

NME

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SPECIAL



Jack
White



Kasabian

Top 50



St Vincent



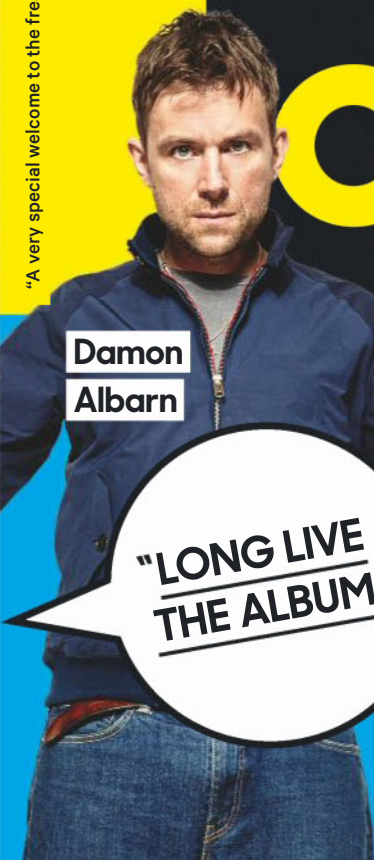
Manics

albums



Jamie T

of 2014



Damon
Albarn



Lana
Del Rey

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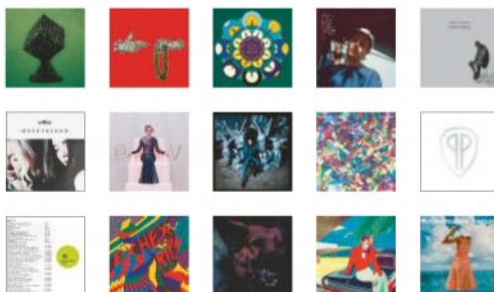
Damon Albarn, Ariel Pink and Clipping in London; Girlpool in Brighton

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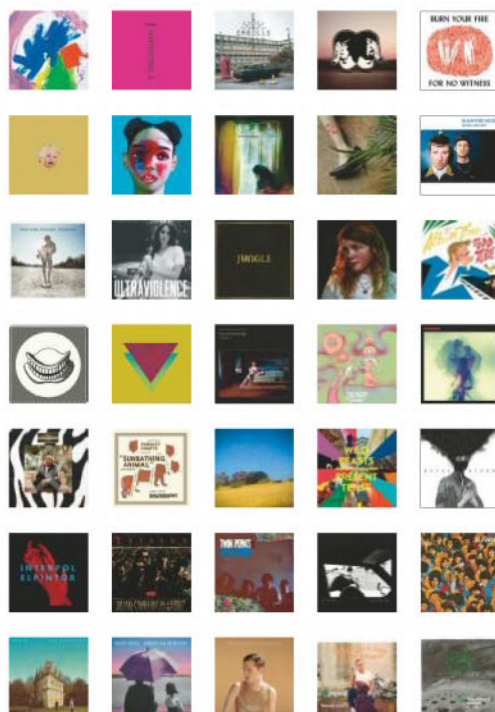
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LETTER OF THE WEEK

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BAD AID

Hey Africa, great news! George Osborne has decided to waive VAT on sales of Band Aid 30; another showing of generosity from the British government, who've now pledged £1.34m in aid for regions worst hit by Ebola. Of course, they could just reclaim some of the millions allegedly squirreled away by some of the artists who appear on the single instead, and donate that infinitely more sizeable sum. Bono was subject to a mass protest at Glastonbury 2011 over U2's legal but morally murky use of tax bill-reducing offshore accounts. Bob Geldof has been dogged by questions over his tax affairs since blowing up in a journalist's face in 2012 when asked about it, shouting: "My time? Is that not a tax?" (Err, no, it isn't.) Even Tracey Emin, who created the single's cover and earlier this year sold a bed for £2.2m, threatened to "leave Britain" in 2009 over being forced to pay the government's current 50 per cent on annual earnings over £150,000 a year. Really want to feed the world? Try taxing the fucking rich. **Carly Tinbrook, via email**

Al Horner: Damn right, Carly. And Band Aid 30's problems don't end there: last week, Damon Albarn complained that the song "patronises Africa", and an artist originally set to



guest on the song – Ghanian-British MC Fuse ODG – turned down the track after seeing what he described as its "appalling" new lyrics that depicted the continent as a hopeless and helpless dust bowl. Over 5,000 people have now died in Africa as a result of Ebola, so there's no debating it's a great thing to raise millions of pounds. But as your points highlight, there's an air of hypocrisy to Band Aid 30 that's difficult to buy into.

A FUCK-OFF INFINITE VORTEX

Not to get all Jaden Smith about things, right, but do you ever feel, waking up every day to news of another band reunion and nostalgia-charged comeback tour, like nothing really ever ends and in turn nothing ever really begins, and instead we're all just floating along aimlessly in a fuck-off infinite vortex where time is but a mere illusion? Anyway, nice to have Ride back.

Paul Thomas, via email

AH: Not that often, Paul, no. I share your joy about Ride's return, though. Creation Records built an empire on the back of their euphoric shoegaze – without their four albums there'd be no 'Loveless', no 'Screamadelica' and perhaps no 'Definitely Maybe'. When Beady Eye, featuring Andy Bell on

guitar, split last month, a lot of people crossed their fingers hard in the hope that this would happen, and here it is. Ride are a band who've never quite got their dues, if you ask me, but hopefully a run of major festival performances (Primavera's already been announced) and big gigs will change that.

GETTING SHIRTY

Something that bothers me every time I go to a gig and see the merchandise table is the price of the

T-shirts. T-shirts are free advertising for bands, and the perfect memento of a gig. But what teenager, or adult, can afford to fork out £20 for a T-shirt after paying for a ticket, travel and drinks? It simply can't be costing more than two or three quid to make each shirt, and if they were sold for a tenner each I bet nearly everyone there would buy an official one, instead of buying a rubbish quality one off some tout outside. This is something that needs changing!

Daisy Fitzgerald, via email



AH: Don't be mad at the bands, Daisy – it's usually the venues responsible for the hike in price. I've heard quite a few bands complain about it off the record, in part because wearing a band T-shirt is one of the purest ways to support your favourite act. Plus, from a band's perspective, imagine how good it must feel to look out at a crowd full of people with your face on their clothes. This is as good a reason as any to get behind this Friday's annual Wear A Band T-Shirt To Work day. I'll be digging out my favourite shitty Japandroids 2012 tour tee.

IT'S SNOWTIME

After seeing the news that Interpol have been trapped in a Day After Tomorrow-like snowstorm for over 50 hours, and watching them document their descent into madness on Twitter (at the time of writing,

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they're wondering whether "British people like peanut butter"), I've been thinking about other rock stars who should star in big-budget Hollywood disaster movies. Serge Pizzorno has the facial hair for a Cast Away-style marooning on a desert island. Keith Richards could survive a zombie apocalypse by simply blending in with the stumbling ghouls. And a few tweaks to Bowie's 'Space Oddity' video and you'd have a Gravity-type story of astro-peril. Good, eh?

Jack Edmunds, via email

AH: Sounds like you need to get Transformers director Michael Bay on the phone immediately, Jack. I'd like to throw Bono into your pitch, as he seems to be living out the plot of a PG-version of *Final Destination* – in the last week he's not only fallen out of a plane mid-flight, but crashed a bike in New York. Might I also suggest a blockbuster about a Birmingham indie band tasked with diverting a comet on collision course with earth. I call it *Swim Deep Impact*.



LOOK WHO'S STALKING

Me with the Royal Blood boys after their wild album-release gig at Rough Trade East in London.

Charlie Catmull, via email

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Band: The Mariana Hollow Photo: ©Matt Golowczynski

NME TRACK OF THE WEEK

1. Peace
Gen Strange

Peace's second album might be taking longer than expected, but 'Gen Strange' is a sign that it'll live up to 'In Love'. Frontman Harry Koisser takes his cues from Ziggy Stardust-era Bowie, mixing surreal situations with modern doom ("Man on the news, he said, 'Try not to be scared'/Blood, love and terror next to weather") as his bandmates writhe beneath. Uncertainty never sounded so funky.

Rhian Daly, Assistant Reviews Editor

2. Duke Garwood
Heavy Love

Newly signed to Heavenly Recordings (Toy, The Wytches), British blues' best-kept secret has joined forces with a whispering Jehnnny Beth of Savages for the hypnotic title track from his forthcoming album. Recorded at Josh Homme's LA studio with heavyweights Mark Lanegan and Alain Johannes, this has all the dirt and decadence of the Desert Sessions series as well as a remarkable feeling for the grittiest kind of groove.

Leonie Cooper, writer

3. Charli XCX
Gold Coins

Having written or featured on an impressively long list of Top 10 hits in recent years (Icona Pop's 'I Love It', Iggy Azalea's 'Fancy' and her own 'Boom Clap'), Charli XCX is probably amassing quite a substantial pile of gold coins. This cut from her upcoming 'Sucker' details the lifestyle she's halfway to fulfilling. "My platinum troubles/I'll drown 'em in pink champagne/And escape into the sky in my own private jet". It's an electropop smasher.

Luke Morgan Britton, writer

4. Curtis Harding
Surf

Part of The Black Lips' circle of wayward heroes, Burger Records alumnus Curtis Harding finally makes it to the UK this week for his first European shows. He'll be playing tracks from his sprightly debut album 'Soul Power', including this. The midpoint between Ty Segall's bucket-kicking fuzz racket and King Khan's acid-flecked croon, it showcases Harding's uncanny knack for nailing soul-meets-garage pop perfection rather well.

Matt Wilkinson, New Music Editor

5. Nicki Minaj
Bed Of Lies (feat. Skylar Grey)

After the ridiculous 'Anaconda' and rapping about a "ménage" with Drake and Lil Wayne on 'Only', Nicki Minaj has decided to show us her softer side. This latest trailer for next month's 'The Pinkprint' has Nicki rapping about a failed relationship with a serial cheat who "could never make eye contact" before Skylar Grey delivers an irresistibly sad chorus. Emotional stuff, and a welcome reminder that rap's most cartoony character is human, too.

Nick Levine, writer

6. Africa Express
In C Mali

Recorded in 1964, Terry Riley's 'In C' is often cited as the first ever minimalist composition. Africa Express are celebrating its 50th anniversary by releasing a 41-minute version featuring Damon Albarn (playing the melodica), Brian Eno, Nick Zinner and new artists from Bamako, Mali. This five-minute edit is warmer than the original, softened by vocals, traditional African instruments and strings.

Lucy Jones, Deputy Editor, NME.COM

7. Flying Lotus
Medication Meditation

Blockbuster videogame *Grand Theft Auto V* has undergone a hefty update for its recently released next-gen edition, and with 162 new songs on offer, the in-game radio stations are among the chief beneficiaries. Flying Lotus' own FlyLo FM offers up this strikingly dusky new joint – a spiritual piece built on angelic vocal samples and Thundercat's oozing bass that comes alive when it meets the flow of Bone Thugs N Harmony's Krazy Bone.

James Bentley, writer

8. Mourn
Otitis

These Spanish teenagers have dug into their lifetime obsession with all things brooding, dark and '90s to create 'Otitis', a brilliant cut from their forthcoming debut album. Already snapped up by Captured Tracks (DIIV, Perfect Pussy), the band owe a clear debt to Kim and Kelley Deal as well as PJ Harvey, but 'Otitis' bundles those artists' energy and passion in alongside some muddy grunge to create something sharp and revitalising.

David Renshaw, News Reporter

9. AC/DC
Rock Or Bust

It's been a period of intense upheaval for AC/DC, what with founder member Malcolm Young leaving after a dementia diagnosis and drummer Phil Rudd facing criminal charges. Rather predictably, though, their music is resistant to change. The title track of the Australian rock grizzlies' new album has the old 'Back In Black' swagger, a giant riff and that committed banshee screech from the now 67-year-old Brian Johnson. In AC/DC we trust!

Matthew Horton, writer

10. Pusha T
Lunch Money

"I'm taking niggas' lunch money/Too bad, I was fucking hungry", spits Pusha T over a gurgling soup of bit-crunched beats and electronics on this surprise new single, produced by Kanye West. Nods to this summer's Ferguson crisis and effortless flow further justify the Virginia rapper's 'King Push' nickname, but it's Ye's thrilling ambient fizz that captivates. If Kanye's giving away beats like this, just how good will the 'Yeezus' follow-up be?

Al Horner, Assistant Editor, NME.COM

ESSENTIAL NEW TRACKS

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11. Beyoncé Ring Off

'Ring Off' is one of two new tracks – '7/11' is the other – that feature on 'Beyoncé Platinum Edition Box Set'. Over a reggaeton thrum, Bey addresses her mother Tina, who divorced the singer's father and former manager Tim in 2011, after he fathered a love child. It's candid and compelling: "*Mama, I understand your many sleepless nights, when you sit and you think about father*".

Lucy Jones, Deputy Editor, NME.COM

12. Kate Tempest Guts (feat. Loyle Carner)

After singles from *Childhood* and *Juce*, producer Dan Carey's experimental singles label *Speedy Wunderground* knocks it out of the park again with this collaboration between Kate Tempest and fast-rising London MC Loyle Carner. Their voices weave around each other like prizefighters, while Tempest's eye for detail gifts us images of people throwing up in Budgens and points out "*There's more to the world than things you can touch*".

Kevin EG Perry, writer

13. Smashing Pumpkins Tiberius

As Billy Corgan and Smashing Pumpkins continue to prepare for the release of *Monuments To An Elegy* – the second in the catchily titled 'Teagarden By Kaleidyscope' trilogy – they've dropped a song named after a Roman emperor. A tinkle of the piano precedes a blast into classic Pumpkins riffs and humongous Tommy Lee drum rolls. This third track from the album is the best yet, lilting between quiet melody and stadium rock.

Eve Barlow, Deputy Editor

14. A Place To Bury Strangers Straight

They've been dormant since 2012's 'Worship', but now A Place To Bury Strangers are stirring loudly. 'Straight' is taken from *Transfixiation*, the New Yorkers' fourth album. If the rest of the record is anything like this, then ears will bleed come February 16. Opening with a deadly rumble, it stretches abrasive guitar and bass to a climactic breaking point. After little more than 180 seconds, the song collapses in on itself, battered and broken.

Ben Homewood, Reviews Editor

15. Sleigh Bells That Did It

Since their 2010 debut, Sleigh Bells songs have tended to come in two flavours: the candy-sweet pop of something like 'Rill Rill' and the full-on, gut-churning aural assault of something like 'Infinity Guitars'. 'That Did It', a new version of an abandoned 2013 track recorded with Chicago rapper Tink is firmly in the former category, but not compared with the original – which, says the band's Derek E Miller, was "so sugary, it put me to sleep".

Dan Stubbs, News Editor



16. Only Real Yesterdays

Jamie T stopped obsessing about overdose cases and the voices in his head, stripped to his pants and went cartwheeling along Venice Beach. That's the world Only Real's 'Yesterdays' exists in. This tongue-twisting new single from Treays-indebted west Londoner Niall Galvin is drenched in sunny harmonicas, top-down psych guitars and indie dreamgirl harmonies.

Mark Beaumont, writer

17. Tyler, The Creator Diaper

Fan of sending out all-caps missives on social media, Tyler, The Creator, tweeted: "RANDOM SONG LAYING AROUND THOUGHT WHY NOT PUT IT SOMEWHERE," on November 18, then neatly mentioned after that he'd added some new dates to his US tour. Clever lad. The song, 'Diaper', has a brief synth intro, then drops into an almost grime-like cacophonous beat. Best line, by far: "*They tell me to sit down, shit, I ain't chairs*".

Phil Hebblethwaite, writer

18. A\$AP Ferg Doe-Active

Ferg's always been the A\$AP Mob member most likely to follow in the steps of Rocky and become a major star in his own right. Maybe his upcoming 'Ferg Forever' mixtape will do it. 'Doe-Active' follows the track 'Perfume', and finds the Harlem rapper amping up his cartoonish flow in an Ol' Dirty Bastard kind of way. He lacks the charisma of the once-great, often-in-jail, now-dead Wu-Tang Clan member, but has the energy to compensate.

Dan Stubbs, News Editor

19. Sleaford Mods Bring Out The Cannons 2

Sleaford Mods seem to have a default position: 'most people are cunts'. David Cameron, Dr Dre, Miles Kane: all have been scathingly dismissed by the Nottingham pair. This previously unreleased companion track to 'Bring Out The Cannons 1', from their recent 'Chubbed Up +' compilation, follows a similar tack. Jason Williamson spits out the gripping chorus as if he's about to gleefully pop off everyone he despises one by one. What a band.

Greg Cochran, Editor, NME.COM

20. Kim Deal Biker Gone

They've been released in fairly low-key fashion, but the singles from Kim Deal's seven-inch series have been some of the most underrated songs of the last two years: last August's 'Are You Mine?' is a sweetly sinister ballad that sits among Deal's best work. The latest addition is 'Biker Gone', where sister Kelley sustains an anxious high bass note, which Kim and Slint drummer Britt Waldorf unsettles further with fractious, unwieldy guitar and drums.

Laura Snapes, Features Editor



TheWeek

► EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS IN MUSIC ■ EDITED BY DAN STUBBS

8

Pussy Riot's Masha (left) and Nadya outside Ecuador's embassy on November 18, after visiting Julian Assange



Anarchists in the UK

Political punks Pussy Riot get pop-star treatment on a speaking tour of the UK, but a musical project is coming soon, they reveal

PHOTOS: JENN FIVE

Pussy Riot's Nadya Tolokonnikova and Masha Alekhina were mobbed by reporters and fans when they visited the UK last week for the first time since their release from prison at the end of 2013.

The pair spoke to the media outside the Ecuadorian embassy after meeting Wikileaks founder Julian Assange and later the same day appeared on a panel in Parliament. Earlier, the pair exclusively told *NME* that they're working on new music and videos in collaboration with former Le Tigre musician JD Samson.

The Russian feminist protest-art activists came to international fame in 2012 when they were imprisoned after playing 45 seconds of their "punk prayer", 'Mother Of God, Drive Putin

Away', at a guerrilla gig in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.

While visiting London, Tolokonnikova said their new creative project represented a different sort of challenge for the band. "It's new for us because we're artists; we're not really musicians or from the music world," she said.

"[In 2012] we just decided that we should do a punk band, and we got our friends together and tried to do a song. We did what we were able to. It wasn't brilliant, but it was enough for a political music video. Now we're working with some real musicians, including JD Samson, on some creative stuff."

Asked whether the intention was to produce a Pussy Riot album, she said: "Our goal is not to make an album, but the form of our statements is very important to us and the video clip ➡

While in London, Russia's foremost punk protesters revealed an appreciation of Banksy and Borat



form is one we like. Maybe at some point in the future we will do an album, but right now we want to make videos."

After visiting Assange at the Ecuadorian embassy, where he has claimed asylum, the pair told *NME* that they "had more in common with him than we expected". Asked to clarify what those things in common are, Alekhina said: "Universal things about freedom of expression, if we're talking about us, and freedom of information, if we're talking about him."

Tolokonnikova added: "Everything about a state should be transparent to its citizens, including the issue of surveillance. Its legality should be explained to citizens. We are under constant surveillance by the FSB (the internal security services) in Russia and we're trying to protest against this, question its legality and ask why they're doing it. We would not want

western states to follow the example of Russia, where we're trying to fight exactly the same things that Assange is fighting against here."

On whether they saw any problem with members of a feminist collective such as Pussy Riot openly supporting Assange, a man who is wanted in Sweden over sexual assault allegations, Tolokonnikova said: "We did not review this charge that has been directed at him. We do not think it is in relation to the things that he is doing right now."

Alekhina added: "We also try to see the direction of one's intentions in the future – what he is trying to do and is doing right now."

The visit to Assange came just hours before the two women appeared at Parliament to speak at an event organised by Russian opposition politicians to support the introduction of a 'Magnitsky law'. Such a law,

named after Sergei Magnitsky, a Russian whistleblower who died in police custody in Moscow, would punish the Russian officials responsible for his murder by freezing their assets in the UK and restricting their visa rights.

That event came at the end of a busy week of appearances, which had also seen Tolokonnikova and Alekhina speak at an Amnesty International event attended by the likes of Django Django, Viv Albertine and Jamie Hince. Asked by former Slits guitarist Albertine whether they'd inspired a new generation of girls, Tolokonnikova said, "We inspired people to be less afraid. A lot of people started their political activity because of our involvement with the law. There's different value to someone going to a political rally in the UK than in Russia, so even if we've only inspired a few people, that has tremendous value in Russia."

While in the country, they also spoke at the Cambridge Union and a 450-capacity audience at the Greenwood Theatre at King's College London. ■ KEVIN EG PERRY

Pussy Riot on tour

Where they went and what they said



Amnesty International

November 14

Speaking in support of Amnesty's 'Write For Rights' campaign, which organises letter writing to political prisoners and those responsible for their incarceration, Alekhina accused Putin of controlling Russian media for his own benefit. "People will just keep choosing the only option that they are shown, in this case that's Vladimir Putin," she said.

promote their campaign for the reform of Russian prisons. They said much of their work began while imprisoned, using hunger strikes to bring change, and highlighted Norway as an example for how a penal system might be reformed.

King's College

November 17

In a light-hearted public interview with *The Guardian's* Luke Harding, Tolokonnikova and Alekhina talked about the importance of satire in their work, and described how they've been inspired by Borat, Banksy and *Dr Strangelove*.

Embassy of Ecuador

November 18

In a private meeting with Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, Tolokonnikova and Alekhina agreed to join the advisory board of the Courage Foundation, a global whistleblower organisation of which Assange is a trustee.

Portcullis House

November 18

On the fifth anniversary of the death of Sergei Magnitsky, Pussy Riot spoke in support of a law that would punish those responsible for his death when they leave Russia.

MY LIFE IN A SUITCASE

FIVE TOURING ESSENTIALS

Ghetts

BOOK

My lyric book

"That's the only book I take on tour with me, just for writing when I'm on the road, to keep my creative juices flowing. I find it easy to write anywhere, and when you're on the road, the tours can be inspiration in themselves."



FILM

House Party

"It's an old American film from the early '90s. There's about four of them where they're always having house parties, these two characters Kid and Play. Everyone should check it out – it's a really fun sort of film."

DVD BOXSET

Sons Of Anarchy

"I'm hooked on it. It's exciting – the whole motorcycle thing. I heard about it 'cos Giggs wouldn't stop going on about it. He kept telling me about it every day: 'Sons Of Anarchy, fam, Sons Of Anarchy.'"



GAME FIFA

"I'm not really a consoles man but I suppose on the tour bus it's always FIFA. I'm terrible at it – and all games."



HOME COMFORT Adidas slippers

"My Adidas slippers are the one that I'd take. They're the shower ones. We call them sliders. They're really comfortable, they're great."

► Ghetts plays

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The Macbeth
On December



2. For information visit
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La Roux

KOKO, February 3

Elly Jackson may have made her name back in 2009 with golden synthpop nuggets 'In For The Kill' and 'Bulletproof', but this year's second album 'Trouble In

Paradise' carries the kind of infectious clout that'll get all of Camden partying.

► **DON'T MISS IT BECAUSE** Jackson's reinvention has turned the singer from frustrated frontwoman to prowling power player.

The Districts

100 Club, February 3

Early tasters from Philadelphia quartet The Districts' forthcoming debut '4th And Roebling' have already been described as "raucous like Babyshambles" and "boasting the louche cool of early Kings of Leon". Add to that a fearsome live reputation and this one should get messy.

► **DON'T MISS IT BECAUSE** With their debut out mere days later, this will be the riotous party to launch it all.

Happyness

Birthdays, February 4

In 'Weird Little Birthday', London trio Happyness crafted one of 2014's most idiosyncratic debuts. Full of slacker riffs and twisted lyricisms ('Montreal Rock Band Somewhere'

daydreams of scalping Win Butler), it's Pavement thrust into an absurdist, mildly disturbing fantasy land.

► **DON'T MISS IT BECAUSE** At their last London show, the band brought out cake and a 7ft statue of Jesus. Need more convincing?

Q&A

Harry Koisser, Peace



You're playing Heaven on album release day – how are you going to celebrate?

"I want to spend as much as possible on pyrotechnics, aircraft flyovers... a visual assault from all angles. Might get a Kickstarter and if people pledge enough we'll hire a spaghetti cannon."

Have you started planning for your tour yet?

"Originally I wanted to play for, like, two hours and just not stop. Just play absolutely everything we've done. Covers, requests... anything people want."

You've played a few raucous London shows in your time – any favourites?

"One London show at The Old Blue Last, Dom from Superfood was our sound guy and we asked for 500 oranges on our rider. There were oranges everywhere. I threw one from the stage and it hit him straight in the face."

Childhood

XOYO, February 5

With this year's debut 'Lacuna', Childhood marked themselves out as Brixton's most blissed-out dreamers. Live, they add a little bite to proceedings, with swathes of smoke, extended kraut jams, and vocal howls.

► **DON'T MISS IT BECAUSE** Superlative non-album track 'Pinballs' usually gets an airing.

Dolomite Minor Vs Baby Strange

Electrowerkz, February 5

In the red corner you have Dolomite Minor: the Southampton blues duo who worship at the altar of sludgy riffs. In the blue corner you have Baby Strange: twitching Glaswegian upstarts, with a twinkle of The Clash in their eyes. In this battle, there are no losers.

► **DON'T MISS IT BECAUSE** Whether you like your guitars low slung or high wired, there's something here to delight you.

Kele

Islington Assembly Hall, February 6

Over the last decade, Kele's gone from spiky fretwork with Bloc Party to the effervescent dance anthems of 'The

Boxer' and a current dalliance with Chicago house and UK bass on recent LP 'Trick'. Here's where to catch him in his latest incarnation.

► **DON'T MISS IT BECAUSE** 'Tenderoni' is still the kind of indisputable banger that'll get the whole crowd united.

Peace

Heaven, February 9

Peace are one band who know how to throw a party. And with second album 'Happy People' released on the day they rock up at Heaven, Harry Koisser and co are sure to be glitter-clad ringmasters of their own indie graduation ball.

► **DON'T MISS IT BECAUSE** At early shows, Peace had a penchant for setting off confetti cannons. God knows what they'll do this time.

Honeyblood

Oslo, February 11

Glasgow duo Honeyblood (below) deal in the kind of sweetened snarl that bands thrice their size would be envious of. Their recent self-titled debut is a lesson in deceptively doe-eyed, grungy sass.

► **DON'T MISS IT BECAUSE** With new drummer Cat Myers, the band are mightier than ever.

The Crips

Electric Ballroom, February 12

Since Wakefield's finest last brought their raucous live show back to home shores, the Jarman have



The Crips play the Electric Ballroom, London on February 12

12



been working on not one, but two new records. Expect various new treats, plus a back catalogue of punk-spirited gold.

► **DON'T MISS IT BECAUSE** The Cribs rarely play it by numbers – tackling albums in full, letting the fans choose the setlist...

The Pains Of Being Pure At Heart

Village Underground, February 16

Having made their name concocting the kind of whimsical C86-indebted jangles made for hand holding and coy crushes, Brooklyn quartet TPOBPAH came back this year all grown up. 'Days Of Abandon' swapped subtlety for synths: a forward move for the indie-pop darlings.

► **DON'T MISS IT BECAUSE** They once wooed you with the old favourites; now they'll also make you dance.

Twin Peaks

100 Club, February 17

If you like your garage rock as melodic as it is shambolic, then Twin Peaks are your guys. Laughing in the face of the three-minute pop song, recent LP 'Wild Onion' proved they know how to create an effervescent whirlwind in less than 150 seconds.

► **DON'T MISS IT BECAUSE** Their three recent sold-out London shows were pure, sweaty, crowd-surfing parties.

Darla

Garage, February 17

Far from the gaudy kicks of the Pleasure Beach, Blackpool trio Darlia deal in the kind of grunge-indebted, monstrous riffs that suggest they'd spit in your 99 cone and throw it in the sea. Last year's 'Knock Knock EP' was only a taste of the dirty kicks they've got on offer.

► **DON'T MISS IT BECAUSE** A long-awaited debut is surely coming round the corner.

Interpol

Forum, February 17

After four years away, last year's NME Awards Tour headliners re-emerged in 2014 one member down but a bucketload of confidence up. Like their recent anagram album title 'El Pintor' suggests, this is Interpol reimagined and recharged.

► **DON'T MISS IT BECAUSE** The New Yorkers have over a decade of hits to draw on.

► We'll be announcing more shows over the coming weeks, so keep an eye on the mag and NME.COM for details.

EXCLUSIVE TICKET PRE-SALE

begins at 9am on Wednesday, November 26 at NME.COM/tickets. Tickets go on general sale at 9am on Friday, November 28.



Snow hands

Interpol got stuck on a tourbus for three days this week. Here's how it played out

As the year's biggest chill bit in America last week, Interpol were on the road near Buffalo, New York, where a year's worth of snow fell in just three days. Aboard their tourbus, Paul Banks, Daniel Kessler and Sam Fogarino found themselves trapped amid 100 cars on a snowed-in highway for a numbing 60-hour stretch.

The band first raised the alarm on their Twitter account on Tuesday, November 18, putting out word that, "Unfortunately, we'll have to cancel tonight's concert in Toronto due to snow," coupled with an image of the white-on-white windscreen of their tour bus. While some of their fellow road users dosed down to sleep in their cars, the trio fended off cabin fever by tweeting regular updates to their followers...

► **HOUR 13** "Hour 13 trapped in the snow," wrote Daniel Kessler, next to a picture of touring bandmembers Dave Pajo and Brandon Curtis swaddled up in hoodies. "Dry goods and vodka. We will make it."

► **HOUR 30** Kessler again: "Still trapped yo! Haven't really moved in 30 hours and we've been on the bus for nearly 40 hours. Nutso. Never seen anything like it."

► **HOUR 33** One-time philosophy student Kessler tweeted a puzzler: "Who rescues a snowplow when it gets stuck in the snow?" Accompanying it, a picture of two emired ploughs outside their window (below).

► **HOUR 35** The band announced they were going to have to cancel their show in Montreal, too. Soon, they were staring down their second trapped night. "Keeping the spirits in a good place ya'll. Thanks for the well wishes. It means a lot to us. Big ups to you – DK."



► **HOUR 40** A picture showed Paul Banks with his guitar, working on something by the wan light of a MacBook (below). "Pablito Banks keeping productive during our times," wrote Kessler.

► **HOUR 44** By now, Kessler was probing the really big issues: "So... Paul is all like British people don't like peanut butter and I'm like, not true. Public opinion?! Peanut butter is awesome – DK. Truth."

► **HOUR 50** Two full days after they'd first stalled, the bus started rolling towards downtown Buffalo, only to meet a roadblock.

► **HOUR 60** The band finally make it to their hotel in Buffalo. The problem? They're now supposed to be in Boston. #winterpol is over.

■ GAVIN HAYNES



THE MINI INTERVIEW



Jemaine Clement

Flight Of
The Conchords

Tell us about your new film *What We Do In The Shadows*.

"It's about vampires but it's not like *Twilight*. A documentary crew follows four of these bloodsuckers living in Wellington, New Zealand to find out their dreams, hopes, fears and insecurities. I wanted to tell a story that was fun, and the effects are crazy."

Your character Vlad says he likes to torture when he's in a bad place. What do you do when the chips are down?

"I favour masochism and torture myself. But if you torture others you'll find it hollow ultimately. You've got to break out of that cycle of making others feel worse to make yourself feel better..."

Will *Flight Of The Conchords* return for a new series or movie?

"We haven't done any work on it. I need to give Bret (McKenzie) a call. Maybe we should just do a Christmas special, then people would stop asking. But then they'll want another thing, or it'll be a disappointment. You know what fans are like: 'Do another series, do a special, do a movie. We want it!' Then we'll finally get round to it and they'll be like, 'You should have left it while you had it. Why did you push it?'"

■ DAN BRIGHTMORE

► *What We Do In The Shadows* is in cinemas now

STAYING IN

THE BEST MUSIC ON TV, RADIO AND ONLINE THIS WEEK



Hear Sleaford
Mods on XFM,
November 26

Sleaford Mods

X-Posure

►LISTEN XFM, 10pm, November 26

It's a brilliant seven days for artists in residence on John Kennedy's landmark show. First, this week finds swearsy ranters Sleaford Mods nesting down in the studio, presumably with the bleep-button man on constant high alert.

Noel Fielding Mary Anne Hobbs

►LISTEN BBC 6 Music, 7pm, November 29

With the Turner Prize looming, Mary Anne Hobbs invites guests such as *Simpsons* animator David Silverman, poet John Cooper Clarke, Patti Smith, Daniel Johnston and luxury comedian Noel Fielding to make their own art along with the sounds and songs played on the show. How can this possibly work on the radio? We can only tune in,

potato-print in hand, to find out. Badly Drawn Boy also guests. Obviously.

Teleman X-Posure

►LISTEN XFM, 10pm, December 1
Following the Mods, the far gentler but no less adorable synthpoppers Teleman and their arch electro edifices pop in to the X-Posure studio, giving

Kennedy a chance to soothe his battered eardrums.

Morrissey Nobel Peace Prize Concert 2013

►WATCH Sky Arts 1, 1am, November 30

Hang on, wasn't world peace supposed to be none of our business? Now here's Mozzer in the line-up for last year's Nobel Peace Prize concert alongside Jake Bugg, James Blunt and Envy, making like we should all be giving it the full Lennon.

But ours is not to reason why, ours is just to watch and sigh.

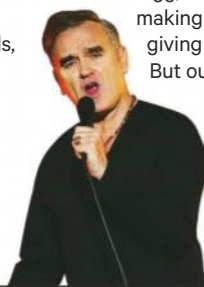
Queen Queen: Live At Wembley

►WATCH Sky Arts 1,

9pm, November 30
De-da-deeeeey-o! High on their Live Aid triumph, Freddie and co were on (ahem) mercurial form at this 1986 gig, spewing out a slew of massive hits to back up their 'A Kind Of Magic' album.

Public Service Broadcasting The Radcliffe & Maconie Show

►LISTEN BBC 6 Music, 1pm, December 2
Leaving behind the transistor tubes of 1942, J Willgoose, Esq of Public Service Broadcasting leaps boldly into the future of wireless by joining Stuart Maconie and Mark Radcliffe for Tea Time Theme Time.



GOING OUT

THE BEST LIVE EVENTS
THIS WEEK



The Wytches

Brighton trio promote debut LP 'Annabel Dream Reader'.

►DATES Leeds Brudenell Social Club (November 27), Manchester Deaf Institute (28) and Ruby Lounge (December 1), Birmingham Hare & Hounds (2)

►TICKETS £8 from NME.COM/tickets with 80p-96p booking fee

Danny Brown

The Detroit rapper plays tracks from recent LP 'Old'.

►DATES Manchester Warehouse Project (November 28), London Coronet (29)
►TICKETS London £22.50 from NME.COM/tickets with £2.25 booking fee

5 TO SEE FOR FREE

1. Wampire

Start The Bus, Bristol
►November 26, 8pm

2. The Black Tambourines

Sticky Mike's Frog Bar, Brighton
►November 30, 8pm

3. King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard

Rough Trade East, London
►December 1, 7pm

4. Tigercub

Bleach, Brighton
►December 1, 8pm

5. Temples

Rough Trade East, London
►December 2, 7pm

GENE GLOVER, ANDY FORD, GETTY

Telefonica

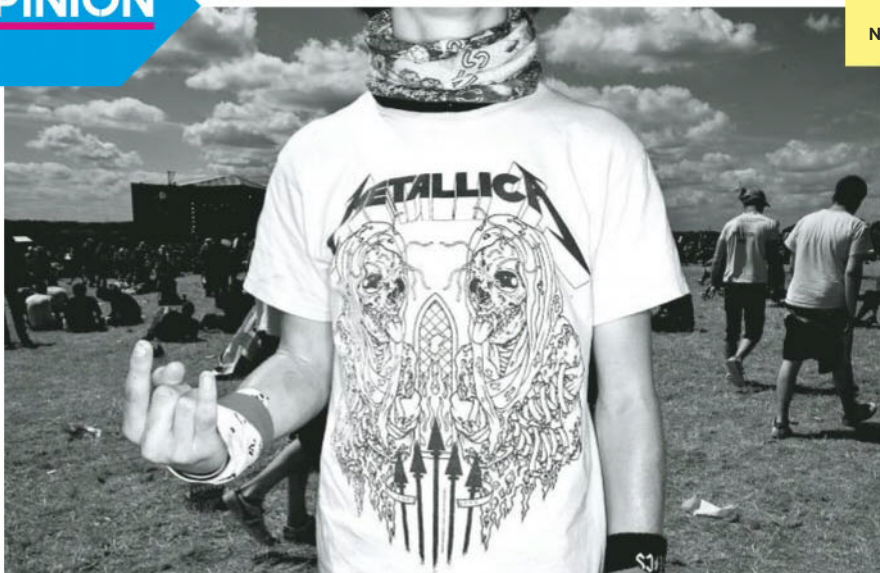
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PRIORITY

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WHY I WON'T BE JOINING IN WITH WEAR YOUR OLD BAND T-SHIRT TO WORK DAY

BY MARK BEAUMONT

After a lifetime spent 'cock-blocking' himself, this NME writer has hung up his band T-shirts for good



The band T-shirt: a mark of belonging. A tribal display. An unequivocal sign of dedication and devotion. The closest thing you can get to having the words 'I AM A FAN OF SUPERFOOD AND YOU'RE NOT, YOU IMBECILE' branded on your forehead while retaining the option to change your mind at a later date. And best of all, they're pretty much the only way your favourite band makes money. Win-win, right?

So why don't I wear them? I did, once. Franz Ferdinand, Fischerspooner, Friendly Fires, I wore them all, and that was just my wardrobe's 'F' section. They'd be sent to me all the time by bands – Morcheeba, to their eternal credit, even made a T-shirt reading 'Satan's own lounge band' in tongue-in-cheek tribute to a line from a memorable kicking I'd given them in the albums section, and I wore it weekly in their honour. Every morning I'd fumble

through a drawer stacked with sartorial adverts, deciding which lucky combo I'd pledge my scrawny chest to for the next 18 hours. On the day I unexpectedly appeared on every news channel to talk about Keith Richards snorting his dad's ashes, Six By Seven got more international screen time than ever before.

Why did I stop? The abuse, for one. I made the mistake of wearing pretty much anything that record labels would send me, and I paid the price. Popular radio DJs openly mocked me for wearing an Andrew WK tee down the Barfly. A photographer for *Vice's* 'fashion don'ts' page stopped to take my picture for the crime of wearing a Death Row T-shirt while simultaneously being white. On the days that my undersized Meatloaf shirt was the only clean one left, I'd get so much unwanted attention and ridicule I felt like Ed Miliband losing a debate to one of Hear'say. And try wearing a Ramones shirt in public and see how many angry punks come up to you shouting, 'I bet you can't name ONE SONG!'

And then there was the crippling inability to get laid. When I was in a relationship the T-shirts were fine, but when single I swiftly realised that, out in the field, I was restricting my potential partners, pretty much, to people who'd heard of Six By Seven – and believe me,

that's a severely limited gene pool. I was, in effect, cock-blocking myself. I came to realise that promo T-shirts were a great university conversation starter, but out in the real world they were a bit like vinyl records: something to build into a private collection to be proud of, but not to bring out in public. They either show you up as a shameless trend-chaser or date you, fix you into a defined period of popular culture, since keeping up to date with them is a pricey business unless you're going to frequent the bootleggers on the pavement outside Brixton Academy selling shirts made out of knocked-off rat hair and held together with chewed-up Haribo.

So buy them, by all means, but be selective. And if you're over, say, 25, only wear them in bed or the gym, put them on your dog or get them signed and framed. It's for your own good. ■

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

LOST ALBUMS

#56

Sean Lennon Into The Sun (1998)

Chosen by Matt Mondanile, Real Estate



"It's Sean Lennon's first record, and I think it unfairly got a bad rep in its time. It's an eclectic mix of different types of songs, all recorded very well. It's its own little universe of songs but he blends them in really well. The single 'Home' is great and 'Photosynthesis' is kind of jazzy and really good. He's worked with all sorts of different people, from Cibo Matto to his group The Ghost Of A Saber Tooth Tiger, but he's only done two proper solo albums. It's got to be hard to release an album when your dad is John Lennon."



► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** May 19, 1998
- **LABEL** Grand Royal
- **BEST TRACKS** Home, Photosynthesis
- **WHERE TO FIND IT** Never reissued, but second-hand copies are easy to find online
- **LISTEN ONLINE** On Spotify

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ANATOMY OF AN ALBUM



"I THOUGHT WE HAD TO SHOW THE OTHER SIDE OF US"

Lou Reed



THIS WEEK...

The Velvet Underground

The New Yorkers' third album saw Lou Reed move away from noise and fury and towards more conventional pop songwriting. The 45th-anniversary reissue is out now

THE BACKGROUND

The Velvet Underground's third album was their first without multi-instrumentalist John Cale, who left the band because he and frontman Lou Reed were at creative loggerheads. Reed had issued an ultimatum to fellow members Mo Tucker and Sterling Morrison, and ultimately the Welshman was replaced by Reed's 21-year-old friend Doug Yule, drafted in from Boston band the Grass Menagerie shortly before sessions began. The New Yorkers decamped to Hollywood to lay down the folksy set of songs, the proto-punk fury of 'The Velvet Underground & Nico' and 'White Light/White Heat' replaced by a softer sound that brought acoustic sonics and eastern instrumentation into the mix. Without Cale's more experimental influence, Reed's songwriting took on a more conventional pop feel, paving the way for 1970's indie-rock triumph, 'Loaded'.

STORY BEHIND THE SLEEVE

The front and back cover photos were shot by artist Billy Name, who lived in Andy Warhol's debauched NYC studio The Factory at the time of the album's release. He's namechecked by Lou Reed in 'That's The Story Of My Life'.

FIVE FACTS

- 1 Opening track 'Candy Says' is about Candy Darling, a Warhol 'superstar' and actress who also features in Lou Reed's 'Walk On The Wild Side'. It was sung by new member Doug Yule.
- 2 The album's low-key sound is often attributed to the theft of the band's amplifiers on tour, just before they started recording.
- 3 'The Murder Mystery' is the clearest link to the band's experimental past. All four members of the group appear on vocals, reciting poetry and singing over each other in pairs across the song's nine minutes. When the stereo mix was played, individual voices come from opposing speakers.
- 4 The final version of the album was mixed by MGM engineer Val Valentin, but Lou Reed also had a bash. His version saw him push his own vocals to the fore at the expense of the rest of the band. Sterling Morrison called it the "closet mix" because it sounded like it had been recorded in one.
- 5 'The Velvet Underground' was the first time the band had produced an album themselves, after working with Andy Warhol and Bob Dylan collaborator Tom Wilson on their first two LPs.

LYRIC ANALYSIS

"Candy says I've come to hate my body/And all that it requires in this world" - 'Candy Darling'

Candy Darling was a transsexual woman, born James Slattery. Andy Warhol cast her in a number of his movies, including *Women In Revolt*, but she never achieved mainstream fame. She died of lymphoma in 1974, aged just 29.

"It was good what we did yesterday/And I'd do it once again/The fact that you are married/Only proves you're my best friend" - 'Pale Blue Eyes'

This delicate ballad was inspired by Shelly Albin, whom Reed met while studying at Syracuse University in upstate New York. Reed was in love, but Albin was already married.

"Someday I know someone will look into my eyes/And say hello you're my very special one" - 'After Hours'

Lou Reed decided that 'After Hours' was "so innocent and pure" that he couldn't sing it. Drummer Mo Tucker took his place, her naive vocals highlighting the track's childlike simplicity.

WHAT WE SAY NOW

The roots of lo-fi and weird folk can both be found in the stripped-back beauty of 'The Velvet Underground'. Lou Reed's songwriting

shone through the low-key arrangements and a classic, engagingly serene album was born.

FAMOUS FAN

Patti Smith says she always remembers her late husband, Fred 'Sonic' Smith of the MC5, when hearing 'Pale Blue Eyes'. "I never fail to think of him and his gaze when I'm singing that or hear that song. Lou had a gift of taking very simple lines - 'Linger on, your pale blue eyes' - and make it so they magnify on their own. That song has always haunted me."

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"I really didn't think we should make another 'White Light/White Heat'. I thought it would be a terrible mistake, and I really believed that. I thought we had to demonstrate the other side of us. Otherwise we would become this one-dimensional thing, and that had to be avoided at all costs." Lou Reed

THE AFTERMATH

Despite critical acclaim, 'The Velvet Underground' barely made a dent in the charts. Following its release, the band made another album that was intended to get them out of their contract with MGM, but the tracks from it remained unreleased until the 1980s. The radio-friendly 'Loaded' was released in 1970, but by then Reed had already left the band.

THE DETAILS

►RECORDED November–December 1968 ►RELEASE DATE March 1969 ►LENGTH 42:56 ►PRODUCERS The Velvet Underground ►STUDIO TTG Studios, Hollywood ►HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION Did not chart ►UK SALES Not known ►SINGLES What Goes On, Pale Blue Eyes ►TRACKLISTING ►1. Candy Says ►2. What Goes On ►3. Some Kinda Love ►4. Pale Blue Eyes ►5. Jesus ►6. Beginning To See The Light ►7. I'm Set Free ►8. That's The Story Of My Life ►9. The Murder Mystery ►10. After Hours

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"We were as shocked as anyone else. The production team fucked up. I turned around in the middle of 'Clouds' and couldn't believe my eyes"

Serge Pizzorno explains how a backdrop reading 'London is full of cunts' appeared during Kasabian's Glasgow SSE Hydro gig

THE NUMBERS

3

Number of Download Festival headliners confirmed in as many days. Muse, Slipknot and Kiss will top the bill in June

312,000

Sales of Band Aid 30's 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' in its first week, the highest since 2012

2

Number of albums Lily Allen's label ITNO released in three years before folding

£10,000

What John Lydon claims he spent on iPad apps. "Like an idiot I didn't check myself," he said



WHO THE FUCK IS...



Prague Service

This is the group of art students who painted over a wall dedicated to John Lennon in Prague. **Why did they do that?** To mark the 25th anniversary of the anti-Communist uprising of the Velvet Revolution and "provide free space for new messages of the current generation". The mural has been in place since Lennon's assassination in 1980; they replaced it with the words: "Wall is over!" **At least they got a gag out of it. Did the authorities see the funny side?** No. The wall's owners, the Sovereign Order of Malta, are allegedly taking legal action.

+ GOOD WEEK +



Jamie xx

Jamie xx is used to making people dance, but not like this. The xx producer has signed up to score an "immersive and sculptural" contemporary ballet called *Trees Of Codes*, for next year's Manchester International Festival.

- BAD WEEK -



Mac DeMarco

Mac was arrested during a gig at the University of California Santa Barbara after climbing the venue's ceiling beams. Campus police stated afterwards that they hadn't realised they'd arrested the headline act until after the show.

IN BRIEF

Beaming baby

Diplo has named his newborn son Lazer. The DJ and producer's ex-girlfriend Kathryn Lockhart gave birth to the 8lb 10oz baby boy. Surely a career in the military awaits.

I am done

Smashing Pumpkins frontman Billy Corgan has swapped leotards for greasepaint. Having announced he's quitting the Resistance Pro Wrestling league he helped start in 2011, he has launched a new enterprise producing musical theatre.

Everyone must go

Manic Street Preachers James Dean Bradfield and Sean Moore will hike through Patagonia to raise funds for Cardiff's Velindre Cancer Centre, retracing the steps of Welsh settlers. The band members aim to raise at least £6,000 each.

► Find these stories and more on NME.COM

Official RECORD STORE Chart

TOP 40 ALBUMS NOVEMBER 23, 2014



01 Pink Floyd The Endless River PARLOPHONE

The Floyd hang on to the top spot for a second week. Their last ever LP is based on previously unreleased recordings from 1994's 'The Division Bell' sessions.

- NEW 2 Four **One Direction** SYCO
- NEW 3 Nothing Has Changed - The Very Best Of **David Bowie** RCA/RHINO
- ▼ 4 Sonic Highways **Foo Fighters** RCA
- 5 X **Ed Sheeran** ASYLUM
- NEW 6 Avonmore **Bryan Ferry** BMG RIGHTS
- ▼ 7 Forever **Queen** VIRGIN
- ▼ 8 The Hum **Hookworms** WEIRD WORLD
- ▼ 9 In The Lonely Hour **Sam Smith** CAPITOL
- ▲ 10 Nostalgia **Annie Lennox** ISLAND
- ▼ 11 Love In Venice **Andre Rieu** DECCA
- ▲ 12 Sun Structures **Temples** HEAVENLY
- ▼ 13 1989 **Taylor Swift** EMI
- ▼ 14 Wanted On Voyage **George Ezra** COLUMBIA
- ▼ 15 The Basement Tapes Complete - Vol 11 **Bob Dylan & The Band** COLUMBIA
- NEW 16 Lost In The Dream **The War On Drugs** SECRETLY CANADIAN
- NEW 17 Home Sweet Home **Katherine Jenkins** DECCA
- NEW 18 Serenata **Alfie Boe** DECCA
- 19 A Perfect Contradiction **Paloma Faith** RCA
- ▼ 20 Melody Road **Neil Diamond** CAPITOL
- ▼ 21 Our Love **Caribou** CITY SLANG
- ▲ 22 No Sound Without Silence **The Script** COLUMBIA
- NEW 23 Lost On The River **New Basement Tapes** CAPITOL/ISLAND
- NEW 24 It's The Girls **Bette Midler** EAST WEST
- NEW 25 Different Every Time **Robert Wyatt** DOMINO
- ▼ 26 Led Zeppelin IV **Led Zeppelin** RHINO
- NEW 27 Chapter One **Ella Henderson** SYCO MUSIC
- NEW 28 Seeds **TV On The Radio** EMI
- ▼ 29 Royal Blood **Royal Blood** WARNER BROS
- NEW 30 Pom Pom **Ariel Pink** 4AD
- NEW 31 No Fixed Address **Nickelback** REPUBLIC
- ▼ 32 This Is All Yours **Alt-J** INFECTIOUS
- ▼ 33 Partners **Barbra Streisand** COLUMBIA
- ▼ 34 If You Wait **London Grammar** METAL & DUST
- ▲ 35 Blue Smoke - The Best Of **Dolly Parton** MASTERWORKS
- ▼ 36 Storytone **Neil Young** REPRISE
- NEW 37 First Demo **Fugazi** DISCHORD
- NEW 38 Sun Zoom Spark - 1970 To 1972 **Captain Beefheart** RHINO
- ▼ 39 I Forget Where We Were **Ben Howard** ISLAND
- NEW 40 Words To The Blind **Savages & Bo Ningen** STOLEN

The Official Charts Company compiles the Official Record Store Chart from sales through 100 of the UK's best independent record shops from Sunday to Sunday.

TOP OF THE SHOPS

LOVEmusic



THIS WEEK LOVE MUSIC GLASGOW

FOUNDED 2010

WHY IT'S GREAT It's run by Sandy McLean, formerly of Rough Trade, and gives prominence to independent Scottish artists.

TOP SELLER LAST WEEK James King & The Lonewolves - 'Lost Songs Of The Confederacy'

THEY SAY "Our motto is 'music that counts, for people who care.'"

SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE



Jimmy Dean



Aerosmith



Nikki Sixx

Mötley Crüe
bassist

THE FIRST SONG I REMEMBER HEARING
'Big Bad John'
- Jimmy Dean

"I was at my grandparents' house. We lived on a farm. The only radio station we could get in the middle of nowhere was a country one, where I heard 'Big Bad John'. I was sucked in by the lyrics and storytelling."

THE FIRST SONG I FELL IN LOVE WITH
All rock music

"I was very lucky to be a teenager in the 1970s, and I'd hear ELO on the radio and fall in love with that, and Aerosmith, Led Zeppelin, Queen, Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, T Rex, Slade and all those bands. It was such a rich time and I fell in love with all of it – the genre of rock, basically."

THE FIRST ALBUM I EVER BOUGHT
'Nilsson Schmilsson'
- Harry Nilsson

"I wanted to buy a Deep Purple record, but my

friend's older sister wore the shortest shorts and I'd follow her around all over the place like a puppy dog. We went to the record store and she told me to buy Nilsson, so I did. It ended up being one of my favourite ever albums, and

"IF I EVER HEAR ANY SONG BY THE DOORS AGAIN, I PROMISE TO BLEED OUT"

I became friends with Harry too, which was fascinating. My son's middle name is Nilsson. I can't remember what happened to the girl in short shorts."

THE SONG THAT MADE ME WANT TO BE IN A BAND
Nursery rhymes

"It wasn't one song, it was all the songs. Before I was in a band I was making up nursery rhymes. I left Idaho to live with my mum, and

there was this acoustic guitar at her house that I started to write songs on. I was a songwriter before I was a musician."

THE SONG I CAN NO LONGER LISTEN TO
'People Are Strange'
- The Doors

"If I ever hear any song by The Doors again, I promise to bleed out. I swear to God, it's fucking torture. Everywhere you go in LA is 'People Are Strange', and I'm like, 'Goddam it.'"

THE SONG THAT MAKES ME WANT TO DANCE
'Jive Talkin'
- Bee Gees

"I always get a bit of strut going to that."

THE SONG I DO AT KARAOKE
'Search And Destroy'
- The Stooges

"It would probably be this song that I would get up and do, but I should add I would never be caught at karaoke, because

a day. At least it's not a song I don't like."

THE SONG I WISH I'D WRITTEN
'Dream On'
- Aerosmith

"I always wish I'd written this, like every day. We made our attempts at writing it in Mötley Crüe with 'Home Sweet Home' – you know, that song that would be the last song on your album and blow everyone away?"

THE SONG THAT REMINDS ME OF THE CRAZY OLD DAYS IN MÖTLEY
'Too Fast For Love'
- Mötley Crüe

"We've been playing this on tour, and I remember just being kids, bashing ideas around and playing at the Whisky [Los Angeles's legendary Whisky A Go-Go venue] and the Troubadour. We were going for it all, it was such a magical time. We were part metal, part punk, part '70s glam, and there was no-one else that was around at the time that doing what we were. I remember watching Tommy [Lee, drummer] during the 'Girls, Girls, Girls' era, doing the drum solo, spinning around, flipping over, and it was the most exciting thing to watch. Such a showman."

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL
'Life Is Beautiful'
- Sixx:AM

"Again, I've picked another one of my own songs here, but with good reason, because it's so appropriate. It says, 'Promise me you won't cry at my funeral', and I'd like to think when that day eventually comes everyone will be able to throw one hell of a party and tell a lot of funny stories."



Harry Nilsson

Rad ar

► YOU HEARD IT HERE FIRST ■ EDITED BY MATT WILKINSON

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NEWMUSIC**

NME
NEW
BAND
OF THE WEEK

20

Alex G

Philly-based US indie obsessive ditches degree to hone his craft

Hey man. I put your laundry on the sofa earlier." Alex Giannascoli is at home in Philadelphia and one of his seven housemates has just walked in. The 21-year-old interrupts *Rad ar* to talk to his friend, and their chit-chat is homey and relatable. The same is true of 'DSU', the first album by Alex G – a childhood nickname that stuck – to get a physical release. Woolly and homespun, 'DSU' is Alex's sixth and best record. It's quickly expanding what began as a cult following on Bandcamp, with compliments for his delicately layered songs and the songwriting talent behind them both numerous and gushing. "People are saying nice things – it's surprising, but you make music because you want people to say 'wow'," Alex says. As an unassuming kid with "no hobbies" who grew up loving Modest Mouse, Wilco and Elliott Smith, he

admits that his music is heavily indebted to American indie. Yet his songs are outstandingly individual. He obsesses over them for hours and left his old band The Skin Cells because he "doesn't like working with other people". After learning jazz drumming in high school, Alex taught himself guitar and piano and spent hours in a cramped bedroom crafting hundreds of songs, the best of which he'd burn onto CDs and hand out at school. "I'm making one right now, actually," he says quietly, explaining that he recently quit his English degree to concentrate on music – a plan that included his first UK shows, which took place earlier this month, and a new album to come next year. Alex says his style – a powerful, knobby vocal tone, wriggling guitar and piano licks and absorbing songwriting – was developed "in a self-taught bubble and shaped by my songs". He sounds sheepish, but he's already shown bags of potential. What will he be like now he's left the books behind? "I'm excited, but definitely not comfortable doing interviews yet! I'm not a good student anyway. I get way more out of music: I just do it for, like, fun and stuff." ■ BEN HOMEWOOD

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exclusive track
'Soaker'

► THE DETAILS

► **BASED** Philadelphia
► **FOR FANS OF** Kurt Vile, Mac DeMarco
► **SOCIAL** facebook.com/sandyalexg
► **BUY IT** 'DSU' is out now on Lucky Number
► **SEE HIM LIVE** Brighton Green Door Store (March 1, 2015), Bristol Cube Cinema (2), London Chats Palace (3), Manchester Soup Kitchen (5), Glasgow Broadcast (6), Leeds Brudenell Social Club (7)
► **BELIEVE IT OR NOT** Alex recently got a new car. "I had a Chevy but I bought a van for touring. It was way more trunk space"

MORE NEW MUSIC

Wild Balbina

Spain's Wild Balbina fit comfortably into all the recent '90s revivalism spearheaded by bands like Yuck and Alvays. After releasing debut mini-album 'Sisters Before Mist' back in June, they've followed it up with the single 'Stay Alive'. The first track is a cut lifted from the album, but the hidden treasure is flipside 'Such A Jerk', a Cobain-influenced fuckabout with a Led Zep groove.

► **SOCIAL** facebook.com/wildbalbina

► **HEAR THEM** soundcloud.com/elefantuk

NME BUZZ ACT OF THE WEEK

Fraser A Gorman

Although he's a key part of Courtney Barnett's Milk! Records crew, there's something about Fraser A Gorman that suggests he'd have made it on his own. New single 'Book Of Love' (out on December 5) recalls Beck's lighter moments, with a hint of mid-'70s Gene Clark thrown in for good measure. It suggests very good things ahead of his debut album, which is due early next year.

► **SOCIAL** facebook.com/fraseralexandergorman
► **HEAR HIM** soundcloud.com/frasergorman

Hugh

The lyrics to Hugh's latest track 'One Of These Days' ("Sooner or later I'll have you all to myself") may seem pretty straightforward, but the London electronic outfit's music is a more complex affair. Hip-hop beats, Beach House-inspired reverb and a soulful vocal style that draws from moody R&B make them difficult to pin down. That's exactly why releases like their EP 'I Can't Figure You Out' are a highly rewarding listen.

► **SOCIAL** facebook.com/hughlovehugh

► **HEAR THEM** soundcloud.com/hughlovehugh

Clarence Clarity

Newly signed to Bella Union,



Spit Shake Sisters

Clarence Clarity's electro-soul sleaze is unlike much else you'll hear this year, or any other year for that matter: a dark riposte to the digi-pop sheen of PC Music that's full of twitching beats, grimy bass and twisted cut-and-splice vocals. Think Prince trapped in the wiring of a dusty Sega Mega Drive.

► **SOCIAL** facebook.com/clarenceclaritymusic
► **HEAR HIM** soundcloud.com/clarence-clarity

Spit Shake Sisters

At the beginning of the year we picked up on Spit Shake Sisters' EP 'The Pretty Youth', and now they've returned with the single 'Blasphemer'. It's a step away from their earlier fixation with The Nuns, and it sees the Brightonians marrying a Ty Segall-style riff to the kind of gothic aesthetic that made us all infatuated with The Horrors after 'Sheena Is A Parasite'.

► **SOCIAL** facebook.com/spitshakesisters
► **HEAR THEM** soundcloud.com/spit-shake-sisters

The Jacques

This Bristol-based four-piece – two sets of brothers – clearly know their stuff when



Fraser A Gorman

it comes to Britpop and early-'00s indie. New single 'Pretty DJ' sounds like a pre-pubescent Pete Doherty fronting Echobelly, while 'Scum In A Bottle' takes its guitar cues from prime-era Elastica.

► **SOCIAL** facebook.com/thejacquesband
► **HEAR THEM** soundcloud.com/the-jacques
► **SEE THEM LIVE** Somerset Pilton Working Men's Club (December 17), Glastonbury The Bocobar (27)

Holy Thursday

There's not much information out there about Holy Thursday bar a recent venture out of their Wirral lair to support Thought Forms, but if they keep knocking out fully-formed psych mini-epics like 'She' they'll struggle to remain anonymous. It's a contorted, kaleidoscopic

track that mixes lovelorn musings with descents into unhinged guitar wigouts. Tightly tethered Beach Boys harmonies meet Tame Impala's liberal use of reverb and woozy melodies, and we're completely sold.

► **SOCIAL** facebook.com/holythursdaymusic
► **HEAR THEM** soundcloud.com/holy-thursday-music

Psychic Soviets

If you're in Glasgow, you've probably seen the Psychic Soviets at gigs around town, or supporting The Amazing Snakeheads at The Art School. Their EP 'Spaghetti Calligraphy' was released in April but their profile is only expanding now. That's a good thing, because tracks like ➔

BAND CRUSH

Stina Tweedale

Honeyblood



Poor Things

"Poor Things are from Glasgow and they played at the launch party for our album. They're the loveliest folk, we had really good fun with them and I love their tunes."

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'Cold War Memorabilia' and 'Yellow Ink' sound like the best parts of The Fall's 'Hex Enduction Hour' re-imagined by The Stooges.

► **SOCIAL** [psychicsoviets.bandcamp.com](https://www.facebook.com/psychicsoviets)
 ► **HEAR THEM** [soundcloud.com/psychic-soviets](https://www.soundcloud.com/psychic-soviets)

Orange County

A solo project from Sunderland's Shaun Cowell, Orange County's first single 'Backwards' appeared online in mid-October. A melancholic, lingering first taster with downbeat lyrics such as "Wouldn't it feel wrong/To try and get along", the whole project gives off an air of foggy regret.

► **HEAR HIM** [soundcloud.com/orangecountyband](https://www.soundcloud.com/orangecountyband)

Spelles

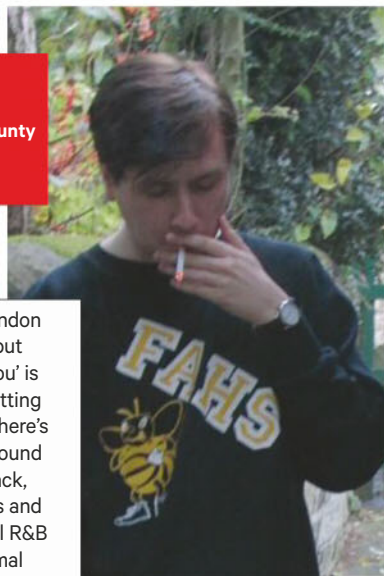
"I was a bird in the cage/ I sang for freedom, I sang to escape", coos Kathryn Baar, aka Spelles, on her debut track 'Bird In A Cage'. The LA-based singer's stomping, free-spirited textures and haunting vocals have drawn comparisons to Lykke Li and Florence + The Machine.

► **SOCIAL** [facebook.com/spellesmusic](https://www.facebook.com/spellesmusic)
 ► **HEAR HER** [soundcloud.com/spellesmusic](https://www.soundcloud.com/spellesmusic)

Fine Print

Few details are currently

Orange County



known about new London producer Fine Print, but debut track 'About You' is so good, it's worth getting lost in the mystery. There's a distinctly modern sound at the heart of the track, with stuttering drums and a reserved but soulful R&B vocal alongside minimal electronics and restrained funk licks. Not so subtle, on the other hand, is the lush saxophone solo at the song's climax – it's the track's finest feature.

► **SOCIAL** [facebook.com/fineprintmusicuk](https://www.facebook.com/fineprintmusicuk)
 ► **HEAR HIM** [soundcloud.com/fine-print-2](https://www.soundcloud.com/fine-print-2)

Bare Pale

Bare Pale haven't been doing much since last time we caught up with them, in summer 2013, but thankfully the wait for new material is over. They've just unleashed new song 'You Owe Me' and it sounds like Stephen Malkmus combining The Velvet Underground's drugged and primal stomping with The Jesus And Mary Chain's atmospheric introspection. It's a timely remainder of just how good this band are.



Bonfire Nights



spiky no-fi excellence.

► **SOCIAL** [facebook.com/bruisingmusic](https://www.facebook.com/bruisingmusic)
 ► **HEAR THEM** [soundcloud.com/bruising](https://www.soundcloud.com/bruising)

The Britanys

Brooklyn punks The Britanys picked the most "popular girl" name they could think of for their band. Their second EP 'It's Alright' opens with the title track and delivers a tempestuous take on Ty Segall's garage rock. 'Reckless' adds flashes of Pavement, and the third and final song, the epic singalong 'Blow', sounds like an American Oasis.

► **SOCIAL** [facebook.com/thebritanys](https://www.facebook.com/thebritanys)
 ► **HEAR THEM** [thebritanys.bandcamp.com](https://www.thebritanys.bandcamp.com)

Swing Hero

Listening to Denver songwriter Marshall Gallagher, recording as Swing Hero, is a reminder that

► **SOCIAL** [facebook.com/barepale](https://www.facebook.com/barepale)
 ► **HEAR THEM** [soundcloud.com/barepale](https://www.soundcloud.com/barepale)

Bruising

Leeds scrappers Bruising – Menace Beach touring member Ben Lewis and singer Naomi Baguley – make sugary guitar-pop swamped in DIY punk grit and crunch, like a more fun, rough-and-ready Fear Of Men. Their debut single 'Honey' is three and a half minutes of sharp,

Radar NEWS ROUND UP

BLOSSOMS MEET THE CORAL

Fresh from playing Jack Rocks The Macbeth, Blossoms have been recording their new single with James Skelly. "When the man who's written some of the greatest guitar tunes of the last 10 years invites you to his house for tea, you pinch yourself," said singer Tom Ogden.

BRETZER GETS ROMANTIC

Following his debut EP 'Making Love', Travis Bretzer is to release debut album 'Waxing Romantic' on February 23 next year. Out on Mexican Summer, the album includes new song 'Promises', and features members of Ariel Pink's Haunted Graffiti and MGMT.

Travis Bretzer



Waxahatchee

WAXAHATCHEE'S RETURN

Katie Crutchfield – aka Waxahatchee – has announced a UK tour to take place next January. The shows, which will likely see Crutchfield playing material from the eagerly anticipated follow-up to 'Cerulean Salt', kick off on January 26 at London's St Pancras Church.

SILK RHODES UNVEIL ALBUM

Baltimore oddballs Silk Rhodes will release their self-titled album on January 5 via Stones Throw. Having caused a stir with recent preview track 'Pains', the duo – who Mac DeMarco hailed as "bound to give boners" – are also tipped to head to the UK for a tour here early next year.

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Spelles

there have been precious few new bands lately with big, stadium-filling tunes. Debut track 'Interest' harks back to the heady days when Foo Fighters tore up sports arenas and TV chat shows, and comes as a welcome relief from all the milksop Sub Pop-style bands right now.

► **SOCIAL** facebook.com/swinghero
► **HEAR THEM** soundcloud.com/swinghero

The Midnight Barbers

Ben Rowntree and Jack Pepper make an exciting pair under the guise of The Midnight Barbers. Hailing from Chelmsford, the rock'n'roll duo play fiercely on debut single

'Business', their rickety guitars, shuffling drums and viciously spat vocals creating a lively, whiskey-drenched atmosphere.

► **SOCIAL** facebook.com/themidnightbarbers
► **HEAR THEM** soundcloud.com/themidnightbarbers
► **SEE THEM LIVE** London The Shoreditch (December 4)

Lull

London four-piece Lull are indebted to '90s alt-rock from both sides of the Atlantic, but they carry it off better than many of their contemporaries. Equal parts My Bloody Valentine and Smashing Pumpkins, their debut EP 'Henbane' features the stormy, brooding and excellent 'Dead Or Gone', but 'Bubble Tea' is their best song, with its hushed vocals, bizarre power-chord bends and spacegazing lead guitars.

► **SOCIAL** facebook.com/lullsounds
► **HEAR THEM** lull3.bandcamp.com

Son Joan

Armed only with a drum machine, a guitar and a treasure chest full of distortion, Hampshire newcomer Son Joan's hyper-fuzzy, bluesy jangle-pop packs a serious punch. With violent echoes of The Gun Club, cranked to speaker-blowing levels, his new EP 'Menagerie Melodies' is out now on Quatre Femmes Records.

► **SOCIAL** facebook.com/sonjoanofficial
► **HEAR HIM** sonjoanofficial.tumblr.com

Bonfire Nights

London-based Aussies Bonfire Nights, who cut their teeth playing with Pond and DZ Deathrays, will release a split seven-inch with Tripwires in December. Their contribution, the mighty 'Ego Death', begins as a wall of Faust-like noise, before growing into a retro slice of Jefferson Airplane-style psych.

► **SOCIAL** facebook.com/bonfirenights
► **HEAR THEM** soundcloud.com/bonfire-nights

NEW SOUNDS FROM WAY OUT

This week's columnist

HUW STEPHENS



WEATHER WITH HUW

I have been loving the songs **Leon Bridges** has online. He's from Fort Worth, Texas and sings from the heart with a bluesy, soulful and lost-in-time voice that is irresistible. He's the most requested new artist on my new night-time show on BBC Radio 1 too, and the door to Maida Vale is open for him when he comes over to play here next. 'Coming Home' sounds like a lost classic, and I'm excited to hear what he does next.

I was in Reykjavik recently for the Iceland Airwaves festival. Russian born and living in London, **Shura** played in a venue called Hurra, which fitted the vibe. The future star has a classic style, and really interesting lyrics that blow me away. They're raw and intimate, coupled with these smooth melodies and future R&B production. It's immersive and beautiful, and she also has some great remixes floating around by some other names worth checking: **Formation** and **Honne**.

Everyone in Iceland seems to be making music and apparently one in 10 people there will publish a book in their lifetime. They know what they're doing; their music community is well organised and the friendly, supportive and nurturing scene in Reykjavik is really inspiring. Iceland's own **Young Karín**, who make pretty perfect, spacious, laid-back pop, were one of the toasts of Airwaves. They're now signed to Bella Union, who are on a roll at the moment. The One Little Indian label is thriving too, with Reykjavik's **Samaris** continuing to thrill and awesome new signings **Fufanu**, an utterly captivating rock band who recently supported Damon Albarn. Last but not least,

Finland's **Jaakko Enio Kalevi** also played the festival, and was superb – part krautrock, part Joy Division. Check his forthcoming releases on the Weird World label.

Away from the land of ice, Chicago's **Meat Wave** not only have an amazing name, but also make

deliciously raucous garage rock. They're over here in January to charm us, thanks to the new Brace Yourself record label, who are putting out 'Sham King'. There are plenty of great new electronic records right now as well, including the **Slow Magic** album and the new **Romare** record, 'Roots', which is jacking and dirty. **Mura Masa**'s mixtape on Soulection is special too – a fragile, minimal collection of songs that ooze warmth during these cold months. I sound like a weather reporter. Laters!

Next week: Glass Animals

Radar LABEL OF THE WEEK

Haus Of Pins

HAUS OF PINS

► **FOUNDED** 2012 by Manchester band Pins – singer/guitarist Faith Holgate and guitarist Lois Macdonald run the label.
► **BASED** Manchester
► **KEY RELEASES** Pins – 'Eleventh Hour'/'Shoot You' (2013), **September Girls** – 'Ships' (2013)
► **RADAR SAYS** HOP is most definitely a label of love. Make sure you check their Christmas compilation 'Hymns', which is being reissued this year for charity.



Leon Bridges sings from the heart with a bluesy, soulful, lost-in-time voice



best of 2014

st. vincent
st. vincent

£5



the war on drugs
lost in the dream

£8



mac demarco
salad days

£8



caribou
our love

£8



merchandise
after the end

£8



jamie t
carry on the grudge

£8



damon albarn
everyday robots

£8



future islands
singles

£8



eagulls
eagulls

£8



sleaford mods
divide and exit

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todd terje
it's album time

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kate tempest
everybody down

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Top 50

albums

of 2014

25

This year, like every year, a bunch of doomy stories about albums did the rounds. Sales are down, the format's dead, and our lives are destined to be soundtracked by a 1,072,054-song playlist going round and round and round until the end of time. That sort of thing. What's fascinating, though, is the response from the artists making the music.

These are people for whom an album remains the greatest possible expression of their abilities, and who wilfully lock themselves away for months on end and put themselves through the physical and emotional wringer in the hope of creating something beautiful. For them, there will never be a reason to give up the one thing they love more than anything else.

This year, we want to celebrate these artistic endeavours more than ever before,

so we've put together this giant homage. Maybe 2014 lacked the blockbuster appeal of 2013 – no Bowie, Monkeys or Kanye. But that has allowed hundreds of wonderfully diverse gems to peak their handsome faces out of the shadows and get the attention they deserve.

Here are the 50 best albums of the year, as voted for by *NME* writers.

Disagree with our choices? Probably. So why not give us a piece of your mind at letters@nme.com.



WORDS: EVE BARLOW, ANGUS BATEY, MARK BEAUMONT, GREG COCHRANE, LEONIE COOPER, CHRIS COTTINGHAM, RHIAN DALY, GAVIN HAYNES, PHIL HEBBLETHWAITE, BEN HEWITT, BEN HOMEWOOD, AL HORNER, TOM HOWARD, LUCY JONES, NICK LEVINE, EMILY MACKAY, BARRY NICOLSON, LOUIS PATTISON, KEVIN EG PERRY, TOM PINNOCK, HAZEL SHEFFIELD, LAURA SNAPES, LISA WRIGHT

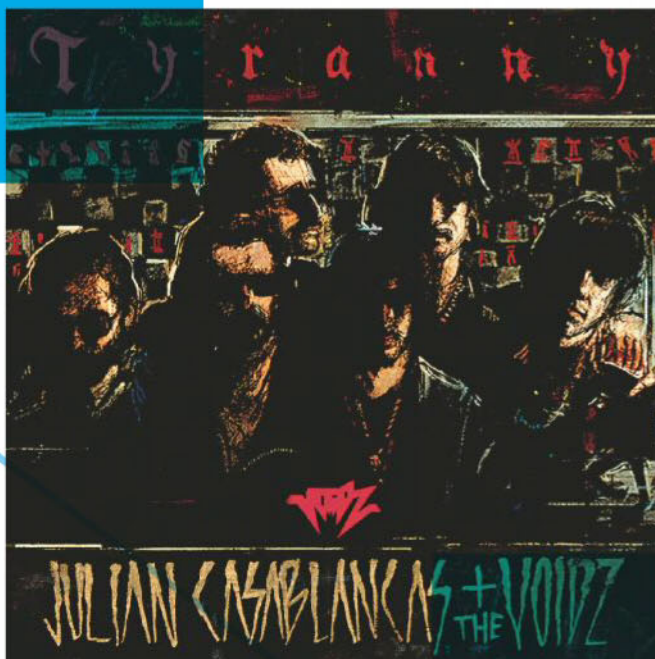


50

Julian Casablancas

+ The Voidz

Tyranny



Yes, yes, 'Tyranny' was messy. That was the point of it, dumb-ass: that a guy who made his name with pin-neat little line drawings like 'Last Nite' with The Strokes was now painting Francis Bacon pictures – six-foot-high abstract daubs that involved flinging tins of paint and pots of blood and shit at the canvas.

The mess was vital because, finally, it felt like Julian Casablancas' career was catching up with his genius. Let's face it, Julian has increasingly been viewed as merely a talented hack. As time has passed, the impact of his original cultural meteor strike lessened. It felt more like the guy who once famously declared in song that he had "nothing to say" really didn't have much going for him beyond a canny ear for melody and a throatful of shopworn disaffection.

Not all of it worked. True. But you'd have hated it if it all worked. The central curse of Casablancas is that he wrote 36:28 of perfection on 'Is This It' in his early twenties, and has had to live with the constant expectation of that slightly twee, slightly adolescent ideal ever since. In 2014, he decided to sprawl; to let the endlessly rambling, slightly sozzled wry cultural enthusiast who comes across in interviews be in charge. In other words, aged 36, Julian Casablancas may well have 'found himself'.

Who is he, then?

Turns out he's a sort of toxic, green stew of metal solos, atonal post-punk, comically distorted Afrobeat, Arabian scales and future-prog, as played on a Nintendo with Parkinson's. 'Johan Von Bronx' at least had something of the sweet synth rush of 'Phrazes For The Young' to it, but the nihilistic riff of 'Where No Eagles Fly' could have been a track by late '70s post-punks Crispy Ambulance, while 'Off To War...' sat way closer to Beefheart than Television. 'Xerox' copied precisely nothing at all, and the Middle Eastern holiday

of 'Dare I Care' dared you most of all to laugh at its own utter ridiculousness.

Sixty minutes in, 'Dare I Care' was the point at which 'Tyranny' fully turned shark jumping into an Olympic sport, and

thereby crystallised its vision. This was an album comfortable with its own daftness, yet crucially for a man associated with a certain level of pastiche, it wasn't ironising its own ugliness. It was just having a very open-ended, messy cultural conversation with you – shouting 100 ideas about hip Syrian musician Omar Souleyman and the prisoner's dilemma game theory drunkenly in your earhole at 3am.

By daring to fail,

Casablancas showed us he isn't condemned to be the eternal slave of the fanboys who want a new 'Room On Fire'. That he had it in him to be his own denim-vests-'n'-puffy-trainers Lou Reed: a man whose career you will follow even if it actively appals you.

'Tyranny' doesn't need to be seen as a stepping stone in order to be loved. It isn't a 'transitional record' or any other of those weasel terms. It was great in its own right. But the one thing it wasn't, was perfect.

Sic semper tyrannis. ■ **GAVIN HAYNES**

▶ THE DETAILS

▶ **RELEASE DATE** September 23

▶ **LABEL** Cult Records

▶ **LENGTH** 1:02:25 ▶ **PRODUCER**

Shawn Everett ▶ **HIGHEST**

UK CHART POSITION N/A

▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 6/10

▶ **TRACKLISTING** ▶ 1. Take Me

In Your Army ▶ 2. Crunch Punch

▶ 3. M. utually A. ssured D.

estruction ▶ 4. Human Sadness

▶ 5. Where No Eagles Fly

▶ 6. Father Electricity ▶ 7. Johan

Von Bronx ▶ 8. Business Dog

▶ 9. Xerox ▶ 10. Dare I Care

▶ 11. Nintendo Blood ▶ 12. Off

To War...

KEY TRACK

▶ 'Human Sadness'

Julian Casablancas:

"When Alex [Carapetis, drummer] first brought me that sample of Mozart and the bass part, I pretty much levitated off the couch. Like, I could listen to that bit alone for a half hour or more. Then there was a jam that Jeremy did, and a number of different magical moments that ended up getting combined. It was a perfect storm of three magical demos that were basically the same song. After that, it was an endless cycle of ideas and interchanging parts. It was a juggling act that kinda stretched throughout the course of the whole recording of the album. We'd visit the song, work on bits, then leave it for a week or two. It took a long time to get it into the form on the album. We really tried to get away from the standard way of recording things. We did one last take, and that's the one you hear on the record."

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Interpol

El Pintor



The adventurous spirit that surged through their 2002 debut 'Turn On The Bright Lights' was back. It was the sound of a band enjoying themselves, striving to move forward. Frontman Banks cites 'Tidal Wave' – the penultimate track and one that wasn't fully mapped out until the band reached the studio – as the moment when everything came together. Reflecting on its eerie pulse, pneumatic drumming and trademark needly guitar line, he said, "We arrived at a certain understanding and a certain vibe together, and that song is the best demonstration of where we got to."

The journey to that newfound creativity was an exciting one. "When things take a turn in life, there's always a great, hidden upside if you just find it," explained Banks philosophically. "The personnel change and the process of discovering as a three-piece how to write songs and then writing with that enthusiasm was invigorating. We had a honeymoon period of, 'Wow, there's only three of us in this room but we're making a pretty good ruckus.'"

The frontman also attributes the invigorated sound of 'El Pintor' to the group being "all of one mind" as opposed to the "disparate" state they were in for 'Interpol'. Indeed, the rejigged lineup meant the group connected with one another and their music in new ways. "I experienced Daniel's songwriting from a new angle, which was fun," Banks recalled. "It was a new way to interact with these dudes. It's like chemistry – we were able to have a new formula that was like, 'Wow, this is new and exciting.'"

Banks thought it was too early to say if 'El Pintor' was a sign of what to expect from the next record. But one thing is outstandingly clear: Interpol have dealt with losing Dengler in spectacular fashion, and 'El Pintor' was a triumph that will last long after the band have figured out their next step. ■ RHIAN DALY

With the release of 'El Pintor' on September 8, Interpol cemented a brilliant rejuvenation. The band's fifth album was their first as a trio following the departure of former bassist Carlos Dengler, who quit in 2010 shortly before their self-titled fourth record was released. Remaining members Paul Banks, Daniel Kessler and Sam Fogarino were rocked by Dengler's decision, but took their time to ride out the tremor and unleashed their freshest and most vital album in years.

From the glimmering falsetto on 'My Blue Supreme' to the subtle use of samples on 'Breaker 1', 'El Pintor' was rich and bold.

THE DETAILS

- ▶ **RELEASE DATE** September 8
- ▶ **LABEL** Soft Limit/Matador
- ▶ **LENGTH** 39:50
- ▶ **PRODUCER** Interpol
- ▶ **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 9
- ▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
- ▶ **TRACKLISTING** ▶ 1. All The Rage Back Home ▶ 2. My Desire ▶ 3. Anywhere ▶ 4. Same Town, New Story ▶ 5. My Blue Supreme ▶ 6. Everything Is Wrong ▶ 7. Breaker 1 ▶ 8. Ancient Ways ▶ 9. Tidal Wave ▶ 10. Twice As Hard

INTERPOL

EL PINTOR

STORY BEHIND THE SLEEVE

Wordplay

Paul Banks: "I got hung up on anagrams when I was working on design concepts for merch, and it seemed to fit well with what had happened in the band."

Tragedy

"'El Pintor' ['the painter' in Spanish] doesn't pertain to me [Banks paints in his spare time]; the artwork just clicked with what we were doing. I liked the idea of the hands being tragic and biblical."

Insect eyes

"I sent our designer close-ups of insect eyes that looked like modern architecture. I was thinking of doing something like that. But then he sent me the image and I was like, 'Fuck!' I was thinking, 'What about that for the cover?'"

48

Temples

Sun Structures

The psych revival showed no sign of abating in 2014, with everyone from The Growlers to Toy to The Wytches releasing records somewhere on the psych spectrum this year.

But no album threw itself into the richly textured, multi-faceted rainbow wonderland with as much dedication as Kettering quartet Temples' debut 'Sun Structures'.

Where others made do with regularly being seen in a paisley shirt or making a passing reference to the 'Nuggets' compilation, Temples understood that the trick to really conjuring up a modern reworking of a decades-old genre was to go big on both quality and quantity. Accordingly, each of the 12 tracks on 'Sun Structures' are a technicolour patchwork of

dense, intricate layers that, when combined, produce an effortlessly lush whole.

"We'd layer and layer things up, and you probably can't even hear some of it but it's there for atmosphere," explains bassist Tom Warmesley. "The brain can only consciously hear something like seven different sounds at once, so half of what we recorded is completely pointless." Far from pointless, these details are what really made 'Sun Structures' an all-encompassing sonic world. Although, as Warmesley attests, the record adheres to precepts about "concise structures" and "pop sensibilities", within these structures there was a perfectly produced (by Warmesley and singer James Bagshaw) playground of multi-part harmonies, instrumental flourishes, orchestral snippets and everything in between.

For further proof of the depth of the album, see the recently released 'Sun Restructured' – a reworked version of the whole record by Beyond The Wizard's Sleeve that turned 'Sun Structures' on its head. "It unearthed more of the ambient and abstract side of our songs, taking them and putting them at the forefront," says Warmesley. "It's what we would have liked to have done if we weren't thinking about pop music."

Back in 2013, Noel Gallagher said the future of the galaxy depended on Temples' debut being fantastic. Look around – seems like the world's still turning. ■ LISA WRIGHT

THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** February 5
- **LABEL** Heavenly
- **LENGTH** 52:48
- **PRODUCER** James Bagshaw
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 7
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ►1. Shelter Song ►2. Sun Structures ►3. The Golden Throne ►4. Keep In The Dark ►5. Mesmerise ►6. Move With The Season ►7. Colours To Life ►8. A Question Isn't Answered ►9. The Guesser ►10. Test Of Time ►11. Sand Dance ►12. Fragment's Light



TEMPLES' TRICKS OF THE TRADE

► Mellotron

Used on: Most of the tracks
Tom Warmesley, bass: "It's probably not a surprise that we didn't have a full orchestra, so we'd get that effect with Mellotron samples. Under each key is a trigger that goes to a tape loop that plays eight seconds of an instrument – flutes and strings and things. They're very scarce and expensive, so we used a sample of those samples, which is what most people do."

► Autoharp

Used on: 'Keep In The Dark'
"It has a very percussive, bright, glissando quality to it and you almost use it like a rhythm guitar. It has this really unique, bright tone that adds another layer to the track."

► Reel-to-reel tape machine

Used on: 'Sand Dance'
"Even though we also used a MacBook Pro, we used a reel-to-reel tape machine too; it blurs the line between analogue and digital. If you can capture a high-quality analogue process, then you have the best of both worlds."



47

Gruff Rhys

American Interior

Very much in a field of its own in 2014 (or any other year, for that matter), Gruff Rhys' 'American Interior' investigated the true story of a distant relative, John Evans, who scoured America in the 1790s in search of mythical Welsh-speaking First Nation tribes.

"He gets mobbed at gigs," says Gruff of his own John Evans avatar, the unlikely felt, wire and wood star of the album, book, film and app. "People kiss him and all kinds of stuff. 'I've never had a record like this that's taken two years to put together,'" he adds. "I started touring it over two years ago, because the first element of it was the [investigative] tour. It still feels fresh – somehow!"

On the likes of '100 Unread Messages' and 'The Whether (Or Not)', 'American Interior' featured the analogue synths, Spanish guitar and bizarre samples we've come to expect from the Super Furry Animals frontman's albums, but it also contained the most moving and mature moments of his solo career so far. 'Walk Into The Wilderness', 'Iolo' and the title track were grand epics, drenched in Morricone-esque strings, that perfectly captured the mystery and danger of the American badlands, druidic charlatans and chronic malaria in Evans' tragic and heroic tale.

Deservedly, it was Gruff's most successful solo album yet, bagging awards, nominations and his highest chart placing to date. "I never have any expectations, really," he says, "because it's dangerous to ever have any. So it's been a pretty overwhelming experience."

'American Interior' also shines at live shows, where audiences get the chance to see the John Evans puppet in the flesh (or felt), coupled with Gruff's decidedly

GRUFF RHYS

AMERICAN INTERIOR



glitch-prone iPad presentations.

"It can be very stressful," he laughs. "You have technical meltdowns... but when the gigs fall apart, they're the best ones, in a way – you're really in the moment. [London's] Queen Elizabeth Hall in September was spectacular – my iPad ran out of battery and it wouldn't recharge with any of the chargers available... some freak occurrence. But it was magical in some ways."

"I'm looking forward to playing long sets with a full band next year in the UK, and just going completely over the top with it. Because it's been a bit of an over-the-top project anyway." ■ TOM PINNOCK

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** 5 May
- **LABEL** Turnstile
- **LENGTH** 46:16
- **PRODUCERS** Gruff Rhys, Ali Chant
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 24
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 7/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. American Exterior ► 2. American Interior ► 3. 100 Unread Messages ► 4. The Whether (Or Not) ► 5. The Last Conquistador ► 6. Lost Tribes ► 7. Liberty (Is Where We'll Be) ► 8. Allweddellau Allweddol ► 9. The Swamp ► 10. Iolo ► 11. Walk Into The Wilderness ► 12. Year Of The Dog ► 13. Tiger's Tale

ON TOUR WITH THE JOHN EVANS PUPPET

► Kidnappings

Gruff Rhys: "So far, so good. I'm expecting one of these times he's gonna get kidnapped and I'll receive a large ransom demand. We played in Mexico City and I was kind of worried he was going to go missing."

► Rescues

"I had an idea that maybe he'd get freed from capture by a gang of lucha libre wrestlers, and that he'd become a wrestler and live another afterlife in Mexico."

► Lost eyes

"He lost an eye after a show in France and I had to post him back to Wrexham to get operated on by [his creator] the Felt Mistress. But John's very easy to work with. I've got no complaints."



46

Twin Peaks

Wild Onion

There were three distinct types of track on 'Wild Onion', Twin Peaks' debut UK release: the breakneck-punk anti-burnout anthems 'Fade Away' and 'Sloop Jay D', written by bassist Jack Dolan; the dreamy pop of 'Mirror Of Time', 'Sweet Thing', 'Ordinary People' and 'Strawberry Smoothie', put together by singer Cadien Lake James; and the dusky, yowling rock'n'roll of 'Making Breakfast', 'I Found A New Way' and 'Good Lovin'', by guitarist Clay Frankel.

Sounds messy, but as Frankel explains, there was a "method" to crafting such a varied album that mirrored the art of compiling a setlist. "You wanna play songs in a certain order so there's ups and downs, slows and fasts. You learn from that." It keeps people interested, he says. "We like that when people listen to the album, they don't get bored or turned off; that it doesn't become stagnant."

'Wild Onion' was the record that introduced the Chicago quartet – completed by drummer Connor Brodner – as an enjoyably sloppy but energetic new force in rock'n'roll: bong-huffing, beer-guzzling hellraisers who'd discovered the art of measured songwriting. Following on from 2012's US-only 'Sunken', their second album marked a significant progression: twice as long, twice as many ideas, twice as good. Despite the vastness of the project, it was a coherent listen.

Perhaps that was because every song stemmed from everyday experiences. "A lot of popular music is like, 'I'm in the club every fucking day of the week,'" says Frankel. "I don't know how many people can relate to that. You can put on a persona or you can just talk about what you do. People will relate to that because they'll be like, 'Yeah, I do that shit too.'"

Or it might have been because Twin Peaks have been on the road since 2009, and best friends for much longer. They've developed a kind of telepathy. "If Cadien shows us a song," Dolan offers as an example, "we know where it's gonna go because we've been

playing together for so long. We can already pick up on the nuances without knowing it."

The record was full of romantic missives from their suburban Chicago lives, such as Frankel's line "Watching the garden grow/ The colour of your eyes is changing with the season/And God only knows why" from 'Making Breakfast', or James' declaration that "you're sweeter and you're colder than a frozen tangerine/Thinking when I'm older I'ma buy you a ring" on 'Sweet Thing'. Lyrics like these were the key, maybe, to getting a more accurate image of what Twin Peaks are actually like as people. "We come across like hard boys," says James, "but we're all soft really."

■ RHIAN DALY

▶ THE DETAILS

▶ **RELEASE DATE** September 1

▶ **LABEL** Communion

▶ **LENGTH** 40:26 ▶ **PRODUCERS**

Twin Peaks, Andrew Humphrey,

Colin Croom ▶ **HIGHEST UK**

CHART POSITION N/A

▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 9/10

▶ **TRACKLISTING** ▶ 1. I Found

A New Way ▶ 2. Strawberry

Smoothie ▶ 3. Mirror Of Time

▶ 4. Sloop Jay D ▶ 5. Making

Breakfast ▶ 6. Strange World

▶ 7. Fade Away ▶ 8. Sweet

Thing ▶ 9. Stranger World

▶ 10. Telephone ▶ 11. Flavor

▶ 12. Ordinary People ▶ 13. Good

Lovin' ▶ 14. No Way Out

▶ 15. Hold On ▶ 16. Mind Frame



THREE KEY TRACKS

▶ 'Sloop Jay D'

Cadien Lake James, vocals:

"The line 'I wrote you all these songs I'll never sing' is one of the truest things I've ever heard. We all write so much music, but most of it is just for ourselves. We have so many songs that we're not going to put out in the world. Jack's got this one called 'Cosmic Breath' – maybe y'all will hear it one day. It's fucking amazing."

▶ 'Mirror Of Time'

Clay Frankel, guitar:

"That song, to me, is like you've got your girl and you love her. Beautiful girls are walking down the street but there's something important about holding on to just one of them, the one you have."

▶ 'Fade Away'

Cadien:

"I love 'Fade Away' because it's like a touchstone song, but it's also where we're at today. We're in the zone. We're enjoying our vices and we're riding the edge. It makes you question things but reminds you you've got to be grateful for what you've got."



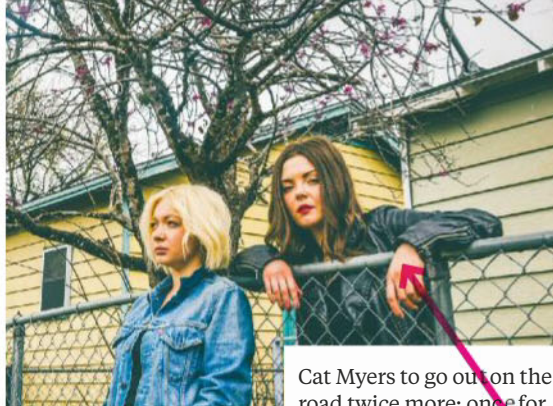
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Honeyblood

Honeyblood

Singer-guitarist Stina Tweeddale, the only permanent member of Glasgow grunge-pop duo Honeyblood, is trying to think of reasons why the band's self-titled album went down so well this year, but all she keeps coming back to is the way its 12 chaotic anthems about catastrophic love and doomed relationships summed up her *own* recent whirlwind past: "2014 was INTENSE!!!"

Since January, she's travelled across freezing America in a van, headlined a UK tour, returned to even bigger shows Stateside and released that debut. She's also said goodbye to original drummer Shona McVicar (tour life got the better of her) and hired a brand new one in



Cat Myers to go out on the road twice more: once for the NME New Breed tour with Superfood and once in support of a sold-out Catfish & The Bottlemen tour in the run-up to Christmas.

"Intense" seems like an understatement. It was, however, the best word to describe 'Honeyblood'. When you listened to this flab-free 40-minute LP, you heard the sound of a band living on the edge. It was in Stina's voice as she turned from sweet and loving to scornful and inflamed in the space of two lines when she sang, "I'll cook you breakfast... *BABY I'LL WASH YOUR CAR*" on 'No Spare Key'. The grunge-fuelled music flitted between alluring seduction and vengeful angst, as though the life stories of the world's worst couples were trapped within the grooves of a record: the fatal danger of Sid and Nancy, the love/hate soap opera of Ike and Tina Turner.

Elsewhere, things were more straightforward. Snarling her way through 'Choker', Tweeddale came on like a murderous cherub: "*What doesn't kill you just makes you stronger/What doesn't fill you just feeds your hunger*". Then on single 'Super Rat' (title: self-explanatory) she was at her most direct: "*I will hate you forever... You. Really. Do. DISGUST. ME*". Here was a record to help you kick back – in the face – at anyone who'd ever wronged you. ■ EVE BARLOW

THE DETAILS

- ▶ **RELEASE DATE** July 14
- ▶ **LABEL** Fat Cat
- ▶ **LENGTH** 40:00
- ▶ **PRODUCER** Peter Katis
- ▶ **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A
- ▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 9/10
- ▶ **TRACKLISTING** ▶ 1. Fall Forever ▶ 2. Super Rat ▶ 3. (I'd Rather Be) Anywhere But Here ▶ 4. Bud ▶ 5. Killer Bangs ▶ 6. Bro ▶ 7. Choker ▶ 8. No Spare Key ▶ 9. Joey ▶ 10. Fortune Cookie ▶ 11. All Dragged Up ▶ 12. Braidburn Valley



· H O N E Y B L O O D ·

HONEYBLOOD'S "INTENSE" 2014

▶ February: American tour #1

Stina Tweeddale:

"We were chucked in the deep end. We missed our flight to LA and had to head straight to the venue from the airport to play the first show like zombies. Touring the States is hardcore. For a band who'd only played to 200 people, playing 1,000-capacity venues was crazy. At SXSW we played four shows in one day."

▶ July: Album release and American tour #2

"When you release an album you become a real band. That was a life-defining experience. It was a release to just let it go. Then we got to do our headline shows in America. It boggles my mind that people across the world know the words to our songs."

▶ September: UK tour and Shona McVicar's departure

"Shona leaving had been going on for at least six months. I'd known [replacement drummer] Cat since I was a teenager. I called her and said, 'I've got some tours booked – wanna come with me?' I was very lucky. We had one practice, a little jam, and she was like, 'Solid, let's go!'"

44

Perfect Pussy

Say Yes To Love

The first vinyl pressing of Perfect Pussy's debut album contained streaks of frontperson Meredith Graves' blood. It was a literal sign of the graft the Syracuse hardcore band invested in the record, but also served as a warning that carnage lay ahead. Nothing about 'Say Yes To Love' screamed welcome: if the band's name didn't immediately mark out their place in the margins, then they were blasted straight there by their soul-scouring production – nastier than anything on punk label Siltbreeze, which itself outdid Hüsker Dü alma mater SST by a long shot.

The whole image was of a band that had terraformed new land out of something inhospitable, and once you got into Graves' lyrics, it became clear that a rotten soul was a prerequisite for entry. *"If you promise to stay*

drunk or devoted/Then I'll do my best to stay for a while", she bawled of another toxic co-dependency on the breakneck 'Advance Upon The Real', though her words only became coherent with the lyrics sheet to hand, obscured as they were because she didn't trust her singing voice.

It was an album that did everything within its power to warn the listener about what they were getting into – stories of betrayal and abuse told by a victim and a perpetrator – and an audible expression of the perverse self-protective mechanisms Graves described in her lyrics. She expanded on their origins in a recent essay she wrote about her adolescent self-abuse for Rookie, the radical website for teenage girls: "My body was a battleground.

What could anyone do that I hadn't done to myself? Nothing hurt any more."

And yet, listeners came. 'Say Yes...' is an album of blissful extremes, ugly thoughts leading to powerful breakthroughs – being *"loved insofar as I cherish this pain"*, as Graves yelled on 'Dig'. You hear about the moments before drowning being peaceful, a sensation this record seemed to simulate in its extreme, shrieking assaults that became euphoric at volume.

As their star rose, Perfect Pussy's sawdust-throated frontperson also became one of alternative music's most powerful voices, writing flooringly lucid essays on Lana Del Rey's much-debated authenticity, and suggesting Mark Kozelek's relentless attacks on The War On Drugs were sustained emotional abuse, rather than "a bit of fun".

There were brief revelations within the record itself – *"I must count it all as joy, I must let love be love in me"*, Graves commands of herself in 'Bells' – but the young lifespan of 'Say Yes To Love' to date feels like its own revelation for the band as much as their devoted listeners. Perfect Pussy's next record will be tough for them – not in that feeble 'difficult-second-album' way, but because they no longer have to dare people to listen. The trick is to continue to challenge the converted with the power they wielded on this transcendent record. ■ LAURA SNAPES

Q&A

Meredith Graves, singer

How do you feel about the record now? You've said that you weren't totally happy with it.
 "I don't think about the record much any more. It matters so much less in the wake of 10 straight months of touring. The songs are part of us now; the record is just the first time we put them down in a complete form, but they've grown and changed with us since then. What's happened to us has been so weird, and despite the stress and the odds, we pulled it off for a year without stopping. Go us!"

This record comes from an extremely sad place. How has your life – and outlook – changed since it came out?
 "This band has saved my life. The last year – touring the world and the surprise plot twist of coming into my own as a writer – has made me feel, for the first time, like my life has genuine purpose and meaning. I'm still self-critical, too much so, and I'm still a deeply sad person, but I don't feel so afraid or alone any more. It's the most amazing thing that's ever happened to me and in many ways, it's given me my life back."

Where do Perfect Pussy go from here?

"If we make another record, it won't be for some time. We've had an unbelievable year but we've had to put all our energy into one band and one record, so we're looking forward to having time off to write music with our other projects."



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Freddie Gibbs And Madlib

Piñata

We wanted it to be like a blaxploitation movie in your ears," says Otis Jackson Jr, better known as Los Angeles beatmaker Madlib.

"A crazy trip that told it like it is." It's been 10 months since his and rapper Freddie Gibbs' brilliant 'Piñata' was unleashed: a '70s soul-streaked boom-bap supernova that told tales of scrapping drug dealers and rusted American dreams informed by Gibbs' teen years selling dope in Gary, Indiana – a town declared the 'murder capital of America' in 1994.

Despite the massive critical success of 'Piñata', hailed by hip-hop purists as a return to the gossamer beats and grizzled street sounds of rap's '90s

'golden era', Gibbs seems still mired in that violent past. In early November, he was targeted by gunmen after a show at a Rough Trade record shop in Brooklyn. Two members of his entourage were shot, and are currently recovering.

"Freddie's fine, back to talking his usual shit," Jackson tells *NME*, a week after the shooting. "These random dudes he didn't know came up on his car and fired. He alright."

Jackson should know: since first working together on 2011's 'Thuggin' EP, the pair have become regular collaborators, delivering another two EPs ('Shame' and 'Deeper') before the colossal 'Piñata'. "It's a good connection between us," he admits. "For the album, I gave Freddie about eight hours' worth of beats and let him go wild. There's a trust there."

On 'Piñata', it showed. From the Freda Payne-sampling shuffle of 'High', which featured a hyperactive guest spot from Danny Brown, to the stoned funk chill of 'Robes', which saw cameos from Odd Future alumni Earl Sweatshirt and Domo Genius, there was

a litany of big name guests (Raekwon, Scarface and Ab-Soul also appeared) – but Gibbs and Jackson's fizzing chemistry remained the main attraction throughout.

Despite having not listened back to the album once since completing it ("I'm too critical... I hear the songs when we play 'em live"), Jackson claims to be "tripping that people like it. The reaction when we've been playing it live has been insane." Its vintage feel, compared to Tupac and early Raekwon, wasn't a reaction to the dark aesthetic blockbuster names like Kanye West and A\$AP Rocky have been ushering hip-hop towards recently, but "a natural thing... my record collection is all old; I got a lot of love for those artists and sounds", says the producer.

"My one regret about the album is we couldn't call it the original title," says Jackson. The pair preferred 'Cocaine Piñata', inspired by a dream Gibbs had of his future daughter's birthday party, surrounded by drugs. "It's a better representation of what the record is about. But we didn't want angry soccer moms chasing us out of Best Buy."

The reaction to the album has inspired them to begin work on its follow-up, with a new full-length "taking shape". Says Jackson: "It's gonna be a continuation, rather than something drastically different. We wanna get it out early next year. We've got a lot to say that we're not done saying yet." ■ AL HORNER

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** March 18
- **LABEL** Madlib Invasion
- **LENGTH** 60:21
- **PRODUCER** Madlib
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Supplier ► 2. Scarface ► 3. Deeper ► 4. High ► 5. Harold's ► 6. Bomb ► 7. Shitsville ► 8. Thuggin' ► 9. Real ► 10. Uno ► 11. Robes ► 12. Broken ► 13. Lakers ► 14. Knicks ► 15. Shame ► 16. Watts ► 17. Piñata

FREDDIE GIBBS & MADLIB



STORY BEHIND THE ALBUM TITLE

Freddie Gibbs: "I'm going to tell you the truth, man. I had a dream, dog, that I had a little baby. The little baby's birthday was here and shit. You know I like Latino girls and shit, man. Anyways, so the baby would probably be Afro-Mexican or some shit. So it was like a little Afro-Mexican baby and shit and it wanted a piñata in the dream. I don't know. I must've been cooking some dope or some shit that week, because then people started hitting the piñata, and there was nothing but dope falling out of it. I was just like, 'Damn, man.' It was little four-year-old kids hitting dope in piñatas. I don't know. It was a crazy-ass dream. I wanted to call it Cocaine Piñata."



42

Hookworms

The Hum

Normally it takes two or three years for bands to release an album and tour the shit out of it before disappearing for six months to record new material. That Hookworms' much-loved debut 'Pearl Mystic' came out in March 2013, and its follow-up 'The Hum' this November, seemed kind of subversive. It was almost as if they were positioning themselves as Yorkshire's answer to ultra-productive Californian garage rocker Ty Segall. But everything's a bit different with the Leeds-based psychedelic noise five-piece, all of whom still have jobs and no intention whatsoever of leaving them.

For frontman/producer MJ, that means running his own studio, Suburban Home. "It's intrinsic to how we write songs and how we operate," he says. "We practise every week and can record when we want to, so in fact it felt like a long time between 'Pearl Mystic' and 'The Hum'. Also, we don't tour like many other bands do – we tour in very intense, short bursts, because we still all work."

Inevitably, there was a relationship between the two albums – most obviously in the band's decision to continue the numbering of instrumental tracks from one record to next – but there were great leaps forward, too, in the quality of the songwriting ('On Leaving', 'Radio Tokyo' and 'Beginners' all break expansive new ground) and in the band's understanding of what makes an album work.

"It's a more minimal record, although it's more upbeat," MJ says. "The first one felt like a kitchen-sink operation where there were no parameters, and there are parts where we went overboard. There was naivety, and that was partly to do with the fact that we'd all previously played in hardcore or garage-rock bands, where there are very defined genre parameters. With 'The Hum', it was really important for us to work within a framework and, importantly, make a record that we could execute live without any difficulty."

The band also felt more pressure. 'Pearl Mystic' was a runaway word-of-mouth success

spawned from one-man Nottingham label Gringo. After signing to Domino imprint Weird World, they suddenly found themselves under increased scrutiny. "Pearl Mystic" was made with no fear of consequences, as long as

Matt [Newnham, Gringo Records boss] broke even. It was definitely different this time. We knew that if we failed, it would be more publicly than before."

They didn't fail. 'The Hum' absolutely deserves its position on this list and the band have been delighted with the responses to it. It streamed for a week before release, during which time MJ and his girlfriend dared to see what Twitter was thinking.

"Everyone was so nice about it," MJ says. "We were scrolling through people's views and my girlfriend suddenly went, 'I'm bored of this now.'" ■ PHIL HEBBLETHWAITE

► THE DETAILS

► RELEASE DATE November 10

► LABEL Weird World

► LENGTH 37:54

► PRODUCER MJ

► HIGHEST UK CHART

POSITION N/A

► ORIGINAL NME RATING 9/10

► TRACKLISTING ► 1. The Impasse ► 2. On Leaving ► 3. IV ► 4. Radio Tokyo ► 5. Beginners ► 6. V ► 7. Off Screen ► 8. VI ► 9. Retreat



WHAT'S WITH THE ROMAN NUMERALS FOR TRACK TITLES?

► They're funny

MJ: "The reason we kept the Roman numerals to name the instrumental interludes, which we started on 'Pearl Mystic', was mostly because I thought it was really funny that track three on 'The Hum' is called 'IV', track six 'V' and track eight 'VI'. It made me laugh when we were deciding how to sequence the record."

► They provide a narrative

"I'm not sure if we'll carry it on, but it ensures there's a narrative between the two albums. We never thought we'd get to make a second record; we wanted to tighten up what we were doing."

► They let you evolve

"I don't have a problem with bands' second albums being aesthetically similar, so long as they evolve. I feel like we evolved with 'The Hum', but there's a connection to 'Pearl Mystic' and the numbers help make that clear."



41

Manic Street Preachers

Futurology



Many bands have tried to make their 'Berlin album', treading in the footsteps of Iggy and Bowie, in thrall to Alexanderplatz and the autobahn. U2. !!! The Rakes.

It's probably second only to Los Angeles for cliché-generating recording locations. And that's something that Manic Street Preachers were only too aware of when they chose to record 'Futurology' in Berlin's Hansa studios, birthplace of Bowie's 'Low' and "Heroes", Iggy's 'The Idiot' and 'Lust For Life'.

"James was paranoid because of that Berlin chic," says bassist Nicky Wire. "We were aware of the pitfalls of doing a Bowie, or doing an 'Achtung Baby'. But everything in our arsenal

was convincing: demos, ideas. This time we knew."

The resulting album was startlingly anti-cliché. 'Futurology' found the Manics rampant with rude, renewed energy on the industrial battle hymn 'Europa Geht Durch Mich', the post-punk barricade anthem 'Let's Go To War' and the gloriously silly 'Sex, Power, Love And Money'.

"Without ideas we fall flat," asserts Wire. "The privilege of travel has led us to so many avenues. For me it's fucking around, walking around art galleries and buying books and postcards, and before you know it, you've written a lyric in your hotel room, staring out into some vast city, and you realise that it's so inspirational."

The album heaved with influences, from books and, in particular, visual art. 'Between The Clock And The Bed', a duet with Scritti Politti's Green Gartside, took its title from a self-portrait by Edvard Munch. 'Black Square' nodded to a painting by Russian futurist Kazimir Malevich. And 'Dreaming A City (Hughesovka)' was a rare Manics instrumental that references the Ukrainian city Donetsk, founded by Welsh industrialist John Hughes. The last two became spookily prescient. "Before we knew it, Malevich was having an exhibition at the Tate, and Donetsk was on a 24-hour news cycle as soon as we released the album. And the whole miasma of Farage and European politics; it was eerily current from the minute we unleashed it."

Always two steps ahead; and after such great strides into their future, all roads now lie open. "Everything is up for grabs for the next album," says Wire. "We have no idea, we have no direction. Which is good." ■ EMILY MACKAY

THE DETAILS

► **RELEASE DATE** July 7

► **LABEL** Columbia

► **LENGTH** 47:05

► **PRODUCERS** Manic Street Preachers, Loz Williams, Alex Silva ► **HIGHEST UK**

CHART POSITION 2

► **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10

► **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Futurology ► 2. Walk Me To The Bridge ► 3. Let's Go To War ► 4. The Next Jet To Leave Moscow ► 5. Europa Geht Durch Mich ► 6. Divine Power ► 7. Sex, Power, Love And Money ► 8. Dreaming A City (Hughesovka) ► 9. Black Square ► 10. Between The Clock And The Bed ► 11. Misguided Missile ► 12. The View From Stow Hill ► 13. Mayakovsky



FUTUROLOGY'S GUEST PLAYERS

► Georgia Ruth Williams

Vocalist on 'Divine Youth'. Harpist and songwriter from Aberystwyth and 2013 Welsh Music Prize winner. A voice like a harvest mouse.

► Green Gartside

James' duet partner on 'Between The Clock And

The Bed' and main man of Scritti Politti.

► Cate Le Bon, H Hawkline, Gavin Fitzjohn

Le Bon and Hawkline, Welsh psych-scene mainstays, bellow along to the chorus of 'Let's Go To War'; Fitzjohn, on backing vocals, also plays for Paolo Nutini.

► Berliner Kneipenchor

The 'Berlin pub choir' provide backing vocals on 'Misguided Missile'.

► Cian Ciaran

Super Furry Animals' keyboard player, who appears on 'Futurology' and 'The Next Jet To Leave Moscow'.

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Bombay Bicycle Club

So Long, See You Tomorrow



If the worth of an album can be measured by the impact it has on a band, then Bombay Bicycle Club's chart-topping 'So Long, See You Tomorrow' was an important record indeed. The album's success fuelled a year of global gigging that's seen the band play the biggest shows of their career. "We've been on tour ever since [the album was released], and it hasn't really stopped," says tired-sounding guitarist Jamie MacColl. "And that's a good thing – it's good to know people around the world want you to play, and you're not at home twiddling your thumbs wondering where it all went wrong."

Those live shows have been burst wide open by BBC's fourth album. They cast their net wide, and used Bollywood samples on 'Feel', melded the delicate with the epic

on 'Whenever, Wherever' and aimed at the dancefloor with the addictive 'Carry Me'. 'So Long...' made it tempting to hear BBC as a new kind of band – a product of the post-internet age, when genre barriers are obliterated and the only thing that matters is whether you

like a song or a sound, and how much it will influence the music you make.

"I think we're very reflective of our generation, and of the internet generation generally," MacColl agrees. "Most people I know don't listen to just one type of music any more. I'm not saying that that wasn't the case in the past, but I don't think it occurred in such a widespread way. We're always looking for new things, and invariably they make their way into our music. We've never really been scared of letting new things come into the music – if anything, it's been necessary for us to keep the drive to continue."

What happens next is still up for debate, but BBC think they can go wider still. "We've made four albums in five years," MacColl notes. "When we were 19 or 20 it seemed like we could keep doing that forever, but that's not the case. I think there's a danger of running out of ideas if we try to bash out another album quickly. But the thing that will motivate all of us to make another album sooner rather than later is that we all believe we've made four very good albums, but I think – or hope – that we have a really great album in us that will transcend everything we've done so far."

■ ANGUS BATEY

THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** February 3
- **LABEL** Island
- **LENGTH** 44:55
- **PRODUCER** Jack Steadman
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 1
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 7/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Overdone ► 2. It's Alright Now ► 3. Carry Me ► 4. Home By Now ► 5. Whenever, Wherever ► 6. Luna ► 7. Eyes Off You ► 8. Feel ► 9. Come To ► 10. So Long, See You Tomorrow

HOW BBC REINVENTED THEMSELVES

► Ditching the A&R people

Jamie MacColl, guitar:

"We kept losing A&R people – they either kept getting fired or leaving. I'm not sure what that says about us! But for this fourth record we just didn't have one. The president of the label came to the studio once, sort of nodded his head along, and was happy with it. That was it."

► Writing albums, not singles

"We've never been a singles band – we've had singles picked up by radio, but we've never had those songs that have quite crossed over in that way. A lot of effort goes into our albums in terms of making something that attempts to be cohesive – on a couple of our albums the first and last songs relate to each other – and there's always the hope that people will listen to them the whole way through."

► Getting more electronic

"Jack [Steadman, frontman] has been making electronic music since he was 13 or 14, before the band even started. The albums have been getting more electronic. A lot of the songs start as samples – this was initially a kind of laptop album, it didn't start with jamming sessions or rehearsals. What makes it uniquely us is to marry what Jack does by himself with the band."



39

Protomartyr

Under Color Of Official Right

Protomartyr's second album improved on their 2012 debut 'No Passion All Technique' in numerous ways. The songs were more nuanced and dynamic, the machine-like clatter of the production lent a pervading atmosphere of unease, and most important of all, frontman Joe Casey cemented his reputation as a brilliantly acerbic lyricist. The thirtysomething theatre doorman ("I actually have to go out to work tonight," he tells *NME*, "but maybe next year I'll take some more time off") was the reluctant star of this record, hopping between subjects that appear to have been picked from a hat, from Detroit's corrupt ex-mayor ('Bad Advice') to angry kids turning on their neglectful fathers ('Scum, Rise!') to the wonder of wart removal ('Wart Remover'). The result was one of the most powerful and poetic punk-rock albums of recent years.

Did you feel more confident on this record than on your first?

Joe Casey, vocals: "No, I felt less confident! The first one we did in one day and we'd had those songs for a while, but when we went in to record this one, some of the songs were brand spanking new, and I didn't know how I was gonna sing 'em. With this record, I was in a vocal booth, doing multiple takes, a lot of things I wasn't used to. It was a little daunting. But I put a lot of time and angst into each song, and I think if I got confident, I'd also get complacent. I keep thinking there's gotta be an easier way..."

While making the record, you had an enforced period of sobriety following a drink-driving conviction. Did that affect the album?

"It happened during the summer, right before we were recording the album. So I was a little more clear-headed, but being stone-cold sober is probably one of the reasons why recording felt so daunting. But it was good – I had to kinda relearn how to write lyrics and how to



sing them, because for both I used to like to get drunk."

It's interesting that two of the best punk records of the year – your own and Sleaford Mods' – were written by guys in their thirties or forties.

"Yeah. I mean, not to speak for the whole generation, but it seems like people in their thirties, at least in Detroit, are looking around going, 'Jesus, when I was younger I assumed that by now I'd be settled, have a career, a future...' There are a lot of people who, like me, have a job that a teenager could have. So if you're still stuck in a teenager's life and you're in your thirties, you have a certain kind of frustration, but it's a little bit more pointed because you actually know what you're yelling at, as opposed to just yelling at the wall."

■ BARRY NICOLSON

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR PROTOMARTYR?

► Dread

Joe Casey: "I'm already dreading going into the studio for the next record. It's a constant struggle between falling back on things you've done before and changing things. You don't want to lose what people liked about your last record – we'll see how it goes..."

► Money

"For some reason, a lot of the lyrics I'm writing right now are about money; so maybe that's gonna be the overarching theme."

► Shitty musicians

"We're recording a track this weekend, maybe for a single or something, and that one is about shitty musicians. It's mostly me making fun of crappy local bands."

► THE DETAILS

► **RELEASE DATE** April 21

► **LABEL** Hardly Art

► **LENGTH** 32:32

► **PRODUCER** Daniel Martin McCormick

► **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A

► **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10

► **TRACKLISTING** ►1. Maidenhead ►2. Ain't So Simple ►3. Want Remover ►4. Trust Me Billy ►5. Pagans ►6. What The Wall Said ►7. Tarpeian Rock ►8. Bad Advice ►9. Son of Dis ►10. Scum, Rise! ►11. I Stare At Floors ►12. Come & See ►13. Violent ►14. I'll Take That Applause



38

Alt-J

This Is All Yours

On their wriggly, crunchy and suggestive second album, Alt-J did a fine job of dispelling any lingering image of them as MOR and predictable. It was replaced by one of a subtly experimental and freakishly sexual band, unafraid to make their unique way through the world of pop. Take June's lead single 'Hunger Of The Pine', which managed to carry a vocal sample from queen of pop and one-woman headline generator Miley Cyrus while remaining brooding and deliciously dark. Unexpected, but it worked.

Then there was 'Every Other Freckle', perhaps the album's most talked-about song thanks to frontman Joe Newman's innuendos about oral sex. His promise to some lucky paramour that he'd "lick you like a crisp-packet" – as if making a woman feel like an empty bag of cheesy Nik Naks was the very height of bedroom chivalry – was juxtaposed by keyboardist and co-vocalist Gus Unger-Hamilton's operatic trills, well honed when he was in a choral group at Leeds University. It was another bizarre combination, but another triumphant mark of individuality. They kept coming. Even the funky twang of single 'Left Hand Free', the record's sore-thumb moment, was strong-minded, and its radio-friendly melody stood apart in glorious fashion from the more delicately woven narrative in tracks like 'Nara'.

A sense of theatre ran through every song on the album like words through a stick of

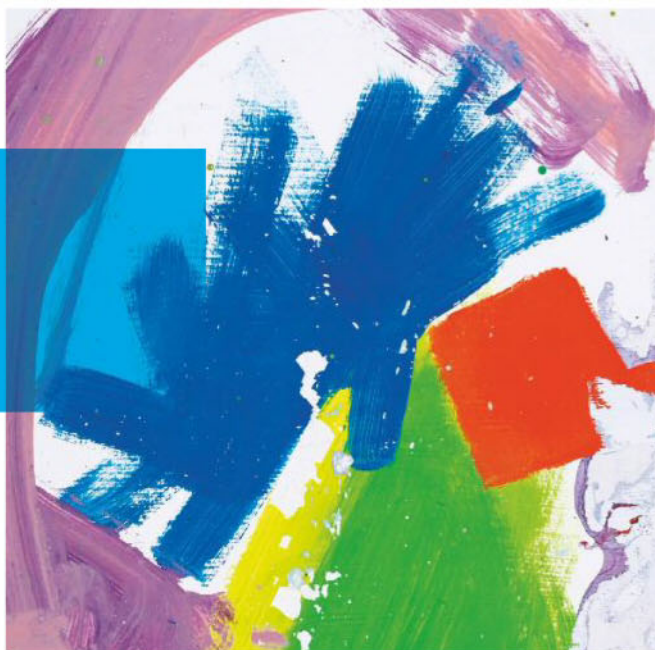
rock. 'The Gospel Of John Hurt' was inspired by the actor's notorious chest-bursting scene in *Alien* ("chest bursts like John Hurt coming out of the woods"), and saw fit to throw in an oblique reference to a prophet from the Old

Testament with the lines "You're headed on the strings/ For the E-X-T-I-N-C-T Jeremiah". Then there was 'Garden Of England', sewn together using only birdsong and a recorder as materials. If you closed your eyes while it played, images of croquet and cucumber sandwiches filled your brain. This was an album that evoked imagery both pastoral and provocative.

The glue that bound it together was Thom Green's percussion, which was significantly more synthesized than

on the band's Mercury-winning debut, 'An Awesome Wave'. That record mainly featured live drums, which wouldn't have suited the hidden track on 'This Is All Yours' – a cover of Bill Withers' 'Lovely Day' that rode along on a slowed-down dubstep jerk. 'Bloodflood Pt II' was Green at his best too, starting off stripped down before rattling along on a super-chilled beat Skrillex might put together if he'd popped a fistful of Quaaludes.

Above all, 'This Is All Yours' showed that 'An Awesome Wave' was no one-hit wonder. In January, when Alt-J became a trio after bassist Gwil Sainsbury's departure, their future was uncertain. Now, both their staying power and imagination seem indisputable. ■ LUCY JONES



THE THREE WEIRDEST LYRICS

"I tackle weeds just so the moon buggers nibble"
– 'Left Hand Free'

Described by the band as the "least Alt-J song ever", 'Left Hand Free' was hella poppy, almost certainly about masturbation and featured one of the album's oddest lines.

"I'm gonna bed into you like a cat beds into a bean bag/ Turn you inside out and lick you like a crisp packet/ ...Pull me like an animal out of a hole!"
– 'Every Other Freckle'

Alt-J sounded like lust-driven maniacs on the album, with X-rated lyrics peppered throughout. 'Every Other Freckle' started off innocently enough with the "cats" line, before Joe Newman dropped his immortal "crisp-packet" simile. Equally strange was the interjection from Unger-Hamilton, later in the song, about pulling "an animal out of a hole".

"Love is a pharaoh and he's boning me"
– 'Nara'

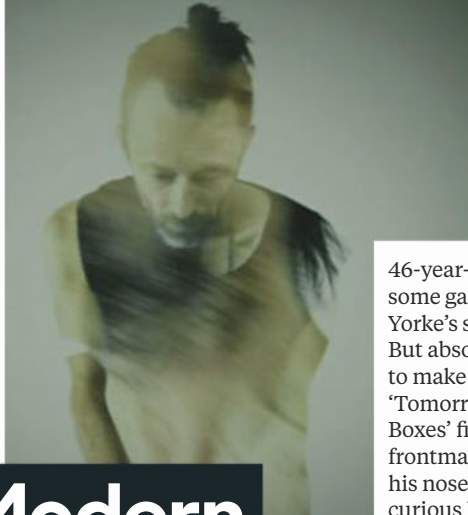
Perhaps the record's most memorable line, in a song dedicated to the Japanese city of the same name.



37

Thom Yorke

Tomorrow's Modern Boxes



Like Radiohead's 'In Rainbows', Thom Yorke's second solo album initially drew headlines for its unusual means of delivery. To bypass the "self-elected gatekeepers" of the music industry, Yorke reached for the pirate's tool of choice, BitTorrent, to seed 'Tomorrow's Modern Boxes' to the masses – for a small fee, of course. But once we'd all finished wondering What This Means For The Music Industry, it was time to turn our attention to the music itself – at which point a record that at first seemed rather muted next to 'The Eraser' or Atoms For Peace slowly opened up like a lotus flower.

Yes, this was Yorke at his most understated, with tracks consisting of little more than the

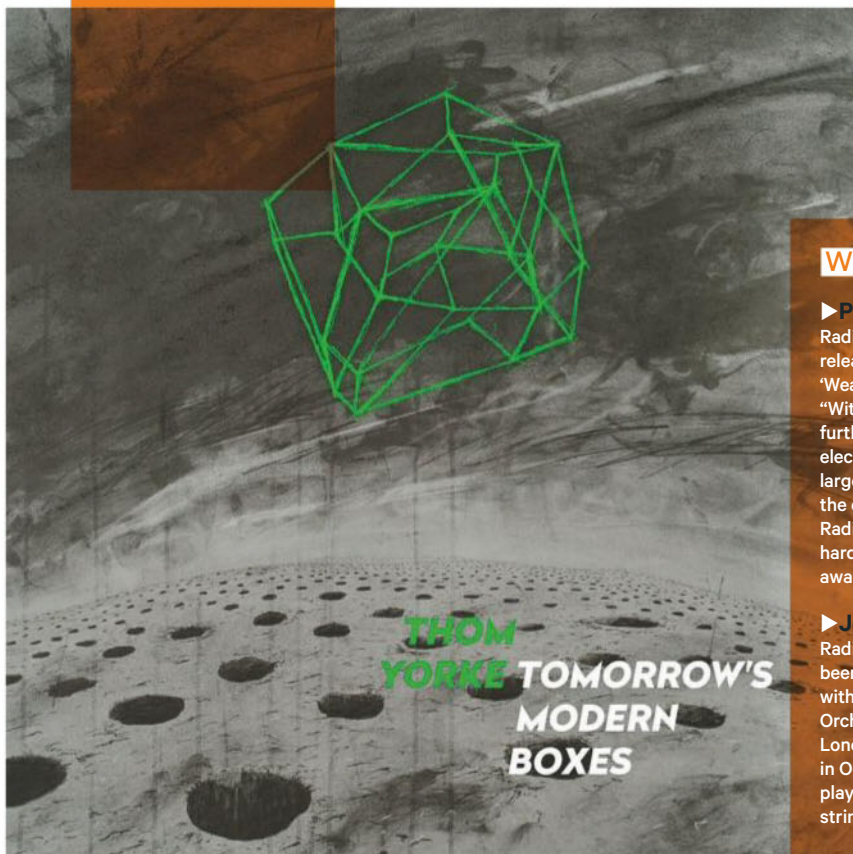
46-year-old's clacking beats, some gauzy synths and Yorke's sly, curled falsetto. But absolved of the need to make big statements, 'Tomorrow's Modern Boxes' finds Radiohead's frontman free to follow his nose and explore some curious little niches. 'Guess Again!' updated the cold piano elegy of 'Pyramid Song' with shuffling beats and lyrics about wild dogs peering in through the

curtains. 'The Mother Lode' was a bouncy UK garage skitter with a recurring piano motif, Yorke's voice sampled, layered and hung about the place like drapes. And 'A Brain In A Bottle' was a piece of wiggly electronic funk that could almost have squeezed onto 'The King Of Limbs', and came with a video that featured its ponytailed maker larking about the joint wearing boxing gloves.

But given a few months to bed in, the real highlights of 'Tomorrow's Modern Boxes' were its quietest, most withdrawn moments – 'Nose Grows Some', an ambiguous tale of companionship set on some distant rock, or the haunted 'Interference', with its cold, lonely premonitions: *"In the future, we will change our numbers/And lose contact/In the future leaves will turn brown/When we want them..."* Radiohead are reportedly back in the studio, but for once, there's no hurry. ■ LOUIS PATTISON

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** September 26
- **LABEL** Self-released
- **LENGTH** 38:13
- **PRODUCER** Nigel Godrich
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 7/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. A Brain In A Bottle ► 2. Guess Again! ► 3. Interference ► 4. The Mother Lode ► 5. Truth Ray ► 6. There Is No Ice (For My Drink) ► 7. Pink Section ► 8. Nose Grows Some



WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF RADIOHEAD IN 2014?

► Phil Selway

Radiohead's doughty sticksman released his second solo album 'Weatherhouse' in October. "With more ambition and further forays into experimental electronics than its understated, largely acoustic predecessor, the expansive nature of Radiohead's influence grips harder," was our verdict, awarding it 7/10.

► Jonny Greenwood

Radiohead's lead guitarist has been busy. His collaboration with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, 'Water', debuted at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall in October, and saw Greenwood playing the tambura, an Indian stringed instrument. He's also

written the score for Paul Thomas Anderson's film *Inherent Vice* and played with the London Contemporary Orchestra, with whom he performed a new composition, 'Loop', at the Hydraulic Power Station in Wapping back in March.

► Colin Greenwood

In January, Radiohead's bassist was named Official Ambassador for Independent Venue Week, a celebration of small-scale venues across the UK. As part of it, he curated a show at Oxford's Jericho Tavern, where Radiohead played their first proper gig back in 1986.

► Ed O'Brien

Unknown. Presumed resting.

36

Goat

Commune

The second album from the extravagantly robed Swedish collective – based in Gothenburg but hailing from the remote settlement of Korpilombolo, supposedly known for its pagan traditions – found them jamming up a storm of sounds very similar to those of their 2012 debut, ‘World Music’. Another dose of slippery sub-Saharan rhythms, wild guitar solos and raucous chanted vocals is no bad thing, though, as confirmed by their spokesman, known to *NME* only as ‘Goatman’.

“On a second album you can’t surprise anyone,” he said, “and we knew people were going to compare it to the first one. We were happy with it – sometimes you know when something is good!”

Though a healthy psychedelic scene has been

flowering internationally over the last decade, few bands have created anything as enjoyable and life-affirming as ‘Commune’. Highlights like the droning ‘Bondye’, the pounding, Silver Apples-esque ‘Words’ and the ferociously groovy ‘Goatslaves’ were as close as rock got

to ritual music this year. Live, Goat can inspire scenes of ecstatic dancing, something the band would much rather see than people “analysing” their music. “Discussing it on forums, that’s not interesting,” says Goatman. “If people feel it’s party music or dance music, that’s great.”

“It’s been a good year.

I think we’ve done the best shows we’ve ever done.

Each show was better than the last one. The Roundhouse show, particularly; it was an honour to have so many people in London come to see us.

I think the UK has been the most enthusiastic – the energy from the audience was amazing. When people seem to enjoy it, you play better as well; it gets easier.”

If you’ve worn out your copy of ‘Commune’, never fear – Goat are due to head back into the studio in February or March 2015 to start work on jamming and recording their third full-length.

“If you’re making music, you can’t expect anyone to change it completely from one album to another,” says Goatman. “We’re just going to do what we do, but we’re gonna twist it. Maybe we have a plan... but maybe I’m not gonna say anything yet...” ■ TOM PINNOCK

► THE DETAILS

► **RELEASE DATE** September 22

► **LABEL** Rocket Recordings

► **LENGTH** 37:32

► **PRODUCER** Goat

► **HIGHEST UK CHART**

POSITION 47

► **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10

► **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Talk

To God ► 2. Words ► 3. The

Light Within ► 4. To Travel The

Path Unknown ► 5. Goatchild

► 6. Goatslaves ► 7. Hide From

The Sun ► 8. Bondye ► 9.

Gathering Of Ancient Tribes



THREE 'COMMUNE' INFLUENCES

► Fela Kuti

Goatman: “I guess we like Fela... but I don’t hear a lot of Afrobeat in our music, to be honest. Maybe in one song on ‘Commune’ and one song on ‘World Music’, but on most songs, I just don’t understand where the reference comes from. He’s not as big an influence as people might think.”

► Malian blues

“Yeah, on ‘Commune’, I can hear more influence from Mali. I think that’s because we have been listening to a lot of Malian music recently, so it comes out! You get influenced and you use it!”

► Amon Düül II

“We have listened to Amon Düül in our past, so then, when you make your own music, it might come out unconsciously. But it’s nothing that we have planned, like, ‘We want to sound like Amon Düül’. If you do that, you’re not going to succeed. But what comes from you, you can’t expect it to be free from influences. What comes out is always influenced by something.”

35

Parquet Courts

Sunbathing Animal

For an album named after a docile cat, 'Sunbathing Animal' was an impressively harsh listen. Sure, the title track on Parquet Courts' third album was inspired by innocent enough events – frontman Andrew Savage wrote it about nothing more than his feline friend Frida catching rays in his apartment – but the music didn't match up. This three-minute punk blast was the Brooklyn quartet's quickest recording, but the addition of thumping drums and a hoarse chorus made it sound like the whole band were about to expire with the effort. The same was true of 'Black & White' and 'Ducking & Dodging', on which Savage's snarl was undercut by fierce and dissonant guitar interplay with guitarist Austin Brown. Rigid solos and punishing rhythms littered the record. Only 'Instant Disassembly' – the first Parquet Courts ballad – was spared. A magnificent campfire singalong, it was a masterful creation of space on an album that bore little resemblance to Parquet Courts' 2012 breakthrough 'Light Up Gold'. It was, though, so much more than just a deliberately awkward reaction to success.

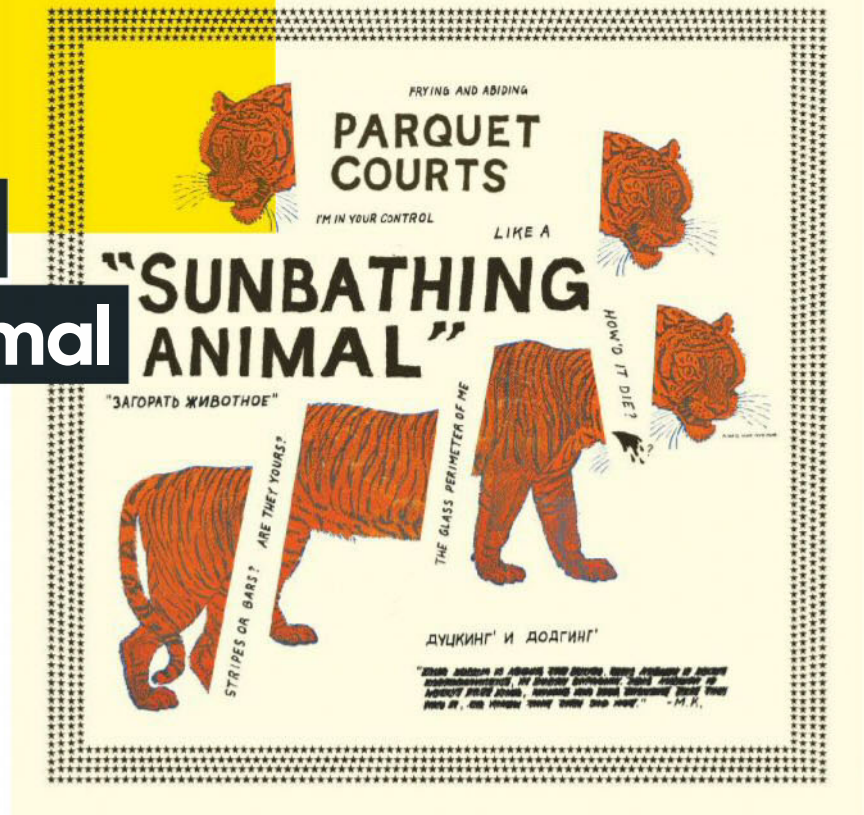
Did you consider the hype around 'Light Up Gold' when making this album?

Austin Brown, guitar:

"To be honest, no. We were completely taken aback by it. Recording this one wasn't in response to anything; it was growth, a creative continuation. I wanted it to be really good. The only real change in our process was having more time, so we wrote more songs. We weren't under any kind of spotlight; I don't think we're that kind of band. I don't think anyone thinks we are either."

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** June 2
- **LABEL** Rough Trade
- **LENGTH** 46:13
- **PRODUCER** Jonathan Schenke
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 55
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Bodies Made Of ► 2. Black & White ► 3. Dear Ramona ► 4. What Color Is Blood? ► 5. Vienna II ► 6. Always Back In Town ► 7. She's Rolling ► 8. Sunbathing Animal ► 9. Up All Night ► 10. Instant Disassembly ► 11. Ducking & Dodging ► 12. Raw Milk ► 13. Into The Garden



Is it deliberately less accessible?

"I like that mythologised narrative. That's a good one; let's leave it there. I don't feel like over-explaining how I hear the record would serve anyone. People can hear where we're coming from, it's pretty straightforward. There's a song on there called 'Always Back In Town'; it's about what was going on with us that whole year while we were writing this record. A lot of songs, not consciously, follow the theme of being in this carousel with bars around it, like one of those rides that goes in a circle and up and down, but never backwards."

How would you describe 'Instant Disassembly'? It's very different to the rest of the album.

"Yeah, Andrew wrote it and I think it's great. I guess you could consider it the ballad of 'Sunbathing Animal', which has a diverse range of aggressiveness and curtness. I most often relate to these songs from playing them live and I honestly haven't actually listened to our record in a long time."

You've toured 'Sunbathing Animal' extensively – how have the new songs affected the band?

"We've had so many different experiences together now, and things are good, but our relationships aren't changing. We did have a soccer ball for a while on tour this year, until Sean booted it onto a roof and none of us could speak enough Spanish to successfully ask for it back. I don't know if 'full-time' is the right word for us, though. On a surface level, things are different and we're playing in places I never even thought I'd see, but creatively we're on the same path we've always been on. This whole thing is a surprise adventure for us. Achievements started to happen off the back of 'Light Up Gold', a record we made with the hope of selling 500 copies." ■ BEN HOMEWOOD



34

Sun Kil Moon

Benji

Death is a simple fact of life, and listening to Mark Kozelek's sixth release as Sun Kil Moon, you wonder if the whole record wasn't conceived as an 11-song exercise in sledgehammering that point home.

'Benji' is an album with a body count, and its characters are scythed down like henchmen in a Bond movie: spree shootings, mercy killings, accidental fires, aneurysms, terminal illness, natural causes – you name it, somebody on 'Benji' dies from it. Yet while their deaths are sometimes senseless, their lives are never meaningless. These people are the protagonists in their own stories, some deeply flawed, others quietly heroic, all of them tragic; but each demise carries weight. Everybody – whether redneck uncles, distant second cousins or long-forgotten childhood friends – means something to somebody, and they *all* mean something to Kozelek.

To the ranks of the fallen, we can probably add The War On Drugs. The Pennsylvania group may have been responsible for one of 2014's finest albums, but the verbal battering they received from Kozelek in the months following 'Benji's' release must surely have taken the shine off their year. Sun Kil Moon's morose indie-folk is hardly a paragon of musical blackness, but 'War On Drugs: Suck My Cock', Kozelek's stinging rebuke to "the whitest band I've ever fucking heard", wouldn't have been half as funny if there wasn't at least a little ring of truth to it. From unimpeachable to bridge-and-tunnel in the space of seven minutes, it's a musical hatchet job to rank up there with John Lennon's 'How Do You Sleep?', yet with that song, Kozelek has also committed a kind of *seppuku*-by-snark.

Always something of an asshole, he's now been tarred as a bully, and the War On Drugs feud succeeded not only in overshadowing their album, but also Kozelek's own. This is a shame, because 'Benji' was a truly remarkable record, one whose memory

lingers well beyond its 62 minutes.

Not that he'd appreciate the comparison – in fact, he'd almost certainly snort something derisory about "beer-commercial rock" – but there is something of Springsteen's 'Nebraska' in 'Benji's' desolate, hardscrabble Americana, chronicling the modest lives and unceremonious deaths of its inhabitants.

Throughout, Kozelek shied away from flowery language and the emotional manipulation inherent in it: there were a lot of words on 'Benji' – well in excess of 5,000 – but they were delivered with a succinct, Hemingway-esque bluntness, and beneath each matter-of-fact description of aerosol cans exploding in backyard fires or the girl whose "brain worked a little slower than others" stewed unseen icebergs of melancholy and regret.

It goes without saying that great art does not excuse lousy behaviour, but nor should that behaviour invalidate the art. In Kozelek's case, it's tempting to wonder if his belligerence is simply

a way of shouldering all that sorrow, which lurked in 'Benji's' sinews like a hereditary condition. ■ BARRY NICOLSON

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** February 11
- **LABEL** Caldo Verde
- **LENGTH** 61:56
- **PRODUCER** Mark Kozelek
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
- **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

MARK KOZELEK'S CRANKY AUTUMN

► September 6

"All you fucking hillbillies, shut the fuck up. I don't give a fuck if I get paid or not, I'm gonna walk." – *Onstage at the Hopscotch festival in Raleigh, North Carolina*

► September 15

"Who the fuck is that? I hate that beer-commercial lead-guitar shit." – *Onstage at Ottawa Folk Festival, when the sound from TWOD's set bled into his own*

► September 29

"My drummer said it would have been easier for him to play along to your set than ours." – *Kozelek's statement clarifying his earlier rant*

► September 30

"I challenge War On Drugs to let me join them onstage and play a hilarious song I've written called 'War On Drugs: Suck My Cock/Sun Kil Moon: Go Fuck Yourself'." – *Kozelek's response to his first statement being interpreted as an apology*

► October 29

The day after The War On Drugs' Adam Granduciel called Kozelek a "douche", Kozelek released 'Adam Granofsky Blues', on which he reads out Granduciel's comments about him and laughs hysterically.



33

Wild Beasts

Present Tense



prided ourselves on our bravery," Thorpe continues. "But this time we thought, a great pop song can exist both as piece of art *and* as throwaway modern rubbish. So we went headfirst into creating these songs which were both functional, neat pop songs but also things that could exist in a more bizarre, weird way."

This was the album that cemented Wild Beasts' status as artists, like Kate Bush or Talk Talk, able to turn idiosyncratic kinks into world-stopping pop. The evil sleaze of 'Nature Boy' was inspired by watching old interviews with professional wrestlers and hooting at their theatrical macho posturing; the mournful 'A Dog's Life' is a lament for a dying pet; and the gorgeous, glassy synths of 'A Simple And Beautiful Truth' found Thorpe cooing as if he'd fallen in love with the ideas of lust and romance all over again.

"It was like coming up for air and dispelling demons," says Thorpe. "It's saying the light still exists, in spite of the shade."

There's maturity to Wild Beasts now. Thorpe says he has more "self-assurance", and there's a deeper sense of a band feeling like a *band* again. "I think the greatest habit of musicians is martyrdom," muses Thorpe. "There's a common thing that's not often spoken of, which is the mid-twenties crisis: you fall out of fearless youth into proper adulthood, and there's a crisis of confidence and a kind of existential breakdown." And so if making 'Smother' frayed those edges,

'Present Tense' knitted them back together. "There were two or three years where just the four of us hadn't been in a room together at all," he says. "And it became obvious that we still liked being in a room together. That was reassuring."

It's not for nothing, then, that 'Present Tense's' opening track, 'Wanderlust', came off as a love letter from the band to themselves, with the telltale line "*We see the things they'll never see*". Four albums in, Wild Beasts are coming of age: staying strange, growing wider, getting better. ■ BEN HEWITT

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** February 24
- **LABEL** Domino
- **LENGTH** 40:55
- **PRODUCERS** Lexxx, Leo Abrahams, Wild Beasts
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 10
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 9/10
- **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

"We wanted to disown a lot of what the last record stood for," says Wild Beasts' co-frontman Hayden Thorpe. And few would argue that they succeeded in doing so. 2011's 'Smother' found Kendal's loudest rogues at their lowest ebb: haunted by past mistakes, trapped by old regrets, scalded by heartbreak. It wasn't just an emotional dead-end they were nearing, either: after becoming increasingly avant-garde with their past three albums, it was time for the band to freshen things up.

On 'Present Tense', then, Wild Beasts were rejuvenated, finding pleasure in brighter sounds. "With the last three records, we'd

STORY BEHIND THE VIDEO

► **A Simple Beautiful Truth**

► **RELEASED** April 7
► **DIRECTED BY** Klaus Thymann & Mike Hughes

Hayden Thorpe, co-frontman:

"I've never felt our past videos have captured who we are. They presented us as arty and stern-faced, and every time we watched them we thought, 'Oh, lads, lighten up a bit!' We wanted an element of absurdity. We were making futuristic songs and wanted our outfits to reflect that, but it became four guys looking like Power Rangers on a Welsh hillside instead. Our dance moves are crude and our outfits looked like our mums made them. I did practise that dance in my bedroom and felt like a teenage boy again. It was great."

WILD BEASTS

PRESENT TENSE

32

Childhood Lacuna

If indie rock's life ever flashed before its eyes, it'd sound like Childhood's 'Lacuna'. Wafts of The Smiths, My Bloody Valentine, Ride, Echo & The Bunnymen, Orange Juice, The Boo Radleys, Mazzy Star, The Strokes, The La's, The xx and MGMT mingled like memory-mist to create an alt-rock Time Lord of a debut album, an elaborate evolution that somehow managed to straddle the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s all at once.

"We're really influenced by the interesting sides of guitar-based pop music from throughout the ages," singer Ben Romans-Hopcraft explains. "We started off being more influenced by '90s guitar sounds and then that bled into more '70s glam stuff and quite a lot of electronic and psychedelic music as well. It's like a big amalgamation of those things."

THE DETAILS

► **RELEASE DATE** August 11
 ► **LABEL** House Anxiety
 ► **LENGTH** 46:02
 ► **PRODUCER** Dan Carey
 ► **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A
 ► **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
 ► **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Blue Velvet ► 2. You Could Be Different ► 3. As I Am ► 4. Right Beneath Me ► 5. Falls Away ► 6. Sweeter Preacher ► 7. Tides ► 8. Solemn Skies ► 9. Chiliad ► 10. Pay For Cool ► 11. When You Rise

All of which made 'Lacuna' a distinctly postmodern listen; amorphous, psychedelic and otherworldly, it was nonetheless rooted in gleaming indie-pop melody, with notes of nostalgia at every turn, like flicking through an old photo album. It cast the four-piece – who

met at Nottingham University and emerged in 2012 – as a musical Madagascar, a place where all manner of exotic and rare rock breeds still thrive. "There's always that fear of not fitting in with this or that," Ben says, "but it exists as a record on its own and it's a nice feeling that something can be accepted in a simple and individual way, rather than being part of some kind of movement that people might reject a little bit. This album has given us confidence to be even more free with what we want to do."

And now, having summed up everything great about three decades of underground music, what's Childhood's next stop? Evolution of their own. "We're gonna experiment with ideas that we think we hinted at on 'Lacuna' but never investigated to their fullest extent," Ben claims. "We want to see what a sparser sound is like. We want to move on from the way we've written songs in the past and hopefully evolve into a different sort of song-making format. We want to keep it melodic as well, obviously, because that's kind of what we do, but we want to make sure that we're more adventurous structurally and sonically on the next record. We never wanted to find a sound and be settled and have that define us for the rest of our career as a group. We wanted to constantly make sure we were doing something different to what we did before. Not just for the sake of it; as individuals we're all quite restless." ■ MARK BEAUMONT



KEY TRACK

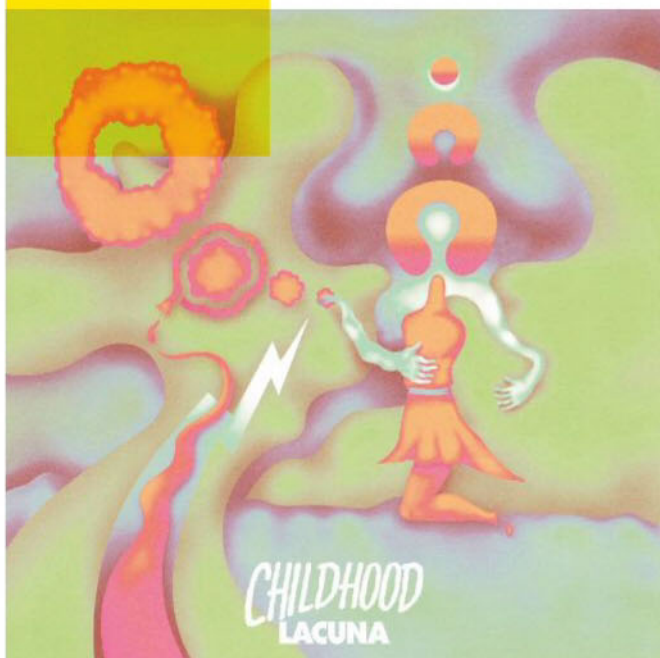
► 'Falls Away'

Ben Romans-Hopcraft: "That was the last song we made on the record. It was about when you're having a situation with someone and you're trying to fill the hole that's been created out of a conflict with fake emotion. Usually that just leads to more problems. It was about the need for people to pretend that everything's alright when there are obviously clear problems and they're exacerbating the issue."



Johnny Marr:

"'Falls Away' sounds perfect for now, for this year. I think if you were trying to tell someone from overseas what a young British band sounds like, you would play them this track. It really sounds like everything they do well."



31

Sharon Van Etten

Are We There

This year, New York-based singer-songwriter Sharon Van Etten's heartbreaking fourth album 'Are We There' gave the lovelorn and emotional somewhere to seek solace. The follow-up to 'Tramp' – which finished 15th in NME's Albums of the Year list in 2012 – documented the end of a long-term relationship, with all the tears, turmoil and black humour appropriate for such a life-altering separation. "I did think, this is going to be different for people; it's going to be a challenge," ponders Van Etten of the album's bleak subject matter. "But I didn't change anything... I also knew that I was really proud of it, so I didn't really question it."

The National's Aaron Dessner had produced 'Tramp' alongside Van Etten, but this time she went it alone. "I had really great experiences working with other people on every other record I've done, [but] at a certain point I was just like, I've learned enough to do it myself, and I need to prove to myself I can do it." Backed by an all-star alt-indie cast, including Adam Granduciel and Dave Hartley of The War On Drugs and Torres' Mackenzie Scott, Van Etten created 11 outstanding tracks, including the fragile yet tough 'Your Love Is Killing Me', the cutting croon of 'Break Me' and the devastating 'Every Time The Sun Comes Up', all looped together with eerie harmonies and lush instrumentation.

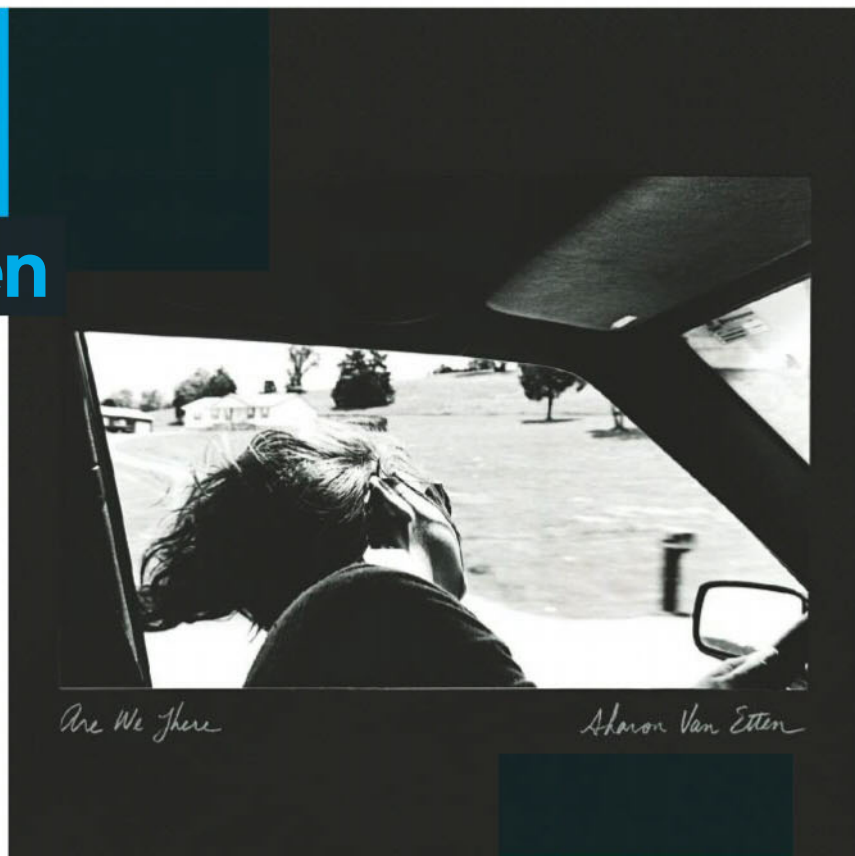
For the writer as much as the listener, these impassioned songs were vividly cathartic. "When I write it, I feel great. I'm an introvert and if I didn't have an outlet I'd be a really unhappy person!" explains Van Etten, cheerily. However, singing and playing the songs live can have the opposite effect. "Sometimes it's a lot harder to perform these songs that I've been

feeling for years. It's a hard place to go back to."

The 33-year-old has been writing since the record's release in May, but whether the songs will make it to her fifth album remains to be seen. "I write all the time, but I don't know if it'll be a record or not yet," says Van Etten, adding that the follow-up to 'Are We There' will start to take shape "when I have a lot of songs that seem like they make sense together". In the meantime, this sensitive soul plans to go back to college and, aptly, study to become a therapist. "I think once I take a break from touring this record, I'm gonna try to just go to school again. It's been over 15 years!" Sign us up for one of Dr Van Etten's sessions immediately. ■ LEONIE COOPER

▶ THE DETAILS

▶ **RELEASE DATE** May 26
 ▶ **LABEL** Jagjaguwar
 ▶ **LENGTH** 47:03 ▶ **PRODUCER** Sharon Van Etten ▶ **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A
 ▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
 ▶ **TRACKLISTING** ▶ 1. Afraid Of Nothing ▶ 2. Taking Chances ▶ 3. Your Love Is Killing Me ▶ 4. Our Love ▶ 5. Tarifa ▶ 6. I Love You But I'm Lost ▶ 7. You Know Me Well ▶ 8. Break Me ▶ 9. Nothing Will Change ▶ 10. I Know ▶ 11. Every Time The Sun Comes Up



SHARON'S 'ARE WE THERE' WINE PAIRINGS

▶ 'Your Love Is Killing Me'

"It would have to be a bigger wine, but with a slower burn, like a Left Bank-style bordeaux or something. It's big but it's still medium and it grows on you a little bit."

▶ 'I Know'

"That one's more of a gamay [a red-wine grape most notably grown in France's Loire Valley]. It's soft and subtle."

▶ 'Every Time The Sun Comes Up'

"I would say maybe a prosecco, because it's a little silly. That's if I'm sticking with wine. Otherwise I would say it would be a tequila!"

▶ 'Taking Chances'

"Maybe an alvar [a Portuguese variety], or a wine from Jura [located between Burgundy and Switzerland], because they're light to medium and a little funky, but really delicate and long."



30

Warpaint

When Warpaint disappeared into the mist back in 2012, it seemed possible – likely, even – that a band this impenetrable and unreliable might never get round to releasing a second album. Debut ‘The Fool’ had taken many years and numerous line-ups to put together, and been a fractious process. So when its follow-up came, in January, it was a delight to find that it was not only warmer than their previous work, but also more cohesive. Led by proggy single ‘Love Is To Die’, it was an album that needed to be lived with in order to unlock the subtle nuances and hidden depths – the ear-filling static of ‘Keep It Healthy’, thick basslines of ‘CC’ and celestial electronics of ‘Drive’ – that were waiting to reward committed listeners. They may or may not make another record. But for now, drummer Stella Mozgawa explains why ‘Warpaint’ is their defining album...

They got aggressive

“We get aggressive with each other, especially Jen [Lee Lindberg, bassist] and I. ‘Disco//Very’ doesn’t stray far from that. We wrote it in Joshua Tree one afternoon. We had been playing for three weeks with the door cracked open. That song’s frequency piqued the interest – or should I say the *nausea* – of one of the residents nearby, who called the cops. We have a recording of the first demo and Emily’s singing the verse in the song ad-libbed, freestyling like a maniac. Halfway through, the cops show up. We thought there was

some significance to the fact that we’d been assaulting these residents for weeks with songs and ‘Disco//Very’ was the one that offended some old lady. It’s got power.”

They slowed that shit down

“One of my fondest memories was recording ‘Biggy’. Emily [Kokal, singer/guitarist] and I had been working on it with Jono Ma from Jagwar Ma in my basement in Hollywood. About a year and a half later we were all in a room with [producer] Flood attempting to

recreate this psychotic demo that was 400 times faster than the song we ended up with. He told us to slow that shit down. He opened up different possibilities for us.”

They wrote together for the first time

“I recorded ‘The Fool’, but it was different because I wasn’t there for the sweet baby moments.

Some of those songs had been around for years. This is a bad analogy but... you know the M Night Shyamalan film *The Village*? You live in a curated environment, then the doors open up and you realise there’s a lot more that’s available to you as a member of a band. I’ve never put so much love, time and energy into anything like I did this record.”

They worked with Flood

“Having Flood work with us made us step up the game. We had to know what we were doing in a much shorter amount of time because someone was watching. It felt more important for us to rewrite our mistakes and exercise the lessons we learned from the last record. It did take a while to record, but it was still a shorter period than the other girls were used to, having taken six years to make ‘The Fool’.”

■ EVE BARLOW



▲ STORY BEHIND THE TITLE

Stella Mozgawa, drummer: “It takes us so long to agree on anything unanimously. Someone suggested the title and within two weeks everyone was on the same page. We’d struck gold. It’s very rare – like a lightning-strike moment – when all four members of Warpaint agree on something. And it’s significant, so we have to listen to the universe and know that it’s the direction we have to go in. It depends on whether all four of us have to agree on something, or whether someone’s taking charge, and holding the trident and saying ‘this is what we’re doing’ and everyone else lends their support to that. When it comes to the name of an album or cover art or tracklisting... that can take a little while. This one, it just felt right to make it eponymous. It just felt like this was the first record we made as a band.”



29

Alvvays Alvvays



Look hard enough, and you could find dirty secrets lurking beneath the butter-wouldn't-melt indie-pop of Toronto five-piece Alvvays. The band's debut took the Telecaster jangles of Best Coast, added sweeter melodies than even Bethany Cosentino is capable of, and launched them onto college radio stations across the globe. But the songs' cynical meanings, says singer and songwriter Molly Rankin, were often overlooked. Each one was like a perfect student with a drug stash in their locker. "It's kind of funny. You write a song that sneers at the idea of lavish corporate weddings, and people take it at face value, like, 'Oh wow, what a nice love song!'"

The track in question, lead single 'Archie, Marry Me', fired shots at "the whole huge fucking economy of marriage where people just throw money at this idea of domestic happiness". Under humungous pop hooks and washes of melancholy, 26-year-old Rankin sang "*Forget the invitations, floral arrangements and breadmakers*", before sweeping into a chorus straight out of the Cranberries school of bittersweet pop. "I just get suspicious and bored by all that," she says.

As a whole, though, 'Alvvays' wasn't an anti-love album. Instead, Rankin strove for a more adventurous idea of what a relationship could be. From the lusty invitations of 'Party Police' ("*We can find comfort in biology*", goes its twinkling chorus) to the Beach House synths of closer 'Red Planet' ("*Met at a seminar, shared the same table/Brushed by you at the bar, didn't match your discretion/Soon became my prescription*"), no other album in 2014 articulated the fraught, addictive power of young love. Released in July, its breezy, sun-kissed vignettes from the dangerous frontlines of romance were the perfect summer daydream.

'The Agency Group', in particular, summed up the clash that underpins the album's charm. The song was a complex tale of two lovers in stubborn denial of their feelings for each other, delivered with disarming simplicity and featuring the key line: "*When you whisper you don't think of me that way/When I mention you don't mean that much to me*".

"I guess you write about situations around you," says Rankin. "A lot of the themes of the record are universal. We've been taken aback this year to find ourselves in England, with people singing the songs back at us, getting messages from people in Mexico, and that sort of thing. I suppose that's why: those stories could be specific to anyone, anywhere."

Following the sleeper hit 'Archie...', the group are back in the UK in January. The band are busy, and Rankin says it's been worth "not having a home for basically the last year" to play it live. "I remember dressing up last Halloween, before anyone knew the band. I went as an elf. Kerri [MacLellan, keyboardist] had this costume like Charlie Brown gone wrong. This year we were so busy we barely noticed Halloween 'til it had gone by already." She chuckles. "But that's all part of the game." ■ AL HORNER

THE DETAILS

- ▶ **RELEASE DATE** July 22
- ▶ **LABEL** Transgressive
- ▶ **LENGTH** 32:55
- ▶ **PRODUCER** Chad VanGaalén
- ▶ **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A
- ▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
- ▶ **TRACKLISTING** ▶ 1. Adult Diversion ▶ 2. Archie, Marry Me ▶ 3. Ones Who Love You ▶ 4. Next Of Kin 5. Party Police ▶ 6. The Agency Group ▶ 7. Dives ▶ 8. Atop A Cake ▶ 9. Red Planet



JESS BAUMUNG

28

Morrissey

World Peace Is None Of Your Business

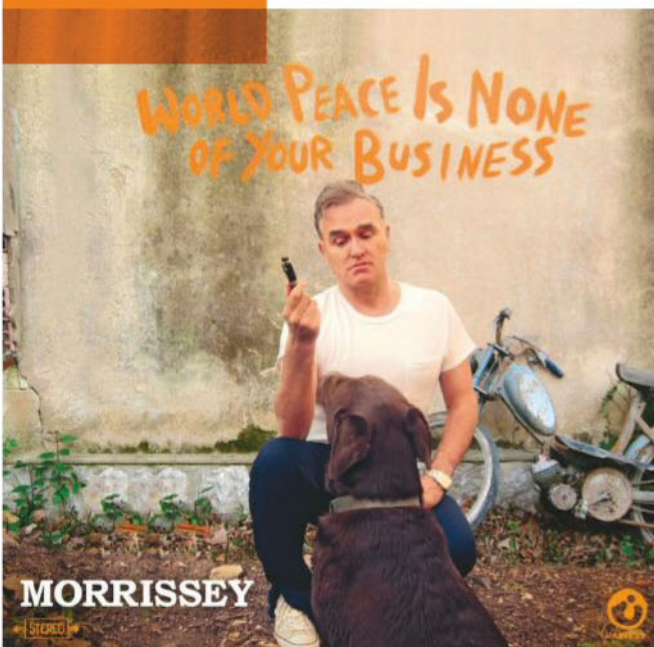
Three NME writers on *precisely* what it is they adore about Steven Patrick's 10th solo album.

He's had the last laugh, says Barry Nicolson

From a fan's point of view, Morrissey can be a hard man to defend – just Google 'Morrissey outrage' and click on any one of the 3,660,000 results to see why. For the last few years, however, the most grievous charge has been that he was creatively spent: his solo career has always been marked by peaks and troughs, but after a barren spell of health concerns, cancelled tours and no new music, many wondered – justifiably so – if we'd ever see him back on top. 'World Peace Is None of Your Business' managed to blow all of those doubts out of the water – it may fall just short of his finest work, but there's always a certain satisfaction to be taken from seeing an embattled artist answer

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** July 15
- **LABEL** Harvest
- **LENGTH** 54:35
- **PRODUCER** Joe Chiccarelli
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 2
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 9/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. World Peace Is None Of Your Business ► 2. Neal Cassady Drops Dead ► 3. Istanbul ► 4. I'm Not A Man ► 5. Earth Is The Loneliest Planet ► 6. Staircase At The University ► 7. The Bullfighter Dies ► 8. Kiss Me A Lot ► 9. Smiler With A Knife ► 10. Kick The Bride Down The Aisle ► 11. Mountjoy ► 12. Oboe Concerto



their critics in a fashion as resounding and inarguable as this. An ascendant, artistically invigorated Morrissey is still one of rock'n'roll's most singular voices, and 'World Peace...' stands as proof that he is more than just an ornery old quote machine. Not for the first time, he's had the last laugh.

It's his most adventurous album yet, says Mark Beaumont

If Rough Guides ever did a series for the discerning vegetarian backpacker, 'World Peace...' is what'll be stuck to the front. From opening parp of didgeridoo and thump of tabor to closing orchestral country sweep, via Arabian pipes and flamenco frivolities, the record was Morrissey's most globe-hugging album to date. It was an album with a vast musical vista; recorded in France, it travelled around the world in 55 minutes. In Turkey, Morrissey went hunting for his lost son around the narcotic souks of 'Istanbul'. In beat-era

USA, he traced the sad demise of a poet icon in 'Neal Cassady Drops Dead'. In Seville and Barcelona, he led the chants of "Come on you bull!" and "Who's the wanker in the cape?" on 'The Bullfighter Dies'. Latino arpeggios and bongo beats drove 'Earth Is The Loneliest Planet' and 'Kiss Me A Lot', while 'Kick The Bride Down The Aisle' was all Germanic oompah – like pop's Michael Palin, Morrissey frolicked through every stylistic continent available to him in his most adventurous and exploratory album yet.

He's the ultimate fly in the ointment, says Ben Hewitt

Poking fun at the armed forces isn't for the weak-willed: lift a pen in anger against the brave boys out in the battlefields and the moral crusaders will be banging on your door, pitchforks in hand.

But Morrissey, of course, isn't just ambivalent about offending such prissy folk – he positively *thrives* on it. "You are the soldier/ Who won't get much older/ You are the slow Joe/ Who signed up to go", he taunted on 'I'm Not A Man', the twinkling, camp-as-you-like centrepiece of 'World Peace...'. It's that rebel streak that makes it his finest album since 'You Are The Quarry'; the fact that not only has Moz come armed with his best songs in years, he's reignited his love for being the mouthiest of contrarians. "You must not tamper with arrangements/ Work hard and pay your taxes", he sang sourly on the title track, taking a potshot at the establishment. "If you don't get three A's, you're no child of mine", he pouted on 'Staircase At The University', mimicking a thousand pushy parents. On 'World Peace...', rock's ultimate fly in the ointment was back – and nobody was safe. ■

27

Jungle

Jungle

Let's get one thing straight. The anonymity thing should be banned in 2015, unless you *are* an actual faceless, nameless person, and not merely someone who lives in an average house in Dunfermline with his or her mum and eats Sainsbury's own-brand crisps and still has an old Hotmail email address which is a thinly veiled reference to a Placebo song.

Anonymity is great for Burial because he trademarked it. And for Banksy, because he would be murdered by mobs of angry art critics if they knew who he was. But for anyone else, it quickly becomes a heavy cross to bear. So it was for Jungle – the collective led by Josh Lloyd-Watson and Tom McFarland – who could have stood inside their classic soul house and made no apologies for the fact that they were middle-class west London lads who'd once been in a psych-baggy band called Born Blonde. Instead, it made it look like they had something to hide, when the fact that they'd gone back to the drawing board was to be celebrated. Jungle pulled off the smartest end of that long tradition of sonic revision – sounding like they'd hit the trend line bang on when they were pretty much inventing a new one.

Maximalist moods came to define them. Their debut album started with a climax in 'The Heat', and then, by track three, 'Busy Earnin', built to a fever pitch of triumphalism that pretty much sampled a kitchen sink being thrown at a cube of blaxploitation VHS tapes. As if unsure of whether they could hold your attention, the production was stuffed like a bird-in-a-bird-in-a-bird. Every time the levels dipped a bit, this turducken of funk would throw a taut section of bass or a jiggy little piano riff in your ear, a deft nod to Fine Young Cannibals here, a dab of arch Bee Gees homage

there. It was unrelentingly well-informed: the sound of veteran record shop shelf-scourers being given free rein to show you how well-informed their taste was.

Yet behind those all-sweatin' all-grindin' choreography workouts, softer moods emerged. 'Accelerate' captured a moment at *once lost and slightly panicked*: "Can I get the car to jump-start please... Everything just happened at once". 'Smoking Pixels' pushed them towards the masculine melancholy of Ennio Morricone gunfight music, while 'Lemonade Lake' served as an eerie and unexpected end to an album that seemed to oscillate between swagger and sadness.

In the end, 'J' and 'T' didn't explode into 2014 in the way that they'd promised in January, but they still had a big hand in defining the feel of the musical year. Anonymous, not quite. Invisible? Definitely not. **GAVIN HAYNES**

▶ THE DETAILS

- ▶ **RELEASE DATE** July 14
- ▶ **LABEL** XL
- ▶ **LENGTH** 47:36
- ▶ **PRODUCER** Jungle
- ▶ **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 7
- ▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
- ▶ **TRACKLISTING** ▶1. The Heat ▶2. Accelerate ▶3. Busy Earnin' ▶4. Platoon ▶5. Drops ▶6. Time ▶7. Smoking Pixels ▶8. Julia ▶9. Crumbler ▶10. Son Of A Gun ▶11. Lucky I Got What I Want ▶12. Lemonade Lake

JUNGLE

TWO CLASSIC JUNGLE VIDEOS

▶ 'Time'

▶ **RELEASED** July 8

▶ **DIRECTED BY** Josh Lloyd-Watson and Oliver Hadlee Pearch

Tom McFarland: "We just loved the idea of people dancing to our music [in this case, a couple of veteran dancers stage a breakdance dance-off in their living rooms] and we found some really cool people who could do that incredibly well, in a really rare way."

▶ 'Busy Earnin'

▶ **RELEASED** February 28

▶ **DIRECTED BY** Josh Lloyd-Watson and Oliver Hadlee Pearch

Josh Lloyd-Watson: "The guys in 'Busy Earnin'" [an unidentified street dance crew who hold their pose for the first 30 seconds before completing an aggressive routine choreographed by BirdGang member Kendra J Horsburgh] represent the meanings of the song, but just in their eyes. I love that human emotion. It's true to what we're about."



26

Perfume Genius

Too Bright

When 'Too Bright' came out in September, many called it a "departure" for Perfume Genius, but that's not how Mike Hadreas saw his third album. "I guess it felt crazier as a record, but I don't feel any crazier," the Seattle-based musician reflects. "I've always been this crazy; I'm just letting it out more."

'Too Bright' certainly sounded different to his previous records, 2010's 'Learning' and 2012's 'Put Your Back N 2 It', which both married confessional storytelling to stark, naked piano melodies. Though it had tender moments, 'Too Bright' was often more aggressive as it fleshed out Hadreas' songs with sinister synths, rumbling basslines and distorted vocal yelps. It even boasted a couple of twisted pop songs: 'Fool' sounded like Erasure gone indie, while 'Queen' had echoes of Bowie as Hadreas proclaimed: "No family is safe when I sashay".

What prompted Hadreas to branch out like this? "I just stopped believing the bullshit that I had been telling myself. I used to think I was only capable of doing what I did on my first two albums, but I don't feel those kind of musical limitations any more. I knew the mood I wanted this album to have and I just went for it," he says.

As Hadreas expanded his musical horizons, his lyrics changed too. "I felt like the music was communicating as much as the words were, so I could improvise with them more and be less over-thoughtful," he says. This led to his strangest song yet, 'Longpig', which imagined a cannibalistic society in which women eat men, and was a new, more confident kind of confessional from Hadreas.

"[On this album] I'm telling you secrets about myself, things that are sort of embarrassing, but I'm singing them very loudly, even yelling. It's so liberating, almost like an exorcism," says Hadreas.

At times his lyrics were agonisingly raw. "I wear my body like a rotted peach/You can

have it if you can handle the stink", Hadreas hissed on 'My Body', a song partly inspired by "general anxiety about my looks", but also

▶ THE DETAILS

▶ RELEASE DATE September 23

▶ LABEL Turnstile

▶ LENGTH 33:38

▶ PRODUCERS Mike Hadreas, Adrian Utley, John Parish

▶ HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION 77

▶ ORIGINAL NME RATING 8/10

▶ TRACKLISTING ▶ 1. I Decline

▶ 2. Queen ▶ 3. Fool ▶ 4. No

Good ▶ 5. My Body ▶ 6. Don't

Let Them In ▶ 7. Grid ▶ 8.

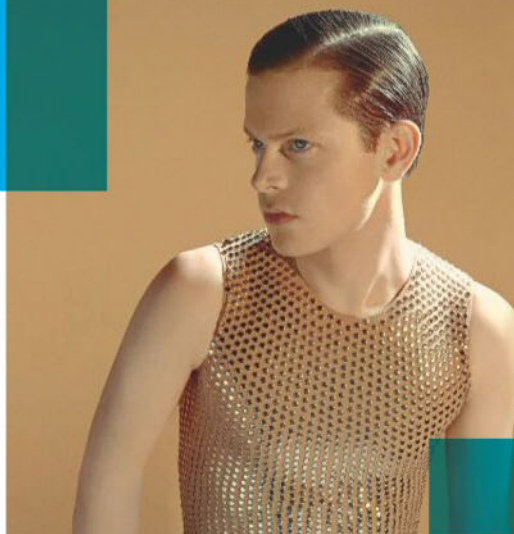
Longpig ▶ 9. I'm A Mother

▶ 10. Too Bright ▶ 11. All Along

that gay people will relate to 'Too Bright' most strongly. "Lots of people feel shitty and like they don't fit in, and these are the people I wrote this album for: basically, weirdos."

■ NICK LEVINE

PERFUME GENIUS • TOO BRIGHT



THREE KEY TRACKS

▶ 'Longpig'

Mike Hadreas: "Longpig is a slang word for human flesh prepared for eating. I heard it on TV and turned it into a song about a utopian future where men aren't needed for procreation and women are essentially using men's bodies as meat. It's the album's craziest song!"

▶ 'Queen'

"Sometimes people on the street call me 'faggot' or give me weird looks because my nails are painted. I used to get self-conscious, but now I'm sick of feeling like a victim. So I took those negative things and flipped 'em. I'm telling people: if you're going to be scared of me, you really should be."

▶ 'Fool'

"Because I'm gay and tiny, some people expect a cute, sassy clown act. The song's beginning was me dealing with this in a pointed way. The middle was designed as a spiritual break where a kind of 'ancient gayness' comes out and rattles the Earth. The song doesn't have a happy ending, though; it goes back to exactly how it was at the start."



25

Lana Del Rey

Ultraviolence



Lana Del Rey doesn't exist. She's a character, like Mickey Mouse, or Batman, or Simon Cowell. It's a fact that came into sharp focus this year on her second album (third if you count 2010's pre-fame 'Lana Del Ray'), a record so ludicrously provocative it hovered toward the point where fiction meets satire.

With 'Video Games', the former Lizzy Grant set herself up as a pop star viewed through the haze of an Instagram filter, with the video montage evoking US suburbia and golden-age glamour. Its attendant album, the ludicrously titled 'Born To Die' (aren't we all?), ramped up the style but under-delivered musically – nothing could match 'Video Games', which

hit the listener like a defibrillator to the chest.

The follow-up arrived with an even more overt message. After 'Born To Die', Del Rey told an interviewer she wished "she was dead already". Twitter balked at the comment, but it made sense in the context of an album called 'Ultraviolence', with a tracklisting like a passage from a Raymond Chandler novel: 'Pretty When You Cry', 'Old Money' and the much-quoted 'Fucked My Way Up To The Top'.

It was our introduction to a darker Del Rey, the femme fatale stereotype amplified.

This time, the music lived up to the image. It found her hooking up with a coterie of reliable names: Adele's right-hand man Paul Epworth, Lily Allen hitmaker Greg Kurstin and, most of all, Black Keys man Dan Auerbach, who ended up co-writing and producing most of the album. Auerbach apparently lavished more attention on the project than he did on his own.

With her team in place, Del Rey cooked up a sound built on James Bond themes and piano bars, and one that rarely does the obvious: the title track slows to half speed for the chorus; the ascendent trills in 'Shades Of Cool' sound like a Disney mermaid in full flow; and lead single 'West Coast' eulogises a version of LA youth that's far from Katy Perry's 'California Gurls'.

NME's reviewer held a microscope to Del Rey's lyrics, which, as on her debut, presented a version of the star as subservient and beholden to bad boys. She even appropriated the line "He hit me and it felt like a kiss" from the song of the same name made famous by The Crystals – a track that's grown in its power to shock since its 1962 release, not least because convicted murderer Phil Spector produced it and Gerry Goffin and Carole King wrote it about the singer Little Eva being abused by her boyfriend.

Del Rey is not setting herself up as a role model; she's fleshing out a character, one that pushes the listener to provocative places. At her Glastonbury show this year, she pushed back tears for 45 minutes of singing and smoking, gliding around like she wasn't touching the floor. The character lives in her performances as much as her music, videos and images – but don't be fooled. Beneath it is someone who knows exactly what she's doing. ■ DAN STUBBS

► THE DETAILS

► **RELEASE DATE** June 13

► **LABEL** Polydor

► **LENGTH** 51:24

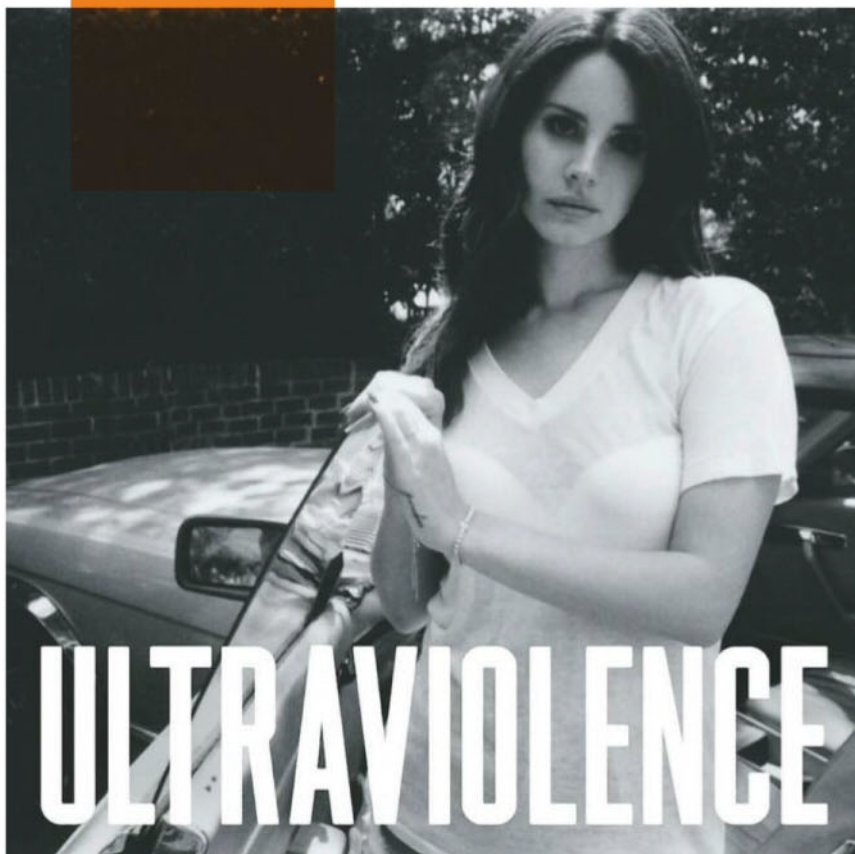
► **PRODUCERS** Dan Auerbach, Lana Del Rey, Paul Epworth, Lee Foster, Daniel Heath, Greg Kurstin, Rick Nowels, Blake Stranathan

► **HIGHEST UK CHART**

POSITION 1

► **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 6/10

► **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Cruel World ► 2. Ultraviolence ► 3. Shades Of Cool ► 4. Brooklyn Baby ► 5. West Coast ► 6. Sad Girl ► 7. Pretty When You Cry ► 8. Money Power Glory ► 9. Fucked My Way Up To The Top ► 10. Old Money ► 11. The Other Woman



24

Angel Olsen

Burn Your Fire For No Witness



Ask most artists what they'd change about an album and they'll usually find something – a vocal that didn't quite come off; a missed beat. Not Angel Olsen. "I don't want to change it," she says down the phone from somewhere in Florida – after a year on the road, even she doesn't know quite where. "Even if I make shitty music in the future, this exists and I'm happy with it."

'Burn Your Fire For No Witness' was recorded at Echo Mountain studios in Asheville, North Carolina in 10 feverish days. "I was pretty sick, but I didn't go in there for a month and just mill around," Olsen explains. "I was ready to finally do things the way I wanted."

By then, she had quit her job as Bonny 'Prince' Billy's backing singer and released one album, 2012's 'Half Way

Home'. As soon as it was out, Olsen started writing 'Burn Your Fire...'. As it came together, so did Olsen's control over her voice. Where before it seemed to burst out of her with a power that channelled '60s country singers

like Skeeter Davis and Loretta Lynn, now Olsen had tamed its cracked and quivering notes. The album's dusty drums and guitars worked to her strengths too. "I think I was ready for changing," Olsen says. "My band and I worked on that change together."

It ended up being a break-up record of steely intent, even at its most sorrowful. Hopelessness invaded 'White Fire': "Everything is tragic, it all just falls apart". The jangly piano and grinding guitar riffs in 'High & Wild' were smothered by Olsen's anger:

"You might as well be blind/ Because you don't see me any more". Redemption came on 'Windows', when she whispered, "Won't you open a window sometime?/What's so wrong with the light?"

A deluxe version of the record came out earlier this month. Among its five new tracks, 'May As Well' offered more forgiveness to a lover than Olsen had ever conceded before, and with 'Endless Road' she covered a song from TV western *Bonanza*. The extra material is fun, but this album was already complete. On 'Unfucktheworld', Olsen repeatedly sang "I am the only one now". It was the sound of someone wrenching back their destiny. "When I was younger, I just listened to what others told me to do and tried to do it the way others did," Olsen concludes. "Eventually, I just decided that I was just going to do what I wanted. I feel very blessed that that turned out pretty well." ■ HAZEL SHEFFIELD

▶ THE DETAILS

- ▶ **RELEASE DATE** February 17
- ▶ **LABEL** Jagjaguwar
- ▶ **LENGTH** 44:20
- ▶ **PRODUCER** John Congleton
- ▶ **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A
- ▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 9/10
- ▶ **TRACKLISTING**
 - ▶ 1. Unfucktheworld
 - ▶ 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

KEY TRACKS

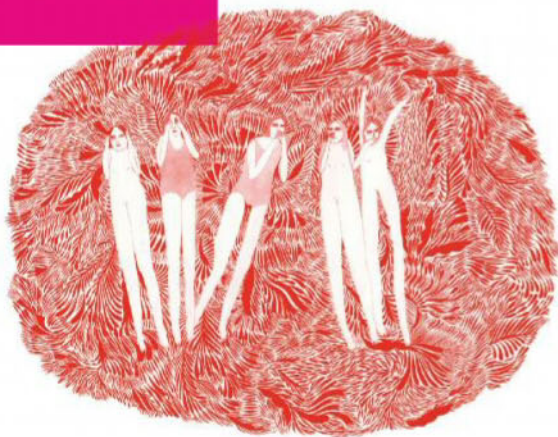
▶ 'Forgiven/Forgotten'

Angel Olsen: "When you hear 'Unfucktheworld', it's like, 'Oh, is this album going to be her and a guitar?' and then this crazy wild thing happens on 'Forgiven/Forgotten', which comes out of nowhere. It sounds like a final, last scream, but then I made it the second track. I guess I wanted it to be unpredictable."

▶ 'Dance Slow Decades'

"I've never played it live, but that might be a fun one to play sometime in the future. People always ask me if it's difficult to play my songs because they're so personal to me. But I don't really feel that they're personal. They're personal in that I wrote them, but I don't feel that when I'm playing them."

BURN YOUR FIRE



FOR NO WITNESS

23

Kasabian

48:13

In 2014, no-one did it quite like Kasabian. They continued to push their own boundaries while maintaining their everyman appeal. They headlined Glastonbury, turning the Pyramid Stage into a playground for the naughty kids in the back row in the process. They made being in their band look like the best gig in the world. And Tom Meighan and Serge Pizzorno spent the year with a look on their faces that suggested they'd just seen a schoolteacher who said they'd never amount to anything and said, "We fucking told you so."

During the making of fifth album '48:13', Kasabian got a very important call from Michael Eavis. Knowing that their next record would now be thrust to the top of the biggest stage in the world, how did chief songwriter Pizzorno react? "To be honest, I just saw it as an opportunity to take big risks. The platform is so big, you could be inclined to play it safe and release something that would not rock the boat, but I felt the opposite," he grins. "I always resented bands who got huge but never took any risks, never scared anyone, and I always thought that I never wanted to do that." So on the eve of the biggest summer of their lives, Kasabian released lead single 'Eez-eh' – a song that rhymed a slang term for cocaine ("*bugle*") with an internet search engine ("*Google*") and featured a (totally genius) video of them spitting milk and pissing about with a taxidermy porcupine. "It excited me that we put something out like 'Eez-eh' because we knew it would make people have an opinion on it," Pizzorno adds.

Everything else that followed was equally brilliant. In April, Serge and BFF singer Tom Meighan were spotted in east London daubing a neon pink wall with the figures '48:13'. The numbers turned out to be the album

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** June 9
- **LABEL** Columbia
- **LENGTH** 48:13
- **PRODUCER** Sergio Pizzorno
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 1
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 7/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. (Shiva)
- 2. Bumblebeee ► 3. Stevie
- 4. (Mortis) ► 5. Doomsday
- 6. Treat ► 7. Glass ► 8. Explodes
- 9. (Levitation) ► 10. Clouds
- 11. Eez-eh ► 12. Bow ► 13. SPS

title. The colours turned out to be the cover design. "I knew people would give us stick, but I thought, 'Well, this is the time to do it,'" Serge shrugs. "I love that there's a look and a style to it. Everyone was like, 'Why have you done that with the [one word] song titles?' And I was like, 'Why not?' The whole idea was to just try something out."

Musically, '48:13' had a bash at everything from gargantuan bangers ('Bumblebeee', 'Stevie') to eight-minute dance tracks ('Treat') to "mantra"-like slowies ('Glass'). And yet, at the heart of it, Kasabian were still just Kasabian: having a giggle, a ball, and very much the last laugh. ■ LISA WRIGHT

KASABIAN

1:07
4:01
4:45
0:48
3:40
6:53
4:48
4:18
1:19
4:45
3:00
4:27
4:22
48:13

HOW '48:13' CHANGED KASABIAN

► Made them unpredictable

Serge Pizzorno: "It's our fifth record and somehow it cleaned the slate. No-one's got a clue where we're gonna go next and that's a really exciting place for a band to be, going into a sixth album. To do that, you have to be bold and you have to take risks, and I'm so glad we did."

► Changed their aesthetic

"All the people I've adored have had that thing where you can [aesthetically] tell which period an album is from and debate which one you prefer. This time, I've been doing the T-shirt; it's become a little obsession. You need a uniform."

► Made them even hungrier

"This is the album where I've learnt the most – about my own zone, about my madness... The energy about making another album has never been this high; I'm so excited it's mad. I just wanna get more information in."



22

Swans

To Be Kind

When Michael Gira 'reactivated' Swans in 2010, like some sort of long-dormant doomsday device, it was never going to be in pursuit of the sepia dollar. Nostalgia is simply not part of the man's vocabulary. "It was never a question of going backwards," says the 60-year-old over the phone from his home in New York. "I didn't want to go out as one of these groups who play their past albums. I think that's just silly. I mean, God bless 'em, everybody's got to make money and it's better than working at Kinko's [now known as FedEx], but I chose to do it for artistic as well as monetary reasons. I've been making music for a long time and it's not the *most* important thing in my life, but it's the thing that occupies my mind. It's just what I do."

Even so, few would have guessed that the reactivation would result in the best music of Swans' 30-plus-year career. From 2010's 'My Father Will Guide Me Up A Rope To The Sky' through 'The Seer' in 2012 and this year's 'To Be Kind', Gira's band are on a remarkable streak that contradicts the conventional wisdom about reunions: that they're almost always doomed to disappoint. Like its predecessors, attempting to describe 'To Be Kind' is a largely thankless task – you could be glib and say that it sounds a bit like The Stooges' 'Funhouse' being reinterpreted by angry Nephilim, but with music this vast and monolithic, it's always going to be a reductive exercise.

Gira himself has always been brutally unsentimental about his work, which is perhaps what makes it so consistently good – he pours every fibre of his being into the making of a record, but once it's done, "I just move onto the next thing. I'm not discounting that the album might

be of worth or merit to other people, but as the person who's laboured over it for hundreds of hours, I'm inured to it by that point. I hack away at it until I feel it's in a shape that deserves presentation and dissemination,

then I abandon it and never listen to it again. Even though the process of making it is invigorating and life-giving, it's just a piece of dead matter."

It should come as no surprise, then, that 'To Be Kind' is already in Gira's rear-view mirror: the process now is the next record, for which he has over 90 minutes of material worked out. For everyone else, however, this is an album to be lived in and pored over, admired like

some ancient, immense monument that makes you stand back and think, "How the fuck did they build *that*?" ■ BARRY NICOLSON

▶ THE DETAILS

▶ **RELEASE DATE** May 9
▶ **LABEL** Mute ▶ **LENGTH** 121:12 ▶ **PRODUCER** Michael Gira ▶ **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 38 ▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 9/10 ▶ **TRACKLISTING**
▶ 1. Screen Shot ▶ 2. Just A Little Boy (For Chester Burnett)
▶ 3. A Little God In My Hands
▶ 4. Bring the Sun/Toussaint l'Ouverture ▶ 5. Some Things We Do ▶ 6. She Loves Us ▶ 7. Kirsten Supine ▶ 8. Oxygen ▶ 9. Nathalie Neal ▶ 10. To Be Kind



THE MECHANICS OF SWANS' SECOND COMING

▶ **Stability**

Michael Gira: "I'm the band leader, that's my role. But this is the longest-lasting band I've ever had, and they have tremendous strength and force of personality. We have a real communication as musicians. I'm not just the head clown who's trying to keep everything in shape."

▶ **Hard work**

"In the studio, we'll work for 12, 14 hours a day, go to bed, pass out, get up and do it again. It's not like we just lay down a song and lap on a few overdubs. Everything is always on the verge of disaster, always on the verge of falling apart."

▶ **Fear of death**

"I'm definitely conscious of death! That's not me being morose, I'm just conscious of how important it is to live, to try to have some aspect of authenticity in your life and work. From my point of view, what you're doing in the moment should have true value, otherwise why the fuck are you doing it?"



21

FKA Twigs

LP 1



When Tahliah Barnett asked “Was she the girl that’s from the video?” in ‘Video Girl’, she was actually singing about herself. Before she became known for making freaky alt-pop as FKA Twigs, Barnett earned her living dancing in music videos for Kylie Minogue and Jessie J. But this Gloucestershire-born singer-songwriter didn’t much suit being in the background. Looking back at her time as a performer for hire in ‘Video Girl’'s final line, Barnett sighed: “I can’t recognise me”.

A pair of acclaimed EPs – simply named ‘EP 1’ and ‘EP 2’ – and accompanying music videos packed with spooky future-R&B sounds

and arresting visuals created excitement out of Twigs’ enigma. Now, in the wake of ‘LP1’, it’s safe to presume “the girl that’s from the video” has gone for good. This debut album’s functional title was misleading: the 10 songs included were innovative, carefully layered and often filthy. What happens between the sheets is the dominant theme, but FKA Twigs didn’t just witter on about boning like a horny teenager; she writhed unsettlingly in an intriguing combination of startling confidence and disarming vulnerability.

Though she boasted “I can fuck you better than her” on ‘Two Weeks’, ‘Pendulum’ contained an admission that’s sad but ambiguous: “You only want me in open spaces”. Was she singing about a boyfriend who sees her as arm candy – or one who likes to get it on in public? Either way, FKA Twigs signed off with the assertion that she didn’t need a man anyway. “I just touch myself and say/I’ll make my own damn way”, she purred defiantly on final track ‘Kicks’.

‘LP1’'s lyrics were titillating, but Twigs’ vision was stark and distinctive. Alongside her own productions were collaborations with a cast including Eminem producer Emile Haynie and Kanye collaborator Arca. The 26-year-old fashioned a set of fluid electro-R&B tracks filled with tricky beats and unexpected details. But tricks never triumphed over songwriting. ‘Give Up’, ‘Lights On’ and ‘Pendulum’ were built on catchy melodies that drew from Aaliyah’s pioneering early-2000s R&B, and the robust ‘Two Weeks’ could yet become a sleeper hit if a condom brand were to pick it up for an ad.

‘LP1’ was so original that it’s difficult to figure out what its maker might do next. The former ‘Video Girl’ sums up one thing pretty accurately on ‘Give Up’, though: “I wish that you would know that I’m here to stay”. ■ NICK LEVINE

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** August 6
- **LABEL** Young Turks
- **LENGTH** 40:46
- **PRODUCERS** Arca, Clams Casino, Cy An, Paul Epworth, FKA Twigs, Emile Haynie, Devonté Hynes, Sampha, Tic
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 16 (UK album chart), 1 (UK indie album chart)
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Preface ► 2. Lights On ► 3. Two Weeks ► 4. Hours ► 5. Pendulum ► 6. Video Girl ► 7. Numbers ► 8. Closer ► 9. Give Up ► 10. Kicks

TWO CLASSIC FKA TWIGS VIDEOS

► Two Weeks

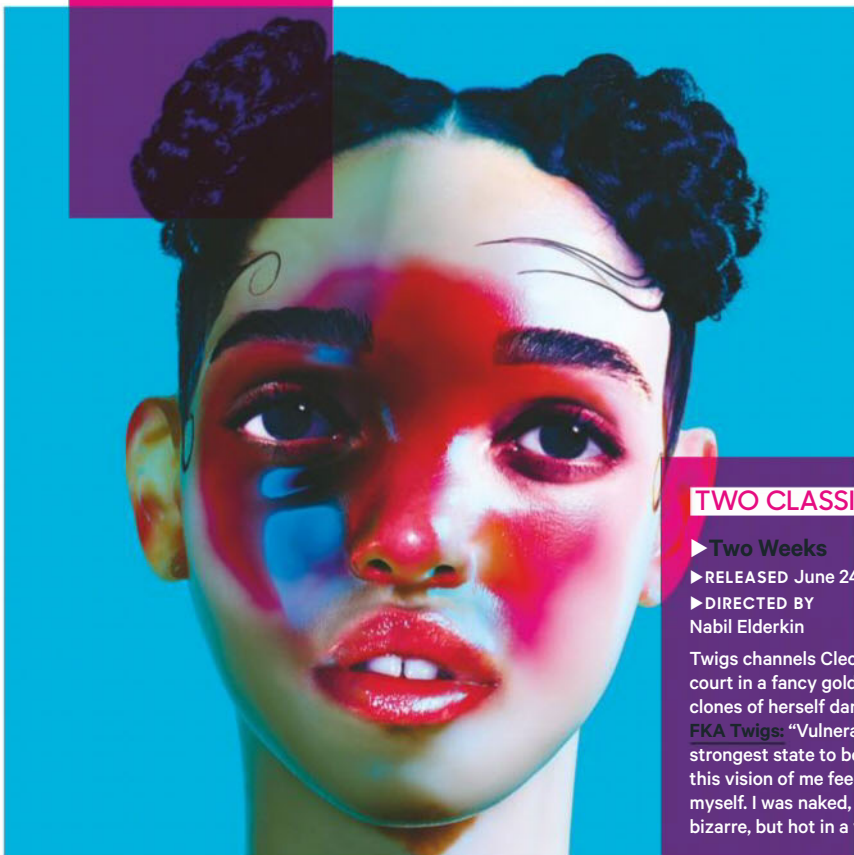
► **RELEASED** June 24
 ► **DIRECTED BY** Nabil Elderkin

Twigs channels Cleopatra as she holds court in a fancy gold palace, flanked by clones of herself dancing athletically. **FKA Twigs:** “Vulnerability is the strongest state to be in... In the video, it’s this vision of me feeding myself, milking myself. I was naked, painted in gold... It’s bizarre, but hot in a very weird way.”

► Video Girl

► **RELEASED** October 29
 ► **DIRECTED BY** Kahlil Joseph

Shot in gritty black and white, this showed FKA Twigs performing back-bending dance moves for a prisoner who’s just received a lethal injection. It’s disturbing but beautiful. **FKA Twigs:** “I wrote that very shortly after I stopped being a video girl. When I got signed, I stopped dancing – I’d given up that part of my life.”



20

Jack White

Lazaretto

As with every record he's released with The White Stripes, The Raconteurs, The Dead Weather and as a solo artist, Jack White played many characters on 'Lazaretto'. So sophisticated has he become as a musician, and so powerful is the name Jack White, that the 39-year-old is able to flit between genres and personas while retaining the individuality he's crafted since forming a band with Meg in 1997.

Most often on 'Lazaretto' he played a victim, and one not entirely comfortable with that status. "It's not enough that I love you", he went on 'Would You Fight For My Love?', "There's all these things I have to prove to you". But soon enough, disgruntlement turned to defiance, bawling "I want you to fight for my love" at the top of his lungs. The song itself was magnificent: moody, cinematic, painful. But more fascinating was the way White used events from his personal life to inject his music with drama. His solo debut, April 2012's 'Blunderbuss', was the break-up album. Here was the

▶ THE DETAILS

- ▶ **RELEASE DATE** June 10
- ▶ **LABEL** XL Recordings
- ▶ **LENGTH** 39:13
- ▶ **PRODUCER** Jack White
- ▶ **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 4
- ▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 7/10
- ▶ **TRACKLISTING** ▶ 1. Three Women ▶ 2. Lazaretto ▶ 3. Temporary Ground ▶ 4. Would You Fight For My Love? ▶ 5. High Ball Stepper ▶ 6. Just One Drink ▶ 7. Alone In My Home ▶ 8. Entitlement ▶ 9. That Black Bat Licorice ▶ 10. I Think I Found The Culprit ▶ 11. Want And Able



aftermath's aftermath, alluding to moments such as White's seemingly amicable divorce from Karen Elson turning nasty in August 2013 when reports of a restraining order from Elson and a counter-motion from Jack did the rounds.

See also: the straightforward accusatory country-rock of 'I Think I Found The Culprit' ("*birds of a feather may lay together, but the uglier one is always under the gun*"), the teary-pissed 'Just One Drink' ("*One of us is happy, the other one is mean*") or the much simpler piano closer 'Want And Able' ("*who is the who telling who what to do?*").

Most antagonistic was the reimagining of Blind Willie McTell's 1928 track 'Three Women Blues', which begins with the line: "*I got three women, red, blonde and brunette*". White's smart enough to have considered the agape mouths that would greet the opening line of his first album as a recent divorcee. Is any of it true? Who knows. Nothing is certain, other than his constant messing about with the audience's perception of him.

Another character played was the more kindly Nashville Jack, cousin of Detroit Jack. Detroit Jack wore red, wrote 'Seven Nation Army', pretended his ex-wife was his sister, dug garage rock. Nashville Jack prefers blue, worked with Loretta Lynn, runs Third Man Records, loves country music – as heard on 'Temporary Ground' and 'Entitlement'.

Elsewhere, the Willy Wonka of Rock persona – who can throw 100 flavours at a song and still make it taste good – was developed on 'That Black Bat Licorice' and the title track. The latter was used to convey many messages. Taken alone, it was a complex song that squeezed in a preposterous number of twists and turns, including lyrics in Spanish and an out-of-place fiddle solo. Taken with the video, it was a high-spec production complete with special effects and a man with the 'Lazaretto' cover tattooed on his chest. It was a million miles from 'Elephant', recorded on the cheap in 2002.

With this album, White was moving his characters and sound on. Take 'High Ball Stepper'. Classic White in many ways – bow down to that riffing – but the first instrumental he's ever put out. Familiar enough for traditionalists, different enough for progressive fans. An unprecedented 16 musicians other than White were credited on the album, helping to realise the complicated ideas of a complicated man. It took The White Stripes four albums to peak. Don't bet against Jack White, solo artist, doing the same. ■ TOM HOWARD

56



19

Royal Blood

Royal Blood

"I got really into juggling and I got these fire clubs at my house and a unicycle," Mike Kerr recalls of his misspent youth. "I could do it for a while... go on the unicycle and juggle with fire in the garden." "I'd be the one throwing fireballs at him," says drummer Ben Thatcher. "I'd soak tennis balls in kerosene and throw them at him."

It's no wonder, then, that flame-flinging nutjobs Royal Blood set 2014 alight. After their two-handed blues-rock onslaught saw rammed festival tents across Europe literally crumbling beneath the pogoing hordes, the charts followed suit; their self-titled debut hit Number One and prompted everyone from Radio 1 chief George Ergatoudis to broadsheet hacks to *Music Week* to declare rock music officially undead.

"Perhaps it just needed to be reinvented a bit," Mike ponders. "The genre's always been around, but it doesn't seem to have received the same attention as other types of music. There's more capacity for heavier music now and I'm not sure why. The people that come to our shows, they're not rockers, they're not goths, it's a real mix. It's dads and their kids and everything in between. I think people are up for it; people are up for things being a bit more left and a bit more heavy and a bit more rocky and creative."

'Royal Blood' was a new blueprint for next-generation British rock. As Mike's superhuman ability to wrench the sound of an entire Download bill out of one bass guitar string collided with the savage crunch of producer Tom Dalgety, the likes of 'Out Of The Black' and 'Figure It Out' attacked mainstream blues rock with hardcore's brutalist attitude; this was Muse's melodic metal raining down on Black Keys



populism, the blues turned inside out and flinging loose its bloodiest entrails.

"I remember feeling quite strange about the day it was released," Mike says, "because it was something we'd had very close to our chests for so long. Things were ramping up for us anyway, so I wouldn't say the day it went to Number One all these things started rolling in and changing, but it was an unexpected special moment for us. The real high-five moment where we got drunk and celebrated was when we finished it; the moment it was done and cut to vinyl, that's when we got hammered. We were so proud of what we'd made and we couldn't believe we'd done it with the instruments we said we'd do it with from the beginning and stuck to our guns on it. So that was the victory."

■ MARK BEAUMONT

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** August 25
- **LABEL** Warner Bros
- **LENGTH** 32:38
- **PRODUCER** Tom Dalgety
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 1
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Out Of The Black ► 2. Come On Over ► 3. Figure It Out ► 4. You Can Be So Cruel ► 5. Blood Hands ► 6. Little Monster ► 7. Loose Change ► 8. Careless ► 9. Ten Tonne Skeleton ► 10. Better Strangers

FAMOUS FAN Jimmy Page Led Zeppelin



"I went to hear them in New York. They were fantastic. Absolutely riveting. They're such fine musicians. However long the set was, I could've heard twice as much. Their album has taken the genre up a serious few notches. It's so refreshing to hear, because they play with the spirit of the things that have preceded them, but you can hear they're going to take rock into a new realm – if they're not already doing that. It's music of tremendous quality."



18

Kate Tempest

Everybody Down

There are those who will tell you that music in 2014 lacks ambition. There are those who'll tell you that contemporary music fails to engage honestly with the politics of British youth; that it's afraid to be judged by the standards of social commentary. Clearly, none of these people have heard Kate Tempest's 'Everybody Down'.

The May release from the 28-year-old poet from Brockley, south London was one of the year's outstanding debuts. Tempest was already a critically acclaimed performer, last year becoming the first person under 40 to win the Ted Hughes Award for innovation in poetry for her epic performance poem 'Brand New Ancients'. Some critics saw the album as a departure, and were taken aback by how accomplished it was, but in fact making hip-hop was a return to Tempest's roots. She grew up and learnt her art at slam nights and in hip-hop clubs and record shops, inspired to write rhymes by the likes of Big L, Mos Def and Ghostface Killah.

'Everybody Down' was a concept album that followed the trials and tribulations of Becky – a 'masseuse' with a heart of gold – plus her boyfriend Pete and an ambitious small-time drug dealer called Harry. The strength of Tempest's narrative drew comparisons with The Streets' 'A Grand Don't Come For Free' and the street poetry of Jamie T, but really the London she portrayed was all her own, drawn from experience. While the album stayed clear of sloganeering or making leaden political points, it did wrap issues of poverty, inequality and even the banking crisis into its story – the drug dealer who sold his wares in boardrooms rather than bars, for example. At the same time, Tempest never lost sight of the people at the heart of her tales, their individual lives and their hopes and dreams.

It's important to note that musically the album was much more than just a platform for her poems. While Tempest's sharp lyricism and impassioned flow was kept to the forefront, Toy and Bat For Lashes

producer Dan Carey's work ensured that none of these songs sounded too out of place when they accidentally come on your iPod shuffle halfway through a house party. It was no surprise to see Tempest play to packed, sweaty raves at Glastonbury, or to see 'Everybody Down' turn up on the shortlist for the Mercury Prize.

She sought to condense a hard-bitten novel's worth of stories into 12 relentless tracks. You can't help but return again and

again to an album with so much to say. With 'Everybody Down', Kate Tempest proved she's here to stand up and be counted.

■ KEVIN EG PERRY

▶ THE DETAILS

- ▶ **RELEASE DATE** May 29
- ▶ **LABEL** Big Dada
- ▶ **LENGTH** 49:29
- ▶ **PRODUCER** Dan Carey
- ▶ **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A
- ▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
- ▶ **TRACKLISTING** ▶ 1. Marshall Law ▶ 2. The Truth ▶ 3. Lonely Daze ▶ 4. Chicken ▶ 5. The Beigeness ▶ 6. Theme from Becky ▶ 7. Stink ▶ 8. The Heist ▶ 9. To The Victor The Spoils ▶ 10. Circles ▶ 11. A Hammer ▶ 12. Happy End



KATE TEMPEST ON...

▶ Music being her first love

"My heart had been hankering after doing a hip-hop record for so long. Taking a break from music was amazing and challenging, but it's so exciting being back onstage playing music again rather than telling poems."

▶ Her poetic journey

"Throughout this crazy journey that I've been on with my writing, the whole thing hasn't really made any sense. At the same time though, it makes perfect sense. Everything I've done informs the raps I write now."

▶ 'Everybody Down'

"I love storytelling rhymes, and it's quite refreshing to not be doing anything like I've done before. These characters just came to life. I started writing chapters, a really early draft of what would be a novel. The idea is that each song can exist on its own, but heard together they become part of a bigger narrative."



17

Todd Terje

It's Album Time

Todd Terje's debut album lit up 2014 with its big-hearted disco bangers, despite having one of the year's least inspiring titles. But the 33-year-old Norwegian producer is all about describing things with sounds, not words. "I've always been into the kind of music that could be in an action movie," he says. "Where you'd know someone was running away from the bad guy just by listening to it."

There's a name for that kind of thing: library music. It refers to albums from the '70s full of tracks called things like 'Car Chase', used by budget filmmakers and DJs in search of obscure source material. It was a reference point for 'It's Album Time', which fizzed with

ideas right through to its gigantic, floor-filling closer 'Inspector Norse'. The track was ridiculously good, like a firework display sketched out with vintage synths. "I like music when it suggests non-musical things, when you get pictures in your head," says Terje.

Library music was big on the Norwegian cosmic disco scene a few years ago, with artists like Lindstrøm, Diskjokke and Prins Thomas the principal exponents. Terje was a key player, but fell out of love with it. "Cosmic disco was about playing anything. It could be The Carpenters, so long as there was a link to the dancefloor. It was refreshing. But then all of a sudden everyone was playing slow, chugging electronic music. It didn't feel special any more." On 'It's Album Time', with tracks like the fluorescent 'Delorean Dynamite' and the seismic disco of 'Strandbar', Terje took that genre's blueprint – essentially feelgood dance music with a soul – and made it more accessible.

Terje's bubbling and soulful dance record has prompted him to consider going even further next time. "I've toyed with the idea of doing something really commercial," he says. "I'm surrounded by people who do go cheesy and mainstream. There's a little devil on your shoulder saying, 'Just do it.' You think to yourself, 'I can do better than that.' It would be great to have a different identity and make really rubbish trance music with country music vocals on top and aim for a global hit."

More likely, Terje's next album will be more of the same, but with "more jazz and some barbershop vocals". Don't hold your breath, though. "I had to finish the last record before my girlfriend gave birth to our first child," says Terje. "Now there's no deadline, so I'm working slowly. Really slowly." No matter, because 'It's Album Time' is a treat that lasts. ■ CHRIS COTTINGHAM

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** April 7
- **LABEL** Olsen
- **LENGTH** 59:10
- **PRODUCER** Todd Terje
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 23
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ►1. Intro (It's Album Time) ►2. Leisure Suit Preben ►3. Preben Goes To Acapulco ►4. Svensk Sås ►5. Strandbar ►6. Delorean Dynamite ►7. Johnny And Mary ►8. Alfonso Muskedunder ►9. Swing Star (Part 1) ►10. Swing Star (Part 2) ►11. Oh Joy ►12. Inspector Norse

THE VINTAGE SYNTHS ON 'IT'S ALBUM TIME'

► ARP 2600

Todd Terje: "The 'It's The Arps' EP from 2012 was made only using sounds from the ARP 2600. It looks like an incredibly complicated machine, and I was a bit daunted when I first got it, but I think of it as an everyday implement now, like a breadknife."

► Neve Compressor

"I'm not a complete geek about collecting old gear, but when I'm bidding for things on eBay I sometimes end up competing with people who are. This is one of those things. It's hard to describe why the Neve is good. It just makes drums sound amazing."

► ARP Odyssey

"You can make the same sounds using a computer, but I don't think I would have been able to get to the same place with the album without old gear like this. Half the fun is stumbling over something cool. I learned a lot from the Odyssey."



16

Iceage

Plowing Into The Field Of Love

With their 2013 album 'You're Nothing', Iceage hinted at the sound that would flourish on 'Plowing Into The Field Of Love'. It was, in hindsight, like working in technicolour compared with the two-chord punk aesthetic that had defined the band up to that point. But nobody could have predicted quite how far they would take things in 2014. 'Plowing...'s lead single, 'The Lord's Favourite', was a country song, beefed up with distortion and the best rock drawl this side of Shane MacGowan, while other tracks referenced The Gun Club and Joe Strummer.

THE DETAILS

► **RELEASE DATE** October 6
 ► **LABEL** Matador ► **LENGTH** 47:54 ► **PRODUCERS** Nis Bysted and Iceage ► **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A
 ► **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
 ► **TRACKLISTING** ►1. On My Fingers ►2. The Lord's Favorite ►3. How Many ►4. Glassy Eyed, Dormant And Veiled ►5. Stay ►6. Let It Vanish ►7. Abundant Living ►8. Forever ►9. Cimmerian Shade ►10. Against The Moon ►11. Simony ►12. Plowing Into The Field Of Love

At the centre of it all was Iceage frontman Elias Rønnefelt, for the first time looking and sounding like a star in waiting. His lyrics, personal and garish at every turn, read like mini epics; from statements of nihilistic

intent on the title track ("I am that ragged figure of a man/ Standing in a mansion window/ Looking down at the strung-out refugees") to the series of hilariously pompous couplets that send 'The Lord's Favorite' on its way to greatness ("After all I think it's evident that I am God's favourite one/ And now is the time I should have whatever I desire").

Surprisingly, considering he's such an intense person onstage, the singer said he struggled when it came to finding such emotion at the lyric-writing stage. Whereas previously he'd scribbled down lines "phonetically" as the four-piece were in the studio, this time Elias decamped to a friend's empty apartment in Berlin for two weeks on his own, penning reams of lines until he had something approaching a finished product – a manuscript, if you will – in his hands.

It was this self-inflicted isolation that gave 'Plowing...' so much soul. "You have to force yourself to sit down and actually wrench it out of your brain," is how Elias explains the process, adding that he found it "a bit of a clusterfuck" to keep writing.

Undoubtedly, this is what makes 'Plowing...' so compelling. It may not have sold as many copies as their previous albums – Elias says some of Iceage's original fans have left the band behind owing to the new direction – but for anybody with even a passing interest in non-corporate, angsty rock music, 2014 simply didn't get much better than these 48 minutes. ■ MATT WILKINSON



Q&A

Elias Rønnefelt, singer

You've been on the road for two months now – are you growing tired of playing the new album live yet?

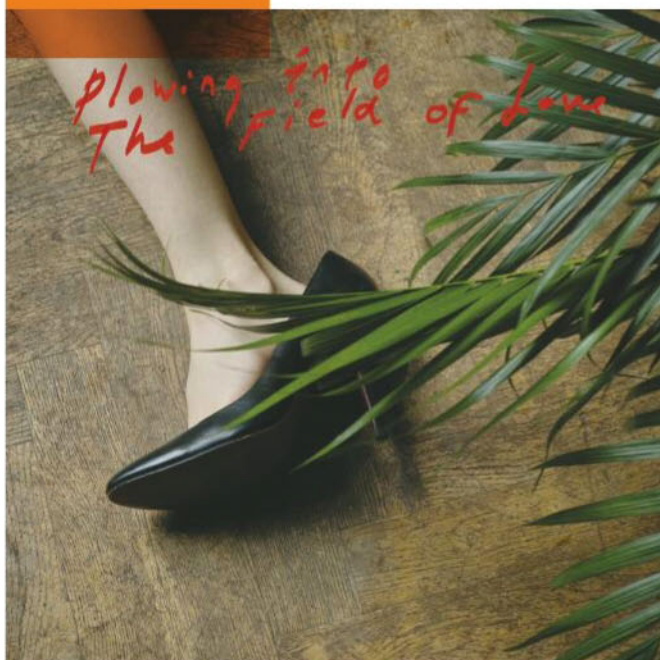
"I haven't started hating it, I still like playing it. It's had a much longer lifespan than the other ones! Live is really where you put songs to the test, because you repeat them again and again, night after night."

Why do you think these songs are different to the others?

"These have subliminal depths. I can elaborate on them. So I've been progressing with the way we perform the songs, which is much harder to do with the other ones because they're much more phonetic. There wasn't really space to do that."

How long did you last with the other albums before getting bored of them?

"Pretty much by the time they came out. I'm sure I'll hit a wall [with the new album] at some point and I'll become sick of it. But we'll see."



15

Eagulls

Eagulls

Itchy. That's how Eagulls' self-titled debut made you feel: a nasty, poisonous little thing that brought you out in flakes and rashes. Here were five pissed-off friends from Leeds who'd grown tired of toiling away in soulless jobs while everything around them rotted, so made an album that sounded as sick as they felt. Rather than dancing around the big issues, they focused on the real nitty-gritty: the grim reality of life for Britain's walking dead, from heroin addiction ('Amber Veins') to birth defects ('Tough Luck') and sexual abuse ('Opaque').

The way frontman George Mitchell tells it, though, 'Eagulls' needed that despair to come to life; it was those feelings of boredom, frustration and hopelessness as life passes you by that took their scratchy, furious post-punk and made it even more vicious. Opener 'Nerve Endings' was inspired by his own battle with anxiety – a torrid, blistering ode to being undone by your own brain and betrayed by your own twitching paranoia.

"I was struggling a lot with anxiety," he says. "There was a lot of stress. We were recording it while we were working full-time, and we had to fund everything ourselves. But all that was channelled into the music. That's why people can actually feel the energy."

Now, they've quit the day jobs. "I said, 'I need some holidays because we're going on tour,'" says George, who worked in the same shop as guitarist Mark 'Goldie' Goldsworthy. "They said no. So I said, 'OK, I'll just quit now then.' So I did one, and Goldie left as well. I winged it: I lied and said I'd already put my notice in. We just scammed them – got some holiday pay and left. I remember walking out and thinking, 'Now I can focus on what we're supposed to be doing.' But then, it's not like we're walking around in Gucci suits just yet."

Feet on the ground, heads still screwed on: that's Eagulls' mantra. And George is still a grumpy sod, too. Earlier this year, Eagulls



▲ STORY BEHIND THE SLEEVE

George Mitchell, vocals: "No other image could have summed up our album. It almost looks like it's been set up. There's a vintage car, which someone's either robbed or it's just been burned out; next to that there's a stereotypical British phone box; and then there's those flats. They were built as some sort of British utopia. The idea was that people could live there and go and work well-paid jobs in Sheffield. It ended up disintegrating and crumbling, like most of the other fucking ideas in Britain. They're renovating it now, so they're doing it again: just another form of crap. And the CCTV camera: if it wasn't for that, you wouldn't know that photo was taken in 2013 or 2014. It's the only thing to show it's from the modern day. When the record came out, everyone said, 'Oh, it's post-punk, it's nothing new.' But this is today. This is our generation – and we've lived this generation."

played *Late Show With David Letterman* – a massive deal for any band looking to crack the US. "It gets very slammed up by people," grumbles George. "But it's a cold, cold room and you sit there waiting. I mean, there's nothing in the green room – there's a couple of cans of Fanta and that's it."

Dourness, be damned; it's a comfort to know Eagulls are still tapping into their irritations. George declares, "You can piss people off with it, but it's a good thing. You're thinking a lot more about your life than most people who just get up, eat breakfast, go to work, eat tea and go to bed without thinking about anything." Long may their itches remain unscratched. ■ BEN HEWITT

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** March 3
- **LABEL** Partisan
- **LENGTH** 35:44
- **PRODUCERS** Matt Leeds, Eagulls
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 86
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Nerve Endings ► 2. Hollow Visions ► 3. Yellow Eyes ► 4. Tough Luck ► 5. Amber Veins ► 6. Possessed ► 7. Footsteps ► 8. Fester/Blister ► 9. Opaque ► 10. Soulless Youth



14

Run The Jewels

RTJ2

It was when 'Close Your Eyes (And Count To Fuck)' came out on October 13 that you knew how big a deal 'RTJ2' was gonna be. Zack de la Rocha, singer of the dormant Rage Against The Machine, is a man who takes his music and message seriously. And here he was rapping about being "miles ahead of you, you can sip my bitches' brew" on a track about starting a riot in a prison.

His guest spot was a major move from Killer Mike and El-P, two 39-year-old men who've been on the hip-hop scene since the '90s and have hit a ludicrous peak: musically, lyrically, spiritually. This second album as a duo was so energetic ('Blockbuster Night, Pt 1') and full of fire ('Lie, Cheat, Steal'), regret ('Crown') and glorious subversions of hip-hop stereotypes ('Love Again') it felt, at times, like it couldn't possibly maintain its momentum for 11 tracks. By doing so, it became the finest hip-hop release of 2014. When Kanye and Jay-Z released 'Watch The Throne' in 2011, it was a big moment for hip-hop collaborations. But El-P and Killer Mike aren't just watching the throne – they've nicked it and taken it for a joyride. ■ TOM HOWARD

It sounds like you were trying to crack each other up in the studio.

Mike: "Most of the time we were high as a kite, drinking and taking mushrooms, so absurdity ruled."

Did it feel like you were upping each other's ante?

El-P: "We were pushing each other, for sure. That's one of the many benefits of two guys at the top of their games in the same room together. You aren't making it out alive if you aren't keeping up."

Mike: "In an age where people emulate the fashionable style, we take pride in being style-benders."

Mike, what's your favourite El-P beat on the record?

Mike: "Jeopardy'. The beat is a movie! Also 'Angel Duster' takes it to another level. It's like the best marijuana."

El-P, what's your favourite Killer Mike rap?

El-P: "'Crown' is a contender for Killer Mike verse of the decade. It brought me to tears."

▶ THE DETAILS

▶ **RELEASE DATE** October 24

▶ **LABEL** Mass Appeal, Sony

▶ **RED ▶ LENGTH** 39:56

▶ **PRODUCERS** El-P, Little Shalimar, Wilder Zoby, Boots

▶ **HIGHEST UK CHART**

POSITION N/A

▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 9/10

▶ **TRACKLISTING** ▶ 1. Jeopardy

▶ 2. Oh My Darling Don't Cry

▶ 3. Blockbuster Night, Pt 1

▶ 4. Close Your Eyes (And Count To Fuck) (feat. Zack De La

Rocha) ▶ 5. All My Life ▶ 6. Lie,

Cheat, Steal ▶ 7. Early (feat.

Boots) ▶ 8. All Due Respect (feat.

Travis Barker) ▶ 9. Love Again

(Akinyele Back) (feat. Gangsta

Boo) ▶ 10. Crown (feat. Diane

Coffee) ▶ 11. Angel Duster

Mike, how did it feel to put words down about selling drugs to a pregnant woman in 'Crown'?

Mike: "I wept. It took me back to a time in my life I'm not proud of but it has helped absolve me of some of the shame. I feel very powerfully about that track."

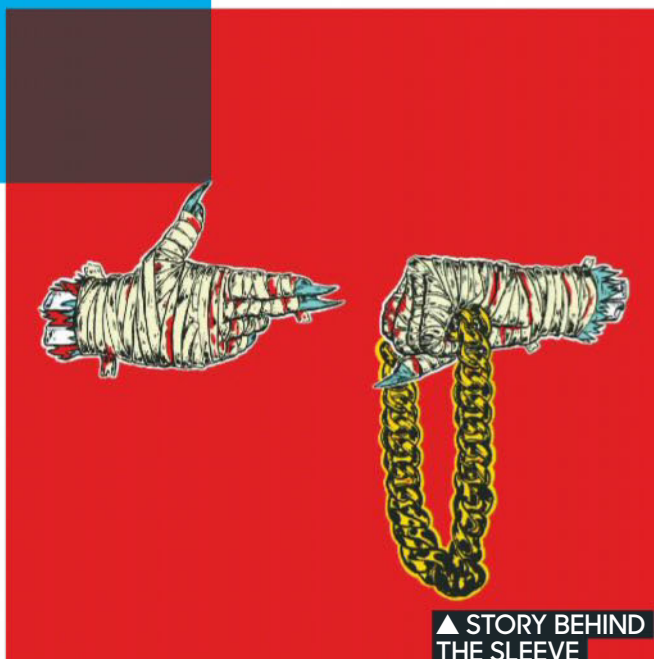
With 'Run The Jewels', you've tapped into some weird energy – what do you put that down to?

El-P: "I've never personally experienced anything this exciting. When Company Flow was on the verge of doing something big, we self-destructed. Being able to follow through with RTJ and eyeing the results of our work is incredibly exciting to me."

Mike: "Holding my children in my arms when they were born was the only thing that felt better. Unless you want to take it back to a room of naked girls taking angel dust and mushrooms and smoking marijuana."

How many takes did Zack de la Rocha need to do his rap on 'Close Your Eyes (And Count To Fuck)'?

El-P: "I bumped into Zack on the way to the studio while getting a juice. Two days later he was in the studio with us recording. It was one take. No bullshit." ■ LUCY JONES & TOM HOWARD



▲ STORY BEHIND THE SLEEVE

Brooklyn artist Nick Gazin:

"Last time El-P wanted the cover to incorporate hands in the RTJ positions and it was my idea to make them dismembered and demonic. My thinking is that there's a progression this time. On the first album, we see these dismembered demonic hands. In the special edition, the flesh rotted off and they had become skeletonised. With this one, the medical bandages and bloodstains imply that the hands have been through hard times but have healed somehow. When we started discussing the art that became the cover, El was describing the wrappings as being mummy wrappings, but by the end we had added the blood stains and decided that this was more of a Japanese hospital fetish-type aesthetic. The hands can either be fun and cartoony or frightening and upsetting depending on your point of view."



13

Damon Albarn

Everyday Robots

"I suppose you could call it a solo record," Damon Albarn said while recording 'Everyday Robots', "but I don't like that word. It sounds very lonely – solo." And yet, though producer Richard Russell helped him hone his 60 songs down to a final 12, it sounded like a solitary, deeply personal record that seemed to float meditatively above the world, fathoming Damon's place within the dizzying churn. For every reference to childhood haunts and the birth of Britpop ('Hollow Ponds'), there were sunny ditties about friendly orphan elephants ('Mr Tembo') or paeans of sadness and confusion over the distances technology has placed

between us all ('Everyday Robots'). After a lifetime of discovery, innovation and experience, Damon looked upon the state of 21st century humanity, and quietly despaired.

In many ways, 'Everyday Robots' acted as the final part of a triptych of thoughtful, downbeat and personal albums from Albarn, moving on from the raw pain of Blur's '13' and the morbid pessimism of the first *The Good, The Bad & The Queen* record to find a place of near-serenity. A place where he could openly rake over his heroin years – "*Tin foil and a lighter, the ship across/Five days on, two days off*", goes 'You And Me' – and set himself adrift on the 'Heavy Seas Of Love'; where he could revisit his earliest and most pivotal life memories on 'Hollow Ponds' with a non-judgemental fondness, indulge his African and electronic music passions in equal measure and sing a duet with Bat For Lashes' Natasha Khan about the communication-free death

throes of a relationship. It was also characteristically creative – the beats seemed built from tapped tin pots and electronic crackles, the languid melodies the result of masterfully manipulated instruments. Strings swept backwards across the title track, rickety acoustic guitars made like cycling windmills throughout 'Hostiles', and 'Lonely Press Play' could have been made by simply recording the everyday workings of the accounts department of a bubble factory located beside a tramline. A rare upbeat moment captured sunnier climes in the muted street vibes of 'Mr Tembo', but largely 'Everyday Robots' was wrapped in found-sound melancholia, a memorial service to the laptop age. And, like so much of Albarn's work, it was utterly immersive.

■ MARK BEAUMONT

▶ THE DETAILS

- ▶ **RELEASE DATE** April 25
- ▶ **LABEL** Parlophone
- ▶ **LENGTH** 46:32
- ▶ **PRODUCERS** Damon Albarn, Richard Russell, Brian Eno
- ▶ **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 2
- ▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
- ▶ **TRACKLISTING** ▶ 1. Everyday Robots ▶ 2. Hostiles ▶ 3. Lonely Press Play ▶ 4. Mr Tembo ▶ 5. Parakeet ▶ 6. The Selfish Giant ▶ 7. You And Me ▶ 8. Hollow Ponds ▶ 9. Seven High ▶ 10. Photographs (You Are Taking Now) ▶ 11. The History Of A Cheating Heart ▶ 12. Heavy Seas Of Love

THREE KEY TRACKS

▶ 'Hostiles'

Damon Albarn: "It's partly to do with the way so many people watch films where characters with no backstory are just being annihilated. Look at video games – 'hostiles' is the name given to the enemy."

▶ 'Mr Tembo'

"It was a recently orphaned [elephant that] walked onto this aerodrome; the people I know took it in and called it Mr Tembo. I was there, and I met this little elephant, and he was very sweet. I sang it to him."

▶ 'Heavy Seas Of Love'

"Back in Leytonstone, there was a Pentecostal church at the end of my road. I remember standing outside with my bicycle listening to the singing. I got in contact with that church, and they've still got a small choir, so they very kindly agreed to sing on the record."

damon albarn
EVERYDAY ROBOTS



12

DFA 1979

The Physical World

Only one album on this list – Aphex Twin’s ‘Syro’ – seemed less likely to exist than ‘The Physical World’. In 2006, Death From Above 1979 parted ways in less than amicable fashion. Bassist Jesse F Keeler revealed that his relationship with drummer Sebastien Grainger had broken down, and their band had already been defunct for over a year. “Sebastien and I had grown apart to such an extent that the only real time we spoke was just before we would play and during interviews,” says Keeler eight years later. “We both changed so much that the people we were by the end of it probably wouldn’t have been friends if they were to meet for the first time again.”

To 2011, then. The Toronto duo had reformed for appearances at SXSW and

Coachella, which unexpectedly snowballed into a world tour. Still, for anyone witnessing them onstage during that period, it was obvious that tensions remained. So the fact that DFA released a second album at all is worth celebrating; that it was one of 2014’s finest feels miraculous. “We had vaguely discussed making a record,” recalls Grainger. “Then, in January 2012, I was mixing my solo music and all of a sudden my inbox had three demos from Jesse. It was out of the blue, but really exciting.”

They took almost 18 months to refine the follow-up to 2004’s ‘You’re A Woman, I’m A Machine’. “The first time around we were inventing the band, and this time the band had *been* invented. That presented a whole new set of challenges but it was cool to be able to rely on our instincts.”

And instinctual it was. Primal, in fact. Sure, for fans of the debut, it sounded familiar – crunching riffs, heroic choruses and pulsating drumming – but there was controlled aggression mixed in. “*The same old song/Just a different tune*”, Grainger sang on ‘Right On, Frankenstein!’. Yes, kinda, but who cares? ‘Cheap Talk’ was a distorted disco-rock beast and ‘White Is Red’ matched their debut’s best cuts.

Where they go next remains unclear. “It doesn’t matter how long we’ve been doing it, it’s just such a physical undertaking. It takes a lot of energy,” confides Grainger. With ‘The Physical World’, DFA haven’t only cemented their return, but embellished their legacy. “We’re going to be playing through to festival season next year,” continues Grainger. “We just want to keep the energy positive. I don’t know what’s going to happen. We’ll see.” Enjoy it while it lasts. ■ GREG COCHRANE

THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** September 9
- **LABEL** Last Gang/Warner Bros
- **LENGTH** 35:54
- **PRODUCER** Dave Sardy
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 37
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 9/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ►1. Cheap Talk ►2. Right On, Frankenstein! ►3. Virgins ►4. Always On ►5. Crystal Ball ►6. White Is Red ►7. Trainwreck 1979 ►8. Nothin’ Left ►9. Government Trash ►10. Gemini ►11. The Physical World



THE COMEBACK TRAIL

► Feb 4, 2011

The band announce their reformation.

► March 19, 2011

Their first comeback show, at SXSW, sparks a riot that had to be broken up by mounted police with tasers.

► July 14, 2012

Play their first new song, ‘Cheap Talk’, at Edgfest in Toronto.

► June 7, 2013

Cancel their appearance at the Governors Ball Festival in New York, saying they’re having difficulties with their new recordings.

► July 11, 2013

Confirm a new album is in the works, but a “medical emergency” forces them to cancel European dates.

► June 11, 2014

Announce ‘The Physical World’. A statement reads: “Hell has frozen over, dogs and cats living together, mass hysteria... throw in Dave Sardy and it is a meeting of truly biblical proportions.”

► August 6, 2014

The band tell NME that they originally “wanted to be the AC/DC of hardcore. That’s still one of our goals.” They discuss new track ‘Always On’, about the way social media means “no-one can get away from anything any more”. Asked what Kurt Cobain would do if he were alive today, they answer: “He’d blow his head off.”

► September 9, 2014

‘The Physical World’ comes out and scores 9/10 in NME.



11

Future Islands Singles

There's something heartwarming about seeing a brilliant band reaping the rewards of their efforts. Baltimore's Future Islands, like other great American bands such as The Hold Steady, The National or Les Savy Fav, are a case study in gladdening perseverance.

After almost six years of non-stop touring, the trio came to a natural pause after their third record, 2011's 'On The Water'. They'd been tirelessly plugging away on superb indie label Thrill Jockey, but the audience never grew. So, for the first time ever, singer Samuel T Herring, guitarist William Cashion and keyboardist Gerrit Welmers took some time off. "We didn't talk about music, new songs, or even practise – we just cut out the end of 2012," says Herring. "We'd already decided we wanted to find a new home that might help us project ourselves a little bit bigger, this time choosing to finish the album before anybody outside the band heard it."

The result was the wonderful 'Singles', a soaring record that showed so much promise that in 2013 they were signed to 4AD, a label with a proven track record of nurturing slow-burning careers. So far, so good. But things were about to get much better. As part of 'Singles' promotion, the band secured their first US talk-show appearance, on *Late Show With David Letterman*.

Their performance of the New Order-style synth jam 'Seasons (Waiting On You)' went viral, mostly because of Herring's unhinged, primal dance moves and soul-scraping growl. "It's like Henry Rollins doing an impression of Carlton from *Fresh Prince Of Bel-Air*," one YouTube commenter quipped underneath the clip. Others put it more succinctly: "Holy shit! This is amazing." The previously underground group became everyone's 2014 discovery.

The TV performance was the perfect gateway into 'Singles': a work that has many levels. Away from 'Seasons...' there are slowies

like 'Spirit', but also the tearful singalongs of 'Sun In The Morning' and 'Doves'. "The ballads have always been there," says

Herring. "However, with 'Singles' we thought, 'Let's strip away some of this heaviness and try and write decent pop bangers.'"

Then there are graver moments, like 'A Song For Our Grandfathers' and 'Light House', the album's key track. "It's a song about contemplating suicide," the singer says. "And being taken away from that idea by someone who shares that you're a brighter person than that, you're stronger... That's really helped some people. It means the most to me, because it's a song about me."

From struggles, great success has been born. And the best thing about all of this? Future Islands have three equally great albums for new fans to discover. Start with 2010's 'In Evening Air'. "I want people to discover that there's a depth to what we've done," says Herring. "You can hear the growth in every album. It's all about the sharing." ■ GREG COCHRANE



FUTURE ISLANDS ON LETTERMAN

► The dream

Samuel T Herring, vocals: "For it to have garnered so much attention is amazing. We were expecting maybe 20,000 or 25,000 views [it's now nearing three million]. It wasn't just music fans but fans of late-night television. Creating that response, that reaction, there's something really good about that. It's really wild. It really did change our year."

► The reality

"I think for a lot of people who'd seen our name or heard a song – even for the people who didn't know anything about us – that moment created something. What people saw as we played 'Seasons...' – that's what we try to do every night onstage. We give everything to try and create a sense of wonder, an atmosphere."

► The fear

"The fear is that it becomes the bane of our existence. You don't want to be the band who did that one thing on *Letterman* and then everyone forgot about you. It's been kind of amazing. You can be the great band, but even after something like that, you want people to come back."

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** March 24
- **LABEL** 4AD
- **LENGTH** 42:11
- **PRODUCER** Chris Coady
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Seasons (Waiting On You) ► 2. Spirit ► 3. Sun In The Morning ► 4. Doves ► 5. Back In The Tall Grass ► 6. A Song For Our Grandfathers ► 7. Light House ► 8. Like The Moon ► 9. Fall From Grace ► 10. A Dream Of You And Me



10

Ex Hex

Rips

What's a figurehead of US punk to do when her latest project runs out of steam? For Mary Timony, the answer was simple: ignore the nagging voices, push away the dreary obligations, and just plug in to make one of the most raucous rock'n'roll records of the year.

Timony has been bouncing from one project to the next for the past 20 years, including cult alt-punks Autoclave, noise-pop outfit Helium and, most recently, indie-rock heavyweights Wild Flag, with Carrie Brownstein and other former Sleater-Kinney members. But when Wild Flag went on hiatus earlier this year, Timony formed Ex Hex with Laura Harris and Betsy Wright. Their debut, 'Rips', was inspired by the music Timony loved when she was growing up. The result? A record that's still drenched in the sticky residue of teenage kicks.

"That was the intention," says the 43-year-old. "Remembering what music sounded like when you first turned on the radio as a kid, and to capture that feeling." Feeling was everything on 'Rips': it's the guttural instinct that underpins the sleazy riffs of 'New Kid' and the dazed-and-confused riot of 'Waste Your Time'. "I just edited out the shit I didn't like," explains Timony. "It was a new way of working: being really brutal and honest. We didn't want to get stuck with anything we didn't like."

It shows. With 'Rips', Ex Hex refused to chase their own tails pursuing wafty notions of self-expression – "fun rock'n'roll music to dance to" was the goal. In the lyrics, too, she tried to pin down that same giddy euphoria of being a kid with an ear trained on the speaker. "*You took me to a party and you hid behind a door/ Then you stole my wallet and passed out on the kitchen floor*", she sang on 'Waterfall', like any pissed-off twentysomething who's just wasted their time on a feckless friend. "*Now you're out creepin' around/Just looking for some action trying to get down*", she sniped caustically on the fuck-you chug of 'You Fell Apart'. "I was trying to be really raw and direct," Timony

confirms. "Every time I wanted to use some coded metaphor in the lyrics, I'd stop myself."

Making an album so in thrall to bygone days and memories could have come off as hammy, but there's no play-acting: each member of Ex Hex gives music lessons to children, and their students' thirst for gut-crunching riffs fired them up. "It rubbed off on me in a good way," says Timony. "Part of this record is trying to tap into that feeling. 'One of my favourite quotes is, 'If you think rock music is dead, maybe you're braindead!'" she adds, laughing. And her version of it has enough electricity to jolt everyone. **BEN HEWITT**

▶ THE DETAILS

- ▶ **RELEASE DATE** October 13
- ▶ **LABEL** Merge
- ▶ **LENGTH** 35:15
- ▶ **PRODUCER** Mitch Easter
- ▶ **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A
- ▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 9/10
- ▶ **TRACKLISTING** ▶ 1. Don't Wanna Lose ▶ 2. Beast ▶ 3. Waste Your Time ▶ 4. You Fell Apart ▶ 5. How You Got That Girl ▶ 6. Waterfall ▶ 7. Hot And Cold ▶ 8. Radio On ▶ 9. New Kid ▶ 10. War Paint ▶ 11. Everywhere ▶ 12. Outro



THE RIFFS THAT INFORMED THE ALBUM

▶ Pentagram – 'Lazy Lady'

Mary Timony: "I guess this was actually recorded by a pre-Pentagram band called Macabre, and I'm sure it was recorded in some little shitty studio. The opening guitar, and the lead that follows it, are fuckin' great."

▶ The Nerves – 'Hanging On The Telephone'

"It's economical, interesting, and just off-kilter enough to make it exciting."

▶ Jimi Hendrix – Every song

"I love Hendrix so much: every song, every guitar part. It's all genius. He was just one million times better than anyone ever had been or will be."

▶ Ozzy Osbourne – 'Crazy Train'

"Come on: this guitar part [by Randy Rhodes] rules! My favorite part is the verse, and all the whammy bar stuff later in the song. It's just so good. It's like eating candy."



9

Sleaford Mods

Divide And Exit

Jason Williamson and Andrew Fearn's album is the most singular in this list. Nothing else released this year sounds quite like it. In the November 1 issue of *NME*, comedian Stewart Lee brilliantly described it as both "genre-collapsing speed poetry" and "quintessentially English and magically timeless". So rather than compete with that, we thought we'd ask Williamson himself to reflect on the record. Here's what he wrote.

Jason Williamson: "We approached the recording of 'Divide And Exit' the same way we had done with 'Austerity Dogs' or any other album for that matter. You don't think about it, you just get on with new tunes. By around August we had about 10 tracks but most of them were used for numerous seven-inch releases we had decided to do on various European labels. Europe

had taken to us a lot faster than the UK so we figured we'd concentrate on that part of the world. We kept withdrawing funds from the song bank, so to speak, and it became quite clear that we needed to write shitloads more before the end of December to make up for the shortfall and to cover the new album.

"After one unremarkable evening in September last year we accidentally wrote 'Tied Up In Nottz' at Andrew's flat. At the time it was just 'alright' but it became clear the following day that we had stumbled on a right tune. It mirrored our time in Germany in August, most notably Hamburg and Berlin, and drew from what I saw around me. I wrote most of the lyrics in a bar in Berlin, just me and Andrew huddled in the corner laughing at the odd sentence or two. Touring was new to us so we just took the piss while at the same time being introduced to its relentlessness.

"Tied Up In Nottz' dictated what was to be the overall style of 'Divide And Exit' and it also defined Andrew's production skills on that album and within Sleaford Mods. His use of guitar hooks mixed with fast drum loops and also the more familiar bass sounds we'd been using opened an unexpected door which enabled us to exploit the formula to its maximum potential and knock out a fresh batch of tunes that were strong enough. Our manager Steve would constantly remind us that whatever we released had to be watertight – it had to follow 'Austerity Dogs', no semi-skimmed gambles. Pure full fat.

"Most of the key tunes (for me anyway) were written from experience of touring and the constant unease of lack of variety in contemporary music ('Tiswas') and not our default use of talking about shit jobs. 'Divide And Exit' changed our creative fortunes and awarded us with a recognition that we fucking lapped up, mate, and then threw back into the faces of all those tossers who had dismissed us. It became all the good things we had been influenced by, historically, and eventually it revealed itself as a true contribution to notable music.

"Divide And Exit' changed our life course. It got me out of fucking work, it connected with thousands of people all over the place and because of that I view it as the most important release in this band's history." ■

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** April 28
- **LABEL** Harbinger Sound
- **LENGTH** 39:54
- **PRODUCERS** Sleaford Mods
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Air Conditioning ► 2. Tied Up In Nottz ► 3. A Little Ditty ► 4. You're Brave ► 5. Strike Force ► 6. The Corgi ► 7. From Rags To Richards ► 8. Liveable Shit ► 9. Under The Plastic And NCT ► 10. Tiswas ► 11. Keep Out Of It ► 12. Smithy ► 13. Middle Men ► 14. Tweet Tweet Tweet

SLEAFORD MODS

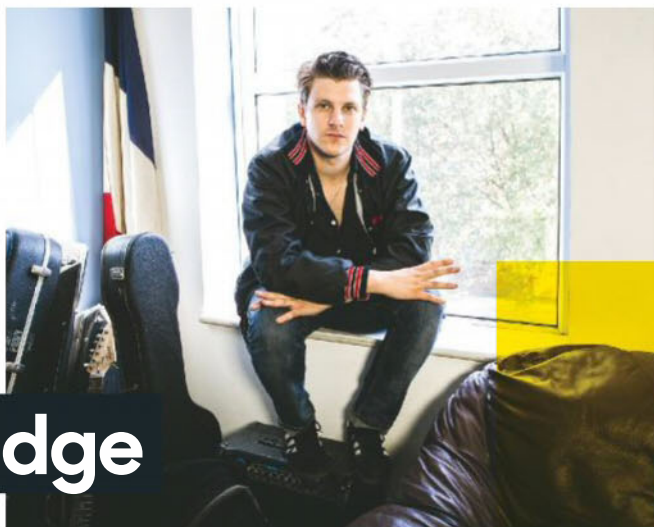
DIVIDE AND EXIT



8

Jamie T

Carry On The Grudge



After he finished touring second album 'Kings & Queens' in 2010, Jamie Treays headed back to Wimbledon and faded from public view. In the years that followed, fans circulated vastly differing online rumours: he was either dead or on the verge of a comeback. The latter was proved right in June, when he announced his return with the reggae-tinged 'Don't You Find', the first single from his magnificent third album 'Carry On The Grudge'.

None of the artists who had emerged since he disappeared were quite like Jamie T. His skilfully crafted, larger-than-life characters and tales of the poverty, pitfalls and intoxicated incidents of city life had been sorely missed, and that approach continued on 'Carry On The Grudge'. But not everything was the same.

▶ THE DETAILS

▶ RELEASE DATE September 29

▶ LABEL Virgin ▶ LENGTH 45:57

▶ PRODUCER James Dring

▶ HIGHEST UK CHART

POSITION 4 ▶ ORIGINAL NME

RATING 9/10 ▶ TRACKLISTING

▶ 1. Limits Lie ▶ 2. Don't You

Find ▶ 3. Turn On The Light

▶ 4. Zombie ▶ 5. The Prophet

▶ 6. Mary Lee ▶ 7. Trouble

▶ 8. Rabbit Hole ▶ 9. Peter

▶ 10. Love Is Only A Heartbeat

Away ▶ 11. Murder Of Crows

▶ 12. They Told Me It Rained

"It's a different sound on this album," says Treays. "I was aware of that when I was making it and I knew it would be contentious. The first two records had a similar sound, so I knew it was going to get certain people's backs up."

Treays injected it with a more personal feel, and went deeper and darker with his lyrics. Tracks such as 'Peter' and 'Mary Lee' mirrored the squalor of the cover art, but maintained the charm of his previous work. More shocking was the concerted effort to slow things down, and remove some of the words from his trademark mile-a-minute raps.

"I felt like I was caught between too many words and not saying as much as I wanted," he says. "You can take what you want from what you hear rather than straight-up statements. It made sense for things to be ambiguous."

He makes it sound simple, but it wasn't. The 28-year-old wrote over 180 songs before 'Carry On The Grudge' was complete. "I couldn't see the wood for the trees," he laughs. "There was a period where it was hard work, when I found a new inspiration it'd start me off on a new tangent and get me enthusiastic."

One inspiration was Melbourne singer-songwriter – and fellow panic-attack sufferer – Courtney Barnett. "I was listening to her record a lot when I was writing 'The Prophet'," he says. "I went to see her live and it struck me how her songs seem simple but when you dig a bit deeper there's a lot of ideas."

When you dug deep, you found invention: the choral-like backing on 'Peter', 'Trouble's guitar zips. Despite the trauma and frustrations, Jamie T's comeback turned negatives into positives. The gaping hole he left when he vanished has been filled. ■ RHIAN DALY

LYRIC ANALYSIS

"Take me far from this sweet city stench/Where friends all betray each other/And I'm just another to war" – 'Turn On The Light'

Jamie T: "I wrote that song when I was in Nashville. It's funny when people assume that songs are about London. I wrote a few [songs on this album] out of London. I was reading a lot at the time and it popped into my mind when I was reading. It's hard to remember how I was feeling at the time so maybe it was [how I felt about London then]. It was more distaste at a situation, I suppose."

"I don't know what to do now I'm definitely on the list/I just sit back, drink brew with Coca-Cola communists" – 'The Prophet'

"It could mean anything really, couldn't it?! It sounds good! I suppose it's about people talking about quite serious topics and being quite far left in their views but then sitting around and drinking Coca-Cola. That was definitely a funny lyric. I wouldn't read too much into it."

Carry On The Grudge
JAMIE T





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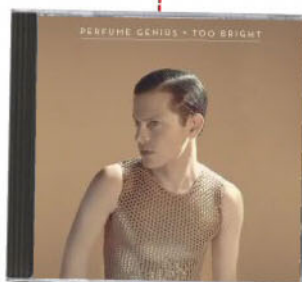
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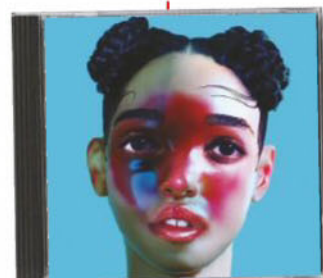
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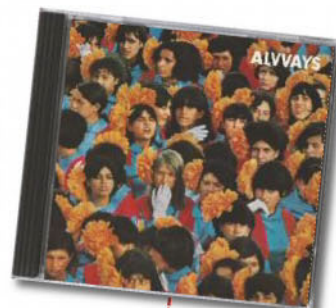
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7

Merchandise After The End

We're going to remake ourselves as a pop band," Merchandise singer Carson Cox told *NME* in January. And the frontman did what so many bands fail dismally to do, and stuck to his guns. By the time 'After The End' arrived in late August, Cox had given so many interviews boldly declaring where his band were headed that they simply had to come good. And while some diehard fans might have been put off by the serene sonic wizardry of 'After The End', few would disagree that it was the most accomplished collection of songs Merchandise have come up with to date. The Floridian act's first album to be released on a *proper* label (4AD), it's the sound of a band broadening their horizons, and is – in its sound, at least – comparable to REM's first steps into the mainstream after years as kings of the underground. For Cox, though, the most important thing it did was to help Merchandise evolve. As he tells *NME* now, 'After The End' was the first album they'd made as a proper band – so it was crucial they got everything right.

You've previously said that you never want to stop recording in your house. How did working with 4AD change things this time round?

Carson Cox, vocals: "It's funny, I had a friend who, when I sent him one of the tracks, was immediately like, 'Oh, I guess 4AD didn't let you record at your house, then?' And I was like, 'No! We recorded at the house!' I just sent it to London for the final mix and then it got mastered at Abbey Road. You know, that's the best advice for anyone who wants to make records – work on it yourselves for a long time and then get someone good to mix or master it."

Were you not even a little bit tempted to go whole hog and record in a proper studio?

"There's something about it [working in a studio]. It's too clinical and too serious, and when I was young, studios just scared me. I'm a really anxious person – failure was my biggest fear when I was young. Now, I've failed enough times it's just irrelevant. When we recorded at the house this time, I worked on it every

day. I'd wake up and just start working on it. Take a break, watch a movie, go back to it. That's why I have two computers – one I can just dedicate permanently to recording. I think it's the best way. More people are doing it that way; I don't think we're the only ones."

2013 was the first year all five of you were able to commit to the band fully. What impact did it have on the album?

"A lot of it was written while we were travelling. There's a lyric in the song 'Green Lady' about tea, which is a very English thing. At some point I got bored of writing about 'stuff'. You wanna just enter into a different kind of thing, so there's weird elements of Coleridge and opium-smoking English people in that song. And then maybe the way Enno wrote lyrics too, when he would just put together words that sounded cool."

Such a fuss was made over you signing to 4AD – were you happy with the way the album came out overall?

"I'm really pleased. It's not pop music in a direct, instant way, and I kind of

wanted that. We're the kind of band where you need to come into our universe. We don't gel with the rest of the world in the same way, so you have to understand how we like to do stuff in order to like the record. There are no rules." ■ MATT WILKINSON

▶ THE DETAILS

- ▶ **RELEASE DATE** August 25
- ▶ **LABEL** 4AD
- ▶ **LENGTH** 42:14
- ▶ **PRODUCERS** Carson Cox, Merchandise
- ▶ **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A
- ▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 9/10
- ▶ **TRACKLISTING** ▶ 1. Corridor ▶ 2. Enemy ▶ 3. True Monument ▶ 4. Green Lady ▶ 5. Life Outside The Mirror ▶ 6. Telephone ▶ 7. Little Killer ▶ 8. Looking Glass Waltz ▶ 9. After The End ▶ 10. Exile And Ego



6

La Roux

Trouble In Paradise

Three *NME* writers on why Elly Jackson's follow-up to 2009's 'La Roux' was the year's best pop album – even though it bombed

It was more than a 'difficult second album', says Eve Barlow

Set me up slowly, that's what you do to me/Set me up slowly, now I can't come down", goes Elly Jackson on 'Let Me Down Gently', the penultimate track on her near-perfect second album. The lyrics were cruelly apt, reflecting the heartbreaking disappointment that accompanies unrealistic expectations. After the commercial success of Jackson's 2009 debut 'La Roux' – which featured hit singles 'In For The Kill' and

'Bulletproof' – was always going to be hard. In doing so, the 26-year-old split from songwriting partner Ben Langmaid and released a disco album infused with social awareness ('Uptight Downtown', 'Kiss And Not Tell'), frenzied dance ('Silent Partner') and tongue-in-cheek fun ('Sexotheque'). The album was a commercial flop. But it could still become a classic post-recession pop moment for a generation of lost twentysomethings.

The songs outweighed the story, says Phil Hebblethwaite

La Roux's album was overshadowed by its inception story, and the mystery of why it didn't sell. Regarding the latter: who knows? Music is littered with examples of great records that bombed, and there's no accounting for the taste of the people who decide Radio 1's playlist (nothing from 'Trouble In Paradise' made the cut). Perhaps the five-year gap between Elly Jackson's two albums – during which she conquered crippling anxiety – didn't help. But the remarkable thing about 'Trouble In Paradise' was how fabulously coherent it was. All nine tracks were perfectly executed pop songs, from the indie-disco opener of 'Uptight Downtown' to should-have-been-a-single 'Sexotheque' and, of course, 'Tropical Chancer', a song about a kind of Caribbean Derek Trotter.

It was unendingly danceable, says Matthew Horton

In taking creative control of 'Trouble In Paradise', Elly Jackson filled out her sound with giant hooks, and added disco influences to her already retro electropop. Only the lack of radio play suffocated otherwise surefire hits like the Bowie funk of 'Uptight Downtown', the infectious Tom Tom Club bounce of 'Sexotheque', the deliciously warped phases of 'Cruel Sexuality' and the zigzagging rush of 'Kiss And Not Tell', denying the charts a flood of intelligent pop that could have dredged the EDM-clogged swamp. But radio's loss was the aficionado's gain. Jackson followed her instincts and blessed anyone who bought 'Trouble In Paradise' with a joyful, unendingly danceable album.

KEY TRACK

► **'Cruel Sexuality'**
Elly Jackson: "It's melancholic in a sexual way, but it's not necessarily about having sex. It's that yearning melancholy, but not the kind you find in a Neil Young song. It's something I hear in old soul music and Motown. I listened to The Isley Brothers' 'This Old Heart Of Mine', and the backing vocals in that second verse are the most sexual thing you've ever heard. But it's kind of vulnerable... – that kind of emotional frustration that has a kind of sexual undertone to it. It's constant and it keeps your adrenalin up."

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** July 21
- **LABEL** Polydor
- **LENGTH** 41:27
- **PRODUCERS** Elly Jackson, Ian Sherwin
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 6
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 9/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Uptight Downtown ► 2. Kiss And Not Tell ► 3. Cruel Sexuality ► 4. Paradise Is You ► 5. Sexotheque ► 6. Tropical Chancer ► 7. Silent Partner ► 8. Let Me Down Gently ► 9. The Feeling

5

Caribou Our Love

Four years have passed since 'Swim', the warm-hearted, psychedelic album that made Dan Snaith's Caribou project a very big deal indeed. Plenty of time, you'd think, for Snaith to construct his glittering magnum opus – but perhaps the real surprise, when breaking the surface of 'Our Love', was how intimate, minimal and personal it felt: dreamy, effervescent songs like 'Can't Do Without You' and the Jessy Lanza-fronted 'Second Chance' gaining their emotional power from intimate words, softly spoken. Meanwhile, Snaith's sideline in pneumatic dance music, conducted under the pseudonym Daphni, has taught him much about the possibilities of rhythm – and so these 10 beautifully crafted songs feel multi-functional in the best possible way, perfect

THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** October 6
- **LABEL** Merge
- **LENGTH** 41:53
- **PRODUCER** Dan Snaith
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 8
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 9/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Can't Do Without You ► 2. Silver ► 3. All I Ever Need ► 4. Our Love ► 5. Dive ► 6. Second Chance ► 7. Julia Brightly ► 8. Mars ► 9. Back Home ► 10. Your Love Will Set You Free

for solo listening on headphones, but infinitely scalable, blowing up to fill a festival field or fire up a dancefloor.

'Our Love' feels clean, minimal – were you aiming for simplicity?

Dan Snaith: "In the past, complexity has been a crutch of mine – you can make something sound big by throwing a thousand different samples at it, piling everything on top and covering it in a load of reverb. This time it was thinking about the listener, and placing things in focus for them, as it were. About picking the right things, and putting them in the right place."

You've really pulled back on the lyrics, too – 'Can't Do Without You' is just one phrase, repeated. What were you trying to communicate?

"I've been in a reflective mode recently, because of how good things have been musically these last few years, and also having a kid. I just wanted to communicate what was going on in my life – people passing away, falling in love, falling out of love.

Singing these songs in front of an audience, I'm sometimes hit by this dissonance – the idea that this is something very personal to me, and here's all those people watching

me sing about it. The song that is most personal is the last track, 'Your Love Will Set You Free'. The lyrics are about complications in relationships, people coming to compromises. But the concluding sentiment is celebratory; euphoric. It reminds me of my relationship with my wife, with my daughter, and when I'm playing it live I feel it very directly."

Have you had people contact you to talk about what the lyrics mean to them?

"Yeah, sometimes after shows, sometimes in a more private way. It's wonderful, actually. 'Can't Do Without You' was intended to be a big festival song, something you'd hear surrounded by a large group of people, and that actually happened – you see people put online, like, some memories from my summer, and that song will be playing over a montage. It's like it's captured a moment for people. I haven't had too many heartbroken people tearing up on me at the end of shows, but they're welcome to do that, I'll be a shoulder to cry on. Could I be an agony uncle? I don't know, who knows? If *NME* is looking to fill some column inches over the next year, I'm sure I could give it a shot." ■ LOUIS PATTISON



FAMOUS FANS Stella Mozgawa Warpaint

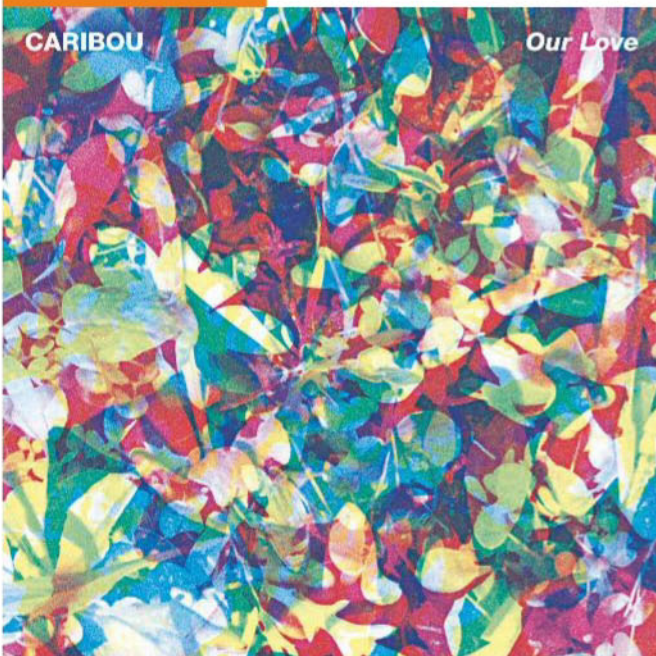


"It's so fresh. I got into [Caribou's 2010 album] 'Swim' really late, at the beginning of this year, and got properly, completely obsessed, listening to it every single day – which was the perfect segue into this record. I love people who make music by themselves, when it sounds as rich as that. It feels a lot more intimate than music made by a band. There's some kind of magic to it."

Tim Wheeler Ash



"One track I've particularly loved this year is 'Can't Do Without You' by Caribou. It's just such an earworm, it's stuck in my head completely and makes me feel great. I've not listened to the full album properly yet, but 'Swim' was one of my favourite records of the last few years, and this track feels like a step up from it."



4

Aphex Twin

Syro

All events, given an infinite time horizon, are probable. The fact that 2014 was the year we got to celebrate the return of Aphex Twin was largely down to chance. It could just as well have been 2008, 2018, 2005 or 2015. We could have been considering it alongside Stellastarr*, or Shitdisco or Bon Iver or 2018 smash Crackfroat ThruityJuice. The deep-web tracklisting felt very now, the blimp felt very 1912, but for sheer cultural impact, 'Syro's sealed Aphex capsule didn't relate to Hoover, UK funky, witch house, or anything else that has come and gone since then.

This was the Aphex Twin at his most quintessential; a comeback that wasn't spectacular in its dazzle, but utterly impregnable in its quality. There were few of his jagged drill'n'bass sorties, nor the soft ambient piano pieces that marked out 'Drukqs' in 2001. Instead, 'Syro' was a lava lamp of the neon gloop that makes up his most accessible mid-level. Consistent if not coherent, it was probably the closest thing Richard D James has ever made to a party album; instantly familiar yet oddly confusing.

After a few listens, it became apparent that this confusion arose because the music wouldn't sit still. On closer inspection, what had seemed quite straightforward was a shapeshifting organism that couldn't rest on the same patch for more than two bars. It was like standing in a house where the doors and windows were switching position. The idea that 'Syro' took seven years and six studios to make it happen began to sound more realistic. Whereas anyone else would have established a consistent sound palette and then worked with that, we learned in interviews that the obsessive musical mind at the heart of it hadn't been able to stop himself

APHEX TWIN	
SYRO	
minipops 67 [source field mix].....	120.2
XMAS_EVET10 [thanaton3 mix].....	120
produk 29.....	101
4 bit 9d api+e+6.....	128.26
180db.....	130
CIRCLONT6A [syrobonkus mix].....	141.98
fz pseudotimestretch+e+3.....	138.85
CIRCLONT14 [shrymoming mix].....	152.97
syro u473t8+e [piezoluminescence mix].....	141.98
PAPAT4 [pineal mix].....	155
s950tx16wasr10 [earth portal mix].....	163.97
aisatsana.....	102
*MARCHROMT3DA edit 2b 96.....	104.980
(*Bonus Track for Japan)	
Website bandwidth costs.....	£0.00204
Watermark CDs for Sync promo mailout.....	£0.00029
Racking and promotions with Independent	
Coalition networks (CIMS/AIMS/MMN) in US.....	£0.02838
Promotions with UK indie music stores.....	£0.00611
Print advertising in Canada.....	£0.00243
Food expenses for press trip in Australia.....	£0.00014
Postage costs for US radio promotion mailout.....	£0.00304
Retail marketing and racking in Denmark.....	£0.00099
Venue hire for LA listening party.....	£0.00486
Finished copy CDs for Sync promotion.....	£0.00073
Outdoor poster in	
Brussels, Antwerp and Gent.....	£0.01988
Postage costs for	
press promotion mailout in Japan.....	£0.00075
Venue hire for Toronto listening party.....	£0.00122
12 page digipack printed 1/0 [Black 6]	
with clear tray.....	£0.578
Online advertising in Italy.....	£0.00166
Venue hire and refreshments for	
Sydney listening party.....	£0.0018
Online advertising in Australia.....	£0.00338
Backline for LA listening party.....	£0.00243
Racking and promotion with	
chain retail in UK.....	£0.00407
Retail marketing and racking in Belgium.....	£0.00282
Production cost for	
retail shopping bag for Japan.....	£0.00212
Cinema advertising in France.....	£0.00497
Christine's lunch/coffee expenses for	
meetings with US writers.....	£0.0003
Shota, Masa and Kiriko's expenses for	

APHEX TWIN
SYRO▲ STORY BEHIND
THE SLEEVE

Ian Anderson, designer and founder of The Designers Republic:

"The original ideas were Richard's. He wanted to list all the costs involved in the making of the album. Between him, Warp and The Designers Republic, this idea was fine-tuned into listing the costs involved in the production and promotion of the format the listener is holding in their hands. As far as I know it's as real as any other truth we're presented with. The people at Warp spent a lot of time compiling the overall costs and re-engineering them as fractions of unit cost, so it makes sense for them to be real. The folded image is totally Richard's idea and creation. He supplied it as two finished versions. We used the one that worked best for what we wanted to do. Originally I don't think there was an intention of having a representation of him. I suggested there should be something, a series of images for the inner sleeves, but we decided to keep the packaging pure. Warp wanted an image with more presence than the small album cover text for ads and street promo. I like that the ads and package aren't simply adaptations of the same idea – it's a very '70s idea, when it wasn't practical to look at reproducing album artwork in the press or on billboards."

from messing up and changing his studio settings on every track because he "got bored".

It's hard to tell where that same

combination of mischievousness, obsessiveness and blithe casualness will push the grinning Cornishman next. After his famously 'lost' 'Caustic Window' album was flogged off on the web earlier this year, the beast seems to have finally awoken from its long slumber. Perhaps some of the secret "thousand song" tranche he claims to be sitting on will finally see the light of day. If not, there is at least the consolation that apparently James' five-year-old son has downloaded cracked music software on The Pirate Bay and already made his own Bandcamp. The race is on to see which one can release their next album first.

■ GAVIN HAYNES

► THE DETAILS

► RELEASE DATE September 19

► LABEL Warp

► LENGTH 64:31

► PRODUCER Richard D James

► HIGHEST UK CHART

POSITION 8

► ORIGINAL NME RATING 9/10

► TRACKLISTING ►1.

minipops 67 [source field

mix] ►2. XMAS_EVET10

[thanaton3 mix] ►3. produk

29 ►4. 4 bit 9d api+e+6

►5. 180db_ ►6. CIRCLONT6A

[syrobonkus mix] ►7. fz

pseudotimestretch+e+3

►8. CIRCLONT14 [shrymoming

mix] ►9. syro u473t8+e

[piezoluminescence mix]

►10. PAPAT4 [pineal mix]

►11. s950tx16wasr10 [earth

portal mix] ►12. aisatsana



3

The War On Drugs Lost In The Dream

Thanks to one grouchy guy with a chip on his shoulder, there's a name for the sound of 'Lost In The Dream', an album that's transformed Philadelphia rockers The War On Drugs from cult concern to band on the tipping point: it's "beer-commercial rock".

This three-word epithet is the work of Sun Kil Moon's Mark Kozelek, who has taken it upon himself to launch one of the lamest beefs in music history (see page 42). But in a way, Kozelek has done The War On Drugs a favour – he's drawn further attention to a band who, this year, hit a creative peak.

The origins of 'Lost In The Dream' lie in turmoil and insecurity. Returning from tour after 2011's 'Slave Ambient', the band's creative lynchpin, Adam Granduciel, found he could no longer blend into everyday life. "All my relationships, romantic or otherwise, were crumbling, and I was in a period of great self-doubt," he told *NME* earlier this year. "It's not like I'm a paranoid schizophrenic, but at the time I thought I was." Granduciel committed himself to therapy both mental and musical, and the latter manifested itself as his new album. 'Lost In The Dream' was an effort to create something to elevate his band out of the indie ghetto. To do so, he plugged into the ley lines of FM rock: driving beats, squealing solos, freewheeling anthems – the stuff of countless Route 66 fly-drive holidays.

So far, so 1976, but 'Lost In The Dream' had something else, too – a sense of yearning and sadness, a cyclical nature that felt like a progression by increments as the album stretched on, jolting the listener out from under the stars-and-stripes-bedecked blanket of Springsteen rock.

Yes, it's the kind of music that attracts aging rockist blokes like a BOGOF offer on an *Old Grey Whistle Test* boxset. Yes, bits of it are nicked from Springsteen and Rod Stewart and Billy Joel. But listening to 'Lost In The Dream' is to exist as its title

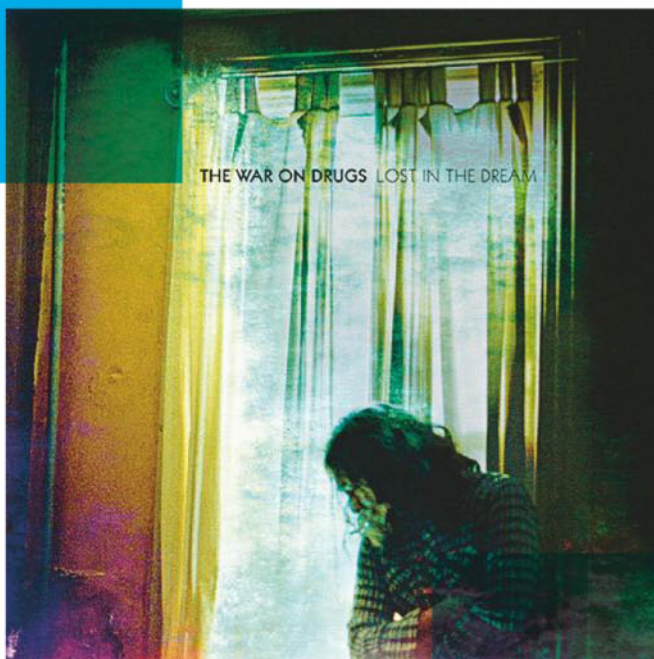
promises. If this is beer-commercial rock, make mine a cold one.

Speaking from the set of *Later... With Jools Holland*, Granduciel is reluctant to agree that 'Lost In The Dream' has been the making of

his band. "I'm still pretty humble about the whole thing, and very grateful," he says. "I don't think it's changed anything apart from playing to a lot more people and our friends thinking we're rock stars." The question remains: how will he follow the album up? "I'm definitely aware that this album comes from conflict in my life," he says. "I don't know if I can tap into that again for the next one. I'm not sure I'd want to, either." ■ **DAN STUBBS**

▶ THE DETAILS

- ▶ **RELEASE DATE** March 18
- ▶ **LABEL** Secretly Canadian
- ▶ **LENGTH** 60:27
- ▶ **PRODUCER** Adam Granduciel
- ▶ **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 18
- ▶ **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 9
- ▶ **TRACKLISTING** ▶ 1. Under The Pressure ▶ 2. Red Eyes ▶ 3. Suffering ▶ 4. An Ocean In Between The Waves ▶ 5. Disappearing ▶ 6. Eyes To The Wind ▶ 7. The Haunting Idle ▶ 8. Burning ▶ 9. Lost In The Dream ▶ 10. In Reverse



ADAM GRANDUCIEL ON...

...beating Sun Kil Moon in this list

"I listened to ['Benji'] a lot when we were on tour. I thought it was such a beautiful record, weird and cool and great. I haven't listened to it since this whole thing between us started, but I probably could if I tried really hard. It would be pretty high in my list of albums of the year. I don't really know what his problem is. He's probably just trying to have a little fun. Maybe there's some comfort in being a little bit of an outsider."

...ripping off The Boss

"Does it annoy me when people say we ripped off Springsteen's 'Dancing In The Dark' and Rod Stewart's 'Young Turks'? Not really, no. The keyboard riff [on 'Burning'] reminded me of 'Dancing In The Dark' and I wanted it to be like that – really low and percussive. But the 'Young Turks' thing: I wasn't familiar with that riff at all. When the record came out I heard about it and went on YouTube to listen to it. I was like, 'Holy shit!'"



2

Mac DeMarco

Salad Days

Onstage in London last October, Mac DeMarco dropped to his knees and snogged his already kneeling bass player Pierce McGarry. It wasn't the first time. He'd spent most of 2013 touring second album '2', necking beers, huffing cigarettes and rattling through the same gag-filled set every night. This endless carousel ruined him. And in November, when he returned to his filthy, tiny studio apartment in New York to record third album 'Salad Days', he was in pieces.

The burnout resulted in his best record yet. Its 10 tracks are seamless, and full of warm, twanging chords and buzzing synth lines. These are pop songs with downbeat lyrics

about the negative effects of touring. The narrative of songs like 'Passing Out Pieces' ("What mom don't know/Has taken its toll on me/It's all I've seen/That can't be wiped clean/It's hard to believe/What it's made of me") was gripping. Here was a document of confusion and discomfort, from someone previously known for good-time rock'n'roll.

From his new house in Far Rockaway in Queens, New York, Mac elaborates on the change of tone between albums two and three. "I didn't have anything to be frustrated about before, but for this record it was 'touring is pretty sweet, but it's slowly killing me with all the alcohol and it's pretty insane'. I'm interested in catchy pop music, and this record's purpose was to bring the spirits up – take all this stuff you're feeling and then pop yourself out of the slump. When I'm complaining, it starts off like, 'Oh boy, I'm tired', but then halfway through the chorus comes in like, 'Shut up, you little prick, you're able to go round the world playing shows!' I'm stopping myself being a little butthole."

His approach worked best on 'Let My Baby Stay', the album's saddest song, on which he sang tenderly about getting his girlfriend Kiera, also Canadian, a US visa. Mac deliberately made it the last track on the A-side of the vinyl release as a jolt of emotion before 'Passing Out Pieces', the record's glistening centrepiece, driven by a bouncing synth and an outrageously good bassline. Afterwards came the slow and enveloping kiss-off of 'Treat Her Better', 'Chamber Of Reflection', 'Go Easy' and 'Jonny's Odyssey'. Perfect, moody sequencing.

All of which made 'Salad Days' far more than a tired mope from an exhausted man. It exposed another side of Mac DeMarco: no longer just a prankster, but a man with a big heart who had quietly gifted us a classic. ■ BEN HOMEWOOD

► THE DETAILS

- **RELEASE DATE** April 21
- **LABEL** Captured Tracks
- **LENGTH** 35:12
- **PRODUCER** Chris Heidman
- **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** N/A
- **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 9/10
- **TRACKLISTING** ► 1. Salad Days ► 2. Blue Boy ► 3. Brother ► 4. Let Her Go ► 5. Goodbye Weekend ► 6. Let My Baby Stay ► 7. Passing Out Pieces ► 8. Treat Her Better ► 9. Chamber Of Reflection ► 10. Go Easy ► 11. Jonny's Odyssey

SECRETS OF THE 'SALAD DAYS' SESSIONS

► Solitude

Mac DeMarco: "At first I felt outside pressure and it freaked me out. Then I realised, 'No, what the fuck am I doing?' I like to be alone when I record. Well, Keira was there, but it was really just me, I guess."

► Leg cramps

"I'd try and sit in different parts of the room or set the drums up four feet to the left, but then you couldn't open the door. There was so little space and it was filthy, not super pleasant. I got lots of leg cramps from sitting on the floor."

► Vibes

"I got really into looking at posters of windows with views on eBay. I never got one but I wanted something to look out at, to give the room a different vibe. I also looked up a lot of freemasonry stuff."

1

St Vincent

St Vincent

Annie Clark was an incredible artist making incredible music long before 'St Vincent' arrived. Each of her three previous albums were like being gifted court-side seats to the strangest show in town: bizarre exhibitions full of songs that flickered between tender and torrid, like the twisted, evil leer of 'Your Lips Are Red' (from 2007 debut 'Marry Me') or the empty gut-ache of 'The Strangers' (the opening track from 2009 follow-up 'Actor'); then the cracked vulnerability of

2011's 'Strange Mercy', which took in sleazy confusion ('Chloe In The Afternoon') and declarations of independence ('Cheerleader'). If 'St Vincent' had never existed, Clark would have still been one of the bravest, boldest musicians of this generation.

But 'St Vincent' does exist. And now Clark has become something bigger, something brighter, something more: a frazzled tour de

force, a warped comet, a bamboozling package of singer-meets-performer that's the closest thing we have to a 21st-century Ziggy Stardust. On her fourth album, Clark elbowed her way into the space between character and musician and fucked up the margins, wobbling and breaking the lines. It was an album obsessed – plagued – with worries and fears about identity in the digital age, about how anyone can make themselves heard above the din, about how anything can mean anything these days. And

there, shouting above the white noise, sat Clark: on the LP's artwork, she was a terrifying, stern-faced overlord sat on a throne, rising above it all. She was apart; she was different; she was a star.

That title was there for a reason, too. Think self-titled and you think honesty, openness, a 'this is me, unvarnished' baring of the soul. You've been duped. Clark was a cypher flitting between lost souls, like when she inhabited the psyche of a reclusive pervert on 'Birth In Reverse' and signed "*Just an*

► THE DETAILS

► **RELEASE DATE** February 25

► **LABEL** Loma Vista/Republic

► **LENGTH** 40:04

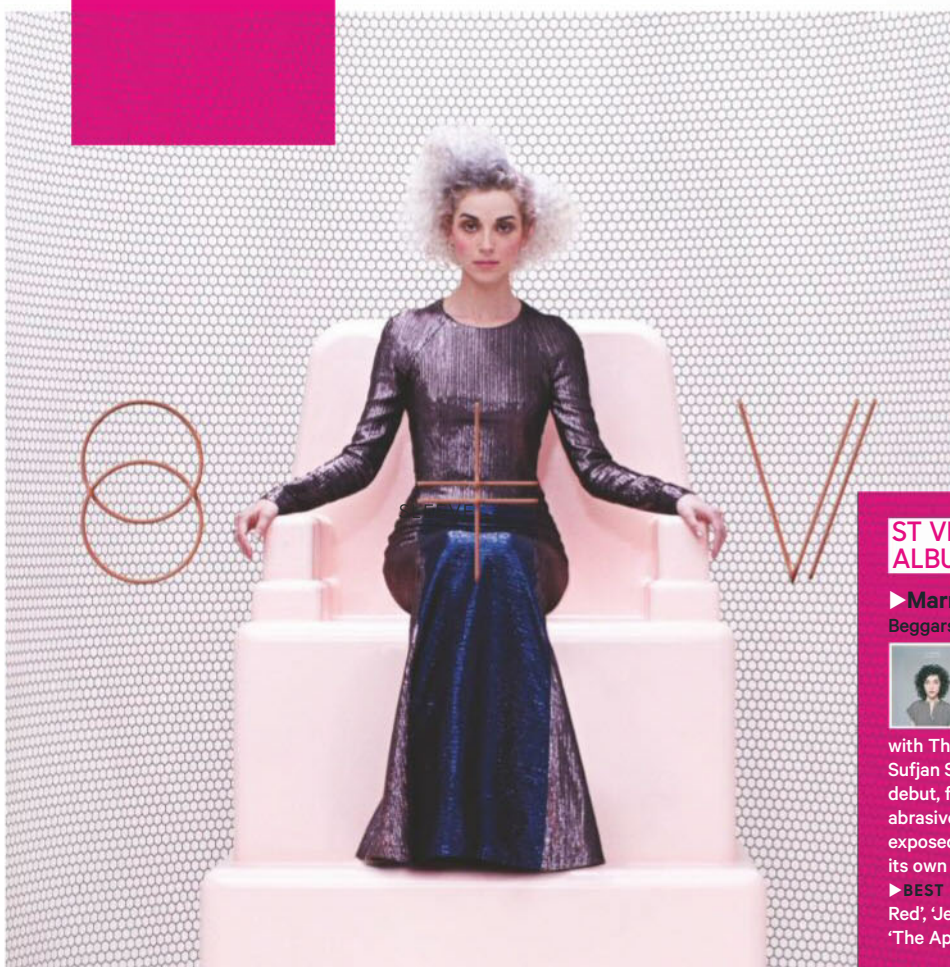
► **PRODUCER** John Congleton

► **HIGHEST UK CHART POSITION** 21

► **ORIGINAL NME RATING** 8/10

► **TRACKLISTING**

- 1. Rattlesnake ► 2. Birth In Reverse ► 3. Prince Johnny ► 4. Huey Newton ► 5. Digital Witness ► 6. I Prefer Your Love ► 7. Regret ► 8. Bring Me Your Loves ► 9. Psychopath ► 10. Every Tear Disappears ► 11. Severed Crossed Fingers



ST VINCENT ALBUM BY ALBUM

► Marry Me

Beggars Banquet (2007)



Clark had long been a supporting player in the US indie scene, moonlighting with The Polyphonic Spree and Sufjan Stevens. Her full-length debut, full of ornate pop with an abrasive and edgy underbelly, exposed a talent deserving of its own spotlight.

► **BEST TRACKS** 'Your Lips Are Red', 'Jesus Saves, I Spend', 'The Apocalypse Song'

► Actor

4AD (2009)



The haunting opener 'The Strangers' set the tone. Darker and bleaker than 'Marry Me', 'Actor' flitted confusingly – brilliantly – between the rollicking rock of 'Actor Out Of Work' and the grimace of 'Laughing With A Mouth Full Of Blood'.

► **BEST TRACKS** 'The Strangers', 'Laughing With A Mouth Full Of Blood', 'Actor Out Of Work'

ordinary day/Take out the garbage, masturbate" over jarring, discordant noise. Or when, on 'Prince Johnny', she got inside the head of a self-destructive face on the New York scene who tried to find self-worth through sexual conquests. "You bragged of when and where and who you were gonna bed next", she sang over floaty, cotton-like guitars, before she reached the telltale chorus: "Saw you pray to all to make you a real boy". And elsewhere, there was the scree-and-tumble din of 'Bring Me Your Loves' – all ricocheting, flashy guitar lines bumping and barging into one another – in which Clark got trapped in a relationship rut where romantic partners aren't people, just animals to be toyed with. "I thought you were like a dog", she sneered, "but you made a pet of me".

It's hard to find meaning in meaningless times. "If I can't show it, if you can't see me/What's the point in doing anything?" demanded Clark on the jerky brass of the strutting 'Digital Witness'. "No-one around so I take off my clothes", she sang on the twitchy, splintered 'Rattlesnake'. "Am I the only one?" Then, when the things that matter rose to the surface, they were all the more bewitching: shapes that loomed so clearly among the fuzz and debris. 'I Prefer Your Love', an ode to her mum, was a breathy, swooning ode to something so powerful and pure ("I prefer your love to Jesus") that even the Son of God couldn't trump it.

And yet here was the rub: 'St Vincent' was an album that perfectly summed up the crisis of identity in the digital age, but in making it, St Vincent – the character and construct – had

never been so immaculate. Clark paid tribute to her 'Love This Giant' collaborator David Byrne, and cited the former Talking Heads man as a key influence in the way she thought about live shows and performance. But 'St Vincent' was Clark's strange baby alone, and over the

past year she has transformed herself into a larger-than-life creature. At a gig at London's Roundhouse in October, she wasn't Annie Clark; she was the frazzled, frenetic St Vincent, an otherworldly beast who was both 21st-century soothsayer and incredible pop star. She pranced around the stage on her tiptoes like a clockwork mouse; she rolled theatrically down stacks of boxes like a felled cowboy; she slithered and writhed across the ground; she delivered weird

monologues about strapping pizza boxes to her arms, trying to fly and relishing the bloody noses she suffered as a result. Her show was dedicated to the "freaks and outsiders" of London, and it wasn't a throwaway comment. If we're the weirdos who flock to hear her sermons, then she's the weirdest of them all. Look upon my works, ye freaks, and despair.

"A party record you could play at a funeral," is how Clark described 'St Vincent' months before its release. And while that eerie, unsettling stiff-limbed sound could be heard in the sinewy tumble of 'Huey Newton' or the skittering-but-sweet synths of 'Severed Crossed Fingers', it only told half the story. Because 'St Vincent' wasn't the soundtrack for mourning or farewells. It was a celebration, the first chapter of Clark's next phase, and the most pristine, precise and on-point takedown of 2014 imaginable. No other record summed up the chaos and confusion of these fractured times, and no-one turned themselves from songwriter to icon-in-waiting like Clark did with St Vincent. "Call the 21st century, tell her give us a break", she groaned on 'Every Tear Disappears'. Make sure to tell her she's got a new heroine to take on, too. ■ BEN HEWITT

► Strange Mercy

4AD (2011)



Arguably Clark's most confessional work, this was full of proud declarations.

It was the contrasts that made it tick, from the bruised ego of 'Cruel', with its fuzzy guitars and woodwind flourishes, to the woozy but rousing emancipation of 'Cheerleader'.

► **BEST TRACKS** 'Cheerleader', 'Cruel', 'Surgeon', 'Chloe In The Afternoon'

► Love This Giant (with David Byrne)

4AD (2012)



Clark found her perfect foil in Talking Heads supremo David

Byrne, and the two took a freakish trip through biblical resurrection ('Lazarus'), saucy grooves ('Who') and off-kilter oddness ('Ice Age'), aided by honking brass.

► **BEST TRACKS** 'Lazarus', 'Ice Age', 'Who', 'I Am An Ape'



Top 50

tracks

of 2014

1 Future Islands Seasons (Waiting On You)

- 2 Caribou
Can't Do Without You
- 3 Fat White Family
Touch The Leather
- 4 The War On Drugs
Red Eyes
- 5 Run The Jewels
Blockbuster Night Pt 1
- 6 Kasabian
Eez-eh
- 7 St Vincent
Digital Witness
- 8 Jamie T
Zombie
- 9 Royal Blood
Little Monster
- 10 Mac DeMarco
Chamber Of Reflection

- 11 Lana Del Rey West Coast
- 12 Merchandise Little Killer
- 13 Jungle Busy Earnin'
- 14 Jack White Lazaretto
- 15 Kate Tempest Marshall Law
- 16 Shamir I Know It's A Good Thing
- 17 Iceage The Lord's Favorite
- 18 Aphex Twin minipops 67 (source field mix)
- 19 Alvvays Archie, Marry Me
- 20 Honeyblood Super Rat
- 21 Jamie T Love Is Only A Heartbeat Away
- 22 Run The Jewels Close Your Eyes (And Count To Fuck)
- 23 Damon Albarn The Selfish Giant
- 24 St Vincent Prince Johnny
- 25 Warpaint Disco//Very
- 26 Mac DeMarco Passing Out Pieces
- 27 Taylor Swift Shake It Off
- 28 Interpol All The Rage Back Home
- 29 Slaves Where's Your Car Debbie?
- 30 Perfume Genius Queen

- 31 Cherry Glazerr
Had Ten Dollaz
- 32 Lana Del Rey Ultraviolence
- 33 Death From Above 1979
White Is Red
- 34 The War On Drugs
Under The Pressure
- 35 Manic Street Preachers
Futurology
- 36 Noel Gallagher's High Flying
Birds In The Heat Of
The Moment
- 37 Sharon Van Etten Every Time
The Sun Comes Up
- 38 Morrissey Kiss Me A Lot
- 39 Protomartyr Scum, Rise!
- 40 Sleater-Kinney
Bury Our Friends
- 41 La Roux Uptight Downtown
- 42 Ex Hex Hot And Cold
- 43 SBTRKT New Dorp New York
(feat. Ezra Koenig)
- 44 Juce Call You Out
- 45 Sun Kil Moon Ben's My Friend
- 46 Flying Lotus Never Catch Me
(feat. Kendrick Lamar)
- 47 Gruff Rhys
American Interior
- 48 Ariel Pink Put Your Number
In My Phone
- 49 David Bowie Sue (Or In
A Season Of Crime)
- 50 Alt-J Hunger Of The Pine





Oh sure, Christmas is good.
But is it as good as winning every
album in *NME's* Top 50 Albums
Of 2014 on CD, courtesy of our
good pals Fopp? Doubtful.

WHAT WAS NUMBER ONE IN NME'S
ALBUMS OF THE YEAR 2013 LIST?

- A ARCTIC MONKEYS 'AM'
- B THE STROKES 'COMEDOWN MACHINE'
- C FOALS 'HOLY FIRE'

TO ENTER, HEAD TO NME.COM/WIN







Slaves

Slade Rooms,
Wolverhampton

Sunday, November 16

Kent pair tackle biscuits and
“miserable fuckers” in an
angry, amusing punk assault

PHOTO BY ANDY HUGHES

▶ “What’s your favourite biscuit?” Slaves guitarist Laurie Vincent asks an audience member, before chiding him over the answer: “You can’t have Fox’s – that’s a *brand*.” Alongside teatime banter, the Kent punks – completed by singer/drummer Isaac Holman – unshackle an energetic, noisy assault. The agitated ‘It’s An Epidemic’, the irresistible Stooges goon-pop of ‘Where’s Your Car Debbie?’ and 15-second scrum ‘Girl Fight’ are angry and amusing in equal measure. Isaac bashes his kit like a sugar-deprived kid destroying a piñata, while on new track ‘Cheer Up London’ – “about the miserable fuckers on the Underground” – Laurie switches to bass. By the end, fans have scaled the barrier and Isaac is crowdsurfing, deservedly held aloft like a king. ■ GARY RYAN

8

Damon Albarn

Royal Albert Hall, London

Saturday, November 15

Graham Coxon and De La Soul are among the guests as Damon turns the Albert Hall into a local boozer

“It was terrifying coming here,” Damon Albarn grins, gazing up at the vaulting dome and ornate arches of the Royal Albert Hall, “but we decided it was just a really big pub.”

Prince Harry’s local, maybe, or the sort of boozer Elton John might build in his back garden. But Damon’s true to his word. Celebrating his debut solo album ‘Everyday Robots’ tonight, he rallies his mates for a rousing knees-up. He’s as jubilant as a lottery winner with his gold card behind the bar, chucking copious liquid in people’s faces, hugging strangers and clambering over the furniture to serenade a gaggle of girls.

Meanwhile, on their travels from the sedate concert halls of early spring to the festival season, Albarn’s band The Heavy Seas have got mighty choppy. As Damon takes to the stage miming the title of Gorillaz’ ‘Spitting Out The Demons’, bassist Seye Adelekan writhes on a podium thumbing its dungeon-deep basslines in a silly hat and guitarist Jeff Wootton provides Clash slashes like a tartan-trousered troublemaker. Since their February debut at Manchester’s 6 Music Festival they’ve learned to beef up the found-sound subtleties of Damon’s hushed and reflective record to command the biggest halls. A string section and gospel choir turn ‘Lonely Press Play’ into a slick soul revue and ‘Everyday Robots’ into sonic bath foam, its theme of stark dislocation flooded with warmth. Delicate clockwork laments like ‘Photographs (You Are

SETLIST

- Spitting Out The Demons
- Lonely Press Play
- Everyday Robots
- Tomorrow Comes Today
- Slow Country
- Kids With Guns
- 3 Changes
- Bamako City (with Afel Bocoum and Madou Diabaté)
- Sunset Coming On (Afel and Madou)
- Hostiles
- Photographs
- Kingdom Of Doom
- You And Me
- Hollow Ponds
- El Manana
- Don’t Get Lost In Heaven
- Out Of Time
- All Your Life
- End Of A Century
- The Man Who Left Himself
- Tender
- Mr Tembo
- Feel Good Inc
- Clint Eastwood
- Heavy Seas Of Love

Taking Now)’ and ‘Hollow Ponds’ grow howling climaxes, and ‘Hostiles’ is given a huge hug of strings that suggests it wants to hang around for next year’s Proms. ‘Everyday Robots’ has become fully sentient.

Pumped up with chunks of Gorillaz and The Good, The Bad & The Queen, the lineage linking all of Albarn’s work emerges like a magic-eye picture. ‘Kids With Guns’ is the demonic twin of ‘Song 2’, no matter how much of Salt-N-Pepa’s ‘Push It’ Damon hisses over its final barrage. A stampede through ‘Kingdom Of Doom’ sounds like ‘Parklife’ playing in the Japanese horror video game *Silent Hill* (‘Darklife’, anyone?). The sublime ‘Slow Country’ becomes a ‘Tender’-style singalong, and when Damon brings on Afel Bocoum and Madou Diabaté, collaborators from 2002’s ‘Mali Music’, there’s a similar euphoria to ‘Sunset Coming On’.

All of which makes tonight a pints aloft celebration of Albarn’s entire musical journey, a lifetime of geezerish melodic alchemy crushed into an ecstatic 90 minutes. And nowhere is it more celebrated than when the 46-year-old takes to the piano for a glorious solo ‘Out Of Time’, ushering in a section of Blur

A JUBILANT DAMON RALLIES HIS MATES FOR A ROUSING KNEES-UP

hits and rarities. The screams that greet Graham Coxon’s arrival for a spellbinding, stripped-back ‘End Of A Century’ couldn’t be louder if Elgar himself had come on to conduct ‘Land Of Hope And Glory’. Their chemistry during ‘Tender’ still sparkles – Damon the tortured ringmaster, Graham the wistful sidekick wrestling with a manic-depressive guitar – and their banter remains charming. “It must’ve been in the mid to late ‘90s,” Graham ponders as they try to remember which single the never-before-played fuzz epic ‘The Man Who Left Himself’ was the B-side of. “That’s why we can’t remember it,” Damon quips.

From here on, it’s an indie *This Is Your Life*. The Leytonstone City Mission Choir that Damon used to eavesdrop on as a child blast out a jubilant ‘Mr Tembo’. De La Soul bounce on cackling like cartoon villains and turn ‘Feel Good Inc’ into a hip-hop party. East London rapper Kano bounds through ‘Clint Eastwood’’s devil skank and Brian Eno shows up to coo the wispy verse of ‘Heavy Seas Of Love’. It’s an Albarnorama, the world’s biggest-ever lock-in. And in Damon’s gaff, Damon rules. ■ MARK BEAUMONT



MORE GIGS

Clipping

The 100 Club, London

Monday, November 10

There's been a blank space in abrasive, eccentric hip-hop ever since Death Grips imploded. Clipping, a caustic trio from Los Angeles, arrive in London showing the potential to fill it. Led by MC Daveed Diggs, they slay a small crowd with industrial hip-hop. Diggs' furious flow drips with charisma and charm as he sweats his way through the killer 'Body And Blood', the sparse 'Work Work' and Alt-J rejig 'Story 4: Sleeplessly Embracing'. At the climax, he leaps into the floor to deliver his final rhymes while fans storm the stage.

LEONIE COOPER

8

Girlpool

The Hope, Brighton

Friday, November 14

LA duo Girlpool arrive for their first British show with just a guitar, a bass and a self-titled EP to their name. Aside from bratty opener 'Blah Blah Blah', Cleo Tucker and Harmony Tividad are quiet and focused, and their songs envelop the room by stealth. Their harmonies are more country than LA punk, until Tividad's screams split the air on 'Jane'. No-one's ready to punch to its 'If you are a Jane put your fists up too' payoff yet, but give them time. Of the new songs, the lonesome chimes of 'Emily' are best.

STUART HUGGETT

8

THE VIEW FROM THE CROWD



Molly, 18, Chichester

"I loved it – it wasn't what I was expecting at all. It's nice to come into something with an open mind and come out thinking, 'I love all the songs.' When De La Soul came on, it was amazing."



Will, 19, from Chichester

"It was brilliant; for me the best bit was when Graham Coxon came out. 'Tender' was the moment for me."



Bronte, 19, Kingston

"My highlight was De La Soul. I love Gorillaz, so it was a bit of a moment when they did that song. Damon's so lively, which is great to watch. He connected with the audience each and every song."



Miles Kane, 28, from Liverpool

"It was a very inspirational gig – my highlight was 'Clint Eastwood'. My mate Jeff was playing guitar and he really rocks out. The same guy who makes my suits makes his suits."

Ariel Pink

Scala, London

Monday,

November 17



The "Jimmy Savile of Los Angeles"

launches 'Pom Pom' in provocative style

After a glide through new single 'Picture Me Gone', Ariel Pink rocks back on his studded platform heels, twiddles his hair around a finger and says, "I'm the Jimmy Savile of Los Angeles."

SETLIST

- Picture Me Gone
- Dayzed Inn Daydreams
- Plastic Raincoats In The Pig Parade
- White Freckles
- Four Shadows
- Lipstick
- Not Enough Violence
- Put Your Number In My Phone
- One Summer Night
- Nude Beach
- A Go-Go
- Goth Bomb
- Dinosaur Carebears
- Negative Ed
- Sexual Athletics
- Jell-O
- Black Ballerina
- Exile On Frog Street
- She's Gone
- Bright Lit Blue Skies

By comparing himself to a prolific sex abuser after tonight's opening song, Pink is acknowledging the controversy that has trailed him in recent months, including accusations of misogyny and a public spat with 4AD labelmate Grimes.

But after that, his concentration is firmly on the music. And it's triumphant. Clip-clopping around, grinning and yelping at his band – which includes Spiritualized's Jason Pierce on guitar for the opening two songs – the 36-year-old looks like a child in front of a toybox. Aside from the first two numbers – 'Dayzed Inn Daydreams' follows 'Picture...' – the 90-minute set squelches

through 'Pom Pom' in order. 'Plastic Raincoats In The Pig Parade', without its neighing horse sounds, is deep and fuzzy. On 'White Freckles', the band Pink calls a "new, improved Haunted Graffiti" really find their groove. Cosmic synths, humungous bass and fidgety drums from the Germs' Don Bolles coalesce under Pink's ridiculous lyrics ('*Freckles! Freckles!*'). 'Four Shadows' slow cock-rock showcases Pink's heavily affected vocals, but he's wildest on 'Not Enough Violence', pushing out his belly and bawling "*Fertiliser!*".

'Put Your Number In My Phone' sounds every bit as good as 'Round And Round', Pink's biggest hit from 2010's 'Before Today'. He omits it tonight – there's no room among the outrageous closing sequence of cartoon noise ('Dinosaur Carebears'), sleazy role play ('Black Ballerina') and coital grunting ('Sexual Athletics'). The funk-heavy 'Bright Lit Blue Skies' – also from 'Before Today' – closes, but it's the ribbiting frog noises from 'Exile On Frog Street', played two songs earlier, that stick in the memory. They're emblematic of the impenetrable mindset of a musician who earlier, after burping into his mic, said: "I can do *anything* I want." ■ BEN HOMEWOOD

83

9

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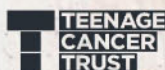
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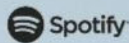


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Leather report

The young guns of Wham! ricochet off the charts and onto the NME cover, with their touchy-feely take on machismo

Smashing into the Top 10 with their second single 'Young Guns (Go For It)', Wham! – 19-year-old Hertfordshire ska fans George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley – are, according to Lynn Hanna, reflecting “the excitement of a harder, hidden world where ‘normal’ rules are suspended and different, darker systems are evolving”. Um... yeah! The lads, meanwhile, natter on about failing their exams, working as cleaners and labourers and stupidly signing to CBS for only £500 each. “We knew we were going to be massive, so we didn’t want a big advance,” says George. “It was the usual job of panicking and signing when you shouldn’t

have done it, [but] any mistakes we may have made, we’d do it again to be Number 10 this week.”

Readying to re-release their first single ‘Wham Rap! (Enjoy What You Do)’, “a spirited fist shaken in the face of adult apathy”, they admit, “We just thought ‘let’s write about what we’re doing and make it funny’... We were thinking about doing [a song] about a driving test.”

THATCHER'S RASTA

Jamaican poet Benjamin Zephaniah has been taking the cabaret circuit by storm with his impassioned takedowns of the PM – “I don’t like the Thatcher”, goes ‘Margaret Thatcher’, “I said I don’t like that girl/Her I want to batter”. “I did a show at the Half Moon Theatre,” he tells Paul Bradshaw, “and this little yout’ come up to me an’ says, ‘I like the one about Mrs Thatcher. I HATE her!’ I thought this yout’ probably doesn’t understand politics but he knows the reason he’s not having his milk is because of this woman.”

SVENGHASTLY

Barney Hoskyns meets Kim Fowley, the mammoth-headed svengali and “Reptile Prince of Hollywood Trash” behind The Runaways, as he unveils his latest batch of radio-rock hopefuls, including Candy (“the male Go-Go’s” whom he describes as “if Kim Wilde fucked Jimmy Savile”), and informs us that “when I fuck, I play the dub version of ‘Guilty’ by Honey Bane, followed by the first Ramones album”. He’s also full of name-drops: “Jim Morrison said to me, ‘You’re not a bad singer and you’re a good poet, but you’ll only make a great record when you’re in love.’ So you’ll have to wait until I find my Linda McCartney.”

REVIEWED THIS WEEK



**Chic
Tongue
In Chic**

“Music to drink
vermouth by;

it’s the bright one, the trite one,
it’s Chic.” ■ JULIE BURCHILL

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

► The Teardrop Explodes split up, five years to the day after their debut gig.

► Reading Festival is under threat as the council vote to banish it from its site in Richfield Avenue.

► A new play called *Pistols!*, based on the story of the Sex Pistols, opens at Plymouth Theatre Royal. Bill Grundy is not featured in the script.

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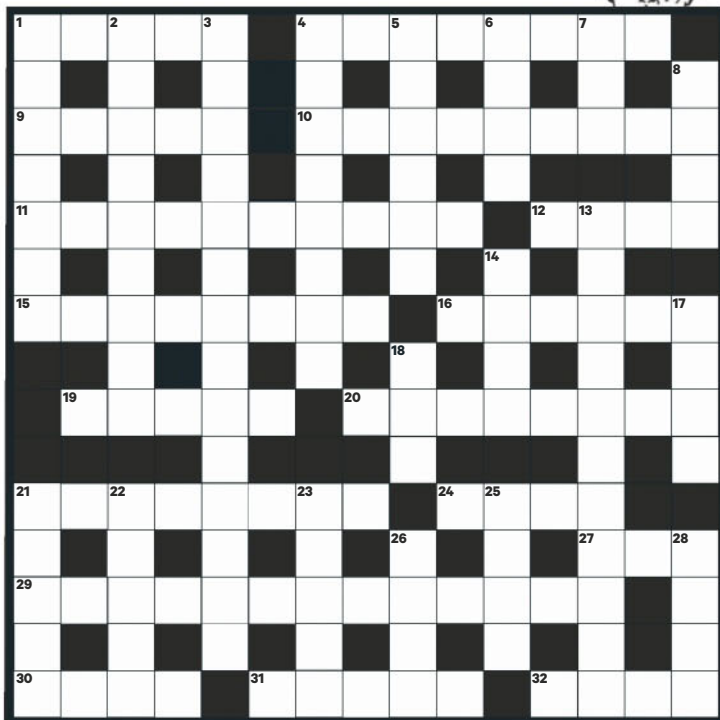
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CROSSWORD

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CLUES ACROSS

- 1+4A** Foo Fighters are going on the road, by the sound of it (5-8)
9 Getting the wrong angle on an album by Pure X (5)
10 Either as a Paul Weller single or a Beach Boys album, it's very much a grower (9)
11 Representing the dark side of Bastille (2-3-5)
12 (See 6 down)
15 1980s alt-rock band _____ 3, formed by Peter Kember and Jason Pierce (8)
16 Lifeless performance from Jamie T (6)
19+30A Time for Carl Barât + The Jackals to be like Bruce Springsteen (5-4)
20 "It only takes a camera to change her mind", Kraftwerk (3-5)
21 Dub tapes remix of George Ezra music (8)
24 Their albums include 'Sunshine Hit Me' and 'Every Step's A Yes' (4)
27 James Brown album that was anything but cool (3)
29 The beginning of the

- story for Simple Minds, although actually it was their seventh album (4-4-1-4)
30 (See 19 across)
31 "____ 'cos I'm breaking, ____ got me aching", The Black Keys (5)
32 "Sometimes I fantasise when the streets are ____ and lonely", from The Stone Roses' 'Made Of Stone' (4)

CLUES DOWN

- 1** Times of the year spent waiting on you by Future Islands (7)
2 Get woken during the hours of darkness at London Grammar (9)
3 (See 18 down)
4 ELO's hits reworked by Damon Albarn (8)
5 The Screaming Blue Messiahs were reluctant to have a shot with this (3-3)
6+12A Don't stop and look, it's just The Stranglers covering a Dionne Warwick song (4-2-2)
7 The Jesus Lizard's frontman is among the property owners (3)
8 Put your hands together for MC Hammer (4)
13 "Don't wanna be ____ / Get up, get out, be what you are", Stiff Little Fingers (7-4)
14 The sound of Fat Larry's Band moving up the charts in 1982 (4)
17 Band formed by Mark Oliver Everett in 1995 (4)
18+3D So has Kanye West learned his lessons since this debut album? (3-7-7)
21 "If there's hope in your heart it would flow to every part", Editors (5)
22 Jazz legend Miles Davis lures us into a trap with this album (5)
23 "Found my way upstairs and had a ____", from The Beatles' 'A Day In The Life' (5)
25 A wicked performance from Interpol (4)
26 "____ makes a man take things over", opening line to David Bowie song (4)
28 Producers ____ Edwards, ____ Terry or ____ Rundgren (4)

NOVEMBER 15 ANSWERS

ACROSS 1+13D In The Heat Of The Moment, 10 Supremacy, 12 Starman, 14+18D You're Not Alone, 16 Old, 23 Creep, 25 Tre, 28 Audio, 29 LFO, 30 Lavis, 33 Nails, 35 Dog, 36 On, 37+9A Deep Sleep, 38 Seeds **DOWN** 1+20A It's Only Rock And Roll, 2+21A Trent Reznor, 3 Expanded, 4+26A Easy Money, 5 Tapes, 6+19D Free All Angels, 7 Hear Me, 8 Ryan, 15 Underdog, 17 Dr, 22 Ramones, 24+11A Paolo Nutini, 27 Naive, 31 And, 32 Ike, 34 SOS

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