15 FEBRUARY 2014

NME

Prince invades London

All the details from the secret shows no-one could get into

All hail Damon!

De La Soul and more pay tribute to NME's ultimate innovator

From bedroom to Brixton The unstoppable rise of

Metronomy

The comeback interview

"The songs have secrets that you discover the more you listen to them..."

"A lot more suffering goes on in the name of love than the little happiness you can squeeze out of it." NICK CAVE ***Happy Valentine's Day***

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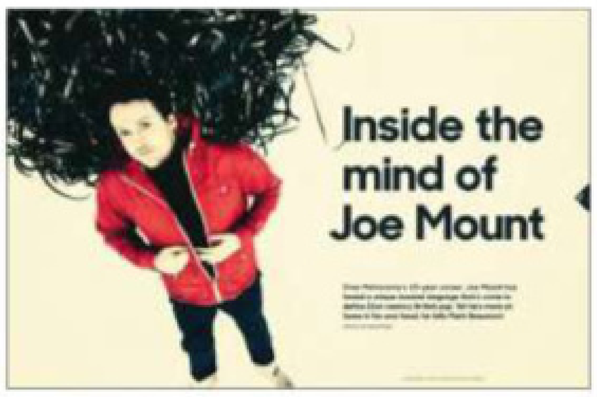
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Speedy Ortiz
On the road with Massachusetts' new DIY heroes, Phil Hebblethwaite joins a self-funded ride taking in private homes and fighting spirit

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NME awards 2014 with austin TEXAS

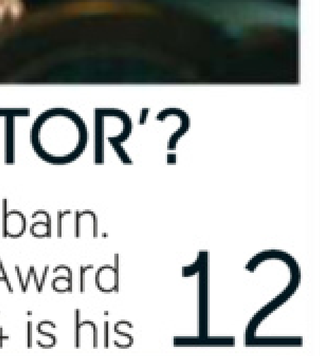
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CONTRIBUTORS



George Ding
Writer
George reported on China's prohibitions on live music: "Gaga's got millions of fans on the Chinese mainland. If she ever toured here, I think she'd be floored by the reception."



Lucy Jones
Deputy Editor, NME.COM
Lucy interviewed our *Radar* star: "The mysterious Sohn rarely talks, so it was a thrill to chat to the man behind one of the most exciting debut albums of the year."



Derek Bremner
Photographer
"Having never seen BRMC live before I didn't really know what to expect from them, but I'm always relieved to see a band throw energy into a performance."

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COVER: ROGER SARGENT

SOUNDING OFF

TELL US WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND

Answering you this week: Emily Mackay

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LETTER OF THE WEEK

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BACK BACK BAXONS

I was so close to giving up hope that I'd buried my glowsticks in the back garden, and then I wake up yesterday and there's a new Klaxons song! And it was worth four years of waiting – I think. They made us wait long enough for 'Surfing The Void', and they had to come back with something strong this time, and this sugary disco-pop belter, though it's cheesy as hell, has got me listening to it on repeat over and over. Let's hope album number three has just as much dancefloor wizardry on it.
Anna Chowdhury, Leicester



Emily Mackay: Well, Anna, if I'm not quite as convinced just yet by the boys' sequinned shimmy back into the public glare, I can't deny that 'There Is No Other Time' would make me reconsider that bar break if I heard it mid rug-cut. What's the point of a Klaxon if you can't dance to it, after all? The band have promised the new record will be "classy and euphoric", and with James Murphy, James Ford and Tom Rowlands of The Chemical Brothers on board, serious beats are likely to abound. Let's just hope they've not been too chastened by the mixed reception to 'Surfing The Void' – and there's some strange new sounds that stray a bit further than the indie nightclub on the new record as well.

CAN'T WIN 'EM ALL

Worst NME awards nominations EVER! It's the same old overrated bands! That is all!
Claire H, via email

'Tis that time of year again. Wherein we eagerly anticipate the results of yet another NME Awards ceremony, where we can bask in the glory (or wallow in the shame) of our favourite groups (or least favourite groups) winning (or losing) a fantastically vulgar *NME* trophy. However this year, as I skim through the categories I am baffled by the lack of the two most important words in British music: The Cribs. After having one of the best years in the band's career and playing some of the best shows of their lifetime, why do I fail to see their names plastered across every category (excluding the nasty ones, obviously). How have the public failed to give them the recognition they deserve after a year of kick-ass gigs? I can't... I just can't.
David Yule, via email

EM: Well, leaving aside the concept of bands rated so highly by our readers they were chosen for an awards shortlist being, er, "overrated", let's deal with The Cribs, last year's Teenage Cancer Trust Outstanding Contribution To Music Award winners. Oh wait... Outstanding Contribution To Music Award. That's that about covered, isn't it? Seriously, though, it's the howls of dismay and screams of joy we hear from your general direction that make the NME Awards 2014 with Austin, Texas as hysterically exciting as it is for us. Every list, let alone one of nominations, causes controversy, but hopefully there's something in there for everyone, even if it's just a nice fat serving of outrage with a side of boiled 'WTF?'.

BLOOPER BOWL

I had never seen the Super Bowl before so I tuned in to see what all the fuss was about. The match was fine, but holy hamburgers, the halftime show wasn't. My first initial thought was why would you pair up Red Hot Chili Peppers and Bruno Mars in the first place? It just looks weird. So anyway, Bruno Mars appears and it's pretty obvious that he loves himself too much. I mean, what kind of singer comes onstage with a drum solo? Red Hot Chili Peppers then made a pointless appearance for about four minutes before pissing off and it left me wondering: was it necessary for them to perform? Seems like a bunch of has-beens trying desperately to be popular again if you ask me.
Joel John Hernon, via email



EM: While the Super Bowl isn't known for booking "has-beens" for half-time (RHCP are, sadly, inexplicably, still that big a deal), I share your pain. I was lucky enough a couple of years back to visit the slightly less illustrious venue of BBC's Television Centre to watch the Chilis perform alongside Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds on *Later... With Jools Holland*. The battle between disdain and incredulity I witnessed on Noel's face as my eyes slid from Anthony Kiedis, bare-chested and bouncing in the chilly studio with one sock rolled up to his knee, to the Chief's corner of the room is the vision that comes into my head every time I think of the Red Hot Chilli Peppers, which is, to be honest, as seldom as humanly possible.

AT THE EDGE

Is there still room in rock'n'roll for U2? I don't think so. I think they lost their way. Don't get me wrong I love rock'n'roll, but what U2 produce these days is pure garbage.
Laís Campos , via email

EM: Strong words, Laís. I must admit, since crushing over raven-haired Bono on my mam's tape of 'The Joshua Tree' as an impressionable tween, I've had an unshiftable soft spot for everyone's favourite critical whipping boys. But even I have to admit most things post-'Achtung Baby' fall gracelessly into the 'half-decent steering-wheel tapper' category. Still, never write them off – even if Bono freely admits his band are "on the verge of irrelevance", they might just have enough spunk and self-awareness in them for one last artistic rebirth. And even if not, you don't have to worry about your next Father's Day present, do you?



LOOK WHO'S STALKING

We parked behind the venue in Detroit where we were seeing Alt-J and got to meet and talk with them all. Nicest rock stars I have ever met. Sad to see Gwil go.
Jason Singer and Adam Podboy, Detroit, Michigan

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UNCUT 8/10, FAKE DIY ****

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ON REPEAT

NME 20

NME TRACK OF THE WEEK

1. Radkey
Feed My Brain

Trio of brothers Radkey never went to school. Back in St Joseph, Missouri they were home-taught by their father and 'Feed My Brain' is all about their indefatigable hunger for knowledge. It may also be some kind of rock'n'roll thank you to their dad, who fixed them with the worldly desire to get the hell out of their no-hope hometown. Either way, it rocks like the Ramones via early The Offspring. Feed our ears.

Greg Cochrane, Editor, NME.COM

2. Fear Of Men
Alta/Waterfall

Brighton indie-gloom merchants Fear Of Men are finally ready to gift us their debut album, offering up a merging of opening tracks 'Alta' and 'Waterfall' as a tantalising taste of what's to come. It's the second part which impresses the most, a perfect mix of cold, dark sonics and effortless melodic gold. "*Take me to the waterfall*", sings Jessica Weiss, as Joy Division-esque drum fills rattle around her ears and this indie pop gem explodes.

David Renshaw, News Reporter

3. Little Dragon
Klapp Klapp

There's a bit more bite to Sweden's Little Dragon as they get ready to drop fourth album 'Nabuma Rubberband'. From the off, 'Klapp Klapp' hits a manic beat – think northern soul meets 'I Am The Resurrection' – with Yukimi Nagano slinking around a pure acid bassline, leering, "*You want it, don't you?/I know you want it*". By the time you reach the fluttery Kraftwerkian synths of the final seconds, you'll admit that, yes, you probably do.

Matthew Horton, writer

4. Various Artists
Go Forth, Feminist Warriors

The righteous babes behind Rookie – a kick-ass website for teenage girls – wrote this new feminist anthem for 2014, a wicked call to arms about mansplaining (Google it), Tumblr and taking control, starring (among others) Waxahatchee's Katie Crutchfield, MNDR, Kimya Dawson, Tegan & Sara and Carrie Brownstein on "pizza freestyle": "*We want the whole damn thing, you can't just leave us with the crust*!" PREACH.

Laura Snapes, Features Editor

5. Major Lazer
Aerosol Can (feat. Pharrell)

The first offering from new five-track EP 'Apocalypse Soon' (out February 25) sounds like it could have ended up on MIA's 'Matangi'. Diplo, Jillionaire and Walshey Fire sling beats at collaborator Pharrell, who responds by pulling some wild lines out of his massive hat. "*Aerosol can, monkey outside, shooting all night*", he rattles, securing another winning guest spot in the process.

Phil Hebblethwaite, writer









6. Dena
Flashed (feat. Erlend Øye)

Dena is one of those impossibly cool musicians who could only really exist in Berlin. Originally from Bulgaria, here she teams up with Kings Of Convenience's Erlend Øye for an irresistible slice of hipster pop that is so trendy that if you turn it right the way up you can actually hear the sound of dot-com companies and gentrifying coffee shops moving in. Get down to it while the rent's still affordable, ya dig?

Kevin EG Perry, writer

7. Villagers
Occupy Your Mind

There's always been a schizophrenic tension to Conor O'Brien's work as psych-folk warbler Villagers. Now, it seems the voices in his head have wanted him to make Muse's 'Uprising' all along. 'Occupy...' is all future-glam stomp beats, handclaps and intergalactic synthetic sizzle, albeit with an acoustic guitar involved somewhere. "*In this infinite space, dear, I can hardly feel time*", Conor trills as the song prepares for its jump to warp speed.

Mark Beaumont, writer

8. Bloody Knees
Bones

Bradley Griffiths, frontman of Bloody Knees, works in a hospital, perhaps the source of the fixation with gore in his band's work and name. 'Bones', a new track from a forthcoming split seven-inch with Brighton's Birdskulls, is a warning to stay away from hard surfaces and sharp edges when listening to this Cambridge punk crew's helter-skelter, harum-scarum joy thrash. You may well end up joining him there as a result of involuntary headbanging.

Emily Mackay, writer

9. The Men
Different Days

'Tomorrow's Hits' might be a presumptuous title for an album but spend four-and-a-half raucous minutes with this ode to growing old and "*hating being young*" and it seems pretty fitting. The Men's punkier edges have been rounded off, sounding glossier than ever before and belying the fact the Brooklyn band's fifth record is their first to have been done in a proper studio. Based on this, though, a little polish suits them.

Andy Welch, writer

10. Gaps
Inside Your Head

Old school friends Rachel and Ed have only existed for around a year as GAPS, but the Brighton-based duo have already established a singular sonic world of their own. The B-side to their recent seven-inch 'I Know It's You,' 'Inside Your Head' is a similarly breathy swell of sparse percussive glottal stops and tidal washes of sampled sound, achieving spine-tingling status thanks to Rachel's ghosting vocal.

Simon Jay Catling, writer

ESSENTIAL NEW TRACKS

▶LISTEN TO THEM ALL AT NME.COM/ONREPEAT NOW

11. Kelela
The High

The LA-based singer follows up her brilliantly disquieting mixtape 'Cut 4 Me' with another piece of glitchy, forward-thinking R&B. Again, Aaliyah and Ciara are the touchstones vocally, but her falsetto harmonies are matched with producer Gifted And Blessed's pulsating industrial beats that gives it a disorientating punch. Kelela does exactly what great pop music should do – unsettle the mind but comfort the soul. And it's a thrilling, chilling ride.
Jenny Stevens, Deputy News Editor



12. Jamie xx and Four Tet
Seesaw

Jamie xx and Four Tet collide in this spacey jam, patching together skittering breakbeats and subdued bass to create the sound of the walk home in the half light of dawn after a heavy night in the clubs. Dialled down in the back, you can just about hear Jamie's xx bandmate Romy Madley Croft adding her own contribution to the track as she whispers about seeing the sun go down – or come up – with you.
Hazel Sheffield, writer



13. Cyril Hahn & Javeon
Breaking

Having burst into prominence in late 2012, ambitiously reworking R&B classics by the likes of Destiny's Child and Mariah Carey into '90s UK garage-shaded dance floor anthems, Vancouver producer Cyril Hahn delivers a clubland gem all of his own making. Collaborating with Brit singer Javeon, colossal vocal hooks and agitated keyboard lines make 'Breaking' sound like a darker Disclosure track – a house-pop hybrid.
Al Horner, Assistant Editor, NME.COM



14. Woman's Hour
Her Ghost

"*Take your words and put them in my mouth/ Help me say the things that never come out*", coos Woman's Hour's Fiona Burgess with the kind of forlorn tones that fans of The xx's first record will be pining for. Musing on a lost and troubled relationship, 'Her Ghost' continues the London quartet's knack for melancholy. Peer through the misery though, and there's a sly dancefloor beat there that's begging for a huge remix.
Lisa Wright, writer

15. Glass Animals
Gooey

The Oxford four-piece and super-producer Paul Epworth's protégés return after last single 'Psylla' with this sleepy jungle-jam. It's a saucy love anthem that bravely puts one condiment to the fore: "*You just want to know those peanut butter vibes*", croons singer Dave Bayley. With slinky drum pads and hazy bleeps, 'Gooey' is an addictive listen that suggests fine things for the group's debut album.
Lucy Jones, Deputy Editor, NME.COM



16. Rick Ross
Oyster Perpetual

Silly man, silly track name. But right here is some typical big talking from Rozay about "*diamonds*", things that are "*presidential*" and "*Swiss*", and how "*this game is all about your movement*" and "*ours is oyster perpetual*". Over an enjoyably chilled soul sample, this is two minutes of hype building for his upcoming album. Conveniently, there's a reminder in the lyrics about what it's called and when it's out: "'*Mastermind', March 4*".
Tom Howard, Reviews Editor

17. Yuck
Athena

It seems more than appropriate for Yuck to put out 'Athena' just after dream-pop denizens Slowdive announce their reformation. An overtly sensual four minutes of strung-out guitars and drifting vocals courtesy of Max Bloom – who's comfortably taken on the frontman mantle since Daniel Blumberg left – it's as pretty as it is woozy, with a grunge-esque breakdown adding a welcome shot of grotty guitar roughness alongside the slinky smooth shoegazing.
Leonie Cooper, writer

18. St Vincent
Prince Johnny

There's something almost Dylan-esque about Annie Clark's portrait of poor, precocious 'Prince Johnny'. You're never quite certain if she's mocking, pitying or secretly enamoured of this well-meaning manchild, who snorts powdered pieces of the Berlin Wall and who hopes against hope to one day become "*a real boy*". Following on from 'Birth In Reverse' and 'Digital Witness', however, there's far less uncertainty about Clark's upcoming new album.
Barry Nicolson, writer

19. Diiv
Like A Rolling Stone

Diiv recently performed this cover of Bob Dylan's classic at the final gig held at Brooklyn venue 285 Kent. At the show, Zachary Cole Smith and his bandmates transformed the song from its folk-rock origins into an almost unrecognisable psychedelic rush. With thick, strobing guitar layers and howls from Smith of "*how does it feel?*", a fresh sense of urgency is injected into an old classic.
Rhian Daly, Assistant Reviews Editor

20. Beck
Waking Light

Of all the hats Beck's worn (hip-hop hat, cowboy hat, crumpled folkie hat), it's his sad hat that fits best. 'Waking Light', from new album 'Morning Phase', is weary and melancholy but magisterial and soaring too, bringing to mind the best bits of 'Mutations' and 'Sea Change' and reminding us why Beck's music is better recorded and not written down, printed and bound into lavish collectors' editions, like the preceding 'Song Reader'.
Dan Stubbs, News Editor

GUY EPPEL, JENN FIVE, NATE WALTON, ANGELINA CASTILLO

TheWeek

▶EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS IN MUSIC ■ EDITED BY DAN STUBBS

Prince onstage at the Electric Ballroom in Camden, February 4

Purple reign

Prince brings new band 3RDEYEGIRL to London

It was the week that London turned purple. Prince – and his new group 3RDEYEGIRL – arrived on Monday. Within 24 hours, he had staged a press conference without the press, introduced the concept of the "open soundcheck", and proved it's possible to play two gigs in the same venue on the same night and deliver three encores each.

News of the iconic performer's arrival was heralded by the announcement he'd be holding a press conference at the residence of unlikely friend Lianne La Havas on Monday evening. It actually took place the following evening, by which time a rampant Twitter rumour sparked a media Prince hunt in Croydon, and numerous #PrinceinCroydon hashtags.

He was, in fact, in the equally unlikely Leyton, east London, at La Havas' flat, where a specially-installed purple light welcomed him to the neighbourhood. It was a strange kind of press conference: just three journalists were invited and they weren't allowed to record him speaking. Almost nothing was announced: no dates, no long-rumoured Glastonbury slot. The simple message was this: Prince is here. Then, as the closed event drew to an end, Prince's manager Kiran Sharma tweeted the news that he would be performing an "open soundcheck" at Camden's Electric Ballroom the same night. And all over the capital, Prince ↦



Prince with 3RDEYEGIRL and (inset) the queue outside the Electric Ballroom



diehards jumped out of bed and into taxis.

At the 1,000-capacity venue, fans approached the modest queue with suspicion, mainly due to a general worry they'd all been pranked. One person was still getting dressed as he arrived. An invited audience of press and guests – including Mumford & Sons members Marcus Mumford and Winston Marshall – were admitted first, and when Prince took to the stage at midnight it was for an audience of no more than 100 people.

Comprising half-shaven headed guitarist Donna Grantis, drummer Hannah Ford Welton and eyemask-wearing bassist Ida Neilsen, 3RDEYEGIRL are the group *Tank Girl* creator Jamie Hewlett would design to back Prince: the look is fierce, gothic and post-apocalyptic, with an afro-sporting Prince wearing a Fred Flintstone-like fur gilet up front. The new line-up puts Prince back where he's best – peeling out impossible guitar solos while contorting his face into Jim Carrey shapes, strutting around stage and occasionally taking to an electric organ.

He seemed to revel in the intimate setting, wisecracking for the crowd and leading them in two-part harmonies. But this was a working soundcheck too, and Prince was signalling to his sound engineers throughout. At the end, he announced the band would return the next night, "earlier and funkier".

PRINCE'S BEST ONSTAGE ONE-LINERS

"My name is Plectrum Electrum. And so is yours."

"There's a sexy mood in here. Someone's going to get pregnant tonight."

"Music is a painkiller. It's all you need."

"Ooh, that's funky right there."

"Put your phones down, please. Participate!"

[During 'Play That Funky Music'] "Who you calling a white guy?"

[To a fan who shouted, "We like you!"] "You're not so bad yourself."

"London, I think I'm gonna like it here."

The next day, fans queued outside the venue for hours with no information about how to get tickets or if the show was definitely happening. A capacity crowd of 1,000 was admitted for the bargain price of a tenner each for an 8pm show, which kicked off with a slowed-down version of 1984 hit 'Let's Go Crazy'. After a set heavy on material from forthcoming album 'Plectrum Electrum', the band exited the stage at 9.30, when – to the surprise of all present – the house lights raised and the bars closed. A full second audience was then let in for another performance, this time beginning at 11pm and following precisely the same setlist until a diversion for a cover of 'Crimson And Clover' led to a series of crowd-pleasing encores including 'Purple Rain', 'Dreamer' and a sample-based megamix of fan favourites, 'Sign 'O' The Times', 'Alphabet Street' and 'I Would Die 4 U' included. "You know how many hits I got?" he asked the uproarious crowd. "I'll play 'em if you want 'em..."

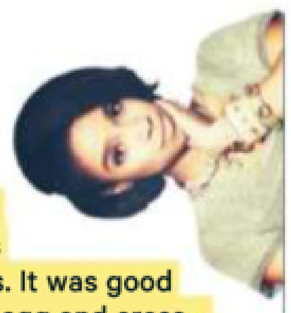
Prince has said he's doing these smaller shows to see if the UK will embrace his 'new' band, implying that they need to earn their chops and work their way up. It's an unnecessarily modest statement from a man who sold out 21 dates at The O2, but with new single 'Pretzelbodylogic' absent from the midweek chart, there may be something in it. Perhaps he's doing it for fun: the focus so far has been on spontaneity, intimacy and creating a unique experience, the band appealing to fans to "spend the night with us, not behind your phones or cameras" before each set.

With rumours of many more dates being planned on the fly, Prince is as likely to have popped up playing the back room of your local pub as any other venue by the time you read this. "We'll stay [in London] as long as you'll have us," he told the Electric Ballroom crowd. He may as well rip up that return ticket.

■ DAN STUBBS

THE ROYAL VISIT

Lianne La Havas on having Prince round for tea



"I first met Prince about two years ago. It turned out he wanted to have a phone call with me. He asked me if I liked Joni Mitchell – I love Joni Mitchell – and we agreed to meet in person at his Paisley Park home, which is beautiful and purple and smells of essential oils. He had a solid gold guitar there, so I played that. We'd hung out before at my old house in Hackney, but this was his first visit to Leyton. He said he thought it had character! It wasn't a low-key visit so we warned our neighbours he was coming. We had to tell Brian next door who Prince was. Workmen came during the day, cleared away the furniture and installed a smoke machine, a lighting rig and a purple light outside. They brought flowers and vases and there was catering in the kitchen for everyone – Sainsbury's sandwiches and cookies. It was good stuff: BLTs, egg and cress... Prince arrived at 8pm and had some tea, which I made. He has it with honey and no milk. He came down with his band when he was ready and they all answered questions from the three journalists as honestly as they could. It was punctuated with some live music too – he played his new single, 'PretzelBodyLogic' without singing. It was all acoustic, so instead of a full kit there were some bongos and an acoustic bass and an acoustic guitar. It was lovely. After his visit, we went to the venue together in the pouring rain. Everyone was so excited to be there. It was so electric. Everyone was like, 'Is this really happening?'"

■ LEONIE COOPER

MY LIFE IN A SUITCASE

FIVE TOURING ESSENTIALS



Euan Hinshelwood

Younghusband



BOOK
Planet Joe by Joe Cole

"He was the roadie for Black Flag. He used to be a semi-pro tennis player and it's incredible to see the change in this middle-class man through these acid experiences."

BOXSET
Twin Peaks

"It's gotta be *Twin Peaks* – it's just so long. The second season is about 30 episodes, so it's basically 30 films. We like to embrace darkness when on the road."

FILM
Brainstorm



"It's this crazy sci-fi film with Christopher Walken. It's so funny and he's pretty much my hero. It was recommended by the guy who produced our album and we first watched it halfway through the sessions."

GAME
Road cricket



"When you drive past pubs you get one run per limb in each pub name you spot – so The Kings Arms would get two. You're out if you drive past one called, for example, The Castle because it has no limbs."

HOME COMFORT
Pen and a notepad

"If I don't leave the house with these I freak out and have to buy them at a service station. I jot down thoughts and things we see and talk about."

SUITCASE WORDS: LISA WRIGHT PICS: GETTY, JENN FIVE, REX

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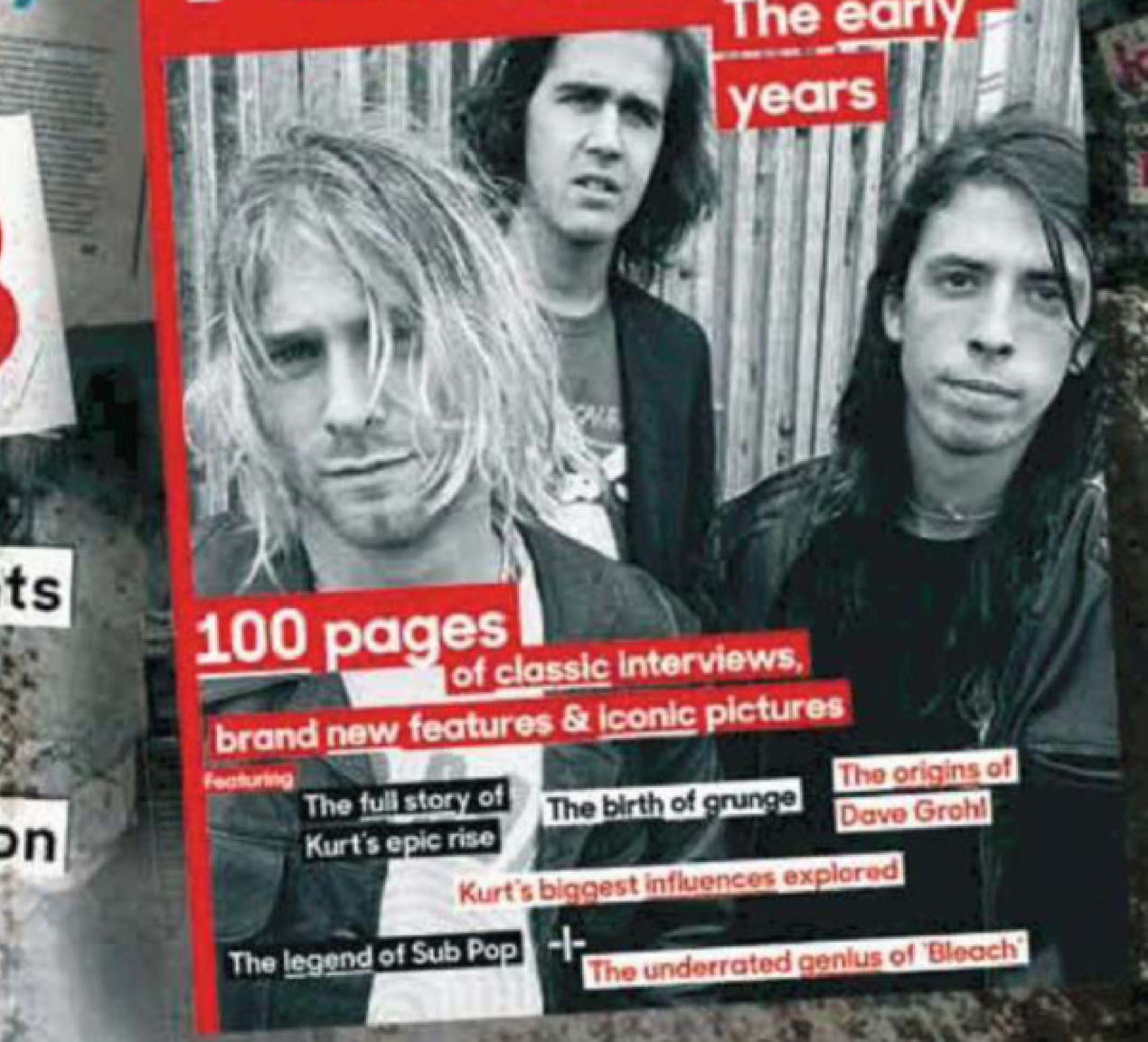
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Boundless man

Damon Albarn to receive NME Award For Innovation at NME Awards With Austin, Texas



"THE WHOLE WORLD'S GOT MORE LIKE GORILLAZ"
Richard Russell

It's been a long, long time since Damon Albarn was just that pretty boy from Blur. In the wake of Gorillaz, Africa Express, *Monkey: Journey To The West* and a myriad of other inspired creative outlets, Albarn has forged himself a unique place in pop culture; a source of constant sonic adventure. So this year, at the NME Awards 2014 with Austin, Texas, we're honouring him with our inaugural NME Award For Innovation. Here's why.

Blur

▶Damon came late to baggy, but even early Blur material showed signs of a mixologist's mind. Madchester merged with shoegazing and Essex art pop on 1991's 'Leisure', but it was with 'Popscene', 'Sunday Sunday' and 'For Tomorrow' that Damon's first major innovation clicked into place. Grunge was becoming a grizzly Goliath across the pond while Suede, Pulp and The Auteurs were boasting distinct but disparate British aesthetics. It took Damon to unite the alternative nation. "Britpop was Damon's idea," Alex James has said, and it was forged in the parochial poses of Blur's British imagery, the Beatledelic brass of 'Modern Life Is Rubbish' and Damon's paeans to Primrose Hill that sparked a scene and tripled the house prices.

"For me, coming from outside London and moving to London when 'Modern Life Is Rubbish' came out, it really resonated with me," says Matt Everitt, 6Music presenter and former drummer with Britpop band Menswear. "Whether it was teenage pride in where you come from, or just your culture, or just being bored of American music, 'Modern Life Is Rubbish' was kind of like ground zero."

Damon's musical fascinations outside of straight-up indie pop were becoming apparent even as 1994's 'Parklife' rode the zeitgeist. "What struck me when I first met Damon," says Robert '3D' Del Naja from Massive Attack, "was that in the midst of the Britpop wave, he was completely different from what I'd expected. Blur were one of the defining bands of the British indie scene, yet here's a guy talking to me about reggae and soul. His reference points were unexpected."

Having pioneered one of rock's pivotal movements, Damon got the bug. He was the first to realise that Britpop was over the day 'Country House' beat 'Roll With It', and the rest of Blur's career was an attempt to bend music to his shifting will for a second time. Their swerves into elegant grunge pop on 'Blur', ambient electro-rock on '13' and amorphous afrobeat on 'Think Tank' wouldn't have the same decade-defining impact, but each revealed Albarn as an artist unwilling to rest on laurels.

Gorillaz



▶When Gorillaz' self-titled 2001 debut arrived – fronted by four animated freakazoids, incorporating dank, spacious hip-hop, dense dub, pop, Latin folk and acid jazz, and promoted with gigs played by shadows behind screens – you could barely believe it was Albarn's baby. "To start a group where the other member was a visuals person was brilliant," says Richard Russell, regular collaborator, producer of Damon's



Damon Albarn onstage with Blur at London's Hyde Park, August 12, 2012

DAMON'S DEVOTEES

Jude Law
"Damon innovates because he has spirit in this general slough of despond to find joy in being himself and bringing others together."

Carl Barât
"He's got the Midas touch. I don't think I've ever heard anything of his that I've not liked, and some of his things I've loved. He's got a reputation for being difficult and hard, and I've witnessed that first hand, but I'll say he's got heart in equal measure. I think Damon's one of the greats."

Kenney Jones, Small Faces
"He's a very talented guy. I first heard of him in his Blur days because they were celebrating Britain, like we were back in the '60s. I could definitely hear a bit of Small Faces in there, which was wonderful."

Yukimi Nagano, Little Dragon
"He's a really free-spirited person. He collects different instruments from all over the world and he encouraged us to be playful with them when we visited his studio. That's pretty inspiring, after all his success, he still has that desire to mess around, have fun and stay inspired."

new solo album 'Everyday Robots' and head of XL Records. "I thought, at the time, 'This is the future. No one's gonna have a bass player anymore, they're gonna have a visuals person'. The whole world has got a bit more like Gorillaz because everything has got a visual aspect now. It was very innovative, it needed doing."

Gorillaz' cartoon conceit was a liberating method of offloading all sense of history and personality from the huge names that drifted through the studio – Paul Simonon, Shaun Ryder, Lou Reed, Mark E Smith, Snoop Dogg, D12, Terry Hall, Bobby Womack, De La Soul, Mos Def – onto the cartoon patsies and create an environment of open door collaboration. "To be able to stand back," says Dave (aka David Jude Jolicoeur) from De La Soul, "and make music as cartoons is a liberating thing. It's the idea of bringing people together that you would never think would cross paths and making something out of it. To sit in a room and see Ike Turner and Neneh Cherry and De La Soul, in a good way, it's disgusting! How *dare* someone do that?"

We'd later see rap acts like Kanye West adopt a similar open-house approach to recording, and Gorillaz' massive US success filtered their attitude of kiddie-friendly experimental dub-pop and hip-hop into the US rap subconscious. "They inserted the fun and the cool back into music and what music can be," says Dave. "Being able to be silly definitely gave a cool vibe and mood, reasserting what this is supposed to be about – enjoying it."

"The thing that was really remarkable was going from Blur to Gorillaz is a great idea to talk about in the pub with your mates, but actually making it happen and making it successful and creative and exciting is a different thing," says 3D. "It's a remarkable achievement."

The Good, The Bad And The Queen

▶Having defined the laddish ennui of '90s British culture, a new decade brought the War In Iraq, 9/11 and economic collapse. Damon again turned his gaze on contemporary Britain with The Good, The Bad And The Queen, a socio-political, officially nameless 'supergroup' featuring Albarn, The Clash's Paul Simonon and The Verve's Simon Tong. Their only album was a dark, history-steeped 'mystery play' about 21st century London life and culture that paved the way for PJ Harvey's 'Let England Shake'. "The lyrics, the London atmosphere, all that evolved as we played," Paul Simonon has said. "There's a lot of craftsmanship on the record, and Damon has a vision for arrangements and everybody slotted in around them."



The Good, The Bad And The Queen

Mali Music and Africa Express

▶Damon's collaborative work with players from around the world with Gorillaz inspired him to explore the 21st-century potential of African sounds. On his 2002 album 'Mali Music' and through numerous Africa Express events and tours, he crushed the tired 'Graceland' cliché by putting artists such as Brian Eno, Nick Zinner, Django Django, Metronomy and Ghostpoet together with traditional and modern African musicians.



Damon takes Africa Express to Leeds, 2012

"If you're willing to make a bit of a leap and visit somewhere like that to make music, you stand to learn a massive amount," says Richard Russell, who Damon invited to Ethiopia and the Congo for 2011's 'Kinshasa One Two'. "He's been out there 15 times or whatever and it's made him a much better musician and broadened his horizons."

"It was very spontaneous," says 3D, who was also on the Congo trip, "there was a little bit of discussion during the day, people would talk about what they might do onstage that night and then just get together and do it. There was very little serious planning, it was all about spontaneity and energy." ⟶

TIMELINE



RICHARD JOHNSON, ELLIS PARRINDER, REDFERNS, SIMON PHIPPS, DAN KENDALL, GETTY, WIREIMAGE



Damon performing with Bobby Womack, Notting Hill Arts Club, October 1, 2012

The operas

▶By the mid-00's, even global pop music and the world's most imaginative supergroup ever weren't enough to fulfill Albarn's creative needs. He branched out into opera and theatrical productions, working with the likes of Hewlett, The Kronos Quartet, Alan Moore and director Chen Shi-Zheng to create music for *Monkey: A Journey To The West*, *It Felt Like A Kiss* and *Dr Dee* for the Manchester International Festival. "Monkey was a mentally ambitious project," says 3D, "it was insane. The fact that they pulled it off is a tribute to the vision of it. It was a visual feast, something out of this world."

Damon was now blazing trails between traditionally disparate wings of the arts.



"Damon is free of inhibition," says director Rufus Norris, who worked with Damon on *Dr Dee* and his 2012 feature film *Broken*. "He has built a trampoline of craft to bounce his melancholic, riotous spirit into flight, and innovation follows in that wake. I aspire to be as innocent and wise."

"These are passions of his, things he's genuinely interested in," says Russell. "It'd be very easy for him to do stuff that appealed to a mass audience but that's not the aim of what he does or why he does it."

Damon the producer

▶Alongside Russell, Damon produced soul veteran Bobby Womack's first studio album in 12 years, 'The Bravest Man In The Universe'. It was a prime example of how Albarn pursues his passions: Damon's enthusiasm for working with Womack, both in the studio and as keyboard player in Womack's band, rejuvenated a waylaid career. "He was in love with my music first of all," says Womack, "He kept saying: 'I don't think you need a lot of music, a lot of production, I just think people need to hear your voice'. He just makes you want to be what he expects you to be. He's consistent, and he's got a nice way of being persistent." It was Albarn who coaxed Womack out on the road. "I told him, I didn't want to come back out on the road because I got sick of the drug scene. And he kept saying, 'Yeah but, you're gonna be straight'."

Solo Damon

▶Like Toto pulling back the curtain on the Wizard Of Oz working his flame-spewing edifice, Albarn is finally ready to show us the naked Damon on his solo debut 'Everyday Robots', an autobiographical record of "empty club music" about the clash of nature and technology featuring Brian Eno and Bat For Lashes' Natasha Khan. "It's definitely a different sound to anything he's had before," says Russell. "He's been very conceptual with the last few records he's done whereas this one is just a personal record that's about him. He worked very hard to express things that were very personal but to do it in an interesting way. That's what makes the record him. He brought me in to create a particular atmosphere and a particular mood, so it's quite an atmospheric record with a certain palate of sounds and a certain rhythmic feel and very personal lyrical stuff."

■ MARK BEAUMONT

SEE DAMON LIVE

'Everyday Robots' launch gigs announced

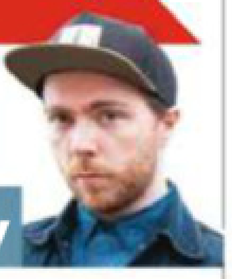
Damon Albarn will play three intimate shows in London to launch his first solo album 'Everyday Robots'. The first will be a tiny fanclub-only show at Leytonstone Library on April 23, followed by shows at the elegant Rivoli Ballroom on April 30 and the art-deco Great Hall at the People's Palace on May 1. The shows, which promise to include songs from throughout Albarn's career with Blur and Gorillaz as well as his solo work and other projects, will act as warm-ups for a string of festival dates in Europe, culminating with a headline set at Latitude on July 19.



VOTE NOW

Nominees' own choices for this year's gongs

NME awards 2014 with austin TEXAS



Martin Doherty

Chvrches

BEST BRITISH BAND

Biffy Clyro

supported by Windows Phone

"I think their trajectory is pretty special. They're a band that's just got bigger and bigger athrough toil and hard work – and great songs obviously. Those guys really fucking worked it and they deserve it."

BEST INTERNATIONAL BAND

Haim

supported by austin TEXAS

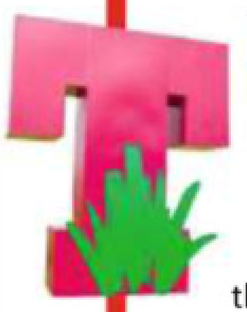
"We've kind of come through with those girls. They're really nice and a great band."



HERO OF THE YEAR

Pussy Riot

"It's important that we don't forget how brutal that situation was."



BEST FESTIVAL

T In The Park

"I guess I'll go T In The Park, given the Scottish thing. We had a bit of a homecoming there last year, which was a nice moment for us. It's always a great atmosphere."

BEST ALBUM

Arctic Monkeys' 'AM'

supported by PS4

"They're so bloody consistent – they go from strength to strength."

BEST NEW BAND

Jagwar Ma

"I'm not sure I'm allowed to vote for myself! Let's say, in the interests of competition and not to be voting for myself, Jagwar Ma. I think they're a great band."

▶Now it's your turn. Head to NME.COM/awards to make your selections

WILL IRELAND, LINDA BROWNLEE, GUY EPPEL, ED MILES, ANDY WILLSHER, TOM MARTIN

storemags.com



(Left) The Chinese 'Artpop' artwork and (inset) the uncensored original. (Right) Gaga's suggestive stagewear may not be tolerated in China



ALBUM CENSORSHIP IS IRRELEVANT. LIVE MUSIC IS THE VICTIM OF CHINA'S ASSAULT ON POP CULTURE

BY **GEORGE DING**

Lady Gaga wants to play live in China. But government censorship laws won't make it easy, says one Beijing-based music fan



Last month, Lady Gaga finally got government permission to release her album 'Artpop' in China. She tweeted: "I'm so excited!!!! The Chinese government approved 'Artpop' to be released in China with all 15 songs! Next I hope I can come to perform!"

Even though she had to make edits to some songs and censor the cover (see above), it appeared to be a change of heart from China's Ministry of Culture. In 2011, the Ministry placed six tracks from Gaga's 'Born This Way' on a list of 100 blacklisted songs to be removed from music websites because they "endangered national cultural safety". Other tracks included in the drive to keep "poor taste and vulgar content" away from China's youth included Katy Perry's 'Last Friday Night (TGIF)' and Backstreet Boys' 'I Want It That Way'.

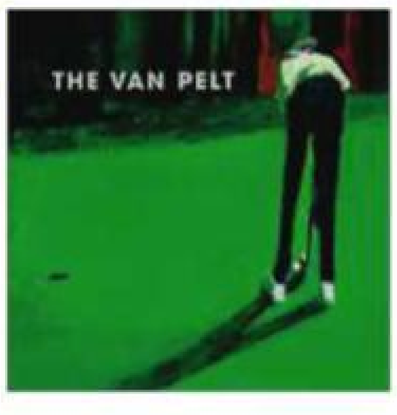
Many Western reports claimed this was a "ban" on the artists and their music, but that's overstating it. In reality, the restriction applied only to online distribution and the offending tracks were targeted not for their content but because they hadn't been registered and reviewed by the ministry – a bureaucratic objection rather than a moral one. In fact, Backstreet Boys brought their 20th Anniversary Tour to six cities in China last year, and Katy Perry performed in Beijing just days before 'Artpop' got the green light.

'Artpop' won't see huge sales on the Chinese mainland. Illegal downloading is the norm in China – I've lived in Beijing for six years and wouldn't know where to buy a CD even if I wanted one. And anyone who did want an uncensored CD would probably have already had it delivered from Hong Kong. Focusing on the changes to Gaga's album artwork detracts from the real problem – and that's her hope to perform here. While she has played in Hong Kong and Taiwan, the Chinese mainland is a very different beast. Even if a concert tour is approved, the government can change its mind whenever it wants. Just ask Oasis, whose 2009 shows in Beijing and Shanghai were cancelled with just a month to go, when censors realised that Noel Gallagher had appeared at a Free Tibet concert in 1997.

Even if Gaga doesn't have a stance on Tibet, the censorship of 'Artpop''s cover doesn't bode well for her more suggestive costumes and choreography. Getting your album approved is a far cry from realising your artistic vision onstage in China. In 2008, I went to see Kanye West's much-touted Glow In The Dark Tour when he came to Beijing. Gone were the elaborate sets and laser lights. Forget about cameos from Kid Cudi and Lupe Fiasco, Yeezy wasn't even allowed to swear. Well-timed pauses took the place of f-bombs. There was little banter with the crowd and no encore. When the last song ended, Kanye quietly walked backstage. He hasn't been back since. ■

▶For more opinion and debate, head to NME.COM/blogs

LOST ALBUMS #16



ANDY WILLSHER, REX

The Van Pelt
Sultans Of Settlement (1997)

Chosen by Frank Turner



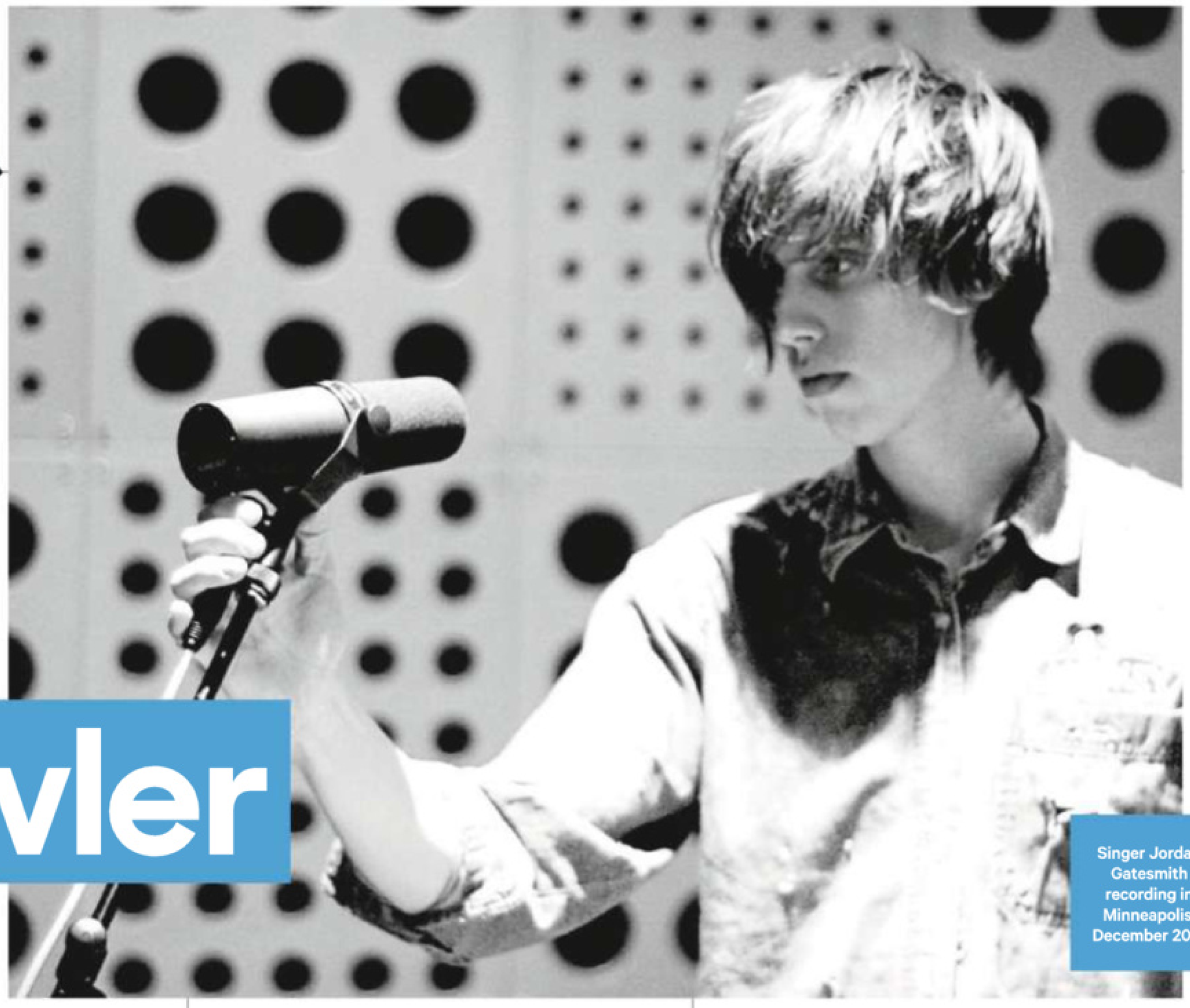
"They're kind of a lost band, really. They were from New Jersey, were around in the mid to late '90s and their singer was called Chris Leo – brother of Ted Leo of Ted Leo And The Pharmacists. 'Sultans Of Sentiment' is their second album and one of the best indie records ever. The guitar playing is incredible, and Chris Leo's lyrics are very special. He doesn't sing about normal stuff, he sings about parent-teacher relationships and infidelity – odd topics done really intelligently, not just girls and cars. I used to worship that record – in fact I still do."

▶THE DETAILS

▶RELEASE DATE 1997
▶LABEL Gern Blandsten Records
▶BEST TRACKS Yamato (Where People Really Die), We Are The Heathens
▶WHERE TO FIND IT Available as an import online or in good independent shops
▶LISTEN ONLINE On Spotify

Thin Lizzy and their own "sick" guitarist inspired the Minneapolis indie rockers' razor-sharp second album

Howler



Singer Jordan Gatesmith recording in Minneapolis, December 2013

"I would say at least one third of this record is about our guitar player in one way or another," laughs Howler frontman Jordan Gatesmith. "There are songs that are inspired by Ian Nygaard as a *person*." Second track 'Drip' is one such song, featuring lyrics like "*What he does all day/That's a mystery*", a distant voice asking "*Is that shingles?*" and a chorus line ("*Ian's on the drip*") based on the guitarist's tendency to get checked into hospital. "There's been many injuries on tour and it usually involves Ian," Jordan explains. "He usually just gets sick, but not like normal sick. He'll get shingles or a crazy mark around his neck and it'll be a life-or-death situation."

Insights into the state of Ian's health aside, 'Drip' rings with urgency and invention. A whirring, racing piece of razor-sharp indie rock, it typifies the wit of 'World Of Joy' and proves that in the two years it's taken for Howler to follow up their debut album 'America Give Up', they've not lost their acerbic side. Where the first record was full of charmingly scrappy guitars and ideas borrowed from '60s girl-group pop and '80s post-punks Hüsker Dü and The Replacements, the Minneapolis quartet's references are now wider – and both more obvious and more unexpected.

"I think I made a conscious decision to be open with our influences this time," explains Jordan. "There's a lot of bands that really inspire us and I feel like sometimes bands hide the fact that they're so influenced by certain things. Hell, we were even influenced by Prince on a couple of tracks and we made it really obvious. If you recognise something as sounding like another song, it's generally because we've thought about it."

Jordan has already admitted to straight-up ripping off Thin Lizzy's 'Jailbreak' on opener 'Al's Corral', although he's keen to backtrack on that original statement slightly. "When I say 'rip off' that's just me being crass with the terminology," he insists. The rest of the record, meanwhile, bears hints of Springsteen, and its slowest paced track, 'Here's The Itch That Creeps Through My Skull', has the yearning quality of Generation X's 'Kiss Me Deadly'. Making the album wasn't as straightforward as feeding old records into a mixing desk, though. After initial sessions in New York with Jon Spencer (of Jon Spencer Blues Explosion fame), the group ditched the recordings and headed home to begin again with long-time collaborator Chris Heidman. "It felt cheesy to be like, 'OK, now we're going to work with someone else.' It almost felt contrived. It was awesome working with Jon Spencer – he is literally one of my idols – but Chris is someone I've known forever. I worked with him on the first record and he helped me when I was 16 to record music. We kind of have this formula."

It might have taken them longer than expected to get here, but it looks like Howler should reignite the excitement that surrounded them first time round. "I think we're all really proud of how the album has come out," Jordan says. "I'm especially proud of the lyrics. There are some songs where the lyrics are really the main focus. Like [comeback single] 'Don't Wanna' – the main focus of that is these weird, obtuse lyrics. I think the whole record's going to surprise people." ■ RHIAN DALY

▶THE DETAILS

- ▶**TITLE** World Of Joy
- ▶**RELEASE DATE** March 24
- ▶**LABEL** Rough Trade
- ▶**PRODUCER** Chris Heidman
- ▶**RECORDED** Terrarium, Minneapolis
- ▶**TRACKS** Al's Corral, Drip, Don't Wanna, Yacht Boys, In The Red, World Of Joy, Louise, Here's The Itch That Creeps Through My Skull, Indictment, Aphorismic Wasteland Blues
- ▶**JORDAN GATESMITH SAYS** "It's deeply sarcastic. It doesn't really pull any punches."

"WE MADE THE PRINCE INFLUENCES REALLY OBVIOUS ON A COUPLE OF THE TRACKS"
Jordan Gatesmith



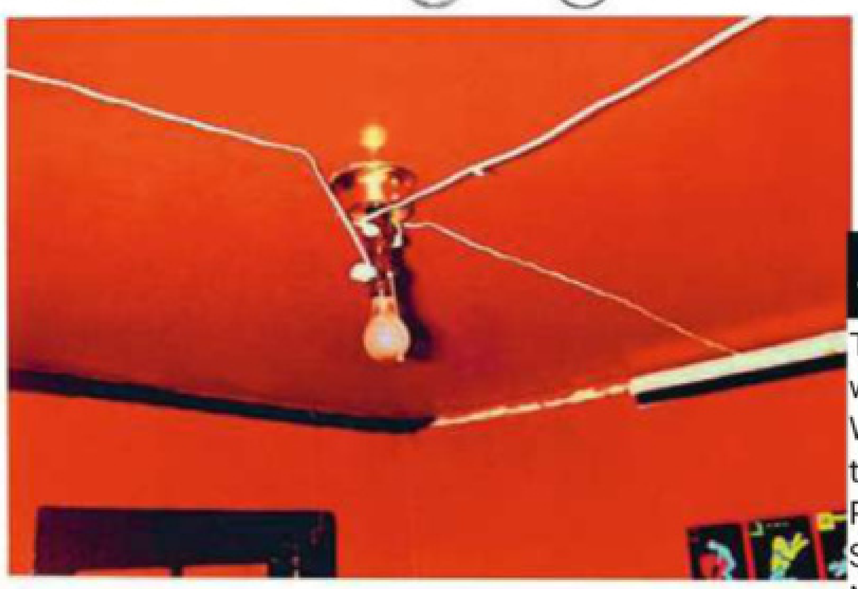
ANATOMY OF AN ALBUM



"'RADIO CITY' REALLY SPARKLES"

Jody Stephens

Radio City Big Star



THIS WEEK...

Big Star: Radio City

The cult album that launched a thousand jangly bands turns 40 this month

THE BACKGROUND

Comprising ex-Box Tops singer Alex Chilton, Chris Bell, Jody Stephens and Andy Hummel, this Memphis-based Anglophile quartet formed outside Ardent Studios, according to in-house producer John Fry, taking their name from the supermarket across the street. Their first album, 1972's '#1 Record', wowed the critics but not the public, and the original line-up fell apart when Bell left, disillusioned at the credit Chilton was getting. "Chris just didn't want to live in that shadow," Stephens says now. As Chilton began work on a solo album, he played the National Association Of Rock Writers' convention with Stephens and Hummel, which got the juices flowing again, and 'Radio City' was born – an exhibition of the now three-piece Big Star at their jangly, riffing best.

◀ STORY BEHIND THE SLEEVE

The cover image is the work of Memphis local William Eggleston, later to be awarded the Royal Photographic Society's Special 150th Anniversary Medal, but already a renowned photographer and a long-time pal of Alex Chilton. It's from Eggleston's own portfolio, and called *The Red Ceiling*.

FIVE FACTS

1 On 'September Gurls', Alex Chilton achieves the high guitar harmonies with a Fender 'Mando-guitar', mimicking a mandolin.

2 John Fry blames the album's commercial failure on a dispute between Stax, who distributed Ardent, and Columbia, who distributed Stax. The contract was signed by Columbia's Clive Davis and Stax's Al Bell. When Davis left Columbia, the new bosses decided they "didn't like his deals".

3 Producer Fry refuses to take credit for producing 'Radio City'. "Andy Hummel learned how to engineer and Alex Chilton could too," he says, "so they pretty well took care of that."

4 Drummer Jody Stephens and bassist Hummel don't appear on 'What's Goin' Ahn', 'She's A Mover' and 'Mod Lang', which were recorded at Chilton's solo sessions with Richard Rosebrough and Danny Jones respectively.

5 Hummel admitted the title of the album was meant to be a self-fulfilling prophecy: "We hoped it would be played on the radio a lot... Of course, it didn't pan out that way."

LYRIC ANALYSIS

"I'm starting to understand/What's going on and how it's planned" – 'What's Goin' Ahn'

Auxiliary drummer Richard Rosebrough remembers the writing of 'What's Goin' Ahn' as a dark time, with Chilton taking control and sinking into alcohol and drug abuse. "Nobody knew how to react," he said in 2000.

"September gurls do so much/I was your butch and you were touched/I loved you, well, never mind/I've been crying all the time/December boys got it bad" – 'September Gurls'

Astrological definition meant a lot to Chilton, who was heavily into the zodiac. "I'm one of the people in the vanguard of this knowledge," he announced in 1977.

"I can't get a licence to drive in my car/ But I don't really need it, 'cos I'm a big star" – 'O My Soul'

The band's name had an air of irony to it from the off. "Sure, there was an element of self-parody," Chilton conceded in 1993 – but maybe wishful thinking too?

WHAT WE SAID THEN

"Chilton had a chip on his shoulder of Atlas proportions, plus he was developing a drug habit, but neither stopped the band's second album 'Radio City' from being a classic." Max Bell, NME, August 6, 1977

WHAT WE SAY NOW

'Radio City' is Big Star at the top of their power-pop game. You can trace Teenage Fanclub's DNA to 'Back Of A Car' and REM's to 'September Gurls'. But for all that influence, these tunes couldn't buy a hit.

FAMOUS FAN

"Big Star makes me want to kill myself. Or get high and fuck. On a grassy hill in the South with the sun out in the fall." **Ryan Adams**

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"'Radio City' really sparkles while other records from the same time sound kind of flat. And that's John Fry. John was pretty amazing." **Jody Stephens, 2014**

THE AFTERMATH

Andy Hummel was out the door before 'Radio City' was even released, but Chilton and Stephens held it together long enough to re-enter the studio later in 1974 to record 'Third/Sister Lovers'. With the band a mess, the unreleased album was unearthed in 1978, and by this point Big Star were history. Chilton and Stephens reunited in 1993 to milk the belated plaudits and Big Star shambled around heroically until Chilton's death in 2010.

▶THE DETAILS

▶RECORDED Autumn 1973 **▶RELEASE DATE** February 1974 **▶LENGTH** 36:14 **▶PRODUCERS** John Fry, Big Star **▶STUDIO** Ardent Studios, Memphis **▶HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A **▶WORLDWIDE SALES** Data not available **▶SINGLES** September Gurls, O My Soul **▶TRACKLISTING** ▶1. O My Soul ▶2. Life Is White ▶3. Way Out West ▶4. What's Goin' Ahn ▶5. You Get What You Deserve ▶6. Mod Lang ▶7. Back Of A Car ▶8. Daisy Glaze ▶9. She's A Mover ▶10. September Gurls ▶11. Morpha Too ▶12. I'm In Love With A Girl

WORDS: MATTHEW HORTON PHOTO: GETTY

Storemags

NEWS DESK
THE NUMBERS



THE NUMBERS

$2m

Amount U2's new track 'Invisible' raised for Bono's charity RED

£6,100

The highest bid for the stock of Liverpool's Hairy Records, which was listed on eBay

48.3m

Number of people listening to UK radio every week according to new RAJAR figures – a 15-year high

£25,000

Amount Wiley spent on new album 'Snakes And Ladders' before scrapping it last week

BIG MOUTH

"I am going to beat the living fuck out him. I am breaking every rule in boxing to make sure I fuck him right up. Once I am done with him, I am going to whip my dick out and piss on him, right in his motherfucking face"



Rapper **DMX**'s plans for George Zimmerman, killer of US teen Trayvon Martin, in an upcoming boxing match



THE BIG QUESTION

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS MIMED AT THE SUPER BOWL. IS THAT OK?



Yukimi Nagano
Little Dragon
"No. We're against backtracks, it feels like karaoke. People are afraid of mistakes, but I think they're charming – if you sing a little off-key, who cares? You're there giving it everything."



Al Horner
NME.COM Assistant Editor
"How DARE the Chilis spoil the most hallowed big-brand-cola-sponsored event in the music calendar by miming?! Seriously though, the Super Bowl half-time show: it's not exactly Glastonbury, is it?"



Coral Rushmer
NME reader
"It's atrocious for a band not to play live. However, I respect RHCP for not plugging in their instruments – at least they were being honest."



WHO THE FUCK IS...

Skinny Puppy

They're the Canadian industrial band who've invoiced the US government for allegedly using their music as a 'torture device' at Guantanamo Bay.

So they're not exactly easy listening?

No. Their 15 albums include the tellingly titled 'Bites', 'Rabies' and 'Puppy Gristle'. The Guantanamo incident inspired the latest: 'Weapon'.

Have they been paid?

Not yet. But it's not really about the money. The band's founder cEvin Key said: "We never supported those types of scenarios... it doesn't sit right with us."

GOOD WEEK ↔ BAD WEEK



Chance The Rapper and James Blake

The pair sealed their bromance by moving in together. "All settled in the new crib," wrote Chance on Instagram. "And there's a fire pit on my balcony."



Rap-loving teachers

A teacher in Florida has been suspended after using the lyrics to Lil Wayne's '6 Foot 7 Foot' in an assignment. That's the one about having *"two bitches at the same time"*.

AND FINALLY

Back so soon?

Having only announced their retirement last week, frontman Vince Neil now insists, "Mötley Crüe's not breaking up. We're still gonna be making music. We're still selling merchandise."

Hats the way I like it

Pharrell Williams is nonplussed by the attention his Vivienne Westwood Grammys headgear got. "I was just wearing a hat. I rest good knowing it's just me expressing myself," he said.

Making paper

An ex-employee of the Motown Museum took Marvin Gaye's passport to *Antiques Roadshow*, where it was valued at $20,000. Next week: Stevie Wonder's NI card.

▶Find these stories and more on NME.COM

Official RECORD STORE Chart

TOP 40 ALBUMS FEBRUARY 7, 2014



NEW 01 **So Long, See You Tomorrow**
Bombay Bicycle Club ISLAND

The north London band have reinvented themselves again, this time eschewing the indie sounds of previous records and adopting programmed beats and Bollywood samples: a triumphant makeover.

NEW	2	Too Much Information **Maximo Park** DAYLIGHTING
NEW	3	Word Of Mouth **Seth Lakeman** COOKING VINYL
NEW	4	After The Disco **Broken Bells** COLUMBIA
▼	5	Rave Tapes **Mogwai** ROCK ACTION
▼	6	Warpaint **Warpaint** ROUGH TRADE
▼	7	High Hopes **Bruce Springsteen** COLUMBIA
▲	8	If You Wait **London Grammar** METAL & DUST
▼	9	Cavalier Youth **You Me At Six** BMG RIGHTS
NEW	10	Under The Volcano **The Family Rain** VERTIGO
▼	11	The B-Sides **The Gaslight Anthem** SIDE ONE DUMMY
▼	12	AM **Arctic Monkeys** DOMINO
▲	13	Settle **Disclosure** PMR
▲	14	Feels Like Home **Sheryl Crow** WARNER BROS
▲	15	Days Are Gone **Haim** POLYDOR
▼	16	Restoring Force **Of Mice & Men** RISE
NEW	17	Tales From The Realm Of The Queen Of The Pentacles **Suzanne Vega** COOKING VINYL
▲	18	Pale Green Ghosts **John Grant** BELLA UNION
▲	19	Give The People What They Want **Sharon Jones & The Dap-Kings** DAPTONE
▼	20	Brothers And Sisters Of The Eternal Son **Damien Jurado** SECRETLY CANADIAN
▼	21	Total Strife Forever **East India Youth** STOLEN
▲	22	Random Access Memories **Daft Punk** COLUMBIA
NEW	23	Hydra **Within Temptation** DRAMATICO
▲	24	Born To Die **Lana Del Rey** POLYDOR
NEW	25	Augustines **Augustines** VOTIV
▼	26	Croz **David Crosby** BLUE CASTLE
NEW	27	Our Version Of Events **Emeli Sandé** VIRGIN
▼	28	Moon **Snowbird** BELLA UNION
▼	29	F**k Off Get Free **Thee Silver Mt Zion** CONSTELLATION
■	30	Halcyon **Ellie Goulding** POLYDOR
NEW	31	Silence Yourself **Savages** MATADOR
▼	32	Ghettoville **Actress** WERKDISCS
NEW	33	Dead **Young Fathers** BIG DADA
NEW	34	Pushin' Against A Stone **Valerie June** SUNDAY BEST
NEW	35	True **Avicii** POSITIVA/PRMD
NEW	36	Dream River **Bill Callahan** DRAG CITY
NEW	37	Immunity **Jon Hopkins** DOMINO
NEW	38	Trouble Will Find Me **The National** 4AD
▼	39	None The Wiser **The Rifles** COOKING VINYL
▼	40	Have Fun With God **Bill Callahan** DRAG CITY

The Official Charts Company compiles the Official Record Store Chart from sales through 100 of the UK's best independent record shops. Owing to press deadlines, this is a chart up to February 7.

TOP OF THE SHOPS



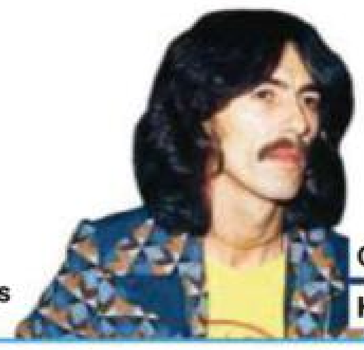
THIS WEEK
IMPERIAL MUSIC
INVERNESS
FOUNDED 2009
WHY IT'S GREAT It's one of the gems of the Scottish Highlands and specialises in vinyl, with a treasure trove of new and old records lining its shelves.
TOP SELLER THIS WEEK
Mogwai – 'Rave Tapes'
THEY SAY "Our owner Mark saw Can live in 1974, and has been on a mission ever since to turn people on to great music."

NEWSDESK COMPILED BY DAVID RENSHAW PHOTOS: WIREIMAGE, GETTY, EMILIE ELIZABETH, JOHN KRAW

SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE



Foggy Mountain Boys



George Harrison



Alexis Taylor

Hot Chip



Stevie Wonder

RICHARD JOHNSON, PHOTOSHOT, GETTY
ALEXIS APPEARS AT KITSUNÉ CLUB NIGHT'S FRENCH KISS PARTY ON FEBRUARY 15 AT VILLAGE UNDERGROUND, LONDON

THE FIRST SONG I REMEMBER HEARING
'Foggy Mountain Breakdown' – Foggy Mountain Boys

"I heard this bluegrass instrumental by Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs in my parents' front room, and I would run around dancing to it as a child. I still do that now, in fact, but I do it onstage while DJing instead of in my childhood home."

THE FIRST SONG I FELL IN LOVE WITH
'I Just Called To Say I Love You' – Stevie Wonder

"I loved the video as much as the melody and sounds. I pretended to be Stevie Wonder, cupping my hands over my ears like he has over his headphones. Maybe the sentimentality in that song has stayed with me."

THE FIRST ALBUM I EVER BOUGHT
'1999' – Prince

"I bought it on cassette from Our Price, and my dad took me into the shop to get it. My brother already had it, but for some reason I needed my own copy. It must have been to get to the bottom of what he was singing about. 'Mummy, why does everybody have a *bum*?' It just didn't sound right – the lyric sheet set me straight."

THE SONG THAT MADE ME WANT TO BE IN A BAND
'Down By The River' – Neil Young with Crazy Horse

"My brother taught me how to play this on guitar, and by learning it on that instrument I felt more like I was trying to make 'band music' rather than play Bartók or things I might have learnt in piano lessons."

"GEORGE HARRISON WAS BETTER OFF WITHOUT THOSE BEATLES!"

THE SONG I CAN NO LONGER LISTEN TO
'Don't Look Back In Anger' – Oasis

"I heard a lot of Britpop in my early teenage years and mostly hated it, but it was very popular, so you couldn't escape it. I used to like Oasis a bit, but I don't think I could listen to 'Don't Look Back In Anger' again – the drum fill just fills me with dread."

THE SONG THAT MAKES ME WANT TO DANCE
'In The Bush' – Musique

"I first heard it in Warsaw, where I had come offstage from playing with [steel pan player] Fimber Bravo. [New York DJ] Victor Rosado played it in his amazing DJ set and I had to rush up and ask him who it was by. I was dancing a lot to it straight away and think I spilt some drinks."

THE SONG I DO AT KARAOKE
'Purple Rain' – Prince

"I did 'Purple Rain' with Peaches in Australia once. There is a photo of us doing it, and my expression of pained sincerity is pretty funny/appalling."

THE SONG I CAN'T GET OUT OF MY HEAD
'Beware Of Darkness' – George Harrison

"I have been overdosing on the 'All Things Must Pass' triple album and outtakes from those sessions, session recordings, alternate takes. I can't get enough of it. He was better off without those Beatles!"

THE SONG I WISH I'D WRITTEN
'Trudy Dies' – Palace

"It's so simple in terms of chords, but so affecting and unusual as a whole song and sound. Royal Trux produced and Liam 'Plush' Hayes played mellotron on it. All the greats in one room!"

THE SONG I END MY DJ SETS WITH
'Love's In Need Of Love Today' – Stevie Wonder

"[German producer/DJ] Justus Köhncke and I ended a set in Berlin recently with this, and our friend [American singer] Mandel Turner got up and did an impromptu vocal over the song. It was an amazing end to the night and I think the crowd enjoyed it *almost* as much as we did."

THE SONG THAT REMINDS ME OF MY CLUBBING DAYS
'Ventolin' – Aphex Twin

"I didn't really have clubbing days – I went to gigs more. But I remember Aphex Twin playing something really boring when I'd stayed up all night to hear him as a 14-year-old. I was so disappointed. I thought he'd be putting sandpaper on the decks or at least playing something odd sounding. So the album 'I Care Because You Do' brings back those memories."

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL
'Memories Of You' – Robert Wyatt

"It was the B-side of his classic 'Shipbuilding' single, it's a cover version of an old standard and I think it speaks for itself, really."

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NME NEW BAND OF THE WEEK

Sohn

Secretive Londoner whose shadowy electronica blew his own mind

Sohn refuses to reveal his real name. "It's not relevant, I didn't choose it," he explains on the phone from his studio. Since his first EP, 'The Wheel', thrust him into the limelight in 2012, there's been an air of mystery surrounding the London-born enigma (whose name is pronounced 'son'). Few photos exist, and there are even fewer concrete details about the man lurking in the shadows. Really, all there is to go on is a bunch of beautiful songs that sound completely different to what everyone else is doing at present, made by a guy who's traded in the UK's chilly climes for the more grandiose backdrop of Vienna.

So why all the secrecy? "Reinventions are a really important part of my personality and make-up," he says. "Hence being able to leave London and drop everything in a second and just suddenly be able to exist as something else, somewhere else." He's switched up his name over and over again since he was 12, with different sets of friends knowing him under different guises. But while he sought solitude in Austria to write 'Tremors', his forthcoming debut album for 4AD, the ultimate metamorphosis took place. By forcing himself to write in a certain way – more simply and directly – Sohn says a "massive personality change" occurred in him. Suddenly the awkwardness he'd been trying to get rid of for years was lost, and he felt "strong" for the first time. "My mind's blown by how it's affected me," he says.

There's a ghostly aspect to his electronica that has drawn comparisons with Banks and Kwabs (he's produced for both) as well as FKA Twigs and Eyedress (artists he's keen to work with), while Sohn himself cites Björk and Radiohead as influences. Some call his music melancholy and morose, but is that fair? "I think that those emotions are the most beautiful and interesting emotions," he says. "Being happy is great, but nobody wants to hear you talk about it."

So with his big debut just months away, will he always write as Sohn? "Maybe I won't," he muses. "Reinventing myself is the core of who I am." ■ LUCY JONES

ON NME.COM/NEWMUSIC NOW
▶Listen to an exclusive playlist of Sohn's favourite tracks

▶THE DETAILS

▶**BASED** Vienna
▶**FOR FANS OF** Eyedress, Banks
▶**SOCIAL** @SOHN
▶**BUY IT NOW** 'Lessons' and 'Bloodflows' are out now. Debut album 'Tremors' will follow in April on 4AD
▶**SEE HIM LIVE** London Village Underground (April 17), London Field Day (June 7)
▶**BELIEVE IT OR NOT** Sohn can solve a Rubik's Cube in under three minutes. He can also name every English king and queen in order from the very first one

AMELIA TROUBRIDGE

MORE NEW MUSIC



Fé

Strange Faces

Employing the same love of fuzz that made Teenage Fanclub so special, Chicago's Strange Faces offer a more delicate approach to the nu-glam stomp of their fellow Windy City buds Twin Peaks. Latest single 'Brand New Way' was mixed by that band's singer, Cadien James, and although it's different enough not to have the band labelled as copyists, it's still every bit as alluring as TP's strongest moments.

▶SOCIAL @sstrangeffaces
▶HEAR THEM strangefaces.bandcamp.com

Seven Davis Jr

Unabashed Prince fan Seven Davis Jr has channelled the Purple one in every moment of his super-slick output to date. 'One' is an undeniable mix of classic funk and a propulsive house beat, his best song by far and an undeniable floor-filler. Meanwhile, a cover of Prince's own 'Controversy' may lay the influence out on a plate but its woozy take on the '80s original has a sense of lo-fi modernity that lifts Seven above mere pastiche.

▶SOCIAL @sevendavisjr
▶HEAR HIM soundcloud.com/seven-davis-jr

Mean Bikini

All-female fivesome Mean Bikini come from a lineage that navigates through riot grrrl and bubblegum punk, winding up at an end point that's as snotty as it is faux-sweet. Dishing out ramshackle, two-minute slices of barely-held-together tunes like 'I Cannot Play Guitar' and 'There's Some Noise', their prolific work rate (the band have put out 10 releases of varying length over the past two years) is only further testament to their DIY ethic.

▶SOCIAL facebook.com/meanbikini
▶HEAR THEM meanbikini.bandcamp.com
▶SEE THEM LIVE Coventry Taylor Johns (February 22)

NME BUZZ BAND OF THE WEEK

Body Of Light

From Ascetic House, the same stable that brought you Arizona psych visionaries Destruction Unit, comes this fraternal synth duo, brothers Alexander and Andrew Jarson. At present you can only get hold of their music through the medium of cassette tape, but their SoundCloud gives you a good glimpse of their particular steez, a smoky gothwave harking back to the period when Depeche Mode started to put a little kink in their pop.

▶SOCIAL facebook.com/bodyovlight

Crosss

Like hometown buds Heaven For Real, Crosss pivot off the muscular beats of drummer Nathan – but the similarities start and finish there. Crosss are in essence a metal project, the boyhood obsession of lead singer Andy March. A serial DIYer and player in a handful of Halifax's most revered garage-punk/pop acts, March spikes his latest outfit's trippy, Floyd-ish melodies with vials of dark, venomous grunge.

▶SOCIAL @crosstheband
▶HEAR THEM crosss.bandcamp.com





Body Of Light

Muck

Fans of Trash Talk's frantic take on hardcore will want to check out Muck, the band currently pummelling thrash fans in their native Iceland. Debut album 'Slaves' is packed full of jackhammer riffs and huge walls of noise, while newer material like 'Here Comes The Man' hints at sleek versatility.

▶SOCIAL facebook.com/muckband
▶HEAR THEM soundcloud.com/muck-iceland

Fé

This London duo honed their craft while busking on the Underground and now they're releasing their debut AA-side single in March via Generator. Produced by Luke Smith (Foals, Depeche Mode), Fé's teasing dynamics, measured guitars and atmospheric aura make for an irresistible and intelligent sound.

▶SOCIAL facebook.com/FEology
▶HEAR THEM soundcloud.com/feology

Cashmere Cat

Like LuckyMe labelmates Rustie and Hudson Mohawke, Norway's Magnus August Høiberg combines eclectic post-everything production nous with an exquisitely detailed sense of melody. Going on new EP 'Wedding Bells', he's a bit of a softie. Check out 'With Me', a gossamer-light paean to finding that special someone wound together from angel sighs, piano flourishes, and squeaky-clean synth bass.

▶SOCIAL @cashmerecat
▶HEAR HIM soundcloud.com/cashmerecat

→

BAND CRUSH



Allison Crutchfield

Swearin'

Radiator Hospital

"Radiator Hospital's 'Something Wild' is my favourite album of last year. It's like if Jeff Mangum started a power-pop band, which is a recipe to win my heart. I first saw Sam Cook-Parrott play in Michigan when I was with mine and Katie's old band PS Eliot. He's one of the most talented people I've ever known."

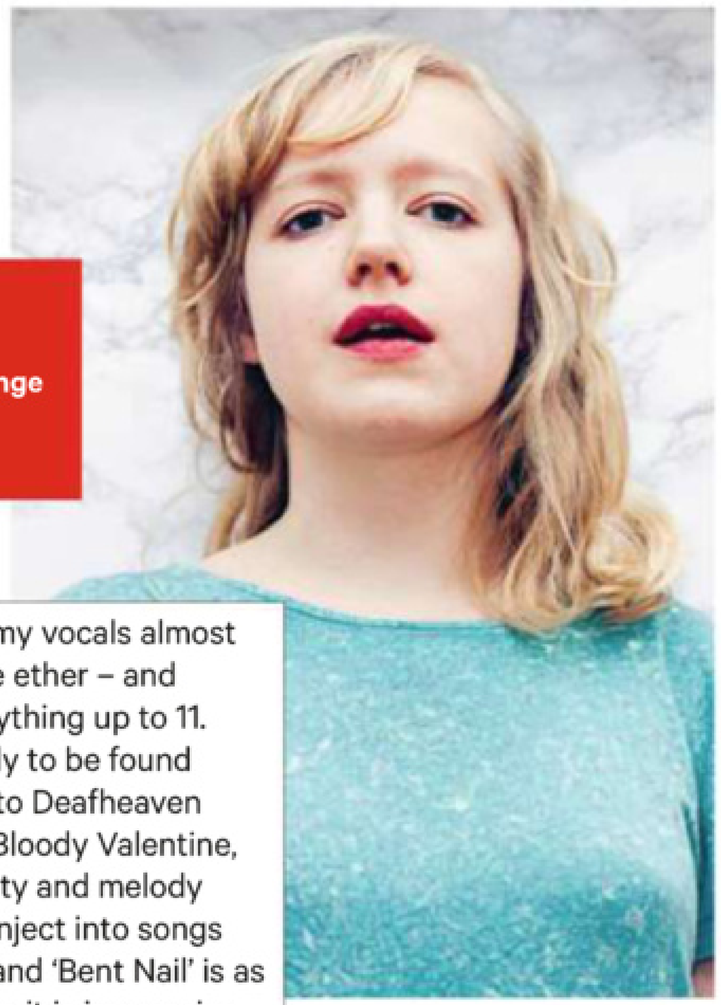
KALEB MARSHALL, GUY EPPEL

storemags

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Radar

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Sea Change

Marshmallow Palace

With that name, you'd be forgiven for assuming the Leamington Spa troupe are purveyors of immediately dismissible saccharine twee. A Facebook description that simply reads "SHIT BAND/ NO FANZ" should allay that. Click play on a track that confusingly seems to be called both 'Cocktail' and 'Brody', however, and you'll find what they're really about: an exciting mix of Interpol-style vocals, brooding guitar lines and epic choruses.

▶SOCIAL facebook.com/marshmallowpalace

▶HEAR THEM soundcloud.com/marshmallow-palace

Ramona Flowers

The Bristol five-piece have been working with Lamb's Andy Barlow on their forthcoming debut album. Latest single 'Tokyo' sees the band take on a more visceral, groove-laden approach compared to previous material.

▶SOCIAL facebook.com/theramonaflowersmusic

▶HEAR THEM soundcloud.com/distillerrecords

Nothing

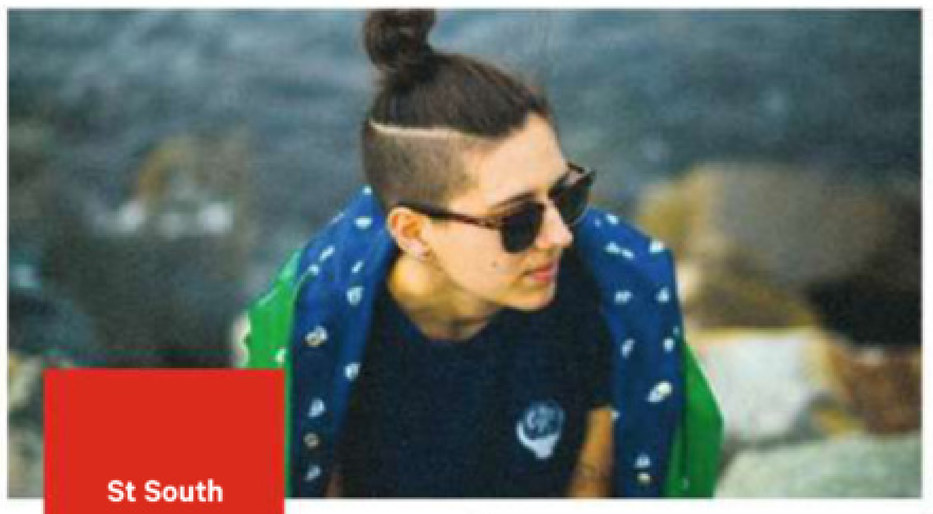
Philadelphia-based Nothing take the shoegaze template – droning pools of feedback and dreamy vocals almost lost in the ether – and turn everything up to 11. More likely to be found listening to Deafheaven than My Bloody Valentine, the ferocity and melody Nothing inject into songs like 'Dig' and 'Bent Nail' is as exciting as it is impressive. It promises huge things for the band's debut album 'Guilty Of Everything', due for release in March.

▶SOCIAL facebook.com/bandofnothing

▶HEAR THEM wearenothing.bandcamp.com

Shallow Sanction

This new London band take the sort of brutal, pogo-friendly street punk that skinheads bashed noggins to in the '80s and add an (un)healthy dose of goth. There are just two tracks online at present, but 'Shallow Sanction' and 'Ouroboros' pile on cobwebbed crust guitar and livid geezer vox to approximate the sensation of being roughed up by a gang of vampire thugs.



St South

Their debut release is due later this year on Hospital Productions.

▶SOCIAL facebook.com/shallowsanction

▶HEAR THEM shallowsanction.bandcamp.com

Chorus Grant

Kristian Finne Kristensen is the newest addition to Danish boutique indie Tambourhinoceros' stellar stable. He grinds his weird-pop melodic doodles into the gloomier recesses of Wild Beasts and the resulting pulpy goodness, 'O Everyone', is some of the most intoxicating Scandinavian downtempo we've heard in ages.

▶SOCIAL facebook.com/chorusgrant

▶HEAR HIM soundcloud.com/chorusgrant

PyPy

PyPy comprise Choyce from Red Mass/CPC Gangbangs and Annie-Claude Deschênes from Duchess Says. Their debut LP 'Pagan Day' jumps from wild walls of noise ('New York') to playground chants over scuzzy guitars ('She's Gone').

▶SOCIAL facebook.com/pages/pypy

▶HEAR THEM slovenly.bandcamp.com/album/pypy-pagan-day-lp

Radar NEWS ROUND UP

PLAYLOUNGE PILOT DEBUT

"All we ever wanted was to sound like south London band William," say noise-pop duo Playlounge of their debut album, 'Pilot'. The record finally arrives on April 14 via Dog Knights Productions, four years after the band formed. It follows recent support slots with No Age and Los Campesinos!.

GANG OF YOUTHS SIGN DEAL

Sydney's hotly tipped Springsteen-esque five-piece Gang Of Youths have inked a publishing deal with Universal. The band are finishing their debut album in New York with Kevin McMahon (The Walkmen). They make their UK live debut in April, supporting Manchester Orchestra.



Famy



Gang Of Youths

FAMY SADDLE UP FOR NEW EP

Famy have announced details of their debut EP, 'Donkey'. Released by Transgressive on March 10, it was recorded by Peel Sessions engineer Miti Adhikari. "He would begin a story like, 'Kurt was a quiet boy...'," say the London quartet. "It was a really special experience."

SUNDARA KARMA FIND HEAVEN

Reading's Sundara Karma follow in the footsteps of former touring buddies Swim Deep as the latest band to be snapped up by Chess Club. The quartet will release their debut single 'Cold Heaven' on the label on March 10 before playing The Great Escape and Dot To Dot in May.

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WORDS: MATT WILKINSON, DAVID RENSHAW, LISA WRIGHT, LOUIS PATTISON, DAN CARSON, NEIL WOOD, JAMES BALMONT PHOTOS: INGRID POP, GUY EPPEL, JULIE RAINVILLE



PyPy

Sea Change

What do you get if you cross Arthur Russell's visionary command over the now-humble loop pedal with the icy aestheticism of modern alchemists Blue Hawaii? Look no further than Berlin-via-Norway artist Sea Change for the answer. Ellen Sunde's latest fidgety slo-fi bubbler, 'Let's Dance', oozes ambient cool.

▶SOCIAL @seachangeartist
▶HEAR HER soundcloud.com/seachanger

Juleah

Austrian soloist Julia Hummer's "one-woman psychedelia" marks a beautiful midpoint between the wavering vocals and tender, spacious instrumentation of Mazzy Star, and the anthemic drive of Ride. Delicate guitar arpeggios meet earthy percussion in slow, colourful conversation on recent EP 'Entangled And Entwined'.

▶SOCIAL facebook.com/juleahmusic
▶HEAR HER juleah.bandcamp.com

Låpsley

Aged just 17 and with a nonchalant vocal delivery, it's little surprise that Holly Fletcher has drawn comparisons to Lorde. However, there's enough in her material online to suggest that the Liverpool-based singer has her own distinctive sound. 'Station' is her best song: a minimal ballad so gossamer-thin you won't realise it's there until it's broken your heart.

▶SOCIAL facebook.com/lapsleymusic
▶HEAR HER soundcloud.com/hollylapsleyfletcher

St South

Aussie vocalist/producer Olivia Gavranich caught Bon Iver's eye back in 2012, and her mash-up 'We Washed Texas' subsequently wound up on Jagjaguwar's 'Stems Project' compilation. At first, her own compositions seem like fragile little ditties, but her solemnly sweet wordplay on 'Slacks' ("*I'm not yours, I'm mine*") hits home like one of Waxahatchee singer Katie Crutchfield's brutal, honest knees to the gut.

▶SOCIAL @st_south
▶HEAR HER stsouth.bandcamp.com

Mangelwurzel

Mangelwurzel (pronounced mangel-vurst-shell) describe themselves as flamenco punk, alternative calypso and doo-wop grunge. The Melbourne seven-piece aren't kidding, either. EPs like last month's 'Dead Pets' are a mish-mash of influences jumbled up into something completely new.

▶SOCIAL facebook.com/mangelwurzelband
▶HEAR THEM thisismangelwurzel.bandcamp.com

Radar LABEL OF THE WEEK

Carpark

▶FOUNDED 1999 by Todd Hyman
▶BASED Washington DC
▶KEY RELEASES **Beach House** – 'Devotion' (2008), **Popstrangers** – 'Antipodes' (2013), **Speedy Ortiz** – 'Major Arcana' (2013)
▶RADAR SAYS Carpark started in NYC when Todd was DJing experimental electronic muic, first signing IDM artist Jake Mandell. Since then, the label has moved to Washington DC and evolved, putting out Toro Y Moi's chillwave and Speedy Ortiz' lo-fi guitar fuzz.

NEW SOUNDS FROM WAY OUT

Radar
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This week's columnist
HUW STEPHENS



HUW UNLIMITED

At M For Montreal recently I saw so much great Canadian music. **Dead Obies** (above) rap in French and English, and cross the line between backpack and bling in perfect measure; they're proper feisty onstage and really exciting to watch. **Andy Shauf**'s acoustic songs made me think of the late Elliott Smith's beautiful music in that they sound intricate and ghostly. And **Royal Canoe**, who come from Montreal, make big shining indie pop that I really love. It's kind of like the early Flaming Lips records.

I went to see **The People The Poet** playing recently supporting Blitz Kids. They're from Pontypridd, and they have huge, soaring songs full of heart and hunger, each one telling a story that's highlighted within their nicely packaged debut album 'The Narrator'. They're also supporting Deaf Havana soon.

I woke up with **Longfellow**'s debut single on legendary indie label Fierce Panda stuck in my head the other day. It's called 'Siamese Lover' and it has a huge chorus – I can't recommend it highly enough. They've got it right onstage too, and seem to be relishing every moment.



I'm booking the Lake Stage at Latitude Festival again this summer, so I've been working on that recently, as well as starting to plan the next Sŵn Festival in Cardiff in October. Also, I'm hosting a showcase at South By South West in Austin, Texas in March, with Jungle headlining and Bipolar Sunshine, Slaves, Sweet Baboo and **East India Youth** all playing. It should be great, and I've got to say that I've been particularly enjoying the latter's album recently, along with **Arthur Beatrice**'s brilliant debut. Those two are both confident, beautiful collections of songs by artists who sound masterful and honest. In contrast, the **Big Ups** album on Tough Love is an abrasive, in-your-face record that I put on in the mornings. I love it. The most surprising record I've heard this year, though, is **Bryce Hackford**'s debut on the new Prah label. It's weird, squelchy techno that reminds me of Daft Punk's classic debut, 'Homework', and Erol Alkan has been spinning it recently too.

"The Big Ups album is abrasive and in-your-face"

Finally, the most impressive single I've heard recently is by **Nanook Of The North**. On 'Panda Eyes' they sound accomplished, warm and beautiful.

Next week: Jagwar Ma

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Reviews



Wild Beasts Present Tense

For album number four, the Kendal band turn to the modern world and find their own unique inspiration and beauty



Wild Beasts have always been fantasists: four young men from Kendal who, finding the humdrum world around them wanting, escaped through the back of their wardrobes to explore other universes. Their 2008 debut 'Limbo, Panto' invented its own playground of dandyish guitar-pop, while 2009's 'Two Dancers' upped the ante with its paeans to caddish courting and knee-tremblers down back alleys. And 2011's 'Smother' saw them replaying memory tapes of lost loves, endlessly self-flagellating and cut off from reality.

Real life, though, can't be ignored forever. With 'Present Tense', Wild Beasts have waved in the modern world for the first time. Tom Fleming has spoken of how, this time round, they worked less in isolation, spending studio sessions flicking through YouTube videos or chuckling at dog memes, welcoming in some 21st-century noise. The result is an LP that feels more in sync with contemporary music than ever before. There are notes here of Oneohtrix Point Never, Clams Casino and Tim Hecker. Crucially, though, 'Present Tense' roams a landscape that couldn't have been charted by anyone else.

You'll have heard 'Wanderlust' by now, an electro tumble that turns the draggy synths of 'Smother' decadent and gothic. "*We'll feel things they'll never feel*", croons Hayden Thorpe. This, of course, is a band who could find crumbs of romance in the dullest forest. But Thorpe's lyrics are tinged with a sense of modern strife, too, a rejoinder to the haves from the have-nots: "*They're solemn in their wealth/We're high in our poverty*".

It's not the record's only insurrectionary stirring. Wild Beasts would never deign to do something so crude as a state-of-nation address, but the sinister 'Daughters', all sparse percussion and moody synths, finds Tom

ILLUSTRATION: JIMMY TURRELL

Storemags

Fleming threatening bloody revolution; a devilish fantasy of "*pretty children sharpening their blades*", plotting a violent uprising against the selfish old guard.

But there's no need to rely purely on polemics when you can channel inspiration from the world's most unlikely sources. 'A Dog's Life' details the final breaths of a faithful canine with stinging, sorrowful guitar. 'Nature Boy', meanwhile, was inspired by watching WWE wrestling, but rather than spandex-clad pantomime, it feels leeringly unpleasant, Tom growling: "*I'm the thing you fenced in/I'm 10 men*". Dying dogs and oiled-up beefcakes: who else could mine gold from such oddball subject matter?

There have been other changes since 'Smother'. The delicate flourishes and loping grooves are gone, replaced by stranger, denser arrangements like the electronic fug of 'New Life' and sweet, nagging piano of 'Past Perfect'. There's a reason, too, why the band have joked that they're less obsessed with "fucking" now. Before, Hayden sounded like a weary glutton, tired of feasting on flesh. Here, he is rejuvenated on the swirling dancefloor shimmer of 'Mecca' with its staccato beats and saucy come-ons.

If it's possible to distil all that's great about 'Present Tense' into just one song, though, it's 'A Simple Beautiful Truth'. Their most straightforward pop moment ever, it could double as a mission statement: a snake-hipped reboot of early Talk Talk with glossy synths and Hayden singing, "*There's a beauty out there/You just gotta know where*". That's Wild Beasts' mantra – finding treasure where others wouldn't think of treading. This time, though, they've widened their search, rooted around in the present and found something unbelievably precious. ■ BEN HEWITT

9

'PRESENT TENSE': LYRIC ANALYSIS

"A little fun for me, and none for you" ('Nature Boy')

Lifted from an interview with grappler Jake 'The Snake' Roberts, a sinister wrestler who used to bring a python to the ring. 'Nature Boy', meanwhile, is the nickname of celebrated wrestler Ric Flair.

"In your mother tongue, what's the verb 'to suck'?" ('Wanderlust')

A swipe at the legion of British bands enamoured with aping their US counterparts: a wordier, waspier take on Arctic Monkeys' 'Fake Tales Of San Francisco', perhaps?

"Just a little girl, and Jesus was a woman" ('Daughters')

A violent rebellion reimagines Christ as a vengeful female: "I always thought that story made a lot more sense with a woman cast in that role, the bottom of the pile," says Tom Fleming. "She's treated terribly, and then this woman takes her revenge."

▶THE DETAILS

▶**RELEASE DATE** February 24 ▶**LABEL** Domino ▶**PRODUCERS** Wild Beasts, Lexxx, Leo Abrahams ▶**LENGTH** 40:59 ▶**TRACKLISTING** ▶1. Wanderlust ▶2. Nature Boy ▶3. Mecca ▶4. Sweet Spot ▶5. Daughters ▶6. Pregnant Pause ▶7. A Simple Beautiful Truth ▶8. A Dog's Life ▶9. Past Perfect ▶10. New Life ▶11. Palace ▶**BEST TRACK** A Simple Beautiful Truth

MORE ALBUMS

Sub Luna City
City Rivims Mk 1
Self-released



On which Archy Marshall replaces his King Krule moniker with the friendlier Edgar The Beatmaker, and hooks up with producer Black Mack and rappers Rago Foot and Jadasea to create a ludicrously chilled exploration of experimental jazz. 'City Rivims Mk 1', the debut mixtape by Marshall's new group Sub Luna City, is reminiscent of Flying Lotus, Madlib or J Dilla's ways with dusty vinyl hisses, twinkly bleeps and warped samples (most notable: Nas' 'The World Is Yours' on 'So Many Wings'). Above this, we hear raps about Jimmy Savile and the banking crisis ('Salamanders Passage'), and the rigours of life in the big smoke ('Cc'). These are the thoughts and sounds of raw south London talent. ■ TOM HOWARD

8

The Jezabels
The Brink Play It Again Sam



Sydney four-piece The Jezabels are big news back home in Oz. Their 2011 debut album 'Prisoner' went to Number Two, then scooped their equivalent of the Mercury, the Australian Music Prize. 'The Brink' seeks to capitalise on the momentum. Songs like 'Angels Of Fire' and 'The End' take the gloomy stadium feel of early-'80s Depeche Mode and The Cure, and combine it with the epic indie of UK bands like Bloc Party and Editors. The result is an album that sounds deeply contrived. A clear attempt to create music hardwired for heartland American FM radio, 'The Brink' brings hooks, but rings dated, cold and cynical. Lead single 'Look Of Love', meanwhile, even manages to mention a "*pick-up truck*", for fuck's sake. ■ PHIL HEBBLETHWAITE

3



Grouplove
Spreading Rumours

The college-pop crew get an electro party going on their second album

If you've ever pondered, 'What would Arcade Fire have sounded like if no-one had ever died?', time to get acquainted with Grouplove. Such is their dedication to upbeat party-starting, this LA college-pop band has even gone electro for album number two. Luckily, no amount of squelchy beats and dubstep bass can suppress their effervescent sense of melody: see the likes of 'Shark Attack' and 'I'm With You', which find Christian Zucconi bawling like the lovechild of Jack White and Conor Oberst while Hannah Hooper adds the adorable angel harmonies. 'Hippy Hill' is joyous folk-pop but it's not long before the Californian campfire is crushed beneath a rampaging juggernaut of Skrillex whoomps. "*I'd rather be a hippy than a hipster*", Zucconi declares. Sounds like they've actually achieved the perfect marriage. ■ MARK BEAUMONT



8

▶THE DETAILS

▶**RELEASE DATE** February 17 ▶**LABEL** Canvasback ▶**PRODUCER** Ryan Rabin ▶**LENGTH** 50:16 ▶**TRACKLISTING** ▶1. I'm With You ▶2. Borderlines And Aliens ▶3. School Boy ▶4. Ways To Go ▶5. Shark Attack ▶6. Sit Still ▶7. Hippy Hill ▶8. What I Know ▶9. Didn't Have To Go ▶10. Bitin' The Bullet ▶11. News To Me ▶12. Raspberry ▶13. Save The Party ▶**BEST TRACK** I'm With You

Lorelle Meets The Obsolete
Chambers Sonic Cathedral



The sturdy Mexican psych duo's third album is a feast of big bastard riffs, peyote-infused beats and marvellously unsettling vocals, courtesy of frontwoman Lorena Quintanilla. Their heavy, mescaline melodies are as groovy as they are intense, like MBV covering the best of '60s Dutch electric-folk outfit Shocking Blue. Brassy guitars start thundering on opener 'What's Holding You?' and rarely let up throughout the following nine tracks. Best is 'Music For Dozens', a time-warped sonic swirl lifted from the mixing desk of swinging London's acid-mandatory, clothing-optional disco UFO. Temptingly trippy. ■ LEONIE COOPER

7

Nina Nesbitt
Peroxide Island



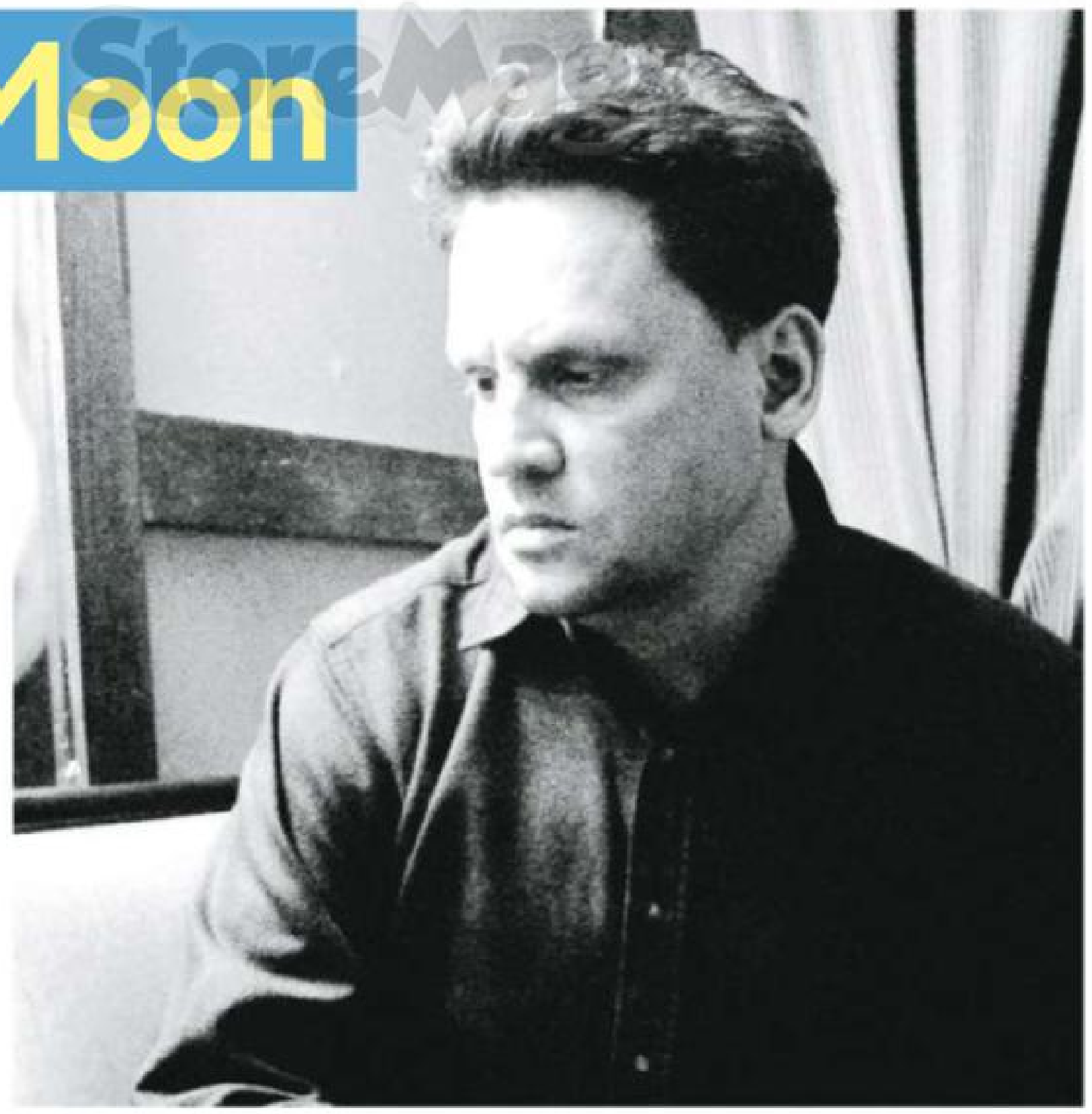
The debut album from half-Scottish, half-Swedish songwriter Nina Nesbitt is pop so sugary it'll rot your teeth. Cutesy keyboards, AOR acoustic guitars and syrupy lyrics about "*going crazy but I don't give a fuss!*" ('He's The One I'm Bringing Back') make 'Peroxide' pretty much everything you'd expect from a singer-songwriter discovered by Ed Sheeran and whose big break came when she Disneyfied a Fleetwood Mac song for a John Lewis advert. 'Two Worlds Away' aims for the heart-fluttering pop of Taylor Swift but lacks the Tennessee charmer's wit, while the bouncy 'Selfies' sees Nesbitt try to win back an estranged lover by finding the perfect Instragram filter. Steer clear. ■ AL HORNER **3**

Guided By Voices
Motivational Jumpsuit
Fire



For all the booze-soaked turmoil they've weathered since starting as an Ohio bar band more than 30 years ago, Guided By Voices have never really lost their following. 'Motivational Jumpsuit' arrives nine months after its predecessor – a work rate matching their early-'90s era of high-cultness – and teems with sub-two-minute songs that jangle Anglocentrically and have garage production values. In other words, a GBV record that sounds like most GBV records. A rut? Sure, but a rut that churns out nuggets of golden songwriting like opener 'The Littlest League Possible' and bozo punk strut 'Zero Elasticity'. Plus oodles of less memorable lo-fi mumbles, but those are a GBV standard too. ■ NOEL GARDNER **7**

Sun Kil Moon
Benji



Death, envy and serial killers make magical material for the prolific ex-Red House Painter

Can old dogs learn new tricks? 'Benji' is Mark Kozelek's sixth album under the Sun Kil Moon moniker, or his 12th if you include the Red House Painters records they follow – and that's not counting two collaborative albums last year. With such a prodigious work rate, a man could be forgiven for losing his edge.

Kozelek's songs match a mordant sensibility with a wry wit that remains unblunted by the passage of time. The sprawling 'Among The Leaves' from 2012 saw him playfully subverting the album format with a 17-track opus that included one song with an 18-word title. This time round, the humour is more subtle but the observations on life – and increasingly death – are no less keen. Kozelek has a novelist's eye for detail, and right from languid opener 'Carissa' – a song about his second cousin – he paints a vivid world and invites you to see it through his eyes.



The ideas come so thick and fast that Kozelek has to speed up his delivery for songs like 'Richard Ramirez Died Today Of Natural Causes', a claustrophobic meditation on the death of the serial killer known as the Night Stalker that recalls Modest Mouse at their darkest.

Mortality haunts the record, particularly on highlight 'Micheline', where Kozelek is joined by Jen Wood, who you may remember from The Postal Service's 'Nothing Better'. It's a tale about loss, including the death of his grandmother, that is beautiful in its raw honesty. Closer 'Ben's My Friend' is just as candid, but sees Kozelek turning his gaze to artistic rivalry and his old pal Ben Gibbard, who he goes to see perform with The Postal Service. As he watches him "*busting moves*" to "*a crowd of 8,000*" at the Greek Theatre, he considers the divergent paths their careers have taken. On this evidence, Kozelek has nothing to be jealous of. 'Benji' is as magical as an old dog suddenly performing card tricks. It might not get him a gig at the Greek, but if you're looking for the truth, you've come to the right place. ■ KEVIN EG PERRY **8**

▶THE DETAILS

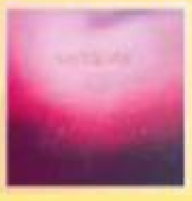
▶**RELEASE DATE** February 11 ▶**LABEL** Caldo Verde ▶**PRODUCER** Mark Kozelek ▶**LENGTH** 61:57 ▶**TRACKLISTING** ▶1. Carissa ▶2. I Can't Live Without My Mother's Love ▶3. Truck Driver ▶4. Dogs ▶5. Pray For Newtown ▶6. Jim Wise ▶7. I Love My Dad ▶8. I Watched The Film The Song Remains The Same ▶9. Richard Ramirez Died Today Of Natural Causes ▶10. Micheline ▶11. Ben's My Friend ▶**BEST TRACK** Micheline

Com Truise
Wave 1 EP
Ghostly International



There's plenty of sci-fi-styled synth about at the moment – big, billowing soundtrack-style music that pairs euphoric electronic washes and '80s drums. New Jersey producer Seth Haley, who goes by the alter ego Com Truise, has distinguished himself from the pack with a jittery sense of experimentalism, his debut album 'Galactic Melt' taking nu-disco sounds and investing them with keen IDM smarts. Sadly, 'Wave 1' is a more disjointed listen. VHS-quality dubstep ('Mind') collides with robo-pop ballads ('Declination'), but Haley's lush synth washes are all too often interrupted by flickering glitches and abrasive drum-claps, and the one thing that does seem truly alien to this record is a steady groove. ■ KATE HUTCHINSON **6**

Shocking Pinks
Guilt Mirrors Stars & Letters



The lo-fi guitar music of Nick Harte's Shocking Pinks is standard fare for his former label, New Zealand's Flying Nun, but towards the end of the '00s he was also the golden boy of the DFA roster, and there are signs of that here: 'Love Projection' rides a skittery beat, like krautrock with the jitters. After seven years away, Harte has released a triple album as his comeback – a bold move, but somewhat unwise. There is a condensed version that fits on one LP, but even in abbreviated form it sounds patchy: the syrupy '80s keyboards of 'Motel' a particular low point, and elsewhere promising grooves are obscured by bleak layers of reverb. Deerhunter can pull this stuff off, but in Harte's hands it's unwelcoming, like incidental music for an uneventful film. ■ THOM GIBBS **6**



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Reviews

Various Artists
Acid Arab LP Versatile

Thought the techno/Middle Eastern crossover was strictly limited to Omar Souleyman? Think again, thanks to this improbably excellent album from Paris label Versatile. Souleyman does feature, remixed by Tigersushi's Crackboy, but for once his thunderous dabke style doesn't stick out like a funk-ridden sore thumb. Instead, this album proves conclusively that the signature acid sound of the TB-303 synthesizer fits brilliantly with the emotional drama and layered rhythms of North African and Middle Eastern folk music. Neither dominates entirely but the intense, 3am-in-a-basement feel of most of the songs means they'll sound more at home at Fabric than Womad. An unlikely but vital triumph.

8

■ BEN CARDEW

Gorgeous Bully
Nobody Hates You As Much As You Hate Yourself EP Art Is Hard



Thomas Crang comes from Plymouth, which may explain why his output as Gorgeous Bully features both the shimmering surf-guitar jangle you'd associate with the south-west and the jaded lyrics that spring from growing up in an uneventful English city. 'Nobody Hates You...' is part chipper guitar lines ('Couldn't Keep It To Myself') and part lo-fi slacker charm ('Sixty Bore') strung together by lines about getting "*that sinking feeling*" and being content to sit in front of the TV all day alone. 'Habit And Fear' is a largely bittersweet acoustic lament, while the title track is about the chirpiest ode to self-loathing you're likely to hear for a while. Cynical? Sure. But cynicism seldom sounded this sweet.

7

■ LISA WRIGHT

Death Vessel
Island Intervals Sub Pop

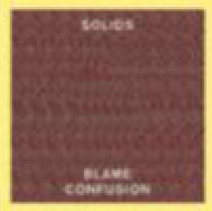


Joel Thibodeau is a rare talent. Not in the freakshow sense of his vocal register, which edges towards the castrato end of the scale, but in the all too literal one that's seen him go nearly six years without releasing a new album. In the interim, little appears to have changed in Thibodeau's world. His songs are still delicate, fragile things, relying more on meticulously maintained atmosphere than any sort of dynamism – 'Ilsa Drown', with vocals by Jónsi from Sigur Rós, and the dark, desolate churn of 'Ejecta' being cases in point. Unfortunately, not everything on 'Island Intervals' is quite as bewitching as that, but at its best this is an album capable of transporting you from the temporal to the ethereal.

7

■ BARRY NICOLSON

Solids
Blame Confusion
Fat Possum



Fuzz-pop duo Solids wear their slacker influences with pride: look no further than the Magic Eye image on the sleeve – an optical illusion that sent stoners wonky-eyed back in the '90s. On 'Blame Confusion', the Montreal band take their cues from the melodic grunge of Superchunk with a side order of Rival Schools' hardcore thrills. Xavier Germain-Poitras lays down sheets of fizzing guitar chords over Louis Guillemette's rumbling drums, his lyrics recycling familiar Gen X worries. Standouts include pulse-quickening opener 'Over The Sirens' and the Foos-esque 'Cold Hands', and while they basically only do one thing, Solids push their sound hard and fast enough to stave off any sense of repetition.

7

■ STUART HUGGETT

BOOK

Words Will Break Cement: The Passion Of Pussy Riot by Masha Gessen



Forensic examination of the Russian punks' battle against the state

In February 2012, Pussy Riot caught the world media's attention with an explosion of smoke bombs, DayGlo balaclavas and raucous punk chords, unleashing their potty-mouthed protest music in Moscow's most hallowed cathedral. *Words Will Break Cement* is not the first book dedicated to the trio who found themselves jailed for their protest targeting the autocratic Russian president Vladmir Putin. But where 2013's fundraising tome *Let's Start A Pussy Riot* featured a slew of celebrity contributions, *Words...* is the diligent work of one woman: Russian-American journalist and primo Putin critic Masha Gessen.

Through a bricolage of first-hand reporting, prison snail mail and IRL interviews with the trio and their immediate families, Gessen traces the ascent of Pussy Riot in full, from their roots in art protest group Voina (War) to the collective's feminist beginnings during Russia's so-called Snow Revolution in 2011. Gessen also documents the incarcerated trio's respective origins: Nadya Tolokonnikova, the straight-A student and young Voina upstart; Kat Samutsevich, the disenfranchised engineer turned Voina member; Maria Alyokhina, the long-haired eco-activist hippy.



▶**PUBLICATION DATE** Out now
▶**PUBLISHER** Granta

Gessen is an adroit and at times unforgiving profiler, with a sharp eye for the character flaws of the comrades, lawyers and family members who orbit the trio; and she critiques the Pussy Riot court battle, which she attended in person, with the same efficiency. Save for the dark farce of the trial, there are predictably few laughs here, and Gessen's commitment to detailing the soul-crushing corruption at work in the courtroom borders on unbearable. The women's sentences in Soviet-style gulags are also painstakingly documented: 17-hour work shifts, sweatshop conditions in sub-zero temperatures, washrooms flooded with faeces, punitive gynaecological exams, psychological warfare meted out by corrupt officials, hunger strikes.

But come the end, what resounds in *Words...* is a story of endurance, resistance and survival. Gessen is concerned not so much with hero-worshipping her protagonists as contextualising their achievements. This is essential reading for anyone interested in understanding the women behind the balaclavas: it's the story of young punk feminists who took on Russia's macho despot, and triumphed.

8

■ CHARLOTTE RICHARDSON ANDREWS

GETTY

Angel Olsen
Burn Your Fire For No Witness



Singer turns emotional pain into a positive on her second album

Angel Olsen is only just releasing her second full-length album, but the Missouri-born guitarist already has a fully formed personal philosophy: "*No-one will ever be you for yourself*", she sang gravely on 'The Sky Opened Up', from 2012's largely acoustic 'Half Way Home'. Released on tiny North Carolina indie Bathetic, the album's word-of-mouth success led to a (comparatively) bigger deal with Jagjaguwar, who are putting out this record.

The album's title is a bold, almost biblical statement, and the 11 songs within put the 27-year-old's worldview in no uncertain terms: she's indifferent to the attentions of others and steadfastly committed to honouring her own intentions and experience. That perhaps makes it sound like Savages' unwavering manifesto, but Olsen's approach is rounded by human fallibility.

With Olsen's Weimar cabaret-worthy voice and gently woven guitar, 'Halfway Home' could have passed for a long-lost classic from an age before electric recordings, sounding haunted by ghosts. 'Burn...' is her first album recorded with a full band, though the resulting fuzzy glam swagger doesn't forsake her wise style, instead coming off like Bill Callahan covering T Rex. Hiring John Congleton to produce was the perfect choice: as evinced on his work with Callahan and St Vincent, he has no signature sound beyond pristine, crisp recording, preserving the purity of Olsen's vision.

Her newfound musical directness translates into the songwriting: much of 'Burn...' exists in the aftermath of various betrayals, which Olsen confronts swiftly and cuttingly. On seething opener 'Unfuckthe world', she raises a glass brimming with sarcasm to "*thinking that it all meant so much more*"; finally snapping on 'Stars', in which she's so furious she threatens to "*scream the stars out of the universe*" with all the verve of Maria Callas. But a few deep breaths later she realises the incident can be put to better use – to "*sing the stars into the universe*".

That's where the light gets into Olsen's work: beyond her gorgeous guitar, whether sawdust punk, reverb-laden slow dance or near-silent reverie, it's in the way she's been steeled by sorrow, a process of galvanising that never ends. It's tough, as the crushed 'White Fire' makes plain, but eventually you'll gather the strength to stare sadness in the face and laugh: the jaunty 'Hi-Five' is a comic paean to lost souls wallowing in self-pity.

To get to that point, "*all you need is one good thought strong in your mind*", she sings on 'Lights Out', a rallying country torch song. The sublime 'Burn...' is testament that Olsen's philosophy of self-belief pays off. ■ LAURA SNAPES

9



▶THE DETAILS

▶**RELEASE DATE** February 17 ▶**LABEL** Jagjaguwar ▶**PRODUCER** John Congleton ▶**LENGTH** 44:37 ▶**TRACKLISTING** ▶1. Unfuckthe world ▶2. Forgiven/Forgotten ▶3. Hi-Five ▶4. White Fire ▶5. High & Wild ▶6. Lights Out ▶7. Stars ▶8. Iota ▶9. Dance Slow Decades ▶10. Enemy ▶11. Windows ▶**BEST TRACK** Windows

Phantogram
Voices Republic



New York's Phantogram – aka the boy-girl partnership of Josh Carter and Sarah Barthel – specialise in a mix of spooked-out folk and synth-led R&B, a smart production hybrid that's seen the pair forge collaborations with open-minded rap acts such as Big Boi. This, the long-anticipated follow-up to 2009's 'Eyelid Movies', shoots for big-hearted romance, Carter assembling symphonic electronica that's grand enough to contain Barthel's mighty, melodramatic vocal. There is a sultry sort of menace to 'Black Out Days', with its Moog throbs and trip-hop percussion. But they can do straightforward, gorgeous pop, too – see how they out-Coldplay Coldplay on 'Fall In Love'. ■ JOHN CALVERT

7

The Eccentronic Research Council
Magpie Billy & The Egg That Yolked (A Study Of The Northern Ape In Love) Desolate Spools



Magpies bring bad luck – unless, as on the strange story that weaves through The ERC's second album, there are two: then comes joy. These northern analogue adventurers' 2012 album '1612 Underture' explored the history of the Pendle witches, hilariously narrated by actress Maxine Peake. It was no one-off curio; this comedy-horror concept album brings antique synthery and film-soundtrack nerdery to a tale of vengeful animal reincarnation, once more graced by Peake's delivery. From the villainous intrigue of 'Mind Yore Language' to the horror of 'Post Wake Estate Agent', it suggests The ERC have much joyous work left to do. ■ EMILY MACKAY

8

PLAY IT AGAIN

RECENTLY RATED IN NME

Cheatahs
Cheatahs
"Neatly avoids the old shoegazing pitfall of drowning weak melodies in oceans of shimmer. This is a gleaming pop wrecking ball taken to the sonic cathedral." (*NME*, February 8) **8**

Katy B
Little Red
"Katy B does flirtatious, nocturnal adventure... [but] like maturity itself, 'Little Red' is a grower, a record about learning to dust off heartache." (*NME*, February 8) **7**

Marijuana Deathsquads
Oh My Sexy Lord
"Ricochets from glitchy electronica to feral noise-rock via lysergic ambience, resulting in a jumble of ideas that somehow hangs together coherently." (*NME*, January 25) **8**

Marissa Nadler
July
"Nadler sings of emotional distance and despondent car journeys; a balance between personal and universal. Guests lead Nadler's muse down unexplored avenues, making 'July' a career high." (*NME*, February 8) **8**

The Family Rain
Under The Volcano
"The simplicity that results from the relative cheapness of their set-up means songs resonate like early Supergrass or Charlatans records did. As indebted to the myths of rock'n'roll as all good dreamers should be in 2014." (*NME*, February 1) **7**

NME GIG OF THE WEEK

Childish Gambino

O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire London

February 4

The cult US sitcom star faces his sweaty masses

Donald Glover has made a career out of dry humour – the sharp laughs of *Community*, the cult US sitcom he stars in, spill out into his punchline-heavy hip-hop when he raps as Childish Gambino. Tonight, though, he barely cracks a smile as he rattles through tracks from last year's 'Because The Internet'. From the Neptunes-shaded soul of 'Shadows' to trap anthem 'Sweatpants', there's an authoritative air to Glover as his rhymes tumble. "*Now, nigga, that's a mixtape!*" he crows on 'Bonfire' (from 2011's 'Camp'), flaunting a musical manifesto that picks from both black and white traditions. "You wanna hear a freestyle?" he offers as the night draws to a close. "I dunno, I see some of you at the back on Facebook and Tinder." The resulting finale gets a resounding 'Like' from his sweaty, adoring masses.

AL HORNER

8

ANDY FORD

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NME awards SHOWS 2014 WITH austin TEXAS LIVE MUSIC CAPITAL OF THE WORLD



The night before Prince turned the same venue purple, the LA-based trio kept things black with their snarling rock'n'roll

Electric Ballroom, Camden, London
Monday, February 3

Black Rebel Motorcycle Club

Before he formed Black Rebel Motorcycle Club with bassist Robert Levon Been, guitarist Peter Hayes used to play in The Brian Jonestown Massacre, one of the most fucked-up, self-destructive bands to ever walk God's green earth. This cabal of degenerates used to promote themselves in the back pages of *NME* with missives bearing the legend: 'KEEP MUSIC EVIL'.

It's a maxim worth living by, and one you suspect Hayes has never forgotten. When Black Rebel Motorcycle Club are at their best tonight is when they're at their most evil: the bursts of snarling, menacing rock'n'roll that open and close their nearly two-hour set. Sadly, to pass between these twin peaks of brilliance requires enduring a sometimes arduous, mid-tempo slog.

WHEN BRMC ARE GOOD THEY'RE GOOD. WHEN THEY'RE EVIL THEY'RE BETTER

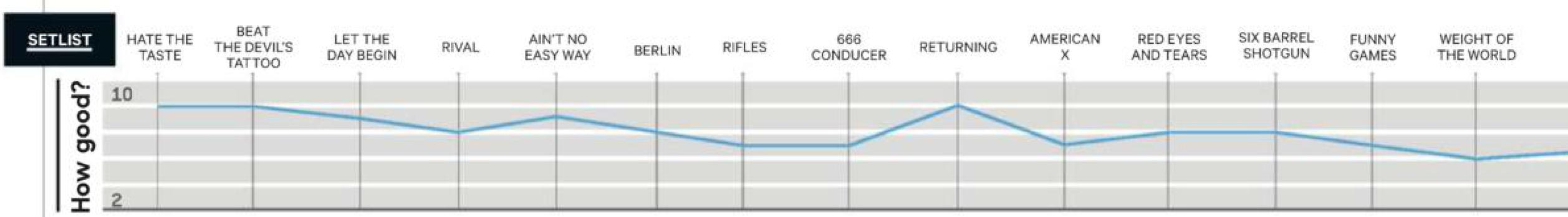
It all starts so well. On opener 'Hate The Taste', Hayes, Been and drummer Leah Shapiro look and sound like the platonic form of the rock trio: leather-clad men and women together on guitars, drums, bass making a righteous racket while the front third of a packed-out Electric Ballroom bounce in unison. We're all up for it. When Shapiro hammers out the rhythm to 'Beat The Devil's Tattoo', every head in the place nods in time.

On 'Let The Day Begin' – a cover of an '80s hit by The Call, a band featuring Been's late father Michael – they pay a fitting tribute to a man who was their friend and mentor. 'Rival' and 'Berlin' are both crowd-pleasers, while in between, the harmonica comes out for 'Ain't No Easy Way', a no good cowboy stomp that's as wicked and dirty as they come.

So far, so good. But after Been removes his hoodie and finally breaks the band's between-song silence to thank the crowd, things take a turn for the worse. Two downtempo songs, 'Rifles' and '666 Conducer', suck the energy from the room. Nobody's doing much bouncing now. Luckily, 'Returning' is a beautiful, stately song and one of the highlights of the band's most recent record, last year's 'Specter At The Feast'. That record made it clear they've found a second wind following the tragic death of Been the elder – but tonight they lose their way again.

A long, jammy extended outro to 'American X' is followed by mid-tempo oldie 'Red Eyes And Tears', and by now the show is badly in need of a kick up the arse. The Oasis-style swagger of 'Six Barrel Shotgun' briefly shakes them from their reverie – what would you give to hear Liam Gallagher wrap his chops

DEREK BREMNER, DAN KENDALL



around a line like "*Son, Sunday's sun never shone on me*"? – but by 'Funny Games' they're back into non-descript territory, and 'Weight Of The World' is the nadir, a knock-off of U2's 'One' which somehow makes you actually long for Bono, or at least for one of the many people now chatting at the back of the venue to say something interesting.

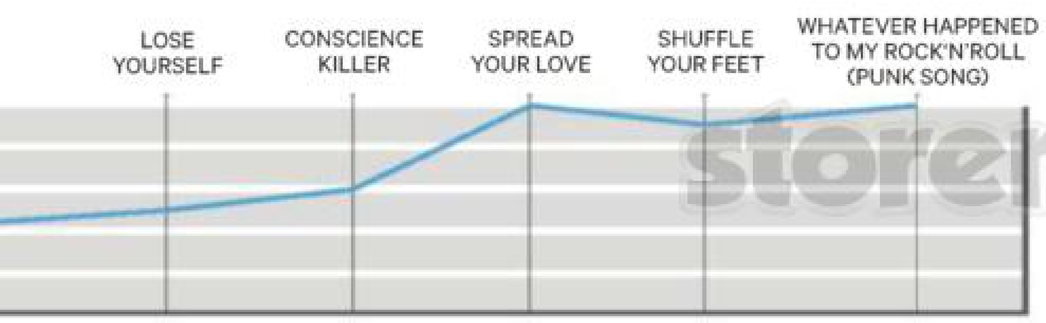
There's still time for the band to redeem themselves, and they do it in style. 'Conscience Killer' cranks the speedometer up a notch, and when the band announce: "We've got time for one more, yeah?" and then fly straight into 'Spread Your Love' it's as brilliant as live music can be: ecstatic and exhilarating and thrilling.

Coming back for their encore, they cheerfully announce that: "We're going to do an acoustic song now. We'd like you to be as quiet as possible." There's an audible sigh of disappointment at this – it's not what we're expecting after the rush of 'Spread Your Love' – but it turns out to be one of the show's best moments. Hayes and Been's duelling voices and acoustic guitars are swelled by the crowd singing and stamping their feet.

They close the show with all guns blazing. 'Whatever Happened To My Rock 'n' Roll (Punk Song)' still sounds fucking brilliant being blasted out at top volume over a decade since it was first released. A couple of great songs can forgive a multitude of dreary sins, so we're on a high as we're ejected into the bitter cold of the Camden night. They could do with a showing a ruthless streak and cutting at least half an hour from this set, but when Black Rebel Motorcycle club are good they're very good. When they're evil, they're better.

■ KEVIN EG PERRY

7



THE VIEW FROM THE CROWD



Chris, 22, Suffolk
"They were awesome. They put on a really good show. It was the first time I've seen them. I missed out last time I came to London. I loved the encore."



Joe, 23, London
"Amazing. This is the second time I've seen them after their show at Brixton Academy last year. They were unbelievable again, and tonight was a little bit more intimate. 'Spread Your Love' was great."



Ximena, 23, Mexico City
"It started fun but they kind of lost me by the middle. Everything sounded really similar. They got my attention again by the end but they could have shortened the set."

MORE GIGS

East India Youth
Sheffield Cathedral
Wednesday, January 29

On paper, 'Total Strife Forever', William Doyle's impressive debut album as East India Youth, suggests itself to be more of a headphone listen than a live spectacle. Not so. Set against the ornate backdrop of Sheffield's Cathedral, Doyle's one-man show – which finds him alternating between loops, keys and bass guitar – more than holds the attention, building from M83-ish album opener 'Glitter Recession' to a dizzying, and appropriate, peak on 'Heaven, How Long'. Some of the knob-twiddling interludes should be left on the record but finishing on 'Hinterland', given a punishing techno workout, we leave feeling much more Berlin Friday than Sheffield Wednesday: a triumph. ■ ROB WEBB

8

Brazil
The Lexington, London
Thursday, January 30

With just one song online, you could forgive Brazil for sounding like they're still finding their feet. But what surprises about this London quartet is just how promising they sound at this early stage. 'Hide Away', their lone reveal to the internet so far, is pure Arctic Monkeys, frontman Joshua Scarratt shrugging his leather-jacketed shoulders with an Alex Turner nonchalance while his bandmates rattle out a noirish rock'n'roll that wouldn't sound out of place on 'AM'. Later, 'Everytime' resembles the chirpy indie of Two Door Cinema Club with edges roughened. Right now, the stage presence might not quite match the tunes, but it shouldn't be long before people are citing Brazil as an influence themselves. ■ RHIAN DALY

8

Cymbals



London, Electrowerkz
Tuesday, February 4

Starting a jock-filled rabble of a party in north London on a rainy Tuesday night is no mean feat, but Jack Cleverly's gang manage it

Several minutes after the unassuming silhouettes of London quartet Cymbals have left the room, Electrowerkz' tiny black-box gig space suddenly turns from a standard midweek venue into an unexpected frat party, as a stream of American jocks clamber onto the stage, taking selfies, chanting for more and attempting to break into the backstage area. It's proof that Cymbals' indie-dance appeal is potentially transatlantic in its reach – although the band have likely spent their fair share of time trawling through DFA's writhing New York-disco back catalogue, their own output cribs more from a particularly British, Metronomy-indebted school of dancefloor-filling.

The band are launching current album 'The Age Of Fracture' tonight, and open with its first track, 'Winter '98', whose housey synths on record are buoyed live by more prominent guitar lines and singer Jack Cleverly's impassioned yelp. Recent single 'The Natural World', meanwhile, may be underpinned by dappled keyboard parts but is basically a huge pop banger straining at the bit to be let loose, while 'Erosion' and 'Like An Animal' combine a disco-influenced rhythm section with spiky indie guitar. They finish with the falsetto of 'Single Printed Name', which flaunts the influences of The Rapture and Pulp in an archly sexy strut fit for party-starting on both sides of the pond.

■ LISA WRIGHT

8

SETLIST

▶Winter '98
▶The Natural World
▶Good Luck
▶Candy Bar
▶Erosion
▶No Bad Decisions
▶Like An Animal
▶The End
▶Single Printed Name

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Phoenix



O2 Academy, Brixton, London
Wednesday, February 5

The French pop heroes deliver a synth-pop masterclass before a devoted London audience

"We are Phoenix – we come from Paris, France!" As if we didn't know. A pop band this poised can only be from the style capital of the world, but there's an abandon about Phoenix that has nothing to do with being Parisian – they've been building success in the big wide world too long for that and the crowd is ecstatic before they even play a note. Interrupting the cheers, this announcement is the most modest display of audience interaction from frontman Thomas Mars, who otherwise spends half the night perched at the edge of the crowd, the hands of his devoted fans reaching up to him.

Stalking onto the stage in the skinniest jeans imaginable, there's no restriction to the band's movement as they launch into opener 'Entertainment' from recent album 'Bankrupt!'. A vast red-lit backdrop silhouettes the band, but it's blown away by blinding white light for a jubilant chorus. Mars has a red microphone wire too, and he drapes it louchely over his shoulder for a pulverising 'Lasso', while behind him two drummers (touring members Robin Coudert and Thomas Hedlund) give it the kind of muscle not evident on the record. It's the perfect opportunity for Mars to make his first foray into the crowd, screaming into the front row's adoring faces.

The pitch stays this fervent throughout thanks to Phoenix's remarkable arsenal of beefed-up synth-pop gems – from 'Too Young' to 'If I Ever Feel Better'. Their riffs squat in your brain, their bridges shiver your spine and their choruses have the Brixton punters raising their hands like an ecstatic congregation. On 'Lisztomania', Mars hands singing duties over to them – and you can see the pride on his usually inscrutable visage as they chant along. A searing 'Long Distance Call' feels like a victory lap, with multi-instrumentalist Deck d'Arcy flipping manically between bass and keyboards, before it's followed by old *Lost In Translation* soundtrack favourite 'Too Young', segueing too soon into the delirious 'Girlfriend', which leaves strangers weeping and hugging.

THE CROWD IS ECSTATIC BEFORE THEY EVEN PLAY A NOTE

The atmosphere calms temporarily for 2004's 'Run Run Run', its mellow country bounce lulling the agitated crowd. But soon the mood changes entirely and Mars is screaming again over a squall of My Bloody Valentine guitars, making way for a 'Bankrupt!' medley of 'Trying To Be Cool', 'Drakkar Noir' and 'Chloroform'.

The mood is then ripe for a special live mash-up in the shape of 'Sunskrupt!' (an amalgam of 'Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix''s 'Love Like A Sunset' and 'Bankrupt!''s title track). It's clearly supposed to be an inspired invention, but it comes as no surprise to anyone who thought the two tracks sounded exactly the same anyway. A moment of darkness descends, then the spotlight falls on guitarists – and brothers – Laurent Brancowitz and Christian Mazzalai stood together. Brancowitz plays a bluesy solo as his sibling grins at him, Mazzalai adding one long sole note as he finishes.

The Strokes-like 'Consolation Prizes' leads the charge to the finish, before we're seen off with '1901', as again Mars stretches far into to the audience, handing mic duties over to them as he balances in the palms of their hands – physically and metaphorically – before they saunter offstage to huge applause.

Mars and Mazzalai creep back onto the stage for an encore, and for the first time the technicolour lightshow is dimmed. As Mazzalai strums some crystalline chords, the singer sits down on the stage and coos 'Countdown' – evidently taking a moment of reflection amidst the joyous din. It's followed by another tender moment. "We have something special for you," Mars says as Air's Nicolas Godin arrives to play some fragile electric piano tinkles on 'Playground Love', the song Mars (under the pseudonym Gordon Tracks) wrote with the duo for *The Virgin Suicides* soundtrack. The demure interlude makes way perfectly for one thrilling final blast as they round things off with a reprised excerpt of 'Entertainment'. A canny choice of track title, because that's exactly what they've given us.

8

MATTHEW HORTON

SETLIST

- ▸Entertainment
- ▸Lasso
- ▸Lisztomania
- ▸Long Distance Call
- ▸Too Young
- ▸Girlfriend
- ▸Run Run Run
- ▸Trying To Be Cool
- ▸Drakkar Noir
- ▸Chloroform
- ▸The Real Thing
- ▸Sunskrupt!
- ▸Consolation Prizes
- ▸SOS In Bel Air
- ▸Armistice
- ▸1901
- ▸Countdown
- ▸Playground Love (with Nicolas Godin of Air)
- ▸If I Ever Feel Better
- ▸Funky Squaredance
- ▸Rome
- ▸Entertainment (reprise)



THE VIEW FROM THE CROWD



Claire Biggar, London, 30
"It was like watching a band performing in your front room. They have that closeness because they've been together so long. I also appreciate that they played songs from all the albums. They weren't ego-picking, they were doing songs they knew the crowd would love."



Luke Anderson, Australia, 32
"They sounded amazing, really tight with high energy. They came out strongly with classics like 'Too Young' and 'Lisztomania', then saved a few for the end too. The other thing was the skinny jeans – I didn't realise they made jeans that skinny. That took it to a whole other level. And the really short guitar straps as well – any higher and they'd be playing with their chins."



Felipe Duarte, Columbia, 29
"Phoenix aren't big in Columbia but they're playing a festival there this year called Estereo Picnic, which should be good. I was impressed by the sound – they're very rhythmic and Thomas Mars is a very good front guy. In Columbia I'm in a big band called Soundacity, so if it works for you to say that I was here..."

JORDAN HUGHES, LAURA PALMER

MORE GIGS

Kins
The Prince Albert, Brighton
Sunday, February 2
Kins are getting used to goodbyes. Having decamped from the relaxed climes of Melbourne suburb Brighton for the UK's namesake equivalent, they've been quietly honing their chilled dreampop into something more striking. Tonight is their chance to say goodbye once again, this time before heading to the US to join fellow Aussie Courtney Barnett on tour. In a packed room, the sparseness of Kins' rhythm section brings a breath of fresh air. Frontman Thomas Savage's high voice drifts over the filigree guitar of 'Pale Faced Fear' and the woozy synth wash of recent single 'Aimless'. Tonight, Kins come out of their shell, and it's spellbinding.

7

■ STUART HUGGETT

Young Fathers
Deaf Institute, Manchester
Tuesday, February 4
Watching Scottish art-rap trio Young Fathers is more like seeing a play than a gig. They menacingly appear onstage dressed wearing trenchcoats, black leather jackets and earnest expressions. "You might not be interested in war, but war is interested in you," Alloysious Massaquoi declares in the monologue that preludes 'No Way'. And then sonic battle commences. Tribal percussion clatters like gunfire during 'Queen Is Dead' while the trio pile on the ferocity with their pugnacious moves. The tension heightens when the electronic barrage of 'Get Up' hits, yet they don't even break character. This lot are true dramatists.

8

■ SIMON BUTCHER

Pup



The Miller, London
Wednesday, February 5

Those that make it despite the London tube strike witness a stirring show from the Canadian pop-punk newcomers

Lady luck isn't on Pup's side tonight. Scuppered by a London Tube strike, the Toronto newcomers are playing to only half their expected crowd as they kick off their first ever UK tour. "We thought there'd be about three people tonight," deadpans tiny frontman Stefan Babcock. But it makes no difference. Having torn up CMJ in New York last October, they bounce on to the stage with more gusto than a screaming trader on Wall Street. "We're Pup from Canada," screeches Babock. "That's a fucking hell of a commute, so if you could scooch up down the front that'd be great."

Tonight's crowd don't take much persuading. Earlier in the night, Kent's Get Inuit kicked off the mayhem with their blend of melodic retro-surf pop, which roared from the speakers like a fuzzy Vampire Weekend. Then Leeds four-piece Brawlers took to the stage, as frontman Harry George tore about, smashing a pint glass, plucking a girl out of the crowd, and then dedicating 'I'm A Worthless Piece Of Shit' to the late cult actor Philip Seymour Hoffman.

They leave the audience riled and ready for Pup's vitriolic opening belter 'Guilt Trip' – from their 2013 self-titled debut album. From then it's a 40-minute barrage of 100-mile-an hour squalling pop-punk anthems. Babcock moshes and leaps from the speakers while guitarist Steve Sladkowski smashes through riff after riff.

Babock recently paid homage to much-missed songwriter Jay Reatard, who, he said, "fulfilled that romantic idea of rock'n'roll that people still like to believe in no matter how increasingly delusional it may be". Tonight, as a homage to Reatard, they blitzkrieg through his masterpiece 'My Shadow', screaming and yelping their way through the track with all the energy of the original.

It's a touching tribute, but the real stand-out anthems by the end of tonight's 10-song set are their own. A sweat-drenched rendition of 'Dark Days' tumbles into the roaring 'Lionheart' before they release broken love song 'Mabu'. Then it's straight into 'DVP', which sees Babock spitting water across the stage while bassist Nestor Chumak and Sladkowski bounce along approvingly.

"Thanks for braving the Tube strike," sneers Sladkowski as they close the roaring set. "Those that didn't make it are lazy motherfuckers." And they sure are. Tonight was more than worth being stuck on a nightbus for.

8

■ DAMIAN JONES

SETLIST

▶Guilt Trip
▶Back Against The Wall
▶Dark Days
▶Lionheart
▶Mabu
▶DVP
▶My Shadow
▶Yukon
▶Mule
▶Reservoir

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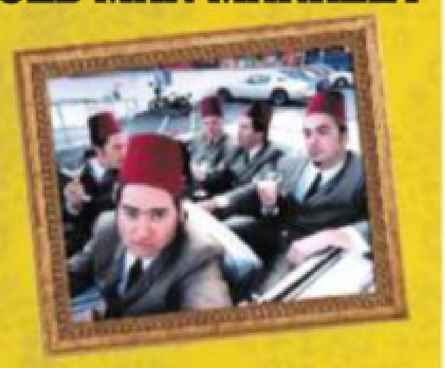
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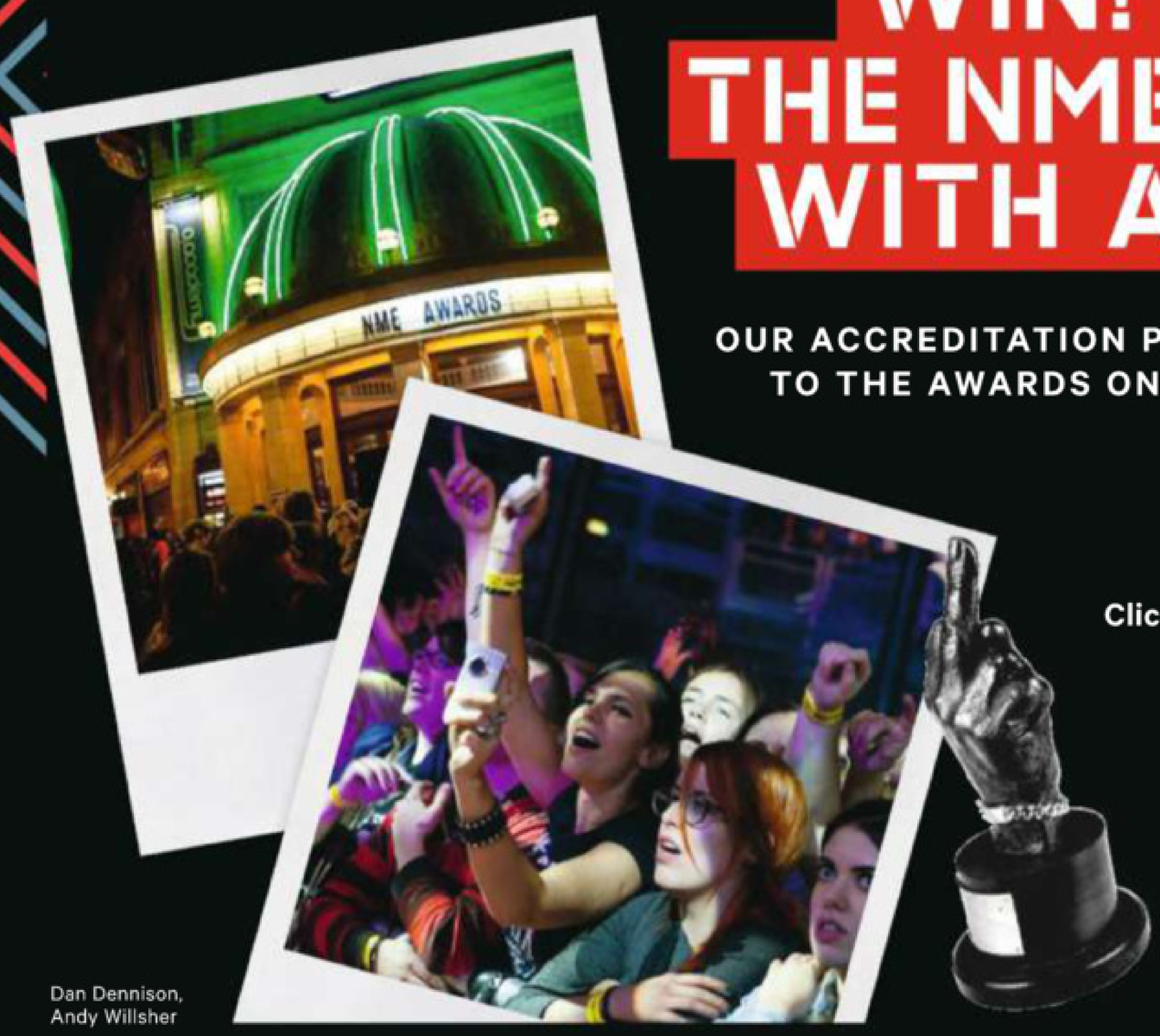
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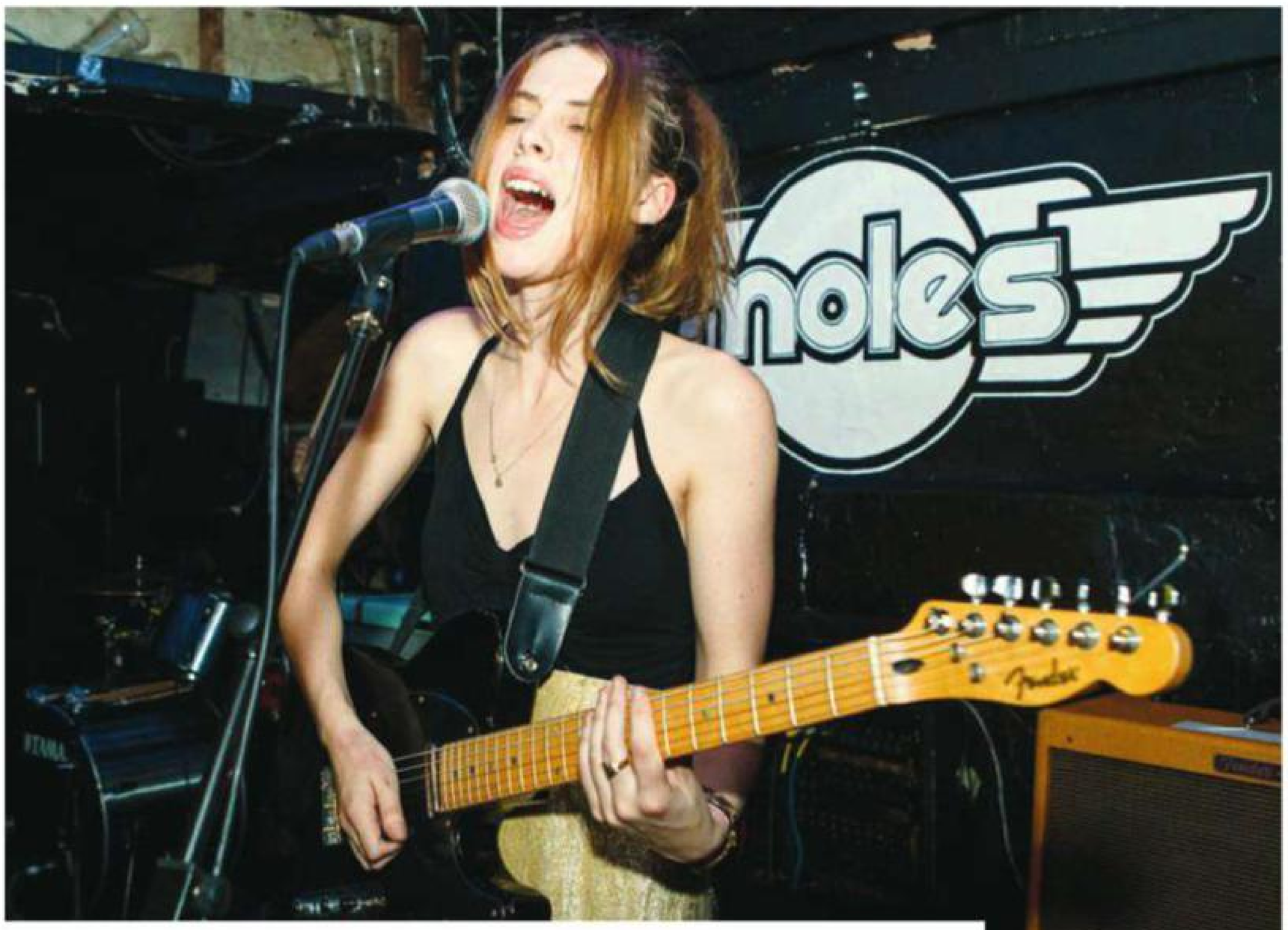
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Wolf Alice

The north London band are set to release their debut album later this year, but before that they'll preview the record on a UK tour, where they'll be joined by recent Radar stars Superfood.

How much of the album will you be playing on this tour?
Joel Amey, drummer: "We're going to be playing, I imagine, the album in its entirety. There's going to be a couple more songs that we're finishing off too. We're going to make an evening's worth of music."
How's the new stuff sounding?
"It's more epic. Not grunge, not just four chords – not that we're going prog or anything. We've taken what we've done over the past year and put it into new songs. I'm really excited for everyone to hear it."
Why have you invited Superfood on tour with you?
"I think they're probably the best new band in Britain. Hopefully people will get an evening of two breaking British bands. I really want to challenge Superfood every night and see who comes out on top. Maybe whoever doesn't do so well on the tour has to give up. I think that's the only fair way to do it and I think it'll probably be us that has to give up cos they're that good."

▶THE DETAILS

▶**DATES** Glasgow King Tut's Wah Wah Hut (May 1), Hull Fruit (5), Sheffield Leadmill 2 (6), Newcastle Think Tank (7), York The Duchess (8), Birmingham Temple (12), Oxford Academy 2 (13), Cambridge Portland Arms (14), Bedford Esquires (15), Guildford Boileroom (16), Leicester Cookie Jar (17), Portsmouth Wedgwood Rooms (18), Brighton The Haunt (20), Preston 53 Degrees (21), Stoke Sugarmill (22), Milton Keynes Crauford Arms (27), London Scala (28) ▶**SUPPORT ACTS** Superfood (except Birmingham, which is still tbc) ▶**PRICE** £8; London £10 ▶**ON SALE** now ▶**FROM** NME.COM/tickets with 80p-£1.35 booking fee; Guildford from theboileroom.net with booking fee TBC; Glasgow from ticketmaster.co.uk with £2 booking fee

Beacons

The Yorkshire festival returns for a third year with performances from Jon Hopkins, The Fall, Daughter, Eagulls, PINS, Girl Band, Menace Beach and Hookworms. DJ sets will come from the likes of Daniel Avery, Roman Flugel and Aartekt, with loads more acts to be announced.

▶**DATES** Skipton Funkirk Estate (August 7-10)
▶**OTHER ACTS** Melt Yourself Down, Sweet Baboo, Nightmares On Wax, Dixon, East India Youth, Money, Galaxians, Darkside
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Parklife

Snoop Dogg and Foals will headline the fourth Manchester weekender as it returns to Heaton Park. Disclosure will curate a stage, with Julio Bashmore and Pusha T amongst those on their invite list. Katy B, Kendrick Lamar, Jon Hopkins, Jamie xx and Danny Brown will also perform across the site.

▶**DATES** Manchester Heaton Park (June 7-8)
▶**OTHER ACTS** London Grammar, Sam Smith, Jessy Lanza, Joy Orbison, Skream, Cyril Hahn, Childhood
▶**PRICE** Weekend tickets £79.50; day tickets £49.50
▶**ON SALE** now
▶**FROM** NME.COM/tickets with £4.95-7.95 booking fee

Janelle Monáe

This will be the first chance for UK fans to catch Monáe playing songs from latest album 'The Electric Lady' live. She'll bring the story of robot Cindi Mayweather – the concept behind the

RICHARD JOHNSON, DAN DENNISON, JENN FIVE



Arcade Fire will headline Primavera 2014

album – to three cities this spring.

▶**DATES** Manchester Academy (May 7), Birmingham Institute (8), London O2 Academy Brixton (9)
▶**SUPPORT ACTS** TBC
▶**PRICE** £26.50; London £29.50
▶**ON SALE** now
▶**FROM** NME.COM/tickets with £2.65-2.95 booking fee

Pulled Apart By Horses

The Leeds quartet take a break from recording their third album to play intimate venues and unveil the new record.

▶**DATES** Aberdeen Tunnels (April 24), Dundee Beat Generator (25), Hartlepool Studio (26), Hull The Welly (27), Leicester The Musician (28), Oxford Art Bar (30), Norwich Epic Studios (May 1), Stoke Sugarmill (2) Cambridge Portland Arms (6), Aldershot West End Centre (7), Kingston McClusky's (8), Southampton Cellar (10), Exeter Cavern (12), Plymouth White Rabbits (13), Bath Moles (14), Cardiff The Globe (15)
▶**SUPPORT ACTS** The Wytches
▶**PRICE** £10; Kingston £7;
▶**ON SALE** now
▶**FROM** NME.COM/tickets with £1-1.50 booking fee; Aberdeen from synergyconcerts.com with £1 booking fee; Leicester, Cambridge and Aldershot from wegottickets.com with £1 booking fee; Kingston from banquetrecords.com with 50p booking fee; Bath from musicglue.com with £1 booking fee; Dundee from ticketweb.co.uk with £1.25 booking fee; Hull from hullboxoffice.co.uk with £1 booking fee

Primavera

Arcade Fire, Nine Inch Nails, Queens Of The Stone Age, The National, Pixies and Kendrick Lamar will all headline stages at this year's edition of the Spanish festival, with a spectacular list of bands making up the rest of the line-up.

▶**DATES** Barcelona Parc Del Forum (May 29-31)
▶**OTHER ACTS** SBTRKT, Cut Copy, Disclosure, Mogwai, Metronomy, Jagwar Ma, Blood Orange
▶**PRICE** 175 euros
▶**ON SALE** now
▶**FROM** NME.com/tickets with 8.75 euros booking fee

Pond

The Australian group follow slots at Primavera and Field Day with their own UK headline shows.

▶**DATES** Manchester The Ruby Lounge (June 9), London KOKO (10)
▶**SUPPORT ACTS** TBC
▶**PRICE** Manchester £11; London £12.50
▶**ON SALE** now
▶**FROM** NME.COM/tickets with £1.10-1.25 booking fee

King Khan & The Shrines

The flamboyant eight-piece garage-psych band return following the release of last year's 'Idle No More' LP. .

▶**DATES** Brighton The Haunt (April 17), Leeds Brudenell Social Club (18), Belfast The Black Box (20), Glasgow Broadcast (21), Manchester The Roadhouse (22), Liverpool Korova (23), London Scala (24)
▶**SUPPORT ACTS** TBC
▶**PRICE** £10; Glasgow £12.50; Manchester £11.50; London £13.50
▶**ON SALE** now
▶**FROM** NME.COM/tickets with £1-1.15 booking fee; Glasgow from ticketweb.co.uk with £1.50 booking fee; London from dashtickets.co.uk with £1.35 booking fee

Years & Years

Away from his day job as an actor who's appeared in *Skins* and *Enter The Void*, Years & Years' frontman Olly Alexander makes minimalist electronica with his two friends, Michael and Emre. They show off their batch of soulful songs at this one off date in the capital.

▶**DATES** London Oslo (March 5)
▶**SUPPORT ACTS** TBC
▶**PRICE** £6
▶**ON SALE** now
▶**FROM** gigsandtours.com with £1 booking fee

FESTIVAL NEWS



Reading & Leeds

Arctic Monkeys will headline this year's twin festivals, joining Blink-182 at the top of the bill. Warpaint, You Me At Six, Annie Mac, Royal Blood and Pusha T have also been confirmed to perform over the August bank holiday weekend. Tickets are still available, with weekend passes costing £202.50 from seetickets.co.uk.

Eindhoven Psych Lab

A new festival run by the folks behind Liverpool Psych Fest, Hookworms, Wooden Shjips and The Growlers are amongst those who'll play the inaugural event between June 6-7, with limited early bird tickets available now for £37.50 from seetickets.co.uk.

TOUR NEWS



Eyedress

Eyedress will follow up his NME Awards show with Austin, Texas at London's Sebright Arms on February 21 by supporting Jungle next month. Idris Vicuña will open for them at London's Village Underground on March 4.





GOING OUT

Everything worth leaving the house for this week

Parquet Courts

Parquet Courts' Austin Brown declared the band had "thawed" towards the UK in an interview last year. While their disdain for these shores might not have completely melted away just yet, expect them to be on thrilling form as they return for three dates playing from last year's 'Light Up Gold' LP.

▶**DATES** Brighton Concorde 2 (February 14), Manchester Academy (15), London Electric Ballroom (16) ▶**TICKETS** £13; London £15.60 from NME.COM/tickets with £1.30-£1.50 booking fee

The Wytches

The psychedelic three-piece take latest single 'Robe For Juda' out for another airing as they visit five venues this week.

▶**DATES** Northampton Labour Club (February 12), Liverpool Shipping Forecast (13), Hitchin Club 85 (14), Bedford Esquires (15), Cambridge Portland Arms (18)

▶**TICKETS** £6.50 from NME.COM/tickets with £1-£1.25 booking fee; Northampton £5; Hitchin £6 from wegottickets.com with 50p-60p booking fee

Circa Waves

The Liverpool indie-pop quartet kickstart their tour with two dates in Scotland.

▶**DATES** Aberdeen The Tunnels (February 12), Glasgow King Tut's Wah Wah Hut (13)

▶**TICKETS** Aberdeen £5 from NME.COM/tickets with 50p booking fee; Glasgow £7 from ticketmaster.co.uk with £2 booking fee

Royal Blood

Ben Thatcher and Mike Kerr warm up for the NME Awards Tour 2014 with Austin, Texas with this run of dates, in more intimate venues than those they'll be playing in March.

▶**DATES** Southampton The Cellar (February 13), Cardiff The Globe (14), Exeter Cavern (15), Leicester Musician (17), Norwich Waterfront Studio (18)

▶**TICKETS** £6; Leicester and Norwich £7 from NME.COM/tickets with 70p-£1.25 booking fee; Exeter sold out

Speedy Ortiz

The four-piece head to the UK for the very first time this week to promote new EP 'Real Hair'. Joanna Gruesome will join them on the road, with Bristol's Empty Pools taking over for London's NME Awards with Austin, Texas show.

▶**DATES** Birmingham Hare & Hounds (February 13), Leeds Brudenell Social Club (14), Glasgow Broadcast (15), Manchester Deaf Institute (16), London Birthdays (18)

▶**TICKETS** £7; London £9.10 from NME.COM/tickets with 70p-£1 booking fee; Leeds sold out; Glasgow £7 from ticketweb.co.uk with £1 booking fee

Fat White Family

New music's filthiest group leave their south London HQ to spread their scuzzy message around the country.

▶**DATES** Brighton The Hope (February 14), Bedford Esquires (15), Oxford Art Bar (16), Sheffield The Harley (17), Manchester Gullivers (18)

▶**TICKETS** £6.50 from NME.COM/tickets with 65p-£1 booking fee

Childhood

Fresh from releasing one of 2013's standout tracks in eight-minute psych wonder 'Pinballs', Childhood warm up for their NME Awards with Austin, Texas gig next week with a date by the

FIVE TO SEE FOR FREE

Thrills don't come cheaper than this

1. Bête Noire
The Waiting Room, London
Lively post-punk newcomers play debut single 'Shut Your Mouth'.
▶Feb 13, 7:30pm

2. Courtney Barnett
Rough Trade East, London
Tracks from 'The Double EP: A Sea Of Split Peas'.
▶Feb 15, 1pm

3. Cloud Control
Sixty Million Postcards, Bournemouth
Album 'Dream Cave' aired.
▶Feb 15, 6pm

4. Lovepark
Green Door Store, Brighton
Quartet bring sparse electronica to the seaside.
▶Feb 15, 7.30pm

5. Planning-torock
Rough Trade East, London
Jam Rostron plays tracks from 'All Love's Legal'.
▶Feb 17, 7pm



Cloud Control


Circa Waves

sea. Telegram join them.
▶**DATES** Brighton Bermuda Triangle (February 17)
▶**TICKETS** £7.50 from NME.COM/tickets with 75p booking fee

Toy

The east London psych group kick off their tour in support of second album 'Join The Dots'.
▶**DATES** Brighton The Old Market (February 18)
▶**TICKETS** £10 from NME.COM/tickets with £1.50 booking fee

Cheatahs

On their debut album, Wichita-signed Cheatahs take inspiration from grunge and shoegaze and come up with something deliciously hazy. See them recreate it live.
▶**DATES** London Birthdays (February 12), Sheffield The Harley (15), Brighton The Prince Albert (16), Glasgow Broadcast (18)
▶**TICKETS** London £9.60; Sheffield £6; Brighton £7 from NME.COM/tickets with £1-£1.25 booking fee; Glasgow £6 from ticketweb.co.uk with £1 booking fee

Galaxians

The Leeds dance duo bring their party tunes to four cities with futuristic disco group Bodybeat.
▶**DATES** Sheffield Audacious Art Experiment (February 14), Leeds Wharf Chambers (15), York The Basement (16), London Open School East (18)
▶**TICKETS** Sheffield and Leeds £5 on the door; London £3.50 on the door; York £5 from seetickets.co.uk with 50p booking fee

STEVE DYKES, ANDY HUGHES, JENN FIVE, REX


The Clash feature in the *London Calling* documentary

STAYING IN

The best music on TV, radio and online this week

London Calling

Sky Arts

This series explores Britain's contribution to pop music with fashion and art, and the Svengalis and kingmakers that pushed bands into the spotlight. This episode concentrates on art schools and their role in producing great bands such as The Clash, The Rolling Stones and Roxy Music, with contributions from Graham Coxon and Wire's Colin Newman.
▶**WATCH** Sky Arts, 8pm, Feb 17

Disclosure

The Radcliffe & Maconie Show

UK dance music's trailblazing duo Howard and Guy Lawrence pop into the 6Music studio this week to chat about their debut album 'Settle' and its phenomenal success, including being nominated for this year's Grammys.
▶**LISTEN** BBC 6Music, 1pm, Feb 12

Courtney Barnett

X-Posure

The Melbourne singer-songwriter received huge acclaim last year for her track 'Avant Gardener' and its witty, deadpan delivery. While she's back in the UK (playing an NME Awards show with Austin, Texas at London's Sebright Arms on February 12), she'll be treating XFM listeners to a live performance of a different song from her 'The Double EP: A Sea Of Split Peas' album each night this week.
▶**LISTEN** XFM, 10pm, Feb 17

New Order

New Order: Their Story

Bernard Sumner, Peter Hook and Stephen Morris contribute to this 1993 documentary, discussing the history of the group, from their formation, the suicide of Ian Curtis through to World Cup anthem 'World In Motion' and beyond.
▶**LISTEN** Sky Arts, 7pm, Feb 13


Courtney Barnett

Kelis

6Music Festival Playlist

The 'Milkshake' singer returns in April with her new album 'Food', but before that she'll perform at the inaugural BBC 6Music festival in Manchester. Here, she presents a playlist of some of the tunes that have influenced her.
▶**LISTEN** BBC 6Music, 1pm, Feb 16

Fat White Family

X-Posure

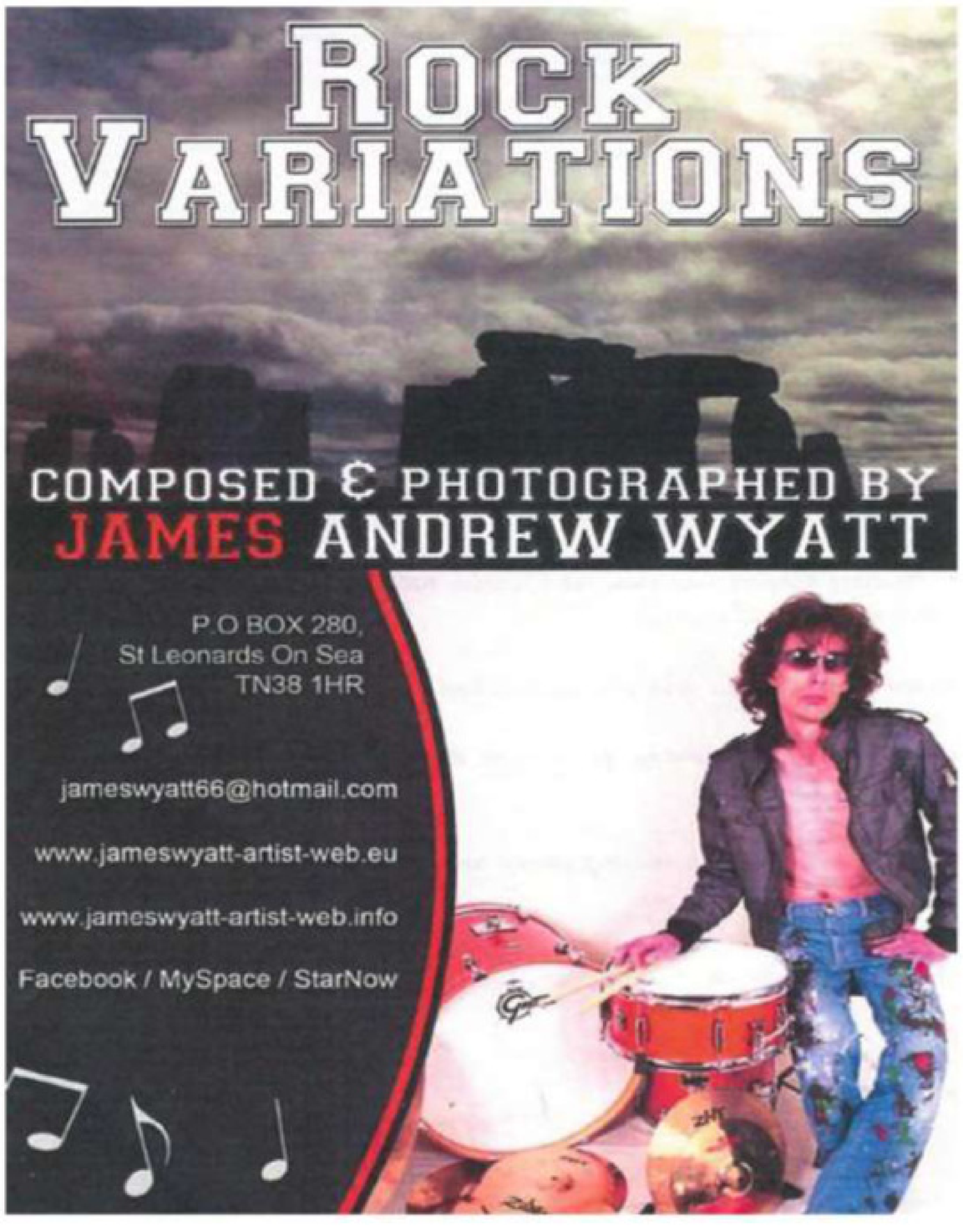
The south London group head into XFM to play a live session for John Kennedy in support of their new single, 'Touch The Leather'. If it's anywhere near as rowdy, messy and unpredictable as their gigs, it should be a broadcast like no other.
▶**LISTEN** XFM, 10pm, Feb 13



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MUSICAL SERVICES





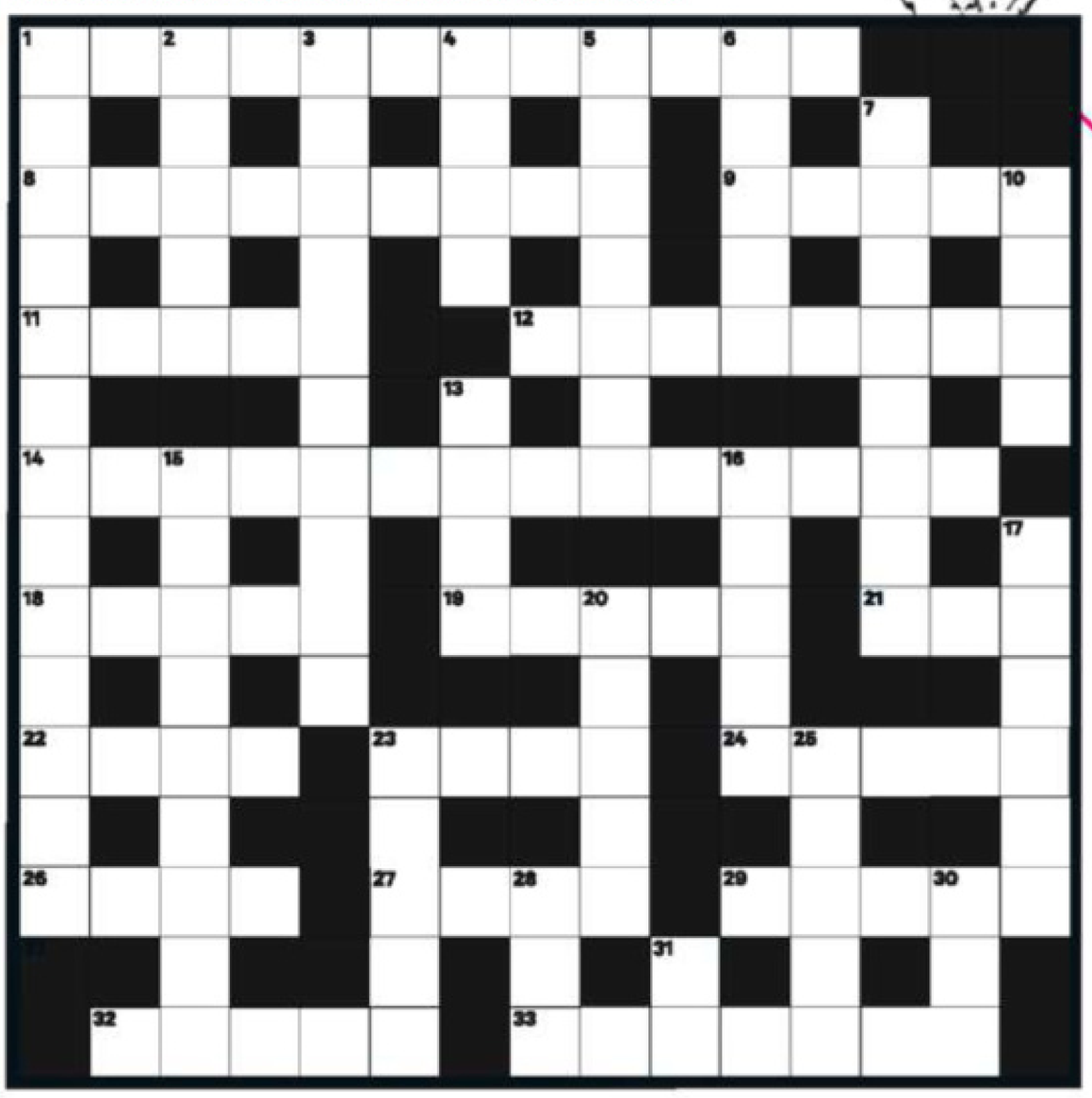
THINK TANK

NME CROSSWORD

■ Compiled by TREVOR HUNGERFORD



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CLUES ACROSS

1+12A Bombay Bicycle Club's farewell, but back together again in the very near future (2-4-3-3-8)
8 Does an owl give a hoot about London Grammar? (9)
9+26A Perhaps overspent on an Echo And The Bunnymen single (5-4)
11 Gorky's Zygotic Mynci album in market at Ayr (5)
12 (See 1 across)
14+33A Shakira gets down on me, and I'm not wearing her out (10-4-7)
18+19A Young Knives on solid ground (5-5)
21 Elton John song featured in *The Goodies* (3)
22 Fitzroy Cunningham includes the singer who attended a 'Shotgun Wedding' (3-1)
23 Feel terrible saying this could be really good, three times over, for Queens Of The Stone Age (4)
24 There's a loud warning sound coming from this Roxy Music album (5)
26 (See 9 across)
27 Their singles include 'Suicide Blonde' and 'Mystify' (4)
29 It was the music of the time, but Ottawan spelled it out for us (1-1-1-1-1)
32 I'd the wrong single by The Hot Melts (5)
33 (See 14 across)

CLUES DOWN

1 Our nearest star gets the arrangements made for Temples (3-10)
2+16D *"Seen you on Aldebaran, safe on the green desert sand/It's so very lonely, you're two thousand _____ _____ from home"*, The Rolling Stones (5-5)
3 Dandy treat arranged for Bob Marley (5-5)
4 *"If I were brave enough to ask you to stay, would that ____ upon your lip move and come my way?"*, Lucy Rose (4)
5+23D His posthumous LP was 'From A Basement On The Hill' (7-5)
6+17D I go on booing, in a strange way, at US rock band fronted by Danny Elfman (5-6)
7 The beginning of orchestral music with The Electric Light Orchestra's debut single '10538 _____' (8)
10 Out of The Black Crowes comes a keyboard player for Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds (4)
13 Vocalist and guitarist with Django Django getting into production effects (4)
15 Will this album make Angel Haze filthy rich? (5-4)
16 (See 2 down)
17 (See 6 down)
20 Their musical career finished with a 'Klang' (5)
23 (See 5 down)
25 Stevie Wonder's personal desire (1-4)
28 Band who had to 'Wake Up' on 'The Big Express' (3)
30 Band who got 'Left Behind' on a 'Donkey' (1-1-1)
31 Common received £200 for passing this single (2)

JANUARY 11 ANSWERS

ACROSS 1+16A Another Toe In The Ocean, 9 Last Splash, 10+34A Feel Better, 12 Stump, 13+18D Once Upon A Time, 14 Inch, 19 In Dreams, 20 Be, 21 Mani, 22+26A You Will See Me, 25 Mock, 27 Unit, 30 High Hopes, 33 Kids, 35 Play. **DOWN** 1 All I See Is You, 2+20D Obscured By Clouds, 3 Hash Pipe, 4+23D Roll With It, 5 Orson, 6+7D In The Open, 8 Ealing, 11 Here, 13+29A Oh Boy, 15 Camel, 17 Chase, 24 Linger, 26 Soho, 28 Nice, 31 PIL.

Normal NME terms and conditions apply, available at NME.COM/terms. Cut out the crossword and send it, along with your name, address and email, marking the envelope with the issue date, before Tuesday, February 25, 2014, to: Crossword, NME, 9th Floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London SE1 0SU. Winners will be notified via email.



QUIZ

■ Compiled by ALAN WOODHOUSE (answers on page 67)





1 What is the shortest track in The Beatles' discography?

2 Zooey Deschanel was once married to a member of which US indie band?

3 Which Radiohead album is dedicated to late US comedian Bill Hicks?

4 Which legendary US singer started out in a '60s folk band called The Wind In The Willows?

5 Whose 2009 debut EP was called 'Four Words To Stand On'?

6 Whose 1996 debut album opens with a sample of a spacecraft from the *Star Wars* movies?

7 Which 2009 animated comedy does Jarvis Cocker have a speaking role in?

8 In which year did the Isle Of Wight Festival return after an absence of 32 years?

9 Which group's backing band were originally known as The Food Groups?

10 Which famous singer reputedly got his stage name from a hearing aid shop?

11 Grace Kelly, Ginger Rogers and Jean Harlow are mentioned in the lyrics to which Madonna song?

12 In which UK city did The Jam play their last ever show in 1982?

13 True or false? One of Florence Welch's middle names is Leontine.

14 Which veteran British band's 1981 debut album was called 'Speak & Spell'?

15 Which Primal Scream album features a guest appearance from Josh Homme?

THE NME COVER THAT I GONE AND DONE

■ by CHRIS SIMPSONS ARTIST



JASON HETHERINGTON, DEAN CHALKLEY

storemags.com



Inside the mind of Joe Mount

Over Metronomy's 15-year career, Joe Mount has honed a unique musical language that's come to define 21st-century British pop. Yet he's more at home in his own head, he tells Mark Beaumont

PORTRAITS BY ROGER SARGENT

StoreMags



Joe Mount and Gbenga Adelekan take pics in Michel Gondry's life-size zoetrope video set

The camera wheels around the zoetrope, and in its lens the four members of Metronomy appear inside a life-size cartoon recording studio. There's a mixing desk in the foreground, and, through the hole where the band sit, a backdrop of painted amps and instruments. "This is the sound stage, with the technician," explains Michel Gondry, in his quietly visionary way. The cult French director walks us around the perimeter to the next scene and the band turn on the spot within in the central space; now they're framed by a painted minibus and a cityscape backdrop. "Then they go on tour," Gondry says. "We see them inside the van."

We take another few steps around the Parisian film studio that's currently playing set to the video for Metronomy's next single, 'Love Letters', a song brimming with vintage gospel-soul harmonies, a funk groove and a sizzle of electronica. With no small sense of wonder, we're suddenly watching the band through the arms of cartoon fans at a gig, rattling tambourines and prodding classic keyboards in a uniform of maroon soul blazers, roll-neck jumpers and cream slacks. A few paces further, and we appear to be sat at a laptop typing messages of devotion to the band, who are now playing in a pop-up window. The concept is brilliantly simple: when a camera tracks around the circular scene, the band will appear in a single, continuous shot that follows them from the studio to stage in Gondry's trademark dreamlike style.

"It looks like a TV show from the 1960s, like *The Monkees*," says Michel, whose last video was for Björk's 'Crystalline' back in 2011. He's right: the whole afternoon is a cross between his 2006 film, *The Science Of Sleep*, which took place in a TV set of the mind, and an episode of *Ready Steady Go!*, the pioneering pop show that brought The Beatles, Beach Boys and Dusty to British living rooms. But it's also a fantasy from Metronomy creative force Joe Mount's mind brought to life: the wonky bedroom-pop band he conceived as a Devonshire 18-year-old are now a fully formed beat revue. Their forthcoming fourth album, also called 'Love Letters', is such an event in the 2014 British pop firmament that even theoretically retired French music video auteurs are dusting off their storyboards to work with them.

Mavericks, it would seem, are magnetic, and Joe's dreaming with both eyes open.

"The first school band I was in, we were obsessed with The Beatles," Joe says, swirling a coffee in a Shoreditch bar a week after the Gondry shoot. He's reminiscing about The Upsides, and musing over the classic 1960s Holiday Special aesthetic he's chosen to define his fourth album. "I guess, to me, the idea of the perfect band and the perfect look is like a Motown band. Since the '60s, bands have never been as perfectly formed as The Stylistics or those all-male soul groups that all have the same look. I like the idea of presenting it like it's part of the military, like the police force. It's quite nice to have a uniform. We're trying to get the feel of a stage set from back in that time, too."

It's typical of Joe to couch Metronomy's fourth act in such a fully formed, all-encompassing aesthetic. He has form. With every album, he's created a distinct and vivid sonic world all of its own, set adrift from pop culture and prevailing trends. Having launched Metronomy as a one-man bedroom electronic project on 2006's 'Pip Paine (Pay The £5000 You Owe)', Joe then aligned his scattershot inspirational shards of Autechre, Kraftwerk, Frank Zappa, Prince and Les Rhythmes Digitales into a more concise – but still decidedly wobbly – electro-funk-pop concept album. 2008's 'Nights Out' detailed a terrible, never-ending party, the catchy but cold antithesis to nu-rave. Then out went original member Gabriel Stebbing and in came a dripping-cool new rhythm





On the set in Paris

section for 2011's 'The English Riviera', where their quirkiness was refined into a masterpiece of sleek synths and cool glamour – a very British, very provincial brand of mechanised funk designed to give its tales of coastal Devon living an Ocean Drive R&B gleam.

Each step has had a unique tone and purpose, and in his warmly human slants on electro-pop, Joe makes albums like Darren Aronofksy or Gus Van Sant make movies; outsider art to immerse yourself in. It's what places Joe firmly in the lineage of breakthrough auteurs who've made their perfectly wrought landscapes of the imagination accessible to all – Eno, Warhol, Bush, Gudmundsdóttir, Murphy, Gondry. Noted fan Josh Homme puts it best. "They aren't overly fussed with chasing a pop culture mirage," he writes in an email. "Being hip? The latest trends? Rubbish. Metronomy is effortlessly unconcerned and it's why they're different. They're a hard-working little boat from a seaside town going on a journey through an ocean of fakers, copycats and naysayers. Insular yet inviting, experimental yet poppy, intense not precious, retro yet current, lovelorn and sexed... They are dance rock for the non-asshole set."

With the release of 'Love Letters', Joe now finds himself a new father-of-one living in Paris with his girlfriend, and feted frontman of a slick super-soul band featuring jumpsuit addict drummer Anna Prior, comic-book enthusiast bassist Gbenga Adelekan and guitarist, tambourine man and long-term collaborator Oscar Cash. They're Joe's teenage dream of pop perfection incarnate. "Since the beginning I've written the songs, and it's this thing that I've taken from my bedroom to your bedroom," Joe says. "But the best way to perform music is in a band – I started playing in bands and I love bands. I love the idea of it and I love what they are."

Yet this is a man so un-popstarry that he regularly plays down his collaborations with Girls Aloud's Nicola Roberts on her debut solo album and believes he ranks just below Bonehead in the natural frontman stakes. "I was born to be the drummer – then it doesn't matter what you look like," he says, referring to 'The Most Immaculate Haircut', a new song inspired by Connan Mockasin and his pristine blonde bowl. "If only I could pull that kind of thing off, but I can't. When people have amazing haircuts and become iconic because of their hair, that defined look will see them through for their entire careers." He strokes his own thatch of untameable curls – a barber's dustpan assortment.

He also felt distinctly uncomfortable playing arenas supporting Coldplay on their last US stadium tour. Joe winces at the memory. "You're playing to a quarter-full ice hockey stadium and you're aware of everything you see – a guy asking his family if they want any drinks. You see them walk off to the bar while you're playing. A few minutes later, you see him come back." He gripes about a news story that made a headline out of his reticence to play Wembley Stadium. "Of course I don't really want us there as a goal. For us to get to that place, something odd will have had to happen either in the public consciouness or in my own head. In a venue of that size you're appealing to people on such a broad level. To get that point you have to probably dilute too much for me to be interested in doing it."

There's a sense of insecurity and self-deprecation in Joe's tone, as though it's not massive mainstream success he's wary of as a groundbreaking left-field artist but his own lack of rockstar oomph. The laptop loner from back in Totnes instinctively wants to scurry away from the burning spotlight he's forcing himself to stare down. "When I first started playing the drums and playing in bands," he says, "I totally thought, 'Yeah, I'm gonna be on the cover of the *NME*.' But I thought I'd be the least important person there, I thought I'd be the drummer. I never thought I'd be the frontman. I've been given four albums to get used to being a frontperson, but I think I'll struggle to be like 'this is where I really belong'."

Irrespective of their given roles, Metronomy is still essentially a one-man concern. Joe says that the rest of the band have been contributing more in recent years, but the others are unavailable for interviews and played on less than 10 per cent of the record. Shadowing the band to east London's Toe Rag Studios – the legendary analogue haven where the album was recorded and where they're laying down bonus material – there's no sign of a dictatorship, benign or otherwise; everybody has their say on the quality of takes and Joe tells everyone present to let him know "if it sounds shit". But it's Joe's perfectionist ear that picks up a tiny buzz on a track, sending Grammy-winning session producer and studio owner Liam Watson scurrying around an antique recording desk. It's very clear who's boss.

So how much is Metronomy's new unified image a protective barrier between Joe and the stresses of pop performance, a layer of irony allowing him to meticulously carve classic soul-pop while maintaining his aura of distance and mystique? Slit open those bittersweet 'Love Letters' and the answers tumble out.

"From far across *the sea/They fly from you to me/But still I get no sleep*".

Dislocation, distance from loved ones, communication breakdown, fractured relationships, a yearning for old comforts long lost. 'Love Letters'' titular lead single is far more upbeat than the rest of Metronomy's fourth album, but its story of a frustrating old-fashioned relationship-by-post sets the theme. If 'The English Riviera' reimagined Joe's hometown as a glitzy gangster's paradise, the restless and often desolate 'Love Letters' is the sound of Mount abandoning any sense of place. Its world is the drifting continent of a tourbus lounge: plaintive psych ballad 'Never Wanted' finds a caring partner packing his bag for a long trip full of "*minibars*", "*foreign money*" and "*hotel pillows*" as he reassures them "*it gets better*". The maudlin synth-funk of 'The Upsetter' is a lush knot of guilt and regret, the pained protagonist knowing he's ↦

YULYA SHADRINSKY, TIM EVE



"The perfect band is like a Motown band... It's nice to have a uniform"

Joe Mount

Mount's long-term collaborator Oscar Cash (centre)

selfish for chasing his dream across the globe, his guilt increasing as he hears home in corny old 'our songs': "*Reliving 1992 here/Playing 'Sleeping Satellite'/Playing Prince and Deacon Blue, yeah/Playing 'I Will Always Love You'*".

"If I'm writing about relationships, they're always an amalgamation of all of the ones I've ever had," Joe says. "I remember hour-long phone calls and apologising constantly and somebody's really upset about the fact you're far away and doing what you've dreamt of doing your whole life. But the main part is about being away and listening to music and things that remind you of listening to them with the person you're in love with, and that helps you."

Don't call it a touring-blues album, though. "I hate the idea of musicians that complain about their job when their job is to travel the world," Joe argues. "All I'm trying to do is use the only thing which I have any authority on – the subject of being away from people – and try to turn that into something which makes more music. All I really know about is about touring and being away and missing my girlfriend. I know about missing people's birthdays."

He recalls growing up in the country, winding back to his days as a teenage skater tearaway into rock drumming and "shotties" (a particularly Devonian way of smoking weed, apparently). He'd go to parties where all his friends wound up doing drugs – but not Joe, who would sit around panicking that everyone was about to go mad. "At 2am, I'd be going to bed on someone's floor and everyone else would be awake. I remember feeling like, 'I really just want to be at home, but it's way too late for that now.' You get that same feeling sometimes in the middle of Europe."

Joe's "the happiest [he's] ever been" at home in Paris, away from the competitive bullshit that informed 'Nights Out'. He DJs at fashion parties (his girlfriend works for "a brand"), fields regular requests for remixes from Parisian synth scenesters and appreciates the love for his music among the French, who recognise his affinity for Air, Phoenix and Daft Punk. He credits them for inspiring his love of dance music in the first place.

"Living in Paris means I'm able to do things because I enjoy them and write something because I like the way it sounds," he says. "I don't really care about what's going on in music at the moment. I feel a lot more relaxed being further away from one of the supposed hubs of new music. I'm beginning to understand what lyrics can do and getting more comfortable with the idea of trying to make little atmospheres."

"Metronomy's songs reveal their secrets the more you listen to them"

Robyn

For all its personal woes and tinges of youth slipped away – 'Reservoir', for example, is a Pulp-ish noir using maritime imagery to represent the friends that drift away when you become a parent – 'Love Letters' expands Joe's emotional and stylistic palette into even richer realms, his most perfectly realised musical cocoon yet. It's the result of recording in two weeks flat at Toe Rag as a matter of necessity – his girlfriend was pregnant and he needed a foolproof way of making a record under a very real deadline.

He also knew that his songwriting might improve if he was forced to finish songs before he got to the recording studio; many of the arrangements on 'The English Riviera' were done in the mixing room, though to no noticeable detriment. "There's something ↦



"I never thought I'd be the frontman"

Mount on Gondry

"When I first met him he obviously didn't know who we were, but with every stage he's been getting more excited. All the music videos that I remembered from growing up, from Daft Punk and The Chemical Brothers, were by people like him, and I never really imagined it would happen. When I started being interested in music, it was when a lot of things went on that don't really go on now. Music video directors like him making videos. People selling CD singles. All these things I dreamt of doing, then when I arrived at the party it was kind of shutting down. So to do a video with him is amazing, everything I wanted."

Gondry on Mount

"I was told to do [the video]! But then I asked my friends and they all said, 'It's a cool band'. I like the song, but I didn't know them. I'm ignorant. I like to listen to funky music, to Michael Jackson. I thought this particular song was a mixture of The Stranglers for the piano and David Bowie a bit for the voice. But from hearing the other songs they made, it's not that. It's really the piano that reminds me of The Stranglers."



Michel Gondry in the Parisian film studio



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that draws me back into 'The English Riviera' over and over," Robyn writes by email. "Maybe it's the minimalism of the arrangements on the record, but I think it's also because it rocks you ever so gently with the bass and the drums, and the melodies leave open spaces for you to fill in. I love that – it's like the songs have secrets that you discover the more you listen to them. I think Metronomy has the rare but wonderful combination of melody and spirit, and they hold each other up and you believe in the dynamic between the two."

Touched by Toe Rag's analogue authenticity, 'Love Letters' thrives in fertile isolation reminiscent of Prince's Paisley Park vault and Bowie's Berlin, inspired by classic psychedelic pop and pastoral folk. "The way psychedelic records work is using a studio to create a little audio world," Joe says. "That's something I took a lot from The Zombies' 'Odessey And Oracle' and 'Fifth Dimension' by The Byrds." Joe is fascinated by the lineage of pop symbolism. He sees 'Love Letters' in the classic tradition of 'Please Mr Postman' and Diana Ross & The Supremes' 'Hey Western Union Man'; songs where the letter represents not being with someone. Similarly, the astrology references at the hollow soul of the chilling 'I'm Aquarius' – "*You said, 'Honey, I best be leaving'/'Cause you're a Taurus and I'm Aquarius*" – are nods to *Hair* and '60s cod-spirituality while also suggesting a mind beguiled by unseen forces.

"Astrology, I don't believe in," Joe says, laughing. "I like spiritual people, I like people that believe that Jupiter is doing something that's relevant to them. I like how self-centred that is! I wrote it as a soulful pop song and never imagined I would be the one to sing it. I wanted to write a wordy song that was about a break-up and someone basically blaming it on the planets, not on the fact that they're not very good in relationships."

Psychedelia, special costumes, fetishising the past: isn't Joe worried that Metronomy could slip into novelty '60s pastiche? "I don't think there's any danger of that at all," he says, grinning. "Fashion is one thing, music is another, and the record couldn't really be further from novelty. It has enough of me and enough of nowadays about it not to be a Mark Ronson-type affair." Instead, Paris has given Joe the space and time to craft Metronomy into a finely wrought repository for all of his troubles and fantasies. "It's a place for all these ideas," he says, ruffling his drummer's hair. "I don't have room for all of them in my life." ■

▶ **Metronomy play the NME/Radio 1 Stage at Reading & Leeds Festival, August 22-24, 2014**

BEDROOM TO BRIXTON

1998: Joe has the idea for the band that would become Metronomy

2006: Metronomy – Joe with help from Oscar Cash and Gabriel Stebbing – release their debut, 'Pip Paine (Pay The £5000 You Owe)'

2008: 'Nights Out', a wary treatise on shit parties, comes out

2009: Gabriel leaves the band on good terms to form Your Twenties, whose singles Joe produces

2011: With Anna Prior and Gbenga Adelekan on board, 'The English Riviera' cements Metronomy's place in the British pop firmament, earning them a Mercury Prize nomination. Joe produces songs on albums by Sophie Ellis-Bextor and Girls Aloud's Nicola Roberts

2012: Metronomy perform on the NME Awards Tour alongside Two Door Cinema Club, Azealia Banks and Tribes

2014: Come March, Metronomy release fourth album 'Love Letters' and wind up their UK tour with a headline slot at Brixton Academy

IN THIS MONTH'S UNCUT





Annie Clark shot exclusively for *NME* in London, November 2013

Storemags.com

"I sound like myself on this record, so I thought, I'll call it 'St Vincent'"

Annie Clark returns unfuckwithable on album four, trawling for meaning in the wreckage of human interaction. Laura Snapes meets the newly self-styled "near-future cult leader"

PHOTOS BY SHAMIL TANNA

Something about the first few minutes of this interview with Annie Clark feels like taking part in a performance art piece. Dressed in a black trenchcoat and high-necked black dress with white lace panels – think cloister couture – she's spacey, switching between gazing up at the window and offering blank stares from a checked red armchair. Fiddling with her rings and pulling Kirby grips from her lilac-white cloud of hair, either the wildly ambitious guitarist is stand-offish or I'm off-puttingly awkward; some combination of the two. Between us is a side table holding Clark's white wine and a bowl of pumpkin soup, which she sips intermittently from a comically large and formal silver ladle. It feels as much of a considered performance and power play as her ballistic live shows as St Vincent.

We're in the private suite of a Soho members' club in late November, talking about – appropriately – human interaction in the 21st century, although the kind where the sharp edges are removed: "I'm interested in the way it seems as though we don't know how to have a private moment any more," says Clark. "We watch a show through a tiny lens on an iPhone; we can't just have a meal, we have to take a picture of it and get the applause and approval of millions of tiny eyes. The cart has been put before the horse. Now it's about seeking the validation of having had the experience rather than just having the experience."

For Clark, life is a full-contact sport where feeling the thud is important – sometimes literally. In August 2012, Clark played the last date of the 'Strange Mercy' tour at Japan's Summer Sonic Festival. She jumped off the stage and up onto the barrier, and was about to leap into the crowd – as she had been doing throughout the tour – when someone aggressively grabbed her breasts. "I turned around, threw myself up against the barricade and punched the perpetrator in the face, hit them in the face with the microphone," she says. "I really hope they're OK, because I feel really bad about it, but it was a moment of rage – like, I don't remember, just blind rage."

She stands, takes my hand and presses it against her thigh to feel the permanent indentation left by the barricade, before digging out an iPhone photo (#nofilter) of the original bruise. There's a noticeable pit in her femur. Don't bands usually say that Japanese audiences are quite reserved? "They are, but I think I broke that fourth wall." She relaxes.

The day after returning from Japan, a bruised Clark went straight into three weeks ↦



Annie Clark: "Music is very powerful. Never take it for granted"

of choreography-heavy rehearsals with David Byrne for the tour around 'Love This Giant', their brassy full-length 2012 collaboration for 4AD. Once out on the road, Clark noticed that the lack of self-consciousness from the performers was getting the audience out of their seats to dance. "People were just free and it was really sweet and special. I'd never really played music that people danced to."

Clark is by no means the first or even the millionth musician to breach the traditional performer/audience contract, but doing so has added a new dimension to the way she approaches her work. Just 36 hours after returning home from the Byrne tour, having sworn that she would take a break, she started writing her fourth album. Six weeks later, she was finished. Her aim was to make something "groove-heavy that would make a really intense live show", eliciting the physical responses she had experienced while stagediving, doing the conga with Byrne and

"I like it when guitars sound like fucking guitars"

Annie Clark

their huge brass troupe, or spitting Big Black songs at a New York tribute show in late 2011. But smuggled beneath Clark's invitations to loosen up and step out of yourself are her concerns about human identity, connection and validation in a world warped by the digital realm. "*Call the 21st century, tell her give us a break*", she sings on 'Every Tear Disappears'. On 'St Vincent', she's standing in the rubble where the fourth wall used to be and surveying the wreckage, figuring out what's important amid the unremitting sensory assault.

Her brassy single 'Digital Witness' is the most literal manifestation of Annie Clark's concerns about a world seen through screens ("*If I can't show it/If you can't see me/What's the point in doing anything*?"), although other songs on the record approach the topic with more elegance and empathy, for others and for herself. The schizophrenic 'Huey Newton' – a song named for the co-founder of the Black Panthers, who appeared to Clark in an Ambien-induced dream – is the sinew that seems to bind the record. Its verses unspool oblique images in a game of free-association designed to feel like a Google wormhole: "*Fake knife, real ketchup/Cardboard cutthroats/Cowboys of information/Pleasure dot loathing dot Huey dot Newton/It was a lonely, lonely winter…*"

"I was envisioning a world where we're so disconnected from other people and ourselves that we have to learn what feelings are from flashcards: a smile corresponds to feeling happy, and only knowing that intellectually and not intuitively," Clark says. "It's also about being angry at the impotence of the internet: the fact that it suggests a reality but is a third-tier version of actual reality." The song later refers to Hale-Bopp and the Heaven's Gate Cult, the Hail Mary, and Hagia Sophia, a museum in Istanbul that's previously been a place of worship for every major religion bar Judaism. Heaven's Gate is one of Clark's obsessions – "which I am *fascinated* by and *love*, if you can say that you love a cult where they were waiting for the comet to come and committed mass suicide, all wearing Nikes" – and here it's part of a triumvirate that shows the ways in which humans have tried to create meanings in their lives over the course of history.

It's a resonant theme for Clark, who grasped for any sense of self or hope after losing several people close to her during the period that informed 'Strange Mercy'. Written during a period of isolation in Seattle – she called it a "loneliness experiment" – that record was coated in a paralysing haze that felt like trying and failing to scream during a nightmare. An archetype tends to emerge while she writes, she says; here it was of a housewife dosed up on barbiturates and white wine, a portrait of domesticated repression that was more *Revolutionary Road* than *Peyton Place*. It was about "a lot of pain in various forms, a more self-lacerating record," Clark says.

By contrast, 'St Vincent' is the most aggressive album Clark has ever made. The archetype she imagined here was of being a "near-future cult leader", though it comes off more in the visuals, where Alejandro Jodorowsky's surreal movie classic *The Holy Mountain* meets the residents of the Capitol in *The Hunger Games*. (I tell her she looks "terrifying", which she accepts as a compliment.)

"It's more extroverted, less about sublimated or submerged anger, and more about owning up to every emotion," she says of the record. "And I like songs where you don't necessarily like the narrator; or admitting your humiliations and downfalls – everybody can relate to that. But I wasn't at a place where I felt that self-laceration, self-loathing, self-denial. I was more confident. It's probably still not what people would consider a light-hearted record, but it's light-hearted for me."

Ultimately, the album looks at how human beings find salvation and validation beyond the superficial digital realm. 'Prince Johnny' is a "love letter to a tragic character and the New York downtown freak, weirdo, queer scene" whose titular character hangs out in bathroom stalls and tries to affirm his worth through famous fucks, but is safe in the city's embrace. "It's the kind of story you don't get from New York City when you're still clutching your purse on the subway," says Clark. "It's the kind you get when you've proven your devotion to this city. Then she lets you in her arms."

The songs that fall towards the end of the record are where the important things float to the surface and everything else just blows. "*Honey, quit your worrying/Distance is exactly like a blowing wind/Putting out the embers and the tiny flames and keeping the big ones burning*", someone tells her on 'Psychopath'.

PATRON SAINTS

Annie Clark's collaborators sing her praises

Matt Johnson

Drummer, 'Strange Mercy' tour; performed and wrote on Jeff Buckley's 'Grace'



"As a person, Annie is real sweet, yet she is ferocious in her spirit. She has the burn to create, to reach beyond herself in the hopes of discovery and synthesis. Watch her! She will be singing something, while also playing some crazy guitar shit that seems as if it would require a second musician to perform. She just gives it a go. She takes real chances. Annie rocks!"

Bobby Sparks

Minimoog, 'Strange Mercy', 'St Vincent'; Grammy-winning keyboardist and producer



"I met Annie through producer John Congleton. One day he called me for the 'Strange Mercy' sessions and the rest is history… Annie is amazing, I've never seen an artist like her. She is the most creative person I've ever worked with. As a composer/arranger, the music is so abstract and her lyrics match perfectly and most of all I love her stories."

'I Prefer Your Love' – "*to Jesus*" – is about Clark's relationship to her parents. "You get to a point where you realise that you can lose them. Or you already have. And like... crossing some precipice into – it's so unsexy, but – adulthood."

Annie Erin Clark picked up the guitar as a 12-year-old in Dallas, Texas, forsaking her place on the girls' soccer team to learn how to play; by 14 she was recording into her computer. During school holidays when she was a few years older, she roadied for her aunt and uncle, jazz duo Tuck & Patti, learning her craft from the two workaday musicians. After briefly attending Berklee College Of Music, she quit to join The Polyphonic Spree and play sideman in Sufjan Stevens' touring band before releasing her solo debut, 'Marry Me', in 2007. The guitar was still omnipresent even then, but it wasn't until 'Strange Mercy' that she started using it to write songs rather than figuring them out on her laptop: listening to country music and "playing the troubadour", as she's previously put it.

Clark's guitar-centric rifforama – somewhere between Robert Fripp, Nile Rodgers and Sister Rosetta Tharpe – has long been her defining trait, but she pushed it further on 'St Vincent', using it to enable the record's general bloodletting. "There's a long history of rock guitar, but I'm not that interested in trying to recreate the quintessential rock guitar paradigm," she says. "I like it when guitars don't sound like guitars. But conversely, I like it when guitars sound like *fucking guitars*, you know? I think I approach it as a means to an end, a way to say the things that I don't know how to say with my words or my voice." On the most confrontational songs here – like the borderline devotion/obsession of 'Bring Me Your Loves', inspired by Pantera and Turkish folk singer, Selda – the guitar sounds like a pinball machine, whizzing and flipping before lighting up middle-eights like Christmas trees.

"I think Annie is one of the most inventive and dynamic guitarists out there," writes Carrie Brownstein in an email. (She should know, given her past in Wild Flag and Sleater-Kinney.) "She doesn't seem too precious about the guitar as a monolithic entity, she doesn't worry about its lineage. She approaches it as a means of expression, as a conduit for a broad sonic and rhythmic vocabulary."

During the making of the record, Clark was reading Miles Davis' autobiography. "Man, sometimes it takes you a long time to sound like yourself," he sighs. "So I thought, 'Yeah, I sound like myself on this record,'" she says. "I'll call it 'St Vincent'." It wasn't the first time a piece of music had pre-empted her identity. "A lot of the time, songs are weird," she told me by phone back in September, prior to sequencing the record. "I'll write about something and then it'll come true. I'm not much of a mystical person – I'm pretty pragmatic and like to err on the side of science, but that is the case, the songs having a lot of power in that way."

'St Vincent' opens with two very different declarations of arrival: 'Rattlesnake' may be as far from the domestic archetype as Clark has ever roamed, documenting a very different kind of isolation. One hot day in Texas, she found herself alone in the wild and stripped naked to experience nature fully – before realising a snake was lurking nearby. "Yes, I think about dying all the time," she says, "and that would have been an *awesome* way to die – like, it would suck to choke on a chicken bone alone in your apartment, but dying by rattlesnake bite is *cool* – but I was like, 'No, not this time.'"


Crowdsurfing in Manchester, Tennessee, June 8, 2012

It's followed by the electrifying 'Birth In Reverse', seen from the perspective of a curtain-twitching shut-in: "*Oh what an ordinary day/ Take out the garbage, masturbate*", she begins, before deciding to break out into the world beyond her blinds, daring others to join her.

"I played that for my best friend and he just laughed at me, like, 'The only thing you wouldn't do is take out the garbage'," she recalls. "That's true. I probably wouldn't."

'St Vincent' is Annie Clark's first album for a major imprint (Loma Vista/Caroline International in the UK) after leaving 4AD late last year. The move seemed surprising – the high-budget, artistic videos for 'Cruel' and 'Cheerleader' didn't suggest that the highly respected indie denied Clark anything. "My contract was up and I just thought it would be time to put a little new blood around it, simple as that," she says coolly, appearing taken aback that anyone would find it significant. "It's a brave new world in the music industry, and the old ideas don't apply in today's world." What old ideas? "In terms of... I mean, Beggars put out Adele. They're not a small label."

To intimate that Adele's presence on the label was a deterrent for Clark would be wrong. "I love Adele. She's no bullshit. I was merely making the point that Beggars is by no means a small label. There was nothing untoward or acrimonious about my decision to move." The "old ideas" refer to "the fate of the 'record' as we know it," she says. "In the digital world, there is no physical technology that insists upon a 40-ish-minute format. The medium is changing. Case in point: Beyoncé's 'visual album'."

Clark can't stand all the extra components that the internet has added to promoting a record – "not just doing some press and shooting a video, all this fucking making a big fuckin' deal about shit". She knows it's all going straight into a void where everything lives forever and is the same age. "And there's no way to really delineate value from meaninglessness unless you're using your own filters, but your own filters are so fucking exhausted from being inundated all the time that you lose it."

In November, a few days before we meet, Clark's filters were refreshed. She received the Smithsonian Institute's American Ingenuity Award for performing arts, honoured alongside the team who helped land the rover on Mars, a woman who helped all of America's high-achieving, low-income students get access to Ivy League schools, and various Nobel Prize winners. "I was *psyched*!" She laughs. "I play guitar, *la-di-da*. The world is big, and it's important, I think, to see what you do not just in the context of a small little world, but as part of the zeitgeist and commenting on where we are right now in the course of history. That helped put it in context for me."

Not to do down the importance of just playing guitar, *la-di-da*. After the darkness of 'Strange Mercy', on 'St Vincent' Clark emerges "stronger than ever", she says, salvation coming from a familiar place. "Music is very powerful. We must never underestimate it or take it for granted. I am one of the many who can say, and mean quite literally, 'music saved my life'." ■

McKenzie Smith
Drummer, 'Actor', 'Strange Mercy', 'St Vincent'; drummer, Midlake



"Annie is one of my favourite guitarists ever. She plays like no-one else and doesn't seem to give a shit about what anyone else is doing. As an arranger, she loves to take a seemingly ordinary thing and take it apart and reassemble it in some totally abstract way. And sometimes she takes a seemingly ordinary thing, and just makes it its own odd and beautiful thing."

Fred Armisen
Co-director, 'Laughing With A Mouth Of Blood' video; *Portlandia* co-creator



"Annie has been on *Portlandia* twice. She's a captivating performer. I've always been a fan of hers. She plays to the sketches perfectly. So funny in the right way. I've been friends with her for a while, and we are both fans of the same type of comedy."

Daniel Mintseris
Keyboards, 'Strange Mercy', 'St Vincent'



"I'm always blown away by Annie's orchestral approach to songwriting, whether she's using orchestral instruments or not. The way she layers vocal, synth and guitar melodies is extraordinary. She's uncompromising about reaching for new ground and raising the stakes, but with the overriding goal of making a visceral, personal, emotional connection with words and melodies. That's a rare gift."

FILMMAGIC, BRYAN MURRAY

This band could be your life



On the eve of Speedy Ortiz' debut UK tour, Phil Hebblethwaite heads to Massachusetts to hear how the DIY band are balancing underground intention with overground attention

PHOTO BY DANIEL TOPETE



Speedy Ortiz in Holyoke, Massachusetts: (l-r) Mike Falcone, Sadie Dupuis, Matt Robidoux and Darl Ferm

There's a gig tonight on this quiet residential street in a small town called Holyoke, 100 miles west of Boston, but you wouldn't know it. The venue is called Rowhaus, but really it's just a private home with a basement that holds about 50 people. To avoid detection from the police, who in recent months have infiltrated and largely dismantled the house-show scene in Boston, information is on a need-to-know basis: the address isn't posted online and the organisers need to keep strict hours.

By 11pm, the music must die, and tonight that means cutting short the headline set by Speedy Ortiz, who only manage to play five songs. Drummer Mike Falcone flips out, then calms down, but the punters perfectly understand the need to stick to the rules. And besides, tonight is something of a celebration – the last night of Speedy Ortiz' self-organised and funded 17-date tour of the East Coast and South with Boston's Grass Is Green. It took place entirely in all-ages venues: warehouses, community-run art spaces, people's houses, along with a couple of clubs that permit under-21s.

A few days later, Speedy Ortiz' singer, songwriter and guitarist, Sadie Dupuis, tweets, "All my friends are my favourite friends and all my favourite friends are in my favourite bands and I'm glad I live in Massachusetts." She moved to the state in 2011 for college, having grown up in New York and Connecticut, the daughter of a mother who worked at *Punk* magazine in the 1970s and ran with the Patti Smith/New York Dolls crowd. Her father supposedly played in Television for a brief period, although Sadie's not sure whether that's just a story he likes to tell. Along with Mike and lead guitarist Matt Robidoux, she lives in Northampton, a few miles from Holyoke. Bass player Darl Ferm hasn't yet moved out of his parents' house in the suburbs of Boston, and doesn't see the point. For most of 2013, Speedy Ortiz were on tour, moonlighting from their day jobs, and they'll be on the road until summer.

Speedy Ortiz formed in 2011 and had already established themselves in the Boston and Western Massachusetts DIY scene before Baltimore indie Carpark released their debut album, 'Major Arcana', last July. Prior to the album there had been self-published singles and an EP, 'Sports', which came out on tiny Brooklyn label Exploding In Sound. (And if you look hard enough, online there's a wealth of Sadie's EPs and home recordings under various different monikers.)

'Major Arcana' changed their fortunes dramatically. One of 2013's best albums in any genre, it brought attention to the band way beyond Massachusetts, helped in no small part by a slew of effusive reviews singling out Sadie's whip-smart lyrics and their huge musical ambition. They're a band that can play lean and tight, but also slay, often in the same song. It's no fluke. All four are rabid students of indie-rock and they've reached their sound through sheer bloody-minded will and understanding.

Darl says that after the album came out, the size of the crowds they were pulling doubled overnight. Manager Elliot Colbert says interest from booking agents in the US and abroad was instantaneous. Having officially quit their jobs, Speedy Ortiz release a new EP, 'Real Hair' on February 11 ("We had been throwing around 'Real Hair' as sort of a funny title, mostly because it implies its opposite, which is fake hair," says Sadie), then make their UK live debut a week later as the prelude to a national tour with Joanna Gruesome as support.

Inevitably, as Speedy Ortiz grow in popularity, they're forced to also work within the confines of the traditional music ↦



Onstage (in the basement) at the Rowhaus, Holyoke

industry, causing endless debate within the band. Says Mike: "We'd rather not be closed off to any specific options, and we keep things as wide open as possible." Some decisions, like whether they should support The Breeders on tour, as they did in December, are easy to make. But they've yet to do the rounds of heavily sponsored summer festivals.

"We talk about that stuff quite a lot," Sadie says. "Bands like Pissed Jeans and Screaming Females play huge festivals, but they also play basement shows. And I think a lot of people who are promoters now came up in scenes before where they really understand the ethics of bands like ours, and the need to keep costs low, and putting together a bill that works... I don't think it's uncommon now for bands to have a foot in both of those worlds."

Not much happens in Holyoke, which is why it's a great place for a house show. Northampton, however, might be the most indie small town in America. Nestled in the middle of the Five College Consortium

"Being in the public eye was intimidating"

Sadie Dupuis

(made up of four liberal arts colleges and one university, the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where Sadie studied and also taught poetry), it's certainly – statistically – the most politically liberal. Thurston Moore and Kim Gordon lived in town for years before they broke up; Dinosaur Jr formed in nearby Amherst and J Mascis never left; and now Frank Black is a Northampton resident, having left Oregon to return to his birthplace.

Northampton has a population of just 30,000, but there's a killer record shop-cum-venue called Feeding Tube, countless independent book shops and cafés selling good coffee and locally sourced food, and only two concessions to American corporate imperialism – a Starbucks and an Urban Outfitters. You can see why Speedy Ortiz chose to make it their HQ. Most of the bands that Sadie calls her "favourite friends" – Pile, Fat History Month and Krill, as well as Grass Is Green – are based in Boston, but Speedy say they would rather drive two hours to Boston and back for a show one night than move.

The day after the house show, the band are in one of Northampton's independent cafés talking about the success of their DIY tour. Outside of merch sales, they didn't take any money at Rowhaus, but touring DIY can be lucrative. "In DC, we played in a really tiny house, so people were like, 'I will pay $20 to get in right now!'" Sadie says. "It was crazy. Shows like that are more gratifying and often more financially viable. People who make the effort to come to a warehouse show do so because they want to hear music and they care about supporting the scene." In fact, Darl says, they sometimes make a staggering seven times more money playing all-ages shows than clubs.

It's not cheap shorthand to say Speedy Ortiz are indebted to Sonic Youth, Dinosaur Jr and the Pixies. Beyond the musical connection, there's also a socio-political one. Referring to Michael Azerrad's 2001 book on the 1980s US punk and indie underground, Sadie says, "Every band we know has their bible copy of *Our Band Could Be Your Life* and has decided they're going to do basement show tours and eat beans for weeks."

But those bands didn't have the internet, which has proven a crucial companion to Azerrad's legendary tome. "It helps you figure out a local scene without you having to show up there first," says Sadie. "We got to Florida this time because we knew a couple of bands in Tallahassee, just from having contacted them after reading online that there was a good local scene there. So we wound up having a show in some weird warehouse with all this bizarre art in. Everyone knew every word to our songs."

Speedy Ortiz' debut, 'Major Arcana', was cut at a relatively new studio called Sonelab, built in a disused plastics factory in nearby Easthampton, which we visit. It was founded by Justin Pizzoferrato, who produced the album and also works with Dinosaur Jr. 'Real Hair' was also recorded at Sonelab, but by Paul Q Kolderie, and has, the band think, a slightly poppier feel. It's both a coda to 'Major Arcana' and a snapshot of exactly where the band are now, after their inconceivably successful 2013.

"Most of the songs on this EP had something to do with identities, both perceived and projected, and how there can be dissonance between a public persona and a private life," says Sadie. 'Real Hair' begins with 'American Horror', perhaps Speedy Ortiz' most ambitious song yet. It's about "witnessing other people's mental health problems and being invested in helping someone go through a personal crisis," says Sadie. "So it's about seeing how the American health system fails people in these situations and also feeling afflicted yourself because you're unable to calm someone's craziness."

Matt says he wanted to play music with Sadie after hearing the lyrics she wrote for her previous band, Quilty. Mike and Darl say they love Sadie's words for what they achieve with them musically, but steer clear of asking for interpretations. Meanwhile, the lyrics on 'Major Arcana' were pored over by fans, drawn in by a narrator who could exhibit bravado, vulnerability and nihilistic tendencies in equal measure. "*My mouth is a factory for every toxic part of speech I spew*", Sadie sings on 'Tiger Tank', but then, "*Don't even care if they take my legs, I've limped before, I can limp again*".

It's tempting to think that Sadie, stunned by the intensity with which fans scrutinised 'Major Arcana', has put more distance between herself and the subject matter of the songs on the new EP. She denies that, saying, "Actually, I found these songs more honest about myself. The album was preoccupied by what seemed to be another person, although it was me, and I'm not really in that place any more. I was writing songs about dealing with myself and feeling quite stressed out – busy, and unsure about things. Things were quite crazy for us then... even if it was just us being perceived in the semi, semi public eye, it was quite intimidating."

They've spoken before about what Matt calls the 'Gwen Stefani-fication' of the band – Sadie becoming the focus – which they're learning to deal with. As devout believers in the scene they came from, they also have to deal with the fact that it's their band, not another, that has become the break-out group from Massachusetts. Matt says modestly, "It feels like people want to support the scene as much as us individually," which rings true: barely any Speedy fan will have skimped on their recommendations of bands from home and away. They'll land in the UK as their own band, but powered by the spirit of the scene behind them. ■

JG ♥ SO

Joanna Gruesome's Owen Williams on the bands' mutual love-in



"Sadie sent us a really nice email saying she liked our record and we talked about the fact we were playing together in New York. It was weird, because me and Alanna [McArdle, JG singer] had been listening to their record all day. On the day, we talked to them very briefly as it was super crowded [at the Brooklyn venue 285 Kent] and when we got home we had been asked to tour! I think there are musical similarities between the two bands: we're both into pop melodies and dissonant, atonal sounds. Plus we're both pretty strict on refusing to take part in shitty things that contradict our personal principles. We've both come from DIY backgrounds that inform how we operate."

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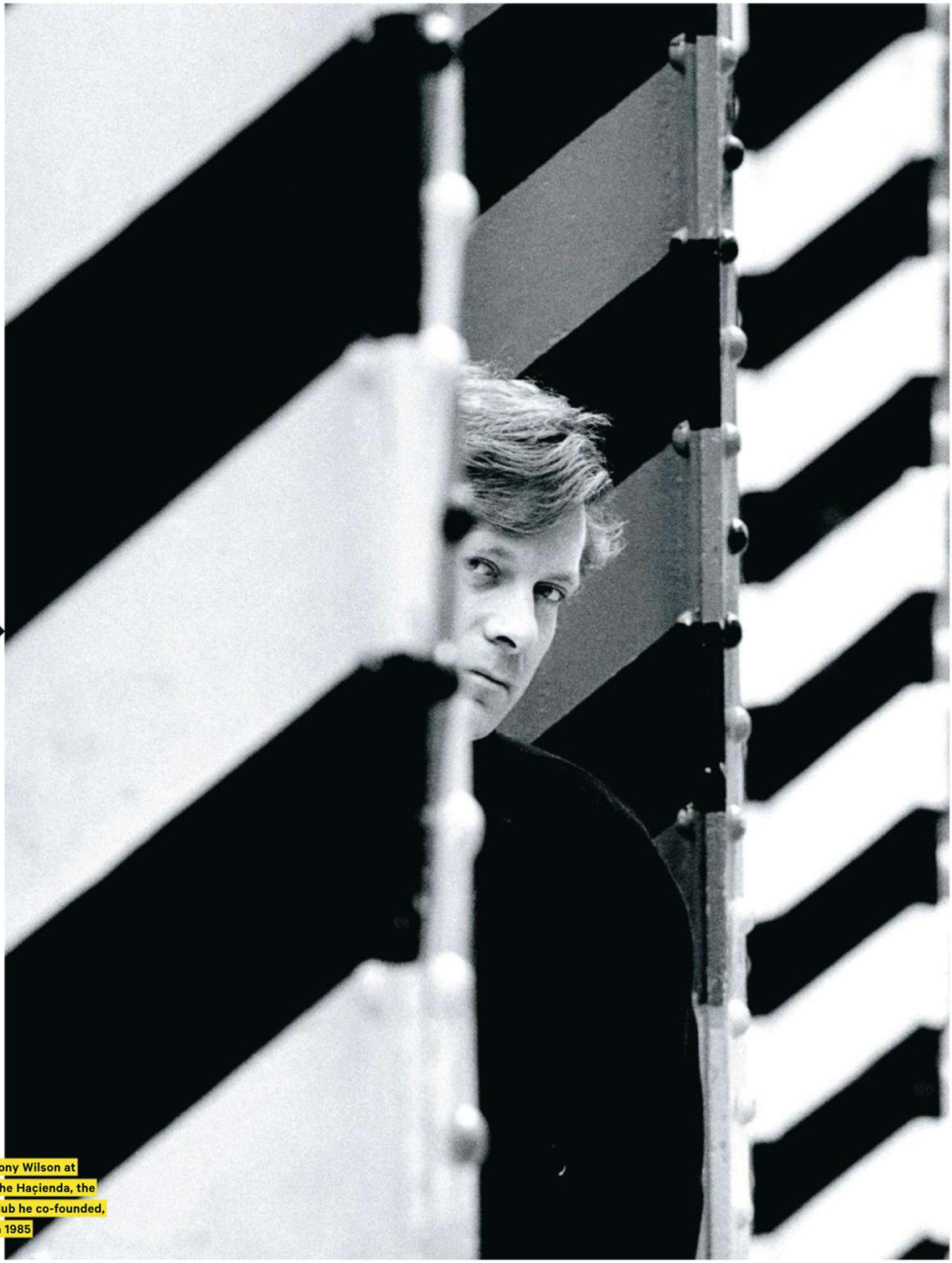
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Tony Wilson at The Haçienda, the club he co-founded, in 1985

KEVIN CUMMINS

FROM THE VAULTS

Power, disruption & lies

NME, 18 February 1984

This week in 1984, NME became "NMedia", investigating press practices. Naturally, a chat with presenter/label svengali/trade unionist Tony Wilson was due: Chris Bohn had the pleasure

At first glance Factory boss Tony Wilson always prompts the question: what is he doing in this business? The answer might come back, "playing it like a game of Russian roulette". But even such rapier reflexes and the knowledge that he was the first to put Sex Pistols, Buzzcocks, Blondie and countless others on television does not disguise the fact that he has always looked painfully out of place in the world of pop.

TV being a cruel medium – especially pop TV – his awkwardness was highlighted when he devised and presented Granada's groundbreaking *So It Goes*, which followed the tradition of Manchester's magazine programme *What's On* in documenting and spreading the word of punk.

Yes, standing dead centre of all this screen chaos he encouraged, in his mid-twenties and so obviously a Granada man, was Tony Wilson, his straw-coloured hair parted to one side and unfashionably covering his ears – then the best ears in TV pop – wearing a godawful murky leather jacket.

To his credit he has never attempted to cover up who or what he was. That was the problem of his detractors, who turned out to be his own generation, not the people *So It Goes* was aimed at. Contempt is mutual.

"I hate my generation," Tony Wilson remarks forcefully. "I loathe and detest them with a real anger. When I did *So It Goes* my generation turned on me with a disgust; I'd go to concerts and people would sneer at me. And suddenly punk came along. Now, whether kids like or dislike me in Manchester, they remember I put the Sex Pistols on."

After Granada took him off *So It Goes* and put him through *World In Action* and regional TV shows, he kept in touch by managing A Certain Ratio, for whom he established the first Factory Club – and shortly after, with ex-actor Alan Erasmus, Factory Records as their outlets. As he is presently juggling three careers – Factory boss, Granada TV man and trade unionist – such chameleon characteristics have become essential.

"I loathe and detest my generation"
Tony Wilson

In London on union business he drops in at Café Bohn for this interview before knocking on designer Peter Saville's door to chivvy him about the sleeve of New Order's new single, 'Thieves Like Us'. Unsurprisingly he is breathless when he arrives, but this does not inhibit his flow of words, spoken with a slight Mancunian tint.

Perhaps it is easy to say you're not in it to sell records if, like Tony, you have a well paid day job with Granada or, like New Order, you've racked up half a million sales of a 12-inch single – 'Blue Monday' – but nevertheless Factory's philosophy began from such an uneconomic premise and they stand by it still.

Tony's dream was to establish Factory as an experiment in art and suchlike as an alternative marketing strategy. Basically, this translates as presenting the consumer with the best package money can buy. An elaborate artwork theoretically mirrors the quality of the record within. It would not be advertised, nor would it be promoted, apart from the most basic of industry servicing. Its quality should be enough to generate interest, so the argument goes, which would then spread by word of mouth.

Anyway, this is Tony's dream. Nobody else is bound to it. Some, namely Joy Division/New Order, live well on it. The Durutti Column and The Wake make a living from it. Early Factory frontrunners Section 25 and third generation Factory group Stockholm Monsters don't. With James, their latest band, it is too early to tell.

"Section 25's Larry is really the star of the forthcoming Channel 4 film," remarks Tony. "He's got a baby, right? His group made £1,000 from their first LP, but that's all gone. So he comes to Manchester desperately needing money and sees all these people who would ↦

StarMags.com



Wilson with Factory sleeve designer Peter Saville in 1984

love to make money for him. But they have one slightly higher goal. He can see that we are trying to offer an alternative form of behaviour in the marketplace and we're not going to destroy that. It's not as if we're holding bands down to our positions. There are no contracts, groups have freedom to do what they want.

"It's fascinating to hear Larry talk about his situation, because despite the desperation and frustration he does realise why we do it."

A nice dream, if you can afford it.

Is such a state of independence still desirable, still viable? When it was declared, the music industry was in disarray, totally unable to cope with contemporary excitements. Nor could the majority of independents, which briefly flowered in punk's wake, leaving only the big three – Mute, Rough Trade and Factory – still flourishing.

Factory were blessed with the world's most popular independent group in Joy Division – whose sales financially support the label, just as the group defined its identity; thus they were spared the need of spoiling their hands. Where other independents took on the industry at their own game, Factory doggedly remained outside it all.

"Factory is an anarchic expression of anti-business"
Tony Wilson

If the Factory experiment in marketing strategy is intermittently working and is branching out into video (Ikon) and club (Haçienda), as an experiment in art it is less successful.

Outside New Order they have nothing to match the early aloof fervour of A Certain Ratio's inspired fusion of funk and industrial epitomised by 'Flight' and their cover of 'Shack Up'. Their ignoble slide into a disinterested jazz hybrid, that Jim Shelley astutely described as JUNK, marked Factory's move into dance. But the anonymity of the present generation of Factory guitar groups is most alarming.

Tony's faith in them pulling through is almost convincing until you go back and listen to the singles. Stockholm Monsters' pair have the spunk of early Ratio, but the overall impression is dreariness. Ditto The Wake , though they suggest they might go beyond their glamorously bleak guitar visions to something truly moving.

If Factory once led the field, it would seem they've taken it up a cul-de-sac. Their refusal to get involved in the machinations of the industry is moral and right, but their disengagement presently lends them an aura of impotence, as if they were leaving their destiny in the hands of others where they once grasped it firmly in their own hands.

Where Factory once looked set to conquer the world, they seem to have shrunken into a small provincial label based around their noblest investment, Manchester's Haçienda club. The thrust forward must come from home.

Though truth is the ultimate goal of both art and journalism, the two faculties are rarely reconciled in its pursuit. Tony Wilson, however, represents an exception. His careers generally run parallel, but they occasionally cross. Just as his experience of the music industry informed *World In Action*'s investigation of chart-rigging and hype, so his experience in journalism and TV alert him to the destructive possibilities of language.

Tony: "Essentially, it's the remarkable use of language in British journalism which allows propaganda to function so well.

"For example, you can't get away from the fact that a person reporting on a strike is a reporter who, however wonderful he may be, however honest or good he is, still earns £20,000 a year. The status quo treats him well. And as he has no choice other than to look through his own eyes; he must be looking through the eyes of the status quo. That's the reality of daily news reporting."

"It's like: unions demand, managements offer. Scargill is arrogant, Geoffrey Howe is confident. It's those loose, variable adjectives, they can both apply to the same thing but they have value judgements implicit in them. I notice them in terms of the criticism I get, I've had them used often enough about me, but I don't mind, I get used to it."

Potentially the most damaging word applied to Factory or Tony Wilson is 'fascist'.

"It arose from a short review in *NME*, in fact, which said that A Certain Ratio got their name from 'a certain ratio of Jewish blood' blah blah blah. Well, the name comes from an Eno song, 'The True Wheel', but anyway it is such a case of complete ridiculousness.

"The question of politics should really arise out of your personal activity. And the whole point about Factory is that in its activity it behaves with what I would call an egalitarian anarchic expression of anti-business or whatever. In our actual moments of working in the marketplace we make that stand every single day. The stand one makes against business and its commodity fetishism.

"And the whole thing is informed by a tradition in my case of academic far-left thought and in Erasmus and Rob Gretton's case by a Manchester working-class, naive, kick-the-bastards-in-the-bollocks attitude to life. Gretton says Factory is still a punk label, and that is a very astute comment." ■

What happened next?

The Factory story continued to its premature end

AFTER DARK

Despite Wilson's success in the music industry, he continued to work on TV for Granada and, later, Channel 4. In May 1987 he became the first host of *After Dark*, the UK's first unstructured late-night chat show, on which he chaired discussions between the likes of politician Peter Hain, author David Yallop and musician Billy Bragg.

THE END OF FACTORY

In November 1992, after 14 years in business, Factory Records declared bankruptcy. It came in the same year that New Order spent hundreds of thousands on 'Republic', and Happy Mondays were trying to put together fourth album 'Yes Please!' at Eddy Grant's house in Barbados but got distracted by crack cocaine.

WILSON'S DEATH

Tony Wilson was diagnosed with kidney cancer and died of a heart attack on August 10, 2007, aged 57. His coffin was allocated a Factory catalogue number – FAC 501 – that mirrored the label's releases. His headstone features a quote from Mrs G Linnaeus Banks' 1876 novel *The Manchester Man*.

PETER ANDERSON

THIS WEEK IN 2000



Macca snubs the Brits in favour of the NME Awards, where he is honoured alongside Happy Mondays' Shaun Ryder

His arm around a very pasty Shaun Ryder as they both celebrate NME Awards wins at the Mermaid Theatre in Blackfriars, central London, Sir Paul McCartney declares that being handed the Best Band Ever award on behalf of The Beatles is better than a Brit – the rival ceremony had given their Outstanding Contribution To Music prize to the Spice Girls when McCartney told them he couldn't go. Thanking "John, George, Ringo and God" in his acceptance speech, McCartney later says: "I came here because it's the readers' choice, unlike the Brits, which is chosen by committee. I think it's amazing when it's the readers who vote – that's always the one, that's the big one. I heard through the grapevine that they'd given us a massive vote, that's why I came. It's fantastic. Thirty years later, it's unbelievable, you know?" Ryder has been crowned Godlike Genius, but Sir Paul argues: "I would give it to Bob Dylan. He's fairly godlike." Still, an emotional Ryder is deeply moved by the honour. "I was almost in tears, man. Where am I going to stick it? Next to the other one: in the pawn shop."



PRIMAL MINISTER

The *NME* readers' poll pulls in some unusual results and loony suggestions. Danny Murphy from Sutton Coldfield nominates Bobby Gillespie for Prime Minister of Scotland, while Tottenham's Jo Walsh suggests Jarvis Cocker for the top job at Westminster. And Robbie Williams is declared "the most annoying wanker since John Major" by Phil Payne from Manchester.

BEACH BOYS

With Danny Boyle's new film *The Beach* hitting screens, the director and leading man Leonardo DiCaprio discuss being accused of "raping" Thailand. Street protests broke out before shooting even began, campaigners arguing the film would "disrespect" the landscape. DiCaprio, whose face was used on protestors' masks sporting vampire fangs, dismisses the claims as "political propaganda". He continues: "I haven't seen any destruction of the beach and I have been there every day."

REVIEWED THIS WEEK



The Cure – Bloodflowers 7/10

"There's the distressed guitar, squirming in tense arpeggios over an undertow of spiralling keyboards. And that face, staring blurrily from the cover – no mistaking it." ■ APRIL LONG

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

▶Dave Grohl is banned from driving in Australia after being found guilty of drink driving when stopped for a random breath test.

▶Johnny Cash enters the studio with producer Rick Rubin to record an album scheduled for a spring 2001 release.

▶Elastica reveal that their long-awaited new album is to be called 'The Menace' – singer Justine Frischmann tells *NME* it was "a menace in every way". Meanwhile, original guitarist Donna Matthews quits the band after a breakdown.

NME

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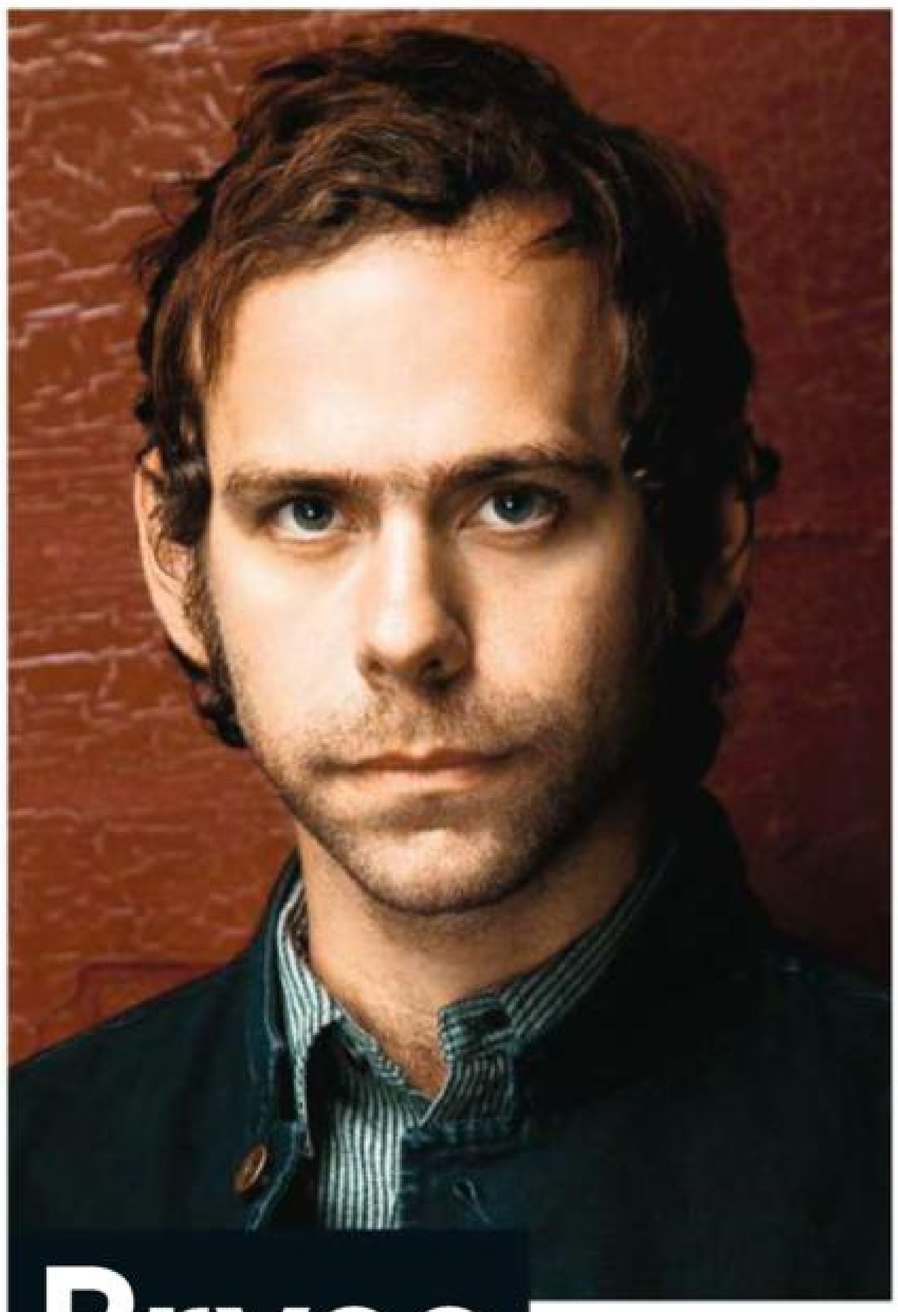
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DOES ROCK 'N' ROLL KILL

BRAINCELLS?

Vs THE FANS

WE FIND THE ROCK STAR, YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS



Bryce Dessner

The National guitarist



Tina Belcher from *Bob's Burgers*

1 Who is credited as the artwork photographer on your early 2001-2004 Brassland releases?
Richard Bolton, York, on Twitter
"Alec Hanley Bemis."
WRONG. Pope Rathbone, aka singer Matt Berninger.



2 How many songs are there on 'Tarquin Roughs', the leaked 'Boxer' sessions?
Jim Mee, Poole, via email
"Oh! Is it 24?"
WRONG. It's 25. Were you feeling very creative then?
"We were. But they were never supposed to leak, so that's why I didn't know the number."

3 What's the original title of 'Conversation 16' from 'High Violet'?
Buck Rogers, the 25th century, via email
"I think it was called 'Droop Mountain' at one point. I'm talking about the original sketch, so no-one would know that but us."
The answer we have here is 'Romantic Comedy'.
"I think you might be right. That was Matt's first title."
WRONG

4 What does the tattoo on Matt's chest say?
J Nash, Leeds, on Twitter
"It says, 'Martha Jane'."
CORRECT. Who's she?
"It's a reference to the Velvet Underground song." [Er, there's a 'Sweet Jane' but not a 'Martha Jane' by them – Velvet Underground Ed]

5 On which National album do you make your first appearance as a full member?
Zoe Hodges, Norwich, via email
"On 'Sad Songs For Dirty Lovers'."
CORRECT. Were you glad about the promotion?
"I didn't think about it too much at the time. I was just helping out."

6 How many times did you play your track 'Sorrow' in a row for six hours straight at the art installation MoMa PS1 in New York last year?
Siriliya Nawalkwar, London, via email
"105."
CORRECT. Blimey. Didn't you get bored of playing it so much?
"You get bored of it straight away, then after that it becomes a very moving, transformative experience."

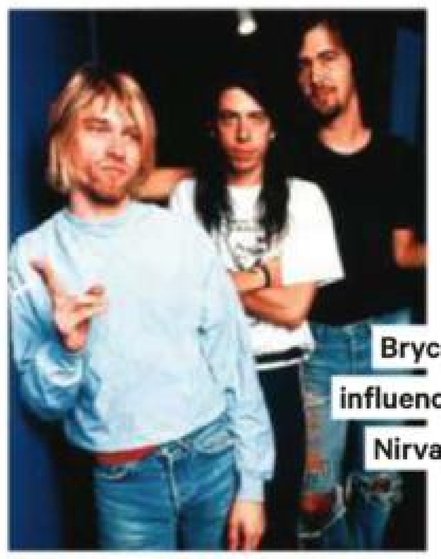


The National at MoMa

7 What was the name of the venue you got all your stuff stolen from after your first ever UK show?
Alec Mardsen, Tonbridge, on Twitter
"The Buffalo Bar [in London]. We saw it happening, phoned the police and they said, 'Sorry, there's nothing we can do.'"
CORRECT. Sorry about that.



8 Name three records referenced on 'Trouble Will Find Me'.
Tom Pyne, Sunderland, via email
"'Let It Be' – we could say the Beatles version or the Replacements



Bryce's influences • Nirvana

version. 'Nevermind'. And Morrissey's 'Bona Drag'."
CORRECT. Were they all big influences on you?
"Let it Be' and 'Nevermind' would be massive influences on me. 'Bona Drag' is something more Matt our singer loves."

9 You've written two songs for animated Fox show *Bob's Burgers*. Can you name the eldest Belcher child?
Natalie Colvy, Truro, via email
"No, I can't."
WRONG. Tina Belcher

10 How does Matt's younger film-directing brother Tom distinguish between Bryan and the rest of the band in 2013's *Mistaken For Strangers*?
J Biddulph, London, via email
"Some of us partied less than the others. My [twin] brother [guitarist and keyboardist Aaron Dessner] likes to wake up early and go running. Our drummer likes to stay up late and sleep in."
WRONG. "You're so metal and they're so coffeehouse!"

SCORE = 5
"Not bad!"

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WORDS: RICH PELLEY PHOTOS: RICHARD JOHNSON, REX

NEXT WEEK

"It felt like a celebration of alternative culture, as though everything had been leading up to it..."

30 years ago next week
THE SMITHS released their first album

In a brand-new interview Johnny Marr recalls the early attitudes and trailblazing ambitions of the band who pioneered indie

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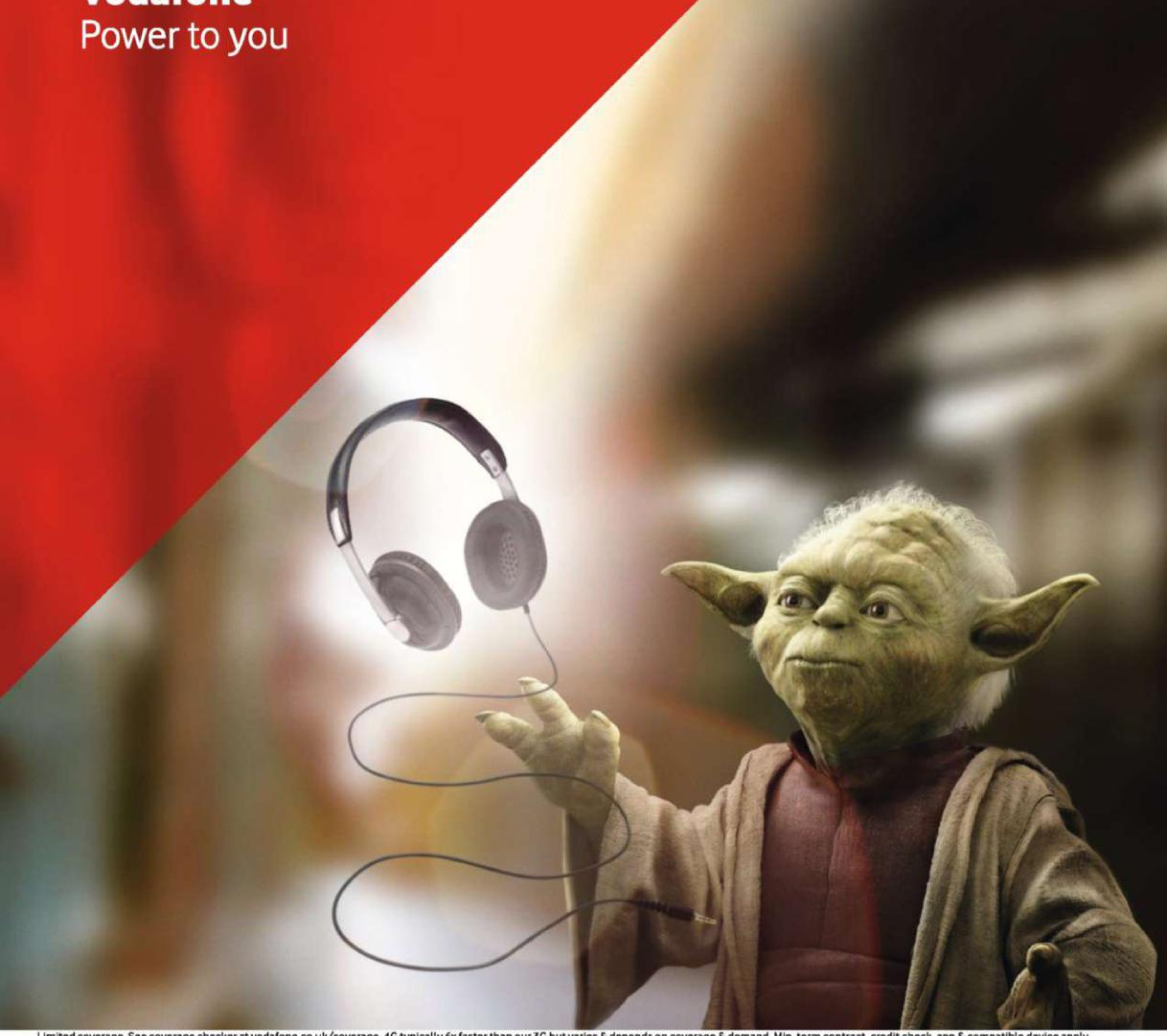
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QUIZ ANSWERS: 1. 'Her Majesty' **2.** Death Cab For Cutie **3.** 'The Bends' **4.** Debbie Harry **5.** Two Door Cinema Club **6.** Ash's '1977' **7.** *Fantastic Mr Fox* **8.** 2002 **9.** Metronomy **10.** Bono **11.** 'Vogue' **12.** Brighton **13.** True **14.** Depeche Mode **15.** 'Beautiful Future'

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