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EBET ROBERTS/GETTY IMAGES

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There's a part of me that refuses to believe that Dire Straits' *Brothers In Arms* can be celebrating its 40th birthday this year. It seems only a few years ago that I listened to it on a cassette that a friend's elder brother taped for me (yeah, we were killing music, remember?). I remember it being a staple on my stereo for a very long time. Then, as these things have a habit of happening, I didn't listen to it for an absolute age.

I was reminded of its excellence in 2001 when the title track was used to brilliant effect scoring a scene in US political drama *The West Wing*. It was enough to rekindle a love affair with Dire Straits' finest hour.

This issue we talked to Mark Knopfler and his erstwhile bandmates to discuss the making of that stone-cold classic and epoch-defining record (or should I say CD?). Read it from page 28.

This issue we also caught up with the Alice Cooper band to discover how they finally reunited to make their first album in 50 years; revisit some of Iron Maiden's standout live moments; take a trip back to the US Live Aid; look back at the life of Mike Peters and much more.

Until next month...



Siân Llewellyn, Editor



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ALASTAIR STEVENSON
Editor-In-Chief of *What Hi-Fi?* Alastair is an avid music fan, audiophile and enthusiastic, but untalented, guitar player. With an ear on the ground for all things audio-related, whether it's the latest gossip on codecs, the ever-present vinyl-vs-CD war, how to position your speakers or which King Crimson track you should be using to test your system, he's got you covered. He waxes lyrical about CDs on p38.



GRAHAM HUMPHREYS
Graham is an illustrator with 45 years of experience behind him. Among his most significant early film posters are *The Evil Dead* and *A Nightmare On Elm Street*, headlining a career in the horror genre. Graham works with traditional paint-on-paper and is in constant demand with commissions for LP sleeves, book covers, movie posters and more. Recent clients include The Damned, Hammer Films and Rob Zombie. His Alice Cooper artwork heads up our feature on p48.



PAUL REES
Paul has interviewed everyone from AC/DC to Madonna, and this month it was Dire Straits' turn (p28). "I queued up for tickets on the *Brothers In Arms* tour at Birmingham NEC," Paul tells us. "I may have ill-advisedly sported a Knopfler-esque headband for a short while thereafter." His next book, *Raised On Radio*, an oral history of the glory days of AOR will be published by Little, Brown/Hachette next February.

GRAHAM HUMPHREYS: ANITA TARANUK

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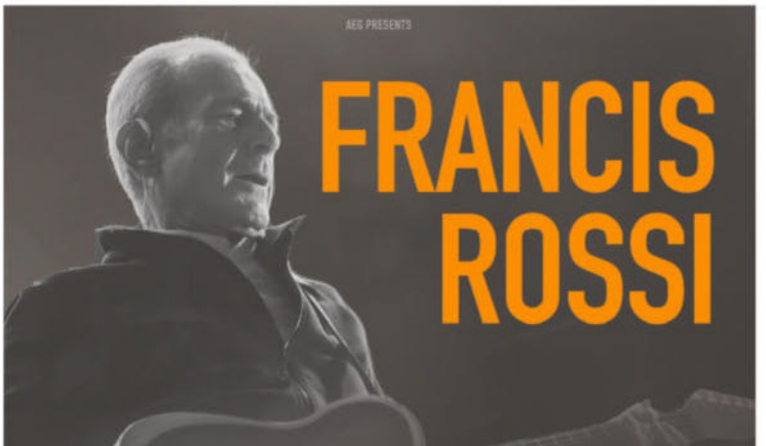


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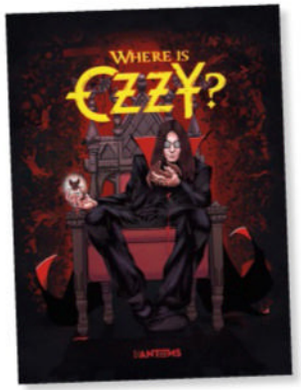
WHERE IS OZZY?

As he prepares to retire from the road, a new seek-and-find book celebrates the legend.

Inspired by the success of previous books *Motörhead: Where Is Lemmy?* and *Rush: Where Is Geddy, Alex, And Neil?* among others, LA-based publishers/ animation studio Fantoons publish *Where Is Ozzy?*, a new, officially licensed seek-and-find book, on July 29.

Its 36 colourful pages are inspired by the songs, albums and major milestones from Ozzy's solo career, including the *Suicide Solution* court case, and of course featuring a veritable deluge of bats, crucifixes and fire-breathing dragons.

With Easter eggs for hard-core and casual fans alike, each double page is brought to life in vibrant illustrations by the award-winning studio who also created *Ozzy Osbourne: The Official Colouring Book.* From the start of Ozzy's solo career with the album *Blizzard Of Ozz*, his story is told in wonderful and colourful glory.



In the *CR* office we spent hours poring over an illustration of Ozzy playing at Ozzfest (complete with a banner cheekily declaring: 'Fuck Lollapalooza!'), and also a depiction of the famous Osbournes' house from *The Osbournes*. In everything, the level of detail is astounding.

The book is written by David Calcano, who for more than a decade has been fusing still and moving pictures with music to create meaningful stories. Its four artists are Alberto Belandria, Juan J Riera T, Larissa Rivero and Jorge Mansilla.

Calcano says: "A book like this only works when it's built around a legend who rewrote the rules – with thunderous music, iconic style, and wicked humour. All abooooard!" **DL**

Fantoons' Where Is Ozzy? costs £20.99 and can be pre-ordered via Amazon (https://amzn.eu/d/iFUN9tW)





This issue The Dirt was compiled by Joe Banks, Rich Davenport, Dave Everley, Rob Hughes, Dave Ling, Stef Lach, Ken McIntyre, Liz Scarlett, Will Simpson, Henry Yates







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RICK DERRINGER

August 5, 1947 – May 26, 2025

The guitarist died at 77 as this issue went to press. Next month we will present a full tribute with a rare interview he gave just last year. Dave Ling offers some highlights of his life and times.

He was the talent of a generation, just 17 years old when his band The McCoys topped the US singles chart with *Hang On Sloopy*, their cover of a past hit for the R&B group The Vibrations, in the summer of 1965.

The first of seven hit singles, *Hang On Sloopy* was the start of it all for The McCoys and a launch pad for guitarist, singer, songwriter and producer Rick Derringer, a fiercely ambitious and prodigiously gifted entertainer who would go on to have a career that lasted for six decades.

Back in '65, The Beatles and the Rolling Stones had taken the United States by the scruff of the neck as part of the so-called British Invasion and were giving it a damned good shake. Though less celebrated, from our side of the Atlantic at least, The McCoys were at the centre of it all.

"[As part of the band] I opened for the Rolling Stones on their very first American tour, and, of course, we received the same adulation as the Stones," Derringer told *Guitar Player* magazine last year. "People ask me: 'Did you see what it was like to be a Beatle?' Well, I already knew what it was like. I had the number-one record in the world while *Yesterday* by The Beatles was number two. Did I know what it was like to be The Beatles? I *was* The Beatles in some form. I grew up like that."

Derringer was born Richard Dean Zehringer in Celina, Ohio, and grew up in nearby Fort Recovery. Having taken an interest in the record collection of his parents, he received his first electric guitar as a present for his ninth birthday. After he moved to New York in his late teens, The McCoys were formed in 1962 and lasted for four tumultuous years. Afterwards, Derringer teamed up with both Johnny and Edgar Winter. He was hugely involved in two Edgar Winter radio staples, being the producer of *Free Ride* and the colourful instrumental *Frankenstein* (which had Ronnie Montrose on guitar).

Derringer's burgeoning solo career began in 1973 with his Bill Szymczyk-produced album *All American Boy*. Its opening number, *Rock And Roll, Hoochie Koo*, became Derringer's calling card. The song had been recorded twice previously (by both of the Winter Brothers), but it found extra resonance in the hands of its writer, and fell just short of the US Top 20. "The rock was me and 'hoochie koo' was Johnny [Winter]," Derringer explained years later.

Derringer went on to release more than a dozen solo albums, including the brilliantly titled *If I Weren't So Romantic, I'd Shoot You* in 1978, and another three with the band Derringer. Working in many musical genres, he performed on tracks and albums by Alice Cooper (*Killer*), Todd Rundgren (*Something/Anything?*), Steely Dan (*Gaucho, Countdown To Ecstasy*), Kiss (*Lick It Up*), Donald Fagen (*The Nightfly*), Joe Bonamassa (*A New Day Yesterday*), Air Supply (*Making Love Out Of Nothing At All*), Meat Loaf (*Midnight At The Lost And Found*), Bonnie Tyler (*Total Eclipse Of The Heart*), Jon Anderson, Neil Sedaka, Barbra Streisand, Cyndi Lauper and many more, as well as producing artists including both Winter brothers and US metallers Madam X.

During the 80s Derringer became a crucial part of the success of comedy parody artist 'Weird Al' Yankovic, and won a Grammy for *Eat It*, their humourous take on Michael Jackson's *Beat It*, and Derringer had a tie-in with the world of wrestling thanks to his association with Hulk Hogan.

In later years he undertook three world tours with Ringo Starr & His All-Starr Band and was also involved with Peter Frampton's Guitar Circus. However, the focus remained on his own music and that of his wife of 28 years, Jenda Derringer, with whom he also recorded. Stylistically they tackled anything from Christian music (Rick described himself as a "Jesus freak" after becoming an Evangelical Christian in 1997) to the blues.

According to Tony Wilson, Derringer's longtime friend and 'caretaker', Rick passed away peacefully in his sleep in Ormond Beach, Florida, with Jenda and Wilson at his side, following "a medical episode". He was 77 years old. At press time the precise cause of death remained uncertain. However, Rick had reportedly undergone a triple bypass two months earlier.

No doubt about it, Derringer was in a happy place, content in his faith and thrilled by the ability to continue playing music – even in the most secular of environments.

"Now people come up to me in a bar or at a biker festival not to tell me that I'm great, but that my music is helping save their lives, helping them in the Lord, and helping them end their vices. That makes me feel good!!" he said in a 2001 interview.

More recently, Derringer quipped: "I'm a double agent for the Lord, working behind enemy lines."

However one chooses to look at it, Rick Derringer, a wonderful musical talent, was blessed. He will be much missed.

FAREWELL ALL-AMERICAN BOY
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"Rest in peace, my friend. It was an honour to know you, work with you and call you a friend."
Joe Bonamassa

"God bless Rick Derringer. It was great playing with him in the All-Starrs."
Ringo Starr

"Rick Derringer was not just an awesome guitarist but one hell of a singer [and] producer. He also complemented Johnny Winter perfectly on their live album."
Steve Stevens

"My mentor and friend has passed. Derringer was my first professional band in 1976. Rick was a great guitarist and even more a teacher to me, recording, playing clubs and arenas. I went in with eyes wide open, ready to learn from a seasoned professional. We recorded three albums together and played many tours, opening for Aerosmith, Boston, Foghat and more. We even co-headlined with Journey on some gigs, we also had Tom Petty, The Runaways open for us. It was an amazing experience."
Vinny Appice

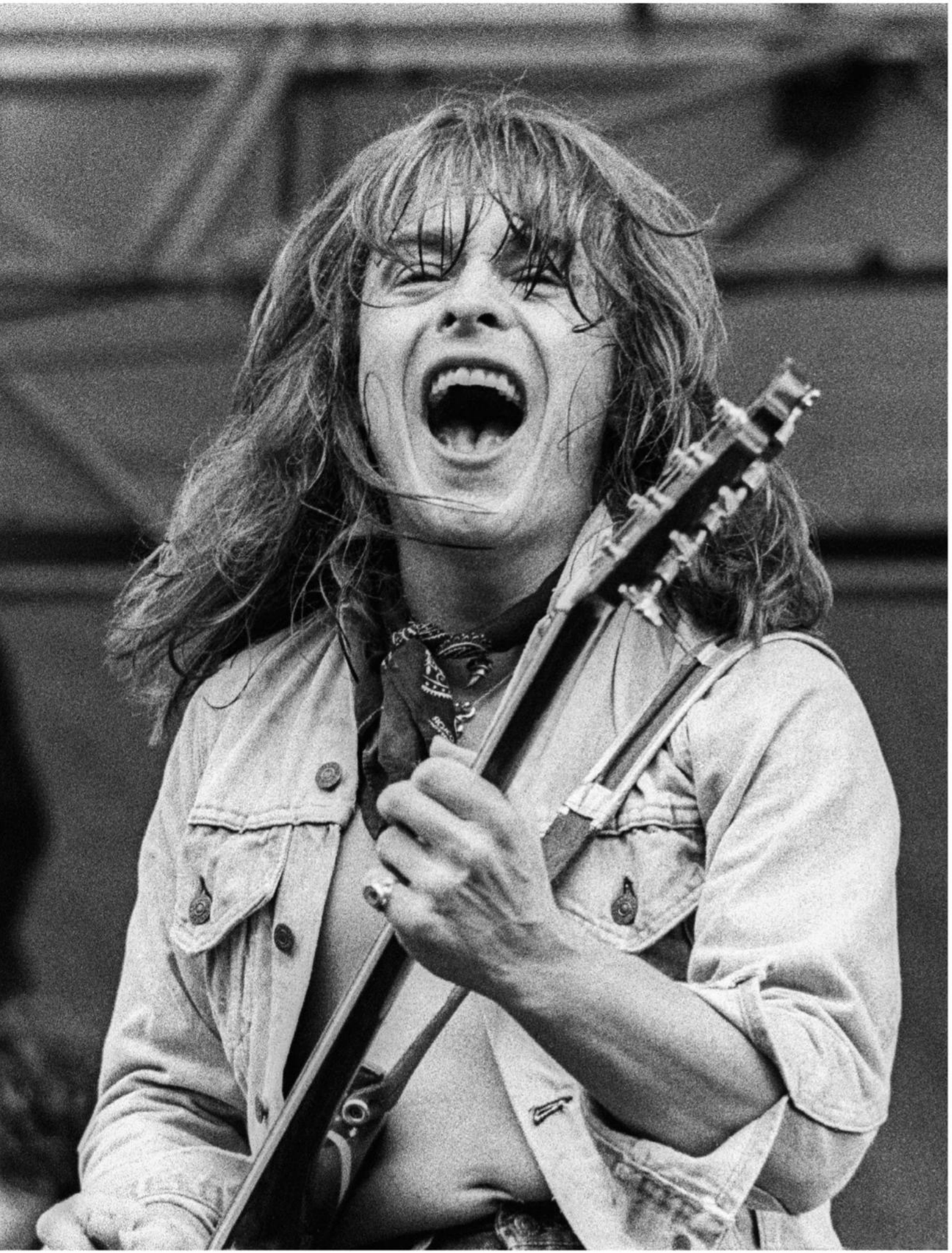
"My good friend has passed away. We had some great times, and what a beautiful person. I will miss our talks."
Carmine Appice

"I'm very sad. Rick produced my first six albums and played guitar on my earliest recordings, including the solo on *Eat It*. He had an enormous impact on my life."
'Weird Al' Jankovic

"From *Hang On Sloopy* to *Frankenstein* with Edgar Winter, Rick Derringer rocked hard. He could do funky, pop, rock... and he made great records."
Andy Powell, Wishbone Ash

"I didn't want to believe it, but it's true. Rick Derringer has passed away. Thank you for your contribution to rock 'n' roll history."
Rikki Rockett, Poison

"A big part of my musical education is gone. From his solo albums to his work with Edgar Winter, Rick Derringer was an absolutely brilliant guitarist and songwriter."
Danny Vaughn, Tyketto



ED PERLSTEIN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

RIP

Thank you... and good night.

Mark St John
Died May 17, 2025

Mark St John (born Mark Ibbotson) managed the affairs of The Pretty Things for more than three decades, during which he wore a number of hats on behalf of the group, including being producer, songwriting partner and occasional drummer. Fiercely devoted to his clients, he even managed to reclaim ownership of The Pretty Things' recorded catalogue by taking their old record companies to court.

Chris Hager
Died May 19, 2025

The former guitarist with LA metal acts Rough Cutt and Ratt has passed away at the age of 67. "I'm saddened to hear about the passing of Christopher," Ratt singer Stephen Pearcy wrote online. "Chris and I started [Ratt forerunners] Mickey Ratt together, and he was an amazing person, a great guitarist and songwriter." After his days as a musician, Hager became known for mentorship and support of up-and-coming players.

Billy Earthart
February 21, 1954 – May 13, 2025

Born in Tullahoma, Tennessee, keyboard player and pianist William Thaxton Earheart III was a co-founding member of Grammy-winning country-rockers the Amazing Rhythm Aces. He later joined the band of Hank Williams. Earthart appeared on more than 200 albums, working with the likes of Al Green, BB King and Waylon Jennings. He was 71 years old and had been battling cancer.

Tony J Liddle
June 15, 1985 – May 6, 2025

Blitzkrieg singer Brian Ross has paid tribute to the NWOBHM band's guitarist from 1989 to 1996, and from 2001 to '02, stating: "Tony wrote many great songs for Blitzkrieg. He was and always will be a massive part of Blitzkrieg history and its family. Tony leaves a musical legacy that will never be forgotten".

Brian Montana
Died April 28, 2025

The former guitarist and bassist with Possessed was killed during a shootout with the San Francisco Police after brandishing a weapon toward his neighbour. Brian Montana was with the group for only a short time, appearing on a demo but leaving before 1985's debut *Seven Churches*. According to police reports, the 60-year fired at officers, before succumbing to his injuries.

John Edwards
December 25, 1944 – May 11, 2025

Born in St Louis, Edwards forged a solo career before becoming the lead singer with US vocal group The Spinners in 1977. He was by a forced to retire due to a debilitating stroke at the turn of the new millennium. Edwards was 80.

James Baker
March 7, 1954 – May 6, 2025

James Baker was a founding member and drummer with Australian rock-meets-new wave band the Hoodoo Gurus, and later with Beasts Of Bourbon, The Victims, The Dubrovniks and The Painkillers. The 71-year-had old fought a long battle with cancer.



Jill Sobule
January 16, 1959 – May 1, 2025

US singer-songwriter Jill Sobule (pictured) is noted for her 1995 hit *I Kissed A Girl*, the first song with openly gay themes to reach the *Billboard* Top 20. A month before her tragic death in a house fire, Sobule made new headlines with her final song written about America's Vice-President, *JD Vance Is A C**t*. She was 66.

Daniel Williams
December 12, 1985 – May 22, 2025

Daniel Williams played drums for the Ohio-based metalcore band The Devil Wears Prada from their inception in 2005 until leaving the world of music more than a decade later. The 39-year-old died in a plane crash in San Diego, California. The Devil Wears Prada posted: "No words. We owe you everything. Love you for ever."



Simon House

August 29, 1948 – May 25, 2025

Hawkwind have paid tribute to the keyboard player and violinist who played with them over several spells, firstly from 1974 until '78, when he left to join David Bowie's band, and again in various capacities from 1989 to 2007.

"We are very sorry to hear of the passing of our old friend and bandmate Simon House," said a post at Hawkwind's social media pages. "Simon was an outstanding musician, and we share treasured memories. Fly free, old friend."

A classically trained violinist who married effortless technique with sonic exploration, Nottingham-born House was one of the great unsung keyboard players of the progressive 70s.

His first band of note was High Tide, with whom he played bass. After switching to violin,joined the Third Ear Band, and later replaced Del Dettmar in the Hawks for an impressive initial run of albums that included *Hall Of The Mountain Grill*, *Warrior On The Edge Of Time* and *Quark, Strangeness And Charm*.

In 1978 he left to join Bowie's live band for the Isolar II (aka the *Low/"Heroes"*) world tour. House had known Bowie since his High Tide days. Dressed all in white he presented a standout yet implacable presence on stage. House also contributed to Bowie's subsequent *Lodger* album, including the hit *Boys Keep Swinging*.

As a session musician throughout the 1980s he worked with the likes of Japan, Mike Oldfield and Thomas Dolby.

Hawkwind breakaway band the Hawklords called him: "A towering musical genius, yet humble and helpful to all of us in pursuit of our creative endeavours." **JB/DL**



Joe Louis Walker

December 25, 1949 – April 30, 2025

Tributes have been paid to San Franciscan blues guitarist, singer, songwriter and producer Joe Louis Walker, who passed away aged 75 following a cardiac-related illness.

Aretha Franklin once affectionately referred to him as 'The Bluesman', and Buddy Guy once predicted that Walker would take the blues "into the future".

Walker's work saw him inducted into the Blues Hall Of Fame and receive a string of other awards. His 2015 album *Everybody Wants A Piece* was nominated for a 2016 Grammy in the Best Contemporary Blues Album category.

He learned to play the guitar around the age of eight and became a known name on the Bay Area scene by the time he was 16, performing with the likes of John Lee Hooker, Thelonious Monk, Steve Miller, Muddy Waters, Jimi Hendrix and more.

Following Walker's death, Kenny Wayne Shepherd wrote: "RIP Joe Louis Walker. We lost another Blues legend."

Sari Schorr added: "Joe Louis Walker gave me my start – and changed my life. He was a mentor, and a giant of the blues. His passing leaves a giant hole in the blues world, but his spirit lives on in every artist he touched." **SL/DL**

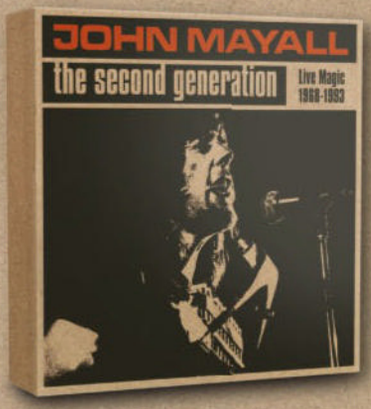
SIMON HOUSE: ERICA ECHENBERG/REDFERNS; JOE LOUIS WALKER: DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS; JILL SOBULE: FRED HAYES/WIREIMAGE

JOHN MAYALL

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The Orchard

The Who Asked Zak To "Lie"

Daltrey and Townshend bring in a new Who drummer.

The Who are uncertain whether their swansong The Song Is Over Farewell Tour – announced as the last issue of *Classic Rock* went to press – will visit the UK. Its US and Canadian shows are set to take place in August and September. Asked about the possibility of the British and European leg at a press event in London, Roger Daltrey insisted: "Let's see if we survive this one".

Recently there has been the somewhat farcical sacking, reinstatement and final dismissal of Zak Starkey, their drummer since 1996. Their new drummer is Scott Devours, from Daltrey's solo band.

Bizarrely, Starkey (son of former Beatle Ringo Starr) later claimed he was asked to lie about his exit. He wrote online: "I was fired two weeks after reinstatement and asked to make a statement saying I had quit The Who to pursue my other musical [endeavours]." He added: "This would be a lie." **DL**



The Who: no UK dates for final tour yet.

The Song Remains ...Confused

Jake Holmes sues Jimmy Page for the second time.

Jimmy Page is again being sued by the American artist who wrote the song *Dazed And Confused*. When Led Zeppelin recorded it for their debut album in 1969, Page was credited as the sole songwriter. Holmes's original version had appeared two years earlier on his debut *The Above Ground Sound Of Jake Holmes*. After a copyright infringement lawsuit in 2010, the credit was amended to: "Page – inspired by Jake Holmes".

Now Holmes, 85, is suing again. This time, Page's co-defendants include Sony Pictures, who Holmes claims incorrectly credited the track in this year's *Becoming Led Zeppelin* documentary. Holmes believes two early live recordings of *Dazed And Confused* appear in the film without his permission and without payment. The legal papers also allege that Page has released a number of other live recordings of *Dazed And Confused* without correct credit or payment. Should judges rule in his favour, Holmes will be paid $150,000 for each copyright infringement. **DL**

NEWS

A new documentary on **Judas Priest** is in the pipeline. Titled *The Ballad Of Judas Priest*, it will be co-directed by Rage Against The Machine guitarist Tom Morello and Sam Dunn of *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey* fame.

Styx release their eighteenth studio album on July 18 via Alpha Dog 2T/UMe. The Chicago band say that *Circling From Above* examines the "complexities of the human experience through the intersecting lenses of technology and nature".

The Leadmill, Sheffield's longest-running live music venue, has lost its appeal against an eviction notice. In its 45 years presenting live music it has hosted shows by, among many others, Def Leppard, Muse and the Manic Street Preachers.

Iron Maiden are requesting that fans do not excessively film or photograph the show on their latest tour, Run For Your Lives. In a statement, manager Rod Smallwood explains: "We want fans to enjoy the shows first-hand, rather than on their small screens," adding: "It's really not a lot to ask, is it?"



U2 are working on their first album of new material since *Songs Of Experience* in 2017. Singer Bono (pictured) recently told US chat show host Jimmy Kimmel: "It's the sound of four men who feel like their lives depend on it. Nobody needs a new U2 album unless it's an extraordinary one."



BONO: DOMINIQUE CHARRIAU/WIREIMAGE; THE WHO: SAMIR HUSSEIN/WIREIMAGE; FISHBONE: RAYMOND AMICO/PRESS

WELCOME BACK

Fishbone

The genre-mixing US band return with hard-hitting album, following last year's Trump-castigating single.

Formed in 1979 by high-school friends from LA, Fishbone blazed a trail through musical and societal barriers with a sound that seamlessly stitched together punk, funk, ska, jazz and tooth-loosening riffs, while irrepressible frontman Angelo Moore declaimed socially conscious lyrics. Since the departure of original members Norwood Fisher and Walt Kibby last year, Moore, fellow founder Chris Dowd and returning guitarist Spacey T (formerly of Tom Morello-approved African American metal pioneers Sound Barrier) have defied the odds and returned with a characteristically eclectic new album.

Angelo, when you announced the personnel changes in April 2024, you said you hoped fans would give the new line-up a chance. Have you been encouraged by the response so far?
AM: Yeah. We just finished the Escape From America tour in France, and ended up in London, at the Underworld. All the shows were sold out – really good response at every show. I never thought I'd see some of the guys gone. It turned into a situation where your brothers turn into your captors. I ended up calling it Fishbone Penitentiary, because you feel like you're trapped, with misunderstanding, ego and pride. But we've been able to reinvent ourselves. We thank the guys that were there, we made this legacy together. Now we've taken the reins. We're riding it into the next dimension.

You released the single *Racist Piece Of Shit* immediately before the US presidential election last year.
AM: *Racist Piece Of Shit* describes not only the president, but a lot of people in his cabinet. Unfortunately, racism is a big, ugly phenomenon in America today. It's a disease of vanity. Hopefully our music and message will change the minds of these people.
Spacey T: My parents are telling me: "If you go to Washington DC or Florida, please be careful, maybe consider not playing *Racist Piece Of Shit*." [But] I've got to stand up for what I believe in.

***Stockholm Syndrome*, Fishbone's first full-length album in more than twenty years, has plenty of the genre-blending variety you're known for.**
ST: There's some surprises on this record. One song reminds me of David Bowie. This is a whole new thing that they probably should have been doing years ago.
AM: We have new band members that have helped us manifest these songs that we couldn't do with the last line-up because of musical and artistic differences. There's a lot of tension, trauma and edge in these songs, from the last experience. I'm glad we're able to actually get it out.

> **"There's a lot of tension, trauma and edge in these [new] songs."**

Spacey, you've said that when Sound Barrier signed to MCA in 1980, they didn't know how to market an African-American metal band, but you've since been cited as an influence by Tom Morello.
ST: I heard stories like that from Fishbone, too. "Make up your mind what style of music you want to do." Just market us like you market every other rock band. The Sound Barrier box set is coming.

Funk rock pioneer George Clinton guests on the album. Can you see yourselves rocking into your eighties like him?
ST: We all plan to try to go the duration, to put the band where it should have been the whole time. This is just the beginning. **RD**

Stockholm Syndrome is out on June 27, released independently. Go to fishbone.net



HIGH HOPES

Ravagers

"Some tours were hard. We'd get into fights. We would hate each other towards the end."

Part Hanoi Rocks, part their skanky selves, meet the band soundtracking the end of the world.

Ravagers are the US's greatest post-apocalyptic rock'n'roll band. I dunno if you realise this, but it's over, man. The good guys lost.

"I thought it was a cool concept," says Ravagers main man Alex Hagen from his hotel in Spain, where the band are on tour. "The name reminded me of a seventies exploitation grindhouse movie where the world is over, and there's just rabid gangs of crazy people on the streets. I related that a lot to the neighborhood I lived in in Baltimore when I started the band."

End-of-the-world vibes, long hair, tight pants and ripsaw sleaze guitars, Ravagers have everything you need for your next street rumble. Half Hanoi Rocks, half back-alley punk rock marauders, they formed a decade ago after the dissolution of Hagen's former band the Living Wrecks.

"I'd started trying to write music and I had a couple tunes that I liked," says Hagen. "I was living with Matt Gabs [previously a member of Baltimore sleaze-punk near-legends Fishnet Stalkers, as well as Atlanta rock heroes Biters], who's in the band now, and I would show him what I was working on. He would give me tips and stuff, and he kind of helped guide my songwriting and guitar skills. It helped me feel confident enough to front my own band, and that's where Ravagers started."

Ravagers hit the ground running, releasing a spate of EPs and a full-length album, and playing every skanky dive bar and punk house in the US. Repeatedly. "We would just go on these long tours across the country with our records," Hagen remembers. "I used Facebook and booked all the tours myself. We would party a lot, made a lot of great connections, met a lot of cool people. We had a good time, but some of the tours were hard. We would get into fights. We would hate each other towards the end," he says with a laugh. "I'd think: 'Is this over? Should I form a new band?' But the moment never came. We just kept going."

Eventually, the US got hip to Ravagers. Europe came next. And now there's new album *On The Loose*. Produced by former Biters frontman Tuk Smith, it sounds sorta like glam-era Japan if they were Scandinavian action-rockers. Its highlight is the nihilistic *No Tomorrow No Problem*, a sneering glam-punk ode to the bad times. "I felt like: 'How can it get any worse?'" says Hagen. "You can't do anything about it. So you might as well just go out with a bang."

Okay, so Baltimore is no Detroit Rock City, but when Ravagers come to play you're never gonna forget them.

"That's the best part, man," Hagen says. "When you know you've won somebody over, and you know the next time you come to that town they're going to be psyched to fucking see you, man. It's cool." **KM**

On The Loose is out now via Spaghetty Town.

FOR FANS OF...



"We all like that one," Alex Hagen says, of punk supergroup the Lords Of The New Church's second studio album (spearheaded by Dead Boys' Stiv Bators and Damned guitarist Brian James). "They experimented with different types of music, but their personality held the vibe of the band together. And they're just cool."

DANNY SIEBENHAAR/PRESS

Sheer Art Attack

Lemmy statue erected, new Sabbath mural on the way.

A statue of Lemmy Kilmister has been unveiled in the late Motörhead leader's home town of Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent. The 2.25m-high bronze-cast statue was created by sculptor and Motörhead fan Andy Edwards. Located in the town centre's Market Place, it portrays Lemmy as he appeared at the Heavy Metal Holocaust in Port Vale in 1981.

"It looks fantastic," comments former Motörhead guitarist Phil Campbell, who was present for the unveiling. "The way he's stood there playing his Rickenbacker, the clothes he's wearing, it really captures his essence."

Meanwhile, a new mural commemorating the final live appearance of the original Black Sabbath is to be unveiled before Back To The Beginning, their sold-out concert at Villa Park on July 5. Located on Navigation Street, the 120ft (36.5m) drawing it will eventually stretch to 120ft in length, across the bridge over the train lines coming into New Street station in Birmingham. **DL**



Lemmy: cast in appropriately heavy metal.

Springsteen's Anti-Trump Chorus Grows

Stars back The Boss.

A remarkable war of words has broken out between Bruce Springsteen and Donald Trump after Springsteen slammed the US president and his "corrupt, incompetent, and treasonous administration" during a concert in Manchester. The speech was later released as part of his six-track EP *Land Of Hope And Dreams*.

Trump responded quickly, insisting that Springsteen is "highly overrated" and "not a talented guy" and branding him a "dried out prune of a rocker".

Neil Young backed The Boss, posting at his website: "I am not scared of you, [Trump]. Neither are the rest of us. You are forgetting your real job. You work for us. Wake up Republicans! This guy is out of control. We need a real president!"

During a gig in Finland, Robert Plant commented: "Bruce Springsteen is touring right now in the UK. And he's putting out some really serious stuff. So tune in to him." And let's all hope that we can be..." His band then played Led Zep's *Friends*. **DL**

NEWS

Foo Fighters drummer Josh Freese says he is "shocked and disappointed" to have been fired from the band for what he sees as "no reason". Freese joined the group two years ago, following the death of Taylor Hawkins. He adds: "I support whatever they feel is best for the band." No replacement has been announced.

An expanded and remastered edition of **UFO**'s 1980 album *No Place To Run*, their first with Paul Chapman on guitar following the departure of Michael Schenker, is released on August 15 via Chrysalis. Available on double CD and triple vinyl, it includes a previously unreleased live show from London's Marquee club on November 16, 1980.

Kelly Hansen is bringing his 20-year tenure as lead singer of **Foreigner** to an end. "It's time to pass the mic," he says. The group's guitarist Luis Maldonado, who recently fronted the band on a tour of South America, will continue in that role.



Robert Fripp (pictured) says he's "in great shape and great spirits" recuperating from a heart attack. King Crimson's leader/guitarist thanked fans for their support.

Thin Lizzy guitarist **Scott Gorham** is almost back to full health after a brush with sepsis that saw him die briefly on the operating table. The incident happened a year ago. "Hopefully soon-ish I can get my buns back out on the road," he says.



WELCOME BACK

A Thousand Horses

The southern rockers tour the UK in the summer, and are currently "making A Thousand Horses rock record".

Hard-driving Nashville country-rockers A Thousand Horses are nothing if not resilient. Their 2024 album *The Outside*, their third, came after a particularly testing time that saw sweeping changes in the band's personal lives and the departure of guitarist Zach Brown, while they also dealt with the knock-on effects of the pandemic. A decade on from big-selling debut *Southernality*, the remaining members – frontman Michael Hobby, lead guitarist Bill Satcher and bassist Graham DeLoach – are gearing up for an exciting new chapter in their career.

Why is *The Outside* such a personal album for you all?

Michael Hobby: We started making this record in 2022 or 2023, and during that time Zach [Brown] left. There was no drama, no band fight or anything, it was just a natural progression in his life. So we needed to restructure our team, and also just getting back together again and making music was important. It re-sparked everything that we love about being in the band.

Had it been a difficult few years for the band prior to that?

With everything that was going on in the world, with the pandemic, we'd been stuck at home, off the road. I'd lost my father during that time as well, which was tough. And we were all new dads, which is a learning curve.

New song *'Til My Heart Don't Beat* is included on the newly expanded edition of *The Outside*. What does it signify?

It's a bridge into what's coming. We're kind of moving back towards our roots and the southern rock thing that we do. We're not trying to thread a needle or chase anything. We're getting back to the records that Bill and Graham and I grew up listening to. It's like: "Hey, here's a little taste of the future."

How does that southern rock heritage play into what you do?

The Black Crowes were a big influence on us, especially me, because they're my second cousins and I grew up knowing them and listening to them. When you talk about great artists from the South, you've got Lynyrd Skynyrd, the Allman Brothers, Tom Petty, Drivin N Cryin. Growing up, that music was everywhere around us. It was just part of the DNA around South Carolina and Georgia, where we're all from.

> **"We're moving back towards the southern rock thing."**

It's been ten years since your debut album *Southernality*. Do you ever reflect on that journey?

Absolutely. We were so young. You think you're prepared for something like that, because you've dreamed of it your whole life. But it's a rocket ship and you're just strapped to it, praying to God that you're going to survive. But we lived it up. Man, what a magical time.

What can people expect from your live shows over here?

We're still working it out, but the thing about our UK fans is they love the deep cuts. So I really want to switch up our set for this run and do something special, pull out some of the older songs. And we'll play some stuff that nobody's heard yet.

So you have new songs ready to go?

Yeah, we're working on a new record now. We've got nine or ten songs cut so far. We're making A Thousand Horses rock record, getting back to what made us who we are. So we're firing on all pistons. **RH**

The band tour the UK from July 30 to August 1. Details at athousandhorses.com

ROBERT FRIPP: DAVE J HOGAN/GETTY IMAGES; LEMMY: RYAN JENKINSON/GETTY IMAGES; A THOUSAND HORSES: ZACK KNUDSEN/PRESS



"I'm a huge fan of people like Queen and Guns N' Roses, bands from the time before sub-genres."

★ HIGH HOPES

Star Circus

Variety is said to be the spice of life, and musically these guys throw a lot into the ring.

Dave Winkler, frontman with Star Circus, the London-based quartet who represent the missing link between ELO and Def Leppard, used to spend his evenings pretending to be other people. "I was Gerard Way of My Chemical Romance for a bit," he says, smiling, "Then I was Ozzy Osbourne; one time a Brazilian couple came up to me and said that they'd seen me at Rock In Rio, which was astounding, really."

Huh? If you haven't already guessed, Winkler was a hired hand before Star Circus, playing in other people's bands, including tribute acts. It paid the bills at least, he reflects.

Seemingly he's drawn on this range of experience across the rock spectrum for Star Circus. Taking inspiration from acts as varied as Thin Lizzy, Alice Cooper and Leppard, they're a throwback to the days when bands would try a little bit of everything. "I'm a huge fan of people like Queen and Guns N' Roses, bands from the time before sub-genres of everything, when the guitarist would throw in a metal song or someone else threw in a funk-pop track.

"I've been in bands where it's like: '[disappointed voice] Oh, you've written a song in a major key. That's too happy for what we do.' Or dismissing a ballad because it's got a key change."

Star Circus' recent single *One Hit Wonder* is certainly inspired by band life, in this case a particularly controlling individual.

"It became a thing where as soon as we got signed, suddenly there were rules, like we all have to stand in diamond formation; I was only allowed to walk forwards if I had a particularly important guitar solo."

While the first Star Circus album, 2022's *Separate Sides*, featured Winkler alone, just-released follow-up *From The Wreckage* is very much the sound of a band. First to join was Sophie Aurelia Young on bass, followed by... let's just say a guitarist.

"We had quite a major issue with him at a festival we played at last year," says Winkler. "He behaved... well, inappropriately. Very inappropriately."

Young takes up the story: "We were due on stage at two p.m. So we got to the festival in good time, and saw the organisers, and they told us that this person had been thrown out of the festival a few hours before we were due to play – and this was supposed to be our biggest ever gig."

Fortunately the band's keyboard player was able to deputise. "He doesn't do all our shows, but luckily he was doing this one," says Winkler. "We had to pick him up from the train station and tell him: 'You've got ninety minutes to learn all the lead guitar parts I don't play.' Somehow we got away with it – even if I had to run up to him between every song with instructions." **WS**

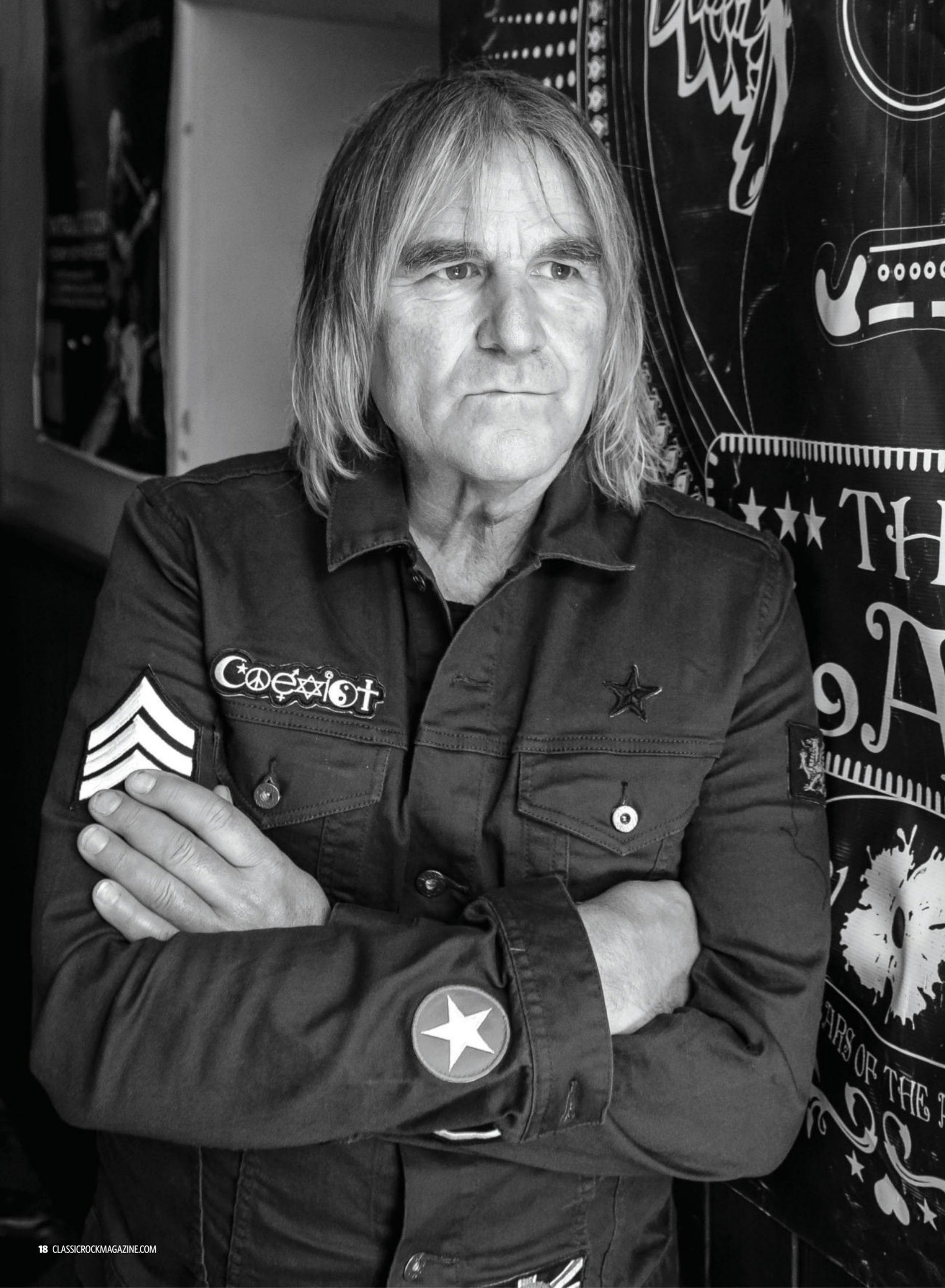
From The Wreckage is out now via Renaissance Records.

FOR FANS OF...



"*Hysteria* is amazing and I'm very fond of *Adrenalize*, but I think *Pyromania* is just a little bit more succinct," Dave Winkler says of the Def Leppard classic. "There's things like *Photograph* on it which is massively up-tempo and is a big cock-rock hit, and you've got darker stuff like *Die Hard The Hunter* which is more sort of minor-key. It's an album I love."

DEAN ADDISON/PRESS


Coexist



MIKE PETERS

February 25, 1959 – April 29 2025

Rob Hughes looks back at the life and music of the much-loved guitarist, singer and songwriter with Welsh rockers The Alarm.

For a working-class kid growing up in an ailing North Wales seaside town during the 70s, opportunities were limited. But Mike Peters resolved to make something of himself. Discovering *A Glasgow Gang Observed*, James Patrick's frank study of inner-city poverty and violence, had a profound effect on the teenaged Peters.

"It's about how a group of people were driven to the bottom of life's ladder," he explained to *Classic Rock* in 2014. "The only things that keep them together are clothes, music, street culture and their friendship. And when they realise they haven't got anything else, that's when they become their most creative. I sort of related to that story."

Peters was inspired to write a piece ("almost a screenplay, really") titled *Sixty Eight Guns*. "It was all about this gang mentality and how creative you can be when you've only got a white sheet of paper and no other materials to build with. I wrote a line for it that said: 'If they take our chances, we'll create our own'."

'His primary objective was to inspire others.'

In many ways, Peters's gangland discourse set the template for his entire career, both as The Alarm's charismatic leader and as a solo artist. He wrote socio-political songs about liberty, togetherness and self-determination. Those detractors who accused The Alarm of cheap sloganeering missed the point entirely. For all the band's anthemic rallying cries, Peters wasn't interested in some spurious call to revolution; his primary objective was to inspire others.

Punk provided the spark. In September 1976, the 17-year-old Peters saw the Sex Pistols play at Quaintways in Chester. Returning home to Rhyl, he wasted no time in starting his own band, The Toilets. They were imbued with plenty of raw punk spirit, but lasted barely a year. By 1978 he was fronting Seventeen, a mod-inclined power-pop alternative. Their legacy was slightly more susbtantial: an indie single (1980's *Don't Let Go*) and a tour supporting Stray Cats.

But there was something else. Peters's final songwriting contribution to Seventeen was *Streets Of Fear*. Informed by his almost-screenplay from earlier, it soon morphed into *Sixty Eight Guns*. As the band transitioned into The Alarm in 1981, they made sure to take it with them.

The Alarm were built very much in Peters' image. Their tenacious energy drew from punk, but the era's pervasive sense of cynicism was shelved in favour of lyrics that spoke of hope, defiance and positivity, however unfashionable that may have been in music biz circles. At their first gig, at Prestatyn's Victoria Hotel in June 1981, The Alarm opened with *Shout To The Devil*. Ostensiby a song about Peters' take on organised religion in America, it sidestepped any devisive connotations by focusing on the universal. '*Live your life as it should be lived*,' Peters yelled, preacher-like, over a cyclical riff and tom-tom drums. '*Follow your heart, for the truth is everlasting*.'

He needed that kind of unshakable optimism. The stop-start nature of The Alarm's early years demanded it. The quartet – Peters, fellow guitarist Dave Sharp, bassist Eddie MacDonald and drummer Nigel Twist - moved to London, sharing a tiny flat in Battersea and scrabbling around for gigs. They recorded demos that left record companies nonplussed.

Perseverance was requisite. The band's first major breakthrough was supporting U2 over two nights at the Lyceum in London in December '81. It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. As The Alarm's fan base slowly grew over the next 18 months, U2 took them along for the Stateside leg of their *War* tour. Back in London, at Hammersmith Palais, Bono invited Peters and Big Country's Stuart Adamson up on stage, declaring them "the new breed".

Having finally secured a deal with label IRS, The Alarm hit their stride in 1983 with third single *The* ▷

KEVIN NIXON







Whether with his band The Alarm (left) or with others (here fronting Big Country), for Peters it was all about the fans.

Stand, an instant classic that was agreeably rough around the edges and carried a rowdy folk charge. The impression was heightened by the band's debut appearance on *Top Of The Pops* that September. With his spiked mullet and navy cavalry shirt, harmonica around his neck and acoustic guitar at full busker pelt, Peters looked like some post-punk descendent of Woody Guthrie or Bob Dylan. MacDonald and Sharp took their positions at either side of him, Twist beating out a rhythm behind the trio as The Alarm leaned into a rambunctious *Sixty Eight Guns*.

It was an auspicious moment. As the single flew into the UK chart, The Alarm arrived in the public consciousness. The following year's debut album, *Declaration*, was a major success too, compounded by another hit with an unequivocal message: *Where Were You Hiding When The Storm Broke?*. Conceived by the band's main songwriting axis of Peters and MacDonald, it's an elemental call to allegiance, a day of treckoning amid a Biblical deluge. '*Get back in your shelter if you can't come down off the fence*,' a full-throated Peters sings, his commitment to the cause absolute.

Declaration was The Alarm at their most consequential, from the aforementioned big hitters to key tracks like *Marching On* and *Blaze Of Glory*. The latter was a damning, battle-scarred riposte to those in the music press intent on questioning the motives of U2, The Alarm and their ilk. '*It's funny how they shoot you down, when your hands are held up high*,' Peters declares, as the song doubles down on the band's core pinciples of holding true to your beliefs.

The Alarm's following grew apace. Steady touring overseas also brought them a sizeable US audience. In April 1986, as one of the first nationwide live broadcasts on MTV, Peters and co. attracted 26,000 people to a headline show in Los Angeles. That summer they also supported Queen at Wembley Stadium.

With their undimmed passion and quaking choruses, The Alarm seemed perfect for huge arenas. Their repertoire had advanced, too. Songs like *Strength* and *Spirit Of '76* (the latter an autobiographical study of Peters' struggle to further himself on his own terms: '*I will never give in until the day I die/Get myself some independence, carve out a future with my two bare hands*') were firm favourites. Parent album *Strength* went silver. By July '87 The Alarm were supporting U2 at Cardiff Arms Park, regaling a crowd of 50,000.

"Despite all that life could throw at him, I never saw him without a smile... He spread nothing but positivity."

Billy Duffy

Behind the scenes, however, things weren't quite so peachy. A schism was beginning to develop within the band. Prior to recording that year's *Eye Of The Hurricane*, primary songwriters Peters and MacDonald were confronted by Sharp and Twist, who demanded that they all begin writing together as a four-piece. A stand-off ensued. Peters and MacDonald held firm through the tense album sessions, no doubt feeling vindicated when it became another big seller.

There were more high points over the next few years – the first Welsh-language single to make the UK Top 40, in the shape of *Hwylio Dros Y Môr*; performing with Neil Young on stage in New York City; a US tour with Bob Dylan, on which Peters duetted with Dylan on *Knockin' On Heaven's Door* ("It was cheek-to-cheek with Dylan," he recalled later. "Amazing!") – but relations within The Alarm were even more strained. In June 1991, during a gig at London's Brixton Academy, Peters announced that he was quitting the band.

"When any band has its first success, you all think: 'This is it, we've made it!'" he told *Classic Rock*. "You think it's going to go on for ever. But all the things we have in life are very fragile. They can change in the blink of an eye."

Having returned to Wales with his family and eased himself into a solo career, life for Peters changed irrevocably in 1995, when he was diagnosed with cancer. He decided to face it head-on. Already committed to live dates abroad, and keen to promote his solo debut *Breathe*, he spent six weeks touring the States. "I knew I had to focus on something or I wouldn't get through those next few months," he told us in 2011. "I thought of Lennon wearing his army jacket, and I went down that route: go to war against the illness. I went to an army surplus store and kitted myself out in green fatigues."

Remarkably, within 12 months doctors gave


Mike Peters and Billy Duffy as Coloursøund.

him the all-clear. "I felt so lucky and so glad to be alive," he said. "It really fuelled the whole of my life from that point on." He wasn't kidding. Peters threw his energies into reinforcing his online presence, releasing exclusive albums to eager fans, performing live and collaborating with others. In 1998 he teamed up with The Cult's Billy Duffy as Coloursøund, who released a self-titled album the following year.

The new millennium saw Peters revive The Alarm name, as well as take to the road with supergroup Dead Men Walking, alongside the likes of Pete Wylie, Glen Matlock, Captain Sensible and Kirk Brandon. In 2004 he released a riotous single and accompanying video, *45 RPM*, under the guise of The Poppy Fields, a fake teenage band from Chester. The media bought it, as did the public, sending it into the Top 30.

Peters revealed the truth live on Radio 1 during the station's chart rundown. He also pointed out that it wasn't merely a cheeky hoax. Bands of a certain vintage, he argued, were often dismissed as outdated by radio DJs and controllers. Peters wanted the music to be judged purely on its own merits, "and not by our old hairstyles". The whole episode led to a Rhyl-set film drama, *Vinyl*, starring Phil Daniels and Keith Allen, with Peters heading up the soundtrack.

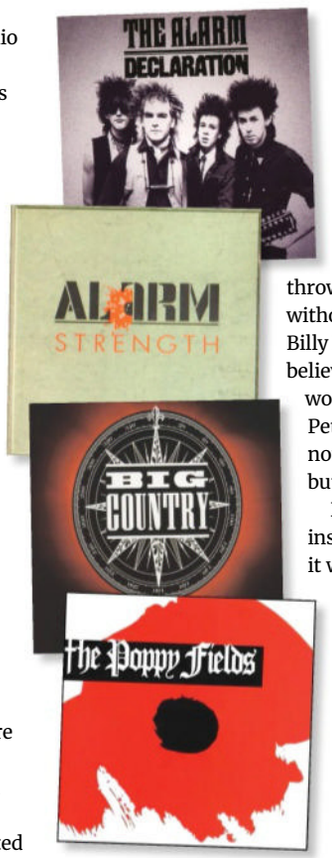
At the back end of 2005, Peters's cancer returned, in the form of chronic lymphocytic leukaemia. His response was to co-found the Love Hope Strength Foundation, a cancer charity designed to raise money for treatment, awareness and early detection. Just as he'd done when forging a career with The Alarm, he turned adversity into a mission.

He staged all-star fundraisers in challenging terrain, from Everest base camp to Machu Picchu to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro. In 2007 he raised more than £60,000 for local cancer care by hosting the inaugural Snowdon Rocks, an annual trek up Wales' highest mountain, which culminated in a celebratory gig. These initiatives dovetailed with his ongoing music career. Peters's live shows accommodated his Get On The List campaign, designed to sign people up to the global stem cell registry, thereby increasing the likelihood of potential life-saving matches for cancer patients.

When Big Country invited him to join as lead singer in 2011, he took it as an honour. The resulting tour and album, 2013's *The Journey*, proved deeply emotional. "[Big Country frontman] Stuart Adamson was a great friend of mine," he told *Classic Rock*. "I've had to come back to health to stay alive as a musician and a father, and a lot of inspiration came from hearing Stuart sing '*stay alive*' on the song *In A Big Country*. Those words were massive to me when I was in hospital having chemotherapy."

Most recently, Peters had been "reimagining" The Alarm's back catalogue with expanded editions of their 80s classics, updated with new lyrics reflecting the roll of time. There was a healthy amount of fresh product, too, the latest being *Transformation*, the final recorded act of Peters's extraordinary life. Having twice gone into remission over the years, his cancer returned last winter. This time it didn't go away. Peters died on April 29, aged 66.

Tributes came in thick and fast. The Waterboys' Mike Scott fondly recalled his first encounter with The Alarm at London club Dingwalls in 1982; Simple Minds' Jim Kerr saluted a great ally and "beautiful person"; Manic Street Preachers called him "a true fighter with a heavenly voice"; Stiff Little Fingers' Jake Burns, a longtime friend who first crossed paths with Peters during those old Seventeen days, marvelled at the fact that "despite all that life could throw at him, I never saw him without a smile". The Cult guitarist Billy Duffy was inconsolable. "I truly believe a light has gone out in the world today," he wrote, citing Peters as a major inspiration and noting that he "spread nothing but positivity in every situation".



Peters himself drew his greatest inspiration from music. Whether it was solo albums, The Alarm or any number of collaborative works, the secret was to constantly shift his perspective, to seek new challenges. "What I've learned is that you've just got to remain fluid at all times," he told us. "You've got to be brave in music, you have to be prepared to take risks to survive."



NEVER GIVE IN
STARS PAY TRIBUTE

"My brother in arms, a great spirit, a voice for all, very sadly missed and fondly remembered. Travel easy, my friend."
Dave Sharp

"No words can be enough. A light has gone out in the world."
Billy Duffy, The Cult/Coloursøund

"Mike had fought his battle with that bastard disease with dignity. Another Welsh talent gone but not forgotten."
Andy Scott, Sweet

"Sadly, after a long and heroic struggle with illness Mike Peters has departed. What a lovely, enthusiastic bloke. A great singer, too. RIP Mikey."
Captain Sensible, The Damned

"Very said news. Mike was a true fighter with a heavenly voice."
Manic Street Preachers

"Saddened to hear of the death of Mike Peters, a great musician, songwriter and performer who always had time for his fans"
The Pogues

"A genuinely lovely person whose positivity with music, life and against the three decades of cancer was inspirational."
John Robb

"The Alarm was a great band and Mike was a proud Welshman who loved this crazy business and appreciated that it was all about the fans. God bless you, mate."
Peter Hook

"You'll read a lot of comments describing Mike as a beautiful person, a Welsh hero and so much more. All will be absolutely true. He was loved and admired by so many."
Jim Kerr, Simple Minds



Buckcherry

Sorry

Frontman Josh Todd's mea culpa gave the Californian rockers their biggest radio hit, with a song that music fans of all stripes can identify with and which has brought many to tears.

Words: **Henry Yates**

At the turn of the millennium, a betting man wouldn't have touched Buckcherry. The Californians had enjoyed gold sales with 1999's self-titled debut album, home to crossover hit *Lit Up*. But 2001 follow-up *Time Bomb* was a relative stiff, and the following year's hiatus suggested a band realising the zeitgeist was against them. "That period was when what I call 'nerd-rock' – y'know, the shoegazer dudes with the Buddy Holly glasses – and fuckin' rap-rock was going on," recalls frontman Josh Todd. "We didn't fit into any of that."

With their sleazeball riffs and Todd's serpentine stage presence, Buckcherry seemed more like a glorious relic of the mid-80s Sunset Strip. Even when he and lead guitarist Keith Nelson rebuilt the line-up in 2005 with Stevie D (guitar), Jimmy Ashhurst (bass) and Xavier Muriel (drums), the industry hardly welcomed them back.

"Nobody would sign the band in the United States," Todd remembers. "We got a small advance from a Japanese record label, and that's how we made the *15* record [2005 in Japan]. In the States, our manager Allen Kovac said: 'Fuck it, I'll start my own label and we'll put it out on that.'"

Thankfully, as an adaptable and prolific songwriter, Todd was holding a couple of aces. The first was *Crazy Bitch*, a leery, lascivious old-school strut seemingly designed for the stripper pole. The second was its polar opposite, *Sorry*, a wistful, instantly catchy country-rock ballad that Todd had initiated as a fun song to sing with his youngest daughter, then realised it was the perfect way to apologise to his wife.

"I met her through a photographer called Christopher Cuffaro when I was thirty," Todd recalls. "I really like eyes, and I was just looking through his pictures and there was this girl's face with these beautiful green eyes. I said: 'Hey, are this girl's eyes for real?' And Christopher says: 'Yeah. That's Mitzi Martin. She's the biggest LA-based model. I've known her for a long time and she's really sweet. Do you want to meet her?' And that started the whole thing."

The sentiment of *Sorry*, Todd says, will be instantly familiar to anyone who makes their living on the road, the singer holding up his hands for not being there for his family. "You can't really understand it unless you're a touring musician but you're always playing catch-up when you get home. You're fucking exhausted and trying to squeeze all your love into your family, and you're saying 'sorry' a lot for all the things you couldn't do."

There were also deeper reasons why Todd wanted to thank Martin for her commitment. "I've been sober the whole time I've been with my wife, but when we got together she didn't really know the depth of dysfunction of my foundation and where I came from," explains the singer, who remembers being a "horrible drug addict and alcoholic" in his teens and early twenties. "She doesn't know the animal I am when I'm drinking and using. I learnt so many bad habits from childhood, and stuffed down so much shit instead of articulating it. There's been a lot of stuff I've had to work through. I'm not the easiest person to deal with. I'm still a work in progress."

"I've seen some big, hard motherfkers singing *Sorry*. So I know it's touching people."**

Having sketched out the lyric and song structure, Todd presented *Sorry* to the band.

"It had started out with three chords on a guitar, just a pretty song with a good melody," he reflects. "But it wasn't great yet. We knew it needed something. So Keith tweaked a few chords to make it sound more like a song. Marti Frederiksen [co-writer] had just come into the fold, so he changed the chorus melody a little and wrote some bridge music for me to write the words and melodies over. And boom, it happened."

With the band's meagre budget stretching to just 15 days for the entire album sessions (hence the title), Todd recalls spending less than two hours tracking the *Sorry* vocal. Yet the finished track joined *Crazy Bitch* to lead the *15* album campaign. It's ironic, he concedes today, that the success of a song he wrote to apologise for being away from home so much left him facing even more road miles. "We toured almost three years on that record, put in over two hundred shows a year and we had to be everywhere at all times. There was no going home. But we were playing crazy-huge radio festivals and the crowds were insane."

It could be argued that *Sorry* is an unlikely signature tune, hardly representative of Buckcherry's feral sound. But this hard-rocking band had no problem with a ballad becoming their highest chart performer (hitting No.9 in the US).

"I have wildly different emotions," Todd says with a shrug. "I'm a human being. And songs are emotions. They're short stories. All of my favourite rock records had peaks and valleys. You had rockers, mid-tempo songs and ballads. It's nice to rock people out then bring them down with that human emotion that a ballad brings out. I've seen some big, giant, hard, tattooed motherfuckers singing *Sorry*. So I know it's touching people. I've also had some real out-of-body moments when we've played *Sorry* at huge venues and you just look out and see a sea of cellphone lights."

Ultimately, he concludes, *Sorry* flew because everybody can relate to its themes of regret and hope for redemption. "We all have a moment when we need to apologise for something we've done. We all need to humble ourselves and say we're sorry. And especially when you've been in a long-term relationship, it's really important. We've all fucked up in relationships. We're not perfect. We're human beings. I think that's why people love *Sorry*."

Buckcherry's album Roar Like Thunder is released on June 13 via Earache.



THUNDER ENLIGHTENING

"Me, Stevie D and Marti Frederiksen wrote the songs again and we have still great chemistry," Todd says of Buckcherry's upcoming new album *Roar Like Thunder*. "On this album we were like: 'Let's just fucking rock – no ballads, no covers.' We recorded it at Marti's Sienna Recording Studios in Nashville, where we've made our last three albums. When it came to writing these songs, I took inspiration from everything around me. On my days off on tour, if there's a mall close by, I like to get a cup of coffee and just sit and watch people, listen to them interact, and sometimes I'll pick up a phrase that resonates with me and save it on my iPhone. We're already playing *Roar Like Thunder* and *Come On* live right now and having a lot of fun with them."

ANNAMARIA DISANTO/GETTY



Buckcherry (Josh Todd centre) on set of the *Sorry* video shoot in LA, November 2007.

THE FACTS

RELEASE DATE
November 2007

HIGHEST CHART POSITION
US No.9

PERSONNEL
Josh Todd
Lead vocals
Keith Nelson
Lead guitar
Jimmy Ashhurst
Bass
Stevie Dacanay
Rhythm guitar
Xavier Muriel
Drums

WRITTEN BY
Josh Todd, Keith Nelson, Marti Frederiksen

PRODUCED BY
Mike Plotnikoff, Paul DeCarli, Keith Nelson

LABEL
Eleven Seven

Q&A

H.e.a.t

Frontman Kenny Leckremo on the state of rock, his predecessor, why Swedes write great songs, big hair...

Interview: **Dave Everley**

Kenny Leckremo is a man with no 'off' switch. H.e.a.t's ebullient frontman arrived only seconds ago, yet here he is, beaming a thousand-watt smile. "Let me get rid of this jacket, I'm burning up," he says, shrugging off his leather without breaking his verbal stride. He's currently on the road as part of his side hustle as guest singer with power metallers Avantasia, but today his enthusiasm is focused on his regular band's gleaming new album *Welcome To The Future*, his second record with the Swedish hard rock champions since rejoining in 2020 after the departure of Erik Grönwall, who replaced him a decade earlier.

The album is called *Welcome To The Future*. What does the future look like through H.e.a.t's eyes?
We called it that because this album doesn't really care what came before it. *Force Majeure* [Leckremo's first album since rejoining] was a great album, but it had to live up to [Erik Gronwall's 2019 swansong] *H.e.a.t II*, whereas this one is unapologetic. It doesn't give a shit. This is how we are moving forward.

Ghost are basically a hair-metal band these days. Are you a bit jealous that they've stolen your thunder?
Ach, I left jealousy behind a long time ago. Today, the more noise we can make as a community the better. I don't care if a band gets on this radio station or gets this many thousands of people to their gigs. What matters is that we get the message to younger generations who don't even know what rock'n'roll music is. I'll go to the gym and put some music on, and someone will come up to me and say: "What the hell is this?'' And I'm like: "What are you talking about? It's Survivor! How do you not know this?!"

H.e.a.t, Ghost, Europe, ABBA, Max Martin - why are Swedes so good at writing massive tunes?
It's the weather. For most of the year it's grey, it's cold, it's snowing, it's dark. You're loath to go outside. So what do you do? You shack up inside and write music to cheer yourself up and make you feel good. I bet you most of those songs were written in the dark.

Have rock bands become too apologetic and forgotten how to write tunes these days?
It's not just in rock, it's in every genre. I guess people associate it with a 'retro' style of music. In H.e.a.t we're not apologetic or retro, we love that kind of music. We're not going to do some sort of hip-hop or EDM song for the sake of pushing boundaries. All the old-school bands we looked up to knew exactly who they were.

Is it tough to get noticed as a straight-ahead hard rock band in 2025?
Rock is definitely a little bit underground at this moment. It's definitely not the centre of attention. You're always going to have AC/DC and Iron Maiden and Springsteen, but regular rock bands aren't gonna have the same space in the media as your Taylor Swifts. But it's exciting right now. There are a lot of great fucking bands just waiting to reach that big audience. And there *is* a big audience for rock music, it's just about reaching through the noise.

What would you say to someone who thinks H.e.a.t are cheesy?
I love cheese! It's great on a sandwich. And maybe on a speaker system too. No, it's a bit weird when somebody says they don't like such and such a band cos they're cheesy. Whatever. Just listen to the music and come see us fucking live and then tell me it's cheesy.

One of the reasons you originally left H.e.a.t was because you were diagnosed with a heart condition. Is that still a factor in your life?
It's all in the past. I was born with a condition called Wolff-Parkinson-White Syndrome, which didn't really manifest itself in a bad way until I got older. It's a rare condition, but you get it operated on and get it fixed, and you have to hope it doesn't come back.

When you were out of the band, were there times when you thought you might rejoin?
Of course. I'm not gonna lie, a few years after I left, I thought it would be amazing to work with the guys again, whether it was in H.e.a.t or something else. And then Erik was, like: "I've had enough of this." The guys told me: "We're gonna ask Kenny if he wants to come back, and if he doesn't then maybe we say fuck this shit".

Have you ever met Erik?
Yeah, and there's nothing but love and respect there. If any weird vibes existed between us, it would have been when we were much younger and we didn't get the opportunity to get to know each other. He's a great fucking guy, and he's part of this band for ever, whether he likes it or not. He was in the band for ten years. You can't just erase that shit.

So when do you and Erik team up for a song together?
You can never say never. I'm a big fan of what he does, and he thinks what I do is pretty good as well. So yeah, it's something that could happen in the future.

You were a boxer when you were younger. Do you still box?
That was a very small percentage of my sporting career. I only boxed for a short time. I was actually an ice hockey player. Can I still play? I think I could still work some magic on the ice.

H.e.a.t have the best hair in rock today. But if one of you went bald, would you kick the guy out, or make him wear a wig?
No, you can look however you want to, man. Personally, if it started going tits-up here [points to luxuriant barnet] I'd just shave it off. Is there room for bald people in H.e.a.t? Fuck yeah!

Welcome To The Future is out now via earMUSIC.



“What matters is that we get the message to younger generations who don’t even know what rock’n’roll music is.”





Battlesnake: sharp-dressed men with grand ideas.

6 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

Battlesnake

They often perform in just underwear, they like to live dangerously on stage, they dig chaos, bombast, the Bible's stories...

Words: **Liz Scarlett**

Appearances can be deceiving. And when it comes to Battlesnake, seven Australians who perform wearing cleric reptilian costumes, it's difficult to know what to expect. Over the past few years the band have performed to many surprised audiences in support of Kiss, The Smashing Pumpkins and Jane's Addiction, as well as on international headline tours of their own.

"I remember walking out on stage at a massive arena, and it was silent," recalls keytar player Billy O'Key. "I could literally hear people going: 'What the fuck is this?'"

"It's my favourite reaction. And then throughout the set we convert them," guitarist Ben Frank adds.

With the release of their snappily titled second album *Dawn Of The Exultants And The Hunt For The Shepherd*, Battlesnake are continuing to proselytize the masses with a riotous riff-powered gospel that involves robot priests, great battles and even Jesus Christ's long-lost twin.

At a Battlesnake gig, expect the unexpected.
Masters of chaos, Battlesnake have perfected the art of riling their audiences. At most shows you'll find the band hanging from the ceiling, forgoing their costumes for skimpy underwear (or as they call them, 'budgies') and igniting some of the most manic mosh pits around. During last year's European tour their set was unexpectedly gate-crashed by one particularly "enthusiastic" audience member. "In Birmingham, a 'lovely' elderly woman got on stage," says O'Key. "It turns out she was actually screaming into the mic, yelling at everyone, trying to spread some anti-vaccine information. It really blew us all away!"

Venues are warned ahead when Battlesnake are coming to town.
Due to their penchant for jumping off stages and clambering over lighting rigs, venues are often flagged of Battlesnake's behaviour beforehand – and issue the band a swift deterrent before their set. "People literally send through specific documents to us now, because they know that's part of what we do," bassist Elliott Hitchcock says with a laugh.

During their appearance at Bearded Theory in 2024, O'Key faced some gnarly consequences after one rather ambitious jump from the stage, leaving him with a badly fractured ankle and an early fight home. Another time, the fire brigade were called when the CO2 canons set off a venue's fire alarms.

Their fans love to dress up.
Battlesnake fans love to sport their own costumes, too. The band are seeing a rise of gig-goers wearing full wizard outfits, dragons and knight-style body armour, looking as though they've just finished a game of *Dungeons & Dragons*.

"One of my favourite things to see as we've been playing more in Europe and the UK is supporters dressed in whatever character they are inspired by in the universe we've made," says Hitchcock.

One fan has said that for the band's performance at Download this summer their group will all be wearing chains, dressed as the dungeon witch from 2024's *The Key Of Solomon*.

The Bible is the most metal story ever told.
Inspired by the vast worlds of *The Lord Of The Rings* and *Dune*, Battlesnake seek to enrich their music with similar levels of complex storytelling. To them, however, the "greatest" and "most metal" story ever created is the Bible, which they describe as the "ultimate battle of good versus evil". One of their favourite Biblical texts is Revelations, which recounts tales of "wicked creatures with multiple heads". O'Key explains: "There's so much depth to it, and so much lore surrounds everything. It's a well of inspiration that you can draw endlessly from."

Chaos is at the heart of their new album.
Dawn Of The Exultants And The Hunt For The Shepherd is their most unrestrained and bombastic so far. Its frenzied riffs, huge percussion and nutty melodies reflect the unsteady mood of the band during its recording. "At one point or another all members were going through a really tumultuous time emotionally," O'Key says. "We thought we were never going to finish it, and I think we all just started throwing shit at the wall. It was a really wild time."

They dream of bigger stage shows. And horses.
Although they currently all still have 'normal' jobs, they are serious about their goal to make music their full-time occupation, and they've got many ideas on what they'd do with that success.

"The stage is set like a castle," Frank muses, describing their vision for their future stage set-up. "And then at the centre is the drawbridge that opens up on the ground, and then we all ride out on horses, and some motorbikes as well."

Dawn Of The Exultants And The Hunt For The Shepherd is out on June 6 (self-released).

THAT'S THE WAY YOU DO IT

After four Top 5 albums, **Dire Straits** were doing well but were hardly a household name. That all changed when they made *Brothers In Arms*. Mark Knopfler, John Illsley and Guy Fletcher take us back.

Words: **Paul Rees**



It's spring 1985 in Britain. The coal miners have ended a rancorous, year-long dispute with Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. In the wake of the Heysel Stadium riot, in which 39 people died and 600 were injured, English football clubs are banned indefinitely from competing in Europe. Coca-Cola is fanfaring its New Coke brand into supermarkets – it will last a mere three months of going unloved and undrunk before being abandoned ignominiously by the company. The latest James Bond film, *A View To A Kill*, Roger Moore's final time as 007, is in cinemas, and the Beeb's new soap opera *EastEnders* is airing twice weekly on TV...

In 1985, as a nation we still have the choice of just four TV channels. No one has a mobile phone or access to the internet. But one new device is offering to the masses the promise of a gleaming new age: Philips's CD150 is the first budget-priced CD player to be launched onto Britain's high streets, and by the end of the summer it will be synonymous with nothing as much as with Mark Knopfler's wry, doleful voice and the sound of his guitar.

Released on May 17, 1985, *Brothers In Arms* is Knopfler's band Dire Straits' fifth album. In the seven years since bursting out from the South London pub circuit with *Sultans Of Swing*, a rollicking love letter to a fictitious jobbing pub band, the Straits have built a robustly loyal following on the back of Knopfler's tunefully literate songs and near-constant touring. *Brothers In Arms*, though, is a whole other deal. In short order, it will make superstars of the balding, headband-sporting Knopfler and his bandmates.

Happenstance is very good to them. Philips hold the majority share in the Straits' record company, Polygram, and Knopfler's co-producer, New Yorker Neil Dorfsman, cajoled him into making *Brothers In Arms* one of the first records recorded to 24-track digital tape. What better way to push a music player touted to be sound-enhancing than with a record actually designed to be sonically pristine? Ergo, wherever a CD150 is to be found, right there alongside it will be a CD copy of *Brothers In Arms*. ≫



DEBORAH FEINGOLD/PRESS



Recording *Brothers In Arms* in the sun-kissed Caribbean: (l-r) Guy Fletcher, Mark Knopfler, Alan Clark, Terry Williams, John Illsley.

This much accounts for the fact that the album fast becomes the first record to sell a million copies on CD. Its other 30 million-plus sales can be attributed to several other factors, among them the band's sortie to a Caribbean island, Sting's trilling of the line '*I want my MTV*' on a track, the onset of another technology, video animation, and the globe-spanning Live Aid concert. Yet for the most part it boils down to the simple fact that nine of Knopfler's songs prove to be so universally irresistible, and a band hitting their peak.

"It was a remarkable thing to have been involved with," John Illsley, Dire Straits' one-time bass player and Knopfler's chief lieutenant in the band, says today. "A wonderful memory, all things being considered, and happy endings."

For Knopfler's part, he offers a shrug, a hangdog smile, and says with what proves to be a typical absence of pretence: "It's not very complicated. It was just a bunch of luck, really. I do remember it being a fantastic time. It was what we all wanted and had been chasing. I suppose you could also say the fallout was much bigger than anything we could ever have foreseen."



To mark its 40th anniversary this year, *Brothers In Arms* is being re-released once more, in deluxe CD and old-school vinyl formats, with the addition of a full-show recording from San Antonio, Texas on night 91 of the *Brothers* tour. Enough for Knopfler, Illsley and Guy Fletcher, the latter brought into the band on keyboards for the *Brothers* sessions, to gather at three different locations in April to look back: Knopfler in his West London studio, Illsley at his holiday home in Portugal, and Fletcher in the sun-dappled living room of his house on the English south coast.

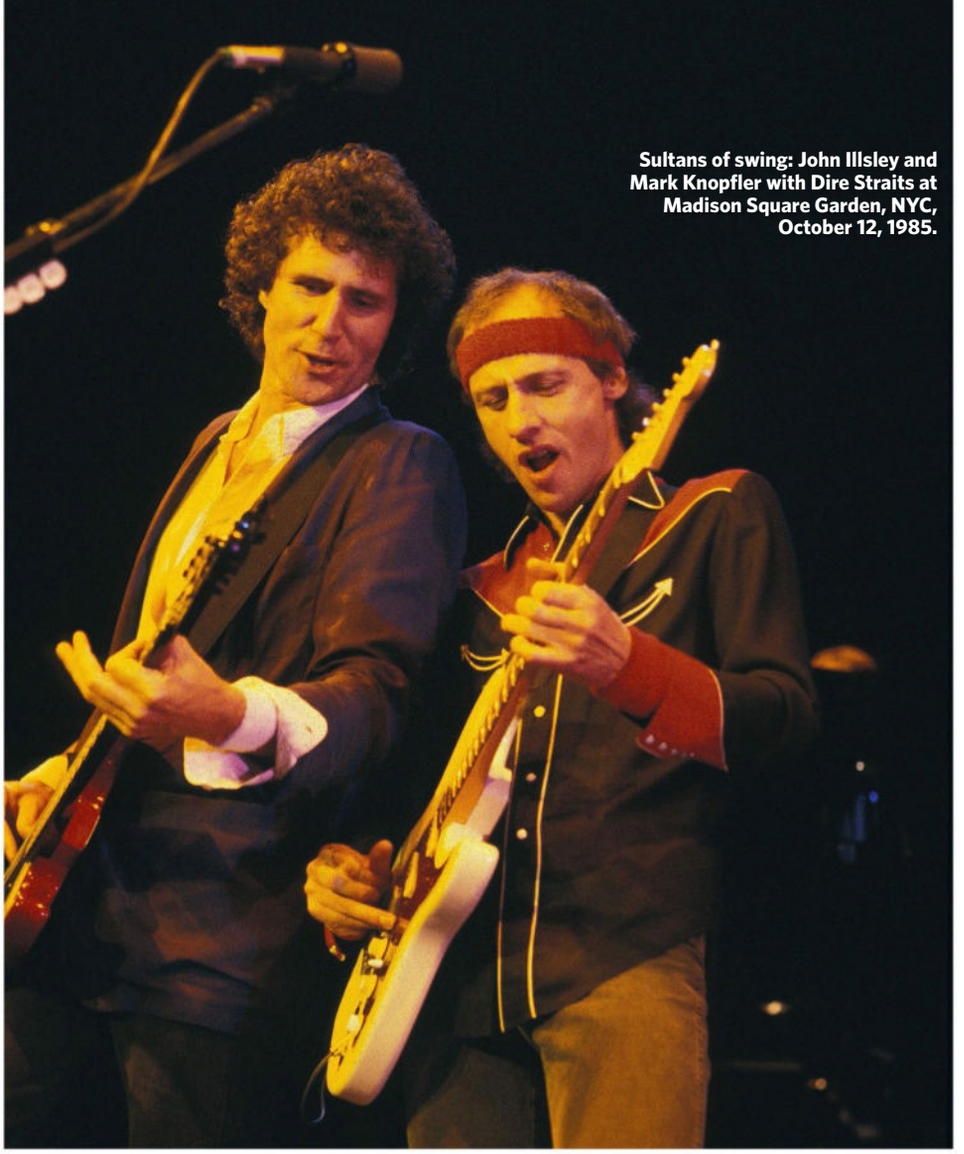
Occasional golf partners and near-neighbours, Illsley and Fletcher are model English gentleman rock stars, chatty, disarming, self-deprecating. Illsley claims not to know of the San Antonio recording's existence, much less to have heard it. "But then people often don't tell me about these things," he says with a sigh.

Knopfler is ever so softly spoken, humbleness personified. He is prone to shuffling off topic and has the air of a kindly handyman who's popped round to mend a leak. But it makes him difficult to pin down, and which is likely the point. As the Straits' long-serving manager Ed Bicknell told me back in 2015: "Mark is the master of vagueness." Knopfler lights up the most when referencing his beloved Newcastle United's recent winning of a long-overdue trophy, the Carabou Cup, in March. "A lifetime of waiting," he says, glowing with the enthusiasm of a 75-year-old schoolboy.

He and Illsley first met in 1976. Illsley was sharing a council flat in London with Knopfler's younger brother David. He found Mark crashed out on their living room floor one morning. Soon enough they'd formed a band together playing Mark's songs, with David Knopfler on rhythm guitar and Pick Withers, a North London habituate, on drums. Withers, jobless at the time, suggested the name Dire Straits.

Their self-titled debut album of 1978 was driven along by Knopfler's knack for folksy melody and a classic rock-minted tune. The following year's *Communiqué* was more of the same, then they raised their game with 1980's *Making Movies*. On that album, Knopfler stretched out on such finely sketched songs as *Romeo And Juliet* and *Tunnel Of Love*. He also had an explosive argument in the studio with his brother, who promptly quit.

DEBORAH FEINGOLD/PRESS



Sultans of swing: John Illsley and Mark Knopfler with Dire Straits at Madison Square Garden, NYC, October 12, 1985.

EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS

"You could say the fallout was much bigger than anything we could ever have foreseen."

Mark Knopfler

As if freed from shackles, Knopfler progressed the band still further on 1982's *Love Over Gold*, an album of just five songs, with the 14-minute-plus *Telegraph Road* and *Private Investigations* navigating a territory between Springsteen's heartland rock and Dylan's regal mid-70s. Withers bailed after they'd made that record, leaving Knopfler and Illsley to soldier on with keyboard player Alan Clark. According to Ed Bicknell again, Knopfler possessed a determined streak and was "quite ruthless. That's not a criticism, by the way. If you're going to climb the greasy poll, you need to be ruthless".

"Apart from the fact Mark was a humble man," says Illsley, "and he didn't really take himself too seriously, I think he saw himself more as a songwriter who played the guitar. Songwriting to him is more significant. He played the guitar in sympathy with the song, and that's what we did as a band when we joined in. But keep in mind, if you're the guy that wrote the song, you really have to be solely responsible at the end of the day for saying: 'That's it.' To me, that's what ran through the whole of the Dire Straits lifeline."

"When I started, I was too good at telling other people what to do," Knopfler avers. "Once I started playing with more practised and experienced, top-level people, I realised I didn't have to do that."

Knopfler was himself fêted, a single sustained note enough to identify the signature sound of his guitar. Dylan was admirer, and invited Knopfler to play on his 1979 album *Slow Train Coming* and produce 1983's *Infidels*.

After *Love Over Gold*, Knopfler branched out into doing film soundtracks. First Bill Forsyth's charming Scottish comedy *Local Hero*, and after that an Irish Troubles drama, *Cal*, and Forsyth's next film, *Comfort And Joy*. To better enable him to write and record at home in West London, he bought an early synthesiser-sampler, a Synclavier, but couldn't get it to work. Enter technical whizz Guy Fletcher, just off touring with Roxy Music.

"Mark had a mews house in Holland Park at the time," says Fletcher. "I literally knocked on his door with a keyboard under my arm. The Synclavier was ridiculously expensive and very high-tech, and he needed someone to help him out with it. He played me a load of music he loved – a lot of JJ Cale, a bit of Dylan – and we hit it off.

"Neither of us is a trained musician. Our upbringing is based on what we were listening to, and it's all done by ear. First impressions? How intense he was, how deep in thought, how meticulous. A million ideas a minute. He had a vision for everything he wrote, and he was very intent on achieving it." ➢

BEYOND BROTHERS

Words: **Henry Yates**

It might be overshadowed by that looming resonator guitar, but Dire Straits' back catalogue runs far deeper and richer than *Brothers In Arms*. From 1978's hardscrabble self-titled debut to the hit-and-miss coda of 1991's *On Every Street* – via arguably the best live record of all time – this is the story of the calm before (and after) the storm, told through six very different albums.

Dire Straits (1978)



The late-70s pub circuit of South London was an inauspicious launch pad ("Deptford was an armpit back then") and Knopfler's men – career sloggers perilously close to their thirties – could easily have ossified into the no-hoper jazz band he so candidly observed on *Sultans Of Swing*. But with no small irony, the demo of that song – chronicling the small, sad, thwarted lives of wetback working musicians – pricked up the ears of BBC Radio London's Charlie Gillett, which helped speed Dire Straits to a deal with Vertigo/Warner and sessions at Basing Street Studios.

On the debut album they made there, what had seemed like an impediment – Knopfler's old-soul earthiness and lack of Jagger-style pizazz – emerged as a strength, the lugubrious singer spinning tales of his native Newcastle's smoky shipyards on highlights like *Down To The Waterline* with an authenticity that was plainly under his fingernails. "If you haven't unloaded a lorry," he once reflected, "you can never quite come to grips with reality."

As a guitarist, too, Knopfler was already fully formed and in a different class to the punk scene's stragglers, and the quicksilver bob 'n' weave outro of *Sultans* sent the song to No.8 on home turf, and helped its parent album to UK No.5/US No.2. For better or worse, the boulder was rolling.

Communiqué (1979)



Communiqué sold three million copies. Yet markers of a band on the rise belied a follow-up that Knopfler simply "didn't think was a very good record".

For some, the rapid turnaround of this second was suspect ("The songs sound like pale imitations," sniffed the *Birmingham Daily Post*, "or the cuts that were not good enough for the *Dire Straits* album"). In the States, meanwhile, Knopfler complained of Uncle Sam's "hang-up" as his new material scraped to No.11 and the critics came after him. "Dire Straits appear to be trapped in a creative

YOU PLAY THE GUITAR ON THE MTV

The instrument that featured on the cover of Dire Straits' *Brothers In Arms* is still very much in use.

Words: **Jamie Dickson**

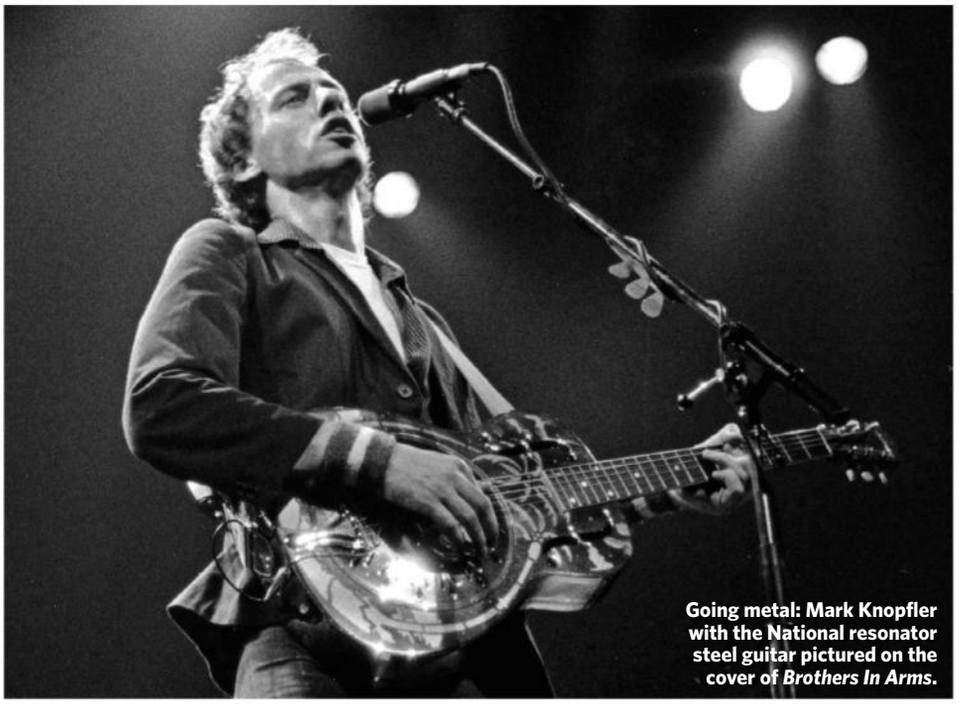
Even more than a Fender Strat, the guitar most powerfully associated with Knopfler's work in Dire Straits is of course the National Style 0 resonator that appears against a background of blue sky on the cover of *Brothers In Arms*. It was no mere prop, however, and is still used extensively today for studio and live work – Mark uses it to play the intro to *Romeo And Juliet*, for example. The guitar dates to around 1936/37, and although it's a very familiar guitar it hides a few details that might not be obvious at first glance, such as the right-hand F-hole, which conceals a jack socket for an instrument cable so the guitar can be plugged in and its internal pickup can be used. Due to its position, only right-angle jacks can be used, for obvious reasons.

National's Style 0 resonator debuted in 1930 and continued in production until 1942, when demand for resonators was waning during the war years. The Style O came in several cosmetically quite different variations, but it was based on a brass body that initially had a plain nickel finish, then with a striking 'lightning bolt' design, with further variations following thereafter. The *Brothers* guitar is a Variation 7 model, with two occupants in the boat depicted on its reverse, rather than the single occupant shown on the similar but earlier Variation 6. The palm trees on the front of the Variation 7 also had visible coconuts, which were absent on the superficially similar Variation 6 model that preceded it. Most Variation 7s had a tortoiseshell-style Lucite scratchplate, which, as on Knopfler's, was often removed. A further difference from earlier Variations is the solid, not slotted, headstock with a curved logo at its peak.

For more information on the fascinating history of the National Style 0, we recommend Mark Makin's excellent reference book *Palmtrees, Senoritas... And Rocket Ships!*.



JOBY SESSIONS



Going metal: Mark Knopfler with the National resonator steel guitar pictured on the cover of *Brothers In Arms*.

BRIAN RASIC/GETTY IMAGES

"Mark was always looking for something different. Some other element that wasn't in the room."

Guy Fletcher

Parallel to his extra-curricular projects, Knopfler was writing songs for Dire Straits' next album, taking scraps of ideas he'd assembled on the road and fleshing them out back at home base. The source of one song, *Walk Of Life*, was a record he'd been listening to of Cajun folk music. The title of another, *Brothers In Arms*, was spoken by his architect father in a conversation they'd had about the Falklands War. More often than not, the lyrics came to him first. Famously, he picked up those for *Money For Nothing* from a conversation he overheard in a Manhattan electrical store: a loud-mouthed delivery man, leaning over his trolley, holding court to the store junior about the fecklessness of modern musicians.

"All the possibilities were there in that song, and that's a thrill," Knopfler says. "I just hid behind a stack of microwaves and listened in, because every next line was better than the last. This bone-headed guy would say things like: 'What's that, Hawaiian noises?' He actually said: 'That motherfucker has got his own jet airplane.' That's how he spoke, and which I didn't put in the song.

"After the guy had left, I had to ask for a pen and paper from the woman at reception. Then I sat down in the kitchen display area, in the front window of the store, and wrote down all these lines from memory."

Knopfler says he had a facility with language from an early age. Always a voracious reader, he took Steinbeck to his bed when he was off sick from school – "nine-years-old, not really understanding it but fascinated".

One summer's day in 1985, he asked Bicknell to have the band reconvene. Illsley, Clark and the newly enlisted Fletcher were summoned to the Holland Park mews to hear Knopfler's fresh batch of songs. With *Love Over Gold* tour drummer Terry Williams completing the line-up, they went into Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera's Galley Studios in leafy Chertsey in Surrey to rehearse them. Collectively they were a mixed bag of songs, ranging from something as knockabout as *Walk Of Life* to the harder-edged *The Man's Too Strong* and the woozy, late-night confection *Your Latest Trick*.

According to Knopfler, he carried a torch for *Money For Nothing* right off the bat ("I knew it was going to be fun"). Fletcher was taken by the simmering *Ride Across The River*, while the quietly brooding title track struck each of them as a substantial piece.

"All the time we worked on it, I felt it was going to be a song that resonated," says Illsley. "And I wasn't wrong. Every time I played it then, and whenever I do now, I get a shiver down my spine. It was the moment with the album where I thought we were doing something different to anything we'd done before."

Knopfler says it was the song he spent the longest on. "Because it's quite deceptive. Each verse is slightly different from the one preceding it. These little variations are built into the song. I've heard classically trained musicians make the mistake of playing it straight. You have to listen hard to figure out what's different from the third verse to the second, and the second to the first. It might be just one 'blue' note, but it changes the way you feel."

His lack of formal training, he reflects, likely made him less bound to the established rules and conventions of writing music. "I would just stagger from one place to the next," he says. "I'm sure a structured education, enrolling at Juilliard, say, is a wonderful thing, but mine came from hearing Lonnie Donegan play Leadbelly songs, and up through The Shadows. You just

impasse," said the *Los Angeles Times*, "and *Communiqué* is marked by an overwhelming sense of déjà vu."

Almost half a century later, with the weight of expectation lifted, there's gold here: try *Once Upon A Time In The West*'s slow-burn shuffle, the mournful strum of *Where Do You Think You're Going?* or the effervescent and still lovely *Lady Writer*. None of that moved the needle in '79, however, and as implied by *Communiqué*'s no-show on 2005's best-of compilation *Private Investigations*, *Communiqué* remains an underrated blind spot for all but the most ardent Straits fans.

Making Movies (1980)



Interviewed by *Classic Rock*'s Dave Everley in 2019, Knopfler claimed to have "always" held the reins of Dire Straits. But the bandleader's grip palpably tightened with *Making Movies*, a fantastic third album whose personnel issues (kid brother David dropped out of the line-up during sessions) couldn't tarnish the first new songs to truly rival *Sultans Of Swing*. "*Making Movies* was closer to what I like to do," Knopfler told interviewer Bill Flanagan. "On that record I was determined I would not be immobilised by anything."

The album sales and streaming figures support the official line that *Brothers In Arms* is Dire Straits' best record. Revisit *Making Movies* now, however, and the podium finish is harder to call. These remain uncommonly strong songs: the wounded resonator pluck of *Romeo And Juliet*, *Skateaway*'s plaintive, instant-classic chorus, the tough riffing of *Expresso Love*... Everything, in fact, apart from the honkingly bad ode to the German gay-club scene, *Les Boys*.

Meanwhile, the hiring of Springsteen's mix-master Jimmy Iovine on production paid the greatest dividends on stunning opener *Tunnel Of Love*. With its tale of a lost love set against the backdrop of the North-East's fading seaside towns – capped by a glorious outro guitar solo that aches alongside the lyric – it boasts both the small-town storytelling smarts and skyscraping musical ambition of The Boss at the peak of his powers. Has Knopfler written a better song?

Love Over Gold (1982)



Settling in at the Power Station to self-produce *Love Over Gold*, Knopfler emerged with a fourth release that, along with *Communiqué*, is usually missing from the collections of casual fans. At first glance, with just five songs, *Love Over Gold* smacked more of a stopgap EP than a proper album, but that was to overlook the sprawl of Side A's two long-form masterpieces.

Of these, *Private Investigations* remains one of the most obtuse-yet-brilliant hit singles in British rock: a seven-minute film-noir that flows from mournful nylon-string flamenco to a closing section alternating between John Illsley's spooky staccato bass and Knopfler's jump-scare guitar blasts (somehow it still made UK No.2). Longer still, at 14 minutes, and even more impressive is *Telegraph Road*:



Beatles producer George Martin's AIR Studios on the island of Montserrat was an idyllic place to record.

go marching out into the middle of the thing, not really knowing what you're doing. Innocence is bliss."

When it came to choosing where to record the album, one option stood out. In 1979, George Martin, The Beatles' producer, had opened a branch of his AIR Studios on the tiny Caribbean island of Montserrat. Both Knopfler and Illsley had got to know the urbane Martin, who suggested they follow The Police and Eric Clapton's footsteps out to Montserrat and record there. Neither man needed too much persuading.

In most aspects, Martin's place was idyllic. Serene, detached, the white-walled, plantation-style studio and accommodation building faced out to a swimming pool, and beyond it the aquamarine ocean. There was a watering hole, Andy's Bar, on site for the visiting artists to patronise. In the evening they could unwind outdoors, dining on freshly barbequed fish rustled up by the resident chef, a garrulous, outsized man known to one and all as Daddy George.

On the other hand, the sheer remoteness of the location made other basic practicalities a challenge. Two of the delicate Sony digital tape machines ordered by producer/engineer Neil Dorfsman had to be transported to the studio on the back of a pick-up truck, over potholed track roads, with a couple of local labourers assigned to hang on to each lest it go bouncing off into the bush. The weather, too, was prone to extremes. Four years later, Hurricane Hugo reduced AIR to rubble. The Dire Straits party arrived in November, and into the jaws of the storm season. It rained relentlessly the first six weeks they were there. There was literally nothing else for them to do but record.

"To do it all over again? My god, I think it'd be better to kill us. There's a time and a place."

John Illsley

Dorfsman, who'd cut his teeth on *Making Movies* and *Love Over Gold*, got to grips with the nascent digital technology.

"Every day, we got up, had breakfast together, and then we were in the studio from ten a.m. to ten p.m.," says Illsley. "We'd arrived there pretty organised, so there was quite a lot we were able to get done."

"It was an interesting period with the digital recording," says Knopfler. "An adventure as well. Neil was chasing after what he ruefully refers to now as 'perfection', which is not something you can actually get, but he'd learnt his craft. He was a tremendous engineer. I used to just sit and watch him work, taking it all in, and he couldn't tell me to clear me off because it was my record."

They broke off to spend Christmas at home in England, then returned to Montserrat in early January 1985.

The second round of sessions got off to an inauspicious start. There were technical issues with the Sony machines, the extent of which the principals disagree on. Fletcher's version of events has it that a bad batch of tape caused them to lose just one of the songs they'd recorded on their first visit. Illsley insists that everything they'd originally recorded was erased and the band "kind of having to start all over again".

What isn't in doubt is that drummer Terry Williams had struggled with his requirement to play to a click track, and was relieved of his duties. In his place came American session ace Omar Hakim, just off having played on Sting's solo debut album *The Dream Of The Blue Turtles*, and at Knopfler's behest.

"Mark was always looking for something different," says Fletcher. "Some other element that wasn't in the room. I do remember watching Omar set his drums up, how he'd play rhythms while he was tuning, and I'd never seen anything like it. There were some heavy chops going on."

The departed Williams had at least left behind one thunderous volley. He'd put it down as an intro part to *Money For Nothing*, Knopfler's intended centrepiece song for the album. The track otherwise was proving to be a headache, never quite right whichever way they came at it, and to the point, says Fletcher, that Knopfler had begun to lose interest in it. Over dinner one night, Dorfsman collared Fletcher and encouraged him to try a synth part on the song. Or, in Fletcher's translation, "to give it a sound like a dinosaur. I thought of it more as a crashing sound. Anyway, I threw it down there and then on my Yamaha DX1. The track was scheduled for the bin, but when the band heard it the next morning it renewed everyone's excitement in it".

From there, simple good fortune intervened. In the first instance, Knopfler was also grappling to find the exact guitar sound he wanted for the track. He was especially taken with the molasses-thick, fuzzy tone Billy Gibbons stirred on ZZ Top's *Eliminator* album of two years previous, but hadn't been able to replicate it just so. In the event, a rogue mic put him right. As Knopfler was taking yet another pass at the part, a guitar mic drooped from a speaker cabinet towards the floor. Presto, he found himself playing a near-identical version of Gibbons's chugga-chugga boogie.

"One of the assistants spotted the mic and went to move it," says Fletcher, "and everybody shouted at once: 'No! Don't touch it!' Once Mark had his guitar lick down, the whole song took off and became its own lifeform."

The final flourish, Sting's beseeching backing vocal, was also an accident of fate. Knopfler was thinking about a promo spot The Police had done for MTV, and it being sung to the hook melody of one of their biggest hits, *Don't Stand So Close To Me*. Over a band lunch one day, he speculated on how *Money For Nothing* might be elevated by Sting's presence on it.

"And one of the lads piped up: 'He's just down the road from here, along the beach, on his holiday,'" he says. "I mean, we're on this speck in the middle of the ocean. So Sting came up one afternoon and sang his part for us. It did feel like a blessed sequence of happenings."

Your Latest Trick, another song they'd butted heads at, also fell into place. On this occasion, a visiting Ed Bicknell was the chief instigator. Knopfler envisaged the song as a bebop jazz number, but had found an appropriate groove elusive. Bicknell posited the idea of removing the epic tale of a dirt track's evolution into a community, written by Knopfler while he sat in the tour bus as it carved along Michigan's famed Highway 24, thumbing Norwegian author Knut Hamsun's *Growth Of The Soil*.

By comparison, the second side inevitably felt a bit slight. Perhaps the tracklisting would have been stronger, and the album more famous, had the Straits not gifted *Private Dancer* to Tina Turner. Then again, the thought of Knopfler singing it is ridiculous.

Alchemy: Dire Straits Live (1984)



Cherry-picked from two Hammersmith Odeon shows at the tail end of 1983's *Love Over Gold* tour, Dire Straits' first live album remains their best. Listen to *Alchemy* now and there's a case that no band ever batted their material around more daringly live. The prelude to each song is often as long as the track itself, as if Knopfler's players are composing in real-time, with the audience audibly surprised as a familiar hook finally arises from the jam.

You could argue that the timing of its release inevitably means *Alchemy* feels a little incomplete (there's no *Brothers In Arms* songs here, for example), while the occasional iffy synth tone plants it unmistakably in the early 80s. Yet these performances take the studio originals right to the wire and sometimes beat them (after hearing *Alchemy*'s bone-rattling spin down *Telegraph Road*, the *Love Over Gold* version sounds treacle-torpid).

Sultans swings, and the *Tunnel Of Love* outro solo is milked to shiver-and-tingle effect. But the ace in the hole here is Knopfler's *Going Home* theme from the *Local Hero* movie: a wordless yet profound instrumental finale whose wistful preamble is punctured thrillingly by the sunbeam of that Celtic-sounding fanfare.

On Every Street (1991)



The silence following *Brothers In Arms* said it all ("After that tour," Illsley told this writer, "there was a definite feeling we had to put this to bed for a while and recover from all the attention").

Released six years later into a post-Nirvana universe, *On Every Street* felt like it came from another century entirely. Yet while the zeitgeist was by now a distant dot to Knopfler and co, this sixth album is far from a death rattle. From the bee-in-a-bottle groove of *Calling Elvis* to the title track's aching pre-internet search for a lost lover, there was enough here to sign off Dire Straits' studio career with credit. But when *On Every Street* misfired – the faux-hellraising *Heavy Fuel*, or Knopfler's baffling host-with-the-most persona from *My Parties* – you couldn't argue with the lukewarm reviews.

Whatever. By then the bandleader was counting down the tour dates until he would at last be free. "I was burnt out, shredded," he told *Classic Rock* of the final straight. "I remember being in Amsterdam, lying on my bed, feeling like somebody had pulled all the wool out of me."

DEBORAH FEINGOLD/GETTY IMAGES

a beat and rethinking it as a bossa nova. "The only song of theirs I had any actual musical input on," the manager told me.

"Mark was quite inclusive with his music. He would often ask me for suggestions, to which I'd more normally go: 'Ooh, that's a bit smelly.' Democracy in a group never, ever works, but that doesn't mean you have to shit on people."

For the greater part, the basic tracks recorded at AIR were done with the band playing together out on the studio floor. Outside of these sessions, Fletcher and Clark found time to learn how to windsurf, while Knopfler was hunkered down with Dorfsman on the nuts-and-bolts details. Knopfler has abiding memories of those band tracking sessions.

"To have a man in every corner, playing with people that are really on their game, it's phenomenal," he says. "Plenty else stands out to me now. I remember going in one morning and Daddy George being in the kitchen cooking breakfast, a whole bunch of people working with him. Stevie Wonder came on the radio singing *I Just Called To Say I Love You*, and everybody started singing along. It was a moment of sheer joy, pure happiness."

In early spring 1985, operations moved to New York City, and the familiar environs of The Power Station studio in midtown Manhattan where Dire Straits had made *Love Over Gold* and *Making Movies*. There, Knopfler set about adding horn parts to several of the songs, by jazz-playing brothers Michael and Randy Brecker and the Average White Band's Malcolm Duncan.

Jack Sonni, a New York session player, was brought in to put a guitar synth on *The Man's Too Strong*. When Illsley broke his wrist while jogging in Central Park ("A slippery path and the most stupid thing you could possibly do. I wasn't even a runner, just in need of some air," he bemoans), King Crimson's Tony Levin and Neil Jason of the *Saturday Night Live* house band overdubbed bass parts. Notably in Jason's case with his slap-bass contribution to the hitherto unremarkable track *One World*.

"Another happy accident," says Illsley. "Both Neil and Tony brought different dimensions to the album, and which I wouldn't have been able to do."

"With a great collection of players, you're in the business of realising things pretty quickly," Knopfler adds. "Sometimes that might be something quite specific. There was one occasion, recording with Tom Walsh, a magnificent trumpet player, I sang the solo I wanted through the vocal mic. But that's often not the case. You know, I wasn't brought into the world to tell Randy or Michael Brecker what to play, and I didn't. It's a give-and-take thing."

As Ed Bicknell told it, once they were at The Power Station, Knopfler decreed that *Walk Of Life* was better suited as a B-side. Upon hearing Dorfsman's final mix of the track, Bicknell successfully lobbied to have it reinstated on the album. "And it went on to be a bigger-selling single worldwide than *Money For Nothing*."

None of Knopfler, Illsley or Fletcher recalls hearing the *Brothers In Arms* album for the first time as a complete whole. Their lasting impression is of the looming tour, and a deadline clock ticking down towards it. Illsley does have a vague recollection of them gathering to compare the CD, vinyl and cassette versions of the album "at some studio or other". He preferred the vinyl, "although the technology was still quite new at that particular time, and the compact disc would eventually sound better," he says. "Then again, I might just be terribly old-fashioned."

Five weeks ahead of the album, its laconic opening track, *So Far Away*, was released as the lead-off single in the UK.

The *Brothers In Arms* album cover was yet another happy accident. An American portrait photographer, Deborah Feingold, had flown out to Montserrat to do promotional pictures of the band for the record company. She just so happened to take a couple of frames of her assistant holding Knopfler's shiny 1937 National resonator guitar up to a sunset, intended as nothing more than test shots.



"It was just a bunch of luck, really. I do remember it being a fantastic time."

Mark Knopfler

Brothers In Arms met with scathing reviews from Britain's music writers – the Straits had hardly ever been critical darlings in their homeland. *NME* berated Knopfler for his "mawkish self-pity... [and] thumpingly crass attempts at wit". *Melody Maker*'s reviewer dismissed the album wholesale as "something very like the same old story". But *Brothers In Arms* followed *Love Over Gold* to No.1 in the UK album chart. From there, says Illsley, "nobody could possibly have imagined it going on to sell the way that it did".

Scheduled to run a full calendar year, the *Brothers In Arms* tour opened in Split, in what was then Yugoslavia, on April 25, 1985. But not without a hitch. The faintly ridiculous fact of Knopfler's Synclavier sharing aspects of its internal workings with missile guidance systems caused it to be impounded at Yugoslav customs.

With Terry Williams back behind the drums, and Jack Sonni and a saxophonist, Chris White, on the tour, Dire Straits arrived in the UK on June 28. The same day, *Money For Nothing* was released as the album's second single – and blast-off point. It was accompanied by a trailblazing computer-animated video by Irish director Steve Barron, brought in by Knopfler. "To this day, I don't really understand computer graphics," says Illsley, "but I do remember that video being very expensive. The record company winced at the cost."

In London, the band played 12 consecutive nights at Wembley Arena between July 4 and 16, where they were joined by guest artists such as Pete Townshend, Sting, and Knopfler's teenage idol Hank Marvin. A second show was slotted in on the evening of Saturday July 13, across the road at Wembley Stadium, where they took part in the Live Aid concert. The band took to the Live Aid stage at 6pm, in between U2 and Queen, and performed just a brace of songs: *Money For Nothing*, with Sting, and *Sultans Of Swing*. Even with such a truncated set, they were by now a powerfully formidable proposition.

"We literally walked off the stage, out of the stadium and across the car park to the Arena," says Fletcher. "I think John was even carrying his bass – and to some quite funny looks from the car park attendants, I might add."

Crossing the Atlantic, the tour wound on through North America that late summer and autumn, returning to Europe and the UK in the winter months, then proceeding in the New Year to New Zealand and Australia. They played a total of 248 shows in 118 cities. Along with it, *Brothers In Arms* maintained unceasing momentum: nine weeks at No.1 in the US. The UK's best-selling album of 1985, beating Bruce Springsteen's *Born In The USA*, Madonna's *Like A Virgin* and Phil Collins's *No Jacket Required*. Enough for even the habitually undemonstrative Knopfler to be somewhat taken in.

"Yeah, I loved it," he says. "But when you're in the eye of the storm you don't really notice it. It was a lot to pile up in a life, you know. There was one occasion a youth in Manchester shouted out to me on the street: 'You're top, man.' No, no, no. I didn't feel as though I was top of anything. I never did."

They played the final show of the tour at Sydney Entertainment Centre in Australia on April 26, 1986. Afterwards they parted with handshakes and hugs and little fanfare. The band were destined not to come together again for more than four years. Both Illsley and Fletcher allowed themselves the extravagance of a new car, a Bentley and a Porsche respectively. Knopfler retired to muse on things. In September 1988 he announced the dissolution of Dire Straits and formed a country-rock outfit the Notting Hillbillies, with Fletcher on piano and Ed Bicknell on drums.

All told, the sheer success of *Brothers In Arms* seemed to catch Knopfler as much as anybody off guard. To what degree and effect we won't be finding out today. Fifteen minutes prior to the end of our appointed time, his assistant enters ➢

PETE STILL/REDFERNS



MURDO MCLEOD/PRESS

the room, one hand making a chopping motion across his throat. "I think we're being hooked," Knopfler says, as if surprised. At any rate, by accident or design, he's spared having to revisit the Straits' ill-starred last-gasping.

In the event, he did summon the band back together. In November 1990 they convened at George Martin's AIR London studio on Oxford Street: Knopfler, Illsley, Fletcher, Clark, and with Toto drummer Jeff Porcaro in place of the departed Williams. There they recorded one more, final, album, *On Every Street*. It was pleasant, but undemanding, and no more than a wisp of its illustrious predecessor. After it, an even longer tour, described to me by Ed Bicknell as "an utter, utter misery. Whatever the zeitgeist was that we'd been part of, it had passed".

"It was exhausting for everybody, mentally and physically, no doubt about it," says Illsley. "The decision to end the band once and for all was made at the end of the tour. Mark was getting a lot of attention, and he didn't want to be playing in these huge places any longer. He wanted to do something different, and I completely understood. I was very happy."

There has been no third act for Dire Straits ever since. But *Brothers In Arms* has never gone away. It's now the UK's all-time eighth-best-selling album, level-pegged with Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. In the intervening years, the band's stock has risen. Dire Straits were inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 2018, but Knopfler skipped the ceremony.

Generally he has stayed out of the limelight, while continuing to make music. To date he's made 11 dependably solid solo albums, plus collaborations with Chet Atkins and Emmylou Harris. He appears thoroughly content with his lot, happy to be pleasing himself. Charmingly, he says he goes to the studio to write these days, because the ringing of the doorbell is too much of a distraction to him at home. "All those Amazon deliveries," he huffs gently.

Fletcher has remained at his side, recording and touring with his band. Illsley, too, has made a bunch of solo records, and plays the odd festival. He has also forged separate career paths as an exhibited painter and the proprietor of the East End Arms, a gastro pub near his Hampshire home. They do assemble intermittently to reminisce with each other, says Fletcher, "and joke about some of the things that happened. Most of them never to be repeated. There were tough times as well, but we don't dwell on those."

"Mark and I are good mates to this day," says Illsley. "I'm very grateful for that. But to do it all over again? My god, I think it'd be better to kill us. There's a time and a place."

Before Knopfler took his leave, there was just time enough to ask him when he last sat down and listened to *Brothers In Arms* in its entirety. He pushed his glasses up his nose, the expression on his face changing at a stroke from its default pensively crumpled state to one of mild bafflement. "Never, never, never," he replied with a chuckle. "I don't ever go home and play my own records. Life's tragic enough without that adding to it."

The expanded reissue of Brothers In Arms is out now via UMC/EMI.

REVOLUTION CALLING

The editor of *What Hi-Fi* magazine charts the rise and fall and rise of the CD.

Words: **Alastair Stevenson**

The compact disc was the go-to format for most music fans for decades. Launched in 1982, it rose to dominance in 1988 when it overtook vinyl sales for the first time.

From there, CD was king for over a decade, continuing its dominance near undisputed until 2002, when we first saw streaming services start to nip at its lead. Even then, it took many more years for streaming to claim the top spot, with the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) reporting that Spotify and co. didn't dethrone CDs as music's top seller until 2014.

Looking back, a key reason for CD's growth came in 1985 when Dire Straits released their album *Brothers In Arms*. It was the first CD to break one million sales,and a key album that opened listeners up to the benefits of CDs.

At a technical level, CD was the first mass-market audio format to capture a whole album's worth of music without the need for A and B sides. On average, a CD can take 74 minutes worth of music, while one side of a vinyl record can store only around 20 minutes' worth. CD players were also much easier to use, making them more alluring for general music fans.

There was also the advantage over vinyl records' delicate nature, and having to make sure to get things including tracking force and RPM right. If you didn't, you risked getting poor quality reproduction, jumpy playback, or even potentially damaging your LP. With a CD you just plonk the disc in your player and press 'Play'.

On top of that, the newer format brought simple quality-of-life improvements, including being able to skip tracks with the push of a button and – from 1993, when recordable-CD technology became cheaper and more widely available – the ability to 'burn' your own CDs and make 'mix tapes' of your favourite songs.

That's not to mention the sonic improvements, with CDs introducing digital recording and offering a wider potential dynamic range than rival formats. In fact the quality remains solid, but not top-tier, to this day.

If you're listening to music on a streaming service such as Spotify, you're getting lower than CD quality. Which is why Neil Young famously said listening to music on the service means you're only listening to "part" of what he recorded.

So why didn't CDs' reign as the top format last if it is in many ways better than Spotify? And why hasn't it enjoyed the same resurgence as vinyl in recent years?

On the latter question, for those that missed it, vinyl sales have been on the up for years. CD sales have been generally in decline or flat by comparison. This was especially true in 2024 when, according to the Digital Entertainment and Retail Association (ERA), vinyl sales grew by 10.5 per cent, with 6.7 million records sold. A flat 10.5 million albums were bought on the CD during the same period.

Answering why CD is not growing like vinyl is tricky, especially among audiophiles. At a quality level, many hi-fi enthusiasts argue that vinyl's analogue nature gives it a warmth and added "authenticity" that CDs can't match. So the debate about which is better is still very much raging.

At a practical level, many of the record shop owners and fans we speak to are also quick to highlight the intangible benefits vinyl brings as a reason for its renewed popularity. These include the community at record shops, many of which double as trendy bars and coffee joints these days, and special-edition treats such as custom artwork and bundled pullouts. This makes a lot of sense considering modern artists' renewed interest in vinyl.

If you look at sales numbers it's actually new artists selling special-edition vinyl versions of their albums with these extras that are drawing the most attention. Taylor Swift, Chappel Roan, Sabrina Carpenter and Fontaines DC account for four out of the five best-selling records from 2024, according to the Official Charts Company/BPI.

The only 'older' band to make it in was Oasis, who had a spike in sales of their 1994 album *Definitely Maybe*. And that's a far cry from the traditional old guard – Fleetwood Mac, Pink Floyd etc – who dominated vinyl sales just a decade ago. This points to reasons beyond pure audio quality and ease of use as a driving force for vinyl's growth. Maybe it's people wanting to own the music, rather than just stream it. Maybe it's pure fandom. Whatever it is, we know it's not audio quality, which is one of CD's only really strong advantages over Spotify streaming in the current world. For fans of physical media, if it was, then SACD – Sony and Philips's short-lived attempt in the 1990s to replace the CD with something even better – would now be the world's leading physical media. Conversely, Apple Music, Amazon Music, Tidal or Quobuz, which all offer higher-than-CD quality streams, would be dominating streaming, not Spotify.

Regardless of the answer, the CD is still healthy, and the fact that sales are holding steady is an achievement in itself considering the dire straits it was in a decade ago when sales were plummeting year-on-year. This, plus artists' willingness to continue releasing music on CD, including special editions, for fans of the format, suggests that CDs won't be going away any time soon.





DEBORAH FEINGOLD/GETTY IMAGES



HALLOWED BE THY STAGE

With **Iron Maiden** about to return to the UK as part of their Run For Your Lives world tour, manager Rod Smallwood shares with us what he regards as "the most important and interesting" shows the band have ever played.

Words: **Paul Elliott**



ROSS HALFIN



The French connection: Paris, September 9, 1999.

As manager of Iron Maiden for 45 years, Rod Smallwood has seen the band play live hundreds upon hundreds of times. That number will increase by the dozen as Maiden celebrate their 50th anniversary with the Run For Your Lives tour – their first with new drummer Simon Dawson in place of the long-serving Nicko McBrain.

"Maiden want to tour every year," Smallwood says. "It's not me cracking the whip and saying: 'You've got to keep working,' it's the guys. They genuinely love touring."

There have been many changes along the way. The band have been fronted by three different singers: Paul Di'Anno, Bruce Dickinson and Blaze Bayley. But the very first time Smallwood saw them, bassist Steve Harris had to sing because Di'Anno, the young rascal, had been nicked. That infamous gig, in a London boozer back in 1979, is where Smallwood begins as he tells gives us his Top 10 landmark Iron Maiden shows from across the years.

"These aren't necessarily the best gigs," he explains. "But to me they're the most important and interesting. And in every case they're teaching us something."

THE SWAN, HAMMERSMITH, LONDON, UK. JULY 1979

This was the first show I ever saw by Maiden, and they had to play without Paul [Di'Anno, vocalist] because he'd been arrested for carrying a flick-knife. Even though I wasn't managing the band then, I went into management mode and called the cop station, but they wouldn't let Paul out. So it was just three of them: Steve [Harris, bass], Dave [Murray, guitar] and the original drummer, Dougie Sampson. I said to Steve: "Do you know the words to the songs?" He said: "Yeah, I wrote them." I said: "Can you sing?" He said: "Not very well." "Can you try?" "Yeah, fine."

The Swan was an old pub on Hammersmith roundabout. Bands played in this tiny room in the back. About thirty people were in there that night. I can still see it now in my mind's eye...

Steve sang pretty well. And as soon as they played *Phantom Of The Opera* I just knew they were going to be enormous. I just thought it was an incredible track.

Even without their frontman, the band had real charisma with Steve and Dave. The way they looked the audience in the eye was the key factor.

I didn't actually agree to manage them for months after that, because I thought I was probably going back to college to study law. But deep down I knew the band was something special.

KOSEO NENKIN HALL, TOKYO, JAPAN. MAY 21, 1981

We actually toured Japan before America. Metal is a worldwide thing and I always wanted Maiden to be a hugely successful international band. I wanted parallel development across the world.

We loved Japan. It was such a different culture to experience. And one of the weirdest things for us was how the audiences were all seated. If a fan got too excited and stood up, a security guy would bang them on the head with rolled up newspapers. So the fan would sit down, but then another would stand up somewhere else, and then – bang! – they'd sit down. It was like Whac-a-Mole. Quite extraordinary.

COLISEUM, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON, USA. JUNE 28, 1983

It was our first sell out arena show in America. By this time, we'd sold 380,000 albums there. I remember the exact figure. We'd done all of these support tours and now it was time to headline. So do we do theatres or do we go for arenas? If I knew then what I know now, then there's no way I'd have done arenas. I mean, platinum albums don't always sell out arenas. So I like to think it was inspiration, but looking back it was more fucking madness that worked.

Seattle was the sixth show on that tour. Sold out, 13,000 people. And believe me, I was very, very grateful.

On that same tour we also sold out Madison Square Garden [in New York]. We rode to the venue in stretch limos, and I'll never forget that feeling of: "Fucking great, we've done it!"

TORWAR SPORTS HALL, WARSAW, POLAND. AUGUST 9, 1984

In the early 80s, Poland was behind the Iron Curtain, very much under Russian control. The audience reaction we got there was magical. If



Rising in the East: Japan, 1981.


Enter sandmen: Dickinson with Maiden at the Desert Rock Festival, Dubai, UAE, March 9, 2007.


Brazil goes nuts: Rock In Rio, January 11, 1985.

you're deprived of live music, to see a full-on arena show was a whole new world for those fans.

What I remember in particular was walking to the show from the hotel and having a feeling of foreboding. I couldn't quite understand it. When I got inside the hall, I realised this was where they used to hold Nazi meetings.

At the top of the cupola, the dome, there was a massive keystone which was covered in a tarpaulin. I found out later that it was covering a huge swastika. And all along the back of the stage there were the little eye holes where the SS would look for people who weren't reacting appropriately and then drag them out. It was one of those times in your life when you feel the past and the present coming together.

ROCK IN RIO, RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL. JANUARY 11, 1985

As a one-off gig, the impact of Rock In Rio was monumental. We had no history at all in South America before then. We played before Queen, and the audience was reportedly 300,000 – but it could have been more. And it was broadcast live on TV. Not just in Brazil, but across all of South America.

The sound was pretty bad on stage. Bruce [Dickinson] got so frustrated that he kicked off some of the monitors. And that's when he ran into a guitar head and cut himself. The blood was streaming down his face. I was on the side of the stage, and Bruce came over to me. I said: "See the camera over there with a red light on? Go and get your head right in front of it!" Bruce tells a different version of that story where I sent a roadie up to him to tell him to make the wound a bit wider so he bled more!

The sight of Bruce's bloody face had a huge impact. After that one show, we were playing to a minimum of 40,000 people a night in South America – for ever, effectively. So it's one of the most important shows we ever did.

MONSTERS OF ROCK, DONINGTON PARK, UK. AUGUST 22, 1988

We did a lot of things very differently to the majority of bands, and a lot of it was based on gut instinct. That's why we never played Monsters Of Rock until 1988. I thought: "We'll wait until we fucking headline it, and make a statement."

By the day before the show we'd sold 75,000 tickets – which was about the same as the record for Monsters Of Rock set by AC/DC – and then 30,000 people walked up on the day. It was unbelievable. 110,000 people there. In the end they ran out of official tickets so they ended up using raffle tickets to let more people in.

SING SING, JERUSALEM, ISRAEL. SEPTEMBER 28, 1995

When Blaze [Bayley] came into the band and we were planning touring, I wanted to start somewhere where we wouldn't really get any media – to give Blaze a good shot at doing a few shows before you're subjected to the opinions of the critics. So we did Jerusalem and two other shows in Israel, and then we did three shows in South Africa, about as far away as you can get.

The club in Jerusalem was small. Maybe 600 people were in there. To hear *The Number Of The Beast* in Jerusalem, it was really quite eerie.

It was clear to me that it was working with Blaze. It wasn't the same, obviously, but the shows went very well. There was never any talk of the band splitting when Bruce left. Maiden will always carry on.

PALAIS DES OMNISPORT DE PARIS/BERCY, PARIS, FRANCE. SEPTEMBER 9, 1999

When Bruce and Adrian [Smith, guitarist] came back we did some small shows in America just to test the water, but the Paris show was a real milestone – 15,000 people, sold out.

It was a great show, but there was something else that was significant. Steve Lazarus was running the fan club at the time, and on the morning of the show he told me he was meeting a lot of fans at the Eiffel Tower. He said the fans had organised the meeting online.

So I went with him, and there were 1,500 fans from all over the world, gathered around the base of the Eiffel Tower. And it's when it really came home to me – the value of social media. We'd always been a band that developed through word of mouth, and our social media took that to a whole new level.

DESERT ROCK FESTIVAL, DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES. MARCH 9, 2007

It was a festival right at the edge of the desert. The Prodigy were our special guests. They were amazing. And the audience came from all over the Middle East; you saw hijabs and Iron Maiden T-shirts.

Music actually is important, and this was one of those moments when you realised how true that is. There was a phenomenal feeling of positivity around this show. It was very touching to see people from disparate regions, all together – united by metal.

"As soon as they played *Phantom Of The Opera* [in London pub The Swan in July '79] I just knew they were going to be enormous."

SAMBODROMO, MANAUS, BRAZIL. MARCH 12, 2009

It was the first tour with the plane, the [Boeing] 707. And the show in Manaus was a great example of how, with the plane, we were able to get to parts of the world which you just wouldn't get to otherwise, because of the sheer cost of freights and things.

Maiden have always taken their whole show everywhere. It's something we've always done. We don't think it's fair on fans in Santiago or Melbourne to not get the same shows as in London or Paris, but it means the costs are prohibitive at times.

Manaus is at the foot of the Andes, the far west of the Amazon, and we had 25,000 people there to see the show.

Like I said earlier, I always wanted Maiden to be an internationally successful band. And what better way to prove it than playing to twenty-five thousand in the middle of the fucking Amazon rainforest!

ROSS HALFIN: TOP LEFT; NIGEL CRANE/REDFERNS

THE GREAT ESCAPE

The human experience is hard. One of life's pleasures for **Eureka Machines** is "having these little tunes, at gigs, that give people a couple of hours to get out of their heads".

Words: **Polly Glass**

It's 5pm on a Bank Holiday weekend. Central London is sunny and packed. Eureka Machines have piled into an old Soho boozer (about the only one without football crowds, or Sunday roasts flying overhead) ahead of their gig at the 100 Club later, when Chris Catalyst has a revelation. The sort that tend to come near the end of your first pint, as you contemplate a second round, surrounded by people who've known you for ever.

"I think pissing around is *really* important," the frontman/songwriter-in-chief declares between sips of stout. "I've got a friend who goes to [male suicide prevention charity] Andy's Man Club, and he says it's been fantastic, because as he got older, and people started having kids, getting married and working away and that kind of thing, his social circle really got smaller. So having this, to get together with your mates and piss about, I think it's important."

He finishes solemnly, gesturing to his bandmates: "And we do a *massive* amount of pissing about."

Dressed in a flat cap, hoodie, and T-shirt with 'Northern' across the chest, silver rings weighing down his earlobes, Chris is chatty without being domineering. Part Ginger Wildheart (but sweeter), part John Cooper Clarke (a 21st-century Yorkshire version), he has the gently 'wired' manner of someone without a real off-switch. It's easy to picture him in his local back in Leeds, pint to hand, quietly noting down things he overhears. Invariably there's a good chance they'll end up in his next song.

"I spend a lot of time in the pub," he says thoughtfully, "especially living in Leeds, people are just *funny*. There's always someone funnier than you in the pub. I find this all the time. It's that realness."

Much of that realness comes out in the tragicomic pearls of Eureka Machines' new album *Everything*. There are stirring harmonies. On-the-nose kitchen-sink poetry. Melodies that hit hard, with juicy twists that hit even harder. Full of emotionally nuanced pop-rock bangers and ballads, it's their first collection in eight years – following a gap brought on by the pandemic, life events and Catalyst's touring commitments as a Nameless Ghoul in Ghost, with whom he played for six years.

While his other guises veer into heightened territory (he still plays guitar with the Sisters Of Mercy and Ugly Kid Joe, as well as being a prolific solo artist), Eureka Machines keep it very real. They formed in Leeds as 20-somethings and remain the best of friends. Bassist Pete Human, bald and straight-faced in his leopard print shirt, is a senior buyer for an IT company. Hench, tattooed drummer Wayne Insane drives a forklift truck at the pet-food warehouse he manages.

"And I work for a digital transformation consultancy," blond, Nirvana-T-shirted guitarist Dave/'Davros' says, joining in.

What's that like?

"It's not as fun as this..."

With limited time together, the emphasis is on making that time count. At this stage there's a shared acceptance of what Eureka Machines can (and can't) be. Everyone has other priorities, family commitments (Dave and Wayne both have children), day jobs.

In order to work around these things flexibly, their cottage industry set-up is relatively self-sufficient. They mostly gig at weekends. They stay in old friends' spare rooms and Airbnbs in different towns. They don't answer to anyone but themselves. It's reaped a niche but extremely passionate audience, with fans coming to gigs ➢



NEIL CHAPMAN/PRESS

from across the country, Germany, the US and even Japan.

"We're lucky, because it didn't just *happen*," Dave reasons. "In our twenties we worked our arses off. We were out all the time because we didn't have 'proper jobs' or whatever, getting in at four or five in the morning, getting up at eight or nine o'clock. We did that a lot, and we built up the fan base."

"This is only ever going to be what it is, if that makes sense," Chris adds. "I can't really intellectualise it. It just sort of *works* alongside our other lives. And I sometimes wonder, if something did happen, and we could all just do this full time, would it just become another job?"

At this point, day jobs and DIY operations are typical for the overwhelming majority of rock bands. With all Eureka Machines' releases, publicity, videos, tour logistics etc arranged in-house, they are about as DIY as it gets. But they seem happier doing it than many. On this latest tour they played the smallest stage of their career ("officially it was three hundred-cap," Chris says, "but I'm fucked if I know where you'd put three hundred people there") and had the best time doing it. Every night a stranger in the crowd has bought them pints. Tonight at the 100 Club it'll be a girl called Grace. Chris will dub her "the fifth member" and declare: "I love being in this band".

Having a supportive inner circle helps keep shoestring tours fun, and Eureka Machines are no exception. Chris's lodger Rob is manning the merch desk. Old mates Tropical Contact are the support band. They change their own guitar strings (Chris used to be a guitar tech for Skid Row, Maximo Park and Ugly Kid Joe) and normally drive their van, although a friend drove them down tonight, allowing them to have a couple of pints with us.

On top of all that they've kept ticket prices low. It's bitten them in the arse financially, but all agree it's worth it. "Everybody's skint," Chris reasons, with the uncomplicated empathy of a total non-businessman. "Venues are struggling, bands are struggling, and it's because people are struggling. So I was like: 'We'll try to make it affordable'."

It's a change of pace from his arena-playing, pyro-heavy days with Ghost, with whom he parted ways in 2023 – having been (his words on social media at the time) "binned off by email". Today he's admirably philosophical about the whole thing, an additional layer of thick skin seemingly acquired.

"It was a job," he reflects, levelly. "Everything I do, I'm fucking *all* in. I thought, and continue to think, that's a good way to live your life. However, I think that with certain jobs, there needs to be an acceptance that things are transitory, and things can change... I'm like, 'I'm all in', and I was all in with that, but it turns out that that's not how they operate the business, and that's okay. I'm no longer mad at that, but it's hard finding that out."

He shrugs. A pang of hurt passes through him, but only for a second. "But you know, it's all part of life's rich tapestry. I hope for their sakes and for the people that follow them – they've got such an amazing fan base – that they're all still really enjoying it, and it seems like they're smashing it. I'm still close with people in the band that I was close with, for the most part."



Eureka Machines: day jobs, DIY and doing things right.

"To get together with your mates and piss about, I think it's important. And we do a massive amount of pissing about." **Chris Catalyst**

The title track of *Everything* taps into feelings that sprung from that time. An ode to letting go, and the beauty of the bigger picture, *'the constant spinning of the wheel'*. The grounding, restorative effect he gets from this band, with its promise of good times, good friends. When Ghost opened for Iron Maiden in 2017, Chris watched the headliners arrive (and depart) in separate, blacked-out limos. The image has stayed with him.

"When we're not touring we'll be texting each other about the snooker, or stupid bands that we found or whatever," he says, as last drinks are finished. "But there's plenty of bands that I know [who] don't have that. And that's okay, but that wouldn't be for us."

The 100 Club is busy and boiling by the time Eureka Machines, headlining, dive into a scorching opener trio of *Everything*, *Scream Eureka* and should-have-been-a-mega-hit *Pop Star*. Sharp-suited. Loose but laser-focused. For all the things Eureka Machines *don't* take too seriously (chiefly themselves), when it comes to performing – and to producing songs that resonate deeply – they couldn't be more sincere.

"It's clichéd to say it," Chris said earlier, "but there's so much... *bad stuff* happening in the world that these gigs have become a haven from that. And I think people see gigs more like that these days. It's our own little 'safe space', where everyone can just be themselves and have a nice time and forget about all the other bollocks."

"And we *are* mates. It's important with a band," Wayne says. "I think it comes across in what you do. It's the way it should be, but obviously it's not always."

During the set we can't help watching the drummer, a commandingly expressive player. You can read the joys, high jinks and emotional depths of this music, this way of life, on his face. He gigs in a covers band on weekends, alongside Eureka Machines. Dave has a project in the works with another singer. Pete plays on Chris's solo music. Passion projects with ripples that penetrate a wider circle, making some lives a little brighter.

"What power have we got, individually, collectively, to just make our days a bit better? And the days of people around us?" Chris mused. "I think what we're quite good at is having these little tunes, at these gigs, that give people a couple of hours to get out of their heads. The human experience is fucking hard. And as we get older, things get harder. I certainly feel things more."

"Sometimes it's not just the audience to escape from themselves," Dave added. "It's us as well. Like when we're on stage, I think of nothing else. I get out of my own head, and I feel like it's a reciprocal thing – there's a relationship there, and it's really important that that exists, for me."

There's talk of touring again this year, and "maybe not waiting another seven, eight years to do a new album". Goodwill and support is plentiful, even if resources are scant. At the end of tonight's gig they'll load out their own gear. Profits will be sparse. Luck permitting, there'll be enough for a curry back home in Leeds.

And yet to regard Eureka Machines as anything other than a great success – if success is measured in happiness – wouldn't feel right. Great music and good times with real friends. Pissing about. Caring enormously. Making good art. Finding joy in what you do, regardless of who's watching. This is what success looks like.

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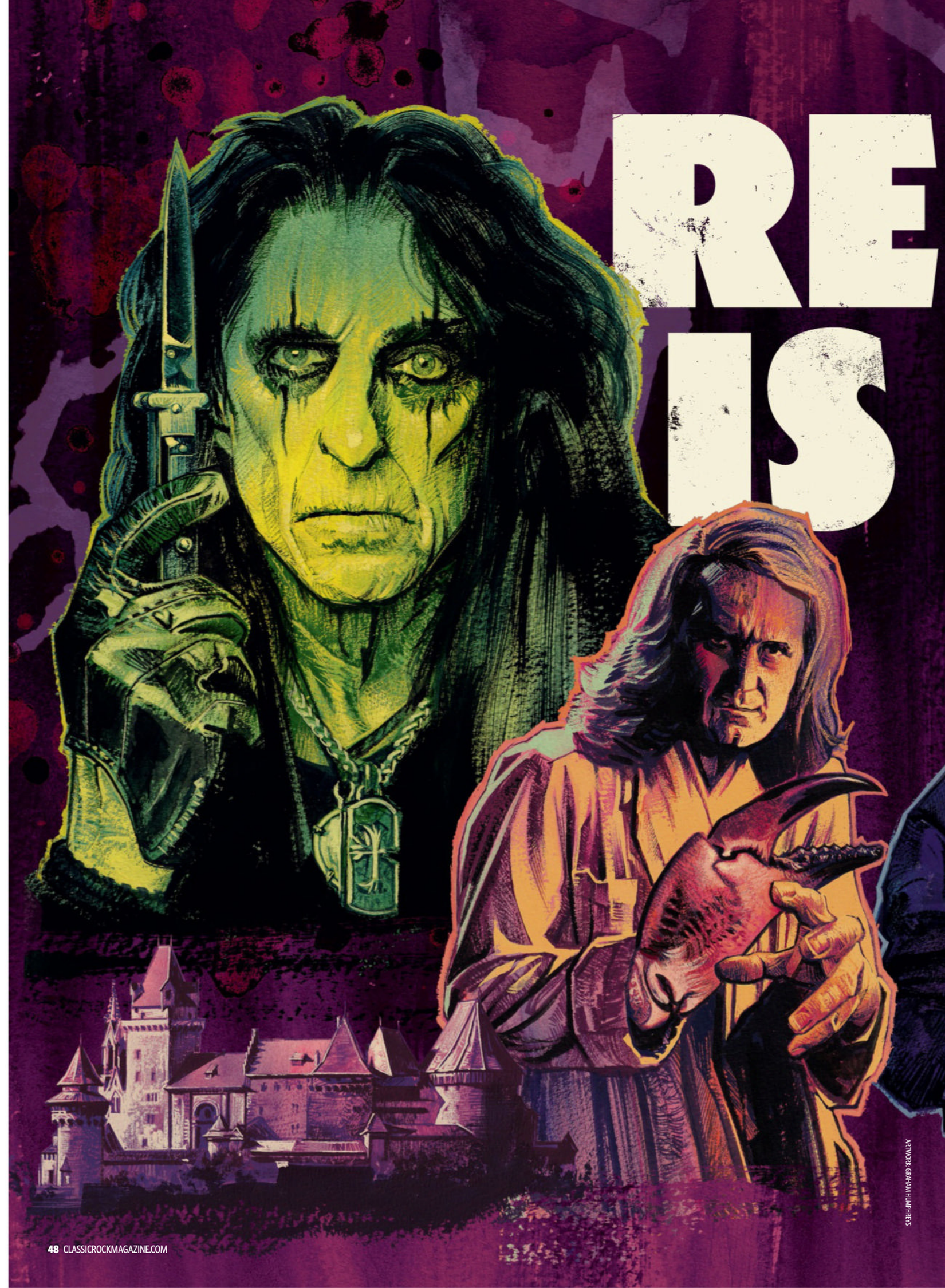
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VENGE SWEET

When **Alice Cooper**'s album *Billion Dollar Babies* hit No.1 in the UK and US in 1973, instead of solidifying the band they unravelled. It would be 50 years until the original group recorded another, *The Revenge Of Alice Cooper*.

Words: **Jaan Uhelszki**



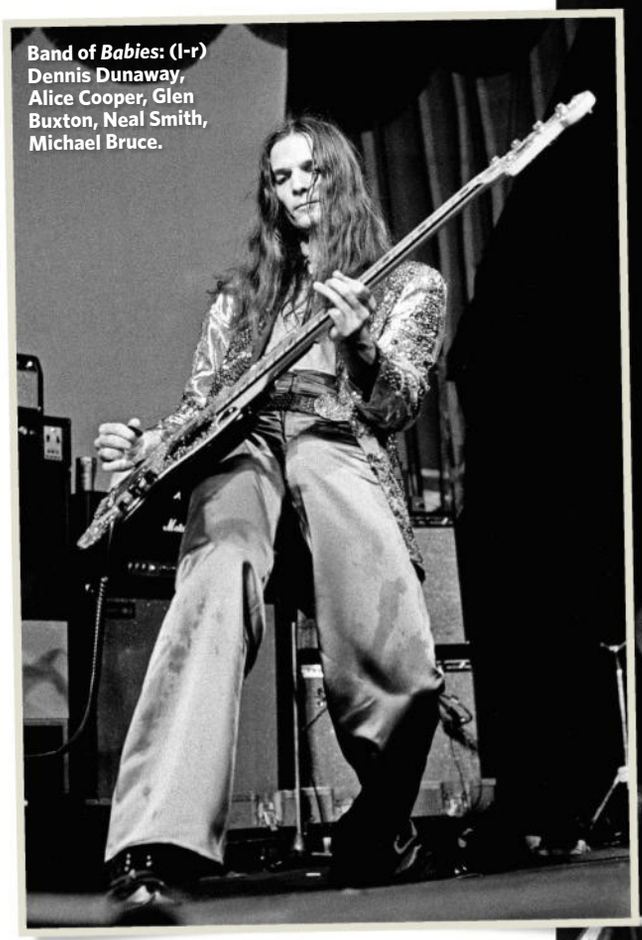
The Disappearance Of Alice Cooper (the band)
Case file: April 1974 – São Paulo, Brazil

Eccentric performers and preternaturally talented showmen, the Alice Cooper band were as much art provocateurs as musicians, one of the few glam acts that managed to slither into the mainstream. It seemed barely more than a blink of a mascara'd eye that saw Vince Furnier – shortly to be rechristened Alice Cooper – Dennis Dunaway, Neal Smith, Glen Buxton and Michael Bruce going from being "the most hated band" in Los Angeles, with the superpower to clear a venue in a single song, to becoming one of the biggest bands in the world.

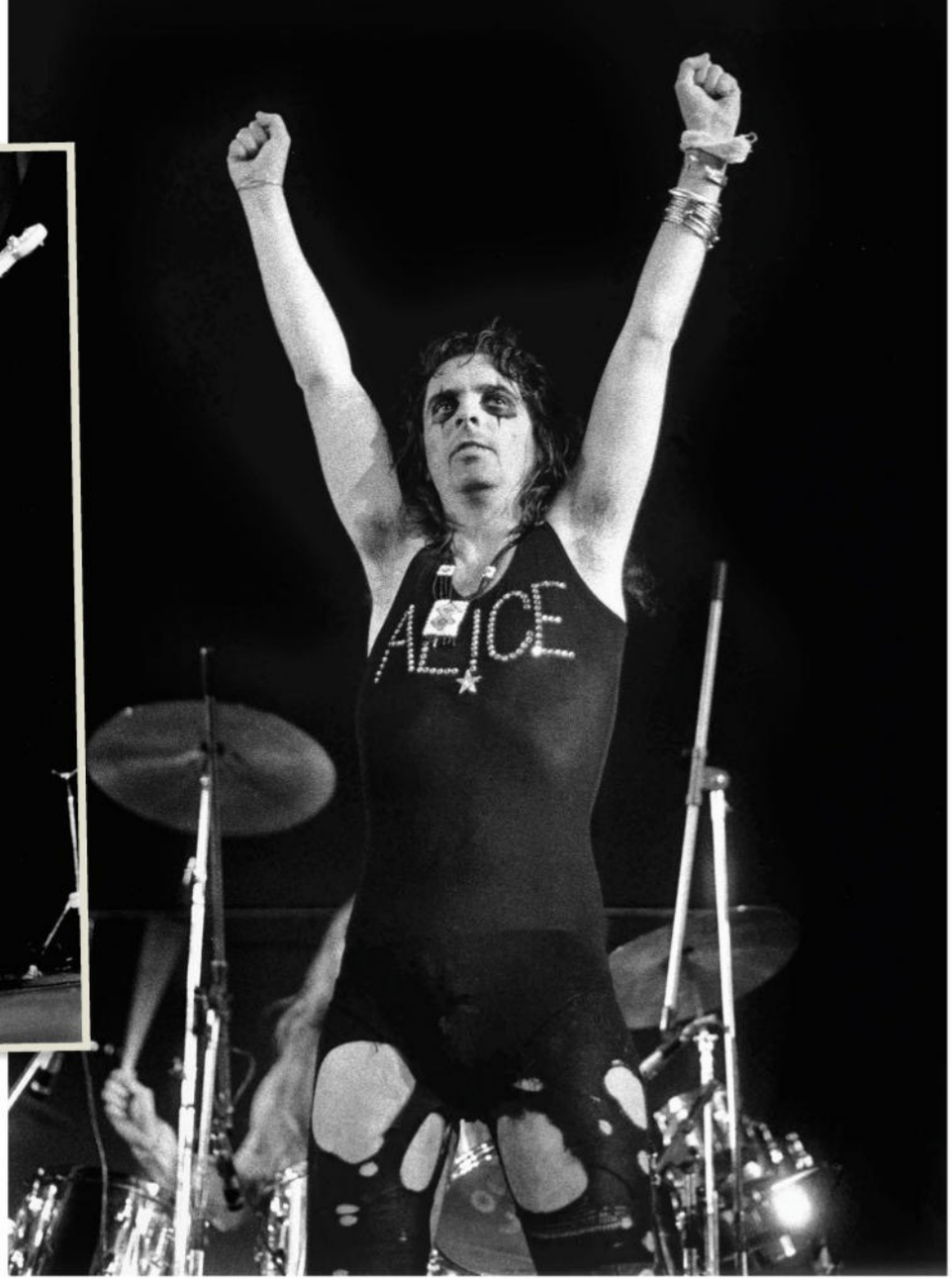
After the release of sixth album *Billion Dollar Babies*, in 1973, they were on top of rock's mighty slag heap, with the album at No.1 in the UK and US and three top-10 singles in the UK in that year. Looking back over five decades with something of a jaundiced eye at some of the lesser metal, shock-rock and hair bands that have fallen by the wayside, it's impossible to overemphasise the effects that the Alice Cooper band had on music, performance, attitude, social (ab)norms and the outcast teenage audience at large. This was the band that changed the landscape of art, respectability and stage wear with their transgressive songs, morality plays gone amok, onstage executions, boa constrictors and twisted humour.

"When we came on the scene, the world was looking for a villain," Cooper said sanguinely at the time. "And we were it." In fact, it's often been said that this was the band that drove a stake through the heart of the peace-and-love generation that preceded them.

And they were about to do the same in South America. The first rock group ever to perform in Brazil, a Catholic and notoriously conservative country more accustomed to ➢



Band of *Babies*: (l-r) Dennis Dunaway, Alice Cooper, Glen Buxton, Neal Smith, Michael Bruce.



the samba, rock rural and Antonio Jobim records, the Coopers had come here two weeks before Easter in 1974 at the tail end of what they were still calling their *Billion Dollar Babies* tour. (*The Muscle Of Love* album was released in November 1973.) They were the number-one rock group in the world, according to a British poll, outselling David Bowie, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Elton John and The Who that year. (Although a secret shame in South America was that they were runners-up to the Rolling Stones – not on the basis of sales, but because Mick Jagger was then married to a Nicaraguan woman.)

They landed in Brazil like conquerors on March 28, 1974. Not just a rock band, they were a menacing phenomenon, part circus, part horror movie, part phantasm, and all swagger, teenage-rebellion ritual, aggressive androgyny and psychic danger. In their satin stovepipe pants, messy black eyeliner and prodigious butt-skimming hair, the Alice Cooper Group didn't just arrive, they invaded.

Their visit to the southern hemisphere was Beatlemania plugged into a different socket: one where The Beatles had been raised on acid, beer, B-movies and Detroit garage rock. From the moment they arrived they were flanked by bodyguards (Alice had seven of his own) and corralled into jeeps equipped with mounted 50-calibre machine guns, but the security couldn't deter the fans. Thousands of them kept up 24-hour vigils outside the group's hotel, trying to sneak into their rooms dressed as waiters, chambermaids and hookers. Many succeeded.

When group members emerged, despite the guards and guns they were manhandled, pushed and pursued, like a scene out of *A Hard Day's Nightmare*. The first day, fans ripped the sleeve of Cooper's jacket right off his shoulders, and grabbed handfuls of the band members' hair as souvenirs.

The shows were even more frenetic and frightening than their arrival. Playing five dates over seven days, they set a record that endures to this day when they performed at the Anhembi Exhibition Hall in São Paulo in front of 158,000 unruly attendees. Undulating waves of aroused punters crashed toward the stage like an out-of-control soccer melee. "They looked like a field of wheat," guitarist Glen Buxton drawled. "But a field of hair."

"When we came on the scene, the world was looking for a villain. And we were it."

Alice Cooper

"Yeah, those people looked like a wheat field flowing back and forth," guitarist Michael Bruce echoed. "But I knew that if they flowed the wrong way, something bad would happen."

Something did. When the band's equipment was turned on, the crowd freaked out and began to stream forward.

"By the third song it looked like the ocean, because there were 150,000-something people in this humongous building," remembered Bruce. "There weren't any seats, and everybody was standing up, so as they're pushing closer to the stage you get a wave effect happening. The wave kept crashing against the stage, and now you had bodies building up at the bottom. About the third song, the first person that climbed up on the bodies below them made it up on stage. And it was getting worse. I kept wondering what's happening to the people on the bottom of this body bath.

"Then the next thing I saw was this well-dressed man in an Adidas top. He walked out on stage, reached inside of his jacket, pulled out a gun, and goes [makes gun noises] *pop pop pop*. I'm thinking: 'Oh, I'm dead.' We hunkered down, and everybody out of the audience went down [to the floor]. They ushered us off stage and we're thinking: 'What is fucking going on here?' We're all asking questions, but no one answered. Then after fifteen-to-twenty minutes they brought us back on stage. Everybody was sitting down now."

The São Paulo show and the four after it were triumphs, the five band members playing as if it were the end of the world. Fans were half-convinced the devil himself had booked the amphitheater. More than half were convinced that Alice was the devil himself. They called him 'the demon with a snake'. A newspaper ran a full-page photo of him on the front page with a single word







beneath him: Macumbo! (voodoo).

But no one in the crowd that night had a clue that they were witnessing a funeral. On paper, the band were on top of the world. But beneath the glitter and the guillotines – and even the life-long friendships – something vital had unravelled. When they left the stage at Ginásio do Maracanãzinho in Rio de Janeiro on April 6, to the strains of *School's Out*, their set closer, no one suspected – not even the band – that when they walked off that stage they were never to return.

Why didn't they? Depends on who you ask.

It wasn't until four decades later that their manager, Shep Gordon, in his 2016 memoir *They Call Me Supermensch*, broke the code of silence surrounding the days leading up to the break-up of the most beloved and, at one time, biggest group in the world.

Gordon wrote: "After the years of hard work and starving, the band was seemingly poised to take over the world. Instead, they were slowly falling apart. They scattered themselves around the Galesi mansion, where they were recording *Billion Dollar Babies* in Connecticut, and lived separate lives. Alice spent much of his time holed up in the master bedroom drinking Bud and watching TV, while the rest of them complained more about falling into his shadow. When we brought in a mobile unit to lay down the basic tracks for *Billion Dollar Babies*, [producer] Bob Ezrin also decided to bring in a session guitarist to play Glen's parts.

"I understood why it upset the rest of the guys that Alice had become the star. They had all gotten into rock because they wanted to be stars. But they all couldn't be the star. We had agreed that had to be Alice. We were on track to our goal of becoming millionaires. I couldn't let their bruised egos derail us."

Because of that, the blame is often laid at Alice Cooper's platform boots. But the answer to the mystery isn't as simple as that.

"I didn't feel that something was changing after Brazil, that it signaled some kind of ending. Not at all," Cooper says from a stop on his current tour with Judas Priest.

"Alice was pretty deep into the bottle back then," reflected bassist Dennis Dunaway, "so he wasn't always as available as he was in the earlier days. On the *Billion Dollar Babies* tour, Alice would be in his room with the bodyguards and they would have their own party going, and they wouldn't want us to be there because it would be competition for them. And Alice would just be sitting there watching TV with a whole room full of people watching Alice watch TV. If Alice said can somebody get me a beer, a hundred people would scramble.

"But for me, no, the last shows in Brazil did not signify any kind of an end. I was always the crusader for forging on. Also, I was deeply convinced that Alice was my best friend, which he still is, and Shep Gordon was my best friend, and I'm the one that kept the pie-in-the-sky naiveté going.

"But regardless, it was certainly something, because after those five [Brazil] shows the band never played again."

"We already thought we were stars. The difference was that the world finally believed us."

Dennis Dunaway

Was it just a case of a group at its peak crumbling under the weight of their success? They were more popular than they'd ever imagined, more famous than they'd ever dreamed, but also more fractured.

"People forget how dysfunctional we were," Alice says simply today. "Especially when we were the hottest band in the world. We were voted number-one band in the world. I think the band believed that. We always came from 'We've gotta prove ourselves.' Nobody ever expected us to even make a second album," he adds. "I think we got cocky. That wasn't who we were. I don't think the band remembers that."

Oh, but they do.

"Did I know we were the biggest band in the world? Of course we did," says drummer Neal Smith. "We had worked very hard to achieve what we had achieved at that time, and we were all enjoying it. People always ask if I could have anybody or anything. And I did, by the way. Was I an asshole about it? Yeah. But I was a happy asshole."



"We believed from the very beginning that we were going to be a big band," Dunaway remembers. "We couldn't believe it that every time we put out an album the world didn't see it the way we did. You can look at Neal, and think he's got this rock-star personality going. He had that way back when he was ➢

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"Scream for me, Boston!" Boston Garden, 1972.

playing clubs in Phoenix, Arizona. So it wasn't like all of a sudden, we're just a lowly band and overnight we're big stars. We already thought we were stars. The difference was that the world finally believed us."

But Bruce never seemed to feel that way. A tireless songwriter, a little bit of an outsider in the group – a former football player, he went to a different high school in Phoenix than Dunaway, Cooper and Buxton – he looks at the past through a different lens than his compatriots.

"What was it like to be that famous?" he asks rhetorically. "I'm not sure I even know. I don't think we expected *Billion Dollar Babies* to go to number one, first of all. We were gradually coming up in the trades, each album building on the next, and I think we thought it was going to keep doing that. It was like the first time we heard *Eighteen* on the radio. It was unexpected. We pulled the car over, pinched ourselves, and asked: 'Is this really happening?' Even after *Billion Dollar Babies*, I didn't think it would go on for ever, because I felt there was a lot of work still to do. It was hard to keep it together, and it's probably lucky it lasted as long as it did."

Some say the break-up's main cause was exhaustion: the slow poison of touring, recording and promotion without a break finally corroding the band's centre. They'd been running on adrenaline and ambition for the past seven years, releasing seven albums during that time.

Others whisper that it was fame itself that killed them – that once they'd become the monster they'd created, they couldn't outrun it. Or that Alice was getting all the attention. Had Buxton's increasing drug use and withdrawal from the band destroyed the band's delicate equilibrium, or was it Buxton's resentment at feeling micro-managed by Bob Ezrin's disciplined professionalism? Or was it principal songwriter Bruce feeling slighted that his songs were deemed not 'Cooperian' enough for their records, causing many to be shelved? Or that Alice and his then-girlfriend had moved out of the Galesi mansion for their own apartment in New York, separating from his pals for the first time since they left Phoenix in 1967?

So much more was afoot besides feeling that their pal Vince was getting all the attention. As with any break-up, you can never put the blame on just one single source, and the transmigration of Alice Cooper the band into Alice Cooper the man was no different. Separately, none of the causes seemed ruinous enough to derail this ground-breaking, chart-and-crowd-conquering band, but together they make a compelling case for what came next.

"There were just so many things that added up to that break-up– unconscious things, psychological things – and it really was that we gave it everything we had for seven years and we were tired," Cooper sums up. "The thing that would bother me was that we were getting on each other's nerves for the first time. We didn't know how to stop it, and the only way we could stop was sort of a divorce for a while, or a separation."

So they took a break. Bruce made plans to turn his collection of songs that didn't fit the group into a solo album, which in turn prompted Neal Smith to announce his plans to record his own solo album. From the beginning, Dunaway was staunchly against the hiatus, writing in his memoir, *Snakes, Guillotines, Electric Chairs*: "I had some songs too, but they were all intended for the Alice Cooper group. If loyalty is a weakness, then I'm a wet noodle. Still, I fought tooth and nail against the idea of solo projects." Buxton didn't seem to care one way or another, and Cooper didn't say a word about his plans, which at the time no one thought was odd. The five friends made a pact to return in a year's time to record what was to be the group's eighth album, come what may.

"We did everything by a vote; no one's vote had more power than anyone else's," Dunaway explains. "Whatever the majority wanted to do, then we would go with that. When it came to Michael deciding he needed to record an album where he didn't have to submit it to a band that was going to change 'I love you' to 'I want to kick a puppy', I was totally against it. In fact I was absolutely against taking any kind of break. I said: 'We just made it to number one, are you kidding?'

"The argument that won me over was that Alice and Glen were in such bad shape that we needed to get them out of that situation so that they can get a chance to dry out. So we decided that we were going to take time off, Michael would record his album, and then the band will get back together, and after the break we would do a bigger album than ever and we'd be more popular than ever because of the break. That was what we thought was going to happen. In the time off, Neal did his *Platinum God* album. I helped him with it, but that was just so Neal and I could keep in shape so that we wouldn't lose our chops."

"For me it was more than keeping my chops up," Smith said. "After we got back from South America, Michael wanted to do a solo album. We all agreed, so you can put blame on anybody that you want to, but we all agreed to take the year off and in that year we all agreed we could do a solo album. Glen didn't want to and Dennis didn't. But I did, and recorded *Platinum God*, and Dennis helped me on it. Michael did his album *In My Own Way*. Then, to our surprise, Alice did an album, *Welcome To My Nightmare*. We weren't expecting that. I'm not sure why not.

"Usually we would have just talked everything," Smith explains. "It was the first time that the

MAIN: TOM COPI/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; INSET: SPENCER GRANT/GETTY IMAGES



Alice in wonderland – the *Billion Dollar Babies* line-up in '73: (l-r) Dennis Dunaway, Glen Buxton, Michael Bruce, Alice Cooper, Neal Smith.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

"Even after *Billion Dollar Babies*, I didn't think it would go on for ever. It's probably lucky it lasted as long as it did." **Michael Bruce**

band was ever separated. When we were together, we always talked about and resolved problems. Alice got a place in New York really close to Shep and we were still out in the country. We didn't have much communication with him. In fact we didn't find out until later Alice was doing *Nightmare*. He had as much right to do an album as we did. But we were still surprised."

"I had the idea of *Welcome to My Nightmare*," says Cooper. "I didn't know where it was going to go, but it was a great title – a great Alice Cooper title. But I felt that the band was going to say: 'Let's not put all the money back into a show, [and] a bigger show than *Billion Dollar Babies*. It would be nice to actually have cash.' Because we always worked that way. We always had whatever we needed, but nobody had a giant bank account. Because a lot of our cash went back into the show.

"I think being exhausted and taking no time off and going to a bigger project made a lot of people go: 'No, wait, wait, wait. No.' I was dumb enough to say let's do it."

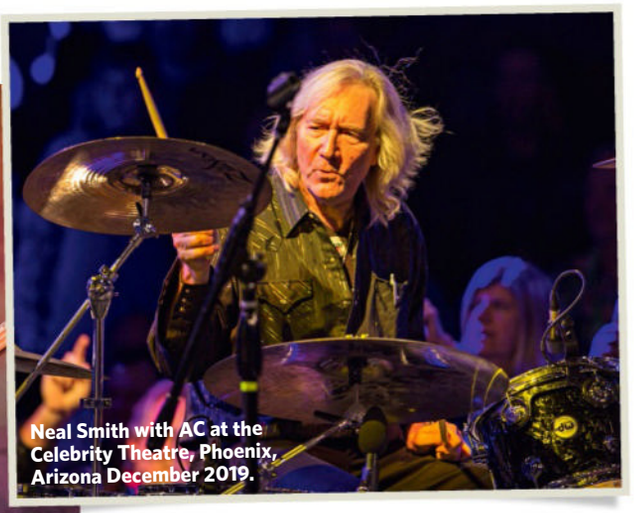
And he did. But without the band.

"All five of us were together; we were returning back from something we did in New York," recalls Bruce. "I think it might have been that meeting where we decided we're going to take that year off, and we're just coming back discussing the details. I remember we were talking about the *Battle Axe* idea that Neal and Dennis and I were kicking around, and Alice was telling me about a dream he had where he's in a nightmare and all these things come to visit him, like the Cyclops. I told him that was kind of a neat idea, maybe we could pursue that after we do *Battle Axe*. Now I reflect on how egotistical of me to tell him we could think about it after *Battle Axe*, and not really listen to what he was saying. But the three of us – Neal, Dennis and I – were jamming on the idea of *Battle Axe*."

Would further consideration of the *Welcome To My Nightmare* concept have changed things? Probably not. ≫



Michael Bruce (left) and Dennis Dunaway with AC at Wembley Arena, November 2017.



Neal Smith with AC at the Celebrity Theatre, Phoenix, Arizona December 2019.

"Our agreement was whether anybody or nobody recorded an album, we would get together a year later and record the next Alice Cooper album," Smith reiterates. "You could tour, you could do concerts, play in clubs to support your album, that's what we agreed to. So Alice had monster success with *Welcome To My Nightmare*, and wanted to do a second album, which was *Go To Hell* [*Alice Cooper Goes To Hell*]. I don't know whether that was referring to what the rest of the band could do, but that's another story.

But Alice reneged on the deal. "If I would've found success with *Platinum God* or if Michael would have found success with *In My Own Way*, would we have continued with the band at that point? Would we stay? I don't know, because it never happened, but I'm just saying that was the risk, the gamble of any of us doing a solo album. It's like Peter Frampton with Humble Pie. Are you going to be successful, or you put Humble Pie back together after *Frampton Comes Alive*? You don't know until it happens, and then you go day by day. The inside circle story doesn't matter, but the reality of it was Alice found success as a solo artist and for whatever reason didn't come back to the band."

The message was loud and clear when the band members found out that their friend had applied to legally change his name to Alice Cooper.

"People would come and see us play, and just assume that since I was the lead singer then I had to be Alice Cooper," he explains today. "But originally the band was simply called the Alice Cooper Band, and because everyone thought I was Alice we all decided it would be easier and better for the band to start calling myself Alice. At one point Shep [Gordon, manager] goes: 'Let's just make sure that if you're going to be Alice, if everything did fall apart you could go on with the name. So later, when I went solo for *Welcome To My Nightmare*, I'd really become Alice Cooper."

You might think any group would think about legal action. But not this outfit. Which has everything to do with everything that has come after.

"The first thing Alice did was change his name legally," Smith explains. "We all owned the name, but there was never going to be a lawsuit, because I would never sue my friends. That's why we stayed friends. We worked out an agreement that would allow Alice taking the name and we would take Billion Dollar Babies, our biggest album, as the name of the band that Dennis and Michael and I put together. And we got to work recording it. It would've been our eighth studio album."

"I'm sure that Michael and Neal came to the realisation that Alice wasn't going to show up before I did, because I still had this faith in our friendship," says Dunaway. "I didn't even really believe that the band had broken up until I saw the *Welcome To My Nightmare* show at Madison Square Garden."

After that, the bassist couldn't ignore it any more. The newly dubbed Billion Dollar Babies began auditioning singers, but couldn't find anyone who could even approach the dramatic, unhinged intensity of Cooper's vocals, so it was decided Bruce should be the frontman. The three tapped Alice Cooper touring keyboard player Bob Dolin and guitarist Mike Marconi to fill out the line-up, but they couldn't replace the rough magic of Buxton or the brilliance of Cooper with new players. Smith, Dunaway and Bruce each spent more than six figures on an elaborate stage show, but they played only four shows, resulting in each member taking a massive financial hit.

"That show we put together was supposed to be the next Alice Cooper album," says Dunaway. "We built this gigantic stage that had this boxing ring that hydraulically came out from underneath the drum riser, and these posts with velvet ropes would slowly rise up and lock into place, and these two gladiators would have this big battle with a guitar that looked like an axe, and it was a great show. But unfortunately, because the *Welcome To My Nightmare* tour was being advertised with our music and with no sign of it being not the original group, we had a hard time getting any gigs, because people are saying: 'The Alice Cooper group is touring now. Who are you guys?'"

After a while they weren't completely sure themselves. Dunaway sank into a deep depression. "I spent quite a few years sitting in a dark room in a rocking chair, pouting, but I had Cindy [wife], who would just tell me: 'Hey, come on, get it together.' I also spent years being so disappointed in the record company just dropping us, and our management. We were all individually signed to Shep Gordon and Joe Greenberg to manage each of our personal careers, and I felt that's not what was going on. Music, this thing that I loved so much, had turned into a sour note for me. If I went in to New York City I would hide in the darkest corner and hope that nobody would recognise me or call me up to sit in for a song or anything I just went into my basement studio and wrote songs and jammed with Glen Buxton and Neal Smith and our other musical friends, because all I wanted to do is get the love of music back."

But did Dunaway ever ask his friend Alice about what happened? Did it even hurt their relationship?

"I had been talking to Alice all along off and on. It was sparse [in the beginning], but when I was in the hospital in 1997, Alice called and we had dinner a few times. Alice and [wife] Sheryl would come over with baby Calico, but we would never talk about the break-up. It was always very congenial. Even though Alice and I had some chances where we were in a room by ourselves, I never brought it up, because for one thing everybody that knows Alice well knows that no matter what you talk about, he's really good at saying what you want to hear. And also, he's so good at it that it seems heartfelt and genuine, and I think it is.



Alice Cooper performing at the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame Induction Ceremony in New York City, March 14, 2011.

MAIN: BRIAN RASIC/WIREIMAGE; INSET: DANIEL KNIGHTON/GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM: JEFF KRAVITZ/GETTY



Michael Bruce, Neal Smith, Alice Cooper and Dennis Dunaway with AC at Wembley Arena, November 16, 2017.

"I don't think he was the one that got to decide whether or not the original band came back. I think there's other factors."

"I think the band ran its course," Cooper said quietly. "I think the band surpassed anything we had ever expected. And it took a lot of work to get there. I think I knew it when we started doing *Muscle Of Love* and the band – it was not my vote – decided not to go with Bob Ezrin to produce. 'What!' I thought. We'd just had two number-one records in a row and the band decided: 'Let's try something else!' [Which was Ezrin's mentor, Jack Richardson, and Jack Douglas producing.] That was the beginning of it right there. *Muscle Of Love* was a good album, but it didn't have a direction. The songs were great, the producers were great, everything was great, except it did not have the Alice Cooper signature; there was nothing dangerous about it.

"That element certainly came from Bob Ezrin, who was our George Martin. And the fact that all of a sudden we decided not to use Bob! Right after it happened, Bob walked me outside and told me: 'I can't do this album.' I asked him why not. He said because they won't listen to me. I said: 'Bob, I can't imagine making an album without you.'"

The first thing Alice did when he set out to record his solo album was to call Ezrin.

"I had taken a step, a very dangerous step, because someone like Mick Jagger [later] made solo records that didn't sell. If you're Mick Jagger and you break away from the band and make an album and it doesn't work, what chance does Alice Cooper have? But I really did believe in this. I believed in Bob Ezrin. I believed in Shep, and we had an idea."

Did you intend to go back to the band after you'd released *Welcome To My Nightmare*?

"I never expected the solo stuff that I did to do so well," he says, not really answering the question. "But if I was going to have a solo career, I was never going to give up with it. I was going to keep doing it until people got it. And that's what happened. That success took me even further away from the original band. I could not have done *Welcome To My Nightmare* with that band. *Trash* would not have existed with that band. *From The Inside* would not have existed with that band.

"If I would have gone back to the band, I think that we would have just started making albums that weren't as good as the early ones. I felt that if this band would have stayed together after *Muscle Of Love* we never would have got back together [like we have now]. Because we would have kept making albums that weren't as good as what we'd already done before, and there would be something there that was all wrong. I think we might not even have been friends if we would have kept making albums and touring together, because it would just have died. It was already dying, and I think maybe we cut it off before it totally died."

"The reality of it was Alice found success as a solo artist and for whatever reason didn't come back to the band."

Neal Smith

Maybe they weren't left for dead, but his band members were struggling after he left. They still received royalties, but by the mid-80s all four were facing financial uncertainty and had to start making plans about their financial futures.

"After a certain point I had to actually get a straight job. It wasn't easy, especially when the only thing on your only resumé is 'I was in the Alice Cooper group,'" says Dunaway. "I had health issues that caused me to need to get health insurance, which meant I had to get a job. And at that time in the eighties it was difficult for a musician to even get car insurance, because you were in a high-risk category. I finally got a job, and it was retail, of all things [managing three Captain Video stores in Stamford, Connecticut]."

"If I lived in any state except Connecticut, I could've lived off the royalties," says Smith, "but in Connecticut I had to do something else in order to make ends meet."

The drummer took a course in real estate as a lark, along with a woman he was seeing at the time whose mother owned a real-estate company. "The daughter was going to take the real-estate course to get a license. I decided to take the course too, took the tests and passed and got my Connecticut real-estate license. I had gone through that 10-year period between '75 and '85, and Dennis and I had a band called Flying Tigers. We played a lot of clubs in Connecticut and Massachusetts, even as far south as New Jersey. After that I'd pretty much had it with the music business. I wanted a totally different lifestyle. I made some pretty good money in the real-estate business in Connecticut and had my license all the way till 2015, four years after the Hall Of Fame."

Michael Bruce's post-band history is a little murkier. Dunaway explains that the guitarist was travelling a lot during those years, while Cooper says: "We lost Mike there for a while. We didn't know where he was." But in 1997, Q magazine reported he was ➢

BRIAN RASIC/WIREIMAGE

working as a student-detention counsellor for the state of Arizona. "None of the kids could believe I was in the Alice Cooper band, but they could relate to me," Bruce told *Q*, adding that he was keen to work with his old team. "We really should jam to see if there is any juice left."

He wasn't the only one who thought so. Alice's mother did too.

"I remember around when *Special Forces* came out," Bruce recalls. "My mom got a call from Mrs. Furnier, Alice's mom. She said: 'I would love for Alice and Michael to get back together and write some songs.' It was just a call from mother to mother. They can cut through the bullshit. She'd seen Alice losing weight and maybe going in the wrong direction. My mom told me about it, and I said: 'Mom, my phone, my door, my window is always open.'"

Even thought that was back in 1981, the windows stayed open. And eventually something came through.

In 1985, Cooper called up Dunaway and Smith during pre-production for *Constrictor*, looking for input, ideas, a flicker of the old spark.

"It all goes back to when Alice contacted me and Dennis to work on songs with [guitarist] Kane Roberts," Smith says. "We'd spent ten years apart, really not seeing each other. But Dennis and I always left the door open. 'If you need anything, anywhere on the planet, I'll be there, just say where and when.' That kind of friendship doesn't go away. There was never any animosity."

From there the band began drifting back into each other's orbits. In 1998 they played together at the first Glen Buxton Memorial Weekend, honouring their bandmate, who'd died the year before. That same year, Smith and Bruce performed at the opening of Cooper's sports bar, Cooperstown. In 1999, Bruce appeared on stage with Cooper in Atlantic City, playing *Under My Wheels* – the first original member to share a stage with Cooper since the group's final shows in Brazil. Alice invited them to contribute songs to *Welcome 2 My Nightmare* in 2011. But the real spark came later that year at the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame induction. On that stage, the original band played together again not as an act of nostalgia, but as something unfinished.

In 2015 they did it again, to celebrate the publication of Dunaway's memoir. Chris Penn, who owned Good Records in Dallas, held an event at his store to promote the book. The four members plugged in, along with Ryan Roxie, Cooper's guitarist at the time, for a short set [later released as *Live At The AstroTurf*]. Then, Bruce, Dunaway and Smith travelled to the UK in November 2017 and joined Cooper for five dates in Leeds, Glasgow, Birmingham, Manchester and London, every step bringing them closer to what seemed like an inevitable next chapter.

So what took so long?

"Cindy [Smith, Neal's sister, Dennis Dunaway's wife] is the one who finally brought it up," says Cooper. "Ten years ago she said to me: 'Why don't you just do an album with these guys?' She's the only one that felt like she could talk like that to me. I said: 'Because it's not the right time yet.'

"And it wasn't. There's no explaining it. There is a reason why you can do an album like this. Dennis still plays like Dennis, Neal still plays like Neal, Mike plays like Mike, I still sing the same way. And that should not happen. But it does. They're still angry. I'm still angry. The best guy that ever did that was Pete Townshend. He's eighty-something years old. I tell young bands: 'You want to know what to do? Go see Pete Townshend. He's still pissed off, his knuckles are still bleeding because he loves hitting that guitar so hard. He will not give up. And neither did we. I never ever thought of us stopping."

"I think it all happened little by little," says Dunaway. "We started doing more shows – the Christmas Pudding shows [at Cooperstown]. We were inducted into the Hall Of Fame. Chris Penn was a big factor. And then us recording songs on Alice's solo album. So little by little everything really came back together. I like to think that my book, writing about the positive rather than the negative, had something to do with it. In 2021 I got a call from Bob and Alice and they go: 'Den, we're thinking about doing an album'. We were all excited about it. Neal was sending demos to me and we were trading demos. Michael, Neal and Alice were in Phoenix, so they flew me out – just the band without Bob. We went into the studio at the Solid Rock Teen Center [Cooper's nonprofit organisation just to rehearse and basically just to be a band together again.



"We were inducted into the Hall Of Fame. Little by little everything came back together."

Dennis Dunaway

Did Cooper think this day would ever come?

"I never thought about it, even though Dennis and I stayed in touch with each other all the time," he explains. "It all came together in an odd moment of me going to Bob Ezrin: 'Bob, would you be interested in doing another album with the original guys?' When the two of us started talking about it, we said this could go way left or it could go way south. But we decided we could give it a shot. Bob and I had been making records for fifty years since [the end of the band], and we have a way of communicating. We figure out where the songs want to go and we go there. That's what makes really good records. We needed to leave in the craziness of what Dennis does and what Neal does and what Mike does. All that needs to be on the record. That's what makes Alice Cooper Alice Cooper."

According to Cooper, Glen Buxton plays the part of the ghost in the machine.

"There's an invisible factor here that nobody talks about, and that is Glen Buxton. Even though he was not functional during the end of *Billion Dollar Babies*, we could not sound like Alice Cooper without him. There was nobody that played like him, he was irreplaceable. When we could not use him any more, that took a lot of wind out of the original sound of Alice Cooper.

"It's really funny how people remember Glen," Cooper continues. "Guitarists will tell me: 'I learned how to play guitar listening to Glen Buxton.' "The guy that actually played on this album, Gyasi Heus, that was why we got him. He told us: 'I know all the Glen parts.' And we went: 'Who knows all of Glen's parts? Are you kidding?' As a guitarist, on top of it we had the luxury of using Robby Krieger [from The Doors]. We didn't want to get too far away from the 'Alice sound', but on *Black Mamba* who else could play that? It's about a snake. Who plays more like a snake than Robby Krieger [the guitarist on The Doors' *Crawling King Snake*]?

"When we got into recording *Revenge Of Alice Cooper*, we had more songs than we could deal with – between Dennis and Neal they brought sixty songs between them," Cooper enthuses. "Everybody was excited about it. This album feels like it should've been the album after *Billion Dollar Babies*, not *Muscle Of Love*."

So will there be follow-up to *Revenge*? A ninth Alice Cooper Band record?

Cooper responds: "We did a gang sort of interview, and they asked: 'Is this a one-off project?' I went: 'Who says it's one-off? This album's really good, why wouldn't we do another one?' I think I might have even shocked Neal, Dennis and Mike when I said that. I mean, the band is the band. They'll always be my band. And I'll always be their singer.

"The moment when we disbanded, I felt really alone," adds Cooper. "These are three of the best friends I've ever had in my life. I'd never been without these guys. And it took a long time to really get comfortable playing with other musicians. We [the original Alice Cooper band] were always the band that was looked down on. I was never, ever considered a great singer. So I really had to grow up. I really had to learn how to jam with other musicians. All of a sudden people were regarding me as a singer, not just an actor. So while that was really something that was good for me, it wasn't immediately comfortable. *Nightmare* did well, *Hell* did well, *Trash* did well, *Detroit Stories* went well. I had some really, really big albums. But you can't ever sit back and disregard the original guys. To me I always felt like that band was still together, we just haven't worked in a long time."

And now they have. After 51 years, the Alice Cooper Group made another album.

Not because they had to. Because they could.

The Revenge Of Alice Cooper is out on July 25 via EarMusic and will be reviewed next issue.

UNIVERSAL ARCHIVE/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES



Alice Cooper 2025: (l-r) Neal Smith, Michael Bruce, Alice Cooper, Dennis Dunaway.

JENNY RISHER/PRESS

“I mean, the band is the band. They’ll always be my band. And I’ll always be their singer.”

Alice Cooper

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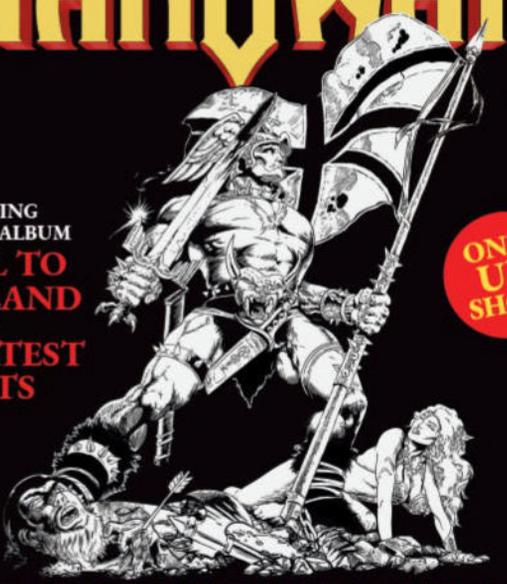
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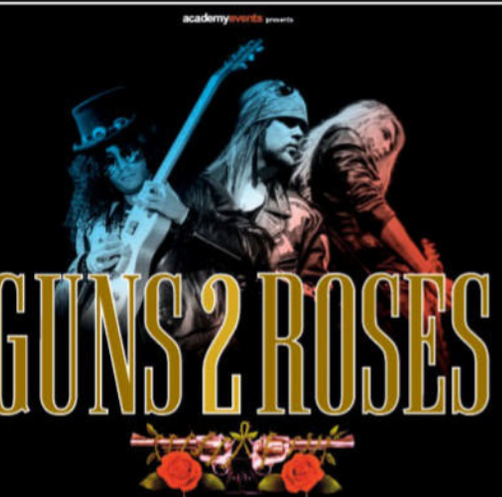
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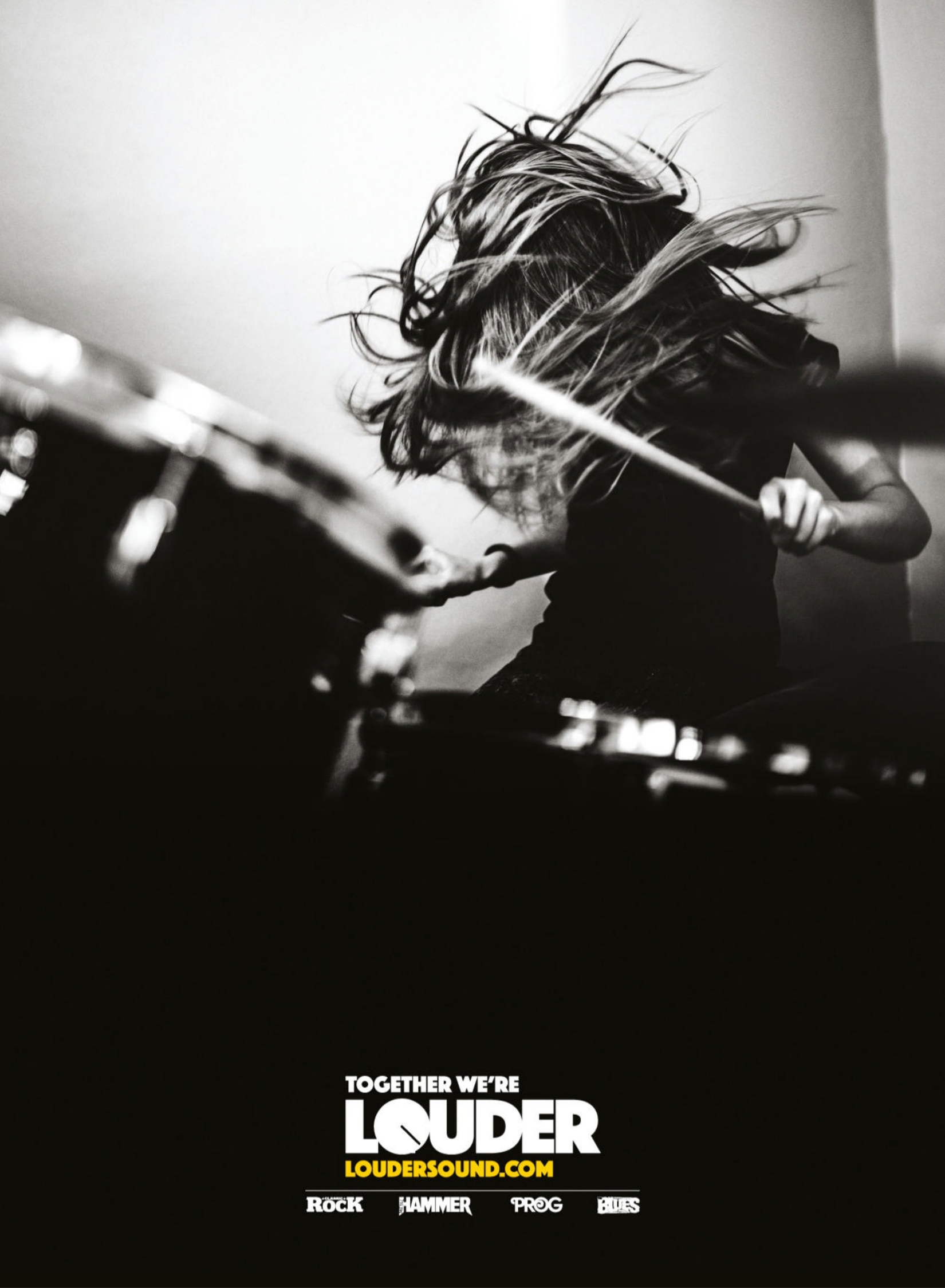
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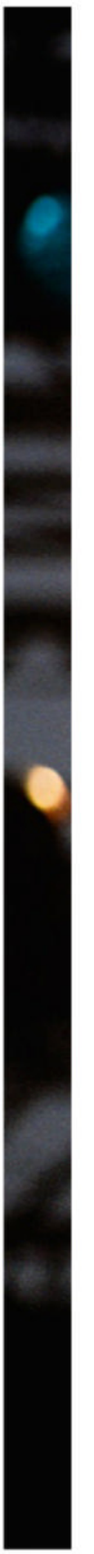
On a summer's day in 1985, some of the biggest names in rock and pop came together to perform at the USA leg of Live Aid. Despite the flood of goodwill and camaraderie, the lead-up to the event wasn't without some clashes of the titans.

Words: **Mick Wall**





The Philadelphia crowd welcomes the world.



"[Page] said he'd only do it as Led Zeppelin. Robert was a bit lairy about it. But because it was for a good cause he agreed." **Phil Carson**

A groggy 9am on Saturday, July 13, 1985. The JFK Stadium in Philadelphia. It's the morning of Live Aid, the global charity event – arranged hastily by Boomtown Rats singer Bob Geldof after an epiphany watching TV reports of famine in Ethiopia – now regarded as the defining musical moment of the 1980s.

The foundational Live Aid show at Wembley Stadium had begun two hours before – midday UK time – with Status Quo doing their cheeky-chappie version of *Rockin' All Over The World*. "I'd done a gram of coke and half a bottle of tequila before we even went on stage," Francis Rossi later told me.

In Philadelphia the earlier morning start is far more sedate, respectful – and corny. Officially, the JFK holds 102,000 people, and it is already nearly full. Clad in black from sunglasses to shoes, 48-year-old actor Jack Nicholson, the show's headline host, wanders on stage all Hollywood howdy-doody, just as the TV announcer intones solemnly: "You know, in the next sixty seconds twenty-eight people are going to die of hunger. Twenty-one of them are going to be children..."

Reading from hand-held notes, Nicholson delivers his rehearsed burble: "...a privilege... proud... international family of artists...", describing the show as "the Live Aid Concert for African Family Relief".

"I didn't know it was *family* relief," says one backstage onlooker.

"He said '*famine*'," hisses another.

The multi-Oscar-winning greatest movie star in the world fumbles his lines again as he introduces the opening act, Joan Baez: "A woman who's always been heard... when a just... when... whose voice has always been heard... when a just cause needed her song..."

"Definitely 'family'," someone says.

Baez is America's Joan of Arc. As Nicholson just alluded to, she has been lending her three-octave soprano to protest concerts, fundraising rallies and social justice causes since Geldof was being bullied by Catholic nuns at school in Dublin.

"Good morning children of the eighties," she announces motherly. "This your Woodstock and it's long overdue!"

Joan's only allocated song of the day, *Amazing Grace*, sung a capella with the audience, segues into *We Are The World*, the superior but still cheesy US version of *Do They Know It's Christmas?*, itself an exemplar of prime 80s cheddar.

It shouldn't work, but it does. Joan absolutely kills it. Live Aid America suddenly takes flight. Turns out this stuff's good for you! Who knew?

Just remember to chew before swallowing...

At that very moment, a high-contrast scene is unfolding elsewhere in the stadium as the four original members of Black Sabbath disembark world-wearily from the drab minivan that has ferried them from their hotel suites, in readiness for their 15-minute set, scheduled for a seemingly insane 9.55am.

An eager young reporter from ABC, who are televising the show, spots Ozzy Osbourne and dashes over, thrusting her microphone into his bemused face as the cameraman takes aim.

"Ozzy!" she screams, "What can we expect from Black Sabbath on this historic day?"

Blinking into the 95-degree sun, Ozzy regards her forlornly. "We thought we'd start with *Food Glorious Food*," he says, not a flicker of mirth on his sad jester's face.

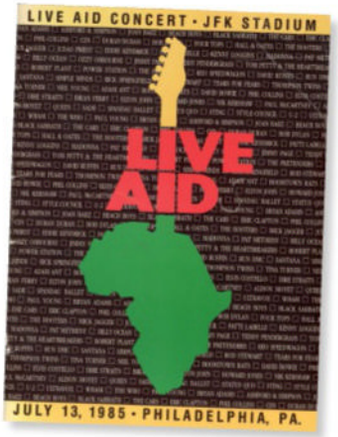
"What?" she says, caught off-guard, clearly unacquainted with the 1960 stage musical *Oliver!* which first showcased the song. Or even the Oscar-winning 1968 film version. For shame, youth of America!

"Yeah," Ozzy says. Helpfully singing '*Food glorious food! Hot sausage and mustard!*'"

While the young reporter keeps smiling, Ozzy stumbles off towards the dressing rooms.

"Ozzy Osbourne," she recovers quickly, camera still rolling. "Here like all these great artists today to help feed the poor of Africa..."

"I know it's for a good cause, but to be honest I don't really care," Ozzy told me the night before in the hotel bar, where ≫

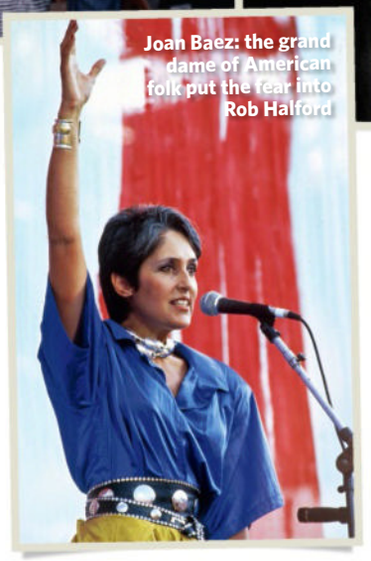


MAIN: ROBERT MATHEU / CAMERA PRESS. TOP: EBET ROBERTS/GETTY. BOTTOM: BLANK ARCHIVES/GETTY


Philadelphia Live Aid host Jack Nicholson: "Did he say 'famine', or 'family'?"


Whole lotta Zep: Jimmy Page and Robert Plant backstage at Live Aid.


Dynamic duo: Tina Turner and Mick Jagger belt out *It's Only Rock 'N' Roll.*


Joan Baez: the grand dame of American folk put the fear into Rob Halford

'When Chevvy Chase introduced them on stage at the JFK, it was as "Black Sabbath *featuring* Ozzy Osbourne!"'

he was sipping Diet Coke. Ozzy had been on the wagon since checking out of the Betty Ford Clinic six months earlier.

"My father used to say in the war everyone was friendly and helped each other, but as soon as the war ended they were back to being pricks again. There'll be people at this show who'll be telling each other to go fuck themselves tomorrow."

This was hardly a minority view shared among the stars, has-beens and their very many best friends glad-handing backstage at JFK. The overwhelming feeling was one of: 'Yeah yeah, feed the world, but why has he/she/they, *everyone else* got better dressing rooms/time slots/stage production/transport/showers?' The famous 'LEAVE YOUR EGO AT THE DOOR' sign that producer Quincy Jones taped to the studio wall during the *We Are The World* sessions is now long forgotten.

"I ain't taking shit off today!" Madonna proclaimed loudly during her set, referring to her recent nude photo-spread in *Playboy*. Classy, like. Following her on stage, Tom Petty gave the middle finger to persons unknown less than a minute into *American Girl*.

Meanwhile, a bedraggled David Crosby thundered around, railing against the drugs and weapons offenses for which he'd just been sentenced to nine months in jail. Telling me how "fucking disgusted" he was that the first Crosby, Stills & Nash performance for 10 years had been followed by "some heavy metal garbage!" Specifically, Judas Priest.

It was a remark that underlined the sense of barely concealed contempt the rock and pop literati held for heavy metal in the mid-80s. Geldof could get his head round having Queen on the bill at Wembley, even Quo synchronising guitars, but Thin Lizzy, fronted by Geldof's once-friend and early mentor Phil Lynott, didn't even get an invite. The only other unequivocally 'rock' band on the bill was The Who.

Even in America, where people knew their KK from their Geezer, Geldof winged it. Zeppelin? Sure. As long as they do *Stairway To Heaven*. How about The Cars? REO Speedwagon? Metal fans eat that crap up, right?

The woeful lack of representation for what was then the biggest-selling music in the world did have one positive consequence: *Hear 'N Aid*. The Ronnie James Dio-led charity album, recorded in London six weeks before Live Aid, featured members of Blue Öyster Cult, Judas Priest, Y&T, Spiñal Tap, Mötley Crüe, W.A.S.P., even ferociously anti-lib heavy metal hunter-gatherer Ted Nugent.

The signpost single *Stars*, written and sung by Dio, was heartfelt and heavy and a stiff riposte to Geldof's shortsightedness. Released in tandem the following year, the Hear 'N Aid project raised more than $3 million for Geldof's famine relief fund.

Of the two events, Philadelphia was the only Live Aid show that included any metal artists, and then only three of the 33 on the bill: Sabbath, Priest and Zeppelin. Of those, Priest were the only one officially still alive and in the game at the time.

The mood in the Sabbath camp was none-more-black. It was the first time since 1978 that the four originals had agreed to share a stage, and hopes were for 'a friendly backstage', in biz parlance. That is, where all personal enmities be set aside while the band rehearse for a couple of days and do some promo. Strictly no aggro.

Two snags. Firstly, Sabbath were now managed by Don Arden, the mafia-connected showbiz maverick famous for hanging rivals from top-floor windows and always beginning meetings by placing a loaded gun on his desk. "I find it focuses attention," he explained.

Ozzy, meanwhile, was being managed by Don's daughter, Sharon, also now Ozzy's wife, who had learned the ropes – and how to tie people up in them – at papa's knee. Yet now she was at war with him. Fighting over Ozzy's contract with Don's label, Jet. Fighting over things only daddies and daughters fight about.



Phil Collins, with his wife, about to board a Concorde flight to the US to perform at Philadelphia, having already played at the Wembley leg.

JOAN BAEZ: EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS; JACK: PAUL NATKIN/GETTY; LED ZEPPELIN: VINNIE ZUFFANTE/GETTY; TINA & MICK: PAUL NATKIN/WIREIMAGE; PHIL COLLINS: DENNIS/MIRRORPIX/GETTY





Tony Iommi, Ozzy Osbourne and Geezer Butler. Getting Sabbath back together for Live Aid was a coup for the organisers.

By 1985, Sabbath's career in the US was all but over, following the acrimonious departure of former Deep Purple singer Ian Gillan, which had followed the acrimonious departure of former Rainbow singer Ronnie James Dio, which had followed the acrimonious departure of Ozzy. The circle of mistrust complete.

Now Don was angling for a full-on Ozzy-Sabbath reunion. He'd seen the millions Purple had raked in with their re-formation. He knew he could do even better with an Ozzy-led Sabbath.

But that led to the other stumbling block: the fact that Ozzy's post-Sabbath solo career had taken off like a rocket in the US. Or as Sharon summed-up: "They need us more than we need them," adding sweetly: "So fuck 'em." Tellingly, when comedian/actor Chevvy Chase introduced them on stage at the JFK it was as "Black Sabbath *featuring* Ozzy Osbourne!"

Don wasn't asking, though, he was telling. Halfway through a live televised interview two days before the show, Ozzy had been served with a writ from Don's lawyer, forbidding him to perform with Sabbath.

Nobody blinked. It was just nasty old Don being Don. But it was a low blow that rankled.

"That was the last straw for Sharon," said one insider. "Any tiny chance whatsoever of Ozzy getting back together with Tony was gone after that."

The fact even a 'tiny chance' existed, however, ran counter to everything Ozzy had to say on the subject in Philly. "Do you know how many years it took me to get out of that fucking mess with Sabbath?" He looked at me wearily. "No, bollocks to all that. I've got enough to worry about trying to kick this drink thing."

Nevertheless, Live Aid became the demon seed behind Ozzy's reintegration into Sabbath amid great fanfare in the 90s. Almost exactly 40 years to the day since they began their Live Aid set with – what else? – *Children Of The Grave*.



By contrast, Judas Priest, who followed Sabbath on to the JFK stage bright and early that morning, appeared to be peaking. The band were in the middle of recording their *Turbo* album at Compass Point studios in the Bahamas, and not at all interested in interrupting that in order to, as Rob Halford recalls in his memoir, "go all that way to do three bloody songs".

Speaking now, Halford recalls the clincher being when Priest's manager, Bill Curbishley, who also managed The Who, "called to say that the Live Aid people had reached out to him asking about putting The Who on the UK side – and he said: 'Okay, but I want Judas Priest for the USA'.

"After that everything happened quickly," says Halford. "We did a couple of run-throughs in the studio then flew into Philadelphia the day before the show and back to work the next day."

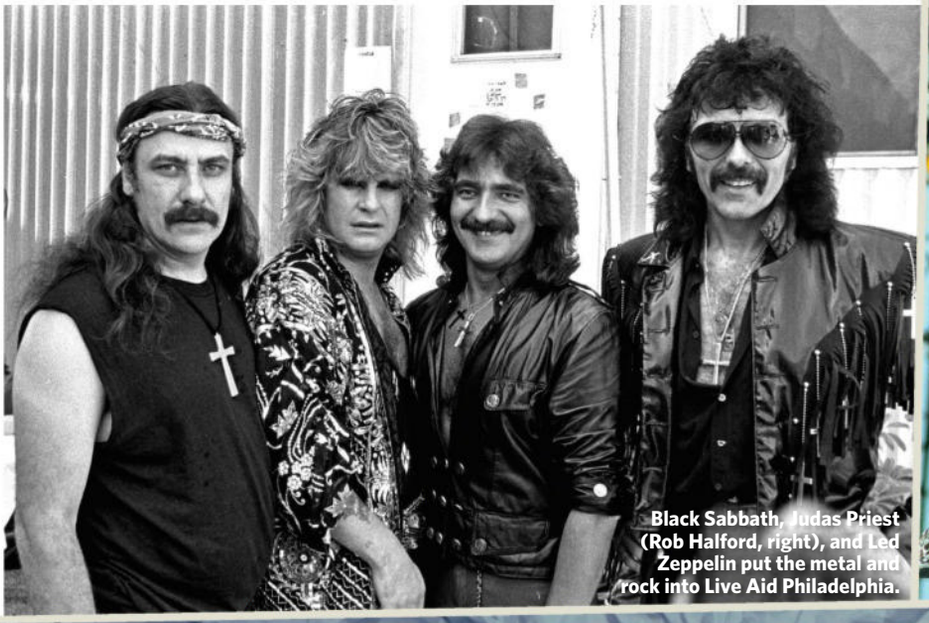
It wasn't until Priest hit the stage at precisely 11.29am with *Living After Midnight* that he "realised the enormity of the event".

Unlike squabbling Sabbath and overcomplicated Zeppelin, Priest actually enjoyed themselves.

"I was there for the whole event," Halford says now. "For me the three best highlights was watching Sabbath – and later Plant and Page. Then toward the end Tina [Turner] and Mick [Jagger]." He'd also thrilled to Madonna. "Pop tart that I am, I loved seeing Madonna," he later wrote. "I've always been a gay metal fanboy for her."

He'd also experienced "an out-of-body feel" when Joan Baez asked to meet him. Rob feared what the grand dame of American folk might have to say about Priest's camp metal version of Baez's transcendental opus *Diamonds And Rust*. ➢

OZZY + GEEZER: PAUL NATKIN/GETTY; TONY IOMMI: E BET ROBERTS/REDFERNS



Black Sabbath, Judas Priest (Rob Halford, right), and Led Zeppelin put the metal and rock into Live Aid Philadelphia.





Instead, "she came tripping towards me, smiling and waving". Joan wanted Rob to know that Priest's regal version of *Diamonds* was her son's favourite. "He thinks it's great that his mom's song was covered by a metal band."

For Halford, Live Aid was a positive. "Looking back, I feel good that Priest took part in something so important and [that] showed the world how powerful music is when all kinds and styles come together for a great cause."

Heavy metal had to be seen to be truly believed. Yet it lurked in the margins of A-list music-biz blags like Live Aid.

"There was a live feed on ABC [and] MTV, I believe," says Halford, "so millions tuned in, meaning a lot of people saw and heard us for the first time."

Halford's mention-in-passing of Page and Plant – specifically not Led Zeppelin – is unintentionally revealing. Long-overlooked is the fact that when they were introduced on stage at the JFK that evening by Phil Collins, it would not be as Led Zeppelin but individually: "Mister Robert Plant, Mister Jimmy Page and Mister John Paul Jones..." In that order.

The backdrop to Zeppelin's unofficial reunion was besmirched by more 'personal issues' even than Sabbath's.

Plant was 37 and intent on putting as many miles between his solo career and his past in Zeppelin as possible. He'd even cut his hair – a bit. Buttoned up his shirt – a bit. Still wiggled his ass, but don't you dare mistake him for one of those clichéd oldsters like Whitesnake. Robert was an artist from a far higher musical order, you see. A sort of Peter Gabriel intellectualism seasoned with white Ray Charles classiness and black Robert Johnson filthiness. Not heavy metal.

"Looking back, I feel good that Priest took part in something so important and [that] showed the world how powerful music is."

Rob Halford

His first two solo albums had gone gold and platinum in Britain and America and several other key territories. But his third, *Shaken N' Stirred*, was a mess; one minute poor man's Steve Winwood, the next poor man's Bowie, the next... Released just weeks before Live Aid, it barely scraped the Top 20 in the UK or US.

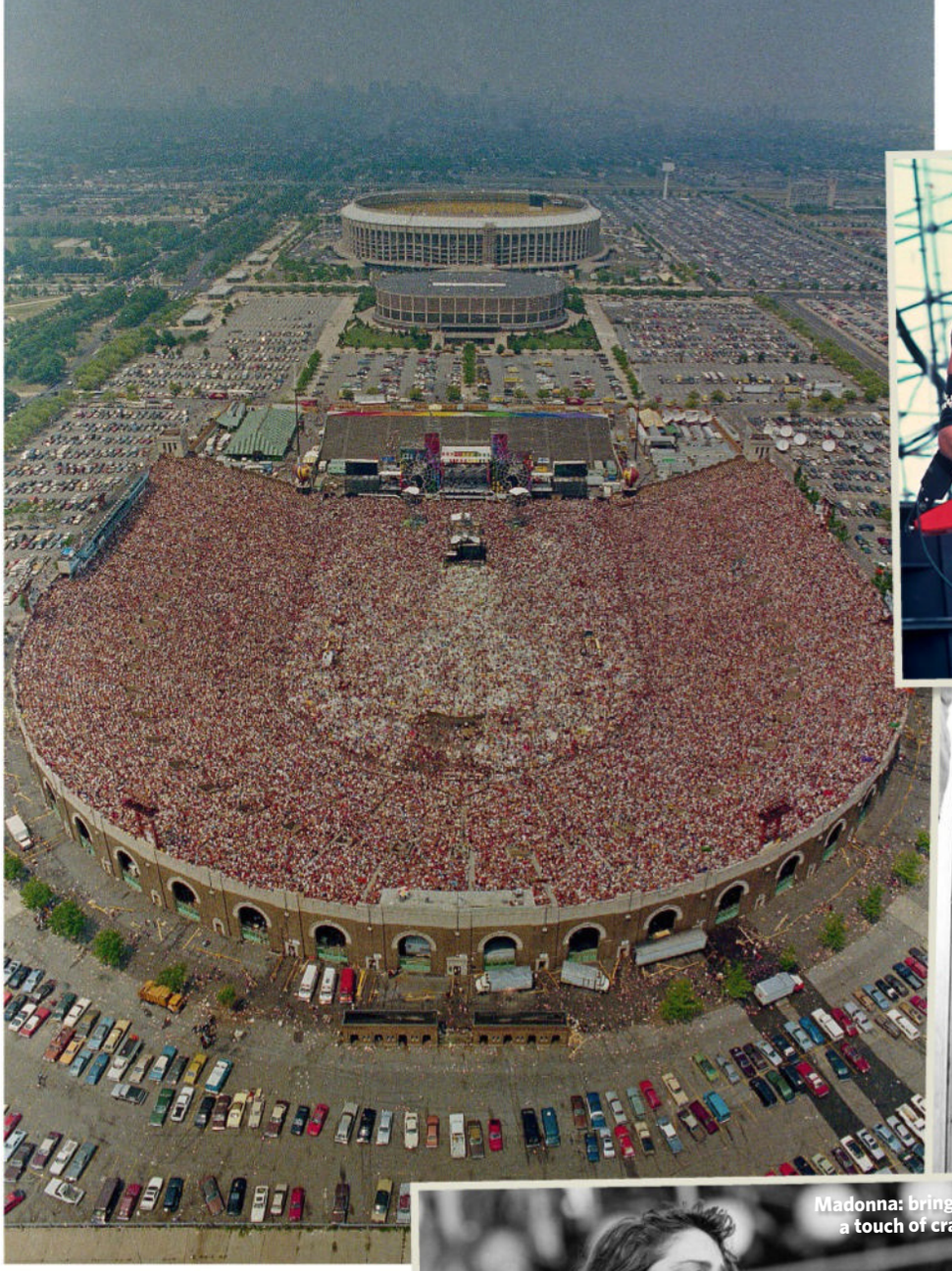
Fortunately for Plant, he had an ace up his rolled-up *Miami Vice* sleeve. The unexpectedly huge success of his mini-album *The Honeydrippers: Volume One*, an almost throwaway idea of Atlantic Records supremo Ahmet Ertegun's to record some of his personal R&B standards from the 1950s. Ertegun took the idea to Plant after being double-wowed by his backing band, named the Honeydrippers, complimented in the studio by Chic's Nile Rodgers, David Letterman's musical director Paul Shaffer, and a couple of old-school session cats named Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page. The public's indifference to Plant's vain attempts to become 80s-relevant was matched only by the ecstasy it expressed at Plant wailing on *Rockin' At Midnight*, or Jimmy Page rockabilly soloing on *I Get A Thrill*.

Plant said it was his favourite-ever non-Zep project. It was also his most successful: Top 5 in the US and Australia, No.1 in Canada, plus a top-three US single. When ticket sales for the *Shaken 'N' Stirred* US tour that summer dragged, Plant started doing more Honeydrippers material and suddenly new life was injected into the tour.

By coincidence, Page's first post-Zep project, teaming up with former Free and Bad Company singer Paul Rodgers in The Firm, had also taken off in the US that year. Their album had gone gold and their tour dates were selling out.

Phil Carson, then managing both Page and

SABBATH: ROBERT MATHIEU / CAMERA PRESS; LED ZEPPELIN: EBET ROBERTS/GETTY; HALFORD: AMY SANCETTA/ALAMY





Judas Priest: rockin' well before midnight.



Ozzy cools off.



Madonna: bringing a touch of crass.

Plant, says the initial approach from the Live Aid team had been for The Honeydrippers, and on that basis Plant had readily agreed. "Then as soon as it got out that Robert was doing it everyone kept asking: 'Is Jimmy doing it too?'"

As Page had played on the Honeydrippers record, Carson suggested he and Robert do Live Aid as The Honeydrippers. But when Carson called Page, "He said he'd only do it as Led Zeppelin. Robert was a bit lairy about it. But because it was for a good cause, he agreed."

All obstacles seemingly surmounted, the whole thing nearly came crashing down again when one of the American TV bigwigs told Carson: "Well, you know, Led Zeppelin's over, who cares?"

Wait... did he say 'famine' or...?

John Paul Jones was not actually invited to Philadelphia. "I had to barge my way into Live Aid," he recalled bitterly. Paul Martinez, the bassist from Plant's band, was already there, meaning Jones had to play keyboards. "Plant went: [adopts Brum accent] 'Ooh, bloody 'ell!' But I elbowed my way in."

Augmented by former Chic drummer Tony Thompson, thrown off course by the bull-in-china-shop arrival of Phil Collins, Led Zeppelin's performance at the Philadelphia Live Aid was ridiculed ever after as a total shambles, to the point where they refused to let the footage be included on the official Live Aid DVD. From where I was standing, side-stage, Led Zeppelin at Live Aid in Philadelphia remains one of the most singular, otherworldly spectacles I've witnessed in more than 40 years in the music business.

Zeppelin in America still exuded some sort of mystical superpower, and you could feel it everywhere that day. Zeppelin were the only act that everyone backstage – from roadies to superstars – stopped what they were doing to stand in awe and pay witness. Rock as godless religion. Only in America, baby-baby-baby.

"My main memories," Page told me, "were of total panic."

Plant had even been moved enough to consider the previously thought impossible. "I'd forgotten what it was like... people crying all over the place... something far more powerful than words can convey."

However, Phil Carson recalls that when Page joined Plant on stage at a show in New Jersey a week after Live Aid, "as soon as Jimmy came on it was like the fucking roof came off the place!" Afterwards, "Plant was absolutely *fuming*. He says: 'Is it always like that when Jimmy Page gets on stage?' I said: 'No, but it's always gonna be like that when Jimmy Page gets on stage with *you*.'"

The result was the first of several failed attempts over the coming years to try to put the led back into zeppelin. Rehearsing in Bath with drummer Tony Thompson, "the first day was all right', reckoned Jones. Then cracks began to appear. Robert moaning about Jimmy – who was off heroin but still drinking heavily – being slow.

Then Thompson was in a car crash, which Plant saw as an omen. Jones recalls he and Plant drunk "and Robert saying nobody wants to hear that old stuff again. I said: 'But Robert, everybody is waiting for it to happen!'"

Choke on that.

STADIUM: GEORGE WIDMAN/ALAMY; PRIEST: PAUL NATKIN/GETTY; MADONNA: JEAN-LOUIS ATLAN/SYGMA VIA GETTY; OZZY: DMI/THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/SHUTTERSTOCK

The Hot List

THE ESSENTIAL NEW ROCK TRACKS YOU NEED TO HEAR THIS MONTH AND



Summer's here, festivals beckon, tours are kicking off and new albums are flying out like chip shop orders after last encores – freshly fried, hot, tasty and exactly what you want, when you need it the most. Collectively, and in their own different ways, all our Hot List entries this month make great summer soundtrack tunes. From sun-baked southern rockers to feral punk'n'roll party tracks, pop melodies and more, it's a timely reminder that backyard barbecues and beach days can be about more than just a few cold ones and your millionth replays of *Sweet Home Alabama*, *Boys Of Summer*, *Summer Of '69* etc, etc (swell as those classics obviously are). There's always good new stuff, if you know where to look.

We hope you enjoy this edition's choices, and for new music every week head to classicrockmagazine.com

Ace Monroe *If You're Gonna Swing*

Based in Nashville but rocking like Aerosmith on a particularly match-fit, loose-limbed day, Ace Monroe make rock'n'roll the way you almost certainly want it (if you're reading this magazine, anyway) on the just-out *Wild Card*. Totally old-school, ripped jeans 'n' leopard print stuff, but with the sort of energy, charisma and attention to melody and detail that makes it feel like an event. The whole album is enormous fun and well worth a listen, but single *If You're Gonna Swing* is a strong place to start, followed closely by mid-tempo, bluesy banger *Bang Bang*. If you miss 00s hotshots Silvertide and enjoy the more recent likes of Dirty Honey, you'll certainly want to check out these guys.

acemonroe.com



Orianthi
Attention

Solo artist, Alice Cooper touring guitarist, Michael Jackson's last shredder-in-chief and Richie Sambora collaborator are among the strings to this Aussie/Greek's bow. Now she's turning to her solo singer-songwriter, as well as axe-slinger sides, with this emotive new cut from her forthcoming Kevin 'Caveman' Shirley-produced album *Some Kind Of Feeling*. A forward-kicking power ballad with a mix of 80s and 90s inflections, a sing-your-heart-out chorus and some searing, climactic lead guitar flourishes, *Attention* makes good on Ori's ability to write a proper tune – as well as nail a killer solo.
orianthi.me

ORIANTHI: ALEX BROWN/PRESS



Zig Zags *Deadbeat At Dawn*

"Zig Zags is metal and punk music written for my thirteen-year-old self," guitarist/singer Jed Maheu explains of the LA power trio's core inspiration. If that doesn't sound like a riotously happy recipe for a rock'n'roll band, then we're not sure what does. *Deadbeat At Dawn*, the title track from their forthcoming fifth album, is a turbocharged whirlwind of ferocious riffage, snarling power stances and biker-gang energy. Imagine Metallica and Misfits bangers being played on the back of a speeding Harley. Weapons-grade fun.
zigzags.bandcamp.com



Robert Randolph *Big Women*

The gospel-rooted virtuoso has been instrumental in elevating the profile (and genre-hopping potential) of the pedal steel guitar, playing for A-listers from Ozzy Osbourne and Metallica to Elton John, Eric Clapton, Sheryl Crow and loads more. He's also a class solo act. "When we say 'big', we're talking about strength, confidence, and lived experience," he says of the inspiration behind this unctuous, swaggering soul-blues'n'roll taste of his next album, *Preacher Kids* (his first with legendary Memphis label Sun Records).
robertrandolph.net



Whiskey Myers *Time Bomb*

One of the rockingest presences in today's burgeoning countrified rock sphere, East Texan firebrands Whiskey Myers have always had an extra layer of grit in their songs that's resonated with massive audiences in the States. Now they've cooked all that up in *Time Bomb*, a mammoth rootsy banger with at least as much of a footing in Rolling Stones-esque rock'n'roll as in the cowboy-booted steps of their countrymen.
whiskeymyers.com



His Lordship *Old Romantic*

Pretenders guitarist/Chrissie Hynde compadre by day, punk'n'roll maverick by night, James Walbourne teams up again with drummer Kristoffer Sonne for their second studio album as power duo His Lordship. *Old Romantic* is our current favourite from said album, titled *Bored Animal*, and it's a flaming rock'n'roll hit charged with the raw, groovy menace, 1950s DNA and charisma that's made them such a compelling live act. If The White Stripes got back together after a few drinks over Jerry Lee Lewis records, they'd have sounded like this. Yeah, we'll definitely take some of that.
hislordship.net



The Inspector Cluzo *Less Is More*

Proudly DIY, principled and all the more fiery for it, these Gascony farmers return with an album inspired by 19th-century naturalist/civil liberty advocate Henry David Thoreau and French philosopher Guy Debord – two thinkers who resonate with Cluzo's own feelings on mass production, in the farming and music worlds they inhabit. But for all its cleverness, *Less Is More* (both the roaring, rousing title track and its parent album) is an absolute blast to listen to, rocking and rolling with the rugged bluesiness of Clutch, and the lyrics and melodies of people who care deeply. They're a rare breed.
theinspectorcluzo.com

HIS LORDSHIP: KI PRICE/PRESS; THE INSPECTOR CLUZO: PHILIPPE SALVAT/PRESS



California Irish
Live Fast, Die Free

The Answer frontman Cormac Neeson has a new band on the go, and they draw from classic road trip flick *Easy Rider* for this latest single – all long-haired, freewheeling Americana and warm slide vibes, with a loose-limbed swampiness and sweet, gospel harmonies. "The song tries to tap into some of the hippie ethos that's captured so beautifully in the movie, themes of freedom, love and living life without regret," Neeson says. "It's also one of those loose, groovy songs that the live analogue recording process suited perfectly."
facebook.com/californiairish



Joanne Shaw Taylor *Summer Love*

"I specifically had it in my mind that I wanted to write a summer pop single for this album," Jo says of this easy, breezy but heartfelt ode to the best of times destined to last a season, not for ever. "It's just something I've always loved – driving around Michigan, now Tennessee in summer and having that one song you love to hear on the radio that years later triggers happy memories. I hope this could be that song for someone out there." Gorgeous Tele solo, too. Plus a key change for added happy-faced, major-key vibes.
joanneshawtaylor.com



And keep an ear out for... The Marcus King Band

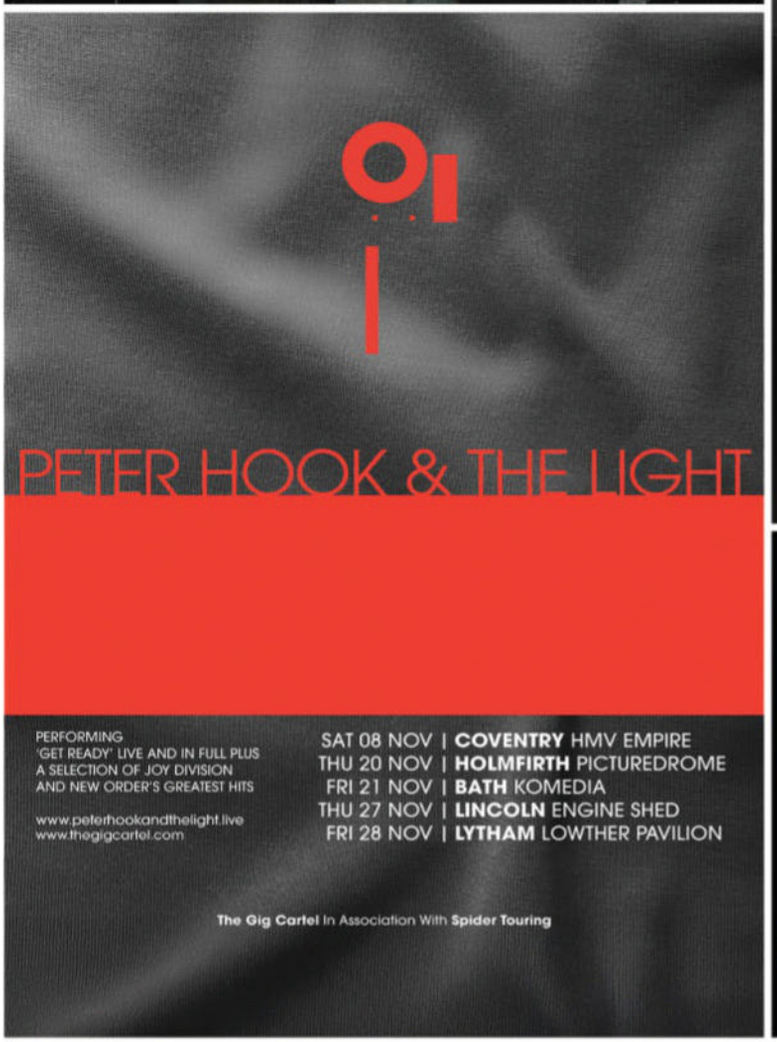
Over the course of this prodigious South Carolinian man's career we've had dazzling bluesy fretwork, introspective heartbreak (notably with last year's Rick Rubin-produced *Mood Swings*), contemporary soulfulness and more. Now he's gone full saloon boot-stomper on new single *Honky Tonk Hell*, billed by King as "an anthem for anyone out there like myself who has struggled with the permanence of sobriety" and joyously laced with piano, slide, brass, gospel backing and all those juicy accoutrements that make southern rock'n'roll so damn lovable. You could totally see him jumping on stage with Blackberry Smoke or the Tedeschi Trucks Band and having a jam through this. And there's more to come. Watch this space...
marcuskingofficial.com

MARCUS KING: JM COLLECTIVE/PRESS; JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR: ROB BONDURANT/PRESS; CALIFORNIA IRISH: NEIL HAINSWORTH/PRESS


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The Hard Stuff
The Ultimate Rock Reviews Section

Classic Rock Ratings

- A Classic
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Above Average
- Average
- Below Par
- A Disappointment
- Pants
- Pish

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18 PAGES

100% ROCK

Edited By Ian Fortnam

ian.fortnam@futurenet.com

p84

Bruce Springsteen

From deep in the vaults comes a "breathtaking" collection of 'lost' gems.



DANNY CLINCH/PRESS

The Hard Stuff Albums



Sparks

MAD! *TRANSGRESSIVE*

Ageless glam-rock surrealists keep their autumnal comeback rolling.



Still surfing a gloriously extended late-career comeback wave, Ron and Russell Mael deliver their twenty-sixth studio album, bolstered by a decade-long run of Top 10 albums, laudatory documentaries and acclaimed left-field collaborations. Although both are now closer to 80 than to 70, the strangely ageless LA duo's high-gloss fusion of art-rock, chamber-pop and avant-cabaret elements remains reliably pin-sharp and lyrically droll. Meanwhile, the brothers are playing some of their biggest live shows ever.

Ron Mael's songwriting has always had a romantic undertow, but typically veiled beneath multiple layers of tongue-twisting wordplay and deadpan mirth. Unusually, much of *MAD!* ruminates on love and heartache in a more-or-less straightforward fashion. The sparkling, softly throbbing ballad *Everybody Looks Great At Night* belies its sardonic title with achingly emotional yearning, while *A Little Bit Of Light Banter*, for all its jokey tone, celebrates the shared humour that keeps couples together. *Lord Have Mercy* is a tender domestic vignette that builds into an anthemic soft-rocker. The lushly orchestrated heart-tugger *Drowned In A Sea Of Tears* is the bittersweet confession of a cheerfully clueless optimist who fails to spot his partner's growing depression.

But fans of Sparks as quirk-pop pranksters can rest easy, because *MAD!* also contains plenty of the duo's signature comic flourishes. Paying semi-ironic tribute to the mighty motorway that cuts through LA, *I-405 Rules* is a thunderous mini-opera, stern and discordant and loaded with drama. The gloriously titled *Running Up A Tab At The Hotel For The Fab* dissects the fake celebrity lifestyle over twangy Duane Eddy-ish guitar rumbles and cinematic strings. *Don't Dog It* is a doomed quest for philosophical truth that reduces the meaning of life to robo-voiced slogans and nagging mechanical piano riffs, sounding like a great lost Devo track.

As ever with the Maels, the relentless high-camp levity and heavily mannered, shrill, staccato delivery can sometimes jar on *MAD!* But after more than half a century of honing their own instantly recognisable art-rock style, through feast and famine years alike, the odd couple are hardly likely to compromise now. One of the most strident tracks here is titled *Do Things My Own Way*, an ear-pummelling belter as obstinate as its title suggests. This is the Sparks manifesto in miniature: even when their music grates occasionally, their impeccably polished fuck-you attitude remains immensely compelling.

Stephen Dalton

Volbeat

God Of Angels Trust *UNIVERSAL*

Danish rock'n'rollers revel in the heavy.



If you were looking for a visual metaphor for Volbeat's music, it'd be a bloke in a rhinestone jumpsuit turning around to reveal a bullet belt and a gnarly death metal tee. Twenty years and nine albums in, their rockabilly-meets-Metallica-via-Entombed approach remains a unique fixture on the heavy metal landscape, *God Of Angels Trust* offering no major reinvention. That said, it kicks harder than a mule in lead boots.

After 2021's *Servant Of The Mind*, frontman Michael Poulsen took time out to reconnect with his death-metal roots with side-project Asinhell, and judging from the riffs of *Angels Trust* he clearly hasn't scratched the itch for the hard stuff. Married to his typically bombastic vocals – part Steve Perry, part Elvis – it sounds massive, the band hitting their stride on shit kickers *Devils Are Awake*, *Acid Rain* and the toe-tapping Americana of *In The Barn Of The Goat Giving Birth To Satan's Spawn In A Dying World Of Doom*.

Rich Hobson

Candlemass

Black Star *NAPALM*

Doomsters' anniversary EP delivers four strong shots.



OG Candlemass fans might remember how gloriously out of step the Swedish doom crew's tenebrous tempos and melancholic melodies sounded when *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus* hit in 1986. Vocalist Johan Längqvist departed after appearing on the album (subsequently revered as a cult classic), but his reinstatement in 2018 ushered in a renaissance, giving the band plenty to celebrate with this year's 40th anniversary.

While only a four-tracker, *Black Star* delivers plenty of doom to the dollar. Its title track flips seamlessly between mournful acoustic atmospherics and an array of crushing riffs. The instrumental *Corridors Of Chaos*, lit up by Lars Johansson's mellifluous lead guitar hook lines, hits a sweet spot between Metallica's *Orion* and Black Sabbath, the latter's influence given a neck-snapping nod with a crushing *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*, along with a similar salute to Pentagram via a lusty reading of *Forever My Queen*.

Rich Davenport

The Minus 5

Oar On, Penelope! *YEP ROC*

Latest and sunniest from R.E.M. collaborator Scott McCaughey.



A resting place for some of Peter Buck's work outside R.E.M. for the past 30 years, Scott McCaughey's Minus 5 have inevitably carried the air of a side-project. With R.E.M. no more and Buck playing on every track here, there's a sense that The Minus 5 are edging towards centre stage.

The Bangles' Debbi Peterson adds soaring, summery backing vocals to every track, Drive-By Trucker Patterson Hood brings vocal grit to *Blow In My Bag* and *Let The Rope Hold Cassie Lee*, and veteran producer Ed Stasium adds rock sheen.

This most motley of crews manage to bring out the best in McCaughey's songs and he's on peak form here. Aside from the brooding *Bison Queen*, these are upbeat, chiming anthems where the divine *We Shall Not Be Released* begins like a Motown track before power-pop takes hold, *Sharktooth* has a raw guitar coda, and *I Don't Want To Hate Anyone* invites us to '*bake a cake*'. Fine work indeed.

John Aizlewood

Saxon

Eagles Over Hellfest

SILVER LINING MUSIC

Metal warhorses deliver predictable live album.

"We're gonna put you on our Facebook site," Grandpa Biff Byford announces towards the end of *Eagles Over Hellfest*, like a man who still calls the radio 'the wireless'. Not for Saxon passing musical and technological fads – almost 50 years after they formed, the Barnsley Barnstormers remain as stubborn and familiar as ever.

Perhaps too familiar. This is Saxon's eleventh live album since 1982's mighty *The Eagle Has Landed*, and diminishing returns set in a while ago. Biff's angry-bison roar is largely undiminished, and *Denim And*

MUNA CHOSSEGBU/PRESS

Leather, Princess Of The Night and the rest are etched into the Great Heavy Metal Songbook. But just two of the 14 tracks recorded at France's Hellfest in 2024 – *Hell, Fire And Damnation* and *Madame Guillotine* – have never appeared on a Saxon live album before, and several have cropped up on all of them.

Fine for what it is, but ultimately pointless.

Dave Everley

Willie Nile

The Great Yellow Light

RIVER HOUSE

Album number 21 is as full of verve and ambition as ever.



Everything changes, but it's hard to imagine the shift Willie Nile has seen in New York from when he first electrified the city and the world with albums like 1980's *Willie Nile* and 2006's jaw-dropping *Streets of New York*. Here he gives a nod to modifying the everyday dreams of a working musician in the folksy swing of *Tryin' To Make A Livin' In The U.S.A*, but for the most part it's prime Nile, inhabiting a hinterland somewhere between latter-day Paul Westerberg and the raucous grind of Social Distortion, taking snapshots of the city and its people as he goes.

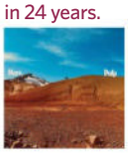
The roughly hewn heartbreak of *Fall On Me*, and the rattling *Wake Up America* featuring Steve Earle, tread familiarly welcome territory, although he saves the best for last with the rousing yet down-at-heel *Washington's Day*, passionate and bloody, but still staring at the stars.

Philip Wilding

Pulp

More *ROUGH TRADE*

Indie/post-punk stalwarts return with their first album in 24 years.



'I was born to perform, it's a calling/I exist to do this – shouting and pointing,' a rejuvenated Jarvis Cocker proclaims on Pulp's comeback single *Spike Island*. It's a long way from the world-weary LPs that bookended the band's first act. With *More* they've returned with a re-energised record that sits comfortably next to *His 'N' Hers* and *Different Class*. Songs like the synth-strutting *Spike Island* and disco-stomping *Got To Have Love* are doused in the same glitterball magic that made us fall in love with them in the first place.

Of course, Cocker is knocking on a bit now, and though much of the record is preoccupied with taking hold of life, the other half focuses on love in later years. The string-calming *Farmers Market* is perhaps the finest example of this as Cocker asks: *'Ain't it time we started living?'* to his other half. It's a sure sign that Pulp are here to make the most of their final years and ensure they really do exist to do this.

Damian Jones

Hed PE

New & Improved *CLEOPATRA*

Woeful covers album from late-90s rap-metal D-listers.



Say what you will about Hed PE, but they have a sense of irony. *New & Improved* takes a bunch of old 80s rock and pop classics and makes them way, way worse than they were first time around.

The Police, Depeche Mode, Cyndi Lauper and AD/DC (twice) are just some of the undeserving acts who here receive a mauling at the hands of the LA band. Their approach to reinventing other people's material is pretty much 'Should we do it as a ska song, or as a punk song?', with singer Jahred Gomes's can-I-be-arsed? vocals summing up the level of effort involved.

Charitably, they're aiming for the kind of backyard party piss-up vibes that's hard-wired into the DNA of the Californian music scene. Realistically, if Hed PE did turn up in your backyard peddling this shit, you'd barricade yourself in the kitchen and not come out until they'd been dragged away by the law.

Dave Everley

King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard

Phantom Island *P(DOOM)*

Orchestral delights from hard rock's restless evolutionaries.



It says everything about King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard's range that the idea for this, one of the Aussie shape-shifters' jolliest albums to date, came just days after the release of one of their heaviest.

Promoting their thrash metal onslaught *PetroDragonic Apocalypse*, the band played the famed Hollywood Bowl, where a chance encounter with LA's Philharmonic Orchestra laid the groundwork for *Phantom Island*. Its 10 songs are bombastic, unabashed boogies, each one stacked with layer upon layer of symphonic volume. The single *Deadstick* opens in a swirl of high-energy drums, with bold trumpets and rock guitar, *Lonely Cosmos* builds up to the good times, a tragic string melody getting lifted up by some bopping bass.

King Gizzard have big plans for this album, playing it in full with a different orchestra at each show, and the quality of this happy-go-lucky collection is worthy of those lofty ambitions.

Matt Mills

Kicked In The Teeth

Watling Street Chambers

RARE VITAMIN

Cheshire hardcore unit keep it cranked on album three.



Since emerging in the late 2010s, this four-piece from Northwich have often made self-deprecating light of the fact they're hardly in the first flush of youth, characterising themselves as old lags reuniting for one last job. But here, on high-octane numbers such as *Death Of Me*, KITT (as their friends are calling them) are as full of vitality as any teenage wrecking crew. However, they only really turn heads when they vary the four-square punk approach to song structure, as when *Lightning Tree*'s chorus backing drops out to leave just a vocal chant, and *There Will Be Nothing* takes a left turn into more metallic waters. Elsewhere, punchy enough hardcore abounds, but there's little to set KITT apart from the generic punk caboodle.

Johnny Sharp

ROUND-UP: SLEAZE

By Sleazegrinder



Zig Zags: cranium-cracking skate punk.

Zig Zags

Deadbeat At Dawn

RIDING EASY



Zig Zags are LA street-jammers who mix wizard-sleeve metal with cranium-cracking skate punk. They're dark and mysterious, and I often wonder whether I've hallucinated their entire decade-long career.

Titled after Jim Van Bebber's one-man wrecking ball of a movie, *Deadbeat At Dawn* shares a similar scrappy low-brow/budget DIY vibe. Many of us felt like we reached maximum Zig Zaggery with 2019's die-hard anthem *Punk Fucking Metal*, but these boys clearly have some more outlandish rock'n'roll in the tank. From the snotty, metallised punk strut of *Say It To My Face* to the chest-thumping headbanger *At War With Hell*, this album will fuck you up plenty.

There is a tangible vroooom to the Zig Zags. They're action-rock in the clinical sense. Lying on your sofa listening to this record is a laughable idea. You gotta be riding mopeds off cliffs or swimming with sharks or smashing bottles over people's heads. You know what I'm saying? They kick out the fuckin' jams, motherfuckers.

Puppy And The Handjobs

I Don't Care About Anything *SLOVENLY*



One time, Puppy came to town and broke every car window in the club's parking lot. Puppy is a fucking menace. That being said, his band rules. Imagine The Mummies with GG Allin stumbling around. Also, the audacity to call seven minutes of music an album. If they let me give out 10s, this would get 11.

The Vicious Cycles

Get Wrecked *PIRATE'S PRESS*



The Vicious Cycles are from Vancouver, and their singer sounds more like a guy on the street corner yelling about chemtrails than any other punk band I can think of. He's great. They have a song on here called *On Fire In The Hot Tub* and another one called *Naked On The Beach*, which shows you where they're coming from. They like denim and leather and parties. Me too. Total jammer.

The Cheats

Old Rats On A New Ship

HEAVY MEDICATION



Pittsburgh's The Cheats return with their sixth long player, a riff-rolling ode to lost weekends and future evictions. Songs like *The Only Thing I'm Fucking Is Up* and *Everything You Love Will Die* tells the whole sordid story, really. Hard-charging scuzz. If we tell the Gen Z this is a Mötley Crüe record, we might solve the rock'n'roll crisis.

Gino And The Goons

Gino And The Goons *SLOVENLY*



Gino's the main guy. Goons come and go, as goons do. If you're wondering what a band named Gino And The Goons sound like, you're probably a fucking goon yourself. Basically they sound like Gino cracked somebody in the head with a pool cue and jumped on stage in front of a bewildered garage-punk band to get away.

PRESS

The Hard Stuff Albums



Buckcherry

Roar Like Thunder *EARACHE*

Nothing broken, nothing fixed. The California veterans are still good for a hard-rock earworm.



Considering that Buckcherry frontman Josh Todd once told *Classic Rock* that *Crazy Bitch* is destined to be their epitaph, that song might be the reason the band are doing the business of rocking in 2025. In a way, with added furore around alleged misogyny and liberal use of the 'F' word, it's their *Sweet Child O' Mine* – a song crafted quickly, demoed and not particularly well thought of that somehow surpassed everything else they did. Funny how things work out.

But now, having recently celebrated the 20th anniversary of their platinum-selling album *15* – the one with said Grammy-nominated track on – it's credit to the band that they're still pumping out bottle-rocket earworms. And new album *Roar Like Thunder* has plenty of them.

The title track opens with purpose: punchy drums, lean guitar riffs and Todd's distinctive vocals – gravelly and sonorous but with crystalline clarity. *Come On* swaggers with the kind of irresistible Malcolm Young-esque riffs that you're compelled to nod along to. The guitar break is tasty as well. Of course, AC/DC also love a double entendre, but Planet Buckcherry is a nuance-free zone. Enter *Talkin' Bout Sex*: '*Talkin'bout sex, in the morning, in the evening, cos you're ready for love*', Todd declares. It's daft, it sounds like a horny Black Stone Cherry, but damn it's catchy. Deed done, next up is a song about getting pissed (*Blackout*), before *I Go Boom* tips its hat to latter-day Aerosmith with high-octane horn sections. As for *Hello Goodbye*'s jangly guitars and Todd's suspiciously Gallagher-like phrasing, they've surely succumbed to the present Oasis fever. Not to say it isn't decent.

At the production desk once again is Marti Frederiksen, the band's long-time collaborator whose resume is virtually a *Who's Who* of rock royalty. Clearly they've developed a fruitful dynamic with their fellow Californian.

Buckcherry's style of sleazy, sun-soaked hard rock takes ample cues from the greats, but it's delivered with a perfect blend of exuberance and temerity that's inherently them. Not too long ago, Def Leppard's Joe Elliott opined to this writer that songwriters should generally get better the more they do it. It's food for thought. Whether it's carpentry, photography or even writing songs about post-booze guilt, doesn't the 10,000-hour rule apply? Buckcherry are certainly showing no signs of decline, and *Roar Like Thunder* is as rollickingly focused as they've ever sounded. Horny or not.

Chris Lord

Young Gun Silver Fox

Pleasure *MONTY MUSIC*

West Coast AOR fans, meet your new favourite band.



A duo of Brit Andy Platts and US-born, UK-based Shawn Lee, Young Gun Silver Fox have existed for more than a decade. Named after Platts being the younger partner and the resplendent silver locks of Lee, the pair, whose many credits include the title track of a No.1 album for Take That, bonded over a love of songwriting and a shared admiration for the music of Steely Dan, Hall & Oates and the super-smooth West Coast AOR of the 70s.

Their fifth album together, *Pleasure* is an exquisite piece of work. Kicked into gear by the effortless groove of opener *Stevie & Sly* (that's Messrs Wonder and Stone), all 10 tracks are on the money, and *Put Up Your Dukes* and *The Greatest Loser*, both prime slices of slinky, Steely-esque seductiveness, are truly exceptional.

Dave Ling

The Pale White

The Big Sad *END OF THE WALL*

Hard rock embraces the heady and cosmic on Newcastle trio's sound-expanding second.



Tyneside skies have got mighty big. With Sam Fender already making North Shields sound like glory rock prairie lands, now Newcastle three-piece The Pale White gaze beyond the arena ceiling on a second album that laces their hard rock with much cosmic weightlessness and celestial psychedelia.

Opener *Lost In The Moment* could soundtrack the first scenes of Sandra Bullock's *Gravity*; a serene solitary spacewalk of tumbling chords is interrupted by a debris field of crushing riffs. *Final Exit*, classic strident jangle-rock, is likewise strafed by space echo and celestial orchestration, and *Trapped In The Vacuum* resembles Hendrix and Lennon jamming away in a corner of the afterlife that's forever 1968. A retro rock knowingness abounds, too, in *Woolly Thunder*'s cowbell rock, *I'm Sorry*'s honeyed grunge and the hard rock Yes of *Real Again*. And a warm Geordie wit - '*You had me at "fuck off"*,' Adam Hope sings on *Preparing For The Big Sad*, over close, enveloping guitars recalling The Beatles' *I Will*. The north is rising.

Mark Beaumont

Earl Of Hell

Copper Feast *COPPER FEAST*

Apparently Scotland is the new Seattle.



It opens with a clip of the Louvin Brothers' immortal Christian honky tonker *Satan Is Real*, which suggests we're about to enter some dark, sticky web of occultism; grunge I did not see coming.

Earl Of Hell is soaked in the cold rains of Seattle, but this Scottish quintet imbue the sheets of grey fuzz with a haunted, post-punky aftertaste all their own. Vocalist Eric Brock switches up from a bleak, wounded howl to an even bleaker doom-punk roar, perfectly complementing the twin-guitar churn and punk-thunder drums. They don't really sound like anybody, except maybe Blood Circus. It really just sounds like new territory. *Calling Is The Crow* is a prime example, a sonic stew of sludgy riffs, psyched-out vocals and rock-star excess.

I get the feeling that a few of you might go: "It's stoner rock, you fucking idiot." And maybe it is. But the weed is laced with heroin and cemetery dust.

Sleazegrinder

The Velvet

Electric Wizard *SELF-RELEASED*

They'll cast a spell on you.



There's nothing quite like wearing your influences as a badge of honour. And so it is for Luxembourg's The Velvet, for whom heavy rock was apparently perfected around the time of Deep Purple's *Machine Head*.

With Mario Percinic's fiery keyboard skills and strident hard-rock vocals very much to the fore, this EP instantly sounds classic, yet distinctively modern. Keeping things simple almost to the point of parody with single-word song titles – only the opening title track goes for two – *Smoke, Rock, Endless* and *Ghost* are powerful, hook-laden and

PRESS

melodically satisfying, Percinic's Hammond duelling relentlessly with guitarist Yannick Stein's deft and groovy riffing. While the band don't really do short songs, the eight minutes-plus *Endless* is the exceptional high point with its smooth Doorsy feel to the mellow keyboards.

Wizards, sorcery and unashamedly epic songcraft – you can't go wrong, really.

Essi Berelian

Hats Off Gentlemen It's Adequate

The Uncertainty Principle

GLASS CASTLE

Playing with atoms.



The uncertainty principle, as recounted by this pair of British prog rockers, was developed by German scientist Werner Heisenberg in 1927, effectively debunking conventional maths and science as a flawed attempt to create certainty where there was none. As an alternative, he came up with quantum physics.

So far so dry. But add the fact that Heisenberg went on to lead the Nazi project to develop the atomic bomb during World War II, and raise the unanswered question of whether he deliberately delayed that project or not, and you have a potent concept album.

The music is somewhere between King Crimson and Peter Gabriel, with shades of Philip Glass and Kraftwerk. Malcolm Galloway's inquisitive guitar and Mark Gatland's dynamic bass, plus the occasional flute, are augmented by plenty of synthesisers which give their traditional prog instincts a modernist kick up the backside. But they really should have used a human drummer (or two).

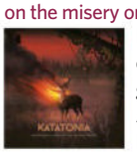
Hugh Fielder

Katatonia

Nightmares As Extensions Of The Waking State

NAPALM

Swedish dukes of gloom lay on the misery on album 13.



Katatonia's co-founding guitarist Anders Nyström quit recently after 34 years, unhappy with the band's glacial drift away from their gnarly doom-metal beginnings. He had a point – the Swedes are unrecognisable as the surly malcontents they once were, having mutated into purveyors of gloomy, prog-tinged grandeur.

Their thirteenth album lays on both the gloom and the grandeur thick. It's singer and sole remaining original member Jonas Renske's show now, and he once again drills deep into mid-paced, mid-life existential bleakness on *Thrice* and *The Light With Which I Bleed*. It's undeniably graceful, but over the course of 45 minutes it blurs into a kind of grey fog, individual songs becoming indistinguishable with no blockbusting chorus or killer hook to illuminate the murk – a problem it shares with many of the band's latter-day albums.

Evolution is great, but some truly memorable songs to go with it would have been nice too.

Dave Everley

Colosseum

XI *REPERTOIRE*

Jazz-rock pioneers can still turn it on.



Following their return to action in 2019 after a shortish layoff, crucially with guitarist Dave Clemson, bassist Mark Clarke and singer Chris Farlowe picking up where they left off, the one-time pioneers of bluesy jazz rock in the 60s/70s have continued to make engaging music that skilfully mixes musical styles without it sounding at all forced or hackneyed.

There's a lightness of touch to new album *XI* right from the off with the proggy *English Garden Suite*, the bluesy jazz swing of *Gypsy* and the sky-skimming melody of *Hunters*, the latter featuring another 'got to listen to that again' solo from Clemson. The piano-tinkling 12-bar *Not Getting Through* does what the title says, but the class returns with *Nowhere To Be Found*, for which Colosseum descend the rope ladder to pluck one from the Jack Bruce songbook.

Stylish stuff.

Paul Henderson

Sting

3.0 Live *POLYDOR*

The power of three.



Over the years, the world's most Marmite Geordie has been reducing the size of his on-stage backing band to the point where, for his ongoing Sting 3.0 dates he has scaled back to a trio – which worked pretty well for an earlier band called The Police. On this live album (originally the first two sides of the Record Store Day double released in April) he retains only his longtime guitarist Dominic Miller, and adds session drummer Chris Maas (who toured with Mumford & Sons). It's simple and effective, but never sparse.

The nine strong tracklist (with an extra one on digital platforms) is split 50/50 between Police and solo singles (with closer *Roxanne* interpolating *Be Still My Beating Heart* from his crowd-pleasing 1987 second album *Nothing Like The Sun*). From start to finish the energy levels are second only to the familiarity of the songs.

Hits on toast – tasty!

Neil Jeffries

Jakko M Jakszyk

Son Of Glen *INSIDE OUT*

Musical companion piece to guitarist's moving memoir.



For those who might have missed it, King Crimson guitarist/vocalist Jakko Jakszyk's 2024 memoir *Who's The Boy With The Lovely Hair*? was a far cry from the usual hack-and-slash rock'n'roll affair that used to litter every bookshop's second-hand bin. His was a more poetic treatise on fractured family and a young boy alone in the world. If you did overlook it, then this elegiac album makes for a welcoming way into a life less ordinary, but perhaps for all the wrong reasons.

It can sometimes feel like a shove in the back, the gentle swing of *I Told You So* hiding the blade-like lyrics of childhood trauma, and *Somewhere Between Then And Now* a lilting paean to a friend taken too soon, but it's filled with heart and the hope that love, no matter how fractured, can find a way.

Philip Wilding

ROUND-UP: **BLUES**

By Henry Yates



Larry McCray: another album of bullish and boisterous performances.

CURTIS KNAPP/PRESS

Larry McCray

Heartbreak City *KTBA*



Life can be cruel to an old-school blues shouter in his autumn years. But while 65-year-old Larry McCray has suffered enough low times – cancer, divorce, raising a teenager alone – to justify that hard-luck album title, there's been a heartening uptick of late for the Rust Belt survivor, reflected in the new music.

With a certain inevitability, all roads lead back to Joe Bonamassa, the younger guitarist having co-produced McCray's restorative *Blues Without You* (2022), and he returns to urge to another set of bullish and boisterous performances.

There's the voice, of course: a velveteen bark that deserves to be cited in the same pub argument as BB King or Little Milton, and elevates upbeat tracks like *Crazy World* and *Everything Falls On Me* to blow-outs that lift you out of your shoes. But the deal is sealed by the hard-won wisdom behind his candid lyrics, not to mention the wit, with *Try To Be A Good Man* reminding male listeners that they needn't bow down to their lady (*'You don't have to wear a ring in your nose'*).

Eric Bell

Authenticity

OF THE EDGE PRODUCTIONS



Irishman Bell's name has bubbled up lately thanks to his guitar fairy dust on Thin Lizzy's *Acoustic Sessions*, and *Authenticity* reminds us that his contribution didn't end with those long-distant songs. Relaxed rockabilly segues into wry 12-bars and reverb-soaked, Shadows-esque instrumentals, a master's touch evident throughout.

Carolyn Wonderland

Truth Is *ALLIGATOR*



Carolyn Wonderland sure can play (she held the lead guitar spot in the Bluesbreakers until John Mayall's death, and decorates this solo album with stinging lap steel). Crucially, she can write, too, with *Sooner Or Later*'s groove evoking roof-down road trips,and the furious *I Ain't Going Back* roaring at US politicos to keep their paws off women's rights.

DK Harrell

Talkin' Heavy *ALLIGATOR*



Bruce Iglauer's label has brought through enough young bluesmen to know the real deal when they see it, and don't bet against DK Harrell fronting a 'best of' Alligator Records compilation in decades to come. Try joyous lead single *Grown Now*, or the party-starting *A Little Taste*, on which Harrell hollers a storm and plays a thrilling Morse code guitar solo.

Ledfoot

Plain Simple Honesty *TBC*



Everything goth-blues veteran Tim Scott McConnell touches sounds like it could soundtrack a Coen Brothers film, and there are some delicious shards of darkness here (not least *Hard Times*, a jet-black companion piece to his 1987 Springsteen-covered breakthrough song *High Hopes*). But that just makes the flashes of redemption taste sweeter, with *Crystal River* letting in the light beautifully.



His Lordship

Bored Animal *PSYCHONAUT*



Oh-oh, yes, he's the great Pretender...

Traditionally, sleaze-infused garage rock is the preserve of the terminally deranged. It's a peculiarly vital sub-genre largely populated by a constituency of musicians best described as primitive; compelled to flaunt their passionately near-adequate command of their instrument because rock'n'roll's infected their souls like a virus. They're known to have unruly quiffs that flop from one side of their sweat-beaded forehead to the other, they hiccup, twang 'n' twitch their Elvine St. Vitus dance like so many possessed Jerry Lees in cheap suits, and they're resolutely, unapologetically, wilfully not very good. But when one of these rock-soused equivalents to Appalachian snake handlers boasts something of a prodigious talent for his instrument, the sort of reliable chops that, say, might secure a position as The Pretenders' guitarist for the past 18 years, well, magic happens.

His Lordship's guitarist/vocalist/frontman(iac) James Walbourne's good. Insanely good. Brian Setzer-on-a-hotplate good. So when he applies his talents to banging out the kind of unhinged, short, sharp, shockabilly blurts, His Lordship (completed by drummer Kris Sonne, also no slouch, and another Hynde alumnus) are evidently devoted to, he presents quite the spectacle.

Bored Animal continues in a similar frantic vein to the duo's self-titled debut. It's fired up and furiously fashioned. Its trademark Sun-Studios-through-a-Superfuzz fidelity sounds as if it were captured on a microphone fashioned from a steel comb, a torn-up betting slip and a peanut can. Steven Wilson isn't about to lose sleep, but this is exactly how His Lordship should sound. Like The Jim Jones Revue in a bucket. And a not particularly clean bucket at that. Musically? Try a feverishly hellbound Billy Lee Riley attempting to shout the ghost of Johnny Thunders straight. It's that good.

Witness the dark subterranean glamour of *Old Romantic*, where an unhinged nocturnal protagonist can be found '*Running from a policeman, pissing in a phone box, stealing from the milkman*'. (And who, dear reader, hasn't been there?) Characteristically bug-shit crazy lead single *I Fly Planes Into Hurricanes* sounds exactly as you'd expect, *12-12-21* reins things in a jot while delivering a fine line in singalong 'woah-woah's, before contemplative-paced closer *Gin And Fog* allows Walbourne to demonstrate virtuosity and restraint worthy of a Tarantino spaghetti western score.

Rock'n'roll, defined.

Ian Fortnam

Cwfen

Sorrows *NEW HEAVY SOUNDS*

Glaswegian goth-doomgaze crew emerge from the darkness on debut album.



We might be heading into the summer, but Glasgow's Cwfen (pronounced 'coven') are steadfastly creatures of the shadows. As their name suggests, the band's hypnotic combination of doom-metal and gothic new wave is steeped in the Scottish witch trials, mysticism and the dark, dangerous corners of history.

It all centres on frontwoman Agnes Alder, a natural descendent of Siouxsie Sioux, whose black-veiled croon often gives way to bloodcurdling howls and screams. On the album's centrepiece and lead single *Wolfsbane* she is literally spellbinding, conjuring a dark cry to the sisterhood, her tribute to the witches who sacrificed everything echoing down the ages, while woozy riffs rage in a maelstrom around her. *Whispers*, meanwhile, makes an offering of chiming guitars and bass that's pure Cure, reinvented for the Chelsea Wolfe generation.

Cwfen are proof that classic black will never go out of style.

Emma Johnston

Brian Eno & Beatie Wolfe

Luminal & Lateral *VERVE*

Dual release comprising "dream music" and "space music".



Recorded on and off throughout 2024, this collaboration between Brian Eno and environmentalist/musician Beatie Wolfe arose from their meeting to give a talk on Art And Climate at the SXSW festival. They use as prompts words from other languages that have no equivalent in English, such as Ailyak (Bulgarian) - going slow, enjoying the process - and Commuovere (Italian) - the experience of being moved.

This has resulted in an album of textural uniqueness, a sonic fabric hitherto unknown. Tracks on *Luminal* such as *Hopelessly At Ease* are almost unsettling seductive, while Wolfe's every sung syllable on *Shhh* looms large and expansive.

The second disc, *Lateral*, consists of *Big Empty Country*, an eight-part piece, an ambient suite based on a two-note motif, as if homing in on a detail from *Luminal*, dwelling on it, tenderly bleeding it dry.

A wholly pleasurable, wholly original album.

David Stubbs

The Cure

Mixes Of A Lost World *POLYDOR/FICTION*

This is some artefact.



A sumptuous, fully realised remix of The Cure's first new album in 16 years, with artists including Four Tet, Paul Oakenfold, Orbital and Shanti Celeste behind the controls, fleshing out and manipulating Robert Smith and co's originals in a way that makes them feel even more cinematic, steeped in fresh layers of melancholy and reflection. Eight songs remixed by 24 artists, often feeling like the comedown tent at an EDM festival, blissed out and nearly always chilled, whether it's Mogwai's transcendental imagining of *Endsong*, Mental Overdrive's temperate, floor-filling take on *I Never Can Say Goodbye*, or Chino Moreno's haunted revisualisation of *Warsong*. Nothing is rushed, nothing hasty, very little is upbeat - as befits a band with such a rep for beautiful misery.

Mixes Of A Lost World comes as a three-LP/three-CD set with all mixes plus originals, or a two-LP/two-CD set with just the mixes. All The Cure's recording royalties go to War Child.

Everett True

The Crystal Teardrop

...Is Forming *POPCLAW*

The latest hippie revival starts here with Stoke crew's debut.



With absolutely zero disrespect to either place or time, it's tricky, at first glance, to see the similarities between Stoke-on-Trent in 2025 and California in 1966. And yet the Crystal Teardrop, formed in The Potteries, are reinventing the sound of the late 60s for a new generation.

There's always a risk of slipping into Austin Powers parody with this stuff, but they've played it perfectly,

KI PRICE/PRESS

their sunny combination of minidress-clad power-pop, hazy psychedelia and stoned garage rock transporting us straight into the Jefferson Airplane universe, a perfect blend of Byrdsy guitar, sitar and Mellotron headily evocative against Alexandra Rose's sunbaked vocals. It doesn't hurt that they've got Liam Watson – a man who knows a thing or two about worshipping and reviving the analogue and old school – on board as producer.

We're certainly not heading into a Summer Of Love any time soon, but the Crystal Teardrop at least offer the option to pretend and escape into the past.

Emma Johnston

Fishbone

Stockholm Syndrome

SELF-RELEASED

Blistering return of LA's funk-punk-ska-metal masters.



It remains to be seen if frontman Angelo Moore can still do a back-flip while playing the sax, but Fishbone's first album in nearly 20 years suggests that he probably can.

Stockholm Syndrome uses the same all-encompassing, high-energy approach that made albums like *Truth And Soul* such essential listening in the 90s. Everything fizzes with vitality, from the George Clinton-augmented *Last Call In America* to the blissful psych-soul plea for sanity of *Love Is Love*, and the band's restless, genre-hopping glee is as infectious as ever.

They are also still avowedly unpredictable: *Gelato The Clown* is pure vaudevillian mischief with an evil twinkle in its eye, the punky *Adolescent Regressive Behaviour* is absolutely itching for a scrap, and *Hellhound On My Trail* is a big-band, ska-punk riot.

Fishbone have always been a force for good, too. Righteous indignation at the state of the world shines through on the Trump-assailing *Racist Piece Of Shit*, and the shimmering dub of *Why Do We Keep On Dying*.

Still insanely entertaining and still kicking against the pricks, Fishbone have never been more needed.

Dom Lawson

Tropical Fuckstorm

Fairytale Codex *FIRE*

Pigeonhole-dodging Aussie rockers keep it weird on album four.



It's might be the heat going to their heads, but from the Birthday Party to King Gizzard And The Lizard Wizard, Australians seem to do odd and unique on a more reliable basis than most. Tropical Fuckstorm certainly land in that uncategorisable category, and their fourth album finds them ploughing their own gonzo furrow once more.

Misfits, weirdos and a view of a society set to implode litter *Fairytale Codex*, as they paint a gloriously blunt picture of it all on a canvas of a wonky, squelching, squonking, serrated, meandering but surprisingly funky take on indie rock. '*It's a golden age of arseholes and a triumph of disgrace*,' guitarist/vocalist Gareth Liddiard grumps on *Goon Show*, and it's difficult to argue against his point. His foil is bassist/vocalist Fiona Kitschin, whose sweeter tones are deceptive – there's plenty of bite to her input, not least on the unsettling *Teeth Marché*, leading us, terrifyingly, into the nightmarescape of the creepshow of a title track.

God knows what genre it is, but *Fairytale Codex* is an arty trip into the unknown well worth making.

Emma Johnston

The Young Gods

Appear Disappear

TWO GENTLEMEN

Celebrated art-rock power trio capture the mid 2020s awfulness zeitgeist.

Classifying the Young Gods as 'industrial' and thereby aligning them with tiresomely transgressive panto dames like Manson and Lindemann would be doing the pioneering Swiss experimentalists a major disservice. In comparison to the band's more recent avant forays into atmospheric soundscape instrumentation, *Appear Disappear* is the Young Gods back at the top of their game. It's possibly one of their most accessible albums since their classic 1987 self-titled debut yet retains their idiosyncratic unnerving sonic malevolence.

Released to coincide with their 40th anniversary, it's informed by the loss of band founder Fran Treichler's wife, who passed in 2023, and their long-term producer and early-career producer/Swans drummer Roli Mosimann who passed away in 2024. Both deaths inform the disquieting timbre of this, their thirteenth studio album, but *Appear Disappear* is primarily a studied discourse in 2025 geopolitics. *Hey Amour*'s inexorable sonic malignancy, *Blackwater*'s pulsing menace and the tribal pounding of *Mes Yeux Des Tous* all contain more rhythmic off-kilter funk than Young Gods disciple Trent Reznor could pack into his executive briefcase.

A profoundly resolute and caustic work of art.

Alex Burrows

Tangerine Dream

From Virgin To Quantum Years: Coventry Cathedral 22 *KSCOPE*

Electronic pioneers return to where they legendarily played in 1975.



Tangerine Dream represent a singular proposition – they continue to perform and record, but with none of their original members. The death of co-founder Edgar Froese did not mean the death of the group. Today they consist of Thorsten Quaeschning, Hoshiko Yamane and Paul Frick, and for this concert Marillion guitarist Steve Rothery guests.

This 2022 set at once revives memories of the group's 70s grandeur and offers a strong taste of their 21st-century iteration. *Stratosfear* and *Phaedra* are faithfully replicated in all of their analogue antiquity, and newer material, from albums such as *Quantum Gate* (2017), holds up well by comparison - *Continuum*, for example has a mellow, post-rave feel to it, with its bubbling electronic keyboards, and the quite lovely *It Is Time To Leave When Everyone Is Dancing* helicopters from the dance floor into inner head-space.

David Stubbs

ROUND-UP: MELODIC ROCK

By Dave Ling



Inglorious: more of their signature hard rock.

NATHERSSON/PRESS

Inglorious

V *FRONTIERS*



Lauded by Brian May and Kevin Shirley (the über-producer once called them "the best British band since Led Zeppelin"), Inglorious spent their first eight years validating such lofty claims, although the group themselves – well, their gob-on-a-stick frontman and leader Nathan James, at least – already seemed convinced of that pedigree.

Now they return with a fifth album, a reconstituted line-up that welcomes back original bassist Colin Parkinson, and, hopefully, an attitude more befitting the band's mid-table status.

James still roars like a new-millennial rock god on the rousing *Testify* and *Eat You Alive* and the lighter, uplifting *Silence*. Stylistically speaking, *V* largely eases straight back into Inglorious's signature hard rock sound, although things come badly unstuck via an alarming flirtation with rap on *Say What You Wanna Say* that addresses the singer's indifference to keyboard warriors. That minor blip aside, *V* is precisely what we want to hear from Inglorious at this moment in time.

Never, ever underestimate them.

Trillion

III: Ray Of Light *MELODIC ROCK CLASSICS*



No, *Ray Of Light* is not a long-lost third album from the pomp-rock heroes that introduced Toto's late frontman Dennis 'Fergie' Frederiksen to the world. It's actually a remastered four-track EP from 2011, bolstered by five previously available solo songs from Fergie's successor Thom Griffin, a wonderful singer. Well worth a listen.

Angeline

Rhythm Of One *BLOW YOUR FEZ OFF MUSIC*



A fifth volume of Def Leppard-meets-Harem Scarem vibes from these Swedes. There's a smattering of very strong material, with the attitude-charged *Hope, Love & Everything* and the insistent title track its standout moments among a plethora of tunes that are pleasantly familiar at best, an example being the vapidity of *Can't Get Enough*.

Prost

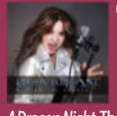
Believe Again *PRIDE & JOY MUSIC*



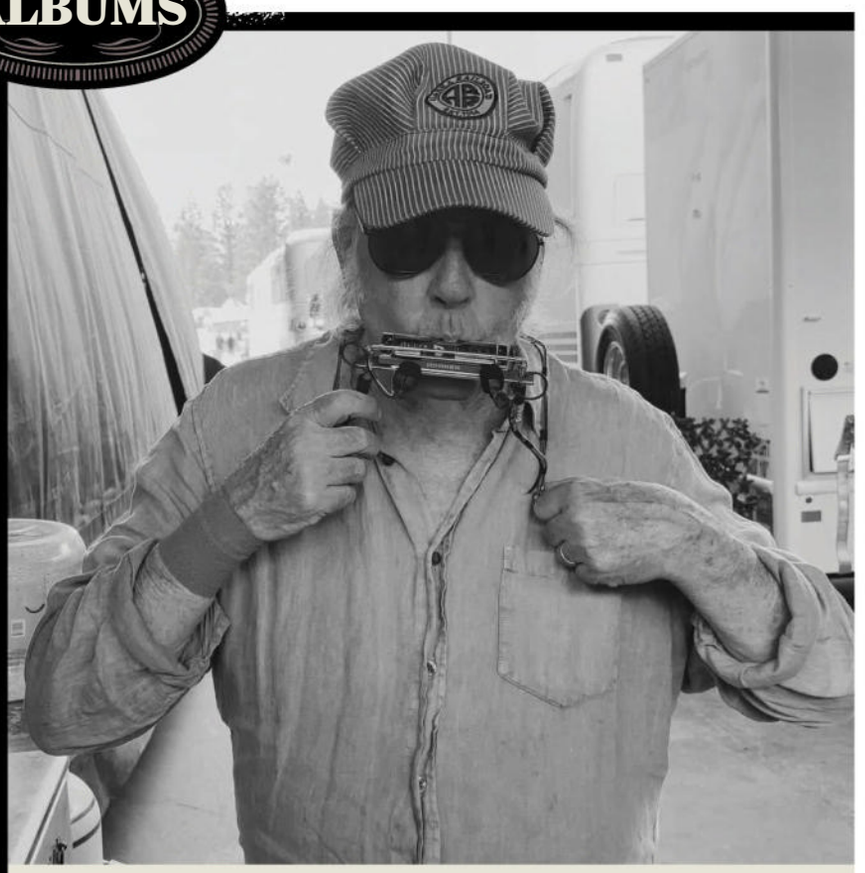
Based on the explosive guitar expertise of Antoine Prost and singer Manos Fatsis's powerful, deeply accessible voice, Prost introduce themselves with this pristine debut, full of stirring melodies to seduce fans of Journey, Foreigner and Whitesnake, while echoing the more contemporary likes of H.E.A.T. and Degreed (whose drummer Mats Eriksson provides the beat).

Gabrielle de Val

I Am The Hammer *PRIDE & JOY MUSIC*



Gabrielle de Val's second solo set is, she admits, a stopgap until her follow-up to 2023's all-star debut *Kiss In A Dragon Night*. The Spaniard's enthusiasm is ingrained in every pop-tinged note, but of these 14 songs – sorry, that's *way* too many – few would realistically have made KIADN. Nevertheless, *Cry Wolf* will hopefully be worth the wait.



Neil Young And The Chrome Hearts

Talkin To The Trees *REPRISE*

Young ricochets between political fury and bittersweet domesticity on his latest waxing.



As you might have noticed, the US is bitterly politically divided these days. So it's hardly surprising that *Talkin To The Trees*, Neil Young's forty-fourth studio album has a thing or two to say about that. While no one has ever looked to Young for cogent political analysis, there's no denying that he's capable of writing gloriously blunt and bracing protest songs when he's properly fired up.

Big Change and *Let's Roll Again* are the new record's snarling highlights, a one-two knockout punch of sarcasm-drenched yet entirely sincere bile in which Young cranks up his guitar and takes direct aim at Trump and his lackey Elon Musk. *Big Change* boils down to Young declaring: '*Big change is comin*'!' over three descending distorted chords, but that's all he needs to summon up the horror of the Trump Reich apocalypse. Rabble-rousing thrasher *Let's Roll Again* demands in no uncertain terms that Ford, Chrysler and General Motors should build more eco-friendly electric cars, while calling for a boycott of Musk's Tesla empire; key line: '*If you're a fascist, then get a Tesla*'.

In the midst of all that protest, *Talkin To The Trees* (the lack of apostrophe is Young's choice – the man is a grammar maverick) also finds Young taking solace in the people he loves. Warm-hearted folkie opener *Family Life* alludes to his wife Daryl Hannah and name-checks his three children, but it also states that he's estranged from his grandchildren. *Dark Mirage*, with its guttural, almost death-metal-ish backing vocals, makes the same despairing point. Life ain't perfect. However, the record concludes with the self-explanatory *Thankful*.

As for Young's new band the Chrome Hearts, featuring Muscle Shoals legend and long-time Young collaborator Spooner Oldham on keyboards, they follow their benign leader where e'er he goes. The 'rockers' rage, the gentle, *Harvest Moon*-esque ballads lilt.

This isn't an unexpected late-period Neil Young masterpiece, but that's okay. He's made his fair share of masterpieces, it's unrealistic to expect another. What it is, though, is the weirdly comforting sound of an oddball genius proffering words of hope as the world burns all around us.

Paul Whitelaw

Rokets

Bad Choices *SVART*

The rocking and rolling Finns return with an action-packed third album.



Rokets have never been coy about their influences, and just 25 seconds of *Bad Choices* will establish that. They were founded upon a love of Motörhead and Swedish garage rockers The Hellacopters, but the Finnish quintet capture that spirit with their own brand of no-nonsense, rip-roaring rock.

Frontman Sami Mustonen is the key ingredient. There's a cartoonish quality to his holler that might not be to everyone's taste, but it's an undeniably distinguishing delivery. You'll also notice that the guitars sound phenomenal throughout. *Louisa* is unabashed AC/DC worship done right – those layers of taut riffs chomping at the bit. *White Raven* displays the band's melodic chops with vibrant harmonies.

We can analyse it till the cows come home – and we shall – but rock'n'roll has always had a simple formula. When bands like Rokets refuse to phone it in, it's a brilliant thing.

Chris Lord

North Mississippi Allstars

Still Shakin' *NEW WEST*

Album number 14 from the Dickinson brothers.



It's been a slinky ride for Cody and Luther Dickinson as they've embraced and built on southern soul without sounding dated or like young dilettantes. Mainstream commercial success has been and will continue to be elusive, but nobody grooves quite as seductively as them.

This time around they pay homage to themselves, conceiving and recording *Still Shakin'* in the same manner as their debut *Shake Hands With Shorty*. More accurately, perhaps, it's an album that plays to their strengths, whether it's the fierce sizzling guitar that underpins their ferocious attack on Robert Johnson's *Preachin' Blues*, the Little Feat glide of *Stay All Night* (based on Junior Kimbrough's song of the same title; Junior's son Robert guests), with its lascivious refrain '*Pull off all your clothes, throw 'em in the corner*' or the twinkling love letter to their home state that is the title track.

Like they were before, but better.

John Aizlewood

Puddle Of Mudd

Kiss The Machine *PAVEMENT*

Troubled post-grungers drift aimlessly.



It takes some serious effort to outdo Mötley Crüe when it comes to salacious headlines and disastrous performances, but Wes Scantlin has given it a good go over the past decade. But before he was a headline-grabbing tabloid magnet, he fronted a band that – for a hot minute – looked to be on the cusp of something massive. Those days are long behind them on *Kiss The Machine*.

The likes of *Beautimous* and *In Love With A Dancer* could approach toe-tapping territories if the flat production didn't rob them of any potency, leaving behind wan Velvet Revolver off-cuts, while the more balladic tracks (*Free, Firefly*) – arguably the band's strong point with the likes of *Drift & Die* – just sound so *tired*. There are glimmers of their pop-courting past in *Maniac* and *Win Win Win,* but its too little too late; without serious fuel and that creative spark, the band long-since burned themselves out.

Rich Hobson

Zach Tabori

Attack Of The Clout Chasers *FLESH FURY*

Genre? What's a genre?



One of those ridiculously accomplished musicians who simply pile-drives through genres and styles, Zach Tabori is on top form with *Attack Of The Clout Chasers*. Bouncing dizzyingly from hardcore thrash to smooth jazz, lounge act to complex prog, sometimes in a single tune, this album is another eclectic showcase for Tabori's consummate multi-instrumental and composing chops and never-ending search for diamond-encrusted pop hooks. It's like listening to Jellyfish tunes reimagined by early Mr Bungle – playful, violent, witty

and gleefully self-indulgent, and, of course, the maverick spirit of Frank Zappa is evident throughout the likes of *...In A Thin White Shirt, Jazz To Showcase Our Musicanship* and 16-minute key track *Vanité ou la Mort*, featuring Dweezil Zappa.

On paper it reads like a collision of styles, and weird ideas ought to be disjointed, but actually it all flows together beautifully. Altogether a bit of a triumph, really.

Essi Berelian

Lynyrd Skynyrd

Celebrating 50 Years: Live At The Ryman *FRONTIERS MUSIC*

Gary Rossington's swan song.



Poignantly, this album features the final performance of founding band member Gary Rossington, who passed away in 2023, the year after this show at the famous Nashville venue.

But the real star is the setlist, because the only way to celebrate half a century of Lynyrd Skynyrd is to play the old songs: 14 of them pre-date the 1977 plane crash, with only 2003's *Red White And Blue* from the nine albums since.

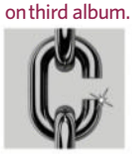
But, as good as that sounds, *Live At The Ryman* pales alongside *One More From The Road*, Skynyrd's classic live double recorded 39 years ago. Guest appearances including Jelly Roll (on *Tuesday's Gone*) and Brent Smith (*Simple Man*) add to the sense of occasion, but also peg it back as going-through-the-motions nostalgia.

Neil Jeffries

Civic

Chrome Dipped *ATO*

Melbourne punks diversify on third album.



Since releasing their second album *Taken By Force* in 2023, these feisty Melbourne urchins have slimmed down to a four-piece and vowed to move their sound on a little from the simple but exhilarating template they previously relied on.

The Stooges-influenced turbo-thump is replaced with moodier material (while *1969* was the blueprint before, it's now closer to *Gimme Danger*) as the opening tracks here, *The Fool, Chrome Dipped* and *Gulls Way*, mine a more introspective seam, albeit with taut riffs keeping our attention. There are further diversions on the brooding, Idles-style rumble of *The Hogg* and *Swing Of The Noose*, which along with the post-punk drone of *Starting All The Dogs Off* channel more complex emotions before *Trick Pony* and *Poison* return to more familiar, hardcore-focused territory.

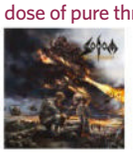
While this album might prove a tougher sell to the moshpit dwellers who lapped up Civic's earlier records, it reflects expanding horizons that should serve them well in the long run.

Johnny Sharp

Sodom

The Arsonist *SPV/STEAMHAMMER*

Germans delivers another dose of pure thrash.



They say booze is the only thing that improves with age, but I think we oughta say German thrash metal does too. It bewilders me, creaky and gnarled as I am, that the same bands I blasted on my tinny teenage boombox in 1984 are still creating fresh, invigorating sounds at this late stage. *The Arsonist* is the band's seventeenth full-lengther and their first in five long years, but it has all the vigour and storm of their bowl-haircut years.

As ever, Sodom's preoccupation with war dominates both the lyrics and the machine-gun riffery, from 'Nam blood-sprayer *Battle Of The Harvest Moon* to the skull-cracking *Return To God In Parts*, a heavy contender for song title of the year and a feral, acid-spitting killer of a closer. If you're looking for some light in the darkness, there ain't none. Just bullets, death, and relentless heavy metal thunder.

Sleazegrinder

Paul Vickers & The Leg

Winter At Butterfly Lake *PX4M*

Strings elevate the clattering surrealism of heartbreak suite.



The avant-pop that former Dawn Of The Replicants singer and surrealist stand-up comedian Paul Vickers makes with alt.folk band The Leg inevitably comes flavoured with his latent absurdism. Now, this fifth album together throws in some genuine emotional distress, embodied by Pete Harvey's lush orchestrations on what Vickers describes as a "heartbreak suite", and the effect is marvellously disorientating. By turns stirring, cinematic and foreboding, the strings weave drama and nobility through slaughterhouse jigs (*Slow Runs The Fox, Optical Illusions*), junkyard crank rockers (*Build A Museum*) and blood-smattered bluegrass songs about EDM pioneer Delia Derbyshire (*Tickled Pink*). One minute all Nick Cave hellfire, the next a lovelorn Dalek, Vickers himself is an impish presence, singing sweetly of pulling the wings from butterflies, over the title track's fluttering violins, or interrupting *Eric*'s gracious This Mortal Coil chamber orchestra to seemingly drop pipework randomly on a piano while singing of a dog that needs a psychiatrist.

Somewhere in this clash of classicism and dark acid cabaret, the ridiculous turns profound and art gushes out.

Mark Beaumont

The Devil Wears Nada

Postalgia *EONIAN*

Soft-focused Swedes summon 80s ghosts.



This Gothenburg quintet make no bones about the formula behind their brand of arena-ready soft rock, with the title of their debut album explained in the attendant press release as 'nostalgia redefined'.

Postalgia is AOR-informed soft metal all the way, its songs careful not to bore us en route to an air-punchable chorus. And when their songs are strong enough they have irresistible potency, even if the edges can be smoothed off to the point of cloying sweetness. Their guitar riffs occasionally hit hard, but more often shimmering synths throw up mental pictures of a carefully coiffured keyboard player in a white suit, sleeves rolled up, on MTV in 1985. Unfortunately, without someone like Desmond Child to add airwave-chomping tunes, few other tracks have the melodic substance to be earworms, in a style where immediacy and sharp hooks are essential.

Postalgia ain't what it used to be.

Johnny Sharp

BEST OF THE REST

Other new releases out this month.

Lifeguard

Ripped And Torn *MATADOR*

Following in the grand tradition of Chicagoan post-punk noise-pop, *Ripped And Torn* finds the early-Siouxsie/Banshees-styled three-piece employing rhythmic sideswipes, jarring guitar clangour and dub bass frequencies through a production filter marked 'Mud'. **6/10**

Phase Transition

In Search Of Being *SELF-RELEASED*

Porto trio PT started as a Dream Theater covers band, but there's more to their ambitious debut than mimicry. Self-conscious complexity can drag, but vocalist Sofia Beco doubles on violin, and when Iberian flourish meets soaring crescendo, sparks surely fly. **7/10**

Strange Boutique

Let The Lonely Heart Sing *CIRCLE MUSIC/BOUTIQUE THINGS*

If the first album from the DC goth 'legends' in 31 years tells us anything, it's that there's a lot more to being Elizabeth Fraser than simply wearing black velvet and frowning at a crow. Hearts yearn, guitars shimmer, tempos drag, but pearly dewdrops only dangle. **5/10**

Star Circus

From The Wreckage *RENAISSANCE*

No doubt, Star Circus talk a good game. The London-based four-piece ostensibly look the part, employ a twin-guitar frontline and name-check Lizzy and Queen as touchstones, but this second box-ticking album never quite hits the sweet spot. It's alright, but not great. **6/10**

Darker Lighter

Darker Lighter *MISHI*

LA-based songwriter, producer and multi-instrumentalist Salar Rajabnik prides himself on being a trusted guitar tech to Foo Fighters, QOTSA and Kim Gordon. He plays everything on DL's indie-rock debut, and it's always adequate, but he sings like a trusted guitar tech. **5/10**

Tumble

Lost In Light *STICKMAN*

If you like a bit of *Vol.4/Sabotage*-era Sabs or the sound of *Killer* Cooper being led to the gallows (and if you don't, why are you even here?) you'll find a lot to waft your flares to on this live-in-the-studio, half-hour, five-track debut EP from this Toronto mega-power trio. **7/10**

Kaleo

Mixed Emotions *ATLANTIC*

It makes a huge difference to a record when its central vocal performance seems wrought with genuine passion. Kaleo are one hell of a rock'n'roll band, but it's Jökull Júlíusson's (Atlantic soul standard) voice that truly renders this Icelandic quartet brilliant. **8/10**

Kurt Deimer

And So It Begins *BALD MAN*

Any man who's played Michael Myers in a *Halloween* reboot's going to be a bit of a cliché. Even with a slightly unorthodox baritone, Deimer's textbook rawk 101: ballsy, macho, laden with ace sidemen, not least Geoff Tate. Route one yes, but it gets you there. **7/10**

Arm's Length

There's A Whole World Out There *PURE NOISE*

Emo-er-than-thou Ontario quartet match dense, in-your-face guitars with persistent drum ordnance and a raging social conscience that's manifested in a set of deeply personal songs written when serially venting frontman Allen Steinberg was at his "most mentally ill". **6/10**

Holler

Next In Line *SCARLET*

It's very AOR, very 80s, the musical backdrop's flawless, if that's your bag, but Brooklyn-born, Italian-American, ex-Eldritch, human swagger Terence Holler doesn't quite convince as he belts out his lyrical clichés like a Robbie Williams-esque musical theatre understudy. **6/10**

Pleaser

Begging Guitars *PART TIME*

Danish punks Pleaser cling desperately to the proudly flaunted limitations of their chosen genre. While their dual vocalists recall every other post-Bikini Kill punk singer (including each other) the bassist appears to be doing something slightly different. But not much. **5/10**

BEST OF THE REST REVIEWS BY IAN FORTNAM

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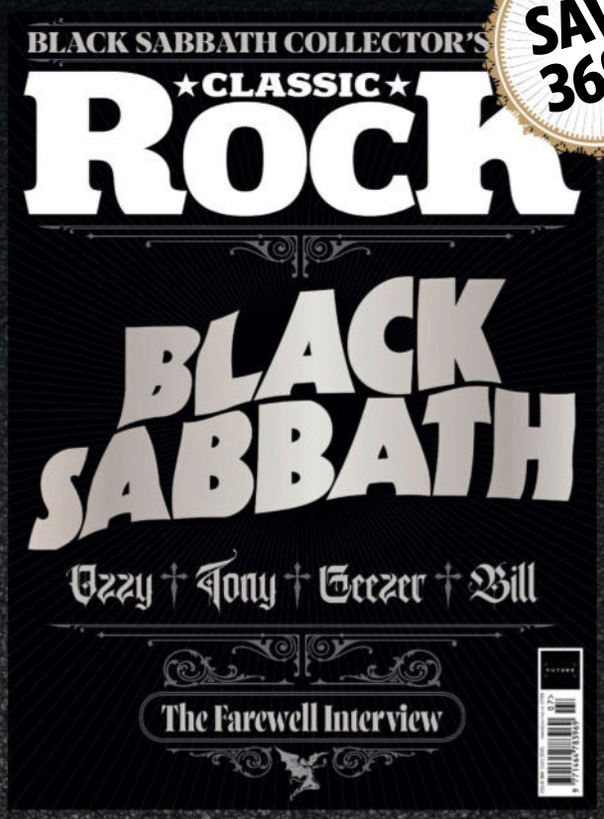
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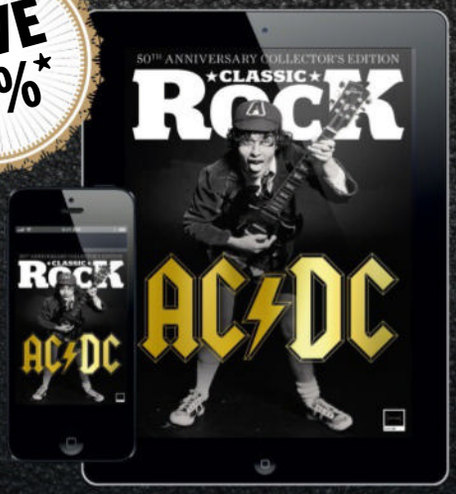
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THE HARD STUFF REISSUES



Queen

Queen 1 (Dolby Atmos Blu-ray) *UNIVERSAL*



Spatial surround sound doesn't restrain their rip-roaring debut album.

There were times later in Queen's career, as they crafted relentless hits ranging from disco to cabaret to whatever *Flash* was, when it was difficult to remember they'd begun as a heavy, genuinely ablaze rock band. Their 1973 debut album bore trademarks of its time – dynamics influenced by Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple, lyrics tapping into the swords-and-sorcery areas of prog – but bristled with freshness and invention. They were hungry, and every track was honed for maximum cheap thrills.

Given the recent passing of producer Roy Thomas Baker, it'd be unforgivable not to eulogise his part in this. His ramping up of every climb and descent, every leap and swoop taken by four fine players, was key to how Queen inhabited their noise, how they grasped the horsepower they were working with. Even at this point the singer and guitarist didn't need much encouragement to show off, and the rhythm section were shrewd enough to travel with them while ensuring they didn't topple the songs' strengths.

In another universe, Queen kept on mining this seam forever, with diminishing returns. Of course, they developed other ideas, bringing them fame and fortune and everything that goes with it. The fact remains that *Queen 1* (as it's now titled) is ridiculously full of itself, in the best way. From the eager rush of *Keep Yourself Alive*, through the theatrical surge of *Great King Rat* to the disclosure of hidden weapons of *The Night Comes Down*, the album doesn't get complacent for a second. It's the astonishing, histrionic *Liar* that tears the roof off, as Mercury prowls like a panther, Taylor has ferocious fun and May ekes as much excitement from an electric guitar as anyone in any genre before or since. (*Mad The Swine*, benched back then, was added to the track-list on last year's box set reboot, and it's gauchely well-mannered.)

For audiophiles who like every surface spick and span, this immersive Dolby Atmos release pans the parts around the room individually, drawing attention to the intense, unique layering of voices and instruments – and use of space – that Queen and Baker crafted. That post-pause guitar re-entry on *Liar* at 5.39? Phwooar. But an album either has it or doesn't, and *Queen 1* has it. They were flying. Play it on even a crappy old cassette deck today and it'd knock out the neighbours. It's one of the most cocky, action-packed albums of its era.

Chris Roberts

Metallica

Load (Deluxe Box Set) Best Of *UMC/MERCURY*

Hard rock 'experiment' gains deafening array of bells and whistles.



Subtitled 'The Whole Kitchen Sink', this 10-pound-plus package doesn't exactly scrimp. Its 301 remastered tracks, 245 of which are previously unreleased, are generously spread across 15 CDs and six 180-gram vinyls along with four DVDs of live shows, rough mixes, demos and all the other stuff serious 'Tallica collectors have come to expect of the band's gold standard back cat boxes. There's a picture disc, laminates, picks, posters, prints, a pack of 14 Rorschach Test cards and a weighty 128-page hardcover book with lashings of exclusive content both editorial and pictorial. So it's great, quite the artifact, eminently desirable but at a penny less than 250 quid, is Metallica's sixth, Bob Rock-produced '96 album ultimately worth all this potentially bank- (and possibly even back-) breaking fuss?

Kirk Hammett calls it "our experimental hard rock album", a bold step away from Metallica's thrash roots that coincided with fanbase-worrying, mainstream-courting haircuts. Dividing critical opinion upon its post-grunge, Britpop-adjacent release *Load* was still embraced as the year's heaviest album, if more considered, spacious and progressive. Central to today's massive 30-ish anniversary trove sits a crisp, warm, snare-taming remaster, and an often overlooked album more than worthy of rediscovery.

Ian Fortnam

The B-52's

The Warner And Reprise Years *RHINO*

Dropping some big bombs.



Has there ever been another band like The B-52's? They shot out of Athens, Georgia like a firework display gone haywire, and impressed everyone from John Lennon to John Peel with their debut single *Rock Lobster*, which mixed kitsch with post-punk riffing, and proceeded to carve out a world of their own that was part eternal yard sale of the heart and part John Waters in a good mood. A hook-up with David 'Laughing Boy' Byrne produced curious results, but the band remained unstoppable, until the death of their unique guitarist Ricky Wilson, after which they took a break, then returned as a polished but still eccentric party band.

There's something joyous and celebratory at the heart of the B-52's, whether it's Fred Schneider bawling '*we'll have a gay old time*' on their cover of *The Flintstones* theme, or Kate Pierson and Cindy Wilson's untrammelled yelps on the incredible *Love Shack* (ironically, for a band rooted in plastic 50s nostalgia it was nostalgia for their own past that produced some of their best later music).

Along the way they inspired Lennon and Yoko Ono to return to the studio, helped R.E.M. into the Top 10, named a film (*My Own Private Idaho*, a song that turns up in 2025's *Minecraft* film) and generally remained both unique and brilliant.

This collection brings together nine albums on coloured vinyl or eight CDs. Of course you want it.

David Quantick

After The Fire

Bright Lights 1974-1983 *CHERRY RED*

The fire still burns.



Despite prog and new wave's apparent incongruity, the quirkiness and centrality of keyboards inherent in both led to cross-pollination, to the extent that by 1980 Yes were two parts Buggles. For London-based After The Fire, the transition between styles would be singularly well-suited.

The band formed in 1972, and the members shared a Christian faith, but they wrote from a spiritual perspective without proselytising, and achieved varying degrees of chart success at home, on the continent and in the US. Despite the overtly proggy keyboard sounds and skilful tempo changes, the tracks on the self-released *Signs Of Change* (1978) are brisk and snappy, with pop hooks, and Andy Piercy is already singing like a new-waver, with distinctive vibrato and upbeat energy.

Intriguing unreleased demos trace the path to *Laser Love*'s (1979) full-blown new-wave makeover, which marries the melodic style and rhythmic drive of *Signs* with edgier guitars

GETTY

and then-contemporary synths on sharp pop rockers *Take Me Higher* and chart single *One Rule For You*.

Queen producer Mack does a bang-up job with ATF's increasingly accomplished brand of earworm power-pop (*Why Can't We Be Friends*) on *80F* (1980), then adds a less effective, colder sheen to 1982's synth-heavy *Batteries Not Included*, but highlights like *Sometimes* win out. A cover of Falco's *Der Kommissar* gave them a US hit in '83, and although tour-induced exhaustion and record company debt led to them splitting that year, the demos collected on *ATF2* prove they went out on a creative high.

Rich Davenport

War

Why Can't We Be Friends? (50th Anniversary Collector's Edition) *RHINO*

Wildly uneven best seller.

While several albums can claim to have conquered the world, few can lay claim to going even further. Multi-ethnic funk-soul collective War's 1975 chart buster *Why Can't We Be Friends?* managed it by being transmitted into the great beyond by NASA during an Apollo-Soyuz mission.

Back down on Earth, the reggae-tinged singalong title track, with its welcome 'let's just all get along' message, has remained a soundtrack regular, appearing in films including *Lethal Weapon* and *Final Destination*. The other standout is the cruising, parping funk of *Low Rider*, the only track that benefits from being presented in unedited form for this anniversary resell. The rest of the album is, frankly, hard work.

The different sections of *Leroy's Latin Lament* showcase a band that certainly had the chops, but such genre hopping was executed better by Stephen Stills's Manassas a year or two earlier. Repeating the word 'funky' ad infinitum on *Heartbeat* makes one long for the considered lyricism of Red Hot Chili Peppers, and it's more painful again in its original 'jam'. *Smile Happy* sounds like background music to a particularly mediocre episode of *Charlie's Angels*, and ballads *Lotus Blossom* and *So* are even worse. Promising bluesy outtake *Roam Ramble* long outstays its welcome, and *Oatmeal Box* should be put in another box and buried immediately. If you're hankering to hear the band carve out the title track over 23 long minutes, then look no further, but this is a record with two decent songs and, sadly, that's about it.

Pat Carty

Robin Trower

For Earth Below *CHRYSALIS*

No leaves left.



Following-up his breakthrough album *Bridge Of Sighs* (1974) was always going to be a challenge for Robin Trower. He had toured the US relentlessly to capitalise on his success and hadn't had a break to prepare new material. In addition, drummer Reg Isadore had failed to cope with the changing circumstances and they had to find a replacement. They struck lucky with Bill Lordan who had previously played with Ike & Tina Turner and Sly & The Family Stone. He brought an authentic sense of funk and had even jammed with Hendrix, so he knew what he was getting into.

Maybe it wasn't the wisest idea to record the album at LA's Record Plant, which was big and glossy but lacked the home comforts of London's Air studios.

In contrast to the crackling start of *Bridge Of Sighs*, *For Earth Below* shuffles in with the hazy blues rock of *Shame The Devil*, followed by the even more sluggish *It's Only Money*. Only then does the funk kick in, peaking on the album's best track, the swaggering *Alethea*. But it doesn't last, and the final, title track almost suffocates on its own dope smoke, reliant on heavy stereo panning.

Hugh Fielder

Skin Alley

Sun Music: The Complete Recordings 1969-1973

ESOTERIC

Shapeshifting Londoners' four LPs reissued along with a 'lost' soundtrack.

Gigging hard on the underground and free-festival scene at the turn of the 70s, Skin Alley were signed to CBS but never quite managed to find a strong musical identity on record, as evidenced by this four-disc reissue set.

Getting dropped after their self-titled debut and follow-up *To Pagham And Beyond* (both 1970) can't have helped, but the latter album in particular reminds us of their talent for turning gutsy prog-minded compositions into extended jams, as on *The Queen Of Bad Intentions* and *Take Me To Your Leader's Daughter*, laced with lysergic flute as well as gutsy guitar soloing. A selling point was the touches of jazz they infused those improvisations with, but it's swinging rather than free or spacey. Nonetheless, it makes the likes of *Marsha* and *Night Time* more accessible for rock-tuned ears.

Instrumentals for the planned *Stop Verushka!* soundtrack, recorded shortly after *To Pagham*, and spread across the four discs here, show their potential for a funkier style in the shape of *Russian Boogaloo* and *Skin Valley Serenade*, and a similar grooviness greases the wheels of 1972's *Two Quid Deal?*, also benefitting from the strident vocals of ex-Atomic Rooster man Nick Graham. Yet by their final album *Skintight* they'd pivoted – perhaps in pursuit of US success – towards a blander, more US rock'n'soul sound, with noticeably less memorable results.

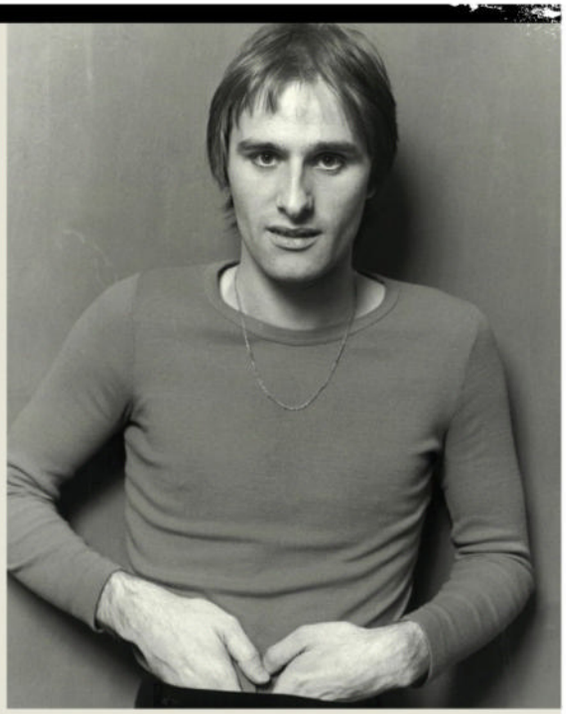
Johnny Sharp



Steve Harley + Cockney Rebel

The Best Years Of Our Lives *CHRYSALIS*

Lavishly expanded 50th-anniversary edition. Includes the biggest hit.



MICK ROCK/PRESS

In early 1975, Steve Harley, leader and sole songwriter of Cockney Rebel, was in a tricky position. In June 1974, their almost guitar-free second album, *The Psychomodo*, reached the UK Top 10. Then, other than loyal drummer Stuart Elliott, Harley's band deserted him over his refusal to share songwriting. He wrote a bitter song about it called *Make Me Smile (Come Up & See Me)*, and brought in a less rebellious Rebel which included former Family man Jim Cregan, the first indication that guitars would be more prominent.

Time was pressing. Just nine months later *The Best Years Of Our Lives* was released, credited to Steve Harley + Cockney Rebel (not even a collaboration-implying 'And'), should anyone now doubt who was boss.

Half a century on, it's been given a swish remix by original co-producer Alan Parsons, and the extras include previously released mixes and hitherto unheard demos and rehearsal versions; Harley's directions as they run through *The Mad Mad Moonlight* are genuinely revelatory. A DVD includes a triumphant *Top Of The Pops* appearance doing *Make Me Smile*, and the April 1975 Hammersmith Odeon concert that also appeared on the 2014 edition.

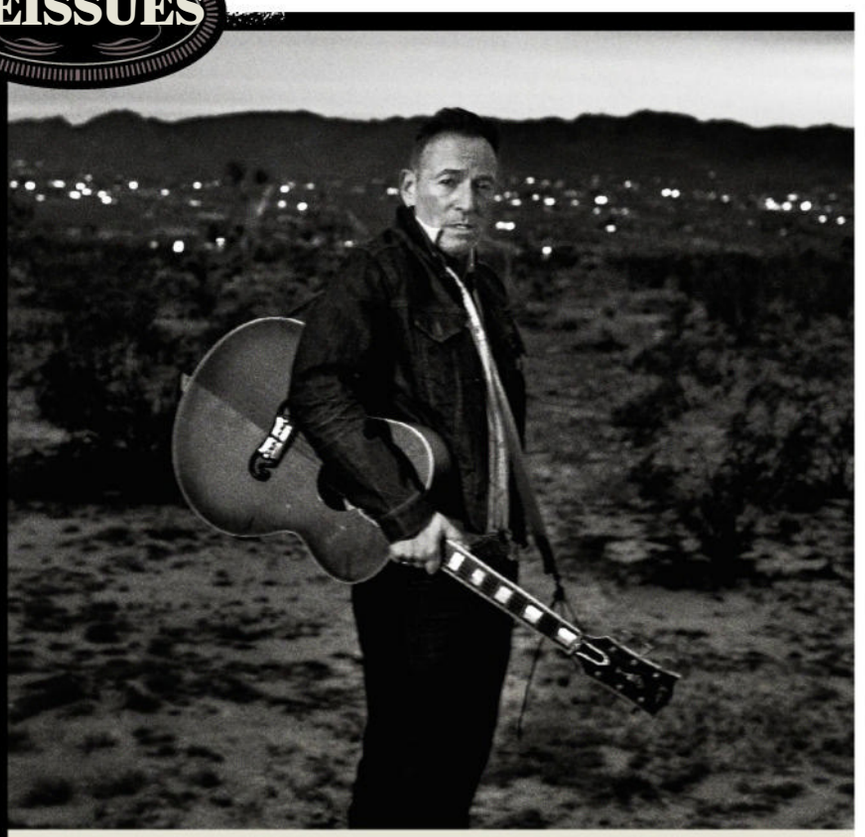
Harley was always an albums artist, and *Make Me Smile* dominates only through familiarity. Overall, the eight tracks (plus a brief, giddy introduction) are less mannered and less out-there than *The Psychomodo*, but he played all his cards at once and there's barely a misstep.

He could still be inspiredly angular, as the mental health allegory *Back To The Farm* and the David Bowie-esque yet surprisingly twangsome *49th Parallel* showed, but Harley's songwriting was developing at a remarkable pace.

Make Me Smile – the pension he wouldn't live to enjoy – still dazzles, but the title track was his third successive gigantic, scarf-waving album closer, and it somehow managed to be simultaneously hubristic and humble. *The Mad Mad Moonlight* rocks hard, while *Mr Raffles* may concern the silly gentleman thief but it's extraordinarily moving.

Harley struggled to export his gifts, so he never quite received his just rewards. That doesn't matter now. What does matter is what a treat *The Best Years Of Our Lives* remains.

John Aizlewood



Bruce Springsteen

Tracks II: The Lost Albums *SONY*

The Boss's magnificent missing chapters.



Putting the flawless first 14 years of Bruce Springsteen's recorded output to one side, there's been a marked inconsistency since 1987's *Tunnel Of Love*; for every *Ghost Of Tom Joad* high point there's been a substandard release like *Working On A Dream*. But rumours of lost work abounded, especially from his unusually sparse 1990s.

This absolutely staggering collection of seven albums recorded – and in some cases very nearly put out – between 1983 and 2018 fills in the blanks and makes you wonder why lesser records were released instead. There's nothing on 2014's odd 'n' sods *High Hopes* to match what's here, for a start. Sadly there's no *Electric Nebraska*, although that'll arrive eventually. Instead *LA Garage Sessions '83* finds Bruce moving towards the world-conquering *Born In The USA* with songs appearing in slightly altered form, such as a never-better *My Hometown*, mixed with should-have-beens like the *Nebraska*n strains of *Richfield Whistle*. At the other end is the E-Streety *Perfect World*, a looser entry not conceived as an album, which ranges from the anthemic *Cutting Knife* to the slow-rolling *Blind Man*.

In between, after *Streets Of Philadelphia Sessions* expands the gentle-beats approach of his Oscar winner to moving effect, especially on *Farewell Party*, are four albums that knock at least half of what was released during the same period into a cocked hat. *Faithless*, an abandoned soundtrack, combines *Tom Joad*-like instrumentation and gospel voices to mesmerising effect. Piano-based love song *God Sent You* is capable of moving a recalcitrant statue. *Somewhere North Of Nashville*, the long-promised 'country' record, is the pedal steel-drenched sound of a wild night out in Bakersfield, veering from the roadhouse chug of *Tiger Rose* to the last-call heartbreak of *You're Gonna Miss Me When I'm Gone*.

Inyo, containing riveting border tales, such as the exceptional *The Last Charro*, sung to a Mariachi orchestra, shows that Springsteen could have had a career as a screenwriter if the music hadn't panned out. *Twilight Hours* is a sister record to late-period masterpiece *Western Stars* and very nearly its equal. The glorious widescreen orchestrations of *Two Of Us*, the sparse beauty of *Lonely Town* and the Bacharachian longing of *Sunday Love* could each have replaced the incongruous *Sleepy Joe's Café* on *Western Stars* because they're that great.

This collection is a breathtaking gift that Springsteen acolytes will cherish. They don't call him The Boss for a laugh.

Pat Carty

Venom

Reissues *DISSONANCE*

Back in black.



A far less celebrated period for Venom, the late 80s and early 90s are often unfairly ignored, despite producing some enjoyably dark and infernal material. Following their lacklustre mid-80s records *Possessed* and *Calm Before The Storm* and a temporary split, Cronos headed off to focus on his solo band, so ex-Atomkraft frontman Tony 'Demolition Man' Dolan was brought in as the new bassist and vocalist, alongside drummer Abaddon, guitarist Mantas and another new member, Al Barnes.

The resulting 1989 album *Prime Evil*, now given the inevitable collectable vinyl release, is a bit of an overlooked demonic barnstormer, boasting tracks such as *Carnivorous, Parasite* and the raging *Skeletal Dance* which could easily go head-to-head with the older classics. For a clearer overview of the era, *Prime Evil* and the equally vital *Tear Your Soul Apart* EP (1990) form disc one of the three-CD *Blackened Priests* set, which adds 1991's *Temples Of Ice* and 1992's *The Waste Lands* for a devilishly brutal triple whammy of manic and satanic metal.

While this brace of follow-ups suffers from less-than-stellar sonics and production, there are nevertheless some worthwhile tracks festering away in the darkness. *Temples Of Ice* offers an inviting couple of nasties in *Acid* and *Arachnid*, and *The Waste Lands* gives us the blazing *Kissing The Beast* (the original album title), *Wolverine* and *Black Legions*. It feels like a case of diminishing returns listening to the end, but taken together this violent and vicious triumvirate has plenty going for it.

Essi Berelian

The Grateful Dead

Gratest Hits *RHINO*

What a long, strange trip.



A true Deadhead, on being told that the Grateful Dead were commemorating their 60th anniversary with a single-CD compilation, might risk a seizure. The band had one hit single, in 1987, but no one has had more chart albums. Last year they released a 19-CD set of shows played in August 1978. The current Dead & Company struggle to find stadiums big enough to accommodate ticket demand (they're currently in residence at Las Vegas' Sphere), and their shows rarely dip under four hours. Their 2023 tour grossed $115 million – just behind Metallica. The counter-culture has many contradictions.

Gratest Hits begins five albums into the Dead's career with 1970's *Workingman's Dead*. They'd finally abandoned trying to condense their 40-minute jams onto record, which had left them $200,000 in debt, hooked up with lyricist Robert Hunter and started writing concise songs. Crosby Stills & Nash gave them lessons on how to sing and harmonise in the studio. It transformed their fortunes. *Casey Jones* is featured here although it should have been *Uncle John's Band*.

Later that year they flowered incandescently with *American Beauty,* which supplies four tracks including *Sugar Magnolia* with its sublime arrangements and playing, although there is barely an instrumental break. At shows was a regular 20-minute encore.

The rest of the tracks come from the mid-to-late 70s and reflect the complications the band and their followers had negotiating and surviving the changes. It ends appropriately with 1987's *Touch Of Grey*.

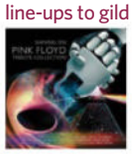
Meanwhile, the true Deadhead can be revived with the limited-edition 60-CD *Enjoying The Ride,* although it's probably already sold out.

Hugh Fielder

Various

Shining On – Pink Floyd Tribute Collection *CHERRY RED*

Classics inspire superstar line-ups to gild the lily.



Although best-known for his associations with Yes since 1989, multi-instrumentalist and studio whiz Billy Sherwood has an expansive sideline in tribute albums. He hit prog rock gold in 2005 by co-producing (alongside Bob Kulick) *Back Against The Wall,* an all-star, song-by-song take on Floyd's 1979 double. This box set delivers three similarly styled Sherwood-helmed remakes that followed.

Return To The Dark Side Of The

DANNY CLINCH/PRESS

Moon, from 2006, stays faithful to the original arrangements and features 36 A-listers including Rick Wakeman (playing brilliant piano on *The Great Gig In The Sky*), Tommy Shaw (singing a fine *Money*), Adrian Belew and Robby Kreiger, alongside actor Malcolm McDowell doing the spoken-word stuff. It's all razor-sharp and clever, but the highlight is *Us And Them* thanks to Pink Floyd touring member Scott Page's sax and Dweezil Zappa's guitar.

On 2021's *Still Wish You Were Here* the guest list includes Billy Sheehan and Jah Wobble, Ian Paice and Rat Scabies (!), and features individual performances more prominent than those on *RTTDSOTM*. Wakeman's MiniMoog enriches *Welcome To The Machine*, Joe Satriani cuts loose on *Wish You Were Here* and Steve Hackett does the same on *Shine On You Crazy Diamond (Parts 1-5)*. Best of all is *(Parts 6-9)* thanks to the inspired combination of bassist Bootsy Collins and guitarist Steve Hillage.

Bootsy returns (his funk counterpointing Steve Stevens metallic guitar) for *One Of These Days* on *Meddle Reimagined* (2023), but on the softer tracks it's the singers that stand out – Graham Bonnet on *San Tropez* for the wrong reasons, but James Labrie, Mark Stein and, particularly, Terry Reid (on *Seamus*, alongside keyboard player Brian Auger) are great. Frank Dimino handles *Echoes*, although its true stars are Dweezil and Jordan Rudess.

Each album is great fun.

Neil Jeffries

Eels

Souljacker *PIAS*

Eels' under-appreciated fourth album, now on red vinyl.



Largely touted at the time as a move into gritty rock music from the pop-orientated introspection of its predecessors, Eels' fourth album didn't entirely live up to the hype, but it did see band leader Mark 'E' Everett move away from the introspection and autobiographical inspiration that had coloured his previous work with a look at the lives, loneliness and alienation of others. As Sting sang in one of his more lucid moments, you're not alone in being alone.

Producer John Parrish, best-known for his work with PJ Harvey, makes his presence felt on the album's more kicking numbers. *Souljacker Part 1* doffs its cap to Bo Diddley's perennial groover *Who Do You Love* before knocking it to the ground and dragging it through the dust as dirt accumulates under its scraping fingernails. The menacing fuzz at the heart of *Dog Faced Boy* is measured and threatening as it ramps up E's melodic sensibilities to scale new heights. And it's entirely apposite that the clatter and madness of the Tom Waits-inspired *That's Not Really Funny* would be used as the theme music to BBC2's ground-breaking, dark and much-missed animated comedy show *Monkey Dust*.

Elsewhere, E's earlier modus operandi comes to the fore. *Fresh Feeling*'s skittering beats, punching bass and lush strings wouldn't sound out of place on any of Eels' previous albums and stands shoulder-to-shoulder with Beck. Likewise the stripped-back *Friendly Ghost*, which retains the existential angst of yore.

Taken within the context of Eels' ever-expanding discography – and one that shows no signs of slowing down – better albums were on the horizon (see *Blinking Lights And Other Revelations* and *Shootenanny!* which followed immediately), but this vinyl version is a fine signpost of a much longer journey

Julian Marszalek

Derek Trucks Band

Joyful Noise / Backyard Tracks *FLOATING WORLD*

Stank faces at the ready please, people.



Formed in 1994 as an outlet for then-15-year-old slide guitar prodigy Derek Trucks, the sometime Allman Brothers Band alumnus's band always rejoiced in a melting pot of influences, merging southern rock, blues, jazz and R&B. The happy result is a darkly melodic, swampy groove pinned down by Trucks' now legendary slide prowess. They released a self-titled debut in '97, followed swiftly by *Out Of The Madness* ('98). Both sank into their vibe and drove it home, and the modus operandi was retained for 2002's *Joyful Noise* (now reissued in expanded, single-CD edition).

A core line-up of Trucks, Yonrico Scott (drums, vocals, percussion), Kofi Burbridge (flute, vocals, keyboards) and Todd Smallie (bass, vocals) is augmented throughout by additional vocalists. Enter Susan Tedeschi, astonishing singer, guitarist and the other half of the Tedeschi Trucks blues-rock power couple, who lends her raw, hearty edge to *Baby, You're Right*; Rahat Fateh Ali Khan brings modal Eastern influence to *Maki Machi*, which sits comfortably alongside Rubén Blades's contribution to Latin American funk masterpiece *Kam-Ma-Lay*.

This time round, *Joyful Noise* is complemented by *Backyard Tracks*, a deliciously groovy four-track live set recorded in Atlanta, Georgia in 2006. Can a flute ever be funky? Well, it certainly pairs well with *I Wish I Knew*'s sturdy shuffle and provides robust call-and-response to Trucks' A-grade noodling on *All I Do*.

We were never expecting a radical departure, but if it ain't broke... The solos are blistering, the vocals soulful, the vibes immaculate.

Phoebe Flys



Motörhead

The Manticore Tapes *BMG*

Old songs, new clothes.



"English rock band Motörhead released 23 studio albums, 10 live recordings..." No. Scratch that. Because what we have here is a Motörhead prequel, a 'new' studio album, true dirty gold from the vaults. *The Manticore Tapes* is a lovingly restored recording of the first full-length session the legendary Three Amigos 'Head line-up – Lemmy, 'Fast' Eddie Clarke, Phil 'Philthy Animal' Taylor – made, recorded at Emerson Lake & Palmer's Manticore Studios in a converted ABC cinema on London's Fulham Palace Road in August 1976. Following the departure of Pink Fairies guitarist Larry Wallis, it was more a 'Fuck you we're going to document this' gesture than a serious attempt at fame. Voted "the best worst band in the world" in *NME*, no one rated Motörhead's chances for success very highly.

Yes, this is as raw as fuck. Yes, this is as brutal, high-velocity, downright mean and no-nonsense hard-rockin' as you'd expect.

The Manticore Tapes comprises 11 previously unheard takes on songs, some of which later surfaced on 1977's *Motörhead* and 1979's semi-official release *On Parole*. And sure, that means some of these pale a little in comparison to later versions; for example *Keep Us On The Road*, with its overlong guitar solo, and a riotously throwaway second version of *Leavin' Here* that still manages to blister paint from every surface it lands on. But hell, this is Motörhead we're talking about here. Let's not quibble over the finer points of musicality, which don't matter anyway.

Many of the early favourites are here, alive and kicking: a version of *Motörhead* that sounds even more frantic and speed-addled (if that's possible) than the single; *Iron Horse/Born To Lose* howling its defiance into a bleak wind of noise; two versions of *The Watcher* (Lemmy's first composition for Hawkwind) with its unsophisticated tripped-out beauty.

Outtakes or no outtakes, this reissue manages to pull off the considerable trick of feeling like a complete whole – the first iteration of the classic line-up after Motörhead's formation in 1975. And yes, it's being released just in time to celebrate the band's 50th anniversary, along with the unveiling of a statue of Lemmy in his home town of Stoke-on-Trent.

The Manticore Tapes will be available as a single LP, CD and digital release, or deluxe expanded book-pack containing two LPs and a seven-inch single featuring live recordings from 1977 (Blitzkrieg in Birmingham).

Everett True

SHEILA ROCK/PRESS



Mike Oldfield

Hergest Ridge (50th Anniversary) *UMC*



Softly spoken *Bells* follow-up now sounds better than the big beast.

No pressure, then. In Spring 1974, Mike Oldfield's debut solo album *Tubular Bells* was, to the surprise of many, not least its creator, taking over the world as Oldfield, just turning 21, was pushed by his label Virgin (for whom *Bells* was their first ever album release) to write and record a follow-up in double-quick time. Not a natural look-at-me rock star, and prone to panic attacks, he retreated to the England/Wales border, in the shadow of the hill Hergest Ridge. He flew gliders. Eventually his subconscious rekindled itself, and he constructed another two-movement tour de force.

Hergest Ridge was received with a mild backlash or shrug, and even though it had a spell at No.1 in the UK it was superseded by its all-consuming predecessor. Yet, half a century on, the difficult second album sounds stronger than its now over-familiar big brother. By accident (the mix was always counter-intuitive, but that gives it an extra dimension) or design (its arc is superior, more fluid), *Hergest Ridge* is *Transformer* after *Lou Reed*. It's *The Godfather* 2. It might even be *Paddington* 2.

Some of that is down to the distracting cultural baggage that *Tubular Bells* now carries, but most of the magic here comes because a gifted muso decides to do his thing and, in his gentle diffident way, goes nuts. It's beautiful, pensive and immersive for about 30 minutes, then turns into doolally dynamite. There are passages, layered by instinct not rules, where it's still impossible to pick out what instrument's doing what. If an obscure Krautrock foot soldier had sold three copies of this, it would now be critically acclaimed from multiple rooftops. Plus it doesn't have any talking on it. Viv Stanshall's narration on *Bells* may have amused at first, but has since locked and limited that album, restricting it from acquiring fresh resonances in the imagination. *Ridge* can still go anywhere it pleases – and does.

Later, Oldfield reckoned it was "half-good", although he was proud of the whirring, dizzying climax, which oscillates between *Meddle*-era Pink Floyd and the *Dr. Who* theme if heard underwater. The haunting refrains of the album's first half weave their spell more organically than the equivalent themes on his debut.

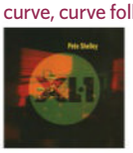
He remixed it in 2010, giving the murk a touch more clarity without blowing the mystique, and that version (on vinyl for the first time), along with a new Abbey Road half-speed remaster, graces this two-LP anniversary salute. There's also a deluxe Blu-ray. Whatever the clothing, the lovely, happy-sad *Hergest Ridge*, which exists outside of time, is a symphonic tonic.

Chris Roberts

Pete Shelley

Reissues *DOMINO*

Buzzcocks genius ahead of curve, curve follows in awe.



The final days of Buzzcocks were a curious chaos of experimental singles and LSD. But when the band finally imploded at the start of the 80s, singer and main songwriter Pete Shelley was already moving away from the punk beat. Recording demos with producer Martin Rushent, whose new Genetic Studios and Linn drums would soon benefit the rebooted Human League, Shelley created a new sound which retained the melodic sense and sardonic romance of his best work, and added a unique blend of acoustic guitars and electronic sounds. The first result of this collaboration, the single *Homosapien*, remains one of the great songs of its era – even if its lyrics caused the ever-censorious Radio 1 to ban it.

The subsequent *Homosapien* album expanded the brief to include thrilling dance-pop (*Qu'Est-Ce Que C'est*), moody reflection (the melancholy *Keats' Song*) and classic Shelley romance (*In Love With Someone Else* could easily have fitted on a Buzzcocks album). Its follow-up *XL1* added more electric guitars to the mix, with the thrilling single *Telephone Operator* and the moody and melancholy *Twilight*.

After one more solo album (the brilliant *Heaven And The Sea*), Shelley returned to Buzzcocks, leaving behind a powerful legacy, but one that history has neglected. But now, with these reissues on vinyl and CD, complete with extra tracks, new listeners can discover their brilliance for themselves.

Both

David Quantick

Don Henley

Inside Job *RHINO*

25th-anniversary reissue for Eagles man's fourth solo album.



Inside Job sits in the odd hinterland of Don Henley's solo output, 11 years after the inspired *The End Of The Innocence* album and 15 years before he resumed making his own records with the crafted country rock of *Cass County*. Both landmark releases in their own way, the former blessed with the elegiac title track and the stirring *New York Minute*, the latter featuring the great and good of Nashville's musical ecosystem. It might have been the turning of the century, it might just have been Henley at a creative lull, but this is the singer at his most underwhelming.

This remastered edition – no extra tracks, let alone any exclusive bells and whistles – is a reminder of how even a great songwriter like Henley can phone it in sometimes. You can tell that even the label is feeling the hard sell when they're pushed to remind you that the soupy *Taking You Home* was used to soundtrack a heart-rending moment in an old episode of *ER*. *The Boys Of Summer* it is not. Elsewhere he utilises Stevie Wonder for *Nobody Else In The World But You*, which serves only to remind you how much of a pale imitation of *Superstitious* the song really is. That said, at least it's got some swing. Most of the album has you imagining the forlorn Henley bent over his piano, overwhelmed by almost everything, wilting away over an indifferent set of songs that wouldn't have got past the door for an album like *Building The Perfect Beast*.

Philip Wilding

Chicago

Chicago II *RHINO*

When rock was fearless.



Before they were subsumed by Roman numerals and a string of MOR hits, Chicago began as Chicago Transit Authority, a bold rock/jazz fusion band, loudly sticking a brass trio onto their four-piece rock core. They didn't need to be subtle about it; this was 1969 and rock music was expanding at warp speed. They were brimming with confidence, and made their self-titled debut a double.

Their jumbled collection of jazzy/pop ballads, rock songs and, because they were politically motivated, chants from the notorious 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago was still riding high in the charts when they set about recording the follow-up less than a year later. The only hiccup was legal proceedings from the 'other' Chicago Transit Authority prissily protecting their name.

GETTY/PRESS

They still had plenty of material, so another double it was. And they carried on blending seemingly divergent styles into successful pop music, most notably with the classically inspired six-song suite *Ballet For A Girl In Buchannon*, which yielded two hits: the upbeat *Make Me Smile* and the poignant *Color My World*. Then there's the darker *Poem For The People*, the politically charged five-song *It Better End Soon*, the Top-10 hit *25 Or 6 To 4* and a bunch of breezy jazzy rockers. Even at this distance it's a stunning array.

Hugh Fielder

Horslips

At The BBC *MADFISH*

Celtic rock's founding fathers in full flight.



Although Thin Lizzy and Rory Gallagher were blending in subtle traditional Irish inflections before them, Horslips brought these elements to the fore with a boldness that has seen them deservedly heralded as the definitive pioneers of Celtic rock. With three multi-instrumentalists able to turn a hand to both folk and electric instruments with equal flair, Horslips achieved a seamless, balanced fusion of styles on record, and delivered it passionately on stage, as this expansive set illustrates vividly.

Disc one's round-up of well-recorded highlights (a few minor hisses and mix imbalances aside) from Horslips' first two albums sets the bar high, capturing the energy and dynamism in tightly nailed renditions of Celtic rock touchstone *Dearg Doom* and *You Can't Fool The Beast*.

The second disc opens with white-hot performances from 1979, the band's relentless touring schedule ensuring that *The Man Who Built America* and *Trouble (With A Capital T)* are dispatched with effervescent zeal. Impressively, they maintain the standard on reunion-era recordings like *Sideways To The Sun*, and throughout disc three's unreleased broadcast mix of their triumphant 2011 show with the Ulster Orchestra, during which the deftly interwoven orchestral layers add pomp to *Charolais*, and swirling drama to a show-stopping *Dearg Doom*.

If you dug 1979's fan-polarising, new-wavey *Short Stories/Tall Tales*, then disc four's newly unearthed rough mixes are a blast, and with a generous DVD's worth of high-quality, career-spanning performances and in-depth interviews this reissue is an immersive document of Horslips' vibrant, innovative sound in full flight.

Rich Davenport

Jack Bruce

Harmony Row *CHERRY RED*

Further up the rope ladder.



With his second solo album Jack Bruce purposefully put even more distance between himself and his old band Cream. *Harmony Row* (1971) takes a more folky direction, albeit more a kind of Canterbury Scene-type version of folk than anyone at the English Folk Dance And Song Society might recognise. Guitarist Chris Spedding and drummer John Marshall were both retained from *Songs For A Tailor*, and there's no way you could mistake them for Eric Clapton and Ginger Baker.

The mellow pop introduction of *Can You Follow*, with Bruce on piano, segues into *Escape To The Royal Wood (On Ice)*, which has a Strawbs feel to it, with Bruce providing bass and keyboards as well as vocals. From then on Bruce's innovative bass catches a succession of genres and styles on the run while his piano flicks at passing melodies and his voice grapples with Pete Brown's surrealist lyrics. 'Commercial' is not the word, but it's fun if you're in the mood.

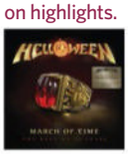
This reissue includes a second disc with a new stereo mix plus out-takes, a third with a 5.1 remix, and a fourth featuring Bruce, Spedding, Marshall and Bruce's old bandmate Graham Bond performing on Granada TV's *Out Front* in 1971, plus a 1972 documentary on Bruce.

Hugh Fielder

Helloween

March Of Time *BMG*

Celebratory box set heavy on highlights.



In May 1998, several thousand headbangers sought refuge from the flapping of nu metal's voluminous trousers at Brixton Academy with Iron Maiden and Helloween. The Hamburg band's performance showcased 80s-vintage feelgood power-metal highlights, while signalling that they'd re-embraced their roots, after crash-landing with early-90s musical detours.

The current Pumpkins Reunited, merging the latter-day formation, fronted by Andi Deris, with predecessors Kai Hansen and Michael Kiske, has followed suit, celebrating Helloween's history, while making new music.

The celebrations intensify with this 40th anniversary set, offering 42 remastered tracks. Although there's no new material, the beefy remastering should satisfy hard-core pumpkinheads, notably on early speedballs like *Ride The Sky*. Likewise the filler-free selection balances late-80s touchstones (*I Want Out, Dr Stein*), equally strong Deris-era bangers (*Power*) and fiery reunion tracks (*Skyfall*), making *March Of Time* a no-brainer for even casual fans.

Rich Davenport

Greg Lake

Live *SPIRIT OF UNICORN*

Lucky man.



Keith Emerson's genial insecurities meant he could never fully acknowledge Greg Lake's contribution to ELP, but Lake certainly could. And while Emerson couldn't really conceive of anything less than epic, Lake was happy performing at a more human level.

Live was recorded during a 20-date UK tour that Lake undertook in late 2005 at the less-than-hallowed Stevenage Theatre. The show, here spread across two CDs, covers most of ELP's greatest hits from *Pictures At An Exhibition* to *Fanfare For The Common Man* (although *Tarkus* is given a miss) and Lake's finest moments with King Crimson, plus a couple of solo songs including *I Believe In Father Christmas*.

Lake is in good voice throughout, particularly on *Take A Pebble*, which is done on acoustic guitar rather than piano and is a highlight of the show. His five-piece band do a good job of reproducing ELP's more fiendish pieces, although interestingly it takes two keyboard players to do justice to even a restrained Emerson.

This release includes a DVD film of the show with backstage and rehearsal footage.

Hugh Fielder

BEST OF THE REST

Other reissues out this month.

Rod Stewart

Ultimate Hits *WARNER MUSIC*

With a Faces reunion apparently imminent, what better opportunity to trot out another batch of Rod's greatest unit shifters (in either one- or two-CD options). There isn't much from the superb early albums you've already got. So that's not a problem. But then again... is? **7/10**

Carter USM

Worry Bomb *CHRYSALIS*

A drum machine wasn't all CUSM had going for them, but this fifth LP (now on three CDs, with B-sides/live Phoenix '94), which introduced drummer Wez, coincided with a punkward creative downturn. *Let's Get Tattoos* is still a banger, but the magic's diminished. **7/10**

Testors

Prime Primitive 1976-1977 *GREEN NOISE*

Fourteen identipunk tracks from CBGB-era NYC vocalist/guitarist Sonny Vincent's Testors you've probably never heard that demonstrate why you've probably never heard them: an ersatz Dead Boys. **5/10**

The Skids

The Singles *CAPTAIN OI!*

Punk chroniclers get sniffy about The Skids. Like Sham and the Subs they committed the cardinal sin of arriving a fraction late before selling an awful lot of records. There are 34 tracks here, As and Bs, from Feb '87 indie debut to 1981's *Iona*. Rich in hits it's only a joy. **8/10**

Various

Rough Trade 45s Vol 1 78-80 *ROUGH TRADE*

A box of eight sevens from pioneering indie label clearly fashioned to exploit the 60-something market. Some are essential (the Cabs' *Nag Nag Nag*, SLF's *Alternative Ulster*), but it's an expensive way to own them. Pop Group, Raincoats, Subway Sect + 3 also serve. **7/10**

Judy Dyble

Darkness To Light *ESOTERIC*

An excellent entry point into the quintessentially English psych-folk eccentricity of the divine Jude. Implausible vocal clarity, flawless diction, a side order of twee, but much magic. Three scarce latter albums combined: the perfect complement to the Fairports' first. **7/10**

The Fall

Middle Class Revolt *CHERRY RED*

You have to wonder if these endlessly expanded (six-CD) Fall sets still sell with no Mark E to promote them with his unpredictable live shows and gurning personality. Anyway, here's studio album 16 from '94, with B's, three gigs, Peel sessions and even your actual Peel. **7/10**

All Seeing I

Pickled Eggs & Sherbert *LONDON*

Though not strictly rock, this sole '99 album from Sheffield electronic production collective ASI certainly inhabits an adjacent planet you're strongly advised to visit. Tony Christie's takes on *Happy Birthday Nicola* and Jarvis Cocker's *Walk Like A Panther* are pure genius. **7/10**

Art Brut

Sorry That It Doesn't Sound Like It's Planned! 2009-2020 *EDSEL*

Five-CD/three-LP + extras set from incomparable post-punk schrechgesanger Eddie Argos's art-rockers shows what the world's been missing. From arrested development *DC Comics & Chocolate Milkshake* to indie-lifer's true confessions *Slap Dash For No Cash*. **7/10**

Gong

I See You (10th Anniversary Remix) *KSCOPE*

Despite being the final Gong album with Daevid Allen, *I See You* marked both a huge leap forward (due to a newly reinvigorated line-up featuring ex-Cardiacs Kavus Torabi) and a welcome reprise of a sound strongly reminiscent of their *Camembert Electrique* peak. **7/10**

Wire

Nine Sevens *PINK FLAG*

Snuck out as a double vinyl on RSD, a handy one-stop-birth-of-post-punk-shop for all connoisseurs of late-70s forward momentum. Wire's first few singles, both sides, in order: *Outdoor Miner, I Am The Fly*, not a sniff of a hit, but who cares? Time proved them right. **9/10**

THE HARD STUFF
STUFF
MULTIMEDIA



Frank Zappa And The Mothers Of Invention



Frank Zappa's Cheaper Than Cheep *ZAPPA.COM*

Lost TV special catches '74 Mothers at their supernatural peak.

Captured when mainstream US punters were surprisingly fine with settling down in front of *Midnight Special* or *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert* to enjoy a TV dinner-enhanced sofa gig, *Cheaper Than Cheep* is the Zappa television extravaganza that never was.

Identifying an untapped market stream, ever resourceful FZ, tired of waiting for networks to call, decided to make his own. Consequently, on June 21, 1974, he invited a small audience to witness his latest Mothers line-up (a doozy, fortunately) run through a career-encapsulating selection of musical bon-bons including trios of tracks from both '66 debut *Freak Out!* and 1975's as yet unrecorded One *Size Fits All*, at their functional, if ratty, rehearsal space.

It was hot, it was uncomfortable and it was long. Nowhere as spontaneous as it appears, it involved multiple takes of arduously complex material. Even when edited it exceeded two hours. No surprise, then, that its cast of tame attendees had to be virtually forced to their feet to 'dance' to show closer *Camarillo Brillo* by a well-meaning stagehand as Zappa mischievously interrupts his vocal to self-destructively call out the deceit with the insistent stage direction: "Get a shot of this guy here trying to make the audience look like they're having a good time... The most fraudulent, ridiculous, Hollywood ending to a television show I've ever seen." How very, very Frank.

While Zappa self-identified as a freak, he's more accurately defined as a control freak, and this foible would repeatedly hole his best efforts below the waterline, both artistically and practically. The fact the show never made it to air – waiting in Zappa's vault for half a century – was because the sound and video recordings didn't synch. Possibly not producer Frank's fault, but it's the sort of error that one imagines TV networks simply don't make. And while these Mothers – George Duke (keyboards), Tom Fowler (bass), Chester Thompson (drums), Napoleon Murphy Brock (tenor sax, flute, vocals), Jeffrey Lael Simmons (guitar), Ruth Underwood (percussion, unlikely star of the show) – are utterly exemplary, Zappa's control issues leave them drilled to such an extent that a potentially exhilarating ascent into improvisational free-jazz nirvana is always out of the question. That said, despite minor shortcomings, this is a beautifully restored must-watch for all serious Zappaphiles.

Ian Fortnam

The Who: Album By Album – Listening To You

Dante DiCarlo *PEN & SWORD*

Much more than just an albums overview.



"The song starts with a shimmering D chord, strummed on Pete's twelve-string Rickenbacker [...] then the harmonized vocals enter before the whole band kicks in, led by Keith's insistent drumbeat and Pete's chiming arpeggiated guitar chords" – author Dante DiCarlo on *The Kids Are Alright*.

This is a book by a fan for fans – DiCarlo is the longest-standing member of prime Who tribute band Who's Next (he's Pete Townshend). This means you're not necessarily going to get much pungent gossip here, although, being a Who fan, he does relish the bust-ups and brawls, the broken strings and fractured relationships, and doesn't shy away from including them when required.

What you have in this book is plenty of meticulous detail, songs pored over and described from a musician's perspective, individual tracks examined in detail and described – 14 chapters covering 12 studio albums, all the way from 1965's near-cursed *My Generation* debut to 2019's surprisingly well-regarded *Who* – with plenty of gloriously aggressive guitar in between.

Everett True

Looking For The Perfect Beat

Arthur Baker *FABER*

Boston-born producer recalls his eclectic career.



Arthur Baker, now 70, was a young club DJ playing Philly soul when he took a sound engineering course as a ploy to hang around studios. He's never looked back, rocketing from his Kraftwerk cut-and-paste Afrika Bambaataa productions to collaborations with, among countless others, New Order, Hall & Oates, Pet Shop Boys, Mogwai and Bruce Springsteen. The Boss was hesitant about Baker remixing *Dancing In The Dark* at first, but after covertly spinning the result in a club and witnessing the crowd going wild, he happily bought Baker some "cold Buds".

The producer inevitably has great stories, from hip-hop to rock, and in this smartly written memoir balances his personal narrative (he owns London bars and restaurants) with starry anecdotes. He's had a knack for being in the right place at the right time, even if Al Green's multiple scatty bewildering personalities bombarded him with – to reference Baker's New Order highlight – confusion.

Chris Roberts

Within Temptation

The Invisible Force

WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/@WTOFFICIAL

Short but powerful documentary on music's place in a war zone.



Within Temptation's pivot from corset-clad symphonic metallers to politically engaged activists has been an unexpected but welcome surprise. Their most recent album, 2023's *Bleed Out*, explicitly addressed the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the human cost that continues almost three years later.

This 23-minute documentary, available to watch free on YouTube, adds context to the album. Ostensibly centred on singer Sharon Den Adel's performance at the Atlas Music Festival in Kyiv in 2024, it effectively illuminates life as a musician in a country under constant, needless attack from a relentless aggressor. Den Adel acts as our guide, meeting Ukrainian musicians who give a sense of the heightened state of awareness that comes with the situation and, in the case of metal band Blind 8, the practicalities of having half your line-up conscripted in defence of the country.

A sobering watch but a defiant one too.

Dave Everley

Croydonopolis: A Journey To The City That Never Was

Will Noble *SAFE HAVEN*

Amusing and affectionate history of the much maligned Windy City.

Loathed by Bromley boy David Bowie, who despite studying at its art college called the place his "nemesis"; knocking Croydon is like shooting fish in a barrel. And yet, beginning with

SAM EMERSON/PRESS

Bill Haley and Buddy Holly at the Davis Theatre in the 1950s, Croydon has a rich musical heritage that includes no less than three appearances from The Beatles in 1963, plus Jimi Hendrix at The Star Hotel. Muddy Waters liked Croydon so much he insisted on playing an impromptu extra set at the aforementioned Star. Pete Townshend, commenting on the pristine acoustics of the Fairfield Halls following a Who show there in '69, said: "I could play there all night".

Croydonopolis isn't purely about the borough's musical history, although it covers enough of that ground – from punk shows at the Greyhound (including the Ramones) and pub rock at The Cartoon, to the much missed vinyl emporiums like Beanos and 101 Records – to make it interesting for those who have lived there or visited.

Local hero Captain Sensible of The Damned, who used to clean the loos at the Fairfield Halls, describes the book as "a stonking read". 'Nuff said.

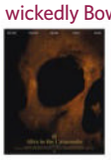
Dave Ling

Queens Of The Stone Age

Alive In The Catacombs

MATADOR

In the infamous catacombs beneath Paris, something wickedly Bowie-esque stirs.



Watched on by an audience of the dead, with ranks of skulls peering out from walls of bone, Josh Homme rises from a tomb marked 'ETERNITE'. As his song, a haunting a-capella *Running Joke*, transforms into *Paper Machete*, he's joined in his torch-lit chamber by a group of gothic sophisticates on strings, acoustic guitars and haunting chanson keyboards. For half an hour he leads them through the dripping hallways and burial chambers of the Paris catacombs – the first band ever to play there, sans fans, in 2024 – a Stygian balladeer hymning the six million whose remains are here interred on towards the darkest place.

Shot by Paris-based production company La Blogothèque and personifying QOTSA's recent art-noir leanings, this arcane live session smacks of a more elemental *Blackstar*. As the mournful grace of *Kalopsia* gives way to a diabolic chorus, Homme holds his hand to his face as if seeing through the hieroglyphic eye painted on his palm. For *Villains Of Circumstance* he reclines against a tomb wall as if singing to the souls of the damned. *Suture Up Your Future* is the token 80s synth-goth piece, and *I Never Came* the grooving devil reel, after which Homme fades into the dark, mesmeric and macabre, back whence he came. No, you're shivering.

Mark Beaumont

Bono: Stories Of Surrender

Dir: Andrew Dominik

APPLE TV+

U2 frontman holds court on camera.



A slickly packaged documentary remix of the spoken-word theatre shows that Bono hosted to promote his 2022 autobiography *Surrender*, this handsome monochrome concert film from Australian director and frequent Nick Cave collaborator Andrew Dominik is consistently engaging but not entirely convincing. The U2 singer's artfully staged, well-polished monologue is peppered with wry jokes and tender personal memories: his mother Irene Hewson's tragic early death, his strained relations with his opera-loving father Brendan, marriage and family, emergency heart surgery and more.

A generally funny and lively raconteur on camera, Bono skates across some big themes like mortality, the dirty politics of giving aid to Africa without cancelling debt, and even thorny criticism of his own tax-dodging hypocrisy: "Hypocrites do the right thing at least some of the time," he shrugs. "Motives don't matter, outcomes matter." Maybe true, but ethically complex issues deserve serious interrogation, not glib slogans.

Joined on stage by a chamber trio, he punctuates biographical ruminations with semi-unplugged live reworkings of *With Or Without You, Vertigo, Beautiful Day, Where The Streets Have No Name* and other U2 anthems. Pared down but punchy, the songs mostly work well.

But behind all the carefully scripted humility and slick salesman charm, *Stories Of Surrender* is very much Bono on his own self-serving terms.

Stephen Dalton





THE HARD STUFF BUYER'S GUIDE



Steve Lillywhite: gated drums a speciality.

Steve Lillywhite

The producer has his fingerprints all over a number of top rock, post-punk, new wave and art-rock albums of the 80s in particular.

Steve Lillywhite was as synonymous with the 80s as big hair, spandex and leg warmers. Working with engineer Hugh Padgham on Peter Gabriel's solo career-defining third album, the duo inventively used the music compression technique of gated reverb. It quickly became a trademark 80s sound. Lillywhite had worked on it prior to Gabriel's third, gradually honing the sonic sculpture: instead of letting a drum 'hit' die away naturally, he cropped its decay soon after its initial hit, creating a punchier 'thud' rather than a sustained 'boom'. That sound was most notably demonstrated on Phil Collins's *In The Air Tonight* from 1981's *Face Value* (which was co-produced by Collins and Padgham), following the latter's work with Lillywhite on the Gabriel album.

Lillywhite's formative years coincided with the advent of synth-pop as well as post-punk. While not directly involved, electronic music's pioneering creativity of the era was an influence on Lillywhite and he co-produced Ultravox's 1977 debut along with the band and Brian Eno. Lillywhite had previously helped the band get signed to Island records by working on their demo.

Working as an engineer/mixer on Golden Earring's *Contraband* (1976) and *Live* (1977), he then produced debut albums for both ex-New York Dolls/Heartbreakers guitarist Johnny Thunders and his brother's band The Members. That combination of producing trad rock and post-punk new wave/art-rock became Lillywhite's modus operandi – despite his love of blues and prog, plus his admiration of pop supremo, Trevor Horn.

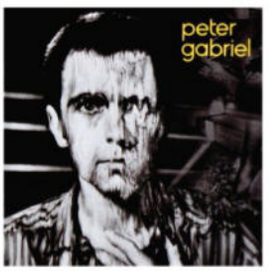
Banshees manager Nils Stevenson – a friend of Johnny Thunders – was impressed by Lillywhite's drum sound on *You Can't Put Put Your Arms Around A Memory* while visiting the studio during the *So Alone* sessions, and hired him for the Banshees. His seminal work on *The Scream* made him the obvious choice for the landmark post-punk palette of XTC's *Drums & Wires*. Peter Gabriel then hired Lillywhite for that third – and superior – album of his initial, same-named, solo records.

A remarkable career followed. The six-time Grammy-winning Steve Lillywhite CBE produced Talking Heads, Toyah, Phish, Counting Crows, The Killers, Dave Matthews Band, The La's, Morrissey and many more.

"It wasn't that I was looking for the sound I wanted," he said of his skill, "I rejected all the sounds that I didn't like until I ended up with something I could accept."

Alex Burrows

Essential Classics



Peter Gabriel

Peter Gabriel (aka Melt)

CHARISMA, 1980

Ending the 70s with production heavyweights Bob Ezrin and Robert Fripp working on his first two solo albums, Gabriel's choice of Lillywhite showed that the ex-Genesis visionary was willing to take risks and wanted something both darker and more cutting-edge. The unnerving noirish *Low*-era-Bowie-meets-Bauhaus opener of *Intruder* features Phil Collins's apocalyptic gated tribal drums, ghoulish backing-vocal harmonies and vocal menace. Gabriel embraced and encouraged Lillywhite's ambitious innovation. Reunited with his engineer Hugh Padgham, this innovative work set an incredibly high standard.



Siouxsie & The Banshees

The Scream *POLYDOR, 1978*

Along with Magazine's *Real Life* and PiL's *Public Image: First Issue* – both also released in 1978 – *The Scream* is one of the albums that effectively launched post-punk – in sound genrefication, not just chronology. But its Ballardian aesthetic and Kraftwerk-influenced motorik set *The Scream*'s avant experimentalism apart. Building on his ambient compression of debut single *Hong Kong Garden* (his first hit as a producer, at the age of just 23), Lillywhite's work was what Sioux and Severin wanted: "cold and machine-like, but passionate", exemplified by the atmospheric *Pure*, disorientating *Jigsaw Feeling* and antagonistic *Metal Postcard*.

Superior Reputation cementing



XTC
Drums & Wires *VIRGIN, 1979*

XTC's third album represented a high-water mark of post-punk's new-wave sonic Dadaism with the band's idiosyncratic quirk.

"If you have two guitarists, why play the same thing?" Lillywhite recently asked an interviewer. No danger of that with the angular staccato of Andy Partridge and Dave Gregory. Meanwhile, Colin Moulding told Lilywhite that he wanted his bass to sound "woolly and indistinct". The drums are flanged to such an extreme on *Making Plans For Nigel* that they sound like a steel mill's cooling turbine. *Drums & Wires* remains a stunning work of art that defies categorisation.



U2
War *ISLAND, 1983*

Having produced U2's *Boy* and *October*, despite Lillywhite's insistence that U2 should try someone else for their third album they went back to him for what Bono described as Lillywhite's clarity of vision. With a phenomenal work ethic, he mixed classic and timeless U2 debut hit single *New Year's Day* in just 15 minutes. *Sunday Bloody Sunday,* with its militaristic tattoo, is more definitive early U2, and *Two Hearts Beat As One* combines Edge's XTC-ish jagged chop with melodic harmonies. But the underrated acoustic *Drowning Man* with its proto-*Unforgettable Fire* Eno/Lanois-style ambience is a Lillywhite favourite.



Big Country
The Crossing *MERCURY, 1983*

Steve Lillywhite and Big Country influenced each other equally on Big Country's debut; frontman Stuart Adamson wrote the band's signature hit *In A Big Country* after being influenced by the sounds being created in the studio at the time of the album sessions. It's a huge sound but one that's still spacious and with the ability to perfectly convey anthemic Celtic rock despite the absence of any traditional instruments (*Smash Hits* made much of Adamson's "swirlesque bagpipe guitar" sound), but with the thunderous Brezezicki/Butler rhythm section. Wonderful stuff that somehow evokes expansive panoramic landscapes. Shout!



The Pogues
If I Should Fall From Grace With God *WARNERS, 1988*

A band whose members Lillywhite maintained that he "had to record early", without any real need to elaborate on his meaning. *Rum, Sodomy & The Lash* was a masterpiece, but *Grace* was the enormous commercial breakthrough. Despite the back-and-forth of Lillywhite's wife Kirsty MacColl duetting with Shane MacGowan on *Fairytale Of New York*, their vocals were recorded separately. But deep cuts like *Thousands Are Sailing* and *The Broad Majestic Shannon* are the real gems here. As the band's sound matured, they worked with Lillywhite at the ideal point in their career.

Good Worth exploring



Psychedelic Furs
Talk Talk Talk *CBS, 1981*

Their self-titled debut album featured no less than four producers – including Martin Hannett – but, crucially, Lillywhite owned its outstanding tracks, including *Sister Europe*, which once again featured that recognisable drum sound. The popularity of *Sister Europe*'s moody slow-burn meant Lillywhite was top choice as sole producer for the Furs' Television-influenced follow-up. A long 80s lifespan, *Talk Talk Talk* was retroactively celebrated for *Pretty In Pink*, which inspired the 1986 bratpack film of the same name. The album broke the London band in the US with its abrasive yet polished and poppy new-wave melancholic melodies.



Joan Armatrading
Walk Under Ladders *A&M, 1981*

Evolving her blues folk origin, Armatrading embraced rock in the early 80s with her sixth album *Me Myself I*. For its follow-up, Lillywhite brought in new-wave heroes like synth maestro Thomas Dolby and XTC's Andy Partridge (guitars) for a thoroughly new Armatrading sound on *I'm Lucky,* while Sly & Robbie did the business on dub number *I Can't Lie To Myself*. Lillywhite's combination of his twin loves of blues and prog filtered through new wave wasn't to everyone's tastes – specifically the US – but it demonstrates his desire for innovation and pushing the aesthetic envelope.



Simple Minds
Sparkle In The Rain *VIRGIN, 1984*

Having provoked the ire of Lee, Lifeson and Peart by tacitly agreeing to produce Rush's *Grace Under Pressure* but then backing out, Lillywhite instead headed to Rockfield for the sixth Minds album. His job was to capture the huge stadium sound that the band had recently been afforded thanks to their increasingly mammoth live shows as a result of *New Gold Dream's* success. Translating that live vibe in the studio bore the colossal sonic intensity of *Waterfront* and *Up On The Catwalk*. While *Sparkle In The Rain* didn't measure up to the glory of *New Gold Dream* or the sales of *Once Upon A Time*, it was enormous in sound. Job done.

Avoid



Rolling Stones
Dirty Work *COLUMBIA, 1986*

Listen to Charlie Watts's wonderfully loose samba shuffle on the live version of *Sympathy For The Devil* on 1970's *Get Yer Ya-Yas Out!* Compare it to the frigid diabolical cover of *Harlem Shuffle* here. The drums might as well be a Roland TR-808 machine. It simply doesn't work.

With Charlie, Ronnie and Bill all studio absentees and Jagger and Richards at the career peak of their feuding, Lillywhite met the Stones at the worst possible time. But specific personnel foibles aside, his techniques are out of place for a band best left under-produced and unpolished. Even the style-bereft DayGlo worn morosely in the sleeve photo is an incongruous misstep.

Essential Playlist

Intruder
Peter Gabriel

No Self Control
Peter Gabriel

Games Without Frontiers
Peter Gabriel

Mirage
Siouxsie & The Banshees

Metal Postcard
Siouxsie & The Banshees

Making Plans For Nigel
XTC

Ten Feet Tall
XTC

New Year's Day
U2

Two Hearts Beat As One
U2

Big Country
Big Country

Fields Of Fire
Big Country

Thousands Are Sailing
The Pogues

Fiesta
The Pogues

Pretty In Pink
The Psychedelic Furs

Dumb Waiters
The Psychedelic Furs

I'm Lucky
Joan Armatrading

No Love
Joan Armatrading

Waterfront
Simple Minds

Up On The Catwalk
Simple Minds

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2025 TOUR DATES

04 JUL	TRING DEMBE THEATRE	
05 JUL	ALFOLD ROCK & BLUES FESTIVAL	
11 JUL	BURES MUSIC FESTIVAL	
17 JUL	CAMBERLEY LOGIN LOUNGE	
19 JUL	BLACKPOOL WATERLOO BAR	
20 JUL	SHEFFIELD GREYSTONES	
03 AUG	CAMBRIDGE ROCK FESTIVAL	
08 AUG	BRIGHTON KOMEDIA	
09 AUG	BUXTON BLUES FESTIVAL	
09 AUG	STOCKPORT FIREVOLT FESTIVAL	
24 AUG	COLNE R&B FEST	
04 SEP	WOLVERHAMPTON KK'S STEEL MILL	
05 SEP	SOUTHAMPTON THE BROOK	
06 SEP	EDINBURGH LIQUID ROOMS^	
07 SEP	NEWCASTLE WYLAM BREWERY^	
11 SEP	BRISTOL FLEECE^	
12 SEP	CARDIFF GLOBE^	
14 SEP	COLCHESTER ARTS CENTRE^	
28 SEP	SOUTHEND CHINNERYS^	
01 OCT	GLOUCESTER GUILDHALL*	
02 OCT	MANCHESTER NIGHT N DAY	
11 OCT	GODALMING BOROUGH HALL	
12 OCT	BARNOLDSWICK MUSIC & ARTS CENTRE	
15 OCT	LONDON 100 CLUB	
16 OCT	NORWICH BRICKMAKERS	
18 OCT	ALDERSHOT WESTEND CENTRE	
25 OCT	HARTLEPOOL HALLELUJAH FEST	
26 OCT	LINCOLN THE DRILL	
06 NOV	DERBY THE FLOWERPOT	
07 NOV	WHITBY ROCKS	
08 NOV	DUDLEY LAMP TAVERN	
05 DEC	LOOE BLUES, RHYTHM & ROCK FEST	
06 DEC	BRISTOL LOUISIANA*	
07 DEC	STAINES THAMESIDE BREWERY & TAP	
18 DEC	LEIGHTON BUZZARD LIBRARY THEATRE	
19 DEC	PORTSMOUTH WEDGEWOOD ROOMS	
21 DEC	HASTINGS THE CARLISLE	

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- CLASSIC ROCK MAGAZINE

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LIVE!

The High-Voltage What's On Guide

Edited By Ian Fortnam (Reviews) and Dave Ling (Tours)

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Band with many a past glory present a vision of the mega-show future.

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CHLOE WEIR



"For me, Skynyrd always made great records, but it was a live band, and that's still true today... And we never, ever phone it in."

Lynyrd Skynyrd

The iconic southern rock band play four UK shows in July. Will they play *Free Bird*? Good chance.

Returning to the UK for the first time since the passing of their last true original member, guitarist Gary Rossington, southern rock icons Lynyrd Skynyrd are also releasing a live album of his final show with the band and won't rule out the possibility of making new music. In fact, says singer Johnny Vant Zant, it's just "a question of time".

Skynyrd's final show with Gary Rossington is released on June 27 as *Celebrating 50 Years: Live At The Ryman*. Five months later he was gone. It must have been an emotional night in Nashville.
It sure was. Gary's health was getting really bad. He called me and said: "Hey bubba" – Gary called everyone bubba – "I may even have to sit down." But eventually he felt well enough to stand, and it turned out to be a really great, great night for us.

Rossington joined the show after six songs and remained until the encore of *Free Bird*. There's no easy way to ask this: was there an air of finality?
No. Gary was such a survivor. He lived through that awful plane crash [in 1977] and a lot of other things that happened afterwards. I never thought he would leave us this early [Rossington was 71]. Gary was such a peaceful man and a real private person. He never complained, he just carried on doing what he loved doing.

Many times he expressed his wish of the band and its legacy carrying on after he was gone.
When Gary got real sick I told him it might be time to throw in our boots and hat, but he insisted: "No, no, no, man. Keep playing these songs. Skynyrd shouldn't go away." Since the plane crash, Gary's whole life was keeping alive that legacy. What happens in the future, I don't know, but right now that's what we're going to do.

You don't pay any attention to the naysayers?
None at all. That stuff was around even when Billy [Powell, who died in 2009] Leon [Wilkeson, who passed in 2001, Ed [King, who Skynyrd lost in 2018] and Artimus [Pyle, drummer for two spells] were in the band. Those people are not gonna be there whenever I take my last breath. Ronnie [Van Zant, who died in the crash] was my brother and



I'm proud of his accomplishments, so protecting his legacy means an awful lot to me.

Is Damon Johnson from Thin Lizzy and Brother Cane now an official member?
Are you kidding? Damon's an Alabama boy and he's one of us. He was groomed [for his role in the band] by Gary.

Getting back to the live album, your brother Donnie Van Zant from Van Zant and .38 Special, Shinedown frontman Brent Smith, Marcus King, John Osborne of the Brothers Osborne and the rapper Jelly Roll were all guests at the Nashville show. Jelly Roll seems a bit incongruous.
[Laughs] Man, Jelly is a great guy. I had no idea who he was, but he's the real deal. He came in reeking of pot, humble and wanting to do a great job, which is something all of our guests accomplished. Marcus King is such an incredible guitarist and a wonderful singer too, as well as being one heck of a nice guy.

Do you view this tour's special guests from Atlanta, Blackberry Smoke, as kindred souls – or maybe even surrogate sons?
I do. Those guys have been around for a while now, and not only are they a great band, they've also become very close friends. It's going to be such fun to make music and hang out together.

Skynyrd are now signed to the Italian label Frontiers Records…
[Interrupting] You know, I just did a gospel album [*Always Look Up*] with my brother Donnie [billed as Brother To Brother, released last year], and Frontiers put that out. We had worked many times previously with Tom Lipsky [the label's head of A&R in North America], so when we were looking for a home for *Live At The Ryman* we carried that on, and so far everything is working out really well.

When the deal was announced, tantalisingly, it mentioned that both the label and the band were looking ahead to "exciting new projects". Could that include new music?
We recorded a song called *The Last Of The Street Survivors*, and we put it out [in 2020]. You can Google it. We were headed to doing a new studio album, and then Gary's health got really bad. There are other songs written with Gary before he died that we could record. We will leave that door open for the future.

If those songs do exist, it would be logical for them to be heard.
That's true, and it would be a question of time. For me, Skynyrd always made great records, but it was a live band, and that's still true today. When I first joined [in 1987] we were all still into drinking and having a party on stage – just like the audience – but nowadays we soak that music up. It's become more of a spiritual thing, and we never, ever phone it in. That's something I'm very proud of.

Finally, what's the likelihood of Brother To Brother playing some shows in the UK?
Once again I will say never say never. We'll see what happens. **DL**

Lynyrd Skynyrd's four-date tour UK begins in Manchester on July 15.

JEREMY SAFFER/PRESS



King Diamond

The Danish shrieker returns with "a horror show set to music".

King Diamond – known to his mum as Kim Bendix Petersen – found fame and a degree of notoriety during the early 80s as frontman and lyricist with the highly influential satanic metal band Mercyful Fate. During the 90s he was a solo artist, before the first of several Mercyful Fate reunions. The Dane previews a pair of rare UK solo dates.

In 2013 you told *Classic Rock* about your new healthy lifestyle. Are you still reaping the benefits of it?
That was only three years after my triple-bypass operation, so absolutely. I'm still doing exactly what the doctors told me. I stopped smoking and began eating differently. Salt is completely out of my diet.

And the changes benefit your voice?
Oh my! Yes. Back in 2011 I was a part of Metallica's [30th anniversary] concert at the Fillmore in San Francisco [where along with Metallica and several Mercyful Fate members King performed a medley of the band's standards]. It was the first time I had tried singing after the surgery, during which three metal rods were inserted in my chest. I changed the entire way I sing. The improved lung capacity makes it easier holding long notes.

Last December you released a brand new song, *Spider Lilly*, as part of a forthcoming Horror Trilogy. When can we expect the first instalment, *Saint Lucifer's Hospital 1920*?
It's hard to say. During a show on the last tour I fell down a staircase and almost broke both ankles. But at the moment I am writing for both Mercyful Fate and King Diamond. For Mercyful Fate there are four songs, but King Diamond is almost done. I have song titles for all three albums.

It's eighteen years since your last solo album, *Give Me Your Soul… Please*.
[Exasperated] Oh my god. There have been so many setbacks.

On social media the fans are getting impatient. On Facebook someone complained: "Even Tool didn't take this long."
Everybody is complaining. *I'm* getting impatient, too. But there are things nobody knows. I could have died three times since 2010.

Three times?!
I'm being serious. In hospital, at one point my blood pressure was more than three hundred… they couldn't even measure it [a reading of around 120 is considered normal]. The doctor said: "You should not be here." And there were three similar episodes. After another example, a heart doctor told me: "Had you gone to Germany on tour [as planned] you would definitely be dead." For a while I was uncertain whether or not I could tour again.

Fortunately that's all in the past, and a pair of solo dates in Manchester and London loom. Will we hear some of your new material?
You will hear *Spider Lilly*, absolutely, and another new one, *Electro Therapy*. But there will be a lot of old stuff – *Funeral*, *Arrival* and *A Mansion In Darkness* from *Abigail* [1987] – plus *Voodoo* [title track of an album from 1998] and *Eye Of The Witch* [from 1990's *The Eye*] now has a real organ, which used to be on tape. After many, many years, *Abigail* is now back. I think it's a great set.

For any King Diamond virgins out there, it's also a theatrical show.
Yeah. I wear different masks and coats. When they [the newcomers] see it they will realise it's a little different. Ghosts fly around. It's like a horror show set to music. **DL**

King Diamond plays Manchester on June 30 and London the following day.



"For the last few tours the setlist has represented our whole career... We try to choose some songs that we haven't done live in the past."

Sparks

With 28 albums' worth of songs to choose from, "hopefully there will be some surprises".

Russell and Ron Mael never stand still. Since the birth of Sparks back in 1972, the singer and keyboard player siblings have operated within multiple genres, including pop, rock, new wave, synth-rock and disco, but always sounded like only themselves. We caught up with Russell prior to their latest tour, based on new album *MAD!*.

Sparks have released twenty-eight albums across seven decades, toured and explored side projects. Your parents must have instilled a very strong work ethic in you both
Our work ethic comes from ourselves and each other. We enjoy what we do and always want to be doing something adventurous and special that excites us. Then we know we will be satisfied creatively, and hopefully our fans will be happy too.

Sparks do things that other bands would run away from. For example, in 2008 you played a 21-night run in London featuring all 20 albums released to that point in their entirety. Where does that sense of ambition – of crazy danger, if you will – come from?
Well, that certainly was crazy, and something we would not recommend to other bands. A song on the new album called *Do Things My Own Way* encapsulates our approach. It's a mission statement that Sparks has had from day one as a band. We kind of like to take our own path.

The album's song *My Devotion* is a wry observation on obsessive, possibly unhealthy adulation of a sports team, a nation or a religion. Could it also refer to a fan of Sparks?
Like a few others from the album, *My Devotion* is about a relationship. We try to find ways of showing relationships in, hopefully, fresh ways that are tender but not saccharine.

***A Little Bit Of Light Banter* addresses the casual yet potentially destructive way people converse in 2025. For clarity, are you pro or against what the kids now refer to as 'bants'?**
It's more a song about human nature, the routine... flipping off the light and on to sleep.

A Martian visits Earth, wanting to know about Sparks. Which one song do you play it?
At the moment I would choose *Running Up A Tab At The Hotel For The Fab* from *MAD!*.

In 2015, Sparks made a collaborative album with Franz Ferdinand as FFS. Who else, current or from the past, might you be inclined to repeat that same process with?
From the past, but no longer alive... Michel Legrand who did the music for *The Umbrellas Of Cherbourg*, a film which was influential on us. The music is amazing and if you aren't crying by the movie's end you have no soul. Also, Little Richard, whose singing was on another level, so intense and spectacularly powerful. And Elvis...

The 2021 documentary *The Sparks Brothers* was critically praised. Were you fully satisfied by its portrayal of the band and its story?
When we started talking with [director] Edgar Wright it was clear that he has a passion for Sparks, and he did a great job. *The Sparks Brothers* was successful both creatively and commercially.

Presumably the latest tour will feature *MAD!* in its entirety during the first half, followed by a second set of hits and deep cuts?
For a while that was the format we used, but for the last few tours the setlist has represented our whole career. There are certain songs, like *This Town Ain't Big Enough For Both Of Us*, that we have to, and want to, play. We like to play a few songs from the new album and then we have the twenty-seven previous albums to choose from. We try to choose some songs that we haven't done live in the past, so hopefully there will be some surprises. **DL**

Sparks are on tour in June and July. Go to allsparks.com for details.

GAVIN ROSS/PRESS

Tour Dates

AC/DC
Edinburgh	Murrayfield Stadium	Aug 21

ARCH ENEMY, AMORPHIS, ELUVEITIE, GATECREEPER
Wolverhampton	Civic Hall	Oct 30
Manchester	Apollo	Oct 31
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Nov 1

BABYLON AD, BAD ACTRESS
London	Camden Underworld	Sep 4
Southampton	Suburbia	Sep 5
Leicester	HRH Sleaze	Sep 6
Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Sep 7
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Sep 10
Grimsby	Yardbirds Club	Sep 11
Bradford	Nightrain	Sep 12
Crumlin	The Patriot	Sep 14

ELLES BAILEY
Carlisle	Old Fire Station	Aug 2
Sunderland	Fire Station	Aug 3

KRIS BARRAS' HOLLOW SOULS
Bedford	Esquires	Oct 16
Chesterfield	Real Time Live	Oct 17
London	Camden Underworld	Oct 18
Stowmarket	John Peel Centre	Oct 19
Shoreham-by-Sea	Ropetackle Arts	Oct 22
Cardiff	The Globe	Oct 23
Leek	Foxlowe Arts	Oct 24
Gloucester	Guildhall	Oct 25
Norwich	Waterfront Studio	Oct 26
Grimsby	Docks Academy	Oct 29
Huddersfield	Parish	Oct 30
Birmingham	Castle & Falcon	Oct 31
Stockton-on-Tees	Georgian Theatre	Nov 1
Carlisle	Old Fire Station	Nov 2
Glasgow	Oran Mor	Nov 4
Edinburgh	La Belle Angele	Nov 5
York	Crescent	Nov 6
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Nov 7
Southampton	Suburbia	Nov 8
Tavistock	The Wharf	Nov 9

BLACK FLAG
Glasgow	Slay	Jun 20
Birmingham	Castle & Falcon	Jun 21
London	Camden Underworld	Jun 23

BLAZE BAYLEY
Newcastle	Trillians	Sep 1
Glasgow	Ivory Blacks	Sep 2
Norwich	Brickmakers	Sep 4
Gravesend	Red Lion	Sep 5
Worcester	Angel Of Rage	Sep 6
Grimsby	Yardbirds	Sep 7
Worthing	The Factory	Sep 25
Newport	The Patriot	Sep 26
Llandudno	Motorsport Lounge	Sep 27

BLACK SABBATH, METALLICA, GUNS N' ROSES, SLAYER, MORE
Birmingham	Villa Park	Jul 5

THE BLACK KEYS
Leeds	Millennium Square	Jul 8
Manchester	Castlefield Bowl	Jul 9
London	Alexandra Palace Park	Jul 11

GRAHAM BONNET BAND
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Oct 22
Glasgow	Slay	Oct 23
Wakefield	Venue 23	Oct 24
Crumlin	The Patriot	Oct 25
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Oct 26
Manchester	Academy 3	Oct 29
London	Camden Underworld	Oct 30
Plymouth	Quad Theatre	Oct 31
Bristol	Lost Horizon	Nov 1
Southampton	1865	Nov 2

JOE BONAMASSA PLAYS RORY GALLAGHER
Cork	Live At The Marquee	Jul 1-3

BRAVE RIVAL
Tring	Dembe Theatre	Jul 4
Alfold	Rock & Blues Festival	Jul 5
Bures	Music Festival	Jul 11
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Jul 19
Sheffield	The Greystones	Jul 20
Cambridge	Rock Festival	Aug 3
Brighton	Komedia	Aug 8
Buxton	Blues Festival	Aug 9
Stockport	Firevolt Festival	Aug 10
Colne	R&B Fest	Aug 24
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Sep 4
Southampton	The Brook	Sep 5
Barnoldswick	Music & Arts Centre	Oct 12
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Oct 15
Norwich	Brickmakers	Oct 16
Aldershot	West End Centre	Oct 18
Whitby	Rocks	Nov 7
Looe	Blues, Rhythm & Rock Festival	Dec 5
Bristol	Louisiana	Dec 6
Staines	Thameside Brewery	Dec 7
Portsmouth	Wedgewood Rooms	Dec 19
Hastings	The Carlisle	Dec 21

ELKIE BROOKS
Worthing	Assembly Hall	Jun 26

CARDINAL BLACK
Nottingham	Rock City	Oct 2
Manchester	Academy 2	Oct 3
Dublin	Opium	Oct 9
Belfast	Limelight	Oct 10
Glasgow	Garage	Oct 11
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Oct 16
Leeds	Stylus	Oct 17
Newcastle	Wylam Brewery	Oct 19
Bristol	SWX	Oct 23
Southampton	Engine Rooms	Oct 24
Brighton	Concorde 2	Oct 28
Cambridge	Junction	Oct 29
London	Camden Koko	Oct 30

ALICE COOPER, BOBBIE DAZZLE
Cardiff	Utilita Arena	Jul 22
Edinburgh	Playhouse	Jul 23

COUNTING CROWS
Dublin	3 Arena	Oct 21
Newcastle	City Hall	Oct 23
Manchester	Apollo	Oct 24
Leeds	Academy	Oct 26
Edinburgh	Academy	Oct 27
Wolverhampton	The Halls	Oct 29
Portsmouth	Guildhall	Oct 31
London	Wembley Arena	Nov 1

ROGER DALTREY
Halifax	Piece Hall	Jul 30
Margate	Dreamland	Aug 8

THE DEAD DAISIES, SCARLET REBELS, DAN BYRNE
Belfast	Limelight	Aug 13
Edinburgh	Academy	Aug 14
Newcastle	NX	Aug 15
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Aug 16
Cardiff	Tramshed	Aug 19
London	Islington Assembly Hall	Aug 20
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Aug 21

DEFTONES
London	Crystal Palace Park	Jun 29
Halifax	Piece Hall	Jul 24
St Austell	Eden Sessions	Jul 26

DEWOLFF, LIGHTNING THREADS
London	Oxford Street 100 Club	Oct 14

DISTURBED, MEGADETH
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Oct 20
Dublin	3 Arena	Oct 22
Manchester	AO Arena	Oct 24
London	O2 Arena	Oct 26
Glasgow	The Hydro	Oct 28

THE DOOBIE BROTHERS
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jul 11
Manchester	Co-op Live	Jul 15
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Jul 17
London	O2 Arena	Jul 19
Dublin	3 Arena	Jul 21

EXTREME
Birmingham	Academy	Aug 6
Halifax	Piece Hall	Aug 7

Recommended

FEEDER
Leeds	Academy	Sep 26
London	Brixton Academy	Sep 27
Manchester	Academy	Oct 2
Glasgow	Academy	Oct 3
Bristol	Beacon	Oct 9
Birmingham	Academy	Oct 11

FIELDS OF THE NEPHILIM
Birmingham	Academy	Oct 25

CLASSIC ROCK RECOMMENDS

METALLICA



You've probably heard of them: former top dogs in thrash metal's Big Three, now just as well known for a big ballad.

See over the page for dates. Currently June 29 to July 27.

Manchester	The Ritz	Oct 26
Glasgow	Academy	Oct 30
Whitby	Tomorrows Ghosts Festival	Oct 31
London	Kentish Town Forum	Nov 1

FLORENCE BLACK
Dublin	Academy 2	Sep 12
Belfast	Voodoo	Sep 13
Glasgow	Garage	Sep 15
Newcastle	Northumbria University	Sep 16
Sheffield	Corporation	Sep 17
Nottingham	Rock City	Sep 19
Birmingham	Academy 2	Sep 20
Norwich	Waterfront	Sep 21
London	Islington Academy	Sep 23
Southampton	Engine Rooms	Sep 24
Brighton	Concorde 2	Sep 25
Manchester	Academy 2	Sep 27

FM
Grimsby	Docks Academy	Sep 4
Barnsley	Birdwell Venue	Sep 5
Edinburgh	Liquid Rooms	Sep 6
Newcastle	Wylam Brewery	Sep 7
Bristol	The Fleece	Sep 11
Cardiff	Globe	Sep 12
Gloucester	Guildhall	Sep 13
Colchester	Arts Centre	Sep 14
London	Islington Academy	Sep 18
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Sep 19
Manchester	Academy	Sep 20
Farsley	Old Woollen	Sep 21
Chester	Live Rooms	Sep 27
Southend-on-Sea	Chinnerys	Sep 28

LITA FORD, VIXEN
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Jul 23
London	IndigO2	Jul 24

FUNERAL FOR A FRIEND, KILL THE LIGHTS, THE BLACKOUT
Leeds	Millennium Square	Jul 18
Cardiff	Castle	Jul 19

GALAHAD
Southampton	1865	Jun 21

GANG OF FOUR
London	Kentish Town Forum	Jun 24
Dublin	Button Factory	Jun 26, 27

THE GEORGIA THUNDERBOLTS
Newcastle	The Cluny	Jul 12
Wakefield	Venue 23	Jul 13
Bilston	Robin 2	Jul 15
Southampton	1865	Jul 17
London	Islington Academy	Jul 18
Maidstone	Maid Of Stone Festival	Jul 19

GUNS N' ROSES
Birmingham	Villa Park	Jun 23
London	Wembley Stadium	Jun 26

HALESTORM, BLOODYWOOD, KELSY KARTER & THE HEROINES
Cardiff	Utilita Arena	Nov 20
Glasgow	The Hydro	Nov 21
Birmingham	bp pulse LIVE	Nov 23
Manchester	Arena	Nov 24
London	O2 Arena	Nov 26

ROY HAPER, NICK HARPER
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Sep 27
London	Palladium	Sep 29
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Oct 2

WARREN HAYNES BAND
London	Islington Assembly Hall	Jul 1

JUSTIN HAYWARD
Cardiff	New Theatre	Oct 19
Truro	Hall For Cornwall	Oct 20
Weston-Super-Mare	Playhouse	Oct 21
Folkestone	Leas Cliff Hall	Oct 23
Bournemouth	Pavilion	Oct 24
Basingstoke	The Anvil	Oct 25
Llandudno	Venue Cymru	Oct 27
New Brighton	Floral Pavilion	Oct 28
Birmingham	Town Hall	Oct 29
Swindon	Wyvern	Oct 30
London	Cadogan Hall	Oct 31

HEAVY PETTIN
Barnoldswick	Arts Centre	Jun 27
London	Islington Academy 2	Jun 28
Hull	Wrecking Ball Arts Centre	Jul 10
Newcastle	Cluny	Jul 11
Glasgow	Slay	Jul 12
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Jul 13

HELLOWEEN, BEAST IN BLACK
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Oct 25

THE HOT DAMN!
Matlock Bath	Grand Pavilion	Oct 4
Southampton	Joiners	Oct 5
Bristol	The Exchange	Oct 8
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Oct 9
Leeds	Key Club	Oct 10
Cambridge	Mash Club	Oct 11
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Oct 12

GLENN HUGHES
Bristol	Academy	Oct 14
Portsmouth	Guildhall	Oct 15
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Oct 17
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Oct 18
Manchester	The Ritz	Oct 21
Newcastle	Boiler Shop	Oct 22
Nottingham	Rock City	Oct 24
Glasgow	Garage	Oct 25

JACK J HUTCHINSON
Sittingbourne	The Appleyard	Oct 1
Oxford	The Bullingdon	Oct 8
Bristol	Louisiana	Oct 9
London	Camden Black Heart	Oct 10
Carlisle	Blues Rhythm & Rock Festival	Oct 11
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Oct 12
Manchester	Night & Day Café	Oct 13
Newark	Flying Circus	Oct 17

BILLY IDOL, NEW MODEL ARMY
London	Wembley Arena	Jun 24

IRON MAIDEN, THE RAVEN AGE
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Jun 21
Manchester	Co-op Live	Jun 22
Dublin	Malahide Castle	Jun 25
London	London Stadium	Jun 28
Glasgow	Hydro	Jun 30

GETTY

LIVE!

JETHRO TULL (2026)

Perth	Concert Hall	Apr 19
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Apr 20
Edinburgh	Usher Hall	Apr 22
Newcastle	City Hall	Apr 23
Blackburn	King George's Hall	Apr 25
Salford	The Lowry	Apr 26
Liverpool	Philharmonic	Apr 28
Sheffield	City Hall	Apr 29
Hanley	Victoria Hall	May 2
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	May 3
Leicester	De Montfort Hall	May 5
London	Palladium	May 6
Basingstoke	The Anvil	May 8
Swansea	Brangwyn Hall	May 9
Bristol	Beacon Theatre	May 10
Truro	Hall For Cornwall	May 12
Bournemouth	Pavilion	May 13
Southampton	Guildhall	May 15
Eastbourne	Congress Theatre	May 16

JUDAS PRIEST, PHIL CAMPBELL AND THE BASTARD SONS

Scarborough	Open Air Theatre	Jul 23

JUDAS PRIEST, ALICE COOPER, PHIL CAMPBELL AND THE BASTARD SONS

London	O2 Arena	Jul 25

KILLSWITCH ENGAGE, HATEBREED, FIT FOR AN AUTOPSY, DECAPITATED

Wolverhampton	Civic Hall	Oct 8
Manchester	Academy	Oct 9
Newcastle	NX	Oct 11
Cardiff	Depot	Oct 12
Leeds	Academy	Oct 13
Glasgow	Academy	Oct 15
London	Wembley Arena	Oct 17
Belfast	Telegraph Building	Oct 19
Dublin	National Stadium	Oct 20

KERRY KING

Manchester	Academy 2 Aug 12	
Bristol	SWX	Aug 13

KING DIAMOND, PARADISE LOST, UNTO OTHERS

Manchester	Academy	Jun 30
London	Chalk Farm	Roundhouse Jul 1

KIRA MAC

Newcastle	The Cluny	Sep 19
Wakefield	Venue 23	Sep 20
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Sep 21
Southampton	The Brook	Sep 24
Cardiff	The Globe	Sep 25
Chester	Live Rooms	Sep 26
Glasgow	Classic Grand	Sep 27
Manchester	Band On The Wall	Sep 28
Brighton	Komedia	Sep 30
London	Islington Academy 2	Oct 1
Bristol	Thekla	Oct 2
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Oct 3

LARKIN POE

Manchester	Academy	Oct 17
Glasgow	Academy	Oct 18
Bristol	Beacon	Oct 19
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Oct 21
Birmingham	Institute	Oct 22

LAZULI

Stourport	Fusion Festival	Aug 7
Bango	Neuadd Ogwen	Aug 8
Dublin	Sound House	Aug 9
Sheffield	Local Authority	Aug 11
London	Putney Half Moon	Aug 12
Southampton	1865	Aug 13
Fletching	Trading Boundaries	Aug 14
Sudbury	Arts Centre	Aug 16

THE LAZYS

Glasgow	Audio	Aug 7
Leeds	Key Club	Aug 8
Stockport	Firevolt Festival	Aug 10
London	Camden Underworld	Sep 3
Southampton	Joiners	Sep 4
Cardiff	The Globe	Sep 5
Manchester	Rebellion	Sep 6

LINKIN PARK, SPITIBOX, JPEGMAFIA

London	Wembley Stadium	Jun 28

LITTLE FEAT

London	IndigO2	Jul 29

JEFF LYNNE'S ELO

Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Jul 5
Manchester	Co-op Live	Jul 9
London	Hyde Park	Jul 13

LYNYRD SKYNYRD, BLACKBERRY SMOKE

Manchester	AO Arena	Jul 15
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Jul 16
Brighton	Centre	Jul 18
London	Wembley Arena	Jul 19

ROBIN McAULEY, LYIN' RAMPANT

London	Camden Underworld	Aug 7
Blackpool	Waterloo Music Bar	Aug 8
Crumlin	The Patriot	Aug 9
Grimsby	Yardbirds Club	Aug 14
Newcastle	The Cluny	Aug 15
Glasgow	Classic Grand	Aug 16

CHANTEL McGREGOR

Glasgow	Garage 2	Jun 20
Newcastle	The Cluny	Jun 21
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Jun 22
Birkenhead	Swinging Arm	Jun 24
Oxford	The Bullingdon	Jun 25
Cambridge	Junction 2	Jun 26

METALLICA

Dublin	Avia Stadium	Jun 19, 21
Glasgow	Hampden Park	Jun 25
Cardiff	Principality Stadium	Jun 28
London	London Stadium	Jul 3, 5

ALANIS MORISSETTE

Dublin	Malahide Castle	Jun 29
Belfast	Belsonic Festival	Jun 30
Cardiff	Castle	Jul 2
Lancashire	Lytham Festival	Jul 4
Glasgow	The Hydro	Jul 5
London	O2 Arena	Jul 27

Recommended

LUKE MORLEY, WILLIE DOWLING

Manchester	RNCM	Sep 11
Glasgow	St Luke's	Sep 12
Sunderland	Fire Station	Sep 14
Leeds	City Varieties	Sep 15
Bristol	St George's Hall	Sep 16
Brighton	Old Market	Sep 17
London	Bloomsbury Theatre	Sep 19

TO BE RETAINED ISSUED SUBJECT TO THE CONDITIONS ON BACK

NEW FOUND GLORY, REAL FRIENDS, KOYO

Birmingham	Academy	Oct 10
Manchester	Victoria Warehouse	Oct 11
Newcastle	City Hall	Oct 12
Glasgow	Academy	Oct 14
Nottingham	Rock City	Oct 15
Bournemouth	Academy	Oct 17
London	Brixton Academy	Oct 18

OASIS, RICHARD ASHCROFT

Cardiff	Principality Stadium	Jul 4, 5
Manchester	Heaton Park	Jul 11, 12, 16, 19, 20
London	Wembley Stadium	Jul 25-28, 30, Aug 2, 3
Edinburgh	Murrayfield Stadium	Aug 8, 9, 12
Dublin	Croke Park	Aug 16, 17

PARKWAY DRIVE

London	Wembley Arena	Oct 4
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Oct 5
Manchester	AO Arena	Oct 6

PENTAGRAM

Bristol	Thekla	Jul 1
Nottingham	Rescue Rooms	Jul 2
London	Highbury Garage	Jul 3
Manchester	Gorilla	Jul 5

PRETTY BOY FLOYD, JETBOY

London	Camden Underworld	Sep 10

PUBLIC ENEMY

London	Royal Albert Hall	Jun 27

PUBLIC IMAGE LTD

Hastings	White Rock Theatre	Jun 26
Newark	Stone Valley Festival	Jun 27
Oxford	Academy	Jun 28
Warrington	Parr Hall	Jul 1
Leicester	Academy	Jul 3
Lincoln	Engine Shed	Jul 4
Portsmouth	Guildhall	Jul 5
Sheffield	Leadmill	Jul 30
Northampton	Roadmender	Jul 31
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Aug 1
Cheltenham	Town Hall	Aug 7
Durham	Stone Valley Festival	Aug 8
Coventry	Empire	Aug 9
Cork City	Hall	Aug 15
Belfast	Putting The Fast In Belfast	Aug 16

REEF, KERBDOG

Nottingham	Rock City	Oct 16
Glasgow	SWG3	Oct 17
Norwich	UEA	Oct 18
Bournemouth	Academy	Oct 23
Bristol	Academy	Oct 24
Southampton	1865	Oct 25
Manchester	The Ritz	Oct 30
Liverpool	Academy	Oct 31
Tenby	De Valence Pavilion	Nov 1

JETHRO TULL



From *Living In The Past* to being a big live draw in the present, thanks to having a setlist peppered with great songs.

See left for dates. Currently April 19 to May 16 2026.

Swansea	Patti Pavilion	Nov 2
Leeds	Academy	Nov 6
Birmingham	Institute	Nov 7
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Nov 8

TERRY REID

Bilston	Robin 2	Sep 11
Dublin	Arthur's Blues & Jazz	Sep 13, 14
Hastings	White Rock Theatre	Sep 16
Portsmouth	Guildhall	Sep 17
St Ives	Theatre	Sep 18
Cardiff	The Gate	Sep 19
Hebden Bridge	Trades Club	Sep 21
Sheffield	The Greystones	Sep 22
Newcastle	The Cluny	Sep 24
Glasgow	Cottiers	Sep 25
Pocklington	Arts Centre	Sep 26
Malvern	Cube	Sep 28
London	Putney Half Moon	Sep 30
London	Camden Jazz Café	Oct 1
Cambridge	Portland Arms	Oct 3

RIVAL SONS

York	Barbican	Jun 24
Bournemouth	Academy	Jul 1
Liverpool	University	Jul 2
Stockton-on-Tees	Globe	Jul 3
Ipswich	Corn Exchange	Jul 7
Folkestone	Leas Cliff Hall	Jul 8

DARIUS RUCKER

Belfast	SSE Arena	Sep 29
Glasgow	The Hydro	Sep 30
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Oct 2
Manchester	AO Arena	Oct 3
London	O2 Arena	Oct 5

SANTANA

London	O2 Arena	Jun 21

KENNY WAYNE SHEPHERD, BOBBY RUSH

London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Jul 18

DAVID SINCLAIR FOUR

Stevenage	Red Lion	Jun 1
Hersham	Surrey Blues Club	Jul 4
Brentford	The Brook	Jul 25
High Wycombe	Dusty's	Aug 6
Sutton	Sound Lounge	Aug 22
Acton	Gunnersbury Garden Estate	Sep 20
Carlisle	Blues Festival	Oct 10
Glasgow	Cathcart Castle Club	Oct 11
Edinburgh	Voodoo Rooms	Oct 12
Richmond	Kew Village Market	Nov 2
Cornwall	Looe Blues Festival	Dec 6
Ruislip	Tropic At Ruislip	Dec 14

SKINDRED

Brighton	Concorde 2	Sep 18

DAVE HILL'S SLADE, SONS OF THE SEVENTIES

Hastings	White Rock Theatre	Nov 28
Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Dec 10
Liverpool	Academy	Dec 12
Bournemouth	Academy	Dec 14
Oxford	Academy	Dec 16
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Dec 17
Newcastle	City Hall	Dec 19
Birmingham	Academy	Dec 20
Manchester	The Ritz	Dec 22

SLAYER, AMON AMARTH, ANTHRAX, MASTODON, HATEBREED, NECKBREAKKER

Cardiff	Blackweir Fields	Jul 3
London	Finsbury Park	Jul 6

SMASHING PUMPKINS, SKUNK ANANSIE, WHITE LIES, MORE

London	Gunnersbury Park	Aug 10

JUDGE SMITH

London	Holborn Holy Sepulchre Church	Jul 12

SOLSTICE

Kidderminster	45 Live	Aug 31

SON OF MAN, THE MIGHTY RA

London	Stratford Cart & Horses	Aug 9

SPARKS

Manchester	Apollo	Jun 21, 22
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Jun 24
Dublin	National Stadium	Jul 15, 16
Edinburgh	Playhouse	Jul 18
Wolverhampton	The Halls	Jul 19

STEREOPHONICS

London	Finsbury Park	Jul 4
Cardiff	Principality Stadium	Jul 11, 12

AL STEWART

Bournemouth	Pavilion	Oct 1
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Oct 3
Gateshead	Glasshouse	Oct 5
York	Barbican	Oct 7
Liverpool	Philharmonic Hall	Oct 8
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Oct 10
Guildford	G Live	Oct 11
Birmingham	Alexandra	Oct 12
Bristol	Beacon	Oct 15
London	Palladium	Oct 15

THE STRANGLERS, BUZZCOCKS

Leeds	Academy	Oct 17
Manchester	Apollo	Oct 18
Newcastle	City Hall	Oct 21
Edinburgh	Academy	Oct 23
Aberdeen	Music Hall	Oct 24
Bristol	Beacon	Oct 28
Brighton	Dome	Oct 29
London	Chalk Farm Roundhouse	Oct 31, Nov 1

TEN

Edinburgh	La Belle Angele	Jul 19
Stoke-on-Trent	Eleven	Jul 27
Gravesend	Red Lion	Aug 9
Bradford	Nightrain	Aug 30
Newcastle	The Cluny	Sep 6
Sheffield	Corporation	Sep 13
Manchester	Academy 3	Oct 25
Newport	The Patriot	Nov 8
Glasgow	Ivory Blacks	Nov 15
Layton	Institute	Nov 22

TESTAMENT, OBITUARY

Bristol	Beacon	Oct 7
Birmingham	Academy	Oct 8
Dublin	Olympia Theatre	Oct 9

GETTY

Manchester	Academy	Oct 10
London	Kentish Town Forum	Oct 11

THESE WICKED RIVERS

Belper	St Peter's	Jun 21

THOSE DAMN CROWS

Leicester	Academy	Oct 17
Leeds	Stylus	Oct 18
Newcastle	Boiler Shop	Oct 20
Glasgow	SWG3	Oct 21
Manchester	Albert Hall	Oct 22
Bristol	Crane	Oct 24
Plymouth	Pavilions	Oct 26
Southampton	Engine Rooms	Oct 28
Birmingham	Institute	Oct 30
London	Shepherd's Bush Empire	Oct 31

A THOUSAND HORSES

Glasgow	Saint Luke's Church	Jul 30
Manchester	Academy	Jul 31
London	Islington Assembly Hall	Aug 1

TRAIN

Southampton	Summer Sessions	Jun 28
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Jun 30
Warwickshire	St Nicholas' Park	Jul 2
Halifax	Piece Hall	Jul 3
Lytham	Festival	Jul 4
Dublin	Iveagh Gardens	Jul 6
Limerick	King John's Castle	Jul 7

TYLA'S DOGS D'AMOUR

Birmingham	Billingsley Rock Club	Jun 21
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Jul 18
Nottingham	Old Wine Vaults	Jul 26
Crumlin	The Patriot	Sep 19
Buckley	Tivoli	Oct 3
Preston	Vinyl Tap	Oct 4
London	Stratford Cart & Horses	Nov 13
Gravesend	Red Lion	Nov 14
St Leonards-on-Sea	The Piper	Nov 15

BONNIE TYLER

London	Indig02	Jul 25

THE UTOPIA STRONG

Bristol	The Cube	Oct 10
Glastonbury	King Arthur	Oct 11
Guildford	Boileroom	Oct 14
St Albans	The Horn	Oct 15
London	Dalston Cafe Oto	Oct 16
Brighton	Hope & Ruin	Oct 17
Ramsgate	Music Hall	Oct 18
Tunbridge Wells	Forum	Oct 19
Sheffield	Sidney & Matilda	Oct 21
Edinburgh	Sneaky Pete's	Oct 22
Hexham	Allendale Village Hall	Oct 23
Hebden Bridge	Trades Club	Oct 24

ADRIAN VANDENBERG PLAYS WHITESNAKE

Dublin	Opium	Oct 11
Belfast	Empire	Oct 12
Newcastle	Digital	Oct 14
Manchester	Rebellion	Oct 15
Glasgow	Classic Grand	Oct 16
Crumlin	Patriot	Oct 18
Grimsby	Yardbirds Club	Oct 19
London	Camden Underworld	Oct 22
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Oct 23
Sheffield	Corporation	Oct 24
Wakefield	Venue 23	Oct 27
Hastings	The Carlisle	Oct 28
Southampton	The Brook	Oct 29

JIMMIE VAUGHN & THE TILT-A-WHIRL BAND

London	Grt Portland Street 229 Club	Jul 28, 29

THE VINTAGE CARAVAN

Margate	Rock Festival	Oct 25
London	Camden Assembly	Oct 26
Brighton	Dust	Oct 27
Southampton	1865	Oct 28
Bristol	The Exchange	Oct 29
Birmingham	Mama Roux	Oct 30
Newcastle	Think Tank	Oct 31
Glasgow	Classic Grand	Nov 1

VOLBEAT, BUSH, GEL

Nottingham	Motorpoint Arena	Nov 5
Cardiff	Utilita Arena	Nov 6
Manchester	AO Arena	Nov 8
Glasgow	Hydro	Nov 10
Birmingham	Utilita Arena	Nov 12
London	Wembley Arena	Nov 13

RICK WAKEMAN, RETURN OF THE CAPED CRUSADER

Aylesbury	Waterside Arts	Oct 12
York	Barbican	Oct 14
Liverpool	Philharmonic	Oct 15
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Oct 16
Gateshead	Glasshouse	Oct 18
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Oct 19
Birmingham	Symphony Hall	Oct 21
Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Oct 22
Northampton	Royal & Derngate	Oct 23
Eastbourne	Congress Theatre	Oct 24
Bournemouth	Pavilion	Oct 25
Torquay	Princess Theatre	Oct 26
London	Palladium	Oct 28
Bristol	Beacon	Oct 29

WAR

Dublin	Academy	Jul 2
Manchester	Band On The Wall	Jul 4
Glynde	Love Supreme Festival	Jul 5
Birmingham	Most Jazz, Funk & Soul Festival	Jul 12

WARRIOR SOUL, SPREAD EAGLE, NEW GENERATION SUPERSTARS

Southampton	Suburbia	Aug 29
Brighton	Dust	Aug 30
Swansea	Sin City	Aug 31
Newcastle	Trillians	Sep 2
Edinburgh	Bannerman's Bar	Sep 3
Stockport	Spinning Top	Sep 4
Derby	Victoria Inn	Sep 5
London	Camden Underworld	Sep 6
Leicester	HRH Sleaze Festival	Sep 7
Birmingham	Subside	Sep 8
St Albans	The Horn	Sep 10
Bradford	Nightrain	Sep 11
Crumlin	The Patriot	Sep 12
Llandudno	Motorsport Lounge	Sep 13
Preston	Vinyl Tap	Sep 14

RICKY WARWICK & THE FIGHTING HEARTS, CJ WILDHEART

Inverness	An Seomar	Sep 13
Edinburgh	Liquid Rooms	Sep 14
Newcastle	The Cluny	Sep 16
Carlisle	Brickyard	Sep 17
Manchester	Rebellion	Sep 19
Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Sep 20
Leeds	Brudenell Social Club	Sep 21
Cambridge	Junction 2	Sep 22
Southampton	1865	Sep 23
Bristol	The Exchange	Sep 25
London	Oxford Street 100	Club 26
Swansea	Sin City	Sep 27

W.A.S.P.

Norwich	UEA	Jul 20
Glasgow	Academy	Jul 25
Ebbw Vale	Steelhouse Festival	Jul 26
Nottingham	Rock City	Jul 27
Newcastle	City Hall	Sep 26
Manchester	Victoria Warehouse	Sep 27
London	Hammersmith Apollo	Sep 28

WEDNESDAY 13

Buckley	Tivoli	Jul 21
Ebbw Vale	Steelhouse Festival	Jul 25
Birmingham	The Asylum	Jul 26
Preston	The Blitz	Jul 27
Sheffield	Corporation	Jul 29
Brighton	Chalk	Jul 30
London	Islington Assembly Hall	Nov 4
Manchester	The Ritz	Nov 5
Leeds	Warehouse	Nov 6
Newcastle	Digital	Nov 7
Glasgow	Slay	Nov 8
Hull	Asylum	Nov 9

WEEZER

Dublin	Trinity College	Jul 2

BOBBY WEIR & WOLF BROS

London	Royal Albert Hall	Jun 21

THE WHITE BUFFALO, CAM COLE

London	Kentish Town Frum	Aug 28

WILCO

London	Royal Albert Hall	Jun 22

DANNY WILDHEART & THE UK REPROBATES

Norwich	The Brickmakers	Aug 29
Corby	Steel Bar Venue	Aug 30
Newcastle	Trillians	Sep 7

THE WILDHEARTS

Holmfirth	Picturedrome	Jul 24

WOLFMOTHER

London	Islington Academy	Jul 29
Manchester	The Ritz	Jul 30

NEIL YOUNG & THE CHROME HEARTS, CATS STEVENS, YUSUF, VAN MORRISON

London	Hyde Park BST	Jul 11

YUSUF/CAT STEVENS

Cambridge	Corn Exchange	Sep 6
Bristol	Beacon	Sep 8
Birmingham	Alexandra Theatre	Sep 11

RIVAL SONS



Catch them first supporting Guns N' Roses, then see the Californians top the bill for shows of their own.

See opposite page for dates. Currently June 24 to July 8.

London	Theatre Royal Drury Lane	Sep 14
Manchester	Bridgewater Hall	Sep 16
Dublin	Olympia Theatre	Sep 18
Glasgow	Royal Concert Hall	Sep 22

Festivals

2000 TREES
COHEED AND CAMBRIA, ALEXISONFIRE, TAKING BACK SUNDAY, MORE

Cheltenham	Upcote Farm	Jul 9-12

ALFORD ROCK & BLUES
WHEN RIVERS MEET, BRAVE RIVAL, NINE BELOW ZERO, MORE

Alford (Surrey)	Springbok Estate	Jul 3-6

ARCTANGENT
GODSPEED! YOU BLACK EMPEROR, KARNIVOOL, MELVINS, MORE

Bristol	Fernhill Farm	Aug 13-16

BLOODSTOCK FESTIVAL
MACHINE HEAD, MASTODON, TRIVIUM, GOJIRA, MORE

Derbyshire	Catton Park	Aug 7-10

CARLISLE BLUES RHYTHM AND ROCK FESTIVAL
JO HARMAN, KYLA BROX, HAMILTON LOOMIS, MORE

Carlisle	Crown & Mitre Hotel	Oct 10-12

CORNWALL ROCKS
FM, TROY REDFERN, GRAHAM OLIVER'S ARMY, MORE

Looe	Tencreek Holiday Resort	Oct 3-5

FAIRPORT CONVENTION'S CROPREDY
FAIRPORT CONVENTION, ALBERT LEE, MORE

Oxfordshire	Cropredy	Aug 7-9

Recommended

FIREVOLT
QUIREBOYS, VON HERTZEN BROTHERS, TYGERS OF PAN TANG, MORE

Stockport	Whitebottom Farm	Aug 7-10

FOREVER NOW
KRAFTWERK, DEATH CULT, THE DAMNED, PIL, MORE

Milton Keynes	Bowl	Jun 22

HAMMERDOWN FESTIVAL
TYGERS OF PAN TANG, DEMON, ONE LAST DAY, MORE

Brighton	Chalk	Jul 19, 20

HARD ROCH HELL SLEAZE
BABYLON AD, JETBOY, PRETTY BOY FLOYD, MORE

Leicester	Academy	Sep 5-7

HELLA ROCK
VIRGINMARYS, FURY, TATTOO MOLLY, MORE

Coventry	Empire	Aug 30

JUST PUSH PLAY
VIRGINMARYS, DAN BYRNE, GORILLA RIOT, MORE

Bury St Edmunds	Apex	Sep 6

KOZFEST
SYSTEM 7, HAWKLORDS, THE BEVIS FRONT, MORE

Builth Wells	Penmenau Farm	Aug 8-10

MAID OF STONE
MICHAEL SCHENKER'S UFO YEARS, BLACK STONE CHERRY, SWEET, MORE

Maidstone	Mote Park	Jul 18-20

NENE VALLEY ROCK FEST
ARTHUR BROWN, DARE, CATS IN SPACE, MORE

Lincs	Grimsthorpe Castle	Sep 6

NORTHERN KIN
MICHAEL SCHENKER'S UFO YEARS, MIDGE URE, UNDERTONES, MORE

Durham	Thornley Hall	Aug 1-3

NOZFEST
SCARLET REBELS, KIM JENNETT, DOOMSDAY OUTLAW, MORE

Southampton	1865	Aug 16

NWOCR LIVEFEST
CATS IN SPACE, THESE WICKED RIVERS, MORE

Wolverhampton	KK's Steel Mill	Sep 27, 28

PROG FOR PEART
AMAROK, KALLE WALLNER, COMEDY OF ERRORS, MORE

Abingdon	The Northcourt	Jul 18, 19

RADAR
CARPENTER BRUT, UNDERØATH, ZEAL & ARDOR, MORE

Manchester	Victoria Warehouse	Jul 4-6

REBELLION
THE DAMNED, HUGH CORNWELL, MORE

Blackpool	Winter Gardens	Aug 7-10

STEELHOUSE
W.A.S.P., THOSE DAMN CROWS, LITA FORD, MORE

Ebbw Vale	Hafod-y-Dafal Farm	Jul 25-27

STONEDEAD
THE ALMIGHTY, THE DEAD DAISIES, SWEET, MORE

Newark	Showground	Aug 23

WILDFIRE
BLACK SPIDERS, AUSTIN GOLD, BEAUX GRIS GRIS & THE APOCALYPSE, MORE

Lanarkshire	Wiston Lodge	Jun 27-29

Y NOT
THE PRODIGY, PRIMAL SCREAM, MORE

Derby	Pikehall	Jul 31-Aug 3

GETTY

NENE VALLEY ROCK FESTIVAL

4th-7th September 2025 at Grimsthorpe Castle, Lincs

Classic Rock, Prog & Blues

Thursday

DARE
The best in classic melodic rock led by Thin Lizzy's Darren Wharton

Yes Please TWO long sets of classic Yes
Ebb Bringing prog to the unbelievers

JOHN VERITY
Classic blues from former Argent man who has worked with a Who's Who of bands

Long Road Home Rock drenched in blues
Delfinia Ukrainian melodic power metal
Dancing Wu Li Masters Rock/funk fusion

Friday

FRANCK CARDUCCI & The Fantastic Speed
Theatrical, flamboyant classic rock & prog

The SANTANA
Winner of National Tribute Music Awards

THE MENTULLS
Genre defying rock

CATS in SPACE
Think 70s... Majestic songs, soaring vocals, powerful guitars, thundering drums!

Blackballed Filthy blues, rock riffs
Splink Folky, spacey, prog rock
Izengard Hard rock in the classic style
Zopp Neo-Canterbury, epic prog-jazz rock
Ruby Dawn Rock in a haunting hypnotic space

GYPSY'S KISS
Hard rock band co-formed by Iron Maiden man

STRAY
Legendary 60s rocking blues band

BERRY JARLOOKER
Raw, energetic hook-laden melodic blues

Leadfeather Classic, 70's style heavy rock
Vmbra Melody focused heavy prog-rock
Troyen Dynamic crowd pleasing rock
Z-Machine Instrumental prog/rock/jazz
... + one to be announced ...

Saturday

Quo CONNECTION
John Coghlan's former band play classic Frantic Four

Chris Bevington ORGANISATION
Rocking, grooving, big band blues from IBBA chart topping band

THE CRAZY WORLD OF ARTHUR BROWN
The God Of Hellfire returns to NVRF with his full show for a second headline appearance

Square Wild Award winning rocky prog
Landmarq Emotional, melodic acrobatics
Simone Galassi Italian blues power trio
The Blue Lena Southern, country blues
... + Band competition winner ...

GALAHAD
40th year show for prog rock veterans

Spriggan Mist
Charismatic folk-prog you'll remember

John Hackett Band
Melodic, funky, jazz, flute infused prog

Hammerhead Heavy, guitar based rock
The Whisky Flowers Blues & Americana
Soulweaver Dynamic & intense classic rock
Jeanice Lee Heavy yet melodic rock
Long Earth Melodic, symphonic prog

Sunday

ATOMIC ROOSTER
Organ-based rock from prog pioneers

KEN HENSLEY'S GROUNDHOGS
Classic psychedelia from legendary band

Uli Jon Roth
The ultimate in classic rock from former Scorpions legend

McHale's Permanent Brew Psychedelic blues
Winter In Eden Crunching symphonic rock
The Dead Can Wait 80s style classic rock
Albany Down Salt of the Earth rock
... + one to be announced ...

SKYS
The Skys... peace, love, wisdom, music!

HEAVY PETTIN
Metal, AOR, prog - it's all there!

HAZE
prog with dual double-neck guitar, flute & violin

Candacraig Dark and twisted neo-prog
Heronimus Fin Improvised neo-psych rock
Tribe3 Modern accessible prog soundscapes
Ashley Sherlock Rocking country blues
Teiger Haunting atmospheric psychedelia

Grimsthorpe Castle



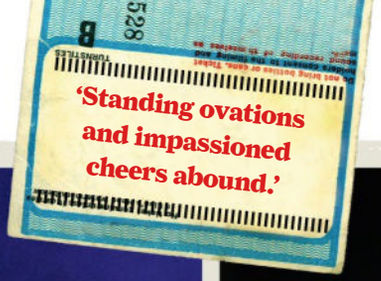
All stages inside marquees
2 alternating main stages
Main stage sets 1 hour minimum
All sets at least 45 minutes
Concert hall quality sound
Real-ale bar, luxury toilets!
Camping chairs allowed

www.NVRF.rocks

Camping next to music arena
Glamping with real beds
Luxury showers & toilets
Free parking for all
4 day & daily tickets available
Pay by instalments
Maximum 1,000 tickets per day

Line-up subject to change without notice

NENE VALLEY ROCK FESTIVAL





Steven Wilson: great music, immaculate sound and cutting-edge visuals.



"A comedian walks into a rock gig..." Support Frank Skinner brings the humour.



Steven Wilson

London Palladium

Complex dark matter with a human heart at the fourth night in Wilson's solo run at the Palladium.

★ There's a moment of deliciously close-to-the-bone truth tonight. Somewhat surprisingly, it's generated by Steven Wilson's curveball support act – one of several things that make this 'old-school' show feel sharp, energised, innovative, shaking dust from the Yes, Jethro Tull and Kraftwerk T-shirts gathered in their masses.

"For the younger people in the audience..." Frank Skinner begins to explain a joke that hasn't quite landed. On cue, a bloke in the stalls booms: "There are none!"

This isn't strictly correct, but it's not far off either. That self-aware streak will carry into our headline set, Wilson poking fun at his audience without losing his affection or respect for them. Standing ovations and impassioned cheers abound in return.

But yes, Frank Skinner. These London gigs have been opened, in turn, by stand-ups Clinton Baptiste, Al Murray, Stewart Lee and Skinner, ostensibly to prove that – for all the prog-tastic, black-shirted seriousness of what he does – Wilson does have a sense of humour. Genius? Toe-curling misfire?

Tonight it feels like the former. Following a slow start, Skinner zips through such inspired topics as Bruce Forsyth's ashes, Steven Wilson's empty sock drawer, and the number of No.1 singles by tonight's performers – "I've had *seven*. How many has Wilson had? Fuck all!" Shot through with loving jibes at long solos and advice for "the four women in the audience" (*slight* exaggeration, though the queue for the gents admittedly gives those at Rush and Joe Bonamassa concerts a serious run for their money), his set helps make this Tuesday night prog gig feel even more like a primetime weekend event.

Wilson's latest album *The Overview* is a captivating listen: two 20-ish minute pieces of immersive conceptual rock, centred on the view of Earth from deep space. Performed in its entirety tonight, complete with immaculate sound, cutting-edge, galaxy-traversing visuals, it's an extraordinary, stirring experience. It's astonishing how such a 70s-friendly premise manages to feel this fresh – this unshackled to the past. Sure, there are notes of *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, *Space Oddity*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, but it's all gazing a billion stars into the future. Sounds and imagery to make you feel smaller, in a way that's kind of wonderful.

Part two (a thoughtfully curated mix from his solo catalogue) kicks off on a swooping note with the title track from 2023's *The Harmony Codex*, backdrop projections flying through post-apocalyptic scenes and sinister empty buildings that nod to Wilson's dystopian literary palette. The gauzy *What Life Brings* makes a sweetly succinct breather, before early Porcupine Tree cuts *Voyage 34* and *Dislocated Day* inject extra heat into the room's whoops – allowing Wilson a rock-star moment amid tonight's cerebral themes, clever technology and celestial soundscapes. Meanwhile, the chilling pallor of *Harmony Korine* nods artfully to the twisted, serial killer-heavy corners of his psyche.

Ten-minute epic *Impossible Tightrope* finds him betting with powerhouse drummer Craig Blundell that he won't fuck up a particularly tricky section (he *does* fuck it up, to the delight of Blundell). But Wilson has long revelled in being 'the worst musician' in his own band, and this is one of his best. Eighties pop star-turned-Chapman Stick maestro Nick Beggs has frontman charm. Guitarist Randy McStine stirs an incredible vocabulary into sharp, original solos. Blundell and virtuosic keyboard player Adam Holzman bookend the stage without feeling remotely bookend-ish.

They pack an emotional closing punch with *The Raven That Refused To Sing*. It's a powerful reminder that, for all Wilson's Atmos-gleamed stargazing, it's the human experience that he captures so movingly.

Polly Glass

WILL IRELAND

Michael Schenker: My Years With UFO / Wytch Hazel

London IndigO2

A joyous history lesson from the former UFO guitarist.



Michael Schenker: delivering a set-list based heavily on UFO's *Strangers In The Night*.

It's extremely pleasing to see how far Michael Schenker has come since a booze-fuelled nadir way back in 2007. Tonight he's imperious, laying down a marker as arguably the finest lead guitarist working in rock music today. With the estimable Erik Grönwall (H.E.A.T., Skid Row) providing equally impressive vocal backup, Schenker's tone and technique are off the scale for a set-list based on UFO's double live album *Strangers In The Night*, plus deep cuts such as *Can You Roll Her, Reasons Love* and a medley of *Lipstick Traces, Between The Walls* and *Belladonna*. What a way to celebrate the 50th anniversary of that first six-year, five-album spell as UFO's unpredictable talisman.

Support comes from Lancaster Bible bashers Wytch Hazel – four long haired blokes bedecked in white, à la Angel, their guitars adorned with crosses. If these guys knocked on your front door carrying an armful of pamphlets you'd most likely slam it in their faces – until you heard the music, that is. Strident, powerful, Lizzy-esque harmony guitars decorate songs about the battle between good and evil. Enjoyable, although slightly unnerving.

Dave Ling

Jon Anderson & The Band Geeks

New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Carteret, USA

Anderson blooms in the Garden State.

It's a good time to be Jon Anderson. His album with The Band Geeks, *Truth*, liberated the Yes music that lives in his head and ushered it into the real world, and this year's *Live - Perpetual Change* showed he could recreate the Yes music of old with extraordinary precision. Tonight at Carteret's Performing Arts Center, a modern not-for-profit events centre, it's a mix of both.

We get the classics. There's the epic opener *Close To The Edge* – which contains the night's only misstep, as Anderson briefly loses his way with the lyrics – alongside *Perpetual Change*, *And You And I, I've Seen All Good People* and a mammoth, near-ecstatic *Starship Trooper*. The first set ends with an extended take on *Owner Of A Lonely Heart* and the second begins with a mesmerising version of the song Anderson describes as his favourite piece of Yes music: *Awaken*.

We also get three of the new songs: *Counties And Countries* and *True Messenger* are both worthy additions to the canon, and the epic *Once Upon A Dream* is a bona fide classic and the best thing Anderson has magicked up this century, as The Band Geeks conjure up the required transcendence with bewildering aplomb. The closing *Roundabout* only serves to ramp up the exhilaration.

Fraser Lewry

Dinosaur Jr

London The Troxy

"You wore earplugs, right?"

Dinosaur Jr's reputation for being one of the world's loudest bands precedes them: age does not diminish the fearsome barrage of noise blasting forth from J Mascis's guitar via an array of wah-wah and other effects pedals, nor does it dull the thunder radiating from Murph's drums.

The audience, needless to say, is loving tonight's show – a 30-year celebration of the US band's venerated sixth studio album *Without A Sound*, performed with a rather curious disconnect between the three members. The opener (*Feel The Pain*) and closer (surprise Japanese hit *Over Your Shoulder*, with its beautiful blossoming guitar solo) really get the mosh-pit going... and it's enough for most to be in the presence of one of ou Great Guitar Heroes, seemingly not really present or otherwise.

The second set, however, sees the band cutting loose and starting to enjoy themselves. "I am Lou's twenty-eight-year-old replacement," announces bassist Lou Barlow at the beginning of the main encore, his sweetly mournful *Garden*, and it's impossible to resist the churning tide of fury and nostalgia that greets old favourites *Start Choppin*, brutally short Cure cover *Just Like Heaven*, *Little Fury Things* and the seismic *Freak Scene* (the song that defined a generation).

A greatly ace night.

Everett True

Tedeschi Trucks Band / Buddy Guy

New York Beacon Theater, USA

Tedeschi Trucks come home again.

Buddy Guy might be 88, but you'd never know it from a bawdy set that's as churchy as it is profane. Guy's status is such that he barely needs to play, but when he does it's a masterclass in tone and volume control. It's also a home economics lesson, as he tells the audience how to grow potatoes, with a bit of woodwork thrown in, as he attacks his guitar with a drumstick during a rowdy cover of Cream's *Sunshine Of Your Love*.

From the ridiculous to the sublime. Tedeschi Trucks Band may be 12-strong, but there's not an ounce of fat to be seen, and everything is played as if perfection were a reality rather than a goal. Bruce Springsteen's *State Trooper* is turned into a spooky Delta blues, John Prine's *Angel Of Montgomery* is breathtakingly beautiful, and their own *Anyhow* utterly sublime. They're brilliant at building songs that end in long, rapturous wig-outs, conjuring up states of extended euphoria. But it's the small moments that truly charm, like when Susan Tedeschi turns and beams at Kebbi Williams as one of his saxophone solos climbs skywards, or the way guitarist Derek Trucks carefully stalks the stage, as if to find the perfect position from which to listen to his band play.

Best blues-rock outfit in the world right now? It's not even a contest.

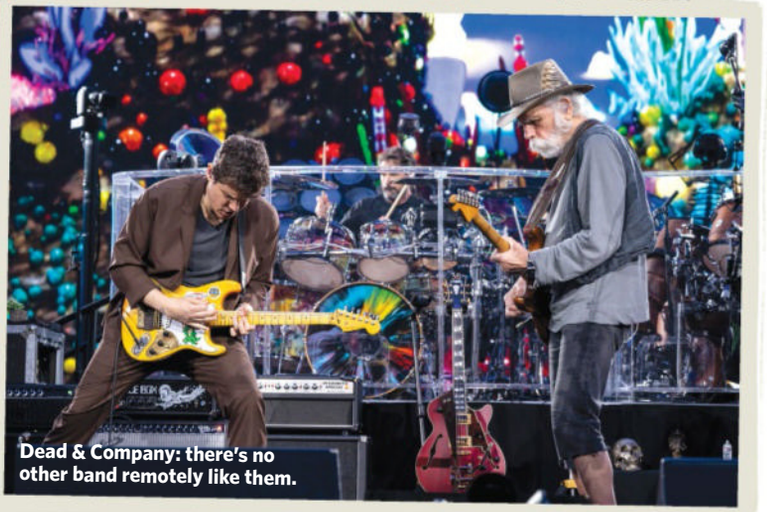
Fraser Lewry

ADRIAN HEXTALL



The eye-popping Sphere: productions have come a long way since the Marquee club.





Dead & Company: there's no other band remotely like them.

'The audience's collective mind continues to be boggled.'

Dead & Company

Las Vegas Sphere

The past and the future collide in the Nevada desert.

In 1982, UK theme Park Alton Towers opened its latest attraction: Cine 2000. That futuristic construction was a dome in which films were shown, projected onto two thirds of the interior, with the edges of the action just outside the ticket holder's peripheral vision. Point-of-view footage of roller-coaster rides and car chases would play, and viewers felt mildly discombobulated. It closed in '93, replaced by Astral Dancers, a more vomit-inducing ride.

More than three decades later, the people behind New York's Madison Square Garden have revived the Cine 2000 concept, albeit with a $2.3 billion budget. Sphere, a block east of the Las Vegas strip, is a staggering piece of engineering, with 15,000 square metres of LED screens (plus 54,000 on the outside), nearly 2,000 speakers, and 17,000 seats that climb steeply more than 100 metres.

It's gonna be spectacular, right? Initially, no. Dead & Company kick off with *Bertha,* the opening song of the Grateful Dead's self-titled 1971 live album. And it's... okay. Live film of the musicians appears on the walls of the venue – and if a 10-storey close-up of Mickey Hart's craggy face projected onto scaffolding is your idea of a great night out, then you're gonna have a great night out.

It's a ruse. As *Mississippi Half-Step Uptown Toodeloo* rambles into being, the venue appears to slowly crack open. The scaffolding slides out of view, replaced by footage of the Dead's old house at 710 Ashbury St. The camera moves up above the rooftops, giving a drone's-eye view of the Haight-Asbury neighbourhood. It keeps climbing. Above the Golden Gate Bridge. It keeps climbing. San Francisco. The state of California. North America. It keeps climbing, into the Milky Way, and to the nebula beyond.. It's a mind-boggling piece of theatre.

For the next three and a half hours, the crowd's collective mind continues to be boggled. During a cover of Jerry Garcia's *Deal*, dancing Teddy bears rendered in old-school Atari-style graphics spring and spin across the venue. Another Garcia song, *They Love Each Other*, finds the entire audience is enveloped in a shape-shifting acid blotter. *Death Don't Have No Mercy* brings out the dancing skeletons. The Dead's iconography is everywhere. The bears. The skeletons. The terrapins. The lightning strike. The Steal Your Face skull. And it all comes together in a terrifyingly trippy *Cumberland Blues*, when the venue is filled with a nightmarish gonzo animation featuring all of the above, as if designed by an acid-fuelled Willy Wonka.

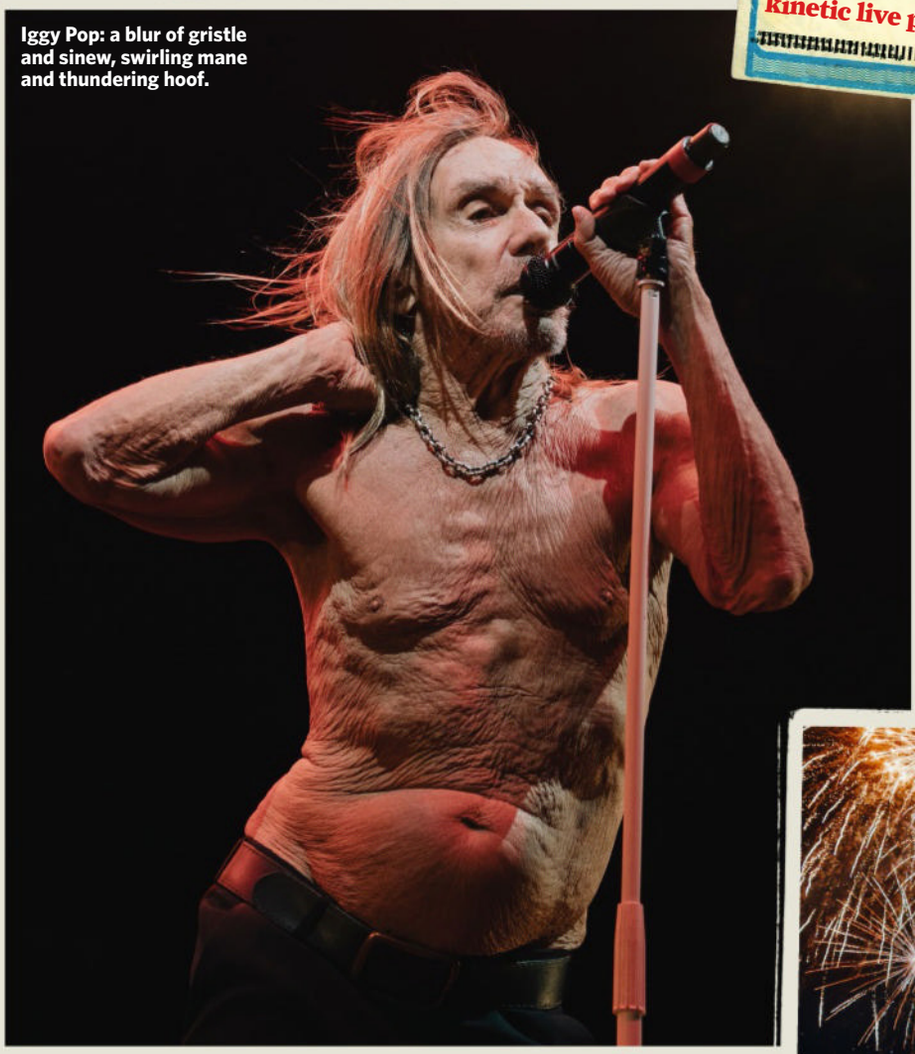
It's clearly too much for some, and more than once a cry of "Medic!" goes up as someone – possibly reacting to more than the visuals – collapses to the floor. Throughout it all, Dead & Company play their curiously un-psychedelic music. Often it soars, sometimes it doesn't, and the *Drums/Space* instrumental flatlines.

Decades before the internet, the Grateful Dead developed a way of communicating with their fan base that meant they sold records and tickets without relying on traditional marketing. They rewarded those fans by giving them extraordinary value for money: long shows that never repeated themselves, state-of-the-art sound and lights, and rather than stamp down on bootleggers they encouraged and facilitated them. Most importantly, they nurtured a community of friends and kindred spirits who are still there, now often accompanied by their children and their grandchildren. As they troop out of the venue the staff know this, and instead of thanking them say something else: "See you tomorrow!"

There's no band remotely like them. And there's no venue remotely like Sphere.

Fraser Lewry

CHLOE WEIR / JAY BLAKESBERG



Iggy Pop: a blur of gristle and sinew, swirling mane and thundering hoof.



You don't want to go putting that crop in an omelette.



'The punk godfather remains an explosively kinetic live performer.'

Bearded Theory Festival

Catton Hall, Derbyshire

It's a mixed bag musically and audience-wise, with a surprise among the well-known names on the bill.

A relatively new addition to the festival calendar, Bearded Theory began as a low-key party in a Derby pub in 2008, and retains some of that same informal flavour today, even after relocating to the grounds of Catton Hall in Derbyshire a decade ago. This is also the home of Bloodstock, deep in the heavy metal heartland, and a similar spirit of unpretentious headbanger hedonism prevails at both events. The line-up is rock-friendly, with a strong element of 80s and 90s nostalgia. The audience spans multiple generations, from kids to blue-haired grandparents reliving their punk youth.

An early highlight on Friday night is the latest incarnation of **Sisters Of Mercy**. After 40-plus years pushing this zombie-croaking rock-vampire shtick, Andrew Eldritch has now gone full Nosferatu, a balding phantom prowling the stage in near darkness, tight-lipped and elusive. Kohl-eyed classics like *This Corrosion, Lucretia My Reflection* and *Dominion* still sound magnificent, but it's frustrating that he relegates himself to semi-cult nostalgia act these days. With just a little more artfully packaged showmanship he could occupy the same arena-rocking league as younger bands who borrow heavily from his Wagnerian electro-goth blueprint, like Nine Inch Nails or Rammstein.

Now that Northern Irish power trio **Ash** are nearing 50, we might expect their adolescent hormone-rush janglers to have lost some of their youthful sheen. And yet both band and music remain eerily ageless, radiant singalong power-pop classics like *Angel Interceptor, Oh Yeah* and *Girl From Mars* still bursting with sunshine and spotless melody. Teenage dreams are hard to beat. There's more joyous goofiness from Japanese punk-pop pranksters **Shonen Knife**, who follow their official set with a full half-hour of Ramones covers.

The knockout discovery of Bearded Theory, for this writer at least, are Philadelphia collective **Mannequin Pussy**, whose commanding dominatrix singer Marisa 'Missy' Dabice punctuates her sassy sleaze-rock numbers with spiky, funny sermons on feminism, capitalism, the evils of Donald Trump and more. Bubblegum riot grrrl duo **Nova Twins** also get the mosh-pit bouncing with their boisterous rap-metal energy, shouty slogans and killer pop hooks.

For sheer heavyweight legend status, **Iggy Pop** packs the biggest kick at Bearded Theory. Now 78, the punk godfather remains an explosively kinetic live performer, his athletic workout more performance art than rock spectacle these days. Backed by a slamming younger band, including a muscular mini-brass section, he inevitably spends this entire show shirtless, a blur of gristle and sinew, swirling mane and thundering hoof. The set-list leans heavily on his 70s prime, chiefly the Stooges and early solo albums. *Lust for Life, I Wanna Be Your Dog, Search And Destroy* and more still deliver impressively visceral bite and brute physicality. Sadly, he ignores his more recent detours into jazz, chanson and electronica, sticking firmly in his comfort zone as monolithic proto-punk icon.,

Rounding off Bearded Theory in more restrained style, **Manic Street Preachers** are now much more polished soft-rockers than gobby Welsh firebrands. Their Sunday headline set plods at times, but it's elevated by fantastic, arty video collages and a handful of mighty, crowd-pleasing anthems, including *Motorcycle Emptiness* and *A Design For Life*. There's also haunted melancholy here when footage of long-lost Richey Edwards flashes across the screen during several numbers. After the final encore, James Dean Bradfield thanks the crowd on Richey's behalf too, a small but beautifully tender moment.

Stephen Dalton

Sammy Hagar

Las Vegas Park MGM

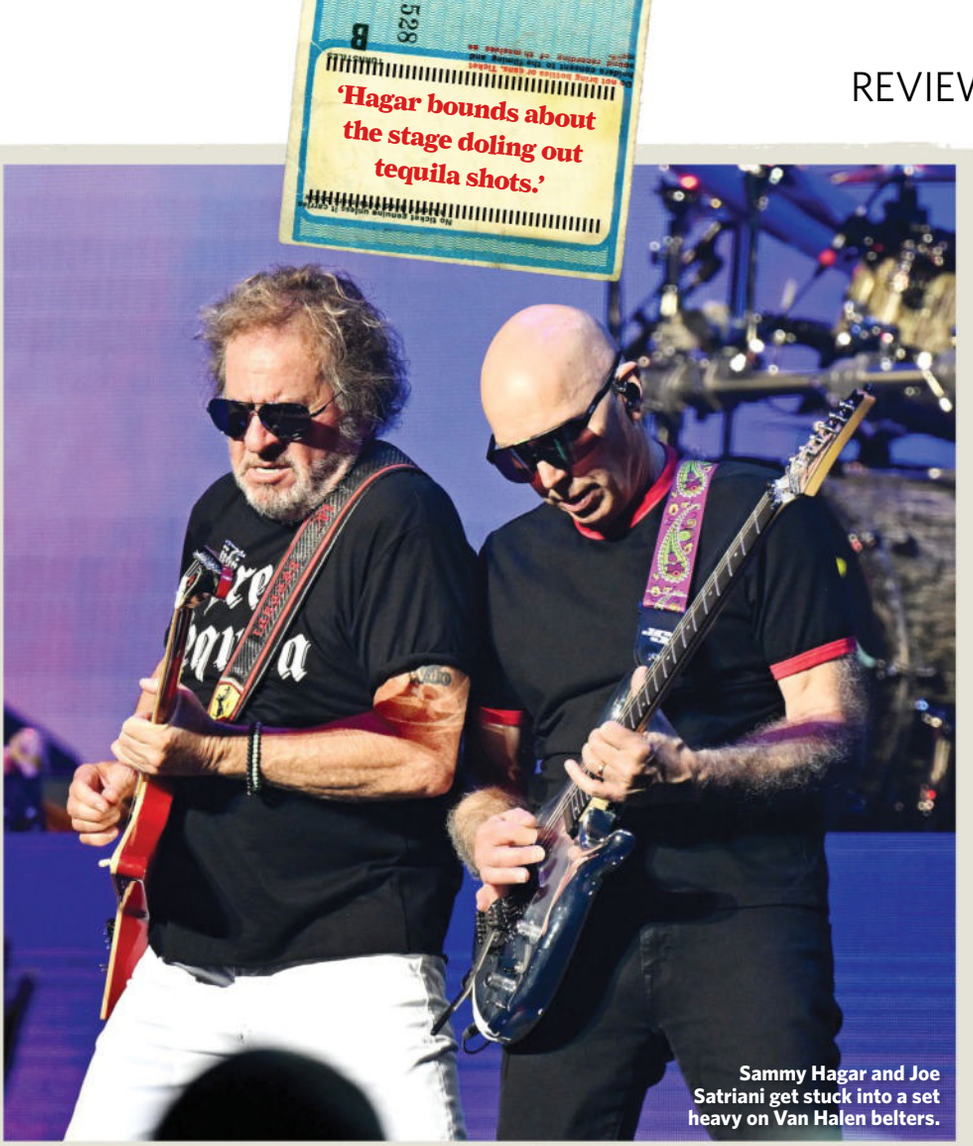
The Red Rocker rocks on his Best Of All Worlds residency.

★ Sammy Hagar opens with a video tribute to Eddie Van Halen and *Encore, Thank You, Goodnight*, the supercharged song Eddie supposedly helped him write in a dream. Joe Satriani showboats, tapping and dive-bombing with dizzying speed. Former VH bassist Michael Anthony is a real asset, still one of the best backing singers in the game. But Hagar's voice isn't in the best shape, and he's frequently straining for notes that must once have been within easy reach.

It doesn't seem to matter. The set-list is about 60 per cent Van Halen, and the highlights – *Panama*, a riotous *Poundcake*, a thumping *Humans Being* – are greeted with the kind of fervour reserved for true stars. And Hagar is certainly that, bounding about the stage doling out tequila shots, an avuncular host in a Cabo Wabo T-shirt, signing merch as it gets tossed at him. Elsewhere, Anthony takes the lead vocal on *Runnin' With The Devil*, iconic Jack Daniel's bass in tow, and the Grateful Dead's Bob Weir guests on a lively romp through Montrose's *Bad Motor Scooter*.

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a happy motherfuckin' fool," beams Hagar, clearly delighted with life. The venue is a short drive to Las Vegas airport, and he says he can be lying on the beach back home in 40 minutes. No wonder he doesn't want to tour any more.

Fraser Lewry



'Hagar bounds about the stage doling out tequila shots.'

Sammy Hagar and Joe Satriani get stuck into a set heavy on Van Halen belters.

Pixies

Granada Palacio Municipal De Deportes, Spain

Proto-glam-metal heroes write a memorable late chapter.

★ Without a word, Black Francis takes up his guitar and unleashes his Andalucian fury. Dark flamenco, Iberian intensity and the bone dust of old Hispanic jails and churches were key elements of Pixies' initial mythic-noir appeal, and in southern Spain they're clearly alt.rock's most religious experience.

The spirit, so close to its source, is particularly potent tonight. *Monkey Gone To Heaven* strikes like a thundercrack, its Pentecostal shrieks – '*then God is seven!*' – scorched by diabolical fire. *River Euphrates* is dark as Doomsday, *Isla De Encanta* and *Vamos* frenzied and possessed, *Mr Grieves* a warped fiesta of manic mariachi. And rising above such arcane earthiness, the Jesus And Mary Chain's *Head On* screams across the arena.

A section of gloriously slow-burn, dark country songs from last year's *The Night the Zombies Came* and the presence of new bassist Emma Richardson from Band Of Skulls are evidence that this is a Pixies much evolved from the crazed bone machine operators of old. But with *Chicken* and *Mercy Me* as mature meditations contrasting ferocious tears through *Debaser*, *Tame* and *The Holiday Song*, they're at a second-gen peak, as exhilarating and unflinching as ever. If all other bands are five, Pixies remain 10.

Mark Beaumont

Jesse Malin

London Islington Assembly Hall

A magical performance following his career-threatening stroke.

★ Strange to think that the last time Jesse Malin was playing here in Islington he was standing atop the back bar of The Garage venue, his elongated mic lead stretched out over the heads of the sold-out audience. We all know the story since then: on May 4, 2023, Malin suffered a rare spinal-cord infarction – a stroke in his back – while having dinner. "I thought it was sciatica, and then I was on the restaurant floor," he recalls of that night now.

Tonight is part tribute, part benefit to pay his escalating medical costs, and even though Malin is seated for the majority of the show – each time he pulls himself up to stand and sing, the audience roar their approval – it's difficult not to be transfixed by tonight's magical performance. His voice is still on point, while his remarkable songbook shines through – from the aching *Brooklyn* to a thunderous *All The Way From Moscow*, and Malin proving he can sing almost anything with a slew of covers including the Pogues' *If I Should Fall From Grace With God* and a stirring *Rudie Can't Fail*. Charlie Harper joins him for the UK Subs' *Party In Paris*, then a couple of Wildhearts show up to rattle through *In The Modern World*. It's Malin whose star shines through, though, and soon you've forgotten he was ever seated at all.

Philip Wilding

Hamlet Hail To The Thief

Manchester Aviva Studios

The Bard meets Radiohead.

★ Something is rocking in the state of Denmark in this hybrid musical stage production, which interweaves Shakespeare's psychodrama with live-band reworkings of Radiohead's 2003 album *Hail To The Thief*, to generally powerful effect. A lot is crammed in, with dance numbers and subtle special effects alongside elegantly reconstructed versions of *2+2=5, There There, The Gloaming* and more.

Hamlet Hail To The Thief is clearly not pitched at Shakespeare purists, but nor is it some overhyped rock-opera stunt. The polished production is mostly sober and timeless, from the cast's understated black costumes to the stark monochrome stage design, which resembles a spartan recording studio complete with vintage amps. Hoggett and Jones trim down the play but remain respectful to the text, aside from occasional added F-bombs and repetitions, notably when a suicidal Ophelia reprises Hamlet's fabled "to be or not to be" speech.

Leading an impressive all-singing, all-dancing cast, Samuel Blenkin plays Hamlet as a petulant emo-kid, sarcastic and entitled, which makes him a more perfect alter ego for Thom Yorke than anyone in this project probably intended. Crucially, Hogget and Jones do not labour the thematic echoes between album and play, instead allowing the haunted dread and gothic horror of Radiohead's music to permeate the slow-motion tragedy on stage.

Stephen Dalton

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The Soundtrack Of My Life

Counting Crows main man **Adam Duritz** on the records, artists and gigs that are of lasting significance to him.

Interview: **Niall Doherty**



It's more than three decades since Counting Crows blew up big with their multimillion-selling debut album *August And Everything After*. But, as new album *Butter Miracle, The Complete Sweets!* demonstrates, the US rockers' knack for soulful and stirring anthems remains as potent as ever. As you'll see, there's a variety of influences that go into the band's melting pot, as frontman and band leader Adam Duritz takes us on a tour through some of the sounds that have shaped his life.

THE FIRST MUSIC I REMEMBER HEARING

My parents had a lot of Beatles albums. I remember listening to them. And they took me to see The Jackson 5 at a rodeo in Texas when I was a kid. That was my first concert. Those two things battle in my first musical memories, a mixture of The Beatles and The Jackson 5.



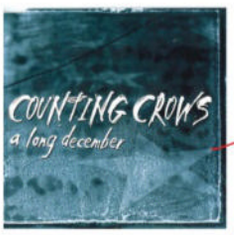
THE FIRST SONG I EVER PERFORMED LIVE

I have a very distinct memory of being out behind school and singing the Kiss song *Beth* to a bunch of girls. I remember thinking: "Oh yeah, this performing thing has some vibe to it." I got a big reaction out of it!



THE GREATEST ALBUM OF ALL TIME

Kind Of Blue by Miles Davis. That's always stuck out there for me. It's such a beautiful, brilliant, groundbreaking and also an incredibly listenable and great record.



THE GUITAR HERO

Richard Thompson. Whether it's Fairport Convention, the Richard And Linda Thompson records or his own records, he's so brilliant. He's got a whole unique style as an acoustic artist, and, completely separate from that, a groundbreaking style as an electric artist on the guitar. He's one of those rare guys that does it all: sings, writes some of the best songs ever written and is an incredible guitar player. He's got that Hendrix thing; it's pretty rare at that level on all three of those things. I've met him several times. He's amazing. I generally say stupid shit in front of him because my brain stops working.



THE SINGER

I've got a few of those. I love Rickie Lee Jones, I love Ella Fitzgerald – she's one of the greatest singers ever, if not the greatest singer. I think Bob Dylan is a phenomenal singer. A lot of people think he's not, but he just may not have the voice everyone thinks of. I love Matty Healy's singing from The 1975.

MY FAVOURITE BAND RIGHT NOW

Gang Of Youths, an Australian band who live in London. My girlfriend turned me on to them. She got me into their music years ago now. We went to see them and we hit it off, and Dave Le'aupepe and his wife ended up spending Christmas with us. We've been brothers ever since. The band is off the hook. They're so good live. They had a big effect on our new record and made me wake up to the fact that I'd been a little lazy in some of the writing, so I rewrote it.

THE SONGWRITER

I'm more a McCartney guy than a Lennon guy. You know, lyrics are one thing, you live your day and then you write from that. But a melody, man, you gotta pull melodies out of thin air. They just don't exist. So that kind of magic, where that comes from, I don't even know. Paul McCartney has probably written sixty or seventy songs that if you name them, I could hum them to you.

THE BEST COVER VERSION

Respect by Aretha Franklin. Because that's really an Otis Redding song, and her version becomes *the* version. That's the problem with Aretha, she would cover songs and then they would be better than everyone else's version. Dionne Warwick's *I Say A Little Prayer* is one of the best songs ever recorded, and then Aretha's version is even better.

THE SONG I NEVER GET TIRED OF PLAYING

A Long December. It's thirty-odd years of touring, and we tour all the time, so I get tired of every song at some point but that's the only one where I don't. I think it's the most perfectly crafted song I ever wrote. There's something about it that always feels right to play. Maybe it's just because I'm lazy and I sit down because I play piano.

THE SONG THAT MAKES ME CRY

We Do Not Belong Together, from the Stephen Sondheim musical *Sunday In The Park With George*.

THE MOST DIFFICULT RECORD I'VE EVER MADE

The first one, *August And Everything After*. I didn't know how to make a record and we were very new as a band. When we got signed, I put the band through a bunch of changes. I wasn't very good at being a band leader. I didn't know how to be wrong. I was an asshole. I made it hard on everybody, and I was hard on myself. I think everyone in the band at some point tried to quit during that first album.

MY SATURDAY NIGHT/PARTY SONG

Hot In Herre by Nelly. It's The Neptunes producing, Pharrell [Williams] early on in his career. He is the greatest at every instrument, and those tracks are honed to a razor's edge. So funky, so good, so hooky.

THE SONG I'D WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

Maybe *A Long December*. It's a good ending song. But I don't want to hear someone else cover it!

Butter Miracle, The Complete Sweets! is out now. Counting Crows tour the UK from Oct 23.

"Richard Thompson is one of those rare guys that does it all. He's got that Hendrix thing."

ADAM DURITZ: MARK SELIGER/PRESS; RICHARD THOMPSON: GETTY


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