

**BLONDIE** THEIR SECRET HISTORY UNCOVERED



# UNCUT

**"LET'S MOVE FORWARD!"**

INSIDE AMERICA'S  
GREATEST BAND

# WILCO

**124  
REVIEWS!**

CASS McCOMBS  
LOU REED  
THE STONES  
• MORE!

**KATE BUSH**  
SOUNDS OF LOVE

**THE KINKS**  
KAOS AND KARMA

**COSEY FANNI  
TUTTI**  
ART, SEX, MAGIC

**STEVE HILLAGE**  
HITS FROM THE GONG

**PAUL McCARTNEY**  
SET OF THE CENTURY?

**LITTLE FEAT**  
STILL SAILIN'

AND...  
**NIGHT OF A  
THOUSAND  
BOWIES!**

**PLUS!**

LOVE  
JULIA JACKLIN  
CHRIS FORSYTH  
JOHN'S CHILDREN  
MAGNETIC FIELDS  
LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

UNCUT PRESENTS

# SOUNDS OF THE NEW WEST

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On the cover:  
Jeff Tweedy of Wilco  
by Mary Ellen Matthews  
Inset: Debbie Harry  
by Anthony Barboza/  
Getty Images

It seems strange, on reflection, that Wilco have never been on the cover of *Uncut*. After all, there are few contemporary bands whose career we've championed so assiduously during our 25-year existence. Certainly, the sequence of albums from their 1995 debut *AM* to this year's *Cruel Country* constitutes one of the most artistically consistent and compelling narratives in music. That they appeared five times in our list of 300 greatest albums of *Uncut*'s lifetime – the most of any artist – simply underscores their considerable musical achievements and ability to redefine what they do and how they do it.

For this cover story we celebrate not one but two Wilcos: the band in transition who recorded the landmark *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* 20 years ago and the band now who've just released *Cruel Country*. With help from Jeff Tweedy and the rest of the band, Nick Hasted untangles the knotty congruence between Wilco past and Wilco present – and in doing so helps find a path to Wilco future. For our free CD, Wilco have reconstructed *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* from other sources – some live, some

alternate versions and some taken from their upcoming deluxe *YHF* special edition. It is, I think, very special.

Elsewhere, Peter Watts takes roads less travelled with *Blondie*, Dave Davies gives us one of his most revealing and emotional interviews ever, Stephen Troussé considers the legacy of David Bowie in the company of a fabulous collection of kooks, Laura Barton investigates Cosy Fanni Tutti's transgressive life and times, we welcome Julia Jacklin and get deep with Cass McCombs. You'll also find Love, Steve Hillage, Chris Forsyth and Little Feat, as well as continued evidence of the enduring power of several *Uncut* favourites. As our piece on the unexpected and welcome success, 37 years later, of Kate Bush's "Running Up That Hill" proves, framing our heroes' evolving work is a critical part of what we do here.

Plenty going on. Until next month...

**Michael Bonner, Editor.** Follow me on Twitter @michaelbonner

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**SUB  
OFFER!**



# INSTANT KARMA!

THIS MONTH'S REVELATIONS FROM THE WORLD OF UNCUT  
FEATURING... Kate Bush | Sonic Boom & Panda Bear | Andy Ellison | Sylvie

Dave Grohl and Bruce Springsteen rejoin McCartney to close out the show with The Beatles' "The End"



Premiere Bond: pyrotechnics light up Worthy Farm for "Live And Let Die"





# Everybody had a good time...

The greatest Glasto set ever? **Macca** charms a bumper Pyramid Stage crowd with a little help from **Dave and Bruce**

**I** KNOW it's virtual," Paul McCartney told the 100,000-strong crowd gathered in front of Glastonbury's Pyramid Stage, "but there I am singing with John again. We're back together." Peter Jackson had isolated Lennon's vocal on "I've Got A Feeling" from the 1969 Apple rooftop concert, and here was McCartney duetting with him live. A Beatles reunion in all but body, it was the last of several unforgettable surprises in a set which many have called the festival's greatest ever.

McCartney arrived at Glastonbury fresh from a warm-up show at the 800-capacity Cheese & Grain in

nearby Frome the night before (June 24). "It was mind-blowing, undoubtedly the best live experience I've had in my life," says local musician Sam Lakeman. "We were standing in the queue next to Olivia Rodrigo, Leslie Mann and Judd Apatow. The energy when he first took the stage was incredible."

Twenty-four hours later, McCartney began his Glastonbury set by interspersing choice Beatles songs with bluesy Wings tracks and recent solo numbers. He reminisced about The Beatles' earliest days, recalling the recording of The Quarrymen's

first demo, "In Spite Of All The Danger", for a pound apiece, playing "Love Me Do" and honouring Lennon with his open letter "Here Today".

The latter half of the 38-song set was dominated by fan-friendly Beatles classics, favouring McCartney's own parts of the *Abbey Road* medley, esteemed album cuts "Being For The Benefit Of Mr Kite!" and "Helter Skelter", a solo ukulele rendition of "Something" – bursting into full technicolour midway through – and big band-along ballads "Let It Be" and "Hey Jude". Announcing "a couple of surprises for you",

McCartney invited Foo Fighters' Dave Grohl on stage for "I Saw Her Standing There" and "Band On The Run", followed by Bruce Springsteen, who recreated his guest appearance at New Jersey's MetLife Stadium the previous week on "I Wanna Be Your Man" and his own "Glory Days".

Emerging for the encore waving a Ukrainian flag, McCartney ran well over time, hitting almost three hours by the time "Golden Slumbers", "Carry That Weight" and "The End" brought this historic set – described by festival organiser Emily Eavis as "pure magic and love" – to a close. Glastonbury, however, kept "Hey Jude" going for a good few hours more. **© MARK BEAUMONT**

**"Pure magic and love"**  
**EMILY EAVIS**

# Keep on running

How a deal with God—OK, Netflix—took a 37-year-old **Kate Bush** classic to No 1 around the world

**K**ATE Bush's drummer Stuart Elliott has never watched *Stranger Things*, so it came as a complete surprise when he checked his phone one morning in June to be told that "Running Up That Hill", a song they'd recorded decades previously, was top of the charts. "I still can't quite get my head around it," says Elliott, who also played on Bush's previous No 1, "Wuthering Heights". "It's about time that the USA especially finally get to hear the genius of our Kate. I mean, crumb, to be No 1 in the whole world is just incredible."

Bush seems as excited as anybody by the clamour. "I'm overwhelmed by the scale of affection and support the song is receiving," she wrote on her official website as "Running Up That Hill" began scaling the charts. "It's all happening really fast, as if it's being driven along by a kind of elemental force. I have to admit I feel really moved by it all."

There was similar excitement at Kate Bush News, the fansite run by Sean Twomey, which has experienced unprecedented demand since "Running Up That Hill" became a recurring motif in the latest series of *Stranger Things*, Netflix's hit sci-fi drama. "Because it's used in such an emotional way, it has entered the younger

generation's world," Twomey reckons. "They are hearing this as a fresh, wonderful piece of music. For them, it's a brand-new hit, not a throwback or nostalgia."

It's a success other TV shows will surely try to emulate, but that won't be easy. One of the reasons "Running Up That Hill" has struck such a chord is that Kate Bush doesn't usually license her music. She was brought into the *Stranger*



Performing "Running Up That Hill" on TV in 1985

Things universe by music supervisor Nora Felder, who'd already shown a sure touch by deploying tracks as different as "Should I Stay Or Should I Go" and Limahl's "Never Ending Story". On this occasion, "Running Up That Hill" literally saves somebody's life, a theme Bush explored herself in "The Line, The Cross And The

Curve". That's why Bush, a long-time horror fan who binge-watched *Stranger Things*, was happy to approve the use. "It's truly a 'lightning in a bottle' moment in music history and I'm proud to be a part of it," Felder tells *Uncut*. "I've always felt timeless music should live on forever, continuing to be heard and reinterpreted through fresh new ears."

Bush's success has broken several world records – the longest time between release and a song reaching No 1; the oldest female songwriter to reach the top spot; and the longest gap between No 1s – but what actually constitutes a hit these days?

Martin Talbot, CEO of the Official Charts Company, explains, "It's a combination of 7,000 sales, 6.8 million premium streams and 1 million ad-funded streams. But whether it's through streaming or sales, it has the same effect – it's still the most popular song in the country. It's a fantastic track and overdue a No 1 as it really is an all-time classic."

**"As if it's being driven along by a kind of elemental force"**

**KATE BUSH**

Talbot says that Bush's entire catalogue is now benefiting from the interest in "Running Up That Hill". Granting a rare interview to Emma Barnett on *Woman's Hour*, Bush reiterated that "what's really wonderful is this is

a whole new audience who, in a lot of cases, have never heard of me, and I love that. The thought of all these really young people hearing the song for the first time and discovering it is... well, I think it's very special." **© PETER WATTS**

*Uncut's* long sold-out Ultimate Music Guide to Kate Bush is now back in print, available in shops or from our web store at [Uncut.co.uk/single](http://Uncut.co.uk/single)



"Come on, angel..." Sadie Sink plays Max Mayfield in *Stranger Things*





Panda Bear and Sonic Boom: building on "songs that had this instant energy"

## A QUICK ONE

Magazine for sale! The latest of our quarterly specials is **Curated By... Pavement**, in which the band tell their story through their records, reveal their favourite albums, and the best shows they ever saw. Also includes: tips for the museum security guard, the unhealthiest foods of the Cincinnati area – and puppets! It's in shops on July 27 or available to order online at [Uncut.co.uk/single...](http://Uncut.co.uk/single...)



The first fruits of Cherry Red's long-term project to restore **Joe Meek's** legendary Tea Chest Tapes are due for release in the form of two 10" EPs. Out August 19, *The Telstar Story* charts the development of Meek's seminal 1962 instrumental via a clutch of previously unreleased demos and alternate takes; while *"The Heinz Sessions Vol.1"*, out Sept 16, focuses on his protégé **Heinz Burt**...

On Sunday August 21, *The Half Moon* in Putney will host a tribute to **Dan Crane** of British R&B trailblazers **The Downlivers** Sect, who passed away in February. It features sets by **The Masonics** and **The Fallen Leaves** alongside the current lineup of *The Downlivers* Sect, led by Crane's former bandmate **Kath Grant**...



"I think we synced in a really special way"

PETE KEMBER

# Sound of collusion

Psychedelic soulmates **Sonic Boom** and **Panda Bear** hit *Reset* for a dreamy homage to early rock'n'roll

"**W**ERE the generation that was born analogue and died digital," says Sonic Boom, over Zoom. "The way things have changed through that time with technology, it's been the Wild West." At 57, Pete Kember is at least enjoying the ride. As a member of Spacemen 3 and as a committed solo voyager, he's spent the last 40 years exploring the outer reaches of space-rock by any means necessary. Now, with his pal Noah Lennox – aka Panda Bear of Animal Collective – he's hit on a winning formula that involves spinning some of rock'n'roll's earliest hits into syrupy, psychedelic pop.

For *Reset*, the pair's first joint album, Kember created a series of loops drawn from the opening bars of loopy oldies by the likes of the Everly Brothers, Eddie Cochran, Randy & The Rainbows and The Troggs – "songs that had this instant energy" – and sent a batch of them to Lennox. In turn, Lennox built new songs around these old grooves and well-worn doo-wop harmonies, conjuring the kind of clouded blue-eyed soul that's been the Panda Bear motif ever since his 2007 album *Person Pitch*.

The effect is uncanny and thrilling, a love letter to a fading era – albeit one that proved a headache for Domino's sample-clearing team.

"The first cassette I remember having was a Buddy Holly compilation, and it hit me really hard as a kid," says Kember. "I still put on 'Everyday' and as soon as that celeste comes in, you realise there's real power in these songs." Kember moved from Rugby to Portugal six years ago, seduced by the warm climate and calmer way of life (following Lennox, who left the US for Lisbon in 2004) and his relocation prompted him to familiarise himself with his neglected record collection. Playing these old songs in his new place in the hills of Sintra set his mind racing. "We discussed late-'60s rock steady and ska too as some sort of model for

on MySpace to express admiration for *Person Pitch*, with Lennox inviting Kember to mix *Tomboy* in 2010.

They've since worked together on a string of Panda Bear releases, notably 2015's excellent *...Meets The Grim Reaper*. On the Zoom call, Lennox sits beside Kember in his Lisbon studio as the room glows blue and pink, explaining why he was attracted to the *Reset* concept. "I'm always trying to push myself to a different place," he says. "I like to explore rooms in my house that I haven't been to, so to speak." Kember seems slightly in awe of his partner. "You're very good at coming up with the juice quickly, like shockingly quickly, two minutes after you thought of the idea," Kember tells him. "I admit to feeling indulged by him a little. I think we synced in a really special way with this."

While Kember is impish, Lennox is a more mellow presence, pointing out that although *Reset* sounds cheerful, the songs deal with darker themes, particularly social media's pernicious influence. "I always say if you're a sentient human being and you're not a little depressed about the state of the planet, you're probably a sociopath," says Lennox – which is partly why they've called the record *Reset*. "It's a nice concept, to reset and reconsider

everything, and check out where you are and what you could or should be doing differently. We all have the ability to improve ourselves."

by Piers Martin

*Reset* is out August 12 on Domino





Andy Ellison (left) and Marc Bolan (right) in 60s bad-boy John's Children

# "I can't believe I'm still alive"

The wild times of **John's Children's** incorrigible frontman, **Andy Ellison**

**"I** JUST love wildness," explains Andy Ellison, whose new autobiography *Stunt Rocker* documents a life of cheery rock'n'roll mayhem in the bands John's Children (with a young Marc Bolan), Jet and Radio Stars. The book is a stream of ripping yarns and eyebrow-rocketing anecdotes. In the '60s and '70s, there seems to be some sort of incident almost every day, including banned singles, smashed vans and riots at gigs. Meanwhile, Ellison's

dangerous stage antics mean the now 77-year-old rocker reckons he's broken most parts of his body – including his back – and happily admits, "I can't believe I'm still alive."

The North Finchley son of a Spitfire pilot, Ellison first walked on the wild side at school. His parents packed him off to what was supposedly a farming boarding school in

Devon, to keep him out of trouble. "But it turned out to be more like a sort of lower version of a boarding school, with other bizarre children," he explains. Police helicopters were called after Ellison and 22 others escaped to live wild on Exmoor, for which he was asked to leave; the school was then closed down. Soon afterwards, he experienced a pop epiphany watching The Beatles at the Palladium. "Ringo Starr came onstage in a helicopter," he remembers. "Obviously it was fake, but I was in the middle of thousands of screaming girls. It was so exciting."

Before long, Ellison was fronting outrageous but influential Leatherhead mod-psych types John's Children, who would arrive at gigs in Al Capone's original Oldsmobile car – which manager Simon Napier-Bell had imported and sprayed white to match their outfits – flanked by a chapter of Hells Angels.

"People would stare in disbelief!" At one point, on acid supplied by Beatles manager Brian Epstein, they decided to travel to the Speakeasy club by boat (stolen from a vicar) down the River Mole, with inevitable results. "We suddenly remembered that

the Mole goes underground," he sighs. Panic ensued and the boat upturned. "We ended up in the water and we never saw the boat again."

Famed London venue the Roundhouse was closed down after John's Children played there. In 1967, they were thrown off a German tour with The Who after upstaging their heroes with smashed gear,

faked fights, blood capsules and pillows filled with feathers. "Pete Townshend said we were too loud and too violent for The Who," chuckles Ellison. Sadly, this incident led to Bolan's departure, but Ellison likes to think "we brought him out of himself. Marc was quiet and introverted before he joined us." After John's Children imploded in an onstage punch-up, Ellison resurfaced in glam-rockers Jet, their career summed up by an incident in which he tumbled into the orchestra pit and ended up outside his own gig.

*Stunt Rocker* is peppered with amusing encounters with the likes of The Beatles, the Stones, David Bowie, Rod Stewart, Queen, Debbie Harry, Sir Roger Moore and the police. But although Ellison did finally enjoy a couple of hits with Radio Stars and has rocked on with the revamped John's Children, he never really made it big himself. "Maybe

it's a good thing that I didn't," he suggests. "I'd have taken things to more extremes and I'd probably be dead."

© DAVESIMPSON

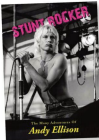
*Stunt Rocker* is published by Wintergarden on August 12; a 2CD anthology, *Wall To Wall Live*, is out on Easy Action



On reflection: ex-mod/glam/punk rocker Andy today



Inglamrock's tailwind with Jet in 1975



The Wild Side of Andy Ellison







# Sylvie

**Drugdealer's Ben Schwab unveils his own immaculate brand of sepiatinted soft rock**

**WE'RE NEW HERE**

**SYLVIE** mastered Ben Schwab is a bit of a late bloomer. "My father's

a musician and I grew up listening to him play with his group Mad Anthony," he says from his home in Silverlake, L.A. "He'd also play lots of music from his generation like Todd Rundgren, Steely Dan, The Beatles, all that stuff. I was listening to that music early on and inspired by it, but I didn't start playing guitar until I was 21 years old or so." But since he began writing and performing original songs as a student at the California Institute For The Arts in nearby Santa Clarita, Schwab's made a name for himself as one of the premier revivalists in L.A.'s eastside music scene.

In the duo Golden Daze, Schwab and bandmate Jacob Loeb channel the spirits of Simon & Garfunkel and Crosby, Stills & Nash, their gossamer harmony singing layered over textural folk-rock arrangements. Schwab also performs with the shape-shifting L.A. collective Drugdealer, led by songwriter Michael Collins, which takes its cues from classic psych-pop and soft rock of the '60s and '70s. With Sylvie, Schwab applies a similar but much more hands-on approach, acting as songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, vocalist, producer and engineer in his garage-slash-studio. "I do it all myself and feature good friends of mine who I believe in," he explains. "The idea is that it can change and expand."

The Sylvie moniker is taken from a deep cut of the same name by British folk-rockers Matthews Southern Comfort, released in 1970. He discovered it shortly after joining Drugdealer and bonding with Collins over music. "There's just something really mysterious and special about it," Schwab says. "We liked it so much that anytime we found a lost song from that period that was really good, we called it a 'Sylvie.' I was nervous to name the group after someone else's song; it seemed like a bit much, but then I just rolled with it."

"Ben is incredibly deliberate and intentional in his production and writing," says singer-songwriter Marina Allen, who performs on



"It can change and expand." Ben Schwab (at keyboard) with Marina Allen and Sam Burton

Sylvie's self-titled debut, which Schwab first posted on Bandcamp in October of last year. "We tried 'Falls On Me' in different keys, different tempos, with different melodies and different lyrics until we finally landed on the album version." The song highlights Allen's silky alto singing and details the emotional ups and downs Schwab felt amid a breakup and transformative period in his personal life. Its minimalist, mid-tempo arrangement of piano, bass, drums and slide guitar recalls The Carpenters without the orchestral schmaltz, a maudlin-adjacent ballad that finds hope in Allen's lilted insistence that "No-one's gonna break my heart again."

Sam Burton rounds out the collective on vocals and guitars, with contributions by Angel Olsen's drummer Sam Kauffman-Skloff, brass blower JJ Kirkpatrick and pedal steel player Connor Gallagher, a scene go-to for spirited glissandos. Schwab's dad John also makes an appearance, his voice narrating "50/50".

Full Time Hobby are poised to issue an expanded version of Sylvie on vinyl, featuring two new tracks, "Further Down The Road" and "Stealing Time". Schwab is hopeful that this wider release will bring the band overseas for the first time, despite the fact that they were in a harrowing car accident in Arizona recently, at the end of a short US tour. They sustained minor injuries, but have since recovered. "I've just been laying low, taking it easy, trying to be healthy," he says. "We'd love to come to the UK and Europe." **ERIN OSMON**

## I'M YOUR FAN



"I am touched by the way Ben captures a vibe. It's not about technical perfection, it's about energy." **Jess Williamson**

Sylvie is out on October 14

## UNCUT PLAYLIST

On the stereo this month...



### LAMBCHOP

**The Bible CITY BANDS**  
Kurt Wagner keeps on wading further out. Classical overtures! Dance beats! Gospel singers! But all held together by a deep sense of wonder and humility.

### DRY CLEANING

**Stumpwork** AAA  
Young London malcontents add musical depth and even tenderness to their despairing observations: "You see a guy cautioned by police for rollerblading..."

### MAKAYA McCRAVEN

**In These Times INTERNATIONAL ANTHEMS**  
Deciphering The Message proved he knows his hard-bop inside out; now the Chicago jazz king in heads somewhere more spiritual, with Jeff Parker and Brandee Younger in tow.



### RACHAEL DADD

**Kaleidoscope**  
**HERPHERDUSTERS**  
From Bristol, a terrific album of upbeat and offbeat English folk-pop for fans of Modern Studies, Alexander

Tucker and Cate Le Bon.

### DUNGEN

**En Är För Mycket Och Tusen Aldrig Nog** THE CANNIBALS  
Swedish psych-rock stalwarts return after six years away with a bright, buoyant effort that plugs the gap left by Tame Impala's drift towards full-on pop.

### MARINA ALLEN Centrifuge

**"An Incantation Of Incandescence?"**  
As well as popping up in Sylvie (see opposite), Allen showcases a deft turn of phrase on her seductive second.

### ALHAJI WAZIRI OSHOMAH

**World Spirituality Classics, Volume 3** 3333  
From the series that brought you *The Ecstatic Music Of Alice Coltrane*, here's some relentlessly uplifting "Muslim highlife" from late-'70s Nigeria.

### BADGE ÉPOQUE ENSEMBLE

**Clouds Of Joy** TELEPHONE RECORDS  
Charalbi and spy library funk courtesy of the Toronto muso collective taking time off from backing The Weather Station, US Girls, Andy Shauf et al.



### TIM BERNADES

**Mil Colosas Invisíveis**  
**PSYCHE**  
If Sessa's whetted your appetite for more nova-MPB, then feast on this sumptuous album by São Paulo's angel-voiced Tim Bernades.

### FLORE LAURENTIENNE

**Volume II** INNOVANT  
Mathieu David Gagnon employs clarinets, synths and soaring neoclassical strings to evoke an awe-struck voyage down the St Lawrence River.

THE GIG CARTEL PRESENT



# THE UNDERTONES

## 2022 UK TOUR

|        |                 |                       |
|--------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| SEP 29 | BIRMINGHAM      | O2 ACADEMY 2          |
| SEP 30 | CASTLETON       | DEVIL'S ARSE CAVE     |
| OCT 01 | HOLMFIRTH       | PICTUREDROME          |
| OCT 06 | SOUTHAMPTON     | THE 1865              |
| OCT 07 | OXFORD          | O2 ACADEMY *          |
| OCT 08 | LYTHAM          | LOWTHER PAVILION *    |
| OCT 20 | NORWICH         | WATERFRONT            |
| OCT 21 | BURY ST EDMUNDS | APEX                  |
| OCT 22 | BEXHILL         | DE LA WARR PAVILION * |

\*PLUS SPECIAL GUEST\*  
*hugh cornwell*

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## feels like home tour 2022

September 2022

|                |                    |
|----------------|--------------------|
| 17 Llandrindod | Pavilion Mid Wales |
| 18 Bath        | Komedia            |
| 20 Cheltenham  | Town Hall          |
| 22 Newark      | Palace Theatre     |
| 23 Bridlington | Spa Theatre        |
| 24 Lytham      | Lowther Pavilion   |
| 25 Newcastle   | Wylam Brewery      |
| 27 Bilston     | Robin              |
| 28 Shrewsbury  | Theatre Severn     |
| 29 Northampton | Roadmender         |
| 30 Barnsley    | Birdwell Venue     |

October 2022

|                 |                            |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
| 2 Blackburn     | King Georges Windsor Suite |
| 4 Buxton        | Opera House                |
| 6 Holmfirth     | Picturedrome               |
| 7 Glasgow       | Oran-Mor                   |
| 8 Edinburgh     | Queens Hall                |
| 9 Yarm          | Princess Alexandra Theatre |
| 11 New Brighton | Floral Pavilion            |
| 12 Exeter       | Phoenix                    |
| 13 Bexhill      | De La Warr Pavilion        |
| 15 Southend     | Palace Theatre             |
| 16 Cambridge    | Junction                   |
| 18 Islington    | Assembly                   |

TICKETS  
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# Caravan

October 2022

|                          |                           |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 07 Brighton Old Market   | 16 Buxton Pavilion Arts   |
| 08 Gloucester Guildhall  | 20 Bury St Edmunds Apex   |
| 09 Basingstoke Haymarket | 21 Newcastle Cluny *      |
| 13 Bilston The Robin     | 22 Glasgow Oran Mor       |
| 14 Leeds Brudenell       | 25 Islington Union Chapel |
| 15 Liverpool Epstein     | *All shows seated except  |

# HALF MAN HALF BISCUIT

Fri 16 Sep Birmingham O2 Institute

Fri 07 Oct Blackpool Winter Gardens

Fri 11 Nov Norwich Waterfront

Fri 16 Dec Hull Tower Ballroom

Fri 20 Jan London Camden Electric Ballroom

Fri 17 March Leamington Assembly

THE SELECTER

SAT 6 AUG  
HOLMFIRTH  
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THE WEDDING PRESENT

# seamonsters

## 30th anniversary shows

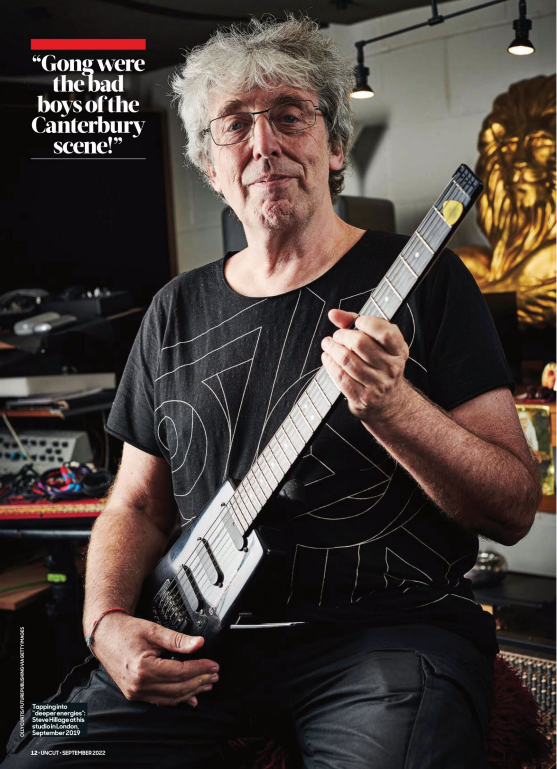
|                                  |
|----------------------------------|
| 18:08 BURY ST EDMUNDS THE APEX   |
| 19:08 BARNSELY BIRDWELL VENUE    |
| 20:08 CASTLETON DEVILS ARSE CAVE |
| 25:08 BURY MET THEATRE           |
| 26:08 LYTHAM LOWTHER PAVILION    |
| 23:09 FROME CHEESE & GRAIN       |

# Focus



SUN 28 AUG  
HOLMFIRTH  
PICTUREDROME

**“Gong were  
the bad  
boys of the  
Canterbury  
scene!”**



Tapping into  
“deeper energies”,  
Steve Hillage at his  
studio in London,  
September 2019

CULTURE GEAR: JEFFREY M. HARRIS/GETTY IMAGES

## AN AUDIENCE WITH...

## Steve Hillage

STEVE Hillage's association with the Glastonbury Festival stretches all the way back to 1979, when he was both co-organiser and headliner (the live album is finally out this month). He even recently moved to Somerset to be closer to his spiritual home, which meant that after System 7 kicked off proceedings in the Glade this year, he was back in time for supper. Was he not tempted to stick around to enjoy the mayhem?

"It's my 19th Glastonbury!" he protests. "And we're still being quite Covid-cautious. But it was a great show. I'm still buzzing, actually." Hillage dismisses the idea that the festival has lost some of its edge over the years. "Obviously it's become much bigger, but it's still a very magical event. It has that special energy because it's on special ground. It's not like any other festival on Earth."

After more than 50 years in the game, from the trippy prog of Gong to the psychedelic techno of System 7 via numerous intriguing diversions and collaborations, Hillage still strives to summon that special energy through his music. "It's a physical artform, it can affect people in a physical as well as an emotional and spiritual way. I like to see music as a channel for positive and deeper energies that help people find transcendence and strength to deal with the problems of living in this crazy world. I think a lot of people would say that's how music works."

**What's the craziest thing you've witnessed in all your Glastonburys?** Elin Cantor, Malmesbury, Wiltshire

Oooh! I've witnessed lots of crazy things, but one of the craziest moments would be when they had a rainy Glastonbury in '98 and the dance tent got flooded. Someone had the bright idea of using one of the tanker trucks

## The Gong and System 7 guitarist talks Glasto, UFOs, Sham 69 and which space-rock band had the best drugs

Interview by SAM RICHARDS



Drinker Kevin Ayers and pot-smoker Hillage in the 1970s

they used to clean the toilets to suck the water out of the big pools in the middle of the dance area. Unfortunately the person working the machine pressed the wrong button and it blew out several tons of excrement! A huge smell went right around the festival and disturbed many thousands of people.

**You came out of the early-'70s Canterbury scene—how close was it to the bucolic idyll implied by Caravan and Soft Machine records?**

Charlie Pegg, North London

Canterbury is an urban area, we weren't living in fields, but there was something special about it. The way the melodies and eccentric English-style vocals worked together with unusual time signatures and particular chords was a very strong style. That was a big influence on me—and maybe I had a little influence on it myself as well. I happened to go down there as a student and discovered it was the epicentre of this small, interesting scene and pretty soon I met some of the people involved and had

some musical interaction. In fact Caravan, through their management, helped me get my first record deal. And of course the Soft Machine connection stuck with me through Kevin Ayers and David Allen of Gong. We used to see ourselves in Gong as the bad boys of the Canterbury scene! We were the wildest and the trippiest.

**What was Kevin Ayers like as a boss?** Geoff Randall, Morecambe

Well, he wasn't my boss—I don't work with bosses and I don't want to be a boss either! But as a musical partner I had some good times with Kevin, although we had a bit of a falling out because I was more of a pot smoker and he was a pretty heavy drinker, and that didn't quite fit on a lifestyle level. Obviously when I hooked up with Gong, I found I was with more like-minded people, certainly on a personal pursuits level...

**How would you describe your time in the Gong commune in France?** Paul Swansea

That was the best period of Gong, when we were all in that house. It was an absolutely magical place in a wood rook south of Paris. There was a large room, separate from the rest of the house—that was maybe an old stable—that was a fantastic music room. We had all the gear permanently set up so we could just go and play whenever we wanted. I spent a lot of my time in there. I really developed my guitar style, we wrote loads of material, we jammed, it was just fantastic. Eventually we moved to another house in England, near Oxford, but it didn't have the same vibe. Mike Howlett [Gong bassist] was driving through France a few years ago and he went back to the house. It's all been tarted up, it's really posh now. Maybe it should have a plaque: here today, Gong tomorrow!

**Who were more out there—Gong or Hawkwind?** Matthew Bell, via email  
In terms of more psychedelically





Take that and party! Hillege with the like-minded Gong, circa 1973

adventurous and extreme, definitely Gong. We were good friends with Hawkwind, they're a five-star psychedelic rock band, but we had a wider palette to draw from because we had the jazz influence. And we also had the delicacy and the glissando guitar and the space whisperer, Gilli Smyth. Hawkwind didn't have those in their sonic armoury. We had more stuff to work with, basically. And great drugs!

**As someone who would have been considered a "hippy", was it scary getting on stage with Sham 69 [at the 1978 Reading Festival]? Rob G, via Twitter**

Well, you have to look at the background of that whole story. Basically it all came about because a magazine wanted to do a rather silly feature of punks versus hippies. They invited me to meet Jimmy Pursey and it turned out we had a lot in common and we got on really well. So all this punks and hippies stuff was nonsense, you know? Afterwards he said, "Why don't you come and play a gig with us?" They had that tune, "If The Kids Are United", and I thought it would make a nice statement. So I said, "Sure, I'd love to - where?" And he said, "Reading festival." Wow, OK! So I turned up and played away. There was a lot of violence going on between different factions of skinheads and punks and we were caught in the crossfire. But I didn't feel any bad vibes towards me, people were very respectful and nice. I found it exhilarating. Difficult, but exhilarating.

**What was it like to turn up to your first rave and hear Alex Paterson playing your Rainbow Dome Musick album? Declan Moreland, via email**

That's an oversimplification because it wasn't my first rave. But it was the first time I'd seen Alex DJ. I already knew he liked my music, but we just happened to walk in the room and he was playing it. And the key thing was, he was mixing it with a beat. That was very interesting. It was like coming home, that was the feeling. But the first time I saw the

potential of electronic dance music was in 1978, watching people dancing to *The Man-Machine* by Kraftwerk in a club. The sound was so pure coming out of the PA - it didn't sound like it was coming from people, it was just this sort of disembodied sonic sculpture, pulsing and making the people want to dance. Both Miquette [Giraudy] and I had this eureka vision where we thought, 'Wow, this is going to be massive.'

**What brand of toothbrush do you recommend for playing guitar? Matt Pluggie Evans, via Facebook**

I haven't actually used a toothbrush on a guitar. I've used a vibrator! That's pretty good because it sets off a kind of buzzing feedback. For the glissando technique, Daavid used to use a Zippo lighter, then he moved to using a whammy bar that he'd detached from the guitar. But the best device I've found for doing that are these surgical instruments that we bought many years ago at a flea market in Paris. I just use the handles, but they've got little spoons at the other end. On



**"I had a lot in common with Jimmy Pursey. All this punks and hippies stuff was nonsense"**



more than one occasion I've had customs look at these things and assumed I'd been using them for naughty purposes...

**What do you think of the current Gong lineup and can they go on refreshing the band forever? Jon Cable, Salford**

I don't know about forever; I say, "Be here now!" But being here now, I think they're fantastic. It was absolutely Daavid's idea [that they'd keep going]. In fact he'd already tried that concept out before. When I first joined Gong, after the *Flying Teapot* album, Daavid went away. 'Elo, I've just joined this fantastic band and Daavid and Gilli have gone! But we stuck it out and discovered some great new musicians and put a new lineup together. We didn't know if Daavid was going to come back for a while, but then he did come back and we made the *Angel's Egg* album. Daavid's concept of Gong was so strong that it could survive perfectly well without him. As he was coming to the end of his life, he was absolutely adamant that they should carry on. This is what Daavid wanted and the boys have done a great service to his vision.

**Have you ever actually seen an "Unidentified Flying Being"? Or even a "UFO Over Paris"? Brian Tickell, via email**

We've not seen anything close up, but we've seen some pretty intriguing aerial objects, particularly in Mexico. A formation of bright lights silently moving over our heads. They couldn't have been planes because they would've been making noise. They weren't balloons or anything like that, because they were in formation and going quite fast. I think it's unbelievably illogical to suppose that in this massive universe, human

beings are the only so-called intelligent form of life. ☺

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## THE UNCUT GUIDE TO THIS MONTH'S KEY RELEASES

# CASS McCOMBS

## Heartmind

ANTI-

**Tragedy and comedy combine on the Californian's brave 10th LP. By Tom Pinnock**

**T**HE ancient provocateur Diogenes – a kind of Grecian hybrid of Slavoj Žižek and Steve Bray – is one of Cass McCombs's recent obsessions. Born two and a half millennia ago, Diogenes demonstrated his radical philosophy by living on the streets of Athens, sleeping in a ceramic wine vessel and offending the public with various stunts, all in the service of sticking it to the corrupt ruling class of the time.

McCombs' fascination is understandable, for Diogenes could easily have stepped from his catalogue; say, from one of the Californian's many songs celebrating outsiders, the damaged and addicted, "the poor and screwed", as he put it on 2013's "Home On The Range".

As peripatetic as he's often been, McCombs has not so far made his home in a jar. Yet his opaque, twisting lyrics have consistently dealt with existential and absurd questions: matters of spirituality, morality, property, personal responsibility. That this is never boring, or in the least bit earnest, is down to McCombs' use of unreliable narrators, sarcasm, the language of the gutter and other acts of literary

**ALBUM  
OF THE  
MONTH**  
9/10

subterfuge. "Silverfish quilting testicle", goes 2005's "Equinox"; a song on the importance of voting is titled "Don't Vote". Its contents equally misleading: the pretty "Morning Star", from 2013's *Big Wheel And Others*, muses on the feeling of defecating in space. With McCombs, smoke and mirrors are de rigueur, nobody is talked down to and no-one's given the easy answers.

If all his records contain fathoms to explore, *Heartmind*, his 10th, is one of the deepest. It's a departure from the course taken on 2016's *Mangy Love* and 2019's *Tip Of The Sphere*: those were glossy explorations of the American psychedelic rock tradition, presentable enough to meet the in-laws once the scent of weed dissipated, and they earned McCombs more listeners and plaudits. *Heartmind* is a thornier and ultimately more interesting

proposition, returning to the lo-fi experimentation of his earlier records across a breezy 42 minutes.

There are eight tracks here, and almost as many genres, with half the album firmly rooted in American traditions: "Unproud Warrior" a wistful folk waltz with a jazzy rhythm section, a mirage of a Nashville Pentangle; "A Blue, Blue Band" a major-key country ballad with gorgeous harmonies. Both these songs also feature ➤







McCombs reflects on "the poor and screwed"

fiddler Charlie Burnham, who provides earthy responses to McCombs' lines with his artfully distressed voice.

Opener "Music Is Blue" is crunchy rock with complex crimson rhythms. "Karaoke" evokes The Cure's mid-'80s pop pomp and "Belong To Heaven" is electric folk with a tinge of the Caribbean. That's not the only global influence on *Heartmind*: a jet-setting cousin of Mangy Love's Afrobeats-influenced "Run Sister Run", "Karakatau" is full-on cumbia with multi-tracked percussion, the sound degraded like a cassette that Habibi Funk might have found in a cellar. The closing title track is perhaps McCombs' own version of spiritual jazz, with corvid saxophone, Moog synth, electric guitar and uilleann pipes – a surprisingly psychedelic instrument – extending the piece to eight and a half minutes.

"New Earth" is positively tropical, a kitsch slice of exotica with bossa nova chords and artificial bird noises. McCombs' soft vocals backed by a female chorus. Listen with half an ear and you'll notice lines about "such a glad day" and "today is the birth of a new earth", but dig a little deeper, and some kind of apocalyptic seems to have occurred, perhaps the

destruction of the earth itself. This "glad day", you realise, has come "after a very, very, very bad day". McCombs keening "thank God time has ended". Elsewhere in the song, "tweeting was muted all season... Mr Musk was in a bad way/Stewing in his bullion like a phony chef..."

"Unproven Warrior" plays the same trick as "New Earth" and "Don't Vote". A tale of a young, discharged soldier, it initially romanticises the plight of the veterans: "September the second, 2017/ That's your discharge date, etched in your soul/ It's been nearly two years now, gone by so fast". The character is suffering with the things he did, and with the reality of war compared to the movies. But as the picture comes into focus, McCombs suggests that he alone is responsible for his choices – "a soldier is not a cog, but a man, like any other". He even argues that youth is no excuse, pointing out the ages at which Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*, SE Hinton *The Outsiders* and Stephen Crane *The Red Badge Of Courage*, "which is still known as one of the most realistic depictions of war/ Even though Crane was born after the Civil War ended". It's brave, but it works.

McCombs mostly uses his Twitter account to pay tribute to departed artists

and friends, and *Heartmind* is dedicated to three of his lost comrades, Neal Casal, Girls' Chet 'JR' White and Sam Jayne. "Belong To Heaven" is a fitting memorial, sincere and touching but still nuanced – "for all the questions I want to ask/ I hope that you find peace at last... so far away from all that now/ I guess it doesn't matter anyhow".

Like Thom Yorke, McCombs has a voice that sounds endlessly sincere, and like Yorke, it means the humour in his lyrics can often be lost. There is, though, a great deal of comedy on *Heartmind*. "Karaoke" opens in a bar, a character taking the stage, "a Chiffon, a Supreme/ And reading from a TV screen". Breezily sprinkling its lines with titles of karaoke classics, it raises questions about authenticity and the roles we play. "Guess I'm a load of karaoke too", he concludes. It's a real ear-worm, the one track here that could displace "County Lines" as McCombs' 'hit'.

"A Blue, Blue Band" also provides light relief. The tale of a group from Virginia City, Nevada, in a blue van, who turn audiences blue too, it meanders through multiple comic verses – "there's a tremendous harmonica player whose name now escapes me" – before ending with a reminder of the power of music, an echo of the opening "Music Is Blue": "Listen to them playing what's been weighing heavy on your heart".

Perhaps that's McCombs' conclusion on *Heartmind*: that music, from karaoke to bar room ballads, can affect us in ways nothing else can, can change hearts and minds even more than sleeping in a jar may do. The message is unclear, messy even, as things are in real life, more often than in song.

Ultimately, pinning this endlessly complex songwriter's work down to a single tagline or meaning is unwise. His songs are not always easy, they're not always straightforward, but so albums in, they're mounting up to create one of the most impressive bodies of work of the century so far. Surely, Diogenes would have dug him too.



SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Music Is Blue
- 2 Karaoke
- 3 New Earth
- 4 Unproven Warrior
- 5 Karakatau
- 6 A Blue, Blue Band
- 7 Belong To Heaven
- 8 Heartmind

Produced by: Cass McCombs, Ariel Rechtshaid, Shahzad Ismaily, Buddy Ross  
Recorded at: Figure 8, Brooklyn; Heavy Duty, Burbank; also Portland, Nashville and New Jersey  
Personnel: Cass McCombs (vocals, guitars, keys, theremin, piano, percussion), Shahzad Ismaily (bass, drums, piano, harmonica), Frank LoCascio (Hammond organ, electric piano), Kasia Overall (drums), Joe Russo (drums, percussion), Wynonna Judd (vocals), Lily Chappin (vocals), Abigail Chappin (vocals), Luke Top (vocals), Buddy Ross (keys, percussion), Danielle Haim (vocals, drums, timpani), Charlie Burnham (vocals, fiddle, mandolin), Charlotte Greve (tenor saxophone, vocals), Isaac Alderson (uilleann pipes), Josh Krumbly (bass, upright bass), Cactus Moser (vocals, lap steel), Nestor E Gomez (flutes, percussion)

HOW TO BUY...

# { THE REAL McCOMBS }

Three fine records from the Bay Area songwriter



**Dropping The Wit**  
DOWNSIDE  
Cass McCombs' third album begins with the same alarm sound that closed its

predecessor, but otherwise, it was a reinvention. Containing his strongest songs up to that point, including the autobiographical mysteries of "Lionel" and the Tarot-referencing "Wheel Of Fortune", *Dropping The Wit* also showed off his love for The Smiths and The Cure on "Crack In My Neck".  
8/10



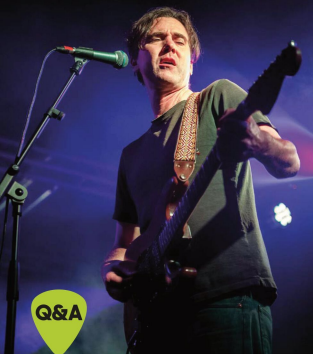
**Wit's End**  
DOWNSIDE  
Following the folksy Catacombs, McCombs turned to darker currents with these eight long

slow tracks. The sorrowful, soulful "County Lines" is, somewhat bizarrely, his best-known song, but the rest is just as intoxicating, from the tranquillised Beach Boys balladry of "Saturday Song" to the two-chord invocations of "The Lonely Dolf" and the mournful "Memory's Stain", which closes with an epic bass-clarinet solo.  
9/10



**Tip Of The Sphere**  
ANTI-2018  
McCombs has long been a fan of the Grateful Dead, and here he uses their mix of

exploratory grooves and folk songform for his own ends. His most 'classic', backward-looking album, it was recorded pretty much live, all the better to give epic tracks such as the opening "I Followed The River South To What" and the 10-minute "Rounder" room to breathe.  
8/10



## Q&amp;A

## Cass McCombs: "Nothing could be less serious than music!"

With *Heartmind and Tip Of The Sphere*, you were very much following a kind of American psychedelic tradition, but this feels more global, shorter and stranger. It's more like your earlier stuff.

I think I was embracing the earlier approach to things, not being too precious, just doing it and seeing what happens. Hopefully, the idea was that it would feel live – I mean, most of it is live, there are very few overdubs. I think we all wanted to be alive again. We felt like we were in our coffin for a sec there, over the last few years. Every person that I spoke to felt a little trapped, and everybody's expressed this desire and passion for life, to play live and feel our aliveness.

I guess the variety on the record also comes from working with three different producers?

Absolutely. Three very different ones too. It just happened that way. A lot of these people were called up on the day or the day before, I like it that way. I like not really thinking it through that much, letting it be whatever it's gonna be.

On 'New Earth', you mention a 'Mr Musk'...

McCombs live at La Nana, Barcelona, November 11, 2019

to maybe detract. I think people are smart enough to think for themselves, and there's no correct way to think.

## Can you tell us about the message in "Unbound Warrior"?

I think it's an allegory for the consequences of all of our choices. And of the migration of the human soul, to get heavy about it. We all have choices, and we're all responsible for ourselves and our surroundings. There's a great responsibility with the choices we make, and it's just another narrative to contemplate the seriousness of these choices. I think there's a tendency to feel like we are victimised by our surroundings, but I don't think so. I think we have a lot more autonomy than we allow ourselves to realise.



**"I like to write songs... It's pretty much all I do"**  
**CASS MCCOMBS**

Well, for one, it's not that person. It's a different person. That's how I see it. It's Mr Musk, it's a different character. It's not referring to anybody specifically, it's an invented fictional character. Is it an apocalyptic song? Yeah, well, like a lot of my songs, I've tried to walk this tightrope between trying to create imagery that is provocative to the listener and that also exploits people's imagination. So it's really hard for me to try to commandeer someone else's subconscious, their imagination, because almost anything that I'm going to say now is not going to aid the listener. It's going

## "Karakatau" seems very influenced by cumbia – you're a fan, aren't you?

I love South American and Central American music, music of the islands, and specifically cumbia music from Colombia. We were lucky enough to have a percussionist from Colombia, Nestor Gomez, play on that track. That lead guitar line, I was just jamming along to something I was listening to. The chords came after that, and then the vocal came after that. It was one of the few songs that began with music first, rather than lyrics first.

## You've experienced a lot of loss over the last few years – how did you deal with that in "Belong To Heaven"?

The song is about loss, but it's also about degrees of loss. There's the reality of losing people, but also some people, very close friends, have disappeared in other ways, due to other forms of loss. I guess I was thinking [as if we're] all particles, that for this moment we collide, and then these particles break apart and form new particle alliances. There's sadness to that, that kind of loss, but of course, we have our memories. I mean, that helps me.

## "Karaoke" is very new wavey – was it like that from the start?

I think it always wanted to be like that. Of course, it's a comedic song, and there's a question contained in the comedy – are all these failures of communication just part of some elaborate play? But musically, of course, it's a highly melodic song, and I think that aids the narrative of the song because it gets to a feeling of joy and pleasure, and that makes the satire of it hopefully even more potent and maybe even dangerous. Nothing could be less serious than music! But our lives somehow seem very serious sometimes, and that's why I think music is a great place to express that kind of paradoxical reality. I'm a big proponent of humour in music.

## What have you been reading over the last few years?

I try to read a lot. I'm always returning to Beckett in one way or another, but there's lots of new stuff, most recently Diogenes, the ancient philosopher. I've been reading a lot of books about the Old West, Gold Rush-era California – I'm very interested in the mythology of the Old West, people like Joaquín Muriel [the Robin Hood Of The West]. I've been reading Mark Twain too, as usual.

## What's next?

I really want to make another record. I've got a billion new songs, as always. That's just what I do, I like to write songs. I mean, it's pretty much all I do.

INTERVIEW: TOM PAINCOCK



# LOUDON WAINWRIGHT III

## Lifetime Achievement

STORYSOUND

8/10

Wainwright ponders age and alienation on his spare, sly 31st album.

By Stephen Deusner

SHERYL NANCE



**H**OW old is 75? Loudon Wainwright III asks near the end of his new album, *Lifetime Achievement*. There's a rickety banjo strumming in the background as he answers his own rhetorical question: "So old you're barely alive". It lands like a punchline, but Wainwright tempers that levity with an almost unbearable gravity. On the verses to "How Old Is 75?" he notes that he's already outlived his mother by one year and Loudon II by 13. What does that signify? Nothing really. It's just the math of mortality, which measures the quantity

# He was something like an old man even when he was young

but not the quality of years: "With our allotted amounts, what gets done is what counts", he sings over strings that quiver and quake. "Was it time wasted or was it well spent?"

It's not necessarily a new sentiment, but Wainwright delivers it in a way that makes it sound like wisdom passed down from generation to generation, from artist to listener. And what has he done with his own allotted amount? A lot, it turns out. In addition to landing memorable roles in films (*The Aviator*, *Knocked Up*) and sitcoms (*Mr. A's H.*, *Parks & Recreation*), he has released 31 studio albums in just over 50 years and penned thousands of songs, one of which was a hit (1972's "Dead Skunk") and one of which remains perfect (1973's "The Swimming Song"). Even more than any of the other so-called "new Dylan's" of the late '60s and early '70s, Wainwright defined himself as a writer both profoundly funny and profoundly sad, who often uses a joke to convey the tragedy of a situation.

That ability has made him such a vital artist so late in his life; he was something like an old man even when he was young, so he takes to the subject of ageing with grace and insight. He tested these waters on 2012's *Older Than My Old Man*, but *Lifetime Achievement* embraces the folksier elements of his sound, pining the music down to guitar, banjo, occasionally a harmonica and even more occasionally a full band. Working with a crew of old friends and collaborators, Wainwright arranges these songs with just one or two instruments, which gives them a delicacy that can be wistful ("Fun & Free"), weirdly humorous (the playfully austere "It"), or heart-wrenching ("It Takes 2"). He delivers "One Wish" a cappella, with no other instrument obscuring the grain or the keening arc of his voice. He's lost little power over the years, even if the song is about struggling to blow out his many, many birthday candles.

But *Lifetime Achievement* isn't an

album about growing old. Or, it's not only an album about growing old. Without sounding curmudgeonly or misanthropic, Wainwright continues to write about his own alienation from other people, including and especially his own loved ones. Sometimes he has fun with it: "I need a family vacation, I mean a family vacation alone", he sings on the Tolstoy- and Sartre-quoting "Fam Vac", extolling the simple pleasure of "leaving the fucking family at home!" It would sound mean-spirited if they didn't need a vacation from him, too. Age makes that alienation more acute, as though he's uncomfortable wherever he is. On the motormouthed "Town & Country", which swings like Mose Allison, he recounts a trip to New York and discovers that the hubbub that used to excite him now just frays his nerves. That song slides tidily into "Island", which he wrote 40 years ago but only just now got around to recording. "Back on the mainland they're going crazy, I'm too old for that insanity", he sings, but also notes the tedium of island life. Is it a haven away from the hubbub, or a hell of boredom? Probably a little of both.

What age does offer him, however, is a new perspective on his life. *Lifetime Achievement* is an album about identifying and appreciating the things that are most important, that make life in the city or on the island worthwhile. For Wainwright, it's family. It's loved ones. It might even be his, his listeners. On the title track he surveys his shelves full of trophies and walls heavy with every award imaginable: "Trophies on my mantelpiece, citations on my wall", he sings over a country two-step, "but who needs cash and prizes? What I achieved is you". He never really says who "you" is. It might be a love song to his girlfriend, a fatherly ode to his kids, or maybe a paean to his fans. But that only makes his declaration sound all the more poignant, as though Wainwright is still figuring it all out while the clock ticks down.

## SLEEVE NOTES

1. I Been
2. One Wish
3. It Takes 2
4. Fam Vac
5. Hell
6. Little Piece of Me
7. No Man's Land
8. Back In Your Town
9. Town & Country
10. Island
11. It
12. Hot
13. Lifetime Achievement
14. How Old Is 75?
15. Fun & Free

## Produced by:

Dick Connette, Stewart Lerman, Loudon Wainwright III

## Personnel

Includes: Loudon Wainwright III (guitar, vocals), Chaim Tannenbaum (vocals, banjo, harmonica), David Mansfield (violin, viola, mandolin, guitar, pedal steel), Tony Scheer (bass, guitar), Rich Pagano (drums, percussion), Jon Coward (keyboards), Rob Moose (string arrangements)

# AtoZ

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## ALTERED IMAGES

### Mascara Streakz

COOKINGWINE

7/10

Clare Grogan revives the *Altered Images* brand after a 39-year hiatus



Save for a solitary solo single in 1987, this is Clare Grogan's first new material in nearly 40 years, a funky, uptempo disco collaboration with husband (and star producer) Stephen Lironi. There are nods to *Altered Images'* post-punk roots – the jangly, anthemic 6/8 stamp of "Your Life Is Mine", the New Order-style electropop of "Double Reflection", the baggy indie-dance of "Beautiful Thing" (co-written with Bobby "Bluebell" Hodgson) – but the default setting is dancefloor hedonism with an air of wistful nostalgia. Best of all are the two Bernard Butler co-writes, "Glitter Ball" and "Home", which sound like Saint Etienne at their most ecstatic.

JOHN LEWIS

## ASI

### Mal Del Otro

SELF-RELEASED

8/10

Modern cumbia and more from Mexico City's Chicago



Hir a DJ night in Mexico City and be met with the sounds of historical regional cumbia,

a rhythmic form of traditional music from Mexico and Latin America now prized by the city's heads. Luckily, the best of the sound isn't relegated to dusty 45s. Chicago's Asi Asi, lead by CDMX native Fernando de Buen, make an excellent version that adds reverberant and synth but remains loyal to the percussion-driven core of the form. It's part of the band's debut album, which combines indie rock with more traditional sounds. The strutting, heart-on-sleeve Spanish-language vocals are the icing on the cake. **BRIAN OSMON**

## Q&A

**Loudon Wainwright III: "Blowing out birthday candles is a solitary activity"**

**You've said you didn't intend to write a bunch of songs or record a new album. So how did this one come about?** Unless I'm asked to, I generally don't try to write songs, but I am aware of what songs of mine might become part of a possible album, songs either recently written or perhaps ones lying around waiting to be adopted. Most of these songs are new, but some are older. If I can get together 12-15 songs that all fit, then I might make an record.

**Why did you want to record "One Wish" and "It" a cappella? When we first recorded "One Wish",**

we tried it with guitar accompaniment, but it didn't feel right. Then I sang it a cappella, and that worked somehow. Could it be because blowing out birthday candles is usually a solitary activity?

**"Town & Country" is a hectic portrait of New York. What's your relationship to that city?**

I've been living out on Long Island with my girlfriend, Susan, and our two cats. Every so often I make up and go into town – not for gigs or recording sessions, but for maintenance, be it orthopedic, urological, perianal or psychiatric. There's an initial excitement, but usually I can't wait to get the hell out. I'm convinced I'll be killed by a food delivery guy on a speeding motorised bicycle.

INTERVIEW: STEPHEN DUNN

A degree of wish fulfillment: Black Thought (left) and Danger Mouse

# **DANGER MOUSE & BLACK THOUGHT**

**Cheat Codes** 2015

**8/10**

A long-mooted meeting of hip-hop minds bears sweet, exotically sample-laden fruit. *By Louis Pattison*



THERE have been times when it feels like everywhere you look, you see the hand of Danger Mouse. Over the last decade or so of work, the New York

born producer Brian Burton has accrued a list of credits that read like a who's who of modern music. Adele, Gorillaz, U2, Beck, The Black Keys, Norah Jones – and that's before you get to his artistic collaborations, with Cee-Lo Green in Gnarls Barkley, The Shins' James Mercer in Broken Bells, and Karen O for 2013's *Lux Prima*.

As impressive a CV as this is, it's sometimes given the impression that Burton has been keen to leave his past behind him. He began his career as a hip-hop producer, recording the seminal 2003 LP *Ghetto Pop Life* with the Brooklyn MC Jenni before breaking into the public consciousness with 2004's *The Grey Album*, a visionary – and very much unsanctioned – mash-up of Jay-Z's *The Black Album* and The Beatles' self-titled "White Album". Since *The Grey Album*, Burton has occasionally returned to rap (in particular, see Danger Doom, his collaboration with the late masked rapper MF DOOM). But by and large, it appears he's nudged his career on a different track, honing his skills as a musical auteur and leaving the beats and rhymes behind. *Cheat Codes* marks Danger Mouse's return to rap, and does so with panache. This collaboration with Tariq Trotter – aka

Black Thought of The Roots – is the result of an artistic collaboration that's been teased as far back as 2006. And on Burton's part, you sense a degree of wish fulfillment. He describes Trotter as his favourite rapper, and you can hear it; these warm, vintage-tinged tracks feel elegantly crafted, shaped to the contours of Trotter's voice.

The formula is deceptively simple. There are 12 tracks here, most built around an extended sample pulled from the depths of Danger Mouse's deep cuts section. The cinematic slide of "Saltwater" is spanned by "L'Amico Suicida" by the '70s operatic Italian prog group Biglietto Per L'Inferno, while "Identical Deaths"

## **SLEEVE NOTES**

- 1 Sometimes
- 2 Cheat Codes
- 3 The Darkest Part [ft. Roskwon and Kid Sister]
- 4 No Gold Teeth
- 5 Because [ft. Joey Bada\$\$, Russ and Dylan Cartledge]
- 6 Belize [ft. MF DOOM]
- 7 Aquamarine [ft. Michael Kiwanuka]
- 8 Identical Deaths
- 9 Strangers [ft. ASAP Rocky and Run The Jewels]
- 10 Close to Famous
- 11 Saltwater [ft. Conway the Machine]
- 12 Voices & Lupinus

Produced by: Danger Mouse  
Recorded at: Home studio, New York  
Personal includes: Danger Mouse (producer, engineer, organ), Black Thought (vocals), Dylan Cartledge (background vocals, bass on "Strangers"), Sam Cohen (organ, bass on "Saltwater", "Because"), J-Zone (drums on "Identical Deaths"), Michael Kiwanuka, Run The Jewels, ASAP Rocky (vocals)

shakes a shimmering segment from "Future Recollections", a track by the obscure UK psych group Raw Material.

But Burton isn't one of those samplers who seems overly concerned with covering his tracks. One of his tricks is to retain a fragment of the song's original vocal, letting it slide into focus behind the MC at an opportune moment. See "Sometimes", which takes a snatch of Gwen McCrae's "Love Without Sex" and slows the vocal into an androgynous cry of despair.

*Cheat Codes* feels like a platform for Trotter's skills, Burton lining up the beats and letting his hero spit unimpeded. There's no surrounding concept, no skits or extraneous scene-setting. Tracks like "No Gold Teeth" and "Close To Famous" showcase his mix of lyrical ingenuity and pugilistic one-upmanship without distraction. You get the sense they could have made *Cheat Codes* in a state of hermetic seclusion, just the pair of them vibing off one another. Instead, it features a diverse, if carefully selected parade of guests. Michael Kiwanuka delivers a breathy hook over the atmospheric boom-bap of "Aquamarine". "Because" features verses from Joey Bada\$\$, Russ, and Danger Mouse's vocal protégé Dylan Cartledge. And there's an unfeasibly stacked lineup on the claustrophobic "Strangers", Black Thought budging up to accommodate both ASAP Rocky and Run The Jewels.

For many, though, the key verse will be the late MF DOOM's cameo on "Belize". Burton says he recorded the vocal after the recording of *The Mouse and The Mask* but hadn't yet found a place for it. Deployed expertly here, it captures what DOOM did best – a blend of gymnastic wordplay, cartoonish imagery and playful assonance that takes a few listens to fully unpack. Fans have been clamouring for a follow-up to *The Mouse and The Mask* for years. It looks likelier than ever that record will never come. But *Cheat Codes* finds Danger Mouse rolling with a new lyrical foil and this one feels like it could run and run.

## **Q&A**

**Danger Mouse & Black Thought: The songs wrote themselves**

**How did you meet?**

**DANGER MOUSE:** Tariq [Black Thought] was my favourite rapper growing up through high school. You wouldn't say you had a favourite singer. But favourite rapper, that's a thing. It's part of your identity. We hadn't met until 2004, when I did *The Grey Album*. I met [The Roots' manager] Rich Nichols and mentioned that Tariq was my favourite. He hooked us up. **BLACK THOUGHT:** After having met Brian, I realised he had done the Jenni stuff – I was familiar, I just didn't know the producer. But The Grey

Album – I was a fan, I had no idea was his favourite rapper. **BLACK THOUGHT:** We got together in the studio, but Gnarls Barkley was going, we were both busy. So we put a bookmark in it. This album in particular took hold in 2018. We always wanted it to be a real collaboration, a full thing. I don't usually start finishing stuff until we have a decent amount, you know what it's going to be.



**Did you work remotely, or in person?**

**BLACK THOUGHT:** All in person. **DANGER MOUSE:** A lot of it was in my apartment in New York, just the two of us. I've just got a small set-up. I've never recorded vocals myself, really – you know, I'm not an engineer... **BLACK THOUGHT:** [Laughs] He's very humble. Once we got set up, the songs wrote themselves. It's quick. Once the beat was ready, I might sit and write for an hour or so. I would let Brian hear what I'd written. Then he might refine the track – he's very detail-oriented. It's quick to work with him. I'm hard-pressed to find another producer with whom I work with as efficiently as Brian.

**INTERVIEW: LOUIS PATTISON**



## AU SUISSE

Au Suisse CITY SLANG  
7/10

The spirit of *Metro Area* lives on in Brooklyn duo's superior synth-pop



Two decades ago, Brooklyn DJ and producer Morgan Geist enlisted his Juilliard-trained cellist friend Kelley Polar to contribute strings to the first *Metro Area* album, a still-stunning fusion of futuristic house, Paradise Garage-era disco and electro-pop. Here the pair get close to matching that 2002 milestone with their similarly sumptuous debut as Au Suisse, which includes guest contributions by Caribou's Dan Snaith and Junior Boys' Jeremy Greenspan. "Savage" and "Maps" could be John Fox's Ultravox remixed by Larry Levan, the songs' harder synth and post-punk textures continually softened by Polar's emotive vocals and Geist's love of warm, soulful grooves.

JASON ANDERSON

## MAT BALL

Amplified Guitar THE GARBORE  
8/10

Stellar collection of guitar improvisations, excoriating yet moving



One of the guitarists in Canadian metal group BIG BRAVE, Mat Ball takes a massive stride forward on *Amplified Guitar*.

Part of this album's power is its simplicity—on these one-take, solo guitar performances, Ball doesn't try to do too much. But what he does, and exceptionally well with it, is work the parameters of the interface between his guitar and amplifiers. There's deep physicality to the playing here, and also, at times, a lush melancholy, and a smart, poetic capacity to embrace feedback and resonance, sculpturally so. **JONDALE**

## NATALIE BERIDZE

Of Which One Knows ROOMS  
7/10

Elegant, hypnotic reels for liminal electronics and whispered torch-songs



For Natalie Beridze, a songwriter and producer from Thilisi, Georgia, *Of Which One Knows* could well be diastolic—collated

from recordings made between 2007 and 2021, it's certainly a wide-ranging selection, spanning ghostly choral vocals on "Ash Wednesday," meandering ambient electronics on "Sio," and the haunted worlds of drone in "Drift." She's long been an understated creative force, but something about *Of Which One Knows* feels strangely consummate: she's captured her core artistic being here, poised yet brittle. **JONDALE**

Au Suisse:  
emphatic  
debut

## BLUE ORCHIDS

ANY GLOBAL PRODUCTIONS

8/10

Bramah and his mystical garage-punkers, reinvented and thrilling



The legend of the Blue Orchids rests on the transcendent surrealism of their 1982 debut album, *The Greatest Hit* (Money Mountain), their formation out of the first lineup of The Fall, and their time as Nico's backing band. But their most significant work is being done in the 21st century, with leader Martin Bramah renewed and writing some of his best songs. *Angus Tempus Memoir* might be their best yet, a cavalcade of songs that juxtapose the roach energy of '60s garage and the chime and clang of post-punk, Bramah calling over chintzy organ, hymning the "joyous city." **JONDALE**

## BONNIE 'PRINCE' BILLY

HAWAIIANITE

8/10

The bonnie prince denuded, singing to the sensuous sweep of pedal steel



Will Oldham's muse is often most inspired when he's undercover, experimenting with the help of small-scale, creative imprints like Emmett Kelly's excellent Haha Institute. On *High And High And Mighty*, Oldham sings, tenderly, gently, over oceanic swells of pedal steel from one Birdman; the two parts of the album move through a number of songs each, with Oldham meandering, wondering, quietly beseeching the listener, and Birdman's pedal steel strings the stars like Christmas lights. It recalls, a little, the hymnal beauty of Martyn Bates & MJ Harris's *Munder Balad* set, but fonder, kinder and subtly playful. **JONDALE**

## CALYPSO ROSE

BECKHOUSE MUSIC

7/10

Veteran Caribbeananics with heavy friends



The queen of Trinidad's exuberant carnival music for more than half a century, instead of enjoying retirement as she approached her eighties, Calypso Rose seized the spotlight with 2016's *From Home*, a joyous album of sun-drenched Caribbean

rhythms. Here she offers an even more expansive set of rock-tinted calypso, soca and ska with contributions from Carlos Santana, the mercurial Manu Chao, Jamaican dancehall star Mr Vegas, French rapper OJi, electro duo Synapson and Belize's Garifuna Collective. Yet it's Rose's ripe voice and fruity rhymes that rightly command centre-stage. **NIGEL WILLIAMS**

## JEMIMA COULTER

Grace After A Party HANDBAND

8/10

Impressionistic short stories from compelling new voice



Like most of the great epics, *Grace After A Party* started with a quest and a doomed love affair: a trip to Marseille in album with the Sawdusters. He crams each song with barbed wordplay and witty observations about life in rural Indiana, and he sings them with a bluesy scrawl of a voice. "Dad drinks like he's paid to, Mama's in an urn", he howls over the muscle-car stomp of opener "I Suppose". Accentuating his handscream songs with subtle synths and drum loops, the Sawdusters sound like they've worked these songs out in a string of middle-of-nowhere roadhouses. **STEPHEN DESSNER**

## DAWES

Disadvantages Of Misadventures Of Dreamscroller SOURCES

8/10

Veteran LA band challenge themselves on reunion with producer Jonathan Wilson



As usual, Taylor Goldsmith's songs on Dawes' eighth studio album draw on 1990s Cali rock, but exploratory instrumental sections stretch several tracks to opus length. The nearly 10-minute opener "Someone Else's Café/Dreamscroller Tries To Relax" shapeshifts from baroque vamping to a fountain of celestial harmonies. The intricate middle section of "Everything Is Permanent", which

evokes Weather Report, pops up amid a pillow, Doozies like highway cruiser; it's followed by "Ghost In The Machine", a rollicking paean to Steely Dan's "Bodhisattva" topped off by Lee Pardini's frenetic piano soloing. Dawes have never sounded more musically sophisticated. **RUB SCORRA**

## NICK DITTMEIER &amp; THE SAWDUSTERS

Heavy Denim SOWBLAST

7/10

Silver-tongued heartland rock from southern Indiana



A Hoosier singer-songwriter with an eye for lowdown details and an ear for clever turns of phrase, Nick Dittmeier doesn't waste a single line on his third album with the Sawdusters. He crams each song with barbed wordplay and witty observations about life in rural Indiana, and he sings them with a bluesy scrawl of a voice. "Dad drinks like he's paid to, Mama's in an urn", he howls over the muscle-car stomp of opener "I Suppose". Accentuating his handscream songs with subtle synths and drum loops, the Sawdusters sound like they've worked these songs out in a string of middle-of-nowhere roadhouses. **STEPHEN DESSNER**

## STELLA DONNELLY

Flood SECRETLY CANADIAN

8/10

Australian singer-songwriter bursts her stylistic banks



"It's a sad diary of shit," Stella Donnelly told one interviewer as she tried to sum up the context of her second LP. Funny, incisive and occasionally alarmingly direct, the Perth native's 2019 debut *Beware Of The Dogs* had her pegged as the McElroy-age Courtney Barnett, but *Flood* pushes her openly toward less easily hash-tagable terrain. The songwriter's takes on treacherous relationships come with a Vampire Weekend-ish talent for a multi-part melody and Phoebe Bridgers' ear for pertinent one-liners, the stately "Underwater", "Move Me", the title track and bedst-ABBA kiss-off "Cold" all deep, powerful, overwhelming. **JAM WYNN**

Alarmingly direct: Stella Donnelly



**ERASURE**  
*Day-Glo (Based On A True Story)* HYPER  
7/10

Veteran electro duo remix themselves with inventive experimental detour



In 2020, Vince Clarke and Andy Bell scored rave reviews and their first Top 5 album in over 25 years with *The Neon*, a confident throwback to their hook-driven, anthemic electro-pop heyday. Having already spawned a more conventional remix collection, that late-career peak has now inspired this more adventurous full-album remix, featuring left-field sonic collages and all-new tracks built from the original's deconstructed songs. Mostly successful, *Day-Glo* finds bell's voice often melting into electro-chaotic abstraction on the serotonin-drenched "The Gnomes" and "Piss-Prick," his luminous vibrato sighs sounding uncannily like Damon Albarn in places. **STEPHAN LEE**

**TIM FINN & PHIL MANZANERA**  
*The Ghost Of Santiago*  
EXPRESS  
6/10

Second together-but-apart set from old comrades



Friends since Split Enz supported Roxy Music on tour 45 years ago, Finn and Manzanera haven't seen each other in a decade but this is their second lockdown collaboration in two years. Like 2023's *Cached By The Heart*, their parts were recorded separately in home studios 12,000 miles apart, although you'd never guess. The 10 tracks draw on an eclectic hinterland, from prog ("Space Cannibal"), sophisticated Bowie-esque pop ("Our Love") and jazz-rock ("Mal Sueno") to Latin ("Costeno"), orchestral pieces ("Rosenzweig Head") and lucid guitar atmospherics ("Curtain Call"), but the warm pleasure

two old comrades clearly derive from making music together without preconceptions generates a pleasing coherence. **ANGEL WILLIAMSON**

**FLEET FOXES**  
*A Very Lonely Solstice* ANTI-  
8/10

Robin Pecknold's lockdown reconstruction of *Shore*, now on vinyl



Recorded in December 2020 at a church in Brooklyn as a lockdown livestream, this features a closely mixed Robin Pecknold performing intimate songs from the largely solo *Shore*, as well as a couple of covers and scattering of older Fleet Foxes numbers. Pecknold is able to deliver a captivating performance that is somber but never dull, with the mid-set trio of "Helplessness Blues," "Silver Dagger" and "Featherweight" particularly magnificent. The opening and closing tracks provide some sense of Fleet Foxes' harmonies through the use of the Resistance Revival Chorus, with "Can I Believe You" providing a positively Technicolor conclusion. **PETER WATTS**

**CHRIS FORSYTH**  
*Evolution Here We Come*  
NO QUARTER  
8/10

Guest-packed outing from New Jersey guitarist hero



Chris Forsyth has spent the last couple of decades carving out his own style: a chunky improvisatory electric guitar sound melding the classic and the avant. With no fixed backing band, Forsyth's records are peopled by a grab-bag of underground names – here, Tortoise's Doug McCombs, Garcia Peoples' Tom Malach and a host of guests including Sun Ra Astro's Marshall Allen, who drizzles frothy sax over the opening "Experimental & Professional." The core sound is instrumental motorik.

Fleet Foxes' Robin Pecknold: somber but never dull



Gwilym Gold: back to basics

rock with sweet licks; the stand-out is a cover of Richard Thompson's "You're Going To Need Somebody" sung by The Dream Syndicate's Steve Wynn. **LOUIS PATTISON**

**THE GABBARD BROTHERS**  
*The Gabbard Brothers*  
KARMA CHER/COLUMBIA  
7/10

Buffalo Killers bros deliver rollicking back-bar rockers and more



The debut release from Zachary and Andrew Gabbard – formerly of Ohio psych-beat outfit Buffalo Killers – successfully blends beer-chugging power-pop, Byrdian country-rock and hot valve, deep-drone riffs. Melody is everywhere, with production and arrangement variously drawing on influences as improbable as the Youngbloods, Harry Nilsson and even Fleetwood Mac. The brothers were part of The Black Keys' expanded touring ensemble in 2019 and are repeating the feat in 2022. The driving "Gimme Some Of That" and "Feel Better Love Better" – with its licks, loping "Cinnamon Girl" groove – show why they belong in this company. **MARK BENTLEY**

**GWILYM GOLD**  
*Blue Garden* SLAB RECORDS  
7/10

Technophilic songwriter goes back to basics



One-time Golden Silvers frontman Gwilym Gold has spent the last 10 years dabbling in the art world and tech sphere, leading to market the machine-learning songwriting software Bronze, which he used to produce 2012's *Tender Metal*. He's returned to his roots with *Blue Garden*, a touching rumination on love and loss that finds Gold licking his wounds, sparingly accompanied by a hybrid harp and recordings of birdsong and rivers by Chris Watson. "I swear I'll change if you bring me back around", he pines on "Blue Well", falling between Thom Yorke and Arthur Russell, his sentiment pure and simple. **PAERS MARTIN**

**KATY GUILLEN & THE DRIVE**  
*Another One Gained* SELF-RELEASED  
7/10

Kansas City roots-rock duo celebrate new beginnings



The first words we hear from Katy Guillen's new musical project are "I am coming to terms". Loss permeates much of the Kansas City songwriter's latest work – the breakdown of personal and professional relationships, including previous band Katy Guillen & The Drive, are alluded to throughout – but, in keeping with the title, so does what comes after. Now performing as a duo with Girls drummer Stephanie Williams, Guillen & The Drive hit the sweet spot with a mix of spiky garage rock ("Set In Stone", "Because It's Blue") and soulful country torch songs ("Harsh Realisation", "Another One Gained"). "I'm working hard on this new skin", Guillen sings, her voice a cool drink on a warm summer evening. **LISA HARRIS**

**HORSEGIRL**  
*Versions Of Modern Performance* HANDKER  
7/10

Grin-worthy teenage grunge of vim and vigour



Horsegirl made a splash with their debut "I" in 2021 on Sonic Cathedral, a smutty but smart slice of guitar-pop that recalled The Breeders or Yo La Tengo but was made by three teenagers from Chicago. Now signed to Matador, Horsegirl's first album makes good on that potential with the trio exploring mid-'90s grunge on poppers like "Option 8", "Antilogy" and "Billy", or going a bit post-rock/shoegaze on "The Fall Of Horsegirl". Steve Shelley and Lee Ranaldo were impressed enough to pitch in, helping form a warmly familiar yet still sometimes thrilling debut album. **PETER WATTS**

**HOT CHIP**  
*Freakout/Release*  
DORNO  
7/10

Electro-pop masters balance darkness and joy on infectious eighth LP



With lockdown, political strife and international uncertainty acting as a backdrop to the creation of *Hot Chip's* latest, an inescapable darkness seeped into the lyrics. "Sometimes I feel I've broken", Alexis Taylor sings on the slow groove disco-electro of "Broken". However, this lyrical malaise is matched, as ever, by immaculately crafted electronic pop music that veers just as much into joy, elation and euphoria as it does melancholic introspection. From the shimmering and bouncy house-skip of "Time" to the Prince-esque funk stomping "Down", the band sound totally at ease bashing out their worries into glorious dancefloor-ready grooves. **DANIEL DYLAN WATTS**

Amanda Shires back from the brink

# AMANDA SHIRES

## Take It Like A Man

8/10

Texas songwriter carves a bold new path on scarily honest seventh album. *By Lisa Marie Fella*



TO really know somebody is to know all the little ways to hurt them. It's fitting, then, that the most devastating moments on *Take It Like A Man* are rarely the most dramatic. "You can say it's all my fault, we just couldn't get along," she sings on the quietly dignified "Fault Lines," "just so you know, I'll say 'I don't know' / But no-one's gonna be asking me."

Like a lot of people—like a lot of wives and mothers—Shires experienced something of a compression of identity during the pandemic, locked down at home near Nashville with her husband, the musician Jason Isbell, and their daughter. A touring musician since joining the Texas Playboys on fiddle at the age of 15, Shires had a considerable body of work to her name before meeting Isbell, whose career-defining albums *Southwestern* and *Something More Than Free* charted their courtship and the role Shires played in helping him get sober. As Isbell's star climbed, the love story captured in his songs charmed fans beyond Shires' own work: on her solo material; with John Prine and in Isbell's backing band The 400 Unit; and recruiting Brandi Carlile, Natalie Hemby and Maren Morris to join her in country supergroup The Highwaymen. Lockdown and the deaths of Shires' friends and collaborators Prine and Justin Townes Earle put that work on pause, as well as exacerbating tensions in the public-facing fairy tale. With two working musicians in the house, Shires found her own creativity stifled. Disillusioned

with music after several poor studio experiences, she was convinced she would never record again—until an approach from musician-producer Lawrence Rothman changed her mind.

*Take It Like A Man*—Shires' second full-length collaboration with Rothman following last year's *For Christmas*—is a bold re-statement of artistic identity. An unsparring document of a very real marriage, it ruthlessly captures the everyday resentments and recriminations, and, ultimately, the love that gets one through those moments. It is, in a sense, Shires' *Lemonade*, with Isbell's guitar work on some of the album's rawest tracks paralleling Jay-Z's contributions to wife Beyoncé's opus.

"Fault Lines," the piano-and-string-led elegy at the album's mid-point, is the rawest of those, a portrait of a relationship stretched to breaking point. "Time was all I'd want," intones Shires over Peter

### SLEEVE NOTES

1 Hawk For The Dove  
2 Take It Like A Man  
3 Empty Cups  
4 Don't Be Alarmed  
5 Fault Lines  
6 Here He Comes  
7 Bad Behavior  
8 Stupid Love  
9 Lonely At Night  
10 Everything Has Its Time

Produced by: Lawrence Rothman  
Recorded at: RCA Studio B, Nashville  
Personnel: Amanda Shires (vocals, fiddle), Jason Isbell (guitar), Fred Eltringham, Julien Dario (drums, percussion), Jimbo Hart (bass), Peter Levin (piano, organ, keys), Lawrence Rothman (keys, percussion, guitar), Brittney Spencer, Maren Morris (background vocals), Austin Hoke (cello), Kristin Weber (violin), Kris Wilkinson (viola), Ben Zelic (melotron, keys), Peter Stroud, Audley Freed (guitar), Marc Franklin (trumpet), Art Edmiston (tenor sax), Kirk Smothers (baritone sax), Kamaron Whalum (trombone)

Levin's gloomy piano, "you can keep the car and the house". The first song to emerge from Shires' early correspondence with Rothman and the first to be recorded, it was cut and re-cut from the final tracklisting, its unflinching lyrics—including a reference to the "flagship" character of her husband's song of the same name—begging to be unravelled. Ultimately it was Isbell who persuaded Shires not to leave it out.

It's an exquisite move, as it allows the album to ebb and flow from rebirth to redemption through resentment, reconciliation and romance. Opener "Hawk For The Dove" is immediately immersive, its booming bass drum, electric guitar squall and frantic second-half fiddle a counterpoint to the coyness in Shires' vocals. "You can call me serious trouble, just admit I'm what you want", she purrs, as Highwaymen protégé Brittney Spencer echoes the mischievous refrain.

"Empty Cups", written solely by Shires, is a lyrical masterwork of tiny resentments: a door slammed so hard that spoons rattle, a hand on a cheek, a "makeup rainbow" of a tear-streaked face. Stately organ and backing vocals from Maren Morris, whose voice could wring tears from a stone at the best of times, complete a picture of looming heartbreak, while "Don't Be Alarmed", which features co-writing credits for Isbell, Rustin Kelly and Liz Rose, attempts to paper over the cracks.

A trio of songs on the back half of the album offer solace. "Here He Comes" is a boomy romp with a horn section as irresistible as the "slight lean and overconfident creep" of its subject matter. "Bad Behavior" tracks a tentative courtship and an underlying wildness, emphasised by glistening keyboards, while "Stupid Love" is a sunny Southern love song complete with a four-part horn section.

While, as in life, no happy endings are assured—see swooping Natalie Hemby co-write "Everything Has Its Time", with its gentle message of "nothing lasts forever"—the overall journey here is one of self-discovery and self-reliance. Even the title of the album turns out to be a message to that effect, with Shires, as the tide track closes, drawing out that final line: no need to "take it like a man" when you can "take it like Amanda".

### Q&A

**Amanda Shires "Suddenly, it's OK to cry"**

**Did you set out to make such a personal album?**

I knew going into it what was going to happen if I put those songs on the record. But I don't have a lot of models for how marriage is supposed to work. A lot of folks probably see what Jason and I have as a romantic. Highly idealised thing—which it is—but it also has its problems just like everybody else's. A long time ago I asked John Prine what his secret was; he said it was being vulnerable, and I really took

that in. I think that's why the record is so vulnerable. From there, we deal with the consequence of choice.

**Wasn't there a part of you that thought you were never going to record music again?**

I had a bunch of bad experiences in a row. Every time I got into a recording studio I was made to feel small—it was always anxiety-inducing and hypercritical. I started thinking that it was music making me feel that way. But with Lawrence [Rothman's] help, I discovered that it wasn't the music's fault. It was the people I was working

with that kept letting me down.

**How does "take it like a man" fit as a title?**

Because it's the opposite of what I'm doing with these songs. To be successful, you were never supposed to be emotional—but now, self-care days and "me time" are in. Suddenly, it's okay to cry. In the end, it's not about how a man takes things versus how a woman takes things: everybody processes their shit differently. And we have to allow people to do those things in healthy ways.

INTERVIEW: LISA MARIE FELLA

**JULIA JACKLIN**

**Pre-Pleasure**

TRANSURGENT

9/10

Let love in: Melbourne-based marvel's cautious ode to joy



"Am I going to lose myself again?" asks Julia Jacklin on fuzzing, garage firecracker "I Was Neon." "I quite like

the person that I am". A brutally acute observer of the darker side of human relationships, the 31-year-old's third album treads warily into the world of happy-ever-after love, "Ignore Tenderness" and the Velvet Underground-ish "Magic" detailing her ongoing battles between hope and bitter experience. As a lyricist, she remains the understatement queen, "Let's keep all our doctor's appointments" from "Be Careful With Yourself" perhaps one of the most superbly subtle statements of devotion in recorded song. Nobody underdoes it better. **JHW/WHM**

**SIMON JOYNER**  
**Songs From A Stolen Guitar**

REBLAND

8/10

Self-sufficient songwriter's desolate tales from Omaha, Nebraska



Over 30 years, Joyner has established a reputation as the songwriter's writer, earning plaudits

from Gillian Welch and Conor Oberst for songs which land in the narrative space between Leonard Cohen and Townes Van Zandt. Joyner's ambition to write short stories "but even shorter" is beautifully realised in the darkly humorous "Caroline's Got A Secret" and the Townes-like heartbreaker "Tekamah." "Life is too short and other cruel clichés," he sings, bringing dry resilience to beauteous tales of uncertainty and isolation. **ALASTAIR/MAY**

**KAMIKAZE PALM TREE**

Mint Chip DEAD CITY

6/10

Mutant art-pop from John Dwyer-approved San Francisco duo



Absurdity runs through *Mint Chip*, the second album by Kamikaze Palm Tree, like coloured letters through a stick of rock. Dylan Badley and Cole Berliner's songs are fragmentary and unpredictable, their springy guitars and elliptical vocals sometimes coalescing into sparkling hooks, at other times deliberately abstruse; think the quirky post-punk of The Raincoats, or a country-folk Doorhof. A tendency towards the ephemeral — "none of the songs are about anything," they explain — grates a little, but there's joy to be had in hearing the way "In

REVELATIONS



**SIMON JOYNER**

How the record shop owner keeps it real

"I VE got this shop I run in Omaha with my drummer and friend Mychal Marasco," says Simon Joyner. "I've always kept music part-time because I don't think it's healthy or artistically fruitful to do it for a living. The best way for me to continue writing is to spend most of my time living the same kind of life that the people I want to write about are living. I've watched artists living this sort of niche existence and after a while they lose the ability to write about people in the same way. They start writing songs about being on the road. Another day, another dollar, another green room."

As you might expect of a record shop owner, Joyner offered an informed playlist for collaborators on *Songs From A Stolen Guitar*: The third Velvet Underground album, *Songs of Love And Hate* by Leonard Cohen, *Stories By David Blue*, Tim Hardin's *First Take* by Roberto Flack, and Berlin by Lou Reed.

It's a somber collection. "I've always been prone to the occasional blue episode," says Joyner. "The record has these themes of isolation and loss, but hopefully the characters help illustrate some resilience and hope too. Struggle is the opposite of resignation."

ALASTAIR/MAY

The Sand" and "Predicament" take guitar, drums, violin and clarinet and magic them into hitherto unimagined shapes. **LOUIS/PATRISON**

**ANGÉLQUE KIDJO & IBRAHIM MAALOUF**  
**Queen Of Sheba**

HYSTERIC

7/10

Bold global fusion from two adventurous spirits



Melding the African roots of Kidjo and the Middle Eastern heritage of the French-Lebanese jazz composer Maalouf,

this seven-part suite that retells the mythical story of the Queen of Sheba's journey from Africa to visit King Solomon in Jerusalem is nothing if not ambitious. As ever, Kidjo sings her Yoruba lyrics with grace and power, but it's the striking arrangements by Maalouf for strings, horns, drums, percussion, guitar, bass and electric piano that are the revelation. The subtle quarter-tones of his own trumpet playing are exquisite too, as the suite shifts seamlessly from gentle reflection to explosive energy,

weaving western classical, jazz and rock tropes into the multi-cultural mix. **NEIL WILLIAMSON**

**MARCUS KING**

**Young Blood** AMERICAN REPUBLIC

6/10

Singer and guitarist's feverish second outing with producer Dan Auerbach



Young Blood serves as a self-initiated exorcism, as King confronts his "vice, coke and whiskey" fuelled demons, leading a muscular power trio that rumbles like it's 1969. With its barrage of bluesy rockers whose titles — "It's Too Late", "Lie Lie Lie", "Pain", "Dark Cloud" — signal their author's distress, *Young Blood* is far darker than 2020's soulful *El Dorado*. "Blood On The Tracks", which chugs along behind a swampy, cowbell-accented groove, provides relief from the monolithic heaviness, which becomes enervating on the generic "Hard Working Man". Let's hope these songs help the preternaturally gifted King get the funk out of his psyche. **BUD/SCOPPA**

**KIWI JR**

**Chopper** SUBPOP

7/10

Third album from the Toronto band given to flights of fancy



Penning odes to disengaged robotic arms, inconveniently placed deer corpses, and extras embarrassed by their films, Toronto singer-songwriter and Kiwi Jr frontman Jeremy Gaudet walks a tightrope between melancholy and whimsy, between sincerity and irony. On the band's third album, which was produced by Dan Boeckner (Wolf Parade, The Constantines), he strikes a tonal balance that's all the more compelling for being so precarious, as though a wrong note or misplaced lyric might send a song spiralling into facetiousness. Whenever he does lose his footing, the band's imaginative take on mid-2000s indie rock — all charming guitars and zigzagging synth — steadies this Chopper. **STEPHEN DEUSHER**

**AJ LAMBERT**

**Dirt Soda** ROUGH TRADE

7/10

Sinatraesque's provocative second



The daughter of Nancy Sinatra and granddaughter of Frank, AJ Lambert emerged as a singer in her own right in 2019, at the age of 44, with a debut of eponymous covers called *Careful You*. Follow-up *Dirt Soda* contains two covers — including an atmospheric conflation of Pavement's "Strings Of Nashville" and Codeine's "Broken Hearted Wine" — and shines a light on Lambert's own material, a narcotic, crushed-velvet sprawl brought to life on "Slaff Of The Flag" and "My Blood" by her wayward, Cat Power delivery. She's enigmatic enough to prowls around the Lynchian art rock of *Dirt Soda* without revealing too much. **PERSHAW**

**MANY VOICES SPEAK**

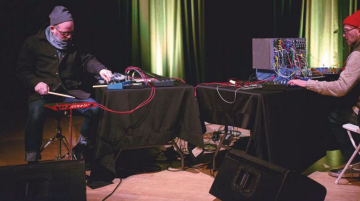
**Gestures** STRANGERS CANDY

7/10

Eloquent, gossamer pop for Scandinavian summer evenings



Despite her pseudonym, Sweden's Matilda Mand doesn't do loud: even on "Phase Out", with its multitracked harmonies, she barely breaks a sweat. Preferring a mid-paced ramble through sparsely synth-decorated landscapes, "Seat For Sadness" and "Nothing's Gone" are as intimate as pillow talk — and suitably feathery, too — while her aching melodies, less girlish than Stina Nordenstam's, float over "Within Reach" and "Worthy" its muted drums. Even quieter and more wistful, the closing "Visual Fields", a starry-eyed lullaby, guarantees sweet, lucid dreams. **WYNHAM WALLACE**



# SAM PREKOP & JOHN MCENTIRE

**Sons Of**

THRILL JOCKEY

8/10

**Captivating electronics from seasoned Chicago post-rockers.**  
By Piers Martin



SAM PREKOP and John McEntire have worked in harmony for close to 30 years. As the singer-guitarist and drummer in The Sea And Cake – alongside bassist

Archer Prewitt – the pair have

amassed a body of work that takes a good few hours to sift through on Spotify, though such is the breezy, effortless nature of the material, you'd be hard pushed to remember which songs stand out. For fans, this familiarity has long been part of the Chicago band's appeal: across 11 albums since their debut in 1999, *The Sea And Cake's* innocuous post-rock – at times jazzy, sometimes overtly pop, always elegantly turned out – has been a reliable, comforting presence; a stable reminder that no matter how terrible things are in the world, Sam Prekop will still be singing his inscrutable poetry in hushed tones over lushly arranged grooves, each new instalment of classy fusion slightly different to the last.

Listen closely and they're a dynamic proposition – elements of modular synthesis and percussive percolations populate 2011's *The Moonlight Butterfly* and 2012's *Runner* – yet like any quality act, their individual talents are in service to the benefit of the group, and *The Sea And Cake's* enduring geniality can often appear to have turned these elite musicians into journeymen. With *Sons Of*, Prekop and McEntire's first joint collaboration, we get to hear what happens when they're freed from the band format, when conventional structures no longer

apply, and these inherently reserved creatures are let loose in the wild. As an exercise in live, largely improvised electronics, these four long pieces bring out the best in the pair, showcasing their ability to go with the flow while harnessing their particular strengths.

By choice, McEntire has spent his entire career as an engineer, mixer and producer working within the framework of other bands' schedules – he recently worked on Ryley Walker's *Course In Fable* – and as the driving force behind Tortoise, his skills as post-rock's rhythm king shine only sporadically these days. Their last album, *The Catastrophist*, came out in 2016, and even within that group of free-jazz maestros each member has a role to play, naturally curtailing their opportunities for self-expression.

Prekop's musical evolution is more revealing, because at some point between his 2005 solo set *Who's Your New Professor* and 2010's *Old Punctured* he got the bug for modular synthesis and decided to shift his focus from shimmering indie to vocal-less analogue electronics, its patterns and irregularities appealing to his artistic sensibility (he's also a photographer and painter). For a quiet and thoughtful man, the daring instrumental works on his two recent albums, *The Republic* (2015) and *Cosmos* (2020), perhaps allow him to say more about himself, as he attempts to give shape and meaning to the abstract sounds he's generating in his home studio in Pilsen, Chicago.

**Sam Prekop and John McEntire: "Everything we do is unplanned"**

**How did *Sons Of* come about?**

**SAMPREKOP:** It was a fluke in a way. I was invited to play the Syn/ Cussion festival in Berlin in 2017 and I asked John he was interested. We didn't rehearse; we showed up and just did it. And it was good, way beyond our expectations.

**It's pretty free-flowing...**

**JOHNMCENTIRE:** It's the first thing I've been involved in that's completely based on

improvisation. Everything we do live is unplanned apart from the fact that there's going to be a tempo and a key signature we're going to stay in. So it's been interesting to approach it from that direction, considering neither of us would consider ourselves improvisers in the traditional sense. Having this framework has unlocked a whole bunch of new possibilities for us. It wasn't too intentional, but now I tell people that we made a techno record. **PREKOP:** I always feel it's important to just follow the flow. We wanted to get across that kind of in-the-moment, live spirit.

*Sons Of* – named by McEntire after the Scott Walker song and featuring McEntire's cats, Jackie and Lamar, on the cover – leads on from a couple of Prekop's post-Comma excursions, "Spelling" and "Saturday Saturday", two 20-minute

pieces of pastoral circuit-bending for the Longform Editions imprint. Yet it's McEntire who propels these new tracks along with succulent kicks and crisp snares, the hi-hats dissolving into hiss as "A Ghost Of Noon" breaks down midway in, and the pulses shifting into a four-hour climax during "Crossing At The Shallow". For a project that started out a few years ago as an occasional live improvisation – the pair sat on stage facing each other, hunched over their gear, no fixed idea of where they're headed – it's become a tantalising

exploration of modern-day kosmische. Seemingly liberated by technology, these two fifty-something blokes conjure the kind of utopian fantasies dreamt up by Harald Grosskopf and Neut on the 24-minute "A Yellow Robe", a swirling, burbling journey that also nods to recent experiments by Roman Flügel and Peder Mannerfelt.

That track is based on a live recording from a show in Chicago at the end of last year, while "A Ghost Of Noon" stems from an earlier performance in Düsseldorf. Both were then buffed up by Prekop and McEntire in their respective studios – McEntire now lives in Portland, Oregon – and then sent between each other until finished. What's most surprising about *Sons Of* is how comfortable the pair are with this more psychedelic direction – leading you to wonder why they've never done this kind of thing before. The closing "Ascending By Night" is a powerful piece of smouldering techno, bathed in gauzy synths. If this is what the post-rock afterparty sounds like, count us in.

## Q&A

**How would you characterise your relationship?**

**PREKOP:** It's not lost on us that we've been working together for 25 years. We're excited about similar things. It's a long-time ongoing, fruitful relationship. **MCENTIRE:** Sam never loses sight of the kind of the overall picture: "We're going to tell a story and there's going to be these beautiful twists and turns through these melodic and harmonic ideas." His sensibility is so unique and I love the way he's taken his whole aesthetic and transposed it to the modular synth world. **INTERVIEW: PIERS MARTIN**

# { AMERICANA }

Album Of The Month



## LEE BAINS & THE GLORY FIRES

Old-Time Folks

DON GIOVANNI

8/10

Southern discomfort from gifted country rocker



LIKE so many artists from the Deep South, Lee Bains is conflicted about his upbringing to the point of obsession. Albums like *Deconstructed* and *Youth Detention* have been filled with songs that explore his roots and the complex socio-political legacy of the South, usually set to an energetic musical accompaniment that owes more to The Clash than Skynyrd. *Old-Time Folks* sees Bains – once of the Dixieteens – on familiar lyrical territory, but musically he has tried to slow down a little, introducing elements of folk and country with the assistance of Drive-By Truckers producer Dave Barbe.

Bains is a fascinating character, straddling the polarised worlds of red and blue America. His evocative poems about Southern food have featured in *The New Yorker*, and he holds down a day job in construction and maintenance. His sometimes tortured need to balance these two worlds have led to his songs becoming perhaps overly verbose, but here he made a conscious

attempt to write singalongs in the style of Billy Bragg or classic folk. That said, there are still breakneck epic screeds such as “The Battle Of Atlanta”, an epic study of Civil War and gentrification, or the hardcore “Caligula”. But the general tone is less hurried and the mood more positive, pointing towards moments of collective harmony rather than discord. Several songs explore working-class life in the South, such as the Stonies “(In Remembrance Of The) 40-Hour Week” or the country ballad, “Redneck”, a hymn to blue-collar solidarity inspired by a comment from a co-worker. There’s a strong D&T flavour to tracks like “God’s A Working Man” or “Lizard People”, about media-fuelled paranoia, while the excellent “Gentlemen” is a piano-led piece that sounds like early Jason Isbell. The album is bookended by two versions of “Old-Time Folks”, the first a charged rocker, the second more of a stripped-down country fiddle, showcasing the development in Bains’ sound as he continues to exercise old demons.

PETER WATTS

### AMERICANA ROUND-UP

FOLLOWING on the heels of Fantastic Negrito’s slave-era-spanning funk-roots album *White Jesus Black Problems*, and continuing African-Americans’ reclaiming of Americana, *Jake Blount’s The New Faith* recasts black folk songs as Afrofuturist gospel-country, imagining black refugees’ new rites after an eco-apocalypse. It’s out on Smithsonian Folkways in September. Swamp-rock pioneer *Tommy McLean* meanwhile releases his first LP in over 40 years on August 26 on Yep Roc, the slow-burning, elegiac *Rain Down Every Dream*, with stellar assistance from Elvis Costello, Van Dyke Parks, Nick Lowe and Ed Harcourt. Following July’s atmospheric, belated debut *Out Passed Nowhere*, former Patti Smith guitarist *Oliver Roy* has completed

a swift follow-up. *Being Gone*, for November release on Royal Oakie, *Jerry Joseph*, whose searing Drive-By Truckers-assisted *The Beautiful Madness* was one of 2020’s finest, is working on the follow-up, this time with members of the E Street Band. Recent Joseph tourmates *The Delines’* September 7” on Decor, “The Lost Duets”, harks back to Willy Vlautin’s Richmond Fontaine days with the cowpunk of “The Golden State”, paired with the Lee Hazlewood-Nancy Sinatra-style “My Blood Bleeds The Darkest Blue”. Self-styled “scary troubadour” *Johnny Dowd* has postponed his September UK

tour, planning to return, “God willing and the creek don’t rise”, in 2023. Fellow Uncut favourites *The Handsome Family* start their own dates here on August 30. [www.uncut.co.uk](http://www.uncut.co.uk)



## BRET MCKENZIE

Songs Without Jokes

SUBPOP

8/10

The funnyman plays it straight(er) on baroque-pop delight



The title is a heads-up to anyone who comes to Bret McKenzie’s solo debut expecting successors to such *Flight Of The Conchords* favourites as “Business

Time” or the New Zealander’s Oscar-winning “Man Or Muppet?”. Yet it’s still a misnomer given the sly humour that permeates “If You Wanna Go”, an instant classic of kiss-off pop, and “That’s LA”, a quasi-tribute to his sometime home in which he dares to rhyme “margaritas” with “defecator”. The album’s vibe of sunny SoCal decadence is greatly enhanced by the contributions of session players like guitarist Doum Parks and drummer Joey Waronker. Evocative of Harry Nilsson and Randy Newman at their most extroverted, McKenzie’s songs provide great warmth, too. [www.uncut.co.uk](http://www.uncut.co.uk)

## MOOR MOTHER

Jazz Codes

8/10

Philadelphia poet-rapper delivers an mighty avant-jazz manifesto



Poet, rapper, political activist and experimental sound artist Moor Mother – aka Camee Ayewa – expands her poetry collection of the same

name into this sense-swamping banquet of free jazz, avant-soul and spoken-word collaborations. The music spans a vast spectrum, from cosmic-jazz transcendence on “Umzams” to voluptuous operatic swirls on “Meditation Rag”, to the insistent electro-rap sermon “Rarely Woke”. Thick with homages to jazz and blues pioneers, this time-travelling kaleidoscopic epic is rooted in the manifesto that liberation from restrictive musical rhythm mirrors liberation from racist, capitalist oppression. Ayewa always makes ambitious albums, but *Jazz Codes* feels like her richest yet, her *Lemonade*, her *To Pimp A Butterfly*.

STEVEN DIALTON

## THE MOUNTAIN GOATS

Bleed Out

7/10

John Darnielle’s action-movie binge puts his band in a rocking mood



“I’m doing this for revenge!” cries John Darnielle a few minutes into *Bleed Out*. It’s one of many references to the action movies and

vengeance tales that fuelled the lockdown creation of *The Mountain Goats’* 21st album. The fixation is not so surprising given Darnielle’s equally deft explorations of pro-breastling’s hyper-masculism on 2014’s *The Bear Came As a Man*. But there’s a more unsettling undercurrent as he connects these fantasies of power and payback to his country’s vicious political climate. Whatever meanings are to be gleaned here, *Bleed Out* still rates as one of the band’s hardest-rocking outings, with Bully’s Alicia Bognanno adding crunch to

## REVELATIONS



## BRET MCKENZIE

Conchords man worth taking a little seriously

"I was just a huge stab into the dark of trying something new and different," says Bret McKenzie of his 'serious' debut solo album. Of course, the Wellington-based singer-songwriter was an old hand at writing the kind of sparkling tunes that fill *Songs Without Jokes*, having spent years making music in *Flight of the Conchords* and crafting funny songs for films and TV shows. "But then at night, I'd write these songs that weren't those songs. I was like, 'What can I do with these ones?'"

Despite the title, there's no lack of humour in the record. Nevertheless, he found it "liberating" to write songs that didn't need to serve a specific character or comedic conceit

yet are rich with his usual wit. The encouragement to record them came from many of the session musicians he'd met making music for Hollywood. In 2019, McKenzie assembled a team of legendary pros like bassist Lee "Leland" Sklar for the album's first sessions. Honed over the course of New Zealand's lengthy lockdowns, the result not only boasts the same sunny yet acerbic sensibility of touchstones like Harry Nilsson's *Nilsen* or Schmilsson but retains the sound of those '70s SoCal inspirations, too.

"It's not like we made this home recording that nods to that slick LA studio sound – we got to make the real thing! And it was such a treat to make." JASON ANDERSON

## GILBERT O'SULLIVAN

Driven

UNRECOGNIZABLE

8/10

Underrated piano man's duet-assisted return



O'Sullivan is long overdue a major reappraisal, and he might have found his Rick Rubin in producer Andy

Wright, who showcases O'Sullivan's songcraft and suggests that he could have been penning hits for others over the last 50 years. KT Tunstall shares lead vocals on the Blues Brothers bounce of "Take Love"; Mick Hucknall dials down the soul mannerisms on the Nashville-friendly "Let Bygones Be Bygones"; "Love Casually" recalls Steely Dan; while McCartney looms over the nostalgic "Penny Lane" stomp of "Blue Anchor Bay" and the string-drenched, dreamlike ballad "If Only Love Had Ears". A songwriting masterclass from an understating craftsman. JOHN LEWIS

## WILLIAM ORBIT

The Painter

WARRIOR

6/10

Away from the easel and back

in the recording studio



Orbit's first album in eight years after taking time out to focus on art (hence the title) finds him treading familiar

terrain on a succession of tracks that adhere to his comfort zone of mannered electro-pop. Previous collaborators Beth Orton and Katie Melua are back for more (the former's exquisitely delicate "New Worlds" is a highlight), while newcomers to his, alien, orbit bring rich textures of their own. Colorado-based trip-hopper Natalie Walker is a spectral presence on "The Diver", and Essex's Polly Scattergood provides just the right amount of post-Britpop quirkiness on "Colours Colliding". Business as usual, for the most part, but none the worse for it. TERRY STATIONTON

## OSEES

A Foul Form

CASTLEFACE

7/10

Rapid-fire thrash pays tribute to the greats on latest from fecund garage-rockers



"Brain stem-cracking scum-punk" is how Osees's John Dwyer describes his prolific band's latest release, A home to the punk

he grew up on, tracks such as "Frock Block" ooze the spirit of Bad Brains, hammering out no-thrills thrash-punk that explodes and disappears in no time. Many tracks barely break the two-minute mark, such as the fuzz-coated, discordant assault of "Scum Show". A revolutionary step in the band's catalogue this is not,

but the sound of Dwyer and co having a lot of fun in his basement radiates throughout, as does the band's seamless knack for tapping into any strand of punk they turn their hand to. DANIEL DYLAN-WRAY

## PANDA BEAR &amp; SONIC BOOM

Reset

SCHNO

8/10

Sample-heavy retro-pop collaboration from the cult pair



This may be their first official shared credit, but Peter "Sonic Boom" Kember has been mixing and co-producing solo releases by Noah "Panda Bear" Lennox of Animal Collective for over a decade. Building these tracks on a bedrock of looped 1990s and 1960s samples, Lennox and Kember create bewitching collages of sunshine melody, fluidly chattering rhythms and fizzing analogue synths without succumbing to full retro-jukebox pastiche. Kember's vocals features more prominently than usual, lending deadpan shading to jaunty handclap sing-alongs like "Go On" and "Whirlpool". The galvanizing finale "Everything's Been Leading To This", meanwhile, conjures up pleasing echoes of Spacemen 3's classic electro-bliss single "Big City". STEPHEN DAWTON

## PIT PONY

World To Me

CUE

6/10

Timeside five-piece give voice to their rage



With a name that's a nod to the region's mining heritage and songs inspired by motherhood, political ineptitude and relationships turned sour, Pit Pony's brand of retro-tinged garage rock is fully rooted in the post-pandemic north-east of England. Vocalist Jackie Purver – glottal stop firmly intact – is on ferocious form on hard rockers "Hide Of Doubt" and "Black Tar"; "Supermarket" is glam rock relationship-gone-wrong storytelling; and a driving beat and scuffling guitars add to the claustrophobia and confusion of re-establishing one's identity after motherhood on "See Me Be". If it all begins to drag towards the end, it's because these are songs to be screamed in sweaty clubs. LISA HARRIS/VERLA



Pit Pony: mining dark seam

"Wage Wars Get Rich Die Handsome" and other songs that ought to be in the next Rambo reboot. JASON ANDERSON

## A MOUNTAIN OF ONE

Stars Planets Dust Me

AFTER

7/10

More cosmic AOR from chakra-aligned duo



With producer Mo Morris based in Bali and singer-songwriter Zeben Jameson living in London, it's taken a decade of file-swapping and video calls to complete the follow-up to *A Mountain Of One's* 2009 debut *Institute Of Joy*. Connected by some kind of leyline, the pair have grown as musicians. By any measure this is a far superior record, one that finds plenty of room for Jameson's spiritual inquiries – the Lindsey Buckingham groove of "Black Apple Pink Apple", "Dealer" is soaring refrain – and Morris's more outlandish ideas involving electro ("Custards Last Stand"), dub ("Make My Love Grow") and Balearic boogie ("Surrender").

PIERS MARVIN

## NIMBUS SEXTET

Forward Thinker

ACID JAZZ

7/10

Tense grooves and rare magic on hip-hop-influenced Scottish jazz band's second



This Glasgow group seemed a bit too attuned to their Acid Jazz home on 2020 debut *Dreams Fulfilled*, offering some generic grooves, though even then they had a nascent, original intelligence. Keyboardist and leader Joe Nicholas now sets them firmly apart from their lauded young UK jazz peers, favouring tensely staccato beats and strangely emotional vistas, from the title track's Mellotron shimmers to the slow-motion weirdness of "Search For Solace". The isolated, echoing parts of "From The Shadows" – the dry guitar plucks, drunk sax sways and cyber shivers – eventually cohere like the cosmos, with a viscerally felt sense of the music: coming to life. This is a band capable of diversity off-kilter composition and, sometimes, something more sublime. NICK HASTED





Joe Pug: a second bite with talented friends

**JOEPUG**  
**Nation Of Heat** [Revisited]

LOOSE  
7/10

Pug takes another shot at his debut EP



When "Nation Of Heat" was first released, it became the organic success that every self-released troubadour

dreams of. Now, *Revisited* is Pug's attempt to make the record he would have made at the time, if equipped with the expertise and the backing musicians (those contributing to *Revisited* include Brandon Flowers, My Morning Jacket's Carl Boeml and The 400 Unit's Derry DeBorja). While the lo-fi haphazardness of the original "Nation Of Heat" was part of its charm, the best of the new treatments lend additional depth to fine songs: "Nobody's Man" and "I Do My Father's Drugs" are particular beneficiaries.

ANDREW MUELLER

**PYECORNER AUDIO**  
**Let's Emerge!**

SCOTICATHRAL  
7/10

A hopeful, warm detour – with guitar from Andy Bell



Martin Jenkins' latest nods to both Stereolab and Spacemen 3 with its artwork, but for the most part their influence elsewhere is minimal, evident – and only just – in the phased, tremolo guitars opening the appropriately named "Saturation Point", for instance, or during the luminous closer "Warmth Of The Sun" by hyponogic climax. Its title, in fact, are frequently revealing: "De-Hibernate" s depths are murky but its surface sparkle, "Does It Go Dark?" its sludgy drones answer in the affirmative (before changing their mind), and "Haze Loops" drifts past in a beautiful blur swaddled in echoing, blissed-out guitars. WYNDHAM WALLACE

**RICH RUTH**  
**I Survived, It's Over**

THIRD MAN  
8/10

Restorative ambient jazz-rock excursion, inspired by EMDR therapy



Michael Rich Ruth is a valued jack-of-all-trades on the Nashville scene. On a recent trip to London he played a set of ambient electronics before strapping on a guitar to rock out with SG Goodman. His latest solo album lays down a bed of smouldering cosmic-fusion grooves over which various soloists – saxophonists Jared Selner and Sam Que on "Heavy And Earthbound", Ruth himself on "Taken Back" – are given the freedom to let rip. Conceived after Ruth was carjacked at gunpoint, and recorded in the wake of the Nashville tornadoes, this is much more than tasteful mood music, reaching hungrily for a complex spiritual resolution. SAM RICHARDS

**JOSH ROUSE**  
**Going Places**

HYPERIC  
7/10

Underrated American troubadour back on top form



Rouse's debut *Dressed Up Like Nebraska* was hailed as a folk-pop classic by *Uncut* on its release in 1998, and further albums established him as something akin to America's answer to Richard Thompson. Since moving to Spain in 2004, his releases have been more low-key, and his last album, 2018's *Love In The Modern Age*, took a left turn into 1980s-influenced electronica. *Going Places* is a delicious reversion to type, full of mature and nuanced songcraft, from the breezy melodicism of "Henry Miller's Flat" and the surging "Hollow Moon", to the sweet acoustic melancholy of "Indian Summer" and the Paul Simon-like "The Lonely Postman". ANGEL WILLIAMSON

**RUSTY**  
**The Resurrection Of Rusty**  
7/10

Nostalgic reunion for Elvis Costello and teenage sparring partner



Fifty years after their last gig together, Costello and his school pal Allan Mayes make a belated recording debut, revisiting material that regularly featured in their Merseyside folk club sets. A brace of Nick Lowe-penned Brinsley Schwarz tracks ("Surrender To The Rhythm", "Don't Lose Your Grip On Love") are noticeably faithful to the originals, but the older men bring an oaky maturity to Neil Young's "Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere" that likely eluded their younger selves. Of particular interest to Docuologists is the sardonic "Maureen & Sam", later reworked by EC as 1980 B-side "Ghost Train". TERRY STAUNTON

**THEE SACRED SOULS**  
**Thee Sacred Souls** [DAPTONE]

8/10

Daptone's new hope: superb, sweet soul debut from San Diego trio



If you're one of the millions to stream "Can I Call You Rose" on YouTube, you'll know that Thee Sacred Souls offer music of terrifically high quality. This fully formed debut is incontestable evidence of an important new act. Bassist Sal Samano, drummer Alex Garcia and vocalist Josh Lane combine to produce a weightless, spacious sound: barrel-aged deep soul, laced with Latin, lyrically inventive, and peculiarly fresh. Lane's voice owes as much to Maxwell and Michael Kiwanuka as Curtis, Smokey and Sam Cooke, and in "Future Lover" and "Sorrow for Tomorrow" you'll find heart-grabbing brilliance. MARK BENTLEY

**AYAL SENIOR**  
**Az Yashir** [PRODIGATIONS]

8/10

Gentle, reflective dreamsongs from Cosmic Canada



Canadian guitarist Ayal Senior has been part of underground, marginal culture for decades now, running his Medusa Editions imprint, playing with the late John Fahey in Three Day Band, and recording a clutch of albums, both solo and with collaborators such as Matthew "Doc" Dunn, that make sidereal connections between guitar soul, country, folk and blues. Clear eared and psychedelically rich, Az Yashir might be his best yet – from the winding raga-space of "Ashby", through "Tindia Ink" its gentle precipitations of snow-drift melody, and into the lambent drone cycles of "There's Nothing I Like More Than Anything Else", it's a beauty. JONDALE

**THE SHEEPDOGS**  
**Outta Sight** [WARRNER]

6/10

Cheerful effort to pretend the last 50 years never happened



An institution in their native Canada, The Sheepdogs make zero attempt to disguise themselves. The cover of their seventh album is a perfect pastiche of something that might have wrapped a collection of good-time bar-room boogie circa 1974. As such, it amounts to due warning of the contents. "Outta Sight" finds The Sheepdogs channelling the swagger and choogle of the Allmans, Skynyrd and Creedence. Grouchy resistance is difficult to maintain in the face of The Sheepdogs' big-hearted guilelessness: highlights include the ZZ Top-ish "Goddamn Money" and "Carrying On", a stately Eagles-esque ballad. ANDREW MUELLER

**KAITLYN AURELIA SMITH**  
**Let's Turn It Into Sound**

GHOSTINTERNATIONAL

7/10

Knockout charm on solo eighth



There's long been playfulness and profundity in KAS's work, and though her latest features plenty of both, it leans toward the former. It also sees her expanding her analogue sound with a vocal processing technique of her own creation, notably in the burbling "Locate" and brief closer "Give To The Water". However nonlinear her compositions, they're bright, full of wonder and have a pop sensibility, recalling Four Tet, Deskin and Suzanne Ciani. There's something darker in play on "Unbearable Mergo" – a Terence Malick score imagined by Dirty Projectors, maybe – but however it moves, this record's every step delights. SHARON O'CONNELL

**SPIRAL STAIRS**  
**Medley Attack!!!** [AWAZING GREASE]

6/10

New lease of life for Pavement man



The man who played guitar in (and coined the name) Pavement, Spiral Stairs has spent an uncertain decade between enjoyable reunions of his old band. Solo records have never quite set the world on fire, and this sixth LP was duly initiated with the feeling that it might mark the end of the line. Coloured by this and bereavement (his bass player Matt Harris passed in 2021), Scott Kannberg has consoled himself with gleaming indie rock. In fine, Stipson voice on "Dry Country", a fair reference point is The Gas: between on "Pressure Drop (End Of The Hurricane)" he maintains the introspective mood, while not being shy of tilting into uplifting, brass-driven "Bos pop". JOHN ROBINSON

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**DEAN SPUNT & JOHN WIESE**  
The Echoing Shell DEAD CITY  
7/10

No Age drummer meets noise legend – no-one emerges unscathed



On The Echoing Shell, the first collaboration between No Age's Dean Spunt and noise/savant éminence grise John Wiese, cut-throat

energy and decisive, 180-degree-turn edits rule the day. The two side-long tracks here take Spunt's percussion – clanging cymbals, hectic drum rolls, vigorous explorations of the kit – and subject them to the surrealist tactics Wiese has perfected through decades of making noise, particularly with fearsome grindcore outfit Sissy Spaoak. If Wiese's previous work reads as unrelenting at times, with Spunt's hot more quizzical, curious, given to sideways glances and sudden jump-cuts. It's tough, but not without a certain oblique sensitivity. **JONDALE**

**STARS**  
From Capetown Hill LAST GANG  
6/10

Ninth album confirms the Canadian indie-pop band still sparkle



"Highly underrated since 2007", Stars' Twitter bio ruefully concedes, perhaps explaining why opener "Palmsistry" is

upbeat chamber pop as Arcade Fire – shorn of their bombast – and why "Pretenders" follows with Johnny Marr-like guitars chiming beneath Amy Millan's sugary tones. "Build A Fire", too, is an air-punching anthem, though Torquil Campbell prefers lighter waving on "To Feel What They Feel", which, like "If I Never See London Again", turns to polished '80s production techniques. They can't shake their melancholy, however, whether directed sweetly on "Back To The End" or reflecting poignantly on "a sea of faces singing all our songs to us" on "Capetown Hill". **WYNNEHAP WALLACE**

**SYLVANESSO**  
No Rules Sandy LOMA VISTA  
8/10

Folk electro duo reboot their indie musings with a dash of rave-pop euphoria



North Carolina electro-folk duo Amelia Meath and Nick Sanborn hit a rich creative seam on their fourth LP,

expanding their indie aesthetic to embrace infectiously bouncy tropical house and rave-pop elements on bittersweet reveries like "Didn't Care" and the lightly glitchy "Your Reality". One key exception is "Coming Back To You", a spine-tingling to-f-a-a-coustic ballad with a fuzzy-sad Mazzy Star feel: "I am the root, I am the leaf, I am the



**LUKE SCHNEIDER**

Celebrating the pedal steel guitar

In 2005 Luke Schneider caught a mind-blowing show by veteran pedal steel player Susan Alcorn at an art gallery in Nashville. "Her performance," he recalls, "was a revelation. I realised that this instrument could be used to make its own statement, outside of any genre, with an infinite palette of unheard sounds and tones."

Nearly 20 years on, Schneider has become one of the most celebrated pedal steel players in Nashville. When Tompkins Square Records asked him to curate an instalment of its Imaginational Anthem series, he knew he had to get Alcorn involved, among others. "I wanted artists who identified as

dedicated pedal steel guitarists, who colour outside the lines – way outside – of traditional genre boundaries."

Subtitled 'Universal Chrome', the collection includes exclusive tracks by BJ Cole, Barry Walker Jr and Spencer Cullum, among others, all of which show the versatility of this notoriously difficult instrument. Schneider even contributes an original composition that conjures a very different mind-blowing experience: visiting Yosemite National Park. "I went there with high expectations and was still over-whelmed. You feel humbled and in alignment with the universe. I tried to approximate that feeling on the pedal steel." **STEPHEN DEUSNER**

big tree you grew beneath", sobs Meath. Longer songs are punctuated by studio chatter, voicemails, birdsong and other ambient sounds, lending the whole project an artificially informal intimacy. **STEPHEN DAWSON**

**JAMIE T**  
The Theory of Whatever POLYDOR  
7/10

More urban vignettes and pungent class clashes



The five years since Tricks is about par for Jamie Treas, the suburban songwriter who, together with Lily Allen and Mike

Skinner, coined a 2000s English argot. His fifth album is like a night-long cab ride through shadowy London corners, from "St George Wharf Tower" (a acoustic tribute to Vauxhall high-rise mothers' brave, brooding dreams, to the swaggering disco of "Keying Lamborghini's" anti-Chelsea girl. There's the Jam influenced "Jas Cars", whose protagonist is treated "with narrow distaste", while brooding piano ballad "50,000 Unmarked Bullets" conjures a war-crimes-investigating, burnt-out bureaucrat even the phone-tappers ignore. "I used to be outgoing," she sighs, "now I barely leave The

Rogue". These empathetic tales teem with life. **NICK MASTED**

**VARIOUS ARTISTS**  
Luke Schneider Presents Imaginational Anthems, Vol. 1: Universal Chrome TOPKINNS SQUARE  
8/10

A sampling of cosmic Americana from the Nashville pedal-steel player and in-cense magnet



Notoriously difficult to play and even more difficult to haul out on tour, the pedal steel guitar is enjoying a renaissance in the 2020s, thanks to its association with the new cosmic pastoral scene mixing country instrumentation and ambient sounds. Universal Chrome, the latest instalment of the excellent Imaginational Anthem series showcasing contemporary folk guitarists, offers a wide-ranging survey of pedal steel innovators, each with a very different style and approach. Susan Alcorn layers mathematical rhythms together like she's solving an impossibly complex equation, while Maggie Björklund unleashes what sounds like a death metal band with true indie Sho-bud Pro. **STEPHEN DEUSNER**

**SHAWN WILLIAMS**  
Wallowin' In The Night SHAWN WILLIAMS  
7/10

Solid set from New Orleans singer-songwriter



When Shawn Williams' fourth album is good, it's great. Her throaty rasp, sardonic lyrics and the confidently

pragmatic band behind her combine, at best, to suggest a spiritual sister to both Lucinda Williams and Chrissie Hynde. "So Tired" is a barely repentant hangover ballad ("I haven't washed my hair in five days... maybe eight"). "Don't Go" a lovely, pedal steel-lashed swoon recalling the tears in the beer melodramas of Patsy Cline, and "Everything You Stood For" a convincing melding of country heartbreak to an alternative backdrop, like Radiohead's "Creep" adapted by Margo Price. **ANDREW MUELLER**

**NEIL YOUNG & PROMISE OF THERAL**  
Noise & Flowers REPRISE  
7/10

Spirited live shows from 2019



Recorded during a European tour, Noise & Flowers is dedicated to Elliott Roberts, Neil Young's close friend and manager

for more than 50 years, who passed away just prior to these shows in 2019. But the album is more of a celebration than a wake, thanks to the Promise Of Theral's youthful exuberance and Young's own ageless spirit. The group are a versatile unit, capable of garage rock abandon and easygoing country rambles. And they go even deeper on a majestically brooding "On The Beach", with icy electric keyboards and menacing percussion cooing an intense performance from Young. For about seven minutes there, the world stops turning. **TYLER WILCOX**

**ZZ TOP** Raw SHELTER/RED  
8/10

Texas boogie legends swagger down memory lane



Raw was recorded in a day at infamous San Antonio-area honky-tonk Gruene Hall – and deployed as a soundtrack to the tremendous 2019 Netflix doc ZZ Top: That Little Ol' Band From Texas.

Raw appears in its own right partly as a memorial for ZZ Top bassist Dusty Hill, who died in 2021. It does him proud. Though the Top live experience has hardly languished unchronicled – there have been four official live albums – this carefully recorded and intimate performance captures their cool command of Texas rock'n'roll better than most. "La Grange", "Legs", "Gimme All Your Lovin'" et al have rarely sounded better. **ANDREW MUELLER**

Furman: songs of connection and (un)belonging

# EZRA FURMAN

## All Of Us Flames

BELLARUN

8/10

**Self-determination, struggle and solidarity, with a high-beam rock'n'roll soundtrack. By Sharon O'Connell**



PLENTY of artists openly protest against their categorisation along genre lines, while many more just quietly resent it, but across five albums

since 2012, Ezra Furman has unabashedly channelled the rock'n'roll classicism of Reed, Dylan, Young and (especially) Springsteen, while repurposing its power to a unique end. In the run-up to 2013's breakthrough, the hectic *Day Of The Dog*, Furman, who came out as a trans woman last year, declared her ambition was to be like Elvis, Buddy Holly or Patti Smith, and though solo identity as a group leader was on her mind there, not glory, with the blazing *All Of Us Flames* she's stepping into the spotlight.

It follows 2019's *Twelve Nudes* and the previous year's *Transangelic Exodius* and though it wasn't planned as part of a trilogy, when the new LP was finished Furman noticed she'd intuitively been developing the themes explored on those earlier records – very real institutional threat and the active oppression of minority communities, including her own. The title is lifted from the single “Book Of Our Names”, whose springboard was the second book of the Hebrew Bible. It sees Furman demanding a space where society's outcasts can freely and safely declare themselves: “I want there to be a book of our names/None of them missing, none quite the same/None of us ashes, all of us flames”. Squint and it could be a Springsteen lyric, but on

this album Furman has translated his politico-personal take on how any of us might make the kind of society we want to belong to and find a part to play in it, into her own (Jewish) faith-based yet hugely humane survival manual. It's religious, not political and defiant, collectivist spirit of these 12 new songs.

Much of the record was written early on in the pandemic, when Furman was driving around Massachusetts in search of a quiet refuge from her overcrowded house, parking up at random and writing in her car. Produced by John Congleton, it flexes some of the same muscles as Sharon Van Etten's *Remind Me Tomorrow* and Angel Olsen's *All Mirrors*, roaring with emotional truth and transformative power, against whatever odds. Speaker-busting single “Forever In Sunset” is the

### SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Train Comes Through
- 2 Throne
- 3 Dressed In Black
- 4 Forever In Sunset
- 5 Book Of Our Names
- 6 Point Me Toward The Real
- 7 Lilac And Black
- 8 Ally Sheedy In The Breakfast Club
- 9 Poor Girl A Long Way From Heaven
- 10 Temple Of Broken Dreams
- 11 I Saw The Truth Undressing
- 12 Come Close

Produced by: John Congleton  
Recorded at: Sargent Records, LA  
Personnel:

Ezra Furman (vocals, guitar), Ben Joseph (keyboard, guitar), Jorgen Jorgensen (bass), Sam Durkes (drums), John Congleton (keyboards, drum machines), Vikram Devasthali (trombone), Josh Johnson (saxophone), Nathaniel Walcott (trumpet), Shannon Lay and Debbie Neiger (backing vocals)

exemplar, and with its road references, high-contrast dynamics and throat-tearing vocal intensity, also Furman's Boss-iest tune yet. Opening the set, though, is “Train Comes Through”, a synth-pop anthem with a slow build to juggernaut urgency, as befits a metaphor for seismic change: “But a great machine can break down suddenly if someone removes a tiny screw/And the solid things will move in all directions when the train comes through”. “Throne” is next, with its bluesy drama, horns and unexpected nod to ‘80s Dylan (circa his “Christian trilogy”), but a switch occurs with the bittersweet, Shangri-La-like theatricality of “Dressed In Black”. There's the odd flash of sly humour, too: Furman describes (herself, perhaps) “an obsessive, detail-oriented heathen few” in “Train Comes Through” and later, in the darkly twinkling “Ally Sheedy In The Breakfast Club” admits, “The black shit on your eyes, your purse full of junk/I built my world on versions of your VHS visage”.

Despite its will to collective power, the record's tone is by no means solely triumphant. With its deceptive sweetness, well-placed “motherfuckers” and suggestion of “Comes A Time” given a Spacebomb rinse, “Point Me Toward The Real” ushers in a run of fragile, more contemplative songs, interrupted only by the ‘80s art pop-edged “Poor Girl A Long Way From Heaven”, which tells of a childhood encounter with God. Most striking in the album's second half are the last two tracks, both unbearably poignant: first is the Prince-y, slow-mo “I Saw The Truth Undressing”; finally, “Come Close”, the tender tale of a brief sexual encounter and the set's only directly autobiographical song, described by Furman to *Uncut* as “an open wound for me, lyrically” and “so intimate it almost scares me”.

*All Of Us Flames* is not a collection of diary entries or part of a memoir in progress. Personal it may be, but the inclusivity of that title betrays Furman's intent: these are songs of connection and (un)belonging for – as “Come Close” has it – “the broken hearted”, “the desperate ones” and “the freaks/s with no place to hide”. A revitalised rock'n'roll soundtrack for a push towards the brightening of the light.

### Q&A

**Ezra Furman: “The aim is to make songs you never forget”**

**How did you initially conceive the new LP?** It wasn't ‘til we finished it that I realised it completed a trilogy. *Transangelic Exodius* was about the downing sense of danger, realising the world's no longer safe. *Twelve Nudes* is that but more: the fury and panic and us-against-the-world mentality turned up to 11. The new one is about facing the fact that the danger is not going away; we have to live with it for the long haul. And how the thing to do at that point

is learn to take care of each other.

**What role does the Bible play?**

I read the Bible more or less constantly. The thing about God is that God's totally infuriated by the abuse of the poor and the otherwise vulnerable. That's one of the main themes throughout the Bible and may be the core of the Jewish message to human civilisation. It's kind of essential to my spiritual and social stance, so I end up making records about it.

**Are all of these songs autobiographical?** “Come Close”

is the only song that contains events that actually happened to me. The god here isn't really confession or even self-expression. It's to make songs that you never forget, songs you can use as armour or sustenance. That's how I use the music in a fan art.

**Who does the record speak to?**

It's an offering to anyone who wants it. I hold my queer and trans listeners particularly dear, and the record is majorly about trans people. Jews, too. But these are songs of love and struggle. I would hope anyone can feel that. **INTERVIEW: SHARON O'CONNELL**



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# LITTLE FEAT

## Waiting For Columbus (Super Deluxe Edition)

REISSUE

Forty-five years later, an expanded revisitation of the Feat at their live best. *By Jon Dale*

**A**SK anyone who was a fan of Little Feat during their initial run – a decade-long stretch from 1969 to '79 where vocalist and guitarist Lowell George, and keyboard player Bill Payne, steered a leaky ship through toil and trouble – and they'll tell you Little Feat's music truly came alive onstage. Much like peers the Grateful Dead, the Feat needed the unpredictable conduction of energy between band and audience, plus the heat-of-the-moment, now-or-never fury of live performance, to take flight. It's no surprise, then, that *Waiting For Columbus* is one of Little Feat's most enduring albums, often included in lists of the greatest live albums of all time; it's also wild to consider how the sextet pulled things together against the odds, and almost in spite of themselves.

They'd already been through a hell of a lot. Little Feat formed in '69, when George left Frank Zappa's Mothers Of Invention, taking bass player Roy Estrada with him, and connected with Payne (whose prehistory included appearing on an obscure garage rock stomper, Something Wild's "Trippin' Out"), and drummer Richie Hayward, who'd previously worked with George in The Factory. They recorded two albums (1971's *Little Feat* and the following year's *Sailor Shoes*) as a quartet before the band temporarily split, with Estrada leaving for Captain

REISSUE  
OF THE  
MONTH  
9/10

Beefheart's Magic Band. Reforming soon after, George and Payne replaced Estrada with guitarist Paul Barrère, bass player Kenny Gradney and percussionist Sam Clayton. The "classic lineup" of Little Feat was thus in place, recording a string of albums across the '70s, though they always seemed to be in some state of complication or confusion; during a temporary split across '73 and '74, for example, members of the group would end up playing with the Doobie Brothers, Robert Palmer and Ike Turner.

The road to *Waiting For Columbus* seemed particularly rocky, though. There were shifts in the intra-band dynamic; George wanted Payne and Barrère to contribute more, but still needed to maintain his

position of dominance in the group. Little Feat's music, which had, for several years, felt genre-agnostic, moving from blues to country to funk to R&B, seemed to be bending towards a more fluid, improvisatory jazz-rock sensibility, which George found a little alienating. His songwriting contributions decreased and others stepped up to the plate, such that by 1977's *Time Loves A Hero*, George's songs felt almost like an afterthought – he simply wasn't coming up with enough material. And while Little Feat were having limited success – Top 40 albums, a good concert draw – they couldn't quite push through to the next level, something that dogged the group through the entirety of their existence.





Peaks of ferocity: Lowell George leads Little Feat in London, August 1977

Band politics and cultural relevance aside, if *Waiting For Columbus* proves anything, it's the elasticity and playfulness with which Little Feat approached their material, with a fearlessness that seemed, somehow, to shoe-horn – and not uncomfortably – the freedoms of jazz and improvisation into the elemental structures of the song. They do this in two ways – in live performance, you can hear them knocking songs into new shapes, improvising passages that lock together effortlessly, taking songs and re-wiring them entirely. The New Orleans funk that became so central to their music is in full display on songs like “Mercenary Territory”; “Dixie Chicken” is stretched out like so much taffy, woven into a beautifully limber groove; Mick Taylor’s guest appearance on “A Apolitical Blues” is instructive both of how malleable a player Taylor was, and how accommodating Little Feat were as a group. But the album itself is also a Frankenstein, pieced together post-production from various shows, with some guitars and bass re-recorded, and most of George’s vocal performances redone.

Thus, there’s real value in the three full live shows that make up the rest of this super deluxe edition. From the evidence here, they lifted some stellar performances from the Washington show for the album. It’s a bit of a shame to not hear other nights from all three cities represented here, though some are buried, no doubt, for good reason – one night from London would come to be known as “Black Wednesday”, performed, as it was, under a cloud of all-night partying, acrimony

and internecine fighting. The August 2, 1977 London show here is a gem, though, the group fully in control, riding the music to peaks of ferocity, but still maintaining a core playfulness. The addition of the Tower Of Power horns gives the songs real heft, and the version of “Mercenary Territory” here is one of their very best. The Washington performance makes up a good portion of the original *Waiting For Columbus*, but it’s great finally to hear the set in full, as by that point, the Feat were a tightly drilled machine.

The revelation of this deluxe edition, though, is the Manchester City Hall set from July 29, 1977. None of the Manchester recordings have been previously released, which, on the evidence, seems a real missed opportunity. The group hadn’t yet been joined by the Tower Of Power brass section – that would come later, in London – so the Manchester set gives a great chance to hear the Feat in six-piece formation. There’s an electricity pulsing between the members of the group, with potent performances of “Fat Man In The Bathrub”, “Rock & Roll Doctor”, and “Oh Atlanta”, though the set really gets expansive with a 10-minute “Dixie Chicken”, where the group prove their improvisational cojones – there’s both sensitivity and fierce conviction in the way they interact here, and an elasticity that can only really come with years of shared illumination.

If the truth be known, each set has its moments of longueurs, while Little Feat were “on” more often than not, they sometimes were given to the overly prolix, and the jazz-rock “Day At The Dog Races” dragged at times – stretching out to 10 minutes and beyond, its vamp on a repetitive riff could meander, though there are some particularly beautiful moments on the Manchester rendition, when things simmer down a little, and Payne lets out little sussurating sighs of liquid keys over a subdued musical palette. It’s moments like these that suggest there was more to the Feat’s dalliance in such music than George clocked at the time – allegedly, when he heard the tapes of the studio version, from *Time Loves A Hero*, George snapped, “What is this? Fuckin’ Weather Report?”

George would often leave the stage while the rest of the group performed “Day At The Dog Races”, a visible marker both of the complex and multiple musical threads being followed by the various group members, and the simmering volatility of the relationships at the heart of Little Feat. But for all this strangeness and unpredictability, listening back to *Waiting For Columbus* – both in its originally released form, and with the appended live sets in this deluxe collection – reinforces the staying power of the music here, an ideal combination of elevated songwriting, musical voraciousness, and the rare alchemy of a group, on stage, in full possession and understanding of their abilities, playing with nuance and sensuousness. That they’d continue to do so, even after the death of their erstwhile leader, Lowell George, in June 1979, is testament to the lasting power of the music here and its ongoing resonance.

Few played it so well, with such generosity of spirit and fluidity of groove, before or since.



#### HOW TO BUY...

## { LITTLE VICTORIES }

The pick of LF’s Lowell George-era studio albums



### Sailin’ Shoes

WARNER BROS, 1972

On their second album, Little Feat’s first lineup effectively capture the breadth of their vision, and Ted Templeman’s production gifts each song its own universe to inhabit. This may be their best collection of songs – see “Sailin’ Shoes”, “Trip Face Boogie”, “Teenage Nervous Breakdown”, and a transcendent reworking of their debut’s “Willin’”. 8/10



### Dixie Chicken

WARNER BROS, 1973

A high point for Lowell George’s songwriting, *Dixie Chicken* was one of the few fully cohesive Little Feat albums, for the way it

intersects what the group had already done, with George’s nascent love for music from New Orleans. It’s clearly signaled by their cover of Allen Toussaint’s “On Your Way Down”, but subtle, implicit groove infects everything here. 9/10



### Feats Don’t Fail Me Now

WARNER BROS, 1974

On *Feats Don’t Fail Me Now*, the classic lineup had fully cohered, and the playing here knocks it out of the park. It’s probably the closest Little Feat got to a true democracy: Bill Payne’s “Oh Atlanta” is one of their finest songs; Paul Barrère’s “Skin It Back” is similarly glorious. Full of grimy energy, it’s Little Feat in excelsis. 9/10



#### SLEEVE NOTES

- Discs 1 & 2**  
Original album, remastered  
**Discs 3 & 4**  
Live at Manchester City Hall, 29 July 1977  
**Discs 5 & 6**  
Live at The Rainbow, London, 2 August 1977  
**Discs 7 & 8**  
Live at Lister Auditorium, Washington, DC, 10 August 1977

**Original album produced by:** Lowell George  
**Personnel:** Lowell George (lead vocals, guitar), Paul Barrère (guitar, vocals), Kenny Gradney (bass guitar), Bill Payne (keyboards, synthesizer, vocals), Richard Adams (drums, vocals), Sam Clayton (congas, vocals), Mick Taylor (lead and slide guitar on “A Apolitical Blues”), Michael Mc Donald & Patrick Simmons (bik vocals on “Red Stevedreamer”), and the Tower Of Power horns: Emilio Costello (tenor saxophone), Greg Adams (trumpet), Lenny Pickett (alto and tenor saxes, clarinet), Stephen “Doc” Kupka (baritone saxophone), Mic Gillette (trombone, trumpet)



**What do you remember of the shows themselves, how they played out for you?**

The band was stellar, we really could put together some good shows. We did our first gigs, as warm-ups, in Manchester, and there's a lot of good energy, it really showcased what the band sounded like without horns. When we got the horn section, that solidified a few things as well. They were all amazing players. What I remember too, was our rhythm section, Sam Clayton, Kenny Gradney and Richie Hayward, they were

just... what's the right word – they were fun to play with, OK, but there was some really serious stuff going on with those guys, in a good way. They really held it together for the band, and were a real joy to work with. Richie Hayward – there's nobody like him on the planet, really! Jimi Hendrix's drummer, Mitch Mitchell, was a fan of Richie Hayward, you know. Virtually every drummer on the planet loves Richie.

**Can you tell me more about Richie's playing?**

He was out of control at times as a player, but he never went over the edge. You were just going, "Oh my God, is he gonna make that come?" These recordings capture that freeness that he played with. He was a big fan of Elvin Jones, who was a jazz player who played with John Coltrane and Miles Davis, all those guys. His use of the cymbals was inspired by Elvin. Kenny Gradney and Sam Clayton came to us from Delaney & Bonnie, so they were used to playing with some heavy hitters too. They were all just a wonderful rhythm section to have.

**Little Feat have been touring lately, playing *Waiting For Columbus* in its entirety. How do you broach the experience of going back to this music?**

The two new members we have, Scott Sharrard and Tony Leone, they came into this band and they said, "Hey, we're gonna do this material that we grew up listening to and studying – we studied Little Feat's music." I told them from the get-go, we're not gonna play that album verbatim. We'll replicate, to a point, the order in which those songs appeared on the album, but we even changed that at one point, to make it a little more set-friendly. **INTERVIEW: JON DALE**

things work. It was not easy. The albums that we had been making in the studio, I would think that with the exception of *Fear Don't Fail Me Now*, they're OK, but none of us could agree whether we liked them or not. So the idea was to go with what Warners, and

probably what we all thought was our strongest suit, which was playing live. And we already had a good collection of music, so that was easy. It was a normal Monty Python skit with bands! [laughs] They built the bridge, the bridge burnt down. They built a castle, the castle got overrun by dragons. It was business as usual, I guess.

**Being in a band is a hothouse environment.**

It is, because of the creativity, because of the direction, who's leading and who's not leading the band. We'd follow Lowell anywhere, but sometimes Lowell was a tough guy to follow. With regards to attitude, he'd think a couple of steps forward, three steps back, one step forward... It was just uneven times. And we were young! None of us had it together in terms of who we were as human beings necessarily. That made it even tougher, I think.

**Top: "None of us had it together," Bill Payne behind the keys in Santa Barbara, California, June 1977**



**Bill Payne: "Things were kind of up in the air for the band at the time"**

**What can you tell me about the times leading up to the shows documented on *Waiting For Columbus*? How was Little Feat going at the time?**

There was a lot of turmoil going on before the decision to do any shows. That was one of the things that Lowell, or maybe Warner Bros... it's a little vague as to who suggested doing these live shows to help us out. Things were a little rocky for the band, you know. But when it came down to putting the shows together, we all solidified as a team and said, it sounds like a good idea. Let's head off to Manchester, do a few shows without the horns, being in the horns towards the end of that, in London, and then do the series of shows in the Rainbow Theatre, and then head over to Washington, where we had a Little Feat stronghold. It was a good plan and the rest is history, as they say. But things were kind of up in the air for the band at the time.

**What was happening to lead to things being 'up in the air'?**

I think mainly there was dissension in the band because we weren't selling a lot of records, there was no agreement on things with how we were recording stuff. We had a high point at one juncture when we did *Fear Don't Fail Me Now*, that was a very good thing for the band, we met [engineer] George Massenburg and etcetera. But after that, it was back to [laughs] beating our heads against the wall trying to make

**"None of us had it together in terms of who we were as human beings"**



The Foundations: throwing soul-infused shapes across a dance floor

# THE FOUNDATIONS

## Am I Groovin' You: The Pye Anthology

CHERRY RED

7/10

Pristine pop-soul from multicultural pioneers. *By Terry Staunton*

ONE of the earliest, most noteworthy chart battles in the UK was fought between Bayswater-based The Foundations and their north London contemporaries The Equals, with both bands striving to be the first mixed-ethnicity outfit to make it to No. 1. The former's debut release, "Baby, Now That I've Found You", triumphed when it reached the top spot in November 1967, eight months before their rivals' "Baby, Come Back" followed suit. The victors had been honing their craft in clubs and dancehalls for two years as The Ramrogs and The Ramrog Sound.

A change of name brought success, but the template remained the same: upbeat soul with singalong, pop-minded aspirations, yet infused with the edgier, grittier elements of Booker T & The MG's or the house band at Motown's Hitsville power base.

While The Foundations only troubled the Top 20 on four occasions, the commercial bounciness of their chart-topper, plus "Back On My Feet Again", "Build Me Up Buttercup" – more of which later – and "In The Bad, Bad Old Days" only tells part of the story outlined on this 3CD anthology. They're particularly in their element on the frenzied "Jerkin' The Dog" (previously a minor US hit for R&B showman The Mighty Hannibal), and the mod strut of "Mr Personality Man". For

the fullest, most vivid portrait of the band in their pomp, the inclusion on this set's third disc of the '68 live album *Rocking The Foundations* is hard to beat. From the Hammond-led funk of the Freddie Scott song that gives this compilation its title, to the

horn-blasting howl of Edwin Starr's "Stop Her On Sight", it's a masterclass in how to confidently throw soul-infused shapes across a dance floor.

All was not well in the ranks, however. Shortly before the album's release, singer Clem Curtis announced he was quitting to try his luck as a solo artist in the US (where he was briefly mentored by Sammy Davis Jr. and played a Las Vegas residency opening for the Righteous Brothers). Diplomatically, he hung around to help run auditions for his replacement, the gig ultimately going to Colin Young. The new boy's arrival saw the release of the group's second-biggest hit; like its predecessors, "Build Me Up Buttercup" came from the pen of their longtime producer Tony Macaulay (writing in tandem with Manfred Mann's own new singer, Mike D'Abo), its structure intentionally aping material Holland-Dozier-Holland were fashioning for The Four Tops – a play rewarded by a spell at No. 1 in the American trade magazine *Cash Box* chart.

But the relationship with Macaulay was becoming increasingly strained, largely because of his reluctance to allow the group to contribute self-penned material. The recording of 1969's *Digging The Foundations* displeased some members, unhappy with having to play, especially, a version of "Let The Heartaches Begin",



# SLEEVE NOTES

CD-L From The Foundations—Mono  
1 Baby Now That I've Found You  
2 I Can Take Or Leave Your Loving  
3 Hold Me Just A Little While Longer  
4 Come On Back To Me  
5 Lovels-A-Five Letter Word  
6 Call Me  
7 Show Me  
8 Jerkin' The Dog  
9 A Whole New Thing  
10 The Writing's On The Wall  
11 Mr Personality Man  
Bonus Tracks  
12 Back On My Feet Again (mono)  
13 Any Old Time You're Lonely Or Sad (mono)  
14 We Are Happy People  
15 It's All Right

16 Build Me Up Buttercup (mono)  
17 A New Direction From The Foundations (renew)  
18 Baby Now That I've Found You  
19 I Can Take Or Leave Your Loving  
20 Hold Me Just A Little While Longer  
21 Come On Back To Me  
22 Lovels-A-Five Letter Word  
23 Call Me  
24 Show Me  
25 Jerkin' The Dog  
26 A Whole New Thing  
27 The Writing's On The Wall  
28 Mr Personality Man  
CD2:  
1 Am I Groovin' You (studio)  
2 Harlem Shuffle (studio)

3 Tomorrow (studio)  
4 Give Me Love Digging The Foundations  
5 My Little Chickadee  
6 'Til Night Brought Day  
7 Waiting On The Shores Of Nowhere In The Bad Sad Old Days Before You Loved Me  
9 A Penny Sir  
10 I Can Feel It  
11 Take Away The Emptiness Too  
12 Let The Heartaches Begin  
13 A Walk Through The Trees  
14 That Same Old Feeling  
15 Solomon Grundy  
Bonus tracks  
16 Baby Now That I've Found You (Colin Young vocal)

17 Born To Live, Born To Die  
18 Why Did You Cry  
19 Baby I Couldn't See  
20 Take A Girl Like You  
21 I'm Gonna Be A Rich Man  
22 Who Am I  
23 In The Beginning  
CD3: Rocking The Foundations Live  
1 Lovels All Right (The Horse)  
2 People Are Funny  
3 Harlem Shuffle  
4 Comin' Home Baby  
5 Tomorrow  
6 Am I Groovin' You  
7 Back On My Feet Again  
8 Any Old Time You're Lonely And Sad  
9 Things Get Better  
10 The Look Of Love  
11 Stop Her On Sight  
SCS

12 We Are Happy People  
Bonus tracks  
13 90 Tears  
14 Where The Fire Burns  
15 Build Me Up Buttercup (stereo)  
16 Back On My Feet Again (stereo)  
17 Any Old Time You're Lonely And Sad (stereo)  
Clem Curtis  
18 Mountain Over The Hill  
19 Time Alone Will Tell  
20 I've Never Found A Girl (To Love Me Like You Do)  
21 Point Of No Return  
22 Stand By Your Man  
New Foundations (Featuring Colin Young)  
23 Something For My Baby  
24 I Need Your Love

# AtoZ

## This month...

P40 CHEMICAL BROTHERS  
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P47 PAUL WELLER  
P47 FRANK ZAPPA

## BLONDIE Against The Odds 1974-1982

UP/THE REPUBLIC GROUP

9/10

Their first eight years boxed

Even if they hadn't included a song about West Side Story on their 1976 debut, Blondie would still have been the quintessential New York band, with their hands in seemingly every scene in the city. After covering The Shangri-Las' "Out In The Streets" during their first recording session—demos for which are included in this generous boxed set—the band fused girl-group pop with outer-boroughs garage rock and Bowers punk on their first two full-lengths. In 1978 *Parallel Lines*, their best album, bridged CBGB with Studio 54, thanks to the flashy sheen provided by producer Mike Chapman. "Heart Of Glass" was a legitimate disco hit (the demo here is even called "Disco Song"), rarity "Pseudo Rico" embraces the Latin music explosion in the Bronx, and their 1980 hit "Rapture" gave a shout-out to Fab Five Freddy and the burgeoning hip-hop scene. The bonus material proves just as revelatory as the remastered albums, as *Against The Odds* doubles as a shadow history of the city's creative heyday. **Extras:** 8/10. Liner notes from Uncut contributor Erin Osmon, a trove of demos and rarities. STEPHEN MCGRAW

## DAVID BOWIE The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars (50th Anniversary Half-Speed Master)

EMI

8/10

Not bad half-speed master of Bowie's 10/10 breakthrough

To mark Ziggy's 50th anniversary and in lieu of a larger boxed set, the Bowie estate have released this reasonably priced reissue of the 1972 classic. It's a half-speed master pressed on a customised vintage lathe taken

the Macaulay ballad that had been a UK No 1 for Long John Baldry two years earlier (knocking "Baby, Now That I've Found You" off the top spot, in fact) and the producer's lightweight "That Same Old Feeling", which would later see chart action when covered by Pickettywitch.

To be fair, The Foundations' overhaul of the Baldry track has a lot going for it; a quickening of tempo gives the song the air of an early Drifters hit with a smidgen of The Isley Brothers on the side, while the same album's "Take Away The Emptiness" possesses the finger-clicking fizz of Chairman Of The Board at their best. Ties with Macaulay were severed the following year (he would go on to write million-sellers for David Soul), and although singles like "Take A Girl Like You", the theme song to the Hayley Mills movie of the same name, adhered closely to the Macaulay formula, the hits days were over.

The band finally got their wish when the Young-penned "I'm Gonna Be A Rich Man" was chosen as the A-side for what would turn out to be their last single, but while its bluesy psychedelia was representative of the harder direction they wanted to pursue, fans were in no hurry to go with them.

Curtis returned to the UK in the late '70s to front a new band bearing The Foundations name, resulting in a legal wrangle with a similar ad hoc lineup put

## A quickening of tempo gives "Let The Heartaches Begin" the air of an early Drifters hit

together by Young (compilers of this set include recordings by both). Young later toured in another permutation of the group with original guitarist Alan Warner (who still shepherds a lineup today), following renewed interest when "Build Me Up Buttercup" featured prominently in the 1999 comedy *There's Something About Mary*. Yet their influence goes further than just their own trailblazing hits: their hybrid of white pop and black soul was a torch carried forward into the '70s and '80s by the likes of Hot Chocolate and The Beat, while Lymnal Golding of The Specials has cited seeing The Foundations on the Midlands club circuit in the '60s as a seismic inspiration.

## Q&A

Foundations guitarist **Alan Warner**: "One of the first try-outs was Rod Stewart"

**Did being the first multicultural chart-toppers make headlines when it happened?** It did, yes. We were three white guys, three black guys, and a keyboard player from Sri Lanka, or Ceylon as it was back then, and we often thought, 'Wouldn't it be great to be the first mixed-race group at No 1?' The make-up of the band surprised a lot of audiences, but there was a growing wave of support for what we were doing, from the music papers as well as fans.

**Your Motown and Stax influences were clear from the start, but wasn't the initial plan to have two vocalists, as a nod to Sam & Dave?** Yeah, and we very nearly had a future superstar in the group. We wanted a white guy to play off Clem [Curtis, lead singer], and one of the first try-outs was Rod Stewart. He was very

upfront about having other offers which he ultimately took up, and then we giggled for a while with Arthur Brown, before he went off to do his Crazy World thing.

**Did it feel like Tony Macaulay was painting you into a corner when you wanted to explore less pop-minded avenues?**

Not doing our own material was frustrating, as was taking orders from a guy who was younger than most of us! We did get a psychedelic thing called "New Direction" on the flip of "Buttercup", but it was clear Tony didn't like it! Mind you, he wrote the songs that continue to give me a career, so I shouldn't grumble! **INTERVIEW: TERRY STALANTON**



from a 1920s digital version of the Trident masters, so is extremely crisp with a wider range, but lacks a little of the oomph and sensuality of the 1972 release. That's particularly noticeable with the first few numbers on each side, although it does seem to improve as we get deeper into each side, with this edition's "Rock'n'Roll Suicide" making for a particularly thrilling denouement. If you need a new copy, this isn't a bad option, although it will be unlikely to replace the original in your affections. There's also a new picture disc version for those seeking to complete their Bowie collection or looking for something nice to put on the wall.

**Extras:** None.

**PETER WATTS**

## THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS

### *Dig Your Own Hole: 25th Anniversary Deluxe Edition*

UNISC

9/10

*Tom Rowlands and Ed Simons add five unreleased tracks to their most action-packed outing*



Arriving straight at No 1 in April 1997, the Chemical Brothers' second album confirmed big beat's conquest of charts and dancefloors alike. But what with its relentless pace, its menacing mood and the 23 Skidoo sample driving "Block Rockin' Beats", *Dig Your Own Hole* now feels less of a piece with the cheerier output of UK peers like Fatboy Slim than the grittier dance-punk and electroclash scenes just beginning to coalesce in Brooklyn and Berlin. The highlights of this 25th-anniversary edition's bonus tracks, "I Love Tekno (Ah Mix)" emphasises the brothers' debt to similarly dark strains of bleep techno and hardcore, while "Cylanders" adds an edge of doom-laden dub to a serene landscape of ambient house. An alternate mix of "Where Do I Begin" also rescues Beth Orton's dreamy vocals from the original's unholly maelstrom.

**Extras:** 7/10. Double-CD and triple-vinyl editions include five unreleased tracks. **JASON ANDERSON**

## THE CRIBS

### *The New Fellas* (reissue, 2005)

SONICBLVD

7/10

*Wakefield trio's second album still sounds scrappy, spiky and fun*



The Cribs' second album captures a time when they transitioned from a burgeoning, yet cult, West Yorkshire act into nationwide indie-disco floor fillers. The track that facilitated that shift is the opening "Hey Scenesters", a scrappy but melodic anthem that captured the band's ability to merge pop hooks

with jagged guitars. Released as part of a reissue campaign of their first three albums, *The New Fellas* was produced by Edwyn Collins just before his cerebral haemorrhage, and remains a charming piece of pop-kissed wonky indie. "Mirror Kissers" still sounds urgent and, most notably, fun, full of spiky guitars and raucous vocals, while moments like "It Was Only Love" capture a softer side to a band who probably have more in common with the ragged DIY spirit of Records or Kill Rock Stars than the British indie landfill crowd they often get bundled in with.

**Extras:** 9/10. Twenty-two additional tracks of outtakes and demos.

**DANIEL DYLAN WRAY**

## DUET EMMO

### *Or So It Seems* (reissue, 1983)

MUTE

7/10

*Experimental early-'80s electronica fusion of Mute and Wire*



Just after Christmas in 1981, Daniel Miller of The Normal headed to Blackwing Studio in South London with Wire's Graham Lewis and Ed Gilbert – then in their experimental and quite noisy post-Wire band Dome – to spend the week before the start of 1982 recording an album together. They called themselves Duet EMMO – an anagram of Dome and Mute – and produced a typically abstract and avant-garde piece of electronica, reissued on double vinyl and CD. It contains a wealth of ambition and ideas, with the nine-minute title track coming in like a lo-fi Pink Floyd, a pop-epic recorded in a hurry and on a budget that best captures Miller and Dome's similar but contrasting styles. "The First Person" is a clever reworking of an old Dome track, "Long Sledge" is a largely rhythmless study of sonic texture, while additional track "Heart Off Hearts", a former B-side, ends things with a trippy if sometimes abrasive long farewell.

**Extras:** None.

**PETER WATTS**

## ELMER GANTRY'S VELVET OPERA

### *Long Nights Of Summer*

CHERRY

6/10

*First ever complete anthology of '60s psych warriors*



After supporting Pink Floyd in early 1967, the Five Proad Walkers tuned in, turned on, dropped the R&B covers and exchanged their mod threads for beads and kaftans, re-emerging as psych adventurers Elmer Gantry's Velvet Opera. Their first single "Flames" – a pounding psych-rocker reminiscent of Deep Purple's "Hush" – was included on *The Rock Machine Turns You On* sampler alongside tracks by Moby Grape and Spirit, and was much admired by Robert Plant. There were Peel sessions, a great drug song ("Mary Jane") that earned the obligatory BBC ban and a self-titled album, original and alluring enough to qualify as a minor psych classic. All are included on this three-disc set along with their second album, 1969's *Ride A Hooter's Dream*. Yet by 1970 the group had disbanded, their clouds of glory trailing into oblivion. The evidence here says they deserved better.

**Extras:** 6/10. Outtakes, BBC radio sessions, 6,000-word essay.

**NIGEL WILLIAMSON**

## FAUST

### *The Faust Tapes* (reissue, 1973)

BURGESS

8/10

*German experimentalists' unlikely bestseller remains very strange*



Before signing the Sex Pistols and launching a vanilla cola, the Virgin empire's brashiest act may have been filling record shops with 49p-priced copies of Faust's not-quite-third album in 1973, thereby luring unsuspecting consumers into a nightmare world of krautrock bricolage.

surrealist tomfoolery and other sanity-endangering assaults on the senses (his provocation's impact on Mark E. Smith and Nurse With Wound's Steven Stapleton soon became all too clear). Consisting of recordings originally made by the band after 1972's *So Far* and then cut into a collage by producer Uwe Netelbeck, *The Faust Tapes* remains enthralling, terrifying, hilarious, assaultive and unexpectedly funky in roughly equal measure. And whether first-time listeners are more drawn to the psych-pop prettiness of "Flashback Caruso" or the muted stomp of "Elerimomvid", they are likely to be just as awed and befuddled as those original buyers.

**Extras:** 8/10. Reproduces original Bridget Riley cover. **JASON ANDERSON**

## THE FINN BROTHERS

### *Finn* (reissue, 1995)

NEEDLUPHYSIOLOGY

8/10

*Neil and Tim's junkyard glory, with an extra LP*



The most interesting period of Neil Finn's long career is undoubtedly Crowded House's *Together Alone* (1993), his solo

debut *Try Whistling This* (1998) and, sandwiched between them, this low-key collaboration with brother Tim. There's a strong McCartney vibe, with a hushed, exploratory feel, copious instrument swapping and a starring role for an archaic Chamberlin. Within are some of the Finns' strongest songs, often subtler than usual, from Neil's piano ballad "Last Day Of June" to Tim's deliciously stoned "Wood Swinging Man". Meanwhile, they're rarely been braver than they were on the clattering "Nwha", with its gorgeously subversive solo.

**Extras:** 7/10. An extra platter includes embryonic demos for Crowded House's *Woodface* – an interesting addition but strangely divorced in years and content from the Finn album – and limited-edition signed 12" print.

**TOM SPINNOCK**



Faust in 1971: (l-r) Jean-Hervé Pernon, Rudolf Sessa, Hans-Joachim Irmler, engineer Kurt Graupner



St John in the studio, recording her last proper album, 1974

# BRIDGET ST JOHN

From There/To Here: UK/US Recordings (1974-1982)

8/10

Bridging the Atlantic: maxi-skirt chanteuse's lost decade revisited. By Jim Wirth



**SPEAKING** In the mid-1970s, singer-songwriter Bridget St John was aware that her personal musical golden age was over.

"It's not enough to make nice records any more," she told the *Liquorice* fanzine. "You've got to have a whole campaign behind you." A slightly untethered free spirit, St John struggled to adapt to a more bread-headed world, with this 3CD boxset, stacked with unheard recordings, capturing the Nico-voiced bohemian's curious and woolly attempts to stay artistically upright in a time when being a John Peel show regular was no longer quite enough.

The poster girl of Peel's Dandelion record label, the Surrey-born doctor's daughter carved out a niche on the teacher-training-college-gig circuit at the turn of the 1970s with a run of three winsome LPs: *Ask Me No Questions*, *Songs For The Gentle Man* and *Thank You For...* Initially encouraged to write by John Martyn (who she met while bunking off from her studies at Sheffield University), her deep, reedy voice featured on Kevin Ayers' *Shooting At The Moon* and Mike Oldfield's *Ormadown* as she became a feature of the post-psychedic UK underground landscape.

However, after Polydor pulled the plug on Dandelion in late 1972, times got less groovy. St John recorded a one-off single for MCA, "Passing Thru", before a new manager, Steeleye Span hustler Jo Lustig, managed to snare her an album deal with Chrysalis. An exhausted Martyn cried off producing 1974's *Jumble Queen*, but stand-in Leo Lyons did a stand-up job.

The Ten Years After bassist's sensitive accompaniments and orchestral arrangements (most notably on "Song For The Waterden Widow") help to make St John's last "proper" album to date perhaps her best. There are shades of Ayers on opener "Sparrowpit" – named after the Derbyshire village St John retreated to after splitting with her husband – while the mournful "I Don't Know If I Can Take It" might have been a commercial winner if Judy Collins had recorded it. Gawkily whimsy helped to make St John's early LPs cult favourites, but *Jumble Queen* has a more weathered take on love 1970s style.

"Last Goodnight" bristles at the limitations of open-door relationships ("If we made any promises, we never wrote them down", she sings sadly), and St John writes unashamedly about being the opposite of a hippie house momma on the strange, stately title track ("I know I'm unable to

## SLEEVE NOTES

CD 1: *Jumble Queen*  
Tracks 1-10

Further UK Recordings

- 11 3rd Australia
- 12 Bumper To Bumper
- 13 Grow
- 14 Nancy Alice (Later)
- 15 Just Like A Woman (Battered Ornaments Version)
- 16 Little Song (Take 2)
- \*Previously Unreleased

CD 2: *Take The Fifth*  
Tracks 1-17

CD 3: *The New York Sessions*

- 1 Moody
- 2 Easy Come Easy Go
- 3 Curious And Woolly (New York Version)
- 4 Castaway (New York Simpler Version)
- 5 What Am I Supposed To Do (New York 1976)
- 6 Some Kind Of Beautiful (New York Rock Version)
- 7 I Need It Sometimes (Roxby Recorders Version)
- 8 Face To Face (Roxby Recorders Version)
- 9 Come Up And See Me Sometime
- 10 Keep You In Touch
- 11 Talk To Me (Roxby Recorders Version)
- 12 Crazy Heart (Unknown Version)
- 13 Feel My Love (Roxby Recorders Version)
- 14 Help Him Through It (Roxby Recorders Version)
- 15 Flying For Now (Unknown Version)
- 16 Sunside Up (Roxby Recorders Version)
- 17 Curious And Woolly (Right Track Version)
- \*Previously Unreleased

rise/The dishes are dirty, my hands are unclean"). Languid closer "Long Long Time" offers some hope that love might somehow redeem all, but St John's position – in love and life – was probably better summed up by her line on the Nick Drake-ish "Want To Be With You": "Floundering in promises, holding on to dreams".

In the immediate aftermath of *Jumble Queen*, Chrysalis dropped her, while Elton John's Rocket label flirted with picking her up, only to sign Kiki Dee. A note from publicist Al Clark reproduced in the booklet accompanying this set shows that Virgin records boss Richard Branson was considering releasing St John's dolorous take of Perry Como smash "Catch A Falling Star" ("A cassette of this is now in Richard's possession and is being considered with optimism... and caution," it reads), but the phone call never came.

St John might sensibly have quit then, but *From There/To Here* shows how she found new impetus after an ill-starred romantic adventure took her to New York in 1976. She found a new home and community in Greenwich Village, playing and recording fitfully until the birth of her daughter Cristy in 1983 changed her priorities. Honking 1980s sax perhaps obscures the quality of the songs on the second disc (previously released as *Take The Fifth*), but if St John's sleeveless show her frustration at her inability to land another record deal ("I imagine I had no MTV appeal," she says) this collection suggests she may have had more fun trying and failing than she ever would have done succeeding. With modern firebrands Steve Gunn and Ryley Walker now enlisting her as a collaborator, St John's fuzzy cachet remains undiminished. In the long run, making nice music was enough after all.

**Extras:** 7/10. An unheard studio version of the whimsical "Nancy Alice" (as performed for Peel) and a languid "Just Like A Woman" (featuring the Battered Ornaments) will delight Night Ride ultras, while a third disc focuses on more unissued recordings, a Morrissey-Mullen-assisted "Moody", "It's What It Is" and "Flying For Now" the greatest lost hits of St John's New York years.

## O&A

**Bridget St John on discovering America**

**You ended up in rural Derbyshire at the start of this period: how did that happen?**

I left London to live in Manchester; I was married and my husband went driving one day in the Pennines, and he saw this little house and it was only £3,000. So we decided to get it, and when we split up, I moved out there. I didn't even know how to build the fire.

**Jumble Queen is quite a bleak record, no?** I never thought of *Jumble Queen* as a divorce album,

but it was a very painful break-up. I was just really lost and finding myself. There was also the three-day week at that time and to me it felt as desperate as some things feel now. The album was my way of trying to put into words how I felt – just wanting a safe place, and not feeling that the world was a very safe place then.

**You moved to New York in 1976 – was it love at first sight?** People said you're going to hate New York because you love the peace and quiet, but as soon as I got here it felt like I'd come home. Physically it's a really small space

with millions of people. It's like that concentrated orange juice you have to add water to. New York is like drinking that concentrate. There was so much music in a small area, so moving to New York was like going from isolation to an amazing inclusion in a community. It was a different beginning. I've been here more than 40 years now. I played in clubs but I also did management. I was very involved in the other side of music as well. I never felt like I stopped, though. I stepped back sometimes, but I have my guitars. I'm still playing. In my mind I'm still creating.

INTERVIEW: JIM WIRTH



Pickwick Records  
band The Primitives:  
(l-r) Tony Conrad,  
Lou Reed, Walter De  
Maria and John Cale

## LOU REED

Words & Music,  
May 1965

LIGHT IN THEATRE

8/10

The roots of Lou, untangled.  
By Alastair McKay



IN 1965, Lewis Reed was a half-formed thing. In fluctuating quantities he was a street poet, a reporter, a Greenwich Village folkie, a comedian, a pop hack. He had his own ideas, some of them borrowed, a few of them blue. He was an experiment. He wasn't yet an original. Run the tape backwards – to 1963/4, say – and it's evident that Reed's metamorphosis was speeding up. Back then, when two years in pop history was an age, the Dylanisms came loaded with harmonica and deference to the workmanlike chug of the blues. Peer back further, into the mists of Reed's teenage imagination, and you'll hear the innocent joy of doo-wop, but also a pre-echo of The Velvet Underground's last proper album, *Loaded*, from 1970. The end and the beginning were the same.

As an act of archaeology, *Words & Music, May 1965* is an understated triumph. The album is the first fruit of an exploration of the Reed archive, excavated from the office of Sister Ray Enterprises Inc in New York's West Village. The collection reaches from Reed's final performance in 2013, back to his high school band, The Shades, from 1958. Over 600 hours of tapes were found and catalogued. The bulk of this album comes from 1965, from a 5" reel-to-reel tape that was found in a package Reed had mailed to himself at his parents' house in Freeport, New York, as proof of copyright.

Deep context is provided by the inclusion of that 1958 rehearsal tape of The

### SLEEVE NOTES

**Audiophile 45 RPM  
12" LP1**  
May 1965 Demo  
A1 I'm Waiting For  
The Man  
A2 Men Of Good  
Fortune  
B1 Heroin  
B2 Too Late  
B3 Butterscup  
Song

**Audiophile 45 RPM  
12" LP2**  
May 1965 Demo  
C1 Walk Alone  
C2 Buzz Buzz  
C3 Pale Blue Eyes  
D1 Stockpile  
D2 Wrap Your  
Troubles In  
Dreams  
D3 I'm Waiting  
For The Man -  
Alternate Version

**7" 45RPM EP  
A1 Gee Whiz -  
1958 Rehearsal  
A2 Baby, Let Me  
Follow You Down  
- 1963/64 Home  
Recordings  
B1 Michael, Row  
The Boat Ashore  
- 1963/64 Home  
Recordings  
B2 Don't Think  
Twice, It's All  
Right (Part 1) -  
1963/64 Home  
Recordings  
B3 W & X, Y & Z  
Blues - 1963/64  
Home Recordings  
B4 Lou's 12-Bar  
Instrumental -  
1963/64 Home  
Recordings**

Shades doing a song called "Gee Whiz", with Reed on guitar and lower harmony vocals. The Shades were a doo-wop group who recorded one single (as The Jades) for Time Records. The rehearsal tape is a fragment. It captures Reed and lead singer Phil Harris toying around with the tune. Harris suggests the song could be modified. Reed argues for another key, saying, "What do ya have to lose?" The discussion is unresolved, but it's an interesting moment. Bob & Earl's "Gee Whiz" is a fragile, floating thing, anchored in an idealised notion of teenage romance. It is insecurity, communicated with vocal purity. Reed and Harris's approach is more knowing. Heavenly perfection is beyond them, and their efforts bristle with the tidal energy of surf music.

That, though, is a road not taken. Just as Reed modified his singing voice to something approaching the murmur of his mind's internal dialogue, so he learned to wrap his sincerity in the ambiguity of character. Listening to songs such as "Heroin", "I'm Waiting For The Man" and "Pale Blue Eyes" in their earliest stages releases them from the bondage of Reed's persona. There are two passes at "I'm Waiting For The Man". The first strides

out like a Johnny Cash gunslinger, but there's a hint of the nursery in the circular twang of the tune. The conversational parts are acted out comically, with John Cale playing the dislocated white boy as an English pop, before a harmonica solo drags the narrative up the stairwell. The second take is faster with the comedy subdued, but the rhythm jitters until it implodes. On "Heroin", Reed delivers a near catatonic performance with blurred diction and hesitant two-chord guitar, but the tune rushes as the narrative develops. There are lyrical anomalies – a squirt instead of a shoot – but the song is basically complete. "Pale Blue Eyes" is similarly hesitant, with Reed and Cale's bruised harmonies bringing it home. There are many lyrical differences, but the chorus's exhausted melancholy is intact.

These sketches give a sense of how Reed's songs would be finessed. The less familiar tunes reverse the telescope, throwing the focus on the way Reed bulked his writing muscles, toying with novelty and genre. Just as "Heroin" shows the influence of Reed's poetic sensibilities, songs such as "Buzz Buzz Buzz" and "The Butterscup Song" illustrate the playfulness that developed from (or perhaps earned him) his job as a staff writer at Pickwick Records, winning credits on songs by bands such as The Beachnuts, The Roughnecks and Spongy And The Dolls. Songs in this context were exercises that could be elevated with a modicum of wit. "The Butterscup Song" is a novelty, verging on Monty Python parody, with Reed and Cale just about making it to the end of a lyric that tips a wink to bestiality and an androgynous goldweed.

In terms of understanding what worked, Reed is at his best when he eschews the blues and dumps the harmonica. What these early sketches show is that by combining novelty and songcraft with the soul of a poet, Reed could reach higher. Humour could sweeten his morbid imagination. Plus – no minor

consideration – John Cale was a great foil, challenging but not erasing Reed's rock'n'roll manners.

And so it begins, as Cale takes the vocal on "Wrap Your Troubles In Dreams".

It's a folk nursery rhyme, musing on death, yet it sounds like something from *Bogusss*, a warring of innocence that is both comforting and disturbing. Suddenly everything is in place.





Fela Kuti: elegant expressions of frustration

**FELA KUTI**  
**Roforofo Fight** (reissue, 1972)

UNIVERSAL  
9/10  
Anniversary reissue of serene Afrobeat double



Double the length of many Fela albums, *Roforofo Fight* was originally released in 1972 in two parts – but it had a lot of innovation and vocation to pack in. This 50th-anniversary vinyl reissue comes in a fancy edition, but what is contained within it focuses on less luxurious experience. Urban unrest, overzealous police, even traffic problems... the fuel for the album is agitation, but it finds its expression in nuanced and elegant music. The opening title track finds Fela in amused dialogue with himself as the song races away, his brass section unleashing a furious melody against Tony Allen's rhythm. The sedate "Go Slow" (Lagos traffic as metaphor for bureaucratic deadlock) allows the horns to spread out, as they do again on the closing "Trouble Sleep Yanga Wake Arm", an engrossing, melancholic (and the best) tune. What's remarkable 50 years on is how, at the heart of Fela's displeasure with the status quo, there is a composure that enables it to rise above – and elevate anyone who hears it.

Extras: None. **JOHN JOHNSON**

**MOEBIUS**  
**Solo Works – Kollektion 7** (Compiled by Asmus Tietjens)

BUREAU  
8/10  
Playful, pop-fascist solo material by electronics pioneer



Unlike many of his peers in German electronic music, Dieter Moebius was a miniaturist at heart. Whether working with Hans-Joachim Roedelius in Cluster and Harmonia, or collaborating with figures like Brian Eno, Conny Plank, Mani Neumeier and Mayo Thompson, the core of Moebius's art was to reduce, never to impose, but to always be present. It's something Asmus Tietjens, compiler of *Solo Works*, effortlessly grasps about Moebius's solo music, too. Moebius was a musician of great personality who made his statements clearly and plainly and then moved on – whether the hissing lagoon of fuzz in "Flag", or the spring-loaded toy trunks of "Hoffnungsschimmer", there's usually one key idea in a Moebius piece that he explores intently, but with great sense of play. *Solo Works* lucidly displays this focus, but also proves Tietjens's argument that Moebius made pop music: everything here is somehow both smartly and stupidly catchy.

Extras: None. **JONDALE**

**THE MOVERS**  
**Vol.1: 1970-1976**

ANALOG AFRICA  
7/10  
Eclectic vintage grooves from soulful South Africans



One of the first black South African bands to cross over to white radio, The Movers brought an Americanised soul-pop energy to the hugely influential homegrown vernacular township sound Mbaqanga. This latest classy archive anthology from crate-digger label Analog Africa showcases the

impressive stylistic range these township superstars covered in just a few short years, switching between vocal and instrumental albums, drawing from funk and reggae and jazz. Alongside bubbly, bouncy beat-pop like "Give It Five" or "More" we find the ska-inflected "Balele", the sparkly guitar lines and choral swells of "Soweto Inn", and the soulful sophistication of "Ku-Ku-Chi", all generously laced with keyboard player Sankie Choumyane's Booker T-style organ surges. If this consistently charming retrospective sounds like the work of several different bands, that is because it essentially is. The Movers were always in flux, with new singers and players joining throughout their early-1970s prime, and no original members left by the end of the decade.

Extras: None. **STEPHENDALTON**

**PAVEMENT**  
**Scanted And Enchanted/**  
**Courting Shutdown Offers**

IMPASTO  
9/10  
Brilliant debut reissued with bonus cassette



Pavement's landmark debut is reissued in red and white splatter vinyl for its 30th anniversary and it remains an almost perfect album. An excellent deluxe reissue originally arrived in 2002, but this edition is accompanied by the previously unreleased *Courting Shutdown Offers*, a replica of the cassette the band sent to labels in a bid to get a record deal. Lovingly recreated on D60 with hand-drawn tracklisting, this is essentially the same album as *Scanted And Enchanted*, but in a different running order and a bit more lo-fi. Some of the titles are different – "Our Singer", for instance, is called "Pillowjack", and "In The Mouth A Desert" is "Pain Smiles" – while rarities "My First Mine", which was released on Bessie's in 1991, and "Summer Babe" B-side "Baptist Blacktick" make appearances. Although it's a little disconcerting hearing a familiar album in the wrong order with additional tracks, it makes for a neat novelty – although with no digital download on offer, you need to be in possession of a genuine tape deck to get anything out of it.

Extras: 8/10. Coloured vinyl; *Courting Shutdown Offers* cassette. **PETER WATTS**

**ERIK SATIE**  
**Old Sequins And Ancient**  
**Breastplates: Historical**  
**Recordings 1926-61**

9/10  
A four-disc voyage through antique recordings of his piano music and much more



Satie's life was almost a piece of performance art: someone who dressed for a time only in identical brown corduroy suits

(with matching hats), ate only white food and created his own church (membership: himself). Even the "k" in his first name was a Jimi Hendrix-style affectation. There have been single-artist collections of his piano music before, but never a range of recordings as varied as this mammoth four-disc release. Rarities include a 1961 performance of "Socrates", Satie's "symphonic poem" for solo voice and orchestra; a piano duet dedicated to Stravinsky, played in the early 1950s by Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale; and a load of antique piano recordings made in the four decades after Satie's 1925 death (pianists like Aldo Ciccolini and William Masselos reject the forced romanticism and rubato that characterise many modern readings). There's also a wonderfully silly conversation between John Cage and Morton Feldman that references Satie's ambient music (or "furnishing music", as he called it), suggesting that Satie invented much of the sonic world we inhabit.

Extras: None. **JOHN LEWIS**

**STEELEYE SPAN**  
**Good Times Of Old England:**  
**Steeleye Span 1972-1983**

CHRISTLES  
7/10  
British folk-rock hit-makers chart the course of a wild decade



By 1972, Steeleye Span had three albums under their belt, and almost as many changes in lineup. With Martin Carthy and Ashley Hutchings taking leave of the group, Steeleye Span lost their keenest traditionalists, which set the scene for some significant shifts: new members, new management, new label, newly straightforward approach. Subsequent albums, like that year's *Below The Salt* and 1973's *Parrot Of Rogues*, offer idiosyncratic takes on the rough-hewn electrified rock of the first few Steeleye lineups. The capella "Gaudete", from the former, was an unexpected hit; a few years later, "All Around My Hat" reached the Top 10 and became their signature tune. By 1980's *Sols Of Silver* they were too epic and rock-reverent, but there's still plenty of intrigue if you dig deeper: 1976's *Rocker Cottage* is, in part, an underrated experimental gem.

Extras: 8/10. 36-page booklet, studio outtakes and three live concerts complete the set. **JONDALE**



The Movers: always in flux

**THE MOVERS**



# { REDISCOVERED }

Uncovering the underrated and overlooked



Tall Dwarfs:  
Alec Bathgate  
and Chris Knox

## TALL DWARFS

Unravelled: 1981-2002

PERIOD  
8/10

Kiwi '80s duo reappraised on 55-track anthology



TALL Dwarfs emerged among a handful of standout '80s punk-adjacent acts from New Zealand, bubbling up in the wake of iconic label Flying Nun's founding; and they tread a familiar path – locally beloved, but otherwise more obscure, an intriguing and essential layer in the country's cultural underground. They were born out of cult band Toy Love, who were at one point so popular they made the hop to Sydney, on the promise of a springboard to London, but were swiftly met and then rejected by head-scratching pub-rock punters who didn't get it. Crestfallen, Dwarfs co-founders Chris Knox and Alec Bathgate retreated home to Dunedin, bought a four-track and began experimenting, determined to never again fall prey to the music industry's strappings, which Knox called, "totally 100 per cent despicable".

Never underestimate the motivating force of "I'll show you" – that's not to say that Knox and Bathgate, as Tall Dwarfs, turned the music industry on its head, or even charted. But, beginning in 1981, they crafted exceptional work that stands on its own, on their terms. One would be forgiven for thinking they'd found the template for *In The Aeroplane Over The Sea* after listening to the Dwarfs' closest thing to a hit, "Nothing's Going To Happen", from their 1981 debut EP "Three Songs", released on short-lived Kiwi indie Puritane.

The song's captivating melody and stripped-back, drum-free arrangement, anchored by Knox's impassioned, out-in-front singing – it lands somewhere between Jonathan Richman and a sea shanty – helped launch a wave of oblique bedroom folk to come (Neutral Milk Hotel, Decembrists, Casiotone For The Painfully Alone) and effectively

set the template for the band; one that they'd embellish, or carve away at, but never stray far from, in their 20 years of making records. "All My Hollowness To You", from the same EP, demonstrated their use of handclaps-as-percussion, and love of the Casiotone keyboard.

The group's second EP, "Louis Likes His Daily Dip", was released on Roger Shephard's iconic Flying Nun in 1982, and the Dwarfs remained with the label for the rest of their career, which spanned eight EPs, six LPs and two compilations. Now Merge, in a longstanding partnership with Flying Nun, has compiled this 55-track anthology of the band's output on four LPs or two CDs, and everything is up on streaming services for the first time. It's a great opportunity to dive into the genealogy of a polarising sound, co-opted by major labels by the mid-noughties. As is often the case, one can't go wrong with the original. **BRUNSON**



David Sylvian:  
forbidding and  
fascinating

## DAVID SYLVIAN

Sleepwalkers

OSCELAND

8/10

Useful round-up of art-pop icon's 21st-century collaborations



Though David Sylvian's recent work has often been more abstruse than what preceded it, his velvety voice remains distinctively luxurious, capable even of making lines like "you/fucking sleepwalkers" languid and seductive. Not that he always sings on this updated 2010 compilation: on "Angels" he recites his poetry against Audun Kleive's rattling percussion, and there's more spoken word on the minimalist "Thermal", accompanied by Arve Henriksen's muted trumpet. Other tracks are as forbidding as they're fascinating: "Five Lines", with Japanese contemporary composer Dai Fujikura, banishes spiky modern baroque string arrangements, and Christian Fenness's static dominates the otherwise somnolent "Transit". Much more accessible – and more reminiscent of early solo work – are the gently waltzing "The Day The Earth Stole Heaven" and "World Citizen" (graciously swelling melancholy, while the real treats are sourced from his Nine Horses project, especially the atmospheric "Wonderful World", which provoked Stina Nordenstam's last recorded vocal).

Extras: None. **WINDHAM WALLACE**

## TRACTOR

Tractor

OSTERMEYER

8/10

Head-shop northern powerhouse returns to vinyl for 50th birthday



After hearing Tractor's space raga "Shazunkin" on the John Peel Show in 1972, Julian Cope decided "it was the music I thereafter wanted played at my funeral".

Doomy but delightful, the Rochdale power duo of guitarist Jim Milne and nail-gun drummer Steve Clayton were picked up by Peel's Dandelion label, recording the unusual *A Candle For Judith* as The Way We Live in 1971 before striking free festival gold with second time out as Tractor. A home-rolled five-skinner of dope-head paranoia and sci-fi whimsy, this off-grid freakathon finds Milne one minute howling out the "man in the grey suit" on Black Sabbath-weight opener "All Ends Up", and heading to Narnia the next ("riding in your gobbin ship, guided by a mermaid", he sings unselfconsciously on "Little Girl In Yellow"). A little agricultural, but it continues to stand out in a crowded field.

Extras: 6/10. Red vinyl, unseen pictures and extra tracks "Revolution Man" and "Northern City".

**JAM WORTH**



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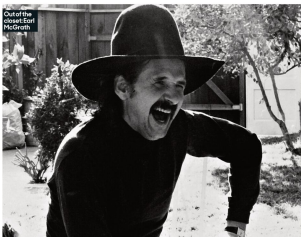
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# {THE SPECIALIST}

Out of the closet: Earl McGrath



## VARIOUS ARTISTS

Earl's Closet: The Lost Archives Of Earl McGrath, 1970-1980

LIGHT IN THEATRE

9/10

Joyful, eclectic, unheard demos from the '70s Stones associate



EARL MCGRATH sounds like a character from a Paul Thomas Anderson film. A socialite and bon vivant, he was born into poverty in Wisconsin before leaving a troubled home at 14 to join the merchant navy. Having broadened his geographical horizons, he started on his cultural ones, meeting WH Auden, Henry Miller and Leonard Bernstein before organising a music festival in Italy in 1959 featuring Cicci Taylor and Jack Kerouac. While there, he met and married an Italian countess, moving effortlessly into high society. An art collector and cultural dabbler, he worked in Hollywood – he bought pot from Harrison Ford and claimed to have conceived *Midnight Cowboy*, *The Monkees* and *Saturday Night Live* – before enabling a crucial meeting between Ahmet Ertegun and The Rolling Stones.

In return, Ertegun helped McGrath form Clean Records with Robert Stigwood. When that failed, he became president of Rolling Stone Records. When McGrath died in 2016, writer Joe Hogan discovered a cupboard in his apartment filled with 200 demos and masters that McGrath had accumulated over the decades. Twenty-two tracks feature on *Earl's Closet*, including previously unheard recordings by Hall & Oates, Terry Allen and David Johansen plus a host of unknowns or also-rans. The sounds are eclectic, but the vibe is distinct: *Earl's Closet* is a tour through '70s LA, all chest hair, music and laidback slinky grooves.

Fortunately, the music lives up to the promise of the great back story. Most of these recordings were rejected, but there's nothing objectively bad – even David Johansen's post-Dolls throwaway "Funky But Chic" has a certain charm. The two Hall & Oates numbers are superb, and several

others could have been hits, such as Michael McCarty's ballad "Christopher", the beautiful Bee Gees harmonies of Shadow's "I See My Days Go By" or Norma Jean Bell's ultra-funky "Just Look...". A handful did become hits, albeit with other artists, such as "Two More Bottles Of Wine", an original by Delbert McClinton (as Delbert & Glen) that Emmylou Harris took into the charts in 1978. The two Terry Allen numbers are highlights but pick of the lot is "Tension", a wined Jim Carroll outtake later dressed up in synth and released as "Voices" in 1985.

McGrath's closet also contained reeds of music by The Rolling Stones, Pete Tosh, Eric Clapton and John Phillips, but the artists on *Earl's Closet* are, for the most part, the ones who never quite made it. Several burned out on drugs, such as Detroit rocker Johnny Angel, while others had fascinating careers on the sidelines, such as Norma Jean Bell. Folk-rockers Country are an interesting case study; one member got hooked, the other became a hit songwriter for Olivia Newton-John. Then there are the complete unknowns, such as the mysterious Jabbar, who dropped a groovy slice of late '70s MOR on "Sail Away" and disappeared forever. Or at least, until they were found in Earl's closet and given a second chance to fly.

**Extras:** 7/10.

Sleevenotes by Joe Hogan.

PETER WATTS



## MAX TUNDRA

Mastered By Guy At The Exchange (reissue, 2002)

DOMINO

8/10

Maximalist studio-pop electro-boffin celebrates archive reissues, also with new covers and remixes



Composer, producer, multi-instrumentalist and pioneer of the post-modern maximalist style later christened "hyperpop", Ben Jacobs launched his Max Tundra alias at the dawn of the millennium. His newly reissued trilogy of albums still stand up today, particularly the middle release *Mastered By Guy At The Exchange*, which finds Jacobs in transition between left-field indie-rock studio sonics and the vivid, explosively melodic, jazz-fusion punk-tronica of his later work. From the emotive whoosh and glide of "Cabasa" to the skittering squeaky-pop of "Lights" and the joyfully wonky six-minute sugar rush of "Labsal", this is the album that earned Jacobs remix work with Pet Shop Boys and Franz Ferdinand. Also released separately is *Remixtape*, which puts a fresh spin on this archive material with newly commissioned guest remixes, left-field cover versions and artful re-arrangements by Jacobs himself. Top honours here go to Julia Holter's inspired deconstruction of "Lysine", a sublime electro-classical dreamscape shimmering with light and space.

**Extras:** None.

STEPHEN DALTOW

## VARIOUS

Spirit Of France

SWITZHOUSE

9/10

Global-minded jazz fusions from 1970s and '80s France



Even jazz-loving Francophiles will be staggered by the nuggets that intrepid crate-diggers have discovered on this compilation. It taps into a peculiarly Gallic appetite for ethnomusicology, a taste for many jazz musicians in the 1970s and '80s to explore the modes, rhythms and instrumentation of Africa, India and the Middle East, fusing them with indigenous French folk music. You'll hear ambient Arabic music from burly-gundy player Rémy Couwez; Lyon-based saxophonist Sylvain Kassap wiggling out over bagpipes and berimbau; Workshop De Lyon setting Maurice Merle's honking alto sax over Burundi-style post-punk drumming; and André Fertier & Clivage mixing hard-bop with Arabic zithers and santos. There's also surreal beat poetry from Catherine Derain, Pan-Ra's bonkers mix of ukulele, darbouka, bagpipes and operatic vocals, and the remarkable "Sokoto" by Structures Sonores Lasry Baschet, which sounds like techno played on plumbing equipment. Best of all is 1974's "Love Always", where French pianist Joff Gilson lends an Art Ensemble Of Chicago-style 15-minute freakout.

**Extras:** None.

JOHN LEWIS



Ben Jacobs  
guitar  
Tundra

**PAUL WELLER**  
**22 Dreams (reissue, 2008)** ISLAND  
9/10

Reissue of the record that rebooted Weller's career



From *Sound Effects* to *Capri Blue*, a lot of Weller's best work has seen him taking tremendous risks, moving out of his comfort zone and embracing new areas of music. *22 Dreams* – praised to the skies even by Weller sceptics – did just that in 2008. “Song For Alice” sees him pay tribute to Alice Coltrane with Robert Wyatt on piano and trumpet; guitarist John McVie guest on the astral folk of “Light Nights”; “Black River” is a woozy, pastoral psych-folk collaboration with Graham Coxon; “Echoes Around The Sun” sees Weller and Noel Gallagher experimenting with loops and Mellotrons. But Weller and his co-producer Simon Dine do plenty of weird stuff without star guests: “Lullaby Für Kinder” is a heavenly waltz for piano and strings; “111” is an avant-garde electro-acoustic instrumental inspired by AMM; while “Empty Ring” and “Cold Moments” are among Weller’s finest pieces of symphonic soul. **Extras:** None. **JOHN LEWIS**

**TONY JOE WHITE**  
**The Beginning (reissue, 2001)** NEW WEST  
8/10

Swamp-rock legend's homage to his blues roots



Self-released on his own label in 2001 but long out of print, this was White's 25th album – and you get the feeling



Tony Joe  
White:  
hoodoo  
chile

that it was perhaps the one closest to his heart. Freed from record company expectations, he went into his own studio with his son Jody producing and recorded these to intimate tracks, his gritty drawl accompanied only by acoustic guitar, harmonica and his stomping foot for percussion. White's earlier, more textured recordings are Southern rock classics, of course, but he's arguably even more compelling here as a stripped-down solo bluesman. Try “Who You Gonna Hoodoo Now?”, which he regaled with a charming swamp-rock on 2013's *Hoodoo*, or “Ice Cream Man”, a song he recast with band as a JJ Cale tribute on 2004's *The Heroes*. Terrific as both of those versions were, you wouldn't want to swap them for the stark intensity heard on these solo takes, which borders on the metaphysical. **Extras:** None, but the set was remixed and remastered by engineer Ryan McFadden. **NIGEL WILLIAMSON**

**STOMU YAMASHITA**  
**Seasons: The Island Recordings 1972–76** ISOLINE  
7/10

Far-out fusion and more from “the man from the East”



Kyoto-born percussionist Yamashita Tsutomu, as he was formerly known, joined his home town's philharmonic orchestra at 13, studied at Berklee and first made his name outside of Japan in Europe, with his Red Buddha Theatre band. This boxset gathers together seven remastered albums and shows off not only Yamashita's instrumental virtuosity but also his breadth of vision, complex yet accessible, jazz rock/progress compositions and collaborative drive. It's a hefty package – 58 tracks – so the uninitiated might want to start with 1976's *Go*, a space odyssey for which he signed up Steve Winwood, Al Di Meola and Klaus Schulze, among others. It's Yamashita's best-known work, with highlights “Crossing The Line” (a bluesy prog epic) and funkified space jam “Time Is Here”. Dipping in at random also yields rewards, like the eerie and delicate “One Way” (from *Floating Music*, 1972) and the blitz of hyperactive prog guitars and synths that is “Rolling Nums” (1973's *Freedom Is Frightening*). **Extras:** None. **SHARON CONNELL**

**LA MONTE YOUNG**

**Trio For Strings**

DA ART FOUNDATION

9/10

Sensuous, sinuous minimalist classic, finally released



For decades, if you really wanted to hear the compositions of minimalist pioneer La Monte Young – the man Brian Eno

once described as “the daddy of us all” – you either had to spend up big on the second-hand market, or root around for bootlegs. This is partly due to Young's reputation for being extremely fastidious, but in the case of *Trio For Strings*, Young has also repeatedly returned to and fine-tuned the piece. Originally composed in 1955, the real shock in finally hearing the three-hour-long *Trio For Strings* is how it sounds simultaneously modern and archaic, as though the music has played out in an uninterrupted thread since time immemorial. Its long-held tones, performed beautifully by the Theatre Of Eternal Music String Ensemble, hold the listener in ecstatic stasis, and its seeming simplicity of form betrays gorgeous, evocative, rich complexity. **Extras:** 8/10. A 32-page booklet with liner notes. **JONDALE**

**FRANK ZAPPA**  
**Zappa/Erle**

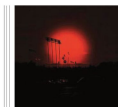
ZAPPA RECORDS

8/10

Seven hours of music from Zappa's best jazz-rock band, from 1974



This mammoth, six-disc, 72-song boxset is compiled from five separate live concerts played in the Midwest in 1974, where Zappa's already impressive band (including pianist George Duke, drummer Chester Thompson and saxophonist Napoleon Murphy Brock) are expanded with Don Preston on keyboards and Walk Forward on trumpet. When this band takes flight, you can almost ignore the stench of Zappa himself – the unfunny novelty numbers; the prog-rock whimsy; the



**COMING NEXT MONTH...**

**N**ext time around, there'll be new albums from the returning **Afghan Whigs**, Austin's psychedelic pranksters **The Black Angels**, glacial drone master **Sarah Davachi** and blues travellers **GA20**, plus Sudan Archives, Makaya McCraven and Beth Orton. In Archives, there'll be Neil's 50th-anniversary boxset, the latest **Stevie Nicks** rarities comp. **Pink Floyd**'s long-awaited *Animals* remix and a live set of **Mal Waldron**'s masterful jazz piano.

EMAIL: FORUM@MAGNETMUSIC.CO.UK

rather revolting lyrics about shagging groups and personal hygiene – and enjoy the music. The band can sound suitably punky on the medley of songs from 1976's *Freak Out*, but the best moments are where Zappa himself takes a back seat. On “Pygmy Twylite” the band sound like Herbie Hancock's Head Hunters; on “The Idiot Bastard Son” they're Steely Dan; on “Penguin In Bondage” they sound like Chick Corea's Return To Forever; on much of “Inca Roads” they're Santana-style Latin-rock virtuosos; on “I'm Not Satisfied” they're the funkiest Southern rock band you've ever heard. That's until Zappa starts to berate audience members for standing up and dancing. **Extras:** 5/10. Detailed liner notes. **JOHN LEWIS**

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# “The truth might be the truth... but it still hurts”

Sitting in his local, **DAVE DAVIES** – guitarist, spiritual warrior, astral explorer – is taking stock. To discuss: his celebrated history in and out of **THE KINKS**, current relations with brother Ray, and where the deep soul-searching that has gone into writing a visceral new memoir will take him next. “It’s better to embrace those feelings full-on than let them fester,” he confesses to Nick Hasted

Photoby AL PEREIRA



Dave Davies  
in New York,  
June 16, 2015

**I**T'S mid-morning as Dave Davies slips into his favourite pub in Highgate. With long white hair flowing from beneath a soft black Tibetan cap, and a rakishly psychedelic scarf slung across his shoulders, he looks leaner and healthier than ever.

"I've always liked it here," he says, ordering an oat milk cappuccino. "It's the sort of place where you feel in transit – it's OK, but you know you're going to leave. I've been used to that feeling all my life on the road."

Dave began work on his new autobiography here. *Living On A Thin Line* is an often jaw-dropping account of life as The Kinks' fiery, innovative guitarist and his equally tempestuous times of stage – from acid breakdowns to alien visitations. "That Covid shit prompted it," he explains. "But it got tough when I realised that memories aren't always good memories. There were times when I thought, I can't fucking do this. It's too hard. The truth might be the truth, but it still fucking hurts."

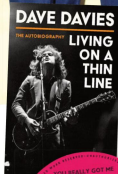
Dave wrote a previous memoir, *Kink*, in 1996, when the band's story was still very raw. But Dave's stroke in 2004, and improved relations with Ray give the new book a wiser perspective. "Is that good?" he wonders. "I've had to live with these thoughts and feelings for decades. I've had time to mull them over and to mature. It is a less angry book."

We're sitting a mile or so from the Davies' family home at 6 Denmark Terrace, where Dave and Ray wrote the early Kinks hits in the cramped front room. Highgate Wood is visible from the pub, part of the suburban landscape mythologised in *The Kinks Are The Village Green Preservation Society* (1968). Ray too lives in Highgate, although the brothers rarely meet.

Where Ray is guarded, Dave is wide open, talking in free-wheeling tangents and shadow-boxing the air for emphasis. Though he takes far-out spiritual flights, they're always grounded by his earthy personality. "I'm glad you noticed that!" he laughs. "It's reassuring. A lot of that came from my upbringing. 'Get on with it, lad! Know what I mean? Check it out – but don't get too carried away.'" The writer of "This Man He Weeps Tonight" also cries several times during our interview, as some memories prove almost too much to take.

Early on in *Living On A Thin Line*, Dave recounts the brothers' 1960 trip to the East Finchley Phoenix to see the great concert film *Jazz On A Summer's Day*. The film afforded them priceless glimpses of Chuck Berry, Thelouious Monk and the America of their dreams. They went home singing Jimmy Guiffre's "The Train And The River" – which, Dave speculates, might have provided Ray with inspiration for "You Really Got Me". When I hand Dave a DVD of the film, he's overwhelmed.

"Oh, man, don't!" he gasps. "Oh dear! You caught me off-guard there. I love that music. Jimmy Guiffre –



It's all right. The Kinks in August 1964 – (l-r) Pete Dinklage, Dave Davies, Nicky Hopkins, Ray Davies



beautiful. And Chuck Berry – he knew what he was doing, when nobody else did! It's such a very moving piece of art. It's the atmosphere, so poignant you can touch it. That's what I try to do with my music. That's something that Ray and I have always had since we were kids. That movie was the beginning of Ray and I connecting in an emotional way over the music. Also, it was the beginning of what we were about to do. It was the ignition key."

**Were there things that surprised you, as you set them down in this book?** I surprised myself. As I was writing I became less shy of the thoughts and feelings that were coming up, trying to come to terms with them all, even if they weren't particularly pleasant. Because there's a reason for them. That was hard. But the more I embraced that, the more I opened up.

**The book mentions your regret at some "repugnant, drunken behaviour" with a girlfriend in your teen rock-star days. Was that the sort of thing you found hard to face up to?** It's important to be honest – as honest as you dare. There are all those moments that haunt me and make me run away, but are still with me – about trust, honesty, all that frightening stuff. All those difficult things are hopefully worth experiencing. I think we grow through discomfort. I think because I've always been Dave the inventor, I find going over something again more painful than in the first place. I always want to discover something new. One important discovery in the book was going over events I'm familiar with and getting different results. I'm not the man I was!

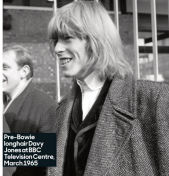
**"There are all those moments that haunt me"**  
DAVE DAVIES



**You give the most forensic account yet of slashing your amp and creating that revolutionary distorted sound for "You Really Got Me". It's always been presented as an impulsive act of teenage frustration, but you write about approaching it with scientific rigour. Rage did instigate the act in the first place. But I really liked science. Making things work was very much a part of me as a person. So I took a cable out of the speaker I slashed and put it into a bigger amp – like a mad scientist, or an inventor. I wanted to make things come together. That's why I was so fascinated by radio. Tuning into the freaky, whooshing oscillations of Radio Luxembourg was like tuning into outer space. Wireless was wonderful for discovering people like [Romantic pianist-composer] César Franck – I'd never heard that kind of music before. It dragged me down but lifted me up at the same time. How do you do that? I found out by experimenting with sound and tone, creating moods.**

**When an early version of Ray and Joe Penhall's *Sunny Afternoon* musical had Ray slashing the amp, you got lawyers in. Is it important that what you did is recognised? Well, that's why I tried to be as clear about it as I could in the book, so there could be no bones about it. That is what happened, and it always will be.**

**Your solos on "You Really Got Me" and that run of '60s Kinks singles are some of the greatest, most original guitar-playing of the '60s. But they're not based on virtuosity. It's based on panic! And based on madness – that's the key. When we open these little cracks into madness, that's when genius comes. I've thought about it a lot. "You Really Got Me" is as much about when I'm not playing as when I am. So when that da-da-da-da riff stops after the first verse, it's an opening into other worlds – maybe just for a millisecond. I've studied a lot of shit, and**



Pre-Bowie longhair Dave Jones at BBC Television Centre, March 1965

## WHEN DAVE MET DAVE JONES

**I**N 1964, The Marish Boys were among The Kinks' support acts. As Dave recalls, their singer Davey Jones – the future David Bowie – made an immediate impression. "He seemed a lovely guy," Dave says, "and we naturally got on really well. Falling into each other's arms isn't the right meaning – but it was kind of like that. He admired me, and liked me as a person, and I liked similar things about him. It was like having a good friend at school. David was obviously an unusual person, much like me. Apart from the music, we had similar interests in science-fiction, and esoteric things. He used to like me because I had unusual ideas about the world, and certain elements of that esoteric underworld, and how we can transcend it."

Then there'd be some nights after a gig on package tours, in the Taunton Odeon or wherever it was, that he'd come to my room, and because the chicks were always chasing me, we found it easier if he went out to get the chicks, because he wouldn't get mobbed. Imagine that later! A handy man to have around? Yeah, he was! It's one of my fondest memories of those silly, early, crazy days."

Zen Buddhism talks about that moment – they call it Dea. I really do think that music has the possibility to play with those other-dimensional energies. The best stuff makes you feel the weirdest. Ray eventually became a craftsman of those explosions. And that's admirable. To become a craftsman out of pure chaos.

**You were 15 when The Kinks started, 17 when you had a hit. Did the band take away part of your childhood? Absolutely. I was just a kid. I didn't spend an awful lot of time at school. Although it was probably more helpful that I didn't learn anything there, actually. Before I was expelled, I'd thought there was a structure to life. When I was expelled, nuances appeared. Cracks in the wall. You do grow up quicker through the intense experiences in a band. But part of you resents growing up and doesn't want to.**

**You describe your '60s lifestyle as "going on, hanging out, getting high, and finally to bed – that was the rhythm". That's why hashish was good, because you could mellow out and go to sleep. Was I squeezing the juice out of everything at the time? I thought that was what you were supposed to do.**

**Ray maintains it's a mystery why The Kinks were banned from America for four years in 1965. The book explains that the band and everyone who worked for you repeatedly made mistakes and ran up a rap sheet with the unions... I came back from America very disappointed. I expected to see Buddy Holly walking down the street! They played crap on the radio, I couldn't find blues anywhere. But I didn't give a fuck – I just went straight down the pub. I was quite happy being back in London. I was starting a family, which finally gave me a chance to grow up – learning about your own children, who you're responsible for. What the fuck do I do with them? I felt very happy about Ray's ideas then. "See My Friends" came out just after we got back. There was a time when I thought "See My Friends" was the ultimate record. If there is ever an end, that was an ending. "See My Friends" felt like the closing of a veil. But then it began again after that. Ray's writing, and our lives, really unravelled in a different way.**

**You said in the book that songwriting made you "morose". You couldn't work at it the way Ray did. Yeah. Every time I tried, I got more and more depressed. That was about the drugs. In moderation, certain drugs do help. Too much is a path that leads nowhere. But when you're young, you think you're invincible.**

**Your songs in the late '60s, for a solo album that you abandoned, are so nakedly revealing of your state of mind – "This Man He Weeps Tonight", "Mindless Child Of Motherhood"... My girlfriend said to me that the first time she ever heard "Mindless Child Of Motherhood", she thought it was one of the saddest songs she'd ever heard [Dave tears up]. I was so stricken by the reality of the song at the time that I didn't realise. It took me a long time to come to terms with the feelings in those songs.**

**You recall a week on tour in 1969 which "turned into a vacuum into which I poured everything bad**





It felt like a 'protection', bearded Dave with The Kinks on Top Of The Pops, 1972

for me", culminating in a devastating acid trip. It sounds like you were torn in half. It wasn't one event. It was a process of being ripped open. My first acid experience in Los Angeles was the ripper, though. I had to put a different handle on things that I was experiencing. I couldn't walk down the road without everything looking weird, or people melting. I'd see people walking around, but they seemed dead, like robots or dummies. It was fucking weird, daunting and terrifying. I did find that yoga and astrology helped me greatly. It helped me restructure my consciousness, over several years.

**Was that breakdown your main preoccupation while Ray was making all those '70s Kinks concept albums, like *Muswell Hillbillies*?** With *Muswell Hillbillies*, it was a big thing that I had a beard. It felt like a protection, like I was in disguise from something, like people can't really tell that you're going fucking mad! It lasted 'til we got Konk studios, where I could move away from showbiz. Not to become a recluse, but to rebuild my inner life.

**The book doesn't say The Kinks split after their last gig in '96 – you just call it a "pause". But was it a relief?** Probably. By then I had a new, different family. And I was living in LA at the time, which is a seductive city. It draws you towards it, it won't let you go – it wants you to always be there. I had a community there – I could have lunch with someone who's interested in film, music or art every day and I'd look over and see someone writing, with a Chagall picture in their notebook. I had some lovely times when I was dabbling in screenwriting and working on treatments and playing pool with my friend John Carpenter. Did I think that would be my life, making films and not music? I did, in a way. I must have been there 10 years, on and off. I still feel like I've got an LA passport. I keep watching



**"My first acid experience in LA was the ripper"**  
DAVE DAVIES

*La La Land* now. It reminded me what a frightening, lonely place it can be, too, though people seem warm. You can really go crazy out there...

**Is it a bit different now you're back here on the Archway Road?** Yeah, but this part of North London's still special to me. There's a different feeling for art, because you have to graft more. This area keeps you down, then gives you something when you least expect it.

**The book recalls the final time the original four Kinks met, at a UK Music Hall Of Fame show in 2005 [bassist Pete Quaife died in 2010]. What happened?** Not a lot, really. You know the feelings you have of comfort, when you feel at home, like with your mum? The four of us being together was like that. Going for a curry at the Fortis Green Tandoori afterwards was totally nicer than the ceremony. We always used to have good times in restaurants like that. We talked about mediocre stuff that last time. When you're by yourselves, you talk about the smallest things, you don't dissect what's going on in the universe. You find out how Aunt Mabel's getting on.

**You had a stroke in 2004. But you've never been more prolific since, releasing five solo albums.**

When I had a stroke, all the yoga and work I'd done after my acid breakdown really helped. Because I was totally wiped out, but I wasn't afraid. I felt youthful, I felt in control. I don't know what of. I felt very lucid and I felt all right internally. There's a yogic saying, the coolest part of the flame is the centre. That's what the stroke was like. I was right in the intense part of the flame. But it was as if everything was in its place. It was like I was watching a movie. When I was lying on that bed the first day, I did think, 'Well, that's the end. I can't play the guitar again. I need to maybe think about what I'm going to really end up doing.' But bit by bit, the muscles came back, with psychological work and meditation. The second day, I started writing. Something changed in my psyche, so it was easier to write than not.

**You call the book "a tribute to Ray and to The Kinks – and especially to Ray's writing. There is really nobody else like him". You wouldn't have written that a few years ago. You seem to be getting on much better lately. We're just getting older.**

**So you're learning to let stuff go now, as you enter your mature 76th year?** I don't know about mature. But you can't be mad forever. Mature in moderation? I hate that word, maturity, actually.

'Acceptance' resonates better with me. Accepting things for what they are.

**Have you and Ray learned to stop hurting each other, then, after all this time?**

Pfff! That's a bit of a sweeping statement! Let's put it this way. It causes me more pain to hurt him than it doesn't. So why go through it? It's a weird fucking deal. It's been with me all my life, since I was a kid. I don't like to hurt people, I remember at school I got in a boxing ring with a mate of mine, and I hurt him. And I didn't want to do it



Having won The Kinks are inducted into the UK Music Hall Of Fame at Alexandra Palace, November 16, 2005

any more. A similar thing happened being in a school gang, where you're hurting someone to get their admiration. I didn't like it. It really upset me.

**The Kinks' punch-ups and conflicts must have been painful for you, then?** Of course it was. But there's no escape – it's better to embrace those feelings full-on than let them fester and turn you into a fucking monster.

**Ray came on stage to sing "You Really Got Me" with you at Islington Assembly Hall in 2015. Was that an important moment for you?** It is to me. I think it was important for him as well. We tend not to dwell on those emotions. What's the point?

**A few days later, you went round Ray's place to work on some demos – which were then abandoned. Did you inspire each other the way you used to?** I don't know what happened to those feelings. I thought, "Do we really need to keep doing this? Are we just trying to rehash something?" It just didn't feel right. I don't want to say I'm bored. But it's that madness of doing the same thing and expecting different results. It's more important for us to go for a curry, share intimacies and talk about funny characters we knew growing up. You get the bullshit out of the way and find out how Arsenal are doing – or not doing! One of the feelings I had in the book was that me and Ray might have been better friends if we weren't relatives.

**Ray doesn't seem to play live any more. So was the Kinks reunion gig you both discussed in 2013 the last chance?** Well, I definitely want to play – now the misery of this book's out of the way. But that idea of The Kinks riding back out of the mist? It's romantic and nice. But the thought of it drove me to hell and back in 2013. If something happened – if we did a recording, or something jumped out – then of course I'd consider it. Maybe it's all been done, as far as that collaboration. But it's not over 'til it's over. Because who knows? Ray could find an old tape in the attic, and say, "Dave should do something on that." And there is stuff.

# KINK AND SON

**Russ Davies on making music with his dad**



"Dave's optimism, enthusiasm and energy to always look forward in life come through in his music, too. He's always keen to take an organic approach to writing and see where the session goes, rather than being too rigid or stubborn, and that's reflected in his character, which is genuine and honest, like his music."

"I helped with beats and synth-scapes on his album *Bug* (2002). Dave has always been inspired by film soundtracks, and electronic music isn't far removed from that. There were synthesizers and drum machines in his home studio in the '80s. Dave's music interests reach far beyond rock. He would listen mostly to classical music at home, and in our household, film was as much of a feature as music, if not more."

"After his stroke, and not being able to tour, Dave had a chance to follow through on some alternative ideas – such as his script for *The Aschere Project*, which started as a concept we had for a sci-fi film epic, and turned into an album [*2010's Two Worlds*]. Dave has developed some great film scripts. It's a natural medium for him to explore, given his interests in spiritualism and occultism."

"I've always leaned on Dave's more reflective and melancholy material – and Ray's – and when I produced Dave's most recent album, *Open Road* (2017), I wanted to bring that side out more. We'd start with a backbeat and rudimentary guitar licks, and jam vocal ideas, and it evolved organically like that. There's a psychic, shared creative vision involved in working with family, and trust and respect. But mostly it's a really fun way of us spending time together, creating something potentially special, and with meaning."

"Like to think that's still a freespik!"  
Dave Davies in Edgewater, New Jersey, 2016



"Me and Ray might have been better friends if we weren't relatives". The Davies brothers in February this year



I've got a lot, in the back of my head, or on tape, or a scrap of old paper. I feel sometimes Ray's got a library catalogue and he knows where all those half-finished ideas are – Row B! He thinks more like that than I do.

**In the book, you describe how you've got a different family helping you make music now.** Yeah. My girlfriend Rebecca's good at organising and PR – it's good to have someone you love around you when you're working. My son Martin manages me. I've made albums with my son Russ. He wasn't shy of saying, "That line's a bit off. Think of something else." I'm used to working with inspiring relatives, who you love and trust. It

does remind me of Ray, in the early days – before he was right about everything!

**Is your life as balanced and contented now?**

In some ways, yeah. Though I'm not an easy person. I like to keep moving. I love the country and one of my favourite pieces of music is Beethoven's *Pastoral Suite* – it reeks of the country, birdsong and everything. I like Mahler. Many, many things inspire me now. I'm basically the same Dave. I find it difficult to slow down. I like to think, apart from my little disciplines and meditations, that I'm still a free spirit. It's always important to me to feel like that.

**Do you feel different, having written the book, and set all this down?**

Yeah – I wish I hadn't fucking done it! But it was important. It's important not to dwell too much on weird shit. But you learn by telling. I'm sure that was behind people listening to family members and elders in ancient days telling their story. It's helpful. ☺

*Living On A Thin Line* is published by Headline



# The Pleasure Principle

Having flirted with acting, **JULIA JACKLIN** eventually found herself in Montreal, speed-writing a follow-up to the acclaimed *Crushing* on a Roland keyboard in view of Leonard Cohen's house. Tom Pinnock hears how she came up with a modern classic by crossing Celine Dion with Goblin. "I was trying to keep the beauty," Jacklin says, "but make sure it was never getting too pretty."

Photo by NICK MCKK

**E**VERY Thursday night, in a brightly lit suburban strip mall above a dental surgery, Julia Jacklin searched for new horizons. She'd already tried tap-dancing and screenwriting classes in her adopted city of Melbourne; now she was enrolled on an acting course. "It was hilariously bad," she laughs, "just excruciating. It was this very bizarre group of people shoved together in this small room for three hours each week. I was going through a bit of a crisis during the pandemic. I guess, like a lot of musicians, I was trying to extend my artistic repertoire."

In part, Jacklin's new pursuits were an attempt to decompress after the pressures of making and touring her second album, 2019's *Crushing*. A powerful, wry examination of

relationships and sexual dynamics, delivered via the Australian's truly classic, burnt-honey voice, it established her as an artist to be taken seriously – except, that is, when Jacklin herself is joking around. A lockdown mercifully put an end to that acting course after six weeks, but it was enough to make her reset her goals completely towards music. "Yeah, I think I've got to stay in my lane."

Fittingly, new album *Pre Pleasure* might just be her best yet: across 10 tracks, it pairs the tortured and imagistic lyrics of *Crushing* with more accessible and bolder musical textures, at times lushly orchestral or crisply fuzzy, at others intimately stripped down. "I was trying to keep the beauty and the joy and the easy listening side of Robyn, Luther Vandross and Celine Dion," she explains of her unusual influences, "but make sure it was never getting too pretty. And that's where, like, Throbbing Gristle and Goblin came in..."



Julia Jacklin:  
"I'm a bit of  
anxiety  
to myself"

Uncut first catches up with Jacklin via videocall while she's on a short trip to Tasmania. She's come away for a few days on her own, hoping to work on some new songs. As seems to be the way with her mercurial muse, however, little actual writing has occurred. "What have I been doing? I don't know! Not much, honestly. Walking. I've been buying books that I probably won't read for a while. I'm in a real memoir phase at the moment, so I bought David Sedaris's new one, and Alice Walker's journals. I'm enjoying reading other people's thoughts at the moment."

"The most obvious thing about Julia's music is just how personal her lyrics are," explains Marcus Paquin, who co-produced *Pre Pleasure* with Jacklin in Montreal. "She speaks of her own journey through self-discovery and feelings of inadequacy – and she's able to express those ideas poetically."

"She has such a cinematic vision," adds Fran Keaney of Rolling Blackouts Coastal Fever, fellow Melbourne residents and occasional collaborators. "It's such neat storytelling – her songs are almost like Raymond Carver short stories."

Throughout our talk, which ranges from musical awakenings in England to Australia's red-bricked, wood-panelled suburbs, from the success of *Crushing* to the joy of singing, Jacklin is open and honest: not afraid to tell personal stories or – most terrifying of all, she says – admit her own musical worth. "I know I'm good. But even saying that now, it feels uncomfortable for my upbringing. Why should I feel uncomfortable saying that? I think it's disingenuous to keep pretending that I'm not [good] when evidence shows that I know what I'm doing most of the time."



## "She goes way behind the doors of suburbia"

FRAN KEANEY



finds Jacklin delivering lines at quite a clip, far from the somnambulant pace of *Crushing*. In the lyrics she's looking back, to her days at a Catholic school – "I'd be a believer if it was all just song and dance", she repeats – while the video, filmed at the top of a lighthouse, is a tribute to the '90s Aussie kid's series *Round The Twist*. "I definitely spent a lot of time over the last couple of years thinking, to a fault," she says. "But in my job I get to explore things in a way a lot of people don't – things you go through before the age of 18, things you don't really have much control over at the time, or understanding. It's really nice to be able to extend a tender hand back to your younger self."

Jacklin grew up in the suburbs around Sydney, the child of teachers. Singing was an early interest – she performed Doris Day's "Perhaps Perhaps Perhaps" on Australian radio aged six, after her mother phoned in to the station – and her musical passions soon included Celine Dion and Britney Spears (check out that poster for Spears' *Crossroads* film in the video for *Pre Pleasure*'s "I Was Neon"). When her dad bought her a copy of *Frogstomp*, the debut by Australia's teen grunge sensation Silverchair, her interest in more alternative musical currents was sparked. "That really changed me, made me realise that there were other kinds of music, not just musicals and pop," she recalls. "Then I heard Fiona Apple. It was a long time before I started writing music, but I think that lit a bit of a fire in terms of what was possible with lyrics."

Playing and singing in bands in her teens, Jacklin didn't write her own material until an ill-fated trip to the UK a decade ago, in search of a high school sweetheart. After the inevitable rejection, and unwilling to return to Australia too soon, she mooched around the UK. Bath, strangely enough, was the city where her solo journey properly began.

"I lived at this really shitty hostel," she says, "and

ANDY HOOD

**J**ULIA Jacklin returned earlier this year with "Lydia Wears A Cross", *Pre Pleasure*'s opening track. Driven by drum machine and piano, it

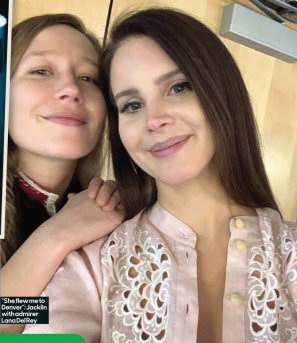
"I think I did something good" releasing second album *Crushing*, 2019







Learning some life lessons touring  
Crushing Forum,  
Kericho Town,  
December 3, 2019



"She flew me to  
Denver" Jacklin  
with admirer  
Lana Del Rey

I worked for board for months and months. I didn't want to go home because I'd told everyone I wasn't ever coming back! It sounds very storybook, but it was just very sad. I started playing open-mic nights there, at this pub called The Bell every Wednesday night, and that was the first time I'd ever played by myself. That's where I first started playing my songs. Bath was also the first place I ever had my name on a poster – it was at a restaurant, it was terrible gig, but it was so exciting!"

Her debut album, 2016's *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood* – the songs composed over a number of years in Sydney, some even during shifts in a factory – introduced a deft writer, sprinkling her scorched examinations with witty asides. "We're gonna keep on getting older", she sings on the title track, a more-than-the-sum-of-its-parts paean to the weirdness of existence. "It's gonna keep on feeling strange". However, it was the follow-up, three years later, that would really put Jacklin on the map.

*Crushing*, released in February 2019, remains a special album, a slow-burner that recalls Leonard Cohen and Will Oldham in its confidence and poise. Its production was masterful, inspired primarily by Neil Young, says Jacklin. There were funny moments, sure, but they were overshadowed by the harrowing tales within, from "Body" – a poetic examination of Jacklin's feelings at an ex-boyfriend still having a revealing photo of her, to the lines in "Pressure To Party" that say so much, so succinctly: "I would run, shoes off, straight back to you/I know where you live, I used to live there too".

"I appreciate every message I get about *Crushing*," says Jacklin. "I don't think I'll ever write a song as good as 'Don't Know How To Keep Loving You'. I think I did something good."

"WE'VE always admired Julia," says Fran Keane, "but particularly so after *Crushing* came out – it just stopped you in your tracks. Burke Reid produced it, and that was one of the reasons we asked him to produce [RBCF album] *Sideways To New Italy*. With Julia's songs, you're still digesting them hours later, days later. They just pack such a punch. Her lyrics are so funny as well – on 'Cry', that line 'You can't never have too much bread' is so well delivered. It's not just for the sake of the gag, it's exactly what that character would say. Her writing is really something I'm in awe of."

"The process of making that record was something I'll always cherish," says Jacklin. "A couple of weeks

## LANA & ME

Julia Jacklin on performing with a famous fan

"I was lucky I checked my requests DM folder on Instagram, 'cos Lana [Del Rey] messaged me. She flew me to Denver [to perform at the Ballico Theater on November 4, 2019] – it was such a weird experience. Ben Gibbard was the main support, and I recall being backstage with them both. I was like, 'Why am I here?' He sang this song which I'd grown to love, 'Me & Magdalena' by The Monkees [from 2016's *Good Times*]. I was like, 'Oh, I love that.' And he's like, 'Oh, I wrote it.' 'I didn't really even know what I was doing when I was on stage in front of all those people. We finished 'Don't Know How To Keep Loving You' and Lana was like, 'Just play another one.' So I played 'Comet'. I was worried that people didn't give a shit about me, but her fans were super respectful."



Ben Gibbard

with friends in the bush, in my home state, playing cards and being supportive of each other. Touring it so much made me a better musician and taught me some tough adult life lessons that I needed to learn."

The album also revealed more of Jacklin's talents in the visual field; she co-directed all the videos with close collaborator Nick McKik, showing off a keen eye for the gaudy weirdness lurking beneath the surface of Australia's suburbs. "The first place my mind goes is Australian red-brick-and-wood-paneelling houses, because that's where I spent most of my formative years. When I think about my base self, I think of that before anything else. For the videos I start with a colour palette and a costume and go from there – I usually go to a costume hire place in Melbourne, Rose Chong's, and I wander around, like, 'OK, what am I going to be in this one?'"

"I love that she uses those suburban settings," says Keane, who was directed by Jacklin in the video for Rolling Blackouts' "Cars In Space" in 2020. "But there's so much depth to it. She goes way behind the doors of suburbia, behind an innocuous house, an innocuous relationship, and really lifts up the rocks... she opens up all the doors and medicine cabinets."

*Crushing* had taken it out of Jacklin, so her initial plan for the follow-up was to make something more upbeat. "I was like, 'Ah, it's been a heavy couple of years, I just want to make something that's fun to play and fun to listen to.' I think I achieved that here and there, but, yeah, you can't ever run away from yourself completely." While working on the new album, she moved around Australia – first of all to a house share in Fremantle, in far Western Australia, where the pandemic had barely made an impact, then to her family home in New South Wales. Each location resulted in different songs, even if the writing process "felt like trying to make a diamond by squeezing a rock with my bare hands alone in a room for two years".



Bringin' her 'neat storytelling' to the Pickathon festival in Happy Valley, Oregon, August 4, 2019

"Moviegoer", for instance, came from a songwriting trip to an isolated property by the coast, with no wi-fi but plenty of "pretentious" DVDs that sparked Jacklin's thoughts. "I was really off art, for some reason," she says. "I'd just watched a DVD they had, and I was thinking about who gets to make art, how we get the same perspectives over and over again. I'm under no impression I'm some sort of special genius, I know which area I take up in the music industry. People say music is so important - I'm like, 'Well, is it?' If it's so important, why is there never any budget for anything? I was questioning the limitations of art. I was grateful for that little trip, because it produced that song."

"Ignore Tenderness", meanwhile, begins as a halting, slyly funky track, crystalline yet sparse. "Ever since I was 13, I've been pulled in every direction", Jacklin sings in the unsettling verse, before the soulful, uplifting chorus finds her giving her past self advice: "(You're) a little leaf catching a wave/ Strong but willing to be saved.../Be naughty but don't misbehave".

"I was trying to reconcile with a lot of younger sexual experiences and approach them with a lot more understanding and care for myself than I think I used to feel. I was trying to reach back and be like, 'You know, you weren't in the wrong in any way.'"

She had a few songs, then, but nowhere near enough for a record. In the intuitive, impulsive way she often operates, Jacklin decided to book a studio anyway, this time in distant Montreal. "By then I just wanted to make a super-folky third record after listening to a lot of Gillian Welch, but then I started listening to Silverchair like I was 13 again. I saw Robyn play live and I heard the Goblin Suspiria soundtrack and I moved somewhere else. If I could pin myself down, I would - it would be a lot more relaxing..."



"It's definitely the least prepared I've ever felt going into a record," admits producer Marcus Paquin. "When we started recording, I think I'd only heard two sketches and some small snippets of lyrics or other ideas." Just before recording began, Jacklin holed up in a rented apartment in Montreal to write the rest of the album. She lined the walls with paper for her lyrics, spied on the neighbours through the large windows and obliterated her comfort zone by ditching her trusty Telecaster.

"She was staying not far from Leonard Cohen's house," recalls Ben Whiteley, Jacklin's longtime bassist and also a member of The Weather Station. "There's this thing that some of these Quebecois artists do, where they're like, 'I'm going to take the risk, I'm going to do the thing that I want to do with my head held high.' In a lot of ways, that energy rubbed off on all of us."

"The apartment was owned by a philosophy professor," adds Jacklin, "some learned man who was really into salsa dancing, so there was a big room in the middle, where he would apparently have salsa nights. There was this Roland keyboard that had all these in-built tracks. At first I thought, 'Should I write on this?' But then my friend Tamara [Lindeman, of The Weather Station] was like, 'That's how Leonard Cohen wrote. If it's good enough for him...'"

Canada, especially the flamboyant Quebec, seems to suit Jacklin, who is naturally more reserved. After her three months in Montreal, she's even beginning to wonder if she's actually a more extroverted and positive personality, squashed by the Australian tendency towards understatement. "I think that's where my true state is, but I've just been crushed over time by self-consciousness, and by societal expectations of what I should be like, especially as a public figure in the indie world. I am grateful - but I also sometimes want to be more like Celine Dion, who's unashamedly dramatic and expressive and cheesy, you know?"

By the time they got into the studio, Jacklin had nearly enough songs, but the process was still all

## PRE



## PLEASURE

# "I CAN GET SUPER FREAKY"

The story behind *Pre Pleasure*'s striking artwork

**"MAYBE it's a representation of how I feel as a musician now with some eyes on me, my own eyes and others. Constantly looking at myself, my face, my soul, can get super freaky, but it's also fascinating in its own right and informs the music in conscious and subconscious ways. It could also be a visual of how outside myself I feel a lot of the time. Quite a few of the songs hint at that. I thought as you get older the gap closes, but it feels like it's getting wider for me. But it could also be that I had a looming deadline and this was the first idea I came up with! We'll never know."**

about intuition, existing in the moment and making snap decisions without much of an idea of the record as a whole. Paquin and Whiteley see some similarities between Jacklin and the more organised Lindemann in their architect's sense of their own music and the way they create aural movies, but their creative processes are worlds apart.

"'Less Of A Stranger' was one that we had all these different versions of, just trying to figure it out," says Whiteley. "On the last day of mixing, we were just sitting around and Julia played it on her own. It was like, 'That's what was lacking from all the other versions.' Sometimes, it needs to be about the person singing and playing the song. And Julia is very special at that."

"On this record, I learned to give an artist space when they need it," adds Paquin. "I had no idea where 'I Was Neon' was going. I was a little lost, because we'd done so many iterations of that song. I said, 'Julia, I'm lost, and I'm going to follow your lead.' I knew that we'd get there because I trust her."

With Jacklin pretty sure about what was working and what wasn't, she unintentionally bamboozled her collaborators with her musical references: she wanted, she said, something halfway between Celine Dion and Goblin, capturing the mood of each. "There were moments where Marcus would just look at me like, 'What?' Because I had just played a Robyn song and then Goblin. But I wasn't necessarily talking about getting down to the nitty-gritty of sonics, it was more just a feeling, trying to take the energy of both those things. 'Love, Try Not To Let Go' is a good example of trying to mash those two things together. I've been in environments before where people will go out of their way to make you feel stupid for bringing up a reference, but I felt like I was in such a safe space with these people."

The record's grandest moment comes at the end, with the strings and electrifying guitar solo that closes "End Of A Friendship" – originally titled "Las Vegas" and always intended as the album's blustery finale. "I really didn't want to end the record with a sad folk number," says Jacklin, "which is what I've done on my first two records. I wanted to send it off, like the end credits of a movie. That song is an ode to how dramatic and devastating a friendship breakdown can be. I said to Marcus, 'I feel like I want strings.' This was the first time I've been in a situation where that's been possible. I sent [arranger] Owen Pallett the melody that I wanted to base it around, and then that day, he sent back a MIDI draft. The next day, the orchestra was recorded in Prague. It was like, 'Is that it? OK, cool.'"

**T**HE next time she speaks to *Uncut*, Julia Jacklin is back in Melbourne. There are no acting courses on the horizon. Instead, she's busy getting her head around the existence of this album she created so organically, and without much of a plan. "It feels like a very private little thing that just exists on my phone," she explains. "Sometimes I feel this almost physical pain in my chest when I realise the thing I'm currently writing or

recording might be up for debate in a YouTube comment section or something, but it passes. It can also be motivating in surprising ways – I think it's important to write music for yourself, but it's not always creatively detrimental if you write with others in your peripheral vision."

Despite her continual urge to get away on her own, she's pretty firmly rooted in Victoria's capital these days, appreciating the city's support for its musical artists. "Melbourne genuinely, down to its roots, respects the arts," she says. "Whereas I think in Sydney, as an artist you can just feel like a loser, like you've got to make excuses for your life. In Melbourne, music is part of the fabric."

While Jacklin is slowly becoming more comfortable with being a professional musician, and with understanding and marshalling her muse, the joy of singing remains at the heart of everything she does. "I don't think I'm ever really going to know what I want," she says. "The making of music to me is just one long attempt at trying to figure it out, but it doesn't feel like the end goal. I think I would die before putting out a single song if I was waiting for that. I'm a bit of a mystery to myself and I think to a lot of the people in my life."

"I love songwriting, but singing is truly where my deep love lies. Over the last couple of years, I realised that what keeps me coming back to this work is just being able to sing. I mean, we've been singing for a lot longer than we've been writing indie-rock songs." ☺

*Pre Pleasure* is out on August 6 on Transgressive

"I don't think I'm ever really going to know what I want", Jacklin in 2022



# "Singing is where my deep love lies"

JULIA JACKLIN

# IT'S THE FREAKIEST SHOW!

To mark the 50th anniversary of *Ziggy Stardust*, collaborators, historians, collectors and fans congregate in Liverpool for a weekend of communion, remembrance and celebration. Stephen Troussé finds that, six years after his passing, **David Bowie's** afterlife might turn out to be his most intriguing adventure of all...

Photos by SAM McMAHON

**Z**IGGY Stardust is alive and well and teetering up the steps of St George's Hall in Liverpool. The old starman looks pretty good for 50: whip-thin in scarlet leather and platforms, crimson cockscorn proudly erect, the 1973 forehead flash the only odd anachronism. We follow him up the steps and into the madly ornate, neo-Grecian hall. Naturally, he has timed his entrance to perfection. The mirrorballs are twinkling, the crowd is expectant, and up in the loft the organist is playing Mick Ronson's magnificent orchestral coda to "Life On Mars".

But something's awry. At the bar, there

are three or four other Ziggys, patiently queuing for plastic beakers of Heineken. Around the hall, a rum selection of Thin (and not-so-thin) White Dukes. There are a couple of Major Toms, in spacesuits clearly not designed for sultry midsummer nights on Merseyside. There's a dainty Pierrot queuing for the ladies, one terrifying New Romantic nun escaped from the "Ashes To Ashes" video, and a frankly sensational late-period Ziggy in light-up Kansai Yamamoto kabuki trousers. For one particular 10-year-old Duke it's clearly all too much, and he's led from the hall in tears by a paternal Aladdin Sane.

We are deep inside David Bowie's multiverse of madness and things are only getting stranger...







Watch those men: Spiders attackman Woody Woodmansey (left) and Bowie's musical director Carlos Alomar (right)

**T**HE Bowie Ball is the cracked cosplay centrepiece of the first ever David Bowie World Fan Convention, hosted by Dave Pichilingi of Liverpool Sound City and curated by Andy Jones and Nick Smart, co-editors of the *David Bowie: Glamour* fanzine. Over the course of a long weekend in mid-June, thousands of devoted Bowiephiles from across the world have descended upon Liverpool to hear from the man's collaborators (Carlos Alomar, Robin Clark, Gail Ann Dorsey, Donny McCaslin, Woody Woodmansey, John Cambridge all hold court to packed, rapt audiences), biographers, photographers, designers and academics.

The convention is the most vivid instance yet of David Bowie's miraculous afterlife, but throughout the summer of 2022, his continuing schedule puts the living to shame. Over the weekend, fans gossip about Brett Morgan's forthcoming documentary *Moogoo Daydream*. Worlds Inc – who created the first, now fetchingly quaint, online Bowie World in 1999 – announce the drop of their Bowie NFTs, part of a Bowie metaverse “where augmented reality, cryptocurrencies, blockchain and non-fungible tokens have emerged as disruptive forces reshaping areas as diverse as music, gaming, sports, fine art collecting and shopping”.

Not to be outdone, Mattel reveals its second Bowie-themed Barbie doll; following 2019's ‘Starman’ model, this is a ‘Life On Mars’ Ziggy, resplendent in powder-blue suit and mascara, though looking disconcertingly like Cilla Black. Hasbro have relaunched their Bowie edition Monopoly (“Invest in stages and stadiums and trade your way to rock’n’roll success – but watch out for taxes, jail and bankruptcy!”). The BBC's *Great British Sewing Bee* includes a ‘design a Bowie costume’ challenge, while the official Bowie Store is continuing its Bowie’s immersive retail event, flogging, among other things, *Scary Monsters*-themed dog collars for your very own diamond dachshund.

Though the vessel of David Jones has perished, his ashes scattered to the

breezes of Bali, the genie of David Bowie is set free to run wild across the culture. In the absence of any permanent resting place, no Graceland, Dollywood or Père Lachaise for pilgrims to pay tribute, Bowie suddenly seems to be everything, everywhere, all at once. If his career had been marked by astonishing, imperious artistic control, from killing off Ziggy on stage in Hammersmith at the height of his success, through to stage-managing the enigma of his own final curtain, now everything is up for grabs. Do you look for him in the corporate heavens of Elon Musk's Tesla Roadster, launched into orbit, eternally playing ‘Space Oddity’? Or in the industrial hell of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks: The Return*, where Bowie's Phillip Jeffries has become incarnated as a kind of infernal tea kettle?

And is BowieCon simply a cosy exercise in nostalgia for retiring sixtiesomethings, keen to recapture the fleeting intensity of their 1970s childhoods, and spend their savings on vintage satin and tat? Or an opportunity to explore the still evolving implications of an artist who feels like a vital beacon for 21st-century genderqueer teens and drag artists?

**THE GENIE OF DAVID BOWIE IS SET FREE TO RUN WILD ACROSS THE CULTURE**

**“W**ITHOUT sounding too wanky,” says Melissa, 60, an actor and lifelong fan from Lancashire, arriving at the convention on Friday afternoon, “it’s kind of a church.” Melissa entered the order when she was 14. “Young Americans was my way in. The Ziggy thing I was a little bit too young for. I used to look at him in *Jackie* magazine and be a bit scared.”

For her, “a lot of the appeal of the convention is just being with other fans. With there not being gigs any more, you really miss that community. When he died I was under a duvet for three days on the sofa, sobbing. My husband just kept bringing me cups of tea. It took a really long time to get over. For someone of my years it must sound a bit pathetic! I didn’t know the David Jones who sat in front of the TV in his underpants. I didn’t know the real man. What I fell in



Italian sculptor Maria Primolan's ceramic Bowie masks; (below) photographer Dennis O'Riagan



"Starman"'s TV debut on *Lift Off With Ayshea*, June 21, 1972



## SEARCH FOR THE BOWIE GRAIL

Five archive nuggets that continue to elude the reissue machine

### "BUNNY THING"/ "FUNNY SMILE"/ "PUSSY CAT" (1967)

Although *Spying Through A Keyhole*, released in April 2019, rounded up some hitherto unreleased Parlophone demos – including the sweet commuter ballad "Angel, Angel, Grubby Face" – there are still unheard tracks. Auctioned in May 2019, this collection of Deram-era outtakes includes a rambling beat poem about drug-smuggling bunnies, and a Tony Newley-inflected take on the nursery rhyme about a cat going to London to meet the Queen.

### ERNE JOHNSON (1968)

Bowie didn't manage to fulfil his dream of staging a rock musical until *Lazarus* opened in New York in December 2015, but he actually plotted and scored his first draft way back in 1968. Ernie Johnson was the story of a man throwing his own suicide party, and included Bowie's first adventures in polari ("Your friend he's really rather bona", he sings on "Tiny Tim"), and a visit to a Carnaby Street boutique ("That's not a stain, sir/That's a psychedelic motif"). A tape of 10 songs recorded in early 1968 was briefly listed on eBay in 2005 but was later withdrawn. Thanks to an of-its-time character study of a racist tramp, it's unlikely to ever see official release.

### LIFT OFF WITH AYSHEA (1972)

The July 6, 1972 *Top Of The Pops* performance of "Starman" is now mythologised as the moment Bowie bewitched a generation with one bony digit pointed down the camera lens,

but real heads revere a performance on Granada's teatime show *Lift Off With Ayshea* two weeks earlier. Long presumed lost after a technician mistakenly deleted the tapes, in 2019 a home recording on primitive videotape emerged. Francis Whately was rumoured to be restoring the crumbling footage for his *Five Years* documentary trilogy, but it has yet to see the light.

### ISOLAR TOUR FILM (1976)

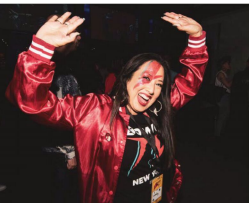
Bowie's 1976 tour on the back of *Station To Station*, launching his Thin White Duke stage persona and featuring the imperious band of Carlos Alomar, George Murray and Dennis Davis, is often regarded to comprise his finest ever performances. While audio recordings have been widely bootlegged, there's precious little film. However, maverick Bowie archivist and



Youtuber Nacha has assembled clips of "Station To Station" recorded in Montreal to produce a tantalising hint of what the shows were like. French TV apparently recorded five songs from the final Paris show, but once again, these have yet to come to light.

### "BLAZE" (2015)

There continue to be rumours of tracks left unfinished in Bowie's final flare of activity in 2015. One song we know that was completed is "Blaze", unearthed by Nicholas Pegg while researching the revised edition of his *Complete David Bowie* book, and apparently originally intended for the *Lazarus* stage show. According to Pegg, "Blaze" finds Bowie "returning to his long-cherished motif of space travel as an existential metaphor."



Blackstar saxophonist Darryl McCaskin improvises on "Warsawa" during a talk with author Nicholas Pegg



Gail Ann Dorsey, Bowie's bassist from 1995 to 2013, wields the Sharpe



Young Americans singer (and wife of Carlos Alomar) Robin Clark at singing



ALADDIN SANE



and of course, once I got it home I tried to stand on it myself. But it was so fragile I thought it would collapse. David must have been as light as a feather in those days!"

Nicholas Pegg's exhaustive reference book *The Complete David Bowie*, now in its seventh edition, has some claims to be one of the holy texts of the Bowie cult, though the man himself is more BBC sitcom vicar than cultish priest. "I would hesitate to suggest anything liturgical about my input," he laughs. "People have been very kind about my book over the years. People do occasionally say it's their Bowie bible and I'm very touched."

"I think if anything it's increasing," Pegg says of Bowie's posthumous fandom. "It's changed, of course. We know there won't be any more new albums. In the wilderness years after the final tour, many people thought that was it. Of course he surprised us. But the interesting thing is that the commodification started in the noughties – you saw the *Aladdin Sane*, the Ziggy package start to crystallise. After *The Next Day*, after *Blackstar*, after David left us, it's all opened out. One of the wonderful things is there are so many young people here who have only discovered him since he passed."

"Because his career was so prolific, varied and fecund, and he had his fingers in so many different cultural pies, there is still a world of potential and possibility and new ways of seeing and interpreting and revisiting DB. His importance in queer studies and gender studies is enormous – he's a pioneer, practically the pioneer, especially for people of my age, growing up in the '70s and '80s. Seeing the video for 'Boys Keep Swinging' meant a great deal to me. There weren't other people putting that kind of stuff out there. In a funky, exciting, sexy way, he was saying, 'Whatever you are, that's great, let me take you by the hand and let's have an adventure...'"

At 25, Beth is one of the younger guests at BowieCon and her immaculately styled Thin White Duke hair sets her apart amid the grey and balding heads that dominate the weekend. "I properly discovered David when I was a teenager, seeing pictures of him from *The Man Who Fell To Earth* and thinking he looked like the most beautiful human being who ever lived. It was the imagery, but also hearing 'Life On Mars?' and thinking, 'Why have I never delved into this?' I became super-obsessed. It was weirdly the right time – I was 15 or 16, there was lots of identity, sexuality stuff going on. It was the perfect time to discover him."

As an artist and animator, she's inspired by Bowie the artist as much as Bowie the musician. "I love so much of his visualisation of his ideas, the costumes and the characters he came up with, the storytelling. I appreciate him as an entire artist. I was so upset when he died, but grateful that I could discover him when I needed him. I've been talking to older people here, saying we felt like we were born a generation late because we weren't able to see him live and experience him as a person. For my generation he was more of an ethereal figure, a fantasy figure. It was all there for us to discover."

**"WE HAVE  
DAVID  
BOWIE  
AS  
TROPHY  
OBJECT"**  
PROFESSOR  
WILL  
BROOKER

WILL Brooker is Professor of Film and Cultural Studies at Kingston University. In 2015, as part of an "immersive research project" for his academic study of Bowie, *Forever Stardust*, he spent a year "living as Bowie": as far as possible visiting the same cities, reading the same books, wearing the same clothes and even eating the same food. He continues to follow the posthumous career with fascination, taking his students to visit the Brixton mural as a palimpsest of fan memory.

"One of my students last year had never heard of Bowie, which I think is a significant landmark event," he says.

"It will happen increasingly. He will pass out of history for a whole generation, perhaps. Meanwhile, we have Bowie as legacy



property – Bowie as trophy object, competed over by those who knew him. Bowie as, interestingly, an unfamiliar, unknown figure to some young people. We also have Bowie as a ‘tame alien’ – a safe sort of corporate mascot.”

Brooker acknowledges how Bowie still feels like an inspiration to gender-questioning teens. “Bowie as queer/trans ally is a current iteration, but I also suggest this is a reton of sorts. To claim Bowie as a trans or queer ally is a re-reading in my opinion and involves putting a certain slant on the available evidence, constructing a specific meaning. We should also consider that some gay men felt very betrayed by Bowie in the 1980s when he claimed in *Rolling Stone* that his early-’70s bisexual announcement had been a terrible mistake. Bowie was arguably quite appropriative of gay culture and it could be said that he used it to provoke and to boost his own image. There is evidence that Angie in particular cynically and cannily pushed this image as she knew it would be good in the press.”

Nevertheless when we meet drag legend Auntie Climax (aka Liverpool artist Brendan Curtis-Brown) before the Bowie Ball, dolled up as a sinister glam clown wizard, a Bowie incarnation that never quite made it into this timeline, s/he is effusive. “I first discovered him via *Labyrinth* and I just thought, ‘Who is this wonderful creature?’ From there it was on to the music and the whole fabulous creation. When he died I cried more than when my grandad died. Which is a weird thing to admit but it’s true. It affected me in a really visceral way.”

**B**OWIECON proves to be an intensely emotional experience all round. On stage, you’re never far from a group hug or a tearful standing ovation as Alomar and Clark talk about raising their family as Bowie’s New York neighbours, or when Woody Woodmansey remembers the early days

when David persuaded the bluff, northern Spiders of the joys of stage makeup. Or when Donny McCaslin recalls the sheer liberty of working with Bowie in the studio, when John Cambridge recalls the in-jokes of a lifetime’s friendship, when Kevin Cann plays his own private interview footage of Ken Pitt, costumer Natasha Korniloff and Mick Ronson. It’s a timely reminder that for all the extraterrestrial glamour, the alienation and dramatic isolation of his art, Bowie was a funny, bewildering, daft human being who for all his inspired talent also seemed to have a kind of transcendent gift for friendship and collaboration.

The back catalogue is playing non-stop through the weekend, songs that soundtracked and changed all our lives, songs we never tire of hearing. But the tune that suddenly hits home as we sit in the coffeshop watching the fans queue to have their pictures taken with a visibly touched Gail Ann Dorsey is “Everyone Says Hi”, that half-forgotten single from *Heathen*, supposedly written by Bowie in memory of his father. The song pictures the afterlife as a kind of eerie, bleak cruise holiday with dodgy food. “I’d love to get a letter”, he sings wistfully, in the awkward way of English families, “Like to know what’s what/Hope the weather’s good and it’s not too hot”.

BowieCon is full of these lovely, gently surreal moments, an audience finally taking the opportunity to wave a happy-sad goodbye to their hero. On Saturday morning in a Beatles-themed city centre hotel, convention guests and celebs mingle at the breakfast buffet. Look, there’s Woody Woodmansey queuing for croissants; there’s Donny McCaslin getting his head around English hotel coffee. And there’s Jan and Lester from *Sollbrul*, reminiscing about a lifelong friendship founded on a shared obsession. They all encountered something incredible. They’re all still trying to make sense of it. **B**



Pianist Mike Garson, who controls several Bowie albums for concerts this autumn

## BOYSKEEP SWINGING

The pick of the tours and tribute shows plugging a Bowie-shaped hole in the firmament

### CELEBRATING DAVID BOWIE

David has always been famous for his spectacular guitarists, says Angelo Budini, one of the producers of the all-star Bowie tribute which originally started in 2017, and returns for a second round of shows this autumn. “To explore all of the guitar sides of Bowie’s songs, we’re highlighting Adrian Belew’s brilliance, Todd Rundgren’s guitar wizardry, and whatever guitar mayhem I can muster in between”. Also features Fishbone’s Angelo Moore, Spacehog’s Royston Langdon and Jeffrey Gaines.

### MIKE GARSON’S BOWIE CELEBRATION

Longest-serving member of the Bowie band, pianist Mike Garson returns with his own tribute this autumn, featuring Bowie alumni including Gerry Leonard (guitarist and musical director of *The Real Thing*), Carmine Rojas (bass on the Serious Moonlight Tour), Alan Childs (drummer on the Glass Spiders Tour) and an array of guest vocalists including Westworld’s Evan Rachel Wood.

### TONY VISCONTI’S BEST OF BOWIE

“Medical differences” (namely drummer Woody Woodmansey’s reluctance to get a Covid jab) meant the end of the long-running Holy Holy project, but Tony Visconti continues to lead his own tribute, the Best Of Bowie, again fronted by Heaven 17’s Glenn Gregory.

**THE LONDON BOYS**  
With a surfeit of Bowie tribute bands hitting the road, these days it pays to have a niche. Dublin’s excellent London



Fishbone’s Angelo Moore at Celebrating David Bowie show in LA, 2017

Boys dedicate themselves exclusively to ’60s Bowie, with a connoisseur’s selection from *The Lower Third*’s ‘Can’t Help Thinking About Me’ to Newley’s *Deram* tunes like ‘The Gospel According to Tony Day’ and onto ‘Memories Of A Free Festival’.

### ART CRIME INC

Also from Dublin, where the city’s annual festivals is a fixture for discerning Bowiephiles, the highly recommended Art Crime Inc occupy an even smaller niche, performing 1. Outside. Bowie’s 1995 *Non-Linear Gothic Drama Hypercycle*, in order, in its entirety – Algeria Touchshrikak spoken-word interlude included.



Holy Holy reassembly: Glenn Gregory and Tony Visconti at Carnegie Hall, March 2016

Electric blue: Donny McCaslin, Gerry Leonard and Woody with new Bowie statue by Andy Edwards



## Album by album

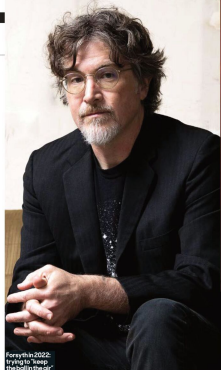
# Chris Forsyth

Evolution here we come! The gradual blossoming of a modern-day rock guitar maestro

**"T**HE guitar is like a puzzle," muses Chris Forsyth, zooming in from an airy cabin in Upstate New York, where his wife Maria Dumlaio has an artist's residency. "I don't think you ever really figure it out. But it's important to punch through and find other things, to keep it interesting. Like any relationship, if it stagnates then it becomes less rewarding."

Forsyth cut his teeth on the New York avant-garde scene of the late '90s and early '00s, where rock was a dirty word. But slowly he found his way back, via an enduring love for the work of Richards Thompson and Lloyd; he credits his renewed enthusiasm for the guitar to a period spent studying with the Television legend. Eventually reverting to something approaching a classic rock-band lineup—minus the egotistical frontman—Forsyth retains a nose for adventure and a determination to take rock music somewhere new without abandoning its core principles.

"I'm always trying to reconcile these two sides of my brain," he admits. "There's a great Eno quote where he says experimental music is like the North Pole: I like to know it's there, it enriches what I do, but I'd much rather live in the South of France. I feel that way about both extremes. Jazz, rock, blues, anything can become this regimented, predictable thing that gets frozen in amber or put in the museum, and then it's supposed to not change. And that's despicable to me. It's got to be alive, and being alive means changing." **SAM RICHARDS**



Forsyth in 2022, trying to "keep the ball in the air"

### CHRIS FORSYTH PARANOID CAT

FAMELY VINTAGE, 2022

After a decade or more in the New York avant-garde, Forsyth makes his first 'rock' album



I grew up playing in rock bands, and then in the mid-'90s I kinda got dissatisfied with that.

Culturally it felt like rock was drying up and I became more interested in experimental approaches. That coincided with me moving to New York City from New Jersey and being exposed to a lot more diverse music at venues like Tonic. Honestly though, part of why I drifted away from rock music was that I wasn't very good at it. When I studied with Richard Lloyd, he basically taught me how to play the guitar and how music works on a fundamental basis. By the time of *Paranoid Cat*, which was coming together just before I moved to Philadelphia in the summer of 2009, I felt like I was at the point where I could deploy some of these things in a way that was interesting to me, that was worth sharing. I still think of that song ["*Paranoid Cat Parts 1-3*"] as one of the more complete things that I've done. It's got that hypnotic, repetitive thing, which comes

from classic New York minimalism, but it's also got this folksy thing. I've always been attracted to where those places meet, a sort of 'back porch minimalism'—stuff that's got its toes in the mud, but that's also reaching for something else.

### CHRIS FORSYTH SOLAR MOTEL

NOGARDNER, 2023

Over the course of four sturdy psychedelic parties, a band begins to take shape



significant chunk of change. They said, "What's some small project that you'd really like to do?" And I said, "I'd really like to be able to go into a recording studio and record with a full band." It's the first time I worked with Jeff Zeigler, who's been involved in almost all of these records. We mixed *Paranoid Cat* together, and then I was able to go into his studio in Philly. We did *Solar Motel* in three days, it was still very quick. Peter Kerlin helped me record *Paranoid Cat* but this is the first record where he's playing bass. Mike Pride is an incredible drummer who can play anything. Shawn Hansen,

the keyboard player, is also one of those people who can play anything, but he also was totally fine with playing something really simple. It's like when guitar players talk about George Harrison, they're like, "He never played the wrong thing." Shawn is great at that.

### CHRIS FORSYTH & THE SOLAR MOTEL BAND INTENSITY GHOST

NOGARDNER, 2024

A breakthrough album, tapping into the essence of classic rock from Zeppelin to Television



For the first time I started getting reviewed, and there were some gigs. And so I was like, now I have to actually make a band. There was a really great synergy for me with the people that played on this

record. It didn't last very long; I didn't know how to be a bandleader or how to be a manager of people and I think my expectations were sometimes out of whack, and so it was challenging from an administrative standpoint. But musically it was great to play with Paul Sukeena. He's a great guitar player who went on to be the star of Angel Olsen's band for a few years. I joked that the working title for this record was "Sticky Fingers," because maybe *Exile on Main Street* is the best Stones record but Sticky Fingers is the most potent punch-for-punch. And this record felt like that for me: it covered a lot of ground very efficiently, the band was in a good place, and it just came together really easily. And that doesn't always happen, you know?

### PEESSEYE SCIFI DEATH MASK

HEP HARMONY, 2024

Last hurrah for the experimental improv trio Forsyth formed in 2002 with Jaime Fennelly and Fritz Welch



We used to say our band was divided into three elements: science, magic, blues. Jaime was the science, Fritz was the magic and I was the blues. Jaime played synthesizers and

**"I've always been attracted to a sort of back porch minimalism"**



"There was a really great synergy" fronting the Solar Motel Band, 2013

electronics; he used to play these ancient sine-wave oscillators from the '50s. Fritz is a totally untrained musician, but he can play shit that other people can't play. He knows how to combine serious avant-garde ideas with humour and absurdity, so he's a very special ingredient. At the time we got together it was post-9/11, which looking back I feel like is an undeniable piece of that band, dealing with the trauma of being in New York when that happened and everything that came after. The band was a collective three-headed monster where nobody's in charge, there was no 'you can't do that', or 'this is how that goes'. Sometimes it was contentious, and that came out in the music as well. The last thing we did was this artist's residency in Antwerp, which is where these recordings came from. And that's still the most potent thing we did – it's just pure intensity and freedom of expression. But a lot of it's kind of dark. It was so intense, playing that music, that I wanted to do something a little less dangerous for me.

#### CHRIS FORSYTH & THE SOLAR MOTEL BAND THERAPY OF EXPERIENCE

NOVEMBER 2024

The focus sharpens, with Forsyth paying tribute to Richard Thompson and singing for the first time



When Paul left the band, I didn't think that somebody would be able to just walk in and fill those shoes and add something, but Nick [Millevol] did. He's a phenomenal player and he'd had a few records out on Tzadic, which is John Zorn's label. *The Rarity Of Experience* is a tight, short-ish record, although there's still some sprawling stuff on there. There's songs, there's vocals. That started because we would just play covers for fun in rehearsal, or at gigs sometimes, and somebody had to sing. I had never sung in a band before, so it was a huge hurdle to get over. I suspect I would win a little bit at some of the vocals now, but that's part of the deal. You're putting something out there, and if you wait until it's perfect, it's probably too late. Jaime [Fennelly] did a synthesiser part for "Anthem" that sounds like The Who! And there's a version of "The Calvary Cross", which I originally recorded for [online music mag] *Aquarium Drunkard* – I remember thinking it was the best performance that the band had done. I would love for Richard Thompson to hear it; there are few musicians on Earth that I think are more compelling and brilliant than him. The Grizzly

Man soundtrack just came out on No Quarter, so we're labelmates now!

#### CHRIS FORSYTH ALL TIME PRESENT

NOVEMBER 2023

A vivid showcase for Forsyth's many talents: rousing riffs, 20-minute trance-outs and an inspired collaboration with Rosali on "Dream Song" When I came up with the riff to [opening track]

"Tomorrow Might As Well Be Today" I was like, 'Oh, this sounds like Richard Thompson playing The Bangles.' There's a part of the melody that sounds like "Manic Monday" to me. Which is great, I fucking love that shit. I feel like there's maybe a sense that I'm this psychedelic warrior who melts people's faces, which is funny because really I think about economy all the time. Television is the same way – a song like "Marquee Moon", there's not a wasted moment on it, it needs to be 11 minutes long. The most interesting thing to me is having that precision and giving it the time to expand. The best composition should sound improvised, and the best improvisation should sound composed. If it's a short, punchy song, it should sound like it just



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exploded, even if it actually took weeks to sew the pieces together. And the best improvisation should sound preordained, like it's telling a story that's really coherent. The score for "Techno Top" was basically: here's a pulse, here's a groove – everybody can do whatever they want, but make a choice and stick with it. And then when you make another change, make it count, so it's not willy-nilly. Be really considered and patient and decisive. The idea of the title was that we wanted it to be like if ZZ Top was playing techno. Both those things are kind of trancey and momentum-based and minimal. They're not indulgent but they require time; you can't get to that place in two minutes. I wrote "Dream Song" in 1993 or



Finding spontaneous structures with Dave Harrington (right) 2019



With 98-year-old free jazz sax player Marshall Allen

something. I tried it at various times through the other bands and it just didn't stick. I was like, 'OK, this time we're gonna get it to stick.' I love Rosali, she's a great singer and also somebody with a really broad conception of music, maybe more broad than the casual listener would discern from her song-oriented records, which are great. But when I first met her, she was doing these really dreamy vocal performances with loop pedals and stuff. Her voice is obviously one of those instruments where you're like, 'God, I wish I could sing like that'.

## CHRIS FORSYTH WITH GARCIA PEOPLES PEOPLE'S MOTEL BAND

NO QUARTER, 2022

A storming live set from Johnny Brenda's in Philadelphia, with Forsyth backed by jam-rock specialists Garcia Peoples



With All Time Present, I felt like I had accomplished a bunch of things that I had been meaning to do, and I was kind of like, 'What now?' I wasn't sure. I was in Philly and my bandmates were still all over the place – Peter was living in New York, Ryan [Jewell] was in Ohio, Shawn was back in Kansas City. And it's a huge thing to coordinate just to do gigs. So that's when I was like, 'Fuck it, there is no band, it's whoever is available.' I liked Garcia Peoples as people and as a band, and we'd played some gigs together. In 2019, they had a show in New York with Ryley Walker, but Ryley got sick. Tom [Malach, Garcia Peoples guitarist] called me up and was like, 'Ryley can't do this gig on Saturday, we're thinking maybe you want to

come up and we'll do a set with you.' So we played 'Techno Top' and 'The Calvary Cross' and 'The Other One' by the Grateful Dead. I did a residency at this place Nublu in New York City and in the middle of that I also booked a gig in Philly with Garcia Peoples and I decided I would record that, just as a way of trying to do something different. So Garcia Peoples learned the material – I remember going to their rehearsal studio, and as I was walking down the hall they were playing 'Tomorrow Night As Well Be Today'. I walked in and was like, 'I don't even need to do this – I could just kick back and have a beer and you guys could play.' Anyway, we did the recording and it came out really well. It captures the atmosphere of being in a club and the band really kicking.

## CHRIS FORSYTH/ DAVE HARRINGTON/ RYAN JEWELL/ SPENCER ZAHN FIRST FLIGHT

ALGORITHM, 2020

A fully improvised set, recorded at Nublu in New York the night after the Peoples Motel Band show



September 2019 was a big month for me! As part of my residency at Nublu, the promoter said, 'Oh, you should do something with my friend Dave Harrington.' I didn't

know Dave at all but I knew Darkside a little bit. And funny enough, he was the first bass player in Sunwatchers, before Peter Kerlin. So there's some weird connections. I got in touch with Dave and he was into it. I said, 'I know a really good drummer' [Ryan Jewell] and he was like, 'I know a really good bass player' [Spencer Zahn], and that was the extent of the discussion. I don't think there was even a soundcheck, we barely talked. And then when we were going up on the stage, Dave said, 'Should we pick a key or something?' And I was like, 'It's too late!' Sometimes it's better to jacthot that there's no preparation for this. And that was another really uncanny gig. We played for 60 minutes straight, just one long thing. But it was episodic, and there were structures that came up and disappeared. People would step forward and make space and there was never any overblowing or fighting for attention. It felt super-organic and natural, and it was just a joy. I remember, we all stopped playing and were like, 'Wow, I don't even know you, man – I feel like I know you a lot better now!'

## CHRIS FORSYTH EVOLUTION HERE WE COME

NO QUARTER, 2022

Tortoise's Doug McCombs joins the band, and there are cameos from Steve Wynn, Bill Nace and Sun Ra Arkestra's Marshall Allen!



Montrose Recording [in Richmond, Virginia] is a studio that Steve Wynn had recommended

to me repeatedly. They've got an eccentric old mixing desk that belonged to Mark Linkous from Sparklehorse and it gives everything this texture. We recorded for three days and as always the best track on the record ended up being the last one we did ['Experimental & Professional']. Doug is an incredible guy to play with, he's so solid and precise and just holds shit together. Tom [Malach] is one of those people that has a special sixth sense about music – he's both instinctive and incredibly full of knowledge. Marshall Allen, it's amazing to be in his presence. He was in World War II liberating death camps, and then living as a black man in America for his entire life. But this joy comes through in his playing... and all the other stuff. It's just the deepest music there is. I was looking at the range of people on the album: even in the core band, there's somebody who's about 30 [Malach] and somebody who's about 60 [McCombs]. Steve Wynn's a little bit older than that. And then Marshall is almost 100! That wasn't necessarily part of the plan but I think it does speak to something about the music. What can this music be? Rock music is not really popular music any more. But then again neither is jazz, so what can it be now? It's partly being able to comment on it or critique it and also celebrate it, rather than replicating something. It's trying to keep it alive, keep the ball in the air. ☺

**"Rock music is not really popular music any more. But then neither is jazz, so what can it be now?"**

Evolution Here We Come is out via No Quarter on August 26

FROM THE MAKERS OF UNCUT



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# INDUSTRIAL. EVOLUTION

**COSEY FANNI TUTTI's** defiantly subversive and progressive work – as a member of COUM Transmissions, Throbbing Gristle and beyond – has always been fired by a boundless curiosity. But with a new memoir and album imminent, has the one-time “wrecker of civilisation” finally mellowed? “Whatever was thrown at me, it never destroyed me inside,” she tells Laura Barton

**A**CROSS the fields around King's Lynn, the wheat grows high and green, and the houses thin out and until they become little more than occasional farms and small parishes, quiet beneath the Norfolk sky. For more than 30 years, Cossey Fanni Tutti and her partner, Chris Carter, have lived out here, in a village where few are interested in the comings and goings of two avant-garde musicians.

This midweek morning, Tutti sits at her kitchen table, dark-ringed eyes beneath a heavy, dark fringe. The scene is a strange combination of domesticity and defiance: the fitted kitchen, the well-kept garden; behind her on the counter, a row of plastic cereal containers. But next door lies the couple's home studio, a framed fan-painting of the cover of Throbbing Gristle's 20 jazz *Funk Greats* hangs on a wall, and opposite the refrigerator, a glass cabinet displays some of the accumulated paraphernalia of a life spent in sonic and artistic experimentation.

Tutti is 70 now, with a career that has so far encompassed co-founding the music and performance art collective COUM Transmissions in 1969 and industrial music originators Throbbing Gristle in 1975. Later came Chris & Cossey – a duo with Carter – and Carter Tutti Void, the couple's collaboration with Factory Floor's Nik Void. There has also been extensive solo work, including her acclaimed 2019 album *TUTTI*, a memoir called *Art Sex Music*, her extraordinary soundtrack to Caroline Catz's documentary film *Delia Derbyshire: The Myths And Legendary Tapes*, and a new book, *Re-Sisters: The Lives And Recordings Of Delia Derbyshire*, Margery Kempe And Cossey Fanni Tutti.



DRUGS DRUGS  
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ROCK  
ROLL

COMING

COMING

AVENUE

Cossey  
Fanni Turtti  
m.l.A. 1991

AVENUE

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AVENUE





Cossey Fanni Tutti and Genesis P-Orridge of Throbbing Gristle, in their Hackney garden, protected by barbed wire, London, 1978

Across five decades her work has been subversive and progressive, it has crossed boundaries and melded disciplines, but above all it has been fired by a boundless curiosity – to explore sound as a means of pleasure and pain, to challenge societal norms and conservative thinking, a desire to understand and to question and connect.

In person Tutti is at first a watchful presence, but the reserve softens, and an animation for her subject rises. Her conversation ranges widely, as if constantly seeking connections, so that five minutes in her company might draw together tuning forks, the black, blue and gold Mandarin wallpaper of her teenage bedroom, and the wonder of first seeing Derbyshire's science exercise books from her school days: "Pages and pages of writing and drawing on wave theory and the shape of the mouth and how it can affect the acoustics," she says, lit up. "I was just astounded. I thought, 'Wow, this isn't about music. No, no. This is sound. That's the big difference.'"



Preparing a Cossey Action at Acme Gallery, Covent Garden, London, July 77



Tutti navigates the world in similar fashion. "I'm not a musician," she says. "Like Delia, I'm into sound. I can turn everything off in the studio if we've been working there all day, and I can go outside and listen to the tractor going by, and then as it gets in the distance, that's a nice whining sound. That's the kind of thing."

"There's almost a form of non-verbal communication with Cossey," Catz says. "You'd play her vague, abstract pieces, or talk to her about ideas that were half-forming, or you'd tell her that something needed to sound 'yellow', and she'd completely get it. She manages to catch the essence of things, really profoundly."

It is not often, these days, that Tutti returns to Hull – though she retains an affection for the city that raised her, and where she was once known more prosaically as Christine Newby. For a while she thought she might even return to live there one day. "It created who I am, Hull," she says. "But my god, it and I have changed so much. We wouldn't be compatible anymore. I was never compatible in the first place."

Home was dysfunctional and not terribly encouraging place, dominated by a father who was cold, and difficult, and often violent. The young Tutti found flickers of inspiration regardless in the way her father tinkered with electronics around the house, the strange sounds his experiments produced somehow running parallel, in Tutti's mind, to the pop charts of the day – The Honeycombs and Kathy Kirby. "I was constantly seeing how you could use sound and how it didn't just come out of the television, the radio or record player," she explains. "You could actually make it come out where you wanted, and in a way that you wanted it to."

Her father refused to buy a record player. She had fantasies of being like her friends, visiting one another's houses with their pale pink vintage case turntables. "I'm stood there thinking, 'Why aren't I like that? Why can't I do that? Oh, my dad...'" she recalls. "So I thought, 'I'll have to make sure I can do it in a different way then, find ways around things, find like-minded people.'"

In Hull, Tutti first met a young man at an acid test at the university students' union who was carrying a wooden staff and looking something like a Greek Orthodox priest. He was called Neil, but he preferred to be known as Genesis P-Orridge. Genesis renamed Christine, too; she was Cosmois, Cossey for short. So began a

partnership that was by turns romantic, creative, turbulent and destructive.

COUM Transmissions began in tandem with Tutti's relationship with P-Orridge, fuelled by the '60s counterculture scene, a love of Dada and surrealism. In time, the early pub gigs, lewd wordplay and tinsel-swathed street actions gave way to more challenging works involving bodily fluids and live sex acts.

For some while, Tutti had been using images from pornographic magazines to make collages, but seeking to understand that world further, she began posing for them herself, appeared in porn movies and found work as a stripper. When COUM were given a retrospective at London's Institute Of Contemporary Arts in 1976, they titled it *Prostitution*, and its combination of explicit imagery, sex workers, used tampons and bloody dildos sent polite society apoplectic. In the House Of Commons, one MP labelled the collective "wreckers of civilisation".

When Tutti talks of these times today – of the chaos and creativity and communal living that dominated first COUM and then Throbbing Gristle, she makes them feel more tender than scandalous. She was, after all, still only in her early twenties when the *Prostitution* show opened. "I wanted my mum," she says now. "She was the one that supported me."

For as long as she could remember, Tutti's mother had backed her. "She tried when I was at home, blessing her. She just would say, 'Well you're so different, no-one's going to hold you back.' She would say, 'I know you're going to go and do what you're going to do.' She understood me in that respect."

The problem was that her mother loved her father. "Absolutely besotted," she says. "And then there came a point where he said, 'It's her or me' – which is really evil, this bloke in the middle keeping us all apart, tearing us apart. And that was after the ICA, so..."

Tutti remembers the barrage of that time – the last time her mother spoke to her, the tabloid outrage, the gathering joy of Throbbing Gristle, her fading feelings for P-Orridge, her growing love for Carter: "Everything fired at me at once. It was scattergun. I felt like I had an invisible shield, because what else could I do?" she wonders. "I'd never crumbled on anything, so I just

# GRISTLE STOP

## How to buy Cosy Fanni Tutti



**THROBBING GRISTLE**  
**DOA: THE THIRD AND FINAL REPORT OF THROBBING GRISTLE (1978)**

TG's second album continued the dystopian work of their debut, but brought more variation across its 13 tracks. By turns it's ear-scorching and brain-burrowing, threaded with taped conversations, flickers of melody and growling synths.



**CHRIS & COSEY**  
**HEARTBEAT (1981)**

Post-TG, the couple's debut as a duo offered a striking if raw melodicism. There were shades of synth-pop and ambient and techno, textural, spooky, glittering. It became a touchstone for many electronic artists that followed.



**COSEY FANNI TUTTI**  
**TIME TO TELL (1982)**

Tutti's solo debut was a subversive feminist offering. Using dislocated synths and a disembodied vocal, it related the experience of sex work and was intended as an accompaniment to her performance art.



**CARTER TUTTI VOID**  
**TRANSVERSE (2012)**

Live performance has of course played an integral role in Tutti's work. Here, she joined forces with Carter and Nik Cok, Void of Factory Floor for a live improvisational multi-part piece of absorbing roboticism.



**COSEY FANNI TUTTI**  
**TUTTI (2019)**

Tutti's later solo outing is a remarkable thing: a marriage of cornet, techno and agricultural landscape, a squelched-synth discotheque, a garbled industrial center. Written around the time of Art Sex Music, these pieces feel something like a sound memoir.

# "EVERYTHING FIRED AT ME AT ONCE. IT WAS SCATTERGUN"

## COSEY FANNI TUTTI

tried to make sense of myself, because I was the one it was aimed at, and I was the one that lost everything through it. I thought, 'Here we go, self-preservation again, as always.' She looks resigned. "There was just something inside me that meant I knew that I could get through it, and I was still me," she says. "Whatever was thrown at me, it never destroyed me inside."

**T**UTTI and Carter first met at a church in North London where Carter was holding a solo multimedia performance. It was perhaps 1974. "I didn't really know who she was," Carter says now. "I'd just come off stage and there she was, all smiling with those big eyes and long legs, and I was quite awestruck at first." Both were already in relationships, but nevertheless they began spending most of their free time together.

Carter joined Tutti, P-Orridge and fellow COUM member Peter "Sleazy" Christopherson in forming Throbbing Gristle. Together they established a sound that combined bilious distortion, pre-recorded tape samples, Carter's electronics and spoken-word turns by P-Orridge and Tutti. They wore uniforms, while performances drew on imagery that ranged from pornography to concentration camps. The objective, the band maintained, was to encourage audiences to think for themselves. "It was a lot about how we as a whole, human beings, cope with awful things that happen, and good things that happen, and how those sounds can echo the feelings that you have," Tutti says. Still, they were as terrifying as they were compelling.

"I think I was scared of them," says Catz. "I was probably about 14, in Manchester, finding their 20 Jazz Funk Greats album and being fascinated and terrified by it. It was intimidating. It was opening up things. I'd grown up with punk around me, but they felt scarier than that – they felt real, properly anarchic, and properly exciting."





Keeping it real:  
Chris and Casey,  
TG studio,  
Hackney 1980

All the while they were making this terrifying, exciting music, Tutti and Carter were falling in love. "I'd had to fight for being me right through my childhood. I used to find ways outside of that situation to be myself," she says. "It was the same all the way through my life until I met Chris and I didn't have to do that. He knew who I was, and he loved me for who I was, and still does."

For a while, Tutti thought the openness of the COUM approach to life would mean P-Orridge was undaunted by her relationship with Carter. "But he wasn't. So I had to make the decision to go," she says. "That was really difficult. I don't like hurting someone in that way." For the two years that followed, Tutti continued to support P-Orridge. "I knew how to deal with him. I knew if I didn't do it that way, it could be worse for me and other people as well."

When Tutti published her autobiography in 2017, she detailed some of the bleaker moments of that time and her relationship with P-Orridge – the abuse, the manipulation, the day he threw a breeze block at her from a balcony and almost hit her head. P-Orridge denied Tutti's account and accused her of confecting the stories to sell books. "What bothered me was that my book came out more or less at the #MeToo time and there were still people siding with him," she says. "Shut-shaming. The lies continued. It was absolutely disgusting."

P-Orridge died in 2020. How did Tutti feel when she heard he had passed? "I don't know if I can say on tape!" she says, and then thinks for a moment. "We were on the sofa watching TV," she says eventually. "I got a text from his ex-wife, Paula, and I said, 'Oh, Gen's died.' It takes you a while to take it in, because you've been expecting it for so long. It was an odd moment. Very, very strange."

When Throbbing Gristle ended, Tutti and Carter formed Chris & Casey, in which they took the grounding of their previous band and charged it with a sublime pop seediness.

For all the sultriness, there was a sweet romanticism to their work too – the simplicity of Carter's electronics in "October (Love Song)", as Tutti sings of falling in love, and of hearts beating together. "Just kiss me, and kiss me forever", she implores.

There was an intimacy in this work that continued in Tutti's solo records. "It was so personal," Catz says. "All her inner feelings, her dangerous secret life, set in these seductive soundscapes, and the juxtaposition of the two."

Though he speaks of their immediate sexual chemistry, Carter notes that the pair were quite different, creatively – Tutti's creative practice rooted in art and art performance, his in a/v technology and music – and also as people. "Personality-wise we were like chalk and cheese," he says. "Back then I was extremely shy, verging on introverted, and she was gregarious and supremely confident and always spoke her mind, she still does. I love that about her."

It is the same in the studio. "If something isn't working, say a melody, the structure of a song or a vocal, she will definitely let you know – and suggest that we 'move on'," he says. "Cosey is not one for holding back or sitting on the fence." Musically, Carter says that they are drawn to different genres, styles, frequencies and tones. "We both like melody and rhythm but come to them from different places," he says. "But we also both like making a noise."

They can agree on bass, as how Tutti explains it, but diverge further up the scale. "I really like the high frequencies, and he can't tolerate them," she says. "He's always saying, 'Oh, that's too high!' I'm saying, 'No, it's really nice!' High frequency to me is almost like zoning out, like meditation. Whereas with him it's unbearable." She pauses. "But he loves Enya. I can take or leave her. It's very odd."

**W**HEN Tutti wrote her first book, she did so in part to put some things to bed. "There was so much controversy and myths around my life," she says. "I'd read about what people thought about me and things that weren't even true. I'd gone through some moments where I thought that I wasn't going to make it, so I thought I needed to get this down so that people understand who I am and what happened to me, from my own words, and just set the record right."

Her new book, *Re-Sisters*, is a different matter, plaiting together her own life with that of the electronic composer Delia Derbyshire and the 15th-century Christian mystic Margery Kempe, who wrote the first English language autobiography. In other hands this might seem an improbable feat, but in Tutti's it becomes a striking rumination on creativity, womanhood and rebellion. "It was an opportunity," she says. "To write about three women who had such a hard time being who they wanted to be."



Casey and Caroline  
Catz in a still from *Delia:  
The Myths and the  
Legendary Tapes*



Delia Derbyshire  
with Diamond  
Briscoe, BBC  
Radiophonic  
Workshop, 1965



Cosy onstage  
at London's  
Heaven, 2015



because suddenly it belongs to you. You're whole."

It is this shared self-determination that unites the three of them, she feels. "For me my source of strength was myself, and with Margery it was herself – but she'd never recognise that. And the same with Delia, that sense of self and the determination to retain it, no matter what, and no I'm going to go ahead and do what I want to do because that's me. And that's my purpose in life and who I want to be."

The project grew out of her 2018 commission to write a soundtrack for Catz's film about Derbyshire – the director and actor waylating Tutti after a live event at Rough Trade East and convincing her to accompany her to the Delia Derbyshire archives in Manchester. "We were there for three or four days," Catz recalls. "In the main archive, with headphones on, not allowed to speak, just communicating via sign language, all this excitement crackling."

Both Catz and Tutti note how alive Derbyshire seemed on those archive recordings. "It didn't feel nostalgic," Catz says. "It felt as if you were listening to her writing – sometimes you'd hear her laugh or hear her talk. So it felt as if the three of us were working on it together." Towards the end, Tutti had the idea of combining all three of their voices together and turning them into pieces that could run all the way through the film, like a thread.

It's a similar note that runs through *Re-Sisters*, Tutti's film frequently finding thematic meeting-points with that of Derbyshire and Kempe. It was while she was knee-deep in researching Derbyshire's life that she also began reading about Kempe. In both cases, she was struck by all the things unsaid about these women.

"With Delia, I felt that everything that I'd read about her was not focused on her as a person," Tutti says. "I thought who you are comes out in your creative work. It has to." She researched widely, from exploring the resonance of polyphonic singing, to interviewing those who had known her, coming to understand her personal life, her collaborations with visual artists, the mysteries of the years after she left the BBC Radiophonic Workshop.

Time again, she is struck by Derbyshire's distinct relationship to sound. In one section she discovers how few notes the composer wrote in her school music books compared with her science books. "I think it was because sound was a language, it wasn't just music, and that's how she approached it," Tutti says. "Her ear was drawn to all the different sounds that come out of a piano when you play it. I don't mean just notes, black and white notes, I mean those little sounds that you get in-between the notes from the resonance of the one that you just played. I can remember that from when I did my piano lessons – I used to go mad on the piano trying to find those sounds that weren't there when I just played the music score."



## "WE MIGHT HAVE HAD SPARKS"

### Cosy on channelling Delia Derbyshire

**M**AKING the soundtrack to *Delia Derbyshire: The Myths And The Legendary Tapes* was not simply a case of repurposing material from the Radiophonic Workshop pioneer's archive. In commissioning Tutti, the film's director, Caroline Catz, was aiming for something more ambitious. "I was interested in that line of influence, the effect that one creative life has on another," she says. "I wanted to have Cosy weave her own sound story throughout it. I wanted there to be this space in the film, reaching across eras, using different techniques, two musicians communicating together."

This made sense to Tutti. "I didn't want to use [Derbyshire's] audio files as I know she was so precious about them. So I was working on experimenting in different ways to get things that sounded like Delia. It was different to my own material as it's a kind of sound of the time. Although it still resonates now. It is a particular way of creating sound."

Getting to know her subject through sound helped Tutti draw a fuller picture of Derbyshire. "I don't think we'd have got on, really," she says. "I think maybe we might have had sparks – but there might have been good sparks – you just can't tell, can you? I'll take that back. I think we'd have got on alright."

It is a warm day, so we head out to Tutti's garden. We talk about her upcoming art exhibition, a new solo project, the swing set for their grandchildren. We take in the peonies, roses, foxgloves and the rosemary bush while Tutti points out the bowls of water she's left out for the hedgehogs. She explains why she and Carter no longer play live, due to her health issues. "I don't want to die on stage and I don't want to die in a hotel room after a gig, thank you very much!" And she explains how, despite knowing it is for the best, she misses the resonance of it all. "The physical effect of the big PA!" she says. "That all-consuming wow moment! The feedback from the audience. The power of the sound and that communal feedback vibe, it's life-enhancing, life-empowering. It's just a wonderful feeling, being able to share that moment with everyone."

What does she listen to at the moment? "Nothing!" she says, and her eyes dance. "No." She smiles. "I just said that out of bloody-mindedness." She hears the influence of Throbbing Gristle and Chris & Cosy everywhere these days. "Rhythms, melodies, effects. We can sit there listening to something, and we'll hear a little sequence and think, 'Is this ours?' But then no, it's gone somewhere else." A few years ago she might've been outraged, but now she takes it as a compliment. "I mean if someone ripped us off big time I would, I'd be in there," she says.

I ask if there is anything else she would like to tell me and she is quiet for a moment, picks a sprig of the apple mint that grows in a tub by the back door and rubs it between her fingers. When she speaks, her voice is quite solemn, as if this is not quite a sermon, but something she has been thinking about for some time. "When we create things, we give a gift for people to share," she says. "We show you can create something and be who you are and give that strength of will to other people. That we're all here to be who we are and we should fight for that. We shouldn't sit back and be suppressed and miserable – that's what it does when people hold you back, it makes you miserable. Do what you can and share your love of life with other people," she says. "You've got one life, for God's sake, live it to the full." ☺

*Re-Sisters... is published on August 8 by Faber. Delia Derbyshire: The Myths And The Legendary Tapes – Original Soundtrack Recordings is released on September 16 by Conspiracy International*

# She Comes In Colors

by Love

Love's ornate third single marked a progression from their garage-band beginnings. Jazz players – and Mick Jagger – were paying attention...

**L**OVE's reputation rests on their dazzling third album, 1967's *Forever Changes*. But the journey there involved several different stops. Not least among these is "She Comes In Colors" – a jazzier, flute- and harpsichord-peppered Arthur Lee composition from 1966's *Da Capo*. The Los Angeles band's second album – named after a musical term meaning "back to the beginning" – took a pivotal step on the odyssey from their eponymous debut's garage rock towards an ornate, psychedelic form of rock'n'roll. "The first album was more minimalist, with everything recorded live," recalls

guitarist Johnny Echols, sipping ginger beer on a tour bus in Leeds, shortly before performing the hallowed catalogue with The Love Band. "But *Da Capo* was a more grown-up album. We wanted to push the envelope. I'm very proud of "She Comes In Colors," because we'd been known as a garage rock band but suddenly jazz musicians would come up to us and ask, 'How on earth did you guys come up with that...?'"

The seeds of this adventure had been sown shortly before the main album sessions, when Love entered Sunset Sound Recorders studio one with producer Jac Holzman and engineer

## KEY PLAYERS



Johnny Echols  
Lead guitarist



Michael Stuart-Ware  
Drummer



Bruce Botnick  
Mix engineer

Bruce Botnick to lay down "7 And 7 Is", a hurtling proto-punk number that would become their first – and only – American Top 40 single (reaching No 33).

"That single was very different from the song Arthur had written," says Echols, explaining that it had started out as "a kind of Dylanesque folk song about Arthur, very autobiographical". As he explains it, an endorsement deal with Vox meant they could try out pioneering new effects, such as a tremolo box for a guitar and distortion pedal for the bass. "Which no-one had then. Arthur was listening in the booth and went, 'That's pretty cool.'"

The results gave them the confidence to experiment even more, changing producers, studios and engineers for *Da Capo* and blossoming with "She Comes In Colors". Receiving little airplay outside the LA area on release in 1966, the song wasn't a hit but has had quite an afterlife. The Rolling Stones quoted it – "She comes in colours everywhere" – uncredited, in 1967 single "She's A Rainbow". The Hoosiers covered it and Janet Jackson sampled it. Even Madonna borrowed from it – unwittingly – on 1999 hit "Beautiful Stranger", with producer William Orbit later admitting borrowing from the melody. "Arthur got a credit for that," smiles Echols. "The whole group should have been credited really, but the acknowledgement was nice." DAVESIMPSON

**JOHNNY ECHOLS:** "My Little Book" had done quite well as a single [reaching US 52 in March 1966], so we wanted to keep pushing with "7 And 7 Is".

**BRUCE BOTNICK:** It was just really, really unusual for me. I had never heard anything like that before. But I loved the energy. The drummer [Alban "Snoopy"



Love, 1966 (top) Arthur Lee, (l-r) Tjay Cantrell, Johnny Echols, Michael Stuart-Ware, Ken Forster and Bryan MacLean



Pfisterer, who'd trained as a pianist, not a percussionist) struggled with the tempo. After about 30 takes Arthur said, "Sit down, I'll play." I guess Snoopy must have then figured out how to do it.

**ECHOLS:** By that time everyone was cursing at the poor man. We played it so much that by the end my fingers were bleeding, but after that we felt we could do anything. We realised we needed a real drummer, so finally got Michael Stuart [now Stuart-Ware] from the Sons Of Adam.

**MICHAEL STUART-WARE:** Arthur had heard the Sons play a few times. One day, he came by our pad in Laurel Canyon and said, "You guys can have this tune if you want it", and banged out "7 And 7 Is" on his black Gibson acoustic. Our lead guitarist Randy Holden said, "That's not really us", so Arthur played us "Feathered Fish". Randy went, "We'll take that!" and we covered it. Love's original drummer, Don Conca, was fabulous, but the drugs took over and he stopped showing up for gigs. One night Arthur asked, "Is there a drummer in the house?" So Snoopy had filled in, but was more comfortable once he switched to harpischord. Arthur was always asking me to join and after the Sons

stopped getting along. I finally said OK. When I bumped into Don Conca he said, "That's cool, man."

You're the only drummer in Hollywood who can handle it."

**ECHOLS:** Don Conca was a loud showman, like Gene Krupa or Buddy Rich. Michael was a finesse drummer. He did these rhythmic counterpoints that sounded marvellous. We all had eclectic tastes. Country, gospel, blues, jazz. Arthur and I went to the same Memphis high school as Charles Lloyd and I'd watch fascinated as he played clarinet. After we moved to Los Angeles, Charles came to see Love at [LA club] Bido Lito's. We were drawing to times more people than him. He was kinda miffed, but light-hearted. When we wanted to go more jazzy we got Tajay Cantrell, who we'd played with in the Grass Roots, on woodwind. He was just going to play a session, but the flute changed the sound so much that he became part of the group.

## "In a way it's three songs in one, but it's hard to hear where the changes are"

JOHNNY ECHOLS

**STUART-WARE:** I'd listened to the first Love album, but Arthur wanted to cover new ground from a jazz foundation. At the first practice at Arthur and [guitarist] Bryan MacLean's pad on Brier,

we smoked hash and listened to Charles Lloyd, Cat Stevens and Fresh Cream. Then Arthur played his new tunes on the Gibson, including "She Comes In Colors". On stage at Bido Lito's, Love were a natural LSD trip with no comedown, but the new songs sounded more sophisticated.

**ECHOLS:** We also changed producers. Mr Holzman [also Elektra Records boss] came from a folk music background and wanted everything clean and pristine, but our sound was loud, levels driven into the red. When Jac told us about Paul Rothchild, who'd just got out of prison for selling marijuana, we thought that was the coolest thing. We hadn't heard his stuff. The only reason we hired him was

because he'd gotten out of prison. We also got a new engineer, Dave Hassinger, who captured our sound as it was and got a great mix. We went into RCA Studios, because Paul Rothchild was working with The Doors in Sunset. RCA had installed an eight-track machine, so we could overdub on *Dr Capo*. It was a brand new slate. I think Paul Rothchild expected us to do something like the first album. It took him a while to get used to these jazzier songs, but then he got on board and he was perfect. **STUART-WARE:** Love ruled the Sunset Strip mysteriously. Because the group didn't play often, everyone was always, "Where are they?" Our racial diversity enhanced that mystique and was an integral part of our difference.

**ECHOLS:** We were a racially diverse hard rock group because Arthur and I were racially diverse and grew up in a racially diverse community. We wanted our group to reflect who we were. We didn't want to be typecast as R&B, or play the Chitlin circuit, where Chuck Berry's manager had to carry a 45 and say, "Pay me now or he's not going on."

**BRUCE BOTNICK:** It was highly unusual to have a black person doing rock'n'roll, before Hendrix, ➤





Arthur wouldn't leave Hollywood Love at the Whisky A Go Go, January 1967

but Arthur never called any race issues. He dealt with you on the level of: "This is my music and this is what I want."

**ECBOL:** Arthur had taken accordion lessons and his parents had also bought him an organ. He only joined the band I had with Billy Preston in school because young ladies flocked to us. He had a musician's soul but didn't want to take the time to become one. His genius was to be able to sit down with a group of us and sing songs that he'd written, and as we'd find the chords he'd go, "I like that." He assembled the music like a collage, in his head from what we played. "She Comes In Colors" was the most difficult song on *Da Capo* to record. It probably took seven or eight takes, because in a way it's three songs in one, but it's hard to hear where the changes are.

**STUART-WARE:** Playing unusual time signatures didn't present much of a challenge for anyone in the group. I'd listened to Dave Brubeck in school and played in a high school jazz group. The jazzy groove on "She Comes In Colors" was one I had from the get-go. I just had to play harder because I was up against electronic instruments. The flute and harpsichord duet was groundbreaking, and Arthur's vocal was diverse and immaculate, as always.

**ECBOL:** Arthur was a showboat, an introspective child who'd found his thing by being different. In summer he'd wear a fur coat and one shoe, sweating like that so much it smelled. He had this idea that a rock person should be nutty, but he was a fantastic poet. Even in elementary school he was always writing little rhymes. He

#### FACT FILE

**Written by:** Arthur Lee  
**Produced by:** Paul Rothchild  
**Recorded:** RCA Studios, Hollywood, Los Angeles, September 29, 1966  
**Released:** (as a single) December 1966  
**Personnel:** Arthur Lee (lead vocals), Tjara Cantrell (harpsichord), Johnny Echols (lead guitar), Ken Forssi (bass), Bryan MacLean (rhythm guitar), Michael Stuart (drums), Albin Pfisterer (harpsichord)  
**Highest chart position:** UK - ; US -

had the knack of taking the most mundane situation into something interesting, and you'd think, "Wow." He wrote "She Comes In Colors" about his girlfriend, Annette Bonan. She's Annette Ferrell now, but always wore colourful clothes, like the flower children did then.

**STUART-WARE:** I never really knew what the songs were about. Arthur usually left it to the listener to work out the reality. If he was ever asked, self-deprecation was his blade of choice: "It's just about some chick." But maybe he did write that song for Annette.

**ECBOL:** When Arthur sang "When I was in England town, the rain fell right down" he'd never been to the UK. I explained, "Arthur, it should be 'London town.'" But he sang it anyway. Maybe he didn't want to share songwriting credits, but people here think "England town" is kinda cute.

**BOTNICK:** By then Love should have been hugely successful, but Arthur wouldn't tour, wouldn't leave Hollywood. In those days to promote an act properly you had to play somewhere to get radio. I think he felt comfortable and safe in his environment, but not touring harmed their career.

**STUART-WARE:** Concert promoters would track me down by phone. I'd call Arthur and the answer was always no. Eventually he got mad at me for asking. I often wondered, "What's with the not playing?"

**ECBOL:** We played in New York, Vegas, or Massachusetts, but we couldn't play

in the South or middle America, or sometimes we'd have bookings cancelled. The problem was the racial makeup of the group. It hurt us, because The Doors and Buffalo Springfield and all those other groups were able to tour. But we were getting successful, buying houses and had women chasing us, whereas at the start we were just trying to make a living. Also, we did some dumb things. I'll demonstrate the mindset of a rock'n'roll kid. I bought an E-Type Jaguar, and when it ran out of gas I left it at the side of the street. My father begged me to go back for it. Eventually it was impounded and auctioned. Those cars are worth hundreds of thousands now. Leaving my car was probably the dumbest thing I ever did,

along with insisting that Elektra sign The Doors. We got a fantastic offer from MCA Records, who could get us into way more shops, but we knew that having Love on their label was part of Elektra's cachet. We figured that if they had The Doors, maybe they'd let us go. But instead all the money that was going to promote Love went on The Doors. People were "What did you do that for?" Because we were dumb

kids! I was barely 18 then.

**STUART-WARE:** Then The Rolling Stones stole the line "She comes in colours" for "She's A Rainbow". Wasn't Mick [jagger] afraid of being sued? I remember we all thought, "Wow. How could Mick think it was OK to do that?"

**BOTNICK:** We all take stuff, but I do remember Arthur when Madonna used

the melody from "She Comes In Colors" for "Beautiful Stranger", Arthur was credited as a writer.

**STUART-WARE:** It doesn't bother me that neither *Da Capo* or *Forever Changes* were hugely successful. What does bother me is that we didn't work harder to promote both albums, or play more shows just for the thrill of playing.

**JOHNNY ECBOL:** But even though *Da Capo* didn't sell a whole lot, we felt we'd arrived as a group. People like The Beach Boys were talking to us as peers. On the next album we felt we had to push it to another higher level. The universe smiled on us, we did *Forever Changes*, and in the 55 years since it's never been out of print. @

Michael Stuart-Ware's *Love book, Behind The Scenes At The Pegasus Carousel*, is now available as a Kindle under the title *Love Revisited*

#### TIMELINE

**September 29, 1966**  
Love record "She Comes In Colors" at RCA Studios, Hollywood, Los Angeles  
**November, 1966**  
Love release second LP

*Da Capo*, containing "She Comes In Colors" at RCA Studios  
**December 1966**  
"She Comes In Colors" released as a single in the US

**January 6/7/8, 1967**  
Love debut *Da Capo* at the Whisky A Go Go, Los Angeles  
**Spring, 2003**  
Echols and Lee reunite for

a *Forever Changes* 35th-anniversary tour, to a rapturous reception  
**August 3, 2006**  
Lee dies of leukaemia, aged 61

**June/July 2022**  
The Love Band featuring Johnny Echols perform "She Comes In Colors" during the *Love Revisited* UK tour



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# PARALLEL



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Max Blaudon on the  
roof of the Record  
Plant, NYC, 1970

# LIVES

BLONDIE

A new boxset shines fresh light on **BLONDIE**'s remarkable journey from downtown scenesters to uptown habitués. Peter Watts explores the roads not travelled during their formative years in the company of **DEBBIE HARRY**, **CHRIS STEIN** and **CLEM BURKE**. "It was always kind of an experiment..."

Photo by ROBERTA BAYLEY

**W**HEN Chris Stein moved out of Manhattan around 20 years ago, he took several boxes of Blondie ephemera with him and stored them in his garage. These included a backstage mirror from Hammersmith Odeon that was hauled back to America like Viking plunder, as well as approximately 100 water-damaged reels of unreleased music, acetates, vinyl and home-recorded cassettes. Some came from the very start of the band's career in 1974, when Stein and Debbie Harry lived together in a succession of crummy New York apartments. Others were experimental remixes, created in 1982 as the band fell apart. In between were the origins of most of Blondie's biggest hits.

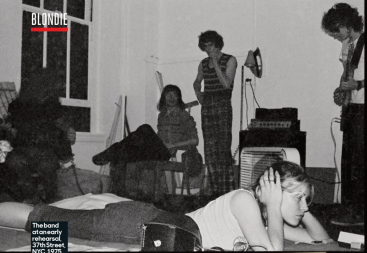
Did Harry have any idea of what her bandmate was sitting on? "I know he is a very good collector and he always kept very interesting things," she says. "It's been a while since we lived together, but I knew that anything he recorded at home or in his own studio would be there. There's all the stuff we recorded together, home demos. Chris had his own label, Animal, so it's all that stuff too."

"All that stuff" has been reclaimed from Stein's garage, restored, transferred and listened to anew for the Blondie boxset *Against The Odds: 1974-1982*. This is the first time Stein, Harry and drummer Clem Burke have authorised such a deep dive through Blondie's archives. As well as the six original studio albums, there are four albums of rare material including 36 previously unreleased tracks. Collectively this represents a chance to take a proper overview of Blondie's career as well as a glimpse some of the roads not taken – weird experiments with sequencer and drum machine, a discarded album with Giorgio Moroder, unexpected covers and song ideas that never left Stein and Harry's home.

"My garage had become a repository for all the Blondie stuff that was floating about," says Stein. "We wanted to put some of this stuff out in the world. There's a lot of interest in the process of how this stuff got made. People like to hear demos. They are the beginning of the creative journey – they show that initial idea before we get to the reality of the finished thing. I didn't see The Beatles thing [Get Back], but everybody was very enthusiastic about it, watching them just fuck about in the studio for hours on end. People told me that was the charm of the thing, seeing it normalised. This set is another version of that."

The box redraws the very boundary of the Blondie timeline, containing three unreleased recordings from 1974 by an early lineup of the band that had Billy O'Connor on drums and Fred Smith – later of Television – on bass. While rudimentary, they evidently contain Blondie's DNA: the deadpan cover of The Shangri-Las' "Out In The Streets", a funky take on Ike & Tina's "Sexy Ida" and one original, "The Disco Song". The track finally emerged four years later as "Heart Of Glass" – the transformational moment where Blondie eclipsed their CBGB peers. "We were the first of those New York

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERTA BAYLEY



The band at a nearly rehearsal, 37th Street, NYC, 1975

bands to go to No 1 – maybe the only one,” says Burke. “Our legacy on a very superficial level is our success.”

That Blondie were able to sit on a song as good as “Heart Of Glass” says something about the quality of material the band were writing at this time. “It’s interesting to see the development of the song and the music and see where we were at any specific time,” says Harry. “I always want to hear other musicians and bands, to get an insight into their creative process and system of growth. For me as a vocalist there are a probably a few things that I cringe when I hear, but I guess that is normal. It’s rare these days to be surprised. Usually everything is already available on the internet. So I heard some of these things for the first time in years and it’s heart-warming and horrifying, but hopefully it’s illuminating.”

**T**HE idea for *Against The Odds* took shape at the Magic Shop studio on Crosby Street in New York’s SoHo district, where David Bowie recorded *The Next Day* and *Blackstar*. Blondie recorded *Pollinator* there in 2015. One day, Stein found studio owner Steve Rosenthal listening to old tapes in the basement. “I was listening to Dave Van Ronk and Chris said, ‘What the hell is this?’” recalls Rosenthal.



Stein's garage

## "WE ALWAYS FELT WE WERE A BIG CULT BAND"

CHRIS STEIN

"I explained that while people made new records upstairs, I was downstairs doing preservation and archive projects. Chris said he had some stuff. My interest was immediately piqued. He said he had tapes up at his house and would I like to check them out? He warned me of one thing – they'd got wet at some point, and by that he meant there'd been a flood."

Rosenthal gathered a team and headed to Stein's home, a couple of hours' drive north of New York City, down a winding dirt road. On arrival, the team donned white masks and gloves before opening the garage door. "It smelt a bit funky," says Rosenthal. "There was mildew, so you could tell it was mouldy and getting mouldier. I wasn't too worried. Analogue tape is a very resilient format. Stuff was buried under other shit and it had all got wet at some point, so we decided to take the stuff out the barn. We had a trunk with us and we packed all the reels into that. There were some LPs, there was quarter-inch tape, there was two-inch tape. We packed it up and brought it to a storage facility in Manhattan."

The next step was getting the tapes in a condition where they could be played. First, they removed the mould with a vacuum cleaner. Next, the tapes were baked at 130 degrees in a convection oven and then transferred at the Magic Shop, while studio outtakes and original masters sourced from label vaults were transferred in London and LA. Rosenthal did a rough mix of around 70 unreleased tracks and sent them to Stein, Harry and Burke. In the process, a portal opened to the band's past.

"Over the years I have heard lots of Chris's demos, and I knew he'd been archiving that stuff for quite some time," says Burke. "After Steve had gone through and baked the



Blondie in 1975: (l-r) Gary Valentine, Debbie Harry, Chris Stein, Clem Burke

US FILM FESTIVAL

Ueeeee!

reels, we all reviewed the material over a period of several years. I spent a lot of time listening to all the outtakes. I was particularly excited to hear the original recordings for *Plastic Letters* because that was a bit different to the debut album, we had Frank Infante join us primarily on bass and guitar and some of those tracks were very interesting to hear in unproduced form. We were able to go back and reassess the creative process. I loved listening back and making notes, and everybody contributed."

**E**VEN in a city like New York during the '70s – a haven for creative thinkers, artists, writers and musicians – Blondie stood out.

"There was a lot of freedom, a lot of underground sentiment in music and the arts," Harry recalls. "It was a direct hangover from the 1960s, which was all about freedom. Freedom of this, freedom of that. Freedom of underwear, freedom of love. The entire hippy nation."

Culturally stitched into the fabric of alternative New York, they were attuned to the city's artistic achievements – Phil Spector girl groups, Brill Building songcraft, the wiry energy of CBGB, Studio 54's disco glosses and South Bronx hip-hop battles. The band's links to the city's vibrant community of artists, photographers, filmmakers and designers included Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Amos Poe and Stephen Sprouse. This connectivity allowed them to occupy more than one world at the same time: new wave and disco, downtown and uptown, the underground and the mainstream.

Such a gift came partly from the diverse personalities of the band. Even today, these differences are apparent. Stein, who spent so many videos hiding behind shades, is matter-of-fact and economical in conversation, Harry warm, helpful and a little self-deprecating, while Burke digs deepest to explain the Blondie phenomenon. "We come from the streets of New York, where there is no mandate on anything other than for us to be ourselves and to be creative," he says.

"The lines were blurred," continues Burke. "We had common denominators like The Velvet Underground, The Shangri-Las and the Stooges. We were also on this Club 82 glam-rock scene with people like Wayne County, Teenage Lust and The Harlots of 42nd Street. Then there was Bowie – we all went to see Ziggy Stardust at Carnegie Hall. That all informed Blondie in a lot of different ways, whether it was the style, the sense of outrage or thinking outside the box."

This gave Blondie a musical dexterity that differentiated them from their contemporaries. Debbie Harry's carefully cultivated, semi-ironic pin-up image made them accessible in a scene where accessibility wasn't necessarily regarded as a virtue.

"We grew up with so many different styles of music," says Stein. "I grew up listening to movie soundtracks and folk music and then got into pop and rock, and it all became part of our musical existence, which is very diverse."

On *Against The Odds*, this is apparent through previously unreleased cover versions of songs by Ike & Tina, The Doors and Johnny Cash as well as the theme to 1964 movie *Topkapi*. Blondie took two cover songs into the charts – "Hanging On The Telephone" and "The Tide Is High" – evidence of their natural ability to make

Shabby chic: Debbie Harry and Chris Bowery apartment, 1976



Harry with Andy Warhol, Truman Capote and Palma Picasso at Studio 54, NYC, June 1979

## ONE WAY OR ANOTHER

10 deep cuts from the Blondie vaults  
on *Against The Odds*

### "THE DISCO SONG (1974 VERSION)"

The first fumbled iteration of "Heart Of Glass", this foretells the reggae influence but melodically and vocally is instantly recognisable. The next version, from 1975, shows how quickly the band improved in the early months.

### "PLATINUM BLONDE (BETROCK DEMO)"

One of several tracks cut in Queens by New York Rocker editor Alan Betrock, the fun, self-knowing "Platinum Blonde" was an early anthem. A little kitschy, but a great example of how Harry was developing her stage persona.

### "SCENERY"

A Gary Valentine song that was cut at the last minute from the debut album, it has a strong organ part, a tough vocal from Harry and lyrics that reflected the often violent streets of New York in the mid-1970s. Strong E Street/Patti Smith vibes.

### "MR SIGHTSEER (HOME TAPE)"

A delicate 1978 home demo recorded by Stein and Harry, which went no further. The say-themed lyric is a little underdeveloped but there's a certain suspense that has a curious appeal.

### "MOONLIGHT DRIVE"

A live favourite – perhaps worked up to impress Ray Manzarek, who played in a band with Blondie's Nigel Harrison and saw Blondie at the Whisky in LA – this slinky studio version misses the intro but demonstrates the band's versatility. Harry's vocal prowess and Burke's pounding sense of rhythm.

### "HANGING ON THE TELEPHONE (MIKE CHAPMAN DEMO)"

Featuring Aussie producer's Mike Chapman's guide vocal Chapman

claimed he was giving Harry's voice a break, but it sounds like he's having a whole of a time. On a later take of "Die Young, Stay Pretty", you can hear Chapman making up lyrics and directing the band while singing guide and playing guitar. "Boy that was a mess," he says at the end.

### "LIVE IT UP (GIORGIO MORODER DEMO)"

One of a handful of songs demoed with Giorgio Moroder for a proposed album following "Call Me". The Autocameras series's Donna Summer references made it ideal for Moroder, but the sessions were canned. Moroder said it was because the band were always fighting, while Burke thinks it's because

Moroder was only interested in working with Debbie Harry.

### "NAMELESS (HOME TAPE)"

Stein is on synth and drum machine, while Harry performs vocal exercises in search of a vocal melody before she starts to work on lyrics.

Recorded before *Parallel Lines*. It's one of the purest insights into the duo's creative process.

### "SUNDAY GIRL (HOME TAPE)"

This is a darker version of the *Parallel Lines* classic, with Stein supplying a synth part that wouldn't have sounded out of place on the debut *Suicide* album before delivering a very rocky guitar solo. Like many of Harry's demos, it's a lot weirder than the finished version.

### "WAR CHILD/CALL ME/HEART OF GLASS (CHRIS STEIN '00)"

A trio of instrumentals taken from the multitracks around 1982. Isolating synths, sequencer and drum machine, these broke down the songs into a minimalist, post-punk, dubby mix. Produced towards the end of the band's career, they were never put out.



a song their own thanks to Harry's personality and the band's imagination. This familiarity with covers helped them to experiment with genres throughout their career, confident that they could take on different textures and flavours without losing their own strong identity. Towards the end of *Against The Odds* there are three tracks stripped of melody and vocal, reduced only to synths and drums – sparse, unnerving but still unmistakably Blondie.

The group began playing clubs and bars in New York in 1974, where covers were de rigueur, something that Harry says they used to their advantage. She still enjoys playing covers today – “From Russia With Love” was a highlight of the 2018 tour in a typically cheeky nod to electoral interference. “We went through a small period playing cover songs at the very beginning and that was an important part of the experimental process,” she says. “It was like going to college.”

“We did so many covers,” says Stein. “We covered everything. We did Rolling Stones songs, we played ‘Heat Wave’ all the time. When we played bars, we’d have to do ‘Lady Marmalade’ when that was a hit even though none of us were crazy about it. The Doors cover of ‘Moonlight Drive’ was done around the time of *Plastic Letters*. We would do that song live and one time somebody turned on the tape when we were in the studio.”

Burke particularly enjoyed hearing the Doors cover as he felt it played to one of the band's biggest strengths. “I always make an analogy between Debbie and Jim Morrison,” he says. “She reminds me of Morrison in terms of stage presence. People go for the obvious comparison like Madonna, but Debbie reminded me more of Jim Morrison or David Bowie or Marc Bolan. I was always looking for somebody to front a band who would have that kind of power and Debbie had that. Her looks meant people overlooked her brilliant songwriting and vocal performances.”

**H**EART OF Glass” introduced Blondie to the wider America public. The first of four US No 1s, it brought into focus their gifts for melody, attitude and new wave sass. But



The 'Heart Of Glass' video shoot, NYC, 1978

although Blondie were unquestionably a very successful chart act, they never really felt like a mainstream band. “Whether or not Blondie was a big band is always a matter of opinion,” says Stein. “We always felt we were a big cult band. Maybe now people consider us part of the mainstream, but that’s not how we felt at the time. We never felt like a pop act.”

*Against The Odds* includes four versions of “Heart Of Glass”, spanning four years – from the original “Disco Song” demo recorded at Performance Studios in New York in late 1974, through a 1975 take titled “Once I Had A Love”, to a pre-production version from the *Parallel Lines* sessions with producer Mike Chapman on guide vocals.

The song's development mirrors the band's own journey from ambitious but shaky bar band to glamorous, futuristic disco-pop. As the band remake and remodel the song, it is also possible to witness the band's craft and creativity in full flight.

Yet even the finished “Heart Of Glass” was never really considered a contender. The fourth single taken from *Parallel Lines*, it came out almost six months after the album was released.

But how come it took so long to get the song right in the first place? “We started that song in 1974 and didn’t release it for many years,” she says. “We tried it many, many different ways live. We tried all kinds of different feels and styles. We just knew it wasn’t right yet, but we really liked it and kept on playing it and it was quite a few years until we got it right.”

At first Harry wasn’t a fan of “Heart Of Glass”. Although he spent many nights at Club 82, where disco tracks like “Shame Shame Shame” were played in between sets by the New York Dolls, he wasn’t sure this was a direction that Blondie should go in. But the success of the single in America made him realise he could trust his bandmates’ intuition. “By the time we did *Autoamerican*, I had an ‘anything goes’ attitude and was happy to be as open as possible to the possibilities of every song,” he says. “That’s integral to the creative process, but it took me a while to accept it. Even in 1978 we didn’t really see ‘Heart Of Glass’ in commercial terms. We were influenced by Kraftwerk and Donna Summer. The track was buried



Hanging on the telephone (l-r) Chris Stein, Frank Infante, Clem Burke (rear), Nigel Harrison (front), Jimmy Destri and Debbie Harry, circa 78



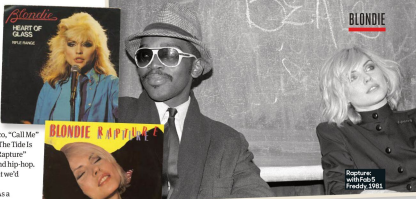
on the second side of *Parallel Lines* because we thought of it as experimental."

Just as Stein suggests that Blondie were a cult band in mainstream clothing, Burke notes that Blondie's American No 1s were all somewhat atypical of the band's rock'n'-roll core. "Heart Of Glass" was disco, "Call Me" was written by Giorgio Moroder, "The Tide Is High" was a reggae cover, while "Rapture" was a trailblazing fusion of rock and hip-hop.

"We were a success in the UK, but we'd return to the States and still be an underground band," says Burke. As a consequence, the band continued to perceive themselves as the underdogs, giving themselves licence to keep trying new things – whether it was working with Moroder (there are a couple of previously unreleased Moroder demos for a proposed album on *Against The Odds*) or fusing rock with rap on "Rapture". Boxset rarity "Yuletide Throwdown" was the first step in this direction, featuring a different version of "Rapture", and another insight into Blondie's alternative reality. "We were working on 'Rapture', so I taped a version that was too slow initially, so I taped a version of the slower version on two-inch tape and overdubbed vocals from Fab & Freddy and Debbie," says Stein. "This was for a British magazine called *Flexipop* which came with a little flexidisc. This was the Christmas issue, but it didn't come out until February anyway."

The experimentation was mostly tolerated by Blondie's record label, especially when it resulted in chart success. "That meant we got to experiment, and that's the interesting thing about these tapes," says Harry. "For us it was always kind of an experiment. I sort of have a contentious personality to some degree. I like ideas, and one of the things we have always done is take some chances and stretch ourselves as much as we could. I don't think that is a mainstream way of thinking, so I don't think of us as mainstream. Labels don't encourage that. They want to sell their product, and once they get a formula and associate an artist with a certain style they just want more of the same. We never did that, and some of the things we did were without the label's approval."

Producer Mike Chapman, who worked with the band from *Parallel Lines* to 1982's swansong, *The Hunter*, was critical in supporting their thinking. On the one



## HEAT TO THE BEAT

Blondie tape bake-off

STEVE Rosenthal's archive and preservation room is filled with machinery, but one of the most important is a humble convection oven. This is what he used to bake tapes at a low temperature – Rosenthal favours 130 degrees over the Library Of Congress's recommended 125. But why do tapes need to be baked at all?

"Here's what goes on with analogue tape and why you have to bake them," explains Rosenthal. "If you look at a reel, there's a brown side and a black side. There is a glue substance that glues the magnetic particles to the black backing. As the years go on, that dries out and that's what shedding is – it means that literally pieces of the tape, the actual recording, fall off and you lose them for good. When you put that in the oven on a low heat, it re-emulsifies the glue and the two parts adhere to each other again, so you can safely play the tape without having any dropouts. Once they are baked, you can play them as many times as you like for six months, then you need to put them back in the oven. The question of how long depends on how, excuse my language, fucked up the tape is."

hand he ensured the label were kept at a distance, forbidding them from attending recording sessions, but he also made sure that the day-to-day business of recording remained enjoyable. A couple of tracks on *Against The Odds* have Chapman on guide vocals, placing his wobbly voice where you'd usually expect to find Debbie Harry. "Mike didn't want me to sing the same thing 100 times," says Harry. "But he really did like to have fun, so getting to perform a little was a lot of fun for him."

**H**UMOUR? Versatility? A strong visual identity? All these factors tumbled into Blondie – along with a commendable refusal to be pigeonholed, their cultural inquisitiveness and the desire for success on their own terms. While *Against The Odds* tells that story in detail, the Stein archive is not yet exhausted. Steve Rosenthal talks tantalising about reels of live recordings that are awaiting transfer. Stein, meanwhile, is excited about his Animal Records archive, which includes recordings by Iggy Pop, The Gun Club and James Chance as well as a Dee Dee Ramone rap song that has never been released. Burke thinks there might be still more covers, while for Harry there are home cassettes of demos recorded by Stein that are particularly precious.

At present the three band members are all in New York, back in the studio working on fresh material, which will include a mix of originals, covers and, perhaps, a song by their friend Johnny Marr. Later this year they will be back on the road to support *Against The Odds*. Blondie are still very much a working band, which means this new boxset should be seen as a comma rather than a full stop. They all insist that Blondie still approach music much as they did in 1974. "The way we record now is very similar, both artistically and technically, even though the technology has changed," says Harry. "When you are seeking to create something you work within the same parameters, and for younger musicians who are trying to put their style and sound together, this set shows the reality of the creative process for Blondie."

The lessons learned in the heyday of New York's underground are still valid today. "Warhol showed us how to walk that tightrope between commercial art and being commercial on your own terms," says Burke. "We all wanted to be commercially successful, but it

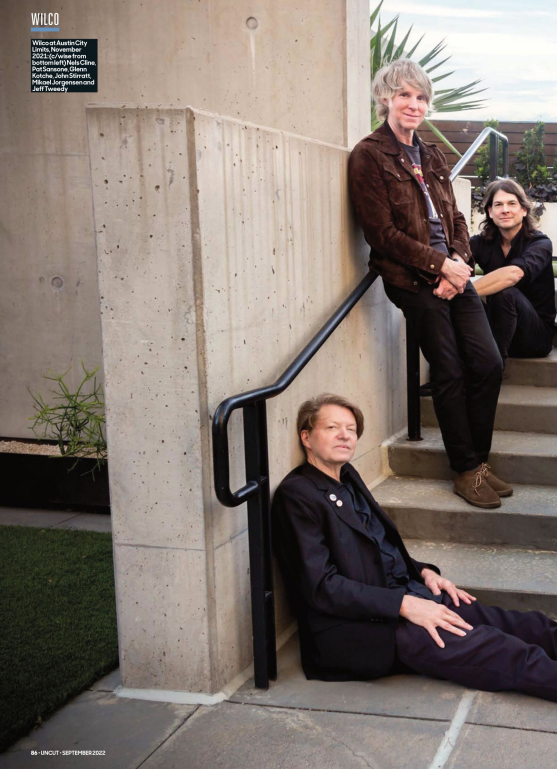
was about doing it on our own terms. We weren't a pop band, we were a pop art band." @

Blondie: *Against The Odds* 1974–1982 is released on August 26 via UMC and The Numero Group





Wilco at Austin City Limits, November 2021 (c/w/wise from bottom left) Nels Cline, Port Sansone, Glenn Kotche, John Stirratt, Mikael Jorgensen and Jeff Tweedy





# "There's a lot going on with this band..."

2022 was meant to be the year **Wilco** celebrated the 20th anniversary of **Yankee Hotel Foxtrot**, the album that almost split the band but ended up securing their legend. However, this is a group that likes to keep moving – hence the surprise appearance in May of the organic and emotionally direct **Cruel Country**. Backstage at Black Deer festival, **Jeff Tweedy** et al tell Nick Hasted why Wilco don't really do nostalgia: "We value ourselves based on what's on the horizon."

Photo by CHARLES HARRIS

Rebirth of Cruel...  
 Wilco play Black Deer  
 Festival, East Sussex,  
 June 18, 2022



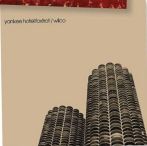
WILCO'S sole UK stop on their summer European tour is at the Black Deer Festival, a celebration of Americana held in the Marquess of Abergavenny's estate on the Kent/Sussex border. Surrounded by the Sussex Weald's thick woodland, it's a sedate English scene far from the wind-blown Midwest landscapes Wilco conjure on their new double album, *Cruel Country*.

It already sounds like one of their finest records, looking back to the glistening, redemptive acoustic beauty of 2007's *Sky Blue Sky*, and further still to Uncle Tupelo. But 2022 also finds Wilco reckoning with their storied past more directly, with the upcoming 20th-anniversary reissue of *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*. With its troubled genesis, an eerie post-9/11 resonance, experimental production and tender songs, the album has always been a Wilco landmark. This new monolithic reissue – the 8CD Super Deluxe Edition includes 82 unreleased tracks – restates the case that it's still their most crucial record, opening the way to everything they've done since, *Cruel Country* included.

Talking to Uncut backstage at Black Deer, John Stirratt – Wilco's bassist and the band's sole constant bar Jeff Tweedy



Yankee Hotel Foxtrot / Wilco

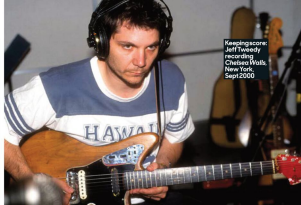
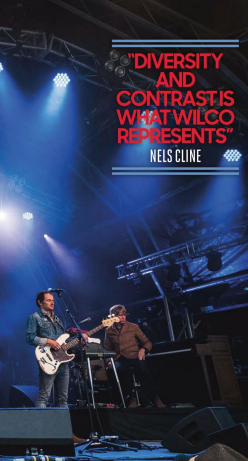


since the band's inception in 1994 – has the rangy, lived-in attitude of a '70s Hollywood character actor. Multi-instrumentalist Mikael Jorgensen, who joined in 2002, still talks with the boyish, undimmed enthusiasm of a Wilco fan. Tweedy sports a green jacket and the rustic yellow hat he'll doff on stage like an Opry showman. He has the amiable conviction of a man who's exactly where he's meant to be, his voice dry in tone but crackling with conviction about his work. "I'm really, really happy that we have a new record out and it's not just a year devoted to looking backwards," he says. "Wilco isn't a band that has any real interest in catering to nostalgia. We value ourselves based on what's on the horizon."

Taking the stage at Black Deer, the band offer one answer to their legacy's conundrums with a set that artfully interweaves their past and present, as new songs rub shoulders with old favourites, revealing the common thread of 28 years of radically shifting styles. The soft, pedal-steel swirl of *Cruel Country*'s "Story To Tell" is followed by *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*'s epochal opener "I Am Trying To

# "DIVERSITY AND CONTRAST IS WHAT WILCO REPRESENTS"

NELS CLINE



Keepsake score: Jeff Tweedy recording *Chelsea Walls*, New York, Sept. 2000

## CHELSEA HOTEL FOXTROT

How Tweedy's *Chelsea Walls* soundtrack fed into the making of *YHF*

**Y**ANKEE Hotel *Foxtrot* wasn't the only album Jeff Tweedy and Glenn Kotche worked on in 2000. As well as taping an album with Jim O'Rourke as *Loose Fur* (released in 2003), they recorded Tweedy's first album under his own name, the soundtrack to Ethan Hawke's film *Chelsea Walls*. On its release this year, Tweedy called it "pivotal for me—there was a burst of creativity that continues to this day." It removed, he says, "the last remaining guardrails" from his music's potential.

"Is it undervalued? Tweedy wonders to himself. "I don't see it as being valued at all. It's a weird curiosity. My instruments on it are from the period of meeting Glenn and figuring out how to play in a more improvisational way. And it's still in the wake of Uncle Tupelo. There's still this pull to free myself up and permit myself to incorporate experimental and avant-garde music. Which is something I always loved, but

was very much not in Uncle Tupelo's vocabulary."

Kotche notes the soundtrack's direct influence on Yankee...s eventual direction. "I remember bringing out my kalimbas and vibraphone on

*Chelsea Walls*. That's when Jeff got the idea for me to play percussion on Yankee Hotel *Foxtrot*. And that's why there's so much percussion on that record, because I'd preformulated all these ideas."



Ethan Hawke and Jeff Tweedy

Loose Fur (l-r) Jim O'Rourke, Glenn Kotche and Tweedy



Break Your Heart", with Tweedy's voice rediscovering its old fragile slur. The new "Ambulance" considers death and redemption, themes that roll through Yankee...s "War On War", as well as "Bird Without A Tail/Base Of My Skull", whose mix of soft ballad beauty and freakout has much in common with Sky Blue Sky's "Impossible Germany". The tumbling, psychedelic madness of 1999's *Summerteeth* ballad "Via Chicago" then shows Wilco's penchant for experimentation didn't start with Yankee.

"That diversity and contrast is what Wilco represents," states guitarist Nels Cline, checking in later from Wilco's next stop in Spain, alongside drummer and percussionist Glenn Kotche. "Having no hits is pretty liberating; so is being stylistically unpredictable. One of the reasons why I joined the band, honestly, is because I was aware of that. I felt coming into Wilco that I wouldn't be in some sort of straitjacket. And I was right!"

"There's a lot of internal resistance in Wilco to looking backward," Jorgensen adds. "Cruel Country is definitely a forward-looking stance. Playing these songs at a festival, mixed in with greatest hits, is almost like Neil Young flexing, in a way. Like, no—we are hardly done."

**S**TILL, Yankee Hotel *Foxtrot* is back in Wilco's world again, forcing them to think about one of their most troubled periods—and demanding attention alongside *Cruel Country*. Glenn Kotche isn't wholly averse to the comparison. "The collaborative energy and spirit of trust is very similar. With Yankee, everybody trusted each other and was just like, 'Hey, what's the worst that can



Ex-men: former Wilco members Jay Bennett (and below) and Ken Coomer

I AM TRYING TO BREAK YOUR HEART: A FILM ABOUT WILCO BY SAM JONES

happen? And the same thing with this. *Cruel Country* was made so quickly, there just wasn't time to analyse everyone's parts. Both those records are steeped in trust."

Whatever his doubts about *Yankee*... 's return, Tweedy confesses pride at its unique position within Wilco's catalogue, as a cast-iron rock classic. "Of course, I find it really gratifying – and not just with *Yankee*.... Almost all our records are in print, and listened to. To have one that has this exalted status over the others, I understand it and I think it's awesome. It does have canonical status with some people. That's a really hard thing to absorb emotionally or intellectually even. [But] I'm thankful for it, because it's like a gateway drug for people to maybe listen to new records that we're still churning out, and be inspired by [them]."

John Stirratt acknowledges that there's a risk of being overwhelmed by this landmark from their past. "Yeah, the connotations of that might not be positive – to just be a legacy act. That was part of releasing *Cruel Country* as quickly as we did, for sure. We haven't spent that much time looking backward. Matter of fact, I have a hard time even with that question. I see it as two different worlds. Certainly that *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* world was before this lineup, which is on the ascendency. But it's true what *Yankee*... means a lot to people."

"*Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* was the only Wilco record



I'd heard when I joined in 2004," admits Cline, underlining the point. "I was on tour with my band the Nels Cline Singers when it came out, and we listened to it all that summer in the van, almost every day."

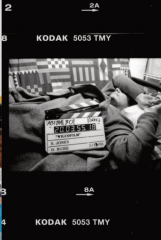
"At the time my incorrect impression was Wilco was very tobacco-burst, strummy acoustic country," says Jorgensen, who joined the band for

the *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* tour. "But hearing what was happening [on that album] I realised, 'Oh, this is an accumulation of an acoustic, song-based thing and very adventurous sonic explorations.' Put together, that became a new thing. It marks the turning of the 21st century, the way *Kid A* did for Radiohead. It was the fulcrum point for so many elements of what Wilco was, became, and is. Wilco was part of that

weirdo American thing, where folk and country-based forms exist to communicate ideas, emotions and stories, as we've just done on *Cruel Country*. But when I joined the next year, something like 'Handshake Drugs' was more like Sonic Youth! There wasn't rigidity around what was acceptable. And *Yankee*... was what ripped the lock off. It allowed *A Ghost Is Born* and everything that happened after that."

## "YANKEE IS LIKE A GATEWAY DRUG FOR PEOPLE"

JEFF TWEEDY



Still writers: behind the scenes shots from *I Am Trying to Break Your Heart*

Stirratt recounts the exhausted, driven atmosphere of those days making *Yankee*..., as the band wrestled with Tweedy's fast-developing visions. They were shooting in the dark, obsessively refashioning songs, as they strove towards an unknown destination. "We were sleeping at The Loft then, recording all day, and I was too tired to listen back to the takes – I need another 20 years to deal with all the versions of 'Kamera' on the boxset! But it was thrilling at the time to do it, first with Ken [Coomer], then with Glenn..."

Tweedy's introduction of experimental musician Jim O'Rourke to mix the album was the shock to the system Wilco required. "When Jim came in to mix his first track, 'I Am Trying to Break Your Heart', it was just this lightning bolt," says Stirratt, the giddy relief still in his voice, "We became a different band."

*Yankee*... 's revolution wasn't without its casualties. In his memoir *Let's Go (So We Can Get Back)*, Tweedy describes his Wilco co-writer, guitarist Jay Bennett, becoming conspiratorial and untrustworthy as O'Rourke replaced him beside Tweedy at the project's tiller. The brutal, unavoidable fallout, with Tweedy sacking Bennett just before the album's release, and Kotche replacing Ken Coomer – Tweedy's loyal drummer since Uncle Tupelo – was nailed into rock lore by Sam Jones' documentary *I Am Trying to Break Your Heart: A Film About Wilco*.

"It was traumatic," recalls Stirratt. "Jay was a big part of the band for a long time, with that



whole complicated relationship with Jeff, and then to lose Ken in January 2001, after we'd recorded through the fall with him and it not really happening – it was people I'd played with for a while, not working out. Going back to *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* this year brought back a lot of those memories. And a lot of good memories! But I try not to dwell on it too much, to be honest. I guess I'll eventually listen to the boxset..."

**T**HE road to *Cruel Country* began during the pandemic. 2019's *Ode To Joy* was Jeff Tweedy's response to the Trump presidency, built on his acoustic toy guitar and Glenn Kotche's crunching percussion, with the rest of the band chipping in subsequently. Tweedy was meanwhile developing a solo career (see sidebar). His fourth solo album *Love Is The King*, taped with his sons in April 2020, directly responded to the pandemic with hushed country and folk-style songs about love and death. This solo flowering overlapped with Wilco's next move.

"I was doing what I've always done, writing songs to console myself," Tweedy explains. "But there was this expanded sense of time during lockdown. And so I felt I had time to not be ambitious, and just let songs come out of me without asking anything of them. It was almost like an exercise in some cases. I wanted to see if I could write a song that would be good enough to put on a jukebox in 1963. But it still sounds like me, the way *Cruel Country* still ended up being us."

Tweedy reveals that just before Covid hit, Wilco were working on a very different project. "We'd started on an art-pop record, which we'll go back to. But then during the pandemic I wrote so much, and writing

## "SOME STAGE MANAGEMENT WAS IN ORDER!"

Jim O'Rourke on rebuilding *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*

**"W**E were all under the spell of Jim O'Rourke's cinematic records as we made *Yankee*," says John Stirratt. But O'Rourke was less familiar with Wilco. "I knew Jeff more as someone who was always at [Chicago venue] Lounge Ax," O'Rourke recalls. "As I didn't pay much attention to popular music, I think the first time I noticed Wilco was when *Summerteeth* came out." Tweedy initially asked to collaborate with O'Rourke for 2000's *Noise Pop* festival, and soon tapped him to mix *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*'s intractable sessions.

"They lacked a through-line," O'Rourke says of the tracks he proceeded to radically refashion. "There was no reason for things to be where they were, too much [had been] added. All they ended up doing was obscuring the vista, where every instrument has a role to play in the

song's drama. It resembled the casting call for a play rather than the play itself. I knew some stage management was in order!"

Still, O'Rourke appreciated Tweedy's broad-minded approach. "He was open to thinking of the band not as 'John on bass' but of each member's whole talents contributing to a common goal. Some of the best times in making *Ghost* later was each member switching instruments, sometimes even mid-take, putting Jeff's songs in a new light each time."

Producing *A Ghost Is Born* from scratch completed O'Rourke's time with Wilco. "I don't know about the band they became later," he says. "But I do know that the Wilco that made *A Ghost Is Born* was both a fantastic live and studio band. The gap left by Jay Bennett necessitated Jeff flitting loose on the guitar more. His solo on 'Muzzle Of Bees' still leaves me in awe when I hear it."

Refashion guru: Jim O'Rourke in 2001

PARTY IN ROCKS (COURTESY OF GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ)



country or folk songs is my comfort food. So there was a whole bunch of 'em. Some even on *Love Is The King*. Then there were ones that, even early on, we called *Cruel Country*."

Wilco properly reconvened in The Loft in January and February 2022, planning to work on the "art-pop" record and *Cruel Country* in consecutive sessions, but the latter soon took precedence. "It was just a joyous music-making experience," Tweedy remembers. "Everybody started liking the sounds that they were getting with a smaller pile of gear, like a simplified version of the band. Getting in the studio and having new songs to sing felt elemental and sustaining."

Everyone in Wilco relates the experience to recording 2007's *Sky Blue Sky*, the first album with the lineup that endures to this day, and another cleansing live session following difficult times. "Sky Blue Sky was a certain way for a similar reason. It was more internal," explains Tweedy. "That was the first record that I made after going through rehab and getting properly taken care of in terms of my mental health. So that was a back-to-basics record for me personally, not wanting to have to think through the infinite choices that a studio presents, and just keeping things as simple as possible. The impulse [on *Cruel Country*] is pretty similar, except that the disorienting nature of the world is external now."

Wilco had become used to the fractured, long-distance methods used on *Ode To Joy* and other recent albums, with individual members working on Tweedy's arrangements in isolation. Finally able to record together—and even jam—they were reborn as a real band in the studio. Their relief is plain, as if their full potential was shackled for too long. "It felt like a really long time coming," says Jorgensen with feeling. *Cruel Country* is a musically plainspoken album, beginning with the bare strum of Tweedy's acoustic guitar, with the rest of Wilco offering subtle support. Jorgensen took his cues from the precious, visceral sensation of Wilco playing together again in a room, alive and sparking together in real time. "I was really interested in finding acoustic, analogue sounds that felt like there was air moving in them," he says, "and not just voltages being transmitted. Giving it a sense of space, and a sense of time as well. Like this was a moment."

For Stirratt, the experience brought memories flooding back of previous highs from the nearly three decades of his life that he's invested in this band. "There's moments, starting with 'Sunken Treasure' on *Being There*, when you knew you were in this worthwhile, time disappeared, and something happened that was important. I've had that at varying times in this band and it came back in a big way here. We were moving really fast, one or two songs a day—and Jeff generally uses first or second takes, so there's a really interesting, ad hoc quality. At least two of the final takes, at least one member was in the bathroom when we'd started. I think I was! It was a blast."

Combined with the direct nature of the music is a switch away from the encoded, sometimes experimental wordplay that dominated previous Wilco records. "I don't want to hear poetry," Tweedy sings on "The Universe." "Say it plain, the way you really speak."

"I don't think he's had more straightforward, understandable lyrics in one place," reckons Stirratt. "Even in writing a book about songwriting, he's working harder and harder to have this airtight

## I AM TRYING TO CURATE YOUR ART

The challenge of assembling the definitive YHFB boxset

"C"HERYL Pawelski knows more about those tracks than many of us. Jeff Tweedy tells Uncut of Wilco's archivist and reissue producer. A 30-year veteran of the reissue game, Pawelski found sifting through Yankee Hotel Foxtrot's tapes to be her biggest challenge to date.

"I put the record's development into stages," she says, "beginning with the early renditions. Some songs disappear



after that point—they never got back to 'Love Will (Let You Down)'. After that, there's a lot happening: we've lost our first drummer! This record was created in its most realized form in the mixing stage with Jim O'Rourke, but before the finished record, they were deconstructing and reconstructing songs. Some were more developed in the earlier stages."

The Yankee sessions started in mid-1999 and took two years, producing numerous outtakes. "There are upwards of 10 genuinely different versions of 'Kamela,'" says Pawelski. "And there are unheard songs: 'Venus Stopped the Train', 'Anniversary (Nothing Up My Sleeve)', and 'American Aquarium', which evolves into 'Radio Cure' but is really its own thing. Even if you've got every bottle, you certainly haven't heard these versions of 'Hummingbird' and 'Not For the Season (Laminated Cat)'—or the cover of Ray Orbison's 'Obey Dooby'." Pawelski considers what her research taught her about Yankee Hotel Foxtrot. "I find this a tale of fortune, and belief in oneself, and that goes for the whole band. There's a door that the music, the players and the world walk through, and there's no going back. It's this hinge point."

narrative about something that's honest. That's never meant more to him than this body of work. It is a Nashville-style, buttoned-up songwriting. But Jeff's version. Which is a lot more poetic!"

"It's way harder to be clear," Tweedy admits, "so it's an effort to get better at songwriting and communicating. But also, people don't really need to be challenged to be more confused these days! I think there's still some beauty and consolation in presenting an abstract or impressionistic lyric, and to let people disappear in it. That's still functionally beautiful to me. But I've done a lot of it, and I find it more challenging and exciting to get the lyric to say exactly what I want it to say with the fewest words."

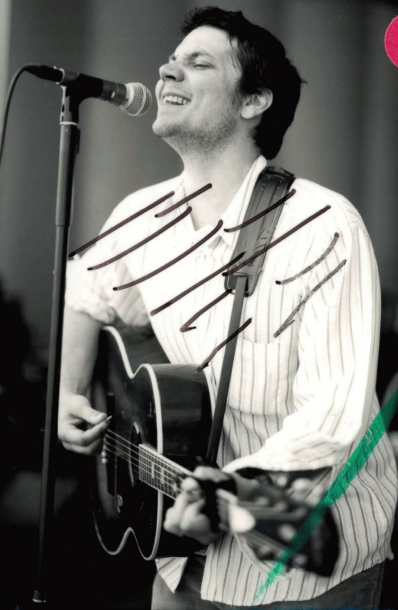
Tweedy thinks back to 2014's *Sukierae*, made with his son Spencer under the name Tweedy. Though its lyrics were still couched in oblique language, they were mostly about his wife Susie, who had just been diagnosed with cancer (she's since recovered). Tender with feeling, they conveyed the couple's love, and his terror of losing her. Did this traumatic period perhaps shift something in Tweedy's writing, drawing his emotions to the surface?

"That's around the time that I started writing even more songs than I had been," he considers. "And I hate to reduce your thoughtful question to something pragmatic, but I found myself having a much more difficult time remembering words that were more abstract and arrived at through experiment. I started really needing the mnemonic of an emotion, not just relying on the melody to carry the words back to my singing voice when I picked up the guitar. I needed to start telling myself what each song was about a little bit."

Thinking about the changes in Tweedy's work makes Stirratt reflect again on their long association. "We've grown up together our whole twenties, thirties, forties and now fifties. Early on, in Uncle Tupelo, I knew him as the second guy in the band, but definitely a harder worker—an upstart. And I just socially gravitated towards him. He is the same guy in many, many ways. [Although] he stopped drinking—I used to go out and get drunk with him, in the '90s, and that's talking about another life. If he's a more forthcoming writer now, well, I think that's just the stages of the band. He already had this body of work by AM. *Summerteeth* was a huge thing, getting geeky about word exercises and exquisite corpses, and having a typewriter where you'd take turns typing lines—crap like that, with our literary, excitable curiosity. When he was able to go that route, it was thrilling. 'She's a Jar' was one of those 'stop you in your tracks' moments. When we finished that, like 'Wow!' Then we're going into this world of Yankee Hotel" ➤







Tweedy recording 174 Fat The Loft—an image taken from the *I Am Trying To Break Your Heart* director's annotated contact sheet

SAMPSON

Reduced circumstances: the four-piece Wilco in 2002

22

Foxtrot, and getting more of an identity. There are a lot of chapters."

The most alarming aspect of the *YHF* chapter was the album's release online, just as 9/11 gave key songs such as "Jesus, Etc" and "Ashes of American Flags" devastating new contexts. Wilco – in a new, quartet lineup, with guitarist Leroy Bach replacing Bennett – played New York Town Hall on September 27 and 28. "Yankee... started streaming on September 18, 2001," Tweedy says. "And the gigs were the first time it really hit me that the lyrics on the record were changed, or enhanced, or the world had changed my music. I don't think we played 'Jesus, Etc' in New York right after, because it felt too raw. People are going to think I just wrote this song about this thing

happening, 'tall buildings shake' and all this stuff. It was way too soon to have made a move like that – and I never would have after, if I hadn't written that song already."

"The emotion in the city at that time was overwhelming," says David Byrner, now Nonesuch's president, who negotiated the signing of Wilco from Reprise. He remembers the New York Town Hall shows as "deeply moving, and I still feel that about this record. It means a lot to the world at large, I know that. But to me it is a deeply emotional record, so full of ambition, ideas and challenge in its making."

"I was happily surprised that the songs resonated so deeply, after we had undergone such a fundamental change in sound," says Kotche.

"Also, the people at those shows were glad to just get out again and collectively experience something new that gave them hope. It was almost like after the pandemic."

In April 2022, Wilco played the album in its entirety in Chicago and New York, to mark the 20th anniversary of

its physical release on Nonesuch. It proved a dramatic and heart-wrenching musical homecoming. For Strratt, preparing for the shows brought back "a lot of memories", from the stems of originally played parts, to the "trauma" of the band's messy, partial dissolution under the strain of Yankee... 's making. Jorgensen came at it from a different standpoint. "I got to play the music that first drew me into the expanded Wilco multiverse as a fan," he enthuses, "and to honour the work that Jeff, Jim, Glenn, Jay and Leroy had done."

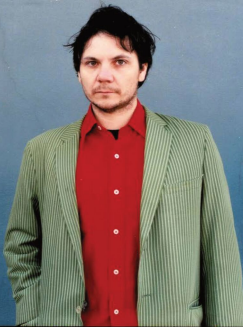
Cline has a sheepish confession: "I realised that I had taken some liberties with those songs when I joined the band. I had done my take on them for 18 years. And as I listened to Yankee with a more forensic mindset, I realised there's very little electric guitar..."

"There isn't a song on Yankee... that we've ever stopped playing completely," Tweedy notes of the shows' practical challenges. "We still sometimes play 'Radio Care', and the deeper cuts. But we put it all together in that order, and reconstructed the original arrangements – we even used the same synthesisers, and I got the same guitars out that I had used at the time, and tried to recreate the sonic texture of that record from beginning to end."

The emotional process of recreating this music proved even more profound. "The first shows were in New York City," Tweedy continues, "so it was like putting everything in the right order to unlock some memories. It became closer to time-travel than I would ever have anticipated.



With guitarist Leroy Bach (right) and director Sam Jones (centre) at the *Am Trying to Break Your Heart* premiere, 2002



▶ 23



▶ 24

And it was pretty overwhelming, to be honest. I cried at the end of every show, just because I felt like, I'm still here, you know? And, thank God, I felt a sense of relief. And going through it with the audience and understanding their countless connections with it, and that it had been such a companion to people for such a long time, was one of the most beautiful things."

The covermount CD Tweedy has compiled for this month's *Uncut* lets you hear the climax of these shows, and the strong reactions they triggered. "We did the long instrumental coda of 'Reservations' the way it is on the record," he explains. "The whole entire theatre would stand there and be quiet. And it would end before people realised it was over, and then there would be this realisation, and the applause that would come out of that would just make tears shoot out of my face! It was really, really rewarding."

Nonesuch's David Byrnes was in the audience again. "To conclude with 'Poor Places' and 'Revelations', with 'Revelations' extending into this almost ambient space for seven or eight minutes, was mesmerising," he says. "I actually left before the encore. It had cast such a spell that I felt if anything came after it, I was gonna lose it. Some people term *Yankee*... experimental, like it was born in a laboratory. But it's always been incredibly emotional music."

Cline thinks that ending with "Reservations", an unabashed love song to Tweedy's wife Susie ("I've got reservations about so many things/But not about you"), added to his tearful reaction. "It's a very affecting song, and for him it's accumulated, I would guess, more and more poignant resonance in his life. While ▶

## FROM YANKEE TO COUNTRY

Five crucial steps between  
Wilco's greatest and  
latest classics



### SKY BLUE SKY (2007)

On which the experimental fireworks and blazing guitar vapour-trails of *A Ghost Is Born* are cleared away, leaving simpler, often acoustic-based songs

played together in the studio, written by a man glad to be alive. Its organic recording is *Cruel Country*'s clearest prototype.



### SUKIERAE (2014)

Recorded as Tweedy with his son Spencer, this prepared the ground for Jeff's solo career. Its turn towards more intimate writing and singing would soon bear

considerable fruit. "Some of *Cruel Country*'s songs have a lot more in common with my solo albums than the last 15 years of Wilco records," Tweedy notes.

### JEFF TWEEDY



### LET'S GO (SO WE CAN GET BACK) (2018)

Tweedy's memoir was a reckoning with his past from a man not prone to looking back. He used its lessons to write *Warm*, an album of "direct, personal, and autobiographical" new songs under his own name, the same year.

### THE TWEEDY SHOW (2020-)

When Covid put paid to Wilco's summer 2020 tour, Tweedy started livestreaming nightly from home with his family, learning hundreds of cover songs. He bombarded Wilco with new songs at a similar rate before the *Cruel Country* sessions. "Jeff's always been prolific," says John Stratt, "but learning so many cover songs for his Instagram show really opened things up for him. We got a song a day, 50 days in a row."



### "DIG A PONY"/ "DON'T LET ME DOWN" (2021)

Wilco's brief stopover at The Loft last year, taping covers of Get Back-era Beatles songs for Amazon Music, was vital to their simply recorded new record. "Everyone was playing and singing live, and we released them that way," says Nels Cline. "That got us rolling in the direction we took in *Cruel Country*."

I didn't cry, I was standing next to Jeff and feeling his emotion, and how he is now reacting to the moment in his life that was 20 years ago. It was very, very moving. And I'm a pretty nostalgic and sentimental person, but not about all that many records. So the idea of recreating a record sometimes seems like a convenient, marketing thing. But it didn't feel like that. It still felt like relevant and emotionally engaging music. I was really happy to be a part of it."

**Y**ANKEE Hotel Foxrot's influence on Wilco's career still continues. It set in motion the changes in personnel that, by the time they toured their next record, *A Ghost Is Born*, had solidified into the unshakable lineup they've had ever since. Selling over half a million as it touched a nerve in America in particular, it also set them up as a viable commercial force. "For

*Wilco = a ghost is born*

a way to have people hear our music. That's one of the parallels with *Cruel Country*, too. With supply-chain issues, and waiting 17 months to put a vinyl record out, I don't have any patience for that right now. We have new songs we want to sing, and we want to go out and play 'em. That's why we put it out the way we did."

years after, record companies were afraid to say no to us!" says Tweedy. He points out that Wilco were pioneers, releasing *YHF* on their website, while their label dispute was resolved. "Even before we had a record deal with Nonesuch, we found that the internet was viable as

Another similarity between the two records is the state of America under George W Bush and Donald Trump – Tweedy's ruefully familiar theme over 20 years. "As far back as Uncle Tupelo, I was very curious about American politics and sociology, and *Yankee Hotel Foxrot* was the first record where I started challenging ideology. Lyrically across the board on that record, I'm trying to make sense of the rhetoric that I had absorbed from punk rock, and the anger I had absorbed from being alienated in my upbringing.

I started thinking about those songs around the time that Bush had been elected. I was shocked at that, like, "Really?" In hindsight he looks like a statesman – I would never have been able to imagine the sort of landscape we have right now. On the other hand, a lot of the introspection and the coping that I've done in response is very similar."

Wilco's recent records wish to heal their country's scars, as much as anything. "Do you remember when wars used to end?" Tweedy asks on *Ode To Joy*'s "White Wooden Cross". "Do you remember when we used to forget?" he asks again on *Cruel Country*'s "Hints". Both songs see a chasm between his country's culture-warring sides.

"It was disturbing enough at the time of *Yankee*...

when I realised that nobody was talking about the future any more, like they did when I was a kid. In the last five or six years, the past has gone away, been changed and fought over, too."

In *Cruel Country*'s opener, "I Am My Mother", Tweedy adopts a conservative mindset to watch immigrants "streaming over the southern border". He slips in a plaintive philosophy, countering the contempt for the weak he believes makes his country cruel: "If it were up to me/I would have rejected the idea/That money can keep you poor". He also admits his own ambivalence in a torn nation – after all, he remains a product of the depressed, conservative Midwest town of Belleville, Illinois: "I'm a new man, but I'm still my mother".

"I don't think it's helpful to deny that you have those things in your makeup," he says. "I don't know how you address your shadow-self without realising that you have one." Talk turns to Tweedy's parents, and particularly his dad. In his son's books, Bob Tweedy is described as a taciturn, 12-pack-of-beer-a-night railwayman, with a surprising penchant for poetry. In the years immediately before his death in 2017, father and son drew closer. "I've kind of cast my father as the less enlightened one in that opening song," Tweedy continues, "which wasn't really the case in my upbringing. My father was much more reactionary in his politics, and maybe a bit more closed-minded. But he had an amazing journey and epiphany as he got older. And my mother

## "I'D NEVER HAVE IMAGINED THE LANDSCAPE WE HAVE NOW"

JEFF TWEEDY



Fellow travellers: Wilco in Brussels in June 2019, touring before the release of *Ode To Joy*



"We have new songs to sing, and we want to go out and play 'em." Tweedy with Wilco at the Black Deer Festival 2022



wasn't around to see it. He voted for Obama twice; he couldn't stand to sit at the bar any more because they watched Fox News. He just couldn't believe that people were falling for Donald Trump – in his mind, the ultimate boss's son. But it was this stuff about immigration that really pushed him over the edge, because he really did see that of course you would carry your fucking family across the desert, if you had to. He'd dropped out of high school to get a job to take care of my sister when she was born, when both my parents were teenagers. So yeah – he changed his tune quite a bit."

**B**ACK at Black Deer, Wilco are playing "Jesus, Etc." Nels Cline's lap-steel makes it sound like one of their new country songs, gentle, consoling and bruised. Its old 9/11 ghosts seem to dissipate in the evening breeze. "The songs themselves have kept up with us," Tweedy says, reflecting on the set's pulling together of every period and stylistic aspect of Wilco's world. "A song like 'Jesus, Etc.' doesn't sound weird next to any record we've ever made since. None of those *Yankee*... songs do. Right now, we're putting a lot of *Cruel Country* songs in our set. And it's kind of nice that those songs sit next to a song like 'Muzzle Of Bees'. It highlights the fact that this is a band with a history, and a sonic palette, even when things are pretty wildly divergent over records. We can make everything work together. And doing that helps the songs keep up with us. Because a bit of 'The Whole Love' gets into 'Kamera' somehow. And then we play 'Kamera' a little bit like 'The Whole Love' for a while. It just gets all mixed up."

After *Yankee*...s' moment back in the sun ends this year, the past can slip back to where it

belongs, as an ever-present but never dominant part of Wilco's lives. "This is one of the rare times we've spent any time looking back at something like this in depth, and doing shows like we have," Tweedy says. "And I'm really happy that we did, because the record still seems to have this resonance, that was profoundly felt by us. Maybe we wouldn't have anticipated that, because it was such an exercise in recreating something. But it's good."

Tweedy is happy to admit the presence of individual ghosts, too, when asked if the DNA of Jay Bennett – who died in 2009 – is still in Wilco in 2022. "Yeah. I think that there's a certain amount of tribute and honour that goes out to Jay on any given night, when we play songs that he had a hand in constructing. That being a fact of who we are and what songs we have in our repertoire would be pretty hard to extract from the other songs that have come since."

His Uncle Tupelo partner Jay Farrar's traces are once again apparent in Wilco, 28 years after Farrar dissolved their old band. "Especially on *Cruel Country*, I hear songs that are connected in my mind to songs that Jay and I would listen to in the van in Uncle Tupelo. There's some Sir Douglas Quintet influence I hear on songs like 'Falling Apart' that was very much a part of our formative years growing up."

Mikael Jorgensen offers his own take on the connecting philosophy between Wilco's disparate three decades of music. "Jeff's always looking for a new syntax. It's the impulse to find a new way to say something that's familiar. How do you use a traditional form to say something new, or say something traditional with a new form?"

The unfinished "art-pop" album awaits Wilco's attention at The Loft, as the future beckons again. Cline believes they may start it fresh, playing together in *Cruel Country*'s blissful manner. "I don't know what style it will end up being, but I don't mind saying that there are a couple of songs with really strong grooves and choruses..."

"It feels like we've bought ourselves time to make that record as great as we think

it can be," adds Tweedy. "We wanna dig back into it as soon as possible."

"We're not just fading and living off past glories," Kotche concludes. "Going from *Yankee*... to *Cruel Country*, and then to this new material, is a nice reminder of what we've been doing, what we're capable of doing – and now let's move forward. There's a lot going on with this band." **👉**

**"WE'RE NOT JUST FADING AND LIVING OFF PAST GLORIES"**  
GLENN KOTCHE

**MORE WILCO! - TURN THE PAGE FOR OUR GUIDE TO THIS MONTH'S FREE WILCO CD**

# cross-eyed strangers

Your guide to this month's exclusive CD

**T**HIS month's covermount CD is a special one: an alternate version of Wilco's classic *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, compiled for *Uncut* by the band themselves. A handy companion piece to Nonesuch's mammoth

20th-anniversary *Yankee...* boxset, due in September, *Cross-Eyed Strangers* encompasses alternate studio takes, live tracks and Jeff Tweedy solo cuts, climaxing with the epic finale to their recent New York performance of the album.

"Revisiting *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* has been a collaboration with our audience," Tweedy tells *Uncut*. "We are a band that likes to make people happy. The tour, the boxset, and now this compilation is all a part of letting everyone in as much as they want to come in."

"The songs pulled for this CD come from a variety of places over the years – versions that fans have responded well to. If you ever wondered what a time-travelling-enabled alternate version of *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* would sound like, here's your chance!" **NICK HASTED**

## 1. I AM TRYING TO BREAK YOUR HEART

An acoustic, fingerpicked version from Tweedy's solo album, *Together At Last*, digs beneath *Yankee...*'s experimental veneer. "It's just closer to the way the song was written," Tweedy explains. "It seemed like a good way to start an alternative version of the record – to remind people that the basic format of *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, songwriting-wise, is still pretty much a folk record."

## 2. CAMERA

This pulsing, feedback-drenched stomp is an early version of what was eventually titled "Kamera". "That just narrowly missed being on *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*," Tweedy believes. "Just texturally, it didn't feel like the same record. It's a pretty exciting version of it, I think!"

## 3. RADIO CURE (LIVE AT UNITED PLACE THEATER, NYC 4/19/22)

A hushed, brooding, piano-led version from this year's New York shows, with the addition of the

Aizuri Quartet. "We augmented with some strings and horns," Tweedy explains. "My feeling was that the *Yankee...* record's broken, and I don't want to fix it! But it was nice to have some of the original things that we'd wanted to have on there and a bit of a bolder sound."

## 4. WAR ON WAR (ALTERNATE TAKE)

This fuzzed-up take goes easy on the album version's weird keyboard swirls, instead favouring breakneck, rough-edged banjo. It was recently released as a single.

## 5. JESUS, ETC (LIVE AT UNITED PLACE THEATER, NYC 4/19/22)

This song "conveyed my wish for a better sense of unity with my extremely devout Christian neighbours," Tweedy claimed in his book *How To Write One Song*. The apocalyptic prophecy its lyrics were saddled with after 9/11 is certainly absent from this amiable live version. With its fiddles, steel guitar and strings, it hovers between a swaying ballad and a hoedown.

## 6. ASHES OF AMERICAN FLAGS

*Together At Last* provides this mellow, country-folk version of

*Yankee...*'s discussion of American materialism. "I was starting to examine whether anything could really be neutral," Tweedy says. "Is the cash machine 'blue or green', as it says in the lyric – or is it evil?"

## 7. HEAVY METAL DRUMMER (LIVE AT THE PAGEANT, ST LOUIS, MO 7/23/02)

This version of *Yankee...*'s breeziest song comes from a rousing gig the band played soon after the album's official release. "It was sort of a homecoming show, with a short-lived quartet version of Wilco," the band's archivist Cheryl Pawelski explains. This song about the innocent fun of metal covers bands is especially resonant on home turf. "Maybe some of you were in those bands," Tweedy told

the crowd just after the song. "Maybe I saw you play..."

## 8. I'M THE MAN WHO LOVES YOU (ALTERNATE TAKE)

"How about one more at this tempo?" someone asks, before Wilco kick into this giddy mix of blues and country-rock, heavy on slide guitar and ending in a feedback freakout. Released as a single, it again shows how different *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* could have been.

## 9. POT KETTLE BLACK (LIVE AT THE PAGEANT, ST LOUIS, MO 7/23/02)

A whistle of feedback, and we're back in St Louis for an almost motorik version of "Pot Kettle Black": the keyboard glides and loops, Glenn Kotche throws weird percussion shapes and Wilco play woozy music to a boozy local crowd.

## 10. POOR PLACES (LIVE AT UNITED PLACE THEATER, NYC 4/19/22)

The climax of Wilco's celebratory *Yankee...* performances in New York begins here, as pummelling piano, psychedelic keyboards and crunching percussion pave the way for the album's finale.

## 11. RESERVATIONS (LIVE AT UNITED PLACE THEATER, NYC 4/19/22)

Elegiac classical piano begins this epic tribute to Tweedy's wife Susie, with the Aizuri Quartet's strings offering grand support. Following a long ambient coda, the crowd's final roar of affirmation washes over Wilco. It left Tweedy overcome every night, he tells *Uncut*. "Tears would shoot out of my face!"

UNCUT



"We are a band that likes to make people happy." Jeff Tweedy (right) and Wilco in Chicago, Nov 2001

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# LIVE

## NOS PRIMAVERA SOUND

Parque Da Cidade, Porto, June 9-11

Pavement, Beck and Nick Cave roll back the years in Portugal

**L**OU Barlow is a past master of the festival wobbler (remember Reading '94?). Here, **Dinosaur Jr** are having to play with borrowed gear after their luggage got stuck in Florence, which doesn't seem to faze J Mascis; he just straps on whatever guitar he's handed, detunes the strings and starts riffing. But Barlow's evident agitation makes for a thrillingly frazzled and confrontational set, ending with the bassist seizing the mic and adding a few new lines to their version of Last Rights' defiant hardcore anthem "Chunks". "We're older than you!" he yells at the startled crowd. "And we can play our instruments!"

To be fair to Barlow, you can see where he's coming from. The Primavera bill is somewhat polarised between alt-rock veterans and playlist-friendly popsters, leading to some strange juxtapositions out in the field. **Pavement** were always a bit of a Marmite band: either you dug their louche verbosity or you were wrong. So while these reformation shows are the festival's big coup, their crowd is fairly evenly divided between people singing along heartily to every non-sequitur and Portuguese youngsters looking utterly baffled by the lack of obvious spectacle.

This sense of eras colliding adds a little extra spice to "Fight This Generation", although there are delighted yelps of recognition when Pavement launch into "Cut Your Hair", "Stereo" and "Harnessed Your Hopes", the former B-side that's recently become an unlikely algorithmic smash. Meanwhile the hardcore are served by "Shoot The Singer", "Trigger Cut" and an enthusiastic "Serpentine Pad", which finds Pavement utility man Bob Nastanovich living his best life out front while Malkmus handles the tricky stuff with laconic elegance. The October Roundhouse shows should be terrific.

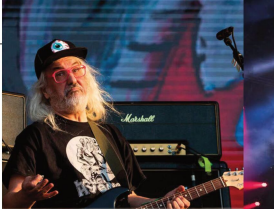
**Slowdive** are another '90s

band whose stock has only risen since their original split. Perfect for the Friday "magic hour" slot, they also serve to highlight the beauty of the festival site – a park next to the ocean, with the main stage at the bottom of a gentle grassy bank meaning you can see from everywhere – as well as the power of its sound system (UK festival organisers take note). While Slowdive's 2017 comeback album foregrounded their more conventional indie-rock side, it's also prompted them to retrofit floatier numbers like "Crazy For You" with punchier rhythm tracks, over which Neil Halstead fires off volleys of guitar bliss into the sunset.

## Stephen Malkmus handles the tricky stuff with elegance

Damon Albarn's solution to bridging the generation gap is simply to pretend that he's still 22, bounding on stage for **Gorillaz**' Saturday headlining set in a pink baseball cap and matching bomber jacket, the latter soon discarded as he starts clambering up the scaffolding or jumping into the front row. By now, the former cartoon band have abandoned all pretence at being an anonymous collective; this is very much the Damon show. But for all of Albarn's infectious energy, it's the guest stars that make a Gorillaz gig, and the excitement sags a little until the cameo start coming: Beck, Fatoumata Diawara, the irrepressible Little Simz and finally De La's Soul's Posdnuos for a delicious "Feel Good Inc".

**Beck** is another of those Peter Pan characters. Recent albums have felt a bit dutiful but he seems rejuvenated



J Mascis of Dinosaur Jr



Stephen Malkmus of Pavement



Beck

here, a deranged TV salesman in a white suit and Elvis shades hawking discount orgies and cocaine nosejobs. The only ban note in a set of nonstop hits is his mawkish acoustic version of "Everybody's Got To Learn Sometime", but he's soon blowing maniacally into a harmonica for a raucous "One Foot In The Grave". And it's certainly handy in terms of singalongability that "Loser" has a bilingual chorus.

**Nick Cave**, too, is an apparently ageless performer – and not just

because he increasingly resembles Dracula on a casino holiday. He's managed to retain the swagger and menace of old while introducing new levels of vulnerability and compassion to his performance. Of course, it's also great to see the full complement of Bad Seeds back in action, seamlessly incorporating songs from *Ghosteen* and *Carnage* into the set.

Acknowledging that they'll never be able to compete with Cave or Beck in terms of stage presence, **Tame**



Kevin Parker of Tame Impala



Gorillaz with Fatoumata Diawara

**Impala** deliver the most opulent festival light-show since Daft Punk's glowing pyramid, drenching Kevin Parker and co in lysergic colours. But the *Slow Rush* material can't help but feel a little on-rails, and it's only when they finally loop back to 2010's "Runway, Houses, City, Clouds", with Parker breaking free of the click-track to solo expressively, that they actually look to be in danger of losing themselves in the moment.

**Dry Cleaning** draw the short straw, having to play in the blazing

5pm sunshine on the less verdant Cupra stage (it's in the car park). You wonder if Florence Shaw's dispassionate diatribes about bus passes and the collapse of heavy industry might get lost in translation, but her band are becoming increasingly fluid, using the disconnect between setting and subject matter to drive home a poignant tension. **Khruangbin's** languid bagatelles are more suited to the late afternoon heat, although in Mark Speer's increasingly

Hillage-esque guitar you can hear them straining at their self-imposed boundaries, keen to initiate their next phrase. Honourable mentions, too, to **Black Midi**, **Squid** and **King Krule**, smart British kids who know their musical history while determinedly forging something new, distinctive and weird. And they all play their instruments too!

Perhaps Barlow was just freaked out by brilliantly ludicrous Gen Z icons **100 Gecs**, who don't play songs so much as TikTok memes

and generally sound like the internet having a seizure. But on the whole, this festival – free of the problems that plagued its Barcelona counterpart this year – couldn't be more welcoming. Even during Dinosaur Jr's rugged set, there are sportswear-clad teens holding up their phones to capture the moment, while ageing rockers are spotted in the 80s stage after-hours, punching the air to **Joy Orbison** or **Special Request**. Fight this generation? No need. © **SAM RICHARDS**

Been around for  
along long year:  
the Stones in 2022  
with Steve Jordan  
on the drum stool



# THE ROLLING STONES

BST Hyde Park, London, June 25

As a fitting tribute to those they've lost,  
the surviving Stones just keep on rolling

**H**YDE Park in midsummer. For The Rolling Stones, this is a ritual place of celebration and commemoration. Here in 1969, Mick read Shelley and released several thousand white butterflies in memory of Brian Jones; tonight, as the Stones mark the 60th anniversary of their first show at the Marquee, they also pay tribute to Charlie Watts. Instead of the poetry and the lepidoptera, Charlie gets a more modern send-off: the video montage. It's a bit like those "best bits" clips when a contestant exits a reality TV show. Understandably, it raises one of the biggest cheers of the night.

As it transpires, the spirits of Brian and Charlie are very much in evidence here. After arriving on stage with a rousing "Street Fighting Man", they circle back to mono Stones with "19th Nervous Breakdown", "Out Of Time" and "Paint It, Black", welcome representatives from the band's audacious and transformative 1966. While the sneering, screw-you attitude still cuts a ferocious swathe through Hyde Park's corporate elites, it proves a little hard to programme against the '70s hits.

They reach firmer ground with "You Can't Always Get What You Want" before heading off somewhere else again with a showstopping "Can't You Hear Me Knocking". On record, this is very much

a Mick Taylor song. Certainly, there are enough people here who'd love to see him walk out of the wings, chiffon scarf billowing behind him, as he did the last time the Stones played Hyde Park, on their 50th anniversary tour. But perhaps these shows aren't so much about guest spots from former band members as they are the three surviving Stones presenting a compelling case for their future. What was perhaps once viewed as a stubborn refusal to grow old/up has now become a testament to their astonishing resilience: in the last three years alone they have overcome heart surgery, Covid and death.

As the sun goes down, yet another transformation takes place, a reminder that the Stones are a band best enjoyed during the hours of darkness. Much of this is down to the interplay between Keith and Ronnie, who spend much of the daylight

## SETLIST

- 1 Street Fighting Man
- 2 19th Nervous Breakdown
- 3 Tumbling Dice
- 4 Out Of Time
- 5 She's A Rainbow
- 6 You Can't Always Get What You Want
- 7 Living In A Ghost Town
- 8 Can't You Hear Me Knocking
- 9 Honky Tonk Women
- 10 Slipping Away
- 11 Connection
- 12 Miss You
- 13 Midnight Rambler
- 14 Paint It, Black
- 15 Start Me Up
- 16 Gimme Shelter
- 17 Jumpin' Jack Flash
- ENCORE
- 18 Sympathy For The Devil
- 19 (I Can't Get No) Satisfaction

part of the set chalking to one another between solos before getting their heads down after sunset. We've read "Keith is sounding better than ever!" a hundred times before, of course, but he genuinely seems to be enjoying playing tonight, slashing through riffs while Ron does a lot of the heavy lifting (and beautiful slide on "She's A Rainbow"). "Miss You" is an immediate party, with Darryl Jones' sinuous bass solo quickening the pulse.

What follows is the Stones at their most unrepentant. "Midnight Rambler" – even without Mick Taylor – is immense, devastating, with Jagger's harp scything through the night air "knife-sharpened, tippy-toe". "Gimme Shelter" thrums with apocalyptic dread. Broadcasting the Ukrainian flag onto the screens while Sasha Allen evokes Merry Clayton's restless howl implicitly connects the turbulence of the '60s to the present day. "Jumpin' Jack Flash" arrives like a thunderstorm. It's hard to imagine a darker and more adversarial run of songs to end a set with.

At moments like these, Charlie brought an edge, a different kind of tension in the way he made the music jump in a slightly dangerous way. Steve Jordan presents a more straight-ahead proposition, dutifully serving the songs (and Watts) but wisely never attempting to copy his swing or groove. Perhaps the most profound thing that Hyde Park reminds us is that what has kept them going so long is quite baffling and intangible. Maybe it's only rock'n'roll. But whatever, this was very much the Stones. As the final chords of "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" fade and the pyrotechnics dim, they disappear into the gathering darkness, bruised and battered by recent events, but never down and certainly not out. ©MICHAEL BONNER



# LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

Brixton Academy, London, June 29

Murphy's mob celebrate their 20th anniversary with a euphoric London residency

**T**HE week before these shows, some mildly embarrassing footage had done the rounds showing LCD Soundsystem playing for a crowd of half-interested tech bros at some kind of NFT convention. They're not the first band ever to take a corporate gig, but it did raise suspicions that – without a new album on the horizon – their long residencies in New York and now London were just a means of milking the cash cow.

Well, cynics be damned. The love in this venue is palpable long before the band even take the stage, and LCD pay it back in spades with a performance that's the very opposite of phoning it in. The eight-strong band are situated on platforms around the stage, each picked out by a warm spotlight in a way that's instantly redolent of *Snob Making Sense*, a reference you imagine is wholly intentional. LCD Soundsystem are not shy about revealing their influences – “I Can Change” begins with a snatch of Kraftwerk’s “Radioactivity” – and indeed this celebration of music you already know and love is kind of the whole point. It's left party DJ set as rock show.

The core band is much the same as when

they played their first ever live dates, in this very city, just under 20 years ago: Nancy Whang on keys, Pat Mahoney on drums and Tyler Pope on bass, plus Hot Chip's Al Doyle on guitar. They have grayer hair and broader waistlines, but as the unashamedly paunchy James Murphy points out, he was already old when he started the group. It means there's none of the pathos that's often unavoidable when a reformed band revisits material written in the flush of youth. LCD's songs were always about slightly more grown-up stuff: friendships, grief, gentrification. Even on the straight-ahead party anthem “Daft Punk Is Playing In My House”, rapturously received here, Murphy ensures “the furniture is in the garage”.

Naturally it all sounds amazing, due in no small part to the barking analogue synths that dominate the stage, which all blurt out a huge and evocative noise the moment a key is pressed. They contribute to a rich, enveloping sound that's more luxe disco-rock than scratchy dance-punk. Murphy, meanwhile, once a subscriber to the Mark E Smith school of vocal delivery, has quietly become a pretty good singer. “How Do You Sleep” feels Depeche Mode massive; “New



LCD Soundsystem: summoning collective euphoria

## SETLIST

1. Get Innocuous!
2. I Can Change
3. Time To Get Away
4. Daft Punk Is Playing At My House
5. You Wanted A Hit
6. Tribulations
7. Tonite
8. Call The Police
9. Someone Great
10. How Do You Sleep?
11. Home
12. INCORSE
13. Beat Connection
14. New York, I Love You But You're Bringing Me Down
15. Dance Yourself Clean
16. All My Friends

York, I Love You But You're Bringing Me Down” becomes a grandiose Broadway showstopper. As the band wring out umpteenth false endings, Murphy steps to one side and pours himself a glass of wine, enjoying the extravagance.

Tonight they don't even play “Losing My Edge”, once considered their signature song. But arguably its self-lacerating, hipster-baiting stance no longer encapsulates what they're about so much as the empathetic surge of “All My Friends”, which closes the show in an outpouring of sweaty emotion. If this residency is purely a moneyspinner, then it's a pretty good one, because you'd pay whatever they're asking to come and experience it all again. Experience being the key word; this is not a show you can watch impassively. LCD Soundsystem are one of the few bands to truly understand the sense of collective euphoria inherent in the best dance music and transfer it to a rock setting. Not bad for a bunch of ageing music snobs. **© SAM RICHARDS**

James Murphy: sweaty and emotional



JEFFREY M. HARRIS

## An exuberant road trip out of Iran: a Vonnegut doc; a nicely balanced Spanish farce; designer folk horror; and more...

**H**IT THE ROAD This is a brilliantly distinctive debut by Panah Panahi – the son of veteran director Jafar Panahi, who over the last decade has been finding inventive new ways to overcome the restrictions placed on him by the Iranian government. While his father made films while under house arrest (*This Is Not A Film*) or in the confines of a cab (*Tehran Taxi*), Panahi has responded to the theme of enclosure by making a film about escape. *Hit The Road* is about a family headed to the Iran-Turkey border, where the oldest son (Amin Simiar) hopes to leave his country. He's joined by his mother (Panteha Panahliha), cantankerous father (Hassan Madijoni) who's stuck in the back seat with his leg in plaster, and his restless kid brother (Rayan Sarlak), plus an ailing dog named Jessy.

As with most road movies, what's important is the ride and the company. We find our way into the story through the family's banter – occasionally tetchy, usually tender, sometimes extravagantly off-the-wall. The most compelling presence, perhaps inevitably, is the kid, an impressively agitated, show-off tyke; an impressive newcomer Sarlak is an extraordinary (and at times, mesmerisingly abrasive) child performer, whether raging petulantly or, in the final sequence, hilariously lip-synching to a ballad. There's magnificent visual beauty, both in the landscapes and in a magic realist sequence towards the end – with the comedy accompanying an edge of political anger at state oppression. This is cinema that expresses its rebellion through exuberance, irreverence, farce and invention; it's one of the discoveries of the year.

**KURT VONNEGUT: UNSTUCK IN TIME**  
An authentic outsider figure, Vonnegut struggled for years in the mines of the sci-fi short story market before, several novels in, finding widespread acclaim with 1969's

Warm smile, wandering eye: Javier Bardem in *The Good Boss*

hybrid time-travel tale and war memoir *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In this documentary, Robert B Weide details Vonnegut's life and career and tells of his own decades-long attempt to get the film made. Weide's personal story distracts only slightly from the picture of a writer who seemed compulsively to downplay the traumatic effect of, surely, the defining experience in his life. His internment as a POW in Dresden, when it was firebombed by Allied forces, became the seed for *Slaughterhouse-Five*, a book that famously shrugs off one of the great horrors of modern warfare with a repeated "So it goes".

Vonnegut emerges sometimes as a mensch, sometimes a neurotic grouch, and – when it comes to his private life – a fallible man whose head was ruinously turned by success. But the film – featuring various family members, and novelist John Irving, Vonnegut's former writing student – reveals a man who emerged from the turbulence of

the American 20th century, stuck doggedly to his craft as a genre journeyman, and somehow developed one of the most singularly irrelevant voices in modern American writing.

**THE FEAST** British cinema has seen a fair amount of folk horror lately, but it rarely comes hand in hand with sleek steel-and-glass modernism, as it does in Lee Haven Jones' bracingly creepy *The Feast*. Set almost entirely in a chic brutalist designer house, it feels a little as if a glacial Austrian art-film auteur had made an extended episode of *Inside No 9* – except in Welsh. Scripted by Roger Williams, it begins with anxious upper-middle-class Glenda (Nia Roberts) planning a fancy dinner that she's hosting with her MP husband Gwyn (Julian Lewis Jones). Meanwhile their adult sons are mooching around the estate, each preoccupied with their own issues, one a moody rebel with drug issues, the other a

### REVIEWED THIS MONTH



**HIT THE ROAD**  
Directed by Panah Panahi  
Starring Hassan Madijoni, Panteha Panahliha  
Opens July 29  
Cert To be confirmed  
9/10



**KURT VONNEGUT: UNSTUCK IN TIME**  
Directed by Robert B Weide, Don Argott  
Opens July 22  
Cert To be confirmed  
7/10



**THE FEAST**  
Directed by Lee Haven Jones  
Starring Anna Elwy, Nia Roberts  
Opens August 19  
Cert To be confirmed  
8/10



**THE GOOD BOSS**  
Directed by Fernando León de Aranoa  
Starring Javier Bardem, Manolo Solo  
Opens July 15  
Cert To be confirmed  
7/10



**THE GRAY MAN**  
Directed by Anthony Russo, Joe Russo  
Starring Ryan Reynolds, Chris Evans  
Opens July 15  
Cert 15  
4/10



## Bardem's Blanco needs to be at once loathsome, cosy and seductive

affable façade wears thin when Blanco must deal with an executive who's coming undone at the seams and a recently sacked worker who decides to take the time-honoured Disgruntled Former Employee routine to new limits. And of course, this respectable family man also has a predatory eye on his new intern (Almudena Amor), who's not nearly the ingénue she looks.

The *Good Boss* is a clever film rather than a really trenchant one, the sly farce just a little too calculated, the pace at moments sluggish. But the film has a definite elegance – not least, in some nice visual variations on the theme of Blanco's obsession with scales, balance and calibration. Bardem is one of the few actors who could really carry off this role: Blanco needs to be at once loathsome, reassuring, cosy and yet plausibly seductive – and the Spanish star fleshes him out with brio and a nicely deceptive middle-age joviality that suggests that, when it comes to playing the flawed, middle-aged, middle-class Everyman, he currently has few screen equals.

**THE GRAY MAN** With James Bond currently in a state of existential suspension and Tom Cruise reasonably likely to retire at some point in the next five decades, the time is clearly ripe to launch a new Indestructible Superspy franchise, so *The Gray Man* might seem a sound bet. Netflix's most expensive feature to date, it has a glossy cast including Ryan Gosling, Marvel mainstay Chris Evans, recent Bond sidekick Ana de Armas, and *Bridgerton* heartthrob Regé-Jean Page; and it's directed by the brothers behind the second biggest box-office success of all time. As a CIA boss says when learning of a secret espionage squad composed of "nameless assassins with limited morality", what could possibly go wrong?

In fact, just about everything. The Russo brothers may have mustered several Marvel movies including the world-beating *Avengers: Endgame*, but when it comes to by-the-book espionage action, they're left pretty much flailing. Gosling plays a man taken out of prison to join a secret elite club within the CIA, who later goes on the run. Settling down only to reduce much of the Czech Republic to rubble, the globe-trotting action jumps dizzily from Bangkok to Baku to Hong Kong to Berlin, quickly inducing that feeling of "Wake me up when they reach Ceeethorpes".

A poker-faced Gosling is so listlessly inert that you fear his career is fated for that straight-to-streamer action-movie purgatory where Bruce Willis and Nicolas Cage have spent so much time. At least Evans seems to be having fun as his ruthless foe, a Schopenhauer-quoting sociopath with a hairstyle and moustache weirdly evocative of J. Jonah Jameson, *The Early Years*.

Clearly the game plan is a long-running franchise, but one seriously doubts we'll get to see even two shades of Gray. **© JONATHAN ROMNEY**

## ALSO OUT...

### A CHIARA

OPENS JULY 15

Director Jonas Carpignano keeps the flame of Italian neo-realism blazing with the third part of his Calabrian trilogy, following *Mediterranea* and *A Ciambra* – this time following a teenager who finds out the truth about her family's business.

### WHERE THE CRAWDAWS SING

OPENS JULY 22

North Carolina marshlands mystery, adapted from Delia Owens' bestselling novel, and starring *Normal People*'s Daisy Edgar-Jones.

### THE WILL

OPENS JULY 22

Charlotte Colbert's British horror comedy-drama is about a film star (Alice Krige) encountering weirdness and witchiness at a healing retreat. Malcolm McDowell and Rupert Everett co-star.

### ALL LIGHT, EVERYWHERE

OPENS JULY 22

Filmmaker Theo Anthony muses on the surveillance society by way of body cameras and Baltimore, in this acclaimed essay documentary.

### PARIS, TEXAS

OPENS JULY 29

Ry Cooder's plangent twangs across the desert could only mean Wim Wenders' *Palme d'Or* winner of 1984, written by Sam Shepard and starring Nastassja Kinski and – in the role that established him as a grizzled icon – Harry Dean Stanton.

### THE HARDER THEY COME

OPENS AUGUST 5

Fifty years on, Perry Henzell's 1972 reggae classic gets a rerelease, with Jimmy Cliff starring as the quintessential rude boy, aspiring singer-turned-outlaw Ivan.

narcissistic cycling obsessive. Drafted in to help prepare is Cadi (Annes Elwy), a young woman from the local pub whose strangely taciturn manner sets the tone unerringly from the start.

Not unlike Ben Wheatley's *Kill List*, *The Feast* wrongfoots you from the start about exactly what kind of film you're watching. At first, its brittle detachment and abrupt cutting makes you feel as if you're watching a Mike Leigh-esque social satire executed with super-poised chill. It's only gradually that you realise there's an entirely different drama bubbling malignly under the surface. Gradually, as things get stranger and folksier – the local song that Cadi sings, the fungus plucked right off the tree – the designer ambience and everyone's attempts to stay unflappably, urbanely polite set a deliciously incongruous tone. Glenda's tropical fruit salsa isn't nearly the most piquant thing about it.

**THE GOOD BOSS** Given how all-out sinister Javier Bardem has been in some of his best-known roles – the merciless killer in *No Country For Old Men*, 007's suave nemesis in *Skyfall* – you can't easily imagine him being avuncular. Yet that's altogether what he is in new Spanish feature *The Good Boss* – although his character is as sinister as uncle figures get. In this black comedy by Fernando León de Aranoa, Bardem, benign-looking in casual jackets and jumpers, plays Blanco, owner of a factory that makes scales. He's first seen smilingly announcing to his staff that the enterprise is up for a major award, giving them an all-hands-on-deck pep talk and reminding them that he's more a friend than a boss. But the

Nastassja Kinski in *Paris, Texas*





Bad penny:  
Jon Bernthal  
in *Wire* *Own*  
*This City*

## WE OWN THIS CITY (NBC)

6/10

## BLACK BIRD (APPLETV+)

10/10

Show or tell? US crime-drama series take different approaches. *By John Robinson*



WHO now would be brave enough to make a cop show? The moral ambiguity that fed into a series like HBO's much-loved *The Wire* (2002–2008) now feels faintly irresponsible in the world post-George Floyd. Twenty years after the series aired, the idea of being “good police” (a quality in a *Wire* character that could eclipse any other personal shortcoming) now seems an almost comically outmoded idea.

No one's laughing in *We Own This City*. Following tours of duty in tip-of-spear Iraq (*Generation Kill*), New Orleans (*Treme*), New Jersey local government (*Show Me A Hero*) and New York porn (*The Deuce*), this is Simon's return to the streets of Baltimore. While *The Wire* presented a fictionalised version of the city, drawn on the experiences of Simon (then a crime reporter) and Ed Burns (a police officer),

for a show that felt truthful and convincing, *WOTC* is based in the hard facts of a real police corruption enquiry from 2016 – yet it feels oddly remote and unreal.

A very exciting trailer it had, too. A swaggering, terrifically stupid, cop (Jon Bernthal) heads up a “gun trace taskforce” that aims to seize weapons from the city's streets, but who while so doing milks the city for overtime and fills his Kevlar vest with stolen drug loot. Meanwhile the FBI and Department of Justice (in the person of Wunmi Mosaku's Nicole Steele) investigate.

Oddly, though, the show chooses to envelope the timeline of this potentially exciting yarn in such a way as to show only a limited view of the cops' story, instead employing third-party characters to tell us about what they're doing. Steele has a lot of very talky lunches about how bad it all is. It's very responsible television, but it feels rather as if we're being told what to think.



*BLACK BIRD* is also a police procedural rooted in horrific real-life events, but it doesn't let that get in the way of a good story – told, for the most part,

in baffling old chronological order. Swaggering drug dealer Jimmy (a charming and Michael Madsen-like Taron Egerton) is offered a reprieve from a long prison sentence. But only if he can persuade a manipulative convict to divulge incriminating details before his release on appeal.

Alongside this story runs a cold case investigation told very much in the downbeat, overhead-shots-of-fields-and-straight-roads *True Detective* manner, as Miller (Greg Kinnear, a good part for him) and McCauley from the FBI (Sepideh Moafi) unshowily track the evidence to support the audacious ploy taking

place within the walls of the prison.

Dennis Lehane, the crime writer and *Wire* veteran who developed the story (and might have been welcomed to the table of *We Own This City*), is equally at home in the prison drama as he is gathering evidence, but it's not just in presenting two genre pieces side by side that the show shines. Elegantly flicking between the two strands, *Black Bird* (also featuring a final appearance from Ray Liotta as Jimmy's ailing dad) looks at times as if it might have something to say to us about fatherhood, nature and nurture, or honour and pragmatism. It ultimately just decides against it.

Maybe there's not much to say. People don't really change. They do bad stuff, and their actions have consequences. The smarter thing *Black Bird* does is to allow its audience room to take in the story and draw its own conclusions.





Catechize you:  
Alicia Vikander  
in *Irma Vep*



## IRMA VEP

9/10

Remaking his film about remaking a film, Olivier Assayas's series is a multi-layered delight. **By Damien Love**



A TV series about a Paris TV crew attempting a remake of the classic French silent serial *Les Vampires*, director Olivier Assayas's *Irma Vep* is also a remake of his own nervy classic 1996 movie, *Irma Vep*, about a crew attempting to remake *Les Vampires* and burning out in the process. Except that, as suddenly becomes clear at one point, this new *Irma Vep* isn't simply a remake of the 1996 *Irma Vep* after all: It's actually a strange, unexpected sequel, continuing its eternally unfinished business.

A hall of mirrors built over a graveyard, there are so many layers at work it's worth stating that you don't have to be aware of any of them. *Irma Vep* is enjoyable simply on its shimmering surface, as a shy, seductive, free-wheeling, frequently goofy film industry satire. It's bitingly smart, it looks great, and – boasting an impeccable mixtape soundtrack and clanging new score by Thornton Moore – it sounds terrific.

Alicia Vikander, who gets better every episode, stars as Mira, a rising Hollywood name imported to France. Her stock has skyrocketed following her most recent movie, *Doomsday*, a superhero blockbuster, and her shark agent (Carrie Brownstein) is pushing her to return to LA for a mega-budget reboot of Marvel's *Silver Surfer*. But Mira is intrigued by the opportunity of working with *Les Vampires* director René Vidal (the excellent Vincent Macaigne), an art-for-art's-sake auteur, offering an earlier role that could push her in ways a comic book might not.

Directed in 1915 by Louis Feuillade, the original *Les Vampires*, clips from which haunt the series, is one of French cinema's holy texts, a surreal pulp about an unrepentant criminal gang. *Irma Vep* was their anagrammatic femme fatale, an incarnation of amoral passion who, as first played by Musidora, a pioneering figure in her own right, became a shadow icon. As she pulls on *Irma*'s signature black catsuit for the remake, Mira becomes captured by the character in unforeseen ways. Meanwhile, Vidal's own obsessions create problems as he clashes with cast and crew, and financiers grow uneasy over his mental state.

Chewing over art vs. commerce, comics vs. 'culture', meaning vs. content, and cinema vs. television; mingling genuine history with fake archive; dropping references to Harvey Weinstein, intimacy co-ordinators and Emily in Paris; and stirring in Mira's failed relationship with her spiteful former assistant (Adria Arjona), *Irma Vep* is a bitingly on-trend backstage baroque: Altman's *The Player* and *Trafford's Day for Night* remixed in Paris's hippest nightclub. It's also frequently hilarious, thanks often to Lars Eidinger as Mira's co-star, a dissipated crack addict.

But there's much more. The underlying theme is the mystery of the creative urge, how things blur and movies can supplant life for the people making them. In Assayas's 1996 film, Maggie Cheung played a version of herself playing Mira – she and Assayas married soon after, then divorced, a buried history that resurfaces as the new series unfolds. Add in nagging references to several of Assayas's other films, and the funhouse becomes a deeply personal feedback loop, filled with ghosts. **DAMIEN LOVE**

## GLASTONBURY: 50 YEARS AND COUNTING

DISCPLAYER

8/10

The great Somerset shindig chronicled



This history of the venerable festival features insightful commentary from big names – from Thom Yorke to Ed Sheeran, Paul McCartney to Billie Eilish – but the real star is Glastonbury founder

Michael Eavis. Using a slightly haphazard timeline, director/producer Francis Whately documents how this gentle Quaker dairy farmer has somehow constantly reinvented his festival to embrace each countercultural wave – from hippies to New Age travellers, from indie bands to anarcho ravers, from grime to queer techno. "I don't have to like it all, do I?" says a cheerful Eavis.

JOHN LEWIS

## THE OFFER

HEAVY HOUND FILMS

6/10

Behind-the-scenes drama on the making of *The Godfather*



With sumptuous 1970s period recreation, this top-part biopic about making *The Godfather* offers some fun, even though it exercises poetic licence aplenty, and the actors attempting to incarnate the likes of Pacino and Brando can veer so perilously close to impersonation that you except a *Saturday Night Live* sketch to break out. The tough guy backstage tale places the spotlight on problem-solving producer Albert Ruddy (Miles Teller), but the standout is Matthew Goode, wickily entertaining as storied studio head Robert Evans. Here's hoping he returns for the making of *The Cotton Club*.

DAMIEN LOVE

## PINK FLAMINGOS

CRITERION COLLECTION

7/10

Pristine restoration for trash classic's 50th anniversary



Director John Waters and his muse Divine established their credentials as the doyens of dubious taste in this outrageous tale of trailer park misfits vying for the title of "the filthiest people alive" – most controversially in a scene where the star simulates eating dog faeces. Time may have dimmed the movie's power to shock, but its portrait of an underclass hungry for fame and notoriety by any means is arguably even more prescient in the age of social media.

Extras: 7/10. Commentaries, deleted scenes, John Waters' tour of Baltimore locations.

TERRY STAUNTON

## THIS IS GWAR

SHEDDER

9/10

Preposterous documentary chronicling the gleefully grotesque



GWAR are impeccably characterised by one fan, Weirid Al Yankovic, as "barbarian interplanetary warrioes who play heavy metal music and shoot bodily fluids all over the audience". Scott Barber's film allows GWAR to recount, with droll self-deprecation, their triumphs and tragedies: two key members did not make it this far. Also provides fascinating insight into the thought, and work, that gets GWAR's show on the road: the spectacle of an alien dinosaur guitarist vomiting blood out of its forehead becomes even more impressive.

ANDREW MUELLER

## TIMES SQUARE

INOX-LORBER

8/10

A coming-of-age cult movie and its great soundtrack



After a decade of films like *The Warriors* that portrayed New York as an urban heliopause, this energetic film – produced by Robert Stigwood – celebrates the city as a safe place where two young women can figure themselves out among the grindhouse cinemas and drug dealers. With her bank-robbard makeup and street-urchin wardrobe, 15-year-old Robin Johnson lends the film its punk volatility, but the true star is the soundtrack, a late-'70s snapshot that includes the Ramones, Talking Heads and Roxy Music.

Extras: 6/10. New commentaries and HD remaster.

STEPHENDUISINER



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INVITED to travel from Glasgow to Newcastle in The Rolling Stones' limo in 1966 while supporting the band as one of Ike and Tina

Turner's backing singers, PP Arnold was none too impressed as the subject turned to interracial relationships. The Stones' crew laughed along as one of their entourage said: "It's OK to go out with coloured girls, but you can't take them home to meet your mother, and you certainly can't marry one!"

In her eventful memoir *Soul Survivor*, the first lady of Immediate Records remembers losing her temper – "Fuck all you motherfuckers!" she bellowed understandably – only for her sometime lover Mick Jagger to apologise and insist that his retinue were in fact "only taking the piss".

A Los Angeles native with a sinuous, powerful voice, Arnold had developed good reason to see the worst in people. Forced to marry young after having two children by a violent, controlling husband who hated her, she explains that she was raped by the appalling Ike Turner on tour and witnessed the regular brutal assaults he meted out to Tina. She was persuaded by Jagger and manager Andrew Loog Oldham to stay in the UK and try her luck as a solo artist but ended up spending months on hold as she tried to navigate London at its most swinging, before scoring medium-sized hits with "The First Cut Is The Deepest" and "Angel Of The Morning".

During what might have seemed like her golden years, she writes that she had an abortion after becoming pregnant by the cold but honourable Jagger, and had dalliances with Jimi Hendrix, Rod Stewart and Steve Marriott ("the only Englishman that invited me home to meet his family back then") before a run of bad decisions and ill-starred relationships drained any remaining momentum from her pop career.

Beset by drug issues and hideous personal tragedy in the 1980s, she rallied with the help of yoga and some good gigs as a backing singer (Peter Gabriel, Roger Waters, et al), earning some late-career kudos as she recorded solo again with the help of Ocean Colour Scene's Steve Cradock. However, a reasonably happy ending only serves to underline the hardness of the times Arnold lived through. If you think they were groovy, think again.

PR giant Barbara Charone crossed the Atlantic a few years after Arnold, but had a less complicated time in London, where the Chicagoan's self-confessed "bulldog personality" and nose for a story made her an in-demand writer for *NME* and *Sounds*. Having already written for *Rolling Stone* and *Creem* back at home, she became a trusted confidante of Keith Richards

## REVIEWED THIS MONTH



**SOUL SURVIVOR**  
PP ARNOLD  
NINE EIGHT BOOKS, £22.8/10



**ACCESS ALL AREAS**  
BARBARA CHARONE  
WHITENIGHT, £20.8/10



**WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE C86 KIDS?**  
NIGE TASSELL  
NINE EIGHT BOOKS, £22.8/10



PP Arnold: the not-so-groovy '60s

## PP tried to navigate London at its most swinging

(writing his first biography, published in 1979), with her *Access All Areas* memoir showing how she learned the business in the 1970s at a time when trust between artists and journalists was sacred. "Back then you went to Eric Clapton's house and watched him drink Carlsberg Special Brew at 10am," she reveals. "But you didn't write about it."

Poacher turned gatekeeper, Charone abandoned journalism for PR in the early 1980s and, as she reports with evident pride, was subsequently described as "the closest thing the music industry has to Alastair Campbell". Still admirably loyal to her many big-name clients – Madonna, Pet Shop Boys and REM among others – "BC" doesn't dish dirt, although she does call her sometime favourite Rufus Wainwright "probably the campiest person I had ever met, and that's saying something". Instead, she presents a genial guide to the dark art of ensuring the right stories go into circulation. Smiley on the surface, but feel the steel underneath.

CHARONE's blue-chip 1980s pop clients lived in a different universe to the "shambling" bands who came together on *NME*'s C86 compilation tape, which showed the ragged state of the indie nation in the golden age of the government's wisely misused Enterprise Allowance Scheme.

Nige Tassell's cheery *Whatever Happened To The C86 Kids?* takes its cue from Dave Simpson's expert hounding of ex-Fall members, *The Fallen*, as it tracks down representatives of all the bands who appeared on the cassette. The relative successes of Primal Scream, The Wedding Present and The Soup Dragons offer a stark contrast to the bathos-heavy stories of The Bodines (cool blown after they signed to a major label more famous for Roland Rat and Alvin Stardust) or The Wolfhounds ("we were has-beens in one of the early twenties, like Lena Zavaroni," says singer David Callaghan).

Tassell turns up worse tragedies (half of the uniquely abrasive Bogshed are sadly no longer with us) and improbable stories (Shrubs guitarist Julian Hutton apparently blew a TIE fighter in one of the later *Star Wars* films).

Tassell turns up worse tragedies (half of the uniquely abrasive Bogshed are sadly no longer with us) and improbable stories (Shrubs guitarist Julian Hutton apparently blew a TIE fighter in one of the later *Star Wars* films). For the happiest acts, there is some vindication for sticking to their guns, however modest they might be. As Nigel Blackwell, frontman of enduring "All I Want For Christmas Is A Dukla Prague Away Kit" hitmakers Half Man Half Biscuit, tells him: "We were on the dole. We skirted the heroin. We used the library. We got lucky." © JEFF WORTH

## Not Fade Away

Fondly remembered this month...

### JULEE CRUISE

Ethereal singer  
(1956-2022)

COMPOSER Angelo Badalamenti faced a dilemma while creating the score for David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* in 1986. Unable to secure the rights to This Mortal Coil's cover of "Song To The Siren", he and Lynch opted to write something similarly atmospheric instead. Enter singer Julie Cruise, whose otherworldly tones and phrasing were a perfect fit for the brooding textures of "Mysteries Of Love". It was emblematic of Cruise's subsequent career, beginning with 1989 debut *Floating Into The Night*, written for her by Lynch and Badalamenti. "I must have taken it from listening to what my mom and dad loved: low, low, bluesy-type music," Cruise told the *LA Times* in 2017, referring to her signature sound. "But I sing like a classical French horn player."

An instrumental version of "Falling" served as theme song of Lynch's 1990 TV series, *Twin Peaks*, while Cruise landed a major global hit with her dreamlike original. As well as featuring on the soundtrack, she appeared in the show itself, as a barroom singer, a role she reprised in 1992's *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* and 2017's long-awaited sequel, *Twin Peaks: The Return*. She also performed in the 1990 Brooklyn stage production *Industrial Symphony No. 1*, co-created by Lynch and Badalamenti, whom she'd first met while playing Janis Joplin in New York theaterland.

Cruise went on to release three further solo albums, including 1993's *The Voice Of Love*, another batch of Lynch-Badalamenti songs.

Other worldly tones: Julie Cruise in 1990



Away from the aforementioned pair, Cruise covered Elvis Presley's "Summer Kisses, Winter Tears" for Wim Wenders' *Until The End Of The World* (1991), replaced Cindy Wilson in the live iteration of The B-52's throughout the '90s, and

collaborated with the likes of Pharrell Williams, Bobby McFerrin and Deee-Lite's DJ Dmity. "Her angelic voice transported us all to another dimension," wrote *Blue Velvet*/*Twin Peaks* star Kyle MacLachlan in tribute.

### MASSIMO MORANTE

Goblin king  
(1952-2022)

Massimo Morante was the masterful guitarist for heavy proggers Goblin, the go-to band for Italian giallo horror soundtracks from the mid-'70s onwards, most notably Dario Argento's disquieting *Profondo Rosso* and *Suspiria*. Aside from his ongoing involvement with Goblin, Morante also issued two solo albums in the early '80s.

### JIM SEALS

Soft rock lord  
(1942-2022)

Jim Seals and Darrell "Dash" Crofts had previously been with rock'n'rollers The Crew Cuts and The Champs prior to forming a duo in 1969. With Seals as main vocalist, the pair became synonymous with '70s soft rock,

scoring sizeable US hits with "Summer Breeze", "Diamond Girl" and "Get Closer".

### HAL BYNUM

"Lucille" co-writer  
(1934-2022)

Having previously co-authored George Jones' "The Old, Old House", Texan songwriter Hal Bynum first tasted success with Jim Reeves' posthumous "Nobody's Fool" in 1970. Johnny Cash cut "Papa Was A Good Man" soon after, but Bynum's signature move came with 1977's "Lucille" (co-written with Roger Bowling), an international hit for Kenny Rogers.

### DAVE SMITH

Electronic pioneer  
(1950-2022)

Enterprising Californian engineer Dave Smith founded Sequential

Circuits in 1974, unveiling the world's first fully-programmable polyphonic synth three years later. His invention, the Prophet-5, was subsequently used by everyone from Michael Jackson to Madonna, The Cure to Radiohead. Smith's legend was secured with his development of MIDI in 1983.

### STEVE BROUGHTON

Edgar's sibling  
(1950-2022)

Alongside his older brother, drummer Steve Broughton founded The Edgar Broughton Band in 1968. The band incorporated blues, psychedelia and hard rock across eight albums, peaking in the early '70s. The band split in 1982, though reformed in 2006. Broughton also played drums on the "caveman" section of Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*.

### JIM AVERY

Third World Warmonger  
(1947-2022)

Formed in 1970 by songwriters Jim Avery (bass) and Terry Stamp (vocals, guitar), Third World War were an uncompromising mix of heavy proto-punk and searing polemic, best heard on their self-titled debut. The band split after 1973's *Third World War II*, with Avery - previously a member of Thunderclap Newman - eventually founding Razor.

### PATRICK ADAMS

R&B and disco king  
(1950-2022)

New York songwriter, arranger and producer Patrick Adams came to prominence in the early '70s, from Black Ivory's *Don't Turn Around* to Sister Sledge, Inner Life, Musiqye and Loleatta Holloway. Adams,

# KELLY JOE PHELPS

**Country-blues innovator**  
(1959–2022)

INSPIRED by the music of Ornette Coleman and Miles Davis, Kelly Joe Phelps' first calling was leftfield jazz, playing bass in various bands around Washington state during the '80s. But the discovery of bluesmen like Mississippi Fred McDowell and Robert Pete Williams brought fresh impetus, leading him to embark on a solo career that held close to rural folk, blues and country forms, while allowing for free improvisation. 1994 debut *Lead Me On* was an intoxicating blend of original and traditional songs, with Phelps excelling on lap-style guitar, accompanying himself on vocals and stomp box. 1997's *Roll Away The Stone* (his first for Rykodisc) expanded into gospel and jazz, as Phelps also proved himself a

master of finger-picked guitar.

He never stopped exploring. As the years wore on, Phelps moved from lap guitar to bottleneck slide, frailling banjo to experimental six-string, the effect heightened by a voice that was both intimate and quietly soulful. The all-instrumental *Western Bell* (2009) reached back into his jazz roots, while carrying echoes of John Fahey's voyaging spirit. His ninth and final album, 2012's exquisite *Brother Sinner And The Whale*, inspired by the Book Of Jonah, arrived just prior to Phelps' announcement that he was suffering from neuropathy in his right arm.

Phelps was prized by others too, recording with Corinne West (2010's *Magnetic Skyline*) and appearing on albums by Townes Van Zandt, Jay Farrar, Greg Brown, Tim O'Brien, Martin Simpson and more. Among those acknowledging his influence were Jason Isbell and sometime collaborator, Bill Frisell.



Kelly Joe Phelps in Paris, 2012: master multi-instrumentalist

who also ran his own PAMUS production company, later worked with Keith Sweat, Salt-N-Pepa and Eric B & Rakim.

**DEBORAH McCRARY**  
**Nashville gospel royalty**  
(1954–2022)

Daughters of ex-Fairfield Four stalwart Sam McCrary, gospel quartet The McCrary Sisters recorded four studio albums and featured as part of the American Awards' annual house band. Deborah McCrary and her siblings were heavily in demand around Nashville, appearing on albums by Carrie Underwood, Miranda Lambert, Margo Price and more.

**LEROY WILLIAMS**  
**Jazz drummer**  
(1941–2022)

A much-respected sideman, Leroy Williams devoted his life to jazz, playing around New York City with Sonny Rollins, Archie Shepp and longtime collaborator Barry Harris in the late '60s. He went on to feature in recording or touring ensembles led by Hank Mobley, Thelonious Monk, Yusuf Lateef, Stan Getz and others.

**INGRAM MARSHALL**  
**Avant-garde composer**  
(1942–2022)

Ingram Marshall drew from world music and minimalists like Terry Riley and Steve Reich for his electro-acoustic soundscapes, which made use of tape loops, synths and

Balinese gamelan tradition. He recorded solo and in orchestral or chamber settings, with 1983's "Fog Tropes" used in Martin Scorsese's *Shutter Island*.

**BERNARD BELLE**  
**New jack swinger**  
(1964–2022)

Briefly a member of The Manhattan, songwriter/producer Bernard Belle and regular collaborator Teddy Riley helped pioneer new jack swing from the mid-'80s onwards. Belle went on to write for Michael Jackson (most notably "Remember the Time"), Whitney Houston, Bobby Brown, Patti LaBelle and others. He later focused on gospel music.

**DENNIS CAHILL**  
**The Gloaming guitarist**  
(1954–2022)

Chicago-born guitarist Dennis Cahill was fascinated by the possibilities of Irish traditional music, teaming up with fiddler Martin Hayes as the explorative *Midnight Court* in the late '80s. They later released three albums as a duo and, in 2011, formed the core of progressive Irish-American ensemble, *The Gloaming*.

**JIM SCHWALL**  
**Chicago bluesman**  
(1942–2022)

Versatile guitarist Jim Schwall and pianist Coby Siegel began playing around Chicago as a folk-blues duo in 1964. They soon formed the

Siegel-Schwallow Band, issuing 10 electric blues albums over the next decade, during which time they also co-produced Joni Mitchell's demo of "The Circle Game". Siegel and Schwall reunited in 1987.

**BRETT TUGGLE**  
**Fleetwood Mac keyboardist**  
(1951–2022)

Brett Tuggle played alongside Mitch Ryder before moving to LA to work with John Kay & Steppenwolf and Rick Springfield in the early '80s. He joined David Lee Roth's band in 1986 (co-writing "Just Like Paradise") and, beginning in 1997, spent 20 years as an invaluable member of Fleetwood Mac's touring band.

**KEN WILLIAMS**  
**Soul songwriter**  
(1939–2022)

Ken Williams' "Everybody Plays The Fool", co-authored with JR Bailey and Rudy Clark, gave The Main Ingredient their biggest hit, reaching the US Top 5 in 1972. He also wrote and produced for Peaches & Herb, The Four Tops and Donny Hathaway.

**ALEC JOHN SUCH**  
**Bon Jovi bassist**  
(1951–2022)

Having previously served in New Jersey club band Phantom's Opera, bassist Alec John Such co-founded Bon Jovi in 1983. He played on their first five albums, from their self-titled debut to 1992's *Keep The Faith*, before leaving in 1994.

**ARTIE KANE**  
**Hollywood veteran**  
(1929–2022)

Prolific composer and conductor Artie Kane began as a pianist on Frank Sinatra's *Strangers In The Night* and Hollywood movies like *Planet Of The Apes*, *The Thomas Crown Affair* and *Westworld*. He wrote music for over 250 TV shows, among them *The Fugitive* and *Wonder Woman*, plus several film scores.

**PAUL VANCE**  
**Novelty hitmaker**  
(1929–2022)

Producer/songwriter Paul Vance first collaborated with fellow composer Lee Pockriss on 1957's "Catch A Falling Star", a huge hit for Perry Como. They went on to co-write Brian Hyland's million-selling "Itsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie Yellow Polkadot Bikini" (1960) and The Cuff Links' "Tracy", plus songs for Johnny Mathis, Astrud Gilberto and more.

**SONNY BARGER**  
**Hells Angel**  
(1938–2022)

As leader of Oakland's chapter of the Hells Angels, Sonny Barger achieved wider notoriety for being involved in security at 1969's infamous Altamont concert, for which he laid blame on headliners The Rolling Stones for turning up late. Barger, who subsequently authored six books, later appeared in TV's *Sons Of Anarchy*. © ROB HUGHES

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## PRECIOUS STONES

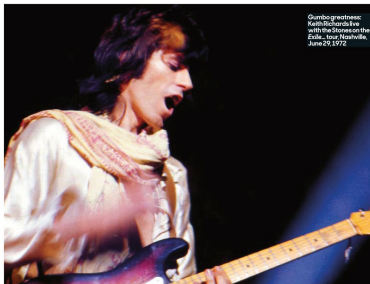
Thanks for the piece on *Exile* *On Main St* in your June issue. Of all the things I cherish turning 50 this year – the original *Godfather*, the late, lamented Roe v Wade, my ex's husband – I have to put The Rolling Stones' strangely cinematic gumbo masterpiece at the top of the list. No other British Invasion band ever managed such an authentic, soulful excavation of its American roots, and I doubt even today the remaining members know quite how they managed to pull it off, straddling time zones, addiction, the authorities and all sorts of idiosyncratic Stones madness. And of all the tributes I enjoyed that of Marshall Chess the most, having heard him speak at Chuck Berry's memorial in St Louis (as a teenager he apparently drove Chuck around just after his prison release in the '60s, great stories). Of that era he is truly one of the sole survivors.

Stephen Conn, Las Cruces,  
New Mexico

## ROCK OF AGES

Music is all about its past, present and future, and this is where *Uncut* delivers. The August issue provided some excellent coverage of The Beatles in 1962, the reissue of the Grateful Dead's *Europe '72* (10 out of 10 indeed), and an interview with Christine McVie. The piece de resistance for me being the review of Neil Young's *Toaster* and the interviews with Crazy Horse. A little pedantic I know, but the photo on the Dead's review was of Mickey Hart, and not Bill Kreutzmann. Both were of course drummers at the same time with the Dead.

It was a pleasant surprise to read a review of Richie Furay's new album, *In The Country*, and a short interview too. A very modest man, and a pastor for 35 years, with a superb back catalogue with Buffalo Springfield, Poco, the SHF Band and numerous solo albums. I remember seeing him perform at San Diego's Humphrey's Concerts By The Bay in 2004, and after the show he was a perfect gentleman in meeting fans, signing autographs and having his photo taken with them. The DVD of his 50th-anniversary *Return To The Troubadour* is evidence that he still has the incredible voice and stage charisma. I look forward to next year's documentary with Cameron



Gumbo greatness:  
Keith Richards live  
with the Stones on the  
*Exile* tour, Nashville,  
June 29, 1972

Crowe. At 78, the evidence is that there may still be more to come.

We love listening to the new artists, but many of the older ones are still very relevant today.

Grahame Reed, Zeals, Wiltshire

## ABSOLUTELY FAB

I've just finished reading August *Uncut* and wanted to say thanks for yet another brilliant issue. I buy *Uncut* because it does a great job of balancing both old and new music. I enjoyed The Beatles, Christine McVie and Chris Blackwell pieces and so wanted to jump on George Clinton's bus with your writer! But the highlights were the pieces on younger artists. Sam Richards' meeting with QSees' John Dwyer was a boot, Sessa's backstory was fascinating and the Album By Album interview with Nina Nastasia moving and powerful. Plus a deep dive into new albums from Ty Segall, Gwenno and – yet another brilliant new discovery through the pages of *Uncut* – MJ Lenderman. The CD was up to the usual high standard, too: great new sounds from Andrew Tuttle, Revelators Sound System and Naïma Bock. You really do spoil us sometimes!

Nick Mackenzie, via email

...I normally don't buy your magazine. But before a long train journey, I gave it a go because of The Beatles on the cover.

I absolutely loved the feature on their 1962. So much I didn't know. Fascinating glimpse into a story I only know so much about. The standard of writing was excellent. I also enjoyed the rest of the articles. The journey flew by.

I will definitely check you out again. Especially if there are articles on anything related to the '60s. My era. Thanks again.

Ronny Melville, Glasgow

...We first met back in late 2004. Take 91. You were recommended to me by a family member who said we would get on well. You soon introduced me to your cool friends from the USA and other parts of the world and I got to know and love many of them, so I took our relationship further and became a regular subscriber.

Over the years you expanded my musical tastes to the point where most of my favourite artists now are people I got to know through you and you comforted me when my idols such as Mark Linkous, Mark Hollis and Scott Walker went to the great studio in the sky. More recently

you have helped me process the loss of Mark Lanegan and Gary Brooker within days of each other.

But being of a certain age now I have reached the point where there is too much music out there that I can listen to. I have begun to ration my gigs and CD collection through basic necessity. I own more than 1,500 albums now and I would need to listen to them almost constantly to be able to appreciate them all fully.

So I reluctantly made the decision to unsubscribe on the basis that I had no need of new artists, I only needed to know when my own people were releasing new music.

But then having missed out on a couple of items I did a U-turn and rejoined recently, so you can imagine my disappointment when the first two issue covers featured Queen and The Beatles.

Then just as I decided that this proved I was right all along, you then blindsided me with a cracking Roger Chapman interview and even better a feature on Nina Nastasia, whose work I have followed for many years and who is only now emerging from a decade of near silence due to personal issues. I hope Nina can make it over to the UK soon to catch up with her friends and fans again.

WIN!

## CROSSWORD

One vinyl copy of Cass McCombs' Heartmind



So there we are, I can't always live with you, but I can't live without you either if you are going to keep chucking out these nuggets. Of course, if you wanted to really keep me on side then a feature on The House of Love (boxset out in late July) would definitely do the trick.

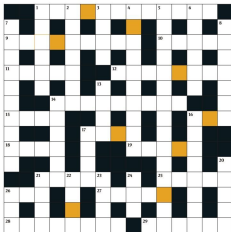
Gary Houchen, via email

As ever, The Beatles proved a mildly controversial cover choice among some of you. I've said it before, the cover is a window for the magazine – there's always tons more inside and we strive to bring you a good balance between the old and new. But anyway... Wilco! Let us know what you think. [MB]

## DOING THE TWIST

Great to see an Instant Karma piece on World of Twist in your August issue. Though destined for relative obscurity, the band were a visual and sonic breath of fresh air in the early '90s, and Tony Ogden a charismatic frontman. A band who evaded stylistic categorisation, their stimulating mix of '60s psych-pop, electronica and dance beats proved an inspirational one-off and we won't see their like again. Thanks, Uncut.

S.Gold, London SW3



## HOW TO ENTER

The letters in the shaded squares form an anagram of a song by Wilco. When you've worked out what it is, email your answer to: [competitions@uncut.co.uk](mailto:competitions@uncut.co.uk). The first correct entry picked at random will win a prize. Closing date: **Wednesday, August 17, 2022**. This competition is only open to European residents.

## CLUES ACROSS

- 11-9A New Order record that was picked up by Eric Clapton (7-2-3-4-2-3)
- 10-21A Album that contains the singles "Lucky Man" and "Sonnet" (5-5)
- 11 David Gray did this, even though this proves he was elsewhere (5)
- 12 Love Ringo to finish early and become the drummer for the Poodles (8)
- 14-10D An ace smash hit served up by Cream (6-3-6)
- 15 "If the \_\_\_\_\_ comes, they run and hide their heads" (The Beatles) (4)
- 16 Freddie Mercury took in some King Crimson music (3)
- 17 Feel depressed when listening to Joni Mitchell (4)
- 18 "Why is the bedroom so \_\_\_\_\_?" from Joy Division's "Love Will Tear Us Apart" (4)
- 19 "I don't ever wanna drink again/I just, ooh, I just need a friend", 2006 (5)
- 21 (See 10 across)
- 25 Louie spoiled an REM performance (5)
- 26 \_\_\_\_\_ & Eddie, duo who were founding members of The Turtles (3)
- 27 "I'm in California dreaming about who we used to be", 2015 (5)
- 28-8D Some rough material with some precious material on Foo Fighters album (8-3-4)
- 29 Cat Stevens' album \_\_\_\_\_ And The Firecat (6)

## CLUES DOWN

- 1 (See 14 across)
- 2 put on a remixed album by Ian McNabb (7)
- 3-14D "It's the best thing that you've ever had", 1995 (4-3-3)
- 4 Lee Hazlewood and Nancy Sinatra questioning each other's past performances (3-3-4)
- 5 Someone identified having passion for Florence + The Machine (5-3-3-4)
- 6 Two different elements in this electronic duo who have worked with U2 and REM (6)
- 7 Check part I broke of US rock band (5-5)
- 8 (See 28 across)
- 13 "Out into the \_\_\_\_\_ of the evening stalks the pretender", Jackson Browne (4)
- 14 (See 3 down)
- 16 "70s glam-pop group celebrated in title of single by The Auteurs (8)
- 17 Neil Young with an album in store (4)
- 20 Pete \_\_\_\_\_ was frontman of The Loft and Weather Prophets (5)
- 21 Trevor \_\_\_\_\_, producer who was half of Buggles and briefly member of Yes (4)
- 22 Connection between The Smiths, The Pretenders and The Cribs (4)
- 23 Jesus Lizard album found in Aldershot (4)
- 24 Hopefully finishes up with a Massive Attack number (3)
- 26 As Roland Gift's band were sometimes called in brief (3)

## ANSWERS: TAKE 302

ACROSS  
11-9A Getting Better, 10 Leader Of The Pack, 11 Easy Rider, 12 Popes, 13 You Have Killed Me, 16-23A Ace Of Spades, 17-50 Hard, 19 DJ, 20-31A Saturday Night,

24 Winter, 25 Louie, 26 Hole, 30-39A The One  
DOWN  
1 Golden Years, 2 Tears, 3 Ice Cream For Crow, 4 Good Deeds, 6 Eye, 7 Trapped, 8 Rakes, 9 Starlight, 12 PIL, 15-14D Midge Ure, 18

Death, 21 Title, 22 Alien, 23 Sloth, 24-32A Wet Leg, 27 Oil, 28 Egg

HIDDEN ANSWER  
"It's A Hard Life"

XWORD COMPLETED BY:  
Trevor Hangerford

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SEPTEMBER 2022

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## BEST OF THE WEST

I've just received my vinyl copy of *Sounds of The New West*. Wow! This is just so beautiful. I vividly remember buying the issue (Neil Young cover) which included the first...New West compilation and having my mind blown by the music it contained. It was a life-changer for me. The subsequent volumes were similarly excellent. This album has been so well curated by your team, bringing together some of my favourite tracks from the CDs. What a treat!

Peter Sharpe, Leicester

...I've just finished playing the *Sounds of The New West* album. How do you top greatness...? Thank you. **Steve Colson, Dorset**





## My Life In Music

# Stephin Merritt

The Magnetic Fields mainman reveals his favourite records: "I like music that takes a set of ideas really far in any direction"



### FLEETWOOD MAC Tusk WARNERBROS, 1979

In 1979, there were two extremes of pop production: bedroom-recorded DIY made purely for the love of music-making, and state-of-the-art California cocaine-fuelled arena rock. Fleetwood Mac had come to epitomise the California approach, whose apex was Rumours,

one of the biggest-selling records ever. So when I received the follow-up, *Tusk*, from the Columbia House Record Club as its album of the month, I didn't get it. Why, with an unlimited budget, was Lindsey Buckingham playing half the songs alone in his bathroom, drumming on cardboard boxes and singing upside down? I've spent 40 years answering that question.



### JUDY COLLINS In My Life ELEKTRA, 1966

The only record in my mother's collection from when I was a tot that I've owned enthusiastically ever since. As opposed to *Bringing It All Back Home*, which belongs in every collection but needn't be played more than once a decade, Judy burns her bridges to the coffee-house folk scene by changing genre constantly. The lyrics – by Dylan, Newman, Lennon-McCartney, Cohen, Brecht, Brel – are all brilliant in very different directions. It's the art-house equivalent of a variety show, and the only album that compares is *69 Love Songs*, which took three hours to be as take-no-prisoners eclectic as *In My Life* managed in 43 minutes.



### STEREOLAB Emperor Tomato Ketchup DUOPHONIC, 1996

There is rarely a foreground in Stereolab and it's certainly not the vocals, which are often in French and sometimes in gibberish. Definitely not foreground is a guitar, so proudly terrified is Stereolab of being called a rock group. And yet they're as loud in concert as Sonic Youth, ie, too damn loud! I found them by rooting around in a record store and noticing their song title "John Cage Bubblegum". This was back when I used to say I liked experimental music and bubblegum, and nothing in between. What I turned out to really like is music that takes a set of ideas really far in any direction, without apology.



### YOUNG MARBLE GIANTS Colossal Youth ROUGH TRADE, 1980

The instrumentation sounds normal on paper: guitar, bass guitar, drum machine and vocal, with occasional Farfisa organ subbed out for guitar, but there is no overdubbing, no ambience but the amps, and seemingly no trickery. And yet the extreme simplicity kaleidoscopically opens up a little universe where Kraftwerk is a surf band, and lyrics about jukeboxes and Fats Waller sound ultra-modern yet timeless. Under the influence of these deviants, I fearlessly made my first album with only two instruments and a blasé female vocal. But alas, the same river twice and all that.



### SWEET Desolation Boulevard CAPITOL, 1975

When I was 11, I had three favourite contemporary bands: Bay City Rollers, Abba and Sweet. All were essentially singles bands, but Sweet released the great bubblegum metal LP of all time. It turned out they were cheating, combining two UK studio albums with revisions for the US. More cheating, please! Being 11, I had no idea that half the songs were about what we now call rape and the rest were about drugs. I thought they were about growing up. Nope! I was in it for the soundscapes. I listened on headphones as loudly as I could stand and so many times that I'd gone through three vinyl copies by the time it came out on CD.



### ELECTRIC LIGHT ORCHESTRA Out of The Blue JET RECORDS, 1977

It's not just because of the cellos: The Magnetic Fields wouldn't exist without ELO. They showed how the '70s variety-show pop album could be systematised. *Out of The Blue* is at least two concept albums in one that meet orthogonally. One is all about weather, the other is an exploration of movie genres. Film noir, Western, Tarzan, kitchen sink drama and even wildlife docs are all gleefully subsumed into ELO's toolbox of mixed metaphors. The spaceship on the cover brackets all these cultural moments as faded nostalgia. The synths and vocoders imply a futurism the lyrics never mention.



### STEVIE WONDER Innervisions TAMLA, 1973

This record turned up mysteriously with no-one remembering buying it. When I read the credits and learned Stevie played almost every instrument it became my archetype for the true solo artist. And when later I learned that Toronto's Expanding Head Band were patching the synths, I came to appreciate that every auteur needs a gang. *Innervisions* was recorded in the heyday of the envelope filter, so practically every sound is "byow byow byow", which seems to convey some mythical ghetto authenticity and probably gave me my lifelong addiction to effects boxes.



### BRIAN ENO Ambient 4: On Land EG, 1982

It's embarrassing how much Eno there is in my life. I have all the albums except *My Squeaky Life*, but that didn't really come out. I have all the albums he produced, except *U2*. And I keep a pack of Oblique Strategies on my studio desk. What I truly love more and more with the passing decades is *On Land*. It's as much atmosphere as music and none of its tracks could be hummed, or easily described. Supposedly he followed the rule "never erase anything", so everything seems to take place in a fictional space just as vast as the real space we're sitting in now.

The Magnetic Fields play London's Eventim Apollo (Aug 31), Leeds O2 Academy (Sept 1), Bristol St George's (Sept 2), End Of The Road festival (Sept 3), Glasgow O2 Academy (Sept 5), and continuing through Europe until Sept 18



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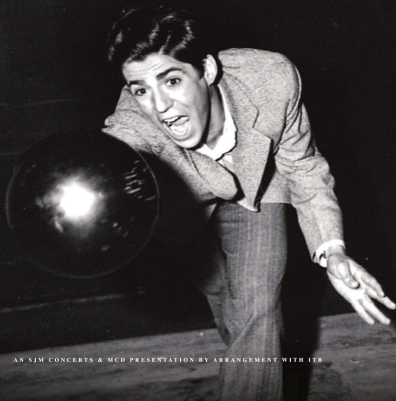
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