

together his second album, over which hovers the ghost of Paul McCartney. Like much of Macca's work, it is heavy on cute melodies and safe arrangements.

The gentle jazz-lite opener 'All About Me' has sweet pop harmonies and a gentle East Coast '60s swagger. 'The Note', 'Til We Die' and the attractively-flawed 'Fool's Gold' all evoke McCartney at his prettiest, with 'Father And Son' owing a debt of gratitude towards the great man's 'Put It There'. 'I've Got a Feeling' (not the Beatles song) is, ironically, more reminiscent of James Taylor, moving up a gear to explore a country-rock vein, and the instrumental title-track has an appealingly hypnotic Spanish flavour.

King's raw voice on 'Chasing Stars', 'No Remorse (I Feel Every Word)' and the waltzing ballad 'Upstream' make you wish he'd showcase his vocals more often. With *My Sweet Elixir* he has veered clear of indie-rock to create an album that takes few musical risks and plays well within the guidelines. At times it makes for delightful undiluted pop, while at others it's drizzled with too much saccharine.

JACKIE HAYDEN

KEY TRACK: 'ALL ABOUT ME'

RAY LAMONTAGNE AND THE PARIAH DOGS

GOD WILLIN' & THE CREEK DON'T RISE

[RCA]

★★★★★



SOLID IF UNSPECTACULAR OUTING FOR COUNTRY STAR

Ray LaMontagne is a country artist who is manifestly unconcerned with attaining the "alt" prefix – this ain't Smog, Wilco or Ryan Adams. No sir, this is straight-down-the-line classic Nashville fare, in which you can hear echoes of such iconic performers as Willie Nelson and Johnny Cash.

LaMontagne's no-frills tunes are hugely popular in the US – like his previous album, *Gossip In The Grain*, this was a top-five hit on the *Billboard* charts. Country isn't a genre usually pumping from the stereo chez Nolan, but it's damn near impossible not to be swept along with the uptempo bluesy groove of 'Repo Man', the opening tune on *God Willin' & The Creek Don't Rise*.

The track actually leads you to think that LaMontagne and his group, the Pariah Dogs, are going to mix some rock 'n' roll flourishes with the acoustic material, but this turns out not to be the case – the album consists almost exclusively of low-key, melancholy numbers – more 'Sunday Morning Coming Down' than 'Me And Bobby McGee'.

This isn't necessarily bad – LaMontagne has a good feel for melody and a deft lyrical touch. Still, *God Willin'...* could definitely have done with a few rockers to balance out the mellow acoustic.

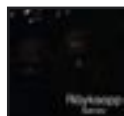
PAUL NOLAN

KEY TRACK: 'REPO MAN'

ROYKSOPP

SENIOR [PIAS]

★★★★★



BIG-BEAT NORDS CLAMBER INTO A FLOTATION TANK FOR FOLLOW-UP TO LAST YEAR'S COMEBACK

ALBUM

A proggy companion to last year's pop-glazed *Junior*, Royksopp's fourth album is all about the quiet moments (the band's Svein Berge has described it as "the senile sibling... who lives in the attic"). Where its little brother popped at the seams with celebrity cameos (Robyn, Lykke Li, The Knife's Karin Andersson) and glistening beats, *Senior* unfolds in a series of untethered ambient instrumentals, punctuated with



KLAXONS
SURFING THE VOID
POLYDOR
★★★★★

SPACE CADETS JOURNEY TO THE OUTER LIMITS ON PSYCHEDELIA-TINGED SECOND ALBUM

Klaxons have walked a rather unpredictable path since releasing 2007's *Myths of The Near Future*. Initial recording sessions for a follow-up to their Nationwide Mercury Prize-winning debut with Simian Mobile Disco's James Ford, bore little fruit. What's more, label Polydor told the band that the recordings were too "experimental" for their liking. After a brief flirtation with Tony Visconti, the former nu-rave figureheads found salvation in the unlikely form of Ross Robinson. Dubbed 'The Godfather of nu-metal', Robinson has previously helmed records by Korn and Limp Bizkit.

Incongruous as the collaboration may sound, it works. At times *Surfing The Void* is scrappy and punk-rock jagged, the frenetic energy of At The Drive-In – another act Robinson has worked with – present on the title-track and 'Flashover'. However, it's when they embrace melody, as on first single 'Echoes'

and album centerpiece 'Venusia', that Klaxons truly bewitch. The latter is a highlight, twinkling keyboard melody operating in blissful tandem with quavering vocals. Elsewhere, the likes of 'Valley Of The Calm Trees' and 'Extra Astronomical' – science-fiction themed songs driven by a strong psychedelic pulse – could score one of Philip K. Dick's senses-blasting novels.

These are songs possessed by a sense of cosmic wonderment, with Klaxons holding forth about the universal oneness of mankind ('The Same Space') and the elasticity of time ('Future Memories'). The overriding impression is of musical horizons being broadened and minds expanded – perhaps a result of the band's well-documented dabbling with the psychotropic brew ayahuasca. In short, *Surfing The Void* is – like the stimulants that fueled its creation – powerful stuff.

FRANCIS JONES

KEY TRACK: 'VENUSIA'

whale-song bass lines and icy fragments of guitar. In isolation, tracks such as '...And The Forest Began To Sing' or 'Tricky Two' can feel like a random coagulation of new agey tempos and acoustic meanderings. Cumulatively, though, the record has hypnotic qualities, as well as genuinely creepy passages ('The Fear'), that might have felt at home on the soundtrack to a '70s John Carpenter movie (according to Berge, The Field-esque 'The Alcoholic' is told from the viewpoint of a homicidal hobo). The result: a chill-out album you'll feel happier listening to with the lights on.

ED POWER

KEY TRACK: 'THE FEAR'

SHIT ROBOT

FROM THE CRADLE TO THE RAVE [DFA]

★★★★★



CRACKING DEBUT FROM DUBLIN DANCE PRODUCER

In a fortnight of great album titles, the debut album by

Dubliner Marcus Lambkin, aka Shit Robot, has possibly the best of the lot. Meanwhile, the music inside – a sublime collection of pop-tinged electro – further confirms that Lambkin is quite possibly the most underrated Irish artist around.

Having moved to New York, Lambkin's DJ-ing and production skills bought him to the attention of LCD Soundsystem mastermind James Murphy, and the Dublin groove mechanic eventually ended up on Murphy's DFA imprint. Indeed, Lambkin actually bequeathed the godlike DFA artist John Maclean with his recording name, The Juan Maclean, and also counts among his admirers Thom Yorke, Simian Mobile Disco, Andy Butler of Hercules and Love Affair, and Hot Chip's Alexis Taylor, who contributes vocals to a track on the album, 'Losing My Patience'.

One of the stand-out tracks on *From The Cradle To The Rave*, 'Take Em Up', features vocals from LCD Soundsystem's Nancy Whang, and her characteristically attitudinal singing style merges brilliantly with the hypnotic dance tune underneath. Lambkin has explained that he sought to bring a pop sensibility to his grooves on the album, and you can certainly

imagine the pulsating likes of 'Simple Things' and 'I Got A Feeling' going down a storm on dancefloors worldwide.

For good measure, the appropriately named 'Triumph' – a collaboration with Murphy – brings the album to a magnificent close. Conclusion: this is some seriously good shit.

PAUL NOLAN

KEY TRACK: 'TAKE EM UP'

SOUTHERN TENANT FOLK UNION

THE NEW FARMING SCENE [JOHNNY ROCK RECORDS]

★★★★★



IT'S FOLK JIM - BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT

Splicing together Celtic sounds with American bluegrass, Southern Tenant Folk Union's second album sees the band continue their quest to rewrite the rules of folk. The results are mixed. Starting

strongly with 'South Yhsie' the record's stories of farming and agriculture are less than engaging at times and while the musicianship is first class, some of the songs ('Those Little Grains Of Sand,' 'Holding On/Beholden On') lack that much needed spark of excitement. A mixed bag.

EDWIN MCFEE

KEY TRACK: 'SOUTH YHSIE'

THREAD PULLS

NEW THOUGHTS [OSAKA RECORDINGS]

★★★★★



COST EFFECTIVE DRUM 'N' BASS POWER

Thread Pulls are a rhythm section that have avoided the ego problems of lead guitarists and singers in order to go it alone. So bassist Gavin Duffy and drummer Peter Maybury have carved out a niche producing gritty and grimy drum 'n' bass concoctions. Okay, that's slightly disingenuous, because this record doesn't just contain a rock-and-roll rhythm section. The duo are augmented by mantra-like, sometimes falsettoed, sometimes ranty, vocals from the bass-player, and an array of interesting harmonic textures from synths, trumpets, electronics, guitar pedals and well-calibrated reverb units.

But at their core, Thread Pulls really are a rhythm section and *New Thoughts* is basically all about the grooves. While Duffy conjures hypnotic riffs, Maybury's drums eschew obvious rhythms in favour of something obstinately wonkier and more difficult to dance to. It's all very sparse and moody – in other words, what would happen if Colm McCarthy and Bord Snip were sent into an inefficient and bloated early '90s shoe-gazing band and asked to go on a cost cutting, personnel firing spree? Yup, Thread Pulls are the reformed, rationalised, efficient rock-making machine of the future. Dodgy economic metaphors aside, however, they really are very good.

PATRICK FREYNE

KEY TRACK: 'HOW TO TALK'

UNDERWORLD

BARKING [COOKING VINYL]

★★★★★



UNDERWHELMING RESULTS AS THE GANG GO JUNGLE

Underworld preceded the release of *Barking*, their first album in three years, with the single 'Scribble.' The public's response was decidedly mixed. Showcasing a new dependency on drum 'n' bass (no doubt due to their collaboration with High Contrast), the problem isn't that *Barking* is a bad record. It's just not an Underworld record as we know it.

Dub Fire is the least obtrusive of the various producers involved: his work on 'Bird 1' and 'Grace' retains traces of the oscillating beats and hypnotic vocals that used to be an Underworld hallmark. Overall, though, the original and unexpected hooks that used to make Underworld exciting are missing here. Mark Knight and D.Ramirez put their stamp on 'Between Stars' and the upcoming single 'Always Loved a Film'. The latter is a euphoric offering but lacks the edge needed to elevate it to the standard of Underworld's finest moments. What a shame.

ROE MCDERMOTT

KEY TRACK: 'ALWAYS LOVED A FILM'

THE VASELINES

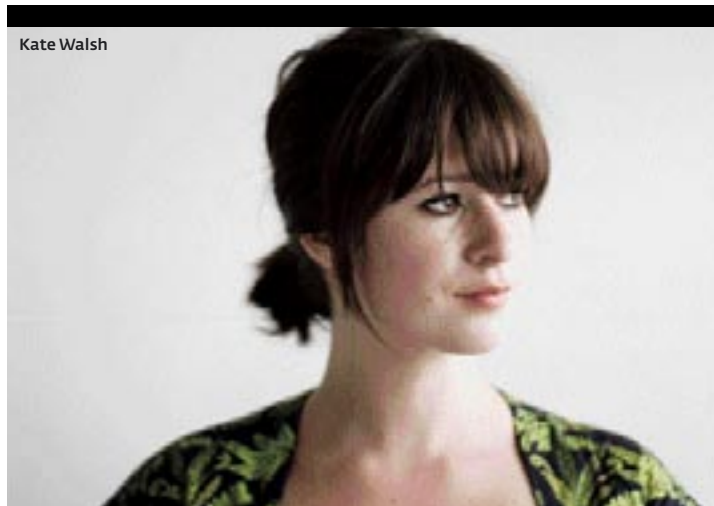
SEX WITH AN X [SUB POP]

★★★★★



KURT COBAIN'S FAVOURITE OBSCURE GLASWEGIANS GET AROUND TO THAT APPARENTLY RATHER DIFFICULT SECOND ALBUM

It's fair to say that The Vaseline's are more famous these days for their association with Kurt Cobain and Nirvana



Kate Walsh

than for their music. And while they never really received the recognition they deserved for their happy-clappy indie-pop the first time around, the Glaswegians have reformed for another stab at things with their second album in 20 years *Sex With An X*. Adopting an "if it ain't broke..." ethos, the 12 track release once again couples sugary melodies with slacker soundscapes and while it isn't the aural celebration the two decade long wait might have warranted, we're glad to have them back.

EDWIN MCFEE

KEY TRACK: 'THE DEVIL INSIDE ME'

KATE WALSH

PEPPERMINT RADIO [BLUEBERRY PIE]

★★★★★



COVERS ALBUMS - DON'T YOU JUST HATE 'EM!

Folk stalwart Kate Walsh has taken a rather surprising route

with her fourth record, a covers collection of all things.

The album is inspired by the singer's childhood, a time when Walsh imagined herself as a DJ broadcasting on the make believe 'Peppermint Radio' and innocently spinning her favourite tunes.

From the '80s synth pop of Erasure's 'A Little Respect' through to Blur's late, lo-fi 'Beetlebum', her versions are delivered in a stripped down, slow tempo format, which consists largely of Walsh's sweet voice set against a basic piano melody.

Alas, the results are decidedly mixed.

The subtle makeover of EMF's 'Unbelievable' is interesting while, in direct contrast, 'A Little Respect' is simply dreary, a far cry from the dramatic energy of the original.

However, the biggest letdown is the predictability of it all.

In almost every instance Walsh has taken a safety-first option, with results that are about as exciting as a double bill of *Oireachtas Report*.

EAMONN SEOIGE

KEY TRACK: UNBELIEVABLE

THE GREAT

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STEPHEN MAGUIRE

IRISH SOUL [SELF-RELEASED]



Belfast-native Stephen Maguire's been a very busy boy these past three years, touring the length and breadth of Canada, but luckily, the folk crooner has managed to find the time to record his debut album *Irish Soul*. Honest, reflective and passionate, *Irish Soul* is chocked full of just that.

GEMMA RAY

IT'S A SHAME ABOUT GEMMA RAY [BRONZERAT]



Raw, powerful and uncontrived, *It's A Shame ...* is a cocktail of old and not-so-old songs from blues vixen Gemma Ray. The LP, Ray's second, includes covers by artists as diverse as Gun Club, The Cookies, Ella Fitzgerald, Obits, Mudhoney, Etta James and Buddy Holly. It's a shame? It's a masterpiece!

SNOWY WHITE BLUES PROJECT

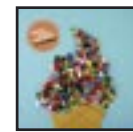
IN OUR TIME...LIVE [SOUL FOOD DISTRIBUTION]



Spanning a career most guitarists would kill for, Snowy White presents *In Our Time...Live*, a unique chance to experience the Brit blues maestro doing what he does best. The Snowy White Blues Project have shared the stage with the likes of Thin Lizzy and Pink Floyd, and this album captures them at the height of their powers, playing at De Boerderij in Holland.

GRAND POCKET ORCHESTRA

THE ICE-CREAM [SELF-RELEASED]



After gaining a reputation for a carnivalesque live show, Dublin alt. poppers Grand Pocket Orchestra finally unleash their debut album on the universe. Building on two solid EPs, *The Ice Cream* is a ramshackle collection of eighteen charming lo-fi pop songs squeezed into a preposterous 36 minutes. As HP's own Celina Murphy puts it, it's a "bewildering, experimental, vicious little gem of a record."

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