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# UNPLUGGED



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REVIEWS

“JUDAS!”

# BOB DYLAN

1966 ONE BATTLE  
AFTER ANOTHER

**SEX PISTOLS**  
“IT’S LIKE A  
MINI OPERA”

**ALEX HARVEY**  
SENSATIONAL!

**SNAIL MAIL**  
SHELLSHOCKED

**RUSH**  
“DAMN  
FUNKY!”

**THE BLACK  
CROWES**  
“LOTS OF GUITARS!”

**BONNIE ‘PRINCE’  
BILLY**  
“...ON TOP OF AN  
ACTIVE VOLCANO”

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Bob Dylan by  
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Arctic Monkeys  
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@shotbyphox

**W**ELCOME to the latest issue of *Uncut* – and it’s an historic one for a couple of reasons. This is Take 350: it doesn’t feel like it was that long ago we were putting the finishing touches to our 300th edition. Dylan seemed a natural cover star this month, not least because a major exhibition celebrating his epic, often combative 1966 is coming round the corner. Damien Love’s cover story digs into this astonishing period (aren’t they all?) in Dylan’s history, from new interviews with his *Blonde On Blonde* collaborators to an exclusive preview of the new exhibition and a revelatory trawl through the regional press reports from his fiery UK tour. It’s a bold claim, perhaps, but I can’t think of any better writer on Dylan than Damien, so dig in.

There’s plenty more besides Bob, of course. Genesis, Manic Street Preachers, Snail Mail, Black Crowes, Arctic Monkeys, Alex Harvey and Billy Childish, not to mention *Uncut*’s expert team of reviewers passing the rule across the month’s album, film and book releases.

This is a landmark issue for another reason, too. It’s also the final *Uncut* to be helmed by our tireless production editor, Mick Meikleham, who takes well-deserved retirement at the end of February. A veteran of *Uncut* Take 1, Mick’s diligence, deep knowledge and cool head have been indispensable. Fortunately, Mick will still be on hand, working on our new sister title *Uncut Greats*, so while it is farewell, it’s not quite goodbye. But do please check out Mick’s rock’n’roll credentials as ‘Swedish guitar hero’ Mik Miklan with ’80s grebo rockers Junior Manson Slags – and as lead vocalist and guitarist with New Wave synth trio Dream Unit, who starred on last year’s compilation *All The Young Droids: Junkshop Synth Pop 1978–1985*. From all of us here: thanks for everything, Mick.



**Michael Bonner, Editor**

Follow me on Bluesky @michaelbonner.bsky.social

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# INSTANT KARMA!

THIS MONTH'S REVELATIONS FROM THE WORLD OF UNCUT  
WITH... Soft Machine | Life Without Buildings | Gary Stewart

## Star treatment

Super-producer **James Ford** on helming **War Child's** stellar new *Help* sequel from his hospital bed

**"I** REMEMBER the original *Help* album [from 1995] being a cultural moment. To have all those artists together on one thing seemed really important. When War Child approached me to do something for the anniversary, it was obviously fairly easy to reach out to the Monkeys and Fontaines and Depeche, given my past relationships with those guys. But then we spread the net quite wide, and it was a really interesting process to assemble something on this scale.

"Abbey Road very kindly gave us a week, so the intention was for me to be jumping between the studios as all the different artists came through. But I've been battling leukemia, and what actually transpired was my immune system failed a few days before, and I was in ICU with a pipe in my neck!

"I'd talked Olivia Rodrigo into doing this beautiful cover version [of "The Book Of Love" by The Magnetic Fields] with a string section and Graham Coxon playing guitar. I couldn't attend the session in person, but with the technology I could hear exactly what was going on – I could press my space bar and talk to everyone's headphones in the studio. So I was still producing, but literally while having a blood transfusion.

"The Arctic Monkeys track, 'Opening Night', was almost going to be on *AM* – the chorus and the chord progression and the riff were from that time. But Alex wanted to rewrite the verse

lyrics, and it needed the whole middle-eight section. AI started to do some demos on this little studio setup that he's got, and we kept the drum machine in.

The band did the basic tracking in Abbey Road, but most of it was finished off between me and Alex, and I was actually arranging and mixing it on my laptop, on the ward.

"I'd approached Damon [Albarn] a while ago about writing a song for the record. He was keen to get a room full of people, with the chaos and the unpredictability that can afford. Grian [Chatten] and Kae [Tempest] are good collaborators, and can roll with the punches quite easily in that situation. There was some last-minute scrabbling to get together a kids' choir, but it all came together pretty smoothly.

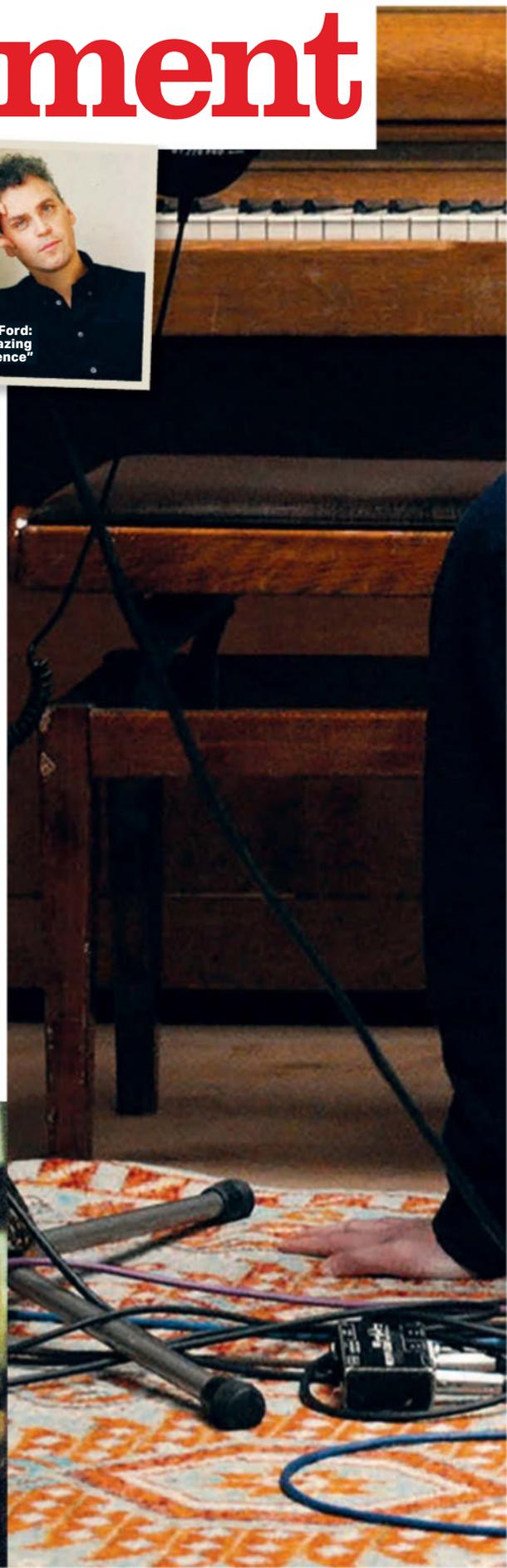
"The overwhelming feeling I got towards the end of the project was, 'How do we do this again?' It was such an amazing experience to have everyone chipping in, and I'm very proud of what we achieved artistically. Music really is a lifeline. It's the sort of thing I maybe would have said in the past in a fairly flippant way, but to have it suddenly become so visceral and real in

my own life – and to have it happen for an undeniably good cause – was incredibly life-affirming." ☺

*Help(2)* is released by War Child Records on March 6; it's reviewed on page 37



Rolling with the punches: Damon Albarn, Grian Chatten and Kae Tempest at Abbey Road



JONATHAN LAZER; LAWRENCE WATSON; PIP BOURDILLON

Alex Turner of Arctic  
Monkeys working  
on "Opening Night"  
for *Help!*(2)

**“Alex  
wanted  
to rewrite  
the lyrics”**  
**JAMES FORD**



Soft Machine today: (l-r) Theo Travis, Asaf Sirkis, Fred Thelionius Baker and John Etheridge

# Softs focus

As they celebrate 60 years of Canterbury Sound wondrousness, the ever-enduring **Soft Machine** pay tribute to the group's inspirational founders

**A**USTRALIAN maverick Daevid Allen was a key conspirator in the first incarnation of the legendary Soft Machine, who came together in Kent in 1966. But before they could record their debut album, Allen left to form Gong in France, after being denied re-entry to the UK following a European tour. Now, a decade after his death, Allen makes a ghostly appearance with his old band.

"I was in Gong between 1999 and 2010," explains saxophonist Theo Travis, who has also been in the

Soft Machine fold for the past 20 years. "I recently uncovered a recording I made in 2001 of Daevid playing his glissando guitar, that technique he learned from Syd Barrett, where he plays a chord shape with his left hand and then scrubs the strings with a piece of metal with his right hand, playing through loops and delay pedals. So we built an entire track around that lovely sound, something that brings the Soft Machine story full circle."

Over the past six decades, Soft Machine have been through more

than 35 members in half a dozen different incarnations: whimsical garage rockers, psychedelic pranksters, Dadaist prog tinkers, rigorous jazz-rockers and, under the de facto leadership of future knight of the realm Karl Jenkins, a neo-orchestral fusion project.

"There have been several very different Soft Machines," affirms guitarist John Etheridge, now the band's longest-serving member. "The Soft Machine I joined in 1976 was a Euro jazz-rock band who never played the earlier psychedelic stuff. When we returned in 2004 with Elton Dean, Hugh Hopper, John Marshall and myself, we didn't play anything from the Karl Jenkins era. But in the last few years we've made a semi-conscious effort to incorporate music from every era."

As well as reviving the famous typographic logo from 1970's *Third* – and featuring a tribute to former drummer Robert Wyatt by the latest occupant of the drum seat, Asaf Sirkis – Soft Machine's new album *Thirteen* recreates the sound palette of earlier albums. "There's a strong Fender

Rhodes presence, always put through effects pedals," says Travis. "We use a Mellotron for that 'Strawberry Fields' sound on 'Open Road', and there's a lot of textures, drones and freakouts that invoke early incarnations of the band." Live, they have been revisiting earlier Soft Machine compositions, "all the way back to Kevin Ayers' 'Joy Of A Toy' on the first album. We also do 'Out-Bloody-Rageous' and 'Facelift' off *Third*, 'Kings And Queens' off *Fourth*, 'Gesolreut' and 'Chloe And The Pirates' off *Six*, 'Penny Hitch' off *Seven*, 'The Tale Of Taliesin' off *Softs*, and more."

"What's different is that there was no guitarist for much of the band's history," adds Etheridge. "So we have to constantly rearrange and reinvent that old material."

As well as leading their own jazz bands, Etheridge and Travis have played with dozens of musical legends between them. Etheridge's CV includes work with classical guitarist John Williams and violinist Stéphane Grappelli, as well as Danny Thompson, Hawkwind, Fairport Convention, Nigel Kennedy and Andy Summers; Travis has played with Robert Fripp, Bill Nelson, Gong, Porcupine Trio, Steven Wilson, Harold Budd and David Gilmour. Both maintain a commitment to improvisation rather than slavish re-creation.

"I've done a few of those prog-rock cruises," says Etheridge,

"where some prog bands might re-create an entire album, almost note for note. Fans love it, and I understand that. But that would drive me insane! Having to re-create, say,

**"Everyone has eccentricities that contribute to the music"**  
**JOHN ETHERIDGE**

every solo on *Third* or *Bundles* would be a technical challenge, but of no artistic value at all, for me. That's why I love this band. It's the best version of Soft Machine I've ever been in. It's a perfect mix of precision and improvisation. Everyone pulls their weight, everyone is a phenomenal musician, everyone inspires me to get better, and everyone has eccentricities that contribute to the music." **JOHN LEWIS**

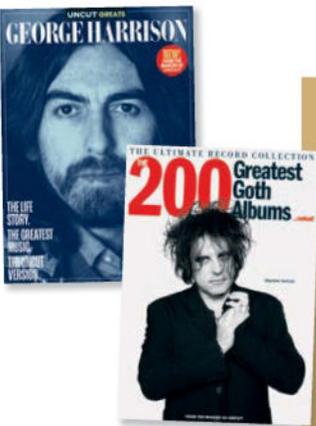
MAIN STREET STUDIOS LTD.; BIPS/GRETT IMAGES



Soft Machine in 1967: (l-r) Daevid Allen, Mike Ratledge (front), Robert Wyatt and Kevin Ayers



*Thirteen* is released by Dyad Records on March 13; Soft Machine tour the UK from March 20 – see [softmachine.org](http://softmachine.org) for dates



# “We’re not precious”

## The exhilarating return of cult Glasgow art-rockers **Life Without Buildings**

*Other City* had come out. Reviews of the album were mixed, but word spread about their compelling live shows,

which culminated in a tour of Australia at the end of 2001 (captured on the posthumous release *Live At The Annandale Hotel*). When a US tour was proposed for the following year, however, Tompkins got cold feet. “I felt as if I had to choose between being in a band or doing all the [artistic] stuff I was beginning to do,” she says. “Now, obviously, I

**W**HEN Life Without Buildings split in 2002 after three years and one album, nobody really noticed. “It was like tumbleweed,” recalls the band’s singer, Sue Tompkins. Twenty-four years later, when a reunion show was announced for this November at London’s Koko – a venue far larger than any they played in their original short lifespan – it sold out in minutes. A second show has since also sold out.

Largely unheralded at the time, the cult Glasgow band’s debut, *Any Other City*, has become a major influence on the likes of Dry Cleaning, Yard Act and even The 1975. Successive generations of musicians have been charmed by the album’s idiosyncratic mix of wiry, euphoric post-rock and Tompkins’ distinctive speak-singing, her seemingly improvised, free-associated lyrics delivered with childlike wonder. Life Without Buildings also enjoyed a surge in popularity in 2021, when their song “The Leanover” went viral on TikTok in clips made mainly by teenage girls, and Tompkins can currently be heard on “No Touch”, a haywire collaboration with Sleaford Mods.

Another admirer is Jasper Llewellyn of avant-folk ensemble Caroline. “Sue’s ‘free’ vocal style and the band’s interwoven guitar and harmony have been

a strong influence on us,” he says. “Bringing together those knotty emo-inspired guitars with a vocal like that is groundbreaking.”

Life Without Buildings were always a slightly odd mix. Tompkins, a visual artist, was asked to join the band after the three other members – guitarist Robert Johnston, bassist Chris Evans and drummer Will Bradley – saw her performing her first-ever spoken-word piece at Glasgow’s Transmission gallery in 1999. “It was a pivotal moment,” she says. “Even though they knew me, they hadn’t seen me do that before.”

While the boys dug Television and Can, Tompkins was coming from a different angle: “My upbringing was chart music. I was listening to Missy Elliott and 2Pac, a lot of dancey stuff and R&B.” This intriguing collision of styles – Tompkins’ lyrics are carefully prepared texts, not, as they may sound, random outpourings – led to a deal with Rough Trade’s Tugboat imprint just as the label was contending with The Strokes.

**“God knows what we’re going to sound like”**  
**SUE TOMPKINS**

Famously, the band supported the New Yorkers at their first UK show in Camden in March 2001, just after *Any* they didn’t tell her. “They were so nice about it, because no-one came to me going: ‘Sue, how can you do this to us?’” In fact, they’ve all remained on good terms, and having turned down “pretty regular” offers to reform over the last few years, they finally decided to get back together for Rough Trade’s 50th-birthday shows. Whether new songs appear depends on how rehearsals go. “God knows what we’re going to sound like,” says Tompkins, “but I know that we just get on and have a laugh. We’re not precious at all.” **PIERS MARTIN**

**Life Without Buildings play Saint Luke’s, Glasgow (Nov 17) and Koko, London (Nov 19, 20)**



Out in the cold: Life Without Buildings, 2001

### A Quick One

My sweet lord! The second edition of our new **Uncut Greats** series is dedicated to **George Harrison**, who would have turned 83 on February 25. Inside, we tell his incredible life story via incisive new writing, ranked reviews and classic archive features. It’s in shops now or available to order direct from us at [shop.kelsey.co.uk/uncut...](http://shop.kelsey.co.uk/uncut...)

That’s followed on March 13 by the definitive version of our **Ultimate Music Guide** to prog titans **Yes**, including an all-new 2026 feature and an eight-page miscellany foldout. And to coincide with Robert Smith’s Teenage Cancer Trust shows at the end of the month, **Ultimate Record Collection: The 200 Greatest Goth Albums... Ranked** will be available again from March 20...

**Lucinda Williams, Kurt Vile and Super Furry Animals** have been added to the lineup for **End Of The Road 2026**, along with a host of other *Uncut*-friendly names, including **Ty Segall, Beverly Glenn-Copeland, The Felice Brothers, William Tyler, Caroline, SG Goodman, Greazy Alice, Folk Bitch Trio, Širom** and many, many more. See you at Larmer Tree in September, then...

**David Bowie: You’re Not Alone** is a new 360° multimedia spectacle coming to Lightroom in London’s King’s Cross from April 22. Written and directed by Mark Grimmer – creative director for the V&A’s David Bowie Is exhibition – it will include unseen restored footage of Bowie performing “Heroes” at Earls Court in 1978...

ANDY WAKE

Stewart in 1976: "a bonafide outlaw"



# Out of hand

**Jimmy McDonough's new book raises a glass to honky-tonk country outlaw, Gary Stewart**

**T**HE life of Gary Stewart, as relayed by Neil Young biographer Jimmy McDonough, is a wild ride in which the singer's 1970s records offer fleeting respite from the chaos. Honky-tonk classics like "Drinkin' Thing" or "She's Actin' Single (I'm Drinkin' Doubles)" – covered by Wednesday in 2022 – show Stewart's ability to marry a tune with a bruised sentiment, but they pale alongside the operatic extremes of his life.

Stewart's story was "forged in Kentucky hollers and Florida honky-tonks", says McDonough of "a bona fide outlaw" who excelled in self-sabotage. Stewart spent years hawking songs in Nashville and served time in Charley Pride's band before a flurry of chart success in the mid-1970s, which he cut short by moving to Florida and embracing the Southern rock stylings of the Allman Brothers. Wearing a band uniform in The Pridemen didn't sit easily. Neither did the expectation to follow the Nashville formula.

"There were many dimensions to the cat," McDonough tells *Uncut*.

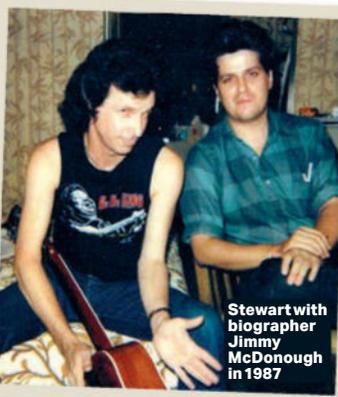
"There was a lot of pressure on him from the record company, like, 'Do another drinking song'. He had many vices. Booze was one of them, but it wasn't really his main choice of poison. And he was an artist who changed with the mood of the times. He just didn't fit into the vibe. He didn't fit in anybody's vibe. Eventually he gave up on recording, because he felt, 'They just want one thing from me, and I can't really give it again.'"

An obvious comparison is Jerry Lee Lewis, particularly on Stewart's early records, but McDonough feels it tells only half of the story. "Gary liked to explore, where Jerry Lee just hit you over the head. Jerry Lee was not going to do an eight-minute psychedelic song that took you to the graveyard."

'Boogie' Bob Melton grew up in the same town as Stewart – Fort Pierce, Florida – and got to know

**"Gary was probably the best entertainer I've ever seen"**

**BOB MELTON**



Stewart with biographer Jimmy McDonough in 1987

him properly when Stewart joined Melton's band, Phoenix. "When he played with us, we turned into a different kind of act," he says. "It kicked us into a higher gear."

A mix of outlaw country and Allmans Southern fusion was Stewart's natural habitat. "There weren't many groups that executed that kind of music. Gary and I spent a lot of time working out the twin guitar parts. Sometimes it was really magical."

On one occasion, Melton saw Stewart's performance rise to such a level of intensity that he appeared to levitate. "A girl was yanking on

his pant leg, and he was trying to sing and play, and he just backed off and did a little dance in mid-air. It's hard to explain. He was a very strange fellow. He just went up in the air.

"He was probably the best entertainer I've ever seen," Melton adds. "He was electric, like sparks flew out of him."

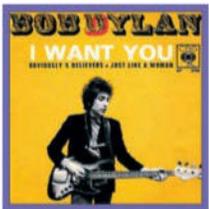
The final years of Stewart's life were conflicted. A car crash left him with chronic back pain. "After his car wreck, his whole persona changed," Melton says. "That's when he started taking the pain pills and getting into more drugs." The suicide of Stewart's son Joey in 1988 intensified his trauma.

Stewart's life ended by suicide on December 16, 2003, a month after the death of his wife, Mary Lou. McDonough's book, 40 years in the writing, doesn't stray from the tragedy, but also celebrates the intensity of his life. "There's some insane behaviour," McDonough says, "but nobody really puts Gary down. Everybody loved him, in spite of certain things. So, you know, I'd like to live with that epitaph." **ALASTAIR MCKAY**

*Gary Stewart: I Am From The Honky-Tonks* by Jimmy McDonough is published by Wolf+Salmon on April 2

# It ain't VG, babe

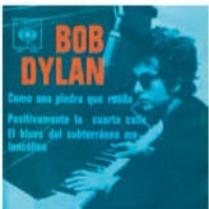
This month: six desirable overseas Bob Dylan EPs



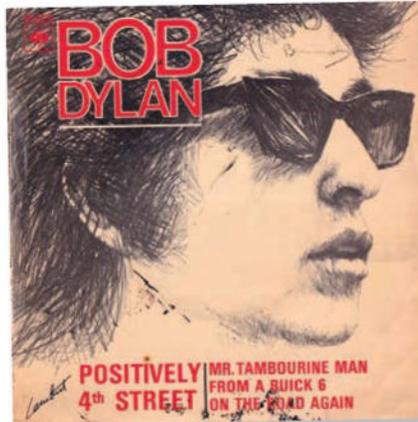
**I WANT YOU**  
CBS FRANCE, 1966  
The French led the way when it came to tasty covers. This is one of the best, featuring a photo of Dylan playing bass guitar set against a bright yellow backdrop and his name written out in a circus handbill font, almost like a Rolling Thunder preview. The title track was followed with "Obviously 5 Believers" and "Just Like A Woman".  
**Expect to pay:** £25



**CAN YOU PLEASE CRAWL OUT YOUR WINDOW?**  
CBS PORTUGAL, 1966  
A very solid selection of "Maggie' Farm", "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" and "On The Road Again" joined the lead song on this Portuguese EP, which came with a cool modernist cover seemingly inspired by Blue Note.  
**Expect to pay:** £300



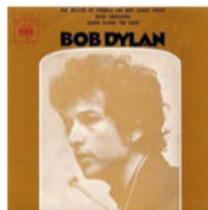
**COMO UNA PIEDRA QUE RUEDA**  
CBS MEXICO, 1965  
A blue-tinted image of Dylan at the piano and dramatic orange font make this a real standout – then throw in three great tracks (with Spanish translation), and you really have something. This backs "Like A Rolling Stone"



with "Positivamente La Cuarta Calle" ("Positively Fourth Street") and "El Blues Dels Subterràneo Melancòlico" ("Subterranean Homesick Blues").  
**Expect to pay:** £30

**POSITIVELY 4TH STREET**  
CBS FRANCE, 1965

Credit the French for capturing the essence of Dylan's shade-wearing 1965 cool on this pen-and-ink cover. Not a bad tracklisting either, with the title track sharing wax with "Mr Tambourine Man", "From A Buick 6" and "On The Road Again".  
**Expect to pay:** £15



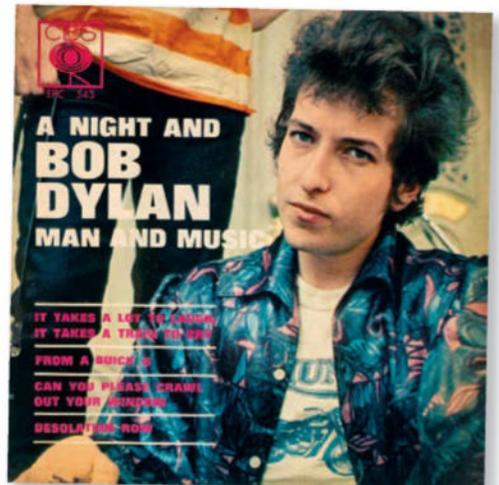
**THE BALLAD OF FRANKIE LEE AND JUDAS PRIEST**  
CBS PORTUGAL, 1968  
Hats off to CBS in Portugal for bigging up "The Ballad Of Frankie

Lee And Judas Priest", which was released as an EP in 1968 alongside two other strong *John Wesley Harding* tracks: "Dear Landlord" and "Down Along The Cove". Now considered one of the more valuable Dylan EPs.  
**Expect to pay:** £150

**A NIGHT AND BOB DYLAN – MAN AND MUSIC**  
CBS MEXICO, 1966

Sporting a *Highway 61* cover and a title to die for, this ultra-rare Mexican EP took three choice cuts from that album: "It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes A Train To Cry", "From A Buick 6" and, stupendously, "Desolation Row" and paired them with 1965 non-album single "Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window?".  
**Expect to pay:** £700

This article originally appeared in *Uncut's* guide to *The Complete Bob Dylan*



ORIGINAL TEXT BY PETER WATTS

OUR FAVOURITE SHOPS

## Diggers Club Records

Second Floor, Portland House, 113-116 Bute Street, Cardiff Bay, CF10 5AB

**Behind the counter:** Luke Pybus opened Diggers Club Records in the backroom of a grand former bank in Cardiff Bay just over a year ago. Initially operating as a 'speakeasy', it's now open for walk-in customers six days a week.

**In the racks:** A wealth of sought-after secondhand delights, from rock, punk and prog, to jazz, hip-hop and electronica. There are over 4,000 records in the shop itself, with a further



11,000 listed on Discogs. **On the wall:** Currently a decent smattering of Blue Note, Black Jazz and Strata-East titles via Pybus's connection in Japan. He recently sold an ultra-limited glow-in-the-dark edition of Misfits' *Walk Among Us*, while a mint copy of Comus's *First Utterance* went to a collector in the US. **Having a browse:** Gruff Rhys and Huw Stephens are regulars, while recent visitors include The Black Keys and Stewart Lee, who admiringly called Diggers Club "a ludicrous place". ©



Luke Pybus in Diggers Club Records

ALEX MILNER



O'Neill: "I want to be more adventurous"

I'M NEW HERE

# Ellie O'Neill

**Skilled but unshowy Irish singer-songwriter exploring "the cave within"**

**F**OR Ellie O'Neill, songwriting is a thing that can't be forced. "It's always been a way for me to ask questions of myself," she says. "Sometimes I feel like the hardest thing about it is getting back to that cave within, and not just being like, 'I need to do this because I want to write more songs.'"

Initially, convention held her back. She remembers childhood guitar lessons where she felt shyly out of place among the boys who were "soloing and showing off", and an abandoned degree in contemporary music that was "too focused on the product" and not on allowing her voice to develop. Eventually a tutor showed her how to down-tune her guitar and find a tone where she could experiment with melody, while transferring to an English degree renewed a love of reading and writing that spills out into her lyrics.

Growing up with three brothers on a County Meath housing estate, O'Neill spent her childhood surrounded by joyful noise. "We're not a 'musical family' in the way that some people are brought up, but my dad taught me a few chords, and my mum is an amazing dancer," she says. She describes her early listening as "a mix of Christy Moore and then Jennifer Lopez", before alternative music entered the equation in her late teens. Her hometown best friend went to school in nearby Dublin and would "buy or steal loads of CDs, rinse them and then give them to me when he was done".

O'Neill wrote the songs that would become her debut album, *Time Of Fallow*, during the pandemic, in her

old bedroom after moving back in with her parents. The songs feel experimental – you'd be tempted to call them playful if they didn't reflect a period of profound heartbreak, grief and slow rebirth – as O'Neill lingers on a chord or fragment of melody before circling back to a profound lyrical realisation.

"I wasn't writing the songs with the intention of writing an album," she says, explaining its title. "It was more like resting, recovering; coming back to life, in some ways. There's no expectation in a time of fallow. The songs don't tie everything up neatly – they're unresolved, cyclical, and this is just one part of it."

Recording the album at Analogue Catalogue in Newry – a tape-first studio with a nest of breeding bats in the attic – O'Neill had to learn to let others into a world of which she had always been protective. "I've always written songs knowing that they were going to be performed live, so when I brought them into the studio, the picking patterns, the lyrics, they were something I was set on," she says. "I really like when you listen to, say, a Joanna Newsom song that's unbelievably dense, where everything is taken care of. But making these recordings made me realise that there's room for songs that are more sparse, more sonically interesting. It made me want to be more adventurous. So that's what I'm working on now."

After support slots with the likes of Adrienne Lenker and John Francis Flynn, and having stunned the crowd at End Of The Road into silence with her gorgeous version of Sandy Denny's "Who Knows Where The Time Goes", Ellie O'Neill is ready for her next act. **© LISA-MARIE FERLA**

*Time Of Fallow* is released on March 20 via St Itch

I'M YOUR FAN



"Ellie is an incredible guitar player and she writes powerful songs that stay with you" **JOHN FRANCIS FLYNN**

## Uncut Playlist

On the stereo this month...



**ANNA CALVI**  
**Is This All There Is?** DOMINO  
Star-studded EP from the *Peaky Blinders* soundtracker, featuring a distinctly "Passenger"-esque duet with Iggy Pop and a haunting, operatic take on Kraftwerk's "Computer Love" with Laurie Anderson.

**BONNER KRAMER & THURSTON MOORE**  
**They Came Like Swallows**

SILVER CURRENT  
Two US indie legends join forces for seven sad-eyed avant-rock requiems – including a spectral cover of Joy Division's "Insight".

**JESCA HOOP**  
**Long Wave Home**

LAST LAUGH/REPUBLIC OF MUSIC  
"You gotta get up a mountain for the view..." Travelling between studios in her camper van, Hoop creates her freshest, sharpest album to date. Sam Amidon and Seb Rochford guest.



**MILDRED FENCELINE**  
**Memorials of Distinction** DOG DAY RECORDS  
New Cali quartet amplify the pathos of everyday disappointments with their threadbare indie ballads and gorgeously hand-dog country-rock.

**SUPER FURRY ANIMALS**  
**"Pocket Sam"** STRANGETOWN

Harmony-rich highlight of the reformed Welshmen's new early-years comp *Precreation Percolation*, featuring their original lead vocalist, actor Rhys Ifans.

**SETTING**

**Setting** THRILL JOCKEY  
Second album from the ace North Carolina improv trio achieves an effortless union of the industrial and the bucolic, with zithers and banjos slowly engulfed by tides of proggy synth.

**THE THREE SEAS**

**Antahkarana** EARSHIFT MUSIC  
Ancient Baul poetry, Nepali folk melodies and Bengali chants bubble up through an intoxicating psychedelic stew, cooked up in Real World's Big Room by this Indian-Australian combo.

**RICHARD BARBIERI**

**Hauntings** KSCOPE  
Evocative follow-up to 2021's *Under A Spell* finds the former Japan synthman wandering the streets of Victorian London, fin-de-siècle Paris and some dystopian future metropolis.



**JUNI HABEL**  
**Evergreen In Your Mind**

BASIN ROCK  
The Norwegian singer-songwriter keeps it spartan – with tapped table legs in place of drums – but still summons a tremulous magic.

**THE SLEEVES** **The Sleeves** 12XU  
Modern Nature's Jack Cooper and Tara Cunningham apply the loose, improv spirit of *No Fixed Point In Space* to the melodic directness of last year's *The Heat Warps*. A low-key marvel.



BONNIE PRINCE BILLY  
WE ARE  
together again

In Will Oldham's songs - and in the circle of others gathered beneath the name Bonnie "Prince" Billy - friendship, the miracle of community, and the stubborn joy of making art with others become a means of defiance

We Are Together Again on 06.03.26

 Tamino

# Play The Document

15 tracks of the month's best music

**UNCUT**

## PLAY THE document

15 tracks from the month's best new releases  
 FEATURING: Courtney Barnett • Bonnie "Prince" Billy  
 Flea feat. Thom Yorke • The Black Crowes • Snail Mail  
 Spencer Cullum • Tinariwen • AND MORE!



The Black Crowes



**1 THE BLACK CROWES**  
**Cruel Streak**

The Crowes take us through their recorded catalogue to date on page 72, including new album *A Pound Of Feathers*. Here's a track from it, produced by Jay Joyce at his Nashville church-turned-studio in freewheeling, intensely creative sessions with the Robinson brothers and drummer Cully Symington.



**2 SNAIL MAIL**  
**My Maker**

Leaving New York behind and newly settled in sunny North Carolina, Lindsey Jordan meets *Uncut* on page 56. The occasion is the release of her new, third album as Snail Mail, *Ricochet*, on which "My Maker" is a standout track.



The Long Ryders



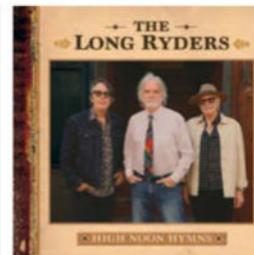
**8 TINARIWEN**  
**Imidiwan Takyadam feat. José González**

The Tuareg veterans' new album *Hoggar* is reviewed on page 32, and here's a fine cut taken from it. Recorded at Imarhan's studio in Tamanrasset, southern Algeria, it finds Tinariwen returning to their largely acoustic roots. Lyrically, though, they're darker than ever, reflecting the continuing turmoil in the region.



**9 ELLIE O'NEILL**  
**Anna With The Silver Arrow**

*Time Of Fallow* is the excellent debut album from Ireland's Ellie O'Neill, reviewed on page 36. We also hear from Ellie on page 10. "Anna...", meanwhile, epitomises her unshowy brand of quietly experimental singer-songwriter folk à la Adriaenne Lenker or Elliott Smith.



**10 THE LONG RYDERS**  
**Stand A Little Further In The Fire**

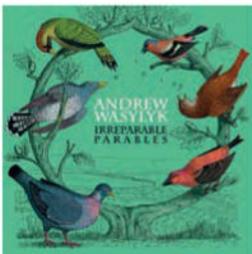
The core Ryders trio return with *High Noon Hymns*, the latest album in their continuing journey from the roots of Americana outwards to garage and psychedelia. With its T.Rex-aping intro, "Stand A Little Further In The Fire" is a customary burst of good times from the group.



Courtney Barnett



Spencer Cullum



**3 ANDREW WASYLUK**  
**Private Symphony #2 feat. Stuart Murdoch**

Here's the opener to the Scottish composer and producer's new album, *Irreparable Parables*. A stately, orchestral gem, it features Belle & Sebastian's lead singer, just one of a flock of collaborators on the record, from Gruff Rhys to Kathryn Joseph and Field Music. Hear more from Andrew on page 37.



**4 COURTNEY BARNETT**  
**Mantis**

It doesn't seem easy for Courtney Barnett to make records, but out of that doubt and frustration comes great music, as on her new album *Creature Of Habit*. Written with co-producer Stella Mozgawa, "Mantis" is quintessential Barnett: catchy, fleet, witty and thoughtful. Check out our lead review on page 24.



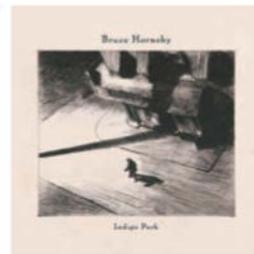
**5 SPENCER CULLUM'S COIN COLLECTION**  
**Rowan Tree**

The third volume of Cullum's Coin Collection project is apparently the last, which means there's even more reason to savour songs like this. Folky and jazzy like a lost curio from the early '70s, it's a folk-horror tale deeply rooted in Cullum's English homeland rather than his adopted Nashville landscapes.



**6 FLEA**  
**Traffic Lights feat. Thom Yorke**

After decades as a Chili Pepper and serial collaborator, Flea is releasing his debut solo album, *Honora*. There are many guests, including Jeff Parker on guitar and Nick Cave doing "Wichita Lineman", but this sinuous piece of ominous jazz-funk features none other than Thom Yorke. Flea chats about the album on page 27.



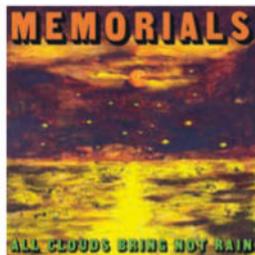
**7 BRUCE HORNSBY**  
**Indigo Park**

While Hornsby selects some seminal music for us on page 114, he's also back with a new album, *Indigo Park*, featuring his Grateful Dead collaborators Bob Weir and Robert Hunter, along with Ezra Koenig, Bonnie Raitt and more. Here's the low-slung title track.



**11 BONNIE "PRINCE" BILLY**  
**Hey Little**

This gorgeous track is taken from *We Are Together Again*, our Album Of The Month, reviewed on page 20. It sees Will Oldham continue the classic streak that's taken him from 2019's *I Made A Place* through last year's *The Purple Bird* and on to this hushed, emotional gem.



**12 MEMORIALS**  
**Dropped Down The Well**

Verity Susman and Matthew Simms do a fine job of merging their histories (Electrelane and Wire, notably) into something new on their second album, *All Clouds Bring Not Rain*. From the angular rush of this track alone, it's little surprise that they've toured extensively with the mighty Stereolab in recent years.



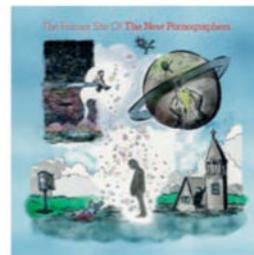
**13 CHARLOTTE CORNFIELD**  
**Lost Leader**

Canadian singer-songwriter Cornfield has been releasing her own music for almost 20 years now, but new album *Hurts Like Hell* is her strongest work to date. Even the guest voices of Feist, Buck Meek and Christian Lee Hutson don't overshadow nimble songs like this one.



**14 BILLY FULLER**  
**Rummer**

This piece of dystopian electronic post-punk is the opener to Fuller's debut solo album, *Fragments*. Pieced together over the last few years, the record finds the Beak> member exploring cinematic cold wave and synth noir, his bass guitar always to the fore.



**15 THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS**  
**Ballad Of The Last Payphone**

Bouncing back from adversity, AC Newman and his collaborators return with a new LP, *The Former Site Of*. Concerning the onward march of progress and what we may lose along the way, "Ballad Of The Last Payphone" is a fitting intro to the record and a nod to the group's continuing journey. ©

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Billy Childish in 2021: painter, poet, author, photographer, filmmaker, singer and garage-rock guitarist

“I’m not really passionate, I’m committed”

AN AUDIENCE WITH...

# BILLY CHILDISH

**“T**HE thing I find with making work is that it’s so easy *not* to do things,” says Wild Billy Childish, pondering a relentless creative drive that has yielded more than 150 albums since debuting with The Pop Rivets in 1979 – not to mention all the books, poems and paintings. Already this week he has written and recorded a new 7” single, filled a few canvases at his studio in Chatham docks, and signed off the final draft of his latest novel

*All The Poisons In The Mud*, about his own punk rock awakening. “My novels are from a very autobiographical point of view,” he explains, stroking his magnificent moustache. “Which probably makes them complete fiction!”

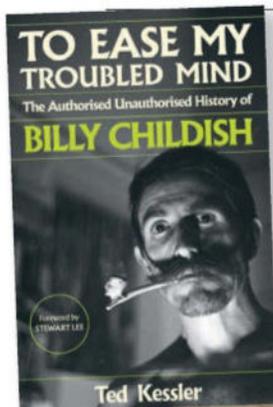
To what does he attribute his prodigious output? “I don’t have agents or managers, I don’t have anyone saying to me, ‘Billy, can we have another record? Or have you got a novel?’ Quite the opposite, it’s like, ‘Can you please stop making all these records?’ And the answer’s ‘No!’ We’re still finding the 15-year-old element within them, which is where pop music really belongs. We’re not going to win many people over, but maybe 30 years down the line, somebody will say, ‘I’m glad someone bothered doing that.’”

**Ted Kessler’s biography [To Ease My Troubled Mind] doesn’t make Chatham sound like the loveliest of places to grow up in. What keeps you there? Tony Melville, via email**

Well, I actually live in Rochester, which is one of four or five towns all stranded on the Medway. It’s still a bit rough, but because we’re quite close to London it was always cheap and easy. As it happens, we’re supposedly moving down to Canterbury, which is a bit of a shock to me. But I’ll either have to come back here to work with Jim [Riley at Ranscombe Studios] or see if there’s anything lurking in that area. Getting

**The Medway musketeer on playing the Star-Club, annoying geography teachers and why his band are “like a really good greasy spoon”**

Interview by SAM RICHARDS



people who understand the way we work is not necessarily easy. A lot of people think we’re quite careless, but everything is very considered. We’re like a really good greasy spoon: we’re not going to have cheap, watery bacon.

**What was the most exciting thing you saw at the Vortex during the early punk days? Bodge, via email**

I used to really like seeing X-Ray Spex, that was good fun. The Jam were my favourite

group, but I didn’t see them at the Vortex – they’d already moved on from there. But I saw them at London University, and at Battersea Town Hall in Jubilee Week, that was exciting. I only got the first album, of course. By then, Big Russ [Wilkins, Pop Rivets/Milkshakes bandmate] had played me Link Wray, John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters and that was that. When I found out that most of the punk rockers were fans of David Bowie, I was quite disgusted. So we decided to delve back into the depths of music that nobody was interested in and play to audiences who weren’t interested. And we carried on trying to get rid of our audiences!

**In December 1977, on a school trip to Snowdonia, you ended an argument about whether the Pistols were better than The Beatles by giving me a dead leg. A year or so later The Pop Rivets recorded “Beatle Boots”. Was that a tacit admission that I was right? Brian Williams, via email**

It depends what Beatles and what Sex Pistols! There’s the amazing relevance of the Sex Pistols in ’76 [but] the Star-Club Beatles probably still beat them as a punk rock group. I saw the Pistols at Uxbridge in ’77, and no matter how much we wanted to like it, it wasn’t very good. So yes, you were right and I was wrong...

**“You Make Me Die” was my introduction to your work in the 1990s, when it appeared as a B-side on a Mudhoney 7”. I’ve since heard you perform it a few times – most recently last month in NYC, sung a cappella. What is it about that song that has given it such staying power? Jake Cunningham, New York City**

I suppose Thee Mighty Caesars’ version is good, the original one. It’s funny, Mudhoney were talking to me and asking me how I played the solo. I said, “Well, the top E string has come off halfway through the solo, and for the second half I’m trying to put it back on again while still playing.” They were like, “Oh, that explains a lot.” It’s written about a girlfriend who wasn’t actually



Where the living is “cheap and easy”: Childish at home in Rochester, 2009

EDD WESTMACOTT/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Doing what's required: Childish in London, April 2016

the next night, which was absolutely disgusting. It was probably burnt down for an insurance job not long afterwards.

**I'd like to know what you thought about being stitched so prominently in Tracey Emin's tent. Art or arse? Claire Keenan, via email**

Tracey got me to go to the exhibition. I said, "I thought you *made* the tent, not bought it!" In my mind it was going to be something along the lines of one of those old army marquees, not a nylon bubble tent. So I was a bit underwhelmed by that. I just thought it was a flash in the pan. But then I'm wrong about most things.

**A record company gives you 500 grand to make a record with Andrew Watt in LA. Do you accept the challenge? Nic Lefevre, Bristol**

Does it matter if the record comes out?! That's a good offer, but it would really depend if the producer would do as he's told. I mean, is it necessary for us to be produced by anyone? Probably not. One time when we were very poor, there was this push to get groups to cover my songs. That Michael Stipe guy was asked if he'd like to do a cover, and then Kurt Cobain was approached,

and some other groups. Mudhoney did one, but Stipe said he didn't like my music and Cobain committed suicide. Infer what you like from that! What I'm trying to say is that, if other groups would do the bad commercial versions, that would suit me. I'm all for everyone ruining my music.

**You've previously said that you don't do what you like, you do what you do. But do you like what you do? Jack Kittredge, Lincolnshire**

Sometimes I'm surprised how much I like something that we've done, but I don't do it to like it. When I make a painting, I try to have the colour and follow what the painting feels like it should be like. And I try to do the same thing with the songs. I do it very instinctively, following the requirement of the song, or the group... something that fits the engine room. So you're really trying to listen, and that means you're not trying to please yourself, you're doing what's required. That's why I can do so much work, because I don't have the requirement that most people have of feeling that it's a reflection of my worth or value. ☺

*House On Fire* by Wild Billy Childish & CTMF is out March 27 on Damaged Goods; *All The Poisons In The Mud* is published by TNC Books in April

## “When I found out that most of the punk rockers were fans of David Bowie, I was quite disgusted”

successful at all, but wanted to be. I've got a real problem with ambition and success, maybe because my father was a bit like it. And maybe I express that eloquently in the song, so for people who share that sentiment it has a ring of truth.

**Do you find the shape and colour of the guitar affect the shape, colour and sound of the song you play on it? Rob Symmons, Subway Sect/The Fallen Leaves**

Oh, Rob's a great guy – great guitar player. I could get excited about the colour and the shape very easily, so let's say it probably does. People say I'm shallow because I'm really drawn to the surface of things, although you have to go to the surface to go in. But I'm into aesthetics – I can get upset at door handles that I don't think are nice. For instance, I saw this Airline guitar in the window of a shop in Seattle for \$160. For me, it's a thing of beauty, even though it's a cheap old piece of junk. It certainly draws you in, and if it draws you in, it will draw your passion in. I'm a bit averse to the use of the term 'passion', but it does convey something. One of my nieces was asking me about what drove me, and the passion in the work and everything. I said, 'Well, I'm not really passionate, I'm committed.'

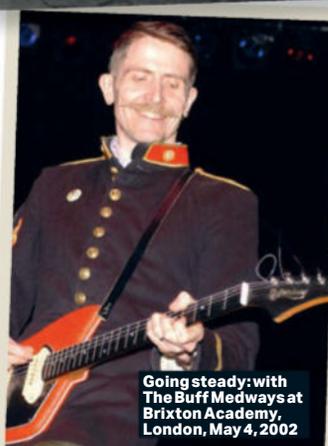
**I've always wanted to get into your music but I'm a bit overwhelmed by the size of your back catalogue. Where should I start? Cara Liederman, via email**

It is a big gamut. We've got the Guy Hamper Trio, which is a very confusing

group seeing as there's four of us, and there's a real musician in the group with Jamie [Taylor] on the Hammond organ. If you were interested in that, you might not be interested in what me and Sexton [Ming] did, the nursery rhyme stuff with me playing the Woolworths organ. So a good idea is the compilations, *From Fossilised Cretaceous Seams* or *Archive From 1959*. The other thing that you could always do is get the first albums [by each group], because it doesn't get much better than that. Actually The Buff Medways' second album is really good, *Steady The Buffs*. It's poppy and punk-rocky, but it still sounds like it could annoy the geography teacher, which is the mark of a good record.

**Is there one particular gig that sticks in your mind that you really enjoyed? Angus Hutcheon, via email**

Playing the last ever show at the Star-Club with The Milkshakes, that was good fun. It had been turned into a sex club but they changed its name [back] for one night in '81. The stage and everything was still there, but the whole thing was quite shambolic. We had free tickets to the sex show



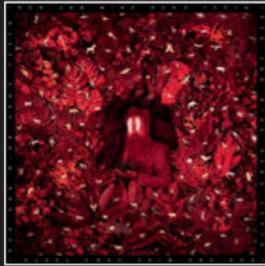
Going steady: with The Buff Medways at Brixton Academy, London, May 4, 2002





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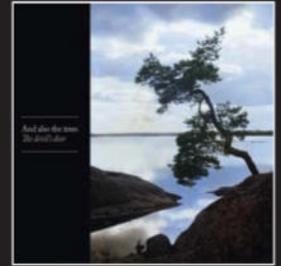
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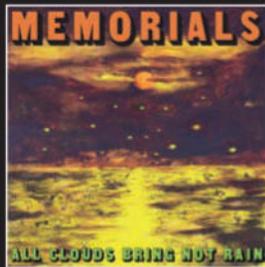
One of the original "Post-Punk" bands, present a quiet storm of an album. At times filmic, poetic and intense with an undercurrent of dark psychedelia.



**J MASCIS + THE FOG**  
**MORE LIGHT**

BAKED GOODS RECORDS LP

The 1997 1st solo venture from J Mascis (Dinosaur Jr). Members & collaborators have included Mike Watt (Minutemen/FIREHOSE), Ron Asheton (The Stooges), Robert Pollard (Guided By Voices), Kevin Shields (My Bloody Valentine), Dave Schools (Widespread Panic) & Kyle Spence (Harvey Milk).



**MEMORIALS**

ALL CLOUDS BRING NOT RAIN

FIRE RECORDS LP / CD

Canterbury psych-rock duo MEMORIALS - Verity Susman (Electralane) and Matthew Simms (Wire). Imagine Nico singing with Can produced by David Axelrod. "Kaleidoscopic art-pop and adventurous psych-rock with an immersive, experimental aura." KEXP.

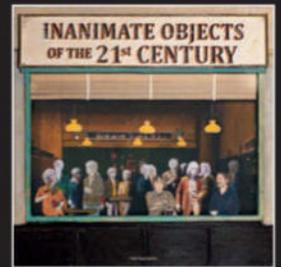


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INANIMATE OBJECTS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

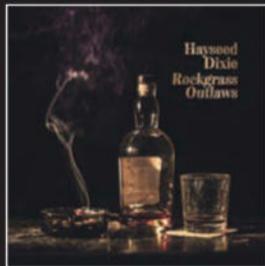
END OF THE WALL RECORDINGS LP / CD  
With their third album Newcastle's The Pale White prove once again that there's no slowing them down, a record that blends the anthemic punch of classic rock with the urgency and edge of modern alternative.



**J MASCIS + THE FOG**  
**FREE SO FREE**

BAKED GOODS RECORDS LP

Free So Free is the second album from Dinosaur Jr. frontman J Mascis under his moniker J Mascis + The Fog, first released in 2002 to critical acclaim and newly reissued.



**HAYSEED DIXIE**

ROCKGRASS OUTLAWS

HAYSEED DIXIE RECORDS LP

A new album for their 25th Anniversary, Rockgrass meets classic outlaw country in a bar brawl.



**BIBI CLUB**

AMARO

SECRET CITY RECORDS LP

Inspired by memorable artistic encounters, including touring with Blonde Redhead, Bibi Club reveals itself through avant-pop and electronic body music blending dark wave, neofolk, and baroque with harpsichords and trumpets.

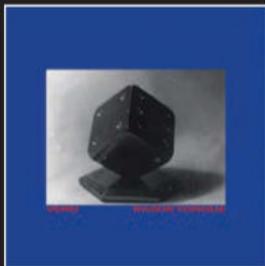


**THE LEAF LIBRARY**

AFTER THE RAIN, STRANGE SEEDS

FIKA RECORDINGS LP / CD

Woody pastoral indiepop mixed by Tortoise's John McEntire. Richly evocative with chiming guitars, pulsating electronics, looping drones & dulcet strings, evoking Yo La Tengo's contemplative moments, The Clientele's warm jangle pop & early Stereolab's motorik melodicism.



**VERO**

RAZOR TONGUE

PNKSLM RECORDINGS LP

Stockholm trio Vero's 2nd album thrives on urgency; no re-takes, no second-guessing — just pedal-to-the-floor intensity. The result is wiry alt-rock with punk edges, choruses that detonate, & lyrics about obsession, loneliness, & fragile declarations of love.

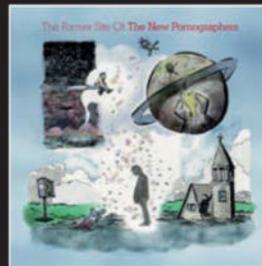


**NEW GERMAN CINEMA**

PAIN WILL POLISH ME

FELTE LP

The voice & songwriter of Fear of Men, Jessica Weiss, carries that same lyrical precision & emotional intensity into her solo project New German Cinema. The album feels forensic & devotional, the product of someone who doesn't rush catharsis.



**THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS**

THE FORMER SITE OF

MERGE RECORDS LP / CD

The New Pornographers evolve rather than rest on their laurels. Songs across The Former Site Of give a distinct pulse to the characters whose lives spill out in bandleader A.C. Newman's tender, evocative lyrics.



**CHARLOTTE CORNFIELD**

HURTS LIKE HELL

MERGE RECORDS LP / CD

Hurts Like Hell is Charlotte Cornfield's most collaborative album to date. Backed by a full band, including Palehound's El Kempner and Lake Street Dive's Bridget Kearney, Feist, Buck Meek, Christian Lee Hutson sing on album.

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THE UNCUT GUIDE TO THIS MONTH'S KEY RELEASES

# BONNIE "PRINCE" BILLY

## We Are Together Again

DOMINO

Will Oldham's recent run of homecoming albums finds a new richness. *By Jon Dale*

**T**HERE are several ages of song for Will Oldham, loosely put. There are the early years, as Palace, where knotty, twisted melodies and imagery cohered in a style that felt

old as the hills, an archaic song fronted by an enigmatic force. You couldn't quite get a handle on him, this singer, and that mystery was seductive. It made some sort of sense in context, too: the community of musicians Oldham was involved with in Louisville, the likes of Slint, Evergreen and David Grubbs, and also his loose alignment with other artists on his home label Drag City – Smog, Royal Trux – was rich with characters who made creative life of the clandestine and quixotic.

Then there's a second era, which feels curious and exploratory, Oldham moving out from under Palace and slipping, slowly, into a new character, Bonnie "Prince" Billy. (These characters make sense for someone who began their artistic career in acting, but never quite found the solace they searched for in that calling.) There are beautiful albums here, like 1999's *I See A Darkness* and 2003's *Master And Everyone*, but also a constant shapeshifting, a desire to try on so many outfits, working with the likes of Matt Sweeney, Bitchin Bajas, Tortoise and Trembling Bells.

ALBUM OF THE MONTH  
8/10

How, then, to grapple with Oldham's return to his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, and a string of albums over the last seven or so years, extended now by *We Are Together Again*, that feel renewed, simultaneously the most straightforward of Oldham's catalogue, and yet still rich with the oneiric and mysterious qualities that drew so many listeners to his art? It seems wrong to suggest this is a 'mature' phase of Oldham's writing: he's slyer than that, even as both lyrics and delivery feel more disarmed here, more natural, than ever.

Perhaps it's partly about the new couching Oldham has found for his songs. Recording among friends and family in Louisville – and *We Are Together Again* is notable for his reunion with brother Ned, himself responsible for many great albums as part of The Anomaonon – there's been a sea-change in how these records sound, both in terms of playing and

arrangement, and regarding their overarching mood. You can trace this development from the charms of 2019's *I Made A Place* through its successors – the quietened *Keeping Secrets Will Destroy You*, the brightly lit Nashville set *The Purple Bird* – but it finds its richest flourish here.

It's also there in the way Oldham uses his voice. He's always had a canny relationship with its possibilities, much as, in our Q&A, he acknowledges ➔



Will Oldham:  
pensive lyrics  
couched in  
joyous sounds





Softspot: Oldham addresses a song to his little ones

Languid & Flaccid and the Dickbrains, respectively. These relationships feel somehow significant to what Oldham is doing with these songs, this music – finding a place for songs to nestle in together, carefully tended to by writer, producer and musicians, bringing local community and local history into the songs in intimate ways. It makes for an album whose strength is in the way it toggles between that intimacy and an expansiveness that tells us much about

early limitations. For some, those limitations were the charm of Oldham’s voice, the way capability strained against ambition. But the newer Oldham voice feels unforced, not natural so much as settled: as in nestling comfortably within the folds of the songs written and arranged, and more elliptically, in Oldham finding a voice to settle into, a comfort that’s still striving for expression beyond the immediate.

You can hear this, most beautifully, in the more intimate moments on *We Are Together Again* – the sweet sweep of “(Everybody’s Got A) Friend Named Joe”, where Oldham’s lovely line entwines with Maggie Halfman’s earthy, everyday melodicism; it’s also there in the next song, “Vietnam Sunshine”, where sweet, punch-drunk brass frames the writing beautifully. This time Oldham is accompanied by Catherine Irwin of Freakwater, who also joins in on the following “Hey Little”, an ode to Oldham’s children.

Tellingly, Oldham encouraged his arranger, cousin Ryder McNair, to garner inspiration from Madonna’s “Dear Jessie” for the arrangements on “Hey Little”, a sign that Oldham’s grasps the depth behind the seemingly ‘simplest’ of songs. The presence of Irwin on both songs, and Sally Timms on “Life Is Scary Horses”, gestures out to other creative relationships, too – Irwin is a founding member of American country outfit

Freakwater, Timms a long-time member of the Mekons.

That latter band have long been totemic for Oldham, and indeed he reflected in interview, “I got so deeply Mekonical back in my late teens.” That relationship back to Oldham’s youthful love of Mekons, and of Freakwater as parallel spirits over the decades, somehow feels important to *We Are Together Again*, in the way it wraps up a world in 12 songs, and that world’s histories.

If you catch echoes of Oldham past in “Life Is Scary Horses”, too, well, you’re not hearing things: Oldham himself confesses, “The song ‘Life Is Scary Horses’ is a rip-off of Sally Timms’ ‘Horses’, and Timms sings on it!” Rip-off seems slightly dismissive, actually; it’s closer to the truth to say the songs share the same psychic space. Oldham covered the Timms original (a co-write with Jon Langford) on a Palace seven-inch back in 1994; the Timms original is from her 1988 album *Somebody’s Rocking My Dreamboat*. Each mutation tells us something new about how songs change over time, are passed down, or in the case of “Life Is Scary Horses”, are borrowed and recast.

The connection to Freakwater is more local – Oldham relays that the younger sister of the band’s Janet Bean was his sixth-grade locker partner; Ned Oldham and Catherine Irwin were also members of Louisville post-punk bands

how Oldham’s world has expanded across the decades of his artmaking.

Of course, there’s the sheer pleasure of playing, listening and being. Some of *We Are Together Again*’s most joyous moments seem in direct contravention of the album’s more anxious lyrical explorations, where fear and the implications of the Anthropocene, gnomic observations like “*O life is full of trouble*” or “*the human times have come and gone*”, hit differently when surrounded by Oldham’s subtle gestures towards renewal, towards potential and possibility, and towards the simple pleasure of being together, again. “Vietnam Sunshine” seems central to the messaging here, a kind of hope against hope – “*Now we restructure the whole of society/Place bliss and equality right at its core*”.

That energy infects the musicianship on the album, ultimately, and accounts for the ease and delight of many of the songs. It’s something Oldham comments on, too, when asked if anything surprised him about the album: “I was surprised, during the mixing process with Jim [Marlowe], how fun the record is to listen to.” It’s moments like that that tell us Oldham is still deep in the valley of his song. As he says, when pondering what song can do, for both the writers and listeners: “This is my life’s work. This is what I am trying to know, with everything I do.”

SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Why Is The Lion
- 2 They Keep Trying To Find You
- 3 Strange Trouble
- 4 Life Is Scary Horses
- 5 (Everybody’s Got A) Friend Named Joe
- 6 Vietnam Sunshine
- 7 Hey Little
- 8 Davey Dead
- 9 The Children Are Sick
- 10 Bride Of The Lion

**Produced By:** Jim Marlowe and Will Oldham  
**Recorded At:** End Of An Ear, Louisville  
**Personnel:** Will Oldham (vocals, guitar), Thomas Deakin (accordion, whistle, electric guitar, cornet, tuba, clarinet, singing), Jaco Duncan (saxophone, flute, piano, vocals), Caleb Vasquez (percussion), Charlie Bisharat (violin), Camille Miller (violin), Jake Braun (cello), Zach Dellinger (viola), Sarah Louise Callaway (violin), Nuala Kennedy (flute, vocals), Eamon O’Leary (bouzouki, vocals), Ned Oldham (bass, vocals), Maggie Halfman (vocals), Ryder McNair (piano), Sally Timms (vocals), Chris Cupp (bass), Jim Marlowe (Moog, piano), Catherine Irwin (vocals), Chris Leidner (drums), Christopher Bush (tapes, electronics), Erin Hill (harp, singing), Tory Fisher, Lacey Guthrie, Katie Peabody (vocal trio)

RECOMMENDER

LOUISVILLE TRILOGY

A Prince goes back to the region where he was raised



I Made A Place

DOMINO, 2019

A sweet return to the Louisville recording orbit for Bonnie Billy, *I Made A Place* is a gorgeous, stripped-back entry in his

catalogue. He’s joined by some great players – including Nathan Salsburg on guitar – and the unaffected, beautifully pure voice of the great Joan Shelley. Poetry in simple motion.

8/10



Keeping Secrets Will Destroy You

DOMINO, 2023

A relatively spare set, here Oldham trains the lens on the relationship between a clutch of

chords on the guitar, the grain of his voice and the deceptive simplicity of these observational lyrics. Losing the drums means that everything breathes a slightly different air, and the arrangements swoon with grace. 8/10



The Purple Bird

DOMINO, 2025

Bonnie “Prince” Billy’s second Nashville set, after 2004’s *Sings Greatest Palace Music*, is wonderfully appointed and

performed, and Oldham feels comfortable within the Nashville paradigm – certainly more so than his first effort, 20 years prior. His adaptability grants him the authority to cover gospel vocal group The Clark Sisters, too. 7/10

## Q&amp;A

## Will Oldham on coming home and facing fear

**This is the latest in a string of albums you've decided to record in Louisville. Beyond being home, what is it about Louisville that calls you to make art there?**

Ten years ago, my morale and enthusiasm for making up songs was at rock bottom. Streaming was alienating and even disgusting. My wife and I were accepted into an artist residency on top of an active volcano, and it was there that I learned that my life is about making songs whether I liked it or not. I figured that liking it would be the happier path. So, a group of songs came into being, and rather than looking to the outside world for ways to bring these songs to shareable life, I looked to my city. It was the first Bonnie Billy record in decades that was made completely and intentionally in a Louisville studio, with Louisville musicians. That record was *I Made A Place*.

I had already begun to have a conception that song-making here allowed me to explore source material that was deeper and richer than if I lived elsewhere, and that, further, there were tons of listeners out in the world who were actively involved with navigating similar scenarios. Most folks in the USA (and western Europe, and Australia/NZ) who might find their way to these songs would be living lives that incorporated relationships to place that many artists and musicians flee in favour of lives in the big cities where there is the illusion of things "happening".

**What does Louisville mean to you as a home, a place of beginnings, a place of formative experience?**

When I was 19 years old I had an inkling that I might be leaving home, and maybe leaving home for quite a while, so I got myself



a tattoo. It was 1989, and there was only one game in town, Tattoo Charlie's ("tattoos while you wait"). My needle-bearer, Donnie, put the symbol of Louisville on my left wrist so that wherever I went I could look down at that fleur-de-lis and feel connected. Because the arts scene was so deep and strong here, the blueprint for a life of creating was well drawn for me by then.

**How have you re-thought the tone and physicality of your voice since your first single, "Ohio River Boat Song"?**

For at least the first 10 years of making records and touring, I had a voice in my head that was not

**"It's apparently time to offer an answer here or there" WILL OLDHAM**

matched by what I was able to pull off with my particular throat/lung machinery. I knew how I wanted to be singing, and I practised and practised, but it took so much actual work to overcome obstacles that were equal parts physical and emotional (if not spiritual). The two real "Nashville" Bonnie "Prince" Billy records, *Sings*

*Greatest Palace Music* and *The Purple Bird*, taught me how far I could push my voice successfully, so now I know that when I'm not hitting it, it's my fault and I need to realign my headspace. I've also learned to appreciate the inherent effective collaboration that occurs when singing in a space: the architect's design is a real and living contributor to the presence of a musical moment.

**'Fear' is a theme across *We Are Together Again*, but also hope against hope, in some ways. There are also other, subtler threads. What are you finding in the album, now you're bringing it to the wider world?**

I've sung a lot about fear. Fear used to be a driving force behind my lyric-writing, as it was a driving force behind much of my existence. And where the fear has transmogrified into something

more constructive, its shadow hangs on and can never forget how crippling fear can be for us. So, I still sing about it. It's like keeping a fire extinguisher in the house. And the lyrics are a massive part of what a record, or any given song, is about.

Still, the record is dominantly about how it presents itself to

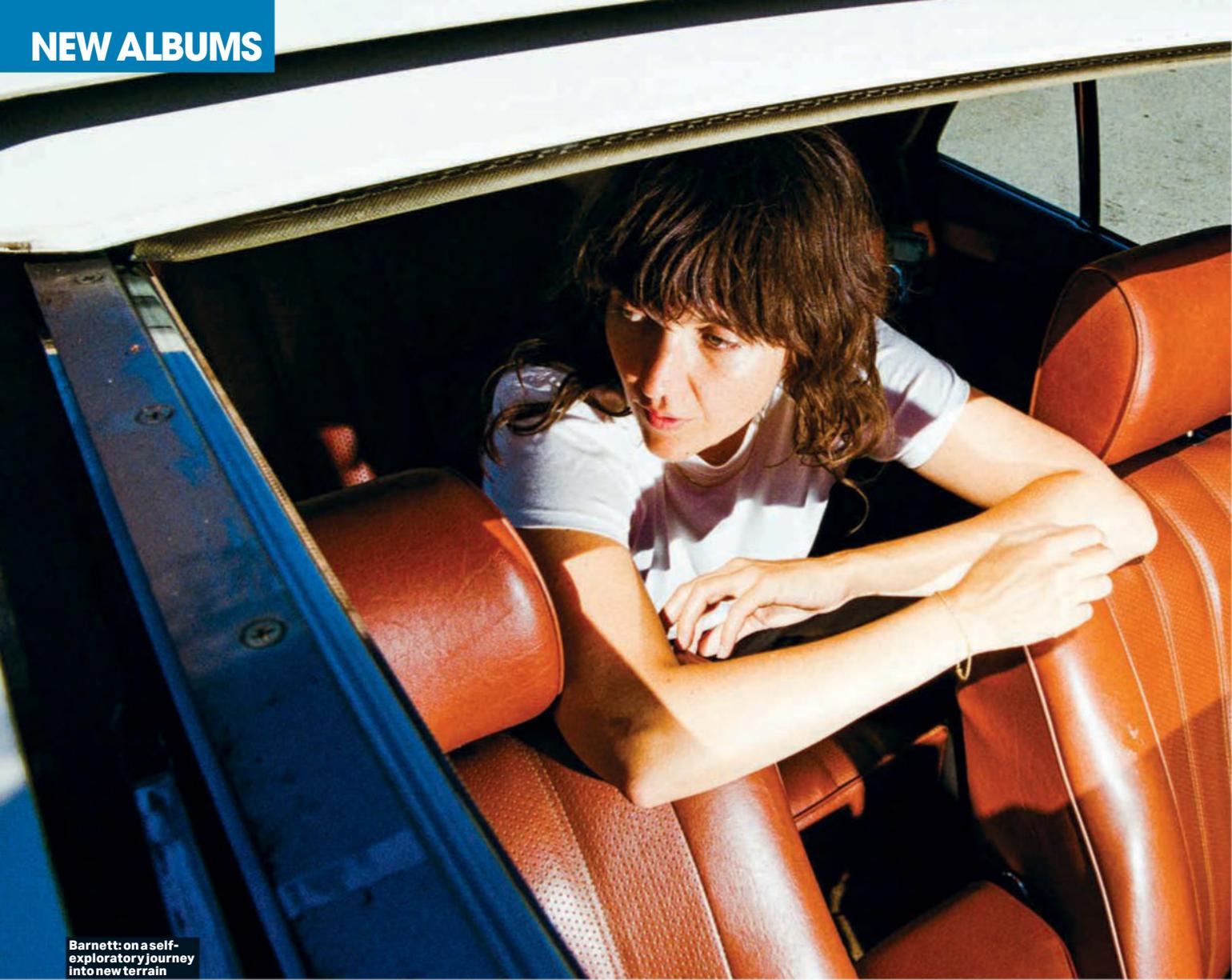
the listeners, in time and space. Like having sex with someone who is physically beautiful feels important for a while, and then you learn that you are having sex with a complicated entity whose way of being in the world is far larger and wilder than how that person looks. And I am more aware of ways, verbally indescribable, of how to build a record that occupies a more organic and shifting sphere.

**How are you navigating the broader world we find ourselves within – its geopolitical and ecological destabilisations, but also the effect this has on us?**

I feel prepared to do my part. Part of focusing on life in Louisville, focusing on family and friends, focusing on mindful approaches to the how and the why of participating in music, is about learning to be capable to face fear, and aggression, head-on. Maybe the best thing about the many 'services' offered by our ersatz connectivity, through technology, is that we have so many examples before us of what not to do, how not to act... including digital engagement itself. Perceptions of reality are so easily distorted and manipulated, only the direct engagement with other humans yields something close to what we can call a healthy perception of reality. So much of life is about questioning; now after living more than half a life, it's apparently time to offer an answer here and there. 🍷

INTERVIEW: JON DALE

Will Oldham: marked for a life of creating



Barnett: on a self-exploratory journey into new terrain

# COURTNEY BARNETT

## Creature Of Habit FICTION

8/10

Deep, fresh breaths and sweet familiarity on the Melburnian's fourth. *By Sharon O'Connell*

**I**NDECISIVENESS, procrastination and lack of purpose; by her own admission, all have plagued Courtney Barnett for years. The twist being, of course, that in her music those very characteristics have become the stuff of uniquely candid songs that have propelled her into cultish stardom. She's picked unselfconsciously through her psyche over three albums, laying bare her imposter syndrome, depression and more in a manner far removed from the construction of anything like a persona. When change finally came knocking, though, as it tends to for anyone feeling stuck hard with a milestone birthday in sight, it did so loudly. *Creature Of Habit*, her fourth album, is a document of Barnett's unsticking, through plain doing.

It's also an instantly engaging record born out of its author's collaborative

curiosity, the deliberate avoidance of any pre-recording plan and a determination to embrace change in whatever form, while staring down the uncomfortable emotions that so often attend it. Early album sessions were recorded in Joshua Tree with co-producers Stella Mozgawa

(who also drums throughout) and Marta Salogni. More studio time followed six months later in LA, where Barnett now lives, with Mozgawa and John Congleton.

Half the set edges Barnett's songwriting into new terrain and realises her ideas

in a fresh way, zinging with different sounds – '80s jangle pop, dreamy psychedelia and synth-pop included – while avoiding any whiff of forced reinvention. While *Creature Of Habit* signals that its maker is moving on both personally and creatively, it should also shift public perception. The "slacker rock" tag was always a little off – a misreading of Barnett's relaxed song forms, see-saw phrasing and casually self-enquiring lyrics as disaffection or negativity – but it's even less appropriate now.

Change is announced in the opening slot with "Stay In Your Lane". From paralysis and despair ("*Feel like a fish on a hook/I'm crying like a child would*") Barnett wrings resolve ("*And now I'm here I might as well just go through with it*"), against the kind of choppy, high-energy backdrop with a blown-out low end that Chris Forsyth might enjoy. A short siren whoop, multi-tracked vocals and a sudden ending complete the bracing picture. "One Thing At A Time" begins with the sun-glazed, loping charm that made Kurt Vile and Barnett such a natural pairing, then stretches out into Pond-like trippy languor before closing with two-and-a-half minutes of irresistibly gnarly shredding. "*Oh, my*



## AtoZ

This month...

- P26 THE BLACK CROWES**  
**P29 CUT WORMS**  
**P31 THE LONGRYDERS**  
**P33 GONG**  
**P33 KIM GORDON**  
**P34 LADYTRON**  
**P36 SUNN O)))**  
**P37 ALEXISTAYLOR**

## JOHN ANDREWS &amp; THE YAWNS

## Streetsweeper

EARTH LIBRARIES  
8/10

Fifth album from the former Woods and Quilt player



Based in the remote Red Hook neighbourhood of Brooklyn, John Andrews specialises in

low-key indie folk. Midtempo and understated, it's the kind of thing that might be mistaken for drowsy, or merely vibey. On his new album, however, he hides tough truths just beneath the placid surface of his songs, full of new beginnings, severed connections and deadening routines. Sounding at times like an American version of The Clientele, Andrews brings a keen sense of melody and an even keener ear for hooks, such as the lovely "ba-ba-ba"s that festoon "What's Good?" and the loping jangle of "Friends In Misery".

STEPHEN DEUSNER

SANAYA ARDESHIR  
Hand Of Thought

KARIGAR

7/10

LA-based electronic auteur in a new guise



Better known as Sandunes, Ardeshir is an Indian-born producer whose debut under

her own name blends ambient electronica with a dreamy exploration of her Parsi heritage, informed by impressionistic themes of "community, belonging and migration". Her all-instrumental compositions are foregrounded by her mostly untreated piano, but saxophonist Rhys Sebastian and UK-based percussionist/composer Sarathy Korwar make notable contributions, creating a more layered and orchestral framework than in Ardeshir's past work. From the ethereal soundscapes of "Between Dreams", with its obvious debt to Steve Reich, to the deft syncopations of "Barefoot Steps", these compositions beguile and challenge in equal measure.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



## She's sharing the process of change as well as the sound of it

skronk with sarcasm shows in "Great Advice": percussion is pushed to the fore, strings whine and the talk – "Appreciate your great advice/But I don't wanna do my hair all nice/I like it this way" – comes with an eye roll.

In between these newly exploratory songs sit the more familiar, freewheeling likes of "Mostly Patient", a twangling, melancholic charmer with a country-pop bent and "Mantis", which supplies the album's title and sees Barnett watching said insect on her door, "looking for meaning or just any sign at all". Kindred spirit Katie Crutchfield steps up for vocal harmonies on a burnished "Site Unseen". Barnett exits on "Another Beautiful Day", a five-minutes-plus, philosophical acceptance of being "reborn, every morning/Still somehow getting older", expressed over a mesh of brightly ringing guitars, Wurlitzer and echoed vocals, tricked out with birdsong and bathed in a Californian warmth that's almost palpable.

Barnett's USP is the singularly unagonised mapping of an interior life that gets in the way of her living out in the world, her consummate guitar work a major part of its soundtrack. In *Creature Of Habit* that plays out rather differently – she's sharing the process of change as well as the sound of it, as if in real time. "I think the reason I write is because I'm trying to understand something," Barnett tells *Uncut*, "trying to unlock some part of my brain that seems hidden from me. Each record feels like a document of that time, while also being a stepping stone into the next chapter." The rush of this album, then, lies in its capture of Barnett's gradual surfacing as a different creature.

## SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Stay In Your Lane
- 2 Wonder
- 3 Site Unseen
- 4 Mostly Patient
- 5 One Thing At A Time
- 6 Mantis
- 7 Sugar Plum
- 8 Same
- 9 Great Advice
- 10 Another Beautiful Day

## Produced by:

Courtney Barnett,  
John Congleton,  
Stella Mozgawa,Marta Solagni  
Recorded at:Animal Rites, LA;  
Rancho de la Luna,  
Joshua Tree

## Personnel

## includes:

Courtney Barnett  
(vocals, guitar,  
bass, Wurlitzer),  
Zachary Dawes,  
Andrew Sloane  
(bass), Flea (bass  
on "One Thing At  
A Time"), Stella  
Mozgawa (drums,  
percussion, piano,  
synth, bass), Katie  
Crutchfield (vocals  
on "Site Unseen")

god, I'm ready for a change", the guitarist repeats, fed up with her mind "always working from the same old pattern".

More unusual in their departure from form are "Sugar Plum" and "Same": the former (note the Cocteau Twins-ish title) lays insistently chiming, '80s-pop guitar atop an over-easy rock chug, while "Same" borrows from the moodier side of that decade, adding needling guitar, swirling synth and squirts of electronic noise to a Bananarama-ish melody. Barnett's skill of combining groovy

## Q&amp;A

## Courtney Barnett: "That's when the truth slips past the filter..."

## What were you aiming for with the new LP?

I don't normally approach the process with an idea of what I'm looking for, but it always reveals itself along the way. I was having a lot of fun just playing guitar and trying to learn new chords, teaching myself how to use new drum machines and trying not to get too worried about the outcome. That's when the truth slips past the filter and you find something special.

## It boasts quite the production team...

I was really curious to collaborate with new and different people on this record. Everyone who worked on these songs brought their own little piece of magic. I was struggling to finish some lyrics

from the earlier sessions, but I had also written a bunch of new tracks, so [in LA] we went straight in with John and recorded "Stay In Your Lane" and "Site Unseen". It was a burst of new energy that I really needed at that point, because I had been wallowing in low self-confidence. John was really encouraging and pulled great sounds instantly.

## "Same" is a wild card...

It was based off a chord progression from an old song of mine, originally a lot slower and on acoustic guitar. When I made the demo, I built the whole track around the drum machine and it very naturally grew into something with a lot more energy. My friend Sam [Shepherd, aka Floating Points] came to visit and started playing around with some synth sounds that I loved; then the song started sounding exciting to me. INTERVIEW: SHARON O'CONNELL

## LAUREN AUDER Whole World As Vigil

UNTITLED (RECS)

5/10

**Goth-pop outsider's heavy-going second**



At 27, Lauren Auder is an old soul with a voice like a lead pole whose art-goth ballads frequently display signs of genius – here, “Yes” sounds like a concussed Waterboys, and her Vegyn hook-up “Halo Flip” was one of 2023’s best. The Anglo-French singer-songwriter’s distinctive baritone moan does a lot of the heavy lifting on second LP *Whole World As Vigil*, addressing affairs of the heart and metaphysical themes, but too often the slick production feels overwrought like a bad Cure facsimile and the songs struggle to breathe, though the murkiness at least conveys the sense of doomed romance. **PIERS MARTIN**

## DAVID AUGUST Hymns

99CHANTS

7/10

**Increasingly experimental DJ/producer returns to his first love**



In contrast to the expansive, sometimes dissonant electronics of 2023’s *Vis*, a piano dominates these nine

sparse pieces. They’re not especially original, it’s true, with the quiet, reverbed hum of the instrument’s dampened strings immediately recalling Harold Budd and Brian Eno’s ambient-classical touchstone, 1984’s *The Pearl*. But August was raised by a professional pianist, and some tracks offer more than mere drift, not least the comparatively busy “Hymn VII”. “Hymn II” and “Hymn IV” also tease out pretty melodies, while “Hymn VI” is founded, like Nils Frahm’s “Toilet Brushes”, upon a rhythm tapped out on the piano’s frame.

**WYNDHAM WALLACE**

## AUKAI Chambers

APAPACHOA

8/10

**Rising East German finds peace and pianos back in Berlin**



Even if he’s inexplicably failed to earn any high-profile soundtracks, Markus Sieber’s work as Aukai remains profoundly cinematic. To some, the sun-dappled, sentimental landscapes conjured by his charango and acoustic guitars may veer too close to New Age, but there’s a genuine emotional heft to the 11 pieces here. Exploiting, like Nils Frahm before him, the acoustics of Berlin’s famed Funkhaus Saal 3 studio, it’s to Frahm’s many keyboards that Sieber also turns, gently filling out the reassuring crescendo of “Held” and rippling tentatively through “Las Llivias”. There’s a welcome additional depth to “Yobue”, while

# REVELATIONS

Salomon: still hitting the back of the net



## THE BEVIS FROND

**Nick Saloman on keeping the psych-pop fires burning**

“As far as I’m aware there’s nowhere actually called Horrful Heights.” Nick Saloman is pondering the title of the latest in a fruitful line of albums by his veteran underground rock outfit The Bevis Frond. “So I guess it must be a metaphorical location, or a state of mind.”

As for any guiding principles behind the album’s various alternative pop moods, Saloman can only point to an ongoing love affair with music for music’s sake. “If I wasn’t able to put

records out or play gigs, I’d still play, write and record for my own enjoyment,” he says. “I put it on a parallel with playing football, which I did regularly until about a year ago when I hurt my leg. Football cost me money every week and caused me a lot of physical pain, whereas music is relatively free of the pain element. Fortunately I’m way better at music than I ever was at football. What can I say? I’m approaching 73, the band’s been going virtually 40 years and we’re still ‘up and coming’. Much to my amazement, people still want to see us play, and seem to really like the music we’re making.” **FIONA SHEPHERD**

“Waterlight” lives up to its title’s pretty charms.

**WYNDHAM WALLACE**

## THE BEVIS FROND Horrful Heights

FIRE

8/10

**Prolific psych-pop veterans offer consistent kicks on a bumper new collection**



Led with charming DIY productivity over the past 40 years by songwriter Nick Saloman, cult indie psych outfit The

Bevis Frond have hit a fertile seam on Fire Records. Their latest album *Horrful Heights* is as good a primer as any for those wishing to wade into their free-flowing waters. Its 20 tracks encompass stormy psychedelia, obstreperous yet laser-guided garage, wyrd folk, urban country and new-wave synth buzz, all bound together by Saloman’s hangdog romance and unwavering love of ‘60s pop, which plays out most affectionately on the Small Faces whimsy of “Buffaloed” and the Syd Barrett stylings of “Animal Man”.

**FIONA SHEPHERD**

## THE BLACK CROWES A Pound Of Feathers

SILVER ARROW

8/10

**The Robinsons’ rapprochement continues to yield dividends**



The Black Crowes’ acclaimed 2024 album *Happiness Bastards* was their first for 15 years – since an apparently

conclusive falling out between Chris and Rich Robinson circa 2015. *A Pound Of Feathers* is a strike on a hot iron, re-embracing the same studio, same producer (Jay Joyce) and similar reluctance to overthink matters (it was recorded in a little over a week). Like its predecessor, it’s suffused with the cocky joy of a band who’ve remembered how much fun unreconstructed Southern rock is to play, and how good they are at playing it – especially on Skynyrdish stompers “You Call This A Good Time?” and “Cruel Streak”.

**ANDREW MUELLER**

## THE BLUEBELLS This Is... The Bluebells

LAST NIGHT FROM GLASGOW

7/10

**Sprightly second new outing for reactivated Glaswegian jangle-pop faves**



Returning with the successor to 2023’s *In The 21st Century*, The Bluebells are impressively productive for an

act that only recently ended decades of dormancy. As befits its confident title, *This Is... The Bluebells* is a more

robust showing than its predecessor, the album’s 16 songs being the collaborative handiwork of the three original Bluebells – Robert Hodgens and brothers David and Ken McCluskey – and their current bandmates. The emphasis on brightly melodic songcraft and Byrdsian vocal harmonies reinforce the band’s rep as a key forerunner of Teenage Fanclub. Likewise, the gently rocking “What I See Up On The Roof” and “Indian Summer” benefit from a fulsome quality that’s rare among the latest wave of C86-citing twee-pop revivalists.

**JASON ANDERSON**

## BOOK OF CHURCHES Book Of Churches

GRAVITY/CAPITOL

7/10

**Wistful East Midlands Americana from Divorce frontman**



Nottingham twentysomething quartet Divorce have earned big love from critics and audiences recently

with their “Wilco meets Abba” blend of playfully wonky country-folk. Meanwhile, in pockets of downtime, on the road and in faraway hotel rooms, their singer-guitarist Felix Mackenzie-Barrow has been working on this quietly lovely, sporadically sublime solo debut. Woozy, grainy, fingerpicking lo-fi ballads like “Song By A Stranger” and the glowing, psalm-like “Stones In Your Bag” offer rueful ruminations on tour bus loneliness, fading family memories, queer desire and burnt-out relationships. Trad with a modern twist, Mackenzie-Barrow adds some agreeably scuffed-up indie-rock tangents to these lap-steel sobs and soul-weary confessionals, honouring classic singer-songwriter tropes without being stifled by them.

**STEPHEN DALTON**

## BUTLER, BLAKE & GRANT Murmurs

355

7/10

**Melodic triumvirate poring over their back pages**



Following on from their 2025 calling card of brand-new songs, the trio of Bernard, Norman and James

return with a record that finds them delving into each other’s old toy boxes. Butler’s “People Move On” is refashioned as a soulful, misty reverie with tinges of gospel. Gently hues are to the fore on the soft strum and harmonies of Teenage Fanclub’s “Lonely Night”, coming as near as dammit to an indie Crosby, Stills & Nash. They veer from the template just once, on the slow country rock of “Me And Magdalena”, originally written by Death Cab For Cutie’s Ben Gibbard for a 2016 Monkees reunion album.

**TERRY STAUNTON**



Shelfaware: Flea goes it alone

# FLEA

**Honora** NONESUCH

8/10

Serial sideman finally gets to blow his own trumpet. *By Sam Richards*



WHATEVER you think of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, you have to admire Michael Peter Balzary's efforts to establish an aesthetic

hinterland beyond the unit-shifting funk-rock of his regular band. Even at the height of the Chilis' socks-on-cocks tomfoolery, Flea was telling anyone who'd listen that Gang Of Four were the greatest band who ever lived, acting in indie movies like *My Own Private Idaho*, investigating transcendental meditation and playing lounge jazz with Mike Watt. Since the turn of the millennium, he's ramped up his extracurricular activities, forming supergroups with Damon Albarn and Thom Yorke, and guesting with the likes of Patti Smith, Tom Waits and Morrissey.

He's also gravitated back towards his first instrument – trumpet – and his first musical love, jazz (his stepdad Walter Urban Jr used to host bebop jams at their house in Hollywood). It's a sideline he's taken seriously; he even enrolled to study music theory and composition at the University of Southern California, and more recently signed up for jazz lessons with Kamasi Washington's dad Rickey. Approaching his 60th birthday, Flea realised that if he didn't make his long-talked-about solo record now he never would, so he resolved to practise the trumpet every day for two years and make

an album at the end of it, come what may. *Honora* is the impressive result.

Flea's best move has been to recruit some of the most interesting musicians currently blurring the boundaries between jazz, funk, indie and experimental rock: saxophonist Josh Johnson, guitarist Jeff Parker, bassist Anna Butters and drummer Deantoni Parks. The warm, limber sound they make together inevitably overlaps with that of Parker's excellent *ETA IVtet*, in which Johnson and Butters also play.

Flea's musical and philosophical manifesto is laid out across the seven minutes of "A Plea", essentially Sun Ra's "Nuclear War" retooled for a time when the overriding threat is not (necessarily) mass irradiation by a foreign power but being gunned down in the street by your own government forces. People like to say that the solutions to these confrontations are complex, but Flea insists it's actually pretty simple: "Everyone just wants to be loved... And everything besides love is cowardice".

This bravura opener is offset by the tense, slippery groove of "Traffic Lights"

## SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Golden Wingship
- 2 A Plea
- 3 Traffic Lights
- 4 Frailed
- 5 Morning Cry
- 6 Maggot Brain
- 7 Wichita Lineman
- 8 Thinkin Bout You
- 9 Willow Weep For Me
- 10 Free As I Want To Be

**Produced by:** Josh Johnson  
**Recorded at:** Sunset Sound, Hollywood, California; additional recording on "Wichita Lineman" at Soundtree, London  
**Personnel includes:** Flea (electric bass, vocals, trumpet), Jeff Parker (guitar, vocals), Anna Butters (upright bass, vocals), Deantoni Parks (drums, vocals), Josh Johnson (alto saxophone, piano, synths, vocals), Mauro Refosco (percussion), Rickey Washington (alto flute), Vikram Devasthali (trombone), Chad Smith (drums), Chris Warren (vocals), Nathaniel Walcott (Fender Rhodes, vocals, string arrangements), Nick Cave (vocals), Thom Yorke (vocals, piano, synth), Warren Ellis (alto flute, viola), John Frusciante (trumpet, treatments, synths), Sasha Berliner (vibraphone), Brian Walsh (clarinet, bass clarinet), Derek Davis (flute)

– featuring a tense, slippery vocal from Flea's old Atoms For Peace bandmate Thom Yorke – and the slow, dubby, cinematic build of "Frailed". These are presumably the "deep hypnotic grooves" that Flea had initially envisaged creating way back in 1991, and it might have been nice to hear more of them.

However, it's hard to deny that Flea's trumpet-playing sounds more emotionally uninhibited when riffing on someone else's tune, exemplified by a moving version of Funkadelic's mournful mind-

mangler "Maggot Brain". Ann Ronnell's jazz standard "Willow Weep For Me" is not especially improved by a swarm of space-invader synths; but a subtly orchestrated take on Frank Ocean's "Thinkin About You" is a triumph, with Flea playing the song's tumbling, wistful verses on bass guitar before passionately blasting out its glorious chorus melody on trumpet.

One final twirl of that impressive Rolodex finds Nick Cave wandering in to sing "Wichita Lineman", given the gentlest of midnight swings by the band. Taken on its own merits, it's brilliant and beautiful. Of course it is: it's Nick Cave doing "Wichita Lineman". But it also feels like too much of a sure thing for an album attempting – largely successfully – to tap into a culture that's all about spontaneity and risk.

So maybe this could have been two different records: the big-name covers album and the back-room jam session. But in terms of conveying the passions, frustrations and intriguing contractions of its restless instigator, *Honora* is perfect.

## Q&A

**Flea: "I wept like a baby, man"**

**What prompted you to recruit the likes of Jeff Parker and Josh Johnson for this album?**

For quite a while, up until pretty close before making it, I didn't know if I was going to get any musicians or just do it all myself. I was making demos at home with my 808, playing bass and trumpet and keyboards, and I was thinking about doing it like that. There were a couple of records I was listening to a lot at the time. One was *The Way Out Of Easy* by Jeff Parker's *ETA IVtet* and another was Meshell Ndegeocello's *The Omnichord Real Book*, which Josh produced. I thought, 'Fuck, man, if I was going to partner up with anybody, he would be the perfect guy.'

**What was it like to essentially join a pre-existing improv quartet?** I was excited and nervous because they're all very studied jazz

musicians and I'm an uneducated fucking punk rocker with a lot of hope and yearning. I have my fair amount of intuition and emotion that has served me well through the years, but I don't really know my bebop shit, I don't really know my alt chords. But I wanted to learn it. The first day in the studio was really moving, how they were there for me. Every take felt great.

**How did you persuade Nick Cave to sing "Wichita Lineman"?** I played with him and Warren [Ellis] a little bit on the *Carnage* tour. In one of my few conversations with Nick, he had expressed to me his love for Jimmy Webb and I was like, "God, maybe he'd want to sing on this?" It just felt right, so I sent him the track, and he responded within a half-hour: "Yes, I'll do it." When I heard it, I wept like a fucking baby, man. He really just destroyed me.

INTERVIEW: SAM RICHARDS



Precise memories: Charlotte Cornfield

# CHARLOTTE CORNFIELD

## Hurts Like Hell MERGE

8/10

The Toronto singer-songwriter returns with a country-tinged album that lives up to its title.

By Stephen Deusner



*"I REMEMBER where we were when you said it"*, Charlotte Cornfield sings at the beginning of "Living With It", the tender, hopeful heart of her sixth album, *Hurts Like Hell*. Sounding

a bit like Gillian Welch in both the tone of her voice and the clarity of her phrasing, the Toronto singer-songwriter doesn't say exactly what it was that was said to her, but it's easy enough to guess. This is, after all, an album about a new relationship. Ultimately, what was said doesn't matter nearly as much as the fact that she remembers the scene so precisely – a hotel with double-locked doors between their rooms, a nifty manifestation of the obstacles that stand between these two tentative lovers. No doubt Cornfield can recall the colour of the carpet, the view from the window, the settings on the aircon unit. *"I remember everything"*, she sings, which sounds both beautiful and burdensome.

*Hurts Like Hell* is an album full of memories, about those little moments that stick with you over time and eventually make up a full life: that tender first kiss, that day at the beach, that debate about Neil Young's best album. She knows the airport gate where she boarded a plane taking her far from this new person in her life. She still sings a song by a band that played only one show before breaking up. She sings about throwing up in the morning before she knew she was pregnant. Cornfield doesn't have a photographic memory; she has a lyrical memory. She drops these little details into her songs not simply to chronicle them but to figure them out – why they stick with her, what they mean. What she doesn't remember she makes

up. For her listeners these scraps of a life create a larger world full of vivid characters, ongoing conflicts and weeping guitars.

As a songwriter, as a singer, in every way possible, Cornfield levels up on *Hurts Like Hell*. Her previous records were sharply observed but tended to be too cleanly produced. Her new songs chronicle major life changes – a committed relationship, the arrival of her first child – which seem to raise the stakes considerably. Following the release of 2023's *Could Have Done Anything*, Cornfield found herself balancing music and family, without much time to write. When her daughter started nursery school, she holed up in the backyard writing shed of her friend Tamara Lindeman (The Weather Station), where she found the time

### SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Before
- 2 Hurts Like Hell
- 3 Lost Leader
- 4 Lucky
- 5 Living With It
- 6 Number
- 7 Squiddd
- 8 Kitchen
- 9 Long Game
- 10 Bloody And Alive

**Produced by:** Philip Weinrobe  
**Recorded at:** Sugar Mountain Recording, Brooklyn, NY  
**Personnel includes:** Charlotte Cornfield (vocals, piano, guitar), Adam Brisbin (guitar, pedal steel), Bridget Kearney (bass, vocals), El Kempner (guitar, vocals), Sean Mullins (drums), Nuria Graham (piano, vocals), Philip Weinrobe (synth), Buck Meek (vocals), Leslie Feist (vocals), Christian Lee Hutson (vocals), Maia Friedman (vocals), Daniel Pencer (saxophone)

and the quiet to dream up new songs and stories. Then she recorded them with Philip Weinrobe, best known for his production and engineering work with Big Thief, Hand Habits and Lonnie Holley. They assembled a ragtag band and invited Leslie Feist, Buck Meek and Christian Lee Hutson to drop by and sing harmonies.

*Hurts Like Hell* leans into a kind of intimate country sound, with subtly twangy guitars, a loose rhythm section and smears of pedal steel. Her band clocks a gentle groove on "Lucky" and "Long Game", always complementing Cornfield's vocals rather than overwhelming them. They intensify the poignancy as well as the playfulness of her songwriting, especially on the switchback hook on the title track. Listen to the way she sings the second verse: *"You just bolted, crestfallen, crying in your car, thinking, 'How appalling'"*. She hits a wry note at the end, savouring the clever rhyme as though it's a punchline. It's a disarmingly funny moment, her new self making a joke at her old self's expense.

Like Faye Webster or Wednesday's Karly Hartzman, Cornfield makes every line count. And, like Lucinda Williams or John Prine, she knows to leave her songs open-ended. She writes to pose questions rather than present facts or provide answers – What does this memory mean? Why won't it let go of her? – and it sounds like she's still figuring it all out even now. She often sounds genuinely surprised by these turns of events, not because she doesn't feel worthy of love but because it never plays out like a love song. Life moves unexpectedly, so her songs do, too.

*"Real love, no fantasy"*, she sings on opener "Before", repeating it like a mantra or a deeply held wish. By the time "Kitchen" rolls around, she's quietly astounded that her wish has come true: *"Who knew that it could be so natural, grounded and factual, passionate and actual"*. The song itself is harrowing, but there's a happy ending in there somewhere, if only because that epiphany sticks with her. She remembers everything.

### Q&A

**Charlotte Cornfield: "I've been in a really positive place"**

**What does it mean to put so many of your own memories into your songs?**

I've been doing it for so long now that it's all that I know. Over time I've figured a way to be present in the emotion of the song, then move on after the show is over. I've been in a really positive place in my life for the last eight years, in a great relationship and now in family mode, so the pain of the past feels like it's far behind me.

**This album sounds rawer and looser. Was that something you intended or what the songs demanded?**

I gravitated towards more stripped-down,

spontaneous-sounding records, like Bobby Charles' "Small Town Talk". Philip Weinrobe suggested we put together a band and not let them hear a single note until we were all in the room together on day one. That drew out the emotionality of the songs in a very fitting way.

**You write a lot about the music you love on these songs.**

The music scene has been a huge part of life since I was a teenager, and so many of my experiences of growing up are rooted there. The songs and artists referenced on the record are woven into that coming-of-age time for me: Neil Young's *Zuma*, Karen Dalton, Sharon Van Etten's "Our Love".

INTERVIEW:STEPHEN DEUSNER

## CHALK

### Crystalpunk

ALTER MUSIC

7/10

Belfast group explore identity via industrial noise pop



"The Irish don't want us, the British don't want us", sings Ross Cullen on "Béal Feirste", over

a thumping electronic beat that sounds like a long-lost gem from '90s-era Underworld. This duality – exploring identity, historical trauma and a sense of place over euphoric, maximalist music – is central to Chalk's debut album. The techno-industrial stomp of "Tongue" sounds like turbocharged Nine Inch Nails, while "Can't Feel It" is pure catharsis, with a detonating drop in the middle of it. Subtle it is not, but it's thrilling, adrenaline-pumping stuff that's as fun as it is angry.

DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

## LUKE COMBS

### The Way I Am

SONY MUSIC NASHVILLE/SEVEN RIDGES

7/10

Inevitably one of the biggest country albums of 2026, but not undeservedly



It would be easy to dismiss Combs as the epitome of large-hatted mainstream country. *The Way I Am*, like his previous mega-selling albums, offers ample evidence for such a conclusion. "My Kinda Saturday Night", for example, is what might be expected of a song entitled "My Kinda Saturday Night", all growling guitars, pounding pianos and soaring choruses extolling the merits of beer, pickup trucks and jukeboxes. But it is no less irresistibly rousing for that, and the same can be said of the broadly similar "Back In The Saddle" and "Alcohol Of Fame", the latter a defiant drinker's anthem twisting on a groanworthy pun evocative of Brad Paisley. Combs' skill as a balladeer is also abundant, even to the extent of – on "Daytona 499" – landing a rueful devotional anchored to a NASCAR metaphor.

ANDREW MUELLER

## CRACK CLOUD

### Peace And Purpose

TIN ANGEL

7/10

Canadian outfit explore grief on stripped-back latest



Recorded with one microphone and a variety of junk instruments, Crack Cloud's Zach Choy set out to wrestle with a "winter of prolonged grief" to produce a record of raw, experimental music that unfolds in eclectic and unpredictable ways. "Safe Room" is lo-fi alt.rock, catchy and quietly moving, while tracks like "Eris On The Run" lean into Royal Trux-style chaotic noise, and "Marathon Of Hope" sounds like deconstructed



Cut Worms' Max Clarke: self-assured

new wave. The album is filled with jagged rhythms and tonal shifts, seemingly embracing the messiness and discordant feelings that grief can produce with this collection of fittingly scattered yet unique songs.

DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

## SPENCER CULLUM'S COIN COLLECTION

### Spencer Cullum's Coin Collection Volume 3

FULL TIME HOBBY

8/10

Romford-born, Nashville-based guitarist completes his trilogy



Cullum's Coin Collection project has always looked to vintage sounds and imagery – just check out the cover shot

on his debut – but with its pastoral, lo-fi textures and retro hard panning, the project's final LP is his most time-warped yet. It's also Cullum's most bewitching, with the guitarist and his community of friends placing tales inspired by the hellscape of 2025 over music that recalls Witchseason's prime and, on "Washed Upon The Shore" especially, Robert Wyatt. Any sense of musical nostalgia is banished by the quality and restraint of the performances and the album's majestic, half-asleep flow.

TOM PINNOCK

## CUT WORMS

### Transmitter

JAGJAGUWAR

9/10

Brooklyn-based Ohioan comes into his own on a visit to Chicago



On *Transmitter*, Cut Worms' fourth album, Max Clarke reaches a rarefied level of expressiveness

and self-assurance alongside Jeff Tweedy, who, serving as producer, lead guitarist and bassist, surrounds his charge with sparkling settings for Clarke's regular-guy ruminations. On opener "Worlds Unknown", Tweedy's chiming guitar filigrees supersaturate the vividness of Clarke's cinematic lyric, whereupon these kindred spirits bring relatable humanity to spirited retro-rockers ("Evil Twin", "Long Weekend"), sad-sack ballads ("Barfly", "Shut In") and an unexpected side trip to Strawberry Fields ("Don't Look Down"). Throughout, Clarke sounds as if he's

pouring out his troubles and hopes to a confidant, as Wilco's Loft becomes his sanctuary, while *Transmitter* doubles as the most delightfully expansive showcase for Tweedy's song-serving guitar wizardry since *A Ghost Is Born*.

BUD SCOPPA

## DEARY

### Birding

BELLA UNION

6/10

London dreampop trio's promising if generic debut



These southeast Londoners list their influences as Cocteau Twins, MBW and Slowdive, and that's no surprise

given the evident inspiration their first full album draws from those acts. But when their compositions summon the character to add new touches to the traditional shoegaze formula, they can really captivate, as when Dottie Cockram's gossamer-soft vocal on "Smile" is underpinned by cavernous Cure-like bass rumble before clouds of glacial noise envelop it. The delicate piano, tingling wind chimes and stormy ambience of the title track also reach new levels of intoxicating. A stepping stone to more original work to come? Could well be.

JOHNNY SHARP

## DELPHINE DORA

### L'Ineluctable Pulsation Du Temps

MARIONETTE

8/10

Quietly mystical instrumental music from French composer



Multi-instrumentalist Delphine Dora reaches a state of rhythmic transcendence on

her latest release, a scintillating blend of neoclassical, folk and ambient. This suite of instrumentals, performed largely on piano and Nord Electro keyboard, is charged with the atmospheric textures of Dora's environment at the time of recording: a change in scenery from city life to a small village in the French countryside. The only other instrument is a musical saw, imbuing "Ubiquité" with an eerie playfulness. The album as a whole is graceful, deliberate and unassumingly esoteric; transportive enchantment

that owes as much to krautrock as it does to traditional classical music.

ANA GAVRILOVSKA

## FIELD COMMANDER ALI

### The Next From Field Commander

WORLD OF ECHO

8/10

Ghostly but grounded melodies from mysterious Australian folk singer



The second album by Field Commander Ali, the project of Wollongong's Ali Mollica, is a smart, brief collection of

folk-inflected songs that pivot on the everyday. Other examples of such fragile music can seem fey or precious, but Mollica's songs are neither – she delivers her melodies and lyrics such that each song expresses the clarity of the revelatory moment. There's a touch of Jessica Pratt in there, and the shapeshifting spirit recalls Aldous Harding, but comparisons only go so far. The impressive thing is how artful Mollica's creative personality is, at such an early stage. JONDALE

## FLICKERS FROM THE FEN

### Stoned In Gielinor III

CRYPT OF THE WIZARD

8/10

High fantasy and bountiful melodies from Somerset synth explorer



Dungeon synth – a gloomy, fantasy-inflected sound spawned out at the far fringes of black metal – has undergone an unlikely renaissance over the last decade or so, while venturing far beyond its underground roots. One of the genre's pluckiest explorers is Mercian Sam, the wizard-hatted creator behind Flickers From The Fen. Flickers have made hay by leaning into the genre's whimsical side, embracing a rich, folkish melodic quality spearheaded by florid strokes from Sam's fiddle. Their third album is a stirring listen – by turns playful, wistful and, on album centerpiece "Beast Beyond Belief", striking notes of booming menace.

LOUIS PATTISON



Flickers From The Fen



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## AMERICANA

Album of the month



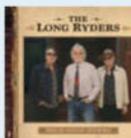
The Long Ryders: indomitable spirit and righteous vigour

## THE LONG RYDERS

High Noon Hymns CHERRY RED

8/10

Paisley Underground veterans continue their remarkable second act



2023's autumnal *September November* appeared to put the seal on The Long Ryders' late-career comeback, one that had begun four years earlier with *Psychedelic Country Soul*, their first new studio album in over 30 years.

Here were the forefathers of alt.country, peeling back time and reclaiming their turf in some style, despite the recent loss of beloved longstanding bassist Tom Stevens. But they clearly weren't done. *High Noon Hymns* is a further testament to their enduring power, an assured roots-rock synthesis of American mores that draws deep from lived experience.

Continuity seems to be key to the band's core trio of Sid Griffin, Stephen McCarthy and Greg Sowders. Regular producer Ed Stasium returns, as do Old 97's mainstay Murry Hammond on bass and X percussionist DJ Bonebrake, reprising their duties from *September November*. The songs themselves range from ringing country-rockers to soulful ballads and varying shades between, thematically weighted between reflection and

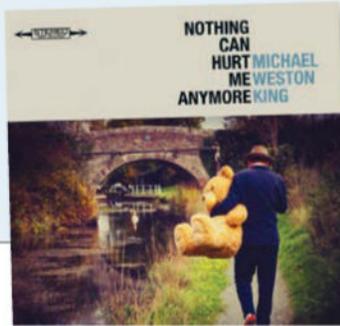
renewal. "A Hymn For The City Of Angels", for instance, finds Kentucky native Griffin paying tender tribute to Los Angeles, scene of his formative musical days in the late '70s: "Home to all those dreamers, drifters and the aged/Young in all their colours..." Similarly, "How Do You Want To Be Loved?" traces a romantic journey from youthful soundtracks of The Go-Go's and the Stones to the present, the fire still glowing despite being "not as young as we used to be".

But *High Noon Hymns* also faces forward. Griffin's "Four Winters Away" proposes a toast to the future, one where the current incumbent of the White House is consigned to history, leaving the rest blessing their luck and counting his sins. McCarthy's midtempo "World Without Fear" takes a broader view of societal ills ("It takes a lot of love in a weary world"), underscored by the snapping, scornful "Down To The Well". But it's the album's sole cover, a full-hearted version of Dylan's "Forever Young", that perhaps best embodies the album's indomitable spirit and righteous vigour.

ROB HUGHES

## AMERICANA ROUND-UP

COINCIDING with their UK tour this spring, **Cowboy Junkies** issue 3LP set *Open To Beauty* **COOKING VINYL** in early May. The collection revisits key tracks from the Canadian cult legends' post-millennial studio albums. "We're now 25 years into this century, the beginning of which saw us leave the world of major labels and return to making music as an independent band," explains guitarist/songwriter Michael Timmins. "We figured this was as good a time as any to look back, reassess and reflect." Elsewhere, the unbearably poignant *Nothing Can Hurt Me Anymore* **CONTINENTAL RECORD SERVICES** sees **Michael Weston King**—one half of My Darling Clementine alongside wife Lou Dagleish—channel personal tragedy and grief into songs informed by the loss of the couple's



six-year-old granddaughter in the 2024 Southport attacks. Musically, King deals in Springsteen-like epics, Southern Gothic ballads and jazz-scented folk. Guests include Jeb Loy Nichols and Erin Moran, aka A Girl Called Eddy. Lou's own solo album, navigating similar themes, is due later this year. Over in Nashville, look out for newcomer **Maisy Owen**, whose *Dark On A Sunny Day* **TOMPKINS SQUARE** is a compelling debut reminiscent of Anne Briggs, Mazzy Star or Nick Drake. The daughter of Oscar-nominated songwriter Gwil Owen, her fingerpicked guitar and haunting poeticism is already attracting famous admirers. Veteran producer Joe Boyd hails her as "an original voice with no modernist clichés in her singing or songwriting".

ROB HUGHES

## SEAMUS FOGARTY

Ships

LOST MAP

8/10

Poignant chronicles from Mayo-bred musical alchemist



The contrasting tones of Moog synthesiser and tin whistle intertwine with languid ease in

Seamus Fogarty's music. His latest album is a gently inventive showcase of his plaintive songwriting, leavened with wry humour, propelled by peppy arpeggiated rhythms and finessed with canny production from Leo Abrahams and Tunng's Mike Lindsay. The touching elegy "I Passed Your House" settles into a rolling gait and is beautifully fitted out with the diary-like directness of Fogarty's rhythmic vocals. Legato notes and devotional tones meet over a pliant bassline and a swelling brass fanfare on "Doer Undoer" and "They Recognised Him" is pure Celtic beat poetry.

FIONA SHEPHERD

## CHRIS FORSYTH'S

WHAT IS NOW

Both/And

BANDCAMP

8/10

Compelling first from Philly guitar don's new trio



That guitarist Chris Forsyth's creativity bucks against containment is proven by his work in both Solar

Motel Band and BASIC, as well as hook-ups with explorers like Bill Nace and Doug McCombs. Now, a new venture featuring double bassist John Moran (who's served with Daniel Villarreal) and drummer Joey Sullivan. Elegantly raw improv is the name of the game in these three longform tracks – all recorded live – which traverse disassembled rock, dub, kosmische, experimental jazz and gnawa to hypnotically opened, masterfully controlled effect. Forsyth's lean, distinctively ringing guitar, flanged for heady impact in "7-11 Red Eye" naturally looms large but this is ensemble playing at its intuitive best. **SHARON O'CONNELL**



Seamus Fogarty: languid ease



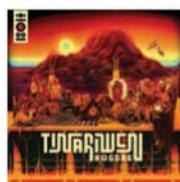
Just desert: Tinariwen

# TINARIWEN

Hoggar WEDGE

9/10

Tuareg trailblazers' fired-up 10th. *By Nigel Williamson*



IT'S now a quarter of a century since *Uncut* first wrote about Tinariwen, when we reviewed 2001's inaugural Festival In The Desert. At a remote site two days drive into the Sahara, we marvelled at the band's performance under an eclipse of the moon, in front of an audience comprising sword-wielding Tuareg warriors on camels and a tiny handful of intrepid European world music fans.

The group were already veterans who had spent the best part of two decades playing the hypnotic guitar music they call *ishumar* or *assouf* for their own peoples scattered nomadically across the desert borderlands between Mali and Algeria; but that review was their first mention in any western media and the prelude to a remarkable journey that led to them winning the *Uncut* Music Award in 2010 for their fourth album *Imidiwan* and two years later a Grammy award for *Tassili*.

Along the way their 'desert blues' – as it reductively became known – picked up a host of celebrity fans including Robert Plant, Bono, Damon Albarn, Nels Cline, TV On The Radio, Kurt Vile, Mark Lanegan, Cass McCombs and Warren Ellis, all of whom have either jammed with Tinariwen live or guested on their records. Meanwhile a host of younger acts including Imarhan, Songhoy Blues and Bombino have come to the fore, influenced and inspired by Tinariwen to create an entire sub-genre of psyched-up Saharan blues-rock.

Yet if Tinariwen's journey from gun-toting rebels who got together in a refugee camp in Libya in the 1980s to 21st-century stars of festival stages from Glastonbury to Coachella seems an

effortless story of talent recognised and creativity rewarded, in reality their path has been strewn with boulders that might so easily have irrevocably blocked their path.

Forged in troubled times as exiled fighters for the Tuareg cause, there has since been the occasional uneasy truce, but the troubles have never abated as their homeland has been beset by drought, famine, coups, guerrilla wars, rebellions, sectarian violence and terrorism. The adversity reached a tipping point in 2012 when the militant Islamist group Ansar Dine overran their home in northern Mali and banned music, forcing Tinariwen into exile again in a pre-Trumpian, pre-ICE America. They found refuge in the Mojave desert where in an arid, sparsely populated environment similar to their homeland they recorded *Emmaar* (2014) and parts of *Elwan* (2016).

Unable to return home, further albums were recorded in Morocco and Mauritania. Their last album, 2023's *Amatssou*, was recorded across the Sahara. By then Mali had suffered another military coup, murderous terrorists linked to Islamic State and a resurgent al-Qaeda were rampant and Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group were carrying out summary executions. As of 2026, the insurgency continues and western nations advise against all travel to Mali.

Tinariwen's 10th album is in many ways dominated by this worsening security and

humanitarian crisis. Recorded in Imarhan's studio in Tamanrasset in southern Algeria, it takes its title from the Hoggar mountain range, visible for miles to nomadic tribes across the Central Saharan desert and serving as a symbol of homeland and a metaphor for Tinariwen's role as fierce and immovable ambassadors for Tuareg culture.

Three of the group's founding members – Ibrahim Ag Alhabib, Abdallah Ag Alhousseyni and Touhami Ag Alhassane – remain and are joined here for the first time in 25 years by

Tinariwen co-founder Diarra and by younger musicians from the bands Imarhan and Terakaft in a trans-generational communal summit of tribal elders and their disciples.

As for the music, all these years on, Tinariwen's loping, syncopated rhythms and interlocking serpentine guitars now sound familiar rather than exotic, although the raw earthiness of the sound – here more acoustic and stripped-down than on much of their recent work – has lost none of its visceral power.

More than ever, though, you need the translations of their Tamasheq lyrics to grasp the full extent of the foreboding and sense of crisis that pervades the album from the opener "Amidinim Ehaf Solan", a slow and mournful threnody for the fortunes of the Tuareg people, to the dark "Aba Malik", a dubbed-up malediction of Beefheartian intensity directed at the Russian mercenaries who have invaded the land ("curse you Wagner/Curse your mother!").

On "Imidiwan Takyadam" the sweet tones of José González contrast gloriously with the earthy basso profundo of Ibrahim Ag Alhabib over a female chorus lamenting the plight of their sisters living under the "hellish tyranny" of Islamist misogyny.

Imarhan's Iyad Moussa Ben Abderrahmane provides the deep, echoing desert blues guitar lines over a rhythm of clattering hand claps on the sombre "Tad Adounya" and there's more apocalyptic blues lamentation on "Erghad Afeweto", which finds the Tuaregs' desert lands on fire and populated only by "the orphaned child and the rotting carcasses of the herds."

There are odd moments of playfulness, most notably on "Khay Erikan" which translates as "new model" and indulges Tuareg campfire dreams of owning the latest Toyota Landcruiser, like a riposte to Janis Joplin's "Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz?". The melismatic Sudanese chanteuse Sulafa Elyas also offers a ray of sunshine on the lovely traditional

folk song "Sagherat Assan".

Such light relief is welcome. Elsewhere, amid a troubling world of woe, this is Tinariwen as deep and darkly compelling as we've ever heard them.

## SLEEVE NOTES

- 1 Amidinim Ehaf Solan
- 2 Imidiwan Takyadam
- 3 Erghad Afewo
- 4 Tad Adounya
- 5 Asstaghfero Allah
- 6 Sagherat Assani
- 7 N'ak Tenere Iyat
- 8 Amidinin Wadar Nohar
- 9 Khay Erikan
- 10 Dounia Tau Ray
- 11 Aba Malik

### Produced by:

Patrick Votan

### Recorded at:

Abbogi Studio,

Tamanrasset,

Algeria

### Personnel:

Ibrahim Ag Alhabib (vocals

guitar), Abdallah

Ag Alhousseyni (vocals, guitar),

Touhami Ag

Alhassane (vocals,

guitar), Liya ag Abili

aka Diarra (guitar),

Iyad Moussa Ben

Abderrahmane

(vocals, guitar),

Eyadou Ag Leche

(bass), Elaga Ag

Hamid (guitars,

background

vocals), Sanou A

Hamed (guitars,

background

vocals), Said Ag

Ayad (djembe,

calabash), Haiballah

Akhamouk

(calabash, backing

vocals), Abdelkader

Ourzig (guitars),

Hicham Bouhasse

(guitars percussion,

backing vocals),

Wonou Walet Sidati,

Nounou Kaola,

Anana Harouna

(backing vocals),

Emile Papandreu

(E-Bow), Fora

(acoustic guitar),

José González

(vocals), Sulafa

Elyas (vocals, lute)

**BILLY FULLER**  
**Fragments** INVADA  
 8/10

**Beak> bassist steps out with an impeccable solo album**



After decades spent playing with the likes of Robert Plant and Baxter Dury, but most prominently as one-third of

Beak>, Fuller is going it alone with his debut solo album. These 16 short, soundtrack-ish sketches are unsurprisingly heavy on the bass guitar, usually woozy and distorted, but synths, guitars, violin and drum machines also add to the dystopian haze. Cold wave, early Cabaret Voltaire, Kraftwerk and Berlin-era Bowie are touchstones, from the fuzz funk of "Todo" and the almost-jazz noir of "Won A Synth" to "Blackstar", guitar-strafed synth motorik that echoes Edgar Froese's early solo work. **TOM PINNOCK**

**GONG**  
**Bright Spirit** KSCOPE  
 7/10

**Energising return of celebrated space-rock adventurers**



Daavid Allen has been gone for more than a decade now, but the current iteration of Gong – the longest-running lineup in the band's history – hold close to his voyaging cosmic philosophy. The third in a trilogy that began with 2019's *The Universe Also Collapses*, *Bright Spirit* is a wide-ranging set flooded with singer-guitarist Kavus Torabi's metaphysical imagery. Skronky prog-jazz epic "Dream Of Mine" exudes rich Middle Eastern flavours, courtesy of sax player Ian East; "The Wonderment" seeks enlightenment amid golden rays of synth-fed psychedelia; and "Fragrance Of Paradise" is a protean wonder pitched between the carnal and the divine. **ROB HUGHES**

**JOSÉ GONZÁLEZ**  
**Against The Dying Of The Light** CITY SLANG  
 8/10

**Soft-sung Swede takes steelier lyrical focus on fifth LP**



As gently as González warbles acoustic vignettes in multiple languages, he's got strong words for us. "It's time to

stop pretending to know shit you don't know", he croons on "Sheet", over hypnotically dovetailing Spanish guitar lines. "Losing Game (Sick)" quietly enquires, "When did we turn on each other?" amid rivetingly rhythmic fingerpicking, but he's no less bewitching when "U/Rawls Sloja" appears to be sung in Croatian over Kozelek-style melancholia, and "Gymnasten" (Dutch this time?) is wreathed in gentle choral backing. But happier sentiments still get a look-in as sparkling fret tickles underpin the lilting "You & We". Righteous and blissful.

**JOHNNY SHARP**

**KIM GORDON**  
**Play Me** MATADOR  
 9/10

**Postmodern Post-It notes on guitarist and singer's solo third**



If Gordon fears that "three chords won't kill corporate rule" on her follow-up to the bludgeoning beats and sampler scree of 2024's *The Collective*, she's valiantly continuing her list-song commentary on our technofeudalist age anyway. Made in collaboration with Justin Raisen once again, *Play Me* explores new territory – swinging vintage hip-hop ("Play Me"), Klaus Dinger motorik ("Not Today"), late-MBV industrial clatter ("Busy Bee", with help from Dave Grohl) – alongside Gordon's now customary Carti-esque trap. Finally she takes on the Trump administration in "ByeBye25!", one landmark among many in her forward-thinking solo career.

**TOM PINNOCK**

**GREEN-HOUSE**  
**Hinterlands** GHOSTLY INTERNATIONAL  
 8/10

**Entrancing environmental music pairs sound design with kaleidoscopic melodies**



**House Of All: grounded but visionary**



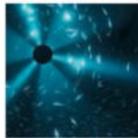
Originally a solo eco-ambient project founded by LA-based artist Olive Ardizoni, Green-House is

now a duo, with the official addition of long-time collaborator Michael Flanagan. The instrumentation on this latest album fizzles and charms, a mix of organic and synthetic sounds that feel as elemental as they do patently man-made. The immersive spirit of high-definition sound design further imbues this eclectic music with the cinematic thrum of humanity yearning for a sense of connection to nature, wonderfully expressed in moments such as the glass-like synths of "Sun Dogs", the folk riffs of "Hinterland I" and the jazzy woodwinds of "Hinterland III". **ANA GAVRILOVSKA**

**LAUREL HALO**  
**Midnight Zone (Original Soundtrack)**

**AWE**  
 7/10

**American composer's ominous music for a film installation**



Densely textured and keenly pressurised, the music on Laurel Halo's latest work feels like it emerges from a place that's

very dark and very, very deep. That makes it an entirely fitting accompaniment to the visuals it serves, which French-Swiss artist Julian Charrière created by sending a camera thousands of feet down into the uncharted depths of the Pacific. Understandably, there are few traces of the more liminal varieties of beauty that distinguish recent Halo efforts like 2023's *Atlas*, though a sense of eerie gracefulness often imbues the music here as various sonic elements cut through the inky drones like shards of light. **JASON ANDERSON**

**HEMI HEMINGWAY**  
**Wings Of Desire**

**PNKSLM**  
 8/10

**Repatriated Kiwi takes flight on sophisticated second**



Its title's salute to Wim Wenders, not to mention Hemingway's grooming habits, suggest an affinity

with fellow Antipodean Nick Cave, but this follow-up to 2023's *Strangers Again* shares more with Bryan Ferry, especially 1985's debonair *Boys And Girls*. "This City's Tryna Break My Heart" combines guitar and saxophone solos with prominent

percussion, while the kaleidoscopic keyboard riff of "Desiree" is underpinned by a stark bassline, and a falsetto croon crowns the muted "6th April '13". "Long Distance Lover"'s murmured sweet nothings embellish soulful funk arguably akin to Love And Money, but the moody synthpop of "No Future No Future No Future" provides a melodramatic climax. **WYNDHAM WALLACE**

**BRUCE HORNSBY**  
**Indigo Park**

**ZAPPO/THIRTY TIGERS**  
 7/10

**The late Bob Weir and Robert Hunter add poignancy to historic ruminations**



Bruce Hornsby's brief, auxiliary Grateful Dead membership has led to extended participation

in its post-Garcia trip, and a solo renaissance which this time incorporates his "The Way It Is" past with moments of AOR pop. Personal history illuminates his piano's Sisyphean, semi-classical climb through "Silhouette Shadows", as JFK is shot to Republican classmates' cheers. Phased guitars recall that past's sweetest '60s spot as lyrics touch on wider, cosmic decay. The epic "Might As Well Be Me, Florida" is the best of two Robert Hunter co-writes, featuring Bob Weir's weathered, benign cowboy vocal on a last droll venture into the counter-culture territories. **NICK HASTED**

**HOUSE OF ALL**  
**Inklings**

**TINY GLOBAL PRODUCTIONS**  
 7/10

**More everyday mysticism from Bramah and co**



There's a Fall-like groove to *Inklings* at times – no surprise, given this band's membership is mostly ex-Fall

members – but the songs of Martin Bramah, from the Blue Orchids onwards, have always gestured towards so much more than his formative musical experiences. Indeed, if songs like "Wrecked" and "Sweet Remembrancer" recall anything, it's the sky-blinded ambitions of the Orchids' masterpiece *The Greatest Hit*, equal parts grounded and visionary. House Of All aren't quite ready to cut the umbilical yet – there's a song here named "Ours Is The Fall" – but they have their own hallucinatory, oneiric thing going. **JON DALE**



**Gong: more cosmic voyages**

## KING TUFF

Moo MUP  
7/10

Garage rocker finds himself by going back to basics on album seven



Feeling lost after some musical sidesteps, King Tuff's Kyle Thomas decided to dig out the same eight-track tape

recorder he used on his 2012 self-titled breakthrough album and embrace the raw power of primitive rock'n'roll. The opening "Twisted On A Train" sets the tone for a record of fuzzy, hooky, poppy garage-rock stompers. There's also some frazzled slow-burn country in "Crosseyed Critters" and a touch of 1970s AOR to the comparatively polished "Unglued", while "Delusions" is pure Guided By Voices territory. There's a palpable sense of fun in this record, with all signs pointing to an artist feeling re-energised and rejuvenated.

DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

## KRONOS QUARTET

Glorious Mahalia

SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS  
7/10

Modern classical unit gives praise to late gospel queen



On *Glorious Mahalia*, Kronos Quartet compose a suite of new music to accompany the voice of Mahalia

Jackson. There are songs here, such as a spine-tingling take on "Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child" reconfigured with shrill, keening strings. But elsewhere, *Glorious Mahalia* plays like a documentary, adding musical colour to archival audio of Jackson in conversation with the oral historian Studs Terkel. Kronos seek to dramatise the pain and the passion in Jackson's words, and some moments work better than others, the subtle generally being better than the overwrought. But Jackson's spirit shines through, and the historical detail – including Jackson's friendship with Martin Luther King Jr and her role in the Civil Rights movement – is enlightening. LOUIS PATTISON

## LADYTRON

Paradises NETTWERK

8/10

Liverpool electro-poppers aim for the dancefloor on vast latest



Ladytron's eighth album is their most dance-oriented yet – and their longest, with 73 minutes spread over 16 tracks.

Spanning electro, disco, house, Balearic and synthpop, it runs the entire gamut of electronic music. "Kingdom Undersea" has a Pet-Shop-Boys-meets-acid-house skip to its infectious grooves, while "I Believe In You" merges clattering 80s with dreamy vocals and dancefloor-ready rhythms. It's familiar terrain for those accustomed to the group's sound palette – and momentum sags



# REVELATIONS

Kyle Thomas: "Fun rock'n'roll music!"

## KING TUFF

"Perfection is boring," says the revitalised Vermont rocker

"It was extremely rejuvenating," says Kyle Thomas, of finishing his latest King Tuff record. "I finally feel like myself again after a decade of wandering around in different directions. I certainly needed to do all that exploring and changing, but ultimately it brought me back to what I consider my sound: fun rock'n'roll music!"

To make the record, Thomas dug out his old Tascam 388 and relished a more primitive setup. "I knew there would be no piano or keys because I'm sick of lugging around a Wurlitzer

on tour," he jokes. He embraced the rawness and back-to-basics approach, favouring fun over flawlessness. "I didn't want a pristine sound," he says. "I was not trying to make it sound big or commercial, not editing or reworking for months on end until the thing had no human qualities left. I'd been in that world of working in ProTools for years and it was not fun at all. It takes away from the music when you overwork in the quest to make something perfect. Perfection is boring!"

The end result is that of an artist who has come to terms with who they are and who they want to be. "It feels relieving to finally let myself be myself," Thomas says.

DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

somewhat over its lengthy duration – but it also unquestionably features some of their finest, and funkier, work to date.

DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

## SON LITTLE

Cityfolk ANTI-  
7/10

Georgia-based singer-songwriter's unfussy fourth melds genres in fine style



Aaron Livingston's category-averse nature shows in his CV, with its Grammy for his reimagining of "See That My

Grave Is Kept Clean" with Mavis Staples, and credits for guest turns with The Roots and RJD2. Fusing R&B, blues and hip-hop with roots music and rock is nothing new, but the slipperiness of Livingston's style remains part of his appeal, alongside his soulfully grazed voice. Recorded in the home studio of Alabama Shakes' Ben Tanner, who co-produced, *Cityfolk* sees the pair wrangling Muscle Shoals' rich heritage in their own way while the singer addresses his family's history. There's much to like, though the groovy, Frank Ocean-adjacent "Cherry" stands out.

SHARON O'CONNELL

## DANIEL LOPATIN

Marty Supreme OST

A24 MUSIC  
8/10

OPN's '80s synth ecstasy



If Oneohtrix Point Never's recent *Tranquillizer* album illustrated why Daniel Lopatin seems stuck in

a rut with that over-conceptualised project, he sounds positively liberated on this new soundtrack for *Marty Supreme*, the high-octane ping-pong drama from Josh Safdie, whose *Uncut Gems* and *Good Time* Lopatin also scored. Drawing on prime Tangerine Dream, Vangelis and Pino Donaggio for this synthesiser fantasia, Lopatin pumps up his usual '80s aesthetic with chintzy melody, choral song and saxophone, fashioning a delirious pastiche that carries surprising emotional weight. The score works powerfully on screen and, as an album, shows Lopatin at the top of his game. PIERS MARTIN

## MEMORIALS

All Clouds Bring Not Rain

FIRE  
7/10

Second from recent Electrelane/Wire hook-up

## MEMORIALS



Given their previous work as film soundtrackers, it's no surprise that Matthew Simms and Verity Susman's

2024 debut, *Memorial Waterslides*, reflected the near anarchic glee of pleasing only themselves. The follow-up sees their experimental instincts tempered rather than tamed, with more focus on song structure and melody, and Susman's expressive vocals softened. It's a seductive listen from the start – "Life Could Be A Cloud" is a fusion of pastoral psych, hurtling kosmische and choral sweetness – right through to dreamy '70s jazz-funk closer "Holy Invisible". Rather than a stretch too far, that's an apparently effortless flex for Memorials, as is underlined by prog-folk epic "Mediocre Demon", with its rippling vibes and electronics.

SHARON O'CONNELL

## MITSKI

Nothing's About To Happen To Me DEAD OCEANS  
8/10

Potent tunes plus a strong narrative thread on her eighth



"I keep thinking, surely, somebody will save me/At every turn, I learn that no one will", confides Mitski Miyawaki,

tapping into the kind of life truth that cuts across generations and has twice propelled her into the upper tier of the *Billboard* 200. It's the music, too, of course: lustrous, with a country edge and darkly glittering undertow, it's a perfect fit for Mitski's powerful yet forlorn voice. This set has a newly dynamic live energy, due to her use of the last album's touring band; highlights include "Charon's Obol", which suggests Weyes Blood fronting a stylish campfire singaround, and irresistibly rambunctious single "Where's My Phone?". SHARON O'CONNELL

## MOBY

Future Quiet BMG

7/10

Chillout mastermind locates a place of Zen



Moby drifted artistically in the years after his 1999 hit *Play*, making a string of records that meekly emulated its

style while further watering down the formula. Lately, though, he's struck a rich seam somewhere between ambient and classical music – a touch genteel, perhaps, but graceful in its poise. *Future Quiet* foregrounds Moby's softly contemplative solo piano playing, sometimes augmenting it with lightly euphoric strings or little pools of ambient synth. He still has an ear for a scintillating voice: most obviously on a retake on his 1995 hit "When It's Cold I'd Like To Die" starring Gabriels' Jacob Lusk, but also in "On Air", a collaboration with Brooklyn soul singer serpentwithfeet. LOUIS PATTISON

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## MUMMY The Lead Of Saturn Is Gold To The Wise **ATE MUSIC** 7/10

**Cardiacs associates bring new project to vinyl**



"When we landed on the moon..." begins Jo Spratley, partner in Spratleys Japs with Cardiacs' late founder, Tim Smith, as atmospheric opener "Bimbo" confirms MUMMY's spaced-out intentions. Recording swiftly and extemporaneously with Bic Hayes, who left Cardiacs in 1991 for Levitation, she adds Liz Fraser trills to the gothic dub of "Doll Hands" and Siouxsie Sioux wails to "TLOSIGTTW"'s pagan drums and Spacemen 3 drones, while Hayes' guitar pyrotechnics on "They Who Knew" recall his work with Terry Bickers. "I Whoosh" is dubby and malevolent, while the playful psychedelia of "Idiot Milk" combines Curve's resolve with Danielle Dax's eerie pop. **WYNDHAM WALLACE**

## MORGAN NAGLER I've Got Nothing To Lose, And I'm Losing It

**LITTLE OPERATION**  
6/10

**LA indie co-writing queen gets personal**



Nagler's co-writing credits encompassed Phoebe Bridgers, Margo Price, Tyler Ballgame, Kyle Deal and Haim, until breaking up with her fiancé inspired her own dormant art. Opener "Cradle The Pain"'s slow grind of rasping, fuzzed-up guitar indicates the big '90s alt-rock sound favoured by co-producer Kyle Thomas, while pop craft spreads even to the spare acoustic tunes. "I'm jumping out the window 'cause I can't get the words on the page", Nagler sings in her sugary croon on "Ball And Chain". In fact, her pain mostly fades as she finds soft-focus, blissed-out imagery. "Greetings From Mars" touches on Lana Del Rey's desolately pretty Americana, with Nagler's voice reserved yet reaching ecstatically high. **NICK HASTED**

## THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS The Former Site Of **MERGE** 8/10

**Veteran band react to the state of reality on the world stage – and painfully close to home**



Carl Newman and his bandmates had nearly completed recording their 10th album when they learned their drummer of 15 years was a paedophile (he's currently serving a three-year sentence). Reeling from this gut punch, Newman re-recorded several vocals from his newly altered perspective and brought in world-class drummer Charley Drayton to recut the rhythm tracks.

The surrounding circumstances inevitably bring an additional layer of darkness to allusively eloquent, quietly agitated songs like "Pure Sticker Shock" ("...at the price on my head") and "Votive" ("My hands are cupped around a match/I'm just trying to keep the lights on"), with male-female chorales hurtling along atop surging synths and Drayton's aggressively intricate grooves. As Newman ruefully – and presciently – acknowledges in "Calligraphy": "It's always Armageddon somewhere". **BUD SCOPPA**

## THE NOTWIST News From Planet Zombie CITY SLANG/DOMINO 7/10

**Munich trio record live in the studio with an extended lineup**



These German indie veterans have been making music in a baffling variety of genres over the last four decades, moving

between brittle proto-metal, jazz-rock, electronica and more. Here the core trio are accompanied by a mini orchestra, including bass clarinet, marimba and harmonium. Songs start as brooding slices of minimalism and slowly mutate into Morricone-esque ballads ("Teeth"), motorik synthpop ("Propeller") or chugging waltzes (a version of Neil Young's "Red Sun"). It was mainly recorded live in the studio, and its sonic confidence is at odds with Markus Acher's vulnerable, introverted voice, which turns punkier tracks like "X-Ray" and "Silver Lines" into appealingly lopsided miniatures. **JOHN LEWIS**

## ELLIE O'NEILL Time Of Fallow **STITCH** 8/10

**Irish newcomer cuts through memory and heartbreak**



O'Neill approaches songwriting like an archivist, sifting through memories to arrive at hard-won truths.

Resisting linearity, the songs on the folk musician's debut album circle formative heartbreak and queer awakening, lingering on repeated chords and dreamlike imagery before sharpening on a singular detail: "You introduce me as the girl who plaits your hair", she sings on the fluttering, ephemeral "Half Immune"; "I'd recognise that ribcage and that masochism anywhere" on "Witness". O'Neill flits between registers in a voice possessed of a similar quiet strength to early Joni, melodies like "Silent Water" and "Sister Of The Sea" bubbling up, ebbing back and, on the ominous, literary-inspired "Bohemia", threatening to pull you under. **LISA-MARIE FERLA**

## THE ORIELLES Only You Left **HEAVENLY** 6/10

**Halifax indie trio move in a math-rock direction**



The mood board for The Orielles' fourth album can be summed up in the song titles "The Woodland Has Returned" and "All In Metal" – pliable, organic textures versus hard, flinty edges. While the former track is soft and introspective, the latter is a subdued blend of undulating guitar and MBV-style whispery vocals. They flirt with sludge rock on "Tears Are" before relenting with melodious math-rock tones, while "Embers" gathers off-kilter bass, percussive notes, bare piano and some proggy runs on guitar. The trio's desire to develop their sound from album to album is commendable, but on this outing it sounds more like step-by-step calculation than natural evolution. **FIONA SHEPHERD**

## JOE PERNICE Sunny, I Was Wrong

**NEW WEST**  
7/10

**Jimmy Webb, Aimee Mann and Norman Blake guest as a Brother goes solo**



A brace of lockdown fill-ins notwithstanding, this is Joe Pernice's official solo debut. The Pernice

Brothers' *Overcome By Happiness* (1998) sugared his songs of catastrophe and self-deception with his gorgeously romantic voice right from the start, though, and his innate bittersweetness has only ripened with empathy and experience. The company he keeps helps define his art, Jimmy Webb's rueful piano gracing "It Got Away From Me", where "I blew half my life away on things I can't explain". "The Black And The Blue" is a requiem for the teen dream of "living free and dying fast", and Pernice's stately tastefulness, acoustic guitar studded with slide and steel, offers honed adult reflection, not excess. **NICK HASTED**

## HUGO RACE FATALISTS I Made It All Up For You

**GUSTAFF/HELIXED**  
7/10

**Superior balladry by Australian underground mainstay**



Hugo Race was an early and recurrent member of Nick Cave's Bad Seeds, and has also served as frontman of The

Wreckery – who made a tremendous run of feral blues records in the late 1980s – and The True Spirit, among many other endeavours. The Fatalists are a band of Italian collaborators, and *I Made It All Up For You* was recorded in the Puccini floating studio on Lake Massaciuccoli in Tuscany. They fall in behind a singer in his more downbeat mode, sighing through a suite of distinctly Leonard Cohen-ish rueful reflections. "Broken Love" and "I Collide", adorned with backing vocals by Elysian Fields'

Jennifer Charles, are among the highlights. **ANDREW MUELLER**

## ROBYN Sexistential YOUNG/XL 7/10

**The Swedish pop star gets silly and serious on her first album in eight years**



On the title track to her ninth album, Robyn raps about getting laid while undergoing IVF and admits to

crushing hard on Adam Driver. It's a silly moment, but with serious implications: how many bangers can you name that address single motherhood? Nothing else on *Sexistential* is so brazen, for better or for worse. Fussy production mires some of these songs, but there are a few that rank among her best. "Really Real" and "Dopamine" question the nature of love over sublimely shimmering beats, as though there's nothing more poignant than wondering if your most intense emotions are merely chemical reactions. **STEPHEN DEUSNER**

## SNAIL MAIL Ricochet

**MATADOR**  
7/10

**Expansive third wrestles with the big questions**



"Another year older, no getting over you", Lindsay Jordan sings, a romantic feint over Smashing Pumpkins-esque

strings that quickly reveals itself as a misdirection. Five years on from *Valentine*, *Snail Mail* is more fixated on existential drift than young love. Still only 26, Jordan's third album is a cohesive catalogue of regret, longing and uncertainty about what comes after: "My Maker" and "Hell" make for particularly striking bookends, one siting her in some celestial arrivals' lounge and the other arguing with the bouncer. Adapting the lushest textures from '90s alt-rock, grunge and shoegaze, most strikingly on "Tractor Beam" and "Dead End", Jordan is ready to take the next step: "The future looks bright". **LISA-MARIE FERLA**

## SUNN O))) Sunn O))) **SUB POP** 9/10

**Elemental post-metal from cloaked veterans**



Seven years on since *Life Metal* and *Pyroclasts*, their pre-lockdown pair of albums recorded with Steve Albini, Sunn

O))) – a duo named after an amplifier, and residing on the border between drone and metal – have returned to the source. Recorded in their native Pacific Northwest for Sub Pop, the album is a magnificently heavy double of downtuned, epic riffing. "Does Anyone Hear Like Venom?" brings

Sabbath-like sludge and howling feedback, while “Mindrolling” begins outside in nature, allowing the sound of running water into the mix. At the start of the 14-minute “Butch’s Guns”, meanwhile, the riffs stop dead; the better to reveal the menacing hiss of the pair’s wall of amplifiers.

JOHN ROBINSON

**TANYA TAGAQ**

**Saputjiji** SIX SHOOTER  
7/10

**Hardcore beauty and pain from Inuit avant-punk throat singer**



Titled after an Inuit word meaning “designated protector”, the latest from prize-winning Canadian author, musician and activist Tanya Tagaq serves as both a standalone collection and the soundtrack to a new stage musical based on her semi-autobiographical novel, *Split Tooth*. Mixing spoken-word poetry, throat singing, industrial trip-hop and avant-folk shadings, *Saputjiji* addresses emotionally raw themes, from racism to suicide rates among the indigenous people of Nanavut. Melancholy, noir-ish electro textures dominate on the deceptively lovely “Imi” and the deliciously mangled techno-tribal ballad “Black Boots”, but Tagaq’s punk-metal side is never far away, raging against the military-industrial machine on “Foxtrot” and “Fuck War”. STEPHEN DALTON

**NEBA SOLO & BENEGO DIAKITÉ**  
**A Djinn And A Hunter Went Walking**

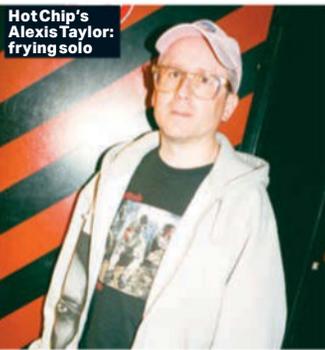
ETOILE AUDIO/NONESUCH  
8/10

**A double dose of magic from traditional Malian duo**



After producing Ali Farka Touré and Toumani Diabaté on his World Circuit label, this two-disc set is the first offering from producer Nick Gold’s new imprint – and it’s a double-barrelled gem. On one disc we get an acoustic field recording with crickets chirping in the background as the earthy strings of Diakitè’s n’goni snap and twist around the mesmerising rhythms of Solo’s balafon. The second disc offers more textured versions of the same tunes with added vocals, percussion and Mellotron. Which you prefer will be a matter of taste, but it’s best to think of them as exquisitely complementary variations on the same theme.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON



Hot Chip’s Alexis Taylor: frying solo

REVELATIONS



Wasyluk: cathartic

ANDREW WASYLYK

**The Scottish composer is guided by voices**

“I wanted to attempt something that celebrated the catharsis of community in collaboration,” says Andrew Wasyluk of his latest LP. “I don’t think I’ve ever really managed to match what’s in my head and heart with what my hands can produce. But aiming and missing is what keeps creativity interesting.” Wasyluk called in the likes of Gruff Rhys and Stuart Murdoch to help shape his vision, one that specifically required more

voices than usual. “Though there’s often been vocal and choral textures in my previous work, I’d not really made anything that celebrated voices as forthright for a while,” he says. “The title, *Irreparable Parables*, is a self-deprecating, roundabout way of enquiring what a lesson or principle could or should be,” he says. “Questioning if the stories, and the music within the album, are any good. In that respect there’s threads of vulnerability, anxiety, memory, resilience of the human spirit, and hope. All the good stuff.” DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

**ALEXIS TAYLOR**  
**Paris In The Spring**

NIGHT TIME STORIES  
8/10

**Hot Chip frontman brings in pals for genre-fluid latest**



Now on his seventh solo album, Hot Chip’s singer has invited numerous guests to join him on his latest, including

Scritti Politti’s Green Gartside and Air’s Nicolas Godin. It’s a beautiful collection of genre-hopping songs, from the dreamy yet strikingly sentimental “Your Only Life” to the low-key disco of the Avalanches-produced “I Can Feel Your Love” and the stark, vulnerable “Columbia”. There’s even an excellent country-meets-dub-techno cover version of the Stones’ “Wild Horses”. This feels like a record that’s sincerely reflective of someone engaging with his equal love of classic songwriting, electronic music and pop. DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

**THE THIRD MIND**  
**Spellbinder!** YEPROC  
7/10

**Psych-rock supergroup launch a satellite to orbit last year’s stellar *Right Now!***



This fourth studio full-length from the West Coast supergroup plays like a standalone bonus disc. The four songs were cut during sessions for ‘25’s blistering *Right Now!*, and their spiralling Otis Rush cover “Reap What You Sow” even appeared on that record. They add a medley of “Darkness Darkness” and “The

Creator Has A Master Plan” along with a version of “Before We Said Goodbye” with a lush string arrangement. But the real gold here is their trippy, tumbling interpretation of Gábor Szabó’s “Spellbinder”, which sounds more like a Pink Floyd deep cut than a jazz standard. STEPHEN DEUSNER

**THE TWILIGHT SAD**  
**It’s The Long Goodbye**

ROCK ACTION  
7/10  
**Scots duo resurface to process personal pain**



Seven years on from their last long player, the Lanarkshire partnership of James Alexander Graham and Andy MacFarlane return with an alluring collection of post-punk that finds space in the mix for folk and shoegaze motifs. Much of its content – (and part of the reason for their long absence) focuses on seismic changes in the duo’s personal lives, including marriage, parenthood and Graham’s mother’s dementia; consequently, it’s a record that walks a fine line between joy and sorrow, the latter illustrated by the unrelenting wall-of-sound fuzz of “Get Away From It All” and the mournful, piano-led “The Ceiling Underground” (“Why does it feel/Like nothing is real?”). TERRY STAUNTON

**VARIOUS ARTISTS**  
**Help(2)** WAR CHILD  
9/10  
**Raising money for the War Child charity, 31 years after the massive-selling initial *Help* album**



This 23-track release is even better than its Britpop-heavy 1995 predecessor, and it’s a veritable music festival of A-listers,

critical darlings and Mercury nominees. There are some fascinating covers: Olivia Rodrigo performs The Magnetic Fields’ “The Book Of Love”, Fontaines DC do Sinéad O’Connor’s “Black Boys On Mopeds”, Arooj Aftab and Beck transform “Lilac Wine”, Depeche Mode reinvent Donovan, and Beth Gibbons dramatises The Velvet Underground. But the bespoke, politically charged originals by English Teacher, Ezra Collective, Foals, Pulp, Bat For Lashes and Young Fathers are a fine primer for current leftfield pop. JOHN LEWIS

**ANDREW WASYLYK**  
**Irreparable Parables**

CLAY PIPE MUSIC/THE STATE 5  
CONSPIRACY  
8/10

**Hazey Janes frontman and Idlewild bassist finds his voices**



Aided by sympathetic vocalists, Wasyluk consolidates a multi-instrumentalist’s multiple interests

– from New Classical to lounge jazz to lo-fi pop – into a coherent style. Stuart Murdoch plays a hypnotic Robert Wyatt battling loneliness amid “Private Symphony”’s ticking monotony, and Tenniscoats’ Saya tenderly converts “Hachi No Su”’s minimalism into exotica, while there are hints of Van Dyke Parks alongside Gruff Rhys’ murmurs on “The Cold Collar”. Field Music’s Peter Brewis adds to the arcadian playfulness of “In Portmanteau”, but “Spectators In The Absence Of God”’s spectral mix of brass, strings and Kathryn Joseph’s shivery trills leaves the deepest impression. WYNDHAM WALLACE

**DANNY GEORGE WILSON**

**Arcade** LOOSE MUSIC  
7/10

**Chamber-country catharsis from ex-Grand Drive frontman**



On his third solo outing we meet Wilson inching his way back from loss with a string quartet. His gruff soul voice – like an indie Willie Nelson with a touch of Michael Stipe – is beautifully complemented by producer Hamish Benjamin’s arrangements. Ex-Fannie Gerry Love is in there too, digging down into what Wilson calls “altered earthiness”. Opening track “Strange Weather” sets the standard, with emotions sketched out eloquently in a few phrases while the lush strings fill in the blanks. Timeless piano ballad “Before September” is infused with Flaming Lips-style tremulous vulnerability before Wilson casts off shadows with the warm nod of electric piano on “Grain Of Sand”. FIONA SHEPHERD



REISSUES | COMPS | BOXSETS | LOST RECORDINGS

# FRANK ZAPPA, CAPTAIN BEEFHEART & THE MOTHERS

## Bongo Fury: 50th Anniversary Edition

ZAPPA RECORDS/UME

Zappa and Beefheart's impromptu tour of '75, featuring bomb scares, Bicentennial musings and shopping bags. *By Peter Watts*

**I**S THAT Don? Send him in." Frank Zappa is ad-libbing vocal prompts for a new composition, "Born To Suck", when he spots old friend Don Van Vliet, aka Captain Beefheart, enter the studio. The pair begin improvising over the microphone, working together in artistic competition – Zappa opting for humour while Beefheart seeks to overwhelm with sheer power. That recording, "Born To Suck (Vocal Session Scoop)", as well as the completed version of "Born To Suck", are among the previously unreleased gems to appear on *Bongo Fury: 50th Anniversary Edition*, a set that pivots on the creative tension between two of music's greatest outsiders.

*Bongo Fury* was originally released in October 1975, after an impromptu tour in the spring that saw a reimagined Mothers Of Invention add Beefheart to their lineup. Beefheart's presence had spurred Zappa into a creative frenzy, and several new tracks were debuted on the road. Two concerts were booked at Armadillo World Headquarters, a hippie hangout in Austin, in May; these were recorded and the highlights called for *Bongo Fury*. The new six-disc, 57-track box features those two Austin concerts in full, as well as a handful of other studio outtakes and songs recorded at the pre-tour rehearsal.

REISSUE  
OF THE  
MONTH  
8/10

It includes a booklet with photos and liner notes by guitarist Denny Walley and archivist Joe Travers. A double-LP version has *Bongo Fury* and bonus material, and there are some collectable single LPs of the album.

*Bongo Fury* was the final collaboration between Zappa and Beefheart in a sporadic association that stretched back to high school. The 1975 tour opened in Claremont, California, a 90-minute drive from Lancaster, where Beefheart and Zappa had first met as classmates at Antelope Valley High School in the 1950s. The pair shared a love of music, B-movies, Beat-inspired storytelling and surreal wordplay, recording their first song, "Lost In A Whirlpool", in 1958 or '59, about a man getting flushed down the loo. Zappa gave Beefheart his stage name and, in 1964, wrote him a movie script, *Captain Beefheart Vs The Grunt People!*. In 1964, the duo formed an R&B band, The Soots, based on an idea they'd had at school, recording "Metal Man Has Won His Wings" and "Tiger Roach". Zappa once claimed to have hours of material recorded by The Soots, which he threatened to release as a 15-record set.

The pair reunited in 1969, when Beefheart sang "Willie The Pimp" on Zappa's *Hot Rats* and Zappa produced *Trout Mask Replica*. But in interviews, Beefheart criticised elements of



Two of music's  
greatest outsiders:  
Frank Zappa and  
Captain Beefheart  
in 1975





Friends and relations: Beefheart, Zappa and the Mothers on the Bongo Fury tour

“Portuguese Lunar Landing”. This ridiculous nine-minute shuffle celebrates an eventful meeting between a naïve Portuguese astronaut and an alien on the moon; it was played on the road but didn’t make the set at Austin and was never recorded in the studio.

Further

unreleased tracks come from the shows at Austin, which had similar but not identical setlists. Both nights begin with Beefheart taking an extended improvised sax solo before he is joined by the rest of the Mothers. Both feature unique versions of “Velvet Sunrise”, a lounge-jazz instrumental that acted as a backdrop for Zappa’s tall tales and rambling lectures. At the second show, he raps about America’s upcoming Bicentennial, an event that informed two tracks on *Bongo Fury* – “200 Years Old” and “Poofter’s Froth Wyoming Plans Ahead” – and which he was anticipating with his typical cynicism. Imagine what he’d make of this year’s 250th anniversary.

Later on the first night comes “The Torture Never Stops”, a showcase for the Mothers’ improvisational qualities, with Beefheart adding harmonica to the Bo Diddley beat. This track was previously released in Zappa’s live archival series, on *You Can’t Do That On Stage Anymore Vol 4*. “Duke’s Things”, also on the first night, is an opportunity for George Duke to mess around, scattering, playing keyboards, finger cymbals and what Zappa describes as “other flower power hippie type objects” while Beefheart and Zappa rave and rant. We also get two versions apiece of *Bongo Fury* tracks “Carolina Hard-Core Ecstasy”, “Muffin Man”, “Advance Romance” and “Debra Kadabra”, the latter a chance for Beefheart and Zappa to trade in-jokes dating back to their schooldays.

Around these new numbers and improvised

SLEEVE NOTES

- CD 1: Bongo Fury – The Original Album (2012 Remaster) + Bonus Fury bonus tracks**
- CD 2: Armadillo World Headquarters – Live In Austin, TX, 5/20/1975 (first night)**
- CD 3: Armadillo World Headquarters – Live In Austin, TX, 5/20/1975 (first night continued)**
- CD 4: Armadillo World Headquarters – Live In Austin, TX, 5/21/1975 (second night)**
- CD 5: Armadillo World Headquarters – Live In Austin, TX, 5/21/1975 (second night continued) + Claremont Rehearsal**
- BLU-RAY AUDIO: Bongo Fury – The Album + Bonus Audio**

moments sit a stash of older songs, including “Stink-Foot”, “I’m Not Satisfied”, a fun “Camarillo Brillo”, the seemingly endless “Pound For A Brown” and the brilliant hard groove of “Apostrophe”, an early highlight on both evenings. Both nights culminate in electrifying versions of “Willie The Pimp”, the archetypal Beefheart-Zappa collaboration, with the vocalist in outrageous and barely controllable form, prompting Zappa to produce some of his greatest solos.

Both Zappa and Beefheart were experimentalists with a taste for the avant-garde, but the difference between them can be heard on the second night when Zappa interrupts Beefheart’s sax solo on “Pound For A Brown” because of a bomb threat. Zappa immediately flips into serious mode, patiently instructing the audience to leave the auditorium without inducing panic. He assures them the gig will continue and is true to his word. As soon as the police have completed what was presumably a very circumspect search, Zappa is back to reintroduce the band – now missing one key member. “Glad you could all make it back,” he drawls. “We’re going to take up where we left off, but since

he’s not here you’re going to have to pretend that Captain Beefheart is still taking a solo.”

Beefheart’s unpredictability and individuality was part of the charm, but it became wearing even for Zappa. By the time the tour was completed, the pair were once again butting heads. Despite that, Beefheart played harmonica on 1976’s *Zoot Allures*, and Zappa agreed to release Beefheart’s next album, *Bat Chain Puller*, on his DiscReet label in 1976. Zappa blocked the release when he discovered his manager, Herb Cohen, had paid for it from Zappa’s royalties. That led to financial complications for both artists, and they never worked together again; the original *Bat Chain Puller* went unreleased until 2012, by which time both musicians had died. But their friendship had been rekindled before the end. In 1993, when Beefheart heard Zappa was dying, he got in touch. Every week the pair would chat on the phone and play their favourite records down the telephone to each other, old friends with a long history and uncommon bonds.

RECOMMENDER

# BEST OF ZAPPA/BEEFHEART

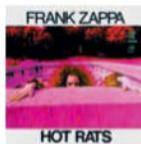
Classics, collaborations and rarities: the torture never stops



**CAPTAIN BEEFHEART & HIS MAGIC BAND Trout Mask Replica**

STRAIGHT, 1969  
Beefheart’s brilliant, disorientating double

album was produced by Zappa and released on his label – because who else would have touched it? Zappa’s voice can be heard on a couple of tracks, “Pena” and “The Blimp”, the latter featuring parts recorded over the telephone. The pair fell out after its release, but the process had created an unrepeatably fusion of their idiosyncratic visions. **10/10**



**FRANK ZAPPA AND THE MOTHERS OF INVENTION Hot Rats**

BIZARRE/REPRISE, 1969  
Beefheart returned the

favour on what might be Zappa’s single greatest record, the largely instrumental fusion masterpiece *Hot Rats*. Beefheart was invited to record the vocal to the only non-instrumental, the epic “Willie The Pimp”, supplying one of his most memorable performances. He would perform the song regularly during the *Bongo Fury* tour. **9/10**



**FRANK ZAPPA The Lost Episodes**

RYKODISC, 1996  
Zappa had been working on this posthumous collection of rarities before his death. It

includes five tracks recorded with Beefheart, including their late-’50s composition “Lost In A Whirlpool” and The Soots’ surf parody “Tiger Roach”. Others date from the *Trout Mask Replica* era – “I’m A Band Leader”, “Alley Cat” and “The Grand Wazoo”, to which Zappa added Synclavier in 1992. Zappa and Beefheart’s 1975 version of “Orange Claw Hammer” appears on the Beefheart retrospective *Grow Fins*. **8/10**

# Q&A

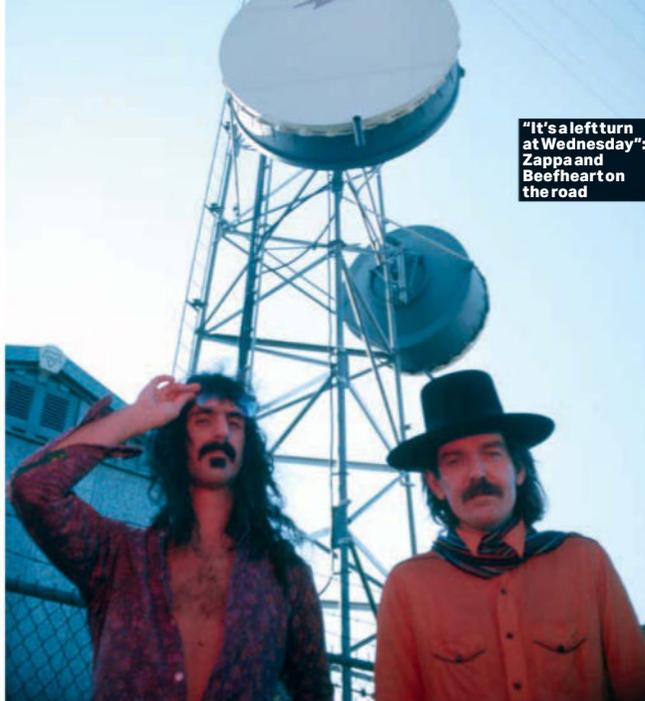
## Joe Travers, Zappa archivist

### What was the state of play for Zappa going into *Bongo Fury*?

Ruth Underwood and Chester Thompson left the band in 1975 because after some recording sessions in January there were no tours booked. But once the decision to have Beefheart join the band happened, they were able to book a tour really quickly. They had a vacancy in the drum department so brought in Terry Bozzio and also Denny Walley on slide guitar. There was no plan to make a record when the tour was booked, but Zappa was able to do so, which was typical of Frank – and we should be glad he did, because it’s great to have this collaboration. As Gail Zappa might say, “It’s a left turn at Wednesday.” The record came as a surprise, and a welcome one. Fans love this record and are very excited about this box because of the inclusion of Don [Van Vliet], Beefheart and Frank both have a really special following, so it’s always great to have them together.

### What will they find in the box?

Most anniversary boxes, I look in the vault for session tapes or any alternative mix. I’m after anything they worked on that didn’t feature on the album, as well as the roots of the content, which in this case was two live 16-track recordings of shows at the Armadillo in Austin. They had been cut up by razor blade but we could heat-treat the tapes and transfer the elements to present them in their original sequence. Those concerts are the heart and highlight



of the box. We also have studio material that’s never been heard before. There’s a song called “Born To Suck” and another unreleased composition – of which there are very few from Frank’s rock bands – called “Portuguese Lunar Landing”, which originated in 1975. This was recorded at rehearsal the day before the first show. It’s really special to finally have that song out there.

### How did the new lineup affect the music?

The feel of the group changed when Terry Bozzio joined. Terry was a different type of drummer, with a different feel. But this was really the last album with the Mothers. By 1976, Frank began having management problems and that was affecting touring – next thing you know, it was really just Terry and Frank for a few years. But Frank never stopped being creative. He was always adapting to who he played with – it was business as usual.

### How much influence did Beefheart bring to the material?

“Poofter’s...” and “Debra Kadabra” were composed with Don during rehearsal. “Debra Kadabra” has a lot of inside jokes between the two, things that go back many years, like the reference to a film called *The Brainiac*. They quote the theme in the music as they loved the cheapness of that movie and immortalised it in the lyrics. The tour resulted in a number of new compositions, not all of which got recorded or released, like “Portuguese Lunar Landing” and “Born To Suck”. There was an instrumental called “George’s Boogie” that didn’t get recorded. “Velvet Sunrise” was another one they only really did on this tour. And they rehearsed “Orange Claw Hammer”, written by Don, which they didn’t perform often. They were really taking advantage of having Don in the band.

### Is it true Beefheart was drawing on stage when he wasn’t singing or playing?

It was very hard to have Don on the road. He was such an eclectic cat and was in his own world. He didn’t conform and it was very hard for the road managers. It caused a lot of stress. Frank felt that stress and so did Don. I have heard that by the end of the tour they were barely speaking. But Beefheart did sit on stage

and draw. He’d sketch the band and then turn the sketchbook round and say, “Got ya!” In the credits he is credited playing “shopping bags” – that’s because he kept his lyrics and harmonicas in a paper bag that he’d take wherever he went.

### We do get a lot more Beefheart with the live shows. That’s never a bad thing, right?

Especially his sax playing. The opening of the show was a feature spot for Beefheart – he was one of the first to walk on stage and start improvising. They do an amazing version of “Willie The Pimp”, which is a classic as far as Frank and Beefheart go.

### What happened with the bomb scare on the second night?

Frank was very good in those moments as he had experienced problems at live shows before, most famously the fire at Montreux. He could handle these situations to stop them becoming chaotic. On [2022 boxset] *Zappa/Erie* there’s a concert in 1974 where he is dealing with a very unruly crowd and did it in such a great way. When everybody was evacuated in Austin there’s a photo of Frank sitting outside with the fans with his guitar. They probably knew it was a prank but had to take it seriously.

### What do we know about the longer versions of two *Bongo Fury* tracks? On “Carolina...”

you have double choruses and the guitar solo is longer. On “200 Years Old”, Frank cut out George’s keyboard solo. As the album took its final form, those songs were cut down, as Frank always wanted his records to sound good. He cut them down to prioritise other things.

### The notes mention a couple of songs Zappa mixed for an unspecified Disney project just before he died – what do we know about that?

All I know is that the tape box says “Disney”. It has these six-channel surround mixes. At the time [1993], there was no standard format for surround sound so they mixed in two different ways – two in the front, two in the side and two in the back, and also the 5:1 we have now. They were doing this in the last year of Frank’s life, so it’s interesting to know he was prioritising surround mixing for this possible Disney project so late in his life. He was probably very motivated by six channels. Imagine how much he’d have loved Dolby Atmos! 🎧

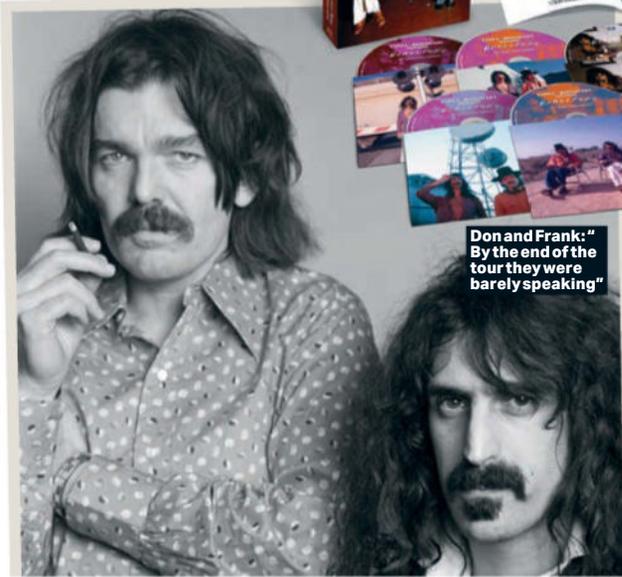
INTERVIEW: PETER WATTS



Don and Frank: “By the end of the tour they were barely speaking”

“Don was in his own world. He didn’t conform”

JOE TRAVERS





A wider canvas: (l-r) The Colourfield's Toby Lyons, Karl Shale and Terry Hall

# THE COLOURFIELD

Sound Of The Colourfield CHRYSLIS

7/10

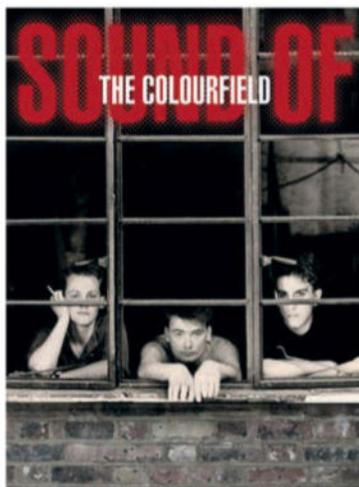
When Terry Hall and new pals went “folky pop”. *By Terry Staunton*

**L**IKE The Specials and Fun Boy Three before them, The Colourfield held Terry Hall’s interest for just two albums, but the band’s mellow and occasionally moody sound would go on to inform much of his subsequent solo work.

Hall first met his co-writer Toby Lyons when the guitarist’s band The Swinging Cats signed to 2 Tone in 1980 (releasing one single, “Mantovani”) and opened for The Specials on a series of UK dates. A former friendship developed when Lyons was drafted in to the expanded touring lineup of Fun Boy Three: “We were hanging out and playing records we both really liked,” Hall said in 2021. “Stuff like Simon & Garfunkel or Bobby Goldsboro. I don’t even know what label you’d put on it; summery, folky pop, I suppose.”

Consequently, and with multi-instrumentalist Karl Shale joining their

ranks, their fondness for those records could be viewed as the bedrock of The Colourfield’s mission statement: semi-acoustic, pastoral tunes, albeit with



glossier productions than the bygone material from which they took inspiration. It’s all over the group’s 1985 debut, *Virgins And Philistines*, which harks back to a seemingly more innocent era, but with Hall’s less than rosy, wearier worldview seeping through the cracks.

Folk was never a stranger to protest, and that element of dissatisfaction

lives on in the sombre, near-despairing “Cruel Circus”, on which Hall sings, “*I see fear in the faces/Of the tea-drinking chimps on TV*”, before going on to lament the “*fur coats on ugly people dressed to kill/And a sport that’s legal within the minds of the mentally ill*”.

The singer had wanted the track released as a single, but was overruled by Chrysalis, the label wary that after the poor performance of first 45 “Take”, a bitter dissection of broken romance, Hall in miserable mode might struggle for airplay. They opted instead for the winsomely optimistic “Thinking Of You”, which climbed to No 12 in the UK, propelling its parent album to the same peak position.

It was a hit that came closer to the “summery, folky pop” Hall and Lyons had bonded over, as does the fairly faithful cover of US sibling trio The Roches’ 1979 track “Hammond Song”, but there’s infinitely more depth to the pair’s “Castles In The Air”, a boulevard crooner tale of regret that strolls into Scott Walker territory. Lyrically, the happy-go-lucky simplicity of “Thinking Of You” sticks out like a sore thumb, compared to the cynicism and sneering wit at play in “Armchair Theatre” (“*You can take me for a ride/But only if I get a window seat*”) and “Yours Sincerely”.

# AtoZ

This month...

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- P49 MARNIE WEBER

## AEROSMITH Aerosmith: Legendary Deluxe Edition

CAPITOL/UME  
7/10

Rough-and-ready 1973 debut  
from New Hampshire boys



Listening back to Aerosmith's self-titled debut, it's clear how indebted they were to the great British rock groups of the '60s – they might have once, incorrectly, been described as the “Kmart Stones”, but there's more Yardbirds here, if anything. Aerosmith is a “classic” debut in that it suffers from all the first-timer's pitfalls – shaky production, performance anxiety – but it's still a great collection of songs, though they're mostly and unfairly overshadowed by the power ballad “Dream On”. If the 2024 remaster, also included here, addresses any such perceived flatness, it also buffs the album to an unwelcome shine, pulling it out of its historical place. Pick this set up instead for the fantastically rough-and-tumble live set from Paul's Mall, Boston, where Aerosmith are at their best.

**Extras:** 6/10. A “super deluxe” pack includes the 5LP set, hardback book, poster and sticker sheet, diorama and, for some, a satin bomber jacket.  
JON DALE

## JON ANDERSON Earth Mother Earth/ Survival & Other Stories (reissues, 1997, 2011)

FRONTIERS MUSIC SRL  
8/10, 6/10

Reissue of solo outings from  
either side of the millennium



The mid-'90s was a startlingly prolific time for Jon Anderson solo, and 1997's *Earth Mother Earth* was co-produced with his new wife, Jane Lutenburger, while on honeymoon. Its hippyish ecological themes border on self-parody, with jaunty acoustic opener “Time Has Come” accompanied by twittering birdsong and “Whalewatching” by – oh yes – actual whale noises. Its charm is cynic-proof, though, as is the lovely acoustic gallop of “Concerto Uno” and the evocative harp atmospherics of “Harp Tree”. After 13 years ➔

### SLEEVE NOTES

#### CD 1: VIRGINS AND PHILISTINES Tracks 1–10

#### CD 2: DECEPTION Tracks 1–10

#### CD 3: A-SIDES, B-SIDES & MIXES

- 1 The Colour Field – A-side
- 2 Sorry [Original Version] – B-side
- 3 Pushing Up The Daisies – B-side
- 4 Windmills Of Your Mind – B-side
- 5 My Wild Flame – B-side
- 6 Little Things – B-side
- 7 Castles In The Air [Single Remix] – A-side
- 8 Your Love Was Smashing – B-side
- 9 I Can't Get Enough Of You Baby – B-side
- 10 Things Could Be Beautiful – A-side
- 11 Frosty Mornings – B-side
- 12 Running Away [Radio Edit] – A-side
- 13 She [Single Remix] – A-side
- 14 Monkey In Winter [with Sinéad O'Connor] – B-side
- 15 The Colour Field [Extended Version]

- 16 Take [Extended Version] – Unreleased
- 17 Thinking Of You [Singalong Version]
- 18 Castles In The Air [Extended Version]
- 19 My Wild Flame [Extended Version]
- 20 Castles In The Air [Instrumental Version]

#### CD 4: DEMOS & OUTTAKES

- All previously unreleased
- 1 The Colour Field [Instrumental Demo]
  - 2 Cruel Circus [Demo]
  - 3 Armchair Theatre [Instrumental Demo]
  - 4 The Colour Field [backing track]
  - 5 Take [4-Track Demo]
  - 6 Thinking Of You (Instrumental) [4-Track Demo]
  - 7 Pushing Up The Daisies [4-Track Demo]
  - 8 Windmills Of Your Mind [4-Track Demo]
  - 9 Yours Sincerely [4-Track Demo]
  - 10 Castles In The Air [4-Track Demo]
  - 11 Heart Of America [Jan Broudie]
  - 12 Jesus And The April Rain [Jan Broudie]
  - 13 Digging It Deep [Studio Davout]

- 14 She [Studio Davout]
- 15 Frosty Mornings [Studio Davout]
- 16 Confession [Studio Davout]
- 17 Jesus And The April Rain [Studio Davout]
- 18 Heart Of America [Studio Davout]
- 19 Goodbye Sun Valley [Studio Davout]
- 20 Things Could Be Beautiful [Acoustic]

#### CD 5: LIVE

- Hammersmith Palais 1985
- 1 The Colour Field \*
  - 2 Pushing Up The Daisies
  - 3 Faint Hearts \*
  - 4 Your Love Was Smashing \*
  - 5 Take \*
  - 6 Cruel Circus \*
  - 7 Yours Sincerely
  - 8 Sorry \*
  - 9 Hammond Song \*
  - 10 Virgins And Philistines \*
  - 11 Thinking Of You \*
  - 12 I Can't Get Enough Of You Baby \*
  - 13 Armchair Theatre \*
  - 14 Castles In The Air \*
  - Warwick University 1986
  - 15 Frosty Mornings \*
  - 16 Take It As It Comes \*
  - 17 Memories Can't

- Wait \*
- 18 Things Could Be Beautiful \*
- 19 She \*
- 20 Jesus And The April Rain \*
- 21 96 Tears \*

#### DVD

- Promotional Videos
- 1 The Colour Field
  - 2 Take
  - 3 Thinking Of You
  - 4 Castles In The Air
  - 5 Things Could Be Beautiful
  - 6 Running Away
  - 7 She
  - 8 Why Am I Standing Here? [The Making Of The Colourfield] \*

#### At The BBC

- 1 Thinking Of You [...Whistle Test]
- 2 Faint Hearts [...Whistle Test]
- 3 Thinking Of You [Top Of The Pops]
- 4 Castles In The Air [ORS]
- 5 Thinking Of You [ORS]
- 6 Thinking Of You [Pebble Mill At One]
- 7 Castles In The Air [Pebble Mill At One]

\*Previously unreleased

The folk-pop blueprint is all but abandoned on the group's second album, *Deception* (1987), by all accounts a difficult experience during which Hall

(including B-sides, demos and live cuts) and a DVD of TV performances.

Hall is atmospherically filmic on “Windmills Of Your Mind”, strutting and cocksure on The Four Seasons’ “Can't Get Enough Of You, Baby”, and playfully deadpan on Bobby Goldsboro's “Little Things”. Speaking of interpretations, a true highlight gets another airing on the disc of B-sides; *Deception* album track “Monkey In Winter”, with Sinéad O'Connor taking over Hall's lead vocal, was consigned to an extra track on the 12-inch single of “She”, when wiser heads might have put it forward as a potential A-side.

Inevitably, there's a fair amount of repetition, with “Thinking Of You” accounting for nine of the 96 tracks (including TV spots), and extended versions of several singles serving little purpose other than pandering to the era's perceived market for 12-inch mixes. They're unlikely to be played much by folk shelling out for the box, who'll glean more pleasure from the disc of warmly basic demos and outtakes, especially songs from *Deception* unsullied by Gottehrer's production methods.

Post-Colourfield, Hall formed yet another trio, Terry, Blair & Anouchka, for an eponymous album cut from similarly summery cloth, then resurfaced as the short-lived duo Vegas with Eurythmic

Dave Stewart. His debut solo release, *Home*, wouldn't arrive until 1995 (with co-writes from Damon Albarn, Nick Heyward and XTC's Andy Partridge), largely revisiting the template he and Lyons had in mind a decade earlier.

repeatedly butted figurative heads with veteran US producer Richard Gottehrer (responsible for the debut LPs by Blondie and The Go-Go's) and Shale quitting early on in the sessions. The echo

## Hall's interpretive talents shine on several occasions

and synthetic drums on band originals such as “From Dawn To Distraction” and “Digging It Deep” are at odds with the intimacy and candour of Hall's lyrics, affectingly contemplative confessionals buried under period studio gloss.

Tellingly, neither of the two tracks lifted as singles came from the pens of Hall and Lyons. The band's take on Sly & The Family Stone's “Running Away” doesn't veer too far from the original, and Hall's bruised and forlorn vocal is perfect for the woe-is-me chronicle of The Monkees' “She”. Indeed, his interpretive talents shine on several occasions throughout this compendium, which sources enough material to fill five CDs





Band Of Horses: indie-rock heroes

without making an all-new solo LP, *Survival And Other Stories* was partly inspired by a series of health scares. The songs were co-written with musicians who had answered an ad on his website, and the tunes are a little uneven. Still, “Big Buddha Song” is a splendidly happy-clappy highlight in which he thanks the titular deity as well as Jesus, then Muhammad, “for being the prophet and singing of Krishna”. Pick the bones out of that one, theologists.

JOHNNY SHARP

**BAND OF HORSES**  
**Everything All The Time: 20th Anniversary Edition**

SUB POP  
8/10

An indie-rock landmark gets more everything



In 2004 a few members of the recently defunct Seattle band Carissa's Wierd rehearsed a few

songs, dubbed themselves Horses, and opened shows for Iron & Wine around the Pacific Northwest. They soon signed with Sub Pop, changed their name to Band Of Horses, recorded their debut and found themselves hailed as indie rock heroes. It was a quick rise for the group, but *Everything All The Time* sounded self-assured and comfortably eccentric, thanks to Ben Bridwell's unassuming guitar anthems and all that reverb. They inspired countless soundalikes, but the years haven't dulled these songs. “The Funeral” and “The Great Salt Lake” retain their casual majesty, but some of the most affecting moments are the gentlest, like the quietly awestruck “Part One” and the eulogistic closer “St Augustine”.

**Extras: 7/10.** A baker's dozen of rarities, demos and live cuts, the best of which – “Biding Time (Is A Boat To Row)”, “Coal Mine” – could easily have been main album cuts.

STEPHEN DEUSNER

**BLODWYN PIG/MICK ABRAHAMS**  
**The Recordings 1969–74/Seasons: The Recordings 1971–72**

CHERRY RED  
7/10, 6/10

British blues guitarist fondly remembered



Abrahams, who died in late 2025, aged 82, was regarded in his day as a blues guitarist talented enough to rival

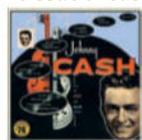
the illustrious names who passed through John Mayall's band. Yet that wasn't really what Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson wanted and so Abrahams left after the band's debut *This Was to Form Blodwyn Pig*, whose two studio albums are now collected on a three-disc set that also includes a Radio One concert set recorded during a brief reunion in 1974. It's solid meat-and-potatoes blues-rock with a tasty side of jazz, the highlight of which is “Dear Jill” from *Ahead Rings Out*, burnished by Abrahams' luminous slide playing, and which later featured in Cameron Crowe's *Almost Famous*. By 1971 the guitarist had moved on again to record two albums with the Mick Abrahams Band in broadly similar style, with Jack Lancaster's sax, clarinet and flute playing lending 1972's *At Last* a more expansive demeanour.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

**JOHNNY CASH**  
**With His Hot And Blue Guitar! (reissue, 1957)**

INTERVENTION  
10/10

Old-school 45rpm mono vinyl reissue of Cash's debut



In the original liner notes for *With His Hot And Blue Guitar!*, Johnny Cash was quoted as mordantly noting: “There

are three things you can't get away from: loneliness, that certain kind of woman, and God.” There were plenty of each on his 1957 debut. Cash's self-penned hits – instant classics “Cry! Cry! Cry!”, “I Walk The Line” and “Folsom Prison Blues” – were packaged with a few of the standards on which Cash had drawn: tunes by Hank Williams, Jimmie Davis and Jerry Reed, among others. It was intended as a manifesto for Cash, and it served as such better than anyone can have expected. The foundation of a half-century career was laid here: the gravitas, the attitude, the preoccupation with the lasting consequences of hasty decisions, whether walking off the line, or shooting a man in Reno. But...*Hot And Blue Guitar!* sounds, decades

later, even more than that: perhaps more than any other album ever recorded, it's the definition of an entire genre.

**Extras: 6/10.** Restored artwork, new liner notes by Sun Records historian Colin Escott. **ANDREW MUELLER**

**LYN COLLINS**  
**Think (About It) (reissue, 1972)**

ACE  
8/10

Soul chanteuse steps out of the shadows



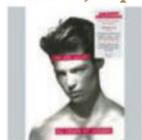
The title number of Collins' debut solo album has carved out a little bit of history as one of the most sampled songs of all time, its drum break estimated to have been employed on in excess of 3,000 other tracks. Realistically, the plaudits for that go to writer and producer James Brown, but this recording is all about the voice of the one-time leader of his stage backup singers. The Godfather is the architect of another brace of high-water mark cuts, the yearning, burning “Just Won't Do Right” and the fiercely funky strut of “Things Got To Get Better”, superb showcases for Collins' range and nuanced phrasing. She also leaves a confident mark on a torch-fuelled treatment of Bill Withers' “Ain't No Sunshine”, while the Bacharach & David favourite “Reach Out For Me” has a richer tone and greater depth than even the Dionne Warwick hit version.

TERRY STAUNTON

**EG AND ALICE**  
**24 Years Of Hunger (reissue, 1991)**

SDE  
9/10

Deluxe 2CD set of elegant, earnest, impassioned pop



Established by a former boy band member, Eg White, with model Alice Temple, an erstwhile BMX champion, this

London duo were as much victims of their era as their enigmatic reserve. Certainly, White's associations with Brother Beyond, and thus Stock, Aitken and Waterman – plus the crossover between their refined, blue-eyed soul and recent Scottish practitioners like Love And Money – can't have helped in 1991, especially in the same month as Nirvana's *Nevermind*. Their debut, however, slots in neatly beside Electribe 101's a year earlier, Massive Attack's *Blue Lines* that spring, and Sade's imminent *Love Deluxe*. “Rockets” was a silken, Steely Dan whisper, “Doesn't Mean That Much To Me” combined Prince's taut funk with The Blue Nile's compassion, while “And I Have Seen Myself” was a brisk, unsung club anthem. It's an impeccable sign of the times.

**Extras: 7/10.** 16 bonus tracks (demos, B-sides, remixes, unreleased songs), plus 36-page book with new interviews.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

**THE FALL**  
**Fall Heads Roll**

(reissue, 2005) CHERRY RED  
7/10

MES and co's noughties peak as a 4CD box or straight 2LP reissue



Sometimes hailed as their best 21st-century effort, the 24th LP from Mark E Smith and friends (soon to be enemies) certainly showcases the width and breadth of The Fall in all their mercurial glory. “Blindness” is a thrilling lope, and one of their greatest songs, “Youwanner” is a savage Stooges sprint, and “Midnight In Aspen” and its reprise are circling electric folk, with Smith at his mystical best: “*He aims the highest, bestest powered rifle at the stars/ Orion/It bounces off the satellites...*” This being The Fall, though, there are also perverse, underdone moments, from the skeletal country canter of “Ride Away”, surely the worst opener in The Fall's discography, to “Breaking The Rules”, with lyrics from the studio's work experience student set to a bastardised “Walk Like A Man”.

**Extras: 8/10.** Available as a straight 2LP reissue or an expanded 4CD boxset. The boxset includes loads of demos and studio outcuts, Peel Sessions and part of a live set from the following year, by which time the group who made *Fall Heads Roll* were predictably no more. **TOM PINNOCK**

**DAVID FORMAN**  
**Who You Been Talking To**

HIGH MOON  
8/10

Foolishly spurned classic rescued 50 years later



Though his eponymous 1976 debut earned him *Rolling Stone's* acclaim as a “brilliant

lyricist” and an “arresting vocalist”, David Forman's second LP, with Jack Nitzsche producing and Ry Cooder among its musicians, was shelved a year later. Inexplicably misread by Arista's Clive Davis as Barry Manilow's successor, Forman combined Randy Newman's literate songwriting with Curtis Mayfield's breezy grooves and, on a title track filled with sophisticated sax and soulful cooing, one might even mistake his falsetto. Elsewhere, “Let It Go Now” brings drama to Laurel Canyon, while a doo-wop childhood informs both “What Is So Wonderful” and “Thirty Dollars”, offering gratifying reminders of Harry Nilsson. Admittedly, “Midnight Mambo” is more “Coconut” than “Me And My Arrow”, but weighty ballad “Little Asia” more than compensates. Mink Deville revived the lazy lilt of “A-Train Lady” in 1978, and Marianne Faithfull softened “Losing”'s edges for subdued spoken-word synthpop in 1995, but these originals confirm Forman's needlessly forsaken talent.

**Extras: 6/10.** Liner notes with new interviews. **WYNDHAM WALLACE**

**PETER GABRIEL**  
**In The Big Room**

REAL WORLD

8/10

First physical release for live-in-the-studio set



Before a small invited audience in 2003, Gabriel and his touring band from the Growing Up tour recorded an intimate live set at his Real World studios in the Wiltshire countryside. Without the spectacular visuals of the stadium shows, the focus shifted to the tight ensemble playing and Gabriel's vocals, which sound distinctly more soulful and expressive in the small-is-beautiful setting. The 14 songs are drawn from different phases of his career and include such long-standing canonical favourites as "Games Without Frontiers", "Shock The Monkey" and "In Your Eyes". Yet much of the material comes from *OVO* and *Up*, the brace of albums with which he greeted the new millennium after a lengthy silence – and the songs from *OVO* stand up particularly well. The convoluted multimedia Millennium Dome show from which they came was much misunderstood, and as a result the power of songs such as "Downside Up" and the gorgeous, plaintive piano ballad "Father Son" was unfairly overlooked at the time.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

**THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL**  
**What A Day For A Daydream: The Complete Recordings 1965–1969**

GRAPEFRUIT/STRAWBERRY

8/10

Anthology of John Sebastian's joyous folk-rock trailblazers



Like many of their '60s compatriots, The Lovin' Spoonful packed a career's worth of beauty, music, growth and churn into fewer than five helter-skelter years. That's commemorated by this 7CD set – a much-needed update of the great Japanese '90s import, *Kama Sutra Box*. It features all four "proper" studio albums – *Do You Believe In Magic* (1965), *Daydream* (1966), *Hums Of The Lovin' Spoonful* (1966) and *Everything Playing* (1967) in both stereo and mono, as well as 1969's not-bad *Revolution: Revolution '69*, which had drummer Joe Butler as frontman after John Sebastian quit.

**Extras:** 8/10. Alongside the standard Spoonful LPs are two groovy soundtracks – *What's Up Tiger Lily?* and *You're A Big Boy Now* – plus Zal Yanovsky's delirious solo album *Alive And Well In Argentina*, an additional four tracks that originally featured on Elektra's 1966 compilation *What's Shakin'*, and other outtakes and rarities such as "Alley Oop" and demos of "Darlin'

Companion" and "Daydream". Good sleeve notes, too. **PETER WATTS**

**ANTHONY MOORE**  
**Monkey's Birthday**

PARADIGM DISCS

8/10

Another clanging, clamorous tape construction for film



It has been a busy time, of late, for Moore. Over the past few years, several of his solo albums have been reissued by Drag City, along with a demo collection and a set of stripped-back re-recordings; he's also been releasing experimental works on Touch and his own Half Cat imprint. *Monkey's Birthday* represents another string to his bow, the second in a run of experimental film soundtracks disinterred by Paradigm Discs. Like its predecessor *Mare's Tail*, *Monkey's Birthday* was made for a David Larcher film; recorded in the mid-'70s, several of Moore's august colleagues (including Dagmar Krause and Peter Blegvad of Slapp Happy) make vocal appearances, folded into the scrum of tape loops and abstruse edits that Moore constructs out of sonic detritus scavenged from his travels. It's music of understated yet ever-present psych delirium, perfect for Larcher's woozy journeyman visions. **JONDALE**

**NRBQ**  
**Grooves In Orbit**

(reissue, 1983)

OMNIVORE

8/10

Seventeen years and 10 albums later, NRBQ still on fine form



They may be the "greatest bar band in the world", but NRBQ also have good claim to being, alongside Redd Kross, the pre-eminent scholars of mid-late-20th-century American popular song. For NRBQ, though, "popular song" takes myriad forms, from R&B through teen pop and on into free jazz – they covered Sun Ra on their debut album, after all. NRBQ recorded and released *Grooves In Orbit* after a major-label dalliance for *At Yankee Stadium* and three underrated gems for Red Rooster; out of this run of gold, though, *Grooves In Orbit* feels truest to the unpredictable spirit of the 'Q. They write great, unassuming pop songs – "Rain At The Drive-In", "A Girl Like That" and "When Things Was Cheap" are all NRBQ classics – and deliver them with the energetic nonchalance of a finely tuned rock'n'roll gang.

**Extras:** 7/10. Seven extra songs; liner notes by John DeAngelis. **JONDALE**

**ELVIS PRESLEY**  
**EPiC: Elvis Presley In Concert**

SONY LEGACY

8/10

Flamboyant celebration of the King to accompany new concert documentary... plus Bono



While Peter Jackson got the slam-dunk of The Beatles, his mate Baz Luhrmann had a tougher sell with Elvis. The King has slipped from public consciousness since 2002's hit remix of "A Little Less Conversation", something partially corrected by Luhrmann's 2023 Oscar-nominated biopic. Baz has now followed that with a documentary, *EPiC*, using unseen concert footage from a pair of films made after the 1968 comeback. The accompanying 27-track soundtrack was compiled by Luhrmann and producer Jamieson Shaw, who had access to Peter Jackson's groundbreaking audio studio. This record takes fairly outrageous liberties with the source material, creating new medleys ("Wearin' That Night Life Look", "A Change Of Reality (Do You Miss Me?)" as well as remixes of "Love Me" and "In The Ghetto" – plus Bono reading his poem about Elvis, "American David". If that sounds too much, there are more straightforward, gleeful performances of "Never Been To Spain", "A Big Hunk O Love", "Suspicious Minds" and "Polk Salad Annie" plus versions of "Bridge Over Troubled Water" and "Get Back" that showcase the King's unique musical intelligence and sensitivity.

PETER WATTS

REDISCOVERED

Uncovering the underrated and overlooked

**DICK GAUGHAN**  
**R/EVOLUTION 1969-84**

GAUGHAN RECORDINGS

9/10

Staggering deep historical dive for Scottish folk legend



"HIS greatness is based in his guts and his soul," says fellow folk singer Barbara Dickson of Dick Gaughan, "not in his fingers or his larynx." There's something to that statement, both in the determination of Gaughan's five-decade career, and the staunchness of his working-class politics, so core to Gaughan's music – and, at a pinch, to most great folk song. It's all clearly on display in *R/evolution*, a box featuring seven discs of music from the first 15 years of Gaughan's career proper. But it would do us all well to remember the agility of those fingers and the power of that larynx, too. For those new to Dick Gaughan's deceptively plain-sung renditions of folk songs both old and modern, well, it can initially feel a bit too raw, too rough against the skin – and then the hypnotic tangle of his guitar playing unspools, the courage in the a cappella performances catches you listening, and the way he allows the constituent parts of his music to move in different orbits, yet always fused, reels you in.

*R/evolution* came about thanks to a Kickstarter campaign headed up by writer, editor and longtime Gaughan fan, Colin Harper, in response to the very real threat of Gaughan's legacy going undocumented – particularly given that after a stroke in 2016 he is unable to play guitar and is now legally blind. Add to this the complications around licensing for some of his back catalogue, and *R/*

*Evolution* begins to feel even more necessary, for archival posterity and, on a broader level, as object lesson and reminder of how the rich thread of traditional song can be rewound in endlessly creative ways.

Gaughan's legend, such that it currently is, often rests on 1981's *Handful Of Earth*, widely recognised as his best album. *R/evolution* feels particularly important, then, for the way it pulls focus and allows a richer understanding of just what Gaughan achieved over his first decade and a half of professional music-making. There's his time in the groups Boys In The Lough and Five Hand Reel, both documented judiciously here, but most importantly there is a body of solo material, from radio sessions, live recordings and cherry-picked from a number of his albums, that allows listeners to experience incremental creative change and development accruing around a sturdy core.

Gaughan took folk song at its word, as both music offering land maps and narratives to history, and the everyday song of the people. He's equally comfortable with contemporary political commentary, and with the rich arc of history – his delivery of "Willie o' Winsbury" equals Anne Briggs's stunning rendition. The 126 performances here, many previously unreleased, offer a non-dogmatic roadbook for sustaining folk song by balancing tradition and experiment.

**Extras:** 9/10. An eighth DVD filled with footage, and two booklets – one with excellent extended essay by *Uncut's* Graeme Thomson, the other collating contemporaneous print appearances for Gaughan. **JONDALE**



Dick Gaughan, Toverbal 1972



Hair apparent: Alex Lifeson and Geddy Lee, 1984

# RUSH

## Grace Under Pressure: Super Deluxe Edition UME

8/10

An '80s evolution expanded. By Jason Anderson



IN his memoir *My Effin' Life*, Geddy Lee expresses his regret about a choice made during the making of Rush's 10th album, 1984's *Grace Under Pressure*.

That was the decision to cut his "witchy tresses" in favour of a more '80s-appropriate hairstyle. No-one was pleased with the results and Lee's efforts to grow it out again during the subsequent tour resulted in "an unfortunate bonnet that got me elected to the Mullet Hall of Fame". Decades later, the sound of his cringing can still be heard. "Why my wife didn't step in and save me from myself is beyond me," he laments.

Yet as is amply demonstrated by the latest entry in the Canadian band's 40th-anniversary series of expanded editions, Rush adapted to the new decade's changes and challenges far more adroitly than the vast majority of their prog-era peers. What's more, they did so without undergoing the kind of drastic overhaul that Yes did in the hands of Trevor Horn, or Genesis had by embracing Phil Collins' affinities for pop and R&B. Instead, Rush's incorporation of new technology – like the PPG Wave 2.2 synth and the electronic drums so fundamental to the sound here – and adoption of more concise song structures felt more evolutionary than revolutionary, even if this same trio had situated themselves among the priests of Syrinx and sentient trees only a few years before.

With the tightly coiled displays of intensity and dexterity on "Distant Early Warning" and "The Body Electric", the band achieves a match of force and velocity that was only intermittently attained on 1982's *Signals*. Whereas that album had too strongly favoured the synths over Alex Lifeson's guitar heroics, *Grace Under Pressure* benefits from a better calibrated balance of digital and analogue, a strength that's further emphasised here in Terry

Brown's new mixes for the Super Deluxe Edition.

Brown's contributions constitute a karmic correction for a disturbance in the Rush-verse, the band having originally decided to end their eight-album relationship with the producer due to their dissatisfaction with *Signals*. After Brown's planned replacement Steve Lilywhite took a gig with Simple Minds shortly before the sessions' start date, Rush hastily hired Peter Henderson, the British producer and engineer whose credits include Supertramp's *Breakfast In America*. According to Lee's liner notes, Henderson's disinclination to serve as argument-settler made Rush's painstaking methodology even more painful. "The whole thing took a major chunk out of us as a band and me as a human being," Lee writes, describing how months of quibbling over tiny differences between takes and mixes left the band "emotionally and physically spent".

Even so, that mood of weary exasperation may have suited the darker nature of the songs, another aspect that makes *Grace Under Pressure* seem well suited to our times. Cold War-era political tensions and anxieties about other threats to humanity's survival course through Neil Peart's lyrics for "Distant Early Warning" and "Between The Wheels". The harrowing "Red Sector A" draws from the Holocaust experience of Lee's mother, which he powerfully recounted in *My Effin' Life*. "Afterimage" starkly conveys the band's grief over the recent

loss of Robbie Whelan, a friend who'd worked with the band at Le Studio in Quebec.

Just as these flickers of anger and despair add grit to the high-tech sheen, the performances feel equally human in their thorny complexity. Accorded more space than on *Signals*, Alex

### SLEEVE NOTES

**CD1/LP1: Original Album – 2025 Remaster**  
**CD2/LP2: Original Album – 2025 Terry Brown Mix**  
**CD3+4/LP3, 4+5: Grace Under Pressure Tour: Live In Toronto 1984**  
**Blu-Ray: Grace Under Pressure: Live In Toronto 1984 Concert Video + additional surround and stereo mixes, promo videos**

Lifeson's guitar continually punches through the mix, especially on the driving rocker "Kid Gloves". A few years on from embracing their new-wave predilections on 1981's *Moving Pictures*, Rush continued to expand their palette with the Police-like, semi-reggae of "The Enemy Within" and the *Remain In Light*-ish avant-funk of "Red Lenses". Throughout, there's a sound of a group keenly aware of their own musical moment, taking in new elements and repurposing them to their advantage.

Originally recorded at Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens in September 1984, the live tracks here further demonstrate the band's fortitude, along with their astonishing ability to

wield all the necessary pedals and contraptions to reproduce their music onstage. The Super Deluxe Edition offers a more complete version of the show than those included in the earlier *Grace Under Pressure* concert video and the *Replay X3* DVD set, newly retooled by Brown in a variety of mixes and formats, including Dolby Atmos. All that work will be appreciated by listeners eager to analyse the Peart solo near the concert's climax, a moment noted in a reproduced setlist as "NEIL". Suffice to say, the all-caps feels entirely fitting.

Lee and Lifeson's upcoming North American tour with Anika Nilles in their late drummer's place gives Rush a new chance to re-engage with the present, much as they did with great determination and intelligence here.



### Q&A

#### Geddy Lee on *Grace Under Pressure*

**"Distant Early Warning":** "I love the statement it makes as it kicks off the album – right away it sends a message that this record is a very different beast from *Signals*, with its dynamic crossfire between Alex's raging guitar and those off-time keyboard punches, each staying pretty much out of each other's way. It's also topical – even more so in our dire 21st century, surely."

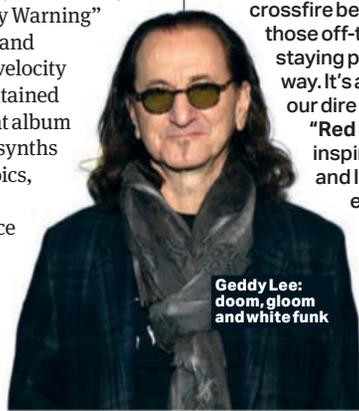
**"Red Sector A":** "Lyrically it was inspired by a conversation Neil and I had about my mother's experiences of the Holocaust and her emotions at the moment of her liberation from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. It captures her shock

that being liberated after over five years of incarceration was even a possibility, as well as the despair at realising how the world at large had largely failed to act sooner. Neil took those feelings and put them in a futuristic context, borrowing the title from the name of the VIP section at the Cape Kennedy Space Center from which the band had been privileged to witness the launch of the Space Shuttle Columbia in 1981."

**"Red Lenses":** "It's damn funky, in my humble opinion – well, as funky as three white Canadians ever got, I guess!"

**"Between The Wheels":** "[It] finishes the album in a powerful, ominous and brooding fashion, apropos the album title and the circumstances we found ourselves in when making this record. For most of these sessions, we felt like we were indeed stuck between a rock and a hard place."

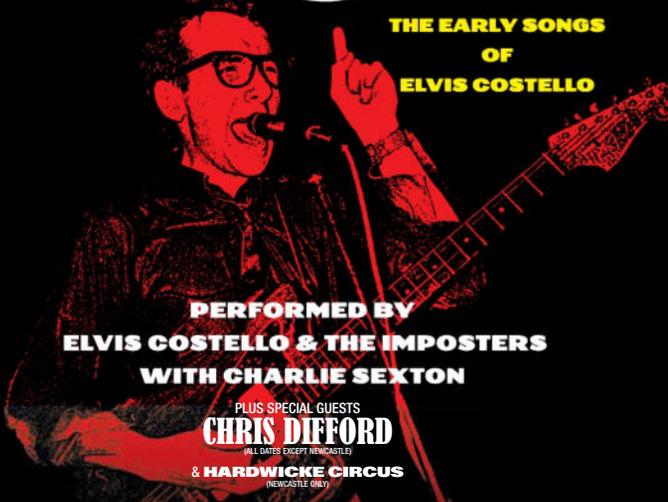
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Geddy Lee: doom, gloom and white funk

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# THE SPECIALIST

## KLAUS NOMI

Nomi OMNIVORE RECORDINGS

8/10

**Boxing up the small catalogue of a unique popstar. By Stephen Deuser**



KLAUS NOMI was not pop's first alien presence, but arguably he was the most alien. The human being born

Klaus Sperber developed the Nomi persona in the late 1970s as part of New York's avant-garde scene; he painted his face white, emphasised his curvy hairline and donned boxy tuxedos like some Martian approximation of formal wear. He sung in a clipped sing-speak, carefully sculpting his vowels and biting into his consonants, but Nomi could also soar operatically along multiple octaves. David Bowie, who knew more than a little about starmen, recognised a kindred soul and invited Nomi to perform with him on *Saturday Night Live*.

That short collaboration launched Nomi's deeply odd and tragically short career. He signed with Bowie's label RCA, which allowed him to elaborate upon his character through two studio records, a live album and a posthumous odds-and-sods collection. They've all been collected in this new boxset, simply titled *Nomi*, which shows how he used his alienness to speak to his isolation as a gay man and an immigrant in America. It's weird, fun, unique and unexpectedly poignant.

Nomi's alien persona introduced an element of novelty to his music, but it never constrained him. He moved easily between a range of styles, including opera, cabaret, chanson and even – on the beautifully bizarre "Rubberband Lazer" – intergalactic country. Before he even met Bowie, Nomi started working closely with Kristian Hoffman of the New York post-punk band



Klaus Nomi: loving the alien

Mumps, who wrote songs and chose covers for the performer. On his 1981 self-titled debut, the pair radically transform Lou Christie's "Lightning Strikes" into a pop aria, and it's impossible to actually do the Twist to his spaced-out version of Chubby Checker's "The Twist". This is an alien version of pop music, a mix of the highbrow and the lowbrow into a kitschy aesthetic. Why even bother with such arbitrary rules when nuclear obliteration looms: "We'll take a million years of civilisation", Nomi declares on "After The Fall", "and we're gonna give it the electric chair". But the delicious way he rolls the "r" at the end of "chair" proves the human race can be redeemed.

Barely a year after the release of 1982's *Simple Man*, Nomi died of AIDS – one of the first public figures lost to the disease. What comes through on *Nomi*, even on the live disc, is the loneliness at the centre of his music. As an alien on Earth, he's the only one of his kind and therefore removed from human emotions like sadness, joy and even love. On "Nomi Song", he wonders whether the world will ever accept him: "If they saw my face, could I still take a bow?/Will they know me, know me, know me now?" It's the alien at his most human.

STEPHEN DEUSER

*Fables Of The Reconstruction* album, with plenty of room for choice cuts from its two predecessors (*Murmur* and *Reckoning*). The group's sole appearance on *The Old Grey Whistle Test* ("Moon River", "Pretty Persuasion") the previous year makes the cut for the DVD running order. Those lean and hungry earlier tracks are juxtaposed by more anthem-leaning outings at Glastonbury and Milton Keynes Bowl, although there's a welcome intimacy to acoustic radio sessions, and a *Later...* special – with you-know-who riding shotgun at the piano for a cover of Iggy Pop's "The Passenger". TERRY STAUNTON

## THE SENSATIONAL ALEX HARVEY BAND Good Evening, Boys And Girls!

MADFISH 8/10

**Live favourites tread the boards across 21 discs**



It's a fair bet that most diehard SAHB fans would concede that, whatever the delights of the group's eight studio albums

released between 1972 and '78, Alex and his pals were at their most vital, venomous and mesmerising on the live stage. There's evidence aplenty of that across the 21 CDs here, kicking off with a sweaty show at the Marquee in London in '73, the set's gritty blues rock augmented by curveball covers (The Osmonds' "Crazy Horses", Del Shannon's "Runaway"). As time marches on, glam-friendly theatrics play an increasing role, affording opportunities for elaborately expanded takes on Harvey originals, the likes of "The Faith Healer", "Midnight Moses" and "Sergeant Fury" almost taking on the form of self-contained short plays. The curtain falls less than four years later at Reading Festival, a performance of bruised pomp that suggests, had their leader lived, greater and more widespread fame could have been in their future. TERRY STAUNTON

## THE SKY CHIEFS The Sky Chiefs

SELF-RELEASED 8/10

**Thirty-plus years on, Long Ryder and chum unearths lively 'lost' debut**



Having spent nearly a year exploring a mutual love of vintage country, Virginian duo Stephen McCarthy

and Kevin Pittman recorded as The Sky Chiefs back in the early '90s. Alas, other projects got in the way, leaving the tapes gathering dust for decades. The belated *The Sky Chiefs* finds multi-instrumentalist McCarthy in the sweet spot between the initial breakup of The Long Ryders (the band he co-founded in 1982) and his early-'00s tenure with The Jayhawks. Pittman, meanwhile, was fresh from stints with The Dads and The Wit Lincolns.

## QUEEN Queen II Collector's Edition HOLLYWOOD US

8/10

**Expanded five-disc version of the album that invented Queen as we know them**



The band's second LP is a game of two halves. Side One, the "White Side", is Brian May's guitar-driven suite,

mixing acoustic balladry with thick, overdriven lead lines. But it's Side Two, Freddie Mercury's "Black Side", that really invents Queen's unique brand of baroque rock. Using crisp diction and his remarkable vocal range, Mercury takes us into the realm of Tolkein-esque fantasy, particularly on the monstrous thrash metal of "Ogre Battle" and the sexually ambiguous "Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke". This five-disc package features live sets, BBC radio sessions and a deluge of demos and outtakes, filled with Mercury's amusing apologies to the engineer ("Oh, this pop star lark is too much for me... I should go back to doing blue movies, fuck this"). As

well as several versions of May's Led Zep-sized blues prowler "See What A Fool I've Been", rarities include the McCartney-esque "Not For Sale", a previously unreleased ballad written as a Christmas song. JOHN LEWIS

## REIGNING SOUND Time Bomb High School (reissue, 2002)

MERGE 9/10

**Memphis-born garage rock from one of the finest songwriters of the noughties**



Greg Cartwright had already been in two brilliant underground bands – Compulsive Gamblers and Oblivians – when

he put together Reigning Sound as the ideal showcase for his old-fashioned songwriting, melodic ear, plaintive vocals and love of classic R'n'B. Every Reigning Sound LP is worth a spin, but this, their second album, might be the epitome of their approach to garage rock, which added a soulful Memphis touch to the dominant Detroit sound of the time. "You're Not As Pretty" is typical of Cartwright's gift, a stunning

song that fuses Big Star with the Stones. The ballads are gorgeous, but Reigning Sound could rock as hard as The White Stripes or The Dirtbombs on "She's Bored With You" and "Straight Shooter". The vinyl version, long out of print, has different sequencing to the CD, dividing songs between a side of bawlers and another of brawlers – this reissue restores that tracklist with new cover art. PETER WATTS

## REM At The BBC (reissue, 2018)

CRAFT RECORDINGS 8/10

**Straightforward re-pressing of a live compendium**



For the most part, this bumper box (eight CDs, one DVD) draws from 1990 onwards, by which time Athens' finest were firmly established as a well-drilled arena act. The exception, and all the better for it, is a disc dedicated to a show at the comparatively humble Nottingham Rock City in 1984, an edgy, wiry performance trying out numbers from the then-forthcoming



Supertramp: slick craftsmen

Roping in a few sidemen, these original songs mostly borrow from classic Nashville tropes – despair, heartsickness, love gone awry – but do so with playful panache, marked by chiming Telecasters and rich country harmonies. Standouts include old-school honky-tonker “All Broke Down”, inspired by pianist Floyd Cramer, and the teary “Walk All Over Me”, whose sentiments are in direct opposition to its pure melodic jubilation. **ROBHUGHES**

**CHARLES JOSEPH SMITH**  
Collected Works And War Of The Martian Ghosts

**SOOPER**  
8/10  
The first career retrospective of a prolific Chicago original

Dr Charles Joseph Smith calls himself a “crossover composer”, which isn’t a comment on either his commercial aspirations or his diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Instead, it’s the mission statement of a man with no regard for style or genre: Smith crosses over from classical and avant-garde techniques to pop sounds and forms, which makes this sampling of his sprawling catalogue a marvel of surprises. Over the last 30 years he has released more than 60 albums’ worth of music via hand-copied cassettes and CDs, but *Collected Works* is the first time any of his work has been made widely available. It’s a dizzying array of settings and modes, ranging from free jazz and showtunes to minimalism and musique concrète. “Le Leader Negatif” and “Acid Rain” could soundtrack classic video games, while his unfinished opera *War Of The Martian Ghosts* is a mind-blowing piano fantasia spanning three acts, two of these discs, and multiple planets. **STEPHENDEUSNER**

**SUPERTRAMP**  
Breakfast In America (reissue, 1979) UMC  
8/10

A half-speed remastering for the prog-poppers’ global chart-topper

That its biggest, Wurlitzer piano-driven hit, “The Logical Song”, concerned Roger Hodgson’s lingering

confusion from boarding school – encapsulated in the plaintive “Please tell me who I am” – confirmed that Supertramp’s sixth album swam against prevailing pop currents. Nonetheless, sandwiched between 1977’s punk-baiting *Even In The Quietest Moments...* and *...Famous Last Words...* early-’80s commercial gloss – both now similarly remastered at Abbey Road – it was engineered to succeed in Los Angeles over eight months. The title track’s similarly confounding brassy oompah and saxophone solo were, inexplicably, almost as successful, and if “Take The Long Way Home” couldn’t match its sales, its nonchalant swing matched its energy. Of course, the muscular production, not least “Just Another Nervous Wreck”’s twin guitars, pre-empted stadium dynamics, and Rick Davies’ opener, “Gone Hollywood”, immediately ensured their shrill bursts of Bee Gees-meets-Queen harmonies remained inescapable. By “Child Of Vision”’s closing, blue-eyed yacht rock, however, there was no doubting their slick craft. **WYNDHAM WALLACE**

**VARIOUS ARTISTS**  
Changing My Scene: Art Music And The Beatles

**CHERRY RED**  
7/10  
The Fabs’ forays into stranger realms, charted across three CDs

To say this engaging compilation chronicles The Beatles’ late-’60s experimental influences might be a stretch; while some of the music here was certainly explored by the group, especially the artier McCartney, the provenance elsewhere is hazier. Still, it all made up the stew of the counterculture: Humphrey Lyttelton’s “Bad Penny Blues” is a key building block of “Lady Madonna”; Harrison’s idols Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan are represented by 25 minutes of beatific raga; Albert Ayler was a favourite of McCartney, who used his music to soundtrack an experimental Super 8 film. Most of the “art music” here comes courtesy of pioneering composers, though, from Stockhausen – a heavy influence on the tape loops of “Tomorrow Never Knows” and “Revolution 9” – Mahler, Bach (the reason there’s a piccolo trumpet on “Penny Lane”) and

Satie, to the entirety of Stravinsky’s explosive *The Rite Of Spring*. Xenakis, meanwhile, despite having no known connection to The Beatles, eerily predicts the rising orchestral clamour of “A Day In The Life” with his own “Metastasis”. **TOMPINNOCK**

**VARIOUS ARTISTS**  
Fight The Fire: Conscious Roots, Digital Reggae And Dub In Nigeria, 1986–1991

**SOUNDWAY**  
8/10  
New comp charts a digitally driven reggae boom in ’80s Lagos

With reggae’s development into a global phenomenon through the ’70s came the proverbial blooming of many more flowers far from Kingston, including a more distinctly Africanised incarnation in Nigeria. In his introductory note for *Fight The Fire*, Louis Chude-Sokei describes how singers and producers in Lagos localised the sound in the ’80s to stunning effect. This intermingling of Afrobeat, highlife and Jamaican riddims felt especially modern thanks to the eager embrace of the more synthetic textures of dancehall and digidub. The 14 cuts compiled here by Jeremy Spellacey chart the shift from the roots-oriented vibe of Johnny Keslar’s “Wadada” toward the hazier likes of Mac Dessy Adult’s “Labrock Dub” and Alphonsus Indigo’s “Mystic World”, two of several tracks that align Nigeria’s reggae boom with the British-made dub abstractions of On-U Sound and Dennis Bovell. The sweeter lovers-rock lilt of Sheila & Des Majek’s “Mother Nature” is beguiling for other reasons, too. **JASON ANDERSON**

**MARNIE WEBER**  
Returning Home: The Music Of Marnie Weber

**PHANTOM LIMB**  
7/10  
Sonic Youth associate curates her goth-tinged catalogue

Given the Kim Gordon-style intoning on her track “Nude In Solitude”, it is unsurprising that Marnie Weber



**COMING NEXT MONTH...**

IN the next issue of *Uncut* there’ll be reviews of promising new records from **White Denim, Souled American, Jah Wobble, Brown Horse, Jesca Hoop, Kneecap, White Fence, Arlo Parks** and many more. Some of the stars of the Archive section, meanwhile, will include **Scritti Politti, Super Furry Animals, The Handsome Family, King Crimson, XTC** and **Yoko Ono**. **EMAIL TOM.PINNOCK@KELSEY.CO.UK**

found kindred spirits in Sonic Youth, creating the collage artwork for 1998’s *A Thousand Leaves* and releasing her own music on Thurston Moore’s Ecstatic Peace label. Weber is more prolific as a visual artist but music has always been part of her artistic expression, from her teenage band Party Boys, who were regulars at downtown LA punk hangout Al’s Bar, to ghost-faced drone-rock outfit The Spirit Girls. *Returning Home...* selects 10 solo tracks, from twanging instrumentals to gothic odysseys, from her albums *Songs Hurt Me, Woman With Bass* and *Cry For Happy*. At times, her unsettling minimalism sounds like Diamanda Galás without the vocal *sturm und drang*, while the pagan intensity, drawing vocals and disturbing sound design of cool punk mantra “The Passionate One” recalls the vocal/percussion melodrama of The Creatures. **Extras: 8/10**. Very limited numbered artist’s edition available with Weber artwork and individually handcut sleeve. **FIONA SHEPHERD**



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# CAN'T GET ENOUGH

A powerhouse blend of hard rock, glam and blues led by their wild Glaswegian frontman, **THE SENSATIONAL ALEX HARVEY BAND** were a unique and thrilling force during their '70s heyday. As a new boxset showcases their formidable live spectacle, bandmates celebrate the dangerous brilliance of their leader. "On a good night, he was amazing," hears Graeme Thomson. "And on a bad night, he was amazing."

Photo by MICHAEL PUTLAND

**T**O understand why Alex Harvey was a star unlike any other, and why The Sensational Alex Harvey Band remained essentially a cult proposition throughout their six-year span, we travel back half a century to a show in Berlin in October 1976, where Harvey has transformed himself into Adolf Hitler.

Written by Leiber and Stoller and first recorded in 1954 by The Robins, "Framed" was intended as a humorous condemnation of police harassment against the black community. In Harvey's hands, it becomes an irony-drenched tour de force in which the hapless protagonist could be Jesus, Harvey himself, or the most detested villain of the 20th century.

In Berlin, he opts for the latter. He slicks his unruly shock of hair to one side, adds a moustache made out of gaffer tape, daubs a swastika on the back of his leather jacket and begins to sing: "I didn't do nuthin', I was framed!" "We said, 'Alex, please don't do it,'" says SAHB bassist Chris Glen. "But he loved all that."

"The Berlin gig was a bit scary," recalls Dave Batchelor, the band's producer and sound engineer. "I was in the audience and I really didn't know how it would land. But Alex, being Alex, got the message across of what he was really talking about. It could have gone wrong on a big scale and in exactly the wrong place, but he absolutely knew what he was doing. He always pushed the boundaries. He wouldn't ever play safe." At the end of the song, Harvey growled, "In case you get the wrong idea, Hitler was a bastard."

The Berlin show isn't one of the 16 concert recordings included on *Good Evening, Boys And Girls!*, a new 21CD set showcasing SAHB's formidable stage prowess, but the tale is indicative of the visceral, unsettling burlesque that defined their shows. With Harvey leading from the front, a bastard blend of Teddy boy thug, cartoon pirate and dark-eyed Glaswegian philosopher, the band projected a powerful theatricality.

The singer would engage in extended monologues wearing a scarlet smoking jacket, brandishing a teacher's cane and deploying the pregnant pause like a weapon. With a Joker grin, he would pour beer on his hands and slick back his hair with it, fill water pistols with his own urine and fire it into the audience, break chairs and spray graffiti while preaching peace and utopia. "On a good night, he was amazing," says guitarist Zal Cleminson. "And on a bad night, he was amazing."

Cleminson, meanwhile, wore harlequin makeup and satirised orthodox "rock guitar" histrionics while gazing at the audience with a maniacal half-smile. But there was much more to the band than theatrics and shock tactics. Revered by Nick Cave, Bon Scott and Robert Smith, the music of SAHB was a powerhouse blend of hard rock, glam and blues infused with the spirit of avant-garde theatre, early rock'n'roll and working-class cabaret.

"They were ahead of their time," says Batchelor. "That voice, the gymnastics, the ferociousness of Alex's delivery. Nobody then had heard or seen anything like it." ➔

"He always pushed  
the boundaries":  
Alex Harvey in  
October 1975



Putting the theatre into rock: Harvey on stage with Tear Gas at the Marquee Club, London, 1972



**W**HEN Harvey hooked up with Scottish blues-rock band Tear Gas in 1972, he was already in his late thirties and had been around the block several times.

Born in 1935 in Kinning Park, one of Glasgow's tougher locales, since winning Scotland's Tommy Steele talent contest in 1957 Harvey had prowled the Reeperbahn in Hamburg at the same time as The Beatles, played in the pit band for the West End musical *Hair* and had, by his own reckoning, 36 "proper" jobs.

By the early 1970s, fronting the Big Soul Band, Harvey was in need of fresh impetus. His manager, Bill Fehilly, approached Tear Gas, who comprised Cleminson and Glen plus Hugh McKenna on keyboards, his cousin Ted McKenna on drums and Dave Batchelor on vocals.

Harvey was already a familiar figure to them all. "I first saw Alex in the late '60s, at a club in Glasgow known as the Picasso," says Cleminson. "He was on tour with the Big Soul Band and his younger brother, Leslie, was playing guitar. Alex was playing a bass guitar, even though he had a bass player. The sound was tremendous – tight, raw and very exciting. I never met him at the time, but I was very impressed with his consummate professionalism."

Tear Gas had released two albums and had a loyal fanbase, but their star was on the wane. "Alex's name was mentioned to us by our manager, Eddie Tobin," says Cleminson. "The suggestion was that he would become our singer and the band would be called The Sensational Alex Harvey Band. Tear Gas were struggling to exist, and it seemed like a good way to keep the band together."

"For us it was about money at first," says Chris Glen. "Tear Gas had got as big as we could get. Eddie Tobin said, 'If you let this guy join, his management will pay off your debts and double your

wages.' We weren't really thinking further than that at the time. Some of our fans didn't like it. There was a rumour that this old guy Harvey had pushed his way into Tear Gas because he was in with gangsters. A couple of big guys asked if we

"He was like, 'Can you play that?'" Glen recalls. "We were like, 'Can we? Of course we fucking can!' It was really simple. We did the 'Fear Gas' thing [Tear Gas were often known as Fear Gas because they were so loud] and you could tell there was something there."

As Tear Gas's singer, Dave Batchelor had most to lose from the merger. He had already taken on a more administrative role within the band, however, as well as becoming involved in song arranging and recording, and was happy to make room for Harvey. Batchelor remained a core figure in SAHB, handling their live sound and producing many of their records.

It wasn't an immediate fit. "There was a bit of 'He's Alex, we're Tear Gas' at first," says Glen. "Just because we'd been together for a while and we were all the same age."

Harvey was a generation removed from the band, and a mercurial personality: a febrile mix of hard-drinking street tough, wide-eyed romantic, hippie idealist, thespian and philosopher. A fists-first pacifist, when SAHB supported Yes at Stoke City's football ground on May 17, 1975, Harvey stopped the band when fighting broke out and told the audience: "If you don't stop that I'm going to come down and kick fuck out of the lot of you."

"Those contradictions, that's just who he was," says Batchelor. "It surfaced in different situations. He grew up in Kinning Park, and he would have learned some tricks there. Then he married Trudy, who was and is a very spiritual person."

Harvey was living with Trudy and their two children in a well-appointed top-floor apartment in Hampstead, north London. The conversation was artistic and the music ranged from Luciano Pavarotti and Louis Prima to Moroccan folk and

**"ALEX TOOK MISCHIEVOUS DELIGHT IN FEEDING HIS APPETITE FOR THE ABSURD"**

ZAL CLEMINSON

wanted them to sort it out. We were like, 'No, no, give it a chance!'"

The two sides met in the Burns Howff pub in central Glasgow, Harvey arriving with a guitar slung over his shoulder. After a few drinks, they moved to a rehearsal room nearby. "Alex played us a guitar riff and asked if we could play it," says Cleminson. "With a smile at one another we started to beat the shit out of the riff until Alex was visibly bouncing up and down on his brothel creepers and grinning from ear to ear. The song was called 'Midnight Moses'. We had an idea that things just might work out."



"No tantrums. No ego trips": Harvey with Hugh McKenna (left) and Zal Cleminson, Manchester, 1972

"Alex could be an imposing, intimidating character and Hugh was a very sensitive type, the ultimate creative mentality. He must have gone through some difficulties understanding what Alex wanted. But what an incredible fusion. It's a testament to Hugh as a musician that he came up with the riffs, the rhythm, the detail. From there, the band and I would be in there rehearsing, arranging and fine-tuning. There were no tantrums. No ego trips. Everyone pulled their weight. It was always creative, always a buzz,

always developing. Each album became a bit more adventurous in terms of song structures and song sources, and the tapestry of Hugh, Alex and Zal."

The breadth of SAHB's reach, whether playing originals or covers, was largely down to Harvey's catholic tastes. Having served several apprenticeships,

he knew exactly what he did and didn't want. His promiscuous influences kept SAHB's music fresh and surprising, but it didn't help their commercial prospects.

"Originality was what I was primarily interested in," says Cleminson.

"I was still keen to remain within the mainstream rock idiom. Alex had a different agenda and at times took a mischievous delight in feeding his appetite for the absurd. He had developed a vocal style that while unique, seemed too extreme. I wanted Tear Gas to be a mainstream band, but Alex saw something else in the project, which I think had grown from his

experience in West End theatre. I think at times it was a step too far and deprived the band of a much larger, more mainstream rock audience." ▶▶

classical Indian. Financed by Fehilly, Tear Gas relocated from Glasgow to a house in Hornsey, not far from Harvey's. "Three levels, cats and dogs and weans and wives," says Batchelor. "It was a fabulous time."

As they all became better acquainted, SAHB began to gel. "One of the earliest shows – it might even have been the first one – was just shite," says Glen. "Nothing was going right: the gear, the sound, nothing. Alex went out into the crowd afterwards and said, 'Look, sorry for wasting your time. Come back next time and we'll be good.' And we were!"

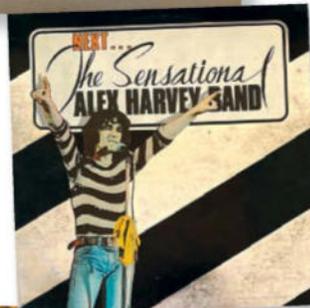
"There was maybe a six-month development period," says Batchelor. "But it wasn't long before it fell into place. Definitely by *Framed*."

SAHB released eight albums in little more than five years. A mix of Harvey originals and blues covers, *Framed* was the first. Released in December 1972, it was "a simple adaptation of songs which Alex had previously performed", says Cleminson. By the second, *Next*, the core writing partnership between Harvey and Hugh McKenna – often aided by Cleminson – began to blossom, most powerfully on "The Faith Healer". The title track, a cover of the English translation of a Jacques Brel song, became a SAHB live staple, and the album featured the first

appearance of Harvey's stripy-shirted alter ego, Vambo, on "Vambo Marble Eye" [see panel].

For the next record, SAHB employed legendary Who, Kinks and Pentangle producer Shel Talmy, but the results, provisionally titled *Can't Get Enough*, were shelved (the album was finally released in 2009 as *Hot City*). "It was just too polite," says Batchelor. "He didn't get what the band was about. Because I was doing the guys' live sound and song arrangements, it made sense to give me a go, and I never looked back."

Batchelor produced the next few SAHB albums, beginning with *The Impossible Dream*, released in October 1974 and featuring the classic "Anthem". He witnessed at close quarters how the band developed, particularly the core songwriting partnership of Harvey and McKenna.



## VAMBO ROOLS OK!!

### Harvey's comic-book avatar

**T**HE star of "Vambo Marble Eye" and "Hot City Symphony Part 1", Vambo was a utopian teenage superhero, a Glaswegian Spider-Man distilled from a romanticised trawl through Harvey's youthful escapades. His heroic exploits were intended to provide an alternative Manifesto For Good Living: "Vambo never vandal be... Vambo never steal from neighbour". A huge comics fan, Harvey described his creation as "a cross between Santa Claus and Captain Marvel, coming to the rescue". On stage, the Vambo section could stretch for 10 minutes as Harvey rapped about his hero while clutching a huge storybook, before spray-painting "VAMBO ROOLS!!" on a fake brick wall at the back of the stage as the band vamped furiously.



American graffiti: Harvey on stage at Alex Cooley's Electric Ballroom in Atlanta, Georgia, March 18, 1975

JORGEN ANGEL/RED FERNS; TOM HILL/WIREIMAGE



"Play The Riff!": The Sensational Alex Harvey Band live in Copenhagen, 1975

"If you bought an album, it would sound like a compilation," said Glen. "There was a bit of jazz, a bit of tango. But go and see the show and it all made complete sense."

As Glen suggests, it was one thing to hear SAHB on record, but for the full experience you had to see them. The SAHB mythology was forged on stage. They toured "endlessly", says Cleminson, who acknowledges that "the band always sounded better as a live act".

As they developed, the visual aspect became more ambitious. "Alex was keen to introduce an expansive theatrical identity," says Cleminson. "The dynamic worked almost immediately, as Alex and myself formed a very healthy and often hilarious rivalry for stealing the limelight. It was this dynamic that fuelled the band's originality. Alex revelled in his role as artistic director. He aimed to draw out the natural performers in the band and develop a visual persona for each member."

Cleminson became Harvey's foil, daubed in harlequin makeup, wearing a skintight jump suit and a series of consciously absurd facial contortions. "One thing I found amusing was 'guitar player angst'," he says. "The pained, often grotesque facial expressions of guitarists offering up a blinding solo. I started to mimic this behaviour, which everyone found highly entertaining. It developed into a full-blown mime character."

Batchelor recalls a show in Southampton. "I remember Zal and Alex nailing that whole interplay. It was so natural, tapping into each other's psyche. It was a magical thing, and a big chunk of that was Zal."

Glen, meanwhile, became a superhero sidekick sporting an outlandish codpiece. Combined, the trio emitted a powerful blend of comedy, power and threat. "When we did 'Midnight Moses' and there was me, Alex and Zal standing on the wee

He'd turn to us and go, 'Play The Riff!' and we'd drop right into it. I think he sometimes did it just to say, 'Remember who's in charge here.' But it wasn't really like that. Everyone did their bit."

Harvey's method of psyching himself up for shows largely involved staring into the dressing room mirror and screaming "CUNT!" at the top of his lungs. "He would get himself really wound up," says Glen. "We just left him to it. It didn't bother us. But if we were sharing the dressing room with another band, they left. They thought we were all going to fight. The thing is, it was professional. It might have been fucking weird – but it was professional!"

Following the release of *The Impossible Dream*, SAHB toured the USA for the first time in late 1974. They recorded a session at Electric Lady Studios in New York and played memorable shows in Cleveland, Columbus and Syracuse. "You really felt you were getting somewhere when we made it to America," says Glen. "They were more ready for what we did." Cleminson isn't so sure. "Our USA experience exposed the band's ambivalent, idiosyncratic shortcomings," he says. "We were adored in some regions, whilst leaving others completely bemused."

One of Harvey's favourite tricks was hiring two bagpipers to appear with the band on stage. Often, after the show, he would march into the hotel bar singing the Scots lament "The Gallowa' Hills", accompanied by the pipers. "They were brilliant," says Glen. "You could get into anywhere with them! Alex would get them to march ahead of us, and we'd walk in wherever we wanted to go: posh restaurants, shops where you couldn't afford anything..."

Though SAHB made converts at every show and enjoyed staunch support from several radio stations, it was an uphill struggle. "The material, inherently, was hard to take for the American audience," says Batchelor. "To try and condense

**"IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN  
FUCKING WEIRD – BUT IT  
WAS PROFESSIONAL"**

**CHRIS GLEN**



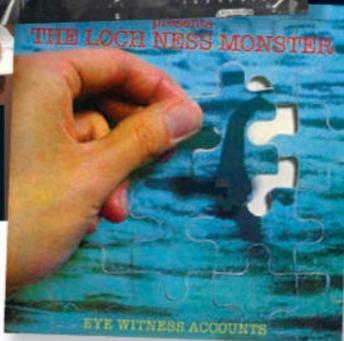
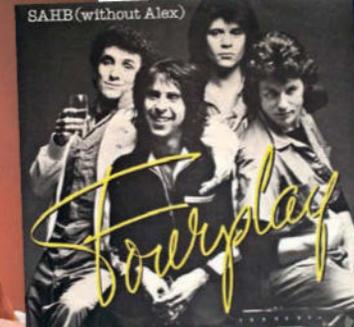
Mime is money: Zal Cleminson's harlequin stage persona

sign we had at the front of the stage, you saw the crowd stepping back away from us," says Glen. "I used to love that, but it would have spoiled the moment if I'd laughed!"

The theatrics did not come at the expense of the music, which was tightly controlled, with Harvey acting as the drill sergeant. "Alex had this thing called The Riff," says Glen. "He'd get us to play it if he thought we were getting too loose.



SAHB (with Alex): (l-r) Hugh McKenna, Zal Cleminson, Alex Harvey, Ted McKenna and Chris Glen in London, December 4, 1975



Reading Festival, 1977: Harvey's final show with the band

what SAHB was about in a 40-minute support spot was hard. It was like going to see a bit of leftfield theatre: you might get it, you may not. You needed to be tuned in."

*Tomorrow Belongs To Me*, released in April 1975, was recorded in the immediate aftermath of the US tour. It became the first SAHB album to reach the UK Top 10 and was followed in short order by *Live*, recorded at Hammersmith Odeon in May 1975 and released in September. An edited version of SAHB's cover of Tom Jones' 1968 hit "Delilah", taken from the album, reached No 7 in the charts [see panel].

**O**VER the next 12 months, SAHB scored two more Top 40 singles with "Gambler" Bar Room Blues" and "Boston Tea Party". The (covers-heavy) *The Penthouse Tapes* and *SAHB Stories* albums, released within four months of each other in 1976, were well-received and the band remained a popular live draw. Yet there was a creeping sense of stasis.

"We probably needed to come out with a couple of songs that were... not more palatable, as such, but how things would play on radio was always an issue," says Batchelor. "There were bottlenecks all over the place." For a band with such a strong visual appeal, says Cleminson, "the forthcoming phenomena of the music video may have offered a chance to improve our success."

SAHB played an average of 280 shows each year. Burnout was inevitable. There was also personal tragedy to overcome. On May 3, 1972, in the early days of SAHB, Harvey's brother, Les, died after being electrocuted onstage at Swansea Top Rank while playing with his band, Stone The Crows. In July 1976, Bill Fehilly was killed, alongside his young son and four others, when the light aircraft in which he was travelling crashed in the Scottish borders.

"Alex never got over his brother's death, and then he never got over Bill's death," says Glen.

"Bill dying was a huge blow," agrees Batchelor. "It hit us all, but Alex in particular."

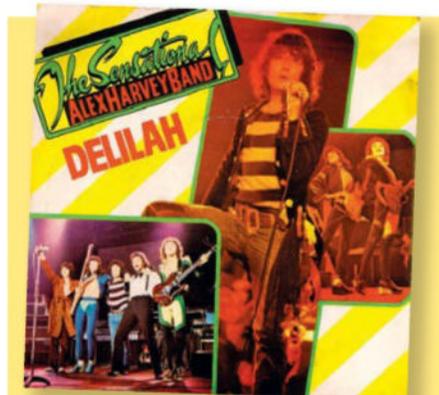
In autumn 1976, shortly after that highwire Berlin show, Harvey collapsed on stage in Lund, Sweden and the rest of SAHB's European tour was cancelled. He was in his early forties and the lifestyle was taking its toll, mentally and physically.

"Something had changed and it never came back," says Glen. "I always shared a hotel room with Zal, and Ted and Hugh shared. Alex had a room to himself. You started to worry when you saw all these empty vodka bottles in his room –

and no mixers. He wasn't well enough. He should have stopped for longer. But that just wasn't Alex."

"He was just an unhappy soul," says Batchelor, who left the SAHB orbit around this time.

"I remember us having an argument in some hotel. That was the end; I had to walk. Alex had gone off the rails and I just couldn't stand it. He was angry and he was hurting, partly because of the [lack of] financial reward. Nobody was in it for money, but we were grafting and we didn't have any real money. Alex was no longer getting the buzz out of going out and doing, 'Listen, boys and girls, let me tell you a story...' Suddenly, it



## "MY, MY, MY, DELILAH!"

### A dark take on a pop hit

**S**AHB's biggest success on 45 was an accidental hit. The song was only added to the live set, according to bassist Chris Glen, because audiences loved "the wee dance" the band had developed when playing Del Shannon's "Runaway", so they came up with something similar. "It could have been almost anything, but Alex liked what he could do with the lyrics. People forget it's a song about a stalker who kills his wife. It's as dark as 'Next'."

"Their version of 'Delilah' is sometimes dismissed or derided, but it's still a really good version, musically," says producer Dave Batchelor. "That interpretation stands up." Typical of the pop industry, many of those involved hoped lightning would strike twice. Says Glen: "Once we had a hit with it, the writers, Barry Mason and Les Reed, sent a couple of songs to our management and said, 'Ask them if they'll do these ones too...'"

much faith in the whole thing."

In 1977, the four original members of Tear Gas recorded *Fourplay* as SAHB (Without Alex), while Harvey made a curious spoken-word album, *Alex Harvey Presents The Loch Ness Monster*. By the time they reconvened for *Rock Drill*, recorded in 1977 and released in 1978, a disillusioned Hugh McKenna had left the band. On "No Complaints Department", the last song he sang in the studio with SAHB, Harvey left nothing to the imagination: "My best friend died in a plane crash, my brother was killed on the stage/So don't be upset if I'm angry and seem in some kind of a rage". As soon as he finished singing it, he broke down in tears.

Their show at Reading Festival in August 1977, included on the boxset, was the last gig SAHB played with their talismanic frontman. "It was no great surprise," says Cleminson, who shortly afterwards was driving a minicab in London. "Alex's health had been deteriorating for some time. Hugh had also succumbed to the rigours of the music business. The band had lost its sense of direction and were afflicted with a degree of apathy. [Later] he did ask me to reform SAHB, but I refused. I wasn't convinced it could be resurrected. It was a painful realisation for both of us. I never saw him again."

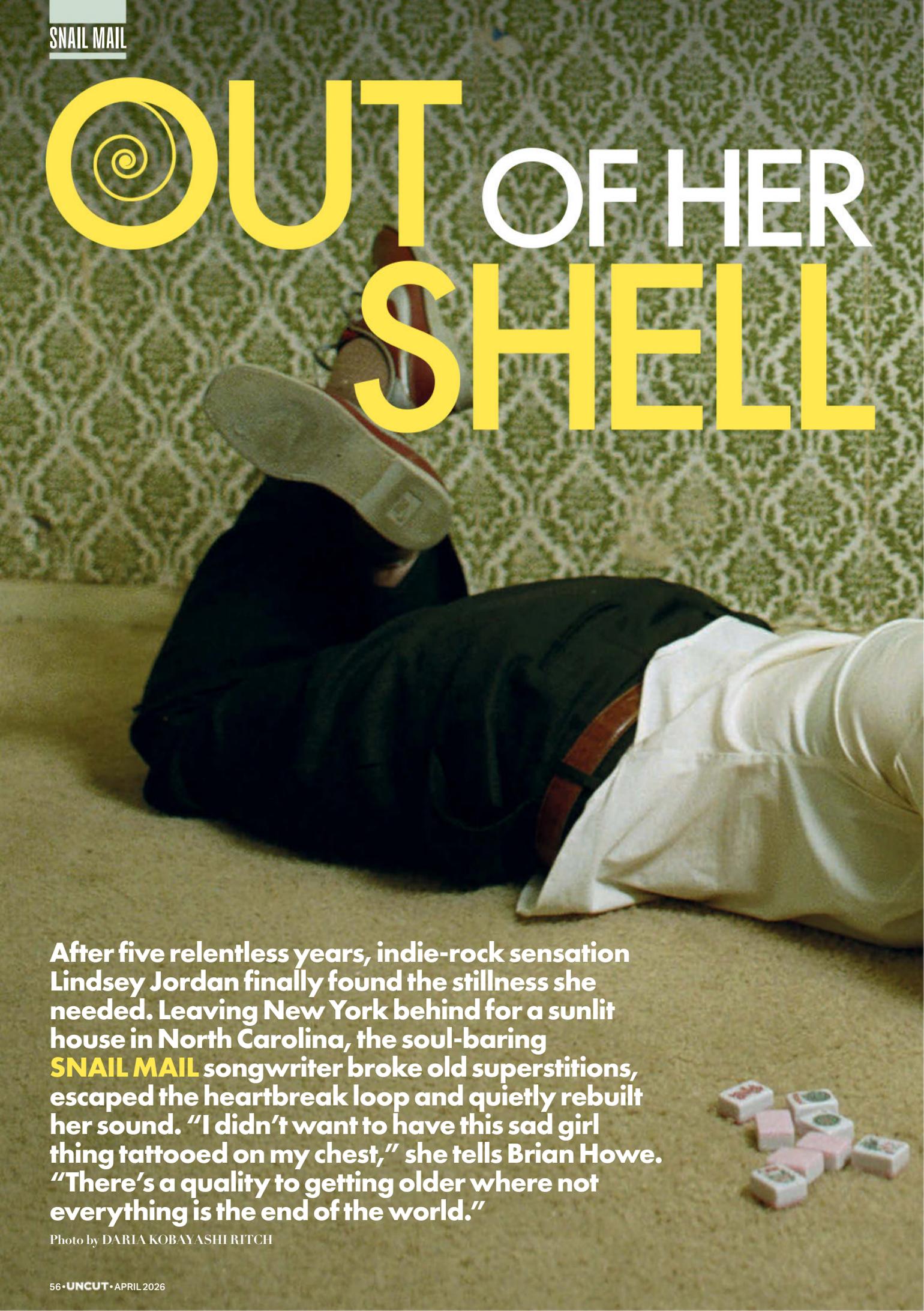
"A few years later, Alex asked me to manage him," says Glen. "I think he just wanted to get back to where he'd been. I think we'd have got back together if it hadn't ended like it did."

Harvey died of a heart attack while waiting to board a ferry in Belgium on February 4, 1982, the day before his 47th birthday. Various incarnations of SAHB continued well into the 2000s, but it is their glory days on stage that power the music on the boxset.

Fifty years later, ask Cleminson what he is most proud of and he replies: "Working with my best friends and producing music that has given pleasure to all the amazing fans around the world. Everything good about SAHB was a joy. The meteoric rise to recognition was addictive. The grand appearances were immeasurable. And the camaraderie had all the hallmarks of a rebellious, mischievous gang parting their talent and worth for all the world to see." 🗨️

*Good Evening, Boys And Girls!* is released by Madfish on April 10

# OUT OF HER SHELL



After five relentless years, indie-rock sensation Lindsey Jordan finally found the stillness she needed. Leaving New York behind for a sunlit house in North Carolina, the soul-baring **SNAIL MAIL** songwriter broke old superstitions, escaped the heartbreak loop and quietly rebuilt her sound. "I didn't want to have this sad girl thing tattooed on my chest," she tells Brian Howe. "There's a quality to getting older where not everything is the end of the world."

Photo by DARIA KOBAYASHI RITCHI

Lindsey Jordan  
at home in  
Greensboro, NC





"I was just like, I want to be part of the fun": Jordan in December 2025

**L**INDSEY Jordan nearly got stuck in her childhood bedroom. That's where her breakout releases as Snail Mail – "Habit" and *Lush* – were wrung from the ecstasies and agonies of high school. She tried to escape to New York, but the global pandemic flung her back to her discarded chrysalis in Maryland, where she laid bare the explosively heartbroken *Valentine*.

"I really got this creepy superstition that I could only write songs in my parents' house. This house literally broke the curse," she says, answering the door in a *Suspiria* T-shirt and exuding a voluble friendliness.

This is the house she bought two years ago, in the leafy suburbs near Greensboro, North Carolina, where she lives with a puffy white dog named Pip. It's where she was finally able to finish writing *Ricochet*, Snail Mail's long-awaited third album, five arduous years after *Valentine*. That's half the band's lifespan – a long time in indie-rock and a long time when you're 26.

Snail Mail toured *Valentine* so much that Jordan hardly felt like she lived in New York. When she finally alighted there for a while, she realised, "I hate loud noises. I hate smells. I hate crowds. I hate lines. I hate traffic. I hate when there's no green." She had recorded *Valentine* in North Carolina but readily concedes that moving to the state was a little random.

The house was the thing. She doesn't get many visitors out here, so she's keen to show it off. It's a consummately 1970s citadel of wood and glass, like a homey cabin prised into a sprawling maze. The ceilings soar, yet the interior is as compartmented as a jewellery box. Light slants through high windows at odd angles, stealing

through a profusion of levels and landings, balconies and lofts. Nested halls and stairs circulate through endless accidental-seeming rooms – each with its unique landmark, an antique mirror, wallpaper or chandelier.

For someone who's been a music professional under much scrutiny since high school, it's more than enviable real estate. It's a refuge and retreat – a place to balance the ledger between motion and stillness, publicity and solitude. The new album, it could be said, much resembles the home. The riffs soar high, yet the hooks are intimately packed inside. The arrangements deflect forward motion, breeding pockets of privacy – nooks where you can sit and breathe without being seen, tight corridors that pour into yawning open spaces.

"When she was talking to me about *Ricochet* before she made it, I had in mind that it was going to be like a return to *Lush*," says Waxahatchee's Katie Crutchfield, Jordan's friend and mentor, who connected her with producer Brad Cook in Durham to record *Valentine*. "But actually I think it's like a merging of the first two records, with a new vibe that still honours everything Snail Mail has been."

Given time to steep and change, it's like Snail Mail sounds more like itself than ever. *Ricochet* is a clarion, confident album that shakes up Jordan's image as the heartbreak kid and probes



tender themes of mortality in one deft, nuanced stroke. It's an upbeat meditation on loss, uncertainty and sadness. It's a mature vision of a sound forged from the malleable stuff of youth. It implies more than it confesses. Instead of straining forward – leaving, longing, lunging – it's about breaking a cycle,

coming to rest and living where you've landed.

**J**ORDAN grew up in Ellicott City, a cobblestoned suburb between Baltimore and Washington, DC. As a child she often helped in the stockroom of her mother's lingerie store, Bra La La. She went to public school and played ice hockey – left wing. But the ice is thin here in the South, so now she roller-skates. "I still dream in hockey smells and sounds," she says. "I miss it so much."

She was just as devoted to classical guitar. Inspired by the movies *School Of Rock* and *Freaky Friday*, she got a red Squier Mini Strat for Christmas and started lessons at age six. "I was really into having something to do by myself in my room," she says.

By age 15, she was cold-calling restaurants and coffee shops to ask for gigs, slipping her clever diaristic songs between covers of

Patti Smith and Waxahatchee. She was making her first inroads in Baltimore DIY music, playing tiny house shows, when a friend from the band Post Pink helped her land a slot at a punk festival at the Ottobar.

This led to the first lineup of Snail Mail, with

**"I HATE LOUD NOISES. I HATE CROWDS. I HATE TRAFFIC"**

LINDSEY JORDAN

drummer Shawn Durham, whom Jordan had befriended at a Beach House show, and his roommate Ryan Vieira on bass. Also on the bill were Priests, who were impressed enough to release Snail Mail's youthfully vivid yet precociously poised mini-album *Habit* on their label Sister Polygon in 2016.

Bandcamp Daily made *Habit* Album Of The Day – “I remember that being the first whoa,” says Jordan – but it wasn’t until 2017, when she and Durham made the video for “Thinning”, that things escalated fast. Best New Track in *Pitchfork* was followed by a flood of emails from labels and managers. “No part of me thought this was going to happen,” she remembers. “I was just like, I want to be part of the fun.” It was her senior year of high school.

When the dust settled, Jordan had a new permanent band – Alex Bass on bass (that’s right) and Ray Brown on drums – and a contract with big-time indie Matador.

Bass was an old friend she’d been bonding with over St Vincent and Speedy Ortiz since high school. Brown was a newer friend from the DIY scene. They borrowed a beat-up van that used to belong to Iceage and hit the road hard, supporting Girlpool and Priests and Waxahatchee, seeing California for the first time.

Katie Crutchfield, 10 years Jordan’s senior, thought the high schooler’s talent and confidence were striking from the start. “She has this raw animal charisma,” says

Crutchfield. She remembers their first meeting, when Jordan strolled into her dressing room half an hour after a Waxahatchee show like she already belonged there.

Crutchfield took the young band under her wing on their first big string of tour dates. “They were green in the most endearing way,” she recalls. “Lindsey would go up there and be a complete star, and everyone would go, ‘Who is that?’ Then she would take her guitar off at the end of the set, put it down on the stage and just walk away.”



Jordan the “complete star” in Atlanta, Georgia, May 7, 2023



Katie Crutchfield of Waxahatchee admires Jordan’s “animal charisma”

Sour cherry: artwork from 2021’s *Valentine*



This is the point in the conventional narrative when the artist who got big too young would often look back with regret – at rites of passage missed, the psychic toll, the opportunities squandered. But Jordan is cut from a certain cloth. She didn’t think it was going to happen, but when it did, she

was more than ready. “It was awesome,” she says, not needing a moment to reflect, eyes shining. “It was so dope. I thought I was going to have to go to college and stuff.”

JORDAN has settled in the wood-paneled downstairs rec room, where there’s a pool table that came with the house. She’s sitting on a couch under a giant poster of The Sundays, a band whose sleek, blossoming lightness is one of many vintage compass points on *Ricochet*, particularly audible in the winsome sunbeam of opening song “Tractor Beam”.

Pip runs in and out of a dog door, carrying a stuffed manta ray. The yard outside the window is broad and green, wrapped in a little creek. Many people who flee towns for cities are eventually drawn back to quiet places like this – around middle age. But Jordan’s life has been a fast track.

“Just like any other suburbanite, I thought I had to get out of the suburbs,” she says. “But then I read that thing Kim Deal said: ‘Every musician, if you ever make any money, you have to invest in a house or you’re dumb.’ It was like, it would be so cool if I could have a permanent writing retreat. That’s basically what this is supposed to be.”

This was important because Jordan had been working on *Ricochet* since *Valentine* in 2021 and it wasn’t supposed to take this long. She prefers to write songs slowly, but “*Ricochet* was my ➔

## SNAIL TRAIL

### Your guide to Lindsey Jordan’s back catalogue



way to hear Snail Mail as its earliest supporters did. 6/10

#### STICKI

##### BANDCAMP, 2015

The first thing Lindsey Jordan ever uploaded to Bandcamp. Long delisted, but it’s out there – and these four raw, riveting solo songs are the only



off like a rocket, fuelled by ’90s alt-rock vibes and anthemic single “Thinning”. 7/10

#### HABIT

##### SISTER POLYGON, 2016

Snail Mail’s breakout EP, with original drummer Shawn Durham and bassist Ryan Vieira. Released on Sister Polygon Records, it took



Matador. After the scrappy “Habit”, this is where Snail Mail becomes. 8/10

#### LUSH

##### MATADOR, 2018

This debut LP forged two lasting relationships – bassist Alex Bass and drummer Ray Brown became the permanent lineup, and the band signed to big indie



painful breakup. It widened her established rock sound with strains of contemporary pop – the suburbs meets the city. 8/10

#### VALENTINE

##### MATADOR, 2021

Lindsey Jordan moved to New York after *Lush*, but the pandemic forced her back to Maryland, where she wrenched this exquisite album from a

"It was really challenging": playing a psychic warrior in 2024 horror film *I Saw The TV Glow*



Digging '90s indie rock: on the video shoot for Snail Mail's latest single, "Dead End"



attempt to speed it up," she says. "I'm not even kidding. I tried every day. There's so many pictures my bandmates took of me outside the bus with my guitar, looking defeated. A lot of the guitar parts were written in those parking lots, and I wrote all the vocal melodies before I had a single lyric. But the really important work didn't happen until I got time off."

Snail Mail usually tours for what Jordan calls "a psychotically long time" – as far afield as Hong Kong, Seoul, Jakarta – which sustains a strong fanbase through the years between albums. But it gets hard to write songs about your life when your life is playing songs. Whether it's for your friends or in distant lands, performing night after night takes a huge amount of energy. "The fact that I live in a big, weird house alone is a side effect of my lifestyle," Jordan says. "I'm a hermit. I could go two months without seeing another person and I'm golden."

Being off tour for the last two years, cocooned in the suburbs – the ones she moved forward to, not back to – she finally heard the themes of *Ricochet* beginning to take shape in the near-silence. Instead of railing at relationship drama and trauma, which no longer dominated her life, the songs would smile bittersweetly at the fear of death, what we lose in growing and other inner truths that unfold when a perceptive gaze turns around on itself.

"It's probably a bad move to disappear for so long between albums, but bands are putting out music so fast that it's making people who take a normal amount of time look insane," she says, reflecting on *Ricochet*'s long, slow bounce into being. "Maybe it was coming out just before TikTok, but I'm

lucky that people still care when we come back. I think bands who came out even a year or two after us cannot do the same thing."

As she struggled to put words to the meaning of her changing life and the melodies she carried like charms, she found other ways to occupy her time. First, she had surgery for vocal polyps which gave her more intentionality in her singing and a falsetto she'd never had before. Then she found an entirely new outlet for that raw animal charisma.

**S**ITTING cross-legged, Lindsey Jordan levitates a few feet above a lakeside dock. The sky streams with colour behind her, and the strains of "Tonight, Tonight" waft in the air. Above, an angry early-cinema moon glares down from the sky, a reference to the Smashing Pumpkins video.

It's Jordan's debut acting role in *I Saw The TV Glow*, a well-received 2024 indie horror film where she plays a Buffy-like psychic warrior on a TV show. She went out for the part almost on a whim (the same week she auditioned to play a 25-year-old Madonna in a prospective biopic, which she didn't get).

"They were showing me the image in spo for their man in the moon and I have a Smashing Pumpkins tattoo on my arm," she says. She holds it up – a moon man with a rocket in his eye. "They were like, 'OK, you're basically cast.'" She filmed her scenes over a couple of weeks in New Jersey and got to attend the Sundance Film Festival. At a time when she was stymied in her own creativity, it was a welcome chance to tap into someone

else's. "I like trying to create under somebody else's guidelines," she says. But acting didn't feel like making music – which shows how personal the latter is to her. "It was really challenging. What I thought was cool was feeding off another actor, looking in their eyes and remembering this sad thing in your head, and trying to express it."

She has a team in the acting world now, and she's very interested in scoring movies, but Snail Mail remains her top priority. Despite the close collaboration with her bandmates, Snail Mail is what she's responsible for alone.

*I Saw The TV Glow* is awash in '90s music and signifiers, which made Jordan an especially perfect fit, though she was born in 1999. Indie-rock writers have a bad habit of being middle-aged, tending to ascribe their influences to young musicians who might not share them. But in her case, the comparisons can be drawn without fear.

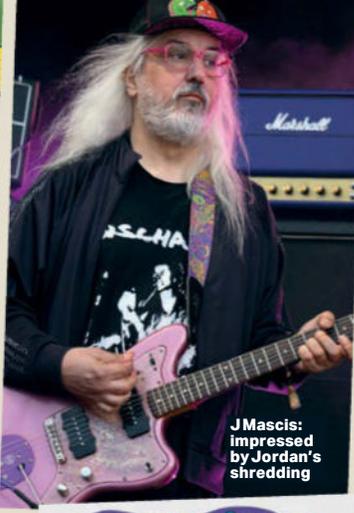
"I do love the '90s," she says. "That's what I like and what I listen to. I fucking love Radiohead so much, and My Bloody Valentine. The obvious legends – that's really all I'm consuming these days."

Snail Mail's sound authentically spans eras, making Gen Xers feel gratefully relevant but spun with the image-savvy finesse of Gen Z. On *Ricochet*, the guitar sound is alt-rock textbook, cross-referenced between 'crunchy' and 'chiming'; the leads are perfectly gleaming and furred. These are old materials, palm mutes and harmonics and hammer-ons and string bends, but refreshed by the topiary-garden shapes that Jordan builds with her expressive but deadpan voice, a quiet powerhouse. The references are spot on, but you'd never mistake the album for old.

J Mascis recognised the affinity when he took Snail Mail out with Dinosaur Jr last year. "I thought it would be a cool tour," says Mascis. "Maybe some of her fans wouldn't know us, and vice versa. I'm always impressed by how she can shred on the guitar. I was amazed that sometimes you can't even hear her because people are singing her songs louder than she's playing. They really relate to her."

So it's apt that *Ricochet* was recorded at





J Mascis: impressed by Jordan's shredding



# THE ROOTS OF RICOCHET



**THE SMASHING PUMPKINS**  
**MELLON COLLIE AND THE INFINITE SADNESS** VIRGIN, 1995

"Light On Our Feet" sounds like "Tonight, Tonight" reduced to an intimate, candlelit scale; Lindsey Jordan has the moon from the Smashing Pumpkins video tattooed on her arm.



**THE SUNDAYS**  
**READING, WRITING & ARITHMETIC** ROUGH TRADE, 1990

From "Tractor Beam" to "My Maker", *Ricochet* rides the same sunny-sad wavelength as the jangly '90s dreampop band.



**MY BLOODY VALENTINE**  
**LOVELESS** CREATION, 1991

The blurred melodic scream of the definitive shoegaze band looms large – check out the neon skywriting blazed at the start of "Agony Freak".



**FROU FROU**  
**DETAILS** MCA/ISLAND, 2002

"I listened to so much Frou Frou while making this," Jordan says. The way the electronic duo combine rock structures with manicured pop vocals casts *Ricochet* in an interesting light.

Fidelitorium, the studio of early REM producer Mitch Easter, not far from here in North Carolina. "I wanted to stay near my house and try something low-key," Jordan says. "I feel like bands get pushed toward the same 10 famous, expensive studios. Mitch was so cool, and Helium recorded there. It's super clean and new-smelling in this way that's really nice to me, and not always normal in studios."

*Ricochet* is also enriched by the band's close bond with producer Aron Kobayashi Ritch, from the band Momma, who got the string arrangements Jordan wrote on keyboards translated to the real thing and infused the songs with period-perfect touches of alt.rock and dreampop, with IDM glitches skittering through "Agony Freak" and a post-punk skronk installed in the middle of "Butterfly". The album's supple, breathable finish is a big part of its effortless appeal.

"Aron is a really inspiring producer," Jordan says. "My vocal is usually a lot drier; we put some cool effects on it." By then she had all the lyrics, which retain the crispness and clarity of her prior work but bend in more metaphorical directions. The songs have the texture of sharply hewn daydreams, pastel confections that char at the edges. Though densely catchy, they're patient and fluid, coruscating with eloquent little details. Death, desire and delicious fantasies are closely, richly juxtaposed.

"Lindsey's ideas are so complex," says Crutchfield. "But to do that and still achieve a good hooky melody, rooted in what is going

to resonate with people – that is kind of her superpower."

JORDAN couldn't have written *Valentine* again even if she wanted to, now that she's been in a happy relationship for three years, with a girlfriend in New York. *Ricochet* represents a more holistic way of working and being.

"I used to try to write one song and focus on it, and four months later I'd start hating it and never see it again," she says. "That destroyed me every single time. It made

songwriting so agonising. This time I was like, my goal is not to get rid of any of this stuff, because it's great.

Working on it all at the same time helped me with getting out of my head, and working on the lyrics at the same time made it more of a concept. I learned how to work better, if not faster, unfortunately."

According to Bass and Brown, there's one way in which the band has never changed. "We're Maryland kids, we're friends, we love music, and we're having fun," Brown says. "Lindsey shows us a song in a voice memo and it makes my jaw drop – that's been our resting state for a decade now." That's as true on *Ricochet* as it was on *Lush*, when they were kids and forging the naïve image they've since outgrown.

"I wanted to branch outside the kinds of songs I had made before," Jordan says. "The music I've consumed my whole life, a lot of it is bathing in someone else's misery. I didn't want to have this sad girl thing tattooed on my chest. There's a

"I LOVE THE '90S... RADIOHEAD, MY BLOODY VALENTINE"

LINDSEY JORDAN

quality to getting older where not everything is the end of the world." Not even the end of the world itself, not in the wistful, happy afterlives that these songs often portray with humour and grace.

"Lindsey is one of the funniest people," Bass says. "The way she can be funny and serious and express herself, it's sort of second nature. There's no overthinking anything, right? It's not contrived."

"She's so herself, more than anyone I know," Brown adds. "It's cool to see it take different manifestations through different eras and albums, all our experiences touring and life-wise. Feelings of anxiety, or the goofy side, it's always a thousand per cent her."

After four years with the riff for "My Maker", it produced what Jordan calls her first lyrical breakthrough – the one that crystallised what the album was going to be. Over a luscious, rolling acoustic groove, she builds a metaphor about flying a plane to heaven, getting stuck in the airport bar. "Another year gone by/What if nothing matters?/Waitin' round to die/To see what happens after". The song emblemises how lightly she bears heavy intimations on *Ricochet*, always tipping them toward what comes next. It's an invitation, not an ending: "Let's restart." 🕊

*Ricochet* is released by Matador on March 27

# “Anarchy In The UK”

## by Sex Pistols

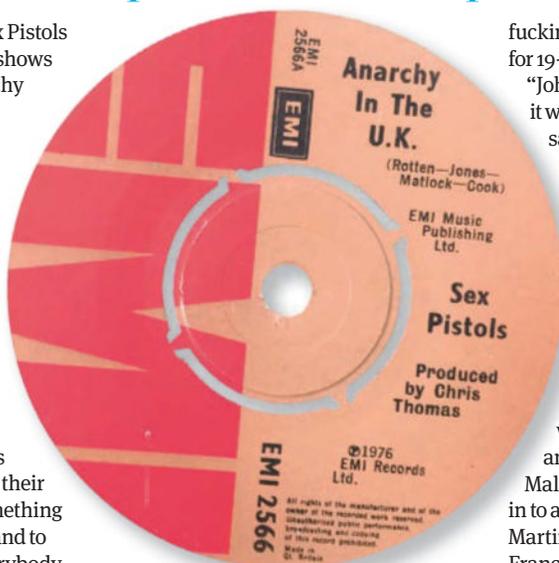
Knocked up quickly in a Soho rehearsal room, one of the first rallying cries of punk becomes a perennial anthem

WHEN the Sex Pistols finish their shows with “Anarchy In The UK” these days, the dynamic from the stage is more celebratory than confrontational. Current singer Frank Carter – veteran of a different punk generation via Gallows and the Rattlesnakes – sings Johnny Rotten’s lacerating lyrics with a smile while the crowd roar them back with glee. “There’s a lot of mixed emotions going on,” says Glen Matlock. “There’s the kind of lives people have lived since then, and their memories. It probably means something slightly different to everybody – and to everybody in the band and to everybody who’s not in the band any more.”

If the song’s chemistry has somehow changed down the years, Rotten’s howl of discontent hasn’t dated. “Even back then it was a rallying cry to people who were disaffected by what was going on,” Matlock says. “Now it’s more of the same with knobs on.”

The record that lit the fuse on UK punk (*pace* The Damned’s “New Rose”) also set the Pistols’ terms of engagement with the establishment. Its execution, however, was rooted in more traditional virtues. “It’s a 3½ minute pop-rock song,” says Matlock, the music’s principal composer. “My yardstick was Small Faces, Yardbirds, Kinks, Stones and early Tamla: all that is in the background and construction of the song. Everything in it has some kind of consequence; it’s like a mini-opera. John’s lyrics are juxtaposed and opposite to what I was trying to do.”

The song’s essence was conjured quickly in the band’s Soho rehearsal



room. The painstaking work overseen by producer Chris Thomas during three days in October 1976, though, layering guitars and finessing Rotten’s mighty vocal, used all of Wessex Sound’s 24 tracks. “Anarchy...” embodied punk’s revolutionary mission using conventional, high-end ’70s studio craft.

“A hundred percent conventional,” Thomas laughs. “John could see the benefit of doing something well, rather than this punk attitude that Malcolm [McLaren] espoused where you just fuck everything up, or get people who can’t play. I didn’t give a shit about the whys and wherefores of punk. I wanted to make a great record. There’s no point in having a great message if you can’t hear it!”

While Rotten’s demonic ire is the song’s animating spirit, its deceptively complex music was equally crucial. “We took it seriously,” says Steve Jones. “No one was drunk when we did ‘Anarchy’. We weren’t

fucking about. That’s pretty amazing for 19-year-olds.”

“John’s always said if he had his way it would have been unlistenable,” says Matlock. “But you can’t have a popular punk anthem if nobody can hum it!” **NICKHASTED**

**GLEN MATLOCK:** I was still at school when I started working at [McLaren’s shop] Let It Rock, which became Sex. It was the hippest place to be on a Saturday afternoon; every little oddball who turned out to be a go-getter went in there. It’s where I met Steve and Paul, then John. I was part of Malcolm’s whole demimonde. I’d got in to a degree in Fine Art Painting at St Martin’s, in the middle of Soho. I’d see Francis Bacon and Lucien Freud going into the Colony Rooms and I felt a part of that. But in the summer of ’75 we decided to take the Pistols seriously and I resigned my position.

**PAUL COOK:** When the band took off it was a real sense of freedom to me. We all had a great time initially. We played anywhere and everywhere, all the suburban little towns. We were still learning how to play our instruments. **STEVE JONES:** It was all great back then, before it was just a circus. We were more creative.

**COOK:** We used to rehearse most nights in our recording studio down our little hovel in Denmark Street.

**MATLOCK:** It was an outbuilding on two floors at the back of what used to be a Greek bookshop, with a rehearsal room downstairs with a room above it with a little sink in the corner where me and Steve lived, and an outside khazi. We were in the heart of Soho. There was the Tin Pan Alley Club next door

### KEY PLAYERS



**Glen Matlock**  
Bass



**Steve Jones**  
Guitar



**Paul Cook**  
Drums



**Chris Thomas**  
Producer



Sex Pistols in February 1976: (l-r) Glen Matlock, Johnny Rotten, Steve Jones and Paul Cook

full of nefariousness, rent boys and junkies, an old-school scene. Our landlord, Big Mac, was like a character in *Budgie*. It all fell into the songs somehow.

**JONES:** The majority of the stuff was created downstairs with me, Glen and Paul knocking up tunes and John in the corner writing.

**COOK:** The songs seemed to just come out of nowhere as we thrashed away. We worked on arrangements which changed along the way, but “Anarchy...” stayed as it was from the word go.

**MATLOCK:** I did the riff on the spot, then we worked on it. I’ve got a James Jamerson bit going on in the last section. I’d also been to see Can at the Hammersmith Palais and Holger Czukay spent most of the evening playing octaves. On “Anarchy...” I started doing it on the bottom G on the low E string and it didn’t stick out enough. I did it on the high G and it didn’t have enough body. Then I switched octaves and covered both bases: it gives it a little lift. It’s also got a groove a bit like the Faces’ “Had Me A Real Good Time”.

## “It was all great back then, before it was just a circus”

STEVE JONES

**JONES:** There’s two guitar solos in the structure. The first one’s D minor to E minor, then you’ve got the G at the end of it. The second I kind of nicked from Bowie’s “The Prettiest Star”, but with a ringing D-string, so it sounded like a chord. God knows how I came up with that stuff. I literally didn’t have a clue what I was doing.

**MATLOCK:** John always had a plastic bag with bits of paper in it full of lyrics. We started playing and he said, “Fantastic! You’ve got something that’ll go with these lyrics.” But Steve had a 100-watt guitar amp turned up full, I had a 100-watt bass amp, and it was a 12 x 10ft room with a low ceiling. We couldn’t fucking hear John!

We had no idea what he was going on about.

**JONES:** I wasn’t into lyrics back then. I couldn’t care less if he was singing, “*Have a nice day*”.

**COOK:** “Anarchy...” didn’t stick out to me. We had “Pretty Vacant” by then. I don’t ever remember “Anarchy...” being that special till I heard the final record. But John was our mouthpiece, he articulated what we were feeling. John

came up with a lot of the vocal melodies in the song.

**JONES:** When we first started and we’d play up north in these working men’s clubs, everyone hated us. They’d sling bottles at you and it was terrifying. But as the year went on, with gigs like the Screen On The Green [in Islington], there was a vibe because people came to see you, they wanted to be there.

**MATLOCK:** We played “Anarchy...” as our first number in Manchester. I’d finished writing it earlier that week.

**JONES:** We recorded the version that’s on [fabled bootleg] *Spunk* in Denmark Street when we demoed the songs we had with our sound man, Dave Goodman. Then once we got a deal with EMI, we attempted to do “Anarchy...” properly with Dave.

**COOK:** Dave went through the song time and time again and we just lost ourselves. When we heard the final mix in Malcolm’s office, we thought, “Oh, no. Is this how we sound?” Another factor is The Damned had just released “New Rose”. We listened to that and thought, ‘We’ve got to do something really special here.’ Steve and me were both Roxy fans and suggested Chris





**Don't give a flying V:** John Lydon and Steve Jones on stage with the Pistols at Queensway Hall, Dunstable, October 21, 1976



**December 2, 1976:** Bill Grundy, the day after the Sex Pistols appeared on his *Today* programme

**FACT FILE**

**Label:** EMI  
**Written by:** Glen Matlock, Johnny Rotten, Steve Jones, Paul Cook  
**Produced by:** Chris Thomas  
**Personnel:** Johnny Rotten (vocals), Steve Jones (guitar), Glen Matlock (bass), Paul Cook (drums)  
**Recorded at:** Wessex Sound and Rampport Studios, London  
**Released:** November 26, 1976  
**Highest chart position:** UK 38

Thomas as producer. He'd worked with The Beatles and all sorts and we never thought he'd do it.

**CHRIS THOMAS:** Malcolm contacted me. They came over to my house for me to listen to the demos, minus John, because Malcolm didn't want him there. "Pretty Vacant" stuck out. I thought that could be a fantastic record. The fuss around them made me nervous, but the material was there. They were already in Wessex, so we stayed there for "Anarchy..."

**COOK:** Wessex was a cavernous old priory with a big ceiling. I wasn't in a booth, it was all open, the guitar was too, so it felt like we were doing a gig. We just set up and whacked it out.

**THOMAS:** Wessex was horrific because there's frigging carpet everywhere, dead as a bloody dormouse. We gated the drums to give them ambience.

**MATLOCK:** The third and fifth take are spliced together. It finishes the way it does because the tape ran out.

**THOMAS:** When John turned up, I would imagine he was very angry for being excluded. We put him in a little vocal booth and he just screamed. I thought, 'Oh my God.' I went in there and said, "I can't really understand what you're singing." He said, "You're the one with a track record. You sort it out."

I thought, 'Oh, Christ. Let's go to the pub.' He walked behind me, gobbing in the street all the way, and I thought, 'Oh no, what is this?' He had quite a few pints of Guinness and came back and got a few takes, and then I did a comp, editing between the takes, literally going through it line by line. It still wasn't there, so pretty soon afterwards, we went to Rampport, The Who's studio in Battersea. We did an afternoon there on the vocal. We did Wessex, Rampport and then Wessex at least once more, doing more takes then taking the original comp and always upgrading it: "Oh, that line's better there", or, "That little snigger's nice." Then finally we had a vocal track.

**COOK:** Every line was fantastic. You can go through the whole song, with its confusion and anger, and "I don't know what I want, but I know how to get it", "I want to destroy passersby". Every line's brilliant and we could relate to it all – especially the last verse, with what was going on at the time with IRA bombs going off everywhere.

**THOMAS:** It was essential that you heard every syllable. That was the whole point of being so precise in

editing and comping, because there is so much character in John's extraordinary voice. I wanted to make sure that I got every little piece of it. It was really, really important. It pays off because it ends up in the most fantastic performance.

**JONES:** We built on the backing track with my guitar overdubs. That was my favourite time in the Pistols, making "Anarchy...", and *Never Mind The Bollocks...* later. I could barely play then. They spent time on me. It wasn't work. It was creative and fun.

**THOMAS:** I wanted to keep some of the stuff that I heard on the demo, like a bit of feedback that comes in accidentally, a nice touch worth repeating. Bits of guitar were orchestrated and threaded on quite carefully. Then on the third day we mixed it. Steve and Paul were asleep upstairs where there was a pool table. John was in the control room. I went, "OK, it's time to turn it up now and play it loud." John stood up and he went, "That's our anthem."

**MATLOCK:** It sounds heavier because the tempo's just right, it's not too fast. It's got a majesty to it. When it came out, *Melody Maker's* Caroline Coon called me up and

said, "How would you describe the music?" I said it's like an overture and she used that in her review.

**COOK:** I was coming out of the Marquee and they played "Anarchy..." over the speaker. Everybody in the crowd started singing along with the chorus. That's when I first realised it was a significant song.

**MATLOCK:** Was the Grundy debacle a week after "Anarchy..." came out bad luck? If all that hadn't happened, I don't think we'd be sitting here now. But we were just on the cusp of being a proper touring band when we couldn't play on the Anarchy tour and they tried to ban us. It became quite intense and the band started devolving into factions. That was the end of my tenure. I'd only just turned 20. Did "Anarchy..." contribute to the assault on us? Yeah. It wasn't "Love To Love You Baby".

**COOK:** It was never the same after the interview and when Sid joined, he was into the chaos. But the *joie de vivre* we had before came across in the records, especially "Anarchy..."

**JONES:** I appreciate it more than ever when we do it live now. Obviously it's a bit different with Frank, but you've got all ages singing along and it's a beautiful thing. I couldn't care less about politics, and my whole idea is when we do a show, I just wanna make people happy and forget the nonsense in the world. You can see the joy in people's faces. Have I got that joy Paul talked about back? Yeah, I have. 🍷

Sex Pistols featuring Frank Carter play a series of 50th-anniversary shows in July and August – visit [Ticketmaster.co.uk](http://Ticketmaster.co.uk) for full details. A 25th Anniversary Edition of Sex Pistols singles comp *Jubilee* is released for Record Store Day on April 18

**TIME LINE**

**November 6, 1975:** Sex Pistols play their first gig at Glen Matlock's alma mater, St Martin's College of Art

**May/June 1976:** "Anarchy In The UK" is written during regular rehearsals at the

Pistols' Denmark Street HQ and performed a week later in Manchester

**July 1976:** Band demos with live sound engineer Dave Goodman at the Denmark Street rehearsal

room include a raw "Anarchy..." prototype

**October 1976:** The Pistols sign to EMI. Goodman-produced sessions for "Anarchy..." at London's Lansdowne and Wessex

Sound studios are chaotic. Chris Thomas takes over for a triumphant second try

**Nov/Dec 1976:** "Anarchy..." is released as the Pistols make their infamous appearance on Bill Grundy's *Today*

programme. Despite distribution problems, the single cracks the Top 40. Meanwhile, the Anarchy tour collapses in the face of bans

**February 1977:** Matlock quits, and Sid Vicious arrives

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<b>SOLD OUT</b>	NOTTINGHAM, THE CHAPEL	
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SAT 21	MANCHESTER, FOLK FESTIVAL	<b>LOW TICKETS</b>
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**In the wake of Peter Gabriel's departure, GENESIS faced an existential question: carry on, or call it a day? Looking back 50 years, band members revisit the fraught months after their first frontman's exit – and the creative surge that set the scene for one of rock's most improbable second acts. "The band was meant to be dead and buried," learns Peter Watts. "But we refused to lay down and die."**

Photo by GOVERT DE ROOS

**M**ARCH 26, 1976. A nervous Phil Collins steps up to the microphone. Clad in simple workman's overalls and clutching a crumpled sheet of paper with ideas for things he can say between songs, Collins has now formally relinquished his onstage role as drummer of Genesis to become their singer and frontman after the departure of Peter Gabriel. But have the band made the right decision? The 2,000-strong audience at Ontario's London Arena will be the first to find out.

From his spot at the back of the stage, Bill Bruford was impressed. The former Yes man had agreed to step in as live drummer for the *A Trick Of The Tail* tour and he liked what he saw.

"He was very good immediately, although I don't think he thought so," says Bruford. "He's something of a mimic, with extraordinary powers. In jazz fusion side-project Brand X he suddenly sounded like Billy Cobham overnight. Similarly, he began singing as a Gabriel soundalike, until he found his own personal voice and his own onstage persona for Genesis."

Gabriel had announced his decision to leave Genesis in November 1974, at the start of the *A Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* tour. The band were staying at Swingos Celebrity Inn in Cleveland, the Midwest's premium rock'n'roll hangout ever since Elvis booked three floors for a tour, enticed by a kitchen that served collard greens, fatback pork and cornbread. Frank Sinatra, The Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin used it as a base, and Cameron Crowe recreated it – right down to the stained wallpaper and worn carpet – for *Almost Famous*.

"I tried to convince him to stay but he was adamant that was what he wanted to do," says Genesis guitarist Steve Hackett. "I felt I was losing a lead singer but also a friend. The band was meant to be dead and buried, but we refused to lay down and die."

Genesis's resilience is the stuff of musical legend. While catapulting Collins into the role of lead singer, it introduced the band's most successful era as they transitioned from progressive art-rockers to stadium-filling behemoths. But in the immediate aftermath of Gabriel's departure, the band



More approachable, less weird: (l-r) Steve Hackett, Phil Collins, Tony Banks and Mike Rutherford in Amsterdam, June 16, 1976

"The dynamic had changed...": Genesis with Peter Gabriel in Copenhagen, 1975



went into a frenzy of creativity, releasing two studio albums in 1976 – *A Trick Of The Tail* and *Wind & Wuthering* – followed by an EP, live album and concert film in 1977.

At 50 years distance, the marvel of *A Trick Of The Tail* and *Wind & Wuthering* is how closely connected they are to the music that preceded them. This was not a clean break as much as a segue, like a subtle time change from one of the band's multi-part epics. "Squonk", "Dance On A Volcano", "Los Endos" and "Wot Gorilla?" would all become fan – and band – favourites, while the instrumental couplet of "Unquiet Slumbers For The Sleepers..." and "...In That Quiet Earth" showed a continued quest for musical adventure. Rather than being lost without Gabriel, Genesis thrived.

"It's always sad when someone leaves," Mike Rutherford told *Uncut* in 2014. "But you started to feel that maybe [Gabriel] wasn't as keen as you were – and that changed the dynamic."

"We'll never know if it would have been the same if Peter hadn't left," Collins said. "Some bands still feel trapped in an era. I think we just moved on a little bit. The songwriting was always more important than the dressing up."

"The decision to carry on was a very important one," says Hackett today. "Pete continued to exert a lot of influence in the way we wrote, particularly with the consciously referential material we served up later. But the albums of 1976 were closer in spirit to the original ethos of the band – songs with surprises. Those two albums had lots of surprises, which ran from fusion to pop to comedy. We still had this idea you could draw from Bach and then from panto. It's part of the reason why I am terribly proud to have been in Genesis."

**N**O single person can claim to have had the bright idea of replacing Gabriel with Collins. Bill Bruford is one of several who had the thought.

He'd been hanging around with Brand X, who released their debut album, *Unorthodox Behaviour*, in 1976. "One day he [Collins] was saying that Peter had left, and he was having a miserable time auditioning singers, all of whom were hopeless," says Bruford. "Either he or I – neither of us can

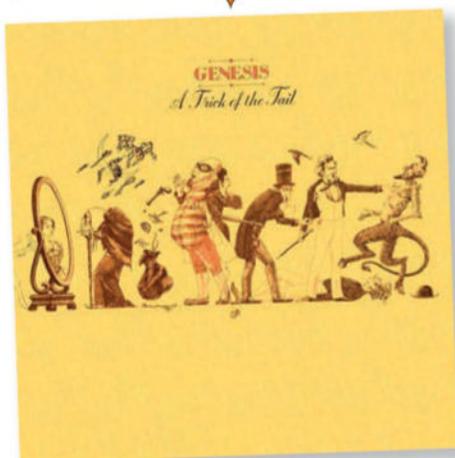
remember who – made the next obvious step: why didn't he sing and I'd hold down the fort at the back? He knew my stuff and was prepared to trust me that the whole thing wouldn't collapse behind him like a house of cards. I said I'd do it for a year to make sure he'd got settled, and then they could look for someone else."

Hackett recalls attending Collins' first wedding in Epsom in September 1975 – just a month before Genesis began recording their new album at Trident – and meeting Jon Anderson of Yes. "Jon said we should make Phil the lead singer and bring in an instrumentalist," he says. "I thought that was a good idea but wasn't sure the others would go for it. But as it happened, that's exactly what we did – although Jon would never have expected the new musician would be his old drummer, Bill Bruford."

Hackett discovered Collins could sing when he began joining in with the radio at a petrol station during an early tour. "I told him he sounded like Steve Winwood," says Hackett. "The first thing I wrote for Genesis was 'For Absent Friends' on *Nursery Cryme*, which I wrote for Phil to sing. He had a solo piece on *Selling England By The Pound* that he had written with Mike called 'More Fool Me'. Audiences didn't blink. They might not even have been aware it was the drummer singing."

All the same, the band took their time over the decision. Hackett and Collins pursued other projects in 1975 – Collins with Brand X and Brian Eno's *Another Green World*, and Hackett with his debut solo album, *Voyage Of The Acolyte*, which included "Star Of Sirius", another singing spot for Collins. As the two non-founding members of Genesis, Collins and Hackett felt less assured of their positions than Mike Rutherford and Tony Banks, and were seeking possible lifeboats. There was a risk, Hackett says, of the band "haemorrhaging members". A solo album was a chance to create a viable alternative.

**"I WANTED TO SEE WHAT I WAS MADE OF"**  
STEVE HACKETT



"I told him he sounded like Steve Winwood": Hackett and Collins in Rotterdam, April 11, 1975



Nicety: Colin Blunstone and Nick Lowe



## PHIL BIG SHOES...

Who else was in the frame to replace Gabriel in Genesis?

**P**ETER Gabriel told Genesis he was quitting in November 1974, but continued to perform with the band in the first half of 1975; his last show was on May 22. In July, Charisma denied newspaper rumours that Gabriel was leaving and as late as August 13, manager Tony Smith wrote a letter to Atlantic claiming Gabriel was prepared to record vocals for the next record – what

was to become *A Trick Of The Tail*. But three days later, on August 16, *Melody Maker* printed a front-page exclusive: "Gabriel Out Of Genesis?" The cat was out of the bag, and the paper followed it up with quotes from Gabriel on September 6: the "Why I Quit Genesis" story. What next?

Auditions, that's what. After placing an ad in *Melody Maker* seeking a singer for "a Genesis-type band", the band were inundated with cassettes from aspiring

replacements – Nick Lowe and Norway's future Eurovision wooden-spoon winner Jahn Teigen are among the unlikely candidates believed to have sent tapes.

Colin Blunstone, Allan Clarke, Mike d'Abo, Andy Fraser of Free and Status Quo songwriter Bernie Frost were considered more seriously, while Mick Strickland of Witches Brew made it all the way to the studio before falling short.

Steve Hackett now adds another name to the list. "A lot of it didn't get past listening to a cassette," he says. "There were one or two who got further, and I think the most-high profile was Graham Bonnet, who became the singer of Rainbow. He did 'Since You've Been Gone'. He was very good, but he wasn't Phil – and a band can get very set in their ways."



"I thought if Pete was going to leave there was no guarantee the band would carry on, and I wanted to see what I was made of," he says. "That was important to me. But *Voyage of The Acolyte* was a success and that made things difficult, as I was accused of not giving everything to the band. As a non-founder I found that Tony and Mike tended to guard the keys to the songwriting cabinet very closely."

**G**ENESIS were never short of songwriters. Even without Gabriel, the band still had Hackett, Rutherford and Banks; Collins still considered himself more of an arranger than a writer. While Gabriel dominated the writing of *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*, they all had plenty of ideas. In theory, that should have made *A Trick Of The Tail* easier to write – but things rarely work out quite as expected.

Hackett, who joined the sessions late while he finished his solo record, eventually contributed the sparkling "Entangled". Structural challenges continued into the new era, he says. "It became a little easier after Peter left, but Tony basically wanted to write it all and that level of competitiveness was difficult for everybody.

"Tony came up with all sorts of wonderful melodies and harmonic inventions. But the competitive side is what I suspect drove away Peter. Phil thought of himself less as a writer and more as somebody who made it swing. I had written 'Los Endos' as an acoustic part, and Phil said we should do it with a furious rhythm. I was terribly grateful that he did."

In October and November 1975, Genesis divided their time between recording at Trident and auditioning singers every Monday in the basement of Maurice Plaquet's music shop on Churchfield Road in East Acton, with Collins singing a guide vocal for the hopefuls. Auditions were not going well, to the extent that Hackett

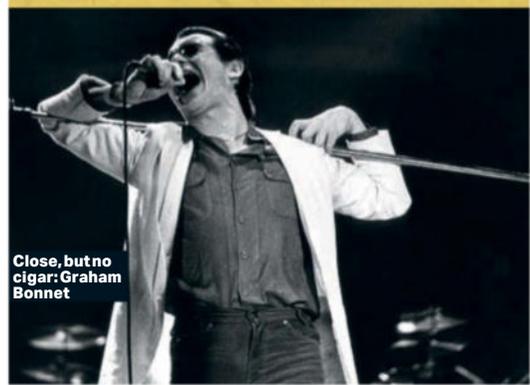
and Collins – both fans of Weather Report and Mahavishnu Orchestra – suggested becoming an instrumental band, an idea Banks and Rutherford vetoed. It was only when Collins agreed to give "Squonk" a crack – after another failed audition, this time at Trident by blues singer Mick Strickland – that Genesis realised the solution had been hiding in plain sight.

Everybody knew Collins could sing ballads like "Ripples..." and "Entangled", but "Squonk" showed he could handle the heavier numbers, while his performance of "Robbery, Assault And Battery" allowed him to spin a story just as effectively as Gabriel, introducing a touch of Artful Dodger into the performance. Lyrics like "With your consent/We can experiment further still" from "Entangled" told fans exactly what to expect.

The studio element was sorted – and the record reached a gratifying No 3 – but could Collins make it work on the road? Even he wasn't sure. Rehearsals took place over 10 days in Dallas ahead of a North American tour.

"I always felt pretty confident that I could do the singing job. It was the other side of it," Collins said. "Between the song stopping and another song starting there's an awful lot of space that Peter filled. For some of that, I was with Pete, I was his stooge – the one-handed drum solo and all that. I was more worried about what I would say to the audience, what I would talk to them about. Peter had his stories and I couldn't really tread on those toes."

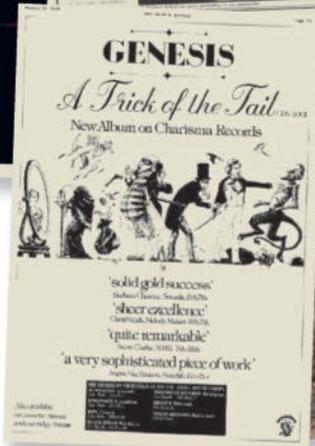
"Pete was the star of the show and his performances tended to be separately



Close, but no cigar: Graham Bonnet



The inflatable penis of the table: Collins onstage in April 1976



"Variation tended to be frowned upon": Genesis with short-lived drummer Bill Bruford (left) in Central Park, New York, April 1976

reviewed from whatever the band did," says Hackett. "Pete was very theatrical and the amount of guises he presented live would easily have given Bowie and Alice Cooper a run for their money. The band sometimes said it got in the way of the music, but if Pete hadn't been so

theatrical I doubt the band would have risen to prominence. We had performed the same songs and people went to the bar – but as soon as Pete started dressing up and acting, they wanted to stay and watch. I respect him for that."

Collins was never going to compete with Gabriel's theatricality. That meant ditching the costumes and props – Collins would not wear the fox's head from "The Musical Box", and the inflatable penis from "The Colony Of Slippermen" was retired forever. Instead, he leaned into his everyman charm, settling on an outfit of white dungarees with a white jacket and drawing on his ability to engage the audience's goodwill. It made the band more approachable – less weird – and the fans loved it. When Gabriel came to see his old band at one of five sold-out shows at Hammersmith Odeon, he could see they were in safe hands, and admitted it gave him mixed emotions.

"Phil had to find his own way," agrees Hackett. "He realised there was no way he could compete with Pete in terms of adopting sperate personas through the various songs. Where he scored highly was that one minute he was on mic, the next he was MC, and then he was running back to the drum kit to play a solo. He came across as the most energetic guy I have ever seen on stage. Audiences began to love him for that. He had this theatrical training so it's ironic that he stepped into Pete's shoes. Pete had been very theatrical, but Phil had been trained for it. Phil was a guy who always hit his marks. He had experience on stage and screen and was a brilliant frontman. When I saw the band a few years after I left, he really had the audience in the palms of his hands."

**W**HILE Phil Collins was hitting his stride as the new Peter Gabriel, Bill Bruford was finding his feet as the new Collins. He quickly discovered that life on the road with Genesis was very different to what he'd experienced in the past. "The tour was undertaken with the same kind of excitement that might have been engendered by an orderly

**"PHIL WAS A GUY WHO ALWAYS HIT HIS MARKS"**

STEVE HACKETT

picnic in Richmond Park," says Bruford. "The band was generous, inclusive and family-friendly, entirely unlike the King Crimson that had collapsed, with me in it, a couple of years earlier. Even though I was the hired help, I was always treated as one of the band."

The challenge came with the playing. As Collins noted in his 2016 autobiography, *Not Dead Yet*, Bruford was an improviser who liked to mix things up each night, and this didn't always work for Genesis. "Some drum fills are cues, something Tony, Mike and Steve rely on," Collins wrote. Bruford was forced to adapt.

"It was assumed I'd play the parts more or

less exactly as per the record," says Bruford. "I learned quickly that variation tended to be frowned upon. I was there as a hired gun, to do a job. It was my first real experience of being such an individual, and I quickly found out it wasn't for me. I focus a little more if I have some emotional connection to the music I'm working with. The band were endlessly patient and polite to a fault, considering I wasn't, musically speaking, very well behaved."

Hackett was also finding things frustrating. After the success of *A Trick Of The Tail* and the 1976 tour – which hit the big screen in 1977 as *Genesis: In Concert* – the band decided to push home their advantage with a follow-up album, *Wind & Wuthering*. Recorded at lightning-quick sessions in the Netherlands, Hackett began to feel his contributions were being overlooked. He began to plot a departure.

All the same, it was another fine album – even more musically adventurous than *A Trick Of The Tail*, with songs inspired by classical music, *Tom & Jerry* and the Mahavishnu Orchestra. As a band, Genesis rarely lacked ideas or confidence, and they threw everything they had at the new record.

"We were from a short-lived era when bands were allowed to get on with whatever they liked and the record label just put it out," says Hackett. "The band knew best. Side Two of *Wind & Wuthering* was staggeringly good. We had a long piece that was the equivalent of 'Supper's Ready', a number of songs that all segued together. It was great stuff – and it was written by everybody. It showed that everybody could write, and it was very collaborative as we all had a point to prove."



Genesis with Bruford's replacement, Chester Thompson (second left), outside the Rainbow Theatre in London, January 1977



Genesis on the Wind & Wuthering Tour – their last with Hackett – at the Playhouse Theatre, Edinburgh, January 14, 1977

# ROUND TWO

A chronological buyer's guide to Genesis's busy 1976 and '77

## FEBRUARY 1976



### A TRICK OF THE TAIL

#### CHARISMA

While Phil Collins' vocal approach is immediately warmer and more approachable than Peter Gabriel's, the first post-PG Genesis album is every bit as peculiar as the ones that preceded it. The effervescent "Dancing On A Volcano" introduced the new lineup, but the pulsating "Squonk" became the album's signature track. **9/10**

## DECEMBER 1976



### WIND & WUTHERING

#### CHARISMA

The success of the 1976 tour prompted Genesis to return to the studio for the dense *Wind & Wuthering*. Some songs were carry-overs from *A Trick Of The Tail*, among them Banks' complex "One For The Vine", while "Wot Gorilla?" captured Collins' love of fusion. Hackett cites the second side as one of the band's finest moments. **8/10**

## JANUARY 1977



### GENESIS: IN CONCERT

#### EMI

Concerts in Glasgow and Stafford from the 1976 tour were filmed for this foray on to the big screen. It premiered in London's Shaftesbury Avenue in January and allowed audiences to see Collins in his new role, with Bill Bruford filling in behind the drums. The fact Genesis were now filling cinemas suggested their star was on the rise. **7/10**

## MAY 1977



### "SPOT THE PIGEON" EP

#### CHARISMA

This unexpectedly successful EP contained three *Wind & Wuthering* outtakes and marked Hackett's last contributions to a Genesis record. Two short tracks – "Match Of The Day" and "Pigeons" – show a band on the cusp of change, while the longer "Inside And Out" is one of the better Genesis rarities. **7/10**

## OCTOBER 1977



### SECONDS OUT

#### CHARISMA

Genesis completed a busy two years with their second live album, recorded on the *Wind & Wuthering* Tour with Chester Thompson on sticks. Essentially a reproduction of a concert in Paris, there are great versions of "Squonk", "Supper's Ready" and "The Cinema Show" as the band continue their transition into a new era. Peter who? **9/10**

**R**ELEASED in December 1976, *Wind & Wuthering* was followed in May 1977 by "Spot The Pigeon", an EP featuring three songs left off the album. They included the oddball "Match Of The Day" and Hackett's elegant "Inside And Out", which he had lobbied for inclusion on the LP. It went to No 14, buoyed by the fact that Genesis were back on the road, albeit with Chester Thompson – formerly of Frank Zappa's Mothers Of Invention and Weather Report – replacing Bruford as drummer. Thompson kept the job until 1992.

"I think there was an intention to continue with Bill but nobody was surprised when he pulled out," says Hackett. "He was a big name in his own right and I suspect Genesis needed him more than he needed Genesis. But to have the sanction of somebody with such a pedigree at that moment was very rewarding."

Bruford's presence had helped smooth over the most challenging moment in Genesis's career. Many bands may never have recovered from the loss of their best-known member, but Genesis emerged from the experience as a bigger group than before. Lights and lasers replaced Gabriel's costumes and props, with Genesis filling arenas – three nights at Earl's Court, an evening at Madison Square Garden and, for the first time, a series of huge gigs in Brazil. They'd even had a Top 20 hit with "Spot The Pigeon" and ended the year with another album, *Seconds Out*, recorded live on the 1977 tour, reaching No 4.

So when Steve Hackett decided to leave, in September 1977, Banks, Rutherford and Collins knew they could carry on. Three songwriters, after all, must be easier to manage than five?

This transition period was an essential part of

the Genesis story, throwing Collins to the fore and setting in motion events that would result in the band's huge success in the 1980s. It also produced stacks of great music – not just Genesis's own studio and live albums, but Hackett's solo debut and Collins' work with Brand X and Eno.

"I might be vintage, but the music is timeless," says Hackett. "I realise people tend to focus on the clichés of bell-bottoms and bad moustaches and fur coats, but Genesis was much more than that – it was music that made people want to pick up instruments and learn to sing. I am glad I stayed for two more albums – *A Trick Of The Tail* and *Wind & Wuthering*. They are both great albums. They worked very well live and I still play a lot of it now."

When Peter Gabriel went to see Genesis in 1976, he was left impressed but confused; but for Hackett, watching them play was a revelation.

"A couple of years after I left the band, I went to see them and realised what it was all about," he says. "It was so very good that I couldn't sleep all night, even the numbers I hadn't been so keen on at the time. When you are in the midst of it you get the idea that it might be good, but you don't know how good until you are out front watching. That was the first time I realised why people liked it. You can only hope. You set it up. You find the best people. You do the best you can, and you have to hope it's all working. The only way you can gauge it is at the end of the concert when you see rapture on their faces." 

Steve Hackett's Best Of Genesis & Solo Gems UK tour begins on October 2 and finishes at London's Royal Albert Hall on October 26

# The Black Crowes

The brothers Robinson recall the highs, lows and sibling spats of a 36-year recording career

“It was like climbing Mount Everest in a short period of time,” says Rich Robinson, reflecting on The Black Crowes’ rise in the 20 months after *Shake Your Money Maker*’s release in 1990. “We were playing in front of 12 people and then, when we finished the tour, we played in front of a million people in Moscow... It’s much harder to deal with success than failure, in a sense.”

Over 40 years have now passed since the group formed as Mr Crowe’s Garden in Atlanta, Georgia. Those decades have brought more albums, more tours, collaboration with Jimmy Page, and more than one split and reunion. “We didn’t recognise the power of what we had, for whatever reason,” says Chris Robinson of these interruptions.

Yet the latest incarnation of the Crowes seems energised and steady, on a roll with 2024’s *Happiness Bastards* and their upcoming LP, *A Pound Of Feathers*. “We’re just in a really good place as a band,” explains Rich. “When we go into the studio it’s far more positive. It doesn’t have to be this epic battle between brothers and all of this shit. It can be cool and still be creatively fruitful.” **TOM PINNOCK**



Dutch courage: The Black Crowes in Amsterdam, June 5, 1990



UNCUT CLASSIC

## SHAKE YOUR MONEY MAKER

DEF AMERICAN, 1990

The heavyweight debut: a funky mix of rock’n’roll, blues and Southern R&B, produced by George Drakoulias

**RICH ROBINSON:** I was 19 when we made this, so I was just out of high school a year previous, and we’d spent that year writing and sending stuff to George Drakoulias. George was cool – he seemed way older than us, for some reason, but he was only about 24.

**CHRIS ROBINSON:** Without George, it wouldn’t have happened. George saw us in a club in New York and he liked that we played “Down On The Street” by The Stooges and “No More No More” by Aerosmith in the same set. George is the one who when we played a new song would say, “It’s pretty good, go back and work on it.” We’d come back a week later and he’d say, “It’s almost there.” It was always a little more.

**RICH ROBINSON:** Looking back, I see that he put the onus back on us

and he allowed us to find our voice, instead of telling us what we should do.

**CHRIS ROBINSON:** “Jealous Again” was our first grown-up song, one that didn’t have any sophomoric undertones to it. Rich would say, “Here’s this song I’m working on.” He’d send me a tape, I’d take it home, work on the lyrics and we’d send it to George. George introduced us to the craft of songwriting. We had the inspiration but we needed to learn the craft.

**RICH ROBINSON:** Then we went into a studio called Soundscape [in Atlanta], and they had one massive room. It just sounded great, we got these massive drum sounds. We were there for a month, and that was our first record. I remember I had three guitars, a ’68 [Gibson Les Paul] Goldtop, a ’68 Telecaster, and then one of these old Telecasters that had two humbuckers on it, and that was it. I had one amp, so we used that one amp. We went in and got one basic guitar sound. There’s something so magical about the first time you do something. Then they flew Chris out to LA and he stayed with George, he had an apartment in Rick Rubin’s basement. They went to this cool studio and finished the vocals.

**CHRIS ROBINSON:** We were still Mr Crowe’s Garden when we

made that record, that was the name of the band. That was the name on all the early tapes, it was on the contracts. It was only when we really saw the record with our name on...

## THE SOUTHERN HARMONY AND MUSICAL COMPANION

DEF AMERICAN, 1992

The rawer second, recorded (and in some cases written) in just over a week



**CHRIS ROBINSON:** We weren’t a really popular local band, we weren’t playing

Saturday nights at the big clubs – that only changed once we made the first record.

**RICH ROBINSON:** After *Shake Your Money Maker* came out, we toured for about 20 months, from March 1990 to October 30, 1991. We played 350 shows and went all over the world. It was a whirlwind. But after that we were on fire as a band. Chris and I had written about three albums’ worth of material on that tour. By the time we got home, we decided to keep a couple of those songs. George came out, we booked the studio for a month or something, then Chris and I went down in the basement [to write]. George would open the door and be like, “How’s it going, buddy?”

We’re like, “We’re fine.” And then that weekend, we’re finished. He’s like, “What, are you sure?!” “Sometimes Salvation” took five minutes to write... Sometimes that’s what it is, you get out of your own way. So then we went into the studio and made the record in eight days. It was basically live.

**CHRIS ROBINSON:** The difference between *Shake...* and *Southern Harmony...* is we played those songs 30 or 40 times in the studio [for *Shake Your Money Maker*]. We played “Sometimes Salvation” two times.

**RICH ROBINSON:** We were like, “Look, we could sit here and become precious and overthink – like, oh, where’s the ‘Hard To Handle?’” But we were just like, “Man, this is what we’re doing. These are our songs. This is what we like, and this is what it is...”

## AMERICA

AMERICAN, 1994

A different process and producer as the Crowes craft a layered studio album



**RICH ROBINSON:** *Southern Harmony...* sounded great, but we wanted to make

something that you could sit and really pick apart, a really lush sonic album. But we made two *Americas*, basically. One was called *Tall*, [but]



"We made two Americas": Chris and Rich Robinson, 1994

Chris had a very different idea than what I had, and we didn't square it before we went into the studio. So his vision of what he wanted was a lot different than what I wanted. Then there was a lot of fighting...

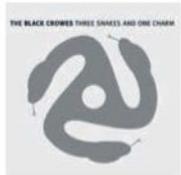
This was the first time we had stopped in about five years, because we just kept touring – it's like a wave when you go on tour, and when you stop, that wave keeps going until it crashes and then recedes. So we took some time and we made this record [*Tall*]. But we weren't happy with it. Chris and I were both really big fans of Jellyfish, so we thought, 'Let's call Jack Puig,' who was the engineer on those records. He's an amazing engineer, so we decided to produce it with Jack and let Jack be the engineer.

There was a little bit of push and pull with the number of takes, but we got some unbelievable performances: "Gone" is one of them, "Nonfiction" was great, and "Cursed Diamond". We weren't interested in making a commercial record per se, we were interested in writing the best songs we felt we could write at the time. But there are some songs that we spent two days getting a fucking kick drum sound on – like "Feathers". It was an amazing sound, but you don't need to take two days! But put that record on a hi-fi stereo system and it's a really fucking well done album, from a sonic standpoint.

### THREE SNAKES AND ONE CHARM

AMERICAN, 1996

Sticking with Jack Joseph Puig, the Crowes rent a house and record this loose, varied set



writing songs up there, I had a whole setup. We were into the idea of making a record like *Led Zeppelin III* – big, big drum sounds, but acoustic guitars too. It's got such a weird quality – like, the juxtaposition of those fucking drums on "Gallows Pole" with the acoustic guitars. There's a really amazing sonic element to it that we were shooting for. So we called Jack back and rented this house in Atlanta. We moved my board over there and Jack brought a bunch of gear. There was zero isolation.

I played some acoustic guitar in a bathroom to get some of the reverb from the tiles. It was a slightly

#### RICH ROBINSON:

After *America*, I bought an API console and put it in my house. I was

chaotic process, but it was fucking cool. We had two of the guys from Parliament/Funkadelic come sing on "Halfway To Everywhere". We had the Dirty Dozen brass band come and play horns. It was a really rich and textured album, it's really one of my favourites. *Shake Your Money Maker* and *Southern Harmony...* were commercial albums kind of by accident. I wouldn't even know how to write a hit if someone told me. We just wrote what we wrote, and people either like it or they don't. *Three Snakes...* was that way.

### BY YOUR SIDE

COLUMBIA, 1999

After another aborted album, 'Band', the Crowes lose half their group and create this "fucking rock record"



#### RICH ROBINSON:

Rick Rubin goes: "I have an idea. Let's bring Mike Wanchic in to produce some stuff." Mike Wanchic

was the guitar player from John Mellencamp. We're like, "That seems weird, but I guess Rick is thinking someone could reel us in a little bit..." But we just didn't click with that guy – he booked us in a studio in Nashville with the first digital board. He didn't really know how to use it and it didn't sound good. Then Marc [Ford, guitar] and Johnny [Colt, bass] left, so we had to regroup and bring people in. In the meantime, we were still writing.

Because of our unhappiness with Rick Rubin, we had negotiated to be pulled away from him and sign directly to Columbia. Kevin Shirley had been working with Aerosmith on that song for [Michael Bay film] *Armageddon*. They flew Kevin down, we talked to him and we liked him. He said, "These songs sound more like a straight-ahead rock record." "By Your Side" used to be called "If It Ever Stops Raining", and he was like, "That's a great rock song. Let's just go in and make a fucking rock record." So that's exactly what we did.

**CHRIS ROBINSON:** At the end of the '90s I was miserably depressed but having a pretty good time. I was anaesthetising myself with cocaine. I can't imagine that person, but that's where I was and we were still making records. I have personal regrets in my relationships and the way I behaved at times, but in terms of my career and my life as a person, so be it, I made those decisions. ➔

**"It was a whirlwind, but we were on fire as a band"**

**RICH ROBINSON**



Led in their pencils: with Jimmy Page at LA's Greek Theatre, October 18, 1999

## JIMMY PAGE & THE BLACK CROWES LIVE AT THE GREEK

MUSICMAKER.COM/TVT, 2000

An epic live album with the Crowes tackling Led Zeppelin classics and deep cuts and – on later versions – their own songs



### RICH ROBINSON:

We had toured with Robert [Plant] and became friends. After

*America*, we played the Royal Albert Hall and Robert was like, “Hey, I want to bring Jimmy to the show.” We’re like, “Fuck yeah, are you kidding?” Jimmy couldn’t have been cooler. We not only loved Jimmy and Robert’s music, but we also listened to what they listened to.

A week later, we were in Paris. Jimmy flew out to see us and then got up and played with us, we hung out. In the summer, we toured with the Stones and Page & Plant. How does that happen?! Then *Three Snakes...* came out and we did more touring with Jimmy and Robert. Then Jimmy said he was doing this charity event for the Brazilian Children’s Fund that he and his wife at the time had set up: “Would you come be my band and play?” So we went down there and he’s like, “What songs do you want to do?” We wanted to play deeper cuts, like “In My Time Of Dying” and “Ten Years Gone”.

Jimmy sounded great and we sounded great with him and it just all worked. So we booked seven dates in the States, smaller shows, finishing at the Greek in L.A. We had a blast. Now I can be like, “Holy shit, that was amazing.” But in the moment, you’re like, “I’m gonna

play this fucking song the best I can and I can’t think about the fact that Jimmy’s standing right there playing B-bender on my song that I wrote...”

## WARPAINT

MEGAFORCE/SILVER ARROW, 2008

Brotherly strife and a new lineup, with Luther Dickinson, Adam MacDougall and guitarist/producer Paul Stacey



### RICH ROBINSON:

It had been a while since we had made a record, because we

had split up and then got back together. It was just the same old kind of shit, but getting away from something can make you shift your perspective when you come back. Chris and Paul [Stacey] are really good friends, so Chris wanted Paul to produce the record. We did it at a studio in Woodstock, New York, in the summer – it was a gorgeous studio on top of this mountain, so you had these beautiful views. But it was a tumultuous record, from the standpoint of Chris and I’s relationship... we were definitely not getting along. That run from 2005 to 2010 was kind of rough, we just were at it the whole time.

**CHRIS ROBINSON:** I can’t even begin to contemplate the cause but we didn’t understand [what we had]. We’d fight in the studio and we’d fight in the gigs but we didn’t fight when we were writing, that creativity was a safe space.

**RICH ROBINSON:** Some of the songs were good, there was some cool stuff we did: “Josephine” is a fucking great song. But emotionally, it was just kind of shitty because we were fighting all

the time. Then we recorded the next record [2009’s *Before The Frost... Until The Freeze*] at Levon Helm’s barn in Woodstock – he was such a sweetheart and that was such a cool thing that he had going on there. It was definitely a left turn for us, musically, again, and Chris and I had started writing on our own. It was a very separate record.

## HAPPINESS BASTARDS

SILVER ARROW, 2024

The rejuvenated return, recorded with producer Jay Joyce at his Nashville Neon Cross studio



### CHRIS ROBINSON:

Rich and I started The Black Crowes. It was our idea and it was our

songs. Nobody will ever argue otherwise. We wrote all these songs. Rich’s music is expansive, and what I do in the CRB [Chris Robinson Brotherhood] is psychedelic and very different. When we focus on this, the unanimous thing is we all want to play some rock’n’roll, no bullshit, lots of fucking guitars. We were finding our footing again.

**RICH ROBINSON:** The whole purpose of us getting back together was to make it positive. We didn’t want to sink into the same shit. Us being away for so long, and doing our own things, really brought us back in a much more positive and cooler way, and rekindled something that we had lost. We decided to bring in new people that were going to support Chris and I, instead of trying to divide us, and it put the focus back on the two of us and allowed us to write these songs and be in these spaces where we weren’t at odds, and we were

moving towards a common goal. So this record was great. We said, “Let’s bring in a producer we can just trust and who takes the onus off of us getting into it.” When we met Jay Joyce, we liked him instantly. He’s a great musician in his own right. I had a huge pool of songs ‘cos I’d been writing all through Covid. I sent Chris, like, 40 tracks and he chose what moved him. Then after Covid, we toured and I was still writing. So by time we got to the studio, we had a lot of concrete stuff to work with. The whole thing just felt normal and natural for us.

## A POUND OF FEATHERS

SILVER ARROW, 2026

The heavy-hitting latest, recorded in a flood of creativity in Joyce’s Nashville studio



### RICH ROBINSON:

We decided to let the studio be a tool, to flesh these things out in the

studio, instead of going in with such concrete pieces. So I really wouldn’t finish the songs – I’d be like, “Alright, well, here’s what I think the verse is...” Then we would get into the studio, Chris would be like, “I think that’s the chorus and that’s the verse”, and we try it. On “Cruel Streak”, the chorus was a bridge that I wrote, but then Chris and Jay were like, “No, man, that’s the chorus.”

**CHRIS ROBINSON:** We’re never going to make the same record twice. We wanted to be spontaneous. On *A Pound Of Feathers*, we were throwing more paint at the walls in the best way. **RICH ROBINSON:** It was me, Chris and our drummer Cully [Symington] – by the end of five days, we had nine songs recorded. When you’re working like that there’s magic there and to try to deconstruct it and bring other people in and then redo it, a lot of times you lose that. So we were like, “Let’s just keep going. If we stop, it’s gonna fuck everything up.” Four days later, it was done.

**CHRIS ROBINSON:** After all of these years, Rich and I can look at each other and he’ll know what I’m about to say. We’re in a good place where we trust each other so much. This isn’t a record you play on Sunday morning. This is a fucking Saturday-night burner. These might be the two most consistently strong records we’ve ever made back to back. Since we got back together, it’s been amazing. 🍷

*A Pound Of Feathers* is released by Silver Arrow on March 13. With thanks to Peter Watts

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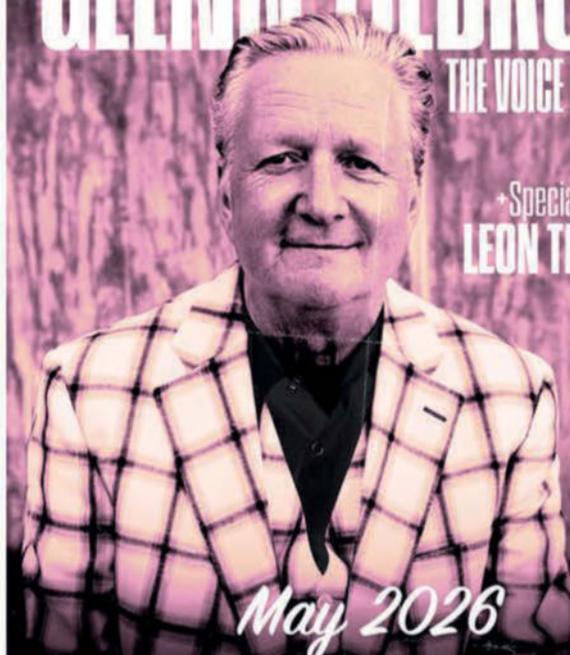
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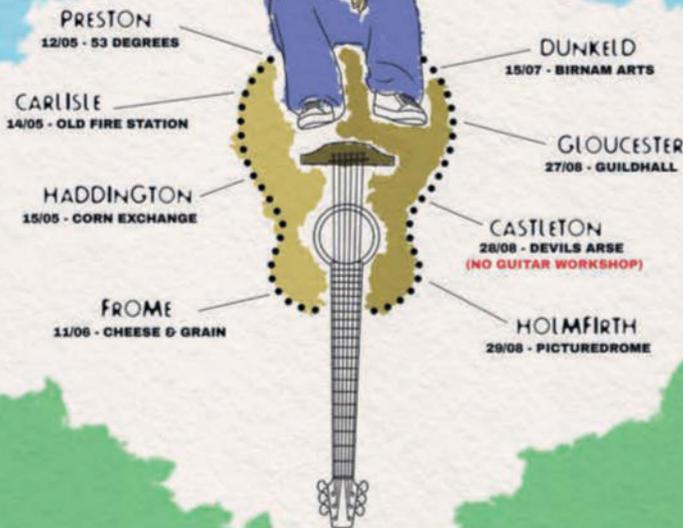
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# DESIGNS FOR LIFE

Following Richey Edwards' disappearance and the "commercial disaster" of *The Holy Bible*, the **MANIC STREET PREACHERS** were told that this is the end. Instead, they roared back with an unassailable anthem heralding one of the biggest British albums of the '90s. Sam Richards celebrates 30 years of *Everything Must Go*: "It was the most spectacular feeling," says Nicky Wire. "That period when you go over the top..."

Photo by MITCH IKEDA

IT'S always telling when a band spend their royalties not on country piles or living the high life, but on building a space where they can write and record more music. Occupying a hillside cottage just outside Newport, the downstairs rooms of the Manics' Door To The River HQ have been converted into an impressive recording studio, driven by a huge analogue mixing console previously installed at the nearby Rockfield Studios – and on which, as James Dean Bradfield proudly relates, The Teardrop Explodes' *Kilimanjaro* and various early Simple Minds efforts were recorded.

While Bradfield makes the tea, Nicky Wire – who's just turned 57, not that you'd guess – shows off his birthday present: a framed 1981 Tottenham Hotspur shirt signed by Glenn Hoddle. Enigmatic drummer Sean Moore is here too, though he politely declines to be interviewed ("I'll let Morecambe and Wise do it") before speeding off into the January gloom.

The Spurs shirt is destined for a prime spot on the wall of the upstairs rec room alongside a large abstract painting, a white guitar, a purple blazer covered in patches, a Dyson Hoover and a well-used dartboard. Truly, this studio couldn't belong to any other band. "We're a strange bunch," admits Bradfield. "We're indie nerds

that love sport, that love politics. There's a little rule that if you bought Big Flame's 'Rigour' EP in 1985, you're not allowed to like rugby or cricket. But we were always like, 'No, I'm not giving up my sport!'"

This determination to prove that ordinary lads from the Welsh valleys can indeed contain multitudes is one of the central pillars of the Manics' mission. You can hear this conviction coursing through "A Design For Life", the stirring underdog anthem that pointed the way forward for the band following the tragic disappearance of their friend, bandmate and chief manifesto-ist Richey Edwards, emerging on the other side of that unimaginably difficult period with the defiant grandeur of *Everything Must Go* – the triple-platinum album whose 30th anniversary we're celebrating here.

As Wire points out, "It was our fourth album in four years – one of which was a double – a member had gone missing and our manager [Philip Hall] had died. I've often thought about it, whether it was mental resilience or just sweeping everything under the carpet. There's a million factors, but the thing that actually made us keep going was this insane desire to create and to communicate with a bigger audience."

"The big mantra in our head was, 'What's the point in giving up?'" adds Bradfield. "We're all in this together. There was still an

answer there for us. And also, Nick is a very resilient motherfucker..."

THE story of *Everything Must Go* begins at a low ebb, with the Manics grudgingly touting the grim prophecies of *The Holy Bible* around Europe with first *Therapy?* and then *Suede* in the latter part of 1994. Edwards' physical and mental health was deteriorating, Bradfield was drinking heavily, and Wire was misdiagnosed with Crohn's disease. "It turned out it was Gilbert's syndrome, which is a liver and bilirubin thing, but it did make me feel incredibly ill and lose weight, so I was a bit of a skeleton. I must admit, I think we were actually probably great for the viewer, because everyone loves to see a band on edge, but it wasn't much fun. It's the one point where it felt being in the band was maybe not the best thing for us."

"Clearly with hindsight it was a troubling time for them," says *Suede*'s Brett Anderson. "Richey seemed very withdrawn and sadly I never really got to know him. But their performances were always incendiary. They took all the tension of *The Holy Bible* and threw it in the faces of the crowd. It was thrilling to watch and I learned a lot."

At the end of their third show at London's Astoria in December, the Manics smashed up all their gear – and some of the venue's too – ➔

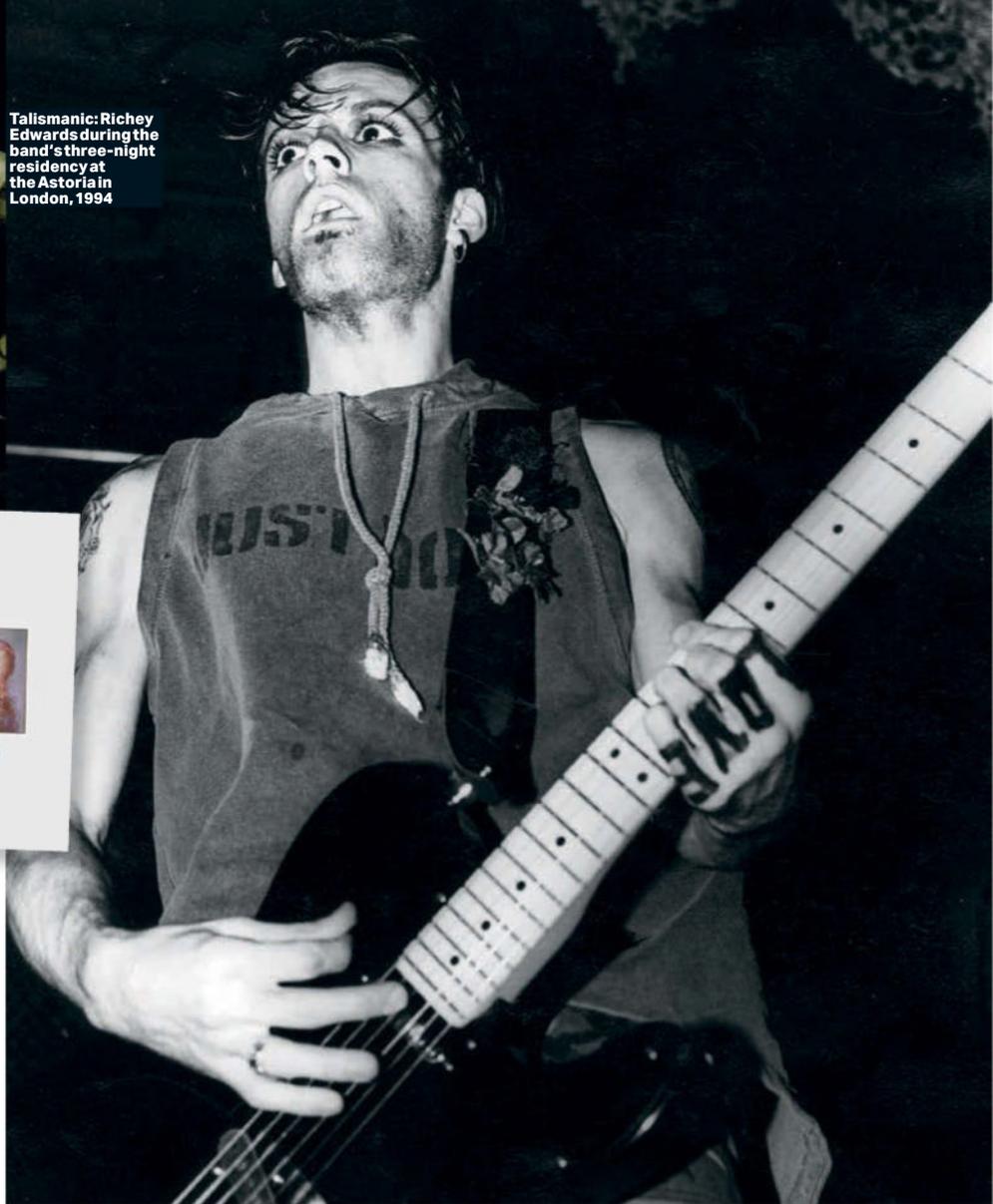
And then there were three: (l-r) Nicky Wire, Sean Moore and James Dean Bradfield, 1996





Talismanic: Richey Edwards during the band's three-night residency at the Astoria in London, 1994

"Everyone loves to see a band on edge": as a quartet promoting *The Holy Bible*, 1994



with a fervour that some onlookers found concerning. It turned out to be Edwards' last performance with the band. On February 1, on the eve of a US tour, he drove out of London's Embassy Hotel never to be seen again; his car was later found abandoned at Aust Services near the Severn Bridge.

For three months, Wire sat in the living room of his newly acquired miner's cottage in Wattsville, agonising over whether and how to move forward without his lyrical sparring partner.

"I don't think you'd call it writer's block, but there was an unwillingness to commit anything to the page," he says. "It didn't feel right to write any words that would be imbued with the heaviness of the situation. The last thing I wanted to do was sound like I was trying to impersonate Richey's voice, so I had to present a different intention to the lyrics."

Looking out of his window up the Sirhowy Valley, he could literally see the remnants of Wales's once-thriving coal industry. Galvanised by the Hillsborough storyline of Jimmy McGovern's gritty crime drama series *Cracker*, as well as an inscription spotted by his wife Rachel on the front of Newport's Pillgwenlly Library, he began writing a pair of lyrics taking aim at what he calls the "endless Benny Hill-ification of working-class culture" accelerated by Britpop. "Everything was a nudge and a wink and so imbued with irony," he says despairingly. "So there was definitely a reaction. We were always good when we defined ourselves against something."

Wire posted the lyrics to Bradfield, then living the bachelor life in Shepherd's Bush. That same week, Oasis's "Some Might Say" went straight in at No 1. "I remember watching them on *Top Of The Pops* and thinking it was brilliant," recalls Wire. "Just Noel holding his guitar above his head as if to say, 'We won.' James wandered off round the

**"WE WERE ALWAYS GOOD WHEN WE DEFINED OURSELVES AGAINST SOMETHING" NICKY WIRE**



streets of London and wrote 'A Design For Life' pretty much straight after that."

"It's a very uncomplicated memory for me," says the frontman. "There were two lyrics: one was nihilistic, one was more positive, but they both seemed to be saying the same thing. What if I just run them together? The

two lyrics balanced each other, and they answered so many questions about things we were talking about and so many insecurities we had, post-Richey.

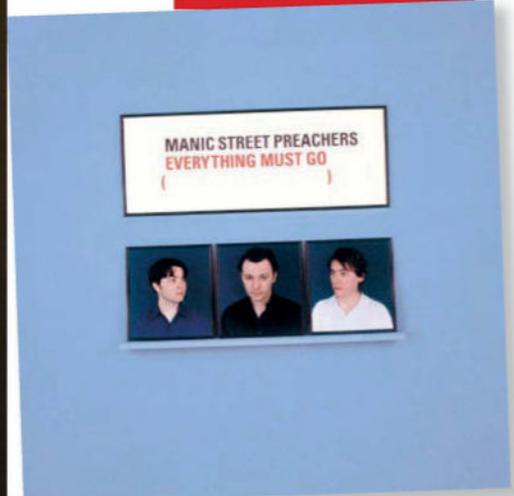
"I knew that [Wire] was a little bit tense about how working-class culture was being hijacked and depicted as a saucy seaside postcard kind of

thing, and he wanted to drag it back. I just thought it was fucking amazing: "What price now/For a shallow piece of dignity?..." There's sarcasm, there's pleading, there's strength, there's everything in those lines."

Several songs had already been written for a putative fourth album prior to Edwards' disappearance, but they hadn't yet settled on a musical direction. Famously, Edwards had envisaged "Pantera meets *Screamadelica*"; Bradfield wanted "more melody, more oxygen, more freedom... I wanted us to fly a bit."

"A Design For Life" was the result. As Wire recalls, "His exact words were, 'It's like Ennio Morricone played by REM.' I thought, 'That sounds good!' And then he played it down the phone to me. I remember thinking, 'This is the start of something.' It felt like such a new version of us, going from 'Archives Of Pain' to that. James managed to transpose the sound of South Wales valleys somehow into this choral waltz."

"It felt like a lifeline": Bradfield on stage in 1996



Both Bradfield and Wire describe their time at Château de la Rouge Motte in almost blissful terms [see panel], with Hedges' easygoing nature – he greeted them at the door by setting his hand on fire with calvados – and old-school analogue set-up proving to be exactly what they needed. They came up with the term “produced

“I just remember thinking, there’s so much pressure on a tune,” says Bradfield. “More than at any time, because there was some kind of sympathy for us and that made me feel a bit queasy.” He recalls going for a drink during that time with the boss of a “famous indie label” who told him bluntly, “Whatever you do next better be good, otherwise you’re fucked.”

Were the Manics really in danger of getting dropped? “*The Holy Bible* was a brilliant record, but it was a commercial disaster,” confirms Sony Music chairman and CEO Rob Stringer, who signed the band to the label back in 1991. “And of course, it was complicated by Richey disappearing on the eve of going to America. So obviously that was a negative.” He grimaces at the memory of the ruthless calculations of the 1990s music biz. “But we had a demo of ‘No Surface All Feeling’ which was really, really good. I believed in them as people, so we kept going.”

Stringer says that hearing “A Design For Life” for the first time was “vindication... I thought, ‘That’s a gigantic record.’” For Bradfield, the overriding emotion was relief. “For all that stuff to be swirling round in your head, and then for it to come good... I was high-fiving myself, not because I felt proud, but because I’d escaped failure. It felt like a lifeline.”

Big admirers of Mike Hedges’ work with The Associates, The Cure and the Banshees, the Manics had originally tried to get him to produce *The Holy Bible*. On hearing what he’d done with the strings on Butler & McAlmont’s “Yes”, they redoubled their efforts. Hedges duly arrived at the band’s Cardiff rehearsal studio, immediately spotting the potential of “A Design For Life”. “I knew within 30 seconds that it was a hit record,” says the producer today. “It’s not often you hear something undeniable, but that was.”

Bradfield subsequently took Hedges out on the town to get “fucking pole-axed” on Brains SA while pummeling him for details on John McGeoch’s pedal set-up, and a bond was forged. The fact that the producer owned a residential studio in a converted château in Normandy was

a bonus. “Not in the sense that it felt exotic or that we wanted to go to France,” explains Bradfield. “It was just an opportunity to get away from everything and go to a country where not one fucking person knew who the fuck we were. That was very, very tempting.”

## FROM DESPAIR TO BIÈRE

How the Manics revived themselves in a French château



**MIKE HEDGES:** “I’d got a massive royalty cheque from working with *The Beautiful South*, so I went to look at houses in France with a view to putting a studio in. Château de la Rouge Motte was actually the smallest house I saw, but I got a good sense music could be made there. It was also difficult to get to, so I wouldn’t have too much record company interference.”

**WIRE:** “It was glorious. It felt like we were transported into a different era. It was Pink Floyd’s desk from Abbey Road with the flying faders, and Mike was just essential to the whole thing. I don’t think a producer has ever made us feel more comfortable in ourselves.”

**BRADFIELD:** “There were two locals. *Le Happy Hour* was this mock-Tudor place in the middle of the Normandy countryside, where all the farmers used to go. They served really strong Belgian beer, the kind that gets served in test tubes. And L’Étrier, one of those French bars with strip-lighting and table football. So it was a really good work-life balance I had there. And the food was amazing: it was pigs’ trotters, it was calves’ livers, cheeses that were way stinkier than Munster, just proper French food.”

trashiness” to describe the sound they were going for, maintaining the clang and crunch of Bradfield’s guitar, with wall-of-sound strings added later at Abbey Road. “I know strings became quite passé after that,” concedes Wire, “but the grandeur within those songs, it was quite new at that point.”

Between spells at the Château, there was an aborted attempt to bring a sleek New Order sheen to “Australia” and “The Girl Who Wanted To Be God” with Stephen Hague at Real World. But the Manics didn’t gel with producer or studio. “Everything was veganised and you had to have dinner with the other bands there,” says Wire, horrified. Who was missing out on the Manics’ mealtime repartee in this instance? “I think it was Reef! Hahahaha! So it wasn’t the greatest, but we did get something.”

“Everything Must Go” was one of the last songs to be written for the album. Stealing a title from a play his brother Patrick Jones was writing, Wire framed the lyric as an elegant entreaty to the Manics hardcore regarding the band’s new direction. “Once I had that title, it was a really easy lyric to write. ‘You Love Us’ was similar, in that it was an address to the audience, even though we didn’t have one. Whereas ‘Everything Must Go’ was, ‘You *did* love us, and we have to apologise, but we’re going slightly off...”

As dramatic as the shift in sound was the radical de-styling that the three band-members underwent on the album’s sleeve, to match the minimalist design of Mark Farrow. “We wanted to get away from perhaps what was seen as the cult of Richey,” Bradfield explains. “We knew it was achievable, because you’re dealing with a band that hasn’t got Brett Anderson as a singer, there’s more of a *bloke* at the front, you know? And I’m fine with that. I remember being in Philip’s kitchen before we did a gig at the Marquee, and I tried to put this top on which ➡

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In reflective mood: the three-piece band soldier on in the mid-'90s

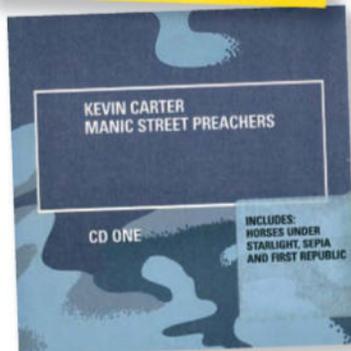


was slightly see-through. He looked at me and went, 'Don't do it to yourself, James...'

It's certainly odd to rewatch videos of the time and see the normally flamboyant Wire skulking around the stage in a nondescript man-at-C&A shirt. "It did feel a bit weird for me," admits the bassist. "I got bored with it after about six months. Whether it was the feather boa or sabotaging a gig by throwing my bass down, I still felt like I needed to feed that wing of the party. But it was probably a relief to James not to have to follow the whims of me and Richey's fashion. It felt good to strip ourselves of having to worry about that."

**B**RADFIELD admits that he was "gutted" when "A Design For Life" was kept off the top of the UK charts by Mark Morrison's "Return Of The Mack" – "though I was kind of happy that we'd been fucking done by a classic pop record" – and again when *Everything Must Go* had to settle for a No 2 placing behind George Michael's *Older*. Ultimately, though, there was no doubting that the Manics had gatecrashed a completely new realm. "It was the most spectacular feeling," says Wire. "That period when you go over the top, when pretty much anyone can like you – mums and dads, your old fans, football hooligans, whatever – you've opened up to the world, and it can only happen through circumstance. You can never contrive that."

## "THERE WAS STILL THREE OF US, AND THAT'S EMOTIONAL MATHS" JAMES DEAN BRADFIELD



Therapy?'s Andy Cairns remembers Bradfield playing him an advance copy of the album in his car one night. "I just thought, 'This is absolutely magnificent – it's bold, it's melodic, it's modern.' It was Britpop enough that people who loved the current musical genre could enjoy and appreciate it, but then to sneak in lines like *'I wish I had a bottle right here in my pretty face'* was fantastic."

The Manics quickly noticed a schism opening up in their live audiences between the glammed-up generation terrorists and the beer-swilling arrivistes. But ever the contrarians, this was a dichotomy they relished.

"There was a bit of sabre-rattling, but I had no problem with that," says Bradfield. "Our audience still felt like it was ours: mostly full of brilliant people."

Indeed, for all the scorched-earth sentiment of the title track, *Everything Must Go* maintained an important sense of continuity. Half of its songs dated back to the tail-end of the *Holy Bible* era,

including five lyrics written wholly or mostly by Edwards. "Kevin Carter" was the most discomfiting Top 10 hit of 1996, its "tribal scars in *Technicolor*" lashed to a confounding bossa-punk beat and a haunting Sean Moore trumpet solo that reprised his days in the Celynen Colliery Band. "Small Black Flowers That Grow In The Sky", meanwhile, about the mistreatment of animals in captivity, became the album's stark centrepiece, graced by the spectral sounds of "Frank Sinatra's harpist", Julie Allis.

"Everybody loved that record," says Rob Stringer. "How could you not? It was a work of total brilliance. Even the lyric content is magical. Obviously we had a wave to surf because of Oasis, so guitar music was really big at that time. But in fairness, [the Manics] embraced the process – they went for it. And they sold a lot of records! Anything that does over a million albums in the UK is a big deal. To be able to turn that terrible period into a triumph says everything about them as people."

In February 1997, these former music industry outcasts sealed their ascent by winning the two most coveted Brit Awards, for Best British Album and Best British Group. Naturally, there was a part of Nicky Wire's brain telling him to go up there and urinate on his statuette, as he had once threatened if the Manics ever won. Instead, he delivered a passionate defence of comprehensive education while wearing an 'I Heart Hoovering' T-shirt. "I mean, you



Dress for success: Nicky Wire reigns supreme at the 1997 Reading Festival

# "IT WAS MASSIVE"

Super Furry Animals' Gruff Rhys on how the Manics inspired a whole generation of Welsh bands



**What did you think of the Manics when they first emerged?**

I was really excited by them. I saw an early gig – a very raw one but full of life and performance and sloganeering.

**Did the fact that they were from Wales**

**provide encouragement to other bands?**

Yes, it was massive. I was turned on to them by Owen Powell from Cardiff, who ended up in Catatonia. Everyone was picking up on it. We'd buy anything they were interviewed in as they were so transgressive and funny.

**What do you remember about supporting the Manics on tour in late 1996?**

We thought they would have really intense goths following them, but their audiences were amazing. There would have been nervousness on our side as newcomers meeting a big band, but they are very encouraging characters. They kept at us 'til we found something in common – which I think was a mutual love of Badfinger.

**How important was it that they took lots of other Welsh bands on tour that year?**

It was incredible for us. The band were like a PR machine for the emerging Welsh bands. Nicky had the flag on the amp of course, but coupled with his armoury of a skirt and a feather boa, it made it more potent and subversive. But it was also a finger and an antidote to the boorishness of Britpop we'd been bombarded with for a few years.

**Did the fact that they became successful while maintaining their integrity provide inspiration for SFA's own career?**

I think any band that gets an anti-fascist anthem like

"If You Tolerate This..." to No 1 should be an inspiration to everyone. *Everything Must Go* laid the groundwork for it. I had a really moving experience in Moscow about 10 years ago on tour – I was stood near the famous brutalist sculpture Monument To The Conquerors Of Space when the Manics came over the Tannoy. "A Design For Life" blasting over central Moscow! It was really mind-blowing.

about what they do, and they care about people, which is important."

"I think we share a gritty determination," concludes Brett Anderson. "The ability to pick yourself up and try again is one of the most vital components of success. They have a belief and a cause – and the fact that they are still here, and still a great band, is a testament to that." 🗨️

Manic Street Preachers play London's Royal Albert Hall on March 26 as part of Robert Smith's Teenage Cancer Trust series

## "THEY HAVE A BELIEF AND A CAUSE – AND THEY'RE STILL A GREAT BAND" BRETT ANDERSON

can't get more situationist than that: demystifying rock'n'roll."

A lifelong devotee of the weekly music press, Wire's personal zenith was appearing simultaneously on the covers of both *NME* and *Melody Maker* following the Manics' headline set at the 1997 Reading Festival. "In a see-through camo dress!" he adds. "Before we went on, Kylie had come backstage because we'd started writing a couple of songs for her. And a couple weeks before that, Arthur Scargill had been backstage. Arthur Scargill and Kylie – only we could do that."

Of course, all these victories were tinged with bitterness. "It's an amazing period that I wish Richey could have experienced," says Wire, "because apart from that initial rush, he never was with us when everything went right. The fact that he never could get the scale [of the band] to be as extraordinary as he undoubtedly was is a deep sadness, besides the friendship and just having him around. It would have given

him such a platform to explode his intellect onto a wider audience."

Bradfield is similarly reflective: "I have moments where I wish I could get the lyrics of 'Yes' again. I miss sitting with him [Edwards] in Harry's Bar in Cardiff watching a shit American football game. You miss all those things, you'll miss them forever. But there was still three of us, and that's emotional maths. It felt as if there was still enough for us to invest in, and that pushes you forward to actually save each other a bit."

Thirty years later, the Manics remain tightly bonded by the experience, still determined to use their platform to push challenging ideas into the world via the medium of ambitious, emotive rock songs. "I feel guilty that I'm not the agitator I was," says Wire, slipping his sunglasses back on despite the stubbornly grey Welsh sky outside, "but we put an immense amount of effort into still making albums that we think are worthwhile. I find it quite hard to write lyrics at the moment, because everything's beyond satire or it's merged into a deep nothingness where to pick a side on one issue means you don't like the other. But we've still got five or six new songs..."

Cairns, for one, is dying to hear them: "Everything that they try, they seem to pull it off. James as a musician is completely restless – every time I talk to him, he's got itchy feet, he wants to do new things. I find that really inspiring. They care about the craft, they care



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# THAT THIN WILD MERCURY SOUND

In 1966, **BOB DYLAN** hit his wildest white-hot creative peak yet, recording one of his most iconic albums, *Blonde On Blonde*, and blazing new ground with his controversial electric tour with The Hawks. As the Bob Dylan Center in Tulsa prepares a major new exhibition exploring this tumultuous year, *Uncut* is offered an exclusive preview of what they have in store. Meanwhile, we go behind the scenes of *Blonde On Blonde* and reconstruct Tour '66, as eyewitnesses share new tales of late nights, cold mornings and chance encounters. "It's Dylan as spectacle, in a very combative way," learns Damien Love. "This is me – deal with it."

Photo by JERRY SCHATZBERG/COURTESY OF GENESIS PUBLICATIONS

**A**S 1966 OPENED, Bob Dylan was moving at lightning speed, in pursuit of a sound only he could hear. It was the year velocity and vision fused in one explosive package. Over the preceding 12 months – in the blur of *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Highway 61 Revisited*, the UK tour

immortalised in DA Pennebaker's *Dont Look Back*, and the furore sparked by plugging in at Newport Folk Festival – Dylan had already outpaced folk music, reconfigured the grammar of rock'n'roll and split his followers in two. Now he was closing in on something more elusive still, flickering just ahead of his reach.

The search began in New York City. Growing his hair, sharpening his clothes, devouring Beats, Symbolists and Surrealists and writing furiously through the night, Dylan entered the studio with his new live group, The Hawks – later The Band – in an attempt to cut his third album in a year. The sessions were fertile but frustrating. The songs were spilling from him. But the qualities he sought – the texture, the atmosphere, the light and space – kept slipping through his fingers.

Nashville, a place more associated with discipline than delirium, and surrounded himself with seasoned backroom musicians whose instincts were honed, unflashy and exact. In the unlikely marriage of mercurial songwriter and craftsmanlike players, in sessions unlike anything Music City had ever witnessed, something locked into place.

*Blonde On Blonde* emerged as the album where everything aligned: the moment Dylan's thrumming inner vision, his teeming chains of imagery and the people in the room all came together as never before. Desire and time and electricity; blues grit and hip pop flash. The

Persian drunkard, the kings of Tyrus and the jelly-faced women. Chaos held together by grace.

"The closest I ever got to the sound I hear in my mind was on individual bands in the *Blonde On Blonde* album," Dylan famously told *Playboy*'s Ron Rosenbaum in 1977. "It's that thin, that wild mercury sound. It's metallic and bright gold with whatever that conjures up."

Having caught it on tape, Dylan took his surging sound on the road, pairing with The Hawks as he brought the battle to "go electric" to the world. The boos that had started at Newport roared after him through North America, to Australia, across Europe, all the way to "Judas!" in Manchester.

To add to the pressure, Dylan had committed to make a documentary of the tour, again with Pennebaker, and deliver his first book, *Tarantula*, to an impatient publisher. By the time Tour '66 hit the UK, the pace was savage.

Then, just as suddenly as it had flared, the streak stopped cold. On July 29, Dylan went tumbling from his Triumph motorcycle, bringing to an end a period of near-supernatural output. He had just turned 25. Sixty years on, what remains is the album, the tour, and the sense of an artist who touched his sound at full burn – and survived to go again. ➔

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About to unearth  
"bright gold":  
Dylan at the photo  
session used in  
the *Blonde On  
Blonde* gatefold,  
New York, 1965



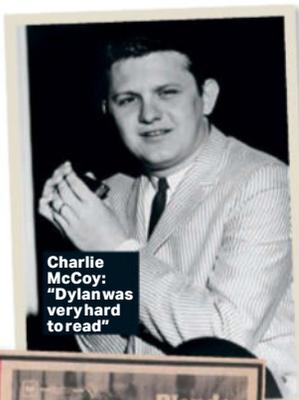
On a hot streak: Dylan in New York, 1965

# “HE WAS IN A STRANGE PLACE WITH STRANGE MUSICIANS...”

Running through the night, seemingly working to the whim of the artist, Dylan’s Nashville sessions were like nothing the Music City had seen before. Session leader **CHARLIE McCOY** takes us back inside the studio

JERRY SCHATZBERG/COURTESY OF GENESIS PUBLICATIONS; MEMORABILIA COURTESY OF THE BOBBY DYLAN CENTER, TULSA, OKLAHOMA

**S** ESSIONS for *Blonde On Blonde* started in October 1965 in New York, at Columbia Records’ Studio A, Dylan’s regular room since cutting his first album in 1961. Between intense touring, Dylan and The Hawks, sometimes augmented by veterans of *Highway 61 Revisited*, worked sporadically until late January 1966. But only one song – the magisterial “One Of Us Must Know (Sooner Or Later)” – made the finished album.



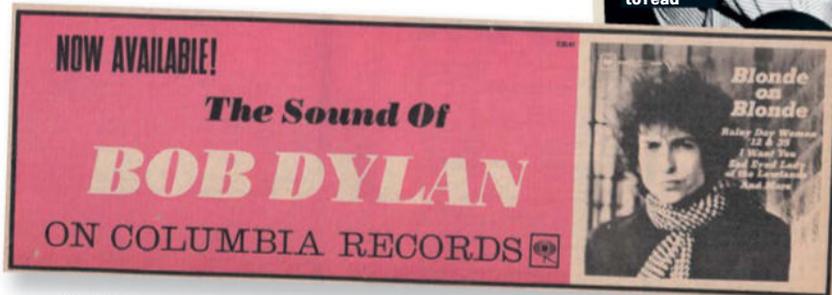
Charlie McCoy: “Dylan was very hard to read”

As outtakes released on *The Bootleg Series Vol 12: The Cutting Edge* in 2015 revealed, some of this work was astonishing. But Dylan wasn’t reaching what he was searching for and, perhaps sensing his frustration, producer Bob Johnston pressed a notion he’d been pushing for a while: Dylan should try recording in Nashville, whose players Johnston knew well.

A rare outside eyewitness to these sessions was Kris Kristofferson, then working as a janitor at Columbia. “*Blonde On Blonde* was the wildest sessions I’d ever seen,” he told *Uncut* in 2002. “I remember Dylan sitting out in the studio, writing all night long by himself with his dark glasses on. It was the most bizarre behaviour anybody in Nashville had ever seen. He didn’t record the damn thing until the sun came up.”

Two sets of Tennessee sessions later – the first on February 14–17; then March 7–10 – Dylan had finally captured the elusive sound he could hear in his mind. *Blonde On Blonde* was finished.

Now here’s Charlie McCoy to tell us how it was done...



MICHAEL LOCHS/ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES



Bob Dylan's new smash single, 'I Want You' from his deluxe two-record set...  
Blonde on Blonde including the hit, 'Rainy Day Women '12 & '35' Where the action is. On Columbia Records.

# “HE'D PICK UP HIS GUITAR AND START SINGING”

CHARLIE MCCOY

songs into Elvis movies. He came to Nashville to make these demos and called me out of the blue and asked if I'd be session leader. “He came up three or four times a year. We got a band together and Johnston wound up getting five or six songs into those movies. But, needless to say, he didn't get all his songs in. So he started taking the unused songs around

other record companies. He took some to New York, to Columbia. The head of A&R, Bob Mersey, said, ‘Boy, these demos are sounding really good, where did you cut these?’ Johnston told him Nashville. Then Mersey opened the door: he asked, ‘Did you produce these? Ever wanted to be a record producer?’ So Bob thought for about a second and said, ‘Sure!’ That's how he became

“IN February 1966, Bob Johnston called me and said, ‘I'm bringing Dylan to Nashville.’ Right before he hung up, he said, ‘By the way: I was using you for bait.’

“A few months before, in summer '65, I'd had a chance to go to New York.

Johnston had just moved there and before he went he told me, ‘Charlie, if you ever get up there, call me, I can get you Broadway theatre tickets.’

“So, the World's Fair was on, I went up, and I called him: ‘Hey Bob! I'm in town, how about them tickets?’ He said, ‘No problem. Uh, can you come over to Columbia Studio this afternoon? I'm recording Bob Dylan, why don't you come meet him?’

“I took a taxi to Columbia Studio, walked in and he introduced me to Dylan, who said, ‘We're getting ready to record a song – why doncha grab that guitar over there and play along?’ It was just me, Dylan and the bass player, and the song was ‘Desolation Row’.

“We only did two takes, because the bass player had to leave to go on to another session. When I was playing, I was thinking, ‘Man, this is a poor excuse.’ It was like my worst try. I kept thinking, ‘What would Grady Martin do?’ But ever since, people come up to me and say, ‘Oh my God, what you did on “Desolation Row” was brilliant!’ I'm still thinking, ‘Well, it didn't sound brilliant to me...’

“Anyway, unbeknownst to me, it seems Johnston was using this as a way to convince Dylan to come to Nashville. He'd been trying to get Dylan to come and Dylan wasn't sure. But after that ‘Desolation Row’ session, Johnston said to Dylan: ‘Hey – see how easy that was? That's the way it would be in Nashville.’

“Bob Johnston was from Texas. He first started coming to Nashville in the early 1960s as a songwriter writing for the Elvis Presley publishing group, Hill & Range, trying to get his



a producer at Columbia.

“Johnston had been trying to get Dylan to come to Nashville for a while. Dylan's manager, Albert Grossman, was really not for it. But after ‘Desolation Row’, Johnston told me, ‘I've talked them into giving it a try.’

“He asked me to get the band together. When we did those demos, we had this core group: me, Kenny Buttrey on drums, Hargus ‘Pig’ Robbins on piano, Henry Strzelecki as bass player and Wayne Moss on guitar. For *Blonde On Blonde*, it was us as the core, plus Joe South played some bass; another piano player, Bill Aikins, was there for one session, Mac Gayden played guitar one night and Jerry Kennedy did some.

“They knew about me doing ‘Desolation Row’, but I didn't really have any information to give them about what this was going to be like. But as studio musicians in Nashville, we go to the studio every day, usually never knowing what we're going to be doing. We hear the music the first time we walk into the studio. We're used to that.

“But the first day on *Blonde On Blonde* was a little strange. We were booked to begin at two in the afternoon. We were in Columbia Records' Studio A. It was brand new, only just opened. We set up and then Johnston came in and said, ‘Well, Dylan's flight's been delayed – you guys, just hang around.’

“So we hung around. We went out for dinner at five, came back and shortly after that, Dylan finally arrived.

“He never said anything, except: ‘I've not finished writing the first song. Uh, you guys just hang loose 'til I finish it.’



Johnny Cash and Dylan in Cardiff in 1966, in *Eat The Document*

## THE CASH CONNECTION

When the man came around

**B**OB Johnston wasn't the first to propose Dylan should try Nashville. Johnny Cash originally made the suggestion, after he and Dylan bonded at 1964's Newport Folk Festival and became steady correspondents. What has been almost entirely unrealised until now, however, is that Cash actually attended some *Blonde On Blonde* sessions.

Buried deep in the archives of the *Toronto Star*, in a tiny interview with Cash published on March 18, 1966, one week after *Blonde...*'s recording wrapped, columnist Michael Sherman reported: “Seems that Dylan was in Nashville recently to cut a new album and Cash dropped in to say hello and watch... According to Cash, Dylan was furiously composing... between takes. A few days later, he sent Cash a tape of the final product with a note that read: ‘Take whatever you want for yourself and send the rest back to me. I don't want anyone outside of Nashville to see this tape, but I wanted you to have first choice.’”

Dylan and Cash next crossed paths in Wales, on May 11, when both had gigs in Cardiff, and hooked up for a burned-out backstage jam.

COURTESY OF THE BOB DYLAN CENTER, TULSA, OKLAHOMA

We've said it before and we say it again...  
**Nobody sings Dylan like Dylan!**

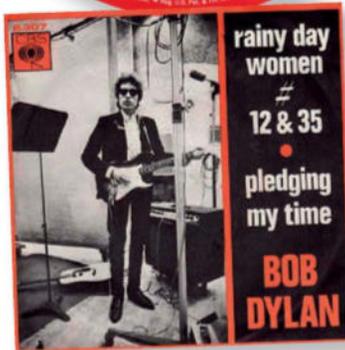


The original  
**'Just Like a Woman'**  
From his sensational new album

On COLUMBIA RECORDS



**"We all blended together well": Bob with Al Kooper, 1966**



"None of us had ever seen anything like that before.

"So, we waited, and it was getting pretty late when we finally got the word that Dylan was ready.

"The way we started was, Dylan would just pick up his guitar and start singing, and we'd all listen, take down notes. I was session leader and my job is, I'm go-between, between the artist and the band. So, when I heard the songs, I'd have ideas about instruments and things. First, I'd run my ideas past Dylan – but he would never really answer. So I finally quit asking and just went to the band and told them what I thought we should do: 'Wayne, guitar, you fill here; Pig, keyboard, you fill here...' Just like a typical Nashville session.

"Dylan never said anything, really. It was hard to tell just what he was thinking or feeling. But he started playing his songs that first night and we started recording them. We finished up sometime around daybreak.

"My thought that night was that Dylan was maybe just a little uncomfortable at first, because he was in a strange place with strange musicians. He had two other guys with him: Al Kooper, playing organ, and later Robbie Robertson from The Band – great guitar player. I think they had been trying to do some recording for this in New York with Johnston before.

"The second day on *Blonde On Blonde* was maybe even stranger. We showed up in the afternoon and got the word again that he hasn't finished writing the song: 'You guys just be patient while I finish this.'

"Then what happened was a very long night of

us killing time and sitting around trying to stay awake while he goes off to finish writing the song. There was a little green room downstairs, where they had a coffee machine and ping-pong table, so we would go away from the studio while Dylan sat in there writing on his own. We'd play ping-pong, tell jokes, drink coffee, anything to stay awake – because you never did know when Dylan was going to say, 'OK: now let's do it.' He could be ready to go any minute.

"At 4am, Dylan appeared: 'OK, I'm ready. Let's record.' The song was 'Sad-Eyed

Lady Of The Lowlands'.

"Now, after you've tried to stay awake till four o'clock in the morning, to play something so slow and long was really tough. An 11-minute-plus song. Nobody wants to make a mistake. None of us had ever played on a song as long as this. None of us had ever heard lyrics like that. We

always listen to lyrics. As a musician, you've got to use common sense and hear what the song has to say. But 'Sad-Eyed Lady...' was something else.

"Everyone stayed alert, though, and we got it in one or maybe two takes. Dylan himself rarely ever made a mistake. You'd maybe think he would've had some trouble remembering all those lyrics, but he was always right-on.

"The whole *Blonde On Blonde* experience was strange in some ways. Like I said, I felt Dylan was just a little uncomfortable at first. He didn't know what to expect in Nashville. I think he was unsure of himself and unsure of us, and he was still writing the songs there and then as he went along. But, as the days passed, I thought he felt more comfortable.

"He still didn't say much, though. Whenever we would start on a new song, I'd immediately begin to get ideas about how to do it. I'd walk over to Dylan and say, 'Bob, what would you think if we did this..?' He'd have the same answer every time: 'I dunno, man. Whadda you think?'

"Finally, I went to Bob Johnston and said, 'You know what? I'm gonna quit asking. Maybe if we do something he doesn't like, he'll speak up.'

"Dylan never spoke up. So, either he just didn't want to be troubled by making a scene, or he was happy. Dylan was strange that way, very hard to read.

"But while Dylan never really said anything to me about the music, he obviously said a couple of things to Bob Johnston, because Bob came over one afternoon and said, 'Well, tonight, he wants to record a song that sounds like the Salvation Army. I think we're gonna need a trumpet and a trombone.'

"Now a lot of those Salvation Army bands are people who don't play much and they can sound pretty awful. So, I said to Johnston, 'Do you want the trumpet to be... good?' He said, 'No!' So, I said, 'Well, OK: I'm your man.'

"So that's how we did 'Rainy Day Women'. I took the trumpet, and I called a friend, Wayne Butler, to come play trombone. I think it was just one take. All that noise in the background was

**"NONE OF US HAD EVER HEARD LYRICS LIKE THAT"**

**CHARLIE MCCOY**

the musicians screaming. Bob Johnston said, 'I want you guys to whoop and holler like it's a real party.' All that noise was live, it wasn't overdubbed later; that was the guys, like Pig and Strzelecki, just having themselves a big time.

"Another thing I remember is that there was a new janitor in the studio. He'd just been hired. Nobody knew anything about him. One night, we took a break. I was in the hallway and this janitor walked up and said, 'Hey, are you Charlie? You on the Dylan session? You think there's any way in the world I could sneak in there and listen for five minutes?'"

"I said, 'OK, tell you what: you come in, I'll show you where to stand and so long as you stay quiet, you can listen. But five minutes, then you leave.'

"I told the engineer I was letting this janitor come in, so that he could kind of hide him. So, this guy came in and he stood back there and watched for a while. Later that night I ran into him again, and he said, 'Oh, man. I can't thank you enough for that.' That janitor turned out to be Kris Kristofferson.

"I played the harmonica on 'Obviously Five Believers', because it had fills that went right in close to the lyrics – Dylan couldn't play the part and sing at the same time. Also, I don't know if it was Dylan's decision, but they wanted this riff to be a little more of a straight-out bluesy thing, which was

right in my wheelhouse.

"We did both 'Rainy Day Women' and 'Obviously Five Believers' on the last night, and that was the most fun night. Everybody was getting along great; seemed like Dylan, Al Kooper and Robbie Robertson were happy to be there and we all blended together well.

"The *Blonde On Blonde* sessions were interesting, to say the least, but it was never a problem. Even those nights we spent sitting around waiting for Dylan to finish writing a song: after midnight, as a studio musician, you're getting paid time-and-a-half. We were all on union scale. So, we sat around for eternity, but we were on The Big Clock.

"Nashville has a unique combination of being laidback but taking care of business and that's what we did. We did good together."

The last 100 copies of Genesis Publications' *Thin Wild Mercury: Touching Dylan's Edge* by Jerry Schatzberg are available from [DylanBook.com](http://DylanBook.com) from £325/\$435/€375

Charlie McCoy and Billy Swan backstage at the Paris Olympia, May 1975



## "A LOT OF PING-PONG WAS BEING PLAYED..."

Kris Kristofferson wasn't the only singer-songwriter pulling shifts as studio janitor during the *Blonde On Blonde* sessions. **BILLY SWAN** had the job before him. Here, he remembers Dylan's first nights in Nashville

"I'd gotten a job at Columbia Studio A, as 'engineer's assistant'. It was going getting food for the engineers, helping clean up the studio between sessions, erasing tape. Yeah, it really was just like a janitor. But it was a good job, because I got to see a lot of my heroes record. After a year, I was ready to do something else – I don't know what – so I quit. I gave my two-weeks' notice to the studio manager, and he said, 'Well, if you know anyone looking for a job, bring 'em in.' As I was leaving, Kris Kristofferson was opening the door to come in and first thing out his mouth was: 'Do you know where I can get a job?' So we went back in and Kris got the job I'd just gave notice for.

"I worked there the first time Dylan came, three days or something. Then when he came back for a second set of sessions, about a month later, Kris was working by then.

"Mostly I just remember how Dylan would write a lot of the songs in there. There was a booth in back of the studio and he'd be back there, writing. Sessions would be scheduled to start 6pm, and Dylan would just go in and write and they wouldn't start recording till two or three next morning.

"One night, I was in the control room all by myself and he was out there, writing in the studio. But then he came in and said, 'Uh, man, there's somebody looking in through the door at me, and it's bothering me y'know?' So I went and checked and there was someone there, someone I knew. I just said, 'Hey, you looking through the window's bothering him, you'll have to leave.' It was no problem.

"When they did start recording, those musicians learned the songs really fast. They went right through them. I knew all the players, a great group of Nashville's younger musicians, led by Charlie McCoy – he arranged a lot of

that. Next time Dylan spoke to me was in the control room that first night. We were listening to a playback of that song, 'I filled up my shoe/And brought it to you...' 'Fourth Time Around'. A long one. There were other people in the studio, but Dylan asked me, 'Do you like that song?' I told him, 'Yeah. I like it a lot.'

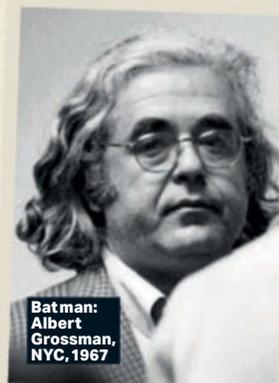
"Bob Johnston had been a friend of mine. Him and Dylan seemed to have a great relationship. Johnston let Dylan do what he does: be Bob Dylan. He'd have suggestions every now and then, but not many. Johnston was really all about just getting all he could get down on tape, just record all he could.

"The second night, I went down and picked Dylan up. Him and Al Kooper were staying at the Capitol Park Inn. The studio had this blue station wagon, and they sent me to pick Dylan up. He was just there to do what he had to do, still just writing a lot right there in the studio.

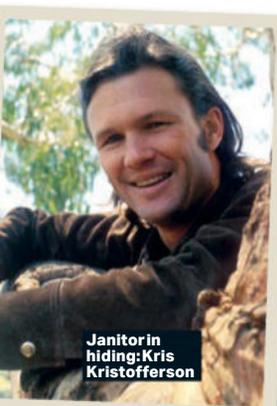
"I remember he wanted something to write with, he didn't have anything. All I could find him was those black markers, Sharpies. Dylan wrote a bunch of stuff with Sharpies on yellow legal pads.

"While he was writing, the guys would hang out, waiting. There was a lot of ping-pong being played while Dylan was writing those songs.

I played Dylan's manager, Albert Grossman. Playing ping-pong with Albert is probably my most vivid memory of that whole time. Nice guy. We'd talk while we played. I remember him asking, 'Have you ever heard of Thelonius Monk?' I hadn't at that point, so I said, 'No, I never have.' Albert said, 'Well, he's a very good ping-pong player.' So, I guess Bob Dylan's manager must have been playing ping-pong with Thelonius Monk."



Batman: Albert Grossman, NYC, 1967



Janitor in hiding: Kris Kristofferson



# “I’D PUT A PAIR OF PLIERS IN HIS POCKET...”

The eye behind the lens, **JERRY SCHATZBERG**, on *Blonde On Blonde*'s game-changing cover photography



JERRY Schatzberg heard about Bob Dylan before he ever heard him. Two friends he knew through his work as one of Manhattan's hottest photographers kept pestering him to check the singer out. One was called Nico; she'd soon sing with The Velvet Underground. The other was called Sara; she'd soon marry Bob Dylan.

Eventually Schatzberg listened, and was hooked. When Sara heard he was interested in photographing Dylan, she arranged a date and in summer 1965 Schatzberg visited Columbia Records on Seventh Avenue to document Dylan recording *Highway 61 Revisited*.

“I photographed him probably a couple of days there,” Schatzberg recalls, “and then I was part of the atmosphere.”

Dylan agreed to subsequent sessions at Schatzberg's Park Avenue studio, beginning a remarkable collaboration. Under the highest pressure of his career, Dylan seemed to trust Schatzberg, who shot him in the studio, on the

street, on stage and during downtime at Ondine, the nightclub Schatzberg part-owned; images that capture Dylan at his most playful and sharpest. Dylan chose several for *Blonde On Blonde*'s inner spread.

“He was great,” says Schatzberg. “I’d put a pair of pliers in his pocket, he’d go with it: take the pliers and start working on a painting I gave him. He was an actor.”

Housing rock's first double album, *Blonde...*'s sleeve was groundbreaking: for its pioneering gatefold design, its impudent lack of text and its audaciously out-of-focus cover image. Schatzberg explains the blur simply: he was shivering.

“I tried some things inside,” he says. “But I wanted to find something different. As a kid, I always liked going to the Meatpacking District with my parents on a Sunday, because



they always had great steak, and I just remember the atmosphere being different. We went there and did a whole session. There were about three

or four that were moving and out of focus – everybody says we were trying to emulate a trip, but no: it was fuckin' cold. It was February.

“Bob picked that one. Probably, if I was sending them in, I might have pulled them out as rejects – I figure no record company's going to use a blurred photograph. But what Bob wants, Bob gets. I was delighted.”

Jerry Schatzberg quotes via Michael Chaiken and the Bob Dylan Center



JERRY SCHATZBERG/COURTESY OF GENESIS PUBLICATIONS; CHARLIE STEINER/HIGHWAY 67/GETTY IMAGES



## “HE SAID: ‘THAT’S WEIRD, MAN...’”

Photographer **CHARLIE STEINER** recalls how a chance encounter with Dylan led to his picture gracing *Blonde On Blonde*

IT'S often overlooked, but not every photograph on *Blonde On Blonde* is by Jerry Schatzberg. In the inner montage, the single image showing Dylan at work with a guitar was taken by Charlie Steiner, part of a fantastic set the young student shot when Dylan and The Hawks played Philadelphia's Academy Of Music on February 24, 1966. “I showed the prints to a guy at college. He said, ‘Hey, you should show those to Dylan,’” Steiner tells *Uncut*. “I thought: yeah, sure. But when I was home visiting my parents, I dropped off some pictures with Columbia Records' art department in New York. They called later and said, ‘We like these, but don't really have any use for performance pictures.’ So, I went back to pick them up – and as I was about to leave the office, Dylan walked by. I went out in the hallway and built up my confidence, then found him and said, ‘I have some pictures...’ He was interested and he looked. He was carrying a box of Jerry Schatzberg's prints – he was actually there at Columbia dealing with pictures for *Blonde On Blonde*. The picture he chose, he liked because he realised there were no pictures of him with a guitar in the Schatzberg pictures. Then he said there was some deal: he wasn't supposed to use other photographers – but he thought that if I worked for a newspaper it'd be OK. So Dylan invented a newspaper that didn't exist: the ‘Philadelphia Tribune’. He wrote that with my name on the back. But they ended up not crediting me or Jerry Schatzberg.

“On the album it's considerably cropped: the original shows him down to his waist. I'd actually made another print, where I'd blown up his face, using Kodalith film. It's black and white, no greys, so you get really interesting effects. I showed Dylan and he said: ‘That's weird, man.’ It's the best thing anyone ever said to me.” ➡➡



See more of Charlie's work at [charliesteiner.com](http://charliesteiner.com)

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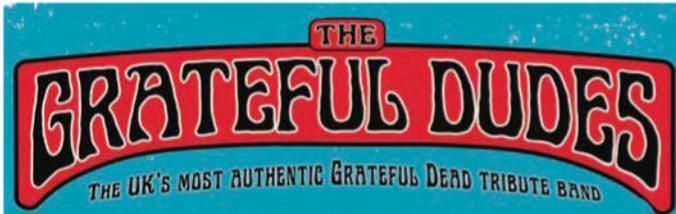
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# THEY'LL STONE YOU

"The catcalls began..." Dylan at the Olympia Theatre in Paris on the day of his 25th birthday, May 24, 1966



When Dylan's 1966 tour hit the British Isles, a hostile press had the knives out from the first. *Uncut* scours the archives to reconstruct how it all went down in real time

**A**MONG the footage filmmaker DA Pennebaker shot during Bob Dylan's 1966 tour is the following scene. It's May 21 and Dylan is backstage at Newcastle's Odeon Theatre, weary and wired and waiting for the moment he'll have to walk onstage and go through it all again. Killing time with him in the bare dressing room are Robbie Robertson and Rick Danko, guitar and bass of the band who will back him for the second half of the show, along with Richard Alderson, sound engineer on their chaotic campaign.

The subject of conversation is the booing they all know is coming. Tonight will be their 12th gig in the British Isles and the routine has gone unchanged since the opener, in Dublin on May 5. First, Dylan will step out alone with his acoustic guitar and the crowd will sit in pin-drop silence, applauding whatever he does. Then he will return with the five-piece band still dubbed simply The Group, and the ritual chorus of jeers and slow handclapping will commence, as the "folk purists" in his audience voice the betrayal they feel toward Dylan for plugging in a Fender Telecaster.

"Hey, I loved the description in the paper last night," says Alderson. "There wasn't one truth in the entire article." "From what town, man?" asks Dylan. "Last night, Edinburgh." Alderson begins quoting: "'Another Night Of Cat-Calls For Dylan. Many of the audience walked out...'"

"I saw one, man," interjects Dylan. "Didya see one paper that said

everybody walked out? Everybody walked out. In Liverpool I saw it."

"They're really losing their minds," says Alderson. Dylan pauses, considering. Then: "I'm gonna walk out."

Sixty years on, we know all about the booing – about "Judas!" and all that. But the animosity didn't let up when the crowds went home. As Pennebaker, hired by Dylan to document the European trip, caught repeatedly, Dylan made a habit of reading the press coverage – and the vitriol he would have found there was unrelenting.

## DUBLIN, ADELPHI CINEMA, MAY 5

**I**RELAND'S *Evening Herald* critic "J.K." laid down the media blueprint for the next few weeks with his Dublin review, published on May 6 as THE NIGHT OF THE GREAT LET-DOWN!

"O what a storm blew up when Dylan came to town! They booed. They said things (mostly unprintable). They whistled. They jeered... For the

first half... he was on his own... After the interval there appeared behind him a heavily amplified – three tons of it, flown in from the USA – backing group of five... Dylan assumed the role of a slightly down-at-heel paperback edition of Mick Jagger... Someone shouted 'traitor,' someone else 'leave it to the Beatles'... It was just brutal."

Ireland's *Sunday Independent* chimed in: OH, WHAT A SHOCK FOR DYLAN FANS! "...Dylan switched on his equally diminutive electric men... There were shouts of 'traitor,' 'stuffed golliwog'... His beat arrangements were monotonous and painful..."

Late to the party, but concise, the *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph* on May 19 offered: "Bob Dylan died a terrible death at his Dublin concert."

Debate raged in the *Evening Herald's* letters pages as pro- and anti-electric factions let rip. Among the former, a correspondent who signed off "Disgusted" was the most passionate:

"[Dylan] belted out the ingenious lyrics with an overpowering driving dynamic voice which shook the whole building and was backed by pounding drums, crashing piano and organ, and electrifying guitars, the whole effect was unbelievable, weird and wild."

## BELFAST, ABC THEATRE, MAY 6

**N**O press covered the Belfast gig. But, before the concert, Dylan was visited backstage by Roger Daltrey, en route to a Who show in Lisburn with a columnist for the local *Cityweek* in tow. As Dylan and Daltrey drank tea, the

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1966

MEMORABILIA, COURTESY OF THE BOB DYLAN CENTER, TULSA, OKLAHOMA; KEYSTONE-FRANCE/GETTY IMAGES; KEVSTONE/FRANCE/GETTY IMAGES

journalist noted Dylan's frame of mind: "All he wanted to do was go home..."

### BRISTOL, COLSTON HALL, MAY 10

**D**YLAN DOWN BEAT ran the *Bristol Post's* review of the first night on the British mainland: "The Bard of nihilism, hope, anti-convention and protest... even if you could not hear him clearly. During the first half... he belched his way solo through half a dozen marathons... The second half... was spent listening to beat music à la Bob Dylan with the volume turned on full... not very enjoyable."

The *Western Daily Press* reported THE NEW DYLAN BLAST: "Bristol saw the new stylised, commercialised Bob Dylan last night – and did not like what it saw..."

HAS FAME SPOILT DYLAN? wondered the same paper's Peter Gibbs: "A noisy, blaring, ear-splitting disaster... Perhaps this exaggerated Top Ten sound has been forced upon him by others..."

The *Evening Post's* Michael Green returned to the story on May 14: DAY OF DISILLUSIONMENT FOR THE DYLAN FANS – "Complaints about the show generally and Dylan's backing group particularly showered on the head of Colston Hall manager Mr Ken Cowley. 'A number of people walked out,' he said, 'and lots of people wanted to know who to write and complain to...'"

### GARDIFF, CAPITOL CINEMA, MAY 11

**A**N IDOL WITH FEET OF CLAY began *South Wales Argus* scribe Merle Jones: "Dylan made the biggest mistake of his career by changing to an electric guitar and using a backing group..." The review prompted a fiery defence from reader JM Harris: "Dylan is an artist in every sense... his whole heart went into this performance."



"I don't write drugs songs": in London, May 3, 1966

### BIRMINGHAM, ODEON THEATRE, MAY 12

**D**YLAN THE LEGEND DISAPPOINTS opined the *Birmingham Mail's* "B.B", in the only review not to mention the concert's electrified portion. The *Walsall Observer* provided the obligatory slating: FANS WERE UPSET BY DYLAN'S "COMMERCIALISM": "an uninspiring display of loud, incoherent music..."

Thankfully, *Stratford-Upon-Avon Herald* writer James Belsey was also on hand, filing one of the most fascinating reviews of the entire tour: A SORT OF DEMI-GOD TRIES TO SMASH HIS HALO.

"The first half was devoted to the Dylan we know... But there was an air of nervousness. Rumours were abroad that God had stopped enjoying deity and wanted to come down to the level of a mortal pop star... His anger at himself was rousing as I slipped down... to see him at close quarters. That face was the mask of a hawk, red eyes and red lips, converging into the beaky sharpness of his cruel nose... Dylan seen at close quarters is an unworldly object. The dirty grey suede rocker boots, stained black jeans and

jacket and that incredible forest of hair... when he sang you heard every catch and breath and when he played harmonica it hurt you... Second-half, the rumours became facts. He leapt on stage with a group... Many were walking out... Two girls in the front row leapt up at Dylan as the concert ended and hugged him like attacking tigers... Dylan is creative and needs a new direction every few months... it's essential that he keeps moving..."

### LIVERPOOL, ODEON THEATRE, MAY 14

**N**O publication covered Dylan's Beatletown gig, but *Disc & Music Echo* reader T Hardern provided a glimpse in a letter: "Dylan can certainly keep his cool... the audience appreciated the quiet sense of humour which he showed to hecklers... Incidentally, all the kids round us were digging the new Dylan very much..."

### LEICESTER, DE MONTFORT HALL, MAY 15

**"S**HOUTS of 'Get them off,' whistling, jeering, slow handclapping and people walking out left, right and centre were the only things that greeted Bob Dylan when he brought on a five-piece band," according to the *Northamptonshire Evening Telegraph*. The *Leicester Daily Mercury* continued, POP GOES BOB DYLAN – AND 'BOO' GO FANS: "Has Bob Dylan sold his soul to 'pop'?"

But the *Leicester Chronicle's* David Sandison conspicuously bucked the trend, enthusing about the full-band set. DYLAN BOOED – BUT STAYS AHEAD ON (ELECTRIC) POINTS: "I was a bit bored with the first half... Dylan looked slightly fed up... But what a contrast when Bob Dylan, the shouting electric poet with his



Press conference with Robbie Robertson and Richard Manuel in Stockholm, April 28, 1966

TT NEWS AGENCY / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; DAILY HERALD / MIRRORPIX VIA GETTY IMAGES

Dylan with Françoise Hardy in a still from the restored 1966 tour footage, shot by DA Pennebaker and Howard Alk



all-steam rave band, jumped on the stage for the second half! He was alive again..."

#### SHEFFIELD, GAUMONT THEATRE, MAY 16

**R**EVIEWERS skipped Sheffield, but in his *Derby Daily Telegraph* column – DYLAN'S FANS IN DILEMMA – Roy Hollingworth quoted a fan who'd attended: "I started to cry as the audience humiliated him with shouts of 'get off...'"

#### MANCHESTER, FREE TRADE HALL, MAY 17

**A**STONISHING as it seems, no press caught the "Judas!" night. But James Fox was fanning pre-gig flames in that morning's *Manchester Guardian*: "Now there is something disturbing about Dylan: he is said to have disowned all the songs he ever wrote before he turned to 'folk-rock'... the man who took contemporary folk music out of its hermetic shell and has shaken it and enriched it has seemingly turned his back on it."

#### GLASGOW, ODEON THEATRE, MAY 19

**G**LASGOW'S enterprising *Evening Citizen* rushed out a "souvenir edition" dominated by a Jerry Schatzberg portrait for vendors to hawk outside the venue; Pennebaker captured Dylan himself browsing a copy. The next morning's *Daily Record* cast Dylan as THE LEGEND IN BLACK: "He sang a song he'd had in the Top 20... But there ended the similarity between the Bob Dylan concert... and any other pop show..." The *Record* also recorded BOB'S SHOCK: "...when he left the Odeon... his private touring coach had been broken into and electrical equipment stolen..."

The *Scottish Daily Mail* reported FOLK FANS WALK OUT ON DYLAN: "There was a shouting battle between the folk song purists... and the beat fans. It ended in an overwhelming victory for the beat fans..."

Meanwhile, *Scottish Daily Express* writer Gordon Reed frothed himself to fury under the title DYLAN CAPTURED... BUT WHY WON'T HE TALK SENSE? After papping Dylan in George

Square while he watched a police dog demonstration, Reed attended the gig: "I've never seen a show like it... 3,000 fans packed the Odeon... Dylan ripped them right down the middle... But for heaven's sake don't ban this weasel-like little man. TIME WILL SHOW HIM FOR WHAT HE'S REALLY WORTH."

Reed's closing tirade was a reference to another story breaking in that day's *Daily Mail*: JENKINS ASKED TO BAN TWO DISCS – "Home Secretary Mr Roy Jenkins was asked yesterday to ban two pop records because, it was claimed, they encourage drug-taking. The records are folk singer Bob Dylan's 'Rainy Day Women Numbers 12 And 35' and 'Eight Miles High' by the Byrds..."

## "DYLAN WAS BOOED OFF THE STAGE AGAIN"

SCOTTISH DAILY MAIL

#### EDINBURGH, ABC THEATRE, MAY 20

**D**YLAN FACES SECOND NIGHT OF CAT CALLS, purred the *Scottish Daily Mail*. "Dylan was booed off the stage again... many of his fans walked out. Some... even took out mouth organs and tried to play down his singing... Dylan repeatedly turned his back on the audience and posed for his personal cine-photographers..."

#### NEWCASTLE, ODEON THEATRE, MAY 21

**T**HE day after Newcastle, the *Sunday Sun*'s anonymous reporter was among the minority to rave about The Hawks: A NEW-LOOK BOB DYLAN ELECTRIFIES. But in the *Berwick Advertiser*, "Flip" ran the standard line: "...semi-unintelligible rubbish! Any pause between

songs was soon filled by a disappointed section of the audience with cries of... 'take some lessons from The Animals...'"

#### PARIS, OLYMPIA THEATRE, MAY 24

**O**N his 25th birthday, Dylan escaped over the Channel, only to face a poisonously hostile Paris audience. French papers followed suit: BOB DYLAN GO HOME! (*Paris Jour*), FALL OF AN IDOL (*Figaro*) and "A complete deception" (*24 Heures*). London's *Evening News* gleefully reported from Paris: "A flop. When the curtain went up and the predominantly teenage audience swivelled their eyes from Françoise Hardy, Johnny Hallyday and Hugues Aufray, themselves in the audience... the cat-calls began..."

#### LONDON, ROYAL ALBERT HALL, MAY 26 & 27

**B**Y the tour's final two-night stand, the music was sounding simultaneously magical and terminal, blazing while burning out. During his final acoustic set, Dylan alluded to all the headlines: "I'm not gonna be playing any more concerts here... this is a typical example of one of the songs your English newspapers would call a 'drug song'. I don't write drug songs..."

Off stage, the response was set in stone: BOB DYLAN IS BARRACKED AFTER SONGS, "R.F.D.G." offered in May 27's *Daily Telegraph*: "a man who does not care whether he communicates or not".

The *Times* wrote of THE BETTER HALF OF BOB DYLAN: "...the first, and infinitely better, half of the evening..." and May 29's *Sunday Times* concurred: DYLAN'S DOUBLE IMAGE – "'Turn the drummer off,' shouted a voice from the gallery, and about 9,000 of us in the Albert Hall agreed..." By the time that appeared, Tour 66 was over. Dylan was already gone.

The next headlines appeared two months later, typified by the *Daily Express* on August 2: BOB DYLAN HURT – "NEW YORK. Monday. Mop-haired singer Bob Dylan has been injured in a motorcycle accident..."

Dylan wouldn't tour again for eight years. ➔

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# THE WORLD'S MOST RELUCTANT POP STAR

As the Bob Dylan Center prepares a major new exhibition exploring Dylan in 1966, *Uncut* is given an exclusive preview of what's in store: "It's our biggest, most ambitious so far"

BOB DYLAN CENTER, TULSA, OKLAHOMA

**A**T THE Bob Dylan Center in Tulsa, they're busy doing their damndest to match the blazing pace Dylan set 60 years ago.

The Center's current exhibition, *Going Electric: Bob Dylan '65*, a thoroughgoing exploration of the period leading up to Dylan's epochal performance at the Newport Folk Festival, is entering its final months. Come spring, the show will be taken apart. The elements on display will be returned to storage out of sight in the Bob Dylan Archive. Then it will be time for what happens next.

"The '65 exhibit is our biggest, most ambitious so far," says Mark Davidson, the Center's director of archives. "But then there's '66. 1966 is a remarkable period in Dylan's career and quite different. It's an extension of '65 – but it's on a different level. It's basically Dylan creating some of the most iconic music he's made while... taking on the world."

Davidson and his team are deep in the process of piecing together *Thin Wild Mercury: Dylan 1966*, assembling artefacts from their archive and beyond to mount what promises to be their

most electrifying, densely textured exhibition yet when it opens this summer.

Indeed, part of the challenge is the sheer wealth of material. "We could fill a gallery just with stuff around *Blonde On Blonde*," says Davidson. "With the '66 World Tour, we're dealing with the most photographed time in Dylan's history. Then there's all the audio recordings, film footage, tabloids and magazines – and unfortunately, we only have so much space."

In attempting to chart the white-heat whirl of Dylan's most tumultuous year and illuminate the churning creativity at the heart of it, Davidson found natural themes and moments suggesting themselves, most obviously the endpoint: Dylan's motorcycle accident in late July, "when everything just comes to a halt".

But, life being messy, things blur, and so the

Dark magus: Dylan at the centre of it all in 1966



**"IT'S A FASCINATING MOMENT IN POP CULTURE"**

MARK DAVIDSON

1966 exhibition actually begins with August 1965, examining Dylan's first post-Newport gig, at Forest Hills Stadium in New York. The show laid the template for the coming year, as Dylan split his set into "acoustic" and "electric" halves, built a backing group featuring future members of The Band and found sections of his audience appear to lose their minds in outrage.

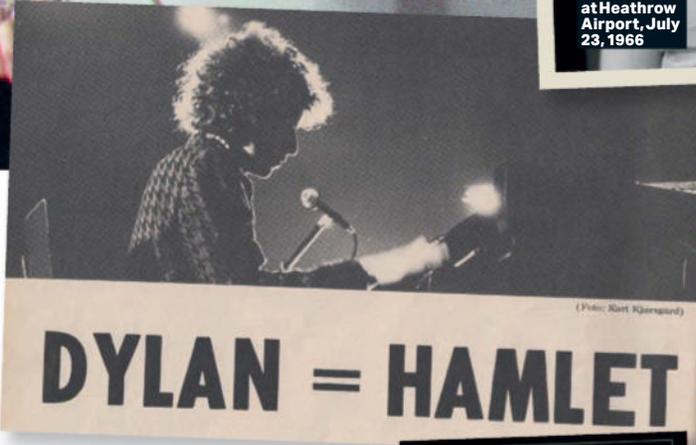
"It's Dylan's backyard, and an audience that had come to expect one thing was getting another," says Davidson. "Other concerts he played around the US that fall with the same setup didn't receive the same level of disdain. Forest Hills really sets up what 1966 was going to look like."

Tackling *Blonde On Blonde*, the exhibition traces the album's writing, recording, release and reception. "Dylan's original manuscripts – those are the holy grail for many people," says Davidson. "Showing those allows us to illustrate the writing process, and then elements from the sessions, promotional materials; we're building a gestalt approach to how that record was made and put out."

Electrified songs of a thin man: restored footage from the 1966 tour



Sharon Tate at Heathrow Airport, July 23, 1966



Dylan seemed to be in the air in 1966 and *Thin Wild Mercury* illustrates this with a focus on Dylan's resonant encounter with Andy Warhol in The Factory, when Dylan sat for one of the Pop artist's "Screen Test" film-portraits – an uncomfortable summit with a hilarious outcome, when Dylan left (or absconded) with a Warhol Elvis painting.

"That *Double Elvis* story is so great it's worth telling," says Davidson. "We've been working with the Warhol Museum to bring the Screen Tests to Tulsa. But our intention is not to make more of that brief meeting than what was there. The point is, at this moment Bob Dylan is the world's most reluctant pop star. The whole idea of image and Dylan in 1966 is paramount. So, for him and Warhol to coincide allows us to show both that iconic hipness, but also the fragility and artifice of image – Dylan was really coming to terms with that at that point."

Another flashpoint is *Tarantula*, the anti-novel Dylan was working on. Originally scheduled for publication in 1966, Dylan pulled the plug after his motorcycle crash, which didn't prevent the book from being instantly bootlegged and sold on street corners.

"*Tarantula* is fascinating," says Davidson. "People look at it as being impenetrable, gobbledygook. But we have four drafts. It's not like Dylan just sat down, did some automatic writing and that was the book. *Tarantula* was something he was working on for a very long time. It's a product of Dylan's mind in that moment: what he was thinking about, what he was influenced by, the Beats and Surrealists, and his hyper-focused but frenetic energy around language and creation. Then you have the bootleg aspect: it was slated to come out – there's a photo of Sharon Tate that summer with a *Tarantula* promo bag – but it doesn't appear, and then there are lawsuits and a swathe of correspondence from the publisher."

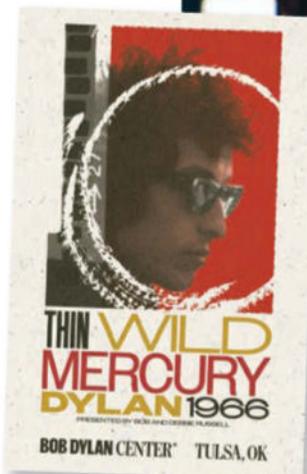
Of course, a major section of the exhibition is

devoted to the 1966 World Tour: "Judas" and all that.

"The Dylan Archive transferred all the '66 film footage from standard to high definition," explains Davidson. "We'll be using some of that to tell the story in a way people haven't experienced. Another element is Dylan in the press. It's a fascinating moment in pop culture history and, in a way that even The Beatles didn't engage with the culture around media, Dylan's right at the centre of it. The holistic approach we're taking allows us to show the pushback Dylan was receiving – and him giving it right back."

"It's Dylan as spectacle, in a very combative way: this is me – deal with it. Image is a piece of that. We're excited about making the display of objects be as spectacular as the stories we're telling."

To add another dimension, concerts and other events are being planned. "That's thing about the way we do these exhibitions," Davidson says. "We're able to bring all these elements out from the Archive and mount the story



in a degree of detail that makes it really immersive. Being able to experience these things in space, having Dylan's actual manuscripts, seeing footage, hearing audio, having live events, being able to walk through all this, really hits people differently.

"That's our goal: to put people in the middle of it."

*Thin Wild Mercury: Dylan 1966* opens this summer – go to [www.bobdylancenter.com](http://www.bobdylancenter.com)



Lennon and Dylan:  
"They noticed each  
other's strengths  
and talent..."

# "THEY ARE FRIENDS AND RIVALS AT THE SAME TIME"

A new book explores the fascinating relationship between Dylan and The Beatles. *By Michael Bonner*

**B**OB Dylan's UK visit in 1966 was not without conflict. But it also provided an opportunity for Dylan to reconnect with The Beatles. Longstanding admirers of each other's work, they had first met at New York's Hotel Delmonico in August 1964, where Dylan famously turned The Beatles on to pot; in London, the friendship burgeoned across a number of encounters during May, dubbed "Dylan month" by the group's tour manager Neil Aspinall in his column for *The Beatles Book Monthly*. "It didn't take long for The Beatles and Bob Dylan to get together," he wrote.



The relationship between Dylan and The Beatles is documented in a new book, *Where The Music Had To Go*, by *New York Times* journalist Jim Windolf, who pulls together explicit connections and teases out undercurrents between the two, spanning multiple decades.

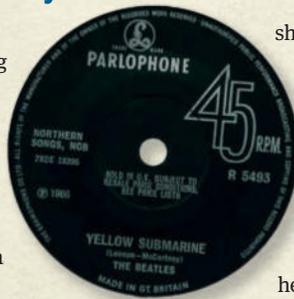
"They are friends and rivals at the same time," says Windolf. "But I think they were closer than people realise. I was surprised to see that when The Beatles arrive in New York to play Shea Stadium [in August 1965], Dylan's there the first night in their suite. It's like the minute they can see each other, they do it. It's the same thing when Dylan gets to the Mayfair [Hotel] the next year: The Beatles are right there."

The idea for the book came when Windolf spotted errors in existing biographies. He began by listing common elements and parallels, and the work began to snowball, yielding pleasing symmetries as well as factual revelations.

"When Dylan plays the Royal Albert Hall [on May 26, 1966], 'Rainy Day Women' is in the Top 10; and that same night, The Beatles are recording 'Yellow Submarine,'" says Windolf. "I never associated those two songs with each

other, but it is the only Beatles song that has a Salvation Army marching band on it, which is exactly what Dylan was going for with 'Rainy Day Women'. Little things like that kept surprising me."

Windolf also places all four Beatles at Dylan's second Albert Hall show on May 27 – a previously inconclusive point finally corroborated by McCartney himself, who confirms their attendance in a substantial new interview in the book.



shot for his (still officially unreleased) documentary, *Eat The Document*.

"Game recognises game," says Windolf of the bromance between the two men. "They noticed each other and each other's strengths and talent.

John can really fall head over heels for the latest father figure, mentor or guru. 'You've Got To Hide

Your Love Away' has lines from 'I Don't Believe You (She Acts Like We Never Have Met)' – it's like Lennon is so besotted he can't help himself.

"I think Dylan was annoyed with 'Norwegian Wood', which is why he wrote 'Fourth Time Around' as a rebuke. But The Beatles had revived rock'n'roll and made it modern again, which made him going electric valid. They took from each other."

The book also explores Dylan's relationships with the individual Beatles after the band had split – Harrison in particular. But it opens with Dylan tagging along on an official tour of Lennon's childhood home, Mendips, in 2009.

"It's the same period when he went to Neil Young's childhood home in Winnipeg, and soon after this he was picked up by the police in the Jersey Shore area, close to Springsteen's childhood home. He's a super fan, in some ways. But he always kept The Beatles in mind. In 1990, he plays 'Nowhere Man' in Canada. Around

2001, he plays 'Tears Of Rage' with lyrics mentioning 'Penny Lane' and 'Strawberry Fields'. He did it more often than that, in rehearsals or in concert. I don't think it's a thread he ever lost." 

*Where The Music Had To Go* is published on April 16 by White Rabbit

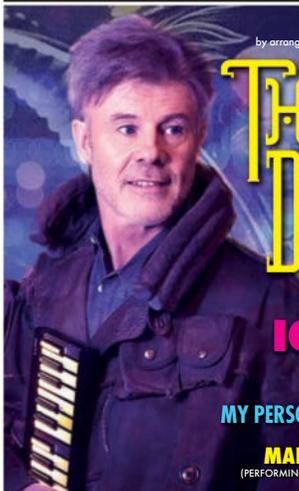
## "THE MINUTE THEY CAN SEE EACH OTHER, THEY DO IT"

JIM WINDOLF

Among other 1966 gems, Windolf digs into Dylan's walkabout in Liverpool on May 14, including a visit to Clarence Docks, the site of a Beatles photoshoot in 1962. "It was shortly after Ringo had joined the band, so they needed new photos," he says. "George has a black eye in those pictures. Crazy enough, during Dylan's 1966 visit to Liverpool, he also poses for a photograph with the guy who was alleged to have punched George... It feels like he's trying to take a piece of their turf."

The book also digs into the footage of Lennon and Dylan that DA Pennebaker





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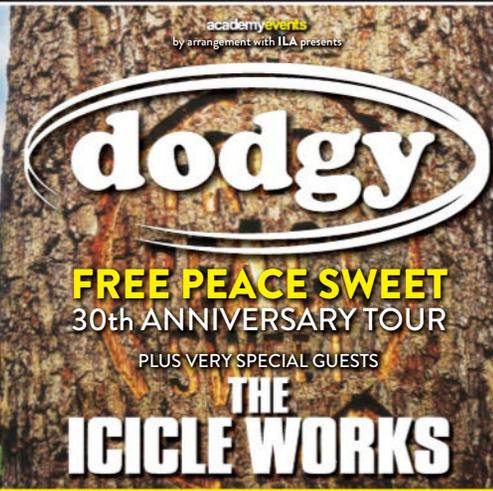
# THOMAS DOLBY

## THE ICONIC 80s

MY PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

PLUS SPECIAL GUEST  
**MARTIN McALOON**  
(PERFORMING THE SONGS OF PREFAB SPROUT)

**2026**  
**FRI 15 MAY MANCHESTER**  
 O<sub>2</sub> RITZ  
**SAT 16 MAY BOURNEMOUTH**  
 O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
**SUN 17 MAY BRISTOL**  
 O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
**WED 20 MAY BIRMINGHAM**  
 O<sub>2</sub> INSTITUTE  
**THU 21 MAY LONDON**  
 O<sub>2</sub> SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE  
**SUN 24 MAY LEEDS**  
 O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
**MON 25 MAY NEWCASTLE**  
 O<sub>2</sub> CITY HALL  
**WED 27 MAY EDINBURGH**  
 THE QUEEN'S HALL



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# dodgy

## FREE PEACE SWEET

### 30th ANNIVERSARY TOUR

PLUS VERY SPECIAL GUESTS

# THE ICICLE WORKS

**2026**  
**SAT 26 SEP LONDON** O<sub>2</sub> SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE  
**THU 01 OCT BRISTOL** O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
**FRI 02 OCT BIRMINGHAM** O<sub>2</sub> INSTITUTE  
**SAT 03 OCT MANCHESTER** O<sub>2</sub> RITZ  
**FRI 09 OCT LIVERPOOL** O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY

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# THE WEDDING PRESENT

## seamonsters

35th ANNIVERSARY TOUR  
PLAYING THE ALBUM IN ITS ENTIRETY PLUS CLASSIC TRACKS

**2026**  
**SAT 24 OCT LEEDS** O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
**FRI 30 OCT LONDON** O<sub>2</sub> SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE  
**SAT 31 OCT LEICESTER** O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY2

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# TONY VISCONTI AND WOODY WOODMANSEY

## HOLY HOLY

FEATURING  
**GLENN GREGORY**  
**THE FINAL TOUR**  
 A CELEBRATION OF  
**BOWIE**

**2026**  
**THU 03 SEPT GLASGOW**  
 O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
**FRI 04 SEPT LEEDS**  
 O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
**SAT 05 SEPT LIVERPOOL**  
 O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
**THU 10 SEPT LONDON**  
 O<sub>2</sub> SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE  
**FRI 11 SEPT BRISTOL**  
 O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
**SAT 12 SEPT MANCHESTER**  
 O<sub>2</sub> RITZ

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**BOURNEMOUTH** O<sub>2</sub> Academy

Tue 26 May  
**OXFORD** O<sub>2</sub> Academy

Wed 27 May  
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# TONY VISCONTI AND WOODY WOODMANSEY

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 O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
**THU 10 SEPT LONDON**  
 O<sub>2</sub> SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE  
**FRI 11 SEPT BRISTOL**  
 O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
**SAT 12 SEPT MANCHESTER**  
 O<sub>2</sub> RITZ

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plus special guest  
**BILLY BLAGG**  
(LAD GIGS TOURING PRESENTS)

**2026**  
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**Fri 15 May BIRMINGHAM** O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY2  
**Fri 23 Oct LEICESTER** O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
**Sat 24 Oct LIVERPOOL** O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
**Fri 06 Nov BRISTOL** O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY + KEELEY  
**Sat 28 Nov MANCHESTER** O<sub>2</sub> RITZ  
**Fri 18 Dec BOURNEMOUTH** O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
**Sat 19 Dec OXFORD** O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY

thesmyths.net

academyevents presents

# THE DOORS

## ALIVE

2026  
**SAT 26 SEP LIVERPOOL** O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY  
**FRI 02 OCT LONDON** O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY ISLINGTON  
**SAT 03 OCT BIRMINGHAM** O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY2

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# SPACE

## TEN NEUROTIC FAIRYTALES TOUR

WITH SUPPORT FROM  
**JIMI BOSWELL**  
presents  
The Dark Shadows

**SEPTEMBER 2026**  
 04 SHEFFIELD SIDNEY & MATILDA  
 05 LEEDS THE OLD WOOLLEN FARNLEY  
 11 MILTON KEYNES MK1  
 12 SOUTHEM ON SEA CHINNERY'S  
 18 DOVER THE BOOKING HALL  
 19 WORTHING THE FACTORY LIVE  
 25 LONDON O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY ISLINGTON  
 26 HERTFORD CORN EXCHANGE

**OCTOBER 2026**  
 02 CARDIFF CLWB IFOR BACH  
 03 BIRMINGHAM O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY2  
 09 LEICESTER SOUND HOUSE  
 10 CAMBRIDGE MASH  
 15 IOM VILLA MARINA  
 16 SHREWSBURY ALBERTS SHED

**NOVEMBER 2026**  
 06 GRIMSBY DOCKS ACADEMY  
 07 HULL SOCIAL  
 13 MANCHESTER ACADEMY 2  
 14 HUDDERSFIELD THE PARISH  
 27 GLASGOW SLAY  
 28 SUNDERLAND POP RECS

**DECEMBER 2026**  
 11 BEDFORD ESQUIRES  
 12 STOWMARKET JOHN PEEL CENTRE  
 19 LIVERPOOL O<sub>2</sub> ACADEMY

# CELTIC CONNECTIONS

Various venues, Glasgow, January 15 – February 1

Annie & The Caldwelles, Fantastic Negrito, The Unthanks and the Buena Vista All Stars join the annual world music cèilidh

FOR more than 30 years, Celtic Connections has been giving Glaswegians a reason to leave the house in January. Now one of the biggest winter music festivals in the world, this multi-venue gathering lives up to its name, finding common cause across its international bill, pairing new talent with veteran artists and revelling in unlikely global gumbos.

This year's edition is bookended by two Americana icons – **Emmylou Harris** transcending a clinical sports hall venue on her European farewell tour, and Lucinda Williams raising the rafters of an Edwardian theatre – and encompasses tributes to Dick Gaughan and Warren Zevon, star turns by Senegalese legends Orchestra Baobab, Malian diva Rokia Koné and banjo virtuoso Béla Fleck, and the massed celebrations of the Transatlantic Sessions and Roaming Roots Revue.

**Buena Vista All Stars'** One Night In Havana show at the Royal Concert Hall is a slick successor to the heritage phenomenon that was Buena Vista Social Club. Three veterans of the Club remain – MC Demetrio Muñiz, Barbarito Torres on laúd (Cuban lute) and trumpeter Manuel Machado – and it's no surprise that these OGs pack more personality than the rest of



the suited and booted 12-piece ensemble put together. Beyond their effortless interplay, this polished presentation is initially more cocktail bar than barrio.

Surplus tourist-board visuals and slogans (“feel the heartbeat of Cuba”) are a distraction from the real cultural transportation supplied by the likes of Daniel Amat's insistent but lithe piano. Conceived as a Cuban greatest hits, from “Quizas, Quizas, Quizas” to “Guantanamera”, the setlist diverted to Mexico for “Besame Mucho” and then to their perennially bizarre Latino rendition of Coldplay's “Clocks” before truly hotting up with “Machado Blues”. Led with alacrity by its namesake, its show-stopping spirit awakens something in the

band. Passing the groove baton around, they eventually achieve full Cuban flight.

Self-confessed recovering narcissist Xavier Amin Dphrepaulezz AKA **Fantastic**

Passing the groove baton around, they eventually achieve full Cuban flight

**Negrito** has the presence of a Sly Stone, but marshals an outfit who sometimes seem to be pulling in different directions. They all speak Negrito, though: instructed to “play the pain that's going on in Minnesota”, his drummer launches into what mere mortals might call a solo, before the guitarist replies with a burst of Sabbath's “Iron Man”.

Such is the freewheeling nature of a Negrito set that there are dual blues and country guitars competing in his opening song. Other influences are brazen but owned with a scattershot charisma, from James Brown soul power to Dr John lowlife hoodoo. While his band riffs with impunity, Negrito pinballs between extempore testifying and psychedelic dandyism, getting by on audacity and musicality but not a lot of tuneage – until, that is, he busts out a low-slung Southern soul number. His free-range eclecticism just about wins the day. Capricious to the end, he hits a very tasty funk groove on “Bullshit Anthem” before bringing proceedings to an abrupt finish.

The playfully titled **Celtic Fandango** is typical of the zinging one-off collaborations at which Celtic Connections excels; in this case, a Scots-Mexican melange featuring luminaries of the Scottish folk scene, including festival director Donald Shaw on accordion, Ross Ainslie on pipes

KRISKESIAK; JERRY PEREZ



Manuel Machado of Buena Vista All Stars



...and Ángel Aguiar with Barbarito Torres

Drama and intimacy:  
The Unthinks with  
the Royal Northern  
Sinfonia



and Patsy Reid on fiddle, facing off against a Mexican delegation also armed with accordion, harp and sundry stringed instruments, ready to stake out their sonic territory like some harmonious iteration of the Jets and the Sharks.

Occasionally the two tribes come together in melodious dialogue, with an athletic burst of mouth music from Gaelic vocalist Kathleen McInnes turbo-charged with castanets and step dancing from John Sikorski. Ultimately, the Mexicans win the day with the unbridled carnival atmosphere stoked by their furious strumming and lusty unison vocals, with Juan José Duarte attacking his harp like a lead guitar and vocalists Nabani Aguilar Vázquez and Mariel Henry on skirt-swishing and foot-stomping flourishes.

In contrast, Rachel and Becky Unthank use foot percussion as an emotional driver. There's no denying the poignant power of their traditional clog-dancing coda for "Mount The Air", doubling down on Lizzie Jones's spine-tingling trumpet solo and the massed surge of the Royal Northern Sinfonia

to make this a highlight of **The Unthinks** At 20 celebration.

Inevitably, the orchestral collaboration determines the direction of this birthday concert. Stormy symphonic swells punctuate otherwise peaceful tunes, making up in exultant drama what is partly lost in the intimacy of their family harmonies.

Their set of traditional songs from Northern Britain begins up in Orkney with "The Great Silkie Of Sule Skerry" before diverting to their native north-east for "The Sandgate Dandling Song" and on to Derby for the pigeon fancier's delight of "The King Of Rome". Their original material easily stands comparison with these retooled standards. Becky Unthank's own "Life's A Flutter" is an ethereal jazz zephyr and Adrian McNally's "Lucky Gilchrist", a rhythmic requiem for Rachel's university friend, is another fine reason to strap on the clogs.

The Unthinks are not the only family band in town. Mississippi gospel firebrands **Annie & The Caldwell** come to claim souls and leave with a room full of Celtic

converts. Appropriately for a show at Saint Luke's, this is church service as flamboyant soul revue, in which preacher Joe Caldwell on simmering guitar defers to his wife Annie, the force-of-nature frontwoman raining raspy blessings down on the audience.

Their sons Abel and Willie Jr, fabulous funk brothers on drums and bass, dice comfortably with the devil's music, while daughters Anjessica and Deborah stir up Pentecostal passions as first

responders to Annie's testifying call, with harmonies that are often more seductive than heavenly.

In just over an hour, they deliver the entirety of their 2025 album *Can't Lose My (Soul)*. Led by the spirit, each track is broken down, ad-libbed and jammed out in evangelical ecstasy, from the mighty soul confessional "Wrong" to the elastic funk meets gospel blues of "I Made It". In a festival of uplifting moments, this is the giddiest thrill. **© FIONA SHEPHERD**

MARK KALLAN; KRIS KESIAK



Anjessica  
Caldwell of  
Annie & The  
Caldwells

Triumphant: (l-r) Suede's Mat Osman, Simon Gilbert, Brett Anderson and (below) Richard Oakes



# SUEDE

Usher Hall, Edinburgh, February 5

Wiry monochrome intensity from indie veterans fully focused on the present

**T**OWARDS the end of a punchy, powerful 80-minute set, Brett Anderson mimes planting a virtual flag on stage and declares that Usher Hall is now part of the independent republic of “Suedeworld”. Though the phrase lands a tad awkwardly – it has, in truth, a whiff of Terry Pratchett about it – it makes a certain amount of sense. Locating the spiky, wiry, neurotic music of the band’s recent years in a parallel realm only encourages the suspension of disbelief sometimes required to fully embrace Suede as urgent post-punk agitators rather than gnarly indie veterans.

Kicking off their residency at the

Southbank Centre last summer, Anderson introduced Suede as “the anti-nostalgia band”. Tonight, they back that statement up. Half the setlist is drawn from last year’s acclaimed *Antidepressants* and its predecessor *Autofiction*, with only three songs apiece from their debut and *Coming Up*. It’s immediately apparent, too, that the scorched-earth ethos extends beyond song choices. Every setting is switched to attack mode. There is little in the way of chit-chat. The lighting is monochrome, the clothing dark and the mood darker. Often, the brightest glint of light comes from Anderson’s very shiny shoes.

Initially, the sound is muddy. The first three songs, which mirror the start of *Antidepressants*, lose some of their crisp intensity as a result, though the “She Sells Sanctuary” riffage of “Dancing With The Europeans” cuts through. With the arrival of “Trash” and “Animal Nitrate” the acoustics settle and the murky staging begins to take on a technicolour tinge. These two old favourites are served ragged but right, the explosive chorus of the former and lurching groove of the latter prompting Anderson into Jaggeresque stomps and handclaps.

The singer remains a tireless ringleader, his powerful physicality alternating between Delia Smith-

style “let’s be ‘avin’ ya!” goading and the provocative, wide-legged stance of a man whose horse has just been whipped from under him. Whatever shapes he pulls, there’s no doubting his commitment. Anderson pours absolutely everything into each song, to the point where his voice occasionally sounds strained. A consummate crooner and caterwauler, at times he makes a less convincing bawler.

“Tides” is intense, almost proggy: the spirit animal of Radiohead’s “Lucky”. The peppy “Sweet Kid” – dedicated to “my darling little boy” – and the pulsing “She Still Leads Me On” are the closest the Suedeworld of the 2020s comes to the grubbily glamorous “Underworld Suede” of the 1990s.

Not everything lands. “Filmstar” is a misfire, and a new song, “Tribe”, feels self-consciously attritional. “The next album is gonna be the noisiest fucker yet,” Anderson promises

– but noise doesn’t always equate to power, a point proven by the tender, moving rendition of “June Rain”. A rare outing for “Still Life”, the sole track aired tonight from *Dog Man Star*, is sung to Richard Oakes’ solo piano accompaniment. Performing the final chorus without amplification, Anderson’s voice is raw and comes close to breaking. It’s a riveting moment of emotional theatre.

From here, the mood switches into something more nakedly celebratory. The home run is riotous. “So Young” and “Metal Mickey” are full of vim and verve. Before “Beautiful Ones”, Anderson coaches the crowd on singalong protocols, but it’s a wholly unnecessary undertaking;

every person here knows every word. As the song unfurls he first buries himself in the front row, then brandishes the microphone stand like Dirk Bogarde cosplaying as Rod Stewart, before perching atop the monitor, arms spread wide, triumphant.

The encore is appropriately forward-facing. Suede return for the rousing uplift of “The Only Way I Can Love You” from *Autofiction* and then they’re gone, still dreaming up new tomorrows amid all our yesterdays. 🎵

GRAEME THOMSON

## SETLIST

- 1 Disintegrate
- 2 Dancing With The Europeans
- 3 Antidepressants
- 4 Trash
- 5 Animal Nitrate
- 6 Personality Disorder
- 7 Tides
- 8 Sweet Kid
- 9 Outsiders
- 10 Filmstar
- 11 Tribe
- 12 June Rain
- 13 She Still Leads Me On
- 14 Shadow Self
- 15 Trance State
- 16 Still Life
- 17 So Young
- 18 Metal Mickey
- 19 Beautiful Ones
- ENCORE
- 20 The Only Way I Can Love You



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OR SCAN ME



# SCREEN

A paranoid hostage drama in 1970s Indianapolis; the secret of eternal life; generational trauma in Germany; and more...

**D** **DEAD MAN'S WIRE** "There will be no pictures of pigs shooting down brothers on the instant replay", insisted Gil Scott-Heron in 1970, but even he could not foresee our present media environment where state goons summarily execute citizens and the cameraphone footage goes viral on social media. After its central role in *One Battle After Another*, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" makes another appearance over the credits of *Dead Man's Wire*, a dramatisation of events in 1977 when aggrieved small businessman Tony Kiritsis kidnapped his mortgage broker and held him hostage in his Indianapolis apartment for two days with the muzzle of a 12-gauge Winchester 1400 wired to his head.

The story has been told and retold in recent documentaries and podcasts, but shows up as a feature film in 2026 presumably in the context of the murder of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson by the telegenic assassin Luigi Mangione. Like Mangione, Kiritsis became a fleeting folk hero, calling in to his local radio station mid-kidnapping to make his case that the system is rigged against the little guy. Could the sympathy he engendered have influenced his eventual trial, where he was found not guilty (albeit by virtue of insanity)?

*Dead Man's Wire* operates through several layers of mediation. On one level, it is a loving homage to the paranoid mid-'70s cinema of Sidney Lumet – *Dog Day Afternoon*, in particular (and the star of that film, Al Pacino, offers a rather overripe cameo here as the uninterested father of the hostage). On another, it feels like a very late entry to the sub-Tarantino wave of ironic heist pics, complete with a superfly local radio DJ (Colman Domingo, a little wasted as Fred Temple) contributing impeccable needle-drops, from Deodato's jazz-funk "Also Sprach Zarathustra" through Yes's "I've Seen All Good People" and Labi Siffre's "Cannock Chase".

It is also the latest entry in the long-running mystery of Gus Van Sant's career. Supposedly,



Early repayment: Bill Skarsgård and Dacre Montgomery in *Dead Man's Wire*

Werner Herzog and Nicolas Cage were previously attached to the project – the mind reels at the paranoid epic they might have cooked up together – but the final form finds Van Sant, with his first film in seven years, on his best mainstream behaviour. There is scarcely a hint of the one-time poet of lonesome hobos, or even the morbid media satire of *To Die For* – subplots following a rookie news reporter and an overearnest FBI agent go precisely nowhere. What we do have is a fine central performance from Bill Skarsgård, trimming back his moustache after last year's *Nosferatu*, that possibly renders this particular outlaw folk hero a little too sympathetic.

**RESURRECTION** Bi Gan's first feature, *Kaili Blues* (2015), made when he was just 25, was notable for a remarkable 41-minute road trip accomplished in a single bravura shot. His second film, *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (2018), transformed into an hour-long 3D dream sequence midway through. Now he returns with *Resurrection*, a surreal 160-minute, six-part portmanteau film, which concludes with a relatively modest 30-minute one-shot that nevertheless took more than two weeks to shoot.

If previous generations of movie brats grew up schooling themselves in fleapits, grindhouses and video stores, then Bi Gan represents a

millennial generation who have mainlined a century of film on the internet. First bewitched by Tarkovsky as a film student in Taiyuan, he now feels like a self-conscious heir to Welles, Godard, Carax, Lynch and Wong Kar-wai, creating films that sail drunkenly through dream, memory and the history of film and somehow gross millions at the Chinese box office.

*Resurrection* begins in an era where the secret of eternal life has been discovered to be very simple: stop dreaming. Nevertheless, some rogue "Deliriants" remain attached to the habit and have to be re-educated, lest they continue to "bring pain to reality and chaos to history". One of the last dreamers, his *Nosferatu* skull as battered and cratered as a Méliès moon, is found hiding out in a decaying movie house, and the film follows his dying memories, taking the form of six discrete chapters, supposedly corresponding to the six Buddhist senses, each in a different genre: silent caper, film noir, gangster fable, apocalyptic vampire flick, and so on.

It feels like one of those early surrealist escapades in which Buñuel and pals would wander in and out of Parisian theatres guided by whim, to be ravished by spectacle without the distractions of narrative – though at 160 minutes the aesthetic convolutions can seem like a trial of patience rather than sensational rapture. Bi Gan can clearly do whatever he pleases with

## REVIEWED THIS MONTH



### DEAD MAN'S WIRE

Directed by Gus Van Sant  
Starring Bill Skarsgård, Dacre Montgomery, Al Pacino  
Certificate To be confirmed  
Opens March 20  
7/10



### RESURRECTION

Directed by Bi Gan  
Starring Jackson Yee, Shu Qi, Mark Chao  
Certificate 15  
Opens March 13  
8/10



### SOUND OF FALLING

Directed by Mascha Schillinski  
Starring Hanna Heckt, Lena Urzendowsky, Laeni Geiseler  
Certificate 18  
Opens March 6  
9/10



### LA GRAZIA

Directed by Paolo Sorrentino  
Starring Toni Servillo, Anna Ferzetti, Massimo Venturiello  
Certificate 12A  
Opens March 20  
8/10



### A PALE VIEW OF HILLS

Directed by Kei Ishikawa  
Starring Suzu Hirose, Fumi Nikaido, Yô Yoshida  
Certificate 12A  
Opens March 13  
6/10



a camera and a screen, but it remains to be seen whether he is an impressive technician (a Chinese Christopher Nolan, perhaps) or an artist with a profound and compelling vision.

**SOUND OF FALLING** Last year, with his suburban haunted house film *Presence*, Steven Soderbergh made explicit what has been hinted at throughout more than a century of film: as it roams through time and space, silently witnessing the deepest feelings of its protagonists, the real ghost in the machine of cinema is the movie camera itself.

Directors have been foregrounding the spectral nature of cinema for a while now: think of the impassive witness in Jonathan Glazer's *The Zone Of Interest*, or the way Joachim Trier, in this year's *Sentimental Value*, analysed intergenerational trauma as it seeped into the walls and fabric of a grand Victorian family house in Oslo. Now, Berlin's Mascha Schilinski ups the ante with *Sound Of Falling*, a film that takes a sweeping ghost-eye view over four generations inhabiting a farmhouse in northern Germany – from Alma, a haunted Victorian waif in the 1910s, through Erika in the war-torn 1940s, Angelika, living near the border in 1980s DDR, and Lenka, plugged into her iPhone in the 2020s.

Schilinski and her cinematographer, Fabian Gamper, weave these disparate lives together with sensory echoes – a recurring photograph, the specific creak of a floorboard or the way light hits a keyhole, as though the Bergman of *Fanny And Alexander* were filming Gaston Bachelard's book *The Poetics Of Space*. The farmhouse becomes a living organism, its wallpaper seemingly saturated with the stain of sadness.

The soundscape is equally vital, utilising an oppressive, rumbling design, at one point haunted by the strains of Anna von Hausswolff's "Stranger". At 154 minutes, this is not a world to be entered lightly. It can seem bewildering, alienating, and impossibly bleak. But give yourself up to the film's rhythms, stay patient and alert, and it feels masterful and uncanny. Schilinski is a major new voice in European cinema.

## It feels masterful... Schilinski is a major new voice in European cinema

**LA GRAZIA** If Paolo Sorrentino sometimes self-consciously aspires to the mantle of Fellini, then Toni Servillo is his Marcello Mastroianni – his avatar, his alter ego, his dream persona. Since they joined forces for *One Man Up* (2001), Servillo has embodied the bungalow spirit of 21st-century Italy, notably as exiled mob functionary Titta in *The Consequences Of Love* (2004), the enigmatic mandarin Giulio Andreotti in *Il Divo* (2008) and, especially, the disillusioned boulevardier Jep in *The Great Beauty* (2013).

So *La Grazia* is a startling volte face. Here, Servillo is Mariano de Santis, a fictional president of the Italian Republic, during his final weeks in office. Nicknamed "Reinforced Concrete" for his unwavering adherence to the law, de Santis is a man of quiet, bureaucratic ritual. He spends his days smoking furtive cigarettes on the roof of the Quirinal Palace, quietly rapping to himself, mourning his unfaithful wife and contemplating three final quandaries: whether to pardon two convicted murderers and whether to sign a controversial bill legalising euthanasia.

*La Grazia* has been classed as "diet Sorrentino", but after the ludicrously overblown *Parthenope* (2024), this might be no bad thing. The usual spectacle is replaced by a moving, meditative, almost clinical study of ageing and responsibility. But the Sorrentinismo isn't entirely gone – most notably a stately, slow-motion walk through the cobbled streets of Rome, led by a robot surveillance dog. Sorrentino is still only 55, and surely too restless to adopt this late style for long, but this is indubitably a career highlight for the impeccable Servillo.

**PALE VIEW OF HILLS** Kazuo Ishiguro's debut novel seemed like a book out of time in 1982. Although he was listed alongside young bucks like Martin Amis, Ian McEwan and Salman Rushdie in *Granta's* list of "Best of Young British Novelists", his writing seemed to belong to a more subtle and refined era – it was no surprise that he was one of the few contemporary writers that Merchant-

Ivory could work with (on *The Remains Of The Day* in 1993).

So when *A Pale View Of Hills* opens in early-'80s England to the sound of New Order's "Ceremony", it feels like a brash anachronism, almost like Bow Wow Wow in Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*, even though it is an entirely consistent soundtrack, thematically and historically. It is a rare shock in a film that otherwise tends

towards an overly tidy model of decorum.

Journalist Niki (Camilla Aiko) has returned to her family home following her sister's suicide. Her mum, the widowed Etsuko (Yō Yoshida), is preparing to sell the house and their conversation triggers a series of vivid, possibly unreliable flashbacks to Nagasaki in the 1950s. The younger Etsuko (Suzu Hirose), then pregnant and trapped in a stultifying marriage, befriends a mysterious mother named Sachiko (Fumi Nikaido) who is desperate to flee to America with her troubled daughter. As the timelines blur, the film suggests that the stories Etsuko tells are less an objective record of the past and more a psychic shield against the traumas she has endured.

Writer and director Ishikawa, who grew up in Toyohashi but graduated from film school in Poland, feels most at home with the Nagasaki timeline, which can feel like a delectable pastiche of an Ozu domestic drama. But his England is far less realised, and the interweaving of timelines feels a little clumsy. But it is worth watching for the delicate chemistry between Hirose and Nikaido, two women living parallel lives in full view of each other.

©STEPHEN TROUSSÉ



Jessie Buckley in *The Bride!*

## ALSO OUT...

### THE BRIDE!

**OPENS MARCH 6**

Jessie Buckley and Christian Bale lead in Maggie Gyllenhaal's punky 1930s reimagining of the Frankenstein myth.

### HOW TO MAKE A KILLING

**OPENS MARCH 6**

John Patton Ford thriller featuring Glen Powell as a man navigating a gauntlet of relatives to reclaim a family fortune.

### THE LOVE THAT REMAINS

**OPENS MARCH 13**

Hlynur Pálmason follows *Godland* with this study of a dissolving marriage in contemporary Iceland, blending domestic realism with surrealist elements.

### REMINDERS OF HIM

**OPENS MARCH 13**

A domestic drama based on the Colleen Hoover novel, following a mother's attempt to rebuild her life after a five-year prison sentence.

### PROJECT HAIL MARY

**OPENS MARCH 20**

Ryan Gosling stars as science teacher Ryland Grace, who wakes up alone on a spaceship to discover he has a mission to stop a mysterious substance destroying the sun.

### THE MAGIC FARAWAY TREE

**OPENS MARCH 27**

Claire Foy, Andrew Garfield and their kids are transported to a fantastical land in this Enid Blyton adaptation written by Simon Farnaby.



Here's to the wild life: (l-r) Denny Laine, Denny Seiwell, Linda and Paul McCartney

# PAUL McCARTNEY: MAN ON THE RUN

PRIME VIDEO

9/10

Excellent documentary details Paul McCartney's post-Fabs creative rebirth. *By Michael Bonner*



IN a way, Paul McCartney's 1970s – as detailed in Morgan Neville's rich, expansive documentary – plays as a love story. There are legal battles, lo-fi experiments, pot busts, exotic locations, near-drownings, pipe bands, punks and prison – and plenty of extremely good music. But at its core, *Man On The Run* is about Paul and his remarkable unions, creative and personal, with John Lennon, Linda Eastman and his new band.

We open in 1969, with a shocked McCartney navigating rumours of his own death and the fallout from Lennon's (then still private) decision to leave The Beatles. He retreats to his farm on the Mull of Kintyre – in Gaelic, literally the “end of land” – with his new family, fixing the roof and raising sheep. “He wanted to be grounded in an ordinary life,” says Mick Jagger, one of the very few people who could understand McCartney's

position. “Because being in The Beatles was free of any kind of grounding whatsoever.”

For McCartney, “an ordinary life” meant several things. Both he and Linda had lost their mothers young – Paul at 14, Linda at 20 – and this shared understanding of loss bound them fiercely to their growing family. Later, they even raised their children on the tour bus. “I don't remember nannies,” says Denny Seiwell. “They would pull out a drawer, put a pillow in it, and that's where the baby slept.”

In an early archive interview, a journalist asks McCartney: “What's the most important thing that you value?” The camera cuts to Linda. “Just personal peace,” McCartney replies. “Can you

develop that a little more fully?” asks the journalist. “Not really.”

But Lennon is never far away – even in the abstract. Over footage of a chorus line hoofing through “Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance”, McCartney muses: “There's never anyone around saying, ‘No, that's a stupid idea. You shouldn't do that.’” Much, you assume, as he and Lennon might have done as they edited one another's works.

In more quantifiable terms, McCartney and Lennon's solo records are constantly compared by pesky journalists. A montage culled from TV interviews finds McCartney repeatedly asked the same question: will The Beatles ever play together again? Eventually, he fake-lunges at an off-camera

reporter, to much laughter from his Wings bandmates. Little wonder McCartney refused to play Beatles songs live until the mid-'70s.

McCartney's determination not to repeat the past is brave – and rare – for an artist so deeply embedded in the public eye. “People thought we were crazy, but that was our way,” he admits. Not everything worked as intended. After the prominence of The Beatles, McCartney envisaged a more democratic environment for his new band. “He wants you all to be normal and equal,” says former Wings drummer Geoff Britton. “But you ain't normal and equal, because he's a world superstar and you're a dog-faced nobody.”

As you'd expect from a fully authorised work like this, Neville has full access to the story's key players and a wealth of exceptional audio and visual material from McCartney's archives. It's very much an honest depiction of the period – as great as the many peaks are, Neville doesn't airbrush out the flops. Or as Nick Lowe puts it: “‘Mary Had A Little fucking Lamb’. Are you nuts?”

The decade ends with Lennon's assassination and the breakup of Wings. But even after such heavy blows, McCartney's perseverance had paid off. He *had* done things differently – and, crucially, on his own terms. “I doubted whether it was possible to follow The Beatles,” he says. “But looking back on it, we made what seemed like an impossible dream come true. That was the magic of it.”

“He wanted to be grounded in an ordinary life,” says Mick Jagger

# BOOKS

FOR much of her career, Alice Coltrane was derided. Jazz critic Bob Blumenthal, for instance, was exercised by the fact that Coltrane was a woman, and the way “she embroidered her piano; her lacework reminded me of a woman crocheting some very hip clothing”. If that wasn’t necessarily damning – crocheted clothing being occasionally desirable – he offered a clarification, dismissing Coltrane with the gold standard of sexist put-downs, calling her “the Yoko Ono of jazz”.

The framing of Blumenthal’s criticism derives from the fact that Alice’s husband was John Coltrane, and the implication that she was trading on his name. The theme persisted into her later career, when Alice was pursuing a spiritual quest under the less marketable moniker Swamini Turiyasangitananda. A review of 1977’s *Radha-Krsna Nama Sankirtana* in *DownBeat* magazine observed: “If Alice had been the wife of a Detroit auto worker, she’d obviously be a nonentity.” She was, *Downbeat* concluded, a “virtually talentless lady who married the right man”.

Happily, that’s not where we stand today. A reappraisal of her reputation is in full bloom, with Coltrane championed by everyone from Radiohead to Björk, Four Tet to Warren Ellis, who cites her as the artist with the greatest impact on his life. For Andy Beta, the author of new biography **Cosmic Music**, Coltrane can be filed alongside Robert Johnson, Nick Drake and Arthur Russell as an artist whose influence has grown exponentially since their death.

Born in Detroit in 1937, Alice McLeod began playing piano at Sunday school when she was nine years old – the age at which she also started to experience “weird things”, such as the sensation she was hovering or floating through walls. Later, she rationalised these experiences as “astral projections”. Playing in church, Alice started to understand how the keyboard could prompt a “God feeling”. Sitting by the stage at the Minor Key in Detroit to see John Coltrane, she recognised the “pure energy” of his playing. She was introduced to Coltrane at Birdland in New York; after an excited conversation about music, art, architecture, Einstein, yoga and vegetarianism, he invited her on a European tour.

Alice was happy with a supportive role in the household, though the Coltranes did play music together. An invitation to join Coltrane’s quartet on vibraphone stalled when the group split, so she accompanied him on piano instead, finding liberation in the avant-garde. Alice had no intention of pursuing music after John’s death in 1967, but the delivery of a golden harp (ordered

Harp of gold: Alice Coltrane with husband John’s posthumous gift



by John a year earlier) prompted her to continue the quest for “a universal sound, a cosmic music”, while also raising their four children.

The crux of Beta’s book, perhaps of Alice’s life, occurred during her mourning. In one interpretation, it was a nervous breakdown involving hallucinations and self-harm. Later, Alice would describe these events as a transit to the astral plane, where she encountered “highly intelligent astral entities and discarnate beings who were not accustomed to being without a body”.

Beta links this airy rationale with Alice’s out-of-body childhood experiences. It also fed into her spiritual practice, centred on the ashram she established in the Santa Monica mountains. Miraculous claims were made for her healing abilities, from lessening the impact of car crashes to abating cancer. The tenets of conventional science did not apply. “To offset the effects of someone’s deadly car crash,” Beta writes, “Swamini [Coltrane] had to ‘astrally rehearse’ two weeks before the accident occurred.” This talk of transcendence feels untethered. It’s a relief when it falls to earth, as in the childhood memories of Michelle Coltrane, who occasionally accompanied her mother to recording sessions. “I just liked the sound,” she says. “I never recovered from hearing that music in the studio, the sound was sooo good.”

WHEN Steve Earle named his son after Townes Van Zandt, it gave Justin Townes Earle two names to live up to.

## In **What Do You Do When You’re Lonesome**

Jonathan Bernstein struggles to foreground Earle Jr’s charm and talent as it is relentlessly challenged by self-obliteration. The miracle is that he succeeded as a songwriter, given his starting position as a “mean little dope-dealing pistol-packing shit” (his own words). An operatic sense of tragedy is captured in “Talking To Myself”, one of the last songs he recorded before dying from an overdose of fentanyl-laced cocaine in 2020. Many of Earle’s songs were about lost causes; this time he was singing about himself. “He wanted the world to know he knew he needed help,” Bernstein writes, almost as if the mixing of pain and romance is contagious.

IN the bracing diatribe **Why Sound Matters**, Damon Krukowski (Damon & Naomi, ex-Galaxie 500) ponders the value of music in a world where a recording artist would need 67 billion streams to equal the worth to Spotify of bloviating podcaster Joe Rogan. Krukowski brings home a bleak argument with flashes of insight, noting, for example, Sir David Attenborough’s amazement that nature soundman Chris Watson (also of Cabaret Voltaire) could identify the world’s oceans by listening to them. The Pacific surf has a “life-affirming richness” to it, apparently, and Watson delivered proof to Attenborough on a CD. “Would that be a CD of no intrinsic value,” Krukowski asks, “...or a precious artefact created by the specialised labour of a singular recordist?” Or, whisper it, both. 🎧

ALASTAIR MCKAY

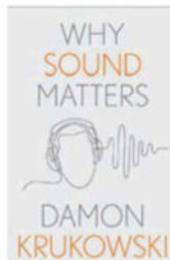
## REVIEWED THIS MONTH



**COSMIC MUSIC: THE LIFE, ART AND TRANSCENDENCE OF ALICE COLTRANE**  
ANDY BETA  
WHITE RABBIT, £30  
8/10



**WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU'RE LONESOME: THE AUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY OF JUSTIN TOWNES EARLE**  
JONATHAN BERNSTEIN  
DA CAPO, £25  
8/10



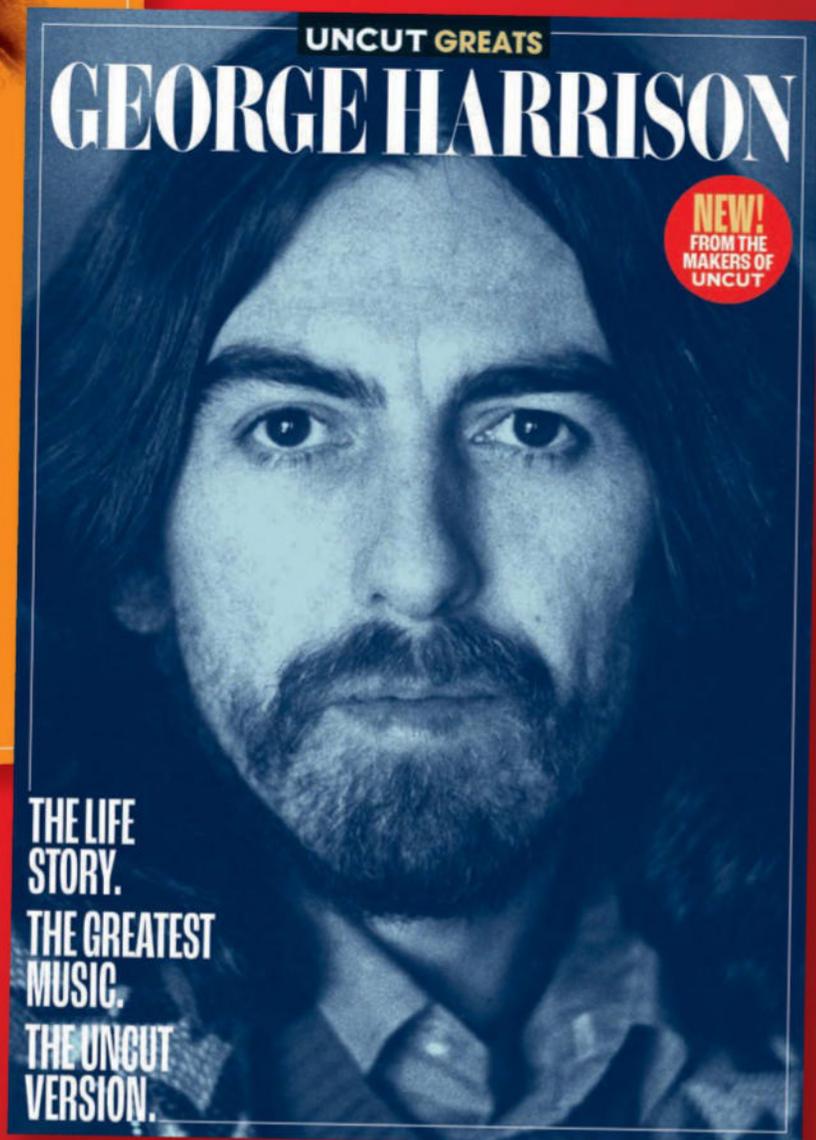
**WHY SOUND MATTERS**  
DAMON KRUKOWSKI  
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, £19  
7/10

NEW FROM THE MAKERS OF UNCUT

# UNCUT GREATS



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THEIR GREATEST  
ALBUMS AND SINGLES  
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## Fuss-free hi-fi with these streaming speakers



The Dinamica fabric is mostly made from recycled polyester, and it's available in a choice of three finishes: grey, brown or black.

Each speaker has two drivers in a coaxial setup: a tweeter in the centre of a mid/bass driver. The tweeter gets 40W of the 100W total output.

Connect the speakers together wirelessly and resolution tops out at 24-bit/96kHz, but if you use the cable they can do 24-bit/192kHz sorcery.

### TECHNICS SC-CX700

£2,399

**T**HE idea of an entire streaming system in a pair of speakers is no longer a novelty – so it's performance that separates the 'great' from the merely 'good'. Well, that and a finish that feels a bit like a carpet...

The Technics SC-CX700 is a well-specified, properly built pair of active speakers with plenty of power (200W), an integrated streaming platform, and a load of physical and wireless inputs allowing it to be a full-on audio system with support for everything from a turntable to a television. It has several control options, including an app that's not much to look at but covers every eventuality. And it has a tactile finish in a suede-like material called Dinamica.

Inside, each cabinet is divided into two chambers – the amplification is separated from the drivers in what Technics calls "acoustic solitude construction". And while we're discussing important-sounding features, the Technics Orchestration Concept uses "model-based diaphragm control" to reduce distortion based on simulations of driver movement.

As is usual in products like this, one speaker is in charge and the other does as it's told. So one just has amplification, a socket for mains power, a button for wireless pairing to its partner and an RJ45 socket for making a wired connection instead, with a bass reflex slot below the coaxial drivers. The other has all that plus the connectivity stuff, and a few buttons on top.

And that performance? It's safe to say the SC-CX700 has got plenty of it. It doesn't matter what sort of stuff you want to listen to, or where it's coming from – you get a big, wide-open and properly defined soundstage, and every part of a recording has the space it needs. Its tonality is natural and convincing, and from the bottom of the frequency range to the top it sounds smooth and detailed. It's dynamic, controlled, and utterly confident. In fact, this is just the sort of balanced, expressive and entertaining sound quality for which the Technics brand became famous decades ago. 🎧

**SIMON LUCAS**

10/10

IN ASSOCIATION WITH  
**Stuff**

# Not Fade Away

Fondly remembered this month...

## SLY DUNBAR

*Jamaican rhythm killer*

(1952–2026)

**K**INGSTON drummer Lowell ‘Sly’ Dunbar was playing locally with Skin, Flesh & Bones when he first attracted the attention of bassist Robbie Shakespeare in the early ’70s. The pair began playing together in Channel One Studios outfit The Revolutionaries, initiating a partnership that saw them become Jamaica’s go-to rhythm section and production duo, reshaping reggae and dancehall in the process. They backed Peter Tosh, Dennis Brown, The Mighty Diamonds, Jimmy Cliff, Culture and others before the decade was out, with Dunbar also appearing on classics like Junior Murvin’s “Police And Thieves” and the 12” version of Bob Marley’s “Punky Reggae Party”.

Dunbar and Shakespeare set up their own Taxi label in 1980, around the same time as Island boss Chris Blackwell installed them as the beating heart of the Compass Point All-Stars, the house band at the titular studio in Nassau. There they recorded with such figures as Black Uhuru, Gwen Guthrie and Grace Jones, whose *Nightclubbing* proved catalytic. “She helped launch us in the international marketplace when we did ‘Pull Up To The Bumper’,” Dunbar told *Elsewhere* in 2003. “The timing was right for her and Robbie and myself.”

In 1983, Bob Dylan recruited Sly and Robbie for *Infidels*. “I don’t know if it was the Grace Jones stuff that he’d heard, but he probably wanted to present something different,” Dunbar surmised to *Uncut* in 2021. “But we



Dub revolutionary: Sly Dunbar in 1984

also listened to rock’n’roll and played a lot of R&B when we were in bands around Jamaica.” Indeed, Dunbar cited Stax, Motown and Sly & The Family Stone as key influences, taking his nickname from the latter. Further clients included Herbie Hancock, Mick Jagger, Ian Dury, Serge Gainsbourg and Carly Simon. In addition, Dunbar added percussion to The Rolling Stones’ *Undercover*.

Fusing reggae with hip-hop, electronica and world music, Sly & Robbie recorded scores of albums under their own name, the most successful being 1987’s funk-oriented *Rhythm Killers*, housing hit “Boops (Here To Go)”. It was Dunbar’s highest-placing UK single since 1970, when he played on Dave And Ansel Collins’ chart-topping “Double Barrel”. He and Shakespeare won Grammys for Black Uhuru’s *Anthem* (1984) and their own 1998 covers collection, *Friends*.

## TUCKER ZIMMERMAN

*Cult folk hero*

(1941–2026)

Literate American singer-songwriter Tucker Zimmerman never achieved the kind of sales his work merited, but he attracted high-profile admirers like sometime collaborator Paul Butterfield, David Bowie – who listed his 1969 debut *Ten Songs* among his favourite albums – and Mick Ronson, whose band Ronno covered Zimmerman’s “Fourth Hour Of My Sleep”. Big Thief served as his backing band on 2024’s *Dance Of Love*, which they also produced. Adrienne Lenker cited Zimmerman as “one of the greatest songwriters of all time”.

*Dance Of Love* arrived during a particularly fertile year, in which Zimmerman also completed a trilogy of albums heading up his own trio. It was a concentrated late-

career spurt after decades spent dividing his time between poems, stories, novels and compositions for short films. Last July, Zimmerman released *Music By River Words By Ear*, a collection of unheard songs first recorded in 2002. A new album, *Dream Me A Dream*, is due in May.

## BILLY BASS NELSON

*Funkadelic bassist*

(1951–2026)

William ‘Billy Bass’ Nelson was an integral part of the original Funkadelic lineup, coining the band’s name and investing his basslines with a drive and melodicism more associated with a lead instrument. He appeared on their first three albums but quit over a financial dispute with Clinton after 1971’s *Maggot Brain*. He later toured with the P-Funk All Stars.

## EBO TAYLOR

*Highlife pioneer*

(1936–2026)

Ghanaian guitarist and songwriter Ebo Taylor was crucial to the development of highlife, merging traditional rhythms with elements of funk, jazz, soul and Afrobeat. Having worked with Fela Kuti in the early ’60s, he debuted with 1976’s *My Love And Music*. A series of compilations brought Taylor wider exposure, his work sampled

by Usher and Black Eyed Peas, and he made a string of acclaimed new albums in the 2010s. He was still touring last year, at the age of 89.

## ANDREW RANKEN

*Pogues drummer*

(1953–2026)

Nicknamed ‘The Clobberer’, Andrew Ranken replaced John Hasler as The Pogues’ drummer in March 1983, remaining for their seven-album run that spanned *Red Roses For Me* and 1996’s *Pogue Mahone*. He then formed The Vendettas with bandmates Spider Stacy and Darryl Hunt, but returned for The Pogues’ 2001 reunion, signing off 13 years later.

## MINGO LEWIS

*Jazz fusionist*

(1953–2026)

James ‘Mingo’ Lewis became Santana’s percussionist while still a teenager, appearing on 1972’s *Caravanserai* and the John McLaughlin collaboration *Love Devotion Surrender*. He recorded with The Tubes, Al Di Meola, Billy Joel, Todd Rundgren and XTC, and played on David Byrne and Brian Eno’s *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*.

## CHUCK NEGRON

*Three Dog Night frontman*

(1942–2026)

New Yorker Chuck Negron’s

doo-wop background was ideal preparation for Three Dog Night, the harmony-led group he joined in 1967. He sang lead on numerous big sellers, among them “Joy To The World”, “One”, “Easy To Be Hard” and “Old Fashioned Love Song”. After years battling addiction, Negron launched his solo career with 1995’s *Am I Still In Your Heart?*

## JOHN FORTÉ

*Fugees associate*

(1975–2026)

Rapper and producer John Forté rose to prominence for his work on Fugees’ 1996’s multi-platinum *The Score*, earning him a Grammy nomination. He also appeared on Fugees’ Top 3 hit “Rumble In The Jungle” and Wyclef Jean’s solo debut, “We Trying To Stay Alive”. Forté released the first of several solo albums, *Poly Sci*, in 1998.

## ROB HIRST

*Midnight Oil drummer*

(1955–2026)

Rob Hirst played a crucial role in the rise of Australian rockers Midnight Oil, augmenting his percussive talents with the occasional lead vocal, and co-writing international hits like “Beds Are Burning”, “Blue Sky Mine”, “Forgotten Years” and “Truganini”. He was also a member of Ghostwriters, Backsliders, The Angry Tradesmen and The Break.

DAVID CORIO/GETTY IMAGES; DIRK LEUNIS



Tucker Zimmerman, 2024

# FRED SMITH

*Television's steady pulse*

(1948–2026)

**F**RED Smith's entry into Television, replacing increasingly wayward bassist Richard Hell in May 1975, came at a critical moment. As Richard Lloyd told *Uncut* in 2012: "Without a solid bass player, especially with Billy Ficca being nuts all the time on the drums, there was no grounding for the band, no solid bottom." Smith's arrival changed everything, bringing them much-needed stability and allowing Lloyd and fellow guitarist Tom Verlaine to improvise freely. "Fred was keeping down the tempo, which meant that Billy could go crazy nuts, but it still sounded like a band," added Lloyd. "Television suddenly all made sense."

Rearing in Forest Hills, Queens, where he briefly played in a band that included Tommy and Johnny Ramone, Smith joined Television from an early incarnation of Blondie. He announced his sudden departure after a gig at CBGB, much to his bandmates' dismay. "Television was higher up the food chain than we were," wrote Chris Stein in his memoir, *Under A Rock*. "Debbie and me spent a couple of weeks being paranoid and sulking."

Smith debuted on Television's "Little Johnny Jewel", but fully proved his worth on 1977's extraordinary *Marquee Moon*, on which his limber, unfussy basslines served as a steady pulse, particularly on the epic title track.



Guiding light: Fred Smith in 1981

When Television split after 1978's *Adventure*, both Verlaine and Lloyd enlisted Smith for their respective solo endeavours. He also worked with Willie Nile, The Roches, Peregrins and The Fleshtones, eventually reuniting with Television for their 1992 comeback and remaining part of their on-off touring life in the ensuing years. "If you're a lover of melodic basslines and counterpoint, you could go to school on what Fred created so effortlessly," said latter-day Television guitarist Jimmy Rip. "He was a natural – never flashy, always essential – always serving the song in ways that only the greatest musicians can."

## LYNN BLAKEY

*Tres Chicás singer*

(1962–2026)

Former college radio DJ Lynn Blakey toured with Let's Active in the early '80s, attracting the attention of The Replacements' Paul Westerberg, whose "Left Of The Dial" was partly written about his infatuation with her. She went on to front Glory Fountain, alt.country group Tres Chicás and Salt Collective.

## MARGARET ROSS

*Cookies vocalist*

(1942–2026)

Margaret Ross joined New York girl group The Cookies in 1961. The trio handled backing vocals on Neil Sedaka's "Breaking Up Is Hard To Do" and Little Eva's "The Loco-Motion", among others, and scored US hits with "Don't Say Nothin' Bad (About My Baby)" and "Chains", soon covered by The Beatles.

## BRYAN LOREN

*Man behind the "Bartman"*

(1966–2026)

A former sessioneer and synth player with Fat Larry's Band, Bryan Loren wrote and produced *The Simpsons'* 1990 spinoff hit, "Do The Bartman", with Michael Jackson on uncredited backing vocals. The following year, Loren – who also issued two solo albums – played drums on Jackson's *Dangerous*.

## PARTHENON HUXLEY

*Symphonic rocker*

(1956–2026)

Songwriter and guitarist Richard Miller, aka Parthenon Huxley, issued his solo debut *Sunny Nights* in 1988,

after which he co-produced two albums by Eels leader Mark Everett: *A Man Called E* and *Broken Toy Shop*. He then joined ELO Part II, founded by former ELO drummer Bev Bevan.

## STEPHEN 'CAT' COORE

*Third World mainstay*

(1956–2026)

Jamaican reggae fusionists Third World were co-founded in 1973 by guitarist and cello player Stephen 'Cat' Coore, formerly of The Alley Cats and Inner Circle. Initially signed to Island Records, the band achieved a global crossover audience with a cover of The O'Jays' "Now That We Found Love".

## BRAD ARNOLD

*3 Doors Down frontman*

(1978–2026)

Lead singer Brad Arnold formed Southern rockers 3 Doors Down in 1996, initially doubling up as drummer. Their breakout moment arrived four years later with "Kryptonite", originally written when Arnold was still at school. Debut *The Better Life* and 2002's *Away From The Sun* both went multi-platinum.

## GREG BROWN

*Cake co-founder*

(1969–2026)

Guitarist Greg Brown was an original member of Californian alt.rock outfit Cake, appearing on their first two albums and writing 1996 breakthrough hit, "The Distance". He quit soon after, citing turmoil in the band, and later resurfaced in Deathray and Rivers Cuomo's side project, Homie.

## DON ADAMS

*George Jones sideman*

(1941–2026)

Alongside his brothers, Don and Arnie, singer and rhythm guitarist Don Adams backed a number of major country stars on tour, including Merle Haggard, Tammy Wynette, Marty Robbins, Johnny Paycheck and, most famously, George Jones, with whom he was billed as The Jones Boys.

## LAMONTE McLEMORE

*5th Dimension creator*

(1935–2026)

Also a photographer for *Harper's Bazaar* and *Ebony*, Lamonte McLemore formed vocal group The Versatiles in 1965; they became The 5th Dimension the following year. Mixing sunshine pop with psychedelic soul, the quintet landed their biggest successes with Jimmy Webb's "Up, Up And Away" and "Aquarius/Let The Sunshine In", from the musical *Hair*.

## RALPH TOWNER

*Oregon free jazzer*

(1940–2026)

Guitarist Ralph Towner was best known as co-founder of '70s ensemble Oregon, who fused folk and world music with avant-jazz and free improv. He issued more than two dozen albums as bandleader, and counted Tim Hardin, Weather Report and Keith Jarrett among his collaborators.

## DANNY COUGHLAN

*Crybaby balladeer*

(1970–2026)

Bristol-based singer and guitarist

Danny Coughlan debuted with 2012's sumptuous, heartbroken *Crybaby*, named after his performing alter ego. He returned six years later with the beautifully understated *Tracyanne & Danny*, a collaboration with Camera Obscura's Tracyanne Campbell, co-produced by Edwyn Collins.

## RICHIE BEIRACH

*US jazz pianist*

(1947–2026)

Classically trained composer Richie Beirach was best known for his work on ECM and Trio during the '70s and '80s, frequently collaborating with saxophonist Dave Liebman, with whom he also played in Lookout Farm and Quest. He debuted as bandleader with 1975's *Eon*.

## FRANCIS BUCHHOLZ

*Scorpions bassist*

(1954–2026)

Francis Buchholz joined a fresh incarnation of Scorpions in 1973, his two-decade tenure coinciding with the German hard rockers' commercial peak in the early '80s. He later played in Dreamtide, Phantom 5 and Michael Schenker's Temple Of Rock.

## GARLAND GREEN

*Deep soul singer*

(1942–2026)

Stirring soul ballad "Jealous Kind Of Fella" was a *Billboard* Top 20 success for Mississippi-born Garland Green in 1969, eventually selling a million copies. He also scored a minor hit with 1971's "Plain And Simple Girl", produced by Donny Hathaway. **ROB HUGHES**

# Feedback

Send your brickbats, bouquets, reminiscences, textual critiques, billets-doux and all forms of printable correspondence to [letters@uncut.co.uk](mailto:letters@uncut.co.uk)



Laura Nyro and Janis Joplin: a tuna day

## A SOUL PICNIC WITH JANIS AND LAURA

Thanks for the recent Laura Nyro piece [*Uncut* Take 347, January 2026] – here's what I remember.

In 1968, I was working as Danny Fields' assistant at Elektra Records. One of my girlfriends was Nico, another was Janis. I was staying with Janis at the Chelsea Hotel, and she got a call from someone she'd never met – Laura Nyro. After the call, Janis was wondering how Laura had gotten her number, but since they both were on the same label, Columbia, we figured Laura had been given the number from someone at the label.

Laura invited Janis to dinner that night. Janis put her hand over the mouthpiece and asked me if I would go with her for dinner at Laura's – she was unsure about meeting her alone. I was fascinated by the idea and said sure.

Laura's apartment was on the Upper West Side in a large, dark, pre-war building near the Museum of Natural History. She greeted us at the door and led us into the very plainly decorated, lightly furnished, living room. Confessing her appreciation of Janis's singing and *Cheap Thrills*, Laura wanted Janis to hear some of her new

recordings. Sitting down on the sofa, with Laura on a stuffed chair next to us and the hi-fi, we started listening to white-labelled test pressings of her latest work.

I was/am a Nyro fan, but can't now distinguish what songs she played for us. There was little conversation – we each made comments about the various tunes – all classics or destined to be. After about an hour Janis turned and whispered to me, "I'm hungry..." I nodded, but didn't say anything. Ten minutes later, Janis nudged me with her leg. I was hungry too. There had been no mention of food since our arrival. So I said it straight out. "Laura, we're getting a little hungry."

She said, "Oh, I'm sorry!", got up and went through a door to the kitchen. There had been no dinner smells when we'd arrived and now we heard some rustling, a little clanking, and 10 minutes later, Laura came from the kitchen carrying two plates. Each held a freshly made tuna sandwich on whole wheat. We said thank you, and Laura started playing the next test-pressing.

We left an hour or so later and laughed in disbelief on into the evening!

*Richard Skidmore, via email*  
Thank you so much for sharing your amazing story with us, Richard. [MB]

## WEIR SCENES

Bob Weir has never been especially interested in endings, tidy or otherwise. Reading your wonderful tributes in Take 349 [March 2026] took me back to Andy Gill's 2016 feature, "Country music, tractor-hopping, out-of-body experiences, and the extraordinary legacy of the Dead." Rereading it now, I was struck by how well it holds up – not just as a coup d'œil into Weir's mindset at the time, but as a reminder of what makes him such a fascinating, ever-curious musician. His reflections on *Blue Mountain* – from its weathered self-portrait to its ranch-hand storytelling – and his talk of improvisation and steering clear of tidy endings show a songwriter who has always been allergic to easy answers.

What I love most is how true the piece feels to Weir's voice. There's no nostalgia or myth-making, just an artist still thinking forward, even as he engages with his past, whether recalling tractor-hopping days in Wyoming or insisting that it would be "sinful" to walk away

from that body of work. Read alongside John Robinson's new interview, where Weir unpacks the practical, almost workmanlike songwriting behind *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty*, it suggests that his real legacy isn't a fixed canon at all, but an ongoing refusal to stop asking questions.

*Federico Forni, London*

## PICK OF THE POTS

Reading Steve Davis's *My Life In Music* in *Uncut* 347 [January 2026] and embarrassingly for me I've never heard of any of the artists he features, other than Robert Wyatt. Anyway, ask him to put together one of your brilliant free CDs. I would love to hear it.

*Alan, Shropshire*

## MOVING ON IN STYLE

Really glad to see that The Style Council's *Café Bleu* boxset (more expense and space issues) merited a four-page 8/10 review by John Lewis [*Uncut* Tale 348, February 2026]. A brave move by Weller alienated his Jam colleagues and the majority of his fans.

While I loved The Jam's golden streak from *All Mod Cons* to "Beat Surrender", TSC were a breath of fresh air and showed how the eclectic Weller had outgrown his former band. John picks out "Dropping Bombs On The Whitehouse" as a failed jazz experiment, but it's exactly that desire to push the boundaries that makes me love early TSC and the homoerotic videos were funny and joyous.

I was at the Dominion gig that is included in the box and still have the ticket and programme with Cappuccino Kid Kerouac-style notes. Can't wait to see if it lives up to my memories of a really great concert. I'm a bit disappointed that the Council Collective's "Soul Deep" isn't included; they're probably saving it for the *Our Favourite Shop* boxset.

*Bruce Marsh, Newbury Park*

## JELLY ROLES

Whilst digging through the collection the other day, I came across the album *Heavy Jelly*, a sometime curious collection of musicians which included among others Jackie Lomax, Chris Wood and Jim Capaldi. The band was first heard in a *Time Out* ad in 1969; problem was there was no band...

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Heavy friend:  
Jackie Lomax  
in 1969

There was a track recorded for the Island sampler *Nice Enough To Eat*, but that wasn't the same band. Confusion set in: who were these guys and how many versions of the band were there...?

It got me thinking about an article about one of the UK's finest vocalists, Jackie Lomax, who few seemed to have heard of. A great historical trawl through the back pages which would include Hamburg, Brian Epstein, The Beatles, Badfinger, Apple Records, Warner Bros, a prog band called Badger, the move to the USA and becoming part of the lost ex-pat community of talented musicians.

A true soap opera for all those interested in a tale of missed opportunity and bad decisions.  
**Simon Haddock, via email**

## QUIPS 'N' QUOTES

Wrote these down in notes after the show – the ever-lovable Mark Eitzel at an American Music Club gig at Manchester's International in March 1989.

"A cavalcade of pleasantness, ain't it?"

"This one's called 'Now You're Defeated'... surprisingly enough." And after one song he simply said, "I'm sorry."

Great band and show, went down well. And yes, they did come back for an encore.

**SRichards, Stoke-On-Trent**

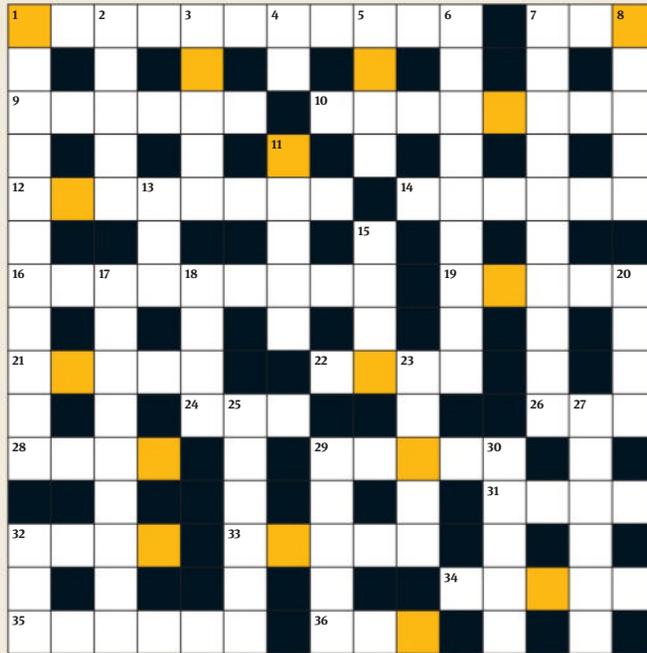
...A couple of my favourite onstage quips which capture two legends perfectly:

David Lee Roth, *Skyscraper* tour, Wembley Arena 1988:

"Hey! What day is it?"  
Someone shouts: "Tuesday!"  
"Awright! Hey! It's the WEEKEND already!"

Robert Plant, *Saving Grace* tour, Anvil Arts Centre, Basingstoke 2023:  
"Good evening... Basingstoke? I once played Madison Square Garden, you know..."

**Kieran Cooke, via email**



### HOW TO ENTER

The letters in the shaded squares form an anagram of a song by **Bob Dylan**. 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 £50 of Rough Trade vouchers to spend online. Closing date: **Thursday, March 26, 2026**. This competition is only open to European residents.

### CLUES ACROSS

- 1+9A Old Depeche Modes singles? We want more of them (4-4-3-6)
- 7 (See 25 down)
- 9 (See 1 across)
- 10 It's a wild guess, but is this by Catfish And The Bottlemen? (8)
- 12 A split in The Ruts with their debut album (3-5)
- 14 US garage punk band with a Lux Interior (6)
- 16 Idles' album not for listening to in stereo (5-4)
- 19+22A Grateful Dead album not for listening to with the light on (2-3-4)
- 21 "You keep all your \_\_\_\_\_ in a big brown bag inside a zoo", from The Beatles' "Baby You're A Rich Man" (5)
- 22 (See 19 across)
- 24 "I know you \_\_\_\_\_, I'm still in love with you", from The Libertines' "Can't Stand Me Now" (3)
- 26 First UK institution to include a singles chart in 1952 (1-1-1)
- 28 (See 34 across)
- 29+3D Ha! Vicarage was adapted to accommodate a piece of *Wish You Were Here* with Pink Floyd (4-1-5)
- 31 (See 32 down)
- 32 He duetted with Frank Sinatra in 1993 on "I've Got You Under My Skin" (4)
- 33 Academy award for single by Shack? (5)
- 34+28A Vocalist with The Yardbirds who later formed Renaissance (5-4)
- 35 He served them right in Suede (6)
- 36 First record label for Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash (3)

- 2 "Well, they \_\_\_\_\_ you when you're trying to be so good", from Bob Dylan's "Rainy Day Women" (5)
- 3 (See 29 across)
- 4+5D Worthless release from The Prodigy (2-4)
- 5 (See 4 down)
- 6 Beastly drink with Scottish band Belle And Sebastian (9)
- 7 Bruce Springsteen song referring to Freehold, New Jersey (2-8)
- 8 "Thirty \_\_\_\_\_ in the mailbox will tell you that I'm coming home", from The White Stripes' "Dead Leaves And The Dirty Ground" (5)
- 11 "And it was cold, and it rained, so I felt like an \_\_\_\_\_", from David Bowie's "Five Years" (5)
- 13 "We always take my \_\_\_\_\_ 'cause it's never been beat", from The Beach Boys' "I Get Around" (3)
- 15 The Kinks left nothing before going to Los Angeles (4)
- 17 Space on another world with metal (3-6)
- 18 Aussie punk rockers \_\_\_\_\_ And The Sniffers (4)
- 20 As far as you can get in U2 (4)
- 23 "Oh, I wish I had a \_\_\_\_\_ I could skate away on", Joni Mitchell (5)
- 25+7A Leonard Cohen was all ours with this 1988 single and album (2-4-3)
- 27 "If you give me a \_\_\_\_\_, a man's got a limit", from Oasis's "The Importance Of Being Idle" (6)
- 29 Tony \_\_\_\_\_, guitarist with The Hollies (5)
- 30 "Loving The \_\_\_\_\_", single from David Bowie's *Tonight* album (5)
- 32+31A US singer-songwriter whose album was *Something Worse Than Loneliness* at the age of 80 (3-4)

### CLUES DOWN

- 1 Punk legend who played for two short spells in The Pogues (3-8)

### ANSWERS: TAKE 348 ACROSS

- 1+10A As Long As The Price Is Right, 8 Catch, 11 Older, 12 Hull, 14 Sand, 16 Dress, 17 Lees, 19+22D New Orleans, 20 FYC, 27 Nilsson, 28 Try, 30 Vital, 33 Learn,

34 Arts, 35 See My Friend

### DOWN

- 1 Amps, 2 Leisure, 3+25A Needles And Pins, 5 Thirteen, 6 Echo, 7+21A Screen Violence, 9 At Last, 15 Ducks, 16 Divinyls, 18 Sean, 20 FBI, 23 Essence,

24 Century, 26 Divine, 29+4D Your Arsenal, 31 Toad, 32+13A Last Nite

**HIDDEN ANSWER**  
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**XWORD COMPILED BY:** Trevor Hungerford

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# Bruce Hornsby

The eclectic piano man reveals the full range of his musical inspirations: “I was so fortunate to be drawn into that world”

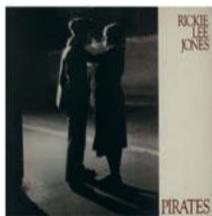


## SAM COOKE “A Change Is Gonna Come”

RCA VICTOR, 1964

I grew up in Southern Virginia, where there were two stations: the Top 40 station and the soul/R&B station. Like any other kid in that era, I loved Motown, Stax/Volt, Atlantic Records, Muscle Shoals. But this was a later discovery,

when I started to delve more deeply into the Sam Cooke corpus. It's such a transcendent vocal performance; it's one of those songs that's sort of untouchable. But every now and then, when I'm playing “The Way It Is” – which is my own version of a civil rights song – I will try, in my own half-assed way, to deal with “A Change Is Gonna Come”. So I'm going against my rule about being untouchable, but the band always seems to like it.



## RICKIE LEE JONES “We Belong Together”

WARNER BROS, 1981

Rickie Lee Jones, to me, is one of the most amazingly gifted and original artists out there. A whole lot of people in my world – singer-songwriters who are interested in trying to create something of depth – feel the same way that I

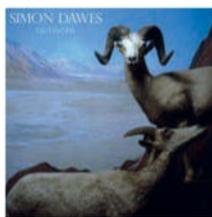
do about *Pirates*, and this song in particular. I always wanted to be with the great producer Lenny Waronker and his partner Russ Titelman, who kinda ruled the singer-songwriter scene of the '70s and '80s. I never was able to get Lenny to be interested enough in me to sign me, but now we've become friends. We've gone to dinner a couple of times, and that's great fun because I can ask him about the sessions for *Pirates*.



## JESCA HOOP “Hunting My Dress”

LAST LAUGH, 2009  
Tony Berg, my great longtime friend and musical partner, has made some amazing records through the years that are not that well-known to the masses at all. And I've picked two for this list, the first being Jesca Hoop. This record has a certain intangible, sensuous feeling about it

that has always gotten under my skin. It's very unpredictable, and that's what I love about her music in general. The second song on my new record is called “Memory Palace”, with background vocals from my new friend, Ezra Koenig of Vampire Weekend. It's me trying to channel my best version of a section of “Hunting My Dress”, because I just think it's absolutely lovely, so moving.



## SIMON DAWES “Execution Song”

RECORD COLLECTION, 2006

On my 2009 record *Levitate*, the young Blake Mills came in to play and just turned the whole thing out in an amazing way. He's always been special and continues to push it. He's all over my new record again... he's a tomorrow musician

playing tomorrow music. Regarding “Execution Song”, his playing is really fantastic on it. I've never heard too many songs about someone in an electric chair, so I have nothing to compare it to, but this is really disturbing and moving in every way. Blake's playing at the end, he gets real dissonant, like a Thurston Moore noise-rock kind of thing. When Tony played this for me I just went, “Wow, this is really completely special.”



## PAUL BRADY “I Am A Youth That's Inclined To Ramble”

MULLIGAN, 1978

Shawn Colvin, one of my great singer-songwriter friends, turned me on to this. *Welcome Here Kind Stranger* is a record totally of Irish music, and Paul Brady is one of those goosebump singers when he sings traditional Irish music – and often

when he's singing his own songs. The flagship song [on the album] is “The Lakes Of Pontchartrain”, and I love that as well. But I decided to pick “I Am A Youth That's Inclined To Ramble” because the other one seems to be so often cited, and I wanted to pick something different that moves me as much. I love the song, I love the title. I've never heard another version of it, but Paul Brady's is enough for me.



## BON IVER “8 (Circle)”

JAGJAGUWAR, 2016

Around 2013 I started getting all these Google alerts about this group Bon Iver, because Justin Vernon was shouting me out in the press. Of course, I was curious, so I checked out the music and it just floored me, it was so amazingly gorgeous. And what a singer! Eventually he

reached out, and over the next five years there was lots of activity between Justin and myself. This one song, “8 (Circle)”, was transformative and transcendent. His layered vocals are crazy, all the harmonies that he puts together. It's very special, and I was so fortunate to be drawn into that world. Hell, I played Coachella with him! I was, by 25 years, the oldest person on any stage.

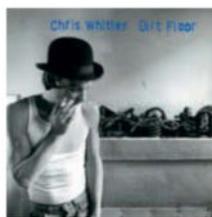


## JONI MITCHELL “Paprika Plains”

ASYLUM, 1977

Most people will look at this list and go, “What the hell is ‘Paprika Plains’?” I'm a Joni Mitchell fan and I've never heard of it! It was a bit of an experimental song for her. It's about 16 minutes long and goes through all these movements, with a nice little Joni-esque dissonance here and there.

I just love it from note one. And it allowed me to have my one conversation on the phone with Joni Mitchell! I needed some orchestral charts written for songs of mine, so I was interested in getting Mike Gibbs, who did the orchestration on “Paprika Plains”. I was able to get in touch with Joni, and we had a lovely time talking, which was a big thing for me.



## CHRIS WHITLEY “Dirt Floor”

MESSENGER RECORDS, 1998

I was in New Orleans working with Robbie Robertson and this guy Chris Whitley comes in – they had the same manager. Chris had just finished his first record, which I thought was fantastic. And then we became friends. He died way too young, but this record he made, *Dirt Floor*,

might be the Chris Whitley record for the ages. Some of his records are harder-edged, but for this one he just sat on the floor of a barn in Bellows Falls, Vermont and played the songs by himself. If you come to a concert of mine, before we play, it goes back and forth from Chris Whitley to Sam Cooke & The Soul Stirrers. It always makes me want to sing, because those two guys are incredible singers. 🎵

Bruce Hornsby's new album *Indigo Park* is released by Zappo Productions/Thirty Tigers on April 3



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