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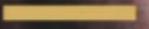
**NEIL
YOUNG**



and the
legend of
Crazy Horse

**"IT'S A WHOLE
OTHER TRIP!"**

THE RETURN OF
AL GREEN



**MOTT THE
HOOPLE**

**"WE THOUGHT
IT WAS OVER"**



OH SEES

**"NOW WE'VE GOT
A MELLOTRON!"**



HENDRIX

AXIS: ALL AREAS



**BETH
GIBBONS**

**BITTERSWEET
SYMPHONIES**

DAMO SUZUKI

**MASSIVE
ATTACK**

MOON DUO

KURT COBAIN

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**PETER TORK &
KEITH FLINT RIP**

BIG THIEF

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**FOREVER CHANGES
- THE SEQUEL!**

{ AMERICANA }
Country, bluegrass, folk & more



MEKONS
Deserted
GLITTERBEAT
8/10

Diverse and experimental beauty from roots-rocking diehards

THE Mekons have taken a variety of turns over the past decade, from a collaborative LP with Robbie Fulks made on the Scottish island of Jura to a “real-time” recording before a New York theatre audience and a studio reunion of their 1977 lineup. All of which means that *Deserted* serves as the current band’s first full album in eight years.

On the face of it, the Californian desert might not seem like the most obvious setting for a bunch of punk veterans. But their decision to record at bassist Dave Trumfio’s studio near the Joshua Tree National Park, among the tenacious plants and animals of the Yucca Valley, is entirely fitting for a deeply idiosyncratic band who’ve endured the vagaries of the music business for over 40 years now. This is reflected in the embattled tone of *Deserted*, which often relies on jagged textures to accompany themes of disquiet and survival. “Mirage”, with its abrasive guitar and harsh call-and-response vocals, is a prime example, its lyrics speaking of guilt,

remorse and loneliness as a dust storm rages outside: “I thought I’d found an oasis/But it was just a muddy stinking hole.” And there’s a biting political edge to the off-kilter “In The Desert”, which savages Bush and Blair for instigating the Middle East crisis and its attendant horrors.

At the same time, this wouldn’t be a Mekons record without a fair dollop of humour. The terrific “Weimar Vending Machine”, which includes a nod to Brecht/Weill’s “Alabama Song”, builds on the apocryphal story of Berliner Iggy Pop buying a bag of sand from a vending machine. Elsewhere, the rowdy and riffy “Lawrence Of California” was inspired by the desert wanderings of Tom Greenhalgh. Vocals are split throughout between Greenhalgh, fellow Mekons co-founder Jon Langford and the estimable Sally Timms. Susie Honeyman’s violin is a key ingredient too, particularly on “How Many Stars?” and the dreamy “Andromeda”, which finds the band amid the dirt and coyotes, offering up a lovely folk-country lament.

ROB HUGHES

AMERICANA ROUND-UP

“It isn’t hard to find worthwhile things to write about these days,” says songwriter Ian Felice. “There are a lot of storms blooming on the horizon and a lot of chaos that permeates our lives. The hard part is finding simple and direct ways to address them.” **The Felice Brothers** have risen to the challenge on *Undress* YEP/ROC, the band’s first release in three years after a stint as Conor Oberst’s backing troupe. Due in early May, the album’s subject matter is reflected in pared-back arrangements and exacting harmonies. Also out that week is *Front Porch Sensibility*/THIRTY TIGERS, the second solo outing from ex-Civil Wars singer **Joy Williams**. The follow-up to 2015’s *Venus* was produced in Nashville by

The Milk Carton Kids’ Kenneth Pattengale, with Williams addressing themes of “coming home, whether to a physical place or to yourself”. The trio of releases is completed by the 10th album of **Josh Ritter**’s career, *Fever Breaks* PYTHEAS RECORDINGS/THIRTY TIGERS. The singer-songwriter and sometime novelist has enlisted Jason Isbell as producer, as well as Isbell’s 400 Unit band, including Derry deBorja (piano, organ and accordion), Sadler Vaden (electric and acoustic guitars) and, naturally, Amanda Shires on violin and backing vocals. In the meantime, there’s still time to catch the inimitable **Tom Russell** as he tours the UK from late March, finishing up in Bury on April 6.

ROB HUGHES



CATFISH AND THE BOTTLEMEN
The Balance ISLAND

4/10
Brit guitar outfit prove there’s still room in the indie landfill on stale third LP

Soaring vocals, chugging guitars, driving bass and plodding drums that sounds like mid-2000s Oasis have long been the modus operandi for this band, and here they wilfully embrace that bored formula. There’s no variation or evolution here; this is meat-and-potatoes indie rock for Stereophonics fans. Parts of the album are perfectly serviceable – “Longshot” skips along with a pleasing melody and fist-pumping bassline – but largely the songs become indistinguishable, and three albums in, there’s really nothing to be proud of in their “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” mentality. DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS
No Geography EMI
8/10

Tom and Ed free themselves with this vividly melodic post-EDM reboot

After several years of sounding dangerously uncomfortable, Ed Simons and Tom Rowlands seem refreshed and rejuvenated on this vividly melodic, restlessly inventive ninth album. *No Geography* is being billed as a highly personal return to the duo’s psychedelic acid-house roots. It certainly has a similar rave-punk energy and sonically promiscuous palette, wisely ditching stale traditions like vocal cameos from middlebrow indie-rockers. Instead, Norwegian singer Aurora and Japanese rapper Nene handle vocals on post-EDM bangers such as “Eve Of Destruction” and “The Universe Sent Me”, while the mighty electro-gospel anthem “Catch Me I’m Falling” ends the album on a spiritual high. A welcome fusion of past glory with 21st-century arena-rocking attitude.

STEPHEN DALTON

COWBOY FLYING SAUCER
Travel Lodge SPARROW HAWK
8/10

Fall-inspired sprechgesang, with added doses of synthpop and free jazz

There is a certain kind of speech-song – snarling, hectoring, declamatory, arrhythmic, almost tuneless – that will forever be indebted to Mark E Smith. And the frontman of London quartet Cowboy Flying Saucer, who goes by the name BK13, ticks all those boxes. The band’s krautrock-inspired grooves often resemble The Fall, but they also take us in some fascinating directions: the squelchy dub of “Mushrooms & Leather”, the steam-punk acid house of “Travelodge Wedding”, and the galloping 5/4 free jazz freakouts of “Heavily Sedated NOW!”. BK13’s poetry is random and surreal rather than scabrously amusing, but the overall sonic effect is appealingly disorientating and often thrilling.

JOHN LEWIS

THE CRANBERRIES
In The End BMG

7/10
Touching last will and testament

When we learnt the late Dolores O’Riordan had left behind some demo vocals and her bandmates were building them into an album, expectations were not high. Yet *In The End* is far better than we could have hoped. Producer Stephen Street deftly updates the brio of their early hits and the songs are impressive, too, particularly the edgy pop-noir of “All Over Now” and the melancholic title track, on which O’Riordan plaintively trills: “Ain’t it strange when everything you dreamed of was nothing that you dreamed of...” It takes a hard heart not to be moved.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

DESPERATE JOURNALIST
In Search Of The Miraculous FIERCE PANDA

7/10
Excellent third album by London indie quartet

There’s something almost radical about the old-fashioned way Desperate Journalist go about their business, constructing shimmering curtains of chiming guitar but always ensuring that Jo Bevan’s precise vocals cut through loud and clear. This is a band that wants to be heard and understood, and Desperate Journalist don’t just borrow the sonic armoury of bands like The Smiths, Suede and The Sundays, they also take a lot of their attitude, punching with intent on tracks like “Cedars”, “Ocean Wave”, “Satellite” and “Black Net”. The album is a loose concept piece with a watery theme, but it’s the infectious melodies and powerful vocals that stand out.

PETER WATTS

ROSE ELINOR DOUGALL
A New Illusion VERMILLION
8/10

A masterclass in elegant folk-tinged pop

Dougall’s third solo album suggests she’s been further immersing herself in the crisp English vowels of her heroes Sandy Denny, Bridget St John and Anne Briggs. The confessional “That’s Where The Trouble Started” and the yearning “Something Real”, in particular, give Britfolk a shiny modern makeover, while the cacophonous “Take What You Can Get” checks in with the widescreen pop of her time with The Pipettes. She’s at her most persuasive, however, on the delicate waltz of the piano-led “Too Much Of Not



Fat White Family reborn: from sleaze to honest elegance

Enough”, a shimmering showcase for one of the most alluring and arresting female voices at work today.

TERRY STAUNTON

DRUGDEALER
Raw Honey MEXICAN SUMMER

8/10
Sublime second from Laurel Canyon throwback

Drugdealer’s Michael Collins continues to push top-quality gear on *Raw Honey*, his LA collective’s moreish second album. Those who fell for his lush 2016 debut, *The End Of Comedy*, will know that this Bacharach acolyte has a knack for crafting timeless West Coast ballads with his own modern-day Wrecking Crew, an Ariel Pink-affiliated bunch that includes Weyes Blood’s Natalie Mering, Sasha Winn and Josh Da Costa. Bookended by baroque pieces evoking Michel Legrand’s score for *The Go-Between*, this is another unhurried set of expertly played FM gold: from the creamy harmonies of “Honey” and “Lonely” to the streetwise strut of “Fools”, Collins doesn’t put a foot wrong.

PIERS MARTIN

THE DRUMS
Brutalism ANTI-

7/10
Fifth album of familiar but undiminished manic twangle pop

Despite romantic catastrophe, the loss of his bandmates, a meagre lyrical and vocal talent and a vanishingly slender source of stylistic inspiration (very precisely: The Wake, March 1984), Jonny Pierce somehow remains an unnervingly reliable source of manic pop thrills. Following the woes of 2017’s *Abysmal Thoughts*, this fifth album starts out worryingly

reasonable (“A nice glass of wine and some quality time”, he trills on “Body Chemistry”), but with “Kiss It Away” and the delirious closer “Blip Of Joy” (“With just one kiss/I forget I hate myself”), The Drums are more stupidly contagious than ever.

STEPHEN TROUSSÉ

CALLUM EASTER
Here Or Nowhere LOST MAP

7/10
Haunting debut from Young Fathers associate

The Edinburgh-based singer plays keys and lap steel with Young Fathers and shares with them an experimental instinct and a confrontational attitude to sound. Easter’s approach is avowedly lo-fi, from the majestic (distorted) opener, which echoes like a shower-stall hymn, to the closing “Back Beat”, where his frail croon is allowed to dominate the minimal backing track. Musically, he pitches somewhere between Suicide and The Clangers, so it’s no surprise that “Be There Always” – his attempt to “do a Motown” – sounds like an army of Space Invaders machines marching through a fairground.

ALASTAIR MCKAY

FACS
Lifelike TROUBLE IN MIND
8/10

Chicago post-punk trio bisect brawn and brooding Born of the ashes of Disappears, FACS excel in the balance between drifting contemplation and sheer velocity, marrying post-punk, shoegaze and post-rock touchstones in a focused transmission that is equal parts atmospheric and punishing. Opener “Another Country” acts as a thesis

statement presenting diverting swings of the album’s pendulum. Singer-guitarist Brian Case concocts a trance-like state with loops, noise and Alan Vega-ish vocals just before drummer Noah Ledger and bassist Alianna Kalaba explode the shell with cracking hits and lower-register throbbing. Holistically, *Lifelike* is the sonic equivalent of teetering at the precipice for a gorgeous canyon sunset. It’s transfixing and entirely dangerous.

ERIN OSMON

FAT WHITE FAMILY
Serf’s Up! DOMINO
8/10

Squalid shock-rockers grow up, impressively

By the time of 2016’s *Songs For Our Mothers*, Fat White Family’s appealingly grimy outlook had become merely grim. Now relocated to Sheffield – a city with a proud history of synthpop sleaze – the band sound utterly reborn. A string section brings deviant disco glamour and a warped cabaret lilt, culminating in a gleeful mutoid swagger through Iggy’s Berlin on “Tastes Good With The Money”, featuring a droll guest monologue from Baxter Dury (“There’s ash in your latte!”). In fact the lyrics are superb throughout, mapping out the band’s eternally grubby milieu of “grinding Stockwell sunrises” and “cold raw abuse” with honesty and elegance.

SAM RICHARDS

CRAIG FINN
I Need A New War PARTISAN
6/10

Final part of a loose trilogy by the Hold Steady frontman

Craig Finn has described his latest solo album as the final instalment of a trilogy he started with 2015’s *Faith In The Future* and continued with 2017’s *We All Want The Same Things*. On *I Need A New War*, the loose-ends characters who populated those albums wander through these new songs, fatigued and battered, their spiritual confusion so ingrained that it almost seems like wisdom. Finn remains an astute and supremely compassionate songwriter, but musically, *New War* is often mellow to the point of lethargic. It’s best when it showcases his deep eccentricities, particularly on the skewed synth doo-wop oddity “Indications”.

STEPHEN DEUSNER



Reappearing act: FACS

BEN GRAYVILLE, ZORAN ORLIC