

From The Vaults

Reissues, remasters and compilations

Still Crazy

Formative soft-rock near-classic, belatedly dominated by one song, adds demos. *By Chris Roberts*

Elton John

Madman Across The Water

★★★★

UMC 3583613 (2CD/3CD/Blu-ray, LP/4LP)

There are people in their twenties now who sing along to Tiny Dancer with no idea that it was relatively unknown, even within the Elton canon, until the turn of the century. Overlong as a single, it didn't make much impact at the time of release. Only three decades later, in 2000, did its prominence in Cameron Crowe's film *Almost Famous*, a romanticised love letter to the 70s US rock scene, ensure that everybody, not just Kate Hudson and Billy Crudup, knew every word of every line.

Those are some curious words and lines. From its cheesy opening of "Blue jean baby, .A lady...", Tiny Dancer finds a simultaneously naïve and jaded Bernie Taupin attempting to capture the feel of life on the road. It fuses the wide-eyed innocence of the farm boy with the glee of a young man seeing all his wildest fantasies – about America, women and rock'n'roll – come true. He'd married Maxine Feibelman in April '71, and she was immortalised herein as "seamstress for the band". Her father was a champagne importer, so the wedding reception had been blessed by unlimited champers.

Bubbling through the muddled love lyrics of Tiny Dancer, however, are the other key themes of *Madman Across The Water*: the loneliness of this endless touring, and the thrill of it: the headlights on the highway. Bernie and Elton's obsession with Americana had already coloured 1970's *Tumbleweed Connection*, and the fact that the US was keener on the singer than the UK only consolidated their affection for the States' mythology. Whereas that previous studio album had still primarily engaged with Taupin's teenage fantasies about America, this documented what it was actually like to be stuck there, with fatigue as an albatross, the gloss shedding incrementally.

Technically, *Madman Across The Water*, released on Bonfire Night, was Elton's third album of 1971. The live set *17-11-70* had emerged in April, and the dreadful yet Grammy-nominated soundtrack album, *Friends*, in March. This, though, was the spiritual follow-up to *Tumbleweed Connection*. The title track had even been recorded for that album, with Mick Ronson wailing on guitar. The "re-recording" here, with Davey Johnstone, was more restrained, oddly. However, it perhaps

sat better within the whole album, which generally simmers under Elton's over-the-top strangulated American accent and tinkling piano. So much tinkling. Gus Dudgeon's production is solid but risk-averse, a dash of gospel in the backing vocals, late on, the only camp flourish. Even Paul Buckmaster's strings seem subdued, by his standards. You've got session men like Rick Wakeman, Chris Spedding and Herbie Flowers chipping in – Dudgeon wasn't overly impressed by Elton's regular band – yet it all feels like it prefers strolling to sprinting.

That does give it a lazy, rumbling swing, even if it tamps down any charisma. Trident Studios engineer Ken Scott was at the time quietly settling in as producer on *Hunky Dory* and *Ziggy Stardust*, but wasn't allowed to unleash any moonage daydreams here.

The album's strengths lie in Elton's then insanely prolific, almost savant, gift for melody and irresistible chord changes. Much like Tiny Dancer, *Levon* is a splendid piece of construction, which as a vocalist Elton sells hard. (Tony Burrows' backing vocals help). Dudgeon claimed it was inspired by Levon Helm of The Band, though Taupin said that was nonsense. (He also denied *Madman Across The Water* was anything to do with Richard Nixon). Songs like *Razor Face* and *Holiday Inn* (another whine about the hard work of being a rock star) tread water; Rotten

Peaches and *All The Nasties* find a second wind. *Goodbye* is a touching send-off.

Yet the other track aside from Tiny Dancer which found a 21st-century resurrection is *Indian Sunset*, which bizarrely was sampled in *Ghetto Gospel*, the Eminem-produced 2004 UK chart-topper from 2Pac "featuring Elton John". If 2Pac's posthumous hit was anti-racism, the original song is a slice of hasn't-aged-well redface, where Taupin imagines being a member of the Iroquois tribe, chucking in words like "teepee" and "tomahawk" and "squaw" with some historical inaccuracy. He had visited a Native American reservation, in fairness, but it feels like he spent most of his time in the gift shop. Nonetheless Elton, a grafter and a ham and a fine set of lungs, gives it his all, almost convincing us it works. Like the album, and like Elton's career at this stage, it had more emotional pull with Americans than with Brits. That course was modified in April '72 when *Rocket Man* came out in the same month as *Starman*, and Britain was invited to co-opt Elton to Glam.

This 50th-anniversary edition arrives – 51 years on – as a straightforward 1LP Bob Ludwig remaster, a 2CD set with rarities and demos, a 3CD & Blu-ray with book and memorabilia (and ...*Whistle Test* performance), or a 4LP box set with intros from Elton and Bernie. Depending on your choice, you'll find tweaked permutations. In essence, the key Santa-drop here is a batch of Elton's solo piano demos – and who doesn't want to hear him belting out Tiny Dancer with full jazz hands to illustrate how big he wants it to sound with the band? Then there's the BBC *Sounds For Saturday* recordings (taped November '71), which – like most early 70s Elton live stuff – reminds us he was an earthy rocker before he was someone famous for being famous. Albeit a rocker with a knack for cooking up a plangent ballad, whether Bernie was penning gibberish or jewels that day.

That slow-burn, sleeper, near-freakish success of Tiny Dancer means *Madman...* is perceived through a different prism now than it was then. In '71, it was another passable huff and puff from a

workaholic striver who was beginning to get traction, had new manager/boyfriend John Reid fighting his corner, and had only recently moved out of his mum's place. Now, it's the Tiny Dancer album, the rest of it a supporting cast. And after all these years, it still throws you that *that* chorus doesn't come in for ages. Half a century on, it's still all about deferred gratification.



Photo (Elton John): Ed Carraeff



Elton John and Bernie Taupin: "What do you mean people won't get into *Tiny Dancer* for another 30 years?"

Broad Church

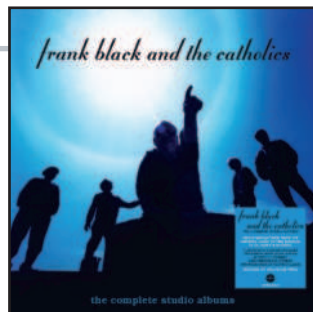
Compiling the diverse ideas of the Pixies leader's other band. *By John Earls.*

Frank Black And The Catholics

The Complete Studio Albums

★★★★★

Demon DEMREBOX 68 (7LP)



Since Pixies reformed in 2004, the prolific workrate of Charles Thompson IV, switching from his original band's alias Black Francis to Frank Black, has been overlooked. There were three entertaining solo Frank Black albums from 1993-96, and then he got seriously busy. From 1998-2003, Black's band Frank Black And The Catholics specialised in recording to two-track, dashing off an average of an album a year (to compensate for Black scrapping 2000's *Sunday Sunny Mill Valley Groove Day* on the eve of its release, 2002 saw two Catholics albums).

In 2015, their albums were compiled in a CD box set with assorted extras. Seven years on, they're out on vinyl, minus the extras. It means three albums make their vinyl debut, including fourth record *Dog In The Sand* – the absolute pick of the Catholics' six LPs, a pitch-perfect mix of the surf-inflected cheeriness that frequently infiltrates Pixies' mania and the more straight-up classic rock The Catholics had honed from their start. A cult classic, *Dog In The Sand* is where it appeared Black was finally being recognised as a frontman and songwriter with more to him than Pixies. One mischievous song is titled *Llana Del Rio*. Perhaps Lizzy Grant was taking notes for her own alias.

Despite the basic recording techniques and

ferocious productivity, there's far more going on here than bar-band primitivism. From their self-titled debut onwards, a devilish energy was the main common link. Black's vocals were more conversational than his old band, and his lyrics similarly unadorned. If you want to hear Thompson as seemingly straight-up singer and lyricist, head to 1999's *Pistolero*. Even there, the Catholics throw out garage rock, AOR, 50s rock & roll and alt. country among its 14 tracks.

Such a mix is broadly typical of a band determined not to overthink things. Sure, Heloise from 2002's *Devil's Workshop* might have become a fully-fledged powerful treasure with less scrappy guitars, but would it have maintained Black's fiery menace so gleefully? Moreover, it's preceded by *Are You Headed My Way*, a brilliant slice of early rock'n'roll where that second recording track might just be a little too much. The tracklisting on the debut album is in alphabetical order to save thinking about sequencing, typifying a band who



Frank Black And The Catholics: "Oh God," his bandmates thought, "not another sermon"



appear to want to get their ideas down quickly because there are so damn many of them they want people to hear.

By the relatively normal country-rock flavours in final album *Show Me Your Tears*, there was a sense that even Frank Black And The Catholics needed a break to recharge themselves. It's been 19 years now. With a new Pixies album due two months after this competently assembled box (a booklet with sleevenotes by producer Ben Mumphy and Steve Gullick's enigmatic photos is the only addition), maybe Thompson will find a way to have two bands happily co-existing. It's Black avoiding demotitis and realising the first idea is often best. They wouldn't need long to get a comeback album recorded, either.



Q&A

Frank Black on his part in online music history and the possibility of becoming a Catholic again.

about any of the repertoire has more to do with the ditty nature of the material, more than the time it was conceived.

After three solo albums, why did you want to start a new band?

As I recall, it just felt like the thing to do at the time; consistent line-up equals a band.

The Catholics' self-titled debut was the first album to be commercially released to buy as a download. How do you view your part in online music's history?

Like all online "history", it's interesting, but not what it's all about ultimately.

Lyrically, the Catholics' style appeared more straight down the middle than Pixies or your solo music. How did you find the challenge of approaching cliches without becoming cliched?

You make the approach. You either fail or succeed in

your ambition. I have experienced both sensations.

Why did recording to two-track become part of the band's ethos?

It happened unplanned on a weekend of "demo" recording. The live to two-track demos revealed themselves to be an exciting paradigm, at least for me.

How do you feel about the band's commercial position in retrospect?

I have no feelings about commercial position as such. You get what you get out of it. It's showbiz.

Would you be interested in ever making more Frank Black And The Catholics music, or touring with them?

Possibly. We're in touch and we've discussed both occasionally. Nothing has materialised yet, but it's a lotta planetary configuration we are talking about. *As told to John Earls.*

10cc Ultimate Hits & Beyond

★★★★★

Xploded TV XPLODED 112 V (2CD, 2LP)

I'm Mandy, buy me!



It's a given that 10cc's music will be endlessly recycled, but the concept here differs from numerous previous hits collections by stirring in other, related elements to justify the "Beyond" tag. These include the three biggest singles

from Kevin Godley and Lol Creme, plus half a dozen 60s classics written for others and performed here by songsmith/bassist Graham Gouldman.

Then there's Hotlegs' hit, five 2006 Godley-Gouldman collaborations and a clutch of unreleased 10cc live cuts from 2010. Perhaps the most tantalising item is *Natural Wonder*, an unreleased 1976 effort from the original four-piece. Written for a Revlon TV commercial, it has a real Brian

Wilson vibe and complements the approach of giving familiar songs a new context. Beyond, indeed! *Michael Heatley*

Tony Allen Secret Agent

★★★★★

World Circuit WLP 082 (2LP)

Afrobeat classic circles back on vinyl

From the money that Tony Allen made alongside Damon Albarn in the supergroup The Good, The Bad And The Queen, the



Lagos-born drum magus was able to finance *Secret Agent*, which he leased to Nick Gold's World Circuit label in 2009. The self-produced album received extremely positive reviews at the time and now, two years after Allen's death, has been remastered for a deluxe double vinyl reissue. Allen's effortlessly pulsing polyrhythms provide the heartbeat for the

set's 11 tracks whose blend of impassioned call-and-response vocals and jabbing horn riffs over a fluid groove rekindle memories of the inedible Afrobeat sound made by Fela Kuti, whom Allen played with for 15 years. The bounteous highlights range from the mesmerising title track to the more meditative, jazz-tinged *Switch* and the life-affirming *Celebrate* with King Odudu on lead vocals. It's addictively danceable. *Charles Waring*

Miller Anderson
Bright City

★★★★★
Esoteric ECLC 2801 (CD)
Soulful Scot goes solo



Miller Anderson played Woodstock fronting the Keef Hartley

Band before making a living as a blues-rock for hire with Spencer Davis, Jon Lord and others. This first solo effort dates from 1971, just post-Woodstock, and originally appeared on Deram. Contributors include Uriah Heep's Gary Thain (bass, a fellow Hartley refugee), Roy Thomas Baker (engineer) and Junior Campbell (orchestration), an indication of his stature. The nearest reference point is Traffic, with woodwind, brass and Hammond organ adorning the songs. Anderson's trademark blues growl alternates with a reedy, almost folksy vocal delivery as he revels in his new freedom. High Tide And High Water (also a BBC session cut) has remained a live staple for half a century, but there is much more to admire here. *Michael Heatley*

Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers With Thelonious Monk

Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers With Thelonious Monk (Deluxe Edition)

★★★★★
Rhino R1 670841/603497842391 (2CD, 2LP)

Classic collaboration between two jazz giants



No drummer could swing quite as hard as Art Blakey, the inspirational

leader of the long-running Jazz Messengers, a prestigious finishing school for jazz's finest young talents. In May 1957, Blakey took his group – with a frontline of saxophonist Johnny Griffin and trumpeter Bill Hardman – into the studio with the iconoclastic pianist/composer Thelonious Monk and came out with a six-track masterpiece. Monk thrives in the presence of Blakey, a polyrhythmic powerhouse whose percussive élan results in unique versions of some of the pianist's most iconic tunes including Blue Monk, Evidence, and a super-charged rendition of the propulsive Rhythm-A-Ning, where Blakey breaks into a seismic drum solo. The second disc spotlights previously unheard alternate takes of all six tracks, none of which are perceptibly inferior to the versions that made the final cut. A valuable jazz history lesson. *Charles Waring*

The Chemical Brothers
Dig Your Own Hole

★★★★★
EMI XDUSTX 2 (CD, 3LP)

Dance masterpiece expanded for anniversary



Cementing the duo's imperial phase, 1997's second

Brothers album houses both the ultimate dance gig opener and set closer, in the grandstanding Block Rockin' Beats and euphoric Private Psychedelic Reel respectively. The latter transcendent epic features Mercury Rev's Jonathan Donohue, one of several guests used perfectly by Tom Rowlands and Ed Simons. Despite his recent work with David Holmes, Noel Gallagher has never sounded so confident on the dancefloor as he does on the thumping Setting Sun. A surprisingly heavy and intense album for such a success, it nonetheless captures the era's hedonism better than anything. After the recent boxset for 1999's *Surrender*, the 25th-anniversary extras are more minimal here: five alternative mixes and outtakes, the mellow Cylinders and a sparser, still beautiful take on Beth Orton collaboration Where Do I Begin the pick. *John Earls*

The Clash
Combat Rock/The People's Hall

★★★★★
Sony 9439968552 (2CD, 3LP)

An extended public service announcement with guitars!



Released in May 1982, 18 months after *Sandinista* became

arguably one of the most crowd-splitting albums ever, *Combat Rock* was The Clash at their most succinct and pithy. The size and afterlife of big singles *Rock The Casbah* and *Should I Stay Or Should I Go* often put the rest of the album in the shade: it's full of style and invention, a diary of where the group were at in '81/82, with guests as diverse as Allen Ginsberg and Futura 2000. Overpowered By Funk, for example, was the perfect partner to The Magnificent Seven, continuing the group's love affair with the groove, emboldened by their legendary performances at Bonds Casino in New York. The additional 12 tracks here offer the fullest representation of the 1981 People's Hall material to date, finally making *Combat Rock* the ambitious double album that Mick Jones originally desired. *Daryl Easlea*

Daft Punk
Tron: Legacy (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)

★★★★★
UMC / Disney 8750257UK (2LP)

Decommissioned French robots' Hollywood outing



When the soundtrack to the long-awaited sci-fi sequel *Tron: Legacy*

was announced more than a decade ago, fans viewed it as more dithering from a band that was becoming famous for procrastination. Viewed retrospectively, *Tron: Legacy* maps out a whole other Daft Punk, and while it is music made to serve a purpose, it stands up as a singular work and has proven more durable than the movie. It's a spacious and, at times, awesome endeavour, featuring the grandeur of an 85-piece orchestra stitched seamlessly into the French duo's electronic working methods. Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo and Thomas Bangalter had enough savoir faire to downplay their own sonic identity for the cause, instead referencing modern masters such as Hans Zimmer and John Carpenter, as well as the original 1982 score by Wendy Carlos. *Jeremy Allen*

George Duke
No Rhyme, No Reason: The Elektra/Warner Years (1985- 2000)

★★★★★
SoulMusic Records QSMCR 5203 T (3CD)

US singer-songwriter's major label years



A multi-talented keyboard player, singer, composer and producer,

George Duke earned music degrees from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and San Francisco State University. He recorded albums with French jazz violinist Jean-Luc Ponty – playing on *King Kong*, Ponty's 1970 homage to Frank Zappa. Duke joined Zappa in 1970 and appeared on over a dozen of Zappa's jazz-rock and orchestral albums. He produced Gladys Knight, The Pointer Sisters and Smokey Robinson and joined Elektra in 1985, debuting with *Thief In The Night*, staking a claim as the king of FM-friendly smooth jazz and funk – with five R&B chart entries to back it up. The 45 tracks are pulled together here on a set drawing from his three Elektra and six Warner Brothers albums, with top quality production and detailed sleeve notes by RC's Charles Waring. *Tony Burke*

NOW ON



THE
bluetones

Hailing from Heston in West London, **The Bluetones** (Scott Morriss – bass, Eds Chesters – drums, Adam Devlin – guitars, and Mark Morriss – vocals) arrived on the scene in late 1995/early 1996 with the #2 single "Slight Return", and #1 debut album "Expecting To Fly". This album and the following two were included in Edsel's 2021 box set, containing the band's recordings from 1994 to 2002.

superior quality recordings 2003 – 2010
Deluxe 4 CD Box Set

This second box set contains **The Bluetones' second period of recordings, from 2003 to 2010: 50 tracks across four CDs.** It includes the albums "Luxembourg" (2003), "The Bluetones" (2006) and "A New Athens" (2010), plus the "Serenity Now" EP (2005), twelve B-sides, and two previously unreleased tracks. The four CDs are presented in facsimile wallets, and the booklet features newly-written notes by Adam Devlin on each album and the EP, along with all the credits, and the singles sleeves featuring Scott Morriss's fabulous artwork.



luxembourg

Released in 2003, and the first on their own label Superior Quality Recordings, "Luxembourg" was the band's fourth album and features the singles "Fast Boy"/"Liquid Lips" and "Never Going Nowhere". As The Guardian review said at the time, "You can't fault their ever-lush harmonies, or the garage-band scrappiness that gives 'Here It Comes Again' its appeal". Now issued on vinyl for the first time since 2003 (on translucent purple vinyl), the inner sleeve features all the lyrics and credits, photos, and a beautiful drawing by Scott Morriss.



the bluetones

Released in October 2006, "The Bluetones" was the band's fifth album and reunited them with Hugh Jones, producer of their first two albums. It features the singles "My Neighbour's House", "Head On A Spike" and "Surrendered". Now issued on vinyl for the first time ever (on translucent blue vinyl), the inner sleeve features all the lyrics and credits, photos, and another beautiful drawing by Scott Morriss.



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SOUL COLLECTOR

By Lois Wilson

Whatever You Want – Bob Crewe's 60s Soul Sounds (★★★★ Kent) spotlights the New Jersey writer, producer and arranger's canon. An indelible talent, he was able to move with the times penning doo wop, girl group pop, R&B for the dancefloor and also for the brokenhearted. He also found huge success, of course, writing and producing for Frankie Valli & The Four Seasons. Bookended by Hal Miller and the Rays' sublime An Angel Cried from 1961 and the Time Keepers' 1970 buzzy intro 3 Minutes Heavy, *Whatever You Want* is a joy from beginning to end with further standouts including Jerry Butler's title track, a dramatic ballad from 1963, Shirley Matthews & The Big Town Girls' snappy (You Can) Count On That from the same year and James Carr's punchy Sock It To Me Baby from 1967. The Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons tracks are ace, too. I'm Gonna Change from their 1967 New Gold Hits album was a hit on the 70s northern scene, although it's Valli's

(You're Gonna) Hurt Yourself from 65 that provides one of both his and Crewe's finest cuts.

From Plainfield, New Jersey, keyboardist **BERNIE WORRELL** was classically trained at the New England Conservatory Of Music and The Juilliard School and his innovative playing – whether on Hammond B3, RMI Electra, piano or Minimoog – was pivotal in the creation of the P-Funk sound from 1970's *Free Your Mind... And Your Ass Will Follow* by Funkadelic to Parliament's US R&B No 1 Flashlight in '78. That same year, Worrell made his solo debut with **All The Woo In The World** (★★★★ Music On Vinyl) which was originally released on Arista and is here reissued as a limited edition of 1500 individually-numbered copies on translucent red coloured vinyl. Its seven tracks, all loose jams, all imitatively P-Funk, unsurprisingly so as the album is co-produced by George Clinton, features P-Funk compadres including Garry Shider, Bootsy Collins and Eddie Hazel and has Fred Wesley arranging the horns. The high points are the madcap Woo Together and the 12-and-a-half-minute anthem Insurance Man For The Funk.

RAY CHARLES gets political on 1972's **A Message From The**

People (★★★★ Tangerine). With Quincy Jones producing, Sid Feller arranging, a crack band featuring Freddie Hubbard, Chuck Rainey and Hubert Laws plus the glorious Raelettes on backing vocals, Charles is on fire, aligning himself to Marvin Gaye, Sly And The Family Stone and Stevie Wonder on a set of social conscience gospel, soul and R&B including a cover of the latter named's Heaven Help Us All. Elsewhere he re-energises Lift Every Voice And Sing and America The Beautiful and takes Melanie's What Have They Done To My Song and Dion's Abraham, Martin And John to church.

New York City Blues (★★★★ Ace) is the soundtrack companion to the book of the same name by Larry Simon and edited by John Broven. It's a compelling snapshot of a vibrant, eclectic scene and includes Blind Boy Fuller's rockin' Step It Up And Go from 1940, John Hammond's 1965 garage R&B take on Billy Boy Arnold's I Wish You Would featuring Robbie Robertson and Bill Wyman plus the much in-demand Bobby Robinson and Marshall Sehorn-produced Jack That Cat Was Clean by Dr Horse aka Alvergous Pittman from '62.

Reality's Disco Party (★★★★ Jazzman) from 1976 was conceived to fail. While the musicians, formerly the Smokin' Shades of Black, led by Dr Otto Gomez, put their heart and soul into the New York session, the label it was released on, TSG, was set up by the legitimate LPG (Lloyd Price Group) company as a tax scam – investors finance a record, it intentionally loses money, they register the loss against their taxes. Nevertheless, ...*Disco Party* is an enthralling slab of dancefloor funk and deserves to finally reach its audience.

Nancy Wilson's All In Love Is

Fair / Come Get To This (★★★★ Cherry Red), her 1974 and '75 albums respectively, signalled a shift from jazz to soul with the recruitment of producer Gene Page. Cushioned in the kind of creamy, lush arrangements coming out of Philly at the time, she's sultry and coquettish on *All In Love Is Fair*, which includes her first US Top 10 R&B hit in a decade, her satisfying take on The Stylistics' You're As Right As Rain written by Thom Bell and Linda Creed. On follow-up *Come Get To This*, produced by Page with his brother Billy, she stamps her authority on Marvin Gaye's title track and If I Ever Lose This Heaven by Leon Ware and Pam Sawyer and returns to the R&B chart with Harlan Howard's He Called Me Baby. *This Mother's Daughter/ I've Never Been To Me* (★★★★ Cherry Red) her 1976 and '77 albums, the first produced by Eugene McDaniels, the second by Page with his sibling again, continue in a similar vein.

Durham, North Carolina's **NIKKI HILL** is a blues shouter in the great tradition of Ruth Brown, Etta James and Koko Taylor. Her 2013 record **Here's Nikki Hill** (★★★★ Hound Gawd!) aligns her to Amy Winehouse with 21st-century words pinned to a vintage sound.

EAST OF UNDERGROUND'S self-titled record (★★★★ Now-Again) is an album of soul and funk and includes covers of Curtis Mayfield's (Don't Worry) If There's A Hell Below We're All Gonna Go and The Impressions' People Get Ready plus the Undisputed Truth's Smiling Faces Sometimes. It was recorded by a group of US soldiers drafted to fight in the Vietnam war and stationed in Frankfurt in the early 70s and intended as a recruitment tool for the US Army.



East Coast

East Coast

★★★★★
Real Gone Music RLGM 13871 PMI (LP)

1973 funk rarity from short-lived Encounter label



Someone forgot to tell these guys the East Coast already

had Philadelphia. But if the Bay Area represented the West, Detroit the North, and Memphis the South, this New York City seven-piece clearly felt the eastern seaboard was theirs for the taking. And it should have been: I Found You marries tight arrangements with runaway energy while You Can't Let It Get You Down burrows deep into Funkadelic's *Maggot Brain* shredding, suggesting that East Coast could have headed in any direction they pleased had they lasted beyond this sole 1973 album. No dead end, it provided a waymarker in singer Gwen Guthrie's rise to fame, and featured the

first recorded appearances of future Cameo mainmen Larry Blackmon and Gregory Johnson. *Jason Draper*

Bill Evans

You Must Believe In Spring

★★★★★
Craft Recordings 7226254 (CD, 2LP)

Influential jazz pianist's posthumous masterpiece



With his predilection for delicate melodic filigrees etched

on an impressionistic canvas of lush tone colours, Evans revolutionised jazz piano playing in the late 1950s. For this writer, *You Must Believe In Spring*, a trio date recorded in 1977 with the august Tommy LiPuma at the helm, marks the pinnacle of Evans' work. Inexplicably, this achingly beautiful record didn't surface until 1981, a few months after the pianist's death. Perhaps aware that his demise was imminent (Evans suffered

drug addiction-related ill health in his final years), the album evinces a sombre elegiac tone, epitomised by the haunting B Minor Waltz, the wistful Gary's Theme and a tender reading of Jimmy Rowles' The Peacocks. This new vinyl edition, mastered by the redoutable Kevin Gray, comes on two 45 rpm discs. Sheer perfection. *Charles Waring*

Go West

Go West (Super Deluxe Edition)

★★★★★
BMG 5060516097609 (4CD/DVD, LP)

Pop duo's debut gets the deluxe treatment



The remaster of Go West's 1985 self-titled debut results in the record's nine tracks hitting even harder than the first time around. Full of infectious pop songs, it's a misdemeanour that only one of its five singles cracked the Top 10. *Bangs & Crashes* was a remix album released

the following year to capitalise on Go West's success and an expanded version makes up the second disc. The third disc contains a host of demos and rarities while the fourth finds the guys rocking the Hammersmith Odeon for an unreleased 1985 set that shows their blue-eyed soul transferring well to the live environment. A DVD loaded with promo videos, *Top Of The Pops* appearances and a live set from Japan are the icing on the cake. *Peter Dennis*

Godley And Creme

Frabjous Days: The Secret World Of Godley And Creme 1967-1969

★★★★★
Grapefruit CRSEG 100 (CD)

Vital piece of Manc history, beautifully presented



The pre-10cc history of Kevin Godley and Lol Creme is so often dismissed in a sentence in biographies. With *Frabjous Days*, David Wells' meticulously researched

selection proves that although they may not have been as commercially successful in the 60s as Eric Stewart and Graham Gouldman, their future 10cc partners, musically they were more than equal. Adding to the handful of tracks already available commercially, Wells has pieced together tracks from demos and, in doing so, completes their unreleased album. The 19 tracks are plump with invention. "You've never heard of Chaplin House," sings Godley in one of those strange, post-Sgt *Pepper* baroque tales; Hello Blinkers is a fine slice of discotheque pop, originally pressed privately for Blinkers night club in Manchester. Soon Godley and Creme would be part of Hotlegs, and the rest, as they say... *Daryl Easlea*

Grandmaster Flash, Melle Mel & The Furious Five

Sugarhill Adventures: The Collection

★★★★★
Cherry Red ROBINBX 50 (9CD)

Hip-hop pioneers collected

Three Is The Magic Number

Expanded reissue of underappreciated 1957 trio LP commemorates the 100th anniversary of the bassist and composer's birth. *By Charles Waring*

Charles Mingus

Mingus Three: Deluxe Edition



Rhino/Parlophone 603497841059/1035 (2CD, 2LP)

"My life flashed before my eyes. I was sure I would die." These are the words of the pianist and arranger Sy Johnson in his enlightening liner notes to *Mingus Three*, recalling a fraught first rehearsal with the badass bassist/composer who could scare musicians shitless with just one hard stare. Mingus wasn't averse to using his fists to hammer his point home but on this occasion, sometime in 1960 – three years after *Mingus Three* was recorded – the bassist preferred to punch the piano keys rather than Johnson's face "while glaring into my eyes with a manic intensity". Happily, things didn't take a turn for the worse, as Johnson reveals: "Just as suddenly, he picked up his bass, and resumed playing." The pianist was relieved but mentally scarred; like someone who had endured a soul-searing baptism of fire.

This kind of incident wasn't uncommon for musicians playing with Mingus, whose pugnacious personality and volcanic temperament could be deeply intimidating. But on *Mingus Three*, the bassist's only recording for the New York Jubilee label, Mingus played opposite a pianist he couldn't so easily bully; Hampton Hawes, a technically dazzling bebop heavyweight who gave as good as he got in musical terms. Their interaction on what is one Mingus' most underrated and overlooked albums makes for a fascinating musical dialogue, mediated by Dannie

Richmond's simpatico drums and percussion, as they breeze through a selection of standards and largely extemporised original material recorded one day in July 1957.

Mingus supplies the tune Back Home Blues, a lazy nocturnal groove, and the swinging Dizzy Moods while Hampton proffers the bebop-inflected Ham's New Blues; but arguably more impressive are the cover tunes, especially a sizzling uptempo revamp of George Gershwin's Summertime, where Mingus' driving bass line invokes the spirit of Dizzy Gillespie's A Night In Tunisia. Eight recently discovered outtakes from the session are added as bonus material; rather than being merely forgettable also-rans they're uniformly excellent and crucial in aiding our understanding of how the session evolved.

Overshadowed by his Atlantic album *The Clown*, released earlier the same year, the largely unheralded *Mingus Three* has often fallen under the radar of jazz fans; but this reissue proves that it deserves more attention because it highlights Mingus the musician rather than Mingus the composer, revealing his

absolute mastery of the upright acoustic bass.

As for Sy Johnson, he lived to fight another day and eventually worked with Mingus on several projects; and amazingly at 92, he's still the arranger for the ongoing Mingus Big Band and living proof that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.



Charles Mingus: ace of bass

COLLECTING... Charles Mingus



Charles Mingus and Thad Jones Collaborations Volume 1

(Debut, DLP-17, Vinyl, 10" LP, US, 1955) £225

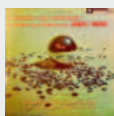
Mingus briefly ran his own label called Debut, which he founded in 1952 with his first wife Celia and the bebop drummer Max Roach, but it only ran for five years. Roach features on this hard-to-find four-track 10" LP, the first of the bassist's two collaborations with trumpeter Thad Jones.



The Clown

(Atlantic, SD 1260, Vinyl, LP, US, 1957) £220

Recorded as a response to critics who had said his music didn't swing, Mingus kicked off *The Clown* with one of his most famous tunes, the pugnacious Haitian Fight Song, on which he could be heard urging his quintet on with raucous shouts. The album's title song, a comedic waltz, combines jaunty music with an improvised spoken narration by Jean Shepherd, a Chicago humorist and radio personality. One of the rarest and most desirable pressings of this album was a 1959 one with a so-called "bull's eye" label, a multi-coloured pinwheel design that was briefly used by Atlantic



A Modern Jazz Symposium Of Music And Poetry

(Bethlehem, BCP 6026, Vinyl, LP, US, 1959) £75

Another manifestation of Mingus' desire to fuse jazz with the

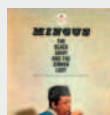
spoken word, this largely forgotten album – the bassist's second and final LP for the jazz indie label Bethlehem – opens with the evocative *Scenes In The City*, a vivid portrait of black urban life narrated by the African American actor Melvin Stewart. The words were written by the playwright Lonnie Elder with help from the legendary Harlem poet Langston Hughes.



Mingus Ah Um

(Columbia, CL 1370, Vinyl, Promo LP, US, 1959) £300

Containing the original versions of two of Mingus' most famous tunes – Goodbye Pork Pie Hat, a haunting elegy marking the passing of tenor saxophonist Lester Young and Fables Of Faubus, a satirical portrait of a racist US Governor – this album is regarded as one of the greatest jazz records ever released. The promo version with a white and red label is highly coveted; the Columbia label features what collectors call "six eyes," referring to small eye-like symbols on the label's outer edge. (The "six eye" labels were only used by Columbia between 1956 and 1961).



The Black Saint And The Sinner Lady

(Impulse!, A-35, Vinyl, LP, US, 1963) £90

Considered Mingus' masterpiece, this Iberian-flavoured album could be described as music for a jazz ballet. It consists of a four-part suite for an 11-piece ensemble that juxtaposes a through-composed score with passages of free-flowing improv. It was the first of three Mingus albums for Impulse!



If The Message – "it's like a jungle sometimes" – invented conscious rap, White Lines

(Don't Don't Do It) was conceived as a celebration of cocaine until the team twigged it might get more radio play as the opposite. Still, that double negative winked at

listeners. *Sugarhill Adventures: The Collection* is a scintillating anthology, gathering all the crew's essential output: the albums *The Message* and *Work Party* plus singles and

remixes. And, in this case, those remixes aren't just filler. While the personnel may have fluctuated, for a brief blaze this gang ruled. Among the highlights, She's Fresh and It's

Nasty sound as inventive as ever, and the pinpoint electro of Scorpio is harder, better, faster and stronger than anything Daft Punk did. They got higher, baby. *Chris Roberts*

JAZZ COLLECTOR

By Charles Waring

"Trane was the father. Pharoah Sanders was the son. I was the holy ghost." So said **ALBERT AYLER**, the Cleveland-born saxophonist whose music, with its emotive shrieks and visceral honks, was intensely spiritual and drew heavily on his deep gospel roots. A trailblazer of free improvisation, he died in mysterious circumstances at the age of 34 in November 1970 but just four months before that, he journeyed to Saint-Paul-De-Vence in southern France for a couple of concerts that were recorded and distilled down into two French LPs called *Nuits De La Fondation Maeght* released on the Shandar label. Now for the first time, all the music from his French sojourn is released as **Revelations: The Complete ORT 1970 Fondation Maeght Recordings** (★★★★★ **Elemental**), a deluxe 5LP set mastered by the redoubtable Kevin Gray. It contains over two hours of previously unheard music and is accompanied by a thick, informative booklet packed with reminiscences of Ayler from those who knew him. The sound quality is astonishingly good, capturing the mesmeric performances of Ayler together with saxophonist/vocalist Mary Parks, pianist Call Cobbs,

bassist Steve Tintweiss and drummer Allen Blairman. The group's set contains impassioned, shiver-inducing renditions of some of Ayler's most iconic numbers, including Ghosts and Love Cry.

Also mastered for the same record label by the in-demand Mr Gray is another significant limited edition vinyl set: **Live In Paris** (★★★★★ **Elemental**) by the **CHET BAKER TRIO**. It features recordings made by Radio France in 1983 and '84, which documented the itinerant Oklahoma-born hornblower and vocalist, then in his early fifties, supported by pianist Michel Graillier and bassists Dominique Lemerle and Riccardo Del Fra. Among the highlights is a hard-swinging take on There Will Never Be Another You and a lovely elegiac version of But Not For Me, which shows that Baker's trumpet playing was still at a high level during that particular phase of his career.

Another high quality live recording liberated from the archives is also saxophonist **JOHN HANDY**'s 1965 album **At The Monterey Jazz Festival** (★★★★★ **Essential Jazz Classics**). Texas-born Handy rose to fame playing on Charles Mingus' iconic 1959 album *Mingus Ah Um* and soon after began making albums under his own name. This memorable set, which originally contained two super-long tracks shows how Handy was playing unfettered free jazz-style improvisations without dispensing with tonal centres. As a bonus, a later, much funkier track – Tears Of Ole Miss (Anatomy Of A Riot) – recorded live at the Village Vanguard with vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson and guitarist **PAT MARTINO** rounds out the set nicely.

Talking of the late Philly fretboardist, who died last November, a new various artists album called **Alternative Guitar Summit: Honoring Pat Martino, Volume 1** (★★★★ **High Note**) pays tribute to his memory and music. There are 14 contributors, ranging from Kurt Rosenwinkel to Russell Malone and Peter Bernstein, who all put their own

spin on their favourite Martino tunes. Unsurprisingly, it's a very tasteful affair.

The American jazz singer **MARK MURPHY** – a brilliant but underappreciated scat vocalist whom Ella Fitzgerald once described as her equal – was the subject of a fine tribute album in 2019, *Remembering Mark Murphy* by his protégé, New York chanteuse Nancy Kelly. The early part of the Syracuse singer's career is the focus of **Four Classic Albums** (★★★★ **Avid**), which includes *Meet Mark Murphy...The Singing M*, *Let Yourself Go*, *Hip Parade*, and *Rah*. The latter LP, with a supporting cast that includes pianists Bill Evans and Wynton Kelly, trumpeter Blue Mitchell and drummer Jimmy Cobb, includes a fantastic vocalese version of Miles Davis' Milestones.

Murphy had a fiercely independent spirit, something that can also be said of the gifted Washington DC singer/songwriter **HEIDI MARTIN**, whose latest album, the mesmerising, self-produced **Gifts & Sacrifices** (★★★★★ **HeidiMartinMusic**), highlights her smoky, Phoebe Snow-like timbre as well as her ability to weld astute socio-political observations with poetic lyrics and cutting-edge sonics. Imagine Joni Mitchell, Michael Franks and Cassandra Wilson rolled into one.

Like Martin, the London-based singer/songwriter **LAURA ZAKIAN** brings a unique artistic sensibility to the art of jazz singing. Her latest opus, **Dreaming Life** (★★★★ **Laura Zakian**) is a collection of musical ruminations infused with atmosphere and an aching sense of melancholy.

At 83, the revered jazz magus **CHARLES LLOYD** is enjoying one of the most prolific phases of his storied career. **Trios: Chapel** (★★★★★ **Blue Note**), a beautiful live recording with Bill Frisell and Thomas Morgan, is the first in an album series the veteran saxophonist is calling *Trio Of Trios*; the remaining two titles in the sonic triptych will appear later this year.

For those who prefer their jazz dripping with atmosphere, then the

immersive experience that is **London Fields** (★★★★★ **Here & Now**) served up by Colin Baldry's aptly named **AMBIENT JAZZ ENSEMBLE** should hit the spot. Sounding like the Cinematic Orchestra meets Eno and Moby, perhaps, the band delivers a cache of shimmering soundscapes that resonate like the soundtrack to an imaginary movie.

More mellow magic comes from **Tremors In Static** (★★★★★ **Gondwana**) by **VEGA TRAILS**; it's a side project by Portico Quartet co-founder, bassist Milo Fitzpatrick and Mammal Hands' saxophonist Jordan Smart, whose musical interactions are subdued but inspired.

Much livelier is **Heat** (★★★★★ **Traumton**) by Austria's **SHAKE STEW**, a uniquely configured seven-piece band (two drummers, two bassists and three horns), whose music is an allusive, hard-to-pin-down blend of disparate elements, ranging from cool Ethio-jazz to blistering Afrobeat grooves. Sizzling.

The singular **MARY HALVORSON** is a guitarist whose innovations have blurred the boundaries between jazz, the avant-garde, rock and noise music. She makes her debut on Nonesuch with two contrasting and spectacular new albums: the iridescent **Amaryllys** (★★★★★ **Nonesuch**), where she fronts a sextet, and the more tenebrous **Belladonna** (★★★★★ **Nonesuch**), a set of through-composed pieces featuring the Nivos Quartet. Both are stunning examples of Halvorson's unique approach to guitar playing.

Finally, **BINKER GOLDING** serves up a solo album that's very different from his avant-jazz work with drummer Moses Boyd. Mixed by Hugh Padgham, **Dream Like A Dogwood Wild Boy** (★★★★★ **Gearbox**) is an eclectic affair that is by far the London saxophonist's most accessible offering yet. Its tracks are very melodic and thanks to Billy Adamson's sterling bottleneck guitar work, the music is infused with a bluesy flavour.



John Lee Hooker and Canned Heat

Hooker 'N Heat

★★★★★

BGO BGOCD 694 (2CD)

Celebrated blues reunion

In 1970, the inimitable talents of the legendary John Lee

Hooker were introduced to one of the previous decade's outstanding white blues bands. In retrospect, the resulting double-album is also notable for being the last recorded work of Canned Heat's Al 'Blind Owl' Wilson, who died in-between creation and release. His photo appears on a wall behind the band on the cover. The music is split between solo Hooker, duets with Wilson and five fully-fledged band collaborations, between-song chart adding to the intimate atmosphere. Perhaps most

impressive is an elongated take on Boogie Chillen which is more than reminiscent of the Heat's On The Road Again. The combination yielded Hooker's first US Hot 100 album, and it still glows today. *Michael Heatley*

The Kills

No Wow

★★★★★

Domino REWIG 168 (CD/2CD, LP/2LP)

Noughties garage-rock staple gets new mix

Honing the fiery garage rock of their debut album two years earlier, 2005's

No Wow was as commercial as The Kills got. The eccentric drum-machine grooves and Alison Mosshart's playground chants were still there, but guitarist Jamie Hince's licks were more focused, turning the title track and I Hate The

Way You Love into punchy punk assaults, which went on to soundtrack several TV dramas. Intriguingly, that mainstream appeal has belatedly been furthered by a new mix of the whole album by occasional associate and The Black Keys and Pearl Jam producer, Tchad Blake. Available separately or in a double-pack with the original, Blake's mix loses some of the duo's uniqueness, especially in those trademark rhythms, but he also overhauls The Good Ones into steely funk. It remains a good entry point into The Kills' thrillingly dangerous world. *John Earls*

Kokomo

To Be Cool: The Rehearsal Sessions

★★★★★

Another Planet APM 010 (CD)

Hot stuff from an ultra cool band

This is the album that never



was for the Brit all-star soul and funk ensemble. These 11 tracks, recorded live in the studio in 1974 when they were struggling for a record deal, only emerged many years later. Here, nearly two decades further on, they're available again, an inspired set taking in Dylan (New Morning), Herbie Hancock (Chameleon), Bill Withers (Friend Of Mine) and more, united by understated guitar (both the Grease Band's Neil Hubbard and Piblokto's Jim Mullen), the powerful sax of Mel (King Crimson) Collins and contributions from other luminaries. This 2CD set adds a previously unheard five-track demo session from the same year (not least Robert Johnson's Sweet Home Chicago) and two demos from a get-together a decade later. *Nick Dalton*

Nektar

Sounds Like This

★★★★★

Esoteric ECLCE 22796 (2CD)

Euro-Brits go Hammond heavy



Nektar, four British progressive musicians led by Royce Albrighton, had already conquered the continent from their Hamburg base by the time their third album became the first to hit the home market in 1973. It was recorded live in the studio in an attempt to replicate their impressive shows and emerged on double vinyl. Yet it has never been a fan favourite, the dominant organ resulting in an atypically heavy sound when compared with classics *A Tab In The Ocean* and *Remember The Future*. The bonus disc of alternate versions and omitted tracks has appeared in previous

The Cat Who Got The Cream

The great British folk-rock troubadour presents his own archive to the public in one great slab of a boxset.

By David Pollock

Al Stewart

The Admiralty Lights

★★★★★

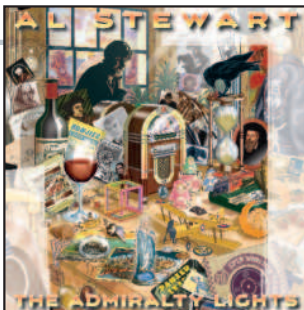
Madfish SMABX1141 (LP boxset)

How much Al Stewart does one listener need? Even the most strident fan of the great folk-rock survivor is about to find out, with this monumental 50-disc vinyl boxset of more or less his entire recorded

output. It comprises 21 studio albums, from 1967's *Bedsitter Images* (in its '67 and '70 incarnations) to 2008's *Sparks Of Ancient Light*, 18 discs of unheard live recordings spanning four decades, three discs of BBC sessions from 1965 to 1972, eight records of outtakes and rarities, and much more.

The relative value of a collection like this depends on your love of the artist involved, of course. As it's limited to 2,000 copies, casual listeners might prefer to limit themselves to the classic albums *Modern Times* or *Year Of The Cat*, or one of Stewart's plentiful greatest hits, while the devoted will pay the asking price for what is the final word on his storied career.

For the latter bunch, there are many hours of discovery to be found in the live discs and the outcuts especially, which are so thoroughly immersive that a separate catalogue is included, containing credits,



tracklists and recording details for each. There's also a photograph-heavy hardback book which acts as a detailed biography of Stewart's career in album-by-album format, with quotes from the artist, his collaborators and press cuttings of the time.

Think of your favourite artist and this is exactly the type of all-encompassing retrospective you want to see. For fans of Stewart, it's a chance to re-experience the development of his career in its rich entirety. *Bedsitter Images* itself is a strikingly complete debut, filled with pastoral, romantic guitar explorations named after girls, Dylanesque crooning, and ambitious bursts of brass fanfare, string accompaniment and medieval-sounding harpsichord.

The follow-up *Love Chronicles* (1969) is one of the great backing-group curios in rock, with Jimmy Page's plaintive guitar and John Paul Jones' meaty bass adding texture to the sex-fascinated title track, while Fairport Convention's Richard Thompson, Simon Nicol and Martin Lamble play throughout. Later, Rick Wakeman appears on *Orange* (1972), and alongside Dave Swarbrick and Queen drummer Roger Taylor on



Al Stewart: his epic new box set isn't for armchair fans

Past, Present And Future (1974).

Stewart's writing and playing has maintained a power and consistency ever since, but this latter album is where his plateau of the 1970s really began in earnest. Turning away from the lighter concerns of a 1960s folk troubadour, it expanded on his interest in historical storytelling, grappling with the legacy of the Second World War on his generation like few other British songwriters, from *The Last Day of June 1934*'s bittersweet reflection on the brief interwar peace, to *Post World War Two Blues* and its rock'n'roll-referencing look at the events of his lifetime.

This album contains arguably his masterpiece, the eight-minute dissection of the Eastern Front conflict between the Nazis and the Soviet Army that is *Roads To Moscow*, a song which has a bitter tang of relevance to the world right now. Two years later in 1976, amid a three-album collaboration with producer Alan Parsons, the urbane, sophisticated pop of *Year Of The Cat*, title track of the album of the same name, briefly made him a transatlantic star.



Q&A

From the road in America, the well-travelled singer-songwriter reflects on the unveiling of a mighty back catalogue.

Does *The Admiralty Lights* contain every single recording you've made?

It's about as complete as you're ever going to get! It covers my entire career, from the earliest Bourne-mouth demos, right up to unreleased tracks from the last album I made, *Sparks Of Ancient Light*. It was Snapper Music's idea to gather it all together, I didn't believe it would be possible. Everyone thought my appearances on John Peel's *Top Gear* were lost for ever, even the BBC – but here they are.

Does listening to these songs conjure places, people and performances from the past?

A song will always take you back to a time and a place. When I look down at the set list and see *Manuscript*, I'm transported back to standing on the beach at Worthing with my grandfather.

Surprisingly, many of my most rural songs were composed in my apartment just off Sunset Strip – you can't get a subject more remote from modern day Los Angeles than a 2,000-year-old Scottish warrior poet discovered by Robin Williamson of the Incredible String Band (*Merlin's Time*).

Which of these albums do you look on as your masterpiece?

My favourite in terms of the lyrics, which are uppermost in my mind when I write, would be *Past, Present And Future*; also *Year Of The Cat* for the production, and *A Beach Full Of Shells* because it's an album I like a lot. But as for calling anything I've recorded a 'masterpiece', I'd have to get up very early in the morning to even get within hailing range of records like *Liege & Lief*, *Revolver* and the second album by The Band.

How do you view *Year Of The Cat*'s title track now?

I'm very glad I recorded it. I'd always wanted to come to America and be successful, and it did it for me. Has it overshadowed everything else? Certainly not in England, where I'm still seen as a member of the 60s folk scene. My audience there is incredibly loyal, I'm very lucky. I can't go anywhere without

being asked to play *Roads To Moscow*, for example, the song seems indestructible, and something like *Lord Grenville*; the moment I start playing it, boom, everyone starts applauding. I have a theory why none of these songs have aged; if you write outside of your own time, then the songs themselves somehow become eternal.

Who or what was your greatest inspiration?

Movies, literature, biographies, personal experience – it's impossible to select just one. I put them all in a bucket and stir. Old Admirals came from reading the 1921 version of (British naval officer) Jackie Fisher's life, history itself has been incredibly inspirational. For the lyrics it was Lonnie Donegan's wonderful story songs, and for music it was Hank Marvin and Duane Eddy, who I loved equally. And of course, Bob Dylan's influenced every singer-songwriter out there.

What are you doing now and next?

I'm in the middle of a very intense run of gigs. Today I'm in Annapolis, Maryland – the land of crab cakes. I've had two years off, so now I'm working harder than ever. At my age, I'm extremely grateful to be asked to play.
As told to David Pollock

reissue formats, but Uriah Heep, Man and Barclay James Harvest fans could still find this a worthwhile listen.
Michael Heatley

The Notorious B.I.G.

Life After Death

★★★★★

Rhino/Atlantic 0603497841837 (BLP)

Biggie's epitaph reborn



March 1997, Brooklyn-born Christopher Wallace's second album was named with eerie prescience. If his debut, *Ready To Die* – in which he'd already played out a vision of his death on closing cut *Suicidal*

Thoughts – hadn't already ensured his place in hip hop legend, *Life After Death* would have done so even without the tragic timing. Befitting Biggie's talent and stature, the double-album is celebrated with a 25th-anniversary deluxe edition and now spread across three LPs, with a further five taking in single edits and other mixes. It's hard not to focus on

the album's obsession with mortality but, though the action is heralded by the sound of a flatline, *Life After Death* contains some of the most vital hip hop of the era. Slinky professions of prowess (*Hypnotize*, *Mo Money Mo Problems*), tips for survival (*Ten Crack Commandments*) and ruthless takedowns (*Kick In The Door*) leave little room

for doubting Biggie's place at rap's top table but, heard in the year when he would still only have been turning 50, *Going Back To Cali* has particular resonance. An olive branch wrapped in a claim on the West Coast's electro-funk territory, it's also a sad reminder of loss in a world that had more than enough space for everyone. Jason Draper

PSYCH COLLECTOR

By JR Moores

The Fab Four never toured in South America. Instead, a quartet of imposters from Florida conned their way over as "The Beatles" in 1964, while local acts such as Uruguay's Los Shakers ordered moptop haircuts and forged a sound to match. A different kind of tribute was paid by the Brazilian pianist Manfredo Fest and his trio in 1966. Recording as **OS SAMBEATLES**, they produced an LP's worth of instrumental Lennon/McCartney compositions performed in a bossa-nova jazz style. The originals' timeless melodies lent themselves to this form, as if there was any doubt. They're the basis around which Fest and company groove so seductively. When I finally learn to cook properly and fulfil my ambition of opening a feijoada-meets-scouse fusion bistro, **Os Sambeatles** (★★★★ **Vampisoul**) will drift out of the speakers as you gently tuck into your fragrant stew.

Why do Eric Clapton and Peter

Green attract all the interest while Stanley Webb remains a footnote in English blues rock? So asks Mark Powell in his sleeveless to **Crying Won't Help You Now: The Deram Years (1971-1974)** (★★★★ **Esoteric**). Perhaps it's because the band names Fleetwood Mac and Cream sound cooler than **CHICKEN SHACK**. (Less so, Derek And The Dominos.) There's no denying, however, that Mr Webb knew his way around the neck of a guitar. This 3CD set compiles 1971's meat-and-potatoes *Imagination Lady*, recorded as a power trio, and its superior 1973 follow-up *Unlucky Boy*, which added horns and strings to the recipe. The line-up on the latter record didn't go on the road, so it's another different incarnation that appears on the third disc's live album. Webb thought the Shack didn't play particularly well on the night in question, and he begged their management not to release the recording. Chances are, Disc Two will receive the most spins.

Somewhat quirkier were **SPIROGYRA**, who were part of the Canterbury scene, via Bolton. They were a zany folk-prog affair whose wordy narratives necessitated close attention. They dealt with serious topics of pressing concern: war,

hunger, materialism, existentialist woe, exploitative dukes... Yet this was handled in a playful way that usually skirted earnestness. Adding a handful of bonus tracks, **The Future Won't Be Long: The Albums (1971-1973)** (★★★★ **Esoteric**) hosts the group's three studio albums, all of which deserve greater contemplation than they've received historically.

Lance Barresi and Daniel Hall's long-running series of proto-metal and stoner rarities shows no sign of running out of motorcycle gas. Given the nature of the blues-based genres under documentation, **Brown Acid: The Fourteenth Trip** (★★★★ **RidingEasy**) contains the odd generic number every now and again. The Legends wear their influences so openly on their sleeves that, halfway through Fever Games, they start namechecking Hendrix and more. Others come into their own, such as Trolley Co. whose Signs is possessed with a lunatic edge. Another distinctive cut is I've Been You which seems to be the only thing, bar its B-side, that was ever recorded by Mijal & White. That's a shame because the song is catchy and delightfully wonky in equal measure. Furthermore, based on the evidence here, Blue Creed were fronted by an actual werewolf. That might explain why they never played a gig. What if it fell on a full moon?

This recurrent lack of live activities is harshing my buzz, so let's turn to **AVARUS**. Recorded in the Düsseldorf venue that provides its title, **Salon Des Amateurs** (★★★★ **Pome Pome Tones**) captures a set from 2011 during which the Finnish collective were joined by American guitarist Jeffrey Alexander and German synth player Moritz Kleiner. Each untitled piece lasts a whole

side of the LP (or cassette, if you're that way inclined) and they're both about as colourfully abstract as free-rock gets. For fans of Amon Düül II, Faust, Sunburned Hand Of The Man, No-Neck Blues Band, Jackie-O Motherfucker, and being pleasurably confused in an unfamiliar labyrinth.

There's been a trend for particularly frantic psych rock over the last few years, with bands like King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard and Oh Sees churning out prog-length LPs full of giddy epics at superhuman rate. Perhaps they're trying to get as much done as possible before the rise of the planet's final tides. Helsinki's **KALEIDABOLT** aren't as prolific as the two aforementioned groups (their last full-length came out in 2019, the lazy buggers) but their vibrant style casts similar spells. It feels as though they've worked a little harder on the choruses and graspable hooks this time round. Even so, the emphasis throughout **This One Simple Trick** (★★★★ **Svart**) remains on cramming as many ideas as possible into each sprightly number without pausing for breath. They rattle through their multifaceted song structures and shifting time signatures in a way that's irresistibly fun, yet unfathomably complicated if you actually stop to think about it.

Similarly energetic are **ECSTATIC VISION** who are based in Philadelphia but have at least one ear pointed in the direction of Detroit. As with prior transmissions, **Elusive Mojo** (★★★★ **Heavy Psych Sounds**) is a hoot and then some. Imagine an MC5/Stooges supergroup, fronted by Lemmy, with hard-funk-era Miles Davis as benevolent musical dictator. The result is... How does the old saying go? "Mamma mia, that's a spicy meatball!".



Prowler Reactivate

★★★★★
Hear No Evil HNECD 166 (CD)

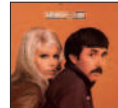
NWOBHM outfit finally get to shine

Yet another overlooked NWOBHM band, Basildon-based Prowler are really only famous for their contribution to MCA Records' 1980 *Brute Force* compilation (recently covered in *Please Release Me*), Gotta Get Back To You. This collection kicks off with that song, produced by Chris Tsangarides in July 1980, and then takes in another three cuts also recorded by the legendary producer later that year. Unsurprisingly, the material is prime-time NWOBHM, riff-driven, melodic, and utterly glorious, and on the basis of the evidence here they really should have broken through. A couple of later re-workings, a live version of *Rocksong Part II/Heavy* from December 1980 and two extremely good songs recorded when the lads

underwent a temporary name-change to Samurai, complete this very welcome retrospective. *John Tucker*

Nancy Sinatra & Lee Hazlewood

Nancy & Lee
★★★★★
Light In The Attic LITA198-1-3 (CD, LP)
The peak of an era-defining collaboration



It was a gloriously unlikely partnership. The Marlboro and Chivas Regal-stenched cowboy and the little girl lost. And it resulted in some of the most oddball hits of the 60s including '66 chart-topper *These Boots Were Made For Walkin'*. But it was the contrast between Nancy's softer low range and Lee's gravelly baritone which created the real magic. The first of two albums they made together (the other appeared in 1972), *Nancy & Lee* is a baroque-soaked gem with horns, harpsichord and orchestra (conducted by Billy

Strange) embellishing some of Hazlewood's greatest songs: *Sand*, *Summer Wine* and the exquisitely demented *Some Velvet Morning*. Charming covers, too, of Billy Edd Wheeler's *Jackson* and *You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'*. All in all, a totally sublime record. *Johnnie Johnstone*

Mavis Staples & Levon Helm

Carry Me Home
★★★★★
Anti-EPIT 27859-2 (CD)
Two greats combine on lost set from 2011



Recorded before an audience at Levon Helm's studio in Woodstock in 2011, a year before Helm died, *Carry Me Home*'s choice of material makes for a wonderful set of gospel, R&B and blues, including covers of *The Impressions'* *This Is My Country*, a cappella gospel on *Farther Along*, while the gospel classic *Handwriting On The Wall* and Mississippi Fred McDowell's

You Gotta Move are taken at rockabilly pace. Dylan's *Gotta Serve Somebody* is bluesy funk and the Staples original *The Last Time* is performed as a downhome blues and the set closes – inevitably – with *The Band's* *The Weight* complete with tuba solo from Garth Hudson. It's absolutely stunning stuff. *Tony Burke*

Suicidal Tendencies

Suicidal Tendencies
★★★★★
Munster FLP 1011 (LP)
Californian upstarts' crossover classic

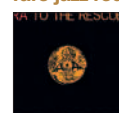


Although highly influential, *Suicidal Tendencies* were often uncomfortable with their own popularity. They once disbanded, briefly, after a dismal tour with Metallica, whose audience reminded Mike Muir of the schoolmates he'd always avoided. The permanently bandana-ed singer would also feud with Megadeth and Rage Against

The Machine, two of many acts with a debt to his own band's fusion of hardcore punk and heavy metal. The brattish energy of 1983's debut is complemented perfectly by Muir's sardonic lyrical eye. He condemns subliminal advertising, frets about dead-end jobs and fantasises about shooting Reagan. It includes Institutionalized, ST's timeless anthem of intragenerational disconnect. "My parents were always there for me," Muir informed *Metal Hammer* a few years ago. "I was very fortunate." *JR Moores*

Sun Ra

Ra To The Rescue
★★★★★
Modern Harmonic MH-8822 (CD, LP)
First ever reissue of ultra-rare jazz recording



A bona fide rarity in the back catalogue of jazz's own cosmonaut, 1983's *Ra To The Rescue* in its original limited edition Saturn pressing came in a

hand-coloured cardboard sleeve with no credits; and to add to the mystery, it featured tracks recorded at different, unspecified sessions. Copies have exchanged hands for as much as £400 but now you can get your hands on a mint pressing for a fraction of that sum, thanks to Modern Harmonic, who are doing a sterling job in making obscurities from Ra's canon widely available. The music here ranges from cosmic call-and-response chants (Children Of The Sun) and piano-led blues stomps (Back Alley) to percussive jams (Drummeristics), sunny calypsos (Fate In A Pleasant Mood) and insane avant-jazz (the bewitchingly cacophonous Space Shuttle). A truly phantasmagorical experience. *Charles Waring*

David Sylvian

Sleepwalkers

★★★★★

Gronland LPGRON 256 (CD, 2LP)

Sumptuous compilation of classic collaborations



Originally released in 2010, these alliances (from Sakamoto to Nine Horses) and alt-takes from the 2000s re-emerge, tweaked, with the previously unreleased tracks Modern Interiors (typically stark yet beautiful) and Do You Know Me Now? (acoustic, with a rich melody). Those replace Ballad Of A Dead Man and Playground Martyrs. These melancholy songs – and they are, at heart, songs rather than sonic experiments – find the overlap between his lush romantic work and his out-there esotericism. That's in no way meant as faint praise: it's an exquisite treat to hear that resonant voice moving with, not against, the flow. There's commentary on the real world too, and even – gosh! – swearing on the icy heat of the title track. *Chris Roberts*

theaudience

theaudience

★★★★

Past Night From Glasgow PNFG 29 (2LP)

Sophie Ellis-Bextor's Britpop years earn reappraisal



"It's unfashionable, I guess/To knock success," are Sophie Ellis-Bextor's first lines on A Pessimist Is Never Disappointed, the opening and best song on her old band theaudience's sole album, from 1998. Now she's the nation's favourite, thoroughly likable disco mum, it's easy to forget her and guitarist Billy Reeves' indie-pop also-rans from the

tail-end of Britpop. It's also pleasing, in light of her recent successes, to reassess them in their own right. Their singles still pack heat, including I Got The Wherewithal, which fuses PJ Harvey with French chanson, and breezy Camdenite glam-rock I Know Enough (I Don't Get Enough). The production is occasionally uninspiring, but the quality of the choruses and lyrics suggests this was a group trying hard to be ABBA, not Sleeper. *David Pollock*

Kim Wilde

Kim Wilde

★★★★★

Cherry Red PCRPOPLP 212 X (LP)

Select

★★★★

Cherry Red PCRPOPLP 213 X (LP)

Catch As Catch Can

★★★★

Cherry Red PCRPOPLP 214 X (LP)

Coloured splatter vinyl outings for 80s popper



The first three Kim Wilde albums witness her exploding onto the early 80s pop scene, then trying to locate her niche. The debut is a minor classic, her brother and dad's songs and production finding the sweet spot between new wave's exhilarated rush and Kim's plaintive yet assertive vocal style. *Smash Hits* called it "the best Blondie album for years", but what was once snark now reads as high praise. *Chequered Love* is almost as giddy as *Kids From America*. The follow-up, *Select*, went more synthy, but on hypnotic highlight *Cambodia* played smartly on latent depths. *Catch As Catch Can* deployed the atypical jazz-swing of *Love Blonde* to shunt through some weird electronic funk. It still catches a moment. *Chris Roberts*

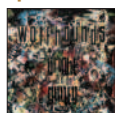
The Wolfhounds

Bright & Guilty

★★★★

Optic Nerve OPNCX (2LP)

Indie experimentalists' special second



The Wolfhounds' blend of car-crash Beefheart guitars, crooked melodies and rumbling Fall rhythms holds up well. Like *The Nightingales*, appreciation filtered through belatedly due to the band's integrity and perseverance (they've released three albums in the last decade). Here on their second album, which comes with a second disc nesting B-Sides and out-takes including two twisted Kinks covers (I'm Not Like Everybody Else and Set Me Free), tracks such as *Non-Specific Song* and *Charterhouse* (a savage

stab at upper-class privilege) showcased David Callahan's acetous wordplay and Matt Deighton's crackling guitar lines to full advantage, deftly employing shade and shifting tempos. Regrettably, despite occasionally hitting poppier notes (single *Happy Shopper*, Ex-Cable Street) the Essex chaps often sounded too grimy and 'Northern' to become a household name. *Johnnie Johnstone*

XTC

Mummer

★★★★★

Panegyric APELP 106 (LP)

First time on wax since '86 for post-punkers' sixth



The latest in Panegyric's faultless series moves *Mummer's* inner sleeve up front as per Andy Partridge's original wishes. Otherwise, it's a straightforward reissue – the master tapes are long lost, so no chance of a Steven Wilson remix. If anything, the no-frills approach emphasises how extraordinary 1983's *Mummer* is. The departure of drummer Terry Chambers and the decision to quit touring seemed to embolden the band – none of this had to be recreated on-stage, so why not go for broke? The result is an album teeming with unlikely ideas performed with panache: *Beating Of Hearts'* fusion of Eastern psych and tribal rhythms; the relentlessly catchy agrarian pop prog of *Love On A Farmboy's Wages*; the tense, nightmarish soundscapes of *Deliver Us From The Elements* and trippy dub of *Human Alchemy* (both of which suggest that, at this point, Kate Bush was the closest Partridge had to a peer). A welcome return of a densely packed and often unfairly overlooked marvel. *Jamie Atkins*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Bickershaw Festival 50th Anniversary

★★★★★

Ozit Morpheus OzitCD 56722 (CD)

Dead, alive in the water



Not even its 50 tracks do justice to the scale of this six-disc set celebrating Bickershaw Festival, the May 1972 bash that took place on a drenched site betwixt Manchester and Liverpool. Of 28 Grateful Dead workouts making up their four-hour set (imagine watching that while wearing soggy pants), a



Nancy & Lee: although here they're actually Lee & Nancy

mesmeric *The Other One* tops 30 minutes and five more top 10. Their set has been available alone, and as part of a boxed music'n'book with the other two discs, but this is the CD-only debut. Festival cherry-picks are a wild mix, from The Kinks (Lola) to the Flamin' Groovies (Jumping Jack Flash), Donovan's *Catch The Wind* to several by Captain Beefheart and six from *New Riders Of The Purple Sage*. Splendid music and perfect sound desk quality. *Nick Dalton*

Gotta Get A Good Thing Goin' – Black Music In Britain In The Sixties

★★★★★

Cherry Red CRJAMBOX 009 (4CD)

Essential overview charting the influence of Black music in the UK



Gotta Get A Good Thing Goin' is a collection that truly celebrates the breadth of black music in the UK in the 60s. Whereas one would expect R&B, soul and ska, it is fascinating to hear easy listening, rock and roll and Merseybeat here, too. With the Windrush Diaspora rightly enjoying its most positive representation than at any point in the past 70 years, *Gotta Get A Good Thing Goin'* is both significant and timely. Extensively annotated, it is far, far beyond an arid history lesson as any compilation with artists ranging from Cleo Laine to Clyde McPhatter, Geoff Love to Laurel Aitken and Shirley Bassey to Kenny Lynch can only offer unbounded joy. The path is surely clear for the same treatment for the next two decades? *RC* is in the queue. *Daryl Easlea*

The Rough Guide To Delta Blues Vol. 2

★★★★★

World Music RGNET 1417 (CD)

The origins of the blues, take two

This follow-up to 2017's initial volume features Son House's



Dry Spell Blues, Skip James' haunting *Cherry Ball Blues*, Memphis Minnie and Kansas Joe's salacious *Can I Do It For You?* and Charley Patton's growling *Shake It And Break It* alongside some lesser known cuts, such as Tommy Johnson on *Maggie Campbell*, Robert Wilkins' *Rolling Stone* from 1928 and an associate of Robert Johnson, Willie Brown's original of *Future Blues* – a *Canned Heat* staple. Louise Johnson's *All Night Long* in an outstanding piano blues take and *Mississippi Matilda* is accompanied by husband *Sonny Boy Nelson*. The *Mississippi Mud Steppers* (actually jug band *The Mississippi Sheiks*), meanwhile, are on toe tapping form on *Vicksburg Storm*, while *Johnny Temple* signposts the route to post war Chicago blues. An enjoyably thorough set. *Tony Burke*

Sharayet El Disco

Egyptian Disco & Boogie Cassettes 1982-1992

★★★★★

Wewantounds WWSLP 60 (LP)

Frankly disco eastern floorfills



Curated by the *Disco Arabesque* collective, *Sharayet El Disco* is an teeming banquet of joyous grooves, offering a glimpse into how disco developed in the Middle East, enabled by the burgeoning of cheap cassette technology. Among the highlights are Dr. Ezzat about *Ouf & el four M's* *Genoun el Disco*, which has a primitive beatbox puttering away while the melody line freely snaffles *Dance In The Old Fashioned Way* and *Love Is In The Air*. *Hazeny* by *Al Massrieen* is a blast – falling somewhere between *Boney M* and the *Blockheads* – and is about how music can shake your soul; and *Youm wi Lilah* by *Firkat Americana Show*, which is a jazzed-up interpretation of *The Girl From Ipanema*, brings a degree of nonchalance to proceedings. *Daryl Easlea*

New Albums

Happy Medium

Radiohead offshoot conjure up radiant debut.

By Jamie Atkins

The Smile

A Light For Attracting Attention



XL XL 1196 (CD, 2LP)

What's in a name? The Smile is a new band comprising Radiohead's creative engine room – Thom Yorke and Jonny Greenwood – and Sons Of Kemet drummer Tom Skinner, produced by the sixth Radiohead member, Nigel Godrich.

By today's standards, it wouldn't have been beyond the pale for The Smile to trade under the Radiohead name. Pink Floyd are releasing new music with one founder member and the guitarist who joined after their glory years. Let's not get started on the line-up of wacky-shirted uncles who pass as most of The Beach Boys. And the current East 17 line-up features backing singer/bad boy Terry, along with a couple of Johnny Come Latelys presumably recruited from a local hard man agency. Still, if there's anything the last few decades have taught us, it's that Radiohead are very much *not* East 17.

Making a new start as The Smile feels like a way for Yorke, Greenwood and Godrich to work together without the pressure and expectations that come with a new Radiohead album. Not only that, but getting the band together would've been a logistical nightmare considering the events of the past few years. Indeed, Greenwood told *NME* back in September, "The Smile came about from just wanting to work on music with Thom in lockdown. We didn't have much time, but we just wanted to finish some songs together. It's been very stop-start, but it's felt a happy way to make music." Meanwhile, introducing the jazz-honed percussive prowess of Skinner into the mix gives the long-term collaborators a chance to spice up their relationship, one unexpected time signature at a time.

The decision has paid off. *A Light For Attracting Attention* feels like an album that exists on its own terms, made for the right reasons. Imaginative arrangements and instrumentation abound, as if a shake-up of personnel and working methods has given the musicians license to stray from well-worn paths with unexpected and often glorious results.

Opening track *The Same* begins in ominous fashion: warped, pulsing synth stabs; one of those drifting, near-slurred Yorke melodies; a feeling of slow-building tension. Where that strain might break in explosive fashion on a Radiohead album, here it's allowed to rise to an almost unbearable level, with layers of circling guitar, nightmarish strings and distortion. Until suddenly, its abrupt end makes it feel like a troubled prelude, rather than a grandstanding opener.

The *Opposite* kicks in with an irresistible, begging-to-be-sampled clipped groove from Skinner. Guitars pile in playing a sort of spidery funk, Yorke is in sarky, bullish mode ("Can we have the next contestant please") over a haunting choir of his own backing vocals. It's a fantastically twitchy, Can-like expression of the freedom The Smile gives these musicians.

Next up, the blistering garage rock of *You Will Never Work In Television Again* blasts things wide open with glee. Greenwood seems to have found a box of pedals lost around the time of recording *No Surprises* B-Side *Palo Alto* and Yorke's vocals are a

deliciously belligerent howl ("You sad fuck/You throw small change/Take your dirty hands off my love" indeed). Anyone who's spent decades yearning for the guitar rock Radiohead mostly abandoned around 1995, look away – they could do it all the time, they were just playing with ya.

Pana-Vision changes the mood instantly. A piano loop reminiscent of Greenwood's soundtrack to Paul Thomas Anderson's 2017 film *Phantom Thread* provides the foundations for a cinematic epic. Again, Yorke is in fantastic vocal form, proving his angelic falsetto is very much intact before letting rip as strings and horns swell around him.

The Smoke acts as a palate cleanser, less of a song and more of a vehicle for an ingenious, supple bassline. Which is more than enough, it turns out. Yorke adds a neat juxtaposition with dreamy vocals, but less is more here.

Speech Bubbles slows things back down, beginning with Yorke cooing beautifully over spare percussion and drone-like organ, before Greenwood arpeggios like it's *In Rainbows* all over again and all is right with the world. It's another example of the inventive arrangements that contribute towards the album's success. Similarly, the math rock frenzy of *Thin Thing* may be one of the least striking tracks here but there's still plenty to enjoy in its energy and dub-like effects on Yorke's vocals.

It wouldn't be a Radiohead-affiliated album without the snazzing up of a near-mythical track – enter *Open The Floodgates*. First played by Thom at an *Atoms For Peace* soundcheck in 2006 and revisited a handful of times in 2009, what was a slow-moving, fairly unremarkable piano song has been transformed into something sublime, with layers of pulsing electronic bleeps flitting around Yorke's powerful vocal like wozy fireflies.

The stunning *Free In The Knowledge* follows suit: Yorke's vocals are Exit Music-intimate as he goes for the emotional jugular with one of his most direct songs in many years. A special mention, too, for the swoonsome string arrangement, another example of Greenwood's enormously successful sideline as a soundtrack composer influencing his main gig.

The skittering, frenetic *A Hairdryer* breaks up the beauty nicely before the meandering *Waving A White Flag* offers more in the way of string-soaked filmic heaviness. We *Don't Know What Tomorrow Brings* is a thrilling post-punk juggernaut. Still, this clutch of songs feel less vital than those that preceded them, as if they were a warm-up for the closing track.

Skrting On The Surface was performed live by Yorke back in 2009 and revived by Radiohead in 2012. While the full band live versions feel ponderous and claustrophobic, here it's an elegiac wonder. Again, it has the warmth of *In Rainbows*, but adds a bucolic string arrangement and free-sounding horns to hypnotic effect.

Far more than an indulgent side project, *A Light For Attracting Attention* deserves to be taken on its own merits as a daring, invigorating and often very moving piece of work in its own right. Its genre-hopping, musically curious approach has effectively given The Smile free reign to do whatever they please should they reconvene, and the material will make for some stunning live shows. It should also give those involved a sense of renewed purpose when it comes to the next Radiohead project, whenever that may appear. For now, though, The Smile can stay another day.



Photo (The Smile): Alex Laine

The Smile: Mmm,
that's more of a
grimace, actually



Branching Out

Victory lap, or onwards march? Prog brainiacs return with options open. *By Kevin Harley.*

Porcupine Tree

Closure/Continuation



Music For Nations 19439956901 (CD/CD/Blu-Ray, 2LP)

Over a long decade for close followers of Porcupine Tree, something was ticking away behind frontman Steven Wilson's evasive interview manoeuvres. While Wilson equivocated on Porcupine Tree's future, he was busily amassing an archive of slow-burning collaborations with drummer Gavin Harrison. As lockdown bit hard, Wilson, Harrison and keyboardist Richard Barbieri worked these fragments and more into collaborative songs, with the band's defining impetus guiding the way: always recognisably themselves, always determinedly different.

That combination is slickly channelled into the teasingly titled – old habits – *Closure/Continuation* (or *C/C*). With bassist Colin Edwin out, the band have reconvened in a new collaborative formation as a limber power trio, refreshed by sundry solo and extra-curricular adventures. Veering between encapsulations of a well-travelled career and open doors (potentially) to future options, the result perhaps misses the conceptual cogency of earlier Tree peaks. But it doesn't want for controlled reach. Over a tight 48 minutes, *C/C* weds a reinvigorated affirmation of band identity to expansive energies, all to confident effect: "The sum of all, of new and old," as Wilson's lyrics put it.

Initial evidence of change arrives with *Harridan*, where Wilson's slapped funk bass heralds bold gear-shifts even as the Porcupine Tree imprint clarifies. Barbieri's limpid washes of *Blade Runner*-ish synth atmospherics and Wilson's crashing guitars occupy



shared space, held in tense, heavy and flexible

formation. Meanwhile, Harrison's cardiac-routine rhythm work summons hammering grandeur and nimble grooves in equal measure; close your eyes and you can picture Thom Yorke wobbling his head in approval.

A more melodic bent buoys up *Of The New Day*, a careworn single giving Wilson's Floyd love full rein. If echoes of *Lightbulb Sun* or *Stupid Dream* also resonate, the result stands as a rarefied take on such, with an airy sense of graceful resilience that – though it predates lockdown – will surely connect with lockdown-bruised listeners.

In Absentia is a closer cousin to *Rats Return*, whose stop-start riff contortions mount revitalised nods to earlier prog-metal PTree highs. While Wilson's lyrics bristle with bile, the song's knotty convolutions hold their own between modern math-rock experimenters such as Black Midi and veteran prog practitioners such as Rush. Talking of whom, an Alex Lifeson-esque guitar break opens *Dignity*, another song that brings to mind Wilson's solo work (notably, *Hand. Cannot. Erase.*) in its empathy for lost souls in the city.

Darker twists on modern anxieties shape *Herd Culling*, which evokes Wilson's fascination with film in its ominous horror-movie lyrics. Between lights in the sky, scratching at the doors and curses on the land, the sense of apocalyptic interior dread oozes a kind of miasmic gloom not many miles removed from Radiohead's *Climbing Up The Walls*.

The reference points for *Walk The Plank* come from closer to home. Continuing the turn away from guitars that distinguished Wilson's *The Future Bites* (2020), the song's mix of queasy atmospherics and experimental electronics also marks fresh territory by foregrounding Barbieri's unmistakably ambient imprint. Finally, *Chimera's Wreck* extends a gift to the old-guard fans in its embrace of the prog-epic jugular, building incrementally through acoustic passages and offbeat time signatures to further echoes of Rush's influence – if the riffs are Lifeson-esque, the bubbling basslines honour Geddy Lee's fleet-fingered example.

Perhaps most pertinently, *Wreck's* lyrics meditate on change, age and legacy, all issues that circle this most confident of comeback/farewell albums. "We can still find there's a future in tomorrow," sings Wilson, ever the tease. Do Porcupine Tree have a future after their upcoming tour? No one involved knows, but the lingering question seems clear. When the suggestion of closure is this strong, how could continuation not be in consideration?

Porcupine Tree: a reunion more successful than this photo suggests



Q&A

Keyboard wizard Richard Barbieri unpacks a freshly collaborative resurrection...

Your last show was 12 years back. Did you anticipate such a long break?

It was a growing surprise. I expected there would be a break of a couple of years and I presumed we'd carry on. But Steven wanted to embark on a solo career. It slowly became apparent. It's like detective work. I only just discovered recently that Steven and Gavin were working together in 2011-12, on ideas. At one point I left it behind emotionally, left the whole thing and forgot about it. I made solo albums. Then around 2017, 2018, I became more involved. When we got to lockdown, everything accelerated and we knew it was a Porcupine Tree album. It was unmistakably us. It had the DNA.

You had your solo career. Did you have any reservations about reforming or did it feel natural?

It felt quite natural. I think they had more reservations about reconvening with me, possibly. Not in a musical sense but in a sense that the last tour we did wasn't great. We were touring too much. We'd made an album that for the first time didn't feel like a move forwards. It was plateau-ing. So I was keen to make another. I didn't want it left with that album and I didn't want it left with that tour. My motivation was to make a great album and to have a tour where we're all friends.

The album is your most collaborative. Was that an organic development or a mandate?

It was a mandate, really, from Steven. He saw no point after having written five or six solo albums to turning up and saying, right, here's 90 per cent of the material. It's the most I've been involved with the writing, production and presentation. And it's the first Porcupine Tree album that just features three people. It distils it down to the core of the band.

Is *Chimera's Wreck* a gift to the fans? It's the most prog track here...

When I first heard it, I was like, This is like something from the 70s. But there is always that element lurking around the corner in our music. It

is a prog epic, isn't it?

There's a sense of anticipation surrounding this album. Did you get a sense of that building while the band were away?

I was kind of aware. Probably Steven was most aware because his fanbase were constantly reminding him that they wanted him to make another. And because of the sheer body of work that we've created, and the quality, I think a lot of young people started to get into the band. In some places, they're crazy for us. We sold 9,000 tickets in an hour in Chile. And these are kids. They're not going to be old prog-heads.

The title is deliberately ambiguous. Do you feel it would be a shame to call closure, given that you're on such form?

We don't know. Any decision on finishing something is always done quite quickly, isn't it, on the spur of the moment. I think either way, we can't lose. We were determined to have a great time and make this fun. We've made what we think is one of our best albums. If we call it a day, we'll be quite satisfied. But we're leaving the door open.

As told to Kevin Harley

!!! Let It Be Blue

★★★★★
Warp WARPLP 339 (CD, LP)
Clutter-free funk from Sacramento scenesters
Back in 2000, !!!'s self-titled debut contained a



track entitled *There's No Fucking Rules, Dude*. If ever a group had a mission statement, it was that. Although they have been in the indie mainstream

for two and a half decades now, !!! (pronounced Chk Chk) still feel fresh. Their ninth album, *Let It Be Blue*, still continues that mission, combining minimalism, electro-pop, dance-punk and impeccable grooves.

Let It Be Blue is possibly the most focused the group have been. With the acoustic 'Laurel Canyon amuse-bouche' *Normal People* to open, the following 37 minutes are full of handsomely terse

funk. The hands-in-the-air daftness of *Panama Canal* is a standout and recasting R.E.M.'s *Man On The Moon* as some lost Ze Records/no-wave outtake goes beyond gimmick and works incredibly well. *Daryl Easlea*

All Them Witches

Live On The Internet

★★★★

New West LPNW 5589 (2CD, 3LP)

Lockdown but not out: Nashville rockers prevail



After the under-powered ATW (2018), Nashville's sulphurous

psych-rockers rediscovered their reach on *Nothing As The Ideal* (2020). As Covid curtailed album touring plans, the quartet-turned-trio occupied a studio to broadcast that ready-to-go fervour online for lockdown-atomised fans. Out on vinyl, the result is a broiling declaration of dynamism and determination from gig-starved rock lifers, kickstarted imposingly by the Bonzo-esque bludgeon, expansive riffs and vocal declamations of Blood And Sand/Milk And Endless Waters. Elsewhere, Witches buffet on the Sabbath-indebted Dirt Preachers, burn slow on Saturnine And Iron Jaw and dredge up something primordial for the sludgy mysticism of 1X1. If Rats In Ruin overreaches for the epic, Enemy Of My Enemy finds Witches in their stoner-rock element, churning out monster riffs in a spirit of pronounced indomitability. *Kevin Harley*

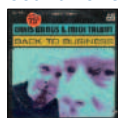
Bangs & Talbot

Back To Business

★★★★

Acid Jazz AJX 640 (CD, LP)

Funk DJ and Style Councilor team up



The DJ/producer who coined the term "acid jazz,"

Chris Bangs is also a percussionist, an able foil for The Style Council/Dexys keyboardist Mick Talbot's first non-sessioneewr album since he was in 00s funk supergroup The Players. Bar a chintzy cover of Marvin Gaye's How Sweet It Is, the duo create their own energetic instrumentals.

A couple of tracks tip into genre stereotypes: Leela's Dance and Kookie T could be from a cheesy spy film spoof. Mostly, Bangs & Talbot spur each other on to showing tough musicianship and frantic riffing. Surf'N'Turf and Stingray – the latter recorded in front of an appreciative Californian club crowd – are tight funk workouts worthy of any DJ's attention.

Occasionally missing a vocalist, mostly a lively adventure from scene evergreens.

John Earls

Brandon Coleman

Black Interstellar Space

★★★★

Brainfeeder BFDNL101 (CD, LP)

Keyboard cosmonaut's third album puts the fun back into funk



Dubbed "Professor Boogie" by Kamasi

Washington, whose band he's played in for several years, Coleman is a self-taught keyboardist from Los Angeles whose stock has been on the rise since *Resistance*, his 2018 debut for Flying Lotus' Brainfeeder label. His latest opus reflects the keyboardist's long-time enthusiasm for sci-fi movies set in space and offers the sonic equivalent of a meditation on the vast expanse of nothingness where "no one can hear you scream," although there's nothing scary about Coleman's joyous cache of vocoder-led astral funk influenced by Herbie Hancock and Parliament. Among the standouts are the two-part We Change, featuring Kamasi Washington and trumpeter Keyon Harrold; On The One, a chunk of Prince-like synth funk; and the lush Say When. Cosmic, man. *Charles Waring*

Steve Earle

Jerry Jeff

★★★★

New West CDNW 6534 XIE (CD, LP)

Country maverick takes a walk on the wild side



One country renegade salutes another on *Jerry Jeff*, Earle

in his best good humour singing the songs of Jerry Jeff Walker – in effect the third of a trilogy honouring his heroes following albums devoted to Townes Van Zandt and Guy Clark.

This is anything but a poignant reflection on a great songwriter; instead it echoes Walker's freewheeling, smile-flashing style, a party rather than a tribute. Kicking off with Gettin' By and quickly followed by Gypsy Songman, Walker's spirit is everywhere, Earle's band the Dukes walking in the footsteps of his own hard-hitting combo, the Gonzo Compadres.

And yet everything is turned on its head with Mr Bojangles, Walker's much-covered classic, which gets a moving, soulful treatment here, accompanied by swathes of fiddle and squeezebox.

Nick Dalton



Liam Gallagher: take your coat off, love, or you won't feel the benefit when you go out

George Ezra

Gold Rush Kid

★★★★

Columbia 19439984121

(CD, LP, Cassette)

Singer-songwriter continues stadium rise



When Herts-raised George Ezra emerged in 2015, the world didn't

exactly need another Home Counties singer-songwriter. Ezra stood out by crafting escapist breezy pop, rather than joining his peers' dreary contest to see who could be the most earnest. Many would still struggle to pick Ezra out in a line-up, but undeniable bangers such as Shotgun led him to headline stadiums, and the first half of Ezra's third album has the same winning catchiness: don't be surprised if Manila and the self-satirising title track also attain radio ubiquity. Unfortunately, the second side is dominated by the moon-faced balladry Ezra usually rises above. Love Somebody Else has a classy Hall & Oates-y sheen, but it's surrounded by winsome platitudes. A solid bronze, rather than gold standard. *John Earls*

Liam Gallagher

C'mon You Know

★★★★

Warners 0190296423932 (CD, LP)

He is the resurrection



Gallagher Jnr's third solo album adds some self-proclaimed "weird shit" to the square meal rock'n'roll that has helped him, to everyone's

surprise, outstrip his big brother. Everything is relative – he hasn't pivoted to drill music – but there is the odd curveball: reflective opener More Power, with its children's choir, sounds like The Flaming Lips covering You Can't Always Get What You Want; Vampire Weekend's Ezra Koenig co-writes the noirish Moscow Rules; The Beatles' influences are more psychedelic than ever on It Was Not Meant to Be and Better Days (essentially Tomorrow Never Knows). Otherwise, it's as you were (sorry) with sweet ballads (Too Good For Giving Up) and polished rock (Everything's Electric) that will fit in nicely between Oasis classics at Liam's Knebworth second coming. *Shaun Curran*

Heldon

Antelast

★★★★

Bam Balam BBRP 091 (CD, LP)

Avant-rockers going out with a bang



Heldon's initial run occurred in the 70s.

Listening to those recordings today, the French group's freewheeling mixture of distorted guitar licks, weighty synth wobbles and lively drumbeats still sounds futuristic. Their leader, Richard Pinhas, is now in his seventies. Although he keeps threatening to wind things down, both archive releases and fresh material keeps on coming. Recorded live in 2019 with younger members Arthur Narcy and Florian Tatard, *Antelast* will be

Heldon's final transmission... unless it isn't. Divided into five movements, the set is often propelled frantically by its energetic and hard-hitting rhythm section, as Pinhas riffs, noodles and spirals on top. Interspersed are mellow, breath-catching moments. But you never have to wait long before another blast-off. *JR Moores*

Hercules And Love Affair

In Amber

★★★★

Skint/BMG 4050538788365 (CD, 2LP)

Dance musician reunites with Anohni and goes goth



On his alias' self-titled 2008 debut, New York DJ Andy Butler

offered one of the decade's most celebrated dance singles: the ferocious Blind, featuring Anohni. Reunited on the first Hercules And Love Affair album in five years, the pair have a whole new vibe. Contempt For You has the unsettling fury of Associates' darker moments, a mood continued in the tracks Butler sings, in a goth rumble recently echoed in Fontaines D.C. Handbag house it most definitely isn't, with Banshees/Creatures drummer Budgie enhancing the melodramatic rhythms. The intensity of Butler's rage, and his innate way with a beat, keep the songs from becoming too histrionic, sometimes colliding with industrial rock so that the pacy Christian Prayers is a thrilling Nine Inch Nails-alike. *John Earls*

Divine Perfection

US singer-songwriter's sixth studio album raises the bar. *By Jamie Atkins*

Angel Olsen

Big Time



Jagjaguwar JAG 424 CD (CD, 2LP, Cassette)

Angel Olsen described her last album proper, 2019's *All Mirrors*, as an "angry record". Steeped in icy synthesizers and spectral strings and set to cold drum machines, it had a seething drama matched by the turbulence and frustration of the lyrics. *Big Time* finds the St Louis-raised singer-songwriter perform an about-turn to deliver a set informed by lush country and hushed folk with lyrics that veer between self-acceptance, grief, emotional exhaustion and optimism.

The songs on *Big Time* deal with the fall-out from a period in Olsen's personal life that left her reeling. After a period of coming to terms with her sexuality, she finally came out to her parents. "Finally, at the ripe old age of 34, I was free to be me," she writes in *Big Time*'s press release. But any feeling of relief was short-lived – her father died three days later. Two weeks after the funeral, her mother was admitted to the ER and didn't return. Just three weeks after her mother's service, Olsen spent a month in Topanga Canyon recording *Big Time* with producer Jonathan Wilson.

"I can't say that I'm sorry/When I don't feel so wrong anymore," begins opener *All The Good Times*, a slow-burning country-soul gem flecked with Stax horns and heartbroken-sounding pedal steel. It's a strong opener sung with controlled power. The title track is another tip of the hat towards Nashville, a weepy waltz giddy with new love.

The eerie beauty of *Dream Thing* appears to find Olsen reflecting on past relationships in the light of her recent experiences, set to a shimmering and melodramatic musical backing that would've done Roy Orbison proud. The defiant *Ghost On* follows ("I can't fit into the past you're used to/I refuse to"), another suggestion that Olsen found comfort in classic country during hard times.



The string-soaked survival ballad *All The Flowers* showcases Olsen's dramatic vocal range: think Karen Dalton backed by *Fantasia* strings and you're some of the way there. It's followed by the show-stopping *Right Now*, a swooning country power ballad that improbably takes a turn into psych-Beatles territory, all heavy descending strings.

This Is How It Works is another countrified gem that finds Olsen mining uncanny beauty from emotional exhaustion. "I'm so tired of being tired," she sings. You believe her.

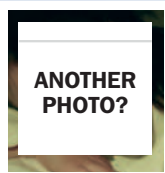
There's conviction, too, in the plain-speaking *Go Home*. Olsen belts out the stirring chorus with the desperation of somebody helpless in the tumult of tragedy: "I wanna go home/Go back to small things/I don't belong here/Nobody knows me."

Elsewhere, *Walk Through The Fire* is such an exquisitely doomy-sounding torch song that presumably David Lynch is writing a film about it as we



Angel Olsen: having it large on her new record

speak. And *Chasing The Sun* is a stunning way for *Big Time* to finish, its lovestruck and content lyrics ("I can't seem to get anything done with someone like you around/Everyone's wonderin' where I've gone – having too much fun") set to sumptuously sad music to bittersweet effect, like Olsen's very own *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*.



ANOTHER PHOTO?

Q&A

Angel Olsen on mining the emotional depths on her startling new record.

In *Dream Thing* you refer to a "waste of fear." Did the events of your personal life inspire a creative fearlessness when it came to the making of *Big Time*?

I'm not really sure, but when I say "waste of fear" in the song – I'm referring to someone spending too long a time holding a grudge, out of fear, out of ego.

Big Time feels like a warm, soulful record. Did you purposely set out to make it sound so different to *All Mirrors*?

I guess everything I make is a little different

from the previous release. I'm usually trying new things because it's what inspires me for a time. I listened to a lot of 70s country and rock during the pandemic. When I went to look for producers, I thought someone who would understand the minimalism needed for these songs, someone who'd just let them be what they are might be best. Might be the most radical thing I could do.

Were there any albums that were especially influential on the sound of *Big Time*?

Neil Young's *On The Beach*, Fleetwood Mac always, Dolly Parton just because I'm a woman, Dusty Springfield, Big Star, Lucinda Williams.

It feels like there's a lot of reflection on past relationships, personal and professional – *All The Good Times*, *Dream Thing* etc. Have you found the clarity you needed to address sensitive subjects in song?

Yes and no – people are weird! But I have found peace with those circumstances without needing clarity from someone else.

Chasing The Sun ends things on a lyrically hopeful note but the music feels exquisitely sad. Do you enjoy that sort of juxtaposition?

Well, when you're falling in love in a real way, I think you kind of feel open, or a little sad at the thought of losing the feeling if you want it so much. I think the same thing can happen with a lot of old country songs: you listen to them at first and they sound upbeat until you hear the words sometimes. And they're a little funny. Kinda like when you've been so sad you've actually learned how to laugh more when you retell your story. Comedians are some of the saddest people. You have to endure a lot to laugh that much. Anytime something bad happens to me I like to say, "I'm just learning how to laugh deeper." *As told to Jamie Atkins*

Horsegirl

Versions Of Modern Performance

Matador OLE 1846 LPE 2 (CD, LP)



Thrilling debut from the Windy City trio

The first breakout group of



barely out of school but belie their young years on *Versions Of Modern Performance*, a

Chicago's thriving underage DIY scene, Horsegirl are layered, atmospheric, darkly playful headrush of a first offering. Their basement-dwelling writing process adds a scuzziness to the strong post-punk/early 90s US alt-rock vibe (see the buzzing riff of *Anti-Glory*) but it's the

guitar soundscapes and pop harmonies a la My Bloody Valentine and Stereolab that elevate tracks such as *Billy* and *World Of Pots* And *Pans* into something truly special. Add in some idiosyncratic, impressionistic,

at times surreal lyrical character studies that take in themes of friendship and youthful lust, often set to an imagined life in the suburbs, and you'll do well to hear a better guitar-based debut all year. *Shaun Curran*

Interpol

The Other Side Of Make-Believe

Matador OLE 1875 LP (CD, LP)

★★★★
New York trio let in a little light



For 20 years, NYC's Interpol have searched for ways to alter the shade

of their monochromatic, elegiac rock: a dignified, if not always successful pursuit. This lightly envelope-pushing seventh album finds that elusive new sweet spot in bringing to the fore a somewhat alien concept: hope. With the help of super producer Flood, the band used lockdown distance to change up their jam-the-songs-out approach, letting some light through the cracks. Daniel Kessler's guitar lines remain inventively distinctive, but a gentleness now exudes from Paul Banks' voice, and his pseudo-absurdist lyrics consider that things might not be so bad after all. It plays into the music: anthemic highlights *Fables* and *Passenger* have a stately, optimistic air. "Still in shape, my methods refined," goes opener *Toni*, and how true it proves. *Shaun Curran*

Leyla McCalla

Breaking The Thermometer

ANTI- 279121 (CD, LP)

★★★★★
Americana mainstay honours Haitian rebel folk



Mixing archival recordings with fertile, shape-shifting original songs

and compositions, this exploratory album from Haitian-American cellist and multi-instrumentalist Leyla McCalla aims a spotlight on the radical Radio Haiti. A university commission compelled the former Carolina Chocolate Drop and *Our Native Daughters* player to dig deep into the independent station's archives from 1957-2003; there, McCalla finds the impetus for bracingly enriched story-songs of resistance and resilience, spirit and selfhood. Creole folk rubs shoulders with vibrant melodies, insistent rhythms and political laments, nurtured to fruition between McCalla's research and her reflections on her own identity. With brisk protest song *Dodinin*, the lovely *Dan Reken* and the lilting *Pouki* among the standouts, the result is a haunting, heartfelt immersion in Haitian history, fully invested and alive with

poignancy and power.

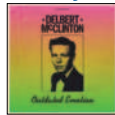
Kevin Harley

Delbert McClinton

Outdated Emotion

★★★★★
Hot Shot HSR 0031 (CD, LP)

★★★★★
Back to the future, Lone Star-style



This Americana lark is second nature to grizzled Texan McClinton.

Now in his early 80s, he recently retired from touring and this 16-track collection reconnects him to the songs that inspired him as a teen. Kicking off with *Lloyd Price's Stagger Lee*, he works his way through an alternative American Songbook, and the result will delight anyone whose path he's crossed over the years. Whether intoning over honky-tonk piano for *Amos Milburn's One Scotch, One Bourbon, One Beer* or frolicking with fiddles on *Hank Williams' Jambalaya*, McClinton proves his talents endure. By the time he closes with the brief, humorous *Call Me A Cab* – "I can't listen to this shit any more," he groans – you wish he'd start all over again.

Michael Heatley

Van Morrison

What's It Gonna Take?

★★★★★
Exile/Virgin 4549777 (CD, 2LP)

★★★★★
Still Van the Manifesto...



According to track 12 of 15, Van Morrison, "Ain't no celebrity... and I don't care if you agree."

You'd think maybe he's trying to put controversy to bed, given recent conspiracy theory headlines – but if you reach that point, you've already consumed an entire manifesto. He takes issue with his detractors from the start, the one-chord organ-fuelled groove of *Dangerous* underpinning self-justifying lyrics. Track two, *What's It Gonna Take*, swings at politicians; *Fighting Back Is The New Normal* derides "fence sitters". This once elegantly enigmatic lyricist has become the ranting uncle in the corner.

Much of the music here is sumptuous R&B, but if Van is intent on exercising his right to freedom of speech he may find many choosing to tune out. *Michael Heatley*

Graham Nash

Live
★★★★★
Proper Records PRPCD 161 (CD, LP)

★★★★★
Solo, and proud of it
Not just a live set, this



21-track release is a celebration of Nash's 50 years as a solo

artist (a career often rudely interrupted by CSNY's own erratic path). Here, Nash plays his first two albums, 1971's *Songs For Beginners* and *Wild Tales* (1973), in their entirety on a 2019 tour not only with his usual crew – guitarist *Shane Fontayne* and former CSN keyboard player *Todd Caldwell* – but with pedal steel, sax and backing singers.

Some songs, notably a bunch from his debut, are favourites Nash has continued to play regularly – *Simple Man*, *Military Madness*, *I Used To Be A King*, *Chicago* – while others are less performed; some, apparently, not at all. The sound is warm and rich and Nash's plaintive vocals soar above everything loud and clear. *Nick Dalton*

Klaus Schulze

Deus Arrakis
★★★★★
SPV 16246151886922461514 (CD, 3LP)

★★★★★
Dune-inspired brilliance from late musician



Klaus Schulze's recent death was unexpected, and if *Deus*

Arrakis turns out to be his swansong – which is likely – then it's a fitting conclusion to a remarkable career, bringing things full circle. This is a sequel to the imaginary soundtrack to *Dune* that the German electronic pioneer made back in 1979, where he enlisted Arthur

"The God of Hellfire" Brown to sing operatic glossolalia, was one of his masterpieces, and four decades later, Hans Zimmer asked Schulze to make a cameo on his own Academy Award-winning score. Inspired, Schulze rolled back the decades and recorded this companion piece: *Deus Arrakis* is as ambient and abstract as much of the kosmische legend's work, creating more an ethereal mood than a narrative which, given his sad passing, becomes a kind of ceremonial synth sepulture. *Jeremy Allen*

John Scofield

John Scofield
★★★★★
ECM 2727 (CD)

★★★★★
Veteran jazz guitarist goes it alone



With its acerbic tone and bluesy, bittersweet inflections, Scofield's

fretboard sound is instantly recognisable and over the last 50 years has been heard in myriad different musical contexts, from spacey avant-jazz to riotous jam band funk and every style in between. This new album is the 70-year-old's first dedicated solo guitar record of his career and truly captures the essence of his unique approach to his instrument. The album's material – veering from jazz standards (*It Could Happen To You*) and traditional songs (*Danny Boy*) to ear-catching versions of *Buddy Holly's Not Fade Away* and *Hank Williams' You Win Again* – reflects the Ohio-born musician's eclectic array of influences. Impressive, too, are several striking self-penned tunes, which range from the hard-swinging, bop-

tinged *Elder Dance* to the gentle *Mrs Scofield's Waltz*. A satisfyingly intimate encounter. *Charles Waring*

Shearwater

The Great Awakening
★★★★★
Polyborus PLBR 001 (CD, 2LP)

★★★★★
Artful birder's still waters run deep



After books about birds, Bowie tributes, Bandcamp releases and

Brian Eno collaborations, Shearwater's deep, dreamy comeback album *The Great Awakening* marks a homecoming for mainman Jonathan Meiburg. Certainly, it cleaves closer to the serene conceptual naturalism of Meiburg's 2006-10 'island trilogy' than the protest prog of Shearwater's last album, 2016's *Jet Plane And Oxbow*. Inspired by Meiburg's South American travels and lockdown, it's an album of expansive reach and intimate ruminations, where field recordings – monkeys, toucans – accompany songs of hope and dread, isolation and connection. Late Scott Walker and Talk Talk are doleful touchpoints for Highgate and the controlled drama of *Xenarthran*. From brawn to beauty, the buff *Empty Orchestra* and radiohead-ish *Aqaba* offer twin peaks of bruised resilience and reflection. The result is an exquisitely textured album of radiant hymnals and restorative eco-lullabies, sculpted for modern trials. And, for Meiburg, a welcome and artistic reawakening.

Kevin Harley

Graham Nash: he booked a decent act for his 50th anniversary celebrations. Himself



Wild Horses

Indie veterans mark their sixth album with their most escapist music yet. *By John Earls*

Foals

Life Is Yours

★★★★★

Warner 0190296274435 (CD, LP/2LP)

Arriving at the tail-end of the era when indie bands could infiltrate the Top 40 singles chart, Foals were initially unlikely contenders for the mainstream. Emerging from the highbrow math-rock scene, the Oxford quintet at least played wild and celebratory gigs to enhance the more tuneful aspects of 2008's fidgety debut album *Antidotes*, which is reissued on recycled vinyl on the same day as *Life Is Yours*. Ever since, Foals have kept the intricate musicianship, but utilised it in search of the ultimate smart funk workout.

That hasn't always worked: despite the title track's phenomenal groove, much of 2015's self-conscious *What Went Down* was like George Michael with a 2:2 in sports science. Having explored all their styles on 2019's enjoyably sprawling two-part epic *Everything Not Saved Will Be Lost*, the band – now down to a trio after keyboardist Edwin Congreave left during early album sessions to take a post-grad economics degree – have settled on what seems the ideal path. Forget growing old gracefully, Foals' sixth record is up for it and chasing the simple pleasures.

Despite working with a team of producers for the first time, Foals' sound is at its most cohesive since punchy third album *Holy Fire*. Although recording began during the winter lockdown of 2020, the trio encapsulate escapist yearning brilliantly, whether for chaotic nights out on 2am or for summer travels in 2001, whose abandoned party mood earns the joyful outro its own interlude track as (Summer Sky). Yannis



Foals: equestrian time

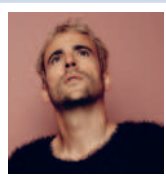


Phillippakis' singing is richer than ever, duetting with himself in dazzling fashion on *The Sound*, where his falsetto and gruffer register do battle on a visceral guitar pop assault. Throughout, Jimmy Smith's choppy guitars keep Phillippakis' vocals taut, equal

parts Ze Records tight funk and imperious Talking Heads pop. Although he still doesn't have a full-time bassist to bounce off since Walter Gervers' departure in 2018, Jack Bevan's fluid drumming is

adept, a powerhouse storm on the title track and enticingly disco on *Flutter*. Only the routine thud of *Getting High* fails among the euphoria elsewhere, with lead single *Wake Me Up* matched by the closing *Wild Green* for a fantastic example of a band still out to cut loose, when most of their peers have entered the reflective and thoughtful stage of their career.

Although their intense image is of a band who are never satisfied, always yearning for the next step up, Foals deserve to bask in accomplishing their most complete and exciting album. After 15 years, that's a rare achievement.



Q&A

Guitarist Jimmy Smith on the influence of Weezer and Kingfishers on Foals' new album.

Did you know when you began *Life Is Yours* that you'd make such an escapist album?

It's one of the first times we've truly achieved what we'd set out to. I vividly remember sitting around with our drummer, Jack [Bevan], in September 2020, talking about Weezer's *Blue Album*: how it's so escapist as it's its own little world, of a 10-song pop/rock package. We wanted something simpler that, once you get to the end, you maybe immediately want to let it roll again.

How easy was it to achieve that aim in reality?

With four different producers, there was a lot of noise going on. John Hill was like the executive

producer, overseeing things, and he did a great job of stripping stuff out. That was mostly my fault, as I was putting arpeggios over everything.

Why did you use a team of producers for the first time?

It wasn't calculated, we were just indulging ourselves with people we'd always wanted to work with. We'd discussed John having that executive role and we loved working with Dan Carey. Miles James is less well-known, but we wanted him for the meticulous way he approaches drums. Miles and Jack were tuning drums for hours and hours. AK Paul was on our hitlist as part of the mysterious Paul brothers with Jai Paul. That guy is a magician.

What was it like recording at Real World during lockdown?

We've recorded in a few fancy studios, but it's really special there. There's nowhere else where you can record looking at wildlife. We bubbled ourselves off during Covid and Real World was a welcome distraction. It can be easy to overthink

what you're doing, and looking at a family of kingfishers meant I wasn't craning my head over to look at my fretboard. It added a lightness to everything.

Any plans for more soundtrack work after *Neptune* was reworked with Hans Zimmer for Brian Cox's BBC2 series *Universe*?

Foals is full-on and it'd be hard to juggle the two, but I'd absolutely be interested. Me and Yannis [Phillippakis, Foals frontman] have so much music sitting in the archives. There's a lot of ambient stuff waiting for the right offer.

Antidotes is reissued on vinyl with *Life Is Yours*. How do you view the album 14 years on?

People still seem to cherish it, as do we, as it's our first child. It's the album we laboured over the most, and I love it. It's aged really well. I can't believe it's that long ago. Being in New York with Dave Sitek producing, that was a "My God!" experience. *As told to John Earls.*

Katie Spencer
The Edge Of The Land

★★★★★
Lightship Records LR 001 CD
(CD, LP)

Yorkshire singer-songwriter's ace second



The influence of the natural and built environment runs deeply through Katie Spencer's album. Recorded live in the studio in just two days, the highly impressive result sees Spencer's thoughtful songwriting complemented by consistently excellent musicianship, as evidenced on the reflective opener, Take Your Time. Elsewhere, the landscape's recurrent presence appears on excellent songs such as the evocative title track, Silence On The Hillside and Shannon Road. The latter track typifies the album's quality; imaginative imagery supported by compelling music that summons up the best of early 70s folk, fluently delivered here with its own contemporary power. This is a fine collection of memorable songs by an outstanding writer and musician. *Steve Burniston*

Jimi Tenor
Multiversum

★★★★★
Bureau B BB401 (LP, CD)

Improbable crossovers from Finland's electro-jazz beatmaker



Clearly, lockdown did little to restrain Jimi Tenor, whose work increasingly seems to operate outside of time and space. Worlds don't so much collide as melt into each other on *Multiversum*, on which a song called Uncharted Waters finds Tenor intoning the lyric "Highway empty, open wide", the implication of deep-sea

driving saying everything about the improbable realms this Finnish electro-jazz polymath creates. The four-to-the-floor kick beneath Baby Free Spirit recalls his early 90s beat-making, while Bass Kalimba Dance takes a bare-bones swing at the borderless approach to rhythms that defined 2020's *Aulos*. Whether flaunting his flautism (Monday Blue) or pulling one of his periodic Gary Wilson seductions (Birthday Magic), Tenor never misses a trick as he upends his kit bag and lets the contents spill across the floor. *Jason Draper*

The Wave Pictures
When The Purple Emperor Spreads His Wings

★★★★★
Moshi Moshi MOSHILP 117 (2LP, CD)
Endearingly eccentric and often emotional



Forever on the cusp of a breakthrough, The Wave Pictures return with *When The Purple Emperor Spreads His Wings*, an ambitious double-album with each side devoted to a season. Leader David Tattersall wrote a song a day during lockdown, and the album showcases the breadth of the Loughborough trio's talents, from the sincere (the floating, acoustic River Of Gold) to the silly (the glam-stomping Hazel Irvine). Back In The City is so Velvets you think you've just found an outtake from *Loaded*. With the passing of Pat Fish, *When The Purple Emperor Spreads His Wings* has that Jazz Butcher outsiderdom shuffle – frequently irresistible, sometimes a trifle glib. If this writer was 17, he would think this the greatest album ever; 40 years on, he still thinks it's pretty good. *Daryl Easlea*

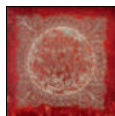


Working Men's Club: a labour of love, despite what it looks like

Wilco
Cruel Country

★★★★★
dBpm Records 051497337483
(2CD, 2LP)

Unexpected double from art-rock institution



The way frontman Jeff Tweedy tells it, *Cruel Country* is Wilco's take on country music, inspired by a collective urge to play the music that felt the most like communion after the six-piece's pandemic-

enforced break. The songs that emerged suggested a narrative to Tweedy that loosely paralleled the story of the United States, or at least evoked the singer's feeling about his birthplace. Hence the double entendre of a title. They have reconnected with the direct, rootsy sound of their early years, but there's always a twist – off-kilter percussion from the staggering Glenn Kotche; guitarist Nels Cline's mini firework displays of solos; Tweedy's idiosyncratic lyrics. And for all of the more straightforward-sounding country-ish tunes, there are so many side-steps: the way the somnambulant psych of The Empty Condor staggers into life; the existential awe of The Universe; the Dead-like cosmic jam, Many Worlds. It makes for a marvellous and consistent outpouring of creativity. *Jamie Atkins*

Working Men's Club
Fear Fear

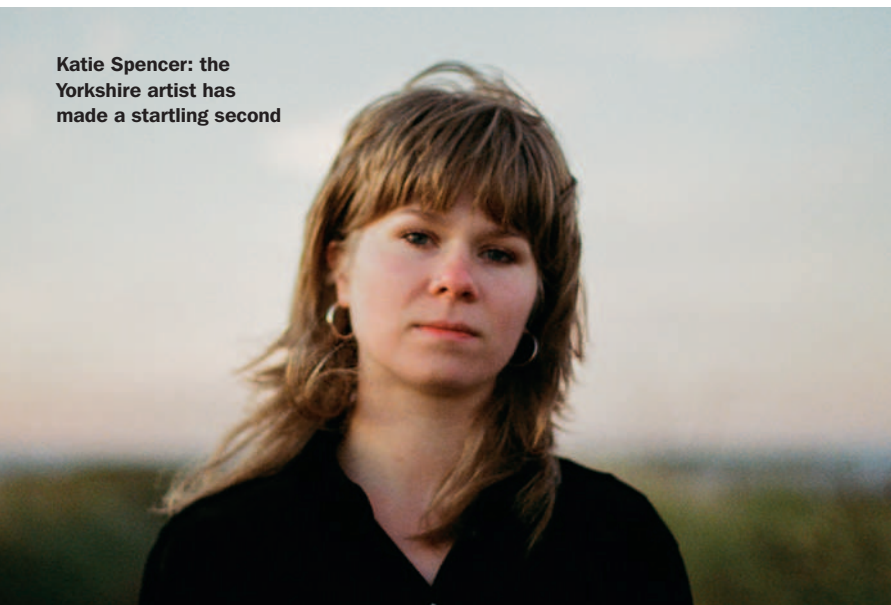
★★★★★
Heavenly HVNLP 203 (CD, LP)

More twisted TV themes in waiting



This Todmorden collective's breakthrough single Teeth was an insistent slice of Underworld-style dark dance that became the theme to BBC2's murderous comedy drama *Guilt*. They're in no rush to change the formula on album two. Leader Syd Minsky-Sargeant claims *Fear Fear* is less minimal, but his band still excel at hypnotic repetition. New Order remain an obvious touchstone, but there's a more Kraftwerk feel this time, especially on the childlike "What does this button do?" mood of Plays. A gleefully macabre world, again full of would-be TV identents. *John Earls*

Katie Spencer: the Yorkshire artist has made a startling second



NEXT MONTH

- Rolling Stones Jamie T
- Black Midi George Michael
- Lou Reed Madonna