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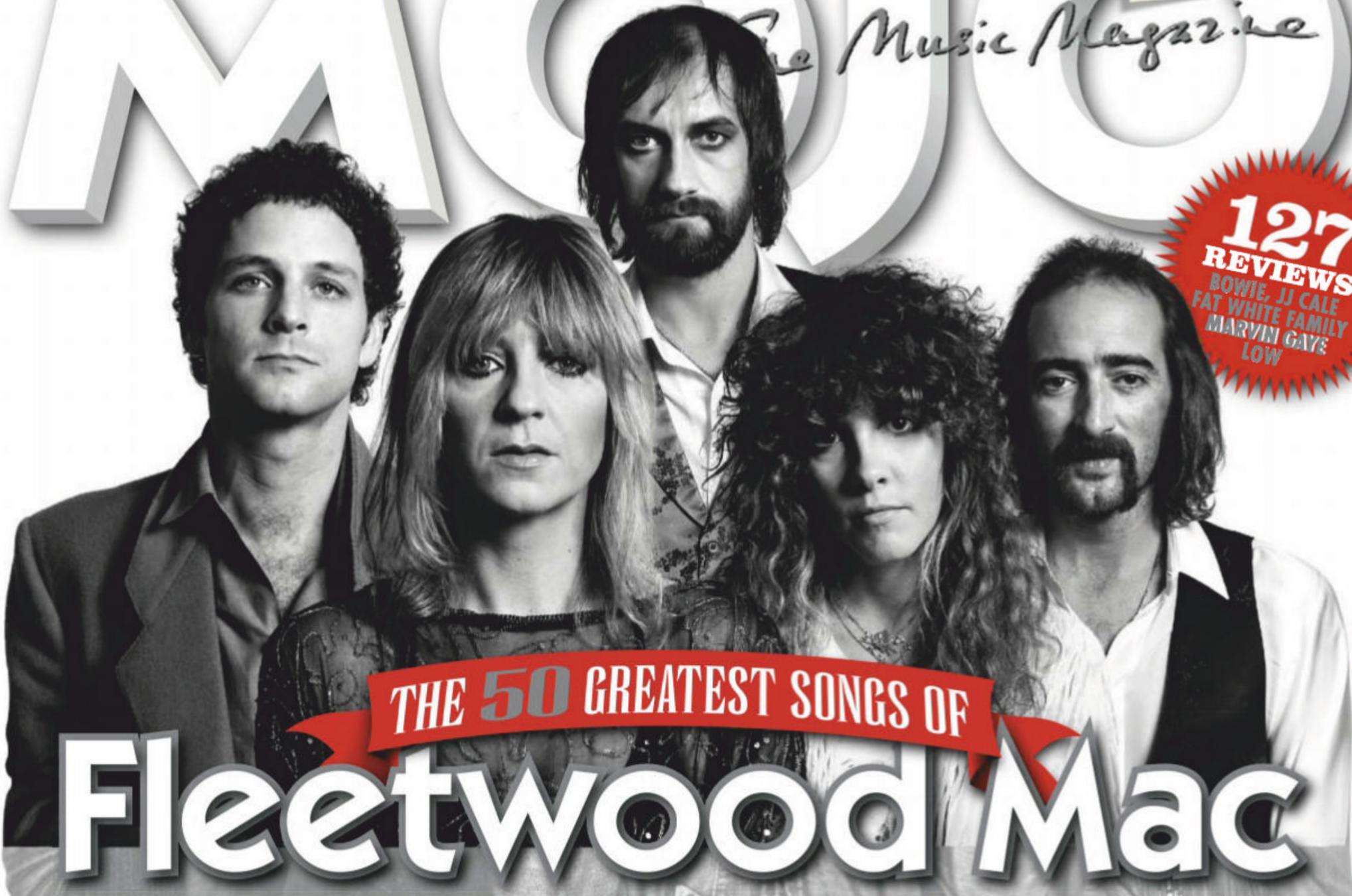


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Lias Saoudi, torch-carrying provocateur.

“Just for shits and giggles.”

Fat White Family's Lias Saoudi speaks to Ian Harrison.

Did recording this album feel like the last chance saloon?

“It felt like the last chance had almost been expended some time ago, y’know? So it was a last-ditch attempt to pull it back together and make something out of it that was more than just a giant hangover. I kind of thought, if we could just get people away from the drugs for long enough periods we could make something of more substance, and make it about the music rather than bash each other round the head with various narcotics, you know?”

You’re not drug-free are you?

“We stopped doing blow, and there was no heroin allowed anywhere near the site. We used quite a lot of ketamine to get us into that visionary state during the writing, but not the recording. I think it’s a far stronger record for it, and the perfect way to follow [*Songs For Our Mothers*]. With that, I think most people would have thought, well, there’s no way that this band can survive, this is just wilful abrasion, an attack on the very idea of an album that’s supposed to sell, and a fuck-you to everything, including ourselves. This one’s more melodious, more articulate, quite a pleasure to listen to, really.”

Are you carrying the torch for something in music?

“What is the point in doing music if you can’t at least pretend to yourself and kid yourself that you’re carrying the torch? There has to be a sort of heroism and grandiosity about it, that’s part of the fun, it’s the only thing you’ve got to offset the inevitable poverty and complete insecurity of living month to month. You’ve got to go along with it and build this narrative arc that hopefully other people can invest themselves in, just for shits and giggles.”

Is it important to make feel people feel revulsion and confusion?

“The shit people get behind now, it’s safe as houses. The medium I’m in is about provocation, it’s about getting things wrong, it’s about trying to make sense of the things that are bubbling away in your subconscious that don’t add up to equality or fairness or what is right or wrong. It’s supposed to be about sharp edges, aggression, violence, love and hate, the shit you’re trying to make sense of. The only thing that got me through my adolescence was the people who’d explored that nightmare for me, time and time again. Moralising bullshit has no place in art for me, and anyone who’s jumped on that bandwagon needs to get some fucking guts. How ugly is it in there? I wanna know, man.”

How real is your online beef with Sleaford Mods?

“Ha ha! I’ve got to sell tickets, man. They’re telling me to put a post out about my European tour, and, ‘Can you write something clever about Brexit?’ I’m like, Why don’t we rinse out all the other bands, go route one? You see, I love Sleaford Mods, put that down for the record. But I really want to hear Jason do a romantic record, and to hear some tenderness. Because there’s no way after all that success and all that cash, right, that he can still feel as fucked off as he did in the first place. And come on, he’s always pulling other people to pieces.”

These New Puritans

★★★

Inside The Rose

INFECTIOUS MUSIC. CD/DL/LP

Underwhelming fourth album from Southend’s erstwhile avant-garde world-beaters



Slimmed down to the core fraternal duo of Jack and George Barnett after the 2016

departure of Thomas Hein, These New Puritans have also stripped their music of many of the baroque flourishes that made 2013’s *Field Of Reeds* such a distinctively ornate extrapolation into pastoral electronica. *Inside The Rose* finds them setting the controls for the earlier part of Talk Talk’s career, stopping off at ‘The Beloved without the tunes’ and ‘Enigma without the profound religious conviction’, before ultimately setting up camp in the middle ground between *King Of Limbs*-era Radiohead and mid-’80s Tears For Fears. “Let this music be a kind of paradise, a kind of nightmare, a kind of I don’t care,” Jack Barnett croons grandly on the threshold of A-R-P’s inevitable deracinated drum’n’bass breakdown. Unfortunately, it’s a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Ben Thompson

T Bone Burnett, Jay Bellerose, Keefus Ciancia

★★★★

The Invisible Light: Acoustic Space

VERVE. CD/DL/LP

Multi-Grammy-winning doyen of Americana explores trance music.



Given his long and deep association with authentic American roots music,

Burnett’s cultivation of minimalist electronic soundscapes on this new album is surprising. *The Invisible Light* is the first instalment of a themed trilogy railing at a world which Burnett believes is “dying by binary codes” and where humanity is enslaved to a desensitising technology that has been manipulating us via decades of propaganda. It’s light years away, then, from what we’d normally expect from the O Brother, Where Art Thou? soundtrack composer, who presents a series of ominous, reverb-drenched spoken narratives floating on an immersive sea of tribal drums and electronic effects. The end result is dark and desolate, but also profound and provocative. Whether it offers, as Burnett hopes, an antidote to a world where pre-programming and mass

hypnosis rule, though, remains to be seen. Enlightening nevertheless.

Charles Waring

Our Native Daughters

★★★★★

Songs Of Our Native Daughters

SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS. CD/DL

New history from onetime leader of the Carolina Chocolate Drops.



Though *Songs Of Our Native Daughters* could easily be seen as a follow-up to

Rhiannon Giddens’ rich *Freedom Highway*, the set may actually better represent a continuation of the work of storied a cappella group Sweet Honey In The Rock: historical, educational, joyful, mournful. Giddens and her collaborators – Amythyst Kiah, Leyla McCalla, Allison Russell – are all African-American women, all expert in that African-then-American instrument the banjo. Polly Ann’s Hammer shifts the John Henry story to his wife’s experience. Better Git Yer Learnin’ pairs a melody from a 19th century minstrel primer with new lyrics based on slaves’ beliefs that literacy was a key to freedom. Moon Meets The Sun is defiant celebration; Mama’s Cryin’ Long is stark horror. Our Native Daughters spotlight a few voices that have been silenced. There could be a hundred albums like this, and we should hope there are.

Chris Nelson

Kevin Morby

★★★★★

Oh My God

DEAD OCEANS. CD/DL/LP

Thoughts and prayers: singer-songwriter tests his faith on fifth album.



There is a deep restlessness in Kevin Morby’s songwriting, his last two albums pinballing between the upstate (2016’s *Singing Saw*, obsessed by The Band, recorded in Woodstock) and the down-

town (the New York strut of 2017’s *City Music*). With *Oh My God*, Morby launches a more overtly spiritual quest, investigating the tensions between the sacred and profane – or “horns on my head, wings from my shoulder,” as he puts it on O Behold. A blast of Mary Lattimore’s harp on Piss River or Savannah’s glassy Dirty Projectors-style choir hint at the celestial, but if Morby speaks in tongues, they are still very much those of Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen – earthly, conflicted, seeking salvation. This album doesn’t have the blinding clarity of proper revelation but, in its febrile examination of survival and redemption, *Oh My God* is on the side of the angels.

Victoria Segal

The Chemical Brothers

★★★★★

No Geography

HEAVENLY. CD/DL/LP

Globe-trotting dancefloor overlords revisit past inspirations.



What next when you’ve spent 25 years making people dance, but are about to turn

50? For The Chemical Brothers, it’s simple – re-engage with your history. It was the sample-adelic production crews The Bomb Squad and Dust Brothers who first inspired Ed Simons and Tom Rowlands to develop the techniques and sonic vision which, alongside late-era rave, they synthesized on 1995’s *Exit Planet Dust* and ‘97’s *Dig Your Own Hole*. Their ninth album, *No Geography* bears testimony to superior crate-digging chops, cut-up skills and disco. A turbo-powered bass line, pummelling Man Parrish synths and Japanese rapper Nene make *Eve Of Destruction* a frenzied presence. Borrowing from Peter Brown’s glittering 1978 club hit *Dance With Me*, and with vocals lifted from ‘60s singer/poet Rod McKuen, it soars and sashays. There’s even space for a peak-time Chems acid freakout with *Mad As Hell*. By heading back to the future, The Chemical Brothers have acquired new urgency.

Stephen Worthly



The Chemical Brothers: their world’s in motion.

Hamish Brown, Sarah Piantadosi



Edwyn Collins

★★★★★

Badbea

AED. CD/DL/LP

Former Orange Juice king’s ninth solo LP. Sleeve photo by Buzzcocks’ John Maher.

Badbea opens routinely, with the kind of twanging nu-soul groove that’s pulsed throughout Edwyn Collins’ career. But *It’s All About You* features a design quirk: lyrics predating his 2005 strokes, unearthed in 2014 as Collins moved house and studio to the Scottish Highlands. Reacquaintance with his former self’s catty élan (“On the rare occasion that words fail you/It’s a chance for some of us to sleep”) has apparently catalysed Edwyn to sharpen the creative weaponry: these are acutely playful and poignant dissections of his world, be it the birdsong-accompanied idyll *It All Makes Sense To Me*, the hiccuppy disco-va of *Glasgow To London*, brooding psychodrama *I Want You*, or brusque *Outside*, which posits Edwyn as Iggy Pop fronting *Wire*. Best of all is *I Guess We Were Young*: a tender tremolo’d reflection on days gone by, with creditable use of the Scots term “easy-ozzy”. The man’s a marvel.

Keith Cameron

John Paul White

★★★★★

The Hurting Kind

SINGLE LOCK. CD/DL/LP

Third solo set from the Civil Wars veteran.



While the cover photo’s meant to evoke vintage album art, take another look and you can picture JPW leaning over the bathroom sink, staring upward into the mirror, wondering, “When are you gonna pull yourself together?” The album is saturated with heartbreak and bad decisions, perfectly decked in country-politan arrangements. *Heart Like A Kite* dips on sweeping melodies to match fickle love. *My Dreams Have All Come True* – which sounds tailor-made for Roy Orbison – isn’t the victory lap its title suggests but a disaster prophecy. Over the years, White’s earned fans among peers, and he enlists ‘70s hitmaker Bobby Braddock as co-writer on *This Isn’t Gonna End Well*, while Lee Ann Womack joins for a

Kathryn Veiter-Miller

duet of self-destruction. After all of it, JPW is left at the sink, repeating, “Your love’s the hurting kind,” unable or unwilling to give it up.

Chris Nelson

The Cranberries

★★★★★

In The End

BMG. CD/DL/LP

Final album, with Stephen Street back producing.



The history of pop is littered with albums completed after the deaths of key

members of groups which should never have been returned to and finished at all. Not so *In The End*, 11 songs of real quality, completed after the accidental death of lead singer Dolores O’Riordan and using her original demoed vocals. Allusions to Dolores’ passing may be coincidental but they are nonetheless hauntingly predictive on lead single *All Over Now* (“Remember the night/At a hotel in London”), and *Lost*, which includes the banshee keen of “Bring in the night!”. *A Place I Know* and *Illusion* are ballads as sweet as 1993’s *Linger*, while *Got It* muses ruefully on the human condition (“Where will we live/Where will we die?”). A fitting, touching elegy for a bewitching talent.

David Buckley

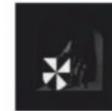
UNKLE

★★★★★

The Road: Part II/ Lost Highway

SONGS FOR THE DEF. CD/DL/LP

Mo’ Wax label boss’s super-sizes sound with eclectic cast.



Many of the collaborators who graced 2017’s *The Road: Part 1*, UNKLE’s first album for seven years, return for its ambitious double album sequel, including Editors’ Tom Smith and Mark Lanegan, but Ian Astbury, Mick Jones and even Stanley Kubrick’s widow, Christiana join in here. *Part II* sprawls across paranoid Massive Attack-style locked grooves (*Nothing To Give*), ethereal folk-prog (*Sun*), gushing, orchestral breakbeat (*Only You*) and narco rock/electronica hybrid (*Crucifixion/A Prophet*). James Lavelle mostly convinces as a modern-day sonic Cecil B DeMille, a brace of misplaced covers aside – Keaton Henson’s *The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face* feels peculiarly overwrought and a reimagining of Rui Da Silva’s *Touch Me* with Leila Moss shares too much DNA with the original. But with Lavelle and his co-conspirators leaving everything out on the pitch, you can’t criticise them for lacking effort.

Stephen Worthly



Everything that rises: Natalie Mering AKA Weyes Blood, out there on her own.

Unsinkable

Glacial beauty from Natalie Mering’s buoyant fourth album. By Victoria Segal.

Weyes Blood

★★★★★

Titanic Rising

SUB POP. CD/DL/LP

NATALIE MERING was 16 years old when she first performed as Weyes Blood (or “Bhlud”, as she sometimes preferred), taking her name from a Flannery O’Connor novel and her inspiration from Syd Barrett. It was, she told MOJO earlier this year, a “saving grace” to be able to perform as an improvisatory solo musician with an acoustic guitar, because nobody else wanted to be in a band with her: “Nobody took it as seriously as I did.”

In the 15 years since, Mering has found no shortage of people keen to work with her, from Jackie O Motherfucker to Ariel Pink, Perfume Genius to Father John Misty. Yet over four albums, the nomadic California-born artist has evolved along her own distinctive lines, Weyes Blood’s musical stem cells – noise, drone, freak-folk – slowly mutating and multiplying into the blissful cosmic pop that fills *Titanic Rising*. It’s not an entirely unexpected leap forward – 2016’s *Front Row Seat To Earth* saw her moving away from the *Marble Index* margins and into the honeyed Laurel Canyon light but even so, *Titanic Rising* is a revelation.

These opulent, sculptural songs have sacrificed none of Mering’s idiosyncrasy, or ability to unnervingly dreamy opener *A Lot’s Gonna Change* has its burnished

piano framed by a blast of chill space-age synths, like an eerie call sign marking a new transmission. The fabulous *Everyday*, meanwhile, might sound like a perfect slice of Carpenters songcraft, but there’s something almost uncanny about its endlessly proliferating melodic twists and curlicues, as if it’s been taken over by an AI generator fed ‘70s radio. Like Julia Holter’s *Have You In My Wilderness*, *Titanic Rising* is the sound of an intractably experimental writer exploring and inhabiting “conventional” song structures, and the results are tremendous.

On the surface, at least, this is a record committed to the idea of connection, of reaching out, of love. “Give me something I can see,” sings Mering on the Judee Sill swoon of *Something To Believe*, “something bigger and louder than me” – while *Andromeda*, a spectacular reimagining of *Calling Occupants Of Interplanetary Craft*, looks up at the sky and decides “Love is calling/It’s time to let it through”. There are little references to “relatable” everyday incidents on *Titanic Rising* – drinking too much coffee, a party conversation about monogamy’s limits – but Mering always returns to hidden messages, lost signals. It’s why she evokes Hoagy Carmichael on the antique echo of *Picture Me Better* or sings of a century “lost to memories” on *A Lot’s Gonna Change*. The bit of *Titanic Rising* visible above the water is beautiful; the nine-tenths submerged make it fascinating. Mering might no longer be the only one taking her music seriously, but she’s still out there on her own.