

Pere Ubu’s *Coed Jail Tour* takes place in March 2016, along with the release of a new boxset, *Architecture Of Language 1979-1982*, out March 18, 2016. Allen Ravenstine’s first solo LP, *The Pharaoh’s Bee*, is available now only at hearpen.com and rermegacorp.com. Craig Bell’s X\_\_\_\_X’s album, X\_\_\_\_X Presents Albert Ayler’s *Ghosts Live From The Yellow Ghetto*, is out now

## TIMELINE

### Early 1974

Rocket From The Tombs form in Cleveland, Ohio – three members write “30

### Seconds Over Tokyo”

**June 16, 1974**

The group perform their first gig at the Viking Saloon in



Cleveland, playing

nearly all of the MC5’s

*Kick Out The Jams*

**July 24, 1975**

Rocket play their final

show, and soon after

split into the Dead Boys and Pere Ubu, the latter

taking “30 Seconds” and “Final Solution”

### Late 1975

Pere Ubu cut “30 Seconds” at Audio Recording, Cleveland. Released on Thomas’ own Hearthan label

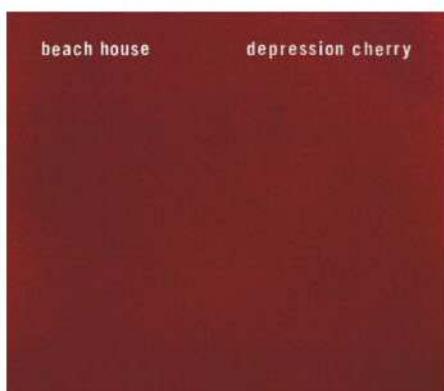
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## BEACH HOUSE

*Thank Your Lucky Stars*



## BEACH HOUSE

*Depression Cherry*



## JOHN GRANT

*Grey Tickles, Black Pressure*



## FATHER JOHN MISTY

*I Love You, Honeybear*



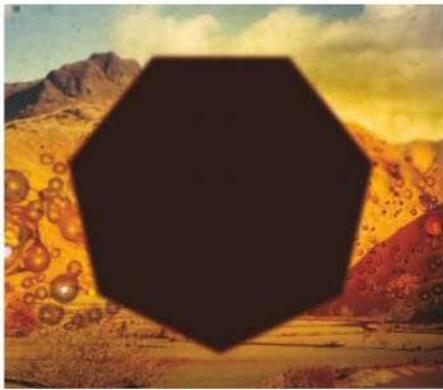
## MERCURY REV

*The Light In You*



## PINS

*Girls Like Us*



## LANTERNS ON THE LAKE

*Beings*



## LANDSHAPES

*Heyoon*



# THE PROTEST SINGER

The eternally uncompromising ROGER WATERS reflects on a lifetime of being “a very angry young man”. To be discussed: hotbeds of Bolshevism, and the Pink Floyd’s school misdemeanours. The allure of folk singers and Jeremy Corbyn. Old enemies and new songs. A film of *The Wall*, and what might happen on the other side of it. Oh, and the minor distraction of David Gilmour’s new album...

Interview: Michael Bonner

**I**WAS A VERY ANGRY YOUNG MAN,” says Roger Waters. “And if you’re honest in any way, you paint what you see. I lived in a political household, so politics was always part of my life.”

Waters pauses for a moment and takes a sip of his coffee. He is sitting in the grand ballroom of a Knightsbridge hotel. Dressed in the routine off-duty rock-star attire of black T-shirt and navy jeans – topped off by a pair of tan leather slip-on boat shoes – Waters is soft-spoken and gracious, far from the curmudgeon that reputation suggests. We are here ostensibly to talk about Waters’ new film of *The Wall*: an update of his Pink Floyd opus, shot during his 2010-13 world tour. Woven through the film is footage of Waters as he travels through France and Italy, visiting the First and Second World War cemeteries where his grandfather and father are

buried. Critically, this new iteration of *The Wall* is the latest example of Waters’ own lengthy history of protest. Described by its author as “an anti-war film”, it forms part of a cycle of protest and political songwriting that has recurred through Waters’ work since “Corporal Clegg” from Pink Floyd’s 1968 album, *A Saucerful Of Secrets*.

But there are other matters to discuss, too. There’s the new music he has been working on, his plans for his next arena tour and whether he’s heard *Rattle That Lock* – the latest album from his former Floyd sparring partner David Gilmour. Our conversation takes in *Daily Worker* bazaars, Aldermaston marches and an incident in Seattle involving 50 kazoos. “When I was younger, I would stand in a corner and snarl,” he says. “Now I’m entirely prepared to converse about matters than I care about – but in ways that might be more conducive to having a voice that gets heard a little bit...”





Live at Newport Folk Festival, Fort Adams State Park on July 24, 2015

**When did your political engagement begin?** I guess when I was at nursery school. Some bloke in a uniform came to pick up one of the kids from school. I went, "Where's mine?" and my mother had to explain to me that my father wasn't going to pick me up from school, ever, because he was gone, which I found very difficult to comprehend. "What are you talking about?" That was the start of my politicisation, if you like.

**How did your mother influence your politics?** My mother was a card-carrying member of the Communist Party until I was 13. She left the Party in '56 [following the Russian invasion of Hungary], as most of them did. So I have quite vivid memories. In fact, I met my very first wife under a trestle table at a *Daily Worker* bazaar when we were about six years old. Bless her, she's dead now. But, yeah, it goes back a while. My mother was a primary school teacher. Her evenings were constantly devoted to politics and one or other cause.

**How did that go down in 1950s Cambridge?** Very well, I think. Cambridge University had always been a hotbed of Bolshevism. The Labour movement was quite strong in Cambridge – though I don't think we ever returned a Labour, or left-wing, MP to Parliament, so there must have been a strong element of Conservatism as well. But it certainly wasn't a Communist society. It was like England was in the '50s, which was anything but. Notwithstanding, [we saw] the beginnings of a great socialist revolution in the aftermath of the Second World War, with some genuinely left-wing voices in the Labour party, like [Aneurin] Bevan for instance.

**"WAR ON TERROR? YOU CAN'T HAVE A WAR ON AN IDEA. IT'S RIDICULOUS"**

**Did the circumstances in which you lost your grandfather and father make you wary of authority?** Oh, yeah. And I still am, obviously. It hasn't gone away. I've become more sceptical as I've grown older. I'm less snotty about it, I think.

**[Hipgnosis co-founder] Aubrey Powell told me earlier this year that he found the**

**'beating manual' for your old school: "Roger, Syd and Storm [Thorgerson] are all in there. I think Roger's in there for throwing water" –**

Fighting! I was in there for fighting! [laughs]

**– "Syd's in there for being argumentative and Storm was in for truancy. They all had six of the best."** So silly! They've still got the fucking cane. Po told me. He's tried to borrow it from them, and the book, to put in some exhibition.

**You were involved with the Young Socialists and CND...**

I remember [future *Spitting Image* co-creator] Roger Law being on the first or second Aldermaston march. I saw this incredibly good-looking guy, and he had a guitar. He was singing folk songs, I suppose Dylan or Woody Guthrie or something. And women seemed to find that very attractive – and it was! I remember thinking, 'Fuck me, I'd better buy a guitar. That looks like a good thing, if you want to get

laid.' Which was obviously an ambition when I was 16 or 17. But the marches were extraordinary. Sleeping on the floor in school halls and things – Slough and Reading or wherever – and then arriving triumphantly in London. There was a great camaraderie. Of course, we never achieved anything. I've rather taken my finger off the pulse of British politics. I've been living in New York for the past 15 years. But as far as I know, do we not still have what's called an independent nuclear deterrent...?

**Yes. So what do you think of Jeremy Corbyn?**

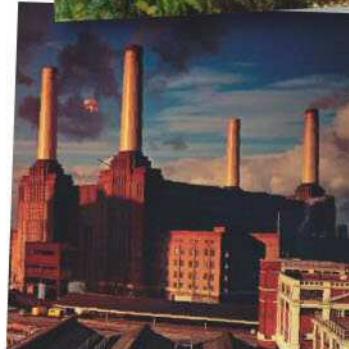
I don't know him. He's snuck out of the woodwork behind my back while I was off somewhere doing other things. But from what I've read, he sounds like a breath of fresh air.

**"Corporal Clegg" is an early example of your anti-war protest writing. What do you remember about writing it?** I remember

buying, I think, 50 kazoos in Seattle, Washington State. I don't remember what year. We were playing a gig. We must have done "Corporal Clegg", because the real memory I have is these 50 kazoos and people in the audience going, "Vrrrrppp, vrrrrppp" and all that. I like the line, "Corporal Clegg had a wooden leg/He won it in the war". Not, "He got it in the war", or, "He lost it in the war". But, "He won it in the war". It's an interesting twist on the idea of commendation.

**Animals is a very political record, but for different reasons. What's your view**

*by d pink floyd*



**on that album now?** It's a cartoon sketch of how I saw the way society was organised. Obviously it leans heavily on *Animal Farm* and the idea of anthropomorphising animals to represent aspects of human behaviour. But it was engaged in another ways. In "Pigs", there's that verse about

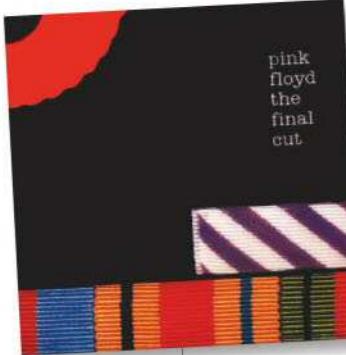
Mary Whitehouse. We were all incensed about this woman trying to tell us about our morals and trying to censor art. She wanted to censor all culture, which was incredibly irritating.

**It's amazing how much power she had...** It's the squeaky wheel. She made a lot of noise and could be bothered to do it. It's a bit like Enoch Powell and all that "rivers of blood" bollocks. People took a huge amount of notice of him and he became a malign influence on our lives for many years – as Mary Whitehouse was.

**For a band so associated with chilled-out music, *Animals* is an incredibly angry record.** I can't remember the last time I listened to *Animals*, but I can hear it in my head. That round at the end of "Dogs" is very powerful and quite chilling. "Dragged down by the stone" is the last line of it. "He was told what to do by the man..." It's a bitter recrimination against authoritarianism and against what I perceived when I was growing up as the misappropriation of an education system. Where they tried to regiment us and tell us what to do and exert their authority over us, rather than give each of us a chance to flower in whatever way might be the best. Which is what education obviously should be.

**The Final Cut was subtitled "A requiem for the post-war dream"...** I see it more in terms of a painting, but unlike "Dogs" it has individuals in it. So there's all that stuff on "Paranoid Eyes" about, "You put on a brave face and slip over the road for a jar... Laughing out loud at the rest of the world/With the boys in the crowd..." You can see the bloke, or I can. I know who it is. Yeah, the concerns that are being expressed in *The Final Cut* about getting ready to go to war again. "Get Your Filthy Hands Off My Desert". It's rooted in the experience of being forced to go through the Falklands campaign, clinging to Margaret Thatcher's filthy coat tails. Sorry! Is there anyone more divisive in post-war history than Margaret Thatcher? Blair, obviously. They're a lovely couple.

**More recently, "The Ballad Of Jean Charles de Menezes" seems a critical song for you...** I was very pleased to be able to do it. I met his parents in Porto Alegre. They were charming people who had obviously been entirely devastated. And were still entirely devastated by the fact the British Government would not apologise for killing him. Not a fucking word of apology has ever come out of that. No culpability, no, "Well, it was their fault or their fault or their fault..."



They lied about it to start with. They said he was "jumping over" the barriers. He didn't jump over anything. He got on a tube train and sat down. Then all these blokes jumped on him. They shot him eight times in the back of the head over a period of 31 seconds.

You look at your watch and go, right – shoot him now. Bang. Bang. Bang. It's another 25 seconds before they finish shooting him. He's been shot four or five times now and they give him a few more. I still don't understand it. How did nobody go, "This is what happened. We're really sorry." I tell you how they didn't, because we're at war. There is a war on terror. We have followed the lead of Dick Cheney and Tony

## "I'VE GOT SOME MEMORIES OF SYD..."

**Roger Waters remembers Syd Barrett, ahead of what would have been his fallen friend's 70th birthday on January 6, 2016**

**“**REMEMBER ONE TIME Syd was sitting on the back of my motorbike. We had a race with a guy who had a Morris Minor 1000. We went out to the Four Went Ways, which is a roundabout outside Cambridge, at the end of the Hauxton half-mile, and I gave him, I don't know, an eight-minute start or something. With Syd on the back of my 350 Norton we chugged back at about 100 miles an hour. As we pulled into his mother's house – no crash helmets or anything like that – the back tyre went 'pfffft'. It had a split in the side. We had literally gone 25 miles at 100 miles an hour in the middle of the night. I still remember the 'pfffft'. We looked at each other and went, 'Fucking hell...' Syd and I could easily have been killed. I've got some memories of Syd. He was a close friend for many years.”

Blair and we all believe there's a war on terror. You can't have a war on an idea. It's ridiculous.

**Your recent set-lists at the Newport Folk Festival, Constitution Hall and the Bay Street Theater have included "A Change Is Gonna Come", "Blowin' In The Wind" and "We Shall Overcome". Do you see yourself as a protest singer now?** Yes.

**You debuted a new song at the Newport Folk Festival in October called "Crystal Clear Brooks". What can you tell us about that?**

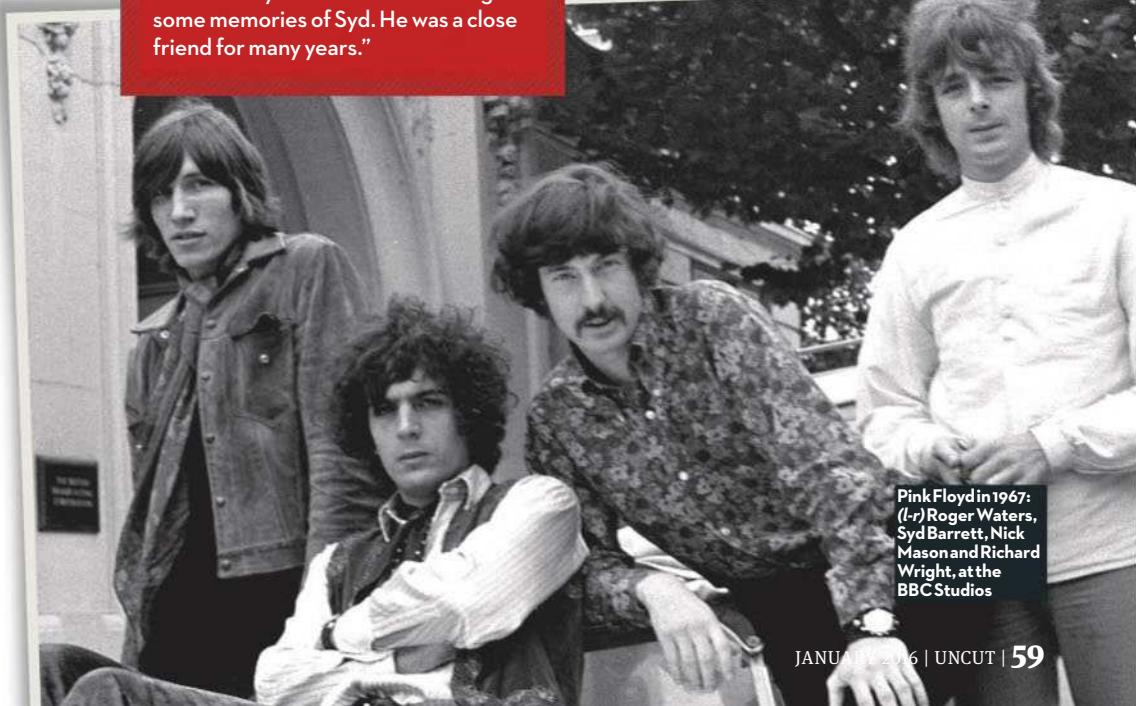
It's a poem I wrote a year ago. I read it a few times and I thought, 'There's a song in there somewhere.' When I sit down with a guitar, I tend to go to G major and I thought, 'I'm going to do this in a different key; let's find somewhere I can pitch it.' I sat down at the piano and I went, "Ah, good. B flat. Perfect." So I wrote this little song, very, very simple, in B flat. I play the piano and sing it, which I've never done before. In fact, Newport was the first time I'd ever played the piano in public before.

**Is that scarier than playing in front of 20,000 people?** Probably, but I'm not scared any more. I used to be, but not any more.

**What stopped you?** Just being older and realising, what's the worst that can happen? You fuck something up. Who cares, really? You have to be prepared to make mistakes in all arenas in life. Music is just one of them. If you're not prepared to make a mistake, you probably won't ever come up with anything that's interesting.

**Talking of new music, did you hear David Gilmour's latest album?** No. I've heard the single. Very Phil Manzanera.

**Would you like to do more scaled-back and intimate gigs, like at Newport?** As you just pointed out, I did this thing at the Bay Street Theater with GE Smith. I played one song on piano and the rest of it is just him and me playing guitars and singing, and it was actually great. It's something that I've come to late in life. I spent a lot of my career with some of the other boys



Pink Floyd in 1967:  
(l-r) Roger Waters,  
Syd Barrett, Nick  
Mason and Richard  
Wright, at the  
BBC Studios



Isthereanybody  
outthere?: From the  
new film of *The Wall*

in the class suggesting that I was tone deaf and I couldn't play anything, blah, blah, blah. Luckily, I parted company with those boys in 1985 and since then I discovered that I actually can play the guitar and bass a bit, and other instruments as well, and that I'm not tone deaf. I've come to realise that, even though clearly I don't have great pipes, it's how you deliver a song. Neither does Dylan, but the delivery is very, very important.

**You played some other new songs at Bay Street: "Safe And Sound" and "Lay Down Jerusalem (If I Had Been God)"...** Yes, I was playing one of them to someone yesterday and going, "It's really interesting. If a song is going to work, it has to work on just an acoustic guitar and voice." You can do what you like afterwards in a studio. You can put anything you want on it, you can arrange or produce it in any way. But if it doesn't work when you sit down and play it on a piano or a guitar and sing it, it doesn't work.

**Can you tell us about the new songs you're working on?** One day, I got the backing vocalists all together round a table in São Paulo and said, "I've got a new song. I want you to help me figure out how the backing vocals go." We worked on it. Anyway, it became part of a long, rambling theatre piece about an Irishman, sitting drinking Bushmills in a council house in Belfast. It starts off with this speech that I just improvised one day. It goes, "It is the year of our fuckerish Lord 2013. The geese has gotten fat and been slaughtered more times than any of us can or care to remember." It's like that, and he's drinking and whatever. "Our children and our grandchildren bend ceaseless over their i-this and i-fucking-that. Time keeps slipping away." He's having a bit of a rant. Anyway, it turns out, he's babysitting. The child wakes up, it's having a nightmare. What's the nightmare? "Grandpa, they're killing the children." No they're not, they haven't been killing the children since the Troubles, 30 years ago. "Not here, grandpa. Over there." So the

grandfather puts him back to sleep and says, "We'll go and find out." The rest of the story is a sort of magic-carpet journey all over the world to find the answer to that simple question: why are they – or why are we – killing the children?

**This is part of the ongoing theme of anti-war in your work?** Inevitably. But the song I was talking about ["Lay Down Jerusalem"] starts off, *"If I had been God I would have rearranged the veins in the face to make them more resistant to alcohol and less prone to ageing/If I had been God with my staff and rod/If I had been given the nod, I believe I could have done a better job".* So that's how it starts. *"If I were a drone patrolling foreign skies with my electronic eyes for guidance and the element of surprise/I would be afraid to find someone at home, maybe a woman at a stove baking bread, making rice or just boiling down some bones/If I were a drone, lay down Jerusalem".* There's a lot of different songs, and

different characters have different things, but you get a bit of narrative and then a bit of song. And I thought, this could be a radio play, and it's a song cycle... I'm now trying to figure out how to make this idea into an arena show so I can go back on the road.

**You don't fancy multiple nights at the Albert Hall?** No, I don't fancy it at all.

**Is there a reason for that?**

The Albert Hall is a nightmare anyway, because it's so fucking expensive. The margins are tiny. It's an exercise in... I don't know... people must have an emotional attachment. Eric [Clapton] certainly must, because he goes back there every February and plays for a month or whatever. Fine. The fact he does so many

nights, I assume that's what makes it so economically viable for him. But Eric and I have never done similar shows. It's Eric and his band playing that set-list, and it doesn't vary. He's been playing the same songs for 50 years, more or less.

**You've been playing *The Wall* for the past three years!** Ha! I'm not knocking it! I love it! I love his set-list and I love going to El's shows. I love listening to him play, he's a genius.

**Your last two tours were *Dark Side Of The Moon* and *The Wall*: would you like to do less structured shows?** That's what I did at the three gigs I played this summer. With the vets at Constitution Hall it was more complex than that, because I had to figure out a set-list and then work with them and rehearse with them. We had to learn all those songs together, so that's a whole other thing. But Newport and the thing with GE... it was lovely. But I'm into theatre. I like it. I like the theatrically of the shows I've been producing since 1975. It's a skill that I have developed over those years and I've made some pretty extraordinary breakthroughs during that time. The work I did with Mark Fisher, Andrew Sanders and Jonathan Park on *Animals* back in the day was groundbreaking, and suddenly spread through the rock'n'roll industry after *The Wall*. Everybody wanted to do shows like that.

**Do you hope that this film of *The Wall* will help people understand what you're about?** Of course I do. Perhaps not so much from the performance of *The Wall*, but more from the interludes, the other narrative: the addressing of my concerns with my grandfather and my father, and the loss that I felt and suffered. And the empathy that I have with others in my position. ☺

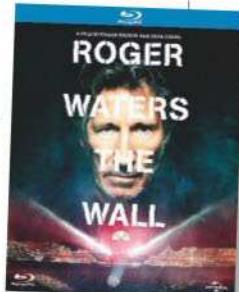
**Roger Waters *The Wall*** is out now on DVD, Blu-ray and digital download. The soundtrack is out now on CD, vinyl and digital download

## COVER ME!

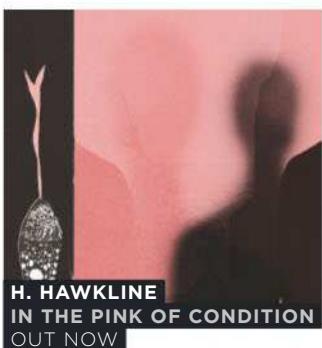
**Roger Waters on performing Springsteen's "The Ghost Of Tom Joad" on October 16, 2015 at the Music Heals benefit for wounded service personnel...**

**“** I PLAYED IT BECAUSE Tom Morello (*inset left*) said that he would come and help me with the vets show and I said, 'All right, what do you want to sing?' He said, 'This is the thing I did with Springsteen at the 25th anniversary of the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. So I went, 'OK, is it on YouTube?' I had a look and went, 'That's great, let's do that.' I really like that song. It's almost impossible to sing, there are so many words and they're all jumbled in. It's a weird piece of writing. It's great."

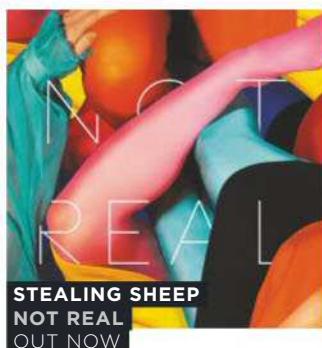




# Heavenly



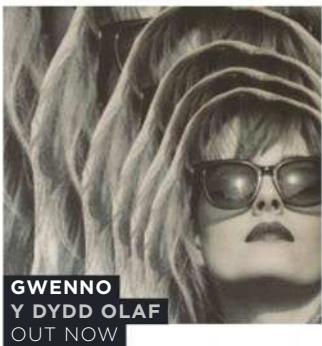
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IN THE PINK OF CONDITION  
OUT NOW



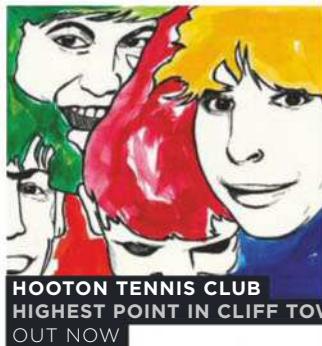
**STEALING SHEEP**  
NOT REAL  
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**KID WAVE**  
WONDERLUST  
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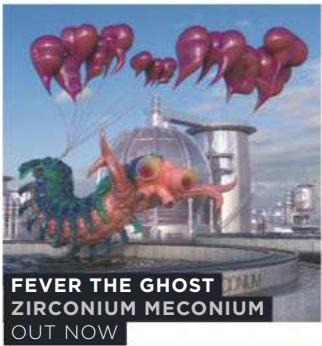
**GWENNO**  
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**HOOTON TENNIS CLUB**  
HIGHEST POINT IN CLIFF TOWN  
OUT NOW



**DRINKS**  
HERMITS ON HOLIDAY  
OUT NOW



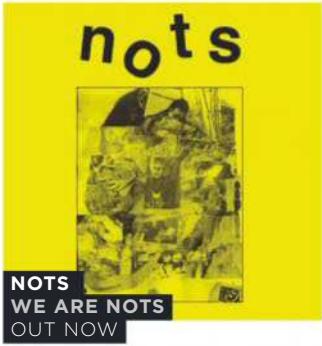
**FEVER THE GHOST**  
ZIRCONIUM MECONIUM  
OUT NOW



**EAVES**  
WHAT GREEN FEELS LIKE  
DELUXE EDITION  
OUT NOW



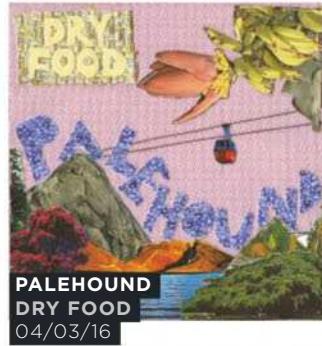
**KING GIZZARD &  
THE LIZARD WIZARD**  
PAPER MÂCHÉ DREAM BALLOON  
OUT NOW



**NOTS**  
WE ARE NOTS  
OUT NOW

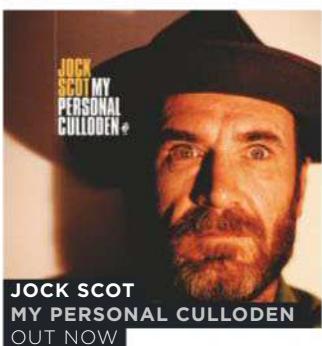


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## ALBUM BY ALBUM

# Robert Forster

**The erstwhile Go-Between takes a detailed trip back down Lovers Lane**

**T**

HE LONDON REVIEW Of Books café, in Bloomsbury, seems an apt place to meet Robert Forster. As we will discover, he meticulously recreated a photograph of James Joyce for the cover of his debut solo LP. "Joyce and Beckett," he says, "were some of my style heroes."

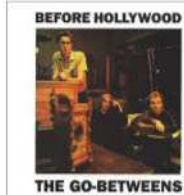
Today, Forster could pass as an academic on a study trip from the Antipodes (he is currently grappling with something akin to a memoir), or perhaps a senior diplomat, taking in a little culture at the British Museum between appointments in Whitehall. The sober and precise demeanour, however, cloaks a different kind of man of letters: a quixotic singer-songwriter, whose work with Grant McLennan made The Go-Betweens one of the finest and most romantic bands of their time; and whose solo albums, often neglected, are every bit as rewarding. Like so many idiosyncratic talents before him, especially those who came of age in the 1980s, Forster's tale pits a nuanced vision against wave after wave of sonic compromises: "It was a push and pull," he recalls, "between us owning our music, and having it tampered with." JOHN MULVEY



The Go-Betweens in 1984:  
(l-r) Grant McLennan, Lindy  
Morrison, Robert Vickers  
and Robert Forster

### THE GO-BETWEENS BEFORE HOLLYWOOD

ROUGH TRADE, 1983



After a clutch of cult singles and a good, if rather awkward, debut album (1981's *Send Me A Lullaby*), Robert Forster, Grant McLennan and drummer Lindy Morrison fetch up in

London and sign to Rough Trade. Soon, they are dispatched to Eastbourne, where Forster and McLennan's timeless songcraft is uncovered by their first proper producer.

We had to make a classic. Our first album was not a classic, and you don't know how many chances you're going to get. We'd never really worked with a producer, and we talked with Geoff Travis about our fantasy candidates, people like Lindsey Buckingham and Robbie Robertson. But John Brand walked into our rehearsal room, taped us, then walked back the next day with the songs written out and with arrangement ideas; no-one had ever done that with our music. John had been working for Virgin with groups such as Magazine and XTC, and realised everything we were doing was in fours and eights, it was all classic. That's what Grant and I had been brought up on: Neil Diamond writing for The Monkees, the first Blondie LP, Bowie, Creedence. We knew how songs were constructed. And so Grant and I had the songs, most of them written in London and then recorded at ICC in Eastbourne, a very good Christian studio; 24-track, two-inch tape. The LP he did before *Before Hollywood* was *High Land, Hard Rain*; Aztec Camera walked out the door and we walked in, and John made two classics. It was the album we always thought we could make,

and a very big sonic jump from *Send Me A Lullaby*. I don't know if we made a jump like that in the rest of our career, except maybe to *16 Lovers Lane*.

### THE GO-BETWEENS SPRING HILL FAIR

SIRE, 1984

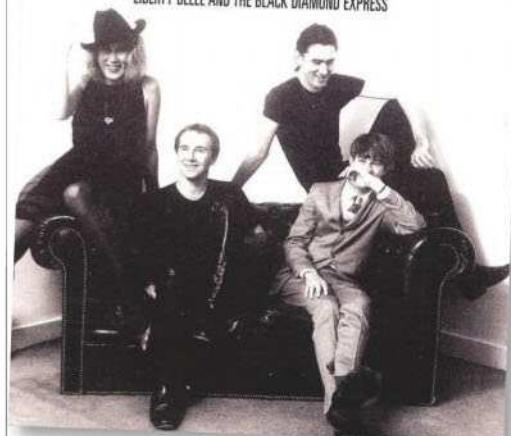
Deep in Provence, the band - now augmented by Robert Vickers on bass - are encouraged to try on the accoutrements of '80s pop, with mixed results. One gleaming, drum-machine-driven single, "Bachelor Kisses", "spooked people"...

Geoff Travis couldn't finance our next LP with Rough Trade, so he took us to Sire. Seymour Stein trusted Geoff's ears and was very hands-off: he'd just signed Madonna, so I think his attention was somewhere else. We were in a studio in Provence, isolated, so it was hard to get co-ordinates on what we were doing. Miraval was a cathedral-like studio, luxurious, and we thought it was going to be like *Before Hollywood* again. But John Brand came in with a different attitude. Y'know, we're in the '80s, there's a highly synthetic approach to pop, so suddenly all these mechanisms started. For us, *Spring Hill Fair* didn't have the swing and the natural feeling of *Before Hollywood*. Another thing is Grant's song selection. There are songs like "River Of Money", a five-minute feedback sprawl, instead of two gorgeous pop songs we'd demoed called "Attraction" and "Emperor's Courtesan" [both included on this year's *G Stands For Go-Betweens* boxset]. Grant was always perceived as the pop kid in the band, but he chose avant-garde weirdness over pop, and I admired him for it - it made the record very varied.

### THE UNCUT CLASSIC

#### THE GO-BETWEENS

LIBERTY BELLE AND THE BLACK DIAMOND EXPRESS

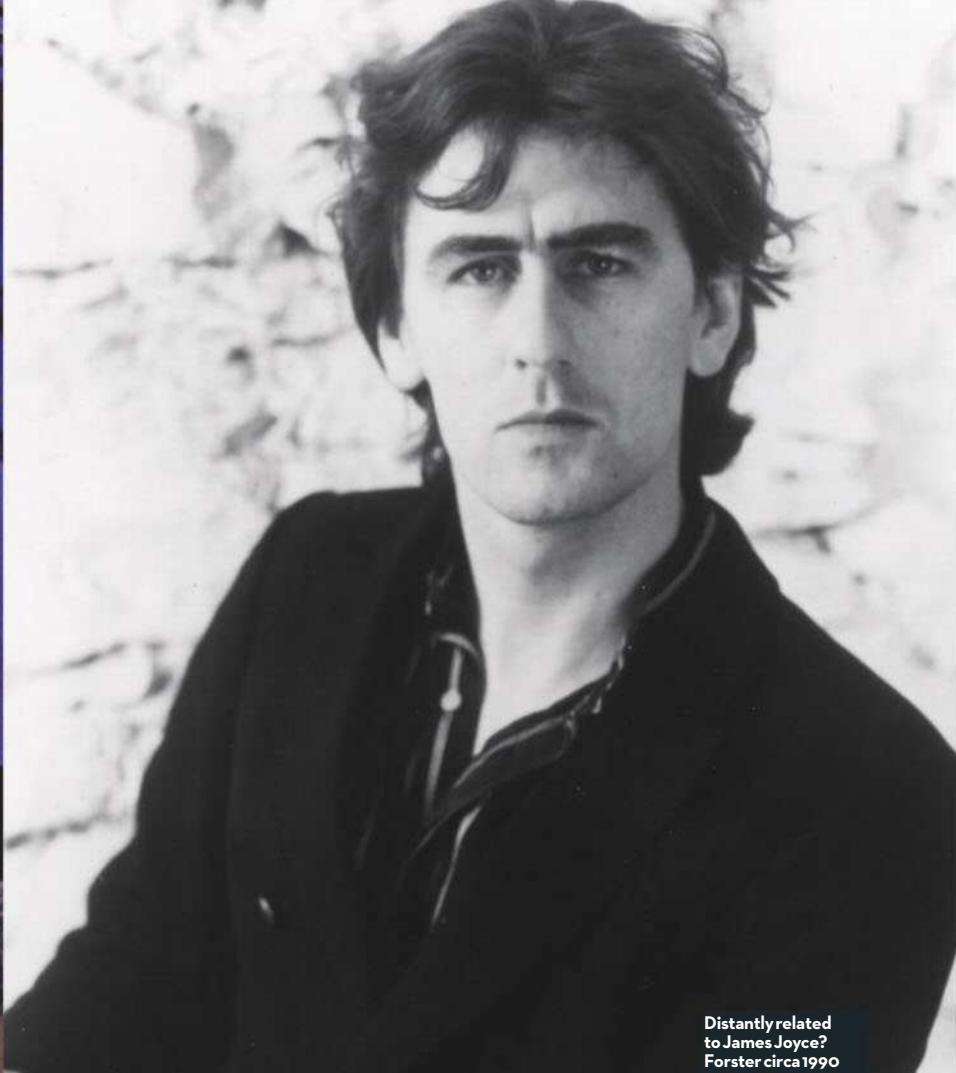


#### THE GO-BETWEENS LIBERTY BELLE AND THE BLACK DIAMOND EXPRESS

BEGGARS BANQUET, 1986

Yet another label change brings the band to the relative security of Beggars Banquet. Rebellious against the glossy expediencies of *Spring Hill Fair*, the quartet hunker down in Farringdon, London, with engineer Richard Preston, and make what might conceivably be their masterpiece.

This was us taking control again. We came out of *Spring Hill Fair* with a list of things that, next time, we weren't going to do. We were going to produce it or be co-producers. We weren't going to have drum machines. We were going to have natural instrumentation. There was a feeling that maybe



Distantly related  
to James Joyce?  
Forster circa 1990

we were only going to be given one more chance, so we were going to go down in flames for what we believed in. We were an amazing band but we were going nowhere, and Grant and I were pissed off, so the career of the band became our subject matter. Our hard-luck stories and cynicism were exacerbated by the fact that *Liberty Belle* was our fourth album on our fourth label. It was a disaster for our career: we weren't like U2, the Bunnymen, The Smiths, REM. They had a system and there was organic growth. We were being dragged back to the start every time. It's also the first album that reflects the role of London. It was the first time we let the city we lived in come into what we do, especially on "Twin Layers Of Lightning" and "The Wrong Road". It's very much us as a group, 'the four Australians'. Lindy, Robert Vickers, Grant and I had been going for a number of years, so we could do the songs justice. People could put mics around us and we could play the songs. The songs were the best I'd written in that phase. I rediscovered melody, linked to the way I wrote in the late '70s. I used to be the singles writer, and it was almost as if I'd forgotten that. But then, in the summer of '85, I wanted a pop sensibility again in what I did. And as the songs were a bit slower, I had more room for lyrics. I could say things, instead of that post-punk thing where it's a yelp and a scream and a few words. I could get verses going. Lyrically, it was a lot richer. A big influence for me was Prince. Everyone mainstream at the time was so po-faced. Even Springsteen was very serious, whereas Prince was impish, winking, extravagant – everything I wanted a pop star to be. He made me realise that you can be in the mainstream and play with form.

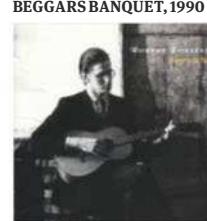
## THE GO-BETWEENS 16 LOVERS LANE BEGGARS BANQUET, 1988



The see-sawing continues, with *Tallulah* (1987) again flirting with commercial trickery, before a return to Oz brings a sunny, mature climax to the band's first phase.

We'd just moved back to Australia after five years in London, having had enough of the darkness, cold and poverty. We'd spent a year on the road with *Tallulah*, and we thought, 'Why can't we do that from Sydney?' Amanda [Brown, violin] was from Sydney, and Lindy had a brother there, so the album arrived like a Sydney summer – it's crystal, it's sunshine. *16 Lovers Lane* was an LP where Grant's and my songwriting came together. It's a very united 10 songs. Although we were enamoured with love songs, we'd never used the word 'love' in a title, but then Grant played "Love Goes On" for me and I played "Love Is A Sign" for him. It was fate. And in terms of our romantic lives at that time, you could see them in the lyrics: Grant's songs were written in the first throes of love for Amanda; Lindy and I had broken up after *Liberty Belle*, and my romantic life was chopping and changing. They were songs from different views: someone who's in love and someone who's wandering around. The last two LPs [producer] Mark Wallis had worked on were *The Joshua Tree* and Talking Heads' *Naked*, so he was about the hottest guy in the world. We sent him a demo from Australia and he said, "That's the best demo I've ever heard in my life." No-one can record acoustic guitars like Mark. It sounds as if it's coming from the mountain and it's 1970 and you're playing an acoustic guitar David Crosby just handed to you.

## ROBERT FORSTER DANGER IN THE PAST BEGGARS BANQUET, 1990



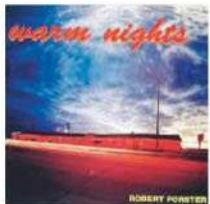
After *16 Lovers Lane*, and enduringly moderate levels of success, Forster and McLennan choose to part ways. The former settles in Germany and recruits a clutch of Bad Seeds for a twanging, wild mercury session in Berlin's storied Hansa Studios.

A personal favourite. I was living in Germany and I wanted Mick Harvey to produce my album. We recorded it in a way that I'd wanted The Go-Betweens to record, but had been, to an extent, thwarted – in a big studio, live, trusting the songs and the glorious sound. In Hansa you don't have to double track an electric guitar; everything's so big. It's a sound that goes back to Buddy Holly's records or to *Highway 61* – there are no overdubs on those records. We did it in 12 days, recorded and mixed, with Mick, Hugo Race and Thomas Wydler – a very tight crew – and it was a beautiful experience. When you write a song like "Danger In The Past", that changes your perception of who you are as a songwriter. It's fantastic, especially after you get past the age of 30. It was like a folk song, and none of my songs on any Go-Betweens record were like that, or had six verses. It had a classic folk chord sequence Neil Young could've written, or Gordon Lightfoot. I came across a photo of James Joyce in a library in Ravensburg University, where my wife was studying. Joyce looks a bit like my grandfather, so I decided to replicate the photo for the cover and make no mention of it; just send it out in the world to see what people made of it.

# ROBERT FORSTER

## ROBERT FORSTER WARM NIGHTS

BEGGARS BANQUET, 1996



Back in Australia, Forster completes one more album (*Calling From A Country Phone*, 1993)

and a covers set (*I Had A New York Girlfriend*, 1995). What can break his writer's block? A balmy Brisbane suburb? Roberta Flack? Old

Postcard chum Edwyn Collins?

I'd moved back to Brisbane to record *Calling From A Country Phone*, but I hadn't written any songs for two and a half years. I thought my songwriting career was over – I recorded *I Had A New York Girlfriend* because I had to try and do something. But suddenly I started to listen to an album by Roberta Flack called *First Take*, which is amazing. It's very sparse, and I started to wonder about songs with more groove, about getting away from more narrative pop songs. It was about sweaty Brisbane nights, banana trees in the backyard, animals walking around at night, fruitbats flying in the air. I was looking at Brisbane with new eyes in this new suburb, and I was listening to this music that had more space, more rhythm. Don't try and write complicated pop songs with lots of lyrics, stay on one chord like "Some Kinda Love" by the Velvets, or "What Goes On"; just groove. I wrote all the songs in about eight months, quicker than I had written since the late '70s, and I brought all of those songs to the UK. Edwyn Collins was building his studio and would have to go off to South Korea to be on TV. He would have to go off to Glasgow and see Rod Stewart covering "A Girl Like You". The greatest regret of my solo career is that I didn't bring my band over and get that Brisbane thing totally going on the record. But I never made a bad record in London. I love the rock'n'roll history of this town. There's something here in my imagination that I can plug into.

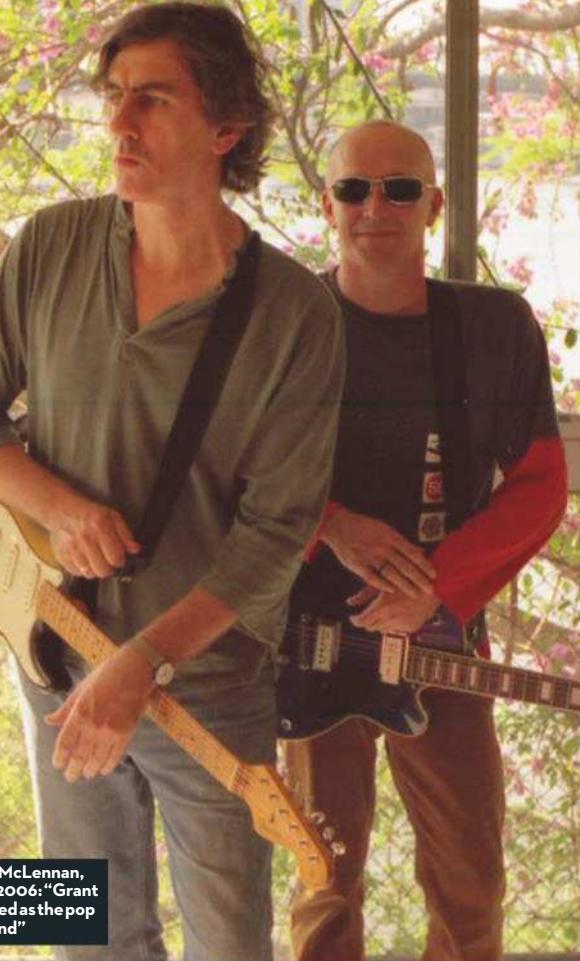
## THE GO-BETWEENS THE FRIENDS OF RACHEL WORTH

CIRCUS/JETSET, 2000



The Go-Betweens – or at least McLennan and Forster – reconvene, in the hip, DIY environs of Portland. A fruitful reunion begins in earnest.

I moved back to Germany with my wife in early 1997. Beggars had dropped me – I had no record label. I was 40, and ready to absolve my ego and my career, and admit children into my life. We wanted to have a very protective, nest-like environment for our children to grow up in, and so that's what I was thinking of while writing songs. But I'm out of the game – that's how I was feeling. Then Beggars Banquet wanted to put out a single-CD Best Of [Bellavista Terrace, 1999]. Grant and I were friends all the

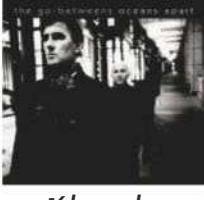


With Grant McLennan, who died in 2006: "Grant was perceived as the pop kid in the band"

time, so we decided to play clubs under our own names, not as The Go-Betweens. Very soon into the tour, Grant said, "Let's restart the band." I didn't see it coming. Grant and I were on the road and looking for a place to record. We were down to the last two or three dates and had no leads. The first show was in Portland and I got interviewed by Larry Crane, who had a studio. One of my favourite bands in the late '90s was Sleater-Kinney, and the next night we played in San Francisco and they were at the gig. I announced from the stage that we were going to restart The Go-Betweens and record an album, and Janet [Weiss] from Sleater-Kinney walked in after the show and said, "I'll be your drummer if you're looking for one." Joanna Bolme [The Jicks] picked us up from the airport and she had this wallet of CDs in her van. I'd never met her, but it was like a sign. I was flipping through these records and I knew every one of them. I thought, we've landed into a scene here that totally understands us, that Grant and I felt great affinity with, but that we hadn't known existed.

## THE GO-BETWEENS OCEANS APART

LO-MAX, 2005



If Rachel Worth privileged Forster's wired garage-rock aesthetic, the final Go-Betweens album highlights McLennan's more orthodox, polished take on pop. 16 Lovers Lane producer Mark Wallis helms what becomes the most critically acclaimed album of the band's career.

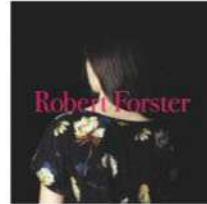
We could have made our comeback with Mark, but we were wilful. We followed a line that was unpredictable, but now we were ready for Mark and we were ready for London. It was made in very chaste conditions. He was working in his

little studio in a very rough part of London, down the hill from Crystal Palace. Rough, rough. Our hotel was up on the hill at Crystal Palace and what the record is now, the way I see it, is a sort of dark, foggy, London Gothic. We were in this Gothic mansion and we'd walk through the forest, down to where there was urban warfare going on, to record the album. It was like I'd walked back into the 19th Century.

We were working with Glenn [Thompson, drums] and Adele [Pickvance, bass], a very tight band; we got on really well. From those last three albums [also including 2003's *Bright Yellow Bright Orange*], these were Grant's best group of songs. He really hit his stride on that album. Mark suited Grant, and Mark loved Grant's guitar playing, because Grant was a riff merchant. Grant wrote a great group of songs after that, and I think the next album would have been better. We felt like we were going to do another *Liberty Belle*. But it was a high-water mark. Does that make *Oceans Apart* a fitting last record? I know it's not a very generous answer, but it'll do.

## ROBERT FORSTER SONGS TO PLAY

TAPETE, 2015



Grant McLennan died of a heart attack at home in Brisbane, May 2006. Forster made one sombre solo album (*The Evangelist*, 2008), then put his musical career mostly on hold. New

alliances with younger musicians from the John Steel Singers, however, produce this summer's exceptional *Songs To Play*, an album in the spirit of *Danger In The Past* and *Rachel Worth*.

I knew what this record would be early on. I had a list of things in my head, and the problem with *The Evangelist* was that I couldn't play those songs live. Grant had written a few of them, and there were keys I found hard live. I remember playing "From Ghost Town" once, and the crowd was so shocked and so down, I felt like I was choking. I had the songs ready by 2010, but I couldn't have come out two years after *The Evangelist* and said, "Everything's different now!" The songs are bouncy, and time's got to do its trick. You need to set the scene. The good thing is, I had the conviction to record the songs in the way I wanted to. I wanted to record analogue, and both *Ocean's Apart* and *The Evangelist* were recorded by Mark Wallis with Pro Tools. I didn't want a computer in the room. I didn't want to work with Glenn and Adele. They'd moved to Sydney anyway, and I didn't have the money to fly them up to rehearse. I wanted to record with my wife, whom I'd played with in the kitchen for 20 years. We'd played a few shows in Germany, then The Go-Betweens and children got in the way. So digital was over, Glenn and Adele was over, there was distance now from Grant's death. I guess I was brave enough to follow a couple of decisions through. ☺

*Robert Forster's Songs To Play* is out on Tapete

# Transgressive

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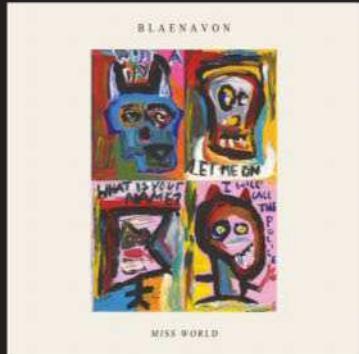
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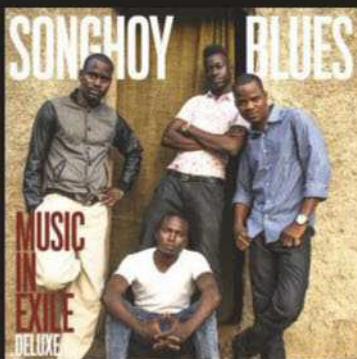
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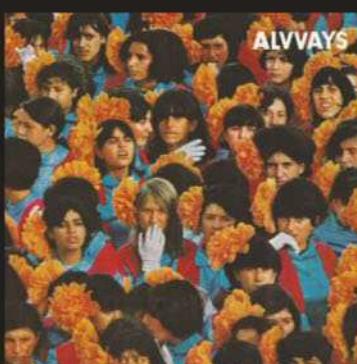
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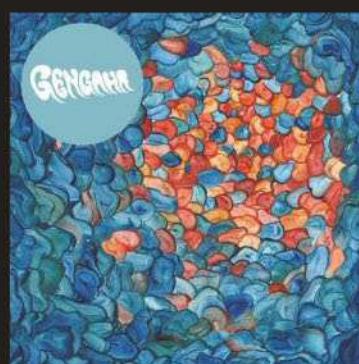
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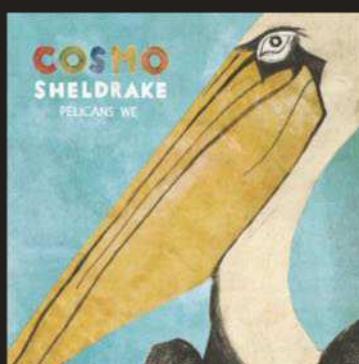
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**12 Feb WINCHESTER**  
The Discovery Centre  
01962 873603  
hants.gov.uk/wdc

**13 Feb GATESHEAD**  
The Sage 0191 443 4661  
sagegateshead.com

**16 Feb LYTHAM ST ANNES**

Lowther Pavilion  
01253 794221  
lowtherpavilion.co.uk

**17 Feb LEICESTER**

The Musician 0116 251 0080  
www.themusicianpub.co.uk

**18 Feb KESWICK**

Theatre by the Lake  
017687 74411  
theatrebythelake.com/whats-on

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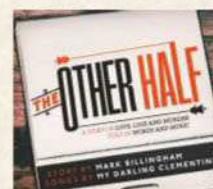
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WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY

# MARK BILLINGHAM

(Best-selling author of the DI Tom Thorne novels)

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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: SUNN O))) | JONNY GREENWOOD | LAURIE ANDERSON



JIMMY KING

**TRACKLIST**

- 1 Blackstar
- 2 'Tis A Pity She Was A Whore
- 3 Lazarus
- 4 Sue (Or In A Season Of Crime)
- 5 Girl Loves Me
- 6 Dollar Days
- 7 I Can't Give Everything Away

## DAVID BOWIE ★ (Blackstar)

COLUMBIA/ISO RECORDS

Jazz metal! Musical theatre! Supernatural transformations! Welcome to Bowie's (latest) Year Zero. *By Michael Bonner*

**8/10**

WHEN YOU'VE COME back from the dead, as David Bowie effectively did with his

surprise 2013 album, *The Next Day*, what exactly do you do for an encore? The sudden appearance of "Where Are We Now?" on the morning of January 8 – his 66th birthday – was a *coup de théâtre* even by the standards of an artist with a long history of dramatic entrances. The problem is, though, that when you've pulled off such an audacious stunt once – one to rival that of Lazarus, you could say – what do you do on future birthdays? "The future," as Bowie told

*NME* in 1973, "is very open-ended, actually."

The clues may have been planted in the last track on *The Next Day*, "Heat": a sinister melodrama driven by eerie violin howls and eldritch electronic effects that suggested Bowie was girding himself to do the full Scott Walker. *Blackstar* (or, indeed, ★, Bowie's 25th studio album, and one that will be serendipitously released on his 69th birthday, is not quite his *Tilt*, but it does represent yet another marvellous reinvention for Bowie. This time, working in cahoots with a brand new band, Bowie has concocted an album that is wide-ranging in



# New Albums

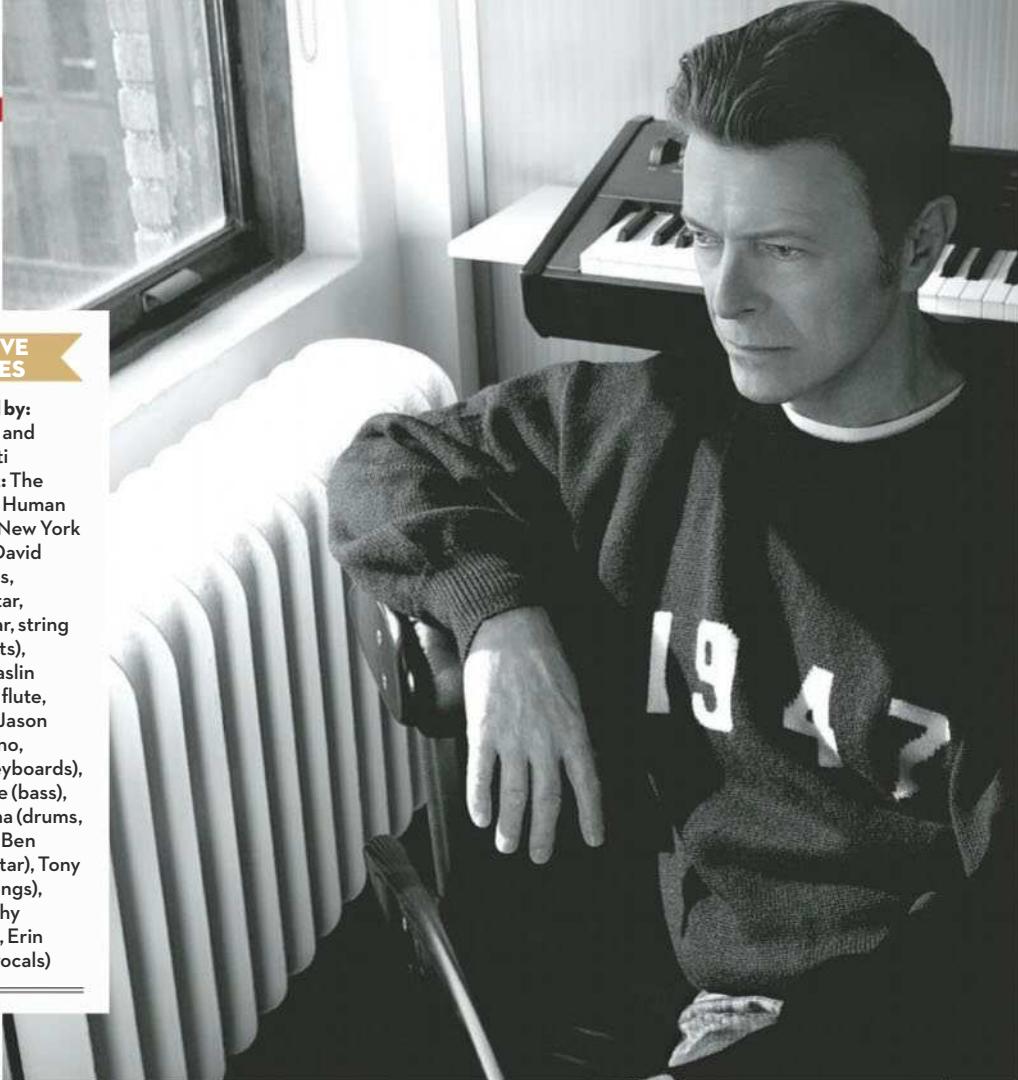
scope and, critically, experimental in tone. After the relatively straightforward *The Next Day*, it is as if Bowie now feels free to indulge his more avant-garde impulses. There are moments of challenging sonic exploration and heavy jazz-metal jams alongside a handful of astonishingly beautiful songs that find Bowie lighting up the room with some of his finest soul singing in decades. *Blackstar* makes reference to bluebirds, prodigal sons and heavenly bodies. One song repeatedly inquires of the listener, "Where the fuck did Monday go?" Welcome then to *Blackstar* – Bowie's latest creative Year Zero.

The roots of the album lie in the 2014 Record Store Day single Bowie recorded with the Maria Schneider Orchestra – "Sue (Or In A Season Of Crime)" (you can also find it on the *Nothing Has Changed* compilation, released in November 2014). A seven-minute postmodern jazz experiment, the song found Bowie operating in an unfamiliar idiom with a new set of musicians drawn from New York's vibrant contemporary jazz scene. Clearly inspired by these sessions, Bowie has conscripted "Sue..." saxophonist Donny McCaslin, whose muscular reed-playing dominates *Blackstar*, to act as bandleader. The 49-year-old Berklee graduate, with 10 albums of his own under his belt, fills out the *Blackstar* lineup with his own players: keyboardist Jason Lindner, bassist Tim Lefebvre, percussionist Mark Guiliana and guitarist Ben Monder.

Bowie has never publicly busied himself much with jazz – aside from Mike Garson's virtuoso piano runs on "Lady Grinning Soul", say – and his collaborations with McCaslin's quartet feel less about getting in touch with his inner Miles and more a means to explore new ideas. These are not just artistic decisions so much as psychological ones. *The Next Day* brimmed with

## SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced by:** David Bowie and Tony Visconti  
► **Recorded at:** The Magic Shop; Human Worldwide; New York  
► **Personnel:** David Bowie (vocals, acoustic guitar, Fender guitar, string arrangements), Donny McCaslin (saxophone, flute, woodwind), Jason Lindner (piano, Wurlitzer, keyboards), Tim Lefebvre (bass), Mark Guiliana (drums, percussion), Ben Monder (guitar), Tony Visconti (strings), James Murphy (percussion), Erin Tonkon (bk vocals)



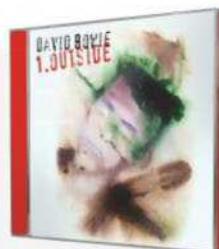
stylistic echoes of his previous records and was mostly staffed by familiar faces – Gerry Leonard, Sterling Campbell, Zachary Alford, Earl Slick, Gail Ann Dorsey. Producer Tony Visconti remains for *Blackstar*, but the onus is on the new; if Bowie now wants to pursue a fresh musical agenda, surely this is best done in the genial company of new companions?

As if to underscore these intentions, Bowie deliberately frontloads *Blackstar* with two of its most outré tracks: "Blackstar" and "'Tis A Pity She Was A Whore". They're very different songs – the former is a mind-bogglingly audacious

ambient-prog-electronic-soul marathon lasting just shy of 10 minutes, the latter a pounding skronkathon – but both act as defiant and divisive statements, as a bold introduction to the album's weird logistics. *Blackstar* has seven tracks in total, two of which have already been out (albeit in different versions) while another is pegged to Bowie's off-Broadway musical, *Lazarus*. It isn't the first time one of his albums has been assembled from other sources: *Diamond Dogs*, for example, was salvaged from an ambitious plan to stage George Orwell's 1984 as a musical; *Heathen* was stitched together from

**HOW TO BUY... THE ROAD TO BLACKSTAR**

The albums that signpost the way to Bowie's latest



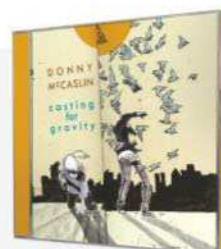
### DAVID BOWIE *Outside* 1995

While there are elements of Bowie's classic era on *Blackstar* – from *Aladdin Sane* to *Diamond Dogs* – *Outside*, which saw Bowie and co-producer Eno fold elements of rock and electronica into their palette, foreshadows the new album's bold engagement with jazz and dissonance. "I'm Deranged" would fit well on *Blackstar*.



### DAVID BOWIE *The Next Day* 2013

Although a more conventional 'rock' album than *Blackstar*, you can find the seeds of the latter's wild experimentation in "If You Can See Me" – a breathless track that can barely keep up with its own contorted time signature – and "Heat", whose dolorous tone is echoed on the opening section of *Blackstar*'s title track.



### DONNY MCCASLIN *Casting For Gravity* 2012

The record that turned Bowie on to his latest set of collaborators. McCaslin's ninth studio album also features Jason Lindner, Tim Lefebvre and Mark Guiliana. The influence here is both jazz fusion – *Weather Report* – and electronica (the album features a cover of the Boards Of Canada track "Alpha And Omega").

Back to the future:  
Bowie readies himself  
for new sonic adventures



cover versions, new material and songs from his thwarted *Toy* venture.

The apparent patchwork provenance, though, makes it hard to discern overall themes from *Blackstar*. The violence and anger of *The Next Day* presented a Bowie actively engaged with the oppressive forces at work in a world to which he returned after a decade-long absence. Here, there is a less obvious thematic thread. The songs are full of narrators and characters offering a jumble of perspectives. One recounts an act of supernatural transformation: "Something happened on the day he died/Spirit rose to leave him and stepped aside". Another negotiates a series of violent episodes: "Man, she punched me like a dude/Hold your mad hands, I cried". A third seems to have committed murder: "I pushed you down beneath the weeds/Endless faith in hopeless deeds". And then there is "Lazarus", one of the four new songs Bowie has written for his off-Broadway musical – based on Walter

Tevis' original novel, *The Man Who Fell To Earth* – but the only one to figure on *Blackstar* (as far as we know). Was Bowie working on both projects simultaneously and, if so, how did one feed into the other? Is he tacitly using "Lazarus" to connect *The Man Who Fell To Earth* to *Blackstar*? Or is Lazarus simply the latest in a celebrated line of starmen to appear in Bowie's songs?

Perhaps *Blackstar* is unified by sound more than message. After the crunchy riffs of *The Next Day*, *Blackstar* has a more nuanced approach. Crucially, there is only one guitar solo on the album – a harsh,

**This is what  
Blackstar feels  
like: the beginning  
of a new  
Bowie phase...**

Fripp-like report across the album's otherwise meditative closer, "I Can't Give Everything Away". For the most part, Bowie lets McCaslin and his band lead the way. On *Blackstar*'s reworking of "Sue (Or In A Season Of Crime)", for instance, the free-jazz textures of the original are replaced by a dense industrial thrum. It resembles a kind of jazz/metal hybrid – Bowie's *Lulu* moment, perhaps? – as McCaslin drives his band towards a thrillingly discordant crescendo.

Of course, it's not a totally new Bowie that emerges from all this. There are subtle resonances of his previous personae throughout the album. The cryptic, fragmented lyrics of "Girl Loves Me" ("Popo blind to the Polly in the hole by Friday") seem to have been created with cut-up techniques similar to the ones he used on *Diamond Dogs* and later revisited via a computer program for *Outside*. "Blackstar" itself shares a dark theatrical atmosphere with "Aladdin Sane" while the song's sudden and transfixing detour into soul – with McCaslin's sax rolling and swooping in the background – recalls the euphoric brass swells on "Sweet Thing/Candidate/Sweet Thing (Reprise)" from *Diamond Dogs*.

"Lazarus" – which will be sung from the point of view of the musical's resident alien, Newton – glides along with the same sumptuous, melancholic grace as *Heathen*'s grand centrepiece, "Slip Away". And while "Blackstar" and "Tis A Pity She Was A Whore" feature some Scott Walker-ish mannerisms, Bowie's warm, soulful timbre on "I Can't Give Everything Away" echoes "Word On A Wing" or perhaps a less operatic take on "Wild Is The Wind".

Bowie elects to close *Blackstar* with two relatively straightforward songs. They are a strong reminder, perhaps, that despite giving free rein to his experimental tendencies, he remains very capable of classic songcraft. Both vocals, delivered close to the microphone to convey a sense of intimacy, find Bowie in reflective mood. On "Dollar Days" he sings wistfully about "the English evergreens" over his own leisurely paced acoustic playing. "I Can't Give Everything Away", meanwhile, is borne along on soft synth washes and fleeting snatches of harmonica. An elegant, relaxed and rather touching end.

When he chose to return to music in 2013, David Bowie made his past work for him on *The Next Day*; a strategic move, perhaps, to help shore up his comeback and to remind a mass audience of his consistent strengths. What could have been read at the time, however, as a dignified coda to an extraordinary

career now looks more like a kind of palette cleanser before new adventures. This is what *Blackstar* feels like: the beginning of a new Bowie phase, one that may turn out to be as uncompromising and creatively volatile as anything that has preceded it. There's an argument that drawing on tag-lines from nearly 40 years ago is somewhat against the spirit of *Blackstar*. Nevertheless, one of the advertising slogans used to promote "Heroes" back in 1977 seems just as apposite today. "Tomorrow," it read, "belongs to those who can hear it coming."

## WHO'S WHO ON BLACKSTAR...



**DONNY MCCASLIN**  
Saxophone,  
flute, woodwind

Berklee graduate, has played with Gil Evans and fusion pioneer Gary Burton, as well as Maria Schneider and others. Two-times Grammy nominee, for Best Instrumental Jazz Solo. Most recent album, *Fast Future*, was released on Greenleaf Music earlier this year.



**JASON LINDNER**  
Piano,  
Wurlitzer,  
keyboards

LaGuardia graduate, veteran of several big bands, trios, quartets and electric groups. First recorded with McCaslin on 2012's *Casting For Gravity*, then *Fast Future*.



**TIM LEFEBVRE**  
Bass

Wide-ranging credits include David Holmes and Jamie Cullum alongside stints on *Late Night With David Letterman* and *Saturday Night Live*. He also plays in Tedeschi Trucks Band.



**MARK GUILIANA**  
Drums,  
percussion

Leader of his own Beat Music, whose line-up includes Lefebvre, and participant in *Now Vs Now* with Lindner. Played on three albums with McCaslin, beginning with 2011's *Perpetual Motion*.



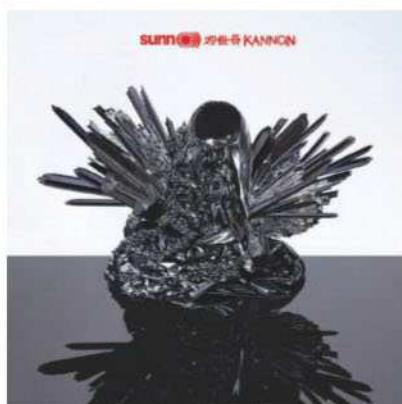
**BEN MONDER**  
Guitar

Veteran of 10 albums of his own, Monder has also worked with Maria Schneider Orchestra and first recorded with McCaslin on 2007's *In Pursuit*.



**JAMES MURPHY**  
Percussion

Former LCD Soundsystem leader. Remixed *The Next Day* track "Love Is Lost". Produced Arcade Fire's "Reflektor", to which Bowie contributed backing vocals.



## TRACKLIST

- 1 Kannon 1
- 2 Kannon 2
- 3 Kannon 3

# SUNN O))) Kannon

SOUTHERN LORD

Druidic drone kings follow up Scott Walker collaboration with oddly meditative slab of evil. By Jason Anderson

**8/10**

IN FRENCH PHOTOGRAPHER Estelle Hanania's shots for the sleeve of *Kannon*, the members of Sunn O))) can be seen in their signature hooded robes lurking about a magnificently gloomy Oslo mausoleum. They have a thing about loitering in these kinds of spaces – in the artwork for 2009's *Monoliths & Dimensions*, it was an Aztec pyramid.

As they so often do, these strange figures look as if they're preparing for a mysterious rite. Perhaps it has something to do with the cryptic black object on the album's cover. Though designed by Swiss artist Angela Lafont Bolliger as a visual representation of the Buddhist goddess of mercy for which *Kannon* is named, it more strongly resembles a charred icon from a long-defunct religion, now being readied for worship by a new circle of eager adherents. In other words, you don't have to be Peter Cushing to know that unspeakable things are about to happen even if – as was the case with the banks of fog that filled

Royal Festival Hall during Sunn O)))'s appearance during David Byrne's Meltdown last summer – you'll strain your eyes trying to see what they are.

The music on *Kannon* has no shortage of sinister elements, either. Even more inhuman than the groans and shrieks of amplifiers are the noises that emerge from Attila Csíhár, the Hungarian vocalist who has been a frequent collaborator with the core Sunn O))) partnership of Stephen O'Malley and Greg Anderson when he's not busy fronting Norwegian black-metallers Mayhem. Rarely have Csíhár's guttural rumblings been so terrifying as they are when they make their first appearance on *Kannon*. Compared with him, Smaug the dragon sounds as menacing as Taylor Swift.

O'Malley and Anderson have always been quick to concede the absurdity of their highly stylised vision of metal at its blackest and sludgiest, perhaps because they're also confident about their music's ability to overwhelm everything in its path like a



river of toxic ooze. With its combination of high-concept ideas and low-end, bowel-quivering ballast, the formula has proved to be irresistible to eggheads and headbangers alike.

Now, thanks to the instantly legendary Meltdown performance and the band's bruising collaboration with Scott Walker on last year's *Soused*, Sunn O))) may be breaking through to listeners beyond the metal and experimental-music camps that have made equal claims on the band since it first emerged in Seattle in 1998. While Sunn O)))'s own cult of adherents is well schooled in the band's studiously curated selection of reference points (the gnarly drones of Dylan Carlson and Earth, the sustained tone compositions of LaMonte Young, the none-more-black extremes of Darkthrone and Bathory) and keenly familiar with its collaborators (Merzbow, Boris and Ulver all having preceded Scott), these newcomers are enthralled first and foremost by the spectacle and scale of it all. Even though any work of ambient doom metal played by scary dudes in robes will remain a bridge too far for many, *Kannon* will leave other neophytes feeling awed by the complexity and physicality achieved here.

The album's 34-minute length adds to the air of accessibility, at least by Sunn O))) standards. It's also a more dramatic demonstration of the band's core ethos than might have been possible on the

## Q&A

Stephen O'Malley



**How do you think *Kannon* compares with your previous albums?** I was playing the mix to Oren Ambarchi, who plays on the record. He reacted by saying, "You know what? I think this is pretty accessible for Sunn O))) – it's kind of like Sunn O)))'s pop album." He was making a metaphor, obviously – it's not pop. But for Sunn O))), there's something about it that you can grasp a little bit more. This record is close to how the band really sounds live.

**Is the music on *Kannon* still steeped in the band's more-is-more aesthetic?** It's not like it's coloured by a lot of effects or crazy edits or stuff like that – it's more the sound of our amps. Of course, there are overdubs and Attila may have three vocal mics going at once, or maybe there's a sub synth that Oren did that sounds like an avalanche, but it's not excessive – they're all parts of the arrangement. What's excessive is the fact each guy needs four full amplifier stacks onstage, or that we have a sponsorship with the fog-machine company, or that we have to air-freight 50-year-old amplifiers to Tasmania to play one show. That's excessive. But hey, who gets to do this shit?

INTERVIEW: JASON ANDERSON

recent collaborations with Scott Walker and Ulver, as well as the far more guest-heavy *Monoliths & Dimensions*. Not since 2004's

*White2* has the band been so pared down or sounded so focused on the mission of achieving maximum density.

The music here first began to take shape during the sessions for *Monoliths* in 2007 and continued to develop via live performances. Though longtime collaborators such as Csíhár, Oren Ambarchi, Rex Ritter and Steve Moore all contributed to *Kannon*'s triptych, the interplay between O'Malley's guitar and Anderson's bass often provides the music's richest moments. This defies the assumption that Sunn O))) owes its impact entirely to slow-motion riffage or cascades of feedback. In fact,

the guitar heroics of "Kannon II" would seem downright Hendrixian if they weren't accompanied by what sounds like a swarm of angry bees, with Csíhár somewhere in the middle of them trying to conduct a black mass.

Speaking of masses, Sunn O)))'s penchant for pomp and ritual has never before yielded music that seems so religious. That association is fostered by the liturgical nature of Csíhár's singing (rather than his growling) and the Buddhist reference in the album's title. While doubters may scoff at the possibility of a devotional dimension to Sunn O)))'s sonic monoliths, *Kannon* could very well elicit a meditative response from anyone who can hear it as something more than a miasma of noise. Indeed, if not for the Hammer Horror signifiers of evil that pervade the band's visual presentation, *Kannon* could soundtrack a yoga class, albeit one taking place in the sixth circle of hell.

### SLEEVE NOTES

► **Produced, recorded and mixed by:** Sunn O))) & Randall Dunn  
**Recorded at:** Studio Litho, Aleph and Avast!, Seattle  
**Personnel include:** Stephen O'Malley (guitars), Greg Anderson (bass), Attila Csíhár (vocals), Oren Ambarchi (guitar, electronics), Rex Ritter (synth), Steve Moore (trombone, keys, synth)

# A to Z

COMING UP  
THIS MONTH...

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p80 JAMES TAYLOR QUARTET

p81 TINARIWEN



### ANY TROUBLE

**Present Tense**

CHERRY RED

Clive Gregson's Stiff veterans reunite once more

Any Trouble were signed to Stiff Records in the late '70s and,

like many of their labelmates, they were a classy, well-established pub-rock covers band who were given the impetus to develop their songwriting chops by punk. Their second album since reforming in 2007 shows that frontman Clive Gregson (now based in Nashville) still has a knack for a sturdy verse, chorus and middle-eight. His soft, rather muffled voice is one of thwarted ambition, and it rather suits the bathetic Middle England persona of songs like "I Just Don't Get It", "Learning How To Lose" and "Missed That Train".

JOHN LEWIS



### ARCA

**Mutant**

MUTE

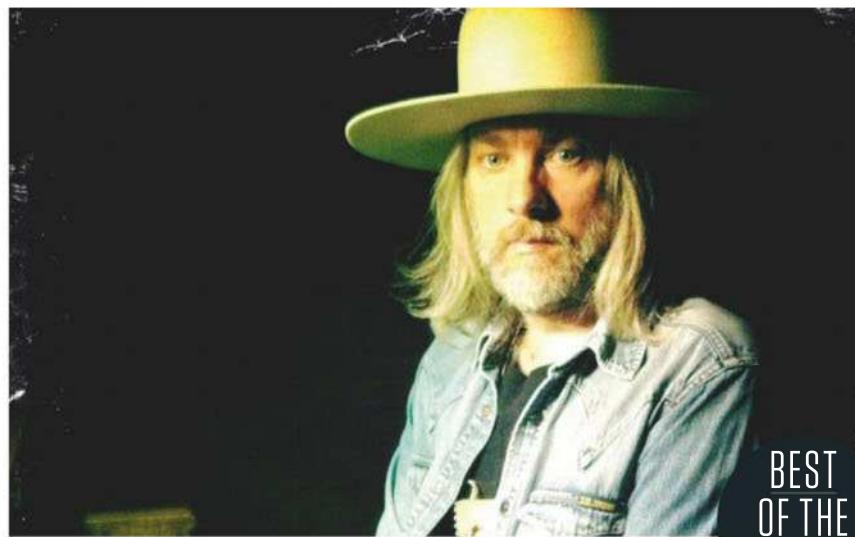
Overwhelming if patchy second from Björk confidante Arca is the gender-bending 25-year-old Venezuelan

boffin whose aqueous

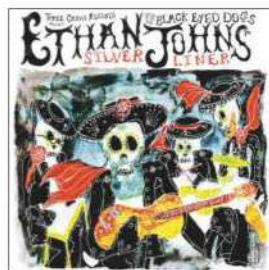
electronics helped frame Björk's recent soffest, *Vulnicura*, and several FKA Twigs cyber-ballads. On this follow-up to last year's *Xen*, Alejandro Ghersi – now resident in East London – rounds off a productive 12 months by depositing 20 tracks of curdled post-rave navel-gazing in what can feel a bit like a desktop clear-out. There's much to admire here, such as the glitchy elegance of "Front Load" and ravishing raptures of "Vanity" and "Hymn" – Ghersi intuitively imbues his music with emotion – but these ecstatic heights are dampened by half-a-dozen shapeshifting doodles. Shuffle and skip for best results.

PIERS MARTIN

## AMERICANA



BEST  
OF THE  
MONTH



8/10

### ETHAN JOHNS

#### Silver Liner

THREE CROWS/CAROLINE INTERNATIONAL

#### Sterling third from noted producer-player

Given the plurality of his contributions to albums he's made for others – guitar, bass, drums, percussion and, as on Paul McCartney's *New*, even a spot of 'iPad Tambora' – Ethan Johns' transition from producer to solo artist isn't much of a leap. What is impressive, however, is his emergence as a highly accomplished songwriter. *Silver Liner* is a swift successor to last year's Ryan Adams-produced *The Reckoning*. It's also an album in striking contrast to its forerunner. Whereas *The Reckoning* was a fairly monochromatic affair, *Silver Liner* utilises a much more effective palette. It's certainly brighter and looser. "I Don't Mind", with Richard Causon on accordion and Johns doubling up on mandolin and hurdy-gurdy, evokes the kind of jubilant country ramble that Levon Helm used to preside over in Woodstock. The delicate flamenco fills, plus guest harmonies from Gillian Welch and former Eagle Bernie Leadon, create a similarly carefree mood on the Dylanish "Juanita". Welch also crops up on the gorgeous title track, its ringing chords and hairy electro-acoustics recalling the Neil Young of "Down By The River" or Gene Clark circa *White Light*.

Bouquets in the air for backing band The Black Eyed Dogs, also, with bassist Nick Pini and drummer Jeremy Stacey both clearly attuned to Johns' sensibilities after playing on his productions for, respectively, Laura Marling and Ryan Adams. The other member is veteran BJ Cole, whose pedal-steel tones wind through these songs like a coppery autumn breeze. Crucially, too, producer Stacey has chosen to play to Johns' strengths. He may be the first to accept that he's no great singer, but this is offset against arrangements designed to accentuate the varied textures and contours of the music. Nowhere is this better expressed than in the epic "Open Your Window", which builds slowly before fanning out into a rich country-rock composite topped by a fractious guitar solo. **ROB HUGHES**



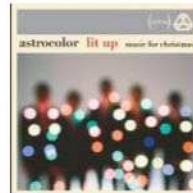
## THE AMERICANA ROUND-UP

► New releases are stacking up for 2016. Chief among them is *The Ghosts Of Highway 20*, the 12th studio effort from **Lucinda Williams**, due in early February. The Georgia-to-

Texas stretch of Interstate 20 serves as a metaphorical link between the 14 songs, most of which were inspired by Williams' own experiences. Veteran guitarists Bill Frisell and Greg Leisz flesh out the travelogue, plus bassist David Sutton and drummer Butch Norton. The record includes a cover of Springsteen's "Factory" and a 'lost' Woody Guthrie song, "House Of Earth", for which Williams composed the music. February also sees the return of gruff-

toned singer Jake Smith (pictured), who, as **The White Buffalo**, is all over the soundtrack to *Sons Of Anarchy*. Led off by Audra Mae duet "I Got You", *Love And The Death Of Damnation* is his much-anticipated fifth album. Not to be outdone, Hank Williams Jr. uncorks *It's About Time*, which features a bunch of plain-speaking originals ("Dress Like An Icon"; "Just Call Me Hank") alongside versions of Neil Young's "Are You Ready For The Country" and Mel Tillis' classic broadside, "Mental Revenge".

And Nashville stalwart **Tim O'Brien** issues *Pompadour*, his first LP in four years, fit to burst with bluegrass, Appalachian country, field hollers, roots-rock and a pinch of James Brown funk. He's marking the occasion with UK dates in January and early Feb, starting with Celtic Connections in Glasgow. **ROB HUGHES**



### ASTROCOLOR

#### Lit Up - Music For Christmas

LAST GANG RECORDS

Have yourself a kosmische little Christmas

7/10

A festive album that owes more to Harmonia and Can than Slade, Wham! or Wizzard, this is the good kind of Christmas cheese. Astrocolor and co-producer Colin Stewart (Black Mountain, Ladyhawk) have delivered 10 arch, ambient "deconstructions" of seasonal classics, including "Sleigh Ride", "We Three Kings" and "Do You Hear What I Hear". *Lit Up* is much more violet-lit chill-out room than cosy log cabin, and features keening synths, jazz soundscapes and more reverb than is strictly decent. "Let It Snow" could be an outtake from Air's *Moon Safari*, and "Sugar Plum" feels like St Germain remixing U2. Too much braying sax spoils the party at times, but it's still beard-strokingly cool.

**MARK BENTLEY**



### BARONESS

#### Purple

ABRAXAN HYMNS/WARNER

Georgian prog-metallers return three years after horrific bus crash

8/10

It may have been the end for Baroness when their tour bus took a dive from a viaduct near Bath in 2012. The repercussions were many – singer-guitarist John Baizley took months to recover, and the band's rhythm section quit. Even though many new songs are steeped in post-accident anxieties, *Purple* is a formidable show of power and resilience, the band – with the help of producer Dave Fridmann – achieving its most consistently thrilling fusion of metal, Southern rock and the edgier end of '90s alt rock. "Chlorine & Wine" and "Kerosene" attain the same balance of the anthemic and the adventurous that Metallica did with "One", and Baroness' own post-tragedy trajectory may prove to be just as heroic.

**JASON ANDERSON**



### BEACH HOUSE

#### Thank Your Lucky Stars

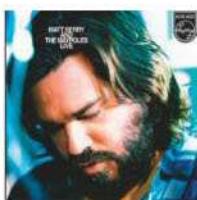
BELLA UNION

Less dream, more pop on rapid-fire follow up to *Depression Cherry*

8/10

Only two months after the fifth comes the sixth Beach House album, recorded at the same sessions as the acclaimed *Depression Cherry*, but with a mood all of its own. Dialling down the reverb and woozy grandeur, the sweet simplicity of "Rough Song" and deconstructed doo-wop of "Somewhere Tonight" yield a rare intimacy, while "Elegy To The Void" is a career highlight, a seven-minute slow-burn that hints at ritual sacrifice. Coming so soon after *Depression Cherry*, it would be easy to dismiss *Thank Your Lucky Stars* as a mere postscript, but, if anything, it's the more impressive of the pair.

**GRAEME THOMSON**



**MATT BERRY  
AND THE  
MAYPOLES**  
Live  
ACID JAZZ

**7/10**

Fetching document from comic actor and musician

Fans of *The IT Crowd*, *Toast Of London* or any of his other comic vehicles may be surprised to learn that Matt Berry's been making albums for far longer than he has television shows. This highly agreeable live set assembles some of the choicest bits, harnessing prog, slinky space-funk and vivacious free-form jamming. The latter is best served by a couple of anything-goes epics, "Solstice" and "Snuff Box", while he and The Maypoles (whose ranks include Bluetones singer Mark Morriss) also make a merry fist of the theme from that most underrated of '80s sitcoms, *Sorry!*.

ROB HUGHES

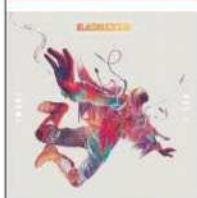


**BJÖRK**  
*Vulnicura Strings*  
ONE LITTLE INDIAN

**7/10**

The Icelandic singer's break-up album restrung Earlier this year Björk released her ninth album, *Vulnicura*, a searing account of the disintegration of her relationship with artist Matthew Barney. This is the same LP stripped of the electronics and re-worked as an acoustic project featuring strings, voice and a viola organista, a rare harpsichord-violin hybrid invented by da Vinci. Far from bringing a dose of elegance to the proceedings, the effect here is of increased fury, which is saying something given the deep despair and drama of the original. Devoid of the percussive effects, "Mouth Mantra" is sharp-edged and stentorian, while on "Atom Dance" the staccato strings inject unexpected urgency. A satisfying, if not earth-shattering, experiment.

FIONA STURGES

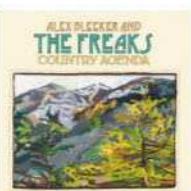


**BLACKALICIOUS**  
*Imani Vol 1*  
OGM RECORDINGS

**7/10**

Socially conscious rap-funk duo make potent return after decade away Northern Cali alternative hip-hoppers Blackalicious have lost little of their kaleidoscopic musical ambition during a dormant decade of side-projects and health setbacks. Kicking off a new trilogy, *Imani Vol. 1* finds virtuoso MC Gift Of Gab (aka Timothy Parker) and DJ/producer Chief Xcel (Xavier Mosley) freestyling through styles and eras alongside a starry gallery of guests including Imani Coppola, Lyrics Born and Amde Hamilton of legendary proto-rappers The Watts Prophets. Propulsive, powerhouse funk-rockers like "Blacka" are tempered with soulful grooves; "Escape", a caustic yet compassionate critique of blinkered thug-life machismo, is worthy of prime Curtis Mayfield. A welcome comeback.

STEPHEN DALTON



**ALEX BLEEKER  
AND THE  
FREAKS**  
*Country Agenda*

SINDERLYN/  
CAPTURED TRACKS**6/10**

Cosmic folk-rock, Brooklyn style

Alex Bleeker is the bass player from the bucolic New Jersey indie-rockers Real Estate, but his side-project is a much more orthodox, plaid-shirted affair that draws heavily from the early '70s. The daft country-gospel numbers such as "Turtle Dove" and "They've Gone Home" get close to parody, but with a strong melody behind them, the Freaks can really fly. Lead single "The Rest" is a wonderful piece of Laurel Canyon-style cosmic folk-rock with a nod to The Band, while the T-Rex-ish patters and sweet harmonies of "Sealong Hair" are almost good enough for you to forget that Bleeker can't really sing.

JOHN LEWIS



**BOOTS**  
*AQUARIA*  
COLUMBIA

**7/10**

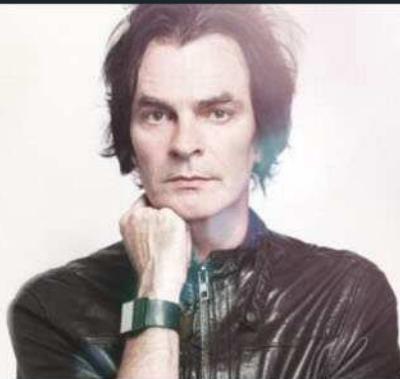
Roc Nation producer steps out on stylish debut A sought-after backroom guy, Florida's Jordan Asher has spent the past few years producing FKA

Twigs, Run The Jewels and a large proportion of Beyoncé's self-titled 2013 album. On *AQUARIA*, he's in front of the mic, weaving a beats-heavy psychedelic R&B bristling with detail. Like, say, Daniel Lanois, Asher produces pop records, but he's not a pop musician. "Oracles" could be a particularly funky Thom Yorke cut, Asher crooning about "Hollywood in the '40s/UFOs in the USA", while the title track drops former Dirty Projector Angel Deradoorian over boom-clap beats and flourishes of zither. It privileges technique and texture over hooks, but as a pitch to be the next Danger Mouse, *AQUARIA* is not a bad one.

LOUIS PATTISON

## REVELATIONS

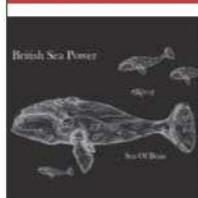
Butterfly Child's Joe Cassidy: "I was dying to do something solid"



► It's been 17 years since Joe Cassidy last released an album by Butterfly Child but it's not like he ever stopped making music – far from it. "My day job is writing music," explains the Belfast-bred Cassidy, who relocated to Chicago before making Butterfly Child's third album, *Soft Explosives*, in 1998. He now works out of his home studio in Los Angeles. "I could be writing for a Japanese commercial on a Tuesday, doing a Lexus car ad on a Thursday and producing a band on a Friday. The nice thing about Butterfly Child is it's about getting back to real music instead of feeling like I'm on autopilot."

Cassidy had amassed hundreds of unreleased songs by the time Dell'Orso Records convinced him to end the hiatus and appease the hardy cult that formed around Butterfly Child's first EPs in the early '90s. Should new album *Futures* increase that cult's numbers – which it ought to, given how many younger artists are steeped in the same swirling, swoony swathes of the 4AD catalogue that first inspired Cassidy – more of that music may soon be heard, including the more orchestral fare he made after *Soft Explosives*. "I did a lot of big pop songs – very upbeat and very Pet Sounds, but with bizarre arrangements." For now, Cassidy's just happy to be making music for people other than his clients. "I was dying to do something that felt solid."

JASON ANDERSON



**BRITISH  
SEA POWER**  
*Sea Of Brass*  
GOLDEN CHARIOT

**7/10**

Quirky indie-rock collective becomes hypnotic brass ensemble Tireless and occasionally tiresome, mercurial indie-rock eccentrics British Sea Power first unveiled their brass-band collaboration as a well-received live show. Now the Brighton-based collective have taken the project into the studio, reworking tracks from their back catalogue, with mixed but mostly positive results. The fizzing art-punk of "Atom" and Kraut-ish groove racket "Machineries Of Joy" are scarcely improved by a backdrop of brassy swells. But "Heavenly Waters" uses the orchestral chemistry more inventively, building from soft chamber waltz to symphonic tumult, while "Once More Now" finds a sweet spot between Arcade Fire-ish exultation and drizzly English understatement.

STEPHEN DALTON



**BUTTERFLY  
CHILD**  
*Futures*  
DELL'ORSO

**8/10**

First full-length in 17 years from dreampop progenitor Joe Cassidy's flair for gossamer-light, reverb-drenched reveries served him well when the Belfast-born musician signed to AR Kane's H.A.R.K! label for a series of releases that made Butterfly Child a minor but well-treasured player in the '90s dreampop pantheon. Seventeen years on from their last release, *Futures* is just as lovely as his admirers could have hoped. Recording in LA with such guests as the Webb Brothers, Cassidy scales down the BC sound from the orch-pop tendencies that sometimes blighted 1998's *Soft Explosives* and embraces the airier sensibility of the first EPs, again finding a home in a pillow comfort zone between *Pink Moon* and *The Pink Opaque*.

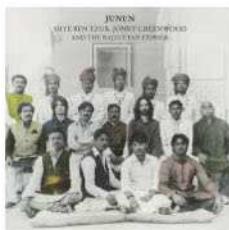
JASON ANDERSON



# SHYE BEN TZUR, JONNY GREENWOOD AND THE RAJASTHAN EXPRESS

**Junun** Nonesuch

Cross-cultural ensemble sheds light on Sufi music. By Louis Pattison



**7/10**

much filmmaking with a capital 'F': rich of milieu, plots as dense as literature, talented actors pushed to the brink of their abilities. But 2015 has seen Anderson take a year off from movies to explore more musical pursuits. He has made a couple of music videos for Joanna Newsom, who herself appeared in *Inherent Vice*. And he has strengthened ties with another musical collaborator, Jonny Greenwood, the Radiohead guitarist and composer who has scored every Anderson film since 2007's *There Will Be Blood*.

Anderson's sole theatre release in 2015, then, is *Junun*, an hour-long documentary that follows Greenwood, singer-composer Shye Ben Tzur and Radiohead producer Nigel Godrich as they travel to the inland northern Indian state of Rajasthan to record with local Sufi Qawwali musicians. The facilitator here appears to have been Greenwood, who met Tzur a couple of years ago while travelling in the Negev desert in southern Israel. Tzur is Israeli by birth, but has spent much time in India studying the devotional music of the fragrant, mystical strain of Islam known as Sufism; his music, sung as it is in a mix of Hebrew, Urdu and Hindi, leapfrogs clear geographic and religious boundaries.

Greenwood and Godrich's presence further complicates this already complex cultural mélange. Anderson's film captures a scene from the recording session, which took place in the 15th-century Mehrangarh fort in Jodhpur. Pigeons flap around in the rafters as Tzur and a group of Indian musicians, sitting cross-legged, beat out a rhythm using handclaps and hand drums. Then the camera pans round to reveal a familiar fringe – Greenwood hunched over his Apple Macbook, carefully

**PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON** is as close as 21st-century cinema gets to an auteur. The Californian director's movies – which include 2012's thinly veiled L Ron Hubbard biopic *The Master* and last year's Thomas Pynchon adaptation

*Inherent Vice* – are very

tweaking an electronic rhythm until it falls into step.

*Junun* slots neatly into a lineage of musical artefacts capturing the raw activity of cultural exchange, from *Buena Vista Social Club* to *Africa Express*. But instead of playing up its audacious collisions – east meets west, Israel meets Islam – these 13 songs feel more about natural chemistry and mutual understanding than grand statements. Anderson's film takes care not to explicitly name many of the players until the end credits, and similarly the recording avoids any sense of explicit leadership, feeling like the product of a democratic whole. Tzur sings and plays guitar and flute, while Greenwood flits between guitar, drum machine, laptop and ondes Martenot. But the emphasis throughout is placed on the circling hand drums, harmonium drones and vocal choruses that are the backbone to Qawwali song.

The results can be stirring. The title track, adapted by Tzur from a poem by the Sufi writer Hazrat Nawab Mohammad Khadim Hasan Shah Sahib about "the madness of love", goes along at a

fair clip, Greenwood weaving sputtering electronic beats around a quick, syncopated battery of hand percussion. Two female vocalists, Afshana Khan and Razia Sultan, take the lead on the stirring "Chala Vahi Des", a song of pilgrimage by the 16th-century mystic Meera Bai. And "Julus" and "Junun Brass" show off the capabilities of a six-piece Indian brass band led by trumpeter Aamir Bhiyani.

Importantly, the size of the ensemble – 21 players in all – doesn't stymie occasional softer moments. We get a measure of Tzur's romantic, spiritual leanings on "Ahuví", a deeply sad, lovelorn piece sung in his native Hebrew, and on "Eloah", a chanted vocal piece about the formlessness and omnipotence of God ("Each letter of the Torah carries his soul/My creator is a sound, his heartbeat is silence", reads the translated script). Meanwhile, "Kalandar" begins with a twinkly ambient section that pairs Tzur on flute and Greenwood on the ondes Martenot, while "There Are Birds In The Echo Chamber" is a brief interlude that appears to capture precisely that, a reminder of the unconventional studio from which this recording sprang.

Often, these sorts of projects can appear rather impressed with themselves, a way of Western musicians applauding their cosmopolitan credentials. If anything, though, *Junun* feels almost too humble; it would perhaps be naïve to expect Greenwood to be cranking out a bit of "Creep" guitar, but his presence may be too fleeting for Radiohead disciples keen for a stop-gap before the next album. This is no critique of *Junun* itself, though, which stands as a fine entry point into the rich mystery of Sufi music, and a beautiful audiovisual document shot with a keen eye and a steady hand.

## Q&A

*Jonny Greenwood*



**How did *Junun* come together?**

My wife introduced me to Shye's music, and persuaded him (and me) that we could make a record together. The key moment was telling Shye that we could record anywhere at all. With Radiohead we were used to setting up studios in old, semi-abandoned houses. As long as there was at least one big room, we could make it work. Then, luckily, Shye met some Maharajahs at a polo ground – at some literary festival, I think – and the Maharajah of Jodhpur offered his palace as a recording location. Aside from endless power cuts, it went really smoothly. We were using every last piece of equipment we had – we brought everything

from the Radiohead studio. These limitations were good for us: Nigel and Sam constructed an echo chamber in a basement of the fort, so it felt like the whole building became part of the record.

**How familiar were you with Sufi music before embarking on this project? What did you see your role as being, once the actual music began?**

Totally ignorant. I knew that Shye was a committed believer in this mystical branch of Islam, but religious music generally is new to me, outside of classical things. My role was overseeing production – basically to sit in with the drummers and pretend we were accompanying James Brown and Miles Davis. What I didn't want was an overly reverential 'field' recording of – terrible name – 'world music'. We were making a record.

INTERVIEW: LOUIS PATTISON



## CAGE THE ELEPHANT Tell Me I'm Pretty

COLUMBIA

Dan Auerbach produces Kentucky quartet's fourth album

**7/10**

of garage and alt.rock comes stripped down and scuzzed up on the follow-up to 2013's *Melophobia*. Producer Dan Auerbach's DNA is all over "Cry Baby", "Mess Around" and "Punchin' Bag", which could moonlight as outtakes from The Black Keys' *El Camino*, but while the fuzzy, riff-heavy keynotes are well-worn – The Stooges, The Zombies, The Cramps, New York Dolls and T.Rex are also heavily referenced – the results are undeniably effective. There's even a whiff of vintage Kinks on the nimble "Sweetie Little Jean". Not pretty, necessarily, but pretty good.

GRAEME THOMSON

## LOVE IS ALL OR LOVE IS NOT AT ALL

**8/10**

Far-reaching seventh from California-based, Dublin-bred veteran Uniting Carroll with teenage hero, Crass narrator/poet Penny Rimbaud, the title track maps this Dubliner's wide-ranging themes. Encompassing the warped salvation of "Ball And Chain" and heartbreaking Gaza tribute "No Hallelujah Here", Carroll mines all of the elements – trad folk, jangle pop and the elemental Big Music – that have characterised his development. The sureness of approach and purpose, aided by accompanists including Bill Fay trumpeter Noel Langley and Big Star's Jody Stephens, accommodates the dazed "Brightest Of Blue" and celebratory powerpop redux "Lost And Lonely" to deliver a seamless, satisfying triumph.

GAVIN MARTIN



## COCOROSIE Heartache City

LOST GIRL

Back-to-basics sixth for perennially kooky siblings

With half-a-million Facebook fans and a knack for infuriating critics and

polarising listeners, Bianca and Sierra Casady know they must be doing something right. Having fashioned a kind of burlesque hip-hop with Antony Hegarty on their last record, *Heartache City* sees the sisters circle back to the homespun freak-folk that made their first two albums so enchanting. Now the songs are sharper and prettier, a meek mix of music-box chintz and hissing drum machine, over which the Casadys unravel tuneful gothic fantasia that touches on "masturbating snails" (from "Un Beso") and peaks with the delirious duet "Bed Bugs" and Oedipal nursery rhyme "The Tower Of Pisa".

PIERS MARTIN

**7/10**

Cage The Elephant's user-friendly distillation

of garage and alt.rock comes stripped down and scuzzed up on the follow-up to 2013's *Melophobia*. Producer Dan Auerbach's DNA is all over "Cry Baby", "Mess Around" and "Punchin' Bag", which could moonlight as outtakes from The Black Keys' *El Camino*, but while the fuzzy, riff-heavy keynotes are well-worn – The Stooges, The Zombies, The Cramps, New York Dolls and T.Rex are also heavily referenced – the results are undeniably effective. There's even a whiff of vintage Kinks on the nimble "Sweetie Little Jean". Not pretty, necessarily, but pretty good.

GRAEME THOMSON



## COLDER

### Many Colours

BATAILLE

Absent Frenchman's frosty new wave

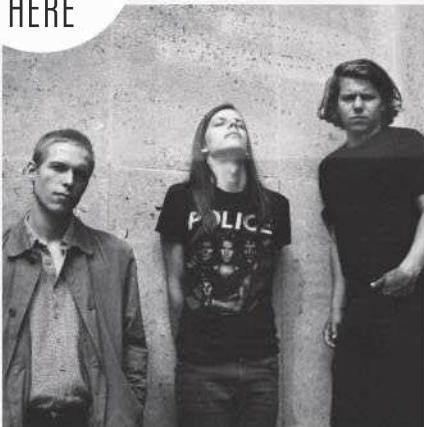
Ten years have passed since Marc Nguyen Tan's last Colder

album, *Heat*, and in that time, while he focused on design and film in Paris, the noirish minimalism he once peddled with impeccable weariness has enjoyed a revival of sorts. *Many Colours* needed to be – and is – a robust return: Tan remains aloof and introspective, still murmuring about lonely walks and cigarettes, but now there's a swagger and verve to his production. Pulsating electronics frame the industrial slink of "Another Year" and "Your Kind", while Tan channels the sci-fi doo-wop of Alan Vega on the crushing drone of "Turn Your Back".

PIERS MARTIN

## Die Nerven

WE'RE  
NEW  
HERE



► "Actually, there is no German 'rock scene' at all," says Max Rieger, the guitarist and vocalist in Stuttgart's visceral, dynamic Die Nerven, when *Uncut* ask about the health of Germany's alternative scene. "Having a rock band in 2015 is a pain in the ass, to be honest. Compared to the huge amount of electronic artists, there are only a few rock bands left in Germany, many of them following a retromaniac approach to music that is already history."

Despite their ferocious sound and dark lyrical mood, though, the three-piece have racked up considerable acclaim in their home country, with 2014's *Fun* featuring on many critics' end of year lists. "It's a very strange thing to get acceptance with such a weird, noisy sound," ponders Rieger, "because it was not the intention at all."

Discussing their influences, the guitarist claims that individual members are currently deep into Neneh Cherry, Talk Talk and, surprisingly, Kiss; however, he reckons it's unlikely that Gene Simmons' feelgood messages will ever permeate their own lyrics. "In our opinion, there is no reason to write anything about sunshine and feeling good in the 21st century, because it doesn't feel right to do so. It's just a reaction to the circumstances we are facing."

PIERS MARTIN



## DIE NERVEN Out

GLITTERHOUSE

German alt.rockers' noisy third album

This young trio from the Stuttgart area draw on a fine tradition in German music – not the usual

Krautrock or kosmische, but the Hamburger Schule of the late '80s and '90s, when bands such as Die Sterne and Tocotronic mixed noisy guitars with strident, German-language lyrics. *Out* is powered by the galloping rhythm section, the perfect base for Max Rieger's feverishly delivered, misanthropic lyrics and slashing guitar. The high points are impressive, and often take influence from further afield than Deutschland: "Wüste" and "Jugend Ohne Geld" feature killer riffs that would fit on Mission Of Burma's *Vs*, while tightly coiled opener "Die Unschuld In Person" evokes both Hamburg's Blumfeld and Washington State's Unwound. TOM PINNOCK



## EVANGELIST

### Evangelist

UNDERScore COLLECTIVE

Posthumous release for Meadows collaborator

If you saw Shane Meadows' *This Is England*, you'll know the voice of Gavin Clark through his

cover of The Smiths' "Please, Please, Please Let Me Get What I Want" that played during the credits. Clark, who also featured in James Lavelle's UNKLE project, died unexpectedly this year, leaving behind a half-finished concept album about a preacher's breakdown that was made with Toydrum's Pablo Clements and James Griffith. *Evangelist*, which has since been completed by Clements and Griffith, is notable both for its haunting psychedelia ("Never Feel This Young") and its bursts of visceral fury, best illustrated in the Cavean "God Song". A moving tribute to an unsung talent.

FIONA STURGES



## JAMES FERRARO

### Skid Row

BREAK WORLD

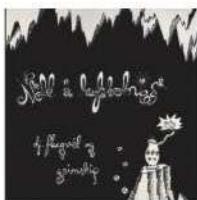
LA maverick's dense soundscape about the apocalyptic modern age

James Ferraro wastes no time establishing a *Blade Runner*-worthy atmosphere

with the opening moments of *Skid Row*, as a Siri-style voice utters ominous phrases such as "gated housing" and "burning Prius" before ordering a soy latte. The most ambitious effort by the former member of noise duo Skaters began as poems inspired by the contrast of late-capitalist excess and societal collapse surrounding Ferraro in LA. His distorted voice and dyspeptic verses become valuable entry points to a vivid tapestry of noise, ambient, fragmentary funk and *musique concrète*. Like 2011's *Far Side Virtual*, *Skid Row* is the sound of 10 minutes from now and is all the more terrifying for it.

JASON ANDERSON

# New Albums



## DJ FLUGVÉL OG GEIMSKIP Nott á Hafsbottini

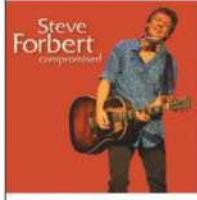
MENGI

Third album of glorious electronic pop from Iceland (and/or the bottom of the sea)

8/10

This is a seriously odd record: playful, genuinely quirky and essentially Icelandic electronic pop, *Nott á Hafsbottini* in fact channels everything from Suicide and Joe Meek to Grimes and J-pop. Indian and Syrian music are influences, too, while DJ Flugvél og Geimskip (Airplane and Spaceship) herself says it's "horror music with a space twist". Released on the Reykjavík-based Mengi label, this album takes the sea as its theme (the title translates as 'Night At The Bottom Of The Ocean'); Flugvél og Geimskip's previous offering was a hymn to outer space, and this is no less otherworldly.

MARCUS O'DAIR



## STEVE FORBERT Compromised

ROCK RIDGE MUSIC

The return of Jackrabbit Slim: latterday folk-rocker's spirited reunion with early-career mates

8/10

Sounding loose, wise and mischievous, enough to unfurl an improbable, chugging, harp-laden cover of "Send In The Clowns", Mississippian Steve Forbert's 16th studio album is sharp and ambitious, a surprisingly fine, upbeat echo of his early (late '70s) classics. Backed by a well-oiled band (NRBQ's Joey Spampinato, keyboardist Robbie Kondor) and produced by early collaborator John Simon, *Compromised* is expansive, dipping into jazzy R'n'B on the subtly political "Big Comeuppance", tipping towards reggae on "Drink Red Wine". It's best, though, on "Whatever, Man" and "Time Seemed So Free", Forbert ripping into the inherent contradictions convergent with time and age.

LUKE TORN



## FOXTrott A Taller Us

ONE LITTLE INDIAN

Engagingly off-centre synth-pop debut

Montréal's Marie-Hélène Delorme makes the kind of sophisticated,

7/10

playful electronic pop that's sure to draw comparisons to Feist. But it's the exploratory nature of her songs that distinguishes her, expressed via their strong rhythmic drive and an obvious delight in odd sounds. Delorme's voice, lustrous and powerful, is a terrific foil for her liquid melodies and percussive clatterings, and she's probably as much an admirer of ESG as Lykke Li or Feist. Despite this, on "Beyond Our Means" she sings, "I don't know how long I can follow the beat," while a synth mimics the sound of a whirly tube. Hopefully, for a good while yet.

SHARON O'CONNELL



## FUFANU Few More Days To Go

ONE LITTLE INDIAN

Darkly hued debut by Damon Albarn-endorsed Icelandic neo-post-punkers fronted by the son of a Sugarcube

7/10

After a few years making clamorous techno as Captain Fufanu, the Reykjavík duo of Kaktus and Gulli decided to pursue a different kind of racket. The son of Sugarcubes co-founder Einar Örn, Kaktus also has history with Damon Albarn – he played on *Everyday Robots*, and Fufanu's first spate of London shows this summer included a set at Blur's big day at Hyde Park. But *Few More Days To Go* is a strong statement of intent in its own right. When it comes to "Circus Life" and "Your Collection", earlier comparisons to Joy Division and Bauhaus are less apt than more rancorous reference points such as Wire and Faust.

JASON ANDERSON



## GIUDA Speaks Evil

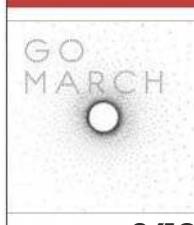
BURNING HEART

Glam-rocking Italian five-piece stomp and bawl

7/10

Giuda sound like Eurovision runners-up who grew up on Slade, AC/DC and Sweet, and want everybody to know it. Their third album opens with "Roll The Balls", combining double entendre with a glam thump, and while there are variations thereafter – "Watch Your Step" is T.Rex pop and "Working Class Man" takes an unexpected political turn – the general tone of sex, fun and rock'n'roll is set. Unreconstructed but entertaining when they get the balance right, as on "My Lu", a neat slice of teenage lust that wouldn't have been out of place on the MC5's *Back In The USA*.

PETER WATTS



## GO MARCH Go March

UNDAY

Krautrock-inspired instrumentals from Belgium

8/10

Go March are a guitar/synth/drums trio from Antwerp who make wonderful post-rock instrumentals and urgently need to be given a soundtrack commission. If there's a default setting here it's a kind of poppy, hypnotic Krautrock, but they're an adaptable bunch. "Chase" is a propulsive, lopsided waltz that should be a cop-show theme; "Earthbound" a swaggering boogie that recalls Johnny Cash's take on "Personal Jesus"; while, on tracks like "Rise" and "Slow Horse", the analogue synths gurgle and throb appealingly. Although they emerged from improvisations, each track has a wonderfully clinical *plastique* quality, as if plotted out meticulously on graph paper.

JOHN LEWIS



## GRATEFUL DEAD Fare Thee Well (The Best Of)

RHINO

Hits from the Dead's July 2015 final stand

6/10

It was the only way they could end it,

really – getting the four core remaining members of the Dead onstage to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the group's formation. Much like the recent *30 Trips Around The Sun* 80CD live compendium, *Fare Thee Well* focuses too much on the group's more straightforward take on song form; consequently, it's a bit lop-sided. Also, the playing has lost some of its limber fluidity, edging a little too close to jam-band by rote. But you can still hear the deep alchemy rising in Chicago's Soldier Field: a gorgeous "China Cat Sunflower", a gilded, lovely "Scarlet Begonias".

JON DALE



## GRIMES Art Angels

4AD

Grimes returns with a seductive fourth

It's been almost four years since Grimes' breakthrough, *Visions*.

The resulting record,

*Art Angels*, takes a few goes to sink in. Referencing All Saints, MIA, Aaliyah, Taylor Swift and more, its pastel-pop eventually coheres into an iconoclastic set where Claire Boucher challenges herself as a songwriter: Taiwanese rap meets pop-punk on "SCREAM", while "Kill V Maim" reimagines the Human League as K-Poppers. Previously released as a mesmeric demo, "Realiti" has been needlessly souped up, and sometimes Boucher's new-agey tastes are too much, but you sense the deceptively complex *Art Angels* will only continue to yield further depths with time.

LAURA SNAPES



## IRMLER/EINHEIT Bestandteil

KLANGBAD

Faust and Neubauten alumni go head-to-head

For their second collaboration, ex-Einstürzende

Neubauten member FM Einheit and Faust lifer Hans-Joachim Irmler tighten the screws on their debut, 2009's *No Apologies*. There's poetry to members of Neubauten and Faust playing in close consort – two generations of German wrecking crews duking it out – but *Bestandteil* is a far more tenacious beast than you'd expect. Einheit's 'bass-string', which gives off a coiled, resonant twang whenever struck – underpins the album, its lugubrious pulse grounding Irmler's organ vamps, while collapsing drones meet in gaseous swamps: "Treat", for example, hovers in the air, drifting clouds of acid rain darkening the skies.

JON DALE



## JENNYLEE

### Right On!

ROUGH TRADE

Spare solo first from Warpaint player As the bassist in Los Angeles quartet Warpaint, Jenny Lee Lindberg supplies the

7/10

fathoms-deep foundation for their blend of post-punk, luminous atmospherics and quasi trip-hop. But her supple style takes the spotlight on this solo debut, which also features Warpaint drummer Stella Mozgawa. She's a versatile player – picking out pristine single notes to set a decidedly wintry scene on opener "Blind", whipping up a furious storm on "Riot" and pouring molten alt.R&B into "He Fresh" – and her bereft voice is a great fit in each case. Early Cure, Salem and The xx are kindred spirits, but *Right On!* casts its own seductively austere shadow.

SHARON O'CONNELL



## SHARON JONES & THE DAP-KINGS

### It's A Holiday Soul Party

DAPTONE

Sleigh bells have seldom sounded so funky

8/10

You know what you're getting with an SJ/Dap Kings album – note-perfect vintage soul voices, impeccable musicianship and a bunch of head-nodding grooves. If that appeals, then here is the record to funk up your festive period, leaving *Now That's What I Call Christmas* unplayed this year. Among these 11 enjoyable and knowing new takes on old Christmas classics, low-slung, sexed up versions of "Silent Night" and "White Christmas" are as great as you'd hope, while "Funky Little Drummer Boy" and "God Rest Ye Merry Gents" are packed with rump-shakin' James Brown breaks.

MARK BENTLEY



## KHRUANGBIN

### The Universe Smiles Upon You

NIGHT TIME STORIES

Texan trio summon vintage spirits on trippy debut

7/10

Though former Yppah live band members Mark Speer (guitar) and Laura Lee (bass) credit the sound they make with gospel drummer Donald Johnson to compilations of '60s Thai funk, others might point to David Axelrod's Electric Prunes productions. Admittedly, the trio record in a countryside barn, but the spacious sound has all the hallmarks of a cavernous cathedral studio, and Johnson's lazy breakbeats are worthy of DJ Shadow's mid-'90s trip-hop. Opener "Mr White"'s title and psychedelic blues guitar licks meanwhile suggest they're auditioning for Quentin Tarantino, while "People Everywhere (Still Alive)" works up a cheerful sweat.

WYNDHAM WALLACE



## HEATHER LEIGH

### I Abused Animal

IDEOLOGIC ORGAN

Devastating dream-songs, under the strength of strings

Pedal-steel alchemist

8/10

Heather Leigh has cast a long shadow across the international underground, from her tenure with Charalambides, where she pushed the long-running group into heavy terrain, to her collaborations with figures such as Chris Corsano and Paul Flaherty. Previously an improviser, on *I Abused Animal*, Leigh works with stretched song forms – the result is remarkable, with tintinnabulating tones caught in sensual caress with her fiercely private vocals, her troubled, dream-warped lyrics sometimes dissembling into stray syllables and clotted sighs. By the closing "Fairfield Fantasy", the memory work Leigh's undertaking is emotionally eviscerating.

JONDALE



## LEROY SKLÃSH

SCHAMONI MUSIK

Idiosyncratic poptronica from Munich

Perhaps perversely in 2015, Leo Hopfinger (aka LeRoy) has declared his lack of interest in

making music with an obvious wow factor.

"Nowadays everybody can produce bold-sounding songs," he says. But there's boldness in his approach, even if the results are lo-fi, DIY and deliberately unassuming. *Sklãsh* is as deep as it is wide, a collision of dub, kosmische, funk jams, ambient house and Afrobeat that's equal parts pure pop and warped abstraction. Can-centric epic "Like A Disease" may be its most out-there expression, but the slack-key guitar simulations of "The Beach" and "Niemals Erwachsen Werden" (Daniel Johnston remixed by John Maus) are just as joyous.

SHARON O'CONNELL

## EMILIE LEVIEINAISE-FARROUCH

### Like Water Through The Sand

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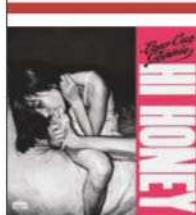
Promising debut from FatCat's revitalised neo-classical imprint



7/10

Although this is her debut album, Levienaise-Farrouch has already scored countless short films. These 11 tracks consequently have a cinematic quality, though they lack the emotional resonance of her countryman Yann Tiersen, replacing it with a more cerebral character on the Steve Reich-ian, string-heavy "Tulsi" or the drier chamber arrangements of "Cotidial Lines". Still, "Hands Closed Together"'s expressive simplicity and the eerie electronic embellishments of "Persephone" suggest additional poignancy isn't far from reach.

WYNDHAM WALLACE



## LOW CUT CONNIE

### Hi Honey

CONTENDER

Third from Philadelphia-based US/UK duo with friends in high places

Nobody was more surprised than Adam Weiner and Dan Finnemore when the irrepressible, stomping boogie of "Boozophilia", from their second album, 2012's *Get Out The Lotion*, featured on President Obama's Spotify playlist last summer. The follow-up is similarly brimming with visceral rock'n'soul that channels the spirit of The Replacements, The E Street Band and Alabama Shakes, and mixes them into an irresistibly tasty gumbo. If tracks such as the pounding "Shake It Little Tina" and the Springsteen-esque "Danny's Outta Money" – which features *The Sopranos'* Vinnie Pastore (Big Pussy) on suitably threatening vocals – are now on rotation in the Oval Office, then perhaps there is hope after all.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

# New Albums



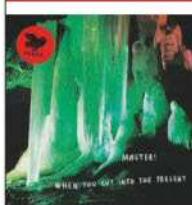
## MASERATI Rehumanizer TEMPORARY RESIDENCE

Kosmische stalwarts veer off the road The synthy, Krauty, space-rock highway has become a crowded route of late, so for their

**5/10**

eighth album, long-running Athens, Georgia band Maserati have taken a chance on a beefier rock direction. It's a bit of a wrong turn. "Living Cell" is the most straight-ahead song they've written to date, but its lucid electro-goth churn merely sounds like Sisters Of Mercy minus the menace. Elsewhere, Maserati stick with their usual motorik structures, but the layers of newly muscular riffage, while occasionally rousing, can often make the journey feel like a slog. With so many other similar vehicles available, there's not much reason to choose this one.

SAM RICHARDS



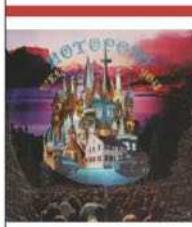
## MØSTER! When You Cut Into The Present HUBRO

Id-driven punk-jazz project from Norwegian saxophonist

**8/10**

Norwegian saxophonist Kjetil Møster is a heavy-duty jazz and improv player, best known for his Wayne Shorter-inspired work with a quartet called The Core and a sparky duet with Chick Corea. However, his own self-titled quartet sees him indulging his punkier id, with a guitar/bass/drums trio providing a suitably squally racket. "Soundhouse Rumble" is a heavy punk-jazz freak-out in 9/8 that recalls the Massachusetts trio Morphine; "Bandha" a lengthy sludge-rock groove in 12/8 that gets hypnotically funky; while other tracks see him and his guitarist Hans Magnus Ryan providing textured squawks, howls and glissandos over a Can-like hypnotic pulse.

JOHN LEWIS



## MOTOPONY Welcome You EONE MUSIC

Seattle's sextet's twisted second – with sitar

**7/10**

It could have been a car crash of some magnitude, but having all six members chip in on the songwriting process for their new album has worked out fine for alt.rockers Motopony. *Welcome You* is both familiar and refreshingly skewed, darting away from comparisons – George Harrison, Crosby, Stills Nash & Young, My Morning Jacket, Ryan Adams – almost as soon as they surface. That the '70s are their favourite decade is confirmed by "1971" ("Life in 1971/I wanna be there, I wanna have fun") and they're clearly fans of alt.country and the darker end of the psychedelic spectrum, but the devil is in the interpretive differences.

SHARON O'CONNELL



## THE NEIGHBOURHOOD Wiped Out! COLUMBIA/SONY

Identikit LA pop rockers come a cropper second time out

**3/10**

As a woe-betide modern matinee idol, The Neighbourhood's frontman Jesse Rutherford strains credibility. The dreary, schematic tunes assembled here – the laborious pop of the title track, the toe-curling slow jam "Cry Baby" – foreground Rutherford against his aerated and characterless cohorts. But the entire committee-bound enterprise, Pro-Tooled to within an inch of its natural life, revolves round Rutherford mining teen angst and tragedy. Gruesomely affected and ladled in studio effects, the suspect vocals are most exposed on double-barrelled epic "Baby Came Home 2/Valentines", but the competition is considerable. A stylistic and conceptual vacuum; there goes The Neighbourhood.

GAVIN MARTIN

## REVELATIONS

Corrina Repp on her new album and "living with sadness"



► Corrina Repp stopped making music completely in the 18 months following the demise of her band, Tu Fawning, in 2013. "I needed to take a break," she says. "I'd split from my partner of eight years [Joe Haege], who was also my bandmate, so it felt like a good time to put shit in the closet for a while. When I came back to it, I realised I'd been hobbling around like half a person for a year and a half."

Despite the circumstances in which it was written, Repp insists *The Pattern Of Electricity* is "not a break-up album. It's more about believing and surviving and being OK with living with sadness". Her last solo outing, 2006's *The Absent And The Distant*, was released on Mark Kozelek's Caldo Verde label – "He's always been really supportive; after he heard this record he sent me an email saying, 'I love your music, don't ever stop.'"

This time, however, it was another old friend, fellow Portland Peter Broderick, who persuaded her to get back to work. After bumping into Repp at a show, Broderick invited her to record in his Oregon studio. "He's a creative genius," she laughs. "He made things even weirder!"

GRAEME THOMSON



## NOTS We Are Nots HEAVENLY

Tennessee garage rockers keep it short and sweet on their debut

**7/10**

Though Memphis has spawned its fair share of garage acts, Jay Reatard and the Oblivians among them, few have been as ferocious as Nots, a quartet led by singer and guitarist Natalie Hoffman. Though their sound is uniformly savage, with buzzing guitar and distorted synth driving these 11 speedy, brief songs, *We Are Nots* (originally released on Goner last year in the US) does head further afield than the garage at times; there are nods to atonal No Wave on opener "Insect Eyes", while "Televangelist" channels early Pixies. Dark, angry and out-there, *We Are Nots* is an impressive, if punishing, introduction.

TOM PINNOCK



## PUBLIC ENEMY Live From Metropolis Studios UNIVERSAL

Hip-hop elder statesmen show leafy West London what time it is

**7/10**

Dense with live instrumentation and jokey banter between Chuck D and Flavor Flav, Public Enemy's set for an exclusive crowd at a West London studio last August was almost PE Unplugged. As latter-day turntable maestro DJ Lord trades licks with fiery funk-metal guitarist Khari Wynn, Chuck and Flavor boom through classics from "Fight The Power" to "Welcome To The Terrordome". A few tracks are weakened by this bloated, guitar-heavy treatment, but others, like "Harder Than You Think", explode with fanfares of brassy funk-rock. Like seasoned soul-revue veterans, PE may play smaller venues now but their machine-gun polemic has evolved into a warm, uplifting, crowd-pleasing spectacle.

STEPHEN DALTON



## CORRINA REPP The Pattern Of Electricity DISCOLEXIQUE

Intense and lovely melancholia from Portlandia

**7/10**

A one-time protégé of Mark Kozelek, Portland's Corrina Repp dissolved her band Tu Fawning in 2013. She returns with her first solo album in almost a decade, a collaboration with the prolific Peter Broderick, who plays, produces, and duets on the stately "Long Shadow". Repp brings a brooding intensity to the beautiful "Long Live The Dead" and the Gothic blues of "Woods", before turning her hand to melancholic synth-pop on "Another Shape". Blending intimate folk-rock with spiralling strings and vocal loops, "Pattern The Cuts/Calm Ass Mofo" epitomises Repp's beguiling dance between solid tradition and something more wilfully esoteric.

GRAEME THOMSON

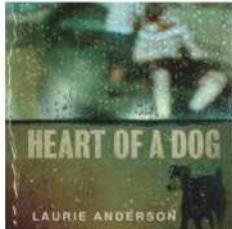


# LAURIE ANDERSON

## Heart Of A Dog

NONESUCH

New York polymath's meditation on death, storytelling and her four-legged friend. By Piers Martin



9/10

who is not mentioned at all, though he makes a cameo towards the end, sitting on a beach in a home movie, and his song "Turning Time Around", from 2000's *Ecstasy*, plays over the final credits.

If *Heart Of A Dog* sounds like a stinker, be assured that it isn't. Rather it's warm, witty and thought-provoking, and strikes a chord with everyone who sees it because Anderson, who is 68, is such a compelling narrator and her subject is the very stuff of life: grief, love, joy, memory, loss.

It helps, of course, to have seen the film before listening to the *Heart Of A Dog* album, but it's not essential. The album is the film's full sound design and consists of 25 or so stories, thoughts and observations set to mostly new compositions by Anderson. This beatless music, broadly electronic and characterised by circling drones and violin, churns quite menacingly in places around Anderson's dulcet voice but never impedes the

narrative or artificially inflates the drama of a story.

Without the film's visual accompaniment, the album is like listening to a series of short radio plays, or a podcast of Anderson's anthropological musings, and it is no worse for that. In fact, Anderson admits that the music was the last element of the film to come together. She dashed it off quickly, even recycling material from her earlier albums *Homeland* (2010) and *Bright Red* (1994).

*Heart Of A Dog* came about a few years ago when the Franco-German arts channel Arte commissioned her to make a personal essay. She had made one film before, the 1986 concert film *Home Of The Brave*, but this would be quite different. Given carte blanche and no deadline, she decided to try to assemble a story about her dog, Lolabelle, who had recently died. But with limited footage of the dog,

IN LAURIE ANDERSON'S new film, *Heart Of A Dog*, everyone dies. Her mother, her husband, Lou Reed, her beloved rat terrier, Lolabelle, her artist friend Gordon Matta-Clark. Anderson ruminates softly and sharply on each one, except Reed,

how best to go about this? How would she articulate and represent her thoughts on film? And how would she connect all these different stories on the screen in a coherent manner? So she drew illustrations, which were then animated, and paired these with home videos shot by her family on Super 8 in the 1950s and more recent iPhone footage and other, staged material. The result is an impressionistic montage that evokes, in its philosophical openness and technical simplicity, Chris Marker's *La Jetée*. (Marker, funnily enough, had Anderson's "O Superman" on his answerphone for 20 years.)

Though *Heart Of A Dog* would become mawkish if Anderson dwelled solely on Lolabelle, the dog does provide moments of light relief. On "Lola Goes Blind", Anderson talks about Lolabelle losing her sight and teaching her to paint and sculpt and play the keyboard, as best one can. Whether through training or by fluke, Lolabelle plays freestyle jazz on the piano fairly competently – the YouTube clips are well worth a look.

Through Lolabelle, Anderson digresses and reflects on her own life, mixing candid observation and childhood memories with thoughts on surveillance and data (a familiar topic) and the contrasting Western and Eastern approaches to death and grieving. "The purpose of death," she realises, said in that mellifluous and comforting voice, "is to release love." Ultimately, in whichever medium she uses, Anderson's role as an artist is to tell stories and join the dots. On "Phosphenes" she muses, not unlike David Attenborough, on those stripes and squiggles you see when you close your eyes, describing them as "screen savers, holding patterns that just sit there so your brain won't fall asleep".

Later, in "Bring Her Some Flowers", she recalls a harrowing visit to a hospital to see her dying mother. "Listen," she tells a priest named Father Pierre, a converted Egyptian Jew, "I have a really big problem. I'm going to see my mother and she's dying, but I don't love her." Prepared for a tranquil reconciliation, she arrives to a scene of chaos in the ward, her mother dead. Beneath this tale seethes the kind of queasy sound design David Lynch uses in his films to invoke impending dread.

Perhaps you could say she's made the ideal album for this digital age: bitesize content packed with real depth and genuine emotion. Yet in many ways, removed from the context of the gallery or museum, *Heart Of A Dog* becomes Anderson's most satisfying and human work. There's something for everyone.

used drone-like keyboard and violin phrases that were kind of twisty. Once in a while I would put in songs or fragments of songs. But I did slap that together really quickly.

**It's impossible to watch Lolabelle playing the keyboard without grinning.**  
She loved music and basically music saved her life. But it was the only world available to her; she did not do well when she went blind. I wished that the castanets and bells she played had been part of the videos, because it was really pretty rhythmic. She played with both paws.

**What are you working on at the moment?**  
Right now I'm doing some work with Lou's archive. I have all of his things and I want to do some exciting projects. I mean, Lou's work doesn't need me to do anything – it's in the world, it's in people's heads, he's already there – but I do have these things I wanna put out there.

INTERVIEW: PIERS MARTIN

## Q&A

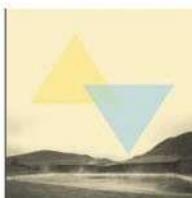
Laurie Anderson

### *Heart Of A Dog* is deeply personal but also totally universal.

It's not really about me and my life and my childhood and getting to know me as such. It's really about what stories are, why you have them and what you do with them. I like it when people make their own story from this, and I try to leave it open.

### How did you go about composing the music?

I cut the film and showed it to some people with just a voiceover, no music at all, and they all said: please don't put music on it. And I thought, well, wait a second, I am a musician, I can always take it off if I don't like it. I did the music super-fast. One thing I did was playing the violin along with the film and finding phrases that worked. I mostly



## SMALL TOWN JONES

### Sky Down To The Ground

DOMESTICO

Second album from singer-songwriter marinated in classic influences

**6/10**

That Jim Jones recorded his 2011 debut, *Freight Ships*, in Texas was a symbolic act of reverence to those who created the troubadour template. To record the follow-up in his native Devon may equally be interpreted as a statement – this time of a determination to be his own man on a set of songs of unpretentious honesty, the surface simplicity of the numbers disguising the skill of a genuine craftsman. Like a British equivalent of Ron Sexsmith, the likes of “Long Goodbye” and “Between The Lines” seem both intimate and universal, with an uncanny ability to sound as if you’ve always known and loved them.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



## SMOKE FAIRIES

### Wild Winter

FULL TIME HOBBY

Folk duo's dark seasonal fare

The latest work from Smoke Fairies' Jessica Davies and Katherine Blamire is a Christmas

**8/10**

album, but not in the traditional sense: you won't find sleigh bells or choirs of angels here. Instead, there's a sinister undertow to the likes of “Bad Good”, in which the pair take on the role of a disciplinarian Santa and ominously enquire, “Have you been good or have you been bad?”, and on “Christmas Without A Kiss”, a tale of thwarted love and paralysing solitude. Elsewhere there are tranquil covers of Captain Beefheart's “Steal Softly Thru Snow” and the Handsome Family's tale of alcoholic misery, “So Much Wine”. Safe to say *Wild Winter* is no Mariah-style bauble-fest, but it's all the better for it.

FIONA STURGES



## SOPHIE

### Product

NUMBERS

Provocative producer's collected singles on vinyl, CD and dildo (yes, really)

**7/10**

Under his Sophie guise, Samuel Long combines the colourful post-rave experimentalism of Rustie and Hudson Mohawke with the kawaii overload of J-Pop and Eurodance. His is a more subversive agenda, deliberately prodding accepted taste thresholds with a mischievous pile-up of corny house pianos, infantile vocals, crass bass drops and ultra-synthetic sounds designed to resemble popping bubble wrap or stretching rubber; tracks such as “Vyzee” and “Lemonade” seem to consist of little else. Yet with most evaporating at the three-minute mark, they never outstay their welcome or settle into anything as complacent as a groove, leaving nothing behind but a sugary residue and a feeling of faint violation.

SAM RICHARDS



## SOULSAVERS

### Kubrick

SAN QUENTIN

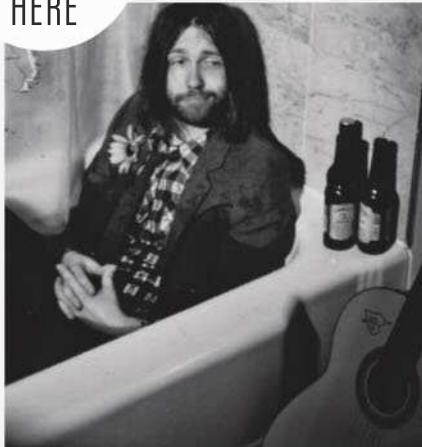
A spare odyssey: eight instrumentals inspired by legendary director

Following their recent collaboration with Dave Gahan on *Angels And Ghosts*, Soulsavers' Rich Machin and Ian Glover return with an evocative and cinematic instrumental album. Wrought from lush strings, woodwind, organ, guitar and occasional drums, each of these eight tracks is named after a character from the films of Stanley Kubrick (“Hal”, “Ziegler”, “Clay”), though you'd be hard pressed to fathom why. The musical themes are narrow and somewhat repetitive, but *Kubrick* duly delivers on atmosphere. “Joker” and “Mandrake” flirt with a rock dynamic, but in the main this is meditative, undemanding and pleasantly immersive stuff.

GRAEME THOMSON

## Aaron Lee Tasjan

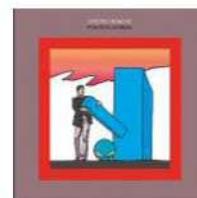
I'M NEW HERE



► “I have a habit of just letting things happen,” Aaron Lee Tasjan laughs, describing his career to date. An award-winning teenage jazz guitarist from Ohio, he turned down a Berklee scholarship to play his own music at 19 in the “terribly named” Americana band Autumn Under Echoes. He moved to Brooklyn in 2006 and joined glam-rockers Semi Precious Weapons, briefly managed by ubiquitous scene-setter BP Fallon, who introduced him to the New York Dolls. Tasjan joined them in 2008 and “it changed my life and wardrobe for the very best”, he says. He was soon also “trying really hard to sound like Tom Petty” in The Madison Square Gardeners. By 2013, he was in Nashville, inspired by country songwriters such as Blaze Foley and Lucinda Williams, celebrated on “Lucinda's Room”, a highlight on this month's solo debut album, *In The Blazes*.

“I identify with folks like Lucinda and Blaze,” he says, “because they'll be remembered by everyone. They never became Elvis or anything, but they have these amazing bodies of work. They're masters of their thing. Like them, I'd like to write a song that maybe somewhere along the way will be remembered. Not because it was a big hit, but because it said something true.”

ALLAN JONES



## STEEPLE REMOVE

### Position Normal

GONZAI RECORDINGS

Quietly thrilling “froguerock” from Normandy quartet

So, it turns out that the spooky post-rock

soundtrack to French supernatural drama series *The Returned* wasn't just performed by Mogwai. Several instrumentals were by this Rouen band, leading lights in the so-called “froguerock” scene. There are some hushed baritone vocals, sung in English and buried deep in the mix, but the most thrilling bits are instrumental. “Invisible Lights” is pitched between Gainsbourg and Morricone; “Mirrors” between Joy Division and Throbbing Gristle. Using eerie analogue synths, industrial rhythms and effects-laden guitars, they produce a wonderfully atmospheric soundtrack to an imaginary film that's both challenging and accessible.

JOHN LEWIS



## AARON LEE TASJAN

### In The Blazes

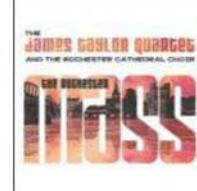
ROCKWOOD MUSIC HALL

Outlaw country solo debut from glam-punk veteran

Tasjan played with gaudy trash-rockers Semi

Precious Weapons and the New York Dolls before moving to Nashville in 2013 for a more self-effacing career as a country singer and guitarist with BP Fallon & The Bandits. His debut album's a gas. Opener, “The Trouble With Drinking”, recalls Willie and Waylon's outlaw prime, “Get Gone” and “\$66 Blues” are Sun-era rockabilly wig-outs, while “Bitch Can't Sing” hits a debauched *Exile On Main St* groove. Better yet are tributes to songwriters Blaze Foley and Judee Sill (“Lucinda's Room”, “Judee Was A Punk”) and the Tom Petty heartbreak of “ENSAAT”, the best train song since Dylan's “Duquesne Whistle”.

ALLAN JONES



## THE JAMES TAYLOR QUARTET

### The Rochester Mass

CHERRY RED

Acid-jazz pioneer hits an angelic groove

**8/10**

One might have expected a jazz setting of the Latin mass to utilise a gospel choir, but Taylor has instead boldly gone for a traditional church chorale, inspired by attending evensong at Rochester Cathedral while his father was dying. Given that such singing dates back a millennium and, as Taylor notes, has seen “no new developments for centuries”, the manner in which he coaxes the 40 choristers to sing with such groove is miraculous. With Fender Rhodes, flugelhorn, sax, flute and percussion adding an airy jazz-funk, the *Sanctus*, *Agnus Dei*, *Gloria* and *Kyrie* are decontextualised and reframed as an uplifting liturgy of boogie and beatification.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



## CHRIS TENZ Nails Through Bird Feet

SLOWWANK

Unsettling but enthralling electro-acoustic experiments

7/10

Despite some provocative titles – not least opening track “Cunty”, which boasts vulnerable acoustic guitars and a fractured vocal performance reminiscent of Will Oldham – Canadian-born, London-based Tenz’s second album is an occasionally soothing affair several years in the making. It was inspired by the slow decomposition of human memories, which perhaps explains his murky shifts in mood and style. On “Left Glimpses”, he mumbles tentatively over wheezing harmonium, and “Bethnal Green Cellar” offers cut-up vocals over an indistinct Flying Saucer Attack soundscape. The title track’s third part, meanwhile, climaxes like an early Sigur Rós rehearsal tape.

WYNDHAM WALLACE



## TIMMY'S ORGANISM Heartless Heathen

THIRD MAN

Excellent punk pounder from Jack White's label

8/10

Timmy's Organism is the latest vehicle for Tim Lampinen, a Detroit rocker who previously played with the excellent Human Eye. His new band are a power-punk trio equally adept at blasting out Clash-like anthems such as “Get Up, Get Out” or slowing down for the Reigning Sound garage-soul heartburn of “Please Don't Be Going”. Far more than hardcore thrashers – although snotty “Back In The Dungeon” is wicked call-and-response punk – the trio are possibly at their best when they stretch out for the changing rhythms of “My Angel Above”, which has a Pixies-esque sense of dynamics and drama tied to a driving beat.

PETER WATTS



## TINARIWEN Live In Paris: Oukis N'Asuf

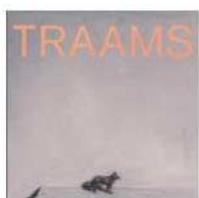
WEDGE

First live album by Mali's desert-blues sultans Recorded in December 2014 at the end of an epic 130-date world tour, the

7/10

title translates as ‘sweeping the blues away’, and road-toned chops and anticipation of desert homecoming combine to evince a mighty set from the world's favourite guitar-toting Tuareg rebels. Drawing primarily on their most recent studio album, *Emmaar*, the stinging guitar lines and camel-gaited rhythms rock with a heft that gets more thunderous as the set proceeds, spiced by the previously unrecorded sombre blues lament “Azawad” (about the Tuareg liberation movement) and a trio of exotic interventions by the 75-year-old matriarch Lalla Badi, ululating deliriously in the traditional desert style known as *tinde*.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



## TRAAMS Modern Dancing

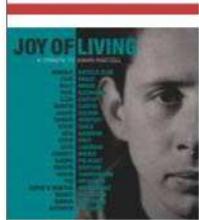
FATCAT

Chichester trio do the post-punk thing with uncommon exuberance and wit

7/10

While many of their post-punk-influenced peers prefer to replicate their ancestors' dour, shouty angularities, Traams exude a sprightlier disposition on this second collection of jagged bursts of noise and melody. Like the trio's impressive 2013 debut, *Grin, Modern Dancing* suggests they're just as smitten with Pavement's affably skronky early works as they are with any '80s touchstones. High-strung frontman Stuart Hopkins and cohorts maintain a hectic pace through standouts like “Succulent Thunder Anthem”, but the more complex dynamics in the title track and “Bite Mark” bode well for future developments.

JASON ANDERSON



## VARIOUS ARTISTS Joy Of Living: A Tribute To Ewan MacColl

COOKING VINYL

Varied cast of notables do fulsome honours to a Great British Songbook

8/10

For a perfect primer in the reach and variety of the MacColl songbook, this new tribute record is hard to beat. Superb interpretations from Damien Dempsey, Martin Carthy, The Unthanks and Seth Lakeman open this two-disc 21-song set, and span generations and subject matter. Thereafter, highlights both unexpected (Chaim Tannenbaum) and expected (Dick Gaughan, Christy Moore) abound. Jarvis Cocker delivers a delicious curveball with “The Battle Is Done With”, while Paul Brady adds fierce eloquence to “Freeborn Man”. Produced by family members, and benefiting folk and traditional courses at Newcastle University, it is a fitting tribute and resounding success.

GAVIN MARTIN



## WARM BRAINS Big Wow

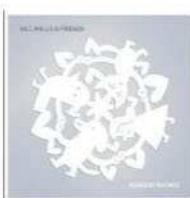
MILK MILK LEMONADE

Deft, smart indie pop from Test Icicles man Rory Attwell of the Test Icicles loves his wordplay, and this first

7/10

Warm Brains album since 2011 has a typically self-effacing title (it was originally called ‘All Hail Davey Cameron's Majestic Luncheon Meat Face’) that belies its serious intent. Attwell favours a new wavey/Supergrass jangle, occasionally laced with popping electro fizz on tracks like “Bewildered”, and loves to tease and prod both the mundanity and silliness of contemporary urban life. Highlights include the excellent “Now That I'm Boring”, which begins with a burst of vacuum cleaner, poppy charmer “I Pedal Faster” and the off-kilter anthem “Brain Inside A Jar”.

PETER WATTS



## BILL WELLS & FRIENDS Nursery Rhymes

KARAOKE KALK

Lateral thought rules in this curious crèche Bill Wells has a knack for making the familiar strange: his Christmas

8/10

album with the National Jazz Trio Of Scotland, for example, was one of the most quietly uncomfortable sets of ‘standards’ heard in a long time. *Nursery Rhymes* finds the weird in the predictable, taking songs such as “Oranges And Lemons” or “Humpty Dumpty” and reworking them, sometimes to devastating effect – sung by Syd Straw, “Oranges And Lemons” is now genuinely sinister. And while there's an all-star cast – Yo La Tengo, Annette Peacock, Satomi Matsuzaki of Deerhoof, Norman Blake of Teenage Fanclub – it's Wells' unorthodox vision that presides.

JONDALE



## WOLF EYES I Am A Problem: Mind In Pieces

THIRD MAN RECORDS

Detroit noise institution inks with Jack White's label; weirdness ensues

7/10

In 2004, Wolf Eyes raised eyebrows when it was announced they'd signed with veteran grunge label Sub Pop. Eleven years later, they repeat the trick – although in fact, there's much that links Wolf Eyes to Jack White: a tireless work ethic, a stubborn resistance to trends, a certain Detroit grit. “Catching The Rich Train” and “Asbestos Youth” offer an acrid mulch of Throbbing Gristle, free improv and The Stooges, with John Olson's wriggly woodwind adding a bit of souk flavour. As noise records go, it's a thing of relative restraint, and enjoyable in its own way: hear how the chewed-up Spacemen 3 drones of “Twister Nightfall” attain a sort of scuzzy euphoria.

LOUIS PATTISON



## YACHT I Thought The Future Would Be Cooler

DOWNTOWN

Fifth full-length from the LA conceptual duo

7/10

That the last two albums from Jona Bechtolt and Claire Evans appeared on James Murphy's DFA label was perfect positioning for their future-retro dance-pop dreams. Since 2011's *Shangri-La* they've changed labels, but their defining touchstones remain intact – a dose of Devo on “Hologram”, a touch of Talking Heads on “Ringtone”, lashings of LCD Soundsystem on “Miles And Miles”, and a burst of Blondie on “Don't Be Rude”. So far, so yesterday's news. But the way breezy, post-disco bubblegum hooks are juxtaposed with lyrics about matters such as the destruction of the planet is utterly engaging as their protest songs fuse profundity and parody in delicious fashion.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

“Bold, different and deserves  
to be seen by everyone.”

Wired



Total Film



Heat



Empire

“Ridiculously entertaining.”

Empire



Hello



Emma Bowden - OK



S Magazine, Sunday Express

“A masterpiece.”

Stuart McGurk - GQ

michael  
fassbender      kate  
winslet      seth  
rogen      jeff  
daniels

steve jobs

15

from director danny boyle and screenwriter aaron sorkin  
in cinemas now

LEGENDARY 

UNIVERSAL



SCORING: THE ORIGINAL ALBUM

10 Masterpiece

1 Poor!

SCORING: EXTRA MATERIAL

10 Untold riches

1 Barrel-scrapings

## Archive

REISSUES | COMPS | BOXSETS | LOST RECORDINGS



DEREK RIGERS

69

THE MAGNETIC FIELDS

## VINYL TRACKLIST

## LP1

- 1 Absolutely Cuckoo
- 2 I Don't Believe In The Sun
- 3 All My Little Words
- 4 A Chicken With Its Head Cut Off
- 5 Reno Dakota
- 6 I Don't Want To Get Over You
- 7 Come Back From San Francisco
- 8 The Luckiest Guy On The Lower East Side
- 9 Let's Pretend We're Bunny Rabbits
- 10 The Cactus Where Your Heart Should Be
- 11 I Think I Need A New Heart
- 12 The Book Of Love

## LP2

- 13 Fido, Your Leash Is Too Long
- 14 How Fucking Romantic
- 15 The One You Really Love
- 16 Punk Love
- 17 Parades Go By
- 18 Boa Constrictor
- 19 A Pretty Girl Is Like...
- 20 My Sentimental Melody
- 21 Nothing Matters When We're Dancing
- 22 Sweet-Lovin' Man
- 23 The Things We Did And Didn't Do

## THE MAGNETIC FIELDS

## 69 Love Songs MERGE

Stephin Merritt's finest three hours. By Stephen Troussé

9/10

POP HISTORY IS not littered with classic triple albums. *All Things Must Pass* and *Sandinista!* are solid doubles with bonus tracks already appended. *Yessongs* and *The Last Waltz* are souvenirs of epic live performances. More recently, Joanna Newsom's *Have One On Me*, at a mere 18 songs, sprawls rather languidly across three discs.

Which makes *69 Love Songs*, Stephin Merritt's magnum opus, now satisfactorily reissued on vinyl, a singular achievement. Approaching three hours of music, it amounts to a perverse, secret history of popular song, as viewed

from late-20th-century Lower East Side Manhattan, and was seen by many, on its release in September 1999, as a fantastical fin-de-siècle folly. *The Village Voice*'s Robert Christgau, in a moment of acuity, dispatched an earlier Magnetic Fields album with the aperçu "more songs about songs and songs" – an assessment Merritt himself appreciated. "*69 Love Songs* is not remotely an album about love," he said. "It's an album about love songs, which are very far away from anything to do with love."

So how has this brazenly self-conscious, self-promotional display of clever-dickery →



## TRACKLIST CONTINUED

### LP 3

- 24 Roses
- 25 Love Is Like Jazz
- 26 When My Boy Walks Down The Street
- 27 Time Enough For Rocking When We're Old
- 28 Very Funny
- 29 Grand Canyon
- 30 No One Will Ever Love You
- 31 If You Don't Cry
- 32 You're My Only Home
- 33 (Crazy For You But) Not That Crazy
- 34 My Only Friend
- 35 Promises Of Eternity

### LP 4

- 36 World Love
- 37 Washington, D.C.
- 38 Long-Forgotten Fairytale
- 39 Kiss Me Like You Mean It
- 40 Papa Was A Rodeo
- 41 Epitaph For My Heart
- 42 Asleep And Dreaming
- 43 The Sun Goes Down And The World Goes Dancing
- 44 The Way You Say Good-Night
- 45 Abigail, Belle Of Kilronan
- 46 IShatter

### LP 5

- 47 Underwear
- 48 It's A Crime
- 49 Busby Berkeley Dreams
- 50 I'm Sorry I Love You
- 51 Acoustic Guitar
- 52 The Death Of Ferdinand De Saussure
- 53 Love In The Shadows
- 54 Bitter Tears
- 55 Wi' Nae Wee Bairn Ye'll Me Beget
- 56 Yeah! Oh, Yeah!
- 57 Experimental Music Love

### LP 6

- 58 Meaningless
- 59 Love Is Like A Bottle Of Gin
- 60 Queen Of The Savages
- 61 Blue You
- 62 I Can't Touch You Anymore
- 63 Two Kinds Of People
- 64 How To Say Goodbye
- 65 The Night You Can't Remember
- 66 For We Are The King Of The Boudoir
- 67 Strange Eyes
- 68 Xylophone Track
- 69 Zebra

Merritt: "It's not an album about love. It's an album about love songs..."

'Melancholy Baby', based upon the chords of 'Melancholy Baby', made out of 'Melancholy Baby', having to do with 'Melancholy Baby' – commentary, exegesis, elaboration, and contradiction."

Merritt's gambit is that this exegesis and elaboration can be every bit as entertaining, amusing and even affecting as the most heartfelt performance of "authenticity". *"The book of love is long and boring..."* Merritt croons on one of the album's many self-referential mini-manifestos. In practice, and after all these years, *69 Love Songs* is anything but.

It's cliché to say that cynicism, irony and self-conscious sophistry are the barbed wire and booby traps protecting a sentimental heart. But you don't have to dig too deep into *69 Love Songs* to find staggering works of genius heartbreak. Two songs in, "I Don't Believe In The Sun" could be an Elton John track – if Elton ever fancied adapting Robert Burton's *Anatomy Of Melancholy* into a jukebox musical. It's followed by "All My Little Words", a kind of cut-glass Appalachian folk song, sung by LD Beghtol as though he were Oscar Wilde on his 1882 lecture tour of the US Midwest. It's also, Merritt says in the sleeve note interview with Daniel Handler, one of the "true" songs – that is, it describes a moment in a "real" relationship, with someone who describes themselves as "unboyfriendable". By overloading the song with ornate metaphor ("You are a splendid butterfly"), by giving it to Beghtol to sing, there's a fascination with a kind of musical alienation technique, seeing how far he can push the song and have it still remain... touching.

As Roland Barthes wrote in *A Lover's Discourse* (a kissing continental cousin of *69 Love Songs*), "To try to write love is to confront the muck of language; that region of hysteria where language is both too much and too little, excessive (by the limitless expansion of the ego, by emotive submersion) and impoverished (by the codes on which love diminishes and levels it)."

*69 Love Songs* is an austere cabaret, closer to Brecht than Rufus Wainwright, but for some people, the excess and hysteria, the "Busby Berkeley Dreams" of it all, is clearly too much. In one of the great modern instances of missing the point, novelist Rick Moody determined in 2003 to winnow out all the "show tunes" and cut down

→ endured over the past decade and a half? I admit to having little perspective on this: in our household, *69 Love Songs* is as ubiquitous as *ABBA Gold*. If you were to run the metrics on my personal listening over the last 15 years, aggregate the car-journey soundtracks, the iPod hours, the late-night singalongs and Sunday morning Spotify sessions, I'd wager that these songs would top my own 21st-century pop charts.

And that's because they're not (just) emotionally arid exercises in meta-pop. The American fabulist Donald Barthelme, whose *60 Stories* anthology is a funny West Village uncle of *69 Love Songs*, was similarly accused of writing bloodless metafiction. Elaborating on his aesthetic credo in 1987, he inadvertently invented Stephin Merritt: "Let us suppose that I am the toughest banjulele player in town and that I have been contracted to play 'Melancholy Baby' for six hours... There is one thing of which you may be sure: I am not going to play 'Melancholy Baby' as written. Rather I will play something that is parallel, in some sense, to

## HIDDEN TREASURES

### AN EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES: four more love songs from The Magnetic Fields

#### 100,000 FIREFLIES

*DISTANT PLASTIC TREES*, 1991

The Magnetic Fields' debut album was an almost psychedelic album of synthetic art-song, which came into focus on this track, sounding like Terry Riley producing ABBA, with Susan Anway singing what may still be the quintessential Merritt lines: "You won't be happy with me/But give me one more chance/You won't be happy anyway".

#### THE SADDEST STORY EVER TOLD

*THE WAYWARD BUS*, 1992

Merritt's second was a fresh take on the tired idea of perfect pop, reimagining the Phil Spector wall of sound as performed by an emphysemic synth orchestra. On this track, Anway once again proves

herself the perfectly deadpan non-interpreter of Merritt's magical nihilism.

### BORN ON A TRAIN

*THE CHARM OF THE HIGHWAY STRIP*, 1994

From their superb Kraftwerk-go-country concept album, Merritt's lugubrious baritone finds its perfect role as the ghost of Hank Williams: "Some roads are only seen at night/Ghost roads, nothing but neon signs/But some nights the neon gas gets free/And turns into walking dead like me."

### I LOOKED ALL OVER TOWN

*I*, 2004

Five years after *69 Love Songs*, the Magnetic Fields returned with the comparatively restrained, pseudo-autobiographical *I*. This ukulele plainsong, a kind of answer to Sondheim's "Send In The Clowns", was one of Merritt's simplest but most affecting songs yet.

the collection to *31 Love Songs*, to demonstrate that somewhere inside the profusion of the three discs there was a pretty tight new-wave rock album trying to get out. This is rather like insisting the construction of the Eiffel Tower is a tad too ostentatious, and would have been better off aspiring to a nice, modest 300 feet.

It also fails to recognise that *69 Love Songs* is, among other things, an acute piece of anti-rockist music criticism. Merritt has always maintained that the genre he is happiest working in is "variety" – that is, the full sweep of pop, from jug-band blues ("Xylophone Track") to cheerleader songs ("Washington DC"), from wartime waltzes ("The Night You Can't Remember") to magical-realist Highland murder ballads ("Wi' Nae Wee Bairn Ye'll Me Beget"). Which isn't to say that (a certain kind of soft) rock is beyond him: "No One Will Ever Love You" is an immaculate distillation of imperial-era Fleetwood Mac. Just that it's no longer the centre of the musical universe – rather simply another satellite of love in Merritt's rich conceptual orrery.

Before *69 Love Songs*, Merritt was known, if at all, as a composer of depressive, fabergé-egg synth-pop – immaculately constructed, perfectly useless music-box contraptions designed to break your heart. What's more, he was signed to Merge, then the earnest torch-bearer of US indie rock. *69 Love Songs* was the supremely audacious act whereby he willed a preferable context into being – imagined himself as a peer of Sondheim rather than Superchunk.

It was, of course, a trick that could only be pulled off once, and subsequent albums have emerged a little apologetically, each trailing a twinkling pretty standard or two, while Merritt continues to try to make good on his ambition of producing 100 Hollywood musicals. It may be that Merritt's genius is ultimately too eccentric, too perverse, too bleak to conquer modern Hollywood (though if "Hallelujah" can wind up in *Shrek*, clearly anything can happen). It may be that Merritt took a devastating creative advance on future achievements and is now spent. Never mind: *69 Love Songs* remains a matchless achievement – a career-spanning 'greatest hits' box that, spendthrift of genius, he somehow contrived to compose in one go.



## Q&A

### Stephin Merritt on whittling down 100 love songs to 69, and the decline of New York

**6** 9 LOVE SONGS originally occurred to you as a conceit to write 100 love songs. Do such concepts occur to you often? How many make it out of the notebook?

Sure do. Possible albums, musicals, books and movies occur to me several times in a typical night, along with one-offs in other media. The vast majority never get beyond my little notebook. For example, I imagine writing a superhero comic with punningly named characters drawn from idiomatic clichés: the observant Jew, the vanishing middle class, white flight, the gay mafia, the yellow peril, the ugly American, etc, with the appropriate superpowers. If I thought I was going to get around to doing this, of course I wouldn't tell you about it.

**What are your abiding memories of recording the album?**

Mostly I remember my minuscule wall space all covered in construction paper, in lieu of a project board.

**Was the audacity of the conceit a way of artificially re-creating the workload of an average Brill Building composer circa 1962?**

**Is such an environment**

**– hard work, focus, coffee, cigarettes – close to happiness for you?**

Yes... Except for the focus, coffee and cigarettes. My hard work involves daydreaming, alcohol and actual oxygen.

**You mention somewhere that around 50 songs were discarded – have any of them surfaced elsewhere?**

I think 31 songs were discarded, for various reasons. "The Sun And The Sea And The Sky", rejected for not being about romantic love, ended up on *Obscurities* [Merritt's 2011 compilation of B-sides, etc].

**Did you realise at the time that this was the record that would make your name, beyond the indie scene? Was global acclaim something you had dreamt of?**

Everyone famous quickly discovers that fame

and fortune are independent vectors.

**Are you surprised at how your songs have subsequently entered people's lives? Do you ever think people may have missed the point of a song?**

There is always the possibility that it is I who miss the point of a song. Playing "The Book Of Love" at a wedding sounds like a terrible idea to me, but it seems to be becoming a wedding standard. Whatever.

**How did you find listening to *69 Love Songs* again for the remastering?**

Every time we tour, I listen to all the records to choose material. I need to listen seldom enough that I can hear new things and be surprised.

**How do you feel about the vinyl revival in general? I imagine you as more of a CD person...**

Actually, I really miss cassettes.

**How important is the sequencing of the album? Is someone missing out if they listen to it on random on Spotify? I remember Lou Reed telling people to listen to his *New York* LP all the way through in the right order in one sitting – do you sympathise?**

He must have been in a mood. Almost any album since 1966 should be listened to that way.

**Do you have any sense of *69 Love Songs* as an album that was influential on other artists?**

Los Campos Magnéticos [the Argentinian trio who perform cabaret versions of Merritt's songs in the bars of Buenos Aires] are probably the best band in the world, but I don't know for sure, 'cos I haven't heard them all.

**Are you still living in LA?**

No, I moved three years ago. I still have a studio apartment in New York, but my house full of instruments is upstate. I desperately miss the silent-movie theatre, so don't be surprised if I move back.

**Have you found anywhere as conducive to writing as the gay bars of New York?**

I find many gay bars in the UK and the Netherlands very comfortable, too.

***69 Love Songs* feels to me like the last, perfect document of Lower East Side/East Village**

**New York culture. Would you agree?**

'Perfect' is exactly wrong, but I'm afraid you may be right about 'last'. Now there are joggers in the streets.

**Do you think *69 Love Songs* would work as a jukebox musical (à la *We Will Rock You* / *Mamma Mia*, etc?)**

I do think the idea is translatable into other media; that is not one of them.

**What was the last great song you heard?**

I have only recently discovered Ketty Lester. She has great material, and what comes to mind is a delightful song called "Lonely People (Do Foolish Things)".

**What was the last great song you wrote?**

"Why I Am Not A Teenager". It's not out yet.





## TRACKLIST

### CD1 *The River - Record One*

- 1 The Ties That Bind
- 2 Sherry Darling
- 3 Jackson Cage
- 4 Two Hearts
- 5 Independence Day
- 6 Hungry Heart
- 7 Out In The Street
- 8 Crush On You
- 9 You Can Look (But You Better Not Touch)
- 10 I Wanna Marry You
- 11 The River

### CD2 *The River - Record Two*

- 1 Point Blank
- 2 Cadillac Ranch
- 3 I'm A Rocker
- 4 Fade Away
- 5 Stolen Car
- 6 Ramrod
- 7 The Price You Pay
- 8 Drive All Night
- 9 Wreck On The Highway

### CD3 *The River: Single Album*

- 1 The Ties That Bind
- 2 Cindy
- 3 Hungry Heart
- 4 Stolen Car (Vs. 1)
- 5 Be True
- 6 The River
- 7 You Can Look (But You Better Not Touch) (Vs. 1)
- 8 The Price You Pay
- 9 I Wanna Marry You
- 10 Loose End

### CD4 *The River: Outtakes*

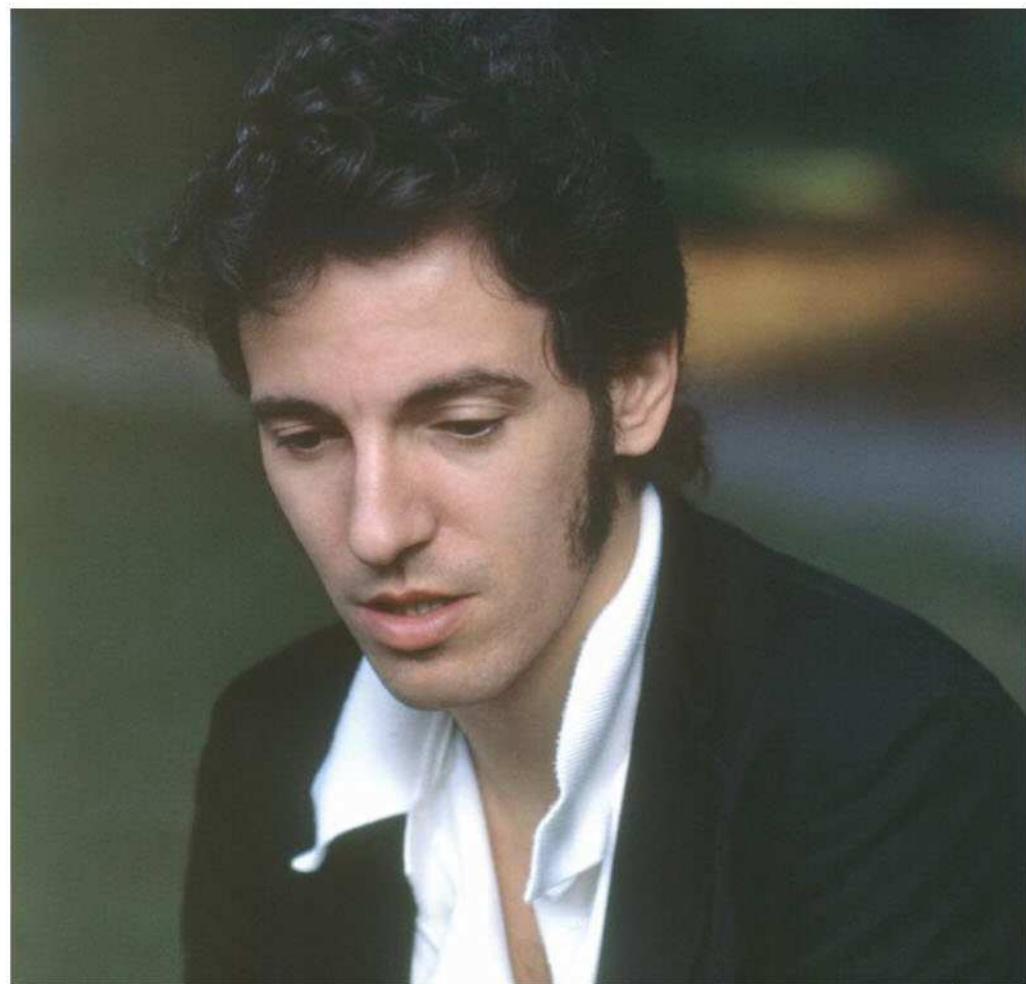
- 1 Meet Me In The City
- 2 The Man Who Got Away
- 3 Little White Lies
- 4 The Time That Never Was
- 5 Night Fire
- 6 Whitetown
- 7 Chain Lightning
- 8 Party Lights
- 9 Paradise By The "C"
- 10 Stray Bullet
- 11 Mr. Outside
- 12 Roulette
- 13 Restless Nights
- 14 Where The Bands Are
- 15 Dollhouse
- 16 Living On The Edge Of The World
- 17 Take 'Em As They Come
- 18 Ricky Wants A Man Of Her Own
- 19 I Wanna Be With You
- 20 Mary Lou
- 21 Held Up Without A Gun
- 22 From Small Things (Big Things One Day Come)

### DVD1 *The Ties That Bind* (Documentary)

### DVD2 *The River Tour, Tempe 1980* - 19 Tracks

### DVD3 *The River Tour, Tempe 1980* - 6 Tracks

### BONUS: *The River Tour Rehearsals* - 5 Tracks



# BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

## The Ties That Bind: The River Collection

COLUMBIA

The Springsteen curation continues with a forensic exploration of *The River*'s flood plain. By Graeme Thomson

**7/10**

ONLY THE INSATIABLE Bruce Springsteen, you feel, could

record a sprawling double

album that would one day prove to be merely the tip of the iceberg. Released in October 1980, unlike its predecessor, the finely wrought *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, *The River* made no attempt to sustain a mood or hold to a narrative through-line: the only story it tells is of Springsteen's sheer prolificacy. Even today, it's the album that comes closest to mapping the contours of his live show. Mixing carefree rockers, soulful testifying and solemn moments of contemplation, *The River*'s 20 tracks move from deep shade (the title track, "Stolen Car", "Drive All Night", "Independence Day") to knockabout romps such as "Ramrod", "I'm A Rocker" and "Crush On You".

All of which begs the question: do we need a hefty addendum to an album that already boasts its fair share of sidebars and diversions? Yes and no. This is a weighty document. As well as four discs featuring 52 tracks of audio material, *The Ties That Bind* includes a double-DVD film shot in 1980 at a concert in Tempe, Arizona, plus rehearsal footage and an hour-long documentary. There is also a 120-page coffee-table book.

Inevitably, not all of it is essential, but it helps immeasurably that *The Ties That Bind* is smartly thought out, and structured in such a way that allows three distinct records to emerge from the one that already exists.

Heard alongside Springsteen's considerable marginalia, the original version of *The River* – which takes up two of the four CDs – is subtly reshaped. The third disc comprises the first official release of *The River: Single Album*, much bootlegged and better known among aficionados as *The Ties That Bind*. This is the album that Springsteen completed in 1979 as the intended follow-up to *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, and which he eventually scrapped because he felt it lacked unity. He was wrong. It holds together very well indeed.

Seven of the 10 songs eventually appeared on *The River*. Some survived essentially unchanged, others feature alternate lyrics and notable shifts of mood and emphasis. "The Price You Pay" runs to six minutes and includes an extra verse, and there's a fine, razor-edged rockabilly version of "You Can Look (But You Better Not Touch)", on which Springsteen channels Jerry Lee. Of the three songs ultimately

dropped from *The River*, the unremarkable “Be True” and terrific “Loose Ends” ended up on *Tracks*, while the unreleased “Cindy” is a pretty, Buddy Holly-ish strum recounting a mismatched love affair.

The big reveal comes on the final disc of outtakes, comprising 22 tracks recorded in 1979 and 1980. Half of these were previously released on the *Tracks* boxset and *Essentials* album, but they speak more clearly returned to their original context. The extent to which Springsteen was being influenced by punk and new wave is evident on “DollHouse”, “Living On The Edge Of The World” – two parts Clash to one part Costello and the Attractions – “Where The Bands Are” and the messy, urgent “Held Up Without A Gun”.

The remaining 11 outtakes are unreleased rarities, some of which have remained off the radar of even the most dedicated bootlegger. They’re a mixed bag, yet even the slightest numbers have an exuberant appeal. Many are essentially genre studies. On “Little White Lies” the Boss does polka, complete with Cossack cries of “hoy!”, “Chain Lightning” is a rowdy rumble, Duane Eddy’s “Peter Gunn” hopped up on moonshine and shackled to spooky organ. “Party Lights” uses The Byrds’ “Feel A Whole Lot Better” as the starting point for a more downbeat exploration of the life of the working single mother who appeared in “I Wanna Marry You”.

It’s a fine thing to finally hear the studio version of “Paradise By The C”, the joyous soul instrumental until now only available on *Live 1975-85*, while “Mr. Outside” is a pleasingly ramshackle solo busk, bringing all this scattershot creativity back to the founding spark of creation. But these are, essentially, trifles. Occasionally, however, *The Ties That Bind* throws up a song that renders Springsteen’s decision to cast it into the wilderness all but inexplicable. “The Man Who Got Away” is a thumping potboiler, blurring the lines between cinematic derring-do and real-life transgressions. Better still are “Night Fire”, “The Time That Never Was” and “Stray Bullet”. These are A-grade Springsteen, fully realised, broiling with atmosphere and emotional heft.

So what are we left with? A handful of wonderful “new” songs, some interesting also-rans and alternative choices, and the sobering realisation that, in 1980, Springsteen could have released an entirely different double album from *The River*: a work not quite of equal quality, but still of a remarkably high standard.

## HIGH-WATER MARKS

### RIVER DEEP: FOUR HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE TIES THAT BIND

#### THE PRICE YOU PAY (Alternate)

Not a radical reinvention, but featuring a subtly altered arrangement, a more full-blooded vocal, and a third verse excised from the *River* version: “Some say forget the past, and some say don’t look back/But for every breath you take, you leave a track/And it just don’t seem fair, but for every smile that breaks/A tear must fall somewhere.”

#### NIGHT FIRE

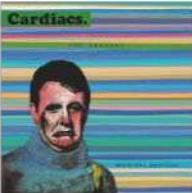
A dramatic tour de force, with strong echoes of “Because The Night”. Gentle minor piano chords lead to a wiry guitar motif. Negotiating a serpentine melody, Springsteen spells out a chilly warning to a woman running with a fast and dangerous new crowd: “Do you really get used to being bought and sold?”

#### THE TIME THAT NEVER WAS

A pained, slow-burning doo-wop ballad, with the E Street Band in full flood. Underpinned by Max Weinberg’s rat-a-tat drum tattoo, Springsteen delivers a terrific, deep-chested lament to “a past we can never touch”, while Clarence Clemons splits the song asunder with a trademark sax solo.

#### STRAY BULLET

A six-minute haunting, located somewhere between Van Morrison at his most Avalonian and a twilit murder ballad. “Over these dark hills I walk alone”, sings Springsteen, wandering from blood-red river to a vale of tears, ending in the place where a “stray bullet shot my baby down”. Rippling piano, ghostly soprano sax and halting organ dissolve into a searing guitar solo – and then darkness.



### CARDIACS

#### The Seaside (reissue, 1984)

ALPHABET BUSINESS CONCERN

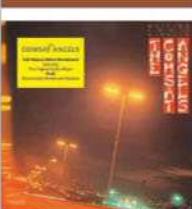
Breakthrough album by Blur’s deranged psych-punk uncles

7/10

The cult collective’s third album was the first to feature the classic lineup centred on brothers Tim and Jim Smith, and Tim’s wife, Sarah. The band cemented their visual image and mythic backstory in this period, when they began performing theatrical shows dressed like a howlingly insane Salvation Army Band. The key thing missing is the sheer musical force and focus that would characterise their sound... Much of *The Seaside* feels more twee and self-consciously arty than their operatically bizarre, novelistically rich later releases. Still, the raw ingredients for the full-blooded sound are here in embryonic form, in breakneck psych-pop gallops like “Gena Lolla Brigida”, the demented fairground cheerfulness of “Hello Mr Sparrow” or the stop-start music-hall waltz “RES”. The seething madness just below the surface of English middle-class suburbia is a recurring theme, with echoes of Syd Barrett, plus a few clear signposts to the future sound of avowed Cardiacs fans Blur. A significant inclusion here is the second recorded version of “Is This The Life”, a relatively conventional, gloriously tumescent anthem that would become the band’s biggest hit in its third incarnation four years later.

**EXTRAS:** Also available from [cardiacs.net](http://cardiacs.net) is a box 8/10 including cassette, badges, poster, art print and lyric booklet, plus a deluxe photo book containing previously unseen photography.

STEPHEN DALTON



### THE COMSAT ANGELS

#### Waiting For A Miracle/Sleep No More/Fiction/Chasing Shadows (reissues, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1986)

7/10

EDSEL

8/10

Bleak beauty from sidelined post-punks

7/10

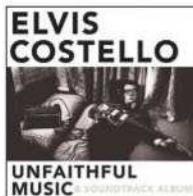
Formed in Sheffield in 1978 and named after a

JG Ballard short story, The Comsat Angels have been gradually shunted to the margins of post-punk history. Carried on the same gloomy swell as Joy Division and the Bunnymen, they never matched those successes, despite an eloquently abstract, strikingly monochrome sound. Their debut shows the band in identity flux, spiking Pil’s experimentation with Elvis Costello’s amphetamine punk, although it features their biggest hit, the driving “Independence Day”. A year later, *Sleep No More* – a statement of such monumental desolation its grooves might have been etched in marble, although the keys-driven skronk of “Another World” proves the band’s eccentricity. *Fiction*, from 1982, evinces a less severe sound, all pealing guitar codas and widescreen drama, save for the Floydian wild card that is “Pictures”. *Chasing Shadows* – co-produced by Robert Palmer – is packaged with 1990’s obscure *Fire On The Moon*, recorded when the CA were briefly known as Dream Command and is for devotees only.

**EXTRAS:** Each reissue comes with a disc of non-7/10 LP singles, demos and BBC sessions.

SHARON O’CONNELL





## ELVIS COSTELLO Unfaithful Music

UMC  
38-song soundtrack to Costello's memoir  
A dollar for every Costello mixtape made would make you rich: here's the man's own, collated to amplify

a memoir where, just possibly, he names the inspirations/muses/enemies that inspired his songs. It proves a potent collection, embracing some touchstones – “Alison”, “Oliver’s Army”, “Shipbuilding” – while not being a ‘greatest hits’. The first disc follows Costello from angry upstart (captured in Anton Corbijn’s cover shot) to accomplished songsmith, a useful guide through the entrails of his increasingly tortured ‘80s output. The selection from the last 25 years – eg, ‘94’s “London’s Brilliant Parade” – sounds breezy by comparison, partly as Costello spent less time with the Attractions, perhaps realising Steve Nieve’s cod-classic keys were doing his writing few favours. The many collaborations yield mixed results. Allen Toussaint’s sharp arrangement of “Truthful Mirror” finds his vocal powers wanting, as do sessions with Bacharach and The Brodsky Quartet. He’s more at ease in country company – his duet with George Jones on “Stranger In The House” was an early victory, and 2008’s “April 5th” (hitherto unreleased) with Kristofferson and Rosanne Cash is a real bonus. So, too are snatches of him reading outtakes from his book; witness his droll account of his time with McCartney. After all these years, he’s still tricky, still engaging.

**EXTRAS:** 1975 demo of “I Can’t Turn It Off”, close sibling of “Red Shoes”.

6/10

NEIL SPENCER

## CREAM The Singles 1967-70

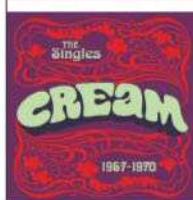
UMC  
Ten UK and US 7ins in lavish package and mono sound  
Current rock history has Cream nailed down as trailblazers of the

over-amplified, formless onstage jam, and “Spoonful”, the third single out of this handsome box, gives some warning of the live indulgencies to come. Yet their singles offer a different narrative for Jack, Eric and Ginger, in which polished, poetic art rock – “Strange Brew”, “...Brave Ulysses”, “White Room” – vies with the whimsy of “Anyone For Tennis”, “Pressed Rat And Warthog” and “Wrapping Paper”, the last a very odd introduction for a powerhouse trio (Baker loathed it). Somewhere between come “I Feel Free” and “NSU”, perfectly manicured three-minute pop songs with melody, mystery and an explosive power led by Clapton’s stinging Stratocaster. The anemic “Sunshine Of Your Love” sounds leaden by comparison. A live “Crossroads” works as a single, if only because of producer Felix Pappalardi’s ruthless edit, while “Badge” cuts a glorious counterpoint to the gruelling live work, spangled with Beatlesque harmonies (Harrison was co-writer) and loaded with end-of-’60s angst. The final single, “Sweet Wine”/“Lawdy Mama”, culled from *Fresh Cream*, shows how tired the triad had become, not least with each other. Even then, they always dressed with real pop panache. Remember them this way.

**EXTRAS:** Booklet.

4/10 NEIL SPENCER

8/10



NEIL SPENCER

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UMC  
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**EXTRAS:** Booklet.

4/10 NEIL SPENCER

8/10

NEIL SPENCER



## RICHARD DAWSON

### The Magic Bridge/ The Glass Trunk (reissues, 2011, 2013)

WEIRD WORLD

8/10

Folk expressionism from fine Geordie troubadour

Tyneside singer-songwriter

and guitarist Dawson is a highly distinctive voice on the UK’s alt.folk scene. Musically active in Newcastle since his teens, he really made waves with third LP *The Magic Bridge*, an earthy mix of finger-picked blues and experimental reconfigurations of the North-East folk tradition. With an emotional depth and (acoustic) discordance that sometimes nudges it into the mystic, it highlights Dawson’s vocal intensity and stylistic empathies with Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Mike Waterson and Kenyan guitarist Henry Makobi. Two years later, Dawson was invited by a local museum to use their archival material as a creative springboard. Sourcing old photographs, newspapers and an 18th-century scrapbook, he conceived *The Glass Trunk*, comprised of six vocal-only tracks interspersed with brief improv eruptions where his (electric) guitar goes head to head with Rhodri Davies’ electric harp. These noisy intervals are in striking contrast to the likes of “William And His Mother Visit The Museum”, which has a hypnotic quality despite its prosaic narrative, and “The Brisk Lad” – a lilting iteration of a Dorset traditional about sheep rustling, recorded by Waterson in 1971.

**EXTRAS:** None.

SHARON O’CONNELL

## HOW TO BUY... EELS

### Before and after DreamWorks



## E A Man Called E

POLYDOR, 1992

Leaving behind a best-forgotten homemade 1985 LP *Bad Dude In*

*Love - E* left Virginia for LA to make his fortune, but was close to 29 when he finally struck upon a marketable songwriting persona. The first of his two pre-Eels Polydor LPs, *A Man Called E*, proved gauche but slightly loveable.

7/10

## EELS Blinking Lights And Other Revelations

VAGRANT, 2005

Lacking a label when DreamWorks was bought out in 2003, Eels were picked up by another arm of Universal for this massive record: 2CDs or 4LPs on the absence of God and perverse beauty of existence. Very ‘eavy, very ‘umble.

8/10

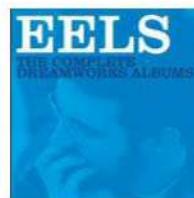
## EELS Wonderful, Glorious

VAGRANT, 2013

A conceptual triptych coinciding with the end of Everett’s marriage preceded Eels taking a few years off in the early 2010s, with the more muscular *Wonderful, Glorious* representing a return to the fray. ZZ Top grunt rock with shades of Prince purple.

8/10

JIM WIRTH



## EELS The Complete Dreamworks Albums

UNIVERSAL

ELPs: vinyl recap for Shrek-approved auteur

8/10

A singer-songwriter of the slightly over-excitable

school (see also: Loudon Wainwright, Robyn Hitchcock, Stephin Merritt), Mark ‘E’ Everett blossomed in adversity, as this recap of his peak years attests. He lost his physicist father as a teenager, while his damaged sister committed suicide days before the release of the first Eels album – 1996’s big-hitting *Beautiful Freak*. Those tragedies – and E’s mother’s losing battle with lung cancer – were woven into 1998’s off-kilter eulogy *Electro-Shock Blues*; E’s imagining of his adolescent sister quietly losing her grip on “3 Speed” is crushing; cathartic closer “P.S. You Rock My World”, a thing of cheesy cosmic beauty. The Virginian further digested being a one-man family on 2000’s widescreen *Daisies Of The Galaxy* – oddly picked out as too sweaty for kids by angry Republicans – and did his best to muster up a dark side on 2001’s *Souljacker*, before 2003’s slender *Shootenanny!* heralded a change of label. His billing as the Randy Newman of the Pro Tools age remains undiminished.

**EXTRAS:** Boxset buyers get an exclusive 7/10 vinyl version of the self-released *Electro-Shock Blues Show* live LP, recorded while supporting Pulp at their glum peak; piecemeal purchasers can obtain the five studio albums separately.

JIM WIRTH



## SERGE GAINSBOURG

### Casino De Paris (reissue, 1986)

UMC

The bawdy, modern-day Baudelaire’s late live set chronicled

7/10

Back in the mid-’80s, Serge Gainsbourg was enjoying a notoriety only matched by his imperial late-’60s period. 1984’s *Love On The Beat* saw the 56-year-old skilfully taking on the tropes of the decade to commercial success, even while he sang of sex, prostitution and incest, the latter in a duet with daughter Charlotte. His burning of a 500 Franc note live on TV in protest at high taxation that year only increased his standing as a bona fide rebel, the type of alcohol-soaked artist that looms so large in French culture. His Parisian gigs later that year acted as a kind of home run, then, with Gainsbourg and a crack team of sessioneers, including Billy Rush of the Asbury Jukes, running through much of *Love...* and selected hits. The band are sickeningly slick, yet Gainsbourg’s magnetic persona still wins out over the dated keys and brassy backing singers. “Initials BB” and “La Javanaise” receive strong makeovers, while “Nazi Rock” is powerfully swinging. The most charming moment comes when Serge abandons a Charlotte-less “Lemon Incest”, telling the crowd: “Charlotte has to go to school tomorrow, she has her homework to do.” When the crowd begin chanting her name, he coolly mutters: “No way, babies.”

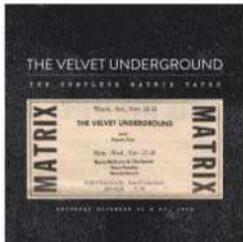
**EXTRAS:** Available on 2CD version with a live 8/10 DVD, while that and the 3LP version come with a 28-page book. *TOM PINNOCK*



# THE VELVET UNDERGROUND

## The Complete Matrix Tapes POLYDOR

The live motherlode from San Francisco, 1969. By Andy Gill



8/10

raging wild beast they had been during John Cale's tenure: a deliberate shift pop-wards had resulted in their third album, released earlier that year, surprising fans with its folksy understatement and uncharacteristically sentimental attitudes; and they were preparing material for another album, their first for Atlantic, hopefully following the new label's demand for a record "loaded with hits".

San Francisco's music scene, meanwhile, was still registering the queasy aftershock of the Manson Family Murders down the coast in Los Angeles. Most bands had already left the city, escaping to Marin County to avoid the huge influx of panhandling hippies and rubbernecking gawkers into the Haight Ashbury district. And a distinct shift in musical style had been signalled by the colossal success that year of local band Creedence Clearwater Revival, whose short, snappy little songs had scored them a run of hits through 1969 that included "Proud Mary", "Bad Moon Rising", "Green River" and "Fortunate Son". The Velvets might have been forgiven for thinking that their new, neatened-up, pop-conscious approach would chime nicely with the changing conditions: was it really that far, after all, from "Proud Mary" to "Sweet Jane"?

All the same, they opted to open their shows with the old warhorse "I'm Waiting For The Man", an echo of their earlier, darker inclinations. "It's going to be a very serious rock'n'roll set," Lou

WHEN THE VELVET Underground played San Francisco's intimate, musician-friendly club The Matrix in late November/early December 1969, things were changing both for the band and for the city's music scene. The Velvets were no longer the

Reed teased the audience amiably. "I don't want any of you to enjoy yourselves frivolously, because it goes against national policy. This is a song written under the influence of dreams, and it's about one man's journey from uptown to downtown." What follows is a very different version from the urgent, implacable motorik of the first Velvets album: a slow, languid affair sauntering past the 10-minute mark on the string-bending swoons of limp guitars, while Reed affects the casual, laissez-faire cool of a nightclub crooner. It's bizarrely devoid of impact, almost trance-like, as if the song has been strained through the aesthetic of the third album; and not for the first time during their shows at the venue, it's greeted initially with stunned silence, followed by a desultory smattering of applause.

It's a red herring, in a sense, as thereafter the shows develop an itchy momentum through nippy rockers like "What Goes On", "There She Goes Again" and "We're Gonna Have A Real Good Time Together", built on Sterling Morrison's frantic, choppy rhythm guitar, so feverish it almost trips over itself, and Mo Tucker's forceful, take-no-prisoners snare shots. Reed's guitar and Doug Yule's organ, when called upon to solo, pursue small



figures incessantly: compared to the expansive, freewheeling improvs the Matrix audience might be familiar with courtesy of such as the Dead and Quicksilver, the Velvets here are rudimentary and tight, disciplined rather than indulgent, and their performances hum with the new, minimalist aesthetic then developing a significant influence in New York art circles.

"I Can't Stand It" is another itchy, rhythmic piece that finds the band in transition en route to *Loaded*, with Reed's surreal, Dylanesque lines ("I live with thirteen dead cats/A purple dog that wears spats/They're all living in the hall/And I can't stand it any more") offering few semantic clues. But there's still room within the tight, itchy groove for Reed to essay an odd, modal guitar solo, through which his Ornette Coleman influence shines with a dark, confrontational gleam. You can sense the effect it's having on the band's chum Robert Quine, out in the crowd with his trusty cassette recorder, capturing it all for posterity. In a few years' time, Quine will apply these lessons in his own "skronk" guitar stylings for Richard Hell & The Voidoids, and for Reed himself.

Sometimes, they try a bit too hard, as when Reed yelps as he launches into his solo in "Sweet Bonnie Brown"/"Too Much", a pair of throwaway rockabilly-style songs featuring notably dull lyrics, about which his bandmates can barely hide the contempt in their desultory chorus responses. And two runs through "White Light/White Heat" are loose and raggedy, paradoxically rushed but stretched-out, the closest they come to losing their shape apart from the woefully wallowy "Ocean", which features some of the world's dullest organ soloing, and simply fails to command attention.

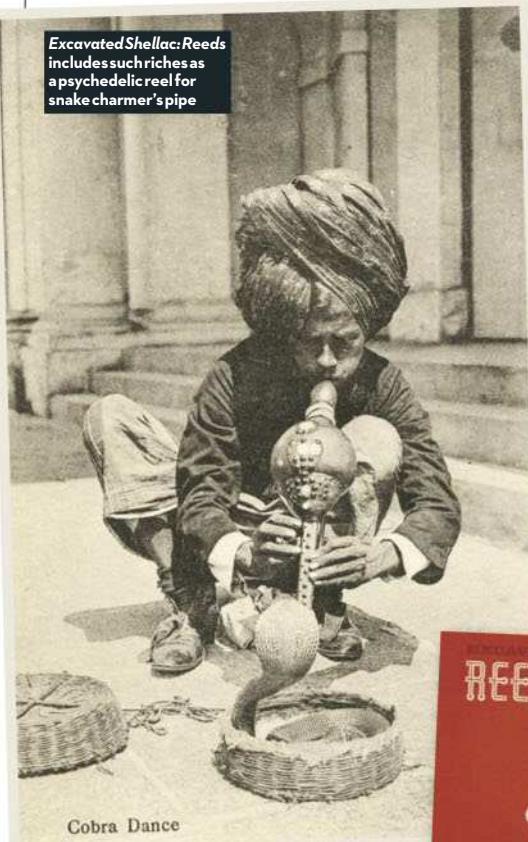
At other times, they are simply perverse, with a grim, antagonistic "Black Angel's Death Song" all too accurately summarised by Reed's smirking introduction: "This song we haven't played in a really long time, because it used to empty clubs – as a matter of fact, when a club wanted to close for a while it would get in touch with us to play this song." But overall, there's a good balance throughout the sets between innocence and experience, fast and slow, benign and malign. The four versions of "Heroin" have a mesmerising, queasy grace, and the two lashes of "Venus In Furs" are stately, majestic, dark and velveteen, like a high-class hooker's counterpane. The four versions of "Some Kinda Love" have a nodding, hypnotic momentum, with Reed again playing the worldly crooner; and there's a lovely formal, faded glamour to "Pale Blue Eyes" that balances beautifully with the sweetness of the ensuing "After Hours".

Substantial tranches of the *Matrix Tapes* have already appeared elsewhere, firstly in 1974 on the 1969: *The Velvet Underground Live* double album, and subsequently on 2001's *Bootleg Series Volume 1: The Quine Tapes*. More recently, Matrix recordings comprised two of the six discs of the 45th Anniversary Super Deluxe Edition of the Velvets' third album, including the 37-minute version of "Sister Ray" included here, which offers the clearest indication of how the band had changed since the departure of John Cale. Starting out slow and relaxed, speeding up, then dropping back and surging forward periodically, it grooves along like a standard jam session. But it's a far more measured acceleration and development than on the 1967 Gymnasium live recording included on the *White Light/White Heat 45th Anniversary Edition*: there's none of the original's architectonic quality, that sense of musical plates shifting under forces beyond their control. Those days were well and truly gone – and soon, so was Lou Reed himself.

# Rediscovered!

Compilations from the world's archives

**Excavated Shellac: Reeds**  
includes such riches as a psychedelic reel for snake charmer's pipe



Cobra Dance

► ONE OF THE outcomes of an extensive research project, *Bali 1928 - Anthology*:

**The First Recordings** WORLD ARBITER 8/10 pulls together highlights from five dedicated volumes of Balinese music, all taken from 78s released by Odeon and Beka. It's an incredible glimpse into pre-WWII music from Bali: the compositions feel more rough-housing than the gamelan often circulating in 'world music' circles, and vocal performances such as Ni Lemon's "Kidung Wargasari I", an incredible example of Wargasari poetry, tease out a different narrative arc for Balinese music.

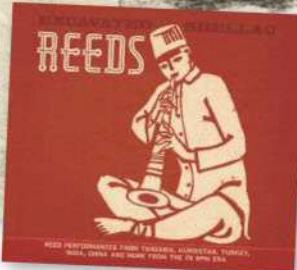
**Chekhov's Band - Eastern European Klezmer Music From The EMI Archives**

**1908-1913** RENAI 9/10 winds us further back, pre-WWI, and moves us across to the Russian Empire, where most of the recordings here were made. There's something quietly remarkable about the work done here – digging material out of the EMI Archives, compiler Julian Futter has pulled together a set that also captures the peculiarities of the early recording industry. Too many highlights here, but the lovely warp and weft of Titunschneider's clarinet on "Ukrainian Fantasy" and "Remembrance Of Zion" is particularly heartbreaking.

Dust-To-Digital have pulled off a coup with the return of collector Joe Bussard, whose new compilation, *The Year Of Jubilo - 78 RPM Recordings Of Songs From The Civil War* DUST-TO-DIGITAL 8/10, digs through his unbeatable archive of 78s and pulls out a generous clutch of sides – there's plenty to charm here, but several



Chekhov's Band - Eastern European Klezmer Music From The EMI Archives... Hasidic wedding musicians

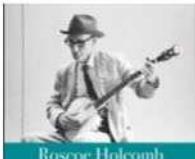
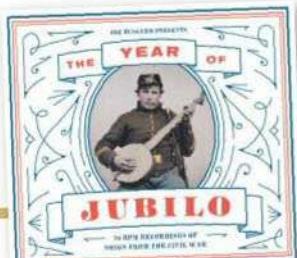


"Sweet Bunch Of Violets", by Virginian country music pioneer Ernest Stoneman.

With blogs often turning into repositories of found material, committed bloggers like Excavated Shellac's Jonathan Ward have hooked up with forward-thinking labels to document their discoveries more permanently. **Excavated Shellac: Reeds** DUST-TO-DIGITAL 8/10 is the second in an ongoing series (the first, *Strings*, has recently been reissued on CD) grounded around instruments, a welcome approach that shifts away from the confines of geography and thinks through the tonality of instrumentation, making unexpected connections and cross references at every turn.

Witness, for example, a breathtaking run of denuded songs, from Obdulia Alvarez's "Cantar Bien Neña", from northern Spain, through Jhande Nath's psychedelic reel for snake charmer's pipe, "Lahara Saamp Ke Masta Karneka", into the Kurdish dance piece, "Raqs Jooli - Aroosi" from Hoseynkali Was Roofakah. Crossing three decades, the '20s to the '40s, these selections all share a tough, flinty melodicism and a bright wildness that sketches in alternate relationships between styles of playing and modes of musical construction. It's breathtaking stuff, particularly for its refusal to settle into any pat, clichéd understandings of music from the international stage.

JON DALE



Roscoe Holcomb  
San Diego State Folk Festival 1972

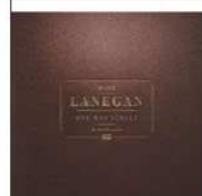
**ROSCOE HOLCOMB**  
**San Diego State Folk Festival 1972**  
TOMPKINS SQUARE

**Haunting Appalachia: enigmatic folk singer's first-ever live set**

**8/10**

As unique a musician as ever graced a stage, Daisy, Kentucky native Roscoe Holcomb inhabited the deepest, darkest fathoms of the Kentucky backwoods and 20th-century roots music. Though his so-called "high lonesome sound" borders on bluegrass, in truth his style and repertoire – folk, blues, country, trad and myriad other hybrid forms of old-time music – defy compartmentalisation. On this exceptionally strong live set, it's as if he's beaming in a signal from an alien planet – music born of isolation, untouched by the tiniest glint of modernisation – Holcomb setting the foundation with rhythmic, rambling banjo and overlaying it with vocals stoic, tense, yet wildly untethered. "Hook & String" is musically emblematic; with brain-rattling, clawhammer-style rhythms and scat vocals, it's a signpost, a workout. "Graveyard Blues" is anything but, though. Given a playfully ironic, even creepy, underlying melody, Holcomb's wailing tenor conveys a disquieting tale, its protagonist waking to find a loved one dead. The set's twin killers are the death-laced "Across The Rocky Mountain", a fingerpicked Holcomb original, and "Wandering Boy", a spooky Baptist hymn sung a cappella, Jean Ritchie keeping pace with chillingly improvised harmonies.

**EXTRAS:** Liner notes by John Cohen.  
**6/10** LUKE TORN



**MARK LANEGAN**  
**One Way Street**  
SUB POP

**The prolific singer's sporadically available Sub Pop oeuvre in one box**

**8/10**

It's difficult to recall now how unlikely Lanegan's solo career seemed at the time. Not unlikely as a career move in itself – restless singers work outside of their bands all the time, and proto-grunge noiseniks Screaming Trees clearly had their limitations. But unlikely in its tone – sombre, reflective, statesmanlike, a solemn world away from the Trees' deadpan headbanging, Lanegan evolving into the grunge era's Tim Hardin or Townes Van Zandt. This set collects the five albums Lanegan made for Sub Pop between 1990 and 2001, all either/both long deleted or never previously available on vinyl: *The Winding Sheet*, *Whiskey For The Holy Ghost*, *Scraps At Midnight*, *I'll Take Care Of You*, and *Field Songs*. Two defining traits are noticeable, both to Lanegan's credit. One is a facility for attracting clearly admiring collaborators, including Nirvana's Kurt Cobain, Mudhoney's Dan Peters, Gun Club's Jeffrey Lee Pierce and Guns N'Roses' Duff McKagan. The other is that the albums get better as he goes along: by the time he reaches 2001's *Field Songs*, via the clearly instructive 1999 covers album *I'll Take Care Of You*, Lanegan's songs are as rich, sonorous and resonant as his voice.

**EXTRAS:** None.  
ANDREW MUELLER



## LUSH Chorus 4AD

Recently reformed shoegazers dust down their back catalogue Blending brooding, feedback-smothered guitars with sweet pop

**7/10**

songs, Lush were an integral part of the early '90s shoegaze scene, even though the spotlight was more often to be found on Ride and My Bloody Valentine. Where MBV were determinedly difficult and therefore, to many ears, more interesting, Lush's sunnier disposition ensured a measure of accessibility, not to say ambition, which increased as their career progressed. This progression is neatly plotted in this shiny, five-disc retrospective, which, as well as underlining the low points (notably *Topolino*, a set of B-sides and rarities from their later period), highlights the many gems, most of which are concentrated on their first two albums: 1992's *Spooky* (featuring the near-perfect "Sweetness And Light") and 1994's *Split*, a blistering yet dream-laden solidifying of their sound. The resemblance of their early songs to the Cocteau Twins is no coincidence, given Robin Guthrie's role as producer on *Spooky*, Miki Berenyi's vocals set against waves of violent distortion to create a perfect storm of fragile melancholy and muscular noise. While Lush may not have the legacy or the credibility of MBV, *Chorus* shows that they are more than worthy of re-examination.

**EXTRAS:** Comes with previously unreleased **7/10** demos, radio sessions and remixes.

**FIONA STURGES**

## DAVID LYNCH & MAREK ZEBROWSKI

### Polish Night Music (reissue, 2007)

SUNDAY BEST

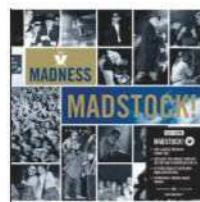
**6/10**

Director's dark ambient duets in expanded vinyl and digital format

Originally issued in 2007 with a sleeve instruction to "play after dark", Lynch's album of improvised collaborations with Polish composer and concert pianist Zebrowski grew out of the director's impenetrably bizarre 2006 movie *Inland Empire*, partly shot in Poland. These four lengthy sound paintings are all called "Night", followed by an individual subtitle suggesting location and tone. Spooked minimalism is the defining mood, each track rooted in drawn-out minor-key synth drones from Lynch sprinkled with spare piano droplets by Zebrowski. "Night (Interiors)" and "Night (A Woman On A Dark Street Corner)" are the richest in terms of tonal shifts and jazzy keyboard flourishes, the latter evoking the melancholy beauty of Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki, who featured on the *Inland Empire* soundtrack. The bonus digital download contains four more variations on the formula, recorded live in Poland in 2006, which are a little more conventional but also more dramatic and lyrical. The overall effect is disquieting, even though it feels as if the Inland Emperor is wearing no clothes in places. Sometimes those deep, late-night shadows contain monsters; sometimes just more shadows.

**EXTRAS:** Vinyl features a code to download *Live At The Consulate General Of The Republic Of Poland*, recorded in 2006.

**STEPHEN DALTON**



## MADNESS Madstock! SALVO

Nutty Boys' glorious 1992 reunion show with bonus tracks and DVD

**8/10**

In an era in which spectacular reunions are announced almost daily, it's easy to forget the excitement and sense of surprise that greeted the return of Madness, who had disbanded six years before this reformation concert at Finsbury Park in 1992. Over a warm August weekend, 70,000 fans danced so fervently they caused a minor earthquake. The concert LP has been released a few times since then, with this 22-song version on Salvo containing four bonus tracks, plus an accompanying concert DVD. It's a warm-hearted, entertaining affair, with the band in sparkling form and Suggs' vocals bolstered on every song by the boisterous crowd. A lively "Shut Up" is one highlight and there are also superb versions of "Wings Of A Dove", "Grey Day" and "Night Boat To Cairo". The concert kicked off a vibrant second life for Madness, one in which they finally received their critical due, and *Madstock!* is great fun, but it's a shame that the full unedited concert hasn't yet been released – the four sharp-sounding bonus tracks are tacked on the end rather than restored to their original positions in the gig – as well as performances from the other acts on the bill, which included Ian Dury and, briefly, Morrissey.

**EXTRAS:** Four bonus tracks, concert DVD, **7/10** updated sleeve notes with new photographs and interviews.

**PETER WATTS**



## CASS McCOMBS A Folk Set Apart DOMINO

Great set of remastered exhumations on label exit

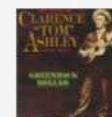
**8/10**

The subtitle of this compilation is "rarities, B-sides and space junk, etc", and it's the last part of that description that's telling. There's always been something of the cast-off and non-precious to many of McCombs' songs, which you might ascribe to the fact that he's been itinerant for much of his adult life. But although best known for splicing grungy Americana with country soul, traditional folk/blues and '60s R'n'B, he's a punk at heart, so a crank-'em-out roughness is innate. As the title indicates, this certainly isn't a folk set in the usual sense. Alongside the garage hammerings of "I Cannot Lie" and "AYD" and the sweetly naïve "Three Men Sitting On A Hollow Log", sit the '60s beatnik swing of "Traffic Of Souls", experimental oddity "Texas" (co-written and featuring Phish's Mike Gordon) and a chunk of flanged psych-pop called "Empty Promises". Standouts of the emotionally potent kind are the epic "Twins", whose damaged, slo-mo majesty nods at Lennon and '70s Elton, the organ-driven "If You Loved Me Before?" and a truly haunting "Old As Angry". It's a mixed bag in the best, revelatory sense, although fans will already have their eye on McCombs' future and (hopefully) an eighth album.

**EXTRAS:** None.

**SHARON O'CONNELL**

## HOW TO BUY... APPALACHIAN MUSIC Banjos, ballads and beauty



### CLARENCE ASHLEY Greenback Dollar: The Music Of Clarence "Tom" Ashley

COUNTY RECORDS, 2001

Ashley's small, concentrated body of work is a powder keg. "House Carpenter", "Little Sadie", "Dark Holler", all delving deep into the US psyche, aided by the clip-clop of Ashley's astounding five-string banjo, are darkly gripping.

**8/10**

### DOCK BOOGGS Country Blues: Complete Early Recordings (1927-1929)

REVENANT, 1997

Spidery banjo blues forge fatalistic tales of crippling loss, deceit and murder – a paragon of the depths of human existence capable of being depicted in music. "Oh Death", with the protagonist imploring for one more year on the planet, and "Pretty Polly", a terrifying murder ballad, top an impeccable catalogue.

**8/10**

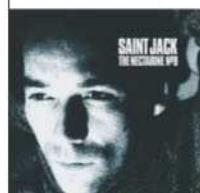
### CARTER FAMILY In The Shadow Of Clinch Mountain

BEAR FAMILY, 2000

With their intricate harmonies, impeccable musicianship and seamless repertoire, the Carter Family are perhaps America's musical Mount Olympus. From their Bristol Sessions beginnings to their latterday country ballads, they remain hugely inspirational.

**8/10**

**LUKE TORN**



## THE NECTARINE NO 9

### Saint Jack (reissue, 1995)

HEAVENLY

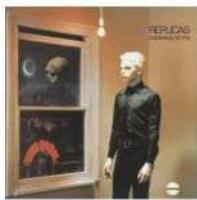
**9/10**  
Former Fire Engines frontman's magnum opus, enhanced

Davy Henderson has spent a lifetime on the fringes, achieving influence (but no great commercial success) with Fire Engines, Win and his current vehicle The Sexual Objects. The Nectarine No 9 were formed after the demise of the sardonically commercial Win, and *Saint Jack* remains their most rounded album. Originally released in 1995, towards the end of the second iteration of Alan Horne's Postcard label, it catches Henderson in pensive mood, musing on the death of his parents on the gorgeously strung out "Un-Loaded For You", which opens like a reboot of *Loaded*-era Velvet Underground, and catches fire halfway through. Henderson has alluded to the influence of Dylan and Iggy Pop on the sound: Dylan is hard to spot (Henderson sounds, as ever, like a Beat incarnation of Marc Bolan), but the relentless rhythms of Berlin-era Iggy colour the closing "Take Your Head On" and the title track. Poet Jock Scot adds guttural colour on the cascading "Just Another Fucked Up Little Druggy On The Scene", and Henderson sounds unusually tender on the penultimate "Clipped Wings & Flower Strings".

**EXTRAS:** Bonus CD of Peel sessions, including

**8/10** a lovely reworking of Jackson Browne's "These Days" (via Nico).

**ALASTAIR McKAY**



**GARY NUMAN/TUBEWAY ARMY**  
**Replicas/The Pleasure Principle/Telekon (reissues, 1979, 1980)**  
**BEGGARS ARCHIVE**

**7/10**

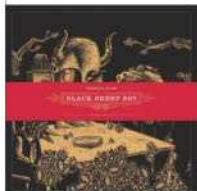
**8/10** Numan's key records: synths to the front

**8/10** While the success of Gary Numan was made possible by punk's socio-cultural

rupture, he was early in casting the net beyond punk's year-zero policy: with blanched features and detached air, Numan was a near-perfect melding of Kraftwerk, David Bowie and John Foxx. Tubeway Army formed in 1977, and their 1978 debut was indistinct and underwhelming. But the more Numan harnessed the power of synthesis, the better the songs. The monophonic synthesiser simplified his writing, all huge riffs that swarm around Numan's nasal voice. *Replicas* is a transitional album – you can hear the Tubeway Army being edged sideways during "Me! I Disconnect From You" and "Are 'Friends' Electric?"'s thrilling rush. Going solo on *The Pleasure Principle*, Numan wrote his most memorable hit, "Cars", and other time-warping songs like "M.E." (sampled by Basement Jaxx on "Where's Your Head At?"), but kept bass and drums live, to give his songs rock's heft. *Telekon* is the real surprise here – it has aged remarkably well, reaching a space of melancholic mourning across "Remember I Was Vapour" and "Please Push No More", the ice man cracking under pressure.

**EXTRAS:** Additional tracks on *Telekon*.

**3/10** JON DALE



**OKKERVIL RIVER**  
**Black Sheep Boy (reissue, 2005)**  
**SECRETLY CANADIAN**

**7/10**

**Obama-endorsed Texans' hefty anniversary special**

You might think any band so keen to assert their kinship with Tim Hardin they took the name of one of his songs for an album title, opened with a cover of it and also built an entire concept around that song, would be on shaky ground. But the career-defining third from Austin country/folk-leaning alt-rockers Okkervil River has an identity very much its own. Full of troubled souls and simmering with turbulence, Will Sheff's songs are articulate and vividly imagistic, his band – expanded to umpteen players on pump organ, analogue synth, mandolin, viola and more – suggesting an affinity with Buffalo Tom, Bright Eyes and The Hold Steady. Sheff's voice has an anguished urgency that can tip into oversinging, but there's no denying the emotional impact of "A Stone", where he plays the role of vulnerable tough guy, the intriguingly impressionistic "In A Radio Song" and (especially) "Get Big", where he trades lines with guest Amy Annelle in a snapshot of domestic discord.

**EXTRAS:** "Black Sheep Boy Appendix", an EP of rejigged outtakes from the original sessions, plus brand new material and *There Swims A Swan*, a previously unreleased full album of covers of American folk standards, including a sweetly creaky "Goodnight, Irene".

**SHARON O'CONNELL**



**THE ALAN PARSONS PROJECT**

**The Turn Of A Friendly Card (reissue, 1980)**  
**SONY**

**6/10**

**Deluxe 35th-anniversary reissue of prog landmark**

The post-punk years of the late 1970s/early 1980s were a surprisingly golden era for prog-rock grandstanding, from ELO and Supertramp to Asia and the Alan Parsons Project, all of whom continued to conceptualise earnestly as if the insurrection had never happened. Released in 1980, Parsons and co-writer Eric Woolfson's fifth album was based loosely on the notion of the casino as the corrupted cathedral of the modern world and gave them a platinum album in America, where its Vegas-as-celestial-city-of-sin theme hit three cherries on the slot machine. Musically, the formula involved layering otherwise simple song structures with synths, brass, harpsichord, clavinet and strings (and even a Morricone whistle on "Gold Bug"), adding theatrical dynamics and tricky time signatures and topping the confection with cod-philosophising lyrics about time "flowing like a river", etc. Yet if you don't take the record as seriously as it takes itself, it has its undeniable moments as a plagiaristic amalgam of all your favourite Genesis/Floyd motifs.

**EXTRAS:** Second disc of home demos and guide  
**3/10** vocals that sound as if they were recorded on a cheap cassette machine, plus radio edits of "Games People Play" and "Time", both of which were US Top 20 singles.

**NIGEL WILLIAMSON**



**SIMPLE MINDS**  
**Once Upon A Time - Deluxe**  
**VIRGIN EMI**

**Bloated reissue of 1985 US breakthrough**

Released on the heels of *The Vinyl Collection 79-84*, a boxset of their estimable early records in 180g remastered form, this 5CD reissue of Simple Minds'

1985 album lingers laboriously on what happened next. Following the more muscular *Sparkle In The Rain* and US No 1 "Don't You (Forget About Me)", on *Once Upon A Time* Simple Minds embraced the scale and excesses of stadium rock. It's a strange affair, the sound of a band simultaneously hitting their stride and losing their way. Half of these eight tracks were hit singles, including "Alive And Kicking" and the propulsive "Ghost Dancing", essentially "I Travel" on steroids, but only "Oh Jungleland" and "Come A Long Way" harness the simmering atmospherics of old. The rest is efficiently mustered transatlantic pop-rock, reinforcing the impression that when bassist Derek Forbes left in 1984, he took something precious with him.

**EXTRAS:** There's no lost treasure among the **4/10** 39 additional tracks. Discs Two and Three offer a wearying diet of instrumental versions, live B-sides, extended and alternate mixes, while the final two discs comprise 1987's concert album *Live In The City Of Light*, a blustery 16-track affair on which everything is slowed down and stretched out.

**GRAEME THOMSON**

## REVELATIONS

Will Sheff on why *Black Sheep Boy* was almost his swan song



► Will Sheff readily admits that Okkervil River's *Black Sheep Boy* was written and recorded as a possible last creative hurrah. "I felt like I'd hit a wall," he explains. "I'd been grinding it out on tour to the point of endangering my health and sanity, but I wasn't getting a sense that the work I was doing was having any effect on people. I figured if no-one paid any more attention to this album than they had to my previous two, I'd at least go out on what felt to me like an artistic high note."

As for using Tim Hardin's song as conceptual glue, it wasn't about love of the track, per se: "It was like I lived in a house that had a strange keyhole and I never thought anything of it, then one day somebody handed me a key. That's how hearing 'Black Sheep Boy' for the first time felt." In terms of the recording process, Sheff opted for simplicity. "I wanted these songs to synthesise what I'd learned from folk music, but take it to a new place. There's an earthy and simple quality to *BSB* that I find myself coming back to these days."

**SHARON O'CONNELL**



**FRANK SINATRA**  
**A Man And His Music (reissue, 1965)**  
**UNIVERSAL MUSIC**

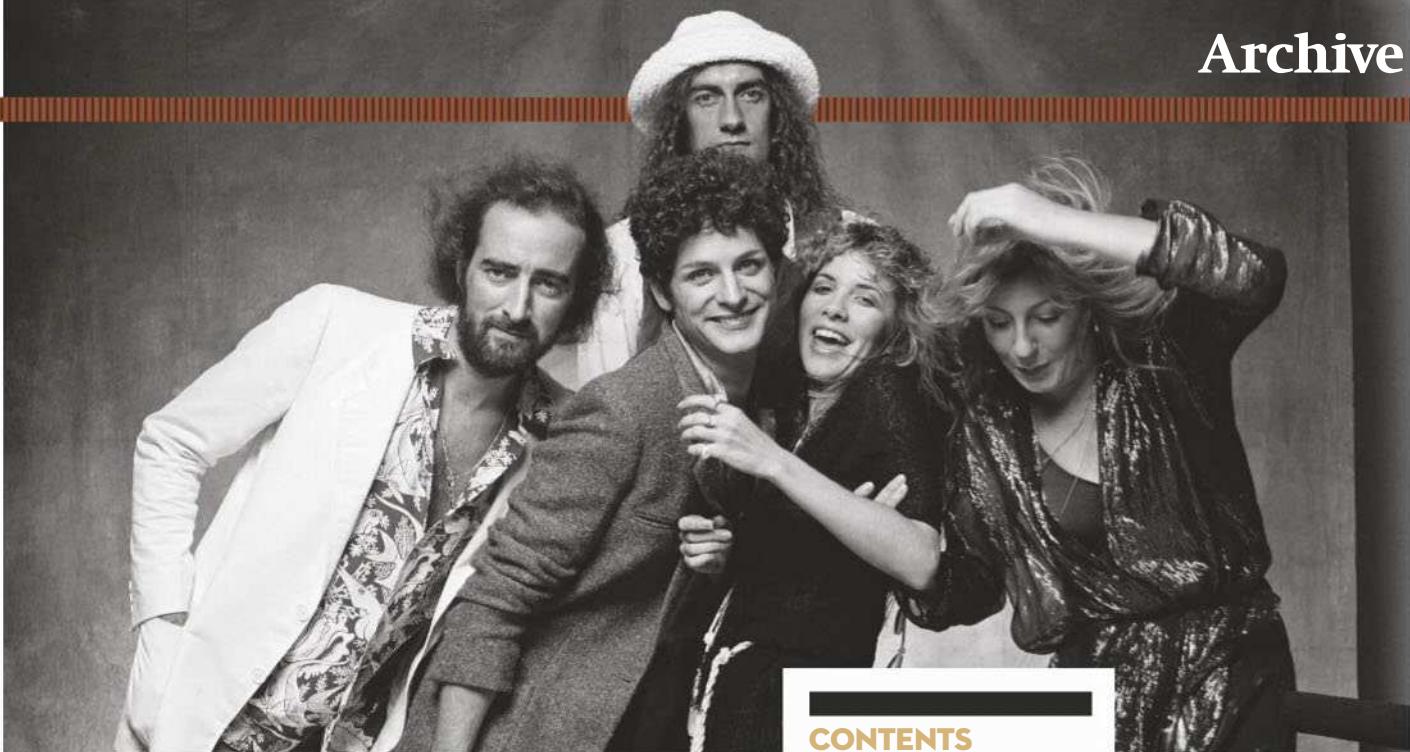
**Ol' Blue Eyes narrates his career over two LPs**

In his 50th year, Sinatra's work rate remained frenetic, releasing four

LPs in 1965. Three have just had the deluxe vinyl treatment: *Sinatra '65* features contemporaneous singles with a pop-radio-friendly backbeat and a rather off-putting choir; *September Of My Years* is a downtempo collection wreathed in strings by Gordon Jenkins. Weirdest of all, though, is *A Man And His Music*, a double album revisiting his '40s and '50s hits made for RCA, Columbia and Capitol. Sinatra's own label, Reprise, thus had to re-record them, with arrangements that are, by turns, zippier, more luscious and more quizzical than the originals. There are also between-song narrations, where Sinatra explains how he learnt vocal phrasing and breath control from bandleader and trombonist Tommy Dorsey ("Old TD could blow that thing a whole week on one tank of air") and pre-empts criticisms of his ring-a-ding-ding delivery ("Don'tcha just hate these singers who take a tender, poignant love song and shoot it full of adrenaline?"). There's also the Rat Pack goofing around onstage in Vegas and – best of all – the epic, eight-minute aria "Soliloquy" from *Carousel*, where Sinatra's young scallywag narrates his own mental breakdown as he ponders what kind of son – or daughter! – he might have.

**EXTRAS:** None.

**JOHN LEWIS**



# FLEETWOOD MAC

## Tusk (Deluxe Edition)

RHINO

The Mac's experimental masterpiece, rebooted. By Jon Dale



**8/10**

by the songwriting trio of Lindsey Buckingham, Christine McVie and Stevie Nicks, and completed by rhythm section John McVie and Mick Fleetwood, refused to rest on laurels – especially Buckingham, who'd been listening to post-punk and new wave, later telling *Uncut* that this new music had offered him “a little room to deprogram and reaffirm things – to retrieve my own style”.

The outcome was 10 months in the studio, costs of around one million dollars, and an album that McVie herself once described as “very different, very Lindsey Buckingham”, and which Buckingham recently told critic Jen Boyles was “the most important album we made, but only because it drew a line in the sand that for me defined the way I still think today”. But painting it as Buckingham's baby (soon after its release, when it was clear it wouldn't repeat the success of *Rumours*, it was referred to as ‘Lindsey's folly’) does grave disservice to the group's two other songwriters, who met Buckingham's experiments with more subtle, yet no less effective, sideways steps.

On *Tusk*, McVie embraced an ambiguity that she never quite articulated before or since: the album's opener, “Over & Over”, begins as though it's suspended in mid-air, a music always in the process of becoming, while the song's protagonist sketches out uncertain emotional territory. Nicks contributes the album's most resonant, Mac-esque songs – several of her classics appear on *Tusk*, including the

FEW MULTI-MILLION-SELLING albums, grounded so thoroughly within the MOR landscape, puzzle more than Fleetwood Mac's 1979 double album, *Tusk*. The stories of its reception are well known. After the wild success of *Rumours*, the five-piece, led

breathtaking “Sara” (which gains a few minutes of aquatic drift on the alternate version on Disc Three of this deluxe edition, more of which later), and one of her most epic melodramas, “Sisters Of The Moon”. But it's fair to say the album's legend rests on the wildness of Buckingham's experiments, such as curiosities like the taut elastic snap of “The Ledge” or the modular drum tattoos of “Tusk” – the album's most experimental song, it was, tellingly, released as the lead single.

From here, the deluxe edition stretches out, firstly with a disc of single versions, remixes and studio sessions. The former are flotsam – truncations or minor alterations that ultimately flag how deceptively consummate *Tusk* really is, as a strongly conceptualised, archly constructed double album. More compelling are the studio sessions, particularly when we reach Buckingham's material, from a bluesy twist around “Out On The Road”, which would eventually become “That's Enough For Me”, through to multiple versions – six of “I Know I'm Not Wrong”, five of “Tusk” itself – from sessions across 1978 and 1979.

The various takes of “Tusk” simply further unveil the borderline ridiculousness, and thus the heroic hubris, of the song. Charting the progression of “I Know I'm Not Wrong”, however, through its various forms, from scratchy demo through off-the-cuff guitar-and-drums performance, to its more considered iterations, suggests the group relished the potential to rewrite and rebuild in the studio. The third disc, which features an alternate *Tusk*

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**DISC ONE:** Original Album Remastered

**DISC TWO:** Singles, Outtakes, Sessions

**DISC THREE:** The Alternate Tusk

**DISC FOUR:** Tusk Tour Live I

**DISC FIVE:** Tusk Tour Live II

constructed of session outtakes, proves this – “What Makes You Think You're The One”, for example, missing the chord at the beginning of the chorus that pivots the song into next gear, is a much looser performance, with Buckingham's vocals strained and stretched.

A common theme from the alternate mix is one of *Tusk* denuded. An acoustic “Storms”, Nicks swooning between two glinting guitars, is gorgeous, and suggests that a stripped-back Fleetwood Mac album would have offered plenty; the subtle reveal of McVie's “Honey Hi” is stealthier, the alternate version mustering its melancholy energies from piano and a twitching, Lissajous-curve guitar figure. “Angel” is far more intimate than in its final manifestation, with a tart, stinging guitar highlighting Nick's understated vocals; “Sisters Of The Moon”, on the other hand, floods the sensorium with waves of organ and guitar, draping the song with even more lustrous fabrics.

If you splash out for the five-disc set, you also get two discs of previously unreleased live material from the '79/80 *Tusk* tour, drawn mostly from shows at Wembley, Tucson and St Louis. Cherry-picking from *Tusk* and *Rumours*, with a few outliers, these are strong performances, but they add little when it comes to illuminating the intrigue of *Tusk*-era Fleetwood Mac. And that's, ultimately, where this deluxe edition comes unstuck. There was a fine opportunity here to really delve into those storied sessions, to pull together, and subsequently pull apart, the mercurial magic of this music, to show the breadth of experiment and risk undertaken, and to detail just how the album's peculiar, light-dappled production came about.

That's not to sneeze at what we have here: the studio sessions on the second half of Disc Two, and the alternate *Tusk* of Disc Three, much of

which was previously unreleased, is plenty illuminating. But *Tusk* is strong stuff, surprisingly unyielding in its intrigue. As a document of a group responding to mega-success by both experimenting wildly, pushing the studio-as-instrument to places that usually only an Eno would go, and by introverting in response to *Rumours*' interpersonal melodramas, it's still a bristling, staggering listen.

**EXTRAS:** Deluxe edition includes **8/10** 5CDs, the original album on double vinyl and a 5.1 mix; the 3CD version loses the two live discs.





Peace and Love:  
(l-r) Frank Fayad, Jay  
Donnellan, Arthur Lee,  
George Suranovich

# ARTHUR LEE & LOVE

## Coming Through To You: The Live Recordings 1970–2004

ROCKBEAT

Four-disc document of a fractured career. By David Cavanagh



7/10

Arthur Lee was a famously mercurial bandleader. He turned down the Monterey Pop Festival, Woodstock and the *Ed Sullivan Show*, believing his music should have top billing or none at all. His hardline go-it-alone policy ensured Love's cult

status for all time. But he was as chaotic as he was dogmatic: he once sacked a Love guitarist (Jay Donnellan) for suggesting the band should aim to arrive at gigs more promptly – or at least on the day they were scheduled to take place – and those kind of old habits die hard. At London's Highbury Garage in 1994, Lee went AWOL minutes before he was due onstage. A search party found him playing pool in a pub on the Holloway Road, oblivious to the panic he was causing.

A life lived by its own rules can be a frustrating one to compile for posterity. No live recordings circulate of Love from the '60s – their heyday of

*Da Capo* and *Forever Changes* – because Lee wouldn't permit concerts to be taped. *Coming Through To You*, a 4CD boxset that attempts to document the best of what's out there, has no choice but to begin in 1970, when the classic Love lineup had disintegrated and a new Love was exploring a heavier direction. That February, Lee allowed them to share a Fillmore East bill with the Grateful Dead and the Allman Brothers; the next stop was England, where fans expecting the beatific splendour of *Forever Changes* had to adjust to a long-haired Love more reminiscent of Hendrix's "Crosstown Traffic".

Eight of the 14 songs on the first disc have been released before – either on *Studio/Live* (1982) or *The Blue Thumb Recordings* (2007) – but six from Copenhagen and the Fillmore West, while known to bootleggers, are previously unissued. None would score high on subtlety. Sensitive listeners may quail at a turbo-charged "Bummer In The Summer" (at Waltham Forest Technical College), but that's got to be better, surely, than Lee's off-key caterwauling on "Good Times" in Denmark

a fortnight later. As for his grunts and screeches at the Fillmore West, he sounds as if he wishes he was fronting Steppenwolf.

The vicissitudes of a stop-start career meant that the 1980s were virtually a write-off for Lee. We next encounter him at the BBC in 1992, promoting a comeback album (*Arthur Lee & Love – Five String Serenade*) with an acoustic session for Radio 1's Richard Skinner. Feted by a new generation, Lee would see his fortunes improve. Disc Two follows him on the promo trail to Amsterdam (for a shaky "Alone Again Or" and a half-remembered "Hey Joe") and to 1993 and 1996 gigs in Massachusetts and Odense. Close-up microphones intrude on every faltering guitar chord ("Signed D.C."), but they also bear witness to Lee's rediscovery of his golden voice. That majestic, heavenly warble! This, we sense, is a vision of the old Arthur. When a young flautist is brought onstage for "She Comes In Colors" – the 48-year-old Lee was happy to revisit *Da Capo* by 1993, much to the audience's delight – her songbird trills seem to sing of a musical renaissance. "7 And 7 Is", tackled

at thrilling speed in Odense, is further evidence of a prodigal return. Within months, however, Lee was in a California prison, jailed for illegally discharging a firearm. His 12-year sentence symbolised his career: three strikes and you're out.

Re-emerging in 2001 after an appeals court reversed the charge, Lee entered a new phase of his life in which he enjoyed near-heroic status among fans of '60s psychedelia. Disc Three sees him at Glastonbury (a lovely "Andmoreagain") and Roskilde, backed by Baby Lemonade – an LA psych quartet – and a chamber orchestra. Familiar with every note of *Forever Changes*, Baby Lemonade were able to pull off uncanny renditions of "The Daily Planet", "Old Man" and "You Set The Scene" as if they'd played on the originals. Finally, Love's recondite masterpiece became the hot-ticket, must-see attraction it should have been in 1968.

If the first three discs comprise good-to-very-good sound quality, Disc Four takes us into the crowd for 16 hand-held recordings from 12 gigs spanning 27 years. Opening with a 1977 harmonica solo (bewildering and brief), it wanders from blues

improv to Hendrix cover ("Little Wing") via – of all things – reggae. Ultimately it finds its way to "Rainbow In The Storm", from Love's final EP ("Love On Earth Must Be", 2004), performed in Wrexham. The sound may lack fidelity, but the tapes are not short on historical significance. At the Whisky A Go Go in 1978, Lee is reunited with Bryan MacLean (who sounds wasted),

while an extended "Smokestack Lightning", from 2003, features Love's classic-era guitarist John Echols and – incredibly – their first drummer, Don Conka, subject of the immortal "Signed D.C.". It's a decent jam, too.

When the boxset ends in April 2004 ("Singing Cowboy", Shepherd's Bush Empire), Lee has become the reliable, punctual, globe-trotting artist he never set out to be, playing to the adoring fans he was too imperious to reach the first time round. Sadly, his rebirth couldn't last. He succumbed to an acute strain of leukaemia in 2006 at the age of 61. Conka (in 2004) and MacLean (1998) had already preceded him.

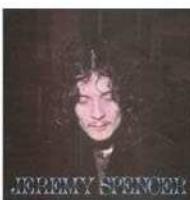
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**DISC ONE: 1970**

**DISC TWO: 1992-'96**

**DISC THREE: 2002-'04**

**DISC FOUR: Assorted recordings from 1977-2004**


**JEREMY SPENCER**
**Jeremy Spencer (reissue, 1970)**

REAL GONE MUSIC

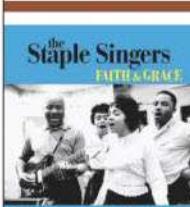
**7/10**

Fleetwood Mac playtime: group's first of countless side/solo projects likely its weirdest

As a snapshot in time, a picture of '70s rockers looking back a generation for inspiration, Jeremy Spencer's forever-out-of-print solo debut paints a fascinating, eccentric portrait. In fact, Spencer's life itself, slide-guitarist rock star turned Jesus freak, makes for one of any era's more peculiar stories. Mick Fleetwood, John McVie and Danny Kirwan are all present here, and they strike a blistering stance, guitars set to stun, on "Mean Blues". Much of the record, though, is given over to Earl Vance & The Valiants, Mac's occasional onstage nom de plume, wherein Spencer engages in a mishmash of Beach Boys mimics ("Surfin' Girl"), Elmore James riffs ("Don't Go Please Stay"), and direct, tribute-style lifts from prominent '50s rockers – Buddy Holly ("Linda"), Elvis ("If I Could Swim The River") and Bo Diddley ("Here Comes Charlie (With His Dancing Shoes On)"). These are quaint curios, but not much more. Better are a cover of Johnny Restivo's rarely heard 1959 rockabilly nugget "The Shape I'm In", and "You Made A Hit", a Jerry Lee Lewis-esque original with some blistering lead guitar. "Take A Look Around, Mrs Brown", Spencer's stunning stab at/send-up of psychedelia, meanwhile, casually out-psychs scores of '60s so-called heavies.

**EXTRAS:** None.

LUKE TORN


**THE STAPLE SINGERS**
**Faith & Grace: A Family Journey 1953-1976**

UNIVERSAL

**9/10**

Hallelujah: the first ever complete career overview

During a long recording career, the Staples shuffled between at least 10 different labels, which presumably explains why we've had to wait so long for a comprehensive retrospective. Licensing logistics now sorted, this four-disc boxset gloriously chronicles their trajectory over 80 tracks, from the righteous simplicity of the early gospel recordings accompanied solely by Pops' reverberating electric guitar, through the Dylan covers of the Civil Rights era and the soul years on Epic, and on to the classic funk of the Stax recordings and the sensual carnality of the Curtis Mayfield-produced "Let's Do It Again". It shows how the Staples never stopped evolving, their output representing almost a history of black American music in microcosm, in which it's hard to credit that it's the same family singing on, say, 1956's "Uncloudy Day", 1966's "Why (Am I Treated So Bad)" and 1975's "Let's Do It Again". The common thread, of course, is the integrity of Pops and the soulfulness of Mavis. Indispensable stuff.

**EXTRAS:** Seven-inch vinyl single with the **6/10** group's first two recordings, "Faith And Grace"/"These Are They", available for the first time in any format since released on 78 in an edition of 500 in 1953.

**NIGEL WILLIAMSON**


**THE SUNSET STRIP**
**Stone Lazy**

GREVILLE/AGITATED RECORDS

**8/10**

Cult Aussie slacker rockers' lost 1995 album Before Pavement came The Sunset Strip. An Australian group formed in Melbourne

in the late 1980s by Warwick Brown and Andy Turner, their early peak was 1990's *Move Right In*, which took '60s Detroit rock and mixed it with Crazy Horse plus some native Aussie sprawl to create a slacker-rock vibe shortly before Malkmus and co did something similar across the Pacific. *Stone Lazy* was intended to be the follow-up – recorded between 1993 and 1995, it was shelved when their label went bust and the group dissolved. Pulled together from surviving tapes, this release is a magnificent celebration of the guitar, which shimmers, drawls, churns, quivers and rocks. The slacker sound of "Bored And Stoned" is the archetype, a song that just keeps going, another riff coaxed from somewhere as it refuses to expire. "Sooner Than You Think" repeats the trick with a country vibe, while "Connection" is a seven-minute Television-style stunner. Elsewhere, "Stone Lazy" is a traditional rocker that shows the influence of Detroit, while variation comes from soundpiece "The Sun Screams Louisa" and "I Don't Believe You", which builds to a gentle folky payoff over barely audible vocals. This would have been a cult classic had it been released in 1995, and is still something special today.

**EXTRAS:** New sleeve notes.

**6/10** PETER WATTS
**REVELATIONS**

The Sunset Strip's Warwick Brown looks back on troubled times



► Melbourne's Sunset Strip were formed by Warwick Brown in 1984. Guitar-focused, with a feel for slacker rock, they released one LP – *Move Right In* – before dissolving in 1995 due to "low self-esteem, depression, addiction". Another record, *Stone Lazy*, had been shelved after their label went bust but now, after 20 years, it's getting a welcome release. "We sent tapes off, but we never got that call," recalls Brown. "So we put the band aside to get on with our lives. The record got forgotten about."

*Stone Lazy* is a glorious mix of "long, loud spontaneous work-outs and short, sweeter tunes", and Brown says these were "songs we had no recollection of ever recording." He's delighted that their time has now come. "They were pretty troubled years for us, lots of stress, depression, bad relationships, the drug thing was everywhere... That can all be heard on the record. But the response has been really great and we are back recording with a double LP almost finished."

PETER WATTS


**SWANS**
**White Light From The Mouth Of Infinity/Love Of Life (reissues, '91, '92)**

MUTE/YOUNG GOD

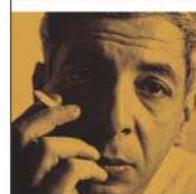
**8/10**

Savage beauty from NY noiseniks available over three CDs or vinyl box

Michael Gira's resurrection of his '80s noise-rock group Swans must surely rank among the most successful reformations in history, with dramatic, grandly orchestrated albums like 2014's *To Be Kind* comfortably transcending the brute simplicity of the band's early work. But Swans made some fine albums towards the end of their first incarnation too – many of them long out of print – and 1991's *White Light From The Mouth Of Infinity* and the following year's *Love Of Life* are two. These records reach for accessibility without diluting the acidity of Gira's muse. *White Light*'s addition of acoustic guitar, mandolin and bazouki lends tumultuous marches like "Better Than You" a faintly medieval quality, while the blasted gothic country of "Failure" and co-vocalist Jarboe's turn on "Song For Dead Time" feel profound, even as they blot out all light. *Love Of Life*, by contrast, is almost upbeat by Swans' dour standards, with the title track and "The Sound Of Freedom" exemplifying Gira's ecstatic, supplicant side; this, to him, is religion. A third CD collects outtakes and live recordings, including a chilling Jarboe-sung take on Nick Drake's "Black Eyed Dog".

**EXTRAS:** Limited vinyl box includes two posters **7/10** and booklet.

LOUIS PATTISON


**MIKAEL TARIVERDIEV**
**Film Music**

EARTH

Little-known Russian composer's stylish music unveiled

**8/10**

It's easy to see why The Real Tuesday Weld's Stephen

Coates is captivated by Tariverdiev's music, with its delicate mix of jazz, Weimar cabaret styles and melodies steeped in Hollywood swing-era standards. Compiled with the late composer's wife, Vera, this deluxe 3LP/3CD set is the first major Western outing for Tariverdiev's prolific film music (irrespective of a vast canon of classical work), focusing on soundtracks between 1964-80. The core music is taken from the two '70s works when Tariverdiev came into his own; *Seventeen Moments Of Spring*, the Soviet Union's most successful TV production – about a Soviet spy in Nazi Germany – and perennial favourite *The Irony Of Fate*, effectively the Russian equivalent of *It's A Wonderful Life*. Defying the expected notion of grand, formidable Russian music, Tariverdiev's approach is more European. Closer to the romanticism of Nino Rota's *La Dolce Vita* or Michel Legrand's *The Umbrellas Of Cherbourg*, he combines poignant songs and haunting instrumental pieces shifting elegantly from introspective to upbeat moods; should appeal to fans of Serge Gainsbourg and pre-spaghetti Western Morricone.

**EXTRAS:** Twenty-four pages of Tariverdiev's **7/10** reminiscences on life in Soviet-era Russia, personal photos, documents, film stills.

MICK HUGHTON

## The Specialist

Coil



Sleazy listening: (l-r) Coil's Jhonn Balance, Peter Christopherson and Stephen Thrower

► RISING PARTLY OUT of the first, strongest lineup of Psychic TV – the group formed by Genesis P-Orridge and the late Peter ‘Sleazy’ Christopherson after Throbbing Gristle’s mission was terminated – and partly from UK fanzine culture (Jhonn Balance was an editor of *Stabmental*), Coil’s 20-year trajectory was a long, twisted, arcane one.

Building a life on the margins, Balance and Christopherson located the chimerical potential of modern electronics, feeding occult patterning through the technological matrix. They’re most often, and correctly, framed within what writer David Keenan has named “England’s hidden reverse” – see also groups like Current 93 and Nurse With Wound – but these reissues, on **THRESHOLD ARCHIVES**, tell a slightly different story.

This is partly because they focus on ancillary materials, such as singles from albums, limited 7in releases and soundtracks. But Coil invested the same intensity and desire in everything they recorded. For example, “Panic” 7/10 and “The Anal Staircase” 7/10 append their first two albums – 1984’s *Scatology* and 1986’s *Horse Rotorvator* – and are of a piece with those albums’ early experiments with Fairlights and primitive sampling.

A latent interest in the ghosting potentials of electronic manipulation is present, particularly on the creeped crawl of “Blood From The Air”, while their cover of “Tainted Love”, from “Panic”, is startling, a funeral drift with Balance giving one of his most devastating vocal turns. 1987’s *The Wheel* 6/10 is slight, but captures something of the flooding overload of Coil’s aesthetic

of the time, waves of glistening drone swamping the title song’s pulsing metronome.

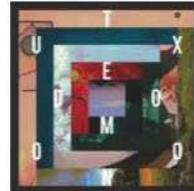
From the same year, but markedly better, are the studies collected on **The Consequences Of Raising Hell** 8/10, drawn from their unused themes for Clive Barker’s *Hellraiser*. They’re uneasy miniatures, working with classic signifiers of the soundtrack genre in beautifully awkward ways. **Wrong Eye** 8/10 compiles a limited single of that name for Stefan Jaworzyn’s Shock label with some excellent secondary material, such as the primitive glitchtronics of “Another Brown World”, which is Eno gone perfectly wrong.

The duo spent the late ’80s working on their masterpiece, 1991’s *Love’s Secret Domain*. “The Snow” 8/10 and “Windowpane” 8/10 are the two singles from the LP, and are great examples of Coil’s dalliance with acid house. “Windowpane” also comes loaded with demos from *Love’s Secret Domain*, while “The Snow” focuses on the multiple remixes of this, their shimmering paean to the dancefloor.

Which leaves us with 1994’s **The Angelic Conversation** 9/10, their soundtrack to Derek Jarman’s film. It’s still one of Coil’s most potent visions – waterlogged, blurry-eyed and full of subconscious movement, in many ways it points toward the moon music they’d make in the late ’90s and early 2000s, before Balance’s untimely death in 2004 put an end to the strange journey.

**EXTRAS:** All reissues come with extra material, often drawn from compilation appearances, or demos.

**JONDALE**



### UXEDOMOON

#### The Vinyl Box

CRAMMED DISCS

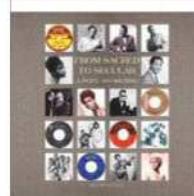
No tears! Cult San Francisco new-wavers receive the deluxe vinyl treatment

**8/10**

Art-rock titans Tuxedomoon produced some of their most vital work at the start of their career in the late ’70s – “No Tears” and then “What Use?” from their debut, *Half-Mute*, signed to the Residents’ Ralph Records, fused no wave nihilism and skittish electro with gothic romance – but, as this handsome box containing their nine key LPs and a slab of unreleased cuts illustrates, they arguably became a more interesting, not to say idiosyncratic band when they relocated from ‘Frisco to Brussels in the early ’80s and indulged their avant-garde sensibilities. Released to celebrate their 38th anniversary, *The Vinyl Box* is one for the Tuxedomoon completist, a long-suffering soul who’ll already own all these LPs, but will appreciate having the recent trilogy of *Cabin In The Sky*, *Bardo Hotel Soundtrack* and *Vapour Trails* on vinyl for the first time.

**EXTRAS:** A poster, an LP-sized booklet with extensive liner notes and photos, and *Appendix*, a career-spanning set of unheard tracks that includes a handful of perverse late-’70s off-cuts such as “Litebulb Overkill”, “Everything You Want” and a preening romp across “I Heard It Through The Grapevine”, plus “Les Six”, a charming duet for woodwind and bass guitar from 1997 that shows how beautifully Tuxedomoon express themselves when they strive to keep things simple.

**PIERS MARTIN**



### VARIOUS ARTISTS

#### Sacred To Secular: A Soul Awakening

THE HISTORY OF SOUL

The story of soul, shrink-wrapped

**8/10**

The path of soul music from the home of the Lord to godless auditoriums is documented in this mammoth and magnificent anthology spanning from 1927 to 1963, and presented chronologically. It shows how African-American music revolving around congregational singing was co-opted by white teenage audiences and radio stations, and turned into a multi-million dollar industry. The journey takes us from some of the earliest blues and spiritual recordings – among them Sister Mary Nelson’s “Vocation” and Bessie Smith’s finger-wagging “Moan, You Moaners” – through to Ray Charles’ 1959 hit “I Believe To My Soul”, which gave the genre its name. Later comes Ike and Tina Turner’s “I’m Gonna Cut You Loose”, Etta James’ “Don’t Cry Baby”, Otis Redding’s “These Arms Of Mine” and “I’ll Go Crazy” by James Brown. While there can be no package large enough to represent all the players, *Sacred To Secular* has a worthy stab at it, excavating as close as possible to the core and acting both as a cultural document and an excellent crash course in one of music’s most epochal periods.

**EXTRAS:** Includes a 36-page, beautifully illustrated booklet providing historical and cultural context to the recordings, taking in mass migration from the south of the US to the north, technological change and the Civil Rights movement, plus background on each of the performers and their geographical roots.

**FIONA STURGES**

**VARIOUS ARTISTS****In A Moment: Ghost Box**

GHOST BOX

**9/10**

The pioneering label's first decade, chronicled

Ten years is a lengthy run in the life of an indie label,

but the output of Britain's Ghost Box imprint has withstood the test of time. Its small, boutique roster – including The Focus Group, Belbury Poly, Pye Corner Audio, The Advisory Circle, and Mount Vernon Arts Lab – have in common an uncanny modernism. If the term 'Ghost Box' refers to TV, it's the kind of wood-veneer TV set popular in the 1970s, when disturbing cultural references infiltrated children's programming and public information films depicted gory domestic dangers. This double CD/double vinyl set fillets out the best of the label's tracks, dominated by three mainstays: Belbury Poly and The Focus Group (respectively, the label's owners Jim Jupp and Julian House), plus The Advisory Circle (Jon Brooks). Belbury Poly meander up folky byways ("The Geography") and pastoral jazz rock ("Cantalus"); The Focus Group's cascade of vintage samples and exotic instruments comes across like a psychiatric experiment in disorientation; while The Advisory Circle's "Sundial" is as good as synth music gets, teasing the blissful fringes of new-age rapture. Add in tracks by Roj, Hintermass and John Foxx, plus a penetrating essay by Simon Reynolds, and you have a supremely listenable collection full of ravishing musicality.

**EXTRAS:** None.

ROB YOUNG

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**EXTRAS:** None.

ROB YOUNG

**HOW TO BUY...****HOST BOX****Haunted exotica****THE FOCUS GROUP****Hey Let Loose Your Love**

GHOST BOX, 2005

Sampladelic soundbites by Julian

House are whipped into an angel's

delight of bustling jazz drums, bass flutes and

descents into grubby science-lab electronica.

House is at his best when easy listening tips over

into something menacing, as if some malevolent

presence has hijacked your television set.

**9/10****BELBURY POLY****From An Ancient Star**

GHOST BOX, 2009

Jim Jupp's music is also haunted

by memories of junior sci-fi and the

clash of folk and modernity in British culture. It

comes out here as primal synth-pop with bucolic

overtones, as on the silicon ronel

of "Widdershins". Meticulous electronica.

**8/10****ROJ The Transactional Dharma Of Roj**

GHOST BOX, 2009

Former Broadcast keyboardist

Roj Stevens transforms vintage

meditational library music into an aural heaven

of mysterious middle-European voices, glinting

ambience and atavistic rhythm science. A hypnotic

psychic journey that threatens to propel listeners

beyond enlightenment into utter confusion.

**7/10**

ROB YOUNG

**VARIOUS ARTISTS****Senegal 70+ – Sonic Gems & Previously Unreleased Recordings From The '70s**

ANALOG AFRICA

**8/10**

More buried treasure from the Afrofunk vaults

A hugely fertile time for Senegalese music, the 1970s saw emerging local superstars like Youssou N'Dour start to reclaim West African styles and sounds from the Cuban and French influences that lingered after colonialism. Meanwhile, others began absorbing funk and jazz, rock and reggae blowing in from America, Jamaica and beyond. As this anthology proves, Cuban flavour was still much in favour, weaving centrifugal percussion swirls and sinewy guitar melodies into marathon grooves like "Africa" by Orchestre GMI, one of the previously unreleased standouts here. But '70s Dakar also played host to visiting African-American acts including the Jackson Five and James Brown, who left his mark on brassy, kinetic funk stomp like "Kiko Medina" by Le Tropical Jazz. Elsewhere, "Kokorico" by Orchestra Lay Thiam borrows as much from West Coast hippy-rock as from West African tradition, with its reverb-drenched bilingual vocals and garage-psych rawness. If Curtis Mayfield and Carlos Santana had been born in Senegal, they might have made fleet-footed wah-wah freakouts like "Ma Penda" by Orchestra Baobab, another highlight of the newly rediscovered tracks. An impressive feat of musical archaeology, *Senegal 70+* is consistently good, with flashes of greatness.

**EXTRAS:** None.

STEPHEN DALTON

**COMING NEXT MONTH...**

With this year almost over, we examine the first batch of 2016's releases in the next *Uncut*. On the white-hot new-release front, January sees

**Savages** return with *Adore Life*, an altogether more atmospheric and nuanced listen than their debut, while former Fiery Furnace **Eleanor Friedberger** unveils her own strong third, *New View*. **Suede** are back with *Night Thoughts*, accompanied by a feature-length film, and **Shearwater** present the "loud"

**Jet Plane And Oxbow**, while **John Cale** re-imagines his bleak *Music For A New Society* with the electronic **M:FANS**. Elsewhere, blustery Canadians **The Besnard Lakes** return with the grand *A Coliseum Complex Museum*, while the less blustery Sean O'Hagan and his **High Lamas** release their lush theatre soundtrack, *Here Come The Rattling Trees*.

It's looking like another healthy month for archive releases, with **Françoise Hardy**'s overlooked first five LPs set to be reissued, all of **Tortoise**'s back catalogue re-emerging (on coloured vinyl, no less) and **Mike Oldfield** dusting down *Discovery* and *The Killing Fields* beside new archival comp *The 1984 Suite*.

Meanwhile, the career of influential Paisley

Underground legends **The Long Ryders** is chronicled in a boxset, while **Roy Orbison**'s fruitful MGM years are compiled in full. The new year looks as dangerous to your finances as 2015 was.

TOM.PINNOCK@TIMEINC.COM

**NEIL YOUNG****Bluenote Café**

REPRISE

Sprawling, swaggering, staggering live set from 1980s Mr Soul incarnation

**8/10**

Neil Young originally assembled a Bluenote Café

live LP in 1988, then, of course, never released it. But for lovers of the short, strange period when he fronted the Bluenotes, the 27 years it's taken to hear the thing have been worth the wait. Just as he'd previously gone country, rockabilly and electronic, in late 1987, Young went soul, or at least his ragged version, augmenting his regular band with blasting Stax-revue style brass. This Bluenotes lineup was immortalised on the underrated *This Note's For You* album, but the rumours (and bootlegs) always suggested the way to hear them was live. Here, across double CD or quadruple vinyl, is the proof. Occasionally, the small-club/big-band blues gets slightly menopausal (previously unreleased "Soul Of A Woman" is waiting on its Jools' Hootenanny piano). Mostly, with Young's guitar sparking and welding weird like it hadn't in years, it's a thick, funky, gritty stew. The best *This Note* tracks rage and brood ("Crime In The City" remade as widescreen *Peter Gunn* noir; spine-tingling simmers of "Just One Thing" and "Twilight"), while unexpected back catalogue reworkings are head-spinning: the closing, wasted, 20-minute prowl across "Tonight's The Night", complete with garage-Batman bass and "Knock On Wood" horns, is a thing of wonder.

**EXTRAS:** None.

DAMIEN LOVE

**UNCUT**

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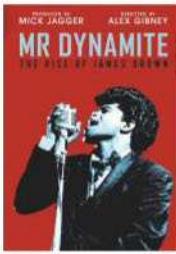
THIS MONTH: BILL HICKS | ROLLING STONES | FRANK ZAPPA



## MR DYNAMITE: The Rise Of James Brown

UMC

Soul Brother Number One profiled in outstanding doc, produced by Mick Jagger. By Neil Spencer



10/10

THE ONE. JAMES Brown was obsessed with The One. It signified the first and over-emphasised beat of the 4/4 rhythm of funk, the music that Brown and his band spawned between 1965's "Papa's Got A Brand New Bag" and 1967's "Cold Sweat" – both numbers have a claim as funk's founding charter. And, of course, The One signified Brown himself, Mr Dynamite, the amazing Mr Please Please, the Hardest Working Man In Showbiz, Soul Brother Number One!

As an act of self-invention, Brown has few rivals in pop. Abandoned by his parents, he was raised

by his aunt in the beer-joint-cum-brothel she ran in poverty-stricken Carolina. In his teen years he spent time in prison before music rescued him. A competent drummer, a supercharged vocalist and a dazzling dancer, Brown clawed his way up through 1950s black showbiz with a mix of raw talent, iron determination and a patrician white manager. The 'hardest working' tag was no idle boast; Brown worked his band 360 days a year, burning up the chitlin' circuit before claiming New York's Apollo for his coronation, the resultant 1963 live album becoming a fixture in black family homes. Thereafter Brown's career was a series of peaks

More than a portrait of James Brown – a vivid picture of a tumultuous era

rare archive footage paints a vivid picture of a troubled, tumultuous era in American history. Unmissable.

**EXTRAS:** Interview outtakes from Chuck D, valet Danny Ray, Bootsy Collins, Maceo Parker and others. Live *Soul Train* performances, round-table discussion, booklet with essay by Mick Jagger.

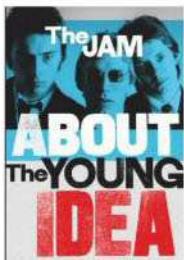
that are the focal points of Alex Gibney's mesmerising documentary: his nationwide TV appearances on the *T.A.M.I. Show* and *The Ed Sullivan Show*, his sequence of groundbreaking hits, and his role as black spokesman and peacemaker during the insurrections of the civil rights era – following the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968, a Brown concert forestalled a riot in Boston. When Brown changed his hairstyle from glistening, pompadoured 'process' to frizzy 'natural' in 1967, America's ghettos followed suit, while 1968's "Say It Loud – I'm Black And I'm Proud" busted the ghetto snobbery that held light skin superior. "Overnight, the dark-skinned girls were the ones everyone wanted," recalls the Reverend Al Sharpton, a fan and later friend of Brown. And when "Sex Machine" arrived in 1970, the whole world hit the dancefloor.

Doing justice to such a gargantuan career and the complex, private man behind it calls for delicate judgment, and Gibney supplies it, lacing terrific archival footage of Brown's live shows with pithy interviews from the man's band and entourage. "A tyrant", to quote one band member, Brown fined his musicians for missed cues, flat notes, dirty shoes... anything that caught his fancy. Onstage the group wore uniform "to show they were proud to belong", and checking into a motel from the tour bus they were expected to show up suited and booted as a mark of black pride.

Brown's band respected and even loved their leader, though, as one remarks, you couldn't tell him so because he would see it as weakness. Drummer Melvin Parker recalls pulling a gun on his boss as the singer was shaping up to punch his brother, saxophonist Maceo Parker. None of Brown's talented band saw a bean in royalties, even saxophonist Pee Wee Ellis, whose arrangements shaped Brown's sound, not least on "Cold Sweat", where Ellis harnessed Miles Davis' "So What" for the song's coda. When his band finally rose up in protest in 1970, Brown promptly recruited a younger team led by bassist Bootsy Collins and his brother Catfish.

Of Brown's private life there is no hint, and his decline and fall are beyond Gibney's remit, though there is an engaging chapter on his influence on the hip-hop generation and '80s stars like Michael Jackson and Prince. What *Mr Dynamite* does is take us deep into the engine room of Brown's music and give witness to his originality and supernatural performing talents. Brown's confused, ambiguous politics – he was bamboozled and used by President Richard Nixon even as he championed black America

– are deftly dissected, along with a psyche that bore the scars of his childhood abandonment – Brown trusted almost no-one, and naively thought that if he could succeed, so could anyone. "He was a civil rights movement of one," opines tour manager Alan Leeds. Finally, *Mr Dynamite* is more than a portrait of James Brown – its rich blend of anecdotes, insights and



## THE JAM About The Young Idea

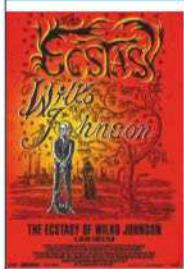
EAGLE VISION

Stirring documentary charts the trio's enduring appeal

Loaded with talking heads – from Paul Weller, Bruce Foxton and Rick Buckler to actor Martin Freeman and various other diehard fans – this engrossing doc posits The Jam as Beatles-loving outliers whose songs nailed the travails of youth with a specificity lacking elsewhere in British pop. Cue plenty of teary reminiscences, videos and sweaty live clips. Don't get your hopes up for a reunion though. "Absolutely, categorically, fucking no," retorts Weller.

**EXTRAS:** Additional interviews, live tracks **7/10** from London and New York, plus *When You're Young*, a 1980 bonus disc from German TV's *Rockpalast*.

ROB HUGHES

**8/10**

## THE ECSTASY OF WILKO JOHNSON

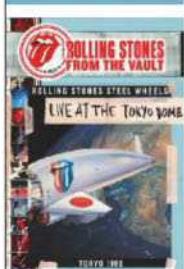
CADIZ MUSIC

Dr Feelgood guitarist's survival story

Drenched in poetry and music, Julien Temple's remarkable film charts the former Dr Feelgood guitarist's strangely euphoric reaction to being diagnosed with

apparently terminal cancer in early 2013, and the miraculous kill-or-cure operation that saved him a year later. Mirroring Johnson's literature-loving conversational style, Temple peppers this uplifting story with quotes from Milton, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Bergman and many more. Roger Daltrey pays tribute as Johnson waxes poetic, concluding, "The mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death."

**EXTRAS:** Q&A, interview, rehearsal footage, **7/10** *Watch With Wilko* – where Johnson watches the film back. STEPHEN DALTON

**8/10**

## THE ROLLING STONES From The Vault: Live At The Tokyo Dome

EAGLE VISION

Steel Wheels over Japan When The Rolling Stones unleashed 1989's massive Steel Wheels tour, it had the definite air of comeback: they hadn't played live in seven years, a gap that felt like an age, and, as this concert film demonstrates, were clearly out to prove they were still the Stones. The campaign saw them playing Japan for the first time, with a 10-night stand in an adoring Tokyo in February 1990, from which this document is culled.

Business as usual: they sound amazing, dress debatably. But Mick has never performed a mime sequence as hilarious as the one that opens "2,000 Light Years From Home".

**EXTRAS:** None.  
DAMIEN LOVE

**7/10**

# BILL HICKS Ultimate Bill Hicks

PIAS COMEDY

Invaluable comp of the late, great king of comedy

**8/10**

BILL HICKS WOULD have turned 54 on December 16, 2015 – far from an old man, an approximate contemporary of Jon Stewart, Louis C.K., Chris Rock. It says much about Hicks, for better and for worse, that it's possible to imagine an almost infinite array of plausible life trajectories had he not been claimed by cancer in 1994, aged just 32 – but not before he'd established himself as

the most influential comedian of his era.

Hicks may have calmed down in middle age, resigned himself to comfortable ennoblement among comedy aristocracy. He may have grown crankier, his toying with conspiracy theory devolving into outright 9/11 Truther-dom. He may – very easily – have been marginalised by the sanctimony of online vigilantes, who failed or declined to appreciate that the ultimate butt of (most of) his jokes about women was men. He may have attempted activism, revving up crowds of Occupy demonstrators with anti-corporate rhetoric. Or he may have directed his rage at religion towards touchier targets than American Christians, risking the fate of Theo van Gogh and the staff of *Charlie Hebdo*.

Hicks' work contained multitudes, as does this boxset, which unites four live specials (*One Night Stand*, *Sane Man*, *Relentless*, *Revelations*) and *It's Just A Ride*, a documentary/tribute released shortly after his death. (While serviceable, *...Ride* was superseded in 2009 by Paul Thomas and Matt Harlock's terrific *American: The Bill Hicks Story*). More than two decades later, it's more remarkable how much of Hicks' schtick resonates than how little. While some of the topical stuff has dated – his rants defending smoking now seem especially quaint – we remain a way from outgrowing his gleeful meditations on hypocrisy vis-à-vis sex and drugs. Hicks' refusal to forgive ignorance is also still a tonic, though his famous encounter with a Nashville waffle waitress ("What you readin' for?"; "So I don't end up being a fuckin' waffle waitress") actually seems less funny since the empowerment of the wilfully illiterate by social media.

The last of these shows, *Revelations*, was recorded at London's Dominion Theatre in November 1992. Even now, it seems improbable and outrageous that this supremely vigorous presence had little more than a year left to live. It's a glorious performance, Hicks grown confidently into the role of the black-clad preacher emerging from a pit of fire. He appears wholly at home, not just on stage but in London, in front of a crowd that, like himself, regards America with a detached bemusement that occasionally erupts into uncomprehending fury. It's perfectly possible that Hicks died without knowing what the internet was. That being the case, his famous suggestion to any marketing and advertising types in the Dominion's audience – "Kill yourself" – now strikes not merely as the key riff of a superb, unfurling routine, but as a last, prescient warning to the future.

**EXTRAS:** None.

ANDREW MUELLER



## TALKING HEADS Stop Making Sense

SECOND SIGHT

Still the best concert movie, looking better than ever on restored Blu-ray Heads completists who own previous DVD and Blu-ray iterations of Jonathan Demme's peerless film will want to know what's new here: nothing as far as extras and (fantastic) audio mixes

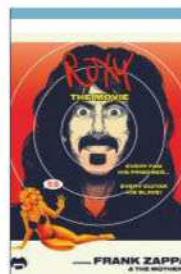
go; but obsessives will be keen to see the new video restoration that has removed "more than 60,000 instances of dirt and scratches", cleaning the big suit without ruining its natural grain. Once again, bonus tracks "Cities", "Big Business/I Zimbra" are extras – shame there's no option to integrate them into the flow, as on the lovely 1980s VHS, though.

**EXTRAS:** Demme and band commentary, **8/10** bonus tracks, press conference, Byrne interviews Byrne, storyboards.

DAMIEN LOVE

**9/10**

Still smokin':  
Hicks remains  
relevant today



## FRANK ZAPPA Roxy: The Movie

EAGLE VISION/  
HONKER HOME VIDEO

"Something terrible has happened," Frank Zappa told the crowd at the beginning of his first show at Hollywood's Roxy in December 1973. For once, he wasn't joking – technical problems meant that this

film has remained unreleased in full until now. The highlights are worth the wait, though, with the funky 12-bar blues of "Cosmik Debris" and the hammy horror tribute "Cheepnis" showing the guitarist and his two-drummer Mothers in strong form. This being Zappa, things get a little *too* silly, especially on the closing freak-out of "Be-Bop Tango", but for diehards, this is an impressive document.

**EXTRAS:** A CD of the soundtrack.  
**7/10** TOM PINNOCK

# Films

BY MICHAEL BONNER

*This month: Tom Hanks plays brinkmanship in Spielberg's latest; Michael Caine ages inscrutably; Keith Richards goes solo; Lily Tomlin raises laughs*

**B**ridge Of Spies Steven Spielberg was 11 years old in 1957, roughly the same age as Roger – a young boy in *Bridge Of Spies* whose fertile imagination is fired by public-service broadcasts instructing viewers on tips to survive a nuclear attack. While Roger is busy filling the bath to conserve water, his father is closer to the heart of the Cold War than perhaps he'd like. Played by Tom Hanks, James B Donovan is a partner in a New York law firm who is assigned to represent Rudolf Abel (Mark Rylance), a Russian spy who faces the death penalty if found guilty. The first half of Spielberg's *Bridge Of Spies* slyly plays Hanks' show and tell against the more nuanced Rylance, an actor who inhabits rather than exhibits.

Hanks' Donovan represents the film's James Stewart-style moral centre – a man doing his job, who believes in due process, even after the windows in his living room are shot out. He finds himself warming to Abel, while the rest of the judicial community – and America, in general – believe he should be strung up. The second half of the film, meanwhile, shifts a gear. Following the downing over Soviet airspace of U2 pilot Francis Gary Powers, the incarcerated Abel suddenly becomes a valuable commodity, and Donovan is dispatched to chilly Berlin to arrange an exchange: Abel for Powers. Berlin, we learn, is "a complicated place" and the film slowly drifts away from Hollywood classicism into muddier waters more suited to a Le Carré story – or, perhaps, *Munich*, which remains Spielberg's most dark, conflicted film.

Late in *Bridge Of Spies*, Donovan laments, "There's a lot of fictions going on." For a filmmaker usually as unambiguous as Spielberg, it's surprising that the thrust of *Bridge Of Spies* is fictions. Abel's fictional cover, the fiction behind the US government's covert methods of gathering information, the fictions Powers reveals under interrogation, the fictions played out by Russian and GDR representatives during their negotiations with Donovan. And, indeed, Donovan's own fictions – as his



Berlin conversations play out, he is revealed as being a shrewd fixer.

It's interesting that the Coen brothers worked on the script for *Bridge Of Spies*: their presence seems particularly strong in the Berlin sequences, which feature a handful of Coen-esque grotesques, but also in the blurring of truth and fiction, a kind of mischievous game of bluff they excel at. It's one of Spielberg's best – anchored by solid work from Hanks but given grace and wit by Rylance. "I'm not afraid to die," says Abel. "Although it wouldn't be my first choice."

► **Youth** Early in Paolo Sorrentino's latest film, Michael Caine's retired orchestra conductor is told by his daughter, "You're a victim of your own apathy." What, then, could raise Caine's Fred Ballinger from his torpor? Perhaps an invitation from Queen Elizabeth II to perform at Prince Philip's forthcoming birthday would do the trick? That, of course, would mean having to leave the swish Alpine sanatorium Ballinger is staying in, whose guests also include a famous American filmmaker (Harvey Keitel), who happens to be his closest friend, as well as a hip young actor (Paul Dano), Mark Kozelek (playing himself) and a levitating Buddhist monk.

*Youth* is a quietly batty film, in which Ballinger's son-in-law runs off with Paloma Faith (also playing herself), and where surreal, dream-like sequences rub shoulders with archly deadpan dialogue. "I'm having a thorough cleansing of my intestines today," Ballinger tells

Boyle. After the pace of his last film, *The Great Beauty* (*The Great Gatsby* reimagined as a kind of disco fantasia), Sorrentino withdraws to a more reflective place for *Youth*. Befitting Ballinger's apathy, not much actually happens here. The film is beautiful to look at – the landscape is incredible, while Sorrentino indulges some predictably brilliant flourishes, ranging from artfully choreographed set-pieces to swooping camera moves. Beneath its luxurious surface, however, bubble themes of regret. The tone is wistful, as Ballinger and Boyle consider lost loves, lost time and encroaching old age. Boyle is working on a script – his "moral testament" – while Ballinger reflects on his wife's sad decline into Alzheimer's. "Being young makes everything close," he says. "Being old makes everything far away."

Caine is terrific – inscrutable and distant, but evidently there are depths behind his oversized horn-rimmed glasses. The sense of dry, wintry pathos is superb. It's great to see him doing such good work, and you wish he'd do more of it. A late-arriving cameo from Jane Fonda, as a fading Hollywood star, suddenly breaks the mood of languid introspection, but is in keeping with Sorrentino's penchant for grotesque characters – and is, critically, very funny.

► **Keith Richards: Under The Influence** The Rolling Stones' guitarist has been the subject of some subtle rebranding over the past couple of years. For too long, Richards had been operating

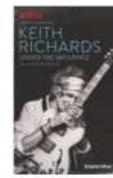
## Reviewed this month...



**BRIDGE OF SPIES**  
Director Steven Spielberg  
Starring Tom Hanks, Mark Rylance  
Opens November 27  
Cert 12A  
9/10



**YOUTH**  
Director Paolo Sorrentino  
Starring Michael Caine, Harvey Keitel  
Opens January 29  
Cert 15  
8/10



**KEITH RICHARDS: UNDER THE INFLUENCE**  
Director Morgan Neville  
Starring Keith Richards, Tom Waits  
Opens Now  
Cert U  
7/10



**GRANDMA**  
Director Paul Weitz  
Starring Lily Tomlin, Julia Garner  
Opens December 11  
Cert 15  
7/10



**SUNSET SONG**  
Director Terence Davies  
Starring Agnieszka Deyn, Peter Mullan  
Opens December 4  
Cert 15  
7/10



Cold warrior: Tom Hanks in Spielberg's *Bridge Of Spies*

as a kind of cartoon version of himself – “To 99.9 per cent of people, it’s Keith Richards smoking a joint, a bottle of Jack Daniel’s in his hand, walking down the road, cursing the fact that the liquor store is closed,” he admits in *Under The Influence*. But since the publication of his autobiography, *Life*, in 2010, his reputation has been recalibrated. The perception of a soused old swashbuckler has been replaced with a more age-appropriate image: Richards as an amiable archivist, steeped in American folk music, jazz and blues. In other words, the kind of guy who can go on Radio 4 and talk with warmth and lucidity about Etta James and Chuck Berry. “He’s like a London cabbie who has The Knowledge,” says Tom Waits in Morgan Neville’s documentary. “He had that in music.”

Neville’s film largely reinforces this view of Richards. The guitarist leads us through the grounds of his Connecticut home to his den – a rather nice, wood-panelled out-building where he plays Little Walter albums on a discreetly expensive turntable and tries to explain the ineffable qualities of music. Watching Richards at his most engaging, talking about music, is a strong sell for Neville’s film. There are some lovely moments of him alone in the studio, playing beautiful and delicate blues lines on an acoustic guitar or country songs on the piano. Tom Waits delivers good colour and there’s some funny footage of them in the studio recording “Last Leaf On The Tree” from Waits’ *Bad As Me* album. Unfortunately, the rest of it doesn’t quite deliver much beyond a largely familiar history of Richards’ life (the war, everything was in black and white until Elvis turned it Technicolor, etc) and a brisk run through his 50 years with Mick Jagger and the Stones. As fun as all this is, you sense that Neville (who directed the diabolical *20 Feet From Stardom*) had a great opportunity he never quite realised properly.

► **Grandma** A self-conscious indie comedy written and directed by journeyman Paul Weitz, *Grandma* shows its hand early on. After

establishing close-up shots of leaves and wind chimes – lens flare included – the film’s opening line is, “You’re a terrible girlfriend but a wonderful poet!” *Grandma* takes place in Silverlake, a hippyish enclave of Los Angeles – all trailing gardenias and artisanal coffee shops – where Lily Tomlin stars as Elle, a cranky, argumentative poet who has stopped writing since the death of her partner of 38 years. When we meet Elle, she is at another critical point in her life: “I am trying to transmogrify my life into art,” she declares grandly. But she is also in the throes of breaking up with her younger partner, Olivia (Judy Greer), while her granddaughter Sage (Julia Garner) reveals she is pregnant and needs money to pay for an abortion. Bundling Sage into her Dodge Royal, Elle traipses round Silverlake’s bohemian margins – a tattoo parlour, a coffee shop – in search of money.

It is often a very funny film – Tomlin, in her first leading role since 1988’s *Big Business*, delivers plenty of scabrous, scatological rants. But Elle’s cantankerous behaviour masks a softer, sentimental side to the film that Weitz grapples to contain. Essentially a filmmaker used to the programmatic requirements of mainstream Hollywood, he wrestles with how best to delineate Elle’s back story. The events in the film conspire to allow Elle to finally get over the death of her partner, while also reuniting her with her estranged daughter (Marcia Gay Harden). There is a terrific cameo from Sam Elliott, as Elle’s first husband, but Weitz doesn’t quite judge the emotional pitch of their scenes together correctly. He wants a big, emotional release; whereas the nature of the film demands something more low-key and intimate.

Where *Grandma* is best – apart from Tomlin – is at capturing the frayed, faded tone of hippie idealism. How the choices Elle made in the ’70s continue to resonate to the present day.

► **Sunset Song** Terence Davies’ last film, *The Deep Blue Sea*, was a dark drama set in repressive postwar Britain. His latest, meanwhile, slips back a generation to the eve of the First World War, where he finds more tragedy in an equally repressive environment. *Sunset Song*, based on a novel by Lewis Grassic Gibbon, takes place in a remote farming community in Scotland. The focus of the story is Chris (Agyness Deyn), the teenage daughter of an unsentimental hardscrabbler (Peter Mullan). The suicide, early in the film, of her long-suffering mother is the first in a series of increasingly gruelling hardships Chris is forced to endure.

Davies, who is now firmly established as cinema’s pre-eminent nostalgist, delivers on lavish cinematography, panning across fields and tracking motes of dust through sunlit rooms. But fetishising the painterly landscape seems a weird disconnect from the cold-eyed realism of Gibbon’s story. “There are lovely things in this world, lovely that do not endure and the lovelier for that,” says Chris at one point, as if to say: watch the sky and the trees and the fields rather than the grim unpleasantness happening in the upstairs bedroom. But Davies manages to pull it all round: there are some sequences as severe and disconcerting as anything by Michael Haneke.

## Also out...

### **VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN**

OPENS DECEMBER 3

Or Young Frankenstein: James McAvoy is the fledgling medical student and Daniel Radcliffe his youthful assistant, Igor. What could possibly go wrong?

### **FUTURE SHOCK! THE STORY OF 2000AD**

OPENS DECEMBER 4

Long overdue doc charting the history of the legendary British sci-fi comic, home to Judge Dredd and friends. Zarjaz!

### **BY THE SEA**

OPENS DECEMBER 11

Angelina Jolie Pitt directs; she and Brad co-star as a couple on vacation, trying to get their marriage back on track.

### **HECTOR**

OPENS DECEMBER 11

Peter Mullan exposes his softer side as a homeless man heading from Scotland to London to a temporary Christmas shelter.

### **PEGGY GUGGENHEIM: ART ADDICT**

OPENS DECEMBER 11

Documentary about the flamboyant art collector, based on interviews recorded before she died in 1979.

### **THE FORBIDDEN ROOM**

OPENS DECEMBER 11

Guy Maddin’s latest unites a submarine crew, forest bandits, child soldiers and a famous surgeon.



### **STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS**

OPENS DECEMBER 17

JJ Abrams visits a galaxy far, far away in pursuit of some lightsaber and X-wing action. Just what has happened to Luke?

### **SISTERS**

OPENS DECEMBER 12

Hard to spot a flaw here, as Tina Fey and Amy Poehler team up for some high-end multiplex laughs, as sisters throwing a house party in their childhood home.

### **THE GREEN INFERNO**

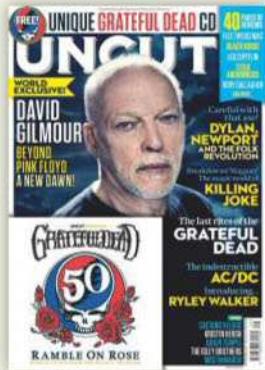
OPENS DECEMBER 26

Cunningly scheduled for a Boxing Day release, Eli Roth’s latest – college kids stranded in the Amazon jungle – riffs on Italian cannibal horror films of the 1970s.

### **IN THE HEART OF THE SEA**

OPENS DECEMBER 26

Ron Howard files a drama based on the real-life disaster that inspired *Moby-Dick*: Ben Whishaw is Herman Melville.



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# Live

ROCKING IN THE FREE WORLD



## U2

02, LONDON, OCTOBER 27, 2015

A year on from their blanket bombing of iTunes, Bono & co return to target the faithful

FOR THAT VOLUBLE cohort who enjoy being annoyed by U2, this is doubtless the sort of thing that annoys them. Among the guests backstage before the second of six nights in the former Millennium Dome is David Cameron, prime minister of the United Kingdom, whose government has recently been expending considerable energy attempting to make poor people poorer. U2 remain unusual among politically engaged artists in that they're not rebels or rejectionists, but engagers and persuaders.

As Cameron is ushered one way, *Uncut* is ushered the other, for its appointment with the great salesman.

"You'll like this," decides Bono, who is hunkered with the rest of U2 and a few friends in a black tent in the hangar-sized space immediately behind the stage. "It's personal, and it's political, but we've tried to keep the political personal, I think."

This ambition is congruent with the album U2 are touring – *Songs Of Innocence*, explicitly a dialogue between the fiftysomething rock'n'roll aristocrats that U2 have become,

and the teenage punks they were. For the first four songs, at least, proceedings look like the stage equivalent of the plain sleeve that accompanied the free iTunes release of the record – no screens, no effects, minimal lighting, just a four-piece band tearing up "The Miracle (Of Joey Ramone)", their debut single, "Out Of Control", "Vertigo", and track one, side one of their debut album, "I Will Follow".

This last-named song – the one they have performed live more than any other – was the first of Bono's attempts to make sense of the death of his mother when he was barely into his teens. Much of *Songs Of Innocence* is a continuation of that process, as the singer acknowledges. "She was the centre of my universe," he tells the crowd, "so I went looking for another centre, and I found it in rock'n'roll. And we came to the city that gave us The Clash, The Jam and the Sex Pistols. But for the next few songs I want to take you back to where we grew up, on the north side of Dublin."

Above the long catwalk, linking the main stage to a smaller stage towards the back of



City of blinding lights: U2 live in London, October 26, 2015

For the ensuing “Cedarwood Road”, a ladder drops from the immense hovering oblong, revealing it as a slender cage, into which Bono climbs, delivering the song from inside a cartoon rendering of his childhood neighbourhood by Belfast artist Oliver Jeffers. For “Song For Someone”, Bono is dwarfed by a Jeffers animation of his 18-year-old self in his bedroom, “writing a song to try and impress a girl called Alison Stewart – still working on that”. Jeffers’ work is most effective on “Sunday Bloody Sunday” and “Raised By Wolves”, effectively a memorial to the victims of the 1974 bombing of Dublin by the UVF. The faces of the victims are shown on the sides of the sort of terraces that, in some neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland, would be plastered with murals honouring their killers – killers who, a vast digital caption reminds us as the song fades, have never been brought to justice.

There’s a sort of intermission: a pre-recorded, gloomy funk version of “The Fly”, played as U2 set up inside the screen, which is repurposed during this interregnum as an iridescent lime Berlin Wall, sprayed with scattershot slogans also retrieved from Zoo TV (“Everything You Know Is Wrong”, and so forth, with a few 21st-century additions, including “Unexpected Item In Bagging Area”). The second half of the show is largely a combination of cheerful greatest hits – “Desire” filmed on a phone by the girl previously fished from the crowd to dance along with “Mysterious Ways”, “Angel Of Harlem” accompanied by a couple of audience volunteers issued with guitars – and U2’s enduring determination that a rock’n’roll show is absolutely the right place to contemplate serious matters.

Footage of recently ruined cities and trudging columns of their former citizens haunts the screen. A furious “Bullet The Blue Sky” is punctuated by Bono attempting to rouse Europe’s conscience via megaphone (“What do you want? A Europe with its heart open, or its borders

## SET LIST

- 1 The Miracle (Of Joey Ramone)
- 2 Out Of Control
- 3 Vertigo
- 4 I Will Follow
- 5 Iris (Hold Me Close)
- 6 Cedarwood Road
- 7 Song For Someone
- 8 Sunday Bloody Sunday
- 9 Raised By Wolves
- 10 Until The End Of The World
- 11 The Fly
- 12 Invisible
- 13 Even Better Than The Real Thing
- 14 Mysterious Ways
- 15 Desire
- 16 Angel Of Harlem
- 17 Every Breaking Wave
- 18 October
- 19 Bullet The Blue Sky
- 20 Zooropa
- 21 Where The Streets Have No Name
- 22 Pride (In The Name Of Love)
- 23 With Or Without You
- 24 City Of Blinding Lights
- 25 Beautiful Day
- 26 Mother & Child Reunion
- 27 I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For

closed to mercy?”). “Pride (In The Name Of Love)” is rewritten in memory of “One boy washed up/On an empty beach”. It is evocative of U2’s live hook-ups with besieged Sarajevo circa Zoo TV in that it is gauche, jarring and intended to be both. The encore contains a few diversions from the expected – a taped monologue advocating general niceness by Stephen Hawking, a version of Paul Simon’s “Mother & Child Reunion” accompanying an animation about RED’s campaign against AIDS, and a guest turn by Noel Gallagher on “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For”.

The “intimacy” for which U2 were searching on this tour is of course a relative concept – the O2 holds more people every night than many bands will play to over a very long tour. But this show bears approximately the same relationship to the previous “360°” stadium leviathan that *Songs Of Innocence* does to *No Line On The Horizon* (perhaps significantly, the latter is ignored for the purposes of assembling tonight’s set-list). The boys-to-men-to-boys plot of *Songs Of Innocence* – which sounds far fresher and far fiercer tonight than on record – could have turned proceedings into “U2: The Musical”. As it is, this is a vivacious, exultant incarnation of a band for whom rock’n’roll was never an escape, but a homecoming.

ANDREW MUELLER

**“It’s personal and it’s political, but we’ve tried to keep the political personal” – Bono**



the standing area on the floor of the venue, hangs a vast rectangular screen, thus far a vacant black slab. It now flickers to life with family movies, for “Iris (Hold Me Close)”, the centrepiece of *Songs Of Innocence*, a track named for Bono’s mother. What follows is one of those U2 moments that can strike as overwhelming in its awkwardness and guilelessness, at least until you absorb that this is precisely the intention, the Bono of here and now reaching hopelessly out to a vast projection of his lost parent. By way of illustrating the key line of the song (“The stars are bright but do they know/The universe is beautiful but cold”) the screen fades into a map of the constellations, vast and indifferent. It’s a trick revived from the Zoo TV tour, when a similar show served as backdrop to “Love Is Blindness”. Now, as then, it reminds of Douglas Adams’ conceit of the Total Perspective Vortex, a map of the cosmos, somewhere upon which the caption beneath an invisibly microscopic dot reads, “You are here.”



Harp attack: Newsom straddling musical worlds at the Apollo

## SET LIST

- 1 Bridges And Balloons
- 2 Anecdotes
- 3 Soft As Chalk
- 4 Divers
- 5 Goose Eggs
- 6 Emily
- 7 Sapokanikan
- 8 Leaving The City
- 9 Have One On Me
- 10 Waltz Of The 101st Lightborne Elite
- 11 Cosmia
- 12 Time, As A Symptom
- 13 A Pin-Light Bent
- ENCORE**
- 14 Baby Birch
- 15 Peach Plum Pear

before. "Goose Eggs" evokes all of Steely Dan's *Pretzel Logic* compressed into a single song, and single "Sapokanikan" is full of similarly agile hairpin turns. It ends with Newsom hysterical with loss as she contemplates buried legacies. It's incredible to see the chorus of "Leaving The City" created in person, every member of the band doubling down on intricate cadences that create a vast billowing.

The versatility of the band is clearer still on Newsom's older songs. "Bridges And Balloons" from 2004's *The Milk-Eyed Mender* now has more spacious intonation, and peals of electric guitar that illuminate its depth. Van Dyke Parks' heavy, baroque arrangements for 2006's *Ys* were divisive; stripped of its rich strings, the sweeps, booms and banjo clucks of "Emily" are breathtaking, as is Newsom's voice. On the final "meteorite" portion, she sings with a force that her microphone can barely contain, and gets a full minute of applause for it. It's a miraculous instrument, and her odd moments of fury are particularly thrilling: at the end of *Ys*' "Cosmia" where she shrieks "I miss, I miss your precious heart" in a piercing frenzy; the bold "la-aw-less-ness" of "Soft As Chalk" from *Have One On Me*.

As with the X-ray fluorescence scanning that reveals the hidden depths of paintings on "Sapokanikan", each new Newsom record illuminates the vast chasm of layers that's underpinned her masterly work all along. "Soft As Chalk" traces the death of a relationship in real time; *Divers* is an epic about time and love's earthly limitations, concluded on "Time, As A Symptom", where mournful beginnings transcend to a frenzied close. The band depart and Newsom fittingly plays "A Pin-Light Bent" – a sad acceptance of her own mortality – alone. On the front of Pete Newsom's drum is a clock face, permanently set to half-eight. As the counterpoint melodies of closer "Peach Plum Pear" draw to an end, it's hard to believe two transcendent hours have passed.

LAURA SNAPES

# JOANNA NEWSOM

LONDON HAMMERSMITH APOLLO, NOVEMBER 9, 2015

**Arc of a diver: the triumphant return of a unique singer-songwriter**

**A**T JOANNA NEWSOM'S first London gig in five years, the whoops of recognition that greet her older material are out of control. You'd almost think she'd emerged from the wings in a plume of dry ice, dressed as Art Garfunkel and ready to do "Bridge Over Troubled Water". It's particularly leaden in the encore when she starts playing "Baby Birch", a wrenching song about the loss of a child from 2010's *Have One On Me*. Woo! Devastating loss! I know this one!

Following the release of fourth album *Divers*, Newsom returns as the most pronounced figurehead of the intersection between indie-rock and more rarefied worlds. Her choice of venue tonight feels apt. While she praises the Apollo's "beautiful room" with its visible acoustic

detailing, you suspect she's aware that many of us were last in Hammersmith for Kate Bush's 2014 *Before The Dawn* tour.

Some easy comparisons between the two artists abide – the clarion synth throughout new song "Leaving The City" recalls *The Sensual World*, but more pertinently, their unmatched control over their respective stages. Newsom's is stripped back – her harp at the centre, with her brother Pete on drums and keys, Mirabai Peart on violin, viola, keys, vocals and recorder, and Ryan Francesconi on electric guitar, banjo, tambura, thumb piano and another half dozen obscure instruments. When Newsom asks him, "Is that it?" it feels like a wink at how easily they exceed their simple means on what might be her best live incarnation to date.

On "Anecdotes" the ensemble

stretch their physical limits. Newsom starts on the grand piano, then darts to the harp on the cascading middle section, before returning to the piano for its ragtime close. Fragmented

**Newsom's voice is a miraculous instrument. Her odd moments of fury are thrilling**

arrangements are characteristic of *Divers*: unlike Newsom's previous albums, it isn't an overhaul of her palette, but a record that furthers the frontiers of everything that's come

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17 BRIGHTON DOME	25 NEWCASTLE O2 ACADEMY
18 PORTSMOUTH PYRAMIDS	26 LEEDS BECKETT'S UNIVERSITY
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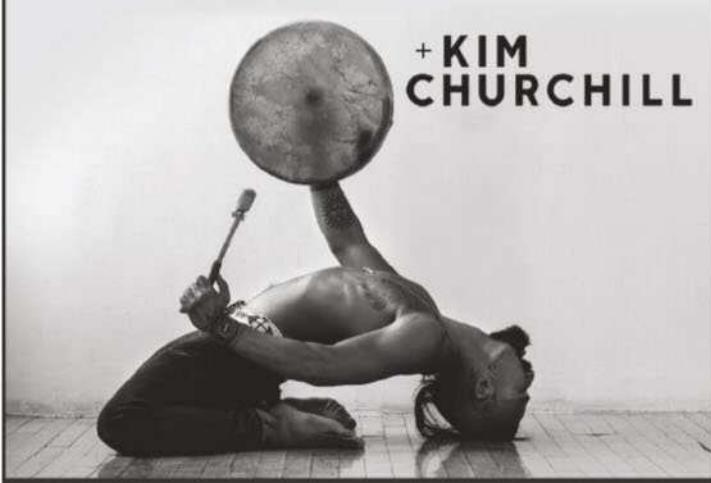
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**ORANGE GOBLIN**

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**THE CHARLATANS**

SATURDAY 12 DEC 2015  
**ASH**

TUESDAY 15 DEC 2015  
**SHED SEVEN**

SUNDAY 17 JAN 2016  
**THE TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT**

TUESDAY 19 JAN 2016  
**BAABA MAAL**

TUESDAY 2 FEB 2016  
**THE CADILLAC THREE**

SUNDAY 7 FEB 2016  
**GABRIELLE APLIN**

MONDAY 8 FEB 2016  
**BOWLING FOR SOUP**

THURSDAY 11 FEB 2016

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**FUN LOVIN' CRIMINALS**

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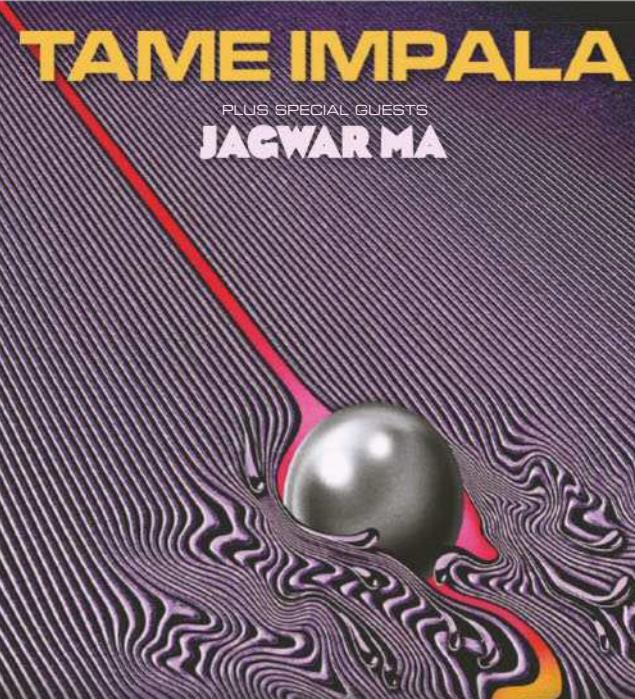
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# TURIN BRAKES

tom speight



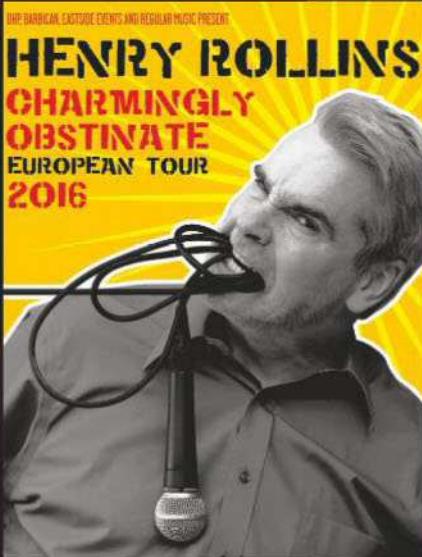
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 18 NOTTINGHAM RESCUE ROOMS  
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 21 NORWICH OPEN  
 22 BUXTON PAVILION ARTS CENTRE  
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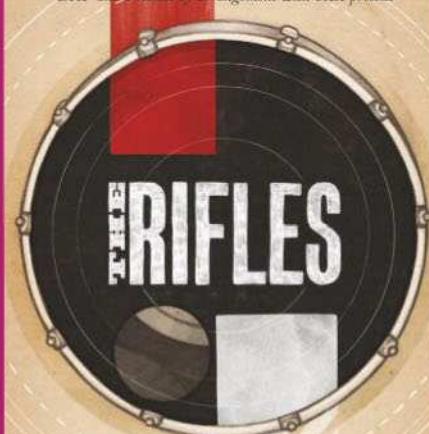
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 03 Mar GLASGOW Oran Mor  
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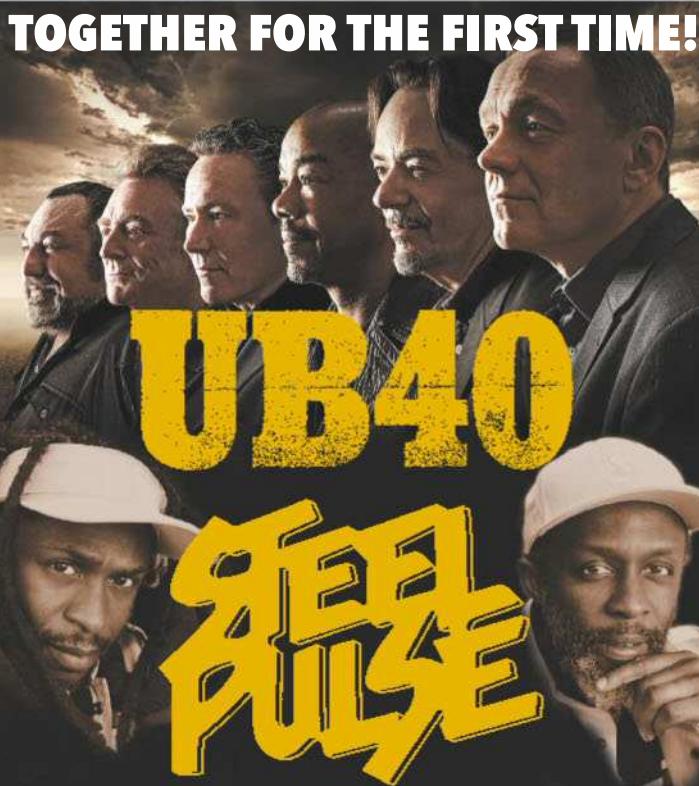
January  
 27 Leeds Brudenell Social Club  
 28 Newcastle Riverside  
 30 Belfast Limelight 1  
 31 Glasgow O2 ABC (Matinee Family Show)  
 31 Glasgow O2 ABC (Evening Show)

February  
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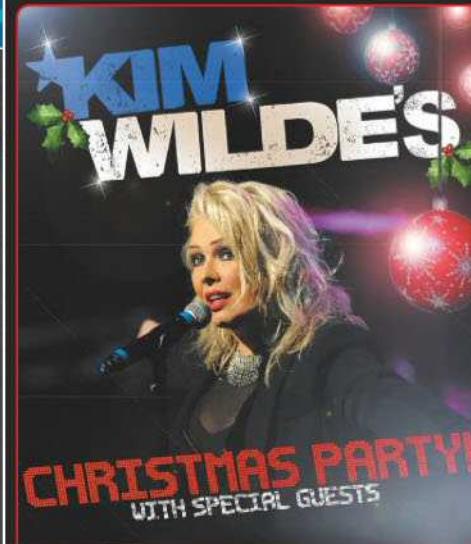
## THE TWANG



SAT 19TH DEC 2015  
BIRMINGHAM O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS TBC

THU 31ST DEC 2015 • 9PM TIL LATE  
LONDON O<sub>2</sub> SHEPHERDS BUSH EMPIRE  
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29 DONCASTER THE DOME  
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03 CHATHAM CENTRAL THEATRE\*  
04 BOURNEMOUTH O2 ACADEMY\*  
11 CARDIFF THE TRAMSHED\*  
13 WOLVERHAMPTON THE GRAND\*  
15 CANTERBURY THE MARLOWE\*  
18 STOKE-ON-TRENT VICTORIA HALL\*  
19 NEWCASTLE CITY HALL\*  
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SAT 13 GLASGOW O2 ABC2  
FRI 19 BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY  
SAT 20 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY3  
FRI 26 OXFORD O2 ACADEMY2  
SAT 27 LONDON O2 ACADEMY2  
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MARCH 2016  
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29 MORECOMBE The Platform

MAY  
05 BRIGHTON Komedia  
06 BIRMINGHAM O2 Academy2  
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FRI 18 LONDON O2 ACADEMY ISLINGTON  
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Sat 5th Dec 15 O2 Academy3 Birmingham  
Sat 11th Dec 15 O2 Academy2 Glasgow  
Sat 12th Dec 15 O2 Academy2 Liverpool  
Sat 13th Dec 15 O2 Academy2 Islington  
Sat 20th Jan 16 Rescue Rooms Nottingham  
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WORKSSAT 12<sup>TH</sup> CARDIFF | TRAMSHEDTHU 17<sup>TH</sup> BRISTOL | O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMYFRI 18<sup>TH</sup> LONDON | O<sub>2</sub> SHEPHERDS BUSH EMPIRETHU 24<sup>TH</sup> GLASGOW | O<sub>2</sub> ABCFRI 25<sup>TH</sup> NEWCASTLE | O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMYSAT 26<sup>TH</sup> LEEDS | O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMYSAT 19<sup>TH</sup> BIRMINGHAM | O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY

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Atkinson Theatre  
6 Shrewsbury,  
Walker Theatre  
7 Much Marcle,  
Hellans Manor  
9 Rhyl, Pavilion Theatre



10 Harpenden,  
Public Halls

11 Bexhill,  
De La Warr Pavilion

13 Buxton,  
Pavilion Arts Centre  
14 High Wycombe,  
Town Hall

16 London, Union Chapel

18 Sheffield,  
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19 Bromsgrove, Artrix  
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- 5 Leeds City Varieties
- 6 Buxton Arts Centre
- 7 Lincoln Engine Shed
- 8 Preston Charter Theatre
- 10 Poole Arts Centre
- 11 Swindon Arts Centre

**APRIL**

- 7 Weston-super-Mare Playhouse
- 8 Stoke Sugarmill
- 9 Scarborough Stephen Joseph
- 14 Worthing Connaught
- 15 Gloucester Guildhall
- 21 Torquay Princess Theatre
- 22 Falmouth Princess Pavilion
- 23 Cardiff Tramshed



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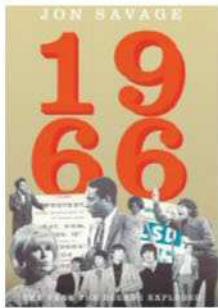
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# Books

BY ALLAN JONES



## Reviewed this month...

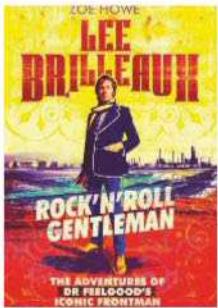


**1966: The Year  
The Decade  
Exploded**

Jon Savage

FABER & FABER

**9/10**



**Lee Brilleaux:  
Rock'n'Roll  
Gentleman**

Zoe Howe

POLYGON

**8/10**

**L**ET'S NOT STOP to argue the fact. As far as Jon Savage is concerned, 1966 was "the sixties peak", an incomparable time of radical creative urgencies, accelerating change, astonishing ambition, bold idealism, eventual breakdown and inevitable backlash. **1966: The Year The Decade Exploded** is an extended analytical hymn to those heady days. Savage turned 13 in the summer of that year. Like many of us of the same age, he was consumed by the euphoric rush of the music we heard, the world suddenly a jukebox in your head you couldn't turn off. The limits of everything were being tested, fractured, broken. It was somewhere beyond exciting, and Savage brilliantly captures the thrill of it all.

The book's structure is deceptively schematic: 12 essays, one per month for the year. The starting point for each chapter is a record released that month as the A- or B-side of a single, the 45 in its last year of supremacy before the long-playing album became the preferred format as pop turned to rock.

Savage, however, doesn't simply deliver a diary of the year, a daily accounting of what went on, history reduced merely to one thing happening after another. He ranges widely across the contemporary cultural, social and political landscapes with scholarly aplomb and finds something worthwhile to say about whatever he alights upon, from Carnaby Street to Vietnam, acid to the atom bomb.

Sixties teenagers grew up in a world threatened by nuclear annihilation. An uncertain future provoked among other things a reckless fatalism, a gung-ho abandon. A willingness to experiment, whatever the consequences, fed on the excitement of ever wilder music, clothes, films, political activism, drugs and emancipation via excess. In his opening essay, Savage takes a little-heard B-side, "A Quiet Explosion", released in January 1966 by Birmingham's The Ugly's, as a specific response to imminent global destruction, the chapter typically broadening to embrace the Cuban Missile Crisis, CND, the British folk scene, Peter Watkins' *The War Game*, Jeff Nuttall's *Bomb Culture* – a key '60s text.

Some chapters are built around familiar records. The Stones' "19th Nervous Breakdown" introduces a terrific section on Swinging London and its decadent new social sets – "arty, drugged, closed to the general public". The divisive impact of Vietnam on America is discussed via Barry Sadler's pro-war "The Ballad Of The Green Berets", one of the year's biggest hits. Wilson Pickett's "Land Of 1000 Dances" heralds a chapter on black American music, Tamla, Stax, James Brown, the Civil Rights movement, black militancy and the Black Panthers. Surprises elsewhere abound. The Velvet Underground's "I'll Be Your Mirror" is the hook for an outstanding chapter on the Warhol crowd. Love's apocalyptic "7 And 7 Is" offers a way into the West Coast scene, Los Angeles and San Francisco replacing fading London as creative epicentres. Norma Tanega's "Walkin' My Cat Named Dog" and a Joe Meek-produced obscurity by The Tornados, a B-side called "Do You Come Here Often?", preface

**Doc savage:  
Feelgoods frontman  
Lee Brilleaux**

valuable sections on female independence and oppressed '60s gay culture.

Savage sees 1966 as the apogee of the '60s pop single. By year's end, the psychedelic era beckoned. Cream and Jimi Hendrix were in the charts. Pink Floyd were at UFO. The Beatles were recording "Strawberry Fields Forever". LSD was everywhere. Suddenly it was 1967. And what a trip that would be.

► **Zoe Howe** doesn't make much of it in **Lee Brilleaux: Rock'n'Roll Gentleman**, but Lee's death on April 7, 1994, was barely noticed by the music press. Our attention was elsewhere. Two days earlier Kurt Cobain had killed himself. Lee's passing became therefore a mere footnote to the unfolding drama in Seattle, briefly mentioned. Twenty years earlier, of course, Lee had been all over the music weeklies as singer for mad-dog Canvey Island rhythm and blues monsters Dr Feelgood. Brilleaux was the livid personification of their raw noise and snarling contempt for the era's musical self-indulgence, crop-haired, fists-clenched, predatory, coiled, about to strike and, until Johnny Rotten happened along, English rock's most

charismatic frontman.

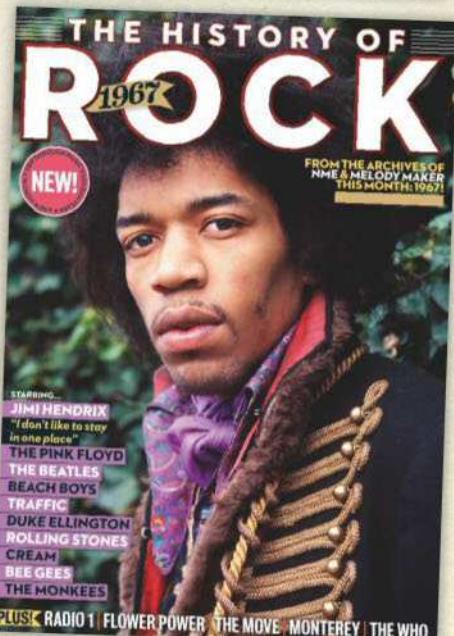
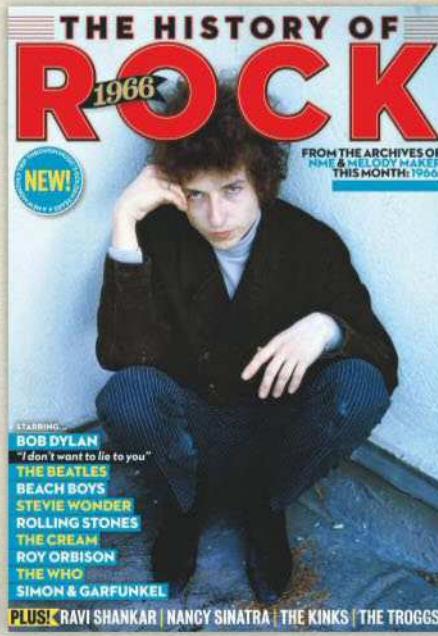
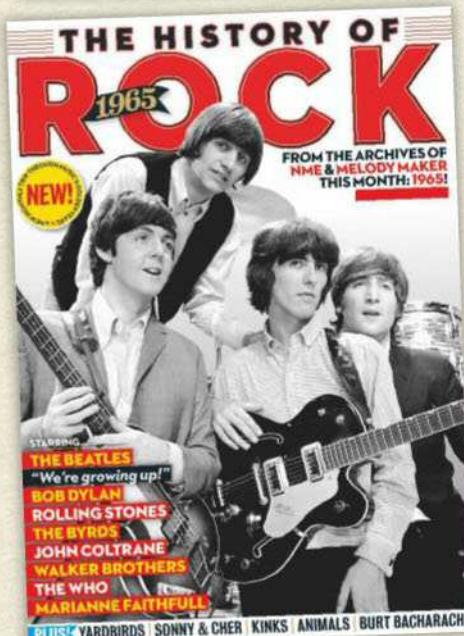
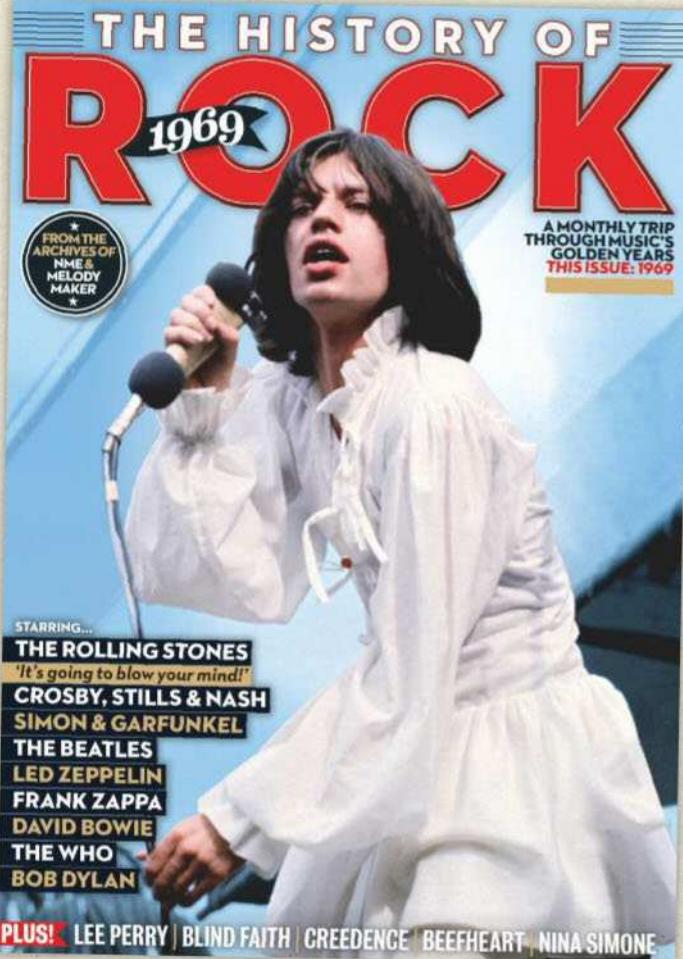
As many of the people who knew him recall in this vivid, entertaining and overdue biography, Lee was well-read (among his favourite writers were Dickens, Trollope, Steinbeck, Patricia Highsmith and Eric Newby), sharply intelligent, outspoken and hilarious. He was volatile, too, occasionally fierce company when he was drinking, which was often. There was also something of the dandy about Lee, even when he came offstage looking as if he'd just been put through a car wash. So it's a hoot to discover that at school he was the leader of The Utterly Club – subsequently The Lovely Club – who sported cravats, waistcoats, watch-chains, canes, the occasional hat and monocles. Later, he frequented bespoke Berwick Street tailors Mr Eddie and Chris Kerr, wore hand-made shoes from New & Lingwood of Jermyn Street. He affected tweeds, cavalry twills and Barbour jackets, was reinvented as a country gentleman. When he was dying, he added a smoking jacket, a smoking cap with a little tassel, velvet smoking slippers and a monocle to his eccentric wardrobe.

The Feelgoods were rocked in 1977 by an acrimonious split with totemic guitarist and songwriter Wilko Johnson. They rallied, but the early-'80s were brutal. They were on their way to being forgotten. Johnson's replacement, John 'Gypie' Mayo, left in 1980, worn down by relentless touring and heroin. Long-serving rhythm section John B Sparks and The Big Figure were also both soon gone, similarly exhausted. Lee soldiered on with new lineups. But by the end of 1992 even he was flagging, in constant ill-health. In February 1993, he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma, a cancer of the lymph glands. Intense chemotherapy with predictably ghastly side effects failed to stop the cancer spreading. Lee was 42 when he died, the Feelgoods an obscure memory for many until Julian Temple's 2009 *Oil City Confidential* documentary and the 2012 *All Through The City* retrospective boxset confirmed their massive influence and his part in it.

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# Not Fade Away

Fondly remembered this month...



## JOE MOSS

Smiths and Johnny Marr manager

(1943-2015)

THE SMITHS WERE forever indebted to Joe Moss. Not only did he encourage the teenage Johnny Marr to follow his musical ambitions, he helped broker the guitarist's historic first meeting with Morrissey and supplied the fledgling band with a rehearsal space, PA and van. Moss also booked The Smiths' earliest gigs, paid for recording sessions and oversaw their record deal with Rough Trade. "Joe was a one-off, an amazing person and totally unique," said Marr in tribute. "He invested his time and money in us when no-one else wanted to know, and his belief in us kept us going. Without him there wouldn't have been any Smiths. He was an original beatnik and

Show special on Leiber and Stoller – led to him knocking on Morrissey's door in search of a co-songwriter.

The Smiths spent the winter of 1982 rehearsing at Crazy Face's warehouse on Portland Street, where they cut demo versions of "Hand In Glove" and "What Difference Does It Make?", among others. In February 1983, Moss stumped up £250 to record "Hand In Glove" at Strawberry Studios in Stockport and, a month later, arranged their debut London gig at the Rock Garden, enabling Rough Trade boss Geoff Travis to view his potential new signings at close quarters.

Moss quit on the eve of The Smiths' first tour of America, post-"*This Charming Man*", in late '83. The following decade saw him promote gigs at Manchester's Night And Day Café and oversee the careers of local bands Marion and Haven. In 1999 he became Marr's manager, a position he kept until his death. "Everyone who met him loved him," recalled Marr. "He can never be replaced."

## JOHN BERG

Grammy-winning art director

(1932-2015)

As Columbia Records' in-house art director from 1961-85, John Berg oversaw a wealth of classic album covers. His four Grammy awards included *Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits*, for which he used Rowland Scherman's backlit head shot of Dylan with its distinctive halo effect. He also designed *Blonde On Blonde* and Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew*, as well as persuading a reluctant Bruce Springsteen to embrace the more informal imagery of *Born To Run*. "It oozes charm," Berg said of the finished product.

## CORY WELLS

Three Dog Night vocalist

(1941-2015)

Randy Newman once personally thanked Cory Wells "for putting my kids through college". One of three singers in Three Dog Night, Wells had taken the lead on Newman's "Mama Told Me (Not To Come)", a *Billboard* chart-topper in 1970. It landed amid a welter of Top 40 hits from 1969 onwards, including Harry Nilsson's "One" and Hoyt Axton's "Joy To The World". Wells recorded a solo LP, *Touch Me*, after they split in 1976, though he revived the band in the mid '80s.

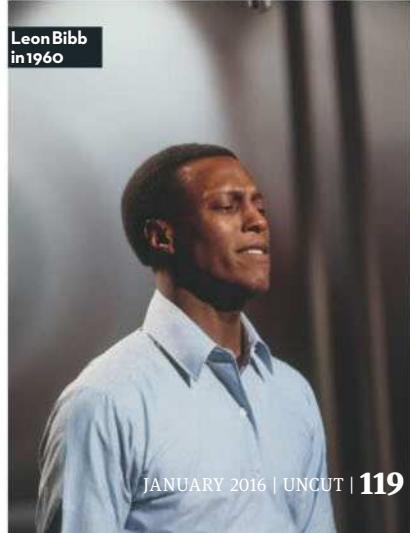
## LEON BIBB

Singer, actor, activist

(1922-2015)

Tony-winning actor Leon Bibb's first love was the theatre, though he was also a very fine troubadour with a rousing baritone. His Vanguard debut, *Leon Bibb Sings Folk Songs* (1959), one of a dozen solo albums cut over five decades, coincided with his appearance at that year's Newport Folk Festival. Bibb, father of renowned bluesman Eric, became a prominent advocate for civil rights, taking part in 1963's March

Leon Bibb  
in 1960



On Washington and, two years later, the historic trek from Selma to Montgomery.

## DIANE CHARLEMAGNE

R&B vocalist

(1964-2015)

Diane Charlemagne, who has died from cancer, made her name as soulful frontwoman with R&B outfit Urban Cookie Collective, scoring two Top 5 hits in 1993 with "The Key The Secret" and "Feels Like Heaven". The following year, she lent her sensual tones to Goldie's "Inner City Life", the pair hooking up again for "Kemistry", another track from *Timeless*. Having begun in the '80s with Manchester jazz-funk band 52nd Street, Charlemagne also toured with Moby and worked with Howie B and D:Ream.

## DON RENDELL

Jazz saxophonist

(1926-2015)

The strapping tenor lines of saxophonist Don Rendell, who was also an eloquent flautist and clarinet player, were a key feature of the Johnny Dankworth Seven, which he joined in 1950. He quit the band three years later, after which he toured with Billie Holiday, gigged in Europe with Stan Kenton and starred in Woody Herman's Anglo-American Herd. In 1961 he issued *Roarin'*, with Graham Bond, and went on to form the highly regarded Rendell-Carr Quintet, with trumpeter Ian Carr.

ROB HUGHES

# Feedback...

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## ASTRAL WEAKNESSES?

I very much enjoyed Andy Gill's thoughtful and informative review of the expanded and remastered re-release of Van Morrison's seminal *Astral Weeks* [Uncut, December]. But how on earth did you decide to award the album only 9/10 (Essential)? If ever an album merited the full 10/10 (Masterpiece) accolade, surely it has to be *Astral Weeks*, a work of unique poetic and musical perfection? Incidentally, Andy's review refers to the story that Warner Bros' Joe Smith had to deliver \$20,000 in cash to mobsters to buy Morrison out of his contract with the late Bert Berns' Bang label. Ryan Hamilton Walsh confirms this in his excellent article in the April issue of *Boston Magazine* (available on the magazine's website), dealing with Van's hideaway in Cambridge, Massachusetts while he worked on the material for what was to become *Astral Weeks*.

Finally, someone somewhere must have a copy of the recording Peter Wolf made of Van playing the *Astral Weeks* material live at the Catacombs club in Boston before he went into the studio. That would have made a perfect companion piece for a 50th anniversary edition of *Astral Weeks*.

**David Lavery, via email**

...It is surely churlish of you to rate *Astral Weeks* as a 9/10, just like any old album, when you know perfectly well that it now exists above and beyond such categorisation in the all-time rock canon. It exists as an example of rock music transcending its form to become a true one-off, so beyond quibbling over mere numbers. I am listening to it now, so much of itself. Other "out there" albums in their own way are *Starsailor* and *No Other*. If I have to say their names, then you have not been paying attention.

**Neil MacAlpine, Broughty Ferry, Dundee**

## ALEX CHILTON'S PRODUCER WRITES

I read with great interest your review of the *Ork Records New York New York* set [Uncut, November issue], which features my Alex



Chilton, Mick Farren and Prix tracks (about a third of the set), as well as the Richard Lloyd "Get Off My Cloud", which I produced the basic track to and played bass on (left off credits for some reason). I enjoyed the review and the colourful stories, but there was a tremendous inaccuracy in the description of my Alex Chilton recordings.

All of the tracks on *Singer Not The Song* were recorded in Memphis at Ardent Studios in 1975. I came back to New York, went to every record company and got rejected, flew back to Memphis and worked with Tommy Hoehn on Prix. Went back to NYC and met Terry, did the deal for *Singer Not The Song* and Prix. Right after the record was released, Terry flew Alex up to New York for gigging. He decided to do some new recordings in New York and he didn't want to be produced, so I introduced Terry to a studio where they could do things on the cheap. There were never any demos; all the recordings were produced by me independently and leased to Ork.

And Prix are back on the boards with a new singer – Sid Herring of The Gants – with an American release of the original Japanese album *HISTORIX* out in the US on

HoZac Records (with one new track featuring Sid), and a new album next year.

**Jon Tiven, Nashville, Tennessee**

## THE GREAT DIONNE WARWICK NEWPORT JAZZ RIOT!

New reader. Been enjoying the September 2015 issue, but wanted to correct a couple of factual errors in your Newport Folk Festival article. Your article states, "Wein experimented with rock programming at Newport Jazz. The slate of performers in 1968 included Jethro Tull and Jeff Beck as well as Miles Davis and BB King. The last-minute cancellation of Led Zeppelin nearly caused another riot." I was not at the 1968 Newport Jazz Festival but I was at the 1969 festival. To the best of my knowledge and confirmed in the archives on the current jazz festival site, none of the performers you cite as playing in 1968 played the festival in 1968, they all played Newport Jazz in 1969. Led Zeppelin closed out the festival on Sunday night as originally scheduled.

I went back to Rhode Island for the Newport Jazz Festival again in 1971. The festival was cancelled early after people crashed the gates by bringing down one of the fences

surrounding the performance area during Dionne Warwick's set the first night. As a result there were no more jazz festivals at the Newport location for many years. As you mention, it first moved to New York City and was held at multiple indoor venues before returning to the old Newport site in the early '80s. The 1969 festival was very crowded but generally peaceful... 1971 was a totally different story.

**Stephen Ramirez, via email**

## THE EDUCATION OF BOOKER T

*Uncut* is far and away my favourite music publication of all time, and that was a fantastic piece on Otis Redding in the November issue. I wanted to point out one correction regarding Booker T Jones, in that he attended Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana and not Indiana State University as quoted in the article. There is a big difference. We Hoosiers are quite proud of Booker T, as he was recently inducted into Indiana University's Distinguished Alumni Hall Of Fame. Indiana State University is an entirely different educational institution located in Terre Haute, Indiana.

**Mike McAfee, Bloomington, Indiana**

# CROSSWORD

WIN!

One of three copies  
of the Sunn O))) album  
Kannon on CD

## SQUEEZED OUT

I was reading the "East Side Story" article in the October 2015 edition of *Uncut* and, try as I did, I saw no reference whatsoever to what many consider to be Squeeze's best song, "Pulling Mussels (From The Shell)". Did I just overlook mention of the song, or was there a deliberate omission? I'm beyond puzzled.

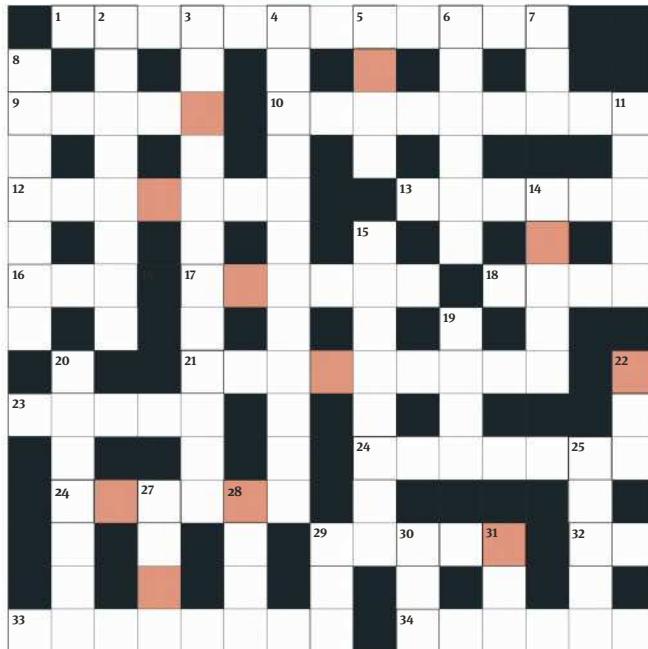
Ken, via email

## WHY DID THE HISTORY OF ROCK START IN 1965?

Regarding *The History Of Rock*, I wondered why you decided on a commencement year of 1965? I reckon the years 1960 to 1964, which coincided with my eventful grammar school era, were a rich vein of popular music. There was so much going on that seemed to link the mid- to late-'50s with what was about to explode in the mid-'60s. I have copies of the early '60s *NME* Annuals, and reckon 1963 is a landmark. January saw some fine instrumentals, as we endured the grip of the Big Freeze. "Globetrotter", produced by Joe Meek, was supposed to have been a Christmas issue, but delayed due to the continued success of "Telstar". The Shadows were still there, alongside The Tornados, and The Outlaws (who backed John Leyton on "Johnny Remember Me"), but "Diamonds" by Jet Harris And Tony Meehan stole the headlines. We had a splendid variety of sounds, including latterday conventional rock'n'roll from Chuck Berry, the continuation of 1950s crooners with Tony Bennett, the revival of doo wop and the commencement of the Mersey Sound. There was Phil Spector and surf music emerging strongly in the late summer/early autumn. Early Motown... trad jazz...

Perry Stephen Cliff, via email

We've had a few similar letters asking about why our monthly *History Of Rock* series began last summer with 1965. For what it's worth, we would have very much liked to start earlier, and in fact John Robinson did a lot of research in the archives of *NME* and *Melody Maker* to see if a 1964 issue, in particular, was feasible. *The History Of Rock* relies entirely on those old stories from the music weeklies, and unfortunately it wasn't until 1965 that the interviews became substantial enough to compile a 148-page magazine. Genuinely sorry we couldn't make this happen. - JM



### HOW TO ENTER

The letters in the shaded squares form an anagram of a song by Paul Weller. When you've worked out what it is, send your answer to: *Uncut* January 2016 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, December 28, 2015**. This competition is only open to European residents.

### CLUES ACROSS

**1+26A** The Zombies coming back to life on an empty stomach (5-3-4-6)  
**9** A tend of the month Mickie Most's record label will feature a King Crimson album (5)  
**10** Reformed post-punk band with 2015 album *Dark Matter/Dark Energy* (9)  
**12** (See 33across)  
**13** Do Wire reform for a Charlantans number? (6)  
**16** "Slip inside the \_\_\_ of your mind", from Oasis' "Don't Look Back In Anger" (3)  
**17** Not the same people in indie band with Dominic Masters (6)  
**18** One of the Haim sisters is into country and western (4)  
**21** "I lost myself on a cool damp night, gave myself in that misty light", soulful classic covered by numerous acts (5-4)  
**23+34A** And so it can't be put right for US songstress (5-6)  
**24** The Straws just can't keep it up (3-4)  
**26** (See 1across)  
**29** Sung a different way with AC/DC (5)  
**32** Amy MacDonald number in the intro to 24 across (1-1)  
**33+12A** Still trying to find somewhere to keep this old Hawkwind album? (2-6-2-5)  
**34** (See 23across)

### CLUES DOWN

**2** A track from Neil Young's *Rust Never Sleeps* that had us well beaten (8)

### ANSWERS: TAKE 222

#### ACROSS

1+4AMusic Complete, 9Songs To Play, 11Lee, 12Rain, 13+22D Leon Russell, 14+32ADo It Yourself, 16As It Happens, 20+18DI It's A Pleasure, 21Early

Days, 26Eyes, 28+10A King Bee, 29Love, 31It, 34Stop, 36+23DRag Doll, 37Sextet, 38Play, 39One..

#### DOWN

1Mistrial, 2Sandinista, 3Cast, 4Choke, 5Melanie, 6Layla, 7Tube, 8Heart, 17+27A Heavy

Soul, 19Sky, 24Someone, 25+15DBitteOrca, 26Egypt, 28Kiss, 30OKGo! 33Fry, 35Ox.

#### HIDDEN ANSWER

"Every Picture Tells A Story"

#### XWORD COMPILED BY:

Trevor Hungerford

**UNCUT**

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## MY LIFE IN MUSIC

# Natalie Prass

2015's soulful new star picks her favourite records, and reveals how you can't start a riot without boiling an egg...



### My favourite holiday album

#### Sly And The Family Stone

#### *There's A Riot Goin' On* 1971

It's the most positive album ever. We listened to this a lot when we were tracking the record [Natalie Prass]. We would put it on almost every morning and get pumped up, make a hard-boiled egg and drink coffee, and talk about the day. So *There's A Riot...* and hardboiled eggs are the bread and butter of our record. It's also the perfect album for Thanksgiving or Christmas – it has a really good spirit.

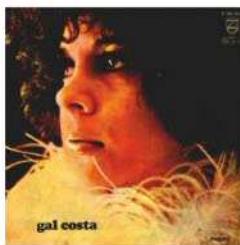


### A big influence on my album

#### Mina Mazzini

#### *Il Cielo In Una Stanza* 1960

Mina is an Italian singer, and she has the most powerful vibrato, very emotional and dramatic. I showed this song to Matt [E White, producer] before we started recording as a reference. When I first heard it, I was like, "I want to share this with people, but I don't want it just posted on Facebook." I felt like it needed something really special, so I thought I'd start a blog where I post all the special treasured stuff that I find.

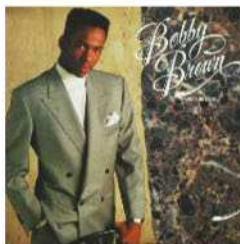


### The song that changed my life

#### Gal Costa

#### *Baby* 1969

It sounds a bit dramatic, but it's true. This was my first introduction to Tropicália music, about six years ago. I was working in retail, and I put on this internet radio station as I was opening the store, and this song came on. I was like, "What is this? It's the most amazing song I've ever heard!" And from there I just kept searching – but Gal Costa, and all those Tropicália musicians, totally changed a lot for me. She's a huge influence in my life still.



### A feelgood album

#### Bobby Brown

#### *Don't Be Cruel* 1988

I got the tape of this when I was six and seven, and I think I put it back on again when I was in college, like, "Oh yeah, a Bobby Brown tape that I've had forever, carrying around with me." Yeah, I love this tape, it's probably in my top 10 favourite albums – I still have it in the back of my car, I throw all my groceries on top of it. It's there, and I know it still works. It's just like a thing I've carried around my whole life.

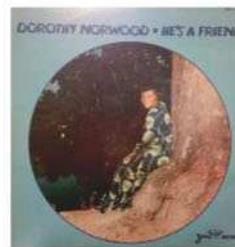


### An album that never gets old

#### The Impressions

#### *This Is My Country* 1968

I haven't listened to this much recently, but there was a point where I listened to it every day multiple times. It's just an incredible record – it's one of their last albums with Curtis Mayfield [who left the band in 1970], and Donny Hathaway wrote a lot of songs on it, too. There are some amazing chord progressions here, just everything I love. Another good holiday album, it's just really great.



### The best LP found in a dollar bin

#### Dorothy Norwood

#### *He's A Friend* 1978

I had no idea who Dorothy Norwood was when I found this, it's just that the album cover was amazing – she's sitting in a tree and wearing this really beautiful long floral dress, and the cover has this sky blue border. It's great. She is a gospel singer from Atlanta. It's just super-groovy. She has made so much great music, but this one kind of leapt out and might be my favourite of hers.



### An album I'm still searching for

#### Odetta

#### *Odetta Sings* 1970

I'm determined to find this naturally, I don't want to buy it on the internet. Any time I look it up online it's really expensive, so I think it's kind of rare. She does a bunch of covers of Dylan and the Stones, but there are some originals on there, too. She never really did the folk thing, this is more like a soul record. One day I will find it, I've been hunting for it for like three years... It's got to be right, too, it's got to be the original pressing.



### The best R&B ballad released this year

#### Ciara

#### *I Bet* 2015

I listen to this song once a week probably. It has everything I love about an R&B ballad: there's really not much to it, it's just a synth, an acoustic guitar, electronic drums and a really great melody. It's just the best, so simple and really sad. There's a really great lyric on the second verse: "You actin' like you upgraded me, I upgraded you/You and me Fashion Week in Paris, I put you on to that new." It's such a good song.

Natalie Prass' self-titled debut album is out now on Spacebomb/Caroline International

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